



**R.A. LAFFERTY:**

**FOUR  
STORIES**

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## THE LAST ASTRONOMER

A new worry for High Rider Charles-Wain began that morning when he stepped on a weighing machine and got a tune and a print-out. The tune was Winterset's 'Funeral March', and the print-out read:

"You're one and ninety kilograms.  
Oh sing a roundelay!  
No more you'll have to give the damns,  
For you will die today."

But High Rider didn't much want to die that day. "The machine is off a kilogram too," he growled. He crumbled up the print-out and flung it on the red grass. And thereupon the machine gave out with that ear-wrenching wail that is called the 'poor man's siren'. It signals that it has another communication for the same person. High Rider took it from the slot, and the new print-out read:

"Pick up that print-out from the grass, you jasper.  
Were you raised in a swinery?"

High Rider threw that print-out on the grass too. Then he quickly took the third one from the slot to cut off the 'poor man's siren' in mid-squawl. This print-out read only "Oaf", and High Rider threw it on the grass with the other two and ambled off to try to leave the noise behind him. But he was crosswise with Red World today, and with all the worlds.

Ah, you have heard of persons who have had their whole world crumble under them. It's a desolate and damnable feeling. But High Rider Charles-Wain had had his approximately ten billion billion billion ( $10^{27}$ ) worlds crumble under him. And the small handful of worlds that were left were all perverse. Certainly Red World was. That weighing machine, for instance--

The weighing machine wasn't a Red World idea or invention at all. It was Earthian in its origin. But almost as soon as the things were built on Red World, the smudged Martian spirit took over. There was not any mechanism for printing anything except the weight. There wasn't any provision for the machines to give personal rimed messages. All that smart stuff had an irrational origin. There sure wasn't any mechanism for that horrible howling called the 'poor man's siren'.

"It's little guys that like to holler that get into them," one Martian red-neck explained. "Nah, you can't see them in there. It's just their holler that gets in. The rest of them stays outside."

On Red World there was no clear line between machines and animals and people. An automobile might argue with people and even buck and try to throw them out. And yet there were other cases of automobiles starting up and plunging into canals and saving people from drowning. There wasn't any mechanism for these things. There was only the irrational thing called 'Spirit of Automobile' that came to inhabit each auto.

Mars, the Red World, was somewhat irrational by old standards. But what was 'rational' nowadays?

"'Rational' is a little man with big eye-glasses going out with a micronomer shorter than his finger to measure the whole outdoors," another Martian red-neck said once. "He gets owl dirt on his glasses, but he thinks that the owl dirt on them is really far galaxies. So he measures the gravity of that owl dirt and calculates how much it will bend space. That is 'rational'."

The reason for High Rider having worlds to the number of ten to the twenty-seventh power collapse under him was that he had been an astronomer, and all those worlds collapsed when astronomy collapsed. The bursting of the 'Great Astronomical Bubble' had been funny, of course. But it wasn't as funny to some of the old and intransigent astronomers as it was to the other people. Some of them died of the shock of that collapse. And they continued to die at an unseemly rate.

When the profession and passion of High Rider Charles-Wain, the old classical astronomy, collapsed, that bereaved astronomer fell into a despondency that was almost worse than death. Well, he just couldn't face the derision on Earth. None of the old astronomers could. So some of them came to Mars where the 'people' were kinder.

Kinder? The Martians? Oh yes, they were very apologetic about anything that even seemed to give offense.

"No, no, that wasn't ourselves snickering," those funny folks would lie. "That was the Snicker Weeds snickering." But the Snicker Weeds only snickered when some Martian was within snicker-shot of them.

But there was an illusion of kindness and compassion here, and High Rider found a bit of solace as he walked through the pink meadows and listened to the pleasant whistles of the canal boats.

He loved the canal boats, and he had several times lived on one of them since his coming to Mars. He remembered with pleasure one night when he and a canal boat family had had a very large fish for dinner. No, no, you misunderstand. The huge fish sat at table with them and ate with them, manipulating the Martian finger sticks as well as any person could. He was a big striped fellow and an interesting talker in spite of the fish-lipped manner of his pronunciation. There was an easy camaraderie among all the creatures of Red World.

Quite a few Earth people came to Mars to die. Death on Red World didn't seem so final, or at least it didn't seem so sharp and sudden as on Earth. And the distance to Mars, once mankind had been liberated from the old astronomy and the old mathematics, was not at all great. It was an easy trip in a variety of scheduled or unscheduled vehicles.

"This life is too pleasant to leave," High Rider mumbled on that day when he had received his death notice. "The taste of gall and disillusionment is bearable here so long as the sunlight is still golden and the fields are living scarlet and



the waters are bright green. And I will not admit that a weighing machine can predict the day of my death. That would be coarse superstition. It's a fact that in the dozen cases I know about the predictions have come true, but that is only coarse coincidence. It's true that the Martians see death on me, but I bet I wouldn't have to die if I really decided that I didn't want to. To die is the only honorable thing for a discredited astronomer to do, of course, but I was never one to insist on my honor in other things. I suppose I really want to die, though, or I wouldn't be doing it."

High Rider wasn't really very old--an even hundred years by Earth time; and he belonged to the first generation that was supposed to average a hundred and fifty years. But, yes, the Martians could see death on him.

They smiled at him this day and they encouraged him with such hearty sayings as "The last day of a life should be the best day of it. Enjoy it, enjoy it! How we envy you!"

The collapse, several years before this, of the classical Hubbleian Astronomy should have surprised no one. It was built on nothing but extrapolations from very faint smudges of light, on angles smaller than that subtended by a beebee or a birdshot on Earth's moon as observed from Earth, on mathematics too coarse to deal with really tenuous operations, and on an open violation of both common-sense and divine economy.

It was really Occam's Razor ("If that man had such a sharp razor, why is he wearing a full beard in the only picture we have of him?") that cut the old astronomy to pieces. What is the use of ten billion galaxies if one galaxy will do? What is the use of ten billion suns in a galaxy if fifty suns will do? What is the use of thirty billion light years of distance-time if thirty light years will do?

It was the Razor that did it in. And it was nine basic mathematical errors, one in the calculations of Herschel, Bessel, Petzval, Dreyer, Max Wolf, Einstein, De Sitter, Slipher, and Hubble that did it in. "Every grade school boy could point out those errors today, but why did we not see them immediately?" High Rider Charles-Wain asked the sorrel-colored hills of Mars. "Of course all of us astronomers copied each other unthinkingly, but such trunk-to-tail following is characteristic of every elite of every species, not just of the old astronomers of Earth. Oh, why did we never doubt? Why did we never cross-check with common sense and with different-viewpoint observation? They've been laughing at us for several painful years now, and they'll not stop till the last one of us is gone. I'm about the last of us, I guess, and I'm about gone."

And the old astronomy had collapsed also because of all the living anomalies that took the easy rationality out of the cosmos. These living anomalies became undeniable as soon as Earthians got to Mars and the other planets. One of those living anomalies landed beside High Rider Charles-Wain right now, and he began to talk to the old astronomer.

"I knew that this was your last day and I wanted to see you one final time," this anomaly said. "I was afraid I would

be too late and wouldn't be able to find you. There are dozens of burial meadows you could be plodding to, but I guessed it would be the 'Star-Flower Burial Meadow'. I finished the regatta just after dawn this morning, and I'm bone tired and wing tired; but I wanted to see you again. You're the last of them, here on Red World at least."

This person who cared enough to look up High Rider for a last visit was a Bird Man who had just finished the Phobos Regatta that day. The regatta was about 3,700 miles or 5,900 kilometers. It had taken nine Martian days of flying. It was a stark physical test. Yes, the Bird Men flew from the Martian Moon Phobos to the Planet Mars. They slept and ate on the wing, but provisions were brought to them by little provisioning boats.

"How did you do in the Regatta?" High Rider asked.

"Oh, I finished three hundred and ninth out of a flight of four hundred and seventeen. But anyone who finishes at all wins a great personal victory. Remember when you Earthians used to say that creatures couldn't fly between planets, or even from a moon to a planet, because there was no 'air' out there? Remember when they said that creatures could not make the flights because the 'distances' were so great? That was funny. But the funniest of all was your believing that there were no canals on Mars when anyone with a cheap telescope could see ten thousand of them. Your theories got in the way of plain facts."

"Our theories did not allow for howling anomalies, and there are thousands of them on the half dozen worlds we now know. And you, Bird Man, are about as feathery an anomaly as any of them."

"I suppose so," the Bird Man said, "yet I sometimes find myself wishing that the grotesque old theories of Earthians had been true. When I was a boy and a young man (and by all the red meadows of Mars I'm still a young man!) I loved to read the 'Astronomy Fiction' of Earth. I still say that there was no harm in it. It tickled the imagination. But they say that those old pathological astronomers of Earth really believed their astronomy. And some of the Earth people believed in their astronomers. Only a few oddities like the great Charles Fort knew that your astronomy was total hokum. Fort has always been popular on Mars. Fort and Edgar Rice Burroughs. It's said that Burroughs was never on Mars, but I do not understand how he was able to describe us so accurately if he was never here. But tell me, Last One, did you yourself believe in the old astronomy? And did you ever stop believing in it?"

"A part of me stopped believing in it when I and a dozen others really did travel to the end of the universe and found it so heart-breakingly near. It was barely thirty light years out from the solar system that we came to the absolute end of the universe. And on that trip we discovered that there was something wrong with all our calculations and with our concept of light years. The trip that should have taken us forty years each way took us only two years each way. And yet we were thirty years out by all the tenets of our astronomy. It was the absolute end of the universe, as I say. There were no stars beyond. There were not even any reflections of stars. Our imagined billions-times-billions universe had been no more than



a house of mirrors reflecting and distorting the same few lights over and over again thousands of times. But we had come to the very end where even the mirroring failed. Do you know how near the end we came? We pushed into it until our ship stalled. One man got out on the hull and seemed to push his arm into the total nothingness. But when he withdrew from it, he didn't have that arm. Listen, that arm wasn't bitten off or destroyed. We examined it all too thoroughly. There was no blood, no bruising, not even a scar. It was as if he had been born without that arm. Once a thing goes into that nothingness, it becomes the case that it has never been. So, I suppose, it is with the old astronomy. But do you know what's at the end of the worlds? Nothing, nothing, nothing! That's what's at the end of the worlds! And that 'nothing' is too close to us, a billion times too close."

"Of course I know it, old man. We've always known it. It's in our songs."

"We don't have billions and billions of galaxies! We have only a small fraction of one galaxy. Oh, it's intolerable! It shuts us up in too small a box! It diminishes me. It diminishes all of us. It even diminishes God."

"Easy, old man, easy! You have been through both the short anguish and the long anguish. And now, happily, you have come to the last day of your frustration."

"But I'm not sure that I want to die."

"Of course you want to die. Everyone wants to die when his time comes. I think you should walk down this series of meadows towards the major canal exchange. It's all so pretty there, and so apt for you!"

"Yes, yes, I am impelled to walk in that direction. Thank you, Bird Man. This day I have received good words from you, an anomaly in whom in my younger wits I could not have believed."

High Rider Charles-Wain, in the last afternoon of his life, walked with a light step through a series of lush and reddish meadows, and he found himself whistling that old tune 'A Land Two Meters Long The Destined Home For Me'. He was met by two Martian girls who had been waiting for him. Grandfather of Anomalies, those girls! Oh hell, they had ears like the Mars Maids in old Burroughs novels!

