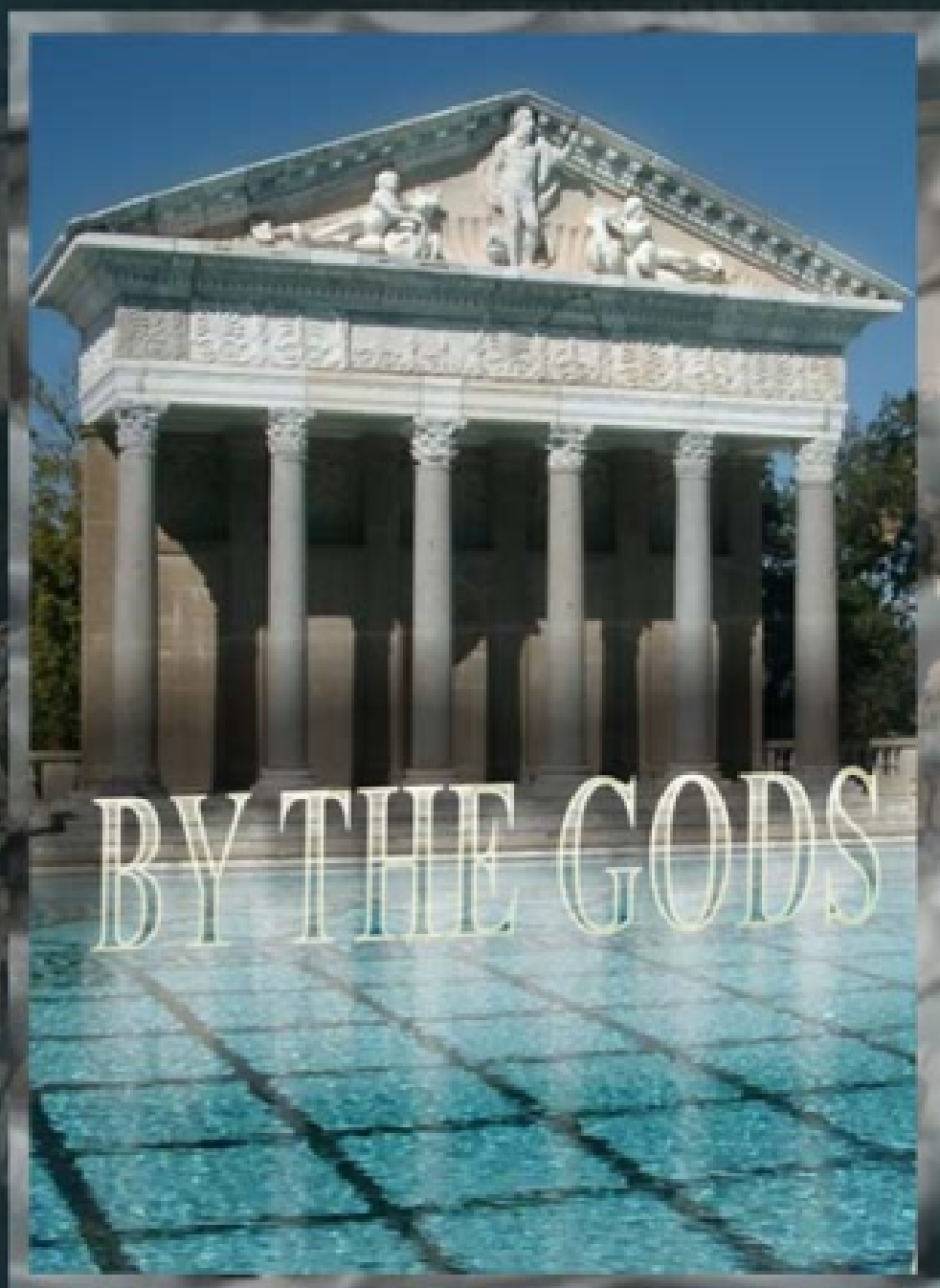




GRAEME S. HOUSTON

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We have taken every pain to ensure that this digital edition is of the highest quality.

