

Ben**Part 1: 50 Word Fantasy: Spell**

"It's too dangerous! The equations are incomplete. Even if you make it through, your mind will be torn to ribbons." The artificer raked his hair.

"By the time your equations are complete, half the greatlord's minutemen will be through that door." The magician reached forward. "I'll take my chances."

Part 2: Expand 50 Word Fantasy to 400-600wc**"The Magician's Secret"**

"Do you have any idea how dangerous this is? The equations are incomplete; the ritual hasn't even reached maturation. Even if you make it through, your mind will be torn to ribbons." The artificer raked his hands through his hair.

Red royalty draped a luxurious study. Bookshelves packed with ancient tomes - worktables cluttered with beakers, sigils and arcane models. A stripe of concentrated chaos cleft the room down the middle, where three sparking cables extended over resinous debris and connected to a hulking metal ring in the center of the space.

"By the time your equations are complete, half the greatlord's minutemen will be through that door." The magician's eyes sparked. He pressed a finger to the marks on his arm. "Need I remind you the meaning of these runes?"

The artificer plopped his head into his hands, revealing the same tattoo on his own forearm. "God's blood, Fedwinn..."

"Fortune favors the bold." The magician extended his palm and cleared his throat.

The artificer stood, grumbling to himself incoherently. He wiped a line of sweat from his forehead and snatched a magnetic conduction rod from his desk. He placed it in the magician's hand. "Approach slowly, try to get an even pull."

As Fedwinn closed his fingers around the rod, the hairs on his arm stood straight up. He felt a tingling lightness move up his arm into his body and trickle up his neck... then the subtle weight of his hair lifting from his scalp. His shoulder-length curls clustered into a dark mantle about his skull and drifted behind as he made toward the machine at the center of the room.

As Fedwinn neared the ring, he held the conductor aloft. A blue circle of energy pooled in the ring, responding to the rod's motions like a mirror image.

CRASH! The study door was swung open on splintered hinges. Three men in cloaked, black armor stormed into the room. Stopwatches lay embedded in the center of their breastplates.

"Focus!" The artificer met his gaze. "Approach slow. I'll hold them off."

The magician's jaw dropped and he froze as the artificer moved to block the path between him and the minutemen.

"Are you insane? I'm not leaving you behind!"

The minutemen crept forward, shields down.

"Take it as a warning, though you wouldn't heed my last." The artificer ground his teeth and lifted a hammer from a holster at his side. "That spell is premature. Volatile." He gave the humming metal contraption a distasteful glance. "Given the options... I'll take my chances against these three."

"Well, then..." Fedwinn eyed the soldiers and looked back at the portal. "I trust you know your measure."

He inched toward the blue pool of energy, centering his rod in the scope of the metal ring.

SLACK! Warm liquid splattered the back of Fedwinn's neck and head. He froze in horror and turned back to see the artificer's body soaring to the side, mangled by a barbed greatsword.

A second soldier had already leapt past the scuffle to descend on Fedwinn. Their limbs moved unnaturally fast. All the air left his lungs as the man tackled him backward, into the huge metal ring.

The magician gasped, clutching the conductor firm and trying to maneuver it properly as he tumbled backward through the air. The blue pool of energy roiled into a chaotic swirl as the rod shook and angled toward the edge. Bad approach.

WHOOM! The blue energy burst into a massive cloud, filling the room. Ticking stopwatches.

As the fog lifted, two soldiers stood beside the contraption. The artificer's body lay on the floor. The conductor rod had disappeared.

Part 3: Continue Part 2 story to ~1000wc Without Changing Part 2 Block

"The Magician's Secret Part 2"

Two threads wrapped together, one over the other, forming a single string.

Fedwinn clutched his chest and glanced around the silvery chamber. Fog and mirrors - an endless expanse of prismatic reflections. He saw his own body duplicated many times, sitting about the plane at different angles. Fading endlessly to and from the ether, an army of apparitions following his every move. The Fractal Plane. Gods damnit, not here. Not again.

He panted. His heartbeat ticked faster and faster.

Tick. Tick. Tick?

Fedwinn's fingers closed around a hard protrusion in the center of his ribcage. He froze.

Tick. Tick. Tick.

In the blink of an eye, he was scrambling at his robes. He fumbled with a lace on his chest for a moment before wrestling his collar into both hands and tugging down the layers.

The flesh of his torso was a ruin, tinged nearly every color in dark blotches under a raw curtain of skin. Corrugated scars roiled over his ribs in a radial pattern, approaching critical mass in the middle where a stopwatch sat melded firmly into his chest. Fresh wounds bled between pulsing wrinkles where the edges of the timepiece fused with his body.

He trumpeted a long-winded groan. Some sloppy cocktail of exasperation and horror.

“Stranded out in the Fractal Plane with a minuteman’s watch in my chest...” Fedwinn grimaced and collapsed slowly onto his back. “Might’ve really gone too far this time.”

IT IS NOT MY WATCH IN YOUR CHEST

Fedwinn’s eyes bulged. He clapped his hands over each side of his head and squeezed against the booming iron words rattling in his skull.

IT IS MY CURSE IN YOUR STEM

Fedwinn screamed. His brain was on fire.

THE WATCH IS YOUR OWN: BLOOD, BONE AND ORGAN

A CLOCKWORK HEART TO KEEP THE TIME OF ONE REMOVED FROM ITS NATURAL RHYTHM

The magician closed his eyes and spoke through clenched teeth. “And what is this curse?”

UNTETHERED FROM THE PACE OF REALITY, YOU DRIFT TO AND FRO AT THE WILL OF OUR LORD, THE KEEPER OF THE DIVINE TAPESTRY. WE ARE A THREAD WOVEN AGAIN AND AGAIN OVER THE MANDALA OF TIME. LOST IN A LABYRINTH OF NIGHTMARES AND MEMORIES, SERVING HIS NEEDS ENDLESSLY THROUGH PAST AND FUTURE.

“And this... divine tapestry...”

IT IS THE GREATLORD’S VISION OF A UNIFIED REALITY

ITS THREADS REPRESENT OUR VERY SOULS

BY CUTTING A THREAD, HE’LL STOP A WATCH TICKING

BY SEWING A THREAD, HE’LL REORDER FATE

“Kantry said today’s haul was worthwhile.” Fedwinn slung his pack off his shoulder and pulled out a rolled mat of cloth. “But I didn’t think it would get me out of a mess like this.”

