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SILENT, STILL, AND COLD

by Kris Dikeman

We walk towards the City, single file through the hip-deep snow. The men at the front curse as they break the path, the frigid air carrying their voices back. We wear woolen hats low against the glare, frozen eyelashes pulling from skin each time we blink. The blowing snow is cold grit, working its way through cocoons of shirts and coats. Our feet, wrapped in rags and stuffed into mended boots, feel more like stone than flesh. It has been winter for many years now. None of us can remember what it feels like to be truly warm.

We pass the trenches that our predecessors, the Emperor's prized Legion, lately occupied. They lived here for months, firing the catapults constantly, the archers picking off anyone foolish enough to look out over the city walls. But the new-fallen snow has smoothed away all signs of their long encampment, the row of graves curving across the fields reduced to a series of gentle ridges.

The city's thick stone walls are encased in sheets of windblown snow, hiding the damage of the catapults. The east gate is a ruin, remnants of the battering ram and its housing

mixed with the splintered wreckage of the iron-bound doors. As we pass under the shattered arch, the blinding glare of sun on snow changes to a dim half-twilight. We enter a warren of high walls and narrow alleyways, gripping our weapons—clubs, spears, the occasional rough sword fashioned from a plow blade.

No sound, no movement, save for the thump of snow sliding from windowsill and rooftop. No smell of cooking, no shouts, no one flees from our approach.

Just inside the gate sit the remains of a wagon, bits of wood and canvas strewn around a crater of shattered iron and scorched earth. A horse's bones protrude from the ice, every scrap of flesh picked off the carcass. The snow in a wide circle all around is churned to thick brown slush, frozen into wild peaks.

One of the farm boys—Ameos—stares at the horse's jutting ribcage, reaches out to touch the bones. He snaps off a piece of frost-covered rib, rolling it between his gloved fingers.

Our officers break us into groups—detachments, they call them—and we march up the narrow streets to begin the search, our feet fitting into the frozen footprints left by the sturdy boots of the Legion.

Two days earlier, they attacked the east gate as they had so many times before, but no bales of straw were lowered to

soften the ram's blow, no fire arrows shot into the housing. With the gate quickly breached, they poured in, all keen for their share of the plunder after months of hardship, eager to help themselves to whatever—and whomever—waited inside.

Not a living soul. No animals either, not so much as a stray cat.

They combed the streets, kicking in doors, searching cellars and attics. The City's entire population had vanished, and everything of value—gold, jewelry, knives, even cooking pots—was gone with them. With no enemy to triumph over, the enraged soldiers made ready to fire the city but were hard-pressed to find anything left to burn.

Then something happened. Reports were vague, details sketchy. Around our campfires we listened to the rumors, twice- and thrice-told tales: explosions, injuries, deaths, more gruesome and strange with each telling. Now the Legion marches south, to another town some distance away. Of no military importance but prosperous, with no walls or battlements. An easy target for the Emperor's darlings.

With the Legion safely away it now falls to us, the conscript army—farmers, shopkeepers, teachers, old men and boys, pressed into service at swordpoint—to solve the mystery of the City. We are to find the missing people, and especially one man: the Sorcerer, he who settled here after the last war.

He is the reason for this costly siege. Our Emperor has need of him.

We round a corner. Scrawled high on the wall of an alleyway is one of the marks we were warned of, a rune drawn in tar.

A group of officers cluster below the mark. One balances an inkpot, another copies the symbol onto parchment, a third notes its location on a map of the city. Near where they stand there is a patch of bloody ice splashed against the stones next to an odd-shaped bundle of rags, the buckles of a Legionnaire's uniform winking out at us. We stare, and the officer with the map waves us away.

The narrow way winds on, the silence and emptiness unnatural. Before us is a street of shops, doors wrenched off their hinges, shutters broken and askew. The empty windows of the rooms above stare down like blank faces. We enter each doorway, kicking open the few not already broken to bits. The rampaging Legion has left ample evidence of their fury: smashed tables, piles of debris, floors thick with wreckage. Everything is limned with frost, refuse and shards of crockery sparkling in the shadows.

Fierst, the drunkard, darts in and out of ruined shops. He finished the last of his homebrew days ago and is frantic for drink. He heads into a wrecked tavern and we hear him

throwing open cupboards, cursing as he goes. His desperation sets us laughing—

—cut short by his screams.

We rush to the tavern doorway, colliding with each other, stumbling through the wrecked front room to the kitchen. Fierst cowers in the corner, his rag-wrapped fingers crammed into his mouth. He has thrown open the huge baking oven. In the dim light from the street, the tangle of bones within is barely visible.

“No...oh no...,” Fierst stutters.

The people of this city ate their dead, of course they did. Locked behind these walls for months on end, what choice did they have? But the tiny skull grinning out at us still turns our stomachs.

Behind us, the officers fill the narrow doorway.

“Out,” the one with the map says. “All of you, out. You’re searching for people, not bones.”

Someone grabs Fierst and we stumble back into the street. The light is dimmer now, day fading fast. We turn towards the center of town, our officers behind us.

“They’re hidden,” one says.

“Yes, but where?”

“We’ll find them,” says the youngest, a young man of perhaps twenty-one, his cloak new and well made. “They’ve bolted down some hole, like the vermin they are.”

“All of them?” This from the one with the map.

“It’s that cursed Sorcerer’s doing,” says the one carrying the inkpot.

We slow our pace imperceptibly, hanging back to eavesdrop. We want to know more about this man who dared to refuse the Emperor. There are rumors he sold his soul to dark spirits for his skill, that he has the power to turn base lead to precious metals, even raise the dead. And if all of that is not true, his refusal to obey the Emperor’s command makes him legend enough to us.

“Remember what he did to that town, up in the mountains?” says the officer with the map. “What a mess.”

“Wherever these people are, they must be starving by now.” The one with the inkpot holds it close to his chest, to keep it from freezing.

“Hey you!” cries the young one, noticing us. He packs up a handful of snow and lets it fly at our backs. “Find me a girl! I’ve got something she can eat!” He grabs at his crotch, laughing.

The officers bray like donkeys and we join in, dutifully. The bits of Ameos’ face we can still see through his ragged scarf turn bright pink.

