

## Spawn of the Lightning: An Army of Hallowe'en Toadstools

*From a seasonal interlude to an Arthurian epic*

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Zigzagging tines, zedshaped lightning's  
pronged weapon impales the primy soil:  
and we follow the flash, foining groundward  
in his points' pathway, to pierce the turf.

*A late summer storm*

Let the earth open. We enter within.  
Here levels below living daylights,  
an otherworldly under-earthen  
landscape layered below the surface  
nests beneath us.

*Katabasis*

    This unknown domain,  
her roofs writhing with roots of trees,  
is the nameless netherdepth, benighted regions  
of an occult kingdom:

    Necropolis grins  
catacomb-sockets;  
    sarcophagi  
decay in crypts,  
    caves inhuming  
the putrid matter,  
    sepulchral swaddlings  
wombed in warrenlike,  
    winding, myriad  
charnel-chambers;

*Necropolis*

    chimneys venting  
fougous' fætor;  
    foul souterrains;  
deep-delved dungeons:  
    dusky vaultage  
—heaped headpieces—  
    —hoards of longbones—  
of grave-galleries.

    Groping steeply,  
tombpassages twist  
    through turnagains  
to undercrofts,  
    while oubliettes  
fold fathoms downwards  
    to Filth's Mansion.  
Pellmell we plunge:

in panoramas  
horizons range  
as we reach deeper  
like tumbledown,  
topsy-turvy,  
sunken citadels,  
a sewerscape  
of terraces and wards  
tiered with platforms;  
doors downfallen  
to dark culverts  
with grille-gratings,  
green slime-curtained;  
canted causeways  
on the chasm's brink:  
skewed screwthreading  
escalier-spires  
leaning, looming;  
the labyrinthine  
abyss beckons:  
the bowels of the Earth.

Here tribes of rats get trapped by cave-ins;  
wriggling rodents, whose runs are thwarted:  
dead-ends their doom. Dens are shrinking,  
their nests narrowing as numbers grow  
in blind alleyways and blocked cisterns,  
to a mangy mass of mating bodies.  
Like their neighbour vermin, knotting reptiles,  
keystones crushing, they are kittening yet  
till the chamber's choked to chink and cranny  
with tangled tails. Teeth start to gnaw.

From the maze of tombs, the morgue-ullage  
bleeds to these bilges. Their black vomits  
emulge and merge; commingled blend  
of what seeps from cellars with sordors leaching  
to the earth's entrails. For from all the jakes'  
clotted catchments, through clogged spillducts,  
dreckerusted drains' downspout scuppers;  
from every addlepool and each latrine,  
ripe reredorter and reasty midden,  
siegehouse, cesspit of our sunlit world:  
the gong-farmers' garderope nightsoil,  
loose cack of lasks, and laystall-slops,  
helter-skelter, the whole system's  
countless câches of the accursèd share,  
in a swilling swelchie —is swallowed down  
through intestine-tunnels and towel-pipework  
from the upper echelons to the enclaves beneath,  
sickly surfeit of sewage-waste,

*Cloaca*

engulfed by gulches. The gurge of sludge  
empties ordures to the uttermost sump  
where lurks waiting, in a lake of slime,  
a prodigious dungheap.

Dirts steam. Dritt of foxes,  
deer-turds. Merd and fewmet,  
scat, spraint; fiants, scumbered  
skite of otter-crottels;  
brock-muck. Brown waggyings  
brew, mix: sharn of vixen,  
critters' crap, hare-buttons,  
crudded spoor, boars' lesses

in a cradling crucible.

The crawling lees  
amalgamate, transmute fusing:  
the realm of rottenness is rich with life.

