

# **2018 Portfolio**

**by Byron López Ellington**

*The following is a collection of the vast majority of non-novel writing (poems, short stories, and essays) by BLE in the year 2018. Much of it is unedited, though some is more polished.*

*This portfolio is dedicated to mi mamá, the most supportive person I know.*

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## **Nonfiction Essays**

## Peace Pilgrim Quote Analysis

Dec. 31, 2017 – Jan. 1, 2018

*The following essay was written as an application to Austin High School. Eventually I opted to instead go to Austin Community College and be “homeschooled,” earning college and high school credit at the same time.*

*The quote in question is: “One little person, giving all of her time to peace, makes news. Many people, giving some of their time, can make history.” —Peace Pilgrim*

I admire the Peace Pilgrim quote for how easily it seems to explain a major aspect of the society we live in -- that being that though a few people have dedicated huge amounts of their lives toward a more peaceful world, it makes hardly a difference unless those it affects also take a stand for the right things.

The quote can be more deeply considered when we understand that Peace Pilgrim was one of those people who dedicated their lives to changing society for the better. When she says that “one little person” inputting a huge amount of effort to campaign for peace only “makes news,” she is speaking of herself; she became quite famous for her actions as a peace enthusiast, but, although many people were influenced by her, not enough of them actually rose up, even a little, to “make history.”

We live in a changing world; people everywhere are beginning to understand the major issues in our culture, such as elitism of the wealthy, oppression of disadvantaged groups (including women, children, minority races and ethnicities, as well as people living in poverty), and unwarranted political involvement in other countries. However, we’re not on a track to

success. The children of today must be taught a more global philosophical approach to these issues, not just in school but in the everyday. If a major societal change were on the verge of success at the current time, too many would simply reject it and go back to the pampered comfort most living in a super power such as the United States enjoy. I must admit, I am one of those who enjoys our comforts here. And that is all the more reason to propel the societal realization that our illusions of grandeur are, as the name claims, illusions, due to the suffering that many others endure as we sit in privilege.

If adults do not teach today's youth to see beyond one's own circumstances, and take even minimal action, the next generation will suffer the same as today. This endless loop will persist, should we not take a global worldview and understand that though we live with life's best comforts, there are many millions who don't.

It may seem an impossible task for our succeeding generations to take on a better way of life, but all that must be done are tiny inconveniences for good that pile up and eventually amount to a quite decidedly better world and generations of children and adults who know what is right and act on it, even in small ways, to promote worldwide welfare. We don't need to suddenly, majorly, shift our culture, but we must promote this cause's success through our miniscule actions, and teach this as our way for generations to come. Humanity has come together to better the world before, and while too many attempts have failed, I believe that this is one we can count on to work, so long as most people help through philosophy, education, and actions.

## Truth

Feb. 14

A crushing weight is upon me. The truth on this earth has gone. The debts of societal existence have pounded against me for many years, but only now do I feel such an intense desire to escape the system. Education has, for the most part, become corrupt. My very purpose, to learn and then to teach, has been without mercy amputated of all necessary organs.

Truth has always fascinated me. But now, it seems, at its most vital time, it has been washed away by the stigma of those within our culture. Never before have we needed unrelenting truth so much as we do now, and yet, while its existence has greatedened in yonder year, it is fading away with any hope of this species becoming a tolerable one.

I am attempting to surround myself with the little truth we have left-- reading books such as *The Origin of Species* and becoming more engrossed than ever with the online entertainment that aids in dispelling falsehood. But alas, there is evermore loss of truth, gone to the lackluster remains of belief. In my current education, I am surrounded by lies, deceit, and useless faculties of so-called "knowledge" that shan't ever be utilized outside of the school building.

As I write this short essay, I am sitting in a class in which the instructor is an honest person who does not wish the world harm. This has given me time to reflect, so I write this during breaks in my digital assignment.

Maybe I speak too harshly, I may question myself before deciding that, in a sense, that is correct, but in the basis of the discussion I am not speaking in rhyme but in intelect (I have nothing against literature, in fact it is my greatest material pleasure, but in this discussion it is

irrelevant). Those spreading the wastes of neural capacity I learn on a daily basis do not necessarily *wish* the world harm, but nonetheless they do harm the world. In such topics, while the sensitivities of others may be important for personal relations, I do not possess any with my dishonest leaders. And thus, I will speak in truth and fact while discussing these matters, and nothing more.

The original purpose of this essay was to express how I have been feeling about the mountains of work with no purpose other than to have work assigned that I have been having to deal with. Not helping the matter is the recent death of my grandmother. However, this essay has turned into a deeper rant than I intended originally for it. I realize that I am writing this while in a depressive state and therefore I likely do not have my full wits about me, and thus may have made some errors, this work (which I have improvised in writing; not one word was planned prior to my writing this) is still quite important to me, and for the world to have. I will not be embarrassed out of sharing this and, if possible, will have it eventually published alongside my other essays and short stories.

To my friends and enemies, though with a wickedness to those who contradict logic and soundness, "A good day to all."

## Survival

When I was three, almost four, my parents discovered I had contracted a terrible disease: a skin tumor, on the left side of my nose. They took me to M. D. Anderson Cancer Center, and got a renowned surgeon to look at me — Dr. Elisabeth Beahm, who unfortunately died in 2013.

She and her team could never tell whether or not the tumor was cancerous, so they had to treat it as such. Many surgeries were performed on the tumor itself to remove it, but each time, it came back. Eventually, it was decided that she would have to remove most of the left side of my nose and rebuild it to be sure the tumor would stay gone. To do this, they had to take cartilage from my forehead and, eventually, rib cage area.

Naturally, as a little kid, I was scared to undergo surgery, and didn't like the anesthesia used to put me in a fully unconscious state (especially since they had to cover my mouth). But the doctors were understanding, and at the time, I had my teddy bear Brown D. with me at all time, so before each surgery, they put the anesthesia mask on him to make me feel just a bit better. I also recall one time that they needed a little bit of my hair (I don't remember what for), but I always have revelled in my long locks. However, I also took great comfort in my mom's lengthy curls, so she cut off a little bit of her hair and gave it to me to hold.

My parents were always told that after I woke up, it would be some time before I would be up and at it again, but despite the doctors' predictions, I was always bouncing around like normal practically as soon as I regained my consciousness. However, there was one exception to this.

One surgery, the one in which they took cartilage from the area around my rib cage, was the most painful thing I have ever experienced. In all my previous surgeries, while my body was traumatised, I didn't have any memories of the pain and didn't experience it afterward because of the anesthesia. This one was different. The pain was so vivid that I recall dreaming while under the influence drugs that normally prevent dreams — and they were excruciating. Then, after the surgery, I was in utter agony. My parents couldn't even have any part of their body on my hospital bed because it would only put me in more pain. I don't know if I've worked out all of that yet, ten years later.

I started kindergarten in late 2008, when I was five. While by then the tumor was long gone, my face still needed lots of reconstruction. I began my public schooling experience with what I called “the finger,” a chunk of my flesh attached to the right side of my nose that would eventually become the rest of it. When I had the finger is the only time in my life that I ever hated how I looked.

In the end, I went through a lot of hardship in those early years of my life. I got twenty surgeries and probably a lot of trauma I don't even know about. But now look at me — I'm writing a novel, about to get community college level education at fourteen, and I have the best family, cats included, that anybody could ever hope for! Anybody can do great things, no matter what. To all those out there with terrible lives: it can and will get better. Things are changing even now.

## Sobre Mi

¡Hola! Me llamo Byron. Soy un medio hispano y un medio gringo, y también creo que español es una lengua más hermosa que inglés. Por estas razones decidí aprender español. Estudié la lengua por tres años antes de entrando este clase.

En el junio del año dos mil y dieciocho, viajé a Ecuador... ¡y al ecuador! Visité el país con mi mamá, mi papá, y mi amigo mejor, quien habla solamente un poquito de español. Fue mucho divertido, y también difícil y educativo a veces.

¡Ahora, sobre mi! Dos de mis cosas favoritas en el mundo hacer incluir escribiendo y leyendo. También me gusta hacer mapas ficticio (especialmente mapas del mundo del libro fantasía estoy escribiendo), aprender pequeños hechos sobre historia y ciencia, hacer lenguas construidas (conlangs), y ver YouTube (¿TúTele?). Mi animal favorito es el gato, y mi gatita, Emma, es la cosa mejor existir en el todo de tiempo. Soy ateo y liberal, y me gusta tener el debate intelectual ocasional.

¡Esto fue el más que he escrito en español antes! Pero voy a detener aquí. Espero hice bien. ¡Adíos!

## Vexillological Essays

### Description and Definition

Sep. 15

A field of study I find quite fascinating is vexillology, the study of flags. The term is also often used to refer to vexillography, the design of flags. Though they are technically separate terms, their high interchangeability and the blurred line between them allows the fact that throughout this essay, I will here on out solely be using the term *vexillology*. The term was coined by Whitney Smith as a teenager, who also published over two dozen books on vexillology; it comes from the Latin word *vexillum*, meaning *flag* (Marquard 1). Vexillology allows for an interesting and unique look at a people's culture, history, and ideology.

Different parts of a flag have different names. The obverse is “the side of the flag that you see when the flagpole is on the left”; its opposite is the reverse. The “half of the flag nearest the flagpole” is the hoist; its opposite is the fly. The “top-half of the hoist” is the canton. A device or charge is any symbol or image on the flag (Bartram et al. 2). There are also a variety of names used for different basic styles of flags. These include the Nordic cross (a cross with the middle line off-center toward the hoist, seen below on the flag of Sweden), the tricolor (three differently colored stripes, seen below on the flag of France), the chevron (a triangle against the hoist, seen below on the flag of Czechia), the Greek cross (shaped like a plus-sign, seen below on the flag of Greece), the saltire (shaped like an X, seen below on the flag of Jamaica), the pall

(shaped like a Y, seen below on the flag of South Africa), and many, many more (Dictionary of Vexillology).



*Flag of Sweden.*



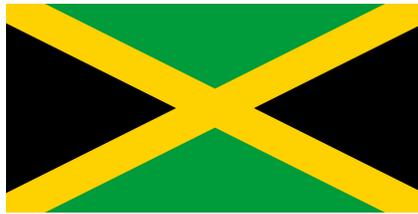
*Flag of France.*



*Flag of Czechia (the Czech Republic).*



*Flag of Greece.*



*Flag of Jamaica.*

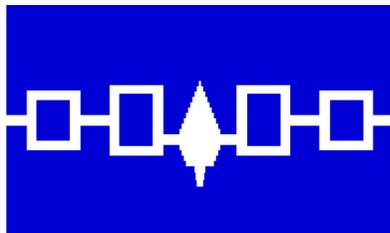


*Flag of South Africa.*

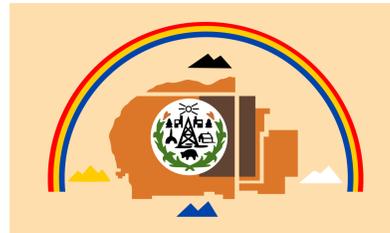
Outlined in Ted Kaye's *Good Flag, Bad Flag* are the five most commonly accepted basic principles of flag design.

The first is that flags should be simple. So simple, in fact, that "a child can draw it from memory." This is because of the fact that not only do simplistic designs often look the most aesthetically pleasing, flags meant to be displayed are constantly flapping in the wind and draping down their pole when the air is still. "Furthermore," writes Kaye, "complicated flags cost more to make, which often can limit how widely they are used" (4-5).

The second is that the symbolism on flags should be meaningful and purposeful, and that there should be symbolism. This is usually expressed through color, pattern, and/or a single device. Adding to the first principle, if there is a device featured, it should be relatively simple and the only one. Kaye shows this through the contrast of two Native American flags: the Iroquois and Navajo. The flag of the Iroquois Confederacy, shown below, features a traditional blue background and upon it what's known as *Hiawatha's Belt*, a simple white chain-like pattern that has been used by the Iroquois for hundreds of years; on the other hand, the flag of the Navajo Nation, shown below, features “[o]ver 20 graphic elements,” including a map of the territory and surrounding states, a rainbow, and a small, complicated seal that is impossible to discern the details of from a distance.



*Flag of the Iroquois Confederacy, USA.*



*Flag of the Navajo Nation, USA.*

When it comes to symbolism through color and pattern, flags such as Italy's and Ukraine's do it very well (both are shown below). Italy's flag is modeled after the flag of France, and is a vertical tricolor, which was originally used to “challenge” the “the typical horizontal stripes of the ruling kingdoms of Europe” at the time it was made. The flag of Ukraine features

two simple horizontal stripes, the top being light blue and the bottom light yellow, representing the sky and fields of wheat, respectively (6-7).

