

# DREADED GAIA(HUNT)BY CAYNE X. MCNEIL

## SHORT STORY PRELUDE CHAPTER(ROUGH DRAFT)

A new boundary-defiling odor of death was beginning to permeate and rudely violate the colonial swamplands of Cansadoy Velado. In this land, the cancerous, finely woven shawl of death was inexplicably adorned upon every living thing; death's repulsive, intoxicating aroma perfumed the very air of the swamp, enticing the unworthy into being enveloped by Mistress Death's frigid and romantic embrace.

This new, disdainfully encroaching odor clashed with the ancient, established, balanced deal already struck millennia prior between death and fear. Usually one did not overtake the other; fear of dying created a dreadfully eerie and harmonious, natural synergy; but at this moment the searing winds blown by refined terror were surmounted by the chill, and stink of death.

Surprisingly-or perhaps unsurprisingly-there was a sole cause for the disruption of the natural order of the country.

The villain in question was a man, though to put him under the same categorical umbrella as human beings is to do them at once, a great honor, and yet, show them great disrespect. No, it is indubitably more apropos to consider the hulking, scurrying, wise, ignorant, wretched, poetic, villainous, noble, lazy, diligent, pitiable, and terrifying behemoth Kakos Gallant Giftig, an entity more than a natural sentient life form.

With his tall, muscular, ape-like physique he sauntered down a very out-of-place, neat, orange brick-road within the outer western region of the swamp. Kakos moved with a clumsy, measured, and graceful gait. He seemed to represent all that was wrong and right with the world.

He proceeded around bends and lanes devoid of any life besides small birds; Kakos' long, clean, wild, shoulder-length, obsidian, lavender streaked dreadlocks were blown about by a

warm, mild, and frustrated wind. The verdant green-trunks of the trees on either side of the path held grayish-brown, moss-like leaves; Kakos knew that the leaves could potentially operate as curatives for many illnesses, and poisons if mixed and prepared properly in various ways. These ‘Dote’ trees—as the locals named them—existed much to Kakos’ chagrin.

“This is a joyously accursed land!”, he shouted enthusiastically.

“How might a radiantly soul-less, scoundrel ply his preferred trade of execution-poison magic—in a land of people accustomed to relieving poison, and even more accustomed to being poisoned?”, he pondered half-seriously.

“The natives and colonists of this country alike are sure to have all manner of concoctions for stalling, curing, and preventing poison...I’ll simply use my demonic axe!”, he succinctly reasoned to himself as he continued his walk, passing yet more trees occupied by small, long

beaked, four winged songbirds of brown plumage.

“If they won't go slowly-they'll go quickly!”, he sang, mocking the melodious “Tweetlah!” of the birds. Kakos promised himself silently that he'd compensate, BRUTALLY for any disadvantages manipulated by foes.

In these dawn hours the plants and animals seemed to be stuck in a serene limbo. Amber-hued swords masqueraded as simple beams of light, their formless shapes haphazardly stabbing and filtering through the green-brown of the swamp canopy. The rays of light bathed everything in a subtle warmth. For a brief moment Kakos felt a sleepy sensation of being pulled gently underwater. He turned his mad gaze upon his surroundings and through fleeting moments of sanity thought of how it seemed everything, including him, was preserved in amber, he abruptly shook it off, and pressed forward unhalting for naught now.

So far Kakos had encountered no-one whilst he was entrapped by his own musings and nature walk, that looked to change as soon as he rounded another bend taking him to the right; before him Kakos heard barely audible noises that surely belonged to a far more colossal, tumultuous clamour farther ahead. Kakos felt a rush of endorphins. One of his few constants was his passionate revelry of chaos-along with his meager disdain for it, of course. He broke out into a maniacal, galloping sprint. His unceasing, pearly-white, malicious grin, his pure white, pupil less eyes, and most noticeably, his blue-black skin that shimmered with constantly shifting patterns of stars and constellations; everything made Kakos personate a dreadfully-locked specimen of a starry night sky, cast from the heavens, stricken with life, and diagnosed with chronic bloodlust.

Moving as a blur along the path he eventually rounded two more bends, one to the left another to the right, and was graced with a distant sight

of the crimson- bleached turmoil he sought. He was standing at the top of a massive, crumbling stone staircase overlooking the large town he sought, a completely militarized, oppressive, frontier colonist settlement-one that just so happened to currently be under siege.

