

FEED THEM

WONDER

(HURRY UP! IMMA HUNGRY!)

By

Emmie Christie

WHY I LIKE IT: *Fiction Editor JOEY CRUSE writes... When I was getting my M.A., I spent hours upon hours reading anything from classical Greek rhetoric – Gorgias, Isosceles, Socrates – to Roman rhetoric – those same guys except Roman – to Old English to 18th century British folklore to modernism to contemporary fiction to postmodernism to the history of theory to pick some other random shit (I never really cared that much about American Lit before 1880).*

Emily Smith's, "Feed Them Wonder," plays into two worlds. Much like Coleridge hearkening back to a time when things could be Romantic, or any other poet who looked back into the previous era and decided it was better, Smith switches us on our feet.

Wonder is the key.

When WWI killed all of our conceptions of beauty and forced us into modernism, shit got real. When that got old, we fell back on our laurels of beatnik poetry, the cut up method, gonzo journalism, post structuralism, and post modernism. Pick any in between and I am fine with that.

Smith, here, is working with the concept that those fantasies, those fairies, the witches, the bygone era of chivalry that wasn't chivalry, and how they are reminiscent of a time when magic was real.

Fast forward to 2022, when the internet offers the small glimpses of wonder that we crave, but never get in the dredge of reality – in the world of science where any asshole think they read an article and produce "facts."

There has been a release.

There has been a release of good and bad and ugly, but a release nonetheless. A newfound acceptance of our natural world, a resurgence of idiotic memes that make people chuckle, and laughter and humor in the world that has been allowed by the spread of information and creativity.

There is a dichotomy to realism: sense and nonsense, fantasy and reality, beauty and mechanical.

Smith's work here is a testament to the both the memory of each writer who ever wanted to be in another time and the present moment in which we all need a bit of wonder in our lives – where we look is simply up to the fairies.

Enjoy.

QUALITY QUOTABLE (for the love of language...)

They slept there for centuries, under the polar bears and the seals. And then the Internet broke out of its eggshell in the last hundred years. It posed as a science at first, but it is a type of Wyrms, and it found a way to funnel the wonder back into the world.

Feed Them Wonder

The butterfairies and the ring-tailed dragons fled first. They buttoned up their fairy coats and looped scarves around their rings and traveled far, far into the North.

They had tasted it in the air—the collective fear—culminating when a woman spotted a young elephant-bird watering her rosebushes with its trunk. Fantastics couldn't flit about rooftops and pretend normality in the 20th century! People had graduated from old tales and had Moved To The Suburbs, and didn't regale their children with stories of trees that could fly or birds that grew roots. And when wonder is removed from the equation of childhood, fear rises in its wake.

And so, all the strange and wild things of Earth ventured deep into the North where no one had yet settled. The Fantastics flocked into the glaciers, those whorls of deep, blue-black ice. The unicorns and deucicorns, the worms of the deep, the saber-toothed tigers and others, they all

migrated into the frigid heart beneath the surface and huddled there together. Some of the fear had touched them before they migrated, and little bits of them flaked off, but they still existed.

None of them tried to eat the other. They didn't need much in physical sustenance, the occasional leaf or fingernail, perhaps, but wonder had always been their meat and potatoes. Little bits of it trickled in from time to time, until they wasted away to little more than concepts and sleeping, vague shapes of themselves, much as the fizz drinks that taste like the sleeping concept of a fruit. But it is hard to kill a Fantastic, for by its very nature it clings to the improbable.

They slept there for centuries, under the polar bears and the seals. And then the Internet broke out of its eggshell in the last hundred years. It posed as a science at first, but it is a type of Wyrn, and it found a way to funnel the wonder back into the world. People search for what they want to see, for what drops their mouths open, and these online searches are enticing the Fantastics back out, hungry for the wonder they sense in the world.

My first butterfly alighted on my gutters just the other day. It dropped a stick of butter on my head and fluttered off, laughing. (That's their whole shtick).

And perhaps I fed it a bit of wonder, for it grew more substantial as it soared away.

AUTHOR'S NOTE:

I remember thinking about climate change and how it changes animal migration patterns, and inspiration struck me. Belief systems have a lot of similarities to the climate: when there are seismic shifts in how people think and feel, it has an impact on the world around them. It got me thinking how, if those beings were real, what kind of effect skepticism and disbelief would have on them, and how they might try and escape both the physical deforestation along with the psychological.

I wanted to explore the theme of invisible impact; how just because we don't notice something or realize it, doesn't mean we don't hurt those around us or push them away. I also loved the idea of how the Fantastics subsisted on wonder, and how much we humans deprive ourselves of wondrous things if we don't give them a chance.

My stylistic influences come heavily from Madeleine L'Engle, Brian Jacques, and C.S. Lewis. I love pastoral, sweeping landscapes, portal fantasy, and the bizarre yet whimsical. I am always reaching for the sense I got from these authors as a child, that little gasp of 'they went where?' and 'they found what?' Because what is being an adult, anyway, except a decades' long quest to generate the same intensity we felt at our first contact with awe?

AUTHOR BIO: Emmie Christie's work includes practical subjects, like feminism and mental health, and speculative subjects, like unicorns and affordable healthcare. She has been published in various short story markets including Ghost Orchid Press and Flash Fiction Online, and has upcoming poetry in F&SF. She graduated from the Odyssey Writing Workshop in 2013.