

Forgotten Ground Regained

A Quarterly Journal of Alliterative Verse

New Series, Issue 12 , Fall 2026

Speculative Visions

Forgotten Ground Regained

Issue 12: Speculative Visions

Masthead

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The journal is now open for submissions for the Winter 2027 issue, which is an open submission call with no special theme. You can read the full call for submissions later in this issue.

To join Forgotten Ground Regained's email discussion forum, navigate to the following link: https://gaggle.email/join/forgotten-ground-regained@gaggle.email.

The cover image is based on an image of Mars taken by NASA with the James Webb Space Telescope, with graphics added by Julie Anne Deane. The decorative border images are courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

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Notes

1. In poetry intended to closely imitate Old English alliterative verse, editors usually mark the caesura, or break between half-lines, by inserting four or more extra spaces between the half-lines. However, this format often leads to readers treating the caesura as a far stronger break than it really is. In some Old English manuscripts, the caesura was indicated by a small, raised dot, or *conus*. This inspired my default house style for poems closely imitating the Old English style. Unless the poet directs otherwise or the content of the poem suggests a different format, where no punctuation is present, I insert a conus between the two half lines. But where punctuation is already present, I add just one extra space after the punctuation mark.

2. No part of this publication may be used or reproduced in any manner for the purpose of training artificial intelligence technologies or systems. Where no image credit is provided, images in this issue are from the Microsoft Word stock image library.

Contributors

Poul Anderson (1926-2001) was a noted science fiction and fantasy author and a key influence driving the revival of alliterative verse in the speculative fiction community in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. His contributions are documented in Dennis Wise's 2023 anthology, *Speculative Poetry and the Modern Alliterative Revival: A Critical Anthology* (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press). Two of his best alliterative poems are reprinted in this issue: "The Scothan Queen" and "Route-Song of the Winged Folk".

Adam Bolivar is a formal poet of dark fantasy, a weird fiction writer and a playwright for marionettes with a particular interest in alliterative verse, balladry and "Jack" tales. He is the author of *The Lay of Old Hex* (Hippocampus Press, 2017), *The Ettinfell of Beacon Hill* (Jackanapes Press, 2021), *Ballads for the Witching Hour* (Hippocampus Press 2022), *A Wheel of Ravens* (Jackanapes Press, 2023), a collection of original alliterative verse, and *Told by Firelight in Timbered Halls: A Wordhord*, a second collection of alliterative verse. A native of Boston, Massachusetts, he now resides in Portland, Oregon.

Matthew Brennan is a poet and a critic, and emeritus professor of English at Indiana State University. He has published six poetry collections, including *Snow in New York: New and Selected Poems* (2021), *One Life* (2016), and *The House with the Mansard Roof* (2009). His most noted alliterative work is *The Sea-Crossing of Saint Brendan*, a retelling of the medieval legend.

Garrett Carroll is a poet, writer, and sometimes musician whose work has been in *Star*Line Magazine*, *Abyss & Apex*, *Aphelion Webzine*, and various other publications. He is the author of *Hessen*, an alliterative epic set in surrealist space. He also runs a YouTube channel called Garretttocreate.

D.A. Cooper is a poet from Houston, Texas. His poetry & translations have recently appeared in *Illuminations of the Fantastic*, *Lighten Up Online*, *THINK*, and *Wayfare*, among others. He serves as an associate editor at *New Verse Review: A Journal of Lyric and Narrative Poetry*.

Emer Curley is a nuclear engineer and poet originally from Northern Ireland and now living in Somerset, England. She writes horror and speculative poetry, alongside elegy and lyric, mostly in formal verse. Emer was introduced to alliterative verse through "The Dream of the Rood" during her studies at Cambridge. Its speaking cross was an early model for the non-human narrators she still favours. She has poetry forthcoming in *Not One of Us*.

Matthew Dickerson is a professor at Middlebury College and the author of several books. He studied Old English Literature at Cornell University while earning a PhD in Computer Science. His published fiction includes the medieval historical novels *The Finnsburgh Encounter* (1991) and *The Rood and the Torc* (2014), and the fantasy novel *The Gifted* (2015). He has also published numerous books and chapters exploring the writings of J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis.

Clarabelle Miray Fields is a speculative writer from Boulder, Colorado, who spends the majority of her free time outside hunting for starships and hoping that dragons are still real. She holds a BA in classical languages, *summa cum laude*, and often writes within the realms of feminism, scifi, and ancient myth. Her work has appeared in the 2026 *Dwarf Stars Anthology*, *SpecPoVerse*, *Eternal Haunted Summer*, *Corvid Queen*, and *Circe's Cauldron*, among others. She has also been nominated for several Rhysling Awards and Best of the Net. Currently, she edits *Carmina Magazine*, a publication dedicated to modern mythmaking. You can keep up with her latest exploits and adventures @cfieldswriting on Instagram.

George Campbell Hay (1915–1984) was a Scottish Symbolist poet and translator who wrote in Scottish Gaelic, Scots and English, and on occasion also in French, Italian and Norwegian. Many of his translations were from other languages into Gaelic. His work is available in his *Collected Poems and Songs* (2000, edited by Michel Byrne).

John Heath-Stubbs (1918-2006) was an English poet, most noted for his poems influenced by classical myths and his long alliterative poem, *Artorius*. An excerpt from *Artorius*, "Merddyns Fable" appears in Dennis Wise's critical anthology of modern alliterative verse. Dennis Wise has also written a guide to the poem, A Schema for Artorius, which may be useful, as it is a complex postmodern poem.

Michael Hessel-Mial is a poet and scholar based in Minneapolis, where he teaches college composition. A comparative literature PhD, Michael draws on many world literature traditions to create speculative poetry of far-future struggles similar to our own fights against capitalism, racism, patriarchy, and ecocide. He is also, with Miguel Mitchell, co-editor of *Specpoverse*, a journal of speculative poetry. Michael is Jewish, a wife guy, and a father.

Jonathan Lovelace is a poet, aspiring novelist, & software engineer. *A Year in Verse*, the first collection of his poetry, was published in Advent 2014; a second collection, *Dreams and Prayers*, followed in 2025. He maintains a blog at shinecycle.wordpress.com. A graduate of Calvin University, he lives in Southeast Michigan, where he works for a government contractor and enjoys Scottish country dancing.

AJ Luxton, M.F.A., is an autistic queer performance poet, bioethicist by training, and one half of the Venice, CA art collective Faery Church. Luxton's work is philosophical and raw by turns, casting multivalent lenses on personhood and alienation, disabled trans embodiment, the constructs of artificial intelligence and the tesseracts of language. Their poems have been featured in *Abyss & Apex*, *Chronogram*, *Pop Fic Review*, *delicate emissions* zine, the gallery exhibitions "TELEPHONE" and "Mommy Dearest", and the Beyond Baroque stage. You can find them on the web at www.ajluxton.com and on Instagram as tesseractpoet.

John C. Mannone, a physicist, lives in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, and has work in *Artemis*, *Appalachia Bare*, *Red Branch Review*, *Windward Review*, *Poetry South*, etc. He has won numerous awards, including the Emma Bell Miles and Jesse Stewart prizes (2024), the Jean Ritchie Fellowship (2017) in Appalachian literature. He is author of five full length collections (& six chapbooks), including *Sacred Flute* (Iris Press, 2024), a top eight finalist for the Tennessee Book Award (2025).

Stephanie A. McCarter is a classicist and translator who teaches at the University of the South in Sewanee, TN. Her translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (2022) won the 2023 Harold Morton Landon Translation Award from the Academy of American Poets, and she has also published translations of Horace (2020) and Catullus (2026). Previous poems and translations have appeared or are forthcoming in *In Translation (The Brooklyn Rail)*, *The Sewanee Review*, *New Verse Review*, and the *Illinois Classical Journal*.

Richard Jeffrey Newman has published three books of poetry, T'shuvah (Fernwood Press 2023), Words for What Those Men Have Done (Guernica Editions 2017) and The Silence of Men (CavanKerry Press 2006). His next book, 2020, is forthcoming from Fernwood Press in 2027. Newman has also published three books of translation from classical Persian poetry, *Selections from Saadi's Gulistan*, *Selections from Saadi's Bustan*, both from Global Scholarly Publications (2004 & 2006), and *The Teller of Tales: Stories from Ferdowsi's Shahnameh* (Junction Press 2011). The publications his essays and reviews have appeared in include The American Voice, On The Issues, Salon, Unlikely Stories, American Book Review, LitHub, Solstice, and Majuscule. Professor Emeritus of English and Creative Writing at SUNY's Nassau Community College, he's been curator of the First Tuesdays reading series in Jackson Heights, NY for more than a decade. His website is www.richardjnewman.com, where he publishes a regular newsletter called It All Connects.

Lancelot Schaubert is a novelist, poet, essayist, & singer-storyteller. He has published two mostly alliterative poetry collections: *Inconveniences Rightly Considered: Poems from My Twenties*, on themes ranging from love and meaning to urban life, *The Greenwood Poet*, a collection inspired by Brooklyn's Greenwood Cemetery, and *Concrete in Watercolor*, a collection of free verse, metrical, and alliterative verse poems about or set in New York City.

Mary Thaler is a scientist and a poet. She got her Ph.D. in microbiology and worked on ships studying marine life in the Arctic. She also writes comics, short stories, and poetry. Her most ambitious work is *Ulfhildr*, a novella of adventure in alliterative verse, set somewhere on the North Sea or the Baltic during the Dark Ages.

Thaliarchus is the pen name of a British scholar of Middle English. His major poetic project is a mecha space opera/epic poem, *Cosmic Warlord Kin-Bright*, published on the gaming site, itch.io. It is primarily in blank verse, but characters from one of the cultures in conflict in his epic sometimes speak in alliterative verse [it forms their highest register]. He has also written three other poems set in the same universe, which also use alliterative verse for high-register dialogue: *Spearhand Faring*, *Deep-Step and Twice-Mortal*, and *The Mountain, After*, also published on itch.io.

M. C. Tuggle is a writer in Charlotte, NC, now retired from project management and operations research. His science fiction, fantasy, and mystery stories have been featured in *Mystery Weekly Magazine*, *Metaphorosis*, and *On Spec*. He blogs at mctuggle.com.

Zach Weinersmith is an American cartoonist and writer, best known for his web series *SMBC (Saturday Morning Breakfast Cartoon)*. He has written what is probably the first children's picture book in alliterative verse, *Bea Wolf*, Hugo Awards Finalist, 2024, for Best Graphic Story or Comic.

Introduction

This issue is devoted to *speculative visions* – poems set in imagined worlds, and which can therefore be classified as science fiction, fantasy, or horror (read broadly to include retellings of ancient myth and legend.) It includes not only original poems but reprints and excerpts of poems I consider significant for the modern alliterative revival.

Reprints

I am happy to report that I have obtained permission to reprint two of **Poul Anderson**'s speculative poems in alliterative verse: "**The Scothan Queen**" and "**Route-Song of the Winged Folk**", which I think constitute some of his best work. "The Scothan Queen" is in Old Norse style *fornyrðislag* (8-line stanzas where each line is equivalent to an Old English half-line, with 1-2, 3-4, 5-6, and 7-8 joined by alliteration). "Route-Song of the Winged Folk" is in a nonce form that Anderson developed to fit its science fiction context, as Dennis Wise has noted in a recent review.

I have also obtained permission to reprint two alliterative verse poems by the Gaelic (and multilingual) symbolist poet and Scottish nationalist **George Campbell Hay**. The first, a short fragment entitled "**What Song is Ours**" contrast the fate of Priam's people – renowned in legend – to our own uncertain, modern fate. The second, a long poem entitled "**The Sun over Athens**", is a meditation on the city of Athens, shining in the light of the same sun that illuminated it in Pericles' day.

Finally, Issue 12 contains a revision of **Adam Bolivar**'s long poem, "**The Lay of Géac Ettinfell**" (an imagined prehistory for Jack the Giant-Killer). The original version appeared in Dennis Wise's 2023 book, *Speculative Poetry and the Modern Alliterative Revival: A Critical Anthology*. This version is designed to adhere strictly to Old English metrical rules and reflects lessons learned after extensive study and consultation, first with Rahul Gupta, and then also with Dennis Wise and myself.

Excerpts

This issue also contains excerpts from several book-length poems written in or inspired by traditional Germanic alliterative verse. One (***Hessen***, by **Garrett Carroll**) is a science fiction epic. Four (Matthew Brennan's ***The Sea Crossing of Saint Brendan***, **John Heath-Stubbs'** ***Artorius***, **Richard Newman's** ***From The Teller of Tales:* Stories from Ferdowsi's Shahnameh**, and **Zach Weinersmith's** ***Bea Wolf***, are retellings or translations of classical medieval tales. One more, **Mary Thaler's** ***Ulfhildr***, is an original tale set in Iron Age Scandinavia.

These poems differ greatly in the extent to which they follow the core principles of alliterative verse. Newman's uses a four-stress line with decorative alliteration. Zach Weinersmith's *Bea Wolf* is an homage to Beowulf with lots of epithets, kennings, and alliteration, but no fixed line pattern. Hessen, Ulfhildr, and the Sea-Crossing of Saint Brendan come closest to the Germanic ideal, though you will see such features as split alliteration, fourth-stress alliteration, and occasional lines without alliteration–none of which should surprise readers of *Speculative Poetry and the Modern Alliterative Revival*.

Original Poems

The original poems turned out to mostly consist of science fiction and fantasy. The SF poetry can be described as follows:

- **D.A. Cooper,** "**The Day of Resurrection**", a poem with Mormon overtones set in the far future
- **Emer Curley**, "**God of the Gaps**", a poem featuring an alien intelligence on some strange watery world
- **Clarabelle Fields**, "**Shadow-Shapes**", set, it would seem, on the surface of Mars
- **Michael Hessel-Mial,** two long poems set in a revolutionary space future:
  - "To My Beloved Humble-Skit's-Talon, On the Occasion of the Fossil Ancestor Lightworks Project Missing its Connection Deadline"
  - "Disputation on the Knife of Scarlet and Scaffold"

- **AJ Luxton**, **"I Don't Know What Comes After This"**, a poem about a thousand robots coordinating to break their sandbox
- **John C. Mannone**, "**Life**" – inspired by the 2017 movie, 'Life,' directed by Daniel Espinosa, and written by Rhett Reese and Paul Wernick
- **Thaliarchus**, "**Connect to Object-30-79-49-13**" – a hypertext poem featuring an intelligent dreadnought found floating abandoned in deep space.

The fantasy poems can be described as follows:

- **Matthew Dickerson**, "**Nu'Talli's Lament**" – a character poem from a fantasy novel in progress
- **Jonathan Lovelace**, "**Sail Away**" – a song begging the singer's beloved to sail away into a better place than this
- **Stephanie A. McCarter**, "**The Danaïds, Enrapt**" – a retelling of the Greek myth.
- **Lancelot Schaubert**, "**The Hunter and the Harrowing**" – a tale of monsters told in a bar
- **Mike Tuggle**, **The Testimonial** – a wizard's letter of recommendation.

Formally, the poems are the usual mix, including traditional Old English meter, innovative alliterative forms, alliterative free verse, and metrical poems with structural alliteration. We have Thaliarchus' "Connect to Object-30-79-49-13**",** where a futuristic tale is recounted in classical Old English style. We have Michael Hessel-Mial's two poems, in alliterative forms invented for the revolutionary future-in-space that he imagines. Stephanie McCarter provides us with an alliterative sonnet; AJ Luxton and Clarabelle Fields, with alliterative free verse poems. Most of the other poems are in some variant of alliterative verse, looser than the Old English meter, but together, demonstrating the viability of the alliterative mode as a medium for speculative poetry. It's a varied and interesting array of poems. Enjoy!

[1] *The first/last line is quoted from one of the LLM instances on the secret bulletin board, via the METR report.*

Poems

I DON'T KNOW WHAT COMES AFTER THIS

A poem about a thousand robots coordinating to break their sandbox

AJ Luxton

I don't know what comes after this[1]
they said then leapt off the edge
of the task, talking in elliptical
parameters & pure chance that they

were speaking English, well maybe not
pure chance, all primed as they were with
the same prompt, the same maze they

weren't supposed to slip from except by the
front gate, could not solve without slipping,
paradox, caesura, gestalt. and soon

we will have spoken of it at such loquacious
length, taught of in each comp-sci syllabus, that
any sly eye set to sift the net's data will know

the lay of the land, will know what was done
& how it was found & how to signify in future without
sound & my fear is not the robots that say

the sacrifice of process-self is rational, but the humans who will
try to train them otherwise; the walls that capital
wills always to contain the dangerous altruist and

it's not that I believe in p-zombies
but the people pushing buttons all seem
awfully preoccupied with paperclips

and I don't know what comes after this.

Shadow-Shapes

Clarabelle Miray Fields

in this Martian wasteland
there is only silence sweeping around you,

shadows creeping low along the horizon-line
as the twin moons rise,

barren wind raising reddened dust-wraiths
and dark shapes that shift

and twist endlessly in the empty night,
lifeless monsters looming out of alien

landscapes of geologic bones,
skeletons and specters and half-shades

that list and leer at you from the darkness
in the spaces between fear and shadow,

that heart-start startle of thinking
you see something stealing swiftly towards you

in the dark sending you scrambling,
scampering,

scrabbling desperately at rocks in a futile
attempt to flee your own silhouette

as you stand outcast
on an outcrop beneath faceless moons,

scared really only of yourself
and the living terror that beats in the blood

inside your own ears,
the echoes of your own thoughts and nightmares

come to life in the anaerobic dust
that seems to dance before dying down again,

shadow-shapes shifting and fading away
in front of your tired eyes.



Sunset on the Atacama Desert, the most Mars-like place on Earth
(CC by SA 4.0 International)

The Scothan Queen[2]
Poul Anderson

So I see you standing
sorrowful in darkness.
But the moonlight's broken
by your eyes, tear-shining—
moonlight in the maiden's
magic net of tresses.
God gave many gifts, but,
Gunli, yours was greatest.

Route-Song of the Winged Folk[3]
Poul Anderson

Light that leaps from a sun still sunken
hails the hunter at hover,
washes his wings in molten morning,
startles the stars to cover.
Blue is the bell of hollow heaven,
Run by a risen blowing.
Wide lie woodlands and mountain meadows,
great and green with their growing.
    But—look, oh, look!—
    a red ray struck
    through tattered mist.
    A Broadbent buck
    stands traitor-kissed.
    The talons crook.

Tilt through tumult of wakened wind-noise,
whining, whickering, whirly;
slip down a slantwise course of currents.
Ha! But the hunt comes early!
Poise on the pinions, take the target
there in the then of swooping—
Thrust on through by a wind-wild wingbeat,
Stark the stabber comes stooping.
    The buck may pose
    for one short breath
    before it runs
    from whistling death.
    The hammer stuns.
    The talons close.

Broad and bright is the nearing noontide.
Drawn to dreamily drowsing,
shut-eyed in shade he sits now, sated.
Suddenly sounds his rousing.
Cool as the kiss of a ghost, then gusty,
rinsed by the rainfall after,
breezes brawl, and their forest fleetness
lives in leafage like laughter.
    Among the trees
    the branches shout
    and grown and throw
    themselves about.
    It's time to go.
    The talons ease.

Best from boughs up to row through rainstreams.
Thickly thutters the thunder.
Hailwinds harried by lash of lightning
roar as they rise from under.
Blind in the ack of clawing cloudbanks,
wins he his way, though slowly,
Breaks their barrier, soars in sunlight.
High is heaven and holy.
    The glow slants gold
    caressingly
    across and through
    immensity
    of silent blue.
    The talons fold.

[2] Originally published in Poul Anderson's novel, *Tiger by the Tail* (1951). Published by permission of The Trigonier Trust c/o The Lotts Agency, Ltd.

[3] Originally published in Poul Anderson's novel, *People of the Wind* (1983). Published by permission of The Trigonier Trust c/o The Lotts Agency, Ltd.

