



❧ The Origin of Species ❧

‘My brain is whole! I see the world!’

Esteemed Reader

We have been given an opportunity to see behind the veil the Wise place between themselves and the world. It has been our good fortune to have fall into our hands a collection of letters exchanged between sundry members of the Scholasticarium in Kaiin and their colleagues. These letters, normally transported by elementals (which allows for almost instant literary communication) have obviously been gathered together for some academic purpose, perhaps a dissertation or formal diatribe. We have edited them slightly and you will see at the top of each letter the person or persons to whom it is addressed, and at the bottom of the letter, the sender. General messages might well be headed ‘Colleagues’ where they are addressed to the Academic body of the Scholasticarium. Sometimes a writer will address his remarks to a single recipient, sometimes to all. We bring this document to your attention because we believe it will be not merely an education, but a unique source of inspiration and information for those who are running role-playing campaigns set on the Dying Earth.

The Editor



Colleagues,

There has been a lot of conjecture that the various half-men originated in the vats of crazed magicians. The time has come to put an end to this speculation. I have it on good authority¹ that these creatures evolved in a short period that coincided with the removal of the moon in the Great Tumble in the 8th Aeon. The terrible rupturing and reforming that occurred in this time released elements that affected those of lower social standing and the process of transformation began. Those in the upper echelons of society were unaffected due to a predilection for armabar extract, which conferred immunity. Armed with this knowledge, we can offer explanations for notable phenomena.

- ❧ The manner of speech and the attitude of 21st Aeon denizens. They are haughty, difficult to rule and speak in a genteel and assiduous fashion.
- ❧ The hatred of the half-men towards humans. Their blood-lust is a vestige of the yoke of servitude that was imposed upon them. They are vengeful still. One test for this theory would be to learn the speech of an 8th Aeon peasant and attempt to use it on a deodand.
- ❧ The hatred, resentment and fear of humans towards half-men. In the human mind is an atavistic memory that the half-men exist solely to sow seed, kow-tow, and serve green wine and spiced sausages on silver platters. This causes resentment in humans. The erb-spear evolved from an obscure 8th Aeon implement for beating recalcitrant retainers.
- ❧ The sudden flurry in the development of magic. If you suddenly find that you have to do your own laundry, you become inventive.
- ❧ The inability to get decent staff. In mitigation, I have heard that this was a problem as far back as the Larval Age.

Kemawick Perrin

INFERATOR OF THE SYNCRETIC SYMPOSIUM FOR THE SIMULATION OF REALITY



1. Over 150 citations are included in the discussion document, with such authorities as Phandaal, Phetmus the Invigilant, and Coldark the Mesamath adding weight to volume.

My Dear Perrin

This argument, while possessed of a certain charming naively and not entirely untrue, is nevertheless of such misleading simplicity that I find myself obliged to set aside my work on the octopus God Sigodin-Yth long enough to make a brief criticism. Note:

- ✦ This argument applied only to those man-beasts of partially demonic character, the Great Tumble being directly related to the point in time when man's cumulative evil reached sufficient magnitude to allow demons to manifest in corporal form.
- ✦ Many of the man-beasts in question have been refined in subsequent Aeons, either through a process of evolution or by magicians. In both cases the forms best suited to their environment have triumphed. The pelgrane and erb are examples.
- ✦ The duration of the Great Tumble is estimated at 4000–7000 years, during which time Earth displayed a plethora of cultures among a population far greater than in our own time. Only a proportion of these were characterised by rigid social grouping, and still fewer of these by the consumption of armabar extract. Those who survived the cataclysm unaltered were not simply the grand and wealthy, but those of natural nobility and poise, factors not necessarily related to wealth or status. Note the vulgar ostentation of the Gid in the collecting of bright objects, and the artistic taste of the Grue.

Iunutharis Grashpotel, Sage

ps. On the subject of good staff, and perhaps not unrelated to this argument, I understand from a resident of Val Ombrio that it is possible to train hoons if the beasts are taken as cubs. Given the difficulty of extracting a hoon cub from its mother I have always been reluctant to further investigate this claim. Still, good staff are indeed hard to get. Does anybody have further knowledge on this subject?



Grashpotel.

Surely your work on Sigodin-Yth is not still proceeding! After all, it is merely a cult that shares the *raison d'être* of all cults: a vehicle to allow the priests to spend as much time as possible in the company of nubile young women.

