

The Faust Dilemma

A *Highlander* fanfic by Jason Vey

Disclaimer the first: I don't own them. Panzer/Davis do. Lawsuits bad. Me broke. No harm done, right?

Disclaimer the second: This story sucks. Sorry about that. It's the skeleton of an idea I may flesh out and redo some day, because I think the idea has some merit.

Iceland, 1000 A.D.

Allegiances broken, oaths betrayed, honor in the dust. That was what these times were about, and Gunnar knew it. He stood with a small contingent of men at the precipice of a bluff overlooking the Rang River and waited for the enemy to approach.

Christians. This new faith had swept across the continent with its tyranny and lust for power. Iceland was the final holdout—the last bastion of the Old Ways, and Gunnar refused to be a convert to the one god of the interlopers. And yet, as he looked to his left at the man he'd sworn to serve, Mord Sigurdsson, husband of Gunnar's beloved Grynild, Gunnar felt a twinge of guilt. In choosing to stand beside Mord, he had betrayed his own father, already a Christian convert. For the thousandth time he asked himself why loyalties and oaths couldn't be simpler. Why must one dishonor himself to retain honor? Had he done the right thing in choosing the oath he had sworn over the oath his blood held him to?

The gods only knew.

The Christians came into view. They approached in full battle regalia, a testament to the true pacifistic nature of their god. Still, Gunnar said a quiet thanks to Odin that he wouldn't be forced to slaughter unarmed and unarmored men. That would be the height of dishonor.

"You are unusually pensive, Gunnar," Mord said, moving to his liegeman's side.

"Yes, I suppose I am."

"You doubt whether you made the right choice in supporting me over your father. Fear not; when we make our stand against the new religion, history will remember us all with honor. You have not tainted yourself in choosing between your loyalties."

"Would you still say that had I chosen my father's side?"

"I would. Your father, convert that he is, is an honorable man, and I think you'll have no fear of wounds from those loyal to him. Think of the faces of the people you defend."

Gunnar squared his jaw with renewed resolve. "Indeed. Odin is with us this day. And now, we ride!"

* * *

The sword in his gut was like iced fire. Gunnar dropped to his knees, but continued the fight. He smote three more men before the strength in his sword arm left him, and he watched his heavy iron blade plunge into the snow, now colored a deep crimson in mockery of Iceland's spoiled purity. As he fell

backwards, Gunnar's head lolled to the right and there in the snow he saw Mord, staring wide-eyed and unmoving. There was no spark left in the great leader's eyes.

Then a voice resounded in Gunnar's ear. In his fading consciousness he realized it was the voice of the man who killed him, whispering a last taunt.

"I am Boniface. Know that he who killed you is also the servant of Jehovah who will fell the Oak of Donar with one blow of my arm. That is the strength of my god."

"Perhaps," Gunnar coughed, "but even your god has an Adversary, and if my gods have abandoned me, it is to him that I turn. By my dying breath I swear that if your Lucifer gives me life again, I will spend the rest of eternity destroying your faith."

He spit in the face of Boniface, who let out a primal scream of rage and drove his sword seven times into Gunnar's breast. Gunnar only felt the first impale.

* * *

Blackness. A series of dull, throbbing aches all over his body, like quickly fading bruises.

Coughing, he was coughing. Was it true, then? Had he somehow survived Boniface's assault?

Was there something to the Christian's belief in a demonic adversary after all?

Gunnar sat bolt upright, coughing, trying to stop his head from spinning. That was when he felt it: a queasy sort of vertigo. A pounding headache that seemed to pulse somewhere in the back of his brain. And a sense of power unlike anything he'd ever known.

As his vision cleared, Gunnar saw a man sitting on a log not far off, watching him. The man wasn't Christian, that much was certain. His face was covered in a strange, jagged sort of war paint, and his hair was long and wild. He wore a suit of iron banded mail and his hands rested on the pommel of a heavy bastard sword. The man could've been a Visigoth or one of the violent Celts from Eire. The two stared one another down for a few moments before the stranger stood and walked over, offering his hand to help Gunnar up.

"You're him," Gunnar said, exasperated. "I realize it, now."

"Him who?" The stranger seemed confused, and yet there was a glint of amusement on his face. His eyes were those of a hardened warrior. Nay, they were the eyes of a killer.

"The one the Christians call Satan. The one I offered my soul to, if only I be granted a chance to avenge my fellows on their dark ways."

The stranger quirked an eyebrow. "Satan? I suppose I've been called worse."

"You speak in strange ways, my lord."

"Lord, is it? Yes, this could work out well. I am he who gave you a new life, and I am he who will teach you how to keep it. You will listen, or I will take the life I've given you, and I will consume your soul. But listen well, and I will give you the power to consume the souls of others. Would you like that?"

“I swear at this moment to serve you unto the rest of my days.”

