

# Drums around the FIRE



The World of  
Darkness™

## *Legends of the Garou*

Gaia is in pain. The Earth Mother is torn by the vile talons of the Wyrms, the dragon of destruction. Only Her children can stand before it - only the Garou, the werewolves, can hope to stop it. The Garou live in a dying world, a wilderness ravaged by the forces of greed and corruption. From the heroic Silver Fangs to the techno-savvy Glass Walkers, the 13 tribes use all their powers of spirit and nature to defend the earth.

## *These are their tales...*

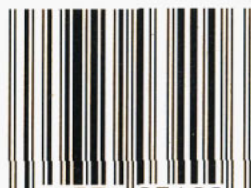
At the dawn of history, a Garou hero must fight against the most dreaded minion of the Wyrms... in the heart of a modern city, a Glass Walker learns a dangerous lesson in honor... a young pack fights to save children from the clutches of corruption... to save his people, a Stargazer must discover the secret of a dying bear... a Garou is forever changed by the dark vision revealed in the heat of the unleashed atom...  
...these tales and more are told to strengthen the Garou for their final fight: the Apocalypse.



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*The Apocalypse*

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around the  
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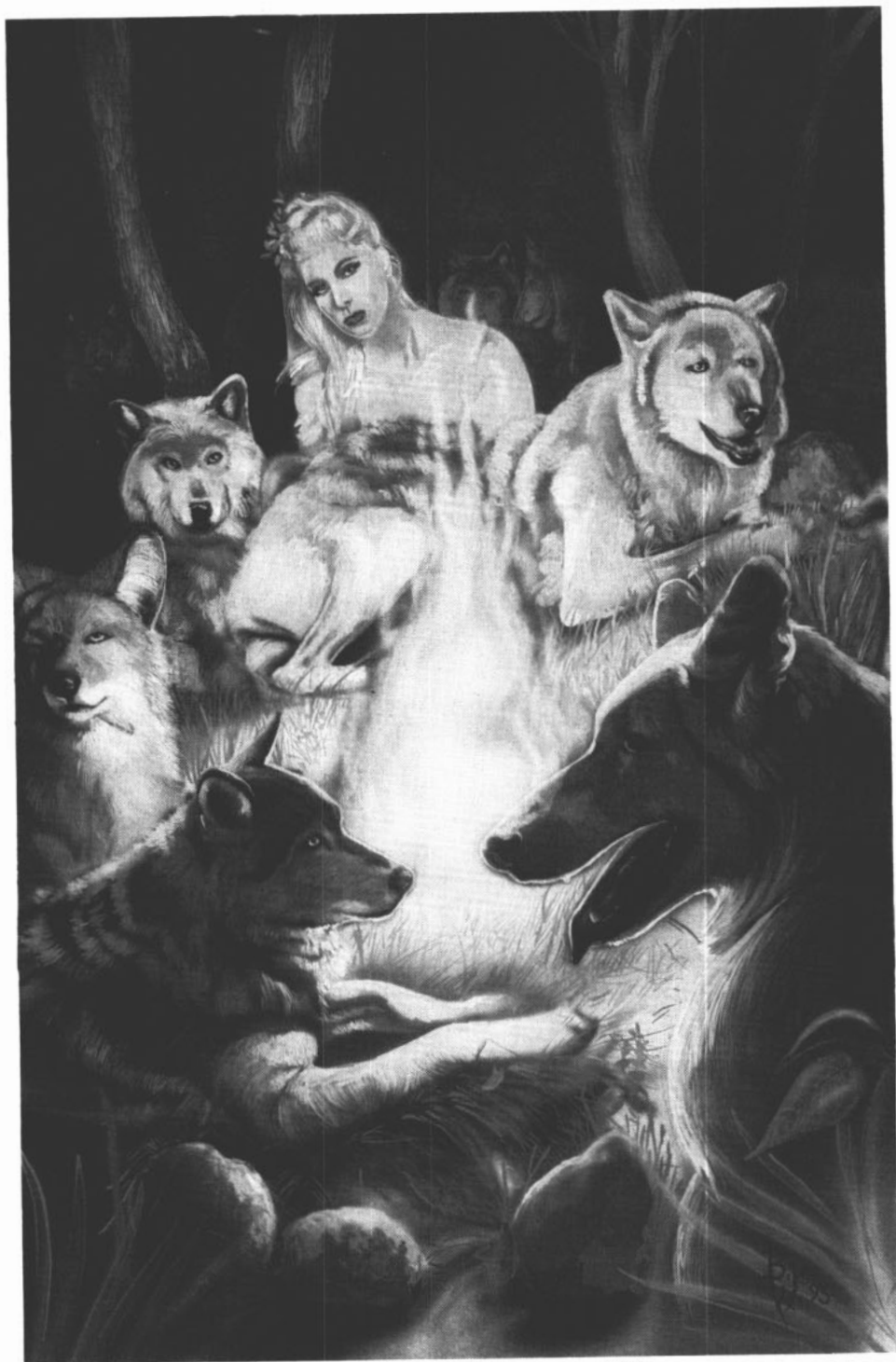
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# Drum's Around the FIRE

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# *Introduction: The Talefires*



By sundown, the last rangers were chased out of the reserve. They crawled into their cabins and shakily opened bottles of gin or whiskey, trying to ignore what they knew was going on out there in the woods. A few of them had tried to tell others what they had seen, but of course no one believed them. So they hid in their dimly lit cabins and waited the night out, shivering with every howl that carried across the pines, through the walls and into their nervous hearts. It was a night for the wolves.

The Guardians straggled back into the clearing, each nodding to the Warder that the bawn was clear; no one would bother them that night. The Warder signaled to the chieftain of the sept, an old, grizzled wolf known as Great-Thunder.

Great-Thunder rose on his shaky feet. Old age had begun to take its toll even on him. The ongoing, once-indomitable healing process in his body had begun to slow, to tire. He even knew disease these days.

The others, gathered about the many fires spread throughout the huge clearing, all turned to him, watching and waiting for the Opening. He raised his head back and slowly, almost silently, began the low rumble that grew and grew until it became a deep bass howl. The other wolves threw back their heads and followed in their own way, and the howl grew in unison till it smothered all the lesser sounds of the night. The crickets ceased their love-calls; the birds quit their night music — the wolves' time to speak had come.

Great-Thunder's howl fell off, and the others soon quieted. Silence fell over them. Great-Thunder looked out, and his heart swelled as he beheld his fellow Garou, nearly 200 in number, gathered there that night for the concolation, the coming together of all tribes. It had been a hard year for all of them. Many caerns had bled from wounds inflicted by the dread Wyrms, the all-devouring serpent of corruption. But they had overcome hardships and dangers to come here this night to remember who they were and what they must do.

This last thought pained Great-Thunder. What had become of time? There was once so much of it — time enough to fight the Wyrms and time to rest besides, time for peace and for war. But now there was only time to fight. And to keep fighting. The younger cubs knew nothing of the pleasure of a lazy day lying in Gaia's blanket of tall grass. There was no time for that — the Wyrms took the idle.

Great-Thunder shook his head to clear the melancholy. He had a duty now. As the leading Galliard for the sept, to him fell the Opening of the Moot. He was leader of the sept, thus it was also his duty to begin the business at hand. It weighed heavy on his heart, this coming war in the Amazon. Many would die, but what would they achieve? Was it a war they could win? He doubted the outcome. But there could be no going back. Gaia was in pain, and the Amazon was important to Her and thus to Her children and defenders, the Garou.



Great-Thunder looked out at all the eyes upon him, some wolf, some human and some in-between. He knew that the human form was best for what he was about to say, so he began the shift.

Fur disappeared, mass increased, legs lengthened and arms stretched. Paws reformed into hands: fingers and thumb. Snout withdrew, and ears shortened and rounded. He stood before them now in the skin of man, no longer an old wolf.

"My people, I am glad you are here," he said. "It has been too long since we have come together as one, a single tribe under the moon." There was nodding in the audience, as all accepted what he had said. "We come together out of need. Our Mother cries for us to help Her. Far to the south in the deep jungles, She is hurting. The minions of the Wyrms have begun to attack Her there. They bring with them all their vile powers and machines. We must stop this. Many of you have already prepared to depart for the south, to leave your septs and caerns behind in the guardianship of but a few. I fear this, for the Wyrms will use it against us. But what can be done?"

"The south is not the only place in trouble. Just two protectorates away from here, we fought a war against the vampires of the Chicago city. Many died there, but much was accomplished. And there are other places where we are needed. Sometimes under our very noses, the Wyrms breeds its filth and corruption.

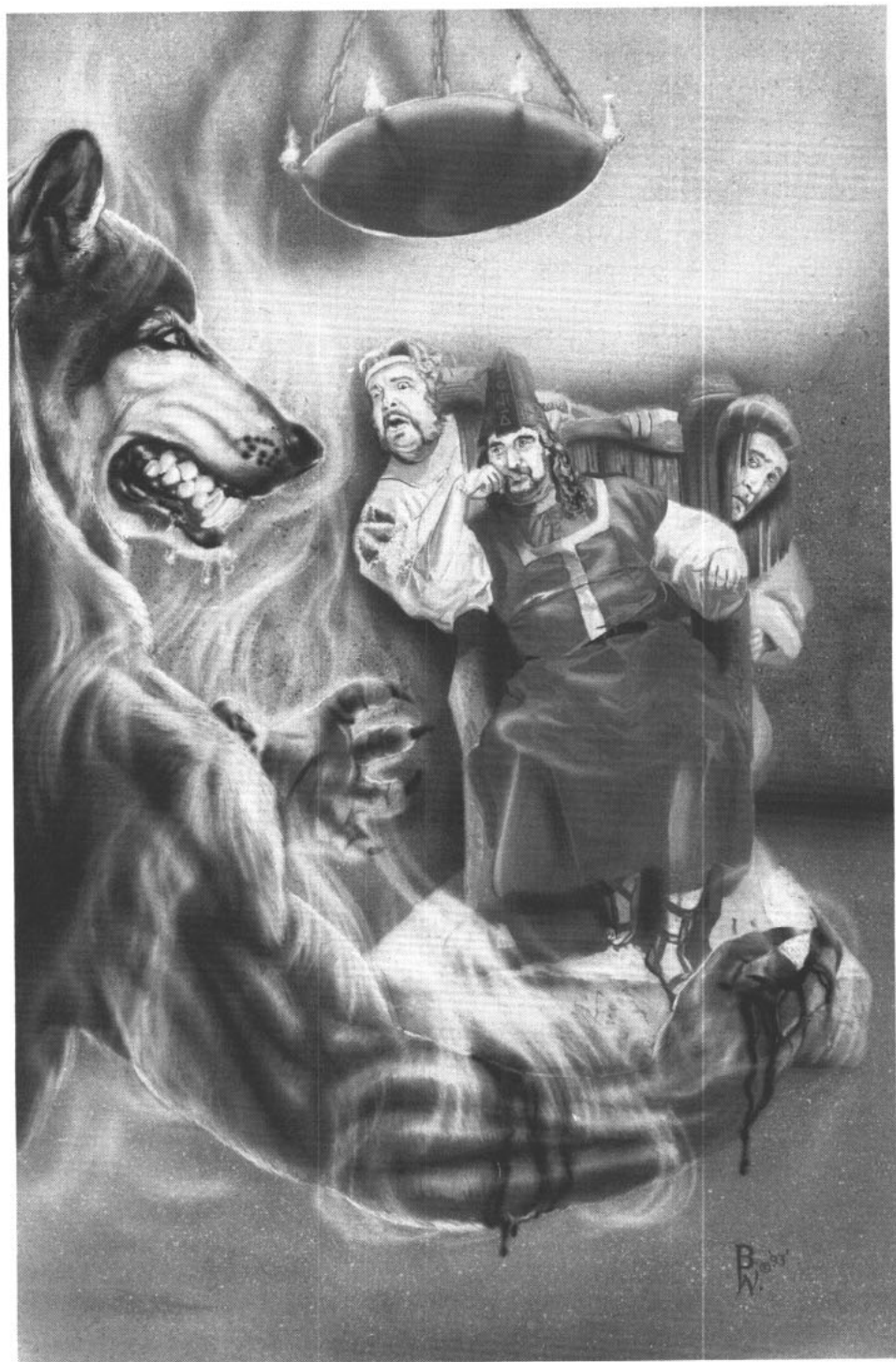
"There are many among you who hate the humans for not recognizing this. I agree that they are blind and know not what they do. But I ask for understanding for them. They are our greatest allies in this war, not our enemies."

A low growl rose from the audience, followed by others. A few wolves in the crowd began to pace angrily, disturbed by Great-Thunder's words of reconciliation. Great-Thunder grew silent. He knew he had overstepped by speaking his heart here before those who came to hear other words. He could not risk their leaving, but what could he do now? How to heal the rift between them, the rift that kept many of the tribes apart?

Of course — the tales.

"We will do things different tonight!" Great-Thunder yelled. "We have much to speak of in the coming night, but first we must remember who we are and why we have come. To forge a path into our future, we must first forge a path into our past. Let the tales begin!" And he let out a high-yipping cry that was immediately followed by other cries, cries of joy and eager anticipation, for here was the moment favored by all the Garou.

Here was the time for stories...





# Tales of Glory



# The Fall of Criton

by Emrey Barnes

*Of battle and triumph this tale will tell. Peaceful Wyld and Weave were torn asunder by the Unnamable before Gaia's will could be righted by the most noble of Breeds. And soon after, the Concord was to find its birth!*

*Here I must call upon Awen to guide my tongue. Only she can spin the thread of this tale with justice. It is for her to work the loom in its weaving. I am only a mortal conduit for her divine transcendence. Without her, this is but a blundering mouthful of syntax.*

*Come to me now, Awen, for I must speak!*


Over 3,000 years before, when we still gripped the hearts of the apes with fear by the Grace of the Impergium, a sept of Black Furies had in its domain a village of philosophers and poets that was known by the name of Criton.

For untold decades, the Black Furies held Criton's populace as their flock, breeding with the men of Criton in order to procreate. Followers of the goddess Artemis, the Black Furies allowed no males to practice their secret rituals. For this reason, they held special full-moon moots at which they ate all the male children born unto them.

For their part in the Impergium, the tribe waited for the night of the full moon and the sacred hunt following their moon-worshipping moot to purify the apes of their excess numbers. They did so without malice or joy; it was but their part in Gaia's plan. None opposed their duty to Gaia and to all Garou — until one blighted night.

From the hills and forests, the Black Furies flew on their appointed task with the speed endowed them by the Pegasus. In Crinos form, they swept down into Criton's stoneless streets. As the brilliance of the moon shone bright with its silvery light, they traveled in search of the old and sickly, the stupid wanderer of the midnight, or the periodic sacrifice left for them to find, kill and eat.

But they did not expect those who had so often hidden like sheep to rise up and battle them! In shock, they were taken aback by glinting silver at every turn and in every hand. Many Furies were killed by sudden blow or secret trap. Few survived to flee to the Huntress Caern that night.



The Black Furies that survived were beside themselves with grief. What now had come to change the flow and alter their destiny before the grace of Artemis?

As if their minds suddenly awoke, they instantly fell upon the answer. It must be sudden Blight — darkness come in hidden form. The Wyrms worked within their village. They had to combat this plague, but their number had been more than quartered.

The tribe knew that aid must be called for, but to admit weakness grated against their souls. Yet their number were too few. They could not track down and defeat this foe alone without risking absolute destruction.

The closest source of aid, the Avenging Talons of Heracles Sept at the Strength and Vengeance Caern, was a sept of Silver Fangs and lay far to the north; it was to them that the messenger sped off in the darkness of that night.

Josphea ran until her heart pounded from her mouth. Not even the rising of the sun stopped her racing feet.

Josphea knew this would bring her glory! It was all she could think about as the pain within her increased. She concentrated against it and pushed herself ever onward.

Through both day and night, Josphea traveled into the deepest forests and up into the cresting mountains. There she collapsed within the bawn of the Silver Fangs.

Quivering with exhaustion and shock, Josphea related the plight of the Healing Huntress Sept. When she had completed her plea, Josphea died. Her eyes rolled up to show white, and her body became cold as ice. She had pushed her body too far and paid the price for her pride.

Griffules, greatest of the Silver Fangs' number, held Josphea against his sobbing breast and, with tears streaming down his muzzle, howled for long, hanging hours. His was a kenning so proud and true that the mountains and forest cried along with him for the death of Josphea and the souls of the Healing Huntress Sept that had been freed by trickery and silver.

Now, down from the mountains the Silver Fangs flew. Traveling as wolves, they made their way to the crippled Healing Huntress Sept.

At the Huntress Caern, the events of the last full moon were fleshed out fully. Together as one pack, the Garou planned and made a pact to destroy those who had brought the silver death and killed their kin.

In the days that followed, members of the pack, in Homid form, stalked the village. It took none too long to find the rot of the meat.

It was a mortal bearing the name Teneglocles. He professed that he had come from the Far East to free humanity from its silly superstitions and fears. In his stupidity, he made his place of residence known. Granted many gifts by the chieftain of Criton,



Teneglocles took his rest in the sacred hall of worship and justice. He went even so far as to brag freely that he had come to bring death to the “beast that bred with man and wolf alike.”

Such an insult demanded face-to-face confrontation and the throating of the transgressor. None within the newly formed pack argued this point.

What was truly puzzling was that this foreigner had managed to possess the human leaders and lift the Veil within the villagers’ minds. It was obvious that this Teneglocles had planned the ambush expertly. It was evident that he had fought against the Garou before.

Griffules called together his fostern, numbering 20. Hadria-rhya and Lextes-rhya, athro of the Silver Fangs, stood in as mediators, joined by Elysia, the remaining athro of the Healing Huntress Sept. They discussed the seizure of Criton and the possibility that this surface blemish might be part of deeper rot. In this meeting, one of Griffules’ fostern came to the sudden realization that she had seen no plant life within the walls of Criton. The decision was made to commence with the removal of the immediate corruption upon the next full-moon night. As time would find them fit, the pack would work to cleanse the remaining Blight from Criton and its inhabitants by force or wit.

Each Garou prepared in his or her own fashion for the night of battle. Hate grew in the hearts of the Garou, but none held so bright a fire of vengeance within their breast as did Elysia.

With each day’s passing did Elysia’s impatience grow. She had seen her sept laid low and kinain blood flow free like a river. Elysia knew the pack should wait for the fullest form of Phoebe; it was the strongest time for them to strike. But Elysia’s rage broke free of her control and consumed her.

Elysia alone dashed down through the darkness of the new moon toward the village. As she reached the walls, she stopped, for she had heard the hurried movements of a pursuer.

Great Griffules rose proudly from the wind-blown grasses and called quietly to Elysia, “Do not do this thing alone, Elysia. It is for you to guide the remainder of your tribe. Return with me to the rest of the Healing Huntress Sept where you belong. This is not the time to take the Wyrn in fang and talon! We must work together and harry our foe as a pack. Have you not heard the proverb, ‘Even the strongest lone wolf falls as easily as the runt of the litter?’”

Elysia knew that it was within Griffules’ ability to force her return to the shelter of Huntress Caern. She hissed under her breath with a warning growl, “Heed me, Griffules. Though you are leader of this pack combined anew, I am leader of this sept. To take this battle to that Wyrn-spawn is my right. Command me not!” Elysia’s brown eyes were full of passion and determination. “Have respect for my position, Griffules,



and return in my stead to take care of my fostern and kinain. They are now rightfully under your domain as pack leader.”

“It is not for me to steal from you the leadership over the Healing Huntress Sept or its caern, Elysia. I did not travel here to usurp your power, but to ensure the continuation of your sept and tribe.” Griffules strode cautiously toward Elysia. “If you feel that I have slighted you, I ask your honored apology.” He could see the anger building within her eyes. He could feel the rage within her reaching out for release.

“How could I assert my dominance over your sisters who have only contempt for men? Answer me that at least, before you charge headlong into this, the darkest of nights.” Griffules gestured to the clear, starry sky with wide and sweeping arms.

“Leave me, Griffules, or I will slay you just as I’ll slay the evil within these village walls. With a sudden burst of rage, Elysia assumed the Crinos. Locking her eyes on Griffules in one last warning, she went silently over the wall and disappeared into Criton’s pathways.


Griffules slunk back into the grasses and worked to ease his temper. His rage was already threatening to throw him into the rapid, unyielding torrent of frenzy. It was in the grasses that he waited for Elysia’s return or howl for aid.

Elysia knew Criton well and made her way, tracing shadows that stretched from tent to tent. By torchlight, guards equipped with silver swords and spears patrolled the packed-dirt pathways. It made Elysia’s blood run cold to see the shining metal, but she locked this rage within her heart and ventured on through the darkness.

Coming upon the meeting hall, Elysia ventured into its sheltered recesses. Adjusting to the greater darkness, she peered about for her prey. All was quiet, but for the rear of the structure, where instead of the roughly chiseled columns and open space there was a stone enclosure built as a last defense and personal stronghold for the village leaders. From this structure, Elysia could hear mumbled voices.

Slowly, Elysia crept forward. Quietly, she peered in through a crack in the doorway. In the dim torchlight, she could make out the form of a man sitting on an ornate throne with the village leaders and their families tightly bunched about him. Elysia was sure that this man was the one known as Teneglocles who she had seen speaking before the assembled masses of Criton.

Outside Criton, Griffules grew impatient. He had assumed Crinos form and prepared for battle by sharpening his claws upon a large boulder. Still, Griffules was not consumed by his rage. His ears strained and twisted about for any call for aid, and his nostrils flared as they waited for the scent of first blood. Griffules called upon the mighty Falcon to guide his path that night and to understand Elysia’s need for unplanned vengeance.



Griffules had fought against the Wym's minions countless times; he knew their tricks and tactics. He feared for the life of Elysia, knowing that in these things Elysia was just a suckling cub.

Griffules focused his mind on the things that he must do; thus, he sealed his mind from the meddling of others. Griffules called down aid from Gaia to strengthen him against the silver that he knew he would meet that night.

And then he waited in pacing meditation.

Within the temple, Teneglocles stroked the hair of the chieftain's youngest daughter. His eyes seemed alive with fire as he clairvoyantly watched Elysia's form stalk about outside the torch-lit room.

"Why not come in?" Teneglocles called out into the echoing meeting hall. "We are all friends here."

The doors of the temple flew inward. Elysia's strong legs had managed to take them clear from their hinges. Elysia growled fiercely and strode into the room. With her first step upon the circle etched in the floor about Teneglocles, agony swept through Elysia like a raging torrent. She stumbled back reflexively.


"Oh, so you are one of those filthy creatures." Teneglocles pulled himself up straight upon his throne and motioned toward her. "Guards, hold that beast at bay."

From each side of Elysia came forward a man enshrouded in every manner of silver armament. Upon their shields was etched an occult glyph of mystical origin. With spears pointed with sharpened silver, they advanced upon her.

Elysia eyed them cautiously, but did not back down. Deep within her throat a low growl came as she bared her fangs. What is this before me that blocks my path *with an invisible wall of searing agony and flame*? Her mind struggled. *How do I get past this obstacle to tear this ape's throat free?*

"You don't understand it, do you?" Teneglocles laughed. "As a student of arcane mysticism, I know full well the strengths and weaknesses of your race. What do you call yourselves? The Garou? The circle that I have inscribed about myself is embellished with glyphs endowed with the power to repel all lupine kind.

"Tell me, how do you dare to come here before me? You should have fled when you had the chance. Now you will die a lonely death!" Teneglocles rose and held a fist out defiantly toward her. The nobility of Criton clung to him like vines. "I curse you and your line to die! You have taken the lives of the members of this village for decades upon end. You have no right to these people. You have no right to their lives. You have fed off them like they were your herd. You will do this no longer. See how they stand to fight against you?"



“Mankind has a right to its own destiny! It is your kind that forces us to defend ourselves. It is your kind that drives mankind from our rightful place in nature and forces us to live within walled cities. Can you name an enemy that we cannot defeat? Answer me that if you can!” Teneglocles stopped and waited for a reply, but there was none.

“You are as helpless to stop us from now achieving our rightful inheritance as we have been helpless before your assaults. Until, of course, now. My studies have allowed me to draw upon a power of which your mind could not comprehend. I will call upon the spirits that bind this world together to bring about your doom.”

Elysia drew herself down into a low, defensive stance and, with one great burst of energy, flung her hands forward. Her dark talons separated from her finger tips to soar across the room, only to come to rest in the chest of Criton’s leading citizen, who had risen to defend Teneglocles. Elysia looked on in terror as the man fell to the floor, quivering in his death throes.

Teneglocles’ eyes glowed red. He pulled the rest of those about him up close, covering himself fully with a human wall until only his head could be seen.

“I am greatly impressed; I did not expect this tactic. From now on, I will prepare myself to deal with it as well.” Teneglocles stared at her bristling form filling most of the doorway. “Yes, still the dominant one, I see. Yes, stare deeply into my eyes. Prove to me that you do not fear me.”

Then, as Teneglocles gazed into Elysia’s eyes, he began to call upon the powers he had learned. Teneglocles forced his will into her mind and forced her to kneel before him. “That’s right. You are as tame as a puppy. You can do nothing to stop me.”


But Elysia’s rage climbed even higher within her as she slid gently through the change to her wolf form; she knew that Teneglocles was taking control of her mind and spirit. Elysia submitted herself to the flowing rage within her and reverted to full Crinos to become a blur of claw and fang.

The guards rushed forward to pin her, their spears thrusting and poking.

Snap! Crack! Elysia split head from haft of spear and rushed the terrified guards. Her mighty legs shot out to crush man against wall and skull into paste, but as she touched the guard’s shield, so did her paw burst into flame!

In pain, she stumbled back to fall upon the circle’s edge. Again she writhed in agony from the burning touch of Teneglocles’ magic until she could roll back upon the cold stone floor of the entranceway.

The guards were upon her with swords crafted of the cursed metal. Elysia struck again and again to kill them, every attack leading to contact with dreaded silver or



flaming glyph! Though tortured and enraged, she realized her fate would be to die within the ghastly human-made cave unless she fled into the night.

But Teneglocles had not gone to these elaborate lengths just to let his prey escape. "Guards, seal off the doorway. Don't let the she-beast escape!" Teneglocles began to conjure mystic shields to bind Elysia within the roughly hewn stone walls.

*I have to get out of here. This is a trap,* Elysia thought, but as she approached the entrance, searing heat began to surge through her battered body. She was beside herself with pain and horror. "No! Don't let me die like this! Let me out into Gaia's beauty! Destiny, don't damn me to a fate of entombing stone!" Elysia's howl echoed through the night to summon the aid of all Garou!

Griffules' ears pricked up and the hackles rose along his back and neck as the Call of Succor pierced the cool night air. His wait had ended.

Griffules leaped into the village. His body began to glow with a silvery radiance that rivaled that of a full moon. Those who patrolled the streets tried to strike Griffules down, but were instead dashed sprawling and broken to the earth.

Following Elysia's injured growls and painful screams, Griffules made his way into the meeting hall.

There upon the polished stone floor, Griffules waged battle with the silver-wielding guards. He, unlike Elysia, had undergone countless battles with the human users of magic, known as the Magi. Griffules recognized the glyph embossed upon their shields. He knew full well the symbol was a seal of warding used to fend off Garou with searing mystic fire.


Outside into the packed-dirt pathways of Criton, the guards charged after Griffules as he fled. They yelled in joy and banged sword to shield to further scare the beast.

Reaching the first large tent, Griffules turned to make his stand. His large, tree-like arms tore the tent from its pinnings and flung it to cover the advancing men. With tooth and nail, Griffules was upon them. With canvas to cover the wizard's scribbling, he was free to peel meat from bone and soul from flesh until there were none to stand against him.

Once again Griffules stalked into the sky-blocking hall to stand before the shattered doorway leading into the sanctum sanctorum.

There before Griffules, in the silvery light that shone from within his body, was the fallen form of Elysia, naked and homid upon the cold, stone floor. It was riddled with arrows and scorched by burns. Two silver-clad men were torn asunder nearby.

Griffules, heaving with rage and pumped full of adrenaline, stood filling most of the huge doorway. He barred his dripping fangs, and arched back his giant muscular



arms, preparing to tear forward with razor-sharp talons. His red-glowing eyes shot from side to side with a wide, penetrating gaze.

Teneglocles sat quite still upon his oaken throne. His lips turned into a smile. "It is so touching that you have come to protect your fallen mate. Please, do come in."

Griffules raged at the insult. Garou do not breed with Garou; it is uncouth and breeds Wyrms-fetid offspring. He knew that Teneglocles was baiting him in order to gain control of the moment. But Griffules was master of his rage, unlike many Garou.

Even so, Griffules' heart was gripped with terror at the sight of the enchanted circle inscribed about Teneglocles and his entourage. He could only decipher bits and pieces of the mystic script, but this was enough to warn him back from direct contact with it. Griffules worked his way around, slowly following the perimeter of the circle about the room.

Teneglocles held the beautiful daughter of a village leader upon his lap; she stared up at him lovingly with fawning eyes. In fact, all those surrounding him did likewise.

It became rapidly apparent to Griffules that this Wyrms-kin, Teneglocles, was a conjurer and alchemist of great knowledge and practice. Anyone able to call upon the power of the spirits was a formidable enemy. Griffules knew that if he did not watch his step carefully, this Teneglocles would be his downfall. It was time to even the odds.


Throwing back his head, Griffules began to howl. The echoing resonance of his voice began to reverberate against the enclosing stonework. The buxom woman leaped from Teneglocles' fondling grasp and fled from the room, clutching her bleeding ears. The village leaders began to cry out in pain, and they too rushed from the shuddering chamber. Only Teneglocles and Griffules remained as Griffules' howl dwindled to an end.

Teneglocles thought it now his turn to strike and stared deeply into Griffules' eyes. Try as he might, Teneglocles could not gain a mind-lock upon Griffules.

Griffules knew full well the mind was weak to illusion and mystical intrusion. He had centered his mind within himself before entering Criton. It was this stark and predetermined single-mindedness that had allowed Griffules to perform the task that brought him glory time and time again.

With Teneglocles stripped of his minions, Griffules felt it safe to examine the fallen Elysia for signs of life.

Elysia's hairless skin was cold to his touch and her limbs limp. Thoughts of Josphea raced through Griffules' mind. Again and again, he recalled the sound that he swore was Josphea's heart exploding from overexertion. Griffules felt the icy talons of sorrow cutting into his heart; they penetrated him to the very core of his being.



“She is beautiful, isn’t she?” Teneglocles ogled the form of Elysia that lay naked upon the stone floor. “Yes, I can see it. She is — or was — very attractive. Too bad she was one of your kind. I think I would have enjoyed having her wait upon me.”

Griffules looked up from Elysia to stare piercingly at his adversary and growled with a great power from within himself.

Teneglocles leaned forward and tried once again to pry into the mind of the Silver Fang leader. Hoping that Griffules would not cross into the circle to attack him, Teneglocles sat back and relaxed for a moment. His hands came together, and he leaned on his elbows.

Griffules crouched over the body of Elysia and stared into her ghostly face. Griffules knew that the hunter must be smarter than the prey and that, when the prey begins to think that it is the hunter, the test comes down to powers of a different kind. Just as Teneglocles had blocked Elysia’s retreat, so Griffules had to make sure that the wizard could not flee to infect another bawn with his Wyrmlike Blight.

Teneglocles began to weave a spell. As Griffules watched, a bow of silver appeared within the wizard’s hands. Next, an arrow grew from nothingness; it, too, was made of silver. Teneglocles raised up the weapon and took aim at Griffules. With an effortless pull of the string, the arrow whistled through the air with the speed of thought. Griffules darted to one side, dodging the first arrow, grabbed a fallen shield from a dead guard, and with it struck a second arrow from the air. Rolling onto his feet, he assumed a ready stance with both fang and nail prepared for battle.

“Very good. I am impressed. I have not met another of your kind with the subtlety you have mastered.” With a gesture of his fingers and flip of his wrist, Teneglocles made a quiver of silver arrows levitate into the air and float across the room to him. Once it was in his hands, he slowly drew forth an arrow. “It’s just a matter of time now.” With a loud twang, the arrow streaked toward Griffules. “There is no escape. Eventually I will hunt you down and kill you. As I told your fallen mate, I am here to purge this village of your ilk. This village belongs to mankind, and I will be its savior.” With that Teneglocles let fly another arrow.

Griffules’ rational side told him to maintain his temper and wait. He knew Teneglocles couldn’t kill him; once outside of his enchanted circle, the mystic would be vulnerable to attack from talon and tooth. But Griffules’ emotional side ran wild with fire. *This stinking human thinks itself ruler of this bawn. The ape dares think that I, the great Griffules, and Elysia were breeding partners. The thoughts growled through his mind. It goes so far as to boast that Griffules, leader of pack and kinain alike, is helpless!*

Griffules began calling upon the spirit of his great ancestor, Og, as he shattered shaft of soaring silver-tipped arrow. Og-rhya heard the call and surged up into Griffules’ being. The spirit of the past infused Griffules with greater strength and speed. Og was



within him. Griffules' head spun with powers that he knew were Og's. Thoughts within his head carried the pattern of a simpler time: harvest or become compost.

Og was straight forward and powerful. The enemy Wyrms-being was nothing out of the ordinary. It was merely a foe to be trodden upon. It was clear immediately what must be done. Griffules rushed forward, crossing into the mystic circle with the speed of the wind. "The time has come for your death, Wyrms-fiend!"

Griffules could smell his fur singe as he burst into a ball of fire. His mind began to race, and Og took a firmer grip of his actions. His claws a wall of whirling death, Griffules lunged for the seated Wyrms-kin.

Laughing madly, Teneglocles became insubstantial as the morning mist with but a simple gesture and a subvocal mutter. His essence floated between the noble-breed's razor talons. Wind-blown, this mist dispersed about the room and began to work its way out through the cracks in the stone walls.

Og's self-preservation kicked in, and Griffules was back outside of the wizard's circle with one spring of his mighty legs. Now he was getting angry, yet still he contained his rage, focusing his racing mind upon Teneglocles' destruction.

Griffules cursed himself for a pup. He had withheld using his power over the spirit realm for fear that its strength would be turned against him. Quickly, before the gaseous form of Teneglocles could fully depart, Griffules called upon the power of Strength and Vengeance Caern to wrestle all connection to the spirit realm from the wizard's grasp. Thus Griffules left Teneglocles weak as a newborn cub.


With all his mystic powers stripped from him, Teneglocles resolidified onto the physical plane and clawed at the walls for escape. He quivered and quaked with fear as he attempted again and again to conjure unspeakable attacks upon Griffules. Teneglocles' face flushed as he realized the extent of his helplessness.

Griffules smiled, showing his glinting fangs. With one great leap, he cleared the space between them and bit deeply into the neck and shoulder of the wretched mystic. Once again inside the circle, Griffules began to burn with an unearthly fire.

Teneglocles cried out in pain as each bone cracked. His eyeballs all but popped from his head. Pitiful human hands tried to damage Garou hide as Griffules' released his jaws only to sink deadly talons into his enemy's gut. Teneglocles' swollen tongue hung limply from pale lips as blood pumped from the gaping wound.

"How long have you plotted the downfall of Garou and gallowin alike, Wyrms-spawn?" Tightening his now-unbreakable grasp, Griffules scurried backwards, dragging the body of Teneglocles from the enchanted circle and out into the hall.

"Answer me before you die," growled Griffules. His fur was still smoldering, and blood poured from cracks in his skin.



But Teneglocles could not answer, for he was in deep shock.

Before the last of his energy left him, Griffules knew what he must do for his kinain and the Healing Huntress Sept. With talons of razored sharpness, Griffules carved the still-beating heart free of Teneglocles' chest. Claws cut and sawed until limb was spread from limb and the human's head lay crushed by Og's great might.

Dripping blood covered Griffule's exhausted body. His chest heaved as he fell back to rest on the cold stone floor, his eyes staring at the carnage about him, his mind numbly trying to rationalize all that had happened, his soul seeking release from its torment. The will of Og within him fought to rise and find another foe.

"Is this all?" Griffules screamed. "Is this what has brought this sept so low? Is the Blight now ended? May I sleep this night knowing that pack and flock are safe from harm?"

The ground beneath Griffules began to murmur as if in reply to his words. The foundation of the meeting hall began to shudder, and the bricks in the floor began to shake themselves free. Columns tumbled as the roof of the main structure crumbled to the ground.

Griffules managed to crawl back into a corner and began nursing his wounds. His life had very nearly been drawn from him in battle; he could not withstand much more abuse. He felt faint. Yet he willed himself not to fall unconscious. His mind sought out the unseen danger coalescing beneath him.

The remains of the hall tumbled out into the village as the earth beneath exploded upward toward the moonless sky. Reality began to crumble and melt at the edges as the Nexus Crawler carved its way up to the surface of the earth.

Griffules was beside himself. In his weakened state, he could not hope to defend himself. His eyes could only stare up at the insidious, near-indescribable form towering above him.

Criton was a thunder of noise. The Wyrms-beast howled with an unearthly crescendo. The apes within Criton, screaming madly, ran helter-skelter about the streets. Fires had begun to break out about the village, and tents blazed to light the night.

The Nexus Crawler lashed out and leveled a section of village with one stroke of its monstrous form. Its thorny limbs stuffed an uncountable number of mouths full of struggling ape bodies. Suddenly, the limbs raced across Criton toward Griffules with a gaping maw close behind.

With a great leap several hundred feet through the air, Hadria-rhya, glowing now with a body of silver, was first to sink fang into the hideous Wyrms-beast. Her body collided with the beast with such a force that Hadria uprooted the Nexus Crawler and



sent it sprawling. Claw dug deep, and tooth ripped unearthly flesh from unknown anatomy.

Griffules could do nothing but watch the scenes unfolding about him. To his side came Lextes to channel the power of Gaia into Griffules' pain to wipe away the wounds of the great hero. Griffules could feel his strength slowly coming back. His limbs surged with power anew. His mind was resolute. Once again, he was on his feet and tensing for battle.

"Don't be too quick to jump into the fray, Griffules-yuf." Lextes rested a hand upon his shoulder. "Let Hadria-yuf take some of the glory she rightly deserves this night. Do not forget your place in the pack, great one. Even a leader must have respect for his elders."

Hadria-rhya was easily holding her own. She would stop and growl at the evil hellspawn before dodging an attack or taking swipes at the creature's trunk.

Lextes tried to help Griffules from the ravaged village. But all of the area was in the Wyld. Fires raced up into the heavens. Banes had come to join the fray. Silver Fangs fought strong and nobly, and Black Furies gained vengeance for kinain, gallain and fallen flock.

"This battle is too big for me to leave, Lextes-yuf. You must see that by now as clearly as I." Griffules tensed his muscles and drew power from deep within himself. "As pack leader, I must at least aid in the downing of the greatest of Wyrms-beasts." Griffules smiled over toothy fang. "Elder or no, Hadria-rhya doesn't deserve all the glory!"


Griffules raced toward the beast and slashed deep and low, while Hadria again bounded into it with a high, arching leap. With spiked limbs flailing, the beast rolled out of Criton, crushing what little of it remained standing.

Now Griffules and Hadria flanked the beast, drawing its attention back and forth with alternating attacks. The ground gave way as huge sections of the subsurface were destroyed by burrowing tentacles. Griffules' fangs held fast as his razored claws dug their way into the Wyrms-kin. Hadria sent the upper half of the beast rolling away.

Vile green ichor boiled and sputtered. The air filled with the Nexus Crawler's death stench as it vanished from this plane.

"I could have handled it alone, you know," spat Hadria. She rubbed at the stump that once had been her right arm; the battle scar was covering fast with a newly formed layer of fur.

"I know." Griffules' face had taken several hits from the beast's reality-rending appendages. "I should have let you die killing it, Hadria-yuf. Your name would have been passed down for generations."



“My name will be passed down for generations even without your help, great Griffules.” Hadria peered about the shattered village. “And I think I will gain even more glory if I stay alive and battle yet more Wyrmspawn. Dying in battle does not necessarily bring glory. If none see your last battle, who would be able to tell tale of it?”

“So true.” Griffules pointed to where the Banes had begun to skirmish among themselves. “Look, if we don’t hurry, they will tear each other to shreds and leave no vengeance for us!”

Griffules bounded off first with Hadria close behind, fighting fiercely alongside kinain and pack. And in this manner, the night wore on until the onset of day.

With the stain of Teneglocles-ikthya purged from Criton, Griffules held moot over the Garou who remained living; decided there was the fate of the village.


Herded together, the apes were slain, for they had been driven mad by the carnage and the sudden, mind-shattering appearance of Wyrmskind and un-Veiled vision of Garou. Criton had been torn asunder. Spread about the countryside brick by brick, the meeting hall stood no longer. Black Furies and Silver Fangs alike worked to cleanse the Blight from Huntress Caern. The complete healing process would be slow and complicated.

Eventually, the Silver Fangs prepared to return to their own caern. The Black Furies pledged loyalty and assistance to Griffules and his kinain, but would not grant Griffules’ request that they join with the Silver Fangs to form a more permanent pack and to travel to the northern Caern of Diana’s Healing to restore one and all to full health.

“Our wounds will be a reminder to future generations of what we have endured,” said the new leader of the Black Furies. She was young, but held true to the ancient beliefs of her tribe and kinain. “It is our duty to protect Huntress Caern — in whose healing glow we were all born. We must purify this place until it is right with Gaia’s will. And we must repopulate our sept. Fate has been cruel to us, but we shall triumph over corruption.” None could argue with her points or valor.

As a sign of thankfulness for the help of the Avenging Talons of Heracles Sept, the Black Fury leader swore to send all her sept’s male offspring to that Silver Fang sept instead of killing them at birth.

“Let me add to this day another note of reminder.” Griffules stood before the assembled mass, his voice booming with a force that made all heed his word. “I mourn for the loss of your Josphea. I mourn for the death of Elysia, your once-leader. Both were noble and full of glory. Both lost their lives in order to defeat that Garou-hunting mystic. I feel sadness for your Blighted bawn.



“The vengeful Teneglocles-ikthya has stricken from you the whole of your flock; even from death, he managed to bring this point true. My heart feels for your hardship, but I think that the time is come for humankind to develop without our influence.”

The Black Fury sept leader responded, “Josphea died for duty and honor; she has done us justice. Elysia faced death, pledging fang and talon to battle with the Wyrmin; the glory of Gaia overflowed from deep within her. All is well. What better death than that opposing the vile evils that are the Wyrms?”

“Do not shed tears for them, for now they have ascended to higher forms. Such a death should be wished for by any true Garou, for it is our duty to right the balance between Wyld and Weaver alike.

“Of humans the case is clear. We overstepped ourselves here, and it will take a great deal of work to bring a human flock back to our bawn. We will have to work beside them and nurture the development of a new village, or we will fall into extinction and lose Huntress Caern to the Wyrms.

“It is better to let humankind expand than to give cause to the Wyrms to multiply. We must not give them a reason to give in to the Wyrms’ false gifts.”

All stood silent in contemplation.

Griffules howled to the others of his tribe. The Silver Fangs transformed into wolves and ran from the Black Furies’ brugh to their own, far to the north.

Soon after, a Concolation was held with representatives from all the true tribes of the Garou. It was in this great meeting that the Impergium was first openly questioned. All present agreed that humankind was turning toward the Wyrms for its tainted powers. If Gaia was making plans for humanity to live and flourish, then it was not the place of Garou to thwart its destiny. A member of the Avenging Talons of Heracles Sept suggested that the Garou should begin to treat humankind just as they would any other animal, instead of singling them out for destruction. One day, the Silver Fang hoped, Garou, wolf and human would live side by side in peace.

*Thank you, Awen. My voice has rung true with your aid. Let all who have heard my words think about the fallen ones, for we are the inheritors of their legacy. We are the ones who must live this day in true glory as these heroes did in the days of old, or we will surely die as Wyrms-tainted shadows of our true selves.*



# The Guardian Stone

by William Spencer-Hale


“Shut up, puppies! Damn! Do you wanna hear this or not?” A sudden silence fell upon the gathering, and all eyes looked to Speaks-With-Clenched-Fists as he paced impatiently about the children. “Damn kids,” he muttered under his breath and waited for the proper moment to begin his tale.

“Long before Laughing Wolf ruled the Sept of the Crimson Gaze and commended such respect among the Get of Fenris, before any of you puppies were born, there was Kurak. Now Kurak was as mean as a bitch-wolf in heat with no hope of a mate, if you know what I mean. He led the sept with a steel fist and an icy stare. When he said jump, you had better ask how high or he would bust your butt then laugh at you while you bled. Gotta respect that. Anyway, this is a story of that stone you sit beneath, of Kurak’s greatest glory and of the day that Gaia gave him immortality, so shut up and listen.”

Speaks-With-Clenched-Fists, the eldest tale-master and perhaps the most respected, waited very impatiently for his young throng to settle down. They sat at the foot of the great stone, the center of the caern and a monument to the glory of the past. Speak-With-Clenched-Fist’s face held no expression, but this said more than mere words could ever convey. It told of the pride he held for this next generation, the hope he held so dear to his heart for these special children — those born of the Changing Breed. It also spoke of the sorrow that had etched caverns of despair beneath his tired, old eyes; of his remorse that this generation was born into a dying world and that they may very well be the last to hunt these lush forests as so many had done before them. It is a sad time for all Garou; the Apocalypse has come. Gaia, the great Earth Mother, closes her eyes and prepares for eternal sleep.

Speaks-With-Clenched-Fists was an impressive man for his age. His hair was gray, but it was full and thick as it rested softly on his broad shoulders. His eyes, despite the wrinkles that framed them, sparkled in the light of the fire and gave the impression of eternal youth. His body was covered with scars, trophies of battles past, and his voice was clear and musical as it rose to the treetops.

Speaks-With-Clenched-Fists began to stalk around the fire, locking eyes with each of the cubs as he did so. The smoke from the blaze danced about him like the ghosts



of the past, and he saw the fear begin to awaken in the children. The time was right to begin his tale.

“It had come back to hunt. No one really knew what the hell it was. All we knew was it fed off of Death. It would hunt you down, relishing the fear that it caused, intoxicating itself on your terror, and then it would strike — AAAAHHHHHH!”

The cubs jumped at the sudden scream. Speaks-With-Clenched-Fists chuckled to himself. “It never ate the bodies, though; only left them mangled and horribly disfigured in some way, like peeling away their faces like the skin of a fruit and posting them to a nearby tree. In fact, this was our only sign that it had a sense of humor. It was like the corpses were nothing more than a toy for its amusement. Not very damn funny, huh?”

“It was a horrible thing to look at. It stood as tall as the elder oak and had no hair at all. Its pale green skin seemed to glow and cast a foul light on the surrounding trees. When it walked, it hunched over and dragged its claws on the ground like a gorilla. Its teeth were so big that it couldn’t close its mouth, and they were so sharp that its lips always oozed a sick, dark-green liquid because it was so stupid it kept cutting itself.


“This monster had no name. It was so horrible that we rarely spoke of it at the moots, or any other gathering for that matter. When it was mentioned, it was in whispers, for fear of capturing its attention.”

The children were completely still now. They gave all of their attention to their elder, as much out of respect as for fear of what might be behind them were they to look.

“I was a youth then, with memories of my Rite of Passage still fresh in my mind. I had just taken my place within the sept, and I was swimming in pride. Each of you will know what it’s like someday. I remember my pack, the Black Fangs. There were seven of us, including me. We thought that we would live forever. How wrong we were. Except for me, the Black Fangs hunt the forests of Valhalla now. My time to join them approaches.

“But I digress... It had come back. By no means was this the first time this creature had come to prey upon Garou. We had been talking about it for generations. Some say when it wasn’t hunting Garou, it was the mistress of the Wyrms, breeding with the Wyrms so as to give birth to any number of nameless horrors. Of course, nobody knows where the hell it came from, only that it came. And whenever it did, it brought nothing but death with it. It had come in cycles for longer than most Galliards could remember — but this time, it preyed upon the wrong sept. These were Kurak’s kin, and while other tribes may lack the courage to meet such a monster in battle, the Get of Fenris do not.

“You see, cubs, despite Kurak’s violent temper and impatience with everything, he cared deeply about his sept. He looked at it like this: he could beat the hell out of



you if you didn't do things right, but no one else was allowed this privilege. He would stomp the dirt out of anyone — or anything — that tried to harm his people. This was the creature's greatest mistake."

Speaks-With-Clenched-Fists paused a moment and bathed in the quiet of the night, allowing the darkness to wrap around him like a blanket, protecting him from the memories that he was about to awaken.

"I remember that night. It seemed like any other, but what was to happen would forever change my life and the lives of my kin. We had just returned from the hunt and were cleaning ourselves of the blood of the kill when it came.

"It took us completely off guard and dragged three of my sept-brothers screaming into the darkness before we knew what was happening. That was its way. It would either catch you alone in the woods and hunt you until it grew tired of its little game, or it would attack at blinding speed and drag you away to toy with you. From the expressions etched on the faces of the corpses — those with and without skin — it seemed in no great hurry to kill.


"After the creature's raid, I looked over to see several of our Ahrouns holding Kurak down, to keep him from giving chase to the monster on his own. I was in shock. Hell, I really didn't know what to do. I was still just a pup myself; no matter what I told myself, I had never truly been tested in battle. That, too, would change.

"It took the other warriors several minutes to talk some sense into Kurak. He was a hardheaded son of a bitch. After a few minutes, he stopped screaming and beating on everyone within arm's reach and listened to the opinions of the others. They spoke until dawn, discussing various plans and the best course of action to take. As the sun rose over the trees, the warriors came to an agreement."

Two of the cubs, distracted by Speaks-With-Clenched-Fists' rhetoric, began a coy slap fight between themselves. The elder tale-master spun quickly on his heels, positioning himself above them so they were totally eclipsed in his shadow.

"Damn! Damn! Do you wish to hear this tale? Do you consider yourselves old enough to challenge my right to speak?" The two children apologetically bowed their heads and averted their eyes from the harsh, menacing gaze of Speaks-With-Clenched-Fists. "AAAHHH!! *Do not hide your eyes from me!* You are Get of Fenris! Face me with courage, or by Steelclaw's battle-howl, I will teach you the price of cowardice."

The larger of the two children glared angrily up at Speaks-With-Clenched-Fists. His posture suggested he was prepared to pounce upon the elder. Speaks-With-Clenched-Fists looked down at the youth, a slight smile illuminating his aged features, and returned to the center of the circle.



“Anyway, they had come to a decision. As the sun made its journey across the sky, they would rest and prepare themselves for the task ahead. At dusk, they sat down to the warrior’s last feast. At this time Kurak gave the Call of War, inviting all who would defend the sept, not just the Ahrouns, the opportunity to taste the glory of battle. My pack leader, with support from all of us, told Kurak that the Black Fangs would join him in battle this night. We were offered a place in the warriors’ circle as we gathered our weapons and thrilled in the anticipation of what was to come.

“Luna began her dance in the night sky as we found the scent of our kinain, tainted with the foul stench of the monster that carried them away. The trail was broken in several places, and the scent was faded in spots — it was the rainy season — but eventually we found those who had been stolen from us.

“In a clearing near the western edge of the forest, we discovered our slain brethren. The clearing was overpowering with the stench of the Wyrn. In fact, the evil was so strong here that our bodies, revolted by the corruption of our beloved hunting grounds, forced our evening feast to spill onto the cold ground. The condition of the corpses did nothing to ease our pain.


“They were completely dismembered. Heads, arms, legs — everything had been cut away and arranged in patterns on the blood-stained earth. Their heads were positioned in the center, their lips etched in forced smiles held in place by sharpened sticks. That vision still haunts my nightmares.”

One of the children, a boy no older than 11, sat wide-eyed as the tears rolled down his pale face. Speaks-With-Clenched-Fists walked over and kneeled beside the youth, wiping away his tears with a callused hand. “Do not cry for what is already done, pup.” Speaks-With-Clenched-Fists smiled for a moment then reclaimed his place in the center of the circle, his face becoming cold and emotionless once more. The fire mingled with the blaze in his somber eyes as he cast them to the horizon, seeming to focus on something far away.

“The creature that committed this crime was nowhere to be seen, and although its taint was on the corpses and within the clearing, the scent had been weakened by the rains. Kurak decided that we should rest for a while. We all agreed, but no one wanted to rest in this foul place. We trekked about a mile east, to where the forest became thinner. There we sat, caressed by Luna’s cold light.

