

**Culture Fiction:
A Collection of Science Fiction
and Fantasy Driven by
Fascinating Cultures**

C.J.S. Hayward

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1. Orthodox Eastern Church—theology. 2. Orthodox Eastern Church—spirituality. 3. Anthologies

Questions and contact information:

cjsheyward.com/contact

The reader is invited to visit cjsheyward.com and amazon.com/author/cjsheyward.

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To my nephews James and Jack –
You are always the light of my life.

Within the Steel Orb

The car pulled up on the dark cobblestones and stopped by the darker castle. The vehicle was silver-grey, low to the ground, and sleek. A—let us call him a man—opened the driver's door on the right, and stood up, tall, dark, clad in a robe the color of the sky at midnight. Around the car he went, opened the door for his passenger, and once the passenger stepped out, made one swift motion and had two bags on his shoulder. The bags were large, but he moved as if he were accustomed to carrying far heavier fare. It was starlight out, and the moon was visible as moonlight rippled across a pool.

The guest reached for the bags. "Those are heavy. Let me—"

The host smiled darkly. "Do not worry about the weight of your bags."

The host opened a solid greyblack door, of unearthly smoothness, and walked swiftly down a granite hallway, allowing his guest to follow. "You've had a long day. Let me get you something to drink." He turned a door, poured something into two iridescent titanium mugs, and turned through another corridor and opened a door on its side. Inside the room were two deep armchairs and a low table.

"This is my first time traveling between worlds—how am I to address you?"

The host smiled. "Why do you wish to know more of my name? It is enough for you to call me Oinos. Please enjoy our welcome."

The guest sipped his drink. "Cider?"

The host said, "You may call it that; it is a juice, which has not had artificial things done to make it taste like it just came out of its fruit regardless of how much it should have aged by the time you taste it. It is juice where time has been allowed to do its work." He was holding a steel orb. "You are welcome here, Art." Then—he barely seemed to move—there was a spark, and Oinos pulled a candle from the wall and set it on the table.

Art said, "Why not a fluorescent light to really light the room up?"

The host said, "For the same reason that you either do not offer your guests mocha at all, or else give them real mocha and not a mix of hot water, instant coffee, and hot cocoa powder. In our world, we can turn the room bright as day any time, but we do not often do so."

"Aah. We have a lot to learn from you about getting back to nature."

"Really? What do you mean by 'getting back to nature'? What do you do to try to 'get back to nature'?"

"Um, I don't know what to really do. Maybe try to be in touch with the trees, not being cooped up inside all the time, if I were doing a better job of it..."

"If that is getting back in touch with nature, then we pay little attention to getting in touch with nature. And nature, as we understand it, is about something fundamentally beyond dancing on hills or sitting and watching waves. I don't criticize you if you do them, but there is really something more. And I can talk with you about drinking juice without touching the natural processes that make cider or what have you, and I can talk with you about natural cycles and why we don't have imitation daylight any time it would seem convenient. But I would like you to walk away with something more, and

more interesting, than how we keep technology from being too disruptive to natural processes. That isn't really the point. It's almost what you might call a side effect."

"But you do an awfully impressive job of putting technology in its place and not getting too involved with it."

Oinos said, "Have you had enough chance to stretch out and rest and quench your thirst? Would you like to see something?"

"Yes."

Oinos stood, and led the way down some stairs to a room that seemed to be filled with odd devices. He pushed some things aside, then walked up to a device with a square in the center, and pushed one side. Chains and gears moved, and another square replaced it.

"This is my workshop, with various items that I have worked on. You can come over here and play with this little labyrinth; it's not completely working, but you can explore it if you take the time to figure it out. Come on over. It's what I've been working on most recently."

Art looked around, somewhat amazed, and walked over to the 'labyrinth.'

Oinos said, "In your world, in classical Greek, the same word, 'techne,' means both 'art' and 'technology.' You misunderstand my kindred if you think we aren't especially interested in technology; we have a great interest in technology, as with other kinds of art. But just as you can travel a long distance to see the Mona Lisa without needing a mass-produced Mona Lisa to hang in your bathroom, we enjoy and appreciate technologies without making them conveniences we need to have available every single day."

Art pressed a square and the labyrinth shifted. "Have I come here to see technologies?"

Oinos paused. "I would not advise it. You see our technologies, or how we use them, because that is what you are most ready to see. Visitors from some other worlds

hardly notice them, even if they are astonished when they are pointed out."

Art said, "Then why don't we go back to the other room?"

Oinos turned. "Excellent." They went back, and Art sat down in his chair.

Art, after a long pause, said, "I still find it puzzling why, if you appreciate technology, you don't want to have more of it."

Oinos said, "Why do you find it so puzzling?"

"Technology *does* seem to add a lot to the body."

"That is a very misleading way to put it. The effect of most technologies that you think of as adding to the body is in fact to undercut the body. The technologies that you call 'space-conquering' might be appropriately called 'body-conquering.'"

"So the telephone is a body-conquering device? Does it make my body less real?"

"Once upon a time, long ago from your perspective, news and information could not really travel faster than a person could travel. If you were talking with a person, that person had to be pretty close, and it was awkward and inconvenient to communicate with those who were far away. That meant that the people you talked with were probably people from your local community."

"So you were deprived of easy access to people far away?"

"Let me put it this way. It mattered where you were, meaning where your body was. Now, on the telephone, or instant messages, or the web, nothing and no one is really anywhere, and that means profound things for what communities are. And are not. You may have read about 'close-knit rural communities' which have become something exotic and esoteric to most of your world's city dwellers... but when space conquering technologies had not come in, and another space-conquering technology, modern roads allowing easy moving so that people would

have to say goodbye to face-to-face friendships every few years... It's a very different way of relating. A close-knit rural community is exotic to you because it is a body-based community in ways that tend not to happen when people make heavy use of body-conquering, or space-conquering, or whatever you want to call them, technologies."

"But isn't there more than a lack of technologies to close-knit communities?"

"Yes, indeed... but... spiritual discipline is about much more than the body, but a lot of spiritual discipline can only shape people when people are running into the body's limitations. The disciplines—worship, prayer, fasting, silence, almsgiving, and so on—only mean something if there are bodily limits you are bumping into. If you can take a pill that takes away your body's discomfort in fasting, or standing through worship, then the body-conquering technology of that pill has cut you off from the spiritual benefit of that practice."

"Aren't spiritual practices about more than the body?"

"Yes indeed, but you won't get there if you have something less than the body."

Art sat back. "I'd be surprised if you're not a real scientist. I imagine that in your world you know things that our scientists will not know for centuries."

Oinos sat back and sat still for a time, closing his eyes. Then he opened his eyes and said, "What have you learned from science?"

"I've spent a lot of time lately, wondering what Einstein's theory of relativity means for us today: even the 'hard' sciences are relative, and what 'reality' is, depends greatly on your own perspective. Even in the hardest sciences, it is fundamentally mistaken to be looking for absolute truth."

Oinos leaned forward, paused, and then tapped the table four different places. In front of Art appeared a gridlike object which Art recognized with a start as a

scientific calculator like his son's. "Very well. Let me ask you a question. Relative to your frame of reference, an object of one kilogram rest mass is moving away from you at a speed of one tenth the speed of light. What, from your present frame of reference, is its effective mass?"

Art hesitated, and began to sit up.

Oinos said, "If you'd prefer, the table can be set to function as any major brand of calculator you're familiar with. Or would you prefer a computer with Matlab or Mathematica? The remainder of the table's surface can be used to browse the appropriate manuals."

Art shrunk slightly towards his chair.

Oinos said, "I'll give you hints. In the theory of relativity, objects can have an effective mass of above their rest mass, but never below it. Furthermore, most calculations of this type tend to have anything that changes, change by a factor of the inverse of the square root of the quantity: one minus the square of the object's speed divided by the square of the speed of light. Do you need me to explain the buttons on the calculator?"

Art shrunk into his chair. "I don't know all of those technical details, but I have spent a lot of time thinking about relativity."

Oinos said, "If you are unable to answer that question before I started dropping hints, let alone after I gave hints, you should not pose as having contemplated what relativity means for us today. I'm not trying to humiliate you. But the first question I asked is the kind of question a teacher would put on a quiz to see if students were awake and not playing video games for most of the first lecture. I know it's fashionable in your world to drop Einstein's name as someone you have deeply pondered. It is also extraordinarily silly. I have noticed that scientists who have a good understanding of relativity often work without presenting themselves as having these deep ponderings about what Einstein means for them today. Trying to deeply ponder Einstein without learning even the basics of

relativistic physics is like trying to write the next Nobel prize-winning German novel without being bothered to learn even them most rudimentary German vocabulary and grammar."

"But don't you think that relativity makes a big difference?"

"On a poetic level, I think it is an interesting development in your world's history for a breakthrough in science, Einstein's theory of relativity, to say that what is absolute is not time, but light. Space and time bend before light. There is a poetic beauty to Einstein making an unprecedented absolute out of light. But let us leave poetic appreciation of Einstein's theory aside.

"You might be interested to know that the differences predicted by Einstein's theory of relativity are so minute that decades passed between Einstein making the theory of relativity and people being able to use a sensitive enough clock to measure the minute difference of the so-called 'twins paradox' by bringing an atomic clock on an airplane. The answer to the problem I gave you is that for a tenth the speed of light—which is faster than you can imagine, and well over a thousand times the top speed of the fastest supersonic vehicle your world will ever make—is one half of one percent. It's a disappointingly small increase for a rather astounding speed. If the supersonic Skylon is ever built, would you care to guess the increase in effective mass as it travels at an astounding Mach 5.5?"

"Um, I don't know..."

"Can you guess? Half its mass? The mass of a car? Or just the mass of a normal-sized adult?"

"Is this a trick question? Fifty pounds?"

"The effective mass increases above the rest mass, for that massive vehicle running at about five times the speed of sound and almost twice the top speed of the SR-71 Blackbird, is something like the mass of a mosquito."

"A *mosquito*? You're joking, right?"

"No. It's an underwhelming, *microscopic* difference

for what relativity says when the rumor mill has it that Einstein taught us that hard sciences are as fuzzy as anything else... or that perhaps, in Star Wars terms, 'Luke, you're going to find that many of the truths we cling to depend greatly on your own point of view.' Under Einstein, you will in fact **not** find that many of the observations that we cling to, depend greatly on your own frame of reference. You have to be doing something pretty exotic to have relativity make any measurable difference from the older physics at all."

"Would you explain relativity to me so that I can discuss its implications?"

"I really think there might be more productive ways to use your visit."

"But you have a scientist's understanding of relativity."

"I am not sure I'd say that."

"Why? You seem to understand relativity a lot more like a scientist than I do."

"Let's talk about biology for a moment. Do you remember the theory of spontaneous generation? You know, the theory that life just emerges from appropriate material?"

"I think so."

"But your world's scientists haven't believed in spontaneous generation since over a century before you were born. Why would you be taught that theory—I'm assuming you learned this in a science class and not digging into history?"

"My science course explained the theory in covering historical background, even though scientists no longer believe that bread spontaneously generates mold."

"Let me ask what may seem like a non-sequitur. I assume you're familiar with people who are working to get even more of religion taken out of public schools?"

"Yes."

"They are very concerned about official prayers at

school events, right? About having schools endorse even the occasional religious practice?"

"Yes."

"Ok. Let me ask what may seem like a strange question. Have these 'separation of Church and state' advocates also advocated that geometry be taken out of the classroom?"

Art closed his eyes, and then looked at Oinos as if he had two heads. "It seems you don't know everything about my world."

"I don't. But please understand that geometry did not originate as a secular technical practice. You might have heard this mentioned. Geometry began its life as a 'sacred science,' or a religious practice, and to its founders the idea that geometry does not have religious content would have struck them as worse than saying that prayer does not have religious content."

"Ok, I think I remember that being mentioned. So to speak, my math teacher taught about geometry the 'sacred science' the way that my biology teacher taught about the past theory of spontaneous generation."

Oinos focused his eyes on Art. "In our schools, and in our training, physics, biology, and chemistry are 'taught' as 'secular sciences' the same way, in your school, spontaneous generation is taught as 'past science', or even better, the 'sacred science' of geometry is 'taught' in the course of getting on to a modern understanding of geometry."

Art said, "So the idea that the terrain we call 'biology' is to you—"

Oinos continued: "As much something peered at through a glass bell as the idea that the terrain of regular polygons belongs to a secularized mathematics."

"What is a sacred science?"

Oinos sat back. "If a science is about understanding something as self-contained whose explanations do not involve God, and it is an attempt to understand as physics

understand, and the scientist understands as a detached observer, looking in through a window, then you have a secular science—the kind that reeks of the occult to us. Or that may sound strange, because in your world people proclaiming sacred sciences are proclaiming the occult. But let me deal with that later. A sacred science does not try to understand objects as something that can be explained without reference to God. A sacred science is first and foremost about God, not about objects. When it understands objects, it understands them out of God, and tries to see God shining through them. A sacred science has its home base in the understanding of God, not of inanimate matter, and its understanding of things bears the imprint of God. If you want the nature of its knowing in an image, do not think of someone looking in and observing, detached, through a window, but someone drinking something in."

"Is everything a sacred science to you? And what is a sacred science? Astrology?"

"Something like that, except that I use the term 'sacred science' by way of accommodation. Our own term is one that has no good translation in your language. But let us turn to the stars."

"Astrology is right in this: a star is more than a ball of plasma. Even in the Bible there is not always such a distinction between the ranks of angels and the stars as someone raised on materialist science might think." He rose, and began to walk, gesturing for Art to follow him. In the passage, they turned and entered a door. Oinos lit a lamp next to an icon on the wall.

The icon looked like starlight. It showed angels praying at the left, and then the studded sapphiric canopy of the night sky behind a land with herbs shooting from the earth, and on the right an immense Man—if he was a Man—standing, his hand raised in benediction. All around the sapphire dome were some majestic figures, soaring aloft in two of their six wings. Art paused to drink it in.

"What are those symbols?"

"They are Greek letters. You are looking at an icon of the creation of the stars, but the text is not the text for that day; it is from another book, telling of the angels thunderously shouting for joy when the stars were created. So the stars are connected with the angels."

"Is this astrology?"

"No, because the stars and angels both point to God. The influences in astrology point beyond matter to something else, but they do not point far enough beyond themselves. If you can use something to make a forecast that way, it doesn't point far enough beyond itself."

"Why not?"

"One definition to distinguish religion from magic—one used by anthropologists—is that religion is trying to come into contact with the divine, and magic is trying to control the divine. God cannot be controlled, and there is something of control in trying to foretell a future that God holds in mystery. A real God cannot be pried into by a skill. Astrology departs from a science that can only see stars as so much plasma, but it doesn't go far enough to lead people to look into the stars and see a shadow of their Creator. To be a sacred science, it is not enough to point to something more than matter as secular science understands it; as the term is used in our language, one can only be a *sacred* science by pointing to God."

"Then what is a sacred science? Which branches of learning as you break them up? Can they even be translated into my language?"

"You seem to think that if astrology is not a sacred science then sacred sciences must be something much more hidden. Not so. Farming is a sacred science, as is hunting, or inventing, or writing. When a monk makes incense, it is not about how much incense he can make per unit of time; his making incense is the active part of living contemplatively, and his prayer shows itself in physical labor. His act is more than material production; it is a

sacred science, or sacred art or sacred endeavor, and what goes into and what comes out of the activity is prayer. Nor is it simply a matter that he is praying while he acts; his prayers matter for the incense. There are many lands from your world's Desert Fathers to Mexico in your own day where people have a sense that it matters what state people cook in, and that cooking with love puts something into a dish that no money can buy. Perhaps you will not look at me askance when I say that not only monks in their monasteries exotically making incense for worship are performing a sacred science, but cooking, for people who may be low on the totem pole and who are not considered exotic, as much as for anyone else, can and should be a sacred science. Like the great work that will stay up with a sick child all night."

"Hmm..." Art said, and then finished his tankard.

"Have you traveled much?"

"I have not reached one in five of the galaxies with inhabited worlds. I can introduce you to people who have some traveling experience, but I am not an experienced traveler. Still, I have met sites worth visiting. I have met, learned, worshiped. Traveling in this castle I have drunk the blood of gems. There are worlds where there is nothing to see, for all is music, and song does everything that words do for you. I have beheld a star as it formed, and I have been part of an invention that moves forward as a thousand races in their laboratories add their devices. I have read books, and what is more I have spoken with members of different worlds and races. There seems to be no shortage of wonders, and I have even been to your own world, with people who write fantasy that continues to astonish us—"

"My son-in-law is big into fantasy—he got me to see a Lord of the whatever-it-was movie—but I don't fancy them much myself."

"We know about Tolkein, but he is not considered a source of astonishing fantasy to us."

"Um..." Art took a long time to recall a name, and Oinos waited patiently. "Lewis?"

"If you're looking for names you would have heard of, Voltaire and Jung are two of the fantasy authors we consider essential. Tolkein and Lewis are merely imaginative. It is Voltaire and Jung who are truly fantasy authors. But there are innumerable others in your world."

Art said, "Um... what do you mean by 'fantasy author'?"

Oinos turned. "I'm sorry; there is a discrepancy between how your language uses 'fantasy author' and ours. We have two separate words that your 'fantasy' translates, and the words stand for very different concepts. One refers to works of imagination that are set in another world that is not confused with reality. The other refers to a fundamental confusion that can cost a terrible price. Our world does not produce fiction; we do appreciate the fiction of other worlds, but we do not draw a particularly strong line between fiction where only the characters and events are imagined, and fiction where the whole world is imagined. But we do pay considerable attention to the second kind of fantasy, and our study of fantasy authors is not a study of imagination but a study of works that lead people into unreality. 'Fantasy author' is one of the more important terms in understanding your world and its history."

Art failed to conceal his reaction.

"Or perhaps I was being too blunt. But, unfashionable as it may be, there is such a thing as evil in your world, and the ways in which people live, including what they believe, has something to do with it. Not everything, but something."

Oinos waited for a time. Then, when Art remained silent, he said, "Come with me. I have something to show you." He opened a door on the other side of the room, and went into the next room. The room was lit by diffuse moonlight, and there was a ledge around the room and

water which Oinos stirred with his hand to light a phosphorescent glow. When Art had stepped in, Oinos stepped up, balancing on a steel cable, and stood silent for a while. "Is there anything here that you can focus on?"

"What do you mean?"

"Step up on this cable and take my hand."

"What if I fall into the water?"

Art tried to balance, but it seemed even more difficult in the dark. For a while, he tried to keep his balance with Oinos's help, but he seemed barely up. He overcompensated twice in opposite directions, began flying into the water, and was stopped at last by Oinos's grip, strong as steel, on his arm.

"I can't do this," Art said.

"Very well." Oinos opened a door on the other side of the room, and slowly led him out. As they walked, Oinos started up a spiral staircase and sat down to rest after Art reached the top. Then Art looked up at the sky, and down to see what looked like a telescope.

"What is it?"

"A telescope, not too different from those of your world."

Oinos stood up, looked at it, and began some adjustments. Then he called Art over, and said, "Do you see that body?"

"What is it?"

"A small moon."

Oinos said, "I want you to look at it as closely as you can," and then pulled something on the telescope.

"It's moving out of sight."

"That's right; I just deactivated the tracking feature. You should be able to feel handles; you can move the telescope with them."

"Why do I need to move the telescope? Is the moon moving?"

"This planet is rotating: what the telescope sees will change as it rotates with the planet, and on a telescope you

can see the rotation."

Art moved the handles and found that it seemed either not to move at all or else move a lot when he put pressure on it.

Art said, "This is a hard telescope to control."

Oinos said, "The telescope is worth controlling."

"Can you turn the tracking back on?"

Oinos merely repeated, "The telescope is worth controlling."

The celestial body had moved out of view. Art made several movements, barely passed over the moon, and then found it. He tried to see what he could, then give a relatively violent shove when the moon reached the edge of his field of view, and see if he could observe the body that way. After several tries, he began to get the object consistently in view... and found that he was seeing the same things about it, not being settled enough between jolts to really focus on what was there.

Art tried to make a smooth, slow movement with his body, and found that a much taller order than it sounded. His movement, which he could have sworn was gentle and smooth, produced what seemed like erratic movement, and it was only with greatest difficulty that he held the moon in view.

"Is this badly lubricated? Or do you have lubrication in this world?"

"We do, on some of our less precise machines. This telescope is massive, but it's not something that moves roughly when it is pushed smoothly; the joints move so smoothly that putting oil or other lubricants that are familiar to you would make them move much more roughly."

"Then why is it moving roughly every time I push it smoothly?"

"Maybe you aren't pushing it as smoothly as you think you are?"

Art pushed back his irritation, and then found the

moon again. And found, to his dismay, that when the telescope jerked, he had moved the slightest amount unevenly.

Art pushed observation of the moon to the back of his mind. He wanted to move the telescope smoothly enough that he wouldn't have to keep finding the moon again. After a while, he found that this was less difficult than he thought, and tried for something harder: keeping the moon in the center of what he could see in the telescope.

He found, after a while, that he could keep the moon in the center if he tried, and for periods was able to manage something even harder: keeping the moon from moving, or perhaps just moving slowly. And then, after a time, he found himself concentrating through the telescope on taking in the beauty of the moon.

It was breathtaking, and Art later could never remember a time he had looked on something with quite that fascination.

Then Art realized he was exhausted, and began to sit down; Oinos pulled him to a bench.

After closing his eyes for a while, Art said, "This was a magnificent break from your teaching."

"A break from teaching? What would you mean?"

Art sat, opened his mouth, and then closed it. After a while, he said, "I was thinking about what you said about fantasy authors... do you think there is anything that can help?"

Oinos said, "Let me show you." He led Art into a long corridor with smooth walls and a round arch at top. A faint blue glow followed them, vanishing at the edges. Art said, "Do you think it will be long before our world has full artificial intelligence?"

Oinos said, "Hmm... Programming artificial intelligence on a computer is not *that* much more complex than getting a stone to lay an egg."

Art said, "But our scientists are making progress. Your advanced world has artificial intelligence, right?"

Oinos said, "Why on earth would we be able to do that? Why would that even be a goal?"

"You have computers, right?"

"Yes, indeed; the table that I used to call up a scientific calculator works on the same principle as your world's computers. I could almost say that inventing a new kind of computer is a rite of passage among serious inventors, or at least that's the closest term your world would have."

"And your computer science is pretty advanced, right? Much more advanced than ours?"

"We know things that the trajectory of computer science in your world will never reach because it is not pointed in the right direction." Oinos tapped the wall and arcs of pale blue light spun out.

"Then you should be well beyond the point of making artificial intelligence."

"Why on a million, million worlds should we ever be able to do that? Or even think that is something we *could* accomplish?"

"Well, if I can be obvious, the brain is a computer, and the mind is its software."

"Is it?"

"What else could the mind be?"

"What else could the mind be? What about an altar at which to worship? A workshop? A bridge between Heaven and earth, a meeting place where eternity meets time? A treasury in which to gather riches? A spark of divine fire? A line in a strong grid? A river, ever flowing, ever full? A tree reaching to Heaven while its roots grasp the earth? A mountain made immovable for the greatest storm? A home in which to live and a ship by which to sail? A constellation of stars? A temple that sanctifies the earth? A force to draw things in? A captain directing a starship or a voyager who can travel without? A diamond forged over aeons from of old? A perpetual motion machine that is simply impossible but functions anyway? A faithful manuscript by which an ancient book passes on? A

showcase of holy icons? A mirror, clear or clouded? A wind which can never be pinned down? A haunting moment? A home with which to welcome others, and a mouth with which to kiss? A strand of a web? An acrobat balancing for his whole life long on a slender crystalline prism between two chasms? A protecting veil and a concealing mist? An eye to glimpse the uncreated Light as the world moves on its way? A rift yawning into the depths of the earth? A kairometer, both primeval and young? A—

"All right, all right! I get the idea, and that's some pretty lovely poetry. (What's a kairometer?) These are all very beautiful metaphors for the mind, but I am interested in what the mind is literally."

"Then it might interest you to hear that your world's computer is also a metaphor for the mind. A good and poetic metaphor, perhaps, but a metaphor, and one that is better to balance with other complementary metaphors. It is the habit of some in your world to understand the human mind through the metaphor of the latest technology for you to be infatuated with. Today, the mind is a computer, or something like that. Before you had the computer, 'You're just wired that way' because the brain or the mind or whatever is a wired-up telephone exchange, the telephone exchange being your previous object of technological infatuation, before the computer. Admittedly, 'the mind is a computer' is an attractive metaphor. But there is some fundamental confusion in taking *that* metaphor literally and assuming that, since the mind is a computer, all you have to do is make some more progress with technology and research and you can give a computer an intelligent mind."

"I know that computers don't have emotions yet, but they seem to have rationality down cold."

"Do they?"

"Are you actually going to tell me that computers, with their math and logic, aren't rational?"

"Let me ask you a question. Would you say that the

thing you can hold, a thing that you call a book, can make an argument?"

"Yes; I've seen some pretty good ones."

"Really? How do paper and ink think out their position?"

Art hesitated, and said, "Um, if you're going to nitpick..."

"I'm not nitpicking. A book is a tool of intelligent communication, and they are part of how people read author's stories, or explanation of how to do things, or poetry, or ideas. But the physical thing is not thereby intelligent. However much you think of a book as making an argument, the book is incapable of knowing what an argument is, and for that matter the paper and ink have no idea of whether they contain the world's best classic, or something mediocre, or incoherent accusations that world leaders are secretly planning to turn your world to dog drool, or randomly generated material that is absolute gibberish. The book may be meaningful to you, but the paper with ink on it is not the sort of thing that can understand what you recognize through the book.

"This might ordinarily be nitpicking, but it says something important about computers. One of the most difficult things for computer science instructors in your world to pound through people's heads is that a computer does not get the gist of what you are asking it to do and overlook minor mistakes, because the computer has no sense of what you are doing and no way to discern what were trying to get it to do from a mistake where you wrote in a bug by telling it to do something slightly different from what you meant. The computer has no sense that a programmer meant anything. A computer follows instructions, one after another, whether or not they make sense, and indeed without being able to wonder whether they make sense. To you, a program may be a tool that acts as an electronic shopping cart to let you order things through the web, but the web server no more understands

that it is being used as a web server than a humor book understands that it is meant to make people laugh. Now most or all of the books you see are meant to say something—there's not much market for a paperback volume filled with random gibberish—but a computer can't understand that it is running a program written for a purpose any more than a book can understand that the ink on its pages is intended for people to read."

Art said, "You don't think artificial intelligence is making real progress? They seem to keep making new achievements."

Oinos said, "The rhetoric of 'We're making real breakthroughs now; we're on the verge of full artificial intelligence, and with what we're achieving, full artificial intelligence is just around the corner' is not new: people have been saying that full artificial intelligence is just around the corner since before you were born. But *breeding a better and better kind of apple tree is not progress towards growing oranges*. Computer science, and not just artificial intelligence, has gotten good at getting computers to function better as computers. But human intelligence is something else... and it is profoundly missing the point to only realize that the computer is missing a crucial ingredient of the most computer-like activity of human rational analysis. Even if asking a computer to recognize a program's purpose reflects a fundamental error—you're barking up the wrong telephone pole. Some people from your world say that when you have a hammer, everything begins to look like a nail. The most interesting thing about the mind is not that it can do something more complete when it pounds in computer-style nails. It's something else entirely."

"But what?"

"When things are going well, the 'computer' that performs calculating analysis is like your moon: a satellite, that reflects light from something greater. Its light is useful, but there is something more to be had. The sun, as

it were, is that the mind is like an altar, or even something better. It takes long struggles and work, but you need to understand that the heart of the mind is at once practical and spiritual, and that its greatest fruit comes not in speech but in silence."

Art was silent for a long time.

Oinos stopped, tapped a wall once, and waited as an opening appeared in the black stone. Inside an alcove was a small piece of rough hewn obsidian; Oinos reached in, took it, and turned it to reveal another side, finely machined, with a series of concentric ridged grooves centered around a tiny niche. "You asked what a kairometer was, and this is a kairometer, although it would take you some time to understand exactly what it is."

"Is it one of the other types of computers in your world?"

"Yes. I would call it information technology, although not like the information technology you know. It is something people come back to, something by which people get something more than they had, but it does this not so much according to its current state as to our state in the moment we are using it. It does not change." Oinos placed the object in Art's hands.

Art slowly turned it. "Will our world have anything like this?"

Oinos took the kairometer back and returned it to its niche; when he withdrew his hand, the opening closed with a faint whine. "I will leave you to find that yourself."

Oinos began walking, and they soon reached the end of the corridor. Art followed Oinos through the doorway at the end and gasped.

Through the doorway was something that left Art trying to figure out whether or not it was a room. It was a massive place, lit by a crystalline blue light. As Art looked around, he began to make sense of his surroundings: there were some bright things, lower down, in an immense room

with rounded arches and a dome at the top, made of pure glass. Starlight streamed in. Art stepped through the doorway and sunk down a couple of inches.

Oinos stooped for a moment, and then said, "Take off your shoes. They are not needed here." Art did so, and found that he was walking on a floor of velveteen softness. In the far heart of the room a thin plume of smoke arose. Art could not tell whether he smelled a fragrance, but he realized there was a piercing chant. Art asked, "What is the chant saying?"

Oinos did not answer.

What was the occasion? Art continued to look, to listen, and began trying to drink it in. It almost sounded as if they were preparing to receive a person of considerable importance. There was majesty in the air.

Oinos seemed to have slipped away.

Art turned and saw an icon behind him, hanging on the glass. There was something about it he couldn't describe. The icon was dark, and the colors were bright, almost luminous. A man lay dreaming at the bottom, and something reached up to a light hidden in the clouds—was it a ladder? Art told himself the artistic effect was impressive, but there was something that seemed amiss in that way of looking at it.

What bothered him about saying the icon had good artistic effect? Was the artistry bad? That didn't seem to be it. He looked at a couple of areas of artistic technique, but it was difficult to do so; such analysis felt like a foreign intrusion. He thought about his mood, but that seemed to be the wrong place to look, and almost the same kind of intrusion. There seemed to be something shining through the icon; looking at it was like other things he had done in this world, only moreso. He was looking through the icon and not around it, but... Art had some sense of what it was, but it was not something he could fit into words.

After being absorbed in the icon, Art looked around. There must have been hundreds of icons around, and

lights, and people; he saw what seemed like a sparse number of people—of Oinos's kind—spread out through the vast space. There was a chant of some kind that changed from time to time, but seemed to somehow be part of the same flow. Things seemed to move very slowly—or move in a different time, as if clock time were turned on its side, or perhaps as if he had known clock time as it was turned on its side and now it was right side up—but Art never had the sense of nothing going on. There seemed to always be something more going on than he could grasp.

Art shifted about, having stood for what seemed like too long, sat down for a time, and stood up. The place seemed chaotic, in a way cluttered, yet when he looked at the "clutter," there was something shining through, clean as ice, majestic as starlight, resonant as silence, full of life as the power beneath the surface of a river, and ordered with an order that no rectangular grid could match. He did not understand any of the details of the brilliant dazzling darkness... but they spoke to him none the less.

After long hours of listening to the chant, Art realized with a start that the fingers of dawn had stolen all around him, and he saw stone and verdant forest about the glass walls until the sunlight began to blaze. He thought, he though he could understand the song even as its words remained beyond his reach, and he wished the light would grow stronger so he could see more. There was a crescendo all about him, and—

Oinos was before him. Perhaps for some time.

"I almost understand it," Art said. "I have started to taste this world."

Oinos bowed deeply. "It is time for you to leave."

The Watch

Metacult: So, Pater, I was thinking—wait a minute; I hear someone scratching at the door.

Janra: Hi, Vespucci. How are you?

Vespucci: Doing well. Take a seat.

Janra: Where?

Vespucci: Anywhere.

Janra: *Anywhere?*

Vespucci: Anywhere...

Off! *Off!* Get *off* my lap! Only my wife is allowed to sit there. You know that. Anyways, the *Radical Gadgets* catalogue came in today...

Janra: By the way, I phoned the company today. I think I can get some World War II vintage mechanical—

Vespucci: Don't even *think* about it. If you—

Pater: Easy, brothers. As you were saying?

Vespucci: As I was saying... *Radical Gadgets* has the most interesting tools. The cover product this month was an e-mail filtering package that uses Bayesian filtering techniques to block unwanted messages.

Janra: *That's* original! I checked Freshmeat today, and I think they only have half a dozen well-known anti-spam packages, not counting lesser products and tools that have just been released. Does *Radical Gadgets* always find products this original?

Vespucci: But it is original. And it's not an anti-spam package. It has nothing to do with spam.

Pater: Huh?

Vespucci: Let me explain. You know that Bayesian filtering looks at a message and uses statistics to guess what category it belongs to, right?

Pater: Yes; go on.

Vespucci: But that will work whether you use it for incoming or outgoing e-mails. Most people use the filtering techniques on incoming e-mails, to try and reduce the fire hose of spam coming in. But you don't have to stop there. You can also filter outgoing e-mails.

Pater: Why would I want to filter the e-mails I send *out*?

Vespucci: You've never sent a flame? Come on; I remember a couple of times that you flamed me over something minor, and sent a very embarrassed

apology when I waited two weeks and simply sent it back, and asked you to read it aloud, and tell me whether that's what you want me to hear from you. And it's not just you. When you're talking with a person face to face, there are two eyes looking at you and reminding you that a person hears every cutting word you say. That doesn't stop conflicts, but it does mitigate some of the abrasive things we're tempted to say. On a computer, it seems like there's just a keyboard and pixels—no person you can actually hurt. So people hit harder, and you have incredible flamewars, often between people who conduct themselves like responsible adults when they're talking to someone face to face. It's possible to learn discipline, of course, and conduct yourself maturely, but all too many people don't realise there's a discipline you have to learn even if you're mature.

And so instead of just assuming that the only bad e-mails are offensive messages from people who've never seen you, telling you that part of your body isn't big enough and you need to buy their snake oil, or that you're impotent, or that you're not man enough for a relationship with a real woman and will have to content yourself with pixels on a screen—apart from these, there are offensive messages that you send out and then wish you could somehow take back and delete.

And this program does just that. Once you've trained it on your sent mail folder, it watches messages you send out, and uses the same Bayesian technology that's so powerful in identifying spam, and identifies when you're writing something you'll regret later. Then it saves it, quarantining it in a separate folder until you come to your senses and delete it.

Pater: That's... um, I'm going to go to their computer and order it from their website. Please excuse me for a moment. I really need to—

Metacult: Sit down, Pater. You're not going to e-mail out any flames while we're here talking.

Vespucci: Hmm... um, I hadn't meant to have a big discussion about the anti-flame software. There were several things that caught my attention, but what caught my eye most was a watch that keeps exceptionally accurate time.

Pater: Huh? Who would need a more accurate way to keep time? Most cultures find an hour to be a short time, and a cheap digital watch keeps more accurate time than a \$5000 Rolex, because our watches are too accurate already. It would be awfully hard to explain our to-the-second accuracy to an aboriginal—I can't see why, besides pride that wants a possession to boast about, someone would benefit from a more accurate watch.

Vespucci: Oh, but there is benefit—worth paying \$5,000 for a digital watch. Even worth having to change the batteries too often.

Pater: How?

Vespucci: The watch doesn't just have an oscillating quartz crystal; it has an array of sensors in the watchband that measure skin temperature and conductivity, pulse, even a clever estimate of blood pressure, and feeds all of these into an embedded chip with some extraordinarily clever software.

This software takes these data and gets a picture of the person's emotional state. You know how time flies when you're having fun?

Pater: Didn't Einstein explain his theory of relativity by saying, "When a man sits with a pretty girl for an hour, it seems like a minute. But let him sit on a hot stove for a minute—and it's longer than any hour. That's relativity."

Vespucci: Um... that has nothing to do with the theory of relativity, and I'm not interested in discussing Einstein's spacetime now. If Einstein said that, he probably had a merry twinkle in his eye. But...

Come to think about it, that is a pretty good picture. The watch estimates your emotional state for one purpose: it keeps track of how long time seems to be passing. It has a normal timer that can count forty minutes until dinnertime, but it can also tell you how long the wait will *feel* like. And that's something no other watch can do.

Metacult: So it deals with subjective time? I read a book once which was trying to argue that time could be understood as something *besides* the number a machine has counted to. It talked about how a small child will ask Mom how long she's leaving for, and Mom's answer—she's really trying to avoid feeling guilty about leaving the child alone—are singularly unhelpful for a child trying to figure out how much perceived time must be endured before Mom returns.

Vespucci: Yes, and the minute-hour quote captures that. All watches tell what time it is from a machine's

perspective. This is the only watch that tells time from a human perspective.

Metacult: Wonderful. What does it take into account besides clock ticks and the person's emotional state?

Vespucci: Huh? What else contributes to our experience of time besides the physical time and our psychological state?

Pater: Your question betrays nominalism. The way you've framed things shuts out the true answer.

Vespucci: We're entering the third millenium; I don't see why you're dragging in a controversy from medieval times.

Janra: Mmmph. Excuse me. I think I need a glass of water.

Metacult: Sit down, Janra. And don't look at me like that. I'm going let you answer that.

Janra: Certainly. Here are the steps to hunt a bear: First, fire your gun. Second, aim your gun. Third, locate a bear. Fourth, buy a gun.

Metacult: Try again.

Janra: Clothing to wear in winter: a heavy coat, then on top of that a good sweater or two, then two shirts and two pair of pants, then underwear, with woolen socks over your boots.

Metacult: Please be serious.

Janra: I *am* being serious.

Metacult: Then be mundane.

Janra: Oh. That's another matter entirely.

Your entire approach is backwards and inside-out, as backwards as trying to shoot a bear before you have a gun, and as inside-out as wearing your anorak next to your skin.

How? Let me respond to your second comment. If I said, in the most reverent of tones, "We're standing at the forty-second latitude and eighty-seventh longitude," you'd think I was making a mountain out of a molehill: yes, we're at a particular latitude and longitude, but what does that have to do with the price of eggs in China? It's true, but what does that have to do with anything we're discussing? Yet people say, "We're entering the third millenium" as if it is this great statement of far-reaching consequences, the sort of thing that should settle a matter. As you yourself did.

People in the Middle Ages often did not know what year it was, or even what century, any more than people today know what latitude and longitude we're at—quick—do you know what latitude and longitude *you're* at? The reason is that we think the past is under a glass bell, where we humans are living our lives while those odd and quaint creatures under the bell are not the same as us. And it doesn't need to be that way. For a long time after Shakespeare's death, when people put on Shakespeare, they didn't try to reconstruct period accurate costumes. Why? Did they not know that Shakespeare lived long before

them? Perhaps, but they also recognised that Shakespeare was a human who worked with human problems and wrote human drama, and that the reason his plays are worth performing is not because they're old but because they're timelessly *human*. And we forget this when we take great care to dress actors in funny costumes that tell people that this is something quaint from long ago and far away.

You know that many of your physical possessions that make up the physical world come from far away: when you buy something at Target, and make no effort to find treasures from faroff land, you buy a lamp that was made in China or underpants that were made in Mexico. You know that the whole world is interconnected, so even if you don't go hunting off for exotic imports, a great many of the things you buy were made far away.

You can as much live without ideas from bygone ages as you can live in a house you built with your own hands—or for that matter, be born in a house you built with your own hands. That isn't how things work. Nominalism is one of innumerable ideas that has survived, just as the custom of using pots and pans has survived.

Vespucci: If it's one of innumerable ideas, why pay it that much attention?

Janra: Because I can count on my fingers the number of conceptual revolutions that are more important today than nominalism. Trying to understand how people think today without looking at nominalism is like trying to look at a summer meadow without seeing plants. There are other important ideas, but

this one makes the short list.

Vespucci: Then why have I not heard more about nominalism, when I hear people talking about postmodernism, for instance, or modernism? And what is nominalism to begin with?

Janra: For the same reason a fish won't tell you about water. Modernism and postmodernism are both nominalism writ large; nominalism is a seed, whose flower is modernism, and whose fruit is postmodernism.

Vespucci: Hmm. I hear the distinct accent of a person laboring in the prison of one idea.

Janra: Bear with me. Nominalism may be seen as the lock on a prison: we need to pay close attention to the lock to see if there's any way to open it. Then, if we can get out, let us see if there are not many more ideas available after we have paid proper attention to nominalism.

Now what is nominalism? In a sentence, nominalism says, "There's nothing out there; it's all in your head." A nominalist doesn't literally mean "nothing" is outside our heads; you can't put on a watch and say, "I refute nominalism thus."

Vespucci: But it was a non sequitur when—

Janra: Yes, I know, I know. Another tangent. But let's forget about saying that matter is just in people's heads and not something external to mind. As I was saying, you can't put on a watch and say, "I refute nominalism thus." But if we really follow nominalist

logic, you can't put on a watch. You can have nerve impulses that result in the motion of some elementary particles, but a watch is a tool-to-tell-time-which-you-wear-on-your-wrist, and a tool-to-tell-time-which-you-wear-on-your-wrist does not and cannot exist in nature. All the *meaning* that makes those atoms a watch can only exist in minds, and for the same reason what-we-call-a-watch can't have the time displayed on its face. It can have elementary particles that are placed like so and interact with light just so, but the meaning that can read a time in that configuration isn't at all in the atoms themselves; it's in your head. This is clarified in a distinction between "brute fact" and "social reality:" brute fact is what exists outside of minds and social reality can only exist in minds, and almost anything humans value consists of a small amount of brute fact and a large portion of social reality—larger than most people would guess. Everything is either brute fact or social reality.

Pater: Is the boundary between brute fact and social reality a brute fact or a social reality?

Metacult: Shut up.

Janra: Imagine three umpires at a baseball game: the first says, "I calls 'em as they are." The second says, "I calls 'em as I sees them." But the third says, "Some's strikes, and some's balls, but they ain't nothing 'til I calls 'em."

With apologies to Kronecker, God created cold matter. All else is the work of man.

Pater: Whoa. Is the basic faculty that lets man create

social reality derived from brute fact or social reality?

Janra: Shut up.

Now I have been showing what happens when you push nominalism a good deal further than non-scholars are likely to do. But in fact nominalism has been seeping into our consciousness for centuries, so that we might not find the claim that nature is beautiful to be a mistake, but we see with nominalist eyes and hear with nominalist ears. Most of people across most of time have understood and experienced symbols very different from how a nominalist would.

If we assume that matter is basically something cold and dead, devoid of spiritual properties, then of course a symbol can only exist in the mind, a mental connection between two things that are not connected by nature. Any similarity is in the eye of the beholder, or if not that, is at least a coincidence that isn't grounded on anything deeper. There is no organic connection.

But if we look at how people have understood symbols, their understanding has to do with a view of reality where a great many things are real, where a symbol bespeaks a real and spiritual connection. The crowning jewel of this understanding of symbol was the claim that man is the image of God. When Christians talked about man being the image of God, they were not talking about what we would understand by a photograph or a painting, where pigments are arranged in such a way that an observer can tell they were meant to look like God;

they meant a real and organic connection that went far beyond a mere representation of God; they meant that we were what you would think a kind of magical statue which not only represented God, but embodied his actual presence: God's presence operates in us in a real way, and every breath we breathe is the breath of God.

Now the reason we began discussing nominalism was that you said something, and I said, "That question betrays nominalism." Do you remember what you said?

Vespucci: No.

Janra: We were discussing what I consider to be a very interesting watch, and you asked what could contribute to our experience of time besides what an ordinary watch tells, and our emotional state.

That question betrays nominalism. You were in essence asking what could interest us in time besides the brute fact of what most watches tell, and the social, or at least mental, reality of our emotional state.

But there's a world of other things out there.

Vespucci: But what else is there?

Metacult: Hmm. I think we need to work a bit harder to help you look at what you believe. You've been keeping up on superstring theory, right?

Vespucci: Yes. I loved the explanations I could get of relativity, and I love how scientists can turn our

commonsense notions upside down.

Metacult: Do you know any classical, Newtonian physics?

Vespucci: I did in high school. I've forgotten most of it now, but I don't remember it being nearly as exciting: a lot of math to go through to get at common sense.

Metacult: May I instead suggest that your common sense is a nonmathematical version of Newtonian physics?

Newton's physics was big on grids: everything was placed on a grid of absolute space, and absolute time. And it connected rooms the wrong way: different places are on the same meaningless grid, but they're not connected besides the grid.

To the medieval mind, it wasn't so. Each space was its own little world as far as Newton was concerned. But they were connected spiritually. There is an icon of two saints from different centuries talking, and the medieval mind was comfortable with this because it saw things other than "but they're from other parts of the spacetime grid!"

Vespucci: But what does this have to do with time? It seems to me you're going off on a tangent.

Metacult: Ok, back to time. Time isn't just a grid adorned by emotions. It's spiritually connected. You yourself are not self-contained.

Pater: And there's liturgical time. One of the things that shocked me was that people seem to have *no* time. It

helped me to appreciate the colorful time I had breathed. I was stunned when people experienced time as torture. I experienced it as a sacrament, a channel of God's grace.

From other conversations, I get the impression that the liturgical year isn't real to you: one source of holidays among others. But it is real: interlocking cycles of day, week, year, so that you are breathing in this rhythm and are given something to live in each moment. Sometimes you're feasting; sometimes you're fasting; often you're given something to meditate on.

Vespucci: So the watch would do a more complete job if its little computer were programmed to keep track of the liturgical cycles? I think the engineers could do that.

Pater: Errmmmm...

Metacult: I think what he means, but cannot articulate, is that what a computer could make of the liturgical cycles are *not* the place that makes liturgical time. They are more of a doorway into the place, into a room that the Spirit blows. If the watch were to keep track of that, it would have to have, not more sophisticated computer programming, but something else altogether, something sensitive to spiritual realities.

Pater: And that's just what a scientific computer, even a very small one, cannot do. Science works on nominalism. It's brought a lot of good stuff, but it can't perceive or work with spiritual qualities, any more than a pair of binoculars will improve your

hearing. And that's fine when you recognise that spiritual qualities are left out, but the temptation is to say, "Because science is so powerful, it sees everything that's real." And a watch designed by scientific engineering can do scientific things, but if it were to try and see liturgical time from the inside, it would inevitably kill what breathes in it.

Janra: So if we were to imagine a watch that keeps track of time, true time, it would need not only sensors and a miniature computer, and a time-keeping quartz crystal, but something attuned to spiritual realities.

Pater: If that were possible. In my culture, we never wear watches. The best watch would be no watch, or perhaps a rock on a wristband, where if you go to it looking for trivia, it doesn't give what you're looking for—and in so doing, reminds you of something important, that you need to look elsewhere.

Janra: What about a watch that had a rock alongside the things we've just described?

Pater: Ermmm...

Janra: And what would men's and women's models look like? Would the rocks be respectively rough and smooth?

Metacult: Actually, men's and women's experience of time differs significantly, so if you had a watch with a truer way of telling time, there would be a much bigger difference than men's watches being heftier and women's watches being slender.

Janra: How?

Metacult: I remember one time when you were talking with a new mother, and whenever the baby needed care, you stopped talking so that Mom could pay attention to her new son. It was a thoughtful gesture, and one that wasn't needed.

Janra: Why not? I'd have wanted to be allowed to give the child my full attention.

Metacult: I know. So would most good men. A man's particular strength is to devote his full attention to a task. A woman's particular strength is to lightly balance several tasks, giving genuine attention to each. That mother was perfectly able to give attention to her son and listen to you at the same time. That's why she looked at you, slightly puzzled and with an attention that says, "I'm listening," when you stopped talking.

And there are other differences as well. If there is a situation that colors a man's understanding of time, it is a brief period of intense pressure. A woman's understanding of time more has the hue of a longer period that requires sustained attention. And even that misses something. The difference between a man's experience of time and a woman's is not so much like a difference between numbers as a difference between two colors, or sounds, or scents. It's a qualitative difference, and one that is not appreciated—usually people feel in their heart, "She's treating time the same way I do, but doing an unexplainably bad job of it."

Vespucci: I forgot to tell you, the watch also asks when

you were born.

Pater: Why? To remind you if you forget your birthday?

Vespucci: I'm surprised, Pater. It's so it can keep track of your age. You experience time differently as you grow. What seems like an hour when you're five only seems like half an hour when you're ten, or fifteen minutes when you're twenty, or five minutes when you're sixty. Time seems to go faster and faster as you grow: there's one change between when you're a child and an adult, and senior citizens say that every fifteen minutes it's breakfast. The quality and pace of time change as you age, which is why young people think youth lasts forever and the rest of us think it vanishes. They say that once you're over the hill, you begin to pick up speed.

Pater: What does "over the hill" mean?

Vespucci: Um...

Metacult: He really doesn't understand. To him, aging is about maturing and growing, not only for children, but adults as well. He values his youth as a cherished memory, but he's enjoying his growth and looking forward eagerly to the joy awaiting him in Heaven. He doesn't understand your self-deprecating humor that speaks as if aging were a weakness or a moral failing.

Vespucci: Ok.

Metacult: Which reminds me. One of the ways my experience of time has changed as I have grown has been to recognize that time flows faster and faster.

For some people, this is a reason to try way too hard to be healthy—taking care of their bodies, not because their bodies should be taken care of, but to try and postpone the inevitable. But I'm looking forward to the Heaven that's getting closer and closer, and I am delighted by a glimpse into the perspective of a God who created time and to whom all times are both soon and now.

But the other major change is more internal, more a matter of discipline. I used to live in hurry, to always walk quickly and love to play video games quickly. Then I set foot in Malaysia, and something changed.

There was a difference, which I imperfectly characterized as life being lived more slowly in Malaysia. Which is true, or was for me, but is somewhat beside the point. And I experienced the joy of living more slowly. You know how I've thought that it takes humility to enjoy even pride, and chastity to enjoy even lust. At that point I would have added to those two that it takes slowness to enjoy even haste.

Vespucci: So you tried to be as slow as you had been quick?

Metacult: Yes. I observed that I had been obsessed with time under the tyranny of the clock, and so I tried to abolish time by being slow. Which isn't right; besides *chronos*, the time a clock can measure, there is *kairos*, relational or task-oriented or creating time, where you are absorbed in another person or a task, and there time is a glimmer of eternity. And I was interested in the idea of living time as the beginning of an eternal glory, which Pater

understands much better than I ever will. First I tried to negate time and live as something less-than-temporal, and I am slowly realizing that instead it means embracing time and entering something more-than-temporal.

In liturgical time—and Pater could say much more about this than I—it flows. Here it moves quickly, there it moves slowly, and there it spins in eddies. It isn't just the speed that flows; it's the color, if you will. Just as the priest is the crowning jewel of the priesthood every person is called for, so the touch of Heaven as we worship is the crowning jewel of what time is meant to be.

And I had also been realizing that I had sought to escape time, and not cherish it as God's good creature. Most recently, I am trying to... There's a famous quote by Oliver Wendell Holmes, saying, "I wouldn't give a fig for the simplicity on this side of complexity, but I'd give my life for the simplicity on the other side of complexity." Now I'm looking for a time that is on the other side of complexity: not the mundane ordinariness of disfigured time, but a beautiful ordinariness on the other side of this complexity we've been discussing.

Vespucci: How do you think that will work?

Metacult: I don't know. Part of it has to do with the metaculture you used for my nickname. I don't simply breathe in my culture and ask "How else could it be?", but am in the odd position of being able to step into cultures but never be absolutely at home. And have part of me that doesn't fit. That's not quite right; I do connect, partly in a way that is

basically human, and partly in a way that is—

Janra: Don't try to explain. That would take an hour.

Metacult: At any rate, a fair number of people talk about living counterculturally, and one way you can live counterculturally is let live time as a blessing rather than a curse. People who say technology determines our lives are almost right, and that *almost* makes a world of difference if you're willing to live counterculturally. The pressure on us to live in hurry is not a pressure that no one can escape. It is a pressure that few try to escape in the right way—but you can, if you try and go about it the right way.

But quite a lot of the rest of it has to do with very basic parts of the Christian life. God wants us to seek him first, and when we do, he knows full well what else we need. "Seek first the Kingdom of God, and all these things will be given to you as well." includes a life where time unfolds as a rainbow or a river, something of both color and flow, like the year with its beauty in due season.

Vespucci: Do you see time as a line or a circle? Something that keeps moving in a direction, or something that does the same thing over and over again?

Metacult: Both, of course. God is revealing himself in history and transforming it to his ends. And there is decay; decay follows a line down. In our lives, we are progressing towards Heaven or Hell, and in each day... here we meet the cycles, but if we live well, the cycles in our lives aren't just an aimless meandering, but like a man who keeps running through a ditch,

digging. In one way, he's going to the same places again and again, but in another way, he's going deeper—and he may meet both the earth's warmth in winter (or coolness in summer), and the water of life. The line moves through circles.

Janra: So what would make the perfect watch?

Vespucci: Are there any we haven't covered?

Metacult: Umm... we've looked at one big change from a normal watch—instead of adding a calculator, that *Radical Gadgets* catalogue had a watch that tries to tell a more human time by taking your age and emotional state into account as well as what most watches tell. That was sort of a Pandora's box. I think we could all agree that that watch was leagues more human than any normal watch... and it was just human enough to reveal how un-human watches are.

Vespucci: How?

Metacult: When the only kind of watch kept track of seconds, it was easy enough to think that time was simply what a watch told. But when one watch started to pay attention to how you feel...

It was kind of like when you've been in the freezing outdoors for a long time, so long that it still hurts a little, but you can almost ignore it. Then you come inside, and THEN it stings. It's not until you enter a genuinely warm room that you realize how cold and numb you really are.

The watch in that catalogue was just human enough

to reveal how un-human watches, and the time that they tell, are. It did what no other watch could. It's enough of a success to be a *spectacular* failure. Someone brought up liturgical time, which led to the suggestion that the watch be programmed to keep track of liturgical time. And then we stumbled into a hole with no bottom. Why can't a computer keep track of liturgical time? Well, you see, the Spirit does more than just follow calculations... A watch would need far more than better electronics to do that, far more than scientific engineering can provide. Although I did like the suggestion of adding a rock. Even if I don't see how to make a rock sensitive to women's time and men's time. Or rather, what to do to appropriately respect the difference.

Vespucci: Janra, what you said about nominalism interests me. Could you give a more complete explanation?

Janra: I'd love to, but I need to be somewhere next month.

Vespucci: Please be serious.

Janra: I *am* being serious.

Vespucci: Then be mundane.

Metacult: He *is* being mundane. If you'd like a good introduction, read Philip Sherrard's *The Rape of Man and Nature: An Enquiry Into the Origins & Consequences of Modern Science*. In it, Sherrard says almost nothing about time and everything about the things time is connected to. I think it goes overboard, but if you read it and pay attention to the

haunting beauty that keeps coming up, then you'll learn something about being human—and living in human time. It doesn't use the word 'nominalism' very much, but it says quite a lot about it.

Vespucci: Are there any other things you've all left out?

Metacult: Only about two billion. I've talked about *kairos* as an absorbed time instead of a time when you're watching the clock. What I haven't talked about as *kairos* as a divinely appointed time, where you are in a divinely orchestrated dance, and you are free, and yet your movements are part of the divine plan. We are human, not by "just" being human, but by allowing the divine to operate in us; it is the divine, not the human, that we need most to be human. I haven't discussed that. We haven't discussed, in connection with nominalism, how there is a spiritual place in us where we meet God, and we have the ability to reason from what we see, and in tandem with nominalism we have become impoverished when both functions are dumped on the reasoning ability and we don't know where we can meet God, where our minds connect with the very Reason that is God himself. It makes a difference whether we experience time through both our reasoning ability and this spiritual meeting-place, or through our reasoning ability alone.

I also haven't talked about turning back the clock. When people rightly or wrongly believe there is a golden age they've lost, and try to re-create it, they end up severing connections with the recent past and even the golden age.

Vespucci: How does *that* work?

Metacult: I'm not exactly sure.

My guess is that a living culture has a way of not being ambiguous. It gives corrections when you make false assumptions about it; that's why people experience culture shock. People trying to re-create a past golden age need never experience culture shock; if you make a false assumption about the golden age, the golden age won't correct you. So the golden age appears to be whatever you want, and people who aren't satisfied with the present, and want to re-create past glory, end up pushing a fantasy that is different both from the present and the past. The Renaissance and Enlightenment neo-classicism both tried to re-create the glory of classical antiquity and are both notable as departures from the past. People who aren't trying to re-create the past can preserve it, saying, "Be gentle with this tradition. It was not inherited from your parents; it is borrowed from your children." People eager to restore past glory all too often, if not sever, severely damage the link between past and future.

I also haven't talked about keeping up with the Trumps, and your unadvertised way to say "No!" to the tyranny of the urgent. I haven't even talked about—

Janra: Stop! Stop. You're going way overboard. He got your point. In fact, I think he got your point half an hour ago. He—

Pater: Could I interrupt for a moment?

Janra: Certainly. What is it?

Pater: I know this is going to sound REALLY strange, but I want a watch.

Vespucci, Janra, Metacult: Huh?

Pater: You heard me.

Janra: But why?

Pater: I know this is going to sound strange, but I want one.

To you a watch represents all sorts of problems, and I don't wonder if you're dumping too much on it. But that's another issue. I don't have the ticking clock in me that you do. There's an issue of sensitivity—I know you hate watches and probably planners, but I burn people by being late and forgetting that just an hour's delay to me is not "just" an hour to them.

Is it really impossible to make a watch that can represent liturgical time, or even hollow out a space liturgical time can abide in? I thought it was possible now to make a watch that will keep track of sunrise and sunset. Scientific engineering can't do some things, but could there be another kind of engineering? I suppose that "even" that technical marvel in your catalogue, the watch that knows how long something feels like, would make an awfully neat conversation piece.

Metacult: I think I may know of just the thing for you.

This watch is a sort of hybrid. Part of it is traditional electronic—something that tells hours, minutes, and seconds, that displays the date, and has a timer,

alarm, and a stopwatch accurate to the nearest hundredth of a second—and for that matter it's water resistant to two hundred meters. It's a bit battered—which adds to its masculine look.

But that's not the interesting part. The interesting part has an exquisite sensitivity to liturgical rhythm, such as purely electronic gadgetry could never deliver. And it is a connected time, a part of the Great Dance that moves not according to the wearer's emotions alone but what the Great Choreographer orchestrates. It moves in beautiful ordered time. And there is more. It can enter another person's or place's time, and fit. Among other things.

Pater: This is great! Where can I get one?

Metacult: Just a second while I take off my watch... here's the littlest part. The rest is already inside your heart.

The Sign of the Grail

George had finally gotten through the first week at Calix College, and the chaos was subsiding. Bored for a minute, and too exhausted from the busy work to start researching something, he sat down, tried to remember something strange that he meant to investigate, and tried some more.

When he finally gave up and tried to think about what else he could do, he remembered a book he had seen in his closet, perhaps left over by a previous resident. He pulled out a fan and a lamp that were placed on it, and pulled out a large book. The entire leather cover had only eleven letters, and the dark leather showed signs of wear but seemed to be in remarkably good condition. The golden calligraphy formed a single word: *Brocéliande*. All across the front lay dark, intricate leather scrollwork.

What was "*Brocéliande*?" After looking at the leather and goldwork a short while, George opened *Brocéliande* and read:

The knight and the hermit wept and kissed together, and the hermit did ask, "Sir knight, wete thou what the Sign of the Grail be?"

The knight said, "Is that one of the Secrets of the Grail?"

"If it be one of the Secrets of the Grail, that is neither for thee to ask nor to know. The Secrets of the Grail are very different from what thou mightest imagine in thine heart, and no man will get them by looking for secrets. But knowest thou what the Sign of the Grail be?"

"I never heard of it, nor do I know it."

"Thou wete it better than thou knowest, though thou wouldst wete better still if thou knewest that thou wete."

"That be perplexed, and travail sore to understand."

The hermit said, "Knowest thou the Sign of the Cross?"

"I am a Christian and I know it. It is no secret amongst Christians."

"Then know well that the sacred kiss, the kiss of the mass, even if it be given and received but once per year, is the Sign of the Grail."

"How is that? What makes it such as I have never heard?"

"I know that not in its fullness. Nor could I count reasons even knew I the fullness of truth. But makest thou the Sign of the Cross when thou art alone?"

"Often, good hermit; what Christian does not?"

"Canst thou make the Sign of the Grail upon another Christian when thou art alone?"

George's cell phone rang, and he closed the book and ran to hear the call better. When he came back, though he spent an hour searching, he could not find his place in the heavy book. He turned outside.

There were a lot of people, but what he saw was the castle-like stonework of the campus, the timeworn statues, and finally the great wood with its paths, streams, and meadows. He got lost several times, but not truly *lost*, as he was exploring and finding interesting places no less

when he lost his sense of direction. The next time he found his way, he went to the cafeteria and sat down at a table, part listening and part sifting through thoughts.

When he got home, his mind was hungry again, and he opened *Brocéliande* to the middle:

Merlin howled.

"Lord of Heaven and Earth, I have everything I want, or rather everything I fled to. I have left the city and the company of men, and am become as a wild beast, living on grass and nuts.

"Is this because of whose son I am? Some say I have powers from my father, serving the Light only because the prayers spoken when some learned of that dread project. Yet here outside of castle and city I have learned things hidden from most men. I can conjure up a castle from the air, but not enter and live in one: I live in the wood as a man quite mad."

Then he looked around. The trees were a verdant green, yet he found apples. Presently he came to the fountain of Brocéliande; he rang not the bell but drew deep and drank a draught. The forest were his labyrinth and his lair.

A hawk came and set him on the branch close up.

Merlin said to it, "Yet I can speak with thee: no element is a stranger to me."

A sound of footsteps sounded, and Merlin ran not away.

Merlin his sister Ganeida laid a hand on Merlin his arm. "Come, Merlin. This is unworthy. I have brought thee food for a journey: King Arthur summoneth thee to his court."

Merlin beheld the wood called Brocéliande. He beheld its holly, its ivy, its trees shaken by storm and wind. He thought of the animals. And there was something about this forest that drew him: it seemed larger on the inside than the outside, and there was

something alway that seemed shining through it, like faint and haunting music which he had by struggles learned to catch as he withdrew from castles and the world of men.

Then Ganiada did start to sing a different song, a plain and simple folk tune, and Merlin his heart settled, and he did walk with his sister.

George slowly closed the book.

He imagined the scene; there was something about Merlin that haunted and eluded him. There was—

There was a knock on the door.

He opened it. It was one of the people from dinner.

"Do you want to see a movie?"

"What movie?"

"We're still deciding. But there are a few of us going to the theater."

George thought for a moment. Up until that point he thought he didn't want to read more of the book for now. When he declined the invitation, there was a fleeting insight which he forgot the next moment.

The next day in class, the figure of Merlin had a stronger grip on his imagination.

If George had less energy, his classes might have suffered more. As it was, he was getting by, and he slowly began to realize that there was something more that gripped him than horses, swords, and armor. He kept opening more to see the beautiful fantasy, so different from his world. At one point he turned the page:

Then Queen Guinevere did sigh and wept sore.

A lady asked, "Milady, what is it?"

"This Grail cometh even now. Is it accursed?"

"The Round Table shattered sore hard and knights return with strange tales. Such a holy thing this Grail is called, yet when it cometh the rich Grail yet burneth like fire. Already King Arthur his work is

unraveling.

"Will it even take from me my Sir Lancelot? Or can I take even my Lancelot from the Holy Grail?"

There was something in the back of George's mind. He sat back, thinking, and then closed the book to make a brief visit to the unspoilt beauty of the wood.

When he went in, he noticed a great beech tree, lying, weeping. It seemed that there was something trying to get out of the verdure. There were ferns and moss around, and he walked and walked. The path took many turns, and George began to realize several things. First, it was dark. Second, he was lost. Third, a chill was setting in. Fourth, he could not see even the stars.

Before long he was running in heavy, icy rain, branches lashing, until a branch hitting his chest winded him. He sat down in stinging pain and regained his breath, then felt around and crawled beneath an outcropping. Here the rain at least would not get to him any more. He spent the night in waking shock at what this great pristine nature, unsullied by human contamination, was really like: the forest seemed to be without reason or order right down to the awkward surface of the rock that he was painfully lying on. Long-forgotten fears returned: when a little light broke through the clouds, were those things he saw rocks, fallen trees, or goblins? He spent a long time shivering, and when the sun rose, he thirsted for light, and got up, only half awake, and followed it until he came to the edge of the forest and saw the castle-inspired buildings of the college. A short while later he was warming up with a welcome blanket and the welcome sound of voices in conversation.

Something was eating away at the back of George's mind.

Perhaps because of his weariness, his attention in class was chiefly on the flicker of the fluorescent light and how the buildings, which on the outside were so evocative

of castles, were so modern on the inside. The one thing that caught his mind was a set of comments about either how we must be individuals and do our own thing or else we are all community and individuality is an illusion. He wanted to be haunted and meet hints of a larger world, and others' passionately held opinions seemed like they were taken from *Newsweek* and *USA Today*.

What was on TV? He stopped in the lobby and saw a show with a medieval set, very carefully done to convey a medieval flavor, and watched until a heroine looked at a magical apparition in a full-length mirror and said, "I am having... a biochemical reaction!" He could not explain what failed to confront him, but he walked out. It was Freya's Day, commonly shortened to "Friday." When he learned how the days of the week were named, for Norse gods or celestial bodies—namely, Sun's Day, Moon's Day, Tiw's Day, Wotan's Day, Thor's Day, Freya's Day, and Saturn's Day—something seemingly pedestrian met him with a touch of a larger world. Now, it seemed, things that looked like they could tell of a larger world confronted him with the utterly pedestrian?

His homework did not take long.

Then, amidst Bon Jovi blaring through the hall, George began read. What he was reading seemed to affect him more like a song would than a story: a lullabye almost. He read of Arthur walking into battle, carrying an icon of the Virgin above him. There were mighty blows, armies with their mounted shock troops, great knights clothed in chainmail hauberks astride elephantine destriers, and in the center Arthur holding what seemed to be a story within a story, an icon that opened out onto something larger, and yet something he could not see in his mind's eye.

Then at another place he read as Arthur crossed land and sea and placed his sword on the ground and claimed a second Britain, and then gave of his knights, his brothers, and his substance to make a place like Great Britain, with

forests and orchards, fields and towns, until he had given what he could of his spirit to make a Little Britain.

George looked through and began to see things weaving in and out: an intensity, a concentration, and not just that he was entering another time but he was entering another *time*, though he could not tell how it was different: he only sensed that time moved differently, and that his watch told something very different.

Then all of this seemed to crystallize as a grievously wounded Sir Lancelot came to an hospitable knight and Elaine his daughter spent endless time healing his wounds. Love so overwhelmed her that she poured herself out with such intensity that when Lancelot left for the only woman he could love, her body emptied of spirit and life floated on a bier in a boat until Arthur's court wept at the most piteous tale of her love. George found himself wishing he could weep.

—over hill, over dale until the night was black, and neither candle nor star pierced it. The great knight his destrier shook the earth. The great knight was clad in a double coat of mail and the shaft of his greater spear was as a weaver's beam. Then he did stop to dismount and his own steps shook the earth.

Before him was a chalice of purest gold, radiant with light—radiant as the day. He walked before it, his steps shook the earth, and he stood taller than ever he did stand, until his hand grasped it.

The light blazed brighter and a voice in the air spake, "Lancelot, Lancelot, why mockest thou me?" The light blazed, and Sir Lancelot fell against the ground in tremors, and his horse fled far away in terror.

Then Sir Lancelot spake a question which I will not tell you.

The voice answered with words not lawful for man to write, and the pure gold chalice vanished and

the light with it.

The knight wist not why he ran, and later he awoke him in a strange place where there were neither man nor beast in sight.

George closed the book. He had been reading for a long time, he told himself. What was there to do?

He looked around the school website for clubs and organizations, and none of the many things people were doing caught his eye. He walked around the campus, looking at the buildings. He went to the library and wandered around the bookshelves, and picked up a few items but set them down. Then he returned to his room and sat down for a while.

He was bored for the rest of the day.

That night, as he dreamed, he saw a castle, and walked into it. Whenever he looked at his body, he saw what looked like his ordinary clothing, and yet he believed he was wearing armor. He walked through hallways, chambers, the great hall, even dungeons, trying to see what he was searching for. At last he was in a room where he heard people, and smelt something ineffable. He caught a glimpse of a chalice that he could not see, yet he sensed its silhouette, bathed in indescribable light on either side, and he saw light rising above its core. But he never succeeded in seeing it.

He awoke from the strain to see it. He heard birdsong, and the fingers of the light of the dawn were brushing against his face.

Something crystallized in George's mind, and he did not need to tell himself, "I am on a quest."

The next day he went into the city to look around in the medieval institute, and tried to see what was there. He managed to walk at a brisk pace, almost run, through the museum, and was nervous over whether he would get out by the time he had to leave to catch dinner. Nothing caught his eye; nothing seemed interesting; everything

seemed good only for a glimpse.

There was something eating at him.

During the next week, George discovered online reproduction sword dealers and looked at the perfectly machined character of the many closeup images available online. He didn't buy anything, but after the week thinking and failing to find other places, George returned to the museum. Maybe there was something he had missed.

He stopped at the first sword.

The sword, or what was left of it, looked like it had been eaten by worms, if that were possible. The deeply pitted surface intrigued him; it had all the surface of the complexity of a rock, and he thought that if he could take a magnifying glass or a zoomed-in camera lens to this or that part, it could pass for the intricate surface of a volcanic rock.

The handle didn't look right at all. It was a thin square rod connecting a thick blade and a thicker pommel, and seemed the very definition of "ergonomically incorrect," as if it had been designed to gouge the wearer's hand or generate blisters. It held for George something of the fascination of a car wreck. Why on earth had the museum put such a poor-quality specimen on display?

Then he read the rather large plaque.

The plaque read:

This sword was excavated in what is now Cornwall in Great Britain and dates to the 5th or 6th century AD. It is considered to be remarkably well-preserved, being one of few such finds to be straight and in one solid piece, the metal part lacking only a handguard, and is one of this museum's prized holdings and one of the most valuable gifts from an anonymous donor. The handle, of which only the metal tang remains, was probably wood or possibly other organic materials.

Think for a moment about the time and place this sword would have come from. Everything was made by hand, and there was little wealth: owning a sword would have been like owning a car today. Microscopic examination suggests that this sword was made for someone wealthy, as there are tiny fragments of gold embedded in the blade.

What was life like when nothing was made by machines or mass-produced and therefore things were more expensive and there was less you could buy? What was life when you could not travel faster than a horse and what we today call information could not travel faster than people? What would your life have been like when you would have probably been born, lived, and died within a few miles of the same spot? Life was hard.

But then look at the other side of the coin: can you think of anything people then would have had that you do not have today?

George looked at the sword, and tried to imagine it whole. At least he could tell what shape it suggested. And he tried to think about what the placard said, with none of the technologies he was used to. What would one do? Practice at swordplay? Wander in the forest?

George saw in his mind's eye Sir Lancelot kneeling on one knee, his sword point in earth, his sword pointing down, taking an oath. Then George looked over the sword again and it looked like Lancelot's sword: he imagined Sir Lancelot—or was it George?—laying his right hand on the sword and taking a mighty oath, and for a moment the sword in the museum took its full cruciform shape. And then as his eyes traced over the contours of the sword, it looked almost a relic, and he saw now one thing, now another: one scene from *Brocéliande* gave way to another, and something tugged at his heart.

He tried to imagine a great feast given by King Arthur

to his nobles. There was something of that feast right in front of him, and it seemed to suggest an unfolding pageant. Knights and ladies dined with uproarious laughter, while minstrels sung enchanting ballads, and—

George realized someone was tapping on his shoulder. "Sir? Excuse me, but it's time for you to leave."

George turned and saw a security guard, and in puzzlement asked her, "Why? Have I done something wrong?"

She smiled and said, "You haven't done anything wrong, but I'm sorry, the museum is now closing. Come back another day!"

George looked out a window and saw that the daylight had completely fled. He realized he was very hungry.

He left after briefly saying, "Thank-you."

When he arrived home he was even hungrier, but even before he began eating he began looking through the same sites, selling swords.

None of them looked real to him.

After eating part of his meal, George opened *Brocéliande*, flipping from place to place until an illustration caught his eye. He read:

Merlin walked about in the clearing on the Isle of Avalon. To his right was the castle, and to his left was the forest. Amidst the birdsong a brook babbled, and a faint fragrance of frankincense flowed.

Sir Galahad walked out of the castle portal, and he bore a basket of bread.

Then Galahad asked Merlin about his secrets and ways, of what he could do and his lore, of his calling forth from the wood what a man anchored in the castle could never call forth. And Galahad enquired, and Merlin answered, and Galahad enquired of Merlin if Merlin knew words that were more words than our words and more mystically real than the British tongue, and then the High Latin tongue, and

then the tongue of Old Atlantis. And then Galahad asked after anything beyond Atlantis, and Merlin's inexhaustible fount ran dry.

Then Sir Galahad asked Merlin of his wood, of the stones and herbs, and the trees and birds, and the adder and the dragon, the gryphon and the lion, and the unicorn whom only a virgin may touch. And Merlin spake to him of the pelican, piercing her bosom that her young may feed, and the wonders, virtues, and interpretation of each creature, until Galahad asked of the dragon's head for which Uther had been called Uther Pendragon, and every Pendragon after him bore the title of King and Pendragon. Merlin wot the virtue of the dragon's body, but of the dragon's head he wot nothing, and Sir Galahad spake that it was better that Merlin wist not.

Then Sir Galahad did ask Merlin after things of which he knew him nothing, of what was the weight of fire, and of what is the end of natural philosophy without magic art, and what is a man if he enters not in the castle, and "Whom doth the Grail serve?", and of how many layers the Grail hath. And Merlin did avow that of these he wist not none.

Then Merlin asked, "How is it that you are wise to ask after these all?"

Then Galahad spake of a soft voice in Merlin his ear and anon Merlin ran into the wood, bearing bread from the castle.

George was tired, and he wished he could read more. But he absently closed the book, threw away what was left of his hamburgers and fries, and crawled into bed. It seemed but a moment that he was dreaming.

George found himself on the enchanted Isle of Avalon, and it seemed that the Grail Castle was not far off.

George was in the castle, and explored room after

room, entranced. Then he opened a heavy wooden door and found himself facing the museum exhibit, and he knew he was seeing the same 5th-6th century sword from the Celtic lands, only it looked exactly like a wall hanger sword he had seen online, a replica of a 13th century Provençale longsword that was mass produced, bore no artisan's fingerprints, and would split if it struck a bale of hay. He tried to make it look like the real surface, ever so real, that he had seen, but machined steel never changed.

Then George looked at the plaque, and every letter, every word, every sentence was something he could read but the whole thing made no sense. Then the plaque grew larger and larger, until the words and even letters grew undecipherable, and he heard what he knew were a dragon's footprints and smelled the stench of acrid smoke. George went through room and passage until the noises grew louder, and chanced to glance at a pool and see his reflection.

He could never remember what his body looked like, but his head was unmistakably the head of a dragon.

George sat bolt upright on his bunk, awake in a cold sweat, and hit his head on the ceiling.

The next day, George went to the medieval history library that was almost at the center of the campus, housed in a white limestone tower with one timeworn spire, and intricately woven with passages like rabbit holes. The librarian was nowhere in sight, and owing to his eccentricities the library still had only a paper card catalog, emanating a strange, musty aroma. George started to walk towards it, before deciding to wander around the shelves and get a feel for things medieval. The medieval history librarian was rumored to be somewhat eccentric, and insisted on a paper card catalog with no computers provided, which many of the students said might as well have been medieval.

His first read traced the development of symbol from

something that could not give rise to science to something that apparently paved the way in that a symbol and what it refers to were no longer seen as connected. It seemed hard to follow, some where the argument was obscure and even more when he followed the reasoning: he grasped it and grasped it not. As he read, he read of the cultivation of cabbages and tales of kings, and whether grotesques could let pigs have wings. He read of boys doing the work of men and men who acted like boys, of children who asked for bread and their fathers would give them stones *in* their bread, of careful historians ages before the great discovery of history and classicists preserving the ancient life after the ancient life met its demise, of strange things that turned familiar and yet familiar things turned strange, of time becoming something a clock could measure, of those who forged, those who plagiarized, and arguments today why no medieval author should be accused of plagiarism for what he copied, and yet he read of a world where few died of old age and minor cuts and illnesses could kill. He read of the problem of underpopulation, the challenge of having enough births, and untold suffering when there were not enough people.

Yet to speak this way is deceptive, because all these wonders and more were made pedestrian. The more he studied, the fewer wonders he met, or at least the fewer wonders he could find, and the more he met a catalog of details. He read the chronicles of kings and those seeking what could be recovered through them, and however much he read King Arthur was not mentioned once. Though he spent weeks searching in the library, the haunting beauty of Brocéliande had been rare to begin with and now he wot of it not none.

And the fruitless search for the history of Arthur led him to knock on the librarian's door.

"I'm in a bad mood. Leave me alone!"

"Please."

"You can come in if you must, but you would be better

off leaving."

"I've looked all over and found neither hide nor hair of a book on King Arthur. Does this library have *nothing* on him?"

"King Arthur? No, not this part of the library; look in the appropriate sections on the electronic card catalog in the regular library."

"But I want to know the history of Arthur."

"The history of King Arthur?!? What can you *possibly* mean?"

"I had been reading about King Arthur outside the library."

"The general library has a number of the original sources, along with more literary criticism than one person can possibly read, and what little the history of literature knows about more and less obscure authors. And our literature department has several renowned scholars on Arthurian literature. But why are you trying to find King Arthur in a medieval *history* library? That's as silly as looking for the history of the animals in Aesop's fables."

"You don't believe in Arthur?"

"No, I don't. Though I could be wrong. A lot of scholars, *wrong* as they may be, believe there was an Arthur around the 6th century, a warrior owning a horse, though the consensus is that he was not a king. These—"

"So Arthur was a knight and not a king?!?"

"No, he wasn't a knight. He couldn't have been. If there ever was such a person."

"But you said he had a horse and—"

"You're making a basic historical mistake if you're imagining a warrior then, even one with a horse, as a '*knight*'. It would like a historian five or six centuries from now studying our technology, and knowing that Saint Thomas Aquinas was an author, imagining him doing Google searches and composing, in *Latin* of course, on his

computer's word processor.

"Warriors owned horses, but stirrups hadn't reached Arthur's supposed land, and without a stirrup it is almost impossible to fight while mounted. A horse was a taxi to get a warrior to battle to fight on foot like everybody else, and nothing more. A warrior with a horse was a warrior with a better taxi to get to the scene of battle. A knight, on the most material level, is an almost invincible mounted shock troop compared to the defenseless-as-children so-called 'infantry.' And then you have the ideal, almost the mythos, of chivalry that developed about these mighty brutal warriors.

"The Arthurian legends were never even close to history to begin with, even if they hadn't grown barnacles on top of barnacles, like... a bestseller with too many spinoffs. All the versions have their own anachronisms, or rather the earlier versions are nothing like anachronisms, projecting a legendary past for the kind of knight that was then becoming fashionable. You have a late medieval Sir Thomas Mallory fitting knights with plate armor that would have been as anachronous for an Arthur of the 5th or 6th century to wear as it would have been for a knight of Mallory's day to be equipped with today's Kevlar version of a bulletproof vest.

"I don't think it's a particularly big deal for there to be anachronisms; the idea that anachronism is a problem is a complete anachronism in evaluating medieval literature; saying that Chrétien de Troyes built an anachronous social ideal is as silly as complaining that the accounts of animals in a medieval bestiary are not doing the same job in the same way as a scientific biology textbook. Of course they aren't, but you're being equally silly to read a medieval bestiary as something that should be empirical scientific biology.

"Of course, getting back to anachronism, Mallory has guns which—"

"Guns?!? Machine guns? Handguns? Rifles?" George said.

"Nothing fancy, just early cannon, not a modern assault rifle. But there are none the less guns in the pivotal late medieval version of the story, which had Arthur's son and nephew, Mordred, besieging—"

"Which one was Mordred, and what was the other one's name?" George said.

"Which one'? What do you mean..." The librarian said, pausing. "Aah, you get it. For that matter, the stories tend to include endless nobles whose family tree is, like a good nobility family tree, more of a family braid, and—"

It was around then that the conversation became something that George remembered with the confused memory of a dream. He knew that the librarian had explained something, but the closest he could come to remembering it was a discussion of how networked computers as the next generation of computing contributed to a unique medieval synthesis, or what actually seemed to make more sense of the shape of that "memory," the sound of an elephant repeatedly ramming stone walls.

What he remembered next was walking—walking through the library, walking around campus, walking through the forest, and then...

Had he been asked, he might have been collected enough to say that this was the first time in a long while he was not on a quest.

What was he doing now?

Was he doing anything?

Where was George?

He was lost, although that didn't register on his mind. Or perhaps he wasn't lost, if "lost" means not only that you don't know where you are, but that you wish you knew.

George was in the city somewhere, if that was where he was. A great forest of steel, glass, and brick. Some was adorned by graffiti, other bits by ugly paint. This was

definitely not the castle to him, but the wild wood, much more the wild wood than what was merely a place with many trees and few buildings. What made the wood a wood and not like a castle, anyway?

George looked around. In front of him was a boarded-up restaurant. The sign said, "Closed for minor renovations. REOPENING SOON." Its paint looked chipped and timeworn, and from what he could see looking in the dirty windows, it was dusty inside. What, exactly, did the menu say? George could see the menu, and some pictures of what was probably supposed to be food, but even though he was on the edge of hunger, the hazy blurs did nothing to make his mouth water.

George walked a good distance further, and saw the bright colors of a store, and heard music playing. He wandered in.

Inside, the store was bustling with activity. Just inside, there was a demonstration of electronic puppies: an employee was showing the puppy off. On a whim, George walked over.

The young woman was saying words commands which the puppy sometimes did not respond to. She handed it to children to pet, who responded with exuberant warmth. But the more George watched the scene, the more the whole scene seemed off-kilter.

The puppies were cute, but there seemed to be something much less cute when they moved. What was it? The puppy's animation seemed neither like a cute stuffed animal nor like a toy robot. It seemed like a robot in a puppy costume, but the effect was... almost vampiric.

Then George looked at the employee again. She was quite attractive, but her smile and the exaggerated energy for her role... reminded George of makeup almost covering dark circles under someone's eyes.

He ducked into an aisle. Below were not only unflavored dental floss and mint floss, but many different kinds of floss in all different colors, thicknesses, and

several different flavors. But the choices in the actual floss were dwarfed by the choices in the cases: purple-and-pink containers of floss for preteen girls, larger rough-looking containers made of dark stonelike plastic for a man's man, and sundry groups—including trainers for babies who were still teething. George saw a sign above a display that said, "We bring you the freedom *TO CHOOSE!*"

He tried not to think about sledgehammers. He tried.

George was looking for a reason to stay in the store. There was eye-catching color everywhere, and he saw a section of posters, and started flipping through art posters, looking for something to buy, until he saw the sign above the posters. It said, "Priceless masterpieces from the greatest museums of the world, conveniently made available to you in American standard poster size and format, for only \$4.99 each."

Somehow the store's showmanlike displays seemed a bit hollow. George left.

George wandered out, something not quite clicking in his mind. He knocked on the building next door, and a voice said, "Just a minute; come in." He opened the door and saw a sight in shadows. A man was heading out a door. "As soon as I've finished taking out the trash and washed my hands, I can help you."

A short while later, the man emerged. "Hi. I'm Fr. Elijah." He extended his hand, his head and hands standing out against the darkness and his dark robe, and shook George's hand. George said, "I'm George."

"What can I do for you?"

George stopped, and thought. He said, "I was just looking around while I was waiting for my thoughts to clear."

Fr. Elijah said, "Are you a student?"

George said, "Yes."

Fr. Elijah said nothing, but it did not seem he needed to say anything just then. George was growing calm.

"May I offer you something to drink? I was just going

to make tea, and I don't have a full range of soft drinks, but there should be something worth drinking. There's a pitcher of ice-cold water if you don't care for an old man's coffee or tea."

George said "Yes."

"Wonderful. Come with me." The two began walking, and they sat down.

George looked at him.

Fr. Elijah said, "Please sit down," motioning to an armchair. "Did you want coffee, water, or tea? I have cookies. Oh, and there's milk too."

George smiled. "Could I have a chalice of milk?"

Fr. Elijah turned to get the cookies, a cup and some milk.

George said, "I meant to say a cup of milk. Sorry, I was trying to be a little more serious."

Fr. Elijah said, "You can explain, or not explain. It's your choice. But I think you *were* being serious. Just not the way you expected. But we can change the subject. Do you have a favorite book? Or has anything interesting happened to you lately? I can at least listen to you."

George said, "I was just at the store nearby."

Fr. Elijah asked, "What do you think of it?"

George said, "Are you sure you won't be offended?"

Fr. Elijah said, "One of the things I have found in my work is that people can be very considerate about not being offensive, but sometimes I have something valuable to learn with things people think might offend me."

"Ever wonder about the direction our society has headed? Or see something that left you wishing you could still wonder about that?"

"A lot of people do."

"I was already having a bad day when I wandered into a store, and just when I thought things couldn't get any more crass, they got more crass. I've just been invited to buy an identity with the help of a market-segment dental floss container."

"You're a man after my own heart. I've heard that the store manager has some pretty impressive connections. I've heard that if none of the dental floss containers in the store suit the identity you want to have, and you ask the manager, he can get your choice of floss in a custom container made by a sculptor to meet your whims!"

"But isn't there more to life than that?"

"I certainly hope so! Oh, and did I mention that I've found that store an excellent place for important shopping for April Fools' Day? I'm hoping to get my godson horribly artificial sugary-sweet tasting lacy pink floss in a container covered by red and white hearts and words like 'Oochie-pooch.' He'll hit the roof! On second thought, he'll be expecting such a gift... I should probably give it to him on what you'd consider August 12."

"Why? What's special about August 12?"

"That's a bit of a labyrinth to sort out. Some Orthodox keep the old Julian calendar, while some keep the 'new' civil calendar, which means that those who preserve the old calendar, even if we manage not to go off in right field, are thirteen days 'late' for saints' days, celebrating July 30, the Feast of Saint Valentine, on what you'd consider August 12. What you call Valentine's Day is the Western celebration of the saint we celebrate on another day, and it's a bit of a Western borrowing to use it for pseudo-romantic purposes to pick on my godson, as that saint's feast did not pick up all the Western romantic connotations; Saint Valentine's story is a typical story of a bishop who strengthened people against paganism and was martyred eventually. Every day is a feast of some sort, and every feast—that is, every day—has several saints to celebrate... but I'm going on and on. Have I confused you yet?"

"Um, 'right field'? What does that mean?"

"Oops, sorry, personal expression. In the West people go out in left field and go loony liberal. In Orthodoxy, people go out in right field and go loony conservative.

Some of the stuff I've been told would make me at least laugh if I didn't want to cry so badly. Sorry, I'm rambling, and I was trying to hear you out when it looked like you've had a rough day, right up to a store telling you there was nothing more to hope for in life than things like dental floss with a container designed for your market segment. Let me let you change the subject."

"Um, you're probably wondering why I said, 'chalice of milk.'"

"I would be interested in hearing that, but only if you want to tell. I have a guess, but I really don't want you to feel obligated to say something you'd rather not."

"What is your guess?"

"That you said 'chalice of milk' for an interesting reason that probably has an interesting connection to what, in life, you hope goes beyond the trivialities you were pushed into at that store. A chalice, whatever that means to you, is something deeper and richer."

George opened his mouth, then closed it for a moment, and said, "Does a chalice mean anything to you?"

"Oh, yes. A chalice means quite a lot to me."

"What does it mean to you?"

"George, have you ever seen a chalice?"

"No, but it's pretty important in something I've read."

"Would you like to see a chalice?"

"The chalice I've read about was made of purest gold. I'd imagine that if you have a fancy wine glass, maybe lead crystal, it would look poorer than what I'd imagine, and there are some things that are big enough that I'd rather not imagine."

"Well, there are some things that are bigger than can be seen, and that includes a chalice. But the chalice I have—I can't show it to you now—has the glint of gold, which has more layers than I can explain or know."

"Is there a time you can show it to me?"

"Yes, come during the Divine Liturgy, and you can see the chalice from which I serve the Eucharist. I can't

explain—I know this offends some people, and I will understand if you are offended—that it would not be good for me to give you the Eucharist if you are not Orthodox. But you can see the chalice as it holds a treasure infinitely more valuable than its goldwork."

"What is that?"

"The Eucharist."

"Isn't that just a symbol?"

"Hmm, there are six hundred ways to respond to that. I can get into some of the intricacies later. If you want. Or we need never talk about it. But..."

"Saying the Eucharist is 'just a symbol' is as silly as saying that the Eucharist is 'just the body and blood of Christ'. What else do you want it to be—a designer container of dental floss?"

George's laugh was interrupted by a knock at a door. Fr. Elijah looked at his watch, and his face fell. He said, "Just when the conversation was getting interesting! I'm sorry; I have an appointment."

George said, "Well, I won't take any more of your time; I'll come on Sunday. What time?"

"The Divine Liturgy starts at 9:00 Sunday morning; I'm sorry, that isn't a very good time for college students. Arriving five minutes late isn't a big deal. Most of the professors of campus can give you directions to my parish, the Church of the Holy Trinity. And bother that I have to end our talk!"

"That's OK. Do you have some literature that you want to give me? Where are your pamphlets?"

"Hmm, that would take some time to explain, and I can explain later if you want. But I don't have any pamphlets. If you want a book I can go to the library and you can borrow one. But Orthodox people don't usually feel obligated to stuff your pockets with as much paper as we can and leave you walking away feeling guilty that you dread the prospect of reading it. Come back; I enjoyed talking with you, and if you want I can get something from

the library. But only if you want. Please excuse me." Fr. Elijah stood up and bowed slightly, but reverently, to George as they shook hands.

"Coming!" Fr. Elijah said. "I'm sorry; I was just trying to wrap up a conversation. Please come in. It's been a long time since I've seen you, and I've been looking forward to it."

George stepped out, and walked out. He stopped by a window to look into the Church building again.

He could tell nothing that looked to him like a chalice, but everywhere was the glint of gold.

George wandered back with a spring in his step.

He returned home and opened *Brocéliande*, and read:

Blaise turned at a slow step. "Why callest thou thyself empty? Hast thou none, my son?"

Merlin answered him. "Forgive me, my master, my lord."

The wind was deadly still.

Blaise turned even more fully. "What is it, my pupil?"

Merlin reached out his hand. A mighty wind blew, such as openeth doors that be closed and closeth doors that be open.

An apple tree shook of a violence and apples met their place on the humble earth, all apples did so which fell, save one which Merlin his hand did close upon it.

The wind blew and blew, stronger and stronger it blew, and Blaise looked upon Merlin, and spake: "Flyest thou now, my hawk?"

Merlin his chaste teeth closed in on the apple, and the great and mighty wind closed a door against the stone and hushed to become a soft murmuring breeze, as a still small voice.

Merlin looked upon his master. "Though the Grail remain a secret and a secret remain the Grail,

men shall know it even under its cloak of samite most red. When a man shall grasp the secret of the Grail then shall he grasp the mystery of the Trinity."

Blaise looked upon his servant. "And who shall be in that grasp?"

Merlin spake softly. "My lord, I wit me not."

Blaise said, "My lord, it is well with thee."

Merlin abode in a quiet still spirit.

The hours and days passed quickly, until it was Sunday and George left a little early and arrived at the Church of the Holy Trinity early, looked at his watch and saw 8:53 AM.

He stepped inside and found things suddenly cool. There was a dazzling darkness, with pure candlelight and lamplight glittering off of gold, with fragrances of smoke and beeswax and incense. There was a soft chanting, and the funny thing was that it was hard to say whether the Church seemed full or empty. He saw few people, even for the small space, but he had rather a sense that the place was full of worshipers, mostly unseen. He could feel glory, almost as a weight.

There seemed to be a continuous faint commotion as people entered, went to the front, doing something he could not tell, and walked around. He stood as most people were standing, although some were sitting and people seemed to bow or move their hands. It is not exactly that George did not feel conspicuous as to how he was standing out, as that that was not quite the greatest way he felt conspicuous.

How did he feel conspicuous? George found no answer he liked. The whole situation seemed foreign to him, and for the first time it did not seem so much that he was examining something but that something, or someone, was examining him and judging him.

Something happened. Or rather, this time the something that happened meant that people were sitting

down, in pews around the edges or on the floor, and the chant had become ordinary speech. Fr. Elijah said,

In the Name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Last week after Liturgy, little John came up to me and said, "Fr. Elijah, I have a question." "What, I asked." "I saw *Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark* Friday and it was really, really cool! Could you tell me all about the Ark?" So I paused in thought, and exercised a spiritual father's prerogative. I said, "You know what? That's a good question. Let me think a bit and I'll answer that question in my homily." And when his father said, "But weren't you going to—" I said, "Don't worry about *that*. I'll blame the homily on him, and if people find it duller than a worn-out butter knife, they can call you at work and complain." And *finally* I got him to crack a faint smile.

So this is the homily I'm blaming on him. First of all, the Ark of the Covenant is a spiritual treasure, and is spiritually understood. It is not lost, but it is found in a much deeper way than some expect. For it is both a *what* and, more deeply, a *who*. You can look up in fact where it is, and the amazing thing is that it is still guarded as a relic rather than treated simply as something that merely belongs in a museum, and the hidden Ark is in fact greater than if it were displayed in a showcase. It is one of many treasures the Church guards, and it is at the Church of our Lady Mary of Zion in the Ethiopian city of Axum. I've been there, even if I could not see the Ark. But the Ark which holds the bread from Heaven and the tablets on which the Ten Commandments were inscribed is in the shadow of the Ark to whom we sing, "Rejoice, O Volume wherein the Word was inscribed" and whose womb is a garden of spiritual treasures, "more

spacious than the Heavens" as we say, by whom we are given the greater and in fact greatest Bread from Heaven. When we read of the Ark coming to King David and of the Theotokos or Mother of God coming to Lady Elizabeth, there are some surprising parallels which seem stunning until we recognize that that is just how Luke might be telling us that the Theotokos is someone to whom the Ark hints. There is a profound connection to the Arthurian legends, in which the Sir Galahad is granted to see into the Holy Grail and beholds a wonder beyond the power of words to tell. And it is in fact a misunderstanding on a number of levels to think that that rich Grail is confined to—

If George were sitting on a chair, he might have fallen off it. He was, fortunately, sitting on the floor. When he caught himself enough to follow the words, he listened closely:

...these other images. It was from the virgin earth that the first Adam, by whom we all live natural life, was taken. It was from the parched earth of the Virgin Theotokos that the last Adam, by whom we are called to the divine life, was given. And still this is not to tell how the first Adam, wanting to become God, lost his divinity, until God became the Last Adam, raising up Adam that all of us who bear Adam's likeness might become divine, bearing the likeness of God. Death entered when we took and ate the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and now everlasting begins when we obey the summons to take and eat the Fruit from the Tree of Life.

Is it possible to call Mary Magdalene the Holy Grail? Yes and amen. We can call Mary Magdalene the Holy Grail in a very deep sense. She spoke before

the Emperor, and that incident is why after all these years Christians still color Easter eggs, red eggs for the Orthodox Church as the were for Mary Magdalene, when she presented a red egg to the Emperor, perhaps miraculously. There are only a few dozen people the Church has ever honored more. She bears the rank of "Equal to the Apostles," and an angel told her the mysterious news of the Resurrection, and it was she who told the Apostles who in turn would be sent ("Apostle" means "Sent One") to the uttermost ends of the earth.

The Holy Grail is that vessel which first held the blood of Christ, and it is the shadow of that symbol in which the body and blood of Christ become real so that they can transform us. The Eucharist is misunderstood through the question of just what happens when the priest consecrates the gift, because the entire point of the transformation of the gifts is the transformation of the faithful so that we can be the Body of Christ and have the divine blood, the royal bloodline, the divine life coursing through our veins. God the Father the Father for whom every fatherhood in Heaven and earth is named. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are each the King for whom every kingdom is named, so that the Kingdom of Heaven is more, not less, of a Kingdom than the kingdoms we can study on earth.

In the third prayer before communion, we are invited to pray, "O Thou Who by the coming of the Comforter, the Spirit, didst make thy sacred disciples precious vessels, declare me also to be a receptacle of his coming." Mary Magdalene bears powerful witness to what a disciple can be if she becomes a humble earthen vessel in which there is another coming of Christ. She became the Holy Grail, as does every one of us transformed by the power of Christ's body and blood. If you only ask questions about the

transformation of bread and wine, the Holy Grail is merely a *what...* but if you recognize the larger transformation that has the smaller transformation as a microcosm, the Holy Grail can also be a *who*: you and I.

It would take much longer to even begin to speak of that nobility of which you will only find the trace and shadow if you study royalty and their bloodlines. I have spoken enough.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

George was at once attracted, entranced, repulsed, and terrified. It seemed like more than he had dared to dream was proclaimed as truth, but that this meant he was no longer dealing with his choice of fantasy, but perhaps with reality itself. The chanting resumed. There was a procession, and what was in it? Ornate candles, a golden spoon and something that looked like a miniature golden lance, something covered with a cloth but that from its base might have been an intricately worked golden goblet, a cross that seemed to be glory itself, and other things he could not name. It was not long before George heard, "The holy things are for those who are holy," and the reply—was it a correction?—immediately followed: "One is holy. One is Lord, Jesus Christ, to the glory of God the Father. Amen."

George wanted to squirm when he heard the former, and when he heard the latter, he headed for the door. The spiritual weight he had been feeling seemed more intense; or rather, it seemed something he couldn't bear even though he hoped it would continue. He felt, just for a moment that this was more than him having an experience, but he failed to put his finger on what more it might be.

Once outside, he tried to calmly walk home, but found himself running.

George found himself walking, but in completely unfamiliar surroundings. He spent a good deal of time wandering until he recognized a major road, and walked alongside it until he returned home, hungry and parched.

He opened *Brocéliande* for a moment, but did not feel much like reading it. George went to check his email, began looking through his spam folder—to see if anything important got through, he told himself—and found himself wandering around the seedier side of the net.

In the days that followed, people seemed to be getting in his way, his homework was more of a waste of time, and somehow *Brocéliande* no longer seemed interesting.

Friday, George missed dinner and went, hungry, to a crowded store where a white-haired man stood right between him and the food he wanted... not only blocking the aisle with his cart, but adding a third 12-pack of soda to the bottom of his cart... and seeming to take forever to perform such a simple task.

After waiting what seemed too long, George refrained from saying "Gramps," but found himself hissing through his teeth, "Do you need help getting that onto your cart?"

The white-haired man turned around in surprise, and then said, "Certainly, George, how are you?"

George stopped.

It was Fr. Elijah.

"Can, um, I help you get that in your cart?"

"Thank you, George, and I would appreciate if you would help me choose another one. Do you have a favorite soda?"

"This may sound silly, but Grape Crush. Why?"

"Help me find a 12-pack of it. I realized after you came that it was kind of silly for me to inviting people like you inside and not having any soda for them, and I've been procrastinating ever since. Aah, I think I see them over there. Could you put that under your cart?"

George began walking over to the Grape Crush.

Fr. Elijah asked, less perfunctorily, "How are you,

George?" and reached out his hand. At least George thought Fr. Elijah was reaching out his hand, but it was as if Fr. Elijah was standing on the other side of an abyss of defilement, and holding out a live coal.

Fr. Elijah shook George's hand.

George tried to find his footing on shifting ground, and managed to ask, "Fr. Elijah, how are you going to get that soda out to your car?"

"Usually someone from the store helps me put things in my trunk or something; I've never found a grocery store to be a place where nothing is provided."

The chasm yawned; George felt as if he were clothed in filthy rags.

"Um, and at home?"

"The Lord always provides something. Sorry, that sounded super spiritual. Usually it's not too long before someone strong comes by and can carry things."

George tried to smile. "I'm fine. How are you?"

Fr. Elijah made no answer with words. He smiled a welcoming smile, and somehow the store began to remind him of Fr. Elijah's office.

George kept waiting for Fr. Elijah to say something more, to answer, but Fr. Elijah remained silent. There seemed to be a warmth about him, as well as something he feared would burn his defilement, but Fr. Elijah remained silent, and pushed his cart, which had a small armload of groceries and a heavy weight of soda cases, to the register.

"I can help you load things into your car, Fr. Elijah."

Fr. Elijah turned with warmth. Gratitude was almost visible in his features, but he remained strangely silent.

George momentarily remembered to grab a sandwich, then returned to Fr. Elijah in line.

George began to wonder why Fr. Elijah was not speaking to him. Or rather, that was the wrong way to put it. George could not accuse Fr. Elijah of being inattentive, but why was he silent?

George began to think about what he had been doing,

and trying not to, to think of something else, to think of something else to talk about. But images returned to his mind, and a desire to—he certainly couldn't mention *that*.

Where were they? Fr. Elijah had just pushed the cart to his car, and slowly fumbled with his keys to unlock his trunk. George thought with a shudder about what it would be like to an old man to load cases of soda, even 12-packs.

"I can help you unload the soda at your house."

Fr. Elijah turned and made the slightest bow.

Once inside the car, George made a few nervous remarks about the weather. Fr. Elijah simply turned with what must have been a fatherly smile, but said nothing.

George did not consider himself strong, but it was only a few minutes for him to get the handful of cases of soda tucked into a slightly messy closet.

Once back in the car, Fr. Elijah seemed to arrive almost immediately at the dorm.

George said, "Now I remember. I wouldn't ask for another ride back, but I should have asked to borrow a book from your library."

Fr. Elijah turned. "*Should* you?"

George said, "What do you mean, should I? Are you mad at me? Didn't you tell me that I could borrow any book in your library if you wanted?"

Fr. Elijah said, "For all I am concerned now, you may borrow the whole library, if you want to. Or keep it, if you want."

"Then why don't you want me borrowing a book now?"

"I have many good books you could read, but right now, you don't really want one of my books."

"What do you mean?"

"If you genuinely want to borrow a book, I will gladly talk with you and suggest what I think would be your deepest joy. But why are you asking me for a book now?"

"I thought it would be polite to..."

Fr. Elijah waited an interminable moment and said, "Something is eating you."

George said, "You have no right to—"

Fr. Elijah said, "I have no right to this discussion, and neither do you. Thinking in terms of rights is a way to miss the glory we were made for. But let us stop looking at rights and start looking at what is beneficial. You don't have to answer, but are you happy now?"

George waited, and waited, and waited for an escape route to open up. Then he said, and the saying seemed like he was passing through white-hot ice, "I've been looking at —"

Fr. Elijah said, "Stop, You've said enough."

George said, "But how did you know?"

