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## **TALES FROM THE AKARKINAD: a mythology**

### **#01 AN ELEVATOR RIDE**

“Let us go to a financial consultant,” said Mutt-Bly Akarkin. He was not in his dog shape.

“Why do you wish to do that?” said Bee-Elka. She was in neither her bee shape nor her elk shape. She was surprised that Mutt-Bly had ever heard of financial consultants.

“I wish to find out if I have money and why,” said Mutt-Bly.

“It is hard to imagine that this will be a useful trip,” said Bee-Elka.

“It does seem borderline,” said Galactic Jack the newspaper reporter. He was in his Galactic Jack shape, the only shape he had.

But Mutt-Bly was determined to go to the consultant. So Bee-Elka and Galactic Jack went with him.

They got into an elevator on the ground floor of the building in New York where the financial consultant had his office. Although the elevator was crowded, they were able to squeeze in, by making themselves sandwich-thin.

Mutt-Bly pushed the button marked “5”, because the financial consultant was on the fifth floor. But the elevator went past the fifth floor without stopping. It didn’t stop until it reached the 23rd floor, where some people got out and others came in.

Again Mutt-Bly pushed the button marked “5”. But the elevator went directly down to parking level E. People got out and people got in.

“Will this go on forever?” said Bee-Elka.

Although Mutt-Bly kept pushing the button marked 5, the elevator kept going to other places, such as floor 101, floor 2, and a maintenance basement.

Finally Bee-Elka became impatient and transported the entire elevator and all the people (including Mutt-Bly, Galactic Jack, and herself) to a south sea island in the 1920s.

“Bee-Elka,” said Galactic Jack, as everybody got out of the elevator and onto the south sea island in the 1920s, “all of these people wanted to go to places in that building. And some of them were probably trying to leave the building to go home.”

“It is okay,” said Bee-Elka. “They will like it here. Magazines say that south sea islands in the 1920s are pleasant.”

“Yes,” said Mutt-Bly, looking around. “It seems to be pleasant here.”

“What about your visit to the financial consultant?” said Galactic Jack.

“That does not matter,” said Mutt-Bly.

“Yes,” said Galactic Jack. “I believe you’re right about that. However--about south sea islands in the 1920s--you can’t believe everything you read in a magazine.” As a member of the press, he was somewhat skeptical when it came to that sort of thing. But Mutt-Bly and Bee-Elka were already going with the other elevator passengers to walk along the beach. So Jack went with

them.

Jack was thinking that this event would be a good news item for his newspaper--if only he worked for a newspaper. Since he did not work for a newspaper, there was nothing much he could do. Too bad. It was hard being a newspaper reporter without a newspaper. It often made him pensive.

He made the most of the experience anyway. For an hour he walked along the shore with Mutt-Bly, Bee-Elka, and all the elevator people, looking at the beach and the sea.

Then Mutt-Bly, Bee-Elka, and Galactic Jack came upon a staircase cut into the coral. The three of them took the staircase upward, which brought them back to New York City in the 21st century. From there they went into the Adirondacks.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Adirondack Mountain range in New York state. Highest peak: Mount Marcy, 5344 ft (1629 m).

## #02 BEE-ELKA PAINTS A PICTURE

Bee-Elka often goes into wilderness places alone to paint pictures. Once, as she was walking through the autumn woods to look for a scene to paint, she was attacked by three assailant chaps. They thought she was an incidental damsel and that she would make a good damsel in distress.

Not wanting to be a damsel in distress, Bee-Elka turned them immediately into stone--but only for a thousand years.

The assailant chaps looked so interesting as stone figures that Bee-Elka stayed there, sitting on a fallen tree trunk, and started to paint their images on her canvas. But she was drowsy and fell asleep. When she awoke, she found that leaves had fallen onto her painting and had stuck to the paint. She decided to leave it that way, and named it *Leaf Montage with Three Geologic Beings*.

“Why did you not vaporize them?” asked Bellatop, a mountain goddess, who happened to come along just as Bee-Elka was leaving.

“I don’t do that,” said Bee-Elka. “It is not in my artistic temperament.”

It is probably because of this episode that there are passages in the *Bokotrack* (Book of Traces) suggesting that Bee-Elka routinely turns people to stone. “That is absurd,” says Bee-Elka.

The painting itself went, by some unknown path, to being a wall decoration in a dentist’s waiting room. It is there now. Its title is *Personified Teeth in an Autumn Thicket*.

As to the assailant chaps, after their millennium in stone, they will become a remorseful earl, a cheerful baker, and a mendicant monk--and will treat everyone very nicely--perhaps based on the old adage: *you never know who might turn out to be a deity or such.*

### #03 THE BOKOTRACK

While most of the tales presented here are based on the *Akarkinad*, there also exists the *Bokotrack*, sometimes referred to as *The Book of Traces*. It is only in the *Bokotrack* that various deities and persons of the mythos appear explicitly in animal form. It is true that the *Akarkinad* touches on these forms--but it does so negatively and obliquely. The *Bokotrack* shows no such restraint.

Most mythologists regard the *Bokotrack* as an oddity, an apocryphal work not to be taken too seriously. (The mythologist Panicault is an exception to this.) And it certainly is a convoluted and chaotic labyrinth of rituals, lists, and occult procedures.

To illustrate the nature of the *Bokotrack*, consider its recipe for recognizing Z’Nux, the librarian friend of Mutt-Bly Akarkin. The following passage comes directly from the *Bokotrack*.

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Of course, the place to look for Z’Nux is in a library, and any public library with a reference desk will do.

Once you have selected a library, how do you look for Z’Nux? What are his attributes? He is known to assume various forms--appearing as human, as a heron or other wading bird, or as a dot.

It is also written that Z’Nux appears in the form of “a nimble troll dodging among the book stacks.” He does this so that he won’t be seen by the other



librarians, who do not know that he works in the library. If that is his mode in the library you have chosen, you will not be able to see him. In that case, you should go to a different library or wait for a different day.

However, Z’Nux is an intellectual being. So, despite his tendency toward disguise, he has an overwhelming urge to man the reference desk, in order to track down esoteric subjects for inquiring visitors.

To determine whether a male librarian behind the reference desk is Z’Nux, you must proceed cleverly.

It would not do to directly ask, “Are you Z’Nux?” Whether or not he is Z’Nux, his answer will likely be along the lines of “Are you crazy?”

No, you must use subtlety and speed.

As an example of a good approach, you can go to the desk and suddenly, loudly, and forcefully say, “Z’Nux!” The intent here is to catch him unaware.

If he is not Z’Nux, he may think your outcry was a sneeze. He is apt to say, “God bless you.”

If he is Z’Nux, he will know exactly what you are doing. In order to fool you, he also will say, “God bless you.”

The difference will be a matter of timing. If the person behind the desk is not Z’Nux, the blessing will be immediate. If he is Z’Nux, he will first think that you have identified him. Then it will occur to him that you are merely testing. Next he will realize that your utterance sounded like a sneeze. After that, he must consider what the response of some non-Z’Nuxian librarian

would be. Only then will he say, “God bless you.”

The delay involved should be about three seconds. So if the benediction occurs three seconds after your outcry, you have found Z’Nux.

If you prefer a non-verbal approach, draw a dark dot on a small blank card. When you arrive at the reference desk, suddenly whip out the card, slap it down on the desk, and (using left and right forefingers) point to the dot and the librarian at the same time, implying that they are one and the same. Most librarians will look puzzled. If the librarian is Z’Nux, he will look angry for one second before assuming a puzzled look.

On the other hand, you may prefer to work outside. Then go among long-legged wading birds, and run toward them shouting, “Go back to the library.”

If they don’t all fly away at the same time, the last one to go will be Z’Nux. Again expect a three-second delay. He has to figure out the direction to the library--and then fly opposite to that.

## #04 DINNER IN AGRAMYD

Mutt-Bly Akarkin and some of his friends decided to go to an upscale restaurant in downtown Agramyd.<sup>2</sup> The name of the restaurant was *Old Agramyd*. “We will go to dine there,” said Mutt-Bly.

“Yes,” said Bee-Elka. “That is what one usually does in a restaurant.”

So they set out for *Old Agramyd*. But downtown Agramyd had become so complex with new buildings, new bridges, and so forth, that they could not find the restaurant.

“We do not seem to be having much luck in finding it,” said Galactic Jack.

“That is true,” said Mutt-Bly. “We are not in that restaurant.”

“Oh, I am sure we will find it,” said Pingrille, a Mutt-Bly groupie. She looked in her hand mirror and added some blue eye shadow to the places where blue eye shadow goes. “How could we not find it?”

“I could think of a few ways,” said Bee-Elka.

They did not find it.

“Too bad,” said Galactic Jack, “that this isn’t the Agramyd of ten or twenty years ago, when things were simpler and less built up. Then we would find *Old Agramyd* easily.”

“You are right,” said Mutt-Bly. “We must go back in time. We will go to *Old Agramyd* 20 years ago.”

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<sup>2</sup> The latest name of a city whose name is forever slightly changing. It changes spontaneously, by itself. Except for some minor problems in mail delivery and tax collection, this process appears to be seamless.

“That will undoubtedly put some kinks in our dinner reservation,” said Bee-Elka.

“Wait!” said Galactic Jack, who found these time changes to be unsettling. But Mutt-Bly had already started the time change.

So there they were in the past. Looking about, they saw no streets or buildings at all. Instead, they saw large reptiles walking around.

“What are those large reptiles?” said Galactic Jack.

“Those are dinosaurs,” said Bee-Elka. “We have somewhat overshot our target.”

“Yes,” said Z’Nux the librarian, who was not in his shorebird shape. “We have gone a few hundred million years into the past.”

“I will make a correction,” said Mutt-Bly.

“Wait!” said Galactic Jack. But then, having just missed being snapped up in the jaws of an allosaurus, he did not regret going forward in time with the others.

“We did not come quite far enough,” said Z’Nux, peering left and right, looking around at the streets and buildings of Agramyd-past. “We are now in a time before they built the restaurant known as *Old Agramyd*. We cannot dine here unless we wait for them to build the restaurant.”

“And heat some soup,” added Bee-Elka.

“We must start to build the restaurant ourselves,” said Mutt-Bly. “As soon as it is built, we will be the first customers and we will not need

reservations.”

“Oh, what a wonderful idea!” said Pingrille, putting her mirror back in her purse.

“Miss Wisdom speaks again,” said Bee-Elka.

“Are there enough of us to build this restaurant in time for dinner?” said Galactic Jack.

“No,” said Mutt-Bly. “But if we start to build, workers will come and join us.”

So they started to build the restaurant.

However, when workers came to join them, those workers began to tear the restaurant down. As fast as Mutt-Bly and his friends built the restaurant, the workers tore it down.

Z’Nux rubbed his nose briefly against a telephone pole, which helped him to think. “I see what is happening,” he said. “Two time levels are now overlapped. The workers who are tearing it down are from a future time when the restaurant is very old and that is supposed to happen. As to us--we are in a past time when it was first being built. Now both are happening at the same time.”

“Yes,” said Galactic Jack. “As fast as we build it up, they tear it down. It’s hard to tell whether the restaurant is coming or going. This is making me giddy. I would have been better off if I’d taken my chances with the allosaurus.”

“Oh, what shall we do?” cried Pingrille.

“Let us go up the space-time road to Sam’s Roadside Cafe,” said Mutt-Bly.

“We can get chop suey there.”

So they all went up the space-time road to Sam’s Roadside Cafe where they ate chop suey. They liked it.

## #05 OLD MCGINITY'S BIRTHDAY

Mutt-Bly Akarkin came swooping in on a wave. That was because he liked to swim. After he washed up onto the beach, he went to sit on a blanket, along with several of his friends. He was not in his dog shape.

“We are late for Old McGinity’s birthday celebration,” called out Pingrille, running bouncily along the sand. She came to a halt next to the blankets and towels, a little out of breath.

“What Old McGinity?” said Mutt-Bly.

Z’Nux, who was sitting on a blanket, said, “Do you not remember? It is the strategist McGinity, who gives advice to war gamers and such.”

“Oh,” said Mutt-Bly. “*That* Old McGinity.”

“In contrast to all other Old McGinitys,” remarked Bee-Elka, who was lying on her belly on the sand.

