



I am indebted to two friends, both writers, for ideas important to the publication of this ms. G. C. (Ged) Blackmore suggested the unifying principle for the collection, and the title was inspired by that of Terry Morrison's excellent book of puns, *Mattress-ide and Other Grammatical Atrocities*, which is published by Tantalas Books of Gander, Newfoundland. Terry is also the author of several children's books, including *The Fog-Spinner*, which is set in Newfoundland, and Ged wrote *Bound in Shallows*, a Newfoundland play with which the Folk of the Sea, performers organized by the fishermen's union after the cod fishery was suspended, toured the province. I hold the copyright in *Parricide and Other Weird Ploys: The Tales of Prester Nicol*. I've been told the first pun in this series is remarkably unimpressive, but it did get the series going and it is "part of the Prester Nicol canon," so I've kept it here. Many of the puns in the series seem to me to be reasonably ingenious.

PARRICIDE AND OTHER WEIRD PLOYS:

THE TALES OF PRESTER NICOL

Presented by

Vincent Colin Burke

TPN-1

THE DRAGON AND JOHN OF THE GARDEN

Once upon a time there was a fair and noble kingdom, famous for the valour and prowess of its knights, for the prudence of its king, and for the ugliness and bad temper of his daughter Euphemia and the beauty and placid good nature of his daughter Rose. But one year there came to that kingdom a fierce and mighty dragon, which devoured many people and took much treasure and which all the prowess and valour of the knights could not defeat, so that most of them died frightfully. And it came to pass that the king in desperation had it proclaimed that any man who killed the dragon would rule his kingdom after him and have the hand of one of his daughters in marriage. And the first to meet that

challenge was a kind and gentle man who laboured among the palace flower-beds, whose name was John of the Garden. He had a magic sword and magic shield from Faerie, which an Elven prince had given his great-grandfather, a knight who later fell, through no fault of his, into disgrace and lowly station. And with that sword and shield he went forth and fought and slew the dragon, and then returned and said unto the king, "Your majesty, I come, having slain the dragon, to claim your daughter Rose."

And the King made answer and said: "I never promised you a Rose, Garden."

TPN-2

THE WIZARD AND HIS STUDENTS

Once upon a time there was a great and learned wizard whose tutelage was greatly sought by those young men who desired to learn wizardry, so that he always had many students, whom he taught to use magic in one of two ways. They could affect things of reality by forming within their mind's eye a detailed image of the thing to be worked upon, and slowly and subtly alter that image in a manner which would work upon the reality the effect desired, or they could listen to the inner music which is made by the inner essence of a real thing and, by making skilful music of their own in harmony with that music they could, by changing the music slowly and subtly, alter the essence of the thing. And magic of mental seeing could be worked only by wizards or wizard-students who worked alone, but the magic of inner hearing was worked best by groups. And it took many, many years of study to enable a wizard to master both kinds.

Now, one day in a certain year, while the wizard was teaching all his students one kind of magic, for all were that year best suited for that, a messenger

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came from the king and said, "Master wizard, the kingdom is invaded by a great crystal dragon which the court wizard cannot defeat, which is vulnerable only to magic of inner hearing worked by many men. The king requires that you bring as many of your students as you can to aid against the dragon."

The wizard said, "Sir Messenger, you arrive too late to have my students help the kingdom as a group. They are already too much into visuals."

TPN-3

SIR GORDON AND THE WIZARD

Sir Gordon and Sir Hugh were knights of old who had great friendship and affection between them, so that when Sir Hugh was slain by the treachery of a villainous cousin, Sir Gordon slew that cousin within short time without trial, but his grief was not thereby assuaged, but he was inconsolable. But he posted guards about the body of Sir Hugh, charging them to keep it undisturbed, for he dimly remembered having heard of a great spell which could bring a body back to life if it were so left. And he went to a mighty wizard and besought of him that he bring Sir Hugh back to life.

The wizard said, "That one great spell might possibly bring your friend back among the living, if anything can, short of the final resurrection of all men. But whether it will work or no, I must demand in return for my working it your service of protection for seven years, for there is great peril to me in its working, whereby I will earn much enmity." And Sir Gordon agreed to serve the wizard, in protecting him, for seven years and the wizard worked that most powerful of

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spells, in the cavern which was his home, from afar, upon Sir Hugh's dead body. And when the spell was fully done, he said, "I think your friend now may well be living. Let us go and see." And they went to where Sir Hugh was lying, and Sir Gordon looked at him and said at once, "Thou charlatan, he is still as dead as broken stone."

And the wizard said, "I never promised Hugh arose, Gordon."

TPN-4

THE KING AND THE VASSAL

There was once a king named Kiffordon who ruled a vast country and therefore commanded many vassals, whom he treated always with great patience, and indeed he treated all his subjects with great patience. And there came a time, the first of his long reign, when he felt it was his duty to make war against a neighbouring king, and he summoned his vassals to give their military duty. But one vassal, called Forduil, questioned whether the duty was a strict obligation.

"It is usually the duty of a vassal to support his liege in time of war," said Forduil. "But there has now been established a practice of peaceful vassalage in this kingdom, since we have never been called to war during your reign, which has been very long indeed, so that we may be justified in deeming it to be established custom with the strength of law. On the other hand, of course, we have sworn to go to war under your banner if called, so it is quite possible that oath supersedes established custom. But I am not sure. I think the opinion of the chief judge may be sought with some profit, upon this point. Maybe an oath is



not binding when custom enjoins against its fulfilment.

"On the other hand, my private sense of honour tells me I should uphold my oath, even though I might not, strictly speaking, be obliged to. On the other hand, my lady wife is against my going to war, and I vowed to cherish her until death parts us. If I go to war and death does therewith part us, I shall be forgiven, for my lady wife holds no grudges against the dead, but if I survive, she will claim I failed to cherish her, and my life will be miserable for a long time thereafter, and she will scold me with blame for breaking of my vow to her. On the other hand, Your Majesty is known for your patience and would never scold me if my conscience fairly forbade me to yield my military duty. But I would be keenly aware of your great disappointment, all the same. On the other hand --"

"My dear fellow," said King Kiffordon, "I have a war to wage by Tuesday next. Could you come to the point, please."

"With all due respect, my lord king," said Forduil, "surely it is a sworn vassal's sacred right to vassalate?" Then grinning hugely, he agreed to go to war. The king's great patience prevented murder being done.

TPN-5

THE KNIGHT AND THE ARROW-TREE

Once upon a time a mighty wizard buried in the ground a rich and splendid treasure, and planted sixty feet east of it an enchanted tree, of whose branches a fearful spell made living arrows which the tree would shoot, screaming, at anyone who approached for digging up the treasure or for chopping down the tree. And those living arrows could pierce any armour, and once they had struck, the life in them turned to deadly poison and painful death in whomever they struck, be the wound otherwise never so trifling, which few of those wounds were, so accurate was the magic upon the tree. So no one would approach the treasure.

However, a certain greedy merchant learned that a certain knight had a magic sword which could cut anything in the world, no matter how hard that thing might be or how fast it might be moving, though it was rumoured that such enchantment could remain upon the sword only while the knight refrained from slaying one certain kind of living creature, which he had sworn by a great oath

never to slay, albeit he had never told anyone what that creature was. And the merchant sought enlist aid of that knight and his sword, by challenging him at wager to prove his sword's magic against a certain thing which the merchant would point out when the wager was accepted. And the merchant offered great odds for that wager. But the knight was a canny man, and he replied, "Methinks ye seek the treasure of Dumindalin and would have me slay the living arrows shot by the tree Forlominix. So I must tell you now that those arrows and that tree are the creatures I am forbidden to slay, by the oath which keeps my sword. No matter what the reward, I never promise to hew arrows guarding."

TPN-6

THE SPELL AND THE SQUIRE

Once upon a time there was a squire of eighteen years of age, of whom it was foretold by an unerring soothsayer that he would be most fell and dastardly and treacherous knight of his century, and bring great harm to his own country, if he should come of age and be dubbed a knight. And that same seer foretold also that any knight who refused to elevate the squire after his coming of age would be destroyed, in an agonizing death, by a great curse. And the soothsayer told those things to the king of that squire's country, and forbade him to have them repeated to more than one person, on pain of death to all of his three daughters. For the squire was the protege of an evil and mighty sorcerer, who was bound by geas to give the king some warning.

Now, the king pondered the warning for several weeks, and then resolved to call upon a mighty wizard who had owed him a boon for many years. And the wizard said there were two things he could do to prevent the curse from falling on the kingdom: he could confuse the young squire's inmost being, so that the squire

would always think himself to be eighteen years old and never ask to be knighted and would steadfastly refuse if minions of the sorcerer should urge that he be knighted; or the wizard could kill the squire by a secret spell unknown to the sorcerer, so that the sorcerer would never know that anyone was to blame for his protege's death.

"I am loath to condone murder, even though refusal allow my kingdom great harm," the king said. "I am content that you confuse his inmost being, to keep him ever young in mind, if you are sure the confusion will last for all his natural life."

"I promise it, your majesty," said the wizard. "He will never outgrow his addled essence."

TPN-7

THE KING AND THE DEER

Once upon a time a certain king went hunting by himself, except he was accompanied by his deerhounds, in a great forest which was rumoured to be enchanted, and his dogs started a small but noble buck and gave chase to it, and it led an arduous chase indeed, but when he caught up to it, the buck was sore bestead by wolves and like to succumb to their attack, so the king set his dogs upon the wolves and drove them off, and gave the buck his life and freedom.

Now, as the king was riding home with tired horse and dogs but upraised spirits, the buck caught up to him and passed and came back, facing him, and said, "Lord king, in return for your kindness of today I give you this ring which you may now take from my left antler. It bears my likeness as a seal. As long as you have this ring, or your heirs have it after you, my magic will ever come to your aid when you are sore bestead. For I am a prince of Faerie, sent by my father to test the magnanimity of those allowed to hunt our forest."

And the king took the ring as the buck inclined his head, and he thanked

the buck, and he went home with great joy.

Years passed, and during them the king never needed the help the Elven prince had promised, but he never ceased to treasure the ring, though he never told why, and it came time for his eldest daughter to marry, but it was rumoured that she bore a curse which would bring her future husband great misfortune, and though the rumour was untrue, yet belief in it persisted and the princess had no suitors. But one day there came a tall and handsome prince who said he would marry her if the king would let him claim after the wedding any royal wedding gift he might then name. And the king said, "Any single piece of property I have you may claim as wedding gift when you and my daughter are married and the marriage is consummated, except there is one thing you may not have, that I must keep for myself. And since you might conceive that I would hold such thing to be any you might claim, I will now write on paper what it is, and seal the paper with my royal seal, and give you the paper, but you must not break the seal unless I refuse the gift you name." And the prince agreed, and so it was done.

After the wedding was held and the royal couple had enjoyed their wedding night, the prince went to the king and said, "I claim as wedding gift the seal ring with the seal in likeness of a certain small deer, which you wear on your

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left hand."

The king said, "Open the paper I gave you." The prince broke the seal and unfolded the paper, and on the paper was written, "I never promised you a roe's guerdon."



TPN-8

THE PEASANT AND THE ROSE

Once upon a time there was a mighty lord in whose castle courtyard grew magic roses whose thorns would pierce with poison and thereby kill anyone who picked them after failing any test the lord might set him, or anyone who picked them without essaying the test. And anyone who picked one of those roses and did not die at once was assured of health, wealth, happiness and long life.

Now, there was a long time one year in which the lord's test was that an aspiring rose picker insult him without his knowing it. And there came many learned men who phrased to that lord's face many subtle compliments which skilfully concealed a barb of insult, and yet the lord detected each hidden affront and roared first with anger at being insulted and then with laughter at the skill used and at his own quick wit in detection.

Now there was at that time a young peasant who was betrothed to a lass of wondrous beauty and quick temper, and because of her temper he was doubtful about the betrothal into which her beauty had led him. So he was minded to pick

a magic rose of that lord who owned them, so that he would be assured of happiness despite his intended's quick temper. And he bethought him of a ruse which he felt might work, since he, being a peasant, was coarse of speech.

The peasant lad went to the lord's courtyard on a day that it was open for aspiring rose pickers, and he went among the various learned men seeking to take the lord by insult unaware, and he asked each man if he might pick certain other flowers which graced the courtyard. And the learned men said they did not know. So then he glanced at the lord as if unaware of who the lord was, and, pointing to the magic roses as he had to other flowers, he said, bowing, "You, sir -- are dese pickable?" and the lord said, "Why don't you try them and see?" For he was sometimes of cruel humour. And the peasant lad picked a magic rose and remained alive, and was thereby assured of health, wealth, happiness and long life. Seeing this, the lord thought for a moment and then roared with chagrin and then with happy laughter. For he was at heart a good sport.

TPN-9

THE KNIGHT AND THE SPELL

Once upon a time there was a mighty wizard who claimed he could make any knight, but only one knight, invincible, by a special ceremony invoking a mighty spell, on condition that that knight swear an oath, and forever after adhere to it, to fight always by himself alone and to remain always celibate.

There were forty-one knights from all over the world who undertook to meet the conditions, and from among them the wizard chose Sir Ermondus of Dwalwaith, and swore him by a great oath to fight only by himself forever and to avoid all dalliance. Then he bade Sir Ermondus to kneel, keeping vigil, in the depths of the wizard's cave, for twelve hours before the final ceremony. And he said that if Sir Ermondus broke silence or stopped kneeling after four hours, then he would be condemned to fight alone forever, while his life lasted, but would never be made invincible.

Now, when Sir Ermondus had been kneeling in silence in the cave for five hours, his closest friend, Sir Devordus, rode to the cave door and told the wizard

that he and five friends were undertaking a great quest which was guaranteed by a strong prophecy to make them all renowned for ever, but the quest needed seven knights and they wanted Sir Ermondus to be the seventh, and Sir Devordus said that it was the greatest desire that Ermondus had had from childhood, to be certain of renown forever.

"I fear Sir Ermondus cannot join your band," the wizard said imperturbably. "He is already too greatly in the vigil."

TPN-10

THE KING AND THE SPECTACLES

Once upon a time there was a great and fierce king who had a pair of magic spectacles which enabled him to see anything that presented a danger to his kingdom, and when he saw anything that would do so, he dealt with it fiercely but with chivalry. His name was Hipontumicostocles, but his people called him "Eyes", because of his magic device which kept the kingdom safe. But no one named him to his face by that nickname, for all his people were too much in awe of his power and his fierceness. No one had in his presence named him with that nickname since the death long ago of his wife the queen, who had used it frequently, and it was in his old age his fondest secret wish that someone would call him "Eyes" in his presence, in token of friendship and deep affection.

Now, one day the king saw with his magic spectacles a mighty wizard in an enemy country labouring over a written spell which could cause deep and fell and endless winter to fall where the wizard might will it, and the king knew the wizard had it in mind to cast that winter on his kingdom, for the spectacles

revealed danger only to the kingdom of Hipontumicostocles, and the king was much afraid for the welfare of his subjects. He called to him an old wizard who in his youth had been mighty, and told him what was toward. And the wizard, whose name was Siptas, said, "My king, this spell can be stopped only by a counterspell which can be used by me alone. I must scale unaided the highest mountain of our kingdom and speak in a loud voice the words of power that will climatise our land against the deep and fell and deadly winter our enemy is brewing. Let me rest seven days in my magic blanket to give what strength I can to my old body and I shall essay the mountain. It is my duty as one who was once chief wizard of your kingdom."

The wizard went away therefore and rested, for the enemy's spell would take many days to form before it could be cast, and then he went with the king to the foot of the tallest mountain of the kingdom, where they said farewell, the wizard using the king's full name in formal ceremony of departure. "For," he said, "it is most unlikely I shall survive this task, with the great outpouring of power it requires. It is not even certain I shall be able to reach the mountain's top, though I feel reasonably sure I can climb it, Eyes."

At this usage in his presence of his old nickname, the king knew the

wizard was giving his life for friendship as much as duty to the kingdom, and his eyes filled with tears, and he knelt upon the ground and stayed there until he felt in his heart that the counterspell was cast and the danger gone, but as he was departing to give orders for the body to be brought down with all reverence, the wizard caught up to him, crying out, "Hold up, Eyes old buddy! I tell you, the memory of that nice pun gave me strength upon the mountain, and I live to tell the tale!"

And the king said, "What pun?"

But the wizard would only point at the mountain and yell, "Climb it, Eyes!" and laugh immoderately.

TPN-11

THE KNIGHT AND THE OATH

Once upon a time there was a knight of great valour, who for that valour was made well-nigh invincible by the King of Faerie, on condition that he never swear an oath, no matter what the need for it might be. And he was permitted to tell only one person of the reason for that favour, and he chose to tell his wife.

Now, that knight, because of the great prowess that he now had, surpassing that of all others and what had previously been his, which was considerable, was often sent on quest by his king when such was needful, and he was always successful, so that he was often sent again. But one time he was sent on a long and perilous quest, and came back much changed after many years, and no one, including his wife, could tell by looking at him whether it was he indeed. And he partly failed in his quest, though not in any essential aspect thereof, so that the king doubted that his knight had returned, but thought an evil trick was being played.

The king, therefore, had a wizard and a bishop devise an oath that none



could break and live, and bade the knight swear upon that oath that he was who he claimed to be. But the knight said, "Indeed, I am myself and no oather," and his wife, being present, gave a great cry of joy and made the mighty oath that he was indeed her husband, and she survived the making of that oath and they lived many happy years together.

TPN-12

THE TWO PRINCES

Once upon a time there were twin princes who were so much alike that no one could tell afterward which had been born first, not even their mother, for only a few minutes had separated their birth, so that when their father died it was decided they should rule the kingdom jointly, submitting to their older sister's resolution any matters on which they disagreed. But for the first ten years of their reign they never once disagreed.