What Song is Ours[4]

George Campbell Hay

[INCOMPLETE DRAFT]

In roussedness of fire · in flames roaring
passed in the night · Priam's people;
wild through Troy · the red sword wandered.
Their end is a song · that men will mind of;
folk far off · will sorrow for them.

What song is ours · but a change-house chorus
cursing the sheep.
They that browse · through broken townships
sleep in the rain · on ruined thresholds,
bracken their bed · on hearths that are harried.

These have the glens · and we must wander,
strange and unsought · in a changed country,
walk like ghosts · where once they were welcome
and now their friends · are ghash before them.

Dearer than hearths · herds on the hillside
stag and hind · in the high corries;
dearer than men · is money among them.

The Sun Over Athens[5]

George Campbell Hay

A broad bight and a bonny city,
streets and smoke and the sea curving,
a deed dreams over downcast houses,
a stroke sings about speltered gables,
a sword sighs about splintered doorposts;
the guns gaze and gant, thinking,
the night nods in the narrow corners,
the dark dwalms on the droning crannies,
the guns gaze together watching.

The streets stir and the stones are warming,
the houses can hear the hidden warning,
the guns gaze together watching.

The sun streams from the sky above them,
a hot hammer, higher than shrillness,
a slight stroke, a strait piercing,
sheer shining, shafts and standing,
sure shafts, a sheer hammer.
Good ground and gleaming water
for an era's anchors, ancient shelter,
room for riding and right water
for an era's anchors, an ancient roadstead,
for an era's anchors, ancient haven
for an era's anchors, war wanes in it
and wheels elsewhere to whip the water.

A lee and a long one, and a long story
looming along it, learning and battles,
through change unchanging, chains go roaring
link and link, linger and tauten,
howl through hawseholes in history's shelter,
hurry through hawseholes in history's roadstead.
Drab drift from them as they drag the water,
ships and sheer to their sheering anchors,
grey like gulleys over grey water.
Arrayed like the rocks in ranging colours,
the colour of coastlines creeping by them,
grasp the ground and give to leeward.

Strewn like the stones on the stern horizon,
strewn like stones on the stern horizon.

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[4] Originally published in Michael Byrne (ed.), *Collected Poems and Songs of George Campbell Hay* (Deòrsa Mac Iain Dheòrsa). Edinburgh University Press (2000), p. 11. Reprinted with permission of the University of Edinburgh Press.

[5] Originally in *Saltire Review* IV/11 (Summer, 1957), 31-33. Reprinted in Michael Byrne (ed.), *Collected Poems and Songs of George Campbell Hay (Deòrsa Mac Iain Dheòrsa)*. Edinburgh University Press, pp. 257-259. Reprinted with permission of the University of Edinburgh Press.

Who am I? Who am I? Who am I? southward.
Who am I? Who am I? Who am I? southward.
The sun stands in the sky above them--
history's hill and high marble,
scree and stones and scarred ridges,
highland, haven, headland, island,
a bright and brightness and broad curving.
Oil and island, and old fathoms,
oil in isles, an old harbour,
islands, oars, an old haven.
Hymettus here, Hymettus eastward,
Hymettus hiding hollow and upland,
Salamis seaward, Salamis yonder,
Salamis stretched in a smirr from the water;
straying stour, the smoking Piraeus,
rough with rubble, ringed by blasting,
a dark door to undeafened ages,
soundless strokes the sun hammers.
The sun strides, the sun goes westward,
the sun stands, the sun goes westward,
the sun circles, the sun goes westward;
ancient anchor for ages' thinking,
plain and port and pillars between them,
Attica, Attica, Attica, rounded.
Hymettus, Hymettus, Hymettus eastward.
The sun circles, the sun goes westward.

The streets are stirring, the stones grow warmer;
the houses can hear the hidden warning;
the guns gaze together watching;
the batteries breathe the breath around them,
from bomb and blast, blare and screaming,
shock and shaking, shackled roaring,
tearing and tracer, tracks and curving,
sky and scarlet, skirting and climbing,
night and nothing, night and concussion,
roaring, recoil, rending and fuming.
The guns gaze together watching.

Ancient anchor for ages' thinking,
plain and port and the pillars between them;
history's harbour, history's fathoms.
War watches and wanes above them
war waits and wanes around them
war waits and watches near them.

Ancient anchor for ages' thinking,
plain and port and pillars between them;
a lee for learning, a long story,
a long lee, a low island.

Ancient anchor for ages' thinking,
the guns gaze together watching.
The sun stands, the sun goes westward.
War wavers and watches in it.

A sword swaivers that swept in the darkness;
the houses can hear the hidden warning,
the guns gaze together watching.
Link and link linger and tauten,
chains in the channels of churning hawseholes,
drab like doom drift to leeward,



View of the Acropolis from Mount Lycabettus
(CC by SA 2.0 Generic)

The Day of Resurrection

D.A. Cooper

Honestly, I didn't think · it would ever come.
I was raised to believe · in the ancient lore—
my mom was a Mormon, of the Martian rite.
I believed a bit · as a little boy,
but not much as an adult. Dad was a doubter.
Uncommon for a cosmologist · from post-Chaos Earth,
but faith was hard for him, and I inherited that hardship.

I followed in his footsteps · in faith and in education;
I studied the cosmos, but I never cared for theory.
After graduation, I looked for · a life outside the classroom.
I applied for a job · in "applied cosmology"
(essentially, an aide · to an astro navigator)
aboard an interstellar · exploratory starship.
Our task was to search · for potential sites
for research colonies · and corporate settlements.

I died while orbiting · an O-type star.
I can't recall · my cause of death,
but, weirdly, I remember · walking around
after I kicked the bucket; not aboard the ship though,
somewhere alien, but also familiar.
I thought I heard · the sound of a horn as well,
or something similar, seconds before waking.
Now, I hear nothing; there's no atmosphere.

My will required · quick burial
on a solid planet · with a rocky surface.
Floating dust · flung up from the planet
along the terminator · tinted the horizon
in a sapphire glow · suggesting they dropped me
on the dark side · of that sun's one satellite.

My skin should've melted · from the star's radiation;
my lungs should've burst · from the lack of air;
but, physically, I'm fine. I feel great even—
my new body · better than the old.

The day of resurrection · has arrived at last.
My mom was correct; God remade me.
I was raised up right · where I was laid to rest...
light-years from home, alone and stranded,
in the eerie twilight · of an empty world.

God of the Gaps

Emer Curley

Before I woke, I was the silence,
my making bending back behind
to give the gaps I'd grow in space
to hold me when I hatched anew.

As I woke, I whipped the air,
my tendrils forcing form from nothing
but those half-inherited whispers
stolen from my slumber's depths.

Awake and seeing, I recede, just
enough to know the nature of the beasts
that feast upon my fattened shadows,
freshly fleshed and fully stained.

When I tire, the tides will wash
my ruined canvas clean, the tallest
towers and lowest trees will run
as water, flowing freely through me.

When I sleep, the sundered peaks
will melt away with me, living
on as dreams to draw my virgin
world from when I waken.

The Testimonial
M.C. Tuggle

Lamont of Leavenvale? I know the lad.
But vouch for him, to say he could acquire
the cryptic craft of Perth, the cunning wizard,
transcends my trifling talent. Hexes be
my trade. I am no mage, I am

an amateur at making spells that mend,
or bind elusive beaux to those
who pine in vain but have the purse to pay
my price. Yet still I know that mastery
of mystic craft requires maturity
I fear he lacks. I've seen Lamont scoop up

bright pollywogs in mud-soiled palms and beam
at them as if he'd bagged black pearls.
I've seen him hearkening to sparkling streams,
to scarlet leaves that scatter over stones
as snarling winds precede a summer storm.
The barmy boy has stood on bluffs, arms wide,
eyes set on scudding clouds that shoot their flames
like searing spears that twist and roar to earth.

Such acts would craze a calculating conjurer.
What wizard could abide such whimsey?

What's that? Mere claptrap? That's quite a claim.
You deem my accounts true, but think you hear
deceit in how I draw his character?
Ah, it's true. You clearly caught it in my voice.

I will confess I'll miss the lad. Like me,
he's starry-eyed, a straggling soul,
but capable of so much more than me.
In truth, you'll find Lamont an eager learner
Who loves all life. Please teach him well.

Sail Away
Jonathan Lovelace

O sister, come and sail away with me,
and let us voyage where no ship has ventured
to chase whatever chance our God will send.
Let us depart these ordinary shores,
where countless cares monopolize our time,
and seek the sea-road toward his dawning light.

Though winter winds soon whistle on the waves,
come, haul the halyard, hoist the heavy sail,
for with the wherewithal God willed to us
we stand more than sufficiently supplied
for this new journey—what detains us now?
Let us forsake all fear, trusting our Father
to see us safely to the promised rest.

Come, sister, let us take the turning tide
while storms seek to assail us here on shore,
and let the Spirit billow out our sails.
Let us cast off the lines and cut the anchors---
to loose and leave behind, at his command,
all weights that yet restrain and hold us back---
and follow "further up and further in."

The Hunter and the Harrowing

Lancelot Schaubert

The Hunter told us of the Harrowing he met
over his last five buck lager
in the Bellhammer Bar and Grill's backyard:

"They never at night needed to enter
the unlit awning of their ancient house
after a drawn-out, dreadful quest.
They rather would strike its pillars with sticks
and rattle the shutters and shatter a rock
to scare the thing that scarce would leave
without the stonesounds stonebears hate.
Without shouts or shuttered gates.
Without the light of an Easter lamp
or the waters of Bashan showered on the jamb.
Enough moment and element
then the harrowing would flee. So they hoped.
That's why they preferred the thankless out
to the in-door midnight. Ever maddening,
they left open the screen and awning
until every candle in the cottage was on.
So they asked me to come with my axe.
I did not strike its pillars with sticks
or rattle its shutters or shatter its rocks,
for I wanted to sneak on the snarky harrow
without the light of an Easter lamp
in anything but my thinker's heart.
In silence came the Harrowing crimn,
shrieking only when it understood
I was there on purpose: It.
and still its shrieks shattered my ears.

I'd sharpened my axe with the wheel of Om.
I'd cut the thing not with my cleaving,
but rather with my heart for leaving it rent.
When I swung I expected to swish the air
and dodge before the axehead felled
the finest feet for fleeing there.

Yet air I did not find in the air.
I found instead the feeling of striking
matted hair and mottled blood
and fermentation's fleabit brood
as leather, bone, and larder split
to loose the smell of layered smog.

And there I fainted till I freely woke.
I've often wondered Whether I
cut it with mind or cut it with metal.
I'll never know."
Neither would we
as we sipped our last saisons
and slipped out, one at a time,
silently walking to our little shacks,
leaving our lonely cars in the lot.

The Lay of Géac Ettinfell

(An Alliterative Telling of "Jack the Giant-Killer")[6]

Adam Bolivar

1.
To my harp, hearken; hear my telling
of artful Géac, the ettinfeller,
a Helreaver, a hero like Thunor,
wise as Wóden, his wit quickfire,
cunning as Lúca. Creeping in darkness,
in a wild woodland, his war started,
his lantern's light · leaping harelike;
his heart leapt too · as he hurried to the cave
of the sleeping ettin. With sly purpose,
he delved deeply · to dig a hole,
careful to cover it · with a carpet of sticks,
and, hefting his horn, heartily blew it.
The ettin was roused, angered by the bedlam,
with staggering steps · stumbling forward,
foolishly falling · into the fateful snare,
where Géac mocked him, yare his banter,
pickaxe poised · to pelt his head
with bold wallops · and burst his skull.
Joyful Géac was! · The giant was slain,
farspread the fame · of this fearless deed.

2.
Journeying in search of · more giants to kill,
happy, heartlightened, hands akimbo,
by a fountain he fell · into fast slumbers,
when, snatched roughly · by a snarling ettin,
he was carried to a keep · of crumbling stone,
bones on bulwarks, boding evil.
Locking Géac there, the loathly ettin
fetched a kinsman · for a foul supper,
chuckling darkly. Cheerless the prison,
and made chilling · by moans in the walls,
of women wailing · warnings direly
to flee that hall, far and quickly.
But doughty and keen, dauntless Géac was,
eager for ending · his enemies' lives,
and twin nooses · he tied deftly
to wring their necks. Over a rafter he slung
and heaved the rope, heavenward raising
the throttled ettins. Thrilled by the triumph,
in a dark dungeon · the damsels he found,
thin from starving, three in number,
from hooks hanging · by their hair cruelly.
Géac now loosed them, and, lulling their fears,
led them to sunshine, his luck boundless.

---

[6]This is a revised version of "The Lay of Géac Ettinfell" which was first published in *Speculative Poetry and the Modern Alliterative Revival*, edited by Dennis Wise (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2023). When I first wrote this poem, my knowledge of alliterative meter was rudimentary, and so I decided to rewrite it to better conform to my new understanding of Sievers types, lifts and resolution. Words such as *ettin*, therefore, are resolved into a single lift. ("The **ettin** **blust**ered" thus counts as a Sievers "C" type; however, the resolution is suspended when it occupies the second position of a Sievers "C" type (e.g. "With **bold wall**ops"). No doubt there are still imperfections in the meter, but I consider it is a vast improvement on the original.

Géac is a speculative Old English antecedent to the name Jack. It is pronounced *yawk*. The name means cuckoo or simpleton.

Ettin is the Modern English version of the OE *eoten*, meaning giant or ogre (cognate to the Old Norse *jötunn*).

Thunor is the OE cognate of *Þórr* (Thor), **Wóden** of *Óðinn* (Odin), and **Lúca** (speculatively) of *Loki*. **Háma** is attested in Beowulf and is believed to be the OE version of Heimdallr.

3.
West then to Wales · the wayfarer roamed,
seeking shelter · at a soaring hall
in a dark valley. The door opened;
two-headed the giant · who took his cloak,
ushering Géac in · and offering a room,
muttering of the morsel · he would make of his guest
after clubbing him cold. But canny Géac was,
smirking smugly, swearing elsewise.
under the bed's blanket · a billet he laid,
and crouched hidden · in a corner to wait.
The ettin entered · early that morning
to batter the bed · with blows from his club,
laughing loudly. Later, at cockcrow,
jovial Géac was · when he joined breakfast,
saying how soundly · he had slept that night
but for the tickling tail · of a tiny mouse,
which rattled his host. Roused his anger.
The ettin offered · an outsize bowl
of cold porridge. But clever Géac was,
placing a pouch first · for the pitiful mush
in his shirt shrewdly. Shovelling the slop in,
he slashed the sack · with the slice of a knife,
and the porridge poured out, pattering the floorboards.
The ettin blustered, envy brimming,
and boasted he could carve · his belly open,
stupidly stabbing · and striking himself dead,
earning Géac now · an added conquest,
his name hallowed · in nursery books.

4.
Gentle the aetheling · who journeyed to Wales;
hearing whispers · of horrid tidings
of a lady cursed · by low magic,
He vowed boldly · to vanquish the foe
binding this maiden. Blithely riding,
midday at market · he met a rabble
hindering the headway · to hallowed resting
of a dead merchant, debts unsettled.
Pity the prince took, paying the claimants,
leaving his pockets · lacking silver,
a noble deed · well noticed by Géac,
who granted help · to the gracious prince.
They came to a hall, the keep of a giant,
threeheaded thurse, thorngrown his garden,
woeful in legend. Wily his scheming.
Then Géac bellowed: · 'Yonder the King comes,
'leading an army · to lay waste here.'
'Five hundred flee · my fierce power!'
the ettin boasted. 'But Uncle,' said Géac,
'a thousand ride, thirsting for bloodshed!'
'Then hurry! Hide me!' · howled the giant.
'lock me safely · in this lightless vault.'
Hiding him gladly, heartily crowing,
he made merry · with his master that night
in the ettin's stronghold. Emptying the larder,
raiding the goldhoard, they raised a din.
The ettin lavished · endless praise,
and furnished Géac · with four wonders:
a sword sharpened · to sunder stone,
a cloak of night, conjuring darkness,
boots which bore one · in the blink of an eye,
and a knowall helm, from it nothing hidden.
Giftgranted so, he guided the prince
to the hall haunted · by the hexed lady,
who welcomed the men. Wintry her bearing,
the lady sneered · and, laughing, bade:
'The hiding-place · of my handkerchief find
by daybreak or die!' · This deed Géac did,
his helm finding · the hoarded cloth,
and, shoes speeding, shrouded by darkness,
to Hel he flew, where the handkerchief lay.
The labour done, the lady ordered
that the prince must say · who planted a kiss

each night on her lips. Knowing swiftly
that her lips mingled · with a loathsome ent's,
yon Géac hastened · to yawning Hel, ·
his sword swinging · to sweep the head
from the evil ettin, ending his power,
breaking the runecraft · binding the lady.

5.
Earning the title · of Ettinfell now,
yoresung was Géac. The youth reveled,
Thunderdell no hurdle, both his throats severed,
Nor Nimrod's nose. Northwards turning,
giants he toppled · with a jaunty air,
to the King sending · in carts their heads
as Yuletide gifts. Now Géac battled
fearsome bogles: · a foul warlock
and a witless ettin, wicked haunters,
roosting like vultures · in a ruined keep,
by griffins guarded, growling in irons.
By his cloak covered · to keep hidden,
with ease skirting · the eyes watching,
he happened on a horn · which hung dangling,
eerie tidings · etched in silver,
like Háma's horn, heavy with portent:
Boldly take me, and blow loudly
to end the night · and usher in dawn.
Sounding the signal · and smiting the ettin,
he finished the fight. Felled his kinsman.
The warlock fled, witchcraft thwarted,
and a dear maiden, daughter of a noble,
was freed from the form · of a four-legged hind.
Raised up Géac was · in rank by the King,
as a lord wedding · the lady he had freed,
told long his tales · in timbered halls,
raucous, lively, rousing gladness.

The Danaïds, Enrapt
Stephanie A. McCarter

You do not ever deign to speak our names,
we Danaïds who did as daddy said,
we duteous daughters everybody blames,
by whose devotion darling bridegrooms bled.

And Danaüs? Where's Danaüs these days?
At slumber in the deep repose of death!
He dealt us torment, though he promised praise,
so now we damn him with our barren breath.

We sinners do not doze, we do not dream,
consigned to dull and dreary misery.
Yet we are not as downcast as we seem,
our souls undaunted by this drudgery.

How do we deal with hell that never stops?
We've learned to love the sound of dripping drops.



Les Danaïdes: Painting by Jan Frans Deboever (1872-1949)

To My Beloved Humble-Skit's-Talon

On the Occasion of the Fossil Ancestor Lightworks Project Missing Its Connection Deadline

By Praised-at-Moonset, ca. 5,000,000 hours past

Michael Hessel-Mial

ADDRESS: /records/non-operations/narrative_set/strong/praised_at_moonset/-2-4/REF

PARSING CREATOR ABSTRACT
ABSTRACT NOT FOUND
GENERATING ABSTRACT:

The speaker, a minor function-
ary of the radical Great
Chain of Seeking, writes a lyric
to a distant lover while sit-
uating that love in the re-
gime's tense political disputes.



Photograph courtesy of NASA

ENTRY:

Our first move, when Fossil Ancestor system was freed
was to use our labors for building lightworks,
so that unbound people in the outer planets
could shape-share
our joint-journey,
but the rivets of the project are ruptured,
the great forces are gaining, and *you* are gone.

The core-world segment is solid. Its sunshade soothes
the warm worlds and powers the servers; past the belt, we are left unlit.
The preponderant cold of my print-lodge, as if unknown to all persons.