On we go through winding streets, down narrow staircases into cellars, up into the flats above the shops. Overturning beds and tables, pulling plates and clothes from cupboards, we search while our stomachs rumble. The provision wagons are more than a day behind us, lumbering over snowbound roads. Our breakfast, eaten in haste well before light, was a single bowl of thin gruel apiece. In every room there is a desperate rummage for anything edible, but the shelves are as bare of food as the city is of people. Once in a while a bone—boiled clean, cracked open for its marrow—surfaces in the rubbish. Nothing more.

On the floor of a shop a ruined book lies open. Pictograms run across the pages like insects marching in columns, some of the characters resembling the rune from the wall. Finally, up a steep staircase we see a shadow, a glimpse of movement behind an attic door. Sierkel, one of the southern boys, charges up the stairs. He kicks in the door, screaming “Up! Up, you swine!” and we swarm after him, weapons raised, hearts pounding.

A woman’s gown hangs near an open window, swinging in the draft. On the bed, a worn blanket pulled tight over the straw mattress holds the tantalizing shape—unmistakably female—of its last occupant.

We laugh, all of us for the first time in days, the grinding fear we wear around our guts gone for just a moment. We jab at

the gown with spears and swords, shouting and jeering, tearing the fabric into strips. We grab handfuls of the musty straw, throwing it into the air, flinging it at each other like children. In the flurry of laughter and noise, a few of us notice the mark drawn in black tar along the floor near the window.

Ameos does not. Laughing, hurling straw, he steps on it.

A roar like thunder in that tiny room, and then—not an explosion—an implosion, so cold it burns us, leaving patterns of frost on our clothes. One moment Ameos is laughing; the next, bits of his clothes and flesh fall to the ground in a cloud of straw and ice. For a moment, silence. Then screaming we run down the stairs, directly into the cluster of officers.

One of them rushes up to the attic while the others pull us out to the street, babbling in their excitement. Was it a symbol? Was it on the floor or across the ceiling? How many dead? How did he die? Did he speak?

We answer as best we can, struggling not to vomit, not to lose the precious food still in our bellies. The young one extends a flask and with a desperate cry Fierst grabs for it, drinking greedily. The officers argue, hands waving, shouting, pushing. In their excitement, they forget us as we huddle by the door still panting in terror. The cold, kept at bay by our movement, creeps back into our bones, numbing us slowly.

The sun is setting. Shadows gather around us.

The officer with the inkpot raises his hand and puts a finger to his lips. Several streets away a bell is tolling; the signal to converge.

They yell at us; we run, towards the sound of the bell—how strange it feels to run, rather than our usual clumsy attempts at marching—relieved to put space between ourselves and that cursed room and its pile of blood and straw.

We reach the square at center of the city, form up into columns with the rest. The place where Ameos should stand is taken by another boy. We are fewer now. Those that remain are spattered with blood and frost. We are each issued a piece of hardtack and a strip of dried meat, tough and stringy. We gnaw off pieces and hold them in our mouths, savoring the salty brine as the meat slowly dissolves. Our stomachs, woken by this pitiful offering, growl in protest.

Our officers, now part of the larger group, compare their map with those of the others. They point at us, then at the parchments.

Night falls, moonrise begins. The square feels smaller, the moonlight shadows more ominous. We shift on our feet, whisper to one another to distract from the sensation of being watched. Across the square is a church. The massive doors are torn from their hinges; drifts of snow and ice spill in across the stone floor. We gaze in longingly, wondering if there are

wooden benches inside, an altar, prayer books. We build bonfires in our minds from holy relics.

Finally we are ordered to march two abreast through the dark streets, to a dismal and neglected alley in the east sector. We move slowly. The officers scream at us to pick up the pace, but we are beyond caring. The drip of melting snow slows in the deepening cold, like a dying heartbeat.

At the end of the alley more officers wait. The cursed symbols cover the walls here, dozens of them in confusing tangles. Puddles of blood—not yet frozen, too wide to step across—cover the cobblestones. We are directed to the weather-beaten door of a squat, mean little house at the end of the alley. The officers herd us through like cattle, shout for us to be careful, to keep alert.

If we were less cold, less hungry, if weariness didn't weigh down our bones and our souls, perhaps we could rebel against their cowardice, against being tossed into danger like wheat into a gristmill while the blood of our comrades congeals on the street. Still, what else can we do? This, after all, is why we are chosen for the job. It is our one strength; we are expendable.

We move single file across the doorstep, our weapons heavy in our clumsy hands. This house is tiny, just a hovel. How can we all possibly fit inside?

The answer comes almost at once. Just inside the door, a stairway narrow and steep, leading down. We pass only a little way along before the light from the torches fades behind us, along with the shouts of the officers. We hang on to one another, each man keeping the one before him upright. Moving slowly, blindly, our numb feet feel for the edge of each worn stone step.

At first there is the stink of earth and mold, but the further we descend, the stronger the sharp smell of tar increases. As our shoulders brush the narrow, curving walls we think of the strange marks and falter, but the press of those behind forces us on. Finally we reach the bottom, stumbling forward into an open space, blinking in sudden, unexpected light.

The room is vast; it must run the length of the alley above us. The ceiling sits low enough around the edges that must we stoop in the doorway; then it curves up to a high arch at the center. Crude tables and benches set against the walls are covered with hundreds of flickering candles, strange blue flames giving light but no heat, sending weird shadows darting along the curving walls.

Rope-strung cots stand in rows, as in a barracks. Blinking in the strange blue light, it takes a moment for us to realize they are occupied.

The women lie on their backs, arms at their sides. Their eyes are open but sightless, staring up at now-familiar symbols inscribed along the arching beams. Their breath, slow and measured, sends plumes of mist through layers of what looks like spider's silk enveloping their naked bodies.

We step closer, walk up and down the rows, reaching out to run tentative fingers across an arm, along a length of thigh. The webs melt away, our touch leaving trails along their skin. In the flickering light, the women move, as if finally sensing our presence. They open their mouths in soundless moans, hold out their arms to us. Every man feels the heat rising within him; every one of us hears their call.

Come to me.

We drop our weapons and pull at our clothes, shedding layers of rags and tattered shirts. Our bodies, like theirs, are blue in the strange candlelight, our skin dimpled from the cold. The women make no sound as we tear at their soft coverings, grip their flesh and climb atop them. But their bodies arch up, pulling us close. Though we are the ravishers, it is we who surrender to their embrace, to cold ecstasy.

They pull us down, each of us, into enchantment so deep we cannot see its end. They lead us to the gates of another city, a bright twin of this one, warm and full of life. The walls here

are whole and unmarked, the gates unbroken. Summer sunlight beats down, the sky a pure and rapturous blue.

