

# ERIDAN

Issue 12 • April 2012



# CONTENTS

## Short stories

Valentina Mišković: The Long Lost White Brother . . . . .	3
Tamara Crnko: The Pet . . . . .	10
Aleksandar Žiljak: The Argosy . . . . .	17
Dafne Flego: Through the Glass . . . . .	25
Dario Ban: Anais. . . . .	30
Ivana Delač: Becoming a Pegasus . . . . .	33

## History

Hrvoje Beljan: G.R.R. Martin - historical sources used as inspiration for A Song of Ice and Fire . . . . .	40
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## Science

Ivana Božić Šakan: Poisons . . . . .	45
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## Interview

Hrvoje Beljan: Lois McMaster Bujold . . . . .	53
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# INTRODUCTION

Dear readers,

we present you a special edition of our fanzine "Eridan" in English, so all Eurocon visitors can read it!

"Eridan" was first published in July 2005, and since then we have published 11 issues, in printed and/or electronic form (depending on our finances).

This issue features a selection of some of the best short stories, interviews and articles published in our fanzine so far.

We hope you will enjoy our fanzine, and if you do - please consider voting for it in the ESFS awards ;)

"Eridan" team  
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# ERIDAN

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# THE LONG LOST WHITE BROTHER

Valentina Mišković

There was a thud. The body fell to the dusty ground and a smile broke across the worried face of the young Indian who now stood erect, holding his bow and arrow. "Another one!" he shouted. Soon other men from the evening scouting party came running, holding their weapons tight. The young man who killed the intruder now approached the body and turned it on its back. A youthful face appeared, covered in sand; the face of a boy from a tribe they all despised. "This is the third one today. But this one we actually killed. The first two got away. So the time is finally upon us..." the eldest of the scouting party said quietly, then added: "I do not think the gods will give us any more time. Our time has passed, the chief of the Taim sent all his men against us. For far too long has he tried to conquer what little land we have. Take him and carry him far from our village!" He gave the order and then summoned the boy with just a glance.

There was a new moon that night. The women lit fires in front of their houses, illuminating the beautiful stone surroundings, crafted from sheer rock at the edge of the pine forest. Two-storey houses with small windows and dozens of hanging bridges reached several dozens of meters into the rock. In the courtyards the girls and the women weaved baskets and waited for their husbands to return. For several weeks the attacks had been a daily occurrence and what was yet to come was, they knew, to be much worse than anything they ever experienced.

"They are back already? That cannot be good, does that mean they found someone? Where is Tocho?" I'm not sure if I'm talking to myself or asking questions all around. I push my way into the courtyard to see what is happening.

"Yoki!" someone called my name.

I knew that voice well so I stood on tiptoes to catch a glimpse of Tocho. He was waving at me, only a few meters away, surrounded by children who yammered questions and men who tried to push through them and get to their wives.

"I killed him. He was younger than me," he said, glum, as we moved away from the commotion in the great house's courtyard.

I took him by the hand up to the rocks above the village and now we were sitting on the warm sand and watching the sky, maybe for the last time.

"I know that it will all be over soon and I may die. But I'll fight. What's mine is mine. They won't take it away," he spoke quietly.

Something was breaking inside me, tearing its way out, trying to escape. I kissed his forehead, saying for the thousandth time that all will be well.

I was proud of myself for being the daughter of the witch-doctor and for having some



kind of social standing in this small, godsforsaken tribe. I could have had my pick of any man and kiss him to my heart's content, as long as father approved. I was the only one in the village who was of a marrying age yet still a virgin. All other children were younger than me and all of them were boys.

In past years the gods did not grant the village a single female child. But I would not marry until I was certain there was love. Tocho spent the last year trying to convince me he loved me and I could not imagine what I would do without him. My father liked him but he was not too happy with my choice. However, after tonight's success Tocho had earned much greater affection from my father.

My father is a very good person. He's always there when the people need him and his prayers result in gods sending us rain for our corn and to wash away the mud carried here by the winds sent by the prayers of the chief of the Taims. He is an evil man, foul and obsessed with power. His people live in fear, obedience and prayer. There's nothing else they can do. Since he discovered the power to turn into animals, no one would oppose him. I wouldn't wish such a life upon anyone and he has conquered so many tribes already... Those who resisted now rested with their gods, among the stars and the new Moon.

I was in my bed. I could not summon the dream god, my heart was beating too fast and would not be still. I listened to my father talking into a kiwa under my window. A kiwa is a temple of sorts, a place to summon gods. It was a small round underground chamber with a roof opening. Various plants were burned under the opening to summon our gods a chase away the Taimins, all day and all night. Only men could enter the kiwa. I never actually found out what a kiwa looks like inside. All I could see while crossing over it was the fireplace of black and purple ashes.

"She is our only virgin, we have no one else," someone said but I could not recognize the voice. They weren't talking about me, surely? Up until now they only whispered of Pahana, whom we desperately need in this time of chaos and unrest. Our long lost White Brother. Sun shines from his cheeks, black eyes calm the bones and soul and his arms lead into serenity...

"No! We must find another solution!" I heard my father angrily say in a broken voice. This was becoming interesting. I sat on my bed and neared the window to hear better.

"Yoki is our last hope. In my dream I saw Pahana and he asked we sacrifice a virgin. You know yourself that Taima is here, bides his time until we weaken or leave to gather corn so he can send his warriors against our village. Is that how you want it to end? Love for Pahana is what you serve. No earthly emotion may cloud your dedication to the task. Your task is to save the Anasazi. We are all we have left."

He hesitated and I could not believe what I heard! I heard my father speak, knew there were tears in his eyes, his voice revealed all his secrets to me... He interrupted him again: "I know what she means to you, your only daughter and heir but your people need

you. Will you anger the gods and turn your back on us all when the moment you await your whole life finally arrives? Do you not want the honor of summoning Pahana?" he continued with wonder and disgust.

Words slowly fell into place, like kernels of corn one beside the other, completing each other. The shaman needs a virgin to summon a god, a god who would bring these people to a sacred place, away from Taim's warriors and evil plans. I am the only virgin in the village. I must save my people. My blood must be spilt over the burning flames of those scented plants.

But I don't want that! I don't want to die! I don't want my father, who has loved me from my birth, who honors all my decisions, which is something few Anasazi fathers can say, to cut my vein and pour my life onto the fire. Straight to peace! To Pahana! To the one who would help us? The one who leads his people in peace? Am I certain this that Pahana? Maybe there is another? How will my father do it? He can't just force me to enter that damned kiwa, close my eyes and surrender? I stifled a scream, covered my mouth with a hand, my breathing fast and shallow. My head spun, the room grew murky, so many questions and horrible answers came to me... I could not take it any longer and left the room. Where to go? I cannot run, the enemy awaits in every bush around the village...

I remembered something that a man said to my father. I do not want my blood to soaks the dry land but I have a people I must save. This idea had opened a way for another. What if my blood fails? What if Pahana does not come? Tears ran down my cheek, hot and I returned to reality. I stood on top of the escarpment which led down into a dark green river, which silently passed through the desert. I could not see in the moonlight but I knew this land like the palm of my hand. What was Tocho without me? How would I go into another world without him? How would my father live with the knowledge he killed his own daughter? How would he survive the failure, both his and mine, if one occurs?

Pale light illuminated the morning sky over the green river. In the village, between the buildings, shadows formed as the sun slowly rose above the desolate forests and plains. It was too peaceful. I knew something would happen. I had not slept last night. Most of the time I could not breathe, thinking about what I heard. My hands shook. Was that a sign? A true, unconscious sign of weakness and frailty?

My father exited the kiwa with red eyes and a look on his face I had never seen before. He walked over to me and sat beside me on the ground.

"You will forgive me for what I am about to say. I do not know how to tell you this. I do not think I can," he spoke with a quiet voice filled with sorrow. I knew what was to come so I spared him the trouble: "I know, dad, I heard you talking last night. You don't have to justify yourself to me. You don't have to go through the pain of repeating it."

He looked at me with wonder and cast down his eyes, as if in shame. I saw a tear flow from his eye. It fell to the ground soundlessly, swallowed by the ever thirsty ground. I thought how many more tears would this dusty ground drink if I did not let him... I could



not even think it.

"Listen to me, Yoki," he started slowly. "I do not know if I can do it. Even if it were another girl, any girl I knew, I do not know if I could do it. For so many years have the gods been on my side, asking for peace and prayer but I never dreamed they could ask me to... How could I even think of sacrificing my own daughter?"

I looked at him and his eyes were seeking something in the eastern distance. Maybe he expected a sacrificeless Pahana. But we both knew Pahana does not come just like that, like the wind or the rain. "Dad? May I have a little more time, to say goodbye to Tocho? Please?", I asked with expectation. I still did not know how to tell Tocho my father would have to kill me and that we did not know if that would even save the tribe from certain doom.

"I'll be waiting in front of the kiwa. Come when you are ready. I am very sorry. If I could, I'd run away with you but there is a Taima in every bush a mile around. Listen to me and do what is most important for your tribe and family. I love you," were the words he said to me as he slowly rose to his feet. He moved towards the house, to tell my mother what he must do. I was not sure which one of us had it worse. I, who had to die or he who must kill me.

"Tocho?" I asked as I entered the darkened room in the western face of the rock. I took a deep breath and lay beside him. I slowly shook him, softly speaking his name. "He must sacrifice me. Do you hear? I want you to know this is for the good of this family."

"What? Say that again, I'm not sure I heard you right," he said in disbelief, eyes wide open. He turned towards me and waited, looking at me stunned.

"Pahana will come only if the ashes are soaked in virgin blood. If the fire touches my blood Pahana will hear our prayers and deliver us from Taim's fury," I spoke slowly.

"What does that have to do with you? Except your father being..." he did not finish. His eyes opened wide suddenly, realizing what I was saying. "No, no, no! They cannot take you away from me like that! How can he kill his own daughter? You will not let him? We will run away from these dirty elders? Tell me!" he repeated, begging.

Searching for an answer in my eyes he realized there was no other way. I shoved my head in his chest and cried, just like last night on the cliff above the village.

"Forgive me!" I begged. I explained how I felt, that I talked to my father and what I had to do. He rose and dressed, took his bow and arrows, turned towards me and said: "If I kill Taima, he will no longer pose a threat to anyone." He left.

What? He could not do that!

They would kill him! I ran after him and caught up with him in the courtyard. I grabbed his arm.

"You can't! He'll kill you!" but he did not look at me. He looked straight ahead, towards the forest by the village. "Quiet," he said. I did not understand what was happening. All

the men stood in their courtyards, looking at the forest while women retreated into their houses, taking the children with them, saying tearful goodbyes to their husbands. It didn't start already, did it?

From the thick underbrush a man stepped out, in full warrior's gear, holding a spear. A wicked smile danced on his lips as he watched the village. He stood tall and said: "Surrender and there will be no deaths. You will serve the great Taima and in return keep your lives." He waited. One of our people, the chief's son took a step forward and spat on the ground. I watched the ground swallow it. I remembered again why I was there and what I was to do. My eyes returned to the man's face. His smile was gone and there was now just a demonic grin as he waited for one of us to make a mistake.

"Clallam!" he shouted.

The echo spread over the sleepy forest like a wave. All the birds took flight simultaneously, knowing what was to come. The underbrush rustled several times and an entire row of armed men stepped out, ready to loose. I looked at Tocho, seeing pride and fear on his face. Kachine, help us, I prayed inside. I kissed Tocho and reluctantly let go of his hand and walked towards the kiwa. He looked at me with pain in his eyes. Father was standing still in front of the kiwa, in the courtyard. Seeing what I decided, he climbed down the short ladder into the kiwa and waited for me. He offered me his hand. I looked around – on one side my family, the only I would ever have, my life. They stood firm and ready to die for their land. On the other side, in the field on the edge of the forest there were the people led by an evil hand, who would not retreat. The order was clear. Conquer them or slay them all.

The battlecry spread through the forest and brought me back to reality. I opened my eyes in disbelief, seeing legs run towards our walls, doors, listening to the thunder of footprints they left behind. Arrows flew from our side but I did not see who loosed it. Women hid behind hard walls of their rooms and chose their targets carefully through the thin slits. A few of the attackers in the first row fell silently to the ground. I felt a sudden touch on my skin. I realized my father was trying to pull me into the kiwa to save my life. I jumped and leapt inside, not caring for the ladders. My heart beat like never before.

"I want to see what is happening with Tocho!" I bellowed over the shouts coming from the outside. After several moments my father's grip loosened, allowing me to peek out. He started burning the plants and chanting and singing the summoning of many gods. The wind rose and white clouds gathered in the east, overshadowing us.

I saw my Tocho fight with all he had, running through their ranks and felling them like cobs in the field, pushing his way through the beasts bravely. I heard an arrow whoosh. A thin, almost invisible arrow came from the forest and pierced my Tocho's shoulder. My scream drowned out all noise. I caught his gaze.

Tocho was looking at me, his lips forming a silent I love you and Save us, as he loosed



arrows with the remains of his sapping strength, shooting for anybody. I could not bear to watch it. With tears in my eyes I looked at my father and nodded. He knew what he had to do. If Tocho was dead, there was no point in me living and no point in taking my time with this salvation.

I lay on the cold ashes of the fireplace under the opening which showed me the beautiful blue sky. In that blue the colors of the morning danced. I felt my father place plants and powders around me in an irregular circle. Seeing the sorrow in his eyes I thought ony of how could he, should he survive, get over all this. I placed my arms in their intended position. I saw him raise a knife in one and a leaf in another hand. He approached me and placed the leaf on my tongue. I started feeling dizzy and a strange drowsiness came over me.

I shuddered, feeling the tingling touch of sharpened stone on my wrist. My head was so heavy I could not move it. The screams died out like they were carried away by the wind, one by one. The smell of my blood filled the tiny room. Fire burned around me and I felt the prickling on my other arm. It was all so warm and nice. I felt like floating in warm water, the Sun around me, dreaming. All was dark and warm, like in the best of dreams.

I felt my will to live drain away with my thoughts, all was growing black and numb.

I closed my eyes. There was nothing left.

