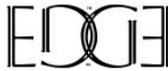


URBAN GREEN MAN

EDITED BY ADRIA LAYCRAFT
& JANICE BLAINE



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CALGARY

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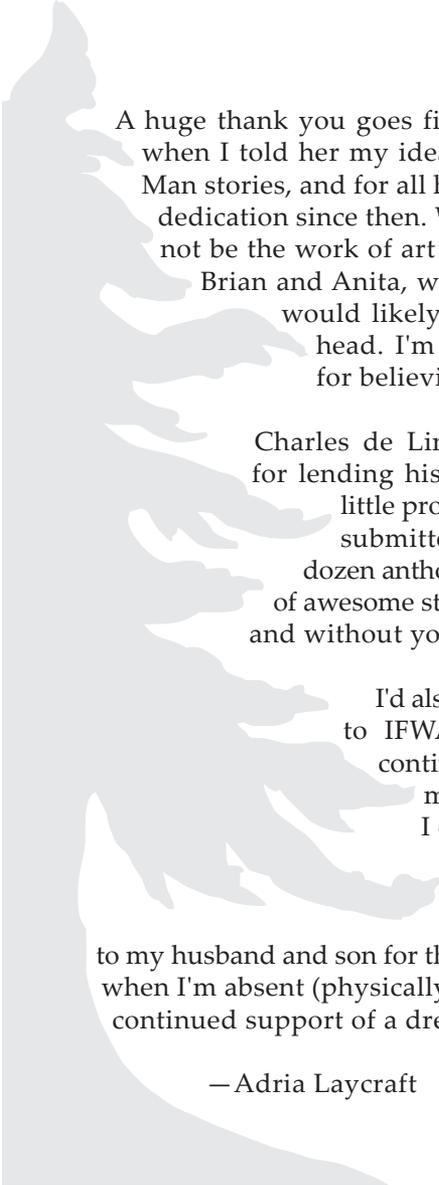


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Charles de Lint deserves much gratitude for lending his talents and support to our little project, as do all the authors that submitted. We could've made half a dozen anthologies with the sheer number of awesome stories and poems we received, and without you I'm nothing.

I'd also like to send my appreciation to IFWA and Odyssey folk. Your continued friendship and support makes me strive to be the best I can be. Thank you for that.

And last but certainly not least, a metric ton of gratitude to my husband and son for their love, their understanding when I'm absent (physically and/or mentally), and their continued support of a dream. Love you guys!

—Adria Laycraft



THE SPIRIT OF THE WILD WOOD

BY CHARLES DE LINT

There was a green man
at the back of
my yard; he
stood hidden and tall

under the spruce trees
and held a
sleeping hare in
the crook of his arm

I watched them till
a cloud passed in
front of the
moon and they were gone



At first glance the title of this anthology appears to be a contradiction in terms, or at least it does if you have any familiarity with the mythology and folk tales surrounding this most venerable figure from British and Celtic folklore whose iconic image appears throughout the world, in art and story, from pub

signs and carved stone grotesques on buildings to reinterpretations such as DC Comics' *Swamp Thing* when the character was redefined as the protector of the Green.

The on-line Encyclopedia Mythica gives this description of the Green Man:

He is "a legendary pagan deity who roams the woodlands of the British Isles and Europe. He usually is depicted as a horned man peering out of a mask of foliage, usually the sacred oak...He represents spirits of trees, plants and foliage. It is believed he has rain making powers to foster livestock with lush meadows. He was frequently depicted in medieval art, including church decorations."

And he has many names. Green Jack. Green George. Jack-in-the-Green. Wildman of the Woods. Lord of the Beasts. The Corn King. In mythology and folklore he appears as Merlin, Robin Hood, Herne the Hunter, the Green Knight, and Cernunnos.

He is forever the spirit of the wild wood, the guardian of the world's green spirit. If, as the folklorist and scholar John Matthews puts it, "we think of the earth as Gaia, the Goddess of Nature, then the Green Man is surely her consort."

He can be a somewhat fearsome figure in the old stories. These days he represents not only the greening of the earth, the rising up of spring after the long cold days of winter's frozen fields, but also the greening of the spirit.

It's in that aspect that this anthology's title begins to make sense.

Every city — no matter how urban and modernized it might be — has its wild acres. I love those places. A little thicket of trees and brush and wildflowers that somehow manages to escape the bulldozers of the developers. Or perhaps a place where the wild has reclaimed some small portion of the concrete and glass towers. It might only be an overgrown backyard, or the wild borders of otherwise civilized parks.