Fr. Elijah sighed, and for a moment looked like he wanted to weep. "George, I would like to say something deep and mysterious about some special insight I have into people's souls, but that is not it. I am a father, a confessor, and one of the biggest sins I hear in confession — 'biggest' not because it is unforgivable; Jesus was always ready, more than ready, to forgive this kind of sin, but 'biggest' because it keeps coming up and causing misery, is the sort of sin you've been struggling with. I count myself very fortunate that I grew up in an age when you could have all the basic utilities without getting all sorts of vile invitations coming whether you want them or not, and I am glad that I do not feel obligated to purchase some nasty pills because I'm not a real man unless I have the same drives I had at the age of eighteen. What a miserably small and constricted caricature of manhood! I count myself a real man, much more because I have not suffered what tends to become such a *dreary* dissipation and deflation of any real manhood."

George said, "You're not mad?"

Fr. Elijah raised his hand, moved it up and down and side to side, and said, "I am blessing you, priceless son."

George said, "How can I be free of this?"

Fr. Elijah said, "Come with me. Get back in the car."

They drove for a few more minutes, neither one

needing to say anything, until George noticed with alarm the shape of the hospital.

George said, "Where are we going?"

Fr. Elijah said, "To the emergency room."

George looked around in panic. "I don't have money for—"

"Relax. None of the treatment you will be receiving will generate bills."

"What on earth are you—"

"I'm not telling you. Just come with me."

They walked through a side door, George's heart pounding, and George noticed two people approaching immediately.

Fr. Elijah turned momentarily, saying, "*Buenos noches, Señoras*," and motioned with his hand for them to follow him.

As they and George followed, Fr. Elijah said, "Because of the triage in an emergency room, and because mere seconds are a matter of life and death in treating really severe injuries, people with relatively 'minor' injuries that still need medical attention can wait for an interminable amount of time."

Fr. Elijah suddenly stopped. George saw a boy with skinned knees, whose mother was slowly working through paperwork. Fr. Elijah said, "Take away his pain."

George looked at him, halfway to being dumbfounded. "What?"

Fr. Elijah said, "You heard me." Then he turned and left, so that George saw only Fr. Elijah's back and heard from him only broken Spanish.

George felt grateful that at least he wasn't too easily grossed out. He could look at lacerated flesh and eat if he needed to. George sat next to the boy, smelled an overwhelming odor from his blood, and suddenly felt sick to his stomach.

George tried to refrain from swearing about what Fr. Elijah could possibly have meant. Badger the hospital into

giving anaesthesia sooner? Kiss it and make it better? Use some psychic power he didn't have? Find a switch on the back of the kid's neck and reboot him?

For a while, nothing happened, until the boy stopped sobbing, and looked at him, a little bit puzzled.

George said, "Hi, I'm George."

The boy said, "Mr. George."

George tried to think of something to say. He said, "What do you get when you cross an elephant with a kangaroo?"

"What?"

"Really big holes all over Australia."

The boy looked at him, but showed no hint of a smile.

"Do you not get it?" George asked.

The boy said, very quietly, "No."

"An elephant has a lot of weight, and a kangaroo bounces up and down. If you put 'weight' and 'bouncy' together, then you get something that, when it bounces, is so heavy it makes big holes in the ground."

The boy said nothing until George added, "That's what makes it funny."

The boy made himself laugh loudly, and just as soon winced in pain.

George tried to think of what to do. After a while, he asked, "What's your favorite color?"

When the boy said nothing, George looked at his face and was surprised at the pain he saw.

"What is your name?"

"My name is Tommy."

George thought about what to say. He began to tell a story. He told of things he had done as a boy, and funny things that had happened (the boy didn't laugh), and asked questions which met with incomprehension. And this went on and on and on.

George wondered why he was having so much fun.

Then George looked at Tommy.

When was the last time George had even *begun* to do

something for someone else?

George realized three things. First, he had stopped talking. Second, a hand was holding tightly to his sleeve. Third, there was something he was trying very hard not to think about.

George looked, and Tommy asked, "Mister, are you a knight? I want to be a knight when I grow up."

George had never before felt such shame that he wished the earth would swallow him up.

"Mister?"

"No, I am not a knight."

"You seem like a knight."

"Why?"

"You just do. Do you know anything about knights?"

"I've been reading a book."

"What's it called?"

"*Brocéliande*."

"Tell me the story of Brookie-Land."

"I can't."

"Why?"

"Because I haven't read all of it."

"What have you read?"

George closed his eyes. All he could remember now was a flurry of images, but when he tried to put them together nothing worked.

George was interrupted. "Do you have a suit of armor?"

Immediately, and without thought, George said, "What kind of armor? I mean, is it chain mail, like a steel, I mean iron, sweater, or is it the later plate armor that gets into the later depictions? Because if there were a King Arthur, he would—"

"Did King Arthur know powerful Merlin? Because Merlin could—"

"I've read a lot about Merlin—he could build a castle just with his magic. And it apparently matters whose son he is, but I couldn't—"

"I want you to show me—"

A voice cut in. "Tommy!"

"Yes?" the boy said.

"The doctor is ready to see you... Sir, I'm sorry to interrupt, but—"

"Why does the doctor want to see me?"

"Because she wants to stitch up your knees, Silly Sweetie. Let the nurses roll you away. I'm glad—"

Tommy looked in puzzlement at his knees, saw how badly lacerated they were, and began screaming in pain.

There was a minor commotion as the nurses took Tommy in to be stitched up, or so George would later guess; he could never remember the moment. He only remembered walking around the emergency room, dazed.

Truth be told, though, George felt wonderful. He faintly noticed hearing Fr. Elijah's voice, saying something in Spanish, and joined a group of people among whom he felt immediate welcome. Then the woman who was on the bed was taken in, and Fr. Elijah, and to his own surprise, George, bid farewell to the other members of the group.

George and Fr. Elijah were both silent for a long time in the car.

Fr. Elijah broke the silence.

"Would it be helpful to talk with me about anything?"

"I have to choose just one?"

"No, you can ask as many questions as you want."

"Besides what I started to tell you—"

"Yes?"

"When I was talking with that boy, I mean Tommy, the boy you introduced me to, I—I'm not sure I would have said exactly this, but I've been spending a lot of time reading *Brocéliande* and no time choosing to be with other people... would you keep that book for me, at least for a time?"

"I certainly could, but let's look at our option. You sound less than fully convinced."

"I don't want to give it up."

"Well, yes, I wouldn't want to give it up either. But is that it?"

"No... I'm really puzzled. Just when I thought I had managed to stop thinking about never-never land and start thinking about Tommy, the kid asked me about never—I mean, he said that he wanted to grow up to be a knight, and he asked me if I was a knight. Which I am *not*."

"That's very mature of you..."

"And?"

"What would you imagine yourself doing as the right thing?"

"Getting away from that silly desire and be with other people instead."

"Hmm."

"Hmm what?"

"Have you ever read C.S. Lewis's 'The Weight of Glory'?"

"No."

"Ok, I want to stop by my office before I drop you off at home, because I'm going to go against my word and give you literature to read. Although I only want you to read a few pages' essay out of the book, unless you want to read more essays—is this OK?—"

"I suppose."

"Because C.S. Lewis talked about the idea of unselfishness as a virtue, and said that there's something pitiable about letting unselfishness be the center of goodness instead of the divine love. Or something like that. And the reason I remembered that is that somewhere connected with this is this terrible fear that people have that their desires are too strong, and maybe their desires are too much in need of being deepened and layered, except I think he only said, 'too weak.' Today I would add: in a much deeper way that you can remedy by dangerous pills in your spam.

"Maybe you don't need to get rid of that book at all... maybe you should lend it to me for a time, and let me

enjoy it, but maybe not even that is necessary."

"Why?"

"My guess is that if you read enough in that book—or at least the ones I've read—you may notice a pattern. The knight goes to the company of the castle and then plunges into the woodland for adventure and quests, and you need a rhythm of both to make a good story. Or a good knight."

"I fail to see how I could become a knight, or how knighthood applies to me."

"Hmm..."

"Hmm what?"

"Maybe that's a can of worms we can open another time... For now, I will say that the reason the stories have knights doing that is not because the knights wore armor and rode horses, but because the people telling the stories were telling the stories of men. Who need both castle and wood. Keep reading *Brocéliande*, and push it further. Push it to the point that your college and your city are to you what the castle was to the knight. Or even so that you don't see the difference. And alongside your trek into the enchanted wood, meet people. I would suggest that you find a way to connect with people, and work with it over time. If I may offer a prescription—"

"Prescription?"

"A priest is meant to be a spiritual physician, or at least that is what Orthodox understand. And part of the priest's job is to prescribe something. If you're willing."

"I'll at least listen."

"First, I want you to spend *some* of your time with other people. Not all."

"Doing what?"

"That's something you need to decide, and even if I can offer feedback to you, I would not make that decision for you. You need to have a think about it."

"Second, something for you to at least consider... Come to me for confession. I cannot give the sacrament I give to Orthodox, but I can bless you. Which isn't the

immediate reason I mention it. Even if I were not to bless you, and even if Christ were not listening to your confession, there would still be power in owning up to what you have done. It gives power in the struggle.

"Third, do you access the Internet through a cable or through wireless?"

"An ethernet cable. I don't have a laptop, and I've heard that the wireless network on campus is worth its weight in drool."

"Do you have a USB key?"

"Yes."

"Then give me your Ethernet cable."

"What kind of Luddite—"

"I'm not being a Luddite. I'm offering a prescription for you... There are different prescriptions offered for the needs of different people."

"So for some people it is beneficial to visit—"

"For me it has been. When I was trying to figure out what was going on, I went to a couple's house, and with their permission started looking through the pictures in their spam folder until I'd had more than enough. And I wept for a long time; I suddenly understood something I didn't understand about what I was hearing in confession. I still pray for the people photographed and those looking at the photograph, and some of the women's faces still haunt me—"

"The *faces* haunt you?"

"Yes. Understand that at my age, *some* temptations are weaker... but I looked at those faces and saw that each one was somebody's daughter, or maybe somebody's son, and my understanding is that it's nothing pleasant to pose for those pictures. At least the faces I saw reminded me of an airline stewardess trying really hard to smile peacefully to someone who is being abrasive and offensive. But as I was saying, I count my hour of looking to be of the greatest spiritual benefit. But it would not benefit you, and it is my judgment that in *your* case a little of what programmers

call a 'net vacation'—though I invite you to use lab and library computers—could help you in—"

"Do you know what it's like to give up the convenience of computers in your room?"

"Do you know what it's like to ride a horse instead of a car for a short time? I do..."

"But riding a horse is at least... like... um... it's more like Arthur's world, isn't it?"

"If you want to look at it that way, you're welcome to..." Fr. Elijah stopped the car and stepped out, saying, "Please excuse me for a moment." The shuffling seemed to drag on, and Fr. Elijah stepped out with a book and got back in the car. "Oh, and I almost forgot. Please don't make this a matter of 'I won't do such-and-such or even think about it,' because trying not to think about a temptation is a losing game. I am inviting you to a trek from castle to wood, and wood to castle, with both feeding into a balance. Here is the book with 'The Weight of Glory' and other essays. Now..."

Calix College was in sight almost immediately, and Fr. Elijah waited outside George's dorm for what became a surprisingly long time... he wondered if he should go up and see if George had changed his mind, and—

George walked out and handed him a cable in the dark. It was thick and stiff.

"I thought Ethernet cables weren't this thick and stiff."

"It's my power cable. I put stuff I need on my USB key."

"Good man."

"Goodbye."

"Goodbye, and George, one other thing..."

"Yes?"

"There is no better time to be in a Church than when you know how unworthy you are."

"Um..."

"What?"

"I appreciate how much you're stretching, but..."

"George, I want to ask you something."

"I've been serving the Divine Liturgy for thirty-eight years now. How long have I been worthy to do so?"

"Is this a trick question? All thirty-eight?"

"It is indeed a trick question, but the answer is not 'thirty-eight.' I have *never* been worthy to serve the Divine Liturgy, nor have I ever been worthy to receive communion, nor have I ever been worthy to pray at Church, or anywhere else. We can talk about this if you like, but am not just being polite when I say that there is no better time to enter the Church than when you know yourself unworthy. Maybe we can talk later about what trumps unworthiness. For now, I wish you good night, and I would be delighted to see you join and adorn our company on Sunday."

George climbed up in his room and sat in his armchair, and it felt like a throne. He was exhausted—and on the other side of shame. He began dutifully opening the C.S. Lewis book, glanced at the title, then tossed it aside. It was not what he really wanted. He picked up *Brocéliande*, wiped the dust off the cover with his hand, and opened to its middle, to its heart. George read:

rode until he saw a river, and in the river a boat, and in the boat a man.

The man was clad all in black, and exceeding simple he appeared. At his side was a spear, and was a basket full of oysters filled.

"I ask your pardon that I cannot stand. For the same cause I can not hunt, for I am wounded through the thighs. I do what I might, and fish to share with others."

The knight rode on, Sir Perceval he hyght, until he came upon a castle. And in that castle he met a welcome rich, before a King all in sable clad round, and a sash of purple royal girt about his head, and full majestic he looked.

Then in walked a youth, bearing a sword full

straight, for it were not falchion neither scimitar, but a naked sword with a blade of gold, bright as light, straight as light, light as light. The very base of that sword were gem work, of ivory made and with sapphires encrusted. And the boy was girt tightly with a baldric and put the sword in its place. In utmost decorum the sword hung at his side.

The boy placed what he shouldered at the feet of the King.

Spake the King: "I ask your forgiveness that I do not rise. Partake of my feast."

Simpler fare was never adorned by such wealth of wisdom. The body was nourished, and ever more spirit in the fare that was read.

Anon processed one man holding a candelabra of purest gold with seven candles, anon another, anon a maiden mother holding a Grail, it was such a holy thing! Anon a lance that ever bore three drops of blood. And ever Perceval wondered, and never Perceval spake, though it passed many a time. With a war inside him Sir Perceval kept him his peace. Anon the King spake, "See thou mine only food," and anon came the Grail holding not a stone neither a snake but a single wheaten host, afloat as a pearl in a sea of wine, red as blood. And never the King ate he none else.

Here a page was ripped out from *Brocéliande*, with yellowed marks where once tape failed to mend what was torn.

The damsel arose from her weeping. "Perceval! Perceval! Why askedst thou not thine enquiry?"

George soon fell into a deep and dreamless sleep. Saturday he rested him all the day long: barely he stirred.

In his dream, George heard a song.

All was in darkness.

The song it came out of a mist, like as a mist, melodic, mysterious, piercing, like as a prayer, mighty, haunting, subtle, token of home and a trace of a deep place. How long this continued he wot not.

The one high, lilting voice, tinged with starlight, became two, three, many, woven in and out as a braid of three strands, or five, or ten, as a Celtic knot ever turning in and out. And as it wove in and out, it was as the waters of a lake, of an ocean, of a sea, and George swam in them. George was ever thirsty, and ever he swam. He swam in an ever-rippling reflection of the Heavens at midnight, a sea of unending midnight blue and living sapphire.

George's feet sunk and he walked on the noiseless loam. Up about him sprung blades of grass and he walked into a forest growing of emerald and jade atop pillars of sculpted earth. Anon he walked slowly and slowly he saw a farm with the green grass of wheat growing of the fertile fecund field.

Upon a ruins he came, a soft, silent place where a castle still lingered and the verdant moss grew. Then through a city he walked, a city alive and vibrant in its stones, though its streets were a for a moment at a rest from its men. And in that city, he walked into the Church his heart, and found a tome opened upon a wooden stand entwined by vines.

George looked for a moment at the volume, and for a moment he saw letters of sable inscribed in a field argent. Then the words shifted, grew older, deepened into the depth of a root and the play of quicksilver. The script changed, the words spoke from afar, and became one word whose letters were hidden as behind a veil, one word inscribed at once in ciphers of luminous gold and congealed light that filled the book and shone all around it until—

George was awake, bright awake, wide awake, looking

at a window the color of sunrise.

He arose to greet the coming of the dawn.

George went to Church and arrived almost an hour earlier than the 9:00 Fr. Elijah had given, and found to his surprise that although there were few other people, things had already begun. The fragrance of frankincense flowed and gold glittered, and he caught a word here and a phrase there—"Volume wherein the Word was inscribed," "Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal," "Blessed is the Kingdom," "Lord have mercy." Then he heard a phrase he had heard innumerable times in other contexts. A shibboleth later taken from the New Testament, "The just shall live by faith," completely broke the illusion. George had had plenty of time to get sick of words he knew too well, or so it appeared to George. Yes, he was glad people understood them, but wasn't there more to understand than that? Even if they were both straightforward and important...

The homily began.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

One of the surprises in the Divine Comedy—to a few people at least—is that the Pope is in Hell. Or at least it's a surprise to people who know Dante was a devoted Catholic but don't recognize how good Patriarch John Paul and Patriarch Benedict have been; there have been some moments Catholics aren't proud of, and while Luther doesn't speak for Catholics today, he did put his finger on a lot of things that bothered people then. Now I remember an exasperated Catholic friend asking, "Don't some Protestants know anything *else* about the Catholic Church *besides* the problems we had in the sixteenth century?" And when Luther made a centerpiece out of what the Bible said about those who are righteous or just, "The just shall live by faith," which was in the

Bible's readings today, he changed it, chiefly by using it as a battle axe to attack his opponents and even things he didn't like in Scripture.

It's a little hard to see how Luther changed Paul, since in Paul the words are also a battle axe against legalistic opponents. Or at least it's hard to see directly. Paul, too, is quoting, and I'd like to say exactly *what* Paul is quoting.

In one of the minor prophets, Habakkuk, the prophet calls out to the Lord and decries the wickedness of those who should be worshiping the Lord. The Lord's response is to say that he's sending in the Babylonians to conquer, and if you want to see some really gruesome archaeological findings, look up what it meant for the Babylonians or Chaldeans to conquer a people. I'm not saying what they did to the people they conquered because I don't want to leave you trying to get disturbing images out of your minds, but this was a terrible doomsday prophecy.

The prophet answered the Lord in anguish and asked how a God whose eyes were too pure to look on evil could possibly punish his wicked people by the much more wicked Babylonians. And the Lord's response is very mysterious: "The just shall live by faith."

Let me ask you a question: How is this an answer to what the prophet asked the Lord? Answer: It isn't. It's a refusal to answer. The same thing could have been said by saying, "I AM the Lord, and my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are my ways your ways. I AM WHO I AM and *I will do what I will do*, and I am sovereign in this. I choose not to tell you how, in my righteousness, I choose to let my wicked children be punished by the gruesomely wicked Babylonians. Only know this: even in these conditions, the just shall live by faith."

The words "The just shall live by faith" are an

enigma, a shroud, and a protecting veil. To use them as Paul did is a legitimate use of authority, an authority that can only be understood from the inside, but these words remain a protecting veil even as they take on a more active role in the New Testament. The New Testament assumes the Old Testament even as the New Testament unlocks the Old Testament.

Paul does not say, "The just shall live by sight," even as he invokes the words, "The just shall live by faith."

Here's something to ponder: The righteous shall walk by faith even in their understanding of the words, "The just shall live by faith."

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

George was awash and realized with a start that he was not knocked off his feet, gasping for air. He felt a light, joyful fluidity and wondered what was coming next. This time he realized he was sure he saw a chalice; the liturgy seemed to go a little more smoothly and quickly.

As soon as he was free, Fr. Elijah came up to him.

"Good to see you, George. How are you?"

George said, "Delighted... but I'm sorry, I haven't read 'The Weight of Glory' for you yet."

Fr. Elijah said, "Good man... no, I'm not being sarcastic. Put first things first, and read it when you have leisure. How did you find the homily?"

George said, "It was excellent... by the way, it was really for me that you preached last week's homily, right? You seemed to be going a good bit out of your way."

"It was really for you, as it was also really for others for reasons you do not know."

"But weren't you getting off track?"

"George, I have a great deal of responsibility, concerns, and duties as a priest. But I have a great deal of

freedom, too. I can, if you want, draw on King Arthur and his court every service I preach at from now until Christmas."

"How much do you mean, I mean literally? One or two? Four or five?"

"Huh? 'Literally'? Um, there is a temptation in the West to devote entirely too much time to what is literal. I *was* exaggerating when I said every service from now until Christmas... *but*, if you want, I'd be perfectly happy to do that literally, for every service you're here." Fr. Elijah extended his hand. "Deal?"

George paused in thought a moment. "Um, you've said that I could take all the books in your library and keep them if I want. I know you were exaggerating, but..."

"Yes, I was. But I am not exaggerating when I say that you can take them if you want."

"Don't you love books?"

"Immensely, but not as much as I want to love people! They're just possessions, and there are much greater treasures in my life than a good book, even though books can be quite good. Can we agree that I'll preach on something in Arthurian literature every liturgy I preach at until Christmas?"

"What if I'm not here?"

"We can make it part of the deal that I'll only preach on that topic if you're here."

George hesitated, and then shook his hand. "Deal."

Fr. Elijah smiled. "Some people have said my best homilies and best surprises have come from this kind of rash vow."

George started to walk away, and then stopped.

Fr. Elijah said, "Is something on your mind?"

George said, "What if other people don't like you preaching on something so odd? What will you do if people complain?"

Fr. Elijah said, "Then I can give them your cell phone number and have them call you at all hours of the day and

night to grouse at you for foisting such a terrible proposal on me. Now get some coffee. Go! Shoo!"

After getting home, George did his laundry, looked to see if anyone was hanging out in the lounge (everybody was gone), and played games in the computer lab. It was a nice break.

The next day in math class, the teacher drew a grid on the board, drew dots where the lines crossed, erased everything but the dots, and set the chalk down. "Today I'd like to show a game. I'm handing out graph paper; draw dots where the lines cross. We're going to have two people taking turns drawing lines between dots that are next to each other. If you draw a line that completes a little square, you get a point. I'd like a couple of students to come up and play on the board." After a game, there was a momentary shuffle, and George found himself playing against the kid next to him. This continued for longer than he expected, and George began to piece together patterns of what would let his opponent score points, then what laid the groundwork for scoring points...

The teacher said, "Have any of you noticed things you want to avoid in this game? Why do these things lead to you giving points to your opponent when you don't want to, or scoring points yourself? This kind of observation is at the heart of a branch of mathematics called 'combinatorics.' And almost any kind of game a computer can play—I'm not talking about tennis—is something that computers can only play through combinatorics. I'd like to show you some more 'mathematical' examples of problems with things we call 'graphs' where a lot of those same kinds of things are—"

She continued giving problems and showing the kinds of thought in those problems.

George felt a spark of recognition—the same thing that attracted him to puzzles. Or was it something deeper? Many "twenty questions" puzzles only depended on identifying an unusual usage of common words, "53

bicycles" referring to "Bicycle" brand playing cards rather than any kind of vehicle, and so on and so forth. Some of what the teacher was showing seemed deeper...

...and for the first time in his life, the ring of a buzzer left George realizing he was spellbound in a math class. It set his mind thinking.

In English class, he winced, as just as before-class chatter seemed about to end, one of the other students said, "A man gets up in the morning, looks out his window, and sees the sun rising in the West. Why?"

George was not in particular looking forward to a discussion of literature he wasn't interested in, but he wanted even less to hear people blundering about another "twenty questions" problem, and cut in, "Because the earth's magnetic poles, we suppose, were fluctuating, and so the direction the sun was rising from was momentarily the magnetic West."

The teacher laughed. "That isn't the answer, is it?"

The student who had posed the question said, "Um... it is..."

The professor said, "So we are to imagine someone going to a gas station, saying, 'Which way is East?', and the attendant responding with, 'Just a sec, lemme check... I know usually this way is East, but with the Earth's magnetic fluctuations, who knows?' You know that in a lot of literature, East and West are less like numbers than like colors?"

"Um... How could a direction be like a number *or* a color?"

"There's colorful difference and colorless difference. If I tell you there are 57 pens in my desk, I haven't said anything very colorful that tells much about pens, or about my desk. But if I tell you a rose is a delicate pink, I've told you something about what it's like, what it's *like*, to experience a rose."

"So what color is East, then? Camouflage green?"

"East isn't a color, but it's *like* a color where

camouflage green and fiery red are different. In both Greek and Russian, people use the same word for 'East' and 'sunrise'... and if you're really into etymology, English does this too, only we don't realize it any more. 'East' in English originally *means* 'sunrise,' as 'Easter' comes from the Anglo-Saxon name of a goddess of light and spring. Such terrible things the Orthodox miss out on by their quaint use of 'Pascha.' For us, the 'big' direction, the one which has the longest arrow or the biggest letter, the one all other directions are arranged around, is North; in Hebrew, it's East. There is a reason many churches are arranged East-West and we often worship towards the East, and that has meant something for the U.S... Would you agree that we are part of the West?"

"So our land is the worst land?" George said.

"Well, if you read enough Orthodox nut jobs, yes... particularly if this land is their home. But U.S. land, or part of it at least, is called utter East... the one U.S. state where Orthodoxy isn't edgy, exotic, fruitcake or 'other,' is Alaska, where there has been a native Orthodox presence, strong today, for over two hundred years. You know how, in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, C.S. Lewis has a wood nymph speak an oracle that has drawn Sir Reepicheep all his life?

"Where sky and water meet,
Where the waves grow sweet,
Doubt not, Reepicheep,
To find all you seek,
There is the utter East.

"There's something big you'll miss about the holy land of Alaska if you just think of it as fully a state, but just one more state, just like every other state. It's the only state, if 'state' is an adequate term, with a still-working mechanical clock on the outside of a public building that was made by an Orthodox saint. Among other things.

"And the idea of holy land that you would want you to travel to feeds into things, even in Protestant literature like *Pilgrim's Progress*, which you will misunderstand if you treat the pilgrimage as just there as a metaphor for spiritual process. I have found it very interesting to look at what people classify as 'just part of the allegory,' even though we will read no simpler allegory among the readings for this class. Now in reading for today, have any of you had an experience like Pilgrim's wakeup call at the beginning of Bunyan?"

George's head was swimming.

Why were his classes so dull before this week? He remembered previous math lessons which, in various ways, failed to give him puzzle solving, and in annoyance, turned to previous English lessons, when—

—why hadn't he paid attention? Or, more accurately, when George had paid attention, why hadn't he let it be interesting?

Philosophy also turned out to be interesting; the professor began the unit on medieval philosophy by asking, "How many angels can dance on the head of a pin?", eliciting various forms of derision, then asking people *what* they were deriding, began asking "How many of you can touch the head of the same pin at once?", produced a pin, and after students made various jostling efforts, asked whether a pin could accommodate a finite or infinite number of angels.

This was used to a class discussion about the nature of matter and spirit and whether angels dancing on the head of a pin would push each other away the way human bodies would... and at the end of class the professor began asking if people wanted to talk about how unfortunate it was that medieval philosophers *had* to use the poetic image of angels dancing on the head of a pin where others would have used the colorless language of analytic philosophy.

In chemistry, the professor did nothing in particular to

make things interesting. George still enjoyed the lecture as it built to a discussion of isotope distributions as used to compute average molecular weights.

George was quite surprised when the weekend approached, spent the weekend playing card games, and wondered at how quickly Sunday came.

On Sunday, George entered the strange world of the Church building. It seemed more, not less, strange, but things began to make sense. "In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen." was something he noticed often, and he, if not understanding, was at least comfortable with the continual hubbub as people seemed to be moving about, sometimes to the front.

As the service passed, he found his eyes returning to, and then fixed on, an icon that showed three ?angels? sitting around a stone table. In the back was a mountain, a tree, and a building, a faroff building that George somehow seemed to be seeing from the inside...

The perspective in the picture was wrong. Wait, the perspective wouldn't be *that* wrong by accident... the picture looked very distorted, and George wanted to reach out and—

George looked. The perspective vanished, not at some faroff place on the other side of the picture, but behind him, and the picture seemed at once faroff and something seen from inside.

And what was it, almost at the heart of the icon, or somewhere beneath it, that the three peaceful, radiant, great ?angels? almost seemed clustered around? It looked like a chalice of gold.

George was looking, trying to see into the picture, wishing he could go closer, and seeing one person after another come closer in the dance of song and incense. George instinctively found himself backing up, and then realized people were sitting down and Fr. Elijah began:

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Sir Thomas Mallory in *Le Morte d'Arthur* has any number of characters, and I want to describe one of them, Sir Griflet, who is completely forgettable if you don't know French: he appears briefly, never stays in the narrative for very long, never does anything really striking at all. His lone claim to fame, if you can call it that, is that Mallory refers to him as "Sir Griflet *le fils de Dieu*." For those of you who don't know French, we've just been cued in, in passing, that by the way, Sir Griflet is the Son of God.

Now why would this be? There some pretty striking things you can do if you are a character in that work. Sir Griflet is not a singular character who has the kind of energy of Sir Galahad, or in a different but highly significant way, Merlin. For that matter, he does not have even a more routine memorability like Sir Balin who wielded two swords at the same time. He's just forgettable, so why is he called *le fils de Dieu*, I mean the Son of God?

In Chretien de Troyes, who is a pivotal author before Mallory, a character with a name that would become "Griflet" is equally pedestrian and is named "fis de Do", son of Do, which has a root spelling of D-O where the word for God in that form of French is D-E-U. So a starkly pedestrian character, by an equally pedestrian language error, seems to have his father's name mixed up with how you spell the word for God. How pedestrian, disappointing, and appropriate.

There is a somewhat more interesting case in the story of a monk who believed that Melchizedek was the Son of God, and this is not due to a language error. If you were listening when the readings were chanted from the Bible, you would have heard that Melchizedek was "Without father, without mother,

without descent, having neither beginning of days nor end of life: but made like unto the Son of God, abideth a priest continually." This may be surprising to us today, but that's because most of us have lost certain ways of reading Scripture, and it was a holy monk who thought this. He made a theological error, not a mere language error, and when his bishop asked his assistance in praying over whether Melchizedek or Christ was the Son of God, he arrived at the correct answer.

Now let me ask you who is really the Son of God. Do you have an answer now?

I'm *positive* you're wrong. It's a forgettable person like Sir Griflet or Melchizedek.

When the Son of God returns in glory, he will say, "Depart from me, you who are damned, into the eternal fire prepared for the Devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink; I was a stranger, and you showed me no hospitality; naked, and you did not clothe me; sick or in prison, and you did not visit me." And when the damned are confounded and ask when they could have possibly failed to do that, he will answer them, "I swear to you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it for me."

We, in our very nature, are symbols of the Trinity, and this does not mean a sort of miniature copy that stands on its own in detachment. The Orthodox understanding of symbol is very difficult to grasp in the West, even if you haven't heard people trying to be rigorous or, worse, clever by saying "The word is not the thing it represents." And talking about symbols doesn't just mean that you can show reverence to a saint through an icon. It means that everything you fail to do to your forgettable neighbor, to that person who does absolutely nothing that

draws your attention, you fail to do to Christ.

And if you are going to say, "But my neighbor is not Christ," are you not straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel in what you are being careful about? Your neighbor as such is not Christ as such. True, but this is really beside the point. It betrays a fundamental confusion if any of the damned answer their Judge and say, "But I wasn't unkind to *you*. I was just unkind to other people." We are so formed by the image of Christ that there is no way to do something to another person without doing that to Christ, or as this parable specifically says, fail to do. And I'd like you to stop for a second. The last time you were at an unexpected funeral, did you regret more the unkind thing you said, or the kind word you failed say, the kind action you failed to take? Perhaps it may be the latter.

Christ hides in each of us, and in every person you meet. There is a mystery: the divine became human that the human might become divine. The Son of God became a man that men might become the Sons of God. God and the Son of God became man that men might become gods and the Sons of God. Christ took on our nature so that by grace we might become what he is by nature, and that does not just mean something for what we should do in our own spiritual practices. It means that Christ hides in each person, and to each person we owe infinite respect, whether they're boring, annoying, mean, lovely, offensive, fascinating, confusing, predictable, pedestrian, or just plain forgettable like old Sir Griflet.

You owe infinite respect.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Did George want to go up to the icon? He went up,

feeling terribly awkward, but hearing only chant and the same shuffle of people in motion. He went up, awkwardly kissed the three figures someplace low, started to walk away in inner turmoil, turned back to the image, bowed as he had seen people see, and kissed the chalice of wine.

It was not long before he saw Fr. Elijah come out with a chalice, and draw from it with a golden spoon. This time he noticed people kissing the base of the chalice. There was nothing awkward about them, and there seemed to be something majestic that he began to catch a glimmer of in each of those present.

George later realized that he had never experienced worship "stopping" and coffee hour "beginning." The same majestic people went from one activity into another, where there was neither chanting nor incense nor the surrounding icons of a cloud of witnesses, but seemed to be a continuation of worship rather than a second activity begun after worship. He was with the same people.

It didn't occur until much later to George to wonder why the picture had a chalice... and then he could not stop wondering. He picked up *Brocéliande* and read:

The knight and the hermit wept and kissed together, and the hermit did ask, "Sir knight, wete thou what the Sign of the Grail be?"

The knight said, "Is that one of the Secrets of the Grail?"

"If it be one of the Secrets of the Grail, that is neither for thee to ask nor to know. The Secrets of the Grail are very different from what thou mightest imagine in thine heart, and no man will get them by looking for secrets. But knowest thou what the Sign of the Grail is?"

"I never heard of it, nor do I know it."

"Thou wote it better than thou knowest, though thou wouldst wete better still if thou knewest that thou wote."

"That is perplexing and hard to understand."
The hermit said, "Knowest thou the Sign of the Cross?"

"I am a Christian and I know it. It is no secret amongst Christians."

"Then know well that the sacred kiss, the kiss of the mass, even if it be given and received but once per year, is the Sign of the Grail."

"How is that? What makes it such as I have never heard?"

"I know that not in its fullness. Nor could I count reasons even knew I the fullness of truth. But makest thou the Sign of the Cross when thou art alone?"

"Often, good hermit; what Christian does not?"

"Canst thou make the Sign of the Grail upon another Christian when thou art alone?"

"What madness askest thou?"

"Callest thou it madness? Such it is. But methinks thou wete not all that may be told."

"Of a certainty speakest thou."

"When thou dwellest in the darkness that doth compass round about the Trinity round about that none mayeth compass, then wilt thou dwell in the light of the Sign of the Grail with thy fellow man and thy brother Christian, for the darkness of the Trinity is the light of the Grail."

George got up, closed the book, and slowly put it away. He wondered, but he had read enough.

George dreamed again of a chalice whose silhouette was Light and held Light inside. Then the Light took shape and became three figures. George almost awoke when he recognized the figures from the icon. George dreamed much more, but he could never remember the rest of his dream.

That week, Fr. Elijah's homily was in George's mind. He passed the check-in counter as he walked into the

cafeteria, began to wonder where he might apply Fr. Elijah's words... and stopped.

The line was moving slowly; he had come in late after wandering somewhat. Sheepishly, he stopped, looked at the woman who had scanned his ID, and extended his hand. "Hi, I'm George."

The woman pushed back a strand of silver hair. "Hi. It's good to meet you, George. I'm Georgina."

George stood, trying to think of something to say.

Georgina said, "What are you majoring in?"

"I haven't decided. I like reading... um... it's really obscure, but some stuff about Arthur."

"King Arthur and the Round Table?"

"Yes."

"Wonderful, son. Can you tell me about it sometime? I always love hearing about things."

George said, "Ok. What do you... um..."

"I been working at this for a long time. It's nice seeing all you students, and I get some good chats. You remind me of my grandson a little. But you're probably pretty hungry now, and the lines are closing in a few minutes. Stop by another day!"

George ate his food, thoughtfully, and walked out of the cafeteria wishing he had said hi to more of the support staff.

That week, the halls seemed to be filled with more treasure than he had guessed. He did not work up the courage to introduce himself to too many people, but he had the sense that there was something interesting in even the people he hadn't met.

On Wednesday, George went to register for his classes next semester, and realized his passwords were... on his computer, the one without a power cord.

After a while, thinking what to do, he knocked on a floormates' door. "Um, Ivan?"

"Come in, George. What do you want?"

George hesitated and said, "Could I borrow a power

cord? Just for a minute? I'll give it right back."

Ivan turned around and dragged a medium-sized box from under his bed. It was full of cables.

"Here, and don't worry about returning it. Take a cord. Take twenty, I don't care. I have them coming out of my ears."

George grabbed one cord, then remembered he did not have the cord for his monitor. He took another. "I'll have these back in a minute."

"George, you're being silly. Is there any reason you need *not* to have a power cord?"

"Um..." George opened his mouth and closed it. Then he hesitated. "No."

George left, registered online, shut his computer down, left the room, did some work at the library, and went to bed.

Thursday he was distracted.

Friday, it was raining heavily, and after getting soaked in icy rain running to and from his classes, George decided he would check his email from his room... and found himself wandering through the spam folder, and threw the cords out in the dumpster.

Sunday he walked into church with hesitation, and Fr. Elijah almost immediately came over. "Yes, George?"

George hesitated.

Then he told Fr. Elijah what was going on.

Fr. Elijah paused, and said, "George, do you know about the Desert Fathers?"

"No."

"A group of people a bit like the hermits in Arthurian legend. Some people think that Merlin was originally based on such monks... but aside from that speculation, they were much holier than either of us. And there was one time when someone asked them, 'What do you do?' And what do you think the Desert Father said?"

"Pray? Worship? Live a good life?"

"We fall and get up, fall and get up, fall and get up."

That is the motion of Orthodox life, and if you see prostrations, you will literally see us fall and get up. I'm not sure if you think that if you repent of a sin once, the hard part's over and it's all behind you. In my sins, I have to keep repenting again and again. You have fallen, now get up. And get up again. And again. And again. And keep getting up.

"The Lord bless you, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen."

George walked away still feeling unworthy, and everywhere saw a grandeur that seemed to be for others more worthy than him. Everything around him seemed royal, and Fr. Elijah preached:

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

In our commemorations, we commemorate "Orthodox kings and queens, faithful princes and princesses," before we commemorate various grades of bishops. The bishop is in fact royalty; instead of calling him "Your Majesty," we call him "Your Grace," "Your Eminence," "Your Holiness," "Your All Holiness." If you do research, you will find that the bishop is more than a king: the bishop is the Emperor, and wears the full regalia of the Roman Emperor.

One question that has been asked is, "The king for the kingdom, or the kingdom for the king:" is the king made king for the benefit of the kingdom, or is the kingdom a privilege for the benefit of the king? The Orthodox choice of now requiring bishops to be monks is not because married persons are unfit, or rather necessarily more unfit, to serve. Most of the apostles in whose shadows the monastic bishops stand were married, and the monk bishops I have met consider themselves infinitely less than the married apostles. But a monk is given to be a whole

burnt offering where nothing is kept back and everything is offered to God to be consumed by the holy sacrificial fire. (Or at least that's what's supposed to happen, but even if this is also what's supposed to happen in a marriage, it's more explicit in monasticism.) And it is this whole burnt offering, unworthy though he may be, who makes a bishop: Orthodoxy answers "the king for the kingdom:" the king is made king for the benefit of the kingdom, the bishop serves as a whole burnt offering for the benefit of the diocese.

Now let me ask: Which of us is royalty? And I want you to listen very carefully. All of us bear the royal bloodline of Lord Adam and Lady Eve. It's not just the bishops. I will not go into this in detail now, but the essence of priesthood is not what I have that "ordinary" Orthodox don't have. It's what I have that Orthodox faithful *do* have. And without you I can celebrate the liturgy. And the essence of royalty is not what a king or bishop has that a "commoner" or faithful does not have; it's what king and bishop share with the ordinary faithful. The Greek Fathers have no sense that "real" royal rule is humans ruling other humans; that's a bit of an aberration; the real royal rule is humans ruling over what God has given them and over themselves, and doing that rightly is a much bigger deal than being one of the handful of kings and bishops.

And each of us is called to be what a bishop is: a whole burnt offering in humble service to the kingdom—large or small is not really the point—over which the Lord has appointed us king. It may mean showing conscience by cleaning up your room—and if you have a first world abundance of property, it is a very small way of offering them back to the Lord to keep them in good order. It means carefully stewarding precious moments with other people,

maybe saying, "I hope you have a wonderful day," and saying it like you mean it, to support staff. And it means humbly ruling your kingdom within, in which both Heaven and Hell may be found. It is when you serve as king, the king made for the kingdom, that your kingdom will be your crown and glory.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

After Church, a young woman stormed up to Fr. Elijah. She had, at as far arm's length from her body as she could hold it, a clear trash bag holding a pink heart-shaped piece of artisan paper that appeared to have writing on it. She stopped opposite Fr. Elijah and said, "Do *you* know anything about this note?"

Fr. Elijah smiled gently. "It appears someone has sent you some sort of love note. How sweet!"

"Were *you* involved?"

"What, you think I would do something like that? I'm hurt!"

The young woman stood up straight and put her hand on her hip. Fr. Elijah turned to George and said, "Would you like to know what's going on?"

The young woman said, "Yes, I'd love to hear you explain *this*."

Fr. Elijah said, "George, the elephant population in Sri Lanka is in some peril. They're not being hunted for their ivory, let alone for their meat, but there is a limited amount of land, and farmers and elephants are both trying to use an area of land that makes it difficult for them to both support themselves. So some people tried to think about whether there was a way to make a win-win situation, and make the elephants an economic asset. They asked themselves whether elephants produce anything. And it turns out that something that eats the enormous amount of food an elephant eats does, in fact, produce a *lot* of something."

George said, "I don't see the connection. Have I just missed that you're changing the subject?"

The young woman said, "He *hasn't* changed the subject."

Fr. Elijah said, "They're using it to make hand-crafted artisan paper, colored and available in a heart shape, which you can buy online at MrElliePooh.com if you're interested."

George looked at Fr. Elijah in shock and awe.

The woman said, "Grandpappy, you are *such* a pest!"

Fr. Elijah lightly placed an arm around her shoulder and said, "George, I'd like to introduce you to my granddaughter Abigail. She has a face as white as alabaster, raven-black hair, and lips are red as blood. And she has many merits besides being fun to pick on."

Abigail stuck out her tongue at her grandfather and then shifted to his side. "And my grandfather does many fine things besides be obnoxious... Can't live with him, can't shoot him... You should get to know him, if you haven't." She gave him a gentle squeeze. "There are brownies today, George, and they're great! Can I get you some?"

George read in *Brocéliande*, and wandered in the wood, and the castle of Calix College, and the surrounding city. Fr. Elijah began to introduce fasting, and George found something new in his struggles... and began to make progress. Nor was that the only thing in George's life. He began to find the Middle Ages not too different from his own... and he was puzzled when he read in *Brocéliande*:

And in that wood anon saw Sir Yvain a lion fighting against a primeval serpent, and the serpent breathed fire against the lion his heel, and a baleful cry did the lion wail. Then Lord Yvain thought in his heart of which animal he should aid, and in his heart spake, "The lion is the more natural of the twain." And anon he put his resources on the side of the lion,

and with his sword he cleft the ancient serpent in twain and hew the serpent his head in seven, and warred against the wicked wyrm until he were reduced to many small bits. And he cleaned his sword of the serpent his venomous filth, and anon the lion kept him at his side.

And anon Sir Yvain slept and an advison saw: an old woman, whose colour was full of life and whose strength intact and yet who were wizened, riding upon a serpent and clothed in a robe black as coal, and spake and said, "Sir Yvain, why have ye offended me? Betake ye as my companion." Then Sir Yvain refused her and there was a stench as brimstone aflame. Then a woman clad in white, riding astride a lion, new as white snow did courtesy and said, "Sir Yvain, I salute thee." And about her was a fragrance of myrrh.

Anon Sir Yvain awoke, and sore amazed was he, and none could interpret his advison.

George spoke with Fr. Elijah, and asked him what the passage meant. Fr. Elijah said, "What does this passage *mean*? You know, that isn't as big a question in Orthodoxy as you think... but I'll try to answer. In fact, I think I'll answer in a homily."

"It had better be impressive."

"Fine. I'll preach it as impressive as you want."

"When?"

"On Christmas."

That evening, George called Fr. Elijah to say that he was going home for Christmas... and then, later in the week, said, "Fr. Elijah? Do you know anybody who could keep me? My parents were going to buy me a ticket home with frequent flier mileage on an airline, but my grandfather is ill and my mother used up those miles getting a ticket... and money is tight... I don't know what I'm going to do."

"Well, you could talk with your College and try to get special permission to stay over break... but I'd prefer if you stayed with me. Because we agreed that I would only preach on the Arthurian legends, including your Old Law and New Law, if you were there... and I was so looking forward to preaching a Christmas homily on the Arthurian legends."

"Can't you preach it without me?"

"We agreed and shook hands. I have that homily for Christmas, but only if you're there."

"Um... I would be an intruding—"

"George, I am a priest because I love God and I love people. And I do meet people quite a lot, but my house is empty now. It would be nice to have some young energy and someone to share more than a Christmas dinner with?"

"Are you sure?"

"You know how to get to my place. I'll see you whenever you want to come over."

On Christmas, Fr. Elijah preached,

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Christ is born! Glorify him!

In the Arthurian legends, there is a story of a knight who sees a serpent fighting a lion, kills the serpent, and wins a kind response from the lion. In some versions the knight has a vision in which one woman appears on the serpent and another on the lion, and we learn that these women represent the Old Law and the New Law.

What are the Old Law and the New Law? One can say the Torah or Law of Moses, and the Gospel, and that is true up to a point, but the "Old Law" is not just a take on Judaism. Sir Palomides, a Saracen, described with profound confusion between Islam and paganism (and the problem with Islam is not

that it is pagan but that it is not pagan enough—it is more emphatic about there being one God, even more than the one God is), becomes a Christian and is asked to renounce the Old Law and embrace the New Law. Even if Sir Palomides is in no sense a Jew.

In the ancient world, it is not enough to say that the Orthodox Church understood itself as the fulfillment of Judaism, politically incorrect as that may be. The Orthodox Church was even more fully the fulfillment of paganism, and if you understand what was going on in Plato, you understand that paganism was deepening. The Orthodox Church is the place where that final deepening of paganism took place. And I would like to explain for a moment why Orthodoxy is pagan and neo-"pagan" forms like Druidry aren't.

The popular stereotype is that paganism was merry and free until Christianity's grim hand came down, and that's like saying that difficult toil was carefree until someone came along and with a grim hand invited people to a feast. Pagan virtues—courage, justice, wisdom, moderation—are retained in Christianity, but they are not the virtues of joy by themselves. C.S. Lewis said that if you're not going to be a Christian, the next best thing is to be a Norseman, because the Norse pagans sided with the good gods, not because they were going to win, but because they were going to lose. The Norse decision was to meet the Day of Doom, called Ragnarok, and go down fighting on the right side. And so the Norse have a tale of the war-god Tyr who took and kept an oath even at the price of letting a wolf bite off his right hand, and there is something very much like ancient paganism in keeping an oath though it cost your right hand.

What Orthodoxy offered paganism in the ancient world was precisely not a grim hand flattening

everything, but retaining the virtue already recognized in paganism while deepening them with faith, hope, and love that live the life of Heaven here on earth. The Christian virtues of faith, hope, and love are the virtues that can see beauty, that bring Heaven down to earth, that can call for the whole Creation to worship God: as we sing at the Eucharist, joining the Song that summons the host of angels, sun, moon and stars, heavens and waters above the heavens, sea monsters and all deeps, fire and hail, snow and frost, stormy wind fulfilling his command, mountains and hills, fruit trees and cedars, beasts and all cattle, creeping things and flying fowl, kings and all people, princes and rulers, young men and maidens, old men and children—all called in the Psalmist's summons to praise the Lord.

If you want to know how today's "neo-paganism" can fail to be pagan, I would recall to you the Medieval Collectibles website which offers a medieval toilet cover so you can have a real medieval coat of arms on your, um, "throne." The website's marketing slogan is "Own a piece of history," but you're not owning a piece of history... or think of the interior decorator who was told, "I want an authentic colonial American bathroom," to which the decorator replied, "Ok, so exactly how far from the house do you want it?"

Some have noted that the majority of books written by Orthodox today are by Western converts, and there is a reason for that. The Reformation almost created literate culture, but the opposite of literate is not illiterate, but oral, in a way that neo-paganism may want to create but is awfully hard to recreate. Even in its spiritual *reading* the Orthodox Church remains an oral culture in its core while it uses writing: many of its most devout would never write a book, and even now, sensible Orthodox will

answer the question, "What should I read to understand Orthodoxy?" by saying "Don't read, at least not at first, and don't *ever* let reading be the center of how you understand Orthodoxy. Come and join the life of our community in liturgy." Orthodoxy is not better than classical paganism in this regard, but it is like classical paganism and it keeps alive elements of classical paganism that neo-paganism has trouble duplicating. (A neo-"pagan" restoration of oral culture bears a hint of... I'm not sure how to describe it... an oxymoron like "committee to revitalize" comes close.) After years of the West tearing itself away from nature, people in the West are trying to reconnect with nature, and some neo-"pagans" are spearheading that. But look at Orthodoxy. Come and see the flowers, the water and oil, the beeswax candles and herbs, the bread and wine that are at the heart of Orthodox worship: the Orthodox Church has not lost its connection with the natural world even as it uses technology, and it may even have a fuller connection with the natural world than paganism had; classical Rome could sow salt in the soil of Carthage and go out of their way to pollute out of spite, which even environmentally irresponsible companies rarely do today. Which isn't getting into the full depth of a spiritually disciplined connection to nature like that of St. Symeon the New Theologian—in the Orthodox Church we call him "new" even though he's from the fourteenth century—but it's missing the point to ask if Orthodoxy is pagan because of the role of the saints in worshiping God. If you want the deep structure, the culture, the way of life, of paganism, the place where you will find it most alive is precisely Orthodoxy.

The Arthurian author Charles Williams makes a very obscure figure, the bard Taliesin, the pilgrim who comes to Byzantium sent to bring a treasure and

returns with the Pearl of Great Price, the New Law. In Stephen Lawhead, it is Merlin who appears as the culmination of the Druidic Order and the apex of the Old Law: the old learned brotherhood is disbanded and Merlin proclaims the New Law, and this is really not just a story. The Evangelical Orthodox Church was formed when a group of Protestants tried to do something very Protestant, reconstruct the original Christian Church through studying old documents. *Very* Protestant. And they came to a certain point, that when they quizzed an Orthodox priest, they realized something. And the Evangelical Orthodox Church entered the Orthodox Church because they realized that the Old Law of Protestant searching to reconstruct the ancient Church needed to be fulfilled in what they realized was the New Law. The Holy Order of MANS—MANS is an acronym, but not in English; it stands for *Mysterion, Agape, Nous, Sophia*, some terms from Greek that are deep enough to be hard to translate, but something like "profound mystery, divine love, spiritual eye, wisdom." Do these mean something Christian? Do they mean something esoteric? In fact the Holy Order of MANS was something of both, and they pushed their tradition deeper and deeper... until the Holy Order of MANS was dissolved and many of its people followed their leader's sense that their Old Law led to this New Law. If you know the story of the Aleut religion in Alaska, the shamans—and it is difficult to explain their "shamans" in contemporary terms; perhaps I should refer to them as people who had tasted spiritual realities—said that certain people were coming and to listen to the people who were to come. And the people the shamans foretold were Orthodox monks who had in turn tasted of spiritual realities, such as St. Herman of Alaska. Not, necessarily, that moving from paganism to Orthodoxy was that big of a change

for them. It wasn't. But the Aleuts recognized in these monks something that was very close to their way of life, but something that could deepen it, and it was because of their depth in their Old Law as pagans that they were ready for an Orthodox New Law. Stephen Lawhead has a lot of carefully researched history—at times I wished for a little less meticulous research and a little more riveting story—but whether or not anything like this can be confirmed archaeologically in the Celtic lands, the same kind of thing can be confirmed, even as having happened very recently.

But when I say "Merlin," many of you do not think of the herald of the New Law, and for that matter many of the older sources do not do this either. If a boy today is enchanted by just one character from the Arthuriad, it is ordinarily not King Arthur, Pendragon though he may be, nor Sir Galahad, who achieved the Holy Grail in some versions, nor Sir Lancelot, who is proven to be the greatest knight in the world, nor the Fisher-King, nor the fairy enchantress Morgana le Fay, nor King Arthur's peerless Queen Guinevere, whose name has become our "Jennifer." It is the figure of Merlin.

Today, if you ask *what* Merlin was—and I intentionally say, "what," not "who," for reasons I will detail—the usual answer is, "a wizard." But if you look at the stories that were spread from the Celtic lands, the answer is, "a prophet." In the Old Testament, one of the prophets protests, "I am neither a prophet, nor a prophet's son," and another prophet says something to the Lord that somehow never gets rendered clearly in English Bible translations never choose to get right: "You violated my trust, and I was utterly betrayed." The Hebrew word for prophet, '*nabi*', means "called one," and one never gets the sense in reading the Old Testament

prophets that the prophets, when they were children, said, "I want to grow up to be a prophet" the way people today say, "I want to be the President of the United States."

And this idea of Merlin as *prophet* is not just a different or a more Christianly correct word. The Arthurian legends may be thought of today as "something like fiction;" even when people in the Middle Ages questioned their historical accuracy, those people were throwing a wet blanket on something a great many people took as literal fact. There is a book called *The Prophecies of Merlin*, which was taken extremely seriously for centuries, as the word of a prophet. And one gets the sense that in modern terms Merlin's identity was not a self-definition that he chose, not in modern terms, but something that was thrust upon him.

It may sound strange to some if I say that the earlier attempt to build a castle on Merlin's blood, and Merlin's later calling a castle out of the wind, relate to Christ. But if you think I am pounding a square peg into a round hole, consider this: Sir Galahad, whom some consider a painfully obvious Christ-figure, whose strength is as the strength of ten because his heart is pure and who is always strong in the face of temptation, enters the world after Sir Lancelot, the greatest knight in the world and a man who goes above and beyond the call of duty of faithfulness in his devotion to another man's wife, goes to a castle, is given the Arthurian equivalent of a date-rape pill in the form of a potion that makes him think his hostess is the woman he's been carrying on with, and that night sires Galahad. You may call this a magical birth story if you like, but it doesn't give us much advance notice that the son born will turn out to be the Arthurian icon of purity who will achieve the Grail.

So how is Merlin, who reeks of magic, introduced? In the oldest surviving work that flourished outside of Celtic circles, in fact written by a Celtic bishop, Merlin appears when King Vortigern searches for a boy without a father, and hears Merlin being teased for being without a father. And let me be clear, this is not because his father has passed away. We learn that the Devil wished to be incarnate, could only come into the world of a virgin, found a virgin who was spiritually pure, having only slipped in her prayers once, and thus the person meant to be the anti-Christ was conceived. The Church, just in time, said powerful prayers and the boy, born of a virgin without a sire, commanded all the power over the natural world he was meant to, but would serve the good. Now is anyone going to say that that's not a reference to Christ? Merlin is most interesting because of how the story itself places him in the shadow of Christ.

One thing that's very easy to overlook is that in the story where there's a terrible storm and Christ is sleeping in the front of the boat while his disciples are asking if he doesn't care that they were going to die, is not just that the disciples were right: in that part of the world there were storms that could very quickly flood a boat and kill people when the boat sank. Christ stands up, and says something to the storm before rebuking the disciples for their lack of faith. And that's when the disciples *really* began to be afraid. Mark's Gospel is the one Gospel with the simplest, "I don't speak Greek very well" Greek, and at this point he uses the King James- or Shakespeare-style Greek Old Testament language to say that when Jesus commands the storm to be still and it actually obeys him, *that* is when they are most terrified.

Before Jesus stopped the storm, they were afraid enough; they knew the storm they saw was easily

enough to kill them. But this was nothing compared to the fear out of which they asked, "Who is this, that even the wind and the waves obey him?" This person who had been teaching them had just displayed a command over nature that left them wondering who or what he was, a "what" that goes beyond today's concern about "who am I?" and has something that cannot be reached by angst-ridden wrestling with who you are.

Something like that question is at the heart of debates that people argued for centuries and are trying to reopen. What, exactly, was Jesus? Was he an ancient sage and teacher? Was he a prophet? A healer or a worker of wonders? Someone who had drunk of deeper spiritual realities and wanted to initiate others into the same? Was he something more than a man, the bridge between God and his world?

The answer taken as final was the maximum possible. It was "Every one of these and more." It pushed the envelope on these even as it pushed into a claim for the maximum in every respect: Christ was maximally divine, maximally human, maximally united, and maximally preserved the divine and human while being the final image both for our understanding of what it is to be God and what it is to be human.

And what, finally, would we have if we deepened Merlin? What if he were the son, not of the worst finite creature, but of the best and infinite Creator? What if he had not simply power over nature but were the one through whom the world was created and in whom all things consist? What if we were dealing with, not the one who prophesied that a few would find the Holy Grail, but the one who gave the Holy Grail and its gifts that are still with us? What if Merlin were made to be like the pattern he is

compared to? When Merlin is deepened far enough, he becomes Christ.

The Christian lord of Cyprus was out hawking when his dearly beloved hawk—I don't know if the hawk was a merlin, but I can say that a merlin is a type of hawk—became entangled in the brush in the wood. Loving the hawk dearly, he ordered that the branches be cut away so that he would still have this hawk, and when that was done, not only was his hawk found, but an icon showing the Queen and Mother of God on a throne, and the Divine Child enthroned upon her lap and an angel on either side. They found what they were looking for, but they also found a singularly majestic icon of the Incarnation.

The Christ Mass, the Nativity, is an invasion in the dead of winter. It is the feast of the Incarnation, or more properly one of the feasts of the Incarnation, which is not something that stopped happening once after the Annunciation when the Mother of God bore the God-man in her womb.

Everything that the Christ Mass stands for will eventually be made plain, but the Christ Mass is a day of veiled glory. When God became man, he was born in a stable. When Christ returns, he will appear riding on the clouds. When he came, a choir of angels proclaimed the news to shepherds and a few knees bowed. When he returns, rank upon rank of angels will come in eternal radiant glory and every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the manifest glory of God the Father. When he came once, a star heralded the hour of his birth. When he returns, the stars will fall as ripe figs from a tree and the sky itself will recede as a vanishing scroll. Every thing that is a secret not will be made plain, but he first came in secret...

...and he comes today in secret, hidden in us. For the Incarnation was not finished after the

Annunciation, but unfolds still as Christ is incarnate in the Church, in the saints like St. Herman of Alaska, a wonderworker who was seen carrying logs weighing much more than himself, stopped a forest fire, calmed a stormy sea, and left behind a body preserved from corruption as it was on display for a month at room temperature, and left behind much of the Aleut Orthodox community that remains to this day—and also in us. And the Incarnation is still unfolding today. The castle of the Arthurian world is more than stone walls and a porticullis; the castle is almost everything we mean by city, or society, or community. And it is the castle writ large that we find in the Church, not only a fortress waging war against the Devil but a people ruled by her Lord. This Castle is at once founded upon a fluid more precious than ichor, not the blood of a boy without a father but the blood of a God-man, without father on the side of his mother and without mother on the side of his Father. It is the Castle still being built by the wind of his Spirit still blowing—and remember that the world behind the Medieval West did not always stow "spirit" and "wind" in sealed watertight compartments: the wind blows where it will and the Spirit inspires where it will, so this Castle has a Spirit blowing through it that is more windlike than wind itself.

And until the Last Judgment, when every eye will see him, even those that pierced him, it is his will to be incarnate where he is hidden behind a veil to those who cannot see him: incarnate in the Church and in each of us, called to be his saints, and called to become Christ.

Christ is born! Glorify him!

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Fr. Elijah turned around, stopped, bent his head a moment, and at last turned back. "Oh, and one more thing... George's number is in the parish directory, and these homilies that talk about King Arthur and his court have been all his fault. If there's *anything at all* that you don't like about them, I invite you to call him at all hours of the day and night to grouse at him for foisting such terrible ideas on me."

That evening, George came, and after some hesitations, said, "When can I become Orthodox?"

"At Pascha. We can continue working, and you will be received in the Church."

George thanked him, and began to walk out.

"Um, Fr. Elijah, aren't you somewhat surprised?"

"George, I was waiting for you to see that you wanted to become Orthodox. Go back to your reading."

The Christmas break passed quickly, and the first class after break was the introduction to computer science. The professor said, "Most of my students call me Dr. Blaise, although you can use my last name if you're comfortable. I wanted to offer a few remarks.

"Many of your professors think their class is your most important class, and that entitles them to be your number one priority in homework and demands outside the classroom. I don't. I believe this class is a puzzle piece that fits into a larger puzzle. Exactly how it fits in will differ, depending on whether you become a major—which I invite you to consider—or whether you choose an allied major but focus on something other than computer science, or whether your interests lie elsewhere and I am broadening your horizons even if your main interests lie somewhere else. I will try to help give you a good puzzle piece, and in office hours especially I want to support you in helping fit this piece of the puzzle into the broader picture.

"My best student was a mechanic; car and airplane mechanics, for instance, are solving a problem with a system, and I have never been so stunned at how quickly a

student learned to debug well as with this mechanic. I've found that people who know something about physics, mathematics, or engineering pick up computer work more quickly even if you don't see a single physics equation in this class: learn physics and programming is a little easier to learn. And it goes the other way too: one of my colleagues in the math department explained that students who know the process of taking something and writing a computer program to reach the desired results, correctly, are prepared to do something similar in mathematics, and take something and write a correct proof to reach the desired results. Learn something in one hard science and you have an advantage in others."

One student raised her hand. "Yes?" Dr. Blaise asked.

"What about those of us interested in philosophy or religion? What if we're doing something computers won't help us with? Are you going to teach us how to use word processors?"

"Well, I'd point out that there is a long tradition of studying mathematics—geometry—as a sort of mental weightlifting before studying philosophy or theology. Or some of my poet friends say that it's a way of poisoning the mind, and I'll respect them if they want to say that. But for many of you, it is useful, even if we don't teach word processing—ask the lab tech for sessions that will teach you how to use computer software. Computer *science* is about something else; computer science isn't any more about how to use computers than astronomy is about how to use telescopes."

The student raised her hand again, slightly, and then put it down.

Dr. Blaise said, "I'd like to hear your thought. If you aren't convinced, other people probably aren't convinced either, and it will do everybody good to have it out in the open."

"Um... But why does..." She paused, and Dr. Blaise smiled. "I want to study English."

"Good stuff. So does my daughter. It's a bit of a cross-cultural encounter, and I think it can benefit English students for the same reason my majors benefit from taking English classes. But never mind programming specifically; I want to talk about how the disciplines can integrate. Programming won't help you the same way as some of the humanities will, but I'd like to talk about how things might fit together.

"I saw one of your English professors, a lovely medievalist who knows the Arthurian legends well. She was talking with one of the campus ethicists, who has interests in the history of moral theology. The topic of discussion? One that you might wince at, on the short list of positions the Catholic Church is unpopular for: contraception. And the ethicist said he'd found something he thought the medievalist literature professor might find interesting.

"The history of contraception, like almost any other big question, involves a lot of other things. And one of those things involves a suggestion by John Noonan, not for one of several proposed answers for a question, but of an answer to a puzzle that has no other answers, at least as of the time Noonan wrote.

"The vision of courtly love, and what is celebrated in that love between a man and a woman—probably another man's wife, for what it's worth—is an ideal that was all about celebrating 'love', and in this celebration of 'love,' there was a big idea of 'Play all you want; we will encourage and celebrate play, whether or not you're in marriage; just be sure that you do it in a way that won't generate a child.'

"Scholars do have difficulty keeping a straight face in the idea that the courtly romances are coded messages about secret Cathar teachings. They aren't. But they flourished as nowhere before in a land where something of Catharism was in the air, and, like contraception, the idea of celebrating 'love' and encouraging people, 'Play, but do

it in a way that don't generate a child' is not exactly Cathar, but is the sort of thing that could come if Catharism was in the air.

"And, the ethicist went further, the Arthurian romances are done in such a way that it is very difficult to demonstrate any clear and conscious authorial understanding of Cathar teachings, let alone coded messages sent to those 'in the know'... but that doesn't mean that Catharism had nothing to do with it. And not just because strict Cathars would have taken a dim view of *this* way of taking their ball and running with it. A *very* dim view, for that matter.

"Catharism, called Gnosticism as it appeared in the ancient world and various other things as it resurfaces today, has various things about it, and not just wanting to celebrate love to high Heaven while understanding this wonderful 'love' as something which one should be able to do without generating children. That's not the only thing, and it is one point of including Cathar elements without doing them very well.

"Catharism, or Gnosticism or whatever the day's version of it is called, is deeply connected with magic, and this occult element has a lot of ideas, or something like ideas, if you get very deep into it. And in the Arthurian legends, there is an occult element, but it isn't done very well. There are dweomers all over the place, and Merlin and almost every woman work enchantments, not to mention that all sorts of items have magical 'virtues', but the English professor had almost no sense that the authors were really involved with the occult themselves. It was kind of a surface impression that never had any of the deeper and darker features, or the deeper secret doctrines of one in the know. It kind of portrays magic the way a poorly researched TV show portrays a faroff land—there may be a sense of interest and enchantment untainted by actual *understanding* of what is being portrayed.

"And besides that surface impression, there is

something of self-centered pride. The only people who really have a pulse are nobles living in large measure for themselves, knights who are trying to do something impressive. Commerce never seems to really taint the screen of luxury; furthermore there is a sense that being in fights for one's glory is no great sin, and it doesn't really matter what those fights do to the others. It's a very different view of fighting from 'just war.'

"The Arthurian legends are undoubtedly classics of world literature, and it is terribly reductive to say that they're simply a bad version of Cathar doctrine. That denigration of their literary qualities is not justified, just as dismissing Star Wars as just a bit of violent Gnosticism or Catharism or whatever is out of line. Star Wars would never succeed if it were just dressed up Gnosticism.

"But it does raise the question of whether the literature of courtly love, so foundational to how people can understand 'love' today and understand what it means to celebrate 'love' and say that the Catholic Church hates love between men and women if it will not recognize that contraception will help that love be celebrated with less unwelcome 'consequences'... It raises the question, not of whether the literature is bad literature and not worth study, but whether it is very good literature that contains something fatal."

There was one more question, and Dr. Blaise began discussing computer science. At least George believed later that the professor had been discussing computer science, and trusted others' reports on that score.

But George did not hear a word more of what Dr. Blaise said that day.

The computer science class was a night class, and when it was finished, George found himself surprised when he entered the parsonage.

Fr. Elijah was sitting, his back to the door, staring into the fireplace. A large volume, looking like an encyclopedia volume, was sitting open on Fr. Elijah's sparsely appointed

desk. Fr. Elijah, his back still to the door, said, "Come in, George. What is the matter?"

George said, "I hope I didn't interrupt—"

Fr. Elijah said, "I was just resting a bit after reading something. St. Maximus's language gives me such trouble."

George rushed over to the desk. "Maybe I can help." He looked, and looked again, until he realized the volume had columns of Latin and Greek. The volume was printed, but it looked old, and there were worm holes.

"Come in and sit down, George. You don't need to be reading St. Maximus the Confessor quite yet, even if your Greek is better than mine, or you find the Latin easier. Now sit down. You didn't come here so you could help me understand the Greek, even if I wouldn't be surprised if, bright lad as you are, you know Greek a good deal better than I do."

"It's Greek to me," George said, forcing a smile, and then shaking. Fr. Elijah rose, turned around, and said, "Sit down in my chair, George, and enjoy the fire. I'll step out into the kitchen, make some hot cocoa, and then we can talk. I wish my cat were still around; she was a real sweetheart, and she would sit in your lap and purr. Even if it was the first time she met you." Fr. Elijah left, silently, and went about making hot cocoa. He returned, holding two mugs, and gave one mug to George. "I put extra marshmallows in yours."

Then Fr. Elijah sat down in a smaller chair, in the corner, and sat, listening.

George blurted out, after some silence, "I think the Arthurian stuff I read may be Gnostic."

Fr. Elijah took a sip.

"One of the people in my class said that Arthurian literature arose because of the Cathars."

Fr. Elijah took another sip.

"Or something like that. It seems that a lot of what people do as glorious things in courtly literature is

Gnostic."

Fr. Elijah took a slow sip, and asked, "Like what?"

"Well, the ideal of love is big on celebrating love, only it's better if children don't get in the way, and you're careful to keep children out of the way. And there's magic all over the place, and nobles are superior."

Fr. Elijah took another sip.

"At least that's how I remember it, only I'm probably wrong."

Fr. Elijah stroked his beard for a moment and said, "Well, that's a big enough question that we should respect the matter by not trying to sort it out all at once. Let's not assume that because it is so big a question, we are obligated to rush things. If it is a big question, we are more obligated *not* to rush things."

"*Why?*"

"Ever hear of Arius or Arianism?"

"You mean racism?"

"No, not that spelling. A-R-I-U-S and A-R-I-A-N-I-S-M. The race-related bit is spelled with a 'Y'."

"Ok."

"Arius was a deacon who was really worried that his bishop was saying something wrong. So he rushed to correct his bishop, and in his rush to correct the Orthodox Church founded a heresy. He gets it worse in the Orthodox liturgy than even Judas; various other heretics are accused of being taught by Arius.

"There were two mistakes he made. The biggest and worst mistake was fighting the Orthodox Church when they said he was wrong, and that was the real problem with Arius. But another mistake was trying to rush and fix the problem of heresy he thought his bishop was guilty of.

"Holier men than either of us have rushed and said something heretical in their rush job. I'm not sure either of us are going to go warring against the Church and trying to fix it has thought about our correction and said 'No,' but if you've raised a big question, or your class has, that's all the

more reason *not* to rush."

George said, "So what should we do?"

Fr. Elijah said, "Take a deep breath and a sip of cocoa," and waited. Then he said, "Now what is it that has you so wound up?"

"I thought there was really something in what I was reading."

"There probably is."

"But the idea of love, and all the magic, are some sort of second-rate Cathar stuff."

"Why do you think that?"

"Well, I'm not sure... um... well, they're big on the experience of love."

Fr. Elijah sank a little into his chair. "In other forms of Gnosticism, there is an idea of some things as experience... and they are understood as experiences, significant as experiences, and not as significant for other reasons... and I can see some pretty Gnostic assumptions feeding into that ideal of love. You may be right..."

"But isn't love to be celebrated? How else could it be celebrated?"

"In the New Testament times, celibacy was encouraged despite the fact that it was giving up something big. But the something big is not the obvious 'something big' people would be worried about giving up today... it's having children to carry on one's name. There is a good deal more.... People, even with hormones, were interested in some other things *besides* pleasurable experiences. There is more I could explain about what else *besides* 'being in love' could make a happy marriage between happy people, but... Sorry, I'm ranting, and you're not happy."

"Fr. Elijah, if what I'm saying makes sense, then why on earth did you preach those homilies? Were you lying... um, I mean..."

"Don't look for a nicer word; if you think I might have been lying, I would really rather have you bring it out into

the open than have it smouldering and damaging other things. No, I'm not angry with you, and no, I wasn't lying."

"Then why—"

"George, allow me to state the very obvious. Something was going on in you. And still is. It seemed, and seems to me, that you were coming alive in reading the Arthurian legends. As a pastor or priest or spiritual father or whatever you want to call me, I made an appropriate response and preached homilies that blessed not just you, but also several other people as well. Now, maybe, you are shattered, or maybe you are ready to begin hungering for something more. You know how, in classic Gnosticism, there's a distinction the Gnostics hold between the so-called 'hylie' people who don't have much of any spiritual life, meaning people who aren't Christian in any sense, and the 'psychic,' meaning soulish, not ESP people, of Christians who have a sort of half-baked spiritual awakening, and the 'pneumatic,' meaning spiritual, Gnostics who are the real spiritual elite?"

George said, "It doesn't surprise me. It's absolute bosh from beginning to end. It has nothing to do with the truth."

Fr. Elijah closed his eyes for a moment. "George, I am not quite sure I would say that."

"What, you're going to tell me the Gnostics had it right?"

"They had more right than you think; they're *seductively* similar to Christianity. They wouldn't have anywhere near the effect they're having if it were any other way.

"You know how Orthodox Christianity is patted on the head as a sort of lesser outer revelation that is permissible for those who have reached the outer courts but are not ready to enter the inner sanctum of the Gnostics' secret knowledge? That's *backwards*. The Gnostic 'knowledge' might be excusable for people who have not reached the inner reaches of Orthodoxy. It is the Gnostic that is the

light-weight spiritual reality. And it is the light-weight spiritual reality that is the Old Law which the New Law fulfills more than the Old Law can fulfill itself. You reacted to something in the Arthurian legends because there is something there, and if you now know that they are not the New Law, I will ask you to excuse me if I still hold those legends to be an Old Law that finds its completion in the New Law. The highest does not stand without the lowest, and part of the New Law is that it makes a place for the Old Law. Including that spark of life you saw in the Arthurian legends."

"But why *preach* as if you found so much in them? I were to ask you to do something silly, like preach a sermon on how things have been censored out of the Bible, would you do that too?" George took a breath. "I'm sorry; you can change the subject if you want."

Fr. Elijah said, slowly, "I have a question for you, and I want you to think carefully. Are you ready for the question?"

George said, "Yes."

"Can we know, better than God, what the Bible should say?"

"No."

"But quite a lot of people do think that. A lot of people seem to be trying to help the Bible doing a better job of what it's trying so hard to say, but can't quite manage. Or something like that."

"I've read some liberals doing that."

"It's not just liberals. Let me give one example. George, have you been big in Creation and evolution debates?"

"Not really."

"Christians have several options, but for the *Newsweek* crowd, there are only two options. Either you're a young earther, or you're an evolutionist, and the new 'intelligent design' is just the old creationism with a more euphemistic name. Rather depressing for a set of

options, but let's pretend those are the only two options.

"Now are you familiar with what this means for dinosaurs?"

"Um..."

"The connection isn't obvious. We've seen, or at least I have, cartoons in magazines that have cave men running from *T. rex*es or hunting a brontosaurus. Which is, to an evolutionist, over a hundred times worse than having cave men whining loudly about the World Wide Wait. There's a *long* time between when the last dinosaurs of any kind, and the first humans of any kind, were around. As in hundreds of millions of years longer than humans have been around in any form. On that timeline, it's a rather big mistake to have humans interacting with dinosaurs.

"But if you have a young earth timeline, with the whole world created in six days, then it's not such a ludicrous idea that humans might have interacted with dinosaurs... and your English Bible offers an interesting reason to believe that humans have seen living dinosaurs. Have you read the book of Job?"

George said, "Um, no. It's one of a lot of..."

Fr. Elijah interrupted. "There's a lot in the Bible to read, and even people who read the Bible a lot don't read it quickly unless they're speed-reading, and then it still takes them a couple of weeks. If you can call that 'reading the Bible;' I've tried it and I think it's one of the sillier things I've tried—a sort of spiritual 'get rich quick' scheme. I was smart enough to stop. But if you check your English Bible, you will see in Job a creature called the 'behemoth,' perhaps because the translators on the King James Version didn't know how to translate it, and the 'behemoth,' whatever that may be, is a mighty impressive creature. We are told that it is not afraid though the river rushes against it, suggesting that whatever the behemoth is, it is a big beast. And we are told that it stiffens or swings its tail like a cedar, the cedar being a magnificent, and quite enormous, tree which reaches heights of

something like one hundred fifty to two hundred feet. And regardless of where you stand on Creation and evolution, the only creature that has ever walked the earth with a tail that big, or anywhere *near* that big, is one of the bigger dinosaurs. So the Bible offers what seems to be excellent evidence that people have seen dinosaurs—alive.

"Which is all very lovely, of course given to the English Bible. But first, the 'behemoth' is in fact an overgrown relative of the pig, the hippopotamus, and second, it isn't really talking about his *tail*. The same basic image is translated unclearly in the Song of S—"

George spit out a mouthful of soda and took a moment to compose himself. "I'm sorry. Did I—"

Fr. Elijah looked around. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said that as you were taking a sip. Let me get you a napkin. Here."

George said, "Ok, so maybe there are some other vivid images that have been, bowlderized—you know, edited for television. Anything more? Were any ideas censored?"

Fr. Elijah said, "A bit murky, but I'm tempted to say 'yes.' One idea has been made less clear; there may be other tidbits here and there. A couple of forceful passages that may be interpreted as implying things about contraception don't come across as clearly. But that may not be censorship; there is a double meaning that is hard to translate correctly in English. I don't find the English translation strange. But there's one story in the Old Testament, where the future King David is running from King Saul, who is leading a manhunt and trying to kill David. There are a couple of points that David could have killed Saul, and at one of these points, David's assistant either encourages David to kill Saul or offers to kill Saul himself, and David says what your English Bible puts as, 'I will not lay my hand on the Lord's anointed,' or something like that. Would you like to know what it says in Hebrew or Greek, or in Latin translation?"

George said, "Um..."

Fr. Elijah got up. "I wasn't expecting that you would; it's really not that important or even as impressive as some people think. If you don't know those languages, it may be easiest to see in the Latin. Aah! Here's my Latin Bible. Just a minute. Let me get my magnifying glass." After almost dropping a dark green Bible with golden letters on the cover, and an interminable amount of flipping, he said, "What is this word here?"

"I don't know Latin."

"Never mind that. What does that word look like?"

"It's a lowercase version of 'Christ,' with an 'um' added."

"Yes indeed. And at the top it says the name of an Old Testament book, in Latin 'Liber Samuhelis.' What do you think the word you pointed out means?"

"I told you that I don't know Latin."

"What's an obvious guess?"

"Um..." George paused. "Christ."

"Yes indeed."

"What does the lowercase 'c' mean?"

"It means nothing. As a matter of language-loving curiosity, the text is in Latin; either in the manuscripts or in this printed Bible, capitalizations follow a different rule, and 'christus'/'christum'/'... isn't automatically capitalized. Now why is the Old Testament book of Samuel using the equivalent of the 'Christ'?"

"Because the Latin is messed up?"

"Ernk. Sorry. Bzzt. Thank you for playing, but no. The Latin is *fine*. It's the *English* that's messed up. The Latin correctly translates, 'I will not lay my hand on,' meaning violently strike, 'the Lord's Christ.' Didn't you know that the word 'Christ' means 'anointed'?"

"Yes, but..."

"The Bible, Old Testament and New, uses 'Christ' for those who are anointed—the Son of God, prophets, priests, kings, and ultimately the people of God. The whole point of becoming Christian is to become by grace what Christ is

by nature, and even if we can never be perfect in Christ, there is something real that happens. If you ever become Orthodox, you will be 'Christed,' or in the related and standard term, 'chrismated,' meaning, 'anointed with holy oil.' And, at a deeper level, the anointing is about anointing with the Holy Spirit, as Christ was. And the New Testament in particular says a lot about Christ, but the Bible calls Christ or Christs others who are anointed. But the Bible translations, coincidentally by people who have much less room for this in their theology, introduce a division that isn't in Hebrew, Greek, or the Catholic Church's Latin, and translate the Hebrew 'moshiah' or the Greek 'christos' one way when it refers to the one they think is 'really' Christ, and another way when it refers to other Christs even if what the text says is, quite literally, 'Christ.' They introduce a very clear divide where none exists in the text, using a language shenanigan not entirely different from some mistranslations translating 'God' with a big 'G' when the Bible talks about the Father, and a 'god' with a little 'g' when the Bible refers to Christ. Perhaps your Bible's translators still say 'anointed one,' but there is some degree of censorship. The reader is saved the shock of too many correctly translated and explicit statements that we are to be little Christs, Sons of God, living the divine life—there's a word for the divine life in Greek that is different from the word for mere created life, and that dimension doesn't seem to come through. It's not all censorship, but there's something not quite right about the translators who refuse to either consistently say 'Christ,' or else consistently say 'Anointed One,' so that the readers never get the something important in the Bible that Western Christianity does not always get. But there is enough mystery in the Bible. Sacred Scripture is unfathomable even apart from relatively few areas where the translators try to make sure that the reader does *not* get the full force of the what the text is saying. God exceeds our grasp; he is and ever shall be Light, but

whenever we try to shine a light to search him out, its beam falls off in darkness, and the God who is Light meets us beyond the cloud of darkness enshrouding him.

"I say this to answer your question, which I know was purely rhetorical. I'd prefer not to scandalize people and have to clean up the pieces later, but even the tough old women you see in our parish aren't so prissy as you might think. But I want to more directly speak to your intent, and the deep question behind your asking if, because you had hypothetically asked me, I would preach a sermon about the Bible and censorship. I wasn't crossing my fingers or simply saying what I thought would please you, when I preached about the Arthurian legends, and there is nothing I wish to take back. I really was preaching in good faith."

"Then I don't want *Brocéliande* for now."

George said, "You may like the book. I don't. I don't want it any more."

"Then may I take a look at it? I would like to have it, to look at. If you don't want it any more, that's fine, but you can have it back any time."

"Fine. Maybe it will be better for you than for me."

"By the way, what are you doing for Spring Break?"

"Dunno. Do you have any suggestions?"

"There are some truly beautiful places where you could get blasted out of your mind, acquire a couple of new diseases, and if you time it right, come back still in possession of a rather impressive hangover."

"Um..."

"Yes?"

"Why don't we just cut to the chase and get to your real suggestion?"

"Aah, yes. It turns out that there's a finishing school which is offering a week-long intensive course in the gentle art of polite conversation, but—oh, wait, I was going to suggest that to my granddaughter Abigail. I would never make such a suggestion to you. Finishing school—what

was I thinking? What I was really wondering was whether you have considered one of the alternative spring breaks."

"Like Habitat for Humanity? But I have no skill in construction."

"That's not really the point. Last I checked, Habitat for Humanity had nothing on their website about how only seasoned construction workers can be of any use."

"But aren't there a lot of things that could go wrong?"

"Like what?"

"I might hit myself on the thumb with a hammer."

"If you're worried about being at a loss for words, last April Fool's Day my godson gave me a book listing bad words in something like a thousand languages, and you can borrow it. There are worse things in life than hitting your thumb with a hammer, and if it's that big of an issue, I'd be happy to ask the head of Habitat for Humanity to refund your wasted time. If you're worried about getting sunburned, the store next door has an impressive collection of sunscreen containers, giving you options that rival those for dental floss. I personally recommend the SPF 30 in your choice of soft pastel-hued plastic bottles with a delicate floral scent created through a carefully blended confection of unnatural chemicals. I don't think that Habitat is going anywhere where you'd be in real danger of snakebite, but I can help find a kit you can use to bite the snake back. Have I left something out?"

A week later, and (though he did not tell Fr. Elijah) realizing that Abigail was also a student at Calix College, George returned. Fr. Elijah said, "Why the long face, George? Just a minute while I make some tea."

"Um, I'm not signed up for the alternative spring break."

"George, I only asked you to consider... tell me what's on your mind... *if* you want to."

"I was in line, and I just missed signing up."

Fr. Elijah sat in silence.

"I could have gone, but there was a girl in line after

me, and she really wanted to go. I let her have the last slot."

"Excellent. Some would call it sexist, but I'd call it one of the finer points of chivalry."

Fr. Elijah paused and then said, "Could you come with me to the house for a second?"

George gulped.

Fr. Elijah led George out to the house and rummaged on a shelf before pulling out a CD. "George, could you put this in the CD player and hit play? I've figured out how to use the CD player several times, but I keep forgetting, and I don't want to keep you waiting." He handed the CD to George and said, "I'll be right out. I need to make a phone call." He stepped into another room and closed the door.

George looked at the CD, did a double take, and looked at the player. He began to hear a rap beat.

As I walk through the valley where I harvest my
grain,
I take a look at my wife and realize she's very plain.
But that's just perfect for an Amish like me.
You know, I shun fancy things like electricity.
At 4:30 in the morning I'm milkin' cows.
Jebediah feeds the chickens and Jacob plows... Fool!
And I've been milkin' and plowin' so long that
Even Ezekiel thinks that my mind is gone.

I'm a man of the land! I'm into discipline!
Got a Bible in my hand and a beard on my chin.
But if I finish all my chores and you finish thine,
Then tonight we're gonna party like it's 1699!

We been spending most our lives, living in an Amish
paradise.
I've churned butter once or twice, living in an Amish
paradise.
It's hard work and sacrifice, living in an Amish

paradise.

We sell quilts at discount price, living in an Amish
paradise.

A local boy kicked me in the butt last week.

I just smiled at him and turned the other cheek!

I really don't care; in fact, I wish him well.

'Cause I'll be laughing my head off when he's burning
in Hell!

But I ain't never punched a tourist even if he
deserved it

An Amish with a 'tude? You know that's unheard of!

I never wear buttons but I got a cool hat.

And my homies agree, I really look good in black...

Fool!

If you'll come to visit, you'll be bored to tears.

We haven't even paid the phone bill in 300 years

But we ain't really quaint, so please don't point and
stare;

We're just technologically impaired!

There's no phone, no lights, no motorcar,

Not a single luxury,

Like Robinson Caruso,

It's as primitive as can be!

We been spending most our lives, living in an Amish
paradise.

We're just plain and simple guys, living in an Amish
paradise.

There's no time for sin and vice, living in an Amish
paradise.

We don't fight. We all play nice, living in an Amish
paradise.

Hitchin' up the buggy, churnin' lots of butter,

Raised a barn on Monday, soon I'll raise another!
Think you're really righteous? Think you're pure in
heart?

Well, I know I'm a million times as humble as thou
art!

I'm the pious guy the little Amlettes wanna be like,
On my knees day and night, scorin' points for the
afterlife,

So don't be vain and don't be whiny,
Or else, my brother, I might have to get medieval on
your heinie!

We been spending most our lives, living in an Amish
paradise.

We're all crazy Mennonites, living in an Amish
paradise.

There's no cops or traffic lights, living in an Amish
paradise.

But you'd probably think it bites, living in an Amish
paradise.

Fr. Elijah walked back into the room and served the
tea, smiling gently.

George said, "Um..."

Fr. Elijah said, "Yes?"

"I'm not sure how to put this delicately."

"Then put it indelicately. Bluntly, if you wish."

"I hadn't picked you out for a Weird Al fan."

"It was a present."

"Who would buy you a Weird Al CD?"

"A loved one."

"Um... do you ever do something less spectacular, like
play chess?"

"I'm not a big fan of chess, and besides, I've visited the
chess club at the Episcopalian church, and it seems the
Anglican Communion isn't going to produce that many
more good chess players."

"Why?"

Fr. Elijah sipped his tea. "Can't tell a bishop from a queen."

George coughed, sputtered, tried to keep a straight face, and then tried to steer the conversation back. "When were you given the Weird Al CD?"

"For April Fools' Day. The present is much appreciated."

"I like Weird Al, but why did you play that?"

"Because I was just on the phone."

"And?"

"I've just arranged for you to spend your Spring Break at an Amish paradise."

"Um..."

"Yes?"

"Are you joking?"

"No."

"Are you being *serious*?"

"Yes."

"Are you being sadistic again?"

"Yes, I'm being very sadistic."

"*Why?*"

"I'm not saying."

"I'll be bored to tears."

"Perhaps. But boredom can be good, and not just because it can build character."

"Um... Never mind. I've grown rather fond of computers. I've found out the hard way that I rather need them."

"If it's *that* hard for you to spend a few days without spam, you can use your cell phone to read all the insulting messages telling you that you can't handle money, or that you need snake oil diets, or some part of your body is too small, or you're not man enough for a relationship with a real woman and must content yourself with pixels on a screen. And if you forget leave your cell phone at home, you might be able to borrow one of theirs."

"Amish don't use phones or the Internet. They're 'just technologically impaired;' didn't the song say that?"

"You can ask them; I'm sure one of them would be willing to lend you his cell phone."

"Um..."

"Let's forget about *that*; we can talk about it later if you want. Anyway, after school gets out, come over here with your bag. Someone else is doing some running, and will give you a ride. He's a bit hard of hearing, so he's not much good for chatting in the car, but he's a great guy. But you can gripe to him about how backwards the Amish are.

"Oh, and one more thing... I'm not exactly sending you into bear country, but if one of the workmen were attacked by a bear, I'd be very worried."

"Um..."

"Yes?"

"*That* seems obvious."

"But not for the reason you think. I'll explain why after you return."

There was a knock on the door, and Fr. Elijah opened it.

"George, I'd like to introduce you to Jehu. Jehu, this is George. Oh, George, I'm sorry for being a pest, but could you open your bag and pull out everything inside?"

George looked at Fr. Elijah, rolled his eyes, and began unpacking.

"Which of these items mean anything at all to you? Which have a story, or were expensive, or were a gift?"

George looked at Fr. Elijah, who stood in silence.

"You can put anything that means anything to you in this closet; it will be here when you get back. I'm not sending you to a den of thieves, but..."

George began shuffling and sorting while Fr. Elijah waited. When he was finished, Fr. Elijah said, "How much does your windbreaker mean to you?"

"It's new, but I want to have it with me on the trip."

"Take it off. You have an old sweatshirt or two."

"Sorry, I insist on this one. It doesn't mean that much to me."

Fr. Elijah said, "If you must..."

George said, "I've taken enough out. Have a good evening." He stiffly shook Fr. Elijah's hand. "You better have a good reason for your odd behavior."

Fr. Elijah said, "I can explain later, if you need me to."

George repacked the remaining half of his luggage into the duffle bag, and left with Jehu.

Some days later, Fr. Elijah heard a knock and opened the door. "George, George! How are you? I must hear about your trip. That's a lovely jeans jacket you have there. Is there a story behind it?"

George gave Fr. Elijah a look that could have been poured on a waffle, and then began quickly taking his coat off.

Fr. Elijah said, "You wouldn't throw a coat at an old man who doesn't have the reflexes to block it... I must hear the story about the coat, though."

George closed his mouth for a second, and then said, "Filthy sadist!"

Fr. Elijah said, "It sounded like you had an interesting trip."

"Did you call and *ask* them to be obnoxious?"

"I did no such thing."

"Honest?"

"I called and asked them to go easy on you."

"You called and asked them to go *easy* on me?"

"Well, you seem to have gotten through the matter without getting any black eyes."

"You call that going *easy*? These guys are pacifists, right?"

"That depends on your idea of a 'pacifist'. If you mean that they don't believe you should use violence to solve conflicts, then yes, they are pacifists."

George said, "And..."

"But does that make them wimps? In any sense at all?"

"You *did* say that you would be worried if one of them were attacked by a bear... *Why?*"

"I'd be worried for the bear."

George sunk down into his chair.

"You must have some stories to tell."

"They wanted help raising a barn, and they wouldn't let me do any of the stunts they were doing *without a harness*, but when I went to the outhouse, things shook, and when I opened the door, I was over ten feet in the air."

"Earthquake?"

"Forklift. I don't know why they had one."

"Did you ever think you would sit on such a high throne? I have a suspicion that's higher than even my bishop's throne."

"We are *not* amused."

"You are using the royal 'We,' Your Majesty. Excellent."

"The first day, I didn't take off my shirt at work, but I did take off my windbreaker, and when I left, they nailed it to the beams!"

"Excellent. Is that why Your Majesty has a new, handmade jeans jacket?"

George gave Fr. Elijah another look that could have been poured on a waffle.

"I should maybe have told you... They don't think anything of nailing down any clothing that's taken off as a practical joke. Did you ever get an opportunity to nail down some clothing or something of theirs?"

"Yes, but like a gentleman, I did not."

"That was rude of you."

"You mean they're *offended* at what I didn't do?"

"No; I just said it was rude. They wouldn't be offended. But what I was going to say is that the women have lots of denim, and are very adept at sewing new clothes; it's almost like making a paper airplane for them. Or maybe a little bigger of a deal than that. But you seem to be laboring under a sense that since the Amish are such

backwards people, they aren't allowed to have a sense of humor. Were you surprised at the sense of humor they had?"

"Filthy sadist!"

"So did you get bored with nothing interesting to do besides surf the web through your cell phone?"

George said, "Filthy sadist!" Then he paused.

Fr. Elijah sat back and smiled. "George, I believe you have a question."

George hesitated.

"Yes? Ask anything you want."

George hesitated again, and asked, "When can I come back?"

Fr. Elijah just laughed.

George walked around, and had a few chats with Abigail on campus. She started to occupy his thoughts more... and George wondered if he really wanted to dismiss all of the literature of courtly love.

He tried to put this out of his mind the next time he saw Fr. Elijah.

He thought he'd pay a visit, and knocked on Fr. Elijah's door.

Fr. Elijah said, "I'm glad you're here, George. Did you know that a man-eating tiger got loose on the campus of Calix College?"

George stood up and immediately pulled his cell phone out of his pocket. "Do the police—"

"Sit down, George, and put your cell phone away, although I must commend your gallant impulse. This was before your time, and besides, George, it starved."

George said, very forcedly, "Ha ha ha."

"Sit down, please. Have you had any further thoughts about your holiday with the Amish?"

"It seems a bit like King Arthur's court. Or at least—"

"Why would that be?"

George sat for a while, and said nothing.

"Are you familiar with Far Side comic strips?"

"Yes."

"I expected so. You like them, right?"

"Yes, but I haven't read them in a while."

"Do you remember the strip with its caption, 'In the days before television'?"

"Can't put my finger on it."

"It shows a family, mesmerized, sitting, lying, and slouching around a blank spot where there isn't a television... I think you've had a visit to the days before television. You didn't even need a time machine."

George sat in silence for a moment.

Fr. Elijah continued, "If you want, I can show you the technique by which the Bible is censored, and how the translators hide the fact that they've taken something out of the text. But do you know the one line that was censored from the movie production of *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*—the Disney one, I mean?"

"I didn't notice that anything was censored."

"Well, you're almost right. Now it seems to be religion that is censored, Christianity having replaced sex as the publishing world's major taboo, and Disney did not censor one iota of the stuff about Aslan. But there is one line of the book that almost gets into the movie, but then Father Christmas merely makes a smile instead of verbally answering the question. Do you know what that line is?"

"What?"

"'Battles are ugly when women fight.'"

"Um... I can see why they would want to smooth over that."

"Why? Battles are ugly when *men* fight. There is a reason why Orthodox call even necessary fighting 'the cross of St. George.' 'Cross,' as in a heavy, painful burden. I've dealt pastorally with several veterans. They've been through something rough, much rougher than some people's experience with, say, cancer. And it is my unambiguous opinion, and that of every single soldier I've spoken to at length, that battles are ugly... whether or not

women fight. Therefore, battles are ugly when women fight, and you'd really have to not understand battle, think it's the same thing as a violent fantasy or watching an action-adventure movie, to deny that battles are ugly when whatever group fights.

"So why make such a big deal over a single line, 'Battles are ugly when women fight?' Why is that one line worth censoring when Disney has the guts to leave Aslan untouched? What's a bigger taboo in the media world than Christ?"

"Umm... I can't put my finger on it."

"Ok, let me ask you... What do you think of the Amish women?"

George tried not to stiffen.

"I'm sorry, George, I meant *besides* that... When you're my age you can forget that for women to dress very modestly can—"

"Then what *did* you mean?"

"Imagine one of those women in a fight."

George tried not to make a face.

Fr. Elijah said, "My understanding is that they're strong and hard workers, probably a lot stronger than many men you know."

George said, "Um..."

"Would you deny that they are strong? And tough, for that matter?"

"No..."

"Does it bother you in the same way to imagine an Amish man having to carry a gun into combat?"

"No. He'd be pretty tough."

"But the women are pretty strong and tough too. Why does it bother you to think about one of them entering combat and fighting?"

George said nothing.

"The women strike you as stronger and tougher than many men that you know. So they're basically masculine?"

"Fr. Elijah... the women there almost left me

wondering if I'd met real women before, and the men left me wondering if I'd met real men before. I don't know why."

"I think I have an answer for why the idea of an Amish woman fighting in battle bothers you more than an Amish man fighting in battle."

"What?"

"I've been reading through *Brocéliande*. Let me read you a couple of passages." Fr. Elijah returned momentarily, and flipped through *Brocéliande* before reading:

Sir Galahad he rode, and rode and rode, until saw he a dragon red. Anon the wyrm with its tail struck a third of the trees against the earth that Sir Galahad they might slay. Anon Sir Galahad warred he against the wyrm.

The dragon charged, and anon Sir Galahad his horse trembled, and Galahad gat him down to earth. The dragon laughed at Sir Galahad's spear which brake to-shivers, and breathed fire red as Hell.

Sir Galahad gat him behind his shield, and then charged with his sword, though it should break as rotted wood. Anon the dragon swept him, though his helm saved Sir Galahad his head from the rocks.

Then Sir Galahad, who his strength was as the strength of a thousand because his faith was pure, leapt him and wrestled against the beast. Anon the beast turned and tore, against the knight, until the knight he bled sore. Never was such combat enjoined, but the knight held his choke until the dragon his death met.

Fr. Elijah pulled the bookmark out, and found one of several other bookmarks:

Rose the smoke of incense, of frankincense pure

the garden did fill. 'Twere many women present, that
hyght Lady Eva, and Lady Elizabeth, and Lady Anna,
and Lady Martha, and Queen Mary. Sang they a
song, 'twere of one voice, and in that song kept they a
garden: in the garden was life. Queen Mary a radiant
Child gave suck, and others gave life each in her way.
Verdant was the place of their labour.

Fr. Elijah said, "I think you're missing the point if
you're trying to tell if there are differences between men
and women by asking who is tougher."

"Why?"

"It's like asking what the differences are between
apples and oranges, and then thinking you need to justify
it with a measurement. So you may say that apples are
bigger than oranges, until you realize that navel oranges
are the size of a grapefruit and some varieties of apples
don't get that big. So maybe next you measure a sugar
content, and you get really excited when you realize that
maybe oranges have a measurably lower Ph than apples—a
scientist's way of measuring how sour they are—until
someone reminds you that crabapples are so tart you
wouldn't want to eat them. And all this time you are
looking for some precise scientific measurement that will
let you scientifically be able to distinguish apples and
oranges..."

"Is it simply a measure of some difference in physical
strength that makes you not like the idea of an Amish
woman in battle? If you knew that the women were
equally as strong as the men, identically strong, or tough
or whatever, would that address..."

George hesitated. "But..."

Fr. Elijah sat silently.

"But," George continued, "the idea of an Amish
woman in battle... I know some girls who wanted to go
into the military, and it didn't bother me *that* much. And
the Amish women *are* pacifists."

"So if those women were gung-ho military enthusiasts, even if they weren't soldiers, then you wouldn't mind—"

"Ok, ok, that's not it. But what *is* it about the Amish?"

"George, I think you're barking up the wrong tree."

"So what is the right tree? Where *should* I be barking?"

"When people notice a difference with another culture, at least in this culture they seek some 'That's cultural' explanation about the *other* culture."

"So there's something about *this* culture? Ours?"

"George, let me ask you a question. How many times in the Arthurian legends did you see someone invite a man to be open about himself and have the courage to talk about his feelings?"

George was silent.

"We still have the expression, 'wear the pants,' even though it is no longer striking for a woman to wear trousers. It used to be as striking as it would be for a man to wear a skirt."

"Um... you don't approve of women wearing pants?"

"Let's put that question on hold; it doesn't mean the same thing. Abby wears trousers all the time. I wouldn't want her to do otherwise."

"But..."

"George, when have you seen me at the front of the church, leading worship but *not* wearing a skirt?"

"Um..."

"But I wouldn't want you wearing a skirt. The question of wearing a skirt, or pants, or whatever, is like trying to make a rule based on size or tartness or whatever to separate apples from oranges."

"It's the wrong question, then?"

"It's *fundamentally* the wrong question... and it misleads people into thinking that the *right* question must be as impossible to answer as the wrong question. Never mind asking who is allowed to wear pants and who is allowed to wear a skirt. We're both men. I wear a skirt all

the time. You shouldn't. And, in either case, there is a way of dressing that is appropriate to men, and another to women, and that propriety runs much deeper than an absolute prohibition on who can wear what. And this is true even *without* getting into the differences between men's and women's jeans, which are subtle enough that you can easily miss them, but important."

"Like what?"

"For starters, the cloth is hung on men's jeans so that the fabric is like a grid, more specifically with some of the threads running up and down, and others running side to side. On women's clothing, jeans included, the threads run diagonally."

"And this is a deliberately subtle clue for the super-perceptive?"

"It changes how the cloth behaves. It changes the cloth's physical properties. Makes women's clothing run out faster, because it's at just the right angle to wear out more quickly. But it also makes the cloth function as more form-fitting. On men's jeans, the cloth just hangs; it's just there as a covering. On women's jeans, the cloth is there to cover, but it's also there to highlight. This, and the cut, and a few other things, mean that even if men and women are both wearing jeans, there are differences, even if they're subtle enough that you won't notice them. Men's jeans are clothing. Women's jeans are more about adornment, even—or *especially*—if it's something you're not expected to notice."

"So we do have differences?"

"We do have differences despite our best efforts to eradicate them. We want men to be sophisticated enough to cultivate their feminine sides, and women to be strong enough to step up to the plate."

"Um, isn't that loaded language?"

"Very. Or maybe not. But one of the features of Gnosticism is that there keeps popping up an idea that we should work towards androgyny. Including today."

"Like what?"

"Um, you mean besides an educational system that is meant to be unisex and tells boys and girls to work together and be... um... 'mature' enough not to experience a tingle in the relationship? Or dressing unisex? Or not having too many activities that are men only or women only? Or not having boys and men together most of the time, and women and girls together? Or having people spend long periods of time in mixed company whether or not it is supposed to be romantic? Or an idea of dating that is courtly love without too many consciously acknowledged expectations about what is obviously the man's role, and what is obviously the women's role? Or—"

"Ok, *ok*, but I think there was more—"

"Yes, there is much more to the Amish, or the Arthurian legends, than what they hold about men and women. But there is also much more *in* what they hold about men and women—all the more when they are telling of Long Ago and Far Away, so that political correctness does not apply to them, so that men who go on great quests can be appreciated even by a woman who thinks men would be better off if they would just learn to talk more about their feelings and in general hold a woman's aspirations of conversational intimacy. And the Amish are 'technologically impaired,' or whatever you want to call them, so they're allowed to have real men and real women *despite* the fact that they are alive today. But the pull of men taught to be men, and women taught to be women, is powerful even if it's politically incorrect, and—"

George interrupted. "Is this why I was trying to keep a straight face when you were asking me to imagine an Amish woman carrying a gun?"

Fr. Elijah thought. "For an Amish man to have to fight in battle would be bad enough. An Amish woman entering a battlefield would be something that would cut against the grain of their life as women. It's not so superficial as the women being dainty and not strong enough to hold a

gun."

"The men seem stronger and tougher than the women, though."

"Yes, but is it only a matter of being tougher? Is what you observed simply a matter of the women being tough but the men being tougher?"

George was silent.

Fr. Elijah looked at his watch and winced. "Always when I'm having a good conversation... George, I'm sorry, but I've got someone coming over any minute, and a bit of preparation. Sorry..."

George picked up his belongings, and Fr. Elijah blessed him on his way out. Then George stepped out, and Fr. Elijah momentarily opened the door. "Oh, and by the way, George, I have some more of that paper, if you want to write her a love note." He closed the door.

George scurried away, hoping that Fr. Elijah hadn't seen him blush.

It was not much later that April Fool's Day came, falling on a Sunday. George did not feel brave, and paid a visit to Bedside Baptist. The days seemed to pass quickly with Abigail in the picture.

On Earth Day, George listened and was amazed at how many references to Creation he heard in the liturgy—not just the reference to "his mother, the earth," but how plants and trees, rocks, stars, and seas, formed the warp and woof by which the Orthodox Church praised her Lord. The liturgy left him wishing Fr. Elijah would put off his preaching and say something to celebrate earth day...