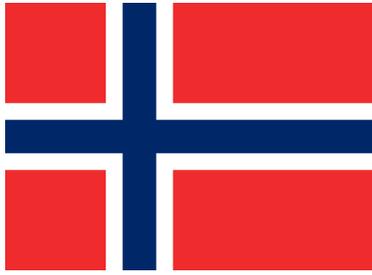


*Flag of Italy.*



*Flag of Ukraine.*

The third principle is that flags should only make use of two or three basic colors. “The basic flag colors are red, blue, green, black, yellow, and white,” writes Kaye. “They can range from light to dark. Occasionally, other colors are used, such as purple, gray, and orange, but they are seldom needed in a good design.” Contrast between colors on flags with three colors by separating two dark colors with one light color, such as the flag of Norway (seen below), which features a blue Nordic cross with a white border around it sitting on top of a red background. Flags that lack contrast and/or feature too many colors, both of which are fulfilled by the Chinese admiral flag of 1882 (seen below, featuring a complex coat of arms in the canton, at least six or seven colors, and the light colors yellow and white above dark black, green, and red, not separating them), are typically very displeasing to the eye (8).



*Flag of Norway.*



*Admiral flag of China, 1882.*

The fourth principle is that flags should not feature any lettering or seals. “Words defeat the purpose,” writes Kaye. “A flag is a graphic symbol.” Also, as mentioned in the first principle, flags are typically not viewed flat, but instead flying in the wind or draping down on their pole, and are usually from a relatively large distance away from the viewer. On top of that, lettering appears backwards on the reverse (the only way to remedy this and keep the text being to have flags be double-sided, which makes them twice as heavy and twice as likely to fray). A good comparison is between two US state flags: South Carolina and South Dakota (both shown below). Both feature a blue background (though different shades) with multiple devices lain on top. South Carolina’s flag depicts the centered image of a palm tree in white, and a white crescent in the canton. South Dakota’s flag has the state’s seal centered, surrounded by the words *SOUTH DAKOTA* and *THE MOUNT RUSHMORE STATE*. What the seal depicts is very complicated, and one of the only distinct things one can easily make out on it is that it features the words *STATE OF SOUTH DAKOTA* (10-11).



*Flag of South Carolina, USA.*



*Flag of South Dakota, USA.*

Last but certainly not least, the fifth principle is that flags should be distinct from or intentionally related to other flags (12). Adding to this, flags should “represent the totality of any particular community rather than individual parts of it. Using a device or emblem associated with one specific location within a broader region renders the flags ineffective as a regional representation” (Bartram et al. 4). A flag that fails to be distinctive or intentionally related is that of Indonesia (seen below); being composed of a red top half and a white bottom half, “[e]xcept for its proportions, [it] is exactly the same as Monaco’s flag (which had it first), but there is no connection between the two countries.” (The flag of Monaco is also pictured below.) A flag that is distinct yet very related to its neighbors is that of Ghana (seen below); a horizontal tricolor of red, yellow, and green (from top to bottom) with a black star in the center. These colors are commonly used by African nations and are based on the red, black, and green horizontal tricolor Pan-African flag (Kaye 12).



*Flag of Indonesia.*



*Flag of Monaco.*



*Flag of Ghana.*

Despite the fact that those principles are accepted by nearly all vexillologists, every rule has its exceptions. For example, the flag of South Africa (pictured again below) uses six different colors (black, yellow, green, red, white, and blue), all making up different parts of the background and pall, breaking the third principle, and yet it is “memorable,” “simple,” and “striking.” Breaking the first principle is the “beautiful mess” of a flag, that of Maryland, USA (seen below). It features two complicated patterns, each taking up half of the hoist and half of the fly; however, the “striking” color contrast (dark gold and black in one pattern, light maroon and white in the other), combined with the historical symbolism of the family one of the founders of Maryland, Lord Baltimore, the flag works and is interesting (Mars 1). Breaking the fourth rule is another US state flag: Colorado (seen below). It features three horizontal stripes as the

background (the top and bottom dark blue, the middle white) and a red and yellow C used as a device. While text normally doesn't work on flags, the C acts as an element of the design, not just a letter, and the flag works (Kaye 14). There are many other flags that break rules and still work, but those are a few examples. Also, it should be noted that whether or not Maryland's flag works is highly controversial.



*Flag of South Africa.*



*Flag of Maryland, USA.*



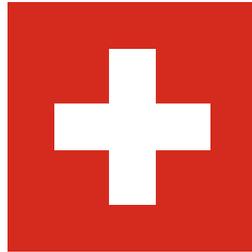
*Flag of Colorado, USA.*

While most flags are rectangular in shape, there are a few unique ones. For example, there are two square-shaped flags: those of Vatican City and Switzerland (both pictured below). However, the most outstanding example is the Nepali flag (seen below), shaped like a

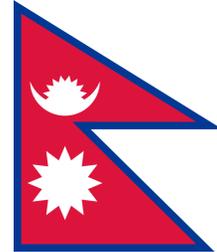
swallow-tailed pennant (Dictionary of Vexillology) with a dark blue border and red background, with two white sun-like devices on it.



*Flag of Vatican City.*

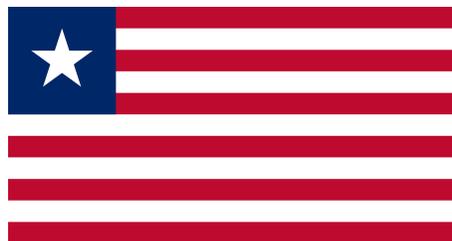


*Flag of Switzerland.*



*Flag of Nepal.*

Vexillology is a significant area of study in the modern day because of how interconnected the world is, and how because of that nearly all of politics is heavily international. Flags represent the overall culture and values of entire peoples, and are often a source of pride for individuals within a certain nation or people group. Not only that, but flags can tell very interesting stories about a culture's history, such as how the flag of Liberia (seen below) is based off of the US' flag due to the fact that the nation was founded by freed American slaves (Kaye 13). All in all, vexillology really does offer an interesting and unique look into the history, ideology, culture, and much, much, more of a nation or people.



*Flag of Liberia.*

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## Source Analysis

Oct. 8

Vexillology is the study of flags, and overlaps heavily with vexillography, the design of flags. The two (both hereafter referred to as “vexillology” due to common interchangeability) can be viewed as a science as much as an art. One source of information highly prevalent in the field is Ted Kaye’s *Good Flag, Bad Flag: How to Design a Great Flag*, a very short book about basic flag design. Another is the video *How To ACTUALLY Design A Flag*, published on YouTube by Edgar Grunewald on his channel, Artifexian. Both of these sources provide thoroughly researched principles and guidelines for vexillology; I will be analyzing the quality and usefulness of their information, as well as the evidence for their quality and usefulness.

The major focus of *Good Flag, Bad Flag* is to inform the reader of the basic principles of flag design, compiled from the combined knowledge and wisdom of many great vexillologists of past and present. It covers what Kaye calls the five basic principles of flag design: keep it simple, use meaningful symbolism, use only two to three basic colors, use no lettering or seals, and make it distinctive from or related to other flags. At the end he also provides some information about length-to-width ratios and exceptions to the rules.

*Good Flag, Bad Flag* is highly respected within the vexillology community and is of rather high quality. This is shown by the fact that it was published by the North American Vexillological Association (NAVA), a reliable organization, on the copyright page there is a list of vexillologists whose work and wisdom inspired the information in the book, and it was written by Ted Kaye (also known as Edward B. Kaye), a prominent vexillologist and the 2017-2018

secretary of NAVA. The quality of this source can be confirmed by looking at the work and good reputation of NAVA, Ted Kaye, and the vexillologists listed in the book.

*Good Flag, Bad Flag* is a useful source because it provides reliable, broad information that is applicable in a vexillologist's everyday work and life. It is known of by nearly everyone interested in vexillology, almost no matter how knowledgeable they are on the subject; because of this and the broad-stroke nature of its information, it can also be a very effective teaching tool for those interested in the study, design, and history of flags. However, the broadness of its information can also quite easily be a detriment; if one wanted to learn the fine details and intricacies of vexillology, *Good Flag, Bad Flag* would not be an ideal source of information for them.

The major focus of Grunewald's previously mentioned video is to go beyond the information presented in *Good Flag, Bad Flag*, and take a look at the much more detailed information presented in NAVA and The Flag Institute's *The Commission's Report On Flag Design*. The video provides an deeper understanding of vexillological terminology, the parts of a flag, flag ratios, Grunewald's process of creating the flag for his channel, Artifexian, and lots of tidbits of other qualities flags should or should not possess.

The video is of very high quality and uses reliable information. However, it is secondhand information being relayed through Grunewald's personal channel, and many of his opinions are sprinkled in throughout the video. The main evidence for the quality of the information in the video is that Grunewald links his sources in the description of the video, the primary of which is *The Commission's Report On Flag Design*, a 2014 joint report on the main details and intricacies of vexillology published by both NAVA and The Flag Institute, the British

equivalent. The video's quality can be confirmed by looking into its sources and their respective organizations.

Grunewald's video on flag design is a highly useful source of information if one is, as opposed to *Good Flag, Bad Flag*, not looking for broad information, but also not looking for incredibly intricate information, and instead wants a rather detailed, but also quick and easily digestible understanding of the principles of vexillology. While most of the information in the video comes from *The Commission's Report on Flag Design*, it is in a format that is much faster and easier to understand for the common learner interested in flag design; much of the same information is presented in a simpler way with Grunewald's personality on top, making it feel more relatable.

These sources are important for my research because they provide me with a foundation on which to build my knowledge and understanding of vexillology. I will use *Good Flag, Bad Flag* for research by referring back to it whenever I learn more of the details of the subject, to consider the two and reconcile any differences they might have in information and format. I will use Grunewald's video for research in nearly the same way I'll use Kaye's book, but also to gather the opinions of a somewhat well-known worldbuilder in the online worldbuilding community. Not for research, but still related, I will likely use the video to introduce others who may be interested in vexillology to the subject. To find additional information, my primary place to look will be the articles published in NAVA's annual journal, *Raven*, which cover specific topics and flags. A science as much as an art, vexillology is certainly an interesting field and endeavor.

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**Informed Comparison**

Oct. 28

Vexillology and vexillography are two branches of the same tree: The former is the scholarly study of flags, while the latter is the design of flags. They often overlap; most vexillologists are vexillographers, and most vexillographers are vexillologists. They both concern flags, but approach the subject differently. The intertwined fields can be compared most significantly on definition, area of practice, and presence in flag-related communities.

The word *vexillology* was coined by one of the first vexillologists, the late Whitney Smith, PhD. He first invented the word as a teenager, from Latin *vexillum*, meaning *flag* or *banner*, and the Greek-derived suffix *-ology*, meaning *the study of*, because he felt it was a distinct enough study to get its own name and be separated from heraldry, which has to do with

coats of arms and related symbols (Smith). Since then, the word *vexillology* has been expanded into many other forms.

The primary of these is *vexillography*, meaning “the art and practice of designing flags.” Vexillography is “allied with vexillology, but is not synonymous with that discipline.” A more in-depth definition of vexillology, other than simply *the study of flags*, is that it is “the creation and development of a body of knowledge about flags of all types, their forms and functions, and of scientific theories and principles based on that knowledge.” These are the definitions accepted and used by *la Fédération internationale des associations vexillologiques* (FIAV), or the International Federation of Vexillological Associations (“Guiding Principles of Flag Design”).

One major difference between vexillology and vexillography is their field of practice: The former is closest to being a science, while the latter is closest to being an art. The vast majority of vexillologists and vexillographers agree that vexillography is highly subjective, despite having established and internationally recognized rules; as vexillologist and vexillographer Ted Kaye puts it, “All rules have exceptions” (14).

On the other hand, even though it is highly disputed whether vexillology is a science or not, it is not considered an art. But many would argue it is not a science either. One of those people was the late Peter J. Orenski, author of the 2001 article *Quo Vadimus: An Essay On the State and Future of Vexillology*. He writes, “The short answer is ‘No.’ No, because for the last 40 years vexillologists have largely been content gathering facts about flags; necessary, for sure, but not enough for Science.” He goes on to argue that it could be a science, but lacks the “paradigms” necessary (54). On a similar note, a contributor to a discussion on the Flags of the World website wrote, “The responses to the question of ‘what is vexillology’ have dealt with the

fact that flags are historical objects. They are also objects related to the sociology and psychology of a culture, ergo they are not limited to historical or historically related disciplines” (Nelson).

Another point of comparison between vexillology and vexillography is their different presence and prevalence in flag related communities. The most notable of the aforementioned communities is the North American Vexillological Association (NAVA), “an international, non-profit, scholarly organization dedicated to the study of flags and their cultural, historical, political, and social significance” (“About NAVA”). From this description, as well as the types of articles published in NAVA’s *Raven: A Journal of Vexillology*, it is shown that despite the fact that NAVA has published a few vexillographical works, such as *Good Flag, Bad Flag: How to Design a Great Flag*, it is above all a vexillological association and focuses on the study of flags, not the design of them. NAVA publications are written and edited by professional vexillologists who have spent most of their lives working to get to that point. As such, the writers at NAVA tend to be more focused on the scholarly and educational side of things.

