

Wheelsong of the Great Rabbit

Can the pen of the Scholar or tongue of the catfolk do justice to Great Rabbit's deeds?
Can mere words truly tell of that life-giving light which the first blessed folk then received?
When the morning broke fiercely like fire to kindle a fire in kind in their souls,
When the sun's serene countenance first they beheld, they our fathers first risen of old
From the ranks of the animals barren of speech who upon their four paws walked about,
At the gold glow of dawn, upon hindpaws they leapt, reaching skyward like tender green sprouts;
Then the four paws once bound to the earth became two, and the tongues which were mute now
were loosed
To sing songs of the Sun and the glimmering Stars, and to dance to the sound of the flute;
Such immeasurable joy yet more joyful became when to virginal earth didst descend
All the host of the Stars, the illustrious shepherds in gentleness come to befriend
Us, the newly illumined, to order our voices toward sonorous chords and to
Wisely instruct in the tending of earth, in harmonious movements of day and of night;
And the glory of glories, the crown of the world on the brow of the mountains was placed,
The magnificent Twelve, the Celestial Thrones, thankful earth in resplendence to grace;
To the rabbitfolk came the Great Rabbit with ears casting delicate afternoon shade
In a cloud of sweet loam and magnolia odor, with choir of golden-moss glade;
From the wells of his eyes poured forth clear crystal springs for the washing of world-weary
paws,
Abundant green gardens sprang up in his steps, and the soil was tilled by his claws;
Homely hearth-fire fervently flickered in each root-deep beat of his sun-hallowed heart,
And where age beyond measure met youth before day, kind instruction that Star did impart:
In the working of earth, the enriching of soil, in the growing of everything green,
In the carving of wood and the cutting of stone, in the digging of warrens unseen
By the eyes of the birds, the most hidden of homes, in the gentle embrace of the hills,
Where the warm runs of tunnels and overstuffed larders by reveling rabbits are filled;
This peculiar craft did the rabbitfolk ply, in their cool, root-roofed homes they remained,
While the groundhogs and badgers carved cabins from trees, yet the rabbits their tunnels
maintained;
But the danger of this the Great Rabbit revealed, he admonished them strictly and warned
That the life of all folk was the light of the sun and that unto such light were they born;
To this end did that Great Constellation deliver commandments for life underground
To be carefully kept without slightest exception, to these blessed precepts the rabbits were
bound:
In the digging of dens 'neath the heads of the hills, on the east-facing slopes should be set
Many windows of colorless, transparent glass unobstructed, whose faces shall let
In the burgeoning glow of the virginal dawn for the cleansing of earth and of air,
That the fingers of morning may cast out the foul in favor of all that is fair;
See that every home by a skylight is domed and let columns be hollowed for flowing
Of soft, wholesome breeze to enliven the stifling corners and closets below;
And in runs where the light of the sun remains scarce, let a lesser light never go out,
For the hearth-fire sighs forth the warmth of the day and its flickering fingers throughout
The runs prod like the watch of the guard, ever vigilant, never asleep,
Seeking out the dark places where wicked things hide for the sake of the rabbitfolk's peace;

