

# **The Minstrel's Song: A Christian High Fantasy Medieval Role Playing Game (RPG) with Rich Cultures**

**From the "Major Works" series**

**CJS Hayward**

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# Preface

*This book is a packaged role playing game.* It is not intended to be read cover-to-cover, exactly, but to deliver reference materials that can be used to play a game. I don't include a mathematical model; if you're a gamer and need a model you can find one easily enough. You are welcome to read all of this if you like; just remember that the way a play is not exactly intended to be read from an armchair, but performed, a role playing game is not exactly to be read as a book but used as a basis for playing.

The Minstrel's Song is a Christian high fantasy medieval role playing game (RPG) with rich races and cultures.

So what makes this game special?

I have lived in the U.S., Malaysia, France, and England, and I find cultures to be very beautiful. When I wanted to play a role playing game but not have my character do unsavory things, I created *The Minstrel's Song* and gave it loving attention, in particular to its cultures, seven in all. I tried later on to make a science fiction world with seven of its own cultures, but nothing came together: the cultures of the world Espiriticthus were for me at least irreproducible.

I do not play role playing games now, but if you are a Christian gamer who would like to see a game with lovingly created cultures arising from international and intercultural experience, you might like this one.

# **Player's Introduction**

## Section I: What is role play?

What is role play?

When you read a book, your imagination transports you to the long ago, the far away, the fantastic. You are there with the characters, listening and feeling with them, watching as the story unfolds.

Role play takes another step. You are still imagining goings on in a fantasy world, but not just as a passive observer: you are an active participant whose actions affect the twists and turns of the story. You aren't just pretending to be with the great explorer, the brave adventurer, the charming minstrel; you are pretending to be that character, and he does what you decide.

The essential premise is that you have a made up character, with his own personality, likes, dislikes, goals, dreams, skills, abilities, attributes, etc. You are playing that character: you are told what your character sees and hears, what happens around him, and you choose what he does.

Your character is in a party of other player characters; these are companions and fellow adventurers who are working together towards a common goal. There is also a game master, whose role is not so much like that of one character as of the author: to serve as a referee as to events in the external world, telling what happens, what non-player characters do, and so on. (When the party walks into a town and starts looking for a tavern, an inn, a supply shop, etc., I'm the one who tells if/when they find it, who they meet on the street, what the bartender/innkeeper/shopkeeper does, and so on and so forth.)

The character should be a person, an entity, within the game world: a member of one of the seven races (Nor'krin, Tuz, Urvanovestilli, Yedidia, Jec, Shal, Janra). (A part of the character design is that it be from within one of the peoples there: a Nor'krin archer would be far more appropriate than a New York City cop who happens to have the body of a Tuz. (That's a part of the fun of role play.)) He should also, as well as a race, have a role within the game: an adventuring related profession. (For

example, archer.)

What you will do in setting up a character for my game is decide what kind of person you want her to be. To this end, I am furnishing a list of personal questions about her, and a list of skills, attributes, and virtues. In the interest of not intimidating you, let me say that they are given, not to tie you down, but to help you. I don't expect a 500 word essay in response to every single question; my intention is rather that the questions help you think about your character — that they will spark an "Aha! I want to play a character who ...". Likewise with the skills and attributes — if you don't need it, you're more than welcome to play without it.

## Section II: What do I need to do to start?

To start playing Hero's Quest, you need to define a character. After the character is defined, role play can begin.

Here is roughly what should be defined in setting up a character.

- **Personality. Identity.** A sense of who the character is. To help define characters, there is a list of questions to that end, and a list of virtues. A personal history is also an important and helpful part of the character's identity.
- **Race.** This is an important part of who the characters are; players should read at least the description of the race that your character is a member of, to understand part of the character's identity.
- **Role and abilities.** What skills the character has; what he can do. The list of roles and the list of skills is intended to help define this part of a character.
- **Attributes:** what the character is naturally gifted at, and naturally not so gifted at. An idea of how strong or weak the character is in the listed attributes.
- **Other miscellanea:**
  - Physical appearance.
  - Possessions.
  - Name.



## Section III: Sample roles

The following roles are samples of what a character might build himself into. They are meant not to be a definitive limit, but illustrative of possibilities. If a particular race is especially appropriate to a role, it will follow the race. (Of course, other races could learn as well; it's just that the particular races are especially well suited).

When a character's role/selection of skills is being determined, one dimension worthy of consideration is whether the character will be a generalist or a specialist. On his own, a generalist is likely to be the most effective character; with a party, it is probably more useful to have specialized characters who excel at diverse skills.

**The Acrobatic Scout (Janra)** If you're a Janra, you're an acrobat. The scout in particular can roll down the passages of a cavern and maze, keeping a good sense of how to get out; he can climb walls and trees, pick locks, disappear into the shadows.

**The Archer** The archer can handle a bow with a virtuoso level of skill. An Urvanovestilli crossbowman has no trouble with parlor tricks such as whipping out a one-handed crossbow and shooting a coin off a child's ear.

**The Bard (Yedidia)** The bard knows tunes to soothe the savage beast. He knows legends and lore, the tales of heroes; he has a decent chance of knowing at least a hint about where lost treasures might be. From extensive travel, he knows the lay of the land and pieces of local color, which inns will give you a night's lodging if you sing for their visitors and which taverns have the best beer. The bard is an excellent storyteller and a master of words; to him, mediation is easy, and he has a most persuasive tongue.

**The Hunter (Nor'krin, Tuz)** The hunter is good at providing food for a whole party, and a decent woodsman to boot — can track, knows how to handle a bow (Nor'krin) or a dagger (Tuz), and knows the tricks of the wood.

**The Interpreter** In a world full of different languages and cultures, a party which does not all speak a common language or which is going to go to different lands will benefit immensely from having an interpreter. The interpreter will be a student of the different languages, know enough of etiquette and customs to avoid offense, and likely be a good general party mouthpiece: know how to secure provisions and a night's roof, how much to haggle for, how to persuade people to do favors...

**The Jack-of-All-Trades (Janra)** The jack-of-all-trades is a dabbler who knows a little of this, a little of that — what would come in handy for an adventurer. He can track, hunt, smell creatures, move silently, hide, dodge, and handle a bow; he can pick locks, search, climb, use ropes, jump, function tolerably well in the dark... He's in decent shape; he doesn't wear out that quickly. He can guess what others are going to do, haggle, and knows a smattering of all the languages. He can survive in the wilderness, build fires, knows first aid, and can repair broken equipment (or at least jury-rig it to work for the moment). None of this he can do spectacularly — he is a jack of all trades and master of none — but he's pretty good on his own and is likely to be able to do at least tolerably what nobody else in the party knows how to do.

MacGyver 'nuff said.

**The Scholar (Urvanovestilli)** The scholar is a very literate person who knows a lot about history and geography. He can read and write, and given time can decipher at least some of each language (and is conversant with the different literatures). It is often sages that Nor'krin seek out for advice in fulfilling their quests; they have sharp minds and extensive knowledge, which can help guide any party.

**The Wayfarer** The wayfarer is somewhat the jack-of-all-trades adventurer, somewhat the interpreter, somewhat the bard... He has travelled to many places and knows the different lands extensively; he's made friends across races and has a lot of open doors.

**The Woodsman (Yedidia)** The woodsman knows the secrets of the wood. He knows which plants are edible, can find water without difficulty, knows which animals have passed by and which are nearby, knows a decent bit of mountaineering. He is able to track and hunt of

KNOWS a decent bit of mountaineering... He is able to track and hunt, of course, but is more than just that. He can calm animals, and enjoys having them eat out of his hand. He is at peace with the wood, and sees a great deal of beauty in it.

## Section IV: The Spirit, and its Gifts

All characters are believers. As such, they have the ear of an omnipotent Father; Christ Jesus dwells in their heart; they possess the Spirit as the structure of obedience and as a power in their lives. Prayer and the motion of the Spirit are to be manifest in play; this is not included in the mathematical model, not because it is not important enough to model, but because it is too big and too important to model. (See model, section III)

The one Spirit that is present gives different gifts to specific believers; Paul, after laying out the teaching of one body whose different parts serve to a higher and necessary unity, writes (I Cor. 12:27-28, NIV):

Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you a part of it. And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues.

For game purposes, a character (if so desired) may pray, asking for a specific gift or gift(s), which may or may not be given. (If something else is given, the character/player has not been bad or anything like that; it's just that a different gift has been given.) One, or occasionally two or three gifts should be given. The gift should be appropriate to the character — his whole personality and identity — if there is one which is fitting. Gifts should not necessarily center around what is \*useful\* to play; it is unbelievably vulgar to think of the Spirit as a power source which is useful to characters. It is fine for not all — for that matter, none — of the characters to have gifts that happen to be useful to play. Gifts may also have different strengths, and/or different frequencies of operation, in different characters.

The gifts mentioned in the Scriptures may be given; other appropriate ones may also be given (for example, the touch given Curdie in The Princess and Curdie). I'm not sure exactly how to define appropriate, but one obvious point is no imitation magic: no incantations

and material components, no items with strange properties. In general, Spirit-given gifts which are consistent with how God has revealed himself in Scripture.

Specific gifts:

- **Administration:**

A Spirit-given leadership ability.

Note that it is possible to have natural leadership talents without this gift of the Spirit; like several other gifts, it may not be obvious whether a person is exercising a gift of the Spirit or natural talent. (Some gifts, such as faith and helping others, are Spirit-given strong measures of qualities that all believers should have.)

- **Apostleship:**

Paul stated that he was the last of the apostles, so this gift is different from the others in only applying to a very small group of people at a very specific time. For the sake of simplicity, I will assume that player characters are not apostles.

- **Discernment of Spirits:**

As this gift applies to the discernment between angels and demons, it will not appear in its current form in the game. It will appear, however, as an ability to sense — perhaps even see, in a person in whom the gift is strong — angels.

- **Evangelism:**

A Spirit-given gift to effectively evangelize. This would not appear in a sinless world.

- **Faith:**

Someone with the gift of faith possesses a great measure of faith, and unusually powerful prayers.

- **Healing:**

The Spirit-given power to heal people.

- **Helping Others:**  
A special Spirit-given ability and energy to help others, flowing out of an endowment of love.
- **Interpretation of Tongues:**  
The Spirit-given ability to interpret what is spoken in tongues.
- **Knowledge:**  
This gift appears in two forms.

The first is a knowledge of sound doctrine — a gift that is at times not clearly distinguishable from prophecy, preaching, and teaching.

The second, "logos gnosis" (word of knowledge), is a Spirit-given insight into facts about the external world, about other people's needs. (This is also not always clearly distinguished from prophecy)

- **Miraculous Powers:**  
Look to the Old Testament narratives surrounding Elijah for a picture of a person in whom the gift is strong.
- **Pastors:**  
The gift of overseeing and caring for and nurturing the spiritual conditions of others.
- **Preaching:**  
The Spirit-given ability to preach the truth in a way that is powerful and shows its relevance to believers' lives.
- **Prophecy:**  
Prophecy, Biblically speaking, is somewhat broader than the contemporary understanding of "Spirit-inspired prediction of the future."

The first and foremost meaning, of chief ecclesiastical importance, is a Spirit-inspired telling of the truth. In this aspect, I am not sure how to clearly distinguish prophecy from preaching and teaching.

The second part of it is things such as dreams, visions, the voice of the Spirit speaking.

The specific form the gift of prophecy takes when given to a character will take some form like this.

- **Speaking in Tongues:**  
Spirit-given (moment-by-moment) speech in the tongues of men and angels.
- **Teaching:**  
The Spirit-given ability to teach and impart the truth.

ONE FINAL NOTE ON THIS POINT: I am placing the Spirit in play, with greatest reverence, as someone too important to leave out. The Spirit is too big and too important to reduce to just another kind of power or just another element of play. Do not do it. Give the Spirit in play a treatment that is nothing short of worship.

I cannot give a rule to make this happen. Walk in the Spirit, and it will give you the power to do so.

## Section V: A Sample of Play.

Here is a sample of play. The characters are Kendall Lightfoot, a Janra scout given prophecy, Qualinesti (regional name), an Urvanovestilli scholar given knowledge in the first sense, Pirt, a Jec wayfarer given faith, 'Limna, a Yedidia interpreter given healing, and Torv, a Tuz hunter given the gift of help. They are currently in a Tuz village on the Urvanovestilli border. As they have been together for a while, they have all studied a common language (specifically Jec), which they have by now learned to speak with a reasonable proficiency.

I would like to emphasize that this is only one of many, many possible kinds of situations.

[...]

**Pirt:** "What did the riddle say, again?"

**Qualinesti:** "As tall as a house, as round as a cup; people drink from me without lifting me up."

**Pirt:** "Hmm... [pauses in thought for a minute] I wonder if it was talking about a well. Why don't we split up, search the village for a well, and meet back here in half an hour, and go to the well if we find one?"

**Qualinesti, Kendall, 'Limna, Torv:** "Sounds good to me."

**Game Master:** In half an hour's searching, you find that the village has one well, next to the miller's house. From the looks of it, it has been dry for quite some time. Pirt found, from a brewer, that the village now gets water from a valley about half a mile away.

**Kendall:** I'm going to climb down the well and search for any signs of anything interesting.

**Pirt:** "Would you like to borrow my lantern?"



**Kendall:** "Yes, thank you."

**Game Master:** The well is approximately 25 feet deep; after fifteen minutes of climbing and searching, you find that one of the stones has letters chiseled into it in some script, apparently Urvanovestilli, which doesn't spell out letters that you can read.

**Kendall:** "Pirt, may I also borrow your rope?"

**Pirt:** "Certainly."

**Kendall:** I'm going to climb up, take the rope, tie a Swami seat on Qualinesti, and body belay him down into the well.

**Qualinesti:** "Wait a minute. How am I supposed to get back up? I can't climb the way you can."

**Kendall:** "Relax. I can belay you, and if you really can't climb, I can pull you up. But climbing's so easy!"

**Qualinesti:** "I am not a Janra."

**Kendall:** I'm going to wink as I say, "We all have our problems."

**Torv:** I'm going to pick Kendall up and throw him over my head.

**Game Master:** Kendall, are you going to try to dodge?

**Kendall:** Given an opportunity to fly through the air? No way!

**Game Master (to himself):** Why did I even ask? (to Kendall) Sure enough, you find yourself flying through the air, and land in a couple of somersaults.

**Kendall:** I'm going to saunter back. (to Qualinesti): "So, how about heading down to read the inscription?"

**Qualinesti:** Ok, I'll head down.

**Kendall:** Once he's down safely, I'll climb down as well.

**Game Master:** After a little while of identifying the script — it comes from some weird dialect — you are able to decipher the message. It reads, "Do the opposite of usual to what is opposite me."

**Kendall:** Hmm... no buttons to push this time. I'm going to inspect the stone again.

**Game Master:** You don't find anything new.

**Qualinesti:** Are the stones arranged in any kind of orderly pattern?

**Game Master:** Yes; as a matter of fact, they are. There are thirty-two in a circle.

**Qualinesti:** I'm going to see if I can do anything to the opposite stone — especially pull it out.

**Game Master:** You can't budge it.

**Kendall:** I'm going to give it a try.

**Game Master:** You are able to pull it out one inch, at which point you hear a sound of some kind of stonework moving. After a few seconds, the base of the well beneath you begins to tremble, and slide to the left.

**Kendall:** I'm going to jump up and shoot my feet out to the sides so that they catch on a foothold, and shoot an arm around Qualinesti's waist to hold him up.

**Torv:** I'm going to grab the rope and brace myself so that I can pull up Qualinesti and Kendall, if need be.

**Game Master:** Ok. (To Qualinesti and Kendall) The stone beneath you slide out to the side, revealing stone steps receding into the darkness.

**Kendall:** I'm going to shift Qualinesti to my back, and climb down to the stairs, and head down.

**Game Master:** At the end of the stairwell is a closed door, with twenty buttons and what appears Qualinesti to be a cryptogram. It says, [hands sheet to players]

Up pqfo uif eppxbz, qsftt jo cvuupot uxp, uisff, gjwf, ojof, boe pof npsf cvuupo. Uijt pof npsf cvuupo dpoujouft uif qbuufso.

**Qualinesti:** [looks at it] "Both 'uif' and 'pof' are repeated; I'd be willing to guess that one of them is 'the'. ('nspf' and 'cvuupo' are repeated, but I don't know any four or six letter words as probable as 'the'.) For 't' to go to 'p' is back four; 'h' going to 'o' is forward seven; 'e' to 'f' is forward one. That doesn't help us any. 't' to 'u' is forward one, 'i' to 'h' is... T-o o-p-e-n... Got it!

"To open the doorway, press in buttons two, three, five, nine, and one more button. This one more button continues the pattern.

"Hmm. Two plus three is five; five plus three is eight. No, that's not it. Two plus three is five; two plus three plus five is ten. Now if we could only find a happy medium."

**Pirt:** "Two times two minus one is three; two times three minus one is five; two times five minus one is nine. Hey! I think I've got it. Who's for pushing buttons two, three, five, nine, and seventeen?"

**Qualinesti:** "Hmm, that's a little complicated. If we add, two plus one is three, three plus two is five, five plus four is nine... it doubles, so nine plus eight is seventeen."

**Kendall:** "I think you agree. How about if we try it?"

**Others:** "Ok." **Game Master:** Gears begin to turn, and the door hinges squeak as the door turns back.

[The party enters the underground, and after a while of puzzles and exploits, locates the map which they had been in search of. Coming out after a couple of days, they go to an inn.]

**Game Master:** Jim, could you come with me for a second? [pulls

Kendall's player, Jim, out of earshot of the rest of the players.] During the night, you have a dream in which an angel appears and tells you to go the cave of Munra, a great prophet and sage, which is indicated by the notched circle on the map. He tells you to examine carefully and heed the information on the map, and says that on the way you will meet three trials, which must be overcome.

**Kendall:** I'm going to ask the angel what the trials are.

**Game Master:** "That is for you to discover." [They return to the players.]

**Kendall:** "Last night, I had a dream. An angel told me that we must seek out the cavern where Munra lives, which is marked by a notched circle on the map. Munra is a great prophet and sage. We need to try to understand and pay attention to the map on the way there. We will meet three trials on the way, which we must overcome before arriving."

**Qualinesti:** Are there any caravans or other wayfarers travelling in that direction from the village?

**Game Master:** No.

**Torv:** "How 'bout if we all buy five days' provisions and set out?"

**Others:** "Ok."

**Qualinesti:** Is there a path to the cave indicated on the map?

**Game Master:** Yes, there is.

**Qualinesti:** "I suggest we follow the path."

**Others:** "Ok."

**Game Master:** You begin to follow the path. Along the way, Torv finds an adequate supply of rabbits, boars, and so on to keep you fed, as well as springs and streams sufficient to always have at least some water in your waterskins. After fifteen days' travel, you come to the place

indicated on the map as Riddler's Pass. There are two ridges coming together, forcing any travellers to pass between them, and between the mountains lies a yawning chasm.

The weather is an intense thunderstorm.

**Kendall:** Can we climb the ledges?

**Game Master:** There is only sheer rock, and the top seems to be angled so that there's nothing for a grappling hook to catch on to.

**Kendall:** Is there anything to secure a rope to?

**Game Master:** Yes; there are trees on both sides.

**Kendall:** I'm going to toss my grappling hook and attempt to secure a rope on the other side, then tie a noose on the other end around the rope, and attach another rope through the loop of the noose so that I can pull the rope back from the other side.

**Game Master:** Done.

**Kendall:** "How about if I shuttle across giving you each a piggyback ride, and then carry across our gear?"

**Others:** "Ok. We'll wait by the edge for you to get back"

**Game Master:** You get Torv, Pirt, and Qualinesti over; while you are carrying 'Limna over, a bolt of lightning strikes the tree on the far side. The electrical spasm causes Kendall with 'Limna to jump off the rope, and the thunder blast knocks Torv, Pirt, and Qualinesti over the edge. You fall seventy five feet onto rock.

Qualinesti has a fractured femur.

Torv has a tibia/fibula fracture, and some broken ribs.

Pirt has unknown injuries; he is knocked out by the impact.

'Limna has two broken arms.

Kendall is able to roll and reduce the damage, but he will have some severe abrasions.

**Limna:** I'm going to pray over myself, and then lay hands on Qualinesti, Pirt, Torv, and Kendall.

**Game Master:** You feel a lessening of pain as the bones begin to slide into place.

**Kendall:** I'm going to search around the sides for a route up.

**Game Master:** The sides are sheer rock and slippery rock; you can see almost nothing now. It's unclear whether you'd be able to find a route up on a sunny day; you can't climb out now.

**Kendall, Torv, Pirt:** We're going to search for a way out.

**Game Master:** You don't find anything.

**Pirt:** I am going to pray that a way out may be found.

**Game Master:** The rain begins to grow less intense, and, after about an hour, the sun begins to shine. You notice that the walls have streaks of talc reaching up to the top.

**Kendall:** Are there any visible climbing routes?

**Game Master:** No.

**Kendall:** "Torv, may I borrow your dagger?"

**Torv:** "Here you go."

**Kendall:** I'm going to start seeing if I can carve holds in the the talc, hoping to find a way to the top.

**Game Master:** In about three hours, you get about two thirds of the way up, before coming to the end of a streak which is not within any

reasonable distance of any other.

**Kendall:** I'm going to climb down and rest for a while.

**Torv:** What's the status of the rope?

**Game Master:** It's lying coiled at the edge.

**Torv:** Are there any small rocks around?

**Game Master:** Yes, there are.

**Torv:** I'm going to throw rocks at it to knock it down.

**Game Master:** You can't throw any rocks higher than about thirty feet.

**Kendall:** I'm going to stuff rocks in my pockets, and climb up the talc trail to throw rocks at the rope.

**Game Master:** You get about halfway through before knocking it down. It falls about ten feet to your right, and goes down about twenty feet.

**Kendall:** "Geronimo!!!"

**Game Master:** You barely manage to stop yourself sliding before you reach the tip.

**Kendall:** I'm going to climb up, scare away any animals, and ferry the gear across, then from the other end, pull across and reanchor the rope, and help the people up. [pause] Wait. I'm going to rapell down the side and carve handholds.

**Game Master:** There are a couple of raccoons who have helped themselves to your food, but no other animals. You manage to do what you wanted to.

**Kendall:** "Thanks for letting me use your dagger, Torv. Here it is."

**Torv:** "You're welcome."

**Game Master:** You continue on, and early the next day come to a fork in the path.

**Pirt:** What does the map say?

**Game Master:** The map shows only one path.

**Pirt:** Is one side more sharply angled, or wider, or more worn?

**Game Master:** Both are equally angled, equally wide, and equally worn.

**Pirt:** I'm going to study the map to see if I can find any hints.

**Game Master:** [pauses] You don't find any.

**Qualinesti:** I'm going to do the same.

**Game Master:** You don't find any, either.

**Kendall:** I'm going to pray for a word on which path to choose.

**Game Master:** You remember the words of an author:

And I said to him, "Sir, give me a light, that I may tread safely into the unknown."

And he said to me, "Put thy hand into the hand of God. That will be better to thee than a light, and safer than a known way."

**Kendall:** Do I receive anything else?

**Game Master:** No.

**Pirt:** "God has sent us on this quest, and I am sure that he desires that we succeed. I think we should just pick a path, and trust God that it will be the right one. Which one do you suggest?"



**Kendall:** "Say, left."

**Torv:** "How do you know? Did you receive a word from God?"

**Kendall:** "I don't. I didn't. But I'm trusting in him."

**'Limna:** "Is that okay for everyone?"

**Others:** "Sounds fine."

**Pirt:** "Well, let's go, then."

**Game Master:** You go along, and as you go the hunting becomes more difficult. You come to the last village before the cave, where you purchase five days' worth of provisions, and go along... four days later, you're almost out of water, having just enough to get back, and haven't been able to find any along the way. It looks like another good week's journey until you get to the cave.

**Pirt:** Has there been any rain or any indication of rain?

**Game Master:** No. You've come across a couple of dry creeks.

**Pirt:** "I say that we go along and pray to find water."

**Qualinesti:** "We could go back to the village and ask about water sources."

**'Limna:** "Yes, we could, but that would mean taking a few days' recovery from dehydration. It would mean a long delay."

**Kendall:** "Point."

**Pirt:** "I think that this is the third test."

[After a continuation of deliberation, they decide to continue.]

**Game Master:** Two days later, you come across an abandoned well which, while the wood holdings, the rope and the bucket are hopelessly rotted, Kendall is able to climb down into to replenish your waterskins.

Four days later, you come across a cavern twisting into the earth.

**Pirt:** I'm going to light my lantern, hold my breath, and walk in.

**Game Master:** It takes your eyes a little while to adjust to the semidarkness, and then you see an old man with a flowing, white beard, wearing a coarse woolen cloak, sitting in a chair. There is a fire in the corner of the cave.

He stands up, raises his hand in benediction, and then says something in his tongue. [pulls Jane, 'Limna's player, aside.] He said, "Greetings, travellers. I have been waiting for you."

**'Limna:** Unless I indicate that I'm having a private conversation with Munra, I'm going to interpret so that you can just speak for him. [to others] "He said, 'Greetings, travellers. I have been waiting for you.'"

['Limna interprets for the interaction.]

...

## **Section VI: Character definition.**

Here is a battery of questions designed to help players think about who the character they are designing is:

Who is he? Does Jesus sit enthroned in his heart? How does he try to imitate Christ? How does he see the world? Where do his loyalty and his love lie? How does he use his talents? What virtues does he embody? Is he temperate, controlled, balanced? What does he search for in other people? How deep are his friendships? How deep is he? How strongly does he embody the qualities he holds? What community is he a part of? What is his family, his liege, his birthplace? What inhabits his thoughts? How does he embody what is truly masculine (she embody what is truly feminine)? What fruit does he let the Spirit work in his life? What is his name?

What is his story? What interests, goals, and desires does he have? What does he cherish? What special twist does he put on things? How does he pray? What is his role in the Church? What does he create? Of what would his friends look and say, "That is him?" What is his story? What (if any) visions has he had [this question is more the focus of the DM than the player]? If he were an animal, what animal would he be, and why? What are his hobbies? What is his favorite story? What does he like to present to other people? What is he afraid of other people knowing about him? What memories does he cherish? How old is he? How has he changed over the years? How has he remained the same? What are his loyalties? Who lies closest to his heart? Who does he exist in relationship to? What communities is he a member of? How does he spend his time? What are his hopes and dreams?

What is he naturally gifted at? What skills has he developed? What would traditional game systems attribute to him? What gifts has he received in the Spirit [again, this question is more for the DM]? Prophecy? Faith? Wisdom? Knowledge? Healing? Miraculous powers? Leadership? What are his weaknesses? Does he have any handicaps? What can and can't he do?

What does he look like? What is his manner?

What are his relationships to other characters?

Here is a listing of skills/areas of knowledge/abilities. It is meant to be illustrative rather than exclusive. (Partially borrowed from AD&D)

(A following parenthesized letter indicates that a skill is common to all members of a race: (N)or'krin, (T)uz, (Y)edidia, (U)rvanovestilli, Je(C), (S)hal, (J)anra. Other parenthesized information may follow.)

