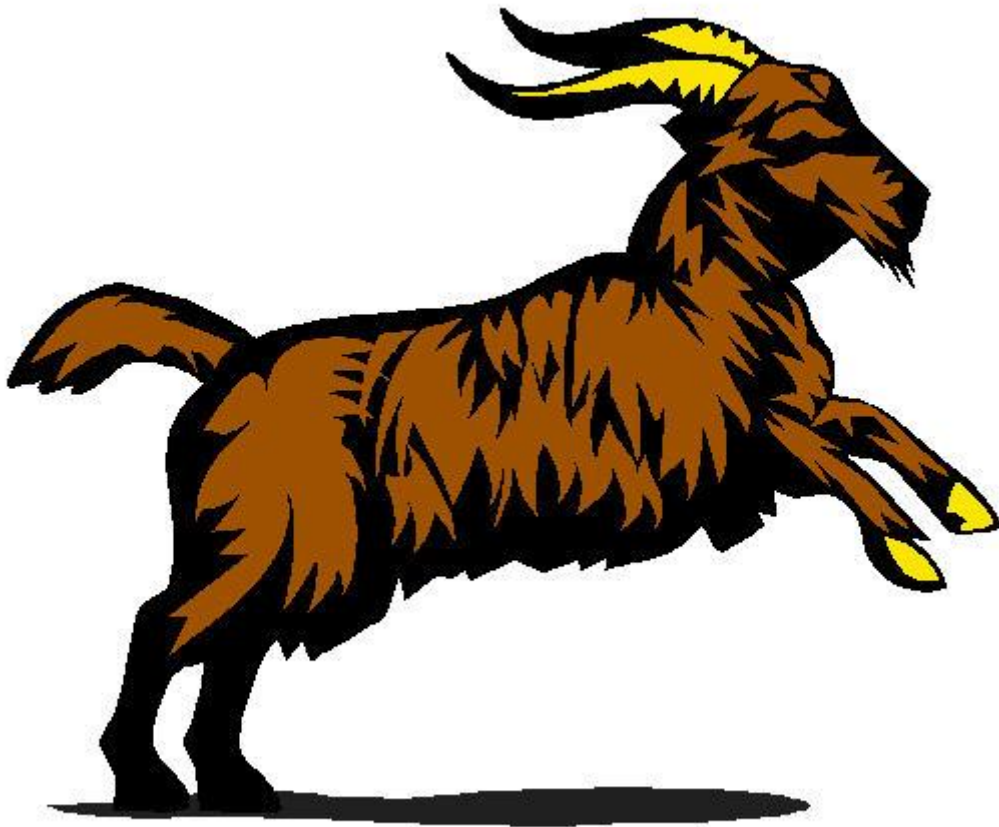


A HISTORY OF Greebie Pigleman



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CHAPTER ONE All That Went Before

Anadam is a planet with a history. Not a singularly long and boring history, like most respectable planet's histories, that take ten chapters of primordial oozing, by single-celled creatures struggling to get out of the ocean, in order to begin; or histories of whole chapters, of Jurassic proportions, on cretaceous plots that move along with the speed of a melting ice age, to take hold; or even histories, which finally begin becoming interesting, on the last line, of the last paragraph of evolution, before merging into the present, such is not for Anadam. There were no geological epics where huge land masses meandered about the oceans to finally end up in continental parking spaces; or biochemical precipitations of enzymes and proteins playing a game of animal, vegetable or mineral; to pass the time for a billion years or so; nor were there any other time consuming processes which require mutations of whole alphabets in order to describe. Anadam was simply created.

The God of just about everything, except a name, (There was no point really. He (It) was the only God around and knew perfectly well who He (It) was. It wasn't as if He (It) was expecting any mail in which case He (It) would have made Himself (Itself) a name), had at that time, a crystal of some power which could transform the metaphorical concept of creation into the physical manifestation of the same idea. In other words, it could turn thought into real things (First Principles of Solidarity – Handbook for the Novice God III Edition). The God of just about everything did not realise this at first and it was rather by accident that Anadam came into being.

The crystal was solid Amber and did not contain any mosquitoes. It had formed A-illions (The epoch which comes before Billions of years); of years ago from the extruded sap of the original tree of creation, which the God of just about everything, had absently placed in the deep pocket of His tweed dressing gown and had forgotten (The God of just about everything does not forget. He (It) just knows things in order of priority. At this time pigs and chickens held the higher priority). That morning whilst discussing the uniqueness of a twin star solar system with His wife; (The Feminine aspect of Himself (Itself) God has no gender which raises the question was He (It) an hermaphrodite; or just plain Gay? This also suggests that He (It) spoke to Himself (Itself) which is a symptom of schizophrenia. The speculation that God was Gay has a split personality, spoke to Himself (Itself) and also had obvious delusions of grandeur and this suggests that any people that He (It) created in His own image ought to be locked up!); The Goddess of just about everything (including the kitchen sink) had actually created without knowing Anadam's two suns. One was a red giant; the other a white dwarf.

