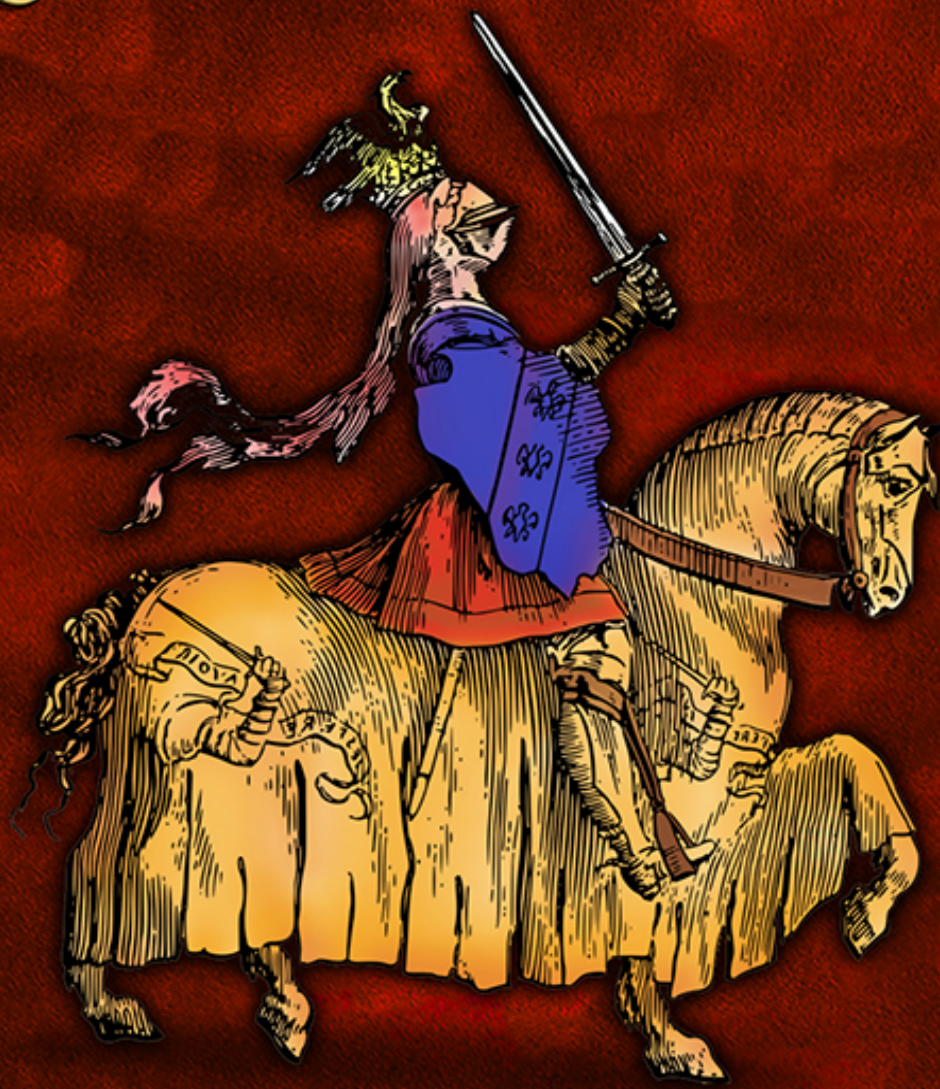


CLASSICS TO GO

THE SILVER STALLION,  
A COMEDY OF REDEMPTION



JAMES BRANCH CABELL



# **The Silver Stallion**

**A Comedy of Redemption**

**James Branch Cabell**

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# BOOK ONE

## LAST SIEGE OF THE FELLOWSHIP

“They shall be, in the siege, both against Judah and against  
Jerusalem.”

—ZECHARIAH, xii, 2.

—Et la route, fait elle  
aussi un grand tour?

—Oh, bien  
certainement, étant donné  
qu’elle circonvient à la fois  
la destinée et le bon sens.

—Puisqu’il le faut, alors!  
dit Jorgen; d’ailleurs je suis  
toujours disposé à goûter  
n’importe quel breuvage  
au moins une fois.

—LA HAUTE HISTOIRE DE JURGEN.

# 1.

## Child's Talk

THEY relate how Dom Manuel that was the high Count of Poictesme, and was everywhere esteemed the most lucky and the least scrupulous rogue of his times, had disappeared out of his castle at Storisende, without any reason or forewarning, upon the feast day of St. Michael and All the Angels. They tell of the confusion and dismay which arose in Dom Manuel's lands when it was known that Manuel the Redeemer—thus named because he had redeemed Poictesme from the Northmen, through the aid of Miramon Lluagor, with a great and sanguinary magic,—was now gone, quite inexplicably, out of these lands.

For whither Manuel had gone, no man nor any woman could say with certainty. At Storisende he had last been seen by his small daughter Melicent, who stated that Father, mounted on a black horse, had ridden westward with Grandfather Death, on a white one, to a far place beyond the sunset. This was quite generally felt to be improbable.