Theebah Houston
Publisher

BY THE GODS

GRAEME S. HOUSTON



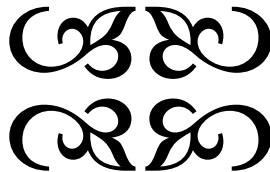
Also by Graeme S. Houston

Short Stories

The whispers before the scream	An eidos and a child
Don't forget your dreams between the stars	Birdsong
Hakatu's Kusanagi-no-tsurug	The devil's taxi
Beware a poet's namesake bearing gifts	Beside the balcony
We dream of the infinite... (short title)	A last wish
The unregistered daydreamer	Dr. Razamuth
Recursion set to a tune of irony	And so she fell
When cats play deadly games	Something Special
Loyalty comes at a price	
Diminishverse: the end of time	
Known Bugs: The book case won't go flat against the wall	

Coming Soon

Novel: Historica	(Techno Thriller)
Novel: The Binary Concord	(Sci-Fi Trilogy)



For more of Graeme S. Houston's
work, please visit his story blog at:
http://stargazer-publishing.com/graeme_s_houston/

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reface

Graham S Houston represents that only too rare section of our world today. He is a man with imagination! Hence, as you take this journey through the pages of ‘By the Gods’, you too will be called upon to let your own imagination run riot, as you are transported into a world, or perhaps I should say worlds, beyond anything within the normal boundaries of human thought.

From the apparent tranquillity of an Olympus-like fountainhead, peaceful beyond our dreams, to the bleak futuristic battlefields populated by alien races too strange and grotesque to comprehend, ‘By the Gods’ will both entertain and dazzle your senses as it takes you into the realms of the authors’ imagination! It is richly captivating, though there are many surprises in store for you, the reader, as you follow the story to its unexpected conclusion.

As you prepare to turn to the first page of this intriguing and highly entertaining yarn, relax, open your mind, take a deep breath, and let yourself be transported into the compelling and at times unsettling world of Graeme S Houston’s ‘By the Gods’.

Juan Pablo Jalisco

Chairman, The League of Extraordinary Authors and Poets

ntroduction by the author

Eros, the Greek god of love... There are two you know. One is an ancient god, who takes the guise of a man; the form of the most beautiful man one would ever lay their eyes upon, no less. The other is younger, son of Aphrodite, the Goddess of Love, and Ares, the God of War. The young Eros would go on to become the Roman god, Cupid. Of far more interest to us, is the elder Eros, who caused the birth of the race of immortal gods and goddesses, and it is he whom the story focuses on.

So how do we visit Eros, do we go back in time? While time travel is very romantic, I once read a paper which proposed a very simple theory time. Unfortunately that theory, while only a theory, has subsequently has made it very hard for me to imagine my own characters going back in time.

Fortunately there is also a theory of science, known as multiple universe theory, which is very well supported (for the moment). In this theory every event splits the universe into branches; every possibility is played out. For a writer it is an exciting theory of science. It lets us get away with

murder, and yet – still – we can say it could be true. In multiple universe theory, since all possibilities are played out, then surely there is one where the pace of civilization has been slower, where the stories of Homer are only just being written, where someone from Earth might slip next door and see our history as it is yet to unfold. And what a surprise we would get, if we should find these Ancient Gods were real!

It is hard to say where the idea for ‘By the Gods’ came from. I had just finished reading EROS by Alberto Bevilacqua. It has a pretty cover, and no doubt my wife bought it for that reason, as she is inclined to do. When I publish my first novel, I will be sure to give it the prettiest cover possible, so that at least I know one person will buy it, but I digress. Eros was part memoir and part novel, an interesting glimpse into the life and loves of the author, and thankfully it was a short one. Far more interesting than Alberto Bevilacqua is Eros himself, and I felt the intense desire to write a story about Eros, since he had been so badly neglected by Alberto. I just didn’t know what to write. It was later, when I was writing something else, that I got a spark and ‘By the Gods’ rolled out, as if Eros himself had commanded it.