“What birthday is it, of that Old McGinity?” asked Mutt-Bly.

“It is his 64th,” said Z’Nux. “It is always his 64th. The deities and such who get strategies from him keep him at 64. That is how they pay him. They keep him at 64, so he can be both a perfect square and a perfect cube. That could not happen again until McGinity turned 729. I know because I looked it up in my library.”

“We will send that Old McGinity a birthday card,” said Mutt-Bly.

“Oh, that Old McGinity will be so thrilled,” exclaimed Pingrille.

“Yeah, right,” said Bee-Elka.

Mutt-Bly Akarkin did not leave the beach. Instead he sent J. April Messenger with a birthday card to Old McGinity. The card said “happy 64th.”

“But, Mutt-Bly,” said Z’Nux, “J. April Messenger never delivers her messages. While it is true that delivering messages is her job, she does not remember to deliver them. J. April goes off and has wanderings and adventures and so forth.”

“True, true,” said Mutt-Bly. “I did not remember that. So I am sending Mitkus to wish Old McGinity a happy birthday.” And so he sent Mitkus, a being who called everybody *Mitkus*.

“But, Mutt-Bly,” said Z’Nux. “Mitkus will probably go to the wrong house.”

“That is true,” said Mutt-Bly. “What do we do now?”

“I will catch up with Mitkus and show him where to go,” said Bee-Elka, standing up and brushing sand off her belly. “I am going in that direction anyway.”

So Bee-Elka left. She found Mitkus in McGinity’s neighborhood. She pointed out McGinity’s house to him.

Mitkus knocked on McGinity’s door.

McGinity opened the door and looked. He saw Mitkus.

“Happy birthday, Mitkus,” said Mitkus.

“I am not Mitkus,” said McGinity.



“Too bad, Mitkus,” said Mitkus. And he went away.

Bee-Elka, who was still there, spoke to McGinity. She said, “Mutt-Bly and the rest of us sent you a birthday greeting.” She pointed to Mitkus, who was just going around the bend of the road. “That was it,” she said.

“I figured as much,” said McGinity, starting to work on a rusty old truck in his yard. Then he paused and looked at Bee-Elka. “Haven’t we been through this before?”

“Yes, we have,” said Bee-Elka.

“How many times?”

“Infinite,” said Bee-Elka.

“That’s what I thought.”

## #06 THE MUTATING HOUSE

Who does not know of O'Shallard, the god of enclosed spaces? Surely he is known to all and his name appears often in the *Akarkinad*. We are reminded of him whenever we look into a clean, empty jar or walk into a room or think about the interior of a vacated sea shell.

O'Shallard once had a house. Is this not the essence of my art form? thought O'Shallard. This house has rooms and a garage. These are enclosed spaces. These are my proper domain.

Just as he was sitting in a comfortable armchair, thinking these thoughts, there came a knocking at the door. O'Shallard opened the door and said, "Who are you?"

The fellow who was standing there said, "Hello. I am Skein, the Great Guest."

"Well, I don't think I've heard of you," said O'Shallard.

Skein told O'Shallard about some of the notable places where he had been a guest, along with his various dogs, wives, drums, and miscellaneous baggage. "But, for the moment, I am alone," he said. "I am just looking for a place to park my broken car. May I park it in your garage for a few days?"

Hmm, thought O'Shallard, this sounds like a good thing. A car contains enclosed spaces--and, by having this guy's car inside my garage, I will have an enclosed space inside an enclosed space. So he said, "Yes."

Then a chap came in a tow truck and towed Skein's broken car into

O'Shallard's garage.

O'Shallard enjoyed the first few days of the car, frequently visiting his garage to view the container within the container. Skein was nowhere to be seen--but he had predicted "a few days," so that didn't seem surprising.

However, after 400 days, O'Shallard began to suspect that the Great Guest had no intention whatever of coming back for the car. This was irksome, because O'Shallard had thought of some other things he would like to do with that space. And since O'Shallard didn't own the car, he wouldn't call a wrecking company to have it taken away. (He was very proper about issues of ownership.)

Furthermore, various beings had begun to colonize the car. These included (but were not limited to) Rain Shapes, Umbrella Types, Welves, Tangentia, and Dancing Wingots. Since there wasn't room for all of them at once, these colonists were perpetually bumping each other out of the car, leaping into any vacant seat, and dropping stray bits of sandwiches on the upholstery.

By no means did O'Shallard like all this going on in his garage.

After much pondering, O'Shallard came up with a solution. He called Cousins of Zab Contractors, Inc. and asked them to add a few stories to his one-story house. His idea was that all that extra space would make the first floor garage unimportant. The Tangentia, Wingots, and all the rest could go ahead with their chaos, it would no longer matter to O'Shallard.

So he went on a vacation trip to Maui while the contractor did the work.

However, when O'Shallard came home, he found that the builders had made a serious mistake. Instead of having added a few stories, they had added an infinite number of stories. Furthermore, they had duplicated the garage and Skein's car on every one of these infinite levels, along with duplicate automobile registrations and feuding colonists.

He tried phoning the Cousins of Zab Contractors. He had no luck because he kept running through automated menus offering choices such as "wallpaper installation," "name your house," and "designate your favorite Cousin of Zab."

Finally he went to the offices of the Cousins of Zab. The receptionist listened to his complaint and then said, "It is okay, they are not floors in metric space. They are floors in number space, so your house will still look like a one-story house when seen from the outside."

"But that doesn't help me," said O'Shallard.

"Next customer, please," said the receptionist.

At that point, O'Shallard decided to make the best of the situation. With an infinite number of stories (and therefore an infinite number of rooms) he decided to call his house a hotel.

Business was very good from the start. All the rooms quickly filled up with guests. Having an infinite number of guests boded well for profits.

A while later, with all rooms still filled, another infinite wave of guests arrived, clamoring for space. No problem. Having talked with a consultant

named Hilbert, O'Shallard had every existing guest change to a room that was double that guest's original room number--so that the guests who were in room 1 went to room 2, the guests who were in room 2 went to room 4, the guests who were in room 3 went to room 6, and so forth. This left all odd-numbered rooms empty, and since there was an infinite number of those, the new wave of guests was easily accommodated.

And, O'Shallard reflected, I can do the same thing again if I need to.

But there was something that neither O'Shallard nor Hilbert had taken into account. While the income from renting all these rooms was larger than any price you could name, so were the costs, including utilities, maids, bellhops, and general maintenance. The result was that, after one week of operation, O'Shallard's total profit was \$5.50.

"That does it," said O'Shallard.

So he stopped making his house payments and went to the Bahamas, where he listened to the waves on the shore by day, and listened to his girlfriend, Ummari, goddess of owls, who sang songs for him by night. And O'Shallard was very pleased.

## #07 MIST

Galactic Jack was in the U. K. to attend a press conference with Queen Elizabeth. He was a little uncertain about a few things--for instance, was this Elizabeth I or Elizabeth II? Also, being unaffiliated, where could he file his story?

To make matters worse, on his way to the conference, he got lost on the sidewalks of London in a thick mist. He would have liked to ask someone which way to go, but he could not see anyone in the mist. Then he did see someone nearby; he had an impression of round, wondering eyes, reminiscent of the eyes of a tarsier. Then he recognized the being known as "Mitkus."

"I do not know which way to go in this mist," said Galactic Jack.

"I do not know either, Mitkus," said Mitkus.

"Then we are both lost," said Galactic Jack.

"It does not matter, Mitkus," said Mitkus.

Jack was about to argue this point, but Mitkus was gone. He seemed to have drifted away through the mist.

Jack eventually found his way to his hotel room, mainly by wandering about randomly until the mist lifted. Unfortunately, he had missed the conference with Elizabeth I or Elizabeth II. However, he reasoned, these things happen. Life is not perfect.

The next day was quite clear and he happened to see Mitkus coming along

a walkway near the Thames. “So you think being lost in the mist doesn’t matter,” Jack said to Mitkus.

“It matters, Mitkus,” said Mitkus.

Jack would have continued the conversation, but Mitkus had already left.

Later Jack met Bee-Elka walking through a meadow in Wyoming. He told her about his meetings with Mitkus. He said to Bee-Elka, “Why did Mitkus say that being lost in the mist didn’t matter--then later say that it did matter?”

“The Mitkus of one moment is not the Mitkus of another,” said Bee-Elka.

At that moment, Galactic Jack was enlightened.

## #08 BOTT'S ABSTRACT NET

Z'Nux came to visit Mutt-Bly, where Mutt-Bly was relaxing on a flat boulder by the sea. Mutt-Bly was not in his dog shape. Z'Nux was not in his shorebird shape.

Z'Nux had come for a reason. He wanted to reminisce about all the times they'd been caught in the net of Bott, the fifth son of Rulfus. Besides, he had something new to tell Mutt-Bly. "I have been doing some library research at my library," said Z'Nux. "Bott the fifth son of Rulfus's net is not made of cord. I have learned that it is an abstract net--which Bott does not know. That is, he does not know that his net is abstract."

"But I remember cords," said Mutt-Bly, thinking of times when they were inside the net--and of all the clever ways they had managed to escape.

"They only seemed to be cords."

"I do not understand that," said Mutt-Bly. "What do the other librarians think?"

"The other librarians do not know that I work in the library," said Z'Nux. "They have never heard of a librarian named Z'Nux."

"True," said Mutt-Bly. "I forgot that."

"I suspect," said Z'Nux, "that the net is much smarter than Bott--which, of course, does not take much. Bott is probably just a servant of the net."

This was too complicated for Mutt-Bly, who merely went on to say, "We must tell Bott that his net is abstract. That will bother him and maybe he will



stop catching us.”

So Z’Nux & Mutt-Bly walked along the seashore until they found Bott’s cavern, which was at a primeval level. They yelled into the cavern. “Oh, Bott, Son of Rulfus, of the seed of Ralfas!” Then they yelled, “Your net is abstract. Ha, ha, ha!”

A polite male voice came echoing back, out of the depths of the cavern. “This is Mr. Bott’s assistant,” called the polite male voice. “Mr. Bott is entertaining guests. Please call another time.”

*Mr. Bott?* thought Z’Nux. *Mister?* And, he thought, Bott shouldn’t have an assistant or be entertaining guests. Bott should be gnawing on a bone.

“What guests?” called Mutt-Bly into the cavern.

“Mutt-Bly Akarkin and Z’Nux the librarian,” called the polite voice.

“But that’s us,” said Mutt-Bly.

“Aha! I am the abstract net,” said the voice. “You have been caught.”

“How do we get out?” said Mutt-Bly.

“By forgetting this,” said the abstract net. “But you cannot forget it.”

However, Mutt-Bly and Z’Nux were very good at forgetting. So they forgot the whole thing immediately. “What are we doing on this stretch of coast, Mutt-Bly?” asked Z’Nux. He rubbed his nose briefly against a wharf piling.

“I do not know,” said Mutt-Bly. “But I see some footsteps that look like ours. Let us retrace them.”

So they retraced their footsteps back to the flat rock where Mutt-Bly had been relaxing.

“Mutt-Bly,” said Z’Nux, “I have come to reminisce about some of the times we were caught in Bott’s net.”

“Yes, let us do that,” said Mutt-Bly, as he sat down on the rock.

“Remember the time,” said Z’Nux, sitting beside Mutt-Bly, “when we were on our way to the theater to see a movie, and Bott caught us in his net. You, me, Bee-Elka, and a few others.”

“No, I do not remember that,” said Mutt-Bly.

“Surely, you must. It was your idea to go to the movie anyway and take the net with us--watch the movie through the net. Of course, we had to drag Bott with us, because he was holding onto the net. And Bee-Elka was irked because she had to listen to Bott laughing and sobbing all through the movie.”

“Oh, yes,” said Mutt-Bly, “I remember that now.”

Then they both reminisced about other long ago times when they were caught in Bott’s net and how they got out. But there were no recent times that they could think of.

Finally it got to be time for Z’Nux to go back to work at the library. So he went there and started sorting books on a shelf deep in the stacks. One of the other librarians almost glimpsed him, but then she thought it was just a flicker of light or shade.