Yet further inquiry had but made more deep the mystery as to the manner of Dom Manuel's passing. Further inquiry had disclosed that the only human eyes anywhere which had, or could pretend to have, rested upon Dom Manuel after Manuel had left Storisende were those of a little boy called Jurgen, the son of Coth of the Rocks. Young Jurgen, after having received from his father an in no way unusual whipping, had run away from home, and had not been recaptured until the following morning. The lad reported



that during his wanderings he had witnessed, toward dusk, upon Upper Morven, a fearful eucharist in which the Redeemer of Poictesme had very horribly shared. Thereafter—so the child's tale ran,—had ensued a transfiguration, and a prediction as to the future of Poictesme, and Dom Manuel's elevation into the glowing clouds of sunset....

Now, these latter details had been, at their first rendering, blubbered almost inarticulately. For, after just the initiatory passages of this supposed romance, the parents of Jurgen, in their first rapturous relief at having recovered their lost treasure, had, of course, in the manner of parents everywhere, resorted to such moral altitudes and to such corporal corrections as had disastrously affected the putative small liar's tale. Then, as the days passed, and they of Poictesme still vainly looked for the return of their great Dom Manuel, the child was of necessity questioned again: and little Jurgen, after sulking for a while, had retold his story without any detected deviation.

It certainly all sounded quite improbable. Nevertheless, here was the only explanation of the land's loss tendered anywhere by anybody: and people began half seriously to consider it. Say what you might, this immature and spanked evangelist had told a story opulent in details which no boy of his age could well, it seemed, have invented. Many persons therefore began sagely to refer to the mouths of babes and sucklings, and to nod ominously. Moreover, the child, when yet further questioned, had enlarged upon Manuel's last prediction as to the future glories of Poictesme, to an extent which made incredulity seem rather unpatriotic; and Jurgen had amplified his horrific story of the manner in which Manuel had redeemed his people from the incurred penalties of their various sins up to and including that evening.

The suggested inference that there was to be no accounting anywhere for one's unavoidable misdemeanors up to date,—among which Dom Manuel had been at pains to specify such indiscretions as staying out all night without your parents' permission,—was an arrangement which everybody, upon consideration, found to be more and more desirable. Good-hearted persons everywhere began, with virtually a free choice thus offered between belief and disbelief, to prefer to invest a little, it well might be, remunerative faith in the story told with such conviction by this sweet and unsullied child, rather than in the carping comments of materialists,—who, after all, could only say, well out of earshot of Coth of the Rocks, that this young Jurgen was very likely to distinguish himself thereafter, either in the pulpit or upon some gallows.

Meanwhile one woeful fact was, in any case, undeniable: the saga of that quiet, prospering grand thief of a Manuel had ended with the inconsequent, if the not actually incredible, tales of these two little children; and squinting tall gray Manuel of the high head had gone out of Poictesme, nobody could say whither.

## 2.

# Economics of Horvendile

AND meanwhile too the Redeemer's wife, Dame Niafer, had sent a summoning to each of the nine lords that, with Manuel, were of the Fellowship of the Silver Stallion: and all these met at Storisende, as Niafer commanded them, for a session or, as they more formally called it, a siege of this order.

Now this fellowship took its name from the banner it had fought under so destroyingly. Upon that sable banner was displayed a silver stallion, which was rampant in every member and was bridled with gold. Dom Manuel was the captain of this fellowship; and it was made up of the nine barons who, under Manuel, had ruled Poictesme. Each had his two stout castles and his fine woodlands and meadows, which he held in fealty to Dom Manuel: and each had a high name for valor.

Four of these genial murderers had served, under the Conde de Tohil Vaca, in Manuel's first and utterly disastrous campaign against the Northmen: but all the nine had been with Manuel since the time of the great fighting about Lacre Kai, and throughout Manuel's various troubles with Oribert and Thragnar and Earl Ladinis and Sclaug and Oriander, that blind and coldly evil Swimmer who was the father of Manuel; and in all the other warrings of Manuel these nine had been with him up to the end.

And the deeds of the lords of the Silver Stallion had fallen very little short of Manuel's own deeds. Thus, it was Manuel,

to be sure, who killed Oriander: that was a family affair. But Miramon Lluagor, the Seneschal of Gontaron, was the champion who subdued Thragnar and put upon him a detection and a hindrance: and it was Kerin of Nointel—the Syndic and, after that, the Castellan of Basardra,—who captured and carefully burned Sclaug. Then, in the quelling of Othmar Black-Tooth’s rebellion, Ninzian of Yair, the High Bailiff of Upper Ardra, had killed eleven more of the outlaws than got their deaths by Manuel’s sword. It was Guivric of Perdigon, and not Manuel, who put the great Arabian Al-Motawakkil out of life. And in the famous battle with the Easterlings, by which the city of Megaris was rescued, it was Manuel who got the main glory and, people said, a three nights’ loan of the body of King Theodoret’s young sister; but capable judges declared the best fighting on that day was done by Donander of Évre, then but a boy, whom Manuel thereafter made Thane of Aigremont.

