

Chapter 1: The End of a Dream, the Beginning of a Journey

Christian awoke with a jolt, as though someone had startled him from his sleep. His unsettling dreams had begun revealing truths that he never before understood. He rose from his bed and looked out the window. There, to his surprise, in the distance shown a mountain that had sprung up as if it were a bamboo shoot. No warning, just a mountain that he had never seen before.

When morning came, Christian went outside. He looked into the distance where he saw the mountain that he'd seen the night before. He went into the street and began asking others in the city if they could see the mountain.

"Do you see that mountain in the distance? Where did it come from?" Christian asked.

The passerby squinted, looking deep beyond the horizon. "I see no mountain." He scoffed at Christian and kept on walking.

Christian asked everyone who passed if they could see the mountain. To his surprise, no one could see the mountain - not even one among them could see it.

After many hours of asking those in the town if they saw the mountain in the distance, Christian went home. *How is it that something he could see so clearly could not be seen by others?* Without questioning, he gathered his things and resolved that he was going to go to the mountain alone. He put his provisions in a bindle and walked outside directing his steps in the direction of the upsprung edifice.

Chapter 2: The Town of Evangelist

After many days of walking, Christian happened upon a town called Evangelist. As he entered into the town, he was stopped by an exuberant man.

"Are you drunk sir?" Christian asked.

"No, I am not drunk," said the man who went only by the name of Redd. "I have seen the upsprung mountain and have dedicated my life to telling others of its existence."

"Do they see the mountain?"

"In the town of Evangelist, all people can see the mountain."

Christian was perplexed. "Have you been to the mountain, Redd?"

"No one here has ever been to the mountain, Christian. The mountain is filled with miners who from deep within it are extracting the purest gold that has ever been pulled out of the earth." He reached into his pocket and pulled from it a small vial. "These flecks are the purest gold that anyone has ever seen."

"What do you do with the gold flecks?" Christian asked.

Redd laughed. "What do you do with the gold flecks? Why, you spend them Christian."

"Where do you spend them?"

"Well, I do not spend them. But that is what you could do with them. No merchants in this town are equipped to accept the flecks for their merchandise."

Christian was enamored with Redd's exuberance. In him arose the same force that had driven him to begin his journey in the first place. While in the town of Evangelist, Christian decided to stay and convince even one merchant to accept the gold fleck. "Should I take upon myself the task of persuading a merchant to accept the fleck?"

“That would be a noble task,” Redd said to Christian. “You should have no trouble with the task. Everyone in the town holds fleck and would gladly spend it at the establishment of any merchant who would accept it.”

“Why has no one else taken up the task of telling the merchants of the fleck?”

“We have all taken it upon ourselves to convince the merchants,” said Redd. “Even the merchants are telling other merchants to accept the fleck.”

After this, Redd led Christian into the town and brought him directly to the Church of the Mountain, where the congregants were speaking to one another about the mountain. “Service has just ended,” Redd said. “I will introduce you to the others in the town.”

Christian made his way around the congregation. The congregants gathered, proudly describing the mornings they had all awoken to see the mountain. When Christian made his way to the preacher, who simply called himself, *Prophet*, he asked, “Have you ever been to the mountain?”

“We do not go to the mountain. It is a terrible place. But we do our work to let others know that the mountain is there.”

“Does that help them to see the mountain?”

“It does not,” said Prophet. “We tell them of the mountain, but most will have to believe in the mountain without having ever seen it.”

“I would like to go to the mountain,” said Christian. “I have begun my journey there, and that is how I got here.”

The preacher looked at him, and cringed. “We had a man who once went to the mountain. He made it all the way to the top. When he returned, he was banished to the forest outside the town. We knew him only as ‘Mongese.’ Do not go to the mountain. It will change you.”

Christian heeded the warning and went into the town whereupon he began to work to convince merchants to accept the fleck. As Redd had told him, it took him no time. Within days he had cajoled a single merchant to accept the fleck. The merchant posted a sign board outside his establishment advertising the new way to pay. On posting, he hired Christian, complementing the young man’s tenacity and ingenuity.