- Acrobatics/Tumbling (J)
- Acting
- Ambidexterity
- Animal Handling (Y)
- Animal Lore
- Animal Training
- Anatomy
- Anthropology
- Appraisal
- Archery
- Artistic Skill (Specific Medium)
- Balance (J)
- Biology
- Blacksmith
- Blind Action (S)
- Bowyer/Fletcher
- Brewing
- Building
- Carving
- Carpentry
- Catch
- Ceremonies (U)
- Charioteering
- Chemistry
- Climbing (J)
- Clockwork Device Craftsmanship (U)
- Cobbling

- Cooking
- Cold Tolerance (N)
- Cultures (specific culture)
- Dancing (Y)
- Dodge (J)
- Doublejointedness
- Endurance
- Engineering
- Etiquette
- Farmer (C)
- Fire-Building
- Fisher
- Gambling
- Gardening (Y)
- Gem Cutting
- Geography
- Guess Actions — guess from looking at a person what he will do next.
- Haggling
- Hear Noise — hear almost silent noises.
- Heat Tolerance (T,S)
- Heraldry (U)
- Herbalism (Y)
- Hide
- History (U)
- Hunting (N,T)
- Illusionism
- Improvisation (Musical)
- Incense Making
- Janra-Ball (J) — incomprehensible to members of other races.
- Jewelry Work
- Juggling
- Jumping (J)
- Jury-Rigging
- Keen Eyesight
- Languages (Specific Language(s))
- Leadership
- Leather Working

- Literature (U)
- Mapmaking
- Massage
- Mathematics (U)
- Mediation
- Medicine
- Mining
- Move Silently
- Mountaineering
- Musical Composition
- Musical Instrument (Specific Instrument)
- Navigation
- Open Locks
- Painting
- Persuasion
- Philosophy (U)
- Poetry Composition
- Pole Vault (J)
- Pottery Making
- Public Speaking
- Pyrotechnics
- Reading/Writing (U)
- Read Emotion (Y)
- Repair
- Riding
- Rope Use
- Sailing
- Search
- Shouting — shout loudly and prolongedly without tiring vocal chords.
- Singing (Y)
- Smell Creature (Y) — smell what creatures are around and have passed by.
- Sports
- Stonemasonry
- Storytelling
- Strategy Games

- Swimming (J)
- Symbolic Lore (N,C)
- Tailoring
- Technology Use (U)
- Theology (U)
- Tightrope Walking (J)
- Tracking
- Trivia
- Ventriloquism
- Weather Sense (Y)
- Weaving
- Wilderness Survival (N,T,Y)
- Withdrawing/Meditation (S)
- Woodlore (Y)
- Wrestling (J,T)

Here is a list of some attributes, to think about how strong or weak a character might be:

- Ability to Learn
- Agility
- Charisma
- Constitution
- Dexterity
- Intelligence
- Knowledge
- Memory
- Perception
- Speed
- Strength
- Wisdom

Possible virtues to think about how a character embodies goodness:

- Balance
- Chastity
- Compassion
- Contrainte

- Courage
- Faith
- Faithfulness
- Forgiveness
- Generosity
- Gentleness
- Honesty
- Honor
- Hope
- Humility
- Joy
- Justice
- Kindness
- Mercy
- Moderation
- Love
- Obedience
- Patience
- Peace
- Penitence
- Purity
- Self-Control
- Simplicity
- Submission
- Wisdom



# **Game Master's Introduction**

## **Section I: Initial comments.**

The game master should know and understand the material in the general player's section, and in addition the material in the game master's section.

The game master is the referee and the "everyone else", the one who designs adventures and governs the pretend world play occurs in.

## Section II: Designing play

There are several components which should shape play. A proper mixture and balance of these different elements, like a balanced diet, provides the most enjoyable passage of time.

Role play, personal interaction, acting — this is (especially) when characters talk and do things in a way that shows their personality. This is perhaps the most central part of play; it is at least the one which this genre of game is named after. This lies more with the players than with the game master in that it is something the players do; the game master's role here is just to encourage and to provide opportunities conducive to good role play. (Ergo, a quest more robust than two riddles, a logic puzzle, three locked doors, and a maze leading to a chest of gold.)

Challenge, problem solving, puzzles — bring situations where players have to think. The key to keep in mind here is that it is not the game master versus the players, but rather the game master providing puzzles that are difficult but not insurmountable — puzzles which will yield to thought and effort. More information is provided in section III, puzzles.

Skill use — situations which bring into play the characters' skills. Locks for a scout to pick. A wilderness trek for a woodsman's wilderness survival skills. A maze to map out. Hidden doors to discover. A quest which brings characters into other lands and requires them to use an interpreter. Et cetera.

Word pictures and stories — role playing is, in a sense, a narrative in the second person, and one attribute of good literature is skillful and beautiful use of words. A description of situations which is beautiful and moving is preferable to one which is dull and mechanical.

Divine action and intervention — points where characters come into contact with God. Gifts of the Spirit at work. A dream in which a character is warned that he will be badly needed by far away friends. A moving worship service. An angel's appearance to give a party a quest.

Exploration and wonder — a sense of penetration and discovery, venturing out into the unknown, and a sense of surprise, is another color on the game master's palette which is necessary to a good painting.

Rewards — rewards of various sort can be worked in for good and successful playing, and set after significant accomplishments. Good role playing, and puzzle solving, are in a sense their own rewards. Other rewards include experience (the characters becoming better at some skill or skills, or learning new ones), Urvanovestilli devices, friendships and alliances, information, the discovery of wonders...

Faith and morality — Espiriticthus is a world where faith is a part of life and life is a part of faith. Sometimes the motion of God is plainly visible; sometimes it takes more subtle forms, as in the book of Esther, where God is not explicitly mentioned even once. But God moves. Faith, and moral virtue, should be a part of the campaign — the setting in which the adventurers move.

## Section III: Puzzles

"It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, and the glory of kings to search it out."

Proverbs 25:2

The following are suggested examples of puzzles:

**Riddles:** These could be posed by a gatekeeper as a requisite to crossing a bridge etc.; alternately, a door could have a riddle engraved on it, the answer to which would tell where the key may be found, or what button to press, or...

**Logic puzzles:** See Raymond Smullyan, *The Lady or the Tiger?*; a good library, in that section, should have other books with other appropriate puzzles.

**Mazes:** twisty passages, secret doors...

**Cryptogram:** On this point, I would issue a strong warning, from personal nrobi experience, that the objective is *\*not\** to protect information, but to es"Ni provide a puzzle which can be solved in a reasonable amount of time. er"nt Ergo, simple and relatively easy: substitution ciphers, something where eeytl the direction is reversed and the vowels are deleted, a creative ntofe rearrangement where "Ninety nine bottles of beer" becomes the contents of the square to the right, a text where the first letter of each word spells out the message, etc. It is very easy to make something which is too hard and frustrating to the players, but care and moderation should make something enjoyable.

**Word game:** Give a text with one rather bizarre feature — a void to perceive, or an odd pattern — which, when noticed, will be helpful to the party.

**Strategy games:** Something simple, but different. Examples of such games may be found among mathematical puzzle books in a library.

Spatial/three dimensional puzzles: Sokoban, various disassembly/reassembly puzzles which may be found in shops, Towers of Hanoi... if these can not be acquired, it's not the end of the world, but they should add something.

Guess the rules: A very simple strategy game, with a (non-optimal) algorithm to play against... but the rules are not initially given, beyond a yes/no answer to the question of, "Is this legal?"

Tessellation puzzles: Fit the pieces in place and/or assemble to make a certain form.

(Explicit) mathematical problems: If there's a good way to put them in play, math contest problems of the sort that can be found in books are a lot of fun to solve.

## Section IV: Urvanovestilli devices, etc.

Urvanovestilli devices may be very useful to players. Devices may include anything which could plausibly be made given a mind like that of Leonardo da Vinci, finely machined gears, levers, springs, etc., and the dexterity of a microsurgeon. (Be creative.) The price of devices should take into account materials cost and amount of skill and labor; in general, they should be rather expensive.

Sample devices include a sewing machine, a Swiss Army Knife, a hang glider, a device which (when pulled along on a leash) leaves an ink trail on a floor to indicate where players have been, a Babbage-style analytical engine, a collapsible ladder, a spring loaded automatic belaying device which (once the springs are pumped up) will shoot up a grappling hook and then automatically pull in slack in a rope (until a certain button is pushed and held, at which it will feed out rope at a slow rate (given over 50 pounds pull — well below the weight of any adventurer) and reset the springs)...

(Unacceptable devices would include a mechanical thinking person, a machine to turn lead into gold, or something else which could not plausibly be made under the technology parameters given.)

The Urvanovestilli also have a knowledge of chemistry which allows the creation of many chemicals — pyrotechnics, glues, acids, chemical (phosphorescent) lights, and drugs being among the more useful to adventurers. (Drugs, if combined with the fruits of Yedidia herbalism, would be roughly on par with what exists in the modern world — for example, medicinal drugs would include antibiotics, antishock drugs, etc., but would not include something to make a third degree burn instantly heal — only the gift of healing can do that). Chemicals in general are expensive. Hormones exist, but are prohibitively expensive, as they can only be gathered in minute amounts each day at butchers' shops, and require a degree of skill and labor to extract. Much of the more powerful drugs and hormones, as well as being extremely expensive, have side effects or potential to backfire — ergo, anabolic steroids having the same problems as in real life adrenaline speeding up reflexes increasing

problems as in fear itself, adrenaline speeding up reflexes, increasing strength greatly, etc., but unpredictably causing either a fight or flight reaction — so a calm and controlled adventurer injected with adrenaline could start running as fast as possible away from all danger.



# A Simple Mathematical Model

After having made an exquisitely complex mathematical model, I am trying to make something simple that will take a back seat to role play, and not confuse new players. It is modelled after White Wolf, and in another sense after the computer language Smalltalk; I am trying to make a rule sheet that is very short and sweet.

In this model, you have four attributes: Physical, Mental, Social, and Other. Each of those attributes is rated 1 to 5: 1 is below average, 2 is normal, 3 is typical for adventurers, and 5 is highest possible. The value of these attributes is determined by you and the game master, at whatever most appropriately represents your character. The Other attribute is one you specify: could be charisma, or understanding of other people, or dexterity, or knowledge. It should be chosen in an area that tells more about your character than just Physical, Mental, and Social would have. You also have skills/abilities, each rated at between 0 and 5; skills can be anything appropriate; a suggested list is as follows:

Acrobatics/Tumbling, Acting, Animal Handling, Animal Training, Anatomy, Anthropology, Appraisal, Artistic Ability, Attack, Balance, Biology, Blacksmith, Blind Action, Bowyer/Fletcher, Brewing, Building, Carving, Carpentry, Catch, Ceremonies, Charioteering, Chemistry, Climbing, Clockwork Device, Craftsmanship/Engineering, Cobbling, Cooking, Cold Tolerance, Cultures, Dancing, Dodge, Endurance, Engineering, Etiquette, Farmer, Fencing, Fire-Building, Fisher, Gambling, Gardening, Geography, Guess Actions, Hagglng, Hear Noises, Heat Tolerance.

Heraldry, Herbalism, Hide, History, Hunting, Illusionism, Improvisation, Incense, Janra-Ball, Jewelry, Juggling, Jumping, Jury-Rigging, Languages, Leadership, Leatherworking, Literature, Mapmaking, Massage, Mathematics, Mediation, Medicine, Mining, Move, Musical Composition, Musical Instruments, Navigation, Open Locks, Persuasion, Philosophy, Physics, Poetry, Pole Vaulting, Pottery, Public Speaking, Pyrotechnics, Reading/Writing, Read Emotion, Repair, Riding, Rope Handling, Sailing, Search, Shouting, Singing, Smell Creature, Sports, Stonemasonry, Storytelling, Strategy Games, Swimming, Symbolic Lore, Tactics, Tailoring, Technology, Technology, Theology, Throw, Tightrope Walking, Tracking, Trivia, Ventriloquism, Weather Sense, Weaving, Wilderness Survival, Withdrawing, Woodlore, Wrestling

You start with a total of 10 points to distribute between all your skills; you will earn from 1 to 3 experience points between sessions, depending on how well you role play. It takes 1 experience point to raise a skill from 0 to 1 points, 2 experience points to raise a skill from 1 to 2 points, and so on, 5 points being necessary to raise a skill from 4 to 5 points.

When you attempt to do something, the game master will assess a difficulty level from 1 (easiest) up to 10 (most difficult). You will add up the relevant attribute plus skill level (-1 if you have no skill points for that skill), and then add a die roll (divided by 2 and rounded down) to your sum, making your total; the game master will add a die roll (divided by 2 and rounded down) to the difficulty, making the difficulty total. If your total is greater than or equal to the difficulty total, you succeed at the action.

Injury is intentionally left out of this model. It is intended to be role played — if you fall when climbing the wall, the consequence is not that you're three hit points lower; the consequence is that you've got a broken leg. The point of this model is not to govern role play; it is to support it, not representing in full so much as evoking just enough chance to lend uncertainty to events in role play.

# General Comments and Theological Groundings

I'm going to attempt to explain a reworked concept of role playing games.

Let me preface this by saying that:

- I'm toying around with ideas; the best that I can offer now is unpolished and half-baked.
- Explaining this in terms of extant role playing systems will be something like explaining non-verbal communication in terms of the logical reasoning of geometry.
- If, by God's grace, I manage an explanation that is not too clumsy to understand, and lay out a system which is not too incomplete to use, it will still be very challenging and require much thought to play.

I have played AD&D extensively, and Star Wars a fair amount. In addition, I am marginally familiar with GURPS, Shadow Run , Amber, and a couple of home brewed systems. I am most familiar with AD&D as the grandfather (technically, basic D&D, but it doesn't matter for what I will be speaking of), and will speak of it as the basis.

I have enjoyed many hours of rich role play; I believe it to be immensely valuable. Not only is it enjoyable, but it develops and

immensely valuable. Not only is it enjoyable, but it develops and strengthens imagination, emotion, and reason. That alone is a needed flash of light at a time when imagination and reason are dying, and emotion is reduced to a tool to influence your choice of shampoo.

When I find problems in existing role playing games, therefore, I am not saying, "Role play is evil. Destroy it." Instead, I am saying, "Fix it. Heal it. Complete what is lacking, restore what is askew, remove what is baneful." The basic principle — a game master creates a world, players create characters, and they play out — is very good.

That being stated, there are two basic things that need a major overhaul.

- Philosophical groundings.

Gnosticism, which is perhaps the heresy plaguing Christendom, holds many things, including the following:

The final measure and achievement is power. You, a member of the elite, will achieve the final end by making yourself more and more powerful, penetrating successive ranks until you become like a god.

Good and evil are equal and opposite, balancing forces which together make a higher order unity.

If this is beginning to sound uncomfortably familiar, it should. The philosophical groundings of AD&D are Gnostic. Another point of Gnosticism is a morality that is, to put it politely, revised. In AD&D, what are the four classes? Fighter. One whose training is in combat, and kills all the time. Thief. One whose training is in thievery. Mage. One whose training is in sorcery. Aah, but we have a relief in the cleric, right? No. Clerics are religious knights who take a vow never to shed blood — and then learn to use blunt weapons with a proficiency far beyond that of most professional soldiers. It is entirely possible for a character to lie, worship false gods, use magical talismans and cast magic spells, wade through blood — and be a hero.

Now to contrast with Christian orthodoxy:

Identity consists not in power or the deified Self, but in Christ. In Christ, after you humble yourself, God will lift you up, by his grace. He will forgive your sins, give you a place in the community of his saints, and call you his son. The Christian's identity is first of all in Christ (hence the term 'Christian'), and second of all in the Church; in that context he is the wonderful new creation.

What then of power? It has no place in identity. Paul, at the end of his life, could have written, "I have written letters outlining the faith, planted churches, served as the Apostle to the Gentiles, cured the lame, raised the dead, and converted more people than Jesus Christ;" in short, "I achieved in power." Instead he wrote, "I have run the race; I have fought the good fight; I have kept the faith," in short, "I obeyed."

Not by might, nor by power, but by the Spirit. God has chosen the weak to shame the strong, the poor to shame the rich, the foolish to shame the wise. Look at the disciples Jesus chose — fishermen, a tax collector, one terrorist even! It was a very foolish choice, but it was divine foolishness. God's foolishness is wiser than man's wisdom, and that is why the Church that Christ started with these men is rocking the world.

There is a place for the use of talent, but the talent is empowered by being given over to God and consecrated by him; anything else is but dust and ashes. And it is clear that God has no need of human power to accomplish anything.

Good and evil are not equal forces; evil is an absence or a twisting of good. Satan cannot create; he can only mock. God creates worship; Satan mocks with idolatry. God creates sex; Satan mocks with adultery. God creates truth; Satan mocks with lies. Evil has no substance or creation of its own; it exists in terms of good, twisted, distorted, absent. Good exists on its own terms; it existed long before evil, and it will exist long after evil has no existence save torment in the lake of fire. But then why do good and evil fight? Evil fights good

because it stands in rebellion against good. Good has its own purposes, and, because evil stands in the way, fights evil as an obstruction. It is not defined by this fight, and will not lose anything of itself when the last battle is over; in the New Jerusalem, we will see good in its truest and purest form.

And what of the teaching that great men are not bound by the "mere" constraints of traditional morality? I can only say that fulfilling the "mere" requirements of morality was a major part of the accomplishment of Jesus Christ, the greatest man who ever lived.

A little leaven leavens the whole lump, which is why every thought must be taken captive to the Lordship of Christ. The system must be built from the beginning, not on heresy, but on the foundation of Jesus Christ.

- Mathematical modeling.

Advanced Dungeons and Dragons, the grandfather of all role playing games, established a detailed mathematical model; the process of generating a character is set according to a system of rules, in a manner that can be accomplished by an algorithm; indeed, it has been accomplished in algorithms, and I have seen several computer programs capable of generating and describing everything but the personality. I might add that the First Edition Dungeon Master's Guide had an appendix which contained an algorithm to randomly determine non-player character personalities as well.

Play follows in which players make choices according to an algorithmic set of rules, and dice rolls are used according to charts and rules to decide what happens or attempts to do this, that, and the other thing. This is the way that events' outcomes are usually determined, and, again, computer programs can do this quite effectively. This basic premise has been imitated in every RPG I know of; in this sense, AD&D still IS the de facto standard. Amber diceless role play made a big splash — by introducing an algorithmic set of rules which used player bids instead of dice to operate. The question asked of a new game system is not "How does it handle things? Does it use a mathematical model?" but "How exactly does

things. Does it use a mathematical model, and how exactly does its mathematical model operate?"

I would like to draw this mode of thought into the light for a minute. First of all, I would like to draw attention to DikuMUDs and the various computer games such as The Eye of the Beholder, The Curse of the Azure Bonds, etc. They have all of the stats and THACOs and ACs and damage ratings that anybody could possibly want. Yet they pale in comparison with true role play.

The reason is that the heart of role play consists in what can not remotely be reduced to rules. It has something to do with an imaginative world, characters who are realistic, and a plot. To technically administer rules is easy; to have good role play requires experience and calls for thought. What author ever began to weave a tale by using charts, rules, and dice to determine that the main character would have a strength of 7 on a scale of 1 to 10, a 43% chance of successfully picking a lock, and could quickly tie any one of 21 different knots?

"Christianity is not a statistical view of life."

-G.K. Chesterton

If we look to Scripture, we see that there is more rejoicing in Heaven over one filthy sinner who repents than ninety-nine righteous men who do not need to repent. We see that a day and a thousand years are the same in the sight of the Lord. We see that many wealthy men made ostentatious and showy gifts out of their excess, and a poor widow dropped two pennies, all that she had to live on, and surpassed them all. I could go on for pages, but eloquence does not consist in a multitude of examples.

One is required to conclude from these things that either God is an incompetent mathematician, or that the measure by which he sees the world is something greater than mathematics.

Therefore, in establishing a system to play with, we should seek not so much to imitate mathematical models and computer

programs, as something else: I would (loosely) propose children's games of make-believe and books.

Having stated what I believe is necessary, let me attempt to lay it out.

It begins with prayer. This is not a question of a waste of power, or annoying God by interrupting him with something trivial. He wants to be involved with the most intimate details of our lives. If we, who are evil, know how to give good things to those whom we care about, how much more will God, who is good, know how to give good things to his own children, for whom he did not spare his only Son? So let us begin by asking his blessing.

Father, bless us in this endeavor, bless it, and bless its fruit.

The divine name is Yahweh; "HE IS." God is spirit, profound, deep, eternal; a substance more real than even the physical; the Rock upon which rock stands. Beyond actions, beyond time, beyond even attributes such as power and wisdom, HE IS.

It is possible, especially in our culture, to be distracted of this, to let doing displace being and accident displace substance. The question of "Who are you?" has been usurped by "What do you do?" This is wrong. The proper place of doing is to point to being, and of accident to point to substance. When I fill out details, I will ask that you not only look at "What does this detail look like?", but "To what, beyond itself, does it point?"

We are created in the image of God; that is, in the image of the Creator. Thence comes our imagination and our power to create. And we hold the power to create in the image of his Creation.

History contains four events: the Creation, the Fall, the Incarnation, and the Second Coming.

In the Creation, God filled his universe with infinite order and beauty and color. In *That Hideous Strength*, C.S. Lewis said, "God does not create two blades of grass alike, let alone two angels, two saints, or



two nations." Light is the presence of all color; black is the absence of color. If there is light, then there will be red and yellow and magenta and silver and polka-dot green. The body of Christ lives and breathes, not as four thousand, nine hundred and twenty two left thumbnails, but as a unity of variety. If the world is to be ordered and beautiful to point to God, then color is not simply permissible but mandatory.

Unless the characters are to be wayfarers, wandering over the face of the earth (in which case there will be many places and cultures for the game master to exhibit), there should be a culture, a nation, a land set for the characters to live in.

What is the nature of the spiritual life there? Do the people live in community, loving each other? Do they look after each other's needs, present in time of weakness, and holding each other accountable? Do they spend time in silence, stillness, meditation, looking inside themselves? Do look — at souls, at birds, at shining stars — and both enjoy their beauty and stand in awe of the Creator whom they reflect? Do they worship in spirit and in truth? What points of sound doctrine do they emphasize? What virtues shine forth? How does the Spirit move among them?

What is the culture like? What is their music? Is it solemn and stately, telling of the great and majestic King? Is it vivid and lively, telling of the Lord of the Dance? Is it soft and still, telling of the Eternal? What is the life of the mind like? Is the thought logical or symbolic? What of imagination? What emotions flow forth? Do the people learn to be ancient, gentle, and wise, speaking the words of a sage? Do they learn to be like little children, dancing without end and staring in wonder of the beauty of Creation? What kind of art do they have? What senses do they focus on — sight, to see and behold; hearing, to listen to music, words, and silence, to hear birds chirping and the voice of a friend; smell, of flowers, food, and people; taste, to savor meat and bread and wine; touch, to feel water and stone and cloth and the soft warmth of human skin?

What is the land like? Is it lush forest, filled with warm rains? Is it arid desert? Is it cool and misty? Is it flat, or hilly, or mountainous? Are villages near or far apart? Is there a body of water nearby? What plants

and animals are around? How much does the weather change? What special natural features are there?

In thinking about questions such as these, and perhaps others which have not come to mind, it should be possible to get a beginning picture of what the world will be like.

Creation was not the only event; there was the Fall, and its twistedness. The very way in which man was created as the holy image of God is the very means used by evil as instruments of wickedness. Created with the power to love, we hate. Created with the need for worship, we whore after idols. Created as sexual creatures, we commit adultery. Created with a tongue to bless the Lord and Father, we curse men, made in God's image. Created with a mind to know the truth, we embrace lies. Created with hands to build up, we kill.

The characters, therefore, are fallen and will walk the dust of a fallen world. The next questions will give shape to that as well:

What moral sins, vices, and heresies are there? Are the people split into ten thousand factions, each one bickering and claiming, "We know the truth?" Have the people turned their back on God as irrelevant to their lives? Do they chase after money? Are they shallow? Are their friendships trivial? Do they throw the mind and scorn wisdom? Do they worship the mind as supreme above God, pursuing religion within a context of reason? Are they self-righteous prudes, tithing mint, dill, and cummin, and neglecting justice, mercy, and faith? Do they pray for their neighbor one day in seven and prey upon him the other six? Do they pursue a false wisdom which scorns the body and objects of sense, which "God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth?" Do they know nothing beyond the physical? Are they proud, lecherous, manipulative, hateful, duplicitous? Do they cut others down with the tongue? Do they lie, cheat, steal? Do they dishonor their elders? Do they crush the weak? Do they commit adultery? Do they kill in their worship of power? What good things do they neglect?

When man had turned away from God and forfeited everything, God paid for redemption at the price of his Son. The Word became flesh, and walked among us. Now we know Jesus Christ crucified for the

walked among us. Now, we know Jesus Christ craved for the forgiveness of sins.

Are the people willing to confess their sins — all of their sins — as sin, and repent of them, in order to receive forgiveness? Are they willing to open themselves to the motion of the Holy Spirit, and be filled with his mighty power? Do they take up daily the Cross, to come and die? Do they know his passion, his agony, his suffering? Have they given him everything?

What color does the new light shine in them? What fruit and gifts? How do they live in the freedom that Christ has given them?

Now, I think, would also best be answered the questions of,

What is their history? Have the people been peaceful or violent? Have they changed or stayed the same? Have the changes been for better or for worse, or both? What are their traditions? What do they commemorate? What are their customs? Have they interacted with other nations abroad, or stayed within their own borders? What other cultures have influenced them? What influences have they brought? Where does their language come from?

After all has passed will come the final end: the Second Coming. The old order of things shall pass away. God himself will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more evil, no more crying, no more pain. The saints will enter into joy and life eternal.

This has not yet come to pass, but it still has a mark on the present. One of the great themes of Christian thought is the Kingdom of Heaven — "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth, as it is in Heaven." Bringing Heaven down to earth is expressed by one relief worker who said, "I'm going back to Hell, to plant some flowers." Worship is a piece of Heaven, brought to earth. The prime citizenship of the believer is the Kingdom of Heaven rather than any worldly kingdom; "in the world, but not of it." Believers carry little pieces of Heaven with and about them.

Do the believers carry with them a sense of timelessness? Do they witness to the world with what the world has never seen? Do they escape

entrapment by material possessions, enjoying them but sharing generously? Do they sow a spark of joy? Do they meditate on the blessed hope of the resurrection? If this is the light that they shine, with what color do they radiate?

After the game world is designed, the players should spend a time — perhaps an hour or two — with the game master. In this time, the players will learn of the world, and the game master will help with any incomplete areas of character development. This should not become a haggling over power.

In a game which revolves around power and struggles for it, it is important that there be a balance of power. Here, that should not necessarily be the case. In *A Wrinkle in Time*, of many characters — a boy genius with second sight, scientists of worldwide renown, mighty and majestic angels — it is a stubborn and impatient ten year old girl who rescues Charles from the power of IT; the weak and foolish chosen to do what the strong and wise could not. The game should not be about power, and if either game master or player focuses on it, something is wrong.

Here, then, are some questions to use in the formation of a character:

Who is he? Does Jesus sit enthroned in his heart? How does he try to imitate Christ? How does he see the world? Where do his loyalty and his love lie? How does he use his talents? What virtues does he embody? Is he temperate, controlled, balanced? What vices does he still hold on to? What sins does he struggle with? What does he search for in other people? How deep are his friendships? How deep is he? How strongly does he embody the qualities he holds? What community is he a part of? What is his family, his liege, his birthplace? What inhabits his thoughts? How does he embody what is truly masculine (she embody what is truly feminine)? What fruit does he let the Spirit work in his life? What is his name?

What is his story? What interests, goals, and desires does he have? What does he cherish? What special twist does he put on things? How does he pray? What is his role in the Church? What does he create? Of what would his friends look and say "That is him?" What is his story?