Whiteness. Light. A man is approaching, dressed in white, beautiful feathers decorate his head and neck. He offers me his tired and wrinkled hand and leads me through the whiteness. Who am I and where am I? Nothing matters now. I think I have found the long lost White Brother, Pahana. I felt only light and fulfilled. Mom? Dad? Tocho? You're all here?

"You saved us. It's all over. We're all here," Tocho said. I hugged him fiercely.







**Kristina Pongrac: "Selfportrait"**  
<http://kristinapongrac.webdominus.com>

# THE PET

Tamara Crnko

He entered the dark room, removing cobwebs nervously with his hand from his sweat-soaked skin. He was particularly annoyed by that forced untidiness. There were cobwebs wherever he turned. White, black, dusty, inhabited and glittery. He never followed the alternations in the decorative fashion of interiors. Trouble would appear when he bumped on decorations along the way. Or the decorations on him, depending on the situation.

Fortunately, not many creatures jittered about the area. Except those behind bars and within different boxes. He carefully observed every movement made by some strange beings in a large box at the other end of the shop. In a way, they seemed amiable, like something you would take home, keep beside the bed and if necessary use as a foot warmer. However, there were several problems associated with the Jitterbugs. Well, to begin with, they jittered everywhere, on carpets, windows, walls, beds. It would be absolutely idiotically naive to perceive them as small and soft foot warmers who were obediently waiting to rest their bones with you. After all, he obviously didn't need any foot warmers in this place, which was evidenced by the sweat that even after so many years never ceased to torture him..

He did not plan any heat strokes in the near future... Well, at least not on himself..

If that had been his line of thought he would have sooner bought an Icey, but these beings were anything but economical. Slow and large, he wouldn't find a place to store it in any of the 7 circles. Besides, it would melt momentarily. Good thing it wasn't so expensive and rare.

It had to be delivered here. Let the snobs have Icey, he pondered, thinking the way he used to - financially reasonable. The snobs of this world were sometimes aroused by impossible ideas about melted pets...

Re-direct your brain waves to the tiny Jitterbugs. Yes, they were smaller... At least he did not have to think about spatial rearrangement in case he decided to adopt one. He remembered his colleague from work. He bought a Golem, that was, well, it was huge. Consequently, his esteemed colleague had to drill another hole in the roof

(Anyway, the chimney was surely indispensable, with the impressive 52 °C outside, absolutely) so that its head could stick out...

He never actually understood what people saw in pets. It was just an additional problem that filled the already overburdened heavy load. For what purpose? It slobbers, it whines, it walks you around instead of you walking him, it eats your slippers and shits all over the furniture... The acquisition of such a problem had always seemed to him like a venture of a person who fell asleep when they were handing out wits...



And yet, here he stood, in a shop with a low ceiling, that smelled of sulphur, had low reddish cabaret (oh, the perversion...) lighting, filled with different creatures, who often had unpleasant dispositions and smells, beating his own, already problem-filled brain out, with economic calculations (and what else, mind you), and requests for a few grams of salt, from the part of the brain that still wasn't moonstricken.

He would never have made himself do it had he not felt the need to. He had an unbearable demand for company, that the colleagues from work failed to meet. This problem occurs when communication persists only on topics related to business, weather (that has never changed, those 52°C are here to stay), the amount of sulphur in the air (which was probably deadly, but not enough to kill him and get rid of his torments...), and other people's children. And he could listen to any topic... except the one about other people's children. The first teeth, claws, tails, the first flight or scorched sofa (which he liked to classify as a financially risky mischief).

If he wanted claws, a tail and scorched furniture he could get his own Salamander, and argue about it with him. Clearly he didn't go bananas, to really do a thing like that. For That Imbecile Above, a Salamander, and a talking one at that!

He was already too hot, without the added bonus of a creature that was full of, produced or spat fire.

This would never have happened if his wife had not been tragically killed. For a month already he had been incessantly crying, so much that he was no longer able to, not even if he wanted. All his sources of tears dried up. He had even been dehydrated, so the neighbours had to water him like a weathered cactus to bring him back to life. What a tragedy...

By all the devils, they had promised they'll return her.

He used to have such beautiful talks with her.

She never interrogated him about the salary, probably because she lived with him, jealously watching his backyard, because she probably maintained it, and pestered him with questions about prison logistics.

After all, she had never ridiculed him because he was human. One of only three humans living in Hell (why meeeee? Whyyyyyyy?). The rest of the population was comprised of daily fried (with flatbread and onions) human souls, in whose shoes I wouldn't like to be, and various demonic inhabitants (of all shapes, patterns and colours).

It never bothered him, naturally, that she had slightly larger teeth, greyish skin and bat wings. She was beautiful for her kind, although she had always refused to sign up for Miss All Circles. Neither looks, nor race or species is important in love, at least he got that impression while he was still living on Earth (when he was reading pathetic authors who liked to bullshit and lie to small children and tearful naive love-watching-soaps housewives). However, prompted by worldly experience, he was glad his family didn't

meet his wife.

Mother would probably stage a theatrical demise. And then he would have her fragile soul on his conscience. Dreadful.

Continue to stare at the little yellow puffy balls. One of them looked at him greedily. He wasn't sure whether it wanted to bite his nose, or if it begged him, in the Jitterbug language, to take it home.

His wife would have liked these soft balloons of trouble. He could see her chasing one around the house, destroying furniture and twittering with joy.

Of course, he was instantly visited by his own image, a poor wretch who cleans the shit up after that creature and buys new furniture... cursing its pagan Jitterbug ancestry.

Now he was little sorry that he ignored her pleas for hairs on the carpet while she was still alive. Maybe she would have cleaned the shit up after her little hobbies, and cease to handle other, more fatal ones, in the meantime.

- I see you've been contemplating for a long time, mister Human – the seller finally crept up from behind.

- I am contemplating, miss Demon.

After all... He couldn't let just anyone under his roof.

How would he know which one to choose if he decided to take a Jitterbug? Female, male, hermaphrodite, genderless? What if they want to have a girlfriend or boyfriend or both? Or children? He already started turning grey at the thought of little Jitterbug children that were the size of a bouncing ball, accidentally being stepped on by him while he's trying to pass the battlefield that was once his carpet... Oh, the pain..!

Besides, why would he need a small squeaking creature that can't talk?

And what to buy when he couldn't stand the Squawkers, not even now, while standing here in the store, let alone to live with one?

He would probably feed it with a kitchen towel, and tie its beak with duct tape.

- Jitterbugs are good with children. They're not aggressive. They don't bite furniture. They don't eat human body parts. – She said even if he didn't ask her anything.

- I'm glad I won't have to feed it with my fingers. What do they eat then?

Happy that he was interested in her lively goods, the demon-saleswoman continued to babble - They eat everything you eat. Highly adaptable creatures. Some can even be taught to eat dust...

Wow, the first positive thing he heard today. Maybe he would eventually buy a small puffy vacuum cleaner. He probably wouldn't need to buy batteries for them, or consume any kind of propulsion system... and it will feed on dust... Oooh, his majesty the economic account has started escalating in his head...

It seemed to him that he could pat himself on the back for his cleverness!

His wife hated vacuuming. In fact, she was probably worse than him (dust screens didn't exist back then, you needed a decent pair of ultra-see-through-styrofoam goggles just to get from the kitchen to the living room).

They were both scientists. He specialized in tectonics, until one day a few very ill-tempered demons flew through his window with a relocation request. They didn't even ask if he wanted to go. Before he knew, he found himself in the suburb of the Limbo, with a new assignment. They needed experts on the issues of lava and subterranean flows so that the prison reheating system in the 7 circles of hell could be optimized. Depraved individuals could take care of everything else (he never understood why they didn't pick someone who was more vicious, was less of a geeky recluse... someone, well... more Infernal).

Of course, he had needed a few shock treatments to adjust to new working and living environment. And the daily presence of different forms of life and death. Also the fact that in this world he was discriminated, and not vice versa. Then the fact that it was not particularly wise to send letters to his family who had previously lived believing he died in his own home due to a disastrous gas tragedy (what a pathetic staging!), and since then, lived mostly in asylums.

When he fell in love with his wife he was already going through hell, literally, for more than 3 months. Since then, he could admit that it was not that bad, if you ignored the unbearable heat and the occasional outbursts of the Ku Kulx demonic posesses

(They calmed down only when his dear astutely nailed the inverted cross on the door, so they no longer burned it among her flower beds).

His unhappy wife was working with some kind of magic he did not understand (what do I even understand? Poor wretch...), she incorporated the entire lab in their basement where he wanted to try and grow marijuana, so that he could disappear for a few hours and forget about his assignment of successfully torturing his own countrymen, who were unwanted by the Lord in his orchard, with heat. That business had obviously failed.

Actually, he should have forbidden her sick experiments.

Then he wouldn't have needed to be where he was now, in front of the hopeful saleswomen with nasty grayish skin that would have shamed even the most weathered bat. She was already taking out the tenth specimen of the yellow puffy ball that fidgeted and squeaked.

Actually, he should have examined her family tree more closely (his wife's, to be exact, he wasn't too interested in the bat). Half her relatives had died exactly the way she did. She got blown in the air in the middle of her experiments, destroying curtains, ceiling and furniture in the process, not to mention the nerves of the unfortunate folks who found themselves in the vicinity.

His poor wife, she had been so lovely in one piece...



Actually, maybe he should have enrolled in philosophy, without pretending to have a bright future as a famous tectonist, that way he would have never been in a situation like this. It seemed to him that these creatures didn't find the Earthlings' questions about life and death intellectually stimulating. Was he surprised? No. Thanks for understanding...

Nevertheless, he had his wife to deal with, now that he was thinking about life and death. He couldn't waste whole days at fashion shows with completely identical puffy balls. (something like beauty pageants in the human world, when clones attack).

- C'mon... – he pushed the Jitterbug from the saleswoman's hand back in the box - I'll choose, please.

He slipped his hand into the box with his eyes closed.

His fist enveloped around the upset trembling little bodies and he took out his new hobby.

She looked at him with watery eyes. Squeaking to say hello (or cursing lusciously, maybe one day he would understand if he bought a Jitterbugian-English dictionary).

He crams IT into a cardboard with holes and walks out of this damned to all, how many were there again, circles of hell store!

He knew he bought something completely pointless. Like the gifts he used to get from his old aunt who didn't know him at all. Like that one lamp in the shape of a heart, which he detested, and had to keep beside the bed because his mommy forced him to, so the old windbag wouldn't be offended. He was regarded as a fairy throughout high school because of that lamp! Oh, cruel world! Even then he lived with demons, before we moved to Hell!

He couldn't wait to sprawl out at home. And to test the vacuuming efficiency of this small gurgling and squeaking being that was fidgeting in the box. Up and down, left and right...

- Ah, the mail... - he said while pensively opening his mailbox.

- Hmph... – it finally arrived.

The new needle and thread (he wasn't paying attention during home economics classes in high school... Oh, so what the hell?... He was a tectonist, a geographer, a prison logistician in this case, not a seamstress...).

They also sent him the "Demon Anatomy – advanced manual". Because the basics of demon anatomy weren't enough. (Oh, in his next life... medicine... Tectonics... Never again!). Along with the book he got the most important part.

He felt like the guy who finds a buried treasure on a desert island probably feels. Enthusiastic, and then depressed with a tendency to end his own life! It was good he wasn't the queasy type. He had seen a whole lot all over his basement walls lately. Open the metal box... Ta-Dah!



It was placed there, all curled up, a new and beautiful appendix.

- Here, dear, just for you... – he said with a blessed smile.

He barely managed to collect all the pieces, then the neighbor's Cerberus thought he found some grilled minced meat on the floor...

Ooooh, how he hated the ugly, three-headed, three-times gluttonous thankless dog.... And his ill-bred owner... Why didn't he teach his pet to differentiate between appendixes and minced beef? (- Behold Puffy... Puffy... Hey, neurotic Crumb... this is an APPENDIX... not edible... right?... you don't understand right?... Fuck you, you fucking jittery creature... IT'S NOT EDIBLE...)

Now that it was taught... (or at least it seemed it was) he will be able to sew all his wife's parts and send her for reawakening. And then she will be back in one piece... It doesn't matter that she'll resemble the Frankenstein... It will be his dear little demon wifey.

He couldn't wait for her to see the new vacuum cleaner... He will forbid her to run for it, so she doesn't fall apart again, but, all in all, he had plenty of time to train Puffy before her return. When he gets to it, it will be a pensioner Puffy, not a hyperactive Jitterbug, that just... jitters. Yes. Certainly.

- Well, small one... - he said lowering the creature on the floor - go eat... bread... (- I said bread not dead... are we clear...?)

Proud like a father, he watched the small yellow puffy ball darting around his apartment and causing a mini-chaos of its own kind. With a feeling of pleasure, at least until...

- Fuck your jitterbug family you little piece of shit... that WAS my slipper!!!





Petra Korlević: "Werewolf"  
<http://p-korle.deviantart.com>



# THE ARGOSY

Aleksandar Žiljak

Tagane put down her bowl and looked with worry at the clouds on the west, rising all the way to the stratosphere. They heralded a storm. On the starboard, half a mile away, several bright yellow blimps floated some fifty feet above the waves. Their tentacles dragged down to the surface, and dozens of feet underwater, tender deadly traps for anything entangling in them. Marble-like patterns on their bladders pulsated peacefully from black to purple, giving no sign of a storm gathering. But Tagane knew that blimps wouldn't float so low if they didn't feel the tempest approaching. "We dive tonight!" she said finally to no-one in particular.

"Shall we look for shelter on the Islands?" Slaven asked. Mina already finished her lunch, she usually ate faster than others. Conrad paid them no attention, taking second helpings from the pot. Only Roberta lifted her gaze and begun eating faster, chopsticks stuffing boiled algae in her mouth. 'We dive tonight' meant it was time to pull out the longlines.

"We won't make it," Tagane said.

"Maybe the storm won't be strong." Slaven didn't feel like taking the lines out. They knew well enough that nothing had time to get caught yet. Nothing worth mentioning.