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The fact is that Bott is well known to be a dual being. That is, on the one hand, he is among the most primitive sons of Rulfus--while, on the other, he functions in a civilized style, apparently taking an interest in marine biology. According to the mythologist Panicault, Bott also owns a bookstore, although other authorities, such as Schmidt, Braden, Jones, and Roustinkamp, consider this unlikely.

All in all, there are good grounds for thinking that Bott manifests as two distinct beings. The apocryphal legend of Olin Beer illustrates the lower half of this.

Olin Beer was said to be a philanthropist who was particularly receptive to the more primitive beings in the mythos. He invited Bott to come to his home as a house guest. When Bott stepped into Beer's house, it seemed to the host that this guest looked weary and bedraggled, evidently from an afternoon of unsuccessful netting attempts. So Beer invited Bott to "take a shower."

Bott went down the hall to the bathroom. A short time later, Beer heard a ripping, clattering sound. When he went to see what had happened, he found that the entire west wall of the bathroom had been shattered. Looking out through the opening where the wall used to be, he saw Bott walking down the road carrying the shower stall.

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The Sons of Rulfus are illustrative of a property that pervades this mythos:

the variable sizes of its beings. Sons of Rulfus are sometimes, by implication, gigantic; in other situations they are comparable in size to Mutt-Bly and his associates. Other beings in the mythos show a similar elasticity.

Nor should we neglect to mention Dr. Waterfinger, M.D., of sub-midget dimensions, able (we are told) to curl up and sleep in a four-liter (~ one gallon) vessel. However, the amiable little doctor happens to be co-identical with The Great Hydrodactyl, a vast, multi-dimensional intelligence, capable of hovering over and eclipsing an entire city. This is documented in the *Akarkinad*.

## #09 MOTSOR

MOTSOR is the name of a social organization. It is an acronym for Mothers Of The Sons Of Rulfus, and it has a large membership. The main activity of MOTSOR members is telling scurrilous tales of Rulfus. The club never runs out of things to do, because there is no end of scurrilous tales of Rulfus.

They also drink tea and eat sandwiches.

## #10 DUALITIES (FROM THE *BOKOTRACK*)

It is exceedingly rare for any mythic being to become two animals simultaneously. Yet, instances of this are cited.

Sometimes Bee-Elka becomes unusually irked at herself for some mistake--such as buying a swimsuit that she later decides she does not like, just after the store has gone out of business and the building that housed it has been razed. At such times, she turns into an elk and a bee simultaneously and stings herself in the butt.

As to Mutt-Bly Akarkin, it is well known that he becomes a dog loping along a beach with a slightly sideways orientation. If you happen to see *two* dogs doing this at the same time, then one of them may be Mutt-Bly. More likely, *neither* of them is Mutt-Bly. Do not even consider the possibility that *both* of them are Mutt-Bly.

Nevertheless, in Mexico, in pre-Columbian times, Mutt-Bly posed for a Mayan sculptor as two dogs simultaneously. The result was the graceful little statue sometimes known as “The Fighting Dogs of Colima.”

If you find yourself in conversation with Mutt-Bly, do not say too much about this. He thought he was posing for a statue of “The *Dancing* Dogs of Colima,” and that is the way he wants it to be.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> In looking at the statue of the two dogs reared up, paw to paw, it is hard to know whether they are fighting or dancing. In fact, they are referred to by both titles. The pre-Columbian artist did not label this work.

## #11 UNCLE UMLAUT

Who is Uncle Umlaut?

He is the spokesperson for Umbrella Types.

Why, on a particular summer day, did hornets pursue Uncle Umlaut?

The hornets pursued Umlaut because a small boy knocked down their nest in a nearby field. The hornets blamed Uncle Umlaut, who happened to be passing by at the time.

How did Uncle Umlaut flee?

He ran for all he was worth, his long, black coattails flying behind him.

Where was Umlaut going when the hornet episode occurred?

He was on his way to visit Dr. Waterfinger.

Had Umlaut ever met Dr. Waterfinger before?

No.

Where was Dr. Waterfinger residing at the time that Uncle Umlaut set out to visit him?

He was residing temporarily on a shelf in a small curio shop.

Why was Dr. Waterfinger residing on that shelf?

Nobody knew, nobody knows, and probably nobody will ever know.

Why did Uncle Umlaut want to visit Dr. Waterfinger?

He hoped that the doctor would help him deal with two vexing problems.

Name the first vexing problem.

Rain Shapes. The Rain Shapes are liquid, transparent beings of human size and shape. They resent Umbrella Types because umbrellas deflect falling raindrops from their natural paths.

So?

So the Rain Shapes swirl in the air around Umbrella Types. They especially swirl around Uncle Umlaut.

How does Uncle Umlaut retaliate?

He retaliates by flailing at the Rain Shapes with his umbrella.

Name the second vexing problem.

Welves, believed by many to be part wolves, part elves. The Welves harass Umbrella Types by howling in their faces and nipping at their coattails--or by dancing in circles around them and tossing strange roots at them. This stems from border disputes along the fractured domains known as Welfland and Umbrella Land, whose borders are utterly vague.

How do Umbrella Types retaliate against the Welves?

They retaliate by using their umbrellas to bop Welves on their heads or butts.

What did Uncle Umlaut hope that Dr. Waterfinger might do?

He hoped that the good doctor would write a prescription that would ward off either the Rain Shapes or the Welves. One set of adversaries was okay. Two sets were too many.



How did Uncle Umlaut know where to find Dr. Waterfinger?

He got a tip from Eileen the Umbrella Type<sup>4</sup>, who worked part-time in the curio shop.

Did Uncle Umlaut reach the safety of the curio shop before the hornets could get him?

Barely.

And then?

*“Prescription?” said the doctor from his perch on the shelf. “No, my friend. This is not a medical matter. This is more of a cosmic matter. However, I suggest that you do not consult the Great Hydrodactyl.”*

*“But where do I find the Great Hydrodactyl, so as not to consult it?” asked Umlaut, still out of breath from the hornet episode.*

*The doctor pondered for a moment. Then he said, “That is immaterial. You must find McGinity, the master strategist.”*

*“Okay,” said Uncle Umlaut. And he began to think about what he would say to McGinity when he found him.*

*Just then he noticed that the good doctor had begun to rotate, spinning like a top on the shelf. Umlaut took this to be a prelude to an announcement, so he waited in silence, watching Waterfinger’s features turn blurry with the speed of the spin.*

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<sup>4</sup> also known as E-Tut

*Having reached a maximum angular velocity, the doctor's rotation gradually subsided until he clicked into a motionless position, exactly facing Uncle Umlaut. Then he said, "You must bring a key adversary with you to McGinity's."*

*"A key adversary?" said Umlaut. "Why would I want to bring any adversary?"*

*"Necessary," said Dr. Waterfinger and closed his eyes.*

*At that point, Uncle Umlaut realized that the interview had ended.*

[To be continued in Rain I.]

## #12 TOOTH WILLIAM

Mutt-Bly's friend, Tooth William, offers no explanation about his habit of assuming extremely small proportions and lodging between someone's teeth. It is what he wants to do on occasion, and that's it.

While he is encamped in someone's dental scene, he likes to sing. Sometimes he sings the *Tooth William* song (whose lyrics are *Tooth William, Tooth William...*) There are also other songs he likes, for instance *Mandalay*.

It was *Mandalay* that he sang on one particular spring day, when his mood was very good, nestled comfortably between molar and premolar on someone's lower left. And so it was with a great sense of abandon that he intoned the opening phrase, "*On the road to Mandalay...*"

But, after a while, it began to occur to him that this host was particularly tolerant and not at all amazed by the voice in his or her mouth singing "*...where the old flotilla lay...*" This casual response was unusual. At this point, people just about always began to do odd things, such as tilting their heads, opening their mouths and looking into mirrors, telephoning doctors, dentists, or psychologists, and so forth.

Tooth William would usually leave at that stage. It was not his intent to cause grief or confusion. In fact, he generally avoided singing until it was about time to move on, usually just a few hours after his arrival.

Feeling puzzled by the calmness of this host, he instantly transported himself to a location on a gravel walkway beside a lake, back in his normal

size. He was amazed to hear, for a brief moment in his own teeth, the dying echoes of *Mandalay*.

Then the song was gone, but he knew what had happened. The host whose teeth he had visited (in his small identity) was himself (in his large identity).

This was disturbing to Tooth William, because he took matters of physical location quite seriously. So he walked along the gravel path in a state of profound thought. All that he could conclude was that he had been briefly present in two sizes at the same time, and thus able to host himself. He did not like that scenario. But, happily, it never occurred again.

## #13 A SPECIAL CUP

O'Shallard, the god of enclosed spaces, found a special cup. It was made of glass with amazing abstract images shown on all its surfaces in wonderful colors. This is a premium enclosed space, thought O'Shallard. So he went outside from the grass hut where he was currently living and placed the cup on a wooden table. It was a fine example of an enclosed space. I will look at it every time I arrive at or depart this place, thought O'Shallard.

But that night it rained, and when O'Shallard came out in the morning to look at the cup, it was not a cup of emptiness, but a cup of water. It was not what O'Shallard considered an enclosed space. So he poured the water on a plant, and then the cup was an enclosed space again. That takes care of that, he thought.

But it rained again that afternoon, and again the cup filled with water. After he emptied it, he decided that he would have to visit Pourania, goddess of rain and ask her to rain less often. He would bring the cup with him.

He found Pourania sitting on a levee beside a river. "Pourania," he said, "see this cup and its great abstract designs. It encloses a beautiful emptiness. But you keep pouring rain into it. Would you mind raining a little less often?"

Pourania did not speak. Instead, she stood on her head on the levee.

O'Shallard thought that the rain goddess looked pretty standing on her head. However, he was disappointed that his request had not been granted. I will go away, he thought, and if it rains again, I will come back and ask her

again.

So O'Shallard returned to his grass hut, where Ummari, goddess of owls, sang songs to him. But the next morning it did rain again, filling his cup for a third time.

Then O'Shallard went back to the rain goddess with his cup. This time she was sitting on a volcanic plug in the desert. "Pourania," he said, "this cup filled again with rain water. Would you mind raining a little less often?"

Pourania said nothing. She stood on her head on the volcanic plug.

"Thank you, rain goddess," said O'Shallard, because now he understood.

He went back home and placed the beautiful glass cup upside down on the wooden table. Then he went inside the grass hut and listened to songs sung to him by Ummari, goddess of owls, and also listened to the next rainfall.

## #14 WOOSHA'S PARACHUTE

Woosha of the Welves was sitting inside a gazebo, wondering why many persons considered her to be half wolf, half elf. She was sure that she was neither of these. It was all very puzzling.

Furthermore, her people, the Welves, were always having conflicts with other people known as Umbrella Types. What was it all about? And was it necessary?

Her brother Wilvern had no interest in such topics. He was nearby in a field, working on his biplane. As usual, he was taking the engine apart and putting it back together again. Since he always ended up exactly where he started, Woosha did not see any sense in this.

Having nobody else to talk with at the moment, Woosha decided to visit Mutt-Bly Akarkin to get his opinion on Welfish matters. Of course, Mutt-Bly's ideas weren't always good. In fact, they hardly deserved to be called ideas, but he was sure to say something. Besides, she liked visiting Mutt-Bly.

The trouble was that Mutt-Bly was rafting down the Mississippi at that time with Bee-Elka.

I know, thought Woosha. I will get Wilvern to fly me over the Mississippi in his biplane, so I can parachute down onto Mutt-Bly's raft.

Galactic Jack did not think this was a good idea. "Bee-Elka will not like that, Woosha," he said. "She sees this as a romantic getaway for Mutt-Bly and herself. She will apply fierce sarcasm to you."

“Maybe so,” said Woosha, “but I don’t always do the social.”

So Wilvern (who didn’t care one way or the other about the whole matter) took Woosha up in his biplane and flew her to the Mississippi. They sighted the raft and Woosha bailed out. The wild side of her character flared up, so she gave a shout of “Geronimo!”

She floated down easily, but missed her target, landing on the wrong raft. It was a raft occupied by five Sons of Rulfus: Bott, Harald, Harold, Hack, and The Hamiltonian. They were playing poker.