IS THAT–

“Your greatlord’s tapestry. Yeah that’s the one.”

HOW DID YOU–

“Honestly, I’m flattered that the booming voice in my head is caught off-guard by my thievery. But unless you have any other lore or other backup info on this shit I’m going to need you to quiet down. You’re up here right now,” Fedwinn leveled his hand at eye-height, then lowered it to his waist. “I need you to take it all the way down here.”

Fedwinn lay the tapestry out over the iridescent, mirror-image floor. “Focus, now. If we’re getting out of here, we’re going to need to do some pretty serious needlework.”

I WOULDN’T

Fedwinn sighed. “Let me guess. It’s dangerous? We could both die?”

There was no answer.

“There are worse fates than death. Like being stranded here... in the Fractal Realm. And besides...” How many times would he have to be the one to prove it? “Fortune favors the bold.”

Micah

Part 1: 50 Word Fantasy: Oracle

“How many crystals does she really need?” Juro whined.

“Well how many God’s do they worship, Juro?” Ni’fta snipped.

Juro thought, “uh... over a hundred.”

“Then that’s how many, now hurry up.” Ni’fta turned and added, “Be CAREFUL. But hurry.”

She changed tones and called, “Sibby, dear, it’s time!”

Part 2: Expand 50 Word Fantasy to 400-600wc

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“Well how many Gods do they worship, Juro?” Ni’fta snipped.

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She changed tones and called, “Sibby, dear, it’s time!”

A young girl skipped around the wheel house nearby, braids bouncing.

She hated when they called her that but keeping them happy and ignorant was step one for Layk.

“Okay, I’m ready!” she sang feigning the innocence a girl should have at her age.

“There you are, my little sunbeam. Now what are you going to tell the Grand Duke when you

meet him?" Ni'fta quizzed.

Layk sucked her teeth, "uhhhh, put up your DUKES!" she giggled with fists raised.

"Sibby! Be serious!" Ni'fta scowled.

"Hehe I'm kiiiidding," Layk assured. She curtsied while continuing, "I say, it is my honor and privilege to meet you Grand Duke. Your charity knows no bounds. I will happily serve your house well for the rest of my days."

Ni'fta's frown broke into a wide grin, "There's my little sun beam. And who am I?"

"High Mother Ju-l-lanna of Temple S-sky Spire", Layk answered.

"Very good! And who is Juro?", Ni'fta continued.

"Your man servant!" Layk exclaimed with a twirl, probably overdoing it but these two were thick as far as she was concerned.

Juro's head whipped round while loading the last crystal, "What'd she call me!?"

"Pipe down, Juro!" Ni'fta snapped, shooting him a dagger stare.

Juro's shoulders sagged as he secured the wagon's gate, "Oh yea, sorry...".

He walked around, checked the reins, and mounted the wagon's bench.

Ni'fta looked Layk up and down one last time with the eye of a sculptor contemplating one last chip.

Nope, she's perfect, street rat to priestess in a week, damn you're good, Ni'f, Ni'fta thought as she set down her mental chisel and took a satisfied breath.

She hugged Layk and pinched her cheek, "Now hop up there with Juro, I'm riding ahead..."

Ni'fta directed while mounting her horse, "and I will see you two in a week's time. God's be kind!"

She spurred her white stallion and was gone in a proud, self-satisfied canter.

"Come on little miss, better get a move-on." Juro reached his hand out, Layk took it and hopped in the wagon next to him.

With a crack of the reins the wagon creaked to momentum as the dusty, yoked draft horse began padding forward.

She had a week, a week until showtime... but she'd have to practice while Juro slept, it had to be perfect.

The risk was high, but the reward was power... and revenge.

If it worked, she would be the last.

Her first demand? Ni'fta's head.

After that?

Whatever the hell she wanted.

Part 3: Continue Part 2 story to ~1000wc Without Changing Part 2 Block

“LIFE SIMPLY CAN’T LAST IN THE DEAD... FOR LONG.” - Eli’zarah, Moon Mother

Layk opened her eyes to the wagon slowing.

“You sure do sleep a lot, little miss.” Juro remarked as Layke blinked in her surroundings.

The road following the river had led them atop a hill that gave vantage of a small city in the distance.

She yawned, “Where are we?”

“2 days ride from the Dukes, this here’s the last decent stop for supplies. Wanna get a hot meal, you a bath, and good night’s sleep for both of us.” Juro explained.

The waking Layk’s face pinched in surprise, “A bath? Again??”

“Hah, yup, nobles take ‘em all the time, you’ll get used to it.” Juro chuckled and clicked his tongue jolting the horse and wagon back to pace.

This was it, her last chance.

The past 5 nights, all of her practice, completely worthless.

She was an obvious imposter no matter how hard she tried.

As much as she hated to admit it, maybe guising the squeaky voice of adolescence with a wizened ancient tongue takes more than a few nights of practice, if even at all possible... come to think of it, she hadn’t ever even HEARD an ancient wisended tongue.

How the hell did she suppose she’d feign one?

But this place, this one night, this was it; her last chance to find a way to sell this.

She’d never been to a city this big... much less a city, ever... but she heard the stories... anything you can imagine wanting, someone’s selling it.

So someone here has got to have the trick she needs.

There’d be witches, alchemists, mediums, tinkers, runesmiths, and dark breweries; not to mention plenty of things she’d never heard of... if the stories were true, that is.

An hour later they were trodding through the city gates.

Layk tried to mask her amusement but it was all too much to take in.

Her jaw hung low as she gawked at the giant water wheels inside the gate.

TWO of them, BOTH five times larger than the one that powered her village.

As the wagon rolled by, she craned her neck to take in the two behemoths collaring the very river she and Juro had been following, the ENTIRE river, into gear-turning power.

They created a mist that cooled and wetted her skin as they passed.

It was as if she'd entered a different world entirely.

"...and if not, we could always just steal a chicken and prep it out back." She realized Juro had been talking since they entered the gates and had no idea where he was in conversation.

"Sounds good to me." she tossed out aimlessly, whipping her head around to survey the street they approached.

Inn's, merchants, kitchens, peddlars, they were everywhere.

She took a deep breath as they passed and a familiar foul smell invaded her attempt at wafting the sizzling savories, a stable must be nearby too.

