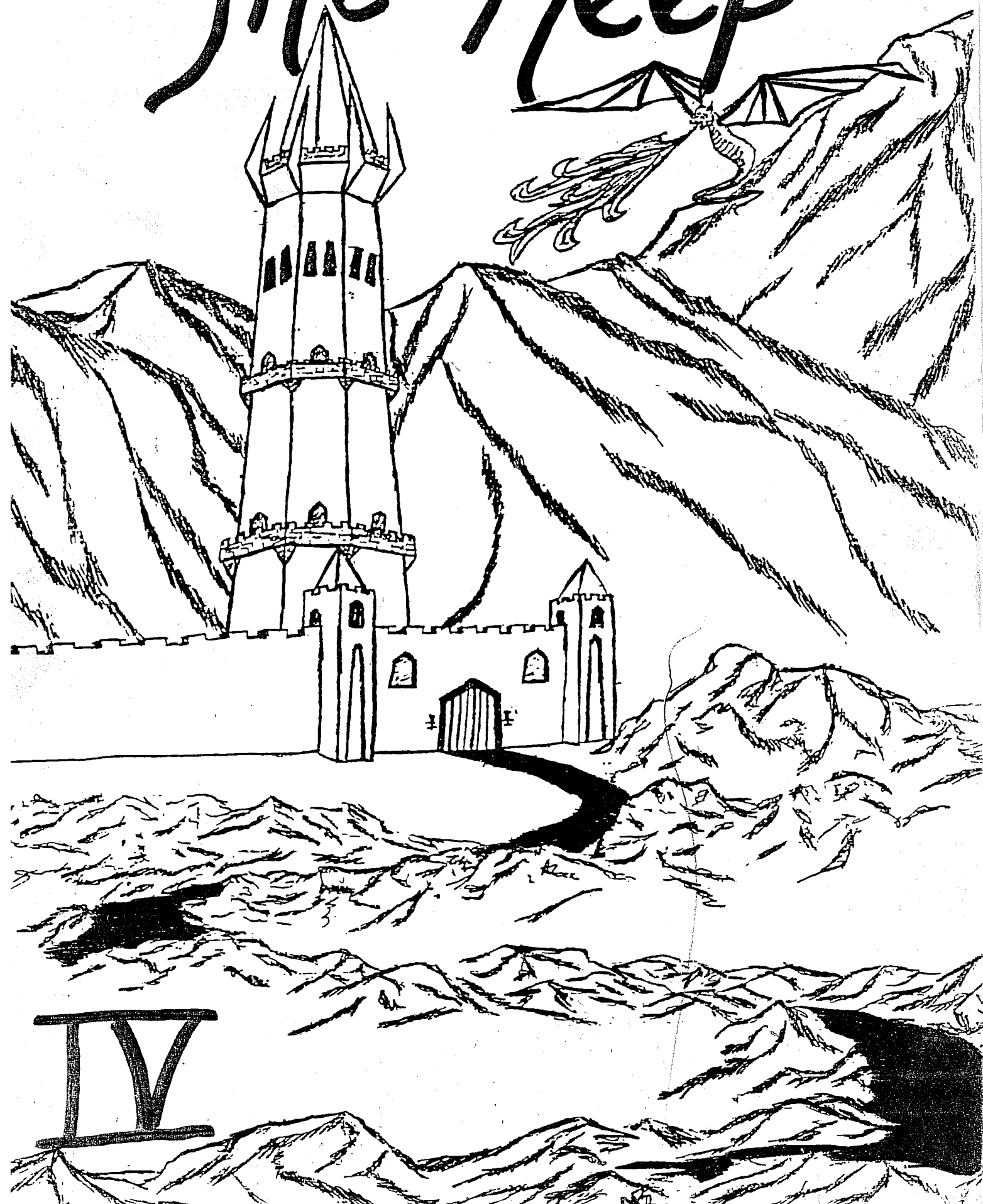


The Keep



Greeting those of Amtgard!!

Well, another exciting issue of THE KEEP. I would like to thank those who participated in the making of a great magazine.

This time we tried something new in conserving space. Any story over four pages that was double spaced got "shrunk". If you have any opinion about it, let me know.

I would like to let all of you know that I am planning on an attempt at publishing one more magazine before my term as Guildmaster of Literature is over, so I would extremely appreciate any donations of the artistic or literary type.

Some of you might notice the regular 1st, 2nd and 3rd placings from the past events are not in this issue. Most of these pieces were not entered. But do not worry. The next issue will finish off the rest of the placings.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Lady Squire Marika auf Herbanach
Lady Squire Marika auf Herbanach

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Cover art was done by Sir Lady Esuom.

Special thanks to Anneka Heartsblood for burning the midnight oil with me.

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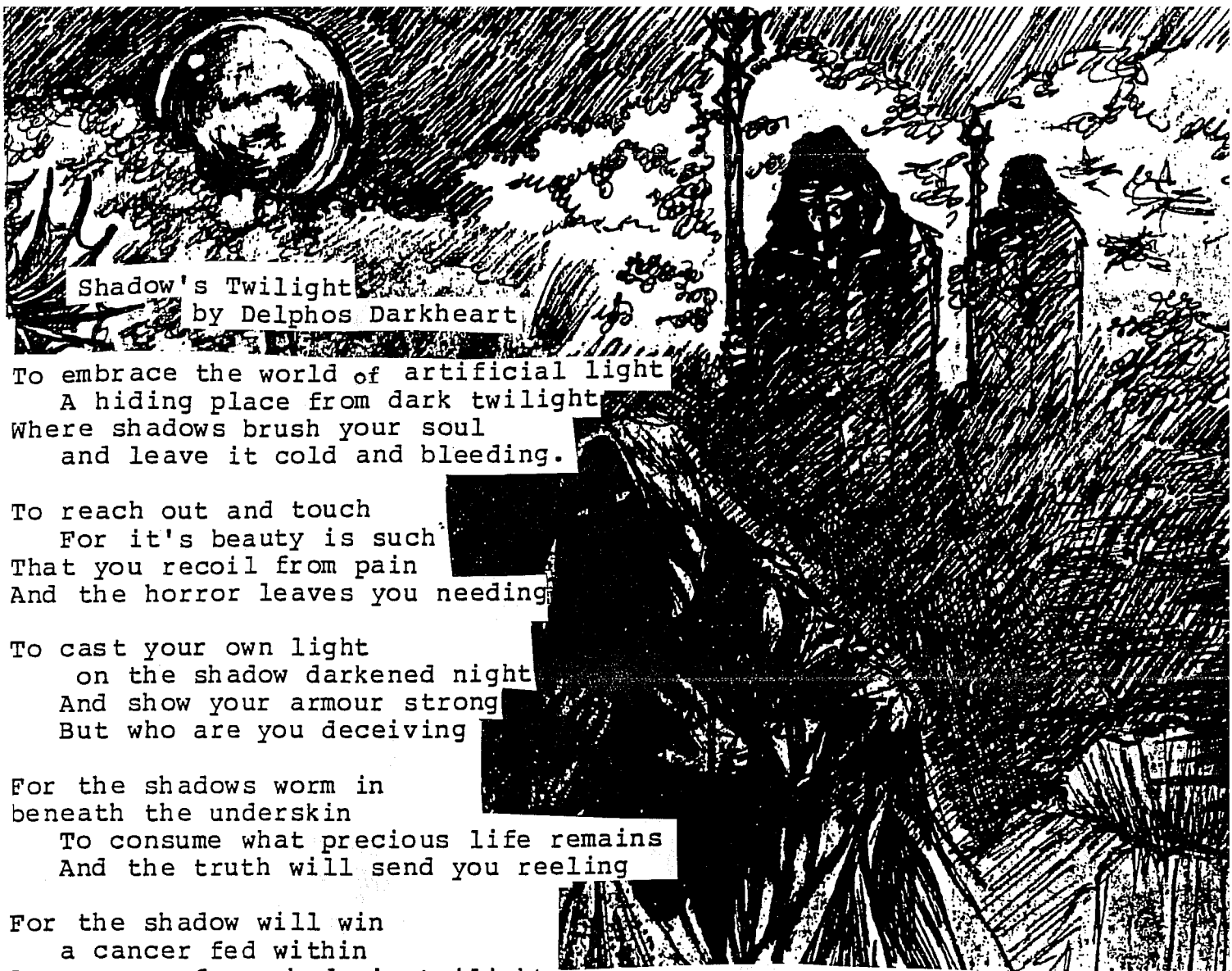
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Shadow's Twilight
by Delphos Darkheart

To embrace the world of artificial light
A hiding place from dark twilight
Where shadows brush your soul
and leave it cold and bleeding.

To reach out and touch
For it's beauty is such
That you recoil from pain
And the horror leaves you needing

To cast your own light
on the shadow darkened night
And show your armour strong
But who are you deceiving

For the shadows worm in
beneath the underskin
To consume what precious life remains
And the truth will send you reeling

For the shadow will win
a cancer fed within
As you run from shadow's twilight
and your own soul you are stealing.

Garden of Lies
by Delphos Darkheart

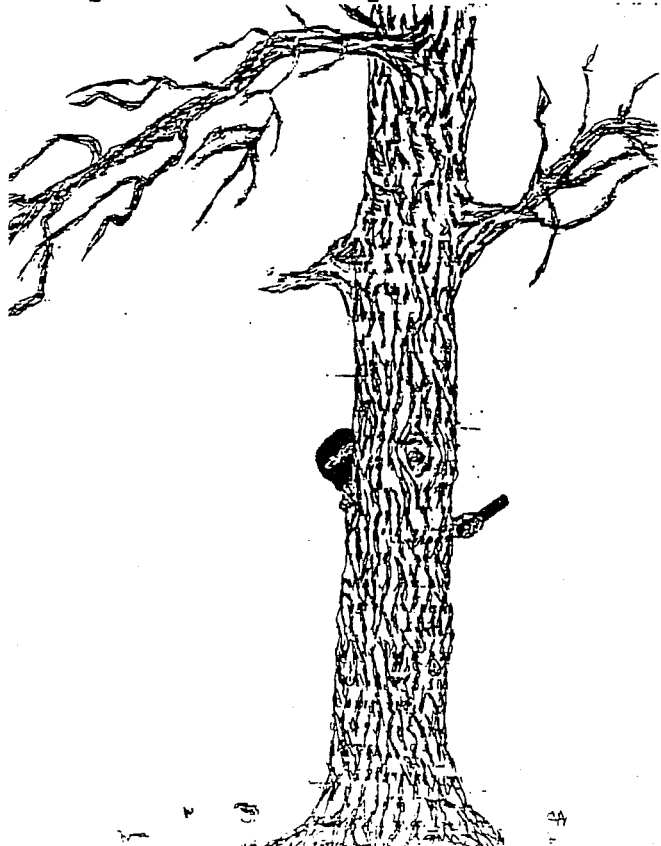
Light in the shadows
Garden of lies
Oh creature of darkness
I know your disguise

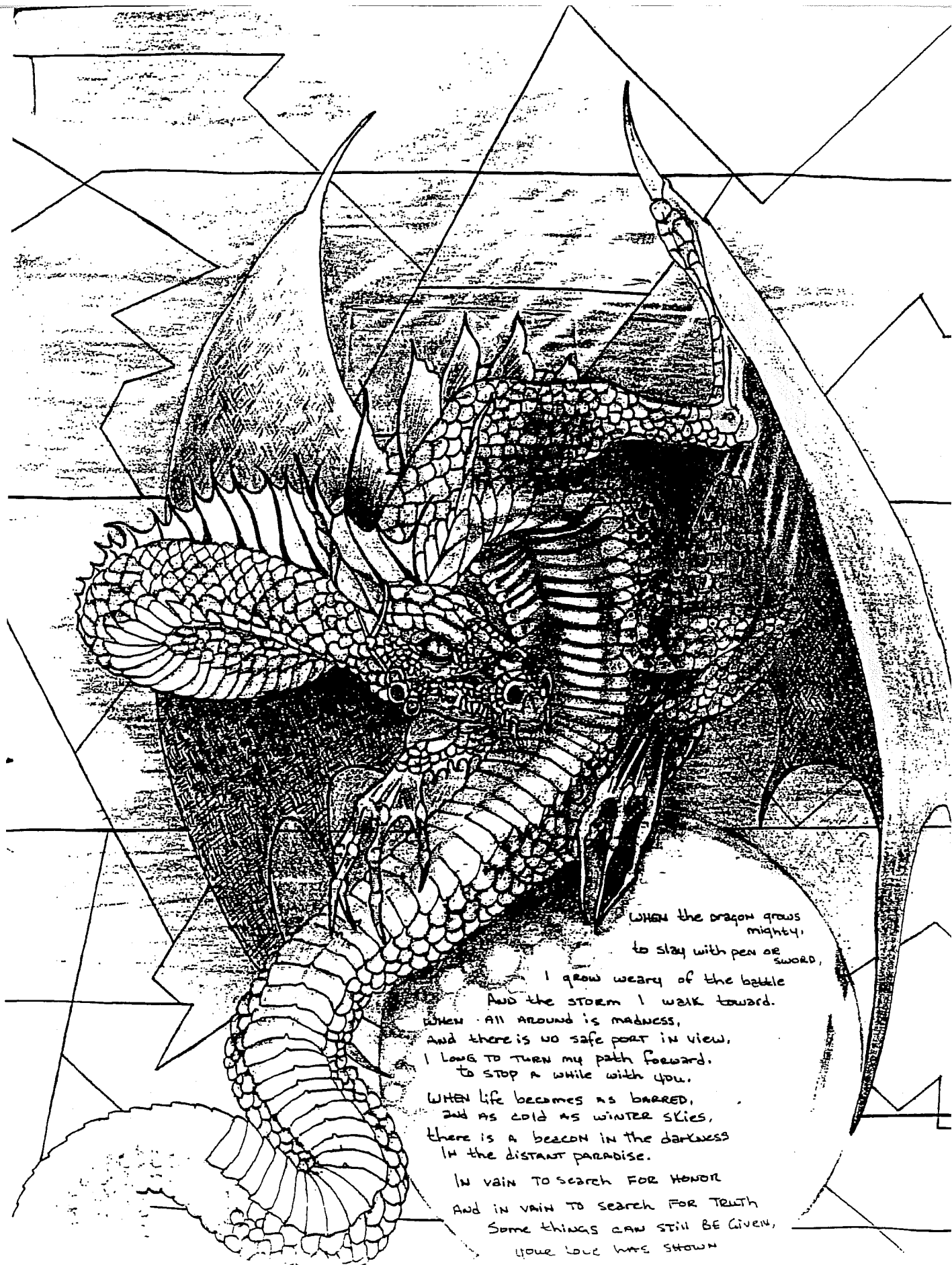
Paper castle burning
The garden ablaze
Now I may peer
And see through the haze

I know your purpose
To consume all my dreams
To leave me with nightmares
To fill me with screams

Trapped in the garden
Never to break free
Tangled in a pattern
Of pure insanity

I cannot be saved
My soul slowly dies
Taken to feed
Your garden of lies





When the dragon grows
mighty,
to slay with pen or
sword,

I grow weary of the battle
And the storm I walk toward.
When all around is madness,
And there is no safe port in view,
I long to turn my path forward,
To stop a while with you.