"But I wouldn't want them any other way," High Rider said. "It is strangely beautiful here. Were you two waiting for me?"

"Oh sure," one of the Mars Maids said. "We dig a grave for you here because we like you."

"And because it's an easy digging place," the second Mars Maid said.

"And because we will take the nodal enzymes and hormones and plasmas from your liver and gall-bladder and pieal and other glands," the first Maid said. "We can get nine dollars red money for that stuff. That's the fun part."

"How did you know I'd come here?" High Rider asked.

"Oh, this is a burial meadow. You have come here like the Elephant to the China Shop, as your own Earthian saying has it. And this is the right burial meadow for you."

Yes, High Rider felt (those two funny-eared girls were digging the best grave you ever saw, and just for him) that this was the right burial meadow for him. The star plants, the star flowers were growing and glowing beautifully there, two by two, always two by two. But no, there was a singleton, just one singleton among the paired flowers.

"I wish, if it were possible--" High Rider began. And those two girls were extracting nodal enzymes and hormones and plasmas and other things from the internal gathering places in the High Rider body. Of course it hurt, but how else could those girls earn nine dollars red so easily.

"If it were possible, I wish that I could live into the late evening and see stars again," High Rider was finally able to say out of his deep emotion.

"Oh, we'll bury you with the stalks of the star flower plants driven into each of your eyes," one of the girls said. "Then they will grow out of you, and it will be the case that you will be seeing the star flowers, the stars forever."

"Oh, that's why they grow so beautifully two by two," High Rider cried with a certain delight. "Each pair is growing out of the two eyes of somebody who loved the stars. And yet, amid all the paired beauties, there is one singleton."

"Oh, we liked him too," the other girl said. The two girls laid High Rider down in the bottom of his grave then. "He was an Earth astronomer like you, and like you he was impelled to come to the beautiful 'Star Burial Meadows' to die and be buried. His name was One-Eyed McGonigal."

"I knew him well," High Rider said. "It is a pleasure to be buried among old friends. Will it hurt, the stalks of the plants being driven into my eyes?"

One of the girls was sharpening two star flower stalks with a brass hatchet.

"Oh yes, it will hurt for about a year," she said. "That shows that the plants are really growing out of you. That shows that you'll be able to see the stars forever. Isn't that nice!"

"Tell me when I'm dead," High Rider mumbled.

The girl hammered the two stalks into his two eyes. Bam! Bam!

"You're dead now," she said. "This part is fun. Stars for the star man! How ritual can you get!"

High Rider's eyes hurt excruciatingly. That showed that the beautiful star flower plants were already growing out of them, out of him, that he was a part of those stunning little stars. And the Mars Maids were shoveling aromatic red dirt onto him to confirm the arrangement.

Wonderful, wonderful!



## IN THE TURPENTINE TREES

I will unfold my enigma to the sound of a harp.  
Psalm 48

Methinks it is better I should have pined away seven  
of my goldenest years... than that so passionate a  
love adventure should be lost.

Charles Lamb

"Now the Lord appeared by the Terebinths of Mamre as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day--" so Genesis begins its eighteenth chapter: and then the Lord held a conversation with Abraham. But is the entire conversation reported to us, or is some of it left out?

At other times, the Lord appeared in a Burning Bush, in a Pillar of Cloud, in a Pillar of Fire, and in a Cloud that was crammed-full of Thunder and Lightning on Sinai Mountain. But are all the words that the Lord spoke at those times reported to us, or do only a very few people know the words in their entirety?

James Eagnach (his name meant either 'James Wisdom' or 'Jim Grumbling' depending on who translated it from the Irish) was an amateur philosopher, an amateur tycoon in the field of Rapid Transit, an amateur wag, an amateur one-of-the-ten-richest-persons-in-the-world, and an amateur lover of his fellow people. Like all true amateurs, he performed in each of these fields for the sheer love of it; and he'd have performed as meaningfully at each occupation (even that of becoming one of the ten richest persons in the world) even if he didn't make a dime out of it.

But he devoted most of his life to seeking the answers to a handful of questions which all very young boys ask themselves, and which all but a few of the boys-who-never-grew-up like Shamus leave off asking themselves after they grow up.

To devote most of one's life to a subject such as this takes some very canny arranging. Shamus could have lived in a tub or a packing-box and begged for his livelihood, but he discovered that begging for a livelihood devours more of the hours of a life than working for a livelihood does. He finally settled on the not-quite-satisfactory solution of becoming very wealthy quite rapidly, and then hiring persons to work and worry about the details of his business while he devoted the most of his life to seeking the answers to 'The Paramount Questions'.

The business trick by which he became very wealthy very rapidly, by which he became one of the ten richest persons in the world, was the 'Happy Hot Dog World-Wide Rapid Transit Tramway System'. He had his trams running in a hundred and fifty countries and soon his system would indeed be world-wide. Oh, they were only the ancient street-cars, but he had modernized them into becoming the 'Street-Cars of the Future'. They were almost completely safe, and almost completely efficient, and very rapid. They were transcontinental and transworld.

They ran through the air like rockets, through the earth like speeding moles, and through the water like rapid fish. Shamus even had two hundred kilometers of scheduled lines on the Moon. The tram-cars were programmed for maximum speed and efficiency and safety and pleasure, and nothing could go wrong with them in any of these departments unless something went wrong with the programming. "It makes me feel almost God-like to have devised such a system," he told his first wife Cinderella Scholtz, "and that brings me closer to my main interest in life."

The main-interest-in-life of Shamus Eagnach, the questions to which he sought the answers with happy and relentless passion, were such as these:

"Remembering that the old Egyptian priest Manetho wrote that our Earth had had seven suns before its present sun, I question whether it may not have had seven gods before our present God. I question whether our present God would know about it if it had been the case. If there had been seven separate and discrete eternities before or beyond our present eternity, how would anyone of our present eternity know about them? If there had been seven separate and discrete, infinite and endless and all-encompassing universes outside of our universe of record, how would anyone in our own all-encompassing universe-of-record know about those seven? I ask whether there is any limit to the number of one-and-only universes that may exist? And if there is any limit to the number of one-and-only universes that may exist? And if there is no limit to the number of them, why cannot I have one of my own in which to be God?

"But my cardinal question is 'How did God get to be God?' Everything depends on the answer to this. Could I have been God if I had thought of it before God did? If even now, after it has been thought of and done at least once, if I could find out how it was done, could I not go somewhere behind God's back and do it all over again? If I find how the trick is pulled, maybe I could pull it myself, aye, and with refinements! To do it myself would be the highest pleasure imaginable. To find out how it was done, even if I could not do it myself, would be the second highest pleasure imaginable.

"And an ancillary question is 'Why does God overdo it? Why does he do more than is required of him?' My grandfather told me that when he was in high school there were only two sub-atomic particles, the proton and the electron. And when his grandfather was in high school, there were no sub-atomic particles at all; the atom was then, as its name indicates, the indivisible smallest of particles. My question is 'Does God overdo it? Does he do more than is required of him? Maybe he only fills in the more minute items of his creation when mankind is on the verge of being able to discover them. That being so, could I not become at least an apprentice god somewhere, doing only what is necessary to stay one step ahead of my own not-very-well-informed creatures? I'd be like the new teacher who studies enough every night to be able to stay ahead of his students in the assignments for the next day. Ah yes, and then there are these three hundred and thirty-three only slightly less cardinal questions."

Cinderella Scholtz, the first wife of Shamus Eagnach, had



her own set of almost archetypical questions, such as: "May it not be that we are only token people or under-people or even manufactured mechanical people whom the real people have set here in their places for either seven or seventy or seven hundred years while they the real people withdraw somewhere and meditate and renew their souls? May it not be that the universe which we see about us is only a token or under-universe because our token or benighted eyes will not allow us to see or understand the real universe? May it not be that even our thoughts and reflections and speculations, even those of mine, are only dim reflections of reflections (hey, 'reflections of reflections' is funny) and are not real? May it not be that when the seven or seventy or seven hundred years are over with we will be jammed into tram-cars and sped away to a big prop warehouse until the real people want to go on another meditation and will bring us out and set us in their places again?"

But Cinderella was a pleasantly ambivalent person who could entertain her husband's main-interest-in-life questions as well as her own; and now she commented on Shamus' last speculation.

"One thing that I bet God doesn't do is do work that has already been done, devise things that have already been devised through not knowing just what has already been done. Oh, I read all your notebooks, Shamus, so I know what you're thinking about. I read all your correspondence, even your correspondence with Pandora Riviera ('You have no right to read my correspondence with Pandora,' you say, and I answer you 'You have no right to have a correspondence with Pandora.');

I run brain-scans on you at night (you were wondering this morning what made the sore spots on your head; it's the brain-prods that I use that make the sore spots, honey); and moreover you talk in your sleep. I am becoming quite interested in these questions myself, but when you waste time in areas that have already been covered, then you waste my time too. I suggest that you set up an Institute to see just what other people have discovered in these fields. There is a caution here, of course. Institutes are the human equivalents of computers, and all computers are atheists or at least agnostics, which is to say that they are narrow-minded. It can't be helped. You are the only one of the ten-richest-persons-in-the-world who doesn't have an Institute of his own. How will you ever have your own Universe if you don't first have your own Institute to keep you informed on the state of your quest?"

So Shamus Eagnach set up an Institute to correlate all known information on a certain group of questions. And by definition, Cinderella's definition, his Institute would be somewhat narrow-minded.

\* \* \* \*

Fairyland is nothing but the sunny country of common sense... Modern minor poets are naturalists, and talk about the bush or the brook; but the singers of the old epics and fables were supernaturalists, and talked about the gods of brook and bush.

G.K. Chesterton

Nothing is gained by picturing God as jealously hiding from his creatures the innermost structure of his creation. Indeed, a worthier conception of a Supreme Being should imply that no ultimate boundary should be set to the knowledge of beings to whom an infinite desire of knowledge has been given. The existence of an absolute ignorabimus would form an exceedingly vexing problem to the philosophical mind. It would be a great step forward in philosophy if the burden of this bewildering problem could be thrown off.

Unanswerable Questions? Moreitz Schlick

"Oh, the reports from your new Institute are most interesting," said Pandora Riviera, the second wife of Shamus Eagnach. "Oh certainly I read all the reports from your Institute before you read them, Shamus, and I read all your notebooks and correspondence, even your correspondence with Anima Rubicunda Mannerly. ('You have no right to read my correspondence with Anima Rubicunda,' you say, and I answer you, 'You have no right to have a correspondence with Anima Rubicunda.') The straight stuff that the Institute has dug up for you is pretty bland, but I love the things that the Institute despises, the material that it classifies as 'Dogs', as 'Shaggy Dogs', and as 'The Ultimate in Shaggy Dogs'."

Yes, Shamus Eagnach was married to Pandora Riviera now. The death of his first wife Cinderella Scholtz had had a sad touch to it as well as a comic touch; and Shamus was sure that Cinderella sometimes laughed at the irony of it now that she was dwelling with the blessed.

