

Hello there! I'm Dyrk Ashton, author of *Paternus*. Thank you for downloading this exclusive short story. If you haven't read the book, here's a bit about it:

*Paternus* is a tale of today, but it also continues some of the oldest stories known to humankind. The gods and monsters, angels and devils of myth and legend--they exist. The epic struggles between titans, giants and gods, heaven and hell, the forces of light and darkness--they happened. And the war isn't over. In a story that takes place in a single day, two ordinary humans, Fi and Zeke, are caught up in the final battle of a war that's been waged since the dawn of time.

**And here's what some authors and bloggers have had to say:**

"Wow! Great ideas vividly realised. Ashton's story is a crucible in which myths are melted and remade to thrilling effect." -M. R. Carey

"Smartly written and laden with emotion. Engaging. Compelling. Evocative. I urge you to read it." -Peter Tr, *Booknest.eu*

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"Terrifying characters and true heroes, sacrifice, defeat and victory. And the pace never lets up." -G. R. Matthews

"An adventure packed riot of action, fast paced and definitely furious."  
*Lynn's Books*

"Utterly unpredictable. Fascinating and stylish. How the author is going to top it (if he needs to) is beyond me." -*Fantasy-Faction*

"A great big mythological smoothie of awesome!" *Kristen Reads Too Much*

"Let us not forget to mention Ashton's stellar sense of humor, use of dialogue, and handle on suspense. I was freaking out from page one."  
Sara Dobie Bauer

"A wild romp through every religion, myth and culture, uniting them all in some sort of late night Urban Fantasy pan-dimension smackdown.  
*Paternus brings it on.*" -*Pornokitsch*

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This short story does not come directly from *Paternus*, but is framed as a “missing chapter.” It tells the tale of the one and only time a character in the book met his father.

## BERSERKER



Bödvar Bjarki, The Bear, sits hunched in an earthen hole too small to be called a cave. His bulky ten foot frame barely fits. Massive knees press to his furry barrel chest, and the oversized rucksack with his companion inside jams against his back. At least she’s no longer singing. That’s one thing he can be grateful for. He begrudgingly left his gigantic sword, Kladenets, and rock-crushing hammer at the entrance, covered in sticks and leaves.

Bödvar could sleep away the day, but he fears the chance of slumbering through the night as well. Only in darkness can he resume his task of bashing open the Madman’s stone prison and putting an end to the little bastard’s life. He has no choice but pass the daylight hours, here in the Mendip Hills of England, engaging in two activities he despises most. Thinking, and remembering.

Pinholes of sunlight twinkle through branches he’s piled at the opening of his makeshift den. They soften as his vision shifts with thoughts that turn, as they often do, to bittersweet memories of the one time in his very long life he ever met his father.

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It was a grim morning, Bödvar remembers well, bleak and gray, that timeless pause of windless chill between night and day. A rarified mist hung in the air, clung to the lifeless grass of the rough terrain as frost.

Across the plain stood a force of Proto-Germanic warriors (maybe the Suebi, Bödvar never paid much attention). There were nearly 3,500 of them, big burly men, dark haired, bearded, draped in matted furs, wielding double-bladed axes, spiked clubs, heavy spears and swords. Two hundred or more sat upon tall black battle-scarred horses.

On this side of the plain, the Scythians numbered just 1,000, but every one of them were mounted on equines of a breed later known as the Mongol Horse, small but swift and sure-footed beasts with long flowing manes and tails. The Scyth were also superb archers, capable of shooting with deadly accuracy from horseback at a full run. Each had a squat but sturdy double-curved bow and bristling quivers of arrows with lethal tre-foil tips. Their blond hair in tight ponytails, beards scraped from their faces, they were a ferocious bunch, for humans. And they had The Bear. If the enemy had known a genuine berserker was among the Scyth, they might not have taken the field. And what fun would it be if they just gave up? Bödvar might have felt sorry for the Suebs (if that's what they really were), if he ever felt such a thing.

As the Scyth charged, bellowing their hails to death, Bödvar hunkered low at the back, advancing on foot, sporting his human cloak. None of the horses could carry him, but he needed no mount. He could easily run fast as those little things, faster over short distances.