What (if any) visions has he had [this question is more the focus of the DM than the player]? If he were an animal, what animal would he be, and why? What are his hobbies? What is his favorite story? What does he like to present to other people? What is he afraid of other people knowing about him? What memories does he cherish? How old is he? How has he changed over the years? How has he remained the same? What are his loyalties? Who lies closest to his heart? Who does he exist in relationship to? What communities is he a member of? How does he spend his time? What are his hopes and dreams?

Only then,

What is he naturally gifted at? What skills has he developed? What would traditional game systems attribute to him? What gifts has he received in the Spirit [again, this question is more for the DM]? Prophecy? Faith? Wisdom? Knowledge? Healing? Miraculous powers? Leadership? What are his weaknesses? Does he have any handicaps? What can and can't he do?

What does he look like? What is his manner?

After the world is created and the characters are established — not as isolated islands, but in relation to their culture and each other (Brother and sister? Friends from childhood? Father and son? Mentor and student? Reconciled enemies?) can play begin.

The game master, as an authority, is to exhibit Christ's model of authority: not an iron fist or a lording of power, but "he who would be great must be a servant, and he who would be first must be a slave," just as the rabbi who washed his disciples' feet. The game master holds the most power and has the final say; he is therefore the most bound to humility and service.

The play itself should consist of that which is wholesome: the playing out of personas, the exploration of a world, the spiritual warfare against the invisible forces of darkness, the participation in the great dance. The game master can do special things — shape the plot, send dreams and visions, people and events — but the world is created not only by the

game master but also by the players, by the richness of their dialogue and the miniature world they create among themselves. In this manner good books may be taken as a model, and, after all things, prayer. This, I believe, will make it work.

# Further Notes

## The Minstrel's Song: Further Notes and Musings

A note on magic...

Most people reading this have probably noticed the absence of anything magic.

This absence is quite intentional, and of it I would like to say a couple of things.

First of all, magic is sin. It's that simple.

But, you may say, playing a character who uses magic does not mean that the player is tracing runes in the air, drawing chalk circles, and so on.

If you mean in the hands, granted. But there is something more to say.

One of the themes in the Sermon on the Mount is that purity belongs not only in the hands, but is to penetrate to the heart. Listen to how this precept is applied to sexual purity: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

That is to say, sin does not begin with the full act of sexual

intercourse (outside of marriage); it is sinful to use the imagination to commit adultery in the heart — and a man who so much as casts one glance in lust has already done so.

The application to magic means that sin does not begin with chanting the words in a spellbook; it is wrong to use the imagination to use magic in the heart... and, just as lust does not begin after spending several minutes imagining every last instant and detail of foreplay and intercourse, pretending to use magic does not begin after imagining every last detail of casting a spell.

Role playing games provide a way to pretend, to use the imagination to become the great explorer who voyages into the unknown, the romantic bard whose tales spin beauty and wonder. Nobody wants to play a scullery maid or a cobbler who makes shoes day in and day out; a character who is played for enjoyment is someone whom it would be enjoyable to be. To play is to pretend; to have fun by playing a magical character is to have fun by committing the sin of sorcery in the heart. (The same also goes for violence, deceit, theievery, etc.)

The second thing to say is this: God creates. Satan only mocks. forming counterfeit substitutes.

Lust is not a wonderful creative flair which Satan came up with. Marriage, including sex, is God's good creation; it is sacred, so much so that the Song of Songs (a Hebrew superlative meaning the greatest and most beautiful of songs) is devoted to eroticism. Lust is a cheap substitute, a cold prickly where God intends warm fuzzies. It can only be appealing because of the goodness of sex.

If the analogy is extended to magic, several useful things can be drawn from the analysis.

The question, "Why do people derive pleasure from pretending to use magic?" has two answers which I can immediately see.

The first is "Power." Magical powers enable characters to do amazing things.



Power is certainly not innately evil — God is all-powerful, and the believer who walks in the Spirit grows in power — but Satan often twists it to do what it was never meant to; function as a substitute for love. Totalitarian dictators and despots are rarely described by psychologists as having spent childhood surrounded by warm and compassionate friends; they are rather described as having been picked on and bullied. Power has a place in life, but role play is not enhanced by making characters into demigods. The terms 'munchkin' and 'Monty Haul' do not describe a solid campaign. Perhaps a character is less powerful in some ways if he does not have a cloak which turns him invisible, but that does not make him a boring and pointless character.

The second, and in my estimation far more informative, answer to the question is, "Wonder."

In common speech and in literature, words such as 'magical' and 'enchanted' are used to describe things that are spectacular, awe inspiring, breathtaking.

God created people to be filled with wonder. Wonder fills pious living, and one of the many evils of looking to magic is that it has a grievous potential to blind people to the wonder God wants to fill them with.

There is wonder in little things that often go unnoticed; in the dance of a candle's flame and the feel of a gentle breeze. The created order — from the deep majesty of the starry vault, to the height of the mountains, to the depth of the oceans — is, as the human body, fearfully and wonderfully made.

There is also wonder in music, in art, in dance, in the form of ideas. It lies in personality, in the beauty of the human spirit. Finally, above and beyond these and many other things, is a source of wonder greater still.

The final and greatest source of wonder is God himself.

It is the motion of the Spirit which animates worship; indeed, Spirit-filled worship is probably the most wondrous element of human experience. It is the motion of the Spirit which enables men to speak in

experience. It is the motion of the Spirit which enables men to speak in the tongues of men and angels; it is the motion of the Spirit which transported Philip from the Ethiopian eunuch to Azoth.

One need only read the story of Elijah and the prophets of Ba'al to catch a little of this. Elijah summoned the four hundred and fifty prophets of Ba'al, and asked the people of Israel, "How long will you waver between two opinions? If Yahweh is God, worship him, but if Ba'al is God, worship him." He proposed a contest: each would have a bull to offer in sacrifice; the hundreds of prophets of Ba'al would ask Ba'al to send fire to their sacrifice, and Elijah would ask Yahweh to send fire to his sacrifice, and the one who answers with fire — he is God.

The prophets of Ba'al went about for hours dancing and gashing themselves, taunted by Elijah: "Surely Ba'al is god! Why don't you cry a little louder? He could be asleep, or traveling. Who knows? Maybe he's sitting on his porcelain throne."

After a while, it was Elijah's turn. He told the people, "I don't want to bore Yahweh. This is too easy." So, after preparing the sacrifice, he made the people thoroughly drench it in water, and drench it again, and then drench it again. Then he prayed, and fire came down from Heaven, consuming the bull, the wood, and all of the water.

It is not in magic, but in the Spirit — always faithful and never predictable — that the believer finds wonder.

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One more note on magic:

There are certain elements of magic which seem to recurrently appear in Christian-designed fantasy role playing games.

I am referring in particular to magic in which the Bible or some book of liturgy becomes a spellbook, and verses/prayers/quotations become runes, incantations, etc.

If I may provide an analogy...

Creating a pornographic film is wrong

Creating a pornographic film is wrong.

Creating a pornographic film which has as its characters the characters of the Gospel (ergo, where it is Jesus, his disciples, Mary Magdala, the prostitutes and tax collectors whom Jesus said were entering the Kingdom of Heaven ahead of the Pharisees and so on who have an orgy, instead of random 20th century people having an orgy), is still wrong.

What is wrong with the latter mentioned pornographic film is not that it contains characters from the Gospel. What is wrong is that it is a pornographic film. Using Gospel characters within the context of a pornographic film does not make everything OK. The context of a pornographic film is wrong, even if the characters who appear in it are perfectly fine.

Now, to extend the analogy to gaming...

It is wrong to play a character who spends time studying dusty spellbooks, from which he learns a magical incantation which, once per day, will cause a fireball to explode in the midst of the enemy, or enable him to fly, or create a magical shield about him.

That stated, let me quote the LightRaider Net fanzine, for the Christian DragonRaid game, (c) 1996 Jill Oviatt (oviattws@alaska.net) and Charlie Banders (charlie@mat.net).

An important WordRune that I think goes hand in hand with #55 Purge Evil WordRune (covered in issue #5) is #49, No Sweat WordRune.

NIV Romans 8:31b "If God is for us, who can be against us?"

This simple and easily memorized scripture (especially if you know the D+K song) is good by itself, but also a good balance to #55. Whereas #55 helps with the offensive strategy of the LightRaider, #49 helps with the defensive side of a battle. The No Sweat WordRune will allow you to raise your LightRaiders 'Shield of Faith rating by 3 for the duration of one encounter'. This Wordrune may only be used once per day so use it wisely.

only be used once per day so use it wisely.

Even in an allegorical situation... This is still magical. It does not involve prayer which rests on faith and which God grants, but memorization, recitation, words which bear power in and of themselves, and in terms of description and game mechanical effects is indistinguishable from a wizard's spell in Dungeons and Dragons.

Prayer is powerful, and memorization of Scripture is good. But the essence of prayer does not stem from the words in which it is spoken: when Jesus gave a model prayer in the Sermon on the Mount, he chastened people who babble because they believe they will be heard for the many words, and reminded his disciples that their Heavenly Father knew what they needed before they began to ask. When the Samaritan woman asked Jesus which place was the true place to worship, on this mountain or on that mountain, Jesus answered that the true place to worship was in Spirit and in truth. Does one do justice to these teachings of Jesus by saying that specific words spoken in prayer have a power in and of themselves, residing the words, that would not be found in any other words? No. The New Testament teaching is that the power resides in the prayer and in the faith of the believer, to which God responds as a loving father, which is anything but governed by mechanistic rules as given in such games.

This kind of thing is, just like taking characters from the Gospel and incorporating them into a pornographic film, taking words from Scripture and incorporating them into a system of magic.

This is not how God works and answers prayer.

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A note on stories (note: this falls into the category of half-baked musings and suggestions rather than moral compulsions, and I may well be speaking of the impossible)

There was one professor of music who said of worship song that, rather than thinking "Here is the song on paper; we start it at time X and finish it at time Y", it might be better to think of one neverending song that always has been and always will be rising in the presence of the

Eternal; people who sing step, for a while, into this song.

My story is like a thread being woven into a great tapestry; beautiful in and of itself, it is being led into contact with other threads, and slowly woven into a magnificent whole. It is not the Story before which there was no world; it is a story which is rather included in a beauty it could never attain on its own. It is not really that God is a part of what I am doing, so much as that I am a part of what God is doing.

Something of this might be brought into play; rather than one party in the world which acts upon a static situation (and in which other events occasionally happen as needed as plot devices for the story of the one party), there might be a Copernican revolution to the point where the world is full of interconnected stories which are parts of the one great Story; the characters and the party are dancing the great Dance.

I'm not entirely sure how to implement this — I'm netter at designing worlds than telling stories; my mind is more shaped around what is, than what happens — but the following seem to be at least promising:

- Just try. In the absence of detailed instructions, simply attempting and keeping it in mind may do a lot.
- Russian author solution. Chez les e'crivains russes, characters, plots, and subplots abound. It may be a lot of work/a headache for the game master, and having several round, many flat, and numerous functionary non-player characters may be a feat not to be attempted by non-Russians, but at least a little hint of this might add a bit of color.
- Multiple parties/numerous characters. This is probably the most promising, and the most capable of generating a nightmare. There are a couple of things that I've observed as tendencies in existing game play:
  - The shortage is of game masters, not players. If there is a reasonable way for a game master to deal with more than one

party (2-7 characters), it's probably worth exploring.

- The basic unit of play is either the whole party, or one player (solo).

In real life, I enjoy time spent with a group of friends and time spent in solitude — and, very much, time spent in a smaller group, and, especially, time spent alone with one person.

If the characters have a strictly professional relationship — I'll keep track of where we are, deal with organization, and talk with the locals; you'll take care of food and other supplies; Jim will work on puzzles and jury-rigging something to do the trick when we're up against a brick wall, etc. — then that may be feasible. Indeed, working together to solve a puzzle is a quite enjoyable experience. I think, however, that rich role play should have friendship as well, which will work out to personal relationships more complex than individual/group.

I think that email may be able to bear \*some\* of the load. Letters from one character to another/others (cc'd to the game master) are a substantial tool for character development and role play. They can carry some interpersonal conversations very well, and are wonderful, to speak in a timewise manner: each player sends his character's words when he is free, and the additional strain on the game master is negligible.

This should not supplant the traditional mode of play. Face to face interaction, the general social environment, munchies and something to drink — this is an enjoyable atmosphere, and a part of why the game is enjoyable.

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A note on puzzles...

"It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, and the glory of kings to search it out."

Proverbs 25:2

After role play, an orientation towards puzzles should be an important constituent of enjoyable play. There is a certain pleasure that comes of a challenge mastered, and that pleasure is particularly sweet when it comes from the mastery of a puzzle. (The balance which should constitute play, as I envision it, would consist of role play, exploration, wonder (motion of the Spirit and detail in the world), and problem solving)

The following are suggested examples of puzzles:

**Riddles:** These could be posed by a gatekeeper as a requisite to crossing a bridge etc.; alternately, a door could have a riddle engraved on it, the answer to which would tell where the key may be found, or what button to press, or...

**Logic puzzles:** See Raymond Smullyan, *The Lady or the Tiger?*; a good library, in that section, should have other books with other appropriate puzzles.

**Mazes:** twisty passages, secret doors...

**Cryptogram:** On this point, I would issue a strong warning, from personal nrobi experience, that the objective is *\*not\** to protect information, but to es"Ni provide a puzzle which can be solved in a reasonable amount of time. er"nt Ergo, simple and relatively easy: substitution ciphers, something where eeytl the direction is reversed and the vowels are deleted, a creative ntofe rearrangement where "Ninety nine bottles of beer" becomes the contents of the square to the right, a text where the first letter of each word spells out the message, etc. It is very easy to make something which is too hard and frustrating to the players, but care and moderation should make something enjoyable.

**Word game:** Give a text with one rather bizarre feature — a void to perceive, or an odd pattern — which, when noticed, will be helpful to the party.

**Strategy games:** Something simple, but different. Examples of such games may be found among mathematical nuzzle books in a library

games may be found among mathematical puzzle books in a library.

Spatial/three dimensional puzzles: Sokoban, various disassembly/reassembly puzzles which may be found in shops, Towers of Hanoi... if these can not be acquired, it's not the end of the world, but they should add something.

Guess the rules: A very simple strategy game, with a (non-optimal) algorithm to play against... but the rules are not initially given, beyond a yes/no answer to the question of, "Is this legal?"

Tessellation puzzles: Fit the pieces in place and/or assemble to make a certain form.

(Explicit) mathematical problems: If there's a good way to put them in play, math contest problems of the sort that can be found in books are a lot of fun to solve.

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Charles Baudelaire, in "La Morale du Joujou", made some very interesting observations about children's play and toys... the most notable was that children, when they play with toys, are not really playing with toys.

There are some, to be sure, that, in all of their flash and snazzle, leave nothing to the imagination... but many, perhaps most children's toys as played with mean a manner of play that uses toys as a springboard to play with imagination.

He commented, with a degree of sadness, that many adults who attend theater do not realize that it is possible to faithfully play Shakespeare with a very simple stage and costume setup. I think that something similar is to be seen in our culture's intolerance of puppetry as a serious adult form of drama; only trivia that is small enough to relegate to children may be permitted to leave pieces to be filled in in the viewer's mind. Hollywood in its present form spends who knows how many million dollars (probably enough to feed and clothe a small third world country) per movie on special effects and computer graphics. The result leaves nothing to the imagination but the plot.



Role playing games are, in a sense, a manner of play which does not directly fall prey to this tendency. Play sometimes involves the use of miniatures, many game books have vivid pictures, and game masters normally generate maps, but the general nature of play finds it entirely feasible to play in a space that exists within the imagination.

I would suggest, however, that this takes a second order form as comes to technical rules and game models. Bad players attempt to use game mechanics as a substitute for playing properly, and proper play — though characters may have attributes and skills to tell the game master what die roll is necessary to successfully swat a mosquito — does not really consist of it. Just as children use their toys but do not really play with them, good players use game rules but do not really play with them. To role play a believable and rounded character is too complex to reduce to dice and charts.

The one point where it is disanalogous, is strategic complexity. Complex and well-designed rule systems facilitate a high level of mathematical problem solving; I would describe the problem solving side of fantasy and science fiction battles as the intersection between mathematics and military strategy.

I think, however, that that challenge can come into through play through proper choice of puzzles.

# A Voyage in Espiritichus

I was running a play by e-mail adventure in the world Espiritichus. Basic documents for [The Minstrel's Song](#) (the game) are on its page. *The campaign is closed.*

## Character descriptions:

The characters are [Caroline](#), [Hood](#), [Jeff](#), [Xingu](#), and [Zakhs](#) online.

## Turns:

[A First Meeting](#)

[A Contest](#)

[Seeking Rozimald's Keys](#)

[A Hermit](#)

[An Encounter](#)

[A Bear](#)

[Continuing On](#)

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**Name:** Caroline Leof'degn

**Race:** Nor'krin

**Age:** 24

**Gender:** Female

### **Physical Appearance:**

Caroline is 5'10" and 160 pounds. A little tall even for one of the 'northern giants'. Her sun bleached blond hair is kept in a neat and tidy braid down her back, reaching down to the small of her back. Her clothing tends to be practical and designed to hold up in all kinds of weather. Her eyes are blue and in times of deep emotion yellow flecks seem to rise and burst upon the surface. She travels very light with a backpack of various healing tools and herbs, a bow, and a long sword. Her iron cross given at becoming an adult at first appears very plain and only with close inspection do the tiny designs show.

### **Personality:**

Started out her life, very concerned with the law and facts. Things of practical use. Used to consider things that were not of obvious practical use as wasteful. She was all the more shocked when at 16 her challenge for becoming an adult turned out to be learning to sing. She left to go live with the Yedidia people, since logically they would be the best ones to show someone how to sing. It was not that simple. Yedidia sing because they enjoy life, and to show Caroline how they sing, she needed to learn

about enjoying life. Not enjoying a particular activity or helping someone, but life and living itself. By the time Caroline left, five years had passed and Caroline was starting down the path to understanding and enjoying life. She had finally learned how to sing.

### **Profession/talents/skills:**

Healing is her first vocation. The taking care of wounded and sick. She is fairly skilled and tended of the physical wounds, and is slowly learning to identify those hurt in other ways. Protecting and taking care of other physical needs is the use she puts her weapons skill too. Singing.... singing she does for joy of life, in answer to the beauty of a sunrise or rose.

### **Miscellaneous:**

Caroline has an true enjoyment of herbal teas. While she still enjoys crisp cold water that her race normally favours, during her five years with the Yedidia one of the pleasures of the senses she learned to enjoy was tea. She has tea either hot or chilled, enjoying not only the taste but the smell as well. She remembers her time spend learning with the Yedidia with every cup.

### **A quote:**

"Sometimes we become so consumed with what we believe we should be rushing to do, we forget to listen in silence to the voice of God."

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**Name:** Hood Natheel

**Race:** Tuz

**Age:** 25

**Gender:** Male

### **Occupation:**

Blacksmith

### **Appearance:**

Hood is a shorth stocky fellow. He is bald but do have a large jetblack beard. He usally wears a pair of short grey trousers and buff coloured sleeveless leather vest with a sort of flap hanging down on the knees( it a kind of blacksmith protection wear that is quite common among the Tuz, also known a "Tuulth")

### **Personality:**

Hood Natheel got a personality similar to the iron he usally work with. He is strong willed, cold in the face of danger and if someone heats up his heart it will melt and the somewhat cold front will disappear and show the true Hood. Usally his temper is very balanced, but on occasions he will emotional outburst( either of joy or if he is really displeased with something)

Hood is a curious fellow always eager to seek answer to the questions he is confronted with. An ability that might put him in jeopardy sometimes. Usally he sort these things out.

He is also looking for solutions to his community, so his curiosity is not at all self centered. If a problem occur among the his friends neighbors or someone else he usally seek out to find an answer to the question at hand.

He is perhaps not the most intelligent being in the creation, but since he is a patient man he usally ends up with the answers in the long run.

The solutions that Hood comes up with are usally based on simplicity and he often hard to understand more complex reason. Therefor he might feel a bit uneasy with the company of scholar and highly educated men an women. As usual he tries to compensate this weakness with the usual patience. Cooperation comes before confrontaion so Hood would probably not start a confrontaion with people who does not share he way thinking.

Hood usally speaks in a laconic way. He seldom expresses more than absolutely needed. That makes him a rather bad preacher and he is not the type of person that tries to impose his ideas on others.

### **A typical Hood quote:**

"Eeh..Wait...I think I got it!!...eeh.or perhaps not"

### **Background:**

Hood is born in a small Tuz village called Haahem. He has very seldom left it when he entered the game. On occasions he has visited other villages. He is the eldest son of a Tuz blacksmith named Holth Natheel. Just like his father(and numerous generations before him) Hood is a blacksmith. The silent steady nature of the Natheel family has given them a good reputation in the home village and the surrounding area. For the moment the Natheel family consist of 15 persons, grandpa Oothol Natheel, Holth and his wife Holthina and their 12 children( among them you can find Hood).

### **Inventory:**

- sledge( used as a protection weapon)
- knife
- tinderbox
- rope 50'
- lantern
- leather protection

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**Name:** Chimera Antonio Pbrush Petra Mistrelli Charleston Jeffery  
Mirrorman

**Race:** Urvanovestilli

**Age:** 35

**Gender:** Male

### **Physical appearance:**

Chimera is 5'3" and weighs 101 pounds. He has clear white skin and long jet-black hair pulled back in a ponytail. When he is out in the sun, he will have a wicker hat on with a long brim that hides his face, and wears a pair of dark sunglasses. He wears all white satin clothes and carries his tools in a backpack along with several blankets that he uses when there is

no place to lodge. He walks with a long metal walking stick that is wrapped with a leather strap. His shoes are made of a cotton black cloth with very thick leather soles. He has emerald green eyes and a claw scar across his left forearm.

### **Personality:**

Chimera is very quiet, but a very hard worker. When he does talk, it is with a very soft and tender voice. His love for God can be seen deep within his eyes and in the fact that he spends much time in prayer and study each day. Once you get to know Jeff, he is very friendly and very willing to offer his hand to assist others.

### **Profession/talents/skills:**

Like his father, Jeff will one day take over the maintenance and construction of the labyrinth of the city Mistrelli. He has been brought up on the studies of Ceremonies, Clockwork Device Craftsmanship, Heraldry, History, Literature, Mathematics, Philosophy, Reading/Writing, Technology Use, and Theology. Jeff is also Proficient at Illusionism, and Moderately Skilled at Opening Locks and is more than just a Dabbler when it comes to Jury-Rigging.

### **Background:**

My name is, Chimera Antonio Pbrush Petra Mistrelli Charleston Jeffery Mirrorman. My friends call me Jeff. I am an Urvanovestilli from the city of Mistrelli. Christ is the center of my life, for I try to live as He would have by giving all that I have and all that I am to helping others. The world is a great place, with many mysteries and wonders. I am but a young adult at the age of 35. I have been on many journeys to see the world and to meet the other cultures that God has created. In this part of my life, I am still filled with the wanderlust that is engraved upon my soul, but I find greater fulfillment when I can help others as I see the world. My family has been apart of the creation of Mistrelli, therefore, I have grown up creating many unusual devices for traps and secret passages. Some of the devices that I have personally developed were the search light for wandering around in the tunnels, and a mirroring device



that allows one's image to be projected at a distance, but my most fun device was a box with a button on it, that when pressed, entangles the holder of the box with strong wires that could not be broken, not even by a Nor'krin. Since I have been on many journeys, I have also been able to help others with minor problems such as water irrigation and food storage. Some of the virtues that I embody would be Contrainte, Faith, Forgiveness, Generosity, Gentleness, Honesty, Honor, Humility, Joy, Love, Patience, Peace, Self-Control, and Wisdom.

I search for Honesty in other people. I have only a few relationships with others, but they are very deep. I think that quality counts much more than quantity. In my spare time, I love to think about the mysteries of God and the universe. How He has created such a symphony of life with as much diversity.

I am my father's first born, and will return one day to become his assistant, and eventually, take over for him. Even though I might look helpless, I would have to disagree. In my travels, I have been able to study and master the Martial Art form Akido, which is a very soft and non-aggressive form. Although non-aggressive, it is very useful when being attacked. The attacker when only gets hurt accordingly to how much force he put into the attack.

I enjoy life very much. One of my favorite games is Imperial Kingdoms, a more complex version of Chess. My other hobby is creating a machine that will allow me to fly. My favorite story is about Eistinia, one of the great inventors from my town. He created a balloon that could carry a basket into the sky with several people. After his first attempt, he landed in a far away place, because he forgot to set up a way to go down. Anyway, he came across a small village that knows nothing of God and was able to share the God news with them. How exciting. I too, want to be able to help others, both physically and spiritually. I like to present others with my gifts of service, to help them in their needs.

I cherish the memory of my great grandfather, because it was he who taught me that God and Science are the same, for we would not have Knowledge if it were not God's will. I have grown much since that time, and I have helped many people because of that. But one thing has not changed. I have always wanted to know why I believe what I believe, and

changed, I have always wanted to know why I believe what I believe, and never just accept anything as that was how it has always been.

There is a girl back home that has also left following her wanderlust, her name is Tia Carolina Pamelita. It would be my desire to win her heart and to ask her to marry me. But before I do, I must find out who I am.

I am a typical Urvanovestilli standing at 5'3" and weighing in at 101 pounds. I might seem very quiet, but I am really very bright and well cultured. I have studied Ceremonies, Clockwork Device Craftsmanship, Heraldry, History, Literature, Mathematics, Philosophy, Reading/Writing, Technology Use, and Theology. But I have also studied Anatomy, Biology, Chemistry, Cooking, Herbalism, Illusionism, Improvisation, Jury-Rigging, Languages, Massage, Mediation, Medicine, Musical Composition, Piano, Open Locks, Poetry Composition, Pyrotechnics, Strategy Games, and Trivia.

Ability to Learn - Good  
Agility - Fair  
Charisma - Fair  
Constitution - Fair  
Dexterity - Fair  
Intelligence - Good  
Knowledge - Good  
Memory - Good  
Perception - Good  
Speed - Poor  
Strength - Poor  
Wisdom - Good

**A Quote:**

"To study what God has created and how it works is to understand who God is just a little bit more"

---

**Name:** Xingu  
**Race:** Shal  
**Gender:** Male

**Age:** 232

**Weight:** 135 lbs

**Height:** 5'5"

Xingu is, for a Shal, of medium height and weight, with soft, penetrating blue eyes. If one wished to know his age, one would be confused by the contrast of his frame - that of middle age, with well-defined muscles in his upper forearms - and his skin whose aging has been accelerated by the salt breeze of the sea; yet Xingu possesses an air of timelessness that makes even thinking of age superficial. He wears a dark green cloak and carries a walking stick of gnarled wood.

Xingu doesn't have as much a personality as he has a presence. One can be with him, and not a word need be spoken before his presence - a feeling of warmth, compassion, love, serenity, peace, and timelessness - is felt.

Xingu lives in the Shal port village of Vis. There he was a sailor and fisherman. Like all Shal, he lives his life in serene mysticism, possessing a timeless wisdom - not exactly logic, not exactly intelligence, but a wisdom much like the Tao masters. As per his trade, he is skilled at fishing, sailing, rope handling, and navigation, the latter based more on intuition than calculation.

Like most sailors, Xingu is passable at some musical instruments, singing, and sea lore. Traditional Shal music is less outwardly joyous; it is more peaceful, serene, and inspiring of meditation.

The Shal sail largely by intuition, by becoming at peace with the ocean. While one certainly should not sail with a Shal if speed is the end goal, there's no person better to be with should the seas get rough. Many a Shal has been known to survive storms which should have cracked a boat to bits, by holding the helm in one calloused hand, the main sheet cutting into the flesh of the other hand, muscles straining to keep the ship under control, and yet maintaining a look of utmost peace and tranquility, a lack of fear, and a faith strong enough to move mountains. The Shal sail, and weather storms, simply by staying in harmony with the sea and remaining at peace. Xingu is certainly no exception.