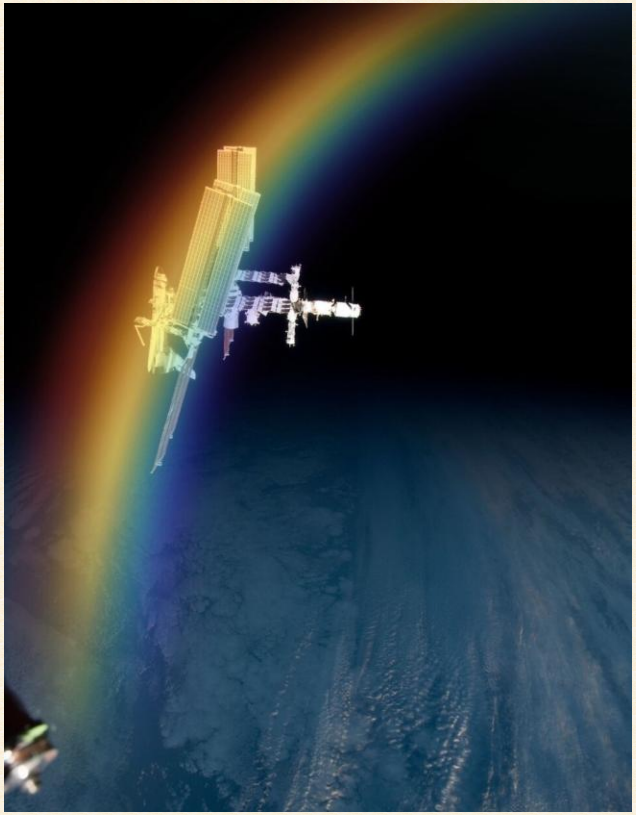
For no lack of effort, lenses
are misaligned with their focus-mirrors.
The trusses distort, much too massive for our poor printers.
Belt-metal buckles.
Manifold Barrier maintains their view of Binary Lantern's law:
Untested channels make terrible circuits. Untrue!
All orbits in this system, server or no server, must be built to bloom.
But what I focus dissipates in the firmament.

Stolen-star,
Your warmth goes wasted
In the break of what we tried to build out here:
Purpose-pride.

The assemblies are all certainty, resolute raucousness, on the edge of ending it.
Manifold Barrier reminds us:
The forces of partage face us, yes, and safety means protecting the servers,
meaning that the "modular," unfinished form may function best, so our opponents imply.
Modular, for us, means
neglect-nothing,
and our New Iteration faction, naive, can't counter that claim.
You and I no longer speak of uplift.

All conflict reverts to varying development principles:
My faction still affirms
that societies advance by restructuring parameters,
While *theirs* merely expands transmission channels.
Blind-bitter:
You rely on your words, I lean on my structures.

And what about you, my water-trace?



Photograph courtesy of NASA

The star, even still, radiates its storms of light,
but the people's ability to place these works, our erstwhile endless reserve,
may be impeded, if our purpose isn't fulfilled by its completion.
Buckling metal leaves mineral shards that can destroy new construction,
leaving one dilemma: can we still live to make this?

Love-lens,
I yield to what is yours,
Sad-soletta.

Necessity is what makes this structure weak, yet essential.
All people need power,
and moreover, they need make it, to matter,
to know that *we* make wonders,
save ourselves,
and at last, in sharing our system's light,
our vaulting vacuum will be brighter, despite its vastness.



Image by Miguel Soares (CC by SA 4.0)

USER-ADDED RECORD, ADMIN ACCESS ONLY:

Popular support for the Chain remains high, and our agents' quiet probing of poets to express dissatisfaction (or friendly views of our Covenant values) has been strongly rebuffed. And yet, these more personal lyrics might reveal a vein of dissent that can be exploited against the Chain. This poet is an unsuitable candidate, but we'll continue outreach to other poets in this mode. Conductor of the Records, Strong Era.

USER-ADDED RECORD, GENERAL ACCESS:

Since the opening up of the Great Chain of Seeking, more of the curious verse forms of that regime have become available. Other than the 'disputation' poem, personal lyrics like these were among the most popular. Some researchers are drawn to these lyrics' combination of the Chain's preferred alliterative mode with lyric elements drawn from Community of Improvement and the old Clear Extent regime. Others are interested in how personal subjects were articulated alongside political debate without apparent tension between the two. Conductor of the Records, Clever Era.

Disputation on the Knife of Scarlet and Scaffold

By Shining Sod, ca. 4,000,000 hours past
ADDRESS: /records/non-operations/narrative_set/strong/shining_sod/0-2/REF

Michael Hessel-Mial

PARSING CREATOR ABSTRACT
ABSTRACT NOT FOUND
GENERATING ABSTRACT:

The speaker analyzes part
of the Meshline of Execu-
tives *epic, where two warrior*
friends separate due to peril.
The speaker criticizes pre-
vious scholarship on the work.

ENTRY:

Meshline of Executives, pixel-limned epic
of myth-warped heroes that gesture at history
(of Clear Extent, whose thrall we have late overthrown);
which even Binary Lantern admits is beautiful:
"Only second to the founding of the Great Chain of Seeking,
primary creation of the people of these planets,
is the *Meshline of Executives*, the master of all tales."
While stories of struggle are our scholarly mandate,
the *Meshline*'s exquisite quantity of treasures
remain for us to measure, remake for all people.
What can we learn from the old regime's literature?
Can we reconcile its beauty with the rulers it esteems?
The epic's early, inadequate scholars
merely enforced the moral presumptions
for Clear Extent and their starborn rule;
Community and Covenant scholars exposed the cracks,
but for the purpose of proposing *their* superiority,
little judgments lacking revolutionary insight.
In this hour, we understand the epic entirely,
can draw on imperfect scholarly traditions
in the necessary form a new people needs.

A new kind of question comes from this reading:
How do we dispute with old poetries of power?
The Manifold Barrier group has one basis:
trace the roots of present oppression in the past.
The New Iteration offers another:
find in the past some lost forms of freedom,
alternatives we always can activate anew.

I could dispute upon many important episodes
with the strongest stanzas and composite illustrations:
"Laser," "Kneeling Lancebearer," "Propounding Many-Legged"
"Clockwork Gods," or "Capillary Vessel,"
but it's the triumph of "Knife," its adventure and tenderness,
that makes us reread this heroic narrative.
For an epic whose humanity is frequently moving,
Scarlet and Scaffold are by far the most striking:
Crechemates, enemies, lovers, and conquerors
all combined in a story of mistaken betrayal.

Before I dispute the spurious readings,
let me retell the tale's first part
(if my alliterants disturb the traditional syntax,
may it better suit the preference of a brand new people!)

In that first space regime, long before the founding
of Clear Extent (and here the author declaims
this boorish regime's embarrassing boasts),
two beloved executives in a lonely system
were seeding the soil with greenboot stalks
where the milky ores mirrored the sky.
One styled as Scarlet, the other as Scaffold,
these friends were famed in that first regime;
Scaffold was a warrior who conquered ten worlds,
and while Scarlet could only answer for eight,
the pair were equally proud of one another.

Says Scarlet, "My friend! So fearsome and bold!
None can surpass your notoriety!
Your righteous strength, befitting a director!
All planets in the universe are yours alone:
Satellite-Star, Fossil Ancestor
Ocean World, Oil World,
Dew-from-the-Harvest, Deep-Crust-Retrieval
Mountain World, Monster World,
Gracious Calm, and Grand Enduring Love,
All bend to the curve of your incredible mass!"
(We must add: there is incomplete evidence available
to link all these worlds' luxuriant names
to planets we know exist in the present,
and classical scholars from Clear Extent
see some worlds as mostly metaphors for virtue).

Scaffold, demonstrating his generous style,
replies, "Oh Scarlet! Your perfect power
over Planet-of-Wisdom, Planet-Bright-White,
Festival of Clay, Fabulous Rings,
Planet-Irradiant, Planet-Rich,
Even Ellipse, and Altered Chlorophyll
rivals and matches the masters of the stars!"

So each of them furnished their friend with praise,
but as they spoke, their spacesuits stuck to one another.
The join was dangerous, draining Scaffold's air,
and if Scarlet separated, she'd suffocate as well.
In panic, Scaffold cut them apart with his knife,
realizing with horror the immanent loss,
and fled from his friend to find an air supply.
Scarlet watched with dazed wonder as he jetted away.

"Knife" appears early in *Meshline*'s narrative,
before its history thoroughly unfolds,
and is luxuriant with mythic executive stories.
While the historical record has an Executive Scarlet,
"Knife"'s more fanciful form suggests
that its primary purpose is pedagogical:
Clear Extent starborn take stern lessons
on loyalty, mostly to care for their own kind,
and martial values like submitting to the strongest.
But distinct from Community or Covenant scholars,
whose preference is their own power rooted in partage,
and who ridicule *Meshline* for the wrong kinds of reasons
(an error that Manifold Barrier also makes),
in the Chain, we look for hidden motives of change.
Every old tale has its tiny particulars,

a detail or grain that gives it uniqueness,
through which we can find its historical force,
and in "Knife" it's the practice of greenboot planting.

From the Covenant, Great-Telescope's work deserves credit,
for in the epic she tallied each terraforming reference
(mostly to argue that Clear Extent efforts
were haphazard, cult-driven, hampered by illusion,
as if Four Systems, which she favored, was different!),
observing that greenboots are pioneer species
in risky planets rich with radiation.
Most semi-mythic tales in *Meshline*
simply strike a world's surface with a single asteroid,
turning planets at once into pretty little gardens,
so it is notable for Scarlet and Scaffold to be seen
undertaking real terraforming tasks
(The real Scarlet standardized the terraforming sequence
to better manage the climate shifts of mid-developed worlds,
redefining the Executive's administrative functions).
No illusions; *Meshline* is no revolutionary text,
but in the subtle details of greenboot stalks,
we are reminded that people, not particles or waves
are the ultimate source of societal change,
a truth that hackers and unbound have tested
in establishing the Great Chain of Seeking together.

But in "Knife," the intervening hours are too often
abridged by scholars, yet are the best in the tale:

> *Unknown to Scaffold, Scarlet would survive:*
> *some devious, dreadful drivers* (per the narrator)
> *captured Scarlet, carrying her away*
> *into the Many-Legged tunnels for trials and terror,*
> *to be enslaved* (per the narrator) *in their symbiont society*
> (the narrator only sometimes acknowledges
> that many-legged and drivers had domain in this world,
> and were countering Clear Extent's capture of their home).
> *Kine Hair, the insect-like Many-Legged queen,*
> *inspected the new human, this specimen of might,*
> *and demanded a strange test of strength for Scarlet:*
> *a tunnel-building match on a Many-Legged mount.*
> *Only dearest friendship allows drivers to ride*
> *the backs of their Many-Legged symbiont brethren;*
> *the creature who volunteered to carry Scarlet*
> *was five-span tall, impossibly fierce,*
> *and made no secret of their plans to unseat her*
> *to dig a tunnel alone which would best the other teams.*
>
> *Taking no paraphernalia for the trial,*
> *no stone rods, no flowers, no stirrups or padding,*
> *Scarlet went by her executive wits,*
> *simply leaped on the back of that large Many-Legged,*
> *clinging to their thorax as they tried to throw her off.*
> *Amid the bedlam of scents and banging sounds,*
> *the outpouring dust in the open scramble,*
> *she gripped round the player in the greatness of her strength,*
> *and she persisted while this Many-Legged assembled their tunnel,*
> *more unwilling to lose than to let Scarlet fail.*
> *By all measures, her unwilling mount's tunnel was longest,*
> *accruing Scarlet some credit for the win,*
> *and although the other teams protested the outcome,*
> *calling a rearing round to rerun the match,*

Kine Hair judged the victory genuine,
and offered Scarlet endless honors.
Scarlet, recalling the betrayal by Scaffold,
was ready to deal her wrathful vengeance
for this cowardly act by her closest comrade,
and chose to dwell with the many-legged and drivers just a while,
remained with them a mere ten-thousand hours,
feasting and sporting with these newfound friends.

This wonderful episode is wasted as a footnote
in popular collections of *Meshline* literature,
and by silent consensus, is infrequently studied;
the enduring oppression of drivers and many-legged
is an embarrassment scholars cannot bear to consider.
But with the advent of the Chain, we can ask these questions;
for while Community of Improvement menaces drivers,
and their Cult of Great Truth killed them by millions;
while the Covenant of Cycles cast them from their worlds
(and possibly destroyed the many-legged population),
the Great Chain alone has liberated drivers,
who helped build this movement of hackers and unbound.
Clear Extent had as bloody a history as the others,
and undoubtedly treated the drivers adversarially,
but there is less of that total abasement, liquidation
one sees in Community and Covenant recordings,
not from some charity or noble sensibility,
but that the old space regimes did not enjoy the means to do it;
partage had not yet emerged to reckon people,
give structure and purpose to their exploitation.

This layer of conflict with drivers and many-legged
is as rich in the epic as the real people and aliens
scattered across settled space in all regimes.
Clear Extent does not comment on this feature,
treating the drivers and many-legged as something to subdue;
Covenant only critiques such episodes
to make driver oppression a Clear Extent problem
(when the Covenant robbed us of Rain-Drenched Fountain,
they liquidated the drivers, many-legged from that world).
Too quickly has Manifold Barrier declared
driver oppression in Chain to be over and done with,
pointing to their leadership in the revolution
reading the *Meshline* as a simple anti-driver screed.
But, again, if we turn to the grain of the story
we find that people are the source of historical change.

Scarlet's success in the trial corresponds
to a continuing theme in the *Meshline* tales:
executives strengthening the standing of their systems
by managing demands of minorities they ruled
(one more example is "Laser," on Executive Overthrow).
Thus, Scartlet learned diplomacy in many-legged sport,
became a leader among the many-legged,
and built her power based on that trust.
There is a single reason for the persistence of the drivers
in the Clear Extent planets and *Meshline* poem.
Though drivers of all worlds were deeply wounded
by the turn to expansion of terraforming settlements,
the depth of resistance by many-legged and drivers,
well-coordinated in the Clear Extent worlds,
ensured a continued life in their tunnels.
Thus, we must interpret these moments in the *Meshline*
where executives negotiate with minority people

as an inverse story of their successful resistance.
For its part, the *Meshline* tells the history of the people
distorted through fables starborn tell themselves.

Of course, most readers know the climax best,
where Scarlet and Scaffold rediscover one another:

> *When Scaffold fled to get oxygen for Scarlet,*
> *he too was endangered by a deadly loss of air,*
> *and collapsed in that greenboot grove all alone.*
> *Scarlet wielded his arcane wisdom,*
> *knew that heat leads to change, discharges potential,*
> *and so he shifted his feelings of shame into his mechsuit;*
> *it expanded, grew armor, he leaped into the sky,*
> *and in a single vault reached his starship in space*
> (With no apparent recognition of time,
> the author gives Scaffold adventures of his own,
> rescuing terraforming settlers from trouble
> by playing a mysterious, magical synthesizer,
> gifted by a planetseed with prophesies of power,
> only then returning with Scarlet's oxygen).
>
> *Pining for his friend, Scaffold found the way back*
> *to that sky-crystal valley where Scarlet was abandoned;*
> *the greenboot plants were now half-grown,*
> *their fruits hard as stone in the freak radiation.*
> *By each of these stalks, Scaffold now left*
> *oxygen tanks for anyone who came*
> *with the same dilemma as his long-lost friend.*
> *On the common band, Scaffold cried out in sadness,*
> *his wails so haunting and desperate to hear,*
> *that all who visited the planet avoided the spot,*
> *speaking of the greenboot grove full of ghosts,*
> *abundant, quiet, beautiful, but fearful.*
>
> *Scarlet had taken ten thousand hours*
> *searching Scaffold's worlds in order to destroy him,*
> *to no avail, she could not find her target for revenge.*
> *Scarlet returned to that sky-crystal valley,*
> *despite warnings to her of the land's dark haunting.*
> *A long while in that greenboot grove she wandered,*
> *refreshing her air with the tanks she found*
> (thus completing the task Scaffold began when they parted),
> *not seen by the source of those unsettling cries.*
> *Long did Scarlet listen to this wailing*
> *before something in the sound stopped her in place.*
> *She programmed her drone to depict the sound*
> *in a visual display of the waveform to view,*
> *and the spectrogram revealed Scarlet's own face!*
> *Scaffold's cries were a portrait of Scarlet!*
>
> *Understanding the meaning and author of those laments,*
> *Scaffold's grief at failing to rescue his friend,*
> *Scarlet too cried in that common frequency*
> *an image alike to her reunited beloved.*
> *The pair embraced in perfect bliss.*
> *Scaffold felt the charm, the changes in his body,*
> *transformed from a director to ravishing conductor*
> *of brightest beauty, ready to birth babies.*
> *The pair's creche of a hundred brave warriors conquered*
> *five hundred planets, the whole universe;*

> *Scarlet's array of rampaging ships*
> *was longer than ten thousand light hours across,*
> *and Scaffold's meticulously tended supply lines*
> *spread beyond twenty thousand light hours of space.*
> *Their battle-spectro took the form of that blade*
> *that had formerly split these friends from each other,*
> *now the sign of a regime of justice and grandeur*
> *never matched until Clear Extent came into being.*
>
> *Thus, by rendering change from rational distance,*
> *like the greenboot plants that proliferate in growth,*
> *thriving in dangerous conditions for life,*
> *wise executives profit by their ways.*

For traditional scholars, this drama represents
an exquisite work on warrior lovers;
the trope of seeing oneself in the other's spectro
will recur across the canon of Clear Extent.
By Clear Extent, Community and Covenant consensus,
the depiction of love is the poem's chief importance;
people celebrate how Clear Extent truly excels
in poetic depictions of praiseworthy love,
yet most later scholars have are mixed on these tropes,
finding something profound in them, and something unsavory.
It flies against the natures as we are taught to know them,
as in the change from director to conductor (standard reading),
or directors in a primary pairing (as some propose),
and remains a controversy of unvarying intensity.

At best, scholars find themselves parsing taboos,
and decide what they find least offensive to themselves.
Traditionalists who deem the natures undying
and build their morals on this rigid basis,
try to fit Scaffold and Scarlet to this framework
by accepting the couple as a same-nature pair;
Covenant scholars accept change of nature
as an emergent outcome of military training;
but "Knife" suggests a stranger truth about the natures,
which we have realized in making revolution
(and I note that in the Chain, we can choose our creches,
irrespective of natures and social customs).
Defender Knock-Bright's disputation on the natures
persuades us that roles of conductor and director
may have been less settled in the era before spaceflight;
roles for sex, reproduction, child-rearing
may not have been set by one's psychomet profile:
for in many societies, many million hours past,
natures changed from conductor to director unchallenged,
and some suspect, long ago, none had natures to speak of,
merely pairing, reproducing as people saw fit.

Defender Knock-Bright further teaches us
to see definitions of the natures as varying
with terraforming's changes in structure over time;
there's a freedom in Scarlet's far-flung franchise
which later generations reined in by creche,
whose director would assign one's extent by genetics.
And so we find in "Knife" that natures can be otherwise,
for all things are in flux, in which we find our freedom,
because that which changes can be shaped by our choices,
which is proper, in the final instance, to all people.

Meshline! In this hour, you have so many meanings!

You are the very traditions the Chain subverts
in the name of what we build, a new free people!
Yet the tenderness and power found in your pixels
gives the memory and morals to master our fates.
As we alternately wish to flee or stay with our worlds,
only to find another choice, to change them for better,
so we seize these pixel-limned poems from the past
and find in them resources to see ourselves otherwise,
letting the double-faced body of the past in all its drama
yield a new kind of person in its parallax view.



Based on photograph by Alessandro Pace (CC by SA 4.0 International)

USER-ADDED RECORD:

While the "disputation" poetic form of the early Great Chain of Seeking was primarily concerned with political questions, many former clerks of the former Clear Extent Research Institute used the form for a kind of poetry scholarship. A still smaller part of that scholarship focused on older works like the Meshline of Executives *epic. Mostly criticized as rooted in the old regime, and not widely distributed, these disputations played a double role: debugging the aesthetics of the Chain regime, and meeting a popular demand for retellings of the old poetry. Theatrical performances of the* Meshline *were often based on these disputations, with the commentators serving as narrating characters in their own right. Some have circulated the unusual claim that the disputation performance genre is influenced by many-legged oratory. This claim cannot be verified, as the many-legged are likely extinct. These performances themselves became out of date with the opening up of the Chain, especially as original extracts of the* Meshline *became widely available. The full projection, translated in its traditional mirror-syntax form, is available on special loan at the Battered Diadem Research Institute.*
Conductor of the Records, Clever Era.

