

The Sword Review

Issue 23

Fantasy, Science Fiction & More

www.theswordreview.com



Featuring:

Waiting for Appa by Mirta Ana Schultz
Winner, 2006 Fiction Contest

Waiting for Appa

Mirta Ana Schultz

"He has promised to return, and he is not a man to let his family down," Adda told us, my little brother and me, in answer to Malhyn's question.

Appa will come back to us, won't he, Adda?

It had become a ritual for the three of us—the question posed, the answer given—as comforting as the sight of her nails raking one of our last remaining popla stalks, freeing the hard grains, those brown teardrops that were now our only remaining source of nourishment after three years without crops.

Our storehouse, once full of stalks and their earthy scent, was now empty.

The night before we had feasted on the last of our offworld supplies, those tins of food left from the great exodus, processed food we only ate out of necessity: five forkfuls each of fermented vegetables and three spoonfuls of sweet fruit from a can. A final treat. We spoke Appa's name together while the honeyed juices still coated our tongues.

He had been gone so long. And he had left us behind to be pronounced outcasts.

His sin, our punishment.

The ritual continued. Malhyn's small voice asked, "Appa will not forget us, will he, Adda?"

"He is not a man to forget what belongs to him."

I didn't doubt he would remember us. But I feared we'd never see him again.

Grain wept down Adda's sun-darkened hand and into the leaf green bowl in her lap. It was her favorite bowl, even though a chip marred the rim and a thin crack snaked along the side. Appa had given it to Adda when they had taken their vows and begun their new life as one. They had chanted their wedding promises into its inner curves, then covered the invisible vows with roasted grains and unblemished fruits and fresh vegetables of yellow and orange hues, all grown by their families.

The wedding ceremony I had dreamed of for myself. Before.

I have had trouble keeping a grasp on dreams since Appa left.

Adda began to sing. The popla grains each played a note in harmony as they struck her bowl—*tink, tink, tonk, tink*.

At least, if we are to die, we will die with the memory of our own food singing its last song in our stomachs. There is a kind of rightness in that, though I don't know why. Some things you simply know inside. Such as Appa's knowing that he must leave. Such as our knowing that Appa surely must return.

Only I didn't know it anymore. I no longer held that assurance as firmly as Adda or little Malhyn.

My hands felt empty.

"Let me help, Adda," I said, reaching for a stalk, for something to fill the emptiness that was not merely in my belly.

She stopped singing. "No, Daughter. Allow me the full pleasure of this. I want today's meal to come from my hands, mine and your father's. He and I sowed the seeds from which this stalk grew. He and I tended and reaped. We stored it in the cool days. I will prepare and cook it in this warm one. My heart will dance when I see you and your brother eat."

I knew what Malhyn did not, what Adda had left unspoken. She would eat none of the popla porridge. It was to be her gift to us, the meal, because it was her duty to keep us alive. Eating it would be our gift to her, as it was our duty to believe we would live and that Appa would not forget us while he sailed the empty places that had never frightened me at night until he went deep into them.

He will be safe, I have told myself, as he was the first time he crossed the black of the second heaven. He will be as unharmed as he was during the months when our parents flew through the vastness to reach Dorna III and build this town of Havenheart, making of this alien world a home. My brother and I had never moved through that desolate darkness, and we never expected to. The elders are stone; they do not waver. Re-entering the void is transgression. They'd allowed the use of the old planet's technology, of the forbidden spacing vessels, only the one time, only to flee the corruption of their original lands.

New world. New life.

Out *there* was the old and discarded. Out *there* was the domain of doubters and strangers, a hollow and lightless place not for us, not for we who have always been people of the light and the covenant.

But now Appa flew out there among the unbelievers and their unfaithful stars.

So much darkness. So cold.

Even a good man could forget the color of his children's eyes when all he saw out of his window was the unsanctified pit of space.

"No, Elpes," Adda said. "Whatever you are thinking, no."

I must have been frowning again.

Since Appa had left us, my face had changed.

Now, whenever I glanced down into the creek water pool Appa had created uphill from our house, or in those stolen moments when I stared into mother's offworld mirror, that shining relic of her youth in the greatest city of the ancient and wicked planet, I could see that my cheeks were no longer round. They'd been whittled down, starkly carved into angularity by our frugal diet. Between my eyebrows, grooves had begun to form, two upright shadows in my flesh that seemed as if ghostly pillars from the first temple had come to mark me for destruction, just as the structure itself had been crushed and burned by defilers centuries ago on the old planet.