Xingu will always welcome a stranger into his house, or sail a foreigner to any destination. Long days and nights on a ship with guests, repeated for nearly two centuries, combined with seemingly infinite patience have made Xingu quite well-versed in the languages, customs and ways of the other cultures, and he has come to appreciate the different races greatly.

One day when withdrawing from his community and the rest of the world, Xingu felt a calling to leave his boat and travel away from Vis, which he had never before left by land. It was then that he happened upon the city of Mistrelli.

Xingu carries just enough possessions to survive - a hunting knife, a tinder box and flints, and a canteen of water. At his home in Vis is moored his simple 16 foot yawl-rigged boat with tan bark sails, his ropes and net.

**Quote:**

"I feel, I sense, and I live. I am, and He is, hence I know."

---

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**Quote:**

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---

**Name:** Zakhs

**Race:** Tuz

**Age:** 28

**Gender:** Male

**Physical appearance:**

Zachs is of medium height and stocky build. His broad grin (his usual expression) is nestled in his thick black beard, and his eyes have a humorous twinkle. When he laughs, it is long and loud. He carries a stout walking stick made of a dark-colored wood, and his clothes are well-worn and comfortable looking.

**Personality:**

He is not naive, for he has seen much of the world, but he is a basically trusting person. He gives people the benefit of the doubt until they prove him wrong. He greets everyone he meets as a friend until proven otherwise, and he is a hearty and enjoyable person. His special gift is the ability to help others, and he takes great joy in this. When he comes across someone working in his travels, he pitches in and helps them finish a job. In this way he can raise goodwill as well as food and a place to sleep for the night.

**Profession/talents/skills:**

He is a wanderer and a pilgrim, seeking through the world in order to broaden his experience. He has the standard skills of a Tuz; Heat Tolerance, Hunting, Wilderness Survival, and Wrestling. He is also skilled in Animal Lore, Brewing, and Endurance. He is good with his

hands and likes to Build and Carve.

**A quote:**

"Greetings, Friend! Care for some help with that?"

---

Mistrelli lies in the heart of the Fog Valley; a shroud of mist cloaks the ground, out of which rise trees and tall buildings with spires and towers. Inside the buildings are all manner of tunnels of tunnels, secret passages, and trapdoors; there are clockwork devices in each one. Throughout the city are spread a handful of entrances to a vast underground labyrinth, of which the better part is unknown; there are all manner of doors and puzzles inside.

The city is full of rose bushes, climbing up the sides of the buildings, over and around gates; most are yellow, but there are some of every color.

The people take a long time to get to know, and their personalities always have hidden gems. Their study of theology emphasizes mystery and the incomprehensible nature of God; Connaissance, a theologian from Mistrelli, began and ended his magnum opus with the words, "I do not know."

Inside this city, which you have all come to for your various reasons, you are each hailed by a young Janra. He is wirily built, with deep, twinkling blue eyes and a shimmering midnight blue robe. He greets you according to your people's way and tells you in your native tongue, "Greetings. My name is Nimbus. I would like to request the honor of your presence tomorrow, in the third hour of the afternoon, at a meeting in the public square."

Nimbus is apparently an adventurer of some renown. He is said to have gone on many quests, although exactly what is not clearly known; no two stories are alike. He is also said to have a massive vehicle known as the Juggernaut, Nimbus's Roving Citadel, etc.

The following day, in the public square, Nimbus divides those assembled into teams, and announces, "I have hidden three eggs, one

gold and two silver, in the labyrinth. A team which returns with a silver egg I will give forty gold sovereigns and a tour of my fortress. The team which returns with the golden egg will receive a hundred gold sovereigns, and I will take them in the citadel anywhere within a month's journey they wish to go."

---

Hood belched a loud belch, and chuckled. He had had little difficulty finding something to do — it seemed that people everywhere had heavy things to carry around — but the dainty little portions he had been served were a surprise. Very cute, the strips of meat arranged across layers of cheese and a flaky bread, but not terribly filling. No wonder all the Urvanovestilli were thin as a beanpole, he mused. He tried to eat with the silver instruments he was given, but the strips of meat kept falling off of the pointy thing. At least the tiny knife was sharp — it cut with a refreshing lightness as compared to the much larger knives he was accustomed to, which assumed that you had a bit of strength.

The chef must have seen him staring in disbelief at the food; he turned the faintest shade red, quickly walked back in the kitchen, and came back holding a pot, by wooden pads, and followed by a little girl holding a miniature bowl and spoon. "I'm sorry; I am used to serving for Urvanovestilli, and forgot for a moment that you were a Tuz," he said through a thick accent. It took Hood a little while to grasp the long sentences, but when he understood them, he smiled. In Urvanovestilli, he tried to say, "Thank you," and took the pot, guzzling the soup from it. The warmth of the steel pot was comforting to his calloused hands, and the steaming soup filled his stomach with a pleasant heat. There was a somewhat awkward moment of silence — the cook staring in disbelief that anybody could touch the pot with bare hands, let alone drink from it, Hood realizing that they had actually intended him to eat the soup with the tiny bowl and spoon. Finally, Hood set the pot down, smiling and again saying, "Thank you," and the cook picked it up, and said, "I hope you liked it."

The soup had had a taste Hood had never tasted before — subtly spiced, with a gentleness to its meaty flavor and salt — and Hood leaned back and belched to express his gratitude. There was a moment of silence,



as people turned to him, and the little girl giggled; Hood remembered that the Urvanovestilli had a rather odd attitude about belching. A young man said something rather loudly in Urvanovestilli, and then fluent Tuz: "Aah, yes, I have heard of how the Tuz express their appreciation for a good meal by a good, hearty belch. It sounds like our hard working friend here is quite pleased with the fare!" The cook looked as if he understood, and then tipped his head, walking away with the pot, bowl, and spoon.

Now that the situation had ended, it was far easier to see its humor. Having spent a few days in the forest, hunting his food, Hood had been out of Urvanovestilli culture, and lived much as if he were in a Tuz forest — though even then, he missed some of the tough and rowdy monsters to be found. Have a little patience, he thought, and you'll adjust to a culture, learn to do things their way, while still remaining you — little moments like the one about the meal brought a bit of spice and amusement.

Hood had left his home village Haheem for the first time in his life. The reason was simple. 12 kids could not inherit a single blacksmith workshop. The Tuz living around Haheem has not developed the idea that the eldest son is the obvious heir to his father's possessions. There were actually no clear rules at all regarding this matter. After a short discussion Hood suggested that they all should solve the matter in one big wrestling match - Hood did not win, so there was nothing more to do for Hood than to leave his village and to seek his fortune somewhere else. Maybe he could start a new workshop in a nearby village one day.

Now you're a somewhat young Tuz blacksmith and you need to get a job, what do you do? Well maybe seek employment in some of the Urvanovestilli cities. The strange inhabitants in these cities sometimes have a need for Tuz artisans. Hood had heard stories about the marvelous city of Mistrelli. A city packed with weird mazes, buildings and other strange things.....maybe the Misterellians needed help with some new constructions.

A couple of weeks later Hood has just entered the city of Misterelli. He has been drifting around a while studying the sites and landmarks of the city when he sees a young Janra. Hood thought for himself.....

"Ahh..a Janra!.... well as we say in Haheem..where there is a Janra there is something going on...."

So now he was at the square, eagerly waiting for things to begin.

There were a few people who stopped to talk with him along the way; the most interesting was an old woman, wearing a black robe with a loose cowl and golden threads woven into its edges, who spoke entirely in questions. She didn't speak any Tuz, but she spoke slowly, loudly, and with simple words, and repeated her questions a few times. It was very difficult to see the person behind those questions, but Hood thought that there was something there, if only he could give it enough time. There was just enough there, for Hood to know for sure that something was eluding him... As Nimbus climbed a tree and cleared his throat to speak, she handed him a piece of paper, and said, "Here's my address; do come by."

The first thing that the young Janra said was, "Brothers and sisters, there are people of many languages here. Please have patience as I explain things in everyone's tongue, and please remain here until I have divided people into groups." He said this, of course, in several languages, but it was not too long before those gathered heard in their own native tongue: that he had hidden three eggs, two silver and one gold, that a team returning with a silver egg would gain forty gold sovereigns and a tour of his Juggernaut, and the team returning with the golden egg would win not only one hundred gold sovereigns, but a trip inside the Juggernaut to anywhere within a month's journey.

It seemed but a moment before Hood was brought together with a team, and then people began to quickly scatter into nooks and crannies. The others assembled and brought into the team were:

Zakhs, another Tuz, a stocky fellow with a broad grin, twinkling eyes, and a thick black beard. His clothing was well-worn, and he carried a thick, dark walking stick.

Xingu, a young Shal with a very peaceful gaze.

Caroline a young Nor'krin bearing a sharp sword a bow and a box

Caroline, a young girl with braided hair running down her back. She bears with her a slight fragrance of roses; when asked, she explained that she was savoring the roses at the rose garden, and held out her hands; her fingertips were a shade of dark pink, the color of the roses having rubbed off on them.

Hood pulled out his lantern and tinderbox, and with nimble fingers, quickly struck the wick afire. "Shall we go a lookin'?"

The square was already still, the people having departed; only Nimbus remained, perched in the tree, and a few people passing here and there.

As the group began to walk about, Hood's sharp eyes looked in a public square and spotted a statue with a large pedestal, with a rectangular block on one side slightly recessed. He kneeled down, and felt around the edges. The block gave a little when he pressed on it, but beyond a short distance seemed to catch on something. It moved more at the bottom, where it moved back, than the top, where it scarcely moved at all. "This seems to give, but I can't tell how to trigger it." The statue was a statue of a thin, despairing man, clothed in rags, with hands stretched up towards Heaven.

Zakhs looked around and said, "There's an inscription on the other side. Can anybody read it?"

Hood walked around. The script was long, flowing, and carved in the stone, overlaid with gold leaf. "Pretty letters." He paused for a moment, and then read, "I am [pause] tall. Who will [pause] me receive something for [pause] to drink?" He paused for a second and said, "Understanding these people talking is hard; reading them... I am tall. Who will receive me something to drink? I have at least one word wrong."

Zakhs said, "Pronounce the 'tall' word."

Hood pronounced it, and Zakhs said it a few times to himself, then changed one sound, and laughed. "I am thirsty. Who will give me something to drink?"

Zakhs looked around and saw a fountain. He cupped his hands

ZAKIS looked around, and saw a fountain. He cupped his hands, taking water, and stepped up onto the pedestal (with a little help from Hood), opening his hands over the statue's mouth. There was a gurgling sound for a moment, then a click, and a sound of clockwork gears turning. The stone rectangle turned inward and upward, on hinges, revealing a shaft with an iron ladder descending into the darkness.

Xingu opened a hand, and then said, "Shall we?"

Hood hefted his massive sledge hammer, and then said, "I think I'd best go down first, in case there are any nasty critters in there." Xingu paused in thought a moment, considering questioning that — but, given the determination in Hood's words, decided not to. He loosened the girdle of his leather protector somewhat, slid in the sledge, took the lantern in hand, and began descending the iron rungs.

At the bottom of the pit was a short passageway, ending in an abrupt stone wall. It was dusty, with recent tracks that led under the stone wall — and there disappeared. As the other people came down, they began to inspect the wall and the surrounding areas for some indication as to how one would open the doorway.

After a time, Xingu began to say, "'Tis said that people often pay too much attention to time and the order of things in time. I wonder..." He began to climb the ladder.

"Where are you going?", Caroline asked.

"Wait a moment. I'm checking to see something." He disappeared into the shaft, ascending noiselessly.

There was soon a sound of shifting stone, of gears turning and chains moving, and the stone door glided into the walls of the passageway.

Xingu calmly said, "Shall we go on?"

The passageway came to a T-shaped junction; the tracks went off one way. There was general concurrence to go the other way. As they walked through the long and twisty passageway, Hood's heavy step brought not only the ring of his iron boot, but a slightly different thud than usual

only the ring of his iron boot, but a slightly different ring than usual. "That stone," said Zakhs, "is different from the others." He knelt down, felt around a little, and then struck one of the stones with his staff. There was a faint echo, a hollow sound. "What are y—", began Caroline, as Hood's heavy hammer came down and slammed into the floor. There was a loud ringing sound, and the stone had several cracks.

Hood began to pull out pieces of stone, then reached into what was a hole, and pulled out a small, shiny steel box. "This shouldn't be too hard to open," he said, setting it on its side.

Caroline quickly snatched the box, looked him in the eyes, and said, "No." in clearly enunciated Tuz.

"But it'll be faster than —," Hood began.

"No."

"But why not?"

"Maybe fragile. Break. Shatter."

"I don't think —"

"No."

Hood looked her in the eyes, to stare her down, and saw a will equal to his own. Zakhs put his hand on Hood's shoulder and said, "Brother, it's probably safe to open, but there's just a slight chance that it has something fragile, that is not broken. Why don't we be safe and wait a little while before opening it, just in case?" With that, Hood relaxed.

They went on; the passageway came to a seven way intersection.

The first path led to a circular room with a small, shallow pool in it. The water in the pool was murky, and had a stagnant smell to it.

The second path was long and twisty, but only came to a dead end.

The third path led to a dead end, but coming back, they found a

secret door to a long, rectangular room with bas-relief sculpture on the walls.

The fourth lead to a winding circular staircase, heading upwards. As they ascended, they began to hear music. It came to a narrow doorway; opening it, they saw the relatively bright light of dusk, a crimson sunset slowly ebbing away. As they adjusted to the light, the music stopped; Nimbus, holding a lute, came walking up. They were at a hidden door, opening outwards, in the corner of a building in the public square.

"Greetings. How was your time in the dungeon?" He listened with interest, and then said, "I'm sorry to say that all three eggs have been located. But let me look at that box. I think I can open it, if nothing else."

Nimbus pulled out some metal tools, and in a short time the lid came open.

Inside were several things. There was a tiny porcelain figurine of a deer, a silver bracelet, a rock with some paint on it, a small crystal phial on a necklace, and lastly, a small, curved fragment of parchment with what appeared to be part of a bard's song:

To Rozimald's chambers the keys are three,  
They all upon the triangle mountains be.

A blue sapphire key beneath a great blue sapphire set,  
A black onyx key, by black onyx is met.  
An emerald key among hanging emeralds does rest.

Nimbus muttered, "Rozimald, Rozimald, Rozimald... Where have I heard that name before... Aah, Rozimald. He was a wealthy Urvanovestilli eccentric long ago, with — never mind that, the tale has probably grown a lot in the telling. Some people know where his abode was, but I haven't heard of anybody being able to get in.

"One thing I will say, though. He is thought to have had a store of a very potent fuel, made of powdered rust mixed with powdered aluminum. I don't remember exactly how much there is, but I can find that out. At any rate, if you bring that to me, I will be glad to train you; I am currently

taking a break from adventuring, to train other adventurers.

"Oh, and I almost forgot. I would like to give you something." He reached into the folds of his robes, and produced a white candle with carvings on the sides. "Keep this with you, and may its light remind you of the hour of our meeting."

Nimbus bowed deeply and disappeared into the shadows.

---

Hood said, "My UCLA Zogah always told me and my brothers never to interfere with rich mens secrets....but I am very curious about these Rozimalds chambers.....and Uncle Zogah cannot always be right.....any ideas where to start looking...eh?"

Caroline stopped her exploration of the sight and textures of the various objects including the box itself, and said to Hood "We are not interfering with Rozimald's secrets but answering his invitation. For that is what this riddle-song is, an invitation for those who can solve it. As for were to start, the song says triangle mountains. I guess there are where his home was, so if we ask about the location of Rozimald's home perhaps what the triangle mountains are will be obvious. Nor'krin teaches using stories and remembering the stories help me remember the lessons the stories contained. The Yedidia teach with song. The Urvanovestilli build physical puzzles and riddles as part of their teaching. Rozimald's invitation is to learn from him, and the works he created during his life. He has even left the riddle-song with other gifts so that we know we are welcome."

Caroline also discovered that tapping the metal box with a flicked finger can cause an interesting bell like sound.

Hood continued, " ....guess your right.....sounds simple enough.....although I must say that the Urvanovestilli are a bit weird...not doing this the Tuz way...much better....can't he just tell his secret with a few simple words....does anyone have any knowledge where to find these triangle mountains?"

Caroline smiled and says "Different things work for different people

Caroline smiled and says "Different things work for different people. Some people lack the wisdom or faith to accept a few simple words and need to learn through trial and experience. These lessons can take a long time to learn, yet in the end the wisdom can be said in a few simple words."

Zachs also smiled at Hood's comments. Then he added, "I have travelled far and wide, and visited many places. I have never heard of these triangle mountains. Perhaps someone here in the city knows of it?"

Hood was a bit unsure about the next step in the research. As usual he started to set his somewhat slowstarted mind of his into motion..... It's easy to see when Hood thinks since the skin on his forehead gets all wrinkled. He also started to pull his hand through his long beard. He was about to say something when he suddenly stopped himself from doing so. It seemed that he was awaiting the the reaction from the other team members to the newly found puzzle.

Caroline suggested "Since it is information that we need, we should ask." She goes and tries to catch a passer by's eye, smiles and inquired, "I am trying to locate Rozimald's home, do you know where it is or who I should ask?"

The passerby, an old man with a white beard, said, "Rozimald. Let me think; I haven't heard that name for several hundred years." He closed his eyes, and a couple of minutes passed. "I'm sorry, I don't know where his mansion is or was. At least not any more; I've long since forgotten it. But if you go to the library's archives — probably here, if not here, at Capitello — and talk with the history librarian, who should be in tomorrow evening, he can look up what is available, and will know whom to talk with.

"The library is under the cathedral, in the center of the city.

"Is there anything else I can tell you about?"

Hood said, "Excuse me Sir! Sorry for my simple Tuz ways and for bothering you with my questions, but may I ask a few questions about the city surroundings?"



The man gently smiled and said, "You need not apologize for your simple Tuz ways, dear friend. The beauty of Urvanovestilli ways lies in their refinement and complexity; those of the Tuz, in their power and strength. Enjoy the blessing that God has created you as a Tuz. Now what is your question?"

"Do you know where the Triangle Mountains are, or where or how we could find out about them?"

"The Triangle Mountains are about six weeks' walk east of north. I don't remember the exact location, but the mapmaker can tell you." He gave the group directions to the mapmaker. "If that is all you have to ask, I'll be going on."

The last rays of the dying sun painted the cathedral as the group reached it. It was intricate, dark, majestic — carved out of black marble.

Inside the cathedral, everything was cool, still, and pitch black. There were a few sounds of walking; there was a faint smell of dust.

Then, suddenly, the building was shaken by a thunderous blast of music from the organ. The sound was deep, rich, majestic; a turgid fugue of four voices played. The party could feel the vibrations in their bones.

Walking along in the darkness, they found a dry wooden door, and, opening it, descended down a circular staircase until they came to a large, open, dusty room.

Most cathedrals had crypts beneath, a reminder of the community and presence of those departed. This one had row upon row of shelves of books. It was filled by an ageless silence, and lit by the glow of candles.

Almost fearing to break the silence, they moved along until they found a librarian, sitting next to a candle, reading from the pages of an ancient volume. He slowly turned, and raised his hand in greeting, asking what he could do for them.

Rozimald, he said, was a man who had lived in the East Ridge Mountains, near the Silouni River. He produced a map which showed the

region, and indicated where his mansion had been said to be located. "I think I can spare you a trip to the mapmaker, if you can memorize a map", and showed a map of a road, with a trail branching off to a small village, beyond which lay the three mountains where the keys had been said to be located.

They went to an inn to sleep, and the next day set out early. It was good hunting, with deer or boar usually only a couple of hours' hunting, and a pleasant trip to reach the village. Once arrived, they spent a couple of days resting, selling pelts and buying supplies, before going on.

The second day out, the day's hunting was met by a long rainstorm which seemed to grow more and less intense. Hood, moving first, was about to strike a hedgehog, when he stepped and the ground beneath him gave.

Hood, very heavily weighed down, is sinking in quicksand.

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Hood takes some dried fruit and eats.....while he is eating he starts to asking questions to the hermit, without thinking about what his mother said to him about what non-Tuz people thinks about eating and speaking at the same time:

"I very grateful for the food.....You sure seem..mauwauawmm(Hood is chewing) to be a wise fellow....you see we are in need of some information...humrph(he swallows the food)...you see we are looking for a chap...a certain Rozimald.....ancient fellow....Urvanovestilli I believe....and the triangle mountains....he is supposed to have some kind of chambers there..."

Xingu, seeing Hood talking and chewing at the same time, cracks a slight grin. He hugs Hood. Slowly, Xingu says, "One cannot appreciate what one has, till one sees that it may be gone in a moment. We are dust, and to dust we shall return. Hood, you are a light among us, and we must thank Him that you are still with us." Xingu bows his head in silence.

Time passes. Or rather, time stands still.

Xingu looks up, and his eyes meet the hermit's. He takes some food, bows his head deeply in what is taken as a sign of sincere gratitude, and eats.

Xingu then addresses the hermit: "All of us are made in His image, and like a diamond with many sparkling facets, each culture reflects a different aspect of Him. We are on a quest in search of the answer to an Urvanovestilli riddle. My mind does not think as an Urvanovestilli, and I confess that many of their logic puzzles escape me. Perhaps you can help us solve the riddle." Xingu turns to speak to the group, "May I see the box?"

Caroline who seems to have found the box in her presence, if only because she was carrying the lightest load and liked the noise it made responds "Of course." Her eyes seem to twinkle with an inner happiness and she enjoys the company and the food. Offering as well to the table, herbal teas if anyone wishes to try a blend, as well as any food she carries that they wish to share.

Xingu slowly opens the box, and places on the table the porcelain figurine of a deer, a silver bracelet, a rock with some paint on it, a small crystal phial on a necklace, and reads from the parchment:

To Rozimald's chambers the keys are three, They all upon the triangle mountains be.

A blue sapphire key beneath a great blue sapphire set, A black onyx key, by black onyx is met. An emerald key among hanging emeralds does rest.

"These are the clues to our quest. What can we make of them?"

He pauses....

"What strikes me first is a feeling that this is the trinket box of a little girl. Bracelet, necklace, little odds and ends, and a poem; all things that one would expect to find. Yet the poem is a puzzle. It could possibly be a puzzle a small child kept in a trinket box.

"Where was it found? In a labyrinth, a large puzzle. Finding the paper in the labyrinth, one would think it a puzzle. Finding the metal box in a labyrinth, one would think the box a puzzle. Finding the same metal box in the room of a young girl, one would find the box as normal, but the paper a puzzle.

"What are the keys? Something we must find on the three mountains? Are they already found, stashed in this metal box by a past adventurer and hidden in the labyrinth? Are they symbols, or metaphors, found by an interpretation of the poem, or the items within the box? Are the items in the box there by chance? Are they needed to find the keys? Are they a part of the puzzle, if not the keys themselves?

"Puzzle within puzzle within puzzle...."

He pauses.

"I also see a similarity in both the poem and the items; I sense a strong feeling of nature. Deer, stone, crystal, mountains, gems...."

Xingu picks up each item, including the box itself, and slowly examines them, looking not only for clues to the mystery, but also admiring the beauty of each object. He passes them around the room to the others.

The hermit looks at the poem, thinks for a time, and then says, "Oh, so you've finally found a good-looking clue to Rozimald's chambers. Let me think."

He leans back, and then closes his eyes for a moment. "Aah, yes. One moment; I'll be back."

He goes into a corner, and returns with a black, frosted glass bottle with a seal on the front. "I had almost forgotten," he says. "A Porto would be quite appropriate to this discussion."

After serving everyone a glass, he leans back, and says, "There are many poets that I have heard of, and some of them spend a great deal of attention on drawing out the wonder in the world around. They are

working to open people's eyes, to fight off the ever threatening grey murk which threatens to cloud vision and make even the sun look dull and drab.

"Some of that group evokes the things that we most regard as precious — gold and silver, diamonds and rubies, wines and delicacies. Those things, perhaps in part because they are rare, are not so often looked at as dull and drab.

"There was one poet — I have forgotten his name — who spoke of gems, describing the world as if it were composed entirely of gems. And the fragment of song which you describe appears to be some of his work."

He opens his mouth to say something, but you cannot hear his words due to a loud growl and sounds of a scuffle coming from outside.

Outside, as soon as your eyes can adjust to the brightness, you see a young Urvanovestilli being attacked by a bear. He is masterfully dodging, but the bear seems to be very determined in its attack.

They are both about a hundred feet away.

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Xingu starts singing, and the bear seems to be beginning to slow down — but it is not clear how quickly it will slow down. As people pour out of the cave and begin to fan out, the bear's paw comes down on the young Urvanovestilli's arm. He winces, and jumps back.

As he jumps back, Caroline manages a fair shot into the bear's heavy bulk. It rears, and begins to sniff around.

Hood's heavy armored steps ring as he runs forward. He swings a heavy blow at the bear's chest; it connects solidly. The bear crouches down to dodge; Hood's sledgehammer slides down a side.



Zakhs has by now run up, and swings his staff, hitting the bear on the head. The staff vibrates in his hands.

The bear swings at Hood, and hits solidly, his claws scraping across his armored chest. Hood is knocked on his back.

Caroline hits the bear again, and hits solidly.

The bear lunges at Hood, who has by now prepared with a blow of the sledgehammer, and has his ironshod feet up in the air. The sledgehammer hits the side of the bear's head, and glances away. His knees buckle into his chest, winding him.

Zakhs swings his staff again, and hits the bear, distracting him from Hood.

Hood is gasping and struggling to breathe, but even so begins to roll towards his feet, sledgehammer in hand. He hits the bear in the back, winding it in turn.

Caroline shoots at the bear again, but misses.

Zakhs swings at the bear, and also misses.

Hood, weakening in his struggle to breathe, swings at the bear, but only grazes it.

The bear swings at Zakhs, but does not move quite quickly enough to hit it.

Hood, beginning to turn blue, swings again, and hits.

Zakhs lifts his staff from below, hitting the bear in the mouth.

Caroline shoots another arrow solidly, hitting the bear in the back of the neck. It immediately falls over.

Hood, turned a deeper shade of blue, finally manages to inhale. He drinks the air in deep gulps; slowly his breathing and his skin color return to normal.

After a little while, your attention returns to the young Urvanovestilli, who was mauled by the bear. He introduces himself.

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Zakhs steps over to the young Urvanovestilli, after pounding Hood solidly on the back (to help him regain his breath). He will examine the young man's arm and see if there is anything he can do for the boy.

"What could have riled that creature up so much?" he will wonder aloud as he examines the Urvanovestilli's arm.

Hood cleans his sledge by rubbing it to the ground....then he comments the whole thing.....

" Tough bear...."

He turns towards the the young Urvanovestilli.

".....you are still alive...glad to see it.....it was a close thing....."

Caroline introduces her self to the young Urvanovestilli. She the proceeds to tell him a story about a brave young person from her tribe, while she tends his wounds. She seems to have more than herbs for tea in her pack. The story and the treatment end at the same time.

Hood brushes off some dirt from his clothes...and continues to adress the young Urvanovestilli.....

"I haven't introduced myself.....I am Hood"

Hood reaches out a hand.....

"I know not what riled it up, but the poor fellow will make quite a delicious meal. Of course, we may not have enough to go around, with only one bear and two Tuz."

Xingu, with a wide grin, gives Zakhs a friendly punch in the gut.