I see you also that you have resurrected Jethone's "Great Tumble Hypothesis." I would refer you to Sadwicks' monumental tome *Conversations with Dancing Sandestin* in which he explores it further. Apparently the whole argument derives initially from a document created by Grunwink Twinkledome, a minor savant of the 17th Aeon who was desperately short of funds and faced the possibility of a contretemps with his angry creditors, among whom he numbered two orders of flagellant monks and a peasant co-operative specialising in producing herbal tea, narcotic stimulants and psychotic assassins.

Forced by circumstances to be inventive he "discovered" a buried manse from whose library he recovered two works, *A Popular History of the Eighth Aeon* and *Travels and Travails of a Rural Preterist*. These he sold and the monies raised both paid off his debts and also funded a period of debauchery which led to his sad demise six years later. However on his death bed he confessed that he had written both books himself and they had then been cunningly aged by a Sandestin called Spork for reasons it is unseemly to delve into.

Glad to be of assistance in this matter
Volune Stinobric
Guardian of the sacred flowers of Falgunto



Ah, Volune,

Indeed so, although in the case of Sigodin-Yth the cult is of an antiquity and complexity sufficient to provide a lifetime of study. More directly relevant, perhaps, is the Handmaidens' Ceremony of Welcome, which must be completed on each visit to the temple. This lasts three days, and while both priests and handmaidens are remarkably indulgent when it is considered they worship what in corporeal form is essentially a gigantic, man-eating cephalopod, relatively minor errors of etiquette can quickly alter a visitor's status from honoured guest to sacrifice. Thus a considerable portion of my research has been spent in mastering the handling of cutlery including the eight-handled zout spoon. Moreover, it is necessary to achieve a not inconsiderable level of elevation in the cult mysteries before one is allowed to view the God, the sole exception to this rule being to view him in what I myself consider an unacceptably abrupt and direct manner, not to say unrepeatable.

Incidentally, I have evidence that the Twinkledome story in fact derives from a popular children's book of the 19th Aeon, Caudlegrane's *Admonitory Yarns*, being a moral tale designed to divert the youth of the day from both debt and debauchery. After all, does his name not suggest a certain levity?

Iunutharis Grashpotel



Colleagues,

As an alumnus of the Green and Purple Collegium and Sage of the Fourth Order, it would be beneath my dignity to utter a formal refutation of the befuddled expostulations that certain individuals have made with respect to the Origin of Species. Even the lowliest noviciate is aware of Vydorsk's seminal work, *Miscegenation, The Underworld, And You*. Vydorsk's reasoning, not to mention his novel and first-hand research, is indisputable on this topic, making further discussion nuncupatory.

Lest there be any doubt, one need merely invoke Glandra's Charm of Panoptic Voyeurism. A single moment's observation of the constant transmigration of demons from the Underworld into the boudoirs, bedchambers, and haylofts of every duchess, dowager, and farmer's daughter in the world would convince even the most brazen heretic.

Principus, Sage



Dear Principus,

Surely here you refer to random demonic hybrids rather than the established species of half-men?

Iunutharis Grashpotel, Sage



My Dear Principus

I must admit that I have always found Vydorsk's work somewhat sensational. Also, buying good copies of his text is difficult in that if you do manage to come across any they are always marked up at an outrageous price and to cap it all are often stained and dog-eared.

I'm afraid I feel that while he is sound on the random demonic hybrid problem, when it comes to dealing with the more established species, especially erb and hoon, he contributes very little to the sum of knowledge that currently exists. I personally feel that the erb was initially bred/created for its pelt and that something went grievously wrong with the matrix. The oldest reference to them I have found is perhaps 16th Aeon, consisting of carvings incised on a cave wall south of Efred.

Volune Stinobric



My dear Grashpotel

While admitting the obvious risks one is exposed to when involved in research such as your work into the cult of Sigodin-Yth, would it not be possible to adopt the same tactic which served Nestam the Ineffable when he sought information about the cult of Iz'had'graz, Demon of the Seven Vices? He commuted twelve years of humiliating

servitude for a one-off cash payment, paid the weregeld when caught seducing the temple virgins and eventually became high priest after winning the position in a gambling game. Admittedly his luck failed him and he was finally killed by an erb when trying to outrun an assortment of creditors, but his untimely death was in no way connected to his religious activities.

