

walls, resembled Death himself, clattering his white bones like musical instruments in the wind. Funerals began to appear in the streets, though it was the middle of summer, a time when all should be tending and harvesting. The Mandarin fell so ill that he had his bed drawn up by the silken screen and there he lay, miserably giving his architectural orders. The voice behind the screen was weak now, too, and faint, like the wind in the eaves.

'Kwan-Si is an eagle. Then our walls must be a net for that eagle. They are a sun to burn our net. Then we build a moon to eclipse their sun!'

Like a rusted machine, the city ground to a halt.

At last the whisper behind the screen cried out:

'In the name of the gods, send for Kwan-Si!'

Upon the last day of summer the Mandarin Kwan-Si, very ill and withered away, was carried into our Mandarin's courtroom by four starving footmen. The two mandarins were propped up, facing each other. Their breaths fluttered like winter winds in their mouths. A voice said:

'Let us put an end to this.'

The old men nodded.

'This cannot go on,' said the faint voice. 'Our people do nothing but rebuild our cities to a different shape every day, every hour. They have no time to hunt, to fish, to love, to be good to their ancestors and their ancestors' children.'

'This I admit,' said the mandarins of the towns of the Cage, the Moon, the Spear, the Fire, the Sword and this, that, and other things.

'Carry us into the sunlight,' said the voice.

The old men were borne out under the sun and up a little hill. In the late summer breeze a few very thin children were flying dragon kites in all the colors of the sun, and frogs and grass, the color of the sea and the color of coins and wheat.

The first Mandarin's daughter stood by his bed.

'See,' she said.

'Those are nothing but kites,' said the two old men.

'But what is a kite on the ground?' she said. 'It is nothing. What does it need to sustain it and make it beautiful and truly spiritual?'

'The wind, of course!' said the others.

'And what do the sky and the wind need to make *them* beautiful?'

'A kite, of course—many kites, to break the monotony, the sameness of the sky. Colored kites, flying!'

'So,' said the Mandarin's daughter. 'You, Kwan-Si, will make a last rebuilding of your town to resemble nothing more or less than the wind. And we shall build like a golden kite. The wind will beautify the kite and carry it to wondrous heights. And the kite will break the sameness of the wind's existence and give it purpose and meaning. One without the other is nothing. Together, all will be beauty and co-operation and a long and enduring life.'

Whereupon the two mandarins were so overjoyed that they took their first nourishment in days, momentarily were given strength, embraced, and lavished praise upon each other, called the Mandarin's daughter a boy, a man, a stone pillar, a warrior, and a true and unforgettable son. Almost immediately they

parted and hurried to their towns, calling out and singing, weakly but happily.

And so, in time, the towns became the Town of the Golden Kite and the Town of the Silver Wind. And harvestings were harvested and business tended again, and the flesh returned, and disease ran off like a frightened jackal. And on every night of the year the inhabitants in the Town of the Kite could hear the good clear wind sustaining them. And those in the Town of the Wind could hear the kite singing, whispering, rising, and beautifying them.

'So be it,' said the Mandarin in front of his silken screen.

The Man Who Collected the First of September, 1973

Tor Åge Bringsvaerd (born 1939), one of Norway's leading authors, has edited a number of science fiction anthologies, as well as writing plays, children's stories and novels. His best imaginative work is in *Karavane* (1974).

I

Ptk discovered that he was about to lose his grip on reality. In fact it had been building up for years (he suddenly realized)—without his caring, without his giving it a thought. Perhaps he hadn't even been aware of it. Now the grey film had thickened to a crust, a stocking cap stretched over and encasing his arms, a sagging tent-like umbrella dimming out the outside world. The hands of his wristwatch flamed, and he no longer knew on which side his hair was parted: the mirror said the right, his hand the left. In the paper he read about a Frenchman who for various reasons had had himself imprisoned, naked, inside a small chamber 300 feet under the earth's surface. When he returned from isolation after three months, scientists were able to affirm that man has '*a natural rhythm—a built-in timekeeper*' and that this time-keeper '*is not adjusted to the sun, but counts 31 hours in the day-night cycle, instead of 24*'. But no one dared to make the inference, the only logic possibility . . . that man is a stranger, that Obstfelder was right, that our real home is another (and slower) globe—which, lighted by an unknown sun, takes seven hours more than the Earth to rotate about its own axis . . . that this is the genuine Eden—the garden we have been turned out from . . . Ptk pointed in amazement at his own mirror image, and neither aspirins nor valium was able to make him think otherwise.

