

***The legend of Mythokrates***, unaffected by differences in education or intelligence or politics in the various sectors, had spread throughout this relatively tiny civilization, easily hurdling otherwise formidable cultural, religious, and historical barriers. His exploits—academic and real, heroic and scandalous—were well known, even to the general population of the estranged TriAD.<sup>1</sup> It was fitting, therefore, that he was made the focal point of the following extraordinary conference, since it was the first truly fleetwide audio-visual coverage of any live event since the war that split the Second Fleet.

From the perspective of our more distant future, this singular event is a great landmark of Exodian history, dating the end of a long age known as the 'Areal Captivity' to all who lived thereafter. The impact of a rare public appearance by this particular Elder at such out of the ordinary time-space coordinates was to be strongly felt (contrary to Professor Habnor's expressed expectations) far beyond the esoteric parameters of science and philosophy, the major beneficiaries of Mythokrates' greatest contributions (even if they were rather ungrateful heirs).

The hesitance of academia to properly recognize him, though of little consequence to his ultimate fame, is easy to understand and, from our point of view, quite proper. Blessed with the advantage of hindsight, we at Eanpahta do not exactly agree with much of what Mythokrates believed, or said he believed, or seems to have believed—though his meaning is often as obscure to us, his distant descendants, as it must seem to you, his remote ancestors.

History demonstrates, in any case, an undeniable liking for the man. Exodians generally admired him for his qualities of courage and good will and for the inexhaustible energy he displayed in attaining, examining, and widely sharing his insights concerning the greatest and deepest problems of nature and existence—and, perhaps most of all, for his flamboyant style, which hardly abated even in his later years at Crucifixius. We still love him, maybe because there is a little of old Mythokrates latent in all of us—or do we only wish it were so?

From early in his career—early, that is, for a theoretical quantist—Mythokrates was well known and highly respected. After his first great paper, recasting the mysterious ideas concerning the wave-particle duality of cosmic structure (as a young assistant professor at the Technological and Vocational Institute of VULCAN), he was summarily initiated into the elite SPK (Society of Philosopher Kings), which at that time actually governed the Fleet.

A chair at the table of Transcendental Mathematics soon followed. But, just as he was about to be seated, that chair was pulled from under him: the position suspiciously deleted coincident with his breaking free of the brilliant but overly political band of thinkers who labeled themselves 'Neo-Quantians.' This small but powerful faction dominated the SPK and effectively controlled the Exodus for many years.

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<sup>1</sup> The TriAD is a three-eikodrome (3-cities) 'empire' united under a dictator bent on conquering the Exodian starfleet. After the death of Emperor Nomothetikos, these cities were removed from the Fleet by several light-seconds. At this point in history, after several centuries of isolation, TriAD is about to rejoin the 'free fleet.'

Mythokrates had openly remarked that he had difficulty assuming (and tolerating) the schizophrenic mind-state required to unquestioningly accept certain assumptions underlying Neo-Quantian Physics. He particularly attacked the wave-particle duality – ironically, his specialty: that problematical paradox that, in accord with some slick principles of his own invention, the Neo-Quantians pretended was demonstrated truth.

Physics clung to life in spite of such bizarre aberrations of logic as this especially obvious one that he had helped them erect (rather to ‘re-erect’) after the unprecedented loss of information due to the previous and disastrous Fleet War. It was, in fact, one of the great supporting pillars of Neo-Quantian dogma. If he no longer believed that the laboriously convoluted architecture of their theoretical temple could actually stand, his fellows and his mentors suggested that it might be best for all concerned that he find (or build) a more secure shelter elsewhere. So they booted him out – that is, they made a pretense of booting him out, though it was obvious he had already departed. They felt it necessary to retain the booting-out posture toward him for many years, in public and in private – even after his final escape from that historical era (at which event all but a few of his peers bade him good riddance).

Mythokrates’ frequent denouncing of the Neo-Quantians (descending into ridicule at times) may or may not have helped hasten the eventual fall of the SPK from their political throne. Their ultimate failure, in any case, had not seemed particularly imminent as he commenced his first long hibernation, and their power was not completely lost until just prior to his first rekindling.

Quantism, however, while it has always had detractors, survived in spite of Mythokrates’ defection and the quantians’ political demise. It remained unscathed by his subsequent attacks, and has repelled innumerable assaults by others, suffering no long-lasting ill effects as an enduring theoretical stance.

Dr. Habnor, in fact, still professed a version of that ideology, and scorned the Elder for having deserted the icons of his science; for turning against the heroes of his intellectual adolescence, the early Neo-Quantians, while those paragons of creative mathematics were actually alive, discussing heady problems of reality and cosmology in classrooms and *kaffés*, and strolling contemplatively along the corridors of the ultra-modernist psychosphere that was Sector VIII/VULCAN nearly seven hundred years ago – VULCAN, which, more recently, presented Professor Habnor himself to the world.

That diminutive genius was experiencing an unusually intense state of mischievous anxiety at the thought of the upcoming opportunity to score some points for his side, the logical statisticians, in memory of his ancient mentors – and against history’s fervent but hopelessly misguided pseudo-romantics, represented by their arch-hero, Mythokrates, in the flesh. And it was about to be broadcast to the whole of the Free Fleet – ‘live,’ from Gargantua.