From clouds to clods, cleaving lightning  
wracks with raptures rainsodden loam,  
and by split seconds the expanse between  
the Heavens on high and humble Earth  
is bridged in brightness: embracing partners  
space sprung apart espouse again.  
Once twins entwined, that twain sundered:  
the husband halved from the whole forebear;  
now sibling-father, and sister-wife  
marry for a moment, to mate powers  
high, dry and hot with the humid deep.  
Attraction triggers the trident-bolt,  
the warm wedding to wet and cold,  
the air to fire; earth to water:  
as when Burn-the-Wind, at his blade-forging,  
that the redshort rods are wrought to temper  
steeps them in moistness —the steel is slaked,  
amid sputtering fumes sparks set alight,  
in quenching oils, to quell its ardour  
(and the venoms unveil viper-chevroned,  
woven-welded, worm's-tongue markings)  
—so the glowing glaive, in glutting thrusts  
shooting downward, ensheathes his length.  
Ground engulfs him. In her gravid belly  
the charge is channelled; for change kindles  
where his liquid lightnings enliven dust.  
Behold the happenings of the hidden places;  
witness wonders —from the worms' vantage.  
Shocks shaking her, he sheds darting,  
fork-formed currents, forces spending  
their virile virtue.

*Lightning*

Pervading the clays

are pores pooling with pregnant fluids.  
Through dropsied ducts, drenched syrinx-glands  
in coral clusters, course her issues,  
unctions oozing, by ebbs and swells:  
what subtle liquors seep and filter,  
yeast-yielding brines with yolk-syrups  
and saps surging, sift lispings through  
fistule-fissures? Fertile venters  
congest with juices like that jellied slutch  
that showers downward from shooting stars  
estranged to earth; the sticky chrisms  
spill through spiracles; from sponge-bladders  
limbeck-tinctures, elixirs stilling  
hoarded honeydews, like the harvests culled  
from the bread of bees, brood-comb drizzlings  
—a moist motherlode milch with nectars.  
The stagnant gulfs stretch out for leagues  
under fens' fastness, fog-bound marshes,  
mould-mildewed tarns, and misty fells:  
like troves of ore, as treasure-laden  
rills running through the rankling dung;  
mine-wealthy malm. At the Moon's fullness  
her beams are bathing foreboding depths:  
the lodes ripen in the lunar rays  
and the mire is rife: with minims thriving,  
krill-creaturely kinds of plankton,  
with embryonic animalcula  
at their feast of filths, feeding, battenning.  
Its sweats swelter, the swamp-mosshags  
humming with humours; the heats brooding  
in queachy quags quicken frissoning  
eggs underground. An urgent drive,  
for a spell, spurs them. Spores are stirring  
awake to sprout in their weird springtide;  
pollen pullulates to the pulse of the Moon:  
cells in seedbeds. These seminal motes,  
cocooned kernels like chrysalids,  
shake in their swaddlings: shoot spicules forth,  
chaffhusks chinking as chits are hatching  
from bulging orbs, with bat's squeakings,  
in throbbing throes. Threadlets burgeon  
to knosplike nebs, whose nippled spires  
unfurl feelers with fanning strands  
and barbs burrow from the umbilical stalk;  
spikes spawn outwards, their spidery talons  
sneaking snakewise.

Snail-horn probings  
that creep and recoil then crawl anew  
reach runners out with ramifying

antenna-twigs that tillow again;  
look, how alike the lightning-flash  
to the pattern printed: its repeating figure  
izzard-emblems in the angled forks  
of vein-branches against the varves' blackness,  
pairing, parting; puny scions  
like marbling maggots, the murky clods  
riddled with roothairs, wriggling vivers;  
weevils delving worm-farm layers  
and rifted vugs. The ravelled suckers  
flex flossing wide, in flower-whorling  
topdownward trees, their tufted plumes  
glairy gauzes like gossamer skeins  
of squirming thongs.

Squirreltail, thistledown-  
filigree fibres are fronding tassels,  
twisting, twining; the twirling biners  
will splay and split, then splice oscules,  
tentacular reticulating  
chenille nervures. Thus the node-weaving  
germs engender a giant ganglion,  
mercurial cobweb, catscradlewise;  
lobe knits to lobe, as a loom shuttles  
a weft-texture, the wiry members  
tendril-tissued: a teeming polyp,  
quarl of quicksilver. By quetch and spasm  
the molten mass is mapped in darkness,  
leviathan-vast.

It is vivifying;  
inhales and heaves: a heart panting,  
a brain beating, or as breathing lungs  
work the entrails; and wavering sobs  
retch restlessly. With rippling surges  
the sprawling globe spreads still farther  
by ceaseless seethings, circulating  
lymphs and ichors, till in labour-pangs  
its ballooning shape dilates warping;  
the mesh morphing transmogrifies  
and with thrilling shudders it thrusts aloft,  
climbs in corkscrews up to the crust above:  
fat fruitbodies force through the turves.