II

Ptk decided to face his everyday, to try to orientate himself in the reality he was stranded in. He went out, bought all of that day's Oslo papers (Saturday the 18th of August 1973) and went home. He read them thoroughly—page by page, column by column. When at last he felt that he had got some sort of grip on Saturday the 18th of August, in the meantime Tuesday the 21st of August had arrived—and reality had changed its face three times. Ptk realized that the sum of information was too weighty for any single man to balance on his head. News fell in heaps around his feet, clung like ivy to his legs and tightened like a belt round his stomach. He fought in despair against Wednesday the 22nd and Thursday the 23rd. He dared not blink for fear that Friday the 24th might weigh down his eyelids. And even so . . . despite the best will in the world . . . Saturday the 25th went over his head completely.

III

Ptk realized that he'd acted in haste. He who consumes too much news has no time for boiling, frying or chewing it over, but is obliged to swallow everything raw and whole. Having considered political digestion and protective fatty layers of tissue, he decided to attack the problem from quite a different angle. Confronted with reality as a many-headed beast he resigned, but chose instead to cut off one of the heads, in order to get under the creature's skin by means of a detailed study of one single head. He selected the 1st of September 1973. In advance he had equipped a corner of his bedroom as a laboratory, and was all set with a typewriter, scissors, glue, paper and a 24-volume calf-bound encyclopaedia at hand.

IV

By the end of October Ptk had finished all the Norwegian papers from the 1st of September (including weekly papers). Without hesitation he delved into the study of papers from the rest of Scandinavia, primarily Denmark and Sweden. He had his fixed seat in the university library, and at night he stuck cuttings, notes and xerox copies on his bedroom walls. He developed an interest in curves and diagrams.

V

Soon his bedroom grew too small. In order to make his material for study as complete as possible, Ptk wrote to papers all over the world and asked for a copy from the 1st of September 1973—whether he had command of the language or not. He went to evening classes in Spanish and Russian.

VI

Four years later his flat had been exploited to the full. Apart from a cooker, a fridge, a bed, a coffee table and a wooden chair there was no furniture; no ornaments. The rooms were divided with hundreds of partitions, and the passages were so narrow that Ptk had to walk sidelong (very carefully) when he wanted to remind himself of an important cutting or add a new note. Working hours apart (Ptk was an accountant), he spent all his time in his historical archives. He neglected friends and relatives, and when he met one of them in the street (going to or from his office) he found it hard to carry on a sensible conversation. He grew more and more appalled at how little people knew of the 1st of September 1973. In the end he cut himself off completely, ignored invitations, had the telephone removed and made detours.

VII

Twice he had to find a bigger flat. By 1982 he knew—more or less—twenty different languages and dialects. But all the time there were more things to learn. The Subject turned out to be just about inexhaustible. Who would have guessed that so much had happened on exactly the 1st of September 1973? 'What a coincidence!' Ptk said to himself (he hadn't talked to anyone else for six years). 'What luck I had, choosing *that* particular day!' He still used the partition system, and busied himself organizing it all as systematically as possible. Not all subjects required the same amount of space. Some subjects, like Temperature and Wind, only needed half a wall, while others, as for instance Business and Finance, covered the whole dining room alone (all in all thirty walls, that is, about 4,050 sq. ft.).