As to the author of *Admonitory Yarns*, is this “Flog ‘em all” Caudlegrane? Also known as “the panderer’s panderer”? I know he mentions Twinkledome, but appears to have got the story from Jisswich’s *Researches in Earlier Aeons*.

Volute Stinobric



Dear Volute

An interesting and illuminating comparison, although sadly the devotees of Sigodin-Yth are less flexible in their outlook. A dish of braised parrot fish has been known to open doors that would otherwise have remained shut, likewise Panguire’s Periapt of Repletion, in a manner of speaking. Otherwise one must simply be patient.

As to Caudlegrane, I suspect that you are thinking of his uncle, whose books are of a quite different nature, both unsavoury and alarming, although purportedly for what he describes as “young adults”. A custom of the time was to name children after favoured aunts or uncles, leading to no little confusion among historians. My copy of Jisswich is somewhat debased and not easy to read, but it appears that Caudlegrane the Elder combined the tale of a 17th Aeon debaucher named Twikedom with various elements best left unpeated. Caudlegrane the Younger then seems to have created the Twinkledome story as a purified version of his uncle’s work.

Iunutharis Grashpotel, Sage



Grashpotel

I’m afraid that one of the many things that irritate me about gods is their “holier than thou” attitude. It is surprising what one can achieve with a more, shall we say, free market attitude. I would point to the results achieved when one shuns religion. Devotees positively queue outside your door to inculcate within your breast a deep knowledge of their faith. Should you show interest and actively seek out this knowledge they shun you, hold you at arm’s length and insist you undergo ritual purification before spending twelve years on your knees washing the temple steps with your tongue. I recommend that you announce publicly that you have lost interest in the sect, that you find it laughably shallow and postulate that the multiplicity of rituals a worshiper must penetrate exists merely to disguise the emptiness of it all. Within hours they will be beating at your door, thrusting pamphlets through your letter box, opportuning your servants and giving presents to your minstrel maidens, begging to be allowed to show you the secrets of the inner sanctum. This technique never fails. Yet in all honesty it must be admitted that some of the more robust sects may well instruct burly lay brethren to beat down your door before insisting on introducing you to the divinity in person.

With regard to the Caudlegranes, things become clearer. I suspect that they were both related to Purge, Purge, Purge Caudlegrane, purveyor of patent medicines and epitomist of several 17th Aeon authors.

Volute Stinobric



Volute

A nephew I think, or possibly a great nephew. In either case an interesting man of such great personal determination that Arnouk, in his *Literary Evolution through the Seventeenth Aeon* considers Caudlegrane’s lifetime the defining period between two major literary eras, a fashion for whimsical and moral tales being replaced by one for horror of a particularly demented nature. Reading Arnouk, I discovered another interesting fact related to the development of man beasts. In all references before the eleventh epoch of the 17th Aeon, the Hoon is listed as of much the same stature as a man. The stories of the post-Caudlegrane era give it greater height, thirty-six ells in one case! Hoons of the 18th and 19th Aeons are often referred to as “gigantic” or “twice the height of a man”, while I myself have measured a skin of twenty-one ells. While it seems preposterous to suggest that the fashion for large Hoons in stories led them to elongate, the observation is none the less puzzling.

Iunutharis Grashpotel



Grashpotel

It is possible that the erb shows a parallel development as erb pelts were first described as being of high quality in about the 19th Aeon. Prior to that they had been regarded by many authors as a trifle rough. It seems that the superlative quality of erb pelt spread as more and more writers wrote about how good erb pelts were.

Volune



Volune

An interesting hypothesis begins to develop. The first question would seem to be “Can erbs and hoon read?” Or, more properly, could the erbs and hoon of the 17th and 19th Aeons respectively read? If this were to prove the case, we might conjecture that erbs, through vanity, began to take pains with their pelts, leading to an improvement in quality. The Hoons, meanwhile, could conceivably have begun a eugenics program in order to enjoy the benefits of large size as set out in the post-Caudlegrane stories.