No man would want to marry me if I dried up and creased like stale porridge. Theer told me once that I was the prettiest maiden of the colony. Saldo of neighboring Gress, son of the First Elder of that town and possessor of the finest eyes ever fashioned by the Maker, had called me lovely during the feasting of the Holiest Day, when all from the five townships gathered at the new temple.

But that was when I was full in my flesh.

And that was before we had been cast out of fellowship. Shunned.

No man of the covenant would marry me now, lovely or not. I would not have my day of joy and speak the ancient words into a polished bowl. There was no bounty anymore to heap over marriage vows.

"Appa shouldn't have gone alone," said Malhyn, fiddling with an old belt of Appa's that he was trying to make fit his much smaller waist. "Who will tell him our names before he goes to sleep?"

A new question for our ritual. Malhyn's fears must be greater than usual.

Is he losing hope, too?

"He will speak them himself, my son," Adda said without impatience, without doubt, with a smile. "Before he closes his eyes and trusts his spirit to the Maker of All Worlds, he will speak the name of our God, the first name among all names, then the name of this, our home world, and then the name of our village, and then my name, and then your sister's name, and then your name—you, who are the youngest of those precious to him. He will sleep with the echoes of us in his mouth and mind, and he will sleep well and at peace."

I spoke Appa's name then, *Melmedain*, softly, savoring the goodness of it. But I tasted also, at the edges of my tongue, the bitterness of fear and the acidity of hunger that would not go away, that had gotten only worse, day by day, since Appa flew his ship up into the terrible night.

"Yes," said Adda. "Go and say it again, outside, where the wind will carry it to the Father of all who breathe. In His mercy, he will bring your voice into your Appa's dreams."

So, I went.



I stood on the hill where Appa had gone every morning to speak to the Maker, fair weather or foul. Today, it was fair, clear and warm, with a few clouds ready to sweep in from the distance as the day wore on.

Down in the valley, the second temple, pale and clean, winked in the sunlight. It was the tallest and widest structure in Havenheart, the core of the colony. Appa had helped lay its foundations, there, where the Silver River met the Jade, and both formed a liquid arrow pointing to the wide valley called Sweetwinds. There the mighty river created by the marriage of the smaller two was called Bountiful. Acre after acre of all manner of crops had once grown to each side of that fine, pure river.

More than two years ago, despite the continued flow of unspoiled water, the land became restless, full of strange and muffled noises, feverish with an unnatural heat, and rank with a sour odor.

And it refused to yield.

I sat on Father's rock, this quiet spot where he came to touch the Holiest, and I pushed the soles of my feet into the earth that had become our enemy. I sensed the movement underneath, though not as intensely as I had in previous months or in the places where our crops had dried and withered and been utterly consumed by the devils in the soil.

In the beginning days of the curse, our men dug up some of the pests: purple creatures as big as a child's palm with teeth like small daggers and hungry, chomping jaws. They were countless in number, digging and devouring in the dark. And we were helpless. We had no way to end the plague of them, for their appetites were boundless, and we are not allowed to kill the living. The colony's covenant condemns bloodshed of all kind.

Now, only the fibrous, hardy grass native to this planet, an inedible thing of a dazzling green, grew along the ground. We had tried eating the hard berries on the highland bushes and the leaves of the fruitless trees, growing things that originated on this world, unlike our crops; but we suffered a running disease of the bowels after doing so. Only the native creatures tolerated these.

"Elpes?"

Theer.

I did not turn around to face him. His once-beloved voice had not touched my ears in many months. Though he'd promised to woo me when the proper time came for it, he'd joined the shunning with the rest. I shook despite the warmth, so angry I feared saying something abominable. If

Appa's sentence fell upon us, then the sentence for my wrong-speaking might fall upon him while he sailed alone and lonely. I could not risk it.

"Elpes."

"Since when has the ban been lifted, Covenanter?"

"It hasn't."

"Then you transgress, Theer."

He was quiet for a few moments, though the ground was not. Clicking and scratching rose from the unseen depths of the soil. The devourers mining for something other than the tough and ill-tasting grass that nourished nothing but the hill goats.