When life becomes as barred,
And as cold as winter skies,
There is a beacon in the darkness
In the distant paradise.

In vain to search for honor
And in vain to search for truth
Some things can still be given,
Your love was shown

by Tyranny

Hearts beat in many quiet places,
then fall out of tune when trying
to harmonize with the dissonant
sounds of day

And tomorrow your heart will beat
far from mine in time and distance.

But before your eyes forget my face,
before my name escapes your mind,
remember this:

You will never again be loved as I
have loved you today.

My trembling fingers touch your warm
cheek and I recall all the good
things that have passed within
their reach and out again.

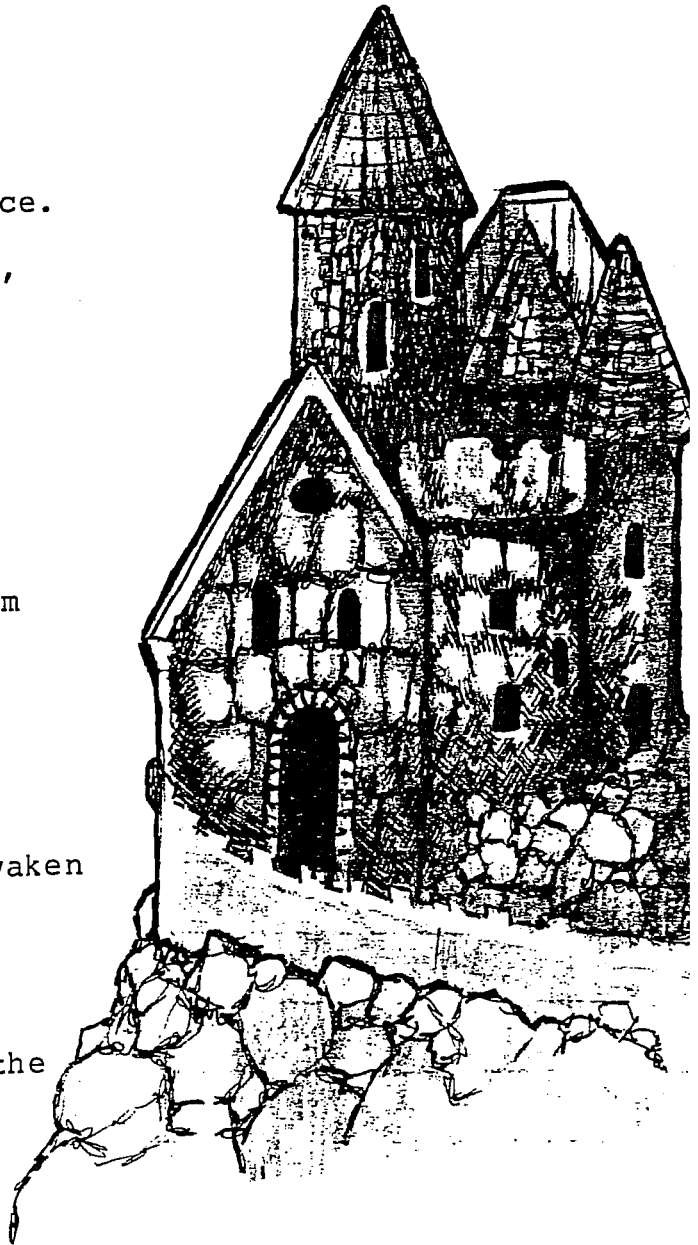
I know that some morning they'll awaken
too late and reach for you.

But you won't be there.

My fingers and heart tremble with the
same thought.

But they remind me,

You're the best feeling we've had in a long time.





by Sir Lady Esuom auf'Tae

1390

Come and be my friend.

laugh and cry

truth and lie

Be there for me

I will help you

No matter what you do

Stand beside me

Become my family

Enjoy the company

Don't ever leave

From pain or spite

Nor a fight

If you must go

Take me with you

I won't know what to do.

No, don't leave

All have left before

Just don't close the door

You are my family

I love and care

and need to share

We can be sisters

And love one another

me to you and the other

We have an advantage

We are friends and family

Can't you see

Truth and lie

laugh and cry

Come and be my family.

Thanatos
by BIRTH-TUL

In the pale garden of Zais,
the mist'shrouded garden of Zais,
Where slumbers the still lakes of crystal,
and streamlets that flow without murmuring.

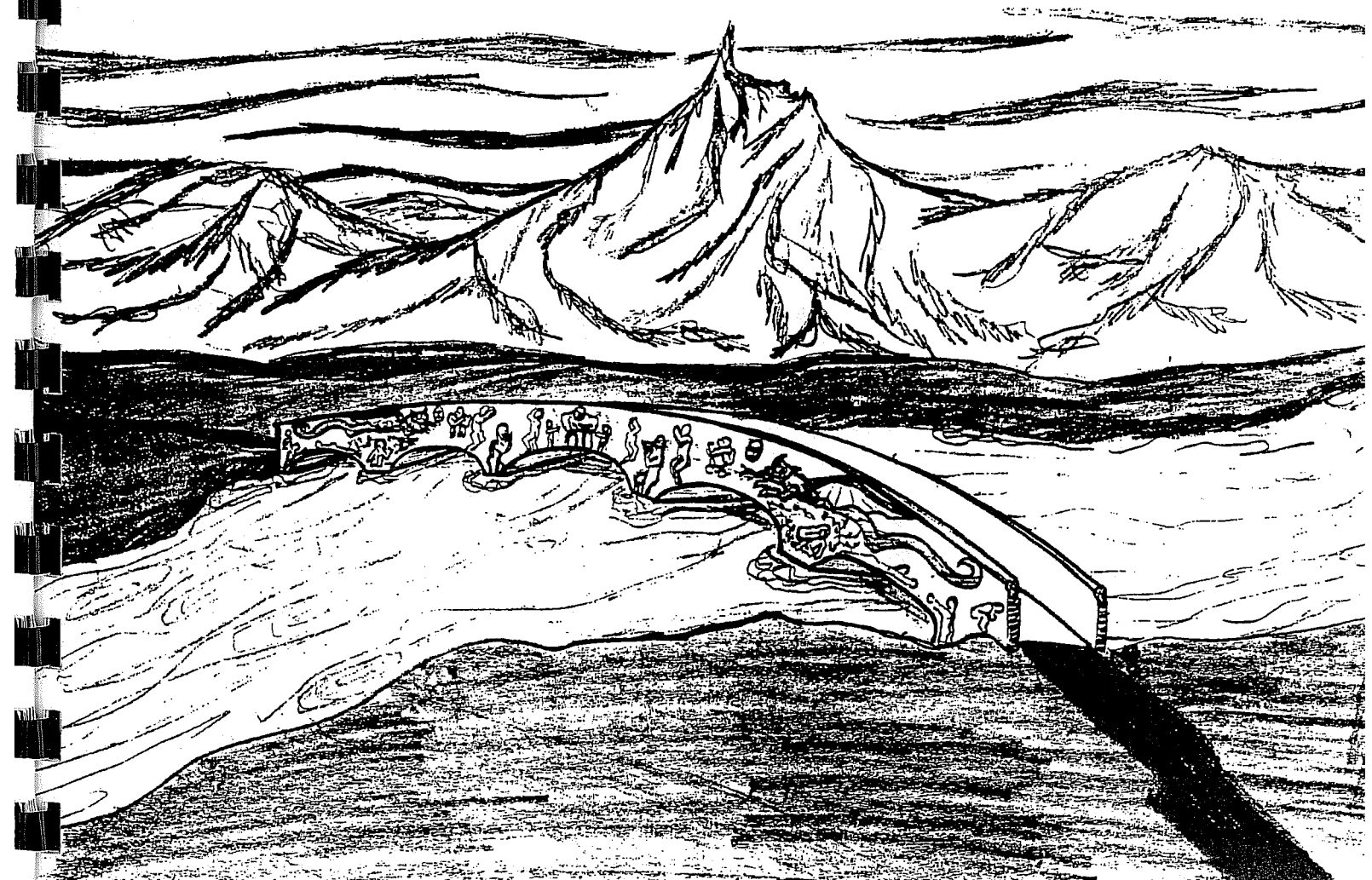
Where over the lakes and streamlets,
lie bridges of pure alabaster,
White bridges all cunningly carven,
with pictures of faeries and daemons.

And here in a swirl of vapors,
a zenith of resplendent beauty,
I saw the divine Nathicana,
The redolent herald of midnight.

I saw the divine Nathicana,
The beautiful divine Nathicana.
In a life whose star was extinguished
in a struggling yearning of anguish

In my labouring, reddening vision,
I searched for the divine Nathicana
That beautiful divine Nathicana,
In this horrible coma called living

And ever and ever I searched
For the beautiful, divine Nathicana
I searched the pale gardens of Zais
The mist-shrouded gardens of Zais.

