

The City of Had, In the Heart of Hades

From the Flash Fiction Title: Orphan and Dice

By: Michael Kouroubetes

Fiction

Travelers rarely return from the City of Had. It is a city nearly all travelers are attracted to, unbeknownst to them, from the day they are born. Any traveler that passes through its two gates, wrought of thick black oak roots and exits through, can remember little of what they have seen but they do recall smells and the shadows of its dark heaven and its hard obsidian walkways.

The City's sky is made of high towering vaults of rich, thick dirt. The sun filters through only to appear as a distant flickering flame which barely illuminates its inhabitants. It is a city that welcomes all races and therefore embraces their different color of skin, eye lashes, their nervous ticks, and the curvature of their lips. When entering the City, one hears the murmurings of multitudinous tongues and languages. A traveler will find themselves passing others, such as themselves, and many nod acknowledgment to the other.

The City of Had has three rivers running through it, each flowing with its own unique particular contents. Pale Gold is a river that runs parallel to all the temples aligned in the City. It is the most luminescent of all the rivers. Through it runs not water, but a continuous stream of gold coins. There is no clinking or rattling of change, like in a woman's purse, only the profiles of ancient kings and queens and dictators and founding fathers and mothers stamped on them, can be seen flowing by the meager burning candle wick of the sun. The coins amplify what little illumination there is, yet not enough to cause spectacular reflections. The light that does bounce off, in turn, dabbles the holy buildings where worshipers kneel, or bow, or lay, with droplets of rainbow colors, giving the temples an appearance as if they are continuously rained on by tiny incandescent fireflies. Many a traveler will try to scoop the coins from the river, but no matter how hard they

try, with nets or hats or even their own hands, they always find the coins gone, only to be found in the river flowing on and on.

The river called Stick is blacker than the very streets themselves. It has only timber pilings across it as bridges, making it very precarious to walk above it. If a traveler happens to fall into its ebony waters and is able to survive by swimming vigorously to shore, they will find that many of their memories are fogged, and some completely swirled away. It is the perfect river to embrace if one wants to forget.

And a traveler cannot visit the City of Had without crossing the River Yearn. Unlike the River Stick, this river has broad bridges made of found rock. It is held together not by mortar but by each stone, fitting intimately into the other, forming a perfect jigsaw puzzle. These bridges are populated by men and women who lay down what burden that they carry like a backpack, a purse, a rolled up moth-eaten blanket, and stare into its waters. But again, this river like all the other rivers of Had flows not with turbulent and roiling waters, but with pages from books coursing by like a cataract of notes. The travelers squint, trying to read the pages that quickly stream by below, each sure they can make out some type of message typed or written in those pages – but the message is not quite discernable to them.

At the center of Had is a great burgundy pillar that rises straight into the dirt sky. It is like a towering building with thousands of floors. Many travelers sit at its base, their back leaning against it. They stare up, and they are all certain that it props up the very heavens of the City of Had. This is where many find the greatest sense of the omphalos, the very umbilical cord of their being.