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Uncommon Cauldron:

(a dialogue attempt to co-exist with fragments of
 Strange Writing from medieval and 320 A.D. China)

Time: Antiquity & Modernity

*Setting: Imperial, then later hidden near a
 purple river of cold lotus and black, brocaded silkworms
 that, if dipped in water, never get wet.*

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GREATEST MAN

The Great man knows, to rule the world, the great men say, is to collect the world. And so the Greatest Man shall command the stars without once leaving his throne. His mandate of heaven shall flow from every cardinal direction – north, south, east, west and the center. He will send forth local gods as the eyes and ears of the greatest empire though they say the sky is high and the greatest man is far away! He shall command a tribute from each hinter region. He shall demand a cauldron from the finest metals to be molten in the image of the strangest beings from the wild zones of cultureless savagery. To be fixed and displayed as if engraved in manuscripts. So we can recognize the evil. They say that when a great man is about to flourish, strange writing will appear in silk and cauldrons. And I have received the strangest letter.

(receiving the first strange letter)

Voice of a letter from the COMMON MAN

If I could only write to you, Great Man, the letter said, between our secrets, in veins of earth, and rarely read books, unusual customs and miscellaneous sayings. In what we find in common there would be, not only clarity of language and the occasional synchronicity of understanding. There would also be such marvelous and uncharted phenomena, things barely heard, misunderstandings, corrections of names and regions far beyond the seas, beyond the pale of civilizing influence. If we could correspond in such uneven fragments. To be lost, and then rewritten suddenly from memory. Between us we might find not only the mandate of heaven but an otherworldly summons to encounter all our local gods and

omens, dreams and monstrous creatures, remarkable ghosts. Glimpsed together as we try to talk or write or walk to common ground.

GREATEST MAN

The Great man quaked with rage and set out for the first time to his hinter regions to find and to destroy this strangest being. With arrows a thousand years old he tore open wells, graves, fires, and other inaccessible places. But he only found another letter. Even more strange, amidst the hinter forest of anomalies, which of course he annihilated easily, with a sweep of his arrows.

(receiving the second even stranger letter, set with brocaded black silkworms)

Voice of the 2nd Letter from the COMMON MAN

If I could talk with you, Great Man, just for an hour, the even stranger letter said, I believe that our opinions, over time, would both become uncertain, rife with rare stones, long-lived plants and moons and features highly derivative of all the others long before us and yet to come. Suspicious signs of discretely disjointed esoterica not common to any frame or topic and yet bound within the very treatise of the veins of the earth.

GREATEST MAN

The Great man quaked with wrath and wreaked his further havoc on every hidden stone, or plant or house to tear and burn. Until he heard a very strange sort of a music and became at once delighted. For he knew that when a great man wants to know the minds of the common people, he sends his local gods, the eyes and ears of his empire, into the smallest villages and hidden caves to listen and record the music of the people. To determine the thoughts and desires of the common people in their songs. To determine his impact and decipher the status of his great regime.

COMMON MAN

The song was very sad and kept repeating the refrain of something like: isn't it sad to rely only on the surface perceptions of eyes and ears to judge the existence of the subtle and the marvelous?

GREATEST MAN

The instrument! *(he raged)* on which this song is played has a 1000 strings and though I recognize it as a common instrument of common people, it has triggered such sorrow that I shall command it henceforth to be played with only 1 string.

COMMON MAN

The song continued with even more sorrow: If I could sing to you, it sang, I would sing of
 oh so many great men pressing forward, will they never arrive?
 In the case of great men will there always be such bursts of anger?
 And mass executions and beheadings and fire and plague and anguish?
 Will the great man always be provided everything he wants?
 Will the blood flow always in the torments of the market place?

GREATEST MAN

The Great Man never wept, demanding to know the meaning of this song in terms of his own success or failure. What traces or slippings of his great ideas were here among the ordinary or extraordinary? Because he knew that great men were informed by certain meanings, precedents, historical moments with the provision of a warrant in tradition, of course, for such new genres. Particular to subcultures legitimized by patterns of action or arguments on an imagined, exemplary past. Particularly crucial when the subject matter of the new genre has been viewed with disapproval, suspicion or ambivalence. Particularly the unwarranted cosmographic collecting of anomalies.

COMMON MAN

And strange writing.

GREATEST MAN (*violently*)

I demand to know who wrote this song!

COMMON MAN

Perhaps it was a fragment of abstruse learning that was lost and then forged and then pirated, lost again and has crept back in fragments, over centuries, into a text of hidden and extreme virtue as an extraneous error, a mistake in transcription from the dark realm of cinnabar from particular springs and wells of inaccessible--.

GREATEST MAN (*in naked wrath*)

I warrant now and evermore to know what is this truth!

COMMON MAN (*after a rather long pause*)

Perhaps there is a small set of principles or veins underlying everything. And those who hesitate as they sip from its ladle will see the clouds above them fill with tears. They will see the cut trees bleed and will breathe the thousand-pace fragrance of forbidden fruit. You...will find the arrows that you sent through the hearts of the common and the poor as if they were written in your own hand. As a seam running through the midst of everyday life where the great and common, center and periphery, human and non-human, unexpectedly collide and dance. It is this talisman of...natural pattern...an attempt to...capture the...inherent...tracks of birds, the markings of turtles or dragons...the patterns of the night...

GREATEST MAN (*quietly*)

And so they almost danced then, for a moment that may not have existed, bathed the sun in the gulf between them and faded into something very small and rare in plain sight.

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And inspired by collaborations written for live martial artists, music and the theater by Ruth Margraff and composer/producer Fred Ho since 1997 including *Voice of the Dragon 1, 2 and 3*, *Night Vision: a Third to First World Vampire Opera*; *Blazing on the Turquoise Sea*, *Hero of Heroes*, and *Deadly She-Wolf Assassin at Armageddon* currently being produced by Big Red Media, Peregrine Arts and the Apollo Theater in the United States.

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