As the opposing armies were about to collide, the Scythians split to skirt the lines and fire their bows, while also opening a gap for Bödvar to charge through. He dropped his human cloak with an ear-splitting roar, revealing himself in Truefaced glory, and hit the front line a fur-clad tempest of sword, tooth, and claw. Great chunks of man and horse flew in all directions. In spite of the Germanics initial shock, however, they kept fighting. To their credit. And to Bödvar's delight.

These men, on both sides of the battle, were tough as they came, with hearty constitutions and wills of iron. In those days, any weakness was weeded out by almighty death at a young age. And those who lived spent their entire lives under conditions that would kill most modern humans in a week. Those with hideous scars from blade and fire, missing ears, fingers and toes, were the lucky ones, or the strongest. They had healed. Most did not. A toothache, bleeding gums, an infected scratch from a thorn, often meant death. There were men afflicted with those and other ailments among them that day. Better to die with an axe through your face than linger with fever from

gangrene or sepsis. Allergies? Special conditions? Particular dietary needs? There were none. Nature has no mercy. Only man. And Father. Some of the time.

The smell of battle has always come back to Bödvar's mind with greatest force. Not the torpid, fetid odor of death, but the vital scent of dying. Bödvar loves it. The smell of real battle between real men who eat only what they kill or steal, sleep on cold hard ground every night, wipe their asses with leaves, grass, stones, or bare hands. The same hands they eat with, and fight with.

It was crashing, screaming, groaning, snapping, stomping, splashing, cracking, thumping, clanging heaven in Bödvar's ears. Steam billowed from spittle-flecked mouths, rose from drenching sweat, flowed from streaming blood. Everywhere blood. Tinging the air itself, soaking the earth to crimson mud. All the raw consequences of men cleaving each other like so much meat. Honorable? Maybe. Noble? Possibly. The most natural thing after eating, sleeping and fucking? Always, and forever.

The lives of the humans are so very fragile, their passions peaked by short, hard lives, their sense of pain and terror heightened by the headlong dash toward death. Firstborn like Bödvar don't feel physical pain like they do. They heal from all but the most grievous wounds inflicted by horn, fang or claw of other Firstborn, or an Astra weapon. And being direct offspring of Father himself, they live, and live, and keep on living, impossibly long lives. With the little humans dying around him, many at his own hands, Bödvar remembers craving with all his heart that he might experience that vibrant thrill of life, that sheer horror, excruciating agony, that genuine sense of impending doom.

Then, in that very battle, his wish was nearly granted.

A Scyth leader cried out, pointing off to the east. On the horizon, riding out of the pallid blotch of a weak watery sun, Bödvar saw a figure bedecked in a gleaming copper breastplate, racing toward them on an enormous pale-gray stallion. The beating of Bödvar's heart nearly ceased.

It was his father, he knew immediately, and the steed he rode the fiercest "horse" in all the worlds, the dreaded Sleipnir.

Bödvar had never spoken to his father, or even seen him up close, only from across vast battlefields. All he knew of him came from other Firstborn, mostly fellow Asura, those who'd opposed him in the Magnificent Holocausts, as Bödvar had. Needless to say, little that Bödvar had heard about Father was good.

Father and Sleipnir raced toward them, their eyes crimson as fresh blood, Father howling a war cry like thunder, Sleipnir shrieking like lightning. The horses of both armies went mad.

Within moments they'd all thrown their riders and were stampeding off, trampling anyone who stood in their way. Then Sleipnir and his father were upon them, leaving burst and broken humans in their wake. Sleipnir leapt, extending his bat-like wings, and sailed over the heads of the stunned humans. Father vaulted from his mount in midair and crashed into a mass of warriors to the clamor of clattering weapons, grunting men, thudding bodies and cracking bones.

Sleipnir peaked and dove to strike the ground like a comet, smashing men beneath him. He lashed out with his hooves, bucked, bit, whirled and reared until no man stood within fifty feet of him in all directions.

Alone in the gruesome circle he'd made, Sleipnir stepped to a muddy pool of blood. With his front "hoof" he picked out a severed arm and tossed it aside. Each of his four hooves were split into five short "fingers," which he could splay for gripping and for surer footing on slippery terrain, though he pressed them together into a single hoof for running at high speed. Sleipnir drank deeply from the blood-puddle, the ends of his flowing bleached-white mane dragging into the thick liquid.