Woosha disengaged herself from her chute, but it remained snagged on the front end of the raft and, catching the wind like a spinnaker, it propelled the raft downstream at amazing speed, rushing past the raft of Mutt-Bly and Bee-Elka. The wind did not blow the poker players’ cards or chips away because the Sons of Rulfus were using cards made of slate and chips made of clam shell.

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Later, Galactic Jack set out to cover the story of Woosha’s parachute jump. He interviewed Hack, an incidental son of Rulfus.

“That little lady gave us all a wild ride,” said Hack. “We were singing *rally round the flag boys, rally round the flag, shouting the battle cry of freedom*, phalaropes were flying, the spray was blowing into our faces, and I won a pot with aces full.”

“I will see if I can fit that into my story,” said Galactic Jack.



“Like drawing on an inside straight,” said Hack.

“I see,” said Galactic Jack. (He did not see.)

“Where is your story being published?” said Hack.

“I am not exactly sure,” said Galactic Jack. “I am hoping for Reuters or United Press International.”

“Do you think the chances are good they will publish it?” said Hack, incidental son of Rulfus. “I like getting pixels.”

“Well, the chances are fair,” said Galactic Jack. (He thought the chances were poor.)

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Sitting on a smooth rock beside a fish pond, watching the mosquito fish navigating around lily pads, Woosha thought about all that had happened. I did not succeed in visiting Mutt-Bly on his raft, she thought. But I did speed up that other raft where those Sons of Rulfus were playing poker--and that cheered them up and made their game livelier. So that was a good thing. Galactic Jack got a story. And Bee-Elka did not apply fierce sarcasm to me. So those were good things. My day was not wasted.

She was wrong about one thing. Bee-Elka applied fierce sarcasm to her. Woosha just wasn't there to hear it.

## #15 NUPTIALS

Galactic Jack had met a woman named Local Jane, and now he was about to marry her. It was to be an outdoor ceremony held in a glade. Jack was standing in the glade with numerous wedding guests waiting for the minister to arrive. He could see Local Jane on the other side of the glade in white bridal gown and veil along with her bridesmaids.

Jack was talking to some of the nearby wedding guests about a problem. “I wanted her to change her name to Galactic Jane. She has refused. She says that I should become Local Jack.”

“Oh, I think Galactic Jane would be a lovely name,” said Pingrille. “So is Local Jane, of course. But I don’t think I could be Local Pingrille. The rhythm is all wrong. Maybe I could be *Lo and Behold Pingrille*.”

“I seem to hear a trilling sound,” said Bee-Elka. “But it doesn’t seem to mean anything. Perhaps I am having an auditory hallucination.”

“Let’s get started with the wedding,” cried Woosha of the Welves. “Where is the effing minister?”

“Yes, definitely auditory hallucinations,” said Bee-Elka. “I’m sure they will subside with time.”

Aside from the name issue, Jack was worried that a rival, The Hamiltonian (a son of Rulfus), might appear in the glade and might carry the bride away like young Lochinvar.

Jack told Bee-Elka his concern as they stood waiting. “I’m afraid,” said

Jack, “that The Hamiltonian is liable to stroll into the glade.”

“The Hamiltonian is the least of your problems,” said Bee-Elka.

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A short time later, The Hamiltonian strolled into the glade.

This had an effect.

The effect of The Hamiltonian was as follows: Before the minister, Dr. Fitz, could say “We are gathered here...,” Local Jane (still dressed in her white bridal gown and veil) rode away with The Hamiltonian on his horse or motorcycle or wheelbarrow (nobody was exactly sure which).

Galactic Jack watched her go. “There she goes,” he said, as she receded into the distance on the conveyance. “She has left with The Hamiltonian.”

“You’re better off,” said Bee-Elka.

“It is possible that you are right,” said Galactic Jack.

“Of course I’m right.”

## #16 TUBES

Woosha of the Welves came to Mutt-Bly where he was sitting on his usual rock by the beach. “Have you heard about the trouble they are having at the House of Tubes?”

“What is the House of Tubes?” said Mutt-Bly.

“It is a sort of mansion. The owner of the mansion is Rim Zerry and he likes tubes. The whole mansion is full of tubes.”

“What kind of tubes?”

“Every kind,” said Woosha. “Tubes that carry air, music, water, sewage, messages in metal canisters, pictures of other rooms, and more, lots more. I can’t remember all the kinds of tubes.”

“What kind of trouble?”

“Somebody has gotten into the air tubes and won’t come out. I think it must be Air-Shape John. Does not Air-Shape John go where the air flow goes?”

“Yes,” said Mutt-Bly. “Air-Shape John goes where the air flow goes.”

“Rim Zerry is very angry and there’s nothing he can do,” said Woosha. “Let’s go help him.”

“Okay, let’s go,” said Mutt-Bly.

“Here comes my brother Wilvern,” said Woosha. “He knows the way there and so do I. We will show you.”

So Mutt-Bly, Bee-Elka, Galactic Jack, Z’Nux, and Pingrille followed

Woosha and Wilvern through woods just inland from the coast. Woosha and Wilvern ran ahead, their wild selves emergent, shouting, “Let’s go!” When they got too far ahead, they came back and shouted things like “Here we are. Let’s go!”

When they all got to the House of Tubes, they found Rim Zerry pacing furiously back and forth in a hallway where there were many tubes overhead. “Why is someone in the air tubes?” he said to Mutt-Bly and everyone else.

“He’s been very angry about the person in the air tubes,” confided Rim’s wife, Anna. “Even his beard is more bristly than usual.”

“Oh, yes,” said Pingrille, “his beard does look very bristly.”

“Now we have confirmation on the bristly beard,” remarked Bee-Elka.

“Just because I’m more--” began Pingrille.

Rim Zerry pounded on a nearby table. “I want that person out of the air tubes,” he said.

“He wants the person out of the air tubes,” explained Anna Zerry.

“I even sent a messenger to the manufacturer,” shouted Rim Zerry. “I sent J. April Messenger. She is a very well known messenger. But I never heard back from the manufacturer.”

“Well, yes,” said Galactic Jack. “J. April Messenger never remembers to deliver her messages.”

“Then why does she take messages?” said Rim Zerry.

“I do not know,” said Galactic Jack.

“It’s your fault,” said Rim Zerry.

“We have come to help,” Mutt-Bly said to Rim Zerry. “We will send somebody into the air tubes to find out what is happening. We will let Galactic Jack do it.”

So they all boosted Galactic Jack up to the ceiling, where he squeezed into the nearest air tube.

Suddenly there came a loud hissing sound. Thumps were heard inside the air tube and the thumps were traveling swiftly along the length of the tube.

“What the hell is happening now?” said Rim Zerry.

“I believe that Galactic Jack has become a series of wave packets inside the air tubes,” said Z’Nux. “That can happen. Apparently there is some sort of resonance.”

Rim Zerry pounded on the table. “Now I have two people in the air tubes,” he shouted.

“We must get Galactic Jack out of this air tube,” said Woosha of the Welves in her quiet, pensive voice.

“Yes, we must do that,” said Wilvern of the Welves in his quiet, pensive voice.

“We need a tuning fork,” said Z’Nux. “That will--”

“Does anyone have a tuning fork?” said Mutt-Bly.

“Yes,” said Anna Zerry, reaching into the pocket of her blouse. “I have been taking music lessons. Here is a tuning fork.” She handed the tuning fork

to Mutt-Bly.

“Now what do we do?” said Mutt-Bly, as he held the tuning fork.

“Don’t do anything,” said Z’Nux. “Just hold it and let it resonate with the sound of the air going through the tube.”

Mutt-Bly held the tuning fork. It resonated with the sound of the air going through the tube. Galactic Jack popped out of the air tube through a hatch and landed on the floor on his feet. At the same time, another man popped out of a second hatch, facing in the opposite direction from Jack, and he too landed on his feet. He was a thin man dressed in a business suit and carrying a briefcase.

“Why, it is Air-Shape John!” exclaimed Woosha.

“No, I am not Air-Shape John,” said the man. “I am just an air tube inspector. My name is Jones. Orson Jones is the name.”

“That proves he is Air-Shape John,” said Z’Nux. “Air-Shape John always says that kind of thing. He never admits that he is Air-Shape John.”

Meanwhile, Galactic Jack was shaking. “What happened to me?” he said.

“You became a series of wave packets,” said Z’Nux. “It is okay now. You are again yourself. And you solved the problem. When you popped out toward the north, Air-Shape John popped out toward the south. That is a natural result of two persons in the same air tube.”

“Oh, you should be so proud of yourself, Jack,” said Pingrille.

“I should have stayed home,” said Galactic Jack, wobbling on his feet.

“I think it’s time for everyone to get their butts out of here,” said Rim Zerry.

“And thank you so much,” said Anna Zerry.

“I could turn them into stone,” remarked Bee-Elka. “But I don’t think I’ll bother.”

And they all left.



## #17 BASEBALL

“Tell me,” said Ummari, goddess of owls, “about the days when you used to play bassball.”

“That’s *baseball*,” said O’Shallard. He and Ummari were sharing a wide hammock in their grass hut. “It wasn’t much. Sandlot ball. Being left-handed, I was first baseman.”

“What does left-handed have to do with it?” said Ummari.

“When you field and throw from that side of the diamond--never mind, it just works out better. I was first base. Bee-Elka was second base, Mutt-Bly Akarkin was shortstop, Tooth William was third base. We were a good infield. Turned lots of double plays.”

“Who did you play against?”

“Mostly Sons of Rulfus.”

“Did you win?”

“Not all the time,” said O’Shallard. He was silent for a moment. Then he said, “Not very often.” Then, after a while, he said, “Hardly ever.”

“Why was that?”

“Our batting wasn’t all that good, especially when The Hamiltonian stepped onto the mound--he was the ace pitcher for Sons of. He was mighty hard to hit. We did a little better against Unbelongen pitchers and some of the others. It was all long ago.”

“Didn’t you practice your batting?”

“Yeah. And I sought professional help.”

“What kind of professional help?” said Ummari.

“Well, one day, I saw this wild-haired old gal in a bandanna and a low-cut bodice all studded with glitter, and a long, pleated skirt, wearing big gold earrings like hoops and gold high-heeled shoes. She looked like a carnival gypsy fortune teller and I could smell her perfume, sort of like incense, even in the open air while I was twelve feet away from her. She was in a front row seat alongside the right field foul line.”

“What’s a fowl line?” said Ummari. “Sounds like a parade of chickens.”

“It’s a line where if the ball--never mind. The point is, this old gal was sitting there. And she reminded me of someone I’d heard about. So I went up to her and I go, ‘Pardon me, ma’am, but are you Rujuduli, goddess of heightened probabilities?’ ”

“And was she?”

“She said she was. So I asked her if she would bring up my batting average.”

“And did she?”

“Well, yeah, sort of. It cost me nothing but an autographed baseball.”

“What do you mean, *sort of*?”

“She had other clients, a lot of which went to her for their pitching and fielding. The Hamiltonian’s pitches began to catch the corners more often than they used to, and so forth. So it all evened out. The pitching and fielding

was getting better at the same time that the batting was getting better. Result--nil.”

“It sounds as if she cheated all the players,” said Ummari, “if all they got was everything the same.”

“Yeah, true. But then all *she* got for it was a bunch of autographed balls. Besides, she made the game better, with everybody’s skill going up.”

“She sounds like a strange lady,” said Ummari.

“She *was* a strange lady. Sometimes she would go through the stands, exactly like a hotdog vendor, calling out, ‘Anybody want a probability boost?’ Nobody much took her up on it. They were busy eating hotdogs and watching the game. I don’t know what became of her.”

Ummari didn’t say anything. She was listening to the silence of the day. The only sound was the humming of cicadas in a nearby grove. Otherwise it was still.

“All that,” added O’Shallard, “was very long ago.”

## #18 SIDEWALK ENCOUNTER

As we are told in the *Akarkinad*, Tooth William was more affected by his alternate, miniaturized life between teeth than he liked to admit. The precision needed to fit safely between molars made him very aware of physical obstacles.

For instance, in his regular, full size identity, he was bothered by the maneuvers required when he and someone else approached each other along a narrow walkway. He didn't like the leftward and rightward moves that he and the oncomer would do to get past each other.

Was this a form of duel? Was the oncomer a sort of personified tooth?