At that moment, another figure stepped from the forest and approached, this one dressed in white from head to toe, with his face half-painted blue. Gunnar took a step back, concerned.

“You needn’t fear him,” Satan said. “This is my companion, Mephistopholes. He is Death incarnate.”

Mephistopholes turned to Satan. It looked to Gunnar as though he was exasperated. “Tell me we didn’t leave Silas and Caspian to an angry mob for this. Tell me you didn’t let him believe—!”

Satan held up a hand to silence Death, then turned back to Gunnar. “You understand that mortals cannot hear you calling us by our true names. From this point forward you are to address us as Kronos and Methos.”

“Yes, my lord.”

“Good, now go and get cleaned up. We have much to teach you.”

* * *

Paris—Joe’s Bar—2004 AD

Joe Dawson was irritated. Another one of MacLeod’s crusades had cropped up; this time it was an Immortal he’d faced decades ago who was now burning churches throughout Paris. MacLeod always expected Joe to be more than he really was. The Watchers were only human, and yes, sometimes older Immortals fell beneath their radar. But *noooo*. That wasn’t good enough for MacLeod.

“Look, Dawson. I don’t want excuses. I want to know where he is!”

“I told you, Mac. The last I heard he’d torched a small church in the Parisian countryside.” Joe threw back a shot of good old-fashioned *American* whiskey and fingered the rim of the glass before continuing. “Bastard killed a dozen people trapped in that building.”

“How the hell does something like this get missed by the Watchers? You’re the most inefficient secret society I’ve ever encountered, Joe!”

“I’ve gone over all this with you before, Mac. This is not an exact science. Sometimes older Immortals fall under the radar. Hell, sometimes newer ones do! There’s only so many Watchers out there, and we’re only human. We’re not gods.”

“No,” came a voice from the door, “But this guy thinks he serves one.”

Joe and Mac turned to see Methos in the doorway, looking sheepish, his hands buried in the pockets of his half-length gray trench coat. He looked at MacLeod through a mop of brown hair, knowing what was coming.

“What do you know, Methos?”

Could you have asked me a more loaded question? Methos thought. Then he cast his eyes upward, took a deep breath, and entered the bar. “Let me have a beer, Joe.”

Joe popped a Molson on the counter. He and Mac stared intently at Methos while the ancient Immortal took a swallow. Then Methos met Mac’s gaze and said, “His name is Gunnar. I don’t know what his original last name was. He left that behind around 1,000 AD. And he thinks he serves the Devil.”

“You’ve encountered him before? And let him live?”

“Let him? MacLeod, I helped *make* him.”

“I don’t think I want to hear the rest of this.”

“Tough. You have to. Seems no matter how far I run, no matter how many of them I kill, I can’t get away from Kronos’ shadow.”

“Yeah, well that makes two of us.” MacLeod threw back a Glenmorangie. “So what’s the story?”

“We found him on a battlefield in Iceland. We’d left Silas and Caspian to the mercies of an angry mob in Hungary and came west looking for new...conquests. The Christian conquering of Europe was just about complete by that time, with Iceland the last real holdout of the ancient ways. It was in that year that they finally converted.”

“I know the history, Methos.”

“Well what you don’t know is that an immortal who hadn’t yet discovered his destiny took part in a battle along the shores of the river Rang.”

“Gunnar.”

“Gunnar. Wasn’t a big fight; a footnote in history at best. But a contingent of men who served the old gods attacked a Christian missionary unit. And lost. With his dying breath, Gunnar swore that if his own gods had abandoned him, he would pledge allegiance to the enemy of Christianity to grant him the power to take revenge.”

“And you and Kronos found him.”

“Well if you can’t get Lucifer, Kronos was the next best thing. He considered just killing the kid, but the whole idea of playing a god—literally playing a god—was too much for him to resist. So he took Gunnar under his wing.”

“And you did nothing about this.”

“I’m not going to continue to justify myself to you. It happened. Accept it or don’t.”

“Fine. So what about now, Methos?”

“He’s dangerous, MacLeod. He has no respect for Holy Ground and he will attack and kill you in a church, a cemetery, a Buddhist temple. It’s all meaningless to him. He thinks he’s an infernal warrior

fighting an eternal battle between the forces of Heaven and Hell, that he was raised as some kind of Nephilim to serve the forces of darkness in exchange for his eternal soul.”

“A modern day Faust. How good is he?”

“He’s killed a lot of our kind, MacLeod.”

“So have I. Where can I find him?”

“There’s a place out in the countryside. It was a sort of retreat for him. Somewhere he could go and get his head together. But you need to be prepared, Mac. He’s not the monster you’re expecting. He’s an honorable man living by the code of his people.”

“An honorable man, who kills hundreds of people out of some misguided quest for vengeance?”