The people are here, all of them, filling the shops and alleys. This place has never known endless winter, the ravages of siege, the choices made by desperate starving people.

Behind every corner, always just out of our sight, we feel his presence, his power in every stone and timber. He is the author of this place. He has rescued the people of the city, the living and the dead, brought them to this haven of his own making.

We cannot smell the trays of bread pulled from a bakery oven, nor hear the happy laughter of a woman as she calls down to her husband from an attic window. A group of children chase a barking dog along an alleyway, passing through us. We are only ghosts here, in this place of happiness and warmth so achingly like our own faraway homes.

Then, like frost when sunlight hits it, the glamour melts away.

We are back in our city, in the room with the women. All around there are shouts, cries of horror as each man sees what he has lain with.

They are little more than skeletons, collections of jutting bones held together by ruined skin. Their heads are shaved, their skulls showing through the scalp. Their eyes are gone,

sockets filled with thick black fluid. The last tattered wisps of their cocoons melt away, revealing the terrible wounds between their desiccated breasts. Each carries one of the Sorcerer's marks, carved deep, baring their hearts, dead and still.

They scream. An endless, deafening keen of pain, sorrow, rage. Their bodies fall to pieces as we wrench ourselves away, jaws and hands and legs breaking into bits. But still they scream. The sound sweeps through us like a frigid wind, seeping into our flesh, gripping our bones.

Finally, the screaming ends. We stand, trembling, grateful for the sudden quiet. We look around the room at one another, numb, confused.

It begins with our feet. Icy patterns drawing themselves along our skin, tattooing the runes across our legs, up our hips to our chests, backs, arms. Finally, mercifully, it reaches our heads. Each of us straightens as he feels the mark drawing itself across his brow. We are conscripted once again.

A phantom wind tears through the room, blowing the candles out, plunging us into darkness. For a long while we do not move.

Finally we bend and retrieve our weapons. We turn towards the door, no panic or disorder now, moving in perfect step. Back we go, up the steep and winding stairs.

Our officers are waiting.

We have much to show them.

After that? Well. It is a long march back to the capital, to the Emperor's palace. The snow lies deep and unforgiving all along the way. But we are soldiers, used to hardship and deprivation. And now we no longer hunger or thirst. We no longer suffer exhaustion, pain, despair. Most of all we no longer fear the cold.

We are the cold.

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THE ADVENTURES OF ERNST, WHO BEGAN A MAN, BECAME A CYCLOPS, AND FINISHED A HERO

by Jesse Bullington

In the castles and caves of the Far Forest there exist strange guardians, which some call creature and others construct, and these sentinels stand vigil over the lost treasures of the last age before the Cataclysm.

It is a matter of much conjecture as to what these treasures are, as is the nature of the Cataclysm itself, but that is what the Holbrookian priests called it before they hanged themselves to a man. When a band of intrepid heroes broke into the church-keep, curious as to why the order had stopped delivering their sour marsh-wine to the nearby villages, they found the cloister filled with hundreds of brothers swaying like overripe monkberries and fled without further investigation.

Yet even in that benighted age there were brave souls who thought the undertaking of quests little more dangerous than the salt mines or other such honest employment, and as it was widely believed that the brotherhood kept not only a chronicle of what came before the Cataclysm but also an inventory of the

priceless artifacts of the Far Forest, the so-called Forbidden Abbey became a popular destination for local adventurers. However, when they crept over the high walls and violated the ancient building's low windows, they always came to the black vestry where the priests still swayed from the rafters. Those who did not flee back through the belladonna-choked courtyard would advance slowly, their boots squelching in the layer of nightsoil the mass hanging had brought forth, and push themselves between the dangling corpses like a city butcher going to the back of a kine-filled coldroom.

Perhaps a dozen valiant souls in as many long years had gotten that far. Ernst himself had watched his sister Corrine enter, waiting in the doorway with a torch and a quaking quiver rebounding up and down his bowels, and then came a scream from somewhere within the upside-down orchard of cassock-trees. Ernst, following the example his cousins had recently set, fled wailing into the swamp.

His sister never returned, and while their mother blithely supposed that her daughter had simply found some sort of booty that enabled her to put a large distance between herself and her family, Ernst had no such optimism, and so traded his virginity and his right eye to the local chapter of the Battle Conservatory in exchange for an education.

Upon his graduation some years later, when the proud headmaster singled him out for praise Ernst was not as flattered as he might have been, having only recently learned that his was the only branch with such strict enrollment prerequisites, and if he had but trekked across the fens to the next chapter over he would have been spared both the painful removal of his eye and his uncomfortable deflowering at the giggle-trembling hands of the headmaster who, Ernst should have noticed from the beginning, had not only both of his own eyes but also a third growing from the end of his tongue. No matter—Ernst could fight as well as any champion lacking depth perception, and his mother was proud; the local medium assured him of this when he went to the official necromancy hut at the graveyard upon discovering that she had died sometime before while he was learning swordplay and how to properly navigate dimly lit staircases.

“Mother,” he told her, “I’m going now, but I’ll be back to visit whenever I’ve avenged Corrine and won honor for our family.”

“And how will you do that?” his mother asked, via the hunchbacked medium who stood with Ernst beside the gravestone that inexplicably bore the rosy cameo image of a lightly mustachioed man instead of a heavily bearded woman.

“By discovering the secrets of the Forbidden Abbey, and the treasures of the Far Forest. Remember?”

“The Forbidden Abbey?” In his excitement the medium had dropped the high voice he had been using. “And the Far Forest, you say? Come along, boy, there isn’t a moment to waste!”

Back in the necromancy hut, the medium rummaged through a long, rectangular box and pulled out a handful of charms, their chains all bunched together. Giving them to Ernst to sort out, he went back to digging, occasionally setting this bejeweled sword or that scalloped helm on the table, which was another one of the long boxes turned on its side. At last a significant pile of loot was set out, the armor and weapons glittering in the glow of the bottled marshlights that dangled from the ceiling like hanged priests.

“Well, my boy,” said the medium, rubbing his hands together. “What do you say? Think this will help with your quest?”

Ernst licked his lips, as he owned only the graduation uniform on his back and a plain but proven sword he had won in a wager years before—everything else, from his boots to his breastplate, he had lost in subsequent wagers. Ernst no longer bet.