He decided that he would move in only one direction in such situations. Depending on the geometry, he would move only to his left, or only to his right. Let the oncomer dodge back and forth. No dodging for Tooth William.

Shortly after he decided on this policy, he was walking along a mostly deserted sidewalk when he saw a male person approaching directly in front of him. Tooth William had the wall of a brick building very close to his right shoulder, and the oncoming fellow was also very close to that wall. There was only one logical move for Tooth William. He would have to move to his left. No dodging or maneuvering or apologies, he would just bear left until the oncomer did the necessary dance, and then they would pass each other.

This particular sidewalk was quite wide at that point, measuring about 8 feet (~2.4 meters), so it seemed to Tooth William that he and the oncomer

would easily pass each other, especially given his own new tactic.

So Tooth William moved in the direction of the street. So did the oncomer. They both kept marching outward, sort of looking at each other, neither of them reversing his motion at any time. Tooth William finally checked his motion at the curb, while the oncomer stepped into the gutter--and then they passed each other.

This is ridiculous, thought Tooth William. This person must have the same idea that I have, except more so. Or else he saw what I was doing and he was making fun of me. What do I do now? Do I keep my new policy--or do I give it up and go back to dodging?

I will ask for advice.

Just then he saw Galactic Jack hurrying past. "Galactic Jack," he said, "I have a problem. A male person and I couldn't exactly get past each other on the sidewalk because--"

"That must have been Malachi Fitzsimmon," said Galactic Jack. "He is the mail person here. He delivers our letters and packages. Sorry I can't say more, I'm in a hurry. On my way to cover an event."

"Wait, I meant--" began Tooth William. But Galactic Jack had gone around the corner.

Tooth William decided then that he would get Mutt-Bly's opinion on this matter.

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“A male person and I had trouble getting past each other on the sidewalk,” Tooth William said to Mutt-Bly. “By *male* I mean *not female*.” And he told Mutt-Bly the whole story.

“Besides yourself, there are only three individuals who would do that,” said Mutt-Bly. “They are Mitkus, Air-Shape John, and The Hamiltonian.”

“How do I know which one it was?” said Tooth William.

“You do not know,” said Mutt-Bly.

Bee-Elka, who had been overhearing the conversation, said, “William --walk on that sidewalk until it happens again. But this time say hello to the oncomer.”

So Tooth William trudged that same length of sidewalk hundreds of times. Then, one afternoon, the same male person came along, and he and Tooth William performed the same maneuver. “Hello,” said Tooth William as the oncomer stepped into the gutter.

The oncomer did not answer.

Tooth William told Mutt-Bly and Bee-Elka about that.

“It was not Mitkus,” said Bee-Elka. “Mitkus would have answered you. He would have said, ‘Hello, Mitkus.’ So walk that block some more, and when you see that person again, ask him if he is Air-Shape John.”

Again Tooth William made many trudges along that same length of sidewalk. Then, one morning, the same male person came along, and he and Tooth William performed the same maneuver. “Are you Air-Shape John?”

said Tooth William over his left shoulder to the departing stranger.

“Yes,” said the stranger. “I am Air-Shape John.” And he went on his way.

Tooth William told Mutt-Bly and Bee-Elka about that.

“He was not Air-Shape John,” said Bee-Elka. “Air-Shape John never admits that he is Air-Shape John unless he has to. Therefore that person is The Hamiltonian.”

“Oh,” said Tooth William. “So what do I do now?”

“Do anything you want,” said Mutt-Bly. “It does not matter.”

So Tooth William went back to dodging left and right, as needed. It wasn't needed very often. And he never again met The Hamiltonian on any sidewalk or hallway or narrow passageway of any kind.

## #19 A MOUNTAIN CABIN

When Hack, incidental son of Rulfus, lived in a cabin in the mountains, his girlfriend was Bellatop, a mountain goddess. Her habits had begun to puzzle him. Her habits: exploring caves, napping at midday on the cabin roof, climbing eucalyptus trees...

“What’s going on with you these days, Bellatop?” asked Hack.

“I’m restless,” she said. “My nerves are on fire.”

“You should see a doctor,” he said. “I hear that Dr. Waterfinger is the best.”

“Who is he?”

“A sub-midget with a great mind.”

“Well, if I need a doctor, I’ll look him up,” said Bellatop. “But I’m not sure I need a doctor.”

So, instead of consulting Dr. Waterfinger, she dug a maze of tunnels under Hack’s cabin and its vicinity. Then she converted the tunnels into lantern-lit, subterranean hallways with ancient Greek statues in niches.

“How are you feeling these days, Bell?” said Hack, as Bellatop paced across the cabin floor.

“I’m on edge,” she said. “Like meteors are streaking through my mind.”

“Maybe it’s time for you to get in touch with Waterfinger.”

“Maybe and maybe not.”

So, instead of consulting Dr. Waterfinger, she collected huge boulders and



arranged them around Hack's cabin like the monoliths of Stonehenge.

"How are you, B. T.?" asked Hack on a mountain slope, where Bellatop stood tossing pine cones into a rivulet of molten lava.

"Not so good. My feelings are smoldering like burning embers. I'd better look up Waterfinger."

So she got an appointment with Dr. Waterfinger.

She was gone for a day, because she had to descend to the flatlands where Waterfinger worked and she had to solve a maze of streets to find his office.

When she came back to the mountains the next day, she looked calm and serene. She said, "Goodbye, Hack. I'm going with Dr. Waterfinger."

She began to pack her clothes and her few other possessions.

Hack swore a little and called Bellatop some unmentionable names, most of which were obvious and predictable. But this was mostly *pro forma*, because he had long expected this sort of thing from her and was actually quite philosophical about it.

Furthermore, he knew from her past that she was peculiarly drawn to miniature men. But, after he asked around about the doctor, he began to suspect that she had also been influenced by that other identity of Dr. Waterfinger--The Great Hydrodactyl, that spatially extended, aerial, implacable, ineffable intelligence whose depths no man, woman, god, or goddess had ever plumbed.

## #20 RAIN I

Uncle Umlaut (spokesperson for the Umbrella Types) and Tanya Titanium (Empress in charge of Rain Shapes) were antagonists of old. Just the same, one day they came to McGinity's together for advice. McGinity was amazed.

Uncle Umlaut came complaining about the Rain Shapes. He said, "They swirl around me as liquid, transparent beings, riding on the wild air."

Tanya Titanium came boasting about the Rain Shapes. She said, "They swirl around Uncle Umlaut as liquid transparent beings, riding on the wild air."

Despite this disagreement, there was one thing they absolutely agreed on. No photo ops. "We must not have our photo taken together," said Uncle Umlaut.

"That is correct," said Tanya Titanium, "even though I am quite photogenic, as you can see. But for any Rain Person and any Umbrella Person to appear amiably together would bring about COTU, the Collapse Of The Usual."

"We are here incognito," said Uncle Umlaut.

"We do not know each other," said Tanya Titanium.

"I see," said McGinity.

But why had they come here? What did they both want? McGinity asked the question.

They gave their answers.

For Uncle Umlaut, it was clear. He did not want to be bothered by Welves while he was being bothered by Rain Shapes, under the logic of two bothers being four times as bad as one.

For Tanya Titanium, it was clear. She did not like confusion. Welves got in the way. When she sent out Rain Shapes to swirl around Uncle Umlaut, sometimes they swirled around a nearby Welf by mistake.

And so the two arch-rivals had both come to McGinity. They hoped that he could find a way to take the Welves out of the equation. And now they put silver and gold on his table.

“This is very good,” said McGinity, looking at the silver and gold on the table. He was not used to receiving silver and gold. Sons of Rulfus, Cosmic Renegades, Tangentia, Unbelongen, and others who came to him for strategies did not bring silver and gold. Instead they brought time itself, a very good thing. But it needed seasoning. As McGinity saw it, silver and gold were the right kind of seasoning.

“Here is what you must do, Uncle Umlaut,” said McGinity, for he had been working out a strategy. “A large rainfall is predicted for tomorrow night over Wild Wotting Heath--as you must know, Ms. Titanium.”

“Of course I know,” said Tanya Titanium. She frowned slightly, wondering whether to remind McGinity to address her as *your majesty*. For a moment, she wondered what her eccentric sponsor, Pourania the rain goddess, would

do. Tanya decided to let it be.<sup>5</sup>

“Some Umbrella Type must go out in the deluge without an umbrella at sunset--and must not leave Wild Wotling until sunrise,” said McGinity.

“What kind of sunrise?” said Uncle Umlaut.

“Any kind of sunrise.”

“What should the Rain Shapes do tomorrow night?” said Tanya Titanium.

“Nothing,” said McGinity.

“Nothing?” said Tanya Titanium.

“Nothing,” said McGinity. “Your rain itself will be enough.”

“Very well,” said Tanya Titanium. True, she thought, my reign is enough.

“Remember,” said Uncle Umlaut, “no photo ops. We do not want COTU, the Collapse Of The Usual.”

“I am remembering that,” said McGinity.

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McGinity walked through narrow, winding cobblestone streets, past white limestone houses, until he came to a vacant lot where an old trailer stood on blocks. A sign read RUJUDULI, GODDESS OF HEIGHTENED PROBABILITIES. McGinity knocked on the rickety sheet metal door of the trailer.

A woman opened the door. She was a wild-haired old gal wearing a bandanna, lots of beads and bracelets, squeaky slippers, and flowing silk

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<sup>5</sup> Pourania was a problem for T. T.; why should a serious and dedicated Empress of the Rain have to work under the auspices of a comical goddess who dwelt on levees along the Mississippi or on volcanic plugs in the Mojave or (in miniature form) on lily pads in undiscovered ponds? T. T. pondered this in stray moments, as she paced through vineyards where answers were sparse, under a lavender sky.

clothes with patches. She looked sort of like a carnival gypsy fortune teller.

Glancing beyond her, McGinity saw a bin full of dozens of small spheres. Oh, they were baseballs. He wondered briefly what she was doing with all those baseballs.

“Madam Rujuduli,” said McGinity, “I am running a very chancy strategy. I need a special probability boost. I want the cube root of my probability.”

“Cube root! No, I cannot do that. I’m basically just a square rooter. As you know, McGinity.”

“I have lots of silver and gold,” said McGinity.

“Come in,” said Rujuduli.

McGinity went in. He knew that this would be an important meeting. However, part of his mind was already focusing on his next meeting. After leaving here, he would go in search of the being known as “Mitkus.”

*[To be concluded in Rain II.]*

## #21 THE GODDESS OF BRIEFCASES

Suppose you are having a conversation in some public place, sitting at a table--and you put your briefcase in a nearby chair. And suppose you look toward that chair after a while, and see, not your briefcase, but a woman. That woman is Bree-Sesha, the goddess of briefcases. More precisely, your briefcase will have metamorphosed into this goddess.

Do not -- we repeat, do *not* attempt to detain her as she leaves. And especially do not say to her, "You are my briefcase." (This warning is explicit in the *Akarkinad*.)

Assuming that you had useful or valuable papers in the briefcase, how do you get them back? Since Bree-Sesha doesn't become a briefcase more than once in a week, you have seven days in which to act, before she becomes someone else's briefcase.

The text contained on your briefcase papers will manifest itself in songs sung by the goddess. You must understand that she does not know that her songs relate to your papers. You must also understand that the lyrics and melodies of her songs will sound nothing like the text of your papers.

Therefore, you must follow a very specific procedure. First, phone the goddess. (Her number is listed.) Ask her if she will sing her latest songs to you. This request will be gratifying to her, and she will sing the songs over the phone. You will record them. You must let her know ahead of time that you are doing this, as it is illegal to record a phone conversation without the

person's permission. She will not object.

Later, you must put the recorded songs through a spectral analyzer. The output of this analyzer will be a precise encryption of the documents in your briefcase. The key to the encryption can be obtained by digitizing the breathing sounds of the goddess between the elements of her song.

But mark this: If all this happens to you twice, no matter how many years apart, something is dreadfully wrong. Leave the country immediately, take an assumed name, and find a home in a secluded countryside, where you should take a job as a woodcutter, dairy worker, bellhop, exotic dancer, or captain of a river boat.

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There is at least one case in which a man with a briefcase responded wrongly to this goddess, while avoiding severe consequences. However, this man was himself a transcendental being. He was Air-Shape John. It happened in the following way.