One of History’s little ironies added an extra note of interest to the upcoming Polylogue. Among certain of the Free Fleet’s intellectual elite, a ‘down with Mythokrates’ movement had been underway for several years. This happens to nearly every great historical figure. Some even live to see it. Most, however, suffer only posthumously and are unable to defend themselves. Generally, prior to the first reasonable attacks, their image has been puffed up to such heroic proportions as to defy

belief. Once under the scrutiny of the 'objective' school of biographers and 'revisionist' historians (no need to mention a muckraking press) they can be deflated practically beyond recognition, after which a rebuilding program will be started by new defenders of the overly maligned ghost.

It was intellectually fashionable, at the moment, to be scornful of Mythokrates and dismiss him as a dilettante—brilliant, admittedly, but an amateur nonetheless; a mind enormously wide, to be sure, yet suffering from a sorry lack of professional and academic discipline (and, as has been often alleged, lacking certain other sorts of discipline as well).

It may not have been the best age for his rekindling but he had seen worse. His original era, one would have to say, had been more than a little hostile to him. If he hadn't the skill and knowledge to build his own hibernaculum (and an extraordinary knack for fund-raising under the most unlikely conditions), he would never have become transferential. It was a much later age that gave him official recognition, whereby he was accepted into the association of true Elders. Until then he had been an outlaw sleeper, resting undisturbed amidst the silent Order of Kharmalenes; protected only by the seclusion and sanctity of their citadel/asylum.

If held in something less than highest esteem, thus ignored in the pompous literature of academe, it must be said that Mythokrates never lost face in the eyes of the Fleet's general population. Like some latter-day Galileo, he was a landmark of Exodian history: a cultural colossus unlikely to be toppled. The demos of every eikodrome and sector would love him always as a symbol of individual liberty during a period of what, charitably, might be called 'pesky' popular resistance to high-tech government over-involvement in personal lives and life-styles.

All the nitpicking at his theories and visions aside, he had been a powerful beacon of free expression in the cold political night after the Great Fleet War. For those fortunate to exist at the dawning of the sixteenth millennium, the man himself, antique science-art hero of a bygone era, was present—and about to give a display (most people dearly hoped) of his legendary intellectual wizardry.

Helenya hastily unrolled one outfit—then decided it might be too gaily colored for meeting with the Elder. Something not *too* somber but a little more formal was needed. As she searched for the perfect attire she began wondering about him. What could have drawn him so suddenly, in his mature years, to religious conversion? He had been such an artist, an entertainer. And now—some sort of priest or monk? It was hard to fathom.

Had he entered a rapturous, early senility when he encountered Sol, the Uranian Prophet? But surely not. Some of his best essays were composed during monastic solitude—well after he had spent himself straight through abject poverty and into impossible debt for the upgrading of Crucifixius. She had heard the old joke: that (with the interest accumulating on his centuries-old loan, plus mounting late payment charges, court and collection fees, and administrative costs veritably defying human conception—not to mention the ballooning fines and penalties claimed by the Sector VII Office of Taxes and Revenue) he still owed the General Fleet Bank so much in credits, the world couldn't afford to let him die.

If the debt seemed unpayable, still his reappearances (every century or so) induced every viewer in the Fleet to tune in the government frequencies. So somebody was getting rich—especially on *this* day. Big advertising interests as well as propaganda needs were being served rather well.

As with special sports clashes of antiquity, popular interest (at least from a far distant historical perspective) was enormously inflated relative to the enduring importance of the actual event. In the final analysis, it is only the generation of interest that has any importance at all. The sheer accumulation of a large crowd and the focusing of its consciousness is, in itself, something remarkable; more so, in fact, than the occasion that draws the audience together. The fête, that is to say, looms much larger in the immediate world of mass emotion than ever it can become in the annals of show business or sports or music, or wherever it is finally enshrined. Besides, Mythokrates, for all his wit and good will, did not really do anything shattering during his last several re-awakenings. He made appearances at famous happenings and said some unexpected and clever things. But he did not overthrow oppressors or drive out demons or magically renovate the civilizations he visited from out of the past. So how was the old priest going to live up to the legend, the Fleet's wild expectations, and his fabulous billing?

How he would hold-up under the rigors of a modern-day polylogue was what troubled Helenya. Rekindling an ancient 'sleeper' could not be repeated forever, and the brain was usually the first organ to show the signs of disorder symptomatic of revitalization-breakdown—not something of great concern to the average human.

He had seemed mentally sharp in his appearance at the chapel, of course. But so old! And how embarrassing, for nearly everyone if he were made to look the fool through the trickery of certain unscrupulous members of the panel: a dozen of the sharpest modern thinkers, most in their prime. They had centuries of hindsight as advantage over the antiquated guest of honor, and all of them were at the leading edge of continuing advance in their respective areas of scholarship.

Helenya knew, only too well, the level of cruelty some of her colleagues could reach when they turned up some weakness or disadvantage in an unwary opponent during a tough debate. Or when an unsuspecting student inadvertently displayed ignorance—*oh*, the delight they took in tearing him or her to mental shreds in front of classmates.

Such a teaching method might be defended (feebly) as a means of weeding out the weaker candidates in the academic honors competition. But it was often indistinguishable from sheer indulgence of the instructor's egomania. And now, if one—or *all* of them could out-shine or stump the famous Mythokrates, their reputations would be made. Their places in history, even if tainted by a streak of meanness, would be assured. After all, a good many of history's immortals were nasty. And too many by far have been immortalized by little else than sheer brutality.

As Sentower began explaining the procedure to be followed in the Polylogue, they slipped on their magnesoles and hastened toward the ship's major theater, the Socratic Auditorium—first, to make the necessary arrangements with Brahlly before show time; then, a date with history.