“What do you want for it?” he asked. “I have no money.”

“How were you going to pay me for channeling your mother then, you—” The medium stopped, his scowl vanishing as quickly as it had appeared. “No matter, no matter. Can’t do enough for you cadets, do so love the Conservatory, yes yes.”

Ernst was relieved to hear it, as the majority of the non-Conservatory sanctioned activities the students engaged in revolved around raiding the graveyard and throwing empty winejugs at the necromancy hut. “If you don’t expect payment, then—”

“If you insist, if you insist,” the medium said, smiling too widely for comfort. “Let’s say that sword of yours?”

Glancing at a gem-studded broadsword buried in the pile of treasure, Ernst said, “Done,” and began unbuckling his old blade.

“And,” the medium said, making Ernst pause, “hmmm, I don’t know, the sword...and a favor. Yes, you can have all this so long as you agree to carry something for me.”

“Carry something? What?”

“It’s nothing, really, you can barely even see it most of the time, and it weighs next to nothing, and doesn’t really smell, usually....”

“What is it?”

The medium shook his head sadly and, lifting the lid to his box, made to start putting the gear away, his hump pointing

accusatorily at Ernst. “If we can’t trust each other this far, my boy, then what hope have I for this cursed world? No no, all my magics and charms rely on love and faith and trust, and if you cannot give me a little in return than I think I have erred. I thought you might be the one to succeed where all others have failed, but if—”

“Wait, wait,” Ernst protested, “forgive me, sir, but my time at the Conservatory has perhaps blunted my manners even as it has sharpened my wits. I will take whatever you like wherever you like—you have my word.”

The medium turned back to Ernst, tears in his rheumy eyes. “Oh, thank you, gallant boy, thank you!”

“It’s nothing,” Ernst said, but he was looking at the gold and silver helmet emblazoned with sunset-hued opals, the greaves that sparkled like ice-diamonds, the sword and shield and dagger and the pendants, oh the many god-arrayed pendants! He quickly donned the armor, the medium helping him into the pieces that were a bit tight. Finally Ernst stood ready and, offering the medium a generous smile, said, “Alright then, sir, what shall I carry for you?”

At this the medium began unbuttoning the front of his long brown robe. Ernst sighed. He should have supposed that *carry this thing* would be some sort of euphemism, and he wondered why the medium had let him get dressed before

telling him, and then he supposed that maybe his being dressed in armor was part of the appeal for—

“Ahhh!” The robe had dropped, the medium naked underneath it. He was not a hunchback. “What in Saint Rouse’s name is that?!”

It was a spider, obviously, but one of such prodigious size that Ernst could be excused for not recognizing it at first. Its white, wooly legs were wrapped around the medium’s chest and stomach, its terrible face peering over his shoulder, its long fine-haired fangs hanging from its bristly mouth and resting gently on a pillow of chest hair. Its eight eyes were distinctly human, and they were all trained on Ernst. There was a long, strange moment of silence in the hut, and then it dropped lightly off the medium’s back and scuttled toward Ernst.

Ernst fumbled with the new sword at his side, but it had some ivory-inlaid clasp keeping it in place and he screamed in terror, at which point the medium muttered something and all the lights went out. Ernst freed the sword and swatted in the dark with it, backing against a wall, which was when he felt the itchy spider hairs rub against his throat. He froze, and the lights came back on.

“Getitoffgetitoffgetitoffgetitoff,” Ernst whispered desperately, closing his eyes from more than the sudden brightness of the hut. The medium was correct that it did not

weigh very much, and truly the smell was more dusty than anything else, and so long as kept his eyes shut he couldn't see it at all, but these were small comforts as he heard the scraping of wiry limbs tightening around his armor.

"Come, come, Ernst," the spider murmured in his ear, some twig-like mandible or comparable mouth-appendage shifting the helmet to the side to be better heard. Its breath was cool and foul as the stink-breeze escaping a bowel-eel's punctured air bladder. "I think we'll be fast friends, hmmm?"

When Ernst later returned to consciousness, unaware until then that he had fainted, he found the spider still on his back. It muttered unintelligibly to itself or the medium; he could not be sure which. Ernst rose slowly, glaring at the medium, and suddenly snatched up his sword, spinning the pommel around in his hand to stab over his shoulder, into the spider's mouth.

It was quicker, its fangs punching through Ernst's breastplate and the skin beneath with equal ease. Ernst fell face-first, simultaneously paralyzed and agonized by the cold fire of the venom injected into his chest—it felt like thousands of ants made of ice squirmed through his blood, biting flesh and excreting acid as they traveled from his torso down through his limbs. Ernst wept.

"That was just a drop, Ernst," the spider informed him, and much as Ernst wanted to close his eyes from the horror at

his neck, even his eyelids were frozen. “If you ever try that sort of disobedience again I’ll make it much worse, and neither of us wants that, do we?”

Ernst whimpered. Across the hut, the medium chuckled.

“Excellent,” said the spider. “Fast friends, as I said. My name is Ardanoi, and I’ll be your companion—I’ve been meaning to visit the Forbidden Abbey and the Far Forest for some time myself, so we’ll just go together if that’s alright with you. Is it?”

Ernst’s tongue was still numb but beginning to wake up. “Uh.”

“Excellent,” said Ardanoi, rubbing his finger-long feelers against Ernst’s cheek. The sensation was akin to nettles swatting his face. “Now get up.”

Ernst found that while he still felt terrible his body again obeyed him, but he dallied just long enough to whisper to the spider, “What about the medium?”

“Old Laidlaw? What about him?”

“Honor dictates that I avenge myself,” said Ernst, focusing on that aspect of his predicament and not the giant nightmarish spider he was talking to. “Will you stop me from my satisfaction?”

“Ernst,” the spider purred like a cat, “I would never stop you from achieving satisfaction, but in my experience such a thing is rarely a confederate of honor.”

That was good enough for Ernst, and picking himself off the floor, he pointed his finger at the medium. “Laidlaw!”

“Yes?” said Laidlaw, buttoning his robe back up.

“You’ll get my honor for tricking me,” Ernst blurted out, his tongue chronically thwarting his intentions to voice the complex proclamations and retorts he routinely concocted in tense situations. “Ass!”

Ernst had his new broadsword in his right hand and a great silver shield in his left, and he charged Laidlaw—who snatched Ernst’s old sword off the table and proceeded to give him the worst beating of his life. The shield fell in two as if made of parchment, and when Ernst parried his former sword his new one blasted apart, the shiny pieces of glass set in the wooden handle turning to dust from the impact and flying into his only eye.