Graeme S. Houston

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

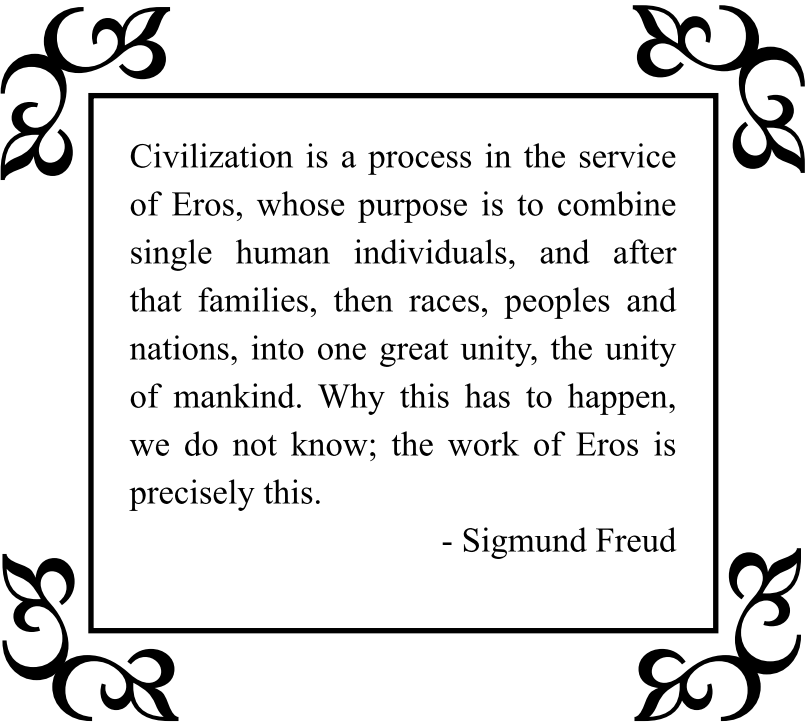
I was collaborating with Brian L. Porter on a project; two stories about man's first tentative steps into space. He had written three wonderful stories to that theme, we figured if we pitched in two stories each, we would have something interesting and unique. To that end, one day I sat down to write on that topic, but instead 'By the Gods' jumped forth, into being.

Thus a great big thank you must go to Brian L. Porter, since without his correspondence, this story just wouldn't exist.

I also must thank my wife and her family for putting up with me.

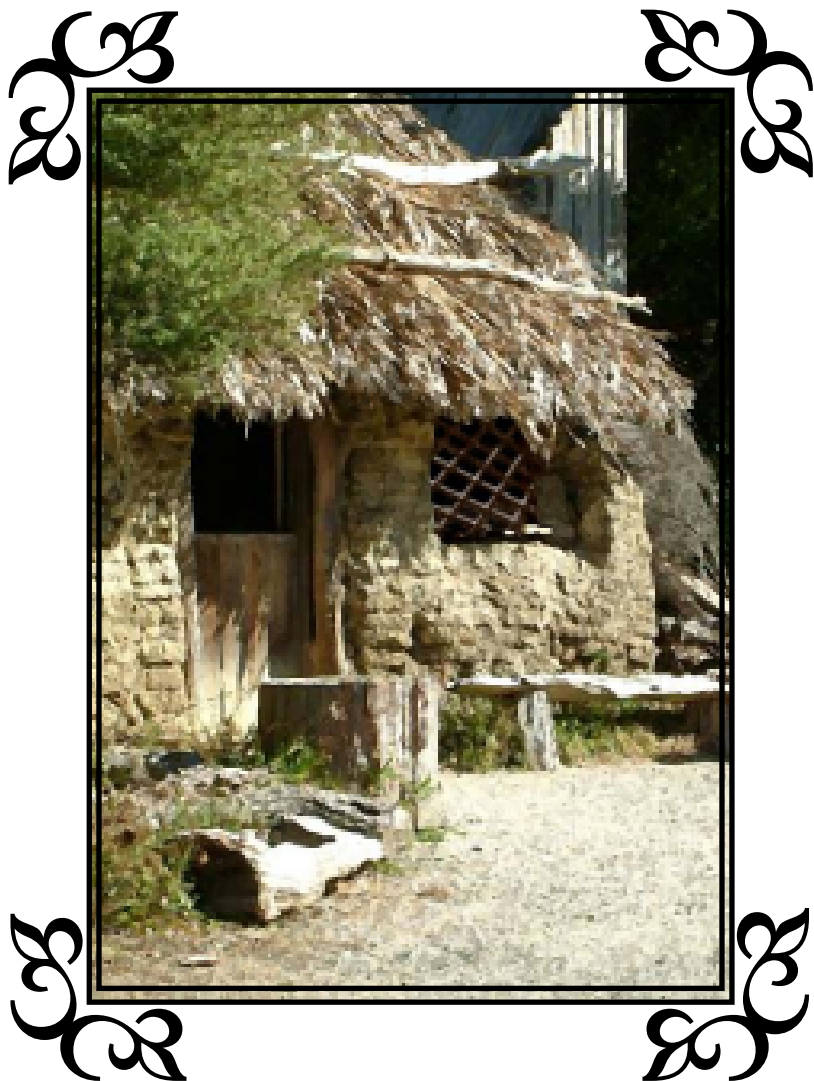
I must thank Alberto Bevilacqua; who's book planted in my mind the idea that Eros would be a great character to work with.