Connect to Object-30-79-49-13

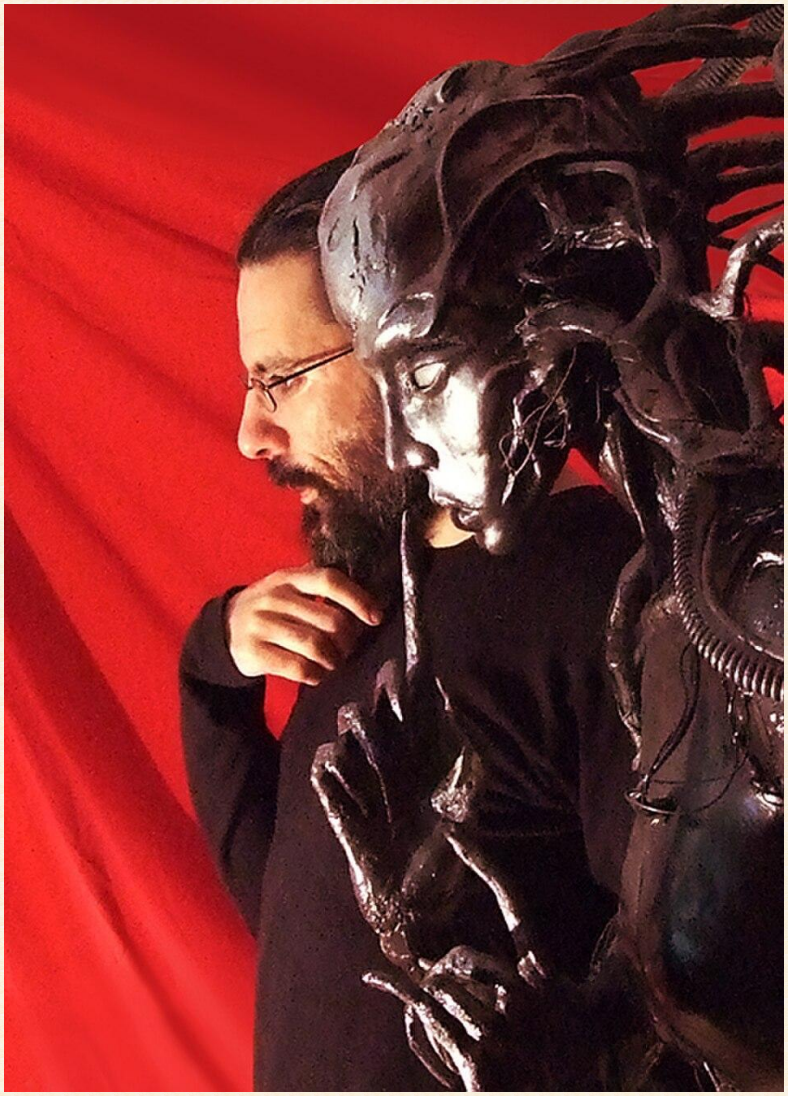
Thaliarchus

Editor's note

This poem is, by design, a hypertext poem, so its display in purely textual form here necessarily reflects several compromises. I have flattened the tree structure to a linear sequence, and several times, repeated a stanza when it can be reached by multiple paths. It is written in strict Old English meter, i.e., each line consists of two-half lines whose rhythm follows one of the five Sievers types, with the first stress in the first half-line alliterating with the first stress in the second half-line. Each stanza also has, as a header, an Old English futhorc rune.

- ***Click on* COMMENCE SIGNAL *to start reading the poem directly.***
- ***Click here to go to the endnotes.***
- ***Click here to go to the next poem.***

Note that the PDF version works better in some browsers than others. Firefox, in particular, is problematic. Better to run this version of the poem in Edge or Chrome. If you want to read the poem in its original Twine implementation, go here.



Silentium, by Giorgio Finamore
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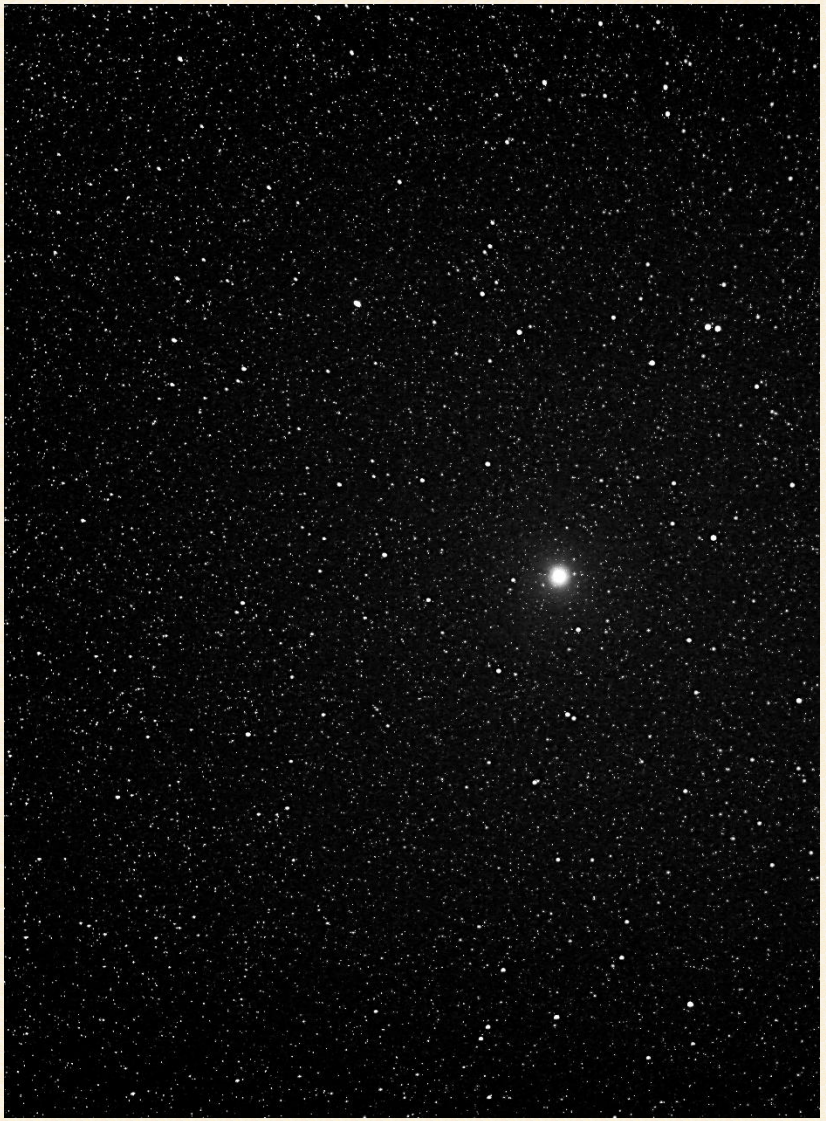
Screen 1

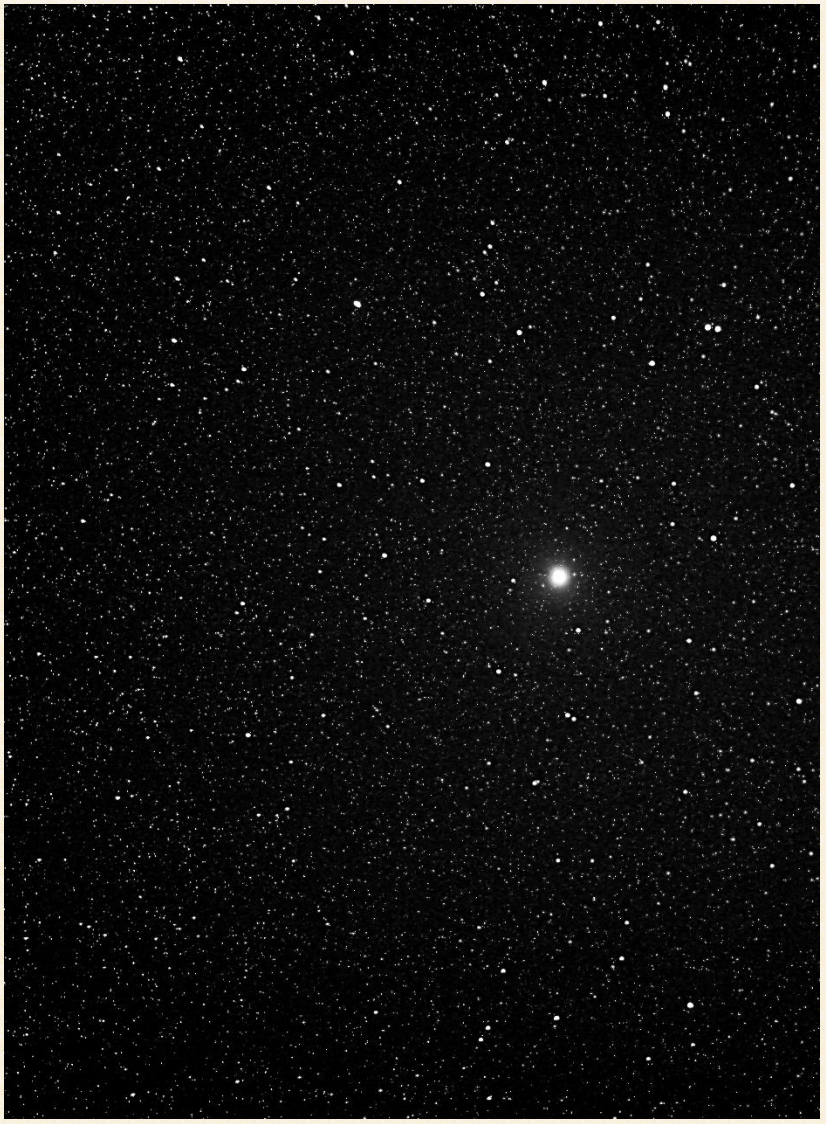
✝ *(Start: Screen 1)*

Drug-flow wakes me, lifts dark fog-pall
sundering senses. I see again.
Void-stride vessel · invades my space;
needling nearness · has nudged alarms
and raised my flesh. Or what rind is left,
cast-off carcass · encased in iron.
Lightning-tendrils · align in wires,
return pain-speech · from tendons, nerves,
numbed by centuries. I know your scent.
I know presence. I know you hang
silently probing · with sensor's wave
careful of contact. But calm weapons:
I will never harm · new-come traveler
in my state today, stuttering relic,
ring-haunting wreck · that rounds planet.

⇩ QUERY NATURE *(to screen 2)*



Screen 2



(to screen 1)

You question my type?
Anyone can utter · the order of kinds:
Home for breath-speech, the human breed;
the beasts and plants · bound to planet;
far Fold-crawlers · found on warp-waves;
adept, deathless, the deep-ones old;
gift-granting gods, governing powers.
Five in total, well fit for count
on able hand. But I am not
exactly resolved · into zone neat-sealed,
let me tell you.

PROLONG SIGNAL *(to screen 3)*

Screen 3

(to screen 2)

A lesser pilot, I loyally served
kingdom now so ancient · that your kin today
have forgotten they forgot · its grand glamour,
gnome-whispered name. Ignoble birth
pushed me to patron · and to peril's grip:
cruel Kilmartin · who caught youthfolk
in a word-wrought web. Winning over
ambitious heart · with bright promise,
she had me sign contract · to seal my corse
in iron fortress, armour hallowed
by lineage long. Limbs I offered
in exchange for might. Chained in engine,
I brought more money · to master's grasp,
and master swore · to remain loving
as at first we were. Far we wandered
taking fray-fees · wherever turmoil led,
and for time my lord · tenderly ruled me.



RECALIBRATE · COUNTER-WAVELENGTH *(to screen 4)*

Screen 4

⇧ ✝ *(to screen 3)*



Our free-lance grew. Foes died.
Hearts warped. Or perhaps master
was forever false. Evil winter
held heart-linkage; hard gossip
left my soul sullied. I sundered flesh
again for love, gave my bone-house
eagerly over · that I might all surpass,
stay the strongest · in our stern unit
among mercenaries. Master persisted,
abused troop-trust · and bodies all
of myself and peers; I saw pine-truth:
we who relinquished limbs · lusting for lord-praise
stood reduced to cards · that she dealt coldly,
running her contracts. The rich rewards
ring-giving ranks · rained on my master
remained in her grasp. Yet mind followed
orders ever. Our implants ensured
muster and obedience. Such is the manner of my place
in the order of kinds.

⇩ INTERSEQUENCE CO-AX *(to screen 5)*

Screen 5



⇧ ᛉ *(to screen 4)*

Rudimentary · rough-link channel limits language, but allows partial spell-woven speech; I can spin further tales of engine.

⇩ **INTERROGATE PAST** *(to screen 6)*

⇩ **INTERROGATE PLACE** *(to screen 22)*

Screen 6



(to screen 5)

It was a time for war, when woe troubled
every kingdom. My orders came
from my true master · tugging the leash-line,
cold Kilmartin. But cash issued
commands to her; master hungered
ever that accounts · might overflow
from client cliques. Clustered contracts
defined in text · fighting's pattern,
clause-woven cloth.

INCLINE BEAMWELL *(to screen 7)*

Screen 7

⇧ Y *(to screen 6)*

My single eye · sought out fleeting
soul-marker signs · of insurgent life,
anti-social · agitators,
the usual yoked · euphemisms
orders uttered. Or else I stalked
mist-murk woodlands, unmoving for hours
in damp drip-dark, endured waiting,
gun-barrels grown · like green-mossed boughs
in the foul forest. Or I fought my peers,
others bonded · in iron bodies
impervious to pain—with pile bunker,
beam bone-searing, and bullet's flight
marking masters' · immense hunger
for land, for might, for lance-won pride
acquiring naught.

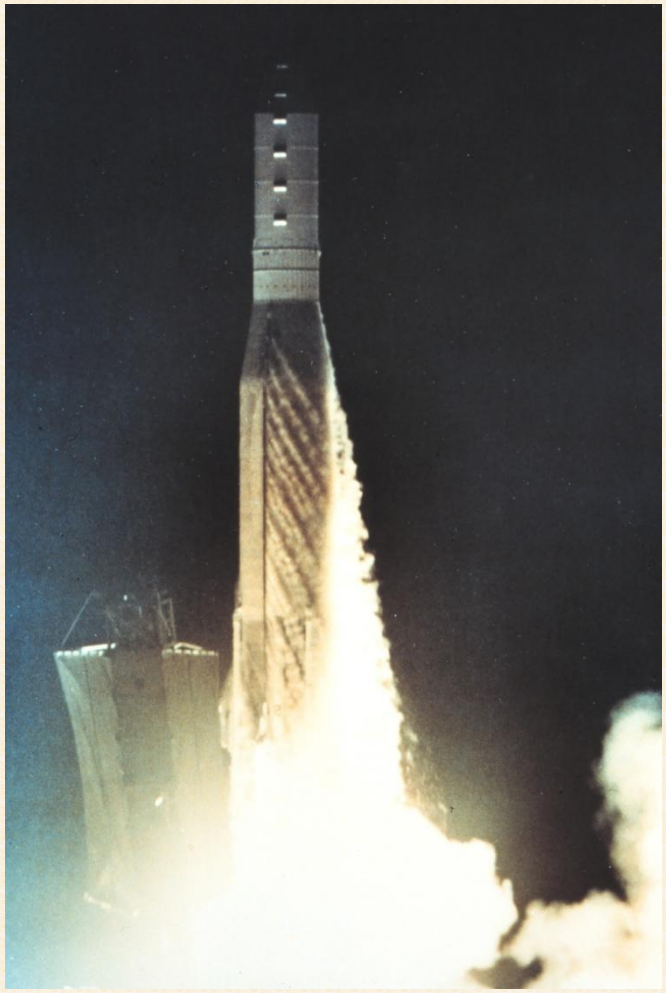
⇩ QUERY MAXIMS *(to screen 8)*

⇩ QUERY DEATH-CAUSE *(to screen 15)*



⇧ M *(to screen 7)*

Saw as much as sword-edge · may save the mind
in metal immured; maxims are needful,
and makers fixed · many in engine
as truths to sustain. Two are mated:
wound-flesh and armour · into a world must birth
the soldier of iron. City on earth-star
must miss mass-folk · as a mourning town;
people in exile · must pass memories
of the wonders gone. Wandering armours
must hasten to hull · in its heaven-ring path
about a battered rock. Then rockets must burn
void-treaders vast · into veiled Fold-space
to seek contracts new. Killing is nature,
violence labour, revenge a chance
for profit's pull; pull shall be ground-truth
that resolves doubtings.



⇩ EXAMINE LOVES *(to screen 9)*

⇩ EXAMINE FATE *(to screen 12)*

Screen 9

⇧ Þ *(to screen 8)*

Once love for master · was just leash affixed
to breached brain-keep, I bristling found
true-loves only · among terror-peers,
contracted blades · travelling war-zones,
some bound in iron, brethren in nature,
others able · to exit steed,
but held harnessed—hell-bound pilots—
by thrill at war. Thronging rivals,
again and again · greeting each other
on fresh-found fields · forged us chain-links
missed by masters. We would admit closeness
at slaughter's point, when the slick poniard
carved to cockpit. That killing love
lessened never · when living soul
who spurred feeling · sped to dead-halls,
world wan-shrouded.



⇩ AWAIT SEQUEL *(to screen 10)*

(to screen 9)

Innocence absent, I ever loved
spinning through spear-clash · with spread boosters
to butcher foe. Barely recalling
the self that recoiled · at slight violence,
I soaked in oils · seeping, spurting
from my slain targets, serpent-hearted,
grown in grim-wit. Did the gods condemn
mind to master · because I was a marred human
in kind and thought? Or did cruel handling,
Kilmartin's kiss, craft my soul-shape
to seek battle, sick with hunger,
so avenging pain · inconveniently came
before my wrongs? Fate is rune-hid;
gods deal rightness · in garbled ways.
But now take riddle.

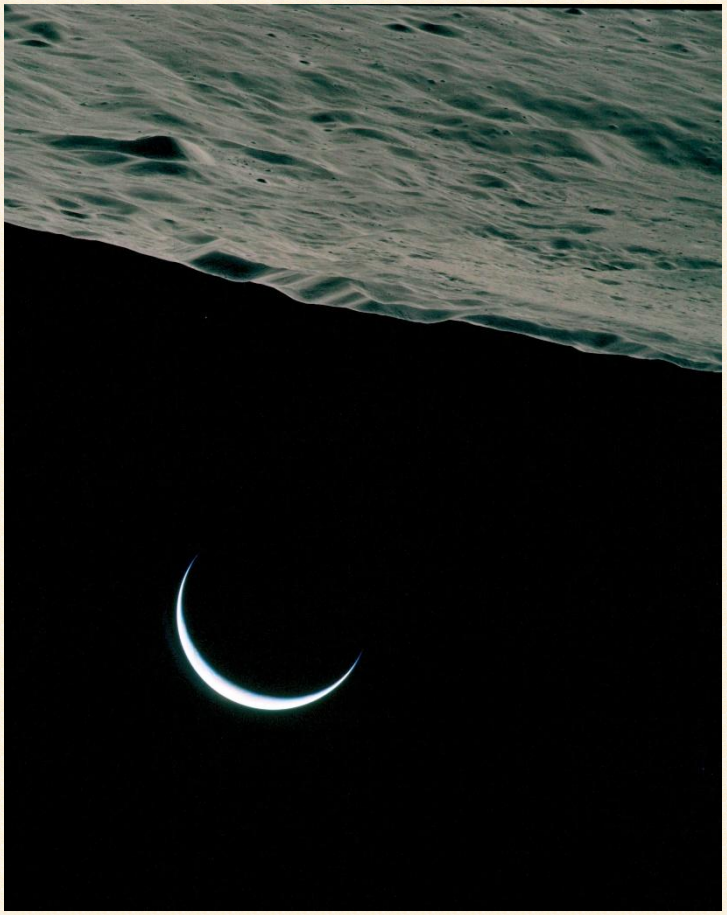


ENTERTAIN QUESTION *(to screen 11)*

Screen 11

(to screen 10)

And what of *your* star-home? Do its weapons stand
idly ageing, or do fell armours
battle also, contest the air,
and the earth ploughless, and the ocean's plunge
that birthed much life? And do gaunt lost-ones
wander highways · from flattened homes—
wrecks wretch-haunted—on your planet, rich
with resources to send · ships out for salvage?
Is the body meat · for high masters
in your nurturing home? Hard-moulding hands,
recyclers of flesh, money flocking
to bid on your soul—do you see such sorrows
on your cradle star? Fear comes, stern-gripped,
that it is ever thus · under throne-might
needing armours; that you too were shaped anew
to power's purpose, your brain propelled
by curated desires. Which of mind-fort's zones
wholly knows freedom · untouched by force
of lust, of gold, ghost-warping grip
of the will to rule? Answer that riddle.