VIII

On a grey and cloudy day in February 1983 a fire started in the Games and Sports department. Ptk was on his way home from a private lesson in Mongolian dialects. When he opened his front door the title fight world heavyweight was in flames, and as champion George Foreman struck a powerful right hook the Puerto Rican challenger photograph as well as the picture curled up. It was an absolute storm of fire. Nothing was saved. Before the fire brigade got there, the whole archive was in ashes. (Apart from the two basement store rooms, of course. But here he had mainly Deaths from the personal columns and unsorted obituaries. All of peripheral interest.) Ptk was badly burnt, and spent the rest of his life (two years) in hospital.

IX

During these two years both doctors and patients tried in vain to get through to him. But whenever anyone spoke of the war in South America, Ptk talked of

South-East Asia. If anyone mentioned the EEC, Ptk replied that he thought there still was a Norwegian majority against it—certainly *he* was. If the other patients talked about games, Ptk always shook his head and mumbled something about an illegal punch and the first world championships in synchronized swimming starting in Belgrade. He now and then talked about two Englishmen rescued after being trapped in a mini-submarine on the floor of the Atlantic, he referred to the king as the crown prince and always spoke of the American president as 'Nixon'. If he was willing to reply at all. Most of the time he was not. 'A hopeless case,' the doctors said. 'There's nothing we can do.'

X

And when no one tried any more, Ptk was allowed the peace he so ardently yearned for. He spent his last three months lying happily on his back. One by one he brought forth the fragments, one by one he painstakingly put them together, starting at the back righthand corner of his brain and working leftwards. The picture of the 1st of September 1973 slowly grew in his mind, getting bigger and clearer day to day. Names and numbers melted into maps and diagrams. Border disputes and cinema advertisements merged. Ptk smiled. The picture filled his head. Some bits were still missing. He found them. His head became too small. The picture shattered his head and filled the whole hospital. Still some bits were missing. A few. He found them. The picture shattered the hospital and filled all of the park outside, unfolded like a transparent film and became one with the trees, the birds and the sky. But then he'd already been dead . . . a quarter of an hour, one doctor said. Ten minutes, said the other. And neither noticed that it was autumn.

The Careless Rabbi

Martin Buber, born in Austria, in 1878; died in Israel in 1965. Historian of the orthodox Hassidic sect and existential philosopher. His works include *Die Geschichten des Rabbi Nachman* (1906; translated into English as *The Tales of Rabbi Nachman*, 1956), *Gog u. Magog* (1941; translated into English as *For the Sake of Heaven*, 1945), and *Ich und Du* (1937; translated into English as *I and Thou*, 1937).

It is told:

Once Rabbi Elimelekh was eating the sabbath meal with his disciples. The servant set the soup bowl down before him. Rabbi Elimelekh raised it and upset it, so that the soup poured over the table. All at once young Mendel, later the rabbi of Rymanov, cried out: "Rabbi, what are you doing? They will put us all in jail!" The other disciples smiled at these foolish words. They would have laughed out loud, had not the presence of their teacher restrained them. He, however, did not smile. He nodded to young Mendel and said: "Do not be afraid, my son!"

Some time after this, it became known that on that day an edict directed against the Jews of the whole country had been presented to the emperor for his signature. Time after time he took up his pen, but something always happened to interrupt him. Finally he signed the paper. Then he reached for the sand-container but took the inkwell instead and upset it on the document. Hereupon he tore it up and forbade them to put the edict before him again.

The Tale and the Poet

Sir Richard Burton (1821-90), the distinguished explorer, orientalist, polyglot and anthropologist, translated *Las Lusiadas* by the Portuguese poet *Luis de Camões* (c. 1524-80) as *The Lusiads* (1880), and the first unexpurgated version of *A Thousand and One Nights*.

Tulsi Das, the Hindu poet, created the tale of Hanuman and his army of monkeys. Years afterwards, a despot imprisoned him in a stone tower. Alone in his cell, he fell to meditating, and from his meditation came Hanuman and his monkey army, who laid low the city, broke open the tower, and freed Tulsi Das.