As He (It) munched on His divine toast (Spontaneous breakdown of carbohydrates) and gently sipped at His (Its) Holy Tea; He (It) postulated the path that an hypothetical planet might etch around such a bi-solar system. No sooner had He (It) thought it than it came into being.

"A mobius ellipse!" ^{Def:} **Möbius strip** noun a surface with one continuous side formed by joining the ends of a rectangle after twisting one end through 180°. ORIGIN:- early Anadamese: named after the Skardman mathematician August F. Möbius. He explained to the spontaneous creator of poached eggs and bacon. "A figure of eight that turns itself inside-out every turn!" he added. "One year round the red sun" whisking His fork in a circle; "the following year round the blue!" he said with His mouth full of sacred egg.

The wife of God; which is not actually God in drag, but the feminine aspect of Himself, nodded her agreement and reinforced it with "Uh Huh! That's nice dear!" then began the heavenly washing up.

It was a good hearty breakfast fit for a King of Kings or a Lord of Lords or for that matter just a plain-clothed God of just about everything. Satisfied, He sat back in His throne and made or more precisely created Himself comfortable and began to read the morning paper.

Suddenly, that same God of just about everything cried out with apocalyptic surprise "Let there be horror!" and there was horror, for there in the headlines, the Universal Newspaper announced;

Twin Suns newly created!
Planet defies physical Laws
A fully furnished and populated planet
Created itself this morning
While God of just about everything, eats breakfast!

It was then that the God of just about everything remembered the tiny crystal of creation in the deep pocket of his tweed dressing gown. So he said to nobody in particular "Cursed be the crystal of creation! I shall cast it asunder to the place of thine own creation and I shall in no wise habitat nor shall I visit that planet!" The God of just about everything was not one to dwell on his mistakes so with a curse he took the crystal from the bottomless pit of his tweed dressing gown's pocket and cast it upon the newly created planet of Anadam, where it plummeted from the skies and fell hard upon the rock and broke itself in twain. Amen.

Things move around on newly created planets. Continents drift (Continental Drift- God couldn't give a continental where the land masses drifted) about aimlessly until they beach themselves on sand cays or become shipwrecked on coral reefs. They crash with the same suddenness as an insurance company pay out (The time involved here could be anything from a few weeks to billions of years) and spew up mountain ranges with the same agonising alarm as the payout figure inspires. The oceans bash against them in order to push them off the rocks and rain weeps upon them in protest.

On their backs huge plantations of forests sprawl out in all directions with rabid determination as mould would on bread and deserts move out of their way with lumbering resentment. Plains of open savannah spring up like new suburbs on which massive herds of mammals migrate pointlessly back and forth.

There is also man: - Man; whose families form tribes; whose tribes form countries and whose countries form nations; which make war. Benevolent kings are assassinated and usurpers take power beginning the obligatory struggle of good over evil.

Thus the story of Anadam saves itself the bother of evolution and eons of waiting until the interesting bits begin to happen. It has also plummeted itself directly into the here and now, passing through history like a giant ship pushing the present forward on its bow wave.

There came the Lord of Darkness, Mogodawn, keeper of dreams who found the unwanted shard of the crystal of creation. He discovered its use in almost the same way as the God of just about everything had. (Except he was wearing a full length black velvet hooded robe in keeping with his evil image and did not nor would he possess a tweed dressing gown). With it he made nightmares for men and creatures of the night and beasts of darkness to prowl the plains and forests. He formed armies of trolls and goblins and spies of owls and bats and

sought to subjugate the races of men under his evil banner. Nowhere in the entire continent was there refuge from his oppression, for he had devised a wicked plan to enslave all the inhabitants of the planet. He was the perfect role model for megalomania that ever existed and he continues to live off the power of the shard.

There arose also, the Brotherhood of Druids; Masters of learning and servants of light. These were the wisest of men who searched diligently for a thousand years for the remaining half-shard. They journeyed across perilous oceans and set up Citadels of Learning in the most remote reaches known. At one such location, at the opposite end of the planet, on a tiny Isthmus of rock, they constructed a Gazebo of Protection they called the Pyx. ^{Def:}**pyx** (also **pix**) - noun **1**Church the container in which the consecrated bread of the Eucharist is kept. **2** (in Anadam) a box at the Royal Mint in which specimen gold and silver coins are deposited to be tested annually. ORIGIN Middle Anadamish: from creation pyxis, from Anadamese puxis 'box'.