Iunutharis Grashpotel



Colleagues,

Whilst I appreciate the short papers you have sent to the entire Scholasticarium, it is my considered opinion that you have been spending too much time recalling fairy tales in the Inns of Kaiin rather than immersing yourselves in the source materials provided for the course. If you wish to become alumni of the Syncretic Symposium, you must present cogent and coherent theses, not the babblings of demonists such as Vydorsk and inebriates such as Sadwick. The latter was expelled from this august institute for promulgating the “Myth of the Worthy Peasant”, a seditious and depraved philosophy. As a demonstration, I will take the trouble to refute the points each of you made:

- ✦ *Volune*, I fear your nose has too long been buried in epiphytes. I have already mentioned Sadwick’s known failings as a scholar. Grunwick Twinkledome, as Grashpotel suggest, is a mere figment. Yet, he was invented not by Caudlegrane but by the sinister Worthy Peasants (under their usual *alias* Jisswich), to disguise the truth that half-men are descended from the lower echelons of society. I am therefore forced to place your submission in the Tittle-Bird category and wonder if you are not merely a student who has submitted comments to our conclave by accident.
- ✦ *Principus*, your theory has the merit of superficial plausibility. Whilst I concur that congress with underworlds beasts is commonplace, it is well known firstly, that the rare products of such a union are sterile (the so-called mule-men or demon-hybrids); secondly, that the majority of such acts conclude with the consumption of the unfortunate human concerned; and finally, that the human male is not potent enough to impregnate the most fecund she-demon. I am forced to remind you that Glandra’s so-called Charm of Panoptic Voyeurism is in fact a variation of Mirraman’s Hallucinatory Vista, and reveals no more than the deep seated urges of the individual casting it. I fear this says more about your state of mind and nocturnal activities than the Theory of the Great Tumble. Your submission does not quite make Unusual Hoon grade.
- ✦ *Grashpotel*. Erbs and Hoons, being descended from the Great Unwashed will finding reading difficult.

Finally, I do not provide citations merely to show my erudition, or confuse students. They are there to be read. May I remind you that there are over 150 references included in the discussion document, with such authorities and Phandaal, Phetmus the Invigilant, and Coldark the Mesamath adding their weight.

I suggest that you prepare in a more diligent matter for the next Master class, avoiding brothels, the temples of erotic cults and other distractions.

Kemawick Perrin

INFERATOR OF THE SYNCRETIC SYMPOSIUM FOR THE SIMULATION OF REALITY



Volune

While I agree with your comments on the origin of the erb in terms of the reason for its creation, but feel it must be placed earlier than the 16th Aeon. Rhialto, in his *Reluctant Travels in the 16th and 17th Aeons*, mentions the Ursial Loper, which is clearly a precursor of the erb. Given that by the late 16th Aeon it had already established itself as a distinct and evolutionarily divergent species, it seems likely that the origin is considerably more ancient.

Incidentally, and without wishing to seem rude, your academic status has been cast into doubt, as Perrin the Inferator infers that you are no more than one of his students. I realise that he is perhaps a little detached (senile would be too strong a word), and may simply be remembering an earlier era, but I would nevertheless be grateful for a refutation. Do you by chance recall what Prince Khandive kept as a pet when he originally attained his status as ruler of Kaiin?

Iunutharis Grashpotel, Sage



Grashpotel

Your comment places me in something of a quandary. I remember discussing this with young Turjan. I had been pleased to assist him when he was having problems creating life in his vats, I found the spell “Call to the Violent cloud” for him. I remember him telling me about his escapades but I must confess that I had totally forgotten just what pet it was Turjan mentioned. Personally I missed the arrival of Khandive in that I was at the time travelling with the nomads on the Great Central Steppe as part of my quest for the remains of a 15th Aeon city I am sure remains in that area. Whilst I have never made any claim to be a sage or even a savant of great renown I have never been a student of Perrin the Inferator. I regard myself purely as a gentleman of some learning who merely strives to improve himself and if possible aid others in their quest for knowledge.

With regard to your comments on the erb, purely in the interests of science I visited the following ladies in Kaiin who I know have had some dealings with various unhumans and half men. To wit I called upon Yana van der Neffte, Shamrine Abelane, and Araminthe Vermoane.

Araminthe insisted that erbs could read, pointing as evidence the little tab of washing instructions sewn into the erb skin which adorns her couch. (In all candour it strikes me that the skins are set principally to display Araminthe. A worthy aim it is true and not one with which I would seek to find fault, but one which does distract the eye from the skins themselves. It must also be admitted that the skins were in some disarray at the time and so my comments on their patterning are of little value.)