And cast spice on the fires to smoke on the coals, thereby censuring the dens and the runs
With the fragrance of chamomile, cedar and clove, and of fine resin taken from trunks
Of the conifers, dripping with sap, of the spruce and the eastern white pine,
That the wisps from the chimney may spread out in delicate clouds o'er the hills to recline;
And amidst these green hills shall the gardens be grown, in stepped gardens that cling to the
slopes
Plant the parsnip and carrot and turnip, the crops strong of root and with leaves keen to soak
Up the life of the sun and to send to said roots all its virtues to bless the soft earth
Which comprises the roofs and the walls of the warrens, engendering wellness and mirth;
In this bliss did the rabbitfolk safely persist through the morn of that first blessed Day,
Growing gardens unmatched o'er the wide Eastern Lands, full to bursting with bounty and
glutted with grain,
Forming rhythms through circles of springtime and harvest, then resting 'til tender spring
sprouted anew
With a beauty more excellent each passing year, while the dens with their litters of kittenfolk
grew;
The magnolias sang, the azaleas blazed like the sun from their wide garden beds,
There were trees full of fruit for the making of wine that went straight to the revelers' heads;
There were fine, fragrant spices in every field, throwing odors both holy and sweet,
And the breeze-bowing meadowgrass, pious and cool, was a suitable carpet for rabbitfolk feet;
So the seasons rolled on in serenity uninterrupted by famine or foe
'Neath the high, watchful eye of their shepherd benevolent, so to persist unto ages unknown;
But alas! must the tale carry on, for the rabbits' tranquility did not persist,
For an evil arose in the youth of the world, a most poisonous root who spread out irresistibly,
Tickling the ears of the heavenly corn, sowing secrets retrieved from the fathomless deep,
Granting unnatural magics for mastery over the earth in exchange for their fealty;
And these powers proved far too enticing for most, one by one folk fell into his thrall
Until all of the land betwixt River and River into this deception did fall;
And forsaking the Great Constellations they bound up their fate with the will of the Eighth,
The most monstrous of goats and the scourge of the seafarers, cankerous chasm of hatred
For sunlight and all that is fair, for the endless expanse of the starry night sky;
An Abyss of resentment, a cancer of avarice, long did the sun burn his covetous eyes,
For the role of a shepherd offended him greatly, his throne was too high, he believed,
To demand condescension toward lowborn folk, as the lord of the nations should he be received;
And amassing an army in Grimfathom Gorge he enacted his sinister plan,
Deploying demoniac hosts, he assaulted the Southlands 'til none could withstand
His encroaching dominion, established by blatant deception and merciless violence,
Offering Star-loyal cities no quarter, announcing his conquest with Belled Buzzard cry;
And when every bit of the Southlands belonged to the Goat, he appointed his deputies,
Hellknights by name, born of union unspeakable, full of fell deeds and with faces detestable,
Stronger than oxen, possessive of blasphemies seen through their flat-pupiled eyes,
They emitted miasma to block out the sun and to darken the hearts of the wise;
Thus the rabbits once wise had grown foolish, forsaking the sun for the dark and the cold,
And the shadow that crept from the depths of the sea seized an ironclad grip on the souls
Of the noblest of warrens, the Bluebucks and Mosshoppers, Lightfoots and Dewlops and Kings,
Swept away were the Willowvaults, long since forgotten the songs which their bards used to

sing;

Yet a few faithful rabbits resisted his whispers, a singular warren stood firm,
For the Three-Ears knew rightly that death did not differ from life in the grip of the Worm;
Yet fighting was fruitless, no war could be won against Goat and his horrible swarm,
And the darkening sky proved a portent of doom that the free folk should come to great harm
Should they stay in the land; and so riddled with grief at the loss of their once sunny home,
They crossed over The River and into the North where the life-giving sunlight still shone,
To the valleys where Black Goat's depravity yet could not poison the soil and the trees,
There the rabbitfolk tended their gardens untroubled and prayed through the night's lightless
watches for peace;

But unto the fallen that fiend soon appointed a terrible tyrant and cruel,
A bludgeoning paw to bring all into order, a voice of command at once stunning and brutal;
Termite they called him, for under the earth he bored tunnels unnatural and reeking of
Ash as the highways for enemy troops, turning miles through wretched technique
Into feet and allowing the sun-fearing demons to march beneath daylight unburnt
Until webbed was the world like a great hive of wasps who infested the innocent dirt;
So thick was the fetor, so total the gloom that the sun ceased to peak through the clouds,
Yet no rain was allowed to refresh with its tears the unending lament of the ground;
The fields all went fallow, the forests dried up, and the underbrush crumbled to dust
As the rivers diminished to trickles and merciless winds turned the iron to rust;
Not even the mountains were spared, for the Goat had their stones cut to pieces for making
His spiraling towers, vainglorious temples, and fortresses wrapped in unbreakable
Walls; and as brick after ill-gotten brick was piled high, so the hills were laid low
Until knife-edged peaks stabbed the sky in the midst of the cold, wind-blown quarries and soot-
blackened snow;

