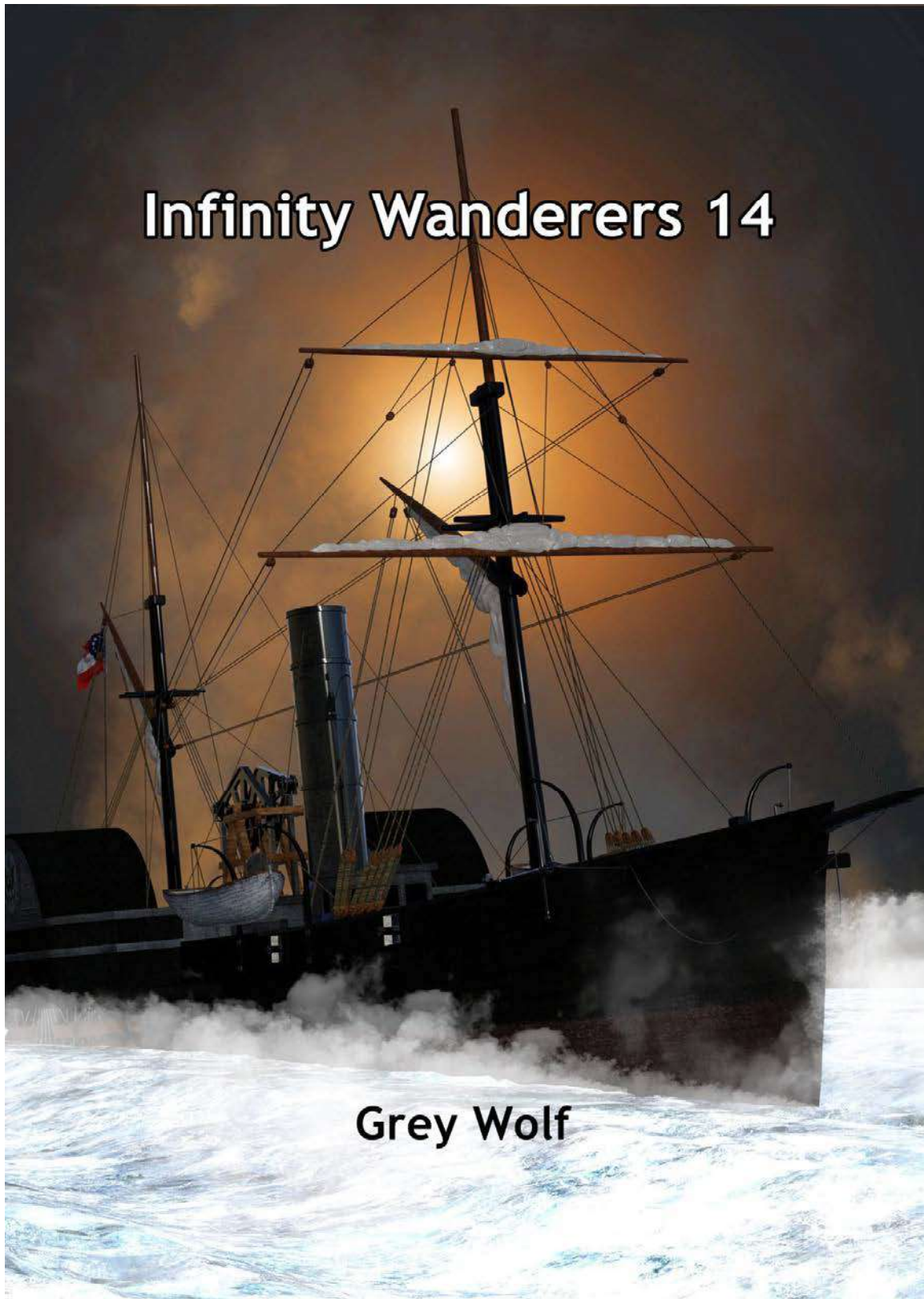


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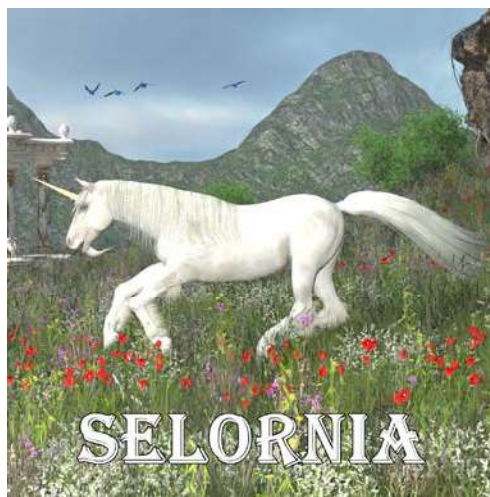
Grey Wolf