From shadowy taths shapes come pricking,  
grope over grass; growths are teeming,  
bald and gibbous; bulbs are swollen,  
puffball-like pods whose pimpled membranes  
are groined with gills; glabrous-wattled,  
blanched blubberflesh: bloated organs;  
limbs of leperlike and lazar-hided



sepulchral pallor are poking up  
from cadaverous depths—  
    Dead Men's Fingers;  
Bearded Bellywark;  
    Bugs' Agaric;  
Webbedpate, Skullcap;  
    Witches' Buttons;  
the lewd Stinkhorn  
    and livid Earthshank;  
Skewbald Hoodwink;  
    the Scurfy Funnel;  
Durgy Dwalecup,  
    Dwimmer Goblet,  
Clubfoot Candle,  
    Carl-on-Horseback,  
Charnel Bonnet;  
    Chilly Waxglove,  
the Sallow Puckfist,  
    Sickening Milkgall.  
Squame-warted squabs squeeze in sending  
stems stiffly out. Staves like truncheons  
unsheathe their shafts to show helmets,  
raise round targes with rimmed umbos;  
espy these spears: a spectral levy  
of midnight-mustering homunculi;  
wan weaponedmen in worm-eaten  
and carrion-coloured accoutrements  
of clammy coifs and clinging veils,  
by rank on rank: rancid circles  
lift lances high, lock the shieldwall:  
earthen armies. From under the ground  
—the reek of decay —rotting scarecrows—  
they advance in onslaught, an invading horde,  
wraiths risen again, arrayed for battle  
in dark dreamings dawn breaks shattering  
their feinted front; fade, melt blurring  
to stipes like straw ...the stuff of shadows  
that dwindles to dust. The day broadens  
on wilting culms and caps withering  
we can tell are but toadstools.

*Autumn toadstools*

    It is the time of Samhain's  
Cross-Quarter feast, Calends of Winter  
and the season's end. From the Summer uplands  
they drive the herds. Now the darker half  
—the Sun's in Scorpion, sinking early—  
of The Year opens, through Yule till Springtide's  
Beltaine brightness, with the blossom of May;  
and for this Day of the Dead, dolmens open  
ajar their jaws. On jambs like menhirs

—great grey longstones— of the gaping portals  
to the humped barrows hived with chambers,  
on their sarsen kerbs, the silvered spirals  
—sidewinding swirls, Sun's wheel-annules,  
chevron, lozenge— shine like snailtracks,  
hoarfrost mirroring the Hunter's Moon.

The King of Planets declines at twilight;

♃

the Red Warrior roams the Goatfish;  
on the day of Samhain, the dawn sunbeam  
shall pierce the portals.

♈

They prepare the wake.

*Hallowe'en*

Force-fires lighted, their fumes a blessing  
on bairns and beasts, the burning embers  
hastened deasil to hearths and torches.  
On westward thresholds and window-sills  
are snubby-snouted or snaggle-toothed  
scooped-empty scalps, scarecrow-featured  
hollow headpieces with hideous grins:  
turnip-sconces, tapers guttering  
through their carven smiles, candles turning  
gley-glaring holes to gleaming peepers.  
With these punkie-lanterns, apparelled as ghosts,  
or by feather-garments or by fishing-nets  
both bare and clothed (to baffle the spirits),  
gangs of guisers go now their rounds  
trick-or-treating, to try their luck  
—skullfaced skeklers, and skeleton-mummers—  
doorstep by doorstep, with doggerel catches  
to the tongs and bones and the tabor-whistle  
for fuel and food for the festal banquet  
of apple-bobbing, auguries read  
from hazelnuts, amid horns of mead;  
and meat for the *Manes*: milk, grain and honey.  
Reechy rushlights and roasting smells  
herald them homeward, to the hall of feasting;  
but in the nomanslands —numb, footstepless—  
fence and carfax, crossroads and ford,  
the restless wraiths may ride on the winds,  
hunt through the trees.

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