But the thrust of this wanton destruction and scarring of earth was in service of building
The Laubed, immense and impregnable, placed like a crown in the Redmaple Hills;
Gilt with gold from his mines and inlaid with the finest of opal and aquamarine
Was a throne the Goat mounted, and from it declared himself lord of the earth and the seas;
But blinded by high-minded hubris and drunk on the wine of dominion, the usurper
Failed to perceive that his days were fast waning, his acts of enslavement and murder
Had not gone unnoticed beneath the black fog, the Eleven were mourning the loss
Of their sheep to the jaws of that ravenous Wolf, and with all of the world in the grip of his claws
Did the Great Constellations convene at the peak of the Mountain of Cloud on their thrones,
On that Mountain around which the very world turns they took counsel together and groaned
For the spiteful despoiling of once happy lands, for the sapping of blue from the sky,
But still more for the hearts of the folk who had fallen so foolishly down from the heights
Into yawning Abyss, the domain of the demons, devoid of the light of the Stars,
Nevermore to endure the full brightness of fire, over desolate wastelands to wander afar;
Such abuse could not stand, they exclaimed, and unanimous sounded the heavenly doom:
If Black Goat so desired the death of the day, then the sun should be laid in his tomb;
To the firmament flew the Great Dragon, and taking the sun from his hook in the sky
She returned to the fore of a million score host of Stars with a rallying cry;
The earth, rising breathless, awaited with great expectation his gladdening light,
Every true rabbit's ear was attentively trained, every eye skyward strained for the sight
Of their shepherd, the Rabbit whose scepter to long-unswept hearths would lost fire restore;

How great was their glee when Great Rooster announced with his crowing the coming of war
From the Comb, a magnificent morning, their long-awaited recompense dawning at last,
A fierce army of Stars in the trail of the sun, with unchecked luminescence their company vast
Then descended in splendor, the sun in his monstrosity, dispelling the dolorous gloom
And destroying like dross in the furnace the works of the enemy, meteoring out doom
To the demons and all things that crawl in the squalor of misery, death, and decay,
Cutting down the high spires and grinding to powder the towers where wizards their blasphemies
made;

The Hellknights, cold horrors, were swiftly dispatched, without trial by fire consumed
Until only their ashes were left for the wind to dismiss and the tomb to refuse;
Rightly robbed of their rest, these most fearsome of spirits proved cowardly, fleeing into the
Abyss

Where the sun could not brighten their writhing and gnashing and shaking of impotent fists;
And then coming at last to the Redmaple Hills, now transformed into ironclad cities
Where factory chimneys belched poisonous billows of swill for the living unfit,
The unstoppable army with thundering bellow the enemy's Laubed approached,
And the gates fell down prostrate to let the Stars pass, not a gate-guard remained but had fled
from his post,

For the arts made in darkness, on sensing the light, could not bear to be thus overthrown,
And so threw themselves down into piles of shivering rubble 'til stone was not left upon stone;
In her wrath the Great Dragon struck down the court doors, making end of the unnatural night
As the full force of morning broke over Black Goat, laying bare his decline in the sight
Of his subjects; for formerly had he been feared as a giant, the greatest of kings,
Yet as lengthening shadows are shown by the light to be cast by the smallest of things
So the cowering throngs found their master a fraud, his celestial countenance faded
To fog and bereft of all beauty, a cripple with sinews decayed;

And this shame of all shames was seen plainly, for he who had viciously railed against day
Was by day now defeated and so soundly crushed that his bluster availed him no way
To retaliate, nor did his pride allow thought of surrender to enter his mind;