The grass crunched beneath Theer's boots as he came closer to Appa's rock.

"I am no longer sure that your father was wrong, Elpes."

"I am not comforted by your change of mind."

"But it's been six months since we've spoken. Didn't you miss me?"

"No," I said untruthfully, in anger. "I only miss my father."

"I miss many things. Fresh juice in the morning. Root cakes at noon. Your company at the end of day."

I let the silence judge him the way we'd been judged, by him and his family, by the leaders, and by the people of all the towns.

"I am sorry, Elpes."

"Adda would say that I should forgive you."

"It's the right thing to do when someone repents."

I looked at him at last. He was changed. Thinner, of course, but also altered in his expression. He had been so jolly, Theer, and mischievous, and now his face was carved with a sorrow and resignation that didn't fit my memories of him.

I moved over on the rock. "Sit down, Theer. You look tired."

He did. "I'm not here merely to regain your friendship, Elpes. There's been talk in the councils. Frightening talk. Some feel that your father's sin will not let the land heal. It is said that the prayers and offerings are rejected because his transgression has not been atoned for."

"The land was cursed for two years and a half before Appa left. How can they blame him?"

"Because they've always thought he was too independent for the general good. Because some say he's always been a bit mad."

"My father is not mad."

"Mostly because death is at the door. Strange thoughts have been voiced in the meetings. In the temple, the smell of despair is rising with the incense. I think you will be in danger soon of more than shunning. There are old ways that resurface in hard times. Bloody ways. I have read the books in my studies, Elpes. Some speak of ancient offerings."

"Is the blood of the Ransomer no longer sufficient to atone? We have ceased from the acts of blood, Theer. We don't eat the living. We don't shed blood to please the Maker. We don't kill to survive. That's the way of the covenant."

I gazed at the rivers bejeweled by the sunlight. Our creek was a slender ribbon of silver and green running cheerfully down the side of Appa's mount. "How can good people plan such terrible things when there is still beauty like this?"

"No one sees beauty when they are hungry and afraid."

"I see it." I rubbed my arms, suddenly cold despite the warmth of the day. "Would anyone really wish to die with our blood on their hands? How is that possible?"

"They lose hope."

"And you?" I studied his face for the truth.

"I'm here because I believe the shunning displeases the Maker. The ugliness that some propose in council is evil beyond my comprehension. You are right. The Ransomer completed the path of bloodshed. It is done. It is finished. The texts say so."

"Then the people have become blind and deaf to the words?"

"They only see the curse and a need to make things right. They look for solutions out of desperation."

"Then they who called my father mad have gone mad themselves."

"Not all. But enough. You aren't safe."

"It's another curse, then, come upon us."

"Perhaps. But all plagues and curses end, Elpes. They must. The Maker is good and merciful. If we've sinned, He will forgive. The crops will return. But if we shed innocent blood..." Theer's new face grieved more profoundly. "I fear that will certainly damn us."

I linked my arm with his, terrified of the things eating up my world, both under the ground and in the souls of my people. But I would not be swallowed up in the horror. I knew I must hold tightly to what I had, to Adda and Malhyn, and the beauty left around me, and the lamp that burned inside where only I and the Maker could see. And there was Theer. His voice had come back to me after the silence. And his arm, though it had lost both thickness and strength, was still warm and now, once more, close. It must be an omen of good. I would hold on to Theer as well.

And to Appa. I would close my fists upon my faith and refuse to lose it again.

"My father will return with help."

"I want to believe that."

"He will."

We prayed until the sky darkened, and then we parted.



Theer came to our home late that night with all his family, except his eldest sister, who had married a smith from a neighboring township. The four of them—Theer and his mother Esta, a widow for many years, and his two young sisters, Ulayna and Kett—sat around our table with cups of the weak tea that was all we had to offer. They and Adda and Malhyn grew paler and paler, and perhaps I as well, while Theer and Esta informed us of what had transpired at the council.

"We are no longer one people," Esta lamented, her tea untouched. "Some call for us to slaughter fish and birds and eat in the manner of the unbelievers of the harlot planet. Half now call for the vilest remedy. I will not even name their blasphemy under your roof, that is how shameful it is to my lips. But I fear they mean to come soon."

"Tonight?" Adda asked.