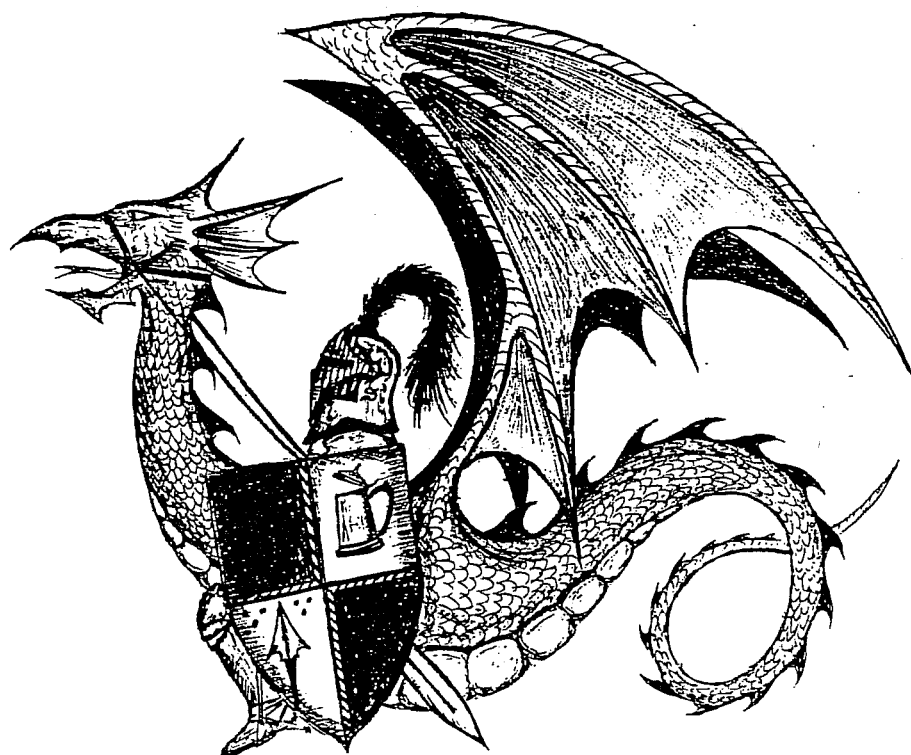


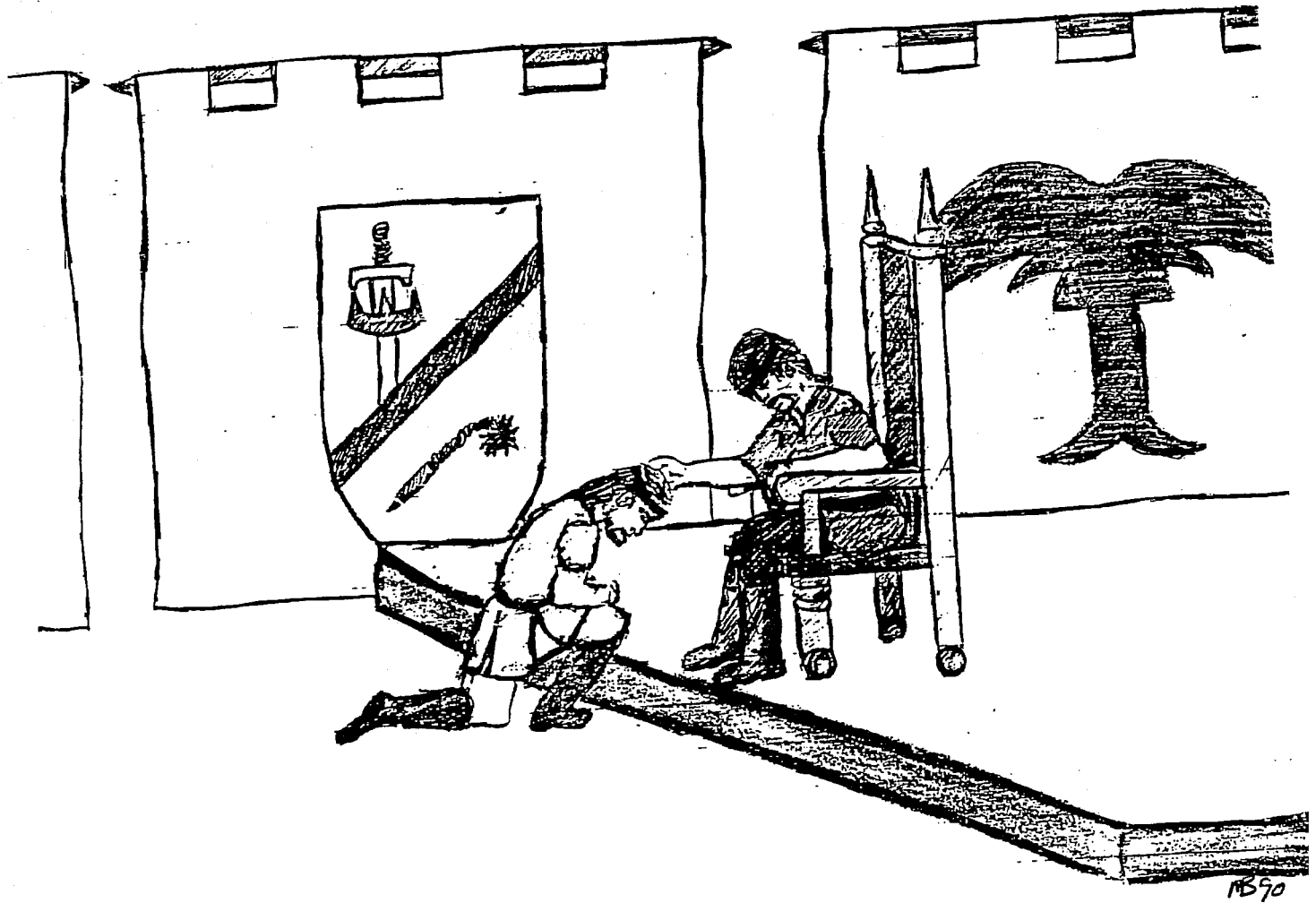
A Tear

A tear is formed, a heart is broken
A soul is darkened, a spirit weakened
All from the love of a touching hand

To touch a heart with a cherished thought
Is to touch many with happiness
To touch so many is to brighten the world with joy

But to hurt a cherished one in thought or deed
Would blind many with anger
To bring anger unto so many
Threatens the world with an empty and fearful heart





THE COMPANY

There is a code of honor
one that protects.

Tis sworn to all

Promised and kept.

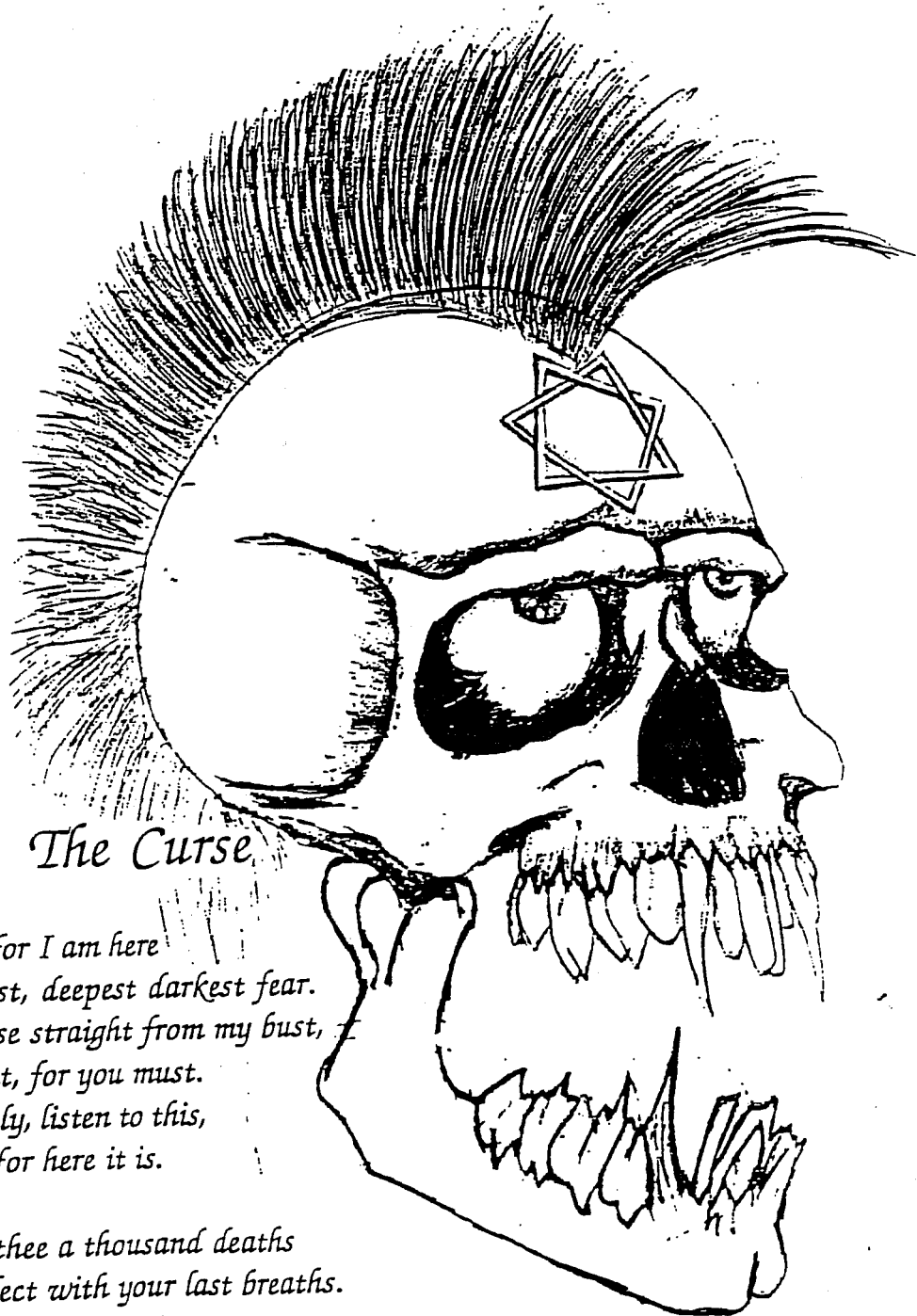
For they look after their own
a bonding of trust

suffer hardships,
Defiant and Just.

Let it be known!

To all who led, There is hope,
for the hurt, confused and lost.
Together we shall carry our burdens.
A Frenzy burns in the core.
We are there, as am I.
a shelter for any storm.
Come, achara, close your eyes.
The battles will be fought.
Rest, my beloved friend,
a vigilance has been
wrought.

Chandra Sierra



The Curse

*Listen up, for I am here
Your deepest, deepest darkest fear.
With a curse straight from my bust,
Hear me out, for you must.
Listen closely, listen to this,
Be afraid, for here it is.*

*I curse on thee a thousand deaths
To take effect with your last breaths.
Be thee in hell for eternity,
Never this world your eyes to see.
From dusk to dawn ye shall be in fire;
From dawn to dusk the fire gets higher.
Ye shall burn and burn just until,
It draws your strength and saps your will.
Ye shall cry and plead for peace within
Then it shall start all over again.
A wailing soul thine shall be
Forever wondering the power of me.*

*Now this makes your life so morbid,
And when you die your soul is forfeit.*

*Greywalker,
Dweller of the Mist*

Abandon here your earthly cares
And take your sword in hand,
For logic has no power here
And magic rules the land.

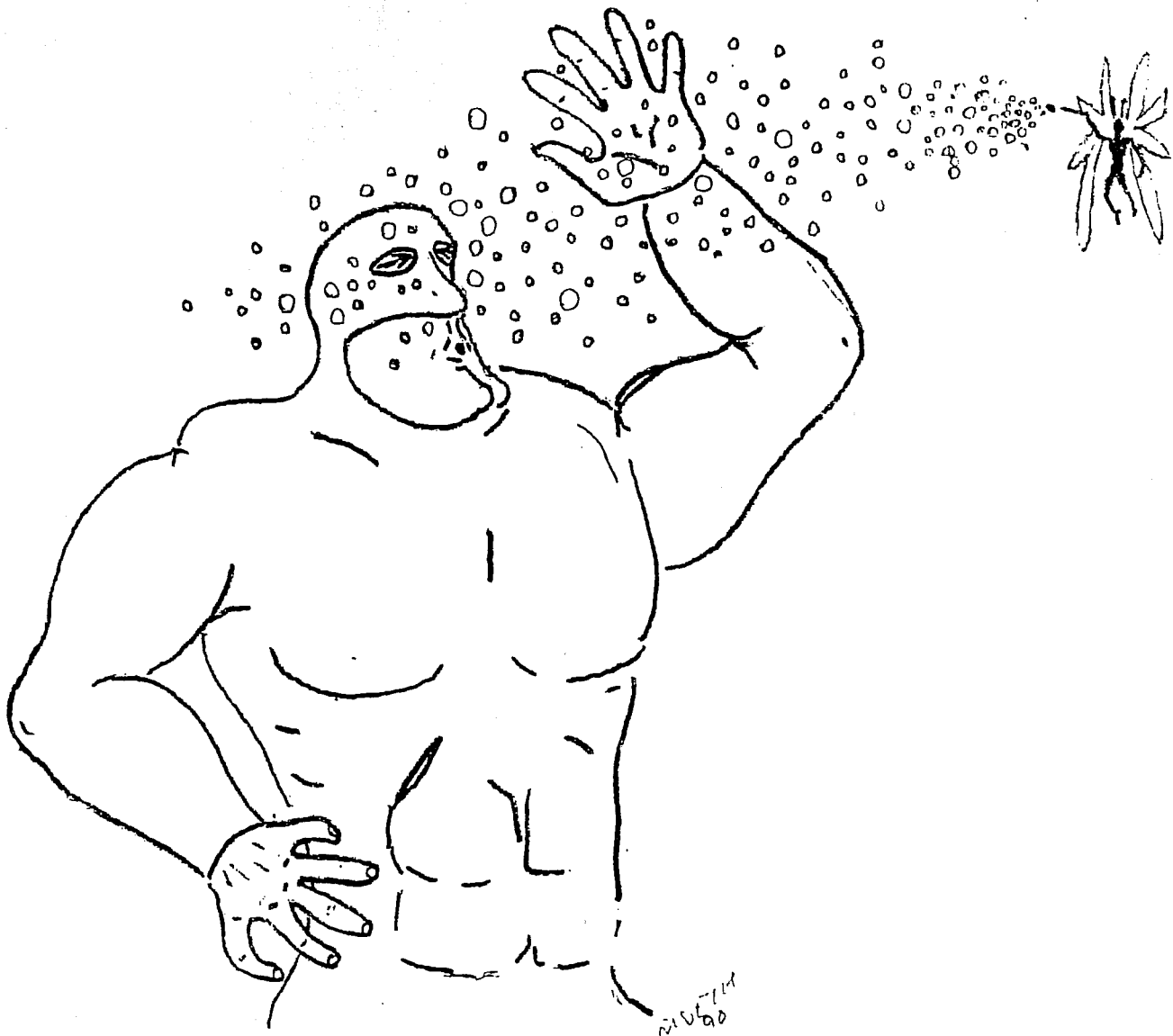
Dragons roar and harpies fly
And bandits burn and pillage.
Only you and your noble steed
Can save the peasant village.