Xingu then walks toward the Urvanovestilli and greets him with a

Xingu then walks toward the Urvanovestilli, and greets him with a raised hand and three kisses, as is the way of Urvanovestilli culture, and speaks to him in his native tongue.

"Hello, my name is Xingu. I thank the Lord that you survived this encounter without greater injury. We are a band of adventurers, following clues to discover Rosimald's chambers. Please stay, eat, and join us; we welcome your insight in solving this puzzle."

The little man looks as if he was coming out of his daze for the previous brush with death, then he stands up to introduce himself, but then sits back down, and says, "Greetings and salutations, you may call by the name that my friends call me, which is Jeff. I am still a little bit shaken by the whole ordeal, so I feel that I would be unable to fully express who I am in an intelligent manner, therefore, could you tell me a little bit about who you are? Just in case if you were wondering, I was sent to help you on your quest."

The hermit walks around and begins collecting branches to make a fire; in a couple of hours, there is roast bear for all to eat their fill of (even the Tuz). Caroline has bound the wounds; the young man's arm is set and healing, and Hood doesn't seem to have taken any grave injury (although his chest will have some nasty bruises).

As you eat, the young man begins to introduce himself.

"Hello, my name is Chimera Antonio Pbrush Petra Mistrelli Charleston Jeffery Mirrorman, but you can call me Jeff. I am from the city of Mistrelli, sent to help you on your quest. I believe that my understanding of Illusions can help you on your journey.

"I am my father's first born, and will return one day to become his assistant, and eventually, take over for him. But for now, I want to continue to see the world, and meet the different races and creatures that inhabit it.

"I also love to play, Imperial Kingdoms, which is a complex version of Chess. I am also working on a flying machine, although it is far from being able to work, it is a hobby that I enjoy."

The hermit asks for the rest of the bear's carcass (after you have taken a good chunk as food for the journey), to make jerky and a rug out of. "I'd heard from other people that there was a rather cantankerous bear around here, and I'd seen a few tracks, but I'd never met it...

"Come with me. Let's stand in a circle around Chimera, and lay hands on him."

As you do so, the pain in Chimera's face begins to ease, and he sits back.

The hermit sits back, after the meal, and begins to talk about the local geography; he describes a few paths, and landmarks for you to find your way on. "Do stop back here after you have looked around, and I wouldn't mind hearing how you mean to set about finding the keys in the forests. See you later." After a night's rest for all, he sees you off again.

# Janra Ball: The Headache

## The Original Cultural Context

"When it comes to games, never try to understand the Janra mind."

-Oeildubeau, Urvanovestilli philosopher and anthropologist

It is known that Janra sports usually last for at least half an hour, involve a ball, two or more teams, running and acrobatics, and animated discussion. Beyond that, neither the Urvanovestilli's logic nor the Yedidia's intuition are able to make head or tail of them. In general, the teams appear to have unequal numbers of players; the players often switch teams in the course of play; teams are created and dissolved; the nature of the activities makes sudden and radical changes; there is no visible winning or losing. There are occasionally times in the course of play when some intelligible goal appears to be being approached... but then, all players seem to be approaching it in a rather erratic manner (when asked why he didn't do thus and such simple thing and achieve the approached goal by an inexperienced anthropologist, one of the Janra said, "Technically, that would work, but that would be a very boring way to do it," and then bolted back into play: the extent to which game play is comprehensible heightens its incomprehensibility). Late in life, Oeildubeau hinted at having suspicions that, if the Janra believe that they are being watched, they will spontaneously stop whatever sport they are playing, and instead begin a series of activities expressly designed to give any observer a headache.

# Rules

1. There is no winning or losing.
2. The game has one ball, which must be kept in motion at all times. If the ball ceases to move, nobody may speak or act except to move the ball.
3. Il est interdit de parler en anglais au sujet de l'objet du jeu.
4. Any player may give any other player a rule point, provided that there is no alliance or "You scratch my back, and I'll scratch yours" arrangement between them, at any time. Any player who has a rule point may spend that point in order to add, delete, or modify a rule in accordance with the spirit of the game.
5. Every player has a persona, or modus operandi, through which he is acting and answering questions. If any other player successfully identifies this persona or modus operandi, it must immediately be changed.
6. There is no rule number 6.
7. Each player must somehow touch another player before or during addressing him in speech.
8. No player may move from one point to another without using at least one acrobatic, dance, or martial arts motion.
9. Any use of a card deck or game board requires one change of rules for the card/board game per move.
10. Any rules disputes are to be resolved by no judge, until all involved parties come to a confusion which is more chaotic than in its initial form.
11. All players must wear one black sock and one white sock.
12. We're sorry, but rule number twelve is not available at this time. To leave a message, please rotate your telephone clockwise by ninety degrees, and simultaneously press 'q' and 'z'.
13. Any player who does not understand all of the rules, in their entirety, is immediately disqualified.
14. Any player who attempts to memorize all of the rules, or attempts to play the game by keeping its rules, is immediately disqualified.

## FAQ list

Q: What is 'Springfield'?

A: Springfield is a game in which two people alternate naming state capitals, and the first person to name Springfield wins.

Q: What's the point of that?

A: The objective is to be the first person to say 'Springfield' as late as possible. The point is to see how far you can go — and still be the first to say 'Springfield'. It's not a game of mathematical strategy. It's a game of perception.

Q: What is Psychiatrist?

A: Psychiatrist is a game in which one person, the psychiatrist, leaves the room, and all of the other players agree on a common delusion (such as believing themselves to be the person immediately to their left). The psychiatrist then enters, and asks the players questions, attempting to guess the delusion.

Q: What is spoon photography?

A: Very well known.

Q: What is Janra Ball all about?

A: Wouldn't you like to know?

Q: Why did you answer my question with another question?

A: How else could it be?

Q: What are the teams like?

A: Highly variable, and not necessarily mutually exclusive.

Q: How do I get ahead in the game?

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A: Mu.

Q: Why won't you give me a straight answer to my questions?

A: Come, come. Aren't there much more interesting ways to grok the game?



# Ingredients

Springfield, Monty Python, Calvin-Ball, body language, Harlem Globetrotters, sideways logic, Thieves' Cant, intuition, counter-intuitive segues, spoon photography, creativity, Zen koans, Psychiatrist, adrenaline, perception, tickling, urban legend Spam recipe, swallowing a pill, illusionism, modern physics, raw chaos, F.D. & C. yellow number 5.

# A Dream of Light

You pull your arms to your side and glide through the water. On your left is a fountain of bubbles, upside down, beneath a waterfall; the bubbles shoot down and then cascade out and to the surface. To your right swims a school of colorful fish, red and blue with thin black stripes. The water is cool, and you can feel the currents gently pushing and pulling on your body. Ahead of you, seaweed above and long, bright green leaves below wave back and forth, flowing and bending. You pull your arms, again, with a powerful stroke which shoots you forward under the seaweed; your back feels cool in the shade. You kick, and you feel the warmth of the sun again, soaking in and through your skin and muscles. Bands of light dance on the sand beneath you, as the light is bent and turned by the waves.

There is a time of rest and stillness; all is at a deep and serene peace. The slow motion of the waves, the dancing lights below and above, the supple bending of the plants, all form part of a stillness. It is soothing, like the soft, smooth notes of a lullaby.

Your eyes slowly close, and you feel even more the warm sunlight, and the gentle caresses of the sea. And, in your rest, you become more aware of a silent presence. You were not unaware of it before, but you are more aware of it now. It is there:

Being.

Love.

Life.

Healing.

Calm.

Rest.

Reality.

Like a tree with water slowly flowing in, through roots hidden deep within the earth, and filling it from the inside out, you abide in the presence. It is a moment spent, not in time, but in eternity.

You look out of the eternity; your eyes are now open because you have eternity in your heart and your heart in eternity. In the distance, you see dolphins; one of them turns to you, and begins to swim. The others are not far off.

It lets you pet its nose, and nestles against you. You grab onto its dorsal fin, and go speeding off together. The water rushes by at an exhilarating speed; the dolphin jumps out of the water, so that you see waves and sky for a brief moment before splashing through the surface.

The dolphins chase each other, and swim hither and thither, in and out from the shore. After they all seem exhausted, they swim more slowly, until at last you come to a lagoon.

In the center, you see a large mass; swimming closer, you see that it is a sunken ship. You find an opening; inside, all is dark, but you find a passageway.

After some turns, you come up in a different place. You come up through a fountain in a public garden; the bushes and ivy are a deep, rich shade of green, and sheets of water cascade down the yellowed marble of the fountain. It is ornately and intricately sculpted, with bas-relief scenes of a voyage.

As you study the pictures, day turns to night, and all that you see is

bathed in moonlight. You are looking upon a statue: a delicate, slender, elfin nude, whose long hair cascades over her shoulders and about her body. She is reaching up to the sky, as if to touch the moon and stars. She is carved out of white marble, which looks pale blue, almost luminous, in the moonlight. It looks as if she was taken from the moon, and is rising up to touch it again.

The statue is on a tall pedestal of black marble. In the moonlight, the forest has a very deep color, a green that is almost blue or purple; the dark beauty of the night makes the statue seem almost radiant. Off in the distance, you hear a high, melancholy, lilting song; it is played on a harp and sung by a voice of silver. There is something haunting and yet elusive about the melody; it subtly tells of something wanted and searched for, yet not quite reached. And it is beautiful.

You sit, looking at the statue and listening to the song, for a time. They seem to suggest a riddle, a secret - but you know not what.

You walk along; fireflies begin to appear, and you can hear the sound of crickets chirping. There is a gentle breeze. The sky stands above like a high and faroff crystalline dome; the trees and grass below surround you, like little children who see a beloved elder coming, and run clamoring for a kiss. The grass is smooth and cool beneath your feet. There is a sweet, faint fragrance in the air, as of lilacs.

A round little girl, wandering through the forest, sees you and comes running. She is dark, with olive skin, and her black hair flares out behind her. She is wearing a dark green robe, the color of the forest, and her step is almost that of a dance - as if she is from a people where moving and dancing are not two different things. She is holding, in her hand, a simple bouquet of dandelions. "Look, look!" she says, "I have flowers!"

She jumps into your arms, welcoming you. Her touch is soft, and gentle. It is not near the softness of a grown woman; it has rather a ... simplicity. It is hard to find the right word. Then you recognize what it is. It has something of the carefree play of a child, but there is more than even abandon. She is holding you with complete trust. You do not doubt that she could fall asleep in your arms.

She begins to talk to you about many things. She talks about the forest, about people, about the stars, about God. After a time, you realize that she is not merely talking, but singing, as if the first words she heard were the words of a song. After another time, you realize that you have lost her words completely, and are entranced by the song. Presently she stops, and says, "Spin me! Spin me!"

Little children everywhere like to be held by the arms and swung around; this one is no exception. After you are both very dizzy, she takes you by the hand and begins, leading you along a path, to show you little details of the forest that you had never noticed before. Apart from the little details, there is something else which you begin to slowly see in the forest. The song by which she speaks, the dance by which she moves - and not just her, you do not doubt, but her people - seem to be echoed in the forest... and then you realize that rather they are echoes of the forest. Hearing, seeing, feeling that beauty from another person - you still do not doubt that they come from her, but they also help you to see what was always there but you had not noticed. As you walk along, you are lost in thoughts about the genius of all great artists... and begin to think about visiting an art gallery, not so that you can see what is in the gallery, but so that you can see what is not in the gallery.

The path widens out, around a shimmering pool. The golden flames of torches around the pool glimmer when reflected in the pool. There is singing - singing like that of the little girl, but the sound of a whole orchestra as next to the sound of a beginning flute. Men and women together pour fourth a rich harmony. The air is sweet with a delicate fragrance of incense; one of them brings you a cool wooden cup. Inside is a strawberry wine. It is sweet, and sour; the taste brings back memories of earliest childhood.

A circle forms among the people, then another, then another. Soon all of the people are spinning and weaving in a joyful dance. After a time, you realize that you are at the center; they are softly singing, "Welcome, Somebody," and listening intently. Arms and hands reach out, and sweep you into the dance. The dance is ordered, but also free; it draws you in, and, as you move, you feel that you can do no wrong.

How long the dance lasts, you do not know; still filled with its bliss, you find yourself sitting and talking with the people. One of them finds a soft seat of moss for you to sit on; another brings you a plum. Its taste is tart, and it has the texture that only a plum has — and, when you bite into it, you know that it was still on the tree when it was chosen.

The night winds on, and, after a time, you are led into a building woven out of living trees, with a bed of loam. Into it you sink; it is soft and deep...

You find yourself standing at the edge of a forest and a grassy plain. The mouth of a cave descends into the earth, and just before this is an old man sitting on a three-legged wooden stool. He is wearing a coarse grey-green robe, and has a long, flowing white beard. He is staring intently into the forest, with a concentration you have never seen before. It is like a gaze into a lover's eyes — nay, even deeper, a probe into the soul.

He shifts positions a few times, in his sitting, and at last stands up, takes the stool, and begins to walk towards the cavern. When he was looking into the forest, you were absorbed in watching him; now, you notice another man, a young one, approach the former.

"Is it Senex?"

"I am he."

"Senex, the great teacher?"

You see the old man's hand move to cover his mouth, but not quite quickly enough to conceal the faintest crack of a smile. The young man stands attentively, waiting for words to come.

The old man's frame shakes once. A second passes, and then it shakes again and again. Then sounds the laughter that he had been attempting to conceal. Soon, the old man is convulsed with mirth, and making no attempt to conceal it.

After a while, almost doubled over with laughter, he begins to pull himself up. You can see his face from a different angle, and you see a

merry twinkle in his eye. He places his arm over the young man's shoulder.

"Forgive me, brother, but it has been ages since anyone has addressed me as 'teacher' or 'great'. You cannot imagine how funny it sounds to me."

"Are you not Senex, who has traveled the seven seas, who has seen visions and been visited by angels, who has written treatises and instructed many?"

The man chuckles, and says, "Yes, I am all that, and much more. I am the image, likeness, and glory of God. I pray, and in my prayers I touch the stars and shake the foundations of the kingdom of Hell. I am a king and priest. I am a son of God. My name is written in the book of life. I am a god."

"Then why do you find it funny that I address you as 'great', or 'teacher'?"

"Because I am more than a great teacher, as are the children who dance through this field, as are you." Here the old man smiles at the young. "Come, now. Do you doubt that you are God's own son? What teaching, or miracles, or visions, or conquests, or exploits compare with that?"

"But if you are so great, why should you object to being called a great teacher? Surely the title is not false."

"My dear god - and now I am not addressing the Creator, but you yourself - what is wrong with the title is not that it says that I am a great teacher. I am. What is wrong is that the title implies that there are others who are not so great," and here the old man gave a great belly laugh, "when the truth of the matter is that the other people are so much more than a great teacher. I will not mind being called 'teacher' by you, if you agree to address everyone else as 'god' and 'goddess'. But if you will not call them 'god' and 'goddess', then simply call everyone 'brother' or 'sister'."

The young man stands in silent reflection for a time. "I came in search of a man who could share with me profound wisdom; I see now that I have found him. So now I ask you: Give me a profound insight, that I may contemplate it for the rest of my life, and grow wise."

"Do you not know that God is love, that God loves mankind, that we have the new commandment to 'Love one another'?"

"All of this I have believed since I was a little boy."

"Then I give you one more lesson, to contemplate and learn for the rest of your life."

The young man listens, eager with expectation.

The old man bends down, plucks a blade of grass, and holds it in his outstretched hand.

The young man takes it, and waits for an explanation. When, after a time, the old man says nothing, he says, "This blade of grass is like the blade of a sword. Have you given this to me as a sign that I should contemplate spiritual warfare, and be ready with the sword of the Spirit?"

The old man says, "You should, but that is not why."

The young man thinks for a time, then says, "This grass is nourished by the sun, and so tells of it. Grass and sun exist as God's creation, and tell of him. Is this why you have given me the blade of grass?"

The old man says, "What you said is very true, but that is not why, either."

The young man says, "When Christ lived on earth, he lived as a carpenter, and observed and was surrounded by the birds of the air, the grass of the field, the lilies, and ten thousand other things. Have you given me this blade of grass to remind me of Christ's time on earth, or of his humanity, or that this is a place he passed by?"

The old man says, "You are still right, and you are still wrong."



The young man says, "Then what profound truth can you be teaching me? What secret key escapes my grass? I asked if you had given it to me as a symbol of a profound spiritual truth, and you said, 'no'. Then I asked you if you had given it to me that I might deduce by logic what it tells about God, and you still said, 'no'. Then, after that, I asked you if you had given it to me as a historical reminder of what has happened about blades of grass, and your answer is still the everchanging 'no'. What can I possibly be missing? What am I leaving out?"

The old man turns to face the young, and looks deep into his eyes. "This blade of grass I have given you," he said, "because it is a blade of grass."

There is a look of puzzlement on the young man's face, which slowly melts into dawning comprehension. He steps forward and kisses the old man, with a long, full kiss on the lips, and then steps back and bows deeply - and the old man bows to him - and says, "Thank you." When the old man has responded, "You are very much welcome, brother," the young turns, clutching the blade of grass as if it were a diamond - no, more than that, as if it were a blade of grass - and walks back into the forest. There is a smile on his face.

You walk off in the field, and lie down on the grass. The day is growing warm and sultry; a faint breeze blows.

The breeze carries with it a small, white feather of the softest down. It gently falls on the sole of your foot. The breeze blows this way and that; the feather catches here, rolls there on your foot, brushing ever so lightly, up and down, up and down.

You feel a finger, cool as marble, just barely touching the back of your neck. It tingles; you can feel the sensation radiating up and down your spine. The feather brushes against your foot, and the finger just barely touches the back of your neck. It is a slow, lingering, tingling sensation; as time passes, the sensation becomes more and more real, and just won't go away. It tickles so.

A time passes, and you find yourself walking along a beach. It is almost dusk, and the rainbow colors of sunset are beginning to spill

almost dusk, and the rainbow colors of sunset are beginning to spin across the sky. It is autumn, and the many-hued leaves of the trees fall about, twirling this way and that in the wind. There is a smell of mist and brine in the air; the waves run and twirl about your toes.

A bird flies off to the right; its flight is light and agile. It flies to and fro, this way and that, until it disappears into the sunset.

There is a feeling of wistfulness, of a presence departed. To the left, you see a grayed swing, rocking back and forth in the wind; its rusty chain squeaks. It is in the yard of a boarded up house, with a garden long overgrown in weeds.

On a whim, you slowly walk up the path into the yard, and sit down on the swing. You rock back and forth; there is a feeling of emptiness. Images form and swirl in your mind.

A tree is felled; from its trunk are taken the staves of a barrel. Fresh and white, the staves are slowly covered with dust; each time the dust is disturbed or brushed off, the wood underneath is darker, grayer, rougher.

People are born, walk hither and thither, grow old, and die. Generations come and pass, and the earth grows older. People learn how to live - and then die. Vanity of vanities.

Everything is dreary, desolate, fleeting. The walls of your vision grow narrow and dark; your mind and imagination seem to protest the motion. It grows darker and darker.

After a time, you see a light - a little light. As everything around grows darker and more drab, the light does not grow brighter, but neither does it grow dimmer.

A voice sounds in the shadows - you do not doubt that is the voice of the light - says, "Come closer."

You come closer, and you see that she is a flame. A little flame.

A thousand questions form in your mind. They pour forth from you - Why is it all so meaningless? Why do things wither and decay? Why does

Why is it all so meaningless. Why do things matter and decay. Why does evil run rampant?

The flame listens patiently, and then speaks. "Look into me."

You look into the flame, and you see everything you saw before, but it looks different. The boards of the cask are no less grey. But you see that inside the cask is wine - wine which grows rich and well-aged. The people still die - and now you see an even darker death for some. But you also see past the death, past the mourning and grieving, to a birth into life - a richness and a fullness that could not be imagined from before.

"Flame, can I step into you, so that I may be delivered from the unpleasant things?"

"No, dear one. That is not the way of things."

"Then what can you give me?"

"I give you this: that you may always look into me, and that I will never be quenched."

"Flame, what is your name?"

"My name is Hope."

You look into the flame, and again see the outside world. There is still the sadness, but there is an incredible beauty. An ant crawls across your finger; you sit entranced at the wonder as its little body moves. Then you look at a rose bush, quivering in the wind - it is covered with thorns, but at the top of each stem is a flower that is still God's autograph.

You get up and walk further.

You see a little girl on her knees, and standing against her, a man holding an immense sword. The man raises his sword over his head, and brings it down.

Then you see the sword stop in the middle of the air. There is a clanging sound; the man's powerful muscles ripple in his exertion, but

the sword does not move an inch further.

Then you slowly see a shimmer in the air, and there is another sword - a sword that seems to be forged of solid light. A sword that is blocking the first. As you watch, you see an angel beginning to become visible. It is powerful, majestic, and terrifying. The man drops his sword, and runs in blind terror.

You can see the angel's sword here, a hand there, the hem of his luminous robe. But what you see is fleeting, and you cannot see the whole angel.

"Why cannot I see you? I can see the grass, and see the girl. Are you not as real as they?"

You see a little boy, walking on the beach, picking up a pebble here, a shell there, a piece of driftwood every now and then, and putting them into a sack.

Then he comes upon a fallen log. And he grabs one protrusion, and then another, trying to lift it. But it will not budge.

"Some day, you will be able to see God himself. But now, you can not see things that are too real for you to see."

You see a diamond, slowly rotating, in light. One facet after another seems to sparkle.

As you watch, not just what appear to be the facets, but what appears to be the diamond, seems to change form, shift, and sparkle in different ways. The light itself seems to shift color, direction, focus.

Then speaks an almost silent voice: "You are looking upon the one thing which never changes, in a light that has been the same since before the creation of time."

There is a moment of silence, and you feel a surge of power rush about you, and tear through your very being. It is like a blast of wind, throwing you off your feet so violently that wind itself is knocked out of

you. It is like the liquid fire that explodes out of a volcano. It is like a flash of light beyond intense, light that is so much light that you cannot see. It bears like an immeasurable weight and presence on your mind and spirit; its might and force fills you with awe - no, more than awe, fear - no, more than fear: terror. It is a reality which lies beyond imagination.

A booming, thunderous voice commands, "Fear not!" Then a hand reaches out and touches you, and you are filled with strength. It holds and stills you; you dimly realize that you have been quivering as a leaf. You somehow find the strength to stand, and if anything see a greater glory and majestic power than before. This being before you is like a storm in solid form. His feet press into the earth with the weight of a mountain, and shine like the sun in full glory. He wears a robe woven of solid light, and at his side hangs a sword sheathed in fire and lightning. His hands radiate power; they seem by their energy as if they are about to tear apart the fabric of space. You dare not look upon his face. Suddenly, you find yourself falling at his feet.

Again booms the voice: "Do not worship me! I am not God!"

A hand lifts you up, and sets you on your feet. His touch is more intense even than his appearance - you are sure that it will destroy you - yet somehow it makes you more solid.

It is all you can do not to fall down again. Somehow the words come, "Who are you?"

"I am a spirit, formed before the foundation of the world. I am a star, who sang for joy as the world was created. I am a messenger, who stands in the presence of God himself and then flies out of the heavens to wage war against the darkness. I am your servant. I am an angel."

Suddenly, images flash through your mind, images to which it would be merciful to call surreal and bizarre. You see chubby little boys fluttering about on birds' wings. You see voluptuous women, suspended in mid-air, whose clothing is perennially falling off. It is as if you have all your life seen pictures of Don Quixote wearing a wash-basin as a helmet, holding a dull sword and sitting astride poor, plodding Rozinante - and then, suddenly and out of nowhere, find yourself staring the paladin

Roland, with his sword Durendal drawn and the rippling muscles that have torn trees out of the ground, face to face. You find yourself babbling and attempting to explain what you remember, and suddenly see the angel shaking with a booming, resounding laughter.

"What, my dear child, you would wish me tame and safe, like a little pet?"

It would be much easier to face a creature which was safe, which one could predict. It would be a great deal less disquieting, and a great deal less disturbing. Yet, somehow, you feel a feeling deep within you that it would be an immeasurable loss.

He stretches out his hand. "Come, take my hand. I have something to show you."

You extend your hand, and find it engulfed in a force that is like electricity. Yet somehow, you feel something else as well - a touch. The angel spreads out great, glorious, golden, many-hued wings, and with a mighty jump launches into the air.

You speed along, both of you. Colors and forms speed by. Then, suddenly, you are at a place that is absolutely still, absolutely silent, and pitch black. "Where are we?"

"That is not a question that I can answer in terms that you will understand. Only watch."

You begin to see a pair of hands, They are together, and facing outward. Then they slowly move outward - and behind the hands is left a rainbow, in all its colors. The hands turn, move along, complete a perfect circle. It is the most perfect rainbow you have ever seen.

Then the left hand strikes the rainbow, and it shatters into innumerable miniscule fragments. The right hand takes the shards, and with a single motion scatters them across the blackness. Each piece of the rainbow glows with light, a little reflection of the whole, and then you see a faint, pale, crystalline blue glow. The pieces are scattered irregularly, and one looks almost like - here an insight comes like a flash - a

and she looks almost like here an insight comes like a flash a constellation.

There is no horizon, no landscape, no other light. There are stars in every direction and from every view. The view is the most breathtaking view of the sky that you have ever seen.

Then the angel takes your hand again, and says, "Do you understand what you saw?"

"I think I do."

"Good. Then let me show it to you again."

Forms shift and move, and you see a faint, nebulous sea of matter spread about in every direction. It is not still - no, it is moving. You look deeper, and you can see that it is dancing.

Then you see a circle forming, and spinning. And another around it, and another. Soon many circles shift and melt together. The ones on the inside seem to move with more speed, vibrancy, energy. Then you can see a kind of a ball forming.

The swirling matter around it spins inward, more and more tightly, until a fire seems to light inside - and fills the new-formed sphere with radiance. Flashes of light, bursts of glowing forms, like water on a pot boiling, seethe and foment. In your silence and stillness watching it, you begin to realize that spheres are forming, coming to light, becoming stars, all around - and, just as the stars formed out of forms dancing, the stars themselves are forms dancing, in a great, glorious, majestic dance.

The strains of a Christmas carol ring in your ears: "Fall on your knees. O hear the angel voices!" Suddenly you realize that you and your host are not still at all, but swept into the great dance - and, about you, you can see shimmers of... you know not what.

After a long, glorious, blissful time, the angel again takes your hand, and again you find yourself swept away. When you find yourself at rest, you are again in pitch black.

"And why am I here?"

"To see what you have seen, for the third time."

You wait with eager expectation, to see what could be next. Inside you, the images foam and mix. The rainbow, containing each piece and found in each piece, the colors, the moving dance, the energy... You try to push it aside, so that you may attentively perceive whatever changes may be happening...

Time passes, with still the forms fermenting in your mind. You feel serene and at rest; the place is a place of profound peace. After a time the images begin to fade, leaving behind a feeling, a wholeness, a satiety. It is like, after a vivacious dance has ended, sitting down, cooling off - and, then, at rest, finding the joy and the intoxication of the dance still in your heart, and your head floating in the air. It is like, after finishing a meal, sitting with its feeling of fullness.

After a time, you break the silence. "Why has nothing happened here? Why have I seen nothing, heard nothing, felt nothing? Am I here to wait?"

"Has nothing really happened here?"

"Nothing that I can perceive. I haven't seen, or heard, or felt anything."

"Really? You have perceived nothing?"

"Perhaps I have perceived something so subtle and ethereal that I can not notice it. I do not doubt that this place holds something wonderful. But I have not noticed anything."

"Really?"

"Why do you answer my questions with other questions, with riddles, instead of telling me anything?"

