



G.O.D.

by Jay Lake

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G: Godstalk

Gods died. Everyone understood that. János just didn't understand why it had to be his problem. They gave him ropes and tools and maps and told him to do the right thing. No one provided any details on how to choose a god.

"Get out there and bring us back a good one," Ferenc had said, handing him grandpa's best stalk-pick. "Glad it's not me," his brother added.

Now János was halfway up a vine ribbed like a vast stalk of celery thicker than a dozen elm trunks. In the distance, vine mites the size of cattle cleaned their host. The ground was lost deep in the clouds below. Grandpa's pick seemed a small thing to trust with his life, old and rusty as it was, so he used safety lines, even though they slowed him down.

"Miracles, fresh miracles." His mother had rubbed her hands with gleeful greed. "It cost me a lot to get you this job -- don't mess it up."

János climbed higher, until the first god nodules were visible around him. They were pouty sacs with a little nipple at the free end. This particular vine had been allowed to age unharvested for almost a century. Potent, some of those nodules.

"Don't fall," Maria had said, and kissed him on the lips for the very first time. A private miracle, that.

His foot slipped, the strapped-on vine spikes nudging a small nodule. It quivered, nipple pulsing with a faint amber glow. János held his breath and prayed he didn't knock it loose. A little god like that, they'd be lucky to sour someone's milk on a summer day.

"Get it right, János, the village will be rich for two generations." Father Imre had smiled, cracked brown teeth leering from withered lips like an open grave. "Get it wrong, you'd best stay up there and eat vine for the rest of your life."

How to choose a god, János thought?

"Here, boy," whispered a great nodule in a voice like faraway thunder on a spring evening. It was bean-shaped, tall as he was. "Choose me."

Its nipple pulsed like a hot coal. János could feel the radiating power. The entire nodule twisted toward him. Propelled by instinctive terror, he crabbed away.

"Back off!" shrieked a voice behind him.

János almost fell from the vine, held on only by his safety line. He craned his neck around. "Who...?"

A little blue-nippled nodule hung from the vine just behind his shoulder. It glared like the eye of the sky. "Mind your own damned business."

The large bean-shaped nodule bumped him from the other side. "Choose me, boy."

János rappelled back down his safety line toward his last anchor. Braking shortly before the static point, he stopped at the small amber nodule. It was a long way to the ground and sour milk felt very safe. Reaching out to snap it off, János chose to believe in a small, sensible god.

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O: Godstock

In the end, they chopped down Yggdrasil. Where else to find such wood? They talked of salvaging The Boat of a Million Years for her planking, but that wouldn't have been enough. Jaguar stole her anchor chains anyway, which later came in handy to latch everything down. One of the archangels rounded up some gopher wood from Noah's old hulk under its Armenian glacier, mostly for the symbolic value. Minos donated his ax to the carpenter who actually built the stocks.

After six days of effort, everything were ready.

Jehovah, Supreme Being and Creator of the Universe, strolled onto the Patio of the Gods accompanied by His chief counsel, Lucifer. The Holy Ghost sat in judgment, a tequila sunrise bobbing over an apparently empty chaise longue. Lesser gods serving as court officers sat around the perimeter of the hearing area, while others watched from the poolside bar.

Matsu clerked for the court from under a Campari umbrella. "Any final remarks from the defense?" she asked Lucifer.

Lucifer glanced at God, who shook His head. Tsunamis washed across the Indian Ocean.

"No." The devil sounded resigned, as if he'd lost badly at Canasta Night.

Matsu bowed before reading from a parchment. "This court finds that God, also known as Jehovah et cetera, styled Supreme Being et cetera, has been remiss in managing His Creation. Do you have any statements for the record, Mr. God?"

God smiled. Sunlight washed over Seattle. "Free will was not a mistake. I do apologize for monotremes and instant coffee." The Brazilian commodities exchange crashed.

Matsu continued. "Your remarks will be entered into the record. This court further finds that as there is no meaningful punishment for the Architect of Existence, symbolic punishment will instead be administered. Mr. God is sentenced to confinement in the stocks until the mercy of His beloved mankind shall free Him."

Tears the size of seas welled in God's eyes, but as the stocks were lowered over His wrists, nothing much changed on Earth.

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D: Gottschalk

The old man stumbled down the streets of Austin. He was not fully anchored in space-time, which was a significant inconvenience except for the ready avoidance of dog turds. It was still hotter than hell. He stopped front of the Starbuck's at the corner of Sixth and Congress where an astoundingly ugly cross-dresser with a long beard was protesting. Her sign had a long rant about police brutality.

"What seems to be the trouble here?" the old man asked the lone protestor, whose name was Dana. Unfortunately, due to his personal space-time discontinuity, the old man's question came out as slurred wino speech. "Obscene in the bubble hair?"

"Fucking cops," said Dana.

The old man realized that he knew the name Dana's mother had given her when she was born -- Owen Gottschalk. "Cops don't hang out at Starbuck's," the old man said. Which came out more or less, "Cops dang all Jeff Beck," with a grace note of saliva spray.

Dana Owen Gottschalk was sufficiently out of things herself to divine the old man's intention if not his actual utterances. "More spare change here." She glanced around. "Don't queer my act, friend."

The old man deduced that Dana was a pragmatist. The old man was a pragmatist, too. He'd been looking for someone like Dana. "There's power in your name."

Or, less precisely, "Fess Parker's a dame."

She glared at the old man. Some bankers were heading their way, exchanging knowing glances with one another. "Enough, beat it."

The old man was drawn to Dana's potential. "You see, and draw with God's chalk. Make me real now."

What the BMW owners heard was, "Easy, Dana Owen Gottschalk. Bake the reality cow."

Dana tried to kick the old man in the nuts. The move didn't work out well, due to the old man's crotch being about seven light years distant, but Dana made her point.

The old man stumbled up Sixth Street, looking for someone else with the right magic to draw a line around his body, and sufficient mercy to bring divinity back into the world.

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