And of course I must thank Juan Pablo Jalisco for kindly offering to write the preface to this edition.



Civilization is a process in the service of Eros, whose purpose is to combine single human individuals, and after that families, then races, peoples and nations, into one great unity, the unity of mankind. Why this has to happen, we do not know; the work of Eros is precisely this.

- Sigmund Freud



Eros placed his hand gently upon the pool of water that he lay beside, little ripples danced off in perfect circles as he caressed its silvery surface; the taut skin of undulating flesh. He touched his fingers here and there until he found a vibration that suited him, a life that inspired him, a moment that touched him as he had touched the gentle waters. In an instant he was gone.

Eros watched; the maiden whose sacred pleasure had brought him here was on the floor, she was lying within a bundle of cloth, warm and hidden so that her hidden pleasure would not be known by her family so nearby; poor farmers, far from the centre of the world. He could not be seen by the mortals, such was the way of things, but he was among them, many of them, where their lives struck harmonies that suited him or angered him. He slid down onto one knee, gracefully, and was about to slide under her covers so that he might help her in the realization of her forbidden play, when the dull thunder of hooves drifted in from outside.

Eros was at once outside, viewing the grassy slopes of the hills all around, and gazing upon the horsemen that so disturbed his divine game.

“Fine day for a battle,” said Ares beside him. The bearded God stood resting upon his spear looking over the scene as if he himself were appreciating it the way Eros was.

“I wonder, if these swiftly fleeting men of war, who glide so solemnly to their deaths and who are but wretched ghosts, unwitting – are not your doing? If I am wrong I shall surely grow a beard,” stated the young, clean shaven God as he flicked his hand in a dismissive manner.



“Such harsh words, young Eros,” Ares laughed. “Will you not preside over this coming battle, that the enemies might come to love one another before their lifeblood is spilt upon these hills?” He laughed even harder then.

“Now Ares, you jest too much today. Your jesting voice is dancing over the hills and gone, yonder, that you might lose it should you let it run so free! This is not a place for a battle, thus I suppose you are playing with me lightly, trying to tease my temper into the fire along with your own. So few soldiers, they surely march to some distant...” but Eros halted then as he realized, without having to look, that there were another hundred thousand men marching relentlessly towards them.

“Gods, hope you are both well prepared.” A third voice joined them. Eros turned, astounded that he had suddenly been surprised by a mortal.

“Who might you be O’ second disturber of my very reverend playful mood?” asked Eros, now worrying about the day’s events.

“I am Temperus Luradook and I have come for the battle.”

“You’re right on time then! The clouds of dust gather at the horses’ feet. The air is heavy with solemn thoughts, and the many prayers uttered by these doomed souls whimper behind them unable to reach us as they trip over one another in the seething mass. You are right on time for this brutal play,” smiled Eros.

“He doesn’t know yet, does he?” Temperus questioned Ares.



