

The Song of Woe

by Paul D. Deane

This poetry is part of a cycle of alliterative epics that I wrote "in character" as the Avarin poet Rhunedhel, a resident of Imladris during the Third Age, while I was playing on Elendor MUSH, an online roleplaying game, in the 1990s and the first decade or so of the 2000s. When I wrote these poems, I was working my way toward an original alliterative stanza form only loosely patterned on traditional alliterative verse. The form I ended up with is what I call the "Daeron Stanza", characterized by 4-stress accentual (mostly iambic tetrameter) lines alliterating in the pattern AA/BB, with a final rhyming couplet. It demonstrates the possibilities of alliterative forms not based on the traditional Old English and Middle English metrics. This poem continues an imagined history of the Avarin elves in the far East of Middle Earth, which soon takes a very dark turn. Other poems in this cycle include The Song of Marwen and Fithurin, The Song of Returning, The Song of Shadows, and The Redemption of Daeron. This poem was originally published on the Imladris Poetry Page.

Listen and learn of days long past!
Be seated, be silent, attend my song!
I'll teach you a tale of trust betrayed,
How brother fought brother and hearts grew black.
I'll weave a web of pride and woe,
Lest wrath be released and rue once more
Spread sorrow, division, fraternal strife.

Wide are the lands that lie in the East
Where Fithurin ruled, the famous king,
Forger of mithril, foe to the dark.
High was his fortress, fair Amon-Gil,
Mighty his sons, strong Einarr, swift Cordil;
First of his folk wre Taurdel, Morfindel,
His sister's sons who stood beside him.

Daring was Taurdel, so all he dreamed
Was his to have and hold and use.
His were the wonders, the gifts of the world:
Strength unsurpassed, the craft of song,
The love of life, the gift of love.
Amon-Gil glittered with the grace that he gave it,
Word-rapid, swift-witted, near-peerless prince.

But prince uncrowned is not a king,
And ambition unslaked an eager thirst
That darkens, drains and dries the soul.
Taurdel betrayed his trust and rose
In rank rebellion from his lawful lord.

The slopes of the hills of stars were stained
With the blood of brothers and the clash of sword.

In press of battle, pulse of war
Fithurin turned to find Morfindel
Hand upheld before his host.
'Sire!' he cried. 'Your subject still
'I'll be, for duty binds me more'
'Than any brother.' The battle broke;
The king's men triumphed, yet the rebel raised his sword.

'Let Fithurin fight if he fear me not!
So Fithurin came and fought alone;
His eyes shone grim, and grim his hand
That held cold steel to slay his kin
And win that war of woe and grief.
Now Taurdel's lord of loam and sand,
His glory faded, his ambition brief.

The city sorrowed in ashes and smoke.
In broken hall a court was held,
Prisoners pardoned, judged, condemned.
They brought before them Taurdel's bride,
Her son stood with her clothed in dread.
Morfindel moved the King for mercy,
To spare hearts loyal to their lord and head.
The king was just and judged the kin
Of the rebel blameless for the wrong he worked.
But Fithurin foretold that the father's sin
Of pride and wrath, to rise above his place,
Might lurk a defect in his line
Like a flaw hid deep in the heart of a gem.

If ever an elf of Taurdel's race
Should choose to usurp his master's place
Not just he but his family shall meet disaster and disgrace.