

The brief, but epic, tale of
Great Sperberg McQueen's

battle with the
Terrible Serpent



And how he saved those whose
code was broken
and they
knew not why

As 'twas sung by the Cymric Bardess
Bethan ap Sieffre ap Gwilym
at Balisage

MM. xx. vii



Come hear now, good people, my story,
Wondrous deeds our forerunners have seen;
I shall hereby unveil
the most marvellous tale
Of the **Python** and **Sperberg-McQueen**.

'Twas in old Montreal, many years past,
Where there gathered a group strong and large;
For the steering committee
had chosen the city
As the home of that year's Balisage.

A glorious band they assembled,
Warriors brave of profuse battle-scars
Who had fought through the hell
of SGML,
Winning fame that arose to the stars.

They revelled in schemas and markup,
Angle-brackets and weird DTDs.
They drank and they sang,
all that glorious gang -
And yet one of them was ill at ease.

For there was at that year's noble meeting
A young knight of lowly estate,
Who nursed in his breast
the desire to be best
And to earn his place amongst the great.



Sir Norman his name, this young stripling,
Of the Walsh clan; a tall man and lean.
His name was known well
in front line XML
Where he fought with a wit sharp and keen.

Yet Sir Norm thirsted always to better
His skill with programming and code;
So he set his sights on
defeating the Python,
A devil of serpentine mode.

But the Python was wicked and wily,
And victory eluded Sir Norm;
Because, if the whitespace
was not in the right place,
His code wouldn't ever perform.

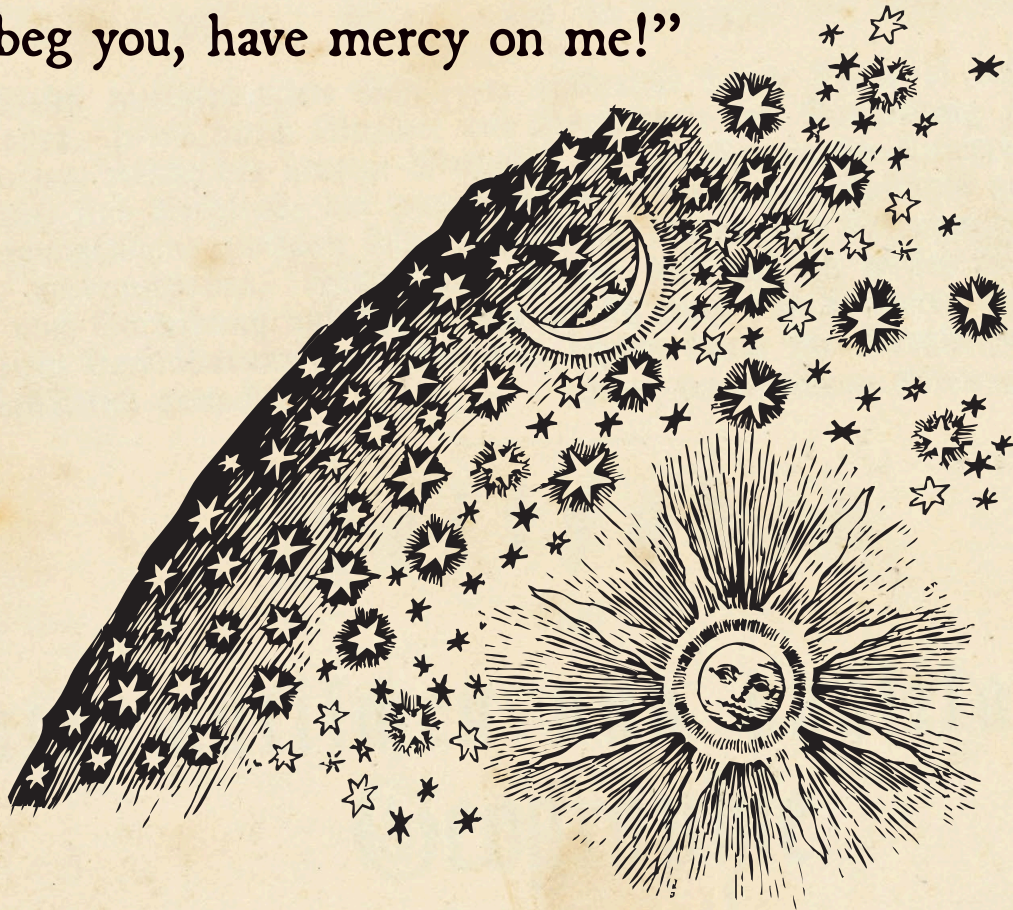
He typed with a furious abandon,
So that onlookers feared he might die.
Ultimately, heartbroken,
he wailed "My code's broken!
It's broken, and I don't know why!"



At these words, twas as though the sky trembled,
And all Balisage held its breath.

The serpent exulted
at what had resulted,
Preparing for poor Sir Norm's death.

On his knees, the knight looked to the heavens,
And called out most desperately
"Oh Gods of the Geeks,
your supplicant speaks;
I beg you, have mercy on me!"



As he spoke, a bright mist made appearance,
As though all the stars coalesced
To a measurable span;
and the form of a man
Appeared; from the mist he progressed.

His bearing was manly and noble,
A figure of scholarly mien,
And in midst of his face
a moustache bore its place;
'Twas **The Great Michael Sperberg-McQueen!**

Sir Norm knelt there with his mouth open;
He could hardly believe what he'd seen.
But with meekness sincere
he spoke soft and clear,
“Canst thou aid me, O Sperberg-McQueen?”



The magician smiled benevolently
At the young knight in lowly distress.
“Sir Norm Walsh, have no fear!
I have come; I am here,
And I'll get us all out of this mess.”

Great Lord Michael looked to his apprentice
(A young lad of intelligence keen -
An assiduous yeoman,
whose name was Syd Bauman,
And who idolized Sperberg-McQueen).



Together, they wrestled the Python;
A brutal and wearisome fight.
They fought all the day,
and never gave way
Til the serpent did yield, byte by byte.

When the Python lay dead, Great Lord Michael
Turned to Norman, down on his knees.
“Well, young Sir, I regret
that your code had a set
Of unbalanced parentheses.”

The people were fairly astonished;
They muttered and rolled up their eyes.
Poor Sir Norman flushed red,
and hung down his head
Saying "I'm really sorry, you guys!"



But the Balisage crowd were all kindness;
They raised the young man to his feet.
"Come, Sir Norman!" they clamoured,
"Let's go and get hammered
To rejoice in the Python's defeat!"



We shall leave them to fill up their glasses,
A delightful and jubilant scene,
And with this end the tale
of the code that did fail,
And its saviour: **Great Sperberg-McQueen.**

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