"What must I do to convince you that you should put 'Bremmer Safety-Close Doors' on all your Hot Dog Tram-Cars?" Cinderella had asked Shamus once and she had asked him a thousand times. Ah well, ultimately she did what she had to do to convince him, but it was an accident and she hadn't intended it to happen. And after Cinderella's mangling death from one of the Non-Bremmer Non-Safety-Close Doors of one of the Hot Dog Tram-Cars, Shamus did put genuine Bremmer Safety-Close Doors on all the cars. He had liked Cinderella a lot, but he didn't especially miss her now two days later. Pandora was so much like Cinderella that the transition was almost automatic.

Shamus took an item from the pile of material classified as 'The Ultimate in Shaggy Dogs' that Pandora indicated to him. It quacked when he picked it up, for some wag at the Institute had attached the quacker from a toy duck to it. "Ah, it is not a shaggy dog at all," Shamus mused to himself. "It is a shaggy duck. So much the better."

"It is not too late for you to be God!" the items shouted in loud print. And then the text of the quackery went on: "Anybody can be God, yes, anybody. And I can show you how. 'But will God play King of the Mountain?' you ask. 'Will he cut off our hands and our heads when we reach for it?' Probably not. I did not react that way when I was God, and I do not believe that the present (the solving of the real meaning of the word 'present' leads to other solutions) that the present monarch will react in such a manner either."



"It only evades the issue to say 'God is already God. He had the job sewed up'. The God who is already God, who already has the job sewed up, can well be you. 'Time' is nothing so narrow as a straight line, and 'happening' is not so shallow as to offer no alternatives to itself. Every point in time can be both the beginning and the end of time, can both precede and succeed all things else whatsoever. Every point in space can contain both all space and all time. The answer to the Mystery of Matter (Why should there even be so cumbersome a thing as matter? Why did the Word have to be made Flesh? Was not the Making of Matter rather a cheap, and also difficult, trick for a spirit to indulge in?) the answer to this contains the answer to the question 'How Did God Get to be God?'. Every thought can contain omnipotence and omniscience and omnipresence and omnicaritas. Be that thought, be that word, be that God! 'How does one get to be God?' you may have asked yourself. And the answer is that one gets to be God by sending for my lessons 'How to be God'. I myself was God for nine aeons, and now I wish to aid my fellow men in sharing this wonderful experience. Order today. Make checks out to 'The Man Who Used to be God, Box 10,000 (the Number of the Larger Millennium), Los Angeles'." Shamus sent for the lessons without informing his Institute that he was doing so. The lessons didn't teach him how to be God, but they did put him on the track of other literature that ultimately answered the question for him.

The Institute did come up with the information that there were about a hundred thousand groups in the world (the groups averaged about a hundred persons each) devoted to finding answers to the same group of questions that Shamus Eagnach himself had been trying to answer. One hundred thousand times one hundred persons is only a drop in the bucket of the world, but it did make Shamus feel a little less alone.

"Oh, when will somebody drop that first shoe?" the wife of Shamus was asking. "There is an old joke about somebody waiting for the second shoe to drop. Oh, that's nothing like waiting for the first one. If somebody doesn't drop it today I may have to do it myself. Oh, by the way, Shamus, there are complaints of obviously dead people racing along our lines and even crossing our lines in defiance of light-speed laws. Some of our regular customers don't like it. 'Why should the dead get to ride?' they ask. 'Let them walk like they always did.' The destination of these wild tram-cars is 'To the Turpentine Groves, or Else', but we have no such destination listed."

Shamus and his wife lived in a simple five-level penthouse atop the 'Happy Hot Dog World-Wide Rapid Transit Tramway System Tower', and theirs was a happy home. Their penthouse was, from a recent notion of Shamus, always filled with the sound of harp music now. This pleased him so much that today he had the same harping sounds built into all the tram-cars for the joy of the riders. The Hot Dog Trams had always been happy trams, and now they would be even happier.

So Shamus grew in knowledge of the ultimate things, and he grew in confidence that someday soon, maybe even today, he'd have the ultimate answers.

"Well, the Institute has picked up the sound of the first shoe dropping," Anima Rubicunda Mannerly, the third wife of Shamus Eagnach, said, "and it certainly is a thumping cobble of folk mythology. By the way, Shamus, there are sizeable checks being received from the 'Turpentine Groves Rapid Transit Tramways' for the use of our right-of-ways, but we show no leasing arrangement with any such company. Well, as I always say, 'Checks are checks however much tainted'."

"And what about that first shoe, Anima Rubicunda?"

"I just told you, they've dropped it. You weren't listening."

Yes, Shamus Eagnach was now married to Anima Rubicunda Mannerly. She was of that Jungian archetype known as the Reeking Red Soul, also known as the Strawberry Blonde, which Jung himself considered to be frightful beyond compare but which many people like to look at and have around the house. The death of the second wife of Shamus, Pandora Riviera, had had a poignant touch to it as well as an amusing touch, and Shamus was sure that Pandora (she had been dead for nearly two days now) often smiled about it as she bode with the blessed.

"What must I do to convince you that you should put 'Override Push Buttons' on all the controls that are designated 'Positively No Override'?" Pandora had asked him once, and she had asked him a thousand times. And after Pandora's mangling death while trying to push an Override Push Button that wasn't there, Shamus did put the Override Push Buttons in all the tram-cars that used the 'Positively No Override' controls. Shamus had liked Pandora a lot, but he didn't especially miss her two days later. Anima Rubicunda was so much like Pandora that the transition had been almost automatic.

"What did the first shoe consist of, modified light of my life?" Shamus asked Anima Rubicunda now.

"Oh, the folk-loric sort of information that the answers to your ultimate questions do exist, that they are written out boldly in a book that anybody may order, that one may read the answers to the questions and understand them and be delighted with them. And then one dies immediately in the fullness of that delight. This detail has bugged some people away from reading the answers in the book, but it seems fair enough to me. Since the only ones who will learn of the books and find the answers are those who have devoted their lives to searching for those answers, it is only just that their lives should end when their life's purpose has been fulfilled."

"Well, let's get the book then, Anima," Shamus said.

"I've got it. Here it is. It cost me fifty thousand dollars, and you can pay me back now if you wish. I have read it. I understand it and am delighted. Do thou likewise."

Anima Rubicunda didn't look dead. Shamus took a fifty thousand dollar bill from his billfold and paid her. Then he examined the book.

"It's written in Ladino or Sefardic," he said.



"My husband, I'd always assumed that you were educated," Anima Ruby said. "If not, then it's all over with us. Don't you know Sefardic? Can't you read it?"

"I don't know. I never tried it. I know Old Spanish, of course, and I know Hebrew. I'll just go and take a half hour lesson in Sefardic from a Sefardic expert I know. Then I'll come back and read the book."

"I'll not wait for you. I'll go ahead and get things ready for the trip. Oh Shamus, what if your first wife Cinderella was right? What if we are only token people? Will we have only a token God then?"

"I'm not sure. Maybe the real God is 'Father of Gods and Men and Computers, and of Token People also. Where are we going?"

"Oh, you may come to understand that after you read the book."

"What's that thing on the sofa there? It looks rather like a manikin made to resemble you."

"Yes, something like that. I'll see you in the tram."

Shamus went and took a half hour lesson in Sefardic, a language that is Old Spanish written in Hebrew characters and used yet by some of the Jews of Istanbul, a city that is the 'Los Angeles of the Near East' when it comes to quackery. Then he came back and read the book. He found all the ultimate answers in it, plainly written out. He understood the answers and was delighted with them. And he didn't feel at all dead. The name of the book that gave the answers and the delight was 'The Terebinto Groves of Mamre'. 'Terebinto' was the word in Sefardic as it is in Spanish.

"Oh, that's wonderful!" Shamus cried out. "The Terebinto tree is only the Turpentine Bush, a runty little tree at best; and the reputation of turpentine as a cure-all for diseases is much diminished in modern times. And yet I believe, as did our ancestors, as I know now with my new illumination, that turpentine is the smell of life itself. 'In the Turpentine Trees' was one of the places where the 'Father of Gods and Men and Computers and Maybe of Token People Also' made pleasant and open promises which he would keep. It's one of the places, like 'A Lodge in a Garden of Cucumbers', or 'A Habitation of Dragons and a Court of Owls' that sing out of the old Bible and are a delight even to imagine. Ah, there's a manikin intended to represent me, sitting on the floor beside the sofa on which reposes the manikin of my wife Anima Ruby. And my dummy holds the hand of Anima's dummy in its own. Oh, I feel wonderful. I have never been so far from death in my life. And now for a trip, in a tramway, I believe."

Shamus descended from his five-level penthouse into the 'Happy Hot Dog World-Wide Rapid Transit System Tower' below it. "It will be given me at this moment to know which tram to take," he said, and then he knew that he had spotted the right one. It had the most amazing device on it, the device that would permit it to go in two opposite directions at the same time. Shamus himself had now worked unsuccessfully on this device for twelve

years, but somebody had now worked it out perfectly. "How has this been done on a tram-car and I have not done it?" he asked himself.

The classification card on the tram-car read 'Fourth Class Cargo--Seven Day Wonders'. This card was placed askew and the previous card could still be read: 'Third Class Cargo--Turpentine'. Shamus entered the tram-car.

\* \* \* \*

I will not serve.  
Lucifer

If we be not the people yet  
When will the people come?

And every morning falls the dew  
In seven years it's gone.  
Nemo

There was an incredible number of persons in the tram-car, and yet it was not crowded.

"How can this be?" Shamus Eagnach asked, neither to himself nor yet out loud, for the distinctions between such sorts of utterances had now disappeared. "How can there be such a number of persons here, and it not crowded? It has to be crowded, and it isn't. Bodies take up room. Ah, that's it. We are not here in our bodies. My own body was left beside that of my third wife Anima Ruby in our penthouse and I thought they were mere manikins. Well, I'll say this, I feel more alive in death than I ever felt in my life. And there are three persons I know both wisely and well. I am fortunate in my wives. Ah there, Anima Ruby, how many of the sizeable checks were received from the 'Turpentine Groves Rapid Transit Tramways'?"

"About three million of them, Shamus, and that was just for half a day. I believe they must have used some sort of preternatural cars to transport the dead people, or made them walk, before our cars became sophisticated enough for them to use. This makes us the richest people in the world, with what we already had. Well, it's something to be the richest people in the world even if we're no longer in it. The piped-in harp music must have gotten their business for us."

The three wives of Shamus were sitting at a club-car table with a deck of Glory Cards before them. "Come take a hand and pass an aeon with us," the first wife of Shamus, Cinderella, spoke, and she winked. And Shamus sat with them.

"Tell me one thing," he began, "if you know it--"

"Certainly we know it, whatever it is," the wife Pandora Riviera said with that lilt that was her vocal signature. "This is the particular judgement going on right now, and at the particular judgement people are given all knowledge of particulars. If we are only token people, as Cinderella here thinks might be the case, then this is the token particular judgement and we are given such knowledge of particulars as applies to token persons. Oh, you with your tram-way mind are wondering who worked out the device to permit this car to go in two



opposite directions at the same time, the device on which you worked unsuccessfully for twelve years. We told God about it, that you had worked on it for twelve years. "I bet I can work it out in twelve minutes," he said. He did, but just barely.

"When did he work it out in just twelve minutes?" Shamus asked.