Shamrine Abelane mentioned that a paramour of hers had trapped a hoon by leaving a piece of card with “Please turn over.” written on both sides. Apparently the hoon was so engrossed with constantly turning the card and re-reading the other side that her paramour dispatched it with ease. Yana van der Neffte was more cryptic. Her one comment was about deodand, of whom reputation states she has a fair experience. She claimed that “put it to them carefully and they can read the writing on the wall.”

While not perhaps the most intellectually stimulating of evenings I feel that it was certainly more entertaining than spending yet another evening in the library and allowed me to further various other projects simultaneously.

Volune



Volune and Colleagues

Gentlemen, gentlemen, while I would not for an instant dispute the glories of the courtesans of Kaiin, nor their taste in rugs, pray let us turn our minds to matter of a more scholarly matter (qualified Eroticists excused).

What of the man-beasts? Can it be that their base descent leads them to be easily influenced? Could the Hoon have bred out its own intelligence in an effort to achieve increasing size and ferocity? Are the hirsute inherently less noble? If so, why do so many sages wear beards?

Iunutharis Grashpotel



Grashpotel

This leads me to another of my hobby horses. I ask you, what other field of mental toil is so cluttered with untrained amateurs? They tell you in unpleasant detail about their fumbling and groping with cold hands and totally clutter the field for the qualified who have great work to do. I do apologise, I must learn to restrain my righteous anger in these trying circumstances. Yet as the Scholasticarum's Eroticist it is a matter which never fails to irritate me.

Back to the discussion. There are many, Carthos of Sfere for one, who claim that there is some sort of optimum total of intelligence, size and ferocity that can be contained within one individual. They postulate that the deodand has managed to achieve it. They point out the humans are smaller and less ferocious than deodand, but are, on the whole, more intelligent. Hoon are larger and more ferocious than deodand but less intelligent.

While I can see the advantages of this argument I would not go so far as Digelos, pupil of Carthos, who postulated that this proves deodand to be the original species, humanity, Hoons and erbs being merely offshoots from the deodand stock.

As for the beards of sages, how many sages ever lower their mental sights to ponder their own face. Or even more telling, how many sages would you trust with cold steel near your throat?

Volune



Volune

Without wishing to seem to accuse Carthos of allowing personal considerations to cloud his judgement, it must be pointed out that he is of remarkably small stature, a fact his theory would seem to suggest lends weight to his claims of high intelligence. The theory collapses on any but the more cursory of inspections. For the deodand, hoon and erb it could be said to work, not otherwise. The Gid is known for insensate ferocity, but the miniature Gid is no less ferocious, merely less dangerous (although I know a one-legged man in Azenomei who might disagree). The Pelgrane is another case in point, with a wingspan of up to fifty ells it must be considered larger than man, yet the body weight is seldom more than half the average human figure. In which direction should we judge? The Leucomorph, again, has human intelligence in its vampiric form, yet little or none as a ball of digestive plasm, although the mass remains constant during metamorphosis.

Typical of Digelos, who should know better than to postulate theories in the presence of his elders. The assessment of common features, (a technique as ancient as science itself) makes it obvious that the human stock is the original, as do the historical and thaumaturgical sources.

It is also true that there are many sages whom it is not really wise to leave alone with sharp objects. Moreover, many cultures measure sagacity as in direct proportion to beard length. Possibly only certain patterns of hairiness are related to being low-bred.

Iunutharis Grashpotel



Grashpotel;

Purely in the interests of research I returned to Amaranthe's salon in daylight and explained the erb hide in question. On examining the skins closely it is obvious that the spots do indeed run in a helical pattern. However on examining the spots closely I noted that the spot itself, if the hair is trimmed very short (indeed almost shaved) is the badge of House Korro, which ruled a substantial area in the 17th Aeon. Whether this is a common feature (for obvious reasons I am reluctant to go around shaving erbs, living or dead) remains to be seen, but it does throw light on the possibilities of the creation of the erb.

Volune



Volune

Fascinating! We must immediately shave a statistically significant sample of erbs. Scientific exactitude demands no less!