There they housed the half-shard in secret and have despatched caretakers and have set up forces to ensure its ongoing safety forever. But now this is all threatened.

CHAPTER TWO
Now and Then

Greebie Piggelman always ate yoghurt (Named after the first person to eat it, who got terrible stomach pain, developed constipation then died. His name was Yog and the substance really HURT him, hence it was called Yoghurt!) before he retired. He believed it to be good for his constitution, especially yoghurt with acid-awful-ous. He sat, as usual, at his dining table by the light of his several candles to meditate. Sometimes he would write in his journal or add paragraphs to one of his novels. Writing had become his favourite pastime since retiring from Druidship. It did not bother him that he had to manufacture his own paper and ink neither did it perturb him that nobody within a hundred leagues could read. Only the very well educated people could read. He even thanked his lucky stars (Lucky Stars are the ones that took part in the Big Bang. After the Big Bang the Universe became pregnant with a whole batch of newly created stars – these were not so lucky) that Marjorie, his wife couldn't, more or less because of his diary of entries (mostly more). Some of his writings were intimate, others were more serious. His titles included such themes as "Early Settlements of Skard - an account of refugee camps which have grown into villages over the past sixty years, since the exile of man from the Fatherland of Gorg began". Another title was "Edible Plants of Skard – a survival guide" put together during his much travelled Druid days. Then there was his Trilogy; three books on the unexplainable longevity of Mogodawn, who if he really does exist, must be at least a thousand years old. He called this "Mogodawn – Myth or Man?" and "Sleepless Nights without Mogodawn" and "A Way in a Manger with a Bloody Mongrel". Greebie however was tired of such serious subjects and had written "Why You Can't Read This Book" as a diversion. This reflected his private wish that the general public could read; an unrealistic notion.

Tonight however he just sat and thought and scraped at his earthenware bowel with his long wooden spoon, and stared blankly into his yoghurt. It is quite possible that he was wondering why he was eating something that tasted so horrible. It is possible also that he was dreaming up suitable punishment for the person who decided to make yoghurt from goat's milk in the first place. Not too far from the same possibility is the thought that he was attempting to determine if his goat's milk yoghurt had in fact gone off! How could he tell? Certainly not by taste! He would have checked it's 'use-by' date if it had one. All these thoughts were quite distinct possibilities, including the notion he had, that if he kept his bowel of goat's milk yoghurt out, while he slept, that it might get itself up and run away! Failing that, he would not be overly surprised to discover on the morrow that it had become cheese; goat's milk cheese with little green fluffy bits (It already had the little green fluffy bits).

Greebie wondered amid all these possibilities, how is it that something so abusive to the sensitive buds of taste which inhabited his tongue, could be in any way, beneficial to his constitution. Poisons tasted better!

He scraped again. Perhaps eating yoghurt was a maternal thing. It may be a behavioural secret locked away in his genes. It tastes so bad so it must be good for you! It could be a psychic phenomenon, as strange and unexplained as the suicidal inclination of lemmings. It's unpleasant but somebody has to do it! The only other probable answer would be that people ate goat's milk yoghurt in order to recharge the tanks of their household septic systems with methane and unfriendly bacteria. Something had to put that smell in there!

All of these possible conjectures were however wrong. What he was actually thinking as he scraped the white, well, cream sludge from his bowel was, nothing! His mind was blank. Deep down, beneath his consciousness there was one hundred-percent preoccupation.

He scraped again, autonomic-ally. He was in that trancelike state where consciousness inverts itself. He was neither fully awake nor fast asleep. He was, sort of wide-asleep as it were or fast awake; like a zombie; which is to say, a zombie eating goat's milk yoghurt.

His thoughts were deep and simmering; churning over like molten lava beneath the crust of his awareness. Soon, very soon they would erupt as a brilliant idea. For the moment however he could only sense its presence.

He took another spoonful of sludge. In the background Marjorie Andoreena Piggelman began to snore. There was a dull recognition of the sound but Greebie largely ignored it.

CHAPTER THREE

The Autobiography of a Retired Druid

Greebie Piggelman had never actually had anything published. This was partly due to the exorbitant costs involved in the publishing industry and the fact that publishing companies had all but lost interest in handling unheard of and little known authors¹³. It was also due to the fact that he had not actually fully completed any work to date. He was the sort of author who had brilliant ideas for themes and little enough time to complete a novel before the next brilliant theme popped into his head. This explained the seventeen unfinished novels which lay dormant stockpiled in the library; "shelved" as he described it, while he began the eighteenth, an autobiography. Whole worlds lay suspended in time in the midst of their creation as if the gods had knocked off for a smoko break; heroes froze motionless on liana vines while swinging between trees; lovers were left in mid kiss, lips glued together as Greebie took up his pen to a fresh manuscript.