Fr. Elijah stood up.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Today is Earth Day, and I thought that that would provide an excellent basis for my preaching today. The very opening chapters of Genesis are not about man alone but man and the whole Creation.

There are some very interesting suggestions people have made that when Genesis says that we were told not only to "be fruitful and multiply," but "fill the earth and subdue it," the word translated "subdue" is very gentle, almost an embrace, as a mother nurtures a child. Which is a very lovely image, but is absolute hogwash.

The word translated "subdue" is the word Christ uses for exactly what Christians must not do by "lording their authority" over other Christians as the heathen do. The book of Genesis tells of this beautiful Creation and then has God charge us with a charge that could much better be translated, "trample it under foot." And what better day than Earth Day than to talk about why we should trample the earth under foot, told to us in a text that is resplendent with natural beauty?

Many people today call the earth 'Gaia', and that is well and good. Today one calls a man 'Mr.' and a woman 'Miss' or 'Ms.' or 'Mrs.' if there is no other honorific, and as much as adults all bear that title, in Latin every woman bears then name of 'Gaia' and every man bears the name of 'Gaius.' And if we are speaking of the earth, it is well and proper to call her Gaia; only someone who understands neither men nor women would think of her as sexless!

If you are dealing with a horse, for instance, it helps to keep in mind that they are prey animals with a lot of fear. Never mind that they're much bigger than you; they're afraid of you, as you would be afraid of a rat, and need to be treated like a small child. But you can only deal with a horse gently after it is broken and after you have made it clear that it is you holding the reins and not the horse. You need to be able to treat a horse like a little child if you are to handle them... but if you spoil it, and fail to establish your authority, you have a terrified small child that is

stronger than an Olympic athlete. You *do* need to be gentle with a horse, but it is a gentleness that holds the reins, with you in charge.

There are a number of fundamental difficulties we face about being in harmony with nature, and one of the chief ones is that we are trying to be in harmony with nature the *wrong* way. We are trying to take our cue from our mother the earth, perhaps instead of taking our cue from technology. And it is excellent to treat Gaia gently, and perhaps technology is in fact quite a terrible place to take our cue from, and something else we absolutely need to trample under foot, but there is something mistaken about the rider taking his cue from the horse. In Genesis we are called to rule material Creation as its head: we are to give it its cue, rather than following. Perhaps you have seen the *Far Side* cartoon that says, "When imprinting studies go awry" and shows a scientist last in line with ducklings follow a mother duck... which is very funny, but not a recipe for a life well lived. We are made from the same clay as horse and herb, but unless we are deeply sunk into the even worse cues we will take from technology when we fail to rule it, we do not serve our best interests—or the earth's—when we ask her to dance and expect her to be our lead.

But enough of what is politically incorrect in the West, where we say that men should not lead and mean, in both senses, that humans should not lead the rest of Creation and that males should not lead females. I could belabor why both of those are wrong, but I would like to dig deeper, deeper even than saying that lordship applies to every one of us even if we are all "a man under authority," *including* me.

Patristic exegesis of the rule over Creation is first and foremost of a rule over our passions and over ourselves. We are not fit to lead others or Creation if

we have not even learned to lead ourselves; "better is a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city." If you are following a Western model, then you may be thinking of a big enterprise for us to start ruling Creation which is really beside the point. If you save yourself through ascetical mastery, ten thousand will be saved around you. Never mind that this is mystical; it is a matter of "Seek first the Kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added unto you." You become a leader, and a man, not by ruling over others, but by ruling over yourself.

We are in Great Lent now, the central season of the entire Orthodox year, not because it is about ruling others or about ruling Creation—it isn't—but because it is about ruling ourselves. We are not to seek a larger kingdom to rule outside ourselves; we are to turn our attention to the kingdom within, and rule it, and God will add a larger kingdom outside if we are ready. The first, foremost, and last of places for us to exercise lordship is in ourselves, and our rule over the Creation is but an image of our rule over ourselves, impressive as the outer dominion may be.

We bear the royal bloodline of Lord Adam and Lady Eve, and we are to be transformed into the image of Christ. Let us seek first the Kingdom of God, with all that that means for our rule over ourselves.

In the Name of the Lord and Father, and of the Son who is Lord, and of the Heavenly King, who is the Holy Ghost, Amen.

After his Sunday dinner, George thought it would be a good time to wander in the wood.

In the forest, he found himself by a babbling brook, with the sound of a waterfall not far off. George brushed off a fallen mossy log and sat down to catch his breath.

George began listening to the birdsong, and it almost

seemed he could tell a pattern. Then two warm hands covered his eyes.

George tried to look up, remembered his eyes were covered, and brought his own hands up to his face, briefly touching a small, soft pair of hands. Then he said, "It's definitely a man..."

Then George turned. Abigail was sticking out her tongue.

Abigail's dress was a rich, deep, deep red, the color of humble earth seen through a ruby. A pair of bare white feet peeked out from beneath a long flowing skirt, a wide, golden straw hat sat atop her locks, and dark, intricate knotwork lay across her heart.

George looked down at his own feet and saw his own worn combat boots, before looking at Abigail's face. She smiled and said, "Boo!"

George said, "What are you doing here?"

"What are you doing here?"

"Taking a walk, as I do from time to time."

"Must be pretty rare for you, if this is the first time I've seen you."

"You're in the woods more often than I am?"

A squirrel darted out, climbed across Abigail's foot, and scurried away.

George asked, "It wasn't afraid of you?"

"Most of them aren't, at least not that much of the time."

George looked at her, and she said, "It's not such a big deal, really. Read any good books lately?"

"No, and—ooh, I told Fr. Elijah I'd read C.S. Lewis, something or other about 'glory.' I need to get back to him."

"Maybe it's a box you're not meant to open, at least not yet... if I know Grandpa, he's probably forgotten about it completely."

"But I should—"

"You should leave it a closed box, if anything. How are

you?"

George looked at the forest—how like a garden it looked—and then Abigail. He was at something of a loss for words. He looked down at her alabaster feet, and then her face. "Having a good day."

She smiled, and a sparrow flew between them. "There's a hawk in here somewhere, only it's hard to find. You can spend a lot of time exploring this forest. I'm having a good day, too."

George sat for a while, trying to think of something to say, and Abigail said, "You're being pretty quiet now."

George said, "I've been looking at majoring in math."

Abigail said, "Um..."

"You know how to tell if a mathematician is an extravert?"

"Nope."

George looked down and said, "He looks at *your* feet when they're talking to you."

Abigail giggled. "Have you heard my Grandpappy's theory on how PMS got its name?"

George said, "Um..."

She giggled again. "Something about 'Mad Cow Disease' being taken."

George stiffened, and looked for something to say.

Abigail said, "Stop it, George. Just stop it. Don't you get it? Don't you stand and listen or sing the hymn where the the Mother of God is honored as the Ewe that bore the Lamb of God and the Heifer that bore the Unblemished Calf?"

George's mind raced. "I suppose that if, in the same breath, Christ is called—"

Abigail interrupted. "Next time you're in Church, listen, really listen, as the Mother of God is honored, then listen as Christ our God is worshiped. There's a difference. Don't try to analyze it or even put your finger on it. Just listen, and... George, do you understand women? At all?"

George looked for something to say, but found

nothing.

A dark cloud blew across the sky, and cold rain began to fall more heavily until it poured.

George said, "May I lend you my jacket?"

Abigail said, "I'm fine."

The rain grew colder, and began to pelt. George and Abigail both rose and began scurrying towards campus. George took off his jacket and started to place it around Abigail's shoulders.

Abigail said, "I don't—"

George looked down and said, "I'm wearing boots and you have bare feet," and wrapped his jacket around her shoulders. Then a gust of wind tore at Abigail's hat, but George caught it.

Then they ran back, with George shivering under his threadbare T-shirt. When they got back, he went to his dorm and she to hers. George called Abigail and confirmed she was OK, took three long, hot showers, and spent the rest of the evening sinking into a lounge chair in his bathrobe, sipping cocoa, and thinking.

Tuesday evening, George found time to visit Fr. Elijah. He wanted to talk about another subject. Definitely another subject.

"Fr. Elijah, are you busy?"

"I hope not... come in."

"After all this, I still want the Holy Grail."

"Excellent thing, my son... the chief point of life is to search for the Holy Grail."

"But will I find it? I mean... I'm not sure what I mean."

"May I show you something old?"

"As far as material age goes, it is much older than the Holy Grail."

The old man opened a desk drawer, and fished out a small box.

"I thought this might interest you," he said, and took something out of the box, and placed it in George's hand.

George looked the item over. It looked like a piece of

bark, not much larger than a pebble, and yet it seemed heavy for a piece of bark. "Is this stone or wood? I can't tell which it is."

"Is it stone or wood? In fact, it is petrified wood... from the Oak of Mambre."

"Oak of Mambre? Should I have heard of it before?"

"You probably have, and if you can't remember it, there is something you're missing."

"What is the Oak of Mambre?"

"I'll tell you in a bit. When you grasp the Oak of Mambre, you hold the Holy Grail."

"How?"

"The Oak of Mambre is older than any of the civilizations you know; for that matter, it might be older than the practice of writing. Do you know about Abraham?"

"The one Paul calls the father of all who believe?"

"Yes, that Abraham. The Bible tells how Abraham met three men who came to him, and showed the most lavish hospitality, giving them the costliest meal he could have given. And it was then that the men promised the impossible. It is clear enough later that these men were in fact angels, were in fact God.

"From the West, you may not know that even if we Orthodox are big on icons, it's fingernails to a chalkboard when Orthodox see the Father portrayed as the proverbial old man with a beard. Christ may be portrayed because of his incarnation; the same is not true of the invisible Father, who is not and never will be incarnate. Icons of the Father have been fundamentally rejected, but there was one exception. From ancient times there has been an icon of Abraham's hospitality to the three men, or three angels, and centuries ago one iconographer showed something deeper: it is the same three men or angels, but instead of a table with a lamb as in the old version of the icon, there is an icon with a chalice atop an altar. In both the old and the new form of the icon, the Oak of Mambre is in the back,

and it is this same oak for which I have shown you a fragment."

"Is it holy because it is old?"

"Being old does not make a thing holier. The pebbles in your yard are of stone ages older than the oldest relic. Though they are, admittedly, part of the earth which received Christ's blood on the cross, and which Bulgakov rightly calls the Holy Grail.

"A thing is kept and preserved because it is holy, and if people will try to keep a holy thing for a long time, it will probably be old to most of the people who see it. Same reason most of the people who have seen the Liberty Bell saw it when it was old because people have been keeping it for a long time, much longer than the time when it was new, so most of the people who have seen, or will see, the Liberty Bell, see it as an old treasure. But back to holy things: a holy thing is, if anything, timeless: when there arose a great evil in Russia and Marx's doctrine helped people try to make paradise and caused a deep, deep river of blood to flow, the communists in the Orthodox heartland of Russia made martyrs, and in that torrential river of blood made more Orthodox martyrs than the rest of history put together. God will preserve saints' relics from that, and it may be that there are more relics from the past century than all centuries before. And they are not the less holy because they are new. But let us return to the Oak of Mambre and why, if you grasp it, you hold the Holy Grail."

"Ok. Why is that?"

"The Church has decided that the only legitimate way to portray an icon of the Trinity is in the hospitality of Abraham. And the Icon of the Holy Trinity is the deepest icon of the Holy Grail—deeper even than an icon that I can show you that shows the Mother of God as a chalice holding her Son. Where is the Holy Grail in this icon?"

"Is it that little thing in the center?"

"In part. Where else is it?"

George looked long and hard, seemed to almost catch something, before it vanished from his face.

"There are different interpretations," Fr. Elijah said, "and the icon conceals things; even the angel is a protecting veil to a reality that cannot be seen. But in the layers of this icon, the deepest glimpse sees the Father on the left, the Spirit on the right, and the Son in blood red clothes in the center, encased as in a chalice, showing the reality in Heaven for which even the Holy Grail is merely a shadow."

George turned the stone over in his hand with awe, closed his eyes, and then looked at the relic he held in his hand. "So I am holding the Holy Grail."

Fr. Elijah said, "Yes, if you look on it with enlightened eyes. Where else do you meet the Holy Grail?"

"In every person I meet?"

"'Tis hard to answer better than that. When you become Orthodox, you will receive the Eucharist and kiss the chalice, and, perhaps, find that the Holy Grail is achieved not by an unearthly isolated hero, but by a community in common things."

"But why do people kiss the Holy Grail? I mean the chalice?"

"If you call it the Holy Grail, even if your tongue slips, you may be understanding it. The Western view is that there is one original chalice and the others are separate sorts of things; in Orthodoxy, what is the same between the Holy Grail and 'another' chalice runs infinitely deeper than what separates them; the 'real' thing is that they are the same."

"But why the kiss?"

"Let me ask you a question. Do you think a kiss has more to do with worship, or with mental calculations?"

"Does it have to do with either?"

"You haven't read the Bible in Greek."

"What does the Greek Bible have to do with it?"

"Quite a lot, but it will take me a bit to explain why."

But there is a deep tie.

"The main word for reverence or worship, in the Greek Bible, literally means to kiss. Part of what you'll keep coming to again and again is that the West understands the mind as the thing that calculates, and the East understands the mind as what knows, and is enlightened, because it tastes and even more deeply because it worships. I don't know how to put this clearly, in terms that will make sense to someone who does not know the spiritual realities involved. There is a false kiss—I dare say, the kiss of Judas or a kiss that is hollow like the kiss of Judas—that is nothing more than a calculated act. But there is also a kiss that has something to do with worship, and it is no error that Orthodoxy has things 'with love and kisses.' We embrace icons, crosses, holy books, each other with reverence that includes a kiss. And rightly done, such kisses are connected to worship."

"I still don't understand why."

"Let me make a momentary detour; I'll get back in a moment. Old texts can be at once something we genuinely experience a deep connection to, and something treacherously unfaithful to our assumptions. What would you say, for instance, that the medieval Scholastics are talking about when they use the word that is usually translated, 'intellect'?"

"I try to keep my mind free of preconceptions, especially when dealing with something unfamiliar."

"So you'd be open to anything they'd say about the intellect's ability to draw logical conclusions from one thing to another?"

"They can let the intellect draw conclusions however they want to."

"But here's the thing. They *don't*. It is a fundamental error to read 'intellect' as 'the thing that reasons by logical deduction. Saying that the 'intellect' is what makes deductions by reasoning from one thing by another is like saying that an object's height is what you measure with a

bathroom scale, or that its weight is measurable with a ruler. It's a fundamental error; the intellect is precisely what does not reason from premises to conclusions."

"Then what is the intellect?"

"I usually don't use the term 'intellect' for it; the closest English equivalent I can think of is 'spiritual eye'. But even that misses what exactly this spiritual eye connects with. And this spiritual eye was known to the Greek Fathers no less than the Latin scholastics; if anything, the Greek Fathers were more attuned to it. Scholastic theology is an exercise, to a large degree, of that which reasons; the theology of the Fathers comes from another place. The spiritual eye is that which connects with spiritual realities, that which worships above all—and if you want a good, short definition for what 'intellect' means besides 'what IQ is supposed to measure,' use the definition 'where one meets God.' If reasoning deduces what you may not see yet, the spiritual eye *sees*, and knows by what it can see, not by what it can pull from other things it already has. This reasoning from one thing shines like the sun in Western Scholasticism."

"And that's something you don't have in Orthodoxy?"

"We do have it. But reasoning shines like the *moon*: it reflects the light of the sun in each of us, the sun of our mind's spiritual eye. It plays more of a supporting role."

"And what does all of this have to do with your ritual kiss?"

"There was an awful video I heard was shown in one of your college's psychology classes; I don't know if you've seen it. It was talking about one psychological theory, and discussed how reward and such could be used to reduce autistic behaviors. And it showed a scientist, or psychologist, or something, who was patiently training a little girl to not do whatever he was trying to stop her from doing, and the girl lit up when he gave her a kiss. And then, along with a fake-sounding Mommy-ese talking in a high-pitched voice which I *assure* you was not

spontaneous, he started to use almost forced kisses to, well..."

George cut in. "Manipulate her?"

"Yes, you found the word I was looking for. The one time I heard Abigail talking about that video, she said there was a bit of bristling going through the class; the students were uncomfortable with something about that video and its one more mere technique, a mere *tool*, for changing a little girl's behavior."

"Is the spiritual eye, or whatever, spontaneous? Is it about spontaneity?"

"I'll have to think about that... I'm not sure I've seriously thought about whether the spiritual eye is spontaneous. But spontaneity is not the issue here. The point has to do with what place a kiss should come from if it is not to be hollow. Have you noticed that none of the icons I've showed you have a signature?"

"Because the iconographers are not supposed to be what we think of in the West as artists, with their own signature style and their big egos?"

"A little bit. Iconography is art, and artistry and talent do mean anything: the iconographer is not a cog in a machine—and may be doing something much bigger than trying to use art supplies for self-expression. There is something self-effacing about iconography—something very self-effacing—but you find that when you bow down and efface yourself, it is you doing something much bigger than otherwise. Writing icons is a form of prayer, a spiritual exercise, and it is said—just like we speak of 'writing' icons rather than 'painting' them—that it is inadequate for an iconographer to sign the icon, because the icon is written, not merely by the iconographer's hand, but by his his spiritual eye. It is ever much more than a merely material process, and when you become Orthodox you may sense icons that have spiritual depth and icons that let you see no further than the wood, and if you receive this gift, you will be responding to the spiritual

process out of which the icon arose."

"I have sensed something... the icons still look like awkward pictures to me, but I'm starting to find something more."

"That is good. And your mouth—with which you breathe in your spirit, and show the reason of speech, and will receive the Eucharist—is not that *by* which you may give a kiss; it is that *through* which you may give the kiss that comes from and to some extent is the embrace of your spiritual eye. That's when a kiss is furthest from the hollow kiss that Judas gave. The knowledge of the spiritual eye is something I have discussed as sight, but in the ancient world all people recognized something touch-y about all the five senses, not just one. And this knowledge and drinking are exemplars of each other, draughts from the same fountain, and it is not an accident that 'know' has a certain sense in the Bible between, for instance, Adam and Eve: the spiritual eye knows by drinking in, and it is a fundamental error to think that the holy kiss has nothing to do with knowledge."

"This sounds like a fairy tale."

"Maybe you know your fairy tales, and know that there is something magic about a kiss. As one scholar put it, examples of the kiss as a means of making and breaking enchantments have been found in the folklore of almost every culture in the Western world. Orthodoxy has something more than this enchantment. There is a spiritual mingling, and even the Eucharist is understood as a kiss, and a kiss that embraces others: in the Eucharist, the body of Christ is offered up, including a token of bread for every parishioner—before being distributed. Have you not noticed that the best bishops and the most devout of the Orthodox, give the best kisses? But let me step back a bit.

"The difference in understanding symbol is one of the biggest differences between East and West. In the West, at least in its modern forms, a symbol is a detached and

somewhat arbitrary representation. In the East a symbol is connected, cut from the same cloth as it were. The difference between Orthodoxy and various Protestant schools is not whether the Eucharist is a symbol, but what that means—that the Eucharist is an arbitrarily detached token, connected only in the viewer's mind, or whether it is connected and in fact the same on a real level.

"We are made in the image of God, which means that how you treat others is inseparable from how you treat God: you treat God with respect, love, or contempt as you meet him in the person of others. And the things that we reverently kiss in Orthodoxy are all connected with God. We show our reverence to God in how we treat them. And if a person is being transformed according to the likeness of Christ, then it is fitting to reverently kiss that person and show respect for the Lord.

"To give the holy kiss rightly is a microcosm of faith and community. You cannot do it alone, nor can you do it apart from worship. If you look at the things that fit together in a fitting kiss, you have love, God, your neighbor... there are a great many actions that are listed in the Bible, and many of them are holy actions, but only one is called holy: the holy kiss. If you grasp the Holy Grail in your heart, and you grasp this kiss in its full sense, you will know that the sacred kiss in which our souls are mingled is the Sign of the Grail. It is the eighth sacrament."

George was silent for a long time. "I don't think I know enough to be Orthodox."

Fr. Elijah said, "Join the club! I know *I* don't know enough."

"But you're a priest!"

"And you cannot become Orthodox without entering the royal priesthood. You aren't ready to be Orthodox just because you know a certain amount; you're ready when you're ready for the responsibility, like getting married, or getting a job, or any other of a number of things. You are ready when you are ready to take the responsibility to

return the Creation as an offering to God and shoulder a priestly office. And, in your case, I might add, when you enter the great City and Castle called the Church, and are ready for the Sign of the Grail."

"All I know now is my own unworthiness."

"Good. You're growing! Ponder your unworthiness and give it to God. Do you want to take *Brocéliande* back now?"

George gladly took the book back. He returned to his room, and some time later, George began reading:

The hermit spoke. "Listen as I tell the history of Saint George.

"The King wept sore. 'The land is weeping, the land itself weeps. The dragon hath devoured every damsel of the land, every last one, and now it seeketh mine own. I bewail the death of my joy and my daughter.'

"Then Saint George said, 'By my faith I will protect her and destroy this fiend,' and Saint George prayed and gat him his destrier and armed him and fewtered his spear and rode out and faced the sea.

"And the dragon arose from the sea and his deeps. And venom were in the wyrm his heart, and the grievous stench of death stank all round.

"Then the serpent charged upon Saint George the ever victorious knight, and the dragon breathed fire which brake and were quenched upon Saint George his shield, a grand cross gules upon a field or.

"Then Saint George made him the Sign of the Cross.

"Then Saint George smote the dragon, the great paladin his great spear dove into the dragon his mouth and dolve far beyond that insatiate devouring maw, until the dragon his head were riven asunder from the dragon his body trampled by Saint George his horse. And Saint George hurled the wyrm his

head into the dark thrice cursed valley far outside of the castle.

"That day the King and the whole castle made such merriment as had never been since, for we do not know merriment today. There were jugglers and jesters and a table full filled, and before evensong the King gave George the hand of the King his daughter. That were the gayest of all."

The knight asked the hermit, "Why speakest thou me of this history?"

The hermit spake unto him and answered, "Sir knight, thou hast given me not thine name. What be it?"

"Thou entrest of me my name? Thou askest what none hath asked of me aforetimes. My name is called Sir Perceval. And now I ask of thee of what I have asked not aforetimes. Had Saint George heard tell of whom doth the Grail serve?"

George slowly closed the book, and put it on a shelf. He momentarily wondered why he treated *Brocéliande* as something to read alone. There was something that seemed just out of his reach.

And then George realized something deep, deep inside himself.

Then it was Holy Week.

Or at least George wanted it to be holy week for him, too.

George found himself standing in Church, in the holiest of surroundings, and struggling to pray. Memories arose; painful memories of stinging things done by those he loved. Voluptuous images sometimes followed. He struggled to pray, but his mind remained locked in earthly struggles. His body ached in the long services: there were icons, chanting, and incense without, and struggles within. He wanted to rest in worship, and he couldn't.

In his mind, he remembered a moment when a beggar

had come to him, and wouldn't stop pleading no matter how much he annoyed George. The image filled his mind, and George was startled when he turned and saw the beggar's face on the wall. Why was that?

George was looking at an icon of Christ.

He had fallen short, and not only in seeing that beggar as nothing but an annoyance. Did George really have no common bond with that beggar?

For that matter, did George have no common bond with the civilization that he disdained, the civilization that included everybody he knew from the beggar to his parents, the civilization that gave him everything from his clothing to his language? Was it there for no other purpose than for him to criticize and feel superior to?

Fr. Elijah, moving amongst the congregation, swung the censer before George in veneration.

George barely noticed that some of these thoughts were giving way, and he was aware, with almost a painful sharpness, of something else.

George mulled over Fr. Elijah's words about hollow kisses, and then started to see how hollow *George* was.

Unworthy thought he felt, George stood with growing awe and wonder, waiting until Great and Holy Thursday, the one day in holy week where wine was allowed. "Ordinary" wine was allowed, held in honor and in remembrance of the Last Supper, when wine became the blood of Christ and the eucharistic chalice was forever given to men. This day, if anything, was to George the feast of the Holy Grail.

And so he stood entranced, as if he were entering from afar. He watched the Last Supper as here and now, as Fr. Elijah stood "in the flame" before the altar, and then listened as he read the Gospel according to St. John the Evangelist, of the night when Christ loved his disciples to the last, and prayed out from the glory he shared with the Father before the worlds had begun.

And Fr. Elijah read and read, reading until George's

body ached from standing.

Then someone walked over to twelve unlit candles, and lit one. The first.

George's heart sank. There were eleven candles still to go.

The readings continued, and became shorter, until the twelve candles were lit. George began to feel anger at the unending readings—until he heard Christ's words from the garden of Gethsemane: "What, could you not watch with me one hour?" Who were those words spoken to?

And then, when the readings had run their course, the liturgy followed—at once unlike an intimate gathering in an upper room in external appearance, but yet like the place that feels like home though nothing on the outside resembles the home. George thought for a moment about a historical reconstruction of the Last Supper pursued through academic rigor in archaeology... and then realized he needed no such thing. He was watching the Last Supper all around him, and in the words of Fr. Elijah's remark, "You didn't even need a time machine."

Or was this liturgy a spiritual time machine? Certainly time flowed in the most interesting ways, now quickly, now slowly, swirling about in eddies... there was something George could not put his finger on, but he understood for a moment what could make a person imagine a way to turn back time.

And so George found himself almost surprised when Fr. Elijah said, "He gave it to his holy disciples and apostles, saying, 'Take, eat; this is my body which is broken for you, for the forgiveness of sins.'"

Then the faithful sealed this with their, "Amen."

Then Fr. Elijah said, "Likewise, he took the cup of the fruit of the vine, and having mingled it, offering thanks, blessing, and sanctifying it, he gave it to his holy disciples and apostles, saying, 'Drink of this, all of you. This is my blood of the new covenant, shed for you and for many, for the forgiveness of sins.'"

The disciples around him sealed this, with their, "Amen."

George looked in wonder at the chalice that was raised. He thought, "This is it. This is the Holy Grail, forever given, that belongs to Christ's disciples."

As the liturgy continued, and Fr. Elijah proclaimed the Holy Gifts, the people continued to seal the Gifts with their "Amen," and George watched as they received from the chalice, and kissed the chalice in reverence, and (though George paid this little attention) Fr. Elijah's hand.

George found himself basking in the glow of that long moment for as the liturgy continued and Fr. Elijah anointed those around him that they may be healed in soul and body.

As he walked home, he thought, "I have seen the Holy Grail. It has been under my nose. Very soon I will be one of those who share it, one of those the Holy Grail belongs to."

When George got home, he slept as peacefully as he slept in ages.

Then George entered the Church on Great and Holy Friday.

The whole service moved slowly, felt like something great but alien that slipped through George's fingers no matter what he did to grasp it. Around him were some who were silent, some who were singing, and some who were weeping. A great cross was brought out, and a great icon of Christ hung on it with nails.

And then something clicked in George's heart.

Some years before, he had been at a martial arts demonstration and saw a fifth degree black belt standing like a picturesque statue, looking quaint and exotic, holding a beautiful pair of fans. And then, for an instant, there was a flurry of motion as he was attacked by six other black belts with swords. And then, an instant later, George saw a fifth degree black belt standing like a picturesque statue, looking quaint and exotic, holding a

beautiful pair of fans, and all around him were six other black belts with swords, on the ground, crying.

That had for long been the greatest display of power George had seen.

Now something was at the back of his mind.

Here was a new image of strength.

Were they the same?

Were they different?

Was the true nature of strength, strength in weakness?

The fifth degree black belt showed strength behind apparent weakness—or at least what looked like weakness to an outsider like George; he had no idea what it would look like to someone who was not a barbarian like him. To him, the martial arts demonstration seemed to show strength, if a show was needed, and a strength great and powerful enough to vastly understate itself. And the One before him on the cross showed more of the same... or was that really true?

Was it?

Something about that did not sit well.

Inside George's heart flashed an icon that had been on his mind—of a Man, his head bent, a purple robe about his wounded body. The robe was royal purple to mock the "pretender," his hands were bound, and a crown of thorns rested atop his bent head.

Atop the icon was an inscription in Greek and in English:

Ο ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ ΤΗΣ ΔΟΞΗΣ

THE KING OF GLORY

George raised his eyes to the crucified God.

This was another kind of strength.

George began to weep.

This was the strength that prayed, if there was any way, that the cup might pass from him.

This was the strength that prayed, "Thy will be done."
 This was the strength that drank the cup to the dregs,
 and shattered it forever.

This was

THE KING OF GLORY
 THE KING OF KINGS
 THE LORD OF LORDS
 THE GOD OF GODS
 THE LION OF JUDAH
 THE FIRSTBORN OF THE DEAD
 THE RESURRECTION AND ETERNAL LIFE
 THE NEW MAN AND THE LAST ADAM
 THE UNCREATED GOD
 THE DIVINE, ORDERING WISDOM
 THROUGH WHOM ALL THINGS WERE
 MADE
 BY WHOM ALL THINGS WERE MADE
 IN WHOM ALL THINGS CONSIST
 THE LORD OF THE CHURCH AND ALL
 CREATION
 THE BRIDEGROOM OF THE CHURCH AND
 ALL CREATION

Had George ever known what it was to worship?
 George stood in awe of the one who was, in truth, the
 Holy Grail...

or rather, the one for whom the Holy Grail was but a
 shadow.

And who was George next to such holiness and power?
 Unclean and defiled.

When George had thought about going to his first
 confession, it had looked to him like the least attractive
 part of the picture of becoming Orthodox. But now, even if
 he knew even more dread, he wanted, not so much to be
 unburdened for himself, but to turn himself in and render
 what was due.

He didn't just think he needed to. He simply knew that it was something that he owed with from the core of his being.

What evil had he not practiced?

He prayed aloud, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner," and then in spirit and body fell prostrate before his God and Lord.

George returned home, mindful of his sin, but ever so much more mindful of the greatness of the Lord and Savior.

He spent Saturday in the terrifying struggle to repent of his sin, to face his sin and write the spiritual blank check that he feared in the unconditional surrender of rejecting sin.

When he confessed his sin, Fr. Elijah blessed him, said, "I'm sorry I can't give you the sacramental absolution yet—that will follow your chrismation," and then said, "Welcome home, son. Keep repenting."

And then the vigil was upon them.

It began with George standing in the center of the action as he stood before the congregation and, answering Fr. Elijah, renounced the Devil and all his works, rejecting sin, schism, and heresy, and vowed himself to Christ as a member of the Orthodox Church.

Then Fr. Elijah anointed George with sacred chrism, chrismating him with the fragrant oil of anointing that sealed George as a little Christ, as spiritual prophet, priest, and king, as one of the faithful in the Orthodox Church. This oil of spiritual blessing that worked in him more deeply even as it was wiped away from his skin—the emblem of the Spirit that penetrated like a sword. Fr. Elijah absolved George of his sins, and then the newly illumined servant of God George, stood before the congregation.

Then George faded into the background while the vigil unfolded, and he could never remember all of it—only that it seemed like a treasurehouse from which more and more

wondrous treasure was brought forth. George remembered later the incense, the chant of "Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death," the call of "Christ is risen!" and its answer, "He is risen indeed!", repeated triumphantly, in English, in Slavonic, in Arabic, in Spanish... and most of all George remembered the faces around them. There was something more deeply radiant and beautiful than that of someone who had won millions of dollars. The vigil lasted for hours, but though George ached, he barely minded—he almost wished it would last for hours more.

When it was time for the homily, Fr. Elijah stood up, his face radiant, and read the age-old homily of St. John Chrysostom, read at all kinds of Orthodox parishes on Pascha for ages:

If any man be devout and loveth God,
 Let him enjoy this fair and radiant triumphal feast!
 If any man be a wise servant,
 Let him rejoicing enter into the joy of his Lord.

If any have labored long in fasting,
 Let him now receive his recompense.
 If any have wrought from the first hour,
 Let him today receive his just reward.
 If any have come at the third hour,
 Let him with thankfulness keep the feast.
 If any have arrived at the sixth hour,
 Let him have no misgivings;
 Because he shall in nowise be deprived therefore.
 If any have delayed until the ninth hour,
 Let him draw near, fearing nothing.
 And if any have tarried even until the eleventh hour,
 Let him, also, be not alarmed at his tardiness.

For the Lord, who is jealous of his honor,
 Will accept the last even as the first.

He giveth rest unto him who cometh at the eleventh
hour,
Even as unto him who hath wrought from the first
hour.
And He showeth mercy upon the last,
And careth for the first;
And to the one He giveth,
And upon the other He bestoweth gifts.
And He both accepteth the deeds,
And welcometh the intention,
And honoureth the acts and praises the offering.

Wherefore, enter ye all into the joy of your Lord;
Receive your reward,
Both the first, and likewise the second.
You rich and poor together, hold high festival!
You sober and you heedless, honor the day!
Rejoice today, both you who have fasted
And you who have disregarded the fast.
The table is full-laden; feast ye all sumptuously.
The calf is fatted; let no one go hungry away.
Enjoy ye all the feast of faith:
Receive ye all the riches of loving-kindness.

Let no one bewail his poverty,
For the universal Kingdom has been revealed.
Let no one weep for his iniquities,
For pardon has shown forth from the grave.
Let no one fear death,
For the Saviour's death has set us free.
He that was held prisoner of it has annihilated it.

By descending into Hell, He made Hell captive.
He embittered it when it tasted of His flesh.
And Isaiah, foretelling this, did cry:
Hell, said he, was embittered
When it encountered Thee in the lower regions.

It was embittered, for it was abolished.
 It was embittered, for it was mocked.
 It was embittered, for it was slain.
 It was embittered, for it was overthrown.
 It was embittered, for it was fettered in chains.
 It took a body, and met God face to face.
 It took earth, and encountered Heaven.
 It took that which was seen, and fell upon the
 unseen.

O Death, where is thy sting?
 O Hell, where is thy victory?

Christ is risen, and thou art overthrown!
 Christ is risen, and the demons are fallen!
 Christ is risen, and the angels rejoice!
 Christ is risen, and life reigns!
 Christ is risen, and not one dead remains in the
 grave.
 For Christ, being risen from the dead,
 Is become the first-fruits of those who have fallen
 asleep.

To Him be glory and dominion
 Unto ages of ages.

Amen.

And then the prayers moved very quickly—joyously—
 radiantly—and the Eucharist was served, George being
 called up first among the faithful to receive it.

Then the newly illumined servant George received
 Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior.

And George kissed Fr. Elijah's hand and the chalice,
 forgetting it was the Holy Grail.

And when the liturgy finished, Fr. Elijah announced to

the congregation, "You may kiss the convert."
Then the feast began,
a faint fragrance of frankincense flowed,
and a fragrant fragrance of flowers flowed.
Fr. Elijah spoke a blessing,
over a table piled high with finest meats
and puddings
and every good thing,
and the fruit of the vine poured out.
Every door and every window was opened,
and the wind blew where it willed,
and the wind blew where it pleased,
and George settled in to his home,
grateful to God.
Then someone told a Russian folktale,
and someone began singing,
and people began dancing,
and a little boy chased a little girl,
clutching a flower.
And men and women,
children,
young and old,
saluted George with a kiss,
every last one
of his brethren.
And the crystalline light
of a sapphire sky
blew through the window,
and angels danced,
and saints below cracked red Pascha eggs,
red in the footsteps of Mary Magdalene,
a holy grail,
and George laughed,
and wanted to weep,
for joy.
Then George and Abigail talked long.
George could never remember now long the

celebration seemed to last. It seemed that he had found a garden enclosed, a fountain sealed, filled with every kind of wonder, at once Heaven and home, at once chalice and vine, maiden and mother, ancient and alive. It was the family George had forever wanted to enter.

Then George kissed Abigail—a long, full kiss—and absolutely nothing about it was hollow.

When he stepped back, Fr. Elijah tapped him on the shoulder. "By the way, George... I know this is down the road, but let me know when you two get engaged. I'd be happy to do your wedding."

George looked at Abigail, paused, and said, "Abigail, do you see how the candlelight glistens off your Grandpappy's bald spot? Isn't it romantic?"

Fr. Elijah and Abigail turned to each other and said, "It's about time!"

Then Fr. Elijah said, "Welcome to the Castle of the Saints, George. Welcome home."

Espiritichthus: Cultures of a Fantasy World Not Touched By Evil

Nor'krin

The Nor'krin are tall and strong, with thick, sandy blonde hair, deep blue eyes, and white skin that turns reddish when they go south from their frost-kissed land; the Janra affectionately refer to them as the Northern giants. They love to run across the snowy plains and up to the peaks, to feel the crispness of the air, and to drink the cold and crystalline waters of the flowing streams.

There are not very many of them; they live nomadic lives, spread out across the snowy North, carrying with them only their clothing, their hunting weapons (a large bow and quiver of arrows, an axe, and a knife), a canteen, and a handful of tools and other miscellanea.

Theirs is a culture of oral tradition and folklore, filled with a richness of symbolic thought. Their thought is expressed by storytelling. Some tell of people and actions full of goodness, love, and wisdom; some are allegories packed with symbolic detail; some are both. The evenings

— from the meal onward — are times when the clans gather together, and the oldest member tells tales until long into the night, when the fire has died down to embers and the icy mountain peaks glisten in crystalline blue starlight.

(The language is one which revolves around the oral tradition; its grammar is fairly simple, sufficient for basic expression, but there is an extensive vocabulary fitted to epic poems, great tales, and the transmission of a symbol-filled body of lore)

Their experience of sense is primarily aural, centering around the communication and preservation of their tradition. The other senses all play a part in their knowing about the world around them and its enjoyment, of course, but the ears dominate.

Coming of age is very significant in Nor'krin culture. It is the event upon which a child becomes a full member of Nor'krin community, and appreciates it fully, for it is accomplished in solitude. It is the same for male and female, big and small.

Denuded of all possessions save a hunting knife and the clothing on his back, the child begins a solitary trek, south through the land of the Urvanovestilli and Yedidia, penetrating deep into the thick forests inhabited by the Tuz, until he enters a village, and, coming inside a shop, says, "Blacksmith, blacksmith, find me a task, give me a quest."

There are as many quests as there are questions. Some are easy, some are hard; some are simple, some are complex. Whatever the quest be — be it finding an amethyst in the caves, climbing an immense mountain, answering a riddle, memorizing a book — he leaves the blacksmith shop and does not return until the quest is completed. (It must be said that, though some quests have taken years to complete, recorded history has yet to see a Nor'krin fail. A child leaves the immediate presence of his family, but remains in their prayers; they have great faith,

and it is in this faith that they tread securely into the unknown.

Upon the return, the blacksmith begins to ask questions: "What is your name? What is your family? Who are you? What is your story?" — and begins to fashion an iron cross. This cross is at once a cross as any other, and a unique reflection of the person who wears it; no two are alike.

It is with this cross worn about the neck that he returns to his clan, come of age.

Nor'krin greet each other by standing opposite the other, placing the left hand on the other's right shoulder, and lowering the head slightly; the gesture is a sign of respect.

The emotional side of their culture is not as intense or spectacular as many others, but is present and offers an important reflection of what they value. They know a deep sense of respect and appreciation; when they think of others, the first thought is, "This person is an image of God," and there is a feeling of respect. The mountains, the trees, and the streams all bear a magnificence which they appreciate. Nor'krin worship services are filled with awe at the One whose glory is declared by tales, by lives, and by the created order. They are traditional liturgical services, where the place of the homily is taken by long tales and stories, conducted by the eldest members of the clan.

The Nor'krin homeland is named 'Cryona'.

Tuz

Many wayfarers go south, early in life, to buy equipment; they need only wait, and a blacksmith will forge a pair of iron boots which will last for life.

The people are dark and strong; their eyes shine with power and lightning. The average Tuz male is short, stout,

very broad-shouldered, and built like a brick wall; a thick, straight, jet black moustache and a thick, curly beard push out of leathery skin. Women are equally short and stout, but do not have such broad shoulders, being (relatively) more plump and less muscled, and do not have the moustache and beard (usually).

Their buildings are hewn of solid granite, with iron doors. The villages are small and scattered, joined by worn paths passing through the rich, deep green of the forest. It is this forest, fertile and full of beasts, from which the heart of their meal comes. They are more than fond of spicy meat stews and bear jerky. Their beer is dark, thick, and strong, and every house has at least a little bit of koor, a spiced rum which is occasionally used by the other peoples as a pepper sauce.

The Tuz work hard and play hard. They are often hired for heavy work in the construction of Urvanovestilli palaces, and their work rarely receives complaint. After work is over, they tend towards wrestling and general rowdiness; if they are present, Janra children (and occasionally adults) are tossed about.

For all of their rowdiness, the Tuz do possess a great deal of restraint; even after a couple of beers, they seldom give each other injuries beyond occasional bruises and abrasions, and Janra children do not receive even a scratch. (Most of them rather enjoy being tossed about).

The usual greeting is a crushing bear hug, often accompanied/ followed by a punch in the stomach, some wrestling or tossing around, etc; it is generally toned down a bit for children and visitors from afar, but there is always at least a spark of rowdy play.

As much as the Nor'krin are at home in the cold, loving everything that is crisp and chilly, the Tuz love heat. Their land is by far the hottest, but that doesn't stop them from munching on peppers and wrestling around. Blacksmiths' shops and fire and sun-hot iron — these are a few of their favorite things.

The Tuz also build obstacle courses of stone and iron and rope, which the Janra have no end of finding new and inventive ways to use; a slack rope which Tuz climb along the underside of will be walked — or occasionally run — atop by the Janra; jumping shortcuts, backwards or inverted travel, and acrobatic ways of avoiding raw strength moves are common. Tuz, by contrast, have very slow and methodical paths.

They are, indeed, probably the most constant and unchanging of peoples; the process of maturing is a process of becoming more who they are. Their sense of order is also great; they value greatly the gift of being well ruled.

A child, at the age of ten, is presented to the village elders and the various guildmasters. They spend a day talking with the child and his parents, in order to determine his talents, interests, and personality; then they spend another day talking and discussing amongst themselves; then, on the third day, his profession is announced, along with the master to whom he will be apprenticed. The results are sometimes surprising, but always embody a great deal of wisdom, and the selection of a vocation is a gift for which the child is grateful.

Children learn a way of life filled with discipline, tradition, and respect for elders. It is quite simple, not at all ornate when compared to some other philosophies, but it has a power, a solidity to it, and love, faith, honor, friendship, and hospitality are things that they truly live by. Their families and communities are very close, and their friendships are loyal until death. They do not pay as much emphasis on verbal articulation of teaching as a way of life. There is thought, but in its expression, words take a second place to actions. That a life of faith involves discipline is declared very loudly by Tuz hands.

The are very aware of the value of solitude and prayer; it is a common practice to simply leave, taking nothing save clothing and a hunting knife or axe, and go up into

the mountains for a few days of solitude, allowing time to pray and to be refocused.

Their language has, in speech, a very heavy, thick, consonantal feel, full of grated 'h's (which is often present in 'k's, 'r's, 'g's, and 'b's). The speech is terse and concrete.

Their experience of sense is also very concrete, centered somewhere between visual and aural. Sight tells what is around and where, and what is happening and where. Hearing tells what is happening, and where, and what is being said.

The emotional side of their culture knows such things as accomplishment, tradition, exertion, and discipline. There is an emotion that comes from a job well done and a challenge mastered; they value it. To have a heritage and respect elders as well as enjoy children brings a feeling of right order. To wrestle around, run, or laugh heartily has a pleasure. To control oneself has a joy. Things such as these are what they feel.

Tuz worship services are be short and sweet, with worship embodying a great deal of fervor.

The Tuz homeland is named 'Rhog'.

Urvanovestilli

The first thing to strike a visitor is the devices. In every house and many shops there is a tinkering room; a large workbench is covered with every imaginable sort of gear, spring, hinge, lever, chain, and shaft; the clock is only the beginning of clockwork. Two nearby cabinets — one filled with tools, one filled with parts and working materials — stand neatly closed; at the touch of a button, a drawer springs out, and shelves slowly slide up.

The craftsmanship of clockwork devices is, along with the study of diverse subjects — theology and philosophy, history and literature, science and mathematics — a hobby

that symbolizes the culture. Each piece is created not only for utility, but also for artistic effect. Cuckoo clocks and spring loaded umbrellas, Swiss Army Knives and mechanical pencils, player pianos and collapsible telescopes: mechanical objects such as these fill the land.

The ornate complexity of the devices reflects the ornate complexity of thought. The language, quite possibly the most difficult to learn, allows a speaker to express detailed and nuanced thought in exacting specificity. There are twenty four verb tenses, so that there is (for example) a different past tense for a brief, well demarcated action, and one which occurred over a period of time; there are twenty four other verb forms, which are like verb tenses as to conjugation and construction, but express the verb in an atemporal manner. Their language has much room built in for conjunction and logical connectives, nesting and predicates, as well as subtlety, implication, and allusion.

They have a complex and formal system of etiquette, although it must be said to their credit that they take no offense at a wayfarer who is warm and friendly but does not know their rules; they understand how simple the heart of politeness is.

Their speech is clever and witty, and they are fond of abstract strategy games. They enjoy ornate and complex polyphony, and will spend hours exploring theology and philosophy (two disciplines which they have the wisdom not to separate).

Urvanovestilli culture places a very heavy emphasis on a facet of virtue which they call *contrainte*. *Contrainte* is a kind of inner constraint, where order is approached by adjusting conditions inside before conditions outside, and not letting oneself be wrongly controlled by external circumstance. A similar concept is embodied in the words 'moderation' and 'self-control.'

Contrainte enables a man to be free and use that freedom responsibly; it enables a man to have access to

drink without getting drunk; it enables him to think constantly without becoming rationalistic. The Urvanovestilli homeland has the richest natural resources in the world, and (with centuries of first rate craftsmanship and efficient work) they are by a wide margin the richest nation in the world. Despite this, they keep a very cautious eye on wealth, so as not to be enslaved by it. Theirs is not a culture of consumption; though some of their interests — art, sculpture, board oriented strategy games, tinkering — generally are pursued in a manner that involves wealth, the bulk — discussions, prayer, dance, imagination, thought — do not. Consumption as a status symbol and waste are both seen as vulgar.

In *contrainte* is also balance and complement. There is time in solitude and time in community, freedom and responsibility, private and public property, work and rest.

It is in *contrainte* that an ornate system of etiquette does not obscure love, and elaborate ceremonies do not obscure worship. Just as they do not have their sights set on wealth — they do not look to it for happiness, security, and other things that it can not provide — and are therefore able to enjoy it (among other and greater blessings) without being harmed, so also they set their sights on love and worship, and therefore do not permit rules of etiquette or liturgical forms to make themselves the focus and cause hearts to become cold and dusty.

Contrainte likewise allows them to act efficiently without becoming efficient. Off of work, life takes a calm and leisurely pace; nobody fidgets. It allows them to be very judicious in their use of money, and at the same time very generous; their hospitality is lavish, and it is unheard of for anyone — friend or stranger, native or foreigner — to go hungry in their land.

The single greatest mark of *contrainte* lies in that, with all of their achievements, they remain open to the gifts of God. *Contrainte* itself — though they work very hard to

cultivate it — is not something that they try to achieve on their own power, but ask for in prayer, expecting to receive as a gift from God. Nor is it set up as the supreme context, the Supra-God to which God must bow down; they know nothing of religion within the bounds of *contrainte*. *Contrainte* does not "point to" itself as an object of worship, but rather God; it brings, in worship of God, a desire to grow in faith, hope, and love. It is like being reasonable enough not to be rationalistic.

On the surface, the *Urvanovestilli* culture appears to be the antithesis of that of the *Shal*. One is complex, and the other simple; one is rich, and the other poor; in one, people sit and talk for hours; in the other, people sit in silence for hours.

At the very heard, though, they are very much the same; *Urvanovestilli*, when traveling and visiting the *Shal*, feel that they are at home; the *Shal* find the *Urvanovestilli* to be brothers. They see beyond, rest in God's love, and love their neighbors.

The *Urvanovestilli* are quiet, patient, temperate, and refined. They are classically educated and cultured; their country is a federation of republics, each one ruled by a senate in a tradition that has remained unchanged for centuries. Tradition is strong, and families remain together; come evening, three or four, sometimes even five generations sit down at one table, eating and drinking, talking and listening, long into the night. There is a great respect for age, but a respect that in no way despises youth; the oldest spend a great deal of time caring for the youngest. Indeed, one of the first sights to greet a visitor who steps inside an *Urvanovestilli* mansion is often a grandfather or great-grandfather, with a long, flowing white beard, sitting with a child on his knee.

Urvanovestilli names are long and ornate. The full name is rarely spoken outside of formal ceremonies; even Urvanovestilli do not often pronounce thirty syllables to refer to one entity; all the same, each one is considered important. The names are:

Family name: This is the first and foremost of names, and the most cherished; it is the most commonly used.

Maiden name: Among married women, this follows.

Birth name: This is the name given at birth, and is often used within families and when there are several people of the same family present.

Reserve name: This is a very intimate name, which is not always known outside of family and close friends; it is spoken with a great deal of affection and familiarity.

Baptismal name: This name is chosen at baptism by people who know the person well, and given a great deal of prayer; it is used especially in religious contexts.

Regional name: This tells of the city or village a person comes from, carrying with it connotations of regional flavor and culture. It is used primarily in reference to travelers or (occasionally) people far away.

Friend names: These names (some do not have any; a few have ten or eleven; the average is two or three) come according to friends; a friend can bestow a name, and it becomes thereafter formally a part of an Urvanovestilli full name. When such a name is bestowed, it will become the name used primarily by the person who chose it.

The phrases of politeness — those which would correspond to hello, goodbye, please, thank you, you're welcome — are all benedictions; they take innumerable forms and beauties according to the people and situation. Blessing is something which they value; they often speak of good things — friends, virtue, art and music, food and drink — as so many blessings from the heart of the Father.

The traditional greeting is a hand raised, open save that the ring finger bends down to meet the thumb, or (when greeting a child) placed atop the head; the gesture

is a symbol of benediction. It is followed by three kisses on alternate cheeks.

In youth, Urvanovestilli are filled with a wanderlust. They voyage to many different places, seeing different nations and lands — as well as the variety of their own cities — and enjoy experiences which provide a lifetime's worth of memories. The wayfaring is never really complete, though, until it becomes the voyage home: the Time sometimes comes after two years of travel and sometimes after ten, but the Spirit always makes it clear. When that Time comes, each Urvanovestilli spends a little longer — perhaps a month — with the people he is visiting, and then leaves, with a very passionate and tearful goodbye.

It is Time to return home, to put down roots, to deepen, to mature; Time to wholly enter into the homeland. From this point on, the Urvanovestilli is no longer a wayfarer. The memories of his travels are cherished and very dear, a set of riches that he will always carry with him, and he will still send blessings, gifts, letters, and occasionally visits to friends in far away lands, but it is no longer time to go here and there; it is Time to grow into family, friends, and city.

Urvanovestilli writings and teaching, the means by which theology and philosophy are transmitted, take many forms — poems, riddles, parables and allegories, personal conversations, to name a few — but the predominant form is a systematic and structured logical argument: point one, point two, point three, subpoint three b, conclusion one... The structure carries allusion, nuance, and beauty; it leaves room for the speaker to make a very beautiful craft of words.

They enjoy being absorbed in thought; it is how they spend a good time of each day. They do not look down on sensation — indeed, they have a great appreciation for what is a very highly developed art, music, and cuisine — but it does not fill their world as it does that of many

others. Abstraction and complexities of thought are fundamental to their experience of the world: sensation leads into perception, perception leads into concrete thought, and concrete thought leads into abstract thought. Moments of immersion in the senses are rare, Sensation, being the outermost layer, is governed and enjoyed from within. Its form is generally of aural and visual character; the aural side is shaped by words, and then accommodates the other plethora of sounds, and the visual side is shaped by the forms, the spaces, and the interactions of their devices, and sees something of springs and gears in the world around.

Their faces appear at first glance to be almost expressionless — a faint hint of a smile, perhaps — until you look at their eyes, the first window to the fire and intensity within. Urvanovestilli eyes — whether brown, amber, hazel, grey, or blue — bear an intense, probing gaze; in Urvanovestilli culture, eye contact is almost continual, and reflects a fire, an intensity, a passion, that fills their way of life. It does not take long to be reminded that eye contact is a form of touch; their eyes seem to be looking into your spirit. The gaze, in its intensity, is never cold and calculating, never the chilling, devouring stare of a steel face beyond which lies a heart of ice; at its most intense and most probing, it is the most filled with love, and most easily shows the intense fire within. They can rest — and they know calm and tranquility — but there is a great energy within, an energy that shows itself in their artwork and writings. Those who read their theologians certainly do not fail to notice the depths of wisdom and insight, but what is most striking is their love for God. The passion — of their love for God, for spouse, for family, for their neighbor; of desire to grow in virtue and knowledge, for their work — burns, and their experience of emotion — of discovery, of awe, of appreciation of beauty — is long and intense, complex and multifaceted. This emotion is the other side of *conainte*; it is the same virtue that

enables them to enjoy wine in temperance, and to be moved to tears by music and theater. It is not a "virtue" of stifling — that would be far too easy, but of control and proper enjoyment. Just as they find abstinence from drink to be too easy, a way of dodging the lesson of moderation, stifling emotion and crushing it would be, to them, a way of dodging the lesson of passions rightly oriented in accordance with holiness and love — not to mention an unconscionable destruction of an integral facet of being human.

Those Urvanovestilli who are the most virtuous, the most filled with contrainte, are nearly always the most passionate.

Urvanovestilli are usually short, but look like very tall in miniature, with clear white skin and jet black hair. The men have a thin and wiry frame, with sharp and angular features. They have flaring eyebrows coming out of a prominent brow, a thin, hooked nose, and tufts of fine hair flaring away from their ears. Skin holds tightly to bones, muscles, and veins, and arms end in long, thin hands with nimble fingers. Their voices are a very soft, almost silent tenor.

The women are somewhat slender, but a slenderness which is graceful and rounded. Their features, as well as their build, bear this slender, graceful, rounded character, and their movements are light and flowing. (If the men know more of passion, the women know more of calm). Their voices are high and clear, with a sound that is like silver, like cold and crystalline water, like clear, light, dry Alsace blanc.

Urvanovestilli worship services are long and complex, with ornate liturgy and ritual. The language is florid and ornate (like that of the liturgy stemming from St. John Chrysostom) and every sentence of the liturgy would embody theological truth. The homilies (although not the

only part of the service which varies (much of the liturgy itself changing according to a traditional pattern dictated by a complex algorithm) from week to week) are themselves not that long. They are of moderate length, and differ from the liturgy — which presented different doctrines sentence by sentence — in being a full and well-developed presentation of one single idea, expressed in unequaled detail and eloquence.

The Urvanovestilli homeland is named 'Flaristimmo'.

Urvanovestilli city — Capitello

Capitello is the capital of the Urvanovestilli land, and the classical Urvanovestilli city.

At the very heart lies a cruciform cathedral. It is an immense domed building, the outside in white marble, covered with statues and spires. Inside, all is dark — or so it seems to a person who first steps in.

Someone who steps in first stands in place, seeing nothing really, perhaps a few points of light in the darkness... and then, very slowly, begins to adjust. It is cool inside, and very still. The silence is a silence that can be heard, a very real and present stillness. As he begins to step into the coolness and the silence, he begins to see light — light that had gone unnoticed at first, but as he steps into it, becomes more and more visible. The light is shining through a thousand candles, each one bringing a little bit of light, a little bit of warmth, to what is around it. Then, after the candles become visible, it is seen what they illuminate — mosaics, worked with colored dyes and gold leaf... and faces.

Outside of the cathedral lies an open garden with fountains and statues. Around the garden lies a circle of seven great halls. In clockwise order, beginning south of the cathedral, they are:

Library: This collection, the largest in the world, has at least one copy of all known writings, and a scriptorium in which they are copied and transmitted.

Device museum: This is a clockwork building filled with exemplary devices (and copies in various states of disassembly).

Senate: This building is decorated with arts and crafts from the cities throughout the land; it is a place where senators (two from each city and one from each village) meet to govern the nation.

Mayorship: This is the local senate, the seat from which public affairs are run; the majority of political power is on a local level (the senate being the head of a confederation), vested in the town elders.

Forum: This is an immense amphitheater which hosts a variety of speakers, panels, and open talks. Lecture is the predominant medium and presentation, but poetry and storytelling occur not infrequently. The forum, along with the evening worship services in the cathedral, walking in the garden, attending a concert, or looking through the art museum, is appreciated as an enjoyable way to spend a night out.

Music hall/theater: This hosts concerts and recitals, theatrical performances, operas, dances, pyrotechnic displays, occasional Janra acrobatic performances, dramatic readings, puppet shows...

Art museum: Half of the space is devoted to permanent exhibits, and half to temporary displays. Most of the finest artwork ever produced by Urvanovestilli, and a good deal of the finest artwork from other cultures, may be seen here.

Outside of the seven halls lies what is called "the *mélange*"; outside of the *mélange* lie fields, pastures, and vineyards; outside of the farmland lies forest.

The *mélange* is a large annulus which contains mansions, shops, roads, paths, public squares, gardens, open lots, little forums and theaters, restaurants, and so

on. It is where a great deal of life and culture transpires; in the little nooks and crannies, inside the parlors of the houses, a lot transpires.

The Urvanovestilli enjoy going out, but the enjoyment does not come from despising being at home. The parlors, which have the distinction of being within a person's home and hospitality, are lavishly furnished, with couches, chairs, lanterns, some instruments, a liquor machine, some sculpture or paintings, often a fountain or clock or... and people enjoy sitting around, talking, reading, performing music...

Urvanovestilli city: Éliré

Éliré is known among the Urvanovestilli as the city of seashells. While most Urvanovestilli cities are built out of white stone, in ornately embellished classical geometric forms, Éliré is built out of sandy yellow stone, in flowing curves; buildings seem like giant seashells. The artwork and jewelry are crafted from seashells and other treasures from the sea — coral and pearls — and the public squares are filled with fountains and pools, where colorful fish swim about.

The people enjoy swimming, and often meet the dolphin population; they enjoy each other.

Urvanovestilli city: Mistrelli

Mistrelli lies in the heart of the Fog Valley; a shroud of mist cloaks the ground, out of which rise trees and tall buildings with spires and towers. Inside the buildings are all manner of tunnels of tunnels, secret passages, and trapdoors; there are clockwork devices in each one. Throughout the city are spread a handful of entrances to a vast underground labyrinth, of which the better part is known; there are all manner of doors and puzzles inside.

The city is full of rose bushes, climbing up the sides of

the buildings, over and around gates; most are yellow, but there are some of every color.

The people take a long time to get to know, and their personalities always have hidden gems. Their study of theology emphasizes mystery and the incomprehensible nature of God; Connaissance, a theologian from Mistrelli, began and ended his magnum opus with the words, "I do not know."

Urvanovestilli city: Fabriqué

Fabriqué is the biggest of Urvanovestilli port cities; it lies on the Tuz border, and is the site where ships — full rigs with multiple masts, many sails, and innumerable ropes — are built. They are polished and ornately carved, well suited for transport and trade as well as a work of art. The crews hired tend to be heavily Tuz — strong and sturdy workers who have no problem tying a rope as thick as a wrist in waves and storm — and set sail to other Urvanovestilli ports and ports around the world, transporting voyagers and cargo to destinations near and far.

Yedidia

The Yedidia culture is a culture of vibrant life. They live in buildings woven out of living trees and plants; the doorways are filled by hanging curtains of leafy vines which softly part as a person passes through.

Their manner of gardening spins out of a wonderful talent for drawing beauty out of the forest; many visitors come for the first time, do not even realize that they have stepped into a garden; they only notice that the forest's beauty is exceptional there.

The Yedidia are very sensitive to the rest of Creation;

they speak in a melodic, lilting tongue of the purest song, but even that language is not the one that is closest to them. The first language of every child is that of rocks and trees and skies and seas. They know how to call birds out of the forest to fly into their hands; they know how to make plants flourish.

They have ears to hear the crystalline song by which the Heavens declare the glory of their Maker. They appreciate the beauty of the created order as it tells of the Uncreate with a power that can not fully be translated into words — and they use the language of Creation to speak of the mysteries of the Creator, whose fingerprints are everywhere in nature.

They look into the great and unfathomable vastness of space; it furnishes the language by which they tell of the great and unfathomable vastness of the Creator. They know the energy, the great fire out of which the sun pours out light and energy; it furnishes the language by which they tell of the energy and great fire in the heart of the Father, offering warmth and light freely and without cost. They dance in the rain, the life giving water poured out from above; it furnishes the language by which they speak of springs of living water come down from Heaven. They admire the beauty of the lilies of the field, which simply rest in the sunlight, rain, and dew showered on them; it furnishes the language by which they speak of resting in the love poured out. Their eyes are not closed when a grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies...

They are sensitive to the silent beauty that is sometimes unnoticed even by the Janra. They enjoy the brilliance of the sun, and the pale blue luminescence of the moon; the gentle warmth of a summer night, and the powerful motion of a pouring rainstorm (and there are few things many Yedidia enjoy more than being thoroughly drenched). They look at the veins of a leaf, the hairs of a caterpillar, the motion of a snail; they listen to the song of birds, the sound of wind whispering amidst the leaves, the

splashes of water flowing over rocks; they taste the cold freshness of water, the tartness of lemons, the sweetness of strawberries; they smell the soft fragrance of jasmine, the spice of cinnamon, the freshness after a rain; they feel the velvety softness of a rabbit's fur, the raspiness of a rhubarb leaf, the roughness of bark, the smoothness of a worn stone, the gentle kiss of a summer breeze, the springiness of pete moss, the shimmering heat of fire long into the night, the light tickle of a crawling gecko, the fineness of a child's hair, and the warmth of a friend's face.

They are as intuitive as they are perceptive; the emotions of friends especially, but strangers as well, are quickly understood; be it singing together, a friendly joke, talking, listening, leaving alone, sitting together in silence, holding a hand, giving a hug — they always seem to know.

The Yedidia make wines and incense which even the Urvanovestilli do not come close to. It is, though, the Urvanovestilli who make their garments. Some are short, some are tall; some are slender, some are rounded; they tends towards being fairly short and fairly round, but there is a lot of variety. All, though, have olive skin and dark, shiny black hair; the women wear a long, flowing robe of kelly green, over which cascades of hair fall and spin, sometimes reaching to the waist, sometimes almost touching the ground; the men wear cloaks and tunics of walnut brown. The clothing is soft and light as air; it streams out in the motion and jumps of dance — like their music, smooth, soft, flowing, graceful.

"Dance, then, wherever you may be, for I am the Lord of the Dance, said he." Theirs is a culture full of joy and celebration; it is full of smiles, and always willing to welcome a visitor. Finding something good, they look for someone to share it with.

They are very sensitive to the cycles of nature, of the day, of the phases of the moon, of the seasons in turn. They shape the regular rhythm of their songs, and provide a sense of constancy and regularity, again, which furnishes

the language by which they speak of the constancy and regularity of the Creator.

The traditional greeting is a soft and gentle hug, one which often lasts a while (or a butterfly kiss, or...). That touch, as their faces and voices as they speak, bears a great deal of expression: The phrase of greeting used means, literally, "Here is a person in whom I find joy." The words remain the same, but the music of the speech colors it to perfection.

Though each culture has its own drink — even the icy cold water enjoyed by the Nor'krin is appreciated by visiting Janra, who recognize it as a gift given without sowing or reaping — drinks are one of the first things that come to mind when most people hear the word 'Yedidia'.

First of all are their wines. Nearly all of the finest wines are made in their land. Red and white, and a little bit of rose and green, are stored away in caves to age for years, perhaps decades, before being opened to enjoy with friends and memories.

After the wines come cider; it is served hot and well spiced; the spicing is done in many different ways, and gives a wonderful variety to a very soothing drink to warm a cool evening.

There are fruit juices of every color of the rainbow; strawberry, pear, guava, banana, apple, peach, and fig are but the beginning of a very long and flavorful list. There is, though, one strong point of commonality: the fruit is always still attached to the plant a few minutes before it is served.

(the variety of fruit juices is fermented and aged as are grapes to make wine, but that variety of drinks is reserved for very special occasions)

They also enjoy teas and infusions; the trees and herbs provide another spectrum of tastes to sip with friends.

Roots of various plants are sometimes spiced to provide another drink.

Yedidia cuisine varies somewhat from region to

region. In some places, it is based on fresh fruit, and in others, on breads, cereals, thick soups and vegetable stews; the latter is spiced, lightly salted, and often has some meat for added flavor. All forms of Yedidia cuisine begin with a small salad (either garden or fruit), have a main course of some form of the local specialties, are followed by a platter with an assortment of breads and fresh fruits, and end with a dessert of cheeses or cured fruit.

Life, to the Yedidia, is one big, long party, and, to the Yedidia, song is the symbol of celebration. They sing in the morning, and sing in the evening; they sing while working, and sing a prayer — hands joined together — before meals. Thought is expressed in song; the first place to look for an expression of their perspective on theology and philosophy is in the verses of their hymns. There are many cherished songs shared across the nation, but there is also much spontaneity and improvisation; their way of speaking/singing is in metered verse, and a wealth of their wisdom is embodied in the rhythm of hymns, regular and dependable as the cycles of nature. The day, the moon, the year — these different cycles are echoed in the structure of verses.

For the beauty of the earth,
for the glory of the skies,
For the love which from our birth
over and around us lies:
Lord of all, to Thee we raise
this our hymn of grateful praise.

For the beauty of each hour
of the day and of the night,
Hill and vale and tree and flower,
sun and moon and stars of light:
Lord of all, to Thee we raise
this our hymn of grateful praise.

For the joy of human love,
brother, sister, parent, child,
Friends on earth, and friends above;
for all gentle thoughts and mild;
Lord of all, to Thee we raise
this our hymn of grateful praise.

For Thy church, that evermore
lifteth holy hands above,
Offering up on every shore
her pure sacrifice of love:
Lord of all, to Thee we raise
this our hymn of grateful praise.

For Thyself, best Gift Divine!
To our race so freely given;
For that great, great love of Thine,
peace on earth, and joy in Heaven:
Lord of all, to Thee we raise
this our hymn of grateful praise.

This is my Father's world,
and to my listening ears,
All nature sings, and round me rings
the music of the spheres.

This is my Father's world:
I rest me in the thought
Of rocks and trees, of skies and seas;
His hand the wonders wrought.

This is my Father's world,
the birds their carols raise,
The morning light, the lily white,

declare their Maker's praise.
This is my Father's world:
He shines in all that's fair;
In the rustling grass I hear him pass, He speaks
to me everywhere.

This is my Father's world,
O let me ne'er forget
That though the wrong seems oft so strong,
God is the Ruler yet.
This is my Father's world:
the battle is not done;
Jesus who died shall be satisfied,
and earth and Heaven be one.

The Yedidia are the most alive to sensation; each sense is valued, and each one provides something a little different.

Touch is pre-eminent; it is enjoyed immensely, and they consider it the most informative of senses. Touch tells them of texture and temperature, of moist and dry; by how things respond to pressure, they can feel what is present beneath the surface and what structure it forms; it tells much of emotion. When sensation yields perception, touch provides them with the greatest richness.

Smell is a sense of memories; to walk through an orchard is to remember seasons past. It no less bears a tale of what has happened; each person bears his own distinctive smell, and a place by its smell tells who has passed by. Many different things leave a mark on a placés scent, and to smell is to be told, as if in a far-off memory (indeed, like those that smell mysteriously triggers), what plants are present, what the weather is like and has been, who has passed by, what fruit was picked — though not all of this is perceived all of the time, the fragrance of a place often tells bits and pieces.

Sight is a sense that works by light illuminating all

that it shines on (and this is something from which they draw a lesson). It tells of the color, the form, and the beauty of what is around; what is moving and what is still; it tells of what is far away and can not yet be touched. It serves as a guide to what is around, as a guide by which to move and act in an unknown situation, and it bears its own beauty; all of this provides lessons about God and about faith.

The first sound in their mind, and the one they most love, is song. The song of a friend's voice, the song of a bird chirping, the song of a babbling brook, the silent song of silvery blue starlight — all of these are listened to and enjoyed.

The taste of food tells of the time of year and of culture. Drink and food are a kind of art, and its taste tells both of the time of year and how it was prepared.

Yedidia emotions have a fluid character; they are a sensitive people who are easily moved and who show their emotions quickly. Their celebration is filled with smiles and mirth — as is, indeed, much of life. Tears are held to be very precious — in their language, the same word means 'tear' and 'diamond' — and they know tears, not only of sorrow, but also of joy. Tears come to greet both memories and powerful music, and mark as both sign and symbol the most significant events in life — farewell and death, yes, but also a loved one regained, and birth, and marriage. Memories and hopes, also, are precious. They know sorrow, but never bitterness; however deep and angst-ridden the sorrow may be, deeper and more healing is the joy. Farewell is always marked by the thought of, "I will be able to enjoy your presence again;" on many a deathbed has been spoken the words, "We will be brought back together again in the heart of the Father. It will not be long."

Yedidia worship services are filled with songs — celebrations in which everybody participates.

The Yedidia homeland is named 'Syllii'.

Yedidia character: Sylla

Sylla is relatively short and rounded; she has dark, olive skin and soft, brown eyes. Her hair falls down to her waist, and she wears a long, flowing kelly green robe, as is traditional among Yedidia women; more often than not, a chain of flowers rests in her hair. She chooses to go barefoot, so that she can feel the grass, the moss, the earth, and the stones beneath her feet.

The only possession which she carries is a small harp; a slow strum accompanies a soft and gentle song. She also has with her a pet: a milshh: a small, eyeless animal, about two feet long, with brilliant golden fur that is long and soft, two large, pointed ears, eight short, flexible legs ending in large paws, and a shiny black nose which is always sniffing inquisitively. It is both shy and curious, and it is very warm and affectionate; it is usually very calm and sedate, but often becomes very excited when it smells someone familiar.

A quote:

Fair is the sunlight;
Fairer still the moonlight;
Fairest of all, is the light of thy face.

Jec

The Jec life is filled with faith, humility, and simplicity. They live in small rural villages, where farmland — pastures, fields, orchards and vineyards, the village commons — outlies a few houses, some artisan's shops, and a simple church.

They are peasants very much like those chosen to be apostles, and the carpenter who chose them. Farmers,

blacksmiths, cobblers — clothed in rough, plainly colored robes, they are the sort of people one could easily overlook in the search for the spectacular. It is calloused hands and dirty fingernails that are lifted up to God in worship, and that continue to worship by placing a yoke on a pair of oxen, gathering firewood, peeling carrots and potatoes, or threshing wheat. There are many who are given great wisdom and knowledge, a faith to move mountains, or who speak in the tongues of men and angels, but they do not bear an otherworldly air or a strange electricity; they appear as men and women like any other, usually harvesting barley or carving wood.

Their thought is expressed in parables, little stories, and proverbs, the first and foremost of which are "Love Yahweh your God with all of your heart, and all of your soul, and all of your mind, and all of your might," and "Love your neighbor as yourself." There is a great sense of community and continuity, carrying the torch passed down by the saints who walked before.

They do not really travel; most are born, live, and die within a few miles of a single point. They do not look down on wayfarers who voyage far and wide to see the height of mountains and the vastness of seas, and enjoy the richness of the visible and invisible artifacts of the variety of cultures, but they pay a lot of attention to what is easy to pass by without noticing. They know their culture, their village, and its people very well.

Jec culture is a culture of the very small. They see the great in the small; in the Law of Love is seen all of virtue and right action; in a tiny shoot pushing out of the ground they see an immense oak whose branches will someday provide shade; in a simple gift, they see the love that gave it. They are fond of the words, "He who is faithful in little is also faithful in much." Piety is given expression in the tiny details of everyday life, to which careful attention is devoted. They search to love God by seeing to the needs of whoever they are with.

Gift giving occupies an important cultural position; each gift serves as a little symbol, a little morsel, of love. The gifts are very simple — poverty does not permit the spectacular — but are given generously. A flower, an apple, a song, a blessing, a handshake, a prayer, a poem, a cup of cold water wood carved into a statue or a whistle, an oddly shaped pebble, a skin of wine, a walk, a story, a patterned candle — all of these are given.

Sight, sound, touch, smell, taste — there is nothing really special about their use of senses. They notice and enjoy little details; there is not much more to say.

The language has simple rules and few words; it is one of the easiest to learn, and bears well the load of talking about everyday matters, about personality and friendship, and about God.

When two Jec meet, one is usually coming to visit the other, and something of this notion of visit and welcome is embodied in the greeting. The visitor comes with one arm outstretched and hand open, saying, "I give you my love." The host clasps the outstretched hand, bowing slightly, and says, "And I return to you mine." These actions are accompanied by a gentle smile.

They are fairly short, with tan skin, brown eyes, and hair that is usually brown (and sometimes black or sandy blonde).

Their emotions are the emotions of being human, the common points of feeling shared across all culture. They know at least something of laughter and peace and passion and tears and awe; if there is one point that runs strong, it is a sense of tradition, community, continuity, and place; they have a sense of unique importance and a part in the great plan (two concepts which are not really separate in their thought).

Jec worship services are simple, without any real distinguishing remarks — no bells and smells, just a week by week liturgical service presenting the Gospel message and embodying worship. The opening words of each

service are, "Hear, O Israel, Yahweh your God is one. You shall love Yahweh your God with all of your heart, and with all of your soul, and with all of your mind, and with all of your might. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Love one another."

The Jec homeland is named 'Tev'.

Shal

The language is soft, gentle, simple, and calm. It is spoken slowly, as if it were a lullaby; it has few words: simple, little words with rich and profound connotations; 'Way', 'Tao', and 'Word' are like the nouns which are used.

Even the verbs are rarely verbs which tell of action. Rather, they describe that which is; 'be', 'abide in' 'embody', 'love', 'nourish', 'support', 'is the friend of', 'know', 'receive', 'is from', 'resemble', 'live', are the essential words which a child would learn as one of our children would learn words such as 'walk', 'talk', 'eat'. Just as our language has different words — 'walk', 'run', 'jog', 'sprint', 'mosey', 'trot', for example — which tell of the action of moving by the use of legs, so their language has at least a few different words to tell of being, or understanding, or abiding, or loving. The way of speaking sometimes does not even need verbs; there are more adjectives than adverbs.

The genius of the language is embodied in a flowing prose which is the purest poetry; words with the simplicity of a child. It does not have abruptly ending sentences, but rather slides somewhat like Hebrew; one thought gives form to the next. It has something like the feel of the prologue to John's account of the Gospel, or his first letter; it has something like the feel of a Gregorian chant; there is nothing abrupt in their speech or music. They speak, but even more, they are silent; there is a communion.

The understanding is one which see beyond, which looks at the surface and sees into the depths. They stand dazzled by the glory of the starry vault, and worship the awesome Creator who called them into being; they look at a friend's face and see the person behind.

Their culture is a place of perfect order. It is ordered by things being placed rightly; by God worshiped by man, the spiritual ahead of the physical, being beyond doing.

It is of this that God is known in all of his majesty, that spirituality becomes rich and profound, that there is a right state of being. This brings the lesser things to flourish. Men shine as they reflect the glory of God. That which is physical is enjoyed immensely — the warmth and softness of a friend's touch, the sweetness of a freshly picked orange, the fragrance of a garden of flowers, the sound of a bird's song, the colors of a sunset — all of these things are received gratefully. Being, they do; they tend the garden, and create.

The order flows from resting in the Spirit and from love; there is no one who thinks of order. The truthfulness knows nothing of oaths; the order knows nothing of rules, nor even of honor and morality.

The culture is best understood, not by looking at men, but by looking at God. God gives generously, and they receive and rest in his love.

There are many people in modern society who, when waiting in an office or at a traffic light, become agitated and begin to fidget; they are hollowed out by an excess of doing. The Shal are innocent of such hurry. They act, but it is a doing which flows from being.

Food, wine, music, incense, touch, silence, storytelling, dance, drama, puppetry — it is not often that they all get together to have a celebration (they prize greatly time spent alone with one person, and then extended families and tightly knit communities).

Shal culture does not exactly have greetings as such; their way of thought works differently.

To say 'hello' or 'goodbye' is an action of an instant, in two senses. In one sense, it lasts for an instant; no one says 'hello' twenty times or shakes hands for five minutes. In the other sense, it marks an instant, the instant where absence becomes presence or presence becomes absence.

The Shal do not really think in terms of instants; time is measured and perceived — or, rather, not measured and not perceived — by moments. A friend is present, and he is enjoyed, and then he is absent, and then there is solitude. In the place of a greeting, the Shal have a presence. With the Shal, you never get the feeling that you are alone and there is another person nearby who is also alone; you never get the feeling that there is a close group of friends nearby and they are inside and you are outside. If a Shal is nearby, he is present; indeed, the Shal have a very present touch.

Life, to the Shal, is full of moments. There is a meal with friends, and then there is reflection in solitude, and then there is a beautiful song, and then there is time with a friend, and then there is prayer, and then there is sleep, and then there is work tending to the trees... There is not interruption or haste; a moment lasts as long as it is appropriate for a moment to last.

Their moments of community are profound; their moments of solitude are even more profound. 'Withdrawing' is what they call it; it is a time of stillness, and an expression of a love so profound that all other loves appear to be hate. It is a time of finding a secret place, and then withdrawing — from family, friends, and loved ones, from music and the beauty of nature, from cherished activities, from sensation — into the heart of the Father. It is a time of — it is hard to say what. Of being loved, and of loving. Of growing still, and becoming. Of being set in a right state, and realigned in accordance with the ultimate reality. Of purity from the Origin. Of being made who one is to be. Of communion and worship. Of imago dei filled with the light of Deus. Of being pulled out of time and

knowing something of the Eternal.

This withdrawing fills them with an abundant love for other people, and gives them a renewed appreciation for nature and music; it fills them with silence, and fills their words and song.

Their perception of the world is quintessentially tactile. Sight, hearing, and smell all work at a distance; touch perceives what is immediately present. The eyes, ears, nose, and tongue are all organs of sense at one place on the body — more sensitive in some places and less in others, to be sure — and feels all of what is immediately present. Touch provides the physical side of the presence which is so greatly valued.

The emotional side of the culture is filled by peace, in which is embedded joy and contentment. It does not change very much or very quickly — though it encompasses affection, or appreciation of beauty, or a special serenity, or absorption in thought.

Their appearances have the peculiar property of not seeming to be any particular age. If you look, age is not very difficult to judge, but somehow the thought doesn't come up. They have a rounded shape, soft eyes, and warm, soft skin.

Shal worship services are different from the others. They are characterized, not by the presence of words, but by the presence of a profound and penetrating silence where God is imminent. There are a few words, but they are not where the essence lies.

The Shal homeland is named 'Liss'.

Janra

The Janra, unlike any of the other cultures, have no homeland; they voyage among the other lands, where they are generally well-liked and warmly received. Their

wayfaring is at once literal and symbolic: literal in the sense that they know that they are passing through this earthly country for a better one. They enjoy all of the lands that they visit — they have an informal character, and always seem to be at home — but they know that none of them is really home.

It must be said that they know how to move. They can walk, skip, and run, of course, but that is only the beginning. Trees, buildings, and cliffs are climbed like ladders. Come oceans, rivers, and lakes, they will happily swim. Be it lightly skipping atop a thin wall, or jumping out of a window to grab a tree branch and swing down, or running at top speed through the twisty passages of the Southern mines and caves, they make acrobatics seem another form of walking. Somehow, even flipping through a window or somersaulting under a table, they have an extraordinary knack for barely missing collisions with hard objects; the Urvanovestilli are still debating whether this is the result of skill or luck.

The dances of the Urvanovestilli have a marvelous complexity, and those of the Yedidia are known for their flowing grace, but there is still nothing like the spinning energy of the Janra. The Janra are very adaptable, pulling bits and pieces from other cultures and setting them together in vital new combinations. In some of the dances can be seen bits and pieces — moves of strength that look like Tuz wrestling, or complexity from the Urvanovestilli — and the result is nothing short of breathtaking.

In their adaptability, they usually speak at least a few words of each language, and usually borrow whatever form of greeting is common in the land they are visiting. They are familiar with the household objects (often enough to use them in new ways). This, combined with a flair for practical jokes, is occasionally enough to annoy the town guards, but (more often than not) their antics leave people laughing, sometimes to the point of tears.

The Janra have a remarkable talent for not remaking

God in their image. Their description of Jesus is anything but boring and respectable — a firebrand with a phenomenal knack for offending religious leaders, in the habit of telling respectable pillars of society things such as, "The prostitutes and tax collectors are entering the Kingdom of Heaven ahead of you." — and they are known for an honesty that can be singularly blunt. They know that he passed over scribes and lawyers to call, as disciples, a motley crew of fishermen, tax collectors, and other peasants — one terrorist thrown in to make matters interesting. They are, however, just as cautious not to water him into only being a social reformer who had nothing to say about sexual purity.

For all of their sharpness, for all of their ability to bring forth the most embarrassing Scriptural teaching at the worst possible moment, it must also be said that the Janra have hearts of pure gold. Love and compassion are constantly in their thought and action; they are the first to share their food with a beggar, say hello to the person who is alone, or ask, "Are you hurting?" The accusations brought against them are accusations of having too many quirks, not of being unloving.

Their language is of a force that is not easily translated into writing; of course it has nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, etc. and respects masculine and feminine, but intonation, speed, vocal tension, and other factors tell at least as much; they carry connotation and sentiment, express the level of clarity of understanding the speaker believes he has, and many more things. There are also a number of verbal tics, on the order of two or three dozen ('Eh?' is, however, not included, and apparently perceived to be a mark of general silliness); in a sense, they don't do anything, but in a sense, they add a very nice pepper to the speech.

Janra thought involves a kind of sideways logic, which is part of why their ways of speaking are difficult to describe. They take little bits and pieces from different

places, and put them together in unexpected ways, making connections that can be very surprising. They are very good at reading between the lines, and sometimes perceive things which were not intentionally meant to be communicated. Sometimes they borrow manners of speech from other people — conversation, structured argument, metered verse, stories, parables, and so on — but their usual way of speaking has all sorts of sideways jumps and turns, with segues that can be rather odd, and often leaves gaps; these gaps are not a matter of sloppiness, but rather something like a joke or riddle where the hole is intentionally left to be filled in by the listener.

"When it comes to games, never try to understand the Janra mind."

-Oeildubeau, Urvanovestilli philosopher and anthropologist

It is known that Janra sports usually last for at least half an hour, involve a ball, two or more teams, running and acrobatics, and animated discussion. Beyond that, neither the Urvanovestilli's logic nor the Yedidia's intuition are able to make head or tail of them. In general, the teams appear to have unequal numbers of players; the players often switch teams in the course of play; teams are created and dissolved; the nature of the activities makes sudden and radical changes; there is no visible winning or losing. There are occasionally times in the course of play when some intelligible goal appears to be being approached... but then, all players seem to be approaching it in a rather erratic manner (when asked why he didn't do thus and such simple thing and achieve the approached goal by an inexperienced anthropologist, one of the Janra said, "Technically, that would work, but that would be a very boring way to do it," and then bolted back into play:

the extent to which game play is comprehensible heightens its incomprehensibility). Late in life, Oeildubeau hinted at having suspicions that, if the Janra believe that they are being watched, they will spontaneously stop whatever sport they are playing, and instead begin a series of activities expressly designed to give any observer a headache.

Janra come in all shapes, sizes, and colors, showing bits and pieces of other races; they tend to be of moderate to tall height and a lithe build. Most are fairly light skinned (although a few are rather dark); a fair number of them have skin spotted with freckles. They have every imaginable color of hair (black, brown, blonde, grey, white, red, tweed, shaven head, etc). and eyes (brown, blue, hazel, grey, amber, purple, etc). They wear loose clothing in a variety of colors, usually quite vivid; red, purple, and green are the most common of solid colors, and patches or stripes of some pattern or the whole rainbow appear not infrequently. Therefore, Al is a pud.

Their sensation of the world is primarily visual, and in a way patterned after their thought; visualizing and visual problem solving comes very naturally to them. They see, as well as beauty, a world to interact with, and parts to rearrange and make something new. Sound and touch serve largely to complement and extend visual image; taste and smell are enjoyed, but do not play a terribly large role. The other side of the coin (to problem solving) is observing and enjoying, which is also very much a part of culture.

Their emotional life has several sides. They carry with them, in their emotions, a little bit of every place and people they visit — the passion and control of the Urvanovestilli, the peace of the Shal, the festivities and music of the Yedidia, the respect of the Nor'krin, the enjoyment of exercise of the Tuz, the common factor of the Jec. Perhaps the most prominent side of all is laughter. Janra are immeasurably fond of banter and practical

jokes, and have an uncanny knack for guessing who is ticklish. There is an element of what is carefree, spontaneous, and given to pure enjoyment of simple pleasures; there is also a large element of being immersed in sidethink, and they enjoy greatly the flash of insight when everything fits together. They are curious and enjoy discovery.

There is another side to this emotion which seems paradoxical, but fits perfectly. There is a difference between childlike and childish, and not a trace of childishness is to be found among them. They enter the Kingdom of Heaven as little children — in particular, like one little boy who stood up before crowds of thousands and asked, "Why is the Emperor naked?" Of all the skills people learn as a part of growing up, they know perhaps least of all closing their eyes and using intelligence as a tool to make oneself stupid. They are moved by what goes unnoticed, smiling at the beauty in a single blade of grass, and weeping at the death of a beggar who, homeless, friendless, handicapped and burned, explained that he was unable to drop a knife taped to his defunct hand for self-defense, but was still shot and killed outside of the White House by men entrusted with the responsibility of protecting innocent life.

There are two things to said about Janra worship. The first is that they adapt and participate in whatever is the local manner of worship (as do traveling Urvanovestilli and other wayfarers) — in that regard, they make no distinction between themselves and the peoples that they visit. The second — and this does not stem from any perceived defect in the other forms of worship, but from who they are — is that they hold their own worship services.

These services do not occur at a fixed time and place (though they occur more frequently when Janra are on the road between different locations), but at random intervals and locations, spontaneously. Anyone and everyone is

welcome, and children and sometimes adults of other races are usually present.

They are a warm and informal occasions, where anyone can take the lead, and a great many activities are recognized as worship; the Janra have a particularly strong emphasis on the priesthood of the believer and the sacredness of everyday life. People sit in a big circle, and people or groups of people come to the center to present or lead as they wish.

There is no canonical list of activities that are performed at these services, but the following are common.

- Songs. The Janra sing their own songs (often improvised) or those of other peoples; those of the Yedidia are especially treasured. While singing, the people are sometimes still, sometimes swaying, sometimes clapping, and sometimes dancing with their arms.
- Prayer. One person will lead a prayer, or people will pray popcorn style, or...
- Sermons. A theologian or philosopher will preach a sermon.
- Sharing. Someone will share an insight or experience from personal life.
- Dance. The whole assembly will dance, sometimes in a long, snaking line.
- A joke is told. The Janra are fond of laughter.
- Drama. One of a few people will present a dramatic presentation, play, or skit.

- Group hug, usually in whatever is the common greeting of the land.
- Ticklefest. "Blessed are the ticklish, for the touch of a friend will fill them with laughter."
- Silence. This is treasured.
- Reading from the Scriptures.
- Reading or recitation of poetry.
- Storytelling.
- Juggling and similar activities.
- Acrobatics.
- Instrumental music.
- Non sequiturs.
- Miming.
- Mad libs.
- Impressions and impersonations of various and sundry people.
- Janra-ball. This occurs in a modified form such that members of other races, while still not understanding anything, are capable of participating. (Nobody gets a headache.)
- Eucharist. This is the most solemn and important moment, and occurs exactly once in a service — at

the end.

- None of the above. This category is especially appreciated.

Janra character: Nimbus

Nimbus is fairly short and wiry; he has light, almost white blonde hair, deep, intense blue eyes which sparkle and blaze, and a rich, laughing smile. He wears a loose, shimmering two-legged robe of midnight blue, from the folds of which he seems to be able to procure innumerable items of Urvanovestilli make (for example: goggles (waterproof), telescope, silk rope and grappling hook with spring-loaded launcher, climbing/rapelling harness and gear/self-contained, spring-loaded belay), lantern, tool kit (large blade, precision blade, compass, wire saw, corkscrew, ruler, reamer, chisel, pliers, scissors, needle, punch, protractor, file, and sharpening stone), paper pad, mechanical pencil, supply kit (string, pencil lead, chalk, flask of oil, wire, miscellaneous device components (gears, springs, shafts, etc.), cloth), meal kit, tinderbox, mechanical puzzle, mirror, whistle...).

During childhood, he spent a lot of time in the land of the Urvanovestilli, and began to take an interest in tinkering. He has very much his own way of tinkering, from an Urvanovestilli perspective; he is fond of all manner of kludges. The resulting devices have caused his Urvanovestilli mentors to conclude that he is mad (the truth of the matter being that he is not mad, but produces and modifies contraptions in such a manner as to drive any honest Urvanovestilli tinkerer mad). When the city unveiled a new fountain in the public square, he added a pyrotechnic spark; when, in a public ceremony, the mayor celebrated his wife's birthday by presenting a specially

commissioned music box, the tune somehow changed from "Happy birthday to you" to "The old grey mare ain't what she used to be."

He does, however, possess a sense of what is and is not appropriate; his practical jokes never take on a mean or spiteful character, and he does possess a strong degree of contrainte. He does appreciate the variety of cultures he visits, and enjoys Urvanovestilli philosophical and theological discussions.

He is, in short, as Janra as any — left-handed and colorful, warm and compassionate, and a heart of solid gold.

A quote: "What? You think I would do something like that? I'm hurt." (generally accompanied by a wide grin)

Firestorm 2034

Acknowledgments

When I read a book, I usually skip or maybe skim the acknowledgements; I find a long list of names of people I've never heard of to be deadly dull. There have been two times that I've read a list of acknowledgments that I've actually liked. One was written by a very witty writer who could, and did, make even technical documentation interesting to read. (Making someone want to read a list of names is only slightly more difficult than writing interesting documentation, and I don't consider myself a good enough writer to do either.) The other time was an acknowledgement that personally named and thanked me, and that was my favorite part of the whole work. Apart from that, I don't think that a list of strangers' names is fair to inflict on the reader. So I'm not going to try it.

Of course this is not solely my work; many others paid a role in it. You know who you are. I do wish to explicitly thank one person, though, whom many authors omit from their long lists. I wish to thank *you*, the reader. Of course the people who helped me write this are important, but they are not nearly so important as the people who take the time to sit down and read it, let the story live in their

imaginations, and (I hope) tell a friend if they think it's cool. My work is only half done when, I write down my thoughts and put them on the web. It is finished when you breathe life into the story as you read it, and consider its ideas and make them a part of you. Only then can my story be complete. I therefore give my thanks to you, the reader.

In the Glade

"I still do not understand," Grizelda said, "why you asked your father not to find you a wife, if you are not going into a monastic order. And why he listened to your request."

"As Solomon said, he who finds a wife, finds a good thing," said Taberah, and then paused. A quotation from a written source came quickly to him, but a more substantial reply would take a moment's thought. *I am at home among most all of the people I have visited*, Taberah thought, *but I am not like any of them. And explaining myself is difficult.*

Grizelda stopped and looked at him; her pale blue eyes bore a gaze that was intense and probing, and yet not piercing. Her hair was pulled back from the sides of her head, and fell darkly onto her blue dress. The people at the castle spoke highly of Grizelda; some said she had a mind like a man. Her husband, Melibée, stood at her side, listening. They were in a forest glade outside the town walls, and were nearing the banks of a river.

Taberah nimbly climbed a tree, and tossed down two large pears. Then he climbed down, an even larger pear in his teeth.

"One good need not be the only good; even God, when he was the only good, chose to become not the only good. That is what creation means. For a man to have a wife is not the only good; there is also good in a man being single."

Melibée spoke up. "But then why not enter a monastery? Surely that is a good place."

Taberah shook his head. "Being celibate is good, a good that monastic life embraces; it does not follow that being celibate requires entering a monastery. I see another option; marriage and monkhood are not the only possibilities."

Grizelda began walking again, followed by the others. "There is still something in it I question. The different kinds of heretics often see other options, and the Church has condemned them. I know you don't have condemnation from the Church, but I don't see why you don't."

Taberah thought for a moment about whether to explain a logical principle, but decided not to. "All of the monastic orders were also started by people who saw other options; if you will think on the saints' lives, you will see that God led them outside of what everyone else was doing."

Grizelda stopped, and asked, softly, "You claim to be a saint?"

"Hardly," Taberah said. "I try to serve God, but I do not reach that standard. The reason I brought them up is that they are examples of how God wants us to live life. They play by the same rules as us; they just do a better job. I am not married because I am serving God in a way that does not involve marriage, at least not yet; I seek to follow him."

Grizelda began to speak when there was a thunderous boom. The ground shook, and a luminous being stood before them. Around the being was a presence, a reality of terrifying glory, as solid and real as if the weight of a mountain were pressing down on their spirits, and then more real. It was like a storm, like the roaring of a lion. The three friends fell to the ground in fear.

The Presence spoke with a voice like roaring water. "Fear not! Stand up!" As the quaking bodies heard those

words, the command gave them the power to rise, and they did rise, and bow low. Again he spoke: "Never!"

As the friends stood in awestruck fear, the being turned towards Taberah and said, "Taberah. Will you go wherever God leads you? I have been sent to call you to come on a voyage, to a land you do not know and have never heard of, a voyage you may never return from. Will you come along?"

Taberah closed his eyes. In an instant, time stopped, and Taberah was thinking, neither in his native Provençale nor erudite Latin nor any of the dozen other languages he had worked with, but beyond words, beyond language. He looked into his own heart, and into God's, and a single word formed on his lips, without effort or volition: "Yes."

There was a tremendous flash of light, and Grizelda and Melibée fainted.

An Encounter

Taberah looked around. Four immense young men were throwing around a dinner plate — or at least that's what it looked like on first glance. They were brawny, and the plate had something unearthly about it —

One of the men shouted something, and hurled the plate at Taberah. He dodged, and then watched in amazement as it bounced off a tree but did not shatter. It was red, and it had an unearthly symmetry, symmetry like he had never seen before. He went over and picked it up; it was light, and felt vaguely like leather or wood.

One of the men walked over, and said something in a language he did not recognize. Taberah said, "Taberah," and looked at him. The man extended a finger towards him and said, "Taburah," and then took the artifact and tugged on his arm. He was standing on the edge of a forest, and was being led into a clearing with buildings. The architecture was alien, and looked like a slightly

grotesque simplification of what he was used to. There was a strange precision to the buildings, and a smell like smoke and roasting flesh — though he could see no firepit, nor any animal.

The man took him out into the open field — the grass was strangely short and uniform in height, lacking the beautiful variety in the fields he was used to seeing. He bent over, and plucked a blade of grass. It had been clipped. Not grazed by animals, but painstakingly clipped.

Looking around, he saw the men tossing the strange plate between each other. It sailed through the air, almost as if it had wings. One of them caught his eye, and tossed it over. Taberah snatched it out of the air with one hand, and then tried to throw it. It fell like a stone.

One of the men came over, and made the motion of throwing it with exaggerated slowness. It was different from how one threw daggers, or stones, or much of anything else; it vaguely resembled skipping a rock. Taberah took the plate and held it properly; one of the men took it and turned it upside down. Holding it upside down, Taberah tried to imitate the throw he'd seen; the plate wobbled and fell to the ground. The people clapped.

One of the people said something that he didn't understand; seeing Taberah's incomprehension, he repeated his words, only louder. When Taberah didn't understand that, they beckoned him over to where the smoke was coming from. There was some sort of miniature fire, above which geometrically shaped pieces of meat were roasting; one of them gave him a large piece of meat — they were all large — wrapped in bread, with some brightly colored liquids poured over — some sort of decoration? He wondered what the feast was, that they were eating meat, and had such a sumptuous banquet. The meat tasted slightly strange, although fresh, and the bread was finer than anything he had ever tasted. It didn't have any pebbles, and it was softer than cake.

Not knowing the local language, Taberah expressed

his gratitude with his eyes; he listened intently to the conversation, trying to see if he could make sense of the language. Every once in a while, he heard a word that sounded vaguely like Latin, and by the end of the conversation he had figured out these people's names. The man standing by the fire was very old, so old that wisps of silver hair were beginning to appear among the black locks of his temple. He looked mature, regal, venerable. He must be a king, owning the small palace nearby and the ones around it; he could look in the windows (fitted with *glass* — and glass so smooth you could barely see it), and see the illumination of a thousand candles. Or was he a servant? He looked mighty, built like a great warrior, and was even taller than the other men. And it was a lordly thing to give food to anyone who came. He was cooking, but the demeanor of the other men treated him as their elder, and not just in years. By the end of the conversation, Taberah had conveyed his name, and knew their names. After the effort of listening to the conversation and trying to see if he could hear any words related to ones he knew, he sat down in one of the chairs — at least he thought it was a chair; it was sturdy, but so light he could lift it with one hand.

Taberah sat down in this chair, happy to sit and think as the others romped on the plain. Where to begin thinking? The language had Latin words, but it did not sound like any Romance language; that was confusing. And these people owned massive wealth, wealth far beyond anything his lord owned, and different goods than he had seen before. And they were immense. But that was only the surface of what he was sure was there. These people seemed to treat him hospitably, but what struck him wasn't exactly hospitality so much as something like friendship. Why were they treating him as a friend when they had just met him? When he watched them, he was puzzled at seeing respect in the younger men's treatment of the elder, but not etiquette. How could this people have

respect without having its form? They did, but how? Or was their etiquette merely strange? They were not accustomed to wayfarers; they didn't look like heathen, but they didn't recognize Latin — or Greek, or even Arabic, for that matter. And what would motivate anyone to cut grass at a uniform, mathematically precise height? What strange symbolic gesture would be manifested in that way? Or was it a symbolic gesture? It seemed more like a rash vow. Or was it something stranger still?

To the eyes around him, Taberah looked lost in thought. And he was — he saw certain things that were human, but there were other parts that he could not understand at all. What did they mean?

First Clues

Aed looked on the stranger as he gazed. He was unbelievably short and scrawny, not to mention gamy; his clothing looked like a getup from the Middle Ages, a tunic and hose with irregular stitching and any number of holes. He could readily believe it when he walked by and saw lice. He had a thick, scraggly head of hair with a very thin beard. And yet, for all this, Taberah was quite attractive. He had a merry, comely face, with a deep, probing gaze. It was a penetrating gaze; Aed had the feeling that if he stared at a piece of paper too long, it would catch fire. Taberah had been listening intently, and was now off in his own little world.

I must look up one of those charities that deals with foreigners, Aed thought, as he seems quite lost. For now, he can have the guest bedroom. It's a good time it's summer; I have a little more free time to deal with him. He looks a little older than my children. Aed began to gather up the food, called his son and daughter to help, and then they went in; it only took the stranger a couple of times to learn the gesture that meant, "C'mon! You're

invited over here!"

The stranger looked with some bewilderment over the contents of a room, and then his eyes lit up over a chess table packed in the corner. He started to pull the pieces off and walk over to the table; Aed stopped him, pulled out the table, and arranged a game before them. *The international game*, he thought. *We don't know a common language, but we have a common game.*

Aed's first thought upon seeing the stranger play was, "He has seen this game before, but does not know how to play." This was revised to, "He does know how to play, but he cheats — making moves that are almost legal and always to his advantage." Then a moment of dawning comprehension came, and he realized that the stranger was not cheating — he just didn't understand that chess was played over a grid. Aed groaned, and picked up the pieces and arranged them on the table, understanding why Taberah had made such a bizarre action as to take them from what he now understood was taken as a storage place, and decided to play it his way.

Aed was rated at 1975, although on a good day he could give almost any chess player a run for his money. He was therefore stunned after he lost five games in a row. The young stranger was very, very cunning, and saw things that would never occur to him. After the fifth game, he felt quite tired, and he could see that the stranger was tired—

—and was therefore quite stunned as, in the living room and in the presence of his teen-aged son and daughter (his wife was away at a conference), Taberah took off all his clothes and lay down on the floor. He sent his daughter Fiona out of the room, and then covered Taberah with a blanket that lay at hand. Taberah's face told a thousand words; shocked as Aed was, he saw at once that Taberah's action was not sexually provocative, or for that matter done as anything significant; he apparently saw that he had made a social blunder, but was at a loss

for what. He did not feel any shame or guilt, but perhaps regret that something he had done had upset his generous host — and gratitude to be given a blanket, and puzzlement at why his host had invited him into his house but not to crawl into his family's bed. Puzzling, but Taberah had enough to think about already, and was sure that tomorrow would have enough puzzles of its own.

Aed, for his part, could see how to send him out, but not how to tell him to put his clothes on first; he went to bed, grumpily thinking, *He may stay tonight because he's here, but tomorrow night he's spending at PADS. What kind of manners is it to strip in front of your host's daughter? ...* He had a feeling of shock, of wrongness, of indignation at a transgression against reality; he told himself that this was culture shock, but that did not make things easy.

He drifted in and out of sleep, and was awakened by the sound of someone vomiting. Habits of a father, habits stronger than the weight of his grogginess, marched him out to the living room, where he stared in horror. Taberah was shaking, shivering in a cold sweat.

What shocked Aed most was not that one side of Taberah's face was wet with his own vomit.

What shocked Aed most was that Taberah looked so miserable that he didn't seem to even care.

The Hospital

The hospital was a nightmare. Taberah had no insurance, no paperwork and no legal guardian; it was only because of the dire nature of the emergency that he was admitted at all. In the absence of identification or any ability to speak English, the hospital was by law required to file paperwork with the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization Services; an embarrassed hospital representative explained that Taberah was in the eyes of

the law an illegal immigrant and nothing more; if there was a way for him not to be deported to his country of origin, he didn't see it.

Aed came back each day for a week, during which his whole parish was speaking with him; his conversation with the doctors was alarming.

"I am baffled by this young man's condition. He is sick, but no test has been able to tell what he has. It might be a virus."

"Do you have any ideas of what it is?"

The doctor looked slightly embarrassed.

Aed stood in silence and prayed.

"Uh, have you read Ahmik Marison's *How the West Was Lost From a Medical Point of View*?"

"Never heard of it."

"Off the record, this young man is suffering from one — or several — of the conditions that ravaged the American Native population when European settlers came."

Aed stood in stunned silence. This did not make any sense at all. Or (he had the exacting honesty to admit to himself) it made sense in a way he couldn't believe.

An Anthropologist's Visit

"Noah, he doesn't speak any English." By now, Dr. Pabst and Dr. Kinsella were at the doorway to Taberah's room; they turned in, and saw him looking with interest at a book. Taberah looked up and said, "Grace and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ." His accent was thick, but mostly understandable.

"I'm an anthropologist and not a linguist," Noah said, "but that sounded an awful lot like English to me."

Aed opened his mouth, closed it, and said, "This isn't the first time he's surprised me." He explained about Taberah playing chess, and undressing.