My god, that's wrank, She thought. Possibly MULTIPLE stables.

Juro halted their cart at a grand building with clay tile roof, wood shutters, woven awnings, and TWO STORIES.

She'd never been in a place this nice, her eyes studied the sign that hung over the door, "Niiiiice. Gold lettering..." She uttered under her breath.

Of course, never learning to read, she had no idea what it meant, but that didn't stop her from appreciating the opulence.

"Eh, this aughta do, wait here." Juro instructed, clambering down from the wagon.

He disappeared through the inn's door and left Layk alone in bewilderment, staring at the people that passed.

Their shoes.... she'd never seen so many different kinds of shoes.

Boots of all leathers, slides, sandals, slippers, clogs... They must have a wizard for a cobbler! Cobblizard! Haha, ehh, probably not, she chuckled to herself as she followed pair by pair with her eyes until they disappeared into the crowds.

She noticed one of particular curiosity... What was that? Scales? Feathers? Something... else? Their movements too... or lack thereof.

She perched her elbows on the wagon's ledge, clasped her hands and mounted her chin as she focused.

They were the only ones not moving in this herd of footwear and they were pointing.. at her.

Layk's gaze followed the inky boots up over a dark ruffled dress to an immaculate coat of woven... glass? What was that?

She continued her study up to lips of crimson and eyes of... LOOKING STRAIGHT AT HER.

To be continued...

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Part 1: 50 Word Fantasy: Oracle

“The Sybil”

She sits before the hot springs, draped in silks, inhaling sacred vapors. On her gates are inscribed the words “Know Thyself.”

She is the Sybil, blessed and cursed by the sun-god, lord of oracles. Come, Traveler—the graying maiden will sing rhymes telling you of your destiny.

Part 2: Expand 50 Word Fantasy to 400-600wc

“The Golden Bough”

Aeneas took in a deep breath of thin mountain air as he crested the peak of the Sybil’s haunt..

Aeneas had sailed all the way out to Cumae, driven on by messages from the gods to seek his destiny and found a new kingdom out of the ashes of his fallen one.

He waited for his head to clear, then pushed open the gate a crack.

“Come in,” a wheezing, ancient-sounding female voice echoed from within the cavern.

Aeneas squeezed himself in through the space between the gates. His crew of guards tried to squeeze themselves in after him, but the Sybil’s voice echoed again.

“No. No companions. You alone, Traveler Aeneas.” How did she know his name? He’d be a true man worthy of his glorious, fallen city, and not tremble.

But the Sybil quite frankly unnerved him. She sat on a stool, inhaling sacred vapors. She was thin, wrinkled, and draped with diaphanous silks. Her hair was done up in an elaborate bun, and her eyes bulged, as though maddened. Aeneas had heard she was in her seven hundredth year already. Looking at her, he believed it.

“Aeneas. Do you wish to know your destiny?”

“Ancient Lady,” Aeneas began. He racked his brains for how to put his unusual request. “Your prophecies, gift of the Sun-God, are not what I seek. My destiny has already been told me by my father, Anchises. But...before my father was able to give me full instructions, he died. If there was any way I could find out the rest of his message?”

The Sybil was silent for a time. “Ah. I see. Do you, then, wish to see him in the Underworld and finish your conversation?”

"I..." Rare was it for mortals to go to the Underworld while still living, still rarer to return. He knew legends of a few of the great heroes who had done so, but the thought of it strained even his great bravery to its limit.

"I can be your guide. I am not only prophetess, but guardian to the gates of the Lower Realms. But you must carefully follow my instructions. Do you, hero Aeneas, promise to do so?"

"Yes."

"Then follow the path up the mountain to a tree whose leaves are of pure gold. Pluck a golden bough. This will protect you in the Lower Realms. Then return to me, and we will journey together to the Gate below the Dark Lake."

Aeneas nodded slowly and bowed deeply and reverently before backing out of the cavern.

"What was that all about?" one of his guards asked him.

"No time to waste, I must find it," Aeneas growled.

His guards backed away from him. Clearly, there would be no interfering with his purpose now. He followed the mountain track above the Sybil's cave, as he had been told. The tree stood before him, glittering gold in the sun. He reached out and plucked a branch. It yielded easily to his grasp. Then returned to the cave.

"So, you have returned, brave Traveler," intoned the Sybil. "Follow me down to the Lake, then."

They wound their way down the back side of the mountain. A black lake, stinking with the smell of rot, loomed before them. The Sybil guided Aeneas to a crack in the face of the surrounding rock.

"The Gate to the Lower Realms is here. Follow if you dare." She disappeared into the rock.

Aeneas held out his golden branch, took in a deep breath, and followed.

Part 3: Continue Part 2 story to ~1000wc Without Changing Part 2 Block

"The Golden Bough Part II"

Aeneas's footsteps echoed in the dark passageway as he and the Sybil marched down deeper into the Underworld. Aeneas remembered tales told of the heroes of old who ventured to these realms, the terrors they had seen. He steeled up his courage for the moment when he might come face to face with the Cerberus, or the fearsome Harpies.

Finally, the descent stopped, and Aeneas and the Sybil walked out into a wide, flat plain under the earth. Shadowy, whispering shades of the departed flitted about, scattered as far as the eye could see.

They gathered around Aeneas and the Sybil, muttering "living souls in the kingdom of the

dead? The Lord of the Dead will not stand for this!”

Aeneas held out his golden bough. “We come sent by the gods, to pursue destiny!” he announced in a voice that was braver than he truly felt.

The shades scattered away from the faint glow cast by the golden bough.

“You will find your father in Elysium, the Realm of Heroes,” the Sybil explained. “Follow me.”

Aeneas followed, trying to ignore the tormented screams of the wicked being punished in Tartarus, or the dark shadowy shapes of shades and monsters that scattered before the light of his golden bough. He had faced and defeated many a mortal enemy, but insubstantial foes were more fearsome, because they preyed not on the flesh, but on the mind.

Finally, he and the Sybil reached a golden gate. She gave a signal and the gates swung open, revealing a bright, sunny plain where heroes practiced fighting drills or feasted and spoke of old times with their friends.

Aeneas spotted his father Anchises instantly and ran up to the old man. “Father!”

“Son! So, you have journeyed all this way to learn your destiny?”

“Yes, father.”