The city was built into the foot of a monumental, reddish brown mountain, facing out towards violet plains, farther beyond which lay gnarled red and blues of swamp woodland. The city was also encompassed by a stoic, defensive wall and built around an intimidating, pristine, azure, cascading waterfall.

Kakos began to nimbly leap like a drunk spider down the ancient, ruined staircase. As he descended further- borne by the hunger of curiosity-he noted that most of the structures were uniform rectangular and low to the ground with only two skyscrapers and several watchtowers being the exception. Everything was hewn from a sort of silver, botanical rock; the

roofs were comprised of sagging green moss—including the three watch-towers which were presently snared by the scarlet fever of conflagration. They bellowed frightening gouts of flame, from multiple crystalline orifices, resembling a nest of anxious dragons. Atop the roof of one such tower, Kakos sympathetically viewed a stranded soldier who leapt salaciously and freely into Lady Death's bed, rather than be burned alive.

Finishing his descent and then, deciding he did actually want a high vantage point, Kakos leapt into and climbed a 60ft tall tree to the top, right next to the portion of the 65ft, metallic-silver enchanted-granite the soldier occupied battlements and sniper nests allotted on the corner of the eastern wall. He could most likely watch concealed, until he conducted an action directly involving the affair of another being; this was due to the hex-imbued aces-and-spades shaped glyphs woven upon his sleeveless, black-and white duster. It was only

ever-so-slightly taxing for him to maintain the cost of mental and physical discipline demanded by the effect. From his perch Kakos' grin grew wider as he relaxed and continued to take in the scene.

The “WRAHNEE!!” of emergency sirens was dumped into the overturned pot of soul-churning sounds being heated and stewing in the air; it was accompanied by the cries of confusion, grief, and anger that had not yet peaked. At least 500 of the men comprising these frontier troops were mobilizing. They were clad in deep browns of wing-emblazoned chest and abdominal plate-mail, a trench coat worn over the armour, and gloves and knee-high spike-toed combat boots fashioned from leather; these were offset well with-Kakos thought-the moss-greens of a sleeveless combat vest underneath the plate-mail, followed by leather pants, plate arm-bracers, and a tactical helmet-mask etched with the avian visage of a boulder-conjuring Rocke-Dove, a brown

feathered, green fedora was attached to the headgear. The last piece to the thrice-enchanted, visually striking frontier trooper uniform was a brown-green, striped scarf worn about the neck, which would have a soldier's family crest woven into it.

Everyone looked at the very least partially, melancholically groggy, as though they'd been violently roused from a dreamy, yet nightmarish slumber. The soldiers fared slightly better in this regard than the shrieking, disordered, and quickly perishing civilians. Their muscle-memory and instinct propelled to attempt their duties: evacuating women and children, arming themselves, prioritizing questing after the safety the affluent, handing arms to the impoverished male citizenry, rallying juxtaposed with receiving orders, and finally, surging furiously towards the unexpected foe upon their threshold. Kakos thirstily drank that sight, seeking more, he inclined his head to the left now to evaluate the aggressors in this

conflict, though they appeared somewhat hesitant and ill-prepared.

The colonists' foe in question looked to be a small 'army'( Kakos felt that one could hardly call a rough, drug-frenzied, and mental-illness wracked, contingent of heretics, murderers, and thieves a unified force...) swelled entirely with *Stellare Nocte*: ancient indigenous peoples of the swamp-country Cansadoy Velado. They physically belonged to the same race as Kakos—he did not consider them 'kin'—, looked near-identical to him, and were crudely referred to as the 'the filthy cave-dwelling, drug-addled Tar-Backs' by the more old-fashioned colonists. This farce of a force that ran itself on liquid-courage, chemical concoctions, and false pride, had managed to rend asunder the mighty town wall due to the workings of shamans who manifested boulder-sized, purple-hued fireballs from the self-loathing in their hearts, and sent them arcing grandiosely through and over the wall.

They were garbed in tarnished-but finely woven-form-fitting sky-blue robes under a clay-red poncho, and beige hood over a brown wooden mask. Wielding staves wrought from once-blessed twice-cursed trees, adorned with the large skull and feathers of a Dire-Hawke, the shamans delved into past shame and summoned arcane fire in an effort to prolong the burning and disarray their enemy.