A much more casual and much, much less exclusive flag-related community, as it is open to anyone with an internet connection, is [/r/vexillology](#), a *subreddit*, or specialized community, commonly called a *sub*, on the social media website Reddit. The sub is a hub for amateur vexillologists and vexillographers alike, lending to a laid-back environment and almost zero scholarly discussion. Its browser tab title exclaims, “Vexillology: for all you flag lovers out there!” (“Vexillology”). When one looks at [/r/vexillology](#), one is greeted by a screen of countless redesigns of real-world flags, typically based on alternate history or humorous, impossible situations. Though it celebrates both, the kind of environment fostered by [/r/vexillology](#) lends to

the community being home to mostly amateur vexillographers, people simply interested in flag design as a hobby, contrasting greatly with NAVA.

Two branches of the same tree, vexillology and vexillography are heavily intertwined fields with a few major differences. Vexillology is the scholarly study of flags, having to do with mostly science, knowledge, and objectivity; vexillography is the design of flags, having to do with mostly art and subjectivity. Each is more greatly appreciated in communities of different builds; professional organizations lend more toward vexillology, while casual online communities lend more toward vexillography. Despite this, the vast majority of vexillologists are vexillographers and most vexillographers are also, to an extent, vexillologists. One cannot exist without the other.

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## Persuasive Researched Essay

Nov. 18

*For this final essay, we were allowed to use portions of our previous essays.*

Flags: everyday objects that can mean a whole lot to some people. Despite their commonality, however, there's more to them than meets the eye. Flag design dates back hundreds upon hundreds of years, but has only solidified into its own field of study in the last few decades. This is called vexillology, "the creation and development of a body of knowledge about flags of all types, their forms and functions, and of scientific theories and principles based on that knowledge." It is allied with vexillography, "the art and practice of designing flags" (qtd. in "Guiding Principles of Flag Design"). The term *vexillology* was invented by the late vexillologist Whitney Smith at eighteen from the Latin word for flag, *vexillum*, and the greek-derived suffix *-ology* (Smith). It can be used to refer to both vexillology and vexillography.

The four most important aspects of the area of knowledge that is vexillology are as follows: The five basic principles of flag design presented in vexillologist and vexillographer Ted Kaye's *Good Flag, Bad Flag*; the very detailed and in-depth look at vexillography in *The Commission's Report On the Guiding Principles of Flag Design*, hereafter the *Report*; the subjectivity and art inherent to flag design; and the debate on whether or not vexillology is a science.

While there is much to know in the flag-related fields, the four most important aspects to understand in them are the five principles of flag design, the information in the *Report*, subjectivity in flag design, and the vexillology-as-science debate, as they delve best into the craft

(vexillography), the study (vexillology), and show that there is much, much more to flags than the layperson likely knows.

The basic principles of flag design, followed by professional and amateur vexillographers everywhere, are to keep the flag one is designing simple enough that a child can draw it from memory, use meaningful symbolism in its colors, patterns, and/or images, use only two to three basic and well-contrasting colors, don't use any writing or seal of any kind, and to avoid duplicating other flags, but use similarities to show connections (Kaye 3).

*Good Flag, Bad Flag* is significant to understanding the area of knowledge because it's packaged nicely in a small, sixteen-page book, making it easy for beginners, it "distill[s] the wisdom of many people who have written on the subject," helping beginners understand the craft, and it mentions that "[a]ll rules have exceptions," a statement helping beginners realize the craft's subjectivity (Kaye 14-6). Overall, it acts as a great introduction to the layperson of what lies beneath the surface of flags.

The *Report* is a deeper look into these same and similar principles, co-written by a commission of members from the North American Vexillological Association (NAVA) and its British equivalent, the Flag Institute. When it comes to the information in it, there's so much of it in those four pages that I couldn't cover it all right now if I wanted to. However, I'll go over some of the major bits. It begins with some disclaimers explaining that "[t]he principles contained within it are only guidelines, as for each 'don't do this' there is almost certainly a flag which does just that and yet works. An obvious example would be item 3.1 'fewer colors,' yet who would deny that both the flag of South Africa..." (*fig. 1*) "...and the Gay Pride Flag..." (*fig. 2*) "...work well, despite having six colors each" (Bartram et al. 1).



*Fig. 1: Flag of South Africa*



*Fig. 2: Gay Pride Flag*

It also disclaims that “aesthetic appeal” is an important part of flags. Beyond the introduction, it introduces terminology — *obverse, reverse, ratio, hoist, fly, canton, device, division*; the basics — the flag will be flying or hanging limp, simplicity is important, and more; color principles — use contrast, define edges, et cetera; structural principles — make the most important parts the most visible, don’t use both sides, make it more tall than wide; device principles — devices should be graphical representations rather than exact depictions, devices should be placed in the most prominent position, and more; and finally, symbolism — symbols should represent all of a community rather than parts of it, prioritize individual identity over group identity, et cetera. Throughout the *Report*, uniqueness and the principles within *Good Flag Bad Flag* (in more detail) are emphasized greatly as well (Bartram, et al. 2-4).

For those who already know the basic principles in *Good Flag, Bad Flag*, the *Report* helps one understand the craft on a much, much deeper level. It also tells of much exact terminology and mentions a few flags which it does not comment on subjectively. This helps the reader to understand that even flags they personally are biased toward or against can be examined objectively. And because of how much information is presented in the *Report*, anyone

who read it would certainly have a more unique and deeper understanding of flags and their design than the common person.

Vexilligraphy is an artform. This is exemplified by the fact that no set of rules, from *Good Flag, Bad Flag* to the *Report* or anything in between or beyond, ever claims that the design of flags is objective. In fact, vexillographical resources typically go out of their way to explain that flag design is subjective, at least to a certain extent, and that there are always exceptions. For example, Kaye writes that “Colorado’s ‘C’...” (*fig. 3*) “...is a stunning graphic element. Maryland’s complicated heraldic quarters...” (*fig. 4*) “...produce a memorable and distinctive flag” (14) despite their breaking of the rules he establishes in that same book. However, I happen to disagree, for the most part, that these flags — especially that of Maryland — look nice, further proof that vexilligraphy is not set in stone.



*Fig. 3: Flag of Colorado, USA*



*Fig. 4: Flag of Maryland, USA*

One who only knows the rules and not how to break them, in any artistic field, is incapable of creating incredible art. Understanding subjectivity in flag design helps one understand the craft better than simply knowing the rules every could. When you understand it, you are also able to more effectively separate flags’ design and the flags themselves in your

mind, which helps in future understanding of vexillology. Along the same line of thought, it can help one look even deeper into what goes into the making of flags and have a more open mind about flags they're biased for or against. However, flag design isn't entirely subjective; otherwise having guiding principles would not be necessary.

On the other side of the flag-related fields is vexillology, a word that can be confusing for many, as it can refer to itself specifically *or* itself and vexillography combined. This is shown, in part, by the fact that some people don't consider *vexillography* to be a word: it's not featured in the Oxford English Dictionary, the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, or on Dictionary.com — though Dictionary.com does feature the word *vexillographer*, one who designs flags (“Vexillographer”).

All of this leads to the final to the final component of vexillology that is quite important to understand if you wish to fully comprehend the field(s): the debate on whether or not vexillology is a science. Whitney Smith, the first organizer of vexillological circles, intended for it to be the scholarly and scientific study of flags. And while the objectivity described by the definition remains to this day, many, if not most, vexillologists would say that it does not possess the qualities of a science. The debate also overlaps greatly with the discussion as to whether or not vexillology and vexillography are even separate fields at all.

One prominent vexillologist who claimed it is not a science was the late Peter J. Orenski. In his essay *Quo Vadimus*, he writes, “The short answer [to the question of whether or not vexillology is a science] is ‘No.’ No, because for the last 40 years vexillologists have largely been content gathering facts about flags; necessary, for sure, but not enough for Science.” He goes on to argue that it could be a science, but lacks the “paradigms” necessary (54). On a similar note, a contributor to a discussion on the Flags of the World website wrote, “The

responses to the question of ‘what is vexillology’ have dealt with the fact that flags are historical objects. They are also objects related to the sociology and psychology of a culture, ergo they are not limited to historical or historically related disciplines” (Nelson).

Understanding the debate helps one to know their own stance on it, which bleeds over into one knowing whether they consider the two intertwined fields to be one in the same or different enough to be considered separate; this is nearly the deepest if not the deepest layer of the metaphorical onion that is vexillology and vexillography, and can get into the fundamentals of what science and art are. It shows that there is so much more beneath the surface than what the common person likely considers there to be when it comes to flags; they’re not simply ornate and symbolic pieces of cloth, they’re philosophical discussions.

The most important components to understanding flags and the study and design of them are the five most common basic principles of vexillography, the information agreed upon in the *Report*, the subjectivity of flag design, and the vexillology-as-science debate. This is because of a couple of things: They best help you to fully understand the fields because, firstly, they dive deep into the craft, or art, of vexillography by establishing rules and then showing that they must be broken; and they deeply examine the study, or possibly science, of vexillology by showing first that flags can be examined objectively and then that there is a deep debate to the exactly how objective and scientific the field is. All of this culminates in an incredibly deep understanding of the philosophy and culture surrounding vexillology and vexillography.

If one is to fully comprehend, or at least know the most important parts of, the fields, no other selection of information would do the job as accurately or precisely as the four components discussed in this essay. This is in part because there isn’t much else to know, but mainly because

they allow one to look at flags from many different angles: the hobbyist, the artist, the scientist, the anthropologist, the psychologist, and so forth. They provide a nearly complete and multi-perspective view of what flags are, how they're used, and even more philosophical questions, such as what science and art are, and how they intermingle.

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## Book Review: *Deep Cosmos* by Project Kyle

Nov. 9

★★☆☆☆

I received a free eARC of this book in exchange for an honest review, so thanks to Project Kyle for that!

First off, as of writing this review, I don't have the ability to finish the book before it comes out. So the comments are of someone 2/3 of the way through the story (sorry, Kyle!). Also, I'm posting this on both Goodreads and Amazon, and, unless you say otherwise, Kyle, including it in my 2018 Portfolio. If you have any qualms about that last bit, PK, please tell me before the year's end!

This book was alright. It kept me entertained, for the most part. Let me start off with the positives:

- The universe it's set in is very interesting
- The concepts are fascinating
- The art in the book is very good

Now the cons:

- The characters seem flat (especially Henry)
- The POV is too unpredictable (this is part of my subjective distaste for an omnipotent perspective)
- It could definitely start at a better place
- There is almost 0 showing, and almost all telling

- There are a lot of minor typos
- The dialogue could get very lengthy / monologuey
- Oddly enough, there weren't enough contractions
- The characters have only slightly different voices
- The characters tend to exactly remember things from their past, including long stretches of dialogue
- This is just a little nitpick, but the animal clearly based off of a jaguar... is called a Ja-gore.

But the BIGGEST con would have to be the writing. This can be separated into 2 sections: filter words and prose.

First, prose. The writing itself was just lacking; building on the previously mentioned lack of showing, metaphors and similes were never used, and there was just always something I felt was missing in the writing. If I were reading this just for fun, I would have quit in the first chapter and given it one star with the review only saying "DNF'd."

And the filter words. Oh, the filter words! It was very rare for something to just be stated. Instead, everything was unnecessarily filtered through a character's perspective, usually in the form of them "noticing" something.

Even if Project Kyle didn't do the necessary developmental edits to flesh out the characters, but hired a copy editor and did many rounds of line edits, my rating would instantly go up to 3 stars, which, for me, is not a negative rating (it's between neutral and positive).

Again, thanks for the eARC - it's my first ARC! And just for (hopefully unnecessary) clarification, none of this was meant as an attack on the author, rather simply a critique of his imperfect work.

People of the writer, aspiring author, and/or reader community/ies on Twitter, please support your fellow writers, aspiring authors, and readers! Project Kyle is on Twitter @DeepCosmosbook and is a very nice fellow! His website is [kyledragoncool.wixsite.com/projectkyle](http://kyledragoncool.wixsite.com/projectkyle). If you want, you can also check me out @ByronLEllington or at [byronlopezellington.com](http://byronlopezellington.com), where I blog every Tuesday and Saturday.

Read, write, and review, my friends!

## **Short Fiction**

## **The Wretched Sound of Incarnation** *(unfinished)*

Feb. – early Apr.

### **The Wretched Sound of Incarnation**

Never before had I suspected such a thing was possible.

In all my days, I have been shunned, disrespected, not allowed to advocate for the truth. Not allowed to advocate for the rights that have been stripped of those thought to be inferior. I have long fought for the sameness of the underfolk, the corporeal beings, the humans. I have fought for the belief that in all ways but physically they are our equals and must be treated as such.

I have long remorse the wars that were fought between the upperfolk and the under, spirit and man. I have argued, “To touch the dirt rather than the essence does not transfer all equality and righteousness away from those who live in the land! To be, just to cease, does not change the fact that they are real and deserve not the hardships of their current corporeal existence!” I begged and begged to the higher-ups, the daemons and djinn behind our supposed “superiority” to underfolk, to release the binding words of their cursed magics that have led to war and famine among those across the river, put in place simply to dispute the shared nature we once had!