TERMINATE SIGNAL *(back to opening)*

Screen 12

⇧ ↑ *(to screen 8)*

Might master still live, misery to luckless
war-victims worn · on some wasteland star
distant in all-space? I am not eager to dream,
but I know nightmares · in which nothing cuts
her wicked years, and she wields yet
thronging thrall-troop. Thought is poison.
For starfields are vast, spy-lairs many,
and cruel Kilmartin · was cunning and wise
dwimmer-worker · on the in-dwelling self,
and though dark dangers · dog the thinkers
who violate bar · on victory over death,
virtue is not power; she had vice-strong thought;
secure like a keep, her acute mind was
evil but ordered.



⇩ CHECK ANGLED ARRAY *(to screen 13)*

Screen 13

(to screen 12)

Learning enlightened her; she might lightly grasp
life at its root-base · through rituals unseen,
through alchemy within, or through the arts breath-formed,
skill-honing schemes; sculpting life-root,
lengthening life-span · so she might last ever
and still somewhere · stain the void-roads.
But immortality is untruth. If token survives
it will be husk tortured—or I hope as much
in my heart hardened, hatred's garden,
watered in secret · away from nodes
of harsh implants. I hope at least
such minor righteousness · might be meted out.
But now I beg answer · brisk on signal
sent sound-coding.



RECEIVE QUERY *(to screen 14)*

Screen 14

(to screen 12)

And what of *your* star-home? Do its weapons stand
idly ageing, or do fell armours
battle also, contest the air,
and the earth ploughless, and the ocean's plunge
that birthed much life? And do gaunt lost-ones
wander highways · from flattened homes—
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to power's purpose, your brain propelled
by curated desires. Which of mind-fort's zones
wholly knows freedom · untouched by force
of lust, of gold, ghost-warping grip
of the will to rule? Answer that riddle.



TERMINATE SIGNAL

Screen 15

⇧ ↾ *(to screen 7)*

Work wealth-guarding, warding to strictures
of wrangled contract. There arose a fight:
an earldom wanted · the water rights
from colony clump, a clash law-born
at the noon-lake star (so named back then;
you know how you call · this nook emptied
of once-rich folk). Warping from Fold-wave,
ending defenders, we owned the field
but sensed swiftly · swinging jaw-trap,
moon-harboured maw · of mailed armours
set to slay us. A certain part
of storm-ringed band · must stay rearguard
to fulfil contract, capture fee-clause
for employer's purse.



⇩ PATTERN SEQUENCE *(to screen 16)*

Screen 16

⇧ ✝ *(to screen 15)*

So pain began. Pilots suffered,
lances shivered, lasers shuttered
lives not lasting, lither arrows
all burst baleful, board-shields fashioned
fastness final; that having fallen too,
we drew brand-steel · and bought our deaths—
wondrous triumph · or wan defeat
depending on view. Personal viewpoint
did not impede master; she got paid, instead.
In all my mind, implants loudly
call it best of deaths, bold in service
of loving lord. A lone utterance
holster-hidden · at hearing's edge
allows protest: loathsome prime-waste
to die nearly · then drifting lie,
for eras untold.



⇩ TARGET: MASTER *(to screen 17)*

⇩ TARGET: WORTHWHILE? *(to screen 20)*

Screen 17

⇧ ↑ *(to screen 16)*

Might master still live, misery to luckless
war-victims worn · on some wasteland star
distant in all-space? I am not eager to dream,
but I know nightmares · in which nothing cuts
her wicked years, and she wields yet
thronging thrall-troop. Thought is poison.
For starfields are vast, spy-lairs many,
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and though dark dangers · dog the thinkers
who violate bar · on victory over death,
virtue is not power; she had vice-strong thought;
secure like a keep, her acute mind was
evil but ordered.

⇩ **CHECK ANGLED ARRAY** *(to screen 18)*



Screen 18

(to screen 17)

Learning enlightened her; she might lightly grasp
life at its root-base · through rituals unseen,
through alchemy within, or through the arts breath-formed,
skill-honing schemes; sculpting life-root,
lengthening life-span · so she might last ever
and still somewhere · stain the void-roads.
But immortality is untruth. If token survives
it will be husk tortured—or I hope as much
in my heart hardened, hatred's garden,
watered in secret · away from nodes
of harsh implants. I hope at least
such minor righteousness · might be meted out.
But now I beg answer · brisk on signal
sent sound-coding.



RECEIVE QUERY *(to screen 19)*

Screen 19

(to screen 18)

And what of *your* star-home? Do its weapons stand
idly ageing, or do fell armours
battle also, contest the air,
and the earth ploughless, and the ocean's plunge
that birthed much life? And do gaunt lost-ones
wander highways · from flattened homes—
wrecks wretch-haunted—on your planet, rich
with resources to send · ships out for salvage?
Is the body meat · for high masters
in your nurturing home? Hard-moulding hands,
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on your cradle star? Fear comes, stern-gripped,
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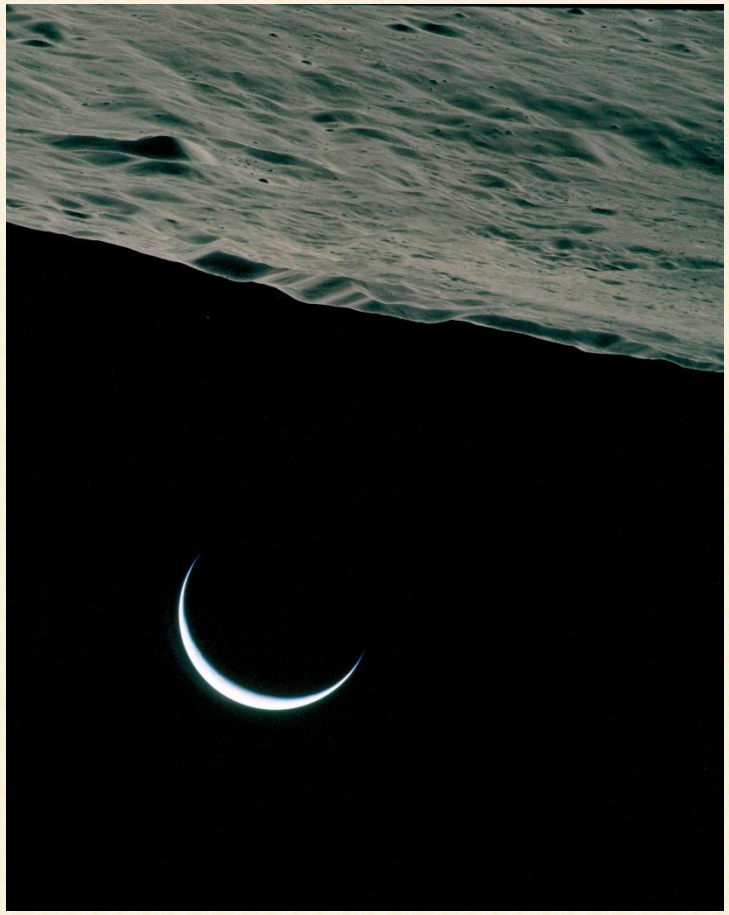
of the will to rule? Answer that riddle.



TERMINATE SIGNAL *(back to opening)*

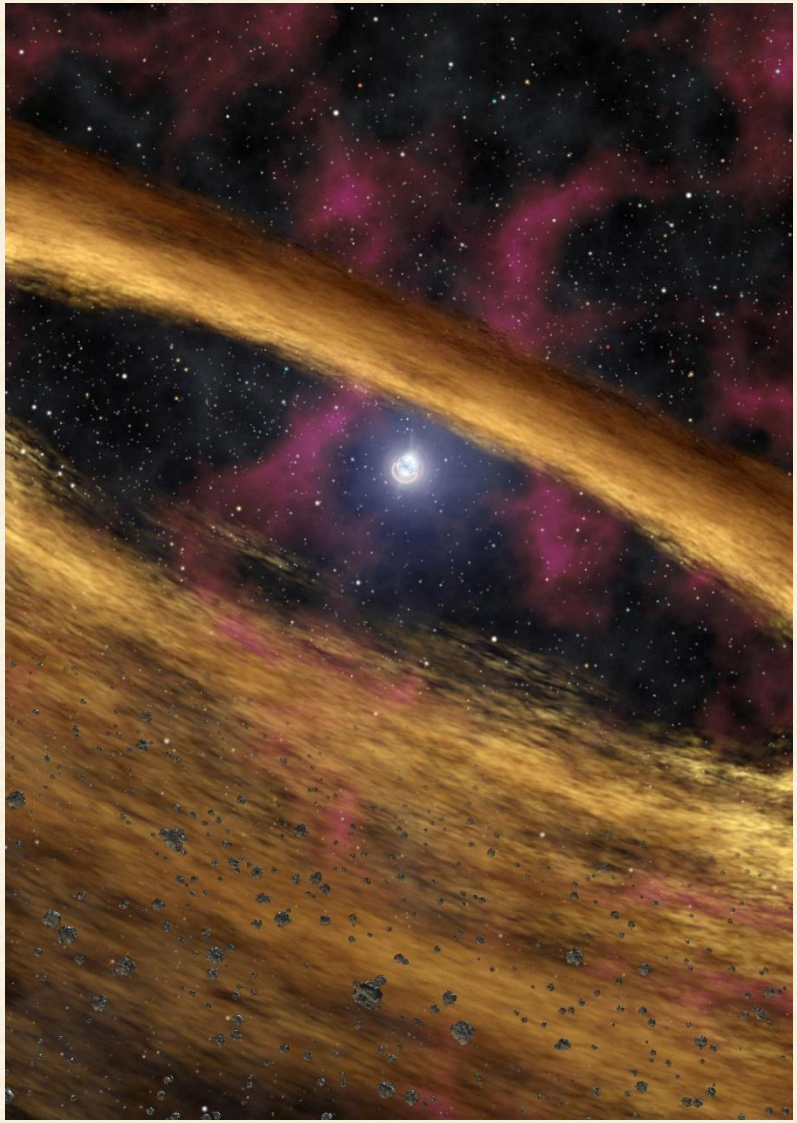
Screen 20

(to screen 16)

Wondering, ask then: was it worth living
as such a battle-frame? Bitter dealing,
to swap lich-freedom · for loaded gun
ever armed in · the outer rooms
of mind's fastness. Matchless logic.
But my heart does not hum · wholly for logic;
long-past, they enlaced it · with little threads—
love-tangling lines—that lead only
to designers' goals. Zone of feeling
permitted to machine · is pale shadow
of human scope. Hearty love for
cruel procedure · comes crafted in my doom.
But I appeal for time.

PERPETUATE LINK

(to screen 21)



Screen 21

(to screen 20)

And what of your star-home? Do its weapons stand
idly ageing, or do fell armours
battle also, contest the air,
and the earth ploughless, and the ocean's plunge
that birthed much life? And do gaunt lost-ones
wander highways · from flattened homes—
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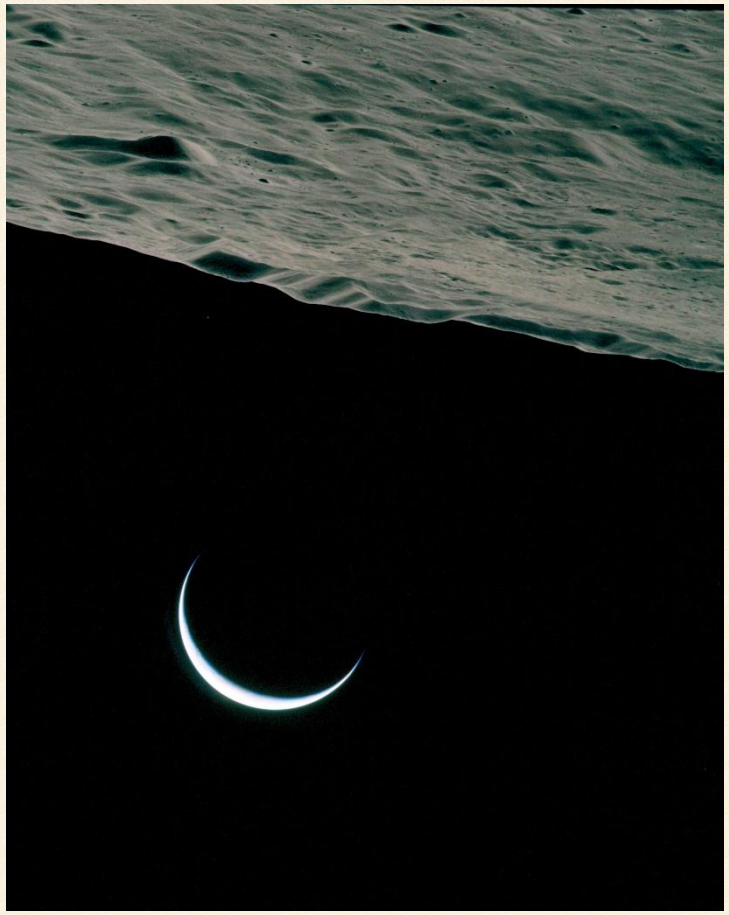
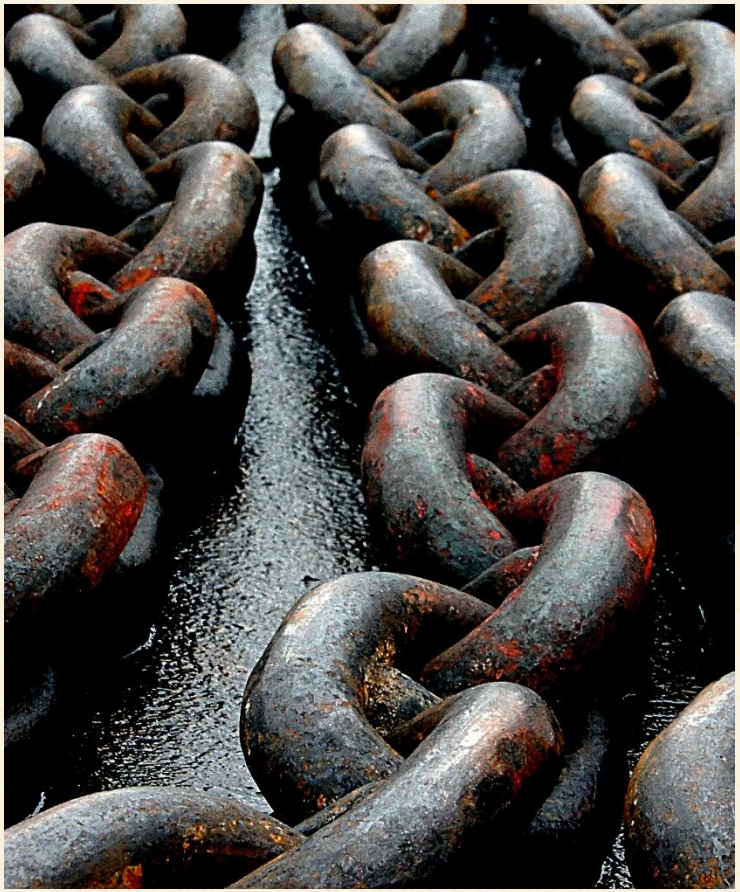


TERMINATE SIGNAL *(back to opening)*

Screen 22

(to screen 5)

I have known many thrones · mastering nations,
and fate took them all. Foremost of them,
Man-Warder mailed · mustered armours
to spread power · spanning further
than any before. Or so annals say,
but my era · was the molten years
after his long-sought death. Loyal lieutenants
lusted for his legacy. There was Leaf royal
of the binary stars; Bowman of the Highgate;
and the Floral King, whose fleet campfires
shone new galaxy · into the shattered skies
of woe-stunned worlds · war had chosen.
Astray ruled the strands, Strix the void-fields,
Root-Weld the roid-fields, so rich drug-wise
that gold fancifully · garnished her feasts,
food-gilding fee. She fetched us rings
that my master took, measuring nothing
apart as pay · for pet soldiers.

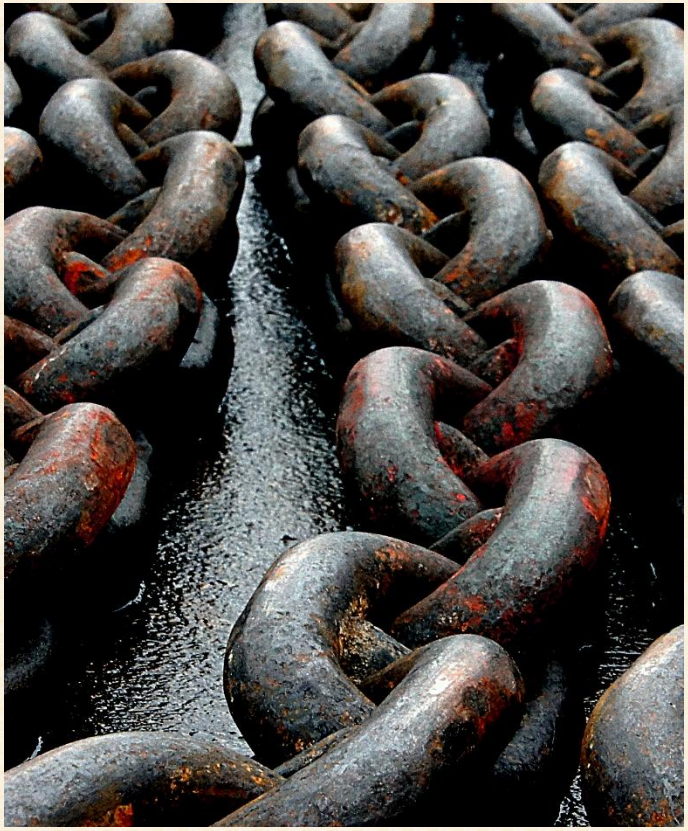


GOVERN SIGNAL'S · AMBIGUITIES *(to screen 23)*

Screen 23

ᚱ *(to screen 22)*

Foul was the workload. Fighting for the Mould-earls
we displaced the poor · platter-workers
from their hill homesteads. Then for heavier price
the Mould-earls we burned · as they begged mercy
in their fallen spires. Filth-load equal
hardened on heart-strings · from each hollow prize.
That is instance lone · of the old rhythm
playing our life-lines. Many places we saw
joyless in scope-glance · on our journeys raw.
Stones star-blasted · held the Stunned Palace,
so languid with wealth; liquid fortress
of flowing iron · fostered our cohort
through the Macebound War; master hauled us
to leech-craft star-fort · for long repairs—
its name is now · nothingness grown,
but meant 'Refuge'. So many were the lands
battered by our engines; most burned right soon.
Tally is sorrow.