“Ah, yes. You are very close. You are only a few days sailing from the shores of Lavinum, where you will find the hospitable people that will take you and your men in, and the princess who will join you in founding a new dynasty. The princess is, unfortunately, betrothed to another at this time. There will be conflict. But trust that you will emerge triumphant to found a new city.”

“What kind of city will it be?” Anchises beamed.

“A grand city, my son. A city of marble and gold. A nation of heroes—of warriors and high-priests, of sturdy farmers and just leaders. A kingdom that will rule over the whole world!”

Aeneas marveled at his father’s words, speechless.

“It is time to leave now, son,” said Anchises. The Sybil nodded her agreement.

Aeneas wanted to stay, to spend more sweet moments with his aging father, but understood that there was no time to dwell on the past. He had to move forward to his destiny. Anchises gestured towards two gates. One was of gold, the other of ivory.

“Exit through the ivory gate, my son. The gate of dreams.”

“Of dreams?” Aeneas asked.

“Does that mean that this was all a dream? Or that my future kingdom is but a dream?”

Anchises smiled and clapped Aeneas on the back. “You are a smart man, my son. I’ll leave that to you to figure out. Now, return to the mortal realms and pursue your destiny.”

Aeneas took the Sybil’s gnarled hand and together they stepped through the ivory gate that

lead back to the lands of the living.

Bryan MacNeill

Part 1: 50 Word Fantasy: Spell

“Death Has Boundaries”

Summer in Hathronere. The battle ended now. His face though blue and red, blood and death, was ever beautiful. Tears tracked my face and guilt racked my heart.

Rage and love bid me speak the words. Forbidden. Fuck forbidden.

A deep breathe and they flowed, then did his blood.

Part 2: Expand 50 Word Fantasy to 400-600wc

Summer in Hathronere. The battle ended now. His face though blue and red, blood and death, was ever beautiful. Tears tracked my face and guilt racked my heart.

Rage and love bid me speak the words. Forbidden. Fuck forbidden.

A deep breathe and they flowed, then did his blood.

I felt warmth in his skin again and slowly his chest began to rise and fall before he opened those eyes of seafoam and focused on mine.

“Garwin” I choked out with a sob.

“How?” He breathed back softly.

“You know how but we mustn’t speak of it. Can you stand? We must leave, with haste.”

“Folton, no! Why would yo-“

“Shhhh” I interrupted. “Not here, not now, come.”

We rose slowly and found Garwin’s footing after only a few wobbly steps. Hunkering low we darted across the battlefield and down the slope of the field. The ground was riddled with corpses, limbs and ownerless weaponry.

I plucked fallen arrows here and there as we went and slid them into the quiver on my back. No doubt they would be needed, and soon. The slope tapered off and morphed into mostly flat earth with tall grass that swayed in the copper scented breeze.

Behind us carrion descended on the great feast of fresh flesh. Shielded by the dark grass, the two of us now slowed pace and followed where the soil grew darker and eventually turned to dense mud. This meant water, a stream to wash off both our bodies and our scent. As luck would have it a stream came into view after only a few moments.

We left our weapons on the bank and waded into the shallow, clear water. Wetting my hands I began wiping away the streaks of blood and soil from my love's face. Scrubbing harder along his bearded jawline. I enveloped his face with my hands and pulled him to me for a warm kiss. More followed, longer and deeper until I remembered we needed to keep moving. Reluctantly I pulled away and sighed.

Looking in his stormy eyes I smiled subtly. "Let's go" I spoke gently.

Recovering our weapons we crossed the stream with them held aloft. We linked hands now and continued along the edge of the water. Late afternoon fog swept across our view ahead, shrouding a dense forest for which we aimed to reach. Our armor creaked from the moisture and dried slowly due to the humidity that lay heavy in the air. The dull thud of our footsteps on the grass echoed in our ears as we grew closer to the tree line.

In mere moments we would be hidden from sight. We would rest and talk, perhaps even enjoy each other. Wishful thinking on my part as seconds before we could cross into the wood a wall of purple-blue flames shot in front of us and grew taller every second.

A raspy laugh rang out from all directions as a figure adorned in a great billowing cloak of the darkest purple emerged from the flame wall and strode towards us.

Felina.

Our hands clenched tighter as we both reached for our blades. Her cat like green eyes danced with flame and hatred as she sharply flicked her right arm toward the ground and a black spear issued from her palm.

"Finally!" She purred. "Your flesh will be in ribbons and your abominations will cease!"

Looking at my partner with fear and anger I said "Gods, I hate this fucking bitch."

Part 3: Continue Part 2 story to ~1000wc Without Changing Part 2 Block

"Hate me all you want!" Felina hissed. "But I am positively soaked with pleasure in the knowledge that this spear will be that last thing that penetrates you and neither of your filthy sword swallowing mouths will be able to bring you back from death again."

My mind raced, how did she know what I had done?

"I am no simpleton, the carrion above the battlefield see and hear many things for me."

"What do we do?" Garwin grunted through clenched teeth.

I fumbled with my thoughts for a moment before my brow furrowed and eyes darkened. "We kill this raging cunt!" I spat.

Felina's head whipped back with uproarious laughter as I knocked and loosed an arrow in one swift motion. It was swatted away by the head of the ebony spear in her hand like a fly and her laugh never faltered. She ran her tongue along the back of her left hand leaving behind a silver

sheen on her skin.

“Kitty likes to wash before dinner.” She whispered before hurling towards us at unsettling speed.

We barely had time to draw our blades and barricade ourselves from her tackling blow. We went sailing back several feet and landed in the sharp grass. Quickly we found our way to our feet and glanced at each other knowing each other’s thoughts. I would go high and Garwin, low.

Barreling forward, I shot two arrows rapidly one after the other as Garwin dashed left in a tight arc, drawing his knives as he ran. Admittedly Felina had not expected so speedy a counter and was only able to send one arrow shaft ricocheting while the second delved into her muscular thigh.

“Fuuuuuuck!” She wailed but simultaneously dropped to her good knee and turned slightly to her right and there spewed streams of those same blue-purple flames from the top of her dark spear.

Garwin however, expected something like this and sprang up from his crouching sprint and spun a somersault over the fiery whisps. Landing he rolled into another skilled tumble and flicked his knife. It whistled a sharp and eerie song as it plunged its cool blade into the flashy patch beneath her right armpit.