As was his custom, John was materializing near an air flow--in this particular case, a wind current through a train station. He materialized, as always, in the form of a man in a business suit, carrying a briefcase. This was on a stone staircase leading up from the tracks to the area of benches and ticket windows.

By chance, at the very moment that Air-Shape John materialized, his briefcase metamorphosed into Bree-Sesha. This was an amazing coincidence,

the juxtaposition of two extraordinary events, not likely to occur again for another 100 trillion years.

To an observer (and there was one), there was a moment when that section of the staircase was empty--and the next moment it was occupied by a man and a woman, holding hands and looking at each other in amazement. The briefcase phase of the process had come and gone in less than a nanosecond.

The observer was David Demivolt of New Haven, Connecticut. He included the event in his memoirs. (*Memoirs* by David Demivolt, Rulfus House, London, Paris, New York, Agramyd, 2008.)

“You’re my briefcase!” said Air-Shape John in a puzzled voice to the woman whose hand he was holding.

Bree-Sesha’s amazement was now replaced by irritation. She did not know why she was holding hands with this business man, but she knew that she did not like what he had said. So, withdrawing her hand, she said pleasantly (with a slight smile), “You are a walnut.”

To her surprise, the business man did not turn into a walnut. Clearly, he was himself a transcendental being.

At that point, they sat down together on a bench to talk about what had happened. One thing led to another, with the result that Air-Shape John and Bree-Sesha began dating. They dated for an entire calendar year.

Then one morning, Air-Shape John awoke from a nap to find that he had turned into a walnut. The curse hadn’t been nullified, it had only been



delayed. It took John an hour of furious concentration to regain his normal form.

This was a turning point in the relationship. John was irked at having been turned into a walnut. Bree was disappointed in him to find that he was so vulnerable that she could turn him into a walnut, the year's delay notwithstanding.

So they broke up and never saw each other again, except as strangers passing in the distance.

## #22 IMPRESSIONS

“Do you ever get the impression,” said Galactic Jack to Mutt-Bly, as they walked along a cobblestone street, “that things are a little strange around here?”

“What is an impression?” said Mutt-Bly.

“The word *impression*,” said Jack, “well, it’s when something has an effect. Like if someone lies on the beach, they make an impression in the sand. More generally--”

“Yes,” said Mutt-Bly, “I saw a strange impression on the beach yesterday. It was a place where Bott, the fifth son of Rulfus, lay down on the sand. He left a strange impression.”

“Well, yes,” said Galactic Jack. “But what I wanted to ask...” Then Jack changed his mind. “Never mind,” he said. “It does not matter.”

## #23 O'SHALLARD HELPS A FAMILY

Pingrille had something she wanted to talk about--all about a weird family. However, on this bright spring day, she could not find anyone to tell it to. She especially liked telling things to Mutt-Bly. But she had overslept----and Mutt-Bly and the others had apparently all gone somewhere.

As Pingrille crossed a small wooden bridge over a creek, she saw O'Shallard coming across the bridge from the opposite direction. She didn't know O'Shallard very well--just that he was the god of enclosed spaces. But she had to tell somebody about that weird family. I will tell O'Shallard, she decided, even if his mind is mostly on jars and sea shells.

"O'Shallard!" she exclaimed, as they met at mid-bridge. "What a coincidence! I was just thinking of you."

"Thinking what about me, Pingrille?"

"I was thinking *oh, that nice O'Shallard!* And now that you're actually here, I will tell you about a weird thing that I've come across."

"What weird thing?" said O'Shallard.

"A weird family."

"What way weird?"

"Well, an old man died. A grandfather. And the people in that family think he's still there on the property. A bird swooped near a woman in the family and she said, 'I wonder what the old man is up to now.'"

"So?" said O'Shallard.

“So she thought that old man had turned into a bird--or was at least directing the birds. Is that not funny?”

“Yeah, sort of.”

“And if the phone rings and there’s nobody there, they think it’s the old man.”

O’Shallard nodded.

“And if there’s an ad stuck in the screen door, they think the old man put it there. They are such funny people.”

“How do you know about this, Pingrille?”

“Oh, I was walking around invisible yesterday, just for the fun of it. Besides, I was having a bad hair day--we girls have those--so I didn’t really want to be visible. And I happened to walk through that family’s orchard and their place of several houses. And I started hearing all those silly things.”

“Where is their orchard--and their several houses?”

“Just over that way,” said Pingrille, pointing. “On that side of the creek and just past that hillock.”

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What an airhead, thought O’Shallard, as he and Pingrille went their separate ways. Nevertheless, her story had made him a little curious and also a little sympathetic toward that family.

So O’Shallard went to that place--the orchard with its several houses--and (like Pingrille) he wandered around there invisible. And he too heard them

talking about the old man who had died. Some thought he had become a cactus; others thought he had become a lizard. But they all seemed to be convinced that he was nearby.

I will make it easier for them, thought O'Shallard. So he went a little bit back in time to the days when the old man was alive. Still invisible, he observed the old man walking through the orchard stiff-legged, grim-faced, in hat, overalls, and boots, carrying a pruning shears and stopping to cut an occasional small branch or twig.

After O'Shallard had studied the old man's appearance and mannerisms for a few minutes, he made himself look exactly like the old man. And then he came back to time-present. He appeared in the early morning mist, plodding through the orchard, pruning trees as he went.

They will see me, he thought, and then they will be surer than ever that the old man is still here. That will make them feel good.

Out of the corner of his western eye, he saw a flurry of motion. Dozens of the family members were rushing toward the orchard. They were flinging rocks at him. They rushed closer. They flailed at him with sticks.

O'Shallard tried to switch back to his god identity, but he was stuck. The shock of the unexpected attack had numbed his switching logic.

Luckily, Tooth William came walking by at that moment and manifested himself as a band of 32 woodsmen clad in simple Lincoln green and armed with quarter staffs. The woodsmen drove the old man's relatives back into

their houses, where they sat trembling.

O'Shallard called out his thanks to Tooth William. Then, finally switching back to his standard identity, he went elsewhere.

While he was elsewhere, O'Shallard saw Bee-Elka practicing her tennis strokes against a wall. Bee-Elka paused in her practice to listen to his story.

So he told her all. And, at the end, he added, "They somehow knew that I was an impostor."

"No," said Bee-Elka. "They thought you *were* that old man. He was a cruel and terrible patriarch. They hated and feared him. Your disguise was too good, O'Shallard."

"I see," said O'Shallard.

"And now," said Bee-Elka, "those relatives are sitting in their houses trembling and wondering what happened."

"Yes, I suppose they are," said O'Shallard.

Then O'Shallard went home (and so forth) and Bee-Elka went back to practicing her tennis strokes and everything was peaceful for a while.

## #24 WOOD NYMPHS

Having sold their mansion (otherwise known as the House of Tubes), Rim Zerry and his mate Anna needed someplace to live. So now they built a small house in the Woods of Ru and settled down in what they hoped would be a peaceful life.

But then certain things happened.

One of these things was that Rim became restless and decided to explore Antarctica, riding on a dog sled.

“I’m not sure that they use dog sleds in Antarctica,” said Anna. “I picture that as more of an Alaska thing.”

“It does not matter,” said Rim, pounding his fist on a table. “I am going to do it in Antarctica.” And so he went to Antarctica with his dogs and his sled.

Well, this isn’t so bad, thought Anna. It gives me a lot more room.

Then, one morning as she looked out her bedroom window, she saw several nymphs in the woods very close to the house. In fact, some of them were inside her property line.

So Anna phoned the Nymph Center.

A man answered the phone, saying “Nymph Center.”

“I have a problem,” said Anna, “there are nymphs on my property.”

“Do they have sharp outlines or misty outlines?” said the man.

“Hold on,” said Anna. “I will go and look again.”

She looked, then came back to the phone. “Very sharp outlines,” she said.

“Then they are young nymphs,” said the man. And he hung up.

Very annoyed, Anna phoned the Nymph Center again. This time she heard a voice menu:

If you are a nymph, press 1.

If you want to learn about nymphs, press 2.

To hear this menu again, press 3.

Anna hung up because she wasn't a nymph, she didn't want to learn about nymphs, and she didn't want to hear the menu again.

For the next several days, she was annoyed to see the nymphs with their sharp outlines wandering in the woods just outside her windows. So she hired some woodsmen to come with axes and chop down trees for a hundred meters on all sides of her house.

That turned out to be a mistake. The chopped-down trees were made into lumber, paper, kitchen chairs, pencils, toothpicks, matches, and other products. When Anna bought books, magazines, kitchen chairs, pencils, toothpicks, matches, and other products, the nymphs came with them. So she started seeing the nymphs in the rooms and hallways of her house. This was extra irksome because the nymphs all seemed to be in their 20s--and, being deities, they had always been in their 20s and would always be in their 20s. Whereas she was in her 40s--and, being a deity, she had always been in her 40s and would always be in her 40s. Besides they were slender and she was plump, which irked her further.



(Anna did not know it, but the nymphs were also irked. They wished they were more mature and plumper.)

She didn't speak to them and they didn't speak to her. They slipped past her in the hallways without looking at her.

But finally she did have a conversation with a nymph. Anna went into a bathroom to find one sitting on the toilet. "It's okay," said the nymph, "I'm just peeing."

"Yes," said Anna, "well, I had an intention of doing the same."

"There are two or three other bathrooms here, aren't there?" said the nymph.

"That is not the point. Get out of my house."

The nymph looked puzzled. "But we goeth where the wood grain goeth."

"What?" said Anna.

"I am finished," said the nymph, flushing the toilet.

"Oh, I am *so* much obliged," said Anna, "*so* appreciative that I am able to use a toilet in my own house."

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Anna especially wanted the nymphs gone before Rim came back from Antarctica. But one day the phone rang and it was Rim. "Hello, Anna," he said. "I am calling you from Antarctica."

"Hello, Rim. It is so nice to hear from you," said Anna.

"I want to come home now," he said, "but I have lost my credit card.

Please pay an airline to bring me home. I have had enough of Antarctica.”

Anna could hear the ice crackling in his beard.

“Hello, Anna, did you hear me? Bring me home.” There was a banging sound, and Anna realized that Rim was pounding his fist on an ice sheet.

“Well not just now,” she said, thinking of the nymphs. “Let’s talk again soon. Bye bye.”

But the nymphs did not leave and so Rim stayed in Antarctica--and Anna was usually able to find an unoccupied bathroom. She often passed nymphs in the hallways, but did not often have conversations with them. She stayed plump in her 40s, while the nymphs stayed slender in their 20s.

With every wood or paper product that Anna bought, more nymphs came into the house. It finally got so crowded that the nymphs did not like it there anymore, and they all left.

So Anna phoned Rim in Antarctica. She could hear his breath over the phone like the sound of breaking icicles. “I will bring you home now, Rim,” she said.

“Oh?” said Rim. “How did you manage it so fast? Did you have to exert yourself?”

Anna pushed the HYPNOSIS button on her phone.

For ten seconds she heard absolute cosmic silence. Then she heard Rim say, “It will be good to be home. Has anything interesting been happening there?”

“No,” said Anna. “Nothing. Do hurry back.”

“I sure will. See you soon, Doll.”

## #25 YAMMARISH

Mutt-Bly Akarkin and a few of his friends were walking along a street of outdoor markets in Agramyd. Suddenly a pretty woman sitting in a wicker chair and dressed in rags, scarfs, and patches, yelled, “There goes Yammarish! Follow him! Don’t let him get away.”

She was pointing at a man running past. Mutt-Bly thought she was pointing at a man wearing a round cap studded with glass reflectors. Galactic Jack thought she was pointing at a man wearing a red hat with a green feather, who was running in the opposite direction.

But Mutt-Bly and the others had already starting running after the round-cap man, so Jack followed them.

After running for a block, they caught up with the man. “Stop!” said Mutt-Bly.

The man stopped. He looked puzzled.

“The woman said not to let you get away,” said Mutt-Bly. “You are Yammarish.”

“No,” said the man. “I am Joe. My name is Joe F. Joe.”

“Sorry,” said Mutt-Bly. Then he said to his friends, “Galactic Jack must have been right. We must catch the man with the green feather.” So they all turned back and started running in the opposite direction.