Now, in the eleventh year of their rule, they had war with a powerful neighbour, and threat of war from one slightly less powerful. And they decided one of them should take half their great army and invade the first neighbour, settling that enemy's fate once and for all, and the other should stay at home to guard against the lesser threat, but they could not decide which was to go and which to stay, for each was a skilful general and mighty warrior, but each secretly and wrongly thought he was the better. They referred the matter to their sister, and one of them in fact the elder though no one knew it, bribed his sister, with

promise of the enemy queen's necklace of fabulous gems, to say that he was the better general and mightier warrior and would settle his part of the war in short order, the more quickly to return for defence of his own kingdom. And his sister accepted the bribe and things were done as he wished. Now the elder prince took half of the army, putting into it the mightiest warriors of the whole army, and led them into his enemy's kingdom, but he was outgeneraled and all his soldiers were slain upon the field of battle, for they were all too proud to retreat to the younger prince's help. Hearing of this, the younger prince sighed, "How are the moiety fallen," made peace and alliance with the enemy that had only threatened war, and with that neighbour's help defeated the first foe soundly.

TPN-13

THE WIZARD AND THE SORCERER

Once upon a time there was a mighty wizard who had great friendship with his king, whose sad duty it was one day to try the wizard for murder-by-magic, which by that kingdom was deemed the greatest of crimes.

Now, the true crime had been committed by an evil sorcerer envious of the wizard and his friendship with the king, whom the wizard protected from corruption by the sorcerer. The latter had put on the appearance of the wizard and chanted words of deadly power, in a voice that sounded like the wizard's, over a poor beggar in a mean street, so that the beggar shrivelled slowly and agonizingly died an awful death, inflicted by wanton cruelty. And the sorcerer had arranged to do that deed with two other men within hearing, for the kingdom's law, following the Jewish law of the Old Testament, required the evidence of two witnesses.

And the two men told the High Court of the King, when the wizard was brought to trial, that they had been behind a hedge when the murder was done.

And one of them said he peeked through a gap in the hedge and saw one who looked and sounded like the wizard's very self, performing murder by means of magical chant against a poor beggar. But the second man said that the terrible chanting made him too afraid to look at what was going on, though he had no doubt at all that he was hearing the wizard's voice, which he had often heard before.

"The law requires that no man be convicted of wrongdoing except on the evidence of two eye-witnesses," said the king, "and the evidence of this second witness is only ear-relevant."

Hearing this by magic from a distance, the sorcerer was taken so much aback that he dropped his magical defences for two moments and the wizard penetrated his guard and by magic made all his evil-doing manifest at once unto all the court, leading to a frightful duel by magic, in which the wizard was speedily triumphant, to the great relief of the king, who, in his faith in the wizard's innocence, had in truth bent the law a little in that ruling on the evidence, in order to trap the sorcerer he had long suspected of meaning to corrupt him.

TPN-14

ORMODULIS THE DARK

Once upon a time there was a powerful sorcerer called Ormodulis, surnamed The Dark both because of his dealing in black magic and because of the colour of his skin. He was a miser and loved nothing more than counting money and he had all the money he received for working magic, converted into pennies, to make for longer counting. And he worked black magic for good purposes and ill, according as he was paid, keeping himself protected in a mystic maze from the demons he summoned to do his bidding.

One day there came to Ormodulis a nasty nobleman, named Zenzabul, who asked the magician to work his magic against another noble, called Dromandic, whom Zenzabul hated with a vile and envious hatred. Zenzabul offered Ormodulis five thousand marks in pennies to destroy Dromandic's castle.

"That same Dromandic recently called me a niggardly mazer, and one of my demons overheard," said Ormodulis. "If there's anything I hate more than an insult, it's a pun. And when an insult is made in racist form only for the sake of a

pun, that's all the more disgustin'. I was goin' to destroy his castle anyway, so you needn't bother with the wreckin' pence." But when he realized what he had said, he called up one of the fiercest of all demons and stepped outside his maze, and thus Dromandic was saved from Ormodulis and Zenzabul forever.

TPN-15

THE IRISH PEASANT AND THE NOBLE

Once upon a time there was an English lord in Ireland who was a cruel man, though called a noble, and he made harsh taxation of his tenants, and was hated and feared by them. But there was one rich peasant in his domain who had concealed his wealth in a buried chest and whom the lord did not know to be rich and for whom the lord had therefore formed no special pretext to tax him of his treasure, but he paid the same rate as all others, which, though harsh, was not totally impoverishing, for the lord was prudent and desired his tenants to have some incentive to work hard, as they did.

Now, this peasant, named Sean O'Gibbon, was a public-spirited man who felt the lord should not highly tax O'Gibbon's fellows, and he resolved to use his wealth to better their lot. And, as he knew the stern noble hated to be laughed at, he anonymously hired a band of travelling actors to perform a mocking play about a nobleman miser gloating ferociously over money raised from taxing honest, hardworking peasants. And the actors made many sneering jests about avaricious



lordlings, without naming names, and the nobleman recognized himself in their portrayal and felt such shame and anger that he died of a heart attack, and his son, a generous youth, succeeded to the manor and relaxed taxation greatly.

"I corrected that stingy skinflint," O'Gibbon remarked to himself at the funeral. "By japers, I did."

TPN-16

THE BANDIT CLAN

"Blessed be the ties that bind," crowed a bandit chief as he counted, once upon a time, the huge haul brought in from a raid on traders by some of his numerous clan, all of whom were famous for their loyalty to him and to each other. "Ye b'ys are the glory of the clan O'Fitzgun," he said to the youths who had brought these latest takings. But those words made those ten youths feel much above themselves, and they turned arrogant toward the rest of the bandit clan, and demanded a greater share of the plunder, and the chief refused it.

"Ye may be the glory of the clan, for I said it once and I'll not take it back, but ye're not the clan's pockets now, are ye?" said the chief. "Share and share alike, is one of the ties that bind the clan. Blessed be the ties that bind!" For that latter saying was a favourite of his, and had come to the ears of the governor long before the ten disgruntled bandits sought out the governor, after turning bitter against the chief for insisting on fair sharing, and offered to slay him for fifty pieces of gold, which slaying they said would destroy the clan for the governor,

who had been unable to do it. And the governor agreed.

One morning after that, nine of the youths were in a barn of the clan stronghold and the tenth went to get the bandit patriarch and told him there had been born in the barn a two-headed calf, which he ought to see first among the clan. So the old chief went out into the barn and the ten set upon him with their pitchforks and stabbed him to death and rode away fast to the governor and offered to enlist in his service. But he would not have them, for he despised traitors. But he counted out their money and bade them take it and leave the country lest the clan be revenged on them. "So much for the b'ys that tined," he said.

TPN-17

THE KING AND THE PROPHETESS

Once upon a time there was a fair and prosperous kingdom, which was ruled by a great and noble king who was so just and also of such kind heart that the only thing about which his people ever complained in him was his strictness in the matter of dress at court, where he desired always that his people wear their best suits or dresses, no matter how poor and ragged their best might be or for what cause, however desperate or urgent, any of his people might appear before him.

This strictness of the king worked to some inconvenience for his people, for they always strove, when at court, to have their best attire somewhat better than they could well afford, so as not to seem disregarding of the king's desire. So they grumbled at it, but not much.

Now, one year there arose within the kingdom a woman who claimed to be a prophetess, who declared that it was the will of the gods that all people dress in the manner in which they felt physically, and not mentally, most comfortable,

according to the time of the year, with no regard for formality of vesture.

And many people believed she had heard the gods, and they began to dress in such manner as they felt physically most comfortable with. And these people often appeared in court in what was not nearly their best clothing, for they felt they should honour the gods rather than the king. The king felt that the woman was a false prophetess, but he was reluctant to say it lest many of his people revolt and many of his subjects die in civil war. But there was a prophet whom the king trusted, who also doubted the prophetess of clothing comfort, and he suggested that the king invite the prophetess to court on six successive days dressing as she desired for these occasions. And on each of these days, the prophetess arrived before the king in a most diaphanous and revealing gown, and on the sixth day she did so, the gods sent down a bolt of lightning, within the palace but not harming it in any way, and struck her dead.

"People may sometimes dress as they please when coming to court," the king said, "but not costume airily." And from that time, his subjects always dressed formally when appearing in his official presence at the palace.

TPN-18

THE KING AND THE TABLE

In the days of Arthur the High King of Britain there was a lesser king in Gaul who was greatly envious of Arthur's company of Knights of the Round Table, and he resolved to establish his own company of knights of a table, and he decided that his table, for the sake of being different from Arthur's, should be oval, and his company of knights should therefore be called the Company of Knights of the Oval Table of King Urofas. And he had a great oval table fashioned of oak, which was cunningly carved with many pleasing devices, and he issued a proclamation that only knights who had done great deeds and won great renown would be invited to sit thereat and eat therefrom.

There were many knights in that day who had done great deeds and won great renown but for whom there was no longer room at Arthur's Round Table, for its tale of seats were filled, and many of these knights preferred to join a mainland company anyway, so King Urofas had not great difficulty making up the company he had purposed. But after years went by and the tale of seats were filled, he had

built for him a much greater oval table and tried to have Arthur's knights abandon the Table Round and join the Company of the Oval Table. And one day when he was feasting with his company thereafter, Merlin appeared in their midst by magic and said, "King Urofas, it is obvious now that 'twas only for envy of my lord King Arthur, and not for honest emulation, that you established the Company of the Oval Table. For that envy you shall in sort be punished, but punishment shall bring a recompense, for in losing your pretentious table through fire of magic you shall be purged of envy and vain desire of glory and become a great and magnanimous monarch." And Merlin made fire of magic consume the Oval Table without harming any of the knights, except for one who drew his sword and raised it to strike at Merlin and died in a sudden flame at that instant.

And Urofas was purged of envy and vain glory and became a notable king.

TPN-19

THE STUDENT AND THE CONTEST

Once upon a time there was a mighty wizard whose most special skill was soothing those who suffered, whether physically or in their own emotions, and replacing their pain with great contentment. And he grew very old and his skills began to fail, and he began to look for a student wizard to take his place and in particular to learn his most special skill, which in its fullness could be possessed by only one wizard at a time. And he announced the holding of a contest among young men studying to be wizards, and there were thirty in that country who accepted his invitation. One of them was Varmonidos, a young man who was not quite certain whether he wanted to be a wizard or to marry, for he was half in love with a lovely lass.

Now, on the day of the contest, the wizard told the aspirants that they would first try which among them could, while sharing separately with him in use of his special power, most quickly soothe a bad-tempered bull stung by a bee upon the nose, and after that the two who had done best at it would be given a



further test.

And Varmonidos was doing really well with the first test when the image of his half-intended entered his mental vision, and then his concentration faltered and the bull went raging about the field.

"It's a shame, a burning shame," Varmonidos was often heard to lament in years to come, after the lovely lass had married another. "I coulda been a contenter," he used to say.

TPN-20

THE WIZARD AND THE PEASANT

Once upon a time there was a mighty wizard who received with great forbearance any complaining of the common people for whom he cast his spells to make their animals healthy and fruitful and their crops plentiful, and he bore without resentment their scolding when, for no reason they knew, his enchantments failed, because of being overruled by the High Ones. And that happened often, for, because of his great good-nature, he was frequently inclined to perform favours which he knew should not be granted.

Now, one day a shrewd and grasping peasant made a wager with a neighbour that he could cuss the wizard soundly on each of three consecutive days for failure of his spells, without adverse response. And on each of those three days he besought of the wizard a favour needing the casting of enchantment, which he knew should not be granted. And the wizard sought to grant those favours, but on each occasion his spell was overruled and his magic failed. And on each of the first two days, the peasant scolded the wizard soundly, with much

insulting language, and the wizard bore it with great equanimity. But on the third day, while the peasant was scolding the wizard for the third consecutive failure, he allowed some pleasure to enter his demeanour, with glee at the thought of winning his wager of much money, and the wizard, using for the first time black magic, which he deeply repented the next day, called down lightning on the peasant and blasted him from the earth.

"People can tell me off now and then," the wizard said grimly, "but not cuss too merrily."

TPN-21

THE KING AND THE PEASANT

Once upon a time there was a certain district in a certain country, which district was famous for the delectable flavour and fine texture of a pheasant found only in that district, and it was the female pheasant only, which was small, as pheasants go, that was such good eating. And the people of that district had the custom of offering a meal of that female pheasant to any stranger who sought hospitality of them, for they were a most hospitable people. And they prepared the pheasant for cooking by hanging it from the walls of their cottages, which, by reason of an ancient custom arising from pagan belief, all had mouldings a short way from the ceiling. And the pheasants were hung from pegs stuck in the mouldings, and were so high that they had almost acquired a mould when they were deemed best to eat and were most truly delicious.

Now, it happened one day that the king of that country was taken by a whim to visit that district in disguise, to see for himself whether the people of the district thought so highly of their duke as they were said to do and whether they

were as well ruled by him as they were said to be. And as he was in disguise, accompanied by a courtier who also was disguised, he was greeted as a stranger and offered female pheasant, ripe from the cottage moulding, in every home he visited. And after he had visited six homes in one day, the taste of pheasant began to pall on him and even, strange though it is to say, to make him a trifle ill. And he said to his companion, "The next cottager who feeds me thus is going to the block, even though the duke himself should beg for that man's life." So, at the next cottage they entered -- for the king was a sceptical man and did not wholly believe the praise he had so far heard of the duke, and he wanted to visit many cottages -- the courtier, who had a kind heart, discreetly drew the cottager aside and whispered to him, "As you value your life, peasant, do not offer that man cornice hen." And when later, because of that warning, Duke Gorlois heard from the cottager that King Uther had been spying on him and even threatened the life of one of his peasants, he started that war which led to the conception of Arthur, the once and future king.

TPN-22

THE SLINGER AND THE KING

Once upon a time there lived in a far country a peasant lad who was as skilled with the sling as David of old, of whom the Bible tells. And he used in his sling smaller stones than most did, which in that country were called dafturools, and he marked them with spiral grooves so that it might be known at once that it was his game that he brought down with them, when several slingers were hunting together. And each slinger of that country had some kind of mark, each a different one, for his dafturools.

Now it happened one day that a foreign king was hunting with horse and hounds in the slinger lad's country, and it happened that one of the hounds, which was of uncertain temper and training, and suspected of being part wolf, turned against the king and would have harmed him greatly had not a stone from the lad's sling -- for he was hunting nearby -- struck the huge hound on the head in mid-spring and killed it. The king said he would never forget this deed, but the lad declined reward, asking only that the king remember.

The years passed and the slinger grew to manhood, and he travelled much. And one year he was travelling in a country where a certain king who had incurred the enmity of a sorcerer was guest. And on a day he passed along a highway, he saw that king hawking in a meadow, and the sorcerer from afar put a spell on the king's hawk to make it attack the king and blind him. But the slinger was very quick and he shot a stone past the king and killed the hawk a few feet from the king's eyes. The king, unaware of his danger from the hawk, was angry and had his retainers seize the slinger. The king asked furiously, "And what, fellow, was that which killed my hawk?"

"It seems to me, my lord king," said the slinger, "that it's a small whorled dafturol." And then the king recognized him and realized what had happened, and conferred on him great honours.

TPN-23

### DRAGONHOUND THE GREAT

Once upon a time there was a mighty wizard known far and wide as bane of evil dragons. For he used to transform himself into a large and swift, tireless and terribly angry dog whenever he was needed to do battle with a dragon, and in that shape he would avoid the dragon's flames and claws and great barbed tail until the dragon was exhausted, when the wizard-dog would tear out its throat with sharp gleaming teeth in powerful jaws. And the wizard was called "Dragonhound" for so long that his more usual name -- which was not his real name, of course -- was quite forgotten.

Now, one day a neighbouring kingdom was assailed by a great and fierce dragon that sought to have its king pay tribute of gold and gems and sheep and cattle and even horses and have the king as his subject, and that king sent to Dragonhound's king for help, and his king sent Dragonhound to the afflicted kingdom.

When Dragonhound arrived where he was sent, the troubled king said to



him, "Can it really be that you are willing to face this terrible dragon who threatens us? He is the biggest dragon I ever heard of."

"I will face him," said Dragonhound.

"He is the strongest dragon I ever heard of. Are your bravery and anger equal to the task? For our trouble will be worse if you lose, will it not?"

"I will face him and kill him."

"He is the fiercest dragon I have ever heard of. Are you sure your bravery and anger are equal to the task?"

"I will face him and tear out his throat."

"He is the swiftest dragon I ever heard of. Are you certain your bravery and anger are equal to the task?"

At this repeated questioning, Dragonhound took on his dog-shape and barked furiously and growled viciously, till the king said, "I'm sorry, old man. I shouldn't have doubted your cur-rage."

TPN-24

### THE COWARDLY DUELLIST

Once upon a time there was a cowardly duellist not known then to be cowardly, to whom for some reason unknown to others a mighty magician owed a favour, and in return the duellist, who fought always with a rapier, asked the magician to make him invulnerable. The magician said that was impossible, but he could cast a spell which would cause the death of anyone who made more than three thrusts, or foins, at that fighter in any one combat, and the duellist accepted that spell as recompense for the favour owed.

After that, the cowardly duellist provoked many men to combat, for he felt confident of being able to parry at least three thrusts from any other man before he would be wounded himself, and he was cruel as well as cowardly. But by the time he had killed eighty men in needless combat, the magician was sorry for the help he'd given, and he thought the favour past repaid, and he wanted to remedy the evil he'd caused. So he went to a brave and skilful fencer and told him what had happened, and asked him to fight the coward.

"You must make one straight thrust at Sir Dastard's face," the magician advised. "Then make another, but compound, thrust which slows so much it seems to stop but really doesn't, between its first and second parts, and after that you must make another such thrust at his body, but seem to stagger midway through it, but keep your sword moving slowly and then fast again as you regain your proper motion."