She howled with pain and fury and from her entire being there issues forth a violet blast of energy that flung them heavily to the earth.

Heaving breathes issues from Felina’s wide toothy mouth. She scooped up her spear and strode slowly toward Garwin. She knew this stained-souled lover would not recover in time to stop what she would do. Then she would move on to me. But Felina had ambition and desire that far outweighed her wisdom and she had already underestimated us both. This was far from her mind know as she stalked closer to Garwin’s fallen figure. Preparing to plunge her weapon into the heart of this plague of a human she felt a sharp tug at the small of her back and a burning pain. I had recovered enough that I could see the pendulum swing of her slender tail beneath her cloak. Fixing a rope to the shaft of an arrow I aimed true and struck the end of the tail, fastening it to the ground.

More shocked than in pain Felina gasped and spun like liquid lightning and cast her spear straight through my eye socket.

Like that, I was dead.

Sighing with relief she turned round once more but before she could take in anything she felt her teeth clench together with a shattering force, her talon tipped hands scratched the air wildly right before her eyes went dark and her body limp.

Garwin, now on his feet withdrew the blade of his knife from Felina's chin in a swift motion that sent a sickeningly wet spout of garnet blood spewing as her corpse fell to the grass.

He clasped his throat as he realized his own blood was a fountain of scarlet and hot bubbles. Felina, in her death crazed slashing had hit her mark.

Falling to his knees as his vision blurred he focused on the body of his great love, knowing I was now incapable of saving him.

And he was unable to save me.

Nothing.

Jamison

Part 1: 50 Word Fantasy: Spell

"One's Tavern"

Rune to sigil, that was all.

"HAND!"

The wizard pulled back as the bottle shattered on impact to his right; the floor now showered with glass and Jameson.

A voice called from behind, "Somatics were spot on, but your vocals could use some work." It was the bartender.

Part 2: Expand 50 Word Fantasy to 400-600wc

The wizard signed his last word and released a breath. He pulled back his hand, careful to not smudge the inscription on the cold glass stein. It was a difficult trick, one that he was sure would impress the High-Transmuter. The condensation could easily ruin the fresh ink, but this was not normal ink, nor was he a normal wizard, that's what he was trying to prove at least.

The wizard raised his voice. "Everyone, you are welcome to gather 'round! Your ogling will not be condemned, as you are about to witness history!" The eyes of the tavern were on him but there was only one set he truly cared about. He winked at the girl who watched him inscribe the rune.

I'm ready this time.

"I will resonate this glass to me," he slowed his delivery, "with not one drop spilled."

A large man with a beard as thick as his accent shouted, "What's so history changing about a simple magic trick!?" The wizard sighed, "Nothing, Staal. It's just a good magic trick." He quickly shifted his tone back to that of a performer. "Now then, I'll take your cooperation by

means of silence please.”

The wizard’s face hardened as the dull ambient hum of power resonated within him. He stared at the stein, eyes unmoving and slipped a brown leather glove on his right hand pulling it down snug. A pattern on its palm glowed with dim violet light. The wizard extended his gloved hand towards the stein and reached for the note he inscribed on it until he, the rune, and the sigil on his glove all matched frequencies.

It was simple enough. Match rune to sigil, resonate, then use the verbal and somatic components necessary to activate the intended magical effect as previously written. First year stuff.

“HAND!”

The wizard pulled back in a controlled motion, but the stein flew at him with the force of a cannonball. He narrowly dodged as it shattered on impact to his right; the floor showered with glass and rum. The floor which the wizard now found himself on.

“Right! That was a good trick.” The wizard was surprised that the walking beard got a breath in between laughs to hurl his words back at him.

A voice called from his left, “Somatics were spot on, but your vocals could use some work.” It was the bartender. “Word of advice,” he said, kneeling beside him. “After activating the spell, while performing the necessary somatics, state your desired effect. ‘To me’ will work fine. No need to shout. Otherwise, the next one will be...career ending.” He looked at the mess and sighed. “Here” he said, extending his hand.

“Names, Ore-Kili.”

“Florin,” the wizard said. He leaned on the bartender’s hand to his feet.

Staal roared, “Academy reject thinks he’ll get his fiancé back!”

Florin put his hand to his flintlock.

“It’s not worth it, mate.” The bartender said. “Let the man sit in his own ignorance. That’s consequence enough, eh? Unlike him, you have a knack for Source-Carving. Not an easy feat, though humility would’ve saved you the embarrassment.”

And my second chance.

He watched the girl, the High-Transmuter, withdraw, head down.

Madeline.

Florin rubbed his forehead. “So, bartender, you plan on handing out any more tips?”

“Unfortunately, poverty has dried up my academic generosity. What I provided is more than enough to get a hand with that.”

Florin put his hand out and resonated.

“To me.” The glass shards lay still.

“Are you mad!? I meant with this!?”

Florin sighed and reluctantly caught the mop thrown at him.

Part 3: Continue Part 2 story to ~1000wc Without Changing Part 2 Block

Florin shrugged off his twinge of guilt. He feared for the lives of the guards he left behind.

“May mercy find you” Florin whispered while leaving the cave. He wasn’t particularly a religious man however he couldn’t help but utter the simple prayer.

The cave where most resonant shards were found was almost always crawling with guards but tonight, they seemed distinctly uninterested in performing their duties. Those who remained at their post laughed with the ferocity of those which had too much rum. Surely, they must have been briefed that some fool had been successfully descending the treacherous mountainside hunting resonant shards.

“Bane of Idalium” they called him.

Florin did not think himself a bane, a heretic perhaps, but only because he defied the law of the academy. Certainly, at this point, Florin accepted that he was in fact a thief. The academy was not known for their forgiveness, however Florin still wished hopelessly that those who failed to uphold their duty tonight to stop him, got their chance to laugh another day.

Florin climbed until he was well out of sight. He closed his eyes and resonated until he heard the small whistle of the note, he inscribed several hundred feet above him. “Ascend.”

Florin reached with his hand and grasped a translucent rope which slowly pulled him up towards the rune inscribed on the edge of the cliff. It was dangerous to use Source-Carving in this way when he was still a novice, even if he was a prodigy. He credited his success towards his knack, diligence, ingenuity, and his new mentor.

This’ll be enough to pay for 4 more months of training from that cheapskate bartender.