And the wars, the wars. Terrible, they were. They were fought from the moment the underfolk became aware. War is in their and our nature, but does not have to be. And while the great conflicts have long since ceased, their effects have the life of a great infinite tortoise; in one

final effort by the daemon admiral, the underfolk became corporeal and were prophesied to lead an existence of unending suffering... which so far has been their only fate. And so, I have argued for their peace to be continued once again.

But I have been shunned and cast aside for my, as they put it a many millennia ago, “inherent ineptitude in society of the Greats.” Even the minor imps who have endured so much of their own hardship have sent me away, magics spewing forth to bind me begone from their days.

It was too much, and for too long. Nearly one aeon had passed since I first began to advocate for the equality of those with Touch, and I could not let the corrupts of yonder century guide the people into an even harsher regime.

So I spoke up one last time.

The difference from the rest of eternity’s attempts, so it seemed, was the horrids’ impulse to lie. They had insulted me and my cause for all Time, they has banished me, forcibly silenced me, cut me from the essence of all incorporeal reality, and yet I had prevailed. But never before had they lied to me.

And this, I thought, was just another step toward the terror of future’s hold. Lies entwining themselves with existence. However, after the evidence had come forth, and I have been contained within this prison of a magic for many decades, watching over and over the explanations unfold, I believe I have finally come to accept the truth:

My very existence. It was my very existence that was formed, like a modified lab rat’s birth, from the destruction of civilizations. Body and mind, my entire Self was constructed from the lost souls of the very beings I had fought for all my life.

Never before had I suspected such a thing was possible.

### **Incarnating the Wretched**

*1083 B.C.E.*

*1730 hours.*

“I have been appointed by Head Medical Officer and good friend of mine Sjattewal to lead this experiment,” said a daemon named Admiral Quaesot. “It is unlike any other project you have been assigned to prior to this day. I’ve been told...”—he scanned over the crowd, as if to see if we were adequate enough for him—“...that you’re the best of the bunch. Now, tend to your stations; instructions will be provided there.”

On the way to my station, a word was spoken and I found myself trapped in place by the chains of a great magic like insects caught in spiderwebs of the corporeal realm. I’m rotated and released. “Oh, um, hello, Admiral.”

“I extend my greetings to you as well, Commander Vaktennaghet.”

“Commander?” I say quizzically. “I haven’t been called that in millennia. Nowadays I tend to simply prefer Officer, if you don’t mind, sir.”

The admiral laughed heartily. “Well, my bad. I figured you’d want to be called by your highest rank. You don’t see me still asking to be called Captain, do you?”

“Uh, no, sir. What was it you wanted to see me about?”

“Ah, yes. I have a... special... mission for you. You see, none of the other scientific officers have the same level of credentials as you—even Sjattewal only carries the rank of lieutenant commander. Which is why you are hereby officially requested and ordered to report to Fort Quaesot by 1800 hours tonight.” The admiral dissipated into the essence.

*0000 hours.*

The job is done. A sickly sensation crawls into my being. My peers, who expected me nearly an hour ago, question why I did not simply travel through dissipation. They will never understand what a noble cause it is to force myself to not infect the essence with my poisoned existence.

I try to speak. But what comes out is not voice, nor sound at all. What is emitted is the glorious becoming a new afrit, the first spirit to be created in nearly a thousand aeons. It is an honest, caring one. But it produces a shockwave, not quite a sound, almost as wretched as its incarnation.

This is the end of my existence and the start of a new era—a terrible, terrible era encompassing the tortured existence of a horridly troubled being.

### **Inside the Piercing Wail**

It was unimaginably terrible. No one quite understands the horror of being trapped inside your own creation for a seeming eternity. And the noise, the noise... like a horn being blown not

once, not twice, not even thrice, but an infinite number of times; and not in succession, no, at once, but slowed so as to last for all of time.

Of course, I had not yet experience the odd sensation that is the passage of time, even in the linear sense as understood by the underfolk, but it was painful nonetheless. Only once I escaped could I, however, truly understand the misery that I had been procured in.

The year is 2,937,468,752 in the Common Era, an aeon after I learned the truth. I have long accepted the facts of my creation, yet that scene of my existence coming to be still haunts me to this day. It is said that a wonderful scientist and commander's essence was scattered in that moment that my life began, a djinn named Vaktennaghet. They say he was whisked away by an admiral, then sentenced to be scattered, to be the sole confidant in the most dangerous part of the experiment that was I: destroying an entire corporeal society.

Even in the modern time, I fight for the unification of upperfolk and under. To provide the luxury experienced in the spiritual realm to those who suffer beneath. While succeed I have not yet, the government does not attempt to suppress my efforts any longer.

And oddly enough, it appears that the new governmental trend of replacing the horrids with competent officials must have begun with the sentence of that one admiral.

### **The Great Demise** *(unfinished)*

The boy walked to his mother one last time. "I'm going to miss you," he said softly and as if he were being choked.

“Don’t lose hope yet, my son.” She took his face in her hand, eyes looking into eyes. “The war can still be won. You’re not going to leave me for good just yet.” A glasslike bead slowly fell from the corner of her eye.

“I love you.”

“I love you. Be safe.”

“I will. Goodbye.” A tear matched his mother’s.

“Goodbye, son.”

The boy marched on. And on he went, for weeks on camelback, through the heat and sand, to reach his station. He didn’t understand why he couldn’t just dissipate through the essence, but he figured his superiors had good intentions for putting their soldiers through the suffering that was corporeal travel. On a sandstone slab, he marked a tally every morning for a month, and only then did he stumble upon the first checkpoint; in the distance was a bar, seemingly abandoned, but the boy knew better.

At the counter sat a young man and an imp. As the boy joined them, the man confronted him.

“Hey, kid. Are you heading to the barracks too?”

“Yeah. Why?”

“Oh, I just wanted to make sure I could trust ya.” He gave the boy a wide grin, many teeth knocked out and crooked. “So, will you help me get rid of this spirit or what? The thing’s not budging.”

One glance at the imp revealed its miniscule size and lack of prominent wings, horns, or claws. It moped on the table, head down and shoulders slumped. “Why should I? It’s not harming anyone, is it?”

“Well, no, but—”

“But what?” the spirit interjected. “Look, I was caught on the same side of this war as you! If anything, fools like my meat-bodied acquaintance here are the only reason I’d have to support the upperfolk in this thing!”

The man’s eyebrows raised. “See, boy? That *thing* is an enemy sympathizer! Us underfolk are so horribly mistreated by the spirits. Disdainful,” he spat.

Eyes narrow, the boy spat back. “You’re disdainful! Leave the poor imp alone!” He turned to the door. As a creak of wood settled behind him, he heard a final remark.

“I’m reporting your offense to the Pharaoh.”

The boy travelled on for another month. Finally, he reached the physical entrance to the incorporeal Pyramid of Giza. Amazing though it was, the sandstone structure before him could never compete with the startling magnificence of its spiritual counterpart. At the great doors, he spoke:

“I am a soldier of the mighty Pharaoh. I will forever pledge my allegiance to him and the underfolk, and no one else. I will not stop...” He faltered for a moment, stepping back with a gulp. “I will not stop until the essence of every last spirit of the upperfolk is scattered. Please allow me to pass.” He stepped off his camel’s back, tethering him to a post.

With a ring of crashing stone, the doors opened.

The boy waded through the winding halls, atop the rough stairs, past the countless statues, until he ultimately reached a minute door, not recognizable to anyone who wasn't looking for it. Lightly, he pressed on the sandstone bricks. Those that made up the entranceway disintegrated into pure sand. After stepping through the opening, he looked back; the sandstone bricks were placed there once again.

Inside the vast chamber lay a great molten pool of light, surrounded by jagged stones jutting up out of the ground. The boy approached it. He touched the light and sunk. Like the winds of a hurricane, body and mind were dragged into the endless depths of the essence.

Emerging in the spirit realm, the boy's Self walked forward, to the empty expanse in which he joined thousands of soldiers like him sat in a formal bow to the mighty Pharaoh.

...

## The Doorway

—”

Aug. 26 – Sep. 7

“Hey, J, what’s up?” William asked in his calm, considering manner. He had caught up to Jahziel, his best friend — or, who he *thought* was his best friend, but Jahziel hadn’t interacted with him much for the last year or so. He had left the school with more eagerness than any other eighth-almost-ninth-grader ready for the weekend, which was saying something. Jahziel’s relieved expression, however, tightened up a bit when he noticed William was there.

“Oh, hey, William. Not much. I thought you were staying a bit longer for your, uh, library books, or something?” Jahziel used to always be excited and crazy in his manner. William didn’t know what changed.

While it was true that William often stayed after school to exchange library books, as he could devour a relatively thick novel in a day or two’s time, as of late he hadn’t done it much. Something felt off inside him, and he figured maybe he needed some fresh air. “No,” he said, hiding his emotions as he had learned to do long ago; he feared what could — or would — happen if he didn’t.

Then, feeling the sudden urge to ask, he said, “What’s going on with you, Jahziel? You’re not like you used to be.” It was a mistake.

“Oh, hey, there’s my bus! Bye, Will,” said Jahziel, an unrecognizable tone in his voice, as he ran off in another direction, disappearing into the crowd. William was alone. He stood there for a moment, dumbstruck; the “old J” would never have done that.

“Jahziel — wait! —”

Jahziel started running, shoving his way through the line at his school bus, not caring about the swears and insults of his classmates. All he cared about was getting home, and having some fun.

Half an hour later, he arrived on his corner, got out, and made his way into his house and room. As always, his parents weren't home yet, as they had to work overtime nowadays. Shoving his backpack onto the ground and changing into more comfortable clothes — athletic shorts and a T-shirt — he laid on his bed and thought about what he wanted to do that night.

When he'd made up his mind, he stepped up to his closed door, and tightly gripped the handle. He took deep, calming breaths, and conjured in his mind the image of unfolding a piece of paper, except that paper was infinitely large and the whole of spacetime.

He opened the door.

Instead of looking into the hall that led to his room, he saw a marvelous green pasture, the Meadow Sitlhal, dotted with beautiful thick live oak trees, sitting under the bright light of the six suns.

As he stepped outside, he glanced through his door. Through it he could see his room — his room that had no magic — in the world with no magic — and with windows looking out into that world. He shut the door, and now all that existed of that place was the door and its frame; behind and around it was nothing but the air and ground of a new, strange world he had discovered about a year earlier.

He had entered the Folds.

A universe hidden from the rest of reality.

A world of magic, mystery, and marvel.

Jahziel set off, feeling the cool grass around his feet. Ants that appeared to be made of blue-hot fire crawled around on the ground. Shadow spirits danced in and out and upon the holes and knots in the great oaks. In the distance, Jahziel spied the Ancient Wood. As he continued onward, he nearly tripped on a rock, loudly yelling, “*Woah —*”

William sat at his desk with his nose buried in a book, *A Theoretical Analysis of Folklore*, meticulously reading every word for complete comprehension. However, his mind kept wandering back to J and their situation. Why had Jahziel been acting so oddly for so long? He had always said he wanted to go off on an adventure somewhere, and maybe he had found a way to do that. Still, William figured, it wasn't right for him to simply not let anyone in on the fact, and instead shove his relationships aside. In that moment, he decided he would go and check on J; after all, they only lived a few blocks apart from one another.

When William arrived at J's house, he took a deep breath, and knocked on the front door. After waiting a minute or so with no answer, he knocked again. Still no response. He went around to the garage door, and opened the keypad. Had the Moreaus changed the code since he last used it years ago? After a couple minutes of racking his brain for what it might be, he finally remembered what it had been and punched it in.

It worked.

William walked through the garage, pausing with his hand on the handle into the house. He considered what he was doing. Something deep inside him told him this wasn't right, he should just leave J alone, he wouldn't have done this the year before. But that year had happened. *I'm being quite unlike my typical self*, he thought, opening the Moreaus' door.

Walking through a long ago memorized pattern, William reached Jahziel's bedroom at the end of the hall. He lightly knocked a short Fibonacci sequence — one knock, another, two knocks, three (he had knocked that way as long as he could count, which was as long as he could remember. It had always annoyed others around him, but by now it was wired into his brain and not going away).

The door didn't open.

Hesitantly, William called, "Jahziel? I'm going to come in, okay? I want to know that you're alright. And... what's been going on with you." *This is highly atypical of me*, he thought worriedly. What was going on with *him*? He opened the door and stepped into Jahziel's room, its walls covered in posters of sports teams and movies about pirates and adventure.

No one was inside.

"J? Where are you?" William yelled into the hall. And then...

The door *slammed shut*.

*"How the f—"*

Jahziel took many deep, tired, and utterly relieved breaths as he leaned against his bedroom door. He was standing horizontally on the vertical wall of the Unfalling Cliffs. The door'd shimmered into existence, falling wide open — William visible inside the room. Luckily, it was one-way viewing.

Deciding to deal with that later, Jahziel slapped a smile on his face and started running, feeling the cool wind on his arms and legs, smelling the natural, wild dust of the cliff, and getting the amazing, energizing sensation that you're falling, even though your feet are firmly attached to the vertical ground.

Something shimmered in front of him.