"It's possible." Esta shook her head slowly, frowning. "They condemned your husband for lacking in faith and operating forbidden technology, yet they seek to breach greater laws themselves. It is a fearful hypocrisy taking hold. How can they not see that they have become no different than Melmedain?"

Adda went rigid, even as she laid a hand on my leg to still the retort that rose to my lips. "My husband never plotted murder, Esta. He bravely pilots the ship that brought us to this world. If it was not a sin to flee to a new life in Havenheart, then I do not accept that we transgress in using the ship to save the lives of our people."

"We had one dispensation for the technology." Esta's finger rapped the table once, hard. "Only to come here. Then we obeyed. My husband, Maker hold him close, dismantled the metal beast he piloted and buried it in the western caves, along with all the others who submitted to the law. Your husband was treated leniently when he refused the order of the council to take his ship apart."

I had not forgotten the arguments. I was tiny and prone to hanging on my Appa's leg whenever I was afraid. A visit from the grim-faced leaders who raised their voices at Appa always frightened me. The elders commanded, over and over, and Father stood firm, saying only, "The Maker decrees otherwise." I remembered that with perfect clarity. Eventually, the elders would tire of wasting their time and my father's and leave. By the time I was four, their attention went into building the temple and judging the townships. Their angry visits ended. Appa's ship stayed whole.

Adda, as if touched by my thoughts said, "My man felt led to keep the ship intact. I think now it was for this very purpose. Is that not possible?"

Esta shrugged. "Perhaps another dispensation was in order for Melmedain's departure."

"He didn't need a dispensation," Adda said. "The Maker spoke to his heart and told him to go. He obeyed. Just as he obeyed when the Holy One told him to choose this plot of land for his own, although it was far from the rivers and dry. The Maker told him to dig in the side of the mount. He dug and found the spring that waters our land. No one has purer water. Our popla grew thicker and taller than any other among the townships, so bountiful that it lasted us these three years. Is that not a sign?"

Esta sat taller. "You dress your husband with the prophet's cloak too freely, Lona."

"If he is no prophet, then he is certainly no vile sinner. He is a man who walks with his Maker. When told to, he flies with Him."

Theer rubbed his face. "In the histories of the prophets, many times it is recorded that chosen ones went against the wisdom of the elders of their times. We have become rigid, I think, and have forgotten that there is a place for the lesser laws to bend to the voice of the Maker of laws in the hearts of his children."

His sisters, wide-eyed, glanced at each other in the secret language of siblings. I could only guess at what they shared—shock at my mother equating my father to a prophet, fascination at the revelations of the adults, delight at the sense that forbidden words were spilling all around them, apprehension at the deeds that might yet happen this night.

But my mother's words fed me her strength, and Theer's support filled my belly with a satisfaction that two bowls of root stew could not have equaled. The fire in my spirit danced and burned in a fresh wind that cleared away the small doubts and new fears that had been clouding my mood.

And then, without warning, the wind was no longer in my spirit alone. It was real.

Theer's long hair swirled roughly about his head, and his sisters' braids went flying. His mother's bangs lifted like arms in worship. My own loose locks flew into my face, momentarily blinding me.

"I don't wish to argue, Lona," Esta said, brushing wisps of graying hair from her broad forehead. "I am here to pray with you for the healing of our people and for Melmedain's safe return."

My mother pushed her hair back, smoothing it slowly, her head tilted, listening.

More was roaring than the wind. A long sigh dropped through the chimney. A sustained hum flew in through the windows. A shout blasted through the door. And with the sigh and hum and shout came lights of different colors that changed the bits of sky visible through windows and doors into something I'd never seen in all my seventeen years.

Malhyn, who'd been sprawled on the window seat in the manner of young boys, hopped to his knees and leaned out, his hair whirling as if it had come to life and could not contain its joy. "It must be Appa!" He ran out of the house before Adda could restrain him with a command.

Then nothing could restrain us. We all ran.

Outside, the sky was ablaze with golds and blues and greens that infused the scattered clouds and reflected from one to the other, until they outshone the moons.

"What is it?" Malhyn cried out, while Theer's sisters, too excited to be still in the face of wonders, ran about and squealed.

"A ship," said Theer. "But like none I've ever seen."

"Is it from the old planet?" Adda asked.