“It felt good to sit. Some of the tension that filled us earlier had fled, and we all relaxed in the company of our brethren. This is what it had waited for.

“The forest erupted with the war-howl of the beast. Trees splintered and flew in all directions as it rushed into the middle of our gathering. Its hunger to kill seemed impossible to sate. My pack leader was the first to die as he tried to block the monster’s



attack. The creature picked him up and snapped him in half like a dead twig; he had not enough time to even give a death howl.

“Three others died in much the same way before the creature once again made its escape back into the safety of the dark woods. As it did so, it threw a morbid, low laugh to the night sky, filling all with a cold, bitter emptiness. Kurak screamed his rage to the forest, pulling us from our shock and instilling us all with the need to bring vengeance to this beast.

“I felt the power of my Rage creep up my spine and fill me with the pride that was the Get of Fenris. I thrilled as I watched my body change to the war-form, the lethal Crinos. The pale moonlight illuminated my transformation, and I felt the power Gaia has given to the Changing Breed as the blood coursed through my veins. I knew: *Tonight I will bathe in the blood of my enemy and know the taste of its defeat. If I am to die, so be it. It is the Way.*

“Through the forest we ran, riding the wave of our violent passions. I remember the sound of the blood rushing through my veins, echoing in my head like the drums of war. The moist grass on the forest floor soaked my feet, and the briars ripped at my flesh, leaving my coat dripping with blood. I was ready for battle.


“We reached the top of a small hill, and Kurak called our war party to a halt. It waited at the bottom of the hill, snarling its defiance at our gathering. It slithered around the trees like some foul snake waiting for its prey. The damn thing was consumed with arrogance as it motioned us to come forward and join with it in death.

“The power I felt was glorious. I wanted so badly to sink my teeth into the creature’s flesh and fill the night with its death cries. This was the moment that I realized the true glory of the Get of Fenris. Despite the fear that raced up my spine and caused the hackles on my arms and neck to stand up, I was still filled with the need to kill, still lusting for battle. Indeed, my children, my fear itself filled me with power. The terror this creature caused made me a tool of destruction. I could almost thank the monster for the lesson it taught me.

“You will all understand this lesson one day; I envy you for it. This thrill — the true passage into adulthood — can only be experienced once. It is the trial by blood.”

Speaks-With-Clenched-Fists stepped outside the circle of children and looked solemnly into the deep blue of the night sky. He removed his worn, leather skins and traced his fingers lightly over several scars as if to help him remember the tale. The sounds of the night orbited the fire and helped remove the tension that filled the circle in the moment of silence. Speaks-With-Clenched-Fists turned to rejoin the pups, his eyes mirroring the bloodshed of the past.

“Kurak gave the howl to attack, and without hesitation, we all did so. The chill night air stung our eyes as we launched ourselves at the horror that awaited us. Such



is our way, to greet death with eyes open. As tribe leader, Kurak had the right to draw first blood, and that he did. He bit hard into the creature's rotted flesh, and its bellow of pain echoed through the forest. At last, it had felt pain, and in doing so, now knew fear.

"It grabbed Kurak and threw him into a nearby tree. The sound of his ribs breaking was like the snapping of deadwood." Speaks-With-Clenched-Fists picked up a twig and snapped it in half to punctuate his point. A grimace etched its way across his face as the fire cast shadows on the gathering. The elder tale-master had begun to change. His features became more pinched and wolf-like as his ears began to grow to a point and the hair on his back and arms became thicker. His voice became a harsh growl as his words tried to escape his protruding fangs.


"The next to attack the creature was not so fortunate. With all the courage that is the Get, he leap into the monster's face, attempting to blind the thing. His white fur instantly turned crimson as his head was taken from him and his life-blood poured in all directions. The slick blood made one of my nearby brethren lose his footing, giving the monster the opportunity to grab him. It lifted my brother up by the throat and thrust its festering paw into my brother's ribcage and relieved him of his heart. Once again, the cold ground was awash in Garou blood.

"This was my chance. I jumped at the towering horror with all my strength and felt its stench fill my nostrils. I tasted the bile as it rose in my throat, but I tried to concentrate on the task at hand. Like those who had attacked before me, I was greeted with the edge of its claws as they ripped into my belly. Fortunately for me, its paws were slippery with Garou blood, and it lost its grip on me. I fell to the blood-soaked earth and scurried to get out of its reach in order to prepare myself for another attack."

Speaks-With-Clenched-Fists ran his fingers across the large scar on his stomach, a broad smile spreading across his face. The cubs moved closer to get a better look then gazed up into the tale-master's face with eyes overflowing with respect and admiration.

"Before I could jump again, Kurak rose to his feet. Pain scarred his expression as he growled his hatred at the beast that stood before him. I looked over at the remains of our war party, a circle of blood and broken bodies around the creature. Sadness filled my entire being, and I felt the Rage once again begin to consume my heart. I made a move toward the thing, but Kurak waved me away. I looked at him questioningly, and he returned my gaze with a snarl. Kurak had decided that he alone would feast on the blood of the monster. All of us who still lived knew not to challenge his decision. It was his right of battle; any who dared to object would suffer his justice.

"Without further hesitation, Kurak lunged at the monster's throat only to be swatted down once again. As he struck the ground, the creature thrust its talons into Kurak's belly, attempting to remove his heart. Kurak rolled away from the beast, but



as he did, it opened a huge gash in his stomach, and Kurak's entrails spilled onto the ground to mingle with the other Garou blood.

"Believing Kurak and his war party all dead, the creature turned its back and began to walk into the darkness of the forest. As it did so, I looked over to see Kurak's eyes ablaze with the fires of hatred. Kurak gathered all his remaining strength and grasped a nearby branch that had broken during the battle. Using it, he managed to pull himself to his feet and stood glaring at the back of the creature's blood-encrusted head."

Speaks-With-Clenched-Fists was in Glabro form now, but with the full claws of the Crinos. His huge hands grasped a long branch to illustrate how Kurak stood so many years ago.

"Kurak rushed at the retreating beast, his intestines dragging on the damp soil behind him and, thrust the branch that he held so tight in his grasp into the creature's back. With a bone-chilling howl, Kurak pushed the branch deeper and deeper until it exploded out from the monster's belly and into the tree that stood in front of the two enemies, pinning the thing to the tree. It struggled like the coward it was to free itself — it knew the fate that awaited it. Kurak, wasting no time, scooped up his intestines and wrapped them firmly around the creature's foul throat. With all of his strength, Kurak began to strangle the life from it, its frantic gurgles mixing with Kurak's war growls.


"This lasted several minutes as Kurak weakened from his wounds and the monster was trying with all its might to reach around and remove the warrior from its back. But the more the beast fought, the more strength Kurak found within himself. With a great howl of defeat, the thing slumped lifeless at Kurak's feet, its black soul returning to whatever hellhole it had come from. It would hunt Garou no more.

"Kurak stumbled once and fell. I crawled over to him, but he pushed me away. He would live or die on his own. This is our way as well. I and one other who had survived followed Kurak back to the caern. We did not speak; words were useless now. Kurak was dying, and we would allow him to do so in silent glory.

"As he entered the circle, the very one that you pups are gathered in now, he looked to the sky and howled to Gaia to give him the power to forever watch over his people. Thunder roared in the distance, and a great bolt of lightning came from the heavens, striking both Kurak and the stone in whose shadow you sit. All that was once Kurak rose from the smoke and ashes and became one with the stone.

"Kurak remains there to this day, forever watching over his people and ensuring their safety. This was his wish, and, because of his courage, Gaia granted it. Gaia will give Herself to any who do not fear battle."

Speaks-With-Clenched-Fists gazed over his young gathering, his heart beating like a war drum because of the fierce, inspired expressions that decorated their faces.



“To bed, pups!” he bellowed, and turned to walk away, resuming his Homid form. The children scurried off as he ordered. All but one.

The young boy who had been weeping earlier stood alone in front of the stone, gazing into its gray depths. He moistened his index finger with saliva and dipped it into the earth at the base of the stone. He then inscribed several war marks on his face with the wet dirt, and stood before the stone with fists clenched and head bowed.

From the shadows of the forest, Speaks-With-Clenched-Fists turned to look at the boy. For a moment, he saw Kurak’s eyes sparkle from the depths of the stone as the boy stood there. Speaks-With-Clenched-Fists knew then that there was hope for the future, that the Apocalypse would not steal away his kind easily, if at all.

Speaks-With-Clenched-Fists smiled and turned away from the boy, disappearing into the darkness of the forest. Luna looked down from the heavens to illuminate the Sept of the Crimson Gaze and cast a light upon the child as he whispered to the ghosts of those who came before him.

And the forest echoed their soft reply as a warm breeze caressed the trees and lifted freely into the night.



# Patchbelly and the Plague-Wolf

by Phil Brucato

*Silence!*

*Call me outcast if you will, but I am Garou and will not be denied my place at the fire!*


*As metis, I am scorned, though I have proven my worth in struggles against the Wyrms. My eye now is dead, and my hide bears scars that prove that metis, too, know the glory of Gaia's battle. Silence, all of you, for I speak now of the glory of a warrior scorned! The Shadow Lords know him as one of Grandfather Thunder's chosen, and the Stormcrows know that I speak the truth ...*

Patchbelly stood alone while his people burned. The pyre singed his fur as he howled for his dead. The heat dried their blood to his Crinos coat, and his howl was the scream of vengeance.

Plague had taken the tribe who had given him shelter. The smallpox-ridden blankets curled to ashes in another fire nearby; he would not insult the departing spirits by burning their bodies and the infested blankets in the same pyre. In the final hours of his people, Patchbelly had gone among them ending the suffering of those still alive. It was the best he could give them — a quick death and a clean fire.

And the deaths of those who had murdered them.

Miles distant, the Plague-Wolf smiled, wrapped in his cavalry uniform. Behind him, at a distance, his Bane-ridden soldiers lashed the horses pulling the supply cart. Beneath canvas tarps lay dozens of blankets culled from cholera wards and smallpox clinics, or infested with the plague of the wolf's own foul breath, a deadly Gift of the Wyrms. In the Black Spiral Dancer's eyes, visions of flies and maggots waltzed across the corpses of Civil War dead and across the campsites of the native people. There were many tribes ahead, and many more blessings to bestow from the Great White Father. A mad wolf's work was never done.



Patchbelly loped along in prairie darkness, frost crackling beneath his paws, and he cursed the smoke lingering in his nostrils, covering the scent of his prey. A week they'd been gone, and fresh frost obscured their scent.

*Why are you doing this?* some inner voice asked as he searched for the trail. He sniffed the air, but he was alone. *What do you owe the dead? What do you owe anyone? Be free,* the voice urged, and Patchbelly paused. What did he owe anyone? All Garou treated him as an outcast, metis born of Uktena and Fianna, and a cub at that. No one would give him Rite of Passage, and most had tried to kill him. The humans were even worse. As Garou, he was a monster; as human, a half-breed.

The Cheyenne who had died were the closest family he'd ever known, though even they could not truly be called his people. When the war against the white man turned to slaughter, refugees fled the white advance, fighting when they could and fleeing when they could not. The Cheyenne who finally accepted him were grateful for help from any of native blood, even a half-breed. There were Kinfolk among that tribe; they knew him for what he was and called him Patchbelly for his bristly coat and gaunt appearance. Although he had never undergone the rite, to his tribe he was a warrior well bloodied.

But even among that tribe, Patchbelly had been feared. "rage," said his mother when they parted, "is your legacy and your salvation." That rage kept him fierce in battle, but when the War Dance was done, Patchbelly was shunned. *Why shouldn't you be free?* Patchbelly had no answers.

The odors of dozens of horses and humans, leather, and fresh-cut wood and the dim light from several lanterns guided him to a ramshackle town. His ever-present rage smoldered at the sight, and he put his doubts aside. Information could be had in this place and vengeance as well. Answers could be found later.

Patchbelly's claws silenced the guard at the headman's cottage. The locked door yielded to his shoulder. In the half-light, Patchbelly saw the headman, writing by a feeble lantern's glow. The guttering fire danced in the chill wind, and the headman's face went pale. Patchbelly rippled with rage and crossed the room in two swift strides. "Tell me," he rasped, "where the Plague-Wolf goes!"

"Colonel Bannister?" choked the headman, for this was the Black Spiral's human name. "Plague-Wolf" was what the natives who knew of his dealings called him. The nickname was more fitting than they knew.

"Yes," growled Patchbelly. "Do not lie."

By the lantern's light, the headman saw his death gleam along Patchbelly's wicked claws. "He passed through not two days ago," the headman stammered, "then went off toward Fort Clifford."



“He had blankets?”

“He did,” the headman replied. “A wagonful.”

“You knew what they were for —” Patchbelly towered over the man, who wet his drawers in terror, “— and you know how the Plague-Wolf got his name.”

“I... I... I...” The headman recalled the buck who knows when the hunt is ended. Suddenly, a boom, the voice of Grandfather Thunder, crashed within the cabin. Patchbelly reeled as the bullet caught him in the back, hurling him to the cabin floor. Another gunshot, and Patchbelly’s shoulder exploded with crimson pain. Two cowboys stood in the doorway, wreathed in smoke. The headman leaped to his feet and snatched up a nearby pistol. “Good shooting, boys!” he cried. “This damned thing wanted to kill me!”

“You deserve worse than death,” Patchbelly snarled. Even now, the bullet wounds stopped bleeding and closed, such was his rage. He rolled to his feet and slashed the headman from gut to shoulder. As he fell, the headman knocked over the table, and the lantern fell to the floor and smashed. Flames spattered across the room.


One cowboy cocked his rifle; the other drew a pistol. Patchbelly was quicker than both. Two swipes, and both men were dying on the floor. Blood and burning oil mixed and spread. From outside, startled shouts and screams began. Patchbelly strode from the burning cabin like a lord. “The Plague-Wolf,” he screamed, “has murdered my people! Colonel Bannister will die!”

Off to the west, at Fort Clifford, Colonel Bannister and his Bane-ridden men gathered in secret to breathe the Wym-plague onto a new pile of blankets. Several soldiers from the fort grew ill that night, and all were uneasy though none knew why.

It took Patchbelly three days to reach the fort, loping through a thin coat of snow. He followed the trail of the Wym-wagon past a Dakota tribe wasted beyond help by the demon plague, warning the survivors to push on and avoid further contact with the Great White Father’s cavalry. He reached the palisade of Fort Clifford near midnight.

Snow was falling, and Patchbelly doubted that his quarry had left the fort. By the light of the gibbous moon, he saw the sentries shivering on the walls. With his Gift, he tunneled beneath the frozen ground, emerging on the other side of the wall, then hid himself in shadow.

The reek of gunpowder and unwashed men hung heavy in the air as Patchbelly scented for his prey; to his frustration, he could not find the Wym-spawned Dancer. He assumed his Homid form, killed a sentry and took his uniform. Disguised, he went about the sleeping fort, straining his senses for the Plague-Wolf and his men.



Out of the darkness came a Stormcrow, silent as a whisper. It perched outside the infirmary where the infected soldiers lay: Patchbelly followed the Stormcrow, peering into the crowded infirmary. The infirmary was full. A doctor stooped over the dying men, his features stiff with anger. Patchbelly looked the soldiers over; the sores on their sweating faces were familiar to him.

“How are they?” he asked the doctor.

“Not good,” the doctor replied.

“Dying?”

“That’s my guess.” The man’s offhand manner could not conceal his frustration.

“I’ve seen that sickness before,” the Garou replied.

“Where?” The doctor eyed him suspiciously.

“You know Colonel Bannister?”

The doctor’s features sharpened: “The so-called ‘Plague-Wolf’? We already figured that Bannister’d gotten careless with his redskin blankets, and the captain’s sent men after him.” The doctor looked at him closely in the lamplight. “Say,” he asked, “you a half-breed, son?”

“You might say that,” Patchbelly snarled. rage surged in him, and he let the doctor see it. The man paled visibly and stepped back.

“You know what Bannister does,” Patchbelly growled, grabbing the doctor’s quivering throat, “yet his sickness concerns you only when it threatens your own kind.” The doctor’s eyes glazed.


“I should kill you,” Patchbelly continued. “But I need to know where the Plague-Wolf is going.” He held the squirming doctor’s face a handspan from a plague victim’s mouth. “Tell me,” said Patchbelly, “or I’ll rip his sores open and bathe your face in pus.”

The doctor gurgled; Patchbelly relaxed his grip. “They... had more blankets... They went south to spread them around... then they’ll catch the munitions train northbound three days from now at Halterston...”

Patchbelly grinned unpleasantly and asked, “Tell me the way to Halterston.”

In their reservations in the deep southwest, the native peoples still speak of the gaunt winter wolf who ordered the shamans to burn the white man’s blankets. Three tribes were spared the Plague-Wolf’s gift. A fourth was not so lucky.

Patchbelly tossed one night in a dream of mockery — of harsh laughter, jeers and spittle — from the tribes of both human and Garou from whom he had once sought shelter. His own tribe sat motionless, flies dancing about their heads. He waited for them to speak, but they said nothing. He awoke, shivering bitterly, to a vision of a snow-strewn plain. In the distance were mountains; above them loomed the Plague-Wolf, midnight black with blazing eyes. Patchbelly’s own corpse lay frozen on the



plain, half-buried in snow and bloated with running sores. *Why are you doing this?* the voice asked again. He remembered the silent faces of his tribe, now dead and scattered ash, and still had no answers.

A Stormcrow perched outside the saloon in Halterston. As he stood on the snow swept boards outside the tavern, Patchbelly shivered in stolen clothing, feeling the Black Spiral's madness. The horses tethered outside nickered and snorted, kicking at the gathering snow while their masters grew drunk inside.

The rage that never him left swelled in Patchbelly's gut as he drew a Bowie knife. Calming the horses with a Gift, he went among them, cutting them free of bridles and saddles, then sending them on their way. This done, he gauged his chances from the sounds of the bar inside.

The Black Spiral and his Bane-hosts, eight in all, commanded the room from their table near the stairs. A half-breed piano player set a tone of desperate gaiety for the place. Saloon girls perched on stools and men's knees, shivering in their scanty costumes. Every man in town who could afford a beer clustered about the wooden tables, gambling, arguing, drinking. Everyone scowled as the chill wind cut through the suddenly opened door. The blood drained from their faces when they saw what had opened it.

Patchbelly stood in the doorway, in full Crinos form. In his rage, stoked to frenzy by the sight of his prey, he shattered the Veil. As drunken men groped for their guns, he leaped into the room and started to kill. Knives flashed, bullets flew and fresh blood splattered the floor. More than a dozen men fell beneath Patchbelly's claws before he reached the Plague-Wolf's table.

Two of the Bane-men, officers by their dress, drew sabers and tried to catch the Garou between them. The other fomori drew their guns and fired into the carnage. Patchbelly dodged many of the attacks, but several drew blood. As the humans fled, fell or turned on their brothers, Patchbelly met the fomori head-on. The Plague-Wolf, screened by his men, laughed as he transformed into his own Crinos form, a twisted, misshapen thing, black and oily as tar with eyes of liquid moonlight.

A Bane-man's sword bit deeply into Patchbelly's shoulder, skidding off the bone. The metis raked his claws through the fomor's chest, tattering jacket, shirt and flesh. Instead of blood, blue pus exploded from the zombie, drenching Patchbelly in slime. Despite his rage, he shrieked as the pus boiled across his skin; where it touched, the fur turned white and fell out.

As Patchbelly reeled from the pain, a second saber-wielding fomor stabbed him through the back. Patchbelly staggered, but ripped the sword from the fomor's hand with a blow that took its arm off at the elbow. It screamed, and the sound shattered the windows and the glasses on the bar. Patchbelly grabbed his ears as his eardrums popped.



Two bullets caught him in the chest, knocking him sprawling, and then the Black Spiral was upon him.

“So this,” he said, “is the hunter I’ve been warned about.” His fangs gleamed in a lopsided sneer. “How pathetic.”

Patchbelly tried to answer, but choked on blood. One of his ears was ringing, the other was dead. A greenish black fog drifted from the Black Spiral’s jaws, its smell making Patchbelly’s stomach churn. The blue pus from the dying fomor pooled around him, burning his back.

Patchbelly was dimly aware of the other fomori slaughtering the remaining humans in the bar. The one with the severed arm stepped heavily upon Patchbelly’s arms, pinning them beneath his boots. Despite his rage, fear gripped the warrior. *But if this is how it ends, he thought, I’ll make them remember me!*

The Plague-Wolf smiled, poison on his breath. “Sleep well, misfit,” he growled. “My master waits with open arms.” He brought his face within inches of Patchbelly’s own.

Patchbelly bit him.


The Black Spiral leaped back in shock, but Patchbelly held on with his dying strength. His arms twisted cruelly behind him as he strained against the fomor’s boots. His jaws ripped furrows in the Dancer’s snout as the Wyrmspawn’s blood burned down his throat. The Plague-Wolf’s claws lashed out, and Patchbelly felt his life drifting away. His jaws lost their hold, and the Plague-Wolf pulled free.

Patchbelly’s head slammed against the wooden floor, motes dancing before his eyes. The Black Spiral loomed above him, caustic blood dripping onto the Garou’s matted chest. The reek of sudden fear filled the bar.

“For that,” snarled the Dancer, “you can die the way your people died, by the Plague-Wolf’s gift!” So saying, he leaned as close as caution would permit and blew a gust of black poison into Patchbelly’s face.

They tied Patchbelly to a cactus. Naked. Face first.

Patchbelly awoke in agony, fire from his wounds clashing with the winter wind’s chill. He was Homid when he awoke, and what hair he had possessed was gone. Long thorns pierced him in a hundred places, all of them painful. The ropes strained against his cramped shoulders. His eyes had been spared, but night was still upon the land and clouds hid the moon. *This is where the vengeance trail has led you, said the voice. Forsaken, dying and alone.* Overcome by despair, he wept.



The fluttering of wings behind him broke through his sorrow. Patchbelly strained to look behind him, but saw nothing. "Do you think that I care so little for my children?" rumbled a voice so deep and loud that it shook the cactus.

"Grandfather Thunder," whispered Patchbelly.

The rustling of wings became louder, like the flight of a thousand crows. "Your courage falters, but your rage has sustained you. Would you honor your oath still?"

Patchbelly hesitated, but only for a moment. "Beyond my dying breath!"

Thunder's voice chuckled. "I do not doubt it." Then it grew serious. "Would you honor your oath for your people or for yourself?"

Patchbelly remembered the silent faces of his dream and a lifetime of rejection. *Who are my people*, he wondered, *and what do I owe them?* The wrong answer, he knew, would doom him to death on the cactus.


Then, suddenly, Patchbelly had the answer. "For both," he cried aloud, "but most of all because I am Garou, and the Wyrmspawn is blasphemy to the Mother!"

Black shapes flapped from the night and perched upon the cactus. "The train leaves at dawn from Halterston." The Stormcrows pecked at the ropes, but Grandfather Thunder did not speak again. Patchbelly staggered as his bonds fell away, but he did not fall. Satisfied, the crows took wing as one.

"Thank you, Grandfather, and Mother," Patchbelly breathed as he let his rage take him. "This time I won't fail you."

Halterston crawled with cavalry, some drawn by the slaughter in the saloon and others guarding the train that carried the white man's powder. Patchbelly, his wounds healing but his fur gone, raced towards the train in Hispo form. From a distance, he saw fomori packing the last of the plague-carrying blankets aboard a boxcar. Smoke belched into the morning sky as the iron monster lurched from the boarding platform. He pushed himself into a flat run as the train pulled away. Several cavalry noticed; they shouted warnings and began to fire as Patchbelly gained on the fleeing train. The bullets went wild, kicking up snow in his wake. On the train, soldiers scrambled to the windows to see the commotion.

As he ran, Patchbelly gauged his final leap, realizing that he would have to change in mid flight to grab hold of the narrow conductor's platform. One soldier, a guard from the caboose, stepped out to the platform and raised his rifle. Patchbelly leapt at the guard, praying that momentum and rage would outrace the bullet. His paws turned to hands just in time to grasp the railing, and the guard screamed in horror as Delirium hit him. Patchbelly's legs scrambled for a hold, but slipped. His arms wrenched as he fell, clinging to the cold railing.



Aboard the train, the Plague-Wolf's men grabbed their weapons and went to investigate.

The metis heaved himself onto the platform as the guard gibbered with fear. Patchbelly swept him from the train and shouldered his way inside. The conductor cowered in a bunk; the Garou ignored him as he passed through the caboose, grabbed up a table and held it before him as he crossed the gap between the cars. By now the train had picked up speed, and the clatter of boots was drowned in the thunder of the grinding wheels.

Guns roared as the metis smashed through the door, but the bullets ripped into the table and left him unharmed. He hurled the table at the cringing cavalry, his gaze sweeping the car for the Bane-hosts.

One burst through the opposite door, clinging to the platform outside. Patchbelly snatched a knife from the floor and pitched it into the fomor's chest. Blue bile spurted as he fell beneath the train's wheels. The wood blistered where the blood had fallen.

Patchbelly dispatched the humans in a fury of claws, then hefted a shotgun stolen from a dead man's grasp. The fomori were fatal at close range, but Patchbelly knew the white man's weapons as well as his own. His howl of challenge shook the car.

"Come and get me, you bastards!" he cried. "You've done your best, and I'm still not dead!"


A hail of gunfire greeted the challenge; the bullets tore the room apart, but Patchbelly was prepared. He cried out as if hit and fell to the floor. One fomori, then another, crossed carefully into the car, guns at the ready. As they approached, Patchbelly exerted his Gnosis and let loose a Banshee Howl. The fomori froze in terror, and he leapt to his feet and clubbed them with the shotgun butt.

One fell into the car; the other was pitched screaming onto the rails. This one popped like a mammoth bug, spewing acidic entrails across the tracks. Metal pitted at the touch.

The other fomor regained its footing. A huge black tongue shot from its mouth. Patchbelly blew the Bane-host to shreds with his shotgun, just to be safe.

A grinding sound made him glance up. A grinning fomor was uncoupling the rear cars from the train. Desperate, Patchbelly dropped the spent shotgun and leaped through the doorway. A blast of foul plague-breath caught him in mid air, and he choked as he scabbled for a hold on the next car.

His hand closed around a rail, then a rifle butt smashed across his fingers. He blinked furiously; his eyes swam with tears. His feet gripped the platform as the car behind him slid away, leaving him hanging in space behind the rushing train.



Two fomori stood between the next car and death on the tracks. He felt plague sores rising on his face as the rifle butt slammed his hand again and again. His other hand flailed blindly for a target. *Grandfather*, he prayed, *do not let me fail now*.

The bloated laughter of the Plague-Wolf himself ripped through the haze of pain. The cackles recalled rotting corpses and joyful flies, the gassy stink of charnel rot. Patchbelly hooked his free claws into the awning above the car doorway, then released his hold on the railing and swung free.

As he swept forward, Patchbelly tore his claws through the fomor with the rifle then reached to pull himself up over the awning, howling with pain. His arms screamed, his claws sang, the wood beneath his claws splintered, but he heaved himself to the top of the car as the train took a steep curve and the wounded fomor fell from the platform. Below, he heard the Plague-Wolf snarl. He braced himself against the rushing wind and staggered toward the middle of the car, buying precious time to recover before the final clash.

"Fancy stunts will only stall the inevitable!" Patchbelly heard the scrabbling of claws on wood behind him. Turning, he saw the Plague-Wolf, shivering with hate, clambering up the ladder to the roof. The icy slipstream lashed at them both as they squared off upon the rocking train.

The Black Spiral struck first, gathering mystic Balefire between his paws and hurling it at Patchbelly. The metis dodged then raked his claws across his enemy's chest. The Black Spiral's face, he noted with pride, still bore the scars he gave it in the saloon. Green saliva bubbled from the Plague-Wolf's fangs, and he grabbed for the metis. Patchbelly dodged again, and the two traded blows as the train raced along.

Once again, a bullet caught Patchbelly by surprise. Behind him, a grinning Banehost cocked his smoking rifle. As Patchbelly reeled from the shock of the hit, the Dancer raked his claws across the metis's throat. A green ichor seeped from its claws, and its touch burned worse than the ripping talons.

Patchbelly stumbled, almost falling, then whirled to face both foes. The Black Spiral gestured absently behind Patchbelly and chuckled. From the corner of his eye, he saw a second fomor aiming a shotgun at him.

"Why not jump," asked the Plague-Wolf, "and spare us the trouble?"

Patchbelly's throat burned, but he could speak. "Your plague-blankets have killed more of the native people than the bullets of a thousand whites."

The Dancer bowed slightly. "Just doing my job."

Patchbelly vomited. The plague washed through him, eating him inside. He gathered his strength. "Grandfather Thunder will have his due. You have killed his people, and mine as well."



“You have no people, outcast,” the Dancer spat. “You are half-breed, metis, and a failure!”

Patchbelly grinned. “Outcast I was and half-breed I may be, but never a failure.” As he said this, he leaped. The guns roared, but the shots went wide. His claws found the Black Spiral’s ribs and punched through. The Plague-Wolf howled, belching blood, and the train pitched violently. Both Garou fell to their knees. The wooden roof cracked beneath the impact. Patchbelly regained his footing first; grabbing the Dancer, he raised him above his head and slammed him against the roof.

The fomor fired again, and this time, bullets and buckshot found their target. Patchbelly dashed his stunned foe against the roof like a rag doll. Dying mists crept across his vision, and the foul blood of the Dancer burned his paws. His fangs sought the Black Spiral’s throat. As he struck, feeling the rush of poisonous blood on his tongue, the Plague-Wolf locked his claws into Patchbelly’s naked sides.

Then the roof gave way, spilling them both into the car below.

Patchbelly took the worst of the fall, while the Dancer broke free and reeled against the wall. Patchbelly shook his head to clear the mists across his vision. Two fomori leveled their guns at him. Other soldiers, human ones, watched with frozen horror. The Plague-Wolf’s eyes blazed with hate.

Patchbelly smiled. Moments from death, his inner doubts were silent. One soldier, he noted, had been smoking a pipe, and it smoldered in his hand. Across the car were three kegs of gunpowder.

The final words of Patchbelly, son of Fianna and Uktena, were in his mother’s Cheyenne tongue: “Spirit of the Flames, hear my summons...”

The explosion was heard for miles around.

How do I know this tale, you ask, when all who lived it are long dead? Ask the Shadow Lords, who read the past in the rumbles of our Grandfather’s voice and who speak with spirits, for the deeds of each pack of the Stormcrows’ choosing. My father’s father heard this tale, and my father passed it down to me.

As metis, I have often wondered why I should doom myself rather than run free. Who is worth the outcast’s sacrifice? For whom should he die? I found my answer in Patchbelly’s tale.

When I came of age, I journeyed to the site where Patchbelly’s last request tore a hole in the earth that remains to this day. I stayed by that crater for three nights, and on the third night a Stormcrow came to me, and she bid me listen to the distant storm. I saw the lightning from many miles away, and in the thunder, I could hear Patchbelly’s laughter...



He is with me still, though decades have passed by, and his spirit never leaves me.  
For Patchbelly found at last why even the outcast does not run.

Ask the Stormcrows. They remember.







# Tales of Honor



# Night Flyer

by Sam Chupp

*Though Ragabash I am, born and bred, I have a tale to tell, and because it is one of honor, I will say it in the voice of Long Hunter, the great war-leader, as it was told to me by my ancestor-mother.*

It was winter, winter of the spirit, of the soul. The ground was covered with ice and snow. Gaia was sleeping, Luna mocked us with cold half-light and prey was scarce high in the mountains. We went hungry and fought among ourselves often, and Leader found a cave where we could sleep out of the cold. We were settling in to sleep when one of the Warders gave the call of danger-to-the-tribe.

“Moon Walker is gone! She has gone off into the forests alone!” We all knew that Moon Walker was one of Leader’s favorite Dancers and that he would be greatly saddened by her loss. I offered to go and find her out into the cold, where the great snow had begun, as I am of the Full Moon and fear runs screaming from me.

Leader nudged me, and I rolled over. He put his pads on me and growled as he looked in my eyes. I was shaken by his pale blue eyes and the snow-fur he had — white as the full moon. His pure breed was part of the reason he was Leader... his snow-coat, unique among us, was how he, in his youth, had become Chief Hunter as I am now.

“I’ll not have you dying for this, Ahroun. But if you can fight Father Winter and get back to us with She-Who-Walks-on-the-Moon, you will be rewarded.”

So I went out into the biting wind, growling at the spirits of Father Winter as I went, the snow icing my fur and freezing my left eye nearly shut. I found her by a faint whiff of scent. She looked up at me and changed from the two-leg back to the proper body. “Why are you out here, Moon Walker? And naked in the embrace of Father Winter?” I asked.

“I am who I am,” she said and went past me, leaving my question unanswered.

Moon Walker helped me find the way into the shadow world, then, leading me along in the Shade until we found the streaming light of the pack waiting for us in the cave. I didn’t much like the Shade, but there the winter-spirits do not seek to ice your fur or freeze your bones, and a few growls from me took care of their curiosity. She showed me a moon-bright bit of ice, and we stepped through the Membrane back into the winter land.



I returned to the cave and found the pack at games, barely noticing me. The no-moon, Night Flyer, was dodging back and forth barking, biting and yipping as the other Ahrouns played with her. She was bleeding from her toes, but her movements were agile and her quickly moving hands slapped a few noses.

Moon Walker crept up to Leader and rolled over for her punishment. Leader bit her throat hard, and she cried out. "Now go, and stray not again from the path," Leader said as he let her up. "Long Hunter!" he called to me. "As your reward, take this, the last share of the deer we brought down this morning."

As I feasted, I watched the game the trickster was playing and called out, "Flyer-of-the-Night! Why do you not challenge one of these rogues? They are making you bleed, and you are a better warrior than that." For I am the leader of the Ahrouns, and my kind had started this game without my agreement.

"Because it is more fun to spank their noses than to scratch their eyes, honored Ahroun," she said, grinning as my full-moons chased her back and forth.

I grinned. I enjoyed watching Night Flyer's two-leg body because it was lean and agile like that of a four-leg, but it moved quick and fought hard. I never learned the two-leg and would not take the Body of War, the half-form, unless it was a grave time. But the two-leg was her way, as all Tricksters must break the path of our traditions, and I admired the way she used it.

I watched Night Flyer as she in turn made fools of my warriors, tripping them, scattering them, rolling them over. Bear-Killer then jumped up on her, scratching her badly. She made a quick, hardly seen move, and Bear-Killer landed across the room, his body hitting the stone wall hard.

I stepped over, put my claws on his neck and said, "So the fool makes fools of you all. But, this is what happens when you disobey your leader when he is away." I held him down for a few more breaths, then let him up. Bear-Killer or not, he put his tail down and slunk into the corner.

Leader called us to sleep then, and we made a pile of bodies, nestled in the warmth of the earth our Mother.

In the morning, I went out with some of my warriors to see what Father Winter had done in the night and to see if there was any prey about. Although I am not the keenest of ear in the pack, I heard a cry in the forest first and ran with my pack-brothers to it.

It was a mewling growl, a strange noise. I found its source under a bough. It was a whelp, fur still stiff with its mother's blood. I was filled with the urge to snap its neck with my fangs, for it was clearly an unholy thing. Though a whelp and truly of the Garou, it lay there in the body of rage, the Crinos body, where two-leg and four-leg



meet and there is madness. I grabbed it up in my teeth by the scruff of its neck and carried the mewling whelp back to the cave, for it would be dishonorable to slay the creature without the authority of Leader, who has said that he wishes to know all Garou that we find on our patrols.

I dropped the screaming whelp on the floor of the cave, and Leader sniffed at it. As we watched, the thing changed bodies to a two-leg, a boy, and screamed some more.

Wind Whisper, our spirit-watcher, said, "The middle breed, spawn of an unholy union of a Garou and a Garou... it is a thing of the Wyrms and should be killed."

The Leader sniffed at it. "I cannot tell who among us, if any, may have birthed it. Its scent is a strange one. Perhaps it was left here by one of the Wanderers who live without a pack?"

Tree Climber, who walks under the half-moon, agreed. "Perhaps so, though my familiar tells me that one of Gaia's Gifts has been used on this... whelp."

Leader bent his head down and stepped forward to sniff at the whelp, who quieted and reached out with its meaty hand to touch Leader's nose. "It is a thing of the Wyrms and must be purged. Clearly, the Wyrms has infested one of our Wanderer sisters for her to have birthed this thing." He looked up at me and said, "Long Hunter, you who are War Leader and my Champion in Honor, I tell you to kill this thing, which is of the Wyrms and must die."

I nodded. I stepped carefully over to the whelp, who was crying again. It changed into a wolf pup then, and my heart skipped a beat as I realized what I would have to do. I set my teeth against the thing's young throat, and it screamed even more. Some of the females turned their backs, not wanting to watch.

Suddenly there was a slap at my nose. Flyer-of-the-Night had struck me! Dropping the whelp, I growled at her, feeling my body grow instinctively to my body of combat, the Hispo.

"Stop!" Night Flyer said. "I claim this child. It is my right to do so. Though I did not birth it, I will raise it, and I will fight anyone who claims it."

And Night Flyer picked up the whining pup and held it close to her breast. Feeling her naked two-leg skin, the whelp changed into a human baby and quieted immediately.

I still felt the rage in me, and I growled again, looking at Leader for a guide to honor.

Leader said, "This thing is a thing of the Wyrms. Do you wish to foster the Wyrms in our own midst? To treat it as a member of the Pack?"



Night Flyer said, "I do not ask for him to be treated as a member of the Pack until he has proven himself, just as he will. But I do wish him to live, and I will promise to care for him, as is my right."

Tree Climber looked tired, but said, "It is her right, Leader. Those of the no-moon can break the sacred ways, though they are without honor. If Flyer-of-the-Night will claim her right as no-moon, there is nothing we can do, for she accepts the duty of caring for it. The Litany is clear on this matter."

Leader said to Night Flyer, "As we are without food, you will not give this whelp food of the Pack. He must take food from you and you alone, and you will provide for him. That is your duty." And Leader said to the Pack, "No one else will protect him, defend him, or feed him. That is Night Flyer's duty."

Night Flyer took the baby to the nest she had made in the cave and wrapped bear-furs around him. For many days, Night Flyer ached and hurt for him, as she had heard from the females that if she gave suck to the whelp, Gaia would provide it with sustenance. I thought the whelp would die, but it did not. Instead, Gaia did provide him with milk, though Night Flyer had never birthed. He grew as a normal whelp, though Night Flyer had to ask Wind Whisper for advice on preparing a special berry-and-herb poultice for his skin, which was exceedingly thin, weak and pale. The poultice stained his fur orange-red, so I called him Fire Flyer in my head, as a joke.

We survived the winter in that cave learning that the two-horns we loved to eat had climbed the mountain; we found a way up, and wearing Hispo it was not hard for us to drag the carcasses down to the cave.

On the first day of spring, when the snows still covered the ground, Night Flyer took her whelp out into the open air to climb the mountain and sit. I sent a spirit-falcon along to watch her, for I was curious about this no-moon and why she would claim a Wyrmling for her child.

I watched as Night Flyer carried her child into the Shadow and as she ran and frolicked there, celebrating spring. Her pup was fast and nipped at her heels as he ran with her. Then she took her raven's feather, made herself into a bird and took to the sky. Wheeling and keening with joy, she had forgotten her pup yipping and barking on the ground in the Shade.

I wanted to cry out through my falcon, but there was no voice for it. I saw too late the great Eagle that stole out of the sky and dived down, grabbed her pup and, with beating wings, carried it off. In those days, we did not make friends with the spirits, but rather hunted them and ate them, though with respect. The spirits sought always to make us hurt and to give us pain, and in the Shadow, they were strong. They lived in a perfect Summer Country, where the land was ever full of prey and where those that died were reborn the next morning. Eagle carried the pup off into the Deep



Shadow, where not even our strong shaman, Wind Whisper, would dare to venture alone. When Night Flyer discovered her error, she cried a keen of mourning and beat her wings to try and follow the great Eagle.

I watched with interest as she flew up, up, and further up, up into the blackest heart of the Shadow, where the Deep Shade loomed like a bottomless pit before her. I found her bravery remarkable but foolish. Why, the Wyrn itself lived in the midnight black ocean of the High Umbra.

My falcon followed her, for though I did not want to lose the service of my spirit-thrall, I did want to know the ending of the story of the Flyer-of-the-Night.

It was not the ending, however, for the no-moon found a trick to help her through. As the Darkness surrounded her, she managed to reach Eagle's tail-feathers and plucked one with her beak. He gave a cry of anger and shame, but instead of dropping the infant to attack the no-moon, he gave three mighty beats of his wings and was gone.

Carrying Eagle's feather, Night Flyer spiraled higher into the Deepest Umbra, following Eagle's scent as he flew away so quickly. My falcon followed her close behind, and I was glad that my pack-mates were still asleep, as I soon found it hard to keep contact with my thrall unless I went deep inside myself in the manner of the Theurges.

Night Flyer passed through to the Gates to the Summer Country, having braved the black lake of darkness, and came first to the Lion who guarded the gates of that bright land.

Lion said, "What brings one of the Warriors of Gaia to this place?"

"I, Flyer-of-the-Night, come seeking my child," Night Flyer said, putting on the two-legs, but holding onto both of her feathers, the raven's and Eagle's. She stood with her legs apart, hands on her hips and my thrall perched gently on her shoulder, still unseen.

"You cannot enter this place. It is a place for the spirits of the animals, and you are not an animal," Lion said.

"But, Brother Lion, I have a token from one who apparently wants me to be here."

"Let me see this token that you say you have. Don't think that I don't know you are a trickster, as I see no moon shines on the place where you walk."

"Brother Lion, that is all superstition. I am an honorable female. I will give you the token."

So Night Flyer gave him the feather of the Eagle, a great tail feather, so beautiful that it caused Brother Lion to gasp.



"You are a guest of the Lord of the Air?" Lion asked.

"Yes, Brother Lion, and now if you will let me pass, I will be on my way."

And so Night Flyer was allowed into the Summer Country, where before no Garou had traveled. This was a shame, as I saw through my thrall's eyes, for the Summer Country was a beautiful place, and indeed, the prey there were fat and unafraid, for they knew they would arise again the next day should a hunter catch and eat them.

As she walked through deep forest where even in brightest summer it was dark, Night Flyer stumbled and fell, frightening my thrall off her shoulder. She turned to look at what she had tripped over, and there was nothing! Then slowly she made out the outline of a lizard, a chameleon.

"Why did you kick me, Sister Wolf?" Lizard asked, a bruise making him visible on his side.

"Because I did not see you, Brother Lizard. Why were you hiding in plain sight on the path?"

"I did not realize that this was the Path, Sister Wolf. But since you point that out, I can see that it is, indeed, the Path. I am a slow being, and I thought that I had walked across the Path long ago."

"Though sorry I am that I wounded you, Brother Lizard, I believe it was your fault for being in the wrong place at the wrong time."

"I am not wounded — or I should say, I do not feel pain, though I know that the pain will be upon me soon. I am a slow being, you see..."

"Yes, I know. You said that before."

"Before when?"

"Before, ah, the time when you said you would help me."

"I said I would help you? I do not remember. I am a slow being, you see."

"Yes, I do see. So you were saying about your special Gift?"

"My special Gift? Ah, the hiding-in-plain-sight?"

"Yes. Tell me of it."

"It is the simplest thing," the chameleon said, and showed Night Flyer how to hide in plain sight.

"I see. Many thanks to you, Brother Lizard. I will sing your song one day."

"Thank you, Sister Wolf. And stay in the cool. It is a hot day. Of course, it is always a hot day."

"Yes, it is. Good day, Brother Lizard."



Night Flyer traveled far and soon was lost in the deep forest. Night came upon the Summer Country, and the Moon rose, all full and beautiful. Night Flyer howled in the night a long, low howl, thinking of her child sleeping in the clutches of that foul Eagle. To her great surprise, her howl was answered with a high, small voice.

"Who? Who's there?" came a voice from the tree.

Night Flyer looked up at the source of the voice. "Who's there?" she mimicked. "That's what I said! Who?"

Night Flyer scrambled up the tree to see to whom she was talking. An Owl, huge and hungry looking, stood perched on a wide branch. "Oh! A wolf-on-two-legs! And how did you get past the Guardian of the Gate?"

Night Flyer showed to him Eagle's feather.

"Oho! Ohoo! So you defeated him with your own great wisdom. Rare it is that one of your kind gets a feather from Eagle. I wonder if you earned it?"

"I did. I bested him in the Riddle Game," Night Flyer lied.

"I see...well, then, you'd not be adverse to challenging his lesser. I am not as good at the Riddle Game as he."

"Er, okay," Night Flyer said.

"I accept the challenge. My riddle is, 'What is the Wisdom of the Moon?'"

Night Flyer looked up at the moon then down at the dark floor of the forest and brushed some of her hair out of her eyes and started to smile.

Night Flyer answered, "To always change and to always stay the same."

Owl's face remained expressionless, but he cocked his ears and swiveled his head to the side. "You are correct. And your riddle?"

"What is the Wisdom of the Umbra?" Night Flyer said, cocking her head to one side.

Owl clicked his beak once, twice, three times. He closed his eyes briefly then opened them, the moonlight making his bright eyes glow. "To be as above, as below," Owl said without pausing.

"You are correct," Night Flyer said, looking crestfallen.

"And now, as we are equal in this Game, I will offer you a final Riddle. If you answer correctly, I will concede this Game to you, for I see that our contest could go on for days, our wisdom being so great."

"I will agree to that. Your riddle?" Night Flyer was smiling, as she felt sure she could answer one more of his Riddles.

"What is the Wisdom of the Dark of the Moon?"



Night Flyer thought. She hummed to herself. She looked down at her toes. She fingered the feathers she carried. She scratched her head. "There is none," she said, breathless.

"Ahhh. You, one-who-walks-under-no-moon, are not as wise as I thought. The Wisdom of the No-Moon is this: there are always better tricksters than yourself," Owl said, smiling. And, at that, Owl changed into Eagle.

Night Flyer gasped, but could not prevent herself from being grasped by his lightning-quick talons. They dug into her skin, and Eagle bore her aloft, rising in the Summer Country's warm night. She saw the Moon lighting a tall mountain peak high in the distance.

Eagle took her to that place, where she saw her son surrounded by bits of meat and trinkets and wrapped in a warm bear skin.

"This is my son, and yet you care for him? I thought you would eat him," said Night Flyer.

"He is not your son. I watched these past moons as he grew within an egg of mine. His mother and I had an agreement: I could keep him if I would take him from her womb," Eagle said. "I have many uses for this whelp. He will defend the Summer Country from your kind and will fight those who enslave our kind. I smell that you are not his mother but that you are a trickster, and I am used to hearing lies from your kind."

But Night Flyer was not listening completely to Eagle, for she used Brother Lizard's trick and hid in plain sight from him, as she was sure he would be upset by her plans to take the child back.

"You may hide as Brother Lizard does, but I will kill you if you take the child, Night Flyer," Eagle said. Night Flyer changed into the form of rage, the half-form, and ran at him, invisible. With one great effort she flung herself at Eagle, and he lost his footing and fell, plummeting out of the nest.

Night Flyer grabbed her son, wrapped him in the bear fur and used her raven feather to change back into that form. As a raven she flew, carrying the boy in her claws, wings flapping furiously. Eagle flew after her, his anger stoked not only because of the attack, but also because his honor was at stake.

"You have no honor, no-moon! There was a pact! Your people must honor it."

They flew, fast and furious, Night Flyer finding wind spirits to carry her faster and faster back to our realm; Eagle's wings beat with the force of his rage.

I summoned my Falcon to me and woke up the rest of the tribe, because I knew that Night Flyer was coming. It was not long before Night Flyer shimmered into being



in front of me, still staring at the mirror-pool in the back of the cave. "Greetings, no-moon," I said. "It seems that you have need of an advocate in an affair of honor."

"I do. Will you, Long Hunter, be my advocate?"

"I will," I said, for I had seen and heard all. I called my spirit-falcon to me, and we sat in communion for a time.

Leader asked, "What affair of honor is this?"

With that, all the Garou were stirred into action as the great Eagle materialized in the cave, his eyes glowing with lightning and his wings sprawled, creating long shadows from the half-light coming from the cave mouth.

Leader spoke for us all, his voice a half-snarl as he took the form of rage. "Why do you trespass into this, our home, Eagle?"

Eagle said, "To take what is mine by right: that middle-breed Garou boy."

Night Flyer covered the head of the little boy-whelp and brought him to her breast. "I am his mother," she said simply.

"Untrue. You are not the one who birthed him."

I spoke up. "I am Night Flyer's advocate of honor: Long Hunter, leader of the warriors of this tribe. If Night Flyer is not his mother and he is not an eaglet in disguise, then whose son is he?"

Eagle's eyes turned unerringly to Moon Walker. "That one, She-Who-Walks-on-the-Moon. She called my name, and I came. She asked me a thing, and I agreed. She bargained her son's life, and I accepted. I carried her son's life inside an old eggshell made whole again. When he was ready to be birthed, I put the egg in her womb. She birthed him, but was tricky. She used her powers to make him hard to smell, hard to see, and I could not find him. He was hidden from me for a long time, until today when I took him from the Shadow where her magic would not work any more."

Then Leader said to Tree Climber, who had a sense for these things, "Does he speak the truth?"

"I cannot say. He is a spirit, and they have many ways to evade our senses."

Leader turned to Moon Walker, a tear in his eye.

"Does he speak truth, She-Who-Walks-on-the-Moon?"

Moon Walker nodded, slowly, and hung her head low.

"Yes. I am not worthy to live."

Tree Climber said, "Why would you do such a thing and then hide it from us? Did you lie with some tribeless Wanderer?"

Moon Walker did not speak to answer, but her whimpering answered for her.



Leader pushed Moon Walker over onto the ground and brought his teeth to bear on her neck. I saw a trickle of blood run out from his fang as he pressed on it. She winced in pain.

"You are a foolish whelp. You have erred mightily against Gaia. You have struck a bargain with our enemies, the spirits, and you have dishonored yourself, your family and your tribe. What do you have to say in your defense?"

"Nothing, Leader. I deserve to die."

"No. That would be a way of honor. You have no honor."

Leader left her there, lying on her side, and turned to face Eagle.

"We Garou keep our agreements. You may have the child," Leader said.

"No!" screamed Night Flyer. "He is mine! Mine!" She clutched her whelp closer.

Leader growled low at the no-moon. I stepped forward, "I am still her advocate, Leader. Can she speak for her milk-son?"

Leader looked at me with new eyes, and I suddenly thought he might attack me. Though still a mighty warrior, old as he was, I thought I could probably beat him in challenge if he chose to call me out. We locked eyes for a moment, staring into each other's soul. Though I might win the combat, I would not win the respect of the tribe this way. I turned aside.

Though he had bested me in this fashion, Leader turned to Night Flyer. "What do you have to say?"

Night Flyer whispered something in Leader's ear, and he shook as though a flea were biting him.

Leader turned to Eagle again, this time more slowly.

"We Garou keep our agreements. But... but you may not have this boy. You will take his mother in his stead." Leader turned and looked at Moon Walker, who was crying and whimpering, but she did not move. Bear-Killer snarled at Eagle as he approached Moon Walker, but one look from me quelled him.

Eagle said, "I can see that I have been wrong about your kind. You are an honorable people. I will carry this news to my brothers and sisters in the Summer Country, and perhaps there will not always have to be war between our people."

"Perhaps so," Leader said, another tear welling in his eye.

Eagle took Moon Walker in his talons. She winced at the pain and yelped, and as she vanished, I saw her eyes turn to the little bundle Night Flyer held.

*And so, my friends, Ragabash though I be, born and bred, I tell you this thing: Even those who walk under the dark of the moon know of honor. Night Flyer was honorable in that she*



*obeyed her obligation to her milk-son, even though she had to travel to a strange land. She never abandoned that honor, strange though her path may have been.*

*Honor, as Night Flyer shows us, is not just the Litany; it is about the way we live and the way we die. It is our shield and our sword, our scales and our salve. When the glory of our youth and the wisdom of our age fail, our honor is there to save us. And so it will be, unto Apocalypse and beyond. And what, do you ask, did Night Flyer whisper to Leader? The true color of her son's fur, without the orange-red stain: snow-white.*



# Gambit

by Nigel D. Findley

The Corporate Raiders Sept's meeting was at what used to be the Smiling Buddha club on Hastings Street, like it always was. Official starting time, 12:37 a.m. — precisely. Glass Walkers are very much into precision, but I'm not totally convinced it's a strength. The other tribes, they go for schedules like "when the full moon is a paw's width over the horizon," or some such crap. Not us: 12:37 a.m. and zero seconds, Pacific Standard Time... and don't forget to reset your watch to daylight saving time in the summer. When the sept leader's electronic organizer beeped its alarm, the monthly moot started, and may the great spirits help anyone who slunk in even a second late.