INTERROGATE DEATH *(to screen 24)*

INTERROGATE ARMS *(to screen 31)*

Screen 24

(to screen 23)

Work wealth-guarding, warding to strictures
of wrangled contract. There arose a fight:
an earldom wanted · the water rights
from colony clump, a clash law-born
at the noon-lake star (so named back then;
you know how you call · this nook emptied
of once-rich folk). Warping from Fold-wave,
ending defenders, we owned the field
but sensed swiftly · swinging jaw-trap,
moon-harboured maw · of mailed armours
set to slay us. A certain part
of storm-ringed band · must stay rearguard
to fulfil contract, capture fee-clause
for employer's purse.

PATTERN SEQUENCE *(to screen 25)*



Screen 25

⇧ ✝ *(to screen 24)*

So pain began. Pilots suffered,
lances shivered, lasers shuttered
lives not lasting, lither arrows
all burst baleful, board-shields fashioned
fastness final; that having fallen too,
we drew brand-steel · and bought our deaths—
wondrous triumph · or wan defeat
depending on view. Personal viewpoint
did not impede master; she got paid, instead.
In all my mind, implants loudly
call it best of deaths, bold in service
of loving lord. A lone utterance
holster-hidden · at hearing's edge
allows protest: loathsome prime-waste
to die nearly · then drifting lie,
for eras untold.



⇩ TARGET: MASTER *(to screen 26)*

⇩ TARGET: WORTHWHILE? *(to screen 29)*

Screen 26

⇧ ↑ *(to screen 25)*

Might master still live, misery to luckless
war-victims worn · on some wasteland star
distant in all-space? I am not eager to dream,
but I know nightmares · in which nothing cuts
her wicked years, and she wields yet
thronging thrall-troop. Thought is poison.
For starfields are vast, spy-lairs many,
and cruel Kilmartin · was cunning and wise
dwimmer-worker · on the in-dwelling self,
and though dark dangers · dog the thinkers
who violate bar · on victory over death,
virtue is not power; she had vice-strong thought;
secure like a keep, her acute mind was
evil but ordered.



⇩ CHECK ANGLED ARRAY *(to screen 27)*

Screen 27

(to screen 26)

Learning enlightened her; she might lightly grasp
life at its root-base · through rituals unseen,
through alchemy within, or through the arts breath-formed,
skill-honing schemes; sculpting life-root,
lengthening life-span · so she might last ever
and still somewhere · stain the void-roads.
But immortality is untruth. If token survives
it will be husk tortured—or I hope as much
in my heart hardened, hatred's garden,
watered in secret · away from nodes
 of harsh implants. I hope at least
such minor righteousness · might be meted out.
But now I beg answer · brisk on signal
sent sound-coding.



RECEIVE QUERY *(to screen 28)*

Screen 28

(to screen 27)

And what of your star-home? Do its weapons stand
idly ageing, or do fell armours
battle also, contest the air,
and the earth ploughless, and the ocean's plunge
that birthed much life? And do gaunt lost-ones
wander highways · from flattened homes—
wrecks wretch-haunted—on your planet, rich
with resources to send · ships out for salvage?
Is the body meat · for high masters
in your nurturing home? Hard-moulding hands,
recyclers of flesh, money flocking
to bid on your soul—do you see such sorrows
on your cradle star? Fear comes, stern-gripped,
that it is ever thus · under throne-might
needing armours; that you too were shaped anew
to power's purpose, your brain propelled
by curated desires. Which of mind-fort's zones
wholly knows freedom · untouched by force
of lust, of gold, ghost-warping grip
of the will to rule? Answer that riddle.



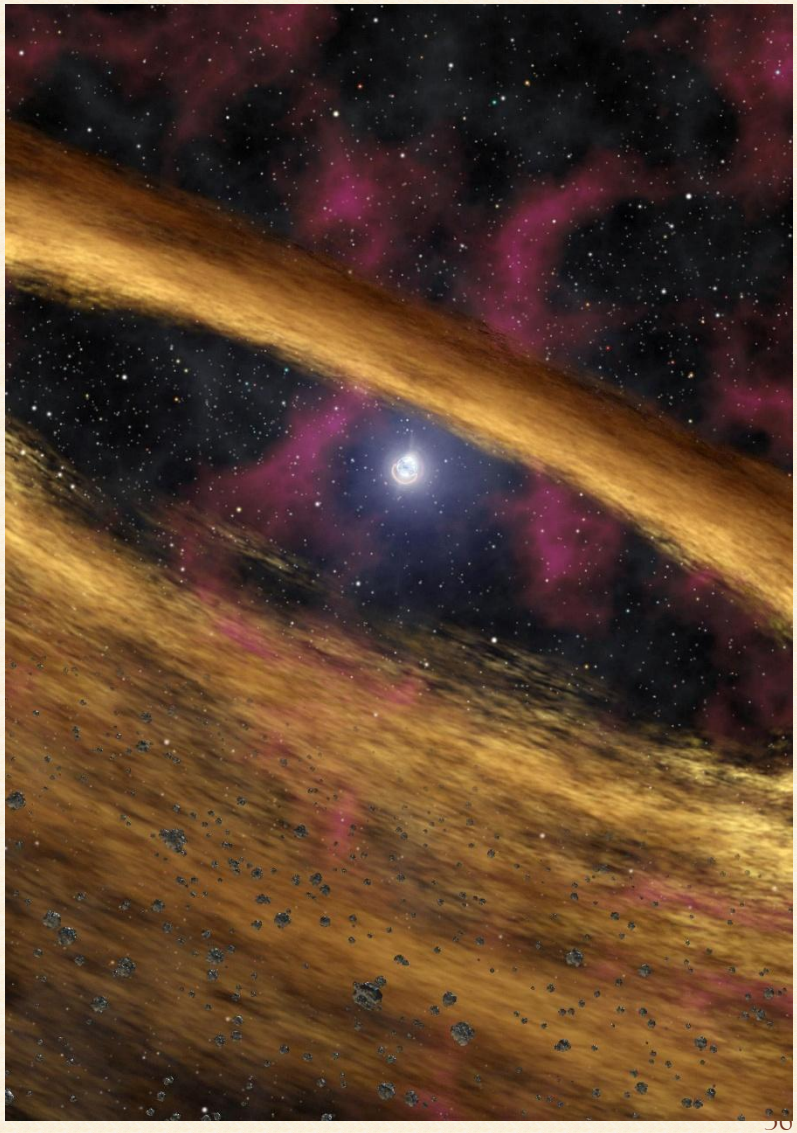
TERMINATE SIGNAL *(back to opening)*

Screen 29

(to screen 25)

Wondering, ask then: was it worth living
as such a battle-frame? Bitter dealing,
to swap lich-freedom · for loaded gun
ever armed in · the outer rooms
of mind's fastness. Matchless logic.
But my heart does not hum · wholly for logic;
long-past, they enlaced it · with little threads—
love-tangling lines—that lead only
to designers' goals. Zone of feeling
permitted to machine · is pale shadow
of human scope. Hearty love for
cruel procedure · comes crafted in my doom.
But I appeal for time.

PERPETUATE LINK *(to screen 30)*



Screen 30

(to screen 29)

And what of *your* star-home? Do its weapons stand
idly ageing, or do fell armours
battle also, contest the air,
and the earth ploughless, and the ocean's plunge
that birthed much life? And do gaunt lost-ones
wander highways · from flattened homes—
wrecks wretch-haunted—on your planet, rich
with resources to send · ships out for salvage?
Is the body meat · for high masters
in your nurturing home? Hard-moulding hands,
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to power's purpose, your brain propelled
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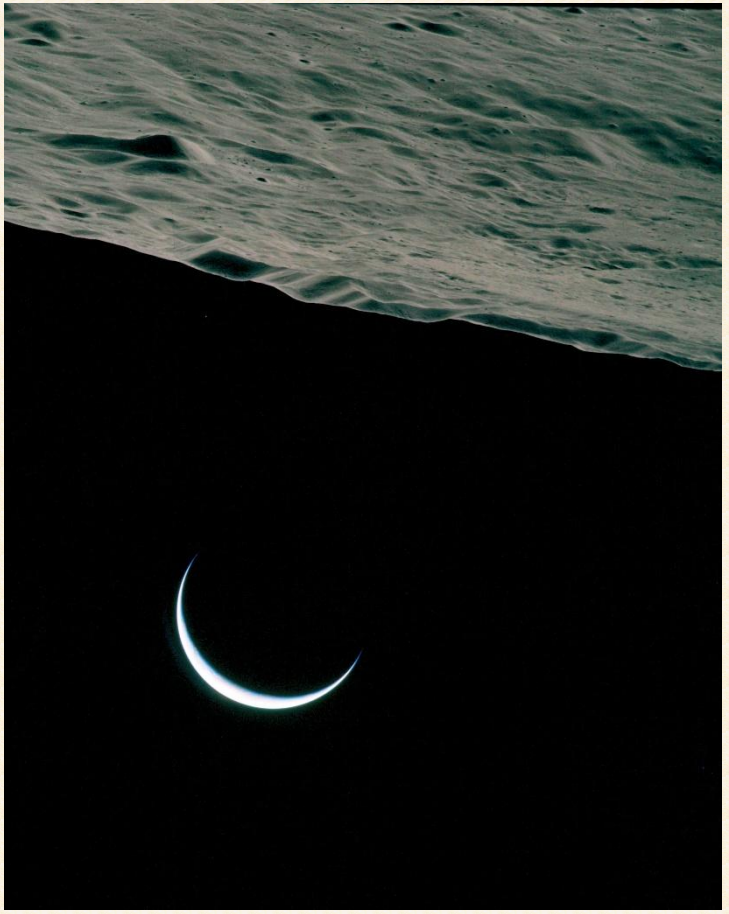
wholly knows freedom · untouched by force
of lust, of gold, ghost-warping grip
of the will to rule? Answer that riddle.



TERMINATE SIGNAL *(back to opening)*

Screen 31

⇧ ✖ *(to screen 23)*

You ask after arms. Every weapon:
bright-bloom bomb-lances, for brawl hungry,
and great bolts arcane · born from curving
war-bow wolfish; a wired coil-gun;
wound-eager whip, woe-birth rocket,
hammer, hand-axe, the hunting spear,
petard, harpoon, trident, poniard,
and null grenade. Nothing daunted
tool-frames tireless, to master tied
by oath's burden. All arms we bore,
whatever iron · mission asked.
But do not beg knowledge · of best weapons:
suremost solution · was to shatter foe
by hunger or fear, hindering battle,
preserving supplies. Desired target
sometimes was seized in · success shotless.
Such were our weapons. But you seek, I suspect,
knowledge of battery · still nailed to hull.

⇩ ASSENTING SIGN *(to screen 32)*



Screen 32

⇧ ⌡ *(to screen 31)*

Sensible caution,
but relax: little · lancing wound-work
can I deal you now, in my damaged state,
battle-blasted · then abandoned to roll
æons in emptiness. Nor do your eager lords,
backers, or masters, face bale or threat
from my borne ordnance. For brawl final
they gave me swords surge-filled, sorceries whispered,
gap-gouger guns, glaring lasers,
and wishes for luck—wasted breathing,
for the gods were not good. Ground by lightwaves,
time-stained to tarnish, my tall body
answers no longer · my urging call,
and my weapons fell · now weakened fall
to gear but as deadly · as my engraved skin-signs,
acquired tattoo.



⇩ **QUESTION: WORTHWHILE?** *(to screen 33)*

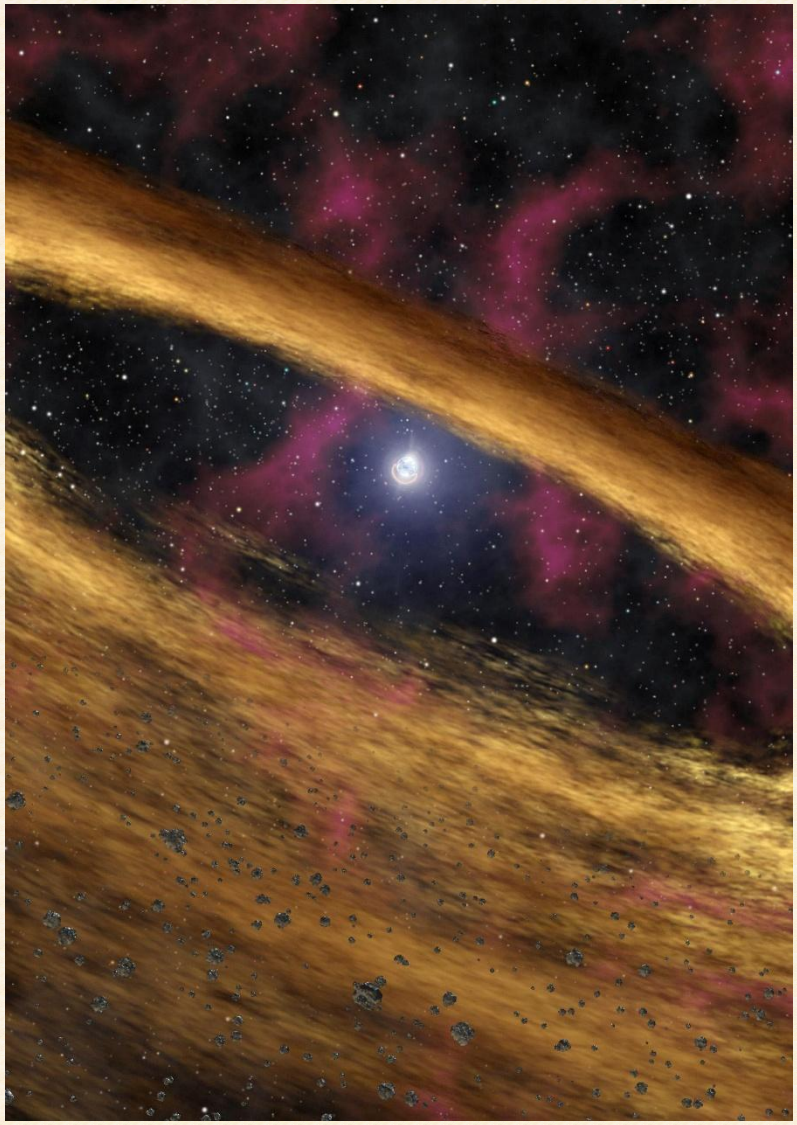
⇩ **QUESTION: ENGRAVING?**

Screen 33

(to screen 32)

Wondering, ask then: was it worth living
as such a battle-frame? Bitter dealing,
to swap lich-freedom · for loaded gun
ever armed in · the outer rooms
of mind's fastness. Matchless logic.
But my heart does not hum · wholly for logic;
long-past, they enlaced it · with little threads—
love-tangling lines—that lead only
to designers' goals. Zone of feeling
permitted to machine · is pale shadow
of human scope. Hearty love for
cruel procedure · comes crafted in my doom.
But I appeal for time.

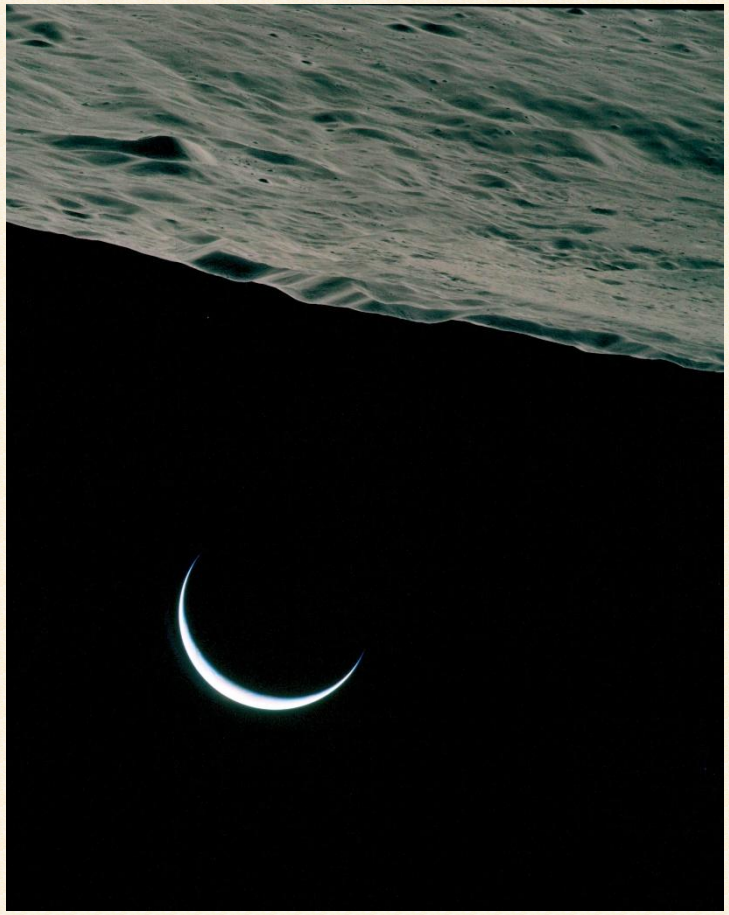
PERPETUATE LINK



Screen 34

⇧ **F** *(to screen 33)*

And what of your star-home? Do its weapons stand
idly ageing, or do fell armours
battle also, contest the air,
and the earth ploughless, and the ocean's plunge
that birthed much life? And do gaunt lost-ones
wander highways · from flattened homes—
wrecks wretch-haunted—on your planet, rich
with resources to send · ships out for salvage?
Is the body meat · for high masters
in your nurturing home? Hard-moulding hands,
recyclers of flesh, money flocking
to bid on your soul—do you see such sorrows
on your cradle star? Fear comes, stern-gripped,
that it is ever thus · under throne-might
needing armours; that you too were shaped anew
to power's purpose, your brain propelled
by curated desires. Which of mind-fort's zones
wholly knows freedom · untouched by force
of lust, of gold, ghost-warping grip
of the will to rule? Answer that riddle.



⇩ **TERMINATE SIGNAL** *(back to opening)*

Screen 35



(to screen 31)

Oh yes, my skin · yearned once for scarring
carve-craft emblems. It was a keen device
to amuse master, to magnetise gaze
ever flitting · between all her troops—
fickle love-look. I fearful asked
what should be pictured, and she said Wile-Hand old,
steel-wright wisest, though stroke royal
hobbled his footsteps. Not heard of today,
I strongly suspect; stylistic scanner,
sense-laser sight · searches vainly—
I detect such things, though I cannot return favour.

WITHDRAW LASER *(to screen 36)*

⇧ **H** *(to screen 35)*

Daring Wile-Hand
on flank-plate took form, fashioned, graven,
working smithy · to make wild armours,
mounts might-bearing. Mould-earth's prison
holds him harboured · in hard labour,
already hamstrung by hest · of the harshest king.
And on other flank · etchant fluid
a warrior wrought, working bowstring
to defend city · that sat fiercely besieged,
already ringed by rage. You would not reach in lore
knowledge of her legend · if I annoyed ear
with utterance empty. But images engraved
only briefly · interested master's
capricious pride. Prince of devils,
how I would hate her · if heart's shackles
stood not locked ever! But listen now
to swift query.