With a deceptively innocent sound like the rustling of leaves, one such shaman leading an unruly, yet hesitant twenty-man squad near a rent hole in the east wall created a purple fireball that strayed and touched down near Kakos, inviting to his wide nose a strong scent of burning grass; the caster in question seemed to be too caught up in his own drug-induced bloodlust and euphoria to even channel his self-hatred properly.

“Aaarrghahaha!!!”, the shaman vigorously howled with laughter.

“Brothers!! Did you witness my ancestor borne courage?!” the shaman asked maniacally as he spun and addressed the wild, yet indecisive, masked raiders behind him, as many others sprinted around him in order to breach the town-proper; most wore culturally inspired, grimy, red leather pants, vests, and boots, along with enchanted, brown, wooden chest armour, pauldrons, and gauntlets.

“ But even by borne blood Stal, ya failed tuh hit someting ‘a worth.”, one dull raider responded in his people's natural thick drawl. The shaman known as Stal’s mania was undeterred by this dull one’s accurate observation.

“Brother, we don't even need to physically incinerate them by roasting the flesh...WE NEED TO EMOTIONALLY INCINERATE THEM.... by the roasting of the attachments!!”, the pitch of Stal’s voice rose and dipped gratingly as he appeared more unstable by the minute-most likely as a result of excessively consumed hallucinogens. Stal pivoted back around, took four steps

forward, and dramatically fell to his knees like a performer who'd just given an energetic performance in a show.

Clasping his hands together and inclining the serpent-painted visage of his masked face towards the heavens, he called out, “ The land has been drunk off the bloody tears of my ancestors! Heretical saint will learn to wield venom!! The eloping trespassers will weep in the needled arms of mine kind!!! I have SEEN!! They whom slumber will awaken with justifiable gluttony!!! I HAVE SE-aarrrhark!”, the melodic yarn woven by his hallucinating, prophesying, was severed abruptly by the blade of fate: a pill-round fired from the rifle of one the newly arrived snipers upon the wall, found it's home, drilled deep within Stal's chest cavity.

Still drawing breath but paralyzed with shock, Stal grunted softly as two of his men came forward to assist. Unfortunately, they had not yet suffered their full carnage. In two seconds, a ten foot long pillar of earth, destructively erupted

forth, with a “SNAPKRESH!”, evoking a sound of splintering trees instead of the bloody rupturing of arteries, bone, and muscle. Kakos viewed all of this madness with delight. As soon as the others approached Stal, five-foot long spires of jagged rock burst from the one embedded in him, and quickly buried themselves in the heads of all nineteen of Stal’s men, becoming at once, wraith-like parasites embedding themselves into new hosts.

Kakos now bored, looked over to the main force at the front of the gate. It appeared as though they collectively had overcome their initial apprehension at attacking in their numbers, and realized they needed to storm the town en masse before the colonists’ superior forces were fully organized, before all the attractive women had fled or were locked in a bunker, and most importantly, before all the potential loot was whisked away. Kakos spotted at least 300 hundred of the main force, flow like a river through the defiled remains of the citizens’

stalwart, stone guardian. The raiders and bandits found themselves anxious to make way to the town-proper, and commence the very standard, raping and pillaging.

Kakos found himself enthralled and disgusted by this unfolding tale of blood and tragedy. Eyes wandering, he spotted another shaman—this one only slightly intoxicated—summon a fireball over his head and launch it with gusto; Kakos followed the trajectory traveled by the sphere with his eyes, and saw it annihilate, with a searing flash and burning screams, a mid-sized building near the center of town that dozens of women, children, and the disabled were in the process of being ushered into.

“BOOM!”, was the noise added to the cacophony, as at least 80 lives were lost. The haunting, rhythmic chorus of anger-and-sorrow-filled wails that blossomed, seemed to instill further bloodlust in the mounting force of resistance.

“If that won't rally the flock nothing will...”, Kakos remarked casually to himself. After 50 or so minutes of mindless confusion, 400 frontier soldiers were gathered before the lip of the waterfall, and dispersed to stymie the tide of enemies that had now flowed past the gate. At least twenty-five snipers, rapidly assembled upon the northeastern portion of the wall and began coolly picking off shamans too distracted by the rest of the conflict to look up.