A kick to the groin brought Ernst to his knees, the armor’s codpiece having folded inward from the impact, and Laidlaw raised the sword to end his life, but then Ardanoi extended two of his willowy white legs over Ernst’s shoulder and hissed at the medium, arresting the deathblow. Laidlaw put the sword away

and helped Ernst to his shaky feet, ushering him out the door of the hut and into the rain.

“Don’t you ever come back, now, or I’ll kill you,” Laidlaw gently told Ernst, giving him a squeeze on the non-spider dominated shoulder. “Kill you real bad.”

Ernst wiped the glass powder from his eye and, returning Laidlaw’s stare, wondered how he had failed to notice before that he also was cyclopean. Then Laidlaw slammed the door of the hut, and Ernst glumly limped through the graveyard, picking up the pace when he noticed a ghoul watching him from a barrow. He knew about ghouls, his sister Corrine having terrified him into silence by telling him all about them when he would not stop crying while receiving the crescent moon tattoo that all in Ernst’s family received on their tenth birthday, with the aid of a ringcoon penis-bone quill and a pot of urn-ash ink. At the edge of the cemetery a trail curved away from the foothills and down into the fens, where the Forbidden Abbey waited like an enterprising cannibal lurking at the bottom of an outhouse.

Partway across the marsh Ernst had to stop and strip off his armor—it was melting in the rain. Ardanoi explained he had spun the equipment from his webbing, which was composed of excreted sugar, a revelation that only expedited Ernst’s removal of it from his person. Ardanoi climbed down to facilitate this

stripping, and Ernst wondered if he could make a run for it before the thing crawled back onto him, but then Ardanoi suddenly leaped thirty paces away, landing on a marshsow that wallowed in the mire. He drained the thrashing creature the way Ernst's headmaster had guzzled wineskins, and with a similar slurping sound. He began to glow a faint white as he fed, and then he skittered back over the bog slime to Ernst, his body bloated, his gait swaying.

"I saved you the bones," said Ardanoi, clambering back onto Ernst with far less grace than before. "Well, go on. Got to keep your strength up."

It took Ernst the better part of an hour to haul the dead pig back through the warm, stinking mud, and by the time he regained the trail the ghoul from the graveyard was waiting for him. She was quite comely, if one were inclined toward the recently deceased, with clumps of ratty greenish hair hanging in front of her gaunt shark-mawed face and her bones shining through her grey translucent skin. Ernst's hand went to where his sword should have hung, but all he found was a furry spider leg.

"Hello," Ernst began nervously. "I don't mean you any harm."

The ghoul barked with laughter, and it seemed to Ernst that Ardanoi was chortling as well. Before he could say any

more, Ardanoi addressed the ghoul, “Madam, as you can plainly see, this boy is mine, and I shan’t part with him. If you move to take any liberties I will be forced to inject him with a quart or two of my juice, which will liquefy his insides in short order and render him poisonous to you besides.”

“And ruin him for yourself in the process?” Her voice sounded like it was echoing out of a deep, dry well. “I don’t think so—and if you did, then we would have to fight, you and I, and I’ve eaten enough spiders in my day to know your tricks.”

Horried as Ernst was, a plan began to congeal like old fat in his skull—they both wanted him, so if he could engineer a way for them to fight each other he might slip away and—

“Capital,” said Ardanoi, recapturing Ernst’s attention. “We’ll share, then. But how?”

“I’ll take his arms,” said the ghoul. “You can spit up your webs onto the stumps so he doesn’t bleed to death, and he’ll still have his legs to move around with.”

Ernst would have protested if he had not been struck dumb with fright.

“No, no,” said Ardanoi thoughtfully. “He needs to defend himself if something worse than we appears, and it’s a long road to the Far Forest. But what if you join us on the road? As we travel, neither you nor I shall lay claim to young Ernst, and when we part paths I will surrender him to you entirely.”

“Hmmm.” The ghoul’s tongue was red as a beet and long and fat as a parsnip as it slipped over her purple lips. “He’s not so pink, and rather delightfully underfed. What say you to my using him for a, shall we say, *mount*, on such occasions that you are not doing using him in the more traditional sense of that word?”

“Madam, I caution you that I am given to a rather jealous disposition,” said Ardanoi. “But provided you allow me to assume a similar position upon your own noble back whilst you engage yourself with my steed, to vouchsafe against any culinary indiscretions on your part due to overexcitement, then we may have a bargain.”

“Hmmm,” said the ghoul. “I think I shall elect to wait until there is a tree or some such where you can supervise from above without actually touching me. For now, all this talk is making me hungry—the cemetery keeper stopped burying the dead a long time ago, the miser, though I can’t imagine what he does with them in his hut.”

“Oh, I can,” said Ardanoi with another chuckle.

“Now wait just a tic!” Ernst finally managed. “I’m not, not some beast of burden, I’m a man! A man!”

“Or close enough,” said the ghoul, squelching closer.

“What can I do?” Ernst fell to his knees and beat his breast, “What can I say or do that will make you both go away and leave me in peace?”

“As I was telling our new friend,” said Ardanoi, “so long as you deliver me to the Forbidden Abbey, unlock the secrets held within, and then gain the Far Forest and its treasures, I’ll gladly let you go. After that it’s up to...”

“Oakscratch,” said the ghoul. “I give you my word, young master Ernst, that if you please me I will find my feast elsewhere—I think you’ll soon find I’m not such a monster.”

She batted her eyes at him, the lashes like thorns, the pupils like charred skulls set in flaming hearths, and Ernst gulped a particularly nervous gulp.

The rain had stopped, and so they camped for the night, Ernst offering the desiccated marshsow to the ghoul, who cracked the bones in her teeth and skinned the smelly hide into one long strip, which she then wrapped bloody-side in around herself, covering her blackened charms. As Ernst lay in the mud Ardanoi settled onto him, their faces brushing, and began making the moist purring noise again.

“What are you doing?” Ernst finally asked, the vibrations and bright light emanating from Ardanoi’s thorax keeping him awake.

“Kissing you, my pet,” murmured Ardanoi, and Ernst began to cry.