He reached the top of the ledge and pulled himself up. Normally he would be able to spot at least two guards on patrol at this point, but the grounds were silent.

Something isn’t right. This whole thing had been too easy.

He clutched the bag tight and checked over his shoulder until he reached a corner where he likely wouldn’t be disturbed. Florin opened his leather satchel and grabbed a resonant shard in his palm. He closed his eyes until he could sense nothing but himself, the shard, and The Ambience which surrounded them and resonated, filling the shard with his power. The shard hummed a melodic tune and glowed with dim violet light.

Well, they work just fine and Ore-Kili wouldn’t care how easy the job was.

So long as it was done and couldn't be traced back to him. Still, he didn't want to continue risking getting caught. Stealing Academy shards got civilians on top of their most wanted list. They made sport of quickly finding those who opposed their rule and throwing them off the edge of the cliff.

Florin heard a rumbling in his inner ears before the stone wall to one side of him grabbed his left arm. He threw his right hand towards the stone. "Shatter!" It broke apart with a torrent of magic at high pitched frequency, freeing his arm. He looked up and saw a cloaked figure preparing another spell.

They found me.

Before Florin could react, the cobblestone curled around his legs, and knocked his head against the ground while hoisting him in the air. His vision blurred and felt the consciousness quickly leaving him. Just as his eyes closed, Florin saw the face of the one who would turn him into the academy. The one who was likely responsible for setting him up. It was the face of the high transmuter, his once fiancé.

"Madeline?"

Everything went dark.

Shannon Percival

Part 1: 50 Word Fantasy: Spell

Her grandfather's fountain pen was in her backpack's front pouch. It shouldn't be used for trivial things, but she needed practice.

She reached inside, felt cold brass contrasted against plastic pencils, then wrote on an empty page:

"Forget".

"Was there homework due?" the teacher asked herself "No, I suppose not."

Part 2: Expand 50 Word Fantasy to 400-600wc

"There are two Magics, as ancient as the world itself." She recited.

She had never had to explain it to someone before and racked her brain for terminology that would make sense to an average person.

"The first you're probably familiar with, that is, if you've ever read a fairytale. We call it Material Magic, but "witchcraft" is an accurate term, too. Sacrifices, rituals, potions. It sounds really complicated, but it's not. It's using materials to gain materials. Anyone can do it without

much training at all. Give your blood, gain a fortune. Mix herbs and torture animals, gain a husband or wife. Pretty much anyone who's rich and famous has done it at some point."

"Are you a witch?" he asked "Like, a witch in training?"

"Hell no." she answered.

"Witches are evil. We believe so, at least. Witchcraft is all about helping yourself. Getting pleasure. It's wicked."

"So you must do the other magic." he leaned in, both to better hear her voice and to exclude any eavesdroppers in the crowded cafeteria.

"My family's magic is called Immaterial Magic. It deals with stuff you can't see - thoughts, emotions, memories, virtues..."

"You can read people's thoughts?"

"No, it doesn't work like that. We can sway things, if that makes sense. And it's really hard to do. Anyone can become a Witch, but it takes a really long time to become a Scribe."

"Is that what you're called? A Scribe?"

"That's what we call people who master Immaterial Magic. I'm...not even close."

"You wiped our teacher's memory, though!"

"Yeah, but she's already kind of forgetful. I just nudged her thoughts."

"Still. It's blowing my mind. Can you teach me?" His eager face lit up at the thought.

If only he knew the extent of what he was asking. He wouldn't envy her if he knew that the reason she hadn't worked on her biology homework last night wasn't out of laziness. Rather, she had spent her after-school hours hunched over a writing table, hand-copying The Iliad onto sheets and sheets of parchment because nothing about her family's magic was easy. Penmanship had to be perfect. Minds had to be mastered. If she were to take her place in the family business, she would have to commit herself to a life of constant self-denial. Discipline was a Scribe's chief virtue. But this boy saw her use a spell on a teacher, so her discipline was clearly not as developed as it needed to be.

"It's a lot of work." she said "And I probably shouldn't have told you these things, anyway."

"I'm really good at keeping secrets." he tried to assure her. "I won't tell anyone about your magic pen."

She couldn't help but smile at that. It wasn't a magic pen, but that's how it would look to an outsider. There was so much about her life that people didn't understand. The wonder in her classmate's face reminded her that her normal was another person's fantastic.

"Would you like to see it?" She asked him, pulling it out of her backpack.

His eyes grew wide as she handed him the fountain pen. It was a century old, but in pristine condition, and so heavy that his fingers hurt at the thought of writing with the thing. The polished brass grip was engraved with a motto:

“Starve the ego; feed the soul”.

Part 3: Continue Part 2 story to ~1000wc Without Changing Part 2 Block

As she rounded the corner, she spotted her grandfather’s blue Ford pickup in the driveway. She sighed knowing that it would be another long night.

“Hey Devan” her mom said, looking up from a pan of ground hamburger on the stove “Papa’s over!”

“Yeah, I noticed.” She replied, hanging her backpack on its hook.

She could hear the news blaring on the television already as the smells from the kitchen welcomed her home. “What are we having tonight?”

“Beef stroganoff. Papa’s favorite.” Her mom said with a smile. Devan grimaced at the thought of the upcoming meal. “Go say ‘hi’.”

Devan found her grandfather perched on the edge of the living room sofa, eyes glued to the television. The coffee table was overflowing with his stacks of books, notes, and stacks and stacks of paper covered in calligraphy. “Hi, Papa.”

“Have a seat.” the old man patted the cushion beside him.

Devan couldn’t make out what the men on tv were arguing about.

“Have you been practicing your inscriptions?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And how’s that been going?”

“I successfully lapsed a memory today.”

“Memento...that’s a tricky spell.”

“Thank you, I just...” He cut her off with the sound of frantic, but perfect, pen strokes on paper.

The men on TV were arguing over something important and political. A United Nations meeting? She couldn’t tell. She read the inscriptions: Peace over power. Frieden über Macht. Paix sur le pouvo... Half a dozen other languages followed. It was the UN again. The arguing died down. The spells were effective.

“I’m going to go to my room and work on my homework. Good to see you, Papa.”

“This is much more important than your homework, Devan. I actually have a new assignment for you tonight.” He put down his fountain pen and stretched his tired, aged fingers.

She sat back down, hopeful. “I’m ready. What kind of inscriptions would you like me to learn?”