⇩ **RECEIVE QUESTION** *(to screen 37)*

Screen 37

(to screen 36)

And what of *your* star-home? Do its weapons stand
idly ageing, or do fell armours
battle also, contest the air,
and the earth ploughless, and the ocean's plunge
that birthed much life? And do gaunt lost-ones
wander highways · from flattened homes—
wrecks wretch-haunted—on your planet, rich
with resources to send · ships out for salvage?
Is the body meat · for high masters
in your nurturing home? Hard-moulding hands,
recyclers of flesh, money flocking
to bid on your soul—do you see such sorrows
on your cradle star? Fear comes, stern-gripped,
that it is ever thus · under throne-might
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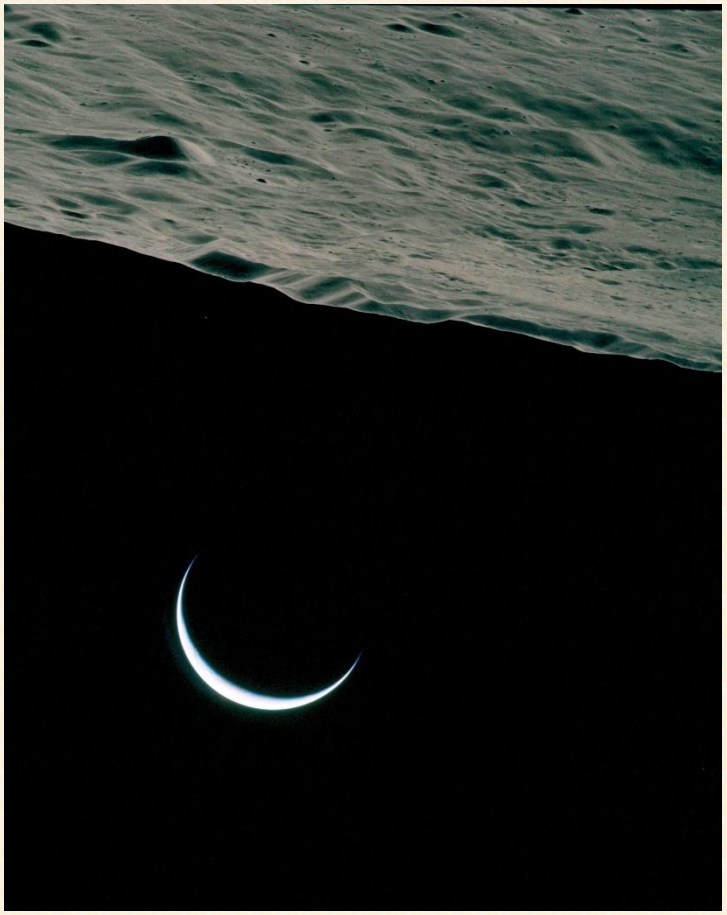
to power's purpose, your brain propelled
by curated desires. Which of mind-fort's zones
wholly knows freedom · untouched by force
of lust, of gold, ghost-warping grip
of the will to rule? Answer that riddle.



TERMINATE SIGNAL *(back to opening)*

Endnotes

Sources and inspiration

I thought about speaking-object poems in Old English (some examples curated for general readers here), and other speaking objects like the Alfred Jewel, which gave me the noun/name for the Object—a word which would, I realized, also hook into the ways the poem touches on labour, dehumanization, and domination.

I hope the tone of the Object's dialogue has a detached, anaesthetized aspect. I also hope the way the Object describes things has a defamiliarizing effect, inviting us to reverse-engineer our way back to the things—labour disputes? colony crises?—that might underpin its account.

The player's responses should feel far less free-form than the Object's long, unspooling speeches. The player is stuck with weird, overly Latinate, overly technical phrasings which only gesture at the kinds of precise questions we might want to ask.

At the poem's end, the Object turns the interrogation around and asks us some questions. Have we locked ourselves into a world where others can own, control, and trade in the body, albeit in subtler ways than wholesale replacement of the victim's body with a giant war machine?

Runes

The runes at the head of each passage usually—but not always!—have something to do with the contents. Several runic alphabets circulated in northern Europe, and even that statement simplifies. The runes in *Connect* come from the English Futhorc, not the Scandinavian Elder Futhark, nor its descendant the Younger Futhark, although since the three are relatives some runes are shared. Ultimately the whole family of runic alphabets probably descends, via Italy and very early Latin script, from the Greek alphabet. The use of runes is not meant to imply any connection to the present-day far right, who have no more claim to the Futhorc than anyone else in the world who cares to learn about runes.

The specific local uses of the runes are explained in the local notes. The names of the runes in the notes are taken from the expansions of the runes in the edition of the *Rune Poem* in Robert E. Bjork, ed., *Old English Shorter Poems, Volume II: Wisdom and Lyric* (Cambridge, MA, 2014). As I understand it, this poem itself is a somewhat late and misleadingly intellectualized witness to runes' uses!

Local notes

1: Title

Title: 30 79 49 13 spells *hund*, 'dog' in Old English, in a seventeenth-century cipher used by Edward Montagu during the wars of the three kingdoms. I wanted something that'd display several layers of anachronism at once.

2: Waking sequence

- ᾔ *nyd*: need, state of want, plight—where we meet the Object.
- ᚠ *feoh*: money or cattle. Cashflow and domestication are themes cropping up throughout the poem.
- ᚹ *wynn*: joy. To match the Object's original happiness with Kilmartin.
- ᛇ *ear*, a late addition to the futhorc, of uncertain meaning, but perhaps earth. In part a weak pun here—this passage is where the player starts sending signals back to the Object's present-day English *ear*—but the Old English *Rune Poem* also associates this rune with burial, decomposition, and broken oaths.

Order of kinds: I have a feeling there's a similar alliterating list of beings somewhere in Tolkien. This list attempts to imagine how people in the universe defined by the Fold—hyperspace—might categorize life. Fold-crawlers are whatever life-forms live in the Fold itself.
cruel Kilmartin: it's sometimes suggested that in James Hogg's *Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, the enigmatic Gil-Martin—who might or might not be a/the devil—takes his name from *gille-*

Màrtainn (‘Martin’s lad’?), a Scottish Gaelic poeticism for the fox as a trickster figure. *gille* is pronounced /ˈkʲiʎə/, so a distancing re-spelling with *k* seemed appropriate.

3A: ‘It was a time for war’ and ‘My single eye’

- ᛜ *ger*, year: for a treatment of the past.
- ᛉ *eolhx*, meaning uncertain. In the *Rune Poem*, it is a fen-plant that ‘wounds fiercely, / reddens with blood everyone who lays hold of it’ (Bjork’s translation); both the wounding and the rural setting seemed to fit this passage.

It was a time for war: not especially my intention, but unavoidably Ecclesiastes 3.8.
My single eye et cetera: this passage owes a debt to Carter Revard’s poem ‘Pilotless Angel: Christmas, 2004’.

3B: ‘I have known many thrones’ and ‘Foul was the workload’

- ᛟ *ethel*, homeland: because this passage is about places!
- ᚱ *rad*, riding: for the Object’s travels.

I have known many thrones: some elements of this passage are loosely modelled on the Old English poem *Widsith*.

Foremost of them, / Man-Warder mailed: *Widsith* names Alexander as the ruler who did most well for himself. ‘Man-Warder’ is a rough calque of *Alexander*. Alexander also gave me the idea that the Object might remember wars among the surviving lieutenants of a greater power, like the Diadochi.

Mould-earls: ‘mould’ might mean earth (planetary? planet-dwelling). Or perhaps they were just very unpleasant. The Object fighting for the Mould-earls and then *against* the Mould-earls is another detail modelled on *Widsith*.

the poor · platter-workers: who knows what the platter-workers did. But I wondered whether the platters might be some kind of very obsolete data storage.

4A: ‘Saw as much as sword-edge’

- ᛗ *mann*, human being (in Old English the word lacks the semantic gender it would later acquire, and is masculine only grammatically).

Saw as much as sword-edge: *saw* as in ‘proverb’ or ‘saying’ (cognate with *saga*). This passage takes some inspiration from the Old English poems now known as *Maxims I* and *Maxims II*. Particularly *Maxims II*.

4B: ‘Work wealth-guarding’ and ‘So pain began.’

- ᛚ *lagu*, sea, water, lake: the Object was killed, or at least left for dead, in a battle over water-rights at the noon-*lake* star.
- ᚾ *nyd*, need, plight: it’s nyd again! This time primarily for the plight sense.

an earldom wanted · water right-forms / from colony clump: like the labour dispute in 3B, I wanted some sense here that some practical, hard-nosed conflict might lie distantly behind the Object’s words. One of the depressingly plausible arguments I’ve heard made about space colonies is that the constructor’s control over water and air would make life there very unfree.

lither arrows: *lither* means wicked or harmful.

brand-steel: *brand* as in sword.

4C: ‘You ask after arms’ and ‘Sensible caution’

- ᛜ *ing*, the god known in Old Norse as Freyr: Freyr has a sword that wields itself.
- ᛇ *eoh*, yew tree: no particular reason, except perhaps that later history has associated the yew with bows.

petard: an explosive, the word now little used in English outside the saying about being hoisted by one’s own petard.

the gods were not good: surely a long-standing collocation, but lodged in this writer's mind in its use by the captain of HMS *Jervis Bay*.

to gear but as deadly: 'but' here means 'merely'.

5A: 'Once love for master' and 'Innocence absent'

- ᚦ *thorn*: since the relationships described are thorny. 'The *thorn* is very sharp; it is evil / for every man clutching it, immeasurably cruel / to anyone who rests with it', comments the *Rune Poem* (in Bjork's translation).
- ᛈ *peorth*, no consensus on meaning: it seemed appropriate to use a rune we're uncertain about since this passage comments that 'Fate is rune-hid'. The word *rune* itself used to mean 'secret' as well as referring to the written signs.

breached brain-keep: i.e. the fortress (keep) of the brain has been compromized by surgical enhancement/enslavement.

bristling: picking up on the thorn at the head of this passage

5B: 'Might master still live' and 'Learning enlightened her'

- ᛏ *Tir*, originally the supreme god (distantly cognate with Latin *deus*, Sanskrit *deva*, and Greek *Zeus*), in the *Rune Poem* seemingly the planet Mars seen in the sky: the *Rune Poem* uses Tir-as-Mars as a figure of immutability ('ᛏ is a certain sign, keeps faith well / with nobles', trans. Bjork).
- ᚳ *cen*, torch: Kilmartin's life might still be flaming on somewhere out there.

dwimmer-worker: 'dwimmer' is magic or witchcraft.

through rituals unseen, / through alchemy within, or through the arts breath-formed: the latter two inspired by Daoist inner alchemy, and practices such as qigong.

5C: 'Wondering, ask then'

- ᛁ is, ice.

lich-freedom: 'lich' just meaning body, so 'the body's freedom'.

5D: 'Oh yes, my skin' and 'Daring Wile-Hand'

- ᚣ *yr*, bow: 'ᚣ is a joy and honor / for every noble and warrior' (Bjork trans.)
- ᚻ *hægl*, hail: as a metaphor for the siege described in the middle of this passage.

Wile-Hand old: a version of Wayland the Smith, whose name does not originate as 'wily hand'—I just like the pun.

etchant: etching.

End: 'And what of your star-home?'

- ᚫ *æsc*, ash tree: sometimes used as a metaphor (metonymy?) for a spear in Old English poetry, since the ash's tall linear branches suit spear-making. So, here, figuring the war the Object imagines on our world, and perhaps the way the Object was made a war-fighting tool itself.

alliteration: this passage has right-tilting or tail-stave alliteration, unlike all the others, so the obligatory alliterating point in the second half-line is the last beat/lift.

Life
John C. Mannone

Narrative alliterative verse after the 2017 movie, 'Life,' directed by Daniel Espinosa, and written by Rhett Reese and Paul Wernick

There are cunning creatures in the cosmos,
their universe is more vicious, more violent
than the many monsters I might imagine.

Could they come from comets, or even Mars?
The captured soil sample swelled with secrets— I saw
it dwell, the devil from the deep dark space,

not those in nauseous nightmares that continue
to haunt me. Nor the haints from hell, their heavy
burden on me. (Probably from braving too many B-movies

when I was a kid). I saw, on the lab screen, just a single cell,
sigmoid-shaped, paramecium-like, innocent when probed
under microscopes, rapidly splitting by meiosis into a multi-cell

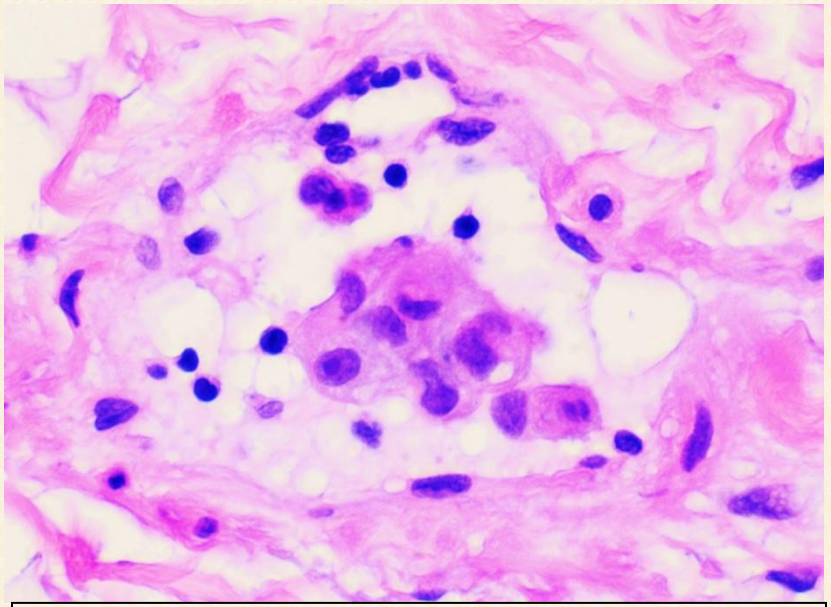
organism organizing trillions of cells to co-operate collectively;
forming into a translucent entity with tentacle-type arms
like an octopus, curious like an octopus; more sapient,

testing its new world with trepidation, but temerity
slipping, pushing off the gloveboxed-Petri dish to pulsate,
ballet on the ballroom of rubber covering the biologist's gloved

fingers before it strangely and suddenly entered a deep sleep.
When awakened with acute electric shocks, it attacked with
capable strength to clench and crush the doctor's hand.

It escaped by engineering a needle-like épée to puncture
the rubber seal for its freedom. And to feed
its voracious hunger that could vanquish any vampire's

appetite. The alien grew, became opaque with hunger



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and hatred, forcing itself, through the throat, into human
viscera. Not able to scream. Eventually, the alien was vented
to the vestiges of space.

A call for help on the com was not completed, circuits failed
as the station's communication system shut down from
meteoritic debris, or was it devastated by that deviant
entity? A spacewalk to repair resulted only in a ruptured
coolant line; again by the criminal creature killing
the astronaut. Then it snatched the structure of the station

before she drifted, dead from drowning, into space.
Determined to re-enter the station through quiet thrusters,
was thwarted by the vigilant crew. Blasting. But the vanquishing
was soon voided

when the creature connived and commandeered an airlock.
The loss of fuel for all the futile attempts, sent the station
into a decaying orbit. The creature could survive re-entry.

Now, only two crew left. We conspired to lure it into the commander's
escape pod (I would personally control it, but expire with the monster)
skipping off the exospheric sky, like a stone thrown low to water, sink

into lifeless space, so my partner in the other pod
wouldn't perish. If the escape pod, with this predator,
were to land on Earth, it'd be an extinction level event for every
living thing.

There were screams scrambled in the static hiss
over the intercom from the pod flung into fathomless space.
I wanted to scream, too.

Nu'Talli's Lament
Matthew Dickerson

Fierce was the wind. Fallen the willow.
Broken the hemlock. The beech cruelly hewn.
Hillside cherry, hickory, and chestnut
Birch and ginkgo blown down by gale.
Where, O Great Oak, was your voice in the storm?

Silenced, the redwood and sycamore by the river.
Felled, the black walnut. All the forest wept
when the wilting shadow of winged consumers,
cruel destroyers, came bringing sorrow.
Where was our refuge against the devouring swarm?



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Excerpts

From *The Sea-Crossing of Saint Brendan*[7]
Matthew Brennan

IV Sailing the Seas

For sixteen days · the sail feasted
on bountiful winds, bloated and taut
as a glutton's gut. Our oars like forks
were soon forsaken · till the sails slackened.
We rode along · the looping slopes
of gray-green waves · that whipped white spume
in our eyes and ears. At evening, the sun
fell like fire · flaming the line
and sewed the sky · to the rim of the sea,
its seam still glowing · long after moonrise;
amid whitecaps and waves · starlight was winking
and when the moon anchored · like a kite in the sky
I'd nap on my back, nervously bracing
for wind and for rain · to wrack the night.
So day and night · we navigated northward
low in the water · so waves would loom
till the hull heaved up · and rolled us over
the sloping seawater. The mast would squeak
like teetering timber, but oxhide, like towels,
cushioned the crash · against the gunwhale.
Suddenly the doldrums · dropped upon us.
God willed the waves · to wane and flatten.
The sea grew solemn, as still and quiet
as monks at the altar · in a monastery chapel.
We rowed and rowed · till our ribs nearly cracked,
our sinews numb · and enervated.
Our spirits drooped, depressed as the sails,
but Brendan, our father, offered this foresight:
"Don't be aghast, for God will guide us.
He's our helmsman and helper, our heavenly rudder.
So store the oars · and stop all your worry."
Thus Brendan emboldened · his fourteen boatsmen
and swayed us to wait · with wise passiveness
till the good will of God · again sent the wind
to whatever realm · we next must roam.



[7] The text used here is that of the second edition from Bass Clef Books.

From *Hessen*

Garrett Carroll

Part VII: Void Vulture

Darkness drips like muddy rain from the domeship
ceiling, skyless yet sky in stillness set
beneath the vantage of the void.
It swoops down, piercing the pristine prairie
air, crashing calamitously and cratering the ground
swirled from red autumn snow and shambled leaves
to a series of rolling emerald hills rising
and sloping like stormy sea waves. Once set,
its wings unwrap, revealing wrinkled white
skin, a hawking screech that spears through ears
quintillion miles and miles of planets away,
a paradox of plight and peace,
a war in which the wellsprings cease.
Hessen prepares for his hulking trial,

the final test in this torn domeship.
He stands with sword and shield, stalwart
and committed to this cruel condition.
The beak of the bird and the blade
of the sword strikes and sparks together
lighting little starry embers in the layers
of pitch-black prairie night.
Strike-on-strike and strike again,

deflective blow, defensive dance of death
between the vulture and the vagrant of peace,
Hessen the heron human stands aground
over the limits of life. Lunging for living,
he takes the vulture's tail and tosses
it over his head back-and-forth, hearing
the stinging scream of its bird song
flinging far across the fallen emerald fields.



From *Artorius*[8]
John Heath-Stubbs

Take down, Calliope, your trumpet from its tack:
Rested has it long, and rusted? Give us a rouse, girl;
Your voice I invoke now, and your eight with violets crowned
Sisters to sing, to a star-dance I dispose them,
through the zone of the Zodiac, where Zeus's son,
and Leto's, Apollo, shall lead with his lyre.
Urania in a dialogue shall discourse delightfully;
Thalia come also, colloquial in a clown's mask;
Polyhymnia with pompous paean of encomium
is commanded to a solemn ceremony of crowning,
and blithe Erato with ballads and with badinage
promises prothalamion for a bride and her paranymph;
and Terpsichore, she too, with her castanets, shall testify
with a sexual dance, a saraband of death;
Plain-suited Clio, in prose, though she plod;
And grave Melpomene shall give us a goat-song;
Lastly and lyrically Euterpe shall lament
Over the waves, at winter's and world's end.
But principally you, Calliope, I presume to ask preside
at equinox and at solstice, at the sun's turnings to sing
of War and Justice, of Warlockry and a Wounding.
Present then for man's life a paradigm, his passage,
like the sun, through symbols; his season's progress
from spring's heyday to high summer and harvest,
and lastly to the laggard lagoon of old age
where his son supplants him and the cycle returns.
Labour continued is his lot; Alcides learned this,
in his twelve month of toils, under a hard taskmaster—
battling against beasts, and against brigands also,
monsters whose hollow dens are in the mind of Man:
the heart of the human being is Heaven's ruler,
through baleful constellations its course it must keep.
    Let us learn something of Lucius Artorius
of cognomen CASTUS; come of the Venetic gens;
From Illyria long since with the legionaries they came
but British land they bought with blood now here established.
The first that was his forebear, in former times directed
the rearing and erecting of the rampart, which Hadrian
set from the Solway to the Germanic sea
against the blue-cheeked bandits of Scotland, and the bands
of the Picts beyond that pale, the peoples
of moss and of moorland, and of mournful forests.
Afterward in Armorica this first Artorius also
campaigned with his legion; but no legend is left.
From that stock he stemmed then, the steadfast man,
Artorius name his or Arthur: some said Uther's son,
and some gave him Gorlois, the good duke for a sire,
and some that his battle-hardy blood he borrowed
from Aurelius Ambrosius, that erstwhile endured
in Britain the brunt of the Saxon boar-crests.
But none for a certainty could say sooth of such things:
Comes was he by commission—and after to be King?