Sleipnir was well over eight feet tall, 24 hands, at the withers. His wings, pressed tightly to his sides, looked like natural armor, bony-ribbed, leathery, and gray. They attached to his shoulders and were powered by heavy muscle over his ribcage, a second set of chest pectorals. He also had a second tail. Boned and webbed like his wings, it was split in two halves, which he kept pressed and folded to his haunches when not in flight. It sprang back and opened when he flew, coming together over the horsetail. He used it to guide him in flight, like a bat uses its back legs, vestigial limbs, less developed than true limbs, but just as practical.

Once he'd sated his thirst, Sleipnir lifted his head, snorted a cloud of red mist, and surveyed the men with eyes that had faded from red to pink. He ran his tongue over his square horse-teeth. And fangs.

Sleipnir was no horse at all, Bödvar was well aware, not even Firstborn of a horse as Bödvar was Firstborn of a bear. Sleipnir was the result of an unlikely union between Loki, the Asura Master's favorite son, long deceased, and an enormous mare of Asgard. Hence the bizarre configuration of anatomy.

Bödvar himself did not fear Sleipnir. He was far older, and Sleipnir was only Thirdborn. But the men did, and should. No one came near. None ventured to loose an arrow or heave a spear.

Bödvar's father was keeping them busy enough, attacking both forces with equal savagery. He carried no weapon, but his bare hands sent men flying high into the air to fall and crumple their comrades or be impaled on their own men's spears. He swung them about by beards and hair, crushed ribs and skulls with his feet, split shields with his fists, bit spear shafts in two, opened gaping wounds with his teeth. Blades hacked through his breastplate and backplate only to glance off his body beneath. Swords blunted and chipped on his skin, spearheads snapped on his back, axes shattered and the spikes of maces broke upon his head.

Bödvar knew what these men had not yet determined. Not even the talon, fang or horn of the most ancient Firstborn nor the highest class of Astra weapon could harm Father. Nothing could.

Father tore through the host a living cyclone, an athlete, an artiste, on his face a mixed expression of fury, glee, and madness. Spinning, leaping, slaying. The maestro of mayhem, the ultimate dealer of death. Bödvar had only heard stories and on occasion seen the results of his father's strength and skill. He'd never been close enough to witness his prowess in person. It was breathtaking.

In those days, Father had already ceased nearly all active contact with humans. He occasionally travelled among them, but incognito, often as a ragged itinerant. This generation of Germanic Suebi and Scyth had never seen Father in the flesh. But they knew of him. They should. They all prayed to him, made sacrifices in his name, fought in his honor. Still, they hadn't made the connection between this preternatural warrior in their midst and the tales of their elders, the names on their altars, the forms of their effigies.

Then it began to dawn on some of the wiser warriors. Rumbblings of names spread through the ranks. Bödvar's father was wielding a battle-axe in one hand and sword in the other when cries rang out from the leaders on both sides. Scyth and Suebi alike dropped their weapons and flung themselves face down in the blood-soaked dirt.

They now had an idea who'd come to punish them for their weakness and sins.

Father had countless names, from all corners of the earth, but in this part of the world, some of the ancient Slavs called him Rod, others Perun, the god who'd defeated the dragon Veles and restored order to the world--which was, in fact, exactly what had happened in the First Holocaust, tens of thousands of years ago, when Father threw down the first Asura Master and ended his life. The Proto-Hungarians worshipped him as Arany Atyácska, the Golden Father. To others still he was Svibor, alternatively Svantevit, Suvid,

Beli, and Byali. Certain religions represented Svibor with four heads, each symbolizing a different aspect of what they understood of his schizophrenic nature--light, knowledge, fertility, and war.

White-whiskered Scythian priests bandied two other names, from pre-Zoroastrian beliefs, debating whether this could be Ahura Mazda, Lord of Light and Wisdom, or Angra Mainyu, the embodiment of evil. Bödvar could have told them. Father was both.

Most of the men, however, Scyth and Seub alike, knew him by another name.

Odin, the All-father.

Whatever they called him, Bödvar's father did not care. He stood ankle deep in the cold red muck, his face, ruined armor and tunic smeared with gore, wild eyes scanning the prostrate horde. Then they fell upon The Bear, and narrowed to an angry glare.

Bödvar's knees went weak. His Mighty sword Kladenets slipped from his fingers to clang on the rocks. He dropped to his knees, placed one enormous paw-hand on the ground, the other to his chest, and bowed his massive head.