The old man reached into a leather bag and pulled out a thin paperback book. “No new inscriptions. A reading and penmanship assignment. Every American Scribe should read and copy Common Sense.”

“Penmanship?! Are you serious? My hand is so freaking cramped from yesterday and I’m behind in every class, grandpa. I can’t spend another night copying out of another old book.”

“This old book crafted the virtues of a nation. If you want to understand the minds and spirits of the people around you, you need to grasp every ideological influence passed down through generations. And your handwriting is still sloppy.”

“No it’s not.”

“When you’re writing a one-word-spell, maybe. Try a page of inscriptions and we’ll see how effective those spells are.”

Devan stormed off to her bedroom, tore out a page from her journal and wrote the words: Go easy on her. “Nice try!” he hollered from the living room.

His mind was too trained. He could recognize which thoughts were his own and which were a foreign inscription. There was no swaying the mind of a Scribe as well trained as him. She would have to get back at him another way.

Beef doesn’t belong in cream sauce. She wrote on the next line, taking her time with every letter, focusing her thoughts and the intentions of her heart.

“Hey guys!” her mother’s voice rang through the home. “What do you think of having tacos instead?”

Success.

Tim

Fell Recurrence

Part 1: 50 Word Fantasy: Spell & Oracle

Witness the self-creating abyss! Cloud’s dark imitation billows towards heaven with sickly-sweet fragrance. Hungry flames feast on virtue. Joy, incinerated. Love, lost. Crisped curls of ash ascend, laden with vice. Soul departed; its sin remains.

Ancestral ash rides carnal winds, accreting skeins of skin. Memory’s shape imposed; the Child born of Man returns. Purified perdition. Vile salvation. Concentration of degeneracy. The earth swallows his bitter draught.

Salvation hath come!

Part 3: Continue Part 2 story to ~1000wc Without Changing Part 2 Block

The tide of paranoia crashes like a rogue wave.

One moment, the alliance stands firm, battle line tightly arranged, pikes forward, men sheltering behind hastily dug pits. A dark figure eclipses the sun. Preternatural shadows scamper outward like cockroaches.

The umbra brushes against a man's shadow. Wakes it from the slumber of death. The line falls to ruin in a frenzy of slashing swords, skewering pikes, and nails. The writhing mass contorts, faces ballooning crimson, then blue as the shades garrote the puzzled recruits.

Discipline fails as men retreat.

Maryam falls back on shaky limbs. An icicle of fear stabs her back. Her stealthy shadow slinks towards the light. Its edges blur, like fraying threads falling to flame. It yearns for the eclipse.

She scampers away, fighting the contortions of her shadow as it scrabbles for freedom. Her child bawls with bellowing lungs as he is tossed about. Something slithers at her feet, pawing at her pant-leg. Her head itches with biting gnats.

"The shadows! Alive! All alive!" She trips, falls toward the ground, twists, holds her child aloft. A thousand pricking talons pierce recklessly into her back. Greedy claws twist through her hair. She shuffles her legs and back, trying to tear herself away from the maw. Where the head goes, the body follows. Her head is planted to the ground. Her shadow screeches victory as she pivots around the dire fulcrum.

She feels a clamber of fungal hands burst along her abdomen, reaching out for the child.

She roots about with one hand, feels a slash of pain, coils her fingers around it. She tears the bladegrass from the earth, slices it along her head with a yelp.

Freed!

She sits up, shrugs off the baby-hungry blots. Her clothes constrict, tethering her to the floor.

Like one, so the other.

She rips the blade through them with a satisfying tear. She jumps up, prances naked about from one foot to another. The sun's light is waning, the abyssal tsunami floods inexorably toward her. On the ground below, she sees her shade spawning weapons of war.

Light. She needs light.

She dashes down, yanks the cloth with one hand. Exhausted hunters give it freely. She runs away, balancing the child, tearing the fabric to pieces.

Imbued, they must be imbued.

Mind whirling, spirit wilting, she begins her confession. She recounts each ignoble thought,

every cursed desire. She beseeches God with doubts. Despair. She recalls weak moments of wanting to quiet her child, forever. Flashes of anger at her husband for little, everyday disturbances. Envy. Sadness at her misgivings. Shame.

Purify with thy flame. Cleanse with thy fire. She begs.

Her hands go molten. Her clothing blackens. Her sins bleed out into the cloth.

Purify. Purify!

She throws a tatter of cloth down, watches a flame catch hold. Shadows reel, dumbfounded by the holy light. Another! She throws opposite, furls of smoke bleeding from her fingertips. All around she scatters the sin-laden cloth. Her heart pounds with awe and fear as the divine light drives away the shadows. All around, encircling her, the fire hungers, scouring the ground of shadow.

She is safe, for now. But ahead, ahead he comes. Outside her circle, all is darkness.

No escape. Just a temporary reprieve.

She looks down at her squalling child. Up at overwhelming darkness. Her heart sinks. Hardens. Trembles.

One last sin to commit.

A final cleansing atonement.

God forgive her.

Part 2: Expand 50 Word Fantasy to 400-600wc

The grass has forgotten its first love. It does not rise to meet the sun, but to spear prey. All is a cadaverous ruin. The sky, stained scarlet. Night is repulsed by tongues of fire patrolling above. Shadow-gnawn faces are frozen with rictus laughter. Shadeselves revel at new-found freedom, courting destruction as they consume their origin.

He will not correct this self-destruction. He is a shade himself; treading out the winepress of the world to a frenzy of martyr's shouts.

A naked woman sits between a circle of blazing fires, clutching an infant forcefully to her chest. Her hair is shorn haphazardly. Her eyes are like a frazzled deer, but quivering muscles betray her ruse.

Her confounded shade mewls outside the fire blockade, naked without shadow. It begs him to extinguish the circle of light. The woman flinches upon seeing him. Holds her infant tighter. Her face tightens into adamant.

His eye bristles with wetness. He blinks it away. There is no time for compassion. He beseeches the sky with empty palms.

There!

Off in the distance, behind the woman, the clouds roll back. Tongues of fire whimper as the sky dampens. There, riding on the clouds, he makes out a heavenly presence. Pinpricks of stars gather about its robe. Roiling mists steam and crackle as earth receives heaven. The sky burgeons with static. The lightning tongue of God arcs to announce judgement.

Smite me!

God's lungs are empty.