I'd been late enough times in the past. The monthly moots just don't do it for me usually. Yeah, sure, hearing the gray-haired Theurge speak the Old Words is always a kick; it always gives me that catching feeling in the throat and stirs the hairs on the back of my neck. But the rest of it's just a bloody waste of good clubbing time. Old business, new business, move to adjourn, seconded, all those in favor... all according to Robert's Rules of Order. Give me a break. When I'm sitting there in the closed nightclub, listening to that crap drone on and on, I usually find myself thinking about the Garou of other tribes, the ones who hold their moots on the slopes of Seymour Mountain or in the forests of Cypress Bowl. You can bet your ass they don't use Robert's bloody Rules.

I imagine the other sept moots as smaller versions of the Concolations that take place every now and again at the great caern in Stanley Park just north of downtown. Now those are a kick: rubbing shoulders with Garou from all over the Lower Mainland — Vancouver itself and as far out as Chilliwack — listening to stories and telling them, howling along with the Theurges as they sound the kenning and invoke the caern's spirit, and maybe getting into a friendly, convivial scrap with some out-of-towners and throating their sorry butts. Yeah, those are good times. And then there's the Run afterward, ranging from Prospect Point around to Second Beach, from Brockton Oval to Lost Lagoon right on the edge of the West End of downtown.

Still, there's a balance. For eight months of the year, Vancouver's a gray, wet, depressing pisshole... and that's when you're indoors. If you're bugging about in the woods, you're going to be wet and cold, and I'll pass, thank you. Give me a moot in a nice, cozy building and the chance to go out for a couple of beers afterwards.



Normally, I'm the last one into the Buddha, half a minute before the moot starts if I'm lucky. Not this time — this time I was early. For the first time in a long time, I was looking forward to a moot.

Why? Because it was the night for my challenge, that's why. My chance to do two things I'd been thinking about for a very long time. One was to advance in rank. The other was to kick the crap out of that snot rag, Jonathan J. Rifkin — Jayjay to his friends, if he had any. What made everything even sweeter was the fact that I'd get to do both at the same time.

Okay, background. The Corporate Raiders Sept — a great, cynical name, I have to admit, though it can't have come from our current leader, who's got less sense of humor than a stapler — isn't large as these things go. Not like the Children of Gaia tree-huggers who hang around Cypress Bowl and those Black Fury death-babes up and over the northshore mountains in the watershed. There's only about 15 of us.

I'm the newest member, and — apart from Jayjay — the youngest by 20 years or so. I know that bothers the older members, that they're getting long in the tooth and there aren't many more Garou appearing. But what can they do about it? Every second or third moot, somebody raises the issue in New Business, and they jaw it around for an hour or two. Yes, everyone agrees, it's tragic, and there should be something we can do about it. But, after all the talking's done, they come to the uncomfortable agreement that there isn't anything they can do, and they let it sit. For a couple more months, at least.

Jayjay and I are the same age, both 24, but he's been in the sept for two years longer than me. I was late undergoing the First Change; I don't know why. That meant Jayjay was no longer a pup when I weathered my Firsting, and he was in the "extraction team" of men in business suits — business suits! — who kidnapped me from my home in East Vancouver and hustled me off to the closed-down Buddha. It also meant he was involved in my Rite of Passage, and I'm convinced the dirtbag made the experience a lot more unpleasant and demeaning than it had to be.

The fact that I'm the newest of the Vancouver Glass Walkers makes me something of an outsider. I made it through my rite and was accepted as a full Garou, but because I was the only pup eligible for the rite at that time, I wasn't made part of a pack. Oh, the elders got around that with sophistry — the way they get around a lot of problems — by declaring that I was the leader of a pack of one. The same thing had happened to Jayjay; he was his own pack as well. But he'd managed to get over that isolation and get in tight with several of the elders. Me, I'd never managed that... not that I'd really tried.

That's the second fact that made me an outsider: I never felt fully comfortable with the elders. They were all business types; they lived in condos on the Fairview



Slopes or sprawling houses in the British Properties, and they wore two- and three-piece suits that cost as much as a small motorbike.

Me? The closest I'd ever come to business was doing a little dealing on Granville Mall at night. I lived in a one-bedroom apartment in the decaying part of the West End, and it was all I could do to make the rent. And I favored Doc Martin over Gucci and black leather over Bill Blass. Jayjay kept suggesting that I was a Bone Gnawer, not a Glass Walker at all, and some of the elders went along with his jibes. Bastards.

Well, that was going to change tonight. After my recent scrap with some out-of-town Leeches who'd set on me — despite the Covenant — the elders declared I'd earned enough renown to challenge for rank. They didn't know that my "raid" against the Cadavers had been more a case of me fighting my way out of an ambush by hungry bloodsuckers than anything I'd planned. They didn't know it, and I sure as hell wasn't going to tell them.

That, of course, put me in the position to challenge the one member of the sept who was one step of rank higher than me: Jonathan J. Rifkin. Good friend Jayjay who made my Rite of Passage such hell. Time for a little payback, Jayjay. I felt my lips draw back from my teeth in something that wasn't really a smile, felt the comfortable warmth of anger and anticipation growing in my chest.

I could smell the other members of the sept as I slipped in through the back door of the closed club. Even though I was 20 minutes early, the rest of the Corporate Raiders were already there. That surprised me for a moment, before I realized that tonight's challenge might engage the attention of more than just me and Jayjay. Whether they wanted to see me throat Jayjay or vice versa or whether they just wanted to watch a good ass-kicking, anticipation seemed to have brought the business-suit crowd out early. Fine with me.

I swaggered into the long, narrow room that had rung with thrash guitar and feedback back in the golden age of punk. I liked it here. I felt at home, almost as though I could feel echoes of the gleeful anarchy that had once reigned here.

The area around where the stage had been was well lit, with the rest of the room fading to twilight, to midnight black in the corners. The folding seats were already set up in rows facing the table, and most were occupied. Roger Daly, the sept leader, sat at the table, the light reflecting off his silver hair and glinting off the frames of his Dunhill glasses. He looked at me as I came in and smiled icily. His face was that of a kindly old uncle, but his eyes were those of a hired killer. His suit and his white gold jewelry must have set him back more than I pull down in a year, but he could afford it, just like he could afford his metallic-charcoal 8-series BMW. A master of the false paper-trail, he owned the husk of the Smiling Buddha, but through four or five shell companies. After all, he couldn't let it be known that the president of Daly &



Associates, stock analysts, owned a club that had been famed for drug and weapons deals — had owned it even before it shut down, since the time he discovered it had been built over an ancient Garou burial site and was, in fact, a caern of low power. He also protected the place from trespassers with defenses physical and spiritual and had even managed — somehow — to hide its very existence from the agents of the Wyrms who would dearly love to corrupt it.

Daly was flanked by his two “executive assistants” — more high-powered business types in their early 50s — Hiram Wirth and Anton Stefanov. They looked through me like I wasn’t even there. Well, screw them.

I sauntered over to a vacant seat in the front row and settled myself down. I lit up a Thai clove cigarette and blew a cloud of the sweet-smelling smoke at the overhead light. I could feel the disapproval around me, like a physical presence. These oldsters probably thought I was smoking a reefer. Well, screw them again.

I was just finishing up my second cigarette when he arrived. Jonathan J. Rifkin himself. I saw him out of the corner of my eye, carefully avoided turning my head his way. He was shorter than me and narrower across the shoulders, with tightly curled, almost frizzed ginger hair. He was wearing a gunmetal-gray double-breasted Armani suit over a silver-gray silk shirt. I smiled inwardly, though I kept my face devoid of expression. I was looking forward to seeing that suit hanging in bloody rags around him. Yes, this was going to be a good night.

I threw my smoke on the ground and crushed it carefully with a boot heel. Only now did I look over at good old Jayjay, letting my lips twist into a feral smile. I felt the rage building in my chest, and it felt very good.

Jayjay took a seat at the back. Daly’s electronic organizer beeped, and the moot began.

The opening, the reading of correspondence and Old Business went faster and smoother than it ever did, as though everyone — even Daly himself — was eager to get on with the main event. When Daly declared New Business open, I didn’t respond at once. The whole room was silent, and I felt all eyes on me. I relished it for a few moments. Then slowly, almost nonchalantly, I raised my hand.

Daly recognized me. “You have something to say, Mr. Rache?” he asked quietly.

I rose to my feet. “I do, Mr. Chairman,” I said, my voice pitched at hardly more than a whisper. In my peripheral vision, I saw everyone lean forward so they wouldn’t miss anything.

And then I watched them jerk like they’d been cattle-prodded as I howled at the top of my voice, “I bring challenge!”



Only Daly didn't react visibly. "You have the right, Mr. Rache," he allowed. "To whom do you bring challenge?"

Even though everyone in the room knew, we still had to play out the charade. "I challenge John Rifkin," I said flatly. "In the ways our ancestors taught us, I challenge him for rank and position, for renown and honor." I spun, pointed to Jayjay there in the back row. "Do you accept?" I roared.

Jayjay was already on his feet. He walked slowly to the front of the room, fastidiously smoothing the sides of his suit jacket. He looked calm and totally in control, and in that moment, I hated him more than ever. He faced me across the open space in front of Daly's table. While I felt poised and ready, as though I were in a gunfighter's crouch, he looked as relaxed as if he was bellied up to the bar at the Enterprise Club.

Daly's gaze flicked back and forth between us. "Vincent Rache brings challenge, for rank and honor," he announced formally. "Jonathan Rifkin, do you accept challenge?"

Jayjay paused, as if he really had a choice. I glared at him. "I accept the challenge," he said at last.

That's what I'd waited a long time to hear. I bared my teeth and began the version of the Chant of Challenge that I'd been thinking about for days. "I am Vince Rache," I declaimed, "son of Hugo Rache, son of Stephanie Bowelsby, daughter of Judith Herzfold, of the Corporate Raiders Sept of the Glass Walkers tribe of the Garou! I challenge you, you miserable turd, to try to prove to me that you're even close to being my equal!"

Jayjay smiled, the same hateful, supercilious smile I'd seen on his face a thousand times before. "I am Jonathan Jerome Rifkin," he responded calmly, "son of Jerome Rifkin, son of Harriet Daly" — I blinked; I hadn't known he was related to Roger Daly — "daughter of Simon Wolfe, of the Corporate Raiders Sept of the Glass Walkers tribe of the Garou... and I'll point out that talk is cheap, and that's pretty much all I've ever expected from you, Rache."

I heard myself snarling. I glared at him, trying to catch his eye, pouring all my hatred, all my rage through my gaze. For a moment, he met my glare levelly, and I saw answering rage start to kindle in his eyes. But then he turned aside.

Calmly, he removed his jacket and hung it carefully over the back of a chair. He wore black suspenders with green dollar signs on them. I imagined how they'd look sinking into the flesh of his throat as I garroted him with them. I pulled off my own jacket, flung it into a corner where it landed with a metallic tinkle of zippers. I'd already tied my long ponytail up into a kind of black bun so it wouldn't be so easy to



grab, and the five earrings I was wearing were all studs or the smallest of loops. I tasted my rage as I stepped toward him.

Jayjay didn't move. His hands were behind his back, and he was looking at me with a smile that mixed distaste with sly amusement. I didn't like that smile; it made me think he knew something I didn't. But what the hell, I'd wipe it off his face fast enough. I advanced slowly.

"There's something you've forgotten, Rache," he said calmly. "According to the traditions, as the challenged party, I'm the one to define the nature of the challenge."

That stopped me in my tracks. I looked at him with surprise. "Are you telling me you want to use weapons or something?" I asked him.

His smile grew broader. "Just because your mind always defaults to violence as a way of solving problems doesn't mean mine does," he said, and I could hear the enjoyment in his voice. "And, as I said, I'm the challenged party." He held his hands out in front of him, both balled into fists. "Left or right?"

"What?" I felt the atmosphere change in the room — subtly, but undeniably. Out of the corner of my eye I saw mocking smiles start to appear on the faces of the others. They knew something I didn't, and I always hated that. "What?" I demanded again.

"Left or right," Jayjay repeated through that maddening, crap-eating smile. "Choose."

"Left," I snarled, still not understanding anything but the fact I was being set up for something.

He turned his left hand over and opened it up. Sitting on the palm was a chess piece, a black pawn. "The challenge is given and accepted," Jayjay said mildly, still smiling. "Now, how about a nice game of chess?"

Light bloomed in one of the corners. Unnoticed, one of the other Garou had left her chair to flick on a lightswitch. Over in the corner, under the new light, was a table and two chairs. On the table was a chessboard, the pieces already set up.

Goddamn it! I saw the smiles on the other sept members' faces, openly mocking now. Jayjay had known the challenge was coming, and had set this whole charade up beforehand. If that wasn't bad enough, apparently every other member of the sept was in on it. Now they were grinning at me, laughing to themselves, mocking me. The rage twisted within me.

"Well," Jayjay said, rubbing his hands together and enjoying himself hugely, "shall we begin?" He turned toward the chessboard.

My rage was a fire burning in my chest. For a moment I tried to control it, but then — what the hell? — I let it go. From a fire, it blossomed into an explosive fireball.



I felt my body shift and grow as I took on the Crinos, felt my head brush the ceiling. With a howl of fury that shook the room, I leaped at Jayjay.

His reactions were fast, but not fast enough. He turned, tried to bring his hands up to shield himself, but he didn't have time. My rage had slowed my perception of time, so he looked like he was moving in slow motion. I swung a clawed paw at his face, turning it at the last moment from a rake into a punch; I didn't want to kill him, not really. The blow landed cleanly, slamming into the side of his head with the impact of a 12-pound sledge. An ape's neck would have snapped, his skull caved in and his brains splattered over that goddamn chessboard. But Jayjay was Garou. Even so, the impact picked him off his feet and threw him against the wall, where he lay in a heap, shaking his head slowly to refocus his thoughts. As I loomed over him, I saw his own body begin the transformation and I thought I'd get my challenge anyway.

But then the transformation reversed itself. Still in his Homid form, he looked up at me calmly. My punch had opened up a scalp wound over his right ear, and blood sheeted the side of his head. As I watched, the wound closed up and the blood flow stopped. "You have no honor, Bone Gnawer," he said quietly. Then — suddenly, shockingly — he flung back his head and gave voice to a snarling whine. The Curse of Ignominy!

The sound shocked me to the core, like I'd suddenly been drenched in ice-cold water. I reverted to Homid form and looked around me.

All the other members of the sept were staring at me, their faces hard and their eyes cold. Jayjay's curse rang in my ears.

Then other voices joined his. Daly was the first, throwing back his head with an abandon that clashed shockingly with his dignified demeanor. Hiram Wirth followed, and then everyone joined in, filling the room with ululating discord.

My cheeks burned with humiliation. I looked wildly around me for a supporter, just one of my sept-mates who hadn't joined the howl. There wasn't anybody.

I turned and sprinted from the room, out through the back door and into the foul-smelling alley behind the Buddha. As I ran through the night, the Curse of Ignominy still rang in my ears.

It was a cold night with heavy clouds, their undersides lit a sickly pinkish red by the lights of the city, but at least it wasn't raining. I walked on through the night, sticking mainly to the back alleys. I didn't have any real destination in mind, I just wanted to get the hell away from the Buddha and the sept and the Curse and



goddamn Jayjay. The cold night air seemed to soak up my ignominy, and by the time I'd reached Granville Mall, humiliation had given way to rage again.

Goddamn that bloody Jayjay. What gave him the right to set me up like that? And the rest of the sept — where did they get off collaborating with him to humiliate me? It was all a set up, wasn't it? Bloody emotional entrapment, designed to trick me into losing control. He said I had no honor, but where was the honor in the kind of emotional ambush he used? Tell me that.

It wasn't much past one o'clock, and Granville Mall was still happening. The White Orchid gang were staking out their usual turf in front of where Did's Pizza used to be, while a couple of skins were hurling verbal abuse at a terrified-looking private security guard outside the Burger King.

Normally, I enjoy Granville Mall at night. I like the feel — kind of keyed up, kind of frenetic, with an undercurrent of barely restrained violence. The dominance-submission displays among the gangers, the skins, the dealers and the rest seems, in some ways, a lot like Garou society. I wonder how many of the black leather types are actually Kinfolk, and I particularly look at the younger ones, wondering which are being followed around by Kin-Fetches.

Anyway, that's normally. Tonight, I was in no mood for amateur sociology, or having a good time, or anything. My rage was a twisting, churning thing in my chest again, and the apes around me could sense it, even though they didn't know what they were sensing. They'd step aside hurriedly if they were in my way and turn away or even shy back if they weren't. If anybody had asked them what they were afraid of, they wouldn't have been able to give a coherent answer; they might not have even known they were afraid. Their reactions fed my mood. They were according me the respect I deserved, in the only way they knew how. Why didn't my kin show me respect? Why did they abuse me and distrust me?

Without really thinking about it, I found myself in the phone booth on the corner of Granville and Nelson, digging in my pocket for a quarter. What the hell did I think I was doing? I asked myself. Then I shrugged, fed the coin into the phone and dialed the number.

Erica picked up the phone on the second ring. In the background, I could hear the throbbing and pulsing of industrial music — Front 242, probably. "Yeah?" she said.

"Hi," I said.

"Vince." She paused. She didn't sound overjoyed to hear from me, but that didn't necessarily mean much. Erica was one for moods. If you didn't like her disposition at the moment, wait five minutes and it'd change. "What's up?"



“Nothing much,” I replied, trying to keep my voice light. “Just got to thinking about you, that’s all. Want to join me for a late-night drink?”

She hesitated again. “No, I don’t feel like going out.”

“Okay,” I said equably, “I’ll come on over and —”

“No,” she cut me off. “No, Vince, I don’t think that’s a good idea.”

“Oh?” I felt my throat start to tighten, heard the anger in my voice. “And why might that be?”

“I just don’t think so,” she snapped, “and that’s all there —”

My turn to cut her off. “No,” I shot back, “that’s not all there is to it. I’ve got a right to know what’s going on.”

“Why?”

“I do, that’s all.” I tried to bite back on my anger, with no success. “You’ve got somebody there with you, haven’t you?” I demanded.

“And so what if I do? What business is it of yours?”

“Are you saying it’s not my business if you’re screwing around on —”

She cut me off again. “Screwing around?” Her anger was overlaid with surprise, even a note of disdain. “Where the hell do you get off, Vince? You think I’m screwing around on you? I’m not, and you want to know why? You can only ‘screw around on’ somebody you’ve got a relationship with. And if you had any character at all, you’d recognize that doesn’t describe us.” I’d never heard her this angry. I took a breath to answer, but she didn’t pause. “Now, if we had a relationship, you’d have some legitimate interest in who I happen to take into my bed. The way it is, it’s no business of yours.”

“So there is somebody there —” I snarled.

“Screw you, Vince.” Her voice sounded more tired than hostile this time.

“Wait, Erica —” I started, but she’d already hung up.

With a growl that even the best ape impersonator couldn’t have mimicked, I slammed the phone back onto its cradle. I felt the hard plastic crack in my hand, and it felt good. I felt a presence behind me and spun quickly.

It was a hulking shape wearing the colors of the Gypsy Wheelers. In the late-night neon, his eyes glistened like they’d been glycerined, and his pupils looked large enough to throw a cat through. Drink, drugs — it didn’t matter, he was in orbit. He gave me a mean little smile, showing yellowed teeth. “Girl problems, huh?” he sneered down into my face. “Oh dear, oh dear.”



“Screw you!” I hissed, and loosed the restraining grip I kept on my rage. I felt my jacket tighten around me as I took on the Glabro and began the shift further into Crinos. I bared my teeth and rumbled a soft, lethal growl.

The biker stared into my face — looking up, now — and his eyes bugged wide. Then I could see the Veil click in him, and he turned away as if he’d largely forgotten about me. Muttering under his breath — “Too high, man. Too freakin’ high...” — he wandered off along Granville. I watched him go, letting myself revert to Homid form but still feeling my anger twisting within me. Girl trouble. What the bloody hell did he know? I turned southeast down Nelson, heading toward the Cambie Street Bridge.

Even though it was late, there was still reasonable traffic. The Cambie Bridge was one of the major arteries into and out of downtown and was never really deserted. As I crossed Seymour Street, I saw the first of the hookers. Wearing anything from almost-evening gowns to lingerie to what looked like nothing more than plastic shrink-wrap, they stood in small groups, waving desultorily at the cars passing by. This “shift” were all young and still fresh looking, not worn down and out by years in the trade. Normally, I might have slowed down for a little conversation, but not tonight. They felt me coming before they saw me, shifting from foot to foot uncomfortably. Then they spotted me, a dark figure in the shadows between the street lights, and they moved out of my way, back into the doorways of closed restaurants and tattoo parlors and pawnshops. I smiled at them as I passed, and I knew that my smile was a terrible thing that’d haunt their dreams for the next few nights.

As I walked, I kept running the conversation with Erica through my mind. She was with someone, I knew that was true. Probably some overdressed snot rag like Jayjay, into a little bit of slumming. So what? Who needs her anyway? Particularly after what she said...

“If you had any character,” I muttered the words under my breath. Character. That was the same as honor in a way, wasn’t it? So that made it the second time in under an hour that people had accused me of having no honor. I felt my cheeks burn.

Honor. Where the hell was Jayjay’s honor in setting me up for that humiliation over the chess game? That was a base, sly, sneaky trick more worthy of a wererat than of a Garou. And by acting dishonorably, hadn’t Jayjay taken away my honor? He’d humiliated me in front of my sept. Again, where was the honor in that?

And then there were the elders — Daly, Wirth, Stefanov and the others. They were always quick to praise honor, to put it up on some pedestal as the most important thing in the world. But when push came to shove, what did they care for my honor when they joined in the Curse of Ignominy? Tell me that.



For a moment, a thought nagged in the back of my brain, a suspicion that I was misinterpreting something here, that maybe I wasn't thinking about this as clearly as I should. But then I drove that thought deep, drowned it in the sea of my rage. No, I told myself firmly, they were the ones who'd taken away my honor. Yes, that was it.

Down by the decaying long-term care facility that used to be called Yaletown, I turned right off Nelson, down onto Pacific Boulevard. Pacific followed the north shore of False Creek, separated from the water by what used to be the site of Expo '86, the World's Fair and one of Vancouver's major claims to fame around the world. There wasn't much left of the fair itself now. Just about every building at Expo '86 had been prefabricated — cheap and easy to assemble, but not designed to last. Now the site was a strip of bare ground maybe two kilometers long and ranging in width from 50 meters to about 200. It was surrounded by high, razorwire-topped fences to keep trespassers out, and the only things that moved inside those fences were crows, rats and — maybe — even more ill-aspected creatures.

The Expo site was a Blight in the middle of what wasn't otherwise a bad city. A couple of years after the fair had closed — after most of the buildings had been dismantled or had rusted away — an offshore developer had bought the land from the government, intending to build a community of luxury apartment towers along the north side of False Creek. But then it came out that the area, which had been a rail-switching yard before it was picked as the site for the World's Fair, was contaminated. Oil and weed-killers and other chemicals had soaked into the ground over years and decades, and now the soil was toxic enough to prevent the development — so toxic that no waste dump in the Lower Mainland would accept it. For seven years, then, it had sat vacant, probably secreting toxins into the water of the Creek, while the developers and the different levels of government argued over what was to be done and who'd have to pay for it.

So there it was, a dark Blight, a Wyrmland, right in the middle of the city. Whatever minions of the Wyrmland had arranged for things to work out that way must laugh themselves sick every time they think of it.

I don't know what it was about the Expo site — the Blight — that drew me, but I found myself walking around the outside boundaries of the fence when I needed to think. It's not that I liked the place; it smelled of toxins and corruption and the Wyrmland itself. But maybe that's what usually helped clear my head: the strong contradictions the place represented. Walking beside the fence, I felt like I was walking the knife-edge between the vibrant life of the city and the death of the Blight, between light and darkness, between the Wyrmland and what the Wyrmland would consume. Maybe walking between two contesting forces helped me focus my thoughts.



Or maybe that was just bullshit sophistry. Maybe it was just that this was a great place to be alone. Nobody walked around the Expo site at night, I told myself. No monkey, that is.

But soon enough, I was proven wrong. As I walked east, under the Cambie Street Bridge, a voice sounded from the shadows to my right where the sidewalk widened. "Life's a bitch."

I spun in surprise, teeth bared, fingers bent into claws.

At first I thought there was nothing there, in the blackness where the lights set on the underside of the bridge had burned out. But then I made out a shape. A man, sitting on the concrete, his back against the fence. I squinted slightly, trying to make out the details. For some reason I couldn't see him clearly — even though I could see the bridge supports a couple of meters behind him on the other side of the fence — as though he were in even deeper shadows than the area around him. Then, slowly, as if he were somehow materializing out of the air around him, he came into clearer view. A rubby, a middle-aged derelict in torn, filthy clothes.

I snarled at him, expecting to see and smell his fear as he sensed my rage.

But if he felt any fear he didn't show it. For a few heartbeats, he just watched me — calmly, levelly. Then he extended toward me a bottle I hadn't noticed before. "Care for a drink?" he said quietly.

For an instant, I didn't know whether to shit, go blind or wind my watch — didn't know whether to assume the Crinos and scare the crap out of him, or turn and run myself. Instead, I found myself chuckling. "Gimme that," I said. I took the bottle he offered, raised it to my lips and took a swallow. It was scotch — good scotch, maybe single malt — not the paint-remover cheap wine I expected. I swallowed, feeling the warmth spread down my throat into my belly, then up and out into my chest. The rich, peaty aroma filled my head.

I held the bottle out toward the rubby. "Thanks."

He shook his head. "Take another," he said. "But first, you need something to drink to."

I thought for a moment, then shrugged. "Like you said: life's a bitch." I raised the bottle in a toast, then took another swallow of the scotch, a larger one this time. The burning warmth of the liquor matched that of my rage. The two seemed to mingle, to merge. Without thinking I took a third gulp, and I could as well have been drinking rage. I handed the bottle back to the rubby, and this time he took it.

"I presume I need a toast of my own," he said mildly.

While he thought, I scrutinized him. On closer inspection, he wasn't as old as I'd thought initially — in his mid-40s, maybe, not in his 60s like I'd expected. He was



a good-looking guy — smooth-skinned, with kind of sculpted lines to his face like Chuck Heston, and silvering hair. His clothes used to be an expensive suit, I noticed, kind of like Jayjay might wear but ripped and filthy, like he'd been mugged in a landfill. For a moment, he reminded me of Daly, but then I discarded the comparison. Stupid, I told myself. What does it matter what cast-off clothes a rubby collects to keep himself warm?

“So,” I asked, “what’s your toast?”

He smiled a knowing, enigmatic smile. “I drink to honor, that which can neither be given nor taken away.”

I stared at him as he drank, felt my rage twist into something like suspicion or even paranoia. “What do you know about honor?” I grated.

He didn’t respond directly, just held his bottle out to me again. “Will you not drink with me?”

I growled... but I took the bottle and upended it again. “What do you know about honor?” I demanded again, my voice rough from the liquor.

The rubby shrugged. “More than you think, perhaps.” He paused, looking me up and down. There was something about his gaze that I didn’t like, some strange, twisty feeling it gave me inside. But I took another hearty pull on the scotch, and the feeling went away.

“You look to me like someone who understands honor,” the derelict was saying. “Honor in its true form, as an upwelling of what’s within your soul. Not the popular misconception of honor.”

The liquor was starting to sing in my brain. I liked it and took another swallow. I noticed the bottle was three-quarters empty; it had been almost full not so long ago, and the rubby had been taking only sips while I’d been gulping it. But so the hell what anyway? “Popular misconception,” I echoed, enunciating the syllables carefully. “What’s that?”

The derelict smiled. “Oh, I think you know what it is,” he said easily. “The misconception that honor is something enforced from without. That honorable action is following this...” — he gestured deprecatingly — “this shopping list of rules and strictures. That if you play by the rules, don’t step over the line, and do just as everyone else in your peer group does, then you’re honorable. Isn’t that it?”

I thought about Jayjay and Daly and the others. Didn’t the rubby’s description fit them to a T? “Honorable sheep,” I muttered around a tongue that felt suddenly thick.

“Precisely!” The derelict was smiling broadly now. I found myself mirroring his smile, feeling good that I’d understood what he was talking about and even managed



to come up with a bon mot in the process. To celebrate, I took another mouthful of scotch.

“And what is honor if it’s not that?” he continued. “It’s something that springs from within you, isn’t it, my friend? Not enforced from outside by your peers, but originating in your soul.” He shrugged. “Honor is being true to yourself, acting on your own behest and behalf. All else is just obedience.” He invested the word with such repugnance that I had to smile. “Don’t you agree?”

I thought for a moment. His words — the ideas behind the words — were persuasive, reassuring. My course was my own, he was saying, wasn’t that it? Nobody but me can sit in judgment on the honor of my actions. Not Jayjay, not Daly, not Erica. “Damn straight,” I said, slurring the words slightly. I upended the bottle one last time, draining it. Then I threw it high over the fence to land with a distant crash in the darkness of the Wyrmgound. “Damn straight.”

The rubby’s smile was even broader — more predatory, I thought for a moment, before I realized how stupid that idea was. “Who can tell you what is honorable action?” he went on, echoing the thoughts I’d had a moment ago. “Only you can, my friend, isn’t that so? Not the others of your sept. Nobody.”

I shook my head slowly. Something important had just happened, I knew it. But I couldn’t put my finger on it. The scotch was a blurring, enervating fog in my brain.

The rubby was still talking, and his voice seemed to sweep away the sense of importance I’d just felt. “There are those who’ve impugned your honor, isn’t that so?” he asked. “Yes, I know it’s true, I can see it in your eyes. You were with them tonight. You acted the way your spirit prompted you to act — the way you had to act to be true to who you are. But your actions didn’t follow their rules, isn’t that so? And so they accused you of acting dishonorably.” He snorted. “Acting dishonorably, they said, while what you were actually doing was failing to show the blind obedience they demand from you. Isn’t that so?”

For an instant I thought of Daly and Jayjay, and the rage flared within my chest. But then the feeling of discomfort came back, quenching the flames of anger. The feeling that things weren’t what they seemed...

And still the rubby kept talking. Without breaking the rhythm of his words, he climbed to his feet — smoothly, almost sinuously, I thought, showing none of the stiffness you’d expect from someone who probably slept on manhole covers — and came toward me. “Yes,” he said, his voice a caress, “you were with them tonight, and they tried to take away your honor.” I found my gaze drawn to his eyes. They were glistening strangely, but still I felt as though I was being drawn into them, deep down into their weird light. “You were with them, weren’t you? You were with them at...” His voice trailed off.



The words were out of my mouth before I even knew I'd spoken. "At the Buddha."

"Yes." The man's voice was like velvet, his eyes like twin moons, truly glowing now with dead white light. "Yes, at the Buddha, of course," he almost cooed. "You realize you can take revenge on them, my friend. You can strike back at them for impugning your honor. I can show you how. It would be so easy, so very easy..."

His eyes seemed to expand until they started to fill my visual field. An emotion started to penetrate the fog of the scotch, to begin to burn that fog away. Not rage this time: Fear.

With an effort, I tore my gaze away from the man's eyes. He was less than an arm's length in front of me. Somehow he'd edged that close without me being aware of it. His breath was on my face, warm and sickly sweet with a hint of something else. A hint of... decay? I backed away, shaking my head to clear it. "No," I mumbled, "no revenge."

The man shrugged equably. "Ah well, no matter." His smile had changed. Now it was a feral grin of terrible joy. My bowels turned to ice water. What the hell was going on? "No matter, my friend, the damage is done, isn't it? The Smiling Buddha, hm? And that's the site of your caern. Well, not for long, I can promise you that. My friends and I will see to it soon enough."

My gut twisted with sick horror. I'd never had the sensory ability to detect Wyrmtaint like some other Garou, but now I didn't need it. My horror fired my rage, and it burned — hot and terrible — in my chest. I'd made a horrible error. But at least I could rectify it now. With an earth-shaking growl, I took on the Crinos and poised myself to lunge for the derelict's throat. Before I could move, his eyes seemed to swell again, to dilate like great windows, and I found myself drawn to look into them.

The eyes are windows of the soul; I'd heard that somewhere. Well, that's true, then the soul of the Wyrms is more twisted and terrible than I'd ever been able to imagine. I howled in horror and disgust, reeling back and raising a paw to shield my eyes from the images that burned into my brain. I collapsed to my knees, my gut twisting and spasming as I emptied my stomach onto the sidewalk. Over my own moans and gasps, I heard bestial laughter and running footsteps retreating into the night.

A fomor. What else could it have been? A human possessed by a Bane and twisted into a servant of the Wyrms.

I would've seen the clues if I'd been in any mental state to notice them. The man I'd classified as a rubby — and thus written off — had reminded me of a successful



businessman, with his surprisingly erudite manner and his torn business suit. Virtually nothing about him had matched the stereotypical image of the street-dweller, right down to the fact that he was drinking scotch rather than vanilla extract.

So what had happened to him? Probably he'd traveled near the Wyrmground on legitimate business — who knows, maybe he was a developer's representative or some crap — and the Bane had grabbed him. The creature had dragged the poor sod off to some quiet, private and tainted sanctuary — probably in the middle of the Expo site —and twisted him into a fomor.

Had he been waiting for me? No, that was paranoid. He'd been waiting for any opportunity to do anything that would further the purposes of the Wyrm. It was just luck — pure, dumb luck — that I'd wandered along. Lousy luck for me, unbelievably excellent luck for him.

I moaned, bending forward on my couch, lowering my face into my hands. And what had I done? I'd told him the location of my sept's caern. I'd revealed a secret that the Corporate Raiders had been keeping for god knows how many years. Sure there were defenses around the caern, maybe good enough to keep out a single Bane. But would only a single Bane be coming to assault and corrupt it? Probably not. The fomor had said, "My friends and I," hadn't he — it? Would the defenses that Daly had set up around the Buddha defend it against an assault by multiple Banes and maybe other minions of the Wyrm as well? Almost certainly not.

Particularly if the other members of the sept didn't know the assault was coming and thus didn't take special precautions against it.

And that was the key issue, wasn't it? By all logic, I had to contact the others and warn them that forces of the Wyrm would be coming.

But how could I? How could I call up Daly, or Wirth or Stefanov, and explain to them that I'd been having a friendly drink with a Bane and that, in passing, I'd told it the location of our caern? Even thinking about it was enough to cripple me with humiliation.

No. I couldn't do that. If I'd thought they'd impugned my honor earlier tonight, how much worse would it be if I told? No. Honor wouldn't let me make the call.

So was I just to forget about it, and let the caern be destroyed... or worse? No. It was unthinkable, against everything I'd been taught since the night I was snatched from my home. I raised my head and howled my frustration, despair and disgust at the ceiling. Honor wouldn't let me do what I knew I should do...

But was it honor?



The thought struck me with shocking suddenness. Honor wouldn't let me call Daly and the others; that's what I'd told myself. But was it truly honor that was blocking me?

Certainly, the derelict's words had reinforced the image of honor I was still clinging to — the one I'd been using all night, I now realized. But was it the correct definition? Was it really my honor that had been bruised by the sept? And was it really honor that was stopping me from placing the call? No.

It was pride, wasn't it? That's what Jayjay and the others had hurt. There was an important distinction between pride and honor — I could feel that it was a sharp one — although I couldn't put my finger on it, not in my present state. So was it really my honor that was stopping me from making the call? No.

All right, so now I knew. But that didn't make it any easier to think about talking with Daly. Honor or pride or whatever, it still burned inside me, brought a stinging flush to my cheeks. Changing the label took away my self-righteous justifications for avoiding personal humiliation, but it didn't take away the humiliation itself. If anything, it even made it worse.

Goddamn it!

But I had to do something. I reached for the phone, had my hand on the cool plastic of the receiver when I stopped. Who was I going to call? Daly? In the past, he'd seemed less knee-jerk opposed to whatever I said than others of the elders, but he was the sept leader, for Christ's sake! Wirth or Stefanov? Those stuck-up, hidebound Europeans seemed to despise me on principle just because I wasn't *der ordnung*. I couldn't talk to any of them.

And that was pride talking again, wasn't it?

I gripped the phone so hard I felt the plastic shift, ready to crack. I loosened my grip.

And an idea struck me. Before I could talk myself out of it, I dialed a number. Then I waited, listening to the metallic echoing of ghost-voices on the line as the other phone rang. Four times, six. Any moment I expected to hear the hiss of an answering machine kicking in — we were Glass Walkers, after all — but no. Eight rings, a dozen.

Finally I heard the click as the other phone was lifted, and a muzzy voice answered, "Hello?"

I took a deep breath, then said, "Jayjay?"

For a moment, all I could hear was the electronic wind and the ghost-voices of other lines, and I thought he'd hung up on me. But then, "Vince?" he asked tentatively.



"It's me," I confirmed. I didn't quite know how to go on.

"You're in trouble." His words were more statement than question. As he shook off sleep, his voice grew clearer, and I could hear — to my unutterable surprise — a tone of concern. "Tell me about it."

I told him about it. There wasn't really a beginning — just about everything that happened wouldn't have happened if events beforehand had gone differently — so I described everything that had transpired, every major thought that had passed through my head from the moment I stormed out of the moot. I considered shading the truth, protecting my pride by making it sound like things weren't so much my fault, but it seemed like so much effort. And when I'd committed to describing everything honestly, I felt a kind of freedom, a lessening of the pressure on me.

Finally I was through. Jayjay didn't respond at once. When he did, it was to ask quietly, "Why did you call me?"

I shrugged, even though of course he couldn't see me. "I had to warn the sept," I answered. "I had to tell someone."

"No. Why did you call *me*?"

"I had to tell someone," I repeated. "And... We're both relatively new to the sept, Jayjay." The words, and the thoughts associated with them, seemed to well up from somewhere within me. As I spoke I also listened, since the moment I actually said the words was when I first realized what was in my heart. "We're both packs of one. We've got more in common with each other than the elders, despite our differences." When I'd finished, I found myself breathing hard, as though I'd just run up a flight of stairs.

Again, he didn't answer immediately. I ground my teeth in frustration. *I know what he's going to say*, I told myself. *He's going to tell me to screw myself, to lie in the bed I've made*. I bared my teeth in self-hatred. Why did I even bother?

But then Jayjay was speaking again. "Okay," he said slowly. "Give me your address; I'll be over."

"Huh?" I said, or something equally intelligent. "Can't you just tell the rest of the sept?"

He paused, then said even more quietly, "I don't think we need to bring the rest of the sept into it. Give me your address, and meet me out front."

Less than 10 minutes later, I was climbing into Jayjay's silver Lexus. As I'd waited, I'd played things through again and again in my mind. This just wasn't working out the way I'd expected it to. Jayjay was actually going to do something to work side by side with me? I just didn't get it.



As I settled myself in the plush bucket seat, Jayjay gave me a tight smile. His curly hair was flat on one side where he'd been sleeping on it. He had bags under his eyes, but — predictably — his Docker pants and rugby shirt were just so. "Do you remember what your fomor looked like?" he asked me.

I snorted, remembering those eyes. "I'd like to forget," I said honestly.

"Then try this." He tossed something small into my lap.

I picked it up, looked at it curiously. It was a small chunk of black-gray metal — iron, I knew suddenly, although I didn't have a clue where the knowledge came from. A rough-edged ingot not much larger than a Zippo lighter. I turned it over in my hand. There was a small rectangular window smaller than my thumbnail cut right through it. Crossing the center of the window, apparently cast into the heart of the ingot, was a fine fiber. A human hair?

"And what the hell is it?" I wanted to know.

Jayjay smiled. He was driving — fast, but in tight control — down the night-deserted streets of the West End toward the Expo site. "It's a spirit tracer," he explained.

"A fetish?" That surprised me. "Are you of the Crescent Moon?" I realized that I'd never known — or cared to know — Jayjay's auspice.

Jayjay chuckled. "Yeah, I'm a Theurge. I guess I don't have to ask your auspice."

I found myself smiling. "What do I do with this thing?" I asked, indicating the metal fetish.

"You've got to attune it to yourself," my companion said flatly. "Concentrate on it, focus your mind on it. And..." — he hesitated, uncomfortable — "project yourself into it." He snorted. "I know that doesn't make much sense, but it's the only way I can describe it. If we had a couple of days, I could teach you all the philosophical background crap so you'd understand, but —"

"But we don't have a couple of days," I finished for him. "I'll try."

I held the metal ingot in my cupped hands, stared at it in the shifting illumination of the passing streetlights. I tried to clear my mind of worries, of thoughts, tried to focus all of myself on the spirit tracer. I imagined my mind, my spirit, like a tightly focused beam — a laser, maybe — lancing down from between my eyes at the hair in its small window.

Nothing happened, of course. I felt my cheeks grow hot. And why not? I felt stupid, staring at this little block of iron like it was supposed to do something...

But that was pride again, wasn't it? I was only starting to understand just how much of my life was interlinked with pride...



So goddamn it anyway, who cared how stupid it looked? With an effort, I put aside concerns with my image.

And that's when the ingot seemed to move in my hand.

"Hey!" I called out involuntarily.

"You did it?"

I turned to Jayjay, grinning like a kid. "Bet your ass," I crowed. "So what's this supposed to do, lead us to the Bane?"

"Concentrate on your memories of the fomor," Jayjay instructed. He was trying to keep his voice calm, but I could sense his excitement. "Concentrate, and tell me which way to go."

It was dark here in the center of the Blight, the Wyrmground that was the old Expo site. So dark that even the enhanced vision of the Hispo gave me all too little information. My other senses seemed similarly limited, as though the Blight wasn't amenable to the same physical laws that functioned in the rest of the world. At least I could sense Jayjay, in the hulking form of the Crinos, at my back. Held gently in my mouth, the spirit tracer still urged me on.

The fetish had led us to where Pacific Boulevard passed under the Cambie Bridge — right near where I'd met the fomor, predictably. Jayjay had pulled his Lexus off the road, and we'd set off on foot, clambering over the fence and into the Blight, following the direction indicated by the ingot.

And now here we were in the heart of the corruption. I couldn't smell chemicals or poisons — the toxins in the ground weren't of that nature — but I could feel them through the pads of my paws, like a spiritual contamination. As I looked around us nervously, I couldn't see anything alive — no crows, no rats, nothing — but still I could feel a malign consciousness that I swore was aware of us. The fomor, or the Bane that had possessed it? Or was it something worse? Maybe the Wyrms itself... The ingot in my mouth tugged me to the left, into the deepest shadows under the bridge.

And that's where the fomor waited for us, of course; I should have known it, or perhaps deep down I did. It gave us no warning. One moment we were advancing cautiously, slowly. The next it was upon us, a howling and screaming dervish, tearing into us with claws and teeth that burned with green-white Balefire. I screamed in agony, dropping the fetish, as it shredded the flesh of my right shoulder. I lunged at it, but it had danced aside, and my powerful jaws crashed shut on nothing.

Jayjay, in his Crinos, aimed a raking blow at the fomor's throat, powerful enough to tear its head from its body. But yet again, with unnatural speed, the thing flung itself aside.



My rage exploded within my chest. Without a conscious decision, I felt myself swell like murderous fury into the Crinos. As the fomor dodged Jayjay's follow-up blow, I leaped forward and grabbed the creature, my clawed fingers sinking deep into its throat. I began to squeeze, readying to rip its head off and fling it like a basketball.

As I exerted pressure, the fomor smiled. "Foolish to come back," it wheezed its voice little more than a croak under the pressure on its windpipe. Its eyes locked on mine.

I knew what was coming. I tried to wrench its head off, tried to look away. Too late. Its eyes dilated into twin portholes, giving me a front-seat view of corruption itself. I howled in horror and disgust, releasing it to cover my eyes.

It wasn't any use. Even with eye contact broken, even with my eyes shut and covered, the horrific images still filled my mind. Gaia twisting and shaking in torment, wreathed in fire and corruption, as the Wyrms raped her. Taint spreading into the Umbra, poisoning all of the Realms. Banes and other, even more hideous creatures tearing down the fabric of the Tellurian, gibbering and cackling their glee. It was more than I could stand. For that instant, I wished I could die just to escape those terrible, terrible images.

Then a sound penetrated the private hell of my mind. An echoing, howling snarl of rage.

Jayjay. It had to be. I forced my eyes open again, and it was the hardest thing I'd ever done.

Yes, it was Jayjay, locked in combat with the foe. In the Crinos, his massive jaws were locked in the throat of the Bane-ridden fomor, his hands trying to restrain the claws that ripped great, bloody furrows in his back and sides. His gray pelt was already matted with blood. As I watched, still frozen in place, the fomor ripped itself loose with inconceivable strength. Its head hung loosely on its neck — a great wad of its tissue was still locked in Jayjay's jaws — and any natural creature would be busy dying of its cruel wounds. But the fomor wasn't a natural creature, was it? It was a minion of the Wyrms and thus free of many of the restrictions and limitations under which creatures of Gaia must labor. Even Garou.

Jayjay was horribly injured, I could see that. He spat out the bloody tissue and lunged again — slowly, too slowly. The fomor spun aside from his charge, almost nonchalantly raked him again across the back of his neck. Jayjay howled once more, and the howl was my name.

As if his voice had been a freeing charm, I felt myself able to move again. The fomor was watching him, but not me — apparently it thought I was already out of the battle. I saw it feint at Jayjay's throat to draw his guard up, then it ducked low and raked him again across the belly. I saw the giant Crinos stagger and fall.



That's when I hit the fomor, a flying tackle that struck like a piledriver. I sank my teeth into the side of its neck, tasting the bile-sharp contagion of its blood. It screamed in a voice that was half human, half something else. I felt bones crackle. It raked its claws across the back of my head, scoring furrows of burning pain. I released it for an instant — it tried to pull away, but wasn't fast enough — and got a better grip on its throat. It clawed me again, shredding the muscles of my left shoulder and arm. I screamed into the creature's throat, but didn't lessen my grip.

With both hands I grabbed its torso, felt it twisting and flailing wildly to free itself. No bloody way!

Using all the power in my arms, back and neck, I pulled and twisted — its head one way, its body the other. The effort sent bolts of screaming agony through my mangled arm.

But the creature's head tore off and bounced on the ground at my feet. I heard its teeth gnashing and snapping wildly, and for a few moments, its body seemed to have a terrible life of its own. Claws ripped into my already-pulped shoulder, and I wailed with the pain of it. I threw the decapitated body away from me.

Blackness was starting to surround me — not the darkness of the Wyrmgound, but a deeper, more profound blackness that was in my own head. Down a rapidly narrowing tunnel, I saw Jayjay — in Homid form now — pushing himself to his feet, coming toward me, concern written across his face. I took another step toward him, knew that I, too, had reverted to the Homid. I tried to croak out some wisecrack, but the tunnel slammed shut, all the lights went out and that was it.

The moot started at 12:37 a.m. precisely, like it always did, and was the first moot I was in any condition to attend. My arm and shoulder had healed up about as well as could be expected. I had at least some range of motion, and closing my left fist wasn't the transport of agony it had been not so long before. Putting on a coat or jacket was still bad enough to defocus my vision and make my guts knot with nausea, but I figured even that might pass, given enough time.

The other members of the sept watched me as I walked slowly into the main room of the Smiling Buddha. Daly, Wirth and Stefanov were already at their table. As I took a seat in the front row, I felt eyes on me, particularly on my slightly twisted arm. A battle scar — I knew the significance we Garou attach to such things.

They knew what had happened. In the two months since the fight with the fomor, they must have learned how everything had come about. I hadn't told them, but Jayjay would surely have done so. Even though I kept my face expressionless, I felt anxiety — no, let's call it what it was: fear — twisting in my belly. What were they going to do to me for imperiling the caern? Censure me? Expel me? Or worse?



Well, let them. It was their right to sit in judgment on me, and I'd face that judgment with honor.

Daly's electronic organizer beeped, and the moot started. To my surprise, the leader didn't follow the usual meeting protocol. Instead of the traditional opening, he rose to his feet and began, "My brothers, we have a special issue to deal with tonight. We must review the actions of one of our number — our newest member." He looked my way, and I tried to return his gaze calmly.

"Jonathan Rifkin has told us of this brother's actions," Daly continued, "and it is our place to judge the honor of those actions. I speak, of course, of Vincent Rache." The eyes that turned my way seemed to burn tracks in my skin. But if the others expected to see me cringe before my fate, they'd have a bloody long time to wait.

"I speak of Mr. Rache's encounter with the fomor in the Wyrmgound," Daly went on calmly, "of his efforts to track it down, with the aid of Mr. Rifkin, and of his victory over it in mortal combat."

I felt my eyes widen. He wasn't saying a thing about my criminal stupidity, about my getting sloppy drunk with the Bane and telling it the location of the caern. Why not? I looked around me and found my answer.

Jayjay was sitting in the back corner of the room, chair kicked back onto two legs. And he was grinning like a bandit.

He hadn't told them, not everything. Why not? I'd have to give that serious thought.

But later — Daly hadn't finished. "Vincent Rache, your actions have brought honor to you and to your pack," he said formally. And then he threw back his head and gave voice to the Hymn of Praise.

As the others joined in and the ululating discord swelled around me, I shot another look at Jayjay. He was howling along with the others.

Jayjay, I thought. I still owe you a challenge, don't I? My lips twisted into a grin. Maybe I'd better start practicing my chess.



# Loba's Tale

by Daniel Greenberg

A piercing howl cut through the cool Minnesota night, rattled through the island trees and died over the lake. Another howl followed it, and another, until the air was filled with sharp, staccato barks, low growls and mournful keening. A burst of silvery light flashed over the island's highest hill, illuminating a savage horde of werewolves carousing around a blazing bonfire. The silvery light flashed again. Each time it pulsed, another werewolf appeared on the butte, stepping through space by walking the path of the Moon Bridge.

The werewolves wore the markings of many packs and many tribes. They barked and wailed their greetings to each new arrival. Some embraced, some glowered, some wrestled and some sat quietly together under the bright, full moon. A haunting song, played on harps, flutes and crude animal-skin drums, rose up from the werewolves and floated over the lake. They chanted a low, guttural song of love and war and loss. Birds and forest creatures quickly scattered, fleeing from the unearthly sounds and intermittent flashes of silvery light.

Some of the werewolves cavorted in full wolf form. A few stayed in human form. But most were in their eerie, in-between Crinos bodies, a form unknown to wolves or humans. As the steady flashing of the Moon Bridge ended, the song reached a crescendo and abruptly stopped. A huge, ancient, brown Theurge Stargazer raised his tattooed arms in a triumphal gesture. "Let us begin the howl," he roared. The strength in his deep, booming voice focused the attention of the hundred wolves, and their howling stopped. The Theurge lowered his arms to his sides and paused for a moment, savoring the stillness of the night.

"Wait," cried Windlass, a young, wiry, dark-gray Child of Gaia. "We're not all here. Where's Loba?" The Theurge looked up at him through narrow, slitted eyes, disturbed to hear the sacred stillness so abruptly broken.

"Yeah, where is the crazy Silver Fang?" snarled Siptah, a great black Shadow Lord, looking around expectantly. "She said that after six years of snubbing us, she was finally going to grace our moot with her imperial presence." He paused then coldly added, "Looks like she lied."

"None of those moon-mad Silver Teeth ever make it to moots on time," an old, mottled Get of Fenris wolf growled as he sulked by the fire.



"Why you take their orders, then, Tyr Hatchet-Maw?" a rust-colored, adult Red Talon hissed. The great, mottled Fenris snarled at the challenge, and the Red Talon quickly added, "Why any of us listen to them? Why we let them rule the Garou?" The old Get of Fenris did not answer, but relaxed his battle stance.

"Let us begin!" shouted a pale-brown Uktena in body paint.

"But Loba is not here yet!" insisted Alia, a stout, young Black Fury who wore a circlet of red and white feathers down her back.

"Banes' blood! Forget Loba!" an elder Shadow Lord barked. "The moon is waxing. The night is ripe. We can wait no longer!"

"Let us begin!" a Fenris warrior shouted.

"Begin! Begin!" a Red Talon howled.

The assembled wolves took up the shout.

