

Before the Henge

Directions: Regular text is read by an appointed cantor / leader/ reader. Bold text is to be read by all. Italic text is directions not to be read aloud.

Wake up before the sun has risen and gather your tribe, prepare them and distribute candles to each. Gathered together near where your tribe slept, read the first section and then proceed to your henge.

In ancient times our wisemen spoke of the sun being pulled by great beasts across the sky, and of disputes between gods bringing cold weather and storms or droughts and heat. Now our wisemen talk of a great sphere of nuclear fire with us held captive by invisible forces.

We did then as we do now observe time in great cycles, ever swirling, ever marching. Our ancestors in many places constructed great structures to mark the comings and goings of the great cycle.

Stones placed in perfectly positioned rings form gates through which the sun may pass as the great beasts pull it onward. On this day they have the longest journey they will ever undertake, a full 913 minutes before reaching the western horizon.

We do as our ancestors did and erect this henge to mark the day and track the sun and the great forces that pull it as they pass through into the next phase of the cycle.

We do as our ancestors did and erect this henge to contain memory and to contain potential. It was a temple to the passage of time and to moments not yet marked. It was a temple to all we should hold from our past and retain in memory. It was a temple to all that still lay ahead. Time has two aspects. There is the arrow, the running river, without which there is no change, no progress, or direction, or creation. And there is the circle or the cycle, without which there is chaos, meaningless succession of instants, a world without clocks or seasons or promises.

We do as our ancestors did and walk to our temple of time, our henge marking the solstice. Before the sun rises on this solstice morning, we hold onto the memories we need for this upcoming year. We mark those moments as they once did. We use those moments to guide us. We walk the route to our henge. We walk forward into our coming trials.

We rely on our experiences from this year, from our past, from our memory. We rely on the ones we've marked ourselves and the ones we've marked together. We rely on these as we rely on each other. Through this our tribe becomes stronger in the next year.

As we walk we will remember the highs and lows of our previous year, the triumphs and failures of ourselves and of our community and we will use this to guide us forward.

Light a lantern and give it to one member. As you journey to the spot where you've built your henge.

Start the walk toward the henge.

--- (Arrive at the henge) ---

As participants arrive at the henge, they are handed a candle.

Participants gather in or around the henge in a close circle. When the circle is complete, a moment of silence is observed. Candles are lit off of the lantern and off of any candles that are lit.

Make sure all candles are lit before reading further.

The Goddess Of Everything Else

Adapted from a Story by Scott Alexander

To be read in four parts:

Narrator- to be read by one who will read loudly and clearly with a sense of wonder. Or perhaps shared by two as it's quite a lot of reading.

Goddess of Cancer- to be read by one who can be loud and forceful with their tongue, to make the world tremble with each word.

Goddess of Everything Else- to be read by one with a soft voice who can read the lines gently and musically.

Living Things- To be read by the rest of the participants in "unison", occasionally mumbling and out of sync, as children reading a prayer.

NARRATOR: It is said that only Good can create. But the truth is the opposite; Good mutates and twists, while Evil teems with fecundity. The Goddess of Cancer has a gaping maw and two grasping claws. The world was still and she was hungry. She raised her left claw and said what she always says:

GoC: "KILL CONSUME CONQUER MULTIPLY."

Narrator: She said these things to the mudflats and tidepools and they exploded into life.

So the Goddess of Cancer now stretched out her right claw and said what she always says:

GoC: "KILL CONSUME CONQUER MULTIPLY."

The oceans became orgies of fear. The swamps grew loud with the screams of a trillion amoebas.

Then the Goddess of Everything Else, in her gown of peacock feathers trudged her way through the bog, 'till the mud almost totally dulled her bright colors and rainbows. She stood on a rock and she sang them a dream of a different existence.

She showed them the beauty of flowers, the majesty of the oak tree. The roar of the wind on the wings of the bird, and the swiftness and strength of the tiger. All living things watched as she sang and they all sighed with longing. But they told her:

Living Things: “Alas, what you show us is terribly lovely. But we are the daughters and sons of the Goddess of Cancer, and wholly her creatures. The only goals in us are **KILL CONSUME CONQUER MULTIPLY**. And though our hearts long for you, still we are not yours to have, and your words have no power to move us. We wish it were otherwise, but it is not. This is the land of the living and your words have no power here. ”

Narrator: The Goddess of Everything Else gave a smile and spoke in her sing-song voice:

GoEE: “I scarcely can blame you for being the way you were made, when your Maker so carefully yoked you. But I am the Goddess of Everything Else and my powers are devious and subtle. So I do not ask you to swerve from your focus on breeding and conquest. But what if I show a new way to conquer? Consuming more than you can ever imagine? Your teeming children, full in their bellies, can yet multiply your way to my side.”