“No. No, he doesn’t. I thought it best if you explain to him, I don’t really have the words to explain, nor the stomach for it,” Ares told Temperus gruffly. Temperus only sighed. Eros contemplated the man, his chiseled body under all those dark robes, and began to wonder if this was not another God playing games with him, though the man read as a mortal.

“Well it is quite simple really,” stated Temperus, “I come from the Universe next door. There has been no sign of any Gods there for quite some time. In the absence of divine trouble except in the form of some ancient scriptures which caused all manner of social problems, we prospered. We grew wise, and developed technologies, powerful technologies, until at last we rivaled any God in the things we could do.

“That does not bode well – it is a sentence announcing the death sentence of all that we are – when men and Gods are equal.” Eros offered.

“Indeed,” Injected Ares as he hurled his spear around to amuse himself.

“Well. Someone realized the top spot was vacant, and occupied it.”

“Such a shame for the people of your world, like...”

“Wait, dear Eros, do not be hasty, listen well,” Ares barked.

“Well, I was already outside that universe, by great fortune, exploring the other places in the multiverse, but the problem is, this new God is now using our technology to conquer the other universes. He will come to this one also.” Temperus watched their reaction as he told them this. Ares

flinched upon hearing it again. Eros looked stunned.

“So he is here to recruit Gods to go to war.” Ares added.

“Not all from the one Universe, of course, I am traveling between them all to find one God from each who will volunteer.”

“I see. So naturally, Ares, you will be our grand representative in this inter-universal battle. How lucky for you, how grand for you, the battles of men will seem boring in comparison! You will rise to the challenge my friend and help sweep, like autumn leaves, the opponent who dares to face your might, this, for which you were destined.” Eros spoke the words as if genuinely delighted for Ares. Ares laughed long and hard.

“My dear Eros,” Ares told him, taking him gently aside, a few meters from the man, “Temperus has already spoken to Zeus, and requested your presence – and Zeus, all knowing, wisest of wise, has granted it.”

Eros could feel a thousand black stars beam their dark wind into him, and he felt light which worried him for such human reactions were not normal for a God.

“Me?”

“Yes.”

“Me, the God of Love?”

“Yes.”

“Me, the God of Love to partake of the grandest battle that has ever been?”

“Yes.”

* * *

It took some time for Eros to recover, but he sat upon the marble floor, next to his beloved pool where the lives of humans could be watched, or felt, or heard. It was sometimes the feel of the ripples which excited his attention, or sometimes the sounds of splashing which mirrored the events of the world. It was all fake, an elaborate deception, it was just a manifestation of his own inner knowledge of the whole cosmos, and in particular this one little world which fixated him and many others. He pondered it, he pondered the many worlds out there, full of life and yet devoid of Godly activity quite on the same scale as this world. When Gods clustered together and became fixated with one civilization, they played games with one another; they made hell for the people of the world.

Eros packed up his possessions, or rather the manifestations of objects he liked merged back into him like dancing beams of light and dark, ripples on water. He then jumped from being everywhere, to being in only one place, as was the custom for inter-universal travel – or so Temperus had informed him.

* * *

Temperus appeared. The place they had arranged to meet was atop a dusty sandstone mountain. A place where Temperus informed him, the barriers between two universes were weakest,



and where a gateway between them could be opened up more easily. Temperus pulled out from his robes a set of keys, and fished through them until he found the one he needed. He moved the key in the air, it glowed ever so slightly. As he waved it around, the glowing waxed and waned, until at last it grew brightest and a bright sparkle appeared in the air beside him. He pushed the key into the sparkling point in mid air, as if it were a lock, and then turned it. When he removed the key, it was as if the walls of the universe slid aside, a portal of glistening spirals in its wake.

“After you, Eros,” said Temperus. He gestured for the God to go through and he did so quickly, sadly. The world and the universe shook, and trembled as if parted from its dearest lover. Temperus went through a few moments behind.

* * *

“Ahh You’re back, Temperus. We have a meeting with yet more clients,” Ramusan told him rather insistently.

“I’m just back.”

“They cannot wait, that have a lot of wealth to offer us.”

“More than the rest of the creatures of this universe?”