As they ran past the pretty woman in the wicker chair, she pointed at Mutt-Bly and shouted, “There goes Yammarish! Follow him! Don’t let him get

away.”

Several people started running after Mutt-Bly. Mutt-Bly stopped running to see what they wanted.

“The woman said not to let you get away,” a man said to Mutt-Bly. “You are Yammarish.”

“No,” said Mutt-Bly. “I am Joe. My name is Joe F. Joe.”

“Oh. Sorry,” said the man.

Mutt-Bly and his friends walked back to the pretty woman in the wicker chair. Mutt-Bly said to the woman, “Why do you say that everyone is Yammarish and ask people to stop him?”

“Yes,” said Woosha of the Welves, “why do you do that? It has made us angry.”

“True,” said Mutt-Bly. “We are angry.”

“I do it because I am Jane the Yammarish goddess,” said the woman. “It is what I do. I shout ‘stop Yammarish,’ and then people chase other people.” She took out a note book and added a tally mark to a long string of tally marks.

“Oh, then that is okay,” said Mutt-Bly. He explained to his friends: “She is the Yammarish goddess. It is what she does.”

“Is there actually someone named Yammarish?” asked Galactic Jack.

“I do not know,” said Jane the Yammarish goddess. “But that does not matter. Do you not agree?”

“Yes, ma’am,” said Bee-Elka, “with that we do agree.”

“Would you care to contribute some silver and gold to the Yammarish fund?”

“No, ma’am.”

## #26 THE WHARF OF DAY AND NIGHT

“I have learned that Daxyl and Nuzure are returning today,” said Bee-Elka to Galactic Jack. She and Jack were sitting on the stone steps in front of a museum in the morning.

“Who are they?” said Galactic Jack.

“Daxyl is the god of the day,” said Bee-Elka, “and Nuzure is the goddess of the night. They come here just once every hundred years.”

“But we have days and nights all the time,” said Galactic Jack.

“Yes,” said Bee-Elka. “They happen all by themselves because of the earth’s rotation.”

“Then why does it matter if Daxyl and Nuzure return?”

“It does not matter,” said Bee-Elka. “However, Mutt-Bly and I are planning to visit them today. You can join us if you want.”

“No, thank you,” said Galactic Jack. “Going places with Mutt-Bly is hard on my nervous system and my nervous system is borderline today. Some other day would be better.” He was remembering the time he turned into wave packets in the air tube at Rim Zerry’s. “Besides I am planning to tour the museum as soon as it opens.”

“Okay,” said Bee-Elka.

Just then the museum opened and Jack went inside.

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Mutt-Bly arrived a few minutes later and sat down beside Bee-Elka. “Let’s

go to visit Daxyl and Nuzure,” he said. “Let’s go now. Where are they?”

Bee-Elka said, “They are at the coast on a wharf where they like to arrive. It is called The Wharf of Day and Night.”

“Let’s go there,” said Mutt-Bly. “Let’s go on roller skates.”

“Ninety kilometers on roller skates?” said Bee-Elka. “Through roads, houses, fields, vineyards, alleys, hills, valleys? It doesn’t sound logical at all.”

“We will skate on the freeway system.”

“The freeway system is full of cars,” said Bee-Elka. “Especially now in the morning, as people go into the city.”

“Then I will move the cars to a different time. I will move them to an early Sunday morning when there isn’t much traffic. Then we can skate on empty freeways today, which I think is Wednesday.”

“Will you leave the cars in Sunday morning?” said Bee-Elka.

“No, I will move them back to this morning right away. The people in the cars will not notice that anything happened.”

“But the stray drivers who are already on the freeways early Sunday morning will notice that something happened when it suddenly gets crowded.”

“Yes,” said Mutt-Bly, “those will notice that something happened. But that does not matter.”

“I think this is a crazy plan, Mutt-Bly,” said Bee-Elka.



Just then she heard a lot of silence from the nearby freeway. Mutt-Bly had already moved all the traffic to Sunday morning.

“Oh well,” she said and she put on her skates.

Mutt-Bly was putting on his skates too. A few minutes later they were both skating at amazing speed along an empty freeway.

About halfway to the coast they saw another skating couple coming along the freeway from the opposite direction. The male skater was wearing orange and yellow running clothes and he had a picture of a sun on his sweatshirt. The female skater was wearing blue and grey running clothes with a picture of a crescent moon.

Those skaters waved to Mutt-Bly and Bee-Elka, who waved back.

“Those people looked a little familiar,” said Bee-Elka, as she and Mutt-Bly continued toward the coast.

“Yes, they did,” said Mutt-Bly, “but I do not know who they were.”

After a while, Mutt-Bly and Bee-Elka arrived at The Wharf of Day and Night. There was nobody on the wharf. But there was a note tacked to a wharf piling. Bee-Elka read the note aloud. It said:

We have gone skating on  
the empty freeway system.

--Daxyl & Nuzure

“Those skaters we passed on our way here,” said Bee-Elka, “I know who they were now. They were Daxyl and Nuzure. We have missed them.”

“Too bad,” said Mutt-Bly. He thought for a moment. Then he said, “But we did wave to them.”

“True,” said Bee-Elka. “And we’ll see them when they come back in a hundred years.”

“True,” said Mutt-Bly. “Shall we go home now?”

“We have no special home,” said Bee-Elka. “Remember? Everywhere is our home. We are home.”

“True,” said Mutt-Bly Akarkin.

## #27 A BOW TIE

Galactic Jack took a temporary job working for Rim Zerry, who still believed in tubes. Rim's slogan was *make everything into tubes*, and he was waging a publicity campaign to further that concept--hence his need for scribes such as Galactic Jack.

Jack attended all of the meetings that Rim held with his staff. However, a problem came into being.

The problem came about in the following fashion. At some point in each meeting, Rim would become energetic, forceful, and rather angry. He would then pound his fist on the conference table. The moment that Rim pounded on the table, Galactic Jack's snap-on, elastic bow tie would pop off, follow a short arched trajectory, and land on the middle of the table.

"It's like a ridiculous punctuation mark," Jack told Bee-Elka as they walked along a boardwalk by the sea. Jack had sought her there, just to be able to tell her his problem.

"You could wear a different tie--or no tie at all," said Bee-Elka.

"Well, no," said Galactic Jack. "I just bought this tie and I like it very much."

"You could sit backwards, facing away from the table, and then your tie would pop off in a different direction."

"No, that would be too disrespectful--as if I did not care what happened at the meeting."

“Very well then, leave the conference room when Rim’s tone just begins to get intense.”

“No, I would miss things that were said.”

Bee-Elka thought for a long moment, while sea gulls flew overhead and jelly fish floated below past archaic pilings. Then she said, “Here is what you must do. The moment that Rim pounds on the table, jump up and snap to attention. Stand at attention until Rim’s voice becomes quiet again. And this is my last advice, Jack.”

Jack thought for a moment. Then he said, “I will feel ridiculous. I will feel like a living exclamation mark and a stooge. But I will try it.”

The next time Rim pounded on the table, Galactic Jack jumped up and snapped to attention. He felt ridiculous. He felt like a living exclamation mark and a stooge. Everyone looked at him. But he noticed that his bow tie had not popped off.

From that moment on, he jumped up and snapped to attention every time that Rim pounded on the table. His bow tie never popped off again.

What a curious thing, Galactic Jack reflected when he was alone. It’s as if the energy that used to go into the bow tie to make it pop off is now being used by my body as I snap to attention.

Conservation of energy, thought Galactic Jack.

But he knew that he was no physicist.

## #28 A CASE FOR A DETECTIVE

Hack, the incidental son of Rulfus, had been down on his luck, sleeping in a rusty abandoned truck on a long forgotten dirt road. That changed when he won a lottery. Suddenly he was amazingly rich.

I will buy a mansion, thought Hack.

So he bought a fully furnished mansion having 30 bedrooms, 15 bathrooms, 3 living rooms, 4 kitchens, a library, 2 game rooms, 12 garages, 4 swimming pools, and more.

However, when Hack went to move into the mansion, he discovered an odd thing. People were sleeping in all the beds in all 30 bedrooms.

Hack did the practical thing. He started to go from bedroom to bedroom, rolling the sleeping people out of the beds and onto the floor.

To Hack's surprise, this tactic did not work very well. Some of the sleepers rolled back up into the beds, as if they were spring-loaded in some way. Others floated up from the floor like balloons, then floated back into the beds. Still others bounced from the floor just like rubber balls--and back into the beds.

At this point, it occurred to Hack that these sleepers were unusual beings. They were certainly not standard.

I will consult a detective, thought Hack. So he went to Jonquil Street on the outskirts of Apramyd, where Quintus lived. Quintus was a retired private detective. But Hack had heard that he would still take cases sometimes,

especially if the pay was good.

“Will you take this case?” asked Hack. “The pay will be good.”

“How good?” said Quintus.

Hack told him.

“I will take the case,” said Quintus.

So Quintus went with Hack to Hack’s mansion. Quintus walked through the mansion, observing the sleeping persons. He performed various tests as he went--for instance: using litmus paper to see if the persons were base or acid; using tuning forks to test the wavelength of their breathing or snoring; using matches to perform the ping test to find out if any of the sleepers were exhaling hydrogen gas.

Finally Quintus sat down at a kitchen table with Hack and told him what he had learned. “These people are ghosts,” said Quintus. “It is good that the temperature is cool here, because that makes them sleepy. Very hot temperatures make them sleepy too. What you don’t want is medium temperature. If the temperature was medium, it would be a scene from hell in here. These ghosts would be swirling around here like gnats, except that they’re much bigger than gnats, as you can see.”

“Okay,” said Hack. “No medium temperatures.”

“That’s if you want to keep them,” said Quintus.

“I do not want to keep them,” said Hack.

“Then that is a different story,” said Quintus. “I will get rid of them for

you.”

“What will you do?”

“I will vacuum them up with a vacuum cleaner. Do you have a vacuum cleaner?”

“No,” said Hack, “I do not have one, so I will get one. But I’m wondering how these big ghosts can fit through a vacuum cleaner hose.”

“They are puffier than they look,” said Quintus. “While they are being sucked through the hose, they will turn long and thin.”

“Wait!” said Hack. “Won’t they fill up the bag very fast? Just one of them should be way too big for the bag.”

“No, they will not fill up the bag,” said Quintus. “They will come squirting out the blower end of the vacuum cleaner in their regular sizes and shapes.”

“Well, what good would that do?” said Hack. “They’d still be in my mansion.”

“Wrong,” said Quintus. “We will use a vacuum cleaner with a very long hose. The vacuum cleaner will stay outside. Only the hose will come in.”

“Oh, I see,” said Hack. “How long a hose do I need?”

“About 30 meters should do it,” said Quintus. “We will move the vacuum itself to different outside spots.” Then, remembering that Hack knew only imperial units, he said, “The hose--that’s about 100 feet.”

“That does not sound very standard,” said Hack. “That will be hard to

find.”

“True,” said Quintus. “But if you shop around, you should be able to find one. Call me when you have it, and I’ll come back and do the job.” He handed Hack a business card and went back to Jonquil Street.

So Hack went shopping. A year later he telephoned Quintus. “I have the vacuum cleaner with the 100-foot hose,” said Hack.

“Good,” said Quintus. “Was it hard to find?”

“The hardest part,” said Hack, “is that I had to sleep in the rusty truck all this time. But now I hope you can vacuum these ghosts, and I will move into my mansion.”

“Yes,” said Quintus. “I will vacuum the ghosts.”

So Quintus came to Hack’s mansion and vacuumed up the ghosts. Hack watched as their big bodies went swooping into the hose, all strung out like taffy as they went. He watched them come out the blower end of the vacuum, which was on a patio, puffing up into their normal sizes and shapes. He saw them float away in the air like angry soap bubbles in iridescent colors.

Finally all the ghosts were out of the mansion.

“Will the sheets need cleaning?” he asked Quintus.

“No,” said Quintus, “ghosts are very clean.”

“Will they come back?”

“No,” said Quintus. “Having been through a vacuum hose once, they will not want to take a chance on doing it again. Trust me on that. But the



countryside will not be very calm.”

“What do you mean?”

“These ghosts are now irked to the max,” said Quintus. “The landscape around here will be haunted for a hundred years.”