Grashpotel



Grashpotel

I have discussed this with one Xolon, who calls himself an erb hide merchant. A nice enough chap, if a little unimaginative. He pointed out that the lower leg of an erb pelt is seldom of any use and is normally cut off and discarded. However if we were to offer a small sum, say a terce for twenty, then most erb hunters would happily save these pieces for us. These pieces do have at least one spot on them.

I realise that it may be that we are not getting a statistically significant coverage of the erb, however the alternative of shaving live erbs is one which I find somewhat daunting.

Volune



Volune

I know of this Xolon, a man who thinks nothing of standing firm to the charge of an enraged erb but who allows himself to be intimidated by the shorecombers. Still, he is a northlander, which might explain a degree of eccentricity; or possibly he simply has an over-sensitive nose. Doubtless his erb offcuts will prove interesting, but we must make a comparative study of erbs other than the mottled variety.

Iunutharis Grashpotel



Grashpotel

Whilst not keen to spend my time haunting the couches of Kaiin's courtesans, taking advantage of their generosity by shaving the spots on their erb hides while they sleep, if the quest for knowledge demands that I do this, then it is a sacrifice I must indeed make.

Volune



Volune

A noble thought! Truly worthy of you. Let diligence be your watchword. Ancient texts suggest a number heavy with significance – two hundred and fifty-six – would be the minimum number of samples required.

Grashpotel



Grashpotel and Volune

You are in good company, if you will accept my endorsement as being “good”. Although our contemporaries are either desperately merry or catatonic in their lassitude, the Institute still applies itself to its work with zest.

There is, incidentally, no need to shave the erbs (whether alive or mere upholstery) one can hire the services of the firm Syrofinodules and daughters', Twk-men who have trained their offspring (which they raise inside hollowed-out apple pips) as surveyors. Alighting on the pelt, they will perform measurements of the most painstaking exactness, all for a drop of honey.

Dafis (For the Institute)



Dafis

Your information is most gratefully received. It strikes me that as this form of examination involves no damage to the pelt I can explain my project in advance. That way I suspect some of the ladies will be persuaded to bring out last season's pelts and perhaps even those from the season before. Work can proceed apace.

Volune



Grashpotel

With regard to the evolution of the hoon, in my recent reading regarding these creatures I chanced upon Pantileniks *Universal History of the Eighteenth Aeon*. He mentions that the Ghar-Knights of Mealass rode Hoons into battle. He also recounts how they were overthrown by insurrection from within rather than by external enemies. It appears that the Hoons, originally created in vats, came to be allowed to breed naturally as the only way to replace battlefield casualties and the results of attrition. Apparently someone introduced a factor into the matrix which meant that many of the stud bulls sired progeny that were erratic and mentally unstable, becoming less and less tractable as time passed.

Volune



Volune

This shows extraordinary ignorance among the Ghar-Knights! The meanest thaumaculturalist knows that allowing sexual reproduction among individuals of a pure strain produces random hybrids! Still, recalling their fate at the hands of Politor the Multiple I suppose arrogance and stupidity are to be expected, and indeed, are often associated with those who subscribe to such elaborate honour codes.

Grashpotel



Grashpotel

In all fairness the original reason, needing to keep up with battlefield losses, was not unacceptable. However their lack of basic knowledge is to be frowned upon. There again it has to be conceded that for their purpose, which was killing people by hitting them with a long bar of sharpened, edged steel, the intelligence of the Ghar-Knights was perfectly adequate. Too much free thinking and education might well have undermined their self confidence and could have led to their defeat even earlier.

However it perhaps gives us an example of just how sexual reproduction can be relied upon to result in the creation and further spread of subspecies.

Volune



Volune

With regard to Carthos of Sfere (whose fatuous theories have begun to irritate me), I have sent him a copy of Yartuine's *The Slaying*, an entirely fictitious account of a hunt in the Great Erm which purports to be factual and to an extent supports his theory. It also describes the Great Erm as containing impossibly high populations of an impossibly large number of predatory man-beast species. One hopes he will be intrigued. It might also be useful to suggest that the climate of Tugersbir would prove beneficial for his carbuncles.

Iunutharis Grashpotel



Grashpotel

I will ensure that the health giving properties of the little-known (and almost certainly fictitious) Tugersbir spar shall be made known to him forthwith.

Volune



Volune

Should he chose to make this expedition, do you suppose he might be persuaded to shave a few erbs while in the north?