"Do I?"



After a time, pondering what this could mean, you ask, "Am I here to wait, for something that will happen? If I am, can you tell me when it will happen? Or at least tell me if you can tell me?"

The angel is silent for a moment, and then says, "When you have seen one of these things, you have seen more than one thing. You have seen the shattering of the rainbow; one of its fragments is the one near your home that shines light on your fields and mountains. But the rainbow is also the one, beautiful, perfect language that was before man took upon himself a second time the quest to become gods."

"But did not the sage say that we are gods?"

"Yes, you are gods, and more than gods, and will become more than you even are now. But the man who would exalt himself to godhood, blasphemes. Would that men could learn to be men, without trying to ascend to godhood or even be heroes."

"Should I not learn to be godlike?"

"Learn to be a god, not in the way of the man who wills to be the highest of gods, but in the way of the God who was willing to be the lowest of men."

After a time, the angel continues on.

"In a way, each shattered piece of the rainbow - including the language that you now speak - contains the pattern and image of the whole. But in another way, it has lost some of the colors. There are things that were in the whole rainbow, that are not in the piece.

"So I will answer your question, about waiting, with a word from another language. The word is not a word which answers the question, but rather which un-asks it. So I answer you with this word: Mu."

"But why do you un-ask the question, instead of simply answering it?"

"That I will tell you, if you first tell me, to use an expression from the

child's' words of your land, if the elephant in your refrigerator is eating peanut butter. Is the elephant in your refrigerator eating peanut butter? Yes, or no?"

Your mind is quite full; it is slow work, pondering and absorbing all that you have seen and heard. Finally you ask, "Before anything happens, may I wait here and ponder, and digest things?"

The angel says, "Yes indeed; that is why you were brought here."

A time passes in the silence, the stillness, the darkness. It is the beginning of the slow growth that makes a newborn experience into a full-grown memory, and brings it into who you are. It is the rest which makes every work perfect.

This lasts you know not how long. After a time, you realize that you are in a different place. You are with a man of sorts - if 'man' is the correct word to use. 'Man' is not a wrong word, but there are many others. He seems to be of no particular age. He is fully what every simple child is; he is fully what every ancient sage is.

After a time, you begin to wonder what his age is, and how long you have been there. You see him smile, and then burst out laughing. "Come," he says, "Let me show you what I see." He places his hand on your head, and suddenly you see an image - of a little child, in a magnificent and wondrous cavern full of rubies, and emeralds, and sapphires, and diamonds. He is off in a corner, picking up lumps of coal.

"This place is full of diamonds; come, enjoy, take and carry off as much as you are ready to carry."

Then you begin to look around, and see that you are indeed in a cavern of sorts. It is filled with a brilliant, powerful light; the walls and ceiling, full of irregular bulges and niches, seem to be gilded and encrusted with glowing gems. The space is full of forms magnificent and wonderful - fountains, statues, pedestals, crystalline spheres, animals. Everything in the room seems to have the breath of life.

You begin to gather gems; each one, luminous, seems to have its own

particular feel, its own particular energy - you can almost hear a music when you touch them. Their cool, crystalline forms seem to be of congealed light.

After you have gathered a great many, you notice a peculiar phenomenon: the more you carry, the easier it seems to be to pick up even more. The gems embrace each other, and begin to form a vast interlocking structure about you. It forms a great, shining suit of armor - a scintillating armor of adornment, a living form that is as light as thought. As even more time passes, the gems begin to melt into you. As each flows into your body, you feel its energy and light, and soon, a high, subtle, ethereal music courses through your veins.

At last you stand, armored with an armor that is flawless. It gives, you do not doubt, a protection against blows that a man of iron would envy. Yet the armor is not dark and cumbersome; it is light and energizing. Your skin is as soft and sensitive as ever, and you feel the unfettered lightness of nudity, free as Adam - no, you realize, a greater lightness, for a nude person is only not fettered by clothing, but this armor fills you with the freedom of which fetters are but a crude attempt to oppose. Carrying this armor leaves you more free to move and dance, and fills you with a positive energy.

You revel in the fullness, the intoxicating lightness. After a time, you realize that the man is looking upon you. He is smiling.

You begin to ask how much you owe for this wonderful treasure, and he breaks forth in peals of merry laughter. "These treasures are not for sale. They are a free gift. Come and fill yourself to overflowing with these treasures as often as you wish."

"Then they cost nothing?"

"No, they are very costly. They are more costly than you can ever imagine. But they are given freely, like water and light and breath, and a thousand thousand other treasures that no money can possibly buy."

"Then why are they given freely? Surely such things are worth a price!"

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The man laughs again. "You are beginning to grow alive - just beginning. When you are truly alive, you will dance so freely that you will need no one to tell you these things, because the answers will be in you."

After a while, he hands you a chalice. "Here, drink this, that you may remain dreaming." You drink it, and have a flash of insight that waking is not the only aroused state. In a moment, you reach out and touch a star.

You find yourself inside a castle of ice. It is cold, elegant, pure. It is night-time, and the deep blue of the starry sky provides the light. You walk about in a magnificent structure, through halls and archways, around pillars and doorways, all the time in a great silence. The place is majestic and massive.

The coldness of the ice fills the palace with a deep peace. There is a rest here. You cannot see, nor feel the presence of, yet you somehow sense a kinship to the resting dead, sleeping, awaiting the dawn when sleepers shall rise.

As you step, as you breathe, you hear your echoes, and then the echoes of your echoes. The silence has a presence.

It is a timeless place. There is no hurry, no rush, no clutter. The sparseness of the architecture is matched only by the stillness of the air. You stand and walk, footfall after footfall penetrating the vastness. For it is vast and large; it is ordered, and yet unknown.

Through the glassy ceiling above you see the stars, and as you look at them, you can begin to hear the faintest tinklings of ethereal music. Your ears listen with a new keenness, flowing from the crystalline armor, and you can hear, not a music breaking the silence, but a music in the silence. It is, like the palace, sparse, and simple. It has an order and structure, and yet not time; it is a music which sounds as if it has always been there.

After a time, you realize that you are singing a song - sparse, simple, crystalline, and beautiful. It would not be quite right to say that you started a song: rather, that you have joined a song - a song that always has been, and always will be, a song which is sung not by you alone, but

has been, and always will be - a song which is sung not by you alone, but by angels and archangels, by the living and the dead, by the rocks and stars and trees themselves. And for the tiniest fraction of an instant, you can almost see the song rising, as incense, in the presence of He Who Is.

As you walk through a corridor, a transformation begins. Tendrils of mist curl about your feet as a shroud slowly rises from the ground. The walls become the walls of tall, narrow buildings lining the sides of the road. They are like ancient, cracked vellum, and ivylike bushes of yellow roses climb the sides.

All is still as you walk the streets; the only motion you can see is that of the mist dancing about you. Every now and then, you catch, out of the corner of your eye, what seems to be the form of a person just disappearing around a corner - but you are never sure.

After a time, you come upon a massive, dark Gothic cathedral. It is carved out of black marble. As you pass through the doors, the air becomes very dry; there is a feeling of imminence.

As you step into the sanctuary, the building itself is rocked by a blast of sound. Your body vibrates as you hear the deep, rich sounds of an organ resound all about you. The song is a fugue, turgid and complex. You hear three parts playing, then four, then six - interwoven, turning about, speaking to each other. It is in the key of E minor.

The song continues for almost an hour, woven with a deep sense of mystery. Like the building, like the city, it is filled with a dark majesty. There is a strain you are listening to hear - and you seem almost to have caught it, now here, now there, but then it vanishes. The song comes to a climax, and then a thunderous resolution. Then the sanctuary becomes as silent as before.

A shaft of light falls, and you see a man walking towards you. He is tall and lean, and wearing a black robe with golden edges. He has black hair, and a thin, close beard. His step is stately and regal, but does not make a single sound. He reaches you, and, bowing deeply, says, "Greetings."

His eyes meet yours, and you see that he has a piercing, probing gaze. It is intense, looking deep into your eyes - no, more, deep into your soul. And there is something else - you can not tell what. You begin to gaze back, and you realize what it is. His gaze is gentle.

He reads the questions on your face, and after a time says, "I cannot tell you everything that you wonder now. If I were to say the answers, answers that I am only beginning to understand, they would sound like trivia, or sound meaningless. And if I could make you understand them all, I would do you a great disservice."

"Why?"

"Because the questions you ask are the right questions, but they are also the wrong questions."

After a time, he begins again.

"But there is something which I can do. I can lead you to the library."

He leads you through a twisted passageway, then down a stairwell. The stairwell alights in a room with shelves upon shelves upon shelves of dust-covered tomes.

"And," the man says, "I can give you this."

He reaches into the folds of his robe, and gives you a black rose.

It is a queer feeling to be alone with that many books. You reach on one of the shelves and pull one out. It is an illuminated manuscript. It tells a story deep, and detailed, and rich, and subtle. What you can read of it is like barely seeing the ripples on the surface of a lake, while untold forms move about below in the depths.

You replace it and look at another. It is a manual of philosophy and theology. It tells something about God - but it is also too subtle and complex to understand. And there is something else... It is like reading a book about arrangements and variations of color - to a man who has been blind from birth.

Then another... You can tell from its form that it has a sort of reason, or structure to it, but you cannot tell what. At first, you find what seem to be logical errors - and it does contradict itself, sharply and in many ways... and yet... you have the feeling that you are like a man, versed in logic and philosophy but devoid of emotion, poring over a joke, trying to understand it as an argument - and having no idea why others read it and then do something called laughing.

Another book, and another. Each time it seems like you understand something, you find yourself more confused than before. After a time, it becomes words upon words - and the more words are added, the less meaning there seems to be.

You sit down, exhausted and bewildered. After a time, you realize that a woman is standing some distance off. She is wearing a robe that is purple and black, with long sleeves and a long, flowing skirt. Her long hair, which falls behind her to a length you cannot tell, is jet black, and yet her skin is almost luminous.

She steps forward, and, embracing you, gives you three kisses on alternate cheeks. "Have you learned anything yet?"

"Nothing. I can't understand anything in the books."

"Have you thought to see what you can learn?"

"I have thought, and I do not doubt that there is a lesson, but it is seven times over too subtle and too complex for me."

"There is a lesson that you are missing, but not because it is too subtle and too complex. You are missing it because it is too simple and too obvious."

"I have read from two and ninety books, and cannot share with you the least shred of wisdom that is found in them. I do not understand. So in what wise am I to claim that I have learned?"

"Is there not even one thing you can claim to have learned?"

It is with frustration that you say, "Only the littlest thing - that I do not understand."

"That is not so little as you think."

She looks at you for a second, and now you can see, as well as a probing gaze, a hint of a smile. "Come; you are fatigued. Let me take you so that you can eat and rest." She places an arm around you - her touch is soft and responsive - and leads you through other passageways into a room with a table.

The table is set with plates of clear glass; the table is set with bread, fish, and white cheeses, and there are two glasses of white wine. She leads you to a chair, which offers a welcome rest, and then sits down opposite you.

After you have eaten a couple of pieces of bread, you see her again gently looking upon you. "I can see the question in your eyes. You are wondering, are you not, why you were not simply told that you do not understand."

"Yes."

"Would you have understood that you do not understand? As you do now?" She pauses, and takes a sip of the wine. "A mouse can only drink its fill from a river, and no man can learn what he is not ready to understand."

The rest of the meal is eaten in silence. It is a calm, peaceful, prayerful silence. The bread is flavorful and dense; the cheese is mild; the wine is dry and cool.

After the meal, you both sit in more silence. It is a time of rest... and also of community. There are no words and there is no touch, and yet you can sense a kind of attention, a welcome, from the lady.

When you feel refreshed, she leads you through another passageway, and out to a door to the street. She gently embraces you, and says, "It is time for you to go, and begin to taste some of the other secrets of this city."



I do not know if we shall meet again, but I suspect that it will come to pass. Fare Thee well."

The street is different from the one you first saw - it also is enshrouded by a cloak of mist, but it is wider, and there are people passing by. Their clothing varies some, but much of it is variation on a dark grey theme, almost seeming to be mist in solid form. A young woman passes by on the other side of the street; a cascade of ebon hair hides part of her face - yet you can still see, in one corner of her mouth, a hint of a smile.

You come across an open square, with an intricate pattern of stone tiles in the center. Two opposite corners have trees - gnarled, angular, and leafless. One of the corners has a fountain; cascading sheets of water fall between many-leveled pools, in which silvery and golden fish swim about. The opposite corner has a statue.

The statue is on a large pedestal of dark grey marble; the statue itself is of blackened bronze. It is of a man, gaunt and haggard, and clad in rags. His arms are raised up to Heaven, as is also his head, and yet his face bears a look of despair. The pedestal bears the inscription, "I am thirsty. Who will give me something to drink?"

You find a jug, and, filling it at the fountain, climb up the statue and pour water into the statue's mouth. You hear sounds of water flowing, and then there is a click. It is followed by a whirr of moving clockwork, and, getting down, you see that one of the sides of the pedestal has turned inwards, revealing a shaft descending into the earth.

A lantern is at your feet; you light it, and begin to climb down the ladder at one side. It descends into a passageway; taking one direction, you come to a four way intersection. The left path turns into a circular room, with a domed roof, and a pool in the center. You test its depths - and find it descends below the floor.

Inside, you find an underwater passageway. You swim through it, and surface in a room with rough walls. Climbing upwards, you find the room to narrow into a shaft, which turns into a low passageway, and then opens into another room

opens into another room.

This room is lit by the glow of torches; it is large and rectangular. At the center is a thick, low stone column, about three feet tall, with some protrusions bulging from the top. When you come closer, you see that it is an intricate clockwork device; working with it, you find a pattern in its motions, and work with it until there is a click, and a segment of the far wall slides into the ground.

The passageway is dark, as was the room and passageway which you traversed without your lantern, and it opens shortly into another room. At first you cannot see; then, as you step in, your eyes slowly adjust to the darkness. Inside this room, you see another statue.

This statue is a male nude. It is an iron statue; it is immense, and the figure is powerfully built. It is in the middle of a stride - a long, powerful stride, one which seems almost to shake the ground. His eyes bear an intense gaze, one which seems to almost flash lightning, and one arm is raised, and hand outstretched, in a gesture of authority. The surface of the statue is rough and unfinished. There is something in this statue that seems to almost radiate power and energy and weight and light.

And yet, when you look closer, you notice something different. The eyes seem sad. And then, looking closer, you suddenly realize that the statue is bound by shackles. The shackles are a monstrosity, a violation; they threaten to wear down his energy and burden his strength. You grab at the shackles to see if you can pull them free, and feel a chill and drain run through the body. You drop them in shock.

As you stand in the room, you seem to even more be able to see - not only the forms, but the absurdity and injustice. The man's great strength - it is straining against the binding chains. Your eyes trace the shackles to where they are engulfed by the floor.

Then you realize that there is another set of shackles, empty, open. You shudder to look at them; the touch of one of the chains sapped your soul; breathing felt as if you had been forcefully struck on the chest. You begin to back out of the room... and you see the statue's eyes.

.....

He is not pleading; he is not begging. If anything, his eyes say "Go far away; that these chains imprison me is bad enough, without one more." You do not see pride, of someone unwilling to receive help, or the cowardice of one who dare not ask. It is rather the compassion, of someone who would not wish his worst enemy to feel the misery he feels. You feel a stirring inside your heart. What the man does not ask, conscience and every noble instinct demand. And you walk in.

A chill sweeps through you as you cross the threshold. You can almost see a presence that is unholy. At each step you are jolted. And yet... you have the strength to follow.

You fasten one of the open shackles about your feet; it stings like the sting of a scorpion. The other, and you feel as if you are sinking into the ground. A shackle is fastened around one hand, and it is all you can do not to fall down. You place your other hand in the last, and begin to close it...

The shackles fall from the man's feet, and you see a surge of power ripple through his muscles. He crouches down, and then jumps up with a force that shakes the earth. He raises his hands upward, and there is a blinding flash of light.

Your sight slowly returns, and you find yourself on a grassy knoll bordering a field. A small grove of saplings is to the left, and a field of dandelions is to the right. From somewhere near come the sounds of birds chirping, and a babbling brook.

You see the man who was shackled, standing nearby. He is looking upon you, and smiling. He picks you up and gives you a hug - a crushing, invigorating bear hug that makes you feel very much alive - and a big kiss. Then he sets you down and opens a large leather pouch. He fills two large stone bowls with stew, and draws two draughts of cider from a small barrel. The stew is a piping hot, well-spiced, and hearty beef stew, but the cider is cold and mild - you could drink quite a lot without getting drunk.

He tells you of how he came to be imprisoned - he let a love of probing mysteries become a love of secrecy, and a love of the beauty in natural darkness become a love of evil, so that what was wholesome and

free became perverted and enslaved - and then asks of your story, how you came to rescue him. He listens eagerly and intently.

After a time, he says, "There are many people who knew of my disappearance and do not know that I am free; it is time for me to go and tell them that I am free, and how you rescued me. But before I go, I give you this." He raises one hand to Heaven and places the other on your head, and speaks a blessing. You cannot understand the blessing, but there is something about it that strikes you... and then you see, in an instant, not just one little fragment in the blackness, but the whole radiant rainbow. He is speaking the first language, before it was broken, and - though you cannot understand it - you are moved by its power, its love, its light.

He presses slightly harder on your head, and your spirit surges with joy. Then he runs off into the distance, bounding like a stag.

After a time, you begin to walk along, into the forest. It grows thicker, and the colors richer and deeper. You can feel warmth, and humidity, and wind.

As you walk along, the forest opens into a wide, grassy clearing, with thick, long bluegrass. A few small raindrops sprinkle on your face; thunder rumbles, and soon there is a heavy and torrential rainstorm. The rain is warm, and in it you begin to run and play.

A woman, short and with a full and rounded figure, begins to dance with you, and soon you are swinging around, and dancing in the rain. Sheets and columns of rain fall, and in the lightning flashes you can see the trees, the leaves - the whole forest - dancing and spinning in the wind.

The woman is laughing; you can hear the laughter in her voice and see the laughter in her eyes. On a whim, you reach and pinch her side; she laughs and squirms. She jumps and tackles you - it is half a tackle and half a hug - and knocks you over.

After wrestling around for a few minutes, she turns and walks towards a large, ancient, gnarled oak tree, and sits on a large bulge a little distance above the ground. As she sits, you vaguely realize that the tree's

distance above the ground. As she sits, you vaguely realize that the tree's form has almost the shape to welcome a human - your eyes did not pick it out, but she seemed to have walked to it as naturally as if she were breathing. She is leaning a little to her left; a ledge of wood forms almost a cushion for her to lean on - one might say that her body is curled into the wood.

You begin to look on her, and see how beautiful she really is. Her skin glistens with little drops of water. She is dark, with olive skin and large, soft, welcoming eyes that seem to enfold you, taking you in as the waters of a lagoon take in a swimmer. There is something that draws you about your hands.

Her hands are small, and seem to contain the beauty of her whole body in miniature. They are rounded, curved, and Rubenesque. You can see soft skin gently enfolding the inside of her hands; it has a looseness and amplex so that you do not see vein and bone, only the rich color of skin. Her fingers are tiny and thin, with very mignonne nails and fingertips. The texture of her hands is subtle, yet gives her hands reality; you can see the strata and shapes in the tiny wrinkles on the back of her hand, the dark, faint hairs, and the many sheets of lines that twist and turn over the inside of her hand. Through her fingernails, you can see a glimpse of white, pink color which contrasts brightly with the rest of her hand.

And yet the shape is only half of the beauty that is in her hands, for they are not still, but in motion. It is a slow, still, lyrical motion, an adagio dance. It does not overpower the senses or make a clamoring demand for your attention, but it is yet deeply moving. Her fingers, palm, and thumb slowly move, in a rich harmony. You can see waves in her fingers as they wend back and forth. The motion is extremely simple, and has a periodicity that comes back to a single thing, yet somehow you do not wish it to be more complex, or do something new - at the moment, you would have difficulty understanding why anybody watching this slow undulation would want to see anyone else. It seems that she is speaking in a language with her hands, and you long to understand what her hands are saying, to put it into words. Then you look deeper, and you realize that you do understand what her hands are saying, and you cannot put it into words because it is a truth different from what words express. You

into words because it is a truth different from what words express. You rather feel and sense... peace... rest... stillness... the motion of breath... the beating of a heart... the music that lies in and beyond silence... the ebb and flow of water... day and night and the four seasons turning in cycle... the rhythm of a song that does not pulse, and yet has order... tufts of long, dry grass, resting in a field... the tops of trees, blowing in a wind... a rock, buried deep in the earth, remaining a rock, in the process of not-changing... the light at dusk, and yet not the light of dusk for the sunlight at dusk fades, and this, even in its softness, would not rightly be said to fade.

She begins to walk along a path, leading you, and takes you to a small hovel. You step inside, and as your eyes adjust to the light, you see a very old woman. She is emaciated, and in her face are etched lines of pain. She begins to try to get up, and say something, but the sounds are hardly understandable as words, and the young woman gently places her hand over the old woman's mouth and leads her to lie down. Reaching up to the wall, she brings a flask of wine to the old woman's lips, and helps her drink a little. After that, she goes to a chair, and picks up a wooden recorder, and plays it. It is the same song as her hands danced: soft, still, and beautiful. It has a very soft, woody sound, and the notes themselves are... like the color grey, like a gentle light, like a friend's voice. You are lost in the music, carried away by its beauty. Slowly, the song tapers into silence, into a rest allowing the music heard to sink in. You look at the old woman, and see that she is still, absolutely still. Her eyes vacuously point into space.

The young woman gets up, with infinite gentleness, and with her hand slowly closes the old woman's eyes. She turns to you, and, speaking so softly that you can barely hear her, says the first words you have heard from her: "She was my grandmother." You can see the tears forming in her eyes.

It is dusk, and the last rays of the sun ebb into darkness, into a dark and moonless night.

The next day, you begin to build a pyre in the middle of the field. Some people come by from the wood and help; they are bearing little gifts and each embrace her. There is not what you would understand to

gins, and each embrace her. There is not what you would understand to be a ceremony; they each come and go. After a time, you realize that the animals also come, and pay their respects in their own ways. Dusk comes again, and she takes a lantern and sets it at the bottom of the fire. Flames begin to lick upwards, and then touch the grandmother's body. Then the young woman screams, a piercing, dissonant, discordant scream of which you would not have thought her capable. She begins to sob uncontrollably, and weeps the whole night long.

The woman stands up to greet the coming of the dawn, the tears still streaming down her face. The first rays begin to break over her face, and then you notice something... different. Something that you had not noticed before.

You see pain in her face; it is of no effort to see that a great hole has been torn in her soul. And yet there is something else. She is beaten, but not crushed; wounded, but not destroyed. If she is bleeding, it is because there is living blood coursing through her veins. It would not be quite right to say that she is not too badly hurt because she is a deep person; rather, she is very badly hurt because she is a deep person. And yet... you cannot quite tell what it is.

She turns to you, and sees the puzzlement in your face. She reaches, and with one hand touches your eyes; her lips move in silent prayer. Then she takes her hand back, and you slowly see something else. You see angels all around, and feel the Spirit of God. One of the angels - great, mighty, magnificent - has wrapped his arms around her. The angels are still, and... intent. It would be a gross distortion to say that one of them waves a magic wand and makes the pain go away, and yet...

You cannot quite see, and yet in your spirit you sense, prayers, around and under and in her. You cannot understand all of what is going on. The pain is not taken away, and you share the pain as well. And yet... Though you cannot say what, you can sense someone, and something happening, which is infinitely greater than the pain. And you, again, hear singing.

Sister, let me be your servant. Let me be as Christ to you. I will laugh when you are laughing. When you weep, I'll weep with you.

Pray that I might have the grace to Let you be my servant, too.

When you feel so weak and burdened, When the world is harsh to you, Know that Christ has gone before you, Felt the pain and shed the tears. As Christ has so giv'n to others, So he will also give to you.

And e'en with Christ you're not alone, For we are Christ's body, too. We are all brother and sister. Your burden is our burden, too. As you have so giv'n to others, So we all shall give to you.

A little boy runs up with something clutched in his hand, and kisses her. He says, "I love you. Sorry you hurt bad. Havva big gift. Look!" He opens his hand.

Inside is a blade of grass.



# Espiriticthus: Cultures of a Fantasy World Not Touched By Evil

## Nor'krin

The Nor'krin are tall and strong, with thick, sandy blonde hair, deep blue eyes, and white skin that turns reddish when they go south from their frost-kissed land; the Janra affectionately refer to them as the Northern giants. They love to run across the snowy plains and up to the peaks, to feel the crispness of the air, and to drink the cold and crystalline waters of the flowing streams.

There are not very many of them; they live nomadic lives, spread out across the snowy North, carrying with them only their clothing, their hunting weapons (a large bow and quiver of arrows, an axe, and a knife), a canteen, and a handful of tools and other miscellanea.

Theirs is a culture of oral tradition and folklore, filled with a richness of symbolic thought. Their thought is expressed by storytelling. Some tell of people and actions full of goodness, love, and wisdom; some are allegories packed with symbolic detail; some are both. The evenings — from the meal onward — are times when the clans gather together, and the oldest member tells tales until long into the night, when the fire has died down to embers and the icy mountain peaks glisten in crystalline blue twilight.

blue starlight.

(The language is one which revolves around the oral tradition; its grammar is fairly simple, sufficient for basic expression, but there is an extensive vocabulary fitted to epic poems, great tales, and the transmission of a symbol-filled body of lore)

Their experience of sense is primarily aural, centering around the communication and preservation of their tradition. The other senses all play a part in their knowing about the world around them and its enjoyment, of course, but the ears dominate.

Coming of age is very significant in Nor'krin culture. It is the event upon which a child becomes a full member of Nor'krin community, and appreciates it fully, for it is accomplished in solitude. It is the same for male and female, big and small.

Denuded of all possessions save a hunting knife and the clothing on his back, the child begins a solitary trek, south through the land of the Urvanovestilli and Yedidia, penetrating deep into the thick forests inhabited by the Tuz, until he enters a village, and, coming inside a shop, says, "Blacksmith, blacksmith, find me a task, give me a quest."

There are as many quests as there are questions. Some are easy, some are hard; some are simple, some are complex. Whatever the quest be — be it finding an amethyst in the caves, climbing an immense mountain, answering a riddle, memorizing a book — he leaves the blacksmith shop and does not return until the quest is completed. (It must be said that, though some quests have taken years to complete, recorded history has yet to see a Nor'krin fail. A child leaves the immediate presence of his family, but remains in their prayers; they have great faith, and it is in this faith that they tread securely into the unknown.

Upon the return, the blacksmith begins to ask questions: "What is your name? What is your family? Who are you? What is your story?" — and begins to fashion an iron cross. This cross is at once a cross as any other, and a unique reflection of the person who wears it; no two are alike.

It is with this cross worn about the neck that he returns to his clan, come of age.

Nor'krin greet each other by standing opposite the other, placing the left hand on the other's right shoulder, and lowering the head slightly; the gesture is a sign of respect.

The emotional side of their culture is not as intense or spectacular as many others, but is present and offers an important reflection of what they value. They know a deep sense of respect and appreciation; when they think of others, the first thought is, "This person is an image of God," and there is a feeling of respect. The mountains, the trees, and the streams all bear a magnificence which they appreciate. Nor'krin worship services are filled with awe at the One whose glory is declared by tales, by lives, and by the created order. They are traditional liturgical services, where the place of the homily is taken by long tales and stories, conducted by the eldest members of the clan.

The Nor'krin homeland is named 'Cryona'.