Months passed, and the shop’s patrons filed in one after the other to purchase the merchant’s goods - each of them citizens of Evangelist. “Would you like to pay with fleck?” Christian would ask the citizens.

“No thank you,” they would say. “Fleck is rare, it comes from the mountain. As soon as others hear of it, I will regret giving it to you for goods.”

For six months, Christian asked every patron who entered the establishment if they would like to pay with the mountain’s fleck. But not even one townsman was to be parted with their shiny dust. The merchant, realizing that no one would use fleck to pay for merchandise, removed the “Fleck accepted” words from his sign, though he admired Christian’s hard work and kept him on. Christian grew ever disillusioned with his errand, and realized that he had been distracted by it.

One morning, he went to the shop owner and said, “I have left my family and friends to go to the mountain, but have been in this town for many months now only to realize that nobody in it will ever be parted with their fleck.” With the merchant’s blessing, Christian, once again,

packed his bindle and left the town. Outside of Evangelist's gates was a thick forest, filled with trees. Christian's eyes could not even penetrate it more than 10 feet. Nervously, he proceeded upon the path, into the forest. Night was upon him, but he wished not to waste another minute in the town of Evangelist and proceeded.

Chapter 3: The Forest

Not so far into the forest, having only traveled less than an hour by foot, Christian heard a friendly song coming from just off the path. He saw the faint light of a fire burning and walked directly toward it. There he met a smiling man playing a guitar.

"Welcome traveller, I'm Mongeese," the stranger introduced himself.

"Hello, Mongeese," Christian said cautiously calling to mind the warnings of Prophet.

"Where are you going to?"

"I'm going to the mountain, do you know anything about it?"

"I have been there," said Mongeese. "I have been to the top of the mountain."

"Is it as they say in Evangelist? Is there pain and suffering there?"

"There is no pain and suffering on the mountain," said Mongeese, "only a deep awareness that there is untold pain and suffering for those who have not been there. I know the way, if you would like to go. To get to the gates at the top of the mountain, you must be free from pride and the arrogance of truth and knowledge."

"I would like to go," said Christian. "I would like very much if you would show me the way."

Mongeese agreed. "We shall make our way out of the forest in the morning."

Christian rested his head, and as soon as the sun came up he shook Mongeese, "can we go?" He was as excited as ever.

"We can," said Mongeese, "I will take you to the fork, and no further."

They walked through the forest as jovial as ever. Singing and laughing all the way. Christian had never met another man as humble, questioning, and somehow kind as Mongeese. Not far away, in the distance, they saw light. They neared the end of the Forest, where Christian saw up ahead a fork in the road. Directly outside the forest there was a fork. And at the fork was a person, half-man, half-woman. To the left was the road, *Right Way*, to the right was the road, *Perpetual Road*.

Mongeese introduced Christian to the creature who stood at the fork. "This is Blythe Buterin, King of Ether, inventor of the Credit Default Swap."

"Hello," said Blythe, "I will guide you on the rest of your journey on the right side of the fork."

Christian looked at Mongeese a bit confused.

"You will have to choose your own way, Christian."

Christian looked down *Right Way*. It was a rocky path with no end in sight. He then gazed down the right side of the fork. It was well-groomed, and lined by credible looking men. To the left and right of it were large buildings, great cities in the distances. Far away, between the two paths, sat the mountain.

"The way to the mountain is *Right Way*," Mongeese said. "Beware the stream of Hype which will wash you back to *Perpetual Road*. But after that, the road is clear."

"It is the harder way," said Blythe.

Christian called to mind the townsmen of Evangelist and their warnings of Mongeese. He looked upon the kind face of Blythe and began walking down the *Perpetual Road*.

"Goodbye and good luck," Mongeese called him in the distance.

Christian walked down *Perpetual Road* with trepidation, but an assuredness that he knew he was right.

Chapter 4: The Beggar

Upon the side of the road sat a beggar man who, when he saw the young Christian approaching, asked him for some fleck. Christian told the beggar that he would not be parted with his fleck, but that he would take him into the nearest city and help clean him up. Just up the road, Christian and the beggar entered into the city of Hubris.