His wife hated it. She hated his continual writing because it seemed to be such a flagrant waste of time; and she loathed his seventeen unfinished novels because they were always underfoot. Marjorie Andoreena Piggelman was not a romantic neither was she a dreamer like Greebie. She was a wife and possibly being that, endowed her with an insight of a magnitude that poor old Greebie could never hope to understand. The logic which uttered forth from her purse-like mouth at times was undeniably, well, logical. It was she who once said "If there's one thing I hate it's something I won't be liking!" and again "How are you ever going to earn any money if you don't get a job?" and yet again "If it's too big it won't fit!" or "If you don't do it now you'll have to do it later!"

Greebie had heard them all and marvelled at the pure unadulterated logic of them. He had even written some of them down and collected them as one collects butterflies. He had sorted them into groups and categories and planned to one day write a book of logical sayings which he would publish and would then make a fortune and probably become famous for, but until then he shelved them. After all, anything that is worth doing is worth the wait!

For the present however Greebie had thrust himself wholeheartedly into his latest inspiration "A History of Greebie Piggelman". The title had a nice ring to it.

**"Chapter One;
- The First Decade -**

I was born; at least I think I was born. I can't actually remember being born but my mother Mrs Philegrey Piggelman told me I was born on the day before ^{Def:} Pink Solstice noun each of the four times in the year, on pink and blue years respectively at midsummer and midwinter, when the sun reaches its highest or lowest point in the sky at noon, marked by the longest and shortest days. DERIVATIVES solstitial adjective ORIGIN Middle Anadamish: from Old French, from concept solstitium, from sol 'sun' + stit-, sistere 'stop, be stationary'. pink solstice at 3a.m. on the morning after the night before. She remembered it distinctly she said. It was a Pink-Sunday she recalled and raining. She had been couped up in the house all week and was thoroughly bored stiff. Having nothing better to do she decided she might as well give birth to a son. It would make a nice surprise for when her husband returned home from his journey at sea. He was a well-known sailor, a Captain; Captain Hornbuckle Piggelman Master Map Maker of Skard. He had been away five years.

Surprise was not the right word for it; shock; horror; bewilderment even disappointment and despair would be perfectly adequate to use to describe his reaction. You see; because it was a pink year! Oh Damn! Now I shall need to explain what a pink year is;" wrote Greebie. Isn't it a shame that so much explanation is necessary in a novel before the author finally gets down to the really smutty bits! Ah well!

"Anadam, the planet is a sphere of air, water, fire and earth trapped in a non-concluding orbit around two suns. Well not two suns actually one is a red giant the other is really an enormous planet which has exploded and now burns fiercely with a blue light caused by the high copper concentrations in its core. The orbit that Anadam takes is called a mobius ellipse. It's not a true ellipse either more like a 'figure of eight' which turns itself inside out every turn. The important thing is that Anadam circles the pink star one year and the blue star the next. It has always been thus a pink year then a blue year. By some quirk of nature called genetic selection boys are only born on blue years and girls on pink years. If on the other hand a child is born out of season, that is, on a year contrary to their sex all manner of strife will befall the family. I was such a child;" writes Greebie.

"This was also the cause of Father's great disappointment. I should have been a girl or at least born on the following year!

Another source of embarrassment to Father was the fact that Mother created me without so much as a iota of his help. ^{Def:}iota · noun 1 the ninth letter of the Anadamese alphabet (· , ·), transliterated as 'i'. 2[usually with negative] an extremely small amount. ORIGIN from Anadamese iota; sense 2 derives from iota being the smallest letter of the Anadamese alphabet (cf. jot) He was at sea. But then Mother always was an independent individual. For instance she raised me totally without so much as an iota of His help. He was at sea. She built the entire house without so much of an iota of his help. She made it out of wattle and daub and constructed furniture from used wine kegs.

Another thing that Mother did without any iota's of Dads help was to earn money. Every day she went off into the mines to work with the other peasants. Now I do remember something of these days although I was extremely young at the time. Memories are very hazy from such early years and can hardly be called reliable. Nevertheless I do recall I was bought up by a wet nurse. I don't know her name. I barely recall what she looked like. I know she had a young voice and peculiarly enough she was totally bald. I can almost feel her soft white skin again as I recall how she cradled me in her arms. She would hold me firmly yet in a comforting way and I would look up into her petit face.

I remember now, how odd she seemed. She had no ears and neither had she any eyes? And no hair! I didn't think this strange at the time however but she also had no mouth. I don't know where the songs emanated from that she sang to me in those days. I do remember her nose; her pink little nose, as cylindrical as an oil drum and as wrinkly as a prune. It was a cute little nose slightly upturned, surrounded by the white fleshly plumpness of her face and to make my amazement complete, I recall that odd game we played that when I sucked her on the nose how it tasted of milk!