“Imposed on him by Kronos.”

“Who ignores the rules of the game? Where’s the honor in killing on Holy Ground?”

“It’s not holy to him, Mac. It’s tainted.” Methos sighed. “I’d hoped that Connor being part of you would impart a bit of pragmatism. I guess that was too much to hope for.”

Duncan spun on Methos, sword in hand. “If you *ever* bring that up again...one of us dies.”

Methos put his hands up in surrender, looked down at the sword. “Take my head, and you won’t have anyone to show you where Gunnar is. Look, all I’m saying is once you meet him you might not have such an easy time passing judgment.”

“I’ll decide that for myself. Let’s go.”

The two left the bar, together. Joe took another drink and muttered, “Now there go two of the most complicated and twisted men walking this Earth. Well, guess it’s time to go ‘watch.’”

* * *

The cabin was small, a one-room log construction, befitting Gunnar’s heritage. He was a bit anachronistic, and he knew it. His anachronism, though, wasn’t from a lack of ability to cope with change; rather it was from his unwillingness to succumb to the soft niceties of so-called “modern” society. Cushions and moving-picture-boxes weren’t for men like him, or his adversaries. He felt that by staying true to the Old Ways he had an advantage over those who allowed the times to soften them.

So like many nights before, he sat staring into the blazing hearth, questioning the actions of his long life. Kronos—Lucifer—had given him immortality, taught him about the others who it was his place to battle. They were Nephilim, half-angels all, blessed and cursed to walk the Earth until only one remained. On that day, and only on that day, would the war between Heaven and Hell be satisfied.

Gunnar cared nothing for Heaven or the Christian Hell, though he had sworn fealty to the lord of the latter. So far as he was concerned, the fall of Christianity meant the return of the Old Gods. This battle was his own personal Ragnarok, and if the Old Gods had fallen with the rise of Christianity, so be it.

That must mean, then, that he was a son of Thor, for only the sons of Thor were to survive the End of Days. And Christians had turned this world into some sort of nightmarish penance for all beings.

Still, the more Gunnar kept his oath, the more anguish he felt over his deeds. Those people in the churches he burned to the ground, they weren't warriors or adversaries. They were to all intents and purposes, innocents. Where, he asked himself for the millionth time, was the honor in the slaughter of dozens upon dozens of innocents? The answer was simple, and yet painfully confusing: there was no honor in it, and yet would not denying his oath be just as bad?

Honor. Loyalty. Divided conflicts. Perhaps the Christians were right, after all. They didn't have these questions to deal with, did they? So long as they proclaimed allegiance to their elusive and untouchable "one God," they earned their eternal reward. Ah, for that kind of simplicity.

Then he felt it: the vertigo, the headache, the pounding of white noise in his brain that Kronos had taught him was the means by which he could sense another of his kind. That was good; at least in battle he didn't have to doubt himself. At least then he could rely on trial by combat to prove his worth.

The door swung open and Gunnar stood, axe in hand, to face a tall, wiry man with stiff black hair, a cream-colored turtleneck sweater, a long sand-gray trench coat, and gray trousers. He held in front of him an ornate Japanese sword, which he wielded with the ease of a grand master. This, then, could be Gunnar's final stand.

"I am Duncan MacLeod of the Clan MacLeod," the stranger said.

"And I am Gunnar Thorsson. You do me honor with your name."

"You don't know anything about honor, Gunnar. You're a murderer."

That was the button to push. Something snapped inside Gunnar and he charged, bellowing, "How *dare* you impugn my honor?" His axe locked with MacLeod's sword and he pulled his opponent in close. "Is it that easy for *you* to solve your conflicts of loyalty? Have *you* never made a choice you later wrestled with?"

MacLeod leveled a hard right cross to Gunnar's jaw, sending the huge Norseman reeling. There was fire in the highlander's eyes. "Every day, Gunnar. But I don't mass murder innocents."

"Haven't you?" The two opponents circled each other like wolves waiting to pounce. "How old are you, highlander?"

"I was born in 1592. What difference does that make?"

"Over four hundred years, and you have never spilled blood out of vengeance, or to keep an unsavory oath you made? Never once?"

The highlander flinched at the question, and Gunnar knew his words had found their mark. Now the only question that remained was: where was the other one? Gunnar knew that the highlander wasn't the only other Nephilim here, so why hadn't the other one made his presence known?

For now it didn't matter. The highlander hadn't pressed his attack, and Gunnar suddenly felt no desire to continue this conflict. The weight of centuries came down upon him and he felt tired of it all. Perhaps he'd had his vengeance, and the time had come to give it up and move on. Perhaps his one-man war had become his downfall. At once the question hit him: *am I Beowulf or Amleth?*

The highlander had lowered his blade and just looked at him, intently. "You know what you're doing is wrong," he said at last.