"She'll be here soon!" Alia pleaded. "She said she would!"

"She can make her apologies known to us then," a young, spotted Get of Fenris said wickedly. "We may tell her what she missed — if she humbles herself enough!" The camp erupted in laughter, as Grumm, the young Fenris, sneered at Alia.

"Her kind never apologizes," Siptah added, missing the joke. "We'll be lucky not to have to apologize for starting without her!"

"Any that apologize to her are fools," the grizzled old Tyr Hatchet-Maw spat. "Her tribal chieftain, Jacob Morningkill, warned the Fenris of the Adirondack about her. Said she's power mad... said she chases shadows... invents enemies to build her own glory. He finally had to ostracize—"

"That's not *true!*" Alia shouted, her lips curling back to expose rows of sharp, white teeth.

The elder Fenris slyly ignored the reaction he had produced in the young Black Fury and continued speaking, hoping that calmly ignoring her would provoke her further. "And he finally had to ostracize her from their tribe in the North Country. She no longer has Silver Fang authority to compel! She is clanless! She is of the ruling Silver Fangs no longer!" He piled insult on insult, watching the rage of the Black Fury pup mount. In a moment, it would boil over, she would attack, and he could tear her apart with utter satisfaction and complete justification. He could tell she was close to raging. While her anger was running white-hot, he gave her one more tiny push. "Any Garou who heed her are milk-fed moon calves!" She still did not attack. "Because she is ronin!" he shouted.

"That's a lie!" Alia erupted, muscles coiling to strike.

Windlass quickly stepped up behind the raging Black Fury and laid his calming hand on her shoulder. The anger drained from Alia's bunched muscles and a look of



gentle tranquillity washed over her face. The young Child of Gaia locked eyes with the grizzled Fenris wolf and said flatly, "Jacob Morningkill is madder than the rest of the Silvers. Every Garou in the Northeast knows he's a toothless old king who's dying too slowly and dragging his people down with him. Many Silver Fangs are wise enough to keep their distance from his court until kingship moves to a more stable leader. But that does not make them ronin, and Loba is not ronin. Your advisors must have misinformed you."

A low growl rattled from deep within the mottled old Get of Fenris. His throat pulsed with anger as he glared at the impudent Child of Gaia. "You've got a lot to learn, pup!" he snarled.

"And *you* have a lot to learn about the proper reverence and respect due Loba Carcassone, the greatest of Garou heroes," the Black Fury shot back, still angry but no longer on the edge of rage.

"The greatest of heroes?" Siptah laughed. "Loba? She has no renown. No glory. She is nothing!"

"I can see that *all* of you have a lot to learn," the Black Fury replied.

"Enough!" shouted Spring, a graceful, golden-furred Fianna, rising to stretch and breathe in the rich night air. "Let us begin!"

"Aye," a frowning Uktena added. "Let that be the last word we will hear of Loba!" The other wolves muttered their agreement.

"Good!" snorted Grumm. "But I notice she's still not here."

The Uktena threw up his hands in frustration. "No more about her!"

A young Shadow Lord laughed, looking to Siptah for approval. "Well, how can the Silver Fangs possibly get to moots on time? They live in their own worlds, with their heads deep in the Umbra."

Grumm continued, egged on by the Shadow Lord. "They live in their own worlds, all right. With their heads deep up their—"

"Coward!" a young Glass Walker fired back. "You wouldn't yelp so boldly about the Silver Fangs if one were here. Soft-bellied coward!" The Glass Walker, a wild, battle-scarred Ragabash called Mister Wonderful, deliberately strode over to Alia and Windlass. He joined them in a pack attack wedge, standing to the right of Windlass and to the rear of Alia, acknowledging her as their pack leader.

The younger Get of Fenris snarled but did not press an attack against the youthful pack, which suddenly looked quite formidable. Instead he turned to Tyr, looking to the old gray for leadership.

The old, mottled Fenris wolf sized up the pack of three young, lean-muscled Garou arrayed in solidarity before him and decided against attacking them.



“Ah... the place is lousy with pups tonight,” he spat. “Who let these mutts into our ancient celebration? They need to finish their Rites of Passage before they try to talk back to their betters.”

A low growl rose in the throat of Three Leaves, a huge, hulking, young Uktena. He strode quietly and deliberately to Alia, Windlass, and Mister Wonderful and fell in line behind them. Krazz, a brawny, young-female Red Talon warrior in full Lupus form, padded over and rounded out a five-Garou attack wedge. She was bursting with vitality and looked eager for a chance to prove her courage. The hackles rose on the Fenris wolf's mottled back as he glowered at the rapidly changing odds. If the challenge continued mounting, he could not back down and maintain his glory. He might soon be forced to challenge the whole pack instead of provoking them to challenge him. There was no glory for him in challenging pups, only in defending against a challenge from them.

The gold-furred Fianna, Spring, quickly stepped between the young pack and the infuriated Fenris. “Tyr Hatchet-Maw,” she said to the mottled Fenris, “I introduce to you the Maverick pack.” She gestured toward the five young wolves. “They come to us from the Moon Bridge at the Goddess' Hand Caern in the Finger Lakes protectorate. They have brought us a wealth of news on the Wyrms' latest actions there and have recently ventured to Malfeas and slain a fell beast of the Deep Umbra.”

“Are you their nurse, crooner?” the mottled old Fenris wolf barked, secretly grateful that she had defused the tension. “Do you suckle them and protect them that they cannot speak up to defend themselves? If they have anything to say, let them say it without you!”

Spring paused for a moment, quieting her own anger. Then she smiled and said, “Wise counsel, Tyr.” She turned to the rest of the assembled werewolves and cried out, “On the advice of the Fenris delegation, I suggest we begin our moot with a tale from the Maverick pack.”

A loud chorus of approval from the assembled wolves all but drowned out the outraged bellow of the Fenris elder. The Fianna smiled, glad to have averted a melee so early in the moot. She knew that a pointless, internecine battle was brewing and would likely happen before the moon set. The three Get of Fenris wolves at the moot were clearly spoiling for a fight and would not rest till they found one. Months of failure and dead ends in the battle against the Wyrms had left many of the local packs deeply frustrated, ready to tear into one another like caged rats. But at least the Maverick youngsters would be spared the brunt of Fenris wrath. Far better that the Get battle the Red Talons or the Shadow Lords, both of whom were eager to wound their own kind.



The Stargazer Theurge howled a series of short, sharp barks that died in a long, sorrowful moan. The wolves settled into a ring around the fire and prepared to fill their spirits with sounds and images. The Stargazer invoked an ancient name for the Goddess and then said, "We are ready for your tale."

The five members of the Maverick pack walked to the center of the clearing, smiled conspiratorially at one another and formed a ring around the fire. Three Leaves, the Theurge, raised his arms and led the pack in an invocation to Gaia and all Her spirits. Speaking in an ancient tongue, he begged Her blessing on their song, on all the assembled wolves and on all of creation. When their voices finally fell and the last echoes faded into the faraway canyon, Windlass began to speak.

"We shall spin a tale of she who is the mystery of the night and the fullness of the moon, she who encompasses both the compassion of a she-bear and the fury! She who points the way into the light of Gaia's wisdom. We sing of Loba Carcassone, the master of—"

"Arrr!" bellowed Tyr Hatchet-Maw. "Not her!" he shouted abrasively. "Let her tell her own tales! Sing of something else!" A few other wolves muttered in agreement.

Windlass, a little rattled from the interruption, bravely forged ahead. "This is a song of the wicked minions of the Seventh Generation, evil followers of the Wym that lie within humankind, hidden from even the greatest of the Garou Theurges."

"Lies!" a Red Talon shouted. "A myth!"

"Loba chases phantoms and claims she fights the Wym," Grumm added slyly, delighted to see the enchantment of the song broken. Other wolves muttered irritably, unhappy to be shocked out of their gentle reverie.

"She's shadow-boxing!" Grumm added with a smirk, leaping to his feet, comically shadow-boxing. "No wonder she has so little renown!" He abruptly jumped into a battle stance. "Sing a different story, or I'll gut your whole pack!" Other wolves laughed.

The elder Fenris grunted approvingly and rose to his haunches. Saliva pooled around his lips and poured over his gleaming fangs. His cold eyes flashed red in the firelight. The pups would have to challenge now or back down in humiliation.

"Please! Please!" Windlass said, trying to calm the Fenris wolves and quiet the crowd.

But Alia just laughed. "Brothers of Fenris! It's our time to sing now! If you wish to gut us, please do so during your time to sing!"



The assembled wolves roared with laughter and slapped the Fenris wolves playfully. The elder Fenris lowered himself back to the ground, mortified. The younger continued standing, but nervously slid out of his battle stance.

The golden-furred Fianna smiled to herself, proud that the young Mavericks had learned so quickly to defuse hair-trigger tempers.

Windlass drew a deep breath and continued. "This tale is of Loba's majesty and might, a tale of her courage and wisdom! And a tale of her patience with a pack of young, unworthy Garou! For she let the Maverick pack stand by her side as she fought the wicked, invisible armies of the Seventh Generation!"

"Hah!" Grumm hooted, still standing. "So invisible no one else has ever seen them!"

A chorus of anger shouted him down, and Garou near him roughly cuffed him and nipped at his stomach and throat. He fell to the ground in a ball to protect his neck and underbelly. The elder Fenris looked away from him, disgusted. Windlass waited for calm and carefully watched the young Fenris. But the speckled wolf remained huddled on the ground, shamed and quiet.

Mister Wonderful, the Maverick Glass Walker, gave a sharp howl and continued the tale, carefully skipping over any more mention of Loba. "Our great escapade began just a few days ago. We left the exciting, stinking piss-den city of wonders called New York to roam the green comfort of the hills at the foot of the Catskill mountains. We were rooting out a Black Spiral Dancer Wyrmhole that we learned about during our last great caper, which I call the Trashman's Holiday! That was when we—"

Three Leaves, the Uktena, eagerly interrupted this digression, holding aloft seven thick, furred fingers. "Yes! Maverick pack killed seven Spirals in Brook-land, New York City! Our tongues wanted more curdled, sour, Spiral blood! Lusted for the taste!"

Alia continued. "Before the last Spiral died, we used Gaia's Gifts to probe the twisted corners of his mind. We learned that he was due to meet other Spirals to deliver a treasure to their human allies in the Catskill mountains. So we left the city and traveled to his rendezvous point in the hills south of the Catskills. The Spirals had come and gone, but we picked up their noxious scent and followed them. We tracked them in Homid form all morning, and as the sun cast long shadows, we tracked them as wolves. Soon we came upon an old oil field, long-since abandoned. Though they had tried to mask their scent, the stink of Black Spiral Dancers lurked under the smell of fir and pine. We knew we had them."



Windlass picked up the tale. "Three Leaves spotted their sentry, who was magically disguised, hiding in a tree. He used his Uktena skills to approach the vile wolf silently, without disturbing the ground or the very air."

"And then *throated* him!" Three Leaves shouted jubilantly, snapping his huge jaws. "I cleaved his neck bone with two crunches! His broken head fell down and bounced, face confused all the way!"

Windlass boasted, "With the Spirals' only sentry gone, Maverick controlled the compound. We silently reconnoitered and discovered two Black Spirals lurking in one of the shacks. They were nervously guarding a large packing crate punched with airholes. It smelled of humans. We looked into souls of the Spirals and found them frightened of a great foe and very fearful that their powerful ally would not arrive in time."

"They right!" the stoic Krazz abruptly barked. The assembled wolves laughed.

Alia smiled. "We stole upon the shack," she continued, "and burst in all at once from front door, back door and boarded-up window. The Spirals lashed out at us, and we had a glorious fight! They nipped small wounds in our hides, and we tore the larger one limb from limb. He died screaming curses at us, and his torso crashed to the floor like a great oak!"

"Legbones!" Three Leaves shouted, eagerly prompting Alia by shaking his fist like a club. "Legbones!"

"Yes, yes," she replied with a grin. "Three Leaves picked up his two still-spurting leg and battered the smaller Spiral with them."

"It was a sharp idea, because it clearly demoralized him and kept us from having to kill him," Mister Wonderful added gleefully. "He collapsed long before his wounds overcame him. To prevent his escape, we slashed his hamstrings and broke his ribs. The mighty Black Spiral Dancer whimpered like a suckling cub abandoned by its mother. But he tried to put a brave face on, whining, 'A great Wyrms-beast will arrive shortly! If you leave now he will spare you.' We laughed at his pathetic desperation and taunted him with his own sorry-ass lies."

"But Windlass is a Philodox and knew the truth of Gaia," Alia added soberly. "He saw that the Spiral spoke the truth. So we dragged the Wyrms-wolf and his huge box of treasures from the shack and delivered them both to the safety of the hills above the oil field. The Spiral passed out from blood loss, but we kept him alive."

Windlass said, "We pried open the huge box while the unconscious Spiral twitched his slow, small dance of misery. And what do you think we found inside?" He paused, savoring the tension. The assembled wolves were dead quiet, hanging on his next word.



“Children! Little human children! Three of them, none more than eight years old, each bound and gagged. They were terrified and nearly mad with fright. Their little faces were creased with terror, and they huddled together as if to shrink themselves away to nothing.”

“But that’s not the strange part,” Mister Wonderful added with a mysterious grin. “They were not afraid of us! They were terrified, but showed no great reaction when they saw us and no sign of Delirium.”

“Something far more terrifying than the Delirium gripped them,” Windlass said in a low voice. “We calmed them as best we could and debated what to do with them. We thought we might release them into a nearby city or kill them to end the terror that possessed them.”

“Kill, I said!” Krazz boasted to her fellow Red Talons.

Alia added, “As we talked, we heard an automobile approach in the oil field below. We bristled with excitement, for we were eager to trace the Spirals to their human contact. His blood would be sweet after the bitter ichor of the Spirals. And after we gnawed on him a bit, we knew he would gladly lead us to his brethren.”

“We watched the bright headlights cut through the night as the car drove up the dusty trail to the shack,” Mister Wonderful said. “It stopped, and a short, pale human got out. He was mostly hairless and wore a business suit. We smelled nothing of the Wyrms on him, but knew he had to be connected in some way. Probably a courier for some Wyrms agent. We decided to mug him and force him to tell us what his connection to the Spirals was.”

“Easy kill!” Three Leaves chortled.

“We crept forward in an attack phalanx,” Windlass said, crouching and gesturing as if leading the sneak attack, “moving so quietly we didn’t even startle the dove that sat in the tree above us. The man stepped into the shack, where he would see our bloody handiwork and become unnerved. If this was the powerful ally the Spiral was expecting, he would be crushed in our clever ambush.”

“But as we reached the treeline, we heard a chilling voice behind us,” Alia said. “It whispered, ‘Trust.’ We froze, and the voice said, ‘Venture not into the empty night. For his might is beyond your star.’”

“The voice which floated so softly on the night winds froze us to our souls,” said Windlass, “and commanded us with a presence that gripped us like the wrath of Gaia. It was Loba. Loba Carcassone. We heard her, but could not see her.”

Mister Wonderful reached out as if to grasp something invisible before him. “The air around us shimmered, charged with tremors of excitement. The trees grew more colorful and vibrant, with a soft glow. The quiet chirping of the nearby birds became



an unearthly trilling. A nurturing pocket of the Near Umbra emerged all around us, transforming the simple thicket into a haven of wonder. The holiest of lands had arrived in the night woods, and with the spirit world came Loba Carcassone.”

“She was radiant with silvery moonlight,” said Windlass reverently. “Her fur shimmered like no other. It was soft as the softest down and fluttered so slowly and gracefully, like it was underwater. And yet, just beneath that deceptively fine silver coat hid rock-hard sinew. Her body was lean and long, and she moved so slowly... slowly, with an ancient grace.”

“So soft...” said Krazz wistfully.

Alia continued, “She whispered to us, ‘Even now, the Sham Man of the Seventh Generation searches for you. In a moment, he will find what he seeks, and all your tribe and all your kin will be hard pressed to save you from his wrath. For the sake of the human children do I open my Umbral home to you and seal you within the safety of its bowers.’”

Windlass said, “As we watched the clearing, we saw the man she called the Sham Man emerge from the shack. He was not the least disturbed by the carnage we left inside. Instead, he strode over to an abandoned oil pit and spat into it. There was a pause... a faint splash... and instantly the ground tore open. A painful shrieking filled the air, as if Gaia were loudly protesting the forcible ripping of the fabric of her body. The very ground around the oil pit wrenched itself wide open, and the metal derrick above it twisted apart like a child’s toy in a furious wind. From the black pit came a huge, terrible, shapeless creature that gleamed with fetid black oil and stunk of decayed flesh. It quivered and shook in the darkness.”

Mister Wonderful added, “The man pointed to the shack, and the oily thing oozed over to the dilapidated building and engulfed it. It dragged out the body parts of the dead Black Spiral Dancer and absorbed each splash of blood. When every trace of the battle was gone, the thing began to howl. A wind whipped up and swirled around it, shaking the buildings in the clearing. The great oily pile hurtled toward us, sucking up splashes of Black Spiral Dancer blood as it traveled, blood we had carelessly let drip behind us. As the creature rocketed toward us, we leaped to defensive postures. Loba said, ‘You are safe.’”

Excitedly, Mister Wonderful continued, “The humungous, black, formless fossil-fuel-thing rushed toward us. As it hit the forest, it tore whole trees out of the ground, shredded them and spit them out in all directions. The next second, the screeching creature engulfed us completely. The pocket of quiet, warm, glowing Near Umbra turned suddenly to cold, empty darkness. The only light was a warm, silvery glow from Loba. Then suddenly, the darkness passed. The creature had moved harmlessly through us and was hurtling into the distance behind us, shredding the



forest as it went. It slowed, stopped and moved toward us again. Again it engulfed us, passed by, stopped and engulfed us again. It stopped and hovered over us for a time, darkening our little Umbra haven. Finally, it shot past us and returned to the clearing.”

“Sham Man was mad!” Three Leaves said, gloating. “He stuffed oily wad back into broken ground. Oil well closed up. Thing was gone.”

Windlass added, “Then we realized we never sensed Wyrms corruption on the oil creature, either. Either it was not a Wyrms-beast, or it was strong enough to mask all traces of the mark of the Wyrms from us.”

“Sham Man drove away in automobile,” Three Leaves said.

“And we didn’t try to stop him,” Mister Wonderful added.

Alia said, “When all was quiet, Loba spoke again. She whispered, ‘I have saved your souls. In return for your five lives, I ask you to relinquish all claims to the three homid souls you rescued.’”

“It took a great effort to not say yes immediately,” Windlass confessed. “Resisting her call was like denying a tiny favor to a beloved queen. But we held our ground and bargained for answers. None of us felt any strong interest in keeping the human young, but we were very curious about Loba’s uses for them, so we asked her.”

“She did not change her expression,” Alia said, “but told us, ‘Even though you know not the significance of the children you have seen, the Seventh Generation covets your souls simply because you have seen them. The more you learn, the easier it shall be for them to find you. Ask not. *Know not. Step back from the lip of this chasm before you take the last step. For what seems so small and innocent a question shall plunge you into a chasm where little else waits but defilement and death. You have your Spiral kills. Take them, and be glad. But take them far from here.*’”

“We looked in each other’s eyes,” said Windlass, “and saw that not one of us would let it end so easily.”

Mister Wonderful said, “I told her, ‘Come on, babe. Just tell us a little bit. You know, so we can make a good decision. You can do that much, right?’”

Alia continued speaking for Loba. “‘There is a reason that I have told few Garou of my work and of the subterranean realm of the Defiler Wyrms,’ she whispered. ‘For to tell you of it would be to submerge you within it. And once you have entered this murky world of secretive defilement,’ she said sadly, ‘you can never leave it again. There is a peril in knowledge, a hard, lonely peril. And at times even I wish I could return to my old world of innocence and ignorance. There shall be no shame for you in not pursuing this.’”

“We did not reply, but we felt our resolve fading fast,” Windlass admitted.



“So return to your world of battles with foes you know and foulness you can find,” Alia whispered, speaking for Loba. “You will not miss my world.”

“We weighed her words for a long time,” Windlass said seriously. “Her infinite sadness convinced us that she spoke true.”

Mister Wonderful interrupted, “But then I said, ‘Hell with it! I’m in! Y’know what, Loba? I never regretted a damn thing I’ve ever done. Only things I didn’t do!’”

Alia added, “And Loba whispered, ‘Then perhaps this will be a new experience for you.’”

“We pledged to help her,” Windlass said, “and she promised to tell us of her secretive Wyrms enemies. Through a special Gift, Loba is able to travel rapidly through the spirit world to her caern. She quickly swept us through the spirit world, and we emerged moments later at the powerful Caern of the Goddess’ Hand in the Finger Lakes protectorate of New York. There, under the protection of the Black Furies who tend the shrine, she untied the children and looked deeply into their eyes, without blinking. Their unspeakable panic subsided and they slept. We reverted to our human form and left the shrine.”

“She almost as beautiful in Homid as in Lupus,” Three Leaves said longingly.

Windlass continued, “Five females— two Silver Fang kinfolk and three non-combatant humans — were waiting nearby. They had several cars and a large, silver van.”

“Tricked out, too!” Mister Wonderful cut in. “Bulletproof glass, hidden gun mounts, cool stuff!”

Krazz grunted with disgust at the Glass Walker’s affection for human technology, but she made no further comment.

Again, Windlass picked up the tale. “The human females climbed into the cars and put the sleeping children into the van. We drove out into the countryside with Loba, and for the whole five-hour trip, she revealed the threat of the Defiler Wym.”

“Loba runs an ‘underground railroad’ for runaway mothers and children,” Alia said. “Teachers, truckers, housewives, farmers — a strange collection of unlikely heroes banding together to protect the children. Mostly nonauthority humans.”

Mister Wonderful added, “She protects the kids from this cult of human Wym-worshippers called the Seventh Generation. Strange bunch. They sacrifice human kids to an aspect of the Wym called the Defiler Wym. They’re also real powerful and real widespread in human civilization. Government, Wall Street, army, cops, doctors — any kind of big authority group, they’re in it. They’re slow and steady — real methodical, real thorough. And real vicious. They avoid Garou notice — and



human notice — by growing gradually and carefully and covering each others' tracks."

"They defile young children," Alia said with disgust, "leaving the innocents with a devastating spiritual wound. If that wound goes unhealed, the Defiler Wyrms can send a spirit of corruption into the child at any time. The child, as an adult, will do the Defiler Wyrms' bidding and not know why. The Defiler Wyrms can quickly leave its host and never be detected by us later. The host will appear in all ways to be a normal human."

Windlass said, "The greater their wounds, the more likely the children are to shut themselves off from the living world. They purposely choose not to experience their empathy, because when their own feelings are unhealed, the feelings of others are too painful to confront. If they do not find healing for their poor, bleeding spirits, their wounds fester, and they lose their vital connection to life and to Gaia. They lose the basic ability of all living creatures to feel deeply the joy, sorrow, hope and pain of other creatures. In advanced cases, the holes in their souls become so great they eclipse their spirits utterly. The shining stars of their souls collapse in upon themselves like black holes. They lose their empathy completely, and when the last vestige of their humanity is gone, they would gladly destroy entire races, including their own, without a care. Through that black hole the Defiler Wyrms calls to them. They belong to the Wyrms more than any Bane, but they look and smell human in every way."

"And that's just the start of it," Alia added. "These scarred, tainted, spiritually wounded children grow up to produce scarred, tainted, spiritually wounded offspring. And so do their children's children. The Defiler Wyrms calls to them through this wound, goading them to kill the enemies of the Wyrms, to torture innocents or even to defile their own young. The worst of them turn their own children over to the Seventh Generation as sacrifices to the Defiler Wyrms. The Seventh Generation desecrate the child until they rip a gaping hole in his delicate soul and into that hole they place a Wyrms-beast. This system funnels power to the Defiler Wyrms and lets it corrupt Gaia's world without direct intervention."

"It's genius, mad genius," Windlass conceded, "because it makes it nearly impossible for us to fight the Defiler Wyrms or even to find its minions." He paused and then answered the question that was on the mind of his captivated audience.

"So we wondered, with a system so perfect, how could we have found the Seventh Generation? Well, we found them for the same reason Loba found them. Their very nature as children of defilement makes them inherently untrustworthy, and they betray one another without compunction. Power is all they understand, and as the Apocalypse hurtles near, these minions vie with greater and greater abandon



for greater and greater power. One large faction of upstarts is challenging the Seventh Generation's ancient leadership. This massive infighting made them get sloppy, lose discipline and leave messes behind.

"Loba stumbled onto some of these messes and survived enough of them to get an inkling of the problem. We stumbled on a mess of theirs, too, but we survived only through Loba's intervention."

Alia said, "Loba realized that the children we found in the crate were specially prepared sacrificial victims. She had learned that the upstart Defiler Wyrms had brazenly stolen the children from the old guard of the Seventh Generation, using the Black Spiral Dancers as expendable pawns in their deadly game."

Mister Wonderful added, "This power struggle going on among the minions of the Defiler Wyrms gave Loba a golden opportunity to find the Seventh Generation and strike at them."

"Loba told us much of Defiler Wyrms," Three Leaves bragged. "Most we can't tell you. It's for knowing by people who fight Seventh Generation!"

Windlass gently rebuked Three Leaves with a glance and continued. "By dawn, we arrived at one of Loba's secret safehouses. We entered a house that looked for all the world like a normal, suburban home and part-time child care center. They used their status as a childcare center as a cover for their sanctuary, for in addition to taking care of neighborhood children, they tended the children reclaimed from the Seventh Generation. Loba explained that this was a dangerous cover, because the minions of the Seventh Generation like to sensationalize the very rare occasions of abuse in daycare centers to shift the focus from the preponderance of violations that occur within families, homes and churches. The center housed human mothers there, as well, who were fleeing men who nurtured the Defiler Wyrms inside a spirit wound."

"And man," Three Leaves said gruffly.

"What?" Windlass asked.

"And man there. A father."

"Oh yes, there was a father protecting his child from an abusive mother."

"Rare!" Krass barked, scowling.

"Yes," explained Windlass. "Loba said there are also fathers who protect children from their mothers, and Loba extends her protection to all. But too, too often, both parents commit the acts of violation and betrayal, and no one is there to sweep the children away."

Alia continued the narrative, "After we settled safely inside, the children woke up. They looked less terrified, but were still silent and withdrawn. Loba explained that the children did not show fright at our Garou forms because the horrors the



Seventh Generation inflicted on them dwarfed even the terrors of the Delirium. Loba suspects that the Delirium and the horrors known to defiled children are manifestations of the same force and cause the same mental blocks.”

“Loba and her human servants took the children to a small, clean, well-protected room,” Windlass said. “Loba inscribed wards on the floor and walls and invoked her Umbral home into the room.

“In this sacred place, we could see our spirit selves. We were wolves of light, with red shining eyes and fangs and claws, and Loba was the brightest of all. Her light was silvery white, like the moon. Her Kinfolk shone as well, their hearts suffused with warm, pink light. But the children — the children looked like gray, hollow skins, with dark, dark holes where their hearts should be.

“In the protection of Gaia’s bosom, Loba placed her hand on the head of each child, and we could see deeply into the holes in their hearts. There we saw the land of Malfeas.”

“And worms of Wyrms!” Three Leaves said with a shudder.

Windlass spoke softly, almost in a whisper. The assembled wolves sat stock still and listened. “As we looked in each of those three dark, deep, murky holes toward the land of horrors, we saw creatures stir, like maggots in living flesh. A powerful, eel-like Wyrms-beast twisted and coiled in a pale, gray, murky soup. We could smell the stink of the Enemy now. The creatures at the other end of the long, dark hole in each of those tiny hearts were truly of the Wyrms. In that moment, we began to understand the children’s suffering.”

Alia spoke. “Loba shook her head sadly. These children have indeed been prepared as sacrificial lambs and have suffered the most wretched form of defilement. In addition to violating such children, the Defiler Wyrms has prepared a special tendril of its own essence for each of them. When its mortal minions sacrifice these specially prepared children, the tendril punches through to the physical world, establishing a greater connection, weakening Gaia and hastening the Apocalypse.

“The Seventh Generation would go to great lengths to get them back, because they would provide the Defiler Wyrms with great power if they were sacrificed to it. And that was not the worst of it. Loba said, ‘If these children are not sacrificed, then the Wyrms continues to turn in their bellies. They can naught but become cold, compassionless creatures who breed only violence and violation. They grow to be the most vile and the most powerful of Wyrms minions.’”

“Our Red Talon packmate, Krazz, suggested a clear and simple solution,” said Mister Wonderful.



Krazz barked, "Kill them!" The Red Talons sitting around the fire quietly growled their approval.

"But Loba said no," replied Alia.

Mister Wonderful interjected, "So I says, 'Look, Loba, my pal Krazz is always a little harsh, but hey, in this case, she may be right. Offing them looks like our best bet.'"

"But I disagreed with our esteemed city dweller packmate," Windlass announced. "I said, 'If the problem is as widespread as Loba suggests, then killing them is not a practical solution. If we try to kill all sacrifice victims, where do we stop? We would meet with unprecedented human resistance if we started a worldwide Impergium on spiritually wounded children. And also, I imagine killing them before they become violators themselves would rob us of a great source of information about the Defiler Wyrms. No, I suspect that destroying the victims is a bad idea.'"

Alia, speaking as Loba, whispered, "It is a practical idea."

"Which came as a complete surprise to me," Windlass confessed.

"Loba whispered, 'It's a solution I, too, contemplated,'" Alia told the assembled wolves. "But I have since learned that there is another choice, a choice that wounds the Defiler Wyrms. I have learned to seal children off from the horrific realm to which the Wyrms connected them.

"Abuse and defilement creates a wound in the soul of the child. This is the hole you see in the children's hearts, a window to the Wyrms-realm of Malfeas. The Defiler Wyrms can call to the child through the hole. By entering the hole, I can close the link to the Wyrms-world. I cannot cure the wound, but I can close the portal to the Deep Umbra. I have succeeded in sealing such wounds in a dozen children now, with very—"

Windlass said, "Alia interrupted her, saying, 'Then you can save these children?'"

Alia replied, "But Loba just shook her head. 'These foundlings are very different from other abused children,' she whispered. 'They are sacrificial lambs, and there is a great, malevolent Wyrms-spirit at the other end of the hole. When these fell beasts see me venture through the hole in the child's heart, they leap into the tunnel to attack. I have fought and destroyed one, but at great cost.'"

Windlass continued, saying, "'Then it is possible,' I said. And Alia said, 'We can destroy these creatures ourselves!'"

"No!" snapped Krazz, speaking as herself. "Too long! Too dangerous. Just kill children."



"I asked Krazz if she was shrinking from a fight," Mister Wonderful laughed, "but she just growled at the suggestion."

Alia continued speaking as Loba. "Though I will not allow the death of the children, your Red Talon compatriot speaks wisely." She started to say, 'You have no stake in the outcome,' but Windlass put his face very close to Loba's and interrupted her, asking, 'Don't we?' Loba thought for a moment. 'You are right,' she whispered, 'and wiser than I gave you credit. But you must know that the enemy is very deadly. In my past forays, I was fortunate to depart alive. When I ventured in with my Kinfolk, we defeated the beast, but two of my Kinfolk gave their lives in the struggle. Healing these sacrifice victims is a dilemma for me, as I do not plan to trade life for life.'

Windlass said, "But Alia stood up to Loba, saying, 'You traded a life for a life because you brought mere Kinfolk! You need your true kin. You need Garou!' Loba said nothing."

Mister Wonderful said, "Alia never lets go when she's got her teeth sunk in. 'Let us be your strong right arm!' she insisted, as if the rest of us had volunteered. 'Your kinfolk may be valiant, but they are not Garou. With us beside you, we can crush this scourge and protect your flank as you heal each child!'"

"Loba looked at us with eyes full of ancient sadness," Alia said. "You know not what you ask,' she whispered. 'This is not like any Wyrms menace you were ever bred to fight. You may assist me in fighting the Defiler Wyrms's more prosaic allies, but this is not of your star. These dangers are not mine to offer, and your sacrifice is not mine to ask."

"Then don't ask it!' Alia blasted back at her," Windlass said. "She growled, 'I demand you take us to fight those things.' She looked at the rest of us, and added, "All of us who wish to go."

"But Loba again said no," Alia went on, "whispering, 'I cannot. I must not. I have sworn an oath to Gaia that I shall risk none but myself and my Kinfolk.'"

"Alia cried, 'Loba! I defy your oath!'" Mister Wonderful said, his eyes flashing as he recounted the scene. "Moving with speed we have never seen before, Alia stepped sideways and hurtled straight into the heart of the youngest child. The rest of us were blown away. We were used to stepping sideways from earth to the Umbra, but she went from Umbra into — well, wherever the tunnel led to."

"She soared down the great, murky tunnel toward the coiling Wyrms-beast, her red and white feathers blazing a trail like fire through the darkness," Windlass said.

"For the first time, Loba lost her fabled cool," Mister Wonderful said, suppressing a slight grin. "Lost it completely. You shoulda seen her. She swore like a sailor. A soft-



voiced, fourteenth-century sailor with an Oxford education, but a sailor all the same. She quickly began whipping up an invocation that would send her and her alone through the hole in the child's heart."

"Loba could not step sideways into hole by will alone, as our Alia," Three Feathers said proudly.

Windlass said, "Krazz leaped up, clamped her jaws on Loba's arm and growled, 'Take us in!' And I told Loba, 'We, the Maverick pack, enter that chasm to hell of our own volition. We'll kill that thing. If you want to take advantage of the diversion by sealing the hole, you may. Now take us in!'"

"For a minute it looked like it was all gonna be over right then and there, and Loba wipe up the floor with us," Mister Wonderful said. "But I guess she figured better the Maverick pack should die in hell than in her living room. Whatever, she agreed and cast a spell to take us all in with her."

"Alia fought Wyrms alone," Three Leaves said reverently. "Falling like star. A shooting star."

Windlass spoke quietly. "We felt a sensation of passing right through the child and moving into a place of hollow decay. It was as if the child's heart were nothing but a portal to this desolate place, hung with broken promises and dripping with sorrow. Stabbing into the walls of the tunnel were the great, cruel spikes that held the hole open, each spike stabbed in by a violent act of betrayal. The tunnel opened up into a place of bleak despair, and at the bottom of that deep well lay the Wyrms-creature, no longer restlessly coiling, but savagely thrashing in its pale-gray slough.

"Alia had dealt it some harsh wounds, but she had been grievously injured in the process. She was valiantly battling on, but was slowing. We tore into the creature and shredded its rancid flesh."

Three Leaves screwed up his muzzle and spat. "If you think Black Spiral Dancers taste bad..."

Krazz shuddered and spat in disgust at the reminder of the taste.

"The beast was like a huge, glistening eel with bursting pustules and sharp, spiky projections," Windlass said, relishing the horrid description. "It lashed out at us with its whiplike limbs, and the wounds stung with poison. It cast spells to weaken us and make us lose our hope. And we had to struggle against the oppressive nature of its Deep Umbra home, which wore down our spirits every moment."

Alia said, "While we battled the creature, Loba tore the spikes from the walls of the tunnel, which sagged like a great, deflated balloon."

"We raged royally," Mister Wonderful said, "and worked up a sweaty, bloody fury as we stripped the rancid 'flesh' off the creature's back, revealing a still-thrashing



skeleton made of crusty, granitelike deposits. We snapped off one small, rock-hard bone and used the broken shards to batter and chip the larger bones.”

“My legbone idea!” Three Leaves boasted proudly. “From Spirals!”

“The creature was still thrashing when Loba’s forceful whisper called to us to retreat,” Windlass said. “Krazz was not eager to go, but we pulled her off the monster and followed Loba back into the tunnel and toward the light.

“The walls of the tunnel were billowing loosely, now that Loba had freed them from their moorings. The Wyrms-creature, now a bony skeleton dripping with ichor, rose out of its murky gray soup to follow us. Loba hurled some of the spikes she pulled from the wall at the beast, and the thing writhed in pain as they shattered its jagged bones.”

Mister Wonderful added, “Once we were all safe in the tunnel, Loba grabbed the tunnel walls and bunched them together, cutting us off from the Wyrms-world. We traveled back toward the real world, pulling the sagging tunnel behind us. It was like crawling through a long, pulsating sack.”

“When we reached the light, we passed through the child’s heart and back into the Near Umbra haven that Loba had created for us,” Windlass said. “She cast one final spell to seal the fissure in the little girl’s soul. The black hole in her heart was gone, replaced by a faint, pale, pink glow. The ordeal was over. We cheered and howled with savage might and chanted the name of Gaia. The humans and even the Kinfolk flinched from the fury of our revels. But Alia, who was bleeding profusely, broke off our joy, saying, ‘We took care of one, but we have two more left. Let’s get going!’

“We convinced Alia to let us bind our wounds before venturing in again. In the next two days, we ventured into the heart of the second child, and then the third. We now knew much about these eel-like Wyrms-creatures and knew how to fight them. Though they varied in powers, we suffered very few direct blows, dispatching them quickly.

“We were surprised and gladdened to learn that these creatures apparently did not communicate amongst themselves to warn each other of our coming. Though they are extensions of the same being, they are out of touch with the whole. Loba told us she learned that the many facets of the Defiler Wyrms do not cooperate well and that they often trust their human minions more than they trust each other. Not even their human minions trust one another; perhaps they even despise each other. Were it not for their common goal, I imagine they should fall apart in paralysis.”

Alia said, “Loba believes that the Defiler Wyrms’ self-loathing will be the key to defeating it.”



Windlass picked up the tale again. "After Loba sealed the holes in their hearts, the children slept peacefully. The next day, we visited them in our Homid forms and watched them come alive again. They were weak and traumatized from their ordeal, but gained strength by the moment and even showed momentary flashes of smiles again as they put the horrors behind them. The resilience and courage of such tiny creatures gave us deep satisfaction and joy. We knew we had triumphed over a great foe and saved some of Gaia's innocent creatures. Gaia would be well pleased with us. We boasted proudly of our triumph in saving the children, but Loba stopped us."

Alia again spoke as Loba. "The children are far from saved," she whispered firmly.

"We all stopped in our tracks," Windlass said.

"Now the real work of healing begins," Alia whispered, speaking as Loba. "And each child must do it himself."

"But we destroyed the monster,' I protested," said Windlass. "And you sealed the holes in their hearts! You healed them!"

Alia continued to whisper, speaking as Loba. "No. We have only given them the chance to heal themselves. They now have the same chance to recover that other seriously abused children have. They still must reintegrate their psyches; just sealing off the magical hole in their hearts does not heal the fearsome damage done to their souls. Nothing can make up for what has been taken from them. They must one day confront what has happened to them and make peace with their pain."

"Will they?" Three Leaves repeated plaintively.

"Some do. Some don't," Alia whispered, still speaking as Loba. "All I can do is soothe away the pain and give them time to heal. Though I have tried with all of my power, I have not been able to do their healing for them."

"But what if they never heal?" I asked," said Windlass. "Will all of this have been for nothing?"

"Loba said softly, 'That is quite possible,'" said Alia. "Unhealed victims become fertile ground for the Defiler Wyrms to return. They are likely to become abusers or victims of abuse. The end result is the same. The shame... the secrets... the damage... all is passed on to the next generation. The pain in their hearts can blossom again, reopening the hole that connects them to Malfear."

Suddenly, Krazz growled.

Windlass said, "At that point, Krazz erupted, snarling, 'Then they must die! Kill cancer... cell... by cell!' We were all shocked, for we had never heard Krazz speak so eloquently or so passionately."



“But Loba said no,” continued Alia. “These kind of violation is endemic in the human race. Killing all humans who do not carry this inner curse would cause far more damage to them, and to us, than it could possibly cure. Furthermore, these wounds are common among the Garou as well as the humans, and not even you would wish to kill your own kind.”

“The Wyrn — among us? I breathed, horrified,” said Windlass.

“Why not among us?” answered Alia, still speaking Loba’s part. “We pass on generational violence and spiritual damage to our get as much as the mortals do, with our wicked, spirit-crushing coming of age rituals.”

Mister Wonderful said, “Man, did that rile Three Leaves! ‘Rite of Passage toughens us, strengthens our tribe!’ he insisted.”

“But then Loba replied, ‘Our very life offers enough challenges and horrors to toughen us; we need not unduly burden a cub’s way. With more trust and less torture of cubs, perhaps our kind would not be dying out.’ Alia said.”

“So I said, ‘Like the Impergium, we went too far...but this time we were too hard on our own kin,’” added Windlass.

“Listen well, little cubs,” said Alia in Loba’s place. “If you learn nothing else from me, learn this. The enemy is not the Wyrn; it is you. All that you have learned from your tribes is wrong, and all our ancestors for millennia have failed because of it. Now the Apocalypse is upon us, and we have but a few scant years to mend our ways. If we carry on as we have done, it matters not how many Wyrn-creatures you or any other Garou kill, for you will spew the Wyrn into all you do.

“Let the humans live, and learn to heal themselves. Your task — and it is a much harder one — is to seek healing for yourselves, and for the Garou. If you are not ready to do this, the enemy is you. When you look into your own eyes, the Wyrn looks back.”

Alia paused for a long time, as if the task of speaking for Loba was exhausting her. The assembled Garou tribes sitting around the dying bonfire were utterly silent. Finally, Windlass spoke. “For hours, we did nothing but watch the children we saved as they began their tentative, halting play. At length, Loba reminded us that this moot was to begin in a few hours and that we had all planned to be here. We did not much feel like revelry with our tribes, but Loba whispered, ‘You have the rest of your life to think on these things I have said. For now, it is best you keep your promise and go. I shall follow along soon, for, though I seldom keep custom with my kind, I have sworn to attend.’”

Alia said, “Before we parted, I had a final question for her. ‘How did you discover the Defiler Wyrn?’ I asked. ‘That is a tale for another time,’ she whispered gently.



'Suffice it to say that the Goddess has seen fit to point the way to them by granting signs, often subtle, sometimes forceful. But all the signs implore me to open my eyes to the pain of these children and the poor, suffering world and to heal this Blight in the holy name of the Goddess.'

"But why not tell all Garou and secure their aid?" I asked," said Alia.

"I have mentioned quite a bit of it to them,' Loba said, 'and met great resistance at every level, a resistance quite out of all proportion. Our masters reject the idea that they missed all signs of so powerful a Wyrms-being flourishing under their noses. In their arrogance, they think they know all aspects of the Wyrms.'

Windlass said "Why not show them what you showed us? Then they will have to believe!"

"It is not so simple. The Defiler Wyrms has infiltrated all great powers among mortals, mages, vampires and, I suspect, even eternal powers. So how could it not have infiltrated the Garou?"

"Though we know little of the Defiler Wyrms, it knows much of us. It has set traps for me within my own tribe, and I cannot go to them for aid. No, until I receive a sign, I shall trust none of my own kind. Especially not our rulers."

"Then... why did you trust us?" I asked," Mister Wonderful said.

"A tiny smile appeared at the corners of her mouth," Alia reported, "the first such smile we had ever seen from her. 'In the woods,' she whispered warmly, 'as I watched you prepare to venture into certain destruction at the hands of the Seventh Generation Sham Man, I received a tiny sign from Gaia, a sign that I should protect you. My private totem animal appeared above your heads and remained there when other animals fled. I did not want to believe that it augured the Goddess' faith in you. Do you remember the first thing you heard me say?'"

"Yes," Three Leaves said. "You told us 'Trust.'"

"It was not you to whom I spoke. I was speaking to myself. Trusting Gaia's sign was difficult, but I did so. And she steered me true.' With that, Loba smiled broadly. 'Well, go on ahead to the moot. I will join you soon.'"

Mister Wonderful said, "We had less than an hour to get to the caern and ride the Moon Bridge to this moot, but Loba's Kinfolk sped through the streets and we made it on time for the opening howl. I'm sorry that Loba is still not here, but her story will live in us forever, as will our new mission!"

The five friends and packmates raised their arms in salute. "Praise Loba the Carcassone!" they shouted. "Praise Gaia! Praise healing the world!"



Their howl echoed down the canyon and died in the dry night air. Slowly, the other Garou began to stir and stretch as if they were slowly coming out of a trance. They said nothing, just gazed at the Maverick pack, lost in thought.

Abruptly, Grumm shouted, "Oh, Fenris' balls! This is just like Loba! She wants glory for fighting enemies no one can find, in battles no one can see. Oh, very nice! Well then, give her all the glory she wants. We will blindly take your word for it all!"

His abrupt cry broke the spell the Maverick pack had woven. The wolves grumbled and shook themselves as if rudely and uncomfortably awakened from a deep dream.

"Ahh," said an angry Uktena, "shut up, pup."

Grumm persisted. "If this were all true, why would she tell us? It would just incite the Red Talons to kill the humans she seeks to protect. They would call for a new Impergium to kill the tainted humans! It would be easy to find them. Just kill all humans who lack empathy!"

The assembled Garou broke into shouts and grumbles, but one voice rose above the rest. An old Red Talon said, "You are a fool, pup. And you did not listen well."

"I did! If this were true, why would she tell us now?"

"She is Loba," a Child of Gaia said. "She has her reasons."

"Yes. Glory from fools!" Grumm shouted, froth at his lips.

Tyr Hatchet-Maw nodded. "Yes. Fool's glory shines as bright as the real thing."

"This is a pack of lies from a pack of liars!" Grumm said. "Glory-seeking liars who puff themselves up with deceit!"

"Loba does not seek glory," Windlass said, "and she never has. Her own honor is far more important to her than renown."

"Every word is true," Alia said coldly.

"Except for one little detail!" Grumm said triumphantly. "If it took you five hours to go from the Caern of the Goddess' Hand to the safehouse, how could you drive back to the caern in one hour? Ha ha!"

Tyr Hatchet-Maw grinned and said, "We just wasted a perfectly good waxing moon on a pack of liars!"

"We did not drive back to the Caern of the Goddess' Hand," Alia said with barely concealed anger. "We went to the Mountain Laurel shrine, which was only an hour away."

The other Maverick pack members shot cautioning glances to Alia.

"Ah," Grumm said. "So the safehouse was not in New York at all, but in Pennsylvania!"



Alia said nothing.

Tyr roared, "Goddess' Hand, Mountain Laurel, makes no difference! These pups are just trying to cover up a blunder!"

"I think we would be wise to attend to their tale," Siptah the Shadow Lord said with quiet intensity. "If they are telling the truth, we have a lot to learn and little time in which to learn it."

"Siptah!" Tyr said with a sneer. "A leader of your wisdom gulled by these churls? Perhaps the mists of senility have deluded you in your advancing years. If there were any such threat, the Get of Fenris would be the first to know of it!"

"And the first to ignore it," Siptah fired back, "so you could cower in the protection of your mountain home and guard your precious caern while the Shadow Lords fight the real foes!"

"I fight real foes!" Tyr shouted and leaped at the Shadow Lord. The two fell in the dust, clawing and slashing and bellowing. The other Garou moved out of the way to give the snarling combatants room to rend and tear at each other. Other Shadow Lords and Get of Fenris wolves eyed each other warily, wondering if they should attack one another or jump into the fight to help their tribesmen.

All the Garou focused their attention on the sudden fight — all but one. Grumm, the young Get of Fenris, slowly moved to the back of the cluster of wolves and crept away from the campsite into the cool night, where he was swallowed by the dark. He loped to the edge of the clearing and squatted down behind a tree.

Grumm inscribed a circle in the dirt and drew warding symbols. Protected from the wolves, he opened the large, gnarled seed-pod that hung around his neck and drew a maggot-ridden seed from it. He traced a rune in the air with the rotting seed.

BREEEEP!

The air before him tore open, and a pale human face peered through a circular fissure in the air.

"Oh, Soarzech, my lord, we have them! The bitch-queen Loba and the escaped spawn are in Pennsylvania, within an hour's drive of the Mountain Laurel Caern!"

The man smiled a tormentor's smile. "Ah," he said. "No wonder we could not pick up the trail. We've been wasting our Snatcher Caste members in a wild child chase in upstate New York. But we have them now. Our agents will descend on central Pennsylvania en masse and stay till they catch the bitch-queen with her guard down. The little ones shall squirm for their temerity. You have pleased us, Grumm. Two more such successes, and Tyr Hatchet-Maw's head and title shall be yours."

"Thank you, Master!"

"Now go, fraternize with your lice-ridden hordes before you are missed."



The fissure faded and the human head disappeared. Grumm rose with a smile. A surge of hot excitement shot from his head to his paws, softly ruffling his fur with anticipation.

A whisper of wind behind him made his soft fur suddenly bristle and changed his warm tingling to icy dread. A whispered voice chilled him to the bone.

"Traitor," the voice whispered. Grumm feared to turn around, but slowly looked over his shoulder.

A sleek, gleaming silver werewolf stood behind him.

"Lo—" he gasped.

He tried to run, but his legs felt rubbery, rooted to the ground. He tried to look away from the piercing eyes that slashed deep furrows into his mind, but his eyes were caught in her trap.

"The little humans never were in Philadelphia, you predictable troll," she whispered. "They are far beyond the reach of your craven masters, and beyond your further consideration. And you... you are beyond all concern." Grumm trembled. "But I shall need that charm you use to contact the Seventh Generation," she said, snapping the seed-pod from his neck. "Now, what shall I do with you?"

He stopped moving, unable to even tremble.

"I know," she breathed with anticipation. "I shall wear your skin."

With a flash of gleaming silver, Loba inserted one razor-sharp claw under Grumm's jowl and traced a line around the underside of his jaw. Before the thin, red line could seep out and stain the speckled dun fur, she tucked her claws into the shallow cut and wrenched upwards.

Grumm's scream burst across the landscape as the fur tore from his face in a single piece.

Wolves dashed across the clearing, paws pounding the earth as they hurtled toward the agonizing noise.

They saw Loba standing in a pool of silvery light, wearing Grumm's speckled coat. The fur from his back was draped across her shoulders like a cape, with the paws clasped across her breast. His empty face sat atop her head like a grim crown.

The still-living Grumm cowered at her feet, skinless, raw and bleeding, an open wound of agony and torment. Pink and naked, he whimpered as he clutched at his exposed flesh and tried to protect his tender tissue from the icy chill of the night. The grisliness of the image choked even some of the hardened Garou warriors. The wolves, familiar with gory, jagged wounds, were unexpectedly unnerved by the smooth, clean, clinical, bloodless precision of the skinning.



Loba addressed the quivering mass of exposed bone and tissue at her feet. "You who were Grumm," she whispered. "Skinless and kinless you are. For in turning your back on your Kinfolk, you forfeit the skin from your back."

Tyr Hatchet-Maw sputtered in horror. "Loba! You go too far!"

"I have not gone far enough. I leave this turncoat to your justice, now that he has turned his coat over to me. This skin-changer tried to exchange his Garou skin for your head, Tyr Hatchet-Maw. But the Seventh Generation will not be able to pay him back, for I have stopped his plan. And the chill his naked flesh feels is nothing compared to the cold ostracism his people have in store for him now. Read his mind, and you will learn his horrors of deceit and defilement!"

Loba turned to the Maverick pack. "Thank you, my trusted friends."

Then she sent them a private message on the spirit plane, one they and they alone heard in their souls. "And thank you also for telling the tale as I requested. Not only did you flush out the Seventh Generation renegade, but by pretending that you used the Mountain Laurel Caern instead of the Goddess' Hand Caern, we shall send the minions of the Defiler Wyrms scrambling far in the wrong direction. I am indebted to you."

She turned to go.

"Loba!" the Fianna cried. "We are honored that you have graced us with your presence. Please stay, and share our tales."

"I have no time for such foolishness," she whispered. "I have children to save."

"But think of the glory!" an Uktena implored.

Loba narrowed her eyes. A few younger Garou shifted nervously and eased themselves away from the Uktena.

"I want no renown," Loba whispered. "It would only get in the way of my work. All I want from you is for these elders and old-minded youngsters to realize that our enemy has completely changed its tactics. Our old reactions will not work to fight them. Perhaps when next I test my fellow Garou, you shall be more receptive."

She departed in a flash of silvery light.

The assembled Garou cheered her. "Let us sing Loba's song!" one shouted.

"Hmff!" snorted a Shadow Lord. "Doesn't want glory! She left only because it would bring her more glory than staying. She tries to gain glory by pretending she wants it not! Well, I'll have none of it! And I'll have none of this Seventh Generation business. Grumm sold out to just another Wyrms agent, probably some enemy of Loba."

The werewolves erupted in argument. The Maverick pack put their arms around one another and smiled as they headed back to the bonfire.