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## Tuz

Many wayfarers go south, early in life, to buy equipment; they need only wait, and a blacksmith will forge a pair of iron boots which will last for life.

The people are dark and strong; their eyes shine with power and lightning. The average Tuz male is short, stout, very broad-shouldered, and built like a brick wall; a thick, straight, jet black moustache and a thick, curly beard push out of leathery skin. Women are equally short and stout, but do not have such broad shoulders, being (relatively) more plump and less muscled, and do not have the moustache and beard (usually).

Their buildings are hewn of solid granite, with iron doors. The villages are small and scattered, joined by worn paths passing through the rich, deep green of the forest. It is this forest, fertile and full of beasts, from which the heart of their meal comes. They are more than fond of spicy meat stews and bear jerky. Their beer is dark, thick, and strong, and every house has at least a little bit of khor, a spiced rum which is occasionally used by the other peoples as a pepper sauce.

The Tuz work hard and play hard. They are often hired for heavy work in the construction of Urvanovestilli palaces, and their work rarely receives complaint. After work is over, they tend towards wrestling and general rowdiness; if they are present, Janra children (and occasionally adults) are tossed about.

For all of their rowdiness, the Tuz do possess a great deal of restraint; even after a couple of beers, they seldom give each other injuries beyond occasional bruises and abrasions, and Janra children do not receive even a scratch. (Most of them rather enjoy being tossed about).

The usual greeting is a crushing bear hug, often accompanied/ followed by a punch in the stomach, some wrestling or tossing around, etc; it is generally toned down a bit for children and

visitors from afar, but there is always at least a spark of rowdy play.

As much as the Nor'krin are at home in the cold, loving everything that is crisp and chilly, the Tuz love heat. Their land is by far the hottest, but that doesn't stop them from munching on peppers and wrestling around. Blacksmiths' shops and fire and sun-hot iron — these are a few of their favorite things.

The Tuz also build obstacle courses of stone and iron and rope, which the Janra have no end of finding new and inventive ways to use; a slack rope which Tuz climb along the underside of will be walked — or occasionally run — atop by the Janra; jumping shortcuts, backwards or inverted travel, and acrobatic ways of avoiding raw strength moves are common. Tuz, by contrast, have very slow and methodical paths.

They are, indeed, probably the most constant and unchanging of peoples; the process of maturing is a process of becoming more who they are. Their sense of order is also great; they value greatly the gift of being well ruled.

A child, at the age of ten, is presented to the village elders and the various guildmasters. They spend a day talking with the child and his parents, in order to determine his talents, interests, and personality; then they spend another day talking and discussing amongst themselves; then, on the third day, his profession is announced, along with the master to whom he will be apprenticed. The results are sometimes surprising, but always embody a great deal of wisdom, and the selection of a vocation is a gift for which the child is grateful.

Children learn a way of life filled with discipline, tradition, and respect for elders. It is quite simple, not at all ornate when compared to some other philosophies, but it has a power, a solidity to it, and love, faith, honor, friendship, and hospitality are things that they truly live by. Their families and communities are very close, and their friendships are loyal until death. They do not pay as much emphasis on verbal articulation of teaching as a way of life. There is thought, but in its expression, words take a second place to actions. That a life of faith involves discipline is declared very loudly by Tuz hands.

The are very aware of the value of solitude and prayer; it is a common practice to simply leave, taking nothing save clothing and a hunting knife or axe, and go up into the mountains for a few days of solitude, allowing time to pray and to be refocused.

Their language has, in speech, a very heavy, thick, consonantal feel, full of grated 'h's (which is often present in 'k's, 'r's, 'g's, and 'b's). The speech is terse and concrete.

Their experience of sense is also very concrete, centered somewhere between visual and aural. Sight tells what is around and where, and what is happening and where. Hearing tells what is happening, and where, and what is being said.

The emotional side of their culture knows such things as accomplishment, tradition, exertion, and discipline. There is an emotion that comes from a job well done and a challenge mastered; they value it. To have a heritage and respect elders as well as enjoy children brings a feeling of right order. To wrestle around, run, or laugh heartily has a pleasure. To control oneself has a joy. Things such as these are what they feel.

Tuz worship services are be short and sweet, with worship embodying a great deal of fervor.

The Tuz homeland is named 'Rhog'.

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# Urvanovestilli

The first thing to strike a visitor is the devices. In every house and many shops there is a tinkering room; a large workbench is covered with every imaginable sort of gear, spring, hinge, lever, chain, and shaft; the clock is only the beginning of clockwork. Two nearby cabinets — one filled with tools, one filled with parts and working materials — stand neatly closed; at the touch of a button, a drawer springs out, and shelves slowly slide up.

The craftsmanship of clockwork devices is, along with the study of diverse subjects — theology and philosophy, history and literature, science and mathematics — a hobby that symbolizes the culture. Each piece is created not only for utility, but also for artistic effect. Cuckoo clocks and spring loaded umbrellas, Swiss Army Knives and mechanical pencils, player pianos and collapsible telescopes: mechanical objects such as these fill the land.

The ornate complexity of the devices reflects the ornate complexity of thought. The language, quite possibly the most difficult to learn, allows a speaker to express detailed and nuanced thought in exacting specificity. There are twenty four verb tenses, so that there is (for example) a different past tense for a brief, well demarcated action, and one which occurred over a period of time; there are twenty four other verb forms, which are like verb tenses as to conjugation and construction, but express the verb in an atemporal manner. Their language has much room built in for conjunction and logical connectives, nesting and predicates, as well as subtlety, implication, and allusion.

They have a complex and formal system of etiquette, although it must be said to their credit that they take no offense at a wayfarer who is warm and friendly but does not know their rules; they understand how simple the heart of politeness is.

Their speech is clever and witty, and they are fond of abstract strategy games. They enjoy ornate and complex polyphony, and will spend hours exploring theology and philosophy (two disciplines which

they have the wisdom not to separate).

Urvanovestilli culture places a very heavy emphasis on a facet of virtue which they call *contrainte*. *Contrainte* is a kind of inner constraint, where order is approached by adjusting conditions inside before conditions outside, and not letting oneself be wrongly controlled by external circumstance. A similar concept is embodied in the words 'moderation' and 'self-control.'

*Contrainte* enables a man to be free and use that freedom responsibly; it enables a man to have access to drink without getting drunk; it enables him to think constantly without becoming rationalistic. The Urvanovestilli homeland has the richest natural resources in the world, and (with centuries of first rate craftsmanship and efficient work) they are by a wide margin the richest nation in the world. Despite this, they keep a very cautious eye on wealth, so as not to be enslaved by it. Theirs is not a culture of consumption; though some of their interests — art, sculpture, board oriented strategy games, tinkering — generally are pursued in a manner that involves wealth, the bulk — discussions, prayer, dance, imagination, thought — do not. Consumption as a status symbol and waste are both seen as vulgar.

In *contrainte* is also balance and complement. There is time in solitude and time in community, freedom and responsibility, private and public property, work and rest.

It is in *contrainte* that an ornate system of etiquette does not obscure love, and elaborate ceremonies do not obscure worship. Just as they do not have their sights set on wealth — they do not look to it for happiness, security, and other things that it can not provide — and are therefore able to enjoy it (among other and greater blessings) without being harmed, so also they set their sights on love and worship, and therefore do not permit rules of etiquette or liturgical forms to make themselves the focus and cause hearts to become cold and dusty.

*Contrainte* likewise allows them to act efficiently without becoming efficient. Off of work, life takes a calm and leisurely pace; nobody fidgets. It allows them to be very judicious in their use of money, and at the same



time very generous; their hospitality is lavish, and it is unheard of for anyone — friend or stranger, native or foreigner — to go hungry in their land.

The single greatest mark of *contrainte* lies in that, with all of their achievements, they remain open to the gifts of God. *Contrainte* itself — though they work very hard to cultivate it — is not something that they try to achieve on their own power, but ask for in prayer, expecting to receive as a gift from God. Nor is it set up as the supreme context, the *Supra-God* to which God must bow down; they know nothing of religion within the bounds of *contrainte*. *Contrainte* does not "point to" itself as an object of worship, but rather God; it brings, in worship of God, a desire to grow in faith, hope, and love. It is like being reasonable enough not to be rationalistic.

On the surface, the *Urvanovestilli* culture appears to be the antithesis of that of the *Shal*. One is complex, and the other simple; one is rich, and the other poor; in one, people sit and talk for hours; in the other, people sit in silence for hours.

At the very heart, though, they are very much the same; *Urvanovestilli*, when traveling and visiting the *Shal*, feel that they are at home; the *Shal* find the *Urvanovestilli* to be brothers. They see beyond, rest in God's love, and love their neighbors.

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The *Urvanovestilli* are quiet, patient, temperate, and refined. They are classically educated and cultured; their country is a federation of republics, each one ruled by a senate in a tradition that has remained unchanged for centuries. Tradition is strong, and families remain together; come evening, three or four, sometimes even five generations sit down at one table, eating and drinking, talking and listening, long into the night. There is a great respect for age, but a respect that in no way despises youth; the oldest spend a great deal of time caring for the youngest. Indeed, one of the first sights to greet a visitor who steps inside an *Urvanovestilli* mansion is often a grandfather or great-grandfather, with a long, flowing white beard, sitting with a child on his knee.

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Urvanovestilli names are long and ornate. The full name is rarely spoken outside of formal ceremonies; even Urvanovestilli do not often pronounce thirty syllables to refer to one entity; all the same, each one is considered important. The names are:

**Family name:** This is the first and foremost of names, and the most cherished; it is the most commonly used.

**Maiden name:** Among married women, this follows.

**Birth name:** This is the name given at birth, and is often used within families and when there are several people of the same family present.

**Reserve name:** This is a very intimate name, which is not always known outside of family and close friends; it is spoken with a great deal of affection and familiarity.

**Baptismal name:** This name is chosen at baptism by people who know the person well, and given a great deal of prayer; it is used especially in religious contexts.

**Regional name:** This tells of the city or village a person comes from, carrying with it connotations of regional flavor and culture. It is used primarily in reference to travelers or (occasionally) people far away.

**Friend names:** These names (some do not have any; a few have ten or eleven; the average is two or three) come according to friends; a friend can bestow a name, and it becomes thereafter formally a part of an Urvanovestilli full name. When such a name is bestowed, it will become the name used primarily by the person who chose it.

The phrases of politeness — those which would correspond to hello, goodbye, please, thank you, you're welcome — are all benedictions; they take innumerable forms and beauties according to the people and situation. Blessing is something which they value; they often speak of good things — friends, virtue, art and music, food and drink — as so many blessings from the heart of the Father.

The traditional greeting is a hand raised, open save that the ring

finger bends down to meet the thumb, or (when greeting a child) placed atop the head; the gesture is a symbol of benediction. It is followed by three kisses on alternate cheeks.

In youth, Urvanovestilli are filled with a wanderlust. They voyage to many different places, seeing different nations and lands — as well as the variety of their own cities — and enjoy experiences which provide a lifetime's worth of memories. The wayfaring is never really complete, though, until it becomes the voyage home: the Time sometimes comes after two years of travel and sometimes after ten, but the Spirit always makes it clear. When that Time comes, each Urvanovestilli spends a little longer — perhaps a month — with the people he is visiting, and then leaves, with a very passionate and tearful goodbye.

It is Time to return home, to put down roots, to deepen, to mature; Time to wholly enter into the homeland. From this point on, the Urvanovestilli is no longer a wayfarer. The memories of his travels are cherished and very dear, a set of riches that he will always carry with him, and he will still send blessings, gifts, letters, and occasionally visits to friends in far away lands, but it is no longer time to go here and there; it is Time to grow into family, friends, and city.

Urvanovestilli writings and teaching, the means by which theology and philosophy are transmitted, take many forms — poems, riddles, parables and allegories, personal conversations, to name a few — but the predominant form is a systematic and structured logical argument: point one, point two, point three, subpoint three b, conclusion one... The structure carries allusion, nuance, and beauty; it leaves room for the speaker to make a very beautiful craft of words.

They enjoy being absorbed in thought; it is how they spend a good time of each day. They do not look down on sensation — indeed, they have a great appreciation for what is a very highly developed art, music, and cuisine — but it does not fill their world as it does that of many others. Abstraction and complexities of thought are fundamental to their experience of the world: sensation leads into perception, perception leads into concrete thought, and concrete thought leads into abstract thought. Moments of immersion in the senses are rare, Sensation, being the

outermost layer, is governed and enjoyed from within. Its form is generally of aural and visual character; the aural side is shaped by words, and then accommodates the other plethora of sounds, and the visual side is shaped by the forms, the spaces, and the interactions of their devices, and sees something of springs and gears in the world around.

Their faces appear at first glance to be almost expressionless — a faint hint of a smile, perhaps — until you look at their eyes, the first window to the fire and intensity within. Urvanovestilli eyes — whether brown, amber, hazel, grey, or blue — bear an intense, probing gaze; in Urvanovestilli culture, eye contact is almost continual, and reflects a fire, an intensity, a passion, that fills their way of life. It does not take long to be reminded that eye contact is a form of touch; their eyes seem to be looking into your spirit. The gaze, in its intensity, is never cold and calculating, never the chilling, devouring stare of a steel face beyond which lies a heart of ice; at its most intense and most probing, it is the most filled with love, and most easily shows the intense fire within. They can rest — and they know calm and tranquility — but there is a great energy within, an energy that shows itself in their artwork and writings. Those who read their theologians certainly do not fail to notice the depths of wisdom and insight, but what is most striking is their love for God. The passion — of their love for God, for spouse, for family, for their neighbor; of desire to grow in virtue and knowledge, for their work — burns, and their experience of emotion — of discovery, of awe, of appreciation of beauty — is long and intense, complex and multifaceted. This emotion is the other side of *contrainte*; it is the same virtue that enables them to enjoy wine in temperance, and to be moved to tears by music and theater. It is not a "virtue" of stifling — that would be far too easy, but of control and proper enjoyment. Just as they find abstinence from drink to be too easy, a way of dodging the lesson of moderation, stifling emotion and crushing it would be, to them, a way of dodging the lesson of passions rightly oriented in accordance with holiness and love — not to mention an unconscionable destruction of an integral facet of being human.

Those Urvanovestilli who are the most virtuous, the most filled with *contrainte*, are nearly always the most passionate.

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Urvanovestilli are usually short, but look like very tall in miniature, with clear white skin and jet black hair. The men have a thin and wiry frame, with sharp and angular features. They have flaring eyebrows coming out of a prominent brow, a thin, hooked nose, and tufts of fine hair flaring away from their ears. Skin holds tightly to bones, muscles, and veins, and arms end in long, thin hands with nimble fingers. Their voices are a very soft, almost silent tenor.

The women are somewhat slender, but a slenderness which is graceful and rounded. Their features, as well as their build, bear this slender, graceful, rounded character, and their movements are light and flowing. (If the men know more of passion, the women know more of calm). Their voices are high and clear, with a sound that is like silver, like cold and crystalline water, like clear, light, dry Alsace blanc.

Urvanovestilli worship services are long and complex, with ornate liturgy and ritual. The language is florid and ornate (like that of the liturgy stemming from St. John Chrysostom) and every sentence of the liturgy would embody theological truth. The homilies (although not the only part of the service which varies (much of the liturgy itself changing according to a traditional pattern dictated by a complex algorithm) from week to week) are themselves not that long. They are of moderate length, and differ from the liturgy — which presented different doctrines sentence by sentence — in being a full and well-developed presentation of one single idea, expressed in unequalled detail and eloquence.

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The Urvanovestilli homeland is named 'Flaristimmo'.

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Urvanovestilli city — Capitello

Capitello is the capital of the Urvanovestilli land, and the classical Urvanovestilli city.

At the very heart lies a cruciform cathedral. It is an immense domed building, the outside in white marble, covered with statues and spires. Inside, all is dark — or so it seems to a person who first steps in.

Someone who steps in first stands in place, seeing nothing really, perhaps a few points of light in the darkness... and then, very slowly, begins to adjust. It is cool inside, and very still. The silence is a silence that can be heard, a very real and present stillness. As he begins to step into the coolness and the silence, he begins to see light — light that had gone unnoticed at first, but as he steps into it, becomes more and more visible. The light is shining through a thousand candles, each one bringing a little bit of light, a little bit of warmth, to what is around it. Then, after the candles become visible, it is seen what they illuminate — mosaics, worked with colored dyes and gold leaf... and faces.

Outside of the cathedral lies an open garden with fountains and statues. Around the garden lies a circle of seven great halls. In clockwise order, beginning south of the cathedral, they are:

**Library:** This collection, the largest in the world, has at least one copy of all known writings, and a scriptorium in which they are copied and transmitted.

**Device museum:** This is a clockwork building filled with exemplary devices (and copies in various states of disassembly).

**Senate:** This building is decorated with arts and crafts from the cities throughout the land; it is a place where senators (two from each city and one from each village) meet to govern the nation.

**Mayorship:** This is the local senate, the seat from which public affairs are run; the majority of political power is on a local level (the senate being the head of a confederation), vested in the town elders.

**Forum:** This is an immense amphitheater which hosts a variety of speakers, panels, and open talks. Lecture is the predominant medium and presentation, but poetry and storytelling occur not infrequently. The forum, along with the evening worship services in the cathedral, walking in the garden, attending a concert, or looking through the art museum, is appreciated as an enjoyable way to spend a night out.

**Music hall/theater:** This hosts concerts and recitals, theatrical performances, operas, dances, pyrotechnic displays, occasional Janra

acrobatic performances, dramatic readings, puppet shows...

Art museum: Half of the space is devoted to permanent exhibits, and half to temporary displays. Most of the finest artwork ever produced by Urvanovestilli, and a good deal of the finest artwork from other cultures, may be seen here.

Outside of the seven halls lies what is called "the mélange"; outside of the mélange lie fields, pastures, and vineyards; outside of the farmland lies forest.

The mélange is a large annulus which contains mansions, shops, roads, paths, public squares, gardens, open lots, little forums and theaters, restaurants, and so on. It is where a great deal of life and culture transpires; in the little nooks and crannies, inside the parlors of the houses, a lot transpires.

The Urvanovestilli enjoy going out, but the enjoyment does not come from despising being at home. The parlors, which have the distinction of being within a person's home and hospitality, are lavishly furnished, with couches, chairs, lanterns, some instruments, a liquor machine, some sculpture or paintings, often a fountain or clock or... and people enjoy sitting around, talking, reading, performing music...

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### Urvanovestilli city: Éliré

Éliré is known among the Urvanovestilli as the city of seashells. While most Urvanovestilli cities are built out of white stone, in ornately embellished classical geometric forms, Éliré is built out of sandy yellow stone, in flowing curves; buildings seem like giant seashells. The artwork and jewelry are crafted from seashells and other treasures from the sea — coral and pearls — and the public squares are filled with fountains and pools, where colorful fish swim about.

The people enjoy swimming, and often meet the dolphin population; they enjoy each other.

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## Urvanovestilli city: Mistrelli

Mistrelli lies in the heart of the Fog Valley; a shroud of mist cloaks the ground, out of which rise trees and tall buildings with spires and towers. Inside the buildings are all manner of tunnels of tunnels, secret passages, and trapdoors; there are clockwork devices in each one. Throughout the city are spread a handful of entrances to a vast underground labyrinth, of which the better part is known; there are all manner of doors and puzzles inside.

The city is full of rose bushes, climbing up the sides of the buildings, over and around gates; most are yellow, but there are some of every color.

The people take a long time to get to know, and their personalities always have hidden gems. Their study of theology emphasizes mystery and the incomprehensible nature of God; Connaissance, a theologian from Mistrelli, began and ended his magnum opus with the words, "I do not know."

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## Urvanovestilli city: Fabriqué

Fabriqué is the biggest of Urvanovestilli port cities; it lies on the Tuz border, and is the site where ships — full rigs with multiple masts, many sails, and innumerable ropes — are built. They are polished and ornately carved, well suited for transport and trade as well as a work of art. The crews hired tend to be heavily Tuz — strong and sturdy workers who have no problem tying a rope as thick as a wrist in waves and storm — and set sail to other Urvanovestilli ports and ports around the world, transporting voyagers and cargo to destinations near and far.

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# Yedidia

The Yedidia culture is a culture of vibrant life. They live in buildings woven out of living trees and plants; the doorways are filled by hanging curtains of leafy vines which softly part as a person passes through.

Their manner of gardening spins out of a wonderful talent for drawing beauty out of the forest; many visitors come for the first time, do not even realize that they have stepped into a garden; they only notice that the forest's beauty is exceptional there.

The Yedidia are very sensitive to the rest of Creation; they speak in a melodic, lilting tongue of the purest song, but even that language is not the one that is closest to them. The first language of every child is that of rocks and trees and skies and seas. They know how to call birds out of the forest to fly into their hands; they know how to make plants flourish.

They have ears to hear the crystalline song by which the Heavens declare the glory of their Maker. They appreciate the beauty of the created order as it tells of the Uncreate with a power that can not fully be translated into words — and they use the language of Creation to speak of the mysteries of the Creator, whose fingerprints are everywhere in nature.

They look into the great and unfathomable vastness of space; it furnishes the language by which they tell of the great and unfathomable vastness of the Creator. They know the energy, the great fire out of which the sun pours out light and energy; it furnishes the language by which they tell of the energy and great fire in the heart of the Father, offering warmth and light freely and without cost. They dance in the rain, the life giving water poured out from above; it furnishes the language by which they speak of springs of living water come down from Heaven. They admire the beauty of the lilies of the field, which simply rest in the sunlight, rain, and dew showered on them; it furnishes the language by which they speak of resting in the love poured out. Their eyes are not closed when a grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies...

They are sensitive to the silent beauty that is sometimes unnoticed

even by the Janra. They enjoy the brilliance of the sun, and the pale blue luminescence of the moon; the gentle warmth of a summer night, and the powerful motion of a pouring rainstorm (and there are few things many Yedidia enjoy more than being thoroughly drenched). They look at the veins of a leaf, the hairs of a caterpillar, the motion of a snail; they listen to the song of birds, the sound of wind whispering amidst the leaves, the splashes of water flowing over rocks; they taste the cold freshness of water, the tartness of lemons, the sweetness of strawberries; they smell the soft fragrance of jasmine, the spice of cinnamon, the freshness after a rain; they feel the velvety softness of a rabbit's fur, the raspiness of a rhubarb leaf, the roughness of bark, the smoothness of a worn stone, the gentle kiss of a summer breeze, the springiness of pete moss, the shimmering heat of fire long into the night, the light tickle of a crawling gecko, the fineness of a child's hair, and the warmth of a friend's face.

They are as intuitive as they are perceptive; the emotions of friends especially, but strangers as well, are quickly understood; be it singing together, a friendly joke, talking, listening, leaving alone, sitting together in silence, holding a hand, giving a hug — they always seem to know.

The Yedidia make wines and incense which even the Urvanovestilli do not come close to. It is, though, the Urvanovestilli who make their garments. Some are short, some are tall; some are slender, some are rounded; they tends towards being fairly short and fairly round, but there is a lot of variety. All, though, have olive skin and dark, shiny black hair; the women wear a long, flowing robe of kelly green, over which cascades of hair fall and spin, sometimes reaching to the waist, sometimes almost touching the ground; the men wear cloaks and tunics of walnut brown. The clothing is soft and light as air; it streams out in the motion and jumps of dance — like their music, smooth, soft, flowing, graceful.

"Dance, then, wherever you may be, for I am the Lord of the Dance, said he." Theirs is a culture full of joy and celebration; it is full of smiles, and always willing to welcome a visitor. Finding something good, they look for someone to share it with.

They are very sensitive to the cycles of nature, of the day, of the phases of the moon, of the seasons in turn. They shape the regular

rhythm of their songs, and provide a sense of constancy and regularity, again, which furnishes the language by which they speak of the constancy and regularity of the Creator.

The traditional greeting is a soft and gentle hug, one which often lasts a while (or a butterfly kiss, or...). That touch, as their faces and voices as they speak, bears a great deal of expression: The phrase of greeting used means, literally, "Here is a person in whom I find joy." The words remain the same, but the music of the speech colors it to perfection.

Though each culture has its own drink — even the icy cold water enjoyed by the Nor'krin is appreciated by visiting Janra, who recognize it as a gift given without sowing or reaping — drinks are one of the first things that come to mind when most people hear the word 'Yedidia'.

First of all are their wines. Nearly all of the finest wines are made in their land. Red and white, and a little bit of rose and green, are stored away in caves to age for years, perhaps decades, before being opened to enjoy with friends and memories.

After the wines come cider; it is served hot and well spiced; the spicing is done in many different ways, and gives a wonderful variety to a very soothing drink to warm a cool evening.

There are fruit juices of every color of the rainbow; strawberry, pear, guava, banana, apple, peach, and fig are but the beginning of a very long and flavorful list. There is, though, one strong point of commonality: the fruit is always still attached to the plant a few minutes before it is served.

(the variety of fruit juices is fermented and aged as are grapes to make wine, but that variety of drinks is reserved for very special occasions)

They also enjoy teas and infusions; the trees and herbs provide another spectrum of tastes to sip with friends.

Roots of various plants are sometimes spiced to provide another drink.

Yedidia cuisine varies somewhat from region to region. In some places, it is based on fresh fruit, and in others, on breads, cereals, thick soups and vegetable stews; the latter is spiced, lightly salted, and often has some meat for added flavor. All forms of Yedidia cuisine begin with a small salad (either garden or fruit), have a main course of some form of the local specialties, are followed by a platter with an assortment of breads and fresh fruits, and end with a dessert of cheeses or cured fruit.

Life, to the Yedidia, is one big, long party, and, to the Yedidia, song is the symbol of celebration. They sing in the morning, and sing in the evening; they sing while working, and sing a prayer — hands joined together — before meals. Thought is expressed in song; the first place to look for an expression of their perspective on theology and philosophy is in the verses of their hymns. There are many cherished songs shared across the nation, but there is also much spontaneity and improvisation; their way of speaking/singing is in metered verse, and a wealth of their wisdom is embodied in the rhythm of hymns, regular and dependable as the cycles of nature. The day, the moon, the year — these different cycles are echoed in the structure of verses.

For the beauty of the earth, for the glory of the skies, For the love which from our birth over and around us lies: Lord of all, to Thee we raise this our hymn of grateful praise.

For the beauty of each hour of the day and of the night, Hill and vale and tree and flower, sun and moon and stars of light: Lord of all, to Thee we raise this our hymn of grateful praise.

For the joy of human love, brother, sister, parent, child, Friends on earth, and friends above; for all gentle thoughts and mild; Lord of all, to Thee we raise this our hymn of grateful praise.

For Thy church, that evermore lifteth holy hands above, Offering up on every shore her pure sacrifice of love: Lord of all, to Thee we raise this our hymn of grateful praise.

For Thyself, best Gift Divine! To our race so freely given; For that great great love of Thine peace on earth and joy in Heaven.

that great, great love of mine, peace on earth, and joy in heaven.  
Lord of all, to Thee we raise this our hymn of grateful praise.

This is my Father's world, and to my listening ears, All nature  
sings, and round me rings the music of the spheres. This is my  
Father's world: I rest me in the thought Of rocks and trees, of skies  
and seas; His hand the wonders wrought.

This is my Father's world, the birds their carols raise, The  
morning light, the lily white, declare their Maker's praise. This is my  
Father's world: He shines in all that's fair; In the rustling grass I hear  
him pass, He speaks to me everywhere.

This is my Father's world, O let me ne'er forget That though the  
wrong seems oft so strong, God is the Ruler yet. This is my Father's  
world: the battle is not done; Jesus who died shall be satisfied, and  
earth and Heaven be one.