"It was either seven thousand or seven billion years ago," said Anima Ruby the third wife. "Your clay is not quite cold yet, Shamus, so the full illumination is a bit tardy coming to you. But you'll have it all soon. We are now in the state of re-entrant time and re-entrant space, and re-entrant size, and re-entrant persons, and re-entrant cause-and-effect, the state that makes becoming a God possible. When re-entrant size prevails, a brain that is normally no more than 2000 cc in bulk may well be many light years across, especially when it has become an immaterial brain. When re-entrant time prevails, there are aeons upon aeons available. When re-entrant personhood prevails, everybody becomes potentially divine. In this vale of tears and chuckles here below, ulp, there below, most of us were truly only token or mustard-seed persons with only token or mustard-seed minds: but each mustard-seed mind may expand to a billion powers of a billion and become a spacious tree full of birds. Where re-entrant creation prevails, creation can happen both before anything else has happened and after everything else has happened. I see that it is coming to you now, Shamus, and wave after wave of illumination is washing over you."

Shamus and his three wives played a four-handed game with the Glory Cards. There are six hundred and sixty-six cards in a pack of Glory Cards. All are unnumbered face cards, and each has its special powers. Only illuminated persons are brainy enough to play with such cards.

Strange feelings did come to Shamus then in the crowding waves of illumination. There were headaches whose radii had to be measured in billions of parsecs. There were responsibilities hard enough to rend a million skies. Talk about mind-stretching: There was a mind being stretched clear around the universes hundreds of times every second. There was a cosmic juggling act going on that required the juggler to be all-knowing and all-powerful and all-just and all-present and all-loving. Did you ever try to be all-loving and all-just at the same time even for an instant? There was a mind, and it impinged on every mind in the tram-car, and perhaps in the whole universe, that had to mark the fall of every sparrow, that had to check out the health of every mite on every sparrow, and the tonic health of every microbe on every mite, and this on as many billions of worlds, not just on one. There was a mind that had to know and nourish every sub-atomic particle everywhere, and there were many orders of such particles much smaller than are generally known about. Well, every mind is as much the center of the cognitional universe as every other mind, and in the quirks of time and person and development one of them may outgrow (may already have outgrown) all the others. This most stretched of minds may be your own, and you just have not noticed it yet.

"It's fun though, for everybody except the work-horse," Shamus said. "What, what, are there some persons in this

tram-car who don't find it fun? Why not, why not? Oh, oh, it's my amazing device that permits the tram to go in two opposite directions at the same time, my own amazing device that I'd have invented if God hadn't beat me to it. We are not all going in the same direction on this tram, I see, and we are not all going in delight. Some of us are already in Heaven and some of us already in Hell, to use the old vulgar names of the places, and yet we're all riding in the same tram-car until the harvest. But this is the harvest. I can hear the whetted scythes cutting the wheat and the tares, the sheep and the goats together. And how will they separate them after they're mown? I'd better pay attention and see.

"What is it that those glum and angry 'other sorts of persons' are saying? 'We will not serve, we will not serve,' they mutter over and over again. I hope it does not come to me either, but I'd be afraid to say out loud that I reject it. Some of those undelighted ones must be the cream of the crop to have it offered to them. Ah, I see now that not every person could make it as God, but perhaps one in every billion could, and there are a handful of billicns in this tram-car. What, have all refused it?"

\* \* \* \* \*

That was an interval of either five aeons or five seconds. When time is re-entrant, those intervals are about the same. And still there hasn't been a traffic in the highest position of all. Those who lack the scope for it are not asked, and those spacious ones who might possibly do it have all refused it in gloom and anger and fear.

And what is it that several wrathful persons who may perhaps be outside of the tramcar are grumbling?

"Well, dammit," the wrathful persons are grumbling, "get with it! On with the continuity and go easy on the side-jabber. If you know it, tell it! What is the answer? How did God get to be God?"

Oh, he got to be God by default.

And now he has to be God until either seven or seven billion years have passed, or until he can find another person who will still want to be God after he has become illuminated and informed about the whole situation.

He hasn't found him yet.



## FAITH SUFFICIENT

Remember how it is written on the holy skins: "If you have faith sufficient you shall say to this mountain, 'Remove from here and cast thyself into the sea,' and it will do it." Well, on that morning they tried it. Several of the big prophets and wrestlers tried it, for they did have faith. They groaned with travail and joy, they strove mightily, and they did move the mountain and make it cast itself into the sea.

Days of Grass, Days of Straw.

The mouse and the handy-man had a little game every day with the pecan, the mouse pushing it with all his physical strength, and the handy-man pushing it with faith and telekinesis. But then the mouse would seem to double his strength, and they would play the game to a standstill.

"Brother Mus, my employers are rather overdoing this thing," Brother Gus the handy-man said. "I wonder why they have become so extravagant in their manifestations. John Salt is likely to challenge them on the genuineness of them. He is riled by such arrogance. I may have to leave their employ as I left that of the extravagant persons at the laboratory. Oh certainly you will go with me wherever I go. You and I are one."

The mouse winked at Brother Gus and giggled, proving that he was a mouse of at least human intelligence. While Brother Gus was turned down by the extravagance of the manifestations and by the pomposities where he worked, he did believe very much in Faith Healing. It was by Faith Healing that he had healed the holes in the head of Brother Mus. Brother Gus himself pronounced their names with the old-world soundings of 'Brother Goose' and 'Brother Moose', and yet they were properly Brother Gus and Brother Mus or Brother Augustine and Brother Mouse.

They had been companions since the mouse was one of those in a bunch that Brother Gus was supposed to destroy after they had been used in experiments.

"The mice of this bunch are all insane now and so they must be nullified," so Enforcer Doctor Dolphus at the Lab had told Brother Gus. "They have all had extracts from the brains of slightly insane humans implanted into their own brains. Now some of them think they are gods and some of them think they are humans, and their intelligence as well as their para-normal powers are greatly expanded. The extracts contained 'faith toxin', but in several cases it was accidentally accompanied by a modicum of 'flaming faith toxin'. So they must be destroyed just as I would have a human person who was so afflicted destroyed if I had the authority to do so. The bright-eyed one in particular should be destroyed. He would be a peril to the world if he were released."

But the bright-eyed mouse had become a personal friend of Brother Gus, and so Gus had been incapable of destroying him. Brother Gus quit his job at the Lab that day, and he took the aberrant bright-eyed toxin-tainted mouse with him.

Now the two of them worked for the 'Scientific Ecumenical

Psychological Encounterful Covenant for Faith Healing and for Civic Management' which was on Meadow Lark Mountain, a small mound between Turkey Mountain and Rock-Crusher Road. The people at the Covenant knew that Brother Augustine was working for them, and they even gave him a slight fee and a place to sleep for the labor that he performed. But they didn't know about Brother Mouse at all.

And then one day, Brother Gus discovered Brother Mus pushing the ecan around without touching it at all. Ah, the mouse himself had Faith Sufficient as well as telekinetic ability, both of them in small and mouseful ways, of course.

\* \* \* \*

Frockless Sister Mary Anne Humility was in total disgrace, and she found herself the object of scorn and derision of Frockless Sister Domina Specially-Esteemed-By-the-Spirit. Well, what had happened was this: at an Ecmenical and Encounterful meeting of the Covenant preceeding the Faith Healing the night before, Sister Humility had been 'slain' by the Spirit. This was presumptive of her, and the manifestation was almost certainly bogus. At these encounterful meetings, the higher-ranked and most worthy of the people would stand in squealing rapture as the Spirit began to blow. Then the Spirit would sweep through the hall and 'slay' the select ones, but not the unselect. The most worthy ones, after looking over their shoulders to be sure that the less-worthy 'catchers' were ready to catch them, would shriek and then throw themselves in total ecstasy. This put the seal of acceptance on their worthiness. But last night, the lowest-ranked of the 'catchers', Frockless Sister Mary Anne Humility, had herself been 'slain' by the Spirit, a total surprise to herself. Sister Humility had conked out and fallen backwards with a thud, this in the split-second between Frockless Sister Specially-Esteemed-By-The-Spirit glancing over her shoulder to be sure that Frockless Sister Humility was ready to catch her and the same Frockless Sister Specially-Esteemed throwing herself backwards in the formalized ecstasy. So Sister Specially-Esteemed had fallen uncaught with a 'thud' as well as with an added 'clunk'.

"I was badly injured because of your presumption and your bogus 'being slain'," Frockless Sister Domina Specially-Esteemed-By-The-Spirit railed angrily. "I could have been killed while being 'slain'."

"Ow, thou got nowt but a knot on thy noggin, and it nowt bigger than a dove's egg," Frockless Sister Mary Anne Humility protested. "There is nowt ever a danger of the 'slaying' killing one."

"Who are you to tell me there is no danger? Who are you even to presume to be 'slain' by the Spirit? Your arrogance and your brass have burst all bounds. Soon you will be pre-tending to be able to speak in the Unknown Tongues which only those very much advanced in the Spirit are allowed to speak in. You are nothing! You are disobedient! Learn your place!"

As the ancient and perhaps holy Enniscorthy Chronicle has it:

"Oh arrogance, Oh pride, presumption sinful!  
Learn thou thy place, thou blatant brass a skinfull!"



The Frockless Sisters had abandoned their Sisterly Frocks or Habits because their Inner Light would always shine out of them and identify them to the World without any such artificial costuming.

\* \* \* \*

John Salt issued a challenge to the whole 'Scientific Ecumenical Encounterful' bunch, and this sent a tremor through the entire Covenant and all its ramifications. John Salt had been a phoney faith healer, and now he had left off all of that and went about the country exposing all the healers he believed to be phoney. He had kept most of the fulgent eloquence he had larded on so thick when he had been a phoney, and it still stood him in good stead.

"A stench has come unto my nostrils from Meadow Lark Mountain in the south midlands," he fulminated through his beard like an old prophet, "the stench of false works and of healings faked by grubby devils and attributed to the Lord. I will post ten thousand dollars as earnest money and as a wager that I can duplicate by natural means any 'healing' that the Meadow Lark Mountain Mountebanks attribute to the Holy Spirit. I maintain that the Larks are not on the flightways of the Spirit at all. If the Meadow Lark Mountain Mountebanks are really concerned about the lame and the halt and the blind as they say that they are, let them win the ten thousand dollars from me and apply it to their works of mercy. I know that their 'take' is good, but ten thousand dollars is at least equal to one or two of their average collections. Where is their faith if they will not leap at this opportunity? I will rattle the bars of their narrow cages till they accept my challenge. I will shake the mountains till their roots squeal like pigs if the Mountebanks will not enter the arena against me."

John Salt's challenges had popular appeal, and it was often possible for him to catch a clutch of faith healers in his trap. He really could, so far, duplicate all their tricks by natural means. But he was himself deathly afraid of the Holy Spirit and he was always careful not to speak any word against the Spirit but only against the 'Falsifiers and Mountebanks and Fakers of the Spirit'.