Christian took the beggar to the nearest clothier where he purchased clean shirts and pants. Then he took the beggar to a grocer, where he purchased for the beggar anything he asked for. The beggar ate voraciously.

"How did you come to be a beggar?" Christian asked.

"I was an entrepreneur," said the beggar. "I began a business with my own money. We wanted to build a new mountain, mine what is in it, and sell it here in Hubris for fleck. We had investors, but not enough money to complete the project. We were only ever able to build a small hill, and it never produced anything. We were able to sell much of the dirt to the people of Hubris for fleck. But once we'd mined, from the hill, all the dirt, we discovered we had spent all of our fleck on those miners we employed. I was left destitute. I was only 16 then. I have been a beggar ever since."

Over time, he and Christian grew to be good friends.

Christian found Hubris to be a delightful city, a center of innovation. The citizens, most of whom had ended up in the city while journeying to the mountain, were doing their best to obtain fleck and invest it in the businesses of others who lived in the city. After many months, Christian had made friends with many of the city's most prolific investors, and had learned quite a lot about investing. He would attend evening seminars wherein new businesses would tell the citizens of Hubris about their new, innovative ideas. The citizens of Hubris were dedicated to such projects as the building of a second mountain, notarization, investment schemes, and the most difficult of all, perpetual motion. Each of the citizens of Hubris had distributed their funds among the local businesses and were awaiting their returns on their investment.

"Who has become rich?" Christian asked one of the investors he'd met in the city.

"Many have gone to the mountain and gained untold wealth. But most of us believe it will take years for many of the investments made here to produce a return. But failure is the risk we all bear. One cannot make fleck without spending it."

It had been months since Christian had entered the city of Hubris, and in that time the beggar had returned to health and regained his wits. He asked Christian to meet with him because he had an idea for a business. Christian, excited to support his friend, agreed to meet.

"I have a business unlike any business ever before," the beggar told to Christian.

"What is it?" Christian asked.

“I have been speaking to a number of people in the town,” said the beggar. “I think we have come up with an innovative new technology that has never been seen before. We have other investors”

Interested, “I have never invested before,” Christian told the beggar with an excitement he’d never before felt. “What about your previous endeavor, though?”

“I learned from it, I will never again make that mistake. We have discovered how to construct a machine that produces fleck forever. I am now 18, much older than I once was. We need a little dirt from the mountain, and then from that, fleck will be output unceasingly.”

And with that, as an investment, Christian gave over the entirety of his fleck to the beggar who immediately picked it up and walked away with it. Christian watched the beggar walk away with a tinge of regret, full-knowing that he would never lay eyes on the man again, nor his fleck.

Like the tree of good and evil, Christian’s eyes were opened at the moment his fleck was taken. He looked upon the mountain, and new colors shown, a streak of magnificent purple through its center glowed with an immutable air - irrevocable in its majesty. The trepidation with which he’d taken the *Perpetual Road* disappeared, as did his surety of rightness. He knew that he had taken the wrong road to the mountain, and that his stopover in Hubris had been nothing more than a distraction.

Again, Christian set off, this time with no provisions. He set out to return to the fork where, when he reached it, set himself on *Right Way*. On his back, where the bindle had been, a newfound humility. Counting the fleck he’d given to the beggar as lost, he made his way down the difficult road with no surety whatever he was on his way to the mountain.

Chapter 5: The Foot of the Mountain

As the foot of the mountain came into view, Christian came upon a stream with a sign at its banks that read: “Hype Stream, No Swimming, Strong Current.” At that moment, a man came running out from behind Christian holding the hand of a woman whom Christian assumed to be the man’s wife.

“We’re here! We’re here!” he screamed as he ran toward the stream. At the moment his first foot was in the water he and his wife were swept under. Christian watched the man and woman struggle for a few minutes as they tried to make it to the banks and get out. But they quickly lay back and let the stream push them, carrying them away from the mountain to wherever it flowed, resolved to end up wherever they were taken.

