

0. PURGATORY ILLUSTRATED - Story Preface

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This magnificent fresco, created by Luca Signorelli, is known as "The Angel Arrives in Purgatory." It is located in the Orvieto Cathedral, at the Chapel of San Brizio, in Orvieto (a town in the Umbria region of Italy). Image online via the Web Gallery of Art. Click on the image for a full-page view.

If there were twelve commentaries on *The Divine Comedy* by 1400, one can only imagine how many frescoes, illustrations, illuminations, paintings and drawings gave life to the story of Dante and Virgil. As the two traveling companions made their way, they saw the horrors of the Inferno, endured a difficult trek through Purgatory, and observed the glories of Paradise.

In the hands of skilled artists, Dante's words were translated into concepts medieval people could understand. A beautiful painting tends to "uncomplicate the complicated." And in the Middle Ages, when many people did not read at all, they learned from pictures. If ecclesiastical authorities wanted the laity to believe in Purgatory, illustrations of Dante's work must have greatly helped.

Taking a virtual trip to the Chapel of Notre-Dame de Benva (in the Provence village of Lorgues, France), we see Purgatory illustrated in descriptive detail. A fresco on the inner part of the entrance wall depicts Purgatory, where penitent souls are temporarily imprisoned and tortured by fire. Since they are not in Hell, however, these souls can—and do—receive help from Angels who give them water to drink and refresh themselves. And, since the jail has no roof, some of the redeemed are leaving this temporary place to make their way to Heaven.

With more color and detail, Luca Signorelli created magnificent Dante-inspired frescoes at the Chapel of San Brizio in the Italian Cathedral of Orvieto. His work is remarkable not only for its beauty but for the speed at which it was created:

- Dante and Virgil stand at the entrance to Purgatory.
- The angel arrives in Purgatory.

Signorelli also used his creative genius to depict scenes from the Inferno and Paradise. A chapel window separates the two parts of this stunning fresco:

*The Elect Being Called to Paradise and the Damned Being Plunged into Hell.*

Michelangelo, a contemporary and fellow Italian, greatly respected Signorelli's style. Details from the above fresco show us why:

- In the intensity of "The Damned," we see extraordinary human bodies and ferocious demons.
- In the calmness of "The Elect," we see peace and joy on the faces of people called to Heaven.

It isn't only Renaissance painters who captured the essence of Dante's words. Since *The Divine Comedy* was first published, nearly seven centuries ago, it has provided inspiration for many artists—even into the modern era.

Especially noteworthy is the art of a nineteenth-century book illustrator from France—Gustave Doré—who created hundreds of outstanding illustrations. Thanks to the University of Arizona, we can view some of his best work on-line.

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](#)

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/PURGATORY-ILLUSTRATED-Purgatory-and-Dante-s-Divine-Comedy>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/PURGATORY-ILLUSTRATED-Purgatory-and-Dante-s-Divine-Comedy>

## Media Stream



### Notre-Dame de Benva

Image online, courtesy [Culture Communications](#) - a French-Language website.

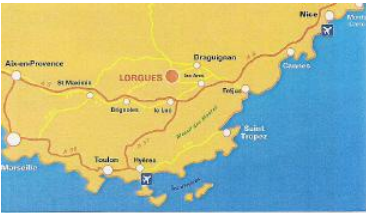
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### Lorgues Village

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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### Map Depicting Lorgues

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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### Fresco Depicting Purgatory

Image online, courtesy [Culture Communications](#) - a French-Language website.

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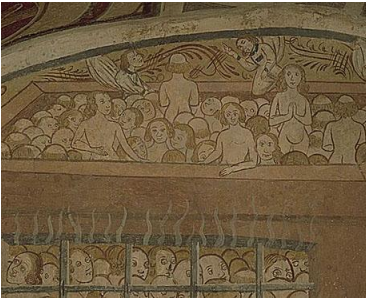


### Angels Provide Relief in Purgatory

Image online, courtesy [Culture Communications](#) - a French-Language website.

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### Imprisoned Souls in Purgatory

Image online, courtesy [Culture Communications](#) - a French-Language website.

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### Luca Signorelli

Image online, courtesy the WikiArt website.

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### Magnificent Frescos Inspired by Dante

Image online, courtesy the Web Gallery of Art.

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### Cathedral of Orvieto

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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### Signorelli Fresco

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

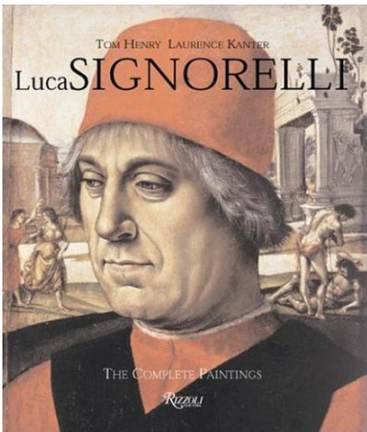
View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Signorelli-Fresco>



### Virgil

Image online courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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### Complete Paintings of Luca Signorelli

Image online, courtesy the [amazon.com](http://amazon.com) website.

View this asset at:

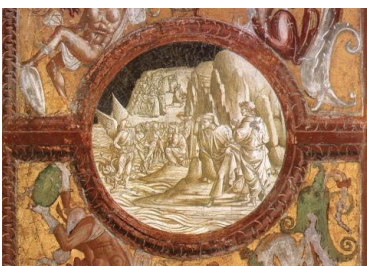
<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Complete-Paintings-of-Lucas-Signorelli>



### Calmness of "The Elect"

Image online, courtesy the Web Gallery of Art.

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### Angel Arrives in Purgatory

Image online, courtesy the Web Gallery of Art.

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### Dante and Virgil at the Entrance to Purgatory

Image online, courtesy the Web Gallery of Art.

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### Demons in Purgatory

Image online, courtesy the Web Gallery of Art.

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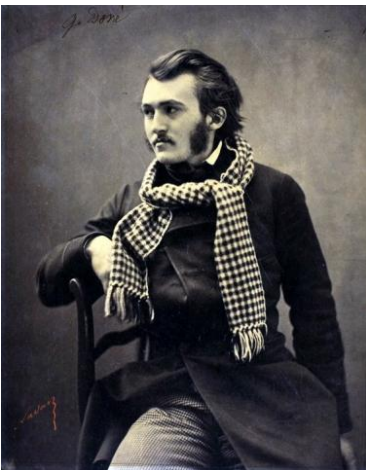


### Ferocious Existence in Purgatory

Image online, courtesy the Web Gallery of Art.

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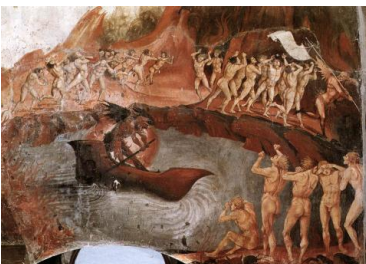


### Gustave Dore

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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### The Damned Being Plunged into Hell - Signorelli

Image online, courtesy the Web Gallery of Art.

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<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/The-Damned-Being-Plunged-into-Hell-Signorelli>



### Michelangelo

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### Signorelli Fresco - Detail from Famous Fresco

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### Signorelli - Ferocious Demons in Famous Fresco

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### Signorelli - "The Elect" in Famous Fresco

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