"No," I said, sensing the alien quality of the form and the metals. This was a thing like none I had seen in the books about the old planet. "I don't think so."

"Is it Father?" Malhyn asked.

No one answered.

"I'll go down," Theer said.

"Me, too!" cried Malhyn.

"No," Theer said. "You are still under ban. Who knows what may befall you if you come to town. Stay and protect your family and mine."

That last was enough to cut short Malhyn's complaint. He squared his small shoulders. "All right."

Their nodded at his mother, then Adda, then locked gazes with mine. "I'll bring news as fast as I can."

I watched him run down the path to the town where we could no longer walk. The enormous ship was landing in the triangle of land behind the temple, where the rivers mingled and gleamed strangely, beautifully, in the alien light.



We waited, unsure if this ship brought salvation or a new curse.

I waited to see if it brought word from Appa. If it brought Appa himself.

And then we saw the torchlights moving down in the town, away from the temple grounds and toward us. Soon, they were coming up the hill. I wasn't sure how much time had passed, but certainly hours, I guessed, by the position of the moons against the multi-colored sky.

Then they were with us.

The elders of the Council of Five rode bony horses guided by younger men and women who'd gone thinner and sharper since I last saw them. Around them, I spotted more familiar faces, none alien, none from that magical ship.

Adda moved to stand between the townspeople and us—Malhyn and me. Esta stood beside my mother. Her daughters piled at her back, peeking over her shoulders at the torch-lit crowd.

"Do not fear, Lona of Melmedain," Elder Vallis said in a strong voice.

"I fear only the One who commands all light and all darkness."

"Then you do well, Daughter."

Elder Vallis and the others dismounted. Adda waited, straight as the stone walls of the temple. I moved to her left side. Malhyn, taking a cue, tapped Esta's arm requesting she give him room. When she did, he took his place at Adda's right.

"We have come with a dispensation. The shunning is lifted, and we ask you to come with us to the town."

"Is my husband returned?"

"We do not know."

"Then why am I called to the town?"

"You are summoned, Daughter."

"By whom?"

Elder Vallis spread his hands. "By beings that are unknown to us."

"Tell her about their cargo," Theer called from the back of the crowd even as he pushed his way to the front. A murmur followed him, quieting only when he took his place beside me, smiling in such a way that I could see his old face in the new, see him the way he'd been before the shunning and the hunger.

Theer smiling? There must be good news!

Appa. Please let it be Appa.

"They have brought with them many crates of foods," Elder Vallis admitted.

The murmur grew louder. Theer's smile turned to a grin. "Huge crates," he said. "Hundreds of huge, massive crates."

"But my father?" I asked Theer.

His grin faltered and he shook his head. "I did not see him."

"If Theer would allow me to continue?" Elder Vallis said with some impatience, but not without kindness in his voice.

Were they becoming themselves again?

I hoped dearly that the elder I once deeply admired was not among those who had called for blood. I scanned the faces lit by torchlight, smelled sweat and burning oil, and wondered who among them would have taken a life tonight had the great ship not come down from the sky.

"Very well, then," Elder Vallis continued, his gaze on Adda. "The aliens seem to have come bearing gifts, Lona. But though we do not understand their language, they have made one thing clear. They come bearing them for you and your children. They will not allow us to approach. They only repeat the same handful of words in our tongue."

And in that moment I knew Appa had succeeded. Somehow, he'd made contact with the world of these strangers—aliens—and made sure that we would be saved.

But where was Appa?

I must have said the words aloud without meaning to, because Elder Vallis answered me.

"He may be within the alien vessel, Child. We do not yet know."

I couldn't understand why Appa would not come out to us. Unless he could not. Unless he was hurt. Unless he was...

"We will come," Adda said, and then she took my hand.



They were very different from us, and yet, in many ways, recognizably like us. Eyes, mouths, hands, legs. The pattern of the Maker's plan for sentient life persisted, then, throughout the many worlds. They had smooth flesh that gleamed like the black stone that adorned the sacred chalice, and teeth and eyes of milky blue. White tendrils as thick as my fingers grew from their heads. Their language was akin to high-pitched music, rising and falling

and rising again. And this is what they said, in unison, as if they formed a choir for our pleasure: *Elhem, Dorna III, Havenheart, Lona, Elpes, Malhyn.*

Our names. They sang our names. Their alien mouths added a thrilling newness to what was so dear and familiar. I'd always disliked my name. In that moment, I changed. Their song showed me how beautiful my name could be.