A short distance up river was a bridge that let Christian cross the stream with no trouble. Having crossed the stream, Christian proceeded at a faster pace toward the Mountain. He recalled the day he set off on his journey, amazed that he’d made it this far. At the foot of the mountain Christian looked to the top and saw the visage of men weeping in the distance. He wondered if Mongeese had been honest, but at the same time he had resolved it fervently that he was better for having made the journey in the first place.

He walked along the bottom of the mountain where he came upon a train station that promised him simple passage to the top. He entered into the train, and looked around it. To his amazement it was full, brimming with men and peppered with trans women. The driver of the train wore a hat whereupon the name “Dorian” was stitched. He smiled and tipped his hat as

Christian stepped aboard. The company seemed odd, but Christian's newfound humility did not cause him to judge the travellers or even to try to understand how diversity of this nature had come to be. Rather, he said to himself: "This is a journey anyone can undertake, and these are the people who decided to take it."

As the train pulled away from the train station, Christian felt a sense of foreboding. He knew he was almost to the top, but wondered if there could be even one more obstacle in his way. He had made it to the mountain, and wondered what would be the reason someone might not make it to the top. The train wended and wound around and around, until, about halfway up the mountain, it stopped. Outside the window, Christian could see what looked like a party. An announcement came over the train's speakers, "this is our first stop, we will depart in 24 hours."

Christian disembarked and moved toward the party. He was greeted by three men.

"Hello, I'm Tony," said the first.

"I'm Eric," said the second.

"I'm Bruce," said the third.

Christian shook their hands, "I'm Christian, and I've been journeying to the mountain for many months.

"Well, congratulations, you've arrived," said Eric.

"This is a town of Invention, we constructed halfway up the mountain," said Bruce, "I am the mayor. I have made it my mission to get the world to see the mountain. You know not everyone can see it?"

"Around here, I am known as the inventor," Eric interjected. "I think of ways to use the fleck and invent methods whereby people who are not on the mountain, might someday see the mountain."

"That reminds me of Evangelist," said Christian.

"Nothing like it," Eric said, "we want people to actually see the mountain. They want people to know that it is there." He pulled from his pocket a pair of glasses. Their lenses were circular and thick, and the frames were awkward, as if made by one who had never before constructed a pair of glasses. "I have made a fortune in fleck from these," said Eric.

"What do they do?" Christian asked.

"If you put them on, you can see the mountain. We are in preliminary testing, but we know they work, put them on, you will see."

Christian put the glasses on and asked: "what's supposed to happen?"

Eric said, "you can see the mountain with them on, nothing more."

"But I could already see the mountain before I put them on. Have you tested these on people who had not already come to the mountain?"

"We have not, but I'm confident they work. Everyone in the city of Invention has purchased one to bring back to their families when they leave the city."

Christian handed back the glasses, when suddenly he caught a wiff of a gut wrenching smell. "What is that?"

"I'm sorry," said Bruce, "in this city, we throw a party day and night. The diet of beer and favors gives everyone in the town a fair amount of flatulence. Worry not, though, after you have been here a few hours, you will habituate."

Tony looked at young Christian. "Let me take you to the party," putting his hands on the small of Christian's back. "It is this way."

When they were a distance from Bruce and Eric, Christian looked at Tony. "When did you get to the mountain?"

"I have been here for many years," he said. "I love the town of Invention. Travellers come here and get stuck, in a nice sort of way. There are no women here, so I import them from far away lands and they dance at our parties. I am the party master, and am proud to say that the party here has not stopped for nearly 5 years." Tony was pleased with himself, "I will remind you, to have come here, you will have certainly shed all of your pride. You will have been made humble. That is what we all have in common here in Invention."

"What is so special about the mountain?" Christian asked Tony.

"Well, I suppose the fleck is what everyone wants. We're not sure what it does, but we know it's important."

"Have you been to the top of the mountain?" Asked Christian.