The brave fencer did exactly as he was advised, and when he seemed to stagger, the cowardly duellist threw up his arms to shout in victory, and the continuing thrust, speeding up, stabbed him through the right lung, bringing him down upon the sword.

As the coward lay dying, he gasped out, "This can't be happening! You should be dead by magic for thrusting four times!"

"Technically, you poor incompetent," said the victorious fencer, "there were three foins in the countin'."

TPN-25

THE PRINCESS AND THE WAND

Once upon a time, a mighty wizard made a straight and slender wand from an elephant's curved tusk, and put upon that wand a spell of surpassing power that would make it always easy for a lover to be agreeable to his beloved, and she to him, if only one of them should sometime give the wand to the other. And the wizard died soon after and the wand remained in the cavern where he had dwelt, and it was known only as a remnant of tenuous legend. And it was gnawed upon by rats that came to live in the cave, but it was not destroyed or broken, nor did its magic dissipate.

Now, after the wizard's death there were a humble knight and a great princess who loved each other dearly but were forbidden by her father to marry, but she besought her father constantly and wearied him, until he said that they might marry if only they could spend three whole years, in alternative months, as menial servants of each other, without a single spiteful word from one to the other.

Hearing that decree, the young knight was minded of the legend of the ivory wand, and rode to the dead wizard's cavern, overcoming five trolls and a dragon on the way, and took the wand, bite-marked but still magical. And he brought it back and presented it, with a bow, to the princess, who, turning it in her hands and looking closely at it, remarked, "That's a gnawful thing to give a girl." But she was smiling joyfully as she said it, so it was not counted spiteful speech, and they served each other humbly and agreeably for three whole years and then were married and lived happily ever after.

TPN-26

THE KING AND THE URN

Once upon a time, there was a great king to whom it was foretold that his country faced a fearful killing winter which would destroy much livestock and cause many of his subjects to perish, unless a potter in his kingdom made a slim and delicate and stately urn in which the gods might keep their nectar for the seven days of its maturing. For the gods were about to brew new nectar, which happens once in a millennium and is no light matter. But the potter chosen was not to know the reason for the making of that urn. And if the potter who made the urn was at all smug about his achievement, no matter how fitting the urn seemed of itself unto the gods, the offering would be rejected and the killing winter fall.

The king, therefore, proclaimed a contest among his kingdom's potters for the making of an urn most beautiful, and he had as the prize for the contest a splendid dish from a famous goldsmith in a far country. And a young potter from an obscure village was judged by the king's counsellors to have made the most delicate and stately urn, and the king brought that young man into the temple of

the gods, and brought with them the urn, after finding out the young man wished he could do better than he had done and felt himself unworthy of the prize, and the king offered the urn to the gods, and he called out, "I demand of ye, O gods -- is this the winner of our dish content?" And the gods said he was not and they deemed the urn most fitting and acceptable, and they spared the kingdom for all of that millennium.

TPN-27

THE PRINCE AND THE RABBITS

Once upon a time there was a king in whose country was a wide and fertile plain whereon dwelled many rabbits whose flesh when cooked was of a surpassing deliciousness. That king declared that plain and all the rabbits thereon to be entirely and always his private property, despite the country's custom from time immemorial, of allowing all the poor to hunt the rabbits and take as many as they could for curing, which made the rabbit-flesh even more delicious, on Midsummer's Day, which afforded most time for gathering.

Now, there came a year five years after the king's mean decree anent the plain, when the poor of his country had less food than usual, and the nobles impressed upon the king that charity, if not justice, must have its due, and the poor must be allowed to hunt upon the rabbit-plain on Midsummer's Day. The king agreed to allow the poor to hunt, but he said he should have his rangers patrol a small wood in the plain's centre and arrest for trial and punishment anyone who hunted rabbits within one hundred yards of it, for he said some limit



must be put on privilege of poor when it encroached on right of king. But the king privily had a ranger gather large amounts of a herb found in that country, a herb called bunnynip, and crush out its scent upon the wind from within the little wood, so that nearly all the rabbits from throughout the plain gathered close around the wood, well within one hundred yards, upon Midsummer's Day.

However, the king's son was aware of what the king was doing, so he likewise gathered large amounts of bunnynip and crushed them on the air, upwind from the little wood, so that many rabbits went in that direction. And the king's son said to the poor, "Blessings be upon ye, who will one day be my children, and may ye hunt rabbits without fear, as long as ye keep on the right side of the copse."

TPN-28

THE HEIR AND THE CHESTS

Once upon a time there was a young man who had two uncles who were twins, and they died on the same day, for they were very old though, until death, apparently quite hale, and each left him an inheritance, which their lawyer, in their village some distance from the young man's home, told him about.

"Now, your Uncle Robert, a left 'ee a chest of gold that no man can carry and no animal can draw, but a man can draw it on a cart, 'cause 'tis enchanted," said the lawyer. "And your Uncle Simeon, a left 'ee a chest of silver that no man can carry and no animal can draw, for that's enchanted, too. But a man can draw both easily, on the one cart. So thou'lt have no trouble to take them home to thy own village; thou'lt need only rent a cart."

The young man, whose name was George, went to a man in the lawyer's village who had carts for rent. That man was curious when George said he needed no horse to draw the cart he wanted, big enough to haul two heavy chests, and he thought the hauling might deal with something greatly valuable or

magical, or both, so he said, "My carts usually go out with a horse of mine attached, that would know its way home and bring the cart back. If ye want not a horse, I'll have to go with 'ee, to bring back the cart. Besides, 'tis an idle day with me today, and I'd gladly give 'ee a hand for a little extra pay." And George agreed with that, and they set out, but on the way they passed the hut of a wise woman whom George knew, and he went back to ask her advice about the care of his inheritances. And the old woman said, "This carter ye have helping 'ee is the nosiest and most talkative man in the district; a has cozened 'ee wi' a false tale to get the truth about the burdens ye draw, which a will noise about so that 'ee will have folk flocking about begging 'ee for parts of your treasure, or maybe wanting to test whether their animals can draw those burdens. 'Tis best ye not leave him long with your chests, or a'll be snooping into 'em and after that a'll soon be pestering 'ee with subtle questionings."

George ran back down the road, and sure enough, there was the carter trying to pry open with a stout stick the chest which held the gold. When the carter saw he was espied, he claimed to was trying to kill with the stick a wood-destroying bug which had attacked the chest, but George said, "Peace, Goodman Carter -- the wise woman's vision is correct; thou hast pulled my leg, a sees. So

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now be off and I'll haul the load myself."

TPN-29

THE KNIGHT AND THE SHIELD

Once upon a time there was a knight named Dimondolos who was under a powerful geas never to hide his identity and always to carry his own proper shield with his own arms thereon. And this he always did, and had many noble adventures thereby. But one day he was upon a quest to rescue a fair lady that was in dire distress, and he rescued her from a foul and vicious villain, and they were hard pursued. And they came to a crossroad, and they met thereat a holy and learned hermit whom they asked what might be the best of the three ways ahead for them to take, bearing in mind the knight's geas.

The holy and learned hermit said, "Upon the way that lieth to the east are many dangers, and there are three of them that may not be escaped unless ye hide your shield's face and the arms thereon, and that will bring upon you doom three years from now, but the lady shall escape.

"And if ye follow the waysign that pointeth north, ye shall escape all dangers, and three that be specially dire, only if ye conceal your arms, but that

will bring upon you doom three years from now, but the lady shall escape.

"But if you follow the waysign that pointeth west, there will be many dangers, but you may be able to escape them. Escape is not assured thereby, but it is likely. And as for the geas that is upon you, it is clear enough that if you do escape at all the perils that lie in wait, you can do it without concealing your identity if you follow the westward waysign. As for hiding your shield, you do not need to where this guides."

TPN-30

THE KING AND THE COIN

Once upon a time there was a man named Silas, who was a maker of coins for his king. One day he did a kindly wizard a good turn, so that the wizard enchanted some golden coins, and silver coins, and copper coins for him, which would burn the hand of anyone who took them as part of payment of any price he made too high. And Silas was thereafter the cause of a few handburnings, through offering some of the coins on occasions when high price of goods seemed to warrant, to the canny merchants who frequented the capital city.

Now it came to pass that the king's daughter was to wed, and the king wanted a goldsmith to make a wedding coronet for her, and he wanted one worth five hundred marks and a certain goldsmith promised full value in a glorious coronet, but the king suspected him of dishonesty, and when the coronet was made, the king called for Silas the minter, who had told the king secretly of the virtue of his special coins, that Silas might test the goldsmith.

When the coronet was made, the goldsmith asked for his five hundred

marks, for he said the coronet, which was most fair to look upon and seemed worth the price, was of pure gold, and a gold enchanted mark of Silas's giving was among what the king gave, and it burned the goldsmith's hand, and he cried out for the pain of it. And it was found that he had alloyed some of the gold with a baser metal of fine appearance, for he confessed after being attainted by Silas's testy money.



TPN-31

THE QUEEN AND THE NOBLE

Once upon a time there was a keeper of chickens, who was delightfully well-favoured and even-tempered to the point of being too meek, and well-thought-of by high and low all about her village. But one of the highly placed, a hot-blooded young lord, had some low thoughts about her and was minded to base action upon them, and he let his mind be known to her, which she resisted, and he liked that not. And one day he made arrangement with her father, who knew not his lowmindedness but thought him a likely lad and pleasant, to have the biddy-keeper go to his house for a week while he was waiting to replace a servant maid who'd left, while her father watched the chickens for her. But it so happened that the queen of that country passed by, travelling in disguise as was her wont sometimes, and she was struck by the resemblance between Biddy and herself, and she was minded to take Biddy's place for some time. And that was the day Biddy was to go to the young Lord's manor, so Biddy told the queen what she feared might hap. And the queen said, "Set your mind well at ease, my gentle

maid." And they changed places, and while the queen served the lord in his household all that week, she was of such regal manner and determined disposition that he could in no wise bring himself to say or make a word or gesture untoward, for he sensed he was dealing with no ordinary biddee.

TPN-32

THE WIZARD AND THE SPIRIT

Once upon a time in Persia there was a prince who was troubled much by spirits inferior to angels, of whom all his counsellors and wizards could not rid him, but one counsellor said he had heard of a mighty wizard in a far-off country who was skilled in disposing of such spirits, by reducing to nothing their essences, more skilled indeed than any other wizard of that age.

The prince sent his most persuasive envoy to the king of that country, and the envoy asked the king to use his authority to have the wizard help the prince, but the king, though he confirmed, in answer to carefully worded inquiry, the wizard's prowess, would not order any subject of his to foreign service. "You must even secure his service on your own," the king said to the envoy. "I will help to promise him much gold," he added, with a wink.

The envoy went to the wizard, who looked more bleary-eyed than most wizards and smelled of an unfamiliar scent, and he carefully explained his mission, using all technical terms in their due places, and concluded with an offer

of much gold.

"Ye'd pay me fer that, would ye?" said the wizard.

"You're not accustomed to payment for such service?" said the envoy.

"Oh, yes, yes indeed, munificent payment," said the wizard. "Just testin' yer good faith, if ye'll forgive me, so I was. Now, just let me cast a minor spell, to whisk us back to yer Persian prince and turn me loose on all this gin ye want me to consume."

TPN-33

THE DRAGON AND THE PIGLET

Once upon a time there was a fair kingdom where crops were plentiful and various, which lived at peace for many scores of years, until a dragon settled in the mountains of its north, and then the king and the people of that country feared that their peace was ended. But they were by no means certain, for a subtle wizard who was chief among the king's counsellors told them that it had been known, though not as often in the West as in far Cathay, for dragons to be friendly unto man.

"If he be not friendly, he is doomed," said the wizard, "for I have magic which will destroy at once and utterly any dragon inimical to man. However, no one may risk using this magic against a dragon not inimical, for magic so used would make a friendly or neutral dragon into a fearsome enemy and strengthen rather than destroy him -- quite apart from the fact of its being quite immoral, or maybe because of that.

"Oh yes, I need to know also whether the dragon is a fire-breather, for

application of the magic differs with the type," the wizard added.

"So, then, we must find out whether this dragon is friendly, neutral, or inimical to my subjects, and whether he breathes fire," said the king. "Are there any volunteers?"

"I have a plan, Your Majesty," said the chief swineherd.

The swineherd took a young piglet on the long journey to the northern mountains and up to the dragon's lair, where the dragon so far was subsisting on mountain sheep and goats.

"Lord Dragon," said the swineherd, "I have here a piglet which I intend to give my baby son as a pet when he is three months older, and I have no one to teach the piglet wisdom suitable to his role. Will you let him stay with you three months, that he may gain wisdom from being in your company?"

"Place the piglet on the ground in front of me," said the dragon, "that I may assess his potential." The swineherd did so. "Ahhhh," said the dragon, "roast piglet." At those words, the swineherd leaped backward as the dragon breathed roasting fire on the piglet and ate it up. Then the dragon tried to do the same to the swineherd, but the wizard had given the swineherd magic boots which

took him back to the king's castle right away.

"Definitely hot-style, Your Majesty," said the swineherd, at which the wizard loosed a great enchantment, destroying the dragon utterly.

TPN-34

THE QUEEN AND THE DEER

Once upon a time, there was a queen who was finicky in her taste of food and affected in her pronunciation of vowel sounds. Her husband the king doted upon her and granted her every wish, provided only that it did not conflict with any law of his kingdom, which he might not change on her behalf. And it was a constant desire of this queen to indulge in the meat of very young deer, but the kingdom's law had always forbidden killing of deer younger than three years. However, the queen bribed a forest ranger to kill a deer four days after its birth and to roast it with delicate herbs and spices, and to bring it to her at night in her private room, while the king was pondering affairs of state with his councillors. And when the king was going to bed, he stopped by her door and asked whether she was minded to sleep at once or whether they might pursue his favourite hobby, which was chess. And the queen said she had just had a late supper and was disposed to sleep at once.

"Did you have a good supper?" asked the king.



"Fahntaistic!" said the queen. But then she realized what that sounded like, and coloured so guiltily that the king questioned her until he had the truth, and he put her in prison for three weeks which he thought quite enough punishment for one of her rank. And she never ate fawn again.

TPN-35

THE SUITOR AND THE KING

Once upon a time there was a princess named Sarah who was adjudged very beautiful by some men and extremely ugly by others, and it had been foretold of her that she would have great difficulty getting a husband, because of uncertainty concerning her disposition, of which reports varied. The king her father therefore offered half his kingdom, to be given on the wedding day, to anyone of royal blood who would take her in marriage. But he decreed that her future husband must take her on the grounds of his judgement of her physical beauty and not wait to become acquainted with her temper, which he said would accord with her husband's finding of her appearance. And he ordered that any suitor who did not make up his mind at first glance, should be put to death.

Now, there was a young prince who wanted a wife, but he trusted not the king's assessment of the princess Sarah's temper, and he went to a wizard for help. The wizard said, "I can put upon you a spell which will prevent anyone from harming you in the circumstances you describe, provided only you state to the

king your purpose of assessing his daughter's temper, in words he will not immediately comprehend, which must nevertheless make sense themselves."

The prince thought for a moment and then said, "Thank you very much, Sir Wizard."

The prince went to the kingdom of Sarah's father, and when he saw the princess, she was to his mind very beautiful, so that he was minded to assess her temper. And the king said to him, "What is your purpose in this kingdom, Prince?"

The prince replied, "I am thinking of marrying the princess, and I come to, oh, case Sarah, sirrah." The king, not apt to realize he was being addressed as "sirrah" by a prince, took these words as expressing resignation to the fate the prince would now expect for hesitating in his decision, but he found himself unable to give the order for execution, so that the prince was able to remain in the palace for some time, becoming closely acquainted with Princess Sarah, whom he later married.

TPN-36

THE YOUNG KNIGHT AND THE CHAMPION

Once upon a time there was a young knight newly dubbed, who went to a far country on a noble quest, on which he did his best, which was better than the best of many knights famed far and wide, but yet he failed, but in the course thereof he did a turn right noble for a great and mighty champion, who swore to return that favour mightily and hoped that soon would come his chance. And when the young knight returned to his king who'd sent him upon quest, the king appealed him of treason for its failure, which in no wise was his fault, and told him he must die a shameful death unless he agreed to meet all ten of the king's approved and formal champions all together in one fell battle. And if he fell in that battle, he would be judged guilty and his body would be thrown out to feed the crows at a much-travelled crossroad. He was told he might take a year and a day to prepare for the combat, and that he might have one friend only join the combat to assist him. "That is," said the king, "if you are willing to drag a friend into your foul disgrace. For he too will be judged guilty of treason if he falls."

Now, the young knight remembered his friend the champion's having told him of having fought and defeated fourteen notable knights at once, they being in full armour and he armed only with sword and shield, and he knew that such champions never lie and that his friend was famous even among such for his veracity, and he recalled that it would take about a month to get word to his friend and half a month for his friend to travel, so making sure of matters, he said, "My liege, I thank you for your mercy and ask three months for preparation, for I do bethink me I would indeed like to have a pal add in."

TPN-37

THE KING AND THE CRUSADER

In the days of good King Richard of the Lionheart, there came one day to England a travel-worn knight on a travel-worn horse, accompanied by what appeared indeed a warworthy destrier, and his armour and his trappings were of a subtle shade of blue. And he went to King Richard and said he had been of a small body of Christian Knights defeated by the Paynim in a minor crusade and sent out of the Holy Land in great disgrace, though much outnumbered, and he pleaded that he might be made one of the First Hundred, the noble knights who would be in the forefront of battle when Lionheart led the Crusade on which he was just about to set forth. But another noble knight was vying for the last place left in the First Hundred, and he offered to borrow enough money from Isaac of York to pay for half the Crusade's expense, on his own account, and save the king much credit, but a holy pilgrim just back from Jerusalem advised the king to take the knight in blue instead, for he knew that knight to be a keen strategist well aware of the Paynim's wiles, and Richard said, "Indeed, Sir Money-Mouth, I think

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it will be worth my while to choose the Turk-wise Knight," and so he did, and that knight won great renown in that Crusade.