The following days were spent fording the fens, but thankfully no trees appeared in the barren marsh to facilitate a coupling with Oakscratch. Unfortunately, she made it clear that if a coupling was not facilitated, and a rather spectacular one at that, she would devour Ernst as soon as Ardanoi released him, which he was not so keen on either. The continued absence of a sword weighed heavily on his mind, and he offered prayers to Saint Tanz—patron intercessor of abandoned kittens, exploited orphans, and lonely necrophiliacs—that the crooked medium meet a creatively pestilential reward for his deception.

At last they came to the Forbidden Abbey, the listing walls and bell tower making it look like a ship-wrecked galleon beached on some desolate, demon-haunted shore. At the base of the bulwark Ardanoi and Oakscratch had a brief argument as to how best to gain the wall—they could both easily climb it but neither wanted to go first, leaving the other alone with Ernst.

A compromise was reached, but, sadly for Ernst, it was not one that involved them leaving him unsupervised long enough to jump into a pool and drown himself. Ardanoi and Oakscratch climbed the wall simultaneously, she hooking her chipped claws into the stone itself and Ardanoi propelling himself up in an even creepier fashion, unspooling a rope of

sugar-silk from his bloated glands as he went. This gossamer line connected to the glob he had already applied to Ernst's belt, and after they gained the rampart and tied off the tether, he began to climb, the stickiness of the spun line making him strangely nauseous.

He dropped down into purple and green forest of overgrown belladonna and pushed through the nightshade with Ardanoi back on his shoulder and Oakscratch at his side, she picking the almost-black berries and popping them into her mouth as if they were currants. Then came the squeeze through a low, narrow window set in the side of the abbey like the gill of some great stone fish, and at last Ernst was once more inside the Forbidden Abbey.

They had no torches, and no sun nor moon nor faint star ever shone down on the fens, let alone the interior of the once-hallowed keep, but Ardanoi had eaten half a dozen piglets earlier in the day and still glowed faintly from his meal, which allowed them to pick their way through the silent halls by spiderlight. Then they entered the cloister, the hanged monks ever swaying like inverted willow catkins, and for the first time in days Ernst felt afraid of something more than his companions.

He heard dripping nearby but realized it was only Oakscratch drooling at the sight of all the ancient corpses, thick

ropes of spit hanging from her mouth. Without a word she dropped onto all fours and scuttled forward but paused at the edge of the priests, sniffing with her wide nose. She bleated like a nervous ewe and suddenly spun around on her backward knees, loping past Ernst and Ardanoi back the way they had come.

Ardanoi made another one of his phlegmy chuckling sounds and tapped Ernst's hips with his two lowest legs, the little hooks in those appendages spurring Ernst forward. Ernst stared up at the hanged monks, remembering the less-than-convincing mask of bravado Corrine had assumed before disappearing forever into the copse. He might not have a sword, or even boots to keep the earthy mandrake-mold that only grows from the contents of hanged men's death-voided bowels from squishing between his toes, but he did have his Conservatory training and his family's honor to propel him to victory over whatever trial lay ahead. He made to push a priest aside to enter the cloister proper when Ardanoi pulled on his hair, halting him.

"When I was not so large as I am now," Ardanoi murmured, "but large enough to have left my brothers and sisters behind, I would weave webs to catch my supper. Do you know how I knew if I had snared something?"

Ernst did—he had often caught grass pixies and tossed them into spider webs as a boy, a dark memory. He remembered how the little sprites had squeaked and writhed, and the spider would feel the vibrations in its web and creep over, and then.... Ernst shuddered, wondering if his current predicament didn't have something to do with a pixie curse. He supposed Ardanoi was cautioning against disturbing the hanged men, but peering into the mass of bodies he had no idea how he could possibly squeeze through without bumping them. He sighed, thinking how nice it would have been if the Abbey lay in a drier climate where the waste would have turned to dust by now instead of serving as a bed for the moist yet crumbly mold that made his bare feet itch and—

Sighing again, Ernst looked down at his feet. There wasn't much room, and none at all if Ardanoi stayed on his back. That was something, at least.

"You'll have to get off," Ernst whispered. "I'll crawl under them, but if you stay on my back you'll knock their legs."

Ardanoi's mouth-appendages fluttered against Ernst's neck, leaving their familiar welts, and then he hopped lightly down. The glow emanating from him was slowly fading, and Ernst quickly lowered himself onto his stomach—the only thing that could possibly make things worse would be to lose his light. He began squirming forward through the muck, Ardanoi

creeping beside him, and together they entered the cloister proper.

It was slow going, and became slower still whenever Ernst encountered one of the thicker heaps of mold that flourished under the hanged men. He glumly supposed their last meal must have been a hardy one as he pushed aside the fungal mounds and wriggled deeper into the forest of suicides. At one point he thought he heard something whispering above him in the twilight of the spiderglow, but he dared not roll over to look lest he knock against a dangling foot or cassock, and in the silence of the cloister he did not risk asking Ardanoi to investigate.

Finally he spied an opening in the ceiling of sandals and, hauling himself out into a clearing, spotted a gilt-edged lectern towering above him. Ardanoi darted forward and climbed the side of it as Ernst rolled onto his back, cracking his neck and popping his arms and legs after the arduous haul. As he did, he saw a monstrous shadow looming above them like some gigantic monastic bat.

Ardanoi, either oblivious or unconcerned, perched on the lectern and read from the open book atop it. Ernst tried to speak but his mouth would not obey. Ardanoi gingerly closed the book and coated it in several layers of sugar-silk to prevent it from being sullied on the floor, to which he slowly lowered it

on a rope of his sweet excretion. As he did, light from his thorax flitted across the shadowy thing above them.

Ernst decided he really didn't want to know what was lurking above him, and so rather than using the spiderlight to confirm that yes, indeed, something terrible was hovering just above, he instead scrambled backward with his eyes resolutely fixed on the floor. He was actually relieved when the familiar weight settled onto his back and around his chest, the known horror a balm for the alien one suspended from the ceiling, but then he noticed Ardanoi was still fiddling with the book in the middle of the room, which meant that something else entirely was touching him from behind.

Before his terror-blasted mind could fully comprehend what was happening, the legs of the hanged priest he had backed into wrapped around him and hoisted him into the air, and through tear-veiled eyes he saw that the entire brotherhood had come to life, their wasted, long-dead eyes opening, their distended tongues wriggling, their robes flapping like cockatrice wings as they kicked and pushed off one another to gain momentum in swinging from their nooses. Above it all reared the gargantuan shadow, which, Ernst realized as it descended slowly into the spiderlight, was the abbot.