INFINITY WANDERERS

#14

EDITED BY GREY WOLF



Infinity Wanderers issue 14

Edited by Grey Wolf

Cover Art by Robin Stacey

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ISSUE 14



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Five Microfictions

Matias Travieso-Diaz

1. End of an Individual: Death of Socrates

Socrates' disciples gathered to mourn the passing of their master. One of them, Echecrates, requested that another, Phaedo, provide a precise account of everything that had happened after Socrates drank the fatal cup of hemlock he had been sentenced to ingest. Phaedo agreed, and proceeded to share his recollections of the philosopher's last moments.

"I was prepared for a tragic scene, not unlike those in an Aeschylus' play. However, instead of casting curses against the cruel Fates, Socrates cheerfully proclaimed that death had something good in store for him, for he believed his immortal soul was going to a place where it could be in better company than when he was alive, so he counseled his disciples not to mourn but celebrate his departure because we would be better off, or at least do as well, after he was gone. As I heard his words, I still grieved over his passing but felt somewhat comforted."

"How does that leave us?" asked somebody. "How will we be able to continue our philosophical education in Socrates' absence?"

Phaedo furrowed his brow. "He said he was certain that we would find someone just as good as him, if not better, to carry on with our learning. But he was vague as to the basis for his confidence."

"That is not very helpful" observed Cebes, another youth. "We never met anyone as sage as Socrates and I doubt we will be able to do so. Did Plato question Socrates about the basis for his assurances?"

Phaedo's stare became vague. He seemed lost in thought, and then replied weakly: "I don't recall if Plato was with us that day."

There was a low rumble of dissatisfaction among the disciples. As Phaedo continued his narration, more lacunae surfaced in Phaedo's narration of Socrates' slow-paced death; these gaps underscored the danger of forgetting or misremembering something important Socrates may have said and made Phaedo's memory of Socrates at best an approximation of the man's final teachings. Apollodorus, virtually in tears, put into words what was already in everybody's mind: "See, his body is still warm and we are forgetting him already."

"There is something I recall well and will never forget" countered Phaedo. "Socrates ran his hand over my hair, as he often affectionately did, and remarked: 'Tomorrow you will have to cut your hair in mourning.' I shuddered and replied: 'Yes, Master.' Then Socrates continued: 'That is a pity. You have beautiful hair. I love touching your hair.' I will always remember his touch and this exchange."

Phaedo and the other disciples realized then that their teacher's death constituted the irreparable loss of the only guide who could lead them on the path to philosophical growth. Phaedo's description of his last physical contact with Socrates suggested additional grief for him and others on account of their physical attachment to the person of Socrates.

The unspectacular manner of Socrates' death – he just died slowly, as the poison he ingested coursed through his body – could not mitigate the tragic consequences of his death for the bereaved: the survivors are the ones who legitimately suffer real misfortune, and true tragedy can be generated by the death of one person upon those who loved and interacted with the deceased.

2. End of a People: The Cuban Taínos

As we approached it, we could tell that the third island off the Southern Swamp in which we landed during our treasure hunt was larger and less forbidding than the first two. For one thing, it had an easy landing area in the form of a coarse beach. Also, it sported some hardwoods and relatively few mangles. We pulled the raft a short distance away from the water and took off exploring.

The beach ended in a slope that curved gently upwards and led to a large open area. The land there was flattened and appeared to have been put to agricultural use; weeds covered what once might have been a field of root vegetables, and a handful of skeletal stalks gave witness to crops that had preceded them a long time before.