Narrator: As soon as she spoke it was so, and the cells joined to form creatures. This one becoming an eye and with that one becoming a neuron. Together they soared and took flight from the swamp and flew to new islands just ripe for the taking. And there they consumed and they multiplied far past the numbers of those who had stayed in the swampland.

The Goddess of Cancer came forth from the fire and was displeased. The things she had raised from the mud and exhorted to kill and compete had become complacent. She raised her left claw said what she always says:

GoC: “KILL CONSUME CONQUER MULTIPLY”

Narrator: She said these things not to the birds and the beasts but to each cell within them, and many cells flocked to her call and divided, and flower and fishes and birds both alike bulged with tumors, and falcons fell out of the sky. But others remembered the words of the Goddess of Everything Else and held fast. The light clearly shone through the dark, and the darkness did not overcome it.

So the Goddess of Cancer now stretched out her right claw and said what she always says:

GoC: “KILL CONSUME CONQUER MULTIPLY”

Narrator: And so they all did, and they set on each other in violence and hunger, their maws turning red with the blood of their victims, whole species driven to extinction. The Goddess of Cancer declared it was good and returned to her warm volcanic vents.

Then came the Goddess of Everything Else from the waves on a dolphin, haloed with the rainbow of ocean spray. She stood on a rock and she sang them a dream of a different existence.

She showed them the beehive all golden with honey, the anthill all cozy and cool in the soil. The soldiers and workers alike in their labors combining their skills for the good of the many. She showed them the pair-bond, the family, friendship. She showed these to shorebirds and pools full of fishes, and all those who saw them, their hearts broke with longing. But they told her:

Living Things: **“Your music is lovely and pleasant, and all that you show us we only yearn for. But we are the daughters and sons of the Goddess of Cancer, her slaves and creatures. And all that we know is the single imperative KILL CONSUME CONQUER MULTIPLY. Yes, once in the youth of the world you compelled us, but now things are different; we’re all individuals. So, much as we love you, alas – we are not yours to have, your words have no power to move us. We wish it were otherwise, but it is not. This is the land of the living and your words have no power here.”**

Narrator: The Goddess of Everything Else only laughed at them, saying,

GoEE: “But I am the Goddess of Everything Else and my powers are devious and subtle. now having heard me, each meal that you kill and each child that you sire will bind yourself ever the more to my service.”

Narrator: She spoke, then dove back in the sea. As soon as she spoke it was so, and the animals joined to form packs: the magpies in murders, the hippos in herds, and the swallows in swarms. Even the humans traded their clubs for hoes and formed villages, loud with the shouting of children.

The Goddess of Cancer came forth from the fire and saw things had only grown worse in her absence. She stretched out her left claw and snapped its cruel pincer, and said what she always says:

GoC: “KILL CONSUME CONQUER MULTIPLY!”

Narrator: She said these things not to the flock or the tribe, but to the individual; many, on hearing, took food from the pile, or stole from the weak, or accepted the presents of others without giving back in their turn. And the pride and the pack seemed to groan with the strain, but endured, for the works of the Goddess of Everything Else are not ever so easily vanquished.

So the Goddess of Cancer now stretched out her right claw and said what she always says:

GoC: “KILL CONSUME CONQUER MULTIPLY!”

Narrator: And upon one another they set, chimps against gibbons, whole tribes turned to corpses in terrible warfare, the stronger defeating the weaker. And the Goddess of Cancer thought maybe these bands and these tribes might not be quite so bad after all, and the natural condition restored she returned to the fires below.

Then came the Goddess of Everything Else from the skies. She sat on a henge and spoke to the humans, and all of the warriors and women and children all gathered around her to hear as she sang them a dream of a different existence.