Thus embittered, Black Goat was then stripped by the sun of his flesh, now so fully entwined
With the earth that no more than a stain still remained, a mere whisper of smoke, black as bile,
His arm, once of iron, had failed him, his quicksilver scales could no longer beguile,
His eyes from which nothing could hide had gone blind, his fine raiment had faded to tatters,
The sound of his bleating fell silent at last, for the horns of the Goat had been fatally shattered;

Such poverty burned him far worse than the Flame, and now with no other recourse
The old tyrant turned tail and as fugitive fled to the farthest extremes of the North
Where he burrowed through mountains to caverns untapped, where the sun he so deeply despised
Could no longer illumine the lowly estate of the Star who had fallen to earth from the sky;

In these unfathomed depths, the Abyss of his making, bereft of his body he seethed
In his rage while the centuries passed and he languished there, down in the dregs of the deep;
And when the miasma was burned up by fire and devils were scattered abroad,
When the mountains were seen to be broken in pieces and great deep ravines had been clawed,
The Eleven saw fit to whip up a hot wind bearing sand which would bury the blight
Of the enemy, wearing his towers away with the tireless forces of wind and of light,
Until years passing number might bring to the desert a peace full of rippling dunes
And the life of the Southlands might once again thrive where the oldest of ash trees take root;

To this end there was cleansing of earth and of air, of the rivers and high mountain springs,
There came curing of poison through marvelous songs which the Stars taught their flocks how to sing;

Then the Dragon appointed the very first exorcists, wielding the Ash and the Flame,
Who with chants could advance into battle, reconquering hearts which the demons had claimed;
So with armor of starlight and green-feathered spear the Great Rabbit advanced at the fore
Of a hundred score exorcists, taking the Flame to the tunnels and waging a war
Against every last holdout still hiding in darkness and nursing his fetorous cloud
Until down with a cry of command came the jubilant band, waving banners and singing aloud
Such illustrious hymns whose high, heavenly harmonies banished the cowardly fiends,
Raising geysers of lamp-fire, showing no mercy to those who with dark arts deceived
The whole world; in the inky Abyss then imprisoned, they rattled their chains at their master,
Returning to mind every moment the wretched lament that their kingdom had come to disaster;
But the Tunneler's trowels, the servants of Termite, bent double and blinded, afraid
Of the bright Eastern sun but who by it were spared were shown pity, for on them was laid
Not a sentence of death, for not all deaths are equal, but of merciful exile o'er wide western sea
Where the daylight waxed far less intensely and sun-burdened strangers could live on in peace;
So these rabbits built ships out of ash wood, great vessels with sails bearing symbols of warrens
Once great, now disgraced, and then fleet after fleet sailed away from the East to the far foreign shores;

Thus ended the tale of the forefathers, eldest of rabbits no more to be found
In the East, who went searching for meadows where seed might be sown in the welcoming ground;
May their memory last unto ages of ages, and may their redemption be found in the uncharted West;

To the few sorry folk who with virtue remained in the South was a boon freely offered,
A haven for healing of body and soul where the terrible wounds they had suffered
Could slowly be mended by passage of time and by gentle caress of the Stars,
Where the years left no wrinkle of care on the brow and where joy was by memory of sorrow unmarred;

A great forest was sung into being, a ring round the mountains encircling the Sunlit Lands,
Kissing their foothills and blessed by the unfading spring which Great Bear thus enchanted
Through melodies rife with the music of life, causing peaceful and orderly growth
Without thorn, where the ground yields its corn without sweat and where down from the mountains the Four Rivers flow;

Thus the Dawning Age ended, and thus did the Great Constellations mount high on their thrones
At the peak of the Mountain of Cloud, where in stillness unspoiled they tend to the dome
Of the sky, sending forth every morning the sun on its circuits to brighten the hearts
Of the diligent rabbitfolk; there the Great Rabbit awaits to embrace the departed
And listens with vigilant ears for the plea of his kittens, "Come quickly!" they say,
And with burning affection their glittering guardian leaps from the heights and comes soon to their aid,

Ever ready as shepherd to tend to his flock, their defender against the dark foe
Until ages may fail in the eve of the world and the rabbitfolk come to their happy repose