“Yes. Far more”

“Very well.”

At the table, there were some grotesque looking creatures. They wore devices to facilitate their breathing, and then slid upon the floor upon some secreted substance like slugs. They were not soft, nor sticky like slugs, their upper half



was a kaleidoscope of colour and thick insect like limbs, many of them. Their lower body was a cylindrical base which met with the ground and seemed to be stuck to it, sliding around was their mode of walking.

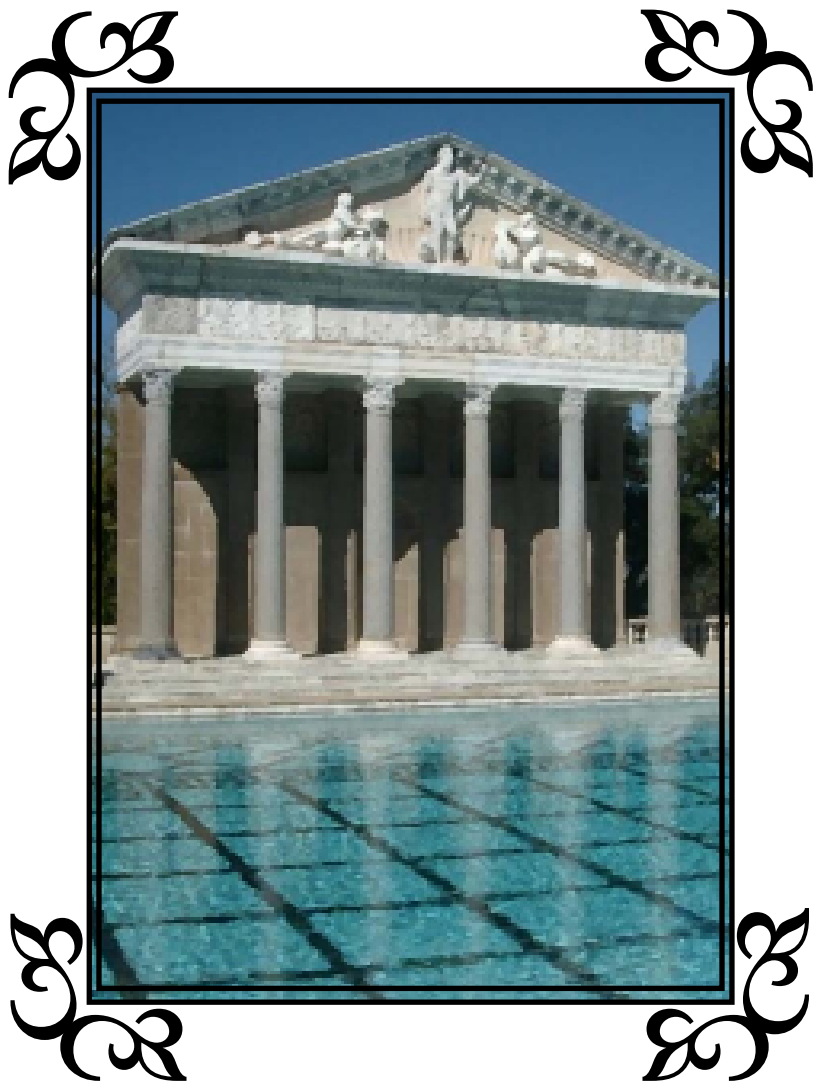
“Weeeeeee aaaarrreeee moooooossst eeeccciitteeedddd bbyyyy thhhiiisss nnnnewwww mmmmmmooodddee oooffff trrraaannssssppopoooooorrrttttt.” One of them informed him in a most painfully drawn out sentence, otherwise in perfect English. The meeting took a long time to reach that satisfying point of nearing agreement, but it eventually came.

“Our ships have opened up the universe,” he was saying, when one held four limbs up, and informed him that business is done, and that they would take five of his ships. Both Temperus and Ramusan looked delighted.