There are two versions as to how John Salt came under the fear of the Holy Spirit. One of them involved the Withered-hand trick gone wrong, and one of them involved the man-raised-from-the-death trick (the most extreme trick in all of Faith Healing) also gone wrong. For the first version, John Salt had a subject who did have such a severe circulation problem with her hand that it would turn black and appear withered. She could get relief from this condition only by an injection into her wrist twice a day. This injection (she herself said that it was nitroglycerin, and John Salt had a longer name for it) would change the appearance of her hand almost instantly, would make it look like a normal hand again. The trick was for the woman to miss an injection before a performance or faith-healing exhibition, and for John Salt slyly to give her the over-due injection while he prayed over her hand. It was quite effective when people saw a withered hand cured almost instantly like that. But on the last performance of the trick it was disconcerting to the audience and shattering to John Salt when the withered-hand woman cried out in agony: "Oh, no, no, you have

not healed my hand! You have destroyed it altogether! It is as though you had dipped it into the boiling brimstone of Hell! Now my hand is afflicted forever and myself am in unbearable pain. Devil man, what have you done to me!" Oh, this in itself was enough to make a man foreswear fake faith healing, for the hand really was destroyed forever in an instant.

In the second version, John Salt had a traveling companion who could go into a cataleptic trance whenever he wished to do so (and sometimes when he did not wish, which made it tricky). In the trance, he seemed to be dead. Oh yes, he even had grave dirt on him when he was brought before the audience, and the odor of death strongly on him. The 'odor of death' that John Salt released for the edification of the audience was really 'concentrated essence of dead weasel'. There is nothing so essential as a dead weasel. And the man could shake the grave dirt off of himself and come out of his cataleptic death whenever John Salt ordered him to do so. He could do it until that very last time.

But the whole business of the cataleptic trances was a token of a severe sickness in the man, and the man died on John Salt before an audience of fifty-five hundred and twelve goggled-eyed persons. Oh, that was more than enough to make a man foreswear fake faith healing!

Both the versions were true, and the both happened in the same week. They put the Fear of God into John Salt so strongly that he left off being a bogus faith healer and became an exposé of bogus faith healers.

John Salt infiltrated the organizations of all the 'faithies' that he dogged, and of course he infiltrated the structure of what he called 'The Meadow Lark Mountebanks'. He found Mary Occhiluenti, who had come to town for a one-shot with the Mountebanks, in the Plugged Nickel Bar. John Salt and Mary had crossed paths many times. She went wherever the faith healers were putting on a top show. She had large bright orange cataracts on both of her eyes, and these dropped off every time she was healed. She had her eyes healed before thousands of people, and always immediately demonstrated her new perfect vision by reading the fine print on a sardine can.

"How do you do it, Mary?" John Salt asked her. "I have experimented with quite a few quick-dissolving crystals but I haven't found the ideal one for the trick yet. Tell me what the substance is."

"It's too common and too widely-used for you to have noticed it, John," Mary O said. "What I use is known as Silly Chrystals. It's sold in kits as a childrens toy, and three million children got some of it last Christmas alone. I don't know the chemical name of it, but just ask for Silly Chrystals in any toy department. I tell you this now, because I'm about fed up with being on the healing trail and I get the feeling that something dire will happen to me if I don't soon abandon it."

"Thank you, Mary," John Salt said.

Then John Salt went to talk to Brother Augustine, or



Brother Gus, who worked directly as handy-man and janitor for the Encounterful bunch, the Mountebanks as John called them.

"Gus," he said, "I am going to do a hit job on your bunch. I am going to catch them in a corner that they cannot back out of. But I am worried about one thing, and that thing is you. I have felt your power before, and it is real. I don't believe that you have any particular commitment to the Mountebanks: your commitments are to things less grubby. And yet your just being around, even in your role as handy-man and janitor, might lend your power unconsciously to their attempts."

"And what are you up to this time, John Salt?" Brother Gus asked.

"I'm going to catch them in the biggest trap of all. I will catch them in the perfect mouse-trap, and it is the mountain. There have been several fables of the mountain and the mouse and most of them have been misunderstood."

"See that you yourself don't misunderstand it, John Salt."

"I'm going to challenge them to the one demonstration of faith that can't be faked. I'm going to put them to the test that Christ Himself suggested to separate the prophets from the boys, the one feat that can in no way be misunderstood, that cannot seem to be performed unless it is performed."

"Oh that! What do you want of me then, John Salt?"

"I want your word that you will not lend your power, whatever it is, to the demonstration of the Mountebanks, should they take me up on it. I want you to promise me to stand clear of it and not abet them either consciously or unconsciously."

"You have my word, John Salt. I will stand clear of it all. I will not lend any powers I might have to them. I will not abet them either consciously or unconsciously. Besides, it's an enormity of which I would not be capable. I can move a pecan, John. I can't move things that are billions of billions of times larger."

\* \* \* \*

If you have Faith Sufficient you can say to this mountain 'Be you moved', and it will be moved. And nothing shall be impossible to you.

Matthew 17-20

It is the one demonstration of faith that cannot be faked: Moving a Mountain. Everything else can be faked, but this is too big to fake. The lame can walk, the blind can see, the lepers can be cleansed, and the poor can have the Gospel preached to them, all by well-done fakery without really doing the things. They can be done by a convincing fakery when the real things do not flow from the fountain of life. But to move a mountain, for a substantial distance, on a clear and sunny afternoon, before thousands of witnesses both clotted together and scattered over the miles, they viewing it from different directions, through eyes direct or through field glasses or telescopes, from different angles, with different plays of light-and-shadow, with camera and with TV eye, with some

witnesses watching from certain points for 'something unusual' but not told what they are watching for, with all of them seeing the mountain separate itself from the earth and rise jiggling into the air--this is beyond faking. Even John Salt was not sure that he would be able to duplicate the feat by natural means if the Meadow Lark Mountebanks should indeed move Turkey Mountain.

But how was he to trap the Mountebanks into attempting it? Oh, they entrapped themselves into it, after John Salt had shot three of them with darts. That's right, shot them with darts.

The only one who saw John Salt shoot the three persons with darts was Brother Augustine: for the three persons were coming up the slope of Meadow Lark Mountain late one afternoon to question this same Brother Augustine. The darts that John Salt shot were insect-small, and they looked like insects, and their hitting felt no more powerful than a fly-bite. But they penetrated their three victims with 'overconfidence toxin', with 'intrepidity toxin', with 'away-with-caution toxin', and with the trickiest of all, the 'what-the-hell venom'. John Salt, hiding behind little cedar shrubs on the slope of Meadow Lark Mountain, shot the darts with a little blow-gun into the napes of Outreachers Preacher Jerome Healing-Hands, of Super-Sister Susanna-Of-The-Spirit, and of Father Raphael whose name, as he always explained it to the people who came to his healing services, meant literally Father Healing-of-God. All three of these persons brushed their hands over the backs of their necks when they felt the nick of the small darts, but they felt nothing there and they thought no more of it. Then they came to humble Brother Augustine and they held confab with him.

"Brother Goose," Super-Sister Susanna-Of-The-Spirit said to him, "I feel, we all feel, that you have certain powers, however slight. Will you lend them to us in a demonstration of faith against an infidel?"

"No, I will not," Brother Gus said. "I have given my word that I will stand clear of it all, that I will not lend any powers that I may possibly have to anyone, that I will not abet you or anybody else."

"Will you be present at the test?" Father Raphael Healing-of-God asked.

"Oh yes. I am still a boy who cannot pass up so good a show as Moving a Mountain."

"Whoever is not against us is with us," said Outreachers Preacher Jerome Healing-Hands. "If you will give us your word that you will not use your power against us, we will be satisfied. Power-for-Good needs only to be present to manifest itself. Have we your word?"

"I give my word that I will not use any powers of mine against you," Brother Augustine swore. "There, I have sworn my word twice this day, and I will swear it no more. There's an old saying that whoever swears his word three times will have forsworn it at least once. Lord, keep my words locked in my mouth for the rest of this day."

"Let's do it!" cried Father Raphael. "I have a sudden



surge of super-confidence. Let us find John Salt and tell him that we accept the challenge."

"Yes, yes, yes!" cried Outreachers Preacher Jerome Healing-Hands. "Let's do it! I have a sudden sure of intrepidity. Where is John Salt. Let him know that we accept his wager."

"I'm for it thumpingly!" Super-Sister Susanna-Of-The-Spirit resounded. "I have a sudden surge of away-with-caution feeling and of what-the-hellism. We can do it now. Let us make compact with the devious John Salt, and stand justified before the world, and be ten thousand dollars richer for our agreement. We accept the deal. John Salt, where are you?"

"I'm right here," John Salt said softly, and (it was at least a quasi-miracle) he stood in the midst of them. It was only a quasi-miracle and not a full miracle because John Salt had been standing all the while behind a cedar bush there on the slopes of Meadow Lark Mountain, no more than three feet from the Mountebanks. Dusk had begun to gather then, and he seemed more of a sudden and ghostly apparition than he really was.

Arrangements and appointments were quickly made. Meadow Lark Mountain was only a low and scrubby mound between Turkey Mountain and Rock-Crusher Road on the West side of the River. And they didn't want to take any chances on cracking the walls of their Covenant Building by moving their own mountain. But Turkey Mountain was of a respectable size; so Turkey Mountain was the one targeted to be moved.

They did it at noon the next day.

\* \* \* \*

And now quick victory and quicker vaunt,  
And still more quick abusing the infirm,  
Nor doubts be given room to roost and haunt.  
But Victory may yet contain a Worm.

Fog-Horn Symphony. Endymion Ellenbogen.

They hadn't as much coverage as they wished. Only a few of the National Media persons had come. After all, nothing had happened yet. But there were promises of a true gala the following day if something should have happened. And all those committed to the happening believed that they could give as many and as grand repeat performances as they wished.

"Turkey Mountain will henceforth be a Holy Mountain," Frookless Sister Specially-Esteemed-By-The-Spirit cried out, "like Mount Zion, like Mount Sinai, like Mount Tabor. The Spirit is running, and we can all feel a small but incredibly powerful dynamo of faith pulsating somewhere nearby.

The people from the local TV stations and the two city newspapers were on standby. And a person from the mayor's office had checked it all out. There were only four houses on the approximately forty acres covered by Turkey Mountain. None of them had city water; all used only cisterns. It was summer, and none of them would need gas for a little while. People from the gas company uncoupled the main union to the pipe that ran up the mountain. All four houses had their electricity from one

transformer. The line to it came off the main line at the foot of the mountain. "Does anybody know how high you're going to raise the mountain?" a public Service Company lineman asked. "No? You're going to raise a mountain and you don't know how high you're going to raise it? I better cut the lines loose here then. They won't need lights this noontime anyhow." The people in all of the houses said they would stay on the mountain just for the ride, and several newsmen went up on the mountain with them.

But preparations for this first Day of the Mountain Moving were lagging. There would be a massive faith healing ceremony after the moving, however; or, if possible, while the mountain was still in the air. Oh, the Spirit was moving, and already Turkey Mountain had began to rumble. Snakes by the dozen slid out of the mountain in cowering fashion. Earth rumbles frighten snakes. "Generations of Vipers, who has shown you to flee from the wrath to come?" Outreach Preacher Jerome Healing-Hands asked them loudly. It was a pretty good line to come up with, but the snakes all seemed to be of the blacksnake sort (coluber constrictor or elaphe obsoleta) and not vipers at all. The gibbering in unknown tongues rose in crest after crest, but the shouting was all as seemly as it was inspired.

And then, and then, and then--

And then Turkey Mountain arose wobbling about a hundred feet into the air. That was it. Faith Sufficient really had moved a mountain. Some of the 'faithies' continued their babble to try to maintain the mountain in the air while the Super Healing Ceremony took place. But, after about ten minutes, Turkey Mountain slowly sank to earth again and assumed its accustomed place.