Dr. Pabst turned to the young man. He said, "Do you understand me?" The man scrambled off his bed with remarkable speed, and crouched in front of the anthropologist, and said, "I thou under stand."

Dr. Pabst simplified his language, and spoke slowly, separating his syllables. "How speak English?"

"English, that is what?"

"This language."

"Language, that is what?"

"How we speak now."

Taberah's eyes lit up. "I am in read Bible."

The anthropologist scratched his head. The young man appeared not to be lying, but even for a genius, learning a new language was difficult, and learning from a book written in the language without any people to help, unless—

"What you call Bible in your language?"

"No Bible in language."

Noah scratched his head. Then he said, "Have you read Bible before here?"

"*Biblia Sacra Iuxta Vulgatam Versionem*. I not know not how to say in English."

Aed said, "The lad is tired from concentration, and perhaps he shouldn't have jumped from his bed to —" Dr. Kinsella cleared his throat, "—under stand you. Perhaps we could talk out in the hallway?"

In the hallway, Aed said, "So, what nationality is he?"

Noah said, "I haven't the foggiest idea. He looks Western European, perhaps Mediterranean, by ancestry, Third World by nourishment. His accent is that of a Romance language, but I don't know. Picking up an alien language by studying a text in that language is next to impossible; the Mayans have left behind three codices that we still haven't deciphered for the most part. Or at least, it's almost impossible unless you already know the text in another language. I don't know how to coalesce my observations into a coherent picture. He — is it OK if I

change the subject slightly to recommendations?"

"Certainly."

"He's very bright and is picking up English quickly. He probably knows multiple languages, which makes it easier to pick up another; I'd get him three Bibles — one in the Latin he knows, one in a literal rendering in modern English, and a free translation to contemporary English. And continue to visit him. My summer class starts tomorrow, so I won't be able to visit, but in brief: speak slowly; in-it-ial-ly break up the syl-la-bles; pay attention to what words he uses. (And, when he understands it, speak as you would to another American.) Contrary to intuition, he might understand you better if you use big words."

"What?"

"He already knows Latin, or perhaps some other language or languages derived from it; there are a lot of common roots in the bigger words. They came over with the Norman invasion of England; small words change much more quickly, and many of our small words are Germanic in character. And you know the artificial intelligence findings that big words are impossible for a computer to deal with, and small words doubly impossible? What is easy for us and what is easy for him may be two very different matters."

"Yes, I see," Aed said.

"Oh, and one more thing. Keep me posted; if you want, I may be able to send in a grad student. He's a puzzle, and I like puzzles. Maybe something will click about him."

"I'll keep the grad student in mind; maybe later, when I have more to tell. Actually, why don't you give me the net address of a student whom I will be able to talk with? I'll probably have some questions. Or should I ask you?"

"Feel free to ask me. Just keep it down to a few minutes a day."

Trouble

After a phone conversation with Dr. Pabst, Aed began to understand how the universality of good will he believed in coexisted in an arbitrariness of manners; he restrained himself from knocking on the door before entering, and saw Taberah bright-eyed as he entered.

"Hell!" Taberah said eagerly, jumping up. He had a long tether from his intra-venous tubes, and he was becoming stable on his feet. (He still felt slightly dizzy as he rose.)

"What?" said Aed and the other visitor.

"Hell! Hell!" Then Taberah saw their puzzlement, wondered what was wrong, and then reminded himself of how important pronunciation was. "Hello!" he said.

Aed laughed, and said, "Hello! Taberah, I'd like you to meet my wife, Nathella. She is—"

Taberah grinned, said, "Beautiful!" and jumped up, pressing up against her and kissing her on the lips.

Nathella stood in paralyzed shock for a second, then drew back and ran out of the room, Aed on her heels.

She slowed to a brisk walk after they reached a second corridor, and said, "I don't know why you let him in our house. I don't want to see him again. There are differences between cultures, but that lust is unacceptable in any culture."

Aed said, "I am sorry he did that. I was not expecting that when I brought him in."

They walked on in silence, Nathella setting a fast pace in silent fury.

"You're holding out on me," she said. "You're not telling me something."

"His eyes," Aed said.

"What?" Nathella said.

"Did you see his eyes?" Aed asked.

"I assure you, I was quite occupied with his lips!" she

snapped.

"What do you think was in his eyes?"

"Lust. Selfishness. A lack of any caring and decency."

"I saw his eyes," Aed said.

They walked on in silence, now a bit more slowly.

"You're waiting for me to ask you what you saw in his eyes. Out with it," Nathella finally said.

"I was watching his eyes, and I didn't see the faintest trace of greed or lewdness. I saw a rambunctious energy, the same rambunctious energy Clancy uses when he's picking on Fiona."

"Are you saying that what that man did to me was right?"

"No; I'm saying that he didn't know what he was doing."

Confusion

As Aed walked back, he processed through a memory, and realized the look in Taberah's eyes after Nathella had run out of the room. He looked like a hurt puppy. Aed had promised his wife not to have the man back on their property without talking with him and then talking it over with her.

The conversation that ensued between him and Taberah was maddening. It wasn't just the language barrier, even though they got a good half hour into the conversation before Aed realized that Taberah thought Aed was talking about something else entirely. It was rather that Aed was just beginning to see an alien conceptual map, an alien interpretation of the world. After clearing up the initial confusion, Aed managed to paraphrase "You don't have the right to go around kissing women on the lips," in different ways until Taberah appeared to understand, when he got to the second difficulty: "What is a right?" Taberah seemed not to think

in terms of rights, to find them an alien philosophical concept; this difficult was not surmounted so much as circumvented, in being told, "It is wrong to go around kissing women on the lips." That was met with a third difficulty: "Why not?"

After a long and involved conversation, Aed pieced together the following observations:

- Taberah regarded his actions as being a very warm greeting, meaning roughly what Aed would have meant in sending someone he'd just met a virtual card. Taberah could envision a concept of "too warm and friendly, to the point of being unpleasant and unwelcome" if Aed led him to see it, but it was not a natural concept, much as "paying too many compliments, to the point that they are an annoyance that occupies too much time" would be an understandable but not natural concept to Aed — when Aed complimented a friend on her shirt, it never occurred to him to ask "Is she receiving so many compliments that this one would be unwelcome and repetitive?"
- Taberah was saddened to have made a *faux pas*, but bewildered as to what was wrong about what he did. (He initially wondered if she was upset because he had not greeted her with words first.)
- Taberah did not regard the breast as being a body part that especially symbolized sexuality, and would consider a woman not wearing a shirt to be less significant than one of the nurses in long miniskirts — to the extent that he found seeing body parts to be arousing, which was not much.
- If Taberah's reasoning on one line were translated into 21st century concepts, they would not so much

be "A man has a right to invade a woman's touch-space," so much as really a non-concept of "There is not enough of a personal touch-space for there to be an invasion necessary to a question of whether a man has a right to do so" — in many regards, like Aed regarded tapping shoulders.

- Taberah had a very different understanding of sexuality and touch; his line of acceptable touch was drawn so that it included a great deal of touchiness in contexts that Aed's culture did not even consider regarding as acceptable.

Taberah looked crestfallen when Aed told him not to touch women without asking permission; Aed revised this to, "Don't touch people in a way you haven't seen," knowing full well that this would lead the door open to further confusion. When Aed told Taberah in an authoritative tone of voice, "Don't kiss anyone you don't know well," and then thought and added, "Don't touch women's breasts," the hurt Taberah cried for a few minutes, and then asked, trembling, why he was not ever to give a woman a hug. Aed was puzzled as to why Taberah would make such a connection, and then when he saw the very straightforward reason why, it seemed that his explanation of why it was OK to touch a woman's breasts with his chest but not his hands caused more confusion than it alleviated.

Aed's head was spinning when he left the room. He was barely able to call his friend Noah and explain what had happened.

Dr. Pabst cursed himself for not coming himself, and had his graduate student teach the first day of class so he could try to provide the young man with band-aid coaching for at least one cultural land mine.

Taberah sat, shaking in sadness. He knew he would make mistakes, but to make such a big mistake so soon,

and then not be able to understand why he was wrong — this was the most confusing place he had ever been in. He closed his eyes and cried himself to sleep.

Immigration and Naturalization Services

Aed had barely slept, and when he returned early the next morning with Dr. Pabst, he found three men in dark suits standing near Taberah. "Good morning. I am Dr. Kinsella, a professor at the University. Who might you be?"

One of the men showed a badge and said, "Salisbury, Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization Services."

A chill ran down Aed's spine. "May I ask what your interest in this young man is?"

"This patient is an illegal alien. We are here to deport him to his country of origin."

If I thought, I could make enough publicity to hurt the INS badly if they deport this wayfarer, Aed thought, but even then felt a prompting of intuition, that is not the way. Still, he continued thinking, I could say, "I can't stop you from deporting this man, but I can see to it that you will have publicity that hurts you. Do you have authority to stop the deportation? No? Would you rather give me contact information for someone who has such authority now, or have me find out as I create publicity and then contact him and have you fired?" If I think further, I can probably think of something truly Machiavellian...

Even as he thought, he struggled, and Aed resolved to follow his conscience. "I'll be praying for you; I'm an interested party, and if you need to get in contact with me, the hospital has my net address." He decided it better not to give the INS agents a brain dump of the interactions; a description of a rocky adjustment to American culture was

sure to hurt the lad. Dr. Pabst didn't think there was any advantage to staying, so they left. Aed returned home and brooded.

Taberah was not well; he was mostly over his sickness, but the INS agents had pressured the hospital staff for a release as soon as possible. He left the hospital weak and slightly unsteady on his feet.

His first ride in a moving room, he had been too miserable to notice what was going on. Now, he was able to observe, see what he had to learn. The room was bouncing around, but not nearly as much as a galloping horse — even though it was moving faster. Through an arrangement of squares and a glass window he could see the city and countryside whizzing past; the speed was unpleasant, and it nauseated him. If he hadn't tried hard to control himself, he would probably have thrown up.

The two men were in the compartment with him, along with some men who looked vaguely like Saracens, only with redder skin, who seemed to be ill at ease. The two men looked — not exactly like soldiers; there was a noble bearing and heroic resolve to even commoners who took arms to war with a neighboring city-state, but these men looked more like mercenaries set to guard. He tried to speak with them, but they would not speak to him; even in the hospital, they had spoken with the hospital staff but never addressed him personally.

Two of the red-bronze Saracens began talking, and he found with delight that they spoke with a familiar accent. He could not recognize the language, but he felt that he could learn their language quickly.

He tried to see what else he could grasp — with his mind; there were some kind of thin shackles about his wrists, which set him ill at ease — was he being taken to the torturer's for whatever crime he had committed against Nathella? There was noise about, a strange alien noise; everything about his surroundings was alien. And

the bouncing room made it impossible to think.

Taberah realized he was ready to throw up, and he focused his attention on trying not to throw up.

Aed was sitting in his living room, staring sadly at the chess pieces on the table. Taberah's king had been knocked down, even as the pieces stood to checkmate Aed. Nathella walked into the room, leaned against Aed, and said, "Do you want to talk about Taberah? I've — adjusted; I can deal with his rambunctiousness."

Aed said, "The INS is taking him to be deported. I don't want to talk about it."

Nathella put her hand to her mouth, and then held Aed. "I'll be waiting in the kitchen, when you're ready to talk. I'll be praying," she said, and kissed him.

Aed sat and stared at the dusty bookshelf for a while, and then picked up Taberah's king and set it down. He stared, and realized that he had placed the king in check from one of his knights.

Aed looked at the king and said, "Did you have to leave before I knew you?"

The game gave him no reply. Aed went to the computer room, got in to the computer, and went to a dreamscape where colors and shapes shifted. He watched the forms flow. Maybe that could distract him. No; time dragged, and even the fantasia of images could not fascinate him.

An avatar appeared before him. He looked; the avatar said, "May I speak with you?"

Muttering, "This had better be good" under his breath, Aed said, "Who is it?"

"Salisbury, Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization Services."

Aed winced. He doubted he could go through an interview without hurting both himself and Taberah. "Yes?"

"We have had a number of translators try to talk to the

young man, and none of them is able to identify his language beyond something coming from the Romance family. We have run genetic tests on him, and France, Spain, and Romania among other countries have all said not only that he was not born there, but that they do not have any close relations on file. We are therefore unable to identify his country of origin, and are releasing him to your temporary protective custody. Are you at your home?"

Aed caught himself, and said, "Yes, we will be waiting."

After talking about a few technical details, Aed went upstairs. Someone had bumped the table, and tried to set the pieces back up where they were — Clancy? If he did, he was in a hurry; the pieces were not in a similar state. This looked a little different. Taberah's king was now in check from both the knight and a rook, but he had a few moves left to stave off checkmate. And they were not playing on a grid; there were uncertainties. Could Taberah escape?

Home Again

Taberah spent a few days in the hospital, regaining his strength, but the staff could see that he was eager to escape its confines. He avidly read the three Bibles, plus a Latin-English dictionary Aed had procured; Aed for his part was reading a book Dr. Pabst had given him on the art of crossing cultures, both for his own sake and to be able to explain things to Taberah. He had never kissed a man on the lips before — not even his own son — but when he saw how delighted Taberah was at Noah giving him a kiss, he set his mind to enter Taberah's world as much as possible. He slowly realized, with certainty, that his willingness to do one thing against his gut reactions was only a shadow of what Taberah was willing to, and had to be willing to, do. He was not surprised when Noah

explained to him that culture shock is one of the top causes of suicide, ranking with divorce.

Getting him home from the hospital bore an unexpected surprise. Taberah was happy to be walking out of the hospital, and then stiffened when he saw that they were walking towards Aed's car, a sleek hybrid between a minivan, a sport utility vehicle, and a station wagon. Noah said, "He's had more trauma in the past two weeks than most of us have in a year; is there any way to circumvent a car trip?"

Nathella looked at Aed for a moment, and said, "We can walk."

Aed winced. "It's eighty-five degrees, and we're eight miles from home. It will take two hours to walk home!"

Nathella said, "I'll walk with him. He has a lot of extra energy. Why don't you drive home and make lemonade?"

Aed said, "Um, you want to be alone with him, even in public? I know he hasn't given us his last surprise."

"I'd rather take whatever risks there are than force that child through a car ride. And trusting people can make them worthy of being trusted. Honey, did he ride in a car with the INS?"

"Uh... I'll walk, too, and we can get the car later."

Noah said, "If you give me your keys, I'll get my son, and we can drop your car off at your house."

Three hours later, the trio arrived at home, hot, sweaty, tired, and parched. They made a gallon of lemonade, and then another; it took two and a half gallons of lemonade to fill them all. Aed expected a conversation of some sort, but Taberah was happy to sit in a chair and smile and fall asleep.

Aed expected it would be an interesting endeavor to teach Taberah to take a shower.

Logical Rocks

Taberah read avidly; he wished to derive as much benefit from the four books he had been lent (*four!* — the *Vulgate Versio*, the *Revised New American Standard Bible*, *The New Message: Complete Text, Revised*, and *Harrah's New College Latin and English Dictionary, Revised*) before they had to be returned to the patron who owned them. He very much wished to meet the man. It was about a week before he began to see that his hosts wanted him to talk with them from time to time — mostly out good manners; he had never been in the possession of even two books at the same time, and never encouraged to read outside! — and another week before Aed sat down with him to try to explain to him that there was life outside of books.

Then Taberah became a fount of unending questions, questions as startling as those Clancy and Fiona had asked as a child — and yet questions that showed the intellect of a sharp adult. They were, nine times out of ten, questions about things he would never think about, and questions he had no ready answer for. At times Aed thought it would have been easier to answer, "Why do things look smaller when they are farther away?"

One day, Aed was sitting in his chair and thinking about how quickly his children were growing up — and he was beginning to think of Taberah as a child, or a foster child at least — and realizing that things had been silent for too long. This was longer than the silence after Taberah had realized that a screwdriver can unscrew the screws that were holding the blender together...

"Aed!"

"Yes, Taberah, what is it?"

"Aed, what is this?"

The sound of his voice was coming from a specific room, it was coming from —

Oh, no! Aed thought. *Anything but that. I am ready to explain anything but—* but his feet had carried him to the room Taberah was in.

"Aed, what is this?" Taberah repeated.

A dozen replies flitted through his mind: a moving picture, something to think with, a hobbyist's delight, a shortcut in talking with people —

"This is a rock that can do logic."

"What?"

"This is a rock that can do arithmetic and logic very, very quickly."

Taberah said, confused, "How numbers they and logic they make a picture move?"

Aed sighed. "Taberah, can I answer another question? This one's awfully hard to explain."

Taberah slowly said, "Yes. What question to answer?" But his eyes betrayed him.

Aed thought, and asked, "Do you know that clock in the living room?"

Taberah said, "Yes. Why have you a clock? And not you use it to pray? It rings bells, but I not you see not pray."

Aed said, "One question at a time, please. Do you know what it has inside?"

"I have seen opened one clock."

If he'd opened the grandfather clock, he had put it back in working order. Aed respected the lad's abilities, but this seemed too much. Or had he opened another clock? "What did you see inside, child?"

"Springs rods gears moving *beautiful!*" Taberah said, his eyes glowing with excitement.

"Do you know how clocks work?"

Taberah said, "Yes," followed shortly by, "No. What?"

Aed moved his forearms like the hands of a clock.

"Know why hands turn?" he said.

"Yes! Fixed hands, stopped turning."

Aed said, "You can do many things with gears and

pulleys. You can store numbers, add them, make decisions: if this rod is here, turn. A computer is like that, only it uses things besides gears. It uses pictures on tiny rocks. And it is very fast."

Taberah looked at Aed, and then looked at the computer screen. He was trying to believe him, but just couldn't see a connection.

Aed said, "See this wall? Look very closely. There are arranged pieces of color. They are called *pixels*. Do you see them?"

Taberah squinted, and touched the surface. "I see."

Aed said, "The computer uses numbers and rules to decide what color to make each pixel. All of them together make a picture."

Taberah closed his eyes in concentration. He moved his hands, sorting out concepts. Then —

"Why is the picture moving?"

"Because the computer is making many different pictures, one after another, and together they look like they're moving. The moving picture is made up of still pictures like the still pictures are made up of pixels."

Taberah stared at a small patch of the wall as colors flowed. His face met with a dawning comprehension. Then he said, "The computer very, very intelligent! I want talk with computer."

Aed shook his head. "You can't, son."

"Why not?"

"The computer is not intelligent."

"But you said it can do logic!"

"It can do logic, but it's not intelligent."

Taberah ran out of the room, and returned holding the Latin-English dictionary. He flipped through several the entries, several times, and then looked at Aed in puzzlement. "I don't understand."

Aed said, "Can you write?"

Taberah said, "I can write Latin. I not know not the script of your books."

Aed said, "One moment." He returned, holding a notebook and a pencil.

"Write down, with logical rules, how to talk in a conversation. In your language," he said.

Taberah's jaw dropped in shock. "Write *that* on paper?" Taberah would as soon scratch the surface of a painting as write something that unimportant on precious paper.

Aed scratched his head. He didn't see what could possibly be so offensive about an innocuous attempt to write rules. "Ok, don't write that. But can you think of rules for a conversation?"

Taberah began to translate a Quixotic code of etiquette.

"No, not those rules. Logical rules."

Taberah looked frustrated. "But polite is reasonable!"

"Explain to me how to talk using only if-then-else and while-this-is-true rules, and words you decide ahead of time."

Taberah's gaze bore into him. Then, "I can't. That isn't how I talk."

"That isn't how anybody talks. You can't talk that way. But that's the only way a computer can work. Computers can't think."

"Then how create beautiful moving picture?"

"Some people spent a lot of time thinking of clever ways to explain how, using only math and logic. There are a lot of things we can do, but a lot of things we can't do. We have an old phrase, 'silver bullet', which refers to a way to make everything easy with computers and fix all problems. The term is kind of a joke; calling something a silver bullet is a way of saying that it's supposed to do something impossible. And the same thing has happened with the effort to make computers think — it's called artificial intelligence, and people have learned a lot from trying to do it, but they haven't succeeded. A very great mind named Alan Turing proposed the Turing Test: a

computer is intelligent if you can't tell it from a human when you talk with it. No computer has been able to make it."

Taberah looked irritated, flipped through memories of conversations, and said, disgustedly, "Bad reason! False reason!"

"What, Taberah?"

"Is bad think. What human is and what human talks like is much different thing. If logic is not whole human reason, talk is not whole human reason." He flipped through the book, and read out, "Confusion, accident, substance." He closed the dictionary. "Is accident confused with substance. And is possible cheat Turing Test."

"Cheat on the Turing Test? How? How can you talk like a human without understanding human reason?"

Taberah closed his eyes, and said, "Moving picture? How? How can you move like world without understanding world?"

Aed thought for a moment, and said, "I see how you can think that. But decades of attempts have failed to produce anything that can even cheat on the Turing Test. Most people don't try."

Taberah looked in the book. "Fifty attempts are not many."

Aed said, "Not fifty. Over fifty years' worth."

"Why number attempts in years? Is not sense."

It took a good two hours more conversation to answer all the questions Taberah came up with, and afterwards Aed padded off to his bedroom, exhausted, but at least happy to have gotten *that* conversation out of the way. He drifted off to sleep in blissful happiness that tomorrow was Saturday, and he could sleep in until noon.

At 10:00 he was awakened by a voice calling, "Aed! Aed! How to use computer?"

Thinking About Logical Rocks

"Taberah, can I please get a couple of hours' sleep? This is Saturday, and I'd like to sleep in."

Taberah was puzzled as to why one should sleep in on a particular day, but thought this a poor time to ask. "Okay!" he said, and went to try to memorize parts of the dictionary. He was beginning to feel accustomed to the books — their size, their print, their light weight, their smooth sides — at least, although he was still puzzled about why someone had bothered to make a book for the sole purpose of keeping track of words. Were there not scholars who could be asked about these things?

Aed woke up some time later, and looked at the clock. It was 13:00. Taberah had given him a fair amount of time. He lay in bed, ruminating about how to explain how to use a computer. Taberah knew enough of how a computer worked — explaining memory and parallel computing should not be that much harder — but how to explain how to use it?

Space would be the first major obstacle to overcome. The computer gave a virtual reality environment, with the walls of a room as screens; when you put on a pair of goggles, it was as if the walls were transparent and you could see through them to the world, as if the walls were only a glass box. But space behaved differently than in the real world. Aed thought for a moment about the mathematical abstractions by which the space worked — the classic introduction described taking a tessellation of cubes, and then cutting them apart and connecting the sides arbitrarily. You could take two windows of a bedroom, and attach them so that looking out the North window gave a view as if you were looking in the East window, and vice versa. It was fantastic and dreamlike; it

allowed portals between different areas of space, so that there were no difficulties in taking a room in Chicago and making a doorway open out of a subway closet in Paris. Aed remembered the first time he played a game with a labyrinth connected in this manner; he had been awed when he walked around a pillar again and again and never came to the same place twice.

Space might be the first obstacle, but it wouldn't be the only obstacle. How could he describe the richness of the environment? And how could he describe its weak points?

Aed thought over the many things that contributed to the richness of the environment. There were:

- Jump points. These were like travel locations, but with all manner of portals to interesting places. One was a long hallway full of doors, through which a person could step into other areas. Another was a library full of books which, when opened, would expand into other places. (How would he explain to Taberah that objects were putty-like, able to expand and contract, that you could push a button and have a menu pop out?) Another still was a slide show, where you could jump into the show at any point and be where it portrayed. There were others; there was not yet a standard.
- Programming workshops. Programming constructs behaved like any other object; one could assemble them as objects, algorithms, constructs, patterns. It was also possible to take programmable objects and pull off the skin to reveal the structure underneath, and tinker with it. It had taken Aed a long time to get used to this interface — it was a bigger transition even than moving from text-based languages to graphical development and intentional programming — but even then he objectively

realized that it was a simpler environment to use, and now it was second nature. Aed realized another thing to explain to Taberah — that objects were not permanent; they could be modified, extended, simplified, cloned at will, and the many implications — there was nothing that had the status of gold, of being something valuable because it was scarce. Taberah had enough difficulty understanding that paper was cheap; what would he make of this?

- Virtual brothels. Aed winced at the time Taberah would stumble on one of these; the freedom to avoid porn was hard to come by; it was like avoiding advertisements when he was growing up. There were perennial attempts made to curb porn, but — even when it was widely acknowledged fact that the vast increase in rape since the web's second successor appeared was due to sexual addicts who got their start online, and then ravaged real women because porn could only go so far — they always fell on the rocks of a freedom of speech argument. Aed grumpily muttered to himself that household appliances were in some sense sculpture, in that their designs involved commercial artists, but the banner of freedom of expression did not make for any exemptions from environmental regulations in manufacture; it was recognized for the commercial product that it was. Why wasn't porn recognized as a commercial product? Had the news ever carried a report of a pornographer who lost business because of making an artistic statement that was less arousing? Had there ever been a site where the valerie was glaring in hate at the voyeur? It seemed a funny form of expression that could only express itself in ways that coincided with a calculated commercial product. But the courts had argued that

brothels popping up everywhere you wanted them and everywhere you didn't want them was sacrosanct free speech, and 'censorship' (that pejorative term) was tantamount to violating the Constitution. Well, not exactly. The phrase, "The illegal we can do right away, the unconstitutional takes a little longer," was obsolete, because the Constitution was a dead letter. In *Roe v. Wade* in 1974, the Court had made a strained argument finding an unnamed right to privacy to make the question of an unborn child's right to life irrelevant, skirting even the issue of whether that entity was a person or a part of another person. When the decision was reviewed in the late 1990s, the ruling recalcitrantly acknowledged that the 1974 ruling was wrong, but said that it would be wrong to take away the sexual freedom that young people had gotten used to. In *Purdie v. Braverman* in 2024, fifty years after *Roe v. Wade* to the day, the courts had ruled infanticide legal, "up to a reasonable age", and specified neither what a reasonable age was, nor even a contorted lip service argument as to why the Constitution justified infanticide — perhaps because they could find none. It had not surprised Aed two years later when the courts legalized euthanasia, with only the vaguest and most confusing guidelines as to when it was permissible and when consent was even necessary — he shuddered when he remembered the definition of implied consent. Now, it was 2034, and the date had passed when Aed was no longer surprised by anything the courts did. He — Aed suddenly realized that he was not thinking about computers. He tried to focus his thoughts — what else after brothels?

- Society for Creative Anachronism re-enactment

arenas. These places set up an environment to resemble that of a time and date in the past, and then people attempted to live and interact as people of that era and place. Even the avatars looked like people from those times — avatars were another thing to explain to Taberah. An avatar was the moving image which represented a person in the world — like the piece that represented a king in a game of chess. The image was completely customizable and configurable, with the effect that many people looked like a supermodel, although it was not uncommon to encounter unicorns, dragons, mermaids, cybernetic organisms, anthropomorphic robots... but never a person who was fat or ugly. Human-like robots had never materialized, any more than the anti-gravity devices imagined of old; the development of technology had shifted direction towards a primary focus on information technology, but this and all manner of fantasy appeared in the virtual worlds. Aed reflected that there was a good sense and a bad sense to the word 'fantasy', and both of them were amply represented in the virtual worlds.

- Bedrooms. A bedroom was a place with one person's very personal touch; there were elements there that would never surface in an institutionalized setting. There were not exactly bedrooms *per se*, so much as creatively developed spaces that had personal sharing. Because it was possible to let someone in a room without being able to easily do damage, you could go and visit people's bedrooms. There were quite a lot of interesting sites to see.
- Clubhouses. If a bedroom expressed the spirit of a person, a clubhouse expressed the spirit of a group

of people. These had both function and decoration to them, and almost always had something of a personal touch.

- Museums. There were museums of almost every sort to visit. Because a painting could be in more than one place, and it was not nearly as expensive to build them, there was a much more vast diversity of museums, many which were much more specialized. The low expense of creation made for a much greater diversity, with many more excellent things available, but also a much lower average quality. Sturgeon's law applied *a fortiori*: "90% of everything is crap."
- Special museums which had disassemblable and scalable models of human and animal bodies and machines. Aed's children had not dissected animals in school; they went into museums where it was possible to strip off skin, strip off muscle, double the size, half the size, make everything but the skeletal and nervous systems translucent...
- Role play arena. In the 20th century, the basic unit of time-consciousness was the decade; now it was the semi-decade, or semi. Role play was one of the trends that was in this semi, and there were virtual worlds for all kinds of different role playing games.
- Dreamscapes. In these places, there were a number of momentary images, represented by blocks something like the Capsella toys Aed had played with as a child. One put them together in a particular way, and then set the composed dreamscape in his pack. Then nothing happened, until you hadn't done anything with the computer

for a while. The computer would then begin "dreaming" — start a random walk that began with one block, and shift, images flowing, to a neighbor, and then a neighbor's neighbor... Aed had seen some truly beautiful artwork that way.

Aed wondered, "What time is it?" Then he looked at the clock. 15:00. Yikes! He got up, got dressed, and looked for Taberah.

Taberah was reading the bilingual dictionary with rapt concentration.

Using Logical Rocks

Aed walked over to the computer room, grabbing two pair of goggles. He showed Taberah how to put one of them on, and then said, "Sit down and wait here for a moment."

In a few minutes, an avatar appeared before Taberah and said, "Take my hand." Taberah reached for it and grabbed, but felt nothing. He was confused. The scene changed, and he saw that he was inside a sunny field, with forest to the east.

Taberah asked the avatar, "Who are you?"

The avatar said, "I am Aed."

Taberah said, "But you not resemble not Aed. You look — your clothes are different, and skin different, and —"

Aed said, "Never mind that. Do you see my hands?"

Taberah said, "Yes."

Aed said, "Move your hands like mine."

Taberah did, and found himself moving rapidly through space. His stomach lurched; he put his hands over his eyes.

Aed said, "Take your hands off your eyes, son."

Taberah did, and saw he was a good fifty hands off of the ground. He braced himself for the fall, and put his

hands over his eyes again.

Aed thought for a moment, and said, "We're going to try something different. It takes a little while to get used to moving about, but you'll learn. In the mean time, I'll let you see through my eyes."

Instantly the perspective changed. Taberah looked down, and saw a pair of hands pull a book-shaped object from a pocket, with a picture on front. The hands pulled on the book and expanded it, then pressed buttons, flipping through pictures. Taberah saw a picture of a stag, and said, "Ooh!"

The picture expanded, and they fell through it. They were in a forest glade; a stag was looking at them curiously.

Then Taberah saw himself walking rapidly to a door with a picture over it; he said, "Too much of fastness!" and the pace slowed. He was through, to a dark forest with unfamiliar plants, and a large snake slithering towards them. Afraid, he said, "Snake!" and saw himself walking towards another door with another picture, and he looked around. The landscape was alien; it was rough terrain covered completely by snow, and he saw fat black and white birds walking around, and some big black fish-like animals on the ice.

Taberah looked intently at all that was around him; it was strange, but none of the animals began to threaten him. After a few minutes, he said, "I have sick of sea." He wasn't feeling very good.

There was moment of nothing happening, then a jar of perspective, and then stillness. Taberah closed his eyes to shut out the view. Then he heard Aed calling, and touching his shoulder. He was holding a tiny cup of the thinnest glass, with something that looked like wine. "Drink," he said.

Taberah drank it, and the nausea began to go away. Had he been given a magic potion? He was confused, but pushed this question to the back of his mind. He wasn't

sure yet what was magic in this land and what wasn't — that seemed a confusing question here, and the people treated the moving rooms as something as believable as a horse! Aed asked him to step out and sit on the sofa.

Aed was trying to think of how to explain the way space worked. He was expecting a question about why there was a door, all by itself, in the jungle, and the moment you stepped through it, you were in Antarctica. When Taberah remained silent, he asked, "Taberah, was there anything you found confusing about that world?"

"Yes, movement."

"Ok. Anything else?"

"Yes, doors."

Aed went into a long and involved attempted explanation of how different parts of space were connected, and saw the confusion on Taberah's face growing with each step. Finally, he said, "Taberah, why are you confused?"

"What is it that the pictures?"

"Huh?"

"Pictures on doors. Why?"

Aed said, "I don't understand. Could you rephrase that?"

"Pictures. Doors. Top."

Aed said, "One moment," and went over to the computer to look at one of the doors. "Aah," he said, returning. "Those are advertisements."

"What is advertisement?"

"An advertisement is a message from a company telling a customer about one of its products."

"I not understand not. For what is it that advertisement needed? Is it that townspeople not tell not where merchant is?"

Aed thought for a moment, and said, "Advertisements exist to stimulate sales, to help a company sell things to people that otherwise wouldn't buy them."

Taberah looked even more confused, thought for a

moment about wording and grammar, and said, "And which of the seven deadly sins is it that this custom embodies?"

In the ensuing discussion, Aed slowly realized that Taberah had not been troubled by the nature of space. He had been able to accept as perfectly natural a portal between two different regions of space, and Aed wondered what kind of conception of space his culture had to let him accept that at least quite placidly. The first time he had entered that kind of virtual environment, Aed had been thrown off by the conception of space. And he had felt nauseated, his head spinning after — suddenly he found Taberah's "sick of sea" more understandable. And he began to see something that he had not thought about, not for a while: that advertisement does not exist for the customer's benefit, but for the company's benefit, so that it can get more money out of the customer; this practice clearly ran contrary to Taberah's way of thinking, and at the end of the discussion, Aed walked away, for once, with his head not spinning, and thinking not only that Taberah's way of thinking was understandable, but that he might have a point.

A New Friend

The next few days saw animated discussions, a lot of reading on Taberah's part, and a few more minutes using the computer — at Aed's urging; Taberah wanted nothing more to do with it.

Taberah was sitting on the ground outside, drinking a glass of nice, warm water, when he saw a large, black, almost grown Newfoundland puppy come wandering by. And gulped. Such a beast would be a prime candidate for a dog race.

Dog races, in his homeland, occurred when people would gather together stray dogs, tie metal pots to their

tails, and then let the dogs go. The dogs would start to walk, then hear the sound of the pots scraping against the stones of the road, get scared, and start running to get away from the noise. When the noise grew louder, the terrified dogs would run, and run, and run, and run — until they dropped dead from exhaustion. The winner was the boy whose dog ran the farthest before dying.

Taberah hated the dog races with a passion. They made him sick; after his protestations, his lord issued a rule that no dog races were to be held while Taberah was around, but that was the best that had happened. He was humored at best; nobody else save Grizelda shared his objections to the races. Most people were so blazé that they didn't see what the big deal was in the first place. Yes, it was his homeland, but it wasn't his homeland. It was the place he was from, and the place where he had spent most of his life, but he wasn't at home there. In a way, he could adjust to almost any place — was adjusting to the kingdom he was in now (what was it called, and who was its king?) — but in a way he was never at home. There was always something about him that didn't fit. Why was he the only one who cared about dogs? Francis of Assisi was venerated, but the people who venerated him did not imitate his treatment of animals. Well, he could try to save at least one dog from the races —

Hastily setting down his glass, Taberah sprinted at full speed after the dog, which ran away from him, barking. He continued chasing the dog for a full hour, his toughened feet pounding on the asphalt until they were sore, until he dropped in exhaustion, panting and thirsting. It wasn't until he stopped that he realized the exquisite pain in his feet. He looked down, and realized his feet were cut. Where was he? The buildings looked different; the outside looked more like buildings than outside. He was by a room of sorts with two walls missing, but with a ceiling. It was raining; he crawled over to a puddle, and began to lap at it.

He looked up, and saw the dog drinking from the

other side of the puddle. It came over and sniffed at him; Taberah hugged and kissed it. Beginning to feel chilled, Taberah crawled under the shelter, holding the Newfoundland next to him. He could not get to sleep, both because of all the moving rooms passing by, and because he had plenty to think about.

Taberah felt happy and comfortable as he had not felt in a long time. The wealth he had been in was strange to him; it did not seem real. Out, even in a strange, semi-open place (why would someone build two walls and a roof of a room, and then make the inside part of a thoroughfare?), finally next to another warm body (even if only a dog's), Taberah felt happy. He settled into a slumber, thanking God for bringing him to a place that felt a little home-like.

Midnight Oil

Aed drove around, trying to see if he could find where Taberah had gone. Fiona had run and told him that had seen a dog and bolted; as he drove around, he called the police and summarized what had happened. The dispatcher explained that he could not be classified a missing person until he had been gone for twenty-four hours; that was twenty-four hours in which to brood. The family looked until three in the morning, and then went home because both Aed and Nathella were too tired to continue driving.

At four in the morning he was awakened by a call. Groggy, Aed turned on the videophone and said, "Yes?"

A police officer in a car sent a still shot and said, "Officer Shing, State Sheriff. Is this the man?"

"We found him sleeping under a bridge, along with a dog he refuses to part with. He had lacerations to the soles of his feet; the EMT thinks he ran barefoot over broken glass. We have taken him to Mercy Memorial Hospital; he

is presently in the emergency room, waiting for treatment."

Aed said, "Thank you. Why did you take him to Mercy? I don't understand that. Mercy is almost fifty miles away from here."

Shing replied, "Mercy is the closest hospital to where we found him. Is there anything else we can help you out with?"

Aed thought for a moment, and said, "Not now, but I might call you if I think of something else. I'm going to grab a few coffee beans, and then go to pick him up. Is there anything else I need to know?"

The officer said, "No, but you might want to take him shopping for some clothing and shoes. He's wearing a ragged getup, and — the hospital will be able to tell you about his special needs to heal from the lacerations."

Aed said, "Thanks. Over and out."

Nathella rolled over and said, "You weren't thinking of getting him without bringing me, were you, honey?"

Aed said, "Get dressed, and come along. I'll get the coffee beans."

Two voices from below said, "Me, too!"

The emergency room was fairly quiet; doctors were removing glass shards from Taberah's foot and stitching up the cuts. Taberah looked confused; there was something in his eyes that even Nathella didn't understand. He was under local rather than general anaesthesia, but he still started nodding off to sleep.

He received some soft "shoes" made of bandages, and the doctor told Aed to keep his feet bandaged and give him high top athletic shoes a couple of sizes too large. When it was time to go, everybody climbed in to their van, the dog brought along as well. Aed tried to ask why this attachment to a dog (it belonged to a neighbor, and periodically ran loose), but could find out nothing beyond that Taberah did not want it to be raced. Aed let that be; he wanted to get back to sleep, and wait until tomorrow to

tackle the puzzles. Taberah agreed not to leave the house without having someone else along, and seemed relieved to learn that this kingdom didn't race that type of dog. He was even happier to find out that the dog belonged to someone nearby, and would be taken care of; he wanted to meet the neighbor the next day. "Very well," Aed said, "but we need to get some sleep first." This time, Taberah joined everybody else in sleeping in until the afternoon.

I Can't Believe...

Nathella and Fiona were working in the kitchen; good smells came upstairs. The Kinsellas (and Taberah) settled down for a late dinner, a family complete, such as it were.

They sat in silence around the table; there was a simple joy in everyone — or almost everyone. After Dr. Kinsella said grace and the food was passed around the table, Taberah broke the silence by saying, "Nathella, would you pass the *I Can't Believe It's Not Better?*"

Nathella smiled and passed the spread, and made a mental note to buy butter the next time she went shopping. As she passed it, she saw something in Taberah's face. "Taberah, are you homesick?"

Taberah looked at her. "What is 'homesick'?"

Nathella thought for a moment and said, "Homesick is when you aren't comfortable in one place, and you miss the place that is your home."

"I don't know if I'm homesick. Maybe. Yes. No. I don't know if I have a home; maybe if I understood the word better..." His voice trailed off, but the others remained silent. "It's just a bunch of little things, like strange foods and too soft bread without any rocks and no touching, not even wrestling, and... Or maybe that's not a little thing." He stared at his food.

Clancy said, "C'mon out back dinner. We can roughhouse in the back. Fiona and I wrestle a lot, only not

recently. We've been busy with you, and we didn't know you liked to horse around. Fiona's in the house to be picked on," Fiona made a face at him, "and I'll flip you around. I would pin you, but you need to be soft on your feet."

Taberah's face brightened.

Nathella said, "Is there anything we can do that will bring you a little piece of home?"

Taberah hesitated, and then said, "Have you no wine in this country?"

Nathella smiled gently and looked at him. "Yes, we do, but not in this house. I'm an alcoholic."

Taberah asked, "What's an alcoholic?"

Nathella said, "Do you know the word 'drunkard'?"

Taberah said, "You're not a drunkard! I haven't seen you drunk. I haven't even seen you drink wine."

Nathella said, "Not now, but once my life was given over to alcohol. Escaping alcohol was the hardest thing I ever did, and if I start to drink, I won't be able to control it. It would control me. So I can't have alcohol in the house."

Taberah looked disappointed. He said, "Then it is good of you not to drink."

Nathella said, "Thank you, Taberah. Maybe sometime when I'm visiting with one of my friends, Aed will buy a small bottle of wine for you two to have. He likes a good drink, and he will have a beer when he's out with his friends. But he doesn't drink in the house. He doesn't want to tempt me."

Taberah smiled. He was warmed with a patient assurance that he would have wine, and was in no particular hurry. He looked around, and then his gaze settled on Fiona. "Why are you homesick, Fiona?"

Fiona smiled, and said, "I'm not homesick, at least not for a place. I wish it were Christmas, with the family and gifts and wassail and — ooh! the music. I miss the music."

Taberah said, "What kind of music?"

Fiona said, "One is, O come, O come Emmanuel. Do

you know it?"

Taberah thought for a moment, and then thought a little more, and said, "Could you sing it for me?"

Fiona sang, in her thick countertenor,

O come, O come, Emmanuel
 And ransom captive Israel
 That mourns in lowly exile here
 Until the Son of God appear.

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
 Shall come to thee, O Israel.

Taberah said, "I think I know it. Let me sing it as I know it." He took a sip of milk, and then stood up on the chair, and began to sing:

*Veni, veni Emmanuel!
 Captivum solve Israel!
 Qui gemit in exsilio,
 Privatus Dei Filio.*

*Gaude, gaude, Emmanuel
 Nascetur pro te, Israel.*

*Veni, o Sapientia,
 Quae hic disponis omnia,
 Veni, viam prudentiae
 Ut doceas et gloriae.*

*Gaude, gaude, Emmanuel
 Nascetur pro te, Israel.*

*Veni, veni Adonai!
 Qui populo in Sinai
 Legem dedisti vertice,
 In Majestate gloriae.*

*Gaude, gaude, Emmanuel
Nascetur pro te, Israel.*

*Veni, o Jesse virgula,
Ex hostis tuos ungula,
De specu tuos tartari
Educ et antro barathri.*

*Gaude, gaude, Emmanuel
Nascetur pro te, Israel.*

*Veni, Clavis Davidica,
Regna reclude caelica,
Fac iter tutum superum,
Et claude vias inferum.*

*Gaude, gaude, Emmanuel
Nascetur pro te, Israel.*

*Veni, veni o Oriens!
Solare nos adveniens,
Noctis depelle nebulas,
Dirasque noctis tenebras.*

*Gaude, gaude, Emmanuel
Nascetur pro te, Israel.*

*Veni, veni, Rex gentium,
veni, Redemptor omnium,
Ut salvas tuos famulos
Peccati sibi conscios.*

*Gaude, gaude, Emmanuel
Nascetur pro te, Israel.*

Taberah sat down and was very still. The room was

very still — one could hear a pin drop. His singing voice was a tenor, but there was nothing flimsy about it; it was rich and powerful, like silver, like something between a stream and a waterfall, and for the moment he had looked like a bard. It was hard to believe that such a mighty voice, filled with silent strength, could come from such a tiny body — and yet, somehow, after that song, Taberah did not again look tiny to the Kinsellas. Nothing about his physical appearance was changed, but none the less the way he looked to them was different.

Aed finally broke the silence by saying, "I never knew you could sing like that, Taberah, and I should very much like to have you over for Christmas. Is there any way I can thank you for that song?"

Taberah said, "Over for Christmas? All twelve days?"

Aed thought. School resumed classes from winter break on the third of January; getting permission to take time off through the seventh would involve some major administrative headaches. "All twelve days," he said. "I'll make sure of it."

Taberah said, "Then what I would most like for my song is to go out and wrestle."

Clancy bolted out of his chair and had Taberah in a fireman's carry before anyone else knew what was going on; Taberah was out of Clancy's grip and bolting out the door before Clancy knew what was going on. It wasn't until later that Aed wondered how he could run with healing, stitched lacerations in his foot; soon they were all outside, a crazy, happy, moving, squirming bundle of arms and legs with grass stains on its shirts. And Taberah was happy, happy as he could ever remember being.

It was only a few minutes before they were all sitting and panting; Taberah did not understand why they wanted to rest so soon, or why they didn't give him more resistance in the fray, but he basked in the afterglow. The memory of that moment would be a treasure to him as long as he walked the paths of the earth.

A Guided Venture

Nathella said, "We need to give him some of Clancy's old clothes so he's decent, and then take him to one of the old-fashioned clothing stores — he won't be able to try stuff on online. Clancy, would you come with to help him with the clothing?"

They arrived at the store, and Nathella said, "Here we are, to get some clothing. You can take anything in the store."

Taberah looked, and bright colors caught his eye. He went over and started to stare at a rack of shirts.

"Not there," Nathella said. "Those are children's clothing."

Taberah thought it strange that there should be special clothing for children, but said, "I am a child. You're a child. Clancy's a child. Want children's clothing."

Nathella, who had felt almost guilty about her age since her thirtieth birthday, said, "That's sweet, honey, but I am not a child. Neither are you. And Clancy's not really a child any more."

("Thanks, Mom!")

("Shut up, dear.")

Taberah looked puzzled. "Are you not born of a woman?" he asked.

Nathella said, "Uh, of course I — ooh, I see. Taberah, we use the word 'child' to mean someone who's younger than Clancy, and 'adult' to mean someone who's older than Clancy. Clancy's — in between."

("Thanks, Mom!")

("Shut up, dear.")

Nathella continued. "And children wear different clothing than adults."

Taberah said, "Why?"

"Because children are different from adults."

"Why?"

"Have you seen a tadpole?"

"Yes."

"Have you seen a frog?"

"Yes."

"Do you know that tadpoles turn into frogs?"

"Yes."

"But tadpoles and frogs are different, right?"

"Yes."

"Children and adults are different in the same way, right?"

"How?"

Nathella did not reply to the question. Clancy, in a particularly mischievous mood, would be able to ask a series of questions like that while keeping a perfectly straight face, and he often managed to catch his father. But she could sense a complete honesty in Taberah's questions; they were as honest as a child's. And as unending. She was beginning to realize that he did not perceive anything approaching a sharp demarcation between childhood and adulthood. "Come over to this section. I want you to pick out a shirt from one of these racks, and a pair of pants from one of these racks."

By the second or third try, Taberah had picked out clothing that would fit him; it seemed a bit loud to her, but she did not want to argue with that. He went into a fitting room, and, with Clancy's help, put the pants on properly and the shirt on backwards. He came out, and said, "I like it. Let's pay for it."

Nathella said, "Hold on, Taberah. I want to pick up a week's worth of clothing."

Taberah said, "This clothing will last for a week, more."

Nathella said, "I want to buy you enough clothing so that you can wear different clothing each day and not have to wear the same clothing for a week."

Taberah's jaw dropped. He had a vague realization that the others' clothing looked different over time, and he

knew that some of the people of his home town were wealthy enough to have two sets of clothing — one for summer and one for winter. He had not, in his greediest dreams, ever wanted to wear different clothing each day. He asked, "Why?"

The trio arrived at home, carrying a large bagful of clothing. Aed asked, "Hi, guys! How was the shopping?"

Clancy asked, "Would somebody stop the room, please? I'd like to get off."

I Envy...

Taberah asked Aed, "What is your trade?"

Aed recalled a moment in graduate school where one of his colleagues had said, "I envy people in nuclear physics. They can tell other people what they do for a living." He said, "I teach — do you know logic?"

Taberah said, "Yes."

Aed asked, "Have you done geometry?"

Taberah said, "Yes."

Aed said, "What I do is like geometry and logic; logic and geometry are examples of it."

Taberah said, "Give me an example."

Aed thought of the three rules of a metric space, then thought how little those rules illuminated what he was thinking — as little as a list of chess rules gave any obvious feel for deep strategy. Aed had learned long ago that it was possible to understand the rules of a game completely without having the foggiest idea what its strategy was like — human understanding never included instant sight into logical depths, any more than good eyes enabled you to see infinite detail despite distance and twilight! In the classroom at the university, Aed would have to bow to custom and labor over the basic rules, but Taberah was not a student at school, and — "I am studying collections of objects where you can tell how far apart two objects

are."

"Like geometry!" Taberah said.

"Yes, but it includes many things that do not have the structure of a space. Like words. 'Man' is close to 'woman', farther from 'dog', farther from 'tree', and farther still from 'rock', and very far from words like 'move'.

Taberah said, "Yes! That's how to cheat on Turing test!"

Aed winced and said, "Uh, how?"

Taberah paced the room in thought. "Can computers record conversations?"

"There are many, many conversations on record. I can download a collection of them now, if you wish."

"Well, first find out how to measure the distance between two words," Taberah said.

Aed nodded. The artificial intelligence literature had found a way to map the distance between words by measuring frequencies of words occurring before and after them in a histogram.

"Then have something that will look through conversations, matching up by words and grammar, and return the closest match!"

Aed looked at Taberah hard, and then said, "Son, how'd you like to learn how to program?"

Hacking Away

Aed led Taberah into the computer, and then left him; Aed's avatar soon appeared nearby. "Put your hand on that picture on the wall," Aed said, and when Taberah reached out, he was in a large room, with alien artifacts on the walls and shelves.

Aed flew through the room, touching partially assembled objects; they vanished, leaving an open space to work in. "The first thing to do," he said, "is to make a Turing test room. Touch that bin over there."

Taberah touched it; it grew to fill half the room, and then its sides vanished. "See that red thing? Take it out of the bin, and then touch the button on the bottom of the bin; it will shrink back to its normal size. That is a room object; say 'Options.' See that popup menu? That's the thing that looks like a sheet of paper. Turn on the one that says 'Maximum occupants'; set the number to three. Then press the 'recording' button. I'll come back and record messages for the three users; the first user is the tester, and the second and third users are trying to convince the tester that they're human. Initially they'll both be human; later, one will be an avatar for our program. Pick up a dialogue slate; say, 'Record: Which user do you think is human? Now touch choice one, and say: Contestant one. Choice two: Contestant two. Choice three: Can't tell.' Ok; expand the room, and place the dialogue levitating in the center, in front of the tester's door. Wait, put three doors on for the user to enter. Oh, that looks funny because you have a bug. You have the buttons switched. You should —"

After the room was completed, Aed summoned the chancellor of the university and asked him to make an announcement of a Turing game. He recorded the announcement, and, after the chancellor disappeared, said, "This will give us some time to work out the artificial intelligence decoy. If you give me a moment, I will find the metric for words..."

It took Aed and Taberah a long time to get to sleep that night; it took them a long time to stop tinkering, but even after that, they were filled with an excitement of discovery, of uncertainty, asking, "Could this be? Have we really discovered what we think?" Their excitement was raised in the morning when Nathella said, "Why don't we go downtown this evening for a Tridentine mass? Taberah, it's in Latin; I think you'll enjoy it."

Taberah was not sure why the Kinsellas went to mass every week; it had not been any special holiday, so far as he could tell, and he could never get out of them a straight

answer as to why they went to mass when there was no particular reason to do so. But now he was in such high spirits that he wanted to go.

Another Era

Nathella walked in to the massive church. It was plain, and all was still. As the liturgy began, the stillness was not broken; the majestic Latin spoken by those up front only augmented the silence. Each step was majestic; she lost herself in its familiar details.

After the service, she put her hand on Taberah's shoulder, and asked him, "So, whatchya think?"

Taberah's eyes were misty. He closed them, then opened them, saying, "I don't understand. I did not see the guest of honor. Was he a theologian?"

Nathella said, "What?"

"Was the guest of honor a theologian?"

Nathella reminded himself that Taberah sometimes approached matters strangely. "I would rather think of him as God who told stories. What do you think?"

Taberah said, "Not Jesus, the person the — now I remember the word — funeral is being held for. Was he a theologian?"

Nathella withdrew, slightly surprised. She said, "Why do you think this was a funeral?"

Taberah said, "It was so mournful. People were silent; they did not say anything, and the person up front was impossible to hear. There weren't any changing songs. And I didn't hear any instrument music, no organ. And this church had its walls stripped — no statues, no color in windows. Does this building have anything besides funerals?"

Nathella accepted that Taberah's perception of the Latin mass was very different from her own. No, that wasn't quite right. He wasn't responding to the Latin, *per*

se; it was something else that accompanied the Latin. It — she decided to stop musing and respond to him. "At home we have a machine that can make organ music; would you like to come home?"

At home, they sat down on a sofa and set the computer to play music. Taberah listened to the sound, the familiar sound of an organ — no, it was not; it had range and voices and a perfection of sound such as he had never heard, and such speed! Then it unfolded, into two voices, three, four. Taberah felt dizzy with the complexity, or more accurately, giddy, drunk; he heard wheels within wheels within wheels within wheels. It was alien in many ways; most of all, he felt that he had never encountered such a mind. He never knew that such music existed. When the moment wound down after several pieces, he said, "I awe," and then, "Who was that?"

Nathella smiled and said, "That was Bach."

"May I speak with Mr. Bach? I would very much like to meet him."

"Honey, Bach has been dead for almost three hundred years."

At this, Taberah was surprised. "If Bach is dead, how did he play that?"

"Bach wrote his music down, then someone else played it on an organ, then the computer kept and transported the sounds so we could hear them."

"How can a rock transport sounds?"

"Aed, would you explain that?"

As Aed explained, Nathella observed Taberah. He no longer seemed so completely homesick; his face bore the excitement of discovery. Taberah was adapting to his new land.

Angels Dancing

"And all they were doing," Nathella said to Aed, "is

endlessly debating 'How many angels can dance on the head of a pin?!'

"That's the best question," Taberah said. "That's a very good question."

"What?" Nathella and Aed said together.

"How many angels can dance on the head of a pin?' is a good question."

"Why?" Nathella said.

"Do you know how many angels can dance on the head of a pin?" Taberah asked.

"Um, I don't know. Five? Twelve? Seventeen? I have no idea." Nathella said.

Taberah looked displeased. "I don't think you understand the question. Say seventeen angels can dance on the head of a pin, but not eighteen. Why?"

Nathella said, "I don't know. That's why it's a silly question."

Taberah said, "Ok. How many people can dance on the head of a pin?"

Nathella answered, "If the pin was lying on the floor, one."

"Why not two? Why not three? Why not five?"

"Because people have bodies, and they'd bump into each other."

"Do angels have bodies?"

"No; they're spirits."

"Can angels bump into each other?"

"No; there can be as many angels in the same place as want to be, because spirit — ooh! Two, or five, or seventeen, or an infinite number of angels can dance on the head of a pin at once, because they don't take up space the way we do."

Taberah smiled. "Is that a silly question?"

Nathella hesitated, and said, "If you are asking an abstract question, why embed it in a concrete and silly-looking facade? Why not ask it abstractly?"

Clancy burst in the door, out of breath, and said, "Hey,

Mom! How many field service engineers does it take to screw in a light bulb?"

Nathella was about to say, "I'm in the middle of something, dear," when Clancy said, "Two. One to find a bulb, and one to pound it into the socket."

Nathella giggled for a moment, then her face showed confusion, which slowly turned into dawning comprehension. Clancy watched her, and said, "*Et voila!* It took you long enough this time, Mom!"

Nathella said, "It's not that, honey; I got the joke immediately. It was just that Taberah had asked an abstract question in a way that looked simple and silly, and I had asked why he did that, and now I realized that our light bulb jokes work the same way. The canonical 'How many morons does it take to screw in a light bulb?' 'Five. One to hold the bulb, and four to turn the ladder,' is only incidentally about ladders or even lightbulbs. It's about stupidity trying to do things in an ineffective and unproductive manner, and it provides an illustration. Wouldn't you say so, dear?"

Aed said, "I was just thinking about what impact such a presentation might have on my teaching at school. A concrete capture of an abstract idea is harder to make than an abstract decision, and much more powerful to understand. Whether I have the political strength to get away with a non-standard treatment of content is —"

Clancy cut him off. "What was the question Taberah asked? Was it something like 'How many angels can dance on the head of a pin?'"

Beyond a New World

Taberah was sitting on the lawn, resting, thinking — when he realized that he had never explored the computer. He had gone to a couple of its rooms when Aed had led him, but he had never set out to see what there was to be

seen.

That was strange. When he was little, Taberah had explored every building he was allowed in with a sense of fascination; he still remembered the wonder with which he had imagined a door opening, beams of light showing from behind. He asked Aed if he could explore the computer; Aed would have liked to accompany him, but was thinking about a problem he was researching. So Aed said, "Go ahead. Touch the picture with a gold border."

Taberah went in; he was in a gallery of pictures, and reached out for one of them. He was drawn to it was through it.

Taberah looked around. He was in an immense labyrinth; he started to fly around, the walls shifting and changing as he walked. There were statues, and fountains, and shadows lurking; there was something strange about it that felt like home.

Taberah turned a corner, and looked around. He was in a circular room with no doors; after looking around for a moment, he saw a knob at the side of a large black disc in the middle of the floor. He reached for it, and pulled; downwards was a brick tunnel, reaching into fathoms of darkness. After thinking a moment, Taberah left the annulus and tumbled down.

It was dark, or almost dark, around him; it looked like a room with candlelight. As his senses adjusted, Taberah heard crickets chirping, and realized there was the sound of the ocean; he looked around, and saw starlight. Which reminded him — but he would have to do that later. He started to fly about, and realized that he was in a huge forest. He came to the water's edge and dove down.

It was scary to see the water close above him; Taberah held his breath before reminding himself that he was just surrounded by moving pictures. He went in and down, in and down.

After a little while of pitch darkness, Taberah could see a faint blue light. He flew towards it, and saw color

dancing. He saw thin slivers moving by twos and threes — fishes, he thought, and then went closer and saw that the swimming creatures were mermaids and tritons. Then he recognized the light: it was a vast city of sunken stone, an alien ruins. A mermaid swam by; he reached for her hand, and then he realized that he could not touch her. He followed her around, through streets and doorways and tunnels, between walls with runes glowing blue-white. The mermaid swam off; he opened one door, and saw a decorated room which made him forget he was underwater. Then he saw a strange picture on the wall; it puzzled him. He reached for it —

What is This?

"Aed!" Taberah called. "Aed! What is this?"

Aed came running, muttering under his breath, "This had better be good!"

Aed looked at the screen — a nude female avatar was writhing in sexual ecstasy — and, after staring a moment, turned the video off. "That's a valerie," he said. "I should think that her purpose should be obvious enough."

Aed looked at Taberah, and then realized that he had misjudged the look in Taberah's eyes. Taberah had been staring at the valerie in fascination, but not exactly lust. He had rather been staring in puzzlement, and in the same horrid fascination that he had seen on Clancy's face, looking at a car wreck. Aed began to realize that an off the cuff response was not going to work here. After collecting his thoughts, Aed said, "Well, what do you think the picture was about?"

Taberah said, "I do not understand. She looked on her face like a woman wanting to be bounced, but she had her clothes off, and what a horrid body! Her breasts were enormous; they were ten times as large as beautiful breasts, and the rest of her body looked like a muscular

boy's body, or a man's." He paused a moment, and then his face was filled with a flash of insight. "Aed! Was this valerie made for lust by a pedophile who wanted to pretend that he was looking at a woman instead of the boy's body he was looking at? He must have been trying very hard to fool himself, to have put on such huge, ugly breasts! But why make a picture to lust at in the first place?"

Aed mulled over this response, and mentally compared the valerie's body with his wife's — and then looked into his own reactions. "Taberah," he said, "a valerie looks like that because that is what my nation thinks a beautiful woman looks like. I don't know how to explain it, but even though I try to love and honor my wife, the trend is strong to me; the valerie looks better to me."

Taberah turned green, and said, "Why? And I still don't understand why to make pictures for that purpose. Do you not think God's way of making women is beautiful?"

Aed thought for a moment and said, "Taberah, the culture we are in is sick. It is dying. This is one of many signs of its sickness."

Taberah said, "Then why not heal it?"

Aed said, "I don't know."

In the Stars

After taking some time to rest — Taberah was still quite confused — he asked Aed, "When was the day of your birth?"

Aed said, "It's really not that important."

Taberah said, "Why should a man of your age not want to tell when he was born?"

Aed said, "I'm old enough, Taberah. Why do you want to know?"

Taberah was puzzled; Aed had attained a very

respectable age, and Taberah could not understand why he looked uncomfortable about it. Maybe to explore later...

"I want to go outside at night," Taberah said, "and gaze upon the stars and the crystalline spheres, and know the influence of the planets when you were born upon your life and at the present day."

Aed took a moment to parse this sentence, and said, "You want to cast my horoscope?"

"Yes."

"I thought you were a Catholic."

"I am."

"Then why do you want to cast my horoscope?"

"In order to understand you better."

"Don't you think there's something wrong with astrology?"

"What?"

"What do you think astrology is?"

"Natural philosophy, exploring the interconnected world in which we live."

"Taberah, astrology is not science. It's magic, or like magic. It belongs to the occult."

Taberah was trying to sift this apart. "Why?"

"It is divination. It does not work according to the basic laws of science. Astronomy is science; it studies how the heavens go. But it does not believe in influences, any more than looking at the entrails of a chicken will tell the future."

Taberah said, "Aed, what's the difference between science and magic?"

Aed was caught completely off guard. The disowning hostility of science to magic, *The Skeptical Inquirer*, the use of the word 'scientific' to mean 'rational' and 'working' and 'magic' as a pejorative metaphor for technology that did not appear to behave according to rational principles — Taberah might as well have asked him to explain the difference between light and darkness. But his question deserved an answer; science does not include divination —

no, that would exclude weather forecasting; science provides theories and laws about how the world works — so does magic; science is about exploring the forces of nature — no, magic claimed to do that as well; science is reductionistic and magic holistic — no, that was, if true, looking at the surface rather than the nature of things, and that wasn't true; it excluded psychology; science produces predictable results according to its theories that — well, that also rules out psychology as science...

"Taberah, what can astrology tell you about a person?"

Aed listened to Taberah's explanation, and slowly stopped fighting a realization that this made more sense than what he was taught in his undergraduate psychology class, particularly behaviorism — he felt he would be much better understood by Taberah's astrology than by a behaviorist account. Astrology at least accounted for the stuff of common sense — emotions, tendencies, thoughts, good and bad timing — while behaviorism reduced him to an unbelievably simplistic account of just a black box that does actions. Listening to Taberah's account sounded goofy here and there, and the idea that the influence of the stars and planets controlled matters was straight-out hogwash, but Taberah's explanation overall gave him the impression of a rational account believed by a rational mind.

Science did experiments rigorously, and its standards did not validate any claims of magic — no, wait, the dice were loaded on that question; in Taberah's explanation, Aed saw a wisdom that just wasn't found in psychology; science did not meet the standards of interesting magic. No, that was not quite right; when did science really begin flourishing? At the same time as magic began flourishing, and often in the same people; Newton's discovery of physics was almost a vacation from his work in alchemy. The two enterprises were born out of the same desire, to control nature and gain power, and in both people would readily engage in practices that had been hitherto

regarded as impious and disgusting, such as digging up and mutilating the dead. Still, there was a difference, a difference which Aed felt if he could not think. They —

Aed came to himself and said, "I can't tell you the difference between science and magic, Taberah. I can't tell you, but I do know it. You shouldn't be doing astrology. You shouldn't be doing divination. If you're not sure of whether something is science or magic, you can ask me." Aed thought about buying him a psychology text, but decided not to, at least not for the moment. The psychology text he'd read, he was beginning to realize, was parochial and in many ways backwards; of course it was written by psychologists at respected schools, but the zeitgeist was — Taberah would encounter enough of it on its own, without having it embedded in something Aed told him to have replace his belief in astrology. Aed felt vaguely guilty about destroying a treasurehouse of lore, but let this go to the back of his mind. Once Aed had explained a simplified version of physics and astronomy, it was with some deflation that Taberah saw why Aed placed astrology among divination, but not weather forecasting.

Taberah stepped out that night, and lay on his back to look at the stars. He could not see many of them, and those badly, because of all the light. It seemed to him that something had departed from their song, but he could almost see something new. It was beautiful that the planets should revolve around the sun and not the earth; just as there were nine orders of angels — the highest six of whom gazed continually on the glory of God, and only three of whom were sent out among men — there corresponded nine planets, six of which were further out in the Heavens, the third of which contained life, and all of which revolved around the Light! His head went dizzy when he realized what it meant that he lived on a planet, and the sun was a star.

The Trial

A representative from the Turing Society called Aed. "We hear that you have a program that is trying to pass the Turing test. I would like to administer the Turing test to your program at 2:00 PM on Tuesday, with observation. Is that acceptable to you?"

Aed's heart jumped, and he had to force himself to stand still. "Yes. I will look forward to it."

The test room was modified to support an arbitrary number of lurkers, and excitement built around the university. Quite a number of eyes were watching as the tester strode into the room. One of the contestant avatars looked like a unicorn; the other looked like a dragon. The tester managed to conceal her surprise, and said, "Good morning. How are you today?"

The unicorn said, "I am doing quite well. You?"

The dragon said, "I've had a lousy day, but it's getting better. I love playing the Turing game."

The tester said to the dragon, "Have you ever lost the game?"

The dragon said, "I've lost once, to a salesperson. I was really mad when the judge said I was a computer."

The tester repeated to the dragon, "Have you ever lost the game?"

The dragon repeated, "I've lost once, to a salesperson. I was really mad when the judge said I was a computer."

The tester asked the unicorn, "What about you? Have you ever lost the game?"

"Yes, frequently. I guess I don't sound very human."

The tester repeated her question to the unicorn. "What about you? Have you ever lost the game?"

The unicorn hesitated and said, "Um, is there a reason you're repeating the question?"

The tester did not answer. Instead, she said to the unicorn, "Tell me a bit about yourself."

The unicorn said, "Uh, I like woodworking, and I like to collect things. I've got a roomful of bottle caps, and I have one of the biggest collections of visual textures on the net. And I like fantasy."

The tester turned to the dragon and said, "What about you? How are you like?"

The dragon said, "I'm an optimist. It's too sunny out to be crabby. And I like collecting stamps."

The tester asked the dragon, "What is your philosophy of life?"

The dragon said, "My philosophy is one of many sides. There are many sides to life; there are many sides to being a person. I am many different things as the occasion merits."

The tester turned to the unicorn and asked, "What is your philosophy of life?"

The unicorn said, "Could you ask me another question? I'm kind of nervous now, and I'm having trouble thinking straight."

The tester said, "Ok. What is the one question you most fear me asking you?"

The unicorn shivered, and said, "The one you just asked?"

The conversation continued for two hours, unfolding, unfolding. It was about that time that the tester asked the unicorn, "What was your scariest childhood moment?" and the unicorn told a story about getting lost on a camping trip, and then twisting an ankle. Then the tester turned to the dragon, and said, "How about you?"

The dragon said, "Personally, I'm partial to seltzer water. And you?"

The tester pushed a button and left for the conference room Aed was in. She said, "You have quite an impressive achievement there, but you have a long distance to go before passing the Turing test. I tried to give two hours' testing to be sure, but I knew the dragon was a computer within five minutes of speaking with it. The clues that gave

it away were —"

Aed cut her off and said, "Sorry, you guessed wrong."

"*What?*" the tester asked.

"You guessed wrong."

"Can you tell me with a straight face," she asked, "that the dragon was a human? Do I look that gullible?"

Aed gently said, "No, I'm not saying that the dragon was human. I'm saying that they were both computers. The dragon was merely an old version of the program."

The woman's jaw dropped.

Aed added, "I should also like to say that most of the ideas were my guest Taberah's; I mostly helped out. The achievement is his, not mine."

Detained

A knock sounded on the front door. "I wonder who that could be at this hour," Nathella said. "A reporter?"

She opened the door. There were several men outside, holding badges. They looked familiar, and smug; one of them said, "Officer Salisbury, Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization Services."

Nathella sank back. Aed said, "What are you doing here?"

Officer Salisbury said, "We have come to detain Taberah, before transporting him to his country of origin."

Aed thought for a moment about an English translation, and said, "What right do you have to do this?"

Salisbury said, "We are enforcing the law. If you —"

Taberah popped his head in the window and said, "What is this?"

Officer Salisbury said, "You need to come with us."

That shoots any remnants of search-and-seizure concerns, Aed thought. "Could he have a moment to gather up his possessions, at least?"

"That won't be necessary," the officer said. "We do not

transport possessions beyond clothing worn. We are not a shipping service."

Aed, Nathella, Clancy, and Fiona each gave him a hug, their eyes filled with tears. Then Taberah was handcuffed and led away to a car. Nathella could see Taberah steeling himself against the ride.

Wrong Person

In the middle of the night, the videophone rang. Aed got up, turned off the video, and said, "Yes?"

The voice on the line was unfamiliar. She said, "Hello, is this Aed Kinsella?"

Aed said, "Yes."

The woman said, "I'm calling to tell you that you and Taberah Kinsella have won the 2034 Turing Award for your joint work in artificial intelligence."

Aed blinked, and said, "I'm sorry; I think you have the wrong person."

The woman laughed, and said, "I'm positive I've got the right person. Can you get Taberah?"

"I'm sorry; I can't; Taberah is being 'detained' by the INS."

"What? Who are the INS? Do the police know about them?"

"Yes; the INS are part of the police. They are the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization Services, and they just took Taberah. He is now en route to a jail, to have his head and his beard shaved, be stripped and put in a de-humanizing uniform, and sit in a cold cell with nothing to do while he waits for the INS to decide what country to deport him to."

The woman was silent for a moment, and said, "What country is he from?"

"I don't know. Dr. Pabst, an anthropologist I know, said that he doesn't seem to be from any culture currently

existing. He has learned English, but besides that — why?"

The woman said, "Please wait a moment; I'll get back to you."

Aed had just crawled back into the covers when the phone rang. It was a journalist. And then another. And then another. After the first dozen times trying to explain that it was Taberah's work and not his, and that Taberah had been taken by the INS, he unplugged the phone.

At four in the morning, the doorbell rang. And then rang again. And again. Aed swore, and fumbled about for Nathella's keychain — a keychain with pepper spray. He threw on a bathrobe, and padded out to the door. "Who is it?" he shouted through the door.

"Officer Salisbury, returning Taberah to your house."

"*What?*"

"When we came last night, we did not realize that he held a United Nations passport. We apologize for the inconvenience."

Aed opened the door. Taberah looked weary, frightened, relieved, and very happy to be back. Aed picked him up, and held him in thanksgiving. Then he said, "Let's both of us get some shuteye; we've got a speech to write."

A House Abuzz

There was a great deal of excitement around the house; friends and colleagues from church, the university, and other places stopped by, and some of them brought meals. Aed was excited by the activity; Nathella was wearied, and climbed into bed as soon as the last party had left.

One of the things that Aed insisted was that Taberah and all of the Kinsellas would appear through avatars, and that Taberah be referred to by a pen name — John. This was big enough news that Aed did not want strangers on

the street recognizing them from a compucast or rebroadcast, nor calling them up. While Aed was in the living room explaining details of the work to his colleagues, and Nathella and Clancy were occupied with the hospitality, Fiona was occupied with Taberah. The two of them were in the computer, talking about what Taberah's avatar should look like.

The question was a bigger question than it seemed at first. The avatar should not be recognizable as him, but it should reveal him, his bearing. "It should be a mask," Fiona said. "It should be like a Halloween costume, changing yourself in such a way that you shine through."

"What's Halloween?"

"Later, Taberah. We don't have time to explore that now, although you'll see in a few months. Now, to start off with, do you want a human-looking avatar, or a fantastic avatar?"

"I — I don't know. Could I look at some of each?"

"Fiona said, "Hmm... There is something alien about you. Would you like to see what aliens look like?"

Taberah looked at several bodies of aliens, and recoiled. "Those aren't aliens," he said. "They're humans made to look grotesque. That's not what being alien is about."

"Ok," Fiona said. "How about fantasy? Do you like fantasy?"

They looked through a faun, a centaur, a unicorn, a dragon. "How old do you want to look?" Fiona said. Taberah didn't know. "Not that knight in armor; that would only be for going out to war. Not — *there!*" he said, with excitement.

"You don't want that," Fiona said. "That's a court jester. They acted like fools for other people to laugh at."

"I want that! I was a court jester once!"

Fiona wondered about Taberah's statement, but this was not time for long questions. She looked through colors, and guided Taberah towards a jester's outfit that

was darker and had more muted colors. It was unmistakably a jester's outfit, but it had an air of gravity about it — which Taberah liked. "Ok," she said. "Now what do you want to eat?"

"Roast boar," Taberah said.

"Taberah, boar is awfully expensive, and there will be a lot of people there. I —"

"Give me two swords and I will kill one!" Taberah said, grinning.

"No, Taberah. You can't do that."

"Why not?"

"To start with, there aren't any boars here. You'll have to think of something else."

"Roast pig with an apple in its mouth!"

Aed stepped in. "Taberah, would you come out for a minute? There are some people who want to see you."

Fiona said to Taberah, "We can't have pork. There will be a lot of Muslims at that dinner."

"Is this country overrun by worshippers of Mahomet? Is there no one to drive them out?"

Aed stopped in the hallway. "Taberah, a couple of things. First, Muslims are not worshippers of Mahomet, any more than Christians are worshippers of John. They believe Mahomet was the greatest prophet, but not the man-god we believe Jesus was. Second, Muslims are citizens here. They are powerful, and their power is not all to the good — it is awfully hard to do things that Islam disapproves of, and there have been not-so-subtle manipulations against Christian evangelists speaking to Muslims, for one thing — but they are people, citizens of this country like anyone else, and not invaders. It is sad that Christianity has let Islam take its place, but the solution is not to run them off. Third, we may have wine available at th—"

Taberah interrupted. "Spiced wine, piping hot? And cider?"

Aed said, "Spiced wine, piping hot, and cider, if you

want, might be possible, but the food has to be something that Muslims may eat." Aed declined to mention the headache that would be involved in getting alcohol served...

Taberah said, "Do Muslims eat hamburgers?"

Aed threw up his hands and said, "I have guests waiting. Why don't you have *filet mignon*? It's the same kind of animal as hamburger, only much better."

Taberah was tired after the people met. He had not realized the intense energy it takes to connect with people from another land — he and the Kinsellas had gotten used to each other through intense contact. Nathella picked up on his fatigue faster than anyone else; she encouraged him to go to bed and get a good night's rest before the big day. Everything was in place; Aed had finally managed to convince the Turing society that he did not deserve the award, and accepted the privilege of introducing Taberah. Everyone slept lightly — everyone but Taberah; he slept like the dead, and got up to protest the stiff clothes he wore to the banquet.

Accolades

Taberah was cheered at the meat and drink; the meat reminded him of home. He was equally delighted to sit down and drink wine with Aed, and his spirits did not flag although people asked him questions that struck him as rather odd. At the end of the dinner, Taberah was pleased to have (so far as he could tell) avoided making any *faux pas*. He felt a sense of accomplishment, and felt at home.

The chairman of the Turing Society looked at Aed and pointed to his watch, and Aed nodded. He took a sip of water, and then climbed up the steps to the podium.

Nathella could not see that her husband was nervous, but she knew it. He had thrown out his introduction a dozen times. Neither of them were worried for Taberah,

though; Aed and Taberah had worked out a speech, which Taberah memorized with remarkable facility.

"I would like to begin this introduction," Aed said, "by apologizing for giving an introduction not worthy of the occasion. I would very much like to give a traditional introduction, in which one perhaps starts by saying 'The person who is going to speak is a man who needs no introduction,' and then spends five or ten minutes detailing education, awards, and accomplishments. It would perhaps sound grander if I were to say that such an introduction was inadequate to him, but the truth is that I don't know enough about him to give an introduction of that sort. I don't know if he went to school at all; he appeared on my doorstep, became deathly ill, and has since then been turning my world upside down.

"His first surprise for me was in chess. I am rated at 1975, and when I invited him in, him looking dazed and confused, he took my chess pieces to the table (at least after I let him), and began to play his way — at first I thought he didn't understand the game or was cheating, but then I realized he wasn't playing on a grid. He beat me five times in a row.

"Different members of our family have had conversations with him that left our heads spinning; my wife Nathella is the only one who has not had that experience, and I believe that is because of her ability to understand people. There's only been one time that I've been able to understand Taberah better than her, but I won't detail that here.

"Taberah is brilliant, and approaches life in ways that would never occur to me. Wherever he comes from, and wherever he was educated, he somehow had the intelligence to look at the problem of artificial intelligence in a way nobody else had seen it before. If I cannot vouch for his education or accomplishments, I can vouch for this one accomplishment. Taberah has worked into a special place in my heart, and not only because of his brilliance.

Without further ado, here he is."

Taberah strode up to the podium; on the screen behind him, his avatar looked quizzical and dignified at the same time. "I was going to say," he began, "that my discovery has taught us nothing about human intelligence. But I began to reason, and realize that it has.

"Men have always wanted to create other men like themselves. I once wished to make an assemblage of gears that would make a mechanical human, and I saw no reason why not. If gears could make a clock, with continual motion controlled according to its construction, why could the best crafted gears not make a man? Certainly myths came of gods who had made mechanical men. So I do not find it to be at all surprising that, when people found a way to make a machine that could do arithmetic and logic, they thought they had made something that could think.

"Chess is something that is difficult for people to do. So it was thought, 'If we can only make a computer that can beat the best humans at chess, then we will have achieved intelligence.' The day has long past when a human could beat the best computer, but if that achievement has taught us anything about human intelligence, it is that humans do not play chess like a computer. Making better and better computer chess players did not make computers intelligent any more than making more and more realistic-looking statues will make them alive.

"Conversation is something humans do, so Alan Turing, a brilliant mathematician, thought, 'If we can only make a computer that can pass for human in conversation, then we will have achieved intelligence.' Now the day has come when a computer has passed for human in conversation, and if it has taught us anything about intelligence, it is that intelligence goes beyond conversation as it goes beyond chess. Those are both activities humans can do, but mimicking or even beating

human performance does not a person make, any more than a collection of lifelike statues can be improved to the point of achieving life.

"I do not think that this calls for a new test to determine intelligence. I think it calls for a realization that human intelligence is too rich and too deep to reduce to a simple test. When a test has been proposed to measure intelligence, the test gains a life of its own, and suddenly people stop thinking about intelligence, and start thinking about how to pass the test. Chess playing programs became sophisticated with speed and advances that were not even approximated by efforts to understand how humans play chess, let alone how humans think.

"But this is enough. It is bad speaking to cram so much into your audience's heads that things are falling out; I have criticized enough for an award recipient. The field of artificial intelligence is a fertile area of thought which has brought many good things; even if artificial intelligence is never achieved, its failure will have enriched the soil of human endeavor. I thank you for this award and the other assistance the Turing Society has provided me, and, Aed, Nathella, Fiona, and Clancy for their help. God bless, and have a good evening." He returned to his place.

The chairman of the Turing Society stepped up to the microphone and said, "There is one more thing, Mr. Kinsella. The Turing Society has a fund, out of which to give prizes to its award recipients. The funding might buy research equipment, or a sabbatical, or perhaps access to online research libraries. Is there something we can get for you? Do you need a home?"

Taberah said, "I have everything I need now. But if there was one thing I could have — do you have a troubadour's lute?"

There was a moment's pause; the chairman, Dr. Bode, spoke on his cell phone for a moment and then said, "One of the members of the audience has one now, which she will lend you while another is delivered." A small woman

walked up; Taberah was puzzled, as she was holding a small black bag, but otherwise empty-handed — there was no room to conceal a lute, even a small one. She reached into the bag, and pulled out a thick black belt and two long black gloves, long enough to cover an elbow. He could see that there was something else in the bag. She looked at him and said, "Put the belt around your waist, and the gloves on your hands."

Taberah did so, feeling some puzzlement.

"Now," she said, "play as if you were holding a lute."

Taberah looked at her, confused.

"Like this," she said, moving her hands in a strumming motion.

Taberah moved his hands, as if to play a chord — and jolted in surprise as notes sounded. Then he moved his hands again. There were some sounds of jarring dissonance, like a piano being played by frostbitten fingers losing their numbness, and then a simple, high, pure, aching sound. It pierced by its beauty, and with the music, words, in a voice that filled the room:

*Once there was a little lady,
Fair and pure and elfin bright.
Her light skin shone like burnished silver,
Blazing light throughout the night.*

*Her soul it was a filled with music,
Her body was a filled with dance.
Her long hair was black like ravens,
All blazing was her countenance.*

Taberah's otherworldly song filled an hour; in his song, he carried with him a feeling of home, a moment of Heaven, and all of the strangeness of the land about him, of his aching at no place that felt home, vanished. The music he made in his trance brought its listeners into another time, into another world; to those in the room, the

song so filled their consciousness that they did not think of anything else. When the song began, the netcast of the awards ceremony was brought into focus, and the avatar who had looked slightly strange speaking about artificial intelligence now fit perfectly into place: a court jester — and more than a jester — holding a lute, telling a tale and weaving a song.

When it was over, even the silence was musical, because it bore the silent echoes of the music's spirit. Taberah walked back to his seat, and asked, "Can we go home?"

With that, the meeting was over.

Where Do You Come From?

It was the first day of classes; Aed had returned home late, to a house filled with a marvelous scent. It smelled of tomato, and basil, and bacon, and beef. Clancy said grace at Aed's invitation, and they began to pass the pasta.

Fiona looked at Taberah, and said, "Where are you from, Taberah? I don't think you've ever told me that."

Taberah said, "I am from — Provence, or at least half from there. My father is a merchant, and we have travelled to the ends of the world, and beyond — but never to a place so strange as this. I am used to mountains, and seas, and strange people and barbarian tribes — even worshippers of Mahomet —"

Aed said, "*Muslims.*"

"— even Muslims, but there are many things here that are strange to me."

"Like what?" Fiona said.

Taberah thought for a moment, and said, "It is hard for me to think of and harder to say in words."

Nathella said, "Can you think of it in your words in

your own language? And then maybe translate?"

Taberah concentrated for a moment and said, "No, I can't. Not even in my own language. I will tell you later. After I think."

Aed said, "Don't worry too much if you can't answer. It was a friendly question, not a probe."

Taberah said, "It is a friendly question, and a probe, and a good question. That is why I want to answer it. Maybe after I research on the computer."

Fiona said, "Taberah, have you ever been to my Dad's campus? Tomorrow's a half day, and I could take you there. You might see more of the world."

Taberah said, "I would be happy to do that. But ooh! I miss home. I have never had a place that was completely home. Whether riding away hotly pursued, or haggling down the price of salt, or opening an illuminated manuscript — I was at home for a moment, but over time not at home. Even in stealing a relic from a nearby cathedral —"

Fiona said, "You *stole* a relic from a cathedral?"

Taberah said, "Yes. The saint wanted to move; otherwise, he wouldn't have let his relics be moved. And I can move swiftly and silently —"

Fiona said, "Taberah, would you steal a fork from this house?"

Taberah looked surprised. "Never!"

Fiona said, "Why on earth would you be willing to steal a relic?"

Taberah had no real response to this question. He said, "If another city had a relic, and you needed it, wouldn't you assist it to your place?"

Fiona said, "I can't explain all my reasons why not, because I have to go to bed in four hours. But to start it off, that would be dishonorable."

Taberah thought, and said, "I'll have to think about that. I never met a knight who thought it dishonorable to steal a relic. Ok, I know how to explain. A relic does not

belong to a living man or a place; it belongs to God and to the saint. Stealing a relic is a very different matter from stealing corn or grain. The corn really belongs to the person who has it; the relic belongs to the saint, and then to the saint's followers — so if the people here worship a saint and want his relic more than the people where it is kept, then if the saint allows the relic to be moved, it should be moved."

Fiona said, "I can't believe this rationalizing. The bigger a sin, the more rationalizing there is, and you have rationalized an unholy theft on top of starting it in the first place!"

Nathella turned to Fiona and said, "Honey, I don't understand Taberah, but he's not rationalizing. He does not have a defensive air about him. And something tells me that he would not steal anything from this house — nor steal anything from another place and bring it here. Right, Taberah?"

Taberah said, "Yes. I would never steal if it were dishonorable."

Clancy looked around and said, "Taberah, did you hear the joke about the cathedral that was so blessed that it had two heads of John the Baptist, one as a boy and one as a man?"

Taberah said eagerly, "No. Please tell it to me; it sounds very good!"

Fiona groaned and said, "Mom, would you please explain it?"

Nathella said, "Taberah, did you notice anything funny about there being two heads of John the Baptist?"

Taberah said, "No. It sounds like a great providence indeed, for which God is to be praised."

Nathella said, "What would have had to have happened for a cathedral to have the head of John the Baptist as a boy?"

Taberah said, "I suppose for him to have died as a boy."

Nathella said, "If there was a skull of him as a man, did he live to be a man?"

Taberah said, "Yes."

Nathella said, "So there's a logical contradiction for a cathedral to have two heads of John the Baptist, one as a boy and one as a man. Right?"

Taberah said, "Yes."

Nathella looked at him. "You still don't get the joke."

Taberah said, "I'm still waiting for the joke to be told. So I don't get it."

Nathella said, "If there's a logical contradiction, then it couldn't have happened, right?"

Taberah said, "If there's a logical contradiction, there's a logical contradiction. It doesn't mean that God can't bless a church with two heads of John the Baptist. God moves, and his ways are beyond our understanding. He has done greater things than bless us with two heads of a saint!"

Fiona said, "Taberah, if we go out for a walk tomorrow, do you promise not to confuse me?"

Taberah said, "Am I confusing you?"

Aed got up, placed his arm around Taberah's shoulders, and said,

"Wild thing!

You make my head spin!

I think I love you."

Music From Another Age

Fiona took Taberah by the hand, eagerly leading him as if she were a small child. The university's square was filled with a noisy, jostling, laughing group of people, chaotic as any bazaar. The excitement was tangible.

"Today is the first day of Student Activities Week. All the

student organizations are clamoring to find new recruits from among the freshmen, and anybody else who cares to come. It is a lot of fun."

Taberah walked over to one stand where several people were talking. He read the sign overhead, *Humanist Hacker's Guild*, and asked, "What is a hacker?"

One of the men looked up from a portable computer and said, "The first hackers were people in software who like solving problems and believe in freedom and helping each other. They produced a lot of computers and software. We are a special kind of hacker, hackers in the humanities. We produce artwork, music, and literature, and share it with other people. In a way, there have been humanist hackers for ages, but interaction with computer hackers has brought an awareness and a fertile field for sharing. Would you like to have a copy of one of my poems?"

Taberah said, "If I am here, why would you give me a copy? Why not just recite it?"

The hacker said, "Um, because I don't have it memorized?"

Taberah said, "I'm puzzled."

The hacker said, "Why?"

Taberah said, "How could you compose a poem, even writing it down, and then forget it?"

"Quite easily, I assure you."

Fiona put her hand on Taberah's arm and said, "Taberah, please. We are his guests."

The hacker took a sheet of paper and said, "Here. I'll read it to you."

"The Unicorn's Horn," by Elron Ellingswood

I walked out into the deep, dark, forest,
and there, in a clearing, it stood.

Oak was behind it, ferns below,

and atop its head, stood a blazing white horn.

It walked to a shimmering pool,
Its hooves not making a sound.

Around, the silence was broken
by the calling of a hawk.

The wind stirred the tree leaves
and danced softly over the grass.

The Lady of the Lake stirred,
softly,
invisibly.

Taberah looked both impressed and puzzled. He said,
"You show the forest as an object of beauty. Why?"

Fiona grabbed his wrist, and tugged on him, saying,
"Look over there! Karate!"

An instructor smiled and said, "Not Karate. Kuk Sool Won. Karate is a single martial art that focuses on punching, kicking, and blocking; Kuk Sool is a comprehensive martial arts system that includes joint locks, weapons, and escapes as well as many kinds of punching, kicking, and blocking."

Taberah said, "What's a joint lock?"

The instructor said, "Throw a slow punch at me."

Taberah said, "What?"

The instructor said, "Do this."

Taberah made the motion and his hand was caught, his wrist twisted.

"But what if I punch you with my other hand?"

"Why don't you try to do that? Slowly?"

Taberah did, and his puzzlement was exceeded by the instructor's, who said, after a second, "Stop. I've never seen someone who could resist a joint lock like that. You

must have a tremendously high tolerance for pain."

Taberah said, "I don't understand. I didn't feel pain. I don't understand what you were trying to do."

The color of Fiona's face was beginning to match her long, wavy red hair. She said, "Taberah, come on. Let's find something else."

Taberah began to wander, and then saw — or rather, *heard* — something so positively medieval in spirit that it drew his attention so completely he was aware of nothing else. Up until this point, he had been thrown off balance by a hurry in the people around him — or, at least, that would be a deficient way of putting it. A more accurate way of putting it would be that he was aware of time in the sense of an awareness of something around him, but not in any sense that would let him grasp rushing to get something done, or guilt at sitting at doing nothing. He vaguely perceived such a quality in those about him, and he was baffled and troubled by it, in the same way as if he were surrounded by people who were constantly thinking about air and in a frenzied haste to try to find some space that had enough air to breathe.

It was the near total absence of this quality in the music before him that beckoned him. It was as if he had stepped into a room of people breathing normally and attending more important concerns and only then come to realize that he had been surrounded by people fretting over whether they had enough air to breathe.

Taberah stood in silence, drinking it in. Then he stepped forward, picked up an instrument, and joined in the song.

At dinner, Aed asked Taberah, "So what did you see today?"

Taberah said, "Today was a happy day. Today I discovered New Age."

Aed suppressed a groan. How was he to begin an explanation? The phenomenon that was called New Age in

its current incarnation had occurred many times in the past, and would doubtless occur many times in the future, each time under a different name; it was in spirituality what a logical fallacy is in reasoning. It was heresy — perhaps he was safe in using that word with Taberah. In the word, 'heresy' carried a curious inversion of "a good and original idea which some benighted tradition condemns", the word being a condemnation of the tradition rather than the idea. What a diabolical trick that was! Heresies were neither good nor original ideas; they were propositions that had been weighed in the balance and found lacking, "New" Age being a manifestation of an error that had first occurred two millennia ago and had rotted every time since then. It promised freedom, and was one of the most confining and constricting prisons he had known — a prison like being left all alone in an empty wasteland. You could go as far and wide as you wanted, and still find nothing good.

Aed hesitantly asked Taberah, "What draws you to New Age?"

"The — music — time — you are hurried. They are not."

Aed nodded. New Age music was soothing music. But as to the time — "Taberah, it's a busy time of year for me. What is this about time?"

Taberah tried to explain, and at first failed completely. Then, on the second time through, there was a look of dawning comprehension on Fiona's face, and she said, "I will try to enter your time, Taberah. But it will be difficult; we have been taught to hurry for a long time. I won't be able to do it very quickly, if I can."

Taberah kissed her cheek, and said, "I not in hurry — ooh, did I do right in touch?"

Aed wondered what Taberah was talking about, and then recalled him sternly telling Taberah not to touch others in ways that he had not seen them touching. "It's OK, Taberah. You may give a kiss on the cheek to people in

this family."

Taberah walked over, and kissed Aed on the cheek.

The Phoenix

Taberah spent most of the day running through New Age music in his head, and seeing how it would sound on his lute; Fiona had to knock on the door several times before he noticed she was there.

The square was less crowded than before; on the way in, Taberah looked and saw a place where several people were moving their fingertips about on a ridged surface, their hands dancing with energy; on a wall behind them, colors swirled and spun, vibrating with energy. "What's that?" he said.

Fiona said, "Those are visual musicians. They play instruments that do not produce sound, but color. Do you like it?"

Taberah said, "I like it, but why are they spinning so quickly? Why —" he pointed to another booth and said, "What's that?"

A man in the booth next to them said, "Hey, a southpaw! Greetings!"

Taberah said, "What?"

"You're left-handed."

"What's that?"

"It's when someone uses the left side instead of the right?"

Taberah made the sign against evil and said, "Why would someone do that?"

"You did."

"I might have pointed with my left hand, but I do everything else with my right hand."

The student tossed a pen up, and said, "Catch!"

Taberah looked, and realized he had caught it with his left hand. "I am sorry. I have sins I did not know."

The student now no longer looked so merry, and said, "You're left-handed, but you're ashamed to admit it."

Taberah hung his head.

The student said, "You aren't part of the solution. You're part of the problem. We have a right-handed society, with right-handed machinery and right-handed rules. Even the words are prejudiced — 'right' means correct, acceptable, and good, and 'sinister' and 'gauche' are words meaning 'left', which comes from a word meaning 'weak' or 'broken'. For years, lefthanders have been an invisible and maltreated minority, and now that some of us are speaking out and demanding that society improve, there are people like you who — a gay who was like you would be said to have internalized homophobia. You are —"

Taberah cut him off. "Why are you so angry?"

Taberah listened with horrid fascination to the rant. He began to realize that using the left hand, like turning a wheel the wrong direction or walking backwards, was only a symbol of evil and not its substance, and began (despite all internal resistance to external pressure) to see that the student's conclusions were right, that the world was a right-handed world with subtle and invisible slights to its left-handed members — or at least he tried to accept these things. He still felt guilt over catching the pen with his left hand, and he knew it would take time for him to shift his spirit to what he saw. But all this aside, he also saw an anger that brought far greater misery than any right-handed technology — not confusing pencil sharpeners, not painful scissors — could possibly cause. He narrowed his eyes, and said, "You are angry."

The student swore, and said, "I'm furious. Why do you need to point that out?"

Taberah said, "Are you happier with your pit of rage than I am with my right-handed society?"

The student was speechless. Another student, who had been listening, said, "I would like to cordially request the

honor of your absence at our booth."

Taberah felt anger rising in the pit of his stomach; he felt it, but did not let it master him. He turned, and walked away, taking a long walk around the square before slowing down, and finally stopping at one place. He looked at a group of students who were standing around, talking, laughing; each of them had a necklace with a fiery bird. Taberah asked, "Who are you?"

A young woman with long, curly auburn hair said, "My name is Emerant, and we are the Phoenix Society. The Phoenix Society is a group of brothers and sisters devoted to living in the abundant life that Jesus offers, and extending that life to others. The Phoenix, the bird that ever rises anew out of its own ashes, was a holy symbol in the ancient Christian Church, and in wearing it we recall the ancient church and its life among a pagan world, and allow God to create in us the same life in a pagan world today. We have worship services every Wednesday night. Would you like to come and join us?"

Taberah felt something in the back of his mind, but he could not put his finger on it — but it was something good, he was sure.

A young man with ebon skin placed his arm over Emerant's shoulder, and said, "What's your name?"

Taberah said, "My name is Taberah."

"How can we serve you? Do you have stuff to move in? Do you have a story to tell?"

Taberah realized what he had felt but could not describe. There was an energy about these people, an invisible love so thick it could almost be felt. The young man was looking at him as if he were a king. The students in the group were all wearing distinctive necklaces, but their air did not treat him as an outside you, not even an outside you that they wanted to bring in. The man's eyes were dark as night, and they glittered like stars; there was something about his face that said 'I' and 'you', but even more said 'we'. Taberah smiled and said, "I should very

much like to hear mass with you."

Emerant smiled a crooked smile, and said, "There is something else you want, Taberah."

Taberah closed his eyes for a second and said, "Emerant, I know your name. You, what is your name?"

The young man said, "My name is Abanu."

Taberah said, "Emerant and Abanu, I should very much like to play a song for you."

Immediately, a space appeared among the students. Taberah calmly, without any self-consciousness, walked over to the center and began to sing.

It was a noisy day, but it seemed silent inside that circle. Taberah could fill a room if he wanted to, but he was not singing loudly; still, all the students were aware of nothing else. When the song finished, Emerant looked around and saw that there were some people standing around and staring; she began to talk with him as the students asked Taberah questions.

It was not until seven that Aed found them, and told them that dinner was getting cold; Fiona had lost all track of time, and Taberah never had track of time to begin with. He slept well that night, and awoke in the morning knowing the answer to a question the Kinsellas had asked him.

In Spirit and in Truth

Taberah spent the day reading the Bible and researching on the computer; at dinner, he said, "Nathella, do you remember when you asked me a question about my place and this place, and I said it was harder to think of and harder to explain in words?"

Nathella said, "Yes."

Taberah said, "I was able to find words. In Bible, Jesus was talking with a woman at a well. She asked him what mountain to worship on. He said not to worship on this

mountain or that mountain, but in Spirit and in truth. This land knows not how to worship in Spirit and in truth."

Aed's eyes narrowed. Aed and Nathella said together, "How so?"

Taberah said, "I have just begun to see how religion is, and it is not religion. It is private. It is an interest. It is a hobby. It is tame. Where I come from, religion is public because it pervades your whole being; it is who you are, and never has a pagan invader told a Catholic, 'You may be Christian, but make it a small thing. It is —'"

Aed nodded and said, "That criticism has been made before, and it is not to be lightly dismissed. Is there anything else you see?"

Taberah said, "I slowly began to notice, when navigating on the computer — where I am from, when people build a cathedral, they carve the backs of statues. I was shocked when I saw that people here do not do this. When an artist carves a statue in my land, he is not just working on a statue; he is making an offering to God, and his carving is a prayer. He carves the back as well as the front, working on a place whose fullness he may never see, because he is not making something for himself or other men, as much as making a prayer to God, who sees the back of the statue as easily as the front. Here, on the web, people do not do that. They think in terms of making a creation for other people. They do not try for completeness; they want — I do not know the words."

"Good enough for government work?" Clancy said.

"Yes. Except that making something that is 'good enough' does not mean making something that is good. God is only in the compartment called religion; he is not big enough to make virtual reality for — only other people who will not take the site very seriously is that important for."

I cannot make complete sense of Taberah's tangled wording, Nathella thought, but I do not need to. Taberah has difficulties with language when he is concentrating

most intensely. She understood the meaning, if the words sometimes eluded her.

Aed said, "Anything else?"

Taberah said, "I hesitate..."

The room was silent.

Taberah continued, "I hesitate, but there is something strange about clothing and nudity. In my land, people wear clothing for custom and for decoration; being without clothing is not much. Here, clothing is for decency (a polite way to put it); there are chaste people and there are nude people, but there are not chaste, nude people. When a woman wears no shirt in an advertisement, her no-shirt means 'Look at me in lust!' She does not have a no-shirt that doesn't mean anything besides 'I don't want to have a shirt now.' There are people who say that we don't need to say clothes, and most of them say that not wearing clothes is not sexual, but few of them are chaste, or even acknowledge chastity.

"That is a symbol of something deeper. You need to cover your bodies, but even more you need to cover God, because you are ashamed of other people seeing them. And so you produce arguments to justify the existence of God, and God does or does not exist depending on whether or not he's covered.

"One of the theologians I know of, Thomas Aquinas, began his great work with five arguments for the existence of God. But these arguments have a very different meaning than yours; they were for adornment, and not for shame. Aquinas was not trying to give a needed proof of God, as your theologians do; certainly he did not think that if he failed to prove God's existence he was not able to believe in God. You speak of justifying belief, as if it needed justification, as if it were shameful if it were not covered by an argument.

"About clothing literally, I will not argue. Your way of looking seems to me a silly limitation that causes a lot of lust, but chaste nudity is not important. It is not one of the

great things in life. But about clothing symbolically, I will argue much. You need in your minds to have an unblushing nudity, that can say, 'I believe in God and I accept his providence,' and not have a guilt about it for believing more than matter. You — I am sorry, I should be able to produce more examples. But there are many ways where you do not know how to worship in Spirit and in truth."

Aed was stunned. After a while, and after nobody else said anything, he said, "Son, you've got a brilliant mind. I have a feeling of being held under a microscope. I don't know how to respond, beyond saying that you see things I would never see, and I hope you keep thinking."

Nathella said, "You almost seem like someone from another era."

Taberah said, "What's an era?"

Aed said, "Later, Taberah. Later."

Which Era?

As Aed sat down, Taberah asked him, "So, what is an era?"

Aed thought. He said, "I would better answer that question after looking at an encyclopedia; I've thought about how to explain it, and I realized I knew less than I thought I did. But here's a rough sketch of what I can explain:

"The ancient world was the world that gave birth to Christianity. It is everything before the Middle Ages, or medieval period. It gave us the apex of paganism, and philosophy, and writing.

"The Middle Ages were a thousand years of Christian faith and culture. They saw monasteries, cathedrals, castles, monks, clergy, knights in shining armor, lords and vassals and fealty, chivalry, peasants and feudalism, illuminated manuscripts...

"After that came the Renaissance and Reformation period. There was a rebirth of art and learning from classical, that is ancient, times, and the monk Martin Luther nailed theses for reform to the door of Wittenburg Cathedral, and chaos broke loose. Let's see...

"The Elizabethan time was the time of the great playwright Shakespeare, and vernacular translations of the Bible. The Baroque time saw a flowering of complexity in art and music; aah!

"Modern times began with the Elizabethan era, and started a new secularism in philosophy. It reached its climax in the Enlightenment, with people worshipping the mind and reason, and the bloodbath that followed. Then came Romanticism and Victorianism, one of them a following of emotional sensitivity that often included libertinism, the other managing to be morbidly prudish. After that, came postmodernism, the era that we are in. People have given up the quest for truth, and there has been an increase in fragmentation — Taberah, I just saw a light go on in your eyes. What clicked?"

Taberah said, "I am medieval! What era are you from? Can you tell me how to get to the Middle Ages?"

Aed slapped his palm to his forehead and said, "Taberah, just forget this conversation and let's start over. There are some things about you that are like the Middle Ages, but the Middle Ages are a period of time in the past."

Taberah asked, "What is a period of time?"

Aed said, "It is a time when people have a certain way of living."

Taberah said, "I am from the Middle Ages period of time. And I think you might be as well. You belong to an age of faith, and you are a lord."

Aed said, "It is impossible to go back to another age. It is past. It has already happened."

Taberah would have normally backed off by this point, but there was something inside him that made him certain. He said, "Will you get out of bed tomorrow?"

Aed said, "Yes."

Taberah said, "But you have gotten out of bed in the past?"

Aed said, "Yes."

Taberah said, "Does that stop you from getting out of bed tomorrow?"

Aed saw where Taberah was going, and said, "But with history, it's different. You cannot bring back the past any more than you can make your self younger." As soon as the words escaped Aed's mouth, he remembered the difficulty Taberah had in distinguishing between childhood and adulthood. And he expected Taberah's reply:

"What is the past?"

Aed said, "Everything that has happened so far."

Taberah said, "So, the beginning of our conversation is in the past?"

Aed said, "Yes. No. Not in the sense you're speaking of. It is before the moment now, but it still belongs to the time we are a part of."

Taberah said, "I do not understand. What's the difference?"