* * *

It was much later, that Temperus sat in his quarters overlooking the great shipyard he owned. One ship lay incomplete, nothing more than a skeleton. Another was almost done. Business was good. He should be happy, yet a great sadness befell him. He could feel it straining his every breath, a poison in his heart. Always it had been Eros they had taken, tricked, the most potent and powerful - the most trusting and innocent. Was it that having been in the presence of so many versions of Eros, he had been effected by the God, in some subtle way? That worried him.

* * *



Eros lay upon the floor looking at the still, unmoving water of the pool beside him. He had been tricked. He was in a tiny universe, a pocket universe, not even big enough for him to manifest all of his great palace. He had to manifest it a bit at a time, the tiny wing which he occupied. He was a God, but he was not an unmoved mover, or an uncaused cause. Only an unmoved mover had the power to move between universes or create a whole new one, he was merely a lower deity, a reflection of a great one, a shadow only. Still he was powerful, as power goes and now he felt a great pang of hatred, to have been deceived by a mere man. He waited, his vast consciousness trying to work out what could be in store for him.

* * *

Temperus looked upon the control panel and a feed opened up into his brain, filling it with data and information about the progress of this particular ship. Before him through a massive window he could see the whole of the shipyard and beyond that only space and stars. His apprentice walked in.

“You told me that today you would tell me the secret of these great ships.”

“Did I?”

“Yes,” said his apprentice simply.

“Well, they never run out of fuel, they have a near infinite supply of power, they have opened up the whole, great,

universe to man and to man's trade partners. They can move between any point instantly. Indeed they seem as if they are powered by the Gods themselves, don't they?"

"Yes," said his apprentice, hanging on his every word. "Yes, and how do they do it?"

Temperus sighed and looked out towards the great ship, where within the engine was bound to the same sad harmony as a tiny pocket universe he and his assistant had created. Within the pocket universe was the sad and lonely God Eros (the twentieth they had lured), who would be forever trapped like a Genie in a bottle, an infinite power source, tricked, raped, bound. Tears almost came to his eyes, his conscience fought within him, but then he fought them back and said simply, "Sorry, not today, Tuesday ten years from now, I will tell you. There are some Ethical considerations I must ponder."

The apprentice left.

Temperus sighed.

Where are the philosophers when you need them?

About the Author

Graeme S. Houston was born in Scotland. He studied Psychology in Kilmarnock, I.T. in Edinburgh, and toyed with the prospect of working in the field of Artificial Intelligence. But then, it looked a bit risky - who wants to go down in history as the idiot who inadvertently makes mankind redundant? Instead he turned to writing. At first he created content for magazines, both freelance and in-house. Then he turned to fiction - because it is the most fun, and the purest form of the art of writing - and he loves creating veritable worlds within worlds.

He finished his first novel, 'The Binary Concord', last year and is now working on a second novel entitled 'Historica'. Between novels, he wrote a number of short stories, across almost all genres and now continues to produce the occasional short story between chapters of his larger work.

He spends much of his time in Malaysia, with his lovely Malaysian wife, or exploring the neighboring countries with her. He enjoys the warm weather despite the fact he never developed much of a tan, and believe it or not (ironic for a Scotsman) finds 23 degrees celcius rather chilly.

His story 'Dr. Razamuth' will be appearing in a Malaysian anthology (yet to be titled), very soon. Another of his stories, 'Birdsong', is due for publication in Peccary Magazine. His favourite piece so far, 'The unregistered Daydreamer', will be appearing in Forgotten Worlds in the near future.