Behind the vegetable field we came into the remainder of what once had been a small human village. Eight *bohíos* sat in a rough semicircle, and another, slightly larger, occupied the center. All the structures were in a state of advanced decrepitude; the walls of several had fallen and many were roofless.

My owner, Don Luis de Haro, approached the largest of the *bohíos* and entered through an open space that might once have contained a door. It was dark inside and a pervasive odor of wet and rotting fibers, smoke, and decay filled my nostrils, choking me.

Don Luis smacked his lips in disappointment and shoved me outside. "Let's go out and look around. There's nothing here." I was only too glad to follow his directive.

Past the village, under the shade of a copse of scrub pines, there was an area covered by rocks of various sizes. Some of the rocks were scattered about, but a few were piled upon each

other to form small promontories. “What are these things?” I asked, and almost immediately knew the answer myself, even before Don Luis answered:

“That most likely was the Indians' cemetery.”

A feeling of sadness seized my spirit. My mother had told me repeatedly that there was a mix of negro and Indian in my blood, but I had never given any thought to my Indian ancestors, and being confronted with their previous existence and disappearance filled me with melancholy. Perhaps, had things been different, I would not be a slave, but a freeman like one of these people that were now gone and forgotten, wiped off the face of the earth, for the entire Taíno population of Cuba had been killed off by the Spanish *conquistadores* through massacres, forced labor, and the introduction of smallpox and other diseases. Unexpectedly, tears dropped out of my eyes.

Don Luis had been watching me and lay a consoling arm around my shoulders. “Lazarito, that's the way of this wicked world. The powerful exploit, victimize and murder the weak. That's why we must be strong so we can survive.”

“So, where is the treasure we are seeking?” I asked as we left the cemetery.

“The very old Indian told my grandfather that he had buried the treasure under the tallest pine on the island, which was supposed to have a trunk split in two by lightning. It should not be too hard to locate it; the island is not that big.”

“Don Luis” I observed warily, “it is almost sunset. We may not be able to find it in the dark.”

“Well, do you want to spend the night here?”

“Not particularly” I replied. “But we may need to do it anyway. I don’t think it would be wise to try to return to the mainland in the middle of the night.”

“You have a point there. But we have no shelter and only our wet clothes to cover us. We are going to be quite uncomfortable.”

I sighed. “Let’s at least find a place indoors to hide, in case it rains. Maybe the mosquitoes won’t find us there.”

We went back to the village and started checking out the bohíos. Don Luis went to a bohío that seemed a little less dilapidated than the others and still had a door, which Don Luis pushed open without difficulty.

In the failing daylight, we were able to observe that the back wall of the dwelling was lined with a rudimentary stand holding objects made of wood and stone: pots, and clay figurines of various sizes representing grotesque humans and animals. “I think,” observed Don Luis, “that this hut was their church, where they kept the images of their gods.”

I sat reverently, leaning against a side wall. I faced the altar and started to wonder whether the gods of my ancestors were peace-loving or wrathful, and what kinds of offerings were made to them, and whether they required human sacrifices. No, they couldn’t, I told myself. These were peaceful people, and so must have been their gods...

Next thing I knew, Don Luis was shaking me awake roughly. I was sprawled on the dirt floor, with my head resting against the back wall of the bohío. My body ached all over and I was as hungry as I ever remembered. Sunlight was streaming through the door of the hut.

“Well, Lazarito, did you sleep well?” Don Luis asked sardonically.

“I don’t know. I was thinking about these people and their gods and, all of a sudden, I was gone.”

“I envy you. I hardly got any sleep. Anyhow, let’s go looking for that treasure.”

I got up but, instead of going outside, turned to the back wall. In better light, some of the items sitting on the altar were pretty, in a primitive sort of way. I could see how a lot of care had gone into carving or shaping these images, and again a feeling of nostalgia for these lost people almost brought back tears to my eyes. On impulse, I approached the altar and seized a dark wood figurine that represented a woman with large eyes, prominent ears, and wide hips. The figure balanced on her head a bowl, perhaps used to hold offerings. I took the figurine and placed it inside my shirt, close to my heart.

“What are you doing?” demanded Don Luis.

