



Source: Ed O'Loughlin, 'Villagers helpless in face of settlers' land grab', *Sydney Morning Herald* online, 27/01/07.

Tags: [storytelling](#), [violence](#)

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He had learned long ago that the truth, like names, only binds you to people, and you always end up getting hurt. This he resolved would never happen to him. He did not have a name, at least not here, where he had travelled to.

The port slowly came into sight. The traveller stood at the front of the ship looking into the town where he would soon be arriving. The flags above the town hall were not flying. Thinking about it he could not remember the time that they last flew. Thinking back it may have been his last arrival, back when he had come with a strong party. Then he had been greeted by the guard who had showed him to the great hall. Now no one was expecting him, but that was okay: he had come to fight. He was a champion fighter, a renowned campaigner whose name used to echo through the mead halls. Now all he had to show for his success was a solitary gold ring inlaid with a miniature silver blade.

The blade was his addition. In the beginning, there were many people who would gather around him, eager to hear the tale of his journey, his slaying of the monster with his bare hands since he had refused to use weapons, his many fights and his endless triumphs. Nobody wanted to hear his tale now: nobody gathered around him. He drank alone, the mead hall now a pub. The sign lashed the sky with its starkness. The heat of the place was unbearable. No one wanted to be with him. The corner of the room gave birth to a band, whose lead singer tapped his thigh with a finger. The traveller sat and thought about his life.

He was awarded the ring as a prize from a mighty king of an empire long since fallen and a race long since forgotten, except by those who study the dustiest of text books, and even then only faint glimpses of their lives appeared upon the page, nothing about the fight, nothing about the traveller, nothing. Later on he had added the small blade, the blood lust in him now greatly encapsulated in its damage, its ability to inflict scars upon those who challenged the unnamed man. Tonight no one challenged him, no one noticed, but he had come to fight and fight he would.

At closing time he staggered out, vomited violently onto the road and lurched towards his inn. It was a simple affair; the kind of place where fleas go to die, but it was cheap and he was poor.

He spent his days wandering from place to place, looking for a fight, for any reason at all, looking for anything really. Then one day when the heat was bearing down upon him he came across a clearing. On the ground someone had drawn a ring. Around it bystanders stood cheering on two men who fought inside its confines, jeering and laughing as the men barged into each other. Making enquiries he found this was a fighting tournament and he hastily added himself to a list of fighters, simply writing B under name. He was shortly placed within the

ring and before him stood a motion of a man who tossed rice from a bucket and glared at him as if he did not belong, then all of a sudden he charged.

Faced with this opponent, who did nothing more than barge into him and knock him down, he was filled with rage, a sudden anger that people like him could be left on the sidelines, to be mocked by the crowds who watched and laughed and pointed at the crudely drawn ring on the ground, yelling for him to be pushed out and to lose the fight, to lose the one thing he had come here to do. He had given so much of himself to destroying evil and now no one cared, no one understood what evil was. It was a concept noted as old-fashioned and quirky by those in power. There were no heroes and no villains. There were merely people. He was not a people: he was a destroyer of dragons and slayer of serpents, a fighter, a champion. He was mad and he heaved his arm towards his opponent. The blade on the ring glinted in the sun, which then swallowed the screams.

No one tells stories now, no one told stories then but at least they lived them.

He swung again and the blood splattered the circle. The bystanders rushed as one, first towards, then away from the ring.

Weeping is akin to praying: neither will solve the problem but both make you feel better.

He punched again gorging a cut which spurted a red mist into his eyes.

Words Weep. Books Bleed. Literature Leaks Life. People Perish.

Blinded, he lashed out again and again.

Swords Sweep. Shields Smash. Horses Halt. Kingdoms Collapse.

The swords were used quickly and easily and he fell to the ground, inside the ring, scenes of nothing and everything and he began to watch as the blood formed wells upon his arm. The pain doing nothing more than to reassure him that he was alive, that he had feelings. His skin bled the embers of his tale, the dreams he dreamt, the loves he lost and the mind he thought was poisoned. He was a destroyer of dragons and slayer of serpents. The vanishing hero is a concept we can only understand when the hero lies weeping upon the floor, bleeding and smiling, smiling and bleeding.

A small boy pulled the ring from his finger and the unnamed man's legend was lost like a butterfly let loose into a room of hungry frogs.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Paul Byrne.*