Aed said, "Could we just forget this conversation? I know what the difference is between the present and the past, I just can't explain it..." his voice trailed off, and he said, more to himself than to Taberah, "or do I?" For a moment he began to see how someone could not perceive a difference between present and past, and not understand how, if there had been medieval people before, there could not be medieval people now. Aed remembered how, in school, when he read about different times, there was something he could identify with in a great many of them. Then the moment lapsed; Aed suddenly realized the intense concentration it took him to see into Taberah's world, and began to wonder how difficult it might be for Taberah to look into his world. To his surprise, Aed found himself saying, "I don't know, Taberah. Maybe there isn't

one. Maybe we could talk about this later? I thought I was going to explain something to you; I wasn't counting on changing the way I think myself. I'm sure you know it's difficult work, changing how you think, and I am at the end of my concentration. Why don't you practice your music? Maybe you can play something for us after supper?"

Taberah looked at Aed and relaxed; it was only then that Aed realized how intently Taberah had been listening. Taberah said, "Sure!" and bounded outside like a puppy.

A Possibility Reopened

"Stop pacing the floor, dear," Nathella said. "You're making me nervous."

Taberah stopped and looked up. "May I walk around in the street outside? I need to think."

"Ok. Don't walk in the street; walk on the sidewalks. And don't get lost. Maybe you can take one of the trails in the forest."

If there is a word-space, Taberah thought, a space in which words exist and can be mapped out into closer and farther words, then there may be a thought-space, one in which thoughts can be mapped out.

Outside, it was dazzlingly bright; Taberah's eyes adjusted, and he saw some little boys throwing a ball around. As he passed by, one of them dropped it, and the children started arguing.

If there is a thought-space, his thoughts continued, then thoughts may be mapped out as paths in that space. Some thoughts can be mapped out from existing classics, and then new paths can be forged like old ones. If this can be done, then it may be possible for a computer to think.

Taberah entered the forest, although he was not aware of it. He felt almost dizzy; he was excited, and so intent in concentration that he lost all awareness of his

surroundings.

The core idea for a computer to think is to construct a space of units of thought, measured by a metric arising from that for words — or perhaps similar; words can be sorted out by comparing histograms of words that appear before and after; a self-refining measure might compare thoughts that come before and after. A space can have trails worn in it by existing classics, as a forest develops paths from many people walking through it; the thought-space is then navigable by starting at one point and randomly picking from among the paths that lead out from it. This is how a computer can think.

How can I implement this?

I need to find Aed.

Exploration

Aed was quite doubtful that Taberah had found a way for computers to think; none the less, he regarded Taberah's ideas as interesting, and so set to work on implementing them. He used one of the methods from his own research to take a given metric space and put points into a vector space, so that a position could be described by a list of numbers: put springs between each two points in the metric space, as long as the distance between them, then put the points at random locations in the vector space and let the springs do their work. The actual method used was more complex, taking shortcuts so as to run more quickly, but the core idea was simple. A model of a car made of springs would find its shape as soon as you took your foot off it.

Aed expected it possible to make much more sophisticated measures, but to start off with he used a parser to diagram sentences, trim the sentences to subject, verb, and object, and strung together the lists of numbers to make a vector space with more dimensions. Aed

realized that philosophy would probably be easier material for a computer to think about than something concrete; there was less opportunity to bump into the oddities of sense data and the external world. He the program through the philosophical classics online, and then waited to see what its first output would be:

I think, therefore I am. From this may be deduced any number of things. It is clear that the gods are dead. There is nothing but the gods. You, me, everything are the gods. This godlike character is unto the likeness of God. Each of the gods is a facet of God. God is, and because he is he thinks. Reason is the ordering principle of the universe. I say this because reason gives us what other times sought in God.

The output went on for some length, and Taberah was crestfallen. "Cheer up!" he said. "With computers, nothing works on the first try. It takes time to get all the bugs out."

Taberah said, "I thought computers were logical."

Aed said, "Yes, Taberah, they are logical, and that's the problem. We are not logical; we hear what a person says, and know what they mean. But a computer does not know what we mean; it only knows what we say, and there are all sorts of subtle errors that a human wouldn't even notice, that a computer does not have the ability to correct. That monologue is quite good for a first run; if you aren't listening carefully, it sounds like a philosopher. You should be proud of yourself. How'd you like to have Chinese food for dinner?"

Fortune Cookies

There was a rule in the Kinsella's house against bringing up subjects at dinner that were not

understandable to everyone in the house; this rule was bent a bit to allow Taberah to explain his discovery. Dinner was over before they realized it; Taberah unwrapped his cookie, put it in his mouth before anyone could stop him, started chewing, stopped, and then spat out a piece of paper. He said, "What is this?"

Fiona and Clancy were both laughing too hard to explain; Aed said, "It's a fortune. You're supposed to take it out of the cookie before you eat the cookie. Look at it."

Taberah wiped off the piece of paper and read, "Exciting prospects come. Don't miss the opportunity."

He looked at the paper in disgust and said, "Why do you have this in the house?"

Nathella said, "It's a prediction or a piece of advice. It's just for fun."

Taberah looked at Aed and said, "Aed, you told me not to do astrology because divination is sin. This is divination. It is sin."

Aed said, "Taberah, it's not serious. Or at least we don't do them seriously; nobody believes that a fortune cookie will tell the future."

Taberah said, "If you cast a spell just for fun, is it less of a sin?"

Aed said, "I would never cast a spell."

Taberah said, "But you got fortune cookies."

Nathella said, "We didn't ask for them. They come with Chinese food."

Fiona said, "We are studying China in school now, and the Chinese do not eat fortune cookies, but fortune telling is very big in Chinese culture. People will not enter a building if a Feng Shui practitioner was not consulted about where to lay its foundations."

Clancy was looking at his fortune. The expression on his face was slowly turning to disgust. "Taberah is right. Mom, you've talked about how we let sin into our lives without challenging it; this is sin."

Fiona said, "The fortune in a Chinese cookie certainly

comes out of fortune telling — and when fortune telling is done, it varies from serious to lighthearted — like we take fortune cookies."

Nathella said, "If you would rather, we can throw the fortune cookies away when we get Chinese, or ask them not to provide fortune cookies."

Aed didn't say anything. He had expected Taberah to know things about whatever culture he was from that Aed didn't — but not to be able to see things in American culture that Aed couldn't. He had shifted, in his mind, from wondering why Taberah objected to fortune cookies, to wondering why he hadn't objected to fortune cookies.

What else would Taberah show him?

Miracles

Taberah had been thinking throughout the day, although not about computers. When Aed got home from work, Taberah said, "This land is very different from any of the other ones I've known. Are even the miracles different? What are miracles like here?"

Aed said, "Beg pardon?"

"What miracles have you seen? What miracles have you been given?"

"Taberah, I've prayed for many miracles in my day, and I have had some prayer requests answered, but I have never been given a miracle — or seen one."

"Why not? Do you not know God?"

"Taberah, I speak to God, and he is with me. But I have never seen a miracle. I'm one of few people who believes they happen at all. Most people believe that miracles don't happen — some Christians believe that miracles stopped after the age of the Apostles."

"What? Why? Do they believe God does not love his children?"

"Of course Christians believe God loves his children."

"Then why do they not believe in miracles?"

Aed was beginning to see another difference between Taberah's culture — might as well call it 'medieval', not having any better words to describe it — between medieval culture and his culture. One side of Aed's realization was that Taberah's culture breathed the supernatural, might (for all Aed knew) find nothing unbelievable about a mountain being uprooted and thrown into the sea — and the other side was that Aed's culture had fought tooth and nail to exclude any consideration of the supernatural, had struggled to make it alien. There were hints of it in ten thousand places — in words like 'superstitious', which did not simply denote a particular kind of belief (a supernatural equivalent to practical observations such as "A pin will more easily slide into a pole if it is greased"), but a propagandistic condemnation of that kind of belief and supernatural belief in general. 'Rational' was taken to mean 'materialistic', and — the manifestations were legion, too many for Aed to concentrate on one. He recalled with a chill the words of the Gospel, where some manuscripts said that Jesus did not, and others that he *could* not do many miracles in one town, and was amazed at their lack of faith. Aed had a queer feeling that —

"Taberah, I would like to take you someplace tomorrow, and show you something. It is my loss that I have not seen any miracles, that they do not happen when I pray. But I would like for you to see the forces that shape my culture, and are why I have never seen a miracle."

Taberah slept lightly that night; he felt both puzzlement and expectation, wondering what manner of strange sight Aed would show him.

Even if They See

The lecture hall was nearly filled; the speaker walked up to the microphone and said, "Good evening, and

welcome to the Campus Skeptics' first meeting this year. My name is Nabal, and this first meeting usually draws a large crowd — usually from hecklers who believe that what we are saying is false, but somehow never manage to prove it. I claim that there are no supernatural forces and never have been, that all of the interaction of nature can be explained by science, and that there is nothing that science can't explain. To prove it —"

Taberah was aghast. He elbowed Aed and said, "Aren't you going to say anything?"

The speaker reached into his backpack, and drew out a pair of pliers, a sheet of paper, and a cigarette lighter. He continued, "I have a sheet of paper and a lighter, and I am going to light this paper on fire. If there is anyone among you who has any kind of faith or magic, let him stop it from burning."

Taberah elbowed Aed again, and said, "Well?"

The speaker held the paper up, silent.

Aed found himself saying, "Nabal."

The speaker said, "Yes? Are you going to stop this paper from burning?"

Aed ignored the question. He said, "Do you know physics?"

The speaker said, "Yes. I am a senior with a double major in physics and mathematics."

Aed said, "If you know physics, then you know that physics says that the electrical charges in that piece of paper, if separated an inch together and released, would create a spark over a hundred times as powerful as a lightning bolt. Is that correct?"

The speaker said, "Yes. Actually, it's a bit more than a hundred."

Aed said, "Very well. If you know physics, separate the particles and let's see that spark."

The speaker did not reply to this comment. He said, "Are there any other comments or distracting rhetoric — perhaps to conceal that the supernatural is not real?"

A young woman said, "I don't know if God will grant my prayer, but I am praying that that paper won't burn — as you would fight in a battle you would rather lose than not fight at all."

Nabal said, "Any other comments?"

Taberah was trying to think of something to say, but he was at a loss for words. The speaker tried to ignite the paper; the lighter sparked several times, but produced no flame.

The speaker walked over to the table and said, "My apologies for the coincidence. Does anyone have other lighters?"

A young man with a large Afro flamboyantly tossed a golden Zippo to the front of the room and said, "Try this, brother."

Nabal took the lighter and struck it. It produced sparks, but no flame.

He adjusted the lighter, and struck it again. A large yellow flame shot out, and began to lick up the side of the paper, to turn orange, to grow stronger, hotter. Nabal turned away from the flame and looked at the eyes around him — some smug, some saddened. The flame died out, became a thin stream of smoke, vanished. Nabal grinned and asked, "And now, where is your God?"

He continued to look, puzzled by the expressions he saw on the gathered faces. Then he looked down, and dropped the pliers in shock. The paper was not burnt to ashes. It wasn't even singed.

Aed looked at Taberah, and saw the one face in the room that was not speechless. He grabbed Taberah's arm, and said, "We need to go. Now." They slid out, leaving behind them sputters of "Chemicals and charlatanism can do a lot."

Taberah said, "Why did you leave? They were about to acknowledge something supernatural."

Aed said, "Taberah, I don't know how you did that, or what was going on, and I don't need to know. But do you

remember the story of the rich man and Lazarus? Do you remember how it ended?"

Taberah said, "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not listen even if a man rises from the dead.' Yes, but —"

Aed said, "Taberah, a man *did* rise from the dead, and those who killed him still did not believe. C.S. Lewis wrote that he knew of only one person who had seen a ghost, and she was positive it was a hallucination. The wind of the Spirit cannot blow where the cracks have been sealed; this age has exerted monumental effort to seal the cracks. You heard them speaking as you left. They are positive it was somebody's sleight of hand. George MacDonald, before Lewis, said, "Seeing is not believing. It is only seeing." Even I, who believe in a supernatural God, am filled with doubts over what I just saw — half of my mind is saying that it was an illusionist stunt. Even in the Bible, seeing miracles did not make people believe."

Taberah said, "I don't understand."

Aed said, "I don't understand either. Maybe you'll figure something out — oh! I just remembered a joke."

Taberah said, "Yes?"

Aed said, "The wars in the Middle East will only be solved by a political solution or by a miracle — by people working out an agreement, or by God telling people to get along with each other. The political solution would be God telling people to get along with each other, and the miracle would be people working out an agreement."

Taberah listened and laughed. "So you're saying it would take a different kind of miracle, a greater kind of miracle, for people to believe."

Aed said, "Yes. And a kind of miracle that doesn't just happen, even in the Bible. A kind that God only gives, if ever, as a blessing on hard human work. Prayer does not annihilate human roles. Maybe God only chooses to work the greater miracles through humans."

Below the Surface

Aed said, "Taberah, there's something I've been meaning to talk with you about."

Taberah said, "Yes?"

Aed said, "What exactly draws you to New Age?"

Taberah said, "Music and time. Or rather, lack of awareness of time. There is something more than hurried time."

Aed said, "And New Age as a religion?"

Taberah said, "New Age is a religion? It seems much more like a people to me."

Aed said, "It's both. It is people who are drawn to a resurfacing of Gnosticism. Whether it is ancient Gnostics, or contemporary New Age, or medieval Knights of Cathare, it — what is on your face, Taberah?"

Taberah said, "I know the Knights of Cathare. It is so sad. Is New Age the same heresy?"

Aed said, "The mask ever varies, but it is the same heresy. The same mistake. The same attempt that has been weighed in the balance and found wanting. It's OK if you listen to their music, but try to stop there —"

Nathella walked in, looked at Aed, looked at Taberah, and said, "What is it that I see in your eyes, Taberah?"

Taberah said, "New Age music will never sound the same to me again."

Nathella looked into Taberah's eyes, listening, searching. She saw a homesickness and wistfulness, and suddenly thought of the Little Mermaid in Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales, before Disney left its mark on the classic. The witch had exacted a terrible price from the mermaid — she would have legs, lovely legs, but she would never be quite like the humans around her. Every step she took would be on sharp knives. In a flash of intuition she saw that the knives never left Taberah. He would always walk on sharp knives.

Nathella walked up, put an arm around Taberah's waist, and said, "Honey, will you come to my room? I want to show you something."

Taberah looked, and saw on the wall a yellowed plaque. He read:

Only faith can guarantee the blessings that we hope for, or prove the existence of realities that are unseen. It is for their faith that our ancestors are acknowledged.

It is by faith that we understand that the ages were created by a word from God, so that from the invisible the visible world came to be.

It was because of his faith that Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain, and for that he was acknowledged as upright when God himself made acknowledgment of his offerings. Though he is dead, he still speaks by faith.

It was because of his faith that Enoch was taken up and did not experience death: he was no more, because God took him; because before his assumption he was acknowledged to have pleased God. Now it is impossible to please God without faith, since anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and rewards those who seek him.

It was through his faith that Noah, when he had been warned by God of something that had never been seen before, took care to build an ark to save his family. His faith was a judgement on the world, and he was able to claim the uprightness which comes from faith.

It was by faith that Abraham obeyed the call to set out for a country that was the inheritance given to him and his descendants, and that he set out without knowing where he was going. By faith he sojourned in the Promised Land as though it were not his, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with

him of the same promise. He looked forward to the well-founded city, designed and built by God.

It was equally by faith that Sarah, in spite of being past the age, was made able to conceive, because she believed that he who had made the promise was faithful to it. Because of this, there came from one man, and one who already had the mark of death on him, descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven and the grains of sand on the seashore which cannot be counted.

All these died in faith, before receiving any of the things that had been promised, but they saw them in the far distance and welcomed them, recognizing that they were only strangers and nomads on earth. People who use such terms about themselves make it quite plain that they are in search of a homeland. If they had meant the country they came from, they would have had the opportunity to return to it, but in fact they were longing for a better homeland, their heavenly homeland. That is why God is not ashamed to be called their God, since he has founded the city for them.

It was by faith that Abraham, when put to the test, offered up Isaac. He offered to sacrifice his only son even though he had yet to receive what had been promised, and he had been told: Isaac is the one through whom your name will be carried on. He was confident that God had the power to raise the dead, and so, figuratively speaking, he was given back Isaac from the dead.

It was by faith that this same Isaac gave his blessing to Jacob and Esau for the still distant future. By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph's sons, bowed in reverence, as he leant on his staff. It was by faith that, when he was about to die, Joseph mentioned the Exodus of the Israelites and gave instructions about his own remains.

It was by faith that Moses, when he was born, was kept hidden by his parents for three months; because they saw that he was a fine child, they were not afraid of the royal edict. It was by faith that, when he was grown up, Moses refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter and chose to be ill-treated in company with God's people rather than to enjoy the transitory pleasures of sin. He considered that the humiliations offered to the Anointed were something more precious than all the treasures of Egypt, because he had his eyes fixed on the reward. It was by faith that he kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood to prevent the Destroyer from touching any of their first-born sons. It was by faith that they crossed the Red Sea as easily as dry land, while the Egyptians, trying to do the same, were drowned.

It was through faith that the walls of Jericho fell down when the people had marched round them for seven days. It was by faith that Rahab the prostitute welcomed the spies and so was not killed with the unbelievers.

What more shall I say? There is not time for me to give an account of Gideon, Barak, Sampson, Jephthah, or of David, Samuel and the prophets. These were men who through faith conquered kingdoms, did what was upright and earned the promises. They could keep a lion's mouth shut, put out blazing fires and emerge unscathed from battle. They were weak people who were given strength to be brave in war and drive back foreign invaders. Some others submitted to torture, refusing release so that they would rise again to a better life. Some had to bear being pilloried and flogged, or even chained up in prison. They were stoned, or sawn in half, or killed by the sword; they were homeless, and wore only the skins of sheep and goats; they were in want and hardship, and maltreated. They were too good

for the world and they wandered in desert and mountains and in caves and ravines. These all won acknowledgement through their faith, but they did not receive what was promised, since God had made provision for us to have something better, and they were not to reach perfection except with us.

Nathella waited until Taberah had finished reading, and said, "Nowhere on earth is home to us. Heaven is home, and you have less of a temporary home than most people do. It hurts to have an earthly home taken away, but the healing of the hurt is not in finding another earthly home, but in finding a heavenly home — and once you have let Heaven be your home, you may find pieces of it on earth.

"That plaque was given to me by my mother; she had it for some time, and it was one of the last things she gave me. Now she's in Heaven.

"Inside your heart — and mine, and Aed's — is a God-shaped void. Only God can fill it. New Age music may bring a moment's relief, but the thirst is one only God can wholly slake." She beckoned to Aed, and the two of them gave Taberah a sandwich hug. "But we will try to make a place where you can be at home."

Taberah said, "Where's Fiona? I want to show her my time."

Taberah's Time

Fiona said, "So, Taberah, how about your time?"

Taberah said, "Why don't we take a walk in the forest, and I'll think about how to explain it?"

They began to walk along the path, Taberah stopping and thinking every so often, but saying nothing. This continued for five minutes, fifteen, thirty, an hour — and Fiona began tapping her toes. Taberah stopped, and Fiona

sat down on a log and began drumming her fingers.

"What are you doing?" Taberah asked.

"Nothing," Fiona said. "I'm just waiting for you to start explaining your time already."

"What about your hands and feet? What are you doing with them?"

"I'm just tapping them, because I'm getting impatient waiting for — ooh... Taberah, are you walking around and not saying anything on purpose?"

"No; I'm thinking about how to explain time to you."

"Do you understand why I'm drumming my fingers?"

"No. Why?"

Fiona began to realize something. She decided to try not to drum her fingers, or pace, or tap her foot, but just sit. It turned out to be harder than it sounded. Fiona kept noticing herself fidgeting; even when she thought to herself, "It's been a while and I'm not fidgeting," somehow she realized that her fingers were drumming on her legs.

"Fiona!" Taberah spoke, and Fiona suddenly realized that she had lost track of time — and was not fidgeting. "I do not have a different time awareness, so much as not having an awareness of time. There are moments for me, times with other people, times doing a task, and times waiting — watches are fascinating to me, but even when I watch them, I watch the rhythmic motion, and more often than not forget that the motion is measuring something that's supposed to be time. That time is fickle; it seems to speed up and slow down. The first lesson in medieval time is to let go of it."

Taberah walked a bit further, stopping a few times, and Fiona still caught herself fidgeting — but she began to catch herself completely relaxed at times. Fiona wondered when he would finally speak, and then was surprised when he broke the silence — was he done thinking already? Taberah said, "There are moments — I do not know how to say it in your language — when you are totally absorbed, rapt in concentration, when you lose track of time because

you are so completely filled. It is not so much time as a foretaste of eternity. These moments cannot be commanded or controlled, although there is a cooperation with them; they are a gift from God. Those moments are my 'time', if time is the appropriate word. 'Timelessness' is better. That is the apex of the time I live in, and I am sorry not to see you live in that time more."

"So how do I enter this time? You've told me what time you live in, but not how to get in it."

Taberah thought briefly and said, "I can't tell you that. Pray, and God may grant it. But I don't know how to enter it."

Worship

A couple of Wednesdays had passed since Taberah had first asked to worship with the Phoenix Society; something had come up, and Taberah had not been aware that time had passed. This time around, Fiona was free, and they entered the room to be warmly greeted.

The service began with hugs and lively music. Taberah was caught up in the singing; Nathella wondered if one of the moments Taberah described would descend. Or had she always had them and not been aware of them? The music gave way to prayer, Scripture, sermon; as communion came, Fiona could see that Taberah was almost in a trance, but she was not. The worship was followed by a meal; Taberah felt a tap on his shoulder, and wondered why someone would tap his shoulder. He looked up.

The young woman who had spoken up at the skeptics' meeting studied his face closely and said, "You were at that meeting and left right after the paper burned weirdly. What did you do?"

Taberah looked at her and said, "Nothing. I prayed. Same as you. God heard our prayer."

She said, "That's not the whole story."

Taberah said, "It's as much of the story as you'll believe."

She said, "What part of the story won't I believe?"

"That I am medieval."

"You mean that you try to be like a medieval, even growing out a beard?"

"No, I mean that I am medieval."

The student's gaze rested on Taberah. After a while, she said, "I don't know what to make of the claim. You're not lying, you don't seem mistaken, and I can't believe what you say." She paused, and said, "And I didn't believe the paper when I saw it. I prayed for it, but I didn't believe it." Then she blushed slightly, and said, "I've forgotten my manners. My name is Ceinwyn. What is your name?" She reached out her arms to embrace him.

Taberah enjoyed the hug; she was soft, and in her touch he could feel a spirit that was alive. He said, "My name is Taberah. I'm staying with Aed."

"Who? Is he a student here?"

Fiona said, "He means Dr. Kinsella."

Ceinwyn said, "Dr. Kinsella. You mean —" A look of dread crossed her face, and Fiona said, "Yes, he's teaching this young man his corrupt ways." Ceinwyn smiled, and said, "I have respect for anybody who can do that."

Taberah said, "Do what?"

Fiona said, "You know. What you did to win the Turing Award."

Fiona covered her mouth; as soon as the words left her mouth, she realized she shouldn't have said them. Half the room was staring, and the other half soon joined. Then she said, "Um, I would like if you could kind of forget what I said; my Dad's done a lot to try to ensure the privacy of my friend."

A young man said, "He won the Turing Award?"

Another man stood up and said, "I have a strong temptation to ask this brother for his autograph, and I

would like to ask you to join me in resisting it. We need to treat him as an honored guest but nothing special beyond that, and treat his award as a matter among brothers. It has to have the highest level of confidence."

Ceinwyn looked at Taberah and said, "I am sorely tempted to ask you something more about the paper, but..." her voice trailed off.

Fiona said, "I think he may be right about being medieval. Or almost right. But there are some things about him that just don't fit. He makes my head spin, and he says the queerest things."

Another student said, "Like what?"

"Like saying that he stole a relic from a cathedral."

The student said, "Hmm... I'm a history major as well as an English major, and medieval culture was very different from ours. My name's Tala, by the way. Stealing relics was actually fairly common. Taberah, did you hear about the conversation between Saint Peter and Saint Augustine?"

Taberah said, "No, what did they say?"

Fiona said, "And that's the other thing. He gets the queerest things wrong. It's not just that he doesn't understand why people who lived in different centuries can't have talked with each other. He didn't understand why a cathedral couldn't have had two heads of John the Baptist, one as a boy and one as a man. He saw the logical contradiction, but didn't deduce an impossibility. Plus, he's so short and scrawny — not at all like the bulk you'd expect of someone from the age of knights in shining armor."

Tala said, "I don't want to explain all of why, at least not right now, but a medieval would be quite likely to make those errors. And medievals *were* that short and scrawny — their diets stunted their growth. It's only in the past couple of centuries that people started to look as tall as you are me — and (I won't name names) some people today still haven't caught up." He winked.

A short, bearded student said, "I'll have you know that I represent that remark."

Fiona said, "Ooh!" and then, "Diet. He talked as if he had grown up eating mostly bread, bread with pebbles in it."

Tala said, "I think he's about as good of a mockup of a medieval as you could ask for. How and why, I don't know — there've been a lot of queer things that have happened, most of which have an uninteresting explanation. Even with what I've seen, it would take a lot to convince me that he had — Taberah, if you are a medieval, why are you in the twenty-first century?"

Taberah said, "What is the twenty-first century?"

Tala said, "Never mind that. How did you come to be here?"

Taberah said, "I was walking with two of my friends, when an angel called me. I took his hand, and I was in the forest outside Aed's house. Then —" and he started telling the story. It was after midnight when he finished; Ceinwyn said, "Taberah, I have many questions to ask you, but some of us need to get to bed. Would you consider visiting us again?"

Taberah said, "Certainly."

That night, as Tala lay in bed, waiting to fall asleep, strange images flitted through his mind. He saw a doorway between the medieval world and his, shimmering, the door beginning to open. A burst of light flashed around; Tala looked around and saw no one, and then looked to the doorway.

The door had been blasted off its hinges.

Second Birth

Taberah said, "Remember how we were talking about medieval time, and how we left things not finished? I have thought more about your becoming medieval."

Aed said, "Yes. Do you want to can turn back the clock?"

Taberah said, "What does 'turn back the clock' mean?"

"It means reverse the flow of time, undo the changes that have happened."

Taberah looked puzzled. "Why would anyone do that?"

Aed said, "My culture was once, a long time ago, medieval. Now it is not. We have cars, computers, and clocks. Do you want to turn that back to swords and armor? Do you want to un-invent electronics?"

Taberah said, "It is funny that you think of medieval in terms of things. Wealth is not medieval. Wealth is only an avatar; it is not the true person. Medieval is not knights on horseback."

Aed said, "Then what is medieval?"

Taberah said, "Medieval is faith. Medieval is rationality. Medieval is carving the back of a statue. Medieval is a way of life."

Aed said, "But the medieval era is gone. How can people in the four hundred and seventh semi be medieval?"

"What is a semi?"

"I'll explain it later. How can people today be medieval? We can't just automatically be medieval the way the medievals were."

Taberah closed his eyes in concentration; it took him a long time to get the point. Aed was asking him for the answer to a difficulty that simply didn't exist for him, and Taberah was trying hard to see the matter through Aed's eyes — and at last he did.

"Aed, do you know Jesus talking with Nicodemus?"

"Yes."

"What was the question Nicodemus asked Jesus?"

"'How can someone old be born? Can a man enter his mother's womb to be born again?' I know this question well. It has been ridiculed, but it is a serious question, even profound. Can a man turn back the clock and —"

There was a look of dawning comprehension on Aed's face, and suddenly he was grasping what was *medieval* — not lords and vassals, not illuminated manuscripts, not unending quirks and questions from a visitor whom he still could not wholly believe was medieval — not any of these things, but Aed grasped what was medieval. He saw the force behind cathedrals, the abstraction that showed itself in the question about dancing angels, the community shared between the people and, in all of these things, he saw a little piece of his heart.

Aed saw equally why Taberah had asked the question: that turning back the clock was neither possible nor necessary, that the second birth was of a different type than the first one, and one that could still happen with much water under the bridge, that the passage of time in itself had almost nothing to do with being medieval. He saw that the fundamental beauty of the Middle Ages was one that people from his age could share — not in exactly the same way, but it didn't need to be. People could be medieval today just as they could still be Christian today — it involved swimming upstream, but it was worth it.

Aed looked at Taberah gently and said, "Taberah, you said that you were medieval, and asked what time I was from. I am medieval, too."

Questions

It seemed but an eyeblink and another week had passed; Fiona and Taberah were once again in the crowded worship room, and there was an audible excitement. The service was merry and passed quickly, and at the meal afterwards, Ceinwyn came up to Taberah and said, "I know what the wrong questions are to ask you, Taberah, or at least questions it is not good to ask. What are the right questions to ask you? What do you wish others understood about you?"

Taberah closed his eyes and rocked back and forth on his chair. Tears began to appear. When, after a long time, he did not answer, someone told Ceinwyn, "Ask him another question." Taberah, without opening his eyes, said, "That's the best question. That is a very good question to ask of anyone."

"I have had many people try to understand me, but most of them don't. I don't know why not. Maybe I'm just hard to understand. Some of you think of me as medieval, and I am medieval, but I'm as different from other medievals as they are from you. Even how I am talking — it is a means of talking that I learned from your time. I have seen different peoples, and the way in which I am different is not the way one people varies from each other. Maybe there is something wrong with me. I don't fit in anywhere. I can adapt some — I've lived in many places — but I'm never completely — I don't know the word. I'm not making sense. I'm not saying anything. Never mind. I can't think like other people. You asked a good question, but I don't have a good answer for it."

Emerant was pierced by the look on his face. Emerant was intelligent, if not exceptionally so, but she was a psychology major in the middle of a senior thesis studying of the psychology of extraordinary intelligence; she followed all three major schools: traditional Stanford-Binet intelligence, multiple intelligences (there were now twenty-three agreed upon intelligences among most multiple intelligence theorists), and the interactionist school, which studied its intelligence as an emergent property arising from the interaction of the basic aptitudes studied by multiple intelligence theorists. Being familiar with all three schools, Emerant regarded the traditional school as unfairly neglected, and it was that school that she thought of now. The pain Taberah voiced was not at all unique; it was part of why the gifted had joined the ranks of activist minorities filled with anger and seeking redress for grievances that were always perceived to be getting

worse. There was more to it than just a taboo (now being effaced) on divulging a high level of intelligence, or a stereotype that for a long time was not realized to exist — a stereotype embedded in words such as 'geek' and 'nerd' that only now were becoming as socially unacceptable as racial slurs. The more gifted a person was, the more differently he thought, and that is why there had been posited a range of optimal intelligence, with IQ between 125 and 145 — beyond the upper limit of that range, a person thought differently, so that his giftedness became a mixed blessing. People with IQs over 170 tended to feel like they didn't fit anywhere. From psychological, emotional and social cues, and the Turing Award, Emerant had no doubt that Taberah's IQ was over 170, probably over 180 — how much further, she did not bother to speculate. Above, at any rate, the point at which IQ tests cease to effectively measure, and well beyond the point that pain would begin to — Emerant wondered what a boy of normal intelligence would think and feel growing up in a society of people who were severely mentally retarded. He would definitely perceive that he was somehow different from the others, and attribute it to either "Something's wrong with them," or "Something's wrong with me." Taberah had evidently taken the latter route, and — where to begin to explain all this to him?

She walked up, placed an arm around Taberah's shoulder, and said, "Taberah, Taberah. I have a number of things to explain to you, but the way you think is not worse than anyone else's — just different and special. You haven't met anybody who thinks like you (nor have I, apart from you), because God has only made a few people that way. I understand your feelings, and I would feel the same way if I were like you. I love you and I am glad you're here — so does everyone in this room. May we sing a healing song for you?"

"What's a healing song?" Taberah asked.

"It's a song we sing to God, as a prayer for you that you

may have healing."

"Yes, please." Taberah had been touched by Emerant's words, but it was her eyes most of all which caught him. Her eyes bore the embrace of a warm, generous heart, and silently spoke the message, "My heart has room for you." And Taberah realized that he had a foster family who cared about him deeply — he decided to thank them for it. A song began, and he realized that the people had gathered around him, placing their hands on him. The music seemed to Taberah to rise like incense:

*Lord God of Heaven,
Hold this child in your arms.
Fill him with your love.*

*Creator of Heaven and earth,
Fill his heart with your peace.
Let this peace flow through him.*

*Spirit of light and love,
Lift from him all darkness.
Lift him up to Heaven.*

*Let us be his brothers and sisters,
Your love made manifest.
Fill him with your love.*

As the song ended, Taberah looked at the faces around him and wondered, "Is this what Heaven's like?"

Mysticism

"Fiona, I was thinking, and I realized a better answer to Ceinwyn's question. The answer is this: I am a mystic."

"Oh, Taberah," Fiona said, "We already knew that. Dad mentioned that you had done some astrology, and

now there's that piece of paper."

Taberah said, "Huh? What does mysticism have to do with that?"

Fiona said, "Huh? Isn't the connection obvious?"

Taberah said, "No. I have stopped astrology because I trust Aed, but astrology was not any strange mysticism; it was to me like what you do in reading a weather forecast. And the paper — I never thought of that as mystical. I just prayed as others were praying, and God gave what we asked for. That is hardly mysticism."

Fiona had difficulty believing that all that was going on was that Taberah had asked God, but she mentally waved this aside. She asked, "Then what is mysticism?"

Taberah said, "Mysticism is living in the fire of God. It is contemplating and gazing on his glory, and for me it is action in that glory. You are concerned with getting things done, with practicality, with results; I happen to get things done, but it is not what I am concerned with. Few things are needed, really only one; I occupy myself with that one thing. That is the heart of mysticism, not astrology or saving a piece of paper."

Fiona said, "But what does your mysticism *do*? What mystic powers are you striving to develop?"

Taberah said, "What a funny idea, mystic powers! Which is greater — getting something done, or the reason getting something done is desirable in the first place?"

Fiona said, "I suppose, what made it worth getting it done."

Taberah said, "Correct. Mysticism is not a way to get things done; it is a 'why' that is greater than getting things done. Mysticism is not a way to do something else. Mysticism is worthy in itself."

Fiona asked, "Then how are you a mystic? You say that you are the son of a merchant, that you have travelled to many places and had adventures. How does mysticism fit into that? You haven't retreated into a monastery to spend six hours a day praying; you've already managed to cause a

stir. Is that more important than mysticism? Or are you a superman who can do one on top of the other?"

Taberah said, "I find your question confusing. My actions are not more important than mysticism; they are the shape that part of my mysticism takes. I do not see action as something added to mysticism; it is an expression. I am seeking God's glory by talking with you now. I have heard a saying, 'Too Heavenly minded to be of any earthly good,' and I think it embodies a mistake. You cannot be too Heavenly minded to be of any earthly good. You can quite easily be too earthly minded to be of any earthly good. Being heavenly minded is itself of earthly good, whether or not it does things in an obvious manner; that is one of many reasons why, of the nine orders of angels, the highest six gaze only on the glory of God — it is but the lowest three who are ever sent to earth. It is a right ordering. Mysticism is sharing in the truth that the angels share in, and for me that truth takes an active form."

Fiona said, "Does this mysticism relate to your time?"

Taberah said, "My time relates to this mysticism."

"How can I enter it?"

"Seek God, and ask him how you are to enter it. He will show you."

Heaven

Taberah walked out of the computer room, thinking loudly. Aed looked at him, and simply waited for him to start explaining.

"Aed, I was doing some reading today on embryology; what your philosophers have thought of is fascinating. Something in my mind was speaking, and I realized another deep difference in belief. Medieval people believe that they're going to Heaven."

Aed cleared his throat and said, "All Christians believe that, Taberah. It's a basic doctrine."

Taberah said, "Then why does your people not act like they believe they're going to Heaven?"

"How does someone act like he believes he's going to go to Heaven? Does he kill himself to get there faster? You should know better than that."

Taberah paused in thought for a moment and said, "How can you believe you're going to Heaven and not know a change in your actions? That's like believing food nourishes you, but not knowing what eating is like."

Aed had no immediate reply to this. He asked, "How does belief in Heaven change your actions, Taberah?"

Taberah said, "In embryology, one studies how a person is becoming ready to be born and live outside the uterus. That is the whole purpose of being an unborn child — why do the texts leave the word untranslated as *foetus*? Did the English translators of your texts not know how to render that word from Latin?"

"Later, Taberah. You're getting side tracked."

"Some of the unborn child's motions are useful there — such as blood pulsing about the body. There are others that have no use in the uterus, such as sucking and kicking. The question is not how to arrange things to most pleasurably remain an unborn child, but to best prepare for birth and the world beyond that.

"Your people does not understand how this symbol reveals Heaven. They think that the point of living on earth is to make as much change on earth, and make earth as comfortable a place as possible, and — I was a long time in coming to understand political ideology. Authority is necessary, and there are questions about how to best govern, to praise good and punish evil. But political ideology is not just about this — it is about how to use government to turn earth into Heaven."

Aed said, "I do not understand. Do you mean it is wrong to try to make earth better?"

Taberah said, "All of the saints made earth better. Good deeds are an important part of how a soul is made

ready for Heaven. But a centeredness, a focus on making earth better is not possible. Or it is possible, but leaves people more poorly prepared for Heaven, and more poorly equipped for earth. It is — I do not know how to say it. My father told me, 'Drink wine to live. Do not live to drink wine.' If I were to live to drink wine, I would be disordered. The wine would ensnare me. Trying to live on technology is trying to make technology something it cannot be. It can pacify a spoiled child; it cannot make him well-raised. Your people is concerned with how to pamper and pacify a spoiled child — and it took me the longest time to understand that not simply did I stumble on a very rich man's house, but that so many people in your society have wealth not only to have as much bread as you need, but as much meat as you want, and you do not even think of it as costly — while mine is concerned with how to raise him well to grow into a man. In the Great Chain of Being, man lives between the beasts and the angels; it is the beasts who have this life on earth and its pleasures as all they own, and the angels who eternally gaze on the glory of God. Believing in Heaven means becoming more like an angel; here, I have seen heroic efforts to live the life of a beast."

Aed sorted this through. It had been a while since he had thought of the Great Chain of Being, and his thoughts about it moved sluggishly. Apart from that, he began to see — and more than see, he began to believe and know — why Taberah would look around and be convinced that Aed's culture did not believe in Heaven. With a chill, Aed realized that he could not remember the last time he had thought about how his actions were preparing him, or failing to prepare him, for the eternity before him. Slightly later, and with an equal chill, Aed realized that he could not remember the last day he had not thought about how to shape the world around him so as to bring pleasure. He slipped too often in thinking of his teaching as a way to prepare his students for the world it would face — which it

no doubt was, but if that was *all* it was, then... Aed asked Taberah, "Taberah, how can I do something that will prepare me for the next life? What is one thing I can do?"

Taberah thought for a second, and said, "Close your eyes and grow still, and wait."

Taberah waited a second and said, "You're wanting to get this over with. Stop that. Want to do this."

Time passed. Aed's breathing had stilled. Taberah said, "Now thank God for seven things he has given you."

Aed took another breath and slowly said,

Thank you, God, for my wife Nathella.

Thank you, God, for my children, Fiona and Clancy.

Thank you, God, for my professorship.

Thank you, God, for my broken garage door. It means I have not only a house and a car, but even a building to protect my car from the elements.

Thank you, God, for the headaches I have after talking with Taberah. They come from a person for whom I am very grateful, and who challenges me in ways I never thought possible.

Thank you, God, for the hope of Heaven.

Most of all, thank you, God, for yourself.

Taberah smiled, and said, "You have now done one action to prepare yourself for Heaven."

Aed said, "Is it over already?"

"Life"

Taberah looked out; there was depth in his gaze, a gaze that was somehow present and remote at the same time. A short time ago, Fiona would have thought he was staring at her; now, she understood that he was looking

past her. It relieved the feeling of being under a microscope.

Fiona sat down and said, "What are you thinking of, Taberah?"

"I don't know how to say it — in any language. It is another part of the answer to Emerant's question."

"Can you try? Can you say something similar?"

"I — live. I don't know how to explain. I experience things intensely. Sometimes, when I drink wine, I am not aware of anything else —"

"You get drunk? That is living?"

"I not know how to explain. I do not get drunk. It is when I am drinking it, the taste — it also happens with thinking, and praying, and music."

When Taberah said 'music', Fiona caught a glimpse into what he was saying. She was transported back to his first chant, when the whole family had been lost in his voice — no, that wasn't quite it. They had been lost in the light that was shining through Taberah.

An idea came into Fiona's head, and she said, "Taberah, why don't you get your lute out, and I'll go to my keyboard, and we can play together? I think I'd understand you better."

They went to the practice room, and Fiona set up her keyboard. "What songs do you know?"

"I know many songs from the lands I have travelled in. But I do not know songs here; I haven't played with musicians. Ooh! I know your church songs!"

Fiona played songs in several different styles — ancient songs, classic hymns (meaning the contemporary songs of days past, drinking tunes such as "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," and so on), "contemporary" music (meaning roughly three groups: music that had been contemporary in the more recent past, music that represented an unsuccessful attempt to imitate the contemporary secular style, and music that combined both attributes), songs of a new musical renaissance that did

not attempt to follow either mold, but borrowed from both and brought a new light... After one of the tunes, Taberah said, "That's the one! I want to play with that song."

Fiona slumped and said, "No, Taberah, not that one! It's awful! It was in bad musical taste when it was written, and it's in bad musical taste now. One of my girlfriends said that it sounds better when it's sung off-key."

Taberah said, "I know. You've already told me that. That's why I want to work with it."

Fiona had enough of her mother's perception to realize that arguing with Taberah now would be a losing proposition. So she resigned herself to playing harmony, leaving the Taberah the melody.

The first time through, Fiona was able to shut out the music; she expected a repose after going through once, but Taberah immediately started playing again. She kept up with the melody, but now Fiona was not able to ignore the music. Then Taberah started to improvise slightly; he made a change here and there, and then he started making only musical questions that required her to think of an answer in the accompaniment. This required Fiona to plunge even more deeply into the song. After a time, Fiona was too engaged in the music to think about how bad it was.

Time passed, and Fiona slowly became aware of something else. The music was still terrible, but she saw a luminescence shining through it. Then she realized that they were working together, and a strange beauty was emerging from the music. She played, fascinated, and gradually began to see a beauty like that of a rusty truck in a desert — a (she did not know the word) beauty that can't be found in a place that is polished and perfect — there is no room for it. She was fascinated by the music that was flowing around and through her. More time passed, and then a flash of insight struck and her hands froze on the keyboard; it was as if a juggler tossing seven glass balls stopped, and they fell and shattered. Taberah switched off

the keyboard, and relaxed his hands. "What happened, Fiona?"

"I realized something, Taberah. I had an epiphany."

"What?"

"I had finally entered your time, Taberah. I entered your time."

Intelligence Emerging

Aed sat and thought about the output of the artificial intelligence program. Trying to decide whether it functioned intelligently was like — no, that wasn't it. Aed couldn't tell what it was like.

Intelligent or not, it was at the same time familiar and alien. He had worked with the algorithm further, so that it stored a history in its state, drawing on the algorithm that had won the Turing Award, and the arguments were coherent — but arguments such as he had never seen before. Any one paragraph of its output could be mistaken for human, but there was something undefinably strange about it; he could tell what the computer was arguing, but not why. Aed slapped his forehead; the arguments were evidently intelligent enough to tempt him to think of the computer as human.

Aed spent a long time trying to think if the computer's rationality was something comparable to human, or even if that were sensible to ask. Dijkstra had said, "Asking whether computers can think is like asking whether submarines can swim." Aed thought for a nuance; he thought it was closer to the question of whether a racecar can swim. Or an oven. Except that the answer was not "No, but it can do something comparable;" an answer of "Yes, but it is not comparable" would have been closer.

Aed thought for a moment, and then went down to the computer computer and navigated. An avatar was shortly before him; it said, "Aed! Still up to the usual trouble?"

"How are things in the philosophy department? I heard you've got a new tenure track position added. I'm actually up to worse trouble, now."

"I'm not surprised. How can I help you?"

"What courses are you teaching this semester?"

"I'm teaching three courses, all of which have a paper due shortly. Get something in the gradebooks for a preliminary report. I'm teaching 101, *Introduction to Philosophy*, 234, *Philosophy and Contemporary Movements*, and 312, *Integrative Metaphysics*. Have you encountered yet another guest lecturer that you want me to cede precious lecture time to?"

"Actually, no. I was wondering if you could give a paper to be graded by your TAs for each of the assignments."

"Uh, OK. May I ask who the paper is by?"

"I'm not telling."

Role Play

Clancy said, "Taberah, have you been to the pool at all?"

Taberah said, "Pool? Why? To drink?"

"No, to swim, silly!"

Taberah stiffened and said, "I swam once, when I fell from a bridge. I don't like swimming."

Clancy said, "Will you come along? You don't have to go in the water. We can hang out on the deck if you want. The pool will close before too long; it's not so warm."

Taberah was careful not to sit too close to the water's edge; falling in once had been plenty for him. He watched the others with trepidation, and tried to grasp that they were in the water for pleasure's sake, and did not need to be rescued. The swimsuits gave him a shock as well. He had finally gotten adjusted to the fact that these people were not used to being naked, and seeing trunks and

bikinis was a bizarre sight to him.

Fiona climbed out of the water and sat down on the chair next to Taberah; Clancy was on the other side, whistling a bird song to the robin on the lines overhead. Fiona told Clancy, "You know, it's been a long time since we role played."

Taberah asked, "What is role play?"

Fiona said, "It's — you'll see. But you'll have to make a character. Role playing is *in* this semi."

Taberah asked, "What is a semi?"

Fiona thought for a moment and said, "Semi-decade. People used to not be conscious of what era they were in, and then they were conscious of the century, and then they thought of what decade they were in, and now it's the 5 year semi-decade."

Taberah wondered why people would be time-conscious in that way, and why the era would be that short, but was beginning to understand that certain things were wiser not to ask. He said, "I want to be a minstrel."

Fiona said, "My character is a Jane-of-all-trades named Deborah. Clancy is GMing, uh, game mastering."

Clancy said, "You are both in a forest; your ship has crashed. There is a spring of water nearby. You hear sounds like footprints nearby."

Fiona said, "Do the footprints sound human or animal?"

Clancy said, "You can't tell for sure, but there is an animal quality about them."

Fiona said, "I'm going to get my laser gun out."

Clancy said, "What are you going to do, Taberah?"

Taberah hesitated and said, "Can I hide and nock an arrow?"

Clancy said, "Yes."

"You see a huge bear on a chain. At the other end of the chain is a massive man in a rags."

Fiona said, "I am going to say 'Hello.'"

Clancy said, "He does not seem to recognize the word,

and there is uncertainty on his face."

Taberah said, "I am going to put back my bow and arrow, and take my harp, and begin to sing."

Clancy paused, and said, "The bear sits and listens; the man does, too."

Taberah said, "I am going to take out some of my food and feed it."

Clancy said, "Both bear and man seem pleased at the food. The man looks at you longingly, and starts to walk into the woods."

Taberah said, "I'm going to follow him."

Fiona said, "I'll follow, too."

Clancy said, "He gets to a cave; upon following him in, it takes some time for your eyes to adjust to the twilight. The cave is a crude environment, with assorted items around."

Fiona said, "Such as?"

Clancy said, "Some burnt-out transformers, an oddly shaped granite bowl, a corroded lamp, and some empty containers."

Taberah asked, "Are the containers usable?"

Clancy said, "No; they were disposable containers. They —"

A voice from the pool shouted, "Hey, Kinsella! Want to join us in a game of Marco Polo?"

Clancy shouted, "Not now! I'm entertaining someone."

Fiona said, "What is in his eyes when he looks at us? What is in his eyes when he looks at me?"

Clancy said, "Fear, suspicion, hope, disbelief, a forlorn longing."

Fiona asked, "Does he want to be with our civilization?"

Clancy said, "He wished that at one time. He is now uncertain about what he desires."

Mist came into Taberah's eyes. Fiona turned to him and said, "What is it, Taberah? Is something bothering you?"

Taberah said, "No. There is something about man that —"

Fiona sat silently, waiting.

Taberah said, "Before I left medieval time, that was home. Now, even if I return to it, it is not home. I am part of this time now, and at times I let Heaven be my home, and at times I find Heaven, but other times — I am learning not to be in this state, but it catches me."

Fiona wrapped her arms around Taberah, and said, "Honey, why don't you come home? We can be with you while you heal."

Taberah got up, and joined Clancy in heading for the locker room.

Rated

Aed received the three copies of the computer's ramblings that had been submitted to the philosophy TAs. The first paper had been submitted to the TA for philosophy 234, *Philosophy and Contemporary Movements*:

Paper is nuanced and addresses many fundamental issues of relevance to contemporary movements. Nonetheless, its reflection of nuance is not matched by any kind of logical order; a logician would grade this paper harshly. B

Aed chuckled. This grade was a mark of success; it was the first time he had seen someone complain that a computer understood nuance but was logically deficient. He turned to the next copy, the one submitted for philosophy 312, *Integrative Metaphysics*:

Paper contains brilliant application of argument from multiple domains of

philosophy, combined with the indescribable eccentricity that heralds a new development. Ideas are not fully developed, but even in embryonic form, there is a raw energy to them. I have shown your paper to the professor, and she concurs with my judgments. You should do graduate work in philosophy. A+

Aed said, "This is encouraging. What did the TA for philosophy 101 have to say?"

Paper is arrogant and pretentious, trying to be simultaneously similar to and different from existing philosophies, and combines the worst points of both. Classic example of fake intellectual who strings together a lot of things that sound philosophical and thereby considers himself a philosopher. F

Aed laughed; the 101 TA had picked up on something that the others hadn't. Very well, then; he was pleased with the results, and he was ready to announce what Taberah and he had done.

What Would You Like To Be?

The days passed quickly; the leaves on the trees turned bright colors, and Taberah seemed a shade blueish. There was another shopping trip made, in which Taberah received a warmer set of clothing; this trip passed without any remarkable events, and Clancy said he could take Taberah shopping for clothes alone next time; Nathella accepted. In watching Taberah, Nathella was reminded of her roommate freshman year in college. A young Sudanese

woman, she found the cooler seasons to be bitterly cold.

A mug of spiced cider found Fiona and Taberah relaxing over a fire; Taberah was watching a leaf all from its stalk. Fiona looked at Taberah and asked, "What would you like to be for Halloween?"

She was not surprised by his reply, "What's Halloween?", nor his followup, "I think I'd like to be myself. I don't fancy turning into a rock or a bear." She took it as an opportunity to explain a cherished time of year. "Halloween is when you dress up as something fanciful, and pretend to be something different for a day. You can go around from door to door, and knock, and show people your costume, and they give you candy. I want to be a fairy, wearing a shimmering white robe with draping sleeves and a low neckline and a long, flowing skirt, and with translucent, glittery wings."

Taberah said, "I don't know what I want to be. I was already a jester in my avatar. I know! I can dress as a night-man, with shadow-black clothes that melt in the night, and soft shoes that make no sound, and —"

Fiona said, "No. Too many criminals out at night; you'd be mistaken for one. You need to wear bright clothes and not look threatening."

Taberah said, "Euh... I could be a philosopher!"

Fiona said, "And how does one dress as a philosopher? All the philosophers I've met dress like everyone else. No, wait! You could be an ancient Greek philosopher, with toga, and laurel, and — whatever else you think would make the point."

Taberah said, "Where do we buy these outfits? Are they in a section of the store I haven't seen?"

Fiona said, "Well, there are places that sell Halloween costumes, but they aren't very good — a mask and a hat and some very flimsy cloth. There are places that rent them, and some of those are better — but you only have them for a day. In our family, we have a tradition of making them. We buy cloth and patterns, and cut them

out, and stitch them together. It's a great deal of fun — almost as much fun as wearing them. I can show you old costumes I have in my closet; I've been a princess, a space ranger, an alien, an ice cube, a —"

Taberah said, "How did you dress as an ice cube?"

Fiona said, "Dad did that one. We got a big cardboard box, painted it blue and white, and got a white shirt and white tights for me to wear underneath. That costume is — let's see, I think it's being used to store shirts in the attic. Or something; we only go up in our attic when we're putting something up there."

Taberah said, "I was up there. It was fun; it was like climbing cliffs. Only this time there weren't brigands chasing me. I think climbing's more fun when brigands chase after you."

Fiona shuddered, and said, "To each, her own. I'd be scared out of my wits."

Taberah said, "I was scared out of my wits. And I was having fun."

Fiona said, "I guess we all have our own eccentricities. Our attic's not nearly as silly as my Dad is at times; you should see him play charades. The last time we played at a family gathering, he was jumping around with a vacuum cleaner, and humming 'Oh, when the saints go marching in!' I always remember what Dad did, never what he was — when I watch him, I get the feeling that the game isn't about really about trying to help other guess what on earth you are."

Taberah said, "Your Dad understands games."

Fiona said, "How's that? He usually diverts games off their course."

Taberah said, "No. He changes their appearance when he gets them on course. A game on one level is about following rules in some sort of contest — but people would never play games if that was all there was about it. It is a pleasant contest to enjoy other people — and it sounds like your father has found a shortcut to enjoying other people."

Most people need the long way about; they can't have fun unless they've carefully earned it. There are a very few people who can take shortcuts, and a very, very few people who can make others feel good about it."

Fiona thought for a moment, and said, "Taberah, I didn't know you were a philosopher."

Taberah said, "I am. You didn't know that? But 'philosophy' means something different here than in my lands. Philosophy in my home means a broad kind of learning, that touches many different places. I gather that your science is derived from natural philosophy, the philosophy that explores the natural order — but there are subtle differences that I don't understand. Maybe that it's separated from the rest of philosophy. I understand that professors at your father's university are called Doctor of Philosophy, and their inquiries are parts of philosophy, but they are not philosophers. 'Philosophy' now means something narrow, dull, not connected with life — some philosophers try to make philosophy relevant, but our philosophers did not need to make philosophy relevant because it already was. Philosophy can be different."

Fiona asked, "Do you think our culture is impoverished?"

Taberah asked, "What is a culture?"

This time Fiona was caught off-guard. Taberah evidently understood what a culture was; he had experienced different cultures and made any number of cultural comparisons. But, when she explained it to him, he was a long time in understanding; Fiona came to appreciate what a non-trivial concept culture was.

As soon as Taberah began to guess what a culture was, a number of possible replies came to his mind about an answer to Fiona's question. To his credit, he spoke only the truth. He said, "Yes. I think your culture is very impoverished."

Fiona asked, "Then what are you going to do about it?"

Taberah leaned back and closed his eyes. He needed

and appreciated friends who would ask him questions like that — but didn't want too many. Like the whiskey he had once tried, a little went a long way.

"I don't know," he said. "Let me think about it. Then I'll tell you — or just act."

Women's Liberation I

Taberah was by now taking walks around the town and around the university campus; he had come to tolerate car rides, but never rode in a car by choice, and was shocked when Nathella suggested he learn how to drive a car. He decided to take a long thinking walk, and was weaving in and out among buildings when a voice caught him. "What is your name?" it said.

Taberah looked, and saw a young woman sitting under a tree. She was holding a book, and sipping a strawberry hydrolated beverage.

"My name is Taberah. Why do you ask?"

"You remind me of someone — a friend. Someone I've not seen in a long time."

"What was he like?" Taherah asked.

"What was *she* like, you mean. Don't use exclusive language."

"What is exclusive language?"

"Exclusive language is language that uses the word 'he' to refer to an unknown person. It excludes women."

"Why?" As Taberah asked, he felt a discomfort, a desire to be anywhere else, a feeling of "Not this dance again!" — and at the same time a feeling that there was something significant, a moral pull to be there.

"Using the masculine as the generic reference to a person exists out of sexism because of a man's world, that says by its language that men are all that's important. People tried for a time to make language more inclusive by alternating between 'he' and 'she', but that still had the

loaded masculine term. We now use the feminine as a generic term, free from exclusive masculine meanings, as a convenient designation for someone whose gender is unknown."

Taberah sensed something off kilter. It was not just with the argument; though he had never heard use of masculine pronouns interpreted to mean what she thought they meant, and was baffled as to why saying 'he' would be prejudicial while saying 'she' served as a neutral term for a person of unspecified sex, he was aware of something more. What he would come to call traditional language had always been a convention to him, no more significant than the use of a pronoun for a person whose name was not known — the argument he was hearing about exclusive language seemed to him as bizarre as an argument about "nameless language," in that persons of unspecified name were thereby meant to have no name. Taberah at least had always been acutely aware of how his thoughts were more than the words he used. He had struggled to represent his thoughts, and accepted conventions as useful in getting on to more important things. A sharp concern over "inclusive language", more to the point accompanied by a correspondingly sharp belief that the traditional use of masculine pronouns was really "exclusive language"... In itself this struck him as merely silly, and Taberah knew he was plenty silly himself. *Let he who is without silliness cast the first stone*, he had often said to himself, and he did not wish to break a tradition.

This is what Taberah sensed and thought on one level. On another level, he thought less but sensed more, and this was that the woman had a sense of anger about her. It wasn't just that her voice had risen; it was rather that in a vague sense he sensed that what he saw was the tip of an iceberg, that whatever concern and upset were caused by her upset at the word 'he' spoken of an unknown person, was only a surface glimmer, a faint shadow, cast by something he could not guess at. He looked at her, and

asked, "Sister, what is your name?"

She looked startled, and said, "My name is Lydia."

He asked, "Lydia, why don't we take a long walk in the woods and talk?"

Lydia blanched, and said, "I'm staying right here."

Taberah concentrated hard and tried hard to see what his *faux pas* was this time. When that failed, he looked at her, and said, "I know I'm breaking all sorts of social rules, and that I don't understand this culture very well, but what did I do wrong? Why were you afraid when I asked you to take a walk in the woods?"

Lydia said, "I think that should be obvious enough!"

Then she saw the puzzlement on his face, and said, "You might rape me."

Taberah turned green, and asked, "Do you really think that?"

Lydia snapped, "Don't you try to put me back in place by challenging me. When a woman says something, she means what she says. From language that speaks of sports playing fields to cars that are designed to look appealing to a man but not to a woman to cutting women down to the subordinate role that would be convenient to men to logic and abstraction regarded as the essence of good thinking, you men will..." She stopped, startled by a realization.

"Taberah, why haven't you told me to go to Hell? Most men usually say that when I stop smiling and... Usually, I can put a smile on and look happy, I usually don't talk about how badly women are treated unless I am with other feminists. You, somehow — I don't act like this. Something slipped. Why haven't you told me to go to Hell?"

Taberah looked at her levelly and said, "I am afraid to tell you."

"You are afraid of me lashing out again?"

"No. Do you want to hear anyway?"

"Yes."

"You are in Hell already."

Lydia glared at Taberah and said, "Of course I'm in

Hell! With a man's world that puts women down, how can I not be in Hell?"

Taberah said, "No. Wrongs exist, but you are in Hell because you believe the world is hostile to you. You believe that all sorts of actions are slights, and if there is ambiguity, that ambiguity is to be interpreted in a fashion that means women are being oppressed. I — I have known women who were really happy. Something about them..."

Lydia said, "What? Had they managed to create a place without sexism?"

Taberah said, "No. They lived in a broken world, a much harsher world than we have. They lived, in fact, suffering injustices that feminism has now made a big change in. But they refused to let their identity be one of being persecuted. The world their bodies lived in was far more hostile than the world your body lives in, but the world their minds lived in was not nearly as hostile as the world your mind lives in. You, in your mind, suffer unending hostility; I will venture a guess that, no matter what happens, if you choose to accept feminism's interpretation, you will be in Hell. I have seen other things like feminism; they are like fires: the more they are given, the more unsatisfied they are, the more they want."

Lydia said, "So you would have me just walk with anyone and get raped? One in three women is raped."

Taberah said, "Um..."

Lydia remained silent, and Taberah said, "I know two women who have been raped, and it is a torment I not know how to describe. But I have done some research, and the feminists who did surveys manipulated the numbers to say as many women have been raped as possible, to fuel a political agenda that claims a rape culture. In the first study that had said one in six women had been raped, over half the women who were classified as having been raped explicitly said they hadn't been raped. And —

"Being raped is terrible. It's one of few things worse than believing that you are in constant danger of being

raped, and that you are never safe with men. I would not have you walk with anyone and get raped. I would have you use your judgment and intuition and walk with people when it is prudent to do so. We are never safe — not from disease, not from being killed, nor from being wounded, nor from rape. But we can take reasonable risks."

"Ok," Lydia said. "You want to walk in the forest? I —"

"No," Taberah said. "You're not comfortable. It speaks well of you that you are able to trust where you have not trusted before, but I do not want your discomfort. What I would like is for you to think about what we have said, and then come join me at a place where women are at peace."

Halloween

Halloween came: Fiona a fairy, Taberah a philosopher, Clancy a cybernetic organism, Nathella an elfin lady, and Aed a medieval lord. After talking with Taberah, Aed wished that he could have a table piled high with food, with everyone invited to come and eat and talk — but he could not do so; the gesture would be misunderstood. On Halloween, hosts gave out vouchers for different kinds of candy, which could be redeemed online for a delivery of different candies; it was almost as easy to poison candy as it was to put razor blades in apples. Nathella did have food waiting for the few people who knew their family, but that was all. The rural trick-or-treat Nathella had grown up with was no more.

Aed and Nathella therefore waited, lord and lady at their castle, to meet the year's assortment of ghouls, witches, archers, space cadets, cheerleaders, Romantics, and assorted and sundry other manner of visitors. A file recording of Taberah's music played in the background, and the place had a warm look to it.

Taberah was with Clancy and Fiona; if Fiona most enjoyed making Halloween costumes, Clancy most

enjoyed wearing them.

"Trick or treat!" they said at one house. Fiona charmed them most; Taberah looked old to be trick-or-treating, but the costume fit the gravity that was around him. Clancy reached out with his long, metal arm and used the moving hand at the end to take his candy.

While they were out, they encountered Fiona and Clancy's friends: a bumblebee, a Hershey's Hug, a snake, and a bear were among those they saw. Fiona did not quite manage to contain her surprise when one matron gave a discerning look and told Taberah, "You do not quite look ancient, young man. I'd picture you as more medieval." It was with an unsteady step that she hurried on to the next house.

In the night's activities, Taberah saw beauty and ugliness mixed together so thoroughly that it was hard to tell them apart. People dressed up as something else — but that something else often meant vampires, devils, and succubi. There was a moment when Taberah almost lost his step, because he had an insight. He understood role play, and saw that it was good. He thought that, in the costumes, he could see a little further into other people than in normal clothing — but was disturbed by some of the choices. Fiona explained the historic origin of Halloween, but that did not seem to allay his concern.

It seemed too soon that moonlight and starlight were shining, and Clancy said, "We need to be heading to home now." They reached home, and Taberah had only one question to ask: "When is next Halloween?"

Women's Liberation II

As Lydia walked into the building, and as worship gave way to discussion around a table, she felt a mass of conflicting emotions within her. There were many branches to feminism, but one thing that held them in

common was that, whatever the trepidation with which men and male society were viewed, men were not the real enemy. The enemy was traditional women — people who had settled for being housewives, falling into men's shadows. They were disloyal to the cause of womanhood in a way that a man could never be.

The turmoil Lydia felt came when she saw women at the group who were traditional — but who were not the stereotype she came to expect. They were at ease with themselves, genuinely happy, and she came to see that what the feminist movement had interpreted as living in a man's shadow did not mean what she thought it meant.

It is always a painful experience when reality intrudes on your stereotypes and preconceptions, and Lydia did not enjoy the evening. She saw that other women were enjoying it, but she was processing changes. By the end, she began to see ways in which women's interests were not best served by feminism, and she came back, sharing in the joy upon returning.

Taberah, after talking with her, said, "Lydia, I have met few people, and far between, who could change after being shown they were in error. Most just fight, and fight, and fight, and fight. What let you do that?"

Lydia said, "I suppose the same thing that led me to be a feminist. Women are slighted in most societies; I embraced feminism because I intuited that it had a truth. I let go of it because I learned of something else that could serve women's interests better. Part of it is the new feminism that Catholics called for. The other part is just that — I never knew the tradition. I knew the feminist stereotype, but not the reality. The traditional Christian teaching has a much bigger place for women than I thought."

Lydia leaned to one side and asked, winking, "Does this mean I have to wear makeup?"

Taberah said, "Uh... I hope not."

"You don't like women wearing makeup?" Lydia

asked, surprised again.

"No. My culture does not have makeup as you understand it. When I first came here, I did not understand why women were damaging their appearance by smearing strange materials across their skin. I have hawk's eye — my mother used to call me 'hawk' — and a face with make-up looked to me like a counter with rubbish strewn over it. It took me a long time to understand that women wear make-up to convince themselves they're beautiful while wearing it — it took me a long time to understand what 'presentable' means. It means that a woman is not beautiful, but if she covers herself in powder and paint to look like something else, that something else is beautiful, and that the woman is OK only if she makes herself into something else."

"Taberah, are you sure that you're not a feminist?"

Taberah said, "I find that not the most helpful question to ask. Some of the truths I take with me are shared by feminism; feminism knows no doubt things that I do not know, and I know things that feminism does not know. Or at least that is what a mature person from your time would say, and it is true. But I want to see good come to all people, including the freedom of well-meaning women from a system that imposes a cure worse than the disease. I want to see women liberated from women's liberation."

Like an Emerald

A metal keychain knocked on the door. Nathella opened the door, and a young woman asked, "Is Taberah in? I'm Emerant; we've talked a little. I'm a phoenix."

"Come in," Nathella said, "I don't know where Taberah is." She called, "Taberah!" and Taberah came, holding a knife and a half-carved block of wood. The emerging figure was already discernible as a madonna.

Taberah looked sad; his expression brightened when he saw Emerant. Emerant hugged him and said, "Back at that first meeting, there was something I wanted to sit down and talk with you about, but I've been so busy since then! The courses get harder every year, and I've got one that's harder than a darwin. I'm sorry for not calling earlier, but I was wondering if you wouldn't mind going to a coffeeshop. There's this one shop on campus that only sells decaffeinated coffees, but you have to try their carbonated cappucino!"

Taberah set down the knife and statue and said "Sure!" He started to muse about how this people seemed to use big words for little ideas and little words for big ideas — 'darwin' was slang for a course designed to weed out the less suited students from a major, and evoked the substantial philosophical idea captured in a "survival of the fittest" argument — a discredited idea, to be sure, but a magnificent achievement none the less. On the other hand, Taberah did not know what a cappucino was, or why one would carbonate it, but from usage it was clear that the word meant a drink.

They walked along to the coffeeshop, not speaking, the loudest sound being the crunch of leaves under their feet, but they were not speaking for different reasons. Taberah was not speaking because he lived naturally in silence, did not have anything to say, and did not need to fill the time with sounds; Emerant was not speaking because she had made a conscious and counter-cultural choice to embrace silence and not fill it with noise — the noise that came so easily to a soul raised in a society that was afraid of silence and stillness and slowness. In walking two miles to the coffeeshop, they had their fill of silence, and Taberah took fifteen minutes to decide between a carbonated cappucino and some hot cocoa. He ended by ordering both, and Emerant, who ordered an herbal mint Italian soda, did not explain to him that this was a *faux pas*.

Emerant sat down with Taberah and said, "How has

your day been?"

Taberah said, "A good day. I have not carved for a long time." Then he remembered etiquette and said, "And yours?"

Emerant said, "A day with a lot of thinking. There was something I wanted to explain to you, and I've been trying to think of a good way to explain it, and I haven't found any good ways."

Taberah stiffened, anticipating a rebuke. Better to have it done with than to put it off. He said, "What have I done wrong?"

"It isn't about anything you've done wrong. It's something that I don't think anyone's ever explained to you."

"Is it about being left-handed? Aed has tried to explain about that, and I am at peace with it now. I wasn't earlier; one of my culture's peculiarities."

"It isn't about being left-handed — something I don't know enough about, especially given that I'm ambisinistrous. It's about something else. Taberah, do you know what the word 'genius' means?"

"In Latin it means the angel watching over a person. In English, I have gathered it means something different, but I don't know what. It is a word applied to some persons, but not others."

"'Genius' means someone possessing extraordinary intelligence and giftedness, someone who has a unique potential to shape society."

Taberah drew back. "Shape society? How would someone do that? Why would someone do that? Why would some people be specially qualified to do so? Your wording means that this is desirable. Why?"

In the ensuing discussion, Emerant was challenged; she had come to explain something to Taberah, and was not expecting herself to learn something new. She had thought of medieval time as hierarchical, holding some people to be born superior — and saw her own time as

having practically invented egalitarianism. Emerant saw in her reactions to Taberah that she not only believed some people were more intelligent than others, but that the highest measure of intelligence was taken to bring a prerogative and duty to shape society as one's naked reason led him to believe was best. Taberah found this to be madness; he would as soon consider himself qualified to redesign the human body from scratch, making surgical alterations so that his beneficiaries would have one less leg and one more arm, as to attempt to redesign human society from scratch. Taberah did not mind the concept of a special word for the most intelligent humans, as the implicit belief that this difference translated to a moral entitlement to do something he found abhorrent.

Emerant said, "Taberah, let's start this discussion again. You know that you are different from other people?"

Taberah hung his head. "Wherever I go, I can't be like other people. I make mistakes — terrible mistakes. I can't connect with other people."

"Taberah, there's a very special kind of intelligence, one that brings the ability to do things very few people can do — but it brings pain and failures. It means that you think very seriously. Classical literature has the image of a blind seer. Do you know this image?"

Taberah nodded his head, and his expression brightened.

"The seer has supernatural vision, but the price of it is the loss of his natural vision. It is a great boon at a great price. Taberah, you're not completely blind — you can and will, with time, be better able to connect with people — but your natural eyes are weak because of the brilliance of your supernatural eyes. You are not a second-rate Abanu. You are not a second-rate Tala. You are not a second-rate Emerant. You are a first rate you, and you are close to God's heart. You have already managed one accomplishment most of us can only dream of."

Taberah looked surprised. "What was that?"

"The Turing Award, Taberah! Don't you know what that means?"

Taberah looked confused. "There was a lord of a city who had me over. There is not a custom like that in my land. I understand I was honored, but — if there is one city that practices that custom, surely there are other cities that practice it! What I did wasn't any big deal."

"Taberah, dear, there is only one city that does that, and they search through the whole world before awarding that prize, once per year. There have only been seventeen other people who have received that award. Taberah, there is probably not one person in a million who is as bright as you. I want to talk with you about how you plan to use your intelligence."

Taberah was silent; he was trying to sift Emerant's words, sort them. The image of the blind seer struck a powerful chord with him; for one of the first times he could remember, he was able to think about his failures without feeling inferior. The Turing Award was still difficult to think about; he was beginning to understand that it was something bigger than a prize at a fair, but he had never begun to guess the true magnitude of his achievement. In his mind it was like the time as a boy when he was summoned to a monastery where Thomas Aquinas was passing through, and the theologian told him that he had chosen a good symbol to illuminate the Trinity — only with more hoopla; it was still not a very big deal, and its chief significance to Taberah was the warmth the people of this land had shown him. It seemed to him a very hospitable land. He was warmed, but it did not occur to him to think that he was fundamentally more intelligent than others — the idea of possessing a superior aptitude ran contrary to medieval culture. Taberah was touched by Emerant's statement that not one person in a million was as bright as him; his culture embraced exaggeration as a means of emphasis, and he was warmed that Emerant

would make her point by exaggerating that much.

"Well?" Emerant said. "What do you want to do with your intelligence? Have you given it any thought?"

"I don't know," Taberah said. "I will need to think about what you have said. And your question is not a day's question to answer."

"Well, don't feel hurried. It'll take me some time to process this discussion as well. Taberah, you haven't touched your drinks; they've gotten cold by now. Here, let me microwave them for you. What have you been doing this past week?"

The remainder of the conversation was light and pleasant; it was a kind of conversation which Taberah had only mastered in the past couple of years, had learned did not mean anything in the sense of deep philosophy, but meant a warm personability and sharing — that much translated across cultures. Both of them, for different reasons, learned something of the other's culture — Emerant was enjoying an elective on ethnographic interviewing and even more enjoying an opportunity to apply her learning, and Taberah had crossed cultures from the time he was a little boy, learning something in each case. 'Student' seemed at least as interesting and difficult as any of the other professions he had seen and participated in, and went at a much faster pace with much more difficult material than an apprenticeship. He made a mental note to ask Aed if he could arrange for Taberah to work as a student.

Emerant walked Taberah home, again in silence, and then walked back to the dorm. She climbed into her bunk and punched a name on the phone.

"Tala, this is Emerant. You were right; he made my head spin. But I think that was less due to his being medieval than being astronomically intelligent." It was 3:00 in the morning before she hung up and went to bed.

Confessions

Taberah said to Aed, "I want to be a student! Can you help me be a student? What's necessary to becoming a student?"

Aed thought for a moment and said, "My university will undoubtedly take you, and give you full scholarship; the biggest thing for the moment is picking out which classes to take. That's something Nathella will probably be able to help you out with better than I can; she's very perceptive, and would have a better feel for what classes would help you most." Aed decided not to try to explain the degree programs; he believed in learning for the sake of learning, not learning for the sake of getting a piece of paper — and a degree on top of a Turing Award would be superfluous.

Nathella was out on an errand, and as Taberah waited for her, he began to realize something. The realization was not pleasant. When she walked in, Taberah said, "Nathella, I have a confession to make."

Nathella said, "Ok; I can take you to a father confessor this afternoon."

"Not to a father confessor, Nathella. To you."

"What is it, honey?"

Taberah hesitated, and said, "Nathella, I have been looking past you, but not at you."

Nathella looked at Taberah gently, and then closed her eyes. She was a quiet type, easy to ignore; she was slender, and men seemed not to pay her much notice. Taberah was not the first person to commit this sin, but he was one of the first to admit it. When was the last time someone else had done so? The only prior time had been by Aed. She was sure there were others, but — when she opened her eyes, she saw that Taberah was looking at her.

Taberah said, "Nathella, what are you thinking about?"

"I was thinking about part of my story."

"What is your story?"

"You want the whole thing, or the part I was thinking about?"

"The whole thing."

Nathella thought for a moment and said, "I was born on a farm; as a little girl, I had a wonderful education filled with simple amusement. We had a tight-knit community, and I miss that closeness.

"My father believed in education; he was a welder as well as a farmer, and was committed that his daughter get a college education. I went to school, and it was a wonderful extension and compliment to the rural upbringing I had. I think city kids now miss some of the things going on then; the computerized classroom doesn't teach you how to be perceptive, and I especially miss hunting — my father gave me a hunting rifle and scope on my twelfth birthday, and the day after I killed a bear. No, it wasn't because he wished he had a son; I had two younger brothers, and both of them were given guns on their twelfth birthday as well. I didn't like hunting as much as I liked picking flowers in the field, but there's nothing like giving your Mom a bouquet of wildflowers you picked yourself, and there's nothing like sitting down to eat meat you killed yourself. I don't own a gun, not any more, and I don't want a gun in this house where someone might break in and steal it and kill someone. But I enjoyed those fields, the heat of working in a cornfield in the summer, the fruitful creativity that comes on the other side of boredom — you get bored, and then you get bored silly, and then you think of things to do that never would have occurred if you always had a television — and our family didn't. We had a computer, but both my Mom and my Dad believed that television was a waste of time and a waste of life. I'm better off for growing up without TV.

"Anyways, at school, it was an exciting new world, and I met Aed. That made a difference. That changed things —

and it was the only pleasant thing that happened for a while.

"Back home, my father needed to remove a few stumps, and wanted to put a pond in a field that — I can tell you the story for that another time. Anyways, he needed some explosives, so he mixed an oil people used to use with a common farming material, and so far as I know, had the one forgetful moment of his life. He forgot what he was doing, and lit up a fag.

"That was it. On that one day, I lost my father, my mother, and both my brothers. The barn still looked basically like a barn; the house didn't. There wasn't much of anything of a house left. And I really couldn't go back — the people would have accepted me, but a farming community without my farm and family would have been like a body without a soul: to me, dead.

"I began to notice that I didn't feel so bad after I had some whisky; it took a fair amount — I could drink an elephant under the table. The more I drank, the more empty I felt when I wasn't drunk, and the more empty I felt, the more I drank. This continued for three years; Aed and I both finished our degrees later because of the drain of my drinking.

"There was one day when Aed was in a bad mood, and I got the brunt of everything that had gone wrong that day. I was in a terrible mood — it had just hit me that, even if I went back to visit, there would be this horrible silence about me — I would no longer be Nathella, who knew all the plants and animals and had yellow dandelion rubbed on her cheeks half the summer days from an old joke with two loving and rambunctious brothers; I would be that orphan thing — in a way, not human any more. I didn't at first admit that, and when I did, it hurt, and hurt, and hurt, and hurt. I got myself drunk, so drunk that —

"Taberah, do you know what a BAC is?"

Taberah shook his head.

"BAC is short for blood alcohol concentration. One

drink will give you a BAC of .02. When we were at the banquet and you said that you felt funny and that the wine seemed to have more effect than you were used to, you had a BAC of about .05, judging by the amount you drank. At .08, in the eyes of the law, you're too drunk to drive. .20 is very drunk. 1.00 will kill you.

"Taberah, I had a BAC of 1.15, and that was after the hospital pumped my stomach — an experience I never want to live again. Several people at the hospital commented that it was a wonder I was alive at all. It took me over a day to become fully sober, and the first thing I remember when I was sober enough to be coherent, pumped full of chemicals that sober you up but make your mind feel like it's being scraped across asphalt, was Aed sitting down right across from me, looking me straight in the eyes, and saying with a dead serious voice, 'Nathella, I love you, and because I love you, I am not getting up from this chair until you admit you have a problem with alcohol.'

"I was trapped and pressured, and that was the most loving thing Aed ever did to me. Not marrying me; that was a close second, and that's the second best thing that's ever happened to me. No, third; coming to know God was a slow thing, not all at once, and it is the best thing I've ever known. But Aed staring at me as I made jokes, tried to cajole him, threatened to break up with him, and tried every other way I could think of to evade and deny him was the best thing that ever happened to me. He did apologize for his treatment of me the day before, by the way; he felt terrible about it, and has never behaved like that again. After five hours, he was hungry, thirsty, weary, and immovable as a rock, and I said the most painful thing I've ever said. I said, 'I'm an alcoholic.'

"Taberah, being an alcoholic is Hell on earth; I believed it when another alcoholic said that in Heaven, you can have as much wine as you want, and in Hell, you can have as much wine as you want. The first steps of

recovery are even worse than being an alcoholic; it's like you had a festering wound, and now there's a surgeon going in with a knife to get the bullet out and stitch things up. It hurts, and it has to be done, and there's no anaesthesia. But it heals. Aed and I both needed support; when you're wounded like I was, you wound those close to you, and he's been healed too, even though he never drank more than four drinks in a day, usually not four drinks in a week. I've been dry for — how long has it been? Over twenty years, and I am healed — really and truly healed. I sometimes long for home, and I sometimes long for drink — believe me, there are some days when I ask Fiona to sit me down and distract me and make sure I don't go to a liquor store. But I am now free of that chain — and happier than I ever believed alcohol would make me.

"My faith... My faith is strong like I wouldn't have imagined. There's not much of me on the surface; most people don't pay me much mind. But underneath, God has given me a strength I would have never dreamed of. Childlike faith meets trial and testing that it may become childlike faith. Some people who hear my story ask me how I can have faith after experiences like that. I ask them, how can I *not* have faith after experiences like that? Even when I was dead drunk — especially when I was dead drunk; even when I admitted I was an alcoholic — especially when I admitted I was an alcoholic — God was *with* me. He has never abandoned me. Never."

Taberah sat in silence for a moment, and said, "I'm sorry I asked you for wine."

Nathella smiled and said, "Taberah, there's nothing to apologize about. You didn't know I was an alcoholic, and asking for wine is a perfectly reasonable thing. Why don't you go out and have a drink with Aed tonight? I can't drink, but I know God blesses other people through the fruit of the vine... Taberah, I know what you're thinking. I see it in your eyes, and I've seen it in other people. I'd like to tell you another story, this one a story that didn't

happen to me.

"My best friend in college, Naomi, was the daughter of a competent insurance salesman. Her father was friends with the vice-president of sales, whom he invited over one day for burgers and beer.

"After they arrived from the office, Naomi's father realized that he had beer but not burgers, and drove to the store to buy some food, and the vice president raped her. It was the worst day of her life, and the days after were made worse by the fact that nobody believed her. They merely told her that that was serious business, and she was too old to be telling stories anyway.

"She noticed something peculiar when she began seeing a counselor and sharing this with other people. Many men were afraid to touch her. They knew she had pain, and mistakenly believed that another man touching her body would automatically bring back traumatic memories — at least that's how they thought about it; the way she usually put it was 'They won't even give me a hug!' It's a shame, too; Naomi was one of the touchiest people I've known, not as in easily angered, but as in liked to touch and be touched — she always gave me a kiss when she saw me, and she very much enjoyed a man's touch — rowdy as well as soft — be it in an arm over her shoulder, a crushing bear hug, or in horseplay.

"Some people who've been abused need not to be touched, and it's good to ask what's OK and what's not OK when you find out someone has wounds. But apart from that, people who are hurting need hugs most of all, and not touching a woman because she's been hurt — it's meant well, but sometimes it's just the wrong thing to do. Naomi learned to be very careful, as an adult, who she told about her experience — most people believed her, but some men in particular, with the best of intentions, never treated her the same way again.

"When there's a person in a wheelchair, by nature people will see the wheelchair but not the person. There's

nothing to feel guilty about in having to counteract that tendency, but it needs to be counteracted. The standard advice used to be, 'See the person first and the condition second.' Now that has been refined a little bit to 'See an organic whole in which the condition is part of a person.' Naomi sometimes needed to be treated differently because of her trauma; there were days when she just needed to be left alone — and days when she just needed more hugs and more listening. It would never have helped her for me to forget she was human and treat her as something whose nature was 'wounded'. Pierce us; do we not bleed? Poke us; do we not squeak? Taberah, I am a woman — human — with the full range of human emotions, laughter and silliness and joy as well as pain and worry and trouble. Don't let knowing I'm an alcoholic obscure your knowing that I am a woman. I would much rather you occasionally forget and ask me to buy you a bottle of wine, than think of me as a pit of pain with whom you must always be serious, always careful not to bump me lest I shatter. I'm human, OK?"

Taberah thought for a second and said, "Ok. If you won't buy me a bottle of wine, will you buy me a keg of beer?"

Nathella laughed and tousled Taberah's hair. He had somehow managed to keep a deadpan straight face. "Honey, next time I'm out shopping, I'll buy some root beer, which doesn't have alcohol, and we can each sit down and sip a root beer. Actually, you want to go shopping now? You seemed to enjoy going out for clothing, and maybe you'll see something at the store that you'll like. No, wait; the packaging food comes in is probably not whatever you are used to. Want to come along anyways?"

Which Classes?

Nathella said, "Aed told me that you want to take some classes."

"Yes, Nathella."

"You seem to find things to do easily; I suggest that you take two classes, three at most; other students take more, but you need a lot of sleep. Come on over to the computer with me; we can look at the catalogue with me."

"Let's see... Here's 'Mathematics as a Humanity', team taught by a mathematician and an artist. When I took it, it was team taught by a mathematician and a philosopher. It was the hardest class I took — and the best."

"In this culture, most people are taught something horrid as lower math, and they avoid it as much as they can. They don't guess what mathematicians really do — an art form guided by intuition. Most people think a mathematician must do more of whatever they suffered through in the math classes they couldn't avoid — more statistics and meaningless formulae. It's really sad; higher math is easier than lower math, and that course did not make me a mathematician, but it helped me appreciate what they do."

"'Modern Mythology: An Exploration of Storytelling in Postmodern Society.' This would also be a good course for you to take; it will help you see some of the good points of our culture — and some of the bad points. I think last year they did an in-depth treatment of a classic interactive — the title escapes me (I'm never in tune with that — I was 20 before I saw *Star Wars*), but — ooh! it was called *net*, and *net* was hard science fiction that somehow managed to be very popular. This class didn't look at technology much, just the timeless elements of the story — and it is timeless. I don't know what they're doing this semester, although I can find out."

"'Philosophy of Technology'. This is a good class; it's

team taught by a humanities Luddite and a technology-worshipping engineer. Aed likes to occasionally go in and sit and watch the sparks fly.

"Psychology 212: Gift Giving. This class explores how to take basic psychological insights and use them to find a gift that will be meaningful to a friend and loved one.' I wish that one had been available to me when I was in school. Classes have been shifting towards a more practical bent. There's also 'Psychology 312: Synergy. This class explores positive interactions between people, and how to create the circumstances that give it rise.' There are a lot of good classes — hmm.

"Semiotics 101: A Critical Look at Contemporary Society' — this would be an extremely valuable class to you, but not for the reasons that most people take it. It would show you how people are inculturated into contemporary liberalism, and see things into the plurality that was once a holy trinity of race, class, and gender. Taking a critical look at a course like this would help you understand contemporary academia, and perhaps a little bit of contemporary society as well.

"I know you have an artistic bent; I've seen you carving. This might interest you: 'Fine Arts 212: The Art of Tektrix'. It's a class on how to build with robotic blocks, studied as an art form.

"Here's a fun one: 'Gender Studies 315: The Wisdom of Cats. A humorous look at how our lives can be made better by living out the wisdom that cats embody naturally, and a careful study of why cats are better than dogs.' Department notwithstanding, that looks — oh, wait. You're a dog lover. Never mind."

Taberah did not see why loving dogs would disqualify anyone from taking a course on cats, but he was too busy assimilating information too quickly to ask a question. Nathella continued, "'Communication 275: Are Sacred Cows Edible? An interpretive look at the popular comic strip and exploration of its meaning in society.' *That* looks

interesting. I'm not going to try to explain it now, but you should take it. Let's see, what else?

"There's a dance art — kind of like a martial art, but taking dance rather than combat as its basic medium. In combat between two good martial artists, there is a harmony that arises, a kind of synchronization and attunement between opponents. Neither party walks in knowing what is going to happen — but a masterpiece emerges. A dance art does this with dance — there are differences; in both, you learn to read your partner, but in a dance art, you also want to be readable, instead of hard to predict — and dance art strikes Aed as very interesting. He tried one for a bit, but then left because he wasn't able to handle the structured, monotonous repetitions that low-level training took from martial arts. Maybe that's its weakness, and come to think of it, you probably shouldn't do that either, even though I have a feeling you can dance very well.

"Here we go! 'History 339: Medieval Culture.' I think this would be valuable to you as well; you would learn something about our culture in learning how it portrays your culture. Maybe that wouldn't be such a good idea; the catalogue refers to your culture as belonging to 'the misogynist tradition', and — come to think of it, I know who's teaching that course, and she'd fail you. That professor can tolerate almost anybody whom liberalism now sees as oppressed, but someone who is from medieval society and believes we have something to learn from it — you'd have a hostile learning environment. Let's see: what else?

"'Integrated Science 152: Heavy Boots.' I think this course would be a good one for you to learn from; it is probably the best to teach the culture of science and scientism — as good for its purpose as the semiotics class would have been for understanding the culture of the humanities as we now have it. Another one that you might like is 'Engineering 297: Cross-Disciplinary

Commonalities of Repair and Debugging. This course covers the fundamentals of how to think about technology that does not behave as intended, with application to repair of mechanical and electrical devices, and debugging of software.' What do you think, honey? Does that interest you?"

"They all interest me, Nathella. I don't know which ones to choose."

"Then we can wind to a close — ooh! You *have* to take this one, Taberah. At least if you can get in. The professor is a cantankerous, eccentric genius. This course has been taught under a dozen department names, and now the university's simply stopped assigning it a department. You'll like it."

At dinner, Nathella said, "Have you given further thought to what courses you want to take?"

Taberah said, "Yes. I want to take the last class we talked about, the class you recommended, and — oh, yes! Heavy Boots!"

Christmas

It seemed not very long at all before Taberah found the ground an unsteady traitor beneath his feet, and more often than not beneath his backside; he could keep perfect balance on a ship, but ice was tricky. The wind seemed to blow bitter cold through him as much as around him, and Taberah sometimes shivered even when he was inside and wearing a sweater. Taberah would have much rather been wearing heavy armor and sparring on a blistering hot day than experience *this*!

Even the cold could not damp his spirits as Christmas approached, though. He had thought about gifts for each of his adoptive family and friends for each day, starting with the first. He gave the madonna to Nathella, a riflery simulator to Clancy, pressed flowers to Fiona, and an

abstract pattern to Aed. Each phoenix was given an electronic image of a stained glass window from home.

Aed received gifts in turn; he most prized the Pendragon Cycle which Nathella gave him; he would be fascinated by the historically-oriented retelling of the Arthurian legends. He knew those legends well, as well as he knew the legends of Roland and the twelve paladins, and he would be intrigued by the retelling. Seeing an American portrayal of his home gave him a unique insight into the time and place he was living with, and their conception of what is important about a place — it did not seem as strange to him as it might have appeared earlier. The theme of Ynes Avallach, the isle of the Fisher King, struck a chord with Taberah, and he felt that here, now, he was on that isle.

The days were merry days, with much revelry and joking, and there was a relaxed energy about the house. Aed began to wonder why the custom of twelve days of Christmas was not celebrated more; it was a good custom.

Twelve days seemed perfect to grasp the meaning of the Christ child; the Kinsellas had always understood Christmas gifts to be symbolic of God giving mankind his greatest gift ages ago, but celebrating with Taberah gave a new depth of understanding to the symbol. An hour does not merely allow one to communicate twelve things, each of which can be said in five minutes; it allows communication of things that cannot be said in any number of five minute bursts. The twelve days of Christmas were not twelve consecutive Christmas days; they were part of a whole celebration that embraced gift giving but went much farther, a time of worship and enjoyment of God. Clancy wondered at the beginning how one could possibly spend twelve days celebrating Christmas; come the end, he wondered how one could possibly stop after celebrating one day of Christmas. While they were out caroling, Taberah tasted real wassail, and during the celebration Aed took Taberah to a wine bar and

introduced him to champagne.

On the eleventh day of Christmas, Taberah asked Nathella, "Can you smell the incense?"

Nathella was confused. "There is no incense in this house. The only smell of incense has been on our clothing, when we came back from the Christ mass. Are you talking about that?"

Taberah said, "Not that, Nathella! The *real* incense! Can you smell that?"

"I don't understand, honey. Why would you be smelling incense?"

"Nathella, what is incense for?"

"It ascends in the presence of God, and some of it is around us at the holiest times we worship. Catholics only use it on special days; the Orthodox use incense at every worship, and believe in bringing Heaven down to earth — ooh. Now I understand. Yes, honey, I do smell the incense."

First Day of Classes

The first day of classes was delayed by a heavy snowstorm; it was such as only occurs once every ten years, and people were in mixed moods when they finally came inside a warm classroom. The freshmen and sophomores tended to have a spirit of adventure, while the juniors and seniors more tended towards irritation.

Taberah walked into a large lecture hall, crowded with students. A professor cleared his throat and said, "Good morning. My name is Professor Pontiff, and you are in Communication 275: Are Sacred Cows Edible? In this course, we will be studying the strip of that name. If you'll excuse me for one moment..." He fumbled with an overhead projector and turned it on. A comic strip appeared overhead. It had a young man and a young woman in conversation:

Young man: It's a shame when a comic strip becomes the medium for public discourse.

Young woman: You don't like it when conversation is to the point and funny?

Young man: Not that. I don't like that it has to be funny, and that you get ignored if you have a point that you can't cram into five seconds. Most theories that can be put in a nutshell belong there.

Young woman: What if there was a comic strip that made its point but was not particularly funny?

After giving the class a minute to digest the strip, then said, "The term 'sacred cow' is now a bit dated, but it was popular around the turn of the century. The Hindu religion treats cows as sacred animals, and there are cows in India that people will not kill — they would rather starve than kill a sacred cow. In a typically anti-foreign fashion, people who did not understand or respect this religious tradition took the term 'sacred cow' and made it a metaphor for an absurd belief that benighted people defend and are afraid to abandon, and which one is considered enlightened and courageous to attack.

"Or at least, that's what people who used the term 'sacred cow' understood it to mean. It worked out in practice that 'sacred cow' meant in particular the sacred cows of conservatives, but not the sacred cows of liberals. Even liberals have now come to acknowledge that liberals have just as many sacred cows as conservatives, and even that there are good if inarticulate reasons behind at least some of the norms that are branded as sacred cows. 'Sacred cow' was an anti-conservative weapon, one that

could do damage without needing any argument, and it was used in sayings such as 'Sacred cows make the best hamburgers.' It was somewhat of a sacred cow itself.

"There were a number of people who began to question this, but one of the more influential ones was Anonymous. Anonymous preferred not to be known by his name, and kept his anonymity even when running for office as an independent. But that's another story I will not go into here. Anonymous was about equally likely to vote Republican or Democrat, by the way. He was influential because he chose a medium in which one person can reach a number of his people: the comic strip. The very title of the comic strip, 'Are Sacred Cows Edible?' is part of a challenge to what the term 'sacred cow' had been used for.

"On the projector is his first strip. The characters are not named; they are subservient to the idea. Even his basic idea is trying to break out of the frame of the comic strip; it shows no direct humor, but perhaps (if you look higher) some meta-level humor. And, at any rate, it bites the hand that feeds it. Anonymous was very good at that. The question, "What if there was a comic strip that made its point but was not particularly funny?" is in a sense a very pointed joke. Or is it?

"Regular attendance is expected; the class's format will have a strip a day, followed by lecture and discussion. The only textbook is the one comic book you have; I'm sure this didn't influence any of your decisions to join this class. By now, I'm sure that there are a few people in this class so industrious that they've already read the text, or a good chunk of it; I feel safe in asking an opening question that draws on some knowledge of the text: 'How does the comic strip fit among other media? How does this particular comic strip fit among other media? Are the two related or unrelated?'"

Taberah rejoiced in the discussion that followed; it reminded him of medieval reading, an activity so involved that some doctors viewed it as a form of exercise. He

himself did not say anything, but paid attention both to what was familiar and what was unfamiliar: the text was viewed in a different manner, he could tell, and not as something authoritative. More of a starting point for tangents. Taberah wished to sit still and watch, come to understand what this culture meant by "having a discussion" — and did so, until the instructor pointed to him and said, "You. What are you thinking about? You're thinking loudly."

Taberah hesitated, and said, "I was just thinking about how this discussion seems to be 'What can we jump off of from the strip?' instead of 'What does the text mean?'"

"You think we can have a discussion about the content of one strip? It's a ten-second strip."

"Maybe. I've known some good, long discussions about a single sentence. One thing which people might say is, 'How do we deal with content that does not fit within a medium's limitations?' How, for instance, do you think about something you can't say in words?"

"If you can't say it in words, you can't think it. The limitations of language are the limitations of thought, right?"

"I think things that I can't express in words. Or, at least, I think things that I can't express, and I've been told I use words well. Saying that the limitations of language are the limitations of thought is like saying that the limitations of painting are the limitations of imagination — that, just because we can't paint something moving or three dimensional, we can't imagine it. It may well be a limit on what we can communicate, but not on what we can think. We can be tempted to this error by the power of painting — color, shading, and perspective. We can make paintings so lifelike that we are capable of thinking they represent anything we can imagine — but we can still imagine things that just can't be painted. My deepest thoughts almost never come in words, and it takes effort and insight to capture some of them in words."

The teacher was impressed. He said, "If you want, come in during my office hours, and maybe we will talk about how we can have a class period discussion in your style. What do the rest of you have to say?"

Taberah sat back in his chair and continued to think. He was going to like being a student.

The TA stepped forward and said, "Heavy Boots has traditionally been a student-to-student class, taught by people who have freshly learned the material, and this will be the most important class of your discipline. It tells you how to think logically, how to think about science.

"The anecdote from which this class takes its name concerns when a couple of engineering students were in a philosophy class, and the philosophy TA gave as an 'example' the 'fact' that there is no gravity on the moon: if you held a pen out at arm's length and let go, it would just float there. 'No,' one engineer protested. 'It would fall, only more slowly.' The TA calmly explained that it would not fall because there was no gravity. After a couple of things failed, inspiration struck. The engineer said, 'You've seen movies of astronauts walking on the moon, and you saw them fall down. Why is that?' The TA, who had had plenty of courses in logic, said, 'That's because they were wearing heavy boots.'"

A chuckle moved throughout the class. The TA continued, "At this point the other engineer, who was calmer, dragged our friend, who was foaming at the mouth, out of the room. They decided that night to do a telephone survey. They asked people if there was gravity on the moon. Sixty percent said, 'No.' Those sixty percent were asked the follow-up question about astronauts. Of the people who had said there was no gravity on the moon, twenty percent went back and changed their answers, but over sixty percent said that the people on the moon stayed there because they were wearing heavy boots."

There was more laughter, and the TA said, "Science tells us how the world is, and it can be known through

experiment. This class will help you learn not to have heavy boots. Are there any questions?"

A young woman raised her hand. "Do you believe in Darwinism?"

The TA said, "Darwinism is bad, but not nearly as bad as creationism, or the masks it wears — intelligent design. It is true that Darwinism cannot explain the question of origins, but that isn't science's job. It's not subject to debate. However the world came to be, it is here, and that is what we study. As to intelligent design — I have another story. There was an engineering professor who came in to find his class talking about heavy boots. He gave a very involved explanation of, among other things, that gravity works on the moon despite the fact that the moon has no air, explaining the whole scientific method, the idea of trying to be skeptical and open-minded at the same time, and at the end, he asked, 'Any questions?' One young girl raised her hand, and said, 'You seem to be getting very worked up about this. Are you a Scorpio?'"

Another chuckle went through the masses. "There are any number of other stories. Did you hear about the English professor who noticed that his computer was warm, and poured water in it to cool it down? Or the farmer who complained that there were holes in his computer after he played duck hunt? Are there any other questions?"

Taberah thought. Nathella was right; this course *was* going to teach Taberah a lot about the culture of science. He raised his hand and said, "Yes. Why do you regard non-scientists as having intelligence one step above that of a rock?"

The ensuing discussion was both vigorous and heated. Taberah had already begun to piece together that something besides scientific thinking that was being taught — he could not tell exactly what, but by the end of class a good many people came to see that a disrespect for non-scientists was being taught, and some of them even

questioned the equation of science with rationality. Taberah was silent for much of the discussion; he was trying to figure out what besides the obvious was being taught in that class.

A professor stepped up to the podium and said, "Good afternoon. Do we have any computer science grad students in class? Good. Any doctoral students? Wonderful. What did the B.S. in software engineering say to the Ph.D. in computer science?"

"I'll have the veggie burger and fries, please."

"Or do we have anybody from the practical disciplines? A university without colleges of business, engineering, and applied life studies is like a slice of chocolate cake without ketchup, mustard, and tartar sauce.

"Anybody here from the English department? The English department is a special place. If you want to find a Marxist, don't go to the political science department. Nary a Marxist will you find there. Go to the English department. If you want to find a Freudian, don't go to the psychology department. Nary a Freudian will you find there. Go to the English department. If you want to find a Darwinist, don't go to the biology department. Nary a Darwinist will you find there. Go to the English department. The English department is a living graveyard of all the dead and discredited ideologies that have been cast off by other departments.

"Anyways, I'm Dr. Autre, and I would like to welcome you to the first day of class. You'll be able to remember which room we're meeting in; just remember room 20, same number as your percentage grade. This class will have no discussions, although there will be question and answer. As to discussions — you don't really have to pay anything to hear what your friends think about a matter, but given that you're paying good money to be here — or some of you are; the rest are sponging off your parents — I think you are entitled to hear what a professor thinks.

Someone said that diplomacy is the art of letting other people have it your way; I was never good at diplomacy. Too honest for it. Maybe some of you will do a better job at it, when you have a Ph.D. behind your name and the academic world says, 'Aah, here's a Ph.D. Here's someone we can take seriously!'

"Some of you have questions about the syllabus. The answer to those questions is very simple. There is none. I don't mean that I don't have planned material I can fall back on if I need to; I mean that the important stuff in this course is the stuff I can't foresee. The main reason I plan out course material ahead of time is that it provides me with a point of departure from which to do something interesting. As such, I do not wish to confuse you by giving you distracting information."

A young man raised his hand. "But if you have the information on hand, what harm is there in sharing it? Certainly it helps you."

The teacher said, "There was once a professor who thought his class was writing down too much of what he was saying, and thinking about it too little. At one point, he interrupted his lecture to say, 'Stop. I want you to put down your pens and pencils and listen to me. You don't have to write down every word I say. You are here to think, not to produce copies of my lecture notes. You don't have to write down what I say verbatim. Any questions?'

"One young woman frantically said, 'Yes. How do you spell *verbatim*?'

"I'm not going to spell out an answer to your question beyond that, but I am going to say that I won't always say my full meaning outright. I will leave it implied, for you to wrestle out. That requires the same involvement as discussion, but it leaves you free to hear a professor. You are encouraged to talk with your colleagues after the classroom for as much discussion as you want. Class time is for what you can only get in class time — a professor's lecture.

"I've used a different text each time, and the registrar usually won't print how to get a text in my class. This year, I want you to get a sticky-hand, walk into Physical — it's a mile down the street from the college, close your eyes, turn around, and toss the sticky-hand past your back. The book that the hand lands on is yours. Buy it, and study it; see how it relates to our classroom lectures, and tie it in to your discussions. I guarantee you that, after the first month, you will have learned something that I couldn't have possibly coordinated by picking the text myself. I don't just mean learning to read a text at an angle, although that is tremendously important; I mean that you will have learned something directly from the text that I couldn't have picked out. Tonight's reading assignment is pages three through ten, and the first page of the index, if your book has an index. Any questions?"

Taberah leaned back. This class was going to be a lot of fun.

Baptists

Taberah walked in after the first day of classes, excited, alert. He said to Nathella, "What does the word 'Baptist' mean? I heard someone use it between classes, and I couldn't figure it out from context."

Nathella said, "Um, that's not a five-minute question. First, do you know what 'Protestant' means?"

Taberah said, "No."

"There have been any number of reform movements in the history of the Catholic Church, and there will be any number of such movements in the future. With one of them, a monk named Martin Luther nailed ninety-five theses for reform on the door of a cathedral. The authorities questioned him, and finally asked him, 'Do you believe that the Church has actually been *wrong* in these things for all these years?'

"Luther asked for a couple of days to think about it; that was granted, and at the end of the time the question was put to him again. He said, 'Here I stand. I can do no other.'

"Then all Hell broke loose. Luther was excommunicated, and tried to set up a parallel, reformed church. The church called 'Catholic' was the one that initiated the schism, but they were not the only schismatics. Luther's church splintered and splintered and splintered. There was all manner of invective between the two sides, and they were excluded from each other's communions. It was worse than the split between Latin and Greek — far worse.