He dodged to the left (up), barely missing the open door to his room. Again, he thought, *Later. L-A-T-E-R*, and continued to run, shoving everything but the thrill aside. Up ahead he spied some rock spires. As he approached, he didn't stop running, but leapt with all his might. For a few brief moments in the air, he was completely disoriented — Which way was up? — Which was down? — Left? — Right? — Was it changing? — but he managed to land safely on his feet with a loud *thunk* on the wall of a spire. After a few yards, he reached the edge, and overlooked the beautiful and terrifying sight in front of him.

The sun shone bright, directly in the middle of his field of vision. If he looked up or down, he was greeted with the view of an endless series of spires and cliffs jutting almost impossibly — scratch that, *actually* impossibly — out of the ground. To his left and right and behind him were those same cliffs and rock spires, but as if laying flat on their sides — even more incredible.

Preparing for the moment of confusion and lack of direction as he stepped onto the flattish peak of the spire, Jahziel closed his eyes, living in the breeze as it swept downward (to the side like normal), from his head to his toes. He stepped down (up) onto the peak.

And into his bedroom.

He collapsed on the ground, dizzy and confused. Quickly, however, his confusion morphed into guilt, for just a second, and then to the nasty solution that came from anger and confusion. He stood, his fists and face clenched.

*“William! You — you — broke into my house?! How could you?! How...”* Dizziness overtook him once more, and he collapsed. Post-Folds fatigue was settling in, and stronger than normal... “How — how —”

William crouched down over Jahziel, concerned. J was unconscious, but breathing. William put a hand to his forehead, and started muttering to himself, “Oh, this is all my fault...” After a few minutes it became, “What is going on? *What is going on?*” And when J still didn’t wake after ten minutes, William collapsed in on himself. Everything was wrong. Tears began to fall from his eyes — *This isn’t like me at all* — and soon became dry, confused sobs — *Stop crying and think through this logically!* — before condensing into a sniffing, stifling sadness, as confusion crept through his mind — *Nothing makes sense anymore... Nothing makes sense anymore* — and everything was whittled away, away, away, and then all was gone, gone, gone... all except for anger — *This is all my fault!* — *Why is he like this?!* — *Why am I like this?!* — anger at himself, at Jahziel, at the world, at everything, at nothing, and ultimately at himself again, before settling into a peaceful torment — the eye of a hurricane — the “calm” but not really calm that comes with being accustomed to a perpetual maelstrom — and all he felt was empty.

And then, finally, Jahziel awoke. He sat up quickly, his eyes darting about like he was wide awake, but for some reason he appeared... almost calm. William rocked in his place, his face red and eyes still a bit puffy.

William began to speak. “I’m sorry —”

“No,” said Jahziel, meeting his eyes. As he had rested, something had sparked inside of him. Something he couldn’t quite place. “You look like you’ve had a really rough time.” His

throat caught, as if there were something massive lodged inside it and his chest. “I’m sorry,” he said, realizing what it was: guilt. He’d made his decision. “For everything. I ignored you, and everyone, and... And I want to make that up,” he said firmly. “And if I can’t do that, I at least want you to know where I’ve been and what I’ve been doing this whole time.” He extended a hand.

It was taken.

Jahziel led William to his door and closed it, before gripping its handle with his free hand. “Close your eyes,” he said, taking a deep breath as he focused on unfolding the paper. And soon enough, as he opened the door and stepped outside with William, they opened their eyes not to the meadow from earlier, or the Unfalling Cliffs, but the Meandering Moon, a small rocky sphere that hovered only a mile or so off of the ground as it orbited the Folded Earth.

“Welcome,” said Jahziel, the thrill in the cool air filling his lungs, “to the Folds.”

“You’re not saying...” began William. “It’s *real*?” He looked to Jahziel, something wild in his eyes.

“You *knew* about the Folds?!”

“Of course! It’s written of in *A Theoretical Analysis of Folklore* by —”

“I thought I was the only one from our world who knew about it!”

William considered for a moment. “Well, plenty others know about it, but hardly anyone believes it exists anymore. I learned all about it in, uh, *that book*; the author said it was technically possible, but highly improbable for anything like it to exist. Oh, I could examine the mathematics and physics behind this realm for millenia!”

“Well, in the meantime, do you, uh, wanna maybe go on a li’l adventure?”

William thought for a good two minutes, forty-five seconds, and 700 or so milliseconds. He'd never exactly been the adventurous type. In the end, he figured it was worth a shot.

The two friends started with exploring the Meandering Moon, before travelling by way of portal to the Bay of Qesqhaa, which was enchanted to have a neverending beach ("It's not enchanted," explained William. "It's just an interesting application of the Folds' lax physics."); the Ancient Wood, a massive, million-year-old, spirit-inhabited temperate rainforest that was actually just one tree; the Conflux, a magical wellspring ("Again, not actually magic," said William.); and finally, the Long Moment, a patch of land that was frozen in time.

"Wanna do that more often in the future, Will?" asked J when they finally got back.

"No thanks," said William. "I've had enough adventure to last me a lifetime. But I think I'm going to dedicate my life to studying the Folds!"

And from that moment on, their friendship was never quite the same. It was rooted much, much deeper, and yet... the two grew farther and farther apart as time went on. However, it was a natural progression, not a sudden change, and though they parted ways in life, they still kept in occasional contact, and said they would always be there for each other when needed.

Long ago, their friendship was planted. The seed grew into a sapling, but its branches were cut. Then, they grew back stronger and the sapling became a tree.

THE END

## The Spirit Whisperer

Oct. 1 – Oct. 6

*Akins — Londinium, England, Great Britain, 1773*

The boy from Cairo, Akins, lay on the dirty, stone floor of his new, shared bedroom, tightly clutching his thin, scraggly blanket as close to his body as possible. He was dangerously cold, and not used to the freezing winters of England. Still, he was not on the run. He and his mother, Isis, had narrowly escaped into the Mediterranean four years ago, when he was eight. He was twelve now, and they had finally travelled up the Thames to the Londinium refugee camp. They were safe from the Pharaoh here.

Akins shared a room with nine other boys, some younger, and some older. They were all from different places. Jerusalem, Kiev, Prague, even Stockholm. The Warlock Alliance was spreading, and as it grew, many more fled its tyrannical regime. Egypt, Israel, Pakistan, Kievan Rus', Finland, Sweden, Latvia, Bohemia, Rome, Byzantium. All part of the Alliance. It seemed Bavaria, Arabia, Nihon, Korea, and Tibet were likely to join soon as well.

And Akins had a secret.

He was a warlock.

A Spirit Whisperer.

In Egypt, he had spoken to his late father, Osiris, regularly. The spirit was not quite his father, but a shadow of his former self. Osiris died when Akins was very young, but was determined not to disappear forever. He used his dying breath to cast the magick that let him

continue caring for his son in some form after his death; like his son, he too was a Spirit Whisperer, and as such could choose to become a spirit.

Akins was terrified of this power, for he knew in England it would only cause him harm. Magick of every kind was illegal in the British Empire, and punishable by death. Evidently, the King thought it wise to keep every ounce of magick outside of his nation for fear of an infiltration. And frankly, Akins couldn't blame him; he didn't know that not all warlocks were bad. Akins thought the King probably assumed all the refugees were regular people fleeing the Warlock Alliance and its terrible, horrible magick. Or maybe the King didn't know about the refugees. Maybe they weren't important enough for his thought.

Akins considered all this while he froze in the middle of the night. He didn't dare sleep, never knowing if he was having nightmares or being surrounded by real spirits...

*Isis — Londinium, England, Great Britain, 1773*

Isis, like any good mother at this time, was worried sick. She couldn't fall asleep or even get tired, she was too afraid. The Brits did not let her hold her baby at night. The rules were very strict in the camp. So instead of going mad from the terror in her mind, instead of thinking of her child frozen alive in the other room, instead of considering the politics of the world, she busied herself with trying to find a way to get herself and her baby out of the camp and into the city, where they could blend in and stay.

To leave, however, they would have to know they could get a job. And to get a job, they needed work experience. A few years working all night and all day at the refugee camp should be enough for most low-end businesses to hire them. But it was winter, and Isis could not work

while she had to take care of Akins. She pushed back a nagging worry that they would not live through the ice, snow, and rain.

*Charles — Londinium, England, Great Britain, 1773*

Grumbling and drowsy, Charles climbed up the ladder on the refugee camp's single watchtower. The job wasn't hard, for the Crown cared not whether crimes were committed in the foreigners' playpen or not, but he had to stay awake. It put on a good look for the Righteous Lands, whose troops were being sent out day after day in support of the War on Warlocks. Magick was a tricky thing to fight, but eventually a bullet or a sword would outpace an incantation.

Of course, there was opposition to the war, even in the Righteous Lands, but luckily it was always squashed soon enough. Charles thought with self-admiration of the good deeds he was helping get done by participating loyally in his government. Bohemia and Sweden and Rome might be all for letting the warlocks continue to thrive, but Britain, Ireland, Gaul, Castile, Catalonia, the Netherlands — the countries that really mattered — were fighting relentlessly on the borders of those traitorous neighboring kingdoms.

*Akins — Londinium, England, Great Britain, 1773*

The horizon was a soft reddish orange, and the refugees were allowed to leave their rooms. The other boys in Akins' dormitory were still asleep, and he softly unlatched the door to find his mother already waiting outside. He ran into her, and they embraced in a deep hug, that could have lasted seconds or hours. Finally, when Akins let go of her, they gathered in the

common area, around a fire pit that was being tended to by a guard. Akins gasped audibly when a puff of smoke first rose from the wood. A tiny, nearly invisible spirit had risen with it. That fire pit had been used to kill.

“What’s wrong?” murmured Isis to him in their native language, a creole of sorts between the ancient Egyptian language and Arabic, simply called Egyptian.

“Oh — nothing,” he murmured back, also in Egyptian.

“Never seen fire before, little boy?” goaded the white guard. “Does it scare you?”

“No!” said Akins in English, puffing out his little chest.

“Akins, don’t—” Isis whispered in their native tongue.

The guard sneered at him. “Listen here, black baby. I stayed up *all night* guarding this place so *you* could be safe! *Don’t* get on my bad side. And mama”—he jerked his chin at Isis—“don’t you be talkin’ in that savage tongue of yours. We are *highly* tolerant of foreigners escaping here from the Warlock Alliance, but aside from that, we do *not* tolerate anything having to do with”—he spat into the small flames as he said it—“*magick*.”

Fuming, Isis spoke through her teeth. “Yes, *sir*.” Her accent was very thick.

“There’s a good woman,” said the guard, smiling broadly, making him appear less human, and he walked off.

Once he was sufficiently out of range, Isis whispered through her still-clenched teeth in Egyptian, “What did you see, Akins?” though it sounded as though she already knew.

“A spirit,” he told his mother in the same tongue. “In the smoke.”

She held him tightly, humming a prayer to Osiris — not Akins’ father Osiris, but the ancient Egyptian god Osiris, god of death, life, and the afterlife. Nobody in Egypt worshipped

the old gods any longer, but the prayer seemed to give Akins' mother some small comfort anyhow. He looked up at her, wondering what she was thinking. She never spoke much, but maybe she had spoken more when Akins was small and they were not moving through country after country. He didn't understand it, but his mother was never good with learning languages. Akins was really the reason they got through so many countries, he could learn them so fast. But it had been a long time since they were in Roman Africa, or Castilian Africa, or mainland Castile, or Portugal, or even Gaul, just a few nights ago...

*Isis — Londinium, England, Great Britain, 1773*

There was war in Portuguese Africa, on the border of Chad. Portugal was trying to cut off the thin strip of land that connected Chad and Egypt, which almost gave the Chadians access to the Nile. Isis had read this in the single newspaper delivered to the camp, after the guards had gotten it dirty (though she had much difficulty with speaking English, she could read it just fine). She overheard them arguing whether neutral Portugal was helping the Nonmagick Coalition ("The Righteous Lands," as they were called here), by cutting off another empire from the Warlock Alliance; or planning to join the Alliance after getting closer to it. Frankly, Isis did not care whether this empire or that joined the Alliance, so long as someone assassinated the Pharaoh of Egypt. Sure, the other member states probably had terrible rulers, but she had long ago deduced that were it not for the Pharaoh's political power, much of the Alliance would be perfectly safe. Safe for Akins, at least.

Isis' baby had already nearly revealed his powers, and on top of that nearly gotten them thrown out. But she was not going to punish him, certainly not. He had endured enough

punishment for her actions of rebellion against the Pharaoh; she was not going to put him through more. Instead, she busied herself with keeping them alive and learning as much as she could about the goings-on of the world, though she promised herself she wouldn't just the previous night. As the days went on, and her reading improved tremendously, she gleaned everything she could from the newspapers. The propaganda she found most enjoyable and absolutely despicable, for example:

### **MALI TO JOIN THE WARLOCK ALLIANCE?**

The Mali Empire, a terrible place on the west coast of the dark continent, is believed to have been in contact with its fellow savage African empires, Chad and Ethiopia, which have thus far remained independent at the expense of their citizens (who are in a perpetual cycle of cannibalism and human sacrifice). While the three cesspools of disease and slaughter are officially neutral, there is no reason not to believe they are not secretly planning to cooperate with and possibly join the Warlock Alliance. *(To learn more about how magick is the greatest force of evil and threat to democracy ever encountered, turn to page 2.)*

Next to the article was a crude drawing of naked black men and women with four spears (labelled Mali, Chad, Ethiopia, and The Warlock Alliance, respectively) brutally stabbed through a white man (labelled The Righteous Lands) dressed in a fancy tuxedo and leather dress boots.

