

Title: Refusing Paradise

Sub: An Analysis of Miyazaki's Dark Saint

[Image 1 - Header/Featured]

I have wondered about her for a long time. Longer, I think, than anyone.

There is little else to do here but wonder, and she is, after all, the question the whole of this place is made of: the girl who stood there at the end of the world, armageddon at her back.

You will think you know her. The gentle one. The one who talks with insects, who glides down out of a poisoned sky to save a valley, her home. That is the tale familiar to most, and it is not wrong, exactly. But it is only the first step in a much longer journey — itself a saga some decade in the making. In truth, the completed work does not actually end in a valley by the sea. It ends in a tomb.

So if you wish to know that ending for yourself, then go, read her story, and return when you are ready. You will find me here waiting still. For I am patient. And there is nothing here but time.

As for the rest of you, I must lay the whole of it bare, because I cannot ask my question otherwise. We must come to learn the truth as she has learned it.

That the world had been poisoned a thousand years before her birth, sickened so completely that the old civilization, in its dying, built two things to outlast itself. The first was a forest: a vast and toxic jungle everyone mistook for a plague, which was in truth a machine, patient beyond human attention, drawing forth, grain-by-grain, the toxic ruin of the earth. Given long enough, the forest would finish. The world would become clean again. But the people who lived through this long cleansing—*her* people—had been shaped to breathe that poison, and a purified world would have killed them just as surely as the poison had killed everything else. They were never meant to reach the far shore. They were a lifeboat, made to endure the hardships of their time, to be used, and then discarded.

The second thing produced by the old world were the people meant to replace them. In a great sealed vault beneath the Earth there was laid down a more pure humanity: lucid, gentle, cleansed of the violence that had burned the first world down, they slept in darkness. This was humanity's second draft, the answer to the question the first had failed so catastrophically to answer. Everything the old world had learned about its own capacity for destruction had been poured into their making.

To guard them, the old world left a piece of itself: a great preserved intelligence, the gathered knowing of their once-vast civilization, set to watch over the long night and steward the poisoned centuries.

And so it stood awake down there for a thousand years. Generation after generation it had watched the living—the poisoned, provisional, half-made people of the interim—squabble and kill and die upon the surface. It had watched empires rise and fall. It had shaped religions, and seeded prophecies, and arranged the slow machinery of history such that upon the appointed morning, when the air had turned sweet, the vault might open upon a clean and luminous paradise, and there would be peace at last.

But then she arrived.

[Image 2 - Nausicaa from the Crypts Perspective]

She had been a girl from the Valley of the Wind, one of the provisional people, shaped for the ugly middle. She looked upon the second draft of her entire species, and she understood them for what they were. And so she gave the order to burn them, and she stood there and watched the future of her species go up in fire while the voices inside cried out.

Her story gathers all its light to her in this moment, and it calls it grace, and we close the volume certain of having watched her attain apotheosis.

But I have stood in the aftermath of that decision for a long while now, and I am not so sure. I do not say that she was wrong for what she did — I would not know how to weigh it even if I tried. I mean only that there was something else within that chamber, something which had also loved humanity, and it did not believe as the girl believed.

And it is the distinction between these two certainties, the caretakers and her own, wherein there lies the only question I have ever truly wanted answered: *why did she do it?*

When the future of humanity was stood right there before her, and the morning was beginning to dawn, why did she choose to burn them? Why choose extinction over paradise?