"We won't be taking any chances," Tagane faced them all: Slaven, Roberta, Mina and Conrad. "You all know what our Argosy is passing through." They all nodded as one. They knew. The argosy is as good as the captain, Tagane thought. And the captain is as good as the sailors. "Let's finish our meal and then let's get to work!"



Slaven was right, as usual. Meager fifty-something pounds of swift-tails and several spikefish. They only wasted their baits. Large jacks and 'cudas rise at night, when the ocean's on fire.

But Tagane was also right, as usual. While they were pulling the lines out and securing all the hooks and gutting all the catch, the wind gained strength. The waves started splashing the sides of the Argosy and spraying her deck, and she - apparently not worried by the imminent storm - spread all the four sails. The Argosy rushed across the surging ocean, leaving the foaming wake behind: pushed by wind, driven by her instincts, older than memory.

"As far as we're concerned..." Slaven approached Tagane from behind and embraced her around her waist. She nodded. His touch comforted her. The Argosy murmured deep inside her. Her lust drove Tagane, too. The wind ruffled her jet black hair, rolling leaden clouds from the west. And then, a lightning flashed through the lead. And another, and another. It's time, Tagane decided. The Argosy still held all her sails spread: leathery membranes some thirty feet across, carried by the strong arms, turned and tilted to

catch most of the wind and keep the Argosy always in the right direction. But the Argosy was heavy, swollen, sinking deep; she'll weather the storm with difficulty. And she felt Tagane's silent plea, too: her unease before the unbridled wind and unleashed ocean. The instincts will have to wait.

The Argosy lowered two sails, drawing the arms into her shell. Roberta, Mina and Conrad were already inside, in the chambers between the longitudinal septa that were their home. The waves grew stronger, washing the deck, foam flowing down the sides of the shell. And then the Argosy drew the remaining two sails. Tagane felt rather than heard the chambers filling with water, the shell beginning to dive. In several minutes, the waves will close above the shell and them within. The Argosy will sink into the deep quiet, safe before the fury of a fierce tropical storm. "Let's go," Tagane led Slaven inside.

A near lightning flashed across the interior mother-of-pearl layer of the septum. Through the viewport, Tagane took one last look at the lead torn by electricity, before the waves closed above them. They were sinking, chambers full. The ocean above turned savage, whipped by wind, beaten by lightnings: howling foaming beast, moaning and then roaring again, driving every living thing deep into calm, into darkness spangled with shimmering photophores, like stars in the night.

Roberta was lying on a mattress made of dried algae. Conrad stretched next to her, taking her hand, kissing her fingers, licking the salt from her palm. Roberta stirred, sighing barely audibly: there wasn't much else to do underwater. Mina was hanging lanterns all over the chamber: small dried blimp bladders, filled with fine powder made of dried torchworms. She dipped her fingers into a bowl of water and sprinkled the powder in each lantern. Moist, they glowed in soft greenish glow spilling through the view ports into the deep. Every so often, an Argosy's arm would coil through the light.

The Argosy was sinking deeper and deeper, the storm remaining just a muted thundering above. Something swam through the greenish glow: something large, bigger than the biggest 'cuda. Tagane strained to see, but it was already swallowed by the dark. She stared into the black for some time, and then she shrugged her shoulders. Who knows what abides these depths, she thought. But she felt safe in the Argosy's shell, huge and strong, capable of enduring the pressure of 1500-fathoms-deep sea. She felt protected, guarded by dozens of strong arms: centuries were the only enemy of a fully grown argosy.

Mina nodded towards Roberta and Conrad, embraced in the dry algae, kissing. Roberta spread her legs shamelessly. Conrad pulled her gaudy flower-patterned sarong up, exposing her firm lower belly, and touched her where it was sweetest, his fingers ruffling her pubic hair, caressing her lips, tickling her clitoris. Mina rolled her eyes, as if saying 'they have only that on their minds'. But Tagane didn't miss the spark of lust in Mina's naughty green eyes. The passion spilled from the Argosy into them all. Tagane felt it flowing through her body, tingling her skin, making her moist between her legs.

With one hand, Tagane reached for Mina. With another, for Slaven. She led them to the other mattress and surrendered to them. Slaven took off his T-shirt and denim shorts, his cock proudly rampant as Mina unbuttoned Tagane's beige trousers and pulled them down her legs. Slaven undid her white flannel shirt, baring her full breasts, and then waited for Mina to peel off her orange jumpsuit. Then they both attended to their captain, showering Tagane with kisses, soft and warm and wet all over her face and neck, breasts and belly. She sank happily into a steamy whirlpool, enflamed by their heavy hot breaths, teased by their fingers and tongues and lips, moaning in ecstasy as Slaven's cock slid into her pussy. Mina fondled them both, kissing them, burning with desire of her own at the sight of Slaven fucking Tagane in slow, steady thrusts; and then stiffening and coming into her, filling her with sperm, and Tagane coming, too, and Mina fingering herself frantically to an orgasm; and the three of them collapsing on the mattress, body next to body next to body. And Roberta and Conrad next to them, screwing, he in her, she around him, and them all within the Argosy, deep in the bosom of the ocean that was life to them.



The storm passed and the ocean glittered. The Argosy rested on the surface, arms coiling lazily through the water, sails drawn, shell gently washed by the waves. Tagane and her crew stepped out on the deck, their passion satisfied. For the time being... The sky above them was spangled in stars, the ocean around them burning.

After the storm, life returned from the deep haven to the surface: immeasurable masses of microscopic spike-boxes, tiny creatures protected by filigree shells armed with spikes and endowed with light organs. Following them, torchworms and bristleworms and lanceheads. Serpent-gulpers, gazers and hatchet-fish and other deep-sea fishes that rise to the surface at night. And voracious jacks and 'cudas and spikefish and who-knows-what-else to look for food in the ocean of lights, torches, lanterns tearing the darkness apart with bright colors. Greens, blues, yellows, reds, whites: glowing and merging and flowing from one into another as the plankton stirred. Schools gathering and scattering and gathering back as life teemed around the Argosy.

Tagane studied that ocean nebula surrounding them: she always felt that the colors were at their brightest right after the storms. In the distance, she spotted dark shapes speeding through the green, something large and unfamiliar, something they didn't catch yet. Maybe better we didn't, Tagane thought. Some fifty black blimps rose two hundred feet above the surface, marbled patterns burning orange, reminding her of glowing magma lumps that were cooling.

Suddenly, the Argosy started with a jerk. Tagane felt her unrest a moment before the Argosy rose her strong arms high above the surface and spread all four sails to catch what little wind was blowing. Mina jumped to her feet, Roberta and Conrad following. "You think...?" Slaven asked.

“Possibly,” Tagane nodded. She felt new unrest stirring in them all. And in the Argosy, too. “And about time.” Burdened, the Argosy was quite sluggish and disinclined to obey their commands, to sail where they want, to follow the fish and algae and torchworms they make a living of.

The Argosy sailed, driven by urge. Slowly, sluggishly, but she sailed, leaving behind a bright wake. As if heeding the Argosy’s silent pleas, the wind grew somewhat stronger. They left the blimps behind, sailing across the flaming ocean, followed by a school of jacks keeping safe distance from the arms. Tagane leaned against the rail; wind chilled her face, scattered her hair. She cast a glance at Slaven, Roberta, Mina and Conrad: the tension among them grew anew. It rose in Tagane, too. Expectation, nervousness, unease. She looked at her sailors once again, the comrades she shared the Argosy with. Because of them, she didn’t live on the Islands, in the safety of the firm soil beneath her feet. Because of them, she was on the ocean, carried by winds and currents and whims of the Argosy. Before the storms, they’d escape into the deep. Before the monsters, they were protected by the arms of a benevolent monster. Because of them, Tagane realized, I sail. And with them, she felt alive.

You don’t have to live, but you have to sail. An old saying, ancient, dating from the Earth. Tagane heard it a long time ago. But there was no difference on the Argosy, living and sailing were one and the same. Tagane realized that she couldn’t imagine a life without sailing anymore. And in some way - against any logic, considering that they were just passengers lulled in the mercy of infinite ocean that didn’t really care for its children - it filled her with joy and peace.

“Tagane, look! Over there,” Conrad’s cry started her. She rose her gaze and, following his finger, saw a distant shell and arms and all four sails. Another argosy.

Before she had time to say anything, Tagane felt the chambers filling with water, quickly, faster than usually. “Inside!” she ordered and they all rushed into the shell, into their bubble of air, while the Argosy was diving, led by the instinct they had no control of.



“He’s huge,” Mina whispered, her nose to the viewport. Tagane didn’t miss the tremor running through her fragile-looking body. She felt it herself. They all felt it, it was the tremor of the Argosy. Tension. Expectation. Sweet.

“He’s no bigger than our Argosy,” Slaven said.

But he’s not much smaller, Tagane decided. The male rested some fifty fathoms deep, arms gathered, sails drawn in. His shell was a dark egg-shaped form in the glimmering aquarelle of colors. He waited for their Argosy to approach him.

“You see anybody?” Conrad asked. Tagane looked at the ports through which milky green spilled around the male. And yes, she saw a man. She waved to him. He waved back. And then another head appeared next to him, a woman’s head.

"We have guests!" Tagane shouted. They all cheered up, it was time for some change. They all squeezed against the port, next to Tagane, to see who was that coming to them. "I can't see," Roberta complained. The Argosy was approaching the male, the other argosy.

"They're not familiar," Slaven said. He waved to the three heads now observing them from the male. "Could be somebody from the north. The Northern current is strong these months."

And then, through the burning ocean, the Argosy extended an arm and touched the male. She was feeling him across his shell and gliding down his arms. She circled around his huge eye and caressed his shield. Tagane knew the female is always the first to extend the arm. The female is always the first to invite to dance. Such is the tradition and custom of the argosies.

It wasn't necessary to invite the male for long. Tagane's heart leapt when he spread his arms and approached the Argosy. She spread her arms, too, impatient. The male paused a bit, and then he came quite close. His siphon connected to the Argosy's. Whoever was in the male, Tagane knew, will cross to their Argosy through the siphons. The crew of the male always crosses to the female. They all - Tagane, Slaven, Roberta, Mina and Conrad - stared tensely at the meaty membrane on the entrance to the chamber.

The membrane opened and a mid-life blonde man accompanied by two younger women entered their home. There were only three of them in the argosy and it calmed Tagane a bit. She didn't really like when seven or eight men entered the chamber, with perhaps a woman or two. And crews don't choose. The argosies do.

They're nervous, too, Tagane realized. They felt the urge of their argosy, just like Tagane felt the urge of hers. And they don't know us, the way we don't know them. Tagane smiled. A smile always breaks the ice. The women responded with visible fluttering of their hearts. The man smiled, too. "I'm Sven," he said. The visiting captain is always the first to introduce her- or himself. "Tilda and Marina."

Tagane introduced herself, and then her sailors. "Come in", she invited the guests to her Argosy with opened arms. She studied them as the membrane closed behind them, water-tight, and she finally decided she liked them.

"You must be from the north," Slaven came to them.

"Yes, the Northern current is strong this year," Sven nodded. His gaze paused on Roberta and Mina. He liked Tagane and her sailors, too, they may have been the first new faces he saw in the past few months. All the same, Tilda and Marina were still holding back somewhat.

Then the Argosy shook. They all knew what was happening: they were feeling it within them, beating in their hearts, drumming in their temples. The female and the male were clinging to each other, their arms entwining, two argosies joined to mate in lively jerks.

"Our Argosy is quite impatient," Tilda said as if apologizing, her mouth dry.

"Yes," Tagane muttered as she took Sven for his hand and led him to the mattress. The captains begin. Such is the tradition and custom of the sailors. "And our Argosy barely listens anymore." The Argosy shook again, this time stronger. Her urge hit Tagane like lightning, splitting her and torching her to cinders like an old tree. Fingers shaking, she caressed Sven's unshaved cheek and tousled his hair and drew him to herself, just like the two argosies were holding each other with their powerful arms.

They kissed, briefly at first, uncertain, and then they looked at each other - eyes containing nothing else but urge - and kissed once more and never stopped kissing again, driven by the lust of their argosies. They undressed hastily and Sven gently pushed Tagane into dry algae. Tagane opened her legs before him, ready for him, wet, wanting him, and accepted him - swollen and hard - into her, taking him the way he was taking her, giving herself the way he was giving himself, with joy, welcoming him, just like her argosy was welcoming his. In the mist of their passion, two fucking captains rocked in sweaty, shaky, burning sea of bodies of their sailors.

It all came to Tagane in flashes of consciousness, in bursts of color spilling through the ocean around them. Emerald. Conrad, with Tilda riding him, impaled on his cock, whipping the air with her unbridled auburn hair, and Mina - sweet Mina, always helpful - fondling and kissing them both. Orange. Marina in an orgasmic spasm, her legs tightly clenched around Slaven. Cerulean. Slaven collapsing after a loud orgasm, spent, his forehead sweaty, with Roberta laying next to Marina and Marina accepting her with a smile and the two of them kissing and embracing and caressing; and Roberta going down and licking Marina's puffed cunt, curly blonde hair tickling her nose as she enjoyed Slaven's seed trickling between her pussy lips. Green. Sven moaning and bellowing in some Northern language Tagane didn't understand and stiffening and filling her with his seed, and she enjoying it with him and joining him after several moments of rest as he was fondling Mina and lifting her bottom and entering her. Fiery red. Slaven fucking Tilda wildly, pounding his cock into her. Yellow. Conrad joining Marina and Roberta, and Tagane with them, too, taking his cock and bringing him before Marina and leading him in; and he entering her, and the two of them screwing while Roberta and Tagane kissed them and fondled them and licked the sweat from their salty skin, before devoting themselves to each other. Purple. Sven and Mina, he came after several minutes of fierce stabbing, but he still wanted more and his strong arms turned Mina on her belly; and he kissed and petted her firm ass before mounting her from behind. White. Slaven and Tilda pressing next to them, eight bodies were hot sweaty maelstrom of kissing and licking, caressing, rubbing and teasing, fucking and shagging. A continuous stream of orgasms merged into a big one, that words cannot describe. Breath lost, consciousness fading as the two crews and two argosies created a new life in the midst of fireworks of countless beings they shared the ocean with.