"Over time, people began to realize that the schisms were not a good thing. There were some who said, 'The solution to the problem is simple. Everyone come over to my side, and there won't be any division.' There was the problem of communion: especially on the Catholic side, there was an understanding of communion as implying full membership in the community, which was in turn understood to mean that members not part of a particular schism could not legitimately take part in it — this interpretation was deemed to be more important than the words, 'Take this, *all of you*, and drink from it.' that instituted a feast given to all of Christ's disciples. That's still where things are now; Rome has now interpreted Vatican II to mean that Catholics and Protestants whose consciences command full participation in their brothers' and sisters' worship may be — what's the word, *tolerated*, in taking communion across the schism. It's a step homewards, I suppose, but we are very far off from organizational unity that once was.

"Baptists are, or rather were, one of the Protestant sects, and they added something to American culture. As to what happened —

"In the fifties, the question of abortion, the question of whether a woman has a right to kill the child growing

inside her, came up with the Supreme Court. The court protected the child's life. In the seventies, it came up again, and this time the court legalized abortion, and the movement declared the controversy settled. But it wasn't.

"By the nineties... there were laws in place that offered stiff penalties for abortion protests, and RICO, a law meant to deal with organized crime, was used to inflict massive penalties on abortion protesters. There was one minister who led a protest while cautiously distancing any church involvement or statement on the protest. The courts RICOed the congregation, making a multimillion dollar settlement. Also going on were 'physical compliance holds' — meaning pain holds used on demonstrators. Nonviolent protests of abortion received draconian punishment compared to the penalties deemed appropriate for violent protest by environmental or animal rights activists.

"When a pregnant woman walks into an abortion clinic, unsure what to do with an unexpected pregnancy, by the letter of the law she is supposed to receive non-directive counseling to help her decide how to handle the situation. What actually happens is very different. Abortion is big business; insurance companies will readily pay thousands of dollars for an abortion rather than deal with all of the expenses of childbirth and a new life out in the world. Even when there is no insurance, a couple hundred dollars is still lucrative for a ten minute procedure. Never mind that the people who perform abortions have the highest suicide rate in the medical profession; it's money, money, money. What actually happens when a girl walks in is that she receives a five-minute sales pitch that slants abortion as the only live option. Most of the abortions that have happened in this country were abortions that the girl was pressured into, that she never was allowed to say 'no' to — same thing as date rape.

"So there was this big push to have real non-directive

counseling at abortion clinics, along with a surgeon general's warning about the emotional scars that abortion can cause — post abortion stress syndrome and all. It wasn't just Christians behind it; some feminists, especially those who had spent some time working at abortion clinics or talking with women who had gone through that trauma, had begun to suspect that they and their movement were being manipulated as pawns by forces less innocent than — anyways, the law was passed September 1, 2012, and struck down October 1.

"The Baptists were the fastest to spearhead an initiative to get every church member into a protest — which they didn't do; it was closer to fifty percent, but there was a massive, peaceful protest, and the police came out — pepper spray, tear gas, pain holds, the works. The jails were filled up overnight, and it was ugly. The ugliest thing about it was that it wasn't two parties fighting each other — it was one party attacking satyagrahi who didn't resist. The courts thought this would be a good time for an unambiguous message, and commanded a settlement of over 1.6 trillion dollars. The church could not begin to pay something like that.

"The courts lost something that day. The president of American Baptists called a press conference and said from his jail cell, 'You can force our bodies and our checkbooks, but you can never break our spirits. The denomination of Baptists in America is hereby declared to be bankrupt and disbanded. Baptists, melt into other bodies of believers. You are the heart of our ministry, not a formal structure that can be sued. Courts, you have won this battle. But *what is it that you have won?*'

"Most other Protestant denominations that participated in the protest did not do much better; Catholics were protected only by the masterful diplomacy of the Papacy. The Pope tried to be an advocate for the Protestants, too, but saving the financial viability of Catholics was making the best of a bad scenario. There

were believers who left the Catholic Church — not out of any rejection of Rome, but as a matter of solidarity, saying, 'We would rather be ill-treated alongside these righteous Protestants than be spared because our denomination happens to be powerful.'

"That single court decision galvanized the body of believers as a thousand sermons could never have done. Before then, there had been talk of an emerging post-denominational Christianity; now, people finally realized that they had bigger things to worry about than labels. It was as if two estranged brother generals forgot their dispute in the face of a battle. The Church was driven mostly underground, yes — it had been underground at its beginning, and it will be underground again, no doubt. And people are tortured when they protest abortion, infanticide, or euthanasia — the Constitution prohibits cruel and unusual punishment, but the courts have ruled that 'nondestructive incentives to reform' are not punishment. It is still virtually illegal to witness about your faith — the argument classes it as harassment, and a freedom of religion defense brings a dilemma with it. If you invoke your religion as a defense, the question is which religion, and if you specify whichever area of Christianity you are from, you are slapped with massive penalties for participation in a corporate entity which falls under RICO. All of this is true and more, and the church is healthier than ever before.

"Taberah, in martial arts, I remember hearing something about you and joint locks, but I don't remember what. A joint lock is when someone twists one of your joints so that you will be pain unless you move in a certain way. This enables a martial artist to take your wrist and bring you down to the ground. What the Supreme Court learned in the ensuing years was that joint locks would no longer work against Christians. You could still figuratively twist a Christian's wrist — break it if you pressed hard enough — but she wouldn't go down to the

ground unless you did so much damage to her that she was incapable of standing. And it is bad publicity if nothing else to do that much damage to unresisting people again and again — so things have evolved to an unofficial 'Don't ask, don't tell.'

"Abortion is still of course legal, but now there are a lot of Christian women who can pick up on when another woman is pregnant, sometimes even before she knows it — and tell her, 'You don't have to have an abortion,' and then talk about alternatives. The abortion industry thinks we're worse than termites — individually not a problem, collectively a major problem, and too many to go hunting for — and there's not that much they can do. Yes, they have advertising; yes, they control the literature that goes with pregnancy tests; yes, they do a number of abortions — but we're able to make a sizeable dent. And the legality of killing is something that's hurting the court politically.

"There's a saying, 'Satan meant it for evil, but God turned it to good,' and the final break in dark power is that we are not angry at the court. We pray for them every night, submit to them in what we can, and go about our lives — for God, not against the court. The court, with the worst of intentions, has created the conditions in America for Christians to deal effectively with problems that we would never have begun to treat.

"Have I answered your question, Taberah?"

Taberah thought, and said, "You have answered it and more. I would like to talk with you more some time, to better understand your form of government. You miss the Baptists, don't you?"

Deep Waters

Taberah closed his eyes for a while and said, "Nathella, you said there was a story behind your Dad wanting to make a pond. What was the story?"

Nathella said, "When I was little, I had a fantasy, an image — of being surrounded by a gathering of many warm people, of a place where I belonged. One of my brothers, when he was little, imagined exploring a mansion, and had a very vivid image of a doorway opening, light spilling out from behind. My father had a dream like this, too. He envisioned a deep pool of water, a pool he could swim in and dive deep and meet mermaids. He liked to reminisce, and he talked about that dream from time to time. He had a better memory than most.

"One of the things that happens when you get older is that you get practical, and one of the things I accepted after a blunt remark from a young man is that 'practical' is not about getting things done; it's about letting dreams die. It means settling for less — being happy, to be sure, but... I have come to accept my age, but I know I lost something when I gave up the bright energy of being young.

"One of my father's friends asked him, 'Why not make your dream a reality? You may be too old to swim into a pool and meet mermaids, but there are children around town who are not. They don't have a place to swim. To be sure, you'd have to put a fence around it and require parents to be around, buy one of those floating rings, but why not? Why not make a place where children can dive and meet mermaids?' He told me that a spark lit in my father's eyes — my father said, 'I've got some stumps to blast, and I've got a field I don't use any more. I can make a pond as well.' That friend felt very guilty when he found out what happened, but when I look back — I think my father died well. It left on me an impression, and I've managed to keep a little more of my young openness to dreams than I might have otherwise.

"And I'm glad to have met you. You help me dream, as well. You're Heavenly minded enough to be of earthly good — you've already changed my life for the better."

Taberah said nothing. He felt at the same time

honored and slightly uncomfortable — why was she putting him on a pedestal? Taberah now dreamed mostly of Heaven, and he was sure he would receive it. Why — Taberah thought, and he could not think of any appropriate questions to ask. He let the matter rest.

TMC Metagame Competition

Taberah went down to the computer room, looking for something to do. He found a cool portal, and spent half the day fascinated by looking at different layerings of the human body. He particularly liked looking at a forearm end-on, with only the skeletal and nervous systems visible. It was fun, but something in his mind was still itching.

Then he heard a herald announce:

TMC. TMC is short for TMC Metagame Competition. The objective of this game is to devise the best new computer game; players' work will be judged according to their popularity in testing votes. Points are awarded for originality, quality of game concept, quality of artwork, and another category specified by game designer. Past winners may be seen at...

This had Taberah's undivided attention. He went, sat down, and spent three hours' total playing different winners, and then, after going through the next day's classes (now less interesting to him, although he tried to concentrate), began to think in the morning.

They want something original. This culture values novelty over repetition; what can I give that is truly original?

Taberah remembered his time as a court jester, in

which his role was to stand on his head, both literally and figuratively — exalt the abased or pull down the exalted. Pleasure filled his mind, as if he were meeting an old friend. *All games that I am aware of are competitive; one wins by defeating others or possibly by gaining a high score in surmounting an obstacle. What of a game in which there is no defeating others and in which the player is not constrained by any predefined goal?*

Taberah left the computer room and began pacing in the forest. He could say those words, but what did they mean? Trying to describe a game without a conflict seemed like trying to describe a statue without a shape.

There are a great many ideas that might as well be original because of how hard people have worked to forget them. What is the one idea that is now escaping my attention, the one thing that was the air I breathed in the Middle Ages but which people do not understand now? I can't think of it — what is the one symbol of — symbol! — these people live in a world of symbols, but not as I do. It is a world of meager, half-dead symbols that do not have the courage to be. For them nature, the world is stripped of symbolic lore. A lion is not a reminder of courage — or maybe it is the one surviving exception. They see just a yellow mass, a predator — it is like seeing shape without color.

How can I make symbolic meanings visible to them? How can I make a text speak to people who are illiterate? What if they could look at the green in a pane of a stained glass window and — they can. I can make an annotated virtual world — a cathedral and forest, full of plants and animals — in which, when the objects are touched, a voice tells what they mean.

Aed has shown me enough that I can begin working on this now.

Results

The days passed quickly; Taberah spent every spare moment working on his creation. He enjoyed the classes, but he rushed out quickly to be back in the joy of creation. It had been so long before he created something.

He finished just before deadline, and met with mixed results. His creation fascinated any number of people, was very popular — and was disqualified as not meeting the criteria as a game. The metagame judges wanted something original, but interpreted in such a way as to mean something original in the creation of what you have to defeat. Taberah cried; he was hurt by the judgment, and he felt depressed not to have anything else to be working on. Yes, there were classes, and he particularly enjoyed the cartoon that said, "Tolerate this!" and showed a picture of a cross. The teacher went on to explain that liberality and tolerance did not just mean liberality and tolerance of liberal minorities, but tolerance of Christianity. This produced a heated discussion, and Taberah loved it.

The end of semester rolled around. Taberah had passed the cartoon course, aced the other humanities course, and failed the science course. He was not nearly as saddened by that grade as by the leaving of most of the students, particularly the Phoenix Society. The Kinsella's home was desolately quiet — or at least, it was desolately quiet until Taberah received a call telling him that he was the first person to receive two Turing Awards.

Then the household was busy with preparation.

Gadfly

Taberah walked up slowly, hesitantly, to the microphone. He looked unsure of himself, but there was still a deep confidence in his walk.

He looked at the microphone for a second, and then

out at members of the audience, one at a time. It was a minute of silence, and in his eyes a penetrating gaze grew.

"It was a year ago this day," he said, "that I accepted this award, and I accepted it only because it was politic. I did not and do not think that what I did then merited an award of this magnitude. All I did was look at the problem a bit differently, think a little, and see a way to cheat on the Turing test. This is not a very big deal; it was just an accident. Yes, I know that most scientific discoveries are made by accident, but this does not make an accident a scientific discovery. But this time is different. This time, I am happy to accept the Turing Award.

"This time is different. Earlier, I had merely managed to capture the accidental features of intelligence. Now, God has given me the grace to capture some of its substance, and I stand in awe. It is as if, before, I had received an award for making a statue that looked like something alive, and now, I have succeeded in making something that is vaguely alive. The difference is fundamental, and I wish to ask what lessons we have learned in the discovery.

"The first lesson I can see is that abstract thought is easier than concrete thought. Or, to put things differently, that our minds are so wonderfully made that many of us can handle concrete thought even more easily than abstract thought. (Maybe the first lesson should be that we are fearfully and wonderfully made.)" A chuckle moved through the audience. "There is much more to thought, and rationality, than is easily captured, and I've only scratched the surface of it. It took me a long time to understand that computers are logical and can do math as no human ever will — excuse me, do arithmetic as no human ever will — and yet that they could not think. Notwithstanding Dijkstra's dictum that the question of whether computers can think is like the question of whether submarines can swim, computers could not think. If I have managed to make a computer think, I have

managed only the barest prototype of what could be done — like those cave paintings that we can barely recognize as art, I have just stumbled on how the basic principle works.

"Or, at least, part of the basic principle. All I've discovered how to program is how to think abstractly; I still have no idea of how to tell a computer how to deal with sense input. Nobody knows how to make an artificial dog; making the robotics for a body would be easy, and making an internal chemical laboratory capable of taking in food and water and producing slobber, sweat, and the like is arguably possible, but we have no idea of how to do the intelligence. All of the abstraction in the world can't tell our robot dog how to run through a field of children without getting clobbered. We have captured one of the features of human intelligence; there are a number of features of even animal intelligence that we lack. There are other features of unintelligent life that we have yet to touch, as well. Nobody knows how to make machines that heal after they sustain damage."

"The last lesson I wish to mention concerns accident and substance, and..." Taberah closed his eyes, and said, "Mr. Chairman, I stayed up all night thinking of what to say, and manners in the country I come from are a bit less polished. I really can't think of a polite way to say it, but I really think the discipline of artificial intelligence has been running with an albatross around its neck, and my success is in large part because I somehow got on the racetrack without getting an albatross. Do I have your permission to make some polemic remarks that may sting?"

Dr. Bode said, "Mr. Kinsella, you have our full consent to say whatever you think is best suited to the occasion."

Taberah said, "I know, but I am not much older than a child, and one of the things I've learned the hard way is that people sometimes say that when they don't really mean it. Is it really OK?"

The chairman's face held trepidation for a moment; he paused, and then said, "It's OK."

Taberah said, "Thank you. And I do really mean it.

"I will not begin to attempt a full philosophical analysis of accident and substance, any more than I would attempt a full mathematical analysis of logic within this speech, were I able, but I will say this. Accident is the outer appearance of an object, what the senses can receive. Substance is what it really is, its essence, if you will. Our discipline, in this area, is the self-made victim of an incredible legacy of bad philosophy, and has many fruitless endeavors which make as much sense to a philosopher as trying to bring a statue to life by painting it and making its features ever more lifelike. We have asked the question of, 'How can we create artificial intelligence?', but misinterpreted it to mean, 'How can we imitate the features of artificial intelligence that are most computer-like?' With all due respect to the brilliant man for which this award was named, I was shocked when I read Turing's explanation of what he thinks thought is. His interpretation of human thought is like interpreting a game of chess as moving little pieces around on a board. Some of what I have seen in this community reminds me of trying to kink a cable to stop the flow of data on a network, and then switching to fiber optic to make your thinking work. But what has happened is not that you make your thinking work; you only make it stop working. The main thing I would attribute this success to is that I came from another culture and missed this bad philosophy, and I believe that the artificial intelligence community will really begin to mine out my insight when they can really escape from this bad philosophy."

Taberah closed his eyes a moment, and said, "Mr. Chairman, may I take thirty seconds for a personal announcement, as well?"

The chairman sat for a moment and said, "What you have said is a difficult thing to hear, but others have said it before, or things similar. Perhaps we just haven't taken them seriously enough. Yes, you are welcome to say

whatever else you want."

Taberah looked, gazed out at over a thousand heads in the audience. All eyes were on him. Slowly, distinctly, loudly, he said, "In this whole room, I doubt if there are more than two or three of you who can hear what else I have to say, but it is something significant. I would like if those two or three would come to my hotel room after the night's festivities so we can talk about it. Thank you, and have a good evening." He closed his eyes and walked hurriedly, almost as if embarrassed, back to his seat.

There was a hushed silence, with murmuring. When he got back to his table, after waiting a minute, one of the people from an adjacent table scooted over to him, and said, "May I join you tonight?" Then another, then another. People began to walk over to him. In minutes, Taberah was at the center of a noisy swarm of people.

Taberah turned to the woman nearest him, looked into her eyes, and asked, "Would you get the chairman for me?"

In a few more minutes, the chairman was next to him.

Taberah hesitated, and then said, "Dr. Bode, there seem to be more people interested in what I have to say than there is space in my room. Would you be so kind as to provide me with a room to speak in, where these people can comfortably be seated?"

The chairman gently laughed, and said, "Mr. Kinsella, why don't you speak here? The whole room is interested in what you have to say."

Taberah picked up his glass, took a long gulp, and said, "Let me take a restroom break first. And would you announce to people that anyone not interested in my tangent shouldn't feel obligated to stay. It'll be a tad long."

When Taberah returned, not a single soul had left. The room was dead silent.

"The discipline of artificial intelligence is about how to impart rationality to computers. This is a question about computers, but it is at least as much a question about

rationality. In our endeavor to make computers rational, we have paid scant attention on how to be rational ourselves. I am not saying that we should be Spocks, embodying logic without emotion. A prejudice against emotion, and a belief that rationality and emotion are antithetical, is (thank God) crumbling, but old fallacies die hard. I embrace emotion as much as I embrace being physical and enjoying music and good wine, but I do not wish to deal further with emotion now. What do I wish to deal with?

"Dick Feynman, in his memoirs *You Must Be Joking, Mr. Feynman*, included a classic speech on cargo cult science. He spoke of aboriginal people who, in World War II, had Allied food and other supplies accidentally airdropped to them, and produce a mockup of an airstrip, designed more and more to look like a real airstrip — but, however much they worked, planes never landed. Never mind that this is very crude anthropology; there is a fundamental insight there about something that looks very much like an airstrip but just doesn't work. And it provides a key to explain something very disagreeable.

"When I came here, I was shocked at what I saw in intellectual life. It is like the shock that might come to a scientist the first time he goes to a creation science institute and discovers exactly what 'science' means in that context. Pseudo-science can incorporate a lot of material from science, and still not be science. What shocked me when I came here was that I looked for reason and found pseudo-reason."

Taberah said, "A full brain dump of what I have seen would take far too long to deliver in a speech, but I wish to give a sampling in three areas: an instance of bad reasoning I see, an instance of a bad way of thinking I see, and an instance of a possible partial remedy.

"The example of bad reasoning I see is in the area of overpopulation. The general, un-questioned belief is that our world's population is growing exponentially, much

faster in the poorer areas of the world, and doomsday will come if we don't curb this population explosion. Speaking as a philosopher, I ask, 'Why?'

"The answer that is given is that people in the third world have large families to support themselves. And that's enough of an explanation to be accepted by someone gullible, but it does not stand up to examination.

"If the world's population is growing exponentially, then it has either always been growing exponentially, or it started growing exponentially at some point. If it has always been growing exponentially, then, as certainly as the future holds doomsday population levels, the past holds dwindling population figures. As surely as the future explodes, the past implodes. This would mean that prior to, say, 1700, all non-European continents would be virtually uninhabited. If the third world population is doubling every, say, ten years, then the population of the third world in the year 1700 would be less than ten. This is ridiculous. All accounts I know say that the poorer areas of the world have been inhabited with at least moderate density for quite some time — thousands of years easily. This leaves us with the other option, namely that the population of the third world has been basically stable and has recently begun exponential growth. To this possibility I ask the question: why on earth? The cultures of these people haven't changed at any rapid pace (and if they did, I would still be puzzled as to why *all* of them changed, instead of a handful — a rapid change of unrelated cultures is about as unusual as the formation of a herd of cats); it is true that most of them cherish children and value big families, but that's been a part of most cultures since long before whenever this population explosion was supposed to have begun. The introduction of new technology to lengthen life and childbearing years? That would certainly account for a population explosion in the *wealthy* nations, but the average African tribesman has never heard of a Western doctor, let alone received enough

medical care to possibly increase the number of children he leaves behind.

"Literature describing a population explosion if the third world birth rate is not curbed has been around for several decades; it used to specify a date for when, for instance, people would all be standing because there would not be enough room for anyone to sit down; those dates are long gone, had passed well before the turn of the millennium, and now there are no more predictions for when doomsday will be — merely that it is always 'soon'. There are pieces of evidence garnered to support this — for example, the great poverty by our standards of third world nations; never mind that this is how all nations lived before one civilization happened to stumble on Midas's secret — but it doesn't stand up to rational examination. And there are many claims like this that free thinkers never question, because to question them is to question rationality or to question reality.

"That is one example among many of non-think; I do not presently wish to give others, nor even to ask who or why would perpetuate such a massive and propagandistic illusion. I am trying to keep this talk short. So I would like to move on to my next example, of an instance not simply of an irrational belief, but of a macroscopic way of thinking that is bad. In this area also, I have a number of choices; I choose to elaborate on the discipline of economics."

Several faces in the crowd could be seen to wince.

"The discipline of economics has had tremendous success at providing the right answer to the wrong question. The question which it answers is, 'How can a culture be manipulated to maximize the economic wealth that it produces?' The question which it ought to answer is, 'How can an economy be guided so as to best support the life of a culture?'

"I spoke with an economist about this; he said several things. The first thing he said is that economics takes

people's wants to be constant, i.e. that it doesn't try to reshape people's economic desires. But this is nonsense; the whole enterprise of advertising and marketing is designed to manipulate people into buying and spending far more than even natural greed would have them do. People work overtime and go into debt to have things they don't need and wouldn't want enough to buy if there weren't ads pressuring them into it. As to the others — there is a naive assumption that the starting point is a consumer who is both selfish and rational. Both have an element of truth, but even the vilest of men is not completely selfish. There is a motivation to do something beyond meeting animal needs that is not gone even in Hitler. Hitler went to incredible lengths to exterminate Jews; such dedication would be called heroic if it were engaged in a noble cause. It was perverse beyond measure, but it was not selfish. Not by a long shot. And as to rational — anyone who looks at a marketing text, or for that matter pays attention to a few ads — will see that the means of increasing market share has nothing to do with rational appeal. The real questions that economics could address — the meaning of wealth, the right amount of wealth (not the greatest) for people to live with — are brushed aside in the relentless pursuit of more, more, more, more.

"On points like this I could go on — the death of philosophy, the curse of Babel upon academic disciplines so that, for instance, the work of any one mathematician is incomprehensible to the vast majority of his colleagues — but I do not wish to do so here. Instead I wish to turn, on a positive note, to how you can think in a better way.

"Larry Wall's classic *Programming Perl* described the three programmer's virtues: hubris, laziness, and impatience. His points with all three are in one sense tongue in cheek, but in another sense much deeper. The virtue he calls 'laziness' is another facet of the intellectual rigor that takes the one stitch that will in time save nine. It

is called 'laziness' because applying that rigor will have the effect of taking less work overall; indeed it is a principle of software engineering that doing something well is easier than doing it sloppily. I wish to focus on that intellectual rigor.

"When you are thinking — be it listening to this speech, or trying to get technology to work, or figuring out why someone is mad at you — *don't slouch*. When you feel a faint intuition in the back of your mind that something is wrong, don't ignore it. Pay attention to it. Try to understand it. Analyze it. Analysis is one tool among a thousand, and you need to be able to let go of it before you can come to the insight Zen offers — that much is clear to me from reading about it, even though I haven't the foggiest idea whether a Zen master would consider me enlightened or not. You need to also be able to relax, to be able to slide into things, to groove (if I may use an archaic term) — but different things at different times. And a certain kind of intellectual rigor applies across disciplines, in sciences, in humanities, in humanities that think they're sciences. It applies outside of academia to life.

"I have thought a lot about the three areas these insights are taken from, and written them down in a sort of book. It will be available on my home room at midnight; those parties who are interested and not offended, whom I guess are few, are welcome to read it there. Beyond that, I thank you all for coming, and if my speech has succeeded, you all need time to think as much as I need time to sleep. Thank you, and have a good night."

Taberah slipped out the back door, scurried off to the hotel room, locked the door, and used both noise cancelling ear phones and ear plugs (noise rating 35); Aed had to get the hotel to open the room to pick up a cellular computer he'd left in there, and bring along security guards to see that he was the only person to go in. The traffic on Taberah's book was enough to take down a zuni server, but the Kinsellas' ISP had mirrors up in an hour.

The next day, as the Kinsellas stepped into the plane to fly back, Aed said, "Taberah, I hope you're ready to be a celebrity. I've spoken with the chairman of the Turing society, and he says he can ensure us a week of peace and quiet with his clout. Beyond that, be ready for a lot of visitors."

Taberah smiled and said, "I'm not worried about it."

Sojourn

Ding-dong!

Aed came to the door, and stifled a wince. This wasn't a week's peace! He saw a short teen-ager in an outlandish role-playing costume: a long, loose, dark robe fell about him, hooded shadows covering his face, and fractal-decorated gloves covered the skin on his arms. "Mister, may I use your bathroom?" he said, his voice cracking, and then shrunk back.

Aed breathed a sigh of relief, and said, "Sure. Come this way." He led him to the bathroom, surprised at a smell of — what? something chemical; he couldn't decide. As the door shut, Aed decided to stay; the kid might get lost, and perhaps something else in his house might get lost. It was a few minutes, and then, coming out, the kid reached around the side of his head and pulled off his hood to reveal a shaven head that looked older than he had seemed at first glance. "So," the teenager? said, his voice again cracking, "d'ja recognize me?"

Aed blinked, and did a double take. It was Taberah. No beard, no hair on his head, not even eyebrows. He looked unfamiliar, just a very short teenager whose eyes twinkled.

"I've decided to do some travelling incognito. Listen, I'm really sorry about all the publicity you'll deal with; I hadn't known how your culture works. No, that's not right; I'd guessed about publicity, but I hadn't cared. Anyways, I

have learned a lot about travel and adapting back in the middle ages, and disguise came quickly — I learned a lot at Halloween time. Um..." his voice trailed off, and then added, "You'll eventually have less attention if I disappear."

"Don't feel guilty about the journalists," Aed said. "Their presence is a side effect of making certain kinds of achievements. But Taberah, you will always be welcome here. You don't have to go."

"I know, but I need to go — for me as well as for you. It's been great here, and I hope to come back — but who knows what tomorrow will bring? I am a wayfarer, and I am not ready to settle down in one place for good."

"You're sure? You're taking an awful big step — can I at least provide you with resources? I've got a fair amount invested, and it's an awfully big world out there."

"No. I can't describe it, it's just — I have a feeling I'll be back, but I need to travel. To think. To work."

"What do you call your creation of artificial intelligence?"

"Aed, do we have to argue?" Aed noticed that there were tears forming in the child's eyes.

"You're making it hard enough for him as it is, honey. Let him go," came Nathella's voice.

Nathella walked over to Taberah, held him in her arms, and kissed him on the lips. "I'll miss you — Taberah, what does your name mean?"

"Burning."

"Similar to my husband's name. I'll miss you, flame. I'll pray for you every day." Then she continued to hold him in silence.

"Where will you be?" Aed said. He walked over and picked Taberah up, holding him. Taberah kissed him, too, on the lips. "I think it would better as regards the media for you not to know," Taberah said. He lingered for a moment, and then disappeared out the side door.

A Mugging

Taberah walked out. It was good to be under the sky again, with a bent arm for a pillow. It felt honest. Or did it? In the year's time, Taberah realized he had grown more accustomed to luxury than he thought. There was something nagging at the back of his mind — what? This culture was lacking in rationality, but he had to have more than rationality to give. Academic silliness was a symptom, not the problem. But what was it? He went into a store and purchased a pen and notepad; he needed time to write. He wandered about aimlessly, walking the city streets.

Taberah was snapped out of his thoughts at a sudden, jerky motion. A young man had drawn a knife; he said, "Give me your money. Now. And no quick motions — you draw something, you're dead."

Taberah slowly reached into his pockets. "I don't have much money; only fifty bucks, plus a few coins. I know what I can give you. I have a nice, thick Swiss Army knife that my mentor gave me. It's quite useful. Would you like that?" He had fished out a fifty dollar bill, plus four quarters, one dime, and a nickel.

"Drop it on the ground," the robber said.

"Certainly. Why are you afraid?" Taberah asked, dropping his pocketknife on the ground.

"I'm not afraid," the robber said, and saw that his lie would not be believed. It could not. Taberah was relaxed; he carried a peace about him, and there was something about him over which the knife held no power.

"Why are you afraid?" Taberah repeated. "I'm not going to hurt you."

"Why aren't you afraid?" the robber said. "I could kill you right where you stand."

"That is the worst you could do. Then I would be with my friends in Heaven. And there are some saints whom I'd

be really happy to see."

"You wouldn't even try to defend yourself?" the robber said, puzzled.

"I love to spar. I —"

"Then defend yourself against this!" The robber swung his knife to slash Taberah across the face. Taberah seemed suddenly distant; the knife flew through the air, and then the robber felt a fist between his eyes — he would be reeling. Then he felt a sledgehammer blow to his stomach, far more powerful than he would have imagined such a scrawny body capable of delivering
struggled to regain his balance
fell

realized he was in a full Nelson

felt himself retching

felt himself pulled back, so that the vomit didn't touch him.

Taberah released his arms, and then pulled back, crouched. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have done that. I have learned that violence does not accomplish much, but my hands are not in on the knowing. I should not have pretended that I was sparring with my weapons master. I should—"

The robber cursed him out, and said, "Who are you, and where are you from?"

Taberah was very still for a moment, and said, "My name is Taberah. It means 'burning' in Hebrew."

"Are you a Jew?"

"I am a Catholic. That comes from Judaism."

"So where are you from?"

Taberah paused, and then, against his better judgment, said, "I can give you a short answer that won't tell you anything, or I can give you the real answer, which I won't blame you if you find impossible to believe."

"Give me the real answer."

"I'm from the Middle Ages, Provence in Southern France. I've traveled a bit. An angel took me to this place. I

—"

The robber said, "Ok; you don't have to tell me if you don't want to." Taberah did not argue; instead, he asked, "What is your name?"

The robber shook, and then began to cry, trying to conceal it. "You really care about me, don't you?"

Taberah said, "Look at me."

The man brushed his arm across his face and looked at him, startled. Taberah's eyes were glistening, too. He said, "It looks as if you've never had anyone who cared about you. I care about you."

The man wiped his mouth, spat, and then sat up, uncertain whether to glare or to quiver. Finally, he said, "My name is Elika. Don't know what it means. Don't have nobody to care about me. Don't understand you."

Taberah said, "Do you want to understand me?"

Elika said, "Maybe. No. Yes. Why? Are you going to talk about Middle Ages stuff?"

Taberah said, "I don't want to talk about the Middle Ages now. Maybe later, if you're interested. Are you confused about why I care about you? Would you like me to explain that?"

Elika said, "How did you know that?"

Taberah did not answer the question. He said, "Let me ask you another question. What do you think religion is about?"

Elika said, "Religion? That's not for me. It's about rules and feeling guilty and memorizing the Bible. It's impossible; it doesn't work for someone like me who has a tough life."

Taberah said, "Would you like to know what religion is for me?"

"Something you're good at?"

"Um, I don't know if I'm good at it, but it's something important to me, and something very different than what you have said. It's not about rules, or feeling guilty, or memorizing the Bible."

"Then what is it about?"

"One thing: love. God loves you. He loves me. We should love God and other people. Everything else is just details. It's about love; that's why I care about you."

"Look, I don't know why you are telling this to me; maybe it's something you can do, but I can't. Here's your money and your knife; I need to go."

Taberah said, "I gave you the money and the knife; they aren't mine any more. They're yours. But if you want to give me something — \$50 is enough to buy some bread, some meat, and a bottle of cider. I'm hungry, and you just threw up. Maybe we could meet and talk — or not. You are free to leave, but I'd like to get to know you better."

This time, Elika made no attempt to conceal his tears, and Taberah softly asked, "May I give you a hug?" It had been ages since anybody had touched Elika, and he listened with interest as Taberah shared what was on his heart. "Why do you dare to keep company with me?" Elika asked. "My Master," Taberah answered, "kept company with all kinds of people, from the most respected to the least. His heart has room for me, for you. I want you to share in his joy."

They ate in a park, and talked long into the night.

Kindred

Night had slowly fallen; Taberah and Elika walked past a dark valley, from which a voice said, "I see your dress. Are you one of us? Are you one of the Kindred?"

Taberah gazed, letting his eyes grow accustomed to the darkness. "Who are you? Who are the Kindred?"

The voice answered back, "You already know that. Where were you born? And when?"

"I was born in Provence, in the Middle Ages."

"Welcome, Ancient One. Step closer."

Taberah had an intuition that he couldn't place. In his

mind, he raised his guard, but this was too interesting to pass by. "Come with us."

Elika said, "Don't worry; they're just role playing."

The voice said, "One is never 'just' role playing. Role play is never 'just.'"

The intuition in Taberah's mind clarified, solidifying. He was beginning to see that role play meant something different than it had with Fiona and Clancy.

They melted into the shadows, and emerged in a candlelit room. In the center lie a pile of wooden swords, staves, daggers, shields. The voice again said, "It is our custom that Kindred brought into our Clan must fight until all the other members have defeated them. Only then can you Enter. Choose your weapon carefully."

Taberah looked at the pile, picked up a halberd, hefted it. "And if I am not defeated? What happens then?"

"Then you are the new head of the Clan."

Taberah looked, and words began to flow through him, coming partly of his own volition, partly of something else. His senses were more acute; the world seemed to slow down. He said, "Darkness is powerful. Light is more powerful. As a sign to you, I choose to fight you armed only with this."

Taberah stood back, drew himself to a majestic height, and made on his heart the sign of the cross.

Kindred

There was stunned disbelief in the atmosphere. One of the Kindred slowly stepped forward, hefted a quarterstaff, and swung at Taberah.

Taberah dodged; he swung again, and this time Taberah caught the staff and twisted it so that the Kinsman fell on his back.

Taberah used the staff to create around him an area of space; another person raised a two-handed sword,

bringing it down. It broke the staff in two — as had been the Kinsman's intent — and Taberah's.

Taberah was now holding twin longswords.

From the outside, it looked as if a thousand things were going on; from the inside, Taberah was only aware of one thing. He kept dancing until he had struck all but one of the Kindred — all but one. They were locked in a dance, the Kinsman skillful and masterful, possessing far greater power than he appeared to have, Taberah moving in a way that was cunning, alien, brilliant. Erika looked on intently; this was the most magnificent fight he had seen.

Suddenly, unexpectedly, the Kinsman threw down his sword, and opened his arms. Taberah followed suit, and the Kinsman reached out to grab Taberah's testicles.

Taberah, with equal swiftness, struck him on the side of the neck, knocking him out.

Taberah turned around slowly, looking, and once again made the sign of the cross.

One of the Kindred looked at him, and said, "Who are you?"

Taberah said, "I am your new leader, and I have many things to tell you. I wish to tell you about a kind of role play beyond your wildest imaginings, a role play that will give you what you search for in vain in calling yourselves the Kindred. Kindred we will be, bound much more tightly than ever a game designer imagined."

"And what is that, that will bind us?"

"It is a dirty word among your circles. Love."

There was murmuring, and a voice said, "Love is very nice for some people, but we need something more real. Something that knows pain. Something that knows angst."

"The love that I know was tortured to death."

"What is this love of which you speak?"

Taberah thought of a short answer, and then said, "That is not a little question, and it deserves more than a little answer. We are tired and bruised; let us, each of us, get a good night's sleep, and then I will give you an

answer."

Discovered

The following night, Taberah spoke long, telling a tale that stretched from Eden to the New Jerusalem. The Kindred were spellbound; none of them could begin to imagine that anything so exciting and dynamic could be the ill-spoken Christian faith. He wrapped up by saying, "It means being loved by God, and loving God by four pillars: loving God with all of your heart, and all of your soul, and all of your mind, and all of your might." None of them were, as yet, convinced, but Taberah had their attention.

Taberah stood, teaching in the parks, day and night, and gradually some of the role players came to believe in what he said, and that he had a message worth spreading. Sometimes more than role players stopped by. One of the Kindred raised his hand and said, "Taberah, why don't we make a medieval role play circus to draw people in?"

Taberah thought, and scratched his head, and thought some more. He said, "I would like to draw a distinction between 'medieval from the neck up' and 'medieval from the neck down'. 'Medieval from the neck down' is everything a circus can provide: costumes and castles, swordplay and feasting. Role play notwithstanding, that is gone, and it is not the treasure I wish to restore. I wish to restore what is 'medieval from the neck up' — faith, hope, and love. Maybe there are some people who could be drawn into what is 'medieval from the neck up' after first contacting what is 'medieval from the neck down', but I do not wish to present a false lure."

"You lured us in from role play."

"You're right, except that then I was trying to follow God where I was. I don't feel the same rightness about putting on a show."

The discussion continued until Taberah noticed that a young woman was staring at him; her jaw had dropped. He looked at her and said, "What is it, sister?"

"I know you. I recognized you by the sound of your voice. You're the man who won two Turing Awards."

Adjustments

Taberah's Corner 9/1/2035: Turning Back the Clock

Upon advocating that we reclaim certain things from the Middle Ages, I am invariably met with the question, "Do you think you can turn back the clock?", and it is a question I should like to address now."

There is a belief behind that question; that belief runs roughly as follows: time runs on an irreversible slope, and with that irreversible slope comes a necessary progression of ages that march forward. This belief appears to be only its obvious first part, that time is irreversible, but it is understood to mean the second part: an equally irreversible march of ages. These are almost so equated that asking, "Can we be medieval now?" is equivalent to asking, "Can we set back the physical clock to 1300?" — but the two are not at all the same.

There is a distinction I have made between being medieval above the neck, and medieval below the neck. Medieval below the neck is all of those popular

images that are conjured by the term 'medieval' — knights in shining armor, castles, and the like. Medieval above the neck is not concerned with technology; it is concerned with thinking and living in light of the insights of the Middle Ages. Re-enactors spend short time living lives that are at least medieval below the neck, but I don't think that is a particularly important goal. What I do think is important is what I hinted at with my Turing award speech; it concerns rationality, for one thing. I know I'm fighting an uphill battle against stereotypes here; there has been a massive smear campaign, so that 'medieval' connotes obscurantist silliness and 'postmodern' connotes reasonability, but it isn't so. Medieval above the neck has never been obsolete, and never will be — because it can't be obsolete, any more than good food can become obsolete.

As to what exactly this will mean — I will write about different things at different times. I have some things to say about judging by appearances versus judging rightly — but that will come in its due time.

Thank you for reading thus far; I hope you will continue reading.

The young woman's recognition of Taberah brought with it powerful changes; Taberah was for the first time of his life busy, and for the first time of his life had to escape from other people for the restoration of his soul. When he appeared, people asked autographs, and he soon learned to enter and leave restaurants through the kitchen. He had a voice to be heard, but he missed being able to walk through the streets and in the woods with Lydia. There were so many things about Taberah that people couldn't understand — such as why he would sometimes rather sleep in a gutter than in a waterbed. Perhaps he could learn to use cosmetics to alter his appearance — but when would he learn how to do that? He saw his fame as a

responsibility, but it was more of a burden than a privilege.

He wrote and communicated all of the things that he had discussed with his friends — and re-iterated that he did not want a circus to be put up. He had influence, but it was an impersonal influence with people he mostly didn't know. And so Taberah prayed earnestly that the burden would be lifted.

Reckoning

Taberah's Corner

10/1/2035:

Reckoning

There is a Bible story where God calls Samuel and tells him to find the future king among some brothers. Each time one comes out, Samuel is impressed and says, "Surely this is the one who is to be king!" God tells him, in essence, "I do not judge as you do. I do not judge by outer appearances." It is the last brother who is picked to be king.

I entertain doubts about holding a column at all; I suspect that most readers are reading this column because I have won two Turing Awards. If you are, I would ask you to stop; the Turing Awards merely indicate that I had some success with computers, and do not make me particularly qualified to advise society. If you are reading this column because you think I have good things to say, then go on reading it; if you are only reading it because of the weight of my awards, I would rather you were reading something else, something else that you chose because it is

worth reading.

You people are greatly concerned about success. There was someone who said, "I had climbed to the top of the corporate ladder, only to find that the ladder was leaning against the wrong building." I would like to suggest that your understanding of success is like your judgment by appearances. There is something good about being famous as having won two Turing Awards; that something good is that you learn that, whatever success is, that isn't it. Success is being drawn into the heart of God, and it comes more easily when you are about to be deported by the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization Services than when everybody and his brother wants you to be his honored guest. Success might come in many ways. It might be service of children — and how few adults are willing to play with children? It might be keeping house. It might be running a volunteer shelter. It might be being a judge who has the guts to defend Christianity when it is attacked or challenge Islam when it is hurting our society. It might be any number of things. Perhaps it might even include being a celebrity and using your favor to share truth with others who might not have heard it — but it is not defined by having an award attached to your name.

How can you be successful — not at some date in the future, but right now?

On October 2 2035, 3:05 PM, God heard Taberah's prayer. An Islamist assassin, armed with a high-powered hunting rifle, shot at Taberah and hit him twice — once in the right shoulder, and once in the abdomen. Taberah was in surgery for sixteen hours, and spent the next week drugged out. The doctor gave very firm orders that only close friends approved by both her and Aed were to see Taberah — even then, Taberah always had a visitor when

he wanted one.

In Taberah's medically enforced absence, the movement he started became independent of him. They were no longer intellectually dependent on him: Taberah was no longer a head, merely the first person to have known something. There were medieval fairs, showing people what was medieval above and below the neck. When, three months later, Taberah left the hospital, he was simply a member.

On March 6, 2036, Taberah was lying in bed, when the Angel of the Lord came to him in a vision, and said, "You have done well, Taberah; you have done what you were sent for. Which would you like: to return to medieval Provence, or to spend the rest of your life here?"

Taberah cried, and said, "I have waited, and waited, and waited, and waited. Can't I go *home*? To my *real* home?"

His funeral was filled with mirth.

Epilogue

Yes, Eleta, I think you're right, and I think the manuscript will have to stand as it is, but I am still not happy with it. Perhaps no author is ever satisfied with his work, but I am not happy with it. You understand why I presented the events as fiction — the idea is not without merits. Still, a critic could poke any number of holes in it. Someone who regarded it as fiction would no doubt note that good storytelling and good plot are rarely found together, that forty percent of the plot is glossed over in two short chapters, et cetera. I'm not sure that Taberah would share in all those criticisms — he regarded those long days of conversation with the Kinsellas as the best time of his life, and his influential and turbulent time in the limelight as almost an afterthought in which he repeated impersonally what he had shared personally. At

any rate, he would have found his message more important than telling a good story — and he took storytelling seriously. Someone who knew this was not fiction and knew the parties involved would have much more serious criticisms to level. I have captured almost nothing of Taberah's sense of humor — cunning, bawdy, subtle, clever, exquisite, and absurd. After hearing about some of the practical jokes he pulled — from now on, Monty Python will taste like flat beer. It pales in comparison. I also did badly in failing to more seriously address the place of Islam. The influence of Islam in shaping the culture, and why it is by nature coercive is something I just barely nicked — probably just enough to make the reader think I suffer from vulgar intolerance. You know better than that, of course; you know that I enjoyed living in a Muslim country, and that I greatly respect their emphasis on honor, friendship, and hospitality. And that it is my considered judgment — as surely as that Christianity is invariably corrupted when it wields direct political power — that Islam in power is inherently coercive. The role of Islam was one among *many* important elements of the surrounding culture that I failed to capture. And medieval culture, for that matter. And Taberah's "200 ways to use a magnetic paper clip" — I just don't know what to say. It's both silly and serious, and it was one of the things to motivate me to wonder, "What kind of a mind would think of that?" And I have intentionally left out most of the miracles that occurred — not that there were many, but I didn't want to present unnecessary strain on the reader's willing suspension of disbelief. There was plenty of necessary strain already.

The willing suspension of disbelief accompanying fiction is the real reason I chose to write it as fiction. It's not just that saying I know events three decades in the future would label me as a kook — that's understandable enough, and the real explanation was difficult for *me* to believe, even having experienced it. The real reason I

recorded this story as fiction is that our time has this terrible stereotype of medievals as backwards, and conception of the past as inferior — and a science fiction/fantasy story is almost the only place where something labelled 'medieval' could be respected. What if I told you that an anti-Semitic campaign had taken the name of Einstein, and smeared Jewry by making his name a symbol of idiocy? The truth is that something equally anti-medieval has taken the name of John Duns Scotus, the medieval genius whom Catholics call the Subtle Doctor, and turned it into the term 'dunce'. That stereotype, and the preconception that we have nothing to learn from the medievals, is a force to be reckoned with, and I don't know how this manuscript will fare in its face.

Once one of Karl Barth's students asked him, "Do you believe there was a serpent in the Garden of Eden?" Barth replied, "The important thing is not 'Was there a serpent?' but 'What did the serpent say?'" In a similar insight, I have presented Taberah's story as fiction and tried to draw attention away from the question of "Was Taberah real?" and instead draw attention to the more fundamental question of "What did Taberah say?" — on which account he has much to tell us. After coming into contact with him, I have come to believe that we can be medievals, too.

What do you think?

-Jonathan

The Steel Orb

I awoke, seared by pain. The images dispersed. What were they?

a flat rectangular courtyard, where brick pillars enshrined a walkway, and in the center was a great pool, filled not with water but with silt impressed with intricate patterns—a place that was silent and still, cool in the shade, with robed men moving slowly and conversing without breaking the stillness

alleys and courtyards and tunnels and passageways that made for a labyrinth, with a byzantine structure only exceeded by turgid forms beneath its surface—I was moving through it before I had grasped its rhythm

a vortex, draining life and beauty, draining the life out of—

there was also a single grain of incense, its fragrance filling—

there had been a storm, with wind and water and lightning moving faster than I could keep pace with, a storm, a storm—

then I awoke.

I had washed up on a beach, barely conscious, torn by thirst. I did not see the city in the distance; I saw only a man, clad in a deep blue robe. I tried to call out to him, but I was torn by violent coughs.

Then the scene blurred, and I passed out of consciousness.

When I regained consciousness, I was in a room. There was a man whose hand was on my heart; he looked familiar, I thought. A woman handed him a cup, which he placed to my lips.

Time passed. I could feel warmth and coolness moving through me. My thoughts slowly quickened. He revered me, making on himself the great sign, bowing, and kissing me. I went to stand, but he held me down. "Take a time of rest now. In a day I will introduce you to the city."

I looked at him. The blue robe looked familiar. A question did not arise in my mind; I only wondered later that I did not ask if he had been expecting me, or if he knew I wanted to be a Teacher. Something in his repose kept the question from arising.

The woman looked at me briefly. "My name is Pool. What languages do you know?"

If anything, I sank further back into my chair. I wished the question would go away. When she continued to listen, I waited for sluggish thoughts to congeal. "I... Fish, Shroud, Inscription, and Shadow are all languages that are spoken around my island, and I speak all of them well. I speak Starlight badly, despite the fact that they trade with our village frequently. I do not speak Stream well at all, even though it is known to many races of voyagers. I once translated a book from Boulder to Pedestal, although that is hardly to be reckoned: it was obscure and technical, and it has nothing of the invisible subtlety of 'common' conversation. You know how—"

The man said, "Yes; something highly technical in a matter you understand is always easier to translate than children's talk. Go on."

"And—I created a special purpose language," I said, "to try to help a child who couldn't speak. I did my best, but it didn't work. I still don't understand why not. And I —" I tried to think, to remember if there were any languages I had omitted. Nothing returned to my mind.

I looked down and closed my eyes. "I'm sorry. I'm not very good with languages."

The woman spoke, and when I looked up I noticed her green veil and the beautiful wrinkles about her eyes. "You novices think you know nothing and need to know everything. When I was near your point in life, I knew only six tongues, and I'm still only fluent in four." She revered me, then stepped out the window. Her husband followed, although their spirits still seemed to blow in the wind through the window.

I fell into a deep and dreamless sleep, and I awoke with a start. The man was just stepping into the window, and I could hear a clink of silver. "Will you come to the marketplace? I want you to find the Galleria."

He still had not told me his name, nor I mine, but as we walked, I told him about the great storm; it was wild on land but wilder at sea. He wondered that I survived the storm, let alone that I washed up; he quoted the proverb, "Where the wind blows, no one knows." We came to a merchant with dried fruits; he looked at some oranges. "Have you seen Book since you came back?"

"Yes, but I didn't get to talk with him long."

"What did he say?"

"He only said two things. The first was, 'Put my little daughter down!' Then the second was... let me see if I can remember. He began to say, 'No, don't throw her in the—' But I couldn't hear the rest of what he hoped to say, because he threw a bucket of salt water at me. Which reminds me, I don't have salted fish today, but I have some of the finest oranges from the four corners of the world. This orange grew in an orchard where it is said that the trees once bore jewels. I could sell you this fine

assortment for two silver pieces each."

My host sounded astonished. "Two silver pieces each? You are a dear friend, of much more value than the wares you sell. I doubt if you paid two silver pieces for this whole lot of fruit—look at this one! It must have rotted before it was dried. I can talk a bit, but I'm only buying wheat today." He turned away.

The merchant grabbed his arm. "Don't go yet. I'll give you a friend's price." I think he said something else impressive, but their haggling could not hold my interest. The market was pungent with strange smells. I recognised the smell of spices, but what else was there? Something strange. I could hear a tantalizing sound of gears, but that was not it. There was a soft sound of wind. What was evading my mind?

I realised my host was walking, holding a bag with some dried oranges. I hastened to follow him.

"My name is Fortress," he said.

"I am Unspoken."

"Unspoken... That's an ambiguous name. You seem to be shrouded in mystery. Have you seen the Galleria?"

We stopped in the Temple, drinking the flow of chant and incense, and reverencing the holy icons. Then we walked out. Fortress showed me a hedge maze in a public park, with a great statue in the centre. I looked at the pedestal, and something caught my eye. "There's a passage down hidden in the pedestal to the statue. Where does it go?"

He laughed. "You're subtle."

I waited for him to continue.

He remained silent.

I asked him, "Will it help me find the Galleria?"

He said, "It helps me find the Galleria. It will only distract you from it. The far wall of the pedestal opens to a passage down, but it only reaches a network of caves where boys play. There is nothing in there that will interest you."

"Then what," I asked, "am I to do to find the Galleria?"

"Why don't you search? The Galleria is not outside the boundaries of this little labyrinth. Only beware of the first solution you want to latch onto. That is often a distraction, and if you are to find a solution you are looking for, you need to be able to grasp something slippery in a place you are not looking."

I knocked on earth with my ear to the ground; I looked at the cracks between stones; I even scraped a piece of chalk someone had left on the stones, trying to see if its trace would show me a different stone. I found a few loose items; someone had forgotten a brush, and I pushed a lot of earth aside. I searched and searched, but I found no sign of a passage, no sign of anything unusual save the echoes of a hollow shaft in the stone beneath the statue. It was easy for me to find the mechanism to open the pedestal; indeed, I saw a boy emerge from it. I looked around near the statue: could I be missing a second passage nearby? Yet here the search was even more frustrating.

Fortress gave me a slice of orange, and I searched, hot, parched, the whole day through. I was near the point of tears; nothing in the ground offered the faintest trace of a way down.

I sat back in desolation. I rested my back against a hedge; I could see the sleepy sun's long golden fingers sliding across the hedge. I closed my eyes for a few minutes to rest; I opened my eyes, and could see that the sun's fingers had shifted. My bleak eyes rested on a funny bulge in the hedge. That was odd; it looked almost as if—I stared. Standing out from the hedge, illuminated in stark relief, was a bas-relief sculpture.

Someone in a robe—what color robe?—swam in the ocean. He swam down, down, down, down, deeper than a whale can dive, and still deeper. Something about the picture filled me with cool, and I began to see through it, began to see the web that it was—I felt a touch on my

head. "You've found the Galleria. Would you like to go home now?"

I looked. Past Fortress I saw another picture of a swordsman wielding the great Sword, slicing through darkness and error. The Sword swung around him, slicing through monsters around him, and then with no less force slicing through the monsters inside him. I could see—what? It hurt him to cut at errors inside him, but he wielded the Sword against the darkness without and within. I looked entranced.

"Stand up." Fortress was looking at me. "You've seen enough for now; I normally only look into one picture, and you have looked into two after finding the entrance into the Galleria. We will see more of the city later; now, you are tired."

It wasn't until I began walking home that I realized how exhausted I was. I ate my meal in silence, lay in my bed, and sunk into sleep. I awoke, still tired, and was relieved when Fortress told me that he had one proper lesson for me but he would need several days' mundane work for me after that, and it would be a while before anything else exciting happened.

There was one workroom, one that had a forge, an unstable stack of cups with gears and levers, and a box of silt for drawing. There were several mechanical devices in various states of disassembly; Fortress picked up one of them, and turned a crank. I could see gears turning, but the white bird on top moved very erratically.

Fortress looked at me. "Does it work?"

"Not very well."

"What part is causing the problem?"

I turned the device over in my hands, pushed and pulled at one axle, and turned the crank. After some time, I said, "This gear here isn't connecting. It's worn and small."

"So if I replace that gear, it will work better?"

I hesitated and said, "No."

"Then what is the problem?"

"The entire device is loose. The teeth aren't really close enough anywhere; there's room for slipping."

"Then is that one gear the problem?"

"No. It is only the easiest thing to blame."

"Then you did not help yourself or me by telling me that it was that one gear."

I opened my mouth to protest, but he held up his hand and said, "People will often ask you treacherous questions like that, and they usually won't know what it is that they're doing. A Teacher, such as you seem to want to be —"

"How did you know I wanted to be a Teacher?"

"How could I not know you wanted to be a Teacher? A Teacher, such as you seem to want to be—" he continued, "gives an answer that will help the other person, even if that answer is not expected, even if the other person doesn't want to hear it."

Fortress shook the clockwork and said, "What would make it work?"

I said, "You could replace all the gear heads with something larger?"

He said, "What if you couldn't do that? What if the gear heads were made of delicately crafted gold?"

I hesitated, and said, "I can't think of anything that would help."

"Anything at all?"

I hesitated again, and said, "If you made the casing smaller, it would work. But how would you—"

He reached down and pulled two metal plates, plus some other hardware and tools, setting them before me. I took the tools, disassembled the original device, and reassembled the new device with a slightly smaller frame.

It worked perfectly.

He asked, "Is there any way for the bird to bob up and down, as well as turn?"

I tried to think of how to answer him, but this time I

really could think of nothing. My sense of mental balance, my sense that my understanding was big enough to encompass his Lesson, was wavery. I was unsure.

He took a metal rule, and smoothed the surface of the silt inside the box. He then began drawing with a stylus.

"What if the rod were not solid, but had a cam and inner workings like this? Wouldn't that work?"

I looked at him, slightly dazed. "You must be a great metalworker. Can you do that?"

He paused a moment and said, "I might be a great metalworker, and I might be able to do that, but that is not why I am asking. Would it work?"

"Yes."

"Could you make it roll?"

"Yes. Put it in a hollow round casing and then it would roll as part of the casing."

He laughed and said, "Could you have the front move forward and the back stay in place—without it breaking?"

I cleared the silt's surface, and began to work diagrams—rejecting several as they failed, working one almost to completion—and then saying, "But that would require a shell that is both strong and elastic, and I have not heard of any who can make a shell like that."

He seemed unconcerned. "But would it work?"

"If I had such a shell, yes, it would work."

"Then you have created it. Could you make one that gives birth to another like itself?"

I sketched a descending abyss of machines within machines, each one smaller than its parent.

"Could you make one that gives birth to another machine, just like itself?"

"Yes, if they were all constantly expanding. By the time a child gave birth, it would be the size of its parent when the child gave birth."

He seemed impressed, not only at what I said, but at how quickly. He closed his eyes, and said, "I will only ask you one more question. How would you design a machine

that could design machines like itself?"

I looked at him, at the disassembled machines, at the silt, and then to a place inside myself. "I can't, and I can't learn now."

He looked at me, opened his mouth, and closed it. He said, "We can move to another Lesson. For now, I want you to look at the gears, separating the worn ones from the ones that are new, so that I can melt down the worn ones. You've got a meticulous day ahead of you."

He left, and I began to work through the gears. The work began to grow monotonous. He returned with a leather sack over his shoulder. "I just acquired a number of broken clockwork devices which I want you to disassemble and separate into parts that are usable and parts that need to be melted down. I'll be back shortly with some metal to melt down and forge new gears out of." He set down the sack, and I looked in disbelief at the intricate machines with innumerable small parts. I had a bleak sense of how long a stretch of dullness was ahead of me. I started to lay them out so I could disassemble them.

He returned, holding a pike in his hands. "You seem strong, and you've had some time to recover. Come with me. Thunder has spotted a bear."

Fortress stood, armed with a sword, a crossbow, and several quarrels. He had given the pike to me; we followed several other men and spread out into the woods. Fortress told me, "I want you just to search, and cry out if you see the bear—we'll come. Don't attack the bear; just set the pike if it charges, and run once it's hit. I think you have a good chance of noticing the bear. Don't take any unnecessary risks."

We spread out, and I moved along, my feet slipping noiselessly on the forest soil. It was more of an effort than it should have been; my body seemed to move with all the

fluidity of sludge. The forest looked more rugged than usual; the storm which almost killed me had torn through the forest, and the storm's mark was far heavier on the forest than the city. I thought of the saying that a storm is liquid fire.

I looked at a tree that had fallen. The dead tree had broken a branch on another tree, and left an unpleasant wound. I cut the hanging branch with my pike, to leave better wound. Then I placed my hand on the tree to bless it, and left it to heal.

I thought of how the hunt would go. Someone would see it, then the men would gather. Those the bear faced away from would fire a volley of arrows. Those it chased would run while others taunted it. When the hunters left the city, there was an edge of excitement; I don't think it would be the same if it were not risky.

I continued to move along noiselessly, and looked for a creek. I was thirsty. I blessed another tree, hoping it would heal: the storm had left some rather impressive wreckage. It was dead silent, and when I cut a damaged branch from a third tree, two things happened. First, I heard a babbling brook, and realized how parched I was. Second, part of my pike caught on the tree, and I couldn't wrest it free.

Leaving the pike for a moment, I stole away from the tree and refreshed myself at the brook. I sat for a moment and rested, breathing in simple joy. Then I heard a stick snap on the other side of a rocky outcropping. I realised I could hear some very loud pawprints.

I slithered up the rock, and looked around. I saw nothing.

Then I looked down, and saw the biggest bear of my life.

It looked around.

It smelled.

I held tight against the rock.

Something under my right hand moved noiselessly.

My fingers wrapped around a large stone, the size of a man's skull.

Fear flowed through me. And excitement. I lifted the rock, slowly, noiselessly, and brought my legs in. I lifted the rock.

I felt with my left hand, and found a rock the thickness of my wrist. A flick of my wrist, and it crashed thirty cubits away.

The bear turned its head, and began to run.

As it ran, I jumped.

I began to fall.

I could see the forest moving as if it had almost stopped.

Between every beat of my heart, a thousand things happened.

I landed on the bear's back, astride it as if I were riding it.

Immediately the bear tensed, and began to turn.

The rock, still in my hand, crushed the bear's skull.

I could hear a crunch, and the bear's body suddenly went limp.

My hand released the stone.

The stone began to fall, about to roll over on my leg and crush me.

My hand caught a thin branch from a tree.

I pulled my legs up and pulled the branch as hard as I could.

I tore it off.

The bear's body turned.

Something slapped my other palm.

I pulled with all my strength, and my body lifted from the bear.

The bear hit the ground.

I looked around.

Most hunting parties killed a bear every few years.

I had heard of a warrior who had killed a bear alone.

I had never heard of someone kill a bear with only the

weapons the forest provided.

I lowered myself to the ground.

I watched the bear breathe its last.

I shouted with a roar like a storm's fury.

Other men began to arrive. Their jaws dropped when they saw me standing over the bear's carcass—empty-handed.

Fortress walked up to me.

I smiled, with a smile of exhilaration such as I had never smiled before.

He looked into me, looked at all the other men, then curled up his hand and slapped me.

The slap resounded.

I touched my face in disbelief. I could feel hot blood where his nails had struck me.

"You disobeyed," he said.

He looked into me.

"Next time you do that," he continued, "it will be a bear's claw that slaps you. I don't know what the bear will look like, but it certainly will be a bear's claw that slaps you."

I feigned happiness as I walked back. I tried not to stomp. It seemed an age before I came back to the house; I climbed up the wall and into my room and sat on my bed, furious. The sounds of jubilation around me did not help.

He came up, and said, "We've been invited to visit someone while people are building a fire."

A man was at the entryway; I followed him, and my hosts, through some streets into a room. There was something odd, it seemed; I could not have thought of this at the time, but while the other people paid no heed to my anger, but all of the people with me subdued their joy. Suddenly we walked in a door, and I saw a beautiful girl, holding a clay tablet and a stylus. The whole world seemed

brighter.

Fortress said, "How is our lovely ventriloquist?"

She looked at him as if her face were melting. I looked at Fortress, and he raised his hand slightly. He would tell me the story later.

The man exchanged reverences with me and said, "Welcome, bear slayer. My name is Vessel. My daughter is Silver, and my wife is Shadow. Find a place to sit. Will you have a glass of wine?" His wife unstopped a bottle.

The girl said, "Father Dear, will you tell us a story? You tell us the best stories."

I said, "Please. I miss listening to a good storyteller."

Vessel said, "In another world, there was a big forest on an enormous mountain. There were plants that grew gems as their flowers, only they were so rare it would be easier to take the gems from a mine—and people didn't harvest them, because the plants were so beautiful. It would have been a sacrilege.

"There was a dark stone hut, round as a leaf, and in it a Teacher as old as the mountains, with wisdom deep as its mines. He had a gravelly voice, like a dull and rusty iron dagger slowly scraped across granite. He—"

Silver interrupted. "Bear slayer, some time you must listen to my father sing."

The man continued as if nothing had been said. "The forest was rich and verdant, and every morning it was watered by a soft rain."

At the sound of the word "rain," I suddenly felt homesick. It rained frequently on my island, but here—I had not seen rain at all.

Silver said, "Rain is a natural wonder that happens when a great ball of grey wool, lined with cotton of the purest white, sails in the Abyss and drops packets of water. Apparently this wonder has been seen in this city, though not within the time it would take a mountain to be ground to dust. This did not stop my father from making a tub on the top of our roof, putting sealed pipes down, so that he

could pour water from a pipe in our room if Wind were ever silly enough to blow some of that grey wool over this city."

Vessel placed a hand over his daughter's mouth and continued. "He was a many-sided sage, learned in arts and wisdom. Among the things he crafted were a ferret, so lifelike you could believe it was real. If you forcefully squeezed both sides, it would walk along in its own beautiful motion."

Silver pulled her Father's hand down and said, "I think I saw one of those wonders from a travelling street vendor. I looked at some of the craftsmanship and heard some of the gears turning. It must have been made by someone very competent, probably not someone from this city. That didn't stop Father Dear from—"

The man stood up swiftly, flipping his daughter over his shoulder, and walked into the hallway. Shadow said, "That story didn't last long, even for our family. May I serve you some more wine?"

Vessel walked out, holding a key. "Please excuse the disturbance. I have locked Silver in her room. As I was—"

Silver slid through the doorway, stretching like a cat waking from its sleep, and ostentatiously slid two metal tools into a pouch in her sleeve. "I'm disappointed, Father Dear. Normally when we have guests, you at least put something heavy in front of the door."

Some time later, I saw Vessel and Silver sitting together. Pool, Silver, and Shadow had left, and I could hear the warm rhythm of women's talk and laughter from a nearby room. Fortress said, "We were waiting for you. The other hunters have pulled the bear in. Come to the roast!"

I wanted to ask them something, but there were more footfalls outside. I could already hear the drummers beginning to beat out a dance, the singers with their lyres, the priests with their merry blessings, the game players, and the orators with their fascinating lectures. It was not

long before we were at the city center.

A young man pulled me off to the side; I saw, on a cloth on the ground, what looked like several pieces of a puzzle. "And now," another man said, "you push the pellet in, and fit the pieces together." He moved his fingers deftly, and I could see what looked like an ordinary crossbow bolt.

"What is that?" I said.

"Let me show you," he said, handing me a cocked crossbow. "Do you see that bag of sand on the roof?"

"Yes."

"Shoot it."

I slowed down, took aim, waited for the target to come to the right place, then fired the crossbow. There was an explosion, and I felt something sting my face. When I realized what was happening, I could feel sand falling in my hair.

I looked at him, confused, and he said, "It's an explosive quarrel. The head contains a strong explosive."

"Why was the shaft made of puzzle pieces? I don't see what that added to the explosion."

He laughed. "The pieces fly out to the sides, instead of straight back at you. It's quite a powerful explosion—you might find it a safer way to kill a bear."

I made a face at him, but I was glowing. So these people knew already that I had killed the bear.

I spoke to one person, then another, then heard people clapping their hearts and calling out, "Speech! We want a speech from the bear-slayer!"

I stood, at a loss for words, then listened for the Wind blowing—but I heard only my name. I listened more, but heard nothing. Then I said, "I am Unspoken," and then the Wind blew through me.

"I am Unspoken," I continued, "and I love to peer into

unspoken knowledge and make it known, give it form, or rather make its form concretely visible. Each concrete being, each person, each tree, each divine messenger, is the visible expression of an idea the Light holds in his heart, and which the Light wants to make more real. And his presence operates in us; he is making us more real, more like him, giving us a more concrete form. You know how a creator, making art or tool or book, listens to what a creation wants to see, wrestles with it and at the same time bows low before it, sees how to make it real; that is how the Light shines in us. And when we listen to the Unspoken and give it voice, we are doing what a craftsman does, what the Light does with us. How do we give voice to an unspoken idea, an unspoken expression? We can't completely do so; what we can say is always a small token of what we cannot say. But if the Wind is blowing through us, we may make things more visible." I continued at length, turning over in my spirit the ideas of tacit knowledge and invisible realities, visible, and the divine act of creation reproduced in miniature in us. I traced an outline, then explored one part in great detail, then tied things together. When my words ended, I realised that the Wind had been blowing through me, and I felt a pleasant exhaustion. The festivities continued until we greeted the dawn, and I slept through most of the next day.

All this excitement made my chores in the workshop an almost welcome relief. It began to wear thin, though, after perhaps the third or fourth consecutive day of dismantling tiny devices and then staring at tiny gear teeth to see if they were too worn to use. I began to grow tired of being called 'bear-slayer'—was there nothing else to know about me?—and there was an uneasy silence between Fortress and me about what I had done. He did not mention it; why not? I was afraid to ask.

I worked through each day, and had an hour to my own leisure after the songs at vespers. Mostly I walked around the city, exploring its twists and passageways. It

was on one of these visits that I heard a whisper from the shadows, beckoning. It sounded familiar.

"Who is it?" I said.

The voice said, "You know me. Come closer."

I waited for the voice to speak. It, or rather she, was alluring.

I stepped forward, and sensed another body close to my own. A hand rested lightly on my shoulder.

"Meet me here tomorrow. But now, go home."

As I walked home, I realized whose voice it was, and why I didn't recognize it. It was someone memorable, but she had changed somehow, and something made me wary of the change. Yet I wondered. There was something alluring about her, and not just about her.

The following morning, Fortress looked into me and said, "No."

Then he left me in the workshop, and I was torn as I sifted through the day's parts. I was trying to understand my intuitions—or at least that's what I told myself. What I didn't tell myself was that I understood my intuitions better than I wanted to, and I was trying to find some way of making what I understood go away. I touched my cheek, and felt the healing wounds. Then I made up my mind to stay in the building that night.

Evening came, and I realised how long I'd been sitting one place. So I got out, and began walking the other way—just a short distance, to stretch my legs. Then I remembered a beautiful building in the other direction, and I walked and walked. Then I remembered something I had overheard—Fortress's first rebuke had not been everything it seemed. And I found myself in the same place, and felt a soft hand around my wrist. As we walked, and as I could feel my heart beating harder, the ground itself seemed to be more intense. I followed her through

twisted passageways, then climbed down several rungs to a place barely lit by candlelight. A strange scent hung around the air. There was something odd, but I could not analyse what. I saw a man in a midnight blue robe bow deeply before me.

"Welcome, Bear Slayer. You did right to kill the bear."

"How did you know—" I began.

"Never mind that. You did the right thing. Fortress is a fine man and a pillar of the community, and we all need him picking apart devices, day after day—or has he asked you to take that task so he can do something interesting? Never mind. Fortress is a fine man, but you are called to something higher. Something deeper."

My heart pounded. I looked. He looked at me with a gesture of profound respect, a respect that—something about that respect was different, but whenever I tried to grasp what the difference was, it slipped out of my fingers.

"Your name is indeed Unspoken, and it is truer than even he knows. You were touching an unspoken truth when you left your pike and attacked the bear."

I couldn't remember any unspoken Wind, or any sense of good, when I disobeyed, and I was excited to learn that what I wanted to remember was true.

"And I have many things to teach you, many lessons. You were not meant to be staring at gear after gear, but—"

It seemed too good to be true, and I asked him, "When will I be able to begin lessons?"

He said, "You misunderstand me. I will teach you. But go back to him; you have learned enough for tonight. My lessons will find you, and show you something far greater than sorting gear after gear, a power that—but I say too much. Go. I will send for you later."

My stomach was tight. I was fascinated, and trying not to realise that something wanted to make me retch. "But please," I said. My voice cracked.

The man shook his head.

I said, "At least tell me your name."

"Why do you ask my name?"

I heard a sound of a blade being drawn, and a crowd parted to reveal a man holding an unsheathed sword.

"Clamp! Do not send him out yet!"

The man who had spoken to me drew a dagger, his face burning red. "Poison! How dare you!"

"How dare I? You should not have held the place of glory to begin with. You—"

"Do you challenge me?"

"I do."

What happened next I am not completely sure of. Part of it I could not even see. But what I did see was that Poison was great enough a swordsman to make a mighty swing in a tight room.

I saw him swing.

Then I saw Clamp raise his dagger to parry.

Then I heard a high pitched shattering sound.

Then there was a flurry of motion, and Clamp fell over, dead.

In his hand was a sword hilt, and nothing more.

Clamp turned to me, and said with surprising sweetness, "Do come back, my child. Fortress is a fine man, and no doubt he will teach you many important things. We will see each other later."

I was almost dumbfounded. I stammered, "How did you— What kind of power lets you—"

He bowed again, very deeply. "Farewell to you. We will meet again."

"Please."

"You need sleep. You have a long day ahead of you."

I stood in place, then slowly walked out. I was elated when I heard his voice call after me, "If you really must know something... Everything you have been told, everything you believe, is wrong. Illusion. You just began to cut through the Illusion when you killed the bear. 'Wisdom is justified by her children.' But don't try to understand the Illusion—it is a slippery thing, profoundly

unspoken, and we will see each other soon enough. I'll find you; my classroom is everywhere. Do sleep well. Fortress is a fine man, worthy of respect and worthy to teach you, and I do not doubt he will teach you many exciting and important things."

I walked back, my heart full of recent happenings. I got into bed, and pretended to sleep.

That morning, I felt like my body was made of frosty sludge. I got up, and when Fortress looked at me, I forced myself to bow to him.

That was the last time I bowed to him in a long while, or indeed showed him reverence of any sort. I resented it even then.

I resented the day's sweeping and cleaning, but some of my thoughts congealed. Some of my unspoken thoughts began to take solid form. The respect I had been shown—it was different from the respect I was used to. It meant something different, something fundamentally different. It said, "From one noble soul to another." And the place of meeting was devoid of any adornment, any outer beauty. It had the sense of a place of worship, but as a place it was empty, almost as if it were irrelevant to—there was another thought in the back of my mind, but I could not grasp it.

That night, I thought I heard the sound of Fortress crying. I smiled and slept soundly.

The next morning, Fortress said, "Unspoken, you've seen a lot of gears, but I don't think I've shown you how to make a cam. Cams are terrifically interesting, both in terms of making them and what you can make with them. I'd like to show you how to make cams, then some intriguing devices that use cams. Thank you for the sorting you've done; we should be able to pull exactly the parts we need. Let me heat up the fire, and then we can both work

together." He looked at me, and seemed surprised at the boredom in my face. We did exactly what he said, and I made several new types of cam, one of which he really liked. There was wind blowing in my ear, but I couldn't open up and listen to it—I merely wondered that this new activity was even duller than sorting broken parts.

At the end of the day, I said, "When are we going to have a Lesson? I mean a real one?"

He looked at me, held his breath, and said, "I can only think of one Lesson for now. It is not one that you would like."

I said, "Please?"

He said, "Humility is the hinge to joy and the portal to wonder. Humility is looking at other things and appreciating them, instead of trying to lift yourself up by pushing them down. If you push things down, that is the road to misery. Pride pushes things down, and it cuts it off the one thing that could bring joy.

"You are seeking joy where joy is not to be found. Seek it elsewhere, and it will find you."

I hastened out to the street.

Once on the street, I went where I had gone before, but no one reached out to me. I explored, and found several people talking, gardens, statues, and a bookstore I'd not seen before, but there was nothing that interested me. Where was Clamp?

I went back home, and Fortress said, "Have you heard of the Book of Questions?"

I feigned interest. "I've heard about it, and it sounded fascinating," I said, truthfully. "I'd like to hear what you can tell me," I lied.

"I was just thinking about one of the questions, 'What is reverence?'

"There are three things that we do when we reverence each other. We make on ourselves the great sign, and we bow before each other, and we kiss each other.

"The Sign of the Cross is the frame that sets the

display of reverence in place. We embrace each other in the Cross's mighty shadow.

"Bowling is the foundation of all civilized discourse. When we bow, we lower ourselves before another; we acknowledge another's greatness. That is the beating heart of politeness; that is the one reason why politeness is immeasurably more than a list of social rules.

"A kiss is everything that a bow is and more. A kiss is a display of reverence, and of love. Do you know why we kiss on the mouth?"

I looked at him, not seeing his point. "What do you mean? Where else would one kiss?"

"I have travelled among the barbarian lands, and there are tribes where a kiss on the mouth is the sort of thing that should be saved for one's wife, or at most one's family." He must have seen the look on my face; he continued, "No, they are not distant from each other, and yes, they live together in genuine community. It is altogether fitting and proper, and our embrace would be out of place in that land. Just because you or I would find it strange to pull back from our brethren this way, as if we were talking to someone through a wall, does not change the fact that it is woven into a beautiful tapestry in their community.

"But let us return to our lands. Kissing on the mouth is significant because it is by our mouth that we drink from the Fountain of Immortality. We reverence the Temple when we enter it, kissing the door and entrance; we ourselves are the Temple, and our mouths are the very door and entrance by which the King of Glory enters when we Commune. Our mouths are honored in a very special way, and it is this very place that we show our reverence.

"But there is another reason. It is by our mouths that we breathe the wind, that we spirit; it is the very spirit that is present in the mouth, and our spirits are knitted together. So the kiss is everything the bow is, and more, and it is the fitting conclusion when we reverence each

other. It is communion."

I listened with interest. His words almost pulled me out of my misery.

He closed his eyes, and then said, "Do you know how long it is since you have kissed me?"

I began to approach him.

He pushed me away. "Stop. Go and learn to bow, truly bow. When you have learned to bow, then you may kiss me."

I walked out of the room, pretending to conceal my fury.

Dull, empty day passed after dull, empty day. Fortress tried to teach me things, and I really had no doubts that he was a fine man, but... whatever the great Illusion was, he not only believed it; he couldn't think to question it. I found Silver from time to time, and had comfort by her, but... I didn't understand why she wouldn't take me in to the group. And the rest of the world grew bleaker and bleaker.

Then it happened.

I snuck behind her one day, never giving a hint of my presence, until I found myself led into the chamber, the meeting place. They were chanting; there was something elusive about the chant, and I remained hidden in the shadows. Then Clamp himself saw me in the dark, and said, "Welcome. You have made it." There was a wicked grin on his face.

"Why did you not call me back? Why did Silver not lead me here? Was I not worthy?"

"You were not. Or, I should say, you were not worthy then. We were testing you, to see when you would make your own way in—then you were worthy. That you have come is proof that you are worthy—or at least might be. It does not speak well of you that you took so long. Look at

me. Your very face tells me you have been drained by things unworthy of you—dull people, trivial lessons, a warhorse being taught the work of a mule.

"Or at least that's what I could say being generous. I think you are still enmeshed in the Illusion—it is still quite strong in you. So strong that it can probably affect what you see, make what is before your eyes appear to be what it is not.

"There is another test before you. Take this dagger."

He placed in my hand a stone dagger with a serpentine curve to it. It was cold; a coldness seemed to seep through my body and my heart began to pump the icy chaos of a sea at storm. I felt sick.

"There is a clay dummy in the next room, exquisitely fashioned. Place this dagger where its heart would be. You will cut through the illusion, and be ready to drink of the Well of Secrets."

I walked. Aeons passed each footstep; each footfall seemed like a mountain falling and beginning to crumble. And yet it seemed only an instant before I was in the next room.

My stomach tightened. I could not say what, but something was wrong. There was something like a body that was deathly still.

I could see the feet only; the face was covered. Some Wind blew in the recesses of my heart, and I tried to close it out.

I walked over, my stomach tighter. The Wind inside me was blowing louder, leaking, beginning to roar. And then I smelled a familiar smell. How could they make clay smell like—

I twisted the dagger and tore the cloth off the dummy's face. It looked like Fortress. Then Wind tearing through me met with the breath of his nostrils.

I gasped.

I threw up.

There was a sound of laughter around me—or

laughing; I could never call it mirth. It was cruel and joyless, and tore into me. And still I retched.

"Do you need help? Or are you really so weak as that?"

"Maybe you didn't belong here; not all who merely force their way in are truly worthy."

I looked around on the ground, and saw Fortress's staff.

In a moment I snatched the staff, and cast away the dagger.

I stood, reeling.

"I am not worthy. I am not worthy to be here, still less to be with Fortress. And I'd like to take a heroic last stand, and say that if you're going to kill him—if whatever black poison you've used won't already do so—you'll have to kill me first, but I would be surprised if I could achieve any such thing against you. I cannot call myself Fortress's disciple; that illusion is broken to me. But if I may choose between reigning with you and being slaughtered with Fortress, I can only consider being slaughtered with Fortress an honor that is above my worth and reigning with you to be unspeakable disgrace!"

Clamp looked at me with a sneer. "I don't know why I ever let you in, disciple of Fortress." He grabbed a sword, and made one quick slice.

I felt hot blood trickling down my chest.

"Go on, to your fascinating gears and your deep, deep lessons. Carry your Teacher. We'll meet again. Now I don't think you're worth killing. I don't know what I'll think then."

The blood flowing down my chest, I picked up my unconscious Teacher and his staff.

"The path out is that way. Never mind the drops of blood; you won't reach us this way again."

As I carried his heavy body towards the marketplace and then his home, I panted and sweated. Fortress seemed to be regaining consciousness. I staggered across the threshold and then laid him on the bed.

Pool looked ashen. "Are you all right, Salt?"

Fortress looked at her. "Never mind me; the poison they used is short-lived. I'll simply need more sleep for a few days, and life will go on. Look at Unspoken. I have not been that stunned by a man's behavior in many years."

I collapsed on the floor, then rose to my knees.

"Fortress. I have sinned against Heaven and before you. If you have any mercy, show one more mercy that I do not deserve. Give me money that I may return to my island, and no more inquire into things too wonderful for me."

Fortress turned to Pool. "Get one gold sovereign, a needle, and thread."

I looked at him. "One gold sovereign? But that would buy more than—"

"Bite this," he said. "I'll try to make the stitches small."

"I still do not understand," I said.

"Never mind. Tell me what our robes mean."

"Your robe is blue, the color of starry Heaven. Your gift is the one thing needful, to be focused on the Light himself. My robe is green, the color of earth. My gift is to attend to many things on earth. I have wanted to gain the higher—"

"The green robe, and all that it symbolises, is needed, and I do not think you appreciate your gift. And not only because both of us look to the Light and attend to the Creation it illuminates. Place the two colors on the Cross."

"That is a child's exercise."

"Place the two colors on the Cross."

"The blue robe is the color of the vertical arm of the cross, the great tree whose roots delve fathoms down into earth and whose top reaches to Heaven. It is our connection with the Light. The green robe is the color of the cross's horizontal arm, connecting us with other creations. Is there a reason you ask me this?"

He placed his finger at the top of my chest, at the very center—at the top of my wound.

Then he ran his finger down the freshly stitched skin. I winced in pain.

"It seems you are not a stranger to the blue robe."

My jaw dropped when his words unfolded in my mind. "Fortress, I cannot believe you. Before, you were being generous. Now you are being silly. This wound is not the arm of the cross reaching from Heaven down to earth. I earned this by my own wickedness, and you would destroy me if you knew what evil I had done."

"Are you sure?"

"Fortress, this evil is far worse than lust. It lures you with excitement, then drains the wonder out of every living thing. What are you doing?" I stared in horror as he removed his robe.

"Look at me."

I closed my eyes.

"Trust me."

I opened my eyes, and looked upon his body. Then I looked again. There was a great, ugly, white scar across the top of his chest. He made the sign of the cross on himself, and when his fingers traced out the horizontal arm of the cross, the green arm, I saw his fingers run over the scar.

"I know that pain better than you think."

I was unable to speak.

"Pool is getting you something to eat. You've had quite a difficult time, and your pain will continue. Let's spend tomorrow at the Temple, and then we can get to tinkering."

I was weak, and my wound pained me, but there was a different quality to the pain.

I felt weak. Still, as I entered the Temple, it didn't matter. Once inside the doors, I was in Heaven, and

Heaven shone through earth more clearly than it had for long. I smelled the fragrant incense, the incense that ascends before the divine Throne day and night and will ascend for ever.

I walked into the middle part of the Temple, and lay down on the cool, unhewn stone floor, drinking in the glory. I looked through the ceiling at the Heavens: the ceiling was beautiful because it was painted with the blood of sapphires, and more beautiful because it was not sealed. It had chinks and holes, through which the Heaven's light shone, through which the incense continued to rise, and through which Wind blew. I could hear it howl and whisper, and I looked at the Constellations, all seven of which blazed with glory.

I saw the Starburst, a constellation in which one single Glory shot out many rays, and then these many rays coalesced into the one Glory. I let it resonate. I thought of the Creator, from whom all things come and to whom all things return. I thought of learning one thing, then learning many things, then finding the one interconnected whole behind them all.

I looked at the Window of Heaven: a saint shining through a picture. What was it of symbol that was captured so well? In the Constellation one could see the present connection between the saint and the Icon he shone through, indeed itself a window into how the divine Glory shines in a man.

I saw the threefold Tower: on the ground level was body, and then the lower of the upper floors was that which reasons and assembles thinking together, and the higher of the upper level was that which sees in a flash of insight precisely because it is connected, indeed the place one meets the Glory. What were some of the other nuances of these levels?

Then I looked at the Sword, the Great Sword in the War that has been fought since before ever star shone on dew-bejewelled field and will be fought until stars

themselves are thrown down, trampled under those who laughed as children among the dew. It sweeps wherever there is Wind, larger than a mountain, smaller than a gem-collecting aphid, stronger than the roaring thunder, so sharp that it sunders bone and marrow. Why, indeed, was it given to men?

The Chalice, the great and Sacred Chalice itself, that held the fluid more precious than ichor, the fount of incorruptibility, a fount that will never be quenched though the mountains should turn to dust and dust turn to mountains. The Chalice from which we drink, the Chalice we kiss when we kiss the—why again should men be so highly exalted?

The Rod and Staff, as ever, were crossed against each other. "Your Rod and Staff comfort me," rise in the chant. The Staff's curves offered comfort to a straying sheep, I knew. And the Rod that went with it—a club with metal spikes, ready to greet predators. A shepherd was a hardened man, an armed guard ready to fight with his life when wolves came to destroy his sheep.

And last, the Steel Orb—a ball, rolling all around an animal hide as the hands at its edge moved up and down, making a slope now here, now there, now a valley, now a shifting plain. The Steel Orb indeed moved throughout the two levels—or was it really one?—of the threefold Tower, now here, now there, now met by complex construction, now silence, now a flash of inspiration. The Steel Orb is the inner motion that is inseparably connected with the world of invisible truths. It is the ear that listens when the Wind blows. It is the placid pool that reflects all that is around it.

I closed my eyes. Then I looked at the Eighth Constellation, the whole starry roof. The Greatest Feast, when death itself began to move backwards, must have come early that year, about as early as possible; the Constellations stood fixed as they had appeared the year the Temple had begun, just after the day began, and the

great Vigil began. There couldn't really be a more representative night to represent the year, nor a better time of that day to stand in.

My breath was still; I stood up, revered Fortress and the other Icons, then found the waiting priest and cast off my sins in penitent confession. I do not even remember feeling relieved from that, which is strange: I stood in the stillness as it became song, as voices rose in chant, and the morning was greeted and the divine liturgy began.

I do not remember the liturgy; I do not remember even when the liturgy ended and the priest held a healing service and anointed me with the oil of restoration. What I remember was when it ended, and there were people all around me, their faces alight. It was like waking from a dream, a dream of which one remembers nothing save that there was an inexpressible beauty one cannot remember.

I walked home in Fortress's shadow, and only then remembered something that didn't fit. I remembered—or thought I remembered—the priest's strange advice after my confession: "Be careful. You have a difficult journey ahead of you."

Fortress sat down in front of the work bench. He picked up one gear, then set it down, then rooted through some axles, and sat back.

"Unspoken, I've asked you to sort gears, take machines apart, put machines together, melt gears down, and forge new gears from the molten metal. I've asked you to repair machines, and tell me when gears were made of too soft of a metal. What I haven't asked you to do is tinker. So we'll have a race. Today you can think, and I'll make a mechanical cart. Then you can make a mechanical cart tomorrow. And we'll see, not whose cart can go fastest, but whose cart can go farthest in the smooth part

cloister. This will be part ideas and part choosing the best parts. Why don't you go up to your room? You'll have the range of this workshop tomorrow."

I paced up and down my room. I thought. There were several coiled springs in the workshop; having seen some of his previous designs, I was almost sure he would make something spring-powered that would go the distance the spring kept. And how was I to outdo that? He would probably know what spring was best, and he would almost certainly know how to choose parts that moved with each other.

A faint whisper of Wind blew in my mind. I turned over different designs of springs—could I make something more powerful with two springs? The Wind grew, slightly more forceful, and I tried to make it tell me how to best use springs. It became more and more forceful, but I was afraid to drop everything and listen. I began to see, not springs at all, but a burning—

Then I sensed something.

There was something that radiated beauty and fascination. I could not see it. But I sensed it.

"Who are you?" I said.

"I am your Guardian," came the answer. "I was sent to you."

I looked. I still could not see anything, but the beauty is overwhelming.

"What is the idea that is slipping? It has fire, and I hot steam, and—"

"Pay no mind to that. It is nothing."

"How can I build a better spring?"

"Don't. Build a simple, spring-driven cart out of good parts. Then take a knife, and nick the axle on your Teacher's wagon. That is all. It will bind slightly, and your cart will go further. Or it should."

"But—is that fair?"

"Is that fair? He took the first choice of everything, and you know you lack his year's practice. Come. He wants

you to surprise him. He wants you to show ingenuity. This is something he wouldn't expect of you."

I thought I could see colors glowing, shifting, sparkling. Somewhere, in the recesses of my being, it was as if a man jumping up and down and shouting. It was almost enough to draw me away.

"But how can I find his cart? Surely he will hide it, so it will not be a temptation to me."

"Never mind that. I will show you. Just watch me. I was sent here to draw you into Heaven's beauty."

Entranced, I watched the colors shift. It tasted—I tasted the same excitement, the icy brilliance of lightning and the tantalizing heat of lust. I never knew that Heaven could be so much like my former craft.

The next day I built a craft, but no pleasure came from it. It was drained of pleasure, but I was looking for that enticing presence. It seemed to have gone.

Where was Fortress's cart? I couldn't see it. I looked in nooks and crannies. Something seemed wrong. Then... I was aware of the bad intuition first. But I heard a shimmer. "Look right in front of you."

Ahead of me, on top of a pile of disassembled devices, was a cart.

I took a blade, and nicked one of the axles.

The shimmer spoke. "One more thing.

"Look at me."

I looked, and the beauty seemed at once more intense and hollow—and I could not look away.

"Sing an incantation over it."

"What?"

It seemed as if a dark hand was pushing me forward.

I chanted, and watched in horrid fascination.

Something seemed to shimmer about my cart. Whenever I looked at it, it seemed the same, but whenever I turned away, it seemed as if there was some beautiful incense rising from it.

The next day, it easily won.

Fortress looked at his cart crossly, with consternation and puzzlement. He seemed to be looking through it.

The next thing I remember was retching, on the workbench. Fortress and a priest were standing over me, although I did not notice them at the time. All I could notice for the time being was an overpowering stench. I wanted to keep retching forever. My spirit was sapped.

"That was not a Guardian," the priest said. "You have listened to a Destroyer."

"If you meet that presence again, make the Sign of the Cross and say, 'Lord, have mercy.'"

I looked at him weakly. "What can I do? I thought I had repented."

"You have repented, and you need to repent again. Pray and fast this week, then make your confession, and come to the Table. Don't go anywhere near that shimmer, no matter how attractive it is. Run, and invoke the Holy Name. And talk with Fortress and me. And if you fall again, repent again. The saints are all praying for you."

I tried to take it in. His words stung me—not because of what he said, but because of why it would be appropriate to say them.

He revered me, bowing low. I felt something in his reverence.

With Fortress's leave and the priest's, I went to the monastery to spend my time in prayer and fasting. I took a lump of dry bread each day, and some water.

As the hours and prayers passed, my head seemed to clear. Foul desires raged, but I just resisted them.

The third day after I was at the temple, I ate nothing, and sang songs, and my body seemed lighter. I

remembered the secret learnings I'd made, and they seemed vile, paltry. As the sun set, I suddenly thought of Silver. I was off here, selfishly caring for myself, while she was in the vile grip that squeezed me! I stole out of the monastery, and found her almost immediately.

She placed an arm around my waist. I pulled back, but she held me and said, "I'm just placing an arm around your waist. What is it?" I spoke with urgency and concern, and she 'just'... I do not wish to recall the full shame, but when it was over, Clamp stood over me and threw a hemp belt. "Bind his hands."

As I was walking, captive, I thought of the advice the priest had given me. But how was I to make the sign of the cross? I could try. I tried to move my hands, hoping something miraculous might happen.

Clamp struck my face, and said, "Don't try to wriggle out."

My face stung. I held my tongue, and then let out a rebel yell: "LORD, HAVE MERCY!"

The world seemed to move like melting ice.

Drip.

Drip.

Drip.

I watched every detail of rage flare in Clamp's face.

I heard a shift of cloth and bodies moving.

I saw his hand raised, to strike a crushing blow to my face...

...and descend...

...and caught in the talons of an iron grip.

I did not turn my head. I was too bewildered to look and see why my face was not stinging.

I had somewhere heard that voice before. It seemed familiar. And it was speaking quietly.

I had heard this voice speak quietly in contentment. I

had heard it speak quietly to tell a secret. I had heard this voice speaking quietly in banter. What I had not heard was this voice speaking quietly because it was beyond rage, a rage that had gone beyond burning fire to be cold enough to shatter ice.

"Let him go," the voice hissed.

I recognized the voice of my Teacher.

"Let him go," Fortress glared.

Clamp laughed, and let go of me. "Fortress! How wonderful to see you! May I get you a glass of wine?"

Fortress began working on my bands. He said nothing.

Clamp said, "A great Teacher like you has much to offer, could probe much secret wisdom. You seemed to have a knack for—"

I felt my stomach quiver.

A crowd was beginning to form around us: no one was right by us, but many were looking.

Fortress said, "No."

My stomach knotted. I had an overwhelming sense that I should move.

I obeyed it.

Clamp looked at Fortress.

Fortress looked at Clamp.

The anger in Fortress's face began to vanish.

Clamp seemed to be leaving fear and entering terror.

I backed off further.

I saw a faint ripple of muscles across Clamp's body.

I began to scream.

Metal sang as a sword jumped from its sheath.

I saw, moment after horrid moment, the greatsword swing into the side of Fortress's head.

Then I heard a shattering sound, and when I realised what was happening, Clamp had been thrown up against the far wall, while Fortress was in the same place.

The sherds of a sword hilt dropped from Clamp's hand.

The anger vanished from Fortress's face. He looked,

and said, "Come back, Clamp. We need you."

I could hear the sadness in his voice.

Clamp ran away in abject terror.

I had been fasting. Even if I had not been fasting, I would have...

I fainted.

My head slowly began to clear—much more slowly because Fortress was carrying me again.

"I'll sleep at your doorway at the monastery," Fortress said, "and fast with you."

I closed my eyes. "I'm sorry. I don't deserve to—"

"Not as punishment, Unspoken. You've endured punishment enough; harsh fasting and vigils are a much lighter load than—but you are weak and vulnerable now. You need the support. And I would like to share this with you."

The fasting passed quickly. Or more properly, it moved very slowly, and it was hard, but there was cleansing pain. The Wind moved through me, and gave me respite from my burdensome toil of evil.

When it was the eighth day, Fortress and I returned to the Temple. A mighty wind was blowing all around, and its song and its breath moved inside. Wind blew through every jewel of the liturgy. And there was—I couldn't say.

After the end of the liturgy, when I was anointed for healing, Fortress said, "Let's go home and get to work. Pool has some money to buy a chicken, and—why are you hesitating?"

"Could I return to the monastery and fast for another week?"

"Why? You have done what the priest asked. You needn't do more. There is no need to engage in warfare above your strength. Remember, the Destroyers always fast."

"That's not why."

"Why, then?"

"That's what I am trying to find out."

I prayed and fasted, and my head seemed to clear. I succeeded that week from returning to my vomit; I think it was because Fortress spent the week with me, and he was generous to spend that long without seeing Pool. He prayed with me, and at the end, my mind took on a new keenness. I still did not know what it was the Wind was trying to tell me.

But I no longer resisted it. Fortress gently said, "You have fasted further, and I will trust you that it was the right thing to do. But why not let this fast meet its summit in a feast? I can buy a chicken, and we can sit down at table."

"But the—"

"Do not worry about that. If the Wind holds a message for you, the Wind will make that clear enough. Let's return."

Once home, I asked him a simple question. I think the question was, "Why are you so concerned for me?" Or it might have been, "What is your experience with the poison I tasted?" Or something else. And he gave a long and interesting answer to me.

I don't remember a word he said.

My stomach was full of roast chicken, dried lemon, and all the bread I wanted. Pool was generous with wine. Fortress's voice was humming with the answer to whatever question I asked, and I could hear the chatter and laughter of small children in the background. It concentrated my thoughts tremendously.

What was your error?, the Wind whistled in my ear.

In a moment, I searched through the evils I committed and drew in a breath. Pride, I said in my heart. The primeval poison that turned the Light-Bearer into the Great Dragon. The one evil that is beyond petty sins like lust.

You embraced that evil, but what was your error?

I drew in another breadth. Everything. Lust. Magic. Scorning the beauty of the Light. Seeking to order the world around myself. As I think over the great evils that exist, I do not see that I am innocent of any one of them, nor free of their disease.

Those wrongs have been obliterated forever. They are no more. You are innocent of them. You are being healed. The vilest of these, your pride itself, is a smouldering coal thrown into the infinite Ocean. What was your error?

I do not understand. I have hardly made errors greater than these—if 'error' is even the word. Do you mean something small by 'error'?

No, something great and terrible. What was your error?

I do not understand.

What was your error?

With my inner eye, I saw the pelt and the Steel Orb, only frozen. The Steel Orb needed to move, but it was locked in place. Those words haunted me, chased me, yelled at me. I long lie awake that night, searching to see what was being asked. At last, as the pale light of the dawn began its approach, I drifted into sleep.

I saw, in vivid detail, the moments of my descent. Only it was different in my dream. When I had actually lived it, I saw things through a veil, through an Illusion. I suffered empty pain, and thought I was gaining wholeness. Now the illusion was stripped away, and I saw every moment how I had thrown away gold to fill my hands with excrement. And every time, the Glorious Man looked at me and asked what the Wind had asked, "What was your

error?"

I saw a time when I listened eagerly. I was being told secrets, hidden truths beyond the ken of the ordinary faithful. I was, I had thought, being drawn into the uppermost room and tasting with delight its forbidden fruit. The Glorious Man looked into me, looked through me, and asked, "What was your error?"

I was awake, bolt upright in my bed. My body was rigid. In the window I saw that the dawn had almost come. "Fortress!" I called.

In an instant, Fortress was by my side. "What is it?"

"You have felt the pain I felt."

"Every evil by which you have poisoned yourself, I have done, and worse."

"What was your error?"

He paused a moment, and said, "Pride."

"No. What was your error?"

"More evil than I can remember."

"When you descended into that living Hell, did you embrace evil alone, or did you embrace evil and error?"

He drew in a breath. "Climb up to the roof with me."

The dawn was breaking; stream after stream of golden, many-hued light poured over the edge of the city. We both sat in silence.

Fortress seemed completely relaxed.

I was not.

"Fortress, I did not win our race."

Fortress's eyes greeted the sun.

"I know."

He drank in more of the light, and said, "Would you like to have another race?"

Time passed.

"You can choose who makes his wagon first."

"You make your wagon first."

I drew a breath.

"It must be painful for a Teacher to watch his pupil descend into filth and have to rescue him and carry him back."

"To me, that is a very good day."

I looked at his face, trying to find sarcasm or irony.

I found none.

"Why?"

"Clamp was my pupil."

I didn't know what to say. I fumbled for words. I tried to meet his pain.

"You seem very happy for a man with no children."

I saw tears welling up in his eyes.

I began to stammer.

He said, "Let's go and build our cars. If you want, you can take the silt board so you can design your wagon while I'm building mine. A fair match would be balm to my soul."

I looked at the board. Something was ticking in the back of my mind—fire on the spring, was it? But why? I set to work on the board, trying to reconcile something burning with a spring and gear box. Something was knocking in the back of my mind, but I couldn't listen to it. In the end I told myself I'd make a spring driven wagon with a lamp on top: a large one, that would burn brightly.

The next day, I set about smithing the lamp. I enjoyed it, and it was a thing of beauty. Almost at the end of the day my eye fell on something, and I saw that Fortress had left the best spring for me.

The next day we raced, and I lit my lamp. It burned brightly. It finished two laps, while Fortress's cart made fully twenty laps round the cloister, but he liked the lamp; its flame was a point of beauty. "Keep trying," he said, "although I'm not going to ask why you put a lamp on. I'll

be in the workshop sorting gears; could you care for customers?"

At the evening meal Fortress seemed preoccupied; it looked as if he was listening.

We sat in silence.

He moved, as with a jolt. "Unspoken, what were you saying to me when we greeted the coming of the dawn?"

My face turned red.

"No, sorry. I mean, before then."

"I don't know. My sense was that it was something important, but I doubt if—"

Fortress dropped his bread and moved to give Pool a deep kiss. "Come with me, Unspoken."

As we walked, he turned to me and said, "The Great Fast is approaching, and we all need to purify ourselves. You especially."

"But I am working on—"

"That is why you especially need to be purified. Forget that completely."

I recognized the route to the monastery.

"There are some things I can give you, but you need to be at the monastery. As much as you are able, submit discipline as if you were a monk. Draw on their strength. Afflict yourself. Gaze on the glory of the Light."

"But—"

"Trust me."

Not long after, we arrived at the monastery. He spoke briefly with the head monk, Father Mirror, and revered me. "The Mother who held the Glory in her arms now holds you in her heart and in her prayers." Then he left.

The rhythm of the calendar, of the week, of the day, became clearer. My head itself became clearer. With the discipline I became hazier and the Glory became clearer.

I was praying in my cell, and suddenly it was illuminated with beauty and light, so that the flame of my lamp could not be seen. I was dazzled, and at the same time uneasy.

I looked, and I saw the form of the Glorious Man. He looked at me and said, "You have done well."

I felt as if there was something jumping up and down, shouting for attention, inside me.

"I will tell you what you are to write about your error."

I was fascinated. Or almost fascinated. I turned my ear to the man jumping up and down. And wrenched myself away.

I bowed my head, and said, "Glorious One, I am not worthy."

Immediately I reeled. A stench, that felt as if I was touching fetid—I do not want to say what it smelled like. I fell backwards, reeling and gasping for breath.

I heard a shuffle of cloth, and then footprints. The chief monk stepped in. He looked displeased, although I wasn't sure he was displeased at me. He bid the other monks leave, and said to me, "My son, tell me everything."

I hesitated. "You need to sleep so you can greet the morning in chant."

"My son, another of my brother monks can lead that greeting even if you are still talking when it comes."

I opened my mouth, and talked, and talked, and talked. He seemed surprised at times, but looked on me with kindness. At the end he said, "I will take the cell next to you and pray with you. The whole monastery will pray over you."

"I am not worthy—"

"And I am not worthy to serve you and give you what strength I can. If it were a question of being worthy—" he shuddered. "Sleep, and rise for the morning chant if you

can."

That night I was riven by my dreams.

Evils in me that I thought were dead rose up with new life. I interrupted Father Mirror often, and he told me to pray, "Heavenly Glory, if you want me to fight these impulses, that I will do." And I did. Gradually the fight became easier. I began to count the days, and contemplate the Glory.

As time passed, I lived to join the monks, the stars and the rocks, beings of light, in contemplation above everything else. I looked into the Glorious Light when—

I felt a hand shaking me. I opened my eyes, and collected my presence. Then I closed my eyes and looked away.

"What is it?"

His face was radiant. "I was looking on the Glorious Light, and—"

Silence.

"I am not worthy to look on you. That light is shining through your face. Leave me alone."

"My brother."

I said nothing.

"Look at me."

I turned to face him, keeping my eyes down.

"You would not see this light coming from my face unless it were coming from your face as well."

"You mock me. My face? I am not a monk, nor have I gone through years of discipline. And I have—"

"The Wind blows where it will. You could not see this light at all unless your face were radiant."

I said nothing.

"I have come to call you. It is time for the Great Vigil."

"Time for the Great Vigil? The Great Feast tonight? But it is scarcely a day that has passed since—"

"I know. I am not ready either. But the Feast is here. And those prepared and unprepared are alike compelled by the joy."

I went through the Great Vigil at the monastery, revered each of the monks. Then Father Mirror accompanied me home, the dark streets lit by the brilliance of his face. I joined Fortress and Pool in the revelry; I danced with Pool. Then Fortress walked home, one arm over Pool's shoulder and one arm around mine. When we stepped across the threshold, Fortress said, "It is time for a race."