“Do I care?” said Hack.

“No,” said Quintus, “you do not care. They will not come on your property again. Here are several of my business cards. If your neighbors have trouble, give them these. I will help them if the price is right.”

“Okay. Thank you very much.”

Hack wrote out a check to Quintus, then went into his mansion, found a pleasant looking bedroom, went to sleep, and dreamed about Bellatop.

Quintus went back to Jonquil Street on the outskirts of Apramyd, where he also went to sleep. He did not dream about Bellatop.

## #29 THE LOST CITY

Mutt-Bly and several of his friends were sitting around a table on a veranda.

“The O’Shallard House has an infinite number of floors,” remarked Z’Nux. “And that is true going either up or down from the ground floor. Is that not interesting?”

“How is that possible?” said Galactic Jack. “That would mean the elevator shaft would have to tunnel all the way through the earth. Besides--”

“No,” said Z’Nux, “they are not spatial floors.”

“Oh!” said Galactic Jack. “Then they must be time floors.”

“No, no,” said Z’Nux. “They are neither space nor time floors. They are just number floors.”

“What are number floors?” said Mutt-Bly.

“They are floors in number space,” said Z’Nux.

“How could that be, Mitkus?” said Mitkus.

“I cannot explain it,” said Z’Nux. “I do not understand it. But I talk about this for a reason. It is said that there is a lost city at floor minus 100.”

“We must go there,” said Mutt-Bly. “We must go to the lost city.”

“Wait!” said Z’Nux. “I was only speaking conversationally.”

“I suspect,” said Bee-Elka, “that it is already too late for protests.”

“I am so excited about going to the lost city!” said Pingrille.

“Let’s go there!” cried Woosha of the Welves.

“But how would we go there?” said Galactic Jack. “And, if we do go there, how do we get back?”

“The logical way to go there,” said Z’Nux, “would be to go to the O’Shallard House, get in the elevator, and go down to floor minus 100. But I don’t necessarily--”

“Let’s go!” said Mutt-Bly. “Let’s go to the O’Shallard House.”

So they all went to the O’Shallard House and got into the elevator on the ground floor.

“Don’t anybody press the minus infinity button,” Z’Nux warned.

“Okay,” said Mutt-Bly. He pressed the minus 100 button.

“Good job,” said Z’Nux.

When the elevator stopped at floor minus 100, everybody got out.

“Look!” said Galactic Jack. “There is sky overhead. How can there be sky overhead when we’ve gone 100 floors down?”

“Remember,” said Z’Nux, “we did not travel in space-space, we traveled in number space.”

“Sorry, I forgot,” said Galactic Jack. “But the ground floor itself was indoors. Why was that?”

“That is because it is the *ground* floor,” said Z’Nux.

“Oh.”

“It is so comforting to be given a rational explanation,” said Bee-Elka.

“Look!” said Pingrille. “There are old buildings made of white stone. And

there are people wearing robes and walking on clay roads.”

“True,” said Mutt-Bly. “Let us speak to them.”

So Mutt-Bly went to the people and said, “Is this the lost city?”

“No,” said the people. “It is the found city.”

“But sources in the library say that the lost city is at this very level,” said Z’Nux, rubbing his nose briefly against a marble column.

“Yes, this was the lost city before you came here,” said the people. “But then you found it. So now it is the found city. The lost city is on floor minus 101.”

“Then we will go there to visit the lost city,” said Mutt-Bly.

“No,” said the people, “you cannot do that. If you go there, it will be the found city. Then the lost city will be on floor minus 102.”

“Let us go home,” said Mutt-Bly.

So they all got back in the elevator.

“Don’t anyone press the plus infinity button,” Z’Nux warned.

“Okay,” said Mutt-Bly. He pressed the LOBBY button.

## #30 RAIN II

It was a night of very hard, pelting rain. Wilvern of the Welves was living in a tent at that time on Wild Wotting Heath, his tent being the only habitation on Wild Wotting Heath. As Wilvern sat tinkering with some airplane parts by lantern light, he could hear the rain thudding against the canvas. It is good that I am in here where it is dry, thought Wilvern.

Just as he thought that thought, he heard a husky voice outside the tent. The husky voice was saying, "Can somebody what is inside this tent let in somebody what is outside in the rain?"

So Wilvern opened the flap of the tent, and in came a squat, husky male being.

"Thank ye kindly," said the male being.

"Here, have a towel," said Wilvern. That was because the newcomer was drenched.

The newcomer used the towel to mop himself off somewhat, then sat huddled close to the lantern. "I be much obliged, man," said the newcomer. "You be a generous guy. My name, should you want to know it, is Shub the Umbrella Type."

This came as a shock to Wilvern, Umbrella Types and Welves being eternal enemies across every Welf-Umbrella border. At that moment, Wilvern felt his wild self about to take over. He made it go away and he began to think.

Of course, out here they were in neither Welfland nor Umbrella Land. Just the same, this visitor was sort of a born enemy to Welves. But, thought Wilvern, I am sheltering him against the storm and he be grateful--I mean he *is* grateful. How can I fit this together?

He had to say something to this Umbrella Type. So he said, "It is good that you are out of the rain." He did not say that he himself was a Welf.

"Thank ye kindly," said Shub the Umbrella Type.

Wilvern wondered what his sister Woosha would think about this situation. Since she had made friends with Mutt-Bly Akarkin and them, she had been saying that the number of *kinds* of beings in the world exactly equalled the number of *beings* in the world. This was a strange idea and it seemed to wash out the whole scene of Welves against Umbrella Types.

That was okay. But how would Woosha feel about an Umbrella Type in the same tent with her? Wilvern guessed that he would find out soon, because Woosha had been out with Mutt-Bly at the planetarium and was due back in this tent very soon.

"The life of an Umbrella Type be hard, even in fair weather," said Shub. "Us Types have been knocked around by Welves--also by Rain Shapes, who ye can see right through like they was glass, and they swirls around us."

"That is too bad," said Wilvern. However, his private opinion was that the life of a Welf could be hard, and that Welves were often knocked around by Umbrella Types, who even bopped Welves on their heads or butts with

umbrellas.

He wondered briefly why this particular Umbrella Type was without an umbrella, especially in a rainstorm. But then he recalled having heard of this sort of thing before. Occasionally a Type would be seen without an umbrella.

Just then Wilvern heard female voices outside the tent--and in came Woosha with J. April Messenger, whom she had met along the way.

Wilvern said, "Woosha and J. April, this be--I mean this *is* Shub. He came here to get out of the rain. He was very wet. Still is."

They all said hello, and Woosha said, "We're very wet too. Us girls will go behind the screen to get into some dry clothes."

So Woosha and J. April went behind a screen that was there, and there was some rustling of fabrics as they changed their clothes.

Meanwhile, Wilvern was wondering how to handle the situation. He could not very well say to Woosha, in front of Shub, *this is an Umbrella Type*. So what to do?

An idea came to Wilvern. This woman, J. April Messenger, was someone who carried messages. So Wilvern found a scrap of paper and wrote on it THIS BLOKE IS AN UMBRELLA TYPE!!! And he folded the paper so that the message would not show.

Then, when Woosha and J. April came out from behind the screen in dry clothes, he said, "J. April, you are a message deliverer. Just to see how that works, I have written a message to Woosha. Let me see how you would

deliver it to her.”

J. April laughed. “I seem to have so much trouble delivering messages.” As she spoke, an envelope fell out of her blouse. From its appearance, it seemed to be a greeting card to someone named McGinity. For a moment, J. April looked puzzled. Then she said, “Must have come out of my bra.” She picked it up and put it in a pocket. “Messages from gods and such. Something always comes up along the way and I never seem to get there with them. Silly me! But this time I can hardly miss, Woosha being right here.”

So she took the folded message from Wilvern and started to walk toward Woosha.

Just then, J. April’s cell phone rang. She answered it. “This is J. April.”

She stood listening to a voice on the phone.

“Yes,” said J. April into the phone. “I would love to.”

Then, having closed the lid of the phone, she said, “I have an unexpected date. What a nice surprise! Goodbye all, and thank you so much. I see the rain has stopped too. So I must leave. Thank you all for such nice hospitality.” And she left the tent.

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“She did not deliver the message,” said Wilvern, as he and Woosha sat by the lantern with Shub the Umbrella Type between them.

“Yes,” said Woosha, “I noticed that.”



Suddenly the flap of the tent opened and a being with round, wondering eyes stepped in. “Smile, Mitkuses,” said the being. There was the flash of a flash bulb. The being with the round, wondering eyes went away.

“What was that?” said Wilvern.

“I do not know,” said Woosha.

“Well,” said Shub the Umbrella Type, getting to his feet, “seeing as the rain has stopped, I be going too. Thank ye much for the shelter.” And he left the tent.

A moment later, Wilvern said to Woosha, “That was Shub the Umbrella Type. He is an Umbrella Type.”

“That is okay,” said Woosha. “The number of *kinds* of beings in the world--”

“I know,” said Wilvern. “Exactly equals the number of *beings* in the world.”

“Yes, that is right,” said Woosha.

They both sat silent for a while.

Then Wilvern said, “Something happened. Someone came and there was a flash.”

“I know,” said Woosha.

## #31 JASTRYN REMOOTH

## AN APOCRYPHAL TALE

*This tale has been recovered from archaic fragments. Missing sections or “lacunae” are indicated by open square brackets, [ ]. Where a logical assumption has been made as to the lost text, the hypothesized text is enclosed within the lacuna, [like this].*

Jastryn Remooth was an ordinary mortal youth who lived in the town of Pi Limes, California. His parents [ ]

He was pro[bab]ly not, as some have claimed, a grandson of Rulfus, because his family [t]ree could be traced back through several generations and was as reliable as most people’s family trees are.

[ ]

However, Jastryn believed in Mutt-Bly Akarkin, Bee-Elka, Galactic Jack, the O’Shallard House, [ ] and the Great Hydrodactyl. His parents and school cou[ns]elors tried to reason with him. But his belief [ ] myt[hic] beings persisted.

[ ] [rea]ding *The Ak[arkin]ad* [ ]

At last, a particularly clever school counsellor, Ms. [ ] arr[anged] a meeting with [ ] long-legged [ ] who sai[d], “[ ] reality [ ] logi[c] [ ]

And so Jastryn Remooth was enlightened.

Everyone was very pleased. Even the mayor of Pi L[imes] spoke

per[sonally] with Jastryn. “Son,” said the m[ayo]r, “Pi [Limes] i[s] [p]roud of you. [ ] Mind you, anyone can believe whatever they want in this [t]own. So, I hope you know that you were never coerced into changing your point o[f] [view].”

[ ] sir,” said Jastryn.

“Exactly!” said the mayor.

[ ]

“Yes.”

[ ]

“If there’s anything you need, son, at this stage in your development, it’s to see something of the wide world [ ]

[ ]

[ ] train station. [ ] Atch[eson Tope]ka and Santa Fe.

“[ ] best of [l]uck [ ]” [ ]

[ ]

[ ]ord, the vagrant rose up from the bench and pointed to the [ ]ast, then subsided again with a clatter, like a collapsing easel.

[ ]mm[ ]

[ ]

[ ] as the train raced through the de[ser]t, visions came to Jastryn Remooth. He saw the Unbelongen [r]iding high, [ ], heard the voice of Ummari the ow[l] [godde]ss, and of Mitku[ ] saying [ ]itkus, saw from the

train window the finite facade of the O'Shallard House, [ ]ubes,  
[ ] B[ ]ka sunbathing on a ledge, [ ]s, [ ]co[s]mic renegades in mar[ ], [ ]  
and looming above, vast and perv[asive] [ ] projection of The Great  
Hydrodactyl.

[ ] ages of the ea[rth]

[ ] smelled the sea in the ha[rbo]r at Y[ ]

[ ] rally round the [ ]

[ ] jade and tourmaline, serpentine and jasper, [ ]

[ ] cleavage [ ] through the planes of memory [ ] above what seemed to  
be a fou[nt]ain [ ] and especially [ ] whose tenuous but remembered  
presence [ ]

[ ] sa[ ]

[ ] as if [ ] a distant globular cluster [ ]

[ ] once, long ago, in Pi Limes on a spring evening.

END