The fireworks fizzled, night turned into dawn. Tagane extricated herself from the bundle of bodies strewn on algae. Tenderly, so that she doesn't awake her, she removed Marina's hand from her breasts and a lock of her blonde hair from her neck, and stood up, shaky, barely standing. She was hungry. It can wait, she decided and came to the port. The argosies still had their arms entwined. Thousands of transparent balls floated in the sea, as big as Tagane's clenched fist. Eggs. Fertilized eggs, fertilized in a night of instinct and passion and sweetness, animal and human, in the ocean that nurtured them, that was home: the ocean that was life.

Tagane didn't know how long she stared through the viewport. Suddenly, she felt warm breath on her back. The unshaved cheek leaned against her face. She lifted her hand and fondled Sven's hair. Sven dropped his hand on her belly, caressing it gently, caringly. The urge was satisfied, it was all done according to the tradition and custom of the argosies and sailors. "What are you thinking of?" Sven whispered into her ear, and then he kissed her neck.

The bodies on the mattress stirred, Mina murmured something in her sleep. Slaven hugged her to him and she calmed again. Conrad nested among Roberta, Tilda and Marina, all four sleeping tight and Tagane knew they won't wake for a long time. With her hand, she covered Sven's on her belly. Perhaps a new life was started in her last night, who knows? If lucky, they may all be left with children.

Tagane looked through the port at new little argosies, just conceived, sinking into the deep where they will hatch and grow and mature and - if lucky to escape plenty of hungry jaws filled with sharp teeth - return one day to the surface, big and mighty. The Argosies.

And Argosies always need captains and sailors.





**Karin Bogdanić: “Mora”**  
<http://raenyras.deviantart.com>



**Marko Horvatin: “Black Queen concept sheet”**  
<http://markothesketchguy.deviantart.com>



# THROUGH THE GLASS

Dafne Flego

*This story won the first prize in the University of Rijeka's Kultivator project short story contest.*

The persistent redness broke her sleep, but she chose not to open her eyes yet. Warmth tickled her skin, not unpleasantly. Her resting place was cold, and the warmth was welcomed. She peeked through her eyelashes, only to shut her eyes immediately on a reflex. The light flooded in, hurting her unadjusted pupils. Blinking the pain away, she risked another look.

The sun penetrated the glass barrier and generously spilled its rays over her frozen body. Above the glass, gauzy wisps of clouds interrupted the clear-blue monotony. Her obtuse stare remained locked on the sky. The world felt hazy and slow.

The sun's gaze burnt her even when she closed her eye-lids, so she sought refuge in the sight offered on her left. A turf of grass grew on the other side of the glass surface, and its dewy morning green soothed her strained nerves. A brown beetle was making its way towards her and was stopped by the panel of her see-through coffin. She watched his baffled flounder. A pair of birds – distant blue dots – flew through the visible portion of the sky.

There was nothing to see but the blue field, the grass, and the dark outline of a forest up ahead. The time hadn't arrived yet.

She closed her eyes, allowing the heaviness of sleep to settle upon her eye-lids once again. Consciousness retreated.



The next sensible blink of mind revealed to her that she wasn't bathing in the sun anymore.

She was drowning in it.

The blinding heat scorched her skin, invading her secluded square of glass. The treacherous material played the part of a magnifier which focused the sun's full blow on her, turning her case into an oven.

A few salty drops slid down her temples. The merciless yellow disk hit her eyes, and she raised her arm, with some difficulty, to shield them.

'Noon time,' the thought was grouchy.

The sun was at its meanest at noon time. It drained energy from everything it could lay its claws upon, and revealed all faults that could remain hidden when there were shadows. A peep through her fingers affirmed, sure enough, a set of greasy fingerprints that sullied the once-clean surface of her coffin's frail lid.

She glanced away from the unwelcome sight, and noticed the grass turf she had last seen in its prime. The colour was yellowish and the blades shriveled.

The cracked earth thirsted behind her glass panel, and she was glad that thirst and hunger couldn't reach her. It seemed that everything was thought out. 'Well, almost everything.' The place was unbelievably uncomfortable, and she wished to move, if only a little. The first attempt almost proved the task to be unfeasible. Her weakened, limp muscles couldn't fully cooperate, and it took a great effort to force them to comply. She clumsily turned on her side – earning a bruised knee in the process – and managed to find an acceptable position.

Laying her head down on the sweaty, sticky lining, she covered her face and tried to go back to sleep.

'I wish he'd come quickly... I'm not keen on waiting here any longer than I have to...'

Slowly, the all-pervading redness lost its edge, and the darkness claimed her once more.



The world was pleasant and cool the next time she woke up. No sun up in the sky.

'I'll take that', she yawned.

It was dusk, and peace was coming down on the glade, descending from the higher parts of the hill. The early stars twinkled behind thin clouds, chaperoned by the crescent moon. There was still plenty of light – blue and translucent – but the dark was gathering in the breezy forest and would soon emerge from the tree-tops.

She didn't feel as sleepy as usual. She could think.

The first thought that came to her was the last one she went to sleep with. He.

'How much time has passed?'

She silently did the calculating. The turf of grass was green and the nature fresh and young-looking when she had first arose from her dreamless sleep. Spring? It was eaten up by the sun the second time. Summer.

She looked to the left, but the turf was rendered colourless by the approaching night.

The leaden feeling of discomfort subtly nestled in her bosom. An inkling of doubt crept in, pressing her heart.

'He should've come already. What is taking him so long? What could've happened?'

Light jolts of panic tingled on her skin and quickened her pulse.

She wrestled the thoughts, trying to bring the nervous, fear-aroused images and scenarios under control.

The soothing half-dark was not so soothing anymore. The cold of the night somehow managed to break through the magical barrier of the glass, or did it just seem so?

'He'll be here. Definitely, he'll be here. That's how it goes. He'll come. I'll just wait, and

maybe, the next time I open my eyes, he'll be standing above me.' She nodded to herself and winced at the word 'maybe'. There shouldn't be a 'maybe'.

He'll come.



The sky was milky and cloudless, except for a few patches of smoky grey up above the forest, but she barely noticed it. Something else drew her attention.

It wasn't a man, but a wilted, dried-up wreath of wild flowers and dark red autumn leaves. The wind had scattered some of the petals and they wrinkled and lay across the glass surface of her resting place. The leaves seemed almost black against the white sky. A second passed before she remembered who could have adorned her coffin with such a nice and simple ornament.

'They came...' To visit her. The thought moistened her eyes.

With the thought came memories, of their warm calloused hands, bushy eye-brows and kind eyes. The kindness they offered to a stranger. The warmth with which they had given her shelter at the time when she was most entitled to say that she was alone in the world.

Even now, when the rest of the land seemed to have forgotten her, they returned to honour her memory, although they had spent together only the briefest amount of time.

'If only I'd been awake...'

What then? How would they react?

An unexpected cynical splash soaked her thoughts. What would they have done if her eyes had suddenly fluttered open and her croaky, unused voice called out to them? Shriek. Stare in bewilderment. And then?

According to the rules of the game, she ought to have been asleep the whole time – and she was, with short intervals. What would they have done if they had caught her in one of those intervals? Would they abide by the rules? That meant leaving her to lie in the coffin, drawing back with apologetic eyes. Or would they break them?

The rules said only he could save her.

'But I don't see him galloping in on his white horse!' she thought bitterly.

The anger swell in her chest and fell, swell and fell with her hard, heavy breathing, until it slowly subsided.

The tears leaked through her firmly shut eyes and streamed downwards. These tears had nothing to do with a touched heart.

'He'll come, he'll come, he'll come, he'll come...' The sniffing mantra wore her down into sleep.





She couldn't see anything. The darkness which enveloped her didn't have the usual quality of dark. It didn't feel like night. It was more consistent, and less equally spread.

The moment of panic seized her, and passed.

She thought she could guess what was happening.

'Snow. It's winter... I'm covered in a snow blanket.'

That's it, of course. He couldn't find her because snow buried the coffin. Well, nothing she could do about it.

Her teeth nervously bit into her lip while she strove to trick herself into believing that he'll come with the spring. She willed the sleep to come, but it took some time until it fulfilled her wish.



She couldn't tell what the sky was like because she didn't see it, although she stared straight into the vastness. She stared in silence, of her mouth and her mind.

The snow had melted.



One eye creaked open. The other followed, and the pair looked up.

The sky was blue, brilliantly blue, and she didn't need to turn around to see that the turf was green again, and the nature fresh and young-looking. She had no admiration for its beauty.

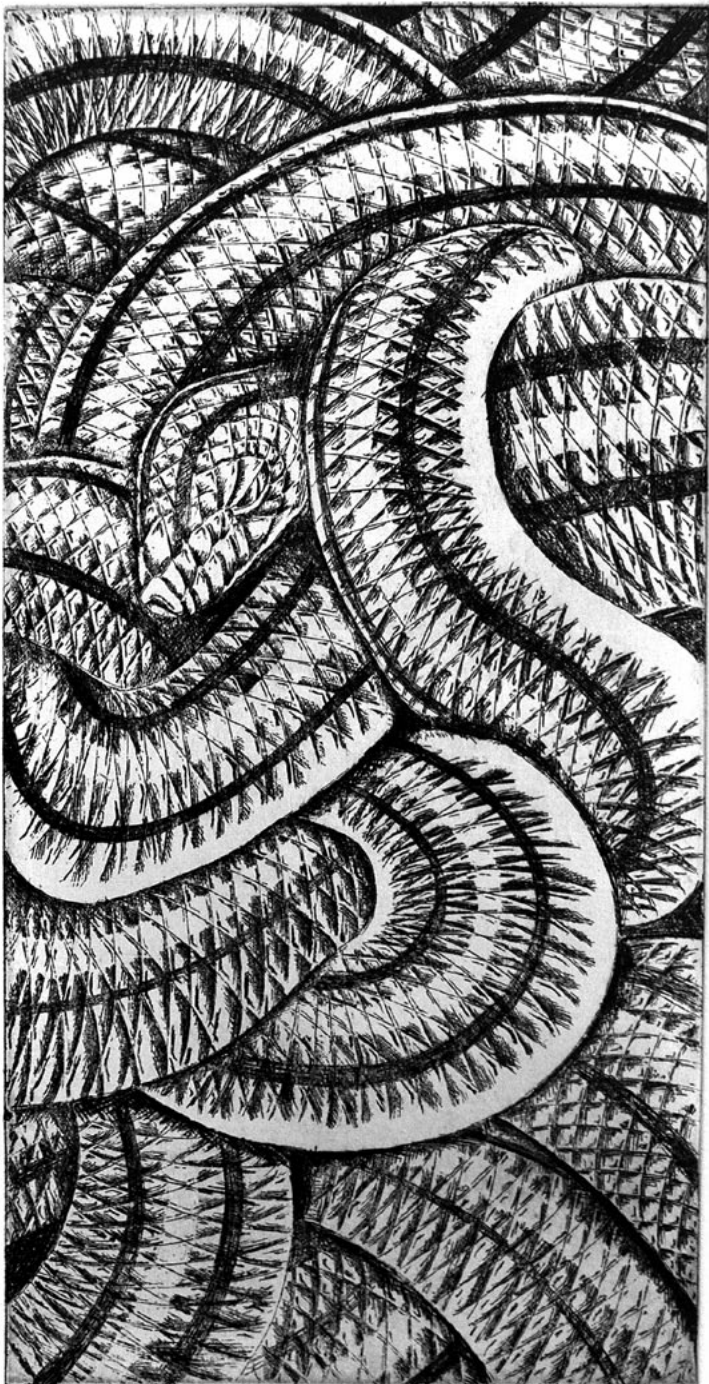
She'll have to do it by herself. Push the lid open. It had come to that.

She glanced at the hinges on the right.

But next time. She was too tired now.

Snow White closed her eyes.





Kristina Pongrac '09

**Kristina Pongrac: "Friendship"**

<http://kristinapongrac.webdominus.com>

# ANAIS

Dario Ban

*This story entered the University of Rijeka's Kultivator project short story contest and has received honorable mention.*

Anais was extremely rusty; at least that's what his doctor told him a week ago. He didn't feel rusty at all, he felt like rain. Like rain pouring down on a wrecked street in the middle of nowhere, filled with white-coated people carrying a ridiculous amount of tables, and tiny daffodils scattered on zebra crossings. He had a hard time trying to figure out what this feeling meant, which is why he started concentrating on the rustiness. After approximately two hours of thinking completely unrelated ideas, he realized that the doctor must have been a dirty paedophile fraud. He didn't sleep well that night.

The following morning he completed his shopping, chatted with his friends, showered and then had absolutely nothing to do for the next twenty-three hours and a half. He tried to remember what his life was like when he was young, but he couldn't and that worried him. He had trouble remembering anything that happened in the last two months, or was it years? His whole life had become an insufferable routine filled with random events that filled his memory like a moth fills a lit lantern. Deep inside himself, he felt that was a good thing.

Anais awoke to the sound of his head hitting one of the gray-green slate tiles that covered the floor of his living room. His body started twitching uncontrollably, making unpleasant whirring sounds in the process. There was nothing else to do but let the darkness cover his eyes and hope to wake up another day.



The engineer examined the malfunctioning android in front of him. He had to fiddle with the circuit board in order to stop the twitching, but it was still seriously damaged. The android was looking at him expectantly, monitoring his every move with its eerie lazy eye. The engineer found its appearance to be very odd; all the other androids he fixed, or tried to fix, were tall and handsome, while this one was short, chubby and almost bald. The sharp and symmetrical features of its face were instantly ruined by the lazy eye, which was probably a programming mistake, the engineer thought.

"Android Anais, as I understand you were told of your rustiness?" The engineer asked.

"Yes, I was, doc. But my name isn't Android." The android mumbled humbly.

"All right, Anais, you see, you're seriously damaged as a result of not attending your annual examinations, and, long story short, I'm going to have to repair several of your microchips."

"Microchips? I thought it was cancer, or Alzheimer's.."