“I want to take with me something to remind me of this trip and the people I will never meet.” Don Luis said nothing and walked briskly outside the bohío, and I hurried to follow him.

Finding the tall pine with the riven trunk was not difficult; it was very tall, and its trunk split in two directions which shot upwards leaving a wide gap between them.

“I think this is the place” announced Don Luis, eagerly.

“How are we going to dig? We have no shovels” I pointed out.

“We’ll use my sword, and its sheath, and our bare hands. The ground is soft, as it is throughout this swamp.”

“I see” I replied unenthusiastically.

Don Luis did the most of the digging. The soil yielded easily, and as he opened a hole and widened it, he handed me piles of dirt, which I picked up with both hands and cast behind me.

It took only a few minutes before he hit something. Soon a wooden box, the size of a small passenger trunk, revealed itself.

“Come here, help me get it out!” Don Luis summoned.

There was no room for me in the hole Don Luis had dug, but I got on the ground, leaned over the edge, and stretched to grasp one side of the box while Don Luis pulled it up from the other side. The box was surprisingly light and came out of its resting place with a whoosh.

We brought it out of the hole and lifted the lid. It opened easily, and was almost empty.

We spread the contents of the box on the ground: small gold ornaments, like earrings and pendants; necklaces of semi-precious stones; a few antique Spanish coins, mainly silver *reales* and a single gold *escudo*; and metal hoops that appeared to serve as bracelets. The Indian “treasure” was underwhelming.

“There has to be more!!” shouted Don Luis angrily. “Is this *mierda* what the Indians called treasure!?”

I tried to bring him to his senses. “Don Luis, these were poor Indians that found refuge in this swamp, fleeing from the Spaniards. What they would have considered a treasure would probably mean much less to us.”

Don Luis continued to shake with anger and disappointment for a few minutes, and finally calmed down somewhat, but lamented: “I’m ruined! I’ll never be able to rise from misery! I’m doomed!”

“These things must be worth something.” I countered, pointing to the motley array of objects.

“Not much, I fear” he came back, disconsolate.

“Well, you can have what would have been my share, if it helps” I responded, trying to be nice.

“Thanks” he replied. “Let’s get out of here.” I noticed that, even in the middle of his grief, Don Luis did not mind taking me up on my offer and keeping the entire loot for himself.

3. End of an Empire: Death of Flavius Orestes and of the Western Roman Empire

At the beginning of the Fifth Century, the Roman Empire was divided into Western and Eastern halves, each with its own emperor and administration; the western half of the Empire moved its capital from Rome to Ravenna and fell into increasingly hard times. The river Rhine froze in the winter of 406, allowing waves of Germanic tribes to cross into Gaul and spread through all reaches of the empire. Four years later, a Visigoth army led by King Alaric besieged and sacked the city of Rome. Then came the Huns under Attila, and for twenty years they ravaged Gaul and Italy, and just stopped short of taking Rome. After Attila's death, the Vandals, under King Gaiseric, sailed from North Africa and sacked Rome for a second time in 455, leaving the city devastated.

The last Emperor of the Western Empire to be formally crowned in Rome was Julius Nepos, who ruled for only a year, mid-474 to mid-475. He was then deposed by the chief of his armed forces, Flavius Orestes, and had to flee to Dalmatia. Flavius Orestes realized that his hold on the empire’s rebellious troops was tenuous and, instead of taking the crown from himself, he proclaimed his teenage son Romulus Augustulus as the emperor. He was counting on the repeated occurrences of the army adopting a popular young boy (like Heliogabalus) as their ruler.

Orestes was immediately challenged by the barbarian mercenary troops stationed in Italy, who demanded to be given land grants within Italy as payment for their service. Orestes, out of a desire to maintain his power base intact, refused the troops' petition. This refusal ignited a widespread mutiny among the mercenaries. They found a leader in Odoacer, a chieftain who promised to fulfill their demands if they would make him their king. On August 23, 476 AD Odoacer was proclaimed king by his troops. Orestes retreated to the fortified city of Pavia in northern Italy. Odoacer's forces, however, immediately besieged Pavia. The city's fortifications were stormed, and the town was pillaged. While Pavia was being sacked, Orestes managed to escape the city. He was swiftly pursued by Odoacer's victorious forces and captured near Placentia and executed on August 28, 476 AD.