TPN-38

### THE KNIGHT AND THE PRINCESS

Once upon a time there was a young squire named Emandoas who became knight a year earlier than most squires, in spite of his being most rustic in speech and person, and it was foretold of him by a reliable soothsayer that he should win great renown by his first adventure, through rescue of a lady attired in a certain manner, who would be in deadly danger.

Now, it happened in that year that the Princess Delisandola was betrothed against her will, by a decree of her ambitious and cruel father, to a prince of a neighbouring country, who had reputation as a philanderer and the pox to support it. And because of her repugnance for the prince and her reluctance to marry for any reason but love, the king, to punish her, had her tied to a stake, in a scarlet wedding dress, midway between the prince's kingdom and the lair of a fierce dragon, and said she would be the spoil of which might reach her first. And he told the prince about it, but not the dragon, who was expected to sniff her out with his great sense of smell if he became aware of her at all, which the king and the



prince hoped he wouldn't.

As it happened, the prince and the dragon arrived at the same time and began to argue about which should take the princess. While they were arguing, Sir Emandoas rode by and asked the princess, most politely for a rustic, whether it was her will that she be rescued. (He didn't want to exert himself for a woman bent on suicide.) Delisandola said she was indeed of a will to be rescued, but she asked, "Can one knight alone prevail against this prince's gang of cutthroats and this fierce and terrible dragon?"

"Fear not, me lady, dat is no great difficulty," said the knight, "for I am destined to rescue a damsel in dis dress."

TPN-39

THE KNIGHT AND THE SEERESS

Once upon a time there was a great seeress who could see into the hearts of men and declare to all the world whether what they said was true or false. To her was many a knight brought when he claimed to have done great deeds for which there was now to hand none other witness, and many such a knight did tremble and confess to lying when she looked deep into his eyes and then cried, "Fie!" in a mighty voice.

Now, one day there came to where the seeress sat in state a young knight named Dillindoes who claimed to have done deeds of great moment in another kingdom which was far off, and he worded his tale to the seeress in such wise that his deeds of which he told seemed to have mended the fortunes of noblemen and great ladies, when in truth he had merely been of great help to lowly men and peasant maids. But he felt in his heart that such were as worthy of knightly aid as others were, and that he ought to have as much credit for his help to them as other knights got for succouring the great. And he coloured his wording of the tale so

skilfully that the seeress could not decide whether he told truth or lied, for in his heart he was an honest man, if he did hold strange opinions. But she doubted him on principle and readied in her mind and throat a mighty shout of "Fie!", but when she made to give voice she found herself for the first time speechless. It was an event she often recalled with great merriment in later life. "That young rascal Dillindoes," she would say, chuckling. "He just stood there and defied me, weaving his tale so skilfully."

TPN-40

THE BARRED JESTER

Once upon a time in merrie England, in the days, in fact, of Richard the Lionheart, there was a minstrel who was famed throughout Europe for his sonorously majestic lays and the magnificent music with which he accompanied them.

One evening, however, as he sang in Richard's court a long and stately lay praising the king's part in the last Crusade, he was seized by a waggish whim which prompted him to end most suddenly, about halfway through, with a most deplorable play on words that gave a vulgar point to all that had gone before. The courtiers screamed with laughter, but the Lionheart was savage. "That was punnish meant enough for all time!" he roared. "Never again shalt thou have a chance so to barb the Lion in his den." And he barred the bard from his court forever.

From that time on, no one in the kingdom would take that minstrel seriously. Whenever he tuned his harp to start a stately lay in any gathering,

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someone was sure to say, "This is he that jesteth bardly," and request the song that had delighted the court and enraged the king. There was no escaping the tale that dogged the wag.

TPN-41

THE WIZARD AND THE GOBLET

Once upon a time there was a mighty wizard who had a small, round, and thin plate of a rare metal, which when passed once in the air to and fro above anything purporting to be of precious metal would make the wizard know whether that object was genuinely valuable or counterfeit. And when that little plate was passed twice over any precious metal, it immediately made the wizard know the exact degree of purity of that metal. And when it passed three times to and fro above any metal object, it made him know precisely the kind and strength of any magic that object might have.

Now, that wizard was chief counsellor to a great king, that was high king over seven kingdoms, and one of the lesser kings rebelled and made war against him for a long time, with the help of allies from the East. But the high king began to gain the upper hand, and the kinglet's allies to weary, and the kinglet sued for peace, sending the high king a small golden cup which the kinglet said was of twenty-four-karat gold and which he said had such virtue that three sips from it,

of water or wine, would counter any poison, no matter how deadly it might be or how advanced its effect.

The high king's chancellor received the golden goblet, but, fearing treacherous magic from the rebel kinglet, he brought it to the wizard, but the high king was told that the magical device had come into the palace, and he was anxious to see it. And he was finally told the goblet had been taken in for testing but the wizard was busy with matters more pressing just at the moment. The king was angry, and he stormed into the wizard's study just as the wizard was finishing his other, more pressing, business and was reaching for the cup.

"Sir Wizard," said the high king, "I demand you assay that golden cup at once to see whether it hath healing magic or power to bewitch or kill!"

"Indeed, my lord king," the wizard said, "that is precisely what I was just about to disc-over." Then he found the cup was genuine, and that ended the civil war.

TPN-42

THE KING AND HIS RIVAL

Once upon a time there were two mighty and prosperous kingdoms which lay side by side upon the western coast of a great continent, and they were for the greater part of time at peace, one with the other, but vied in producing great works in painting, especially portraiture, and in sculpture, and in literature, but in architecture they were not either of them greatly skilled.

Now, the king of the northernmore kingdom was at one time host to a nobleman from the east, who brought him word of the art of building gracefully, wherein that nobleman's country did excel, and that king was minded to build for himself and his people a city of surpassing beauty, which would attract painters and sculptors and poets and romancers to enhance even more the glory thereof, and he cried aloud, in his enthusiasm, that he would much enlarge his kingdom, and much would his neighbour rue it. And that word was brought to his neighbour of the south, who feared war therefore and prepared therefor.

When the northern king heard of his neighbour's preparations, he asked for



a meeting with him and inquired whether the southern king had heard of danger from the east and yet had not informed the north of that. And the king of the southern kingdom brought forth what he had heard, and asked whether it was true.

"'Tis true I said I would enlarge my kingdom at expense of ruefulness for you," said the king of the northern kingdom. "But I meant not the word 'enlarge' in a littoral sense."

TPN-43

### THE BRAGGART KNIGHT

Once upon a time there was a boastful knight who was most proud of his great ability to keep his seat upon horseback, whether in tournament or very battle. He always said he was never yet struck down upon the ground by shock of lance unless it were for the weakness of horseflesh, for at those few times he was struck down it was by a stroke that bore down horse and man together, with man firmly in saddle till he saw fit to quit therefrom.

Now, there was a wizard who heard much of that knight's boasting and grew mightily tired thereof, for it was by his doing that the braggart knight had so firm a seat, by reason of a spell that he had cast when the knight, while but a humble squire, had piteously begged for it, saying he would never boast thereof as though his seat were of his own virtue. And the wizard had promised that he would never undo that spell.

Now, the wizard aforesaid had a young apprentice that was friend of a young knight newly dubbed, and he hinted to the apprentice that he was most

mournful of having done the boastful knight that favour of enchanting him to sit firmly on horse whate'er betide, and, as if carelessly, he left his book of magic open at a page whereon was careful direction for undoing of the spell he had bemoaned. And the apprentice took the hint, and read carefully. Then he went to the young knight that was his friend and bade him challenge the boastful knight near end of the next tourney. And the young knight did so, and the braggart knight laughed him to scorn and boasted mightily, and threatened him with great disgrace, but just when lance of each met other's shield, the wizard's apprentice undid the spell that held the boastful knight, who in consequence was resoundingly derided.

TPN-44

THE PLUNDER'S RETURN

Once upon a time there was a lord fierce and fell, that was a robber baron, and his name was Harry. And he raided all the land around, and plundered, except his own domain, whereto he was a lord fair and just and well ruling. And one time he made a long journey to a distant land and raided mightily, killing none but taking great treasure from a prince who had befriended him. And the sin of that one raid only, for the treachery thereof, weighed upon his conscience at his death, and he urged his young son, who much resembled him in face and form, to take back all that treasure to the principedom of his victim, when his son had come of age.

Now, his son, whose name was William, came of age in fourteen years therefrom, and he set out for the far principedom, and he had many adventures on the way thereto, and he lost his way. And in his wandering with his knights and men-at-arms, he came to a far country, and to a mighty castle where an aged gatekeeper took one good look at Lord William's face, which now resembled his father's more than ever, as did his form and manner, and he began to raise the

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drawbridge and to shout and yell: "Robbers! Rapine! Pillagers! Plunderers!  
Traitors! Treachery! Call out the guard!"

Hearing and seeing this, a young knight who accompanied William  
remarked to his young lord, "It must be here raided Harry."

TPN-45

### THE DRAGON'S TOES

Once upon a time there was a mighty dragon, the number of whose toes exceeded by one the number of toes of the average cat. And a wizard most subtle and discerning learned that that dragon depended for his life and power upon his retaining a certain one of his toes, but the wizard, for all his subtlety and discernment, was unable to discover which toe that was.

The wizard, with his knowledge and the limit upon it, told the latest king on whose country the dragon preyed, that it was needful to cut off the full tale of the dragon's many small members to make sure the dragon died. And many knights were sent against the dragon, singly, as the knights deemed proper to fair and chivalrous combat, and all the knights pretended at first to be trying to wound dragon in an eye but suddenly turned aside and cut off toe. Each knight who did so was killed by dragon's crushing jaws when he turned his back to them, and soon there were ten knights killed and ten toes cut off dragon's paws. But when the eleventh knight cut off the eleventh toe, choosing at random among those remaining, he was most agreeably surprised to find himself still living and the

dragon keeled over dead.

The knight told the king and the wizard the good news, but the wizard said, "The dragon might be shamming death till he may safely fly away and grow more toes to keep safe the one he really needs, when he will be deadlier than ever to this kingdom. It is needful that all his toes be cut off, to make sure his power is destroyed.

"That presents a difficulty," said the knight. "For it were not chivalrous to dismember the dead body of a fearsome foe. But if a butcher be sent to the task, he will be killed if dragon shameth."

"Then you, sir knight, shall stand by while butcher does his work, and shall die if dragon shameth, while butcher shall escape," said the king.

"Good idea, my liege," said the knight. And he stood guard over the king's best butcher until the toe tale was numbered.

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TPN-46

THE UNCLE AND THE HEIR

Once upon a time there was a lord who doted on his only son and thought the lad could do no wrong, and indeed the son did rarely much of ill or good, but lay about the manor living on his father's bounty and goodwill, despite all the urging of his only uncle, his father's younger brother, that his father try to make a man of him.

The son took no interest in running the estate, and never learned the arts of war for its defence should that be needful, but his father always said, "The lad hath good stuff in him; he is of my blood; when he cometh of age he will be a man indeed and do all that is needful and proper in a man. My offspring can do no other. But while he is but a lad, he may indeed live the life a proper lad can delight in."

Now, the son came of age but still was slothful and loving of ease and good food of which he made no manner of provision and of amusement supplied by servants, but the lord his father said, "Tigers mature later than tabby-cats; seven years of manhood will make my son a proper man, delighting in all the

needful arts."

At the age of twenty-eight years, the heir was no more provident nor diligent nor war-worthy than he had ever been, and his father died for grief thereof. And the heir's uncle had him haled to court on charge of causing his father's death, and the court judged him indeed to be a useless parricide.

TPN-47

THE SIMPLETON AND THE KING

Once upon a time there was a foolish young man who thought himself vastly wise, who therefore went to the king of his country and offered himself in service as counsellor.

Now, the king was a lover of jests of the kind called practical, which, however, seldom seem really useful, and he told the young simpleton that, to become one of his trusted counsellors, he would have to persuade a neighbouring king to give a daughter, the youngest of six, in marriage to a son of the simpleton's king with half his kingdom as dowry, and the simpleton gladly undertook the task.

The proposal was so distasteful to the neighbour king, and the mediary's arguments for it were so silly, while put with an air of such grave wisdom, that the neighbour king knew not whether to laugh out loud or declare war at once. But he was at heart a kindly man unminded to war for light reason, and it came to him that the simpleton's king was playing a jest on the simpleton, so he decided to enter into the spirit of the project.

"Meseems my answer to your liege must be unmistakably clear, must it not?" he said, and the simpleton agreed. Then the neighbour king said he would cause therefore the mediary to smell to his liege in such wise as the proposal he had considered seemed to him, so he would have the mediary perfumed with many fragrant scents and send a swift courier to the first king with the words that as the mediary would smell when he arrived, so was the odour of his proposal in the nostrils of the neighbour king. And this was done.

At first, the odours of the fragrant perfumes blended sweetly and were most agreeable, and the simpleton set off home in high spirits, but as he rode, they combined to make him stink like cream of rotten egg, so that as he approached his king's palace his head hung down and his steps dragged, for he was too dispirited to sit upon his horse's back and be conspicuous in such condition. And as he went into the palace gate, his king, being apprised of his approach, went out into the bailey and greeted him jovially with the cry, "How comest thou in this mess, Sage?"

TPN-48

THE LESSER ARK

In the days just before the Flood, when Father Noah had his Ark abuilding, there was a neighbor of his named Nehemiziah, who began to take seriously the word of Noah that the Lord was about to drown the earth with heavy rains. But he was too proud to ask Noah to allow him place aboard the Ark, for he thought well of his skill in carpentry and was minded to build a lesser ship of his own for himself and his family and the beasts of his flock. And he therefore set his three sons abuilding under his instruction, and he selected the second-best among his beasts of flock to offer to the Lord in sacrifice for his family's safety in that lesser ark. And the ship was builded before the rains began, and when the rains began, he and his sons and their wives and his two daughters and their husbands got aboard. But his ark was not as seaworthy as the Ark of Father Noah, and it began to list somewhat. So Nehemiziah and his sons sacrificed the animals they had chosen, to appease the Lord's anger and keep their lesser ark from sinking, but the Lord liked not at all that worse ship and those who made it, and it sank and they were drowned, and the Bible tells not of them, but only

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Prester Nicol does.

TPN-49

THE SORCERER AND THE HORSE

Once upon a time there was a peasant boy who owned a fine stallion, that was given him in answer to a request of his father, who was told to name his own reward after saving the life of a knight right noble. And many men offered to buy the steed, and some sought that right persistently, but the boy would not sell.

Now, there came to pass a time at which the king of that country wanted new blood among his tale of knights at court, and he offered the accolade to anyone who could perform certain feats of knightly horsemanship with a steed the rider could call his own. And the peasant boy, whose name was Peter, undertook to win his spurs, for he had practised with his noble steed, in secret, all arts seemly unto knightly horsemanship.

When the time of the king's contest was arrived, the king's chief wizard set forth certain tests of health and hardihood, to be performed in the art of medical animal husbandry, which steeds must pass to be admitted to the contest, lest they come to grievous harm. And a sorcerer who was renowned in the practice of medicine pertaining unto beasts, saw Peter's horse and desired it greatly for

himself. And he offered to perform with the king's chief wizard, who was the foremost practitioner of the medical art for animals, those tests which had been set. For he knew that if he should get so close to steed, he could make it seem unsound of wind, and, if he could do that, he meant to offer Peter a lesser steed, in exchange, as if in pity for his plight.

And the chief wizard, who trusted him much, agreed thereto. But the king, who stood nearby, was a shrewder judge of sorcerly character in this one instance, and he said, "I do not deem it seemly, Sir Sorcerer, that you should covet this horse." And the sorcerer turned pale and forbore, and the steed was judged sound and he and Peter exceeded all standards set for achieving knighthood in the contest aforesaid, and Peter became a knight, and the deeds of him and his steed became famous across seven countries.



TPN-50

THE GODS' PRACTICAL JOKE

Once upon a time there was a mighty wizard with whom the gods decided to have a little fun. They so dealt with him that anyone whom he might chance to abuse verbally would most surely, regardless of the wizard's own intention, suffer much minor misfortune from then on, unless the wizard, being made aware of the mischance, should recant the words of abuse which caused the trouble.

Now, the wizard, named Humopostis, was a man of great forbearance and rarely, very rarely indeed, even slightly tempted to revile even the worst troublemaker who might irritate him -- which was why the gods, who have peculiar sense of humour, had thought it might be fun to deal with him as they did. It came to pass, however, that one day a saucy and impudent young man was tempted to pat upon the backside the dainty, refined, and beautiful only daughter of Humopostis, and the wizard, being by this action most highly enraged, named the young man by seventeen most vulgar epithets all of which mean "libertine", and by fifteen more, all equally vulgar, meaning "presumptuous".

From that time onward, the young man, whose name was Loposities, was

subject to a string of minor but most discomfiting misfortunes, until he chanced to make the acquaintance of the only man, a minor wizard, to whom the gods made their deed in this instance known, and upon hearing of the young man's ill-thought deed and his misfortunes, the minor wizard told him the cause and said he should have a mutual friend beg forgiveness for him of Humopostis and ask the wizard to retract his epithets. And a friend whom Humopostis respected greatly made that attempt on behalf of Lopositias, but Humopostis sternly refused to discuss him.