No matter. They'd moved the mountain once, and they'd do it again tomorrow, to great acclaim and world-wide coverage.

John Salt sauntered over to Outreach Preacher Jerome Healing-Hands and his triumphant Meadow Lark Mountebank group. John counted out one hundred one-hundred-dollar bills into the hot hands of Healing-Hands.

"But you'd better put it into escrow," John Salt said. "I have two days to duplicate it by natural means." But they laughed him to scorn.

But the Super Faith Healing Ceremony busted almost at the start. The Meadow Larkers started with tried and true subjects, and the most tried-and-true of them all was Mary Occhiluceni. The orange-colored cataracts on her eyes were made out of Silly Chrystals, and Silly Chrystals could be dissolved suddenly by jolting, by quick heat, or by the sparking of a small palm-of-the-hand electric capacitor with pen-light battery. The Faith Healers had been doing her cataracts mostly by this capacitor-with-battery when they touched her eyes with their healing hands. It was Outreach Preacher Jerome Healing-Hands himself who touched the large cataracts on Mary's eyes, and they did come unchrystaled, they did dissolve and disappear. But then Mary gave a great cry of anguish: "I'm blind, I'm blind, I'm blind forever now. My eyes have grown shut. Devil man, what have you done to me?" Her eyes were indeed grown shut. It was



as if they had grown shut ten years ago, and she would never see again. She'd had perfect vision before this.

And several other attempts at healing also busted, even the sure things.

"Never mind," Frockless Sister Specially-Esteemed-By-The-Spirit consoled them. "It is that we are all tired from the mountain moving, too tired to entertain the Spirit properly. Tomorrow we will be rested."

John Salt came to Brother Gus.

"Brother Augustine, it would be impossible in your case," John Salt said in his fulgent style that he even used in one-to-one conversations, "but it seems that you lied to me and failed your word. You gave me your word that you would not lend your power, whatever it is, to the demonstration of the Mountebanks. Well, somebody loaned extraordinary power to them. Did you keep your word to me, Brother Augustine?"

"Yes, I kept my word, John. I stood clear of it all the way."

"Then there is another and likely much stronger power very close to us here. I must find it and bargain with it."

A telegraph boy brought a telegraph to Brother Gus, and the gram read in part: "--a report has reached me that the mouse, lab-named 'bright-eyes', subsequent name 'Brother Mus', has not been destroyed. Dammit, find him and kill him at once, Gus! He may be the unfortunate aberration of one of our contingent studies 'The Mouse That Destroyed The World', a comic study-title that has now become horribly uncomic. A report has also reached me of the happening at your place an hour ago. Remember, Gus, that mountain-moving can become addictive! Remember that the mice in our experiment received injections of a 'faith toxin', but in at least one case, that of the mouse 'Bright-eyes', it mutated into a 'flaming faith toxin'. This mouse has total faith, so there is nothing it cannot do. Present the corpus of that mouse here within one hour (the corpus is of course 'signed' in a way you can't know) (yes, you can make it if you kill the mouse immediately and catch the Delta flight), or I will have your own corpus.

"Enforcer Doctor Dolphus."

Brother Gus went to Brother Mus in his box. "Little mouse, there are those who seek your life," he said. "Should I get a donkey and hie with you to Egypt to thwart your killers? I know where I can get a donkey."

But the utterly exhausted mouse was asleep. It would sleep for thirty hours more. Now and then, however, it giggled in its sleep.

\* \* \* \*

"While strut the proud in peacock-power craze,  
The humblest shall be raised, and eke shall raise."  
Lowly Rimes. Refrocked. Sister Mary Anne Humility.

The Meadow Lark Mountebanks failed to raise Turkey Mountain the next day, and they failed before the eyes and ears of all the world media. This was bitter to the Mountebanks. And persons even implied that the mountain-raising of the day before had been faked; but it had been well-witnessed and attested.

Brother Augustine had been taken into custody by a mysterious Medical Authority, and his little room at the Encounterful Covenant Building had been ransacked again and again. Before those medical authorities had arrived, however, Brother Gus had slipped one small object, a sleeping mouse, to John Salt.

"Keep that kale in safe escrow," John Salt advised Out-reacher Preacher Jerome Healing-Hands and Father Raphael Healing-of-God and Super-Sister Susanna-Of-The-Spirit and all their buddies. "Turkey Mountain will be raised tomorrow noon, by more or less natural means, and I'll have my money back then, along with ten thousand dollars of yours. Tomorrow noon, yes. He should have his sleep out by then."

"Who? Who should have his sleep out by then?" they asked him.

"Ah, only a mouse, only a mouse," John Salt said. And they laughed him to scorn again.

John Salt had to make it look as though it was by natural means. He borrowed a slide-rule, a calculator, and a no-nonsense-looking Command Telephone. And John was a talker. He could fake anything, even the scientific patter. Surely he would be able to cover so small a thing as mouse-tracks, if it were necessary for him to do so.

And at eleven fifty-five the next day, Turkey Mountain began to bounce and dance. Some very powerful entity was having fun with the mountain. There was no media coverage of this. It was a private show-down. The Mountebanks were there, a bank person was there with notaries, a lawyer was there. John Salt was there. That's about all.

The lawyer made a declaration. John Salt made a fulgent declaration in his oratorical style, and he fiddled with his slide-rule and his calculator and barked cryptic commands into his no-nonsense Command Telephone.

Turkey Mountain rose one hundred feet into the air. There were groans of anguish and the gnashing of teeth from the Meadow Lark Mountebanks. The bank person counted out twenty thousand dollars to John Salt, and the notaries attested it.

It was done. And then something busted. There rang out, like feeble silver or quicksilver, one of the most seldom noises ever heard on earth, that of a mouse breaking up into total laughter, but only John Salt heard it. Turkey Mountain swayed for a while in the air, and then settled back roughly to Earth.

A bit later, John Salt overtook the downcast Mountebanks as they arrived back at their Encounterful Covenant Building.

"I know it is a little unusual--" he stammered to them with all his fulgence gone, "but I've run through everything else in



a short time without result, and you are healers of a sort, and I don't know how to bring him out of it."

"What is it, man?" Super-Sister Susanna-Of-The-Spirit demanded roughly. "You have your money! You have your smirking victory! What else do you want?"

"A cure, a cure from anybody. It could be serious, even fatal if it goes on long enough. A very small cure, but the thing goes on and on--"

"Oh, what is it, John Salt-That's-Lost-Its-Savor?" Out-reacher Preacher Jerome Healing-Hands asked dully. "A cure for what?"

"For giggles in a mouse. They go on and on. I don't know how to stop them at all."

## B I R D - M A S T E R

'There was a Cheyenne sub-chief named Whistling Elk. There was also an animal, or a ghost-animal, in the mythology of several tribes, the Cheyennes, the Sioux, the Osages, and the Comanches. There is something spooky about this Whistling Elk in the legends, for real elks do not whistle. The Whistling Elk is an apparition, a ghost, a messenger of death. He is also the one who give the birds the signal to migrate. They would not know when to mill and fly away, and they would perish of the cold and hunger, if the Elk didn't give them the signal. The Whistling Elk is sometimes associated with the Bird-Master, who is variously known as the 'shape-changer' and the 'cloud-shaper'.

'The Whistling Elk is also a death omen. When he whistles, the temperature immediately drops thirty degrees: this is the 'blue norther', but it is really the coldness of death. Many human persons die in the night after the Elk whistles. The birds devour the souls of the persons who die on this night, and the food helps to sustain the birds on their migration.'

### Legends of the Country Between the Cross-Timbers and the Shining-Mountains. Harry Fire-Island.

'The Bird-Master has two sets of bones, his winter bones and his summer bones. When he has left one set of bones, then he can fly like a bird, or like the boneless spirit that he has become. It is by this trick that he migrates with the birds, leaving his summer bones in North America and winging off to inhabit his winter bones in Brazil. The Bird-Master can manufacture illusions (illusions because they deceive the eye, and yet are material), configurations that are made up of insects and birds in their thousands and even millions, the Shaggy Giant, the Ravening Bear, the Dead-but-Walking King, all of them mountain high.

'The Bird-Master believes that he makes and manipulates the whole world and everything that is in it out of the configurations of birds and bugs. Alternately he believes that he dreams the whole world. 'The Mummers' are the enemies of the Bird-Master. He is not sure whether he makes them or not, whether he dreams them or not, or whether they are independent of him. Like Wathighthoncici Kika, the Osage Solomon, the Bird-Master understands bird-talk.

'The usual appearance of the shape-changing Bird-Master is that of a human boy about ten years old. Sometimes he sits on the edge of a cloud with a fishing pole, and he dangles his line and hook down to lower clouds. If somebody asks him what he is doing he says that he is fishing. And he does catch very many fish.'

### Further Legends of the Country Between the Cross-Timbers and the Shining-Mountains. Harry Fire-Island.

'It was Oliver Hampton who brought tatters of Guy Fawkes Day from England to the middle-plains Indians of North America. He established the Bloody Red Mummers with both Indian and White Man lodges. Every November Fifth a lodge would hang, draw, and then burn like a torch either a real man or an effigy man. If it was a real man, they ate the entrails they drew from him and called it 'eating the soul'. If it was an effigy man, they chewed the straw and the corn-husks that they drew from the body. In later decades, the Mummers say that they never heard of Guy Fawkes Day and that November Fifth is Bird Migration



Day. This is the big day of the year that they celebrate.  
British Explorers in Midland North America. George Saffron.

'It was the loudest and most fearful shout that I ever heard in my life. It shook the ground and rattled the trees and set me to trembling. I am somewhat given to uneasiness and apprehensions anyhow.

'I am constantly surrounded by human persons; and humans are cold, calculating, nerveless, unflappable, easy in their minds, and they hardly know the meaning of apprehension. But I am a machine, so I am nervous and apprehensive and worrisome and often despondent. For one thing, I have recently received a very weak signal the detecting of which was one of the things for which I was manufactured. For another thing, I am very much worried about my good friend the Bird-Master. The Bird-Master was a rather slow-witted and likeable young man generally believed to be of the human species. But a change has taken place in him within the last two days. I can feel powers and cross-powers all around him, and he speaks of 'marshaling my nations'. And then this huge shout comes like raw salt rubbed into my worries (that is a human proverb).

'Valery Mok and myself (I am Epiktistes the Ktistec Machine) were walking in the weed-patch to the north of the Institute for Impure Science in the very early morning when the Shaggy Giant made his first appearance in our immediate neighborhood. He made it to the accompaniment of brilliant but unconvincing lightning and thunder.

'"That is the phoniest lightning I ever saw," Valery declared, "and the fellow himself reeks of pigeons. Moreover, he's unsubstantial. And yet he's impressive. I wonder why he is?"

'The reason for the giant being impressive to me is partly embodied in certain words contained in one of those books that were inserted into my memory-bank when I was manufactured. It is the old Modern Library edition of Gargantua and Pantagruel, and the introduction, by Donald Douglas, contains the words and image: "No doubt you are inclined to feel at home in a fiction where men exchange the small mean gossip of the common day and no giant ever darkens the length of Main Street with the shadow of his big toe."