He was roughly the size of the one-room shack where Ernst had been born, a mass of marshlight-bright flesh bursting out from rips in the patchwork habit that draped over his hideous, bloated limbs like a thin, sodden handkerchief wrapped around an overgrown winter gourd. His habit was quite clearly composed of the skins of men and women, including, Ernst noticed with a dry heave and a sob, his own sister Corrine, her crescent-shaped familial tattoo recognizable even in the dim light of Ardanoi shining up from the lectern.

The abbot had a dozen nooses around his barrel-wide neck, and both his arms and legs were likewise suspended from thick ropes that disappeared into the gloom of the ceiling. The priests surrounding the abbot hung at varying heights, like holiday ornaments strung up by some celebrant afflicted with Ernst's same ocular impediment, and as he found himself passed upward from feet to grasping undead priest arms to feet again he realized they were delivering him to this monstrosity, and that it was alive.

"Thieves!" the abbot gurgled, a substance resembling raspberry jam bubbling over his sausage-thick lips, but his eyes were not upon the unfortunate Ernst. "Forget the novice—bring me the arachnidan interloper!"

The priest gripping Ernst suddenly released him. Uncertain how long a drop it would be to the floor, Ernst clung

to its waist as it began to swing itself back and forth with ever-greater vigor. He soon saw the reason for his being let go—Ardanoi had been caught, two or three of his long legs fractured and oozing a frothy, luminescent white paste, the rest of his limbs snatched by swinging priests who passed him higher and higher as they had Ernst himself but moments before. Again and again Ardanoi sank his dagger-long fangs into his captors, but the priests paid him no mind, and more not-jam splattered on Ernst's face as the abbot chortled above them.

“Ernst!” Ardanoi called, his voice cracking as he was traded off to another priest, “be ready, boy!”

Ernst was close to vomiting, the stench emanating from the undead priests bad enough without the dizziness that swaying through the dim heights of the church had brought on, but he managed to blink away the tears—or maybe it was abbot sputum—and saw that while the tome lay on the floor beside the lectern, Ardanoi had a long glinting piece of metal adhered to the bulb of his abdomen. As he was slung closer and closer, Ernst clearly made out a pommel set with a black stone, and though the scabbard was obscured under the layers of gossamer that Ardanoi had used to stick the weapon to his back, Ernst was sure it was the very same sword his sister had carried into the cloister so long ago.

“The sword! Are you...are you Corrine?” Ernst called excitedly, already fitting together the strange puzzle of transformation and curses that must have led to his sibling changing into a spider and—

“Fool!” Ardanoi howled, now only a few priests’ breadths away. “It was on the floor and I—”

His words were cut off as the priest holding him hurled him upward and the next caught him by a broken leg, leading to a terrible cry from him and another moist guffaw from the abbot. Before he could be passed on, however, he bit cleanly through his already damaged appendage, leaving the priest holding the end of a spider leg as he leapt away. He landed on the back of a priest swinging close to Ernst and from this new perch jumped again, crashing into Ernst’s shoulder and holding fast, the secretions dripping from his broken and missing limbs burning Ernst’s skin.

“Enough of this fiddle-faddle!” bellowed the abbot, and Ernst heard a sound like a river lock being raised. Looking up, he saw that the abbot was descending toward them, his habit billowing out and granting an unsolicited survey of the grotesque landscape of his groin. The other priests swung out of the way and then Ernst felt the one he clung to being pulled up, the impatient abbot reeling them in. “Fiddle-faddle!”

“Be ready to strike,” Ardanoi whispered in Ernst’s ear. “Draw and lunge in one go, no flourishes or feints.”

“But I can’t,” Ernst protested, “I’ll fall!”

“Fool!” said Ardanoi. “Look down.”

Look Ernst did, and with equal measures disgust and understanding he saw that Ardanoi’s gyrations upon his back had not been idle weirdness—he had coated Ernst’s lower back in sugar-silk, lashing him to the hanged priest’s legs. The red slurry thickened as they were raised closer and closer to the abbot, his yellow teeth and yellow tonsure looming above them.

“Hullo, hullo,” said the abbot. “What sort of naughtiness is this?”

“Now!” hissed Ardanoi. Ernst fumbled over his shoulder for the sword protruding from the spider’s back. It was stuck fast. As he tried to wrestle it free of the webbing, they were brought ever closer to the abbot’s leering, moon-like face. The abbot opened his mouth wider and wider until it unhinged like a viper’s, affording them an unobstructed view down his cavernous throat, and at that moment the sword tore free of the sugar-silk.

Ernst wasn’t expecting it to, unfortunately, and so he suddenly flopped forward, the blade bouncing off one of the abbot’s teeth. In the aftermath of this bungled attack Ardanoi sprang forward onto the abbot’s cheek, which sent the abbot

into a frenzy of face-slapping. The rope from which Ernst and the priest were suspended was still wrapped around one of the abbot's massive palms, and so his frantic efforts to squash Ardanoi whipped Ernst and the priest through the air. There was a blur of white flesh and brown habit, and then they landed heavily on the abbot's back, the impact breaking Ernst's left arm and snapping off the priest's legs, which remained stuck to Ernst even as the rest of the priest was jerked free by the abbot's continued flailing.

"Where are you!?" the abbot howled. "Foul demon, where are you!?"

Ernst did not see Ardanoi, either, and was unsure if the rocky pustules jutting up through rents in the habit of human hide were caused by the spider's bite or a mundane skin condition. He also recognized that he had precious little time before the abbot became aware of his presence. Not knowing what else to do, he crept up to the base of the abbot's head. The tonsure flopped as the abbot suddenly twisted his noose-ringed neck, as if listening to some distant murmur of heresy, and Ernst struck.

Gauging distance with only one eye was difficult in the best of times, and in his haste to deal a deathblow Ernst forgot his academy training and swung upon the abbot's skull before properly ensuring he was within range. The result was that he

fell short of his target entirely, instead severing one of the dozen stout nooses circling the abbot's neck. Both ends of the cut rope immediately erupted jets of black blood, and the abbot went absolutely berserk, twisting and thrashing and spinning around from his ropes like the marionette of an epileptic puppeteer.

Pitching forward, Ernst attacked again, this time connecting with the back of the abbot's head. His sword rebounded off the skull as if it had met iron, sending painful reverberations down his arm but not even breaking the abbot's skin. Ernst tried again and almost caught his blade in the face as it bounced back at him. He slipped in the blood pouring from the noose he had accidentally severed, and as the abbot bucked beneath him he realized what must be done.