Bödvar's father strode toward him, casting sword and axe aside and tearing off his breastplate as he came.

The Bear heard the approaching footsteps, awaited the stroke that would end his miserable life. Bödvar may have been ancient by human standards, but not all that old as Firstborn go. It might take Father some work to kill an Elder Firstborn. Bödvar he could slay in an instant. The men's bodies were like rotten tomatoes to Father's hands. Bödvar's might put up the resistance of, say, a watermelon.

Father halted before The Bear. The familiar odors of dying came with him. But somewhere beneath the stench, Bödvar noticed the scent of something else. The smell of himself. The scent of The Bear.

Bödvar dared raise his eyes to gaze upon his father's face. He looked like a man, had for some time, from what Bödvar understood. He appeared to be between 40 and 45 years of age. Six feet tall, medium build, his body hairless, muscular, but not overly bulging. His skin was neither light nor dark. His hair, shoulder length and simply brown. Strong features beneath a shaggy beard. Handsome, Bödvar supposed. But to all appearances, just a man. Except for his eyes.

When wrath or the heat of battle took him, they smoldered red like the sun rising before a storm. This trait he passed to his Firstborn children, and



they to theirs, though it diminished with each generation. Some humans still speak of “seeing red” when in a rage.

As his father stood before him, Bödvar saw his eyes, truly, for the first time. The red faded to be replaced by a vivid emerald green--and deep within them shown a cosmic spark, mysterious, mesmerizing, beautiful, and terrible. Primal, ageless, and unforgiving, like the world itself.

Bödvar’s throat quaked, “Father.”

At that time, The Bear was not yet known as Bödvar Bjarki. His father spoke his Truename, the one he’d given him at birth. “Matunos.” But there was no kindness in his voice.

This was the end, Bödvar was certain. For all the terrible things he’d done. For opposing Father in the Great Wars, murdering thousands, humans and his own Firstborn brothers and sisters alike. Finally, he would get what he deserved.

Bödvar did not dare hope it would be swift. He knew he didn’t warrant even that mercy. As least, for a brief time, he would know real pain and terror, feel what it was to be truly alive, and dying.

But before Bödvar knew what was happening, Father had thrown his arms around The Bear’s thick neck and pulled his face to his chest. “My son,” he sobbed, “my poor, poor son.”

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Weapons had been retrieved from the field, supply wagons and women of the clans brought up from both sides. The surviving Scythians and Suebs, now brothers-in-arms, marched without a word, Bödvar and his father side by side in the lead. Behind them black smoke billowed from bodies of the dead that had been piled, doused with oil and set ablaze. Sleipnir sauntered along nearby, side-eyed warily by the men.

Ever since Father had stopped sobbing and hugging Bödvar, he hadn’t stopped talking. He jabbered on that he’d *wanted* to stay with Bödvar’s mother and help raise him and his sister but she fought him and tried to drive him away and wouldn’t stop and he didn’t want to hurt her so he *had* to go for fear she would injure herself and the newborn cubs. After that he’d become busy with many things, yes other families too, but he’d always planned to come back and steal the cubs away and he *had* come back and searched but he couldn’t find them. Decades, centuries, millennia flew by, as they do, and before he knew it the cubs were grown and made their own ways and Bödvar had become such a bad boy and the next thing he knew the First Holocaust was upon them and then the Second. He apologized again and again for not

being there to nurture him, teach him, guide him, and he could only blame himself for The Bear's having sided with the Asura during those wars.

The whole one-sided conversation made Bödvar very uneasy. He knew of his father's bouts of patermania from stories, and the extremes of mood, from savage glee to carnal obsession and brutal aggression that came with them. It was obvious he was afflicted with the mania then. All wise Firstborn avoided him when he was so enthralled. Bödvar was well aware he'd better tread carefully. He never had patience for speeches or lengthy dialogue, but if Father wanted to talk, he'd listen, and graciously.