TPN-51

THE WIZARDS' CONTEST

Once upon a time, there were two mighty wizards who were judged the greatest practitioners of their art then living in the whole world, and they were great friends and in no way rivalrous, but their students, who were many, often argued much about which was singly the greatest wizard in the world, and that argument took up so much of the students' time and thought that some of the better were neglecting study alarmingly. The two wizards therefore resolved to settle the matter by friendly contest, and the one who was younger by a year, intending that the contest be waged with no admixture at all of any kind of black magic, but wholly with white magic only, named all the spirits he could think of at the moment who deal in magic less than wholly white, and said that their help should not be used in the contest. But he absentmindedly failed to mention imps, who in particular are regulated by their own special code of behaviour and like not classification of themselves with other spirits, good or evil. And the older wizard, noticing his oversight, agreed with all of his forbiddings.

Now, the contest was that each wizard build a castle in the air that should

be solid and comfortable and liveable for six hundred days, with each wizard living three days at a time in each castle, until one wizard should concede that the other's castle best suited the conceiver. And in three weeks the younger wizard conceded that the older had made the better castle. But he said he had detected a whiff of subtle black magic in the texture of its walls, and he said that had been forbidden.

"Not so," said the older wizard. "In a strict interpretation of the rules to which I agreed, use of minor black magic is implicit."

TPN-52

THE QUARRELLERS

Once upon a time there was a knight's daughter named Anna, called Anna the Pious to distinguish her from a cousin of the same name less given to attending Sunday Mass, and she married a merchant's son who was very prudent in business. Their wedding feast was sumptuous, for his old father was much pleased at the match and inclined to spread himself therefor, and the match indeed at first seemed verily made in heaven, for the young spouses were much enamoured each of the other. It came to pass, however, that the young husband's prudence began to look to his young wife like tightfisted, cunning avarice, while he often therefore accused her of assuming airs beyond the station to which her marriage called her. And when they grew angry, which happened more and more often, she was inclined to call him, "Moneygrubber," and he to call her, "Snobbish." And much they followed their inclinations thereto, until one day her epithet was "Moneygrub" and his was "Snobbitch", wherefor she went pale with anger and he was aghast and promised to call her no more names in anger but only petnames in all tenderness. And all went well betwixt them for some

months, until in a moment of tender exasperation he murmured lingeringly the word "snobbitch". So they went to the village priest for advice.

The priest told them straightway that husband and wife are bound together for hell or heaven, neither being saved without the other, and he said that whenever one of them felt like calling the other ill names, that one should kneel and thank God for his gift of marital chastity and the other's part in that gift, and ask God to forgive them both the sin of anger, and ask the other to kneel also and share in that prayer, each praying for both to have the gift of meekness and to be made holy.

And Anna and her merchant husband were noted from that day to pray more copiously than other married people in their district.

TPN-53

THE DRAGON'S TEST

Once upon a time, a knight who was a dragon-slaying specialist did slay a great and mighty dragon from whose cave door a cubling dragon watched them fight. And when the great dragon was dead, the dragon cub begged the knight for mercy and pleaded that he be spared.

"I wasn't going to kill you myself, anyway," said the knight. "You're too small and weak to be a respectable kill for a knight of my prowess. On the other hand, if I let you grow to size for fair fight, you will have had ample time to develop tactics to counter my technique, which you have had full opportunity of observing while I dealt with your father. I was going to have a wizard resolve my dilemma by dealing with you in the manner proper to wizards."

"Oh, that dragon you killed wasn't my father," said the cubling dragon. "He was of an evil breed of dragon, as you know, but he could have no children, so he stole me from a noble sire of the right-living, rare breed up North and was going to raise me to an evil life if my sire found me not. And he was skilled in hiding from the wights who practise good. If you spare my life, you need never

fear my wrath, but if you let me go to find my own way home, my sire will doubtless reward you magnificently and I myself will be a redoubtable friend to you when I come of age."

"Soundeth good indeed, but I can't just take your word for it," said the knight. "You'll have to come to a wizard friend of mine for testing of your veracity." And the dragon cub agreed.

Now, when they came to the knight's wizard friend, the wizard said, "The only scientific way to tell good from evil dragons, other than by abiding the deeds thereof, is to put a drop of the dragon's blood into a vial of magical water I have here somewhere. Oh, yes." And he took from a shelf in his dwelling a crystal vial, which had a clear liquid in it. "Now dragon-blood in its normal state looks all the same to mortal eyes, but when a drop of blood from noble dragon is placed in this water, the drop will turn to liquid gold, but blood from evil dragon there will turn black and viscous. Will ye take this test, young dragon?"

The cubling dragon hemmed and hawed a moment, but the knight looked sternly at him and felt of the hilt of his sword, so the young dragon agreed, and he nipped himself beneath a scale, and a drop of blood oozed out, which the wizard caught in the vial, having taken the cork out of it, and he held the vial to the light,



while the knight did watch the dragon closely. "Ah, ha," said the wizard then, "there is a taint of vileness in the blood, which is right here rated tarry." So the wizard cast a spell and killed the cubling dragon forthwith, which is perfectly proper conduct for wizards.

TPN-54

THE OUTLAW AND THE TRAITOR

Once upon a time in old Ireland, there was a bold and cunning outlaw named Terence the Good, who was a thorn in the side of the English tyranny, and he could not be caught or outwitted by the tyrants.

Now, the father of Terence the Good had been of blood right royal, with a claim, more than merely plausible, to the country's crown and throne, and he had been done to death most cruelly by the English after being betrayed by a commoner who had tried to seduce him into giving her a merry-begot of royal blood but had been scornfully rejected and had later borne a daughter to a man among the English who then cast her aside. And it was his father's dying wish, made known to Terence by the priest who heard his father's last confession, that Terence take good care of the traitress's daughter, for her mother had died of shame soon after the treachery. And Terence did as he was told his father wanted, and the lass, whose name was Kate, grew up with him in the wilds of Ireland, wherein he could always foil the English.

Now, it came to pass that a raid of Terence's band upon an English

stronghold, made with craft and wile, was foiled through treachery, but all the band escaped with their lives, and they began to cast about in their thoughts and words for the source of treachery. And one of the two outlaws who were both called Michael, pointed to Kate and said, "Like mother like daughter; I'd stake my life 'twas her ratted, Terry." But Terence would not believe it, and he devised a ruse that uncovered the real traitor, and the band did that man to death most quickly.

TPN-55

THE GEAS ON THE CLAN

Once upon a time, there was a clan of mighty warriors who were about to fight in a war that had been brought upon their country by a devious and subtle foe, and they marched from their own territory to where their country's army was to muster, and the clan was divided into the offspring of each of two ancient brothers, of time long gone, so that the descendants of one brother were under a geas to carry into battle small white kerchiefs wrapped around their helmets, which kerchiefs were to be perfectly unsoiled until the war's first battle was fully joined, and the descendants of the other brother were under geas to sleep for fifteen minutes in each afternoon of the march to muster. And the whole clan was under geas to stain their garments with blood of foes killed on the march, if any such there were. And the two halves of the clan were obliged to march in files side by side, one half of the clan by the other. And if any of the geases was broken, that half of clan which broke it might no longer march. And if one half the clan went into major battle by itself, without the other half, then all the warriors of that half of clan would be slain in the first battle.

Now, it came to pass that a small party of foemen, sent out as raiders in advance of the main body, came upon the clan warriors while half the clan was sleeping for the prescribed fifteen minutes. But the waking half defeated the foemen, killing all but one, whom they took prisoner. And they each dipped their hands in blood of foemen and wiped their bloodied hands on the garments of those yet sleeping (for the fight, though fierce, had been brief). And the prisoner asked them for what reason they did thus.

"Why," said one of the waking clansmen, "we are under strict obligation not to de-file our nap-kin."

TPN-56

THE YOUTH AND THE SCHOLAR

Once upon a time, there was a warrior tribe to the near east of Saxony, that were fell warriors indeed, who had a custom of calling on the god of war for strength and courage, through a ceremony of manhood-achievement, long before a youth who underwent that ceremony might be deemed of age to go to war. And in that ceremony, a youth who sought to be courageous stood on the one side of a fire of green boughs, which fire was ten feet long and threw up thick smoke to be as it were a grey curtain. And the youth would be bound by each wrist with a long rope to a stake at his left and another at his right, with some slack in each rope so that he could dodge somewhat and bend somewhat, but would not be entirely free. And three warriors who each had been through the same ceremony ten years before would cast spears in his direction, through the smoke-pall. And the tribe believed that a man of true courage would be granted luck and skill to dodge all spears that came through the smoke, though three spears were always cast at same time for nine turns.

Now, there was a youth among the tribe whose turn was coming soon that

he should undergo the ceremony of the spearcasting, but as the day was drawing near, there came to the tribe for guesting a scholar from afar, whose name was Mickle Newtongue, who told the tribe's younger sons of similar customs in other tribes, which he said believed in their own gods as that tribe believed in the god of war. And he said those customs of the other tribes proved often fatal to young men, which he said was like to hap, for those other tribes believed in false gods, though their belief was as strong as his host tribe's faith in the god of war. And the scholar spoke so smoothly that when the day of his ceremony of manhood-getting was come, that youth of whom the tale has told had lost all faith in the god of war and would have nothing to do with the spear ritual.

TPN-57

THE WIZARD AND THE DEMON

Once upon a time there was noble treasure of splendid gems, which a sorcerer hired thieves to steal for him, and he put it in a cave cunningly hidden. And the lord from whom the gems were stolen hired a wizard to oversee their recovery, and the wizard sent a brave knight and his own chief apprentice to the cave of which he had pierced the concealing spells, and he warned them that the treasure was guarded by a fell elemental and possibly by something else with it, of which he was not able to gain real knowledge, either of its nature or even its existence. And besides a spell to his apprentice for aiding the knight's combat against the elemental, he gave the apprentice another spell that should have been good against most foes spiritual or physical, but was of a kind that largely was untested, being but a recent product of modern progress.

Now, when the knight and wizard's apprentice were almost into the cave that held the treasure, the wizard had a sudden inspiration anent a new divining spell, and he used it and found his partial guess had been correct; there dwelled in the cave besides the elemental a demon very fell, of the kind that had fierce



appetite to devour all that it perceived as other than its own ego. And the wizard tried to warn his helpers, but his magical vision of that scene was suddenly obscured, so that he knew not of their fate till they came back successful. And when he had heard their tale of how both spells worked exceeding well, he said, "I had no fear for your prevailing against the main guard that was the elemental, but the spare eat-you-all had me really worried."

TPN-58

THE MESSENGER AND HIS STEED

Once upon a time there was a messenger who had a horse that many said could understand the speech of men and would run his fastest when the messenger did ask it as a special favour. And that messenger was much employed by kings and nobleman upon important business, for that horse was, when need demanded, the fastest in the world at that time. And the messenger and his horse gained great renown. But the messenger used upon his horse nor whip nor spur, but only the asking of his own voice.

Now, it came to pass that the horse became overmuch accustomed to his rider's gentle voice, and required more of it before he would give of his best, which was growing more needful as the messenger was commissioned on errands ever more pressing. And the coddling by voice that the horse came to expect began to exasperate the messenger, who therefore went to a wizard that specialized in mastery of beasts, and the wizard gave the messenger a gold spur of which one touch would strike into the soul of horse really intelligent an overmastering urge to run its best, provided his rider's soul did really demand it.

And soon after getting that spur, which was costly but, the messenger deemed, well worth the cost, the horse upon an urgent errand became most balky. And the messenger lost patience and said, "Mine able steed, I have done with catering to your desire for incentive gently emotional and am minded greatly now to use the spur, wit you well, so cease your selfish laggardliness and make good speed." And the horse did so, nor gave any trouble from that time onward.

TPN-59

THE KING AND THE CLERK

Once upon a time there was a clerk in the court of a king who loved to watch roosters fighting, and the clerk deplored that pastime and often tried to persuade the king to forgo it and even to ban the holding of cockfights anywhere in the kingdom. But the king berated him for caring more about the bodies of birds than for the souls of men, with which (said the king) a godly cleric should be more concerned.

Now, that clerk was given to writing satire in his leisure, and he was minded one day to write a wholly fictitious account of two roosters fighting after the manner of the king and the king's master-at-arms, his favourite partner for combat-practice. And he had the monks of a nearby priory make copies of that, which cast much subtle mockery at both cockfighting and the king's style of fence, and at the king's delight in both, which he made appear most unseemly in a man that should be of noble soul, and he had the copies distributed to such of the courtiers as could read and appreciate such art. Now, the king was soon made possessor of a copy, and he deemed he knew the author, and he told the clerk he

must either recall all copies and burn them before the king's own eyes or lose his position at court for his greatly overweening. "A little pride of the intellectual kind is possibly not too much amiss in a learned clerk," the king said, "but I like not what you have of the spar writ too well." The clerk refused and lost his job, and the nearby prior gave him the task of providing parables for his monks to copy in books of sermons on the pride of kings.

TPN-60

THE KING AND THE WIZARD'S FEE

Once upon a time there was a king who had a beautiful daughter of temper so uncertain that she had few suitors, and those few she spurned, so that the king, whose only child she was, was near despair of having a grandchild to rule after her, and he was not much sanguine about her own future queenship, because of that very doubtfulness of temper. And the queen was of like mind with him. So they had word put about, without knowledge of the princess, that they would be willing to pay a large price to any physician or wizard who could give their daughter true evenness of disposition. And two wizards came forward thereto. One said that for one hundred gold pieces he could keep the princess even-tempered long enough for her to secure a wise husband of royal blood to rule the kingdom well with her despite her crookedness when it returned and for her husband to get her with child who would be wise and mild, but then that spell would wear off and her husband would have to bear the brunt of her sometime meannesses. The other wizard demanded a thousand gold pieces for a permanent cure. When the queen asked whether it would cost so much to effect the cure

with legitimate profit, the wizard said that it did not, but he needed eight hundred and fifty of the coins to pay a rival to lift a spell of constipation which the rival had put upon him six months earlier.

The king, who knew the value of his money, sat pondering long time, but at last the queen interrupted his thought, saying, "We should pay the more, I think, the costive, it would be worth our having a contented son-in-law."

TPN-61

THE SAGE AND THE GEM

Once upon a time there was a peninsula jutting straight out west from a long even coast of a far country, and the people who dwelled on that large arm of land were mostly half-elven, being descended from many mixed marriages in the Elder Days and having bred true, with permanent qualities of both races, in the long time since the passing of those days, and one of the most deeply grounded of the traits inherited from the Fair Folk was a magic that went to the heart of care for the land, in which they had much skill and invested much deep feeling. And midway of the second half of that great peninsula there jutted due north west a lesser arm of land and narrow, on which dwelled a folk mixed of men and elves and merfolk, whose magic had, as it were, branched at an angle, even as their arm of land, from the magic of the Trunk as its folk named the greater peninsula. And the magic of the Lesser Arm dealt chiefly with the sea and its creatures, and was alien to the Trunkers, who for the most part shunned that magic and the sea and were farmers.

Now, there came a time when the crops upon the Trunk began to fail, and



the eldest sage among them told the people at a great assembly held to discuss this unheard-of untowardness, that there was a great gem that had once been the heart of the peninsula but had been gone long time, and after its protracted absence, the life it had left behind was waning, and only its being recovered and placed back in the earth, at the midpoint of the Trunk, would restore life to the soil. And his arts had shown the sage that that great gem was at the bottom of the sea, near the tip of the lesser arm of the great peninsula. "It galls me much to give such rede, but our own magic will avail little in recovery of the Heart of the Trunk, and I counsel we have recourse to the Diver-gents," he said.

TPN-62

THE SAGE AND THE RAVEN

Once upon a time, there was a tribe of warriors who lived on an island in the Atlantic Ocean and were skilful sailors as well as mighty wielders of the sword, and they were independent and honest men who lived by farming and fishing, for the island was large and fertile, and the sea about it abounded in fish, and they sought no dominion over any, but each only over his own farm, and each held with pride to his share in the ship wherein he fished.

Now, it came to pass that the king of Great Warrior Isle, for so that land was named, did a great favour for the king of the merfolk, whose territory bordered on the fishing ground of the men of the island, and the king of the merfolk showed the king of the island where to find a certain sea-growth that was well-suited to caulking ships and which carried further an enchantment which would protect in battle on the sea the lives of all who fought in ships that were caulked with it. And the king caulked with that seaweed all seven score of his ships, the only fleet of privately owned ships on Great Warrior Isle. And the king, thinking himself invincible on sea and bearing in mind that his countrymen

scorned to fight among themselves on land but settled in ships all quarrels that needed combat, began to act tyrannously and exact excessive taxes. And so the free-minded folk of Great Warrior Isle sent secretly a spokesman (for spokespersons were not invented in the days of old, but at the very most were only spokesmembers and these were passing rare) to a sage among the merfolk that the king of their kind had once offended grievously. And the spokesman (who might conceivably have been a spokesmember but was, in fact, a little ashamed of his great virility, which often got him into difficulty), told the merfolk sage all the trouble with their king that the island folk were having, which included a pact of the king with the local ruler of ravenkind, who had agreed that he would watch the king's fleet during that one hour, which included midnight at the midpoint thereof, when the king's sailor-warriors were likely to be affected by such magic as the island folk could wield to bring about drowsiness and sleep, to which magic the wereravens (fell warriors in their human form, which could be induced only by causing alarm within their souls), were immune. For the free-minded subjects of Great Warrior Isle had known for some time that if a brave man might swim in the magic hour to even one ship of the king's fleet and pluck out one small strand of magic caulking, all of that sorcerous material would

vanish out of all the ships. And all of this complex difficulty was put before the sage by the spokesman of the island folk, who were loth to engage the open enmity of ravenkind, but wished to somehow deceive its ruler in secret.

"Fear not, my friend;" the merfolk sage told the spokesman of the island people, "I have a spell and a stratagem that will precisely serve your purpose with regard to the Caw-King." And it did, and the king of Great Warrior Isle was humbled and did penance and ruled wisely and well thereafter.