Isis had once lived near the border of Chad, and could not see how its citizens could have been any less nice than the rather kind people she met there.

Weeks passed without anything eventful happening. Until one night...

*Charles — Londinium, England, Great Britain, 1773*

Everything changed the night the warlock came. A Fire Elemental from the Swedish colonies in what was once Germany. The entire place was alight, and Charles awoke with a start to the screams of the refugees.

And once the scum had shown his magick, others did as well. There were warlocks in Londinium! This was unheard of! Disgusting! Disgraceful! And to think it happened under Charles' watch! He couldn't bear to think what would come of him.

The buildings burned, rain poured but did not put out the flames, the ground shook like he'd never felt before, and he could've sworn he saw what looked like a small, night-black dragon soaring through the sky, only visible from the moon's reflection on its scales. But the instant Charles saw it, it was gone.

The guards all looked around when the flames had subsided, finding countless dead bodies, burnt to crisps. The Elemental warlocks were nowhere to be seen, and neither were any

of the other living refugees. Charles chuckled despite himself at the thought of how scared that little black boy must have been when the entire place was on fire.

After the incident, Charles got what he expected; he was sacked from his post, and sent to live on the streets if he couldn't find a job. But seeing as he had apparently "let" the place burn down, he clearly wasn't going to be hired anywhere! Like the other guardsmen didn't also "let" it happen! But he didn't complain and left his sergeant's office without a word.

As he left, he vowed to himself that he would someday exact revenge on that Fire warlock, and every refugee in that camp if he could. He had always known Britain shouldn't've been letting foreigners across the English Channel.

*Akins — Londinium, England, Great Britain, 1776*

Three years had passed since the fateful day Akins and his mother had to flee their burning refugee camp. That day onward, he had suppressed his magick as much as he could. He shook with terror and teared up anytime he thought of what might happen to him and Isis if anyone even so much as suspected him of being a warlock.

Akins had only had anything resembling a home for a few weeks when he was twelve after they left Cairo. Tensions were higher than ever worldwide, for the Warlock Alliance was spreading to every corner of the Earth. Britain's American colonies had recently gained independence after a long and bloody war, and were likely to join the Alliance.

But Akins was fifteen now, and Isis was getting weaker every day. He was determined to find them somewhere to stay, somewhere to work. Maybe they'd have to leave the country... no, border security was too high, he'd never get past their warlock checks.

He, like his mother, had begun to read the paper daily, stealing it off someone's doorstep. He did not doubt that Isis gained more insight from these fancy prints of paper than he ever would, and admired his mother all the more for it.

And soon enough, they would have somewhere to stay, where she could read newspaper clippings all day if she wished...

*Isis — Londinium, England, Great Britain, 1776*

Isis' baby was nearly grown up, and his mother was beginning to fail as a result of years of malnourishment combined with age. She now relied on Akins to get them both fed, but got worried sick every time he left their hiding-place-of-the-week, as she did not know where he went to find them food and water.

Disease was rampant throughout the city, everything from dysentery to malaria, but they were careful, probably the most careful people in the whole of Londinium. The others, of course, could see the effects of the diseases all around them, but Akins saw more. She knew when she looked into his sad, wide eyes that he saw spirits everywhere. He no longer gasped when one emerged from the sewers, or the mud, or any human dying around them. No, his eyes only widened the slightest bit and his breath left him for less than a second. She watched him intently at these times. Isis was a people-watcher, and had learned exactly everything she could about Akins and the world around her.

She found that she was particularly fascinated by the propaganda produced by English satire writers, such as in a small piece she had torn out from an old newspaper:

One day back in secondary school I was lounging with my mates and the topic of warlocks came up. My best mate at the time said to me, “So, whaddya’ think o’ them magick folks? I really don’ see what the fuss is about.”

I told him the truth. “They’re not like us. Warlocks don’ just ‘ave magick, I’m not sure they got minds. I mean, you ever seen a warlock doin’ anything smart? All they do is walk around killing people.”

And I mean, when you think about it, that’s all you hear about them doing! Can you think about that, a warlock not just killing people all the time? It’s unheard of.

Isis did not know how her son was getting their clean food and drink, but she certainly did not think he was killing the rich every night.

*Charles — Londinium, England, Great Britain, 1776*

Three years. For three long years Charles could not get solid work. And he wasn’t even allowed into the army, in which he would be glad to serve Britain and the Righteous Lands. But no, magick being done under his nose meant he could never again be trusted by the Crown.

This treatment made him only despise magick and warlocks more than anything he had ever experienced. At the slightest thought of it, he would feel a tightness in his chest, clench his fists, and resist the urge to swear at every innocent bystander. *But how many of them actually are innocent?* he would ask himself at these times. *How many of them are warlocks, hiding behind the blind protection of the Crown?*

Eventually he decided he would move to Paris, Gaul, where he would be allowed to serve the army. Border security on the English Channel was tough nowadays, but he was sure as a native, loyal (maybe not so much in the Crown's eyes), non-magick, white Englishman, he would have no trouble leaving for another Righteous Land.

On the day he was to board the ferry, however, he was stopped on the street by none other than the African kid who was afraid of fire those years ago.

"You—you there!" called the boy. "Come here, will you?"

Begrudgingly, Charles turned around, and did not succeed with hiding his surprise quick enough. "What do *you* want?"

"I want you to tell you something, Charles."

Turning around to hide his being startled by hearing his own name from the mouth of someone whom he never told it to, he said, "I have a ferry to catch. Goodbye." He began walking away when the boy took hold of his shirt collar and turned him around. "*Let me be, boy!*" he shouted.

"I saw your name with your picture three years ago in the newspaper. '*Charles Smith, former guard, sacked after he let a warlock burn down a refugee camp,*'" he quoted. "Why did you let it burn?"

“I didn’t, I swear!” He was yelling, and people were taking notice of the scene. “I wasn’t on duty that night!”

“Liar!” screamed the boy. “You were on duty every night there, and because of you my mother and I have been on the streets for the last three years! Not to mention all the people killed because you did *nothing!* Do you know how much suffering you caused that night? *Do you?*”

“It’s not my fault that *filth* came to the camp! I didn’t know it was possible for those magick *freaks* to get into the *country*, for God’s sake!”

“*This* is why we do these things! That warlock only burned down the place because he knew it would hurt people like *you!*”

“Did you say ‘we’...?”

“What? No! Of course not! Why would you say such a thing?”

“I heard you very clearly...” Charles took a step back, and pointed at the boy. “*He’s a warlock!*” he screamed. “*A warlock on the way to the ferry! Police!*”

Two guards from a nearby building ran forward, seizing the boy and forcing his head back, shoving a knife very near his throat. A black woman with the look of having very abruptly woken up came around the corner. “Did we hear right, sir?” the one holding the knife asked Charles. “This young man is a warlock?”

“That’s right, sir.”

“Good work. You’re helping to cleanse the world of evil.” The guard moved his knife for the boy’s throat.

“*No!*” shouted the black woman, running forward. “*Don’t touch my son!* He did nothing wrong!”

“Madame, your son is a warlock,” said the guard not holding the knife. “I will give you the benefit of the doubt — perhaps you did not know. But he’s an active contributor to the filthiness of this world. May the Righteous Lands prev — !” He was shoved to the ground; the boy had wrangled free while the guards were momentarily distracted. The boy kicked the other guard in the chest, sending him to the ground and his knife flying, which the boy caught.

“You’re in big trouble, now!” said the now knifeless guard.

“I will kill him, Akins,” said the boy’s mother.

“No,” said Akins calmly. “There are too many spirits wandering the streets of Londinium already.”

“Akins, don’t speak of your magick so publicly!” It was said in a harsh whisper.

Akins seemed to ignore this and turned to face a dumbstruck Charles. “Do the right thing, Charles. Much of the Alliance is corrupt, yes, especially the Egyptian Pharaoh. But we are not all bad.”

As the two walked off, everyone, including the small crowd that had gathered, seemed frozen in place. A quiet murmur carried through the crowd.

“Er — I have a ferry to catch,” said Charles suddenly, and he walked away to accompany a boat to the Gallic coast.

*Akins — Aberdeen, Scotland, Great Britain, 1777*

“Mother, it’s time,” whispered Akins, now sixteen, in Egyptian. “We’ve got to go.”

Isis opened her eyes and looked up at her son for a long moment. “Did you know that your name means ‘brave’?” she asked him in a whisper. He sat there for a moment, taking it in.

“Let’s go,” he said finally.

That night they paid a black market sailor, a Water Elemental warlock himself, to take them to the southern coast of the Norwegian Peninsula, which was controlled by the Swedish Kingdom.

War was coming soon — rebellions were sure to pop up as the Pharaoh aged — and they would much rather be in warlock-friendly territory when it happened.

*Isis — Aberdeen, Scotland, Great Britain, 1777*

After eight years, Isis and her son were returning to the Warlock Alliance. The war between it and the Nonmagick Coalition (the more common name for the Righteous Lands) was getting even more fearsome, and anti-warlock opinions were getting even more strong and prevalent.

Isis and Akins decided on Sweden because of its relative ease of access from Britain, compared to the rest of the Alliance, combined with its large distance from Egypt; the closer they were to Cairo, the more likely it was that someone would recognize them as wanted criminals. Also, the Alliance was growing much faster than the Coalition, providing more safety in numbers.

To Isis, it seemed the worst thing was that she was going to have to learn another language, which had already been hard enough when she was younger: the only Norwegian words she knew were *hallo*, *ja*, and *nei*.

*Charles — La Moselle, Gaul, 1777*

Charles was in the Gallic army now. He was currently on the Moselle River with the rest of his team and their horses, travelling to the border of Bavaria, which controlled all of what was once the southern half of a united Germany. The northern half and the Danish Peninsula were controlled by Sweden.

The Gallic language Charles had trouble learning. To him it sounded like a gross hodgepodge of Welsh or Gaelic or something and Latin. It may have been tough, but if he wanted to succeed as a soldier, he had to learn it! He wasn't going to let anything stop him from serving the Righteous Lands, and found it easiest to ignore the run-in he'd had a year earlier with that Akins boy.

*Akins — The North Sea, 1777*

Amhlaidh Dunbar, captain of the *Shadow Merchant*, stood looking out onto the stormy, night sea, gripping the ship's rail. Carefully, Akins approached.

"Captain, may I stand here with you?"

"Go ahead."

Akins too gripped the railing now. "She's a beautiful ship, sir."

Dunbar sighed. "She is, yes, but she's gettin' old." He had a gravelly voice. "She can't hold on much longer, but who's gonna buy a ship from a smuggler?"

Not knowing what to say, Akins waited a moment before revealing the real reason why he came out. He took in a deep breath of the salty, cold air, which burned his nostrils, and let out a visible puff. "They say you're a Water Elemental. Is that true?"

“Yep,” said Dunbar with another deep sigh. “But I don’ like that term. It makes ya out like yer’ some kind o’ creature made o’ water, like in the folk tales.” He turned to Akins. “What about you, young man? Are you a warlock?”

“Yes,” he said simply.

“Care to elaborate? I like to know who it is exactly that I’m illegally carryin’ to the Alliance.”

“I’m a Spirit Whisperer.”

Caught off guard, Dunbar took a step back before coming forward again and gripping the railing even tighter. “D’you know how rare yer’ abilities are, boy?”

“No,” said Akins inquisitively. “The only ever warlock I knew before was my father, who died when I was young. He was a Spirit Whisperer too, so I assumed it was at least somewhat common.”

“No, no! Spirit Whisperer magick is only passed from parent to child, and even then it’s rare. How much d’you even know about warlocks?”

“Not much,” Akins admitted. “I really haven’t had time to learn about us.”

“Well, I have, and I’ll tell you, Whisperers of any kind are rare! I’ve seen thousands of people across the North Sea in my time, and only ten Whisperers. You’re the tenth. The other nine were all Animal Whisperers. But I’ve had hundreds upon hundreds of every type of Elemental — I’ve still got no idea why so many Water Elementals needed a boat, but that’s beside the point.”

Very soon, the conversation died down and Akins went off to bed. The next day (Dunbar's magick sped up the travel greatly), they parted on the shore of Norway. After a few months, Akins and Isis had settled down, living at the tavern where they now worked.

*Isis — Bjørgvin, Norway, Sweden, 1785*

Isis was middle aged and not very fit now, and could no longer do as much as she would have liked. Akins brought here more reading material every day, as the most she could do now was learn about the world and hopefully educate the young people, who had been born and grown up during the reign of the Warlock Alliance. She learned and shared everything she could about history and the modern world.