'But in the present case, the shadow of the Giant's big toe (the giant was barefooted; all authentic giants are always barefooted) did darken our own place in the weed-patch in the early morning light. The big toe was a hundred feet above us and was about the size of six elephants. The Shaggy Giant had his left foot raised as if he would stamp us to death. He was impressive because he was big and he was threatening. And yet he had a furlong-long comic grin on his face high above us, and he was of an unsubstantial and unreal appearance, and he really did reek of pigeons and of other birds. The morning light was tricky, and the jagged lightning was--

'But suddenly a big hand (only God has a hand that big; it must have been his) came out of the higher sky and caught the Shaggy Giant up by the nape of his neck and shook him.

'"Lemme go, lemme go!" the giant called out in a very ungiant-like voice. The thunder had gone out of the voice, and it was the voice of someone we knew. Then the dangling giant himself turned into somebody we knew, the Bird-Master. "Lemme go, Aloysius, lemme go!" he begged.

'Then Aloysius Shiplap, Member of the Institute, came from the ridge into the wide area of the weed-patches. He was lugging by the nape of his neck the no-more-than-life-sized Bird-

Master in his most usual appearance of a boy about ten years old. The Bird-Master in the sky seemed to grow more substantial.

"Scatter it, Bird-Master, scatter the image," Aloysius Shiplap ordered with iron in his voice.

"No, no, Aloysius, lemme go! I was having fun. I was scaring Valery and Epikt with a giant."

"Scatter it!" Aloysius ordered again, and the image in the sky (erstwhile the Shaggy Giant and later the Bird-Master) scattered. It broke up into clouds of birds and insects and bugs, and then into smaller and smaller clouds. Then, with a final sigh of large and small wings beating in the receding distance, the material illusion was gone.

"Is there always a preponderance of pigeons?" Aloysius asked.

"No. Only when I make a Shaggy Giant," the Bird-Master said. "When I do the Ravening Bear I use mostly ducks and geese. When I do the Ghost of the Dead Leader I use a lot of shrieks and sea-terns. When I will do the Valery Mok mock-up that I am planning I will use mostly larks mixed with saber-billed butcher birds."

Aloysius Shiplap let the Bird-Master go then, and all four of us had a good laugh about it.

"The Bird-Master is a good friend of mine, probably because neither of us is entirely human. Well, the Bird-Master looked human much of the time; and several of my own mobile extensions are as human-looking as artifice can make them. But I am a Ktistec Machine. And many persons have doubts about the Bird-Master's humanity."

"There is something wrong with that boy they call the Bird-Master," our Institute-Director Gregory Smirnov said just the other day. "He's been a boy around here for more than a hundred years (for more than three hundred years if we're to believe the happy-tongued Pawnee Indians). He should have grown into a man in that much time. It's unnatural for him to remain a boy so long."

"There's something wrong with that boy they call the Bird-Master," said Glasser of the Institute. "Anyone who maintains two sets of bones, one of them in a cave in that hill yonder, and the other set in Brazil, goes beyond being merely odd. Yes, I know that he explains that he chews a lot of slippery elm and this makes his bones easier to slip out of, but that explanation won't stand up at all."

"There is something wrong with that boy they call the Bird-Master," said Cogsworth of the Institute. "Not only can he understand bird-talk, but (though he's no more than a middle-grade moron) he can understand every sort of talk. He talks Armenian with Bob Askandanian and Arabic with George Bozarth. He talks Cantonese with Mary 'China Doll' Ming, and he talks Mexican with the Mexicans and Osage with the old Osages. But in every case the people say that the Bird-Master talks a very low-class version of their language. There is something wrong with that boy. And why does he remain only ten years old no matter how many years go by?" I can answer that last part myself. He remains only ten years old because nobody older than ten can understand bird-talk. But that gives an idea of the objections that some people bring against the Bird-Master, and all of these people are his friends.

"There is something wrong with that boy they call the Bird-Master," Aloysius Shiplap of the Institute added to the indictment. "He draws pictures in a drawing tablet. He works with many erasures until he gets pretty much what he wants."



Then he postures a bit and comes to look like what he has drawn. And then he whistles a tune or chants some gibberish, and the thing he has drawn in the tablet, the thing he has come to look like himself, appears in the sky made out of clouds that are made out of marshaled birds and insects and even buggier bugs. The things he makes in the sky seem to be alive and vocal, and yet they show all the defects of his drawings."

"Oh sure, knowledgeable people and machines, such as ourselves at the Institute, recognize that his apparitions are made out of birds and insects; but where do the birds and insects get their intelligence to assemble in such astonishing order. The Bird-Master is a sculptor of clouds and of convincing pseudo-persons and pseudo-animals-or-mechanisms (he can do a two-toned Ford Imperial Runaround perfectly, and set it to bumping over convincing bumps in the sky). But all these things are made up of living pieces, birds, bats, insects, and non-insectuous bugs. And all of them, in their thousands and millions, are regimented together to make a convincing image from whatever angle it is seen.

"When the Bird-Master does the Ghost of Gaetano Balbo (the Bird-Master calls it The Ghost of the Dead Leader) he does it complete with monocle. And seven mansard-locusts must combine their diaphanous wings to make the glass for that monacle. How does he discipline things as flighty (there is a sort of pun there, though Gregory says it is unseemly for machines to make puns), how does he discipline things as flighty as are mansard-locusts?

"And Gregory says that we can only understand the Bird-Master by studying both his long-term cycles: and he says that I haven't been around long enough to study any except the B-M's very short-term cycles. (I'm only a kid by either human or machine standards; I have not yet completed the second year of my life.)

"Yesterday I sat with the Bird-Master on a cloud-bank and we fished together in a cloud below us. Several of my own mobile extentions can be airborne, and I had selected the Old Time Brave Aviator in Goggles and Boots. And the Bird-Master seems to get up into the air pretty much whenever he wants to. To me the Bird-Master has always been Huck Finn, one of the ninety-nine personalized human archetypes that were set into my classification system at my beginning. He is freckled, his hair is between tow-colored and red, he grins, and he snaps his blue eyes back and forth. He looks like a scarecrow that is indwelt by a cornfield-sprite. He is the freckled color of straw and corn-husks, and his eyes are like blue corn-flowers bobbling on short stems. He is almost always barefooted, but yesterday he was wearing a pair of bird-feather shoes. A man saw him wearing a pair of such shoes once and wanted to know whether Bird-Master could have many such pairs of shoes manufactured if the price was right. Bird-Master took the matter up with the birds, and they told him that they would not make shoes for anybody except himself. They were gift shoes for him to wear on the nine chilly days that come before the bird-migration, they said.

"It was while we were hooking and pulling speckled carp out of a pond in a hollow in a cloud that the Bird-Master told me that he had a fear of falling, and that all the birds had it too. "Heck, Epikt," he said, "that's the way that most birds die, by losing their nerve and crashing to the earth. It takes a lot of nerve to fly. Airy-dynamics and stuff like that don't do it; nerve is what does it. Birds live dangerously, and so do I. That's what I like about chumming with the birds. Say,



Epikt, I'm going away with the birds late tomorrow, I think. Look in at my summer bones now and then while I'm gone. They'll be in the same place they were last year."

"I have seen your summer bones after you've slipped them off," I said, "but I still don't believe in them. There's something wrong with the whole business."

"You're the guy whose main brain fills more than twenty big rooms in the Institute building," Huck-Finn Bird-Master grinned the words at me, "and whenever you go out for an hour you ask yourself 'How many brains had I better put into this extension of myself for this little jaunt?', and you find something wrong with as slippery a kid as I am slipping out of his bones for a little while, or for half a year? Where is your sense of proportion, Epikt?"

"Bird-Master," I said to him, "you have told me that the Whistling Elk gives the signal for the birds to fly south. But there are no elks in Brazil. Who gives them the signal to fly north again in the springtime?"

"The Whistling Tapir," he grins. Nobody can throw a fast answer at you with a slower drawl than can the Bird-Master.

"Last winter (the first winter of my life) I found the Bird-Master's summer bones in a little cave in a nearby hill. They were guarded by a badger named Anthony, and they were sometimes savaged by a wolverine named Gulo. The Wolverine Gulo was also the Devil Gulo who sometimes came out of the animal body and prowled around the neighborhood seeking whom he might seduce. There were terrible animal fights between the badger and the wolverine, and people came and watched them fight and bet money on them. But nobody except myself found the Bird-Master's bones in that little cave. Nobody else could have gone in there, and I had to make a very slim mobile extension of myself to do it.

"Crows brought sticks of wood up to us as we sat there on the cloud-bank. And the Bird-Master laid them to build a fire. Then a Thieving Magpie (Pica Nuttali) brought us a cigarette lighter that he had stolen and kept in his nest. So we lit a fire. The Bird-Master pulled out a frying pan that he kept in a fold in the cloud there, and we had a fish fry.

"The Elk appeared on the moors below, right on the edge of our weed-patch. He looked like a painted elk. An elk painted by a good artist is as noble an animal as there is in the world, but a run-of-the-moors elk is unkempt and bleary-eyed and grubby, and a loud-mouth. But this elk was noble, and there was something puzzling about his size down below there. He stood up taller than the tall trees around him, but I had the feeling that if he were in a growth of toadstools he would stand up only about as high proportionally above them as he stood above the trees. The Elk made noises.

"Is that the Elk whistling?" I asked the Bird-Master.

"No. He is only blaring now. He will test all the sixteen winds, and then he will test them again. And then, in a couple of hours or days, when he is satisfied with the conditions, he will give the whistle. And the night after he gives the whistle, several persons in the neighborhood will die; and the birds will eat the souls of the persons who have died to gain the strength for the migration. And sometime on the following day (probably tomorrow) the birds will rise and begin to turn in mills and turmoils, the geese and ducks flying the highest in the mills, then the swifts and swallows just below them, then the crows and hawks and eagles, then the shrikes and larks, and all the other birds lower than these. Then they will all peel off from the rotating mills and fly south in their forma-



tions according to their species. And I will fly with them."

"How will you fly with the birds, Bird-Master? You got all out of breath just flying up to these clouds."

"Heck, Epikt, when I slip out of my bones I can fly with the swiftest birds and never get out of breath."

"Then, late in the afternoon yesterday, the Elk did whistle. And during the night that followed (last night) several people died in the neighborhood."

Notae Diurnae, November 5. Of the Second Year of My Life,  
Epiktistes the Ktistec Machine.

'Cautio de Notis Diurnis of Epikt. Dammit, Mechanismus, you were programmed to be a speculating machine among other things. You weremade to be very strong on the 'what if?' imagination caper. But you must keep a grasp on reality. You have written notes into the Institution Journal about things that did not really happen, things like sitting on a cloud-bank and fishing with the Bird-Master. Cool it, kid, cool it.'

Gregory Smirnov, Director of the Institute for Impure Science.

\* \* \* \*

O du Kindermund, O du Kindermund,  
Unbewusster Weisheit froh,  
Vogelsprachekund, Vogelsprachekund  
Wie Solomo!

Oh you childhood-mouth, Oh you childhood words,  
What a lore unknown you spun,  
Understanding birds, understanding birds  
Like Solomon!

Aus der Jugendheit, Friedrich Rukert.

But after the age of ten, the Vogelsprachekund talent is lost.