We walked straight toward them, unafraid, Adda and I and Malhyn, with Theer close behind. How could we fear them when they sang of us into the light-dazzled air?

Elhem. Dorna III. Havenheart. Lona. Elpes. Malhyn.

These astounding beings had heard my Appa's nightly chant. They had heard it, and they had found him; and, somehow, they had understood what Appa's quest had been. And they completed it.

But where was my father?

"Elhem is our God," Adda said to the unusually tall one at the front who seemed to lead the chorus. "This planet is Dorna III. This town is Havenheart. And I am Lona."

"Loooonaaaaa," the alien repeated, and Adda raised a hand to her temple.

"I'm Elpes," I said before Adda could.

"EIIIIIIpesssss," they chorused.

I felt an intrusion in my mind, small lappings, as if many living things were tasting my thoughts.

"I'm Malhyn!"

The lapping sensation left me as they sang, "Maaalllllhyyyynnnn." My brother giggled and scratched the top of his head.

Then the wondrous, black-fleshed, white-tendriled aliens let loose a skittering sound, high and happy, that could be nothing other than laughter. That too was music.

Adda and I and Malhyn laughed and wept with these new friends.

"Please," Adda said. "Please. Where is Melmedain? My husband?"

A signal was given and four aliens came out of the vessel carrying a long bundle wrapped in an exquisite fabric that shimmered liquidly in pale green. They moved with a grace none of us of the covenant could ever match, step by step, past the crates overflowing with fruits and vegetables and grain.

"No," Adda said, understanding, even as I understood.

We held each other—the three of us—wife, daughter, and son of a great man, as the aliens bearing Appa's body approached. Our arms tightly grasped waists and shoulders, and our cheeks rubbed together, slippery with tears.

I thought I heard sobbing behind us, where the townsfolk clustered.

And then I thought: Appa's home.



The wondrous ones stayed among us for three days.

Somehow, they made themselves understood, entering our thoughts, moving within our minds as gracefully as they did through our land with their long, dark, reflective bodies. They showed us the images of Appa's damaged ship, floating, unguided, and of Appa himself, also damaged, but still praying, still speaking the names of the beloved ones. Our new friends had been moved by the purity of Appa's mind, the sureness of his hope, the unsearchable depths of his love.

And they recognized one of the names: Elhem.

He was our brother and father and son as well, they spoke into my mind.

And I felt them pouring comfort into me.

They didn't read the minds of all or place their thoughts into many. Adda, me, Malhyn, Theer, Elder Vallis, a few of the other leaders, no more. When Elder Vallis, first among the priests, announced to the people that the aliens also worshiped the Maker of All Worlds and followed the way of the Ransomer, the news left some silent and awed, and others babbling with astonishment.

None disbelieved.

After all, was the food not proof of the provision of the Maker? And was not the goodness of the Aardavi—the name the aliens called themselves—evident to all in their manner and behavior? Had they not brought back the blessed remains of Melmedain, the people said, he who was the Holy Transgressor?

Yes, they had named Appa a prophet, after all.

But the Aardavi had brought more than my dear Appa's body, more than the abundance of supplies, more than renewed faith among those who had wavered, more than a fresh revival among the covenanters, including a new feast of repentance, where all those who had considered shedding blood threw themselves on the floor of the temple and wailed for forgiveness. And forgiveness was given. The Aardavi's arrival brought one more thing: hope.

The devils in the soil, they said, were benevolent creatures that thrived on other worlds. Kungkapa, they were called by the Aardavi.

No curse. The Aardavi spoke into my mind. *Blessing.*

We are to expect three years without harvests, then forty-nine years when the Kungkapa rest. On the fiftieth year, they will awaken and eat

everything they can for two years. They will then lay their eggs. When the eggs hatch, the young will join the parents for one more year of feeding, after which the parents die and the offspring sleep. They will leave behind freshened soil ready for fifty years of planting and reaping, soil more fertile because of the three years of devastation.

A blessing, not a curse.

And I see that Havenheart and the other towns are also stronger and more fertile for three years of loss. I have seen the newness in all of us. We are gentler; we are kinder; we are more merciful; we are striving for a deeper holiness. We are questioning our solitude. The laws of the covenant have been revisited with enlightened eyes and with a spirit more closely matching the compassion of the Ransomer and the patience of the Maker.