Such are the distortions of early memories; and so life went on. By the time I was fully two years old nothing extraordinary had happened to me and when I reach

three the nothing that had happened to me at two continued. It was in such motion that it even spilled over into my fourth year of life. This however is not exactly true. It's obvious that some things did indeed happen to me. I learned to walk and I learned how to talk for instance. Full credit of these achievements must go to my Mother for her superb tutoring. It never ceases to amaze me however that she chose to teach me to walk BEFORE she taught me to talk! The task must have been made doubly difficult not being able to communicate with me. Apart from these two momentous accomplishments however, nothing happened.

Something was happening to me at this time that although I was unaware of, would have drastic and lasting effects upon my whole being and livelihood. I speak of nothing less than the psychological development of a fatherless child born out of season. It is not uncommon for such a child to blame himself for the absence of the Father. Little did I realize what I was doing to myself in those early years?

If I were to say that I returned to the place of my birth in order to write my memoirs it would be a lie. So I shan't say it. The truth is that I inherited this bed bug and daub house when Mother passed away. I therefore took up residence here for cheap rent. This may not be very glamorous but it keeps my wife busy. She also enjoys the view out over the craggy mountainous rooftop of Skard.

Through habitation I maintain possession of the land. It is Skard Law that any uninhabited premises are reclaimed by the shire clerk and put to use for the common good. Not wanting the commoners to get the good of my land, I am forced to live here. I do have other options but it is too soon in the story to manifest them yet. For the present, it will suffice that I am here, where I was born.

The house fronts onto a mountainous and treacherous pathway through the Razorback Gorge to the township of Kab-Ababa, five miles away. From there the track winds its way down through eighty odd miles of rain forest to the sea. By travelling east along the same path a pilgrim will eventually descend into the lowlands of Skard, after many days journey. Such a journey is not undertaken lightly as there are many dark and ferocious animals to be encountered on the way. Travellers are few..."

Suddenly Greebie Piggelman ceased writing and lifted his head to stare at the blank grey earth of the wall in front of him. His face went pale. The kind of paleness one achieves upon hearing a blood curdling scream. (Not all screams can curdle blood. The scream that Greebie heard may have been able to curdle blood but since there were no pots of blood in the vicinity we shall never know). What he actually heard was in fact his own name hacksawing its way through the twelve inch thick studs of the house. His wife was calling. He listened.

"Greebie! Greebie Piggelman! Ha' ye hitched up Bessie to' the' cart? Where are ye Greebie?"

It is said that panic is caused by an airborne virus which is carried by the four winds to the abode of man. If this is so, then such a virus, was at that moment, surfing on the crest of Greebie's own name wave, as it flung itself towards his ears. Yea it had already infected him because he had all the symptoms. At first there was the slamming of the book, then the stuffing of papers into an already overcrowded drawer, then the flinging of pencils into a case and the compulsive tidying up of the desk; and then the wife came in.

"Ah there you are!

Trembling he coughed.

"Yes dear?

...and then the cold sweat slithering over the nodules of raw nerve fibres which lay just under his skin.

"Ye aren't even dressed yet! Ha' ye forgotten we're t' go into yon village. Ha'ye forgotten that ye'ha t'take the wine barrels into t'Inn. And Mrs Crabtree is a'waitin fer ya t'pay fer them mountain berries? And yer promised t'take her a shoppin at t'market! Ha ye forgotten that too?"

....and then the stammering of unco-operative lips...

This would be opportune moment to interrupt. It would be unfair to Marjorie Andoreena Piggelman to allow the reader to draw the wrong conclusion about her character. She is a kindly and good natured lady. She is in fact the backbone of the community. She said so. She is always helping those who are less fortunate than herself. She thinks nothing of raising money (as long as it is not hers) for any charitable cause. She is at the forefront of trouble-spots in the township. She is the president of the Kab-Ababa Women's Guild. Nothing happens in Kab-Ababa without her knowing about it; (and her permission). She is the wife of the once great Druid Greebie Piggelman and daren't he forget it. She is a big woman in the eyes of the people. Eighteen stone of authority.

Greebie was wise. He studied all forms of wisdom at the Lake Tower, from infantile to the great ultimate wisdom of the mountain hermit Ben Ufi. With such knowledge he knew that Mrs Piggelman would one day outgrow her assumed command of the household, and the district and Skard and well, Anadam itself. He sighed.