Iunutharis Grashpotel



Grashpotel

I will wait until he is aboard ship before offering him the loan of a razor. Even with the Twk-men working in Kaiin, it would be useful to check pelts from further north.

Volune



Volune

... So Carthos is outfitting a ship? Perhaps we should send somebody?

Grashpotel



Grashpotel

Believe me, I have tried. Unfortunately Carthos is wise to the usual suspects and is refusing to take people who fall into the categories of “the husband of my current mistress” and “people I owe large sums of money to.” It strikes me that, as this expedition is being launched as much because Carthos has fallen foul of Prince Khandive as because he has an urgent desire to explore the uttermost north, it is possible that pressure can be brought to bear on him through the proper channels. I have approached the delectable Suletta with a short list of names and she has promised to bring this to the attention of the Prince. It might still be possible to add to this list if we hasten.

Volune



Grashpotel

I note that you claim that *The Slaying* is fiction? Not to proponents of Dresno’s theory of Reciprocal Inevitability, which states that fictitious events actually and inevitably happen in quantity inverse to their likelihood. So, given a long enough span of time – say 22 Aeons – everything has happened, except the sun going out, which, by this analysis, is a supremely unlikely event. Thus the events described in *The Slaying* undoubtedly occurred.

Dafis for the Institute



Dafis

While not entirely convinced by Dresno’s work, I do find it somewhat comforting. I suspect that this factor is the main reason for its popularity.

Volune



Dafis

Nonsense! While I am acquainted with Dresno’s theory, it does not apply in this case for the simple reason that the details given in *The Slaying* are not merely improbable but impossible. For instance, the hero is beset by a pack of ten thousand erbs, many of over twelve ells in height. Even allowing for the opportunistic and omnivorous habits of the erb, such a number of beasts would require an enormous area of forest to sustain themselves. I estimated that an adult erb requires sixty-four square miles of feeding territory to remain in reasonable health. Ten thousand would therefore require six hundred and forty thousand square miles of forest. Maps show the distance from the southern edge of the forest to the ice-wall to be on average some forty-five miles, and while I can not claim to know the east-west extent of

the forest, it would only be twenty thousand miles or so if it circled the earth, which it does not. This gives a figure of nine hundred thousand square miles, which is undoubtedly in excess of the true figure.

Thus, even if we assume his pack to have included every erb in the forest it is of scarcely feasible proportions, without considering the problems of feeding while gathered in such numbers, or the other predators in competition with the beasts, deodands, grue, gids, hoon, leucomorph, asms, pelgrane and random hybrids, all of which enjoy a similar diet.

(Nor, incidentally, is it practical to kill ten thousand erbs with a small fruit knife and a jar of Madame Milgrim's Pickled Mungberry!)

Iunutharis Grashpotel



Grashpotel

While the fruit knife offers little potential, I remind you that the spicy nature of Madame Milgrim's Pickled Mungberry is such as it is known of have led to several recorded incidents of cardiac arrest. I admit that the best hope of slaying erbs using the pickle would be to smear yourself with it and hope that erbs were trampled underfoot in the rush.

Volune



Grashpotel, Volune

I am afraid you are wrong on both counts, but not in all particulars. The Great Erb is indeed inadequate for the purposes of supporting such a population of erbs under normal circumstances, but every seven years, the nocturnal erbs travel *incognito* in their hundreds to the forest to mate and undergo their primordial rituals. These rituals are an imitation of the hoeing, weeding and planting that their distant peasant ancestors undertook. The other creatures of the area are slaughtered, driven away or seek refuges said to be in locations similar to the erbs' ancestors' demesnes. There is no more moving sight than that described by Yartuine in *The Slaying*, the epic struggle of two deodands against the erb horde. Their deaths are filled with irony. The two deodands, having beaten off wave after wave of erb begin to fight over the numerous erb corpses. One suffers a mortal wound, the other is so bloated with erb-flesh that it cannot move. (This reminds me of a reliable way to kill a deodand. Capture three erbs, render them helpless and tie them to a tree. After the deodand has feasted, is bloated and unable to move, peg it down with your three-pronged deodand barb, and finally run it through.)

Madame Milgrim's Pickled Mungberry is an erroneous translation in an early version. I recommend Yarlane's more accurate version: the "fruit knife" is in fact an "sun-apple corer" or "erb impaler" later known as the *erb spear*. Joanus Milgrim would be unhappy to know that her creatotic mung-fish poison would be later mistaken for a potent, but relatively harmless comestible.