"No one goes to the top of the mountain. There is pain and suffering there. This is far enough for me," Tony assured Christian, "and if you're wise, it will be far enough for you. At the top of the mountain, they are skeptical, unwilling to believe that anything is possible. But the mountain makes all things possible, Christian. Here, you throw your dreams into the mountain, and all things can be made true."

"Have you met Mongeese?" Christian asked Tony.

Tony put his index finger on Christian's mouth, "We do not say that name here. We do not like his sort associated with the mountain. Far too many who are like him go to the top of the mountain, and when they leave the mountain, they are given over to the skepticism and cynicism that is awarded to anyone who reaches the summit. They concoct cockamamie lies about the nature of their experience. They tell you that you must be 'free from pride and the arrogance of truth and knowledge' in order to get to the top of the mountain. But there is nothing but suffering at the top of the mountain. I have seen it myself. And more than that, anyone who goes to the top of the mountain, quickly walks away from the mountain, abandons it, never to return."

As they entered the party, an astounding gaseous scent overcame Christian. Everyone at the party was wearing the glasses that Eric had invented.

"Why do you wear the glasses?" he asked one dancer.

"So I can see the mountain."

"Can't you already see the mountain? How else did you get here?"

"I can, but I want others to know that I can. I want them to ask me if I too can see the mountain."

"Can't everyone here see the mountain?"

"You would never know if that were true, if we did not wear our glasses," said the partier.

Christian did not understand. As the night drew on, he grew weary of the party and, convinced that Bruce had misspoke about his ability to stomach the odiferous gas, he made haste to the parked train. To his surprise, as he walked aboard, he and one trans woman were all that were left. Every other passenger had decided to stay in the town of Invention. Christian touched his face. He realized for the first time that in the 6 months he had been travelling, he

had grown a splendid, unkempt beard. The woman looked at him and nodded. They affirmed their kinship in that supreme moment. "Wizard," she said as she moved her head down.

"What?" asked Christian.

"Wizard. You are a wizard," said the woman. "There are many like you at the top of the mountain."

"Have you been there before?" Christian asked.

"I have not. But I know what is there."

"Is it pain and suffering?"

"No," said the woman. "At the top of the mountain is a gate guarded by Peter. He will ask a single question that no one knows the answer to. Your answers will not get you in; only your humility. You must understand the summation of your journey to the top of the mountain if you wish to be allowed in."

With that, the train pulled away from the train station and proceeded toward its last stop at the top of the mountain.

Chapter 6: The Top of the Mountain

The train came to a screeching halt at the top of the mountain, where Christian and the woman disembarked. Immediately, the gate they needed to enter through was made clear. They walked to the man at the podium.

"I am Peter, I am charged with the mountain's preservation."

"Nice to meet you Peter," said Christian.

"I must ask you a question, and you must answer correctly if I am to allow you to enter through the gates."

"Ok," said Christian sheepishly.

"How do you propose we preserve the mountain?"

Christian looked at Peter perplexed, "I do not know, I only just arrived."

The gates opened and Christian was let through. With him walked the woman who had proceeded to the top of the mountain with him on the train.

Just on the other side of the gates, he met a man known as the Great Wizard Maxell. His beard was long and scraggly, with a tinge of red: "Welcome Christian, to the top of the mountain. Let me introduce you to the others who have entered here already."

Christian was ushered into a small building that looked like a saloon. When he entered in, the patrons were screaming at one another and throwing bottles at each other's faces. When they were hit by something, an impervious grin would overcome their face. They would reciprocate by picking up an object and throwing it back at whomever it was that threw it in the first place.

The Great Wizard Maxell smiled at Christian and bellowed to the great room, "I would like to introduce you to the newest traveller, Christian."

At that moment, the raucous fighting stopped. Everyone walked to Christian and greeted him heartily. The once-fighting crowd put him on their shoulders and held for him a small procession, like a parade one might have seen in their youth. They celebrated his arrival, and at the end, they set him to the ground. A woman greeted the young man first. "I am Madame Krystal, I have been banished to the mountain for my profession."

“What do you do?” Christian asked.