# Tales of Wisdom



# The Rabbi's Tale

by Bud Webster

So, now it comes time for old Croucher to tell a tale. This I can do, and very well, for I've heard uncounted tales in a long life in the shadows, and many of those are secrets; secrets make the best tales, yes they do, for no one is supposed to know them and they have power for both the teller and the listener.

Well, tales I know aplenty; it's been long since I was a pup, and I see elders here who were not yet born when I saw my first moot. I know tales that were told around the drumfires when this place was still real wilderness, and not the human lie it has become. I can tell you stories of heat and terror, of stones that bleed, of old houses that scream like women in the night when there's none to hear. I could tell you of the Things that crawl only when darkness drops and how the Moon weeps to see. . .

. . . But these aren't tales to soothe after a long moot, no, but to frighten the young when the fire burns low and silence falls like fog in the darkness. This is a night for tales that tell us what we are and why. A night for tales that grow greater in the telling, that ask us our purposes and, perhaps, make us laugh to know the answers.

So I'll tell you a tale that I heard at my first moot, longer ago than I care to say — before I was first scarred, before I first slunk into the darkness of abandoned tenements.

I heard this story from an old, white-headed Philo who claimed to have heard it at his first moot from an elder of yet another tribe. I believe this to be so, because who's ever heard of a lying Philodox? Not I, no.

It would seem that there was a Garou who, in his human life, was of the Jewish faith, a rabbi in fact. A Jew Garou? How could this be? you might ask. The answer isn't a simple one, no, but much of the Talmud consists of hair split finer. Is not the word "Jahweh" not much different from "Gaia"? And if there may be a Heavenly Father, would this not also indicate the presence of an Earthly Mother? And what Husband is truly the lord and master of his own Home? No, my friends, the idea is not so far-fetched as you might think.



This rabbi of whom I speak lived and taught in the shtetls of Krakow, long after the time of Rabbi Loew of Prague and his clay man. His homid name was Levi ben Jacob — yes, little one, “Yah-koob” is how this great Garou’s name is said, not “Jay-cub” — and he was wise and respected by the elders of his tribe, though he was not an elder himself (he was far too humble to beg that boon; those were days when the Litany was taught from pup-hood, and submission to those above you was more important than it has become now, of course — but I see you grow impatient for the tale).

As a rabbi, Levi ben Jacob was valuable to his tribe, since this put him in a unique position to know the goings-on in his city and the villages that surrounded it. In those days, the Veil was much thinner than it is now; Krakow is on the Vistula River, which runs at the feet of the Carpathians, an area rife with legends of monsters and shapechangers. There was no question in the humans’ minds that we existed, and that made it much harder to hide. Now, a Jew in Poland in those days certainly wasn’t a man invited to sit in on the conversations of governors and police chiefs, but a rabbi hears everything from everyone and is able to prepare his people against both pogroms and hunting parties. Sometimes he would send the Garou away; other times he would suggest that the hunters look elsewhere: “Reb Shmuel tells me that he saw one kill a lamb down by the iron mines last night. I mention it only in passing.” And in this way, he kept his sept from harm, and in return, his kin Garou protected, as best they could, the Jews of his flock.

As has always been the case with us, there was strife and discord among the Garou of his sept. And, as has always been the case, the elders grew weary of the fighting and sought a solution. They came to this rabbi and put before him the facts.

“Rabbi,” they said. “The packs fight among themselves. The Theurges are contemptuous of the Moon Dancers, the Ahroun tease the Bards with corrupt verse, and all of them are ready to slaughter the Tricksters. If we cannot live together in peace and harmony, is there at least some way in which we can keep from tearing out our own throats?”

Rabbi Levi ben Jacob nodded in thought. He scratched his beard and drummed his fingers on the table. Then he rose and pulled down several old books of law and history from his shelves and read from place to place in them, making notes on a scrap of parchment. He seemed about to speak, and the elders leaned forward to hear, but he stopped short and again scratched his beard.

After what seemed to be hours of contemplation, scratching, writing on scraps of paper and study accompanied by tuneless humming, the rabbi stood. Placing a hat on his head and taking up many papers and several volumes of the Talmud, he said, “We must consult the Baal Shem. Come.” And down the streets of the Jewish ghetto they went, a procession of six, to a wretched house set apart from the others by thin but



thorny hedges. The rabbi knocked and spoke in quiet tones to the ancient woman who opened it. She glared at the small company with unconcealed distaste for all fools impolite enough to disturb the Baal Shem's studies, but grudgingly allowed them entry.

The Baal Shem himself was tall and ferociously thin, with fiery eyes below bristling black brows that grew straight across his forehead. . .

Ah, I see that you don't know of the Baal Shem. I will explain. The Baal Shem are of the Hasid, who broke away from their fellow Jews in the mid-1700s, claiming that the others had grown too rational in their interpretation of the Torah and that only by strict observance of ritual could evil be undone — and who are we to say they were wrong? Do we not, even now, practice rituals whose origins are lost in antiquity? Do we not, even now, argue almost Talmudically at every moot that our Brothers in Gaia, the Glass Walkers, have lost the traditional focus that was once our only reason for existence? But again, I stray from my tale, and again, I beg your indulgence for an old Bone Gnawer's rambling. Where was I? The Hasidim and their Baal Shem, yes.

Thus, you see, the Hasidim became the most tradition bound of all Jews — those who believe in devils and dybbuks. They view the world through mystic eyes and delve into knowledge that other men would tremble to contemplate. They are secretive and enigmatic, protecting their secret knowledge jealously, and the most mysterious of these mysterious Jews are their shamans, the Baal Shem. They are the conductors of rituals: purification, blessings and curses. They are the exorcists of their people, and no dybbuk can stand against them. They are the wielders of all that is arcane in Judaism, but it is wild power, and their existence disturbs the other, less traditional Jews. They are, in short, the Theurges of their people, and they are powerful.

At least, that is what is said about them by other Jews and by those who think they know the Jews. Who can say if they are right or if they are wrong?

This, at any rate, was what faced the rabbi and the elders; a human, yes, but one, perhaps, with sight far beyond that of other humans.

The Baal Shem glowered at the group. His brows went up then drew down in disapproval.

"These others," he said to the rabbi, "they are like you?"

The elders started in surprise, and Rabbi Jacob held up a hand to still their murmuring.

"Yes," he answered, "they are."

"Hmph! I suppose there are worse things to be, and in these times, we have far worse than those who wear two skins to trouble us."



“My tribe has been of some small help to the people of the shtetl, rabbi. It was they who waylaid the soldiers in the forest last Pesach and prevented a conflagration that could have claimed many lives.”

The Baal Shem looked at the elders and nodded. “Very well. What would you ask of me?”

And here, Croucher can tell you little of what they said to each other. They spoke Aramaic, a tongue none of the others spoke, and their words have been lost in the winds of time. But it is said that they spoke and argued for long hours, consulting the Baal Shem’s library and poring over the texts Rabbi Levi ben Jacob had brought with him. With much arm-waving and shouting and even more scribbling in margins and on paper scraps, they came, finally, to an agreement. They shook hands, nodded to each other, and then the old woman ushered the little group out of the cottage. The rabbi carried with him his books and scrolls and a parchment heavily written upon and rolled in fine felt.

It was evening as they walked the streets of Krakow, hurrying against the dying of the light and the coldness of the wind. The elders were displeased and spoke to Rabbi Jacob in low but angry voices.

“He knew about us,” one said. “What of the Veil?”

“He knew, but will not tell,” the rabbi replied. “He has greater secrets to keep, and he knows that Garou are not his enemy.”

“He is human,” whispered another. “What can he do to help us? He doesn’t know our ways!”

“He is of the Tribe of Israel,” replied the rabbi. “One tribe is much like another.”

“He makes me uneasy,” another said. “I do not trust him.”

Rabbi Levi ben Jacob shrugged. “That doesn’t matter. I do.”

And with that final word, the rabbi led the elders back to his rooms above the little synagogue and spread the parchment out across his table.

“There is much preparation to be made,” he said. “Specific Garou must gather herbs and roots from special places in the forest. You must find among us a mason and instruct him to build a great hearth by the Vistula River to my specifications. A smith must be found,” he continued, “who can design and build a great cauldron to go on the hearth, and you must find a clockmaker to create a device for which I will give you plans.”

“A clockmaker?” cried one elder, his voice shrill with confusion. “Clockmakers are Weaver folk, and there are none in the packs. We’ll have to find one from among the Kinfolk.”



"This problem is unimportant to you, that you come to me to solve it out of idle curiosity?" the rabbi asked mildly, looking at him over the top of his glasses.

"Oh, very well!" the elder cried. "It will mean calling in many favors, but it will be done."

"But what is it all for?" asked another elder, bewildered by all the intense study and the long list of preparations.

Rabbi Levi ben Jacob wrote two letters in Hebrew on a clean sheet of paper. "This is what it is all for," he said, showing it to the elders, who of course could no more read Hebrew than a chicken can swim.

"But what is it?"

"It is *Ch'Vush*."

"Ka-voosh?"

The rabbi shook his head. "No. In the back of the throat, as in *l'chayim*. Ah, it doesn't matter. Pronounce it as you will; it will still work."

The elders looked at each other in puzzlement. "And what," they asked, "is this *Ch'Vush*?"

"Medicine to save the sept."

The elders took the paper and looked at it, turning it this way and that as if trying to divine its meaning.

"Very well," the eldest of them said. "What must we do?"

"Call a moot. I will speak to the packs and tell them what must be done."

So it was that two nights later the packs gathered in the forest by the Vistula not far from Wieliczka to hear the elders speak. Restless and resentful, the Garou grumbled and milled while the pack leaders shouted for order.

Finally, the eldest spoke.

"There is no one here who is unaware of the tensions and fighting among us," he said, "Garou set themselves against Garou and packs against packs. Fools!" he shouted, and those closest drew back from his heat. "Are there not enough enemies to the land, enough already hunting us, that we must turn against each other for something to do? Does not the Wyrn collect a tithe with every fight, each insult? Do you not hear the Kindred laugh at us, even in their boxes of dirt? Fools. And worse than fools!"

Silence fell at his words, for none could deny them, but it was a sullen and uneasy silence.

"Well, we, your elders, have decided that if you must behave like pups, we shall treat you as such. Thus," he spat from clenched teeth, "an Initiation. We shall set you



a task that must be finished in two weeks' time. If you succeed, then the sept will heal. If you do not..." He left the rest unsaid.

"Listen, then, to the words of your brother, Levi ben Jacob, and do as he says." The eldest glared around him at the faces of the packs, then motioned the rabbi to the front. He, too, gazed about him, but in curiosity rather than in anger; he'd never seen the entire sept gathered at once, and he blinked behind his glasses in wonder.

"Good evening," the rabbit said quietly. Those closest leaned forward, but his voice carried well enough in the night air for those in the back to hear. "The task we have will be divided between all of you, so that all may play a part in the healing. The eldest of us," he said, nodding in his direction, "would have you do this from fear." He shook his head. "He is wrong." There were murmurs at this, as might be expected. In those days nobody disagreed with or corrected an elder, at least not publicly, without risking a challenge. Now, of course, it would seem to be our most popular hobby — although, who am I, who gnaws bones, to say?

Be that as it may, the words of Rabbi Jacob caused a stir, not least amongst the elders, who were aghast. One moved to interrupt him, but the eldest stopped him and shook his head, his eyes thoughtful on the rabbi.

Rabbi Jacob folded his glasses, while the packs muttered to themselves, then looked out at them again.

"There is a sickness in the sept, one that threatens not only the packs gathered here, but Gaia as well. For if we fall, who then is left to protect Her? And is that not why we are Garou?"

"The eldest has said you are pups again," he said. "Perhaps he is correct. Certainly, pups fight among themselves for selfish reasons, with little thought for others." He shrugged. "I suspect, rather, that the constant hunting by both human and Kindred has strained you, made you frustrated by your inability to do much about it."

Mutterings of agreement rippled among the packs, and the pack leaders nodded and listened all the harder.

"So," said the rabbi, "see this more as Quest than Initiation, and one that depends on the actions of all of us, even the elders, who shall have their tasks, as well." At this, the eldest nodded.

"On this spot in the next few weeks, some of you will build a great hearth of stone and brick. Upon this hearth will be set a great cauldron, forged of iron by the strongest of us and still others will fill this cauldron with herbs and roots that they have gathered in the woods and hills." Here, Rabbi Levi ben Jacob paused and smiled gently. "The medicine we will make, what my people call Ch'Vush, will heal the sept and make us whole again, but only if all of us work hard together." He unfolded his glasses and put



them back on, nodding to the packs gathered around him. "Thank you for listening. Are there questions?"

A young Garou with the look of the Ahroun in his eyes spoke: "This medicine—how powerful is it?"

"Very powerful indeed. If all goes well, its strength will restore that of the sept."

The Ahroun flicked his eyes from side to side and made a tentative gesture with one hand. "How, er, does it taste?"

Rabbi Jacob smiled slowly and said, "It is truly very powerful."

"Oh," the Ahroun said, with a touch of dismay in his voice.

"I have never heard of this 'medicine,'" sneered an ancient Philodox the rabbi recognized from the city.

The eldest spoke before the rabbi could reply. "It is quite old, though known by other names in other places. I have heard of it in my own youth and am sure that the legends of Levi's people speak of it, too."

Rabbi Jacob looked at the eldest and nodded. "Yes, Vaclav," he said to the Philodox, "it is ancient. To my knowledge, it has never failed to work as long as those involved all did their parts."

"Hmmp. Very well."

"Anything else? Then I'd like to speak with all the pack leaders, please."

The leaders dismissed their packs, who sat around the fires telling stories and eating or who simply went home to await their instructions, as befit their habits. When the leaders were gathered about him, Rabbi Jacob handed each one a piece of paper. "This will tell each of you what must be done; I leave it to you to parcel out the work. All of you, assign to each work party at least one of each Auspice; the moon must be represented in all her faces.

"Wojciech, your pack has the task of gathering the forest herbs. They are listed here, with a drawing and a brief description." The pack leader took the list and looked long and hard at it, muttering, "Nuts and berries? Ecch."

"Anna, to your pack falls the gathering of roots and tubers from the hillsides. They must be prepared in certain ways and picked only from the west side of the hills.

"Tadeusz, your task is to build the great hearth," and here he handed the pack leader a scroll. "These are the plans. Gather only stone from the east side of the hills, and make the mortar of river sand. Other materials you will find in town.

"Wladyslav, your pack has the only iron-monger, so the great cauldron falls to you. Here is the design with the dimensions. Oversee the smiths personally, please.



"I," said the rabbi, "have a task of my own to oversee, with a clockmaker from among the Kinfolk. I would like to hear from time to time about your progress, if it's no imposition."

Anna shook her head ruefully. "It is no imposition, rabbi, if it will help quell the in-fighting that plagues us."

He smiled. "Thank you, Anna. Do you all know where to find me?" They all nodded assent, and he dismissed them.

Now, of course, none but those involved can speak of what happened during the next few weeks, but several incidents are told as tales unto themselves, and I have heard many of the things that are said to have occurred.

It is said, for example, that when a group went out to gather roots, complaining loudly that collecting horse-fodder was no fit work for Garou, they had among their number one Stanislaus, a Ragabash known to his pack as Bugs, after, we may assume, his favorite snack. As his three companions grumbled about, digging and checking against the drawings on the scroll, he capered and teased them as was his nature. The more he teased, the angrier they became, until he leaped onto a tree limb that broke under his weight. At once, he began waving his arms about his head, running in circles and yelping. His companions stared in wonder at his gyrations until they too became the targets of the bee-swarm Bugs had disturbed and began running and whooping, as well. They ran for the river bank and splashed into the water up to their ears, swimming against the river's current until the bees had gone.

They boxed Bugs' ears and discussed his lineage and habits at great length in their anger, but he was stung much worse than any of the four and looked so bedraggled and sore that they soon relented and went back to gathering roots, chuckling from time to time over the trick turning on the trickster.

While in the river, though, they found these things: a piece of rose quartz, worn wonderfully smooth by the movement of water and the passage of time; a small bottle made opalescent by the sun; a copper coin from an unknown place; and a pyrite crystal that glistened like gold.

"Well," said Krystoph, a Theurge, "it would seem that we have been given treasure at the end of our little adventure. Bugs, I think it only right that you have the fool's gold." The Ragabash sheepishly took the shiny mineral, and, laughing, the others took their pick of what was left. It is said that from that day on, each carried his "treasure" as a good-luck piece, and who's to say that they didn't work?

This, also, is said to have happened: Tadeusz sent a work party into the village, headed by an insufferably self-important Ahroun named Skibinski, who insisted he be called Bear after his totem — although, if the tale is to be believed, he was more often called Jackass behind his back.



After purchasing brick for the hearth, the workers went too slow at loading it to suit him, so with a snort of derision, he said, "Stand aside! I will show you how this is done!" And he strode to the brickhouse dock and began bossing them with many a curse and cuff. "Hah!" he cried. "If you want something done right, you must do it yourself."

Now, I must describe for you how the brickworks were laid out and how the bricks were stored. Picture a large, open building with two floors. On the ground floor are the ovens and the clay and straw. Above, the finished bricks were stored and they were transferred from the loft to the ground by several barrels hung by ropes from large pulleys, suspended from beams that ran the length of the brickworks. The barrels were hoisted and tied off at the ground, the bricks were loaded into the barrels, and then the barrels were carefully lowered to the ground by several workers.

So up Jackass — forgive me — up Bear went, cursing and shoving everyone out of his path. He loaded bricks into the barrel, then stomped down the ladder, strode to where the rope was tied and yanked it loose. What he hadn't stopped to consider was that the barrel weighed more than he did; before he could stop it, it came down and he went up. Halfway, he and the barrel met well and true, and then at the top, he struck the beam an alarming blow with the crown of his head. The barrel, hitting the ground, broke apart at the bottom, and the bricks spilled out.

Of course, now Bear was heavier than the empty barrel, so he began the return journey to the floor of the brickworks, again making the acquaintance of the barrel halfway. Upon reaching the floor with almost as loud a crash as the bricks had made, he let go of the rope to ponder this sequence of events, and his new friend the barrel chose this moment to join him, being no longer held aloft by the rope. It fell about him like the ring-toss at the fair, and if there are those who swore at the time that they could hear birds singing around his head, who among us can say they did not?

Ah, yes, you laugh at the picture this makes, and so did they at the time. To his credit, so eventually did Skibinski, for he was merely insufferable and not, if you will pardon me, un-Bear-able.

Much else happened in the next few days, involving overturned boats, enraged goats and inquisitive stoats, but I will only say that there was much laughter and a great slapping of knees and backs; if feelings were hurt or indignities suffered, those concerned bore it all at best with great good humor, and at worst stoic silence.

In the end, all the materials were finally prepared. The hearth had been laid early on, the cauldron finished soon after, and the rabbi's mysterious project was completed with the help of a Kinfolk clockmaker named Avram.

At last, the Great Cauldron was mounted on the Great Hearth. A fire was built under it, and it was filled with bucket after bucket of water. Then, bagful by bagful, the



roots and plants were added as the water boiled. The eldest himself stood above the cauldron with a paddle, stirring and keeping a critical eye on the preparations.

(I should mention here that the rabbi and the Baal Shem had carefully chosen the herbs and tubers, leaves and flowers for their pungency; they had garlic and pennycrest, skunk cabbage and asafetida, stinkwood and toadflax, onions and rockweed, bloodwort and bladderwort. As these cooked slowly in the boiling water, they released an aroma not unlike that said to have lingered in the timbers at the bottom of the ark long after it ran aground on Mount Ararat—or perhaps, redolent of cheese that has lain too long in a cellar. In fact, you could go so far as to call it a stench.

The sept was present in its entirety, all packs and all members of packs. As the breeze took the fetid odor from nose to nose, an uneasy stirring spread as the realization dawned upon the Garou that they would, in fact, have to swallow this vile swill. There was a grumbling shuffle of feet and many cast baleful looks at elder and pack leader alike— with a large measure going to the rabbi himself.

Finally, the rabbi climbed to the top of the hearth and addressed them. “Friends,” he said, “You have done well. You faced problems, but you dealt with them. You had difficulties, but you overcame them. And you will find, if you think back, that you managed to work side by side without jealousy or anger, and you succeeded not in spite of your diversity but because of it.

“Now, all that’s left is the healing, and the administration of the Ch’Vush. Please line up at either side of the hearth.”


A heavy sigh went up from those now convinced that if this *Ch’Vush* tasted one-tenth as bad as it smelled, then perhaps it was time for noses and tongues to take holidays in Warsaw.

The rabbi made as if to jump down off the top of the hearth, but stopped when the eldest said, “Rabbi, might the honor of prescribing the dosage go to me?”

The rabbi scratched his beard thoughtfully, shrugged and said, “And better to whom?”

The eldest Garou waved his arms to get the attention of those lining up to take their medicine. The low hum of dismayed voices gradually quieted, and he spoke.

“My kin, we have all of us learned much these past two weeks. We have learned as individuals, but more important, we have learned as packs, as a sept. I feel confident that we will indeed be healed by this medicine called *Ch’Vush*.” And he reached up behind a row of bricks and pulled a lever attached to the cleverly crafted device that the rabbi had built with Avram the clockmaker, and this set in motion the cleverly counterweighted clockworks, which in turn slowly upended the Great Cauldron so



that the vile-smelling medicine splashed over the huge fire and into the river with a tremendously loud

CCCCCHHHHAA Aaaaaaaaaaaaaa VVVVVVUUUUUSSSSSSHHHHH!!!!

For a while after the sound died away and the steam rose out of sight, the only sound was the roaring laughter of the eldest, eyes streaming and holding his side. The others simply stood in dumbstruck shock as the *Ch'Vush* ran down the banks into the water of the Vistula (and, I've heard it said, the fish in that ancient river fed well for days and days, fish having no sense of smell to speak of). Then, here and there, a relieved titter was heard, and then a Ragabash leaped for the sky in delight and before you could take a half-dozen breaths, the laughter had spread throughout the gathering like milk in water.

The very ground shook with the stamping of feet, and the birds took panicked flight away from the sound of glee and the sight of dozens, if not hundreds of Garou rolling on the ground, their faces red and streaming. The Eldest slid, weak with laughter, to a sitting position on the hearth, and just when it seemed that the laughter had finally died away, someone would cry, "ChaaaVOOOSH!" and it would begin again.

When at last the joke had passed, the packs brushed away what was left of the ashes and, weak-kneed and chuckling, restored the cauldron to its upright position.

So, there's my tale. The sept grew strong and stayed that way. Bear was no longer called Jackass behind his back, and whenever Bugs thought of a particularly nasty trick to play, he'd finger the fool's gold in his pocket, shake his head ruefully — and think of a better, more instructive one.

But what of the rabbi? Ah, well, with the passing of years, the elders grew to respect him more and more and finally asked him to join them. Perhaps he even became the Eldest — who can say? It's said that he and the Baal Shem enjoyed many a glass of wine over the story and became good friends.

What's that? Was the rabbi a trickster? Not at all, my friend, not at all. The Baal Shem, perhaps, or the eldest, who had guessed the rabbi's secret and kept it happily.

No, the rabbi was what a rabbi among us must always be: a Theurge, full of knowledge and wisdom. Anyone can use tricks when they suit the occasion, and the trick worked well this time; at least we may gather so, as here my story ends.



# Apocalypse Noir

by Bill Bridges

I heard that damn sax again. The notes wafted up to me, all the way to the fifth floor and three blocks away. I wouldn't mind these things — it's a free city, right?' Cept the city ain't free, and that joker plays sax about as well as I can sing, which ain't at all.

Hell, nothing for it but to sit back and try to ignore the racket. It wouldn't scare off clients at least. Anyone desperate enough to come into the digs and look me up wasn't going to turn away at a few nails-on-chalkboard notes.

Of course, I could be wrong. I hadn't had a client in a couple of weeks; come to think of it, that's about the time that sax peddler started setting up his pennies-in-the-hat routine. Maybe it was time I went to check him out. If I didn't like his face, I'd have to run him out of my territory. A wolf's gotta protect what's his, right?

So, I got up, pulled on my old trench, popped my hat on — set at just the right angle, of course — and locked the office behind me. As usual, the elevator wasn't working so I took the stairs. The light was out on the third floor, and I made a mental note to kick the super around until he fixed it. Hell, what if something as simple as a dark stairwell was scaring clients away? That's money out of my pocket, and I won't stand for it.

Well, I hit the street steamin' mad. I marched on down the three blocks to the sax player, ready to rough him up if he wasn't willing to leave and hoping he wasn't. I turned the corner, finally laid eyes on the guy and was knocked for a loop.

"Benny?" I asked.

The grizzled old guy silenced his squawking instrument and looked up at me. A smile lit up his face, and I knew it was him.

"Black! It's you! After all these years..." he said.

"Christ, Benny, what are you doing here? What happened to you? You just disappeared — hell, must be five years now — and we thought the worst."

"Oh, I just got a bad case of walking feet. Got sick of the digs, thought I'd move on." He shook his head, a sort of "tsk, tsk" motion.

"Well, come on up to the office. I've got a bottle stashed away. You can tell me what's been happening," I said.



He smiled and opened his sax case to put the thing away. He then lifted his hat and emptied all of three cents into his pocket and plopped the floppy thing on his head. "Let's go; I wasn't making any money tonight anyway."

"I'd be surprised if you made any all week. Who ever told you you could play that thing?"

Benny looked shocked. "I've spent years learning it. What are you doing telling me I can't play? Who died and made you critic?"

"It don't take a degree to tell me that all you're putting out is racket. Don't pull the injured artist routine on me, Benny boy; I don't have a lot of sympathy for the arts."

"Heh, heh. All right, fair's fair. So, I can't play; what else is new?"

We reached my building and walked up the dark stairs. Benny said something about somebody getting killed on the stairs on account of there being no lights and all. I told him I'd do something about it in the morning.

We got to my floor and started toward my office, when I noticed someone standing at the end of the hall.

"Can I help you? You looking for someone?" I asked.

And that voice — oh, that voice — came out of the darkness and said, "I'm looking for Mr. Black."

"You found him," I said, trying to cover my awe at the beauty of her vocal chords. "How can I help you?"

And this beautiful dame walks into the light and says, "You can let me into your office, first off."

Ouch. I took out the keys, unlocked the door, opened it and motioned her in. Benny wasn't saying anything. He was just staring at her like a lap dog looking for a lap to lie on. I shook my head; Bone Gnawers are not known for their *savoir faire*, especially not Benny.

I flicked on the light, and she came into full, radiant view. I'd never seen anything like her. Right off I knew she was a wolf like me and Benny — a guy can smell these things if he thinks to look for them — but what a wolf!

I stopped ogling — it ain't right for our kind — and offered her a chair. I pointed to the couch for Benny, and he obediently took a seat. I went around the desk and sat down.

"What can I do for you, Miss...?" I began.

"Marylin. Just call me Marylin," she said.

"Marylin. All right. So, what brings you to seek my services, Marylin?"



She was a bit nervous and looked around, as if to make sure that Benny and I were the only ones there besides her. "I'm looking for something, Mr. Black; something that I think only you can find."

"Oh? And what is it?"

"It's a fetish. A carved bird."

I was quiet for a moment. I knew this story from somewhere before. Was I being had? "What makes you think I can find this thing? The spirit racket ain't my business," I said.

"You're the one, Mr. Black. Only you know this city well enough to find what I'm looking for. Oh, I could go to a Theurge, but he wouldn't have the... subtlety I require."

I nodded. I didn't understand, but I nodded anyway. It's always good to keep up appearances.

She continued. "I can pay you well, Mr. Black. I know that your kind likes money. Well, I've got it and I don't care for it, so it's all yours. Just get me the fetish."

I watched her as she talked, trying to peg just who she was. She had to be Silver Fang. She was too beautiful to be anything else, but that odd twitch in her eye betrayed the curdled blood. I knew, like most Garou in the know, that the Fangs were going down. Sure, their blood was old, but it was too thin — not enough young blood to keep the line going. Yeah, the more I thought about it, the more she fit the bill. A Silver Fang, probably from some North Country mansion.

"Well?" she interrupted my musings. "Are you going to help me?"

"That depends," I said. "Where is this fetish, and what does it do?"

"If I knew where it was, I wouldn't need you. As for what it does, that's my business."

Hmmm. This could be tricky. I didn't like fooling with spirit stuff in the first place, especially not strange, unknown spirit stuff. "This could be pricy. There's always a risk involved when the client doesn't divulge all the details."

"I'm ready to pay for my secrets, Mr. Black," she said and reached into her purse. Her hand came out with a wad of bills. I heard Benny gasp over on the couch. I almost lost it, too. There had to be five grand there at least.

"You get this now, and twice as much when you find the fetish. All right, Mr. Black? Do we have a deal?" she asked.

I nodded, staring at the money. "Uh, yeah. All right. I'll find it."

She put the money on the desk and slid it towards me. I started counting, which was a big mistake. I saw the smirk on her face and knew I'd lost some points. So what if I was a bit of a rube in her eyes? At least I was going to be a rube with cold, hard cash.



"Okay," I said. "Tell me everything you can. I gotta start somewhere."

It was her turn to nod now. "The bird is of silver, carved a long time ago. It is a powerful totem relic of my tribe, the Silver Fangs." She paused, looking for some kind of reaction from me, but I kept up a stone face. I already knew she was 'Fang. Benny, however, was sinking deeper into the couch in some sort of submissive instinct. Luckily, she couldn't see him from her angle, so she didn't get the satisfaction she was looking for. Too bad.

"It was last seen in the hands of one of the Court of the Moon, a Theurge named Baldrick Hex. He ran off with it for his own purposes, and I want it back."

"So, this thing is yours?"

"No, it belongs to my tribe. It's my job to get it back, using any means necessary, including you."

So, it was a matter of honor. No wonder she had come all the way down to the digs looking for me. She had to get this thing back, or she'd lose a lot of face back in the North Country. Well, what did I care? I just wanted the money.

"What makes you think he's brought it here to New York?"

"He didn't. He was killed, and it was taken from him."

This was a twist. "By who?"

"Agents of Pentex, Incorporated."

Oh crap. Why me? Why don't I ever look before I leap?

"You've taken the money, Mr. Black. It would be bad faith to give it back and refuse the case."

That was a threat. Damn. She knew that if I refused this one, every damn Glass Walker in the city would be talking about it for months, because she'd tell them. Hell, I guess I got my own form of honor, too.

"So you think it's at the Pentex HQ now?"

"No, I doubt they've taken it there. It's too...obvious. You need to find it and get it back before the next full moon, or else they can use it against us and our totem." She stood up. "I'm staying at the Ritz-Carlton. Call me there if you need any more information." And she walked out. Just like that, before I could say anything else. I sat there listening to her footsteps echo down the hall and down the stairs.

"Whoo-ee," Benny said. "Looks like I came back just in time. You're gonna need some help with this one."

I looked over at him, wondering what in the world would make Benny suicidal enough to want to help me. His eyes said it all. They were boring holes into the wad of bills on my desk, and he was getting drool all over my sofa cushions.



“All right, Benny,” I said. “Since you volunteered, why don’t you hit the street and find out what you can. If you get something good enough, there’s a filet mignon dinner waiting.”

Benny whined a little in anticipation, then pulled his tongue off the floor and straightened himself up. “You got it, Black. Hell, it’ll be easy. I got the perfect excuse to ask what’s going down, seeing as I just got back into town after a long absence.”

“Go to it,” I said, and he made to leave. “But leave that behind.”

He looked at his sax case and shrugged his shoulders, smiling. He put it on the couch and left. I sat at my desk wondering how in the hell I would get a valued Silver Fang fetish from the hands of Pentex, the dirtiest corporation in the world.

While Benny hit the streets, I thought I’d look up a few contacts of my own. If there was a silver fetish moving through the streets, I knew a few guys who just might know about it. So, it was back on with the coat and hat and down into the cruel world again.

I reached 86th Street pretty quick; I know all the tricks for catching just the right trains and cabs to reduce travel time. I stood in the lobby waiting for the elevator and avoiding the eye of the watchman, who didn’t like my looks. He’d seen me here before, though, and the man upstairs said I was okay, so he didn’t bother me — not that he didn’t want to.

When the elevator opened, I jumped in, slid my key into the special slot and hit “Penthouse.” The doors closed and up I went in a hushed whirl of electronics and cables. I was lucky. I was one of the few who had a special pass to see the Dragon.

The doors opened up onto the Zen garden. The sand and pebbles were carefully laid out without a stray stone anywhere. The composition was perfect, and even I recognized the brilliance of it all. But I couldn’t help feel that it was false, that it somehow denied the grime that existed 30 or so floors below. Not that Accolon didn’t know that. Hell, I knew the only reason he let me up here was to somehow confirm that grime in his mind.

I walked along the path, careful not to disturb the perfect illusion he had built there. I went on up to the sliding glass doors and knocked. Beyond the curtains, I could see his figure rise and come over. The door slid open, and Accolon stepped out.

He was a fine figure of a Garou: lean, trim and in perfect form. He moved well, too; so perfectly practiced in every step, as if he had contemplated years ago the exact way he was going to move at each moment. It was kind of eerie.

“Black. What do you wish of me?” he said.

There was no beating around the bush with him; you had to give it to him straight, or he’d get tired of you quick. “I’m looking for a missing — stolen — Silver Fang fetish.



It's a silver falcon, some kind of tie to their tribal totem. It was taken by Pentex agents, and they're trying to hide it until they can corrupt it."

Accolon nodded. He walked to the edge of the penthouse and looked out over the city. I followed him and caught a glimpse of his view. No other penthouse in the city was so pure and clean. Accolon had spirits working overtime to keep the pollution away from his walls. He was living in a bubble of clean air in the midst of rot and decay. It gave him a real pretty view.

"Why do you keep playing this game, Black? There are untold horrors out there, waiting to take all of us down, yet you play at being a fiction and a dark one at that."

"Is this psychoanalysis time again? I've told you before, I do it because it's dark out there. And what's fiction anyway? What's more ludicrous: a gumshoe or a man who changes into a walking, talking wolf? Cut the crap. You know why."

He nodded. "The time for games is coming to an end. We'll all have to wake up soon. The time of Apocalypse draws ever near. I've indulged you for a long time, Black, but I'm afraid that if you pursue this trail, it could lead to a bad end."

Now I was worried. I knew this case was big, but to get Accolon all worked up — that was something else. "What do you know? What the hell have I gotten myself into?"

"I don't know," he said. And that was all he needed to say.

I felt cold, real cold. I walked to the edge next to him and looked down. The city moved on, far below us, a living, breathing entity. I knew it. So did Accolon. But most other Garou couldn't see what I saw. Most of them couldn't see the beast for what it was: life. I'd made my home in the city for years; I was born here, and after my rite, I came back here. You couldn't keep me away. I loved all of it, the good and the bad. Its mix was pure wonder, and that was all that needed saying.

Accolon looked over at me as if he knew what I was thinking. Hell, he probably did. "It's a big riddle, Black. And I can't solve it. I don't have all the pieces of the puzzle."

"Tell me what you do know. I gotta have something to go on," I said.

"I know these things from the spirits: the silver fetish is in the city, in a dark, wet place where lonely spirits howl in the mist to warn others away. Those who hold it are puppets for some dark master, but those who seek it are also puppets, though for whom I cannot say. Too many clues from too many spirits, and I cannot understand them." He looked at me. "But you can find them because you play the game. The City Father recognizes your role and applauds it. You have a certain wisdom to you. You're a fool, Black, but you're the only fool who can work this through."

I didn't know what the hell he was talking about. I knew about the City Father; every Glass Walker did. It was the totem spirit of the city, the brain of sorts for the living



entity we're all living on and in. But I didn't see how that mattered to what I did. And where did he get off calling me a fool? Aw, hell, he was probably the only one in the city I'd let get away with that —what was I gonna do about it? But at least I was a wise fool; he'd said so himself. And he had given me some clues.

"Thanks, Accolon; at least I know where to start."

He looked confused. "You actually understand these clues?"

"Yeah, they're at the docks. A dark, wet place. Those lonely spirits are foghorns, telling other ships to watch out for them."

I nodded a thanks and walked back to the elevator. Accolon just stood by the edge looking at me. Then the elevator doors closed on me, and I was whisked back into the maw of the hungry city.

I met up with Benny back at the office. He was eager to tell what he had come up with, so I poured us two shots and sat back to listen. It seems the Pentex boys we were looking for were small guys, almost free-lance. This heist of theirs would catapult them to some status in the company, perhaps even a promotion to a First Team. They had a rendezvous with some bigwig set up for 3:00 a.m. tonight, when they would turn over the fetish. Benny had gotten his info from a Glass Walker hacker he knew, a class-A monkeywrencher who didn't know enough to put what was going down together. He didn't know what they had or where the meeting was to take place, but I did.

I took my gun from the drawer and made sure it was loaded with the special bullets I'd had made a while back. These babies would tear through about anything, especially fomor hide. They were silver to boot, just in case my own kind gave me any trouble. I told Benny to watch the office, but he wanted to come. Now I knew the world was nuts when Benny was taking risks.

"C'mon, Black. I want some of that dough. I know you won't give me my share unless I earn it," he said.

"I'm hurt, Benny. After all we've been through?" I said. But I wasn't kidding anyone. I knew he was right. I was a greedy bastard and I'd use any excuse to keep most of the earnings myself. Hell, it was my business, wasn't it? "All right. I could use a look out. But you keep your head down and do as I say."

"You got it!" he said, smiling. You couldn't deny Benny anything when he smiled.

We climbed into my beat-up Ford. I didn't like driving it, since it could fall apart at any time, but cabs didn't go where we were going. So, we sputtered down the street toward the docks.

We parked two blocks from the warehouses and walked the rest of the way. The trick now was to figure out which building they were in, if they were in any of them at all. We spent the next hour or so peeking in windows and snooping around sewer



holes with no luck. It was coming up on 3:00, and I wanted to find these guys and get down to business before the bigwig arrived.

Benny finally found them, holed up in a shack at the end of one of the docks. He smelled something nasty, and it turned out to be fomori. We crept up to the window and looked in. They were gathered around a table playing poker. A 60-watt bulb was the only light in the room, hanging above the table and throwing deep shadows on their faces. There were five of them total, and a gang of uglier cusses I never saw.

One of them had these soupy eyes that sloshed in his head every time he moved. It was unnerving; I don't know how the other guys stood it. Talk about a poker face. Another one had these warty growths all over, probably under his suit, too. My bet was it was pretty tough skin, hard to slice through with claws.

Another one had a tentacle — with suckers on it and everything — coming out of his back; he had a slit in his shirt for it. Then here was a gal with sharp teeth and another guy who looked normal until he took off his hat and you saw his hair — each strand alive and moving. Yeah, a real group of uglies.

You know the world's on the downslide when you start dealing with fomori. But I had to deal with them, 'cause right smack dab in the middle of the table was a smooth, silver falcon. That was it. It didn't look so special to me, but then I don't have the eyes for such things. There could be hordes of spirits collecting around that thing, and I'd have no clue — unless I went stepping into the spirit world, and I don't care for that. I'm outta my league there.

Well, I had to figure out something quick, 'cause my watch was reading 15 of. A little while from now, a big limo would pull up, and a king fomor would step out, take the fetish and that would be that. Of course, it might not be a limo; it could be a helicopter or a boat. But that didn't matter. I had to get that thing now.

There was nothing for it but to get Benny to distract them while I charged in and grabbed it, trusting my moves to get me out of there. I wasn't worried about Benny; he could elude just about anyone. I was worried about what kind of defenses they had in store for me.

I explained my plan to Benny, and he looked at me like I was crazy, but he agreed anyway. He stood up, went straight to the door, knocked hard and then ran off in plain sight. It only took a second or two for one of the fomori to answer, the guy with the tentacle, and he took off after Benny. The gal with the teeth followed, as did warty skin. This was working better than I thought, because the guy with the hair was yelling at them to come back. But they had already disappeared into the fog.

I leaped up and jumped through the door, slipping past the guy with the soupy eyes. They both yelled and jumped for me. I shifted to a wolf and grasped the falcon with



my jaws — then dropped it and screamed. I'd forgotten it was silver, and it hurt like hell.

That's all the time they needed to plow on top of me. They were heavy, too, but I shifted to Crinos and threw them off with ease. I wear a damn hardy Crinos, thank you, and it's always good for a surprise maneuver. The guy with the eyes swung a board at me, but it didn't hurt a bit. I reached out and slashed his throat out, leaving him to slump quietly to the ground. I lost some time as I stared at his eyes, which leaked out of their sockets and began to drain out towards the door. My stomach took a turn or two at that.

Then the other guy's hair wrapped up my left hand. His hair was now longer than a Woodstock hippie's, and he had complete control of it. I couldn't break the grip — damn he was strong. So, I slashed the hair with my other hand and was able to tear some of it away. This seemed to hurt him, but he still held on, so I slashed at his head instead. It burst like a ripe melon, spilling brains and coils upon coils of hair everywhere. This was getting gross.

I grabbed the fetish, this time ready for that burning touch, and quickly threw it into my trench coat pocket. I like my coat; it's me all over, so I wear it in most of my forms. I bolted for the door and ran out into the night. As I took off over the pier, I noticed those damn liquid eyes making their way to the docks, oozing along at a good pace. I couldn't allow them to warn anyone, so I stomped them good on my way past. A sickly squishing noise almost made me lose it, but I kept running.

I heard yells all around, from left and right. Apparently, the others were splitting up to corner Benny. I heard two of them around the corner, and it sounded like Benny was in a bind. He was pulling his "Let's talk this over, guys" line, but it wasn't working. Looked like I'd to pull his fat outta the fire.

I pulled out my .38 Special and took careful aim. I couldn't see them around the corner, but I knew that I could hit my mark anyway, thanks to Gaia. It was a little trick I'd learned from some wise guy Garou who owed me a big favor. I focused on what sounded like the tentacled one, then pulled the trigger. The bullet shot out of the barrel, did a loop around the corner and burrowed right into the back of my target. I heard a gurgle and the sound of a body hitting the ground.

The warty-hide guy came running around the corner to get me so I took another shot point blank. It bounced right off of him. I leaped back and dodged as he ran past, barely missing me. If this baby with the special bullets couldn't take him down, I couldn't count on my claws, either. No, I had to aim this one good.

I took an extra second, which was enough for him to get turned around and charge again, but it was all I needed to get a bead on his eye. I fired, and the slug punctured



the eye and went straight on through to the brain. I still had to step aside to avoid his hurtling mass as he fell down dead.

Benny came around the corner, bigger than usual in Glabro form and looking relieved. "Do you have it?"

"Yeah, let's get out of here," I said, patting my coat pocket. "Where's the other one?"

"What other one?" Benny said.

"The other fomor—" I said, just as she landed on top of me. She had a perfect opening on my neck, but went for my pocket instead. Stupid. I shifted to Lupus and slipped out from under her, then made a quick shift back to Crinos in time to meet her oncoming face with my claw. It was a real mess, but I didn't have to clean it up.

I checked my pocket quick and noticed that the falcon was gone. She must've nabbed it quicker than I thought. I looked down at her body but it wasn't there. "Benny! It's gone!" I yelled.

"No it ain't," Benny said. I looked over to see him clutching it in his big, bare hands, which were burning and sizzling at the touch.

"Whoa, let go of that thing; it's silver, you fool!" I said.

"Oh, I know, Black. But it's ours now."

I didn't like the way he said ours. "You mean it's the Silver Fangs', right, Benny?"

"Oh no, Black. I mean it's *ours*," he said as he shifted to Crinos and I realized that the Benny I knew five years ago was not the thing that stood there. His huge, batlike ears were torn in places, as was his snout. Fetid saliva dribbled down his chin as he began cackling. Christ, Benny was a Black Spiral.

"Oh, Benny, what happened? How did you let them get you?" I said.

"Get me? They didn't get me, Black. I got them! I'm tired of crawling the streets and getting everyone's leftovers. They promised me power, Black. It's all coming down — the Apocalypse, the big reversal — and I aim to be on top of the new world. I'm somebody now."

"No, Benny, you ain't nobody but a fool," I said, pointing my gun.

"Ha, ha! You think I'd let you shoot me? Those bullets won't work! I had some free time in your office, Black, enough to do a ritual on your gun. It can't hurt me!"

"We'll see about that," I said, as I sent some silver into him. He was right, though. Nothing happened. He just sat there laughing.

"I don't get it, Benny," I said. "I thought you guys and Pentex were buddies."



“You’re naive, Black. I deserve that promotion to the First Team, not these sniveling fools you thankfully killed for me. As soon as I give this to the boss, I’m gonna get a fat reward. Oh, yes. But first, I’ve got take you down, Black.”

He started towards me, but I backed up. I didn’t want to fight Benny, even if he was a Black Spiral now. Besides, I didn’t know what tricks he had up his sleeve. “Let’s talk this over, Benny. You can have the statue; just let me keep what dough I’ve earned up to now.” I had to stall him while I thought my way out of this.

“Nope, I’m going to kill you,” he said, and he said it so gleefully that I knew the Benny I had known was long dead. “Teach you to dis my sax playing.”

A shot rang out of nowhere, and Benny fell down flat on his face with a surprised cough. I looked up, and there she was, holding a smoking gun: Marilyn.

“What are you doing here?” I said.

“I followed you. I knew you’d get in over your head, and I couldn’t risk letting you lose my fetish. I’ll take it now, by the way.”

I nodded and bent down. I pulled it from Benny’s burned hands — it hurt like hell — and tossed it to her. She was ready, though, and caught it in her free hand; she was in Homid, so it didn’t burn her.

“Thanks, Black. If I ever need your services again, I’ll be sure to look you up.”

“Yeah, anytime,” I said. “But I think my rates have just risen. Speaking of which...?”

“Oh, of course,” she said. She dropped the fetish into her purse and pulled out a monstrous wad of money. She tossed it at me, and I caught it — damn straight I caught it; I wasn’t about to let it go into the river. And she turned and walked off.

“Hey!” I yelled. “What does that thing do, anyway?”

She turned around and looked at me. “Nothing, as far as I can tell. But it’s been in the family for a long time.” She turned away again and walked off, but this time she didn’t look back.

I shook my head. All this for a damn family heirloom that doesn’t do a damn thing. Typical Silver Fang. They’re going down and dragging us all with them — for what? A lousy piece of silver and a lot of face. It may be just a hunk of junk, but it’s *their* hunk of junk, and damned if anyone’s going to take it from them. Maybe Accolon is right and this game has gone on too long. What’s wrong with me, anyway? I should have pegged Benny as bad from the start. Am I getting sentimental in my old age?

I walked back to the car. I didn’t want to be around when “Mr. Big” pulled up and found his toy gone. What was the deal with Accolon anyway? He made this caper sound like some sort of major move on the chessboard of life. Hell, maybe he’s right there too. He sees broader than I do. He’d have known Benny right off.



Maybe Accolon had been trying to tell me something. He didn't really say this was a big case, did he? No, he implied that it was big for me. Maybe this was some kind of turning point. Yeah, maybe I should wake up and smell the coffee. Time to wise up and quit being the fool. Sure, there was wisdom here if I'd think about it, some clue to the big picture.

But I don't drink coffee; it makes me too nervous and jumpy. No, I ain't gonna let a little setback like this change my mind about the world. It's a game, all right, and I aim to play it by my rules. So what if my rules stink of gin and neon and shadows? That's all life's about anyway, ain't it? Yeah, Apocalypse noir.



# Otava

by Rustin Quaide

This tale of the Garou is true and happened in my lifetime. I am witness; I can say yes — so listen up. You know how it is: some time in your life you are witness to one great thing, and it sticks with you — a tick under the fur or a vision of beauty, sometimes good or sometimes harsh, a thing you cannot outrun or ever forget. I find the words hard to explain; this is not my native language. It is like smelling the pack when returning home to your brothers and sisters from a lone hunt: the scents are very familiar, but strike you as always new.

Now I am not quick; I've had to let this sink in. The tale I am about to tell you is of the wise Garou, Avar of the Stargazer clan. Every time I speak on the events that united Avar and myself, I get something new from the telling. I'm old, and I've traveled far from my native Finland, taking shit jobs as I move to find our scattered kin. It is hard on an old man, goddamn. But I am living Avar's vision.

My name is Risto Saarinen; I am also called Lostwind and Sorepaw. When I was young, I never thought I would leave my home, but I've had to follow what Avar taught us. The best teachers teach with their lives, and Avar did through blood and battle.

I've tried to follow his advice, but I have not his brains or wisdom; my nose gets smitten often enough, or I bump my damn head too much, then something settles between my ears. I try to retain the essence, goddamn. This is how his wisdom was, hard as bones under matted blood and fur.

Now Avar's reputation is great. He was wise long before he settled among us; the tales about him filled the north. There was one tale about a young pup seeking him out somewhere in the north or some such place. I think they say this happened near Lake Lovoz in Russia. The pup asked him what the meaning of the Garou was, what was life as a werewolf supposed to mean, as opposed to the lives of our neighbors, men and wolves.

Only a youth would ask that kind of damn idiot question of our adopted Vainamoinen — you know, the wise man in the Kalevala. Avar barely moved, he had this dignified look to every flicker of motion; he just answered, "Our life was given by both man and wolf equally for the purpose of outrunning the black runner, Death. For a while, a Garou can outrun Death faster than man or wolf. That is our glory, like a fierce wind. But eventually, the runner overtakes us, and we return to the earth, our



mother. The earth has made us powerful because She wanted to see some of Her children give death a chase.”

That is an example of the sort of legends I mean; you have all heard them. Come to think of it, at least that one was fairly straightforward; some of them have an elusive beauty. Someone would ask Avar how to achieve harmony between two quarreling Garou, and Avar would turn his gaze to a lone hawk soaring above the earth, and the questioner would have to ponder the image before an answer came. But I do not want to quote Avar’s proverbs; I want to get to the marrow.

Avar was not from my tribe. My tribe, the Children of Gaia, were not originally native to the region, but we arrived in such numbers that soon we were the dominant tribe in northern Finland. Swiftly our human heritage took on Finnish and Laplander blood. As for other tribes, there were the Get of Fenris — originally native to Scandinavia, but many had gone to Germany — as well as a small scattering of other tribes. We knew there were Stargazers, the wisest tribe, but aside from Avar, we rarely saw them.

It was a great place once, living among the heathen Lapps, hunting the elk and reindeer, honoring their strange bear god and shaman traditions, singing with their spells and drums. We still honored the bear god of the Lapps. While he is not the totem of the Children, a few of the local packs carved a totem to him to place in our caern, our sacred place. This was no secret.

Even after the Lapps were Christianized, and much of this happened last century, the north was a wild place, filled with room. If a Garou needed wealth to barter with the human community, he could find employment in the reindeer herdings in the fall, and the Children of Gaia do not look on mingling with humans as a bad thing, which many other tribes do. We existed well enough near them and had the room of the north. Today they hunt wolves in Lappi by helicopter, and the young Lapp girls want Norwegian boyfriends who make the young Lapp men look poor, stupid and provincial. Snowmobiles cut across old paths — but some of the young Lapps, they’re turning back to tradition or seeking alliances with the Native Americans and other colonized peoples.

They’re getting political, the way we are trying to do. I mean, Finnish and the twentieth century are crashing down on them, and some are seeking solutions. But I make it sound like the whole century is one big hangover and that the previous century wasn’t even that good a party. But this is in my time; when I was young, things were still wild.

We lived in happiness at the top of the world for generations. Other tribes also dwelt in the north, like I said, from Norway to old Russia, running beneath the blue skies and long sun of the north. A werewolf had hunting and open spaces and wolf



brothers and sisters and small pockets of human villages and farms, but most of all, we had room. We would run about the lake country, hunt in the pine and river areas or just frolic in the open country. If the mood took us, we could go into the towns for human companionship or seek the wolves in the great expanses. If we needed money, we could work as reindeer herders or trappers. And as the Children of Gaia, we found harmony in all things. This is not to say that accidents didn't happen or fights didn't break out among us, but overall, we had a balanced existence and for the most part a good one.