Ottawa, where I live, has many such places. We have the true wild places, as well, within easy driving distances — the Gatineau Hills, parts of the Ottawa Valley — but I'm always intrigued by and drawn to those within the city's limits. My

neighborhood is a suburb of paved streets, rows of houses, old trees, manicured lawns and gardens. But I see rabbits living in the hedges. Foxes and coyotes wandering down the middle of the street at midnight. Ducks resting for the night on the pointed gable of a bungalow.

Many backyards have sections that have gone feral. We walk our dog in a tidy park that is broken up with sections of untouched brush and even a wild wood. There are pathways through the wood, but off those paths, nature runs rampant with ferns and wild onions, trout lilies and floods of trilliums. Some years the crows roost there in their thousands. Owls perch in the trees and pileated woodpeckers and their small cousins fill the air with the *rat-a-tat-tat* of their bug hunts.

A six-lane highway cuts through the city, from one end to the other, but here and there, surrounded by highway and off ramps, are little pockets of pure wilderness, some no bigger than a large backyard.

All these places are filled with a wild, green spirit. They're like bonsai trees— nature in miniature. They're the places where the gossip of their neighborhoods lies thickest and truest, the air's a little clearer, the mysteries whisper a little deeper— especially in the twilight, or through the long hours of the night.

In places like this I can easily imagine a spirit, a *genius loci*, a Green Man, holding the urban blight at bay.

There's one other place I don't just feel, but see the Green Man on a regular basis and that's at FaerieCon, particularly FaerieCon East in Baltimore. Though it might seem a bit like Cosplay, it's not really the same. Yes, people "dress up," but rather than mimic the characters from books and movies, the Faerie community uses this opportunity to take what lies inside their spirit and wear it on the outside for a few days.

You'll find every sort of otherworldly creature. Faeries, of course, in all shapes and sizes, but also gnomes and trolls and satyrs...

And Green Men. Dressed in their full regalia of green, with leaf-and-vine-draped cloaks and leafy masks.

There's a general sense of good will and generosity to be found at these gatherings which is particularly exemplified by the Green Men. They wander throughout the proceedings, forming hedges (love that term for a gathering of Green Men) to sing

blessings and toss acorns. They're filled with a natural humour and you can't help but smile yourself in their presence.

But these Green Men are serious about their role in the world. They are a brotherhood dedicated to the greening of their environment. The West Yorkshire Pagan John the Wiz explains it thusly:

"Many modern Pagans, especially men, also recognise [the Greenman] as a representation of the masculine side of the Divine. There are many others, mostly incorporating an animal motif and harkening back to our hunter-gatherer days, but the Greenman seems to capture something for men which is both virile, masculine, and natural and graceful. There is great strength in the Greenman, he has always been seen as the protector and the guardian of the Woodland of England and his face can often be stern and powerfully determined. Although our other God forms might have very positive things to say about masculinity, perhaps the Greengod is more relevant now than he has ever been. This current culture does seem to have largely forgotten the importance trees have to play in our continued survival as a race and might, perhaps, need reminding."

Contemporary Green Men have had to develop their own ceremonies and customs but that's not a bad thing. People sometimes forget that folklore, like language and traditional folk music, isn't static. It's a living, breathing thing that changes over time, and that's something I've appreciated with many who follow Pagan practices. Yes, there are those who swear by arcane rituals and lore, but most practitioners — whether part of a group, or solitary — develop their own rites. They have to.

Nobody knows what the Druids actually did. They died out long ago and while you can try to glean the battered remnants of their mysteries from tree ogham, "The Battle of the Trees" and other folkloric sources, in the end, you have to make it up. Though perhaps a better way to state that is you have to follow your heart.

That's what these modern Green Men do.

For more about the roots of the Green Man tradition, I'd recommend *The Quest for the Green Man* by John Matthews (Quest

Books, 2001), or check out his website at www.hallowquest.org.
uk. For more about the Brotherhood of Green Men go to www.bogbrothers.org.

Now I'll turn you over to the authors and their stories of this anthology in which you will discover many fascinating takes on Green Men (and Women). Read and enjoy. And the next time you come across one of the little wild acres that share our urban landscape, you might find yourself looking at it with new eyes. Perhaps you'll even feel the stir of a greening spirit inside yourself.

—Charles de Lint
Ottawa, Spring 2013