TPN-63

THE KING'S AGREEMENT

Once upon a time, there were two kingdoms that were neighbours, and they had held between them long time a formal agreement of peace and mutual aid. And there was a large and ancient oak on the border between those kingdoms, in the bark of which was carved ten runes, and each rune stood for a condition of the treaty, of which there were ten. And on Midsummer Day of each year, the two kings and seven court officials from each kingdom would gather at the Oak of Agreement and read the runes and recite the terms of the treaty pertaining to the chief idea for which each rune stood, and that custom was maintained for many years.

Now, it came to pass that the kingdom which was northeast of the other began to pride itself on the learning of its scholars and the literacy of its subjects, so that one year its king suggested to his fellow that the oak be cut down and made into many pieces of paper on which should be inscribed copies of the treaty between their countries, and the southwest kingdom's king said he would consider that notion, and while he was considering it, the northeast king had it carried out,

but on his copies of the treaty he added another term, which was detrimental to the southwest and greatly profitable to the northeast, and when questioned he argued that it was a genuine term of the old agreement and should be upheld with the others.

"If you do not hold to this condition, you will have broken our honourable and ancient treaty," said the king of the northeast kingdom.

"Nay," said the king of the southeast kingdom, "it is you who have abrogated the treaty." And he made war on his rival and defeated him and enforced the agreement as it had always stood.

TPN-64

THE PRINCE AND THE DICER

Once upon a time there was a king who had three sons, and the youngest of them was a quiet and peaceful man (though of the three the most skilled with weapons and the hardest in battle), except that when he had drunken enough wine to kill three men of normal constitution, he would begin to sing songs of sweet melancholy and then challenge three men to fence with him all together, with sharp swords but no ill intent, and many men were wounded by him, some of them grievously, though none actually died, for that his skill in holding back from dire thrust was altered by his drinking so much. But no strong drink but the best of wines did have on him that effect, to make him sing like a tomcat and seek mock-combat that against his intent would turn grievous. And he was a skilled gambler at cards but never indulged in dicing, which he scorned as needing no skill, and was withal full honest in his gaming, so that never did that pastime give rise to quarrel with him in it. But because of the danger to others that arose from his drinking good wine, his father the king warned him one day that any further wounding by him in mock-combat would be dealt with harshly.

Now, it happened that a man who looked much like the king's youngest son came to the prince's favourite tavern one night when the prince was elsewhere, and he began to drink mead and to dice, and began singing songs of melancholy, and accused a fellow player of cheating at the dice, and they fought, and the prince's double slew his opponent and fled, for that duelling with serious intent was a capital crime in the kingdom. And the men of the watch seized the prince when he arrived a little later, and brought him to the chief judge of the capital city, and told in great detail what was alleged against the prince.

"Why," said the prince, "this is sheer foolery; 'tis well known that though sometimes I've caused trouble, 'tis never with mead I sing." And the watch allowed that that was so, and looked for a double of prince and caught him, and the latter was tried and beheaded for duellous murder.



TPN-65

THE KING AND THE PIRATE CHIEF

Once upon a time, there was a more than usually villainous and baleful pirate chieftain who prowled the seas with seven ships for seven years, wreaking havoc on merchant shipping and sometimes making dire raids on coastal towns and villages. And on one such raid he took captive the son and daughter of a mighty king and would not ransom them for any price but made them walk the plank with sharks in wait below, to satisfy his cruelty. And three of his men who had grown sick of his foulness and fearful of his uncertain temper toward even his best friends, betrayed him to that king whose offspring he had destroyed, and he was given fair trial preceding execution.

Now, after the trial, the king condemned the pirate chief to the same death he had meted to his victims, and his court put out to sea to find some sharks. But the pirate chief feared sharks with a most morbid fear exceeding all his other fears, and indeed exceeding the morbid fears of most men, and when he was set upon the plank above the four sharks enticed by raw salt beef, he began to gibber most insanelly. And his lawyer, just before the king's raised hand was about to be

swept down in signal for the plank's being tilted, asked leave for one last appeal against mode of sentence, and leave was given therefor, though the king kept his hand upraised. And the lawyer said that, since sharks know nothing of justice, they should have nothing to do with a just execution, but rather the pirate chief should be beheaded by a man, as any man deserving of death should be considered to deserve.

The king considered the question for a long time, with his hand upraised, and his mien grew grimmer and grimmer as he felt the merit of the lawyer's appeal and remembered the fate of his daughter and his son. And as the long moments stretched out, a courtier whispered to the lawyer, "What, do you think, are your clients' prospects for a good death?"

"Oh, bleak," answered the lawyer. And indeed the plank went that way at the king's signal ten seconds later.

TPN-66

THE HOSPITABLE KING

Once upon a time there was king to whom privately it had been foretold that he would have a curse, the nature of which was not foretold, put upon him by a traveller if ever his hospitality fell below a certain standard set by St. Christopher. And ever after that foretelling, he ordered all his servitors to be especially kind and respectful to all travellers who sought guesting, or might even seem considering of seeking it, within his palace. But he told no one the reason therefor, for he was by nature inclined to privacy as much as a king might have it.

Now, there came one day at evening to the palace a once-powerful but rather woolly-minded wizard, down on his luck in his old age, who was travelling about for guesting here and there, who never stayed more than one night in one place, to avoid what seemed to him a more than needful semblance of begging, and as he approached the great hall where supper was being set, three dogs ran out and nipped at his heels, and the aged wizard began loud sonorous mouthings that were most unspecific of import, and the king sent a servitor out to see what the noise was and why the dogs, which usually were timid toward people, as

wolfhounds go, were continuing to bark. The servitor went out, came back, and said, "Just a vague rant, Your Majesty." And the king turned pale and called upon St. Christopher and went out and brought the old man in and apologized and fed him with his own hands, and the wizard revoked the curse he had been trying to impose, which hadn't worked anyway. And then the king, who recognized the old wizard from rumour and distant fame, made up a long and complicated yarn, involving princesses and goblins and dragons, about a great favour he said the wizard had done him in earlier days, and he begged that as recompense he might be allowed to have the honour of giving guesing to the wizard for the rest of his old age. And the wizard, who remembered having done just such favour for some young king whose name escaped him at the moment, was deceived entirely, and graciously accepted ease and luxury of established residence for all his remaining days. And St. Christopher was well content.

TPN-67

THE FIREFLY EXPRESS

Once upon a time, there was a king in a far country who established a relay system of riders to carry messages throughout his kingdom, which was primarily for official business of the king and his nobles but which his other subjects might use for private communication when the kingdom's needs allowed. And the king was very proud of that system and was constantly seeking to make it faster, so that a wizard was hired to cast a spell that made the horses run much faster and much longer, without any harm to them, than even the fastest horse had until then been known to go, though that spell also made them gallop silently, so that the riders had to call out warning sometimes to those ahead as they sped eerily along the king's highways, and yet the king sought to have his post made even more swift.

Now, the wizard had another spell that could make any number of horses gallop with speed that was passing superlative, but it meant he had to clothe their hinder ends in a glow like unto St. Elmo's fire, which would be harmless. And the king ordered it to be done, and established a moderately heavy fine for anyone

who might therefor call his beloved post the "Horses' Ashes". And because they loved the king as much as they feared the fine, his subjects, when they saw a member of the Royal Relay surge along, were content to remark, "How strange; it makes the post eerier."

TPN-68

THE PRINCE AND THE MAIDEN

Once upon a time there was a young king who was to become renowned in later years for the excellence of his administration of the high justice, and this reputation had an early beginning, for the first case he tried was that of a nobleman accused of ravishing a lovely peasant maid.

Now, several young serfs gave evidence on behalf of the accused, that the maid who claimed to have been wronged, had dallied oft with them and then sought payment, saying that the labouress is worthy of her hire, though she had enjoyed the dalliance muchly and would never refuse a man who could give her that pleasure.

"Her told me her'd never turn me down, 'er did," said the final witness. "And her asked for money, so 'er did. Said her would cry rape against me if I never paid, so 'er did."

Now, the young king had himself once tried to seduce that very maid, and her spirited contempt in response had impressed him greatly. That was not in evidence before his court, but he could not put from his mind her lively appeal to

him to seek chastity for sake of Christ, and he decided that in this one instance he would not be bound by formal evidence only.

"So 'er did' about sums up the defence," the king remarked. And he ordered that those witnesses against the young maid should be untestified.



TPN-69

THE EMPEROR AND THE FRIAR

Once upon a time, a wandering Franciscan journeyed to a distant land in the far East and learned the language thereof in short time, for he was clever in matters of speech, and he came to the attention of the Emperor of that land for his brilliant play with words and his subtle mockeries of the foibles of man, in which that Eastern potentate was learning from the Friar to delight, in a manner formerly foreign to the Emperor's august austerity. And the Emperor desired to make more formal contact with the West, and in particular with the Holy Roman Emperor, and so he sent the Franciscan back with the message that if the Holy Roman Empire could shortly return with the Friar a man of royal blood who could speak the Eastern nation's language to discuss terms, they could consider an alliance for the exchange of literature and learning.

Now, the Holy Roman Emperor was at wit's end, for he knew no one but the Friar who spoke that language, and he had no courtier of royal blood with the facility in tongues needed to learn from the Friar in time short enough. But there was visiting the Imperial Court at that time an elderly duke from England whose

son, just come of age, had done a great favour for a mighty wizard and been granted the boon of acquiring simply at his wish a great facility in each of seven languages, whenever he might choose to speak in them. The duke told the Holy Roman Emperor about his son's magic and said he thought that the youth had not yet used up the tale of languages to which he'd been granted access.

Now, when the duke's son was brought before the Holy Roman Emperor, the later did ask, "My son, have you yet exhausted the tale of languages in which a wizard benefactor allowed you to acquire facility, or can you learn quickly the foreign tongue in which this holy friar is so well versed?" And the friar, bidden by the Emperor, spoke some sentences in that language.

"My Lord Emperor," replied the youth, after briefly invoking the magic given him, "I have remarkable jape-pun ease." And he was sent off with the Friar, but somehow the alliance proposal miscarried and nothing more was heard of it or them.

TPN-70

THE KING'S PROGRESS

Once upon a time there was a mighty king who took great delight in eating flesh of fatted calf, and one time he was making a progress he demanded that none of his nobles but one only, to be chosen by lot, should offer him that delicacy, lest he be gluttoned in the progress and lose his taste therefor.

Now, the noble to whom the lot fell was the enemy of a great wizard and the friend of one but slightly greater, who were always seeking to irk each other through him. And when the enemy wizard heard what was toward, regarding the king's progress, he thought he could arrange to have the noble executed by the king, to the great chagrin of the greater wizard. So he readied his enchantments and prepared for the king's feast at the noble's castle. And when the king was at table and four servitors brought in the whole roast body of a fatted calf on a great covered platter, the enemy wizard cast from a distance a spell that turned the carcass into pork covered with great livid spots of putrid corruption. But the wizard friendly to the noble had been prepared for the foul trick and he cast a counterspell, so that when the cover was lifted, the meat was revealed in all its

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soundness.

TPN-71

THE BARD AND THE CAT-MAN

Once upon a time there was a wizard's apprentice who learned early to change his form into that of an extremely lustful gib-cat, and in that shape he had much to do with many shecats, and he had many kittens. But the time came when he lost interest in cats and turned his attentions to other men's wives, using his feline form to sneak unnoticed into their homes and changing suddenly back into manshape when their backs were turned and then pretending he was the king of Faery, smitten with their beauty so that he must have them. And those on whom that stratagem did not work to gain their will to his desire, he often ravished. But he cast a glamour on them all, so that his face should not later be recognized by them.

Now, the wizard had a familiar, an old gib cat unknown to the apprentice, who was jealous of the apprentice's ease with female cats and who followed him about and learned of all his doings and told the wizard about them at the moment when the apprentice had just annoyed the wizard greatly. And the wizard took the form of a Norse bard visiting the apprentice's village and sang of a man who had

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seduced and traduced and gloated, and at the end of that song, when all the men in the market place were properly angry and inquisitive, he sang the apprentice's name, on a high and climbing, piercing note. And the wizard's apprentice ran like a scalded cat.

TPN-72

### THE YOUTH AND THE QUERN

Once upon a time, there lived an old woman who had a magic quern, that would grind a little wheat into much rich gold dust, or a little dust of any nonliving kind into much good wheaten flour, accordingly as it was turned at certain high speeds, which it could reach only after a certain combination of short and long turns in each direction. And she was the only one who knew that combination.

Now, the old woman's will said that the magic quern was to go upon her death to that one of her three nephews who could make best use of it in shortest time, and she wrote the combination down upon a piece of paper and gave it to her youngest nephew and told him the quern was really meant for him, who was her favourite. But the oldest nephew was rooting about one day in his brother's private cupboard and found the combination and guessed its nature and memorized it and destroyed the paper, so that after the old woman died, he was able to lay claim to the quern. But the old woman's ghost appeared to the youngest nephew and showed him an even better combination which she had

learned in the next world, that made the quern turn even faster than it used in her day and made it work its magic even more efficiently. So the youngest nephew got the quern after all, and made a good living with it, and every night at prayers he used to say, "God, please convey my thanks also to my revvin' aunt."



TPN-73

THE PRINCELY SUITOR

Once upon a time, there was kingdom of which an enchantress had foretold that it must always be ruled by a queen with hair like gold, or it must come to great disaster. And the ruling family always had as its eldest child a girl, and these girls had always from their birth long tresses that looked as if spun from pure gold. But one year when a queen had ruled for a long time childless, there was born to her a girl child with red hair, with a twin brother with hair like gold following her birth immediately. And the queen changed artificially the colour of the princess's hair at once, and had the midwife strangled as soon as she signed the certificate saying the princess was first born of the twins. And the prince knew the secret when he grew older, but was sworn by the queen never to reveal it, for she said that was demanded by the good of the kingdom, which it was the prince's duty to pursue and maintain.

Now the princess grew ever more beautiful each year till she came of age, and was sought in marriage by many princes of other kingdoms. And one of them

was very much in love with her and often sought the aid of her brother in furthering his suit. And one day he was writing a poem to the princess's beauty, and he asked her brother whether it would be better to refer to the tresses coiled round his head as a crown or a tiara.

"Neither," said the princess's brother. "'Diadem' is much the best word. Find a proper rhyme for that, and you're set for life." But that prince never found a suitable rhyme, failed to marry the princess, and escaped the disaster that overtook the kingdom during her short reign. But her brother had a daughter with hair like spun gold, totally undyed, and she succeeded her aunt, and the kingdom flourished again.

TPN-74

THE SOOTHSAYER'S PROJECT

Once upon a time, there was a king to whom it was foretold, in a private foretelling, that he should come to disaster if ever he sought knowledge of the future by anyone's reading of the stars.

Now, there was in a neighbouring kingdom a skilled soothsayer whose speciality was foretelling the harvest for the next five years, so that preparation could be made for famine. And his method of foretelling was looking at images in a certain magic spring, of which only he and two wizards knew where to find it. But also he was sometimes prone to drink heavily of cider, so that he got drunk and imagined situations most embarrassing for some people but grossly hilarious for onlookers, and if ever he mentioned these imaginings to anyone, they were sure to come to pass, for such was a geas upon him. And it came to pass that he was sent for by the king aforesaid, who was anxious to know the prospects for harvest for the next five years.

Now, on his way to the aforesaid kingdom, having looked in the magic spring, the soothsayer got royally drunk and imagined a courtier playing a most

droll and humiliating prank upon the king, to whom he decided, while drunk, that he had taken a dislike. But as he was about to give his foretellings, both serious and droll, the king put up his hand and said, "We must caution you, Sir Soothsayer, that we have no interest, no interest whatever, in any predictions remotely sidereal." The soothsayer thought his secret thoughts uncovered, at least by someone close to the king, and he confined his foretelling to prospect of harvest for the next five years.

TPN-75

### THE TWO ARTISTS

Once upon a time, there was a very old artist famous for his murals, which he painted by a very old-fashioned method, of scenes in the life of the Christ Child, whom he always depicted as having three narrow beams of light radiating from his head, to indicate they were part of a cross of which the fourth part was unseen as being behind the Child.

Now his king wanted that artist to paint a great mural for his throne room, depicting the artist's favourite subject, which was also the king's, but the king wanted it done by a new method called distemper, so he asked the old artist to take lessons in it from a rising new master. The old artist was not much pleased, as he was very old fashioned indeed and not much taken with the young master's reputation, but he agreed, for he loved his king and approved of his choice of subject for the mural.

Now, the new master was a man of very definite opinions, and he always told his students several times a day, that distemper was the only fit method for murals, and that any picture of the Christ Child should always show at least six

beams of light radiating from the Child's head. And whenever he said that, the old artist used to nod energetically and exclaim, "Oh, tempera! Oh, more rays!" After a while such vigorous acceptance got on the young master's nerves, and he stopped insisting so much, and they got on much better, and the old man painted a marvellous mural for the throne room, but with only three rays in the Child's halo.

TPN-76

THE WRITER OF STORIES

Once upon a time, there was a teller of tales who wrote down on paper, since that, though costly, was the manner in which he was best able to imagine them, eerie stories of marvellous events and strange people, and the hearers who liked those stories liked them very much and urged him to write more and received the next ones eagerly and with great pleasure whenever he told them, but such hearers were few indeed, and he made little money by his storytelling, though he enjoyed very much the giving of pleasure to such as liked the kind of work he did best. But his family and relatives kept nagging him to write such tales as they said were more like life as most people knew it, for his relatives wanted him to have more money available for borrowing, and his family thought his talent deserved recompense, and they kept nagging until he gave in and began to write such tales as are found to be like the living of life as most people knew it, but he exaggerated somewhat, with a certain insincerity of intention, and imagined rather more evil of the pettier sort than is needed to make life ordinary for most. And his new mode of storytelling was much in demand, and he was

invited to many feasts to tell his tales to the feasters, and he made much money. However, his skill was such that he exercised in the telling of tales a certain strong magic, that had been harmless as long as he had been content to describe things largely impossible, and a larger degree of humdrum, everyday evil than usual began to crop up in the lives of those who loved his new work, so that there was a great deal more of petty tyranny, impurity, false indignation, lust, routine annoyance, and especially avarice (since that had taken root in his own soul) among those who were most of his circle of devoted patrons. But one day it came to light that the storyteller's best friend offered the storyteller's favourite sister a large sum of money to engage in dalliance of a fairly degenerate sort, and everyone in the family was shocked and blamed the author himself for giving them wrong ideas through the manner of tales he told, and that shocked him to his senses, and he wrote since eerily about things fantastic, and was content with a meagre livelihood therefrom.