As time went on, other Garou from across Europe came north as the wild spaces ran out and man the Weaver absorbed too much into his activities. Garou from the Get of Fenris came from Germany and Eastern Europe — back to their northern homeland, they said, but to make a point clear, their homeland was Scandinavia, not Finland. We accepted them; they came in small numbers. Oh, an ornery Garou or two might be chased off, but overall, as long as they came in small groups or individually, we could take them in. Some of the Children around Kymi began to challenge the newcomers, but overall, we're a pretty accepting tribe. I mean, the local sept was pretty much Children, but we had a couple of Red Talons and Fenris, one Silent Strider named Olaff, and of course Avar of the Stargazers. If you ask me what kept such a diverse group together, well, we had all the space in the world, and you could do a lot of howling without killing. It's when a sept gets crowded, fenced in, when all hell sets in, killings and fights and useless challenges.

At times in those days, if you were alone in the great forests, you could hear an eerie wind as if the branches were singing, and we said it was the whispering of the dying gods of the north. You don't hear it anymore. It was a soft chanting and humming that would shoot into your very being and stir the heart, causing a sadness and longing similar to what lone travelers feel in autumn when they come across a solitary farm with lights inside and somewhere the sound of distant music, a mother playing on her flute for her children.

Avar came among us — well, I had not even been adopted by the sept when he did. It was a time when I was unaware of my heritage and just thought of myself as some odd unruly child. I've been told that Avar was originally from Norway. He had Icelandic blood in him, as well as a bit of Danish; I don't know what else. He had traveled about Europe and Asia in his youth seeking wisdom and had passed through our area several times before settling there. He remained removed from us and preferred solitude. He made his living — when he needed money to barter, which was seldom — by doing carpentry, hunting and fishing. His full name was Avar Gunnarson.

When I call him up in my memory, the first thing I see is a white wolf, quiet and contemplative, but with a streak of nobility and pride. I always remember the wolf



before the human form. He didn't look much different from other men, except that he had that sort of ageless character that made it hard to pin down a date on his years. His hair was white, and he had a short, cropped beard. His frame was thin, but he had powerful shoulders. His face was somewhat full, with clear eyes the color of a northern lake, and laugh lines and wrinkles about his eyes and mouth. He had the curious habit of always brushing his long hair from his face and squinting into the sun. He would do this as you talked to him, going through the motions in a clear, methodical manner, absorbing what you said and then peering off into the distance. Finnish was not his native language, so he had an accent, but he chose his words slowly and carefully so it was interesting to hear him speak.

Avar was curious in his youth and sought a thousand paths. They say he had sought out the leading thinkers and poets of Europe, Rilke and Jung and God knows what crazed artists, but I don't know about that. He probably didn't, but others claim he did. Once some poor shit gets a reputation, everybody invents all kinds of nice stories about him. I don't mean any disrespect, but you know how it is.

In his later years, Avar confined himself to the north, mainly Norway, where he seemed to have connections with other Stargazers and our people in Finland. You know how Stargazers are: damn philosophic and introspective; two of that tribe may meet after a decade apart and never exchange a word, just sit in wolf form and count the stars. Of all the tribes they are the most scarce, but I would claim the most "at peace." They know who they are.

I said he came into our sept; well, let me clarify that. We knew where he could be found, unless he was on a seasonal journey or hunt to God knows where. He interacted with us, sure, but mostly kept to himself. All his thoughts, his proverbs — he never wrote them down. He said to me once that was useless; you had to live your philosophy.

I always remembered that. But Garou have remembered him; the Get of Fenris and even Red Talon hold him in awe. So we honor him.

The return of the dying god happened in my youth, and this is what I will now tell. When I first became aware of my heritage and was accepted into the tribe, Avar had been around for a few years. I knew him as Avar the Trapper, but as with many others in your life, I never suspected he was a werewolf until after I received my new name. Oh, before I knew of my heritage, I had strange yearnings, but up in the north country, a somber and crazy youth doesn't attract much attention if he can keep some discipline. But the werewolves among the community saw that I had the sign, so when the time came, I had plenty of help.

I inherited the werewolf blood from my mother's side of the family, and I was born during the Ragabash, or trickster's moon, which explains a lot. Once I was accepted into the sept, the whole world opened up; you know how it is: the night runs, the sudden



knowing of your new community, the testing of your new strength against your pack brothers and sisters.

I received the lore of the Garou from old Matti; he owned a considerable reindeer herd and was probably the most powerful Garou in our region of Lappi — which helped, as he gave us jobs during the summer and fall driving the reindeer herds into the churns by the warehouses. This was good for those in the sept, as there is not much supervision during the paliskunta expenditure, and we could herd the deer in wolf or half-wolf Crinos form for a couple of weeks before driving them into town. And if we brought down one or two for the kill, he winked his eye. It helped to have such a prominent citizen in the sept, believe me; in many ways, it made life easier for us.

Matti gave me what every reindeer man considers the two essentials: a pair of binoculars and a 20 meter lasso. Anyway, we would drive the deer in autumn and get our pay. It was good work, and I was running with other young Garou: Kaija and Timno, my friends, and Juko, a moody Fenris our pack had adopted, but a good hunter.

Kaija was a young woman about my age; she joined with us after the herding. In those days, it was unthinkable to send a woman out on the reindeer herding. Anyway, she was quite beautiful and we all had crushes on her, but it stopped there. Well, we did sort of vie for her attention, so she carried a certain amount of tension with her. Anyway, this was in the old days, just before the Russian invasion of Finland. We took seriously the advice of our elders about keeping the bloodline strong.

We had been out for a couple of days in the countryside when Juko told us of his dream. I am old now, but I remember it as if it was this morning.

We had all taken off into the woods for a few days after the reindeer herding, just killing time and having fun before the season faded, exploring the Kemi River. The third morning out, Juko woke up in a state of agitation.

“What’s the matter, Juko?” Timno asked. “You look as if you’re having a painful time emptying your bowels.”

“Shut up, I am in no mood for your constant joking,” Juko answered. But Timno went back to the attack; that was his way.

“Well, you’d better change your expression before we return. The girls don’t go for a man with a gloomy look. Isn’t that right, Kaija?”

“Leave him be,” she answered. “It’s too early in the morning for your jokes.”

Juko snarled a half-articulated reply in Timno’s direction and then looked moodily at his feet.

“What is it, Juko?” I asked after an embarrassed silence had fallen over the camp. He was a pack brother, if somewhat thickheaded at times. The night before, everything had been fine: we were running in wolf form among the pines, racing and howling and



raising hell. Now the joy of the previous night had been dimmed by Juko's strange mood.

"I had a dream, Risto," he whispered finally. "A real bad one."

"Everyone has them," Kaija said. "I often have the one where I am falling through the ice."

"Well, it wasn't like that. It seemed real." Juko looked at all of us for a moment with the closest thing to introspection I had ever seen flickering briefly across his face. "I was sleeping, see, right there," he pointed at where he had slept, "when I felt something. I got up— look, I can see my tracks, I really did get up! — because I felt something coming through the grasses, nearer the river. I do not know how to explain it. I was asleep, and then the moonlight shone through the branches and woke me. A cold wind swept over my face. You three were still, bundles in the darkness; you looked like little mounds of earth. I slipped into wolf form and went down to investigate, checking for any strange scents. I smelled a powerful odor, old and musky. Then by the light of the moon, I saw a great bear, standing upright, ears twitching, but otherwise still. It was aware of me — its eyes caught mine — but we were a good distance apart. I was on the higher ground, and he was in the wet grasses that border the river.

"The wind changed, and I could feel my hackles rising. I smelled blood, and I could see on the bear's jaws a fresh wound. There was blood on his matted hair, and some dripped. But I dared not go closer; it had a power over me. I could feel my ears flattening to my side against my will, and a part of me wanted to appease it, so I stayed my distance. The bear continued to stare at me, swaying to and fro in its upright position, and then it spoke to me. It was a voice low and old and seemed to seep into my being from the very earth. 'I am in pain,' the bear said. I did not know what to do. 'I am in pain, but still have a secret to tell.' I do not know how long we stared at each other, but when I noticed the east flush red with the false dawn and the cool breeze before morning, he was gone."

"What then?" I asked.

"I must have made my way back here. I do not remember it, though."

"Maybe you had a vision from the Umbra, the spirit world," Kaija said. We were all bewildered at the force of the dream, and while we had heard of some of the old-timers having visions and going on spirit journeys, this was certainly new to us. We decided to follow Juko's tracks, and they led from our clearing towards the river, as he described in his dream. We saw no sign of any bear or bear tracks in the morning light.

We went to the spot where Juko said the bear had been. There was *something there*. We could discern a faint, unidentifiable odor about the place. It clutched at the edge of our senses. It did not smell like any animal we had encountered, and beyond a heavy, overripe sweetness, we could not place it. After two hours or so of going over the ground



in human and wolf form, we gave up. Aside from the odor, we had no clues of anything amiss.

We spent a couple more days just following the river, hunting and eating wild lingobberries, but at the back of our thoughts, Juko's strange dream rather dampened things. Finally, I decided enough was enough. It was still early in the season, and we were young, so I changed into wolf form and howled into the night. My pack brothers and sister joined me and we ran for pure joy, sniffing the north wind; before the day was out, we brought down a white-tailed deer, a stag. It is something to have the wild north before you, and friends, and the feeling that you can do anything. No dream or vision could dampen our enthusiasm.

But that is the spell of youth, to feel immortal no matter what the circumstances.

Once we returned to our farms, word of Juko's vision got out into the community. I guess when I reflected on it, which was seldom, I thought of the lines in the *Kalevala*, which we were taught as children, about "the skill of the Spirit of the Great Bear," Otava, because the old Finns worshipped a number of gods. I thought the dream might be connected to Juko's memories of the great epic. I doubt I shared this with anyone for some time. I just thought about it and then returned to everyday things.

Anyway, it appeared that strange medicine of some kind was in the air, because two months later, a local Garou named Johannes, a Fenris wolf originally from Sweden, had a similar dream.

About this time, Timno and I were both competing for Kaiser's affections, and we became moody about each other until we discovered two sisters living in Villajarvi. As I said, there were strong taboos against choosing among the People for a lover.

Kaija was a little upset, but life went on. It was then that I heard about Johannes' dream. He also saw the injured bear, this time wading through a lake. He heard the same plea. Of course, I put the two visions together. The entire sept did.

It was decided to hold a moot to discuss the matter. This would be the first one I would attend where the sept elders would be present. Now that I look back on it, they were not the wisest bunch, very traditional and out of contact with the modern world. But who can blame them? They did not know that the world was advancing, despite the presence of the telephones and railroads. If they involved themselves in human affairs at all, it was to preserve the freedom of the north. Some of the older ones had joined General Mannerheim's armies during the War of Independence and had ravaged down in the south, but the north as a whole was for Mannerheim and against the reds. That was pretty much the extent of those old-timers' wisdom.

The larger tribe assembled at one of the sacred spots, a forested area where a caern was raised over a great hero, Valp. Members came from as far as Lake Inari. I arrived with my Uncle Veli, coming in human form, but already the eyes of wolves and half-



wolves were everywhere glinting in the darkness, gray wolves silently and patiently counting the number of new arrivals. Off to one side was a white wolf, respected but aloof. It was a bit frightening at first, all the wolves and scents, but soon it became a source of pride. Here was my true family.

One of the elders, Paavo, opened the talk, stressing the need to discover the meaning of the dream vision of the injured bear. Both Juko and Johannes told of their visions and then the matter was opened to debate. Some of the tribe thought it was possible that an injured bear had entered the region, and the dreams were merely triggered by the bear's scent. One old Get of Fenris wolf from Germany laughed and said it was a symbol of the Russian bear entering Finland. We all thought he was crazy; there was a rumbling of laughter, but later events turned the old crank into a minor prophet.

I spoke up. I was nervous, and all eyes were on me. I said that the bear might be a vision of our old beliefs, those our ancestors honored as is written in the *Kalevala*: Otava, the old bear god. The white wolf looked at me then, his eyes questioning me for the longest time. Damn if that wasn't eerie.

I had spoken my piece and wanted nothing better than to melt back into the crowd, conscious of my youth and the bright eyes of the white wolf.

A few elders spoke up next, tossing number of thoughts around. Was the bear from the spirit world? Was it a shapechanger? At one time, along with the werewolves, there were those who could shift form from human to bear. Yet they were wiped out long ago by another wolf tribe; it was said only a few stragglers remained.

Finally, Paavo said, "We have the honored Avar among us. What is his opinion?" Paavo indicated the area where the white wolf had been. There stood Avar, dressed in warm furs, complete with Lapp cow belt and sheathed knife. He looked thoughtful for a moment, rubbing his beard before he spoke.

"The bear will come," he finally said. Then he looked about at the assembly. "I want some of you to accompany me," he added, which caused quite a stir, as Avar was averse to traveling with others. Such a request from our resident philosopher was unheard of.

He asked Paavo, one called Snorri—a renowned hunter—and myself to journey with him that night. Paavo, I guess he asked because he was an elder; Snorri, due to his strength; but myself I could not figure, unless my suggestion at the moot had made an impression on him. It was quite an honor for one so young, and I heard some murmuring. It was a mixed blessing. While my reputation would only improve by his suggestion that I accompany him, it was at a cost. Avar's strength lay in his wisdom, and that was not the normal route by which a young Garou like myself would use to rise in the eyes of the pack. Usually it was through challenges and alliances that we



attempted to gain dominant positions. While wisdom was regarded as necessary, it was also somehow placed apart, so if I followed Avar I would have a reputation, but not one that would cause me to be considered a future leader.

As the moot broke up, the four of us drew together. I looked for my friends, but Timno was gone and Kaija stood at a distance, watching me with her dark eyes. There was no time to seek her out. Avar swiftly changed into wolf form and shot out into the night. We followed as fast as we could in wolf form, chasing the white phantom shape across the autumn landscape beneath the sickle moon. I felt great pride and urgency at being so chosen, and the adrenaline shot through my veins. I ran into the night with my heart pounding. At times Avar's eyes glinted back; I could remember being pierced by the sharpness of those eyes as I followed. This silent communication, filled with expression, kept our spirits up.

We ran for many kilometers, and my legs were tired when we entered the sacred totem place of our tribe, which was in a high craggy area in the forest, surrounded by granite deposits. Avar stopped at the crest of the hill that lead to the totem and waited for us. He did not move as we gathered, waiting for old Paavo to catch up. Then, once we had assembled, he took us to the sacred bear totem of our tribe: the old bear, "the Grandfather of the Hill" as the old Lapps called him. There we stood before the intricate carved woodwork, and Paavo howled in anguish. We soon joined him, and our high-pitched music wailed at the surrounding hills, echoing in lonely melancholy against the long darkness that covered the earth. There was a chip at the bear's head, and a small portion of the jaw was missing. Nothing had to be said. The sacred totem had suffered damage.

Great scandal followed. Who had done this? There were no enemy tribes in the immediate area. A lone hunter? We did not know. The entrances to that place had been guarded by our people, and spells of concealment lay over the earth. A panic spread throughout our community. Who had injured the old god?

Avar approached me a week later in Vikajarvi. I was helping out my uncle in his shop, moving supplies from the storage room. I had spent a week not thinking about the totem, or Kaija, or much of anything. Sometimes things get overwhelming, and the best thing to do, especially if you're me, is to take a vacation from your tired head.

Avar moved up on me silently. I had just placed some boots down when there he was, dressed in his warm fur coat. "Risto," he said, "I am going to be taking a journey soon to get to the heart of the bear. If anything occurs or anyone needs me, explain that I will be back after a time. When I return, may I ask for your assistance?" His Finnish was a bit slow, and I had to listen carefully. Now, up to this point in my life, I had been foolhardy and without much discipline, or so I thought. Avar and my uncle knew how to draw the more responsible part of me out and develop it.



"I'll be glad to help, Avar. Any way I can."

"Good," he laughed. He began to slowly pace the store, walking back and forth in front of the tackle and hunting supplies. "By the way, keep your ears open to any more mention of Otava, our bear. He may show up in dreams and visions, but I doubt for any extended length of time. I may have to seek him out in the half realm. I need to address Maderakka," he said, giving the Lapp term for the old earth goddess. I nodded; what can you do but nod when some old man tells you these strange things?

Avar paced some more, laughed to himself and then purchased a few supplies from my uncle. They talked a while; I could hear them in hushed tones by the old stove, warming their hands. This was a sort of ritual in the store; people would do this for hours, telling stories and exchanging local gossip. Avar did not stay too long.

My uncle came over and asked me what Avar had asked me, although I believe he knew from their conversation. When I told him that in some unspecified way Avar wanted my aid, I could see my uncle beam with pleasure. I mean, his damn face lit up like an Independence Day lake fire.

"Ask only good heart to fasten the rope you climb down on," uncle said, muttering his favorite proverb. "I guess he considers you good heart, Risto. I bet he's going to have a vision to ponder recent events. Yes sir, that's what old Avar will do," he said, forgetting that he was as old if not older than Avar.

I continued with my tasks, but felt somewhat overwhelmed by everything. I tried to seek out Kaija later on. She was my age, and I hoped she would prove sympathetic to the confusion and hope that moved through me. It took me a while to find her, but she listened. She was sympathetic but quiet. "It's all going to come down, Risto," she said as we parted.

Three weeks later, the bear struck. It was mid-November. Johannes and two others were keeping an eye on the reindeer herd in the region of Lake Tekojarvi. In this season the deer meat tastes the best, but by winter the animals are reduced to eating lichen and the taste deteriorates, and by March, they are not worth eating at all.

At any rate, a few of the reindeer that had strayed from the herd had been uselessly slaughtered. They were not eaten, just left to rot. After a couple of occurrences like this, Johannes and the others noticed a bear that was following the progress of the herd. They moved to attack it, and Johannes recognized the bear as the same one of his vision. "Come, little wolf brothers," the bear said, and it beat Johannes senseless, cracking his ribs. Johannes' two companions managed to chase it off long enough to get Johannes out. He was unconscious for two days.

When the two Garou returned to the spot where they had fought the bear, they found it had left no tracks. They searched fruitlessly for hours. Their descriptions



matched Johannes': the same injury to the jaw, the same great form and the voice that did not come from the throat.

This news disturbed everybody, and the human community was told Johannes had been injured by a wild bear. The secret tribe knew more of the tale, yet under everything, a sediment of untapped mystery remained. The elders decided to call another moot. Already there was talk of hunting parties to avenge Johannes. But by then, at the end of November, the news spread throughout the country: Russia had invaded Finland.

This event changed everything. Several of my comrades were called up for military service. At the moot, for which Avar had not yet returned, some of the elders and the Fenris wolves grew very animated. They talked of battle in the east. Our sacred soil had been invaded. Some of the most influential and peaceful were drowned out, but at least they held their own. "It is not our war," they said. "Let us wait on events." The Fenris spoke openly of a cleansing, of war against the east at last. Their words carried weight, and some of the younger Garou followed them into the winter forests, where they ran amok and slew isolated Soviet pockets, howling and slaying in that strange winter war. The bear was not forgotten, but became a lesser concern. War hung over the entire nation.

For a time, Finland held out; Mannerheim's line held. The motti tactic of breaking invading columns into small segments worked. Over one million Soviet soldiers died, but in the end, the sheer numbers of the invaders broke the lines. Those were anxious months, and we feared that Finland might fall into Russia's hands again. This was the background to the events I narrate, which happened during that awful time.

The confusion of those times cast its net over us. Some of the Fenris viewed Germany as a cleansing agent of the earth, and when Finland joined with Germany in the Continuation War, many of them went into battle in the east. Some of them viewed Hitler as a powerful earth shaman, but Avar told me — only once — that Hitler was a servant of the Wyrms, that he was a corruption that wove into his strange fabric the old ideas and spewed them forth again into a dark crusade, capturing the raw energy of nations and directing it to sacrificial ends. The Wyrms often ensnares and traps the earth's noblest defenders into its plans, and those Fenris who were misguided are an example of how powerful the foe was.

I guess we must remember that at that time, many in Finland viewed the nation as a defender of civilization against the east. That poem by Uuno Kailai comes to mind:

*Like a chasm runs the border  
In front, Asia, the East:*



*In back, Europe, the west:*

*Like a sentry, I stand guard.*

As can be expected, we took no unified action against the bear.

But sightings of the bear continued. In December, a Lapp hunter was killed, and his companions said it was by a bear. We all knew that the boundaries had been crossed. You could feel it. A weight like a heavy fog descended over the community. Neighbors' eyes were downcast: anxiety gnawed at us as if some frail commandment stood on the verge of being irrevocably shattered. Rumors took on a life of their own, and a depression seeped into our songs, which fell to silence. Until a name was given to this strange power that blanketed the region, we had no protection against it. The anxiety of the ongoing war coupled with the strange sightings of the "ghost bear," as some began to call him, broke us apart, isolated us from one another. We were all in the dark. Poor Finland. Poor Garou. The world had caught up with us in the north.

My conversations rather followed the mood of the time. I did not want to admit it, but I was worrying about Avar. When would he return? Timno came by to see me, and we spoke of the latest rumors.

"They say some of the Fenris are breaking the ancient taboo and eating human flesh," he said, indicating those of our wolf brothers who had gone off into the war.

"I suppose it's possible," I answered, wanting to sound intelligent about the matter.

"Anyway, I heard that some foreign aviators have volunteered to help us. They're in Helsinki. Even a black pilot from America. You must admit, we have the sympathy of the world."

"What we need is help," I responded.

"Didn't you hear? The British and French might send a force."

"That would be good. I hope that happens soon. I've been worried. This war, the ghost bear, it eats away at you."

"Yes, I know. I haven't seen you in a while. Come down to the farm sometime."

I promised I would soon, but I waited for Avar. As December continued, sightings of the ghost bear became more frequent. One of our tribe saw the bear clearly in the daylight and followed him for some kilometers before losing him in the open spaces. Another Garou, Bakki, gave us more concern when he noticed that the bear had been following him towards the sacred site of the totem. Bakki halted and so did the bear. The odd thing, Bakki said, was that the bear left no tracks through the snow. Bakki took an odd path home from the site. The bear followed but soon disappeared again. After this, I took to running more and more to escape my thoughts.

It was late December when Avar returned. I was walking through the snow and fog, returning from a talk with Kaija that left me dissatisfied. There was no sun that day.



Suddenly, a voice pierced the gloom. "Risto, it is time." Avar came before me, looming up through the swirling mist, his damp face pulled out of his heavy coat.

We prepared for the journey to the sacred site. There was a thick silence between us as I followed him. We were both lost in thought, but it was strange, almost as if we could hear each other. It seemed we made little progress. You know how it is when you travel through the white snow on an overcast day: everything looks the same and you get dizzy and can't tell of your progress. It began to snow.

Behind us we could hear the soft crushing of snow. Kaija had followed.

"Risto, is that you?" she called.

"Yes," I answered. "Go back. I have some important business to attend to with Avar." That was the wrong thing to say.

"I want to go with you," she said, reaching us out of breath. There was a determined look on her face, and she scowled at me. "Why can't I come?"

I wanted to say that it might be dangerous, but that sounded stupid. She was a pack sister and could handle herself. I mumbled something about the strangeness of the task before me.

"Let me share it with you," she said. "I know you chose him," she looked at Avar, "to deal with the ghost bear. But don't you see? It's important that I come. I have to learn. You can't leave me in ignorance. That is how things are run around here, and it's damn frustrating!" She looked at us with fury in her eyes. I was too frightened to speak. Her face glowed red.

Avar stepped forward. "What Risto is doing is something I have asked him to do, and I assure you, Kaija, it is dangerous."

"I know that," she said. "It's just that at times you seem to be the only one who knows what's going on. God, those elders don't listen; my friends don't listen. This war... we can't play stupid anymore. Avar, you know what I'm talking about."

I sure didn't. Avar put his hand on her shoulder. "Look, both of you, I have been on a long journey and have retrieved something at great peril." He reached inside his coat and brought out a small box wrapped in twine. "Untie it, Kaija," he said. She did so. Inside was a red stone glistening with an inner light.

"This," said Avar, "is the heart of the bear. It is not bad or evil, but it is stone. He will come to reclaim it. The injury that the bear sustained has driven him to do destructive things at times, but the essence is, or was, good."

I think he lost both of us on that one. We stared at the stone, the result of Avar's searches. He calmly placed it back in the box, putting it into the folds of his coat.

"Try to understand," he told Kaija. Next, he was off into the fog in wolf form. I bounded after, changing shape in the swirling clouds.



Our senses in wolf form caught a thousand scents and sounds, all familiar but made eerie by the sacred task at hand. Sacred? I say sacred, goddamn; even the lonely winter birds made piercing noises, which echoed, lost in the chambers of our souls. It was not ordinary. It was a dream; there was some strange power to it all.

When we arrived at the totem spot, late afternoon had become night. The blue shadows that shimmered across the snow stretched into cooler shades, summoning infinity, kissing darkness. I could see my breath, a cloud of smoke rising into the cold air. I was too intimidated to move, conscious of Avar's presence, so I averted my gaze skyward. Deep azure bounded into lost regions of vast space; here and there shy stars appeared, dancing bit players lighting up the black stage of night.

I so wanted to speak, to be heard, but I could think of nothing to say and didn't want to stammer like a damn drunk in the presence of the Stargazer. I believe he sensed my awkward thoughts. I don't know why, but I was comforted when he sat still and pricked his ears, listening to the distance.

A lone shape ran toward us in the night; Kaija had followed in wolf form. She ascended to the spot, but then her pride must have been knocked out of her, and she slunk towards us. I looked over to Avar. He did not acknowledge her, but more important, he did not chase her off. I guess we both accepted her headstrong decision in that quiet hour. She took a place near the bear totem and then became quite still, another sentinel of that holy spot.

We all stood unflinching. The cold winds bit into me, yet after a time, the sensation did not bother me; I became positively warm. My paws felt the warmth shoot up from some hidden source and spread like molten fire through my wolf form. I cannot explain it, but it happened; I was humming with a fierce inner heat. Gradually, as I warmed, I noticed that time had dropped from my shoulders. The world whirled about, but we were one step removed from it. I saw the stars dance overhead in a great symphony of flashing energies and then fade as a dim promise in the east grew brighter and brighter. The sun rose, a great fire shooting through the retreating night, her light falling like the promise of pagan prayers on the tops of pines and hills.

I do not know how long this went on; I think it seemed a day had passed. I was still, yet I remember playing in the snow, perhaps some fancy of my mind. Night came again.

A small shape rose in the distance, a dark figure moving across the snow, giving me an odd feeling as the shape distinguished itself from a fallen pine, emerging against the backdrop of white snow and the void of night. It moved at a constant speed, slow but making time. The bear had come.

It walked, crossing the open landscape, appearing from a distance to be tracking some small prey. Its eyes looked only to the immediate task at hand; as of yet, it did not regard us.



I thought, "What is that bear sniffing for?" Then he stopped, stood up in that beggar's posture bears adopt and looked at the totem. The totem bear stared back into infinity. I could see the clouds of breath rising from the bear, I could see the wet nose, but all I remember thinking then, aside from a dawning excitement and fear, was that bears look oddly like dogs at times. It's funny how one part of you can be so observant when the rest of you is filling with adrenaline.

Avar moved up to block the bear's path to the totem. Now the scent reached us — overpowering, similar yet different from the way a bear is supposed to smell. It came up the hill. I could see the large size that others had spoken of.

The bear halted again. I could see his eyes. I felt fear like a rifle shot tear through my frame.

"Aside, wolf-man, I come to end what must be ended," the great bear spoke, though no words issued from its mouth. They were conveyed, deep and powerful, ripples across the silence that joined mind to mind.

Avar stood up from his waiting position, a cloud of snow falling from his fur. He answered in kind. "Halt, ancient. I have what you seek."

The bear notched his head. "Seek? Do you know who am I? Yet I sense you do not boast. In our old age, we have seen you ask questions beneath the ancient moon. You have opened your heart to all things. For your sake, I will not kill the pups there."

The bear looked at Kaija and myself.

Presently, the bear continued. "I am weary, Avar Stargazer. I know what you have. But I tell you, my heart is stone because it is dead. I do not need it; it cannot help me now. Maybe a century ago, if you had found it, things would have been different. Let me say, I am the god who has come to kill god; I am sick because all gods are sick. My injured jaw drips the blood of all old things. We cannot last." A lone wind howled mournfully through the pine branches, skimming down hidden hills.

Avar did not answer.

"You are wise not to answer," the bear said. "What response would you have? The north can no longer hide us. There is no room. Your silence honors me far more than feeble words. Words denote nothing. I came stalking the half-wolves because my own people have forgotten me. Only you and some of the Lapps remember. I knew only you would give ear to the injured god. The injured god; yes, that is who I am. I come as a warning to my children who have worshipped me since the great ices. Do you know what I am about to do?"

"Yes," answered Avar.

"Will you then allow me to do what I must?" the bear asked.



"I will," Avar said, moving aside and motioning for Kaija to move also. She did, somewhat confused.

The bear rose in fury and charged the totem, smashing it down with its massive weight. My heart jumped — our totem was being destroyed! I rose, but Avar growled at me, a low, steady sound emitting from the back of his throat. I met his eyes, but my tail dropped in submission. I did not understand, but I obeyed.

The feeling was not unlike a nightmare where all movement is slow and sluggish. I saw the old totem topple onto the snow-covered earth and under the constant stroke of massive claws, splinter and break apart to become shattered wood. The bear seized bits in his jaws and wrung it like river fish. He rolled onto pieces until they cracked; he wrestled like hell's fury with one section that would not break until he dug a hole into it. The madness of the bear was constant, but divinity danced in his dark eyes. Breaking, striking and chewing on wood, he left the totem unrecognizable, the remains of a slaughtered animal.

After the bear god's frenzy abated, he paced to and fro, swatting at bits of wood with the impatience of an angry child. He walked in circles, still unsatisfied, glancing as if he expected the splintered totem to resurrect itself against his wishes. There was something equally horrible and comical about the sight, and I expected that momentarily a circus trainer would approach and take the applause of an invisible crowd. But the bear's eyes were too angry, and there was a threat behind the ragged breathing.

Avar stood up. "O god of the Lapps and totem of the tribe, I see now that the old ways are gone and the old gods are no more. We must prepare ourselves."

The bear laughed loud and terrible. "That is wisdom," he said. "Yes, you are right, but you knew before I came. The pups there, it is for them to ponder in their young heads. If they understand, then good, but I doubt some young pup just pissing out his territory will know what I have done. I am injured, yes. Long ago was the wound made, but it has gone deep. I am dying. I think, unless you are truly wise, you and your kind are next.

"Do you know that the Lapps, my children, used to hunt the bear, kill him in his sleep and then return to their village in great ceremony for a festival? Just as your kind once hunted the bear shape-shifters. But they gave me life. It was the world outside that changed, that came with injury and hurt to the north and destroyed the magic timelessness we had here. My wound came from outside, inflicted by invisible and malicious enemies. Each year, it has killed me a little more. I think when the names of the gods were forgotten, I knew the end was near. It is the value of life that has changed. There is no room for local life to the mass man who is dawning." The bear halted a moment before continuing.



“I do not like you. We fight the same fight, but long ago your kind did damage to the bear shape-shifters. For the most part, you Garou are arrogant and stupid. I know some of you are better than that; like you, some find the way. But you do not hold all wisdom, Avar. No. This time I shall teach you wisdom.

“I want one last fight before I die and the seasons take me. Avar, you will either win or lose, but if you win, you will thank me for showing you the path you must take.”

Avar showed no emotion and remained still. I was impatient. What would Avar do? But he stayed motionless for some time, then he let loose such a howl that a new voice for fear entered that lonely region. It was long and deep; I felt it tremor through the snow and settle into all things. Avar leaped down from the knoll, a flash of white falling onto the bear-god.

Avar’s jaws fell, an iron trap closing on the neck of the bear. The bear was caught by surprise; it reeled about, growling in its hurt, but could not shake the wolf. Finally, the bear rolled onto the ground and Avar was forced to let go, but he stood his ground, barking like all hell had broken loose.

The bear backed up but could not attack. Avar would dive towards the bear, ripping into flesh and fur, and the bear-god would swing his massive paws in retreat. They trampled circles into the snow. Both were growling, and their movements were fast. I have never witnessed anything so fierce.

I shot down to help Avar, but he lunged at me and chased me off. I thought he was going to kill me, but after a distance, he let up and shot back towards the bear; the contest was between them. I returned, humiliated, to my former place, and Kaija came and stopped at my side. This helped some, but my pride was shattered. Avar kept wounding the bear, but he received a strike across his shoulders that went deep. The snow beneath them took on the color of smashed berries.

Finally, Avar backed off. He could wound the bear, but not bring the old god down. Finally, he cut his losses and retreated to gather his strength. The ancient one followed warily into the woods. Kaija and I waited and then followed at a comfortable distance. I could dimly see the bear, a dark shape meshing with the brambles in a particularly wooded area — goddamn if he had focused on me, but I could not think of that. I thought of the earth, my Mother, and the trees whispered and became audibly friendlier towards me. The forest now seemed crackling with energy; it told me where to go and I went.

A baying in the woods broke the silence, and the thrashing of bodies broke into our view. There was Avar in near-wolf form, a huge, prehistoric carnivore large enough to challenge the bear-god. He had changed; a hungry fire was in his eyes. The bear god strode into him, and together they rolled onto the dry snow, biting with blood-drenched teeth.



The noise froze us where we stood. We were a distance from the caern, but there was still power enough near the sacred site. Had Avar lured him here for some reason? I could not tell. Fur and blood splattered the frozen forest floor. The bear-god bore Avar into a tree; a crashing sound of cracked bone resounded through the night. With a desperate yelp, Avar fell to the earth.

“Think!” yelled the great bear-god. His words echoed in the empty thicket. Avar swiftly gathered himself and ran off. A trail of blood, easy to scent, remained.

The bear followed. The region we entered was rocky; great granite rocks jutted from the earth’s crust, the remains of some prehistoric giant. Although injured and tired, the bear gathered energy and seemed to enjoy the pursuit. Avar emerged, leaping from a rocky slope, now in half-man, half-wolf form, the powerful werewolf of legend. He clung again to the bear, and again they fell into the snow. The bear screamed in pain and emerged from the tumble, his left eye gone.

I began to shake. Something was wrong, all wrong. A sense of guilt overwhelmed me. Why were the champions of the earth fighting each other? The world was beset by the power of the Wyrn, and the evil and the corruption of the earth increased while man the Weaver overstepped his bounds; yet, here was the wisest Garou battling the last god of the Lapps. Both respected the earth, but here in this vale of tears, they fought to the death.

The great bear began batting Avar with his paws, emitting massive laughter that resounded off the granite. Avar fell and tried to grasp a rock, but he couldn’t in his half-wolf form so he scrambled again to the rock deposits, leaping ahead of his slower adversary.

The bear continued, but now his breathing was labored, and for the first time during the battle, I caught a scent: the smell of a dying animal. He had suffered more wounds than Avar and should have crawled off to die or recover. But he did not. Avar in wolf form could dance away from the bear-god’s attacks, but only when the bear tired did he make the mistakes that had hurt him.

In the strange light of the half-moon, Kaija saw Avar change. Now, Avar the man gathered up a large rock. Yet the human form is the most vulnerable. Had it come to this? Perhaps they would end together: the bear from his wounds and Avar from his frustrations.

Avar scrambled up a rocky hillside. The bear made his way slowly, but Avar climbed to a higher slope, inaccessible to his foe. Then with a swift stroke, Avar threw down the rock, which struck the bear in the head, stunning the animal.

Wasting no time, Avar came down brandishing a heavy stick, which he used to club the bear until his foe lay on the ground. Then, in swift motions, he picked up a rock and battered the animal about the head.



The bear was stunned; a low yelp came out of his throat, but silence soon followed, and the old god lay down to welcome Death. His eyes, dazed, looked up pitifully.

His foe, standing before him, produced the stone heart and returned it. The stone vanished into the bear's chest.

"It is yours," the man said. The bear looked at him, and a flicker of the old intelligence returned to his eyes. He moved his bleeding head and placed it in Avar's lap, looking for all the world like a dying dog finding final comfort from his master.

"Thank you," he said and spoke no more. The light went out of the animal's eyes, and his faint breathing soon gave away to the sound of the wind rustling the branches of the great trees.

Kaija and I changed form and approached. Avar stroked the animal's head, a look of sympathy and sorrow etched across his features.

Finally, we left the dead god to the woods, picked up Avar and began to tend to his wounds. His shoulder had suffered a deep cut, and he limped as we supported him. Here was our solitary David, but the Goliath he had defeated melted into the earth, and as we looked back, we saw no remains of the ancient god of the forests and the Lapps.

We returned the next day. A moot was called. Avar came on a crutch, but his voice was clear as he addressed us.

"Listen to what the old god taught me," he said. "We cannot keep entirely to the old ways. We have been happy here at the top of the world, forgetting that elsewhere our kin are being hunted and driven out of the wild places of the earth. In time, the world will come up here to the north. In time, none of us will have a place to go. This is what Otava, the old bear-god, wanted to teach me, to teach all of us. A vision is not given until the time is right.

"We did battle, the old god and I. In wolf form, I could only bite the bear, do it injury as it did me injury. In half-wolf form, it was the same. In human form, I killed the old god. This is what the old god wanted known."

He stopped and looked about. There was silence from the assembled throng. Presently Avar continued. "It is in human form that we must prepare for the future. We must send out some of the people from the tribe to walk the earth in that form and gather allies among the other Garou tribes, even among those of the humans who are sympathetic to the plight of the earth. They are out there. We must do this or perish.

"Use stealth. Be tricky. Our foes are wise, so we must be wiser. Only by using the many gifts the great earth has bestowed on us can we create an alliance that may stem the tide of the Wyrms' abuses and hold it back. The human in us must know when to keep the Garou in check, and in the modern world, in the world that is coming, much



can be accomplished in this form. This is what the dying god wanted me to know, so that we could create a path. None of us can go on a path and return unchanged, but the other choice is extinction.”

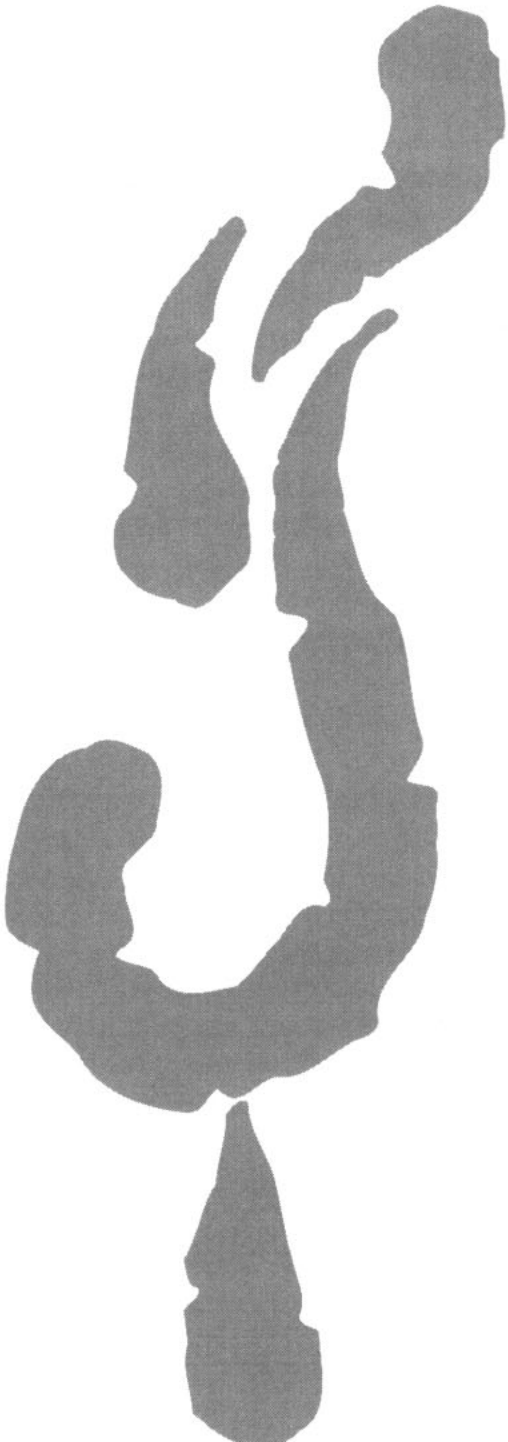
This was called Avar’s Sermon. There was debate, yet his ideas were taken up; even the elders sensed that a way of life was ending. It was decided that some of us would take on a new role as travelers, seeking the wide world to find allies and to begin the uniting of the tribes.

Avar placed my name forward, and Kaiser’s, so we entered into a life of responsibility. Goddamn, and this in the months when the winter war was raging against the Russians and when all of Europe was poised for destruction. Maybe this was a hopeful seed, planted in the harvest of universal destruction.

Avar took us aside and taught us so that we could travel among and learn from humanity. He told us of the different tribes and where to look for them. We met other Stargazers and learned the secret roads that run through the world.

Why he chose me I still don’t know. I do not have the wisdom but I was born under a lucky moon. I have traveled from Finland many times and grown old going to the various tribes, trying to carry the message of my old mentor. I have not seen Avar for over two decades; he probably rests in the earth now.

The last time I saw him, he was meditating in the open country, and he barely acknowledged me. Why should he? I left him to his lone musings. After all, Avar had given his all to his children, and that is who we are, for are we not all the children of his message and vision, and is he not the father of us all?







# Totem Tales



# Pegasus

by *Phil Brucato*

The tales of Men speak of Pegasus springing from the blood of the Gorgon, Medusa, slain by Perseus, the raper of Andromeda. There is truth to this, but it is Men's truth and thus flawed.

It is said that Medusa and her sisters were Garou, among the first of our line; such was their fury that men froze like stone in the face of their wrath. They conducted the first Impergium in our homeland, but Perseus battled them in the name of Man and slew them. As their daughters gathered about them, weeping, the Great Mother sent Pegasus to appear before them. "Of blood I am born," Pegasus told them, "the blood of battle between Women and Men. Such is not the way of the Mother, and I stand before you to bind what was severed in blood."

The Daughters of the Gorgon were skeptical. "How," they asked, "will you bind these wounds? Does the Mother send you to chain us to the will of Man?"

Pegasus shook her mane. "Never are you to be so bound. It is the will of the Mother that I seek out a champion of Men, one untainted by the brutality of arrogance. With him, I may guide the sons of Prometheus back to the family of Gaia, and the war with Man may be set aside."

The Daughters of the Gorgon were unsatisfied and cursed Pegasus as blind. "Man," they said, "is stubborn, and his heart is divided among nobility, foolishness and vice."

"It is that division of his heart," said Pegasus, "that I will show to him. When he has conquered it, I will know him wise."

In time, Pegasus found a young man, fair, strong, charming and wise, known as Bellerophon for his accidental slaying of a relative. Such was his charm that Queen Anteia conceived a passion for him. Such was his honor that he refused her. Such was his wit that Anteia's husband refused to slay him, but delivered him instead to the court of King Iobates. Pegasus met him on the road to that king, as Bellerophon bore a message that sealed his doom.

"Know you," Pegasus said, "what fate that letter brings upon the messenger?" Bellerophon confessed he did not. When she told him, he declared, "The gods know my innocence. I shall not die unjustly."

The Daughters of the Gorgon would have had their own opinion of his wisdom, but Pegasus saw this as a sign of courage and visited King Iobates in a dream. "In a valley



in your kingdom," she told him, "there stalks a beast part lion, part goat, and part dragon. This monster, Chimaera, makes cruel war upon men and women both and must be slain." This Chimaera of Iobates was a vision-spirit, not flesh as we know flesh, and it combined the natures of Man: the lion of nobility, the goat of foolishness and the dragon of vice. Iobates had not the wisdom to see the vision for what it was, but Pegasus had not assumed that he would. "A man comes to you," she said, "under an unjust doom. Only he can rid your kingdom of the beast."

Iobates agreed, and when Bellerophon appeared he charged the young man to slay the Chimaera. Bellerophon consented, but privately despaired. "I am no warrior. How can I slay a monster with three devouring heads?"

"It is because you are not a warrior," said Pegasus, appearing before him, "that you will succeed."

Pegasus took Bellerophon on a vision-journey against the Chimaera, and Bellerophon rejoiced when he destroyed it. "As he has conquered his own nature," she thought, "I will guide him so that he may teach other men to do the same." With Pegasus as his mentor and companion, Bellerophon rose to greatness in Iobates' kingdom, Lycian, and brought an era of peace and tolerance between men and women. Even the Daughters of the Gorgon were impressed.

For a time.

But Bellerophon had not truly killed the Chimaera within him, and as he prospered his dragon nature, the taint of the Wyrms, spread poison in his soul. He grew arrogant; when the women of Lycian demanded true equality, he turned a deaf ear to them. Pegasus tired of this.

"Ride with me," she said after one too many kingly tantrums, "I have something to show you." He agreed, and she took him far above his kingdom, to dizzying heights, hoping to humble him.

"What do you see?" Pegasus asked.

"I see a world to conquer," Bellerophon replied.

"What of my advice?" she asked, despairing. "What of the glory we have attained together and your wisdom, known throughout the kingdoms of Man?"

Bellerophon laughed bitterly. "The kingdoms of Man call me a fool," he said. "I have given the women of Lycian more freedom than they deserve and still they demand more."

"More than they deserve!" raged Pegasus. "And what is this awful freedom we do not deserve?"

"They wish to be treated like men."



She shook her head. "Still you do not understand. We are not the same, Women and Men, but equal in the eyes of Gaia and deserving of respect."

"They are protected," replied the man, "and the law sees to their health and prosperity. This is respect."

Pegasus exploded in fury. "It is not! Have you learned nothing? Does the Chimaera live again within you?"

"The Chimaera is dead," he replied, "and never was it within me at all. It was a beast, and I have killed it!"

"I thought you wise!" screamed Pegasus.

"And so I am," said Bellerophon.

"No," said Pegasus, "the kingdoms of Man are right. You are a fool, and I more so for having trusted you!"

"I have had enough of you, horse," said Bellerophon. "Take me home."

"Horse!" she howled. "Horse? I'll take you home, good sir!" So saying, Pegasus bucked him from her back and watched him scream to his death. Then she turned her back on Lycian and returned to the Daughters of the Gorgon, who had gathered to discuss the fall of Bellerophon.

"You were right not to trust the wisdom of Man," she said. "They will never be free of the Chimaera of their spirit."

"You were not wrong," they replied, "to try to temper the arrogance of Man. With time, perhaps, they will learn the ways of Gaia, of the Balance and the Mother, and of respect." The Daughters' fur was the color of dried blood, and their claws shone in the moonlight. "Until that time, we swear by the blood of our mothers to defend our land in the way of the Gorgon."

Pegasus shifted uneasily. Although Bellerophon had become corrupted in the end, there had been much good in him. "I will stand by my purpose," she said at last, "and continue to strive for Gaia's peace. But never shall I trust another like Bellerophon, and always shall I stand by the Daughters of the Gorgon, the Black Furies of Gaia's will."



# Coyote

by James Medley

I can feel the power of the caern ahead of me. Of course, it is guarded. I may be blind, but my nose is sharp. My aged body drags itself into the primeval clearing.

From the forest around me, they charge. They throw me to the ground and I feel saliva drip upon my upturned face. My walking staff is ripped from my hands.

"Have mercy," I say. "Have mercy upon an ancient one."

The answer is guttural snarls; they are Red Talons by the smell of them. I must talk quickly to prolong my worthless life.

"A story!" I say. "A story of the ancient times! A story in exchange for a few minutes of life in this precious caern."

One Talon stays near me as the others withdraw. Hearing them confer in the wolf-speech, I know the outcome. All Garou love to hear the old stories. It is a drug for them.

The pack circles me once more. They snarl and bark at me. I struggle to a sitting position.

"I am old, older than any of you," I snap. "Has respect for elders of the people fallen in disuse among you cubs? I am in my Homid form because it is hard for me to achieve the change. Assume your Homid forms out of respect for me!"

I can sense them change around me. Their rough hands pull me into the center of the clearing. My staff is laid at my side, and a skin is pushed into my hands.

"Water," a voice grunts. "Drink, then story."

"Story, then die!" another voice snarls.

Harsh laughter follows this witticism. I fix them with my sightless gaze until there is silence.

"Do you wish to hear this story? Good: I will not tolerate any more outbursts. As I said, this story is an ancient one. I was told it by my mentor, and she by hers. It has been passed down the ages. This is a tale of the world when it was young, before the coming of the Garou."

"Lie! Always Garou, always!"

The dissenter is on my right. I snatch up my staff and give the offender a sharp crack; a yelp of pain is my reward. "Who is telling this story? If you know so much, cub, you tell the tale."

"I kill!"



I hear the Talon's fellows forcibly restrain him. I smile.

"Quiet, hear story!"

"I quiet. Hear story, then kill!"

"In this time, before the Garou, the world was at peace. Here in this land we now call North America, Coyote roamed the forests, the plains, the rolling hills. Forever was he in mischief, for he is, above all else, the Trickster. It was the role Mother Gaia had given him.

"In his wanderings, Coyote came upon a strange, new animal. It walked upon two legs, not four, and was almost totally hairless. Numbers of these animals were traveling across the great ice bridge of the frozen north, intruding upon Coyote's domain. Coyote went to Gaia to learn about these creatures.

"Gaia,' Coyote said, 'what are these strange creatures?"

"They are humans,' Gaia answered. 'I have made them from apes to be lords of the earth.' Coyote howled with laughter.

"Far be it from me to question your wisdom,' said Coyote, 'but these creatures as lords of the earth? Wouldn't my brethren serve better or — cut off my tail for saying so — even wolves?"

"I have made my decision,' said Gaia, 'and I tell you, Coyote, leave the humans alone.'

"Of course, we all know that Coyote will do the opposite of whatever someone tells him, especially if it will create mischief. He went again into the wilderness and began to bedevil the humans. He fouled their traps, he tore up their crops, he howled all night long so the humans could not sleep. All in all, Coyote had a grand time.

"One day, Coyote began to grow bored with the tricks he was playing on the humans. The humans were so stupid, it was all too easy. Even the wolves were harder to trick. Then Coyote hit upon a brilliant plan, a most excellent trick, a trick upon humans and wolves alike.

"The next morning Coyote sat on the riverbank waiting for the human females to come and draw water. When they did, Coyote cried and cried. He sounded like one of the human cubs, lost and afraid. The females left their waterskins and followed the sound of Coyote's voice deep into the woods. Soon, they were hopelessly lost in the primeval forest.

"Leaving the females, Coyote raced to the spot where he knew a pack of wolves laired. He spoke to the Akela, telling him a group of the strange animals were lost in the forest, and it would be a perfect opportunity to strike a blow against these intruders. Coyote led the males of the pack to where the human females wandered.



“The wolves were ready to slaughter the humans when Coyote wove a magic spell. The wolves were convinced they saw a group of she-wolves ready to breed, and the females believed they saw the most desirable human males. The two groups mated to the music of Coyote’s laughter. Afterwards, they went their separate ways and remembered nothing of the occurrence.

“Coyote patiently waited nine moons for the culmination of his joke. He was rewarded by cries of horror and shock as the human females brought monstrosities forth from their loins. He howled with laughter as the cubs were taken to a hill and left to die.

“A strange thing then happened. Coyote was moved with pity for the mewling, defenseless cubs. He gathered them up and presented them to Gaia, begging forgiveness for his actions. Gaia raised the cubs to adulthood and made them her protectors, to make certain that the humans she had made lords would not despoil her. Coyote, as atonement for his cruel joke, she sent to be a helper and servant of this new race.

“Gaia sent forth her guardians, some back to the lands of what is now Asia and Europe, but others she kept in North America. These cubs, these few, were the first Garou. And this is the end of my story.”

I can hear them, sitting in stunned silence, barely breathing.

Then a chorus of voices are raised in anger.

“Lies!”

“Kill, kill, kill!”

“No! No!”

“We not joke!”

“Filthy liar!”

I begin to laugh so hard that tears are running down my cheeks. I cannot keep the howl from my voice. They are dumbfounded by my actions.

“Of course, it may all be lies,” I say. “Coyote is the Trickster. But remember, without humans there would be no Garou. Learn that lesson before you try to slay them all.”

I drop my disguise and change to my true form. They sit around me, mouths gaping open. It is so funny, I howl again with laughter.

“Another thing,” I splutter. “Try to get a sense of humor, will you? You don’t want the Red Talons to be thought of as sticks-in-the-mud.”

I fade away to nothingness, leaving them my story and my howl upon the night air.



# Chimera

by James A. Moore

The Stargazers all told riddles to each other for amusement, and one night, when the moon was new, the tribe leaders called for new riddles. A beautiful young Garou stepped forward and presented them with a puzzle made of string. The riddle was simply to find the beginning of the string and then to find the end.

