

PROLOGUE
A MYSTERIOUS DISCOVERY

Could there have been a civilization that reached our level of technological development long ago?

Once upon a time could there also have lived a people with computers, the internet, e-mail and the rest of it?

And could they too have been driven to despair with all that clusters like a pack of vultures around us worldwide today?

What if they also faced something like what now confronts us?

What if they suffered the worst? But then, by drawing on the strength of both what we've lost and not yet attained, they recovered?

How might they have done it? Could there be a lesson here for us?

I write as an American, shellshocked to find myself still stuck, along with the rest of us, in a situation that worldwide gets worse rather than better.

Here we wallow like a rudderless ship in the wake of an environmental and social death sentence—runaway rape of the planet, government by, for, and of the greedy one percent, corporatism morphing into fascism, ethical idiocy, the spread of the religion of terrorism, and to top it off and embody it politically, here in America, the mind-boggling irresponsible lunacy of the GOP, Tea Partiers, and their enablers.

Beyond everything else we're trying, what can one do?

The more I've thought about it, the more attractive one answer looks. Much history and psychology shows how often, in order to cope with a frustrating, and at times terrifying, reality, we've turned to the relief, and often quirky humor, of the allegory, satire, lampoon, or parable.

Those supposed children's stories *Gulliver's Travels* and *Alice in Wonderland* were actually written by two morally sensitive and politically astute clergymen, Dean Swift and Lewis Carroll. Behind the surface of delightful nonsense lie their pot shots at the mess in their time via the weapons of allegory, satire, and lampoon.

Proof of the power of this approach, you might say, is often demonstrated most nights online here in America by Jon Stewart and, in particular, Stephen Colbert.

As for the parable, most familiar to most readers are the famous parables of Jesus. Wikipedia, however, tells us that, more generally, "A parable is a short tale that illustrates universal truth, one of the simplest of narratives. It sketches a setting, describes an action, and shows the results. It often involves a character facing a moral dilemma, or making a questionable decision and then suffering the consequences."

By turning to the power of the ancient parable in modern story form, George Orwell in *1984*, Aldous Huxley in *Brave New World*, Sinclair Lewis in *It Can't Happen Here*, Charlotte Perkins Gilman in *Herland*, Huxley again in *Island*, and James Hilton in *Lost Horizon*, aimed books with enduring bite and inspiration at the mess for the 20th century.

So into my head came the thought: Why not try to update this classic genre for the 21st century?

It was an enticing idea. But could I really do it? Pretty stiff standard to try to live up to. But with so little to lose and much to gain, why not try? And so there emerged the following Parable.

Let us say our Parable begins with the discovery of a strange ancient artifact in a cave high in the mountains of Tibet. Bearing out the rumors, the finding is of thirty containers made of an unknown substance that still resists attempts to open them—all but one. This container is a box of what was apparently once rosewood, so old that its sides are crumbling. In it have been found the objects currently kindling wonderment. One is a curious map on a paper of an intriguing feel to the hand, like the petal of

a rose, but which also seems to be indestructible. It shows a route by sea and then overland up a river to a mountain with a place toward the peak marked simply O.

A second object is a tablet of gold approximately six inches by three and a quarter inches with a rounded top, as of a monument or gravestone. Upon it are inscribed six lines of some kind of ancient advice, with identification this is a replica of the Stone of Vigilance in the Place of Remembrance, whatever this can mean.

It is the last object, however, that generates the greatest interest. For it is clearly a CD or DVD but of a most unusual design. Indeed, it is so far advanced beyond anything of which our present technology is capable it must be called a futuristic design. Upon its face is a play of imagery of indescribable beauty and complexity—the faces of girls and boys, men and women, and what appear to be very ancient humans of remarkable vigor, all shimmering in an effect of layer upon layer for which it is again hard to find words.

Let us say that, in a feat described as “little short of code-busting for the Rosetta Stone,” an ingenious Israeli team has discovered a way to play this CD/DVD on our machines today.

It is from this disk that Israeli and Icelandic teams have recovered this remarkably prescient tale—i.e., foreboding, foreshadowing, some would even say it is uncannily *predictive* of recognizable people and events in *our* time.

Here, in any case, is the long lost but now recovered parable of the noble village of **Osanto**, the vicious village of **Snarlsgrrrrr**, and the woeful village of **Mystifu**.