TPN-77

THE YOUTH AND THE DEAD DOGS

Once upon a time there lived in Saxony a tribe that had the custom of sacrificing dogs of uncertain ancestry and cooking and eating those dogs' flesh, in honour of men who died of illness but faced their end with nobility, and thus were deemed brave in acceptance of shame from the gods who willed that they not die in battle. For that tribe had some dim notion of Christian humility.

Now it happened that one evil man among the tribe became addicted to dogflesh cooked in the manner of that burial custom, and he began to poison certain of the elderly so as to make them seem to die of illness rather than of age, so that more dogs, which otherwise would be kept safe and unharmed, were sacrificed and cooked in the accustomed manner. But a warrior noted how greedily the poisoner ate, taking stealthily more than his share, and began to watch him closely and therefore caught him trying to poison the food of an old man that had been a noted warrior, and that was brought to the attention of the chief, and the whole story came out and the poisoner was executed, and the whole tribe abandoned the custom of eating of mourn-grill.

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TPN-78

THE HATRED OF DIS

Once upon a time there was a man who for some reason so trivial it has been utterly forgotten incurred the great hatred of Dis, god of the dead, who therefore decided to take the man into the Underworld long before the time the Fates had decreed for his death. And that occasioned great argument between Dis and the Fates, and it was finally agreed that the Fates should write down three means of killing that should be forbidden Dis, but Dis should not see the writing, and if Dis chose in his first choosing, another means than one of the three forbidden, he should be allowed to take the man into the Underworld before his time, for if the man lived to his appointed time, he was destined to die a hero and go to the Elysian Fields, which would have caused Dis great chagrin.

Now, Dis thought and thought for a long time and gave much consideration to his project, and finally decided to become a small sort of deadly being that, when taken with the cheese the man much loved, would cause the man to die of a particularly noxious and noisome flux. But it turned out that the Fates had forbidden Dis entry.

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TPN-79

THE DOGSPELL

Once upon a time there was a hunter-youth with greater skill in tracking than most hunters, even men with much practice, and he delighted in exercise of that skill, and essayed harder and harder tasks, and tasks ever more unfitting for that exercise, such as following a week later the paths of lovers to trysts and reading in the grass their every exchange of lovemaking. This habit grew so that it became passing sick, and one time he spied, three weeks after the event, upon an outdoor dalliance of a wizard that loved privacy exceeding much, and the wizard turned him into a hound of low degree with a sense of smell exceeding sharp, with a spell upon him that compelled him to seek out and track down breeding wolves and seek to frolic with the males at time of breeding. And the youth in dogshape was much hard done by, for the wolves were passing fierce and wrathful at his interference. And soon his sickness of habit passed from his mind, and he repented his spying on human lovers, and the spell left him and he was once more a youth in form of man. And the wizard, who had kept track of his progress, realized that he need never make the spell recur, for the youth became a

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blacksmith's apprentice after that and forsook tracking forever lest he again be tempted as before.

TPN-80

THE IRREVERENT YOUTH

Once upon a time there was a youth who could maintain no manner of serious regard for men or gods, or anything that his fellows held sacred, and a monk put a curse upon him that he go from one religion to another, gaining respect gradually for each as he went until his soul was whole.

Now, first, he felt impelled to reverence much the gods of ancient Greece, until he saw an aspect of comedy about a latter-day maenad who nearly tore him to pieces amidst his laughter and his jeering, and he turned from religion for a while. Then he got an interest in the Manichee religion, and his mind turned to a dour and implacable respect for the evil he thought ensouled in matter. But one day, he saw the funny side of that, and laughed long and jeered at a Manichee preacher that had an axe handy, and nearly lost his life thereby. And he was without respect for a long time for any kind of godliness, and then he drifted from one religion to another, gaining first respect and then a merry disregard for each, in many turnings, until he found the Catholic religion could house reverence and humour both, and he re-veered a final time and found his soul's salvation.

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TPN-81

THE THREE GAMBLERS

Once upon a time there were three knights who loved passing much to gamble, and they all went together on a quest for the perfect taking of great chances. And it came to pass, that they reached a crossroad in a forest with three damsels sitting under trees.

And the first damsel said, "I am the sister of a maiden taken prisoner by a fell dragon, and a wizard told me I would have one chance in a hundred of finding here a knight who would have one chance in a hundred of rescuing my sister and staying alive himself. Would any of ye three gallant knights take up that quest?"

And the second damsel said, "My youngest brother has been taken captive by an evil witch who means to seduce him so as to work much magic through him against the good among mankind. A wise woman told me I would have one chance in a hundred of finding here a knight who would have one chance in a hundred of rescuing my brother and staying alive himself. Would any of ye three gallant knights take up that quest?"

Now, the third damsel was most nebulous in her explaining her presence,

but she finally made it reasonably clear that she had one chance in a hundred of making a huge fortune by dicing and cards in a city that she knew of, to which she had one chance in a hundred in finding her way back with the right knight.

The knights conferred. "Me liketh the adventure of the dragon," said the youngest knight. And the first damsel accepted him as her champion.

"Me liketh the adventure of the evil witch," said the second knight. And the second damsel accepted him as her champion.

"Well," said the eldest knight, "I'll just have to take my chances with lass vaguest."

TPN-82

NICHOLAS THE IRON WARRIOR

Once upon a time there was a gentle youth of great courage and strength and much hardihood, who was trained in both the arts of the clerk and the arts of warrior wherein he had much skill, so that he led a double life, preferring a career as scholar for the most part, but taking to war with zest when need drove and his conscience approved. But he never started a quarrel himself. And he was called both Nicholas Clark or Nicholas the Iron Warrior, as might seem fitting at the time.

Now, one week it came to pass that Nicholas Clark was on an archaeological expedition to Jerusalem, commissioned by Holy Mother church, and he carried his weapons and armour bundled up with his extra clothing and gear of scholar in case of paynim, and he and his fellow clerks were stopped at an inn, when a thief who was a ruffian and a bully went searching the baggage on their sumpter mules, and came into the inn claiming that one of the scholars was bearing stolen gear of knight and they should all be brought to court.

"Oh, Sir Warrior, do not insist upon this measure," said Clerk Nicholas,

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"for I am passing fearful that I might be put to trial by combat against such a man of his hands as thou."

"Better watch your step, fellow," said another clerk to the bully. "This man is most dangerous when he's being Iron Nick."

TPN-83

THE KNIGHT AND THE ORACLE

Once upon a time there was a knight-errant who took it upon himself to execute summary justice upon those whomever he took to be malefactors, of whatever kind. When a damsel in distress besought him to recover a gem that had gone missing from what she alleged to have been her rightful possession, he would not be content to recover the jewel for her and have a court of law inquire into the right and legal justice of the matter, but would summarily cut off the hand of the person who was found to have that gem, without listening to any tale of the circumstances of that person's possessing it. His treatment of any man accused by any woman of sexual misconduct toward her was most regrettable, at least in the eyes of fair-minded men who uphold the concept of the rule of law. He was a right hard character.

Now, it came to pass that this knight was in pursuit one time of a young farmer who had been accused by a damsel of caressing her untowardly, that would have had his hand cut off had the knight caught him in time, but the farmer fled into a land that had strange customs, and appealed unto the law of that land,

which depended much upon some oracles. So it happened that when the knight-errant caught up to him, finally and with hard-breathing horse, the farmer and the chief judge of the district they were in of that foreign country, were kneeling at the shrine of a saint known for his mercy when he was on earth. And when the knight raised his sword against the young accused, the judge had the knight seized and held by strong men-at-arms, and explained to him that the oracle of the shrine, after a twenty-four-hour vigil by accused and judge and any accusers present, would render a verdict through the holy hermit at the shrine, and if the accused were found guilty, he would be flogged but never maimed, and his accusers might assist in the flogging if they desired so to do, but if the youth were found not guilty, then anyone taking part in the vigil who had tried to punish him beforehand as a result of prejudging, would surely be hanged.

"What the hell kind of judicial system do you call that?" demanded the knight, as he reined his weary horse around for hasty flight.

"The official phrase for this procedure is 'raising the vigil ante'", answered the chief judge. And at the end of the vigil, the youth was freed, but the knight could not be found anywhere in that country, though he was much sought by diligent law-enforcers.

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TPN-84

THE LORD AND THE SPANIELS

Once upon a time there was a lord who bred fine and strong water spaniels and insisted that all his tenants help him therein, so that every tenant had a dog and bitch of that breed, and all the tenants mixed the matings of their pets thereof, for to produce good specimens. But some of them bred lesser samples, in hope of being allowed to keep for themselves more than one pair. But then the lord bethought him of a test for choosing of those that he would take, and he decreed that all spaniels in his domain that reached a certain age must then be cast into the middle of a river that ran by his castle, which river he had called Sirius, and that every dog which conquered the force of the river and was not dragged down thereby and not drowned therein, was to be his property, and the man that had bred that pup was to have his rent forgiven him for that year. But any man whose pup had drowned was to have his rent doubled for the year. And he obtained many fine dogs by that custom, and made much money by their sale when he had got more than he needed for his own pursuits.

Now, a knight-errant heard of that lord's custom and took amiss his



drowning of tenants' dogs, and challenged the lord to combat for that custom's discontinuance. And the lord laughed a great guffaw and accepted the challenge, for he loved a fight. But the knight-errant was a puissant man of his hands and defeated the lord eftsoon (though killed him not) and after that there was no more talk of paying that lord's cur-rent.

TPN-85

THE KING AND THE COUGHER

Once upon a time there was a king's ambassador who was so subtly cunning that he once did a great wizard a great favour at the same time of annoying him exceedingly. And the wizard laid a spell on him that limited his use of cunning, but gave him the magical power of filling with noxious fumes any room he happened to be in, at the expense of suffering himself a mild attack of asthma.

His king thereafter claimed his ambassador had great power of magic, as witnessed by this power of calling up evil atmospheres and his ability to withstand them much more easily and to much less ill effect than others who were present when these were called. And so the king gained reputation of having a wizard for his ambassador, and those rulers with whom he treated were overawed thereby and gave him good terms in treaties. And the king was wont to say in private to his fool, but to no one else, "Some statesmen claim that rulers should always be open with each other, at least when they each know other is trustworthy, but I tell you there is no better type of diplomat than miasmatic."



TPN-86

THE KING AND THE POTION

Once upon a time there was a wizard who specialized in making healing potions brewed chiefly from fresh dew gathered from certain rare flowers he grew in a magic clearing near his forest retreat. And there came to him one day a king of late middle age who had never married, and the cause of his being still a bachelor was that when he dealt with any important matter he was ever inclined to eruct a huge belch of exceeding bad breath. This had a calming effect upon his nerves, every time, which was passing effective indeed, so that he gained renown for his coolness in crisis. But his getting nervous when about to propose marriage, and the subsequent belching of noxious air, resulted in his suit being rejected by many a princess, so that he was almost in despair of getting an heir. But when he went to the wizard aforesaid, the wizard said there might be hope. "But this belching of bad breath is put upon me by the magic of a mean old witch who had the gall to propose to me, and that not marriage, either," said the king.

"Be of good comfort, your majesty," said the wizard. "I know now the witch in question, for she proposed less than marriage to me one time, too, and we need but wait for a sufficiently cold morning,"; and it was then the time of

autumn.

One morning a few days later, the wizard woke the king with a pint mug of a steaming infusion in his hand and bade him drink it down. The king did so, and he felt the mean enchantment lift, though yet he knew he had not lost his famous calm for times of stress. "What in the name of the blessed archangels is in that potion?" he asked.

"Sorry, your majesty; trade secrets," said the wizard. "If I named more than three ingredients, I'd be expelled from my guild. But I can tell you it's essentially heavy-dew tea."

TPN-87

### THE YOUTH AND THE WENCH

Once upon a time there was a youth that had a great desire to become a wizard, and it was found, when he was tested by the guildsmen, that he had the needful talent for wielding of magic should he get the needful training and learning, but he was entirely beardless, and the rules of the guild required that every apprentice of a wizard have at least the beginnings of a beard. And a kindly wizard took pity on his freakishness, for the youth was well past the onset of puberty and into the age of temptation to impurity, and told him that he would cast a spell to give the youth a beard, if the youth would engage to be his apprentice afterward. And the youth agreed.

The wizard said the youth must traverse the kingdom on foot, by the king's highway, in exactly three weeks, from east to west, and then come back, with the fine short facial hair unwashed but cleanly that would start to grow on the first day of the return journey, and if these hairs should at all be soiled or washed during that return, he should have to start again that journey of return.

Now the youth's return journey took him past the home of a young maiden who dwelt near a blackthorn thicket who was much taken with him as she saw

him stride along all hopeful, and she threw blackthorn plums at him in hope of getting his attention. And her aim was passing good, and she struck him on the chin with three ripe plums right where his youthful beard was sprouting short and spattered it with the juice and pulp, so that he had to go back to the start of the return. And that happened three times, and he was much annoyed but stubborn, so he wrapped his face in cloth the fourth time and ran past the maiden's house with his fine short facial hair unsoiled (for he bethought him at the last that the wizard had not said he need travel with face uncovered) and kept his face covered till journey's end, and was accepted into the Wizards' Guild as an apprentice. And when he was become a journeyman in wizardry and was asked by his master what he would like to cast as his first spell, he did reply, "I'm goin' to make 'er broom spank that wench who sloe'd me down."

TPN-88

THE PRINCESS AND THE LIZARD-MASTER

Once upon a time, there was a young man named Ian who lived in a cave with many lizards, on a mountain where lizards thrived, and his mien unto other men and to women was as vinegar unto cream, but he was kindly unto the lizards and gained their confidence, so that there seemed to be some trace of magic, or at least of influence greater than nature usually gave, in his dealings with them.

Now, it came to pass that a relatively small but starving swarm of locusts descended on the kingdom wherein was Ian's mountain, and folk fought the swarm with brooms and buckets of water, but for all the locusts swatted or drowned an equal number appeared, so that the swarm remained the same size ever, and food planted in the fields diminished quickly wherever they cropped up. And the king grew desperate and offered his daughter in marriage, and the heirship of his kingdom, to any man who could rid his kingdom of this pest. And Ian came down from his mountain with the lizards and the latter gobbled up all the locusts and the crops were saved. But when Ian went to the castle to claim his reward, he found there a knight-and-wizard team seeking were-dragons for destruction, and the wizard said his magic had led him to Ian and shown him to be



the kind of deadly foe to man that they were hunting.

"Methinks the jig be uppermost!" quoth Ian, and he assumed his dragon-form, and the knight fought him and killed him, and the princess knelt at the knight's feet and cried, "Have thanks, Sir Knight, for saving me from marriage to that sour Ian!" And she offered to marry the knight but he said he was too busy hunting were-dragons to settle down before the world was safe from them.

TPN-89

### THE EARL AND THE DUCHESS

Once upon a time, there was an earl in England that was a mortal enemy of a duke in Ireland and often raided the latter's lands for valuable goods and much treasure and sold them to enrich himself greatly, and such sales were commonly held at his castle gate and much frequented by the common people of his domain.

Now, the duke in Ireland died, when the earl in England was getting up in age, and their sons -- they had one each -- were desirous of making peace, and the cause of the quarrel had been that the duke's wife and the earl had been childhood sweethearts, sundered by the marriage to the duke, arranged by the parents of the young spouses. And the sons arranged that the earl, whose own wife was many years dead, be received kindly by the duchess, after a long time of mourning, in a badger-park among many yew-trees, in England, which the two sons had jointly purchased. And the duchess there agreed with the earl that they should marry, except she wanted a formality of revenge for the earl's raids. And it was agreed that her knights and men-at-arms should make a token raid into the earldom and not be prevented from making off with valuable goods and much treasure, which

should be sold in the badger-park to the duchy's profit, and they should there pledge their troth. But that agreement came hard to the earl, and the duchess feared he might go back upon it. But the raid was made, and the selling of the goods and treasure was arranged, and while the duchess stood in the market waiting, with some doubt about the earl's showing up, she passed the time by singing, "Raid-sales on the sons' sett, I'm trysting in yew."

TPN-90

THE CAUSE AND THE EFFECT

Once upon a time, there was a king who much enjoyed a trencherful of beans from time to time, and they had upon him greatly that effect of which beans are often said to be the cause in men who eat of them, in some more than others, and often more in those that love them much. And the king was wont to cock his leg and chortle gleefully when that effect was caused. For men took great delight in all natural effects of natural causes in those days of old.

Now, it came to pass that after an especially goodly trencherful of his favourite repast, the king felt an effect being caused that he thought would be to monstrous effect in point of sound, and he cocked his leg so briskly thereat that his hose were ripped along the middle seam, even as the effect gave voice in tone full melodious to the king's most natural ears. And the tale thereof went through all the kingdom, that the king's effect had blasted a hole in his hose. But a scholar who studied much the past and who contributed much to current chronicles, disputed the tale with anyone minded to argue, especially Ian the Younger, his favourite student, whom he was training to succeed him.

"But to what manner of man, Master, doth it really matter what happed to

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the king's hose, so that the yarn thereof be good?" that student asked.

"His tore, Ian, I am sure," the scholar quietly insisted.

