

## **THE QUICK AND THE DEAD— ON THE LAST AUSTRALIAN MUNDI**

Graybeard (Greg) headed for the waterless Mundi regions,  
Where winds and sands sculpted and streaked the rocks,  
And where the Knights Templar of the armor plates  
Would be at a disadvantage...

There he waited and looked up at the sharp white stars.

Soon his pursuers would arrive,  
For he had let it out that this was his destination;  
However, all was never as it seemed.

On the Last Mundi, or was it Tuesday,  
Greg (Graybeard's alter ego) was walking  
Along the windswept plain of the Mundi...





On his way back to his camp at the large rock,  
Returning from a hike in the mountains.

It had been a good day with nature;  
He already felt somewhat primeval.

It was almost dusk  
And so the stars of home  
Would soon shine above and beyond.

It was good to get away to see and learn  
What more this life was all about.

*What's that!*

A mad rabid dog ran out from the shadows,  
Heading crazily but swiftly toward Graybeard...





How did he know all this?

Of what is a human made?

Would an acute fear response  
Give him a good shot at staying alive?  
Should he confront or avoid?

In this case he would have to  
Try to avoid by flight  
And then perhaps confront by fight,  
Which is really more like a freeze,  
There being flight, fight, or fright.

We are actually hardwired to flee first,  
But, if overtaken, we must defend,  
Although a trancelike passive state  
Of being filled with fear is also possible.

Within seconds, Graybeard was primed;  
His pupils were dilated  
And his respiration had sped up.

He stopped producing saliva  
As sweat poured out all over;  
His blood rushed away from his stomach  
To soak his brain and muscles  
In nutrients and oxygen,  
Energizing him for what lay ahead.

He froze, watched, and listened  
But only for a second.

Light waves flashing off of the dog's teeth  
Had passed through his eyes  
That could now see all the better.

Electric signals had entered his brain,  
The visual information  
Routed to the opposite sides,  
This depth perception helping him  
To better locate and keep track  
Of the oncoming and insane assailant.

The sound waves of  
The dog's growling and barking  
Crashed against the tympanic membranes  
Of his ears and were on into his brain  
As sounds to be processed.

Yes, all this, as well, in a second or two.

Within milliseconds,  
Neurotransmitters chemically ferried electric signals  
From one neuron to the next,

Spreading the latest news of the dog  
To a quick response unit born of ancient times.

The sensory information had funneled  
Deeper into the brain for further analysis.

Graybeard's vast network of neurons  
Lit up like a Christmas tree.  
The ultimate decision would be made  
By the amygdala—the 'fear' center.

Would there just be cause for a temporary alertness  
Or should there be a full-fledged fear response?

The dog was going wild;  
There were no trees to climb;  
There was little chance for escape, but....



The amygdala sent a siren sounding  
Through Graybeard's brain,  
Having cued the locus ceruleus  
In the brain stem to release gobs  
Of the neurotransmitter nor-epinephrine.

Twin brain structures at the bottom of the head,  
The cerebellum,  
Considered various attempts or escape or of self-defense.

All of Graybeard's ancestors  
Had now arisen to heed the threat.

The brain stem had sent  
An all-points bulletin,  
This constricting his blood vessels  
And inhibiting all ordinary  
Parasympathetic nervous activity.

His throat tightened, in case a scream was necessary;  
His body was preparing for the worst.

This real danger was  
What his formerly safe life had come down to.

To stare death in the face was now to live twice.

The dog was fifty yards away and bearing down upon him,  
Its nature having gone wilder than wild.

The spinal cord had aided the cascade  
Of the acute fear response  
To all the corners of Graybeard's body,  
Activating the peripheral nervous system  
Of his arms and legs, among other senses,  
To attend to the stimuli  
Of the new and dangerous environment.



Greg threw a few stones; No effect. Some more; nothing;  
They could not halt the foaming rabid beast.

The flight signal had reached his muscles,  
Their fibers already contracted  
To increase his running ability;  
Heart and legs racing,  
He ran and then looked back  
To see the savage dog gaining on him...

He threw a larger stone;  
It even hit the dog,  
But there was no overall effect.

Graybeard reflected on  
All his years on forums,  
Wishing that he had said "boloney"  
A few more times.

The crossroads all went nowhere;  
The signposts all pointed toward oblivion.

The vicious dog was almost upon him,  
So he stopped and waited and planned for the fight,  
Having but a second.

He wished that he had brought a weapon along;  
There was not even a stick or a branch lying about.

He recalled his bevy of girlfriends,  
But for the one he had given Austin,  
For she was not much of a scientist.

Eternity called out Greg's name.  
But this was a wrong number,  
For he was now totally  
Graybeard the Magnificent.

The foaming dog leapt for Graybeard;  
Even one bite would be fatal;  
Graybeard's sturdy hiking boot  
Caught the dog in the throat  
As he kicked toward a vital area,  
Stunning the dog  
And sending him to the ground.

Just as the dog was about to recover,  
Graybeard dropped a knee  
Into his head and crushed it,  
The poor creature's brains  
Splattering all over the ground.

Greg's body and mind still swirled  
With the rapid firings  
Of the acute fear response,  
But, he eventually calmed down.

There was a sour taste in his mouth—

His salivary glands were turning back on,  
A good sign that his life was returning to normal.

He walked back to camp and drank the beer  
That his glands had further requested.