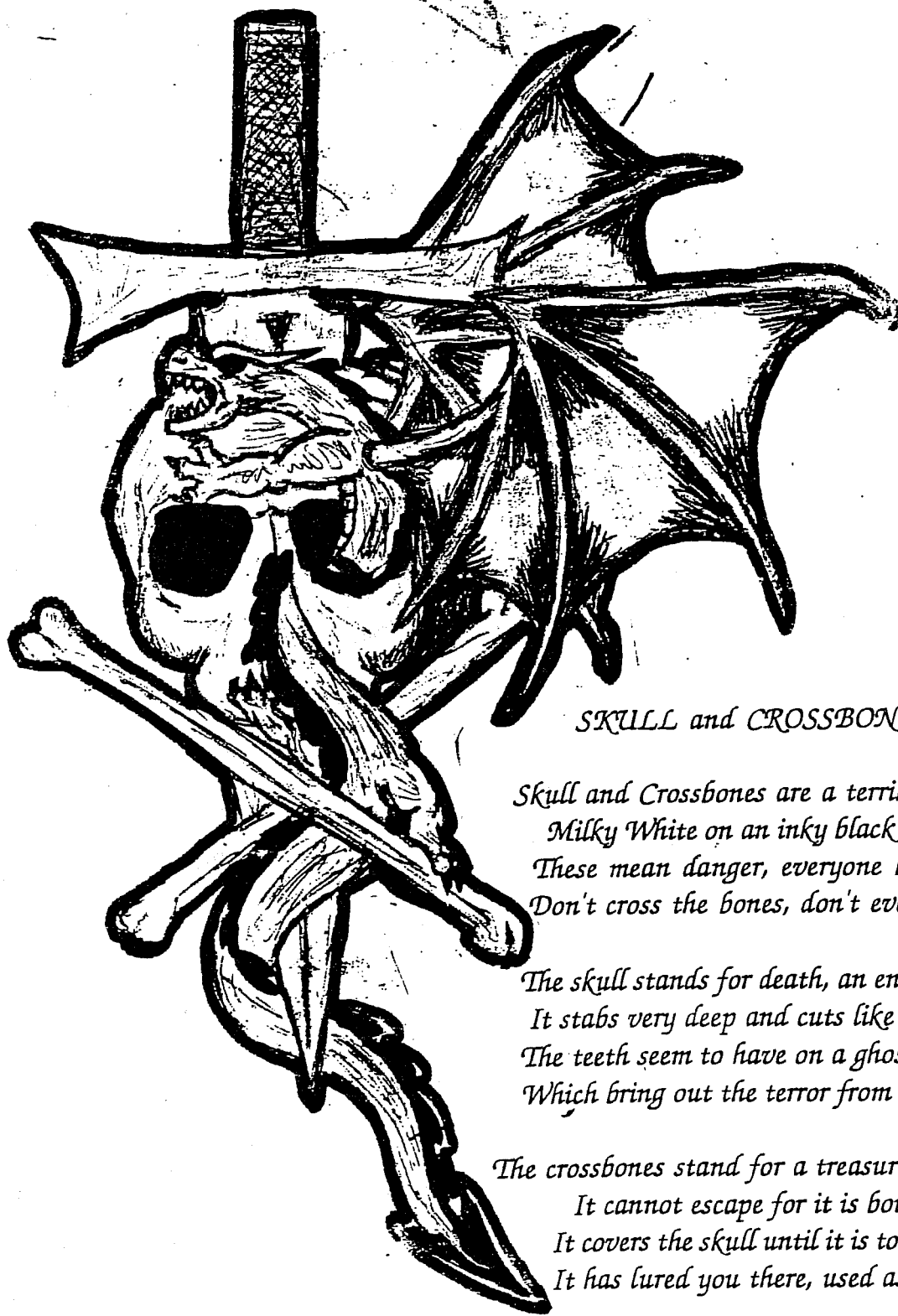
Wield the power consummate,
The burning silver fire.
Turn the Dark Lord's castle keep
To a blazing funeral pyre.

The battle fought and finally won
And though it cost you dear,
It's worth it when the sun dawns bright
On a land that's cleansed of fear.

Now you rule a peaceful land.
Your name makes evil quake.
You've made the kingdom safe again,
So now you may awake.

by Aegar





SKULL and CROSSBONES

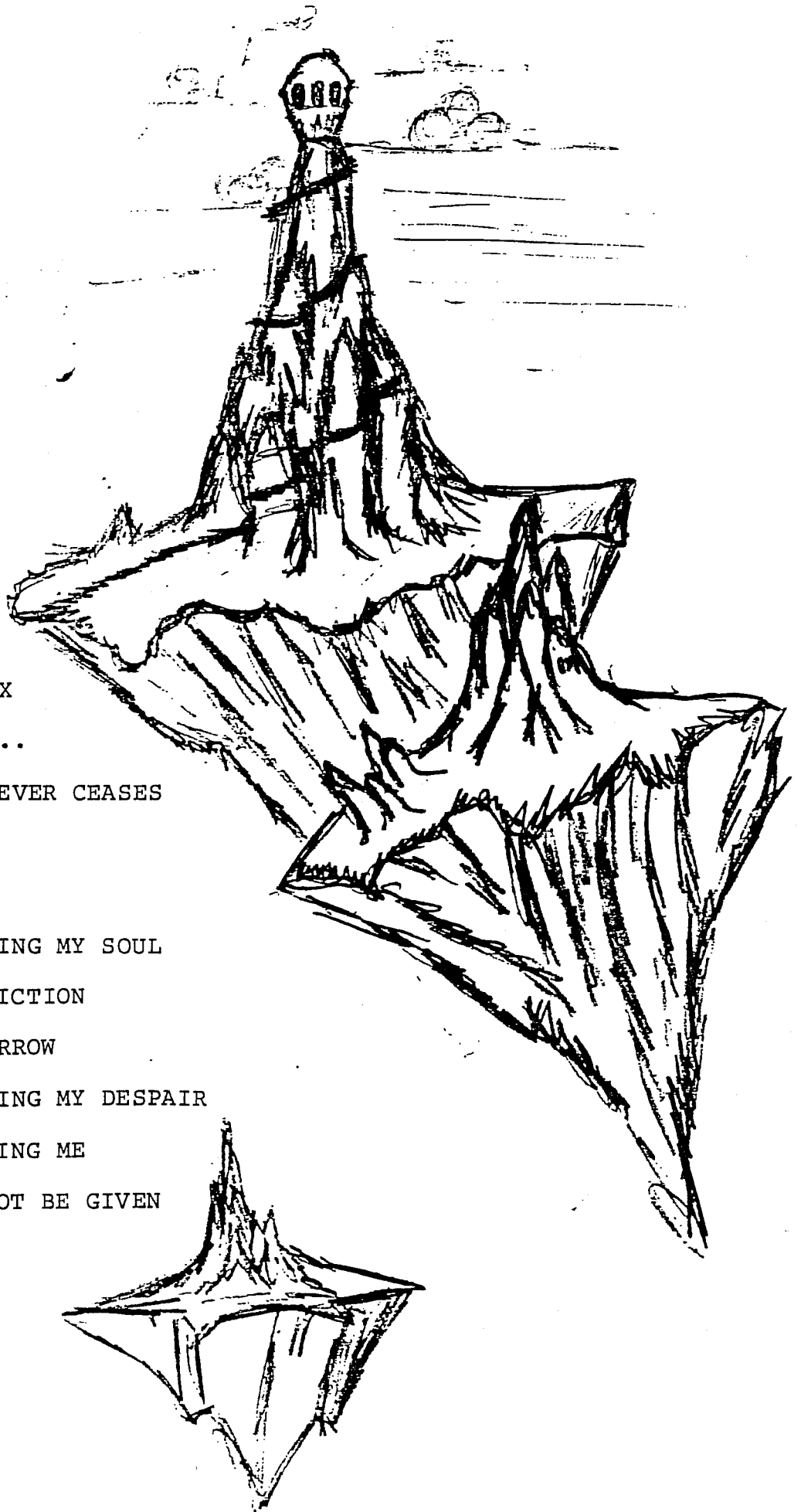
*Skull and Crossbones are a terrible sight
Milky White on an inky black night
These mean danger, everyone beware
Don't cross the bones, don't even dare*

*The skull stands for death, an end to life
It stabs very deep and cuts like a knife
The teeth seem to have on a ghostly grin
Which bring out the terror from the chin*

*The crossbones stand for a treasure unfound
It cannot escape for it is bound
It covers the skull until it is too late
It has lured you there, used as bait*

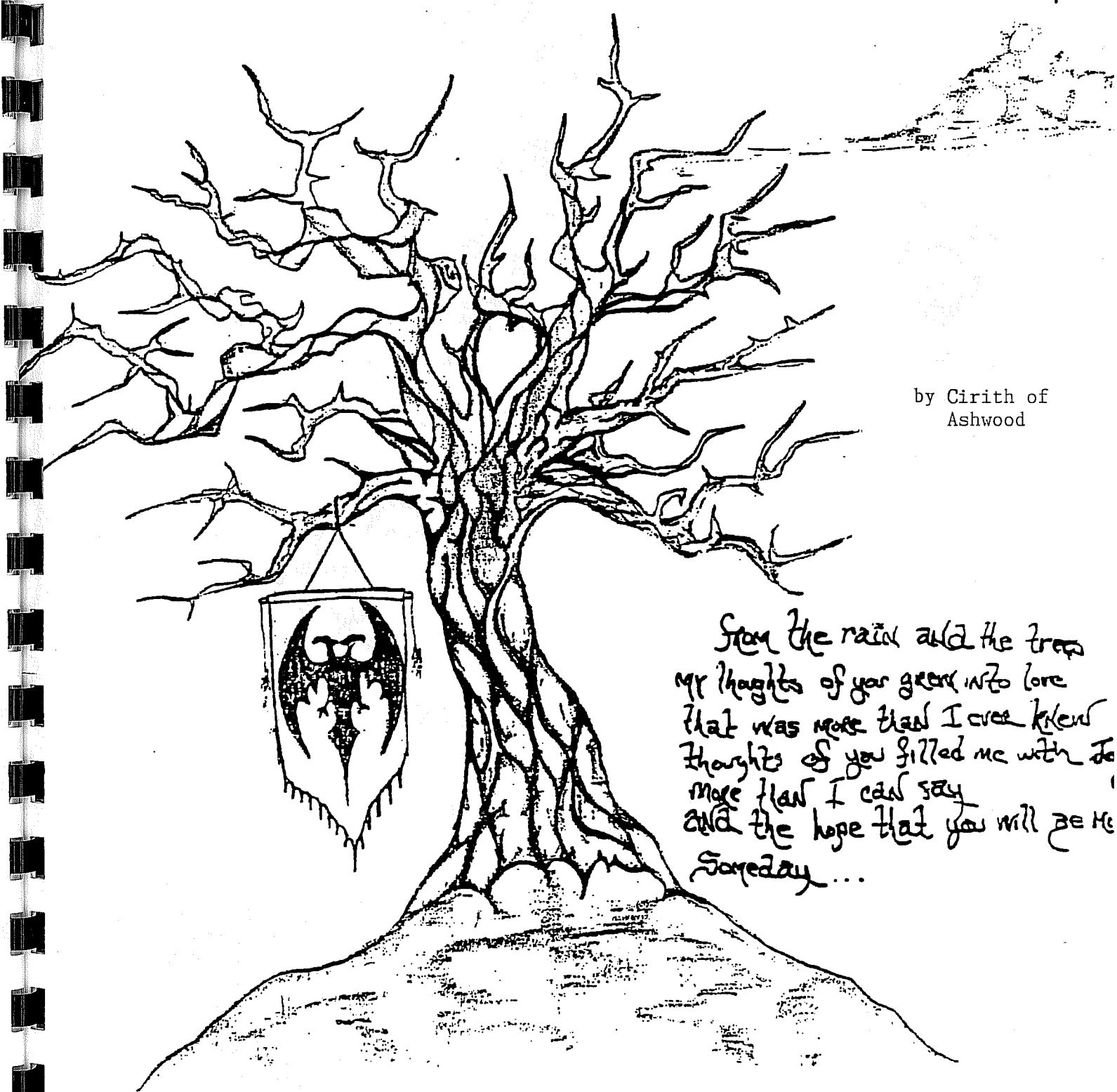
*Together forever, the pair means death
To all who stare and take their last breath
To some it's a joke until they feel
The horrors of skull and crossbones are real.*