The goat Bessie which pulled his tiny cart along the rocky track to Kab-Ababa couldn't care less. Bessie was so familiar with the sound of 'The Voice' that she accepted it as part of the journey. Occasionally she would wonder where it came from. She knew it was not part of the cart. She was often hitched to the cart and more often than not could not hear 'The Voice'. Bessie thought it might have been caused by something beside the track to Kab-Ababa but that did not seem plausible either. They would have passed it and 'The Voice' would have died away as the distance increased. It was a mystery to Bessie. Mountain goats are not known for their intelligence. 'The Voice' continued all the way to Mrs Crabtree's where it strangely stopped. Mrs Piggelman had got off and Mrs Crabtree had got on in her place. The rest of the journey to Kab-Ababa was quiet and uneventful. The load seemed lighter too. Bessie thought had Greebie oiled the axles or something?

A large sign flapped on two hinges in the breeze above the door of the Inn. There was always a breeze above the door. It blew up the mountain slopes especially to be there. It was sharp and cold and waited above the door, poised, ready to pounce on the clientele as they came out from the warmth within the Inn. Inside the Inn, Roberto Wainwright Jnr. The owner greeted Greebie from behind the bar. ¹⁵A long family history of serving customers had cultivated the opinion that it was easier to serve them from behind the bar rather than in front of it.

"Aye Oo-aye, Druid Piggelman, nice to see ya'agin squire!"

"Don't call me Druid, Bob. You know I've retired!"

"Right ye'are Druid. Anything ye say squire! Did ye bring the mountain berry with ye?"

"Aye that I did, but before I unload I might have an Ale! Ale was made from a particular shrub 'Youforia Elevatus' which Roberto Wainwright Seenya imported from the mainland.

"Of course Druid, of course" said Bob as he drew up a mug of greenish coloured liquid.

"Don't call me Druid" snapped Greebie.

"OO-aye I do beg ye pardon Master. It's just that we is all proud o'ye in these 'ere parts; Thart we are! Ye deserve respect ye do. Why it were right 'ere in this ere Inn Thar Druid Mogie promised t'prentice ye if ye recall! When ye were't a lard of eight year old ye were."

"I recall, I do recall" answered Greebie with some pleasure whilst sipping the snot-like drink.

"An thart plaque on't wall there is in ye honour an all it are!"

Greebie looked at the wall. It occurred to him that the plaque that Bill referred to was not the ridges of mould that covered most of the slate wall, rather he spoke of a brass plate commemorating the Druid Mogie's visit.

"yes; Yes"

"And them thart do come in who be strangers in these 'ere parts, they is all told of Druid Pigglesman they is."

"Yes Yes but I wish you wouldn't its, its embarrassing!" answered Greebie.

"Oy don't be barrased Master. You has made it you has. Thart be nothing to be barrased 'bout, it ain't. Why there be men round 'ere twould give their roight arms to be Druid they would. Some just to have you dine in their kitchen to be sure!"

"Yes Yes I know but..."

"No need t'be barrased Master"

"Thanks responded Greebie as he tried to hide behind his ale". This of course was impossible. Greebie was at least 500 times larger than the mug of Ale although given enough time the Ale would probably outgrow him

It seemed to Greebie that every time he came to the Inn he was confronted by the same conversation, or variations on a theme. It was tiring but it was all parts and parcel to living in the town of his birth. Most Druids never did. Most Druids became hermits in mysterious mountain caves or far away castles or were lost at sea. The latter being the most favoured as it left the hope open that the Druid would return. Greebie chose to return to his birthplace. At times he perceived this to be a mistake but having been trained in wisdom knew that perceptions aren't always how they are perceived. He also knew that authors have a tendency to rave on about absolute rubbish at times. The fact of the matter was that he returned to the town of his birth for the single minded purpose of seeking his revenge. He did not know this. It was a psychological desire which had thus far, successfully

masqueraded itself as a wish to upkeep his mother's cockroach and daub hut, for the reward of free rent. A Druid can have free rent anywhere for a small price. He did not consider this either. What he actually considered as he sipped or chewed on his Ale was the very thing that Bob had been talking about.

It all happened fifty years ago. As Bob said, he was eight years old himself. It was one of the few times that his Father was actually home; between commissions.

Those were the days of the great pilgrimage when men and elf alike fled the continents of the northern hemisphere and came they to Skard. There were many travellers at that time and all came by, passed through or stayed over at the Inn.

The Inn was crowded and Greebie earned extra money for himself in those times tending horses and sweeping the floors of the Inn. He earned two shillings and sixpence plus tips per week but that fact has little if any bearing on the actual happenings. Those were troubled times, the continents of the northern hemisphere were at war. Mogodawn the dark lord had roused his villainous armies of trolls and goblins and invaded the great countries. Men and elf alike fled the onslaught mostly arriving at the southern continent of Skard. The same became the pioneers of the lowlands and they all traversed the mountain trail of Kab-Ababa. All were seeking safe lodgings and news of the journey ahead or of lost relatives or how the wars were faring or of the possibility of work or of adequate country to settle or of a million other items of information such as pools numbers.