TPN-91

THE KNIGHT AND THE MERCENARIES

Once upon a time there was a knight whose son had just been knighted, and they both went out to fight in their king's army. And the king had hired some mercenary soldiers, of which the elder knight did not approve, and some of the mercenaries were in the company commanded by that knight. And the knight was minded to test their purchased discipline, and also his son's fitness for command, so he sent his son, with his ring, to tell certain hired men-at-arms in a further part of his camp that they must go to scout out land that lay ahead on the way of march.

When the younger man had brought the word to those mercenaries for whom his father meant it, one of those men said, "Methinks I'll have some few or more flagons of ale before I leave," and the other said, "Methinks I'll visit the tent of one we know of among the camp followers, before I leave."

"Methinks ye'd better reckon neither, and go at once," said the young knight, for such was his father's order, and he looked upon them with such a reckless sternness of mien that they hastened to obey.

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TPN-92

THE KING AND THE ESCARGOTS

Once upon a time, there was a king of France that much enjoyed vast meals of small escargot which lived mostly on the firm stems of certain water plants growing along the river that ran through his capital. And those escargots were customarily eaten by sucking them from their shells after boiling, which made them easily removed. And that king passed a law that no one else in the kingdom should eat that delicacy while he lived, though the eating thereof made him so desire cold wine that he was often much intoxicated.

Now, that king had no wife, when that law was passed, and therefore no heir. And as years passed by, he grew more concerned for the future of his throne, and resolved to marry. And he took one lovely foreign princess boating on the river aforesaid, with a great basket full of dishes of the small delicious boiled escargot, and offered her some to eat, and told her that she could always share with great fairness in his partaking of them for the rest of her life, if she would marry him. And while she was thinking it over and chewing away, he began to sing, "Reed-snails on the Seine sucked, I'm thirsting anew." But of course he said it in French, so it gains somewhat in translation.



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TPN-93

THE WIZARD AND THE SPEARMAN

Once upon a time there was a yeoman with such long and thin arms and legs that his neighbours called him Rails, that had been exceeding skilful with a spear in his youth and middle age, but now he was old and feeble and given to talking much of days in which he had been great help to his lord in many battles. And war came once more to that domain, and he greatly desired to be of help thereto again therein, but he could hardly heft his spear. And he wanted greatly to die in battle for his lord, and not in bed, in his old age. So his two sons pooled their money and besought a wizard to help their father regain strong and supple use of his limbs once more, long enough to fight one more good fight. And the wizard took their money and gave them a flask of potion, saying, "If your father's longing for worthiness in battle is of such a quality as to be what the Germans mean by a certain word which at the moment escapes me, this potion will enable him to practice his foining long time and to foin fiercely in at least one battle thereafter." And the old yeoman drank down the potion when it was brought, and set himself to practice his spear. And for long moments as his sons watched no movement was toward, but then it happened: Said Rails in the sehnsucht, "I'm

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thrusting enow."

TPN-94

THE KING AND HIS CHAIRS

Once upon a time there was a king whose favourite pastime was the practice of heraldry. He delighted much in collecting crests, set in wax, from foreign lands, and in identifying them, and in tracing the connections among them, and he was accustomed to study those crests in one of two favourite chairs, of which one had the main resting place made of elephant leather nailed over an open space in the frame, for comfort, and the other had in the same place a latticework of the leather of an African antelope. And that chair furnished with antelope in latter years had its thongs worn out, and the leather had to be replaced; but he had a store thereof. So the king sat in the elephant-leather chair, which was his lesser favourite, until the other should be repaired, which was being done by his chamberlain. But the queen had been much using the chair of elephant leather and it, too, was much worn, and the king had therein some discomfort, and he complained thereof until the chamberlain exclaimed, "Read seals in the sound seat; I'm through stringing gnu."

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TPN-95

BLANCHE SILVERTONGUE

Once upon a time, there was a young woman named Blanche Silvertongue, who could talk to her advantage in almost any situation. And she was of gentle temper and greatly pleasing to look upon, but no man was eager to marry her, for she was guardian to three young sons of her only brother, who had died, together with his wife, of smallpox. But a young noble met her one day and was charmed by her speech and bearing and desired to wed her, but insisted on a morganatic marriage, not so much concerning children of them both as the nephews she would bring into their family. And he said the morning gift would be her weight in silver. But she persuaded him to add to it the weight in silver of her three nephews, since they might lack other help from her in later years. And so, when it was time for to decide the amount of silver to be paid and the seneschal asked why her nephews were also in the scales, Blanche Silvertongue replied, "Because I've got to weigh with wards."

TPN-96

THE TOWN AND THE GIANT

Once upon a time there was a town which was middling near to a great cave where dwelt a giant who for the most part was friendly unto men but who sometimes got drunk on beer he brewed for himself in a vat outside his cave. And at such times he was oft passing rumbustious and came to the town aforesaid for much uproarious jollifying, which was taken in good part for that he did indeed rarely any real harm. But after years had passed, it was noticed that his drunkenness was cumulative, as was the effect upon his temper, so that he got drunker and angrier each time he did get drunk, and indeed he sometimes damaged property and broke the limbs of men as beer affected him more with the passing of years. But always he was sorry afterward and made amends.

Now, a time came in which that giant did go on what was verily a tear, and there was no stopping him, but he went from house to house demanding more and more beer and getting rowdier and rowdier until the town council felt that something must be done, and they consulted the apothecary for a cure for the uproaringness that ailed the giant. And the apothecary compounded many pills

which he called "tranquilizers", which he said were sure to have effect, but he did not know how many it would take to have the effect desired without going mayhap a little too far. He said two pills might do the trick quite well, but if they did not, they would have reverse effect and the giant would get rowdier, and then four more must be tried, but they too might backfire, and six more might then make the giant thoroughly pacific but even they might fail and have effect much to be unwanted, but eight would then be sure to work, but would cause the giant to sleep for eight days and be vastly weak and hungry when he woke, so that getting him back to such sufficient strength as would enable him get home, would require much food at great expense. But eight pills would not require all the prior dosage that might be tried, in order to work thus. And the pills would have to be taken in the giant's beer to have any effect at all, since that was the only way the giant could reasonably be expected to take them.

Now, the council put two of the pills in a keg of beer and gave it to the giant and the result was not at all such as they would have welcomed, but brought great harm to limbs of men and property of townsfolk, so a half-hour later they gave him four pills in another keg and that had result similar save in being worse, and the council began debating whether to give a six-pill dose or an eight-pill



dose for the next essay -- whether to risk more harm and damage or to pay for much food. And the councilmen were divided in their vote, and the mayor had to break the tie and say himself what dosage should be given.

"Methinks 'tis time we said eight," said the mayor. And it was done accordingly, and the townspeople later said the mayor had been right. And that experience convinced the giant that he should never get drunk again, and so he took the pledge and lapsed only at very long intervals.

TPN-97

THE KNIGHT AND THE SPRITE

Once upon a time, there was a knight named Richard Reese who went upon Crusade against the Paynim for to free the Holy Land. And in the company wherein he rode there was a French knight who loved him not and sought always to outdo him. And that French knight, whose name was Haveras du Longueille, had once been given by a grateful wizard, so he said, the service of an elemental sprite the wizard bound unto the seal ring of Sieur Haveras, so that his authority might more truly be embodied thereby, unto enhancement of his might to command whether those who owed him allegiance or those who might be convinced he should have it. And he had always used that power prudently and wisely and well, unto great enhancement of his honour. But in battles with the Paynim, though Sieur Haveras had higher rank by virtue of seniority, Sir Richard outshone him in renown of deeds of chivalry, and that was greatly grievous unto Haveras, and it became more so when Sir Richard gained rank equal unto his. And therefore Sieur Haveras, when he and Sir Richard disputed in the commander's tent (where Haveras was loth to seem to use undue influence) about

strategy against the Paynim, sent his seal ring to Sir Richard's tent after their argument, with instruction that Sir Richard defer again to his seniority, as Sieur Haveras deemed was fitting. But Sir Richard deemed he knew what was toward, and had prepared for it, he also having known grateful wizard, and so he produced a flask of liquid which he said would increase tenfold the power of any sprite when the object to which that sprite was bound had been soaked in that liquid for five minutes. And he said he would, as favour unto Haveras, soak the seal ring of Haveras in that flask before asking what his message was. And since Sir Richard was widely known to be passing strong of will, the messenger, being privy to design of Haveras, agreed, especially since the sprite, eager for more power for itself, strongly suggested silently, after the manner of sprites, that he do so, when the messenger first bethought him of first asking permission from Sieur Haveras. And Sir Richard, when the ring and sprite were put within his flask, replaced therein the stopper and kept the ring and sprite therein for seven minutes, not merely five (which would have worked as he had said), and that decreased the power of the sprite to a seventh of its first measure, and the sprite was greatly wroth when it came out, and vented much spleen upon the messenger.

Now, when the messenger went back to tent of Haveras, he told the

French knight first that Sir Richard would not defer to his seniority but maintained his disagreement over strategy against the Paynim and asserted that his own plan was the better and would so try to convince the commander at the next meeting in the commander's tent.

"Pourquoi, parbleu!" said Sieur Haveras. "Hath mine authority been tampered with?"

"Monsieur, I fear it has been; Reese tricked it."

TPN-98

THE KILLER AND THE PARASITE

Once upon a time, there was a most Christian prince in Africa who sought aid from a king in Europe to train his warriors in the European style of arms-wielding and warfare, and that training, when the king sent many knights, proceeded with good speed, because of the competence of the trainers and the talent of the pupils. And a neighbouring ruler against whose plans for conquest these warriors were being made ready, feared his plan would not succeed in the face of warfare style his own warriors would find unfamiliar, so he sent an assassin in the guise of a donkey-riding peace envoy to slay the Christian prince. But the assassin caught some roundworms from his donkey and these caused him to become allergic to the poison he was going to put into the prince's drink, so that when he was surreptitiously opening its container, he sneezed and dropped some and it killed the prince's pet monkey, whereupon one of the prince's new European-trained warriors ran the assassin through with newly forged broadsword even as assassin reached for hidden dagger, with which to stab the prince.

"God be thanked, that plot miscarried," said the prince, who had a shrewd

idea from whom the assassin had been sent.

"I think, my lord, we'll find it more accurate to say that that killer's destiny was ass-carried rather than miscarried," said the prince's wizard, who was an Arab learned about such medical matters as the symptoms and effects of roundworm infestation. And from that time on, all native African warriors trained in warfare by Europeans have been called askaris, from the Arab word for soldier.

TPN-99

THE MONKS AND THE SIGN

Once upon a time in Merrie England was a noble monastery famous for alms to the poor and hospitality to the sick and hungry, and the monks and the abbot thereof desired to purchase land from a wealthy merchant which was adjoining its own holdings, for the building of an orphanage, as there were in the district many children recently orphaned both by disease and by warfare between two lords that lived nearby. And the merchant was minded to sell the land cheap, for that it was wanted for such a good cause. But a baron wanted the land for to give it to a man who was willing, for that, to marry a mistress the baron was minded to discard, and the baron offered a much higher price, but the merchant, who had sins of his own to atone for, held to his purpose of confirming sale to monastery within a month of the monks' asking, which would be within three weeks of the baron's offer. And therefore the baron let erect on a small patch of land which was his own in that neighbourhood a large signboard on which he had writing made that accused the monks in that monastery of riotous and dissolute living, in secret, and imputed to them dubious motives for wanting the care of

fatherless children. But the abbot applied to a well-renowned local lawyer named Edward Yellowyoke to sue the baron for libel, seeking from him destruction of the signboard and retraction of the message which was thereon, and such a sum of money as would pay for the land they wanted and go well toward cost of building orphanage.

Now, Lawyer Yellowyoke was confident of success and told the monks' lord abbot that he would soon have that adjunct. And so it proved.



TPN-100

THE FARMER AND THE SUITOR

Once upon a time there was a farmer very prosperous who was a very witty man and passing proud of being prosperous and of being witty. And he was a widower and had a very lovely daughter who had just come of age to marry, and he wanted a good and prosperous husband for her, and he said that anyone who wanted her in marriage must give her a dowry of fifty pounds and have a good farm on which to live with her, and must best her father in a contest of word-wit. And there was a young man who was in love with the farmer's daughter, and she with him, and he was fairly quick of his wits. And that young man said he would leave home at once to seek his fortune and buy a local farm, and five years later he came back and bought the farm and had fifty pounds left over, besides some savings to live on while he worked the farm for his first season. So he challenged the farmer to a contest of word-wit. And folk gathered round to hear them on the day appointed for it, and there was much laughter as the banter flew fast and freely, but the farmer was judged the wittier by the most of them, who were somewhat envious of their otherwise successful young neighbour. But the lass

whose hand was sought had told her suitor of a minor fault her father had of which he was much ashamed and of which he thought no one at all had any inkling, and at the last, in desperation, the young suitor made a remark that seemed fairly harmless and devoid of humour to other listeners but conveyed by way of pun to the old farmer a gibe at his secret fault, and the old farmer thereupon conceded the contest and his daughter's hand, and the young man and woman, who until that time had been kept well apart most of the time by command of the old farmer, were reunited well and happily for the rest of their lives. And two yokels who lived nearby and had been at the contest discussed the matter at great length in the tavern next evening, and one of them said at last, "Yes, old man, 'tis all very well what 'ee says, but were the lad's answer a witty reply? That's what I asks 'ee, since we both bin aheard it. When 'a answered the old man, were it a witty reply?"

"Well, thinks I," said the other, "it must have been; 'a rejoined 'er, pretty sharp, after all. Ain't it so, now?" But the first yokel would not agree, and they argued and drank long into the night.

TPN-101

THE KNIGHT AND THE CONDEMNED MAN

Once upon a time, there was a knight named Victor who because of his great fairness in all his known dealings was accorded the right of the high justice in his lands, and he had many tenants on wide holdings, and his dealings with them were ever as merciful as might be allowed by the law and by justice to those who had been wronged.

Now, one day a maiden that belonged to Sir Victor's lands accused a young man of having ravished her, and the young man admitted he had done the crime, and the maiden's father demanded that the criminal be hanged as the law allowed, but Sir Victor had never hanged anybody yet for anything, for he objected upon principle to hanging, for that such way of killing depended more upon natural force pertaining to weight than upon action by those responsible for justice and for punishment, and he always executed with a straight thrust of his sword to the heart, those whom he found guilty of offenses deserving of death, and he was not minded now to change that custom. But the maiden's father appealed to the king for allowing of execution by the rope in this case, but the

young criminal wanted to die by the sword. And Sir Victor argued mightily before the king that ropes and attraction of Earth for lesser bodies know nothing of justice, which he said must be performed by men, so that if sword-thrust were disallowed, at least beheading must be permitted instead of hanging.

Now, while the king was retired to consider his ruling upon the appeal, two of Sir Victor's tenants not directly concerned in the case discussed which way the king was likely to rule, and one of them laid a bet that the young ravisher would die by hanging and that Sir Victor would be required by the king to hold the rope. And the other peasant wagered that the knight would never agree that he himself should kill by hanging, but would challenge the king to trial by combat for final determination of the ruling, should the king seek to compel him thereto. And he wagered further that the knight would so challenge the king even if the king held only that the hanging should be done by someone other than Sir Victor, but that hanging was indeed required by law since the maiden's father insisted.

"No, no," said the first peasant; "the lad'll hang and Sir Victor will hold the rope."

"Indeed, verily," said the other, "his punishment won't be that Sir Vic'll stretch en." And he was right, for the king accepted Sir Victor's argument and

ruled that hanging, unlike a sword-thrust or beheading with an axe, is cruel and unusual punishment and forbidden by natural justice. And the young criminal was beheaded.

AFTERWORD

by

Prester Nicol

How oft have I heard mine hearers say sadly, here at Ye Inn of Ye Shaggie Dogge, "That soundeth as ought to be fine tale, Gaffer Nicol, for such as grasp the final speech thereof, but me it grabbeth not at all, alas for my great dulness. Sorry." And then a small copper coin tossed for sake of pity of old age, of one once truly renowned as travelling news-monger to the common folk, setting straight in dry or merry detail the high romances sung by balladeers with better singing voices, manners more pleasing, and far less shame, than I had. But I have store of coin set by from those great days, now I am too old for travel, and it is I who pay my nephews Joey Mick and Jonathon, mine able hosts of Ye Shaggie Dogge, for keeping me, instead of my being, as men think, their guest-burden driven to trying drum up custom by resort to kind of making I, in high regard for strictest truth, once slighted mayhap overmuch. Still, I laugh within, for I deem a day will come when men shall see the subtler meanings I conceal within these tales, to whom Ye Sign of Ye Shaggie Dogge shall be an honoured memory

though somewhat veiled, in token of the favour I -- who now flavour with quick glimpse or two, afforded by the Sight that runneth in our Family, the tales that grow now from my light talent -- once held in hearts of hearers, and one day shall again if Sight be sure. For I have seen far off an offspring of our Family who will be like me in youth a bearer of stories well worth telling. And whether his skill in telling shall draw readers to mine own tales, or mine shall get such aid for his, I do not See, but I foresee that he shall live in such a time as shall be ripe for both our kinds of tales, and I wish him well, and I shall bequeath to him, in a sealed casket timeworthy and watertight, this collection of my one hundred and one exactly of my tales which I have told under Ye Sign of Ye Shaggie Dogge. And also I foresee that this offspring of the Family will be a means of bringing back to men on Earth that noble history its maker called The Chronicle of Clombendorn, now lost to Tellus but preserved upon Tellares, as a member of the Wise once told me, which was made by at least as good a teller as I or our far-off offspring.

Written this twenty-first day of December in the Year of Our Lord thirteen hundred seventy-eight, at the village of Saynt James, near Oxenford in Merrie England, by Gaffer Nicol of Ye Shaggie Dogge, sometimes called Prester Nicol, for my having once studied for the Priesthood and having failed thereat.