*Greywalker,
Dweller of the Mist*



by RAXX

IT'S COLD NOW...
THE EMPTINESS NEVER CEASES
TO AMAZE ME.
ENDLESS VOIDS
LONELINESS WARMING MY SOUL
UNFOUND CONTRADICTION
IN MY JOYFUL SORROW
LOVINGLY EMBRACING MY DESPAIR
COMFORTING, GIVING ME
THAT WHICH CANNOT BE GIVEN



by Cirith of
Ashwood

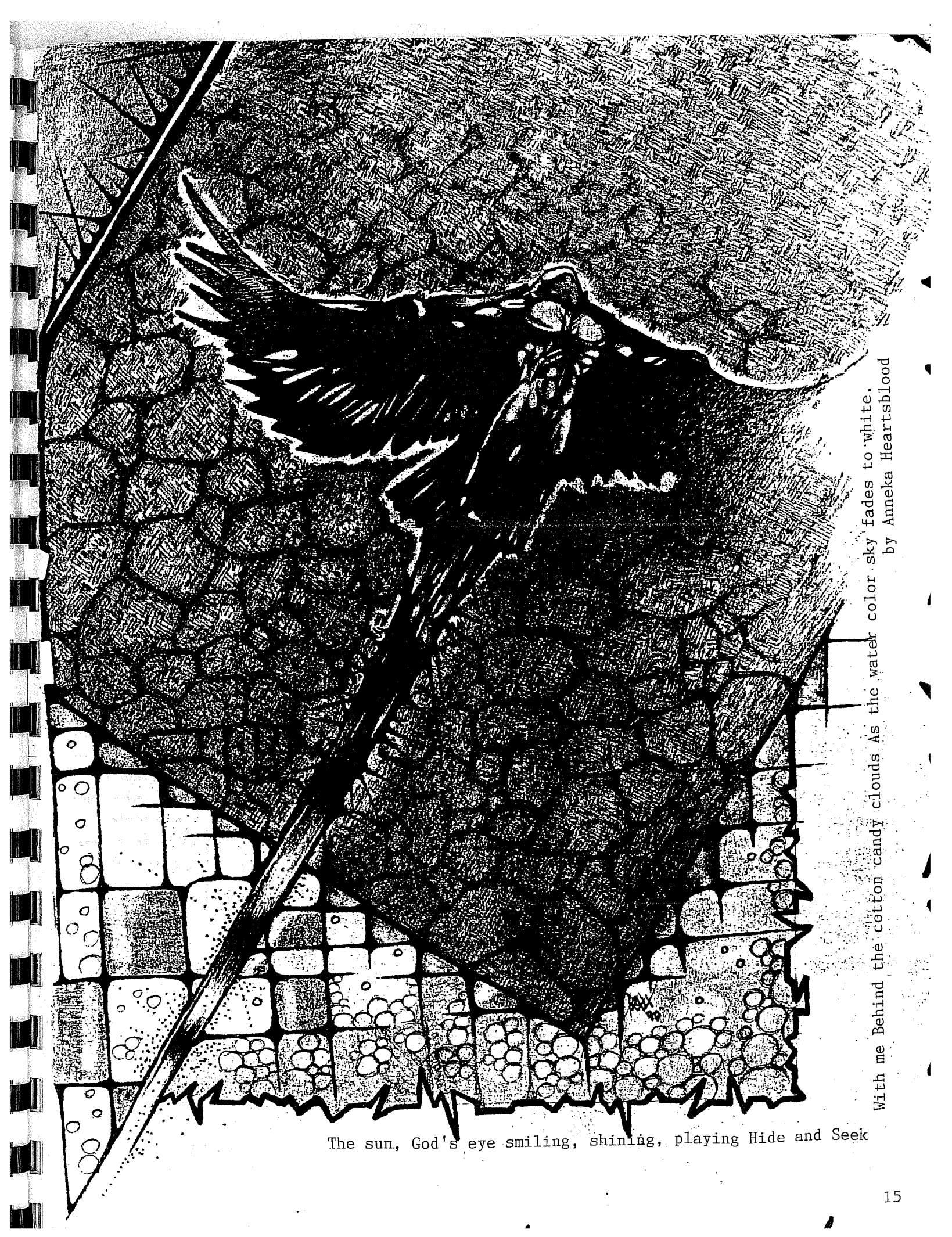
From the rain and the trees
my thoughts of you grew into love
that was more than I ever knew
thoughts of you filled me with so
more than I can say
and the hope that you will be here
Someday...



by RAXX

Why must I feel
This that I do
Loneliness and rebellion
tearing, shredding, mutilating
my inner soul
Driving me to destruction
My heart cries to me in pain
But I do not listen
I hear only the
smashing,
grinding,
crushing,
of my inner self

Is this not real
to feel
or is it just me
No ropes to grab for
Empty hands
Empty thoughts of hope
or reality
Do--
and it will be done
Seek-- and you will find
Love
and you will be loved
seems a joke to me.



With me Behind the cotton candy clouds As the water color sky fades to white.
by Annika Heartsblood

The sun, God's eye smiling, shining, playing Hide and Seek

A chill, crisp breeze blew through the sable darkness of a starless night, causing thick tendrils of mist to swirl softly across the verdant fields of Eire. A sorrowful moon hung like a melancholy orb of soft light in the dark sky, shedding precious little light on the windswept isle.

Korlain sat at a battered wooden table in a great feasting hall, one of the largest in Ireland. This in particular happened to have been built by one of the wealthier cattle-lords, and was patroned by the Celtic charioteers of the highest order, among whom Korlain felt distanced. He sat at a lengthy bench of rough and splintered wood, long since absented by all but he. Gloomily he watched the last of the revelers retire to their quarters, sighing at the bite of the outside air which struck even within the fire-warmed hall. All through the festivities, Korlain smiled not once, for he had been taken by a bout of depression in recent days, a bout which refused to be shaken.

His eyes glittered slightly as the wind flew through the high windows with an eerie wail, reminiscent of the childhood tales of banshees which yet held firm to his tired mind. A great caw interrupted Korlain remembrance then, and he looked up to see an immense raven perched in the opening. The bird was adorned in a robe of luxuriant feathers, so black as to have a purple sheen play upon them. The raven peered deep into the depths of Korlain's emerald eyes, as if staring straight into the memories of times long lost. The great bird cocked its head curiously before taking leave of its perch, departing into the ice-laden night.

A great sigh escaped Korlain's lips as he doused his sorrow with a swig of the potent mead. He looked down into his mug, swirling the warm liquid about in a haphazard manner. Again he sighed, taking one last sip of the intoxicating liquid before setting the mug down on the table with a firm sense of finality.

He slowly arose from the bench, rubbing his aching back with large hands. Korlain took one last glance around the cluttered hall before departing to his bed-chamber through large wooden doors carved with images of the gods of hospitality. As his footfalls echoed through the torch-lit hallway he peered cautiously into the shadows, fearful he had seen movement there. Checking his suspicious with timeless care, he saw naught but the occasional spider sitting expectantly upon its finely-woven home.

The door to Korlain's chambers creaked open with ease as he entered. He moved to light a candle which sat upon a small bedside table, clumsily stumbling over discarded articles of clothing which lay strewn across the floor. With much difficulty he kindled a small flame, but a wicked stirring of the air extinguished the short life of the flickering bit of fire.

Korlain froze in his place as he heard the rustling of robes flow to his ears from a corner, and he felt certain this was not merely his imagination. He slowly twisted his stiff neck, gazing into the veil of ebony.

A loud laugh rang forth. The cackle echoed in Korlain's ears for a very long time, and, as it died away, a burst of flames violently erupted in the fireplace. Korlain was much startled, for there was no wood within the ashy confines of the

stone hollow against the wall.

The harsh light spread across the room, evicting the darkness from its hold. There stood a hunched old man, pointing accusingly to Korlain with a gnarled finger. "Where is my pay? His voice grated on Korlain's senses.

"I owe you nothing, old man!" Korlain growled from where stood, for some reason not willing to move.

"I have done that which you requested, and you are in debt to me! Your vessel of life shall not run dry! Ne'er shall you feel the cold grip of Death's bony hands!" The old man narrowed his yellowed eyes, and his voice fell to a harsh whisper. "Have given you immortality!"

"Leave me be!"

"Where is my pay?" The man demanded adamantly.

"You deserve none!"

"But, the immortality..."

"Immortality, indeed." Korlain spat upon the chill ground. "What has it brought me but sorrow? First my wife, and now even my young, when shall it end?"

"Their times were up, but yours never shall be. They age, you did not, it was to be expected." The old man soothed the warrior, though anger still flowed from his honeyed words. "Such is the nature of that gift which I gave you."

"Gift! No, 'tis nothing more than torture. I walked among the men who fathered most of the warriors in the hall tonight and yet I look no older than they! I am nothing more than a lonely soul. No, I shall not give thee thy pay." Korlain shook his head sadly, "Let me go to my grave."

"Your payment was nothing! I asked no more than for you to kill my foes, nothing to a warrior like yourself. You have nothing to fear, you can not die!"

"I am sick of these deaths. At least on the battlefield I have a reason to kill, but now, there is nothing..." Korlain raised his voice. "Now leave me! Begone!"

"Very well, if that is indeed your wish..."

"Indeed it is."

"Then I shall leave you, your gift is no more!"

The old man turned slowly about and glanced at the closed window. The shutters burst away with a fiery blast. The old man then stepped towards it, and, as he did, his skin grew dark black. He seemed to shrink, and before he was completely changed he shrieked, "Sorrow comes on midnight wings." The raven flew out the window.

After a few years of mourning, followed by a few years of travel, Korlain's sorrow lessened. He made new friends, and indeed found a wife worthy of his love. Their lives together were pleasant, although they endured a meager existence. No longer able to die, Korlain had to worry about things such as shelter and sustenance. Their home was a small hut in the midst of a large field, and they lived off what they grew. And they were happy.

On a bright summer morn the sunlight beat gently down on their humble abode. The fields were green and birds flitted playfully through the warm air. A cool breeze wandered through

the hut, and Koriain awoke to see that his wife was gone. Feeling sure she was off doing her morning chores, he unwillingly departed the comforts of his bed to wash himself and tear a piece of bread off a rather large loaf for his breakfast. As he stood from the table his wife entered.

"Good morn." Bespoke the maiden, her red hair playing in curls about her fair face.

"A very good morn, indeed." Returned her husband.

"I saw a raven today." The woman said.

"Indeed?" Koriain rasped through a suddenly dry throat.

"It spoke to me, it told me secrets."

"Now, now, dear," Koriain said nervously, "birds don't speak."

"Nevertheless, this one did." The woman's eyes grew wide as she whipped out a large kitchen-knife, plunging the utensil-turned-weapon into her husband's chest with quickness. As he sunk to his knee she explained, "He told me of your deeds," her words were hollow, "he said you killed my father!" Koriain shook his head, and his wife grimaced, "Don't deny it, I rememoer now, even though I was young then."

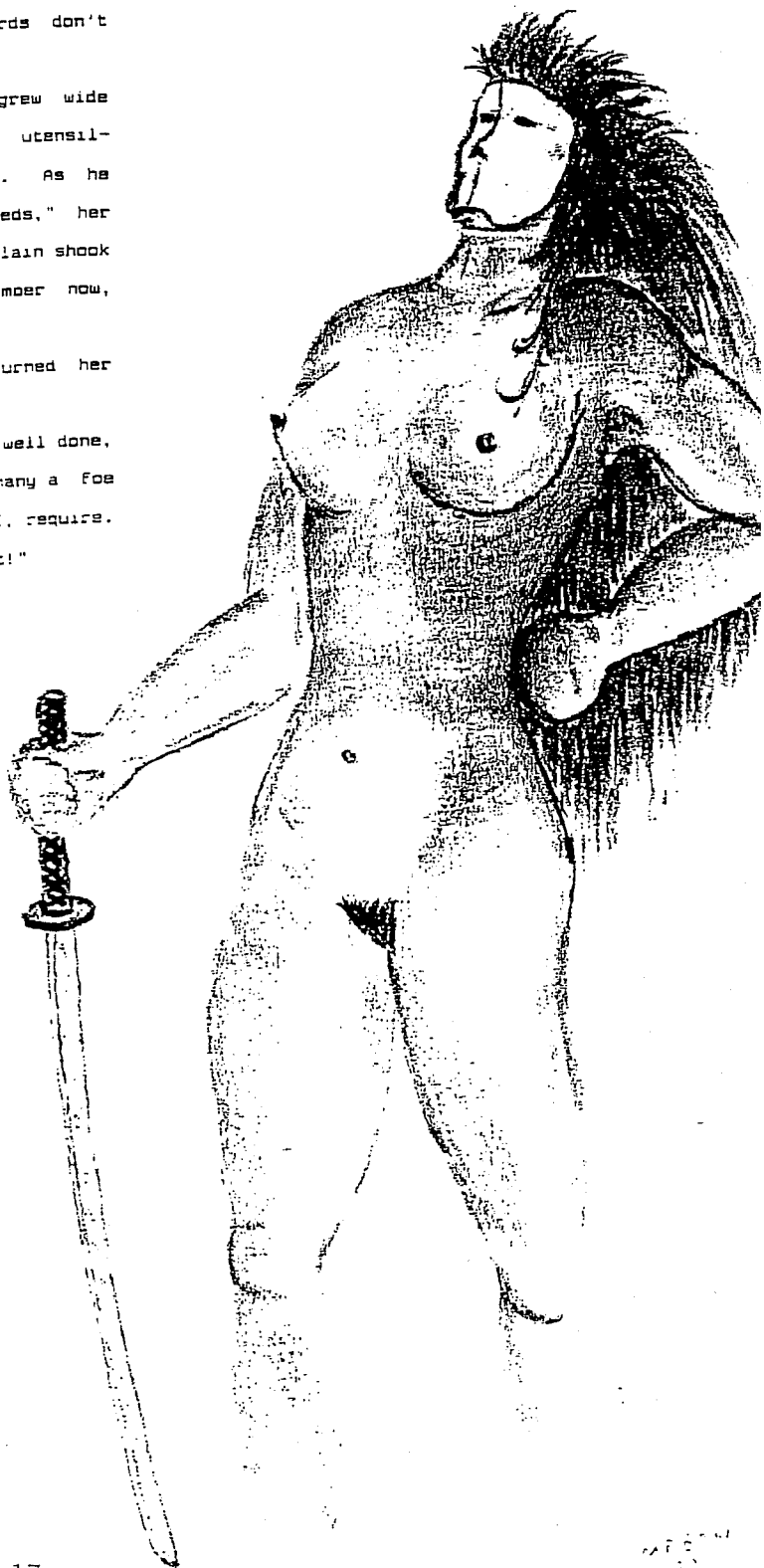
"Forgive me..." Koriain pleaded, but his maiden turned her back to him as he died.

A withered old man then entered the abode. "Very well done, very well done indeed! You could enter the homes of many a foe in the guise of a maid, you have the skills they, and I, require. I have a deal for you, one you will find hard to resist!"

"And what might that be?" Queried the maiden.

