

## MEN OF WAR

*by William A. Cook*

Are men who rise to power born to the task,  
Offspring of some primordial curse,  
Children of the first conflagration  
That raged in the recesses of the universe,  
Dividing creation into the twin Charons of Heaven and Hell?

Do they divine their dominion in the dungeon of despair,  
And glower in delight at the magnitude of their power,  
Monarchs of the souls harvested there?

Are they the demon riders of the red horses  
Let loose by the breaking of the second seal?

Have they orders from some terrible force  
To take peace from the earth, to slay their brethren  
That the prophecy of ancient stories be fulfilled?

Or are they the horsemen of the fourth seal  
Riding the winds of war, spreading disease and destruction  
Across the sands and the seas and the cities  
That dot the earth?

Or are they men devoid of heart, defective and deformed,  
Whose chest is filled with cynicism and contempt  
For those less fortunate, the desperate and deprived  
That struggle to survive in a world unkind?

What manner of men can distance themselves from their kin?

What beast of prey have they become to devour so many  
Without compassion or remorse, able to wield  
Weapons of unimaginable force against unseen foes,  
Who hear the screaming cry of the angel of death  
Hurling from the sky,

Where life itself should be the only force:  
The warmth of the sun, the gentle cooling of the rain,  
The promise of spring, the hope that comes again.

Listen to those who conspire behind closed doors the destiny of men;  
See how they huddle amongst themselves, laughing to scorn  
The voices of those who council patience and restraint,  
Who caution against gut reaction, the antidote to passion,  
The enemy of due deliberation that considers consequences  
That destroy those we would save.

Listen as they conspire, like Richard of old, to create their empire  
On the ruins of ancient castles and tombs,

The graphic symbols of life and death,  
Oblivious to the reality they portray as they plot their rise to power.

Witness the arrogance that leaves a legacy of lost memories,  
Where preservation is weakness and destruction is might.  
Where once the silent dreams of ancient voices scrolled their beauty  
    Before our eyes, moist with sympathy for their expectations,  
    Recognizing our dreams in theirs though centuries have passed,  
Now they smolder, thoughts lost forever,  
    The very glory and magnificence of Mesopotamia.

These are the men who dismiss the misfortune of others,  
    Ignorant of causes that curse a culture  
    Into ruin by the ravages of time or wind or drought,  
Leaving generations destitute and deprived, innocent detritus of wasted days,  
Hostages of happenstance, fodder for the selfish, the savage, and the strong.

These are the men who have contempt for the poor,  
    Who understand weakness as evil, might as right,  
Lies, deceit, and duplicity as strength against failure,  
Who believe empathy, kindness, and compassion betray success,  
Allowing the weak to survive as parasites on the strong,  
And strain the juice of ambition from their loin.

Memory that gives life to identity must be destroyed  
    By those who conquer, or it will destroy the myths  
That gave them purpose in their slaughter.  
The baubles and slogans parroted by the powerful  
Become the voice of reason and the spirit of violence  
    To subdue the weak and extol the strong,  
    And death becomes the gauge of success.

Morality lies dead beneath the sword of arrogance,  
    Slain by the seven angels of Revelation,  
    The ministers of god's messenger,  
Who unleash heaven's candles to open the bottomless pit,  
Spewing spasms of smoke back to the heavens,  
    Blocking the light of the sun,  
    Casting darkness over the faces of men,  
    Even as the locusts' wings whirl their fury  
Over the frightened hoards below who suffer the scorpion's blow.

This must we know of those who rule by myth:  
    Their truth is imbedded in an icy heart  
Frozen in time to a god of vengeance and retaliation,

Whose mission they serve by fulfilling their ambition,  
And in that heartless world they find meaning.

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