Always ready for a challenge, the elders set to solving the puzzle. After three hours, when they could find neither a beginning nor an end, the young Garou left, explaining that she would be back when Luna was full; if they had not answered the puzzle's question by then, she agreed to solve it for them.

Days passed, and finally Luna lit the skies with her full glory. The elders still had not found the beginning or the end of the puzzle. When the young Garou returned, she gave them another puzzle instead of solving the first. She handed them a dying branch, and on the branch was a spider's web. Before the elders could ask any questions, the young Garou was gone.

When the moon was new again, the elders met and discussed the two puzzles they had before them. Many claimed that they were close to solving the riddles, but none could actually say they had solved them already. The elders were both frustrated by their lack of success and pleased to have been granted a challenging riddle. As they talked, the young Garou came forward again.

"Have you solved my riddle?" she asked the wisest Stargazers.

"No," they replied, "we have solved neither of your riddles."

"Ah, but I only ever gave you one riddle to solve."

This confused the elders, and they talked for a few moments while she waited. "We have solved your riddle," said the wisest of the tribe. "You have shown us the Triat. The string represents the Wym, which has no beginning and no end. The branch represents the Wyld, which is broken and weakens beneath the weight of the Weaver, which is the spider-web that covers the branch's limbs." The elders smiled with satisfaction at having solved the riddle.

The young Garou smiled back and then she shook her head. "You are half right, but there is more to the puzzle. Now you must join the three in harmony, so that the branch still lives, the web is unbroken, and the string unites them all." The faces of all the elders fell. This was not possible; the Triat was no longer joined. Before they could tell the young Garou as much, she was gone again.



The elders of the tribe joined together to see if they could solve this latest puzzle before she returned. They tried for over a month, with no sign of the young Garou, before they finally surrendered. The branch had died and the web, now broken, was tangled with the string. The whole mess had fallen into a worse shamble than when they started.

The young Garou returned, smiling to herself, and looked at the elders. "Have you solved this puzzle so easily?"

"No," the elders sighed. "The web became stuck to the string, and the branch has broken and died. The Weaver has ensnared the Wyrn, and the Wyld has become weaker because the Wyrn is trapped in the Weaver's webs."

The young Garou shook her head sadly. "How can you solve this riddle?"

"We cannot. The Triat is broken and we cannot fix it."

"Then what will happen?" she asked the elders. Sadly, they shook their heads; no words came from their muzzles. "Will this be the Apocalypse?" Sadder still, they nodded.

Then, the pretty, young Garou changed, becoming a beautiful human woman standing 10 feet tall. The elders knew then that this was the shapechanger, the Chimera. She looked as sad as they felt, and she sat with them. "You were the first of the tribes to solve my first puzzle, and I hoped that you would solve my second puzzle, as well. Now I shall have to find another tribe who is better with riddles."

The elders swelled their chests with pride and exclaimed, "No one is better with riddles than we! We have made the riddles of the universe our mission, and someday we will solve them all."

"How can there be none better at solving riddles than you, when you have already said that there is no way to solve my second puzzle?" Chimera shook her head and stared at each of the elders in turn. "How can the Triat be broken and never repaired? Certainly there must be a way."

The elders of the Stargazers stared at Chimera, and she at them. Finally they turned from her and talked amongst themselves. When they had finished talking, they turned and faced Chimera again; this time she was still there.

"You say that there is a way to solve this riddle, and we know that there are none greater than you at creating or solving such puzzles. Have you solved this riddle yourself?"

"No," Chimera replied, "I have not. But I will."

The elder Stargazers smiled and nodded. "We will help you. Perhaps between us all, this riddle can be solved." Beautiful Chimera smiled in return and nodded. She touched the broken spider's web and replaced it in the branch; the puzzle was no longer



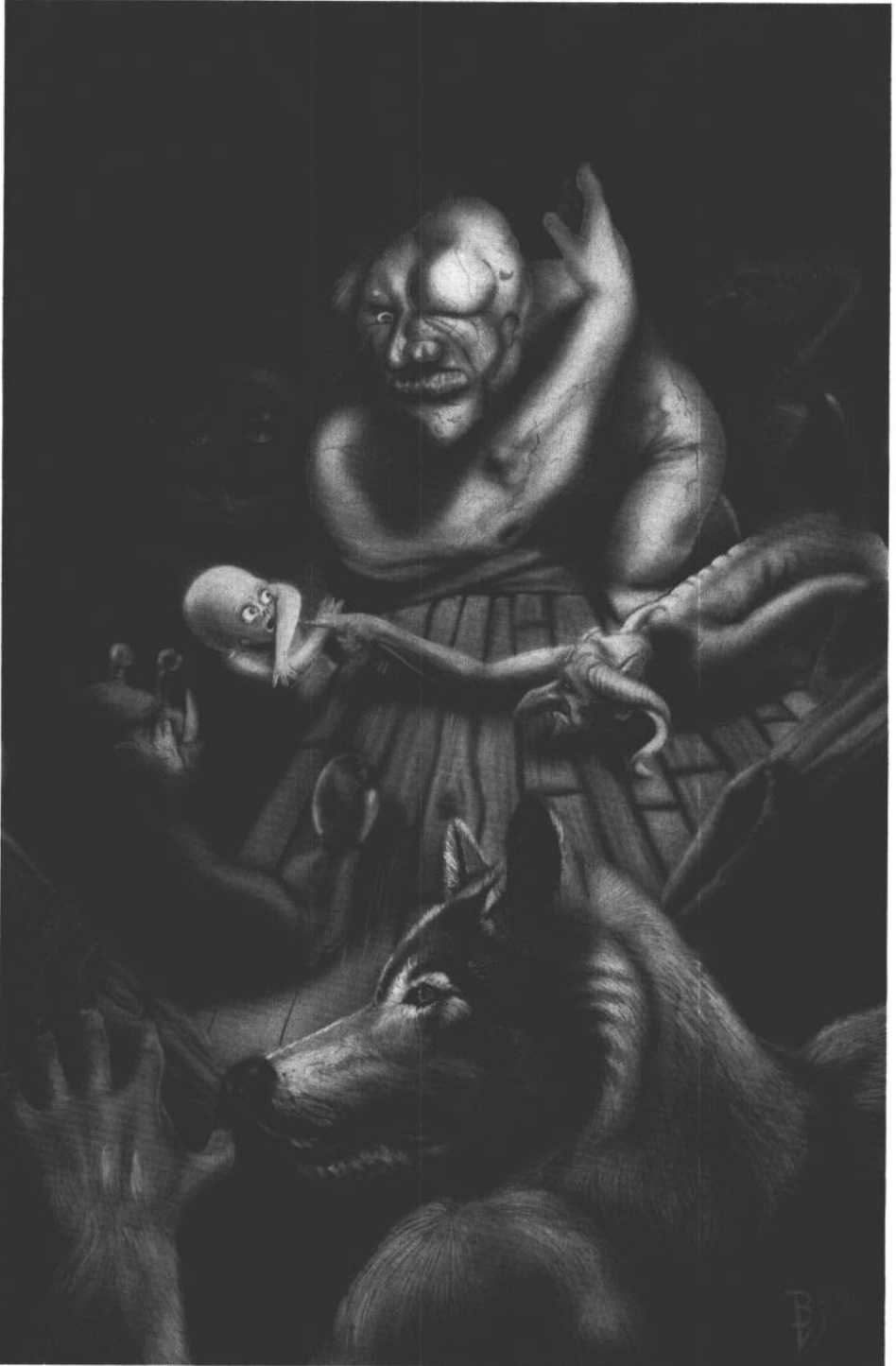
broken, but as beautiful as it had ever been and just as tricky. When she touched the branch, it was brought back to life, weakened but no longer dead.

“Together we will solve this puzzle,” she said to her friends the Stargazers. “Now, where shall we start?”

The elders and Chimera conferred, and some time later, the Chimera reached for her first puzzle. With long, delicate fingers, she cut one of the parts of the string. “It is agreed, the Wyrn has grown too big for the Weaver and the Wyld. First we must weaken the Wyrn, and then the rest of the puzzle will be easier.”

Chimera and the Stargazers still work to weaken the Wyrn, but it is stronger than they had ever guessed, and the battle is a hard one. But one day, the Wyrn shall be weakened, and then the Stargazers and Chimera will solve the rest of their puzzle.







# Tales of the Umbrora



# Restricted Entry

by Robert Hatch

"Bad moon rising," Derek whispered to himself in the dark. It was one of those big ones, "harvest moons" he guessed they were called, all fat and greenish and hovering in the sky like a big, staring eye. Its radiance coated everything in a St. Elmo's phosphorescence, as if the world had been immersed in plankton-rich water.

He looked across at the lightless tower, jutting from its fringe of near-empty parking lots like a giant finger clawing from the ground. There, that blank, black box on the eighth floor — that was his office window. This was the DataTek tower, and he was a DataTek employee — Derek Beausoleil, Administrative Supervisor (one of the last from the old company) — and if he wanted to work late one night, his superiors could certainly find no fault with that.

But Derek whipped his head around from side to side as he edged his '86 Accord into the farthest recesses of Lot C, on the side adjacent to the burned-out factory. And his heart beat just that much faster when one of his wheels crunched through some glass or something and made a scraping noise, magnified all out of proportion by the silence. When one of the trucks (the big, unmarked 18-wheelers that dropped by DataTek from parts unknown on unknown errands and departed to destinations unknown) cruised into the lot from the other side, Derek shut his motor down and flipped the lights off and squeezed down as low as possible, like an underage kid with a six-pack when the cop car pulls into the hideaway. Only when the truck had circled off to the other side of the tower did Derek raise his head.

*Ridiculous*, Derek thought. *You're acting like a damn burglar*. But he had to admit, working at night seemed to be one of the unwritten taboos at DataTek since the takeover. The new management enforced the nine-to-five corporate thing like gospel. On the occasions when Derek had wanted to do a little extra work, the security people had hovered around his office, like waiters around the table of a party who's finished eating; he'd given up in disgust and gone home. And a couple of months ago, when Bud Mulhaney had said he was going to come in late and work on that presentation, he hadn't even shown up the next day. Ms. Sontag said he'd been transferred, but there'd been no talk of it the previous day and no word from Mulhaney thereafter. The employees, old and new, just hid behind their papers and did their jobs and acted like they didn't notice.



Derek made sure he had his office key and got out of the car. He tried to shut the door as quietly as possible and winced at the sound it made. He started across the lot, circling away from the side with the trucks, and headed for the tower's back doors. There were no lights on in the parking lot, just the ghostly pallor of the moon, and he was grateful for the cloaking darkness even as his mind populated the shadows with a thousand of his great-grandmother's old stories.

Maybe he should just leave now — leave the company, get another job somewhere else. Yeah, right, in this economy. Despite everything, he'd been surprised how many quit — the ones that weren't fired or "transferred" — after the takeover. Derek had worked too damn hard to be unemployed now, and come hell or high water, he was cashing a paycheck.

Takeovers, even ones as questionable as Drake & Company's acquisition of DataTek, happened. Corporate ethics had been honed to a serrated edge on the Darwinian grindstones turned by the Milkens and Boeskys of the world. If this wasn't the '80s anymore, there were a hell of a lot of people who didn't know it yet.

Still, the new order was just so...weird. Nothing really tangible, but at work he often thought of old Tia, his great-grandmother, who had come over on a boat from Haiti. She had been near-dead and half-senile even when he had been a child, and he remembered the things she'd used to mutter in her rocking chair in the shadows of the Beausoleil living room. It felt like that at work: tension, ominous foreboding. Everybody crept around like mice, did their jobs, tried to avoid the new people, and left. DataTek was a labyrinth of **NEED TO KNOW**, **AUTHORIZED PERSONNEL ONLY**, and **RESTRICTED ENTRY**. The thing was, not too many of the old employees wanted to know exactly why the company was being restructured. Neither did Derek — until now.

Derek reached the back doors: big slabs of utilitarian gray plastic, not at all like the elegant glass front plates that DataTek displayed to the world. He looked over his shoulder, took out his key, slid it in the lock and softly turned. There was a click as the lock gave way. He paused, took three uneasy breaths and slowly opened the door.

Instead of the total darkness he'd expected to find, light scattered down from the single dim fluorescent tube that had been installed in all the ceilings after remodeling. It vaguely outlined the stark, white, empty corridor stretching into the building's bowels. Devoid of pictures or adornment of any kind, the corridor reminded Derek of a wasps' nest. The only sound was the nearly inaudible hum of the bulbs. He half expected to see some lumbering mutant from a bad '50s horror flick.

He had not been down here since the remodeling; the sullen stares of the maintenance people, combined with a general lack of curiosity, had kept him away. He figured the elevator would be somewhere ahead. He pinned his ID tag on in case



one of the security people showed up, but something in the back of his skull told him it would probably be best were he not seen at all. Keeping one hand on the slick plaster, he slowly crept down the corridor. Derek felt like one of the hapless protagonist/victims in a slasher movie and nervously eyed the shadows for any hint of shapes within.

Then he froze. Ahead, near the point where the corridor curved to the right, one of the shadows detached itself from the wall, sliding around the curve and away. Derek felt his throat tighten into a knot. He had no authorization to do this. He could just turn around and leave. But he forced one foot forward, then the other, creeping the way he had in his youth when he wished to avoid the old neighbor lady. With a modicum of silence, he stalked forward, arms tensed at his sides, peering into the gloom.

Claire? He peered closer. It was Claire, Claire... Hayes, was that it? — one of the temps who worked in personnel. What the hell was she doing here? Before he could decide whether to call out or avoid her, she whirled to face him as if he had tapped her on the shoulder.

Despite the near lack of light, mirrorshades masked her face. She was dressed in black sweats like some kind of ninja, and at her hip was what appeared to be a very large gun of some kind, although it looked like no firearm he'd ever seen. Dangling from her neck, refracting the ceiling bulb with a pale fire, was a metal pendant depicting some kind of — scarab or something?

"It's a cockroach," Claire said in answer to his puzzled stare. She stepped closer, teeth bared in a grin. "Well, well, Mr. Beausoleil; I have to admit, I didn't think you'd be the one to answer the Howl."

"Lady," Derek said, "I don't know what the hell you're talking about, but no one I know types memos while packing ordnance. If this is some kind of industrial espionage —"

"Nothing of the sort," Claire retorted. She patted her hip. "This isn't even a gun, anyway — it's a Jagg — but that's beside the point."

"Well, what is the point?" Derek asked. This was getting too creepy.

"The point is, Drake & Co. are bad news — for DataTek, for this city, for the world, really. You probably already figured something was rotten in Denmark, so to speak, but you have no idea what's gonna go down.

"Look," she continued, "DataTek was bought out as part of a plot by the ones who control Drake. One more telecommunications network they can corrupt — and your company's setup is good enough to where they can just build a caern right here — am I losing you?"

"Oh, yeah," Derek whispered. This girl was psycho, no mistake.



“Use your eyes, man! You can see what’s going on. You mean to tell me you think the new people are fine, upstanding members of the business community?”

“No,” he replied, “but I’ve never seen them packing pistols to work. I don’t know who the hell you are, but there are channels to handle racketeering, if that’s what you’re implying, and creeping around in the dead of night dressed like Steven Seagal isn’t one of them.” He turned his back, his shoulders knotting in anticipation of the whisper of the gun being drawn. “I think Security needs to hear about this.” He started to walk toward an intercom.

“You find Security,” Claire’s voice cut behind him, “and they’ll rip you limb from limb. Like they did Mulhaney.”

Derek spun. “What do you know about Mulhaney?”

Claire shrugged. “Very little, but I know fomori and I know Black Spiral Dancers and I know that he probably died a very agonizing and pointless death so that this company’s skeletons remained in their closets.” She stepped toward him; her hands were clenched, and he could have sworn that a glow emanated from behind the mirrorshades. “And that, Mr. Beausoleil, is why my family — *our* family — sent me here to bring these bastards down. And that is why you, my Kin, answered when I Howled to Luna.”

Despite himself, Derek chuckled. “*Our* family?” he asked. He looked down at his own coffee-colored skin and up at Claire’s porcelain flesh. “Now I *know* we’re not related.”

“Ah, but we are,” she responded. She offered the pendant for his view. The metal roach seemed to crawl in his palm. On its carapace were engraved words: “Sshraaknaa-nha-grakklaa.”

“What kinda language is that?” he asked.

“In English,” Claire replied, gently pulling the pendant back and straightening it, “it means ‘Glass Walkers.’”

Five seconds of silence ticked by on Claire’s watch. Then Derek asked, almost plaintively, “They really killed Mulhaney?”

“Look into yourself and you’ll know I speak truth, my brother,” Claire said.

Claire put her hand on Derek’s arm and said, “We’ve gotta go. We’re exposed out here, and we’ve got a lot of work to do. You *must* trust me.”

“What are we gonna do?” Derek asked. He didn’t know what all this babble about Glass Walkers and Ferraris and Dancers was, but he knew, deep down, that something was terribly wrong at this place and that Claire seemed to have some idea of what was going on. If she was some kind of crazy anarchist — well, as far as he knew, she hadn’t yet committed murder.



"We're gonna yank the cancer out by the roots," she said. "In the Umbra. Now look," she continued, "you've gotta trust me here and obey me explicitly. Cool?"

"Until I have reason to believe otherwise, I suppose," Derek sighed.

Claire took his hand, guided him down the corridor and into a side hallway branching right. It was as featureless as all the other corridors save for the rows of plastic doors on both sides. She — sniffed? — at each door in turn, finally steering him toward the third door on the right, #823 according to the stenciled number on its surface. She opened the door and stepped inside, drawing him behind her. Then she quietly shut the door behind them, shrouding them in darkness. Only when the door was completely shut did she turn on the light.

The sudden light pierced his eyes like a lance. Derek inhaled deeply and instantly gagged. The odor was abysmal; Derek had never smelled anything like it. The closest comparison he could draw was the stench of a wet dog — if the dog had been dead for a few weeks. Breathing through his mouth, he looked around.

They were in a storeroom of some sort. Boxes, barrels and metal drums were piled haphazardly about, stacked from floor to ceiling, leaving only a labyrinthine trail between the debris. None of the boxes were marked. Was this stuff what those trucks unloaded?

Claire deftly wound her way among the containers, muttering, "Try not to touch anything." Derek followed her, feeling an acute sense of claustrophobia from the looming cliffs formed by the crates. It was unnaturally cold in here, almost as if the stores were radiating some sort of chill. When they were at the center of the room, she turned to him, taking his hands in hers.

"We're going to the Umbra. Though you're not of the Full Blood, you've enough that you can step sideways — I think. You have to trust me." Claire reached into her pocket and pulled out a mirror. Holding it in her left palm, she stepped up to him and embraced him, wrapping her arms around his neck and staring over his shoulder at the mirror. She smelled good; some kind of musk or perfume she wore nearly drowned out the dead-dog stench. "Look into my glasses," Claire instructed. "Make your mind gray — no thoughts, no feelings. Fall into the mirror..." Her voice took on a singsong drone. "Don't think, don't plan, don't worry, relax..." Derek tried his best to do as she asked, staring into the eyes of his twin reflections in her mirrorshades. Then even words faded and her voice shifted to a comforting purr, like the fan Derek often turned on to drown out the night-noises when he slept.

The faces — his faces — rose to meet him as he fell into the silver abysses. They smiled, distorted, and oozed like putty before him. Claire's voice became a roaring wind, lifting him, sailing him forward — or was it down, or up? The gleaming silver became his sky, the liquid through which he slowly, ecstatically sank. Sank? No,



dropped — plummeted! The silver began to tarnish, the billowing wind began to thicken with smog. Reeking gray clouds surrounded him as he fell, extending tendrils like curious octopi. He opened his mouth — did he still have a mouth? — but was instantly aware that if he screamed, the smog things would find him, grip him tight and devour him.

Derek fell faster and faster. He tensed his body, bracing for the sure-to-be-shattering impact. But instead of solid ground, he crashed into some sort of sticky membrane that gave underneath him. He expected to be sent spiraling into the air again, like a gymnast on some enormous trampoline. But he stayed where he was, and through the roiling clouds of greenish gray smoke, he saw Claire staring at him in concern. “You made it!” she yelled over the wind. “You made it!” She waded toward him through the knee-deep muck in which they both stood.

Derek looked around. He was still in the storeroom... but it was — different. Light in the form of a sickly green phosphorescence pulsed and throbbed from all the surfaces. The atmosphere was a maelstrom of wind and smoke. The floor was covered in a viscous, opaque black sludge. The stench was, if anything, even worse here. The boxes had been replaced by placentalike sacs that clung to their contents and offered vague clues about the nature of those contents. From these Derek averted his eyes. He looked down at his legs, buried in the mire, and he saw and heard flopping hints of things writhing through the slime. From these he also averted his eyes, but he felt them, swarms of them, nuzzling his legs. Panic clutched his heart, and he began staggering around the room, kicking madly at the things and flailing at the clouds of sticky smoke.

Claire grabbed him and shook him. “Calm down, man!” she hissed. “You can’t fear! They feed on it; they’ll be on you like flies on honey!”

“Pretty goddamn tall order, lady!” Derek yelled, voice midway between anger and fear. “You turn a building into a freakin’ swamp, and you expect me just to shrug it off? Where the hell are we — and what the hell are *they* — and what the hell are you?” He stepped back, taking in Claire for the first time since the transformation.

She had changed. She was a gleaming sculpture in the green glow. Her skin had assumed the metallic luster of chrome. Her hair glowed of its own accord, neon fiberoptics flaring purple. Her eyes were the electronic red of LEDs or traffic signals.

“Not now, Derek, there’s no time anymore. Where we are is the place your new bosses have created in the spirit world — just like the place they want the real world to be, too. If you don’t want that to happen, you’ve gotta help me out here!” Her eyes flared, cowing his panic into a more quiescent paranoia.

“Spirit world, huh?” Derek said. That he could vaguely understand; he still remembered old Tia in her rocker, scaring him as a kid with her stories of the Caribbean



and the loa and the hounsans. “So what’s the play?” No more panic, just dull resignation. He figured he was dead anyway. Might as well go with the flow.

“I’m gonna pacify; you’re gonna purify,” Claire said. “Here’s the deal: I understand that you’re a rational product of the 20th century and all that, and this is all crazy and mumbo-jumbo to you, but you’ve just gotta accept that this world works according to different laws. All that ritualistic shit you grew out of — call it back up. Salt over the shoulder — step on a crack, break your mother’s back — four-leafed clover — you never know around here. So in order to purge this taint, you have to reconsecrate this place, for Gaia.”

“For what?”

“Never mind. Anyway, where’s your office?”

“Eighth floor, #33.”

“Okay. Go there and go to work.”

“What?”

“Specifically, you know how Ms. Sontag had you cancel all those grants for the environment?”

“How did you know about — ”

“Don’t worry about it. Just go back and review the paperwork and reestablish them. You’re in charge of a lot of that PR stuff, aren’t you?”

“Well, yeah, but what good’s it — ”

“Just go in and do your job. Your old job. Get online and write memos, disburse funds, start a recycling program, cancel the incoming shipments from those trucks — whatever, you’ll think of something. Just do something constructive.”

“But I don’t see how it’s going to do — ”

“This is the Umbra. It doesn’t matter. Here it’s literally the thought that counts.” She looked up at him, electronic eyes meeting his. “This is a sanctification, Derek — a spiritual purification.”

Claire took the cockroach pendant from around her neck. “The masters of this place will undoubtedly try to stop you. This amulet is a powerful ward against the Banes of the Wyrn. It should protect you against them — as long as you don’t stop your work and as long as you don’t focus on the areas of their purview. This means you must not fear, you must not hate, and above all, you must not succumb to anger; we of the Changing Breed are most vulnerable to that emotion. You must be a vessel for the forces of cleansing and healing. Fear created this.” Claire gestured with one metallic hand at the murky wasteland about them. “Hate created this. Anger created this. If you falter in your task, if the negative emotions rule you, the protection will fail... and the Banes will — ”



“Yeah, I get the point,” Derek cut her off. “What about you? What are you going to do?” He gingerly drew the roach pendant over his neck; it felt surprisingly warm. Light blazed along the chain and coagulated within the roach emblem.

“Find lots of Banes,” she replied, “and rip them to shreds.” She pivoted on her heel and darted out of the room and down the corridor. “Good luck,” she threw back over her shoulder before she vanished into the recesses of the building.

Derek was alone. He was on — let’s see, the first sublevel, and he had to get to the eighth floor. *Through a monster-filled nightmare*, that little voice in the back of his head whispered perversely, and he shuddered; the gleam along the amulet faded ever so slightly, and he physically shook himself to rid himself of the draining fear. He headed off toward where the elevator would be, wondering if elevators worked in the spirit world, and how many Banes could ooze on the head of a pin, and whether he was dead or Claire had slipped him some serious acid.

Derek waded through a dead world of slime and rusted wires and cracked rock. The pristine, albeit eerie, corridors of the waking world had become phosphorescent tunnels, roughly slashed from what appeared to be obsidian. A sluggish current flowed through the knee-deep ooze, sending it swishing and sucking past his legs. Occasionally, the current would drive something, usually something soft and bulbous and sticky, into his shins, and he would resolutely refuse to look down until whatever it was had passed. Some form of Muzak filled the halls — a tinny, Barry Manilowesque voice cheerfully singing twisted lyrics reminiscent of Skinny Puppy’s.

The layout of the place appeared roughly similar to that of his real-world building, and he had little trouble orienting himself. Once, as he walked, the cockroach medallion on his neck gleamed a cold white. Derek had little trouble interpreting that as a warning and pressed himself into the nearest alcove, gripping the medallion, facing the wall and shutting his eyes. A cold wind whistled past and the humidity in the air increased, as if a fog had wafted into the area. A vague feeling of stickiness overcame him, and he heard two distinct sounds: a faint tinkling like distant wind chimes and a sucking noise, as if liquid were being gurgled through a straw. The sounds grew louder, as if whatever were making them was approaching. Derek felt the medallion pulse in his palm, and he pressed his face into the wall and shut his eyes.

The clammy feeling, and the noises, increased, and finally appeared to emanate from all around him. Though he would not look, Derek felt certain that something was crawling or hovering near him. He clutched the medallion and felt an electric tingle wash over his body. Slowly, the presence receded into the distance.

When he was sure that the — whatever — had left or dissipated, Derek opened his eyes and continued his journey. A few more turns brought him to the elevator bank.



In the elevator shafts throbbed great fleshy tubes, like enormous veins. The colors of the structures constantly shifted from bruised purple to blotchy white. Derek was reminded of the time he had been to Sea World in Florida and had seen an octopus in an aquarium change color. There were apertures in the tubes where the elevator doors were in the real world, and Derek realized that if he wanted to get to his office on the eighth floor, he would have to travel inside the things.

Firmly gripping the medallion, Derek stepped toward the nearest tube. The aperture widened to receive him, like an enormous mouth. Derek stepped through, feeling strands of some sort of membrane brushing against his body. A feeling of weightlessness overcame him, and he realized that he was suspended in a translucent, viscous liquid. Momentary panic was dispelled when he discovered that he had no particular difficulty breathing the fluid.

There were no buttons or panels on the inside of the shaft, and Derek's immersion had rendered him numb and lethargic. Closing his eyes, he concentrated on his office on the eighth floor, wondering as he did so what it would look like in this nightmare. As the picture formed in his mind he felt a backwash in the liquid, and then a sudden velocity as he rocketed up the tube.

For what seemed like hours, Derek raced up the tube and then came to an abrupt halt. Another aperture opened in the tube before him, and Derek assumed he had reached the eighth floor. He stepped out into the corridor, noting as he did so that he was bone-dry despite having been surrounded by the liquid.

Finding his office proved little trouble — the eighth floor appeared little different from its earthly counterpart. Derek grasped the knob and pulled his door open, afraid of what he would see. To his surprise, his office appeared identical. There were the pictures on his desk, there was the potted plant, there was the Dali clock.

Derek sat at his desk, opened his files and turned on his computer. The screen slowly lit, and an eerie hum filled the room. The screen glowed with a bizarre, ghostly radiance — what Derek imagined ultraviolet might look like if he could see it — and a lattice pattern filled the monitor. The pattern danced and undulated before his eyes; strands of it coiled and wound about the screen. It was like a spider web, and as Derek's eyes adjusted, he noticed that small, multilegged creatures crawled about among its filaments. One of the creatures seemed to grow in size as Derek stared at it; it deliberately moved to capture his gaze. The computer creature looked like a sort of spider or scorpion, yet it had a face of a sort, and Derek swore he could see the faintest trace of a smirk on the arachnid countenance.

The creature's mouth moved, and the crackle of static filled the room. The words "input command" resonated through the office, sounding as if someone had spoken through a faulty microphone.



Derek stared for a moment. The raspy voice again reverberated through the room. Confused, casting about for something to do, his fingers dropped to the keyboard and typed: "PURIFY BUILDING."

There was a loud, angry beep. The tiny computer dweller glared at him with what seemed to be disgust. "Invalid command," crackled through the room.

Okay. His fingers again touched the board. "OPEN FILES," he typed.

The computer bug danced about agitatedly on the web. "Specify," it hissed.

Derek thought a moment. "RECENT PROJECTS, UPCOMING PROJECTS, PROJECTED GROWTH," he typed.

The web pattern disappeared, replaced by scrolling screens of information racing by him. Despite the rapidity with which the data flashed by, Derek found himself able to assimilate it as quickly as it appeared. He learned about Drake & Co. and about the giant Pentex conglomerate that pulled its strings from the shadows, and he learned far too much about Glass Walkers and fomori and Black Spiral Dancers and Banes. But the information that most stunned him was the needless cruelty and waste of it all.

The resources of this company, the countless amounts of raw material ritually befouled and dumped into the soil, could just as easily be used for constructive purposes. And Derek knew what he would do. He typed: PROPOSAL 1-A: SUGGESTED MEASURES FOR ENVIRONMENTAL CLEANUP. He began to write his report, losing himself in the graphs and charts of data that he analyzed, formatted and composed into a useful outline.

"Deeeee-rek." The ominous whisper, the syllables of his name stretched out as if by a kid trying to scare another, came from just beyond the threshold of his office. For an instant the mechanical cadence of his typing was interrupted; then he remembered Claire's warning and resumed his work, looking up as he did so.

Standing at his door was his boss, Ms. Sontag. At least, it superficially resembled Ms. Sontag, although in the other world her skin did not gleam so and was not covered with cancerous blotches. Her head did not loll on her neck that way, like that of someone hanged. In life, her eyes were not so round and lambent and expectant; her mouth, so wide and predatory and round; and her teeth arrayed thus, in a circle, like those of a lamprey.

Icy tentacles crawled up Derek's spine; his fingers trembled on the keyboard, the gleam of the amulet faded ever so slightly and the rictus that was Ms. Sontag's mouth widened ever so slightly, as if in a smile. Derek saw the trap and focused on his business once more; he smiled pleasantly at that face and said, "Good evening, Ms. Sontag. Working late?" in the most cheerful tone he could muster.



Sontag twitched as if she were suffering an epileptic fit and shambled toward Derek like a zombie from *Night of the Living Dead*. As she touched the threshold, however, there was a pulse of light from the cockroach and a corresponding flash from the door. Ms. Sontag gurgled in pain and staggered back from the door. Derek continued to work, flipping through a file on the American Cancer Society and deciding it would be a worthy recipient of some of DataTek's PR funds.

Sontag righted herself and took her place by the door. "Deeeee-rek," she whispered. "Won't you let me in, Deeeee-rek? Won't you let me in? We have some business to discuss," she finished, stiffly brandishing a file in her right talon.

Derek looked up from his paperwork, faced those eyes without flinching. "I'm sure it's important, Ms. Sontag, but I've been assigned this project from the higher-ups. Priority One. If you come back tomorrow morning, I'll be happy to discuss your needs." He turned back to the file.

Sontag screamed in rage, a rasping sound like the whirl of a cicada. She clenched her hands in fury, but wariness of the amulet stopped her before she could hurl herself at the door. She drew back as if in thought.

Derek continued his feverish task: typing, checking, crosschecking. The World Wildlife Fund — um-hmm. Tax write-off here — um-hmm. He refused to think about the thing staring at him from the hall.

"Deeeee-rek," came the voice once more. *Oh God*, Derek thought, *does she know a way to get in?* He had to play the game the way he knew it — besides, even as he succumbed to that instant of self-doubt, the amulet's gleam ebbed ever so slightly.

"Yes, Ms. Sontag?" he replied politely.

She pressed her face as close as she could to the door without being repelled. Her mouth opened until a wet, gaping hole filled half her face. "Do you see these teeth of mine?" she said.

Derek looked up, and indeed she had teeth, rows and rows like those of a shark, all arrayed in circular precision and grinding one against the other. But he had listened to his great-grandmother, and he knew mumbo-jumbo like this. "I see those," he replied in age-old response, "but I'll type this." And he continued with his work, noting as he did so that the sky outside his window was beginning to lighten degree by degree.

She noticed it, too, and there was desperation in her voice as she snarled, "Let me in, or you'll suffer as no mortal has suffered!" She scraped her tongue over her teeth. "I'll chew the flesh from your living body strip by strip!"

"I see," Derek replied, "you want to discuss your proposal over lunch tomorrow? An excellent idea. In the meantime, however..." He continued with his task,



categorizing his data, writing, charting graphs. She wailed in anger as the black sky turned to gray and then to faintest purple.

Derek's fingers flew over the keyboard. The monitor became his world, the lightening sky his heaven. Then Sontag's voice drifted into the room once more.

"Deeeee-rek," she hissed.

"Yes, Ms. Sontag? How may I help you?"

"Do you know," she slowly asked, "how Bud Mulhaney died? What I did to him before he gasped his last?"

Derek's fingers froze on the terminal.

"He was here, the little ant, working late on his important proposal. Oh, how he screamed and screamed when he saw my friends and me!" Her voice was ecstatic in remembrance.

"We took him down to the lowest levels where the Black Spirals dance. We showed him things that broke his brain in pieces. And then, because Drake & Company is such a progressive place and we believe in corporate-sponsored daycare, I sent some friends to his house."

Derek's eyes were riveted to her, and he ignored the rapidly dwindling light from the pendant. She continued, "We brought his little Jennifer — she was only eight and shouldn't have been staying with only a babysitter — to see her daddy at work.

"Children have such lovely, innocent faces — wouldn't you agree, Deeeee-rek? And it seemed such a shame for her to grow up and lose those rosy cheeks, that soft, pink complexion..." She held something up for his gaze, something that gleamed under the bulbs. She worked her hand, and Derek recognized the shape and sound of scissors.

Derek snarled, work forgotten as he stood in rage. The last gleams of the pendant were snuffed out on his chest, smothered by the anger. Sontag trilled in triumph and came to meet him, claws extended, lamprey mouth sucking in anticipation. He punched at her; his fists sank into something yielding and doughy. She laughed and bent him back like a doll, mouth poised above his face.

There was a flash of neon light behind the monster, and something leaped from midair, crashing into her and knocking Derek from her grasp. Derek shifted his bearings and saw the creature flailing at its back, trying to dislodge the enormous robotic dog that had locked its titanium jaws into the monster's spine. The construct of steel and plexiglass tubing sheared gouts of flesh from the monster, who warbled in agony.

"Claire?" Derek gasped.



The dog swatted the creature into a corner and turned to Derek. "Keep working!" it shouted at him in Claire's voice. "Till moonrise — then it's ours!"

Derek stood in confusion for the briefest instant; then, spurred by the Claire-creature's electronic howl, seated himself at his desk, picked up his strewn papers and resumed work. The two beasts hurled themselves at one another, and the Sontag-monster's black ichor mingled with the pulsing purple liquid that filled the tubes of the metal dog.

"And so, in conclusion," Derek typed, "I think that it would behoove the new management to give this proposal serious consideration, as the application thereof would be of considerable benefit both to Drake & Company's public image and to the world in which we live."

As he typed in the last character, the first shafts of moonlight shot through the blinds. They cascaded over the monster. Where they touched her, boils and blisters rose on her flesh. She howled in pain, and the stench of burned meat filled the office. She jerked spasmodically, staggering toward the blinds to close them. At that instant, Claire leaped, pulling her forepaws back as she did so and driving them down on impact. There was a wet, snapping sound, and Claire came crashing to the carpet atop her ruined foe.

She shook her head; whether in disbelief or to clear the haze of battle was hard to say. She turned toward Derek. "Well fought, Kinfolk," she said. She turned her pitted metal flank to him. "Stare into the mirror, and let's go back."

After his ordeal, Derek found it relatively easy to blank his weary mind. The trip back was much gentler than his initial entry. He found himself and Claire in the middle of his real office, which was evidently none the worse for wear from the psychic battle. "Yep, that's the beauty of the Umbra," Claire said, looking around in satisfaction. "You can trash the place, come back and have your battlefield look like something out of *Better Homes and Gardens*.

"Course," she pondered, "a lot of the management is gonna be kind of indisposed. I guess we'll have to send in a transition team to keep DataTek afloat. I'll tell the alphas about what went down, so you're probably looking at a nice, fat six-figure salary and a serious promotion. Cool with you?"

Derek glanced at the clock: 6:27 a.m. "First and foremost, I'd like to get a little sleep," he said.

"Go ahead, take the week off," Claire replied. "I don't think the new management will have a problem with it."



# Gardens Are Their Seeds

by *Stewart Wieck*

No Garou in that ancient time failed to see the dark wings of the wise Owl on the back of Euricles. These wings carried Euricles' mind higher than the thoughts of other humans or, after he had discovered his true heritage, Garou. His thoughts were as strong as the predatory movements of his totem. He silently slid through the carefully woven arguments of others to crush the core of the idea with talons made for ripping more than flesh. His debates were unapproachable, for rarely could anyone crack his solid logic. Listeners generally accepted the merit of his position, but too often dispassionately.

Euricles gained this insight through no magic or special Gift, but through clear vision and reasoned cognition. Would Owl choose an impostor to fly the lunar days of the Umbra quite so high?

But Euricles, as in a human myth of the same era, flew too high — or too far. He searched for unattainable wisdom, knowledge that carried too great a price. Whatever the flight, it was beyond the power and desire of the wings to take him there. It was flight into the Umbra, and in the end, Euricles walked, for Owl grounded its favorite son.

At his earlier apex with Owl, Euricles would never have been fooled by a mere Jaggling.

With Owl's wings on his back, Euricles flew into the Umbra. He needed answers. He was a leader in all fields of thought among Garou and humans, but he had reached a plateau, a leveling unknown to him in the past. There had always been more variables to consider, more permutations to ponder. He had come to understand that the world of reflections, the physical world into which he was born, must intrinsically lack some of the character, some of the truth of the real world, the Umbra.

Euricles entered the Umbra at night, of course, for that's when it's safest. At night, the Umbra was still lit by the glow of Luna, so Euricles was able to travel safely as he had many times in the past. He was prepared to persist in his journey through the coming day; though more dangerous, the daylight would reveal more stimuli, more



chances at breaking through the locks in his mind. Where else but in the Umbra could the mind wander quite so freely?

Like those who spend so much time in the Umbra, Euricles felt not that he had arrived, but that he had returned when he stepped sideways. For many, the Umbra is much more vivid, more alive than the mundane world. The colors are richer, the odors deeper, the sounds sharper. In the Umbra, you acquire a strange mix of instinct and intellect, a composition often difficult for Garou to balance in the physical world. Because the environment is more fundamental, these two means of perception do not seem opposed. You can trust your instincts, something those of intellect sometimes find impossible to do.

The night held no mysteries for Euricles. Even the Umbra had become laden with familiarity. He spoke briefly with a few spirits at the beginning of his journey, but he treated them with no sense of the respect he usually showed without trying.

Some of the spirits sensed that something was amiss with Euricles, though Owl was still with him and began to float behind him. It is said that he wandered aimlessly, but an inspection of his path shows guarded avoidance of all caerns. No one can say why he chose to fly this route.

Euricles wandered until finally day came. He watched as the pattern spiders awoke and began their misguided work of calcifying the world with organization. Euricles whispered warnings to nearby spirits to avoid being caught in the webs of Pattern, though he miraculously avoided incident. The wings of Owl must themselves have guided Euricles away from trouble, for he seemed to have little regard for himself or even his surroundings, so intent was he on capturing an elusive, elemental new thought.

Even in the daylit Umbra, Euricles found nothing to ignite his mind. Everything was still too real, too defined. To him, reality and its truth were of such magnitude that coherent thought and analysis could not describe them — only comprehension. Reality was too huge to be bound into the discrete elements the mundane world and Near Umbra required and still be accurately portrayed. Like the impossibility of describing a sunset in mere words, the possibilities of reality could not be so contained.

To achieve comprehension, Euricles felt he had to throw off all perceived shackles — so he cast out Owl. Who is to say whether or not Owl foresaw this end? Euricles had contributed to Garou culture in his own way for many years under the wisdom of Owl. Perhaps this is all Owl desired. No matter what his reasons or unknowable motivations, Owl cast Euricles off, as well.

The wings slowly shriveled to nothing, and Euricles fell to the ground of the Umbra, free but unable to fly.



Some say that the only thing Euricles never sensed as sharply in the Umbra as in the mundane world was his loss of Owl. Don't believe it. The loss of a totem may seem superficially exhilarating because of the sense of solitude and freedom that accompanies it, but it's a lobotomy. It's the loss of part of yourself, for a totem is not an addition to you: a totem is attracted to you because it's literally in your blood, in your nature. People, even wise ones, have forsaken their totems in all times, and never can they truly be held accountable for the madness that comes afterward. Euricles is the only exception in our legends. He was too wise; he should have been infallible.

Without his totem and unable to think where to look for more answers, Euricles decided to embark on Questing, a path normally chosen by elder Garou who nobly intend to spend their last lucid thoughts to seek for something, anything, beyond Gaia. Something beyond the deepest Umbra; something far beyond any of the known Realms. Like mankind's search for alien life, Questing is highly unlikely but full of promise, of the potential to find allies in our struggle. There is, of course, a chance that the seeker will encounter even more conflict, but this chance is balanced by the vast improbability of finding anything at all.

So Euricles went Questing, but he did so for all the wrong reasons. He did so for himself, not for Gaia.

The problem, of course, was surviving the journey. Many elder Garou who choose Questing are destroyed by spirits of the Wyld long before they reach even the periphery of the frontier. Very few have fled far enough to survive intact beyond the most remote areas we can sense. However, Euricles reasoned that the vast potentials of Wyld-space might offer him answers, so he must not have cared whether or not he would last beyond the first short moments — moments he apparently expected to survive. On the other hand, he may have counted on the same easy, blessed travel he encountered in the Near Umbra the night before.

Euricles was tricky, even if his wisdom had fled with Owl. Even though he would have no control over the destination or travel time of his journey, he caught a ride on a Vortex. A Vortex is a powerful spirit of the Wyld formed of — well, formed of everything and nothing, of whatever the spirit's ever-shifting designs and manipulations require. Vortices do not normally exist in the Near Umbra, but such a summons could still have been within the Euricles' power.

The tendrils of the Vortex raged in random directions, silent as the vacuum of space, but Euricles slipped past the violence of the beast and insinuated himself into its being. The spirit's squirming mass blithely accepted Euricles before the Wyld took hold again and Euricles was forced to change himself, and change again a thousand thousand more times. Euricles somehow survived the contortions, riding the Vortex to parts unknown in the Deepest Umbra.



From within the feverish center of the Vortex, Euricles could see the Umbra spinning past. The landscape at times melted away behind swirling bits of the Wyld-spirit, clearing just in time for Euricles to glimpse far-flung, half-forgotten Realms: a nightmarish Chimare where the troubled sleep of mortals was personified, a massive, suspended citadel guarding the portal to Shangri-la. But he held tight, wishing to be carried to parts previously unfathomed.

Eventually, Euricles arrived somewhere completely foreign even to him. His connection to Gaia was distant and cold, his grasp of his own nature tenuous. That he should heave the writhing Vortex at such a point says much about the narcissistic mission of this Garou.

Euricles had succeeded, though, in providing himself with opportunity. He had survived, if barely. But the Wyld is powerful, seductive; in his crippled state Euricles was vulnerable. Bewildered from his torturous journey, Euricles must have been startled to find himself deposited near a spirit, a Jaggling able to dodge his now-dulled talons and rend the Garou's once-sharp mind with riddles and tricks of its own.

The Wyld Jaggling and Euricles spoke, but not of themselves. For the Jaggling, it was enough to know that a glittering prize, a Garou, dangled suspended and powerless before it in the emptiness of the Deep Umbra. The Jaggling took advantage of the situation immediately.

It's impossible to understand why Euricles didn't learn more of the Jaggling. Why would he not at least try to discover what kind of spirit spawned the malevolent imp? Was it some Celestine, something akin to Luna herself? Or was its parent one of the myriad Incarna? To exist so deep in the Umbra, the Jaggling must have been a spirit of the Wyld. The unnatural corruption of the Wyrms often cannot exist in so remote an area, least of all in such a powerless spirit as a Jaggling.

Somehow, Euricles found a kindred spirit in this Jaggling. The wisest Garou will find connections in all things, but by this time, Euricles was straining for correlations, and there were few. The Jaggling spoke a little of its fear to approach Gaia too closely; it was horrified at the idea of losing itself in an area overrun by the Weaver. It rightly feared for its existence, and this touch of truth must have flared the compassion still within Euricles.

The seduction of the Wyld turned to lust, and this greed overtook Euricles. He made a proposal the Jaggling immediately accepted: if it would show him the reaches of the Wyld, the true frontiers of the Umbra, and help him survive, he would in turn show that Jaggling the nature of Gaia, the unpleasant combination of definition and chance. These are his own words, conveyed by those with ears that are always in attendance. Euricles was awash in possibility, and he immersed himself so deeply that he did not realize that he was losing himself.



The Jaggling, of course, accepted this arrangement, knowing full well that it would succeed in adding to the chaos in the far reaches of Umbra, for Euricles would lose himself completely after a time, especially if he went where the Wyld-spirit directed. Euricles, on the other hand, felt as if brand new worlds of opportunity were finally opening to him. So completely had the Jaggling manipulated Euricles that the Garou was actually optimistic.

Euricles' dissolution in the void of the Wyrn was so sudden that his screams were never heard.

This story is nothing other than the tale of a Garou who felt he had access to more wisdom than Gaia Herself. In his arrogance, Euricles made a mockery of noble Questing, a sacrifice Garou make in Gaia's honor, going forth as her seeds, not as gardens unto themselves. In becoming his own garden, Euricles forsook Gaia's ways and dreams...



# End Time Song

by Daniel Greenberg

I sing, O princesses and princes of the moon, of the Garden of Gaia. I sing of that blessed land so long gone from us and of that holy time all but forgotten. I sing of the endless golden time, when the world was a place of rich enchantment and peace. Garou and animals and humans all lived in harmony under Gaia's tender ministry, and even the spirits were kindly. All living beings, even the rocks and plants, lived in both the physical world and the Umbra and knew no division. But suddenly, without warning, the physical world was wrenched from the spirit world. In an instant, our paradise became hell beyond measure. We were torn apart and could not function in the new, divided world. But the Wyrms could. It was ready to fulfill its apocalyptic mission.

This was a barren, desolate time, when the warm light of the sun had been cast down and the moon's face was hidden. A shroud of dark doom lay over the land. The earth crumbled away beneath our feet in some places and blasted into the sky in others. Fell beasts gibbered and screeched their icy howls of war as they rumbled over the land. All things that lived were dying, and Gaia's voice was no longer heard in the ground. It was the end time. The Wyrms had come.

The Wyrms spread their dominion over the land and created great, factorylike fortresses to process every living thing from life to death. Wyrms burst from these hulking strongholds to scour the earth and gather souls. No one was safe, as the very earth below us, sky above us and water within us conspired against us. Earthquakes, choking smoke and sudden, virulent disease spread rampant destruction and pulled all of life down a great sinkhole of despair. This crushing misery left living beings easy prey for the relentless, rampaging demons.

Many perished in that great assault. Many of those who lived cried out that the Goddess had forsaken them. Many more huddled quietly in the dark and waited for the end to come. But some were resolute that the world would not end. These heroes marshaled their forces and journeyed deep into the citadel of the invader. They crossed over into the Deep Umbra to tread the halls of Malfeas. They met the ragged beasts and did battle. They pushed the Wyrms back, and severed its connection with the world. The worlds remained sundered, physical world from spirit world. But life persevered.



Those servitors of Gaia were the greatest of heroes, and their song is sung by all tribes. We believe that they all died in that final fight, sacrificing themselves to save us. We believe that when they cut the Wyrms off from the physical plane, they perished, trapped on the other side. But that is not entirely true. One did not die in the halls of death.

One Ragabash survived the severing of the living world and lived as a spy in the lands of the Wyrms. This Ragabash, Spike, saw all that happened after the first fall of the Wyrms. It drove him mad, but he has appeared to Garou shamans in visions and revealed the tale of the creation of the three faces of the Wyrms.

Spike has revealed that all his fellow Garou made a frontal assault and perished. But he hid in the shadows and lived. He went down, down, down into the heart of Malfeas and saw the Wyrms just after it was repulsed from the physical world. He saw the great beast bubbling in its slime pit, recovering.

"Oh, I have lost," it moaned. "Creation proceeds. Generation continues unchecked. We have not ended the reign of progress. How can this be? Some part of me must be to blame!"

And with that, the bubbling, undifferentiated mass of the Wyrms roiled furiously, and three heads popped up.

"There!" two of the heads shouted, looking at the third. "There is the one who failed! Not all of me is guilty! Just that part of me!"

The third head responded angrily, "What is it I have done to you, that you would single me out in such a fashion?"

"You lost!" the first head shouted.

"Cost us the war!" the second head shouted.

"Humiliated us before the hated forces of Creation and Pattern!" the first and second head shouted in unison.

"This cannot be!" the third head protested. "We are one being!"

"But the plan for this mission came from that side of the one being!" the first head shouted. It grew a pseudopod and pointed for emphasis.

"We had nothing to do with the plan!" the second added. "So we are blameless, and you are the author of *all* the wrongdoing."

"Never!" the third head responded. "We are one being! We must not tear at ourselves!"

"We must!" the first head opined. "If we are to learn from our mistakes, we must find the part of us that erred, root it out and destroy it. In this way we will become a more crafty Wyrms and never err again."

"That is Pattern talk! You are talking like the Weaver!" the third head replied.



The second head angrily lunged for the third, growing pseudopods as it moved. It battered and clubbed the third Wyrms head with emanations of pure force and ripped the third head from the main body. "The Weaver is our enemy! Never call us that! Never!"

The head rolled across the chamber and lay gasping. "Don't you see? You are becoming like the Wyld. We are subtlety and corruption. Your uncontrolled outbursts and force are not our way!"

"Your way is no longer our way!" the first head charged. It rose up, drawing the remaining bulk of the Wyrms up into itself. It became a great Inquisitor in somber black robes. The chamber began to mutate and changed into a dark, bleak courtroom. It was no longer a great void into which matter disappeared, but was now a real place, with form and substance.

"Yes!" sneered the second head, drawing itself up into another great Inquisitor, in mimicry of the first Wyrms creature. "You have lost and may not speak for the Wyrms any longer!"

"It is my solemn duty to judge you," the first head intoned.

"Yes! It is — wait! Why isn't it my duty to judge it?" the second being demanded, turning on the first.

"Because..." the first being replied slowly, "because you will be the one to execute the sentence once I judge it."

The second Wyrms-creature was unconvinced, but said nothing.

"That is the most efficient division of labor," the first creature continued. "We can't have two judges or two executioners. And of we two, you are clearly the superior executioner."

While the second being pondered this, the third head rose up into a much smaller body and ran from the chamber.

"Yes..." the second being said haltingly, thinking as hard as it could. "I am. But why... why... why are you to be the judge? You are not clearly the superior thinker."

"Look out!" the first being shouted. "While we are pointlessly arguing, the criminal is escaping!"

The second being reacted faster than thought. It leaped to pursue the escaping third Wyrms. It ran on pure instinct, pouring forth the boundless energy of the hunt.

"I must remember that," the first creature mused to itself. "I must always provide that one with enemies, or it will turn on me and seek to find an enemy in me!"

The second creature brought in the third, who had not gotten far away.

"Very well done," the first being told the second. "Now remain vigilant, for it may flee at any time."



To the third creature, it said, "Your flight confirms your guilt. But it is still our difficult task to determine your sentence for betrayal of the Wyrn."