Greg wondered how Ninja Graybeard  
Had accomplished the kill, then thought,  
"Thank you, evolution and natural selection!  
You made me what I am today."

Another dog arrived, a tame one.  
Greg talked to it like a friend.



## Mundi Epilog

'Twas the Pope's highest Cardinal [Sin] himself  
Who'd ordered the assault on the Gray One,  
And so the end was to be at hand,  
But, on the other hand, Graybeard had algae,  
And had flung it into the eyes of his pursuers,  
Then patted the end of his horse.

The knights faltered and gave up the chase,  
But the spiritual chasers appeared in their stead,  
Stating unscientific theories,  
Such as "*God is*".

And then?

The Spiritual Chasers of God Arrived.





Meanwhile, science had been rewritten  
By them to say that *some ancient wise men*  
*Had long ago discovered*  
*The weak and strong nuclear forces*  
*While thinking about earth, air, fire and water,*  
*Then correlating it to consciousness.*  
*One of the ancient ones discovers a photon,*  
*As well as the entire electromagnetic spectrum,*  
*The strong force and the weak force,*  
*Which corresponds to thought,*  
*But they called it 'Taurus'.*

The spiritualists wanted it all,  
And so they had to ordain themselves as 'special',  
Above and beyond all the rest,  
For that way they could be deserving  
Of even more reward in the afterlife,  
All this born out of their pride

Of their very own Divine Creation...  
That they had made up.

Greg had befriended some of the spirituals,  
But had to use logic on some of those remaining...

From the top of a large weathered rock,  
Graybeard cried out, "Where is God?"

Each spiritual answered in turn:

*"He is between our heartbeats and breaths."*

*"He is life."*

*"He is the universe."*

*"He is love."*

*"He is everywhere."*

*"All is of His illusion."*



Graybeard answered,  
“You have said nothing but that life is life,  
And that the universe is the universe, and so forth,  
Just equating one real thing  
With another name of an invisible thing  
That is even quite undefined in the first place.

Who are you all that makest all of these words  
Plied upon and on top of what is?”

*“We are the spiritual chasers of God;  
We label Him as anything  
And everything we choose.”*

Old Gray, looking a bit like God himself,  
With his long gray and flowing beard, continued,  
“Are you human mammals of such recent vintage  
So extraordinarily important and special

In the whole entire scheme of things  
That took so many tens of billions of years  
To stumble along in such a haphazard way?”

“Yes.”

“Do a trillion stars exist  
Just to illumine your night?”

“Yes.”

“Do forty million species thrive  
Just for your delight?”

“Yes.”

“And is all of space out there just for show,  
To glorify you?”



*“Yes.”*

“Did the supernovae stardust showers  
Of the atomic elements write the names  
Of future humans across the sky way back when?”

*“Yes.”*

“Does every atom exist and spin to service you?”

*“Yes.”*

“Did Proto-men, and before them, and all, live,  
Die and suffer only for your promise?”

*“Yes.”*





“So, then, every dinosaur, and more, was condemned  
So you could gain a space to live, war and kill?”

“Yes.”

“Does the sun shine with you in mind?”

“Yes.”

“Was Heaven’s Shrine built just to await your coming,  
You being so special as to deserve a divine reward beyond?”

“Yes.”

“Oh my, religious ones, how vain and proud you all are!  
What hubris, conceit, self-love, and vanity  
Have you to claim such full self-importance  
To demand so much from the universe

That you would even claim an angelic vapor that  
Drives a living being, provides character,  
Morality, and consciousness, on top of  
A burdensome, fragile, and expensive  
Organ such as a brain ne’er to be used?  
It’s a silliness born from exaggerated  
Self-worth, an invisible hilarity—  
Becoming a merciless indoctrination.  
May you all soon recover your humility.”

As such spoke the humble Graybeard to show  
The truth of what we all are: mammal, organic;  
Past narcissism and self-adulation,  
To the bio-electro-chemical organism  
Evolved upon a planet near a star,  
In the long and winding mindless way of  
Slow time, dust, and selection by death that  
Sifts the best from the rest: evolution.



And such did Analog once observe that  
The creature out thinks the creator,  
With inferior tools, to imagine a  
Much more peaceful and joyful world,  
And that it is emotion that creates  
Delusions of heavenly scenarios of  
Creation, and an existence beyond death.

These are lessons in humility to all  
Mammals grown so high and haughty...

“So... enjoy it all as though you will never  
Know it again; for who is to say that you shall?”

Only one spiritual was left at the base of the rock,  
But she had Graybeard surrounded...  
With her words on evolution  
'Symbolized' by the Bible.





“That’s it,” said Gray Newt, “I’m gone”,  
And so he fired up his jet pack  
And launched himself into the sky  
Toward the white patches of vapor and fluff.

Some of the aboriginals now thought him a God—

And so he became the legend—

That God was an old white-haired  
[Gray bearded]  
Guy sitting on a cloud.





## Mundi Memories

Greg walked to the mountain and back,  
Sitting safe on some lone rock for the lack  
Of any other seat to pick but that of his own;  
Wherewhence he slept, thinking he was all alone.

As there he lay asleep so peacefully in repose,  
Some dogs wandered by and licked his nose.  
And while he turned untossed, a kangaroo  
Of boundless flight, hopped over him, too.

The Great Equalizer stalks all creatures made,  
Lying ever just round the corner in the shade,  
Taking both human and the beetle as one,  
After their lives are spent from rolling some dung.