“I am a prostitute.”

The next man to shake Christian’s hand was Cornelius. “I was banished to the mountain for my profession,” he said.

“What did you do,” asked Christian, “I was a seller of goods that those in my city did not care for.”

“Do you know Mongeese?” The curious pilgrim asked.

“Indeed, he is a good man, he was a traveller like yourself. He came here curious. The curious rarely walk through those gates. And if they do, they rarely leave the same.”

Each time Christian’s hand was shaken, a new story was told. To a man, each had been banished from their respective villages, forced to the mountain.

“Most cannot see the mountain without necessity,” said the Wizard. “And curiosity is rarely enough to induce them to its highest heights.”

“Then why am I here?” Christian asked.

“I do not know,” said Maxwell, “but you can likely never return to the place you travelled from.”

“And what of the fleck?” Christian questioned the wizard.

“The fleck is a beginning,” said the Wizard. “It is the questions you have encountered that will pay off in the end.”

“But what of the fleck? What does it do?”

“The fleck is the lifeblood of those here at the top of the mountain. We use it because we must, not because we want to. We hoard it because we don’t know what else can be done with it. We argue over what to do with our vast stores of it because we are certain it’s important, but we aren’t sure why. Someday, Christian, we, through humble work and the endless bickering that you have observed, will come to understand precisely why the fleck is important.”

Christian was stunned by the answer, and stood silently for quite some time. When he regained his wits he realized a slow calm had enveloped him. Satisfied, humbled, and filled with a desire for answers, Christian left the top of the mountain. “I will go into the world and think upon what I have learned here.” And with that, he set off.

Roger the Traveller

When Christian reached the bottom of the mountain, there was a man in a suit standing with a bindel on his shoulder much like the one that Christian had.

“Where are you going to?” Christian asked.

“I am Roger, and I am going back up to the top of the mountain.”

“I have just come from there.”

“I have been to the top of the mountain many times and have felt fulfilled each time I have gone there. But when I leave, I find that my journey has left me empty. I return to tell those at the top of the mountain that the lessons there are of no use.”

At that moment, a chrome-coated Bentley with 24 inch golden rims passed Christian’s way. The driver rolled down the window and smiled a gleaming smile. His skin was dark and mouth was filled with the golden fleck of the mountain.

“Can I help you sir?” Roger asked.

“You want to trade some information for fleck?” The driver asked.

“What kind of information are you selling sir?” Asked Roger.

“If you must ask, you will never know,” the sage driver retorted. He smiled once again, his teeth catching the sun, rolled up his window, and drove on his way.

“I came to the mountain to stop war, help the impoverished, save the proverbial chattel from the fetters of law. But the mountain has done no such thing. The mountain has only left me alienated from the very people I desire to help,” Roger said. “I go to the top of the mountain where I tell the followers of the Great Wizard Maxwell that he is misleading them. He has taken them from their families and has destroyed their relationships with all the people whom they love. He has surrounded them with miscreants, like the man in that car. The promise of fleck was to help those who needed it. But it is becoming a tool of the evil middlemen. They are wasting it by putting it in their mouths, around the tires of their cars, and using it to woo women of low morals.”

As Roger finished, the conductor of the train yelled *All Aboard*. Christian and the traveller exchanged pleasantries and wished one another well. As the train pulled away, the Bentley drove by yet again. The driver rolled the window down, “Get in.”

Christian opened the door to the back seat of the car and entered. And there, sitting upon the seat quietly was Mongeese. “I see you have met Roger,” said he to Christian.

“I have. Is he right? What comes next now that I have been to the top of the mountain?”

“You must go to the top of the mountain carrying with you the burden of humility. Without it, your eyes and heart will fail to reveal to you the nature of what you have seen. The mountain turns things about: up is down, right is wrong, and poverty is wealth. From your eyes were shed today the lens of judgment which clouds the vision of those who have never been to the mountain like cataracts. And those that go there with no humility will leave the mountain much the same way as they went to the mountain, save for the a new arrogance that comes with having an experience that others cannot fathom. For Roger, the arrogance will cause alienation. For you, the alienation will come from a recognition of judgment. You will find satisfaction in it, he will find torment. For you, there is no pain and suffering on the mountain. But for those who are blinded by judgment, there is only pain and suffering there.”