Forgive me, what was the question?

Perrin for the Syncretic Symposium



My dear Perrin,

I suspect that you have been drinking a tot or so too much of your excellent sub-cellar ale. By "Great Erb" I assume you mean the Great Erm unless our discussion is to move into the realms of the surreal. I do not dispute your knowledge of the migratory habits of the erb, save to say that even in a good year, three to four thousand individuals would be the maximum size for the pack. Certainly Yartuine's description of the death of the two deodands is moving, he was a fine dramatic writer. Yet it had no basis in fact, the magnificence of the deodand's defence being merely a literary device to make his hero, Loparion, appear in the best possible light when in the next chapter he defeats three deodands bare handed, again an obviously impossible feat.

Iunutharis Grashpotel, Sage



Colleagues

Pah! Deodands never suffer such lassitude. When well fed, they become ever more zesty, burning off the excess vittals in an oily perspiration. This is, incidentally, how you can tell well-fed from famished deodands. One glistens, the other is dull and lifeless.

With regard to the “fruit knife” here I confess to uncertainty, as both my editions clearly state “fruit knife” and “pickled Mungberry”. However, in the previous chapter we have Loparion peeling and coring crab apples with his knife, which I venture to suggest would be a tricky feat with a fifteen ell killing spear. Meanwhile, after slaying the erbs he is recorded as having eaten the preserve, which with mung-fish poison would surely be an unwise move even for a hero of Loparion’s supposed stature?

As an aside there is of course, the tale of Rabasion the Mole Slayer, who after a surfeit of sun-apple calvados earned his sobriquet with just such a spear. The symbolism of his actions was lost on him, as it is on the tellers of his tale, but it raises a titter here at the Institute. Indeed one of our tests for initiates is for them to read the passage. If they giggle they become acolytes, if not, catamites.

Masdrio, for the Institute²



... Dear Colleagues,

I am sending this to your *stilograe* not from the comfort of my manse, but from a cabin onboard Carthos’ ship, *The High Didactor*.

Last night I was invited to taste the ten year Tanvilkat vintage from that series of tombs known as the “Eighteen Quenules”, which proved excellent. A discussion began on the relationship between vintage quality for Tanvilkat and for Golden Porphiron; after some further tasting we concluded that it was impossible to draw a conclusion. For both to be ideal a peculiar combination of weather is required, with fog rising from the Derna but not the Scaum ...

I digress. On waking I was puzzled at gentle rolling motion of my bed, then surprised, alarmed and finally outraged when a surly brute by the name Smebin entered my cabin and informed me that I had signed up on Carthos’ northern expedition as Chief Classifier. While my cabin is a commodious and well-appointed affair in the sterncastle (albeit with a wholly inadequate library), I nonetheless cannot quell my sense of injustice and have resolved to treat Carthos and his men with cold formality, no other means of redress being open to me. While grudgingly obedient in minor matters such as the salting of my morning porridge, Smebin is effectively my guard, and I am allowed on deck only at certain hours, Carthos having explained that this is to ensure that the seamen are not disturbed at their work!

As I prepare to send this missive, an uneasy thought has come to me. Perhaps I am not the only savant of Kaiin to have been so used?

Grashpotel



Grashpotel

It is indeed an interesting circumstance. I would press you to think carefully. Have you loaned money to someone recently, or has some savant taken a closer than usual interest in your library?

Another point to ponder is the virtue of your lady wife. I do not raise this matter lightly, but even if she is as yet blameless, it may be she has admirers who wish you out of the way.

I shall endeavour to make enquiries to ascertain who might have put your name forward. I must nonetheless remind you that your presence on this expedition immediately lifts it from merely a collection of exiled nobodies to a genuine learned endeavour. I would urge you to make the most of this rare opportunity and have taken the liberty of including with this missive one razor, soap, and shaving brush.

Volune

². To join the Institute, simply repair to the tap room of the New Moon Inn in Taun Tassel, ask for Voluna and tell her “Masdrio sent me”.

Voluna has been giving herself airs after repeated encounters with a grandee of the Scaum Valley, recently returned from foreign parts. She must be made to remember her place, so give her a gratuity.