"Immortality...for a price..."

by Astrean



Once there lived a little girl from a small village. One day the little girl was playing with the other children of her village, when, an excited little girl ran out of the forest with a grand surprise for all to wonder about. The children full of excitement, danced and frolicked around her, begging her to tell them about her surprise. With the full enjoyment of tantalizing her friends to near pandemonium she finally conceded to show them all God's most beautiful creation. Merrily she led them deep into the forest to a soft glade with a gentle waterfall which tumbled down moss covered boulders filling a clear pool. In the middle of the pool there was a tiny moss covered island with a single purple iris growing out of the soft green. There came a collective sigh from the little band then all looked on silently in wonder of God's perfect artistry.

After a time, the children became distracted by those things which naturally hold wonder for inquisitive minds. Soon they had all left the glade, except for one child. She looked fondly at the iris and could smell its delicate fragrance. She wanted so desperately to feel its soft petals and to breathe deeply of its fragrance. So she slid softly into the cool water pulling herself gently towards the tiny island. Looking up at the delicate flower, she reached hesitantly towards it, grasping its stalk and pulling the straining plant from its island home. Flushed with excitement she skipped home and put the flower into a box to keep safe this most beautiful of God's creations.

The next day the little girl who had been so excited about her discovery came back from the forest crying to her friends. It seemed that some horrible creature had waded into the clear pool and had stolen the beautiful flower. All the children gathered around her and comforted her except one. She told her friend not to worry. No monster had stolen the flower, on the contrary she had pulled up the beautiful iris and safe guarded it in her room. She ran back to her house and came back shortly with a box and a smile on her face. Gently she opened the box and drew forth the wilting flower.

"You killed it!", came the mournful cry of the ailing little girl. "How could you be so selfish?" she continued. All the young eyes turned accusingly.

The little girl dropped the flower and ran off into the woods, tears began streaming down her face blinding her in a cloudy haze. She ran as fast as her little feet would take her and as fast as her halting breathes would allow. Tired and miserable she stopped near the little glade where the little island lay, now devoid of God's precious creation. Once again tears erupted unbidden from her eyes and sobs shook her body.

"How could I have been so selfish! What have I done? I'm sorry," she cried, "please forgive me. I didn't mean to kill you."

"Mommy!" she moaned, "Mommy help me I have killed God's beautiful flower." The little girl fell to the ground moaning and weeping.

The sound of the little girl's crying had upset the forest animals, they felt her pain coursing through them with violent sorrow. With the tenderness only the innocent can give, two wolf cubs drawn by her crying sniffed and nuzzled the little girl's face trying to comfort her. Through the tangles of her wet hair the little girl could only feel the warm excited licks of the small cubs. Now the sorrow of her soul poured forth from her cleansing her of pain, as tiny howls echoed her anguish. A warm feeling spread throughout her body as the two cubs continued to clean her tears of sorrow away. Soon she was asleep.

As she slept the little girl had a dream. She was walking through a foggy forest that she could only half recognize. Soon she was lost and began wandering aimlessly trying to find something that looked familiar. She came out of the forest into a large glade that she didn't quite recognize. It looked like the little glade where she had fallen asleep. Near this glade, a large waterfall tumbled down a great cliff spilling into a large lake. In the center of the lake was an island full of trees and purple irises. She softly slid into the cool waters and pulled herself gently towards the island. Ascending out of the water she realized that she was no longer a little girl, but was now a young lady dressed in gauzy purple.

As she walked through the island flowers, a whispering voice came to her saying

"You are the loveliest of God's creation a flower for all to behold and admire." warm breeze lifted her hair and caressed her cheeks as it sighed past her throat trees.

As she walked through the irises two large wolves appeared wagging their ears flat against their heads. She knelt down, her dress spread around her like the of an iris. The two wolves came up to her licking her face as she tried to turn to avoid wet reception, but to no avail. Soon she was laughing, her hands gliding through thick soft fur of the two wolves who continued to nuzzle and lick her.

The scene changed. She was now standing on the island's shore, the two wolves by her side, watching a small boat crossing the misty lake. One wolf sniffed the air ears erect and tense. A low growl began to emanate from her throat, all at once the boat turned and fled into the trees with her companion following her.

The girl did not follow, but stayed, her eyes fixed on the small boat and the wolf guiding its path. She felt the urge to flee but could not. The boat drew ever closer could almost make out the features on the figure's face, then she woke up.

Sitting up, she found a small wolf cub curled up next to her asleep and answered the first. In a moment both were gone back into the forest. The little girl up and began to make her way back home.

Years passed and now the little girl was a beautiful young woman. Not far from her lands, in a castle, a young man was being crowned ruler of his land. Since his he had led the younger children in games and outings. The children admired and respected him for his abilities, yet there was something about him which gave them cause to dislike him. One could not escape the feeling that this boy felt superior to the rest of his friends. When any of the children questioned his ideas or disagreed with him he would immediately take offense and then embark on a campaign to discredit his competitor among the other children. He always had to be right.

As a ruler, the boy's father had seen to it that his own rule was judicious and the people loved him and felt more his friend than his subject. The boy had listened to his father's council on how to rule, but it was his mother who trained him. She would tell him that he was special and better than the other children. At first he did not accept this, but he began finding out for himself that the other children always seemed to be lacking in insights and intelligence. He felt at once alone and superior. Now he was a man and a ruler.

During this special occasion invitations were sent out to all the surrounding lands to honor the new ruler. A tent city had grown up around the castle and hundred people had gathered for the festivities. The young man had never before seen so many people and despite himself he was excited and a little nervous.

That evening there was held a grand feast that all the people attended. The weather was beautiful and thus to accommodate the multitude, the feast was held on the side. After the tedious formalities of court had passed, the new ruler walked among the people and was soon encircled by admirers. This was to his liking and he felt a little closer to his people. It became obvious to him that on the other side of the courtyard a similar circle had formed, but for the most part this group was populated by males. As his interest piqued, he excused himself from his admirers and started walking towards the other circle pulling on his cloak's hood for privacy.

As he came closer to this circle he began to hear a soft, lovely voice rising

falling. Someone was singing. At once he was enchanted as he began to hear the lyrics. He was still too far to see the singer and the crowd was closely packed, so he climbed the stairs of the castle battlements to get a better view. Once at the top he could see a beautiful young lady dressed in purple, a beautiful flower in an island of people.

Within him a feeling like a small fire started to burn. He knew that she was special. The faces that surrounded her were uniformly smiling and euphoric. She had a power that was new to him, so natural she appeared and somehow completely innocent. He felt his being moved. He had never felt anything like this before, she made him feel natural and innocent too. Then her singing stopped. The men all around her roared their approval, so did he. Then to his utter disappointment a young man embraced her and she him. The warm fire that burned within him was immediately quenched, then froze into an icy jealousy. Who was this young man, he was wearing the clothing of a noble and he seemed familiar.

He rushed down the stairs throwing back his hood then paused. He calmed himself and began walking with his usual self confident dignity. The crowd parted as he drew near and soon he was face to face with this lovely young lady.

"My lady," he said extending his hand grasping hers and kissing it. "I have not had the pleasure of making your acquaintance."

"Sire, I have come from your neighboring lands to celebrate your coronation. May I introduce you to the next ruler of our lands."

The young man who had embraced her stepped forward and extended his hand. He took his hand and clasped it.

"A pleasure to make your acquaintance, I thought you looked familiar."

"The pleasure is mine sire, congratulations."

Despite himself he felt an admiration for this young man. He seemed to have similar qualities to the lovely young lady.

"Please do me the favor of staying at my household this evening, so that we may become better acquainted. It seems that we have much in common."

"Your offer is most gracious sire, do you mind if my lady accompanies me?"

"By all means, please bring her. She has the loveliest voice I have ever heard."

The young man motioned for a servant and gave instructions for his guest's accommodations. It was yet early and the two men talked about their lands and their peoples. Then the subject of conversation changed to the young lady. Who was she? Where did she come from? Why was she so compelling?

The young man explained that she had come from a small village where the people were very attuned to nature and specifically to the forest. Many of the women from her village had similar attributes, but she was the embodiment of the forest. She was a free spirit and went where she felt herself drawn. She had come to him several years earlier and had counseled him often. He thought of her, more or less, as his liaison with nature. He had followed her council often and found that his people loved him all the more for it. He loved her and would ask her to sit by his side when he was ruler.

"Did she feel herself drawn here, to my castle?" the young ruler asked.

"No, as a matter of fact she was a little frightened of coming until I convinced her to come." Came the reply.

The young ruler stood up, stretched and yawned. "You must excuse me I have had a very exciting and busy day. I think it is time for me to retire."

"Of course, I should have been more aware of your fatigue. I have enjoyed our conversation. Perhaps we can continue it tomorrow?"

"Yes, tomorrow. Now let me have my servants show you to your chambers."

That night the young ruler went to the lovely lady's chambers and spoke to her about staying longer, they had so much to discuss. At first she seemed agreeable, but something changed her mind. Something was not quiet right, she could sense it. This young ruler had others motives that he was not disclosing.

The next morning came and the two men continued their discussions over a large breakfast. As the day wore on it became obvious that the young man must soon leave and return to his responsibilities in his own lands.

"Sire your hospitality has been most warm. I could not have been treated better in

my own lands. It is time, however for me to take my leave. Would you please send for my lady and inform her of our imminent departure?"

"Why of course, I shall send a servant immediately. I thank you for our conversation and want you to know that you are welcome in my lands at any time."

The servant soon returned with news that the young lady was nowhere to be found within the castle. This was certainly a surprise for the young man, who immediately became concerned for her safety.

The young ruler also appeared concerned for the lovely lady's safety, but offered a possible explanation. "Is it not possible that the young lady has taken her leave, or you put it last night, gone where she found herself led?"

"Difficult to believe, but it is not impossible. Sire, these lands are not my own. I would not pretend to give orders here, but could you please look into these matters more closely? This is very unlike her."

"Of course I shall. Would you wish to stay a few more days until the matter is settled, I would enjoy your continued presence."

"Yes, I was just about to ask you that. I will stay, perhaps it is nothing, but she is very special to me. I will repay your hospitality generously, you have been most kind."

The young ruler began the slow descent into the bowels of the castle dungeon. The torch flame flickered and fumed as he went. Soon he could hear the soft lamen sounds of the young lady's singing drifting up from the darkness below.

With a twist of a large rusty key he unlocked and opened the large iron door that concealed his captive. "My lady I am sorry to have done this, but there is something about you that I need, you must agree to stay."

"Sire I cannot. My lord loves me and I him. We cannot be separated."

"Your lord, is half way home to his own lands," the young ruler continued, "he cares nothing for you. Why did he not stay if he loves you, as you say he does."

"This cannot be true, he knows that I am bound to him. His love is what sustains me. I will die without his love."

"Very romantic, my lady, but it is none the less true, he left this morning. He however, ask me to look for you. I fear you overestimate his affection for you, after all he is a noble and you are but a villager."

To this the lovely lady bowed her head. "Please sire you must release me. I cannot live here. I will die without my lord."

"Please my lady, think about what you are saying. He has already gone and I will give you everything he can and more. Can you not see that I need you?"

"I can see that you want me, but your needs do not involve me. I beg you, do not touch me."

"I will hear no more of this. I sorrow at the thought of you down here, but you must change your mind." He reached out his hand and touched her cheek. A concerned frown crossed his face. Her cheek was cold and dry, indeed she did not look well at all.

"I will take you from this place when time allows, for now I take my leave."

The young ruler returned to his guest. "There is still no word about your lady. Perhaps she is in the forest."

The young man raised his head, dark circles under his eyes were the only c

stinging.

"How can I help you, you do not look well. Perhaps I can send some men with you to look for her?"

"No, you have been most kind, I can only follow my heart now." With this the young man took his leave of the young ruler and rode off into the forest.

Upon entering the forest he became confused and exhausted. Soon he was lost. He plodded on until the forest opened into a large glade, a waterfall tumbled down a great cliff into a large lake. In the center of the lake was an island with many trees and purple flowers. A sudden rush of sorrow overcame him and he fell to his knees sobbing. Somehow these flowers reminded him of his lady. The sound of his sorrow filled the glade like the howl of a lonely wolf. "God," he cried "please help me. I cannot live without her." Once again the sound of his sorrow echoed through the glade. Soon he was utterly exhausted and fell asleep.

As he lay sleeping he started to dream. He was standing on the island with his lady, she looked so lovely. He threw his arms around her, kissing her face, her neck and her hair. "God I have missed you. I thought you were gone forever." he said stroking her cheek. "I love you!" As he finished these words she was pulled from his embrace by the young ruler.

The scene changed, and now he knelt on the far bank weeping and sobbing, his sight clouded by tears. Around him he thought he could hear mournful howls. He felt the gentle licks and the warm muzzles of wolves. The sound of his sorrow poured forth and he realized that he was no longer dreaming. In front of him was a large wolf whining and licking his face. Another wolf lay upon his lap. He ran his fingers through the soft thick fur of the two large animals, closed his eyes and cried some more. Now he was feeling better.

The only feelings within him were frustration and anger. He ran to his horse, mounted and galloped off as fast as he could. The two wolves were nowhere to be seen.

At the castle the young ruler had taken the lady from the dungeon and had put her into his own chambers. She was very pale and near unconscious, it seemed that she was slowly dying before his eyes.

"Why is this happening?" he demanded of his healers. "Can you do nothing for her?"