Kakos decided that it was absurdly far past time that he join the fray too—but stopped, when he noticed two more snipers arrive belatedly to join the nest, and decided he'd watch them first for a bit, then leap head-first into their midst.

“Why aren't they adhering to the ‘Civil Ordered Rules of Combat’?!”, one of the pair angrily demanded to no one in particular. His voice placed him as young man. The young trooper tightened the grip he had round his tan, scoped, long-barreled Rok-Rifle or ‘RR17’. The man he'd arrived with clutched the same weapon, as did

every sniper situated within the nest, along with a combat hatchet sheathed diagonally across the back; the slight shimmering Kakos witnessed, told him that every single piece of equipment these men had was enchanted.

The second frontier sniper made a harsh grunt in response to the young man's outrage.

“When men oppose each other from opposite ends of philosophical ravine with blood in their eyes and fury in their hearts, while lethargic lady peace is being sodomized by her depraved cousin hostility, in the very center of the dichotomy...”, he trailed off, partly due to being lost in thought, and partly because with his needlessly expressive imagery, he painfully saw he'd managed to lose his ‘audience’ of one—who'd only been halfway paying attention, as he scrambled to load cartridges into his RR17.

The young man looked up with what was probably a confused and annoyed look.

“What...why are you going on about sodomy? I'm mildly sure we ain't gotta' be too concerned

with scum ravaging us. Unless you know something about these here fiends that I don't?", he inquired with a tone revealing a restrained impatience and irritation as he spoke to a superior. Against a flashing backdrop of chaos, fire, and noise, the older man grunted once more.

“Essentially boy, the wisdom struggling to part from my lips is this: there truly is scarce civility between men who have naught reason to be civil; furthermore, no rules may effectively shackle the hand that clutches the sword, when the hand wields the blade of violent conflict, and hate wields the hand.”, he intoned a gruff voice. These words still failed to resonate it seemed to due the silence he was met with. The older soldier gave an exasperated sigh and shook his head.

“Tender mother teach him...another young empty head...why give dangerous weapons to a lad lacking in basic wisdom?”, he mumbled underneath his breath, as a fireball sailed overhead and took out 3 snipers farther down the wall.

“Napol I can only dumb my speech down so much for your idiot, inbred ass...”

“Captain Orbe.”, Napol began,

“Didn't you just do it there?”, he asked. Captain Orbe thought for a moment, shook his head, sprinted forward to the northern ledge of the wall, kneeled down, and took aim.

“About time.”, one of the two snipers already nested there remarked. Captain Orbe ignored him and in one motion, lined up a head-shot on a tall, slightly bloodied shaman preparing-alongside four other shamans-a gigantic, lavender, crackling fireball, with a surface like the sun's, to incinerate the entire the nest. He was already dead as Orbe was concerned, just a walking corpse.

The trigger was pulled, a round issued forth speeding to blood. As soon as the round acclimated to its temporary home located deep within the lead shaman's skull, it expanded into a magical boulder and ripped apart first bone then muscle, with grating “Kraaashek!” sound of a cat

clawing glass, all within the span of two seconds. It then hovered, covered in glittering blue ichor over the headless corpse of the shaman now lying in the violet marshy grass for half a second, before exploding like a popped rock-balloon in all directions. The other four shamans aiding this leader in conjuring were disrupted, as jagged shards of rock as long and thick as their hands, furiously impaled eyes, chests, legs, and throats. Their iridescent ichor spurting upon the earth, and they cast up a cacophony of tortured gurgling into the day-break. The fate of fire they manifested above them, was for it to unleash all its chaotic energy upon the unfortunate souls in its midst. Lavender-hued fire and energy lashed out drunkenly with tendrils, like something wrought from the abyss, before combusting like the dying star it was and dragging along with it the lives of those forced to rely upon it; several dozen *Stellare Nocte* had their pulses extinguished by the vindictive, glaringly cold, heat of the fireball. Bodies were near-vaporized,

morale worsened, a crater was left in the earth, and the busy seductress death readied her chambers as 55 lonely souls passed into her realm.

Napol and several others felt tears embark from their hearts towards expression. Both Kakos and Captain Orbe believed they had new ideas for a poem.