Bödvar and the troop of Scythians had been ranging along the Viadua, Viadrus, or Oder River, whatever it was called at the time, far north of their usual stomping grounds in the Ponto-Caspian steppes, when they'd come across the tribe of Suebi. As father rambled on, they followed the river to where it flowed through what's now called the Szczecin Lagoon, then split into three distributaries, the Peene, Świna and Dziwna, which emptied into the Gulf of Pomerania of the Baltic Sea. The Baltic was known as Gandvik for many an age, then later Mare Suebicum and Mare Sarmaticum by the Romans, but most of the Proto-Germanic and Scatinavian folk of the region knew it at that time, in their various and sundry languages, as simply the Eastern Sea. On the edge of the lagoon was a town--one that was not Suebi--so together they all sacked the place, and it was there they decided to stay. Sleipnir remained only a short time before going his own way, to the relief of all but Father, who wept at his departure.

Father remained with them for nearly 30 years, his madness raging all the while. Bödvar and he hosted gluttonous feasts and drank incessantly. They danced and sang songs in Proto-Norse, old Common Germanic, various ancient Slavic tongues, and an early Scytho-Sarmatian dialect of Indo-Iranian, all ballads now long forgotten. They regularly partook of the hallucinogenic substances for which the Scyth were famous, and engaged in grand orgies.

But those were the least of their sins, for the depravity of Father when afflicted with the patermania knew no bounds. Occasionally, of an evening, when they'd tired of inflicting the more strenuous acts of terror and pain, he and Bödvar would sit upon pillows, quaffing a mixture of mead and blood from gilded skulls, while tossing squealing infants into pits filled with wolves, just to relax.

It was nothing out of the ordinary for The Bear to take part in such activities, he reveled in them, but Father was only capable of such things when taken by the dark psychosis of the mania--especially when drinking--which he was doing all the time. Father did not become intoxicated like humans if he

didn't want to, but he wanted to very much at the time, and it affected him badly when the mania was upon him.

The humans worshipped Father by hanging animals and men from tree limbs and bleeding them in sacrifice, and performed foul rituals on elaborate gruesome altars in His name. And Father exulted.

Of course all these fiendish proclivities required a steady stream of fresh supplies. To gather them, Father led the combined Scythian/Suebi forces on sorties to harass their neighbors for hundreds of miles around. For years they struck fear into the otherwise formidable tribes the Romans would later know as the Ruggii, Gothones, Naharvali, Marcomanni, Langobandi and Saxones.

Looking back, that wonderful-terrible time with his father may have been the happiest in Bödvar's otherwise miserable life. Though it ended badly.

It began one night after they returned from a raid to the great feasting hall on the bank of the lagoon. His father was drinking more than usual, of the strongest liquor they possessed, and he became particularly morose.

Bödvar was afraid to ask, but did anyway. "What is it, Father?"

"I'm sorry about your sister," he said. "So very sorry."

"But Father..." Bödvar had no idea what he was going to say. That he just stood there and watched his sister die? That he did nothing to save her life? To his relief, Father did not ask.

"It is behind us," his father said, and clapped him on the back. "We're family." He lifted his skull-tankard and gazed into it. "We're all family."

Next morning Father's patermania had begun to wane, and with its passing came the dawning realization, terrible remorse and sheer horror at what he had done. What he had done, *again*.

He came reeling into the great feasting hall, squeezing his head between his hands as if he had a terrible hangover, knocking over chairs and racks of drying hides. There was no physical pain, Bödvar knew. His father felt none of that. This was worse--excruciating mental anguish. And with it came wrath.

Bödvar's Father beat him within an inch of his life, tore the hall down, and set it ablaze. When his rage was finally spent, he staggered off into the wastes.

As far as Bödvar knows, that was the last time Father appeared to the humans as a "god," that he ever let himself be known as anything but human while in their midst. Bödvar never saw him again.

He did not blame his father. He should have known it would happen. He did know. But he also knew his father would never have come to him, spent time with The Bear at all, unless stricken with the patermania. Bödvar had no regrets, and still doesn't. Not about that, anyway.

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In his cramped earthen den, Bödvar draws a long breath and exhales slowly. He lifts his eyes to the branches that block the entrance, focuses on gaps between twig and leaf. The sun is almost gone. Night approaches. Soon he can release the horror that is his partner in the rucksack and resume his task of murder, and revenge.

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*Dyrk Ashton* is a Midwestern boy who spent some time in Hollywood. He teaches film, geeks out on movies and books, and writes about regular folks and their trouble with monsters. His debut novel, the contemporary-urban-fantasy-adventure-mythic-fiction novel, *Paternus*, is available in eBook, print and audiobook on [Amazon](#), and audiobook on [Audible](#).

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Thanks! I hope to “see” you soon :)