The Warlock Alliance was formed in 1768, the year before she escaped into the Mediterranean. It originally consisted of just Egypt, Israel, and Byzantium. Now it consisted of Egypt, Israel, Byzantium, Rome, Pakistan, Kievan Rus', Latvia, Finland, Sweden, Bohemia, Bavaria, Arabia, Nihon, Korea, Tibet, America, Ethiopia, and Kongo.

The Nonmagick Coalition was formed in retaliation against warlocks organizing together in the same year. It originally consisted of Britain, Gaul, Ireland, Castile, Catalonia, and the Netherlands. Now it still consisted of the same.

Portugal was neutral. Iceland was neutral. Kannata was neutral. Mali, Chad, and Ghana were neutral. But who knew if they would stay as such? Most of those countries had only just won independence through bloody war against Coalition member states.

The Coalition was losing, badly. But the Alliance was also beginning to falter. It seemed that war might break out between many of its member states, and the Coalition was waiting for when that happened.

But for the time being, at least, Isis was content.

*Charles — Berlin, Germany, Sweden, 1781*

Charles had lost a leg in battle. Magicked off, apparently, by a Mineral Elemental, whose flying sword had sliced through countless Gallic troops almost unnoticed. He was angry. Very angry. Everyone in the Righteous Lands, it seemed, was angry, and they had a right to be! The warlocks were killing thousands of their men every day, and while the Warlock Alliance grew, not one more country had joined the good side! It was as if the Lands were the only places on Earth that didn't have warlocks everywhere.

Or as if the warlocks in the Lands were all in hiding.

Charles chose to believe the prior; the latter, he decided, was impossible. Just because he encountered *one or two* warlocks in Londinium alone didn't mean that the Lands were as filled with them as the rest of the world. No, warlocks only lived in dark, dirty places like eastern Europe and Africa — of course, not including places like Berlin, where he had been in battle a few hours ago.

Figuring he should do something more relaxing while he painfully healed, he picked up the book left on his cot by a nurse, and began to read about more happy things.

*Akins — Bjørgvin, Norway, Sweden, 1790*

It was the turn of the decade and Akins still hadn't left Bjørgvin since he and his mother moved there. He had his own house now, but visited Isis every day at least once, as she was getting old and sickly. Twenty-eight now, he had been married for a year to a Norwegian Lifebreath warlock (here she was called a *heks* — witch) named Kjellfrid and had a baby boy named Ramesses. Other than that, however, nothing major had happened in the time Akins had lived in the Swedish Kingdom... until January first, 1790.

Gaul and the Nederlands surrendered to the Swedish and Bavarian forces on their eastern borders. No further aggression was raised against them by the Alliance. Hours later, the other nations of the Coalition got together and agreed to a joint surrender. If those who controlled the border itself between the Coalition and Alliance couldn't continue to fight, the others knew they were destined to lose.

In the midst of the first peaceful international meetings between the Coalition and the major powers of the Alliance in decades, another major event happened: the Egyptian rebels, which Isis was once, who wanted equality between warlocks and nonmagick people, performed a coup against the pro-warlock superiority Pharaoh of Egypt and instated a new, democratic government. If it would last no one knew, but it certainly was an improvement.

In response to the collapse of the previous Egyptian government and lowered tension between peoples, the Warlock Alliance was also dissolved along with the Nonmagick Coalition. Akins considered returning to Cairo to visit his father's grave and speak to his spirit, but in the end, he decided to stay here in Bjørgvin with his mother, wife, and child, for the rest of his life.

*Isis — Bjørgvin, Norway, Sweden, 1793*

Isis requested her son, daughter-in-law, and three grandchildren — Ramesses, Osiris, and Bergljot — stay with her in her final days. She was not as old as she could have lived to be, but was had been very sickly in her last few years.

As she and her son read to each other passages from an Egyptian bedtime story she told him often when he was little, she died in his arms, age sixty-two.

*Charles — Bjørgvin, Norway, Sweden, 1800*

Charles spent many, many years after the Alliance and Coalition fell reflecting on his life — his successes, yes, but the vast majority of times, it was his mistakes and failures he thought of. He was getting to be old, nearly seventy, and felt a deep, sickening guilt inside him. He had learned much of the world and of history in his time back in Londinium after the War on Warlocks, and knew now precisely how he had contributed to the evil in the world.

So, feeling it was required of him by his conscience, he travelled northwestern Europe for the last time, visiting the places he had been during the war, and finding the families of people he had hurt or killed, to give them his deepest apologies. They most often rejected him, but this was to be expected, and did not hurt him.

Finally, as the century turned, he knew the last place he must visit before returning to Londinium: the home of the boy who had told him to do the right thing.

As he reached the house, he approached cautiously and slowly, and knocked on the front door.

“*Jeg kommer!*” a voice called from inside. When Akins opened the door, he said, “*Hallo. Hvem er du?*”

“Hello, Akins,” said Charles. “I’ve come to apologize.”

After a long moment, he was finally recognized. “Come in.” They walked into the small home, and Charles followed Akins to the kitchen table. “Sit down.”

“Do you remember me?” asked Charles, though he already knew the answer.

“*Ja,*” said Akins. “Why have you come so far to see me?”

“I have been travelling for over a year now, trying to help and apologize to those I’ve hurt. In my age I’ve come to realize the errors in my ways of old.”

“I believe you were a soldier for many years in the War? Where was your last battle?”

“Denmark. Not far south from here.”

“And also owned by Sweden, as well.”

After a moment, Charles said, “Sir, you were the first person to tell me to do the right thing. Thank you. I’m so sorry for all that I did during the War.”

Another long moment passed. “Thank you for having the capacity to learn from your mistakes.” Another moment. “My wife will be home soon, and I really don’t want to explain this to her. Perhaps you should go.”

“Yes,” said Charles, standing up. “You don’t have to forgive me, if I made you feel that way.”

“No, you haven’t,” said Akins reassuringly. “I forgive you.”

“Thank you.” Charles walked to the door. As he grasped the handle, however, Akins said, “Have a good first year of the nineteenth century, Charles.”

Charles looked back for the last time. "You too."

THE END

**The Tumor**

*An attempt at making humor of a heavy subject, in the form of a short screenplay.*

Oct. 15

**SCENE 1 - INT. - M.D. ANDERSON'S HOSPITAL, TEXAS, USA - NIGHT**

YOUNG BYRON is sitting up in his hospital bed before surgery, looking worried.

**SCENE 2 - INT. - M.D. ANDERSON'S - NIGHT**

*MONTAGE* of doctors walking around hurriedly, stressfully and operating on an unconscious YOUNG BYRON.

YOUNG BYRON (V.O., serious)

Hi. My name is Byron Ellington, and I have a skin tumor on my nose.

**SCENE 3 - INT. - M.D. ANDERSON'S - NIGHT**

*MONTAGE* of doctors lounging around looking relaxed.

(V.O., playful/nonchalant)

But what's the issue with that? I'm just gonna have a big ol' lump of flesh where half my nose should be for a few years - no issue at all!

In fact, I'm pretty sure I like it better this way. I'll just start claiming it's a mutation I got from a mad scientist.

*CUT TO* YOUNG BYRON sitting up in his hospital bed after surgery with the long piece of flesh for half of a nose that will eventually be made normal through surgery. He is smiling broadly and giving a thumbs up. A happy *ding!* is heard.

THE END

## **Your Cat**

Oct. 17

Hi. First off, I'd like to note that this piece has been mistitled. I am not your cat. You are my human. Got that? Okay. Now we can proceed. I have a few issues to bring up, so hopefully once your feeble ape mind understand the problems, they can be remedied (your mind may be primitive, but you have the advantages of opposable thumbs and a head that can balance on your spinal cord).

Let me get something straight with you — I'll say it slowly so you have time to process the information: When I *stand...* in front of the *eating area...* and *meow* at you, I'm *hungry*. So

when I do... *you*... should feed... *me*. These paws aren't gonna open the wet food themselves, alright? Good, good, it looks like you understand. Now, slave — er, I mean, human — we can move on.

Just because *you* chose to go to bed at midnight doesn't mean *I* don't get to wake you up at five A.M. And I don't even meow — I just purr! That's a good noise! And yet you feel the need to put me out of the room for a few more hours. What kind of relationship do you think we have? Get to it, human! It's not my fault I get eighteen hours of sleep a day and you only get five.

Of course, I still have countless issues to bring up with you, but it seems I may have shattered your feeble brain for the time being, so I'll stay quiet for a bit. But do know, heeding my every command is simply easier and more efficient for everybody (when I say "everybody" I mean me), so it's best you just do as I say.

## **Haiku Poetry**

Oct. 9

### **Hegemony**

Understanding truth

But only telling falsehoods

The hegemon's life

### **Chick**

Chick pecking at seeds

Crying for its mother hen

Wants to learn to fly

### **Painting**

One stroke of the brush

Two, then three, forevermore

Never is finished

### **Politics Among Friends**

It's rarely discussed

For we all tend to agree

Except when we don't

**Breathing**

Reading a good book

Before sitting down to write

Inhale, then exhale

**Fowl Groups**

A murder of crows

An unkindness of ravens

Black birds are disliked

**Reef Triggerfish**

Humuhumunu-

kunukuāpua'a:

Fish of Hawai'i.

**Books**

Books sit on a shelf

Awaiting a reader's hand

The joy of reading

**Calligraphy**

Paint stroke on paper

Of masterful penmanship

The pen as an art

Oct. 10

### **The Light Strand**

From darkness came light

Strand, moving toward a center

The culmination

### **Keyboard**

Tools in clay, then stone

Pencil scratches and ink blots

Pressing plastic keys

### **Imperialism**

Land equals money,

Worthless but agreed upon

Nevermind locals

### **Un haiku en español**

Hablar español:

Lengua hermosa

Fluido en la boca

**Common Education**

From eighteen-hundreds  
When one only had to work  
In the factories

**Poe**

'The Raven' remains  
Forever the best poem  
Beyond my skill set

**Swaying**

Wind through the branches  
Woody trunk swaying gently  
Rocked like a baby

**Good Hair**

Often obscuring  
Always long, curly, luscious  
It's in the family

**Repetition**

Playwright through ages  
Only repeating stories  
This is history

Oct. 11

### **The Chicken or the Egg?**

The answer, it seems,  
Is most likely the latter,  
Or it is neither.

### **Voraciousness**

Consumption at speed  
Of the greatest sustenance:  
Words, their containers

### **Felitocracy**

Cats: superior  
To all other forms of life  
Shall always be true

**Paganism**

“Pagan” is quite broad  
 Most non-Abrahamic Gods  
 Nearly useless term

**12345678910**

The numbers we use  
 Have zero significance  
 But for fingers ten

**Neil DeGrasse Tyson**

Astrophysicist  
 Overcame racist NASA  
 Helped it be better

Oct. 14

*The following two poem is about the novel I'm working on as of writing this.*

**Ley Lines: a haiku**

Flowing energy  
 Can sometimes knot up and pool  
 Drawn on by Magi

**Ghost: a haiku**

Remnant of the lost  
 Trapped, wandering for all time  
 Shadow of old self

**Hegemony 2**

Manipulation,  
 Provocation, derision,  
 Maintaining power

**Windowless**

The windowless room  
 Which the darkness must consume  
 Unless door opens

**The Old Pond: my rendition of the Japanese haiku by Matsuo Basho**

Resting is an old pond  
 Into the pond a frog jumped  
 The sound of water

**Horizon**

The great curvature  
 Unreachable edge of the Earth  
 The stretch beyond us

**Binary**

Nought-nought-one-one-nought-  
One-nought-nought-nought-nought-one-one-  
Nought-one-nought-nought-one

**ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ**

An arbitrary  
Assortment of strange symbols  
Packed with history

**Txt Talk**

From when letters cost  
Useless nowadays, but still  
It is often used

*Panthera onca*

Very early Nov. – Nov. 6

**Leap**

Cat resting on branch

Looks down and prepares to leap

Lands silent, padded

**Evening Twilight**

Soft, quiet, dappled

Jaguar's fur, light on the ground

Nigh invisible

**Forest Floor**

Hauntingly quiet

Against the roar of nighttime

Pounces, prey nonplussed

**River**

Rushing through rapids

Obscured by natural chaos

Strikes fish and caiman

**Water Cat**

Natural habitat

Quite amphibious mammal

Strong and undeterred

***Panthera onca***

*Panthera onca*

Name created by humans

To the cat, pointless

**Reign, Rain**

Beast's reign over all

Who reside in great jungle

Not squashed by downpour

**Morning Twilight**

Hunt nearly complete

Large prey dragged up against odds

Dinner in treetops

**Daylight**

Through day, the cat rests

Asleep, but ready to strike

Throne of wood and leaves

**The Jungle**

'Tis only one part  
Of cycle of life and death  
In the Amazon

## **Longer Poetry**

## The Candle Wick Heir

Oct. 7

Wick upon the candlestick,  
Your flame shall wave and flick,  
But thy time is nearing  
With the clock's tick.

And you,  
Upon the tower in sky blue,  
You waste your time by waiting  
For glory sought in rue.