"It is unlike anything we have seen sire. She just wastes away before us."

"My lady, what ails you?" the young ruler pleaded. "I did not wish for this to happen."

"Return me to my lord sire," she whispered "he is my life."

"That my lady, I will not do. If I am not good enough for you, then no man is."

"Then take me into the forest where I can rest."

These words puzzled the young lord, but at least this he would do. The young lady was lifted onto the young ruler's horse and they rode off to the forest.

It was not long after this that the young man arrived at the young ruler's castle demanding to speak with him. The guards informed him that their ruler had taken a young lady on horse back and was headed for the forest. The young man wasted no time and was off like a shot back to the forest.

It was now nearing twilight and the young ruler had lost his way in the forest. He had been through this forest many times, yet now he recognized nothing. Soon the forest opened before him into a large glade, a waterfall tumbled down a great cliff into a large lake. He halted his horse and gently lowered the young lady from the horse.

"What now?" the young ruler wondered. "My lady, how can I help you?"

"I have only one request that I ask you to grant. Let me cross the lake to the island, that I may smell once more the fragrance of the irises. Only then will I be at peace."

The young ruler liked not the finality of the words that she had spoken, but conceded to them just the same. The young girl softly slid into the cool waters, pulling herself gently towards the island. As she ascended out of the water the fragrant smell of the purple irises rose to greet her. Her sight was fading and so was her consciousness.

On the other shore of the lake the ring of steel echoed through the silent gl

The young ruler and the young man were engaged in battle.

"You come to take the lady back do you?" the young ruler attacked again.

The young man blocked the blow on his sword. "You sought to take her, I am only seeking to find her." The young man riposted.

"You have found her yet in vain," the young ruler blocked "she will not give love to anyone."

"You cannot receive love without giving your own." The young man slashed. "I sought to possess her not to love her. You almost destroyed her with your selfishness."

"As ruler I command love, I do not give it." The young ruler feinted high and kicked the young man in the stomach. He continued down with the pummel of his sword striking the young man on the neck. "So much for giving love..." The young ruler swung blade high in the air. "...I give you death."

The stroke was on its way down when a large form leapt like a shadow from the ground, taking the young ruler off guard and landing full force on his chest. Another fell struck and in a flurry of snarling and snapping, the young ruler had received what he was so willing to give.

The young lady laid peacefully on the island dreaming. She was lying in a field of irises, her lord held her head on his lap, as his whispering voice came to her and said "You are the loveliest of God's creation a flower for all to behold and admire." A warm breeze lifted her hair and caressed her cheeks as it sighed past her through the trees. She began to cry feeling his love flowing over her. Soft warm licks cleansed tears from her cheeks and her eyes fluttered open. Sitting up she found a wolf curled next to her asleep and another sitting looking at her, tail tip twitching.

The young man lifted her gently to her feet, she looked so lovely. He held her in his arms kissing her face, her neck and her hair. "God I have missed you. I thought you were gone forever." he said stroking her cheek. "I love you!"

Giant hounds bark furiously and pull at their ropes, dragging the poor men who must attempt to hold them at bay. The search had been a long one, the longest ever. The two figures hunched over in a corner were what held the hound's interests. Alzax thought these must be very brave men to have lasted so long. Of course, if they were truly great men, they would not have been hunted. They never took a good man and hunted him. Only the bad ones. Or so he thought.

Alzax had the "honour" of being one of the hounds' keepers. Even though it was a position that many boys sought, Alzax could not figure what was so wonderful about picking up the hounds' refuse and endangering his life every time he got near the damned animals. They were trained to kill, and if necessary, eat humans. Alzax shivered as he watched his hounds snarl at the two men cowering in the back of the cave, torchlight causing shadows to increase their starved and crazed faces into what looked like almost demonic scowls.

The animals were allowed to be driven into a frenzy, and before they were let loose the devour the "game", froth flew about, flying out the sides of their maddened jowls, their fangs gnashing. During these scenes all Alzax could think of was the tales he had heard from his older brother of the hounds of hell, when his brother, Racon, had wished to cause his younger brother nightmares.

The hounds of hell were the guardians and servants of the "nosferatu", the undead-- the living demons from hell that came to feast upon the living, taking their souls and lives for nourishment. Alzax had never seen one of these supposed undead, but he sure heard enough about them to not want to.

Yet Alzax's curiosity when he had grown older had caused him to research the matter. He had a kind of morbid fascination with the entire ideal-- to live forever, to never age, to never have to eat the rotten gruel that was fed to most of his most gracious lord's servants every night.

Alzax had to laugh at that thought. "His most gracious lord". He had known more gracious beggars. To think of the treason in his thoughts!! Poor Alzax did not know if he was the only one who thought bad of the lord's actions. He was too afraid to ask anyone. Alzax then once again laughed at the thought of "his most gracious lord".

"Well, my young boy, I am pleased to see you are now becoming mature enough to enjoy in our hunting."

Alzax jumped, clearly startled by Lord Aram's words. The lord did not often speak to the servants. The man frightened him severely but not without intriguing him. All Alzax could do was smile like a little boy caught with his pants down behind the stables, for he knew what he had been thinking had not been good. The lord took care of him, fed him, clothed him, kept him from being the lone beggar child he was sure to have been after both of his parents had been killed.

Yet Alzax could not feel good about a man who did such horrid things. Lord Aram used severe punishment on anyone who defied him, anything from a slow death by impalement to an extremely slower death, the Hunt. He was an evil being. His

lust for blood was slowly depopulating the area, leaving orphans out of many children. Prisoners were sent from afar to become victims of this man's insane hobby, and if there were no humans that he wished to torture, he would dismember live chickens or other types of birds, turning the whole event into a type of town celebration. In fact, all the deaths were a town celebration. This one man's insanity was slowly spreading into the minds of his subjects. The townspeople began to enjoy the daily shed of blood.

Alzax considered it a disease. The disease of blood lust. A lust very highly sexual in nature, the eyes of the onlookers were tainted by an eerie glow, their breaths were quickened, excitement would build throughout them, the excitement becoming a frenzied wave of motion as the victims would be brought to their final destiny.

Lord Aram's mind never ceased to provide new ways of causing death. But the Hunt was the worst of all. The Hunt was a twisted form of manipulation, causing the victims to go insane before they were killed.

Only the worst of criminals to be used in the hunt. The "arena" for this game was a large piece of land, mostly rocky hills with little vegetation, no water and even less life. It was a barren, desolate place, purposely picked to signify hopelessness to the poor men who must endure it. If they attempted to escape from the area, they would be sentenced to death by impalement on a blunt stake. This produced such pain and agony, a slow, delirious death, with the body dying before the mind. The heart and lungs were usually not damaged, so the victim was left to bleed to death from the inside, until the weight of their bodies pushed the stake up to the backs of their throats, after the poor men had lost control of their bodily functions, after they had vomited blood and bits of their intestines. These poor men would wail, a sound the scrape on Alzax's spine. They would cease to sound human after a full day on the stake. By that time, depending on the sharpness of the point, the duller ones would have reached to the upper bowels, the men's weight slowly pushing their bodies along the shaft. The entire length of it would reddish brown, a mixture of blood and bodily excrements. The feet and legs would begin swell, the skin being stretched around the draining blood of a dead man. The legs would take on a purplish hue, the upper body would be ghastly white, slowly being drained of all fluids.

Alzax pretended to watch with intensified interest as the hound's jaws locked onto the hunted men's flesh, tearing bone out along with the flesh. He no longer felt nauseated by these events, only an intense hatred toward the man who planned them, and the people who watched them. Had everyone around him lost their humanity? Were they so barbaric that only blood could provide the entertainment needed to make life worthwhile? Was it this that kept them working in the fields, working in the home of "His most gracious lord"?

After the hunt was over Alzax assisted in returning the hounds to their kennels. There was no need to fear them now. The bloodthirst had been quenched by the men they had just

devoured, and the townspeople's thirst had also been quenched as they milled around, trying to find a scrap of bone or a patch of hair which the dogs left. There was not much left to be found.

As Alzax watered the demon-dogs, as he liked to call them, he saw the daughter of Lord Abram wandering through the lord's impressive garden. She was strikingly beautiful, but an evil beauty that somehow looked displaced among the innocent wonder of the delicate flowers and graceful trees. As she picked the blooming lilacs, she seemed to be mocking how she could so easily take away their appearance of pleasure just by plucking away at the feather soft petals and discarding the slim green stems to the ground.

As she wandered in all her most strikingly evilness, Alzax could not help but feel a stirring in his loins. He desired her greatly. He desired to slowly rip her feather soft petals from her and discard her slim stem to rot.

Alzax then began to muse that she had to look like she did.

If her appearance on the outside had matched her rotten inner core, she would be a beast unbearable to look at. He smiled as he thought of her beautiful ice-blue eyes suddenly sunken in and red with rage. He imagined her nose twisted and contorted, complete with a wart on the tip. He imagined her hunched over, her now perfect breasts hung low and unmatched. Her slender legs became the twisted knots of a vine tree. Her ivory skin would be blotched with purples and blacks and her silken soft hair would be coarse and wiry like that of a tanglewood.

Then he thought of his sister. His sister died for that wretched gorgeous bitch. The lord's daughter had her own bloodthirsty hobby. She liked to bathe in the blood of virgins, as she believed it would preserve her youth forever (so she said). His sister, Anoka, had been the most beautiful creature to walk the earth. And her beauty was equalled inside and out. Alzax suspected after the death of sister that it was not the blood of virgins she wanted, but the blood of those more attractive than she. He noticed the pattern when he realized all of her blood "donors" did not die after they made their contribution to her most gracious Lady's bathing tub. The ones who did die were always the ones who rivaled the girl's position as the most beautiful woman in the country.

After Alzax had finished his work, he looked forward to a quiet evening in the lord's library. As a keeper of the hounds he was entitled to read his books as long as the lord himself was not at the time in the room. The lord seldom went to the library these days, for his sight had begun to fail him.

The collection of books was typical of a man like Lord Aram would have. Volumes upon volumes of great torture secrets and innovative ways of bloodshed. But there was one particular section that provided great interest to Alzax. It was the section the lord had collected on "nosferatu"-- the undead-- the vampires.

Alzax pulled out a large, richly embossed leather bound, handwritten edition. He held it with almost religious reverence as he carefully laid it on the table in the center of the room. The title was written in large, fancy letters. It read, THE

BOOK OF THE UNDEAD.

Alzax had almost become fortunate in a way after his father's death. Lord Abram took him onto his personal staff and had let the tutor of his daughter teach him how to read. Alzax relished in the world of the written word. His hunger for knowledge was comparative to the town's hunger for blood.

He carefully turned the pages to where he had last stopped. His reading was slow, for the language in this book was odd, and was not exactly the world's greatest reader.

As he began to read he suddenly felt very warm and had an overwhelmingly strong urge to open the window. He walked over and opened it, and as if to welcome the breeze he spoke aloud, "Come in."

A strange glitter-like glow danced on a moonbeam coming through the small opening. Alzax blinked his eyes and the shimmer was longer there. He shook his head told himself he must not allow his mind to play tricks on him.

He went back to his book, and the feeling of being watched would not escape him. A terror struck his soul as he felt a cold, vice-like grip on his shoulder. He sat paralyzed for a moment, and as he began to turn his head slowly... A large man burst through the library door, urgency on his face. Alzax almost screamed in fear. The hurried man spoke, "Young Alzax, his most gracious lord requests your presence in his chambers at once! Do not delay! Go, and cleanse yourself quickly, for you are the first young man to ever be summoned to his presence." With that, the fat man turned and strode out of the library, beckoning for Alzax to follow him. After being startled, he almost forgot that there had been a hand on his shoulder. He turned and looked back into the room. There was no one there.

He tried to push the incident to the back of his mind. Lord Aram wanted to see him. In all his great imaginativeness, poor Alzax could not fathom the remotest reason why he would wish to speak to him, in his own private quarters, nonetheless.

He was given a rag and quickly tried to wipe some of the grime off his face. He had not the luxury of a bathing tub, only a small basin which he had to fill from the well outside. His hands shook visibly, for he felt as if the lord was going to make him the victim of the next "town celebration".

He walked down the long corridor with the large man who had burst into the library. The man was almost obscenely obese. and he strode as if he had an air of importance, when all he really was, was an overgrown messenger boy.

They reached a very large door, and the messenger knocked three short, smart times. He heard a grunt inside and responded, "M'lord, I have the boy here you wished to see."

"Send him in," was the reply, a deeply bassooned voice which struck fear in the very soul of Alzax.

The messenger opened the door, and not entering himself, ushered the boy in and quickly closed the door. Alzax stood there, his eyes attempting to adjust to slight glow of candles. He heard the voice in the back, "Come, sit down and drink with me."

As his eyes slowly focused, he realized Lord Aram was sitting in large chair next to a table. On the other side was a smaller chair so Abram went and sat down.

Lord Aram spoke softly, as Alzax had never heard nor dreamed of hearing this monster speak. He shuddered deep inside.

"Well, my young man, aren't you about to be approaching manhood?"

Alzax spoke hesitantly. He knew it was against His Majesty's rule to torture children. "Um, well, Sir, I believe that I am approaching about my eighteenth or nineteenth year. It feels as if it is so."

"Well, I can tell you it is so," the lord replied. "I remember the day you were born, it was this day. Only it was nineteen years ago. And I tell you why I remember. You are a very special boy, Alzax. A very special boy indeed."