Yet Holden of Nérac, the Marshal of St. Tara, was the boldest of them all, and was very well able to hold his own in single combat with any of those that have been spoken of: Coth of the Rocks had not ever quitted any battle-field except as a conqueror: and courteous Anavalt of Fomor and light-hearted Gonfal of Naimes—who had the worst names among this company for being the most cunning friends and coaxers of women,—these two had put down their masculine opposers also in gratifyingly large numbers.

In fine, no matter where the lords of the Silver Stallion had raised their banner against an adversary, it was in that place they made an end of that adversary: for there was never, in any time, a hardier gang of bullies than was this Fellowship of the Silver Stallion in the season that they kept earth noisy with the clashing of their swords and darkened heaven with the smoke of the towns they were sacking, and when throughout the known world men had talked about the

wonders which these champions were performing with Dom Manuel to lead them. Now they were leaderless.

These heroes came to Storisende; and with Dame Niafer they of course found Holy Holmendis. This saint was then very lately come out of Philistia, to console the Countess in her bereavement. But they found with her also that youthful red-haired Horvendile under whom Dom Manuel, in turn, had held Poictesme, by the terms of a contract which was not ever made public. Some said this Horvendile to be Satan's friend and emissary, while others declared his origin to lurk in a more pagan mythology: all knew the boy to be a master of discomfutable strange magics such as were unknown to Miramon Lluagor and Guivric the Sage.

This Horvendile said to the nine heroes, "Now begins the last siege of the Fellowship of the Silver Stallion."

Donander of Évre was the youngest of them. Yet he spoke now, piously and boldly enough. "But it is our custom, Messire Horvendile, to begin each siege with prayer."

"This siege," replied Horvendile, "must nevertheless begin without any such religious side-taking. For this is the siege in which, as it was prophesied, you shall be both against Judah and against Jerusalem, and against Thebes and Hermopolis and Avalon and Breidablik and all other places which produce Redeemers."

"Upon my word, but who is master here!" cried Coth of the Rocks, twirling at his long mustachios. This gesture was a sure sign that trouble brewed.

Horvendile answered: "The master who held Poictesme, under my whims, has passed. A woman sits in his place, his little son inherits after him. So begins a new romance; and a new order is set afoot."

"Yet Coth, in his restless pursuit of variety, has asked a wholly sensible question," said Gonfal, the tall Margrave of



Aradol. "Who will command us, who now will give us our directions? Can Madame Niafer lead us to war?"

"These things are separate. Dame Niafer commands: but it is I—since you ask,—who will give to all of you your directions, and your dooms too against the time of their falling, and after that to your names I will give life. Now, your direction, Gonfal, is South."

Gonfal looked full at Horvendile, in frank surprise. "I was already planning for the South, though certainly I had told nobody about it. You are displaying, Messire Horvendile, an uncomfortable sort of wisdom which troubles me."

Horvendile replied, "It is but a little knack of foresight, such as I share with Balaam's ass."

But Gonfal stayed more grave than was his custom. He asked, "What shall I find in the South?"

"What all men find, at last, in one place or another, whether it be with the aid of a knife or of a rope or of old age. Yet, I assure you, the finding of it will not be unwelcome."

"Well,"—Gonfal shrugged,— "I am a realist. I take what comes, in the true form it comes in."

Now Coth of the Rocks was blustering again. "I also am a realist. Yet I permit no upstart, whether he have or have not hair like a carrot, to give me any directions."

Horvendile answered, "I say to you—"

But Coth replied, shaking his great bald head: "No, I will not be bulldozed in this way. I am a mild-mannered man, but I will not tamely submit to be thus browbeaten. I believe, too, that Gonfal was insinuating I do not usually ask sensible questions!"

"Nobody has attempted—"

“Are you not contradicting me to my face! What is that but to call me a liar! I will not, I repeat, submit to these continued rudenesses.”

“I was only saying—”

But Coth was implacable. “I will take directions from nobody who storms at me and who preserves no dignity whatever in our hour of grief. For the rest, the children agree in reporting that, whether he ascended in a gold cloud or traveled more sensibly on a black horse, Dom Manuel went westward. I shall go west, and I shall fetch Dom Manuel back into Poictesme. I shall, also, candidly advise him, when he returns to ruling over us, to discourage the tomfooleries and the ridiculous rages of all persons whose brains are overheated by their hair.”

“Let the West, then,” said Horvendile, very quietly, “be your direction. And if the people there do not find you so big a man as you think yourself, do not you be blaming me.”

These were his precise words. Coth himself conceded the coincidence, long afterward....