"You idiots!" the third creature said. "I *am* the Wyrn! How can I betray myself?"

"You didn't betray *yourself*!" the second creature shouted. "You betrayed *us*!"

"Thank you, Executioner," the first creature said impatiently. "Oh, and please make sure the prisoner is restrained."

While the second creature busied itself with fashioning restraints for the third creature, who was already unable to escape, the first creature continued with its interrogation. The restraints were like a great rack on which the third creature was tortured.

"We mounted an assault on that wretched thing that is the world, that unbridled creation given unending form. You originated the idea to obliterate the offending lands, and we charged you with doing so."

"And you *failed*!" the second creature shouted.

"That's absurd!" the third creature replied. "The thought originated throughout our being. We all carried it out. You can't just isolate one part of us to blame for it!"

"Oh yes we can!" the second being snapped back.

"You see?" the third being said from the misery of the rack. "You admit that we are still one being and that you are capriciously trying to blame just one arbitrary part. So I am innocent."

"The Executioner does not speak for the Judge!" the first being shouted.

"Yes!" agreed the second being. "The Executioner does not speak for the Judge."

"How can you go along with this sham?" the third being continued, addressing the second. "You can see that this 'Judge' is trying to take all Wyrn power for itself and make you its lackey."

"Your divisive tactics will not split this court!" the first being raged. "We are one!"

"Exactly!" the third being replied. "We are one! And we were one until you two divided us. I don't want us split. I want us reunited. Together we are strong!"

"Yes..." the second being said. "Together we are strong. I do not feel as strong as before..."

"It is trying to confuse the court!" the first being shouted. "Gag it!" But the second being did not move.

Suddenly, the third being began to laugh, a chilling, bitter laugh. "Don't you see what has happened? We have lost, and in losing we have become like our foes. It is a common occurrence, one of our favorite weapons. Whether we win or lose a fight, we



often make our enemies more like us. They need to take on our tactics to win, and so we drag them to our level. But they won, and now we are becoming more like them.”

“Executioner, gag it!”

“It won’t. It knows I’m right!” the third being continued. “Look at yourself, ‘Judge.’ You are all webs and plans and schemes, like the Weaver. And the ‘Executioner’ is just like the Wyld, a creature of force and change. Nowhere are you corruption and endings.”

“I render the verdict!” the first being said. “You are to be stripped of all your power!”

“But —” said the second Wyrms-being. “What if it’s right?”

“It’s not right! Besides, we’re both going to take its power.”

“Ah!” said the second one. “Yes, let us!”

The first Wyrms creature towered over the third. “I shall show you corruption and endings! Your end comes now!”

The third Wyrms-creature writhed in its restraints, but it could not get free. Still, it struggled mightily as the other two tried to destroy it, and they could not crush it.

At length, the second creature said to the first, “I don’t think this was such a good idea.”

“Nonsense,” the first said, sweating and out of breath. “We just have not efficiently divided our labor. You break it down, and I’ll devour it.”

The second Wyrms creature attacked with all its might and broke off a piece of the third creature. The first creature pounced on the soul-shard and devoured it.

“Ahhh!” it said with satisfaction. “See how we succeed when we work together? All that stopped us before was this little failure!”

They continued for many long hours, breaking the third creature down into little pieces and consuming the bits. In the end, the third creature lay on the floor of the court, a drooling, blank-eyed wretch.

The first creature rubbed its swollen belly and said, “Behold! I am no longer just the Wyrms! I am now the Eater-of-Souls!”

“You have consumed much, my brother,” the second creature said, dripping with sweat from its exertions. “But I have yet to gain from it.” It turned toward the first creature with malice in its eyes.

“Never let it be said that the Eater-of-Souls is not generous,” the first creature said. It opened an orifice and poured out pure, distilled Wyrms-power to the second, who drank of it with delirious delight. But the Eater-of-Souls only let out a small fraction of what it had taken in and then cut off the flow.

“Where is the rest?” the second creature demanded, hungry for more.



"I must digest and process it first," the Eater-of-Souls replied. "It is hard work, but for my faithful serv — er, partner, I shall work twice as hard. That is the efficient division of labor!"

Disappointed, the second creature looked back on the crumpled, tiny body of the third. "What shall we do with it?"

"Nothing. It's gone."

"No it's not. I couldn't destroy it."

"What? What kind of Wyrms-creature are you, that you could not destroy one little creature?"

The second creature charged the Eater-of-Souls. "I am carnage and raw power, that's what kind of a Wyrms creature I am! I shall destroy you for such slander!" So saying, it began bludgeoning the first and hacked large pieces off it.

"No!" cried the first. "We mustn't fight among ourselves! It's what our enemy wants!"

"I don't care!" said the second. "It's not fair that you got to eat all the soul-shards. It's not fair that you have a new name, and I don't. It's not fair that you accuse me of weakness in not destroying the little one. It can't be destroyed!"

"You don't have to destroy the little one!" the Eater-of-Souls conceded, trying to fend off the attack.

The second creature continued the assault.

"Stop! I'll give you more power!"

The second creature continued the attack.

"Wait! Wait!" the Eater-of-Souls begged. "I appoint you the... the... the Beast-of-War!"

The second creature stopped its assault. "Hmm... hmmm... Beast-of-War... yes, sir. I like it."

While it pondered this, the Eater-of-Souls frantically gathered up its soul-shards and reabsorbed the pieces.

"I am no longer just the Wyrms," the second creature said. "I am now the Beast-of-War!"

"And very impressive you are," the first creature said, giving the second a small dose of the soul energy it had consumed.

"I am power!" the Beast-of-War ranted, reveling in its own glory.

The third Wyrms creature stirred on the floor, moving with evident agony.

"Well, so we can't destroy this wretch, eh?" the Eater-of-Souls asked. "That could pose a problem."



"If it seeks vengeance against us, I shall stop it!" the Beast-of-War ranted, smashing up the courtroom in its drunken rampage.

"That may not be enough."

"What?" The Beast-of-War stopped still. It looked at the Eater-of-Souls with cold, murderous eyes. "What did you say? That my power might not be enough to —"

"Listen to me, you brutish clod!" the Eater-of-Souls interjected, startling the Beast-of-War with its forcefulness. "It may be weak, but it is one of us. It is as immortal as you or I. We must remain vigilant that it does not take direct power. We must see that it is always in a wounded, weakened condition, or it will one day exact its revenge!"

The Beast-of-War said nothing.

"So, this is your task: I will create plans to injure it, and you will carry them out. We will rename it... but not with a name of glory, like your new name and my new name. We shall call it... the Defiler Wyrms! For that is what it is — Defiled. It is no longer whole. It can no longer break down souls, as you can. It can no longer consume souls, as I can. All it can do is taint everything it touches with Wyrms-essence. You will then be able to break it down, and I will feed on it. I will then share the energy with you, and you will in turn provide the Defiler Wyrms with whatever meager drops you choose. But *we* will keep the real power. Agreed?"

The Beast-of-War pondered this. At length it said, "Agreed."

The Wyrms-creatures were bursting with new power stolen from the being they now called the Defiler Wyrms and they shed this power by creating loyal minions and strong servitor beasts. They then transformed the ruined courtroom into a dining room and sat themselves around the tea table. When the Defiler Wyrms recovered, it was very, very small and still. Its very soul had been pruned back almost to nothing, and it was in a formless state, knowing little and remembering less. It was very isolated and very vulnerable.

"Look!" The Beast-of-War shouted. "The little wretch has finally decided to wake up!"

"You are a failure, little Defiler Wyrms!" the Eater-of-Souls said angrily. "But because we are so wise and kindly, we will take pity on your horrid state and provide for you. I shall give the Beast-of-War sustenance for you, and the Beast-of-War will pass it along. You must always do as we say; be careful you do not make either of us angry at you, or we will cut off your source of power."

The third Wyrms creature blinked, hardly comprehending. But it grew to learn.

Spike had been watching all this and he shuddered. He feared for the future. For he could guess what was in store.



The Eater-of-Souls and the Beast-of-War continually pummeled the little Defiler Wyrms and kept it reliant on them for sustenance. They assigned it strenuous tasks and kept it starving for energy. As time passed, its blank mind became reimprinted.

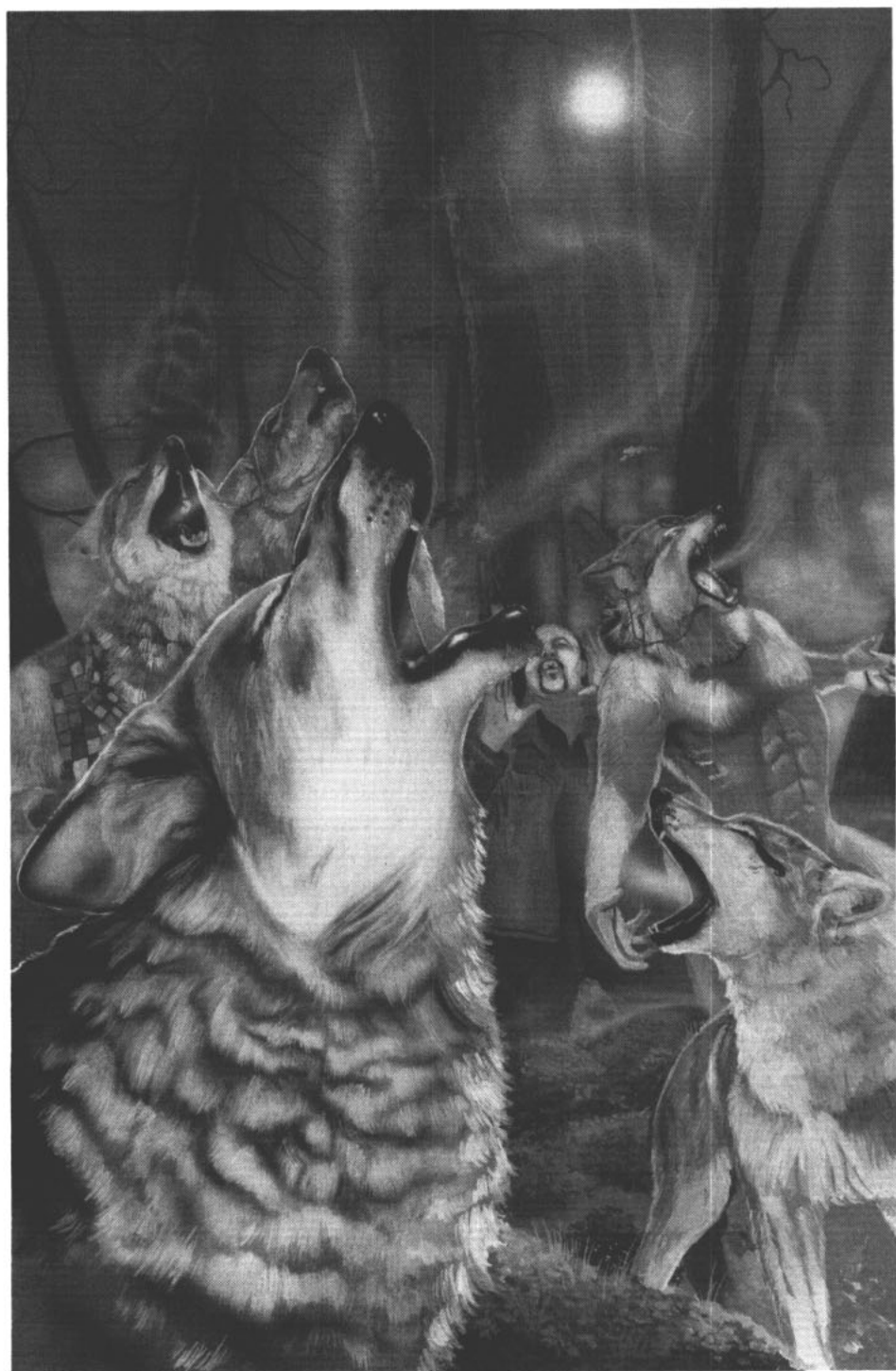
It was no longer strong part of the whole Wyrms, but a weak fragment of a precariously divided Wyrms. While the other two members of the triad grew strong and powerful, the Defiler Wyrms remained stunted. It was charged with spreading corruption over the earth, but never had enough resources to do the job right. The other two were much more effective at spreading war and harvesting souls.

But the Defiler Wyrms grew clever, developing strategies that helped it survive and even flourish. Because it could not stand up to the defenders of Gaia the way the others could, it learned to conceal its presence. Instead of attacking overtly as the others could, it attacked subtly and patiently.

The great wound in its soul called to living creatures and resonated in the souls of humans with similar spiritual wounds. It called to them across the vale of darkness and provoked them to wound others. It goaded, prodded and incited victims to pass on their victimization willingly, usually to those too vulnerable to fight back. By working this way, it escaped detection on earth. And it grew more and more powerful.

In this way, the victim of aggression became the most powerful of aggressors; the victim of bullies became the master bully. And the secretive, vengeful creature secretly works to undermine the rest of the Wyrms, even as it works to corrupt the world.

Many Garou know nothing of the Defiler Wyrms. But they need to learn. This is the lesson of Spike, the last survivor of the first Wyrms War. It knew that the old ways of fighting the Wyrms would not work. The Wyrms was weaker for taking on aspects of the Weaver and the Wyld, but it was stronger where it had become more like itself. For the Defiler Wyrms is a more purified version of the Wyrms than ever before. If the Defiler Wyrms takes over the entire Wyrms, the world is doomed.





# Afterword

A large, light gray shadow of the nest graphic from the top of the page, positioned behind the title 'Afterword'.



# The Closing of the Moot

It was done; the last tale had been told. All rose up from their fires to look about, watching each other to see if they had felt the same thing, the thrill that ran through the blood and pounded in the brain, the pride and honor of being Garou.

Great-Thunder, still wearing the skin of a human, let out a short yell, and all turned to watch him. He felt it — sensed the energy there, electric between them. It would need release. He smiled and began the shift. It was time for the revel, and the form of man would not do, nor would the form of wolf. It was time to wear the Crinos, the half-form, the form of rage.

Great-Thunder grew taller, more massive, his old muscles rippling like steel cables and snapping taut as he flexed them. Even in old age, his Crinos form could hold its own against a group of even the toughest humans. He laughed in joy, a high sound that quickly became a low growl as his snout reformed, teeth glistening in the moonlight. Hair had sprouted all over his body, and claws slipped out of his massive hands.

Great-Thunder threw back his head and let out the howl, a sound that was pure wolf, yet strangely human. The others yelled, too, jumping up and down as they did so. None of them were human now; all wore the Crinos or the Lupus, the form of wolf.

Then, unable to hold themselves back any longer, they flooded out of the clearing and into the woods, a howling-mad pack of wolves and half-humans, hard on the hunt of whatever was foolish or unfortunate enough to wander near a werewolf revel.

But Great-Thunder fell back from them, halting at the edge of the clearing. He looked up at the moon, so full and clear tonight, perfect for the moot. What was it that troubled him? Something at the edge of his thoughts, too ephemeral to declare itself. Great-Thunder sat down, shifting back to a wolf as he did so. Perhaps he really was too old now, too tired to run through the woods in a youthful hunt.

But that wasn't it, was it? No, something else tugged at him. Something deep and painful. It had been that last tale, the one about the Wyrms. He shivered as he thought about it again. Oh, it had been a Ragabash tale, but its telling had brought out memories of long ago, when he was a cub.

That was it, yes — what had bothered him all along: the death of his childhood.



It had been long ago, when another tale was told around a fire, that the burden of age was placed on Great-Thunder's spirit. It was a new tale then, concerning events that were not greatly understood, but of which some Garou had knowledge. He had heard many versions of it since, but none matched that horrid realization of his youth, the sudden understanding that made him an old wolf in his heart even as his young body still sang with new growth.

Great-Thunder wondered how *they* told the tale, for surely they knew of it, too. Yes, they must eulogize it among themselves. He shook his head. It was not good to think of them on a night like this. But they had haunted his thoughts ever since that first tale; he could not forget the Lost Tribe of the Garou, the Black Spiral Dancers.

Or their tale of Apocalypse...





# *A Tale of Apocalypse*



# Trinity Caern

by Sam Inabinet

Behold me.

Behold me now, as I beheld It.

Behold me and know, as I was made to know.

For countless ages did the Wyrms burrow its way into the heart of Gaia, round and round the Black Spiral, which we emulate in our revels. Creatures of the deep earth were we in those days, and the blindness you mark in me now was even more common in our tribe then, for light was unknown to us. But ever we reached outward, for well did we understand that in time, the Wyrms would turn, the Black Spiral would reverse its course and the realm of the upper light would someday be ours.

You are all brought to me to learn of that turning, so know first that I was not born into the tribe of the Black Spiral Dancers. Such is the power of the Wyrms that I, who once counted myself one of Its greatest foes, was favored by a vision of the truth so overwhelming, so powerful, so undeniable that I am now regarded as the greatest Philodox of our tribe, and nary a pup is initiated but that it is first brought, as you have been brought, to hear me relate my tale.

Ask me not of my early years, for I had renounced all vestige of my identity by the time I came upon this Dead Man's Trail. Of my previous tribe I will say only that they were most zealous warriors in what they thought was the cause of Gaia and they were always at the forefront of the battle we now know they cannot possibly win. In time I came to see the truth of that, for though we always returned from battle victorious, with the blood of our enemies dripping from our faces and talons, the screams of Mother Earth in our dreams only increased. While my pack-brothers took this to mean that they should only fight harder, I began to wonder if we had misinterpreted our purpose; indeed, it occurred to me that the cries of the Mother might not be cries of pain after all..

As the flame of my zeal grew dim, my pack whispered behind my back that the gloom of Harano had fallen upon me. Though my scars were many and my renown great, in time, even the greenest human pups felt they could challenge my word with impunity. I had had enough; renouncing all, I left my tribe and the lands of my birth, seeking only the emptiest wilderness, where I could be alone.

So it was that I came to the Jornada del Muerto, as it is called in the tongue of the humans. The desolation of this place well suited the emptiness of my soul, and I dwelt



here in solitude for many years. Ranches like the McDonalds' were more prosperous in those days, and I could occasionally raid their livestock, though the wild antelope of the Sierra Oscura often afforded better fare.

Time passed, and the McDonalds' prosperity waned. The house was abandoned, and I moved in to make it my den. I played at being a human, sitting in their chairs, wearing their clothing and listening to their wireless. I tried to follow the strange rites of human society, and by the time they announced this Great War of theirs, I was as sick of their tribe as I was of my own. Then I noticed that the iron birds of the humans were lingering low over the land around the house, and I began to come to the place but seldom, for the iron birds no doubt portended ill.

My only joy was in the hunt of the open desert, where I could be alone with Phoebe, the only one who ever understands.

One evening, passing the old McDonald place, I sensed that something was different. Though I tried to avoid the place, I could not help but be intrigued, for it seemed that the very earth and air and sky about me were abuzz with spirit-noise of a type I could not place or account for. Stepping sideways and reaching into the Umbra, I could discern that the Pattern Web, which is normally so loosely woven in the desert that it is virtually nonexistent, was now drawn tightly about the old ranch and was extending sensitive feeler-strands into the surrounding countryside.

It was the first time I had ever witnessed the naked work of Weaving, and I must confess that I was mildly fascinated in the midst of my puzzlement. Strands of Web were stretched taut and laid across the high alkaline plain in lines as straight as the gut before the snap. The Weaverlings themselves were unlike any spirits I had yet encountered; like spiders they were, yet large and long of leg, so much so that, in laying their lines, they could stride nigh unto the horizon itself in but a few heartbeats. Scanning the horizon, I could see three other centers of activity to the northwest, west and south, with still others farther northwest.

From where I crouched, I could just make out some of the speech of the Weaver-spiders as they chattered their work-talk back and forth; sharp and rapid it was, without the depth or nuance of the howls I knew so well, and quite incomprehensible, save when they lapsed into the tongue of the humans. Even then, most of their words held little meaning for me, of course — orders, instructions, measurements, specifications in the human fashion of building — but even in the midst of all that were snatches of most evocative poetry. They spoke of “tickling the tail of the Dragon,” of the “Little Boy” and the “Thin Man” and the “Fat Man” — perhaps that was the “Fat Soul” of Alamogordo, not far southeast of here — of “alpha scattering” and “beta decay,” but the name most often invoked was “Trinity.”



Once the spider-spirits left, I ventured into the ranch house, treading with care so as not to disturb the Web. Though much of its import was lost to me, I could tell that some great moot was being prepared, for the Web marked out spaces for a complex series of rites amid a maze of altars and shrines. I had learned a little of how the humans created their fetishes, cumbersome and unwieldy things in which the materials were held to be of greater account than the spirit indwelling, and I reckoned that the McDonald ranch was to be the site of such a ritual.

What did this all portend? I stepped from the house to petition the land and sky for answers.

The normally calm and imperturbable earth elementals of the Jornada were now tense with anticipation, like a sleeper who has awakened yet dares not move. To the east, the shoulders of the Oscura mountains were shrugged tight, bracing themselves for some hardship to come. The spirits of the earth would tell me nothing.

The sky, on the other hand, was aboil with controversy. The spirits of the air had looked down upon this Web stretched across the desert and had read in its arcane patterns runes of doom. "This spells an end to us all!" some cried. There was talk of calling in Grandfather Thunder to shatter the Web. Never had I seen the vast and unconcerned heavens in such an uproar over human endeavor; even the great iron birds rarely provoked more than an indulgent chuckle.

Loath to draw the angry sky's notice upon myself, I set about to reckoning the airts of the Web. The center of the array seemed to be in the northwest, and as I moved in that direction, I became aware of a whole new order of strangeness. In my fascination with the Web-spinners, I had forgotten about the thin, buzzing noise that had first alerted me to these disturbances of the Umbra. So thin and high it was, like a swarm of insects infinitely tiny and infinitely numerous, that I had to focus my mind upon it to be certain that it remained.

As I approached the center of t'he Web, the buzzing increased, becoming louder, more definite, more pervasive. This must be some new creation of the human fetish-makers, I thought, some strange, raw, alien spirit freshly spawned in that mad, careening rush they call progress. But as it grew and threatened to overwhelm me, I began to feel its power, too ancient, too strong, too far-reaching to be the voice of a young spirit. It was certainly elemental, this noise, but of an order beyond any elemental of my experience.

The center of the Web was not on the ground, but some hundred feet in the air. The configuration of the Pattern bespoke a simple construct, a base of liquid stone forming the foundation for a tower of metal beams that supported a lifting machine and a simple metal shed. And within that unbuilt shed... the Center; dizzily hypnotic in its complexity, entirely unreadable to me, the awaiting locus-pattern of some as-yet-



unmade thing whose very shadow caused the ground at my feet to cower in terror and the heavens above to boil in outrage. From this locus did the ancient elemental voices cry out, and long did I sit there beneath it, struggling to distinguish what it was that they said, and puzzling over this strange new human mystery.

The Weaver is mad. All know this. It is of old account, taught to the greenest pups in initiation and sagely agreed upon by the eldest Philodoxes at the great moots. They say that when She first looked into the heart of the Great Web, all sense and reason fled Her, and Her wise and gentle work of the evolution of life became an incessant spinning of decay, of corruption. Her Web has grown into a thing of mindless order without logic, overturning the balance of pattern and chaos until even the ever-free, ever-changing Wyld has been fettered by its strands. In granting Her powers of creation to her children, the humans, She has sealed the fate of Gaia, for in that which they call “progress,” they follow nothing more nor less than the track of the Wyrms, the path of decay and of stagnation. And the children of the Wyld are taught that such a road leads only to death.

Such were my thoughts as I sat and pondered, there with the Web spreading about me and that mad buzzing in my ears. The words of the Prophecy of the Phoenix sprang unbidden to my mind: “So many humans. And they fell against each other, one to one, and the Wyrms brought forth corruption and made them each take a little. And their strange Fire I saw, out of control, the great Plume rising over the wilderness, spreading death wherever it went in that dark and cold land...” I spoke the words aloud to myself, thinking, truly, the days of the third Sign are hard upon the land.

And, as I spoke aloud, naming the Eternal Fire, the voices above and around me started as though in recognition. Could it be? Were these the voices of those first and most numerous children of the Wyld, the great Fires of Creation, now sundered and spread so thin by the Weaving that none but the very wisest of Theurges can discern their tongue? Were they seeking to warn me away from the terrible rite being prepared in this place? Was I being called upon to summon the tribes to avert this new phase of the Apocalypse? Or were they simply howling their agony in the certain knowledge of their impending fate?

Armed with this realization, I called upon that portion of the Eternal Fire within my own breast to help me understand their words. Turning wiser ears up to the high, thin whining, I opened my heart to receive their message.

And I heard.

And I understood.

And I left that place, retiring to my lair in the Oscura. And I did not run down the antelope of the sierra, though hunger rolled loudly in my gut. And I sought not the counsel and solace of Phoebe, though the Harano lay at its heaviest upon my spirit in



that hour. And I laid my head down as though to sleep, though I was not tired, and I tried to wrap my brain around this conundrum, though I knew such an effort could lead only to madness.

For the voices of the Eternal Fire were raised in joy and anticipation, and they chanted, "Free! Free! Soon we shall be free!"

In the months that followed, trucks and men came to the ranch and its surrounding areas to begin the rites of building. Lines were drawn across the ground, areas paced off, stakes driven in and strings tied to them, flags planted and so forth, all so that the men could follow the patterns laid out by the Weaver-spiders. Materials were brought in and stacked up, new shelters erected, and the ranch house was emptied to make room for the fetish-making shrines.

To the north, west and south, some six miles or so from the Center, large holes were gouged into the earth and made into artificial caves of metal and liquid stone; a large camp to house the warriors was prepared 10 miles to the south and yet another 20 miles to the north at Compania Hill, which commanded a clear view of most of the plain. Poles were erected to bear the lines through which their electricity elementals ran, carrying messages from one group to the other. And when the men and their vehicles became too numerous for the dirt paths to bear, then came the inevitable liquid stone, poured along the roads to make the wild sierra fit for human endeavor.

Many of the men who came wore the drab greenish hides that proclaimed their warrior status. After the fashion of human warriors, however, they walked not with pride in their hearts and fire in their eyes, but in sullen submission to their pack-leaders: fat, grim-faced elders whose renown was marked in jewelry rather than battle-scars. Unused to life away from their dens of stone and steel, these humans stumbled clumsily around the gray, hard mesquite, cut themselves on the razor-sharp yucca; danced like scared children away from every passing fire ant, tarantula and rattlesnake; and grumpily shook the centipedes and scorpions from their boots each morning. I laughed, but when they took to hunting the wild antelope with their loudly chattering thundersticks, I reckoned it wise to keep my distance.

There is little to tell of the next few months; if you crave details, then read the words of the humans regarding this rite. Though tediously belabored with the intricacies of fetish-making, some occasional insights emerge for those who understand as do we. "Trinity," they call it in their tales, and I have judged the name well chosen and keep it as our own, for reasons you all shall understand when I have finished speaking.

As the warriors and workers completed their gross preparations, in came the Theurges, the truest children of the Weaver, eyes bright with brilliance and wisdom



and giddy with their own powers of creation — so giddy that they had no idea of the true purpose of their great rite.

I marvel now at the subtlety of our Master the Wyrm, for these men were not mere fomori; though Scrag and Kalus and Psychomachiae hovered about them constantly in the Umbra, they bent their backs to the Wyrm's work secure in the certain knowledge that they strove for the good of all, invulnerable in their innocence. Had I known then, I might have fled for good. Now I laugh at the ingenuity of it all.

Things neared their climax as the hottest days of summer closed in. Trucks arrived in vanguards with flashing lights and howls of warning. The pieces of the great fetish were brought forth in their cradles of packing stuffs and soft hides, carefully assembled within the ranch house and ever so gently hoisted to the top of the great central tower.

To look upon it, you might think it was the egg of some ancient dragon, shattered once and then bandaged imperfectly together again, for its metal skin had been cast in like shape, and the men hovering about clucked and fretted over it like mother hens. So you might think, I say, and you would not be far off the mark.

The work went slowly, for the spirits of the air had made good their threats. Great storms were summoned from the warm gulf far in the southeast, advancing in thunderous processions to spend their fury upon this stretch of desert. But the Trinity Web's purpose had been fulfilled, and the rage of the heavens availed naught against stone and steel.

As the day of the rite grew nigh, I could not help but partake of the tension that gripped the humans. I skirted the dens, the camp and the hill, watching from a safe distance as they chatted nervously about the workings of the fetish, complained about the weather, played cards or laughed at the sound of the frogs mating in the puddles.

The most valuable component of the great fetish, and apparently the hardest to procure, was delivered with much ceremony. Like two halves of a simple metal ball it was, but with spirit-wise eyes, I could see that it blazed brightly with that most ancient of the Wyld's power. One of the warrior chieftains, concerned over the weight of the thing, hefted it in his paws, but then hastily set it down again. Perhaps he was frightened by the slow burn of the Eternal Fire like a live rabbit against his skin. Perhaps he suddenly realized that what he held was to become the Eye of the Wyrm.

It was to happen at dawn; this much I could tell. The chieftains whined that the rains would spoil their tight schedule. Their Theurges assured them that the storm would be spent by dawn and the skies clear enough for the rite. Near where I hid at the south den, I heard the words of the chief of the Theurges, a thin, birdlike whelp who smoked tobacco constantly and kept quiet but strong spirits of wisdom and leadership bound in his crumpled, wide-brimmed hat. He wondered aloud whether the great Trinity rite would set the skies aflame, and I could tell by his words that he spoke not



in the poetic manner for which he was noted, but entertained a literal possibility — that the heat of the Eternal Fire was such that it could ignite the very air itself, burning Gaia's mantle clean off. It was inconceivable, a thing I could not even begin to envision — and yet... storms had been summoned from afar, and the elementals above raged wild with fear.

"You're theorizing over our heads, Oppenheimer," growled the chieftain at his side, "and speaking for the Pentagon, I don't like it!"

The rain stopped not long before dawn; the storms, not realizing that they had spent themselves too soon, retreated to greater heights to await the rising of the sun. Little did they know that the sun would arise twice over the Jornada that morning.

The Theurges began their chant of "T minus" to signal the commencement of the Rite of the Trinity. From the den beside me, a green light went screaming into the sky, trailing smoke. From the camp far behind us, a great howl arose in answer. The humans finished their personal preparations: some pulled heavy gloves over their paws, others rubbed oils and balms onto their faces, and nearly all wore dark eyeglasses or held sheets of dark glass carefully before their faces. Not all were permitted to witness the event; many were ordered to lie with their faces in the sand turned away from the Center. Few did so. "We were determined to look the beast in the eye," a Theurge later explained, not realizing the literal truth of his words. A gong sounded at the den, commanding all to readiness.

Now bear in mind that what happened next took but a few heartbeats to pass, as the body reckons time. As with events of such import, however, the soul can pass through years in but an instant. Even the accounts of the humans attest to this.

From the den, the word of command was sent forth upon the back of a racing electric spirit, across the desert and up into the fetish at the top of the tower. It ignited the volatile albumen of the dragon's egg. The shell of the egg was so strong that it contained the resulting blast, turning it back in upon itself, where it drove the two halves of the orb in its heart together to form what even the humans themselves called... an eyeball.

For the first time in eons beyond count, the Wyrms looked upon the surface of Gaia.

From Its Weaver-fashioned throne atop the high tower, It surveyed the Journey of Death and saw that it was a dry, empty land much to Its liking.

And It swept Its gaze from the spectators on distant Compania Hill down to the huddled stone dens and on to the camp beyond, where rows of men lay in the sandy trenches arrayed like willing sacrifices.

And The Wyrms turned Its gaze upon me.

And I withered in the full force of it.



For in the depths of that gaze, I fell through the abyss of Malfeas, where dwells Our Master, plummeting through nothing toward a coiling, in-folding maze, the true Black Spiral Labyrinth.

And I, though gaunt and gray with all my battles fought and all my songs sung, found myself once more a naked, mewling whelp thrust into the First Rite.

Mark me, pups! When your Rite of Passage is hard upon you, you will wish you had listened closer.

The stony expanse of the Labyrinth gaped before me as hordes of snapping Banes goaded me into the first steps of the Dance. Careening into the cavernous corridors of the outer circle, I struggled to keep my senses and bearings. As the Banes fell back from harrying me, I paused to grasp at a small measure to increase my chances surviving the ordeal.

You have all heard the tale of the hero who wound his way through a maze with a spool of thread to mark his way. I had no spool, but cunning needs no precedents. With trembling talon, I started cutting across the back of my paw, winding down around my wrist until I had a strip long enough to knot and wedge into a crack in the wall.

And I resumed the Dance with fresh frenzy, whirling a howling agony as I slowly flayed myself across the vast stone floors, marking with a taut, dripping thong my passage through the Labyrinth.

By the time I whirled into view of the Great Bane who guards the entrance to the next circle I was no more than a slab of fresh meat, and the Bane might well have feasted upon that slab had not rage reared its head through my agony. Though its ebon claws made butcher's work of my frame, I throated it in the end.

I gathered up my dangling shreds of muscle and sinew and braided them into a cord with which I traced my passage, peeling off fresh thew to add to its length until I needed both hands to keep from dropping my bowels as I danced through the narrow defiles of the Labyrinth.

Deeper into the maze I plunged, but the dark pit of the center seemed no closer. This only increased the speed and frenzy of my Dance, for I had come too far not to know the truth.

At the next circle, I commenced to unravel my viscera, glad to be free of its encumbering weight.

And when I had no more gut to garnish my tracks, I tore the loosely hanging veins and nerves from my frame, spinning them into a fine, slick thread that I stretched down the halls and around the corners of the Labyrinth.



As I stood at the entrance to the next circle, reveling in the astonishment on the Guardian Bane's face when it realized that it had been bested by a bag of bones, I plunged my hand into my heart, pulling forth my very honor itself, and continued my dance, leaving upon the cold stone floors a wake of respect, loyalty, justice.

When honor failed at the next entrance, I tore what little wisdom remained to me from my brain and spun into my final career, trailing crumbs of temperance, prudence and mercy through the tightly coiled tunnels in the bowels of the Labyrinth.

And at the following gate did I fall, stripped to the bare bones of my being: tooth, claw, and rage.

And through the tears of my despair, I saw the great black shape loom far above, and the crimson glare of its baleful Eye swept across the face of the Black Spiral Labyrinth, assessing the route of my passage as one might mark the trail of a slug across rocks, measuring the extent of my will, weighing the strength of my fury and running a thumb along the edge of my cunning as a warrior might test a new klaive.

And the Wyrmspoke with tongues of thunder in my ears: "Of all who have danced the Black Spiral since the beginning of time, only you have attained the threshold of this circle. Therefore, the great secret of this circle, the Great Secret of the Trinity, is unveiled for you alone among all the Changing Breed.

"Yes, I know you and your kind of old, for the Garou have sworn themselves My enemies and inflicted grievous wounds upon Me in the past. They are but children, and are more closely bound to me than they suppose.

"But I can see that your heart is sick with futile strife, and now open to My Truth. So know that I claim Gaia for My own, for the spawn of the Weaver have welcomed Me with their great rite. Know that I am One with Weaver and Wyld, for it is the joining of Our efforts in trine that calls all of the Tellurian into Being. Ever and always has it been thus.

"Know that the great Rite of the Trinity heralds the certain coming of the Apocalypse, but that event is not what you were reared to believe it. Shed the despair you once felt when you heard the cries of Gaia in your dreams and consider what you learn here. The humans shall perform this rite many, many more times all over the world, just as the Father must cast his seed many times before the Mother is fertilized. And consider the women of your own pack or Kinfolk when they are heavy with pups. Can their moods be negotiated with reason? Could it be that Gaia weeps tears of joy, not agony as the other Garou suppose?

"For having the courage to look upon the naked truth of Our work, I now make of you My prophet, My voice. Know that I have children of Mine own among the Garou, whom you may know as the Dancers of the Black Spiral. Even the wisest among them know not this Great Secret, and the time is nigh that they should come to know



it. They shall come to this place, to revel in the wonder of My work, and to draw sustenance and inspiration from the energies I shall leave behind Me to mark My passing. I would that you speak to them, passing on the wisdom that you gained by being here, by witnessing this.”

And the Eye of the Wyrn burst, pouring forth the Eternal Fire in torrents so great that I have seen nothing but the flash of that instant ever since, for it bleached my eyes with its brilliance. I have been told that even the face of Phoebe glowed in that flash.

And the wind from the blast slammed me to the ground as though a solid wall of stone swept the face of the desert. I heard the man who stood upon the stone den hit the ground as I did.

And the Wyld poured forth in all directions, the raw, naked, ancient Fire — not the subtle, insistent force we know, nor even the furies of a raging Vortex, but the unbound energies one only finds in the Deep Umbra, the savage blaze of Father Sun himself. Six miles away, I felt my fur curl in its heat. The elemental spirits that lived in the Eternal Fire screamed the victory of their freedom as they flew past me, around me, through me.

And while thunder rolled from mountain to mountain across the desert, I felt the heat of the fireball rise into the sky, cloaking itself in clouds of smoke and ash, and I did not need to see its shape to know that this was the Plume of which the Prophecy spoke. Even the proud storms of the gulf drew back in awed silence to let it pass.

And I heard the man who had stood upon the stone den clap his hand upon the shoulders of another and say, “Oppie, you owe me 10 dollars.” And I could hear in the center of his breast as he spoke the rustle of dry leaves and insect husks, and I knew that he had just danced a spiral of his own.

For days I wandered the Jornada, fleeing from the scent of humans and sustaining myself by gnawing on the partially eviscerated carcasses of snakes, jackrabbits and antelope that were caught too near the blast. The humans packed up their fetishes and left, carrying in their guts the gifts of the Wyrn, which would in time ripen and reveal to them the truth of Whom their rite had actually served.

Before long, the first of the Black Spiral Dancers arrived. I told my tale and they listened with mounting wonder, and when I was done, we set about the Rite of Caern Building, and the tribe accepted me with all due ceremony.

They led me back here to the Center, marveling at the total obliteration of everything that had been built upon the spot. The Wyld had carved a nest for itself across the face of the sierra. Only the liquid stone foundations that had braced the legs of the tower remained. The floor of the crater was littered with these glass beads, as warm tonight with the essence of the Wyrn as they were so many, many moons ago.



They are indeed a powerful fetish, and you should each find your own to commemorate your initiation here.

Enough of my baying. I am old and blind and the gifts of the Wyrn weigh heavily upon me in my age. Behold me: I was not born blind, nor was I born a mule.

Suffice you pups to gather your fetishes, and when you leave here, remember my tale, for the time will come when you must Dance the Black Spiral yourselves.

*Batter my heart, three person'd God; for you  
As yet but knocke, breathe, shine, and seeke to mend;  
That I may rise, and stand, o'erthrow mee, and bend  
Your force to breake, blowe, burn and make me new.*

— John Donne



# Lexicon



The following is a brief lexicon of terms in broad use among the Garou. They have taken words from many different sources, and an etymological study of their language would lead back to a veritable babel of tongues. However, any attempt to understand Garou and their culture must begin with the peculiar language they have created and with which they define themselves.

### *Common Parlance*

These words are in common use among the Garou.

**Apocalypse:** The age of destruction, the final cycle, the birth of death, the everlasting corruption, the end of Gaia — a word used in Garou mythology for the days of the final battle with the Wyrn, which many consider to be the present.

**Auspice:** The phase of the moon under which a particular Garou was born. Commonly thought to determine personality and tendencies. The auspices are: Ragabash (New Moon; Trickster), Theurge (Crescent Moon; Seer), Philodox (Half-Moon; Ritualist), Galliard (Gibbous Moon; Moon Dancer), Ahroun (Full Moon; Warrior).

**Bane:** Evil spirits who follow the Wyrn. There are many different kinds of Bane: Scrag, Kalus, Psychomachiae and more.

**Bawn:** Boundary area around a caern, where mortals are watched.

**Blight:** Any corrupted area in either the spirit world or physical reality.

**Breed:** The ancestry of a Garou, be it wolf, human or other Garou.

**Caern:** A sacred place; a meeting spot where the Garou can come into close contact with the spirit world.

**Celestine:** The greatest of the spirits, the closest thing the Garou have to gods.

**Chimera:** The tribal totem of the Stargazers. A shapeshifting, enigmatic spirit.

**Concolation:** A great moot, wherein many tribes come together to discuss matters that concern the Nation of Garou.



**Concord, The:** The agreement all the tribes reached nearly 9,000 years ago, after which the Impergium was ended. The traditions thereof are still obeyed today.

**Corruption:** The act of destroying life and the often overwhelming effects of the Wyrms' actions. In the present age, it often specifically refers to the ecological ruin human wreak upon the environment.

**Crinos:** The half-wolf, half-human form of the Garou.

**Deep Umbra:** The aspects of the Umbra that are not of Gaia, but are only found away from the Realm. Reality becomes more and more fragmented the farther away one gets from the Realm.

**Delirium:** The madness that ensues when humans look upon a Garou in Crinos form.

**Diana:** Greek goddess of the moon, also known as Artemis or the Huntress.

**Domain:** The territory claimed and patrolled by a pack or sept.

**Falcon:** The tribal totem of the Silver Fangs. A noble and brave spirit.

**Feral:** Slang term for Lupus.

**Gaffling:** A simple spirit servant of a Jagglings, Incarna or Celestine. Gafflings are rarely sentient.

**Gaia:** The earth and related realms, in both physical and spiritual form; the Mother Goddess.

**Garou:** The term the werewolves use for themselves.

**Hispo:** The near-wolf form of the Garou.

**Homid:** A Garou of human ancestry. Occasionally used disdainfully by ferals (i.e. "That boy fights like a homid").

**Impergium:** The 3,000 years after the birth of the age of agriculture, during which strict population quotas were maintained on all human villages.

**Incarna:** Children of the Celestine, but still greater spirits by any measure; demigods.

**Jagglings:** A spirit servant of an Incarna or Celestine.

**Kenning:** The empathic calling some Garou perform when howling.



**Klaine:** A fetish dagger, usually of great spiritual potency, nearly always made of silver.

**Litany:** The code of laws kept by the Garou.

**Lupus:** A Garou of wolf origin.

**Metis:** The sterile offspring of two Garou. Often deformed and generally reviled by Garou society.

**Moon Bridge:** A gate between two caerns that appears during ceremonies held at one of the caerns.

**Moon-Calf:** Idiot, simpleton.

**Moot:** A conclave of a sept or tribe that takes place at a caern.

**Mule:** Slang for metis.

**Near Umbra:** The part of the spirit world around each realm. Usually used to describe the area of the Umbra that is around the earth.

**Nexus Crawler:** One of the most dreaded and horrifying of the Wyrms' Bane minions, a Nexus Crawler can warp the very fabric of reality.

**Pack:** A small group of Garou bound to each other by ties of friendship and mission, as opposed to culture.

**Pegasus:** The tribal totem of the Black Furies. She is the defender of sacred sites.

**Reaching:** Traveling into the spirit world.

**Realms:** The worlds of "solid" reality within the Tellurian. Earth is referred to as the Realm.

**Ronin:** A Garou who has chosen or is forced to leave the tribe. It is a harsh fate to become a "lone wolf."

**Sept:** The group of Garou who live near and tend an individual caern.

**Stormcrows:** Spirit servants to Grandfather Thunder, the tribal totem of the Shadow Lords. They are his eyes and ears.

**Tellurian:** The whole of reality.

**Totem:** The spirit taken by an individual or tribe to represent its inner nature.

**Triat, The:** The Weaver, the Wyld and the Wyrms. The trinity of primal cosmic forces.



**Tribe:** The larger community of Garou. Tribe members are often bound by similar totems and lifestyles.

**Umbra:** The astral plane around each realm.

**Veil, the:** See *Delirium*.

**Ways, The:** The traditions of the Garou.

**Weaver, The:** Manifestation and symbol of order and pattern. Computers, science, logic and mathematics are examples of the Weaver's influence on the material plane.

**Wyld, The:** Manifestation and symbol of pure change. The chaos of transmutation and elemental force.

**Wurm, The:** Manifestation and symbol of evil, entropy and decay in Garou belief. Vampires are of the Wurm, as are toxic waste and pollution.

**Wurmhole:** A place sacred to the Wurm, invariably a location of great corruption.

## **Vulgar Argot**

The younger Garou use these words to help distinguish themselves from the elders whom they are supposed to respect.

**Ape:** Slang for human or homid. If the speaker wishes to indicate true contempt for her subject, she may use the word "monkey" instead.

**Cadaver:** A derogatory term for a vampire.

**Flock, The:** All of humanity, particularly those humans from whom the Garou recruit their members.

**Gremlin:** A malevolent spirit.

Leech: See Cadaver.

**Run:** A ritual hunt or revel that takes place at the conclusion of a moot.

**Sheep:** Humans.

**Stepping Sideways:** Entering the spirit world. Most elders consider this term flippant and disrespectful.

**Throat:** To best another in ritual combat. Used as a verb (i.e. "I throated his sorry butt").



## Old Form

These words hail from the distant past of the Garou and are no longer used frequently. However, all Garou know these terms.

**Adren:** A pupil or a student who learns from a mentor.

**Airts:** The magical paths within the spirit world (e.g. Moon Bridges).

**Aisling:** A journey into the spirit world.

**Anamae:** “Soul-friend,” most often a bond with a tribal spirit.

**Anruth:** A Garou who travels from caern to caern, but is bound to none of them.

**Athro:** Teacher, mentor.

**Awen:** The sacred Muse, the creative impulse. Some say she is a spirit, but she has never been found. Moon Dancers periodically go on quests for her.

**Banshi:** Angry, spiteful and often malevolent spirits.

**Brugh:** Any sort of sacred place, whether a Garou caern or a Wyrnhole. Often a glade or cave located somewhere in the wilderness.

**Charach:** A Garou who sleeps with another Garou or has done so in the past. Often used as a word of anger.

**Chiminage:** Traditionally, a sept can make a request of any Garou who use its caern; “Chiminage” is the term for the request.

**Cliath:** A young Garou, not yet of any standing rank.

**Fomori:** Humans who have turned to the Wyrn and draw their power from it. They are the enemies of the Garou.

**Fostern:** A Garou’s pack brothers and sisters; those who are her family by choice.

**Gallain:** The Kinfolk of the Garou—those humans and wolves who are related to the people and are not prone to Delirium, but who are not of the blood.

**Harano:** Inexplicable gloom, inexpressible longing for unnameable things. Some say it is depression caused by contemplation of Gaia’s suffering.



**-ikthya:** “Of the Wyrn”; a suffix appended to a name.

**Inceptor:** A Garou who guides another through a rite.

**Kinain:** The relationship among Garou who are related by blood through an ancestor. This term of endearment and pride is never used when referring to metis.

**Pericarp:** The Near Umbra around each realm.

**Phoebe:** The moon.

**Praenomen:** The guardians spirit of a pack.

**-rhya:** “Greater in station”; a suffix appended to a name.

**Urrah:** Garou who live in the city; also, the tainted ones.

**-yuf:** “Honored equal”; a suffix appended to a name.

## *The Tribes*

**Black Furies:** Composed almost entirely of women, the Furies are the servants of the Wyld and the avengers of the Garou.

**Black Spiral Dancers:** Corrupt and vile, the Black Spiral Dancers are all deranged. They are the Lost Tribe who swore allegiance to the Wyrn.

**Bone Gnawers:** Living as vagrants on the streets of the city, the Gnawers are always well informed and universally despised.

**Children of Gaia:** The most moderate of all the tribes, the Children have become the mediators of the Garou and the defenders of humanity. Their young, however, often become radicals and join various subcultures.

**Fianna:** Every member of this tribe is of Celtic descent, and the Fianna are exceedingly proud of this heritage. They live wherever their kinfolk make their homes and keep in close contact with them at all times.

**Get of Fenris:** Savage and bloodthirsty, the Get are largely of Norse descent and proud of it. They tend to dominate the rural countries and towns where they live.

**Glass Walkers:** Of all the tribes, the Walkers are the most well adjusted to the city and the least trusted by the other Garou. They tend to mix with the underworld and frequently employ high technology.



**Red Talons:** Composed entirely of lupus, the Red Talons think that the best way to save Gaia is to destroy the cancer — the humans — once and for all.

**Shadow Lords:** Very domineering and demanding, the Shadow Lords are trying to win the leadership of the Garou from the Silver Fangs. They would do almost anything for power.

**Silent Striders:** Silent Striders live their lives on the road, constantly moving and traveling. They breed almost exclusively with gypsies, circus performers and other such wanderers. They know many secrets of both the mortal and spirit worlds.

**Silver Fangs:** The most prestigious of all the tribes, the Fangs have mated with the noblest humans and wolves for centuries. They are inbred, however, and have become tainted with sickness.

**Stargazers:** Cerebral and contemplative, the Stargazers wander the world in search of enlightenment and truth, but are staunch opponents of the Wyrn nonetheless.

**Uktena:** The sly and mysterious Uktena are the most capable magicians of the Garou and are thus widely distrusted.

**Wendigos:** The only purely Native American Garou left, the Wendigo are fiercely independent and still determined to drive the invaders from the North American continent.

# WEREWOLF

*The Apocalypse™*

## Product List

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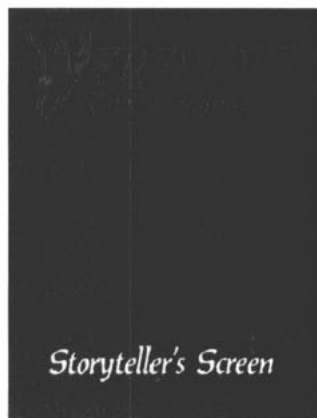
The forces of creation and destruction clash in this storytelling game of Savage Horror. Gaia, the earth mother, is wounded. The minions of the Wyrms eat away at Her, digging up the earth and rending Her form. Gaia cries for aid and Her children — the Garou, the werewolves of legend — answer the call. The Garou must use all their shapeshifting power and Rage to fight back against the onslaught of corruption and evil.

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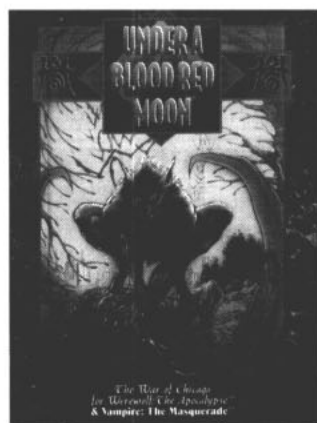
The Garou cannot recover every cub. Those that suffer the First Change without the support of their tribe are lost. The characters are recruited to hunt down the lost cubs, those who endanger themselves and the Veil with their madness. But something casts a shadow on the Foundation. Can the Pack recognize the danger within and avert it in time? *Valkenburg Foundation* is a story supplement that includes five stories designed to be run in chronological order.



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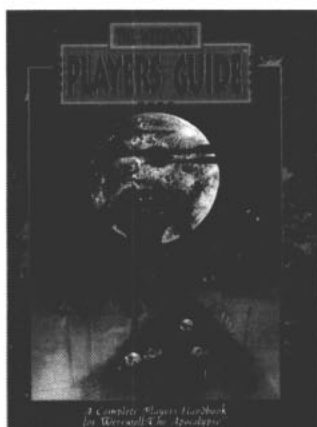
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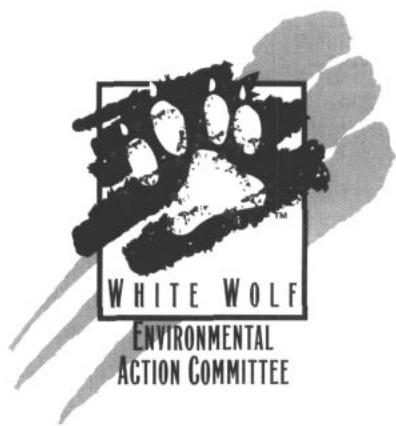
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One of the major ideas in **Werewolf: The Apocalypse** is that the world is in danger from the corrupting, polluting influence of the Wyrm. The danger to the environment isn't just an element of horror fantasy, and the White Wolf Environmental Action Committee is our response to the very real danger we face.

White Wolf has pledged 3% of its profits from the sale of **Werewolf: The Apocalypse** to a fund that is managed by the White Wolf EAC. The EAC is interested in helping fund small-scale projects that have a practical impact.

If you know of a small-scale organization that is doing vital work to help the environment, please write to:

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Public Liaison

**White Wolf Environmental Action Committee**

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Include the organization's name, address, phone number, and any pertinent information. We will contact the organization directly. Thanks in advance for your help.