Following Orestes's death, Odoacer entered Ravenna and, on September 4, 476 AD, deposed Romulus Augustulus and sent him to exile, and forwarded the imperial regalia to the Eastern Emperor Zeno. This marked the official end of the Western Roman Empire, which had lasted many centuries. That "end," however, had been a long, gradual process involving economic decline, barbarian invasions, and political instability.

4. End of a Historical Era: Bonaparte and the end of the French Revolution

TO F. RIES, Vienna, April 9, 1825.

MY DEAR GOOD RIES,--

Someone has asserted in the *Wiener Zeitung* that I have always been an admirer of Bonaparte. I am in no physical condition to respond to that false accusation as energetically as it deserves, so I beg you to write to the newspaper and refute the charges. You may, for example,

reference our conversation during Christmastide in 1804, when you advised me that Bonaparte had crowned himself Napoleon, Emperor of the French. As you will recall, you came to my quarters when I was making final corrections to my Symphony in E-Flat and found me with a copy of the score lying on the table, as I was making final corrections to the work in advance of its premiere early the following year. At the time, the word "Bonaparte" was written as a dedication at the extreme top of the title page. As you brought me the news that Bonaparte had declared himself emperor, I flew into a rage, cried out some obscenities, and predicted: "Now he will trample on all the rights of men and indulge only his ambition. He will exalt himself above all others and become a tyrant," for I saw that this was the end of the French revolution that had for a quarter of a century tried to uphold the rights of the common man. I went to the table, took hold of the title page by the top, tore it in two, and threw it on the floor. (I also tossed my chair violently against the wall, breaking it, but you need not mention that.) When the final score of the symphony was published, I had replaced the words on the title page with "*Eroica – una sinfonia per festeggiare il sovvenire di un grand Uomo.*" I had disowned Bonaparte.

You can also mention in your letter that, in composing *Fidelio*, I thought to underscore the struggle for liberty and justice underlying the French Revolution, which Bonaparte so wantonly betrayed, and you can cite the Prisoners' Chorus of the opera as the ode to freedom that serves as an expression of my views.

I apologize for burdening you with this request, but it is important to me that my name not be associated with that of a now gone foreign tyrant.

I wish you and your wife every good that life can bestow! My kindest and best regards also to your father, from your friend,

BEETHOVEN.

4. End of a State's Unchallenged Abuses Against its Citizens: Nuremberg Trials

Between 1939 and 1945, Nazi Germany invaded many countries across Europe, causing tens of millions of deaths in the Soviet Union and other occupied territories, plus millions more deaths among Germany's own citizens. After Germany was defeated, France, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, and the United States convened the International Military Tribunal, a joint tribunal sitting in Nuremberg, occupied Germany, that tried 22 of the most important surviving leaders of Nazi Germany, including some private individuals who headed enterprises that had sustained the Nazi regime. The purpose of the trial was not just to convict the defendants but also to assemble irrefutable evidence of the Nazi crimes.

What made the inquest significant was that the prisoners were symbols of racial hatred, terrorism and violence, and the arrogance and cruelty of power. It was felt that Civilization could afford no compromise or deal ambiguously with the men that represented those evil forces.

The conduct of the Nuremberg Trials were a landmark event with profound and lasting impact on international law, for they established that individuals in government, regardless of their position, can be held criminally liable for the atrocities they have committed, and the "following orders" defense was rejected. The trials also formalized the "crimes against humanity" doctrine that supported the later definition of "genocide," which includes severe abuses (such as murder, extermination, enslavement, deportation, and other inhumane acts) committed against any civilian population, or persecutions on political, racial, or religious grounds. The trials also

played a crucial role in collecting and publicizing the evidence of the Holocaust and other Nazi atrocities.

As a result of the trials, twelve defendants were sentenced to death by hanging; three defendants received life imprisonment; four defendants received prison sentences ranging from ten to twenty years; and three defendants were acquitted. These sentences were important in themselves, but also served as a warning to future world leaders: a significant step forward has been made to punish atrocities by a tyrannical regime.