I do not think this generation will entertain thoughts of bloodshed again. Perhaps our children will learn from our tale. They will certainly benefit from the hard lessons that have forced re-evaluations and change.



"I have your mother's consent," Theer says to me as we sit on Appa's rock.

My father is buried beneath it. The people believe this to be a sacred spot. I have always thought so, as has Appa. A place to hear the High One.

Now, I hear Him in my heart telling me this man is my true mate. "Then it's past time you ask me properly. We will be sowing popla seeds soon. I want to grow your child along with our new crops."

Theer turns red and laughs. He embraces me and we nearly topple from the rock as he is taken over by his laughter. It takes me over, too. When we calm, I study the face that is almost Theer's own again, the sorrow

well gone, the flesh restored. I know that the pillar ghosts are now the merest wisps on my forehead.

"Marry me, Elpes. I have ordered a green bowl from Surila. She promises to work on it night and day."

I had asked of Theer a marriage bowl the color of Appa's pale alien shroud.

"Thank you, Theer. I will marry you."

It is the last day of the week. The earth is quiet, at peace. The small, purple creatures are asleep, cradled in the remains of the previous generation. Appa's body sleeps, too, until the day set for him to awaken.

"Your mother and brother are coming."

"Good," I say, watching Adda and Malhym climb. "The wind is good today. Appa's name will carry far."

Men and women come to Appa's rock to talk to the Maker and wait for Him to speak into their hearts. Adda only forbids visitors on days such as today, the last day of each week. It is our day, ours to sit and remember and pray. And when we're done, we send out Appa's name.

Melmedain, we say to the west. Melmedain, we tell the east. Melmedain we call to the north, and Melmedain we speak to the south. And then we shout it up past the clouds, up to where we now know there dwell friends and fellow walkers in truth.

Melmedain.

Appa.

The Aardavi taught us a new song before they left. We've added it to our worship feasts. Though we lack their gift of music, we try to sing it as beautifully as our alien brethren did. I will sing it on the day Theer and I marry, because it is a song of hope and new beginnings. Every Aardavi sang

it for us as they left our temple to board their splendid vessel on the day of their departure.

They promised to return.



Copyright 2007, *Mirta Ana Schultz*

Mirta Ana Schultz say about herself:

"I'm a married, Cuban-American, Southern Baptist, South Florida resident. I hold two bachelor degrees, one in English, one in Health Information Management. I'm 46 and have a large library full of wonderful books, thousands of them. I'm writing a Christian apocalyptic urban fantasy with the working title of *Age's End*, and I'm assistant editor for *Dragons, Knights, & Angels*, an online magazine of Christian SF/F. I belong to RWA and ACFW, and I fiddle occasionally on my two blogs."



Cover: "Black Pegasus"

Original Art - 12" x 9" colored pencil illustration on Strathmore Artagain fiber-enhanced paper.

Copyright 2007, *Michelle J.A. McIntyre*

Specializing in colored pencil works on fiber-enhanced paper, more of the work of Michelle J.A. McIntyre can be found on her Webpage, < www.fantasyrealmcreations.com >. She creates a variety of fantasy art subject matter including dragons, unicorns, gryphons, fairies, and centaurs.



The Sword Review is a publication of Double-Edged Publishing, Inc. It is available at www.theswordreview.com and updates are published weekly. Issues are completed monthly.

The Sword Review (ISSN 1556-5416)
9618 Misty Brook Cove, Cordova, Tennessee 38016

For more information visit www.theswordreview.com. The above items appear as part of Volume 3, 2007, Issue 23.



Support The Sword Review

The Sword Review is a publication of Double-Edged Publishing, Inc., a nonprofit corporation designated as a 501(c)(3) public charity. Double-Edged Publishing believes the written word is a powerful tool, capable of shaping ideas and changing lives.

Mail checks to:

Double-Edged Publishing, Inc.
Development
9618 Misty Brook Cove
Cordova, Tennessee 38016

Online donations can be made and more information can be found via *The Sword Review* or the Double-Edged Publishing websites:

< www.theswordreview.com >
< www.doubleedgedpublishing.com >



www.theswordreview.com