Newspapers would have made a fortune if someone had thought to publish them and if people could read. The best means of communication they had in those days was to gather at the Inn, which they did.

Prior to those days, Skard was basically a retreat of the Druids. It is the only continent in the southern hemisphere and since only Ark-wrights possessed the ships and skills necessary to cross the vast oceans it remained isolated for centuries. Nevertheless the Druids have occupied it for more than a thousand years (500 pink, 500 blue). They constructed the roadways. They built the hedges; constructed mountain habitats and huge hermitages but most impressive of all they built seven great castles of learning each of which had little hedges with a two tier effect leading up a driveway.

It was to one of these great castles that Druid Mogie was returning. He and his entourage of six camels, three horses, twenty six goats, two pigs (male and female) and one hundred and twenty manservants and a partridge in a pear tree. Roberto Wainwright Seenya of the Inn of Kab-Ababa was pleased to host such a fabulously wealthy party even though the menagerie were rather troublesome to the narrow mountain track and small stable area of the Inn. A Druid's custom could and would put an Inn on the map. (Mainly because they were map making as they travelled). Druid Mogie was returning to his own castle and towers of learning, the Uni-Ver-city of the Pyx. Def. The Uni-Versity **univer-city** noun (plural **multiver cities**) a high-level educational institution in which students study for degrees and academic research is done. ORIGIN Middle Anadamese: from Old Skardian universite, from Skardian universitas 'the whole', in late Skard 'guild', from universus (see **universe, multiversus, polyverisus and various other verses**).

Something should be mentioned here of the Pyx; the Pyx; the Pyx; the glorious Pyx; the pride of all Druids. It is a gazebo shaped construction, situated on an isolated isthmus of rock on the southernmost pinnacle of land overlooking the Antarctic Sea and Ice. It is an extremely cold and lonely hole. Even so the Pyx building receives more care and attention,

I'll wager, than any other building on the planet. Within the Pyx on a pedestal, encased in a glass dome, is the Halfshard.

The Halfshard is a slither of fractured crystal, a magical stone, a fabulously valuable splinter of history and the object of Mogodawn's lust and wrath. It is the lesser piece of the Motherstone so named because it is believed to be the Motherstone of creation. Mogodawn already possesses the Mainshard and with it he created many evil spirits and deformities. With it he drove men and elf from all the northern continents. Now he seeks the Halfshard and should he find it, he will conquer the whole planet and fill every last inch of soil with abominations and inventions of his nightmarish mind.

When Greebie was eight years old he knew nothing of this. Fifty years ago such knowledge was secret. The Druid Mogie knew this and more but did not reveal it to Greebie at the time of their first meeting. At that time also as has already been stated, Greebie's Father was in town. He drank at the Inn almost every day, morning, noon and night.

The thought caused Greebie to realize that his own glass was empty. He thrust it towards Bob who by some unwritten understanding knew he had to refill it.

"Tell me about that day Bob; it's all so hazy to me. I was only eight at the time" he said while waiting for more green sludge.

"Oo-Aye thart ye were . We were both young in them days we were. And this `ere Inn was nought but a one room tavern it were. And ye father were a reglar patron he were! When He was in town. He were a sailor he were. Ye know one of t'few people sailors; there were only the Arkwrights in them days, could hardly call them peoples! Anyways he ferried folks across the sea to Skard, he did. Them as were refugees, ye might say. He ferried me and most the folk who settled these parts. He ferried the Druid Mogie too an'all. The Druid an all his cattle and camels and horses and manservants. A whole shipload in one party! Aye ye Father were a good custom thart he were!" said Bob reflectively.

Suddenly both these men stared into space as their vision wiggled and went blurry while they reminisced.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Past

Fifty years ago at four o'clock in the morning, the on-coming dawn.

The longboat would have slid silently through the mist, had it not been for the noise of the oars pulling it along in tugs of groaning. The drum beating in slow rhythmic booms, also broke the silence that wasn't there. Apart from that, it was silent though, the type of suspenseful silence one experiences in a pressing fog, on a flat sea, at four o'clock in the morning; which is exactly where this particular silence was being broken.

A black minstrel was on board; a tall dark stranger with eyes that flicked, well, one eye flicked. The other eye just stared straight ahead without seeing. It was not a tick which made his good eye flick as it did, from side to side, but the fear of another attack. So he kept an alert watch on the skies above, that is, on the fog where the skies above would normally be. He both blessed and cursed the fog. He and the other sailors; blessed it for the cover it afforded and cursed it because it gave no indication from which direction the next attack would be mounted.

He said "I bless you fog but I curse you too"

The fog was indifferent.