The Yedidia are the most alive to sensation; each sense is valued, and  
each one provides something a little different.

Touch is pre-eminent; it is enjoyed immensely, and they consider it  
the most informative of senses. Touch tells them of texture and  
temperature, of moist and dry; by how things respond to pressure, they  
can feel what is present beneath the surface and what structure it forms;  
it tells much of emotion. When sensation yields perception, touch  
provides them with the greatest richness.

Smell is a sense of memories; to walk through an orchard is to  
remember seasons past. It no less bears a tale of what has happened; each  
person bears his own distinctive smell, and a place by its smell tells who  
has passed by. Many different things leave a mark on a placés scent, and  
to smell is to be told, as if in a far-off memory (indeed, like those that  
smell mysteriously triggers), what plants are present, what the weather is  
like and has been, who has passed by, what fruit was picked — though not  
all of this is perceived all of the time, the fragrance of a place often tells  
bits and pieces.

Sight is a sense that works by light illuminating all that it shines on (and this is something from which they draw a lesson). It tells of the color, the form, and the beauty of what is around; what is moving and what is still; it tells of what is far away and can not yet be touched. It serves as a guide to what is around, as a guide by which to move and act in an unknown situation, and it bears its own beauty; all of this provides lessons about God and about faith.

The first sound in their mind, and the one they most love, is song. The song of a friend's voice, the song of a bird chirping, the song of a babbling brook, the silent song of silvery blue starlight — all of these are listened to and enjoyed.

The taste of food tells of the time of year and of culture. Drink and food are a kind of art, and its taste tells both of the time of year and how it was prepared.

Yedidia emotions have a fluid character; they are a sensitive people who are easily moved and who show their emotions quickly. Their celebration is filled with smiles and mirth — as is, indeed, much of life. Tears are held to be very precious — in their language, the same word means 'tear' and 'diamond' — and they know tears, not only of sorrow, but also of joy. Tears come to greet both memories and powerful music, and mark as both sign and symbol the most significant events in life — farewell and death, yes, but also a loved one regained, and birth, and marriage. Memories and hopes, also, are precious. They know sorrow, but never bitterness; however deep and angst-ridden the sorrow may be, deeper and more healing is the joy. Farewell is always marked by the thought of, "I will be able to enjoy your presence again;" on many a deathbed has been spoken the words, "We will be brought back together again in the heart of the Father. It will not be long."

Yedidia worship services are filled with songs — celebrations in which everybody participates.

The Yedidia homeland is named 'Syllii'.

## Yedidia Character: Sylla

Sylla is relatively short and rounded; she has dark, olive skin and soft, brown eyes. Her hair falls down to her waist, and she wears a long, flowing kelly green robe, as is traditional among Yedidia women; more often than not, a chain of flowers rests in her hair. She chooses to go barefoot, so that she can feel the grass, the moss, the earth, and the stones beneath her feet.

The only possession which she carries is a small harp; a slow strum accompanies a soft and gentle song. She also has with her a pet: a milshh: a small, eyeless animal, about two feet long, with brilliant golden fur that is long and soft, two large, pointed ears, eight short, flexible legs ending in large paws, and a shiny black nose which is always sniffing inquisitively. It is both shy and curious, and it is very warm and affectionate; it is usually very calm and sedate, but often becomes very excited when it smells someone familiar.

A quote:

Fair is the sunlight;  
Fairer still the moonlight;  
Fairest of all, is the light of thy face.

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## Jec

The Jec life is filled with faith, humility, and simplicity. They live in small rural villages, where farmland — pastures, fields, orchards and vineyards, the village commons — outlies a few houses, some artisan's shops, and a simple church.

They are peasants very much like those chosen to be apostles, and the carpenter who chose them. Farmers, blacksmiths, cobblers — clothed in rough, plainly colored robes, they are the sort of people one could easily overlook in the search for the spectacular. It is calloused hands and dirty fingernails that are lifted up to God in worship, and that continue to worship by placing a yoke on a pair of oxen, gathering firewood, peeling carrots and potatoes, or threshing wheat. There are many who are given great wisdom and knowledge, a faith to move mountains, or who speak in the tongues of men and angels, but they do not bear an otherworldly air or a strange electricity; they appear as men and women like any other, usually harvesting barley or carving wood.

Their thought is expressed in parables, little stories, and proverbs, the first and foremost of which are "Love Yahweh your God with all of your heart, and all of your soul, and all of your mind, and all of your might," and "Love your neighbor as yourself." There is a great sense of community and continuity, carrying the torch passed down by the saints who walked before.

They do not really travel; most are born, live, and die within a few miles of a single point. They do not look down on wayfarers who voyage far and wide to see the height of mountains and the vastness of seas, and enjoy the richness of the visible and invisible artifacts of the variety of cultures, but they pay a lot of attention to what is easy to pass by without noticing. They know their culture, their village, and its people very well.

Jec culture is a culture of the very small. They see the great in the small; in the Law of Love is seen all of virtue and right action; in a tiny shoot pushing out of the ground they see an immense oak whose branches will someday provide shade; in a simple gift, they see the love



that gave it. They are fond of the words, "He who is faithful in little is also faithful in much." Piety is given expression in the tiny details of everyday life, to which careful attention is devoted. They search to love God by seeing to the needs of whoever they are with.

Gift giving occupies an important cultural position; each gift serves as a little symbol, a little morsel, of love. The gifts are very simple — poverty does not permit the spectacular — but are given generously. A flower, an apple, a song, a blessing, a handshake, a prayer, a poem, a cup of cold water wood carved into a statue or a whistle, an oddly shaped pebble, a skin of wine, a walk, a story, a patterned candle — all of these are given.

Sight, sound, touch, smell, taste — there is nothing really special about their use of senses. They notice and enjoy little details; there is not much more to say.

The language has simple rules and few words; it is one of the easiest to learn, and bears well the load of talking about everyday matters, about personality and friendship, and about God.

When two Jec meet, one is usually coming to visit the other, and something of this notion of visit and welcome is embodied in the greeting. The visitor comes with one arm outstretched and hand open, saying, "I give you my love." The host clasps the outstretched hand, bowing slightly, and says, "And I return to you mine." These actions are accompanied by a gentle smile.

They are fairly short, with tan skin, brown eyes, and hair that is usually brown (and sometimes black or sandy blonde).

Their emotions are the emotions of being human, the common points of feeling shared across all culture. They know at least something of laughter and peace and passion and tears and awe; if there is one point that runs strong, it is a sense of tradition, community, continuity, and place; they have a sense of unique importance and a part in the great plan (two concepts which are not really separate in their thought).

Their worship services are simple, without any real distinguishing

Jec worship services are simple, without any real distinguishing remarks — no bells and smells, just a week by week liturgical service presenting the Gospel message and embodying worship. The opening words of each service are, "Hear, O Israel, Yahweh your God is one. You shall love Yahweh your God with all of your heart, and with all of your soul, and with all of your mind, and with all of your might. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Love one another."

The Jec homeland is named 'Tev'.

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# Shal

The language is soft, gentle, simple, and calm. It is spoken slowly, as if it were a lullaby; it has few words: simple, little words with rich and profound connotations; 'Way', 'Tao', and 'Word' are like the nouns which are used.

Even the verbs are rarely verbs which tell of action. Rather, they describe that which is; 'be', 'abide in', 'embody', 'love', 'nourish', 'support', 'is the friend of', 'know', 'receive', 'is from', 'resemble', 'live', are the essential words which a child would learn as one of our children would learn words such as 'walk', 'talk', 'eat'. Just as our language has different words — 'walk', 'run', 'jog', 'sprint', 'mosey', 'trot', for example — which tell of the action of moving by the use of legs, so their language has at least a few different words to tell of being, or understanding, or abiding, or loving. The way of speaking sometimes does not even need verbs; there are more adjectives than adverbs.

The genius of the language is embodied in a flowing prose which is the purest poetry; words with the simplicity of a child. It does not have abruptly ending sentences, but rather slides somewhat like Hebrew; one thought gives form to the next. It has something like the feel of the prologue to John's account of the Gospel, or his first letter; it has something like the feel of a Gregorian chant; there is nothing abrupt in their speech or music. They speak, but even more, they are silent; there is a communion.

The understanding is one which sees beyond, which looks at the surface and sees into the depths. They stand dazzled by the glory of the starry vault, and worship the awesome Creator who called them into being; they look at a friend's face and see the person behind.

Their culture is a place of perfect order. It is ordered by things being placed rightly; by God worshiped by man, the spiritual ahead of the physical, being beyond doing.

It is of this that God is known in all of his majesty, that spirituality

becomes rich and profound, that there is a right state of being. This brings the lesser things to flourish. Men shine as they reflect the glory of God. That which is physical is enjoyed immensely — the warmth and softness of a friend's touch, the sweetness of a freshly picked orange, the fragrance of a garden of flowers, the sound of a bird's song, the colors of a sunset — all of these things are received gratefully. Being, they do; they tend the garden, and create.

The order flows from resting in the Spirit and from love; there is no one who thinks of order. The truthfulness knows nothing of oaths; the order knows nothing of rules, nor even of honor and morality.

The culture is best understood, not by looking at men, but by looking at God. God gives generously, and they receive and rest in his love.

There are many people in modern society who, when waiting in an office or at a traffic light, become agitated and begin to fidget; they are hollowed out by an excess of doing. The Shal are innocent of such hurry. They act, but it is a doing which flows from being.

Food, wine, music, incense, touch, silence, storytelling, dance, drama, puppetry — it is not often that they all get together to have a celebration (they prize greatly time spent alone with one person, and then extended families and tightly knit communities).

Shal culture does not exactly have greetings as such; their way of thought works differently.

To say 'hello' or 'goodbye' is an action of an instant, in two senses. In one sense, it lasts for an instant; no one says 'hello' twenty times or shakes hands for five minutes. In the other sense, it marks an instant, the instant where absence becomes presence or presence becomes absence.

The Shal do not really think in terms of instants; time is measured and perceived — or, rather, not measured and not perceived — by moments. A friend is present, and he is enjoyed, and then he is absent, and then there is solitude. In the place of a greeting, the Shal have a presence. With the Shal, you never get the feeling that you are alone and there is another person nearby who is also alone; you never get the

there is another person nearby who is also alone, you never get the feeling that there is a close group of friends nearby and they are inside and you are outside. If a Shal is nearby, he is present; indeed, the Shal have a very present touch.

Life, to the Shal, is full of moments. There is a meal with friends, and then there is reflection in solitude, and then there is a beautiful song, and then there is time with a friend, and then there is prayer, and then there is sleep, and then there is work tending to the trees... There is not interruption or haste; a moment lasts as long as it is appropriate for a moment to last.

Their moments of community are profound; their moments of solitude are even more profound. 'Withdrawing' is what they call it; it is a time of stillness, and an expression of a love so profound that all other loves appear to be hate. It is a time of finding a secret place, and then withdrawing — from family, friends, and loved ones, from music and the beauty of nature, from cherished activities, from sensation — into the heart of the Father. It is a time of — it is hard to say what. Of being loved, and of loving. Of growing still, and becoming. Of being set in a right state, and realigned in accordance with the ultimate reality. Of purity from the Origin. Of being made who one is to be. Of communion and worship. Of imago dei filled with the light of Deus. Of being pulled out of time and knowing something of the Eternal.

This withdrawing fills them with an abundant love for other people, and gives them a renewed appreciation for nature and music; it fills them with silence, and fills their words and song.

Their perception of the world is quintessentially tactile. Sight, hearing, and smell all work at a distance; touch perceives what is immediately present. The eyes, ears, nose, and tongue are all organs of sense at one place on the body — more sensitive in some places and less in others, to be sure — and feels all of what is immediately present. Touch provides the physical side of the presence which is so greatly valued.

The emotional side of the culture is filled by peace, in which is embedded joy and contentment. It does not change very much or very quickly — though it encompasses affection, or appreciation of beauty, or a

special serenity, or absorption in thought.

Their appearances have the peculiar property of not seeming to be any particular age. If you look, age is not very difficult to judge, but somehow the thought doesn't come up. They have a rounded shape, soft eyes, and warm, soft skin.

Shal worship services are different from the others. They are characterized, not by the presence of words, but by the presence of a profound and penetrating silence where God is imminent. There are a few words, but they are not where the essence lies.

The Shal homeland is named 'Liss'.

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# Janra

The Janra, unlike any of the other cultures, have no homeland; they voyage among the other lands, where they are generally well-liked and warmly received. Their wayfaring is at once literal and symbolic: literal in the sense that they know that they are passing through this earthly country for a better one. They enjoy all of the lands that they visit — they have an informal character, and always seem to be at home — but they know that none of them is really home.

It must be said that they know how to move. They can walk, skip, and run, of course, but that is only the beginning. Trees, buildings, and cliffs are climbed like ladders. Come oceans, rivers, and lakes, they will happily swim. Be it lightly skipping atop a thin wall, or jumping out of a window to grab a tree branch and swing down, or running at top speed through the twisty passages of the Southern mines and caves, they make acrobatics seem another form of walking. Somehow, even flipping through a window or somersaulting under a table, they have an extraordinary knack for barely missing collisions with hard objects; the Urvanovestilli are still debating whether this is the result of skill or luck.

The dances of the Urvanovestilli have a marvelous complexity, and those of the Yedidia are known for their flowing grace, but there is still nothing like the spinning energy of the Janra. The Janra are very adaptable, pulling bits and pieces from other cultures and setting them together in vital new combinations. In some of the dances can be seen bits and pieces — moves of strength that look like Tuz wrestling, or complexity from the Urvanovestilli — and the result is nothing short of breathtaking.

In their adaptability, they usually speak at least a few words of each language, and usually borrow whatever form of greeting is common in the land they are visiting. They are familiar with the household objects (often enough to use them in new ways). This, combined with a flair for practical jokes, is occasionally enough to annoy the town guards, but (more often than not) their antics leave people laughing, sometimes to the point of tears

the point of tears.

The Janra have a remarkable talent for not remaking God in their image. Their description of Jesus is anything but boring and respectable — a firebrand with a phenomenal knack for offending religious leaders, in the habit of telling respectable pillars of society things such as, "The prostitutes and tax collectors are entering the Kingdom of Heaven ahead of you." — and they are known for an honesty that can be singularly blunt. They know that he passed over scribes and lawyers to call, as disciples, a motley crew of fishermen, tax collectors, and other peasants — one terrorist thrown in to make matters interesting. They are, however, just as cautious not to water him into only being a social reformer who had nothing to say about sexual purity.

For all of their sharpness, for all of their ability to bring forth the most embarrassing Scriptural teaching at the worst possible moment, it must also be said that the Janra have hearts of pure gold. Love and compassion are constantly in their thought and action; they are the first to share their food with a beggar, say hello to the person who is alone, or ask, "Are you hurting?" The accusations brought against them are accusations of having too many quirks, not of being unloving.

Their language is of a force that is not easily translated into writing; of course it has nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, etc. and respects masculine and feminine, but intonation, speed, vocal tension, and other factors tell at least as much; they carry connotation and sentiment, express the level of clarity of understanding the speaker believes he has, and many more things. There are also a number of verbal tics, on the order of two or three dozen ('Eh?' is, however, not included, and apparently perceived to be a mark of general silliness); in a sense, they don't do anything, but in a sense, they add a very nice pepper to the speech.

Janra thought involves a kind of sideways logic, which is part of why their ways of speaking are difficult to describe. They take little bits and pieces from different places, and put them together in unexpected ways, making connections that can be very surprising. They are very good at reading between the lines, and sometimes perceive things which were not intentionally meant to be communicated. Sometimes they borrow



manners of speech from other people — conversation, structured argument, metered verse, stories, parables, and so on — but their usual way of speaking has all sorts of sideways jumps and turns, with segues that can be rather odd, and often leaves gaps; these gaps are not a matter of sloppiness, but rather something like a joke or riddle where the hole is intentionally left to be filled in by the listener.

"When it comes to games, never try to understand the Janra mind."

-Oeildubeau, Urvanovestilli philosopher and anthropologist

It is known that Janra sports usually last for at least half an hour, involve a ball, two or more teams, running and acrobatics, and animated discussion. Beyond that, neither the Urvanovestilli's logic nor the Yedidia's intuition are able to make head or tail of them. In general, the teams appear to have unequal numbers of players; the players often switch teams in the course of play; teams are created and dissolved; the nature of the activities makes sudden and radical changes; there is no visible winning or losing. There are occasionally times in the course of play when some intelligible goal appears to be being approached... but then, all players seem to be approaching it in a rather erratic manner (when asked why he didn't do thus and such simple thing and achieve the approached goal by an inexperienced anthropologist, one of the Janra said, "Technically, that would work, but that would be a very boring way to do it," and then bolted back into play: the extent to which game play is comprehensible heightens its incomprehensibility). Late in life, Oeildubeau hinted at having suspicions that, if the Janra believe that they are being watched, they will spontaneously stop whatever sport they are playing, and instead begin a series of activities expressly designed to give any observer a headache.

Janra come in all shapes, sizes, and colors, showing bits and pieces of other races; they tend to be of moderate to tall height and a lithe build. Most are fairly light skinned (although a few are rather dark); a fair number of them have skin spotted with freckles. They have every imaginable color of hair (black, brown, blonde, grey, white, red, tweed, shaven head, etc). and eyes (brown, blue, hazel, grey, amber, purple, etc).

They wear loose clothing in a variety of colors, usually quite vivid; red, purple, and green are the most common of solid colors, and patches or stripes of some pattern or the whole rainbow appear not infrequently. Therefore, Al is a pud.

Their sensation of the world is primarily visual, and in a way patterned after their thought; visualizing and visual problem solving comes very naturally to them. They see, as well as beauty, a world to interact with, and parts to rearrange and make something new. Sound and touch serve largely to complement and extend visual image; taste and smell are enjoyed, but do not play a terribly large role. The other side of the coin (to problem solving) is observing and enjoying, which is also very much a part of culture.

Their emotional life has several sides. They carry with them, in their emotions, a little bit of every place and people they visit — the passion and control of the Urvanovestilli, the peace of the Shal, the festivities and music of the Yedidia, the respect of the Nor'krin, the enjoyment of exercise of the Tuz, the common factor of the Jec. Perhaps the most prominent side of all is laughter. Janra are immeasurably fond of banter and practical jokes, and have an uncanny knack for guessing who is ticklish. There is an element of what is carefree, spontaneous, and given to pure enjoyment of simple pleasures; there is also a large element of being immersed in sidethink, and they enjoy greatly the flash of insight when everything fits together. They are curious and enjoy discovery.

There is another side to this emotion which seems paradoxical, but fits perfectly. There is a difference between childlike and childish, and not a trace of childishness is to be found among them. They enter the Kingdom of Heaven as little children — in particular, like one little boy who stood up before crowds of thousands and asked, "Why is the Emperor naked?" Of all the skills people learn as a part of growing up, they know perhaps least of all closing their eyes and using intelligence as a tool to make oneself stupid. They are moved by what goes unnoticed, smiling at the beauty in a single blade of grass, and weeping at the death of a beggar who, homeless, friendless, handicapped and burned, explained that he was unable to drop a knife taped to his defunct hand for self-defense, but was still shot and killed outside of the White House by

men entrusted with the responsibility of protecting innocent life.

There are two things to said about Janra worship. The first is that they adapt and participate in whatever is the local manner of worship (as do traveling Urvanovestilli and other wayfarers) — in that regard, they make no distinction between themselves and the peoples that they visit. The second — and this does not stem from any perceived defect in the other forms of worship, but from who they are — is that they hold their own worship services.

These services do not occur at a fixed time and place (though they occur more frequently when Janra are on the road between different locations), but at random intervals and locations, spontaneously. Anyone and everyone is welcome, and children and sometimes adults of other races are usually present.

They are a warm and informal occasions, where anyone can take the lead, and a great many activities are recognized as worship; the Janra have a particularly strong emphasis on the priesthood of the believer and the sacredness of everyday life. People sit in a big circle, and people or groups of people come to the center to present or lead as they wish.

There is no canonical list of activities that are performed at these services, but the following are common.

\* Songs. The Janra sing their own songs (often improvised) or those of other peoples; those of the Yedidia are especially treasured. While singing, the people are sometimes still, sometimes swaying, sometimes clapping, and sometimes dancing with their arms.

\* Prayer. One person will lead a prayer, or people will pray popcorn style, or...

\* Sermons. A theologian or philosopher will preach a sermon.

\* Sharing. Someone will share an insight or experience from personal life.

\* Dance. The whole assembly will dance, sometimes in a long, snaking line.

\* A joke is told. The Janra are fond of laughter.

\* Drama. One of a few people will present a dramatic presentation, play, or skit.

\* ...

- ˆ Group hug, usually in whatever is the common greeting of the land.
  - \* Ticklefest. "Blessed are the ticklish, for the touch of a friend will fill them with laughter."
  - \* Silence. This is treasured.
  - \* Reading from the Scriptures.
  - \* Reading or recitation of poetry.
  - \* Storytelling.
  - \* Juggling and similar activities.
  - \* Acrobatics.
  - \* Instrumental music.
  - \* Non sequiturs.
  - \* Miming.
  - \* Mad libs.
  - \* Impressions and impersonations of various and sundry people.
  - \* Janra-ball. This occurs in a modified form such that members of other races, while still not understanding anything, are capable of participating. (Nobody gets a headache.)
  - \* Eucharist. This is the most solemn and important moment, and occurs exactly once in a service — at the end.
  - \* None of the above. This category is especially appreciated.
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### Janra character: Nimbus

Nimbus is fairly short and wiry; he has light, almost white blonde hair, deep, intense blue eyes which sparkle and blaze, and a rich, laughing smile. He wears a loose, shimmering two-legged robe of midnight blue, from the folds of which he seems to be able to procure innumerable items of Urvanovestilli make (for example: goggles (waterproof), telescope, silk rope and grappling hook with spring-loaded launcher, climbing/rapelling harness and gear/self-contained, spring-loaded belay), lantern, tool kit (large blade, precision blade, compass, wire saw, corkscrew, ruler, reamer, chisel, pliers, scissors, needle, punch, protractor, file, and sharpening stone), paper pad, mechanical pencil, supply kit (string, pencil lead, chalk, flask of oil, wire, miscellaneous device components (gears, springs, shafts, etc.), cloth), meal kit, tinderbox, mechanical puzzle, mirror, whistle...).

During childhood, he spent a lot of time in the land of the Urvanovestilli, and began to take an interest in tinkering. He has very much his own way of tinkering, from an Urvanovestilli perspective; he is fond of all manner of kludges. The resulting devices have caused his Urvanovestilli mentors to conclude that he is mad (the truth of the matter being that he is not mad, but produces and modifies contraptions in such a manner as to drive any honest Urvanovestilli tinkerer mad). When the city unveiled a new fountain in the public square, he added a pyrotechnic spark; when, in a public ceremony, the mayor celebrated his wife's birthday by presenting a specially commissioned music box, the tune somehow changed from "Happy birthday to you" to "The old grey mare ain't what she used to be."

He does, however, possess a sense of what is and is not appropriate; his practical jokes never take on a mean or spiteful character, and he does possess a strong degree of contrainte. He does appreciate the variety of cultures he visits, and enjoys Urvanovestilli philosophical and theological discussions.

He is, in short, as Janra as any — left-handed and colorful, warm and compassionate, and a heart of solid gold.

A quote: "What? You think I would do something like that? I'm hurt." (generally accompanied by a wide grin)

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# All

"Not all flesh is the same: men have one kind of flesh, and beasts have another kind of flesh, fish have another, and birds another still. There are also celestial bodies, and terrestrial bodies; the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. The sun has one glory, and the moon another, and the stars still another; star differs from star in glory."

I Cor. 15:39-41

"God does not create two blades of grass alike, let alone two saints, two angels, or two nations."

C.S. Lewis, That Hideous Strength

This world is an exploration of good, a set of musings about cultures not fallen. The variety of cultures exists because of the nature of good.\*

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all tell the same Gospel, the same message of Jesus Christ, Son of God and Son of Man, crucified for the forgiveness of sins and raised from the dead.

They each, however, present this one Gospel with a distinct flavor; it is with a great deal of wisdom and respect for this one Gospel message that Christian tradition has vigorously resisted attempts to reduce the four books to one single, homogenized account. Matthew emphasizes the Kingdom of Heaven and peace; Mark emphasizes action; Luke provides a physician's account of healing and sensitivity towards the despised; John provides a poetic and mystical account of love and intimacy. It is to faithfully represent this one Gospel that the Spirit inspired the writing of multiple accounts.

Faithfulness to a God of color and vibrancy means anything but a dull, monotonous cookie cut-out series of identical believers; just as a person is most faithfully represented, not by multiple copies of one photograph, but by many different photographs from many different

angles, so images of God may faithfully reflect him by being different from each other.

This is why there are different cultures, each with its own emphasis on philosophy and way of life. (Within these cultures, though I have far from described them, should be many different sub-cultures, communities, and individuals. There is a masculine and a feminine side to each culture — or, more properly, each culture recognizes the importance of men who are masculine and women who are feminine). The differences, however, are differences of emphasis, just as the previous analogy spoke of different photographs for the sake of faithfully representing one entity.

It is in this same substance that people of other cultures look at each other and immediately see human beings; the differences are a source of heightened enjoyment between brothers and sisters. It is in this same substance that they love God with their whole being, and love their neighbors as themselves. That there is one God, the Father, the Almighty, Maker of Heaven and earth, of all that is, visible and invisible, that God is holy, possessing all authority and all wisdom, that there is one Lord, Jesus Christ, God from God, Light from Light, Love from Love, the Word made flesh, perfect God and perfect man, crucified for the forgiveness of sins and raised from the dead to be the eldest of many brothers and sisters, that there is the Holy Spirit, a fire of love and energy shooting between the Father and the Son, the new structure of obedience, that the fear of the Eternal is the beginning of wisdom, that God created the sky, the earth, the seas, the plants, the animals, and saw that it was good, and then created man in his image, and saw that it was very good, that the order of the universe is spiritual as well as physical, that God loves man and has given him the Law of Love, that man has as facets cultas and culturas, individual and community, that he created them male and female, faith, hope, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, self-control — things such as these are the reality unequivocally confirmed by all men. Cultural differences provide richness and variety that enhances understanding between brothers and sisters who love one another.

When a character is developed, with a cultural and personal flavor,

do not overlook that which is to be common across all cultures and people, the same identity which holds culture and personal uniqueness.

One brief note, in the interest of clarity to avoid unnecessarily offending people: I am a white, male American who has lived in South-East Asia and Western Europe. I find cultures to be objects of great beauty, but make no pretense to be well-versed in all of them, nor to have included each of them in this world. The absence of some cultures is not meant as a statement of "My culture exists because of Creation and your culture exists because of the Fall;" I tried to envision a world not fallen, and began to create it with a background that certainly includes my theological knowledge, but also includes my cultural background and my own personality. If some members of other cultures would like to make a similar creation based on their knowledge, go for it; if you send it to me, I'll enjoy reading it. I have not, however, myself gone out of my way to include other cultures; I am not ashamed of this. I am grateful to God for the personal and cultural fingerprints that I have left on this creation, and hope that other people, other images of God to whom it is given a slightly different manner of reflecting God's glory, have been able to read it in an atmosphere of mutual respect.

\* Careful readers will have noticed some things — ergo, meat eating, rebuke, the Cross (a symbol of redemption from sin), which do not correspond to Eden. The cultures exist, not always as what sinless cultures might have been in Eden, but sometimes what sinless Christian culture might be today, were such a thing possible. To state some things more precisely: it is a world in which physical evil exists, but not moral evil. I would request that the reader overlook the indirect marks of sin, as the cultures were designed around other concerns primarily.