And what of the information that the driver is selling?

“Those are stolen credit card numbers,” said Mongeese.

And with that Mongeese ordered the driver to return Christian to his home, where Christian lived happy and fulfilled.

===== **THE END** =====

The Apocrypha

The City of Wales

Directly upon leaving his small village, Christian happened upon a town not so far away. Christian read the words aloud that were printed on the gate: “The City of Wales.” At that moment a thin, smarmy man met Christian at the gates.

“Hello,” said Christian.

“Hello traveler,” said the man. “I am the mayor of Wales known around here as The One. T. One, for short,” he said.

“What is done here in the city of Wales?” Christian asked.

“Wales is a port town,” said T. One, “here we wait for ships to arrive, guessing when they will come in by the position of the stars.”

T. One took Christian to the center of the village where there stood a statue of a man on a horse jumping over the big dipper.

“Who is that?” Christian asked T. One.

“This is the first mayor of Wales. It is a new village, filled with hope and promise, and I am the second mayor. He served as mayor for many years and was known to all of us affectionately as T. Zero.”

T. One brought Christian to the port, where hundreds of men were standing and looking out over the ocean with large binoculars.

Christian walked to one of the men, “What are you looking for?”

“I am waiting for the ship I predicted would arrive today.”

“What kind of ship is it?” Christian asked.

“It is a ship that will bring untold wealth into the city of Wales.”

“How did you come to think it would arrive today?”

“It was in the stars, young man. We here are astrologists. The alignment of the constellations over the great mountain in the distance gives us information that no other man has ever had. We write for the rest of the world our predictions so they can come to Wales and share in the great wealth.” The stranger squinted into the distance as if he was sure he saw something on the deep horizon.

“And are you ever wrong?” Christian asked.

“Rarely, but when we are, we bring our predictions into the city and sacrifice them to the great shredding machine called *the Manipulator* built by T. Zero. We are only ever wrong because of the unknown monstrosities that happen in the deep ocean.”

“And what happens when you are right?” Christian asked.

“When you are right, you are given untold wealth by the others in the city by the central repository known as *The Liquid Vault*. Every day we the citizens of the city put into the vault some amount of money from which T. One will write a check to the citizens that are correct on any given day. The money is guarded by large amounts of Thermite, so that we can know it is safe.”

Christian was skeptical of the astrological predictions and of the untold wealth, when suddenly a great commotion happened up the way. A ship was docking, and one of the citizens was standing on a soap box, “I told you all this would happen, I told you and you did not believe me.”

“Give me one second,” said T. One. He walked to the man who was jumping about and outstretched his hand for a shake. T. One turned to the crowd and said, “Today, we have witnessed the great prediction of one of our finest citizens. And I, at this moment, am writing him a check of untold amounts for his contribution to our great city!”

Christian looked upon the ordeal astounded as the rest of the city began to clear the port and make their way toward *the Manipulator*.

At once Christian decided he must learn the art of predicting the arrival of the boats and sat with T. One to begin his training.

After many days, Christian began charting the stars over the great mountain, and published his first prediction. For days and days Christian would walk to the vault, deposit his predictions with a small payment and in return he received a receipt notarized by Mr. Snow, the Treasurer of the vault. Having only carried with him a small amount of money, Christian would go to the port day after day and wait for his ship to come sailing in. Day after day, citizens of Wales would watch their predictions come true, and T. One would give them a check written directly from the funds available in the Vault. And this went on until the day that Christian was nearly out of money, as he had given nearly all it to the Vault.

T. One took pity on Christian, and handed him a small amount of money. Christian looked into T. One's eyes dejected, "I suppose the stars simply do not speak to me as they do the others. I think I will have to leave now."

T. One encouraged the boy to continue practicing gazing at the stars, and walked him to the city gates where he waved to goodbye to him.