Alzax was very confused. All he could say was, "My parents were very special people."

"Why, of course! Your mother had beauty beyond any rival. But the man you think is your father, he was a scoundrel. He committed many acts of treason. He was a trouble maker. An eel, Alzax, a slimy eel."

Alzax had to bite his lip to fight back tears at hearing of his father being spoken about in this way. His father was a great man. But he had a question, although he was almost too frightened to ask it.

"Sir, did you say, 'the man I think is my father'?"

"Yes, I did, my young man. A long time ago, when your mother was young and voluptuous, she came to me in duress. She desired to have one more child. A child her husband could not provide for her.

Alzax could listen no longer. He raped her! He had to have. His mother hated Lord Aram with all the passion her half-starved body could muster. His mind was reeling. He was the youngest of all the children. And he did not resemble his father or his brother. The realization hit him hard, his stomach turned and bile rose in his throat. He attempted to choke it back, but he could not. He vomited on his most gracious lord's slippers.

Lord Aram began to laugh. His laugh started as a small chuckle and then began to grow, echoing through the room, making Alzax's head spin more. The ceiling was going around, and around, and the laugh was continuing... a demon's laugh. He was the son of a demon.

After the horrid incident in Lord Aram's chambers, Alzax had been allowed to retire to his old room to think. His head felt heavy and his insides were twisted. He wondered if he felt anything like the poor man who had been impaled this morning felt. He could hear his wailings even through the thick walls of the servants chambers. In his ears the wails began to take shape into the wicked laugh the lord had been spewing before Alzax had finally lost consciousness.

He said aloud, "Oh, please, dear God, don't let it be true.

It can not be. He is not human."

His candle flickered visibly before him, and there was no draft in his room. Shimmering particles began to gather in the air in the moonbeam entering the tiny crevice in his wall. He stared at it numbly. He had no strength left to be afraid.

The shimmers began to swirl around in tighter circles, slowly making the shape of a man, and that man slowly became a solid substance and stood before him.

"Do not fret, boy. It is not death to be the son of a demon."

Alzax stared in shock, although not in fear. The man standing before him was extremely tall. His face was pale, his lips a dark crimson. A reddish glow emitted from his eyes, and his teeth-- more like fangs, softly rested against the swollen lower lip. His nails were long and discolored, hair grew on the palms of his hands. But Alzax felt no fear. He felt only great comfort.

He tried to speak, "You... you're... HIM!"

"Do not be alarmed. I did not come to harm you. I only came to speak with you."

As he spoke, Alzax could smell a bittersweet odor to his breath, something so familiar, but he could not place it. His voice had an unfamiliar accent, an archaic type of slavic, he supposed. In the background the impaled man continued to wail.

"I have been watching you for a long time, my son." Alzax winced when the man (creature?) said "son". "I first began when you started reading the great Book. I...", the man hesitated, as if not sure how to go on. "You must excuse me, friend. It has been a long time since I attempted to communicate with a living soul without wanting it for my own. You must have patience with me. I have a great favor to ask of you. And in return I can do something for you. But let me explain my situation first."

"It all began about six hundred or so years ago, I sometimes forget, the centuries all blend together. I have been at my so called "job" ever since. Only I had no choice. However, I am giving you one. There comes a time when even the most evil of souls tires and wishes to rest. I have reached that time. I am longing for my space in hell, where I may find peace. But I can not rest until I have a living soul to replace me. Do not look at me so, boy. Do you wish to tell me you have not many a time daydreamed of being me, King of the Undead?"

Alzax could only stare him. He knew it. All the books said vampires could read minds. But they could also hypnotize people. What if he was hypnotizing him now?

"No, I am not. And if you do not believe me, look away from my gaze and tell me if you do not feel the same."

Alzax did so and felt no change. But he could not help but feel that he was being tricked.

"So you want me to send my soul forever to hell so you can rest?"

"Well, not exactly," the demon replied. "You would not be going to hell. You would not go to hell until you were properly 'dispatched', so to say, or until you do what I am doing now,

ask someone to replace you, so you can find peace. The nosferatu find peace in hell. Angels find peace in heaven. And I have captured an angel, and will release her soul to you to either return to heaven or keep for your own. For if I am 'dispatched', as I put it earlier, all the souls I have trapped will be released to go in the direction of their destiny."

Suddenly Alzax felt cold. He knew what he was going to say. He had made a vampire out of his sister.

"Yes, I did. She was too beautiful a creature to let go. In all her innocence I could not resist her. Nothing is more tempting to evil than good."

Alzax tried to sound brave. "I want to see her."

The creature's face seemed to crack as it emitted a laugh from those non-breathing lungs, a deeper, more evil laugh than Lord Aram could ever hope for. "What you will see will not be your sister. It is one of my creatures. Her soul is what needs saving, not the shell that is now a monster."

"Can I not see souls?" His voice seemed far away, distant.

The creature's face suddenly softened. He spoke in a low tone, almost with sympathy. "Yes, you can. I can still vaguely remember what it was like to be human. I once, too, had a sister."

Alzax could have sworn he saw the moisture in the man's eyes.

"Now, rest, young man, and in your dreams I shall send your sister to you. But do not be surprised. Her soul is being tortured even at this very moment. It will be up until the time I..." he paused in thought, "...retire."

And shimmering swirls surrounded him till he was no longer in view. The swirls spread out like wings, and fled out the window. Alzax then heard the wings flapping. In the background were the wails of the man outside on the stake.

Alzax did not remember lying down, or falling asleep, if this was sleep. He felt as if he was floating in thick mire, but in which he could still breathe. He heard wails, thought they were the wails of the impaled, they were not. In his vision appeared the face of a girl, no older than seventeen, yes, he supposed souls aged, when they were tortured, the only resemblance was the eyes, they were not dancing, though, they were crying and the twisted lips emitted wails... wails... then spoke to him in an old voice... Alzax, is that you, no, not you... God help me... not you, too....

Suddenly this vision vanished and she was as the day she died, only pale with thick red lips and long nails and long teeth, and it was laughing, hysterically laughing, laughing and pointing at him and with each laugh he heard his sister's wails grow louder and louder, his ears were going to explode....

He suddenly sat up, and was covered with sweat. He was no longer in the mire but in his servant's room, and there was knocking at the door. He thought it must be late.

He slowly walked to the door, in a daze at the events that had transpired in this short period of time. At the door was the fat messenger. He thought if he was vampire, he would relish all the blood in the grotesque man's body. He thought it

would even be good.

It was not late. Only an hour or so had past. Lord Aram wished him to move into a more suitable room for the son of a lord (Alzax thought it was more like the son of a demon). He gathered his few belongings with no protest. He had to use what was left of his sanity and strength to weigh the matters at hand. Had it all been some horrid hallucination? Was his sister's soul now at this moment being tortured in hell? As if to answer him, the man outside wailed one last long "Help... me..." and then faded into silence.

After he was settled in his new room, with a great splendid bed that to him felt too soft, smelled too much like an old woman, and had too many covers than would ever be needed, he began to think. He almost immediately knew what he would do.

As if sensing the young man had made a decision, the Prince of Darkness once again appeared before him in the same way. On his breath this time he recognized the bittersweet smell. It was blood. He spoke with a smile that showed a drop of blood on one of the fangs.

"You were right. It was good blood. Too much for even my large appetite."

Alzax felt sick at the thought, although not as sick as he expected himself to, almost smiling at the image of the conceited messenger boy-man lying with his throat torn out, the greed of his life spilling out around his grotesque body.

"Now, I know you have made your decision, and I know what you plan to do. But, young man, I must warn you. You will not be entirely human and you will be driven by instinct, not by a man's rational thoughts. You must at all times strive to keep it in check, or you will cause a mob to come looking for you with stakes in hand and garlic cloves galore. Everyone at every turn will wield a crucifix, and these, as I know you have informed yourself of, are not exactly what you want to be looking for.

"Now, are you prepared for your transformation? Good. I have brought our necessary tools."

In a bag he showed the young man two shovels, a wooden stake, a large clove of garlic, a hammer and a large knife, almost like a saw.

He spoke again, "You know what you must do, but first I need to do my part."

He took his long fingernail and gashed deep into his chest on his right side. The nail went deep, and a dark red, almost black fluid began flowing out. A sickening sound emitted from the hole in his chest, and even though a creature he grimaced in pain.

"Now, I have opened my heart and soul to you. Come and imbibe of the pleasure no man, woman or creature has ever had."

As if in a trance Alzax stepped forward and hungrily sucked at the hole, swallowing big gulps of the life fluid that caused nosferatu to be just that-- undead.

Alzax swooned as if drunk, warmth and a deep coldness flowed through his body, yet if felt good, he thought, this felt good.

"Now, we must continue. Come with me on the moonpath and we must journey to the cemetery."

Alzax felt evilly exhilarated when his body turned to shimmers. He was floating on a moonbeam, was this not all children's dreams?

When they reached the cemetery they quickly went to work. They dug a neat hole, perfect for the large man's body. The older man worked even quicker than the younger man, anxious to be set free. He then laid down next to the hole. He spoke with tinge of sadness. "It is too bad I was not human. You would make a wonderful son."

Alzax smiled evilly and put the stake into the hole the man had already cut, and brought the hammer down swift, and felt the stake go into the ground beneath the body. The body began to writhe like a snake, and a foul smell filled the air. Before the creature could writhe away, he brought the saw-like sword down quickly over the neck of the corpse. He marveled at his strength when it was severed as easily as an apple. He then stuffed the garlic clove into the head, dropped it in the hole, and pushed the body in behind it. He quickly filled in the hole, and as he was walking away, he spoke aloud to himself, "Goodbye, friend, and good luck."

He felt relieved. He felt his sister's presence in heaven.

His body surged with a new found energy. He was the Prince of Darkness, the King of Nosferatu, the son of the devil himself.

He smiled inwardly when he remembered his plan. Oh, he was right. It was tempting to run and kill and imbibe in the drink of pleasure. But first he had business to attend to.

He walked into the Lord Aram's chambers with no fear. He commanded him to get up. He was thrilled at his new found powers. His most gracious lord was now under his most gracious prince's power.

He led him quietly through the hall, down to the chambers of his daughter. He laughed an evil laugh. He opened the door.

Lord Aram proceeded first. He told him stand and watch. He leaned over the sleeping, evil beauty. He did not feel he was going to enjoy it as much as he first thought. She was evil. It was no fun conquering evil. But he knew he must continue with the plan.

He laid a cold hand on her face. She awoke startled and began to scream, but the scream quickly died in her throat as her gaze met that of the young man standing next to her bed.

With the father watching, and the daughter held tight in his grasp, he viciously raped the young girl, and laughed at the whimpering father.

After he was done, he reached down into the soft nape of her neck and sunk his teeth into the bitter flesh. He wanted her soul. He wanted her to be tortured forever.

The once great Lord Aram now was a broken man, but Alzax could not decide if it was what happened to his daughter, or if he was thinking about what was going to happen to him. He forgot that he could tell and suddenly heard the man's thoughts

in his head. They were the thoughts of a coward.

Alzax journeyed with Lord Aram to the kennels, and let each of the hounds loose. They gathered behind him like a small army, growling at the pitiful creature that their master was leading. They knew where they were going, and why. They were going on a HUNT.

Alzax led the thing that was once Lord Aram into the middle of the "arena", an area of about ten miles. He then left him alone, in the dark.

Alzax decided it would be best if he took shelter soon, the sun would be due soon. He then wondered if he would dream.

He took shelter in the cave that the men of the last hunt had hidden in. He instructed the hounds of hell to guard over him. He then lay to rest.

He did dream. He dreamed of the hell that his friend was in. He was also dreaming. He was dreaming over and over again of all the souls he ever stole from innocent victims and he was enjoying it. Alzax thought to himself, one man's peace is another man's hell.

At nightfall his eyelids rose of their own accord, and a strong urge to run and feed filled him. No, not yet. Lord Aram was still to be dealt with.

Alzax could easily pinpoint his location, and directed his hounds towards him. He would let them toy with him for awhile, then he would take his soul and send it forever into torture.

The dogs jogged along merrily behind the running, gasping, fear-driven man. They growled when he slowed down, and snapped at him when he stopped. A couple had even drew blood, but not too much. They were to save him for their master.

Lord Aram's breath came in jagged gasps. He did not want to die. But most of all he wanted to have some water. The thirst had started as a growling in his stomach, a pain his legs and sides. But now it was only thirst. He felt his thirst was that of a man in hell. He did not realize he was already there. He had fouled himself at sometime during the jog. He knew this happened to most of them, the ones who were hunted. They were hunted until they could no longer run, always something at their heels, something to keep them moving, always moving. He wondered how long he could hold out in his own game.

He tripped and fell, and a dog was on top of him. It bit viciously at his face, puncturing his cheeks and nose. He began to whimper like a baby, and he began to beg. The stark white face of his son was above him.

"Well, father, how do you feel? Care to go hunting with me today? I do believe we'll have a splendid time. The dogs are just dying to have some blood. I think they want your blood. Like you took my father's blood and my mother's blood, I will take your blood. But, dearest father, I will take more than just your blood. I am going to take your soul."

Just as the dying man's lips formed the words, "God, please forg..." his son tore his throat wide open, and the hounds finished him off.

Alzax felt satisfied. He was now HIS MOST GRACIOUS LORD. Now it was his turn. It was his turn to satisfy his own

bloodthirst.