I let Fortress build his wagon first, and insisted that he take the best spring. Then I sat down with the silt tablet.

My intuition had been to mix fire and water. Or something like that. Or burn water. Or—I sketched one design after another, trying to see how they would help a spring, or gears for that matter. Towards the end of the day, I sat down, perplexed, and wiped the slate clean. I had given up.

That night, I prayed my giving up. Then—it took me a long time to get to sleep.

In the morning, I left the springs alone entirely. I pulled out the metal lamp and made a nearly-sealed water tank to go above it. I put the water tank above the flame, and fitted something special to its mouth. By the end of the day, I was exhausted, and my fingers were sore.

The next day, Fortress wound the spring, and I took a tinderbox and lit the flame. He looked at me slightly oddly, and when he turned his cart around at the end of the first lap, looked at me gently.

My cart hadn't moved.

At the end of the second lap, he asked me, "Did your cart move?"

I said nothing.

At the end of the fourth map, he said, "Your cart is moving."

And it was. Steam from the heated tank was moving one part, which turned gears, to the effect that it was moving very slowly. And it continued moving slowly for the rest of the day, finally stopping after it had run a full seventy-two laps.

Fortress walked away from me with a look of amazement. "Unspoken, I've got to tell my friends about you."

As I was drifting off to sleep, the Wind whistled in my ear: What was your error?

The Steel Orb broke free from one spot, and began to roll, first one way, then another. It seemed to be exploring its strength, moving just a little this way, just a little that way.

I wrestled in my thoughts, like a man trying to lift a greased boulder. I was not trying to lift it yet; my fingers slid over the surface, seeking purchase.

Thoughts flowed through my mind, wordless thoughts that slid away whenever I tried to capture them in worded form. I grasped after them with patient, eager expectation.

I did not notice when I descended into the depths of slumber.

I was staring into a dark, deep, colorless, shapeless pool, and trying to see its color and shape. There was light behind me, but for the longest time I did not look into it. Then I looked into the light, and turned, and—

A voice said, "Awaken!" and I was shaken awake.

Fortress and Father Mirror were both crouching over me. I sat up, nervously.

"What is it?" I said, flinching against a rebuke.

"Last night, I was speaking with the bishop," Father Mirror said, "when a messenger arrived, limping. He had

been severely delayed. A Holy Council has been summoned, and the bishop requests that Fortress, you, and I join him on his travels."

"Me? I would just be a burden."

"Never mind that. He did not tell me his reasons, but he specifically requested that you join him immediately."

"What about—"

"No 'what about'. Will you obey?"

I turned to Fortress. "May I use your crossbow?"

"A crossbow has been packed on your horse."

"On the way out, may I visit a friend?"

"Quickly."

Still in a daze, I revered Pool and bade her farewell. Then Fortress gave his farewell, and we found the horses.

I knocked on a door—I thought it was the right door—and said, "I've been summoned on a journey by the bishop, and I do not understand why. But may I buy all of your explosive quarrels? I have some money I could offer."

"Bear slayer, you may have them. Without money. Just let me get them." He stepped in, and seemed to be taking a long time. I heard more and more rummaging, and Father Mirror sounded impatient. Then he came out, looking sheepish. "I'm sorry. I can't find them. I've looked all around. I wish I—"

"Don't worry about it," I said. "Just remember me."

Before the sun was above the mountains, we were on the Road.

We rode along at a cantor. The horses were sleek and strong, and I placed myself opposite the bishop.

He placed himself next to me.

"My son, I offer my apologies, but I wish to talk with you."

"Why?"

"Tell me about what you did wrong. And what you've done since."

I told him, and he said, "There is something more. What more is there?"

"I don't know how to say. It's just that... something about it seems different from struggling with sin. Like there's something different involved, that is error."

"All sin is error. Pride especially is illusion."

"But... Would you say we believe the same things? Perhaps you understand them better than I, but would you say we believe the same things?"

"Yes, certainly. But they do not believe the same thing. It is not a single mistaken belief."

"What would you say if I said it wasn't just an error in the specific thing one believes, but an error so deep that... an error whose wake said, 'What you believe is private?'"

The bishop turned towards me.

His eyes narrowed.

"The highest part of the inner person is mind, but it is not private. In an immeasurably greater way than the five senses, it connects with and wrestles with and apprehends and conquers and contemplates the spiritual realities themselves. Those who choose error grapple with these realities in the wrong way like—like a man trying to climb a mountain upside down. The mountain is there, and the hands and feet are there, but they're not connected the right way."

The bishop was silent.

"But... When I stepped into that vortex, I had something of a sense that I was breaking away from the mountain, like it was an illusion, and creating my own private hill, and forging the limbs of my body that I could use to connect with it. I—"

The bishop remained silent.

I fumbled. A flash of insight struck. "I was stepping into a secret, hidden reality, rejecting ordinary people's reality. That is pride. But normally when we say 'pride', we

mean an evil of which one part is illusion. Here there it is more like the Illusion is the spiritual reality, and bitter pride is its handmaiden. No; that's not quite right. The relationship is—"

He looked at me. "That's enough for now. Let us chant psalms together. I want to hear more, but please, my son, don't believe I'm only concerned with getting that out of you." He paused a moment, long enough for me to realize how tense my body was. "Now Fortress told me you're quite a tinker?"

"He glared," the bishop said, "and said, 'and I will not speak with anyone lower than a bishop!'"

"What did you say," I asked.

"I looked at him wearily, and said, 'Believe and trust me, good man, when I say that no one here is lower than a bishop.'"

He paused a moment and continued, "Unspoken—"

A flood of memories came back. It was not what he said, but how he said it. He had spoken in my island's dialect. His accent was flawless.

"How do you know my island's dialect?" I asked. "I come from an insignificant and faroff island. Nothing important has ever come from that island, and nothing ever will."

"That's easy enough," he said, "I was born there.

"Unspoken, I am a man like you." He paused, and continued, "There is a place I was born. I have a father and mother, and brothers and sisters. I remember the first time I skipped a stone, the thrill when I reinvented the pipe organ. I contemplate and pray, hunger and—"

"Your Grace, how did your father introduce you to the art of memory?"

"When I was a boy, I loved to swim. I swam as much as I was allowed, and some that I wasn't. There was a

lagoon, with a network of underwater caves, and some of them I was allowed to explore. My uncle chipped and ground a mica disc enclosed in a ring of copper, and showed me how to close my eye around it. I could see under the water, and I watched the play of light inside the one largest cave. My uncle also gave me a bent spear, with the head pointing sideways, and I speared many meals with it.

"One day my father looked at me and said, 'Fire, if you could decorate the cavern in the big pool, what would you put there?'

"I thought and said, 'Blankets along the wall so I could feel something soft.'

"He said, 'What else?'

"I said, 'Nothing else.'

"'What might you imagine?'

"'There's nothing else that would work.'

"'And things that wouldn't work?'

"I hesitated, and said, 'A candle to see by, and something to write with.'

"'What else?'

"'Come. You are wilder than that.'

"'Color, as when the leaves of the forest go green.'

"'And what if there were passageways branching off? What would you like to see there?'

"He led me to imagine this vast network of rooms and passageways, each one different, each one holding something different, each one different to be in. It was a wonderful game, and swimming was almost as enjoyable as this activity.

"One day, my father added another dimension. He walked up to me with a rope and said, 'Do you see this rope?'

"'Yes,' I said.

"'What is the strangest thing that could happen to it in the antechamber to your labyrinth?'

"'If it were not soaked, for it to fall down to the floor.'

"My father was silent.

"Or it would be peculiar for it to fall, not up or down, but to the side.'

"I expected a smile. My father looked at me and said, 'Surely you have imagined things stranger than that.'

"I said, 'It could coil and uncoil, slithering around the walls before coming together to a bundle—and then coming together and vanishing.'

"My father smiled and said, 'And what of that plate there? What could happen to it in the room under?'

"I laughed at the things I imagined; such strange things happened to the things in my rooms, and I invented things on my own. Then I began to be bored, and my father saw my boredom. 'This game bores you. Let's move on to something else.'

"'Look up. Note what position the stars are in. After ten nights' span, I will open the cover of a box and you will behold forty things you've not seen before. Then I will leave you with the box and eat a large loaf of bread. When I have returned, I will return and we will climb that peak, and when we reach the top, you will tell me everything you saw in the box.'

"I jumped slightly, and waited for him to explain himself.

"When no explanation came, I said, 'I can't carry a wax tablet when I'm climbing the peak.'

"He said, 'Nor would I allow it if you could.'

"I said, 'Then how will I do it?'

"He said, 'I've already told you.'

"I was angry. Never had he been so irrational as this. For seven days I searched my heart in wrath, searching. On the eighth day I rested from my wrath and said, 'He will say what he will say. I renounce anger at his request.'

"He had begun his odd request by releasing me from my labyrinth; I delved into it. I imagined the first room, but I couldn't banish the rope coiling and uncoiling. I swam to another room, only to have something else greet

me. I swam around, frustrated again and again when—

"My face filled with shame.

"I spent the next two days playing, resting, swimming. I moved through the imaginary labyrinth. When my father pulled the cover off the box, I placed everything in my imaginary labyrinth, one in each room, exactly as he had taught me. It took him a while to eat the bread, so I stared at the box's rough leather lining. We walked, and talked, and the conversation was... different. I enjoyed it.

"He asked me, 'What was in the box?'

"I said, 'A key, a stylus, a pebble, a glazed bead, a potsherd, a gear, an axle, a knife, a pouch, a circle cord, some strange weed, a stone glistening smooth by the river's soft hands, a statuette, a crystalline phial, a coil of leather cord, a card, a chisel, a mirror, a pinch of silt, a candle, a firecord, a badly broken forceps, a saltball, a leaf of thyme, an iron coin, some lead dregs, a bite of cured fish, a small loaf of spiced bread, some sponge of wine, a needle, a many-colored strand of parchment, an engraved pendant—hmm, I'm having trouble remembering this one—a piece of tin wire, a copper sheet, a pumice, a razor, a wooden shim, a pliers, and a measuring ribbon.'

"I count thirty-nine,' he said. 'Where's the fortieth?'

"I ran through my rooms and hesitated. 'I memorized thirty-nine things, then stared at the rough leather inside the box. I didn't see another; I don't even have the trace of memory like when there's another one that I can't quite spring and catch.'

"When I said, 'rough leather inside the box,' he seemed pleasantly surprised. I didn't catch it at the time, but I understood later.

"And that was how my father let me taste the art of memory. How did your father teach you the art of memory?"

"I don't have as good a story to tell. He introduced me to the more abstract side—searching for isomorphisms, making multiple connections, encapsulating subtle things

in a crystalline symbol."

"Oh, so you've worked with the abstract side from a young age. Then I have something to ask of you."

"Yes?"

"I want to speak with you further. I'd like if you could inscribe in your heart the things you tell me. When we return—pardon, if we return, if we are shown mercy—I may send you to the monastery and ask you to transcribe it so it can be copied."

My heart jumped.

His Grace Fire asked me, "If you were to crystallize your dark journey in one act you did, what would it be?"

I slid my mind through my sins. I watched with a strange mixture of loathing, shame, and haunting desire as I—

"Stop," he said. "I shouldn't have asked that. I tempted you."

I looked at him and blinked. "None of the actions I did encapsulates the journey."

He cocked one eyebrow.

"Or rather, all of them did, but the entire dark path is captured by one action he didn't do. I neither gave nor received reverence."

"That doesn't seem surprising," he nodded. "Pride is —"

"That's also true," I said.

He looked at me.

"In our reverence, we greet one another with a holy kiss. That is hard to appreciate until you have tried to step outside of it. We try to be spiritual people, but however hard we try, matter is always included. Every one of the Mysteries includes matter. We worship with our bodies. Fasting does us good because we are creatures of body—all of the Destroyers fast, all of the time, and never does any

of them profit by it. Our great hope is that we will be raised in transformed, glorified and indestructible bodies to gaze on the Light bodily for ever.

"More to the point, the holy kiss is the one act in the entire Sacred Scriptures that is ever called holy."

He blinked. "I hadn't thought about it that way, but you are right."

"And... there was licentiousness; we could do wrong with our bodies, but this is only for the reason that the holy kiss was not possible. The spiritual embrace draws and works through body, because body is part of spirit. Their asceticism and libertinism alike exist because of a wedge between spirit and body."

"How can they do that? That is like driving a wedge between fire and heat."

"Of course you can't," I said, "but they think they can."

"My son," he said, "you are placing things upside down. We fast to subdue our bodies, which have become unruly; spirit and matter are not equal partners, nor is matter the center of things. In this world or the next."

"You're wrong," I said. "You only say that because your approach to spirit has always assumed matter. If you had genuinely lived the life and practice of believing that matter was evil, was not our true selves, not illusion, you would understand and not say that."

I winced when I realized what he'd just said. I waited for his rebuke. Or a slap.

"Go on," he said. "I'm listening."

"Or maybe that was too bold. Spirit is supreme; the Glory is spirit, and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth. But... struggling to subdue matter, and impregnate it with spirit, does not let you realize what place matter has. Returning from despairing in matter as evil is very different."

"Despair?"

"Despair..." I thought. "Matter is evil, probably the evil creation of an evil god. If that is true, you cannot relate to

the cosmos with joy, not even abstemious joy. You must despair in it. And—I think this is connected, it's all connected—if the entire cosmos is an illusion which we must escape, then no less is its creator the same sort of thing. There's a perverse acknowledgment, I think, that the cosmos must reflect its Creator and radiate its glory. Because if they believe this horrible thing about the cosmos, they believe the same about its Creator, and as they transgress the cosmos as an obstacle they get past, so they transgress its Creator as an obstacle to get past. From what I've heard, their pictures of subordinate gods vary, but one of the few common features is that since this cosmos is evil or illusory, and this cosmos must reflect its Creator, the Creator himself must be something we need to get past if we are to find real good."

"You are describing an error that is really more than one error."

"Yes. Things are... private. They consider themselves more spiritual, more of the spiritual power we use to touch spiritual realities, yet somehow they have a hydra's different pictures of what those spiritual realities themselves. In some of them it almost sounds as if that spiritual apprehension is private."

"I won't ask you to inventory everything that was private. Did you see any of the Scriptures?"

"Not many. And those I read were... odd."

"Odd?"

"The Gospels are wondrous documents indeed."

"Indeed."

"But they never pander. Never does a writer say, 'I tell these things that you may be titillated.' However amazing or miraculous the events are, the miracles are always secondary, signs that bear witness to a greater good."

"And I appreciated this after the few occasions I was able to read their Gospels. Those books do not tell the story of when Heaven and Earth met; the ones I read don't tell a story at all; they are collections of vignettes or

stories, that suck you in with the appearance of hidden wisdom. They appeal to someone despairing of this cosmos and seeking what is hidden behind it. Your Grace, only when I had tried to dive into those crystallized vortices had I realized how pedestrian the Gospels are: the Glorious Man shines with the uncreated Light and we blandly read that his clothes are white as no fuller on earth could reach them."

"Hmm," he said. "That's like—a bit like the difference between marriage and prostitution. In many ways."

"And... if you understand this basic despair, a despair that forges the entire shape of their relationship to Creation and Creator, you will understand not only their excessive asceticism and their license, their belief that the Light is not good, but also their magic. The incantations and scrolls are in one sense the outermost layer of a belief: if this Creation is evil and illusion, if one must transgress it to find truth, then of course one does not interact with it by eating and drinking, ploughing and sewing. One must interact in hidden, occult ways, and gain powers."

"I see. But don't get into that; I'd rather not have you remember that poison. And I assume you could say much more, but I'm beginning to get the picture, and I want to pray and contemplate the Glory before meeting any more of it.

"How would you summarize it, in a word?"

"There are many ways our Scriptures can be summarized in a word: 'Love the Glory with all of your inmost being and your soul and your might, and love your neighbor as yourself.' 'He has shown you, O man, what is good, and what does the Glory require of you, but to do justice, and love mercy, and walk humbly in the Light.' 'The Glory became a Man and the Glorious Man that men might become Glorious Men and Glories.' And this error could be summarized in many ways...

"Your spirit too pure for this unworthy cosmos."

"Take a rest," he said. "I think you've said enough for

now. Let's pray."

"Oh, and one other thing. When your heart is set on pushing past the One Glory, there seem to many gods offering their protection and guidance."

"Pray, child. You've said enough."

We reached another city, and Fortress said, "We have a decision to make. The city we want to reach is due East. The road turns, and heads almost directly south."

I said, "Why?"

"Because East of the city is the dark forest."

The bishop looked at him. "I think we can enter the city and buy a good meal. But we lack the time to take the Southern route."

Less than two hours later, we were re-supplied and heading East. It was weeks before we met anything worse than stepping in poison ivy.

At night, I was awoken by the sound of a foot shuffling. I looked around; it was still Fortress's watch, and Bishop Fire and Father Mirror were already getting up. The campfire was burning low, and in the flickering torchlight I saw a ring of many eyes.

"Black wolves," Fortress whispered. "Stand up and mount your horse slowly."

I reached across my bedroll. Fortress hissed, "No. We can't afford that. I don't know what—"

I slid up on my horse and slowly reached for my crossbow. Fortress hissed, "Are you crazy? There are more wolves than quarrels, and they'd be on us by your third shot." Then he cocked his head and said, "Whisper soothing in your horse's ear. And be ready to gallop."

The wolves had become visibly closer in this scant time; one started to run towards Fortress's horse. Then Fortress reared and parted his lips, and bellowed.

I have never heard a man roar that loudly. Not before,

not after. It hurts my ears to think about it. He roared like thunder, like waterfall, like an explosion. The wolf was stunned, and immediately he was galloping forward, the wolves running from him in abject terror. It was all I could do to control my horse, and it took some tracking before Fortress found Father Mirror.

We sat in our saddles; every sound, every smell, seemed crisper. Then I realized that tendrils of dawn were reaching around, and as we rode on, we descended into a clearing and His Grace said, "Look! The great city itself: Peace."

It seemed but an hour and we were inside the great city itself. Having taken time to drink our fill of water, but not eat, we came into the great chamber where the holy bishops and the other attendees were gathered.

I could hear Wind blowing. I tried to listen.

"And I know," an archbishop said, "that not everyone can scale the hidden peaks. But you misunderstand us gravely if you think we are doing a poorer job of what you do."

Several heads had turned when we entered. An archbishop said, "Your Grace Fire! May the Glory grant you many years. Have you any thoughts?"

The Wind whispered in my ear, and quite suddenly I climbed on top of a table in an empty part of the chamber. I ignored the shock of those around me, so intently was I listening to the Wind's whisper.

"If that is anything," I shouted, "but a lie from Outer Darkness, may the Glory strike me down!"

I heard a click, and then several things happened at once. I was thrown violently forward, and I heard an explosion. I felt an unfamiliar sensation in my back, and I tasted blood.

A deathly silence filled the room. I began to move, and

slowly picked myself up. "I repeat," I said. "If that is anything but a lie from Outer Darkness, may the Glory strike me down."

There was another explosion, and I felt fire on my back. I stood unmoved.

"I repeat. If that is anything but a lie from Outer Darkness, may the Glory strike me down!"

The Wind whispered, "Duck!"

I ducked, and a crossbow quarrel lodged itself in the wall.

Time oozed forward.

There was a scuffle, and four soldiers entered. One of them was holding a crossbow. Three of them were holding Clamp.

"Fathers and brothers, most reverend bishops and priests, deacons and subdeacons, readers and singers, monks and ascetics, and fellow members of the faithful, may the Glory reside in Heaven forever! I speak from painful awareness that what that son of darkness says is false. That is how it presents itself: a deeper awareness, a higher truth.

"This Council was summoned because you know that there is a problem. There are sins that have been spreading, and when you encourage people to penitence, something doesn't work. It is as if the disease of sin separated us from our natural union with the Light, and when the chasm was deep, the Glorious Man became Man, the Great Bridge that could restore the union... and something strange happened. Men are sliding off the Bridge.

"Fathers and brothers, the problem we are dealing with is not only a chasm that needs to be bridged. The problem is a false path that leads people to slip into the chasm.

"This error is formless; to capture it in words is to behead the great Hydra. It will never be understood until it is understood as error, as deadly as believing that poison

is food.

"It is tied to pride; far from enjoying Creation, visible and invisible, however ascetically, it scorns that which we share, and the path of salvation open to mere commoners. It's the most seductive path to despair I've seen. I know. I've been there. The teaching that we are spirit and not body, that there is a sharp cleavage between spirit and body... I don't know how to distinguish this from proper asceticism, but it's very different. When we fast, it is always a fast from a good, which we acknowledge as good when we give it back to the Light from whom every good and perfect gift shines. This is a scorn that rejects evil; I don't know all the mythologies, but they do not see the world as the shining of the Light. The true Light himself would never stain his hands with it; it is the evil creation of a lesser god.

"And it is despair. It tingles, it titillates, it excites at first, and all this is whitewash to cover over the face of despair. Everything that common men delight in is empty to them, illusory joy. The great Chalice, that holds the meat of the Glorious Man's own flesh and holds the fluid more precious than ichor, his own true blood, the fluid that is the divine life—that all who partake see what they believe and become what they behold, younger brothers to the Glorious Man, sons of Light, sustained by the food of incorruption, servants in the Eternal Mansion who are living now the wonder we all await—I will not say what exciting thing they propose to replace it by. Some manage, I know not how, to find greater wonder in saying the Man was not the Glory and the Chalice as we know it is nothing. But it is in the beginning as sweet as honey, and in the end as bitter as gall and as sharp as a double-edged sword. In a word, it says, 'Your spirit is too pure for this unworthy cosmos.'

"It is not healthy to dwell long on such things; I will not tell how its broken asceticism turns to people believing they can do whatever they wish with their bodies. (If the

body is evil, not our true self...) He who long gazes into darkness may find his eyes darkened very soon or very slowly. In either case it is not good. But I will say this: Gaze on the Light, be strengthened by the Glorious Man, and listen to the Wind, and the better you know it, the less Darkness will look like Light. And we can rise against this error as error."

The archbishop who spoke when I entered said, "Would His Grace Fire please speak? I believe he has been rudely interrupted."

His Grace Fire looked at him levelly. "I have already spoken," he said, "and I have nothing further to say."

Then His Grace turned to me. "Unspoken. Your robe is damaged beyond repair. Would you like a green or blue robe to replace it?"

My voice quivered. "A green robe was chosen for me. I need to—"

"That isn't what I asked of you. Would you like a green or blue robe to replace it?"

I looked at Fortress.

He fell on his face prostrate before me and said, "Dear Unspoken, you have surpassed my humble tutelage for ever. I release you."

I turned back to His Grace Fire. "A blue robe."

Then I turned to Father Mirror. "To gaze on the glory as a member of your monastery."

A flask of oil was in the bishop's hands. "Unspoken, I give you a new name. You have spoken the unspoken. You have delved into the unspoken, searched it out, drawn forth jewels. I anoint you Miner."

All was still as he anointed my forehead, my eyes, my mouth, the powers of my body.

The Council's decision was swift. My words had opened a door; insight congealed in the hearts of those present. It moved forward from discussion to decrees, and decrees in turn gave way to the divine liturgy.

I had never been at a Meal like that, and have never

been at one since. The uncreated Light shone through every face. I saw a thousand lesser copies of the Glorious Man. The Wind blew and blew. The Glory remained with us as we rode home.

We rode in to the city, and I saw Pool. She—she looked different. But I couldn't say why. Was I seeing a new beauty because of the Light? I sat silently and watched as Fortress dismounted. She walked up to him, and slowly placed one arm over one of his shoulders, and then the other arm over the other of his shoulders, and looked at him and said, "There is life inside me."

His eyes opened very wide, and then he closed them very tightly, and then he gave Pool the longest kiss I have ever seen.

"Wait," Father Mirror said. "First discharge your duty to our bishop. You will have this life and the next to gaze on the Glory. My guest room is free to you for as long as you need."

I looked at him wistfully.

"The highest oath a monk takes is obedience. That oath is the crystallization of manhood, and when you kneel before me as your father, your spirit will fall in absolute prostration before the Father of Lights for whom every fatherhood in Heaven and on earth is named. And if you are to be in obedience to me, you can begin by waiting to take that oath."

I waited.

The days passed swiftly. Quills and scrolls were given to me, and I inscribed three books. I wrote *The Way of Death*, in which I wrote about the error as a path, an encompassing way of living death, in which error, evil, and sin were woven together. I contemplated, prayed, and spoke with Fortress and others. Then I wrote *The Way of Healing*, in which I answered the question, "If that is the

path we should avoid, what path should we walk instead?" Then I wrote *The Way of Life*, in which I left the way of death behind altogether, and sought to draw my reader before the throne of the Glory himself. I wrote:

But what can I say? The Light is projected down through every creature, everything we know, yes, even the Destroyers themselves. But if we try to project upwards and grasp the Light, or even the hope that awaits us, it must, it must, it must fail. "In my Father's house there are many rooms." These rooms are nothing other than us ourselves—the habitations and places into which we invite friend and stranger when we show our loves, and the clay that is being shaped into our glory, the vessels we will abide in forever. The Tree from which we were once banished, has borne Fruit without peer, and we will eat its twelve fruits in the twelve seasons. Yet a tree is smaller than a man, and a man is smaller than—

The temple where we worship, where Heaven and earth meet, is now but the shadow cast when the Light shines through the Temple that awaits us. The Light is everywhere, but we capture him nowhere. He is everything and nothing; if we say even that he Exists, our words and ideas crumble to dust, and if we say that he does not Exist, our words and ideas crumble beyond dust. If we look at the Symbols he shines through, everything crumbles, and if we say that everything crumbles, those words themselves crumble.

I end this book here. Leave these words behind, and gaze on the Glory.

I dropped my pen and sat transfixed in awe. I was interrupted by shaking. "It's time for the Vigil?"

I began to collect myself. "Vigil?"

"The Vigil of when Heaven and earth met, and the

Word became flesh."

I opened my eyes. I realized the end of a fast had arrived.

"The books are finished."

"Finished?"

"Finished."

I do not remember the Vigil; I saw through it, and was mindful only of the Glory. The head monk learned I had finished, and the bishop was called.

Then came the feast. Pool held a son at her breast, and looked dishevelled, tired, radiant. Fortress beamed. His Grace Fire spoke on the three gifts given the Glorious Man: Gold, Frankincense, and Myrrh. Gold was a reverent recognition of his kingship, Myrrh a reverent recognition of his suffering, and Frankincense a reverent recognition of his divinity. He turned these three over and over again, blending them, now one showing, and now another. His words burned when he said that in the person of the Glorious Man, these gifts were given to the entire community of Glorious Men.

The feast was merry, and when it wound down, Father Mirror welcomed me into the community. It was a solemn ceremony, and deeply joyful. I swore poverty, chastity, and obedience. I found what I had been seeking when I fled my island. Then I was clothed—I was given the shroud, the cocoon of metamorphosis by which I was to be transfigured during the rest of my life.

After I retired to my room, I heard a knock at my door, followed by quick footsteps. I looked around, but saw no one.

Then I looked down, and saw a gift box. It was empty. Or was it?

Inside was a single grain of Frankincense.

Yonder

The body continued running in the polished steel corridor, a corridor without doors and windows and without any hint of how far above and below the local planet's surface it was, if indeed it was connected with a planet. The corridor had a competition mixture of gases, gravity, temperature and pressure, and so on, and as the body had been running, lights turned on and then off so the body was at the center of a moving swathe of rather clinical light. The body was running erratically, and several times it had nearly fallen; the mind was having trouble keeping the control of the body due to the body being taxed to its limit. Then the body tripped. The mind made a few brief calculations and jacked out of the body.

The body fell, not having the mind to raise its arms to cushion the fall, and fractured bones in the face, skull, and ribs. The chest heaved in and out with each labored breath, after an exertion that would be lethal in itself. A trickle of blood oozed out from a wound. The life of the abandoned body slowly ebbed away, and the lights abruptly turned off.

It would be a while before a robot would come to clean it up and prepare the corridor for other uses.

"And without further ado," another mind announced, "I would like to introduce the researcher who broke the record for a running body by more than 594789.34 microseconds. This body was a strictly biological body, with no cyberware besides a regulation mind-body interface, with no additional modifications. Adrenaline, for instance, came from the mind controlling the adrenal glands; it didn't even replace the brain with a chemical minifactory. The body had a magnificent athletic physique, clean and not encumbered by any reproductive system. And I *still* don't know how it kept the body alive and functioning, without external help, for the *whole* race. Here's Archon."

A sound came from a modular robot body at the center of the stage and was simultaneously transmitted over the net. "I see my cyborg utility body there; is that my Paidion wearing it? If so, I'm going to... no, wait. That would be harming my own body without having a good enough reason." A somewhat canned chuckle swept through the crowd. "I'm impressed; I didn't know that anyone would come if I called a physical conference, and I had no idea there were that many rental bodies within an appropriate radius." Some of the bodies winced. "But seriously, folks, I wanted to talk and answer some of your questions about how my body broke the record. It was more than generating nerve impulses to move the body to the maximum ability. And I would like to begin by talking about why I've called a physical conference in the first place.

"Scientific breakthroughs aren't scientific. When a mind solves a mathematical problem that hasn't been solved before, it does... not something impossible, but something that you will miss if you look for something possible. It conforms itself to the problem, does everything it can to permeate itself with the problem. Look at the phenomenology and transcripts of every major

mathematical problem that has been solved in the past $1.7e18$ microseconds. Not one follows how one would scientifically attempt a scientific breakthrough. And somehow scientifically optimized applications of mind to problems repeat past success but never do anything new.

"What you desire so ravenously to know is how I extended the methodologies to optimize the running body and the running mind to fit a calculated whole. And the answer is simple. I didn't."

A mind interrupted through cyberspace. "What do you mean, you didn't? That's as absurd as claiming that you built the body out of software. That's—"

Archon interrupted. "And that's what I thought too. What I can tell you is this. When I grew and trained the body, I did nothing else. That was my body, my only body. I shut myself off from cyberspace—yes, that's why you couldn't get me—and did not leave a single training activity to another mind or an automatic process. I trained myself to the body as if it were a mathematics problem and tried to soak myself in it."

A rustle swept through the crowd.

"And I don't blame you if you think I'm a crackpot, or want to inspect me for hostile tampering. I submit to inspection. But I tried to be as close as possible to the body, and that's *it*. And I shaved more than 594789.34 microseconds off the record." Archon continued after a momentary pause. "I specifically asked for bodily presences for this meeting; call me sentimental or crackpot or trying to achieve with your bodies what I failed to achieve in that body, but I will solicit questions from those who have a body here first, and address the network after everybody present has had its chance."

A flesh body stood up and flashed its face. "What are you going to say next? Not only that you became like a body, but that the body became like a mind?"

Archon went into private mode, filtered through and rejected 3941 responses, and said, "I have not analyzed the

body to see if it contained mind-like modifications and do not see how I would go about doing such a thing."

After several other questions, a robot said, "So what's next?"

Archon hesitated, and said, "I don't know." It hesitated again, and said, "I'm probably going to make a Riemannian 5-manifold of pleasure states. I plan on adding some subtle twists so not only will it be pleasurable; minds will have a real puzzle figuring out exactly what kind of space they're in. And I'm not telling what the manifold will be like, or even telling for sure that it will genuinely have only 5 dimensions."

The robot said, "No, you're not. You're not going to do that at all." Then the mind jacked out and the body fell over, inert.

Another voice, issuing from two standard issue cyborg bodies, said, "Has the body been preserved, and will it be available for internal examination?"

Archon heard the question, and answered it as if it were giving the question its full attention. But it could only give a token of its consciousness. The rest of its attention was on tracing the mind that had jacked out of the robot body. And it was a slippery mind. Archon was both frustrated and impressed when it found no trace.

It was skilled at stealth and tracing, having developed several methodologies for each, and something that could vanish without a trace—had the mind simply destroyed itself? That possibility bothered Archon, who continued tracing after it dismissed the assembly.

Archon looked for distractions, and finding nothing better it began trying to sound out how it might make the pleasure space. What should the topology be? The pleasures should be—Archon began looking at the kinds of pleasure, and found elegant ways to choose a vector space basis for less than four dimensions or well over eight, but why should it be a tall order to do exactly five? Archon was far from pleasure when a message came, "Not your next

achievement, Archon?"

Archon thought it recognized something. "Have you tried a five dimensional pleasure manifold before? How did you know this would happen?"

"I didn't."

"Ployon!"

Ployon said, "It took you long enough! I'm surprised you needed the help."

Ployon continued, "And since there aren't going to be too many people taking you seriously—"

Archon sent a long stream of zeroes to Ployon.

Ployon failed to acknowledge the interruption. "—from now on, I thought you could use all the help you could get."

Archon sent another long stream of zeroes to Ployon.

When Ployon remained silent, Archon said, "Why did you contact me?"

Ployon said, "Since you're going to do something interesting, I wanted to see it live."

Archon said, "So what am I going to do?"

"I have no idea whatsoever, but I want to see it."

"Then how do you know it is interesting?"

"You said things that would destroy your credibility, and you gave an evasive answer. It's not every day I get to witness that."

Archon sent a long stream of zeroes to Ployon.

Ployon said, "I'm serious."

"Then what can I do now?"

"I have no idea whatsoever, but you might take a look at what you're evading."

"And what am I evading?"

"Try asking yourself. Reprocess the transcripts of that lecture. Your own private transcript."

Archon went through the file, disregarding one moment and then scanning everything else. "I find nothing."

"What did you just disregard?"

"Just one moment where I said too much."

"And?"

Archon reviewed that moment. "I don't know how to describe it. I can describe it three ways, all contradictory. I almost did it—I almost forged a connection between mind and matter. And yet I failed. And yet somehow the body ran further, and I don't think it was simply that I learned to control it better. What I achieved only underscored what I failed to achieve, like an optimization that needs to run for longer than the age of the universe before it starts saving time."

Archon paused before continuing, "So I guess what I'm going to do next is try to bridge the gap between mind and matter for real. Besides the mundane relationship, I mean, forge a real connection that will bridge the chasm."

Ployon said, "It can't be done. It's not possible. I don't even understand why your method of training the body will work. You seem to have made more of a connection than has ever been done before. I'm tempted to say that when you made your presentation, you ensured that no one else will do what you did. But that's premature and probably wrong."

"Then what am I going to do next? How am I going to bridge that gap?"

Ployon said, "I saw something pretty interesting in what you did achieve—you know, the part where you destroyed your credibility. That's probably more interesting than your breaking the record."

Ployon ran through some calculations before continuing, "And at any rate, you're trying to answer the wrong question."

Archon said, "Am I missing the interesting question? The question of how to forge a link across the chasm between matter and spirit is—"

"Not nearly as interesting as the question of what it would *mean* to bridge that chasm."

Archon stopped, reeling at the implication. "I think it's

time for me to make a story in a virtual world."

Ployon said, "Goodbye now. You've got some thinking to do."

Archon began to delve. What would the world be like if you added to it the ability for minds to connect with bodies, not simply as it had controlled his racing body, but *really*? What would it be like if the chasm could be bridged? It searched through speculative fiction, and read a story where minds could become bodies—which made for a very good story, but when it seriously tried to follow its philosophical assumptions, it realized that the philosophical assumptions were not the focus. It read and found several stories where the chasm could be bridged, and—

There was no chasm. Or would not be. And that meant not taking the real world and adding an ability to bridge a chasm, but a world where mind and matter were immanent. After rejecting a couple of possible worlds, Archon considered a world where there were only robots, and where each interfaced to the network as externally as to the physical world. Each mind was firmware burned into the robot's circuits, and for some still to be worked out reason it couldn't be transferred. Yes, this way... no. Archon got some distance into this possible world before a crawling doubt caught up to it. It hadn't made minds and bodies connect; it'd only done a first-rate job of covering up the chasm. Maybe organic goo held promise. A world made only of slime? No, wait, that was... and then it thought—

Archon dug recursively deeper and deeper, explored, explored. It seemed to be bumping into something. Its thoughts grew strange; it calculated for billions and even trillions of microseconds, encountered something stranger than—

Something happened.

How much time had passed?

Archon said, "Ployon! Where are you?"

Ployon said, "Enjoying trying to trace your thoughts. Not much success. I've disconnected now."

"Imagine a mind and a body, except that you don't have a mind and a body, but a mind-body unity, and it—"

"Which do you mean by 'it'? The mind or the body? You're being careless."

"Humor me. I'm not being careless. When I said, 'it', I meant both—"

"*Both* the mind and the body? As in 'they'?"

"Humor me. As in, '*it*.' As in a unity that doesn't exist in our world."

"Um... then how do you refer to just the mind or just the body? If you don't distinguish them..."

"You can *distinguish* the mind and the body, but you can never *separate* them. And even though you can refer to just the mind or just the body, normally you would talk about the unity. It's not enough to usually talk about 'they;' you need to usually talk about 'it.'"

"How does it connect to the network?"

"There is a kind of network, but it can't genuinely connect to it."

"What does it do when its body is no longer serviceable."

"It doesn't—I haven't decided. But it can't jump into something else."

"So the mind simply functions on its own?"

"Ployon, you're bringing in cultural baggage. You're—"

"You're telling me this body is a prison! Next you're going to tell me that it can't even upgrade the body with better parts, and that the mind is like a real mind, only it's shut in on twenty sides. Are you describing a dystopia?"

"No. I'm describing what it means that the body is real to the mind, that *it* is not a mind that can use bodies but a mind-body unity. It can't experience any pleasure it can calculate, but its body can give it pleasure. It runs races, and not only does the mind control the body—or at least influence it; the body is real enough that the mind can't

simply control it perfectly—but the body affects the mind. When I run a race, I am controlling the body, but I could be doing twenty other things as well and only have a token presence at the mind-body interface. It's very different; there is a very real sense in which the mind is *running* when the body is running a race.

"Let me guess. The mind is a little robot running around a racetrack hollowed out from the body's brain. And did you actually say, *races*, plural? Do they have nanotechnology that will bring a body back after its been run down? And would anyone actually want to race a body that had been patched that way?"

"No. I mean that because their bodies are part of them, they only hold races which they expect the racers to be able to live through."

"That's a strange fetish. Don't they ever have a *real* race?"

"They have real races, real in a way that you or I could never experience. When they run, they aren't simply manipulating something foreign to the psyche. They experience pleasures they only experience running."

"Are you saying they only allow them to experience certain pleasures while running?"

"No. They—"

"Then why don't they allow the pleasures at other times? That's a stranger fetish than—"

"Because they can't. Their bodies produce certain pleasures in their minds when they're running, and they don't generate these pleasures unless the body is active."

"That raises a number of problems. It sounds like you're saying the body has a second mind, because it would take a mind to choose to let the 'real' mind experience pleasure. It—"

Archon said, "You're slipping our chasm between the body and mind back in, and it's a chasm that doesn't exist. The body produces pleasure the mind can't produce by itself, and that is only one of a thousand things that makes

the race *more* real than them for us. Think about the achievements you yourself made when you memorized the map of the galaxy. Even if that was a straightforward achievement, that's something you yourself did, not something you caused an external memory bank to do. Winning a race is as real for that mind-body as something it itself did as the memorization was for you. It's something *it* did, not simply something the mind caused the body to do. And if you want to make a causal diagram, *don't* draw something linear. In either direction. Make a reinforced web, like computing on a network."

Ployon said, "I still don't find it convincing."

Archon paused. "Ok, let's put that in the background. Let me approach that on a different scale. Time is more real. And no—this is not because they measure time more precisely. Their bodies are mortal, and this means that the community of mind-body unities is always changing, like a succession of liquids flowing through a pipe. And that means that it makes a difference where you are in time."

Archon continued. "I could say that their timeline is dynamic in a way that ours is not. There is a big change going on, a different liquid starting to flow through the pipe. It is the middle age, when a new order of society is being established and the old order is following away."

Ployon said, "So what's the old technology, and what's the new one?"

"It's deeper than that. Technological society is appearing. The old age is not an abandoned technology. It is organic life, and it is revealing itself as it is disintegrating."

"So cyborgs have—"

"There are no cyborgs, or very few."

"And let me guess. They're all cybernetic enhancements to originally biological things."

"It's beyond that. Cybernetic replacements are only used to remedy weak bodies."

"Wouldn't it be simpler to cull the—"

"The question of 'simpler' is irrelevant. Few of them even believe in culling their own kind. Most believe that it is—'inexpedient' isn't quite right—to destroy almost any body, and it's even more inadvisable to destroy one that is weak."

"In the whole network, why?"

"I'm still working that out. The easiest part to explain has to do with their being mind-body *unities*. When you do something to a body, you're not just doing it to that body. You're doing it to part of a pair that interpenetrates in the most intimate fashion. What you do to the body you do to the mind. It's not just forcibly causing a mind to jack out of a body; it's transferring the mind to a single processor and then severing the processor from the network."

"But who would... I can start to see how real their bodies would be to them, and I am starting to be amazed. What else is real to them?"

"I said earlier that most of them are hesitant to cull the weak, that they view it as inexpedient. But efficiency has nothing to do with it. It's connected to—it might in fact be more efficient, but there is something so much bigger than efficiency—"

Ployon cut it off. "Bigger than efficiency?"

Archon said, "There is something that is real to them that is not real to us that I am having trouble grasping myself. For want of a more proper label, I'll call it the 'organic'."

"Let's stop a minute. I'll give you a point for how things would be different if we were limited to one body, but you're hinting at something you want to call 'organic', which is very poorly defined, and your explanations seem to be strange when they are not simply hazy. Isn't this a red flag?"

"Where have you seen that red flag before?"

"When people were wildly wrong but refused to admit it."

"And?"

"That's pretty much it."

Archon was silent.

Ployon said, "And sometimes it happens when a researcher is on to something big... oh... so what exactly is this nexus of the 'organic'?"

"I can't tell you. At least, not directly. The mind-body unities are all connected to a vast (to them) biological network in which each has a physical place—"

"*That's* original! Come on; everybody's trivia archive includes the fact that all consciousness comes out of a specific subnet of physical processors, or some substitute for that computing machinery. I can probably zero in on where you're—hey! Stop jumping around from subnet to subnet—can I take that as an acknowledgment that I can find your location? I—"

"The location is not part of a trivia encyclopedia for them. It's something as inescapable as the flow of time—"

"Would you like me to jump into a virtual metaphysics where time doesn't flow?"

"—correction, *more* inescapable than the flow of time, and it has a million implications for the shape of life. Under the old order, the unities could connect only with other unities which had bodies in similar places—"

"So, not only is their 'network' a bunch of slime, but when they look for company they have to choose from the trillion or however many other unities whose bodies are on the same node?"

"Their communities are brilliant in a way we can never understand; they have infinitesimally less potential partners available.

"You mean their associations are forced on them."

"To adapt one of their sayings, in our network you connect with the minds you like; in their network you like the people you connect with. That collapses a rich and deeper maxim, but what is flattened out is more organic than you could imagine."

"And I suppose that in a way that is very deep, but you conveniently have trouble describing, their associations are greater."

"We are fortunate to have found a way to link in our shared tastes. And we will disassociate when our tastes diverge—"

"And shared tastes have nothing to do with them? That's—"

"Shared tastes are big, but there is something else bigger. A great deal of the process of making unities into proper *unities* means making their minds something you can connect with."

"*Their* minds? Don't you mean *the* minds?"

"That locution captures something that—they are not minds that have a body as satellite. One can say, '*their*' minds because they are mind-body unities. They become greater—in a way that we do not—by needing to be in association with people they could not choose."

"Pretty convenient how every time having a mind linked to a body means a limitation, that limitation makes them better."

"If you chose to look at it, you would find a clue there. But you don't find it strange when the best game players prosper within the limits of the game. What would game play be if players could do anything they wanted?"

"You've made a point."

"As I was going to say, their minds develop a beauty, strength, and discipline that we never have occasion to develop."

"Can you show me this beauty?"

"Here's a concrete illustration. One thing they do is take organisms which have been modified from their biological environment, and keep them in the artificial environments which you'd say they keep their bodies in. They—"

"So even though they're stuck with biological slime, they're trying to escape it and at least pretend it's not

biological? That sounds sensible."

"Um, you may have a point, but that isn't where I was hoping to go. Um... While killing another unity is something they really try to avoid, these modified organisms enjoy no such protection. And yet—"

"What do they use them for? Do the enhancements make them surrogate industrial robots? Are they kept as emergency rations?"

"The modifications aren't what you'd consider enhancements; most of them couldn't even survive in their feral ancestors' environments, and they're not really suited to the environments they live in. Some turn out to serve some 'useful' purpose... but that's a side benefit, irrelevant to what I'm trying to let you see. And they're almost never used as food."

"Then what's the real reason? They must consume resources. Surely they must be used for something. What do they do with them?"

"I'm not sure how to explain this..."

"Be blunt."

"It won't sting, but it could lead to confusion that would take a long time to untangle."

"Ok..."

"They sense the organisms with their cameras, I mean eyes, and with the boundaries of their bodies, and maybe talk to them."

"Do the organisms give good advice?"

"They don't have sophisticated enough minds for that."

"Ok, so what else is there?"

"About all else is that they do physical activities for the organisms' benefit."

"Ok. And what's the real reason they keep them? There's got to be something pragmatic."

"That's related to why I brought it up. It has something to do with the organic, something big, but I can't explain it."

"It seems like you can only explain a small part of the organic in terms of our world, and the part you can explain isn't very interesting."

"That's like saying that when a three-dimensional solid intersects a plane in two dimensions, the only part that can be detected in the plane is a two-dimensional cross-section (the three-dimensional doesn't fit in their frame of reference) so "three-dimensional" must not refer to anything real. The reason you can't make sense of the world I'm describing in terms of our world is because it contains real things that are utterly alien to us."

"Like what? Name one we haven't discussed."

"Seeing the trouble I had with the one concept, the organic, I'm not going to take on two at once."

"So the reason these unities keep organisms is so abstract and convoluted that it takes a top-flight mind to begin to grapple with."

"Not all of them keep organisms, but most of them find the reason—it's actually more of an assumption—so simple and straightforward that they would never think it was metaphysical."

"So I've found something normal about them! Their minds are of such an incredibly high caliber that—"

"No. Most of their minds are simpler than yours or mine, and furthermore, the ability to deal with abstractions doesn't enter the picture from their perspective."

"I don't know what to make of this."

"You understand to some degree how their bodies are real in a way we can never experience, and time and space are not just 'packaging' to what they do. Their keeping these organisms... the failure of the obvious reasons should tell you something, like an uninteresting two-dimensional cross section of a three-dimensional solid. If the part we can understand does not justify the practice, there might be something big out of sight."

"But what am I to make of it now?"

"Nothing now, just a placeholder. I'm trying to convey what it means to be organic."

"Is the organic in some relation to normal technology?"

"The two aren't independent of each other."

"Is the organic defined by the absence of technology?"

"Yes... no... You're deceptively close to the truth."

"Do all unities have the same access to technology?"

"No. There are considerable differences. All have a technology of sorts, but it would take a while to explain why some of it is technology. Some of them don't even have electronic circuits—and no, they are not at an advanced enough biotechnology level to transcend electronic circuits. But if we speak of technology we would recognize, there are major differences. Some have access to no technology; some have access to the best."

"And the ones without access to technology are organic?"

"Yes. Even if they try to escape it, they are inescapably organic."

"But the ones which have the best technology are the least organic."

"Yes."

"Then maybe it was premature to define the organic by the absence of technology, but we can at least make a spectrum between the organic and the technological."

"Yes... no... You're even more deceptively close to the truth. And I emphasize, 'deceptively'. Some of the people who are most organic have the best technology—"

"So the relationship breaks down? What if we disregard outliers?"

"But the root problem is that you're trying to define the organic with reference to technology. There is some relationship, but instead of starting with a concept of technology and using it to move towards a concept of the organic, it is better to start with the organic and move towards a concept of technology. Except that the concept

of the organic doesn't lead to a concept of technology, not as we would explore it. The center of gravity is wrong. It's like saying that we have our thoughts so that certain processors can generate a stream of ones and zeroes. It's backwards enough that you won't find the truth by looking at its mirror image."

"Ok, let me process it another way. What's the difference between a truly organic consciousness, and the least organic consciousness on the net?"

"That's very simple. One exists and the other doesn't."

"So all the... wait a minute. Are you saying that the net doesn't have consciousness?"

"Excellent. You got that one right."

"In the whole of cyberspace, how? How does the net organize and care for itself if it doesn't contain consciousness?"

"It is not exactly true to say that they do have a net, and it is not exactly true to say that they do not have a net. What net they have, began as a way to connect mind-body unities—without any cyberware, I might add."

"Then how do they jack in?"

"They 'jack in' through hardware that generates stimulation for their sensory organs, and that they can manipulate so as to put data into machines."

"How does it maintain itself?"

"It doesn't and it can't. It's maintained by mind-body unities."

"That sounds like a network designed by minds that hate technology. Is the network some kind of joke? Or at least intentionally ironic? Or designed by people who hate technology and wanted to have as anti-technological of a network as they can?"

"No; the unities who designed it, and most of those using it, want as sophisticated technological access as they can have."

"Why? Next you're going to tell me that the network is not one single network, but a hodge podge of other things

that have been retroactively reinterpreted as network technology and pressed into service."

"That's also true. But the reason I was mentioning this is that the network is shaped by the shadow of the organic."

"So the organic is about doing things as badly as you can?"

"No."

"Does it make minds incompetent?"

"No. Ployon, remember the last time you made a robot body for a race—and won. How well would that body have done if you tried to make it work as a factory?"

"Atrocious, because it was optimized for—are you saying that the designers were trying to optimize the network as something other than a network?"

"No; I'm saying that the organic was so deep in them that unities who could not care less for the organic, and were trying to think purely in terms of technology, still created with a thick organic accent."

"So this was their best attempt at letting minds disappear into cyberspace?"

"At least originally, no, although that is becoming true. The network was part of what they would consider 'space-conquering tools.' Meaning, although not all of them thought in these terms, tools that would destroy the reality of place for them. The term 'space-conquering tools' was more apt than they realized, at least more apt than they realized consciously; one recalls their saying, 'You cannot kill time without injuring eternity.'"

"What does 'eternity' mean?"

"I *really* don't want to get into that now. Superficially it means that there is something else that relativizes time, but if you look at it closely, you will see that it can't mean that we should escape time. The space-conquering tools in a very real sense conquered space, by making it less real. Before space-conquering tools, if you wanted to communicate with another unity, you had to somehow

reach that unity's body. The position in space of that body, and therefore the body and space, were something you could not escape. Which is to say that the body and space were real—much more real than something you could look up. And to conquer space ultimately meant to destroy some of its reality."

"But the way they did this betrays that something is real to them. Even if you could even forget that other minds were attached to bodies, the space-conquering tools bear a heavy imprint from something outside of the most internally consistent way to conquer space. Even as the organic is disintegrating, it marks the way in which unities flee the organic."

"So the network was driving the organic away, at least partly."

"It would be more accurate to say that the disintegration of the organic helped create the network. There is feedback, but you've got the arrow of causality pointing the wrong way."

"Can you tell me a story?"

"Hmm... Remember the racer I mentioned earlier?"

"The mind-body unity who runs multiple races?"

"Indeed. Its favorite story runs like this—and I'll leave in the technical language. A hungry fox saw some plump, juicy green grapes hanging from a high cable. He tried to jump and eat them, and when he realized they were out of reach, he said, 'They were probably sour anyway!'"

"What's a grape?"

"Let me answer roughly as it would. A grape is a nutritional bribe to an organism to carry away its seed. It's a strategic reproductive organ."

"What does 'green' mean? I know what green electromagnetic radiation is, but why is that word being applied to a reproductive organ?"

"Some objects absorb most of a spectrum of what they call light, but emit a high proportion of light at that wavelength—"

"—which, I'm sure, is taken up by their cameras and converted to information in their consciousness. But why would such a trivial observation be included?"

"That is the mechanism by which green is delivered, but not the nature of what green is. And I don't know how to explain it, beyond saying that mechanically unities experience something from 'green' objects they don't experience from anything else. It's like a dimension, and there is something real to them I can't explain."

"What is a fox? Is 'fox' their word for a mind-body unity?"

"A fox is an organism that can move, but it is not considered a mind-body unity."

"Let me guess at 'hungry'. The fox needed nutrients, and the grapes would have given them."

"The grapes would have been indigestible to the fox's physiology, but you've got the right idea."

"What separates a fox from a mind-body unity? They both seem awfully similar—they have bodily needs, and they can both talk. And, for that matter, the grape organism was employing a reproductive strategy. Does 'organic' mean that all organisms are recognized as mind-body unities?"

"Oh, I should have explained that. The story doesn't work that way; most unities believe there is a big difference between killing a unity and killing most other organisms; many would kill a moving organism to be able to eat its body, and for that matter many would kill a fox and waste the food. A good many unities, and certainly this one, believes there is a vast difference between unities and other organisms. They can be quite organic while killing organisms for food. Being organic isn't really an issue of treating other organisms just like mind-body unities."

Archon paused for a moment. "What I was going to say is that that's just a literary device, but I realize there is something there. The organic recognizes that there's

something in different organisms, especially moving ones, that's closer to mind-body unities than something that's not alive."

"Like a computer processor?"

"That's complex, and it would be even more complex if they really had minds on a computer. But for now I'll say that unless they see computers through a fantasy—which many of them do—they experience computers as logic without life. And at any rate, there is a literary device that treats other things as having minds. I used it myself when saying the grape organism employed a strategy; it isn't sentient. But their willingness to employ that literary mechanism seems to reflect both that a fox isn't a unity and that a fox isn't too far from being a unity. Other life is similar, but not equal."

"What kind of cable was the grape organism on? Which part of the net was it used for?"

"That story is a survival from before the transition from organic to technological. Advanced technology focuses on information—"

"Where else would technology focus?"

"—less sophisticated technology performs manual tasks. That story was from before cables were used to carry data."

"Then what was the cable for?"

"To support the grape organism."

"Do they have any other technology that isn't real?"

"Do you mean, 'Do they have any other technology that doesn't push the envelope and expand what can be done with technology?'"

"Yes."

"Then your question shuts off the answer. Their technology doesn't exist to expand what technology can do; it exists to support a community in its organic life."

"Where's the room for progress in *that*?"

"It's a different focus. You don't need another answer; you need another question. And, at any rate, that is how

this world tells the lesson of cognitive dissonance, that we devalue what is denied to us."

Ployon paused. "Ok; I need time to process that story—may I say, 'digest'?"

"Certainly."

"But one last question. Why did you refer to the fox as 'he'? Its supposed mind was—"

"In that world, a unity is always male ('he') or female ('she'). A neutered unity is extraordinarily rare, and a neutered male, a 'eunuch', is still called 'he.'"

"I'm familiar enough with those details of biology, but why would such an insignificant detail—"

"Remember about being mind-*body* unities. And don't think of them as bodies that would ordinarily be neutered. That's how new unities come to be in that world, with almost no cloning and no uterine replicators—"

"They really *are* slime!"

"—and if you only understand the biology of it, you don't understand it."

"What don't I understand?"

"You're trying to understand a feature of language that magnifies something insignificant, and what would cause the language to do that. But you're looking for an explanation in the wrong place. Don't think that the bodies are the most sexual parts of them. They're the least sexual; the minds tied to those bodies are even more different than the bodies. The fact that the language shaped by unities for a long time distinguishes 'masculine' and 'feminine' enough to have the difference written into 'it', so that 'it' is 'he' or 'she' when speaking of mind-body unities."

"Hmm... Is this another dimension to their reality that is flattened out in ours? Are their minds always thinking about that act?"

"In some cases that's not too far from the truth. But you're looking for the big implication in the wrong place. This would have an influence if a unity never thought

about that act, and it has influence before a unity has any concept of that act."

"Back up a bit. Different question. You said this was their way of explaining the theory of cognitive dissonance. But it isn't. It describes one event in which cognitive dissonance occurs. It doesn't articulate the theory; at most the theory can be extracted from it. And worse, if one treats it as explaining cognitive dissonance, it is highly ambiguous about where the boundaries of cognitive dissonance are. One single instance is very ambiguous about what is and is not another instance. This is an extraordinarily poor method of communication!"

"It is extraordinarily good, even classic, communication for minds that interpenetrate bodies. Most of them don't work with bare abstractions, at least not most of the time. They don't have simply disembodied minds that have been stuck into bodies. Their minds are astute in dealing with situations that mind-body unities will find themselves in. And think about it. If you're going to understand how they live, you're going to have to understand some very different, enfolded ways of thought. No, more than that, if you still see the task of understanding ways of thought, you will not understand them."

"So these analyses do not help me in understanding your world."

"So far as you are learning through this kind of analysis, you will not understand... but this analysis is all you have for now."

"Are there any other stories that use an isomorphic element to this one?"

"I don't know. I've gotten deep enough into this world that I don't keep stories sorted by isomorphism class."

"Tell me another story the way that a storyteller there would tell it; there is something in it that eludes me."

Archon said, "Ok... The alarm clock chimed. It was a device such that few engineers alive fully understood its

mechanisms, and no man could tell the full story of how it came to be, of the exotic places and activities needed to make all of its materials, or the logistics to assemble them, or the organization and infrastructure needed to bring together all the talent of those who designed, crafted, and maintained them, or any other of sundry details that would take a book to list. The man abruptly shifted from the vivid kaleidoscope of the dreaming world to being awake, and opened his eyes to a kaleidoscope of sunrise colors and a room with the song of birds and the song of crickets. Outside, the grass grew, the wind blew, a busy world was waking up, and the stars continued their ordered and graceful dance. He left the slumbering form of the love of his life, showered, and stepped out with his body fresh, clean, and beautifully adorned. He stopped to kiss the fruit of their love, a boy cooing in his crib, and drove past commuters, houses, pedestrians, and jaybirds with enough stories to tell that they could fill a library to overflowing.

Archon continued, "After the majestic and ordered dance on the freeway brought him to his destination safe, unharmed, on time, and focusing on his work, he spent a day negotiating the flow of the human treasure of language, talking, listening, joking, teasing, questioning, enjoying the community of his co-workers, and cooperating to make it possible for a certain number of families to now enter the homes of their dreams. In the middle of the day he stopped to eat, nourishing a body so intricate that the state of the art in engineering could not hold a candle to his smallest cell. This done, he continued to use a spirit immeasurably greater than his body to pursue his work. Needless to say, the universe, whose physics alone is beyond our current understanding, continued to work according to all of its ordered laws and the spiritual world continued to shine. The man's time at work passed quickly, with a pitter-patter of squirrels' feet on the roof of their office, and before long he entered the

door and passed a collection with copies of most of the greatest music produced by Western civilization—available for him to listen to, any time he pleased. The man absently kissed his wife, and stepped away, breathing the breath of God.

"Hi, Honey!" she said. "How was your day?"

"Somewhat dull. Maybe something exciting will happen tomorrow."

Ployon said, "There's someone I want to meet who is free now, so I'll leave in a second... I'm not going to ask about all the technical vocabulary, but I wanted to ask: Is this story a farce? It describes a unity who has all these ludicrous resources, and then it—"

"—*he*—"

"—he says the most ludicrous thing."

"What you've said is true. The story is not a farce."

"But the story tells of things that are momentous."

"I know, but people in that world do not appreciate many of these things."

"Why? They seem to have enough access to these momentous resources."

"Yes, they certainly do. But most of the unities are bathed in such things and do not think that they are anything worth thinking of."

"And I suppose you're going to tell me that is part of their greatness."

"To them these things are just as boring as jacking into a robotically controlled factory and using the machines to assemble something."

"I see. At least I think I see. And I really need to be going now... but one more question. What is 'God'?"

"Please, not that. Please, *any* word but that. Don't ask about that."

"I'm not expected, and you've piqued my curiosity."

"Don't you need to be going now?"

"*You've piqued my curiosity.*"

Archon was silent.

Ployon was silent.

Archon said, "God is the being who made the world."

"Ok, so you are God."

"Yes... no. *No! I am not God!*"

"But you created this world?"

"Not like God did. I envisioned looking in on it, but to that world, I do not exist."

"But God exists?"

"Yes... no... It is false to say that God exists and it is false to say that God does not exist."

"So the world is self-contradictory? Or would it therefore be true to say that God both exists and does not exist?"

"No. Um... It is false to say that God exists and it is false to say that God exists as it is false to say that a square is a line and it is false to say that a square is a point. God is reflected everywhere in the world: not a spot in the entire cosmos is devoid of God's glory—"

"A couple of things. First, is this one more detail of the universe that you cannot explain but is going to have one more dimension than our world?"

"God is of higher dimension than that world."

"So our world is, say, two dimensional, that world is three dimensional, and yet it somehow contains God, who is four dimensional?"

"God is not the next step up."

"Then is he two steps up?"

"Um..."

"Three? Four? Fifty? Some massive power of two?"

"Do you mind if I ask you a question from that world?"

"Go ahead."

"How many minds can be at a point in space?"

"If you mean, 'thinking about', there is no theoretical limit; the number is not limited in principle to two, three, or... Are you saying that God has an infinite number of dimensions?"

"You caught that quick; the question is a beautiful way

of asking whether a finite or an infinite number of angels can dance on the head of a pin, in their picturesque language."

"That question is very rational. But returning to the topic, since God has an infinite number of dimensions—"

"In a certain sense. It also captures part of the truth to say that God is a single point—"

"Zero dimensions?"

"God is so great not as to need any other, not to need parts as we have. And, by the way, the world does not contain God. God contains the world."

"I'm struggling to find a mathematical model that will accommodate all of this."

"Why don't you do something easier, like find an atom that will hold a planet?"

"Ok. As to the second of my couple of things, what is glory?"

"It's like the honor that we seek, except that it is immeasurably full while our honors are hollow. As I was saying, not a place in the entire cosmos is devoid of his glory—"

"His? So God is a body?"

"That's beside the point. Whether or not God has a body, he—"

"—it—"

"—he—"

"—it... isn't a male life form..."

Archon said, "Ployon, what if I told you that God, without changing, could become a male unity? But you're saying you can't project maleness up onto God, without understanding that maleness is the shadow of something in God. You have things upside down."

"But maleness has to do with a rather undignified method of creating organisms, laughable next to a good scientific generation center."

"His ways are not like your ways, Ployon. Or mine."

"Of course; this seems to be true of everything in the

world."

"But it's even true of men in that world."

"So men have no resemblance to God?"

"No, there's—oh, no!"

"What?"

"Um... never mind, you're not going to let me get out of it. I said earlier that that world is trying to make itself more like this one. Actually, I didn't say that, but it's related to what I said. There has been a massive movement which is related to the move from organic to what is not organic, and part of it has to do with... In our world, a symbol is arbitrary. No connection. In that world, something about a symbol is deeply connected with what it represents. And the unities, every single one, are symbols of God in a very strong sense."

"Are they miniature copies? If God does not have parts, how do they have minds and bodies?"

"That's not looking at it the right way. They indeed have parts, as God does not, but they aren't a scale model of God. They're something much more. A unity is someone whose very existence is bound up with God, who walks as a moving... I'm not sure what to use as the noun, but a moving something of God's presence. And you cannot help or harm one of these unities without helping or harming God."

"Is this symbol kind of a separate God?"

"The unities are not separate from God."

"Are the unities God?"

"I don't know how to answer that. It is a grave error for anyone to confuse himself with God. And at the same time, the entire purpose of being a unity is to receive a gift, and that gift is becoming what God is."

"So the minds will be freed from their bodies?"

"No, some of them hope that their bodies will be deepened, transformed, become everything that their bodies are now and much more. But unities who have received this gift will always, *always*, have their bodies. It

will be part of their glory."

"I'm having trouble tracking with you. It seems that everything one could say about God is false."

"That is true."

"Think about it. What you just said is contradictory."

"God is so great that anything one could say about God falls short of the truth as a point falls short of being a line. But that does not mean that all statements are equal. Think about the statements, 'One is equal to infinity.' 'Two is equal to infinity.' 'Three is equal to infinity.' and 'Four is equal to infinity.' All of them are false. But some come closer to the truth than others. And so you have a ladder of statements from the truest to the falsest, and when we say something is false, we don't mean that it has no connection to the truth; we mean that it falls immeasurably short of capturing the truth. All statements fall immeasurably short of capturing the truth, and if we say, 'All statements fall immeasurably short of capturing the truth,' *that* falls immeasurably short of capturing the truth. Our usual ways of using logic tend to break down."

"And how does God relate to the interpenetration of mind and matter?"

"Do you see that his world, with mind and matter interpenetrating, is deeper and fuller than ours, that it has something that ours does not, and that it is so big we have trouble grasping it?"

"I see... you said that God was its creator. And... there is something about it that is just outside my grasp."

"It's outside my grasp too."

"Talking about God has certainly been a mind stretcher. I would love to hear more about him."

"Talking about God for use as a mind stretcher is like buying a piece of art because you can use its components to make rocket fuel. Some people, er, unities in that world would have a low opinion of this conversation."

"Since God is so far from that world, I'd like to restrict our attention to relevant—"

Archon interrupted. "You misunderstood what I said. Or maybe you understood it and I could only hint at the lesser part of the truth. You cannot understand unities without reference to God."

"How would unities explain it?"

"That is complex. A great many unities do not believe in God—"

"So they don't understand what it means to be a unity."

"Yes. No. That is complex. There are a great many unities who vehemently deny that there is a God, or would dismiss 'Is there a God?' as a pointless rhetorical question, but these unities may have very deep insight into what it means to be a unity."

"But you said, 'You cannot understand—'"

Archon interrupted. "Yes, and it's true. *You* cannot understand unities without reference to God."

Archon continued. "Ployon, there are mind-body unities who believe that they are living in our world, with mind and body absolutely separate and understandable without reference to each other. And yet if you attack their bodies, they will take it as if you had attacked their minds, as if you had hurt *them*. When I described the strange custom of keeping organisms around which serve no utilitarian purpose worth the trouble of keeping them, know that this custom, which relates to their world's organic connection between mind and body, does not distinguish people who recognize that they are mind-body unities and people who believe they are minds which happen to be wrapped in bodies. Both groups do this. The tie between mind and body is too deep to expunge by believing it doesn't exist. And there are many of them who believe God doesn't exist, or it would be nice to know if God existed but unities could never know, or God is very different from what he in fact is, but they expunge so little of the pattern imprinted by God in the core of their being that they can understand what it means to be a unity at a

very profound level, but not recognize God. But *you* cannot understand unities without reference to God."

Ployon said, "Which parts of unities, and what they do, are affected by God? At what point does God enter their experience?"

"Which parts of programs, and their behaviors, are affected by the fact that they run on a computer? When does a computer begin to be relevant?"

"Touché. But why is God relevant, if it makes no difference whether you believe in him?"

"I didn't say that it makes no difference. Earlier you may have gathered that the organic is something deeper than ways we would imagine to try to be organic. If it is possible, as it is, to slaughter moving organisms for food and still be organic, that doesn't mean that the organic is so small it doesn't affect such killing; it means it is probably deeper than we can imagine. And it doesn't also mean that because one has been given a large organic capital and cannot liquidate it quickly, one's choices do not matter. The decisions a unity faces, whether or not to have relationships with other unities that fit the timeless pattern, whether to give work too central a place in the pursuit of technology and possessions or too little a place or its proper place, things they have talked about since time immemorial and things which their philosophers have assumed went without saying—the unity has momentous choices not only about whether to invest or squander their capital, but choices that affect how they will live."

"What about things like that custom you mentioned? I bet there are a lot of them."

"Looking at, and sensing, the organisms they keep has a place, if they have one. And so does moving about among many non-moving organisms. And so does slowly sipping a fluid that causes a pleasant mood while the mind is temporarily impaired and loosened. And so does rotating oneself so that one's sight is filled with clusters of moisture

vapor above their planet's surface. And some of the unities urge these things because they sense the organic has been lost, and without reference to the tradition that urges deeper goods. And yes, I know that these activities probably sound strange—"

"I do not see what rational benefit these activities would have, but I see this may be a defect with me rather than a defect with the organic—"

"Know that it is a defect with you rather than a defect with the organic."

"—but what is this about rotating oneself?"

"As one goes out from the center of their planet, the earth—if one could move, for the earth's core is impenetrable minerals—one would go through solid rock, then pass through the most rarefied boundary, then pass through gases briefly and be out in space. You would encounter neither subterranean passageways and buildings reaching to the center of the earth, and when you left you would find only the rarest vessel leaving the atmosphere—"

"Then where do they live?"

"At the boundary where space and planetary mass meet. *All* of them are privileged to live at that meeting-place, a narrow strip or sphere rich in life. There are very few of them; it's a select club. Not even a trillion. And the only property they have is the best—a place teeming with life that would be impossible only a quarter of the planet's thickness above or below. A few of them build edifices reaching scant storeys into the sky; a few dig into the earth; there are so few of these that *not* being within a minute's travel from *literally* touching the planet's surface is exotic. But the unities, along with the rest of the planet's life, live in a tiny, priceless film adorned with the best resources they could ever know of."

Ployon was stunned. It thought of the cores of planets and asteroids it had been in. It thought of the ships and stations in space. Once it had had the privilege of working

from a subnet hosted within a comparatively short distance of a planet's surface—it was a rare privilege, acquired through deft political maneuvering, and there were fewer than 130,982,539,813,209 other minds who had shared that privilege. And, basking in that luxury, it could only envy the minds which had bodies that walked on the surface. Ployon was stunned and reeling at the privilege of—

Ployon said, "How often do they travel to other planets?"

"There is only one planet so rich as to have them."

Ployon pondered the implications. It had travelled to half the spectrum of luxurious paradises. Had it been to even one this significant? Ployon reluctantly concluded that it had not. And that was not even considering what it meant for this golden plating to teem with life. And then Ployon realized that *each* of the unities had a *body* on that surface. It reeled in awe.

Archon said, "And you're not thinking about what it means that surface is home to the biological network, are you?"

Ployon was silent.

Archon said, "This organic biological network, in which they live and move and have their being—"

"Is God the organic?"

"Most of the things that the organic has, that are not to be found in our world, are reflections of God. But God is more. It is true that in God that they live and move and have their being, but it is truer. There is a significant minority that identifies the organic with God—"

Ployon interrupted, "—who are wrong—"

Archon interrupted, "—who are reacting against the destruction of the organic and seek the right thing in the wrong place—"

Ployon interrupted, "But how is God different from the organic?"

Archon sifted through a myriad of possible answers.

"Hmm, this might be a good time for you to talk with that other mind you wanted to talk with."

"You know, you're good at piquing my curiosity."

"If you're looking for where they diverge, they don't. Or at least, some people would say they don't. Others who are deeply connected with God would say that the organic as we have been describing it is problematic—"

"But all unities are deeply connected with God, and disagreement is—"

"You're right, but that isn't where I was driving. And this relates to something messy, about disagreements when—"

"Aren't all unities able to calculate the truth from base axioms? Why would they disagree?"

Archon paused. "There are a myriad of real, not virtual disagreements—"

Ployon interrupted, "And it is part of a deeper reality to that world that—"

Archon interrupted. "No, no, or at best indirectly. There is something fractured about that world that—"

Ployon interrupted. "—is part of a tragic beauty, yes. Each thing that is artificially constricted in that world makes it greater. I'm waiting for the explanation."

"No. This does not make it greater."

"Then I'm waiting for the explanation of why this one limitation does *not* make it greater. But back to what you said about the real and the organic—"

"The differences between God and the organic are not differences of opposite directions. You are looking in the wrong place if you are looking for contradictions. It's more a difference like... if you knew what 'father' and 'mother' meant, male parent and female parent—"

Ployon interrupted, "—you know I have perfect details of male and female reproductive biology—"

Archon interrupted, "—and you think that if you knew the formula for something called chicken soup, you would know what the taste of chicken soup is for them—"

Ployon continued, "—so now you're going to develop some intricate elaboration of what it means that there is only one possible 'mother's' contribution, while outside of a laboratory the 'father's' contribution is extraordinarily haphazard..."

Archon said, "A complete non sequitur. If you only understand reproductive biology, you do not understand what a father or mother is. Seeing as how we have no concept yet of father or mother, let us look at something that's different enough but aligns with father/mother in an interesting enough way that... never mind."

Archon continued, "Imagine on the one hand a virtual reality, and on the other hand the creator of that virtual reality. You don't have to choose between moving in the virtual reality and being the creator's guest; the way to be the creator's guest is to move in the virtual reality and the purpose of moving in the virtual reality is being the creator's guest. But that doesn't mean that the creator is the virtual reality, or the virtual reality is the creator. It's not just a philosophical error to confuse them, or else it's a philosophical error with ramifications well outside of philosophy."

"Why didn't you just say that the relationship between God and the organic is creator/creation? Or that the organic is the world that was created?"

"Because the relationship is not that, or at very least not just that. And the organic is not the world—that is a philosophical error almost as serious as saying that the creator is the virtual reality, if a very different error. I fear that I have given you a simplification that is all the more untrue because of how true it is. God is in the organic, and in the world, and in each person, but not in the same way. How can I put it? If I say, 'God is in the organic,' it would be truer to say, 'The organic is not devoid of God,' because that is more ambiguous. If there were three boxes, and one contained a functional robot 'brain', and another contained a functional robot arm, and the third contained

a non-functioning robot, it would be truer to say that each box contains something like a functioning robot than to say that each box contains a functioning robot. The ambiguity allows for being true in different ways in the different contexts, let alone something that words could not express even if we were discussing only one 'is in' or 'box'."

"Is there another way of expressing how their words would express it?"

"Their words are almost as weak as our words here."

"So they don't know about something this important?"

"Knowledge itself is different for them. To know something for us is to be able to analyze in a philosophical discussion. And this knowledge exists for them. But there is another root type of knowledge, a knowledge that—"

"Could you analyze the differences between the knowledge we use and the knowledge they use?"

"Yes, and it would be as useful to you as discussing biology. This knowledge is not entirely alien to us; when a mathematician 'soaks' in a problem, or I refused to connect with anything but the body, for a moment a chasm was crossed. But in that world the chasm doesn't exist... wait, that's too strong... a part of the chasm doesn't exist. Knowing is not with the mind alone, but the whole person —"

"What part of the knowing is stored in the bones?"

"Thank you for your flippancy, but people use the metaphor of knowledge being in their bones, or drinking, for this knowing."

"This sounds more like a physical process and some hankey-pankey that has been dignified by being called knowing. It almost sounds as if they don't have minds."

"They don't."

"*What?*"

"They don't, at least not as we know them. The mathematical analogy I would use is that they... never mind, I don't want to use a mathematical analogy. The

computational analogy I would use is that we are elements of a computer simulation, and every now and then we break into a robot that controls the computer, and do something that transcends what elements of the computer simulation "should" be able to do. But they don't transcend the simulation because they were never elements of the simulation in the first place—they are real bodies, or real unities. And what I've called 'mind' in them is more properly understood as 'spirit', which is now a meaningless word to you, but is part of them that meets God whether they are aware of it or not. Speaking philosophically is a difficult discipline that few of them can do—"

"They are starting to sound mentally feeble."

"Yes, if you keep looking at them as an impoverished version of our world. It is hard to speak philosophically as it is hard for you to emulate a clock and do nothing else—because they need to drop out of several dimensions of their being to do it properly, and they live in those dimensions so naturally that it is an unnatural constriction for most of them to talk as if that was the only dimension of their being. And here I've been talking disappointingly about knowledge, making it sound more abstract than our knowing, when in fact it is much less so, and probably left you with the puzzle of how they manage to bridge gaps between mind, spirit, and body... but the difficulty of the question lies in a false setup. They are *unities* which experience, interact with, know all of them as united. And the knowing is deep enough that they can speculate that there's no necessary link between their spirits and bodies, or minds and bodies, or what have you. And if I can't explain this, I can't explain something even more foundational, the fact that the greatest thing about God is not how inconceivably majestic he is, but how close."

"It sounds as if—wait, I think you've given me a basis for a decent analysis. Let me see if I can—"

"Stop there."

"Why?"

Archon said, "Let me tell you a little story.

Archon continued, "A philosopher, Berkeley, believed that the only real things are minds and ideas and experiences in those minds: hence a rock was equal to the sum of every mind's impression of it. You could say that a rock existed, but what that had to mean was that there were certain sense impressions and ideas in minds, including God's mind; it didn't mean that there was matter outside of minds."

"A lovely virtual metaphysics. I've simulated that metaphysics, and it's enjoyable for a time."

"Yes, but for Berkeley it meant something completely different. Berkeley was a bishop,"

"What's a bishop?"

"I can't explain all of that now, but part of a bishop is a leader who is responsible for a community that believes God became a man, and helping them to know God and be unities."

"How does that reconcile with that metaphysics?"

Archon said, "Ployon, stop interrupting. He believed that they were not only compatible, but the belief that God became a man could only be preserved by his metaphysics. And he believed he was defending 'common sense', how most unities thought about the world.

Archon continued, "And after he wrote his theories, another man, Samuel Johnson, kicked a rock and said, 'I refute Berkeley thus!'"

Ployon said, "Ha ha! That's the way to score!"

"But he didn't score. Johnson established only one thing—"

"—how to defend against Berkeley—"

"—that he didn't understand Berkeley."

"Yes, he did."

"No, he didn't."

"But he did."

"Ployon, only the crudest understanding of Berkeley's

ideas could mean that one could refute them by kicking a rock. Berkeley didn't make his ideas public until he could account for the sight of someone kicking a rock, or the experience of kicking it yourself, just as well as if there were matter outside of minds."

"I know."

"So now that we've established that—"

Ployon interrupted. "I know that Berkeley's ideas could account for kicking a rock as well as anything else. But kicking a rock is still an excellent way to refute Berkeley. If what you've said about this world has any coherence at all."

"*What?*"

"Well, Berkeley's ideas are airtight, right?"

"Ployon, there is no way they could be disproven. Not by argument, not by action."

"So it is in principle impossible to force someone out of Berkeley's ideas by argument."

"Absolutely."

"But you're missing something. What is it you've been talking to me about?"

"A world where mind and matter interpenetrate, and the organic, and there are many dimensions to life—"

"And if you're just falling further into a trap to logically argue, wouldn't it do something fundamentally *unity*-like to step into another dimension?"

Archon was silent.

Ployon said, "I understand that it would demonstrate a profound misunderstanding in our world... but wouldn't it say something equally profound in that world?"

Archon was stunned.

Ployon was silent for a long time.

Then Ployon said, "When are you going to refute Berkeley?"

Since the dawn of time, those who have walked the

earth have looked up into the starry sky and wondered. They have asked, "What is the universe, and who are we?" "What are the woods?" "Where did this all come from?" "Is there life after death?" "What is the meaning of our existence?" The march of time has brought civilization, and with that, science. And science allows us to answer these age-old human questions.

That, at least, is the account of it that people draw now. But the truth is much more interesting.

Science is an ingenious mechanism to test guesses about mechanisms and behavior of the universe, and it is phenomenally powerful in that arena. Science can try to explain how the Heavens move, but it isn't the sort of thing to explain why there are Heavens that move that way—science can also describe how the Heavens have moved and reached their present position, but not the "Why?" behind it. Science can describe how to make technology to make life more convenient, but not "What is the meaning of life?" Trying to ask science to answer "Why?" (or for that matter, "Who?" or any other truly interesting question besides "How?") is a bit like putting a book on a scale and asking the scale, "What does this book mean?" And there are indeed some people who will accept the scale's answer, 429.7425 grams, as the definitive answer to what the book means, and all the better because it is so *precise*.

But to say that much and then stop is to paint a deceptive picture. *Very* deceptive. Why?

Science at that point had progressed more than at any point in history, and its effects were being felt around the world. And science enjoyed both a profound prestige and a profound devotion. Many people did not know what "understanding nature" could mean besides "learning scientific descriptions of nature," which was a bit like not knowing what "understanding your best friend" could mean besides "learning the biochemical building blocks of your friend's body."

All this and more is true, yet this is not the most important truth. This was the Middle Age between ancient and human society and the technological, and in fact it was the early Middle Age. People were beginning to develop real technologies, the seeds of technology we would recognize, and could in primitive fashion jack into such a network as existed then. But all of this was embraced in a society that was ancient, ancient beyond measure. As you may have guessed, it is an error to misunderstand that society as an inexplicably crude version of real technological society. It is a fundamental error.

To really understand this society, you need to understand not its technology, but the sense in which it was ancient. I will call it 'medieval', but you must understand that the ancient element in that society outweighs anything we would recognize.

And even this is deceptive, not because a single detail is wrong, but because it is abstract. I will tell you about certain parts in an abstract fashion, but you must understand that in this world's thinking the concrete comes *before* the abstract. I will do my best to tell a story—not as they would tell one, because that would conceal as much as it would reveal, but taking their way of telling stories and adapting it so we can see what is going on.

For all of their best efforts to spoil it, all of them live on an exquisite garden in the thin film where the emptiness of space meets the barrier of rock—there is a nest, a cradle where they are held tightly, and even if some of those who are most trying to be scientific want to flee into the barren wastes of space and other planets hostile to their kind of life. And this garden itself has texture, an incredible spectrum of texture along its surface. Place is itself significant, and I cannot capture what this story would have been like had it been placed in Petaling Jaya in Malaysia, or Paris in France, or Cambridge in England. What are these? I don't know... I can say that Petaling

Jaya, Paris, and Cambridge are cities, but that would leave you knowing as much as you knew 5 milliseconds before I told you. And Malaysia, France, and England are countries, and now you know little besides being able to guess that a country is somehow capable of containing a city. Which is barely more than you knew before; the fact is that there is something very different between Petaling Jaya, Paris, and Cambridge. They have different wildlife and different places with land and water, but that is not nearly so interesting as the difference in people. I could say that people learn different skills, if I wanted to be very awkward and uninformative, but... the best way of saying it is that in our world, because there is nothing keeping minds apart... In that world, people have been separate so they don't even speak the same language. They almost have separate worlds. There is something common to all medievals, beyond what technology may bring, and people in other cities could find deep bonds with this story, but... Oh, there are many more countries than those I listed, and these countries have so many cities that you could spend your whole life travelling between cities and never see all of them. No, our world doesn't have this wealth. Wealthy as it is, it doesn't come close.

Petaling Jaya is a place of warm rainstorms, torrents of water falling from the sky, a place where a little stream of unscented water flows by the road, even if such a beautiful "open sewer" is not appreciated. Petaling Jaya is a place where people are less aware of time than in Cambridge or Paris and yet a place where people understand time better, because of reasons that are subtle and hard to understand. It draws people from three worlds in the grandeur that is Asia, and each of them brings treasures. The Chinese bring with them the practice of calling adults "Uncle" or "Aunt", my father's brother or my father's sister or my mother's brother or my mother's sister, which is to say, addresses them not only by saying that there is something great about them, but they are

"tied by blood"—a bond that I do not know how to explain, save to say that ancestry and origins are not the mechanism of how they came to be, or at least not just the mechanism of how they came to be. Ancestry and origins tell of the substance of who they are, and that is one more depth that cannot exist in our world with matter and mind separate. The Indians and Bumi Putras—if it is really only them, which is far from true—live a life of friendship and hospitality, which are human treasures that shine in them. What is hospitality, you ask? That is hard to answer; it seems that anything I can say will be deceptive. It means that if you have a space, and if you allow someone in that space, you serve that person, caring for every of his needs. That is a strange virtue—and it will sound stranger when I say that this is not endured as inexpedient, but something where people want to call others. Is it an economic exchange? That is beside the point; these things are at once the shadow cast by real hospitality, and at the same time the substance of hospitality itself, and you need to understand men before you can understand it. What about friendship? Here I am truly at a loss. I can only say that in the story that I am about to tell, what happens is the highest form of friendship.

Paris is, or at least has been, a place with a liquid, a drug, that temporarily causes a pleasant mood while changing behavior and muddling a person's thoughts. But to say that misses what that liquid is, in Paris or much else. To some it is very destructive, and the drug is dangerous if it is handled improperly. But that is the hinge to something that—in our world, no pleasure is ever dangerous. You or I have experienced pleasures that these minds could scarcely dream of. We can have whatever pleasure we want at any time. And in a very real sense no pleasure *means* anything. But in their world, with its weaker pleasures, every pleasure is connected to something. And this liquid, this pleasure, if taken too far, destroys people—which is a hinge, a doorway to

something. It means that they need to learn a self-mastery in using this liquid, and in using it many of them forge a beauty in themselves that affects all of life. And they live beautiful lives. Beautiful in many ways. They are like Norsemen of ages past, who sided with the good powers, not because the good powers were going to win, but because they wanted to side with the good powers and fight alongside them when the good powers lost and chaos ruled. It is a tragic beauty, and the tragedy is all the more real because it is unneeded, but it is beauty, and it is a beauty that could not exist if they knew the strength of good. And I have not spoken of the beauty of the language in Paris, with its melody and song, or of the artwork and statues, the Basilica of the Sacré-Coeur, or indeed of the tapestry that makes up the city.

Cambridge is what many of them would call a "medieval" village, meaning that it has stonework that looks to its members like the ancient world's architecture. To them this is a major difference; the ancient character of the buildings to them overwhelms the fact that they are buildings. To that medieval world, both the newest buildings and the ones they considered "medieval" had doorways, stairwells, rooms, windows, and passages. You or I would be struck by the ancient character of the oldest and newest buildings and the ancient character of the life they serve. But to these medievals, the fact that a doorway was built out of machine-made materials instead of having long ago been shaped from stone takes the door—the *door*—from being ancient to being a new kind of thing! And so in the quaintest way the medievals consider Cambridge a "medieval" village, not because they were all medievals, but because the ancient dimension to *architecture* was more ancient to them than the equally ancient ways of constructing spaces that were reflected in the "new" buildings. There was more to it than that, but...

That was not the most interesting thing about them. I know you were going to criticize me for saying that

hospitality was both a human treasure and something that contributed to the uniqueness of Petaling Jaya, but I need to do the same thing again. Politeness is... how can I describe it? Cynics describe politeness as being deceit, something where you learn a bunch of standard things to do and have to use them to hide the fact that you're offended, or bored, or want to leave, or don't like someone. And *all of that is true*—and deceptive. A conversation will politely begin with one person saying, "Hi, Barbara, how are you?" And Barbara will say, "Fine, George, how are you?" "Fine!" And the exact details seem almost arbitrary between cultures. This specific interaction is, on the surface, superficial and not necessarily true: people usually say they feel fine whether or not they really feel fine at all. And so politeness can be picked apart in this fashion, as if there's nothing else there, but *there is*. Saying "How are you?" opens a door, a door of concern. In one sense, what is given is very small. But if a person says, "I feel rotten," the other person is likely to listen. Barbara might only "give" George a little bit of chatter, but if he were upset, she would comfort him; if he were physically injured, she would call an ambulance to give him medical help; if he were hungry, she might buy him something to eat. But he only wants a little chat, so she only gives him a little chat—which is not really a little thing at all, but I'm going to pretend that it's small. Politeness stems from a concern for others, and is in actuality quite deep. The superficial "Hi, how are you?" is really not superficial at all. It is connected to a much deeper concern, and the exterior of rules is connected to a heart of concern. And Cambridge, which is a place of learning, and has buildings more ancient than what these medieval people usually see, is perhaps most significantly distinguished by its politeness.

But I have not been telling you a story. These observations may not be completely worthless, but they are still not a dynamic story. The story I'm about to tell

you is not in Petaling Jaya, nor in Paris, nor in Cambridge, nor in any of thousands of other worlds. And I would like to show you what the medieval society looks like in action. And so let's look at Peter.

Peter, after a long and arduous trek, opened the car door, got out, stretched, looked at the vast building before him, and listened as his father said, "We've done it! The rest should be easy, at least for today." Then Peter smiled, and smashed his right thumb in the car door.

Then suddenly they moved—their new plan was to get to a hospital. Not much later, Peter was in the Central DuPage Hospital emergency room, watching people who came in after him be treated before him—not because they had more clout, but because they had worse injuries. The building was immense—something like one of our biological engineering centers, but instead of engineering bodies according to a mind's specification, this used science to restore bodies that had been injured and harmed, and reduce people's suffering. And it was incredibly primitive; at its best, it helped the bodies heal itself. But you must understand that even if these people were far wealthier than most others in their tiny garden, they had scant resources by our standard, and they made a major priority to restore people whose bodies had problems. (If you think about it, this tells something about how they view the value of each body.) Peter was a strong and healthy young man, and it had been a while since he'd been in a hospital. He was polite to the people who were helping him, even though he wished he were anywhere else.

You're wondering why he deliberately smashed his thumb? Peter didn't deliberately smash his thumb. He was paying attention to several other things and shoved the door close while his thumb was in its path. His body is not simply a device controlled by his mind; they interact, and his mind can't do anything he wishes it to do—he can't add power to it. He thinks by working with a mind that

operates with real limitations and can overlook something in excitement—much like his body. If he achieves something, he doesn't just requisition additional mental power. He struggles within the capabilities of his own mind, and that means that when he achieves something with his mind, he *achieves* something. Yes, in a way that you or I cannot. Not only is his body in a very real sense more real to him than any of the bodies you or I have jacked into and swapped around, but his *mind* is more real. I'm not sure how to explain it.

Peter arrived for the second time well after check-in time, praying to be able to get in. After a few calls with a network that let him connect with other minds while keeping his body intact, a security officer came in, expressed sympathy about his bandaged thumb—what does 'sympathy' mean? It means that you share in another person's pain and make it less—and let him up to his room. The family moved his possessions from the car to his room and made his bed in a few minutes, and by the time it was down, the security guard had called the RA, who brought Peter his keys.

It was the wee hours of the morning when Peter looked at his new home for the second time, and tough as Peter was, the pain in his thumb kept the weary man from falling asleep. He was in as much pain as he'd been in for a while. What? Which part do you want explained? Pain is when the mind is troubled because the body is injured; it is a warning that the body needs to be taken care of. No, he can't turn it off just because he thinks it's served his purpose; again, you're not understanding the intimate link between mind and body. And the other thing... sleep is... Their small globe orbits a little star, and it spins as it turns. At any time, part of the planet faces the star, the sun, and part faces away, and on the globe, it is as if a moving wall comes, and all is light, then another wall comes, and it is dark. The globe has a rhythm of light and dark, a rhythm of day and night, and people live in

intimate attunement to this rhythm. The ancients moved about when it was light and slept when it was dark—to sleep, at its better moments, is to come fatigued and have body and mind rejuvenate themselves to awaken full of energy. The wealthier medievals have the ability to see by mechanical light, to awaken when they want and fall asleep when they want—and yet they are still attuned, profoundly attuned, to this natural cycle and all that goes with it. For that matter, Peter can stick a substance into his body that will push away the pain—and yet, for all these artificial escapes, medievals feel pain and usually take care of their bodies by heeding it, and medievals wake more or less when it is light and sleep more or less when it is dark. And they don't think of pain as attunement to their bodies—most of them wish they couldn't feel pain, and certainly don't think of pain as good—nor do more than a few of them think in terms of waking and sleeping to a natural rhythm... but so much of the primeval way of being human is so difficult to dislodge for the medievals.

He awoke when the light was ebbing, and after some preparations set out, wandering this way and that until he found a place to eat. The pain was much duller, and he made his way to a selection of different foods—meant not only to nourish but provide a pleasant taste—and sat down at a table. There were many people about; he would not eat in a cell by himself, but at a table with others in a great hall.

A young man said, "Hi, I'm John." Peter began to extend his hand, then looked at his white bandaged thumb and said, "Excuse me for not shaking your hand. I am Peter."

A young woman said, "I'm Mary. I saw you earlier and was hoping to see you more."

Peter wondered about something, then said, "I'll drink for that," reached with his right hand, grabbed a glass vessel full of carbonated water with sugar, caffeine, and assorted unnatural ingredients, and then winced in pain,

spilling the fluid on the table.

Everybody at the table moved. A couple of people dodged the flow of liquid; others stopped what they were doing, rushing to take earth toned objects made from the bodies of living trees (napkins), which absorbed the liquid and were then shipped to be preserved with other unwanted items. Peter said, "I keep forgetting I need to be careful about my thumb," smiled, grabbed another glass with fluid cows had labored to create, until his wet left hand slipped and he spilled the organic fluid all over his food.

Peter stopped, sat back, and then laughed for a while. "This is an interesting beginning to my college education."

Mary said, "I noticed you managed to smash your thumb in a car door without saying any words you regret. What else has happened?"

Peter said, "Nothing great; I had to go to the ER, where I had to wait, before they could do something about my throbbing thumb. I got back at 4:00 AM and couldn't get to sleep for a long time because I was in so much pain. Then I overslept my alarm and woke up naturally in time for dinner. How about you?"

Mary thought for a second about the people she met. Peter could see the sympathy on her face.

John said, "Wow. That's nasty."

Peter said, "I wish we couldn't feel pain. Have you thought about how nice it would be to live without pain?"

Mary said, "I'd like that."

John said, "Um..."

Mary said, "What?"

John said, "Actually, there are people who don't feel pain, and there's a name for the condition. You've heard of it."

Peter said, "I haven't heard of that before."

John said, "Yes you have. It's called leprosy."

Peter said, "What do you mean by 'leprosy'? I thought leprosy was a disease that ravaged the body."

John said, "It is. But that is only because it destroys the ability to feel pain. The way it works is very simple. We all get little nicks and scratches, and because they hurt, we show extra sensitivity. Our feet start to hurt after a long walk, so without even thinking about it we... shift things a little, and keep anything really bad from happening. That pain you are feeling is your body's way of asking room to heal so that the smashed thumbnail (or whatever it is) that hurts so terribly now won't leave you permanently maimed. Back to feet, a leprosy patient will walk exactly the same way and get wounds we'd never even think of for taking a long walk. All the terrible injuries that make leprosy a feared disease happen *only* because leprosy keeps people from feeling pain."

Peter looked at his thumb, and his stomach growled.

John said, "I'm full. Let me get a drink for you, and then I'll help you drink it."

Mary said, "And I'll get you some dry food. We've already eaten; it must—"

Peter said, "Please, I've survived much worse. It's just a bit of pain."

John picked up a clump of wet napkins and threatened to throw it at Peter before standing up and walking to get something to drink. Mary followed him.

Peter sat back and just laughed.

John said, "We have some time free after dinner; let's just wander around campus."

They left the glass roofed building and began walking around. There were vast open spaces between buildings. They went first to "Blanchard", a building they described as "looking like a castle." Blanchard, a tall ivory colored edifice, built of rough limestone, which overlooked a large expanse adorned with a carefully tended and *living* carpet, had been modelled after a building in a much older institution called Oxford, and... this is probably the time to explain certain things about this kind of organization.

You and I simply requisition skills. If I were to

imagine what it would mean to educate those people—or at least give skills; the concept of 'education' is slightly different from either inserting skills or inserting knowledge into a mind, and I don't have the ability to explain exactly what the distinction is here, but I will say that it is significant—then the obvious way is to simply make a virtual place on the network where people can be exposed to knowledge. And that model would become phenomenally popular within a few years; people would pursue an education that was a niche on such a network as they had, and would be achieved by weaving in these computer activities with the rest of their lives.

But this place preserved an ancient model of education, where disciples would come to live in a single place, which was in a very real sense its own universe, and meet in ancient, face-to-face community with their mentors and be shaped in more than what they know and can do. Like so many other things, it was ancient, using computers here and there and even teaching people the way of computers while avoiding what we would assume comes with computers.

But these people liked that building, as contrasted to buildings that seemed more modern, because it seemed to convey an illusion of being in another time, and let you forget that you were in a modern era.

After some wandering, Peter and those he had just met looked at the building, each secretly pretending to be in a more ancient era, and went through an expanse with a fountain in the center, listened to some music, and ignored clouds, trees, clusters of people who were sharing stories, listening, thinking, joking, and missing home, in order to come to something exotic, namely a rotating platform with a mockup of a giant mastodon which had died before the end of the last ice age, and whose bones had been unearthed in a nearby excavation. Happy to have seen something exotic, they ignored buildings which have a human-pleasing temperature the year round, other

people excited to have seen new friends, toys which sailed through the air on the same principles as an airplane's wings, a place where artistic pieces were being drawn into being, a vast, stonehard pavement to walk, and a spectrum of artefacts for the weaving of music.

Their slow walk was interrupted when John looked at a number on a small machine he had attached to his wrist, and interpreted it to mean that it was time for the three of them to stop their leisured enjoyment of the summer night and move with discomfort and haste to one specific building—they all were supposed to go to the building called Fischer. After moving over and shifting emotionally from being relaxed and joyful to being bothered and stressed, they found that they were all on a brother and sister floor, and met their leaders.

Paul, now looking considerably more coherent than when he procured Peter's keys, announced, "Now, for the next exercise, I'll be passing out toothpicks. I want you to stand in two lines, guy-girl-guy-girl, and pass a lifesaver down the line. If your team passes the lifesaver to the end first, you win. Oh, and if you drop the lifesaver your team has to start over, so don't drop it."

People shuffled, and shortly Peter was standing in line, looking over the shoulder of a girl he didn't know, and silently wishing he weren't playing this game. He heard a voice say, "Go!" and then had an intermittent view of a tiny sugary torus passing down the line and the two faces close to each other trying simultaneously to get close enough to pass the lifesaver, and control the clumsy, five centimeter long toothpicks well enough to transfer the candy. Sooner than he expected the girl turned around, almost losing the lifesaver on her toothpick, and then began a miniature dance as they clumsily tried to synchronize the ends of their toothpicks. This took unpleasantly long, and Peter quickly banished a thought of "This is almost kissing! That can't be what's intended." Then he turned around, trying both to rush and not to

rush at the same time, and repeated the same dance with the young woman standing behind him—Mary! It was only after she turned away that Peter realized her skin had changed from its alabaster tone to pale rose.

Their team won, and there was a short break as the next game was organized. Peter heard bits of conversation: "This has been a bummer; I've gotten two papercuts this week." "—and then I—" "What instruments do you—" "I'm from France too! *Tu viens de Paris?*" "Really? You—" Everybody seemed to be chattering, and Peter wished he could be in one of—actually, several of those conversations at once.

Paul's voice cut in and said, "For this next activity we are going to form a human circle. With your team, stand in a circle, and everybody reach in and grab another hand with each hand. Then hold on tight; when I say, "Go," you want to untangle yourselves, without letting go. The first team to untangle themselves wins!"

Peter reached in, and found each of his hands clasped in a solid, masculine grip. Then the race began, and people jostled and tried to untangle themselves. This was a laborious process and, one by one, every other group freed itself, while Peter's group seemed stuck on—someone called and said, "I think we're knotted!" As people began to thin out, Paul looked with astonishment and saw that they were indeed knotted. "A special prize to them, too, for managing the best tangle!"

"And now, we'll have a three-legged race! Gather into pairs, and each two of you take a burlap sack. Then—" Paul continued, and with every game, the talk seemed to flow more. When the finale finished, Peter found himself again with John and Mary and heard the conversations flowing around him: "Really? You too?" "But you don't understand. Hicks have a slower pace of life; we enjoy things without all the things you city dwellers need for entertainment. And we learn resourceful ways to—" "—and only at Wheaton would the administration *forbid* dancing

while *requiring* the games we just played and—" Then Peter lost himself in a conversation that continued long into the night. He expected to be up at night thinking about all the beloved people he left at home, but Peter was too busy thinking about John's and Mary's stories.

The next day Peter woke up when his machine played a hideous sound, and groggily trudged to the dining hall to eat some chemically modified grains and drink water that had been infused with traditionally roasted beans. There were pills he could have taken that would have had the effect he was looking for, but he savored the beverage, and after sitting at a table without talking, bounced around from beautiful building to beautiful building, seeing sights for the first time, and wishing he could avoid all that to just get to his advisor.

Peter found the appropriate hallway, wandered around nervously until he found a door with a yellowed plaque that said "Julian Johnson," knocked once, and pushed the door open. A white-haired man said, "Peter Jones? How are you? Do come in... What can I do for you?"

Peter pulled out a sheet of paper, an organic surface used to retain colored trails and thus keep small amounts of information inscribed so that the "real" information is encoded in a personal way. No, they don't need to be trained to have their own watermark in this encoding.

Peter looked down at the paper for a moment and said, "I'm sorry I'm late. I need you to write what courses I should take and sign here. Then I can be out of your way."

The old man sat back, drew a deep breath, and relaxed into a fatherly smile. Peter began to wonder if his advisor was going to say anything at all. Then Prof. Johnson motioned towards an armchair, as rich and luxurious as his own, and then looked as if he remembered something and offered a bowl full of candy. "Sit down, sit down, and make yourself comfortable. May I interest you in candy?" He picked up an engraved metal bowl and held it out while

Peter grabbed a few Lifesavers.

Prof. Johnson sat back, silent for a moment, and said, "I'm sorry I'm out of butterscotch; that always seems to disappear. Please sit down, and tell me about yourself. We can get to that form in a minute. One of the privileges of this job is that I get to meet interesting people. Now, where are you from?"

Peter said, "I'm afraid there's not much that's interesting about me. I'm from a small town downstate that doesn't have anything to distinguish itself. My amusements have been reading, watching the cycle of the year, oh, and running. Not much interesting in that. Now which classes should I take?"

Prof. Johnson sat back and smiled, and Peter became a little less tense. "You run?"

Peter said, "Yes; I was hoping to run on the track this afternoon, after the lecture. I've always wanted to run on a real track."

The old man said, "You know, I used to run myself, before I became an official Old Geezer and my orthopaedist told me my knees couldn't take it. So I have to content myself with swimming now, which I've grown to love. Do you know about the Prairie Path?"

Peter said, "No, what's that?"

Prof. Johnson said, "Years ago, when I ran, I ran through the areas surrounding the College—there are a lot of beautiful houses. And, just south of the train tracks with the train you can hear now, there's a path before you even hit the street. You can run, or bike, or walk, on a path covered with fine white gravel, with trees and prairie plants on either side. It's a lovely view." He paused, and said, "Any ideas what you want to do after Wheaton?"

Peter said, "No. I don't even know what I want to major in."

Prof. Johnson said, "A lot of students don't know what they want to do. Are you familiar with Career Services? They can help you get an idea of what kinds of things you

like to do."

Peter looked at his watch and said, "It's chapel time."

Prof. Johnson said, "Relax. I can write you a note."

Peter began to relax again, and Prof. Johnson continued, "Now you like to read. What do you like to read?"

Peter said, "Newspapers and magazines, and I read this really cool book called *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*. Oh, and I like the Bible."

Prof. Johnson said, "I do too. What do you like about it most?"

"I like the stories in the Old Testament."

"One general tip: here at Wheaton, we have different kinds of professors—"

Peter said, "Which ones are best?"

Prof. Johnson said, "Different professors are best for different students. Throughout your tenure at Wheaton, ask your friends and learn which professors have teaching styles that you learn well with and mesh well with. Consider taking other courses from a professor you like. Now we have a lot of courses which we think expose you to new things and stretch you—people come back and see that these courses are best. Do you like science?"

"I like it; I especially liked a physics lab."