A great palm stretched around to swat him but Ernst cut the ropes holding up the mighty wrist, and the sliced nooses hosed him down with cold, stinking blood as the unsupported hand fell away. Ernst spun back to the ropes around the abbot's neck and hacked at them again and again, the abbot's throes weakening with each blow. Cutting the last noose, Ernst had a single moment of triumph, howling out his sister's name, and then every other rope in the cloister suddenly snapped, and Ernst rode the abbot to the ground and the darkness of death.

Or sleep. Ernst awoke to a ghoul licking his face, and started back—the realization that it was Oakscratch proved small comfort. His sword was still adhered to his palm with spider-silk but he hesitated, unsure if he had the strength to lift it and not inclined to make an obvious effort if it turned out he couldn't. Instead of going in for the kill or a kiss, Oakscratch sighed unhappily.

“A pity—I thought you were gone,” she said, and Ernst realized she was bathed in a familiar pale white light coming from somewhere to his left. She resumed feasting on the fallen abbot, and as Ernst picked himself out of the pile of priests that had broken his fall he saw Ardanoi half-buried under the remains of a rather portly friar.

“Ernst!” Ardanoi called. He had lost another leg and three of his eyes, luminous white fluids coating his furry form, but otherwise he seemed hale. He wriggled out from under the priest, his mouth-feelers rubbing together like anxious hands. “We did it, my boy, we did it! Together we—”

Ernst stabbed Ardanoi as hard as he could, releasing a spray of caustic fluid from the wound that would have gone directly in his right eye, if only he still had it. Ardanoi thrashed and hissed, and Ernst brought his bare foot down on top of the spider again and again, stomping until the carapace cut his heel, a final hollow rasp escaping Ardanoi's wooly maw. Then

Ernst methodically hacked him into yet smaller and smaller pieces, offering a choice array of curses on his former rider as he did.

When he was satisfied, he turned to see if Oakscratch had an opinion on the matter, but she was still occupied eating the abbot, and by the look of it would be for quite some time. He noticed the edge of the smashed lectern poking out from under the abbot's side, and after kicking aside cassocks and priest parts, he uncovered the sugar-coated tome that so many had died to recover. Within it lay the secrets of not only the Cataclysm and the Far Forest but also the finer points of Holbrookian theology, for which Ernst had always harbored a vague curiosity.

Looking more closely at Oakscratch, for he thought it prudent not to keep his back exposed to her for too long at a stretch, Ernst started, gawped, then fell to his knees in the corpse jetsam of the brotherhood. The marshsow hide she had worn since first meeting him and Ardanoi had slipped, and there upon her back was a purple tattoo, one very similar to that worn by his sister, both before and after hers being worn upon the abbot's grisly habit, and to the one Ernst himself wore on his inner thigh.

All the legends about ghouls that Ernst had heard from Corrine and his peers at the Conservatory returned to him

then, little things that he had not bothered to think about whilst being ridden through the fens by a wicked spider. Little things like the idea that ghouls lose all memory of their former lives when they return from the dead, and name themselves from the first thing they see and the first thing they do to it. The changes that whatever plague or sorcery or curse that was responsible for bringing Ernst's mother back as a ghoul had altered her appearance such that he never would have known her if not for the tattoo that branded his eyes with knowledge, his heart with horror, and his groin with shame for his thinking, if only for an instant, that coupling with Oakscratch might not be so bad as being molested by a spider.

Ernst tried to regain his composure, wondering if for honor's sake he might should end her as he had Ardanoi, but the noises she made as she splintered bone and tore flesh led him to the conclusion that perhaps she was not so unhappy as a ghoul, without memory or regret, and he did not know how he would react if he saw her face again now that he might find some familiar feature lurking amidst the monstrous. That, and he did not wish to remind her of his presence lest she renew her interest in other diversions now that her hunger for dead flesh appeared close to satiation, and Ernst was unsure if he had the strength to fend her off.

And so Ernst departed, triumphant.

Even if the cemetery had not been on his way to the Far Forest and whatever adventures he might find there, Ernst would have made the time to stop in and see Laidlaw, he who had set the whole affair in motion. As he banged on the coffin-lid door of the necromancy hut, Ernst rehearsed the proclamation he would deliver before avenging himself, but eventually he was obliged to postpone his internal speechifying long enough to break down the door. The hut was dark, all but one or two of the bottled marshlights dead, but through the gloom Ernst made out the horrible old hunchback slouched over his table.

“Go away,” Laidlaw rasped. “Whoever you be, run, run far from this place—”

“Shut the words, for I have them,” Ernst said, mangling yet another carefully prepared monologue as he advanced. “You were the one to blame, and now, vile gravesneak, you will be undone by that which you set in motion.”

Stifling the tinge of pity in his breast, Ernst raised his sword high over his head and brought it down directly into the old man’s hump. It felt less like chopping into flesh and more like assaulting a sack of beans and, holding his sword up to one of the marshlight bottles, Ernst saw only the faintest smear of blood, as well as a pale, luminescent streak. Looking down, he

saw a stream of bright pearls pouring out of the rent in Laidlaw's robe.

Before Ernst could run or even scream the legion of newborn ivory spiders exiting the punctured eggsack swarmed up his legs, the last thing he heard the dying medium giving a tired sigh at having lost his hump for the second time in his unhappy life.

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Jesse Bullington is the author of the novels The Sad Tale of the Brothers Grossbart and the upcoming The Enterprise of Death, which will be released in March 2011. His short fiction has appeared or is forthcoming in various magazines, including ChiZine, Jabberwocky, and Brain Harvest, as well as in anthologies such as Ekaterina Sedia's Running with the Pack, James Lowder's The Best of All Flesh, and Robin Laws's The New Hero. He currently resides in Colorado and can be found online at www.jessebullington.com.

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COVER ART

“Into the Unknown,” by Kerem Beyit



Kerem Beyit is a freelance artist born in Ankara, Turkey. He started drawing in his early childhood with the influence of comic books, and he trained himself from great fantasy artists like Frank Frazetta and Gerald Brom. He has won Master and Excellence Awards from Exposé 7, and his artwork has been used for covers of European editions of fantasy novels by Tad Williams and George R.R. Martin. Visit his website and gallery at www.theartofkerembeyit.com.

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