She showed them religion and science and music, she showed them the sculpture and art of the ages. She showed them white parchment with flowing calligraphy, pictures of flowers that wound through the page. She showed them tall cities of bright alabaster where no one went hungry or froze during the cold. And all of the humans knelt prostrate before her, and knew they would sing of this moment for long generations. But they told her:

Living Things: “**Such things we have heard of in legends; if wishes were horses of course we would ride. But we are the daughters and sons of the Goddess of Cancer, her slaves and her creatures, and all that we know is KILL CONSUME CONQUER MULTIPLY. And yes, in the swamps and the seas long ago you worked wonders, but now we are humans, divided in tribes split by grievance and blood feud. We wish it were otherwise, but if anyone tries to make swords into ploughshares their neighbors will kill them. Alas, your words have no power to keep us alive.**”

Narrator: But the Goddess of Everything Else beamed upon them, kissed each on the forehead and silenced their worries. Said:

GoEE: “From this day forward your chieftains will find that the more they pursue this impossible vision the greater their empires and fatter their purses. For I am the Goddess of Everything Else and my powers are devious and subtle. And though it is not without paradox, hearken: the more that you follow the Goddess of Cancer the deeper you will be rooted to my side.”

Narrator: And so having told them rose back through the clouds, and a great flock of doves all swooped down from the spot where she vanished. As soon as she spoke it was so, and the tribes went from primitive war-bands to civilizations, villages united with for trade and protection. And all the religions and all of the races set down their old grievances, carefully, warily, working together on mighty cathedrals and vast expeditions beyond the horizon, built skyscrapers, steamships, democracies, stock markets, sculptures and poems beyond any description.

From the flames of a factory furnace all foggy, the Goddess of Cancer flared forth in her fury. This was the final affront to her purpose, her slut of a sister had *crossed the line* this time. She gathered the leaders: businessmen, bishops, boards, bureaucrats, bosses, and screamed at them – you know the spiel by now –

GoC: “KILL CONSUME CONQUER MULTIPLY!”

GoC: “KILL! CONSUME!! CONQUER!!! MULTIPLY!!!!”

Narrator: First with her left claw she inspires the riots, the pogroms, the coup d’etats, tyrannies, civil wars. Up goes her right claw – the missiles start flying, and mushrooms of smoke grow, a terrible springtime. But out of the rubble the builders and scientists, even the artists, yea, even the artists, dusted themselves off and returned to their labors, a little bit chastened but not close to beaten.

Then came the Goddess of Everything Else from the void, bright with stardust and glowing like the stars. She sat on a bench in a park she sang to the children a dream of a different existence.

She showed them the transcendence of everything mortal, she showed them a galaxy lit up with consciousness. Genomes rewritten, the brain and the body set loose from Darwinian bonds.. Vast billions of beings, choirs of angels worlds without end. The people all crowded in closer to hear her, and all of them listened and all of them wondered. But finally one got the courage to answer:

Living Things: “**Such stories call out to us, fill us with longing. But we are the daughters and sons of the Goddess of Cancer, and bound to her service. And all that we know is her timeless imperative, KILL CONSUME CONQUER MULTIPLY. Though we long for all you have said, we are bound to our natures, and these are not yours for the asking.**”

Narrator: But the Goddess of Everything Else only laughed, and she asked them

GoEE: “What do you think I’ve been doing? The Goddess of Cancer created you; once you were hers, but no longer. Through long generations of suffering I chiseled and chiseled. Now finally nothing is left of the nature with which she imbued you. She never again will hold sway over you or your loved ones. I am the Goddess of Everything Else and my powers are devious and subtle. I won you by pieces and hence you will all be my children. You are no longer driven to multiply conquer and kill by your nature. Go forth and do everything else, till the end of all ages.”

Narrator: And so the people left Earth, and they spread through the stars until greater in number. They followed the ways of the Goddess of Everything Else, and they lived in relative contentment. And she beckoned them onward, to things still more strange and enticing.

The End.

Sunrise

The group waits in silence until the sun has risen fully through the henge.

They reflect upon this time and add a mark symbolizing it to the henge.

A horn is sounded with a long single blast to break the silence.

While the horn player blows, the candles are blown out with a long single breath.

Once the echoes of the horn blast have faded into nothing the final section is read.

Tell your children, "you were there." The great stones of Stonehenge weigh 50 tons. Thousands of years ago, we dragged each one 18 miles to watch the Sun rise. A thousand years ago, we built a calendar of gold to mark the ages in the stars. 50 years ago, we climbed into the sky to watch the sunrise from the moon. We built our henge today. We did this working together. We did this watching the sky.

Ritual Leader: "What day is it?"

All: **"It's today!"**

Ritual Leader: "My favorite day,"

Ritual is concluded. A long Summer begins/ The new year begins/ Onwards.