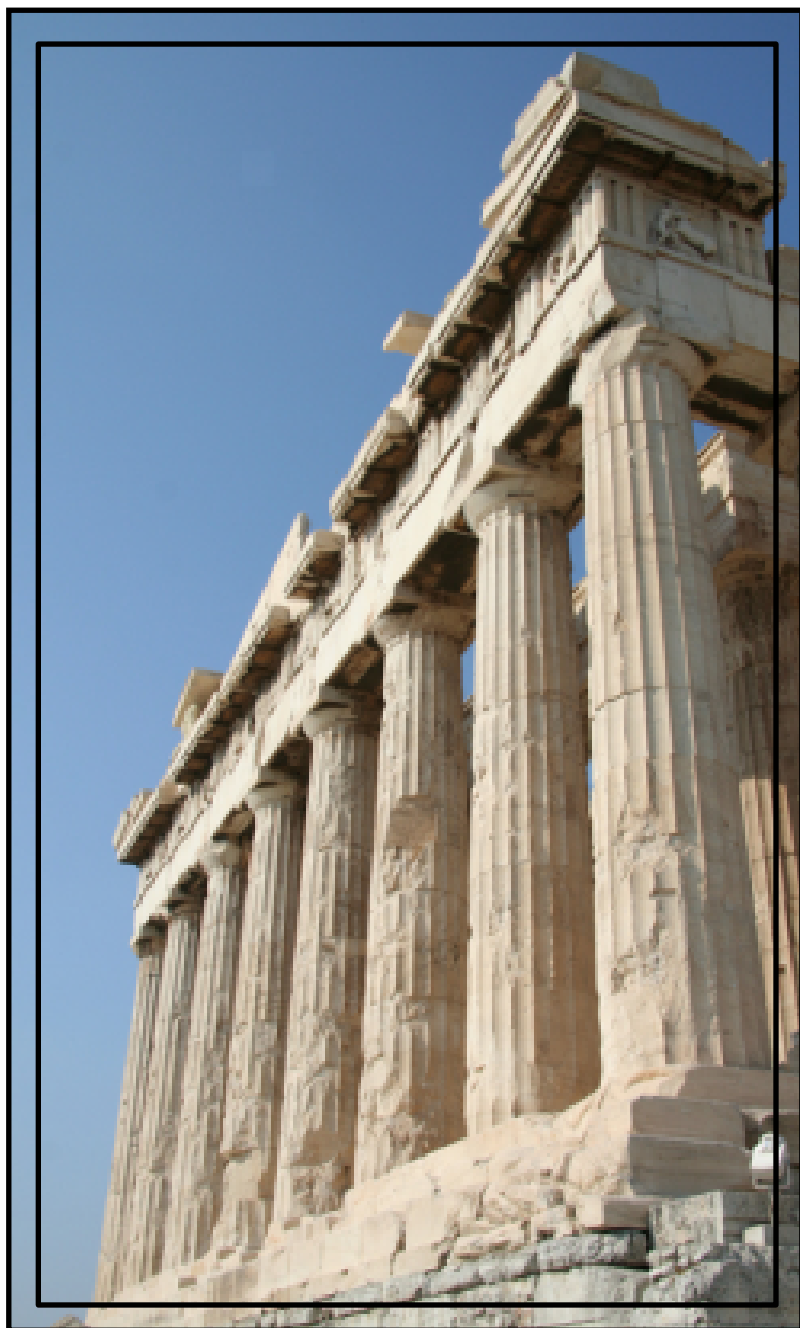


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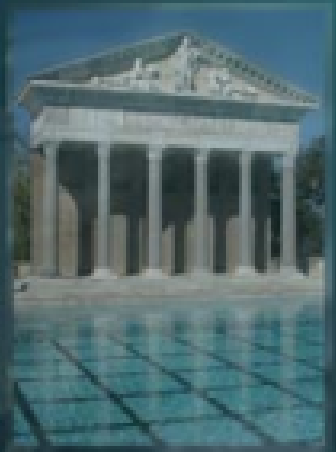
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Imagine a world of ultimate peace and tranquillity, a place where nothing is allowed to disturb the equilibrium or the sheer bliss of the god-like existence of its inhabitants. Then, if you will, imagine a world of war and brutality, of battles raging in deep space, where alien life-forms fight for control of their respective universes.



Now bring these two very different scenarios together, throw in an air of mystery and let your mind take you on a journey guided by the hand of author Graeme S Houston, who, in 'By the Gods' has created a world filled with magic and imagination, where fable, fiction and god-like mischief intermingle in this superbly crafted and colourfully decorated literary kaleidoscope. In short, be prepared to be enthralled, entertained, and perhaps most importantly of all, surprised!

A wonderful story, not to be missed!

Juan Pablo Jalisco
Chairman, The League of Extraordinary Authors and Poets

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