

Forged Anew

Wednesday, 30 November 2016

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2nd place winner in the 11th Anniversary Literature Competition

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“Why should I
fear? When was I less by dying?” - Rumi

Even amidst the madness of battle, he could hear the warhost's damned lord shrieking his name. It was a name from a different time and place, but it was his. He had another now. Hyrocas. It had been given when he was forged anew. Still, he recognized the old name. Despite the raging torrent of war around him, it stirred vivid memories of another life, a noble existence cut short through treachery. He ignored them. He was a Stormcast Eternal of the Celestial Vindicators, a warrior of the God King himself, a knight reborn. He was above such distractions. The greatsword in his hands swept forward like a scythe through wheat. Around him, the foul half-women that followed this warlord gibbered fearfully as he cleaved through their frail husks. He had wielded a similar sword once. It had possessed a name, a mighty legacy. It was lost now, as so much had been lost. Again he felt the memories tugging, but he shoved them aside. With a roar, he swung his blade round once more, pushing through the host to stand before its master.

“Pinabel, my brother, it is good to see you again.” The creature hissed while playfully spinning a slender, silvery blade. He did not respond, gazing upon its wretched form. There was a perfect porcelain face crowned with vestigial horns, a body encased in a purple-hued mockery of another world's knightly armor. In truth, the creature looked much like it had when it was his brother.

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“I am no longer Pinabel, Ganelon. You betrayed me. You killed me. I am reborn. I am Hyrocas. I am vengeance.” His voice was deeper than it had ever been when he was a Bretonnian lord, even deeper than when he had roared orders on that final day in Beregon. The sight of Ganelon brought back a flood of memories. He remembered his wife Marie, his child Danton, the End Times. The hordes of beastmen encircling his keep, the cold pain of a knife sliding into his back, the sickening chuckle of Ganelon watching him die even as the traitor made to open the gates. He heard that laugh again as the warlord oozed forward.

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â€œOh my sweet brother, what has that false king done to you?â€• The monster eased into a fighting stance, â€œI could free you from this, you know? I could return you to your wife and her pretty screams. She screamed so very much as she died. Let me show you. Let me free you.â€•

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He moved with blinding speed to intercept its weapon and the two fell into a furious duel. The greatsword spun, knocking the slender blade back. His armor-clad fist pistoned out, smashing the porcelain face and his greatsword slammed down, barely missing his reeling enemy. Suddenly, Ganelonâ€™s silvery sword thrust out, piercing deep into his chest. The blade was cold, so painfully, familiarly cold.

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â€œI win again, Pinabel.â€• Ganelon gloated as he sunk to his knees. His vision began greying, as it had before. Yet as he looked down at his wound, with ripples of lightning leaking out instead of blood, he grunted and swung up his sword. He heard Ganelon squawk and watched as it collapsed, bisected, to the ground.

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â€œNever again, wretch,â€• he sighed as the world faded into blackness.

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He had fought this particular host before. Its leader was shrieking a name. It was familiar. Perhaps it had been his. He cared little. He was Hyrocas, forged anew so that he might bring death to humanityâ€™s foes. His greatsword, a familiar weight â€“ familiar, as if he had known it in a dreamâ€“ rose and fell as he hacked his way towards the warlord. He vaguely recognized its perfect, porcelain face.

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â€œMy dear Pinabel, we must stop meeting like this.â€• The creatureâ€™s sibilant voice was mocking, patronizing. Despite his focused rage, that name and the face of the monsterâ€“ Ganelon, it was Ganelon - brought back a flood of nebulous, half-formed memories. A keep. A womanâ€™s touch. A childâ€™s laugh. A baleful moon. A horde of monsters. A sharp, cold pain in his back. He snarled and raised his sword.

“That man is dead. I am Hyrocas. I am vengeance.”

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“Yes, so I’ve heard. Now be a good knight, dear brother, and stay dead this time.” The monster lunged and their blades crashed together, once, twice, thrice. When the final blows came, they were too fast to follow. He choked with the warlord’s blade embedded in his throat. Yet, his opponent died, wriggling like a pinned insect on the end of his sword. He smiled as blackness overwhelmed him.

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He vaguely remembered this host. He must have fought them before. He could hear its leader shrieking a name. Who knew what significance it held? He cared little. He was Hyrocas, forged anew to bring death to humanity’s foes. His greatsword sheared through enemies as he approached the warlord. The creature was obscenely perfect, a porcelain face crowned with horns. It started to speak.

“Ah, Pinabel. I!”

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“Silence, wretch. I am Hyrocas. I am vengeance.” The porcelain face pouted as if offended.

“No, no, no, I am Ganelon and you are Pinabel. You were my brother! I betrayed you!” The creature’s voice became angry, “How do you not remember?”

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The creature’s babbling meant nothing to him.

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“I am Hyrocas. I am vengeance.” He hefted his blade and surged forwards.

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The warlord snarled and staggered as he smashed aside its blade. He gave it no time to recover as he whirled the greatsword round and thrust downwards. It crashed to its knees with a shriek, his blade piercing through its torso from shoulder to groin.

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“But I have always killed you,” it coughed.

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“Have you?” Hyrocas grunted as he ripped his sword from its body and beheaded it with a single stroke. There was a brief moment of satisfaction, and then he turned back to war.