It had been more than an hour since the gargoyle had last descended upon them, tore viciously at the sails and rigging, dodged their flailing swords and had flown off with the Task Masters toupee. It was a narrow escape. Without the toupee they would have been doomed. The Task Master was now angrier than ever and beat the drum with more gusto than pre-dawn sailing through pea-soup fog warranted. He did not enjoy baldness although it suited his profession.

The black minstrel noticed the chains of office that he wore, thick iron links welded to his biceps. He was beating the time drum with the flat of his hand, since he had thrown his only drumstick at the winged demons which flew off with his hairpiece. It splashed into the ocean with a gloop sound. He was not impressed.

This journey was beginning to be a health hazard.

Some people will do anything for money. Other people spend money on anything. The black minstrel belonged to the former group. He worked for a company set up expressly to deliver messages. Not just any message but those of high importance. Their clientele was usually from the upper echelons of society, Dukes, Kings, Magi's, the like but occasionally they took payment from the odd assassin with a sense for the dramatic. The company's name was "Singing Doom-a-Grams Inc." These were fearless men who would deliver a singing message of Doom anywhere in the world, to any body.

They had sailed all night and the previous day, from the Isle of Krap. (Translated this name literally means Isle of Barren Rock covered in bird droppings; for obvious reasons) This was an outpost of Arkwright territory. There they had rested the men from the previous month long journey from Centre Lotta. (So named because the reefs had Centre Lotta men to their deaths) This was still north of the equator and the passage from there had been terrible, constantly under attack from Mogodawn's dark minions and the presence of the black minstrel was the primary cause. Finally they were approaching the shores of Skard.

Arkwrights, as their name implies, are shipbuilders. They invented shipping and consequently hold a tight monopoly over the trade. The Order of the Ark is a most secretive Order and their practices are strange and mysterious to men ^(Except Masons). They are a stern ^(No pun intended) race and solemn. Their sense of humour is no sense at all and barely qualifies as humorous an example of which is seen in the very word ARK which literally means 'Coffin'.

The cult was established some nine hundred years ago, by King Blod of Ugdur, who suddenly appeared one day on the River Dum, in a canoe. It is said that when he died he was buried in his own canoe ^(to transverse the underworld in his soul ship) but others say that it was never a canoe in the first place. They claim the truth is that he discovered coffins could float and was able to take the fishing trophy because of his devious ingenuity in sailing one.

Eventually the Arkwrights built larger ships and could then navigate whole oceans. Because of this their wealth grew rapidly, they claimed many lands and islands as their own territory, which was quite acceptable as nobody else could get to them anyway. Thus their race unfurled itself upon history, until now. These days they are so eccentric and self-absorbed that most sensible people steer well clear of them.

The black minstrel gazed at the streamer of smoke that curled off the masthead as it sliced through the fog. He had been travelling with the Arkwrights now for nearly seven weeks and anticipated an end to this uncomfortable alliance, within the hour. They were now driving up the Bay of Bronglark ^(Meaning – lots of trees good for shipping). And heading for the Arkwrights one and only city Arklid of Skard ^(Meaning – Place for building ships more precisely coffins).

He looked forward to landing, not only to see the end of his quest but more urgently to part-company, with these strange monk-like eccentrics. It was not that their presence was life-threatening they were harmless enough, as long as he did not turn his back on them, or fall asleep. It was just that they were so weird; chanting as they rowed and all. They also said stupid things like "We have to catch the tide"; and non-sensible things like "Lets keel haul the lan' lubber!"; and they were wine bibbers to boot for they were always heading 'hard to port'. Their silly speech and intimidating stares made him feel uneasy, like being at a convention of conscientious tax auditors who moonlighted as life insurance salesmen. He just wasn't sure if or when they would make a move on him. This was not fear as such but a foreboding. The frightening bat-winged gargoyles of darkness that were also after his life instilled fear, ordinary fear. He could cope with that. Either they were attacking or they weren't and if they weren't, there was nothing to fear. You could never tell with the Arkwrights however. If one was not extremely careful one could end up on another voyage altogether, as a rower!

He thought the fog was lifting but it wasn't, it was just being diluted by daylight as they pulled the oars into an eastward direction. The incessant drum beat coaxed them on like a migraine. Their rowers obeyed in robotic duty dipping their oars into the syrup sea in unison. The figure-head of a carved dragon ^(The shape was debatable as dragons were mythical creatures) jerked its way through the fog in huge bites.

As visibility returned, the monkish ones, in their hooded sackcloth robes, began to chant ^(again). This was a monotone and divinely serious morning chant "Row Row Row the Boat Ommmm!"

The black minstrel could now make out the coastline on three sides. Huge tree studded cliffs rising into thick cloud in the sky. He could hear the clatter of dawn amongst them; bird

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