

Monster

By Patricia Mathews

The Saga:

Listen up!

There was this Haida chief who went and built him a big, fancy hall, the fanciest in all of Haida country, for him and his raiders. They went raiding from this hall for years, and were so rich from their raids, they were the richest clan in all Haida Country.

But they had an Eater after them, who kept coming after them for just about twelve years, and this Eater hated that chief hard enough to be a blood feud.

Why did the Eater hate the chief so much? Nobody knows. You can't ever tell with Eaters, they're just vicious, that's all. It's not like they were human. But anyhow –

For twelve long years this Eater kept sneaking into the Chief's hall at night and killing his men and butchering them right there, on the spot,

and hauling the carcass off to his hideout in the swamps. The hall had a big heavy set of wooden doors on it with iron bars across it and a great big iron lock to lock them with, but still this Eater got in to do his evil work.

How did he get in? Do I think he picked the lock? Well, I never heard of one that could pick a lock, but you never know with Eaters. They're not intelligent the way people are. They're pretty near as makes no difference mindless. But some of them can be real clever and real sneaky. Ask anyone who's fought them. So it could be he picked the lock.

The Chief kept setting guards, night after night, armed with sword and spear and knife, and every time, the guards were found butchered. Pretty soon the raiders started sneaking off into the woods and sleeping in little shacks out there. You'd think they'd be more afraid of the Eater out in the woods than locked up in the hall, wouldn't you? But this Eater, he never bothered anyone that wasn't in the Hall and anyone that wasn't armed. Go figure, huh? Oh, and he never touched the Chief's loot, not once. Just the men. Maybe the Chief had the medicine man put a spell on the loot, you think?

Pretty soon the Chief started getting desperate at losing all his raiders, and one of his top men set off to ask for help, at a clan where he

had kinfolk. He came back with this great big raider and fourteen men answering to him, and the raider said “I’d be glad to help you, Chief. I’ll be one of your men and my men with you, if you let me do it the way I think best.”

“And what is that?” asked the Chief?

“Does this monster ever use a weapon?” asked the Raider?

“That he does not,” answered the Chief.

“Then for my honor’s sake, I will fight him man to man, barehanded, and we’ll see who’s the better man.”

(“That’s the firewater talking”, said one of the Chief’s men snidely. But his friends said “You never had anything to brag about drunk OR sober! So shut up and listen.”)

Night came and the Raider kept watch with his men. The doors creaked open and in came this big hulking Eater, stinking of the swamp. He charged at the men and killed one, but the Raider grabbed him and wrestled with him all night, trading punches and hauling at his arms and trying to get his hands around the Eater’s throat. At last he hauled the Eater’s arm clear off! The Eater ran away howling back to the swamp, dripping blood and limping.

“He won’t live long with that wound,” said the Raider, holding up the arm. It didn’t end in a hand, but a claw, as hard as iron. All the men gasped when they saw that!

“No wonder our swords bounced right off him,” the Chief said. “He has a hide of iron!”

That evening the Chief threw a great big feast for the Raider and his men, and handed out presents to them, and paid good hard gold for the family of the man who was killed by the Eater. And everything was peaceful until ---

----the raids started up again. It wasn’t the same Eater this time. The footprints were smaller and the butchering, neater. Once again the Raider stayed awake. The door creaked open. And what should come in but a scraggle-haired old woman with a face and form like nothing human! He started to fight with her, but she escaped him and ran back to the swamp, lumbering and rolling, with the Raider in pursuit. Faster and faster they ran, until she came to a swamp – and dove in!

The Raider stopped to strip off his armor and dove in after her, following her into a domed lodge underwater like a beaver lodge. There they fought fiercely until he killed her, and cut off her head, and brought it back to the Chief’s hall, without stopping to loot the lodge, for these

wretches had nothing worth stealing. And all was well in Haida Country again..

The Discovery:

Report to the Inter-University College of Archaeologists, CY 456.
The Honorable Anna Liu, PhD, Professor of Archaeology, University of Corvallis and Dr. Matthew Threefeathers, PhD, professor of Haida Studies, Royal University of Portland.

A farmer draining a swamp adjacent to his property uncovered an Early Protectorate breastplate and backplate, and a watertight metal box in the ruins of what appeared to be a beaver lodge. Within the box was what appeared to be a leatherbound diary of some sort. The armor was shown by comparison of the styles to date from the same period as a crude iron prosthetic hand uncovered in the ruins of a Raider-era clan hall; classic Early Protectorate. The hand had apparently hung on the wall as some sort of trophy.

The Noblewoman's Tale:

My name is Lady Adelaide Dubois, wife of a landed knight under Baron Netarts. Sad is the day the Haida burned Dubois around our

heads! I took up armor and fought for our home, and our little son beside me. He was our only son, with only eight years on his head that day. They took me for a slave. The chief and all his men took turns defiling me, who had been the chaste wife of the best and noblest knight in County Tillamook. If not for our son, who needed me in our vile captivity, I would have prayed God to take me, but poor innocent Gherlaine – no longer innocent, for those foul fiends used him in unnatural wise – was left alive, sick and weeping and in dire distress. For he had fought to save me, his little eating knife in one tender hand, and in the battle they did wound it so badly that it festered. It was later, much later, that it was so badly festered I had to take it off with my own knife to save his life, and pray he either healed or died quickly.

But when they led us from the raven-prowed ships, I fought our captors with the desperation of a tigress with a cub. They wounded me sore and left me to die, my son in my arms; thinking, I believe, that a woman who fought was too dangerous to be kept in captivity; and that Gherlaine was not long for this world in any event....[diary illegible]

I hid us in the swamps where we could find fish and water creatures and plants. From my old gauntlet I fashioned a hand for my boy, and taught him to use it. I taught us to live from God's bounty, but greatly feared discovery and knew not how to avoid it until I chanced to see a pair of beavers at their labors. It was then I knew how we could

hide and never, ever be discovered. For I had taken a solemn oath before God and Christ, the Virgin Mary, and Saint Catherine, Protectress of Virgins, that I would be avenged on these foul fiends, and would not rest until they had been wiped from the face of God's earth like the devils they are.

And so I reared my son[God have mercy on his poor, tormented]

.....[.....His ordeal had turned his brain.....]

[.....discovered in what horrid wise he had]

The Report:

This is the last legible portion of the diary of Lady Adelaide Dubois, late of Barony Netarts. Over the past hundred and thirty years, the water had seeped into the metal box and turned the bottom hundred-odd pages into a mass of woodpulp. Perhaps in the pre-Change era more of the text could have been recovered, but it is lost to us. It remains a chilling testimony to the savagery of our kingdoms' societies immediately following the Change... T.H. Anna Liu, PhD, by His

Majesty's Grace Fellow of the Royal Society; Matthew Threefeathers, PhD; by His Majesty's Grace Fellow of the Royal Society.

The Author says:

It started when I wondered why nobody ever said WHY Grendel hated Hrothgar so badly! A great hate implies he was greatly wronged. Then - the iron claw and iron hide - well, of course any barbarians worth their boiled leather britches would know armor when they saw it, but bards like to make a big bad mystery out of things ... we all know the trick of making the mundane sound portentous, don't we? - and when his mom got into the act, a mother-son tag team?

That thing all but wrote itself.