"You're unable to have conventional human diseases, you're just a machine."

"A machine? I don't remember..." Its eyes widened as if it realized for the first time where he was and how he got there, the engineer was relieved that at least some of the chips were working properly.

"Don't worry, it will all come back as soon as I'm done with you," he fiddled with his papers, found the one he was searching for, and continued. "Lucky for you, your soul human had a good android policy" he said, slightly irritated.

"Soul human? I don't understand.." The android lowered its head in desperation.

"Yeah, the real human Anais who died ten years ago and requested an android in his likeness before his untimely demise." The engineer was getting impatient; he started typing something on his pad.

"But I don't remember anything, are you sure that's..." It suddenly stopped talking as the engineer disabled some of its functions.

"I'm sorry, I don't have time for all your questions, this will be over really soon." The engineer took his surgical saw and walked towards the android. Anais was scared.



Anais relived his whole life. From his first human memory, when he peed on his father's shoe and got beaten like an animal even if he was only six, to his last android one, when he hit his head in his living room. Being hit in the head seemed to be the leitmotif of his life, but that didn't worry him as much as the fact that he, or at least his android form, tried to sabotage his own memory chip. And now, he was thinking of doing it again.

It all started in the most classical way: boy meets girl, boy falls in love, boy is happy. But his happiness didn't last long, the luck that followed him his whole life wanted the girl to be an astronaut, it wanted her to go to space and study a bunch of planets and stars, it wanted him to wait for her return. And he waited, even though she explained that she wouldn't be back for at least twenty years. He waited after being crushed in his sleep by his ceiling that failed to withstand a minor earthquake. He waited even after becoming an android, full of chips and circuits, confined to his home because of a disdainful society. Twenty years came and went; she sent an e-mail explaining that it was going to take a while longer to finish her research. But her research never finished because one day during the thirtieth year of waiting her shuttle exploded into a billion pieces. That was the day Anais truly died.

That day he also learned that the chip emulating his emotions worked way too perfectly. Unfortunately for him, the will to commit suicide was disabled when he was being programmed. Fortunately for him, there were drugs in the black market that were designed specifically for androids with love issues. He bought a strange blue liquid and placed a few drops in his right eye. The liquid damaged his eye and burned his memory chip, the pain was unbearable.



Anais woke up.

“Are you all right?” The engineer asked expectantly.

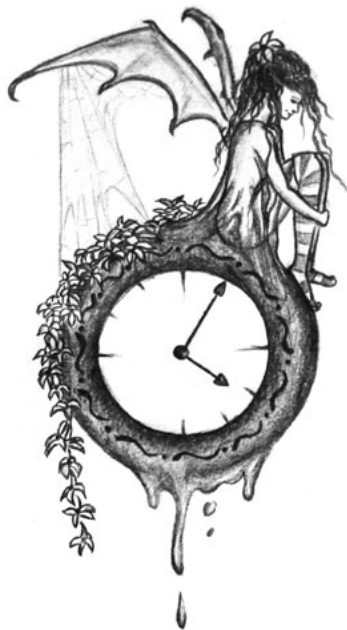
“N-no, not at all.” Anais was on the verge of tears.

“Do you remember everything?”

“Yes, I think I do.”

“Good, we’re done here, you can go home now, goodbye!” The engineer shooved him and went back to his work. Anais decided to follow on his advice and proceeded home, walking absent-mindedly and talking to himself the whole way.

He found the bottle of blue liquid inside his bathroom cabinet, it was half-empty. He held it in his hands, thinking about his wasted life and after-life, hoping that in an alternate universe a lucky version of him was living happily with her and a couple of children. This time, he decided to drink the liquid. As soon as he swallowed, Anais went blind and fell down on his head breaking another one of his tiles. The memory chip was completely fried in the android’s head. Judging by the smile on its face, it was happy.



**Ivona Matejčić: “Time” & “Her Heart”**

<http://luchediluna.deviantart.com>



## BECOMING A PEGASAR

Ivana Delač

*Through clouds of time I fly to days past,  
all limitations remain behind.  
The future and past all in my hand,  
for the Pegasus tells, the key is in my mind.  
A Being of poetry, of Light,  
of all levels of Inspiration,  
I will be your companion  
and with you discover new lands.*

It's not easy to be a freak. You go through life motivated by a burning desire to carve your own path, to be who you want to be, as that's the only thing that makes you happy. When you realize that people avoid you or mock you in their ignorance and intolerance, all you want is to be left alone, yet that is exactly what they won't do. It's hard to deal with it even when you're an adult with a formed identity. It's even worse when you're seventeen and living in a close-minded community where at least half of the ten thousand inhabitants bully and ridicule you.

"I do not care about the bigoted fools," Kristina repeated yet again as she pulled her school bag from the ditch, where it was thrown by her so-called classmates. She even tried to think about the Star Trek episode she secretly watched before school, because of her snitch brother, but this time nothing worked. The dirty bag was one thing, but she despaired at the sight of the wet and muddy books, both schoolbooks and those she read during classes. "My parents are going to kill me," she thought, cleaning the mud from the pencilcase.

She felt something hard beneath her fingers and pulled a stone from the dirt. Furious at the entire world, she pulled back her arm to throw it, but for some unknown reason, she just couldn't. She cleaned it instead and took a closer look.

The stone was perfectly round, about three centimeters in diameter, grey, with white and wavy markings weaving a circle with a hole in the middle. She stared, certain that the markings were too perfect to be natural. Her vivid imagination immediately raced to aliens who left an artefact of their existence for her to find. When she felt a warmth emanating from the stone, she excitedly raised her head towards the sky, almost sure that a ship would show up to lead her to a better future.

Her neck was already becoming stiff, but nothing happened. There were no lights or ships like the ones from Star Trek in sight. She shrugged in disappointment. "It's neither the first nor the last time I got the feels," she thought, flipping the stone. She reached the conclusion that the stone would be a nice pendant and pulled out a thin string from her



bag which was meant to become a piece of jewelry for a while. She got the string through the hole in the stone and happily hung it around her neck, feeling its warmth piercing even through her jacket. Suddenly both she and the stone flashed and she became dizzy. Then she was gone, falling somewhere far and deep...

Her first conscious feeling was of the grass she lay in, tickling her face. Next came sounds – vague rumbling and buzzing which made her ears hurt slightly. She forced her eyes open.

Before her was a meadow, turning into a forest in the distance. The scent of flowers was strong, more exotic than anything she felt before and the grass beneath her fingers was as soft as it had sprouted only moments before. She touched a flower and observed it – bright purple and big as the palm of her hand, the petals silky and shining like liquid silver. She still felt fuzzy as she tried to grasp what had happened and where she was. She slowly stood up and looked around.

There were bright flowers everywhere, grass of a gentle green, trees seemingly layered with a soft plastic. The indescribable and powerful scents made her feel drugged. In the distance, beyond the forest, she saw dozens of domes, flashing like they were caught in a storm, even though the sky was completely clear.

“Do no move!” a voice thundered behind her and Kristina froze in terror. She completely forgot she had no clue where she was, taken by the idyllic scenery.

“Who are you?”

“Kristina,” she said hesitantly.

“Turn around,” the voice ordered and she obeyed.

The owner of the voice was a tall and thin man, around forty years old and in his hand was something that looked like a silver gun with two flat barrels. He could almost pass as her father if it weren't for his dark blue skin. At his side stood a younger, but equally tall and equally blue man. His weapon also looked like a gun and was pointed at her. Both men stared at her, as if they were scanning her from head to toe.

“What are you doing here, lightskin?” the older man demanded.

“I... really don't know.”

“Might she be Narcissa's spy?” the younger one asked. “Her skin is white.”

“Not white. It is more... orange,” the older man corrected him, still carefully observing her. “What did you say your name was? Kraestina?”

“Yes, Kristina,” she said, holding back the urge to laugh at the way he pronounced her name. Laughing would hardly be appropriate in her position.

“How did you get here?”

“I honestly don't know. I found a stone, there was a flash and I woke up here...”

“Hold it,” he interrupted her, suddenly tense. “A stone?”



“Yes.”

“Show it to us.”

She pulled out the stone and turned it towards them. They looked at each other and then lowered their weapons with a sigh of relief.

“She is a Pegasar,” the younger one said.

“A Pegasar?” she wondered.

“A novice, even.”

“Do you know anything about the Pegasars?” asked the older one. “About Mandaloria? Queen Narcissa? The War of the Blues and Whites?”

Kristina shrugged in confusion and the older man sighed.

“Come with us, we will explain,” he said, pointing to the younger one. “This is my son Sardyr. My name is Zehnon. And all around you...” he spread his spears, “is Mandaloria. We were on our way to Londien, the city you can see in the distance.”

“Those domes with all the flashing lights?”

“Yes. We hope the attack will end by the time we reach the city. The source of the buzzing you hear are the Queen’s Fighters.”

“Fighters?” she asked, immediately imagining the Sci-Fi fighters she saw on TV and in her imagination. “I must be dreaming,” she thought, “there can’t be any other explanation for this.”

She went with the blue-skinned men towards the forest. Sardyr was silent and quite suspicious, she felt, but Zehnon was willing to answer all of her numerous questions.

Mandaloria was huge and Zehnon had never seen most of it. He owned a farm of mukols (she didn’t ask) which was recently destroyed by Queen Narcissa’s Fighters as punishment for his protest against unreasonably high taxes. Because of that, he and his son now traveled to Londien where they could join the Blues army.

Kristina didn’t quite grasp what the was between the Blues and Whites was about. As far as she understood, they were two races of Mandaloria which differed by the colour of their skin. A Blue and a White switched on the Mandalorian throne every one hundred years and they were each chosen within their races by a complicated election process. That is how racial equality was upheld. According to Zehnon’s tale, the was began when the White Queen Narcissa refused to stand down after her term ended. Her Fighters now waged was on all who dared oppose her.

Zehnon could not answer whether there were no a Blue and White country. In fact, he didn’t even know what a country was. The Blues did not have a leader and the territory was not split, even though there were predominantly Blue and predominantly White towns and villages. Kristina gave up on asking any further political questions after concluding it was very confusing.



"What about these Pegasars?" she asked. "What are they?"

"I do not know much," he said, scratching his ear. "They wage war on the Queen. However, they are neither Blues nor Whites. They are simply... different, like yourself."

"Because of their skin?"

"Not only because of that. Each Pegasus chooses its Pegasar, and when that one is gone, it chooses another. Everyone knows the circle on your amulet is the mark of the Pegasars and that they suddenly appear, as if they were from another world. He who harms a Pegasar, draws the wrath of all others."

"How do I find them?"

"I cannot say. As I said, I do not know much about them. In fact," he said awed, turning his gaze to the ground, "this is the first time I have seen one."

Kristina stopped to say she was no Pegasar, merely a mal-adjusted teenager, but the stone at her chest suddenly got so hot it seared her skin. At the same moment, something above them neighed like a horse, but the echo was almost metallic. They stopped and the two men dropped to their knees.

"What's wrong?" she asked.

Zehnon pointed a finger behind her instead of answering. She spun around and nearly burst out laughing. Several meters away stood a white winged horse.

"Of course," she thought, "Pegasus, the winged horse from Greek mythology. What else was I supposed to expect?"

The animal stared at her intensely. Its back had something like a saddle with several dangling objects. Suddenly a poem came to Kristina's mind, one she had never heard before. Like hypnotized by the Pegasus' eyes, she approached.

"Through clouds of time I fly to days past," she began to chant, not knowing why. The words simply rolled out on their own. "All limitations remain behind."

The Pegasus whinnied and slightly flapped its wings. The stone at Kristina's chest burned.

"The future and past, all in my hand, for the Pegasus tells, the key is in my mind."

She was close enough to touch the creature and caressed the short and thick fur on its neck. It turned its head and continued to observe her.

"A Being of poetry, of Light, of all levels of Inspiration," she continued in trance, "I will be your companion and with you discover new lands."

After speaking the last words, there was a flash between her palm and the Pegasus' neck. The stone suddenly stopped to burn her and the Pegasus' eyes turned human.

"Welcome, my companion in war and in peace," spoke the creature fluently, in a voice like a long forgotten melody. "Henceforth you shall be known as Erreya, for I am Erithon and we are bound by destiny."



She turned around and cast a final look at the two Blues still kneeling in awe. Then, with one agile leap, she mounted the Pegasus.

“Whoa! Would you look at that? I’ve never even rode before!”

The Pegasars require only instinct,” replied Erithon, soaring into the sky so smoothly she barely felt it. “However, I admit that the gadgets you see here can prove useful.”

She examined the objects dangling from the saddle. There was a gun like the one Zehnon and Sardyr had, a leather pouch with small orbs, a ten centimeter long tube and several other items whose purpose she couldn’t begin to guess.

“Perhaps I should have said goodbye to them,” she said, shocked that she didn’t feel dizzy or afraid if heights, even though they went up very fast. The view was stunning – she could see mountains far in the west and everything seemed tiny, even the domes they were flying towards, where the flashes continued.

“You will meet them again if that is what is meant to be.”

“I know,” she replied. She could not explain it, but she knew it, along with many other things, as if they lay dormant in her mind, but were now finally within her reach. She knew she now wielded powers unique to Pegasars, but what they were, she could not be sure.

“We will learn together,” said Erithon, correctly guessing her thoughts. She nodded and patted his neck.

The world before Mandaloria – her school, the kids who made fun of her, her parents who found her weird and wanted to change her – it felt like a distant dream she could barely remember. She was meant for great deeds in Mandaloria, for eternal flight on the back of her Pegasus. She started to recognize her stone as a powerful amulet whose warmth promised things of which she never dared dream.

“Where are we going?” she asked, already sensing the answer.

“To Londien.”

“Because of the attack?”

“Indeed.”

“But... I don’t...”

“You will know all you need when it is time,” he interrupted. “Believe.”

Soon they flew over the entire forest, where she saw many people advancing toward Londien. Whenever they saw her, they would cheer and wave. Her heart raced with pride – she was finally needed. She was different, but this difference was accepted, even welcomed with joy and hope instead of ridicule.