Gunnar gave a slight nod, never taking his gaze from his opponent's eyes. "But what am I to do? I can't break my oath. It's all I have left."

"Then you've nothing," came a third voice, and Gunnar looked past the highlander to the door, where stood a ghost out of his past. He staggered backwards two steps, and leaned against the hearth.

"Methos!"

Methos smiled, sadly. "Yes, it's me. I've a story to tell you, Gunnar. A tale of a blind man, duped not by the Christian devil, but by Loki."

He tossed something to Gunnar, who caught the prickly object and opened his hand to look upon a single sprig of mistletoe.

"You're saying that somehow, I've been blind," Gunnar responded.

"You or I. Which one doesn't really matter, now. What does matter is that you have to pay for the lives you've taken. Duncan, if you don't mind, I'd like a word with my pupil."

The highlander looked at Methos, obviously wrestling with some personal demon of his own, then abruptly turned and left.

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The Quickening flashed and crackled. Trees exploded and the air pulsed with the tingle of energy. Fires erupted all over. No matter; the Quickening had a way of putting out the fires it ignited, as if it somehow protected the land of which it was a part.

Duncan stood outside the small cabin, waiting for it to be over. The tiny, insistent voice of Connor MacLeod preached at the back of his brain like it always did these days. Something about "there can be only one," and "time to stop playing the boy scout all the time."

"Rough one, eh, Mac?" Said Joe, stepping from the forest to join Duncan.

"I don't know how many more of these I can take, Joe."

"So Methos was right about him."

"Isn't he always? That guy wasn't evil. He was confused, and lost. And Kronos and Methos did it to him."

“A mistake it looks like Methos just rectified.”

“It’s still a shame, Joe. Such a waste of potential. It’s such a loss.”

“Yeah, it is, Mac. But it’s a loss whenever any of you die. And that’s what the Watchers are for.”

Methos walked out of the cabin a moment later, bruised but not much worse for wear. He came to stand beside his friend and a moment of silence passed between the two of them.

“You were right, Methos,” Duncan said at last. “He wasn’t a monster by nature. He was just confused.”

“Some monsters are made, not born, MacLeod. It had to be done; you knew that when we came here.”

“I knew. That’s why it’s sometimes good to have a friend who isn’t a hero.”

Methos made a face like he’d just swallowed battery acid, and shook his head. “Hero. Couldn’t do it. All that morality and honor. I’ve got you if I need a conscience.”

“Sometimes I wonder if that’s enough.”

“For you it is. You might be interested to know; his last words were ‘I hear the angels call my name.’”

“Redemption?”

“Or desperation. Hold on to whatever you need to, Mac. Come on; let’s go finish that drink.”

—FINIS—

Thanks to Lady Moira for the lyrics! I think I need to give this band a listen...

Winter Born- by Cruxshadows

This Sacrifice- Dry your eyes - and quietly bare this pain with pride
for heaven shall remember the silent and the brave
and promise me, they will never see the fear within our eyes
(my eyes are closed)
we will give strength to those who still remain

So bury fear for fate draws near
and hide the signs of pain
with noble acts, the bravest souls
endure the heart's remains

discard regret, that in this debt
a better world is made
that children of a newer day
might remember, and avoid our fate.

I waited all day in the pouring rain

but nobody came
no nobody came

(prepare for battle)

*And in the fury of this darkest hour
we will be your light
you've asked me for my sacrifice
and I am Winter born
without denying, a faith is come
that I have never known
I hear the angels call my name
and I am Winter born*

hold your head up high- for there is no greater love
think of the faces of the people you defend-
and promise me, they will never see the tears within our eyes
although we are men with mortal sins, angels never cry

So bury fear for fate draws near
and hide the signs of pain
with noble acts, the bravest souls
endure the heart's remains

discard regret, that in this debt
a better world is made
that children of a newer day
might remember, and avoid our fate.

(prepare for battle)

And in the fury of this darkest hour
we will be your light
you've asked me for my sacrifice
and I am Winter born
without denying, a faith in God
that I have never known
I hear the angels call my name
and I am Winter born

And in the fury of this darkest hour
I will be your light
a lifetime for this destiny
For I am winter born
And in this moment...
I will not run, it is my place to stand
we few shall carry hope
within our bloodied hands

and in our Dying
We're more alive- than we have ever been
I've lived for these few seconds
for I am Winter born

And in the fury of this darkest hour
we will be the light
you've asked me for my sacrifice
and I am Winter born
without denying, a faith in man
that I have never known
I hear the angels call my name
and I am Winter born

within this moment
I am for you, though better men have failed
I will give my life for love
for I am Winter born

and in my Dying
I'm more alive- than I have ever been
I will make this sacrifice
for I am Winter born

And in my dying
I'm more alive, than I have ever been
I will make this sacrifice
for I am winter born