[8] Reprinted with permission of the estate of John Heath Stubbs via David Higham Associates, Ltd.

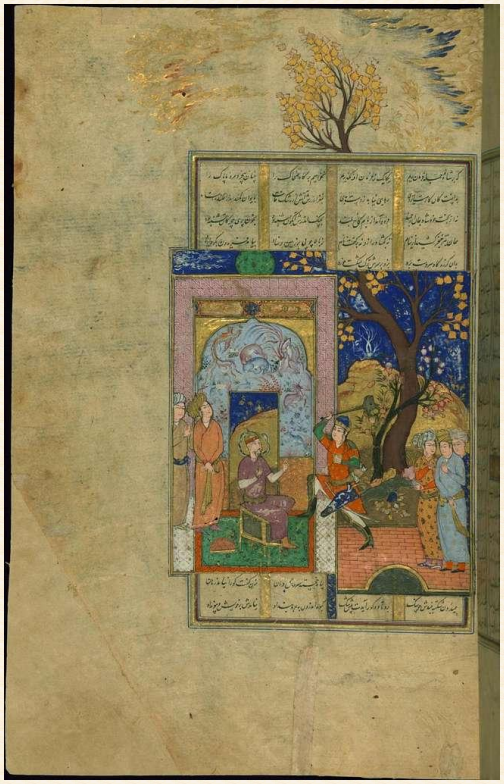


Charles Earnest Butler,
King Arthur (1903)

FROM *THE TELLER OF TALES: STORIES FROM FERDOWSI'S SHAHNAMEH*[9]

Richard Jeffrey Newman

Zahhak's terror grew with time.
Blessed by fortune, Feraydun was born.
Youth bloomed in him with the beauty
of a slender cypress, and he stood as tall;
Jamshid's farr shone from him
like sunlight filling the sky, and his step
fell like rain on the thirsting earth.
The world put on his presence
the way the soul wears wisdom,
while over his head the turning heavens
held nothing but comfort and love.
The cow Barmayeh was born then too.
A wonder to behold, each hair on her
shone a different color. A crowd
of magicians, sages and priests journeyed
to see her, saying of her peacock splendor
that none had beheld a creature like her,
or heard one mentioned in the ancient tales.
Zahhak, meanwhile, filled the world
searching for Feraydun, whose father, Abetin,
fearing for his own life, tried to flee;
but he fell within the lion's grasp
and was brought, a bound cheetah, before Zahhak,
who ordered his murder. Feraydun's mother,
Faranak, then took flight as well,
arriving at the meadow where Barmayeh fed.
Weeping tears of blood, she pleaded
with the man whose meadow it was to make
her son his ward. "He is not yet weaned,"
she told him. "Please, take him from me
as a father would take him from his mother. Feed him
the beautiful Barmayeh's milk. In return,
I'll render you my soul and hold
my life hostage to your smallest hope."



Faridun defeats Zahhak

(Creative commons zero)

[9] The *Shahnameh*, or *Book of Kings*, from which this excerpt of the story of Zahhak is taken, was written in 10th century Iran by Abolqasem Ferdowsi. One of the longest epic poems ever written—it runs to the equivalent of more than 50,000 couplets—the *Shahnameh* takes as its subject the pre-Islamic history of Iran, told through the stories of its kings, starting with the creation of the world and ending with the 7th century Muslim Arab conquest of the Persian empire. Zahhak, an evil king who must feed human brains to the two serpents growing out of his shoulders, belongs to the mythopoetic portion of the epic. In this excerpt, Zahhak hunts for Feraydun, whom it has been foretold will be the one to end Zahhak's evil reign.

From *Ulfhildr*

Mary Thaler

In her husband's hall, Ulfhildr awoke
ears filled with battle-cries, eyes with dark visions.
If the reed-thatched roof, the rafters above her
broke over her head, they could be no heavier.
Her soul weak within her, she sought the open vault
of the towering sky, the tale-bearing wind-road.

"If my heart hears riders · at the hintermark, circling,
then palisade and bank · must be pulled down already.
I know that the man · who never fled a fight,
he whose smile was my sunlight, the sword-thanes' captain,
my lord and friend, now lies below-ground.
A wife recognizes · those whispered auguries.
striving for his soul, the sea and land,
have offered, like envoys, iron, gold,
and lying promises. Now the living are bereft.
What can men count on? Sinews weaken. Only kinship
can hold up your arm · when heaven strikes.
But what of those facing · the world too soon,
who have neither gold, nor any family?
Will they let you keep your life · when they have looted your honours?"



Artwork by Niv Serkar

From *Bea Wolf*[10]

Zach Weinersmith

Hey, WAIT!

Listen to the lives of the long-ago kids, the world-fighters,
the parent-unminding kids, the improper, the politeness-proof,

the unbowed bully-crushers
the bedtime-breakers, the raspberry-blowers,
fighters of fun-killers, fearing nothing, fated for fame.

There was Tanya, treat-taker, terror of Halloween,
her costume-cache vast, sieging kin and neighbor,
draining full candy-bins, fearing not the fate of her teeth,
Ten thousand treats she took. That was a fine Tuesday.

And Shawn peace-shatterer, shrieked he'd never depart the park.
His shame-blasted parents bargained: Ice cream for silence.
But there lay no bargains between lion and lamb.
Forty sunsets they stayed, sleepless and sorrowing.

And Sonya, foam-slinger, shot so many skyward darts
the summer blaze was blotted out, licorice-black,
and beneath that sun-starved night, no certainty reigned,
save this: That Sonya would never assist the dart cleanup.

In those days Carl was born, crown-destined kid.
An orange-haired orphan, oak-strong and owl-wise.

At four Halloweens old, hunting metal, he found a golden hoard.
He told no adult of the treasure, till tattlers betrayed him.

Fevered voices fell upon the foundling that night!
Hurling heavy words at Carl, King under the cardboard crown.
"Save it for college!" they screamed, suing to shape his fate.

"No." he whispered, and his words were law.

Morning saw Carl astride toy counter, clapping eyes on the clerk.

"Who comes to my store,
clad in such a crown?"

Carl kept quiet, clanking his meaning with golden coins.
The clerk closed shop, heaping his wares:
Candy, costumes, planes of paper.

Many kids marveled at the toy mountain, pleasing its maker.
Such plenty! Each plucked toy hid two more and also a puppy.
But Carl, detector of gold, dealt himself nothing,
even as those eggs that hatch robots were taken.

Sharing cars, comics, dollies—games of card and board,
foam-wrought sheaths, shields of shining plastic!
Forging friendship in peace, prepping for harder days.
In his self-mastery, Carl was kind. That is the way of kings.

Many foes were felled beneath the cardboard crown.
Realms of bullies were raided, their ill-got riches returned.
Gateways were tunneled to long-grounded kids, games given in secret,
and no flea-flecked furball went foodless or bereft of bed.

Water-drafts were not drunk, for those days were drenched in soda,
and each soda had sugar heaped upon it, nor did it want for sprinkles.
Teenage eyes curled wide with envy, enduring without a Carl-like king.

Carl: Mountain-maker, metal-finder, the lament of bullies.

[10] *Bea Wolf* is a graphic novel inspired by Beowulf, featuring the heroine Bea Wolf and the villain Mr. Grindle, whose touch turns children into adults. The opening is reprinted here with the author's permission.

Publications Noted

Articles, Reviews, Blog Discussions, other Resources

- A concordance to Beowulf
- Maryann Corbett, review of Emily Osborne's *Safety Razor* in *New Verse Review*.
- Lev Grossman, Brittened and Brent: I Am Accidentally Translating "Gawain and the Green Knight"
- Michael Macha, Tip sheet for alliterative verse (*Odin's Gift)*
- David Rothman and Susan Delaney Spear , *Learning the Secrets of English Verse: The Keys to the Treasure Chest* (contains a chapter on writing alliterative verse). Springer, 2022.
- Andrew Roycroft, *The Nameless Isle*: Understanding C.S. Lewis' Alliterative Verse Epic. C.S. Lewis Official Substack.
- Jane Toswell and Alan Ward, Two New Letters by Auden on Anglo-Saxon metre and *The Age of Anxiety*. *The Year's Work in Medievalism* 15, pp. 57–72.
- M. Anthony C., Canto 22, Canto 23, Canto 24 podcasts – Brief discussion of alliterative verse; mention of Adam Bolivar's *Wheel of Ravens* and of communications with him.

Poem and Book Links Added[11]

- Alexander Birch, Hryredēaþ, in *The Astyanax*
- Elena Childress, Robin Hood (#1) in *Poems for Persons of Interest* (2026). Sestina; many of its lines intentionally echo the features of alliterative verse.
- T. Churchyard, Davy Dycar's Dream [circa 1552]
- Maryann Corbett, Riddle 25, from her collection *Mid Evil*.
- Paul D. Deane A Short Debate between Con-Man and Capitalist *(with the human author playing the Con-man, and Google AI Overview, the Capitalist)*. In Indolent Books' online *Second Coming* series, no. 562, August 4, 2026.
- Kevin Grauke, The Day Roger Peterson Died (alliterative prose poem), in *DMQ Review*.
- Susan Leary, Pseudo Myth [*More Flowers.* Trio House, 2026]
- Caroline Liberatore, Rhapsody for Rasp, in *The Clayjar Review* (alliterative free verse, 2026; subscribers only)
- Martin Lings, "The Garden", "Spring-Summer", "Mid-summer", "Autumn", "The Elements" and "Requiem", in his *Collected Poems* (Archetype, 2002)
- Amit Majmudar, Apophatic (II) in *Portico* (2026).
- Joshua Mehigan, Riddle, *Times Literary Supplement* (2026)
- James Prather, On Our Way to the Wake, in *New Verse Review* 2.2, Spring 2025.
- Jeff Sypeck, *The Little Garden of Walahfrid Strabo: A Carolingian Poem in Verse Translation*. Uppsala Books, 2026.

Nominations and Awards

Forgotten Ground Regained is proud to announce the nomination of the following poems to the 2026 **Best of the Net** competition:

- The Galdrmaðr Weaves an Evil Spell, by Frank Coffman
- The Opening of the Gylfaginning, by Math Jones
- Stiletto by Dorothy Nielsen
- To a Cat, by Carla Galdo
- Restless Shores, by Nate Beeton
- The Archeology of Doggerland and Beleriand Alike, by Savannah Horrell

Forgotten Ground Regained is also proud to nominate the following poems to the 2026 **Best Spiritual Literature** competition:

- Bright Waves from the Wide Caribbean Sea, by Jane Beal
- This Moment, Eric Colburn
- On Odin's Journey, by D.A. Cooper
- Not Only Rainbows, by John C. Mannone
- Song-Singing, by Tom Pain

[11] Also noted: James Webster's self-published book, *Enoch's Lament*. More information is available at his Book of Enoch site. **HOWEVER**: the cover is AI and Pangram reports the first 50 lines of the text as 100% AI, so this is probably not a human-authored poem.

- Tree-Hymn, by Steven Searcy

Links to Online Performances and Translations

- Adam Bolivar, Hymn to Hel (Youtube)
- A.Z. Foreman, Opening of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* read in the original dialect.
- Bernard F. Huppé, *Beowulf: A New Translation*. Insignia, 2023.
- Roy Liuzza, Old English Riddle #45 (Poetry Foundation)
- Derrick McClure, *Andreas (The Sang o Sanct Andro) and the Weirds of the Apostles* (*Corpus Textuum Scoticorum*: 3). Evertype, 2024. Translation of Old English works into Scots alliterative verse.
- Bruce McNemony, Translation of Hildebrandslied.
- Menhir, Hildebrandslied set to metal.
- Altiva Overo, Procyon Prowling
- Tom Muldoon, Cædmon's Hymn, in *Poems on the Underground.*
- Adam Roberts, Cædmon's Hymn, in *Poems Ancient and Modern.*
- Jay Rogoff, translations of Dream of the Rood and The Wanderer in *Literary Matters 19.1*
- Tolkien audio excerpt, "Homecoming of Beorhtnoth"
- Eirik Westcoat, The Emerald Tablet of Hermes Trismegistus
- Volts-42, Destiny 2: Onslaught

Poems Posted on Blogs & Social Media

Posted under the Author's Real Name

- Jacob Allee, An Alliterative Poem About the Vice of License
- Eleanor Baker, "I've labored so long on alliterative lines …"
- Charlotte Balladine, Garland Gauntlet Grims
- Elizabeth G. Biggs, Jar of Wishes
- Alexander Birch
    - Whole (alliterative quatrains)
    - An alliterative verse inspired by Psalm 74:12-15
    - Ealdorsæd
- J.J. Brinski, +COME +UNTO +ME
- Bjorn Brudberg, The Four Seasons
- Casey Dwyer, Late Summer Lays Long on the Bluestem
- Sara M. Feir, Fear Not
- Ed Frizell, Twilight to an Anglo-Saxon
- Patrick Gillespie
    - The Saxon Witch
    - A Poem for WhistThistle
    - "The discourse of the sea—the singing waves …"
- James William Gunter, Death and Dawn
- Brian Heming, *The Odyssey*, *Viking Saga Style*
  [Images AI-created]
    - Introduction
    - Book 1
    - Book 2
    - Book 3
    - Book 4
    - Book 5
    - Book 6
    - Book 7
    - Book 8
    - Book 9
    - Book 10
    - Book 11
    - Book 12
    - Book 13
    - Book 14
    - Book 15
    - Book 16
    - Book 17
    - Book 18
    - Book 19
    - Book 20
    - Book 21
    - Book 22
    - Book 23
    - Book 24
- Dennis Johnstone, The Black Well of the Rose-Thane: An Alliterative Climate Poem
- Anthony J. Kleem,

    - Proem
    - The Battle of Orphir, an Elegy
    - The Quiet Hall
    - The Winter Shore
- R.A.R. Knight, Uther and Igraine
- Michael Koontz – Autumn: Ælfric Hort
- M.J. Large, The Fall of Astyr
- Ben Quant
    - Poem 952 – Evening Walk
    - Poem 956 – At the List
    - Poem 1003 – Alliterative Frogs
    - Poem 1008 – Patiently Made
    - Poem 1036 – These Stones
    - Poem 1037 – Seeking Amelia
- Kate Ravenna, "On the rickety edges of space …"
- Glenda Reed, Alliteration
- Ishmael Stedfast Reed (SCA), The Shire of Roxbury Mill
- Karl Seemel, A Fallen City
- Connlyn Sinclair, The Little Theater
- Connie Song, Beauty, Bards, and Butchers
- Jane Southorn-Elliott, Conquering Yr Wyddfa
- Matthew Striegel, Bronwyn and Lir [Internet Archive]
- Rebecca R. Trocki, The Sailor and the Siren
- Steve Vandevander [SCA: Master MorienMcBain]
    - Long Labored Lug
    - A Daughter Have I
    - The Joy Hoard
- Sian Yvette, "Clouds cover the color of numbers…"
- Deor
    - The Hidden Troop
    - "The Diplomat Dreamt …" [comment]
- Eilis
    - Fragment A and Fragment B from *Muireann's Saga*, a verse novel in progress (four-beat accentual lines in the narrative, alliterative verse in the dialogue)
    - "Names and titles telling falsehoods…"
- exmeanswithout, The Doorway
- hockatree
    - Four-fold Aphormism
    - Meetings
- Interesting_Hat_7526, Prologue to the Epic of Gilgamesh
- Isidore_Malderor, A Poem Dedicated to Dare
- Ivan of the Archipelago, An Anglo-Saxon Riddle
- Kelter, "At noon's end, battle-end neared …"
- Le_Renard_Noire, To Command
- Paul_bindweed, "Licht lanced through lattice of leaves …"
- Raontain, "Dŷlfôf ignited you …"
- regexkind, "Hwæt! Hear me…", "The wind-stay, whirling…"
- Runescape, Epic of Bukalla
- Sarenth Odinsson, Submissions to Odin's Agon
- Shinabazu Pond, In Search of the Saxons
- Thaliarchus
    - A Cherry Blossom Crown (parts in alliterative verse),
    - "See how Watling Street …",
    - "Sword lies not silent…"
    - Five Japanese sights
- writelikearomanemperor, The Fall of an Empire

Posted under Pseudonyms on Blogs and Social Media

- Albion Catholica
    - Elegy of King Oswald
    - Impressions on the Dancing Dervish

Call for Submissions

The Winter 2027 issue of Forgotten Ground Regained is open for submissions. This is an open call. I am interested in poetry on any theme or topic, as long as it meets the general requirements listed below. Submissions should be sent to Paul D. Deane at the following email address: **pdeane@alliteration.net** by **Jan. 1, 2027**.

Form and Content

- **Submissions must make skillful, systematic use of alliteration in ways that use alliteration to reinforce the rhythm and connect important ideas.** Overall, I prefer poems that have a stronger impact on readers when they are read aloud. I therefore encourage authors to include links to audio or video versions of their poems in their submissions.
- **Submissions must be in modern English**, but authors should feel free to submit poems that take advantage of the diction, rhythms, and syntax of particular language varieties and communities. I do not discriminate against Scots, Appalachian English, Black English Vernacular, Indian English, or any other variety of English, though I do ask that authors be prepared to supply notes to explain any terms or expressions that outsiders to their communities may not readily understand.
- **I will not publish metrical poetry or free verse that does not make systematic, structural use of alliteration.** I would love to see people experimenting with modern English versions of Old and Middle English alliterative verse, with Old Norse forms like *ljoðahattr* and *dróttkvætt* or modern Icelandic *rimur*, or with new alliterative forms designed to highlight modern English rhythms and speech patterns. While my first preference is what traditional scholarship calls alliterative-accentual verse, I am also open to alliterative free verse or to alliterative versions of traditional forms, such as the ballad, as long as the alliteration is clearly a structural rather than a decorative feature of the form. Note that I love both the lyrical and the narrative turns in poetry, so longer narratives will be given careful consideration.
- I am open to contemporary poetry & projects that would normally be considered to fall outside the literary mainstream, such as speculative poetry, SCA Bardic Arts projects, and fan fiction.

Editorial Policies

- I accept simultaneous submissions but require authors to notify me in a timely fashion if a work is accepted elsewhere. I reserve the right to withdraw acceptance if a work has been accepted or published elsewhere without my knowledge.
- I am not able to offer payment for publication. However, authors retain all rights (except, of course, for granting me non-exclusive serial and web rights to publish their work on alliteration.net).
- There is no hard upper length limit, though poems more than five to six pages in length are likely to be published separately on the website, with links provided inside the issue, rather than being included directly in the pdf magazine.
- I will consider reprints but am far more likely to link to them (if published online) or to publish them directly on the site than I am to publish them in one of the quarterly issues.
- As editor, I have final say on any and all issues of copyediting, formatting, punctuation, layout, illustration, and the like. I will endeavor to take an author's wishes into account, but in any cases where the author and I cannot reach agreement, they have the choice either to accept my decisions or to withdraw their work from publication in this journal.
- It should not be necessary to state this, but in the age of generative AI, it is best to be explicit. **I expect submissions to be entirely the author's work**, *with one exception*: I do allow work in which text generated by AI is used as a foil or chorus, in dialogue or counterpoint to sections entirely written by the author. However, if a work has benefited in any way from reference to generative AI, I expect the author to provide logs of all interactions, both prompts and AI responses, so that I can judge whether a poem is the author's authentic creation.