He looks at the woman. Her face is defiant. He is appalled by her hope.

No, please, not another!

There is a quiver of indecision in her eyes as she clasps the child.

Earth ruptures before his steps. The blooded valley drains into the crevasse of his footprint. The Savior hovers, awaiting the final shout, while Salvation lumbers forward with anvils for feet. His steps are surer than his passion. He steels his will. Reaches out.

He wrenches the babe away, holding it by a leg. She lunges at him, but he is immovable. He flicks her off like an ant. She tumbles to the grass, crying out at its cut.

His jaw trembles as he looks towards heaven. "Must I suffer the little children too?!" He screams.

God gives no answer. He ever watches in silence.

The child dangles listlessly, a straw doll swaying on the wind. He gasps as the child winds towards him! Its face is like fermenting fruit, a mottled bluish-purple mash. He staggers in a moment of horror.

The woman's face trembles. Breaks. Wracking sobs clutch her breast as she lunges forward, reaching to cradle the dead child.

A lightning bolt zings through him. Euphoria! The tongue of God finally fallen!

He hears a tearing sound, feels his anima shudder.

The woman rushed past the child. A pinion of bladed grass skewers his armpit. Her hand is ashen.

He topples as she blathers, "My child, for all mankind."

"You fool."

Above, heaven recedes. God turns his back again, leaving only his robe of stars to gaze upon.

Man has no need. Yet.

His dying body combusts in a gout of flame. Ashes rise to dance with the wind once again.

LowB**Part 1: 50 Word Fantasy: Oracle**

He didn't see it.

"I don't see it." He looked back.

Faris met his eyes. She arched a brow. He turned reluctantly back to the orb.

No point trying to outstare an owl. "Last chance, Gaven," he whispered.

He looked again.

Nothing.

Perfect.

Every hair stood on end. "Oh!"

**Part 2: Expand 50 Word Fantasy to 400-600wc
Gaven Begins**

"Gaven I thought Faris ate you!" Rim teased his friend as he emerged from the room.

Gaven stared with empty eyes.

"Gaven? What happened? Where is Faris?"

Gaven leaned in the doorway, somehow exhausted as though he had worked all day on his father's farm. "Rim, she's gone."

Rim's eyes widened and he stumbled back. He contemplated breaking for the door.

"What did you do," he said in a low voice.

"Nothing," Gaven said, finally. "I - I saw them."

"Gaven! That's amazing! You can go to Windamore with me this summer! You had me, friend. You really did. I thought you were serious! ha ha ha. I can't believe this-"

"No" came the sharp reply.

Rim glanced past Gaven, then locked eyes with him. "Gav, where is Faris?"

Her eye missed nothing. She could see for miles, even in the dark. Her white wings rustled as she wheeled in a wide, slow circle above Gamben. The villagers below had no idea she was there, watching, waiting for any sign of trouble. Trouble was coming for sure. They had both seen it only moments ago. Gaven. That farmer's boy with little, if any, talent for The Sight had

looked into the glass and seen what even she had missed. How could this be. There would be time to lament her failure later, she thought.

With no sign of immediate danger, she turned to Windamore and caught the current at high altitude.

“She flew. To Windamore. Rim, I saw something terrible. I don’t know how, but I did. I don’t think she knew. She was scared, too.”

Rim rubbed his cheek as he thought. “Well, what was it?”

“Something is coming. Over the mountain, I think. But, there’s thousands of them. They’re coming here. The glass didn’t say when, just, that they’re coming.” Gaven was breathing in short, panicked breaths.

“Alright. Can we look again? Do you think she would know,” asked Rim?

“I don’t want to.”

“No one lives forever, Gaven.” Rim pushed past him into the chamber.

There was the glass. It glowed like an ember was caught deep inside. Its perfect round shape seemed to hold the entire universe. Rim walked towards it. The ember grew. He was the first in his class to pass the test so this shouldn’t be that hard. This didn’t feel the same, though. He didn’t remember the glass pulling him in.

Suddenly, he stopped. He was standing over it now. Its burgundy tone swirled, filling the glass with blood. Swirling. Moving. Ok. No, this was very different.

Part 3: Continue Part 2 story to ~1000wc Without Changing Part 2 Block

Blessed

Darkness filled every crevice of the valley. An immovable, thick darkness that stole the courage of the bravest heart. Mindel crouched low behind a tree, straining for any sign of movement, any sound but there was none.

His short bow, nocked and lying across his lap, gave little comfort. The writhing horde of creatures he spotted in this valley were innumerable. They moved silently, as one, making no sound. Mindel nearly missed them except the angle of the sun, as it fell below the mountain peaks, cast its waning rays onto their glistening, twisted backs.

Through the vanishing light, taking care with each step to be utterly undetectable, he crept down. Each breath brought more fear of discovery. As the last light faded, the fear grew

unbearable.

He knew they were there. The sounds of night were alarmingly absent now in the valley. Even the small stream he drank from that morning was mute. Unseen, unheard in the dark, they traveled over it without so much as a splash or a rock displaced. This was a magic he did not know.

He reeled at every scenario his mind concocted about his gruesome, impending, demise. Each far worse than the last.

The silence consumed him.

This army was moving through the valley; nothing stood in their way. This valley leads to Windamore and beyond to the plains, to the Great City, Pandeen, and on! On to Rillean by the

sea, and the ships...Even his thoughts dimmed after some time. It's been three hours since I first spotted them. How much longer would this go on? Had they all passed by? Were they closing on me now? I'm trapped! Surely they know. They must know. They know! They know I'm

here! His thoughts came roaring back to his mind so suddenly he thought someone spoke them

in his ear. After regaining his composure, the night returned. Slowly, the sounds of night emerged. A cricket started chirping across the valley. Then another, and another. A breeze touched the hair on his arms. The creek spoke once again, but gently and cautiously. He blinked. He could just make out the tree line on the other side of the creek. Wait here until dawn

and make haste to Windamore in the morning.

The bow fell to the ground as he slumped against a boulder. His arms and legs felt suddenly weak and numb.

"Maybe I'll just sleep a bit."

The sun soon fell where Mindel lay. It coursed across the sky, covering him in warmth, before disappearing over the opposite ridge line.

He was blessed.

The swiftness of the strike through his neck left almost no mark. Countless more would follow, their suffering unrivaled in history, but he was blessed never to know.