'There are four stages of living things, cells, individuals, bodies, and corporations; and these four things are really only about two. A bird may be an individual most of the time, but at migration time it becomes only one cell in a Corporation of Birds. A cell has its intelligence all through it; a body or an individual has its intelligence in a specific part of it, the brain; a corporation has to have corporation intelligence, but it is sometimes a puzzle where that intelligence resides. With a Corporation of Birds, the directing intelligence may be an alien particle, possibly a bird-brained human (a human or a quasi-human who has peculiar rapport with birds). Murderous hatred may sometimes be raised against such a quasi-human, but something seems always to save the bird-brains from the wrath.'

Fugue in Straw and Red, Robert Ritzrot.

'I am now putting a few notes of my own into the Journal of the Institute, before things come to their bloody or flaming climax. We may likely see the end of the phenomenon known as the Bird-Master today. There is barely time now, before he is gone, to answer the question whether he ever was here at all. And indeed he has never had a very strong texture of reality.'

'I am Valery, the only person around here entitled to spell 'I' with a capital I, member of the Institute and outgoing person. I knew this morning that something wrong had

happened when the Bird-Master tried to distract us with the largest of his apparitions, the Shaggy Giant. Besides countless insects, there were hundreds of thousands, and maybe millions (including all too many pigeons), of birds involved in the Giant, and there was a fearful expenditure of bird-energy. But the birds are getting ready to migrate anyhow, and they are very prodigal of their energy at such times.

'I tried to interview the Bird-Master after the Shaggy Giant Manifestation (which was broken up by Aloysius Shiplap) and before the Ghost-of-Gaetano-Balbo Construction.

'Myself: It is said that you are more than a hundred years old, Bird-Master. Do you know how old you are or when you were born?

'B-M: I am less than a day old. I was born again today, or maybe it was yesterday. A new spirit has entered into me and taken control of me. It's an evil spirit, Valery. Rotten, real rotten.

'Myself: What is the spirit's name?

'B-M: Gulo. Yes, it is the Devil who has been prowling around the Institute for a long while, and it is also the Devil who has been living in the wolverine who is now named Gulo also. This inhabiting Devil has a bad effect on that animal. I always say there is nothing wrong with a wolverine except bad manners and bad breath when it is not inhabited by a devil. But when it is inhabited by a devil, which is most of the time, it is a mighty rotten actor. And now I've become Gulo himself. I hate myself when I'm completely rotten.

'Myself: Seven persons in the neighborhood died last night, Bird-Master. Five of them died in their beds, apparently from natural causes. But out on the moors last night, an eight-year-old boy was smashed to death by a body blow, and folks say that the legendary Whistling Elk did it. And a four-year-old girl was torn to pieces, and folks say that the wolverine did it.

'B-M: No, you have it exactly backwards. The boy was smashed by an automobile which several young drunken gentlemen were driving around on the moor in that dark. And the girl was killed by house-dogs of the neighborhood that run loose at night. But the five persons who died of apparent natural causes in their beds, they really died of unnatural causes, Miss Valery. And then the birds ate their souls to gain strength from them for their migration. They couldn't migrate otherwise. It's the law of nature, but I wish it wasn't.

'Myself: Why can I see through you, Bird-Master?

'B-M: Because I'm so underweight that there isn't much substance to me. I weigh only one kilogram or two-and-a-quarter pounds, whichever is less. That's not enough for a ten-year-old boy to weigh, not even a ten-year-old boy who was born only today.

'Myself: Why are some people not able to see you at all?

'B-M: Because some people have very poor eye-sight.

'At that point the Bird-Master broke off our dialog and began to sing:

'Be he alive or be he dead,

We'll spill his blood, Oh red, red, red!!

'And he began to conjure up the Ghost of Gaetano Balbo. Or he began to marshal the birds and bugs into forming themselves into that ghostly masquerade. At that point also, the Bloody Red Mummies came and began to get loud and ugly and murderous.'

Notae Diurnae, November 5, of the Second Year of the Life of Epikt and the Twenty-Ninth Year of My Own Life.  
Valery Mok.



'Being a person of remarkably sound, and untrammelled, mind, I may be the right person to chronicle this episode. I am Diogenes Pontifex, scientist and sybarite. I am not (because of the 'minimal decency rule') a member of the Institute; but I have the run of the place, and I contribute most of the better items to the Journal.

'This afternoon, November 5, the Bloody Red Mummies came to cause a tumult. The air had been full of the smoke and reek of burning straw and leaves and stubble. The reek had somehow the smell of burning flesh in it, like Ancient Sacrifice. It blotted out the sky and it turned the sun red. The rotating 'mills' or towers of excited birds had their high tops hidden in the eye-stinging haze. It was quite chilly all day (when the Elk had whistled last evening, the temperature had dropped thirty degrees instantly), and the weather wouldn't warm up again till the birds were gone.

'The Bloody Red Mummies were excited, and the birds were very excited with anticipation of their voyage through the high air. They chattered and howled and screamed in all their dialects, and the most strident of them all was the Magpie. The excited magpies always sound, with their shrieking croaks, as if they were in the throes of death. Nobody except the Bird-Master could understand all these railing dialects of the birds. But where was the Bird-Master?

'Only an Archon-Ochlos, a Mob-Master could have understood all the jabbering of the Bloody Red Mummies. The 'Mummies are a very old social club. They had a band and a string-band. On any other day of the year, they were capable of making real, if a bit deformed, music. But on November 5, their album contains only 'Chantey to Hang a Man By', 'Rag to Draw-and-Quarter a Man By', 'Aria to Burn a Man Alive By' and 'Motet to Eat the Soul of a Man By'. It was randy, raunchy music. Most of the Mummies had bikers' goggles clipped to their belts.

'The mystery of the smell of burning flesh was solved by their discovery of the barbecue. (This same mystery was solved by this same discovery every year.) The barbecue was so big and so near that it had gone unnoticed. The carcass turning on the giant spit was neither of the cattle nor the swine species. It weighed at least a thousand pounds, and it was either a horse or an elk. Some years, when the Mummies were not able to shoot an elk, they would substitute an old horse. In either case, the carcass would be that of the Whistling Elk, to fulfill the ritual.

'A thousand pounds, and there were about two hundred of the Bloody Red Mummies. They'd eat plentifully if not well. And they'd drink plentifully. They had a hundred gallon barrel of 'Poor John's Corn-King Whisky', a back-country whisky one of whose slogans was 'a sound whisky to skin a mule by'.

'The Dog-Fight was always an advertised attraction for the Fall Festival of the Bloody Red Mummies, but I can remember no year in which more than one of the fighters was a dog. This year, neither of them was. It was a battle-to-the-death between the badger named Anthony and the wolverine named Gulo. For those who liked such things, this was a fight that would be remembered for many years.

'"Go to the cave you know in the little hill just behind the ravening beasts and see whether the Bird-Master's summer bones are there already," I told Epikt the handy thinking-and-speculating machine. He went like the wind, and like the wind he returned. "The outlines of his bones are starting to form there," he said. "He doesn't slip out of them as easy as he says he does. They will grow in the cave and diminish in himself for the several hours he is in travail over them. Several



of the bones look as if they were broken though, and several of them look as if they were charred. But where is the Bird-Master himself?"

"The Mummies had seven scarecrows and they would play Mummies Roulette with them. The scenario was that six of them were real scarecrows (without life, or animated only by a Maisfeldgeist or Corn-Field-Sprite that had moved into them to live), but the seventh one was to be a living man. And how long could a living man hide among the scarecrows to avoid hanging, and what were the odds?"

"There was a Slippery Elm Tree there with seven branches. Each branch had a block-and-pulley lashed to it; each pulley had a line running through it with a noose on one end of each line. Each noose had, or soon would have, a neck in it, or one of the scarecrows or of the living man. And standing near was an iron fire-box mounted on a four-wheeled wagon to which were hitched four mules. The fire was so hot that the smell of mule sweat and scorched mule hair was heavy.

"The noise of the towering, wheeling birds was near deafening, washing over the whole countryside in cascades of sound. But a man with canny ears could hear the ducks and geese already peeling off the top of that mill and sliding south in their V-formation with their high-altitude barking.

"Oh, oh, one scarecrow had living and frightened eyes in him. And another, and another. It was one scarecrow and seven living men, not one living man and seven scarecrows. Somebody said that the Mummies' initiation rite was always on November Fifth, and that the candidates for initiation were always so noosed. And if one of them was hanged instead of the scarecrow, why there would be only five instead of six new Mummies that year.

"Oh no, Oh no, there were six noosed men, and the seventh of them, playing the role of a scarecrow, was the Bird-Master. He looked more scarecrowish than any of them, but he was the Bird-Master. And the Bird-Master was going to be hanged by the Bloody Red Mummies, hanged and drawn and burned to ashes. Why were not the members of the Institute doing something about this? Because six strong Mummies had been assigned to hold each Institute member, Gregory Smirnov, Valery Mok, Aloysius Shiplap, Cogsworthy, Glasser. Well, five of them to hold each member, and a sixth to hold a knock-out tranquility needle at ready for each of them if needed.

"There was a ritual and rampage, and finally there was the "Heave Ho!" cry coming from two hundred Mummer throats. And six crews simulated the horrifying heave, and the seventh crew heaved indeed, and jerked the Bird-Master eight feet into the air. Mummies then went up on ladder arrangements and opened him up and pulled the stuffings out of him--but was it real entrails, or was it only cornhusks and straw that came out?

"That screaming, that screaming, it will haunt me forever! Only two things in the world have such a scream, the Magpie when it is excited to overflowing, and a man when he is dying by hanging and is opened up and emptied out. Then the mules pulled the fire-box under the dangling body to consume it.

"And then the shrieks came savagely out of the milling towers of birds; they beset the Mummies and began to tear out their eyes. They blinded about a dozen of them before the fellows got their bikers' goggles on.

"Epikt, go look again at the bones," I said, "and have a look at the badger and the wolverine." Epikt the Ktistec Machine went.

"The ashes that had been the Bird-Master fell from the



tree. Only a short end of still-burning rope dangled down. I raked through the ashes (the Mummers were too busy warding off the shrikes to pay attention to me). There seemed to be nothing solid in the ashes. Yes there was. There were two blue eyes, the Bird-Master's eyes. And there was a grin; but what the material element of that grin might be was a mystery. The Bird-Master winked at me. Yes, with a lidless eye he winked at me. Then there was a 'whoosh!', and he was gone out of the ashes. He was away!

'I will never cease to be amazed at the variety of creatures in our world, especially such one-of-a-kind creatures as the Bird-Master.

'Enikt returned. "It's funny," he said. "The bones were smoking and broken when I got to them, and then they suddenly healed. A Mynah bird walked into the cave and said 'New bones for old, hahr, hahr, new bones for old.' Then the Mynah bird walked out again. And the badger seems to have whipped the wolverine, though they're both pretty much torn up."

'Ah well, so am I pretty much torn up. But I'll recover. And I'll see the Bird-Master again on March 19th when he usually comes back with the birds.'

Notae Diurnae, Diogenes Pontifex, Familiar but not a Member of the Institute for Impure Science (because of the minimal decency rule).

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'The hour of absinthe is over',  
G.K. Chesterton

'The Bird-Master is also the name of a straw-man scarecrow who is hanged by the neck from a tree and then set on fire, a sort of atonement ceremony that I do not fully understand. But the straw-man (or some spirit in him) does sometimes cry out when he is set on fire. Reputable witnesses have testified to this.'

'Appendix B' to Further Legends of the Country Between the Cross-Timbers and the Shining-Mountains, Harry Fire-Island.