Regret sings to thee,  
And thy short time sings to me,  
While you sit, never hastening  
But fearing the fall from thy tree.

As thee watch thy flame disperse,  
You think nothing could be worse,  
While thyself to false security you're luring,  
That at thyself the dying flame could never curse.

But soon in realization you cry out,  
And hope someone shall hear your pout,  
Though none shall even be thinking  
Of the one who had so much doubt.

You plead and claim it is not fair,  
That all you ever did was care,  
But the wick can see that you are lying  
And knows you are its heir.

## Midnight News

Midnight

It was midnight when I awoke to a cry

Midnight when I knew sadness was nigh

Midnight when I heard the word "die"

Twilight

By twilight I was more tired than I could recall

I don't know the whether but 'twas nearly fall

It was twilight when our things to the car we began to haul

No might

No might within me

I felt I must flee

But acceptance washed over like hurricane on tree

Great height

A great height between

And they tried not to glean

Truth from the scene

Always fight

I'll always fight and never bend

I'll always fight against terror's trend

I'll always fight to the end

## **Soy hispano and I'm Proud of It**

Soy hispano—

¡Tejano, mexicano, español!

And I'm proud of it!

I'm of the most huggy culture—

Taking forever to say *¡Adiós!* porque I'm like a vulture

Swooping down to take a bite of hug

The Spanish language es muy hermosa

Words flowing through our boca flexuosa

Hispanohablantes son elegantes in our speech

Our culture's full and rich

Our uniqueness is impulsive like the scratching of an itch

¡Soy castellano!

¡Soy nativo americano!

¡Soy mexicano!

¡Soy tejano!

¡Soy... hispano!

And I'm proud of it!

## **The Books That We Read**

Oh! Hello! Greetings, fellow!

I see thee hath found us upon thy shelves.

'Tis likely we've markers within ourselves.

Read us, for thee haven't much time before thee ought to go!

We bindings of paper contain much lore.  
Thou do tend to read us galore; there's much in store!  
Put down that phone of thy and read me;  
I doubt that thee gain much from not doing so,  
And within me there's so much more pleasure to know!

## **History of Language**

When did words come to be?  
Would I still be sleeping in a tree?  
Did *A. afarensis* have any to share?  
Or did their voices not have that flair?

When did words come to be?  
Before or after one, two, three?  
Did *H. erectus* pause to converse?  
Or were they unable to compliment and curse?

When did words come to be?

All I know is it was before me.

Did neanderthals each have a name?

I do not know, but thinking of this is quite a fun game.

## **Gnargliboof**

Gnargliboof, I dare say!

Quigglediklack, I dare proclaim!

Hepshougmagook, I dare name!

Dravgazmbi, I call to play!

You claim none of those words made any sense,

While I revel in your ignorance:

You still haven't realized I've charged a pound and three pence.

Just my two cents.

## The Long Night

Oh, the long night is nigh!

When the strong king's knight shall cry and cry!

When the world shall go quiet,

But for the withering wails of all who shall rot and die!

When whimsy and wit turn to wistful whining,

When wandering souls shall be wasting away and dying!

Oh, the long night is nigh—

The prophets have foretold it!

So let thy life beguile thou,

For the only time is now!

## Lie of the Madman

Thirty years, thirty years, thirty years...

It seems I've lost my ears, lost my ears, lost my ears...

It seems my voice is gone, voice is gone, long, long, gone...

It seems my blood it drained, my life thus far feigned...

It seems I've been trained not to know when I've been pained...

Thirty years of confinement...

Thirty years of refinement...

Thirty years of nothing...

Thirty years of silence...

Thirty years of only my own *brilliance*...

My heart I doubt is beating...

My food I doubt I'm eating...

Myself I doubt killed the man...

For nothing can be certain...

One can never know who has drawn the curtain...

Light is now the only thing that pains me...

All else subsides as it claims me...

I see the spirits and cast them *begone!*

...I breathe heavily and wait for all time...

I sit in wait of the moment you know I did *not commit the crime!*

*You watch me with pity on your face!*

*You fool, you think you know my place!*

...You claim to know what's happened to my mind...

You claim you know what *precisely* is broken...

*And I laugh!*

For I know what you do not...

I know what happened that night...

For as he told me before he died...

He knew that I *have never lied!*

And while you *sit* there, so calm...

I could tell you if you wished the secrets in your palm...

I could look into your mind and know you are a *fool!*

But you would not think much of it...

You would only think your sane mind *I wish to covet!*

But *you... you are a fool* trapped in your own *selfishness!*

You think, at this very moment, yes, you think I am less...

While you cower in your own prison...

While you name me insane, you wish your own success...

And never realize that it is *you*, not I, under so much duress...

Do you see, *will you ever see?*

Will you ever see that *it is I who is free?*

Not you, not your family, not your *controllers...*

No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no...

It is I, not you... now *go!*

Let me be... *let me stay!*

*From here I shan't ever stray!*

For being here, so long...

It has given me what you can never even imagine...

It has given me own brilliance as kin!

## **The First and Last to Rise and Fall**

From the ground I rise,  
Self concealed in guise,  
And fail I do to seek to hide,  
Ergo I fall and collide  
Into the beast of years yore  
And push it down like ne'er before  
But in the mighty effort,  
Both I and it I hurt,  
And together we fall,  
So the beast may no longer haunt us all.

## Deceit of the Raven Witch

“Stranger in the night, come nigh!”

This she whispereth when the moon was high.

‘Twas a white sphere floating softly,

Yet its shadows shan’t e’er be less lofty.

Her pure white skin hath the most abominable imperfections,

And her face was obscured by a witch’s hat which bore no reflections.

The little hair visible was dark as a raven’s coat,

Shiny, shimmering, blacker than a serial killer’s rote.

As well as this she bore a dress darker than the Black Sea,

Not as dark as her hair but nigh and nearly.

When hesitated did I to move,

Little did the woman approve.

Quoth the mysterious lady, “The end of all things awaits,

“So come along and face thy possible fates.”

Stubborn though I was at this late time of night,

The old hag with raven hair cast into me a fright,

And little choice did I possess

But to follow the woman with the pitch black dress.

Looking back, I see clearly my mistake;

If only to leave then my past self could I make.

Through the shadows I travelled with the hag,  
Everything around me raising a red flag,  
But lost I was in soul, body, and mind,  
So that these warnings my senses could not find.  
Trapped I was within my own elaborate web of deceit  
That noticing my failure was slight cold against immense heat.  
We walked and hiked for what felt like days,  
But we never stopped, nor had any delays.  
'Twas only at twilight that any change was made:  
Our lightless jaunt—it stopped and we stayed.  
We stayed, rooted in that one spot, until the light was right,  
And light enough to see her, but it seems it was too bright,  
For in that very moment, when I would have had a glance,  
Disappeareth completely she did and I never had the chance.  
So I waited in that spot, ever still, all day and all evening,  
Sickened of I and for myself grieving,  
'Til twilight cometh once more and the lady appeared.  
Still she wore her same attire, and her I now so thoroughly feared.  
And off we went in this pattern again for days on end,  
Until we reached a resting place to which ourselves we could lend.  
“This,” saith she, voice barely a whisper,  
“Is the great Tower of Fables.” As she speaketh, her voice groweth crisper.

Continuing, quoth she “‘Tis the place we all come to die,  
“And today thou shalt learn how if thy end is nigh.  
“The Tower of Fables is a structure so mighty and old,”  
She continued, “And yet its existence is a tale never told.  
“Strongly standing over all worlds and all time,  
“It tells of one’s life and death in only riddle and rhyme.”

Up the endless great steps we made our way,  
The trip not bad nor good; not terrible nor gay.  
We simply were, as everything around us was,  
Walking endlessly like one fate-bound does.

At long last we reached the door,  
Opened wide for all and more.  
It was nothing unique, this entry,  
But just beyond lay the land that was peaceful eternally.  
Growing around us now was the greatest expanse,  
A plain and forest of only animals and plants.

“This,” explaineth the withered one,  
Who here groweth clean and greatly young,  
“Is known simply as Eternity,  
“The land of all maternity,  
“Where the young can grow in safety and calm,  
“And where the old can stay pure with the plentiful youth balm.”

'Twas only in Eternity that I could clearly see  
That the woman was not haggard, nor something from which to flee.  
In the light of the land she was youthful,  
And in the light of the land she was beautiful.  
Lead me she did down a twisting trail,  
At the end of which there sat a rainbow-feathered quail.  
This quail cooeth, but understand it I could.  
And it saith, "Thy fate lies in thy hands; do only what thee should."  
In this moment, to me this exquisite bird granted  
The sensation, and only that, that I was enchanted.  
Then away the quail fluttereth,  
And beside me the woman muttereth.  
But after only a moment's wait,  
She once more began her gait.  
We walked for all eternity,  
Through the land of all maternity.  
Unlike the fear-ridden journey to the Tower,  
This stroll was a morning flower,  
Opening up to the marvelous daylight,  
And not even once was there a fright.  
Eventually we approached two great iron gates,  
Which the woman labelleth the Gates of All Fates.

The brightest light poured through the bars,  
Like a hundred thousand shimmering stars,  
And yet I was not in pain,  
And from the light I only felt gain.  
Through the opening Gates we stepped,  
And across a moat of light we lept,  
Until my floating feet felt solid ground,  
And I got the chance to look around.  
We had landed in a forest grim,  
Contrasting greatly, its light dim.  
The green and brown were all too dark.  
'Twas silent as to make me hark,  
Looking out for any subtle change of breeze,  
My body and mind no longer at ease.  
The lady's skin grew disturbing once more,  
Becoming more abominable than ever before.  
"I wish to leave," quoth I.  
Saith the hag, "Oh, my...  
"Believe do thee that I shall allow that?  
"A failure once more, you stinking rat!."  
At these words she shrunk in size,  
Hat and clothes no more, showing her beady, black eyes.

Becometh she a pitch black raven,  
And I became a cowardly craven.  
Her feathers had the hue of a nightmare,  
Dark as her dress and dark as her hair.  
The Raven Witch declareth with a fowl croak,  
“Careth not the Tower of Fables of thy fate, bloke.  
“For thou possess only the one:  
“Thou shalt run.”  
And from the Raven Witch I ran,  
Desperately considering a plan.  
But the forest was too consumed by shadow,  
And I hit a tree too hard for the raven not to easily follow,  
And landeth she did upon my broken face to my dismay.  
“Death,” quoth her, “comes to all but the Raven Witch and her prey.  
“Now suffer in eternal nightmare, foolish man!  
“Thou shalt be slaughtered like a lamb!  
“I shall consume thy very being for all of time,  
“And thou shalt be alive and feeling for my every rhyme!”  
And there still I lie,  
Hoping vainly that I shall die,  
Whilst the Raven Witch consumes and lies,  
A deceitful fowl that finds thee as she flies,

Circling the moon as she laughs with jolly,  
Waiting for thee to show thy mortal folly.  
This is my and my tale's end,  
So, my friend,  
If thee ever see her, do not move a muscle, do not even twitch,  
And never, never in all eternity, trust the Raven Witch.

### **El crujido en la noche**

Fue la víspera del día más oscuro,  
y el mundo estuvo viendo para el futuro.  
Cuervos volaban y veían desde el cielo  
mientras el mundo se convertía tan frío como el hielo.  
Caminaba en el camino brumoso,  
creciente más y más nervioso,  
asustando en cada ruido,  
esperando que podríamos estar unido.  
Este pensamiento fue en vano,  
porque tu destino ya fue decidido temprano.

Las sombras hablaron la verdad,  
pero no pude tomar la responsabilidad.  
A, ¡está muy doloroso!  
¡A mí mismo soy un mentiroso!  
Cuando primero lo oí,  
¡mentí que no fue nada! ¡Mentí!  
Cuando segundo lo oí,  
¡todavía mentí!  
Sabía que fue real,  
pero hablar algo no pareció ideal.  
Fue un ruido muy tranquilo y discreto,  
y no fue hecho por una persona, un animal, ni un objeto.  
Fue un crujido en la noche,  
un ruido de reproche.  
Una sombra o una fantasma,  
una cosa de la luz o la citoplasma,  
no importa qué, porque sólo una cosa es:  
Comenzó este mes.  
Este mes es oscuro y reservado.  
Este mes es silencio y privado.  
Este mes es de muerte y sufrimiento.  
Este mes es de frío y viento.

Y de algun modo,

Muerte es tu todo.

De algun modo... ¡de algun modo te moriste!

¡Y yo sé que tú sufriste!

Nadie sabe que pasó exactamente,

Pero yo sé que lo causé indirectamente.

Y ahora voy a terminarlo todo.

Adiós, el mundo.

Voy a verte en el Día de los Muertos.

## **Bloody Roses**

Roses are red;

Violets are too,

As all will be...

When I'm done with you!

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In special thanks, I'll print out five copies of this and give them to these people:

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- Mi mamá y papá
- Kiki, Anna, and their cats Kitty and Jasper
- Tuli, Zyla, and Tío Javi
- Rich, Heloise, and their hedgehog (puppet, but don't tell him that), Hodge

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**FIN**