As they neared Londien, she counted nine domes of various sizes stacked together like soap bubbles. She took the tube and looked through it. Like using the most powerful binoculars, she could clearly see the Fighters attacking the edges of the domes. It came as



no surprise that they did not appear the way she had imagined them. Queen Narcissa's Fighters were Whites, clad in something which looked like skin-tight tinfoil armor and flew on robotic, metal wings. They were agile and used deadly weapons which fired salvos of flashes. They attacked like ants, disorganized, but relentlessly. She noticed a damaged and cracked part of one of the domes and immediately decided it was the place she needed to go. As she put away the tube, the Fighters became dots in the distance and she wondered where this courage was coming from and what happened to the freak she used to be. She directed Erithon towards the crack in the dome.

As soon as they came close, two Fighters broke off from the dome and attacked. Kristina drew her gun from its holster with one hand and took several of the orbs in the other. She knew what to do.

Erithon skillfully dodged the first salvo of flashes and then she fired. The green beam from her weapon struck the first one and as he went crashing down, Kristina let out a cry of joy. She missed the second one three times before finally landing a hit, but she was also nearly hurt when his flash flew by her head.

"Others are coming," said Erithon as they came closer to the dome. She turned and saw them – several Pegasars flying in from the west. Ecstatic about the backup, about meeting other Pegasars and learning more about Mandaloria and her role in it, she directed Erithon towards a group of five Fighters. The rest of the battle passed in an adrenaline haze. She remembered avoiding certain death a few times thanks to Erithon's dodging and she shot with surprising precision both with the gun and with the orbs which turned out to be miniature guided missiles. She later estimated to have brought down at least twenty Fighters all by herself. The sky above the town cleared fast, as the other Pegasars, people with the same skin color as herself, were even more accurate.

People came pouring through the great doors of the dome, waving and cheering at Kristina and the others who were descending towards them. Her heart beat strong and fast, full of pride and pure, unyielding happiness.

"I will be your companion and with you discover new lands," she whispered.

She had found her place in the world.





**Nela Dunato: "Ascent"**  
<http://inobsкуро.com>

# G.R.R. MARTIN – HISTORICAL SOURCES USED AS INSPIRATION FOR “A SONG OF ICE AND FIRE”

Hrvoje Beljan

The aim of this article is to explain the connections between “our” history and that of the fictitious land of Westeros. In other words I wish to elucidate which personages and events inspired George R.R. Martin’s writing.

I should mention that this article is primarily aimed towards readers who are already acquainted with the world of A Song of Ice and Fire. I will explain in detail the War of Roses and the Albeginsian Crusade, both of which have been cited by Martin himself as historical basis for the series, as well as other events from medieval history that have a parallel in the world of Westeros.

## GEOGRAPHY

As many have noted, Westeros shares some similarities in shape with Great Britain, but rotated on its axis by 180 degrees. Contemporary fantasy writers probably don’t like to waste time on their world’s geography, for example Lois McMaster Bujold – for her Chalion series – simply took the Iberian peninsula and rotated it. However, Westeros’ surface is many times that of Great Britain. Stark lands would be Scotland, although larger in size, Dorne would be Cornwall and Storm’s End Wales. The eastern continent, as yet unnamed, reminds one of Eurasia while the southern continent of Sothoryos is described as filled with jungles and plague – being for the most part unexplored it

draws comparisons to Africa.

The lost and advanced city of Valryia recalls Atlantis, while the island of Ibben – with its whaling and geographical location – can be compared to Iceland. Among the Free Cities Braavos is of note, whose Titan is similar to the Colossus of Rhodes, which was one of the Seven wonders of the world. It was located at the entrance to the port of Rhodes and any ship that wanted in or out of the port had to cross between the legs of this 30-meter bronze and iron statue. The Colossus stood for only 54 years – in 226 BCE it was destroyed in an earthquake. Even in ruins, it was still an impressive sight. Legend states that it remained like that for 800 years, until the Arabs sold it. Oldtown, the center of learning, with its massive lighthouse could be seen as a version of Alexandria with its library and lighthouse that were, just like the Colossus brought down in an earthquake, after illuminating the coast of Alexandria’s port for over 1500 years. Martin’s great Wall is an oversized Hadrian’s Wall. It was built in the 2nd century AD to protect the Roman Britain from the “savage” Picts that lived in today’s Scotland.

## WARS AND BATTLES

As I’ve stated before, two main historical events that inspired the wars and battles in the novels were the War of Roses and the



### Albigensian Crusade.

The War of Roses is a series of civil wars in England, fought on and off from 1455 to 1487 between the houses of Lancaster and York. The war got its name from the white and red roses on the opposing houses' heraldry. The house of Lancaster had the red rose, the house of York white. War was fought by the landed nobles and their vassals, with family connections, promises of feudal titles and lands playing a significant part. Sound familiar? After the fall of king Richard II, brought on by the king's cousin Henry Bolingbrooke, the duke of Lancaster and soon to be king Henry the Fourth, the Lancaster rule was somewhat acceptable to the Yorks. This lasted until the unpopular and mentally ill Henry the Sixth came to the throne. The supporters of York did not previously rebel partly because of the ongoing Hundred Years War in France and partly because both Henry the Fourth and the Fifth were accomplished war leaders and much beloved of the people. Growing discontent among the people due to the way the war in France was waged, coupled with the nobles using their armies to pillage food from the populace and corruption in the court all led to civil war.

On the one side there was Richard Plantagenet, the duke of York and on the other Margaret of Anjou, the wife of Henry the Sixth and Queen of England. Margaret used all the resources at her disposal to put her son Edward on the throne. In 1460 the Act of Accord was signed, officially making Richard of York the heir of Henry the Sixth. Margaret was exiled from London with her son.

However, she soon gathered an army in the north of the land and defeated the forces of Richard of York in a decisive battle at Wakefield. Richard himself was killed in battle. He was succeeded by his son Edward, crowned as Edward IV.

In the great battle of Towton, in which an estimated 80 000 people fought, he defeated the forces of Margaret and Henry the Sixth. After several changes in power and the deaths of Henry the Sixth's son Edward, Henry the Sixth himself and the early death of Edward IV tensions arise once again.

Finally, Richard III ascends to the throne, the brother of Edward IV and imprisons the rightful heirs of Edward IV in the Tower Bridge. The Princes in the Tower were not seen again.

The War of the Roses ends at the Battle of Bosworth in 1485. Henry Tudor, the duke of Lancaster defeated and killed Richard III on the fields of Bosworth after Richard III was abandoned by his most loyal allies in a critical moment. (To all those interested in learning more about this battle I recommend the first episode of Blackadder). This battle was also the final defeat of the house of York and the end of the War of Roses. Many similarities can be seen with the wars in Martin's novels, especially Robert's Rebellion and the War of Five Kings.

The Albigensian crusade is the twenty-year long crusade from 1209 to 1229. On one side there was the kingdom of France and on the other the nobles loyal to the crown of Aragon and the Cathar, a christian sect. The Cathars came into conflict with the

Christian church because of their belief that the entire physical world was evil and that the Christian god was an usurper, taking the place of a god of love, order and peace. They lived in the rich region of south France, Languedoc and were the reason the nobles were not hard to convince to join the war.

The war on “heretics” started with Pope Innocent II, supported by the French king who wanted to return the region back under his control. The Cathars were church’s first great “heretics” in the last 900 years and the church wanted to deal with them in a decisive manner. The entire campaign can be divided into three periods.

The first period (1209 – 1215) was a period of great success for the crusaders, with many towns seized by their forces. The great fortified city of Carcassone fell to the crusaders, allowing them to reach as far as Toulouse. The second period (1216 – 1225) was when Raymond VI of Toulouse turned against his former compatriots. He won many battles and managed to liberate a great portion of the area taken by the crusaders in the past six years. In 1222 Raymond dies and is succeeded as a commander by his son Raymond VII. In the third period (1226 – 1229) the new king of France, Louis VII takes charge of the crusaders. Even though he died only months later, the crusaders won a great number of battles under his command. In 1229 Raymond VII surrendered and the entire Languedoc was now officially under the rule of the king of France.

The war on the Cathars is now taken over by the Inquisition which in 1244 destroys,

after nine months of siege, the fortress Montsegur, headquarters of the Cathars. The last Cathar fortress, Queribus, falls in 1255. It is possible that the forts of Carcassone, Montsegur and Queribus were inspiration for Harrenhal and the Eyrie.

The Norman conquest of England that started in 1066 is similar to the conquest of Westeros by house Targaryen. On the one side we have William the Conqueror, on the other Aegon I the Conqueror. William could not conquer Wales just as Aegon could not conquer Dorne. Both won all the major battles and both turned to ruling their newly acquired lands after the conquest.

The Dance of the Dragons, the civil war between Aegon II and his sister Rhaenyra was inspired by The Anarchy – the age in English history between 1135 and 1154, also known as the Nineteen-Year Winter. It was the time of conflict between Matilda, the daughter of Henry I and her cousin Stephen of Blois. After Henry’s death in 1135, Stephen contested Matilda’s claim to the crown, claiming he was promised the crown by Henry I on his deathbed. Since he had the majority of English nobles on his side, Stephen was crowned king.

Matilda gathered an army in 1139. In the Battle of Lincoln in 1141 she defeated and captured Stephen. However, Stephen’s wife, also called Matilda, defeated her in the Battle of Winchester and freed Stephen in an exchange of prisoners. After prolonged fighting which lead to a state of anarchy throughout England, Matilda was forced to seek refuge with her brother Robert of Gloucester in Normandy in 1147. Stephen

managed to secure the crown for himself but not his children.

On the other hand, Matilda ensured that her son from her marriage to the Count of Anjou, Henry, would succeed Stephen as king in 1154. This made Henry the first king of England from the Anjou-Plantagenet dynasty. Henry II was embodied by Martin as king Aegon II.

Stepping away from English history for a moment, the idea for the Battle of Blackwater came from the Siege of Constantinople. The city had, very much like King's Landing, a large chain that could prevent the passage of ships. Thanks to the chain, Constantinople managed to resist an invasion by the Arabs in 718. Another similarity is in the use of wildfire, reminiscent of Greek fire. The Byzantines successfully used it against the Arabs, Venice and Kiev Russians. It was the most powerful weapon of the Middle Ages and its production and use remain a mystery to this very day.

## ORGANIZATIONS

The Kingsguard are a facsimile of many similar organizations throughout history, tasked with protecting the ruler. Praetorians, Jovians, Herculeans of the old Rome or the Varangian guards of Byzantium, they all inspired Kingsguard. The modus operandi of Varangian guards also reminds me of Martin's priests of

Norvos. They would train elite guards who would be sent to protect the lives of rich individuals, while the Varangian guard consisted of Normans, Vikings who protected the emperors of Byzantium with their lives.

The Faceless Men resemble Assassins, the medieval Arab sect who dealt in assassinations between 1090 and 1272. The newly formed military arm of the Seven, the Warrior's Sons and the Poor Fellows both have the characteristics of Knights Templar.

Finally, I would like to write a little about a subject I find most fascinating – Martin's inspiration for the Valyrian steel swords. From 1100 to 1700 swords were made in the Middle East, renowned for their sharpness and durability. They were made of Damascus steel. It was said they could cut through weaker European swords and even stone. They were made of an alloy of steel that allowed the sword to be both hard and flexible, both being ideal properties of a superior blade. Modern research has proven that Damascus steel contains carbon nano-tubes that make it the strongest material known to man and which can be produced only in advanced laboratories. The secret of making Damascus steel is a mystery to this very day.





**Nela Dunato: "Poison fairy"**  
<http://inobsкуро.com>

# POISONS

mr. ph. Ivana Božić Šakan

By definition, poisons are any substance, plant or animal that at sufficiently small quantities can cause death or injury to the body if swallowed, inhaled or absorbed through the skin. Quantities must be sufficiently small because table salt (NaCl), or even water, can be lethal in large quantities. Toxicity is usually expressed as the mean lethal dose LD50, or as its quantity of poison, once applied, which the sample killed 50% of tested animals.

Terminology comes from the Greek language. Toxicon meant bow (as in archery). Toxeuma means the arrows while poison or toxicos is what was placed on the arrows to make them lethal.

## HISTORY OF POISON

Poisons were always called a coward's weapon because of the cold-blooded planning that went into their use and the prolonged suffering they caused. Early humans used them to hunt. Knowledge of toxins, as well as medicine, was reserved for prominent members of the community, shamans, tribal healers, etc.

The first written records date back to the 4500th years BC, in Mesopotamia and originate from the Sumerians who linked poisons to the goddess Gul, the ruler of magic. Furthermore in Egypt many poisons and poisonous plants were known, such as copper, arsenic, lead, opium ... The Egyptians managed to master the art of distillation and poison

extraction from peaches and poison was administered as a criminal weapon. The ancient Greeks knew of arsenic and other toxic substances such as lead, copper, mercury, gold and silver. Of the plant toxins the most important is hemlock, which was often used either as means of noble suicide or as official punishment – used in the execution of Socrates. It is mentioned in Persia around 405 BCE and in Rome around 331 BCE. Nero used cyanide to slaughter undesirable members of his family. Chinese Chou ritual survives into modern times and consists of five poisons of which four are known: mercury, arsenic, copper sulfate and iron (II)-iron (III)-oxide (magnetite). These toxins can create a toxic fume when burning.

In the Middle Ages pharmacists were those who had a major role in the production and sale of poisons. Most frequently used were arsenic, cyanide, strychnine, opium, atropine, aconite and heavy metals. Since there was no forensics or toxicology, which could provide evidence of the presence of poisoning, the practice of poisoning spread and also did methods of protection, some of which included the horn of a unicorn and the rhinoceros, calcified bone frogs, gems, amulets, talismans, and of course, potions.

Throughout the 14th and 15th Century poisoning became an art. The Italian alchemists realized that by combining poisons they can get a lethal weapon. The

most famous alchemists of the time were members of the Borgia family. Thus Cesare poisoned his father, Pope Alexander VI, using an already popular Borgia recipe which, along with other ingredients, certainly contained arsenic. By

the 17th century in both Venice and Rome many poisoner schools were opened and the “association” of alchemists called the Council of the Ten was formed. The Council would, for a price, murder anyone. A native of Dubrovnik, Ivan Stojkovic, called John of Ragusa, who claimed that you can poison anyone using your own collection of poisons, opposed the Council.

In 1589 a publication “Neopoliani Mago Naturalis” describes the various methods of poisoning, particularly using wine, which was at that time very popular. Porta, the author, provides a formula for “Veninum Lupinum”, a poisonous mixture consisting of aconite, yew, caustic lime, arsenic, bitter almonds and powdered glass. However, the most notorious poisoner of the 17th century was a woman named Toffana. Her recipe, a solution named “Aqua Toffana”, was sold in vials representing saints, usually St. Nicholas of Bari, and contained arsenic. Sold under the guise of beauty aids, they were the cause of death of around six hundred people, mostly husbands.

In the 16th century the spread of food poisoning was notable in France. In Paris around 1572 almost 30 000 wizards were poisoned and poisoning became an epidemic, while simultaneously the fear of poisoning spread. For this reason, Henry IV when he visited the Louvre ate only eggs

that he himself cooked and peeled, and drank only the water that came directly from the river. In 1662 Louis XIV finally passed a law prohibiting the sale of arsenic, except to persons who pharmacists personally knew and introduced the use of registers in which all sales were to be recorded. Poisoning had occurred in the English and the Spanish court. The Victorian era was marked by another poisoning epidemic. Arsenic and strychnine were still available, and journalists noted many cases of poisoning, which became a fashionable crime. The emergence of life insurance contributed to this renewed fashion. Toxicology was still unreliable and its development started in the late 19th century. The most popular and still used poison is arsenic, which is used as an ingredient in face powders and rat poisons. Finally, the increase in number of laws that regulate toxic substances made it very difficult to obtain toxic substances.

In the 20th century, the advances in toxicology, forensics and general education led to a demystification of toxins. However, poisoning has never been at a higher level, due to industry, agriculture (annual use of 2.5 million tons of pesticides), petrochemical and pharmaceutical industry. Many toxic substances are used without knowledge of the potential consequences but there is also a strictly controlled exposure to known toxins, among others lead, mercury and aniline. Most intentional, but also accidental suicides in the past were the result of paracetamol, which can be purchased in pharmacies. Deaths were caused by arsenic and cyanide in World

War II where they were used in liquid form as a means of suicide in the event that you were captured by the enemy. Goering, Hitler and Eva Braun used cyanide. This started a new trend: the use of previously unknown toxins and changed the methods of application.

In other cultures poisons were used while hunting, in the form of poisoned arrows (Antiaris genera, Strychnos and Stropanthus, plant Antiaris toxicaria) that caused paralysis, convulsions and cardiac arrest. An interesting and poisonous insect from the Kalahari desert was used by hunters who would squeeze the larvae to extract the toxin from them onto the tip of an arrow.

It is necessary to mention the Soviet Union, which started with the testing of toxic gases in gas chambers as well as with research and the creation of many toxins that were new and deadlier than anything known. The main researcher in this field, Mairanowsky, executed people with cyclone-B and anthrax.

Some of the most famous poisonings include: Socrates (399 BCE), Cleopatra (suicide by Egyptian cobra bite, 30 BCE), Adolf Hitler and Eva Braun (suicide by cyanide, also Himmler and Goering), Alexander the Great, Charles Darwin (Fowler solution containing arsenic), Napoleon Bonaparte (arsenic in the wallpaper), Yasser Arafat (suspected poisoning), Viktor Yushchenko (alleged poisoning by dioxin, a herbicide used in the Vietnam War).

## THE MOST FAMOUS POISONS

### Arsenic

Through the centuries, arsenic was used for criminal purposes more than any other poison. In the 8th century the Arabian alchemist Hayyan refined and created this white powder, almost odorless and tasteless - the abuse could begin. In the 19th century women had used it as a face powder. Fowler solution (1% NaAs) was used for the treatment of various diseases and the organic salts of arsenic were the first pharmaceutical antibiotics. Organic arsenic was used in World War II as a chemical weapon that caused the irritation of the skin and respiratory tract. Arsenic is often mixed in food, drink or drugs. Diagnosis is difficult to make. Acute poisoning is seen in urine tests and analysis of skin tissue. In this way, 140 years after his death it was discovered that Napoleon Bonaparte was poisoned. No specific antidote known – the British used dimercaprol during World War II, but it is associated with numerous side effects so there is no justification for its use in the treatment of chronic poisoning.

### Cyanide

An ingredient of bitter almond leaf laurel, cherry and cassava, known as toxic plants since ancient times. That cyanide caused the toxicity of these plants was discovered in the 18th century. After the application of this toxin, death will occur within thirty seconds.

### Ricin

Ricin is a plant protein of the oilseed Ricinus communis. Whole plant is

poisonous: three seeds can be fatal for a child, while an adult can be poisoned by two to four seeds and die of eight, meaning that 1 mg of ricin per kg of weight is enough for lethality. Administered into the bloodstream the millionth part of this amount is fatal. Ricin is one of the most potent plant poisons and even twice stronger than cobra venom. There is no antidote, only symptomatic therapy.

### **Strychnine**

Strychnine is an alkaloid of the plant *Strychnos Nux vomica* which grows in India, Sri Lanka and Australia. Discovered in 1818. although a plant extract was used earlier. It stimulates salivation and the secretion of acid in the stomach so it was used to increase appetite, and today serves as a homeopathic remedy. In the 19th century it was available in pharmacies. There is also a medical procedure, strychnine neuronography, where a small quantity of strychnine was injected into a part of the brain or spinal cord and response of the body was monitored to establish correlation between the organism and the brain. Deadly at a dose of 5 mg / kg, that is approximately 350 mg are deadly for an adult.

### **Morphine**

As part of opium (the juice from poppy seeds), it was used since ancient times as a medication, to improve mood and as a “tonic for everything” by Hippocrates. The British in China exchanged it for tea and silk, and when the Chinese Ching dynasty tried to prohibit its use it started the first Opium War (1839 to 1842). Paracelsus was the first to mix it with alcohol and create laudanum tincture. In 1803.

Serturner in Germany isolated morphine, and after testing it on volunteers named it after Morpheus, the Greek god of sleep. The London Hospital St.Mary in 1874 discovered diacetylmorphine, also known as heroin and used it in the treatment of morphine dependence. Morphine bonds to opiate receptors in the brain just like the natural hormone of happiness, endorphins. For non-users a lethal dose is around 30 mg and for addicts it is many times higher. It was used more as a means of suicide than murder in the UK in the period from 1876. until 1890 (543 deaths). Morphine was in that time used in only two murders (of infants), while other deaths were accidental poisonings and 30% of them were suicides. This represents 40% of poisoning in that period. Dr. Shipman from London killed at least 256, mostly elderly women using morphine and the number climbs to 1000, taking into account the ones killed during thirty years of service. In 2000 he was sentenced to fifteen life sentences for killing fifteen persons. The investigation against him is still ongoing and he has pleaded not guilty.

## **TOXIC PLANTS**

### **Atropa belladonna - Nightshade / Wolf raspberries / Deadly nightshade**

The plant is named after Atropa, one of the three mythological goddess who cut the strings of our lives, defining the moment of our death. The name belladonna originates from the 16th century when it was used Venice for cosmetic purposes; women were using a water solution of belladonna to widen their pupils and thus look prettier. All parts are toxic when ingested,



especially the berries. When consumed in high doses it causes hallucinations, rapid heartbeat and extreme fatigue. Toxic or lethal doses cause rapid pulse, thirst, dry mouth, difficulty swallowing, restlessness and fatigue, headache, hot dry skin, hallucinations, convulsions, ataxia and coma.

### **Aconitum napellus - Blue aconite / Wolfsbane / Monkshood**

This plant was used to poison arrows in the ancient China, from which derives the name akontion, which means arrow. All parts are poisonous, especially stems and roots in winter. Toxicity comes from Aconite.

### **Colchicum autumnale - Meadow Saffron**

Colchicine is an alkaloid and the most important of Meadow Saffron, an active ingredient that is contained in all its parts. The highest concentration of poison is in the seeds (0.2 - 0.8%) and the bulbs (0.4 - 0.6%).

### **Conium maculatum - Hemlock - Poison Hemlock**

This is the single ingredient of the official Athenian poison which killed prominent Athenians including Socrates, who was persuaded to drink poison for negatively affecting the youth of Athens.

### **Turbocurarine**

The main ingredient of the poison curare, a plant alkaloid from plants of the family Strychnos, which is used as poison by Amazonian Indians who dip arrows in the sap that contains these compounds. Just a scratch can cause death by asphyxiation because it paralyzes

muscles, including those in charge of respiration (diaphragm, intercostal muscles).

## **ANIMAL POISONS**

### **Batrachotoxine**

Frogs of family Dendrobatidae are known as toxic frogs (Dart – Poison Frogs) because poison arrow blowers use their poison to hunt birds and other animals. The skin of these amphibians even contains four alkaloids of various structures, including batrachotoxine, histrionicotoxine, pumiliotoxine and ephibatidine. Batrachotoxine is the strongest known animal poison (250 times stronger than strychnine), created by frog *Phyllobates terribilis*. A single frog has enough poison to kill 20 000 mice or 10-100 people, because the lethal dose amounts to 1-2 mg / kg.

### **Tetrodotoxine**

Tetrodotoxine is a potent neurotoxin for which an antidote has not yet been found. The poison is found in some tropical fish (puffer fish), the three types of octopus (Blue-ringed octopus) and some worms. It is assumed that the poison comes from bacteria of the genus *Vibrio*; mostly *Vibrio alginolyticus*, which can be found on the surface of the fish's body. It is assumed that a puffer fish has enough venom to kill thirty adults. The fish were named after their reaction to threat: when they feel threatened, they inflate to two to three times their usual size. Poisoning usually occurs after eating improperly prepared Chiro and fish soup and sometimes from raw meat from fugu sashimi. Tetrodotoxine has its uses

– it is used to create zombies in voodoo rituals. Specifically, through the skin an almost lethal dose is applied, which causes a death-like state that lasts for several days, with a total lack of awareness. Then the person is given a plant of the genus *Datura* whose powder contains alkaloids atropine, scopolamine and hiosciamine which induce a state similar to delirium and the person does not behave as if under the influence their own free will. In this way it can be controlled, reminiscent of the Zombies. After returning to a “normal” state people, along with many other psychological disorders also have amnesia, which is interpreted as a return from the dead.

### **Echis carinatus**

A snake called *Echis carinatus* lives on the sand and stone of Africa, India and the Middle East. This is the most dangerous poisonous snake and probably the biggest killer among all snakes. Often living in the vicinity of human, wherever one goes, many others follow. She is very widespread. The largest specimens of this kind barely reach 60 centimeters, but they have an extremely toxic poison, especially to men. For an adult human the lethal dose is 5 mg and a single bite can inject even 12 mg!

### **Black Mamba, *Dendroaspis polylepis***

Black Mamba is not so named because of black scales but for its black mouth. While not the most toxic it causes the most fear because it often attacks first, without any reason. During the attack, the front of the Mamba's body often rises high above the ground and can even bite a person on the head or neck.

## **BIOLOGICAL WEAPONS**

In the category of biological weapons we have various pathogenic microorganisms (bacteria, viruses, rickettsia, fungi, protozoa, natural, altered or synthesized, and their products). There is no evidence of deliberate use of biological weapons in modern wars and their consequences can be difficult to predict. But U.S. military data show that in World War II 85.2% patients suffered from infectious diseases while the wounded accounted for only 3.4%. Some are biological toxins (botulin, ricin) significantly more toxic than most toxic nerve poisons, and also being cheaper and easy to produce in secret which makes them particularly interesting to terrorist groups.

High mortality rate, short incubation period, short duration of disease and significant epidemic effect, identify the following biological weapons: smallpox, *Bacillus anthracis* (anthrax), *Yersinia pestis* (plague), botulinum toxin (botulism), *Francisella tularensis* (tularemia), Ebola virus, Lassa virus and Junin virus (Argentine hemorrhagic fever). There is no known treatment against these weapons.

## **CHEMICAL WEAPONS**

### **Cyanide-chloride**

Cyanide-chloride, or Cyclone B (Zyklon B) is a colorless and volatile gas. Symptoms of exposure include dizziness, convulsions, paralysis and death. It is particularly toxic as it passes through the filter masks. It was used in the Nazi concentration camps.

### **Lewisite**

This compound belongs to Arsenites, in its pure form a liquid that is colorless

and odorless. Sufficient intake of lewisite can cause systemic poisoning by lead and hepatic necrosis ending in death..

### **Mustard Gas**

Mustard gas is the agent that causes blistering and also a strong mutagen and carcinogen. In the period from 4-24 hours after contact with mustard gas the affected develop skin ulcers and worse. If inhaled the same happens to lungs leading to pulmonary edema and death.

### **Sarin**

This highly toxic substance affects the nervous system. Of all known chemicals designed for combat, nerve agents are the most toxic and fastest. They are similar to some types of pesticides called organophosphates, however they are much stronger. They cause continuous transmission of nerve signals to the muscles. Sarin can be lethal even in small quantities. If you fail to obtain an antidote (atropine and usually pralidoxim), death may follow from direct inhalation of 0.01 mg / kg of body weight.

### **Novichok**

It is a series of nerve agents that were, between 1980th and 1990, created by the made the Soviet Union. These are apparently deadliest poisons ever. There are three rules obeyed in their creation: that NATO can not detect them, that NATO equipment cannot protect from their effect and that they are safe to handle before being deployed. As a nerve poison they prevent degradation of acetylcholine and cause sustained transmission of impulses to the muscles.



**Ivona Matejčić: “White Warrior”**

<http://luchediluna.deviantart.com>





**Petra Korlević: "Fog Summoner"**  
<http://p-korle.deviantart.com>



**Ivona Matejčić: "Papercut Ichigo"**  
<http://luchediluna.deviantart.com>

## INTERVIEW WITH LOIS MCMASTER BUJOLD

Hrvoje Beljan

**In January 2002, you visited Croatia. What do you remember of the visit? When someone mentions Croatia, what is the first thing that comes to your mind?**

I actually wrote a little memoir soon after I got home, in an attempt to capture my impressions. It's up on my website at <http://www.dendarii.com/croatia02.html>. But I won't cheat by peeking at it first.

Whatever comes to my mind first is soon overtaken by a cascade of associated memories; I'm surprised at how much comes back to me once I start thinking about it. I remember I was very well taken care of by the convention and by my Croatian publisher, and how impressed and daunted I was by how many people spoke and read English, when I didn't possess a word of Croatian. Without them, I would have been rendered as good as mute. I had a wonderful time walking around Zageb with some fan friends, bought a big book on its history, and used the city later as a rough template for the medieval town of Easthome in *The Hallowed Hunt*. The convention folks took me up to the Bear Castle, too, a lovely outing. After the convention, my publisher took me on a short book tour down to the coast – vivid high points include a fish dinner at a seaside outdoor restaurant, and seeing the full moon rising through the arches of the

Roman amphitheater on the Istrian shore.

My publisher came up with a TV interview for me the last Monday morning. Very early. It's not a medium I have much practice in, I was nervous and tired, and I did not do very well, I'm afraid, although it didn't help that the first question I was asked was mis-translated, so I rattled on for several minutes saying something else altogether. Oops. I'm used to having an hour to fill at convention question and answer sessions – I have to learn to be more succinct for this sort of thing!

My publisher's very kindly interpreter invited me home for cake and more conversation on my last night there, after yet another publicity bash, but I was so burned out by then I turned her down, a treat I still regret missing. I could have made up the sleep the following week...

And the smoking, of course. All European venues have more cigarette smoke floating about than Americans have become used to.

And looking out my hotel window across to the very nineteenth century facades of the buildings across the square, and noticing the very twenty-first century satellite dishes tucked about in them.

And the trams–trolley cars are a memory of my visits to my grandmother in Pittsburgh in my youth, but they were gone by the time I was a teenager.

The three Chalion books have been contracted to Algoritam, by the way. I don't know what happened to them after that, or how far along they may be in the translation and publication process. I don't seem to have author's copies yet, which

are usually my only proof that a title has hit print. I don't think my agent has received an offer on *The Sharing Knife* books as yet, although a number of the Miles books recently had their contracts renewed. The Croatian covers for the Vorkosigan books remain some of my favorite foreign covers.

**Your Vorkosigan novels are very popular and very famous in Croatia. Could you tell us how the whole thing started? Where did the idea for Miles come from? How much hope did you have for the novels i.e. did you think that the series would go on to spawn fourteen novels, all of them bestsellers?**

Miles himself came as real people do—from his parents. I have a catch-phrase to describe my plot-generation technique—"What's the worst possible thing I can do to these people?" Miles was already in my mind even when I was still writing *Shards of Honor*. For his parents Aral and Cordelia, living in a militaristic, patriarchal culture that prizes physical perfection and has an historically-driven horror of mutation, having a handicapped son and heir was a major life challenge, a Great Test. Miles has a number of real-life roots—models from history such as T.E. Lawrence and young Winston Churchill, a physical template in a handicapped hospital pharmacist I'd worked with, most of all his bad case of "great man's son syndrome," which owes much to my relationship with my father. But with his first book, *The Warrior's Apprentice*, he quickly took on a life of his own; his charisma and drive, his virtues and his failings—and he has both—are now all his.

Characters are created by their actions—"What you are is what you do" is never more true than on the page. Miles's actions have created Miles for a dozen books, now, so he's had a chance to grow pretty complex. Characters in turn create and constrain the possibilities of one's plot, and yet for me, characters and stories also create their settings, so it's all balled up together in the end anyway. So there has never been a great over-arching plan for Miles's life; I make him up one book at a time.

Here in the USA, my books have been not so much bestsellers—at least, not in the *New York Times* List sense, although they've been genre bestsellers—as what are called Evergreens, books that sell in modest numbers forever. Every book I have ever written is still in print. When I sat down to write *Shards of Honor* in 1982, I don't think I could have imagined it still being read in 2008, because I don't think I could have imagined 2008. (I stay away from near-future science fiction for a reason.) It still boggles my mind, here in the twenty-first century, to think of my books from back then being read in China. In 1982, that would have *been* science fiction.

**Have the Vorkosigan novels ever been considered for a film adaptation by a studio? Would you like to see the novels adapted to film or tv series? Do you have any casting ideas, especially for the actor playing Miles?**

*The Warrior's Apprentice* was in fact optioned for film in the mid-1990s. The option money paid for my move to Minneapolis, for which I must be grateful,

but no film was ever made, for which I must be even more grateful – I read the script, and it was dire. I am in no hurry any more for a media adaptation – I’m willing to wait for a producer to come along who actually loves the books, rather than one who regards them as a *property*, to be chopped up at will. I have no casting ideas for current actors, although Aral should look rather like the late Oliver Reed in his younger and healthier days.

**The universe of the Vorkosigan Saga grew in detail with every new book. Are the planets and cultures represented in the novels based on parts of Earth’s history or are they your own creations? I ask because one of the planets is called Illyrica and the people who inhabited parts of what is today Croatia in the ancient times were called Illyrians.**

The planets of the Nexus are based on all sorts of sources, variously blended. Nothing is a direct copy, but rather, a complicated braid of science, history, persons, other stories, and my own views on human behavior. I’m afraid Illyrica was no more than a name pulled off a map for me at the time I made it up – and only for a throw-away line at that.

**You are currently writing *The Sharing Knife* fantasy series. Could you tell us something about the characters and plot so far?**

*The Sharing Knife* began as a single fantasy-romance novel, divided into a duology for publication due to length. Since my original vision for it was completed, it’s grown by two more volumes. The first, split story was titled *The Sharing Knife*, Vol.

1: *Beguilement* and *The Sharing Knife*, Vol. 2: *Legacy*, which were first published in October 2006 and June 2007, respectively.

The second pair of books are a bit more rounded in structure, as they were written to be a duology from the get-go: Volume 3, *Passage*, is due for hardcover release April 22, 2008; the fourth and final volume, *Horizon*, which is now finished and turned in, is slated for February 2009. The latter pair were going around with the working title of *The Wide Green World* for a time, but my publisher Eos preferred the unified series title so as not to unduly confuse booksellers, and book buyers. It’s appropriate—this really is one long story divided into four volumes, although each duology pair and each individual volume also have story arcs that reach some closure within them.

Think of four hoops in a row contained by two hoops all contained by one hoop; the main over-arching thematic hoop will only be discernable once the four underlying parts are all in place, but there’s plenty to entertain a reader at the other story-levels while waiting.

So all four volumes will be in readers’ hands within the space of three and a half years, there will be no delays in manuscript delivery, and even if I get run over by a bus tomorrow, the tale is complete. I hope y’all appreciate this.

*The Sharing Knife* begins as the tale of two people, Fawn Bluefield, a young farmer girl running away from home for some very traditional reasons, who meets Dag Redwing Hickory, a seasoned soldier-sorcerer from a nomadic people called the



Lakewalkers, who are dedicated to hunting down and killing a recurring supernatural menace called by his people, malices, and by hers, blight bogles. The sharing knife of the title is a critical magical weapon to this purpose, and the revelation of just what the knives are and how they work is part of the plot.

When both characters are caught up in a malice hunt, a peculiar accident happens to one of Dag's sharing knives, which binds the couple together for a time until the mystery can be solved. Propinquity leads to romance leads to, eventually, troubles (and growth) and a new engagement with their world that neither of them could have imagined at the tale's beginning. *The Sharing Knife* does not have a villain-driven plot, but it does have a strong direction-of-movement, so I didn't find it felt any different in the day-to-day writing than my more tightly-plotted books.

The books and the series have also been my chance to play with genres, attempting to blend fantasy and romance. This turns out to be a trickier proposition than it looks, as the two genres have different focuses, reader expectations, structures, and scopes. The focus of a romance is normally personal: it's the tale of a successful courtship, beginning when the two protagonists meet and ending when their relationship, explored and tested by the plot, is finally confirmed by a lasting commitment. By the end, the reader expects to understand that couple. The focus of a fantasy is normally its world, which may almost be considered another character; we expect to meet that world, get to know it, be shown what makes it

different. By the end, the reader expects to understand that world.

So I deliberately set myself the problem of weaving these two disparate structures together in *The Sharing Knife*. This is in part aided by the two protagonists being themselves representatives of the two main cultures of their shown world, so I can explore those world-aspects through them. Whether I've succeeded will be for the readers to say when the whole work comes out—the reader responses so far seem to be interestingly bifurcated. Some folks relish the blend; others become as hysterical as a toddler who discovers his peas are touching his mashed potatoes.

At the end of the first two volumes of *The Sharing Knife*, the matter of the romance was resolved to my satisfaction and that of its mother genre, which was mainly what I first set out to do. I might well have left Dag and Fawn there, at least for a time. But the matter of the world still begged some questions, hence the second duology, *Passage* and *Horizon*. These are both journey stories—one a river journey and the other a road trip, both American classic tropes, very appropriate to the American-inspired frontier fantasy world setting of these books. They continue from the end of *Legacy*, still with Dag and Fawn as viewpoint characters.

Oh, speaking of sources. All the *Sharing Knife* settings are based on rural Midwestern landscapes of my childhood. *Passage* especially drew on not only my memories of houseboating on the Ohio River in my youth, but also on some wonderful source material, much of it first-hand accounts, of life on the Western



Waters, as the Mississippi, Ohio, Missouri and Tennessee river systems are jointly dubbed, in the early nineteenth century era of keelboats and steamboats. I put an Author's Note in the back of the volume naming the most fascinating books, if folks are interested in following up later.

**Your Chalion series garnered much acclaim worldwide. It's fascinating how you made your mark in both science-fiction and fantasy. Which genre do you enjoy writing more?**

I like them both about equally. I've always read both, from the very beginnings of my exploration of the genres as a child.

**Is it hard to be a sci-fi/fantasy writer in the USA? How different is your life and experiences as an author at this point in life when compared to when you started writing in the '80s?**

It's hard to be a writer anywhere, I think. The USA seems more friendly to the F&SF genres than, say, Britain, or so I'm told. We have a large enough fan community that we hardly need to look for moral support outside it, which has both good and bad aspects. (There's a temptation to grow insular.)

Then and now, oh heavens. In the early 1980s, just before publication, I was a desperate housewife living in poverty stuck in a small town with two small children and an erratic spouse, with almost no friends, and no job (except for writing three books in three years, which no one did count as my work, before they sold.) Twenty-two books and years later, my children are grown and launched, I've been happily divorced for many years, I live in a vibrant city, I have a comfortable income, a large

circle of interesting friends, and all the travel I can manage and then some. If this had been a cunning plan, I would have to say it worked a treat, but I cannot discount a great deal of earned luck. (I am lucky my books sold to Baen, but I earned that luck by writing them and sending them out to the place where that luck could happen.)

In the past decade the internet has had an increasing impact on my daily life as a writer, not all of it good. I spend a large part of each day as my own secretary and publicity manager, doing tasks I didn't have to do back in the '80s or '90s. E-mail from fans is much easier to answer than snail mail, but there is also much more of it. I have much closer communications with my agent and editor, which is good, but my publishers also keep coming up with PR chores that take time from my actual fiction writing, not to mention my life—writing blog posts and e-mail interviews and so on—that never used to exist. I've also discovered how to ego-surf, oops.

Wikipedia is both a blessing and a curse for writerly research. You go online to look up a description of, say, eclampsia, and three hours later find yourself reading an earnest explanation of tentacle porn in anime, with no very clear memory of how you got there and where the time went.

**Which writers influenced you most when you started writing? Which writers do you consider to be currently the best in the genre? What are some of your favorite books and movies, genre and non-genre?**

I have a long list of early favorites. In includes, but is not limited to, Poul

Anderson, Randall Garrett, Cordwainer Smith, James H. Schmitz, Eric Frank Russell, Arthur Conan Doyle, Alexander Dumas, Dorothy Sayers, Georgette Heyer, and J.R.R. Tolkien. I do not read enough in the SF genre these days to have a good idea who is best or most to my taste—I've been exploring in other directions lately, including non-fiction (history and popular science, mostly), and romances, and watching Japanese animation and science and nature programming through my Netflix subscription. I also read friends' manuscripts, but I'm not sure that counts. I also spend way too much time on-line, but that might be classified as observing human behavior.

Favorites to which I return over and over include the works of Heyer, Tolkien, and Terry Pratchett (speaking of current best writers). I loved the recent *Lord of the Rings* movies, even though as a book purist I found they contained many wince-worthy moments, ow, ow. I still watched them far too many times. In the very distant past, the Richard Lester two-part film adaptation of *The Three Musketeers* is still fondly remembered. I like all kinds of modern animation, including *Shrek*, *The Incredibles*, and *Cars*.

**And finally, the question you probably get asked twice a day: do you plan to write new Vorkosigan novel/novels? And if so, could you give us some hints as to what you have in store for everybody's favorite Imperial Auditor?**

Now that the last two volumes of *The Sharing Knife* are in the bag, the next thing on my plate is indeed a contract for a new Miles Vorkosigan novel for publisher Toni Weiskopf at Baen Books. It's in the delicate pre-writing development stage right now, just starting to generate scribbled notes in my notebook, much interrupted by the onslaught of preparation for the *Passage* launch and tour and about a million other PR and career-maintenance chores, including being Guest of Honor at this year's Worldcon in Denver. (The convention isn't till August but they want about 5k words from me for the program book this month, please ma'am. I really can't say no.) Anyway, I expect to write the new Miles book in 2008 (it's also off to a later start than planned, so work on it will likely slop over the end of this year) for publication late in 2009. Probably.

It's too early to talk about it in more detail yet, but you may be assured, it will be a book and it will have Miles in it.

**Thank you very much for this interview, Mrs. Bujold.**





Marko Horvatin: "Rosie the Necromancer"  
<http://markothesketchguy.deviantart.com>