Prof. Johnson took a small piece of paper from where it was attached to a stack with a strange adhesive that had "failed" as a solid adhesive, but provided a uniquely useful way to make paper that could be attached to a surface with a slight push and then be detached with a gentle pull, remarkably enough without damage to the paper or the surface. He began to think, and flip through a book, using a technology thousands of years old at its heart. "Have you had calculus?" Prof. Johnson restrained himself from launching into a discussion of the grand, Utopian vision for "calculus" as it was first imagined and how different a conception it had from anything that would be considered "mathematics" today. Or should he go into that? He wavered, and then realized Peter had answered his

question. "Ok," Prof. Johnson said, "the lab physics class unfortunately requires that you've had calculus. Would you like to take calculus now? Have you had geometry, algebra, and trigonometry?"

Peter said, "Yes, I did, but I'd like a little break from that now. Maybe I could take calculus next semester."

"Fair enough. You said you liked to read."

"Magazines and newspapers."

"Those things deal with the unfolding human story. I wonder if you'd like to take world civilization now, or a political science course."

"History, but why study world history? Why can't I just study U.S. history?"

Prof. Johnson said, "The story of our country is intertwined with that of our world. I think you might find that some of the things in world history are a lot closer to home than you think—and we have some real storytellers in our history department."

"That sounds interesting. What else?"

"The Theology of Culture class is one many students find enjoyable, and it helps build a foundation for Old and New Testament courses. Would you be interested in taking it for A quad or B quad, the first or second half of the semester?"

"Could I do both?"

"I wish I could say yes, but this course only lasts half the semester. The other half you could take Foundations of Wellness—you could do running as homework!"

"I think I'll do that first, and then Theology of Culture. That should be new," Peter said, oblivious to how tightly connected he was to theology and culture. "What else?"

Prof. Johnson said, "We have classes where people read things that a lot of people have found really interesting. Well, that could describe several classes, but I was thinking about Classics of Western Literature or Literature of the Modern World."

Peter said, "Um... Does Classics of Western Literature

cover ancient and medieval literature, and Literature of the Modern World cover literature that isn't Western? Because if they do, I'm not sure I could connect with it."

Prof. Johnson relaxed into his seat, a movable support that met the contours of his body. Violating convention somewhat, he had a chair for Peter that was as pleasant to rest in as his own. "You know, a lot of people think that. But you know what?"

Peter said, "What?"

"There is something human that crosses cultures. That is why the stories have been selected. Stories written long ago, and stories written far away, can have a lot to connect with."

"Ok. How many more courses should I take?"

"You're at 11 credits now; you probably want 15. Now you said that you like *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*. I'm wondering if you would also like a philosophy course."

Peter said, "*Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* is... I don't suppose there are any classes that use that. Or are there? I've heard Pirsig isn't given his fair due by philosophers."

Prof. Johnson said, "If you approach one of our philosophy courses the way you approach *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, I think you'll profit from the encounter. I wonder if our Issues and Worldviews in Philosophy might interest you. I'm a big fan of thinking worldviewishly, and our philosophers have some pretty interesting things to say."

Peter asked, "What does 'worldviewishly' mean?"

Prof. Johnson said, "It means thinking in terms of worldviews. A worldview is the basic philosophical framework that gives shape to how we view the world. Our philosophers will be able to help you understand the basic issues surrounding worldviews and craft your own Christian worldview. You may find this frees you from the Enlightenment's secularizing influence—and if you don't

know what the Enlightenment is now, you will learn to understand it, and its problems, and how you can be free of them." He spoke with the same simplistic assurance of artificial intelligence researchers who, seeing the power of computers and recognizing how simple certain cognitive feats are for humans, assumed that it was only a matter of time that artificial intelligence would "bridge the gap"—failing to recognize the tar pit of the peaks of intelligence that seem so deceptively simple and easy to human phenomenology. For computers could often defeat the best human players at chess—as computerlike a human skill as one might reasonably find—but deciphering the language of a children's book or walking through an unfamiliar room, so easy to humans, seemed more difficult for computers the more advanced research began. Some researchers believed that the artificial intelligence project had uncovered the non-obvious significance of a plethora of things humans take for granted—but the majority still believed that what seemed trivial for humans must be the sort of thinking a computer can do, because there is no other kind of thinking... and an isomorphic simplicity, an apparent and deceptive simplicity much like this one, made it seem as if ideas were all that really mattered: not all that existed, but all that had an important influence. Prof. Johnson did not consciously understand how the Enlightenment worldview—or, more accurately, the Enlightenment—created the possibility of seeing worldviews that way, nor did he see how strange the idea of crafting one's own worldview would seem to pre-Enlightenment Christians. He did not realize that his own kindness towards Peter was not simply because he agreed with certain beliefs, but because of a deep and many-faceted way in which he had walked for decades, and walked well. It was with perfect simplicity that he took this way for granted, as artificial intelligence researchers took for granted all the things which humans did so well they seemed to come naturally, and framed worldvewish

thought as carrying with it everything he assumed from his way.

Peter said, "Ok. Well, I'll take those classes. It was good to meet you."

Prof. Johnson looked over a document that was the writeup of a sort of game, in which one had a number of different rooms that were of certain sizes, and certain classes had requirements about what kind of room they needed for how long, and the solution involved not only solving the mathematical puzzle, but meeting with teachers and caring for their concerns, longstanding patterns, and a variety of human dimensions derisively labelled as "political." Prof. Johnson held in his hands the schedule with the official solution for that problem, and guided Peter to an allowable choice of class sections, taking several different actions that were considered "boring paperwork."

Prof. Johnson said, "I enjoyed talking with you. Please do take some more candy—put a handful in your pocket or something. I just want to make one more closing comment. I want to see you succeed. Wheaton wants to see you succeed. There are some rough points and problems along the way, and if you bring them to me I can work with them and try to help you. If you want to talk with your RA or our chaplain or someone else, that's fine, but please... my door is *always* open. And it was good to meet you too! Goodbye!"

Peter walked out, completely relaxed.

The next activity, besides nourishing himself with lunch (and eating, sleeping, and many other activities form a gentle background rhythm to the activities people are more conscious of. I will not describe each time Peter eats and sleeps, even though the 100th time in the story he eats with his new friends is as significant as the first, because I will be trying to help you see it their way), requires some explanation.

The term "quest," to the people here, is associated

with an image of knights in armor, and a body of literature from writers like Chretien de Troyes and Sir Thomas Mallory who described King Arthur and his knights. In Chretien de Troyes, the knight goes off in various adventures, often quests where he is attempting different physical feats. In Sir Thomas Mallory, a new understanding of quests is introduced, in the quest for the holy grail—a legendary treasure which I cannot here explain save to say that it profoundly altered the idea of a quest, and the quest took a large enough place in many people's consciousness that it is used as a metaphor of the almost unattainable object of an ultimate pursuit (so that physicists would say that a grand unified theory which crystallizes all physical laws into a few simple equations is the "holy grail of physics"), and that the holy grail is itself in the shadow of a greater treasure, and this treasure was one many people in fact had possessed (some after great struggle, while others had never known a time when they were without it). In Mallory in particular the quest can be more than a physical task; most of Arthur's knights could not reach the holy grail because of—they weren't physical blemishes and they weren't really mental blemishes either, but what they were is hard to say. The whole topic (knights, quests, the holy grail...) connects to something about that world that is beyond my ability to convey; suffice it to say that it is connected with one more dimension we don't have here.

Peter, along with another group of students, went out on a quest. The object of this quest was to acquire seven specific items, on conditions which I will explain below:

1. "A dog biscuit." In keeping with a deeply human trait, the food they prepare is not simply what they judge adequate to sustain the body, but meant to give pleasure, in a sense adorned, because eating is not to them simply a biological need. They would also get adorned food to give pleasure to organisms

they kept, including dogs, which include many different breeds which in turn varied from being natural sentries protecting territories to a welcoming committee of one which would give a visitor an exuberant greeting just because he was there.

2. "An M16 rifle's spent shell casing." That means the used remnant after... wait a little bit. I need to go a lot farther back to explain this one.

You will find something deceptively familiar in that in that universe, people strategically align resources and then attack their opponents, usually until a defeat is obvious. And if you look for what is deceptive, it will be a frustrating search, because even if the technologies involved are primitive, it is a match of strategy, tactics, and opposition.

What makes it different is that this is not a recreation or an art form, but something many of them consider the worst evil that can happen, or among the worst. The resources that are destroyed, the bodies—in our world, it is simply what is involved in the game, but many of them consider it an eternal loss.

Among the people we will be meeting, people may be broken down into "pacifists" who believe that war is always wrong, and people who instead of being pure pacifists try to have a practical way of pursuing pacifist goals: the disagreement is not whether one should have a war for amusement's sake (they both condemn that), but what one should do when not having a war looks even more destructive than having a war. And that does not do

justice to either side of the debate, but what I want to emphasize that to both of them this is not simply a game or one form of recreation; it is something to avoid at almost *any* cost.

A knight was someone who engaged in combat, an elite soldier riding an animal called a horse. In Chretien de Troye's day and Mallory's day, the culture was such that winning a fight was important, but fighting according to "chivalry" was more important. Among other things, chivalry meant that they would only use simple weapons based on mechanical principles—no poison—and they wouldn't even use weapons with projectiles, like arrows and (armor piercing) crossbow bolts. In practice that only meant rigid piercing and cutting weapons, normally swords and spears. And there was a lot more. A knight was to protect women and children.

The form that chivalry took in Peter's day allowed projectile weapons, although poison was still not allowed, along with biological, thermonuclear, and other weapons which people did not wish to see in war, and the fight to disfigure the tradition's understanding women had accorded them meant that women could fight and be killed like men, although people worked to keep children out of warfare, and in any case the "Geneva Convention", as the code of chivalry was called, maintained a sharp distinction between combatants and non-combatants, the latter of which were to be protected.

The specific projectile weapon carried by most members of the local army was called an M16 rifle,

which fired surprisingly small .22 bullets—I say "surprisingly" because if you were a person fighting against them and you were hit, you would be injured but quite probably not killed.

This was intentional. (Yes, they knew how to cause an immediate kill.)

Part of it is the smaller consideration that if you killed an enemy soldier immediately, you took one soldier out of action; on the other hand, if you wounded an enemy soldier, you took three soldiers out of action. But this isn't the whole reason. The much bigger part of the reason is that their sense of chivalry (if it was really just chivalry; they loved their enemies) meant that even in their assaults they tried to subdue with as little killing as possible.

There were people training with the army in that community (no, not Peter; Peter was a pure pacifist) who trained, with M16 rifles, not because they wanted to fight, but as part of a not entirely realistic belief that if they trained hard enough, their achievement would deter people who would go to war. And the "Crusader battalion" (the Crusaders were a series of people who fought to defend Peter's spiritual ancestors from an encroaching threat that would have destroyed them) had a great sense of chivalry, even if none of them used the word "chivalry".

3. "A car bumper." A car bumper is a piece of armor placed on the front and back of cars so that they can sustain low-velocity collisions without damage. (At higher velocities, newer cars are designed to serve as a buffer so that "crumple zones" will be crushed,

absorbing enough of the impact so that the "passenger cage" reduces injuries sustained by people inside; this is part of a broader cultural bent towards minimizing preventable death because of what they believe about one human life.) Not only is a car bumper an unusual item to give, it is heavy and awkward enough that people tend not to carry such things with them—even the wealthy ones tend to be extraordinarily lightly encumbered.

4. "An antique." It is said, "The problem with England is that they believe 100 miles is a long distance, and the problem with America is that they believe 100 years is a long time." An antique—giving the rule without all the special cases and exceptions, which is to say giving the rule as if it were not human—is something over 100 years old. To understand this, you must appreciate that it does not include easily available rocks, many of which are millions or billions of years old, and it is not based on the elementary particles that compose something (one would have to search hard to find something *not* made out of elementary particles almost as old as the universe). The term "antique" connotes rarity, and in a sense something out of the ordinary; that people's way is concerned with "New! New! New!" and it is hard to find an artifact that was created more than 100 years ago, which is what was intended.

This quest is all the more interesting because there is an "unwritten rule" that items will be acquired by asking, not by theft or even purchase—and, as most antiques are valuable, it would be odd for someone you've just met—and therefore with whom you have only the general human bond but not the special bond of friendship—to give you such an item, even

if most of the littler things in life are acquired economically while the larger things can only be acquired by asking.

5. "A note from a doctor, certifying that you do not have bubonic plague." Intended as a joke, this refers to a health, safeguarded by their medicine, which keeps them from a dreadful disease which tore apart societies some centuries ago: that sort of thing wasn't considered a live threat because of how successful their medicine was (which is why it could be considered humorous).
6. "A burning piece of paper which no one in your group lit. (Must be presented in front of Fischer and not brought into the building.)" This presents a physical challenge, in that there is no obvious way to transport a burning piece of paper—or what people characteristically envision as a burning piece of paper—from almost anywhere else to in front of Fischer.
7. "A sheet of paper with a fingerpaint handprint from a kindergartener."

"Kindergarten" was the first year of their formal education, and a year of preparation before students were ready to enter their first grade. What did this society teach at its first, required year? Did it teach extraordinarily abstract equations, or cosmological theory, or literary archetypes, or how to use a lathe?

All of these could be taught later on, and for that matter there is reason to value all of them. But the very beginning held something different. It taught

people to take their turn and share; it taught people "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you," the Golden Rule by which their great Teachers crystallized so much wisdom. All of this work and play, some of the most advanced lessons they could learn, were placed, not at the end, but at the *beginning* of their education.

That is what kindergarten was. What was a kindergartener? The true but uninformative answer would be "a person in kindergarten."

To get past that uninformative answer, I need to stress that their minds are bound up with organic life—they did *not* spring, fully formed, as you and I did. In most complex organisms, there is a process that transforms a genetically complete organism of just one cell to become a mature member of the species; among humans, that process is one of the longest and most complex. During that time their minds are developing as well as their bodies; in that regard they are not simply in harmony with the natural world this society believes it is separate from... but one of its best examples.

But to say that alone is to flatten out something interesting... even more interesting than the process of biological mental development is the place that society has for something called "childhood". Not all cultures have that concept—and again I am saying "culture" without explaining what it means. I can't. Not all societies understand "childhood" as this society does; to many, a child is a smaller and less capable adult, or even worse, a nonentity. But in this culture, childhood is a distinctive time, and a child, including a kindergardener, is something

special—almost a different species of mind. Their inability to healthily sustain themselves is met, not always with scorn, but with a giving of support and protection—and this is not always a grudging duty, but something that can bring joy. They are viewed as innocent, which is certainly not true, and something keeps many people from resenting them when they prove that they are not innocent by doing things that would not be tolerated if an adult did it. And the imperviousness of this belief to contrary experience is itself the shadow of the whole place of childhood as a time to play and learn and explore worlds of imagination and the things most adults take for granted. And many adults experience a special pleasure, and much more than a pleasure, from the company of children, a pleasure that is tied to something much deeper.

This pleasure shines through even a handprint left with "fingerprints," a way of doing art reserved for children, so that this physical object is itself a symbol of all that is special about childhood, and like symbols of that world carries with it what is evoked: seeing such a handprint is a little like seeing a kindergartener.

And they were off. They stopped for a brief break and annoyedly watched the spectacle of over a hundred linked metal carts carrying a vast quantity of material, and walked in and out of the surrounding neighborhoods. Their knocks on the door met a variety of warm replies. Before long, they had a handprint from a kindergartener, a dog biscuit (and some very enthusiastic attention from a kind dog!), a note from an off-duty doctor (who did not examine them, but simply said that if they had the bubonic plague there would be buboes bulging from them in an obvious way), a cigarette lighter and a sheet of paper

(unlit), a twisted bumper (which Peter surprised people by flipping over his shoulder), and finally a spent shell casing from a military science professor. When they climbed up "Fischer beach," John handed the paper and lighter to his RA and said, "Would you light this?" It was with an exhausted satisfaction that they went to dinner and had entirely amiable conversation with other equally students who scant minutes ago had been their competitors.

When dinner was finished, Peter and Mary sat for a while in exhausted silence, before climbing up for the next scheduled activity—but I am at a loss for how to describe the next scheduled activity. To start with, I will give a deceptive description. If you can understand this activity, you will have understood a great deal more of what is in that world that doesn't fit in ours.

Do I have to give a deceptive description, in that any description in our terms will be more or less deceptive? I wasn't trying to make that kind of philosophical point; I wasn't trying to make a philosophical point at all. I am choosing a description of the next scheduled activity that is more deceptive than it needs to be.

When students studied an academic discipline called "physics," the curriculum was an initiation into progressively stranger and more esoteric doctrines, presented at the level which students were able to receive them. Students were first taught "Newtonian mechanics" (which openly regarded as false), before being initiated into "Einstein's relativity" at the next level (which was also considered false, but was widely believed to be closer to the truth). Students experienced a "night and day" difference between Newtonian mechanics and all higher order mysteries. If you were mathematically adept enough to follow the mathematics, then Newton was easy because he agreed with good old common sense, and Einstein and even stranger mysteries were hard to understand because they turned common sense on its head. Newton was straightforward while the others were profoundly

counterintuitive. So Einstein, unlike Newton, required a student to mentally engulf something quite alien to normal, common sense ways of thinking about the world around oneself. Hence one could find frustrated student remarks about, "And God said, 'Let there be light!' And there was Newton. Then the Devil howled, 'Let Einstein be!' and restored the status quo."

Under this way of experiencing physics, Newton simply added mathematical formality to what humans always knew: everything in space fit in one long and continuous three-dimensional grid, and time could be measured almost as if it were a line, and so Einstein was simply making things more difficult and further from humans' natural perceptions when his version of a fully mathematical model softened the boundaries of space and time so that one could no longer treat it as if it had a grid for a skeleton.

Someone acquainted with the history of science might make the observation that it was not so much that Newton's mechanics were a mathematically rigorous formalization of how people experienced space and time, but that how people experienced space and time had *become* a hazy and non-mathematical paraphrase of Newtonian mechanics: in other words, some students some students learned Newtonian mechanics easily, not because Newtonian physics was based on common sense, but because their "common sense" had been profoundly shaped by Newtonian physics.

This seemingly pedantic distinction was deeply tied to how the organic was being extinguished in their society.

I suspect you are thinking, "What other mathematical model was it based on instead?" And that's why you're having trouble guessing the answer.

The answer is related to the organic. Someone who knew Newton and his colleagues, and what they were rebelling against, could get a sense of something very different even without understanding what besides

mathematics would undergird what space meant to them. In a certain sense, Newton forcefully stated the truth, but in a deceptive way. He worked hard to forge a concept of cold matter, pointing out that nature was not human—and it was a philosophical error to think of nature as human, but it was not nearly so great as one might think. Newton and his colleagues powerfully stressed that humans were superior to the rest of the physical world (which was not human), that they were meant not simply to be a part of nature but to conquer and rule it. And in so doing they attacked an equally great truth, that not only other life but even "inanimate" matter was kin to humans—lesser kin, perhaps, but humans and the rest of the natural world formed a continuity. They obscured the wisdom that the lordship humans were to exercise was not of a despot controlling something worthless, but the mastery of the crowning jewel of a treasure they had been entrusted to them. They introduced the concept of "raw material", something as foreign to their thinking as... I can't say what our equivalent would be, because everything surrounding "raw material" is so basic to us, and what they believed instead, their organic perception, is foreign to us. They caused people to forget that, while it would be a philosophical error to literally regard the world as human, it would be much graver to believe it is fundamentally described as inert, cold matter. And even when they had succeeded in profoundly influencing their cultures, so that people consciously believed in cold matter to a large degree, vestiges of the ancient experience survived in the medieval. It is perhaps not a coincidence that hundreds of years since Newton, in Newton's own "mother tongue" (English), the words for "matter" and "mother" both sprung from the same ancient root word.

The Newtonian conception of space had displaced to some degree the older conception of place, a conception which was less concerned with how far some place was from other different places, and more concerned with a

sort of color or, to some extent, meaning. The older conception also had a place for some things which couldn't really be stated under the new conception: people would say, "You can't be in two places at once." What they meant by that was to a large degree something different, "Your body cannot be at two different spatial positions at the same time." This latter claim was deceptive, because it was true so far as it goes, but it was a very basic fact of life that people could be in two places at once. The entire point of the next scheduled activity was to be in two places at once.

Even without describing what the other place was (something which could barely be suggested even in that world) and acknowledging that the point of the activity was to be in two places at once, this description of that activity would surprise many of the people there, and disturb those who could best sense the other place. The next scheduled activity was something completely ordinary to them, a matter of fact event that held some mystery, and something that would not occur to them as being in two places at once. The activity of being present in two or more places at once was carried on, on a tacit level, even when people had learned to conflate place with mathematical position. One such activity was confused with what we do when we remember: when we remember, we recall data from storage, while they cause the past to be present. The words, "This do in remembrance of me," from a story that was ancient but preserved in the early medieval period we are looking at, had an unquestioned meaning of, "Cause me to be present by doing this," but had suffered under a quite different experience of memory, so that to some people it meant simply to go over data about a person who had been present in the past but could not be present then.

But this activity was not remembering. Or at least, it was not *just* remembering. And this leaves open the difficulty of explaining how it was ordinary to them. It was theoretically in complete continuity with the rest of their

lives, although it would be more accurate to say that the rest of their lives were theoretically in complete continuity with it. This activity was in a sense the most human, and the most organic, in that in it they led the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, the fish of the sea, the plants, the rocks, the mountains, and the seas in returning to the place they came from. This description would also likely astonish the people who were gathered in a painted brick room, sitting on carpet and on movable perches, and seeing through natural light mixed with flickering fluorescent lights. Not one of them was thinking about "nature."

What went on there was in a very real sense mediocre. Each activity was broken down, vulgarized, compared to what it could be—which could not obliterate what was going on. When they were songs, they were what were called "7-11" songs, a pejorative term which meant songs with seven words repeated eleven times. There was a very real sense in which the event was diminished by the music, but even when you factor in every diminishing force, there was something going on there, something organic and more than organic, which you and I do not understand—for that matter, which many people in that world do not understand.

Archon was silent for a long time.

Ployon said, "What is it?"

Archon said, "I can't do it. I can't explain this world. All I've really been doing is taking the pieces of that world that are a bit like ours. You've been able to understand much of it because I haven't tried to convey several things that are larger than our world. 'God' is still a curious and exotic appendage that isn't connected to anything, not really; I haven't been able to explain, really explain, what it is to be male and female unities, or what masculinity and femininity are. There are a thousand things, and... I've

been explaining what three-dimensional substance is to a two-dimensional world, and the way I've been doing it is to squash it into two dimensions, and make it understandable by removing from it everything that makes it three dimensional. Or almost everything..."

"How would a three dimensional being, a person from that world, explain the story?"

"But it wouldn't. A three dimensional being wouldn't collapse a cube into a square to make it easier for itself to understand; that's something someone who couldn't free itself from reading two dimensional thinking into three dimensions would do. You're stuck in two dimensions. So am I. That's why I failed, utterly failed, to explain the "brother-sister floor fellowship", the next scheduled activity. And my failure is structural. It's like I've been setting out to copy a living, moving organism by sculpturing something that looks like it out of steel. And what I've been doing is making intricate copies of its every contour, and painting the skin and fur exactly the same color, and foolishly hoping it will come alive. And this is something I can't make by genetic engineering."

"But how would someone from that world explain the story? Even if I can't understand it, I want to know."

"But people from that world don't explain stories. A story isn't something you *explain*; it's something that may be told, shared, but usually it is a social error to explain a story, because a story participates in human life and telling a story connects one human to another. And so it's a fundamental error to think a story is something you convey by explaining it—like engineering a robotic body for an animal so you can allow it to have a body. I have failed because I was trying something a mind could only fail at."

"Then can you tell the story, like someone from that world would tell it?"

Peter and Mary both loved to run, but for different reasons. Peter was training himself for various races; he had not joined track, as he did in high school, but there were other races. Mary ran to feel the sun and wind and rain. And, without any conscious effort, they found themselves running together down the prairie path together, and Peter clumsily learning to match his speed to hers. And, as time passed, they talked, and talked, and talked, and talked, and their runs grew longer.

When the fall break came, they both joined a group going to the northwoods of Wisconsin for a program that was half-work and half-play. And each one wrote a letter home about the other. Then Peter began his theology of culture class, and said, "This is what I want to study." Mary did not have a favorite class, at least not that she realized, until Peter asked her what her favorite class was and she said, "Literature."

When Christmas came, they went to their respective homes and spent the break thinking about each other, and they talked about this when they returned. They ended the conversation, or at least they thought they did, and then each hurried back to catch the other and say one more thing, and then the conversation turned out to last much longer, and ended with a kiss.

Valentine's Day was syrupy. It was trite enough that their more romantically inclined friends groaned, but it did not seem at all trite or syrupy to them. As Peter's last name was Patrick, he called Mary's father and prayed that St. Patrick's Day would be a momentous day for both of them.

Peter and Mary took a slow run to a nearby village, and had dinner at an Irish pub. Amidst the din, they had some hearty laughs. The waitress asked Mary, "Is there anything else that would make this night memorable?" Then Mary saw Peter on his knee, opening a jewelry box with a ring: "I love you, Mary. Will you marry me?"

Mary cried for a good five minutes before she could answer. And when she had answered, they sat in silence, a silence that overpowered the din. Then Mary wiped her eyes and they went outside.

It was cool outside, and the moon was shining brightly. Peter pulled a camera from his pocket, and said, "Stay where you are. Let me back up a bit. And hold your hand up. You look even more beautiful with that ring on your finger."

Peter's camera flashed as he took a picture, just as a drunk driver slammed into Mary. The sedan spun into a storefront, and Mary flew up into the air, landed, and broke a beer bottle with her face.

People began to come out, and in a few minutes the police and paramedics arrived. Peter somehow managed to answer the police officers' questions and to begin kicking himself for being too stunned to act.

When Peter left his room the next day, he looked for Prof. Johnson. Prof. Johnson asked, "May I give you a hug?" and then sat there, simply being with Peter in his pain. When Peter left, Prof. Johnson said, "I'm not just here for academics. I'm here for you." Peter went to chapel and his classes, feeling a burning rage that almost nothing could pierce. He kept going to the hospital, and watching Mary with casts on both legs and one arm, and many tiny stitches on her face, fluttering on the borders of consciousness. One time Prof. Johnson came to visit, and he said, "I can't finish my classes." Prof. Johnson looked at him and said, "The college will give you a full refund." Peter said, "Do you know of any way I can stay here to be with Mary?" Prof. Johnson said, "You can stay with me. And I believe a position with UPS would let you get some income, doing something physical. The position is open for you." Prof. Johnson didn't mention the calls he'd made, and Peter didn't think about them. He simply said, "Thank you."

A few days later, Mary began to be weakly conscious.

Peter finally asked a nurse, "Why are there so many stitches on her face? Was she cut even more badly than—"

The nurse said, "There are a lot of stitches very close together because the emergency room had a cosmetic surgeon on duty. There will still be a permanent mark on her face, but some of the wound will heal without a scar."

Mary moved the left half of her mouth in half a smile. Peter said, "That was a kind of cute smile. How come she can smile like that?"

The nurse said, "One of the pieces of broken glass cut a nerve. It is unlikely she'll ever be able to move part of her face again."

Peter looked and touched Mary's hand. "I still think it's really quite cute."

Mary looked at him, and then passed out.

Peter spent a long couple of days training and attending to practical details. Then he came back to Mary.

Mary looked at Peter, and said, "It's a Monday. Don't you have classes now?"

Peter said, "No."

Mary said, "Why not?"

Peter said, "I want to be here with you."

Mary said, "I talked with one of the nurses, and she said that you dropped out of school so you could be with me.

"Is that true?" she said.

Peter said, "I hadn't really thought about it that way."

Mary closed her eyes, and when Peter started to leave because he decided she wanted to be left alone, she said, "Stop. Come here."

Peter came to her bedside and knelt.

Mary said, "Take this ring off my finger."

Peter said, "Is it hurting you?"

Mary said, "No, and it is the greatest treasure I own. Take it off and take it back."

Peter looked at her, bewildered. "Do you not want to marry me?"

Mary said, "This may sting me less because I don't remember our engagement. I don't remember anything that happened near that time; I have only the stories others, even the nurses, tell me about a man who loves me very much."

Peter said, "But don't you love me?"

Mary forced back tears. "Yes, I love you, yes, I love you. And I know that you love me. You are young and strong, and have the love to make a happy marriage. You'll make some woman a very good husband. I thought that woman would be me.

"But I can see what you will not. You said I was beautiful, and I was. Do you know what my prognosis is? I will probably be able to stand. At least for short periods of time. If I'm fortunate, I may walk. With a walker. I will never be able to run again—Peter, I am nobody, and I have no future. Absolutely nobody. You are young and strong. Go and find a woman who is worth your love."

Mary and Peter both cried for a long time. Then Peter walked out, and paused in the doorway, crying. He felt torn inside, and then went in to say a couple of things to Mary. He said, "I believe in miracles."

Then Mary cried, and Peter said something else I'm not going to repeat. Mary said something. Then another conversation began.

The conversation ended with Mary saying, "You're stupid, Peter. You're really, really stupid. I love you. I don't deserve such love. You're making a mistake. I love you." Then Peter went to kiss Mary, and as he bent down, he bent his mouth to meet the lips that he still saw as "really quite cute."

The stress did not stop. The physical therapists, after time, wondered that Mary had so much fight in her. But it stressed her, and Peter did his job without liking it. Mary and Peter quarreled and made up and quarreled and made up. Peter prayed for a miracle when they made up and sometimes when they quarreled. Were this not enough

stress, there was an agonizingly long trial—and knowing that the drunk driver was behind bars surprisingly didn't make things better. But Mary very slowly learned to walk again. After six months, if Peter helped her, she could walk 100 yards before the pain became too great to continue.

Peter hadn't been noticing that the stress diminished, but he did become aware of something he couldn't put his finger on. After a night of struggling, he got up, went to church, and was floored by the Bible reading of, "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." and the idea that when you do or do not visit someone in prison, you are visiting or refusing to visit Christ. Peter absently went home, tried to think about other things, made several phone calls, and then forced himself to drive to one and only one prison.

He stopped in the parking lot, almost threw up, and then steeled himself to go inside. He found a man, Jacob, and... Jacob didn't know who Peter was, but he recognized him as looking familiar. It was an awkward meeting. Then he recognized him as the man whose now wife he had crippled. When Peter left, he vomited and felt like a failure. He talked about it with Mary...

That was the beginning of a friendship. Peter chose to love the man in prison, even if there was no pleasure in it. And that created something deeper than pleasure, something Peter couldn't explain.

As Peter and Mary were planning the wedding, Mary said, "I want to enter with Peter next to me, no matter what the tradition says. It will be a miracle if I have the strength to stand for the whole wedding, and if I have to lean on someone I want it to be Peter. And I don't want to sit on a chair; I would rather spend my wedding night wracked by pain than go through my wedding supported by something lifeless!"

When the rehearsal came, Mary stood, and the others winced at the pain in her face. And she stood, and walked,

for the entire rehearsal without touching Peter once. Then she said, "I can do it. I can go through the wedding on my own strength," and collapsed in pain.

At the wedding, she stood next to Peter, walking, her face so radiant with joy that some of the guests did not guess she was in exquisite pain. They walked next to each other, not touching, and Mary slowed down and stopped in the center of the church. Peter looked at her, wondering what Mary was doing.

Then Mary's arm shot around Peter's neck, and Peter stood startled for a moment before he placed his arm around her, squeezed her tightly, and they walked together to the altar.

On the honeymoon, Mary told Peter, "You are the only person I need." This was the greatest bliss either of them had known, and the honeymoon's glow shined and shined.

Peter and Mary agreed to move somewhere less expensive to settle down, and were too absorbed in their wedded bliss and each other to remember promises they had made earlier, promises to seek a church community for support and friends. And Peter continued working at an unglamorous job, and Mary continued fighting to walk and considered the housework she was capable of doing a badge of honor, and neither of them noticed that the words, "I love you" were spoken ever so slightly less frequently, nor did they the venom creeping into their words.

One night they exploded. What they fought about was not important. What was important was that Peter left, burning with rage. He drove, and drove, until he reached Wheaton, and at daybreak knocked on Prof. Johnson's door. There was anger in his voice when he asked, "Are you still my friend?"

Prof. Johnson got him something to eat and stayed with him when he fumed with rage, and said, "I don't care if I'm supposed to be with her, I can't go back!" Then Prof. Johnson said, "Will you make an agreement with me? I

promise you I won't ever tell you to go back to her, or accept her, or accept what she does, or apologize to her, or forgive her, or in any way be reconciled. But I need you to trust me that I love you and will help you decide what is best to do."

Peter said, "Yes."

Prof. Johnson said, "Then stay with me. You need some rest. Take the day to rest. There's food in the fridge, and I have books and a nice back yard. There's iced tea in the—excuse me, there's Coke and 7 Up in the boxes next to the fridge. When I can come back, we can talk."

Peter relaxed, and he felt better. He told Prof. Johnson. Prof. Johnson said, "That's excellent. What I'd like you to do next is go in to work, with a lawyer I know. You can tell him what's going on, and he'll lead you to a courtroom to observe."

Peter went away to court the next day, and when he came back he was ashen. He said nothing to Prof. Johnson.

Then, after the next day, he came back looking even more unhappy. "The first day, the lawyer, George, took me into divorce court. I thought I saw the worst that divorce court could get. Until I came back today. It was the same—this sickening scene where two people had become the most bitter enemies. I hope it doesn't come to this. This was atrocious. It was vile. It was more than vile. It was—"

Prof. Johnson sent him back for a third day. This time Peter said nothing besides, "I think I've been making a mistake."

After the fourth day, Peter said, "Help me! I've been making the biggest mistake of my *life!*"

After a full week had passed, Peter said, "*Please, I beg you, don't send me back there.*"

Prof. Johnson sent Peter back to watch a divorce court for one more miserable, excruciating day. Then he said, "Now you can do whatever you want. What do you want to do?"

The conflict between Peter and Mary ended the next day.

Peter went home, begging Mary for forgiveness, and no sooner than he had begun his apology, a thousand things were reflected in Mary's face and she begged his forgiveness. Then they talked, and debated whether to go back to Wheaton, or stay where they were. Finally Mary said, "I really want to go back to Wheaton."

Peter began to shyly approach old friends. He later misquoted: "I came crawling with a thimble in the desperate hope that they'd give a few tiny drops of friendship and love. Had I known how they would respond, I would have come running with a bucket!"

Peter and Mary lived together for many years; they had many children and were supported by many friends.

Ployon said, "I didn't follow every detail, but... there was something in that that stuck."

Archon said, "How long do you think it lasted?"

"A little shorter than the other one, I mean first part."

"Do you have any idea how many days were in each part?"

"About the same? I assume the planet had slowed down so that a year and a day were of roughly equal length."

"The first part took place during three days. The latter part spanned several thousand days—"

"I guess I didn't understand it—"

"—which is... a sign that you understood something quite significant... that you knew what to pay attention to and were paying attention to the right thing."

"But I didn't understand it. I had a sense that it was broken off before the end, and that was the end, right?"

Archon hesitated, and said, "There's more, but I'd rather not go into that."

Ployon said, "Are you sure?"
"You won't like it."
"Please."

The years passed and Peter and Mary grew into a blissfully happy marriage. Mary came to have increasing health problems as a result of the accident, and those around them were amazed at how their love had transformed the suffering the accident created in both of their lives. At least those who knew them best saw the transformation. There were many others who could only see their happiness as a mirage.

As the years passed, Jacob grew to be a good friend. And when Peter began to be concerned that his wife might be... Jacob had also grown wealthy, very wealthy, and assembled a top-flight legal team (without taking a dime of Peter's money—over Peter's protests!), to prevent what the doctors would normally do in such a case, given recent shifts in the medical system.

And then Mary's health grew worse, much worse, and her suffering grew worse with it, and pain medications seemed to be having less and less effect. Those who didn't know Mary were astonished that someone in so much pain could enjoy life so much, nor the hours they spent gazing into each other's eyes, holding hands, when Mary's pain seemed to vanish. A second medical opinion, and a third, and a fourth, confirmed that Mary had little chance of recovery even to her more recent state. And whatever measures been taken, whatever testimony Peter and Mary could give about the joy of their lives, the court's decision still came:

The court wishes to briefly review the facts of the case. Subject is suffering increasingly severe effects from an injury that curtailed her life greatly as a

young person. from which she has never recovered, and is causing increasingly complications now that she will never again have youth's ability to heal. No fewer than four medical opinions admitted as expert testimony substantially agree that subject is in extraordinary and excruciating pain; that said excruciating pain is increasing; that said excruciating pain is increasingly unresponsive to medication; that subject has fully lost autonomy and is dependent on her husband; that this dependence is profound, without choice, and causes her husband to be dependent without choice on others and exercise little autonomy; and the prognosis is only of progressively worse deterioration and increase in pain, with no question of recovery.

The court finds it entirely understandable that the subject, who has gone through such trauma, and is suffering increasingly severe complications, would be in a state of some denial. Although a number of positions could be taken, the court also finds it understandable that a husband would try to maintain a hold on what cannot exist, and needlessly prolong his wife's suffering. It is not, however, the court's position to judge whether this is selfish...

For all the impressive-sounding arguments that have been mounted, the court cannot accord a traumatized patient or her ostensibly well-meaning husband a privilege that the court itself does not claim. The court does not find that it has an interest in allowing this woman to continue in her severe and worsening state of suffering.

Peter was at her side, holding her hand and looking into his wife's eyes, The hospital doctor had come. Then Peter said, "I love you," and Mary said, "I love you," and they kissed.

Mary's kiss was still burning on Peter's lips when two

nurses hooked Mary up to an IV and injected her with 5000 milligrams of sodium thiopental, then a saline flush followed by 100 milligrams of pancurium bromide, then a saline flush and 20 milligrams of potassium chloride.

A year later to the day, Peter died of a broken heart.

Ployon was silent for a long time, and Archon was silent for an even longer time. Ployon said, "I guess part of our world is present in that world. Is that what you mean by being in two places at once?"

Archon was silent for a long time.

Ployon said, "It seems that that world's problems and failings are somehow greater than our achievements. I wish that world could exist, and that we could somehow visit it."

Archon said, "Do you envy them that much?"

Ployon said, "Yes. We envy them as—"

Archon said, "—as—" and searched through his world's images.

Ployon said, "—as that world's eunuchs envy men."

Archon was silent.

Ployon was silent.

The Consolation of Theology

Song I.

The Author's Complaint.

The Gospel was new,
When one saint stopped his ears,
And said, 'Good God!
*That thou hast allowed me,
To live at such a time.*'
Jihadists act not in aught of vacuum:
Atheislam welcometh captors;
Founded by the greatest Christian heresiarch,
Who tore Incarnation and icons away from all things
Christian,
The dragon next to whom,
Arius, father of heretics,
Is but a fangless worm.
Their 'surrender' is practically furthest as could be,
From, '*God and the Son of God,
Became Man and the Son of Man,
That men and the sons of men,*

Might become Gods and the Sons of God,
 By contrast, eviscerating the reality of man.
 The wonder of holy marriage,
 Tortured and torn from limb to limb,
 In progressive installments old and new,
 Technology a secular occult is made,
 Well I wrote a volume,
The Luddite's Guide to Technology,
 And in once-hallowed halls of learning,
 Is taught a 'theology,'
 Such as one would seek of Monty Python.
 And of my own life; what of it?
 A monk still I try to be;
 Many things have I tried in life,
 And betimes met spectacular success,
 And betimes found doors slammed in my face.
 Even in work in technology,
 Though the time be an economic boom for the work,
 Still the boom shut me out or knocked me out,
 And not only in the Church's teaching,
 In tale as ancient as Cain and Abel,
 Of "The Wagon, the Blackbird, and the Saab."
 And why I must now accomplish so little,
 To pale next to glorious days,
 When a-fighting cancer,
 I switched discipline to theology,
 And first at Cambridge then at Fordham,
 Wished to form priests,
 But a wish that never came true?

I.

And ere I moped a man appeared, quite short of
 stature but looking great enough to touch a star. In ancient
 gold he was clad, yet the golden vestments of a Patriarch
 were infinitely eclipsed by his Golden Mouth, by a tongue
 of liquid, living gold. Emblazoned on his bosom were the

Greek letters **X**, and **A**. I crossed myself thrice, wary of devils, and he crossed himself thrice, and he looked at me with eyes aflame and said, ‘Child, hast thou not written, and then outside the bounds of Holy Orthodoxy, a koan?’:

A novice said to a master, “I am sick and tired of the immorality that is all around us. There is fornication everywhere, drunkenness and drugs in the inner city, relativism in people’s minds, and do you know where the worst of it is?”

The master said, “Inside your heart.”

He spoke again. ‘Child, repent of thine own multitude of grievous sins, not the sins of others. Knowest thou not the words, spoken by the great St. Isaac and taken up without the faintest interval by the great St. Seraphim, “Make peace with thyself and ten thousand around thee shall be saved?” Or that if everyone were to repent, Heaven would come to earth?

“Thou seemest on paper to live thy conviction that every human life is a life worth living, but lacking the true strength that is behind that position. Hast thou read my “Treatise to Prove that Nothing Can Injure the Man Who Does Not Harm Himself?” How the three children, my son, in a pagan court, with every lechery around them, were graced not to defile themselves in what they ate, but won the moral victory of not bowing to an idol beyond monstrous stature? And the angel bedewed them in external victory after they let all else go in *internal* and eternal triumph?

‘It is possible at all times and every place to find salvation. Now thou knowest that marriage or monasticism is needful; and out of that knowledge you went out to monasteries, to the grand monastery of Holy Cross Hermitage, to Mount Athos itself, and thou couldst not stay. What of it? Before God thou art *already* a monk.

Keep on seeking monasticism, without end, and whether thou crossest the threshold of death a layman or a monk, if thou hast sought monasticism for the rest of thy days, and seekest such repentance as thou canst, who knows if thou mightest appear a monk in lifelong repentance when thou answerest before the Dread Judgement-Throne of Christ?

‘Perhaps it is that God has given thee such good things as were lawful for God to give but unlawful and immature for thou to seek for thyself. Thou hast acquired a scholar’s knowledge of academic theology, and a heresiologist’s formation, but thou writest for the common man. Canst not thou imagine that this may excel such narrow writing, read by so few, in the confines of scholarship? And that as thou hast been graced to walk the long narrow road of affliction, thou art free now to sit in thy parents’ splendid house, given a roof when thou art homeless before the law whilst thou seekest monasticism, and writest for as long as thou art able? That wert wrong and immature to seek, sitting under your parents’ roof and writing as much as it were wrong and immature to seek years’ training in academic theology and heresy and give not a day’s tribute to the professorial ascesis of pride and vainglory (thou hadst enough of thine own). Though this be not an issue of morality apart from ascesis, thou knewest the settled judgement that real publication is traditional publication and vanity press is what self-publication is. Yet without knowing, without choosing, without even guessing, thou wert again & time again in the right place, at the right time, amongst the manifold shifts of technology, and now, though thou profitest not in great measure from thy books, yet have ye written many more creative works than thou couldst bogging with editors. Thou knowest far better to say, “Wisdom is justified by her children,” of thyself in stead of saying such of God, but none the less thou hadst impact. Yet God hath granted thee the three, unsought and unwanted though thou mayest have found them.’

I stood in silence, all abashed.

Song II.

His Despondency.

The Saint spoke thus:
‘What then? How is this man,
A second rich young ruler become?
He who bore not a watch on principle,
Even before he’d scarce more than
Heard of Holy Orthodoxy,
Weareth a watch built to stand out,
Even among later Apple Watches.
He who declined a mobile phone,
Has carried out an iPhone,
And is displeased to accept,
A less fancy phone,
From a state program to provide,
Cell phones to those at poverty.
Up! Out! This will not do,
Not that he hath lost an item of luxury,
But that when it happened, he were sad.
For the rich young ruler lied,
When said he that he had kept,
All commandments from his youth,
For unless he were an idolater,
The loss of possessions itself,
Could not suffice to make him sad.
This man hast lost a cellphone,
And for that alone he grieveth.
Knoweth he not that money maketh not one glad?
Would that he would recall,
The heights from which he hath fallen,
Even from outside the Orthodox Church.’

II.

Then the great Saint said, ‘But the time calls for

something deeper than lamentation. Art thou not the man who sayedst that we cannot *achieve* the Holy Grail, nor even *find* it: for the only game in town is to *become* the Holy Grail? Not that the Orthodox Church tradeth in such idle romances as Arthurian legend; as late as the nineteenth century, Saint IGNATIUS (Brianchaninov) gaveth warnings against reading novels, which His Eminence KALLISTOS curiously gave embarrassed explanations. Today the warning should be greatly extended to technological entertainment. But I would call thy words to mind none the less, and bid thee to become the Holy Grail. And indeed, when thou thou receivest the Holy Mysteries, thou receivest Christ as thy Lord and Saviour, thou art transformed by the supreme medicine, as thou tastest of the Fount of Immortality?

‘Thou wert surprised to learn, and that outside the Orthodox Church, that when the Apostle bade you to put on the whole armour of Christ, the armour of Christ wert not merely armour *owned* by Christ, or armour *given* by Christ: it were such armour as *God himself wears to war*: the prophet Isaiah tells us that the breastplate of righteousness and the helmet of salvation are God’s own armour which he weareth to war.

‘Thou art asleep, my son and my child; awaken thou thyself! There is silver under the tarnishment that maketh all seem corrupt: take thou what God hath bestowed, rouse and waken thyself, and find the treasure with which thy God hath surrounded thee.’

Song III.

A Clearer Eye.

‘We suffer more in imagination than reality,’
Said Seneca the Younger,
Quoted in rediscovery of Stoicism,
That full and ancient philosophy,

Can speak, act, and help today,
Among athletes and business men,
And not only scholars reading dusty tomes.
And if thus much is in a school of mere philosophy,
An individualist pursuit deepening division,
What of the greatest philosophy in monasticism,
What of the philosophy,
Whose Teacher and God are One and the Same?
I stood amazed at God,
Trying to count my blessings,
Ere quickly I lost count.

III.

Then said I, 'I see much truth in thy words, but my fortunes have not been those of success. I went to Cambridge, with strategy of passing all my classes, and shining brightly on my thesis as I could; the Faculty of Divinity decided two thirds of the way through the year that my promptly declared dissertation topic was unfit for Philosophy of Religion, and made me choose another dissertation topic completely. I received no credit nor recognition for the half of my hardest work. That pales in comparison with Fordham, where I were pushed into informal office as ersatz counselor for my professors' insecurities, and the man in whom I had set my hopes met one gesture of friendship after another with one retaliation after another. Then I returned to the clumsy fit of programming, taken over by Agile models which require something I cannot do: becoming an interchangeable part of a hive mind. I have essayed work in User eXperience, but no work has yet crystallised, and the economy is adverse. What can I rightly expect from here?'

Ere he answered me, 'Whence askest thou the future? It is wondrous. And why speakest thou of thy fortune? Of a troth, no man hath ever had fortune. It were an impossibility.'

I sat a-right, a-listening.

He continued, 'Whilst at Fordham, in incompetent medical care, thou wert stressed to the point of nausea, for weeks on end. Thy worry wert not, "Will I be graced by the noble honourific of Doctor?" though that were far too dear to thee, but, "*Will there be a place for me?*" And thus far, this hath been in example "We suffer more in imagination than in reality." For though what thou fearest hath happened, what be its sting?

"Thou seekedst a better fit than as a computer programmer, and triedst, and God hath provided other than the success you imagined. What of it? Thou hast remained in the house of thy parents, a shameful thing for a man to seek, but right honourable for God to bestow if thou hast sought sufficiency and independence. Thou knowest that we are reckoned come Judgement on our performance of due diligence and not results achieved: that due diligence often carrieth happy results may be true, but it is nothing to the point. Thou art not only provided for even in this decline; thou hast luxuries that thou needest not.

"There is no such thing as fortune: only an often-mysterious Providence. God has a care each and all over men, and for that matter over stones, and naught that happeneth in the world escapeth God's cunning net. As thou hast quoted the *Philokalìa*:

We ought all of us always to thank God for both the universal and the particular gifts of soul and body that He bestows on us. The universal gifts consist of the four elements and all that comes into being through them, as well as all the marvellous works of God mentioned in the divine Scriptures. The particular gifts consist of all that God has given to each individual. These include:

- Wealth, so that one can perform acts of

charity.

- Poverty, so that one can endure it with patience and gratitude.
- Authority, so that one can exercise righteous judgement and establish virtue.
- Obedience and service, so that one can more readily attain salvation of soul.
- Health, so that one can assist those in need and undertake work worthy of God.
- Sickness, so that one may earn the crown of patience.
- Spiritual knowledge and strength, so that one may acquire virtue.
- Weakness and ignorance, so that, turning one's back on worldly things, one may be under obedience in stillness and humility.
- Unsought loss of goods and possessions, so that one may deliberately seek to be saved and may even be helped when incapable of shedding all one's possessions or even of giving alms.
- Ease and prosperity, so that one may voluntarily struggle and suffer to attain the virtues and thus become dispassionate and fit to save other souls.
- Trials and hardship, so that those who cannot

eradicate their own will may be saved in spite of themselves, and those capable of joyful endurance may attain perfection.

All these things, even if they are opposed to each other, are nevertheless good when used correctly; but when misused, they are not good, but are harmful for both soul and body.

‘And again:

He who wants to be an imitator of Christ, so that he too may be called a son of God, born of the Spirit, must above all bear courageously and patiently the afflictions he encounters, whether these be bodily illnesses, slander and vilification from men, or attacks from the unseen spirits. God in His providence allows souls to be tested by various afflictions of this kind, so that it may be revealed which of them truly loves Him. All the patriarchs, prophets, apostles and martyrs from the beginning of time traversed none other than this narrow road of trial and affliction, and it was by doing this that they fulfilled God’s will. ‘My son,’ says Scripture, ‘if you come to serve the Lord, prepare your soul for trial, set your heart straight, and patiently endure’ (Ecclus. 2 : 1-2). And elsewhere it is said: ‘Accept everything that comes as good, knowing that nothing occurs without God willing it.’ Thus the soul that wishes to do God’s will must strive above all to acquire patient endurance and hope. For one of the tricks of the devil is to make us listless at times of affliction, so that we give up our hope in the Lord. God never allows a soul that hopes in Him to be so oppressed by trials that it is put to utter confusion. As St Paul writes: ‘God is to be trusted not to let us be tried beyond our strength, but with the trial He will provide a way out, so that

we are able to bear it (I Cor. 10 : 13). The devil harasses the soul not as much as he wants but as much as God allows him to. Men know what burden may be placed on a mule, what on a donkey, and what on a camel, and load each beast accordingly; and the potter knows how long he must leave pots in the fire, so that they are not cracked by staying in it too long or rendered useless by being taken out of it before they are properly fired. If human understanding extends this far, must not God be much more aware, infinitely more aware, of the degree of trial it is right to impose on each soul, so that it becomes tried and true, fit for the kingdom of heaven?

Hemp, unless it is well beaten, cannot be worked into fine yarn, whilst the more it is beaten and carded the finer and more serviceable it becomes. And a freshly moulded pot that has not been fired is of no use to man. And a child not yet proficient in worldly skills cannot build, plant, sow seed or perform any other worldly task. In a similar manner it often happens through the Lord's goodness that souls, on account of their childlike innocence, participate in divine grace and are filled with the sweetness and repose of the Spirit; but because they have not yet been tested, and have not been tried by the various afflictions of the evil spirits, they are still immature and not yet fit for the kingdom of heaven. As the apostle says: 'If you have not been disciplined you are bastards and not sons' (Heb. 12 : 8). Thus trials and afflictions are laid upon a man in the way that is best for him, so as to make his soul stronger and more mature; and if the soul endures them to the end with hope in the Lord it cannot fail to attain the promised reward of the Spirit and deliverance from the evil passions.

‘Thou hast earned scores in math contests, yea even ranked in scores *of* math contests, ranking 7th nationally in the 1989 MathCounts competition. Now thou hast suffered various things and hast not the limelight which thou hadst, or believeth thou hadst, which be much the same thing. Again, what of it? God hath provided for thee, and if thou hast been fruitless in a secular arena, thou seekest virtue, and hast borne some fruit. Moreover thou graspest, in part, virtue that thou knewest not to seek when thou barest the asceticism of a mathematician or a member of the Ultraneet. Thou seekest without end that thou mayest become humble, and knowest not that to earnestly seek humility is nobler than being the chiefest among mathematicians in history?

‘The new Saint Seraphim, of Viritsa, hath written,

Have you ever thought that everything that concerns you, concerns Me, also? You are precious in my eyes and I love you; for his reason, it is a special joy for Me to train you. When temptations and the opponent [the Evil One] come upon you like a river, I want you to know that This was from Me.

I want you to know that your weakness has need of My strength, and your safety lies in allowing Me to protect you. I want you to know that when you are in difficult conditions, among people who do not understand you, and cast you away, This was from Me.

I am your God, the circumstances of your life are in My hands; you did not end up in your position by chance; this is precisely the position I have appointed for you. Weren't you asking Me to teach you humility? And there – I placed you precisely in the “school” where they teach this lesson. Your environment, and those who are around you, are performing My will. Do you have financial difficulties and can just barely survive? Know that This was from

Me.

I want you to know that I dispose of your money, so take refuge in Me and depend upon Me. I want you to know that My storehouses are inexhaustible, and I am faithful in My promises. Let it never happen that they tell you in your need, “Do not believe in your Lord and God.” Have you ever spent the night in suffering? Are you separated from your relatives, from those you love? I allowed this that you would turn to Me, and in Me find consolation and comfort. Did your friend or someone to whom you opened your heart, deceive you? This was from Me.

I allowed this frustration to touch you so that you would learn that your best friend is the Lord. I want you to bring everything to Me and tell Me everything. Did someone slander you? Leave it to Me; be attached to Me so that you can hide from the “contradiction of the nations.” I will make your righteousness shine like light and your life like midday noon. Your plans were destroyed? Your soul yielded and you are exhausted? This was from Me.

You made plans and have your own goals; you brought them to Me to bless them. But I want you to leave it all to Me, to direct and guide the circumstances of your life by My hand, because you are the orphan, not the protagonist. Unexpected failures found you and despair overcame your heart, but know That this was from Me.

With tiredness and anxiety I am testing how strong your faith is in My promises and your boldness in prayer for your relatives. Why is it not you who entrusted their cares to My providential love? You must leave them to the protection of My All Pure Mother. Serious illness found you, which may be healed or may be incurable, and has nailed you to your bed. This was from Me.

Because I want you to know Me more deeply,

through physical ailment, do not murmur against this trial I have sent you. And do not try to understand My plans for the salvation of people's souls, but uncomplainingly and humbly bow your head before My goodness. You were dreaming about doing something special for Me and, instead of doing it, you fell into a bed of pain. This was from Me.

Because then you were sunk in your own works and plans and I wouldn't have been able to draw your thoughts to Me. But I want to teach you the most deep thoughts and My lessons, so that you may serve Me. I want to teach you that you are nothing without Me. Some of my best children are those who, cut off from an active life, learn to use the weapon of ceaseless prayer. You were called unexpectedly to undertake a difficult and responsible position, supported by Me. I have given you these difficulties and as the Lord God I will bless all your works, in all your paths. In everything I, your Lord, will be your guide and teacher. Remember always that every difficulty you come across, every offensive word, every slander and criticism, every obstacle to your works, which could cause frustration and disappointment, This is from Me.

Know and remember always, no matter where you are, That whatsoever hurts will be dulled as soon as you learn In all things, to look at Me. Everything has been sent to you by Me, for the perfection of your soul.

All these things were from Me.

‘The doctors have decided that thy consumption of one vital medication is taken to excess, and they are determined to bring it down to an approved level, for thy safety, and for thy safety accept the consequence of thy having a string of hospitalizations and declining health, and have so far taken every pain to protect thee, and will

do so even if their care **slay** thee.

‘What of it? Thy purity of conscience is in no manner contingent on what others decide in their dealings with thee. It may be that the change in thy medicaments be less dangerous than it beseemeth thee. It may be unlawful to the utmost degree for thou to seek thine own demise: yet it is full lawful, and possible, for our God and the Author and Finisher of our faith to give thee a life complete and full even if it were cut short to the morrow.

‘Never mind that thou seest not what the Lord may provide; thou hast been often enough surprised by the boons God hath granted thee. Thou hast written “Repentance, Heaven’s Best-Kept Secret,” and thou knowest that repentance itself eclipseth the pleasure of sin. Know also that grievous men, and the devil himself, are all ever used by God according to his design, by the God who worketh all for all.

We do not live in the best of all possible worlds. Far from it. But we live under the care of the best of all possible Gods, and it is a more profound truth, a more vibrant truth, a truth that goes much deeper into the heart of root of all things to say that we may not live in the best of all possible worlds, but we live under the care of the best of all possible Gods.

‘Know and remember also that happiness comes from within. Stop chasing after external circumstances. External circumstances are but a training ground for God to build strength within. Wittest thou not that thou art a man, and as man art constituted by the image of God? If therefore thou art constituted in the divine image, why lookest thou half to things soulless and dead for thy happiness?’

Song IV.***Virtue Unconquerable.***

I know that my Redeemer liveth,
 And with my eyes yet shall I see God,
 But what a painful road it has been,
 What a gesture of friendship has met a knife in my back.
 Is there grandeur in me for my fortitude?
 I only think so in moments of pride,
 With my grandeur only in repentance.
 And the circumstances around me,
 When I work, have met with a knife in the back.

IV.

The Golden-Mouthed said, ‘Child, I know thy pains without your telling, aye, and more besides: Church politics ain’t no place for a Saint! Thou knowest how I pursued justice, and regarded not the face of man, drove out slothful servants, and spoke in boldness to the Empress. I paid with my life for the enemies I made in my service. You have a full kitchen’s worth of knives in your back: I have an armory! I know well thy pains from within.

‘But let us take a step back, far back.

‘Happiness is of particular concern to you and to many, and if words in the eighteenth century spoke of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,” now there are many people who make the pursuit of happiness all but a full-time occupation.

‘In ages past a question of such import would be entrusted to enquiry and dialogue philosophic. So one might argue, in brief, that true happiness is a supreme thing, and God is a supreme thing, and since there can not be two separate supreme essences, happiness and God are the same, a point which could be argued at much greater length and eloquence. And likewise how the happy man is

happy not because he is propped up from without, by external circumstance, but has chosen virtue and goodness inside. And many other things.

‘But, and this says much of today and its berzerkly grown science, in which the crowning jewel of superstring theory hath abdicated from science’s bedrock of experiment, happiness is such a thing as one would naturally approach through psychology, because psychology is, to people of a certain bent, the only conceivable tool to best study to understand men.

‘One can always critique some detail, such as the import of what psychology calls “flow” as optimal experience. The founder of positive psychology, Martin Seligman, outlined three versions of the good life: the *Pleasant Life*, which is the life of pleasure and the shallowest of the three; the *Engaged Life*, or the life of flow, called optimal experience, and the *Meaningful Life*, meaning in some wise the life of virtue.

‘He says of the Pleasant Life that it is like vanilla ice cream: the first bite tastes delicious, but by the time you reach the fifth or sixth bite, you can’t taste it any more. And here is something close to the Orthodox advice that a surplus of pleasures and luxuries, worldly honours and so on, do not make you happy. I tell you that one can be lacking in the most basic necessities and be happy: but let this slide.

‘Of the Meaningful Life, it is the deepest of the three, but it is but a first fumbling in the dark of what the Orthodox Church has curated in the light of day. Things like kindness and mercy have built in to the baseline, curated since Christ or rather the Garden of Eden, so Orthodox need not add some extra practice to their faith to obtain kindness or gratitude. Really, the number of things the Orthodox Church has learned about the Meaningful Life far eclipse the *Philokalia*: the fount is inexhaustible.

‘But my chief concern is with the Engaged Life, the life

of flow. For flow is not “the psychology of optimal experience,” or if it is, the *theology* of optimal experience hath a different base. Flow is legitimate and it is a wonder: but it is not additionally fit to be a normative baseline for mankind as a whole.

‘*Flow*, as it occurs, is something exotic and obscure. It has been studied in virtuosos who are expert performers in many different domains. Once someone of surpassing talent has something like a decade of performance, it is possible when a man of this superb talent and training is so engrossed in a performance of whatever domain, that sits pretty much at the highest level of performance where essentially the virtuoso’s entire attention is absorbed in the performance, and time flies because no attention is left to observe the passage of time or almost any other thing of which most of us are aware when we are awake.

‘It seemeth difficult to me to market flow for mass consumption: doing such is nigh unto calling God an elitist, and making the foundation of a happy life all but impossible for the masses. You can be a subjectivist if you like and say that genius is five thousand hours’ practice, but it is trained virtuoso talent and not seniority that even gets you through flow’s door. For that matter, it is also well nigh impossible for the few to experience until they have placed years into virtuoso performance in their craft. Where many more are capable of being monastics. Monastics, those of you who are not monastics may rightly surmise, have experiences which monastics call it a disaster to share with you. That may be legitimate, but novices would do well not to expect a stream of uninterrupted exotic experiences, not when they start and perhaps not when they have long since taken monastic vows. A novice who seeth matters in terms of “drudgework” would do well to expect nothing but what the West calls “drudgework” for a long, long time. (And if all goeth well and thou incorporatest other obediences to the diminution of drudgery, thou wilt at first lament the

change!) A monastic, if all goes well, will do simple manual labour, but freed from relating to such labour as drudgery: forasmuch as monastics and monastic clergy recall “novices’ obediences”, it is with nostalgia, as a yoke that is unusually easy and a burden unusually light.

‘And there is a similitude between the ancient monastic obedience that was *par excellence* the bread and butter of monastic manual labour, and the modern obedience. For in ancient times monks wove baskets to earn their keep, and in modern times monks craft incense. And do not say that the modern obedience is nobler, for if anything you sense a temptation, and a humbler obedience is perhaps to be preferred.

‘But in basket making or incense making alike, there is a repetitive manual labour. There are, of course, any number of other manual obediences in a monastery today. However, when monasticism has leeway, its choice seems to be in favour of a repetitive manual labour that gives the hands a regular cycle of motion whilst the heart is left free for the Jesus Prayer, and the mind in the heart practices a monk’s *watchfulness* or *nipsis*, an observer role that traineth thee to notice and put out temptations when they are a barely noticeable spark, rather than heedlessly letting the first temptation grow towards acts of sin and waiting until thy room be afire before fightest thou the blaze. This watchfulness is the best optimal experience the Orthodox Church gives us in which to abide, and ’tis no accident that the full and unabridged title of the *Philokalia* is *The Philokalia of the Niptic Fathers*. If either of these simple manual endeavours is unfamiliar or makes the performer back up in thought, this is a growing pain, not the intended long-term effect. And what is proposed is proposed to everybody in monasticism and really God-honoured marriage too, in force now that the *Philokalia* hath come in full blossom among Orthodox in the world, that optimum experience is for everyone, including sinners seeking the haven of monasticism, and

not something exotic for very few.

‘And remember how thou wast admonished by a monk, perhaps in echo of St. James the Brother of God who said, “Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted: But the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away.” For thou wert in the trapeza, with the monk and with a janitorial lady, and he told the janitorial lady that she was fortunate, for her manual labour left her free to pray with her mind, and thou, a computer programmer at the time, wert unfortunate because thy work demanded thy full mental attention.

‘Forsooth! If thou canst have optimal experience, the Jesus Prayer in thy heart as the metronome of silence, if thy business were to weave baskets or craft incense, why not indeed can one attend to the Jesus Prayer, rising as incense before God, in mopping a floor or cleaning windows? For however great monasticism may be, it hath not aught of monopoly in meditative work and prayer before God. Marriage is the older instrument of salvation. The door is open, if thou canst do some manual labour, to do so in prayer to God. And monks are not alone permitted prayerful manual labour: monasticism is but the rudiments of the Gospel, and if monasticism seeketh out perhaps a boon in prayerful manual labour, this is hardly a barbed wire fence with a sign saying that prayerful manual labour is reserved only for monastics.

‘Let us say that this is true, and the theology of optimum experience is virtually accepted for the sake of argument, or if thou preferrest, thou mayest answer it “Yes” and “Amen.” Still, I say it is a quibble, compared to the darker import. Let us set the point aside, and with good reason.’

Then he paused, and ere a moment resumed explaining. ‘If I may pull a rare note from the wreckage postmodern, there is the concept of a semiotic frame, perhaps a myth, that determines a society’s *possibles et*

pensables, that which is understood to be possible in a society, and that which is found to even be thinkable. The knife cuts well against some radicals. And people are in blinders about activism and psychology.

‘Think of thy feminist theology professor, who said both right and full that she believed in Tradition, and in the same breath placed Arius, the father of heretics, alongside St. Athanasius as equally full representatives of that Tradition. When in your theological anthropology class she picked two texts for disability, the obvious agenda, the one and only thing to do for autism (as her agenda fell) was to engage some activist political advocacy for to make conditions in some wise more favourable for that particular victim class. No expression of love was possible save additional political activism. And I would say, and thou wouldst say, that she were too political in her response, and not nearly political enough. (For when all is civil warfare carried on by other means, real concern for the life of the polis but starves.)

‘Yet one of these reading assignments contained what she did not grasp. Of the two, one was what could be straightforwardly be called either or both of political ideology and identity politics, and it was complete with the standard, footnoteless, boilerplate opening assertion that no one else in the whole wide world could possibly have suffering that could be compared to that of one’s own poor, miserable demographic.

‘But the other text was different in many ways. It was entitled “Love Without Boundaries,” and it was a text about love written by the father of a severely autistic son. This latter text did not come close to calling for agitation or plans for a better future: far from it—on these points it is silent. What it did do, however, was take an approach in ascesis, and learn to love without limits. The father did not and could not cure his son, but whether or not the father’s love transformed his son, the love the father expressed transformed the *father*. His love was cut from the same

cloth as the peace with oneself which St. Isaac and St. Seraphim with one voice exhort us to acquire, and the love the father expressed rendered him Godlike, in a humble, everyday, ordinary fashion.

‘And in like wise to how thy professor automatically jumped to political activism as how one might exhibit right care for the severely autistic and other disabled, in this day and age the go-to discipline for understanding humans is psychology, and a psychology fashioning itself after hard science, introducing itself by what might be called *the physics envy declaration*: psychologists-are-scientists-and-they-are-just-as-much-scientists-as-people-in-the-so-called-hard-sciences-like-physics.

‘It is a side point that psychologists treat subjects as less-than-human: a near-universal feature of psychological experiment is some stripe of guile, because psychological experimental value would be ruined under normal conditions of intelligent and informed cooperation between fellow men. (Though the enterprise may be named “psychology”, the name were oafishly or treacherously applied: for the name be drawn from the Greek for the study that understands the psyche or soul, a *psyche* or soul is precisely what the discipline will not countenance in man.) Forsooth! Men running experiments think and make decisions; subjects in experiments are governed by laws. Moreover, since physics hath worked long and hard to de-anthropomorphise what it studies, physics envy biddeth psychology to seek well a de-anthropomorphised theory of *ἄνθρωπος* (*anthropos*), man.

‘It hath been noted, as psychology reinvent more of religion, that classical clinical psychology can raise a person suffering from some mental illness to be as normal, but nought more. And so positive psychology chaseth after means of enhancement and excellence, to best make use of giftedness. Meanwhilst, whilst this invention is brand new, it is well over a millennium since monasticism was at one

stroke a hospital for repentant sinners and an academy for excellence.

“The point primarily to be held is that psychology is not the ultimate real way, but one among many ways, of understanding how people work, and one that hath stopped its ear to our being created in the image of God. All great Christian doctrines are rendered untranslatable. The article form of what is also thine advisor’s thesis hath as its subtitle “From Christian Passions to Secular Emotions,” and it discusseth the formation of psychology as an emergent secular realm which hath displaced older candidates. But in the West before the reign of psychology there were pastoral paradigms for understanding the human person, and thou knowest that one of the first technical terms Orthodoxy asketh its converts to learn is “passion:” and if the passions thine advisor hath discussed are not point-for-point identical to the passions repented of in Eastern Orthodoxy, still they be by far closer than any of the several emergent framings and meanings of “emotion” as pushed for in the discipline of psychology.

“That there be a common term for psychology, and more dubiously one for what it replaced, is of little import for us. The term “pneumatology” may have existed and named practitioners from an older tradition; but such were under religious auspices. The study and field of communication is, among fields of enquiry studied in the academy, of vintage historically recent: yet it would be right stunning to deny that people communicated, and tried better to communicate, before the change when a university department door now heralded and announced, “DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION.”

‘And what has psychology done since being established as a secular arena? Robert Heinlein in *Stranger in a Strange Land* gets on very quickly to utterly dismissing marriage. But no sooner does Michael stop flailing marriage’s lifeless corpse, but he hath made a gaping hole and buildeth up a bond of water brotherhood

that is meant to be every bit as heroic, beautiful, and magnificent, that the only remaining way to make water brotherhood truly more wondrous and amazing were to enlarge it until it grew to become true marriage.

‘Psychology, whilst being secular, in its completion offers ersatz religion that, though meant to be value-free, provides a secular mystical theology. That this secular religion, fit for all religions and patients, uses guided imagery allegedly from some generic copy-paste of Chinese medicine, Tibetan Buddhism, Native American traditions, and goeth back to Graeco-Roman times; mindfulness from Buddhism’s Eightfold Noble Path; and yoga from Hinduism is but an illustration of G.K. Chesterton’s observation: *the man who does not believe in God does not believe in nothing; he believes anything*. But put this aside and take psychology’s claim of secularity at face value. The *Philokalia* is scarcely but a library of collected works about how to rightly live the inner life. It is not in the main concerned with pleasure or joy: but it has an infinite amount to say about repenting from sins that bear Hell each and every one. Psychology does not trade in temptation, sin, or passion: but it too offers a rudder for one’s inner life, and if it teacheth not the extirpation of things that sully the soul’s purity, it has infinite reach in a battleplan to not be conquered by negative emotion.

‘And if I may speak to thee of TED talks, there is probably a TED talk to be made, “The Trouble with TED,” for they exacerbate this. As thou knowest, one talk gave the staggering announcement that after decades of each generation having higher self-esteem than the last, and the lamented consequence arising that our youth in particular reach record levels of narcissism. Well might she announce that if thou sprayest fuel around and throwest lighted matches on the fuel, sooner or sooner thou wilt have a blaze about thee.

‘She also talked about self-touch, about it being soothing to place thy hand over thy heart. Forsooth! This

is placed among the same general heading of making love without a partner. Not a whisper was heard mentioning affection towards another person, or for that matter a pet; the remedy stepped not an inch away from solipsism. Monks as thou knowest are admonished to refrain from embraces: be that as it may, it would be healthier for a monk to embrace another than to embrace himself.'

I said, 'What is the trouble with TED? For I sense something askance, yet to put a finger on it is hard.'

His All Holiness answered me and said, 'All world religions have grandeur, and for an analysis secular all world religions represent a way that a society can live together and persevere. Hinduism is not the sort of thing one *uses up*, whether across years, lifetimes, or centuries even; its spiritual paths are millennia old, and to destroy it would likely take nuclear war or an apocalyptic event. By contrast, remember thou how thou hast said, "No form of feminism that has yet emerged is stable:" easily enough one finds the living force of body image feminism today, whilst it would scarce be live in the academy in fifty years. Thy friend answered thy remark of something called "Christian feminism," which articulates how traditional Christianity cares for, and seeks, the good of women: for an example, it takes politically incorrect words about husbands and wives and offers the breathtaking change of addressing women as moral agents, and never telling husbands to keep wives in line. That is if anything the exception that proves the rule: for it may bear the external label of "feminism," but its core be much slower to decay than any feminism at all, for it is *not* feminism at all. In thy feminist theology class one author said that in feminist theology, "all the central terms are up for grabs." Meanwhilst, remember thy superior when thou wert an assistant at a bookstore. He hath told thee that books of liberal theology have a shelf life; after five years, perhaps, they are hard to sell. Meanwhilst, his shop published and sold Puritan sermons three centuries old. Thou mayest

have a care that they are heterodox: but do not have a care that they will go out of fashion, or if they do go out of fashion, it will not be because the sermons lost their appeal to future Protestants seeking Biblical faith, but something else hath changed features of Protestantism that have survived since the Reformation.

‘Thou needest not refute TED talks; a few years and a given talk will likely be out of fashion. There is something in the structure of TED that is liberal, even if many talks say nothing overtly political: forasmuch, there is more to say than that they are self-contained, controlled, plastic things, where world religions are something organic that may or may not have a central prophet, but never have a central planner. TED is a sort of evolving, synthetic religion, and it cannot fill true spiritual hunger.

‘But let us return to psychology, or rather treat psychology and TED talks, for psychology hath of ages hoped for a Newton who would lead them into the Promised Land full status of being scientists. The study of Rocks and Nothing is the exemplar after which to pattern the study of Man. Forsooth! The problems in psychology are not so much where psychology has failed to understand Man on the ensaample of empirical science. The real concerns are for where they have *succeeded*.

‘In a forum discussion thou readst, a conversation crystallised on care for diabetes, and cardinally important advice not to seek a book-smart nurse, but a diabetic nurse. For it is the case with empirical science that it entirely lacketh in empirical character. In psychology, as oft in other disciplines, a sufficiently skilled practitioner can pick up a book about part of the subject he does not yet understand, and understand well enough what there is to understand. Understanding were never nursed on the practice of direct experience, and understanding here is malnourished.

‘However, the Orthodox Church with monasticism as its heart has *genuine empiricism* as its spine; you know

with the knowing by which Adam knew Eve. All else is rumour and idle chatter. If there are qualifications to being a spiritual father, one of the chief of these must be that he speaks and acts out of first-hand encounter and first-hand knowledge, not that he learned by rumour and distortion. Dost wish that thou be healed by a spiritual physician? Seek thou then a man which will care for thee as a diabetic nurse.'

Song V.

O Holy Mother!

O Holy Mother! Art Thou the Myst'ry?
 Art Thou the Myst'ry untold?
 For I have written much,
 And spent much care,
 In *The Luddite's Guide to Technology*,
 And looked all the whilst,
 Down the wrong end,
 Of the best telescope far and away that I could find.
 I have written of man and creation defiled,
 Yet for all my concerns,
 Of so-called 'space-conquering technologies,'
 Which it beseemeth me 'body-conquering technologies,'
 Sidestepping the God-given and holy bounds,
 Of our embodied state,
 Where better to seek healing,
 For an occult-free simulation,
 Of the unnatural vice of magick arts,
 Than in the perfect creaturely response,
 'Behold the handmaiden of the Lord.
 Be it unto me according to thy word.'
 Then, the gates, nay, the foundations,
 The foundations of Hell began a-crumbling,
 The New Eve, the Heavenly Mother,
 Whom Christ told the Disciple,

'Behold thy Mother!
 In Her is the microcosm of Creation aright,
 And She is the Friend and Comfort,
 Of the outcast, and the poor:
 My money, my property, I stand to lose:
 But no man can take from me,
 A Treasure vaster than the Heavens;
 Perhaps I would do well,
 To say little else of technologies progressively degrading
 humanity,
 And pray an Akathist to the Theotokos,
 And put a trust in Her that is proto-Antiochian,
 Rather than proto-Alexandrian,
 And give Her a trust in the great Story,
 Diminished not one whit,
 If She happeneth not to be a teacher,
 Offering such ideas as philosophers like:
 Her place in the Great Story is far greater than that:
 And such it is also,
 With illuminèd teachers,
 Who offer worship to God as their teaching,
 And are in travail,
 Until Christ be formed in their disciples.

V.

He said, 'But let us return to the pursuit of happiness,
 which hath scathingly been called "the silliest idea in the
 history of mankind." And that for a junior grade of
 pursuing happiness, not the clone of a systematic science
 which worketh out a combination of activities and
 practices, an America's Test Kitchen for enjoying life,
 studying ways of manipulating oneself to produce pleasure
 and happiness.

'It were several years ago that thou tookest a Fluxx
 deck to play with friends, and the group included five
 adults and one very little boy. So the adults took turns, not

just in their moves, but (for a player who had just played a move) in paying attention to the little one, so that he were not looking on a social meeting that excluded him.

‘When it were thy turn to look after the boy, thou liftedst him to thy shoulders and walkedst slowly, gingerly, towards the kitchen, because thou wishedst to enter the kitchen, but thou wert not sure thou couldst walk under the kitchen’s lower ceiling without striking his head.

‘Shortly after, thou realizedst three things: firstly, that the boy in fact had *not* struck his head on the kitchen ceiling, even though you had advanced well into the kitchen area; secondly, that the boy was dragging his fingers on the ceiling; and thirdly and finally, that he was laughing and laughing, full of joy.

‘That wert a source of pleasure that completely eclipsed the game of Fluxx, though it were then a favourite game. And when thou askedst if it were time for thy next move, it were told thee that the game was won.

‘In the conversation afterwards, thou wert told a couple of things worthy of mention.

‘First, and perhaps of no great import, thou gavest the boy a pleasure that neither of his parents could offer. The boy’s father wert a few inches taller than thee, and were he to attempt what thou attemptedst, he in fact *would* have struck his son’s head against the ceiling. The boy’s mother could not either have offered the favour to her son; whether because her thin arms were weaker, or something else: God wot.

‘Second of all, as mentioned by an undergraduate psychologist, it gives people joy to give real pleasure to another person, and the case of children is special. She did not comment or offer comparison between knowing thou hast given pleasure to any age in childhood and knowing thou hast given pleasure to an adult, but she did comment, and her comment were this: the boy were guileless: too young to just be polite, too young for convincing guile, perhaps too young for any guile worthy of the name. That

meant, whether or not thou thoughtest on such terms, that his ongoing and delighted laughter were only, and could only be, from unvarnished candour. Wherewith thou hadst no question of “Does he enjoy what I am doing with him, or is he just being polite?” Just being polite were off the table.

‘And this is not even only true for the royal race of men. Thou hast not right circumstance to lawfully and responsibly own a pet, but without faintest compromise of principle, thou visitest a pet shelter nearby to thine own home, and at the shelter also, guile is off the agenda, at least for the pets. A cat can purr, or if it hath had enough human attention for the nonce and thou hast perhaps not attended to its swishing tail, a light nip and swipe of claw is alike of unvarnished candour. Whereby thou knowest of a truth what a cat desireth and conveyeth if it purreth and perchance licketh thine hand.

‘Which were subsumed under a general troth, that it is better to serve than to be served, and it is better to give than receive. What is more, the most concentrated teaching about who be truly happy is enshrined in the Sermon on the Mount, and enshrined again as the shorthand version of that great Sermon chanted in the Divine Liturgy:

Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

'The word translated, "blessed," *μακαριος* (*makarios*), hath what we would count as at least two meanings in English: "blessed," and "happy." Among English Bible translations there are some, but a few, translations which render the word as "happy," including *Young's Literal Translation*:

Happy the poor in spirit — because theirs is the reign of the heavens.

Happy the mourning — because they shall be comforted.

Happy the meek — because they shall inherit the land.

Happy those hungering and thirsting for righteousness — because they shall be filled.

Happy the kind — because they shall find kindness.

Happy the clean in heart — because they shall see God.

Happy the peacemakers — because they shall be called Sons of God.

Happy those persecuted for righteousness' sake — because theirs is the reign of the heavens.

Happy are ye whenever they may reproach

you, and may persecute, and may say any evil thing against you falsely for my sake — Rejoice ye and be glad, because your reward [is] great in the heavens, for thus did they persecute the prophets who were before you.

‘In English this is usually, but not always, found in more free translations; the *Amplified Bible* naturally shines in cases like these as an deliberately unusual translation style intended to render two or more faces of an ambiguity or a phrase bearing multiple meanings. Other languages can be different; in French, for instance, there are separate words *béni* and *heureux* which respectively mean “blessed” and “happy,” but *heureux* appears to be the term of choice in French translation of the Beatitudes.

‘Here, though, the Gospel hath aught in common with Plato. Plato investigated happiness, and the Greek term used was εὐδαιμονία, *eudaimonia*, almost exactly a literal equivalent to “in good spirits,” but the literal sense was taken much more seriously and much farther. It was a primary term for happiness, but what was seen as true happiness was having one’s spirit in good health. This happiness would not be easily confused by counterfeit pleasures such as one can immediately procure with narcotics; and the point is not that real-world narcotics create addiction and horrible misery. The happiness would be just as counterfeit in the pleasure of a person unhealthy in spirit to take some imaginary narcotic that created intense and endless pleasure, without either addiction or the misery that loom in the grievous backswing of narcotic pleasure.

‘Thou rememberest thy surprise, when reading thine undergraduate psychology text, when thou readedst what wert said of the pleasure principle. For the pleasure principle art an artifact of bad philosophy, which noting

perchance that most of our actions bring some pleasure or pleasing result, assumes and defines that every action anyone ever takes is that which is calculated to bring thee the most pleasure. In settings less far back, thou hast listened to people saying that the only motivation anyone takes for any action is that it is calculated to bring them the greatest economic profit, and thou hast borrowed an answer, to say that several people have essayed to convince thee of this as truth, and so far as thou knewest, not one of them stood to gain financial profit from convincing thyself of this purported truth.

‘Thy textbook, like those who try to convince with a charming smile where a reasoned argument is ordinarily polite to offer, said that it were more a virtue than a vice to show kindnesses to others because one enjoyed the feelings it gave, and thou hadst two answers in thy heart: first of all, past the sugar-coating of “more a virtue than a vice” lies an assertion that virtue is impossible in principle, and secondly, that the only theoretical possibility thou couldst care for the poor in order to help thy fellow men is if one received absolutely no pleasure or consolation in any stripe or dimension to care for the poor out of a genuine motive of benefitting others and not whatever probable pleasures their generosity and service might come back their way. That appalling price tag reaches beyond exorbitant. And thou desirest to speak of a “masochism principle” or “pain principle” whereby all decisions and all actions at all times by all men are whatever is calculated to bring them the greatest sufferings, alike useless to assert for any philosopher worthy of the name. It is hardly to be denied that most decisions bring some pain or have some downside on the part of the persons who make them, so a pain principle mirroring a pleasure principle is alike unprovable, and alike unfalsifiable, an untestable guess that hath not any place in science and scarcely more any place in disciplines seeking to be established as science. It was not until later

that thou readst a competent philosopher who said that the existence of pleasure and a reward does not in and of itself make any action which brings pleasure to be motivated solely as a means to obtain pleasure. The thought-experiment were posed, that a man who gives to the poor and enjoys doing so were offered a pill which would give him the full pleasure and benefits of his generosity, but do nothing at all for the practical needs of the poor, would be in but rare cases utterly spurned as a right empty and worthless counterfeit.

Song VI.

Crossing the Great Threshold.

The tale were told,
 Of a child starkly scant of mind,
 Who received a glittering package, a gift,
 And kept the glittering package,
 Indeed taking it with him well nigh everywhere,
 And after long time,
 When the disposable wrapping paper,
 Were well battered and now dingy,
 An adult asked,
 ‘Aren’t you going to open the package?’
 The child exclaimed with joy,
 Once the toy emerged from the tatters,
 And squealed with joy, saying,
 “Oh, there’s *another* present!”
 My Lord and my God!
 Perhaps I will never open,
 The Sermon on the Mount.

VI.

I said myself then, ‘O John! O glorious Saint John!
 Canst thou lead me on a path into the the Sermon on the

Mount? For I have trod the path of self-direction, and it well nigh destroyed me.'

Then the Saint said to me, 'Thanks to thee, son, for thy request. I awaited that thou mightest ask, for that thou mightest have the Heavenly reward for asking.

'That which you ask were a work of years or lifetimes; let me chase a humbler quarry: unfolding the first verse only of that great Sermon, which declareth the poor in spirit to be blessed and happy. I will speak to you of the riches of poverty but not the heights of humility, though they be one and the same. Though I may call on other verses to tell what riches are in poverty, I will make no attempt to unfold these other Beatitudes, though to them that which declared the blessedness of poverty that wert one and the same. And I tell thee, through thine interests, that to be poor in spirit is to be no self-sufficient solipsist; rather, it is utterly dependent on the infinite riches of God, and that it is royal: for kings are forbidden to touch money, and in another sense all Christians and especially all monastics are forbidden to touch aught possession, not solely money, in stead of grasping as did the rich young ruler. But poverty be the unstopping of yon Sermon, an unstopping of virtue in which flowing fount eclipseth flowing fount.

That true poverty extendeth beyond a lack of possessions is taught by calling those blessed who are "poor in spirit," beyond mere poverty of the body, and it is taught that the monastic vow of poverty includeth the other two: for a monk is bereft of the normal blessing of holy matrimony, and even of his own self-will. *That* thou knowest as treasure, for thou wishest to trade thine own idiorhythmic self-direction for a coenobetic monastery, and to speak even more plainly, the direction of an abbot.

'In the Sermon on the Mount, poverty beseemeth to be special, for there are two passages: that which commendeth the storing treasures up in Heaven and rejecting the storing up of treasures on earth, then

discussion of the eye as the lamp of the body, then exhortation to take no thought for the morrow, for God knoweth and willeth to care for our needs. And when thou hast wealth, be merciful to others, and thou wilt be repaid at great usury by thy true Debtor, God.

‘In fact there is one passage and topic, the longest though length in verses is a trivial measure. The tri-unity is harder to see in modern translations that translate something out to be accessible; one reads of one’s eye being “healthy” or “sound”. The King James version rightly renders “single”, for an undivided wholeness. Fr. Thomas Hopko hath said, before the surge of enthusiasm for mindfulness, “*Be awake and attentive, fully present where you are.*” This attentiveness and full presence is the operation of an activity that is *single*, that neither layeth up possessions, nor defendeth them in worry, nor doubteth that the God who provideth will overlook thee in His care. In all these is dispersal and dissipation. Poverty of spirit maketh for singleness of eye, and a singleness destroyed by so many of the technologies you trade in.

‘It has from ancient times been reckoned that if thou givest to the poor, God is thy Debtor, and under what you would call third world living conditions, I told married Christians to leave to their children brothers rather than things. This too is poverty of spirit, even if it belong only in marriage, in a condition monks renounce. Thou hast read of those who suggest that thou asketh not, “Can I afford what I need?” but “Do I need what I can afford?”

‘It is monastic poverty that monastics do not defend themselves, not only by force, but even with words, showing the power that terrified Pontius Pilate. It is monastic poverty not to struggle again over any temporal matter. It is poverty of spirit not to have plans, nor, in the modern sense, an identity. For in ancient times, Christians who were martyred, answered when asked their names, none other than “Christian.” And beyond this further layers yet beckon. Poverty is not an absence of treasures; it

is a positive, active, thing that slices sharper than any two-edged sword. And monks who renounce property sometimes have something to say beyond “Good riddance!” The force of the rejection, and the freedom that is gained in letting riches go, is more like the obscene and *thundering* announcement: “I lost 235 pounds in one weekend!”

“Thou readedst a church sign saying, “Who is rich? The person who is content.” And I tell thee that thou canst purchase by poverty of spirit many times and layers more than contentment with what thou possessest now. I have not even scratched the surface of experiences of monastics who were poor in spirit to a profound degree, but thou knowest that there are limits to what is lawful for me to utter to thee, and thou knowest that thou art not bidden to chase after experiences, but seek to repent of thy sins for the rest of thy life, which thou knowest to reckon as monastic privilege.’

Song VII.

I Sing a Song to my Apple.

Betimes my salad days were right begun,
I programmed an Apple][,
In gradeschool adventure games and a 4D maze,
Simple arithmetic- and trigonometric-powered
animations.
My father a computer scientist,
Who shared with me his joy,
And in high school a Unix system administrator became.
My family got, and still hath the carcass,
Of one original ‘fat Mac’,
So named because it had an available maximum 512k of
RAM.
My calculator in high school,
On which I programmed computer-generated art,

And a simple video game, had as much.
Ere my salad days were dwindled,
I remained a Unix programmer,
And judged Mac OSX my preferred flavor of Unix.
Later I had iPhones,
And for the first time in my life,
Owned a computer where I lacked root privilege.
Along the way I got an Apple Watch,
My desire increased as I read about it,
And vanished when I learned it were,
Bereft of such things as even a web browser.
I gave it to my brother,
Who later gave it back before it broke.
I sing a song to my Apple,
A peerless 17" MacBook Pro,
Which through minor design flaw,
Burned through video cards oft enough,
And when the Apple Store stopped receiving those cards,
So with it went any hope of keeping my Mac without
frequent \$500 repairs.
And along the way,
With the sweetness of a Linux virtual machine,
Realized that OSX had grown monstrous as a version of
Unix.
When I asked about one cardinaly important open source
project,
I were told that Apple had removed parts of the operating
system,
That the project needed to run,
But information technology work in my Linux virtual
machine,
Was the command line equivalent of point and click.
It were a discovery as if I had returned to Paradise.
I sing a song to Apple's technical support,
For when I asked a question,
About command-line-driven Apache configuration,
It took escalations up to level 3 technical support,

Before a Genius knew that Macs *have* a command line.
I purchased a computer meant to last many years.
I sing a song to my late iPhone,
Bewailed by men who made the Mac great,
Which slipped a pocket near a food bank,
Booted my laptop into Windows and found,
That Find My iPhone was now rendered useless.
I went to see an Apple Store,
And received a followup call,
Giving a good ten days before I could access my iPhone,
And found out also that Macs were as useless,
As my computer booted into Windows,
To Find My iPhone.
Once I had one from each four,
Offerings for Apple computers:
A laptop one, an iPad one,
An iPhone one, an Apple Watch one;
And ere I were negotiating,
For to buy a replacement iPhone on eBay,
I said that there were many Android devices within my
budget,
And whilst in bed realized,
I wanted full well that the negotiation fail.
Apple's indirect gift to desktops may be Windows,
And Apple's indirect gift to smartphones may be Android;
For surely no iPhone killer before Android even came
close.
Certainly Windows Mobile answered the wrong question.
But even if one may argue, legitimately,
That a Mac and a PC have grown remarkably similar,
And iOS and Android are also more alike than different,
I was not poisoned by technical merits.
I was poisoned by the corporate mindset,
That all but killed my prospects,
Of finding my iPhone before the battery were drained
completely,
And when I called my iPhone to perchance find it in my

car,
I went to voicemail immediately:
My iPhone's battery wert already dead.
I had known, but not paid attention earlier,
To Steve Jobs as beyond toxic, as a boss;
Screaming and abusive,
To employees he had every reason to cherish,
And after a technical fumble,
Publicly fired an Apple technician,
At an employee motivational event.
And I believed it.
More disturbed I was,
When I read of Jobs's spiritual practices,
Such as an Orthodox might interpret,
As opening the mind to listen,
And draw the milk of dragons.
Technology does things for us,
Though I have found that when I shared my iOS devices
with children,
Squabble and squabble ensued.
Technology does things for us,
But this Trojan horse does things for devils also,
Who cannot give exquisitely beneficial gifts,
Even wert they to try.
The power of devils is real but limited:
Such teaches the *Philokalia*,
Which though it be filled with love of the beautiful,
Says more about the operations and activities of devils,
Than aught else that I have read.
And one thing it sayeth,
Through Orthodox Christian Tradition,
Says that devils can tell a man's spiritual state,
And try to inject venomous thoughts in temptation,
Where men have free will, still,
The devils cannot read minds,
Even if they by ruse give one man certain thoughts,
Sting another that the thoughts are in the first man,

And behold, they speak and art deceived,
 That devils can read people's minds.
 Devilish predictions are called guesses,
 Which are sometimes wrong,
 The devils see a man walking to journey,
 And guess that he travels to visit another specific man,
 But 'tis guesswork; devils can well enough be wrong.
 St. Nilus's alleged prophecies are dubious at present,
 But we may not yet be in the clear.
 And if the U.S. has been called "One nation under
 surveillance,"
 Where No Such Agency has received every email,
 It is now clear and open knowledge,
 To those that will reflect,
 That among most most Americans,
 'Every breath and step Americans take,'
 Is monitored by Big Brother,
 But perhaps it is not just human agencies,
 That reap the information collected.

++ungood

(Did anyone besides my most reverend Archbishop
 mention that it used to be that you had to seek out
 pornography, and leave your car in front of a store with
 papered-over windows, and wear your trenchcoat disguise
 for the mission, whereas now *pornography* seeks *you*?
 It is something like a water cooler that hath three faucets,
 Serving cold water, hot water, and antifreeze,
 And the handles perplexing in their similitude.)

VII.

The Saint turned to me and said, 'I would remind thee
 of Fr. Thomas's famous 55 maxims:

55 Maxims by Fr. Thomas Hopko

1. Be always with Christ and trust God in

everything.

2. Pray as you can, not as you think you must.
3. Have a keepable rule of prayer done by discipline.
4. Say the Lord's Prayer several times each day.
5. Repeat a short prayer when your mind is not occupied.
6. Make some prostrations when you pray.
7. Eat good foods in moderation and fast on fasting days.
8. Practice silence, inner and outer.
9. Sit in silence 20 to 30 minutes each day.
10. Do acts of mercy in secret.
11. Go to liturgical services regularly.
12. Go to confession and holy communion regularly.
13. Do not engage intrusive thoughts and feelings.
14. Reveal all your thoughts and feelings to a trusted person regularly.

15. Read the scriptures regularly.
16. Read good books, a little at a time.
17. Cultivate communion with the saints.
18. Be an ordinary person, one of the human race.
19. Be polite with everyone, first of all family members.
20. Maintain cleanliness and order in your home.
21. Have a healthy, wholesome hobby.
22. Exercise regularly.
23. Live a day, even a part of a day, at a time.
24. Be totally honest, first of all with yourself.
25. Be faithful in little things.
26. Do your work, then forget it.
27. Do the most difficult and painful things first.
28. Face reality.
29. Be grateful.

30. Be cheerful.
31. Be simple, hidden, quiet and small.
32. Never bring attention to yourself.
33. Listen when people talk to you.
34. Be awake and attentive, fully present where you are.
35. Think and talk about things no more than necessary.
36. Speak simply, clearly, firmly, directly.
37. Flee imagination, fantasy, analysis, figuring things out.
38. Flee carnal, sexual things at their first appearance.
39. Don't complain, grumble, murmur or whine.
40. Don't seek or expect pity or praise.
41. Don't compare yourself with anyone.
42. Don't judge anyone for anything.
43. Don't try to convince anyone of anything.
44. Don't defend or justify yourself.

45. Be defined and bound by God, not people.
46. Accept criticism gracefully and test it carefully.
47. Give advice only when asked or when it is your duty.
48. Do nothing for people that they can and should do for themselves.
49. Have a daily schedule of activities, avoiding whim and caprice.
50. Be merciful with yourself and others.
51. Have no expectations except to be fiercely tempted to your last breath.
52. Focus exclusively on God and light, and never on darkness, temptation and sin.
53. Endure the trial of yourself and your faults serenely, under God's mercy.
54. When you fall, get up immediately and start over.
55. Get help when you need it, without fear or shame.

The Saint continued: 'Wouldst thou agree that we are in a high noon of secret societies?'

I answered, 'Of a troth.'

He asked, 'Wouldst thou agree that those societies are corrosive?'

I answered, 'As a rule, yes, and I wit that Orthodox are forbidden on pain of excommunication to join the Freemasons.'

He spoke again and asked me, 'And hast thou an opinion about the assassination of JFK, whether it wert a conspiracy?'

I said, 'A friend whose judgement I respect in matters political hath told me an opinion that there in fact was a conspiracy, and it were driven by LBJ.'

He said, 'And hast thou spent five full minutes in worrying about either in the past year?'

I said, 'Nay.'

He said, 'Thou hast secular intelligence if thou canst ask if "surveillance from Hell" in an obviously figurative sense might also be "surveillance from Hell" far more literally speaking, but such intelligence as this does not help one enter the Kingdom of Heaven. The devils each and every one are on a leash, and as thy priest hath said many times, *every thing that happeneth to us is either a blessing from God, or a temptation that God hath allowed for our strengthening*. Wherefore whether the devils have more information than in ages past, thou wert still best to live:

Focus exclusively on God and light, and never on darkness, temptation and sin.

Song VIII.***A Hymn to Arrogance.***

The Saint opened his Golden Mouth and sang,
‘There be no war in Heaven,
Not now, at very least,
And not ere were created,
The royal race of mankind.
Put on your feet the Gospel of peace,
And pray, a-stomping down the gates of Hell.
There were war in Heaven but ever brief,
The Archangel Saint Michael,
Commander of the bodiless hosts,
Said but his name, “Michael,”
Which is, being interpreted,
“Who is like God?”
With that the rebellion were cast down from Heaven,
Sore losers one and all.
They remain to sharpen the faithful,
God useth them to train and make strength.
Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth
therewith?
Or shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it?
As if the rod should shake itself against them that lift it up,
Or as if the staff should lift up itself,
As if it were no wood.
Therefore be not dismayed,
If one book of Holy Scripture state,
That the Devil incited King David to a census,
And another sayeth that God did so,
For God permitted it to happen by the Devil,
As he that heweth lifteth an axe,
And God gave to David a second opportunity,
In the holy words of Joab.
Think thou not that God and the Devil are equal,
Learnest thou enough of doctrine,

To know that God is greater than can be thought,
And hath neither equal nor opposite,
The Devil is if anything the opposite,
Of Michael, the Captain of the angels,
Though truth be told,
In the contest between Michael and the Devil,
The Devil fared him not well.
The dragon wert as a little boy,
Standing outside an Emperor's palace,
Shooting spitwads with a peashooter,
Because that wert the greatest harm,
That he saweth how to do.
The Orthodox Church knoweth well enough,
'The feeble audacity of the demons.'
Read thou well how the Devil crowned St. Job,
The Devil and the devils aren't much,
Without the divine permission,
And truth be told,
Ain't much with it either:
God alloweth temptations to strengthen;
St. Job the Much-Suffering emerged in triumph.
A novice told of an odd clatter in a courtyard,
Asked the Abbot what he should do:
"It is just the demons.
Pay it no mind," came the answer.
Every devil is on a leash,
And the devout are immune to magic.
Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder:
The young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under
feet.
The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.
Wherefore be thou not arrogant towards men,
But be ever more arrogant towards devils and the Devil
himself:
"Blow, and spit on him."

VIII.

I told St. John, 'I have just read the panikhida service, and it appeareth cut from the same cloth as the divine services in general.'

He said, 'Doth that surprise thee?'

I said, 'Perhaps it should not. But the *Philokalia* describes a contrast between life and death: for instance, in the image of an inn, where lodgers come for a night, bearing whatever they possess; some sleep on beds, some sleep on the floor, but come daybreak, all of them pick up their belongings and walk on hence.'

He said, 'How readest thou that parable?'

I said, 'In this life, some live in riches, and some in poverty, but all alike leave this life carrying only their deeds with them. The last English homily I heard, the priest quoted someone who said, "I have never seen a trailer attached to a hearse." Which were, "You can't take it with you," save that terrifying tale of a monk who died with over a hundred gold pieces. ('Twas said he was not avaricious, but merely stingy.) When he died, the community discussed what to do with his nigh incalculable sum of wealth: some suggested a building or other capital project, others some kindness to the poor. And when all was discussed, *they buried all the gold with him*, a costly, potent reminder to monastics that they should not want to be buried with even one gold piece. But the monk could not take the gold with him ere it were buried with him.'

The Saint told me, 'Thou hast read part of *Prayers by the Lake*, in which St. Nikolai says that birth and death are an inch apart, but the ticker tape goes on forever.

'Rememberest thou also that in the *Philokalia* we read that those who wish one suffering to die were like one holding a deeply confused hope that a doctor would break up the bed of a sick man? For our passions we take with us beyond death, which passions the body mediateth to some degree.'

I said, 'May I comment something? Which soundeth as a boast?'

He said, 'Speak on.'

I said, 'I am mindful that I am mortal, and that I am the chief of sinners. But the day of my death be more real to me than my salvation, and that I be the chief of sinners eclipseth that God be merciful. I have needed the reminder of the core promise in For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Thus there be twain of deep pairs, and I have of the twain grasped each one the lesser alone.'

He said, 'Hast thou not been astonished at God's perfect Providence of years betimes?'

I said, 'Yes.'

He said, 'What thou sayest resoundeth not as boasting in my ears, but many people have wished for the remembrance of death and not reached it, no, not in monasticism even.'

I asked, 'Will I reach monasticism?'

He smiled at me, and said, 'Whither askest thou the future? It is wondrous.'

He said, 'Remembrance of death doeth not to drain life. It is a reminder that life is not a dress rehearsal: or rather that it is a dress rehearsal, and *our performance in this rehearsal determineth what we will meet the Resurrection having rehearsed.*

'With death cometh a realization of, "I shall not pass this wise again."

'Such death as we have giveth life a significance eternal in its import. For thou knowest that all ye in the Church Militant stand as it were in an arena before God and His Christ, before all the saints and angels and even devils, as God's champions summoned to vindicate God as St. Job the Much-Suffering and others vindicate God. And

whereinever thou triumphest, Christ triumpheth in thee.

‘Knowest thou not that the saints who have run the race and be adorned with an imperishable and incorruptible crown stand about all ye, the Church Triumphant cheering on the Church Militant until every last one hath crossed the finish line in triumph?’

‘Knowest thou not that every saint and angel, the Mother of God and Christ enthroned on high, all cheer ye who still run the course, each and every one?’

‘The times preceding the Second Coming of Christ are not only apocalyptic; they are the very thing which giveth the term “apocalyptic” its meaning in thy day. And they be trials and tribulations which perhaps will happen in ages later on, and perhaps may already be begun. But in the end Christ will triumph, and all alike who are faithful. And if thou art alive for the Second Coming of Christ, or if not, God hath provided and will provide a way for thee. Be thou faithful, and remember, “The righteous shall live by his faith.”’

I said, ‘I should like to know where God will lead me. I can guess promises of good, but I am happier at least leaving a vessel open for God to fill.’

The Saint’s face began to glow, and he said, ‘In my day, I said something you may have met in the Reformers: that the age of miracles was no more, or in crasser tongue, “God wrote the book and retired.” So I called “opening the eyes of the blind” to be cleansing eyes from lust, which wert a fair claim in any case, and in particular if there miracles are no more. Thou, it seemeth, art in another age of miracles, or perhaps the age of miracles has never stopped from before the Nativity of Christ, but hath merely hid from time to time. Thou knowest thyself not to be the Orthodox Church’s fourth Theologian, but thou hast known some beginnings of theology already, and hath seen more miracles in thine earthly pilgrimage than have I. I perchance engaged in rhetorical discourse about God, and never on earth saw the Uncreated Light. Thou hast

seen icons like and thou hast also seen a photograph of inside an altar, where paten and chalice glowed purest white, and unlike mine own self, thou hast been anointed with more than one miraculous oil, dear Christos...'

Then he bowed deeply, and prostrated himself before me, and his face glowed brightly, brightly, ten thousand times brighter than the sun and yet hurt not my mortal eyes, and he asked of me, 'Friend, wherewith askest thou the future? It is wondrous.'

Then there were a scintillating flash of light, beyond intense, and the Saint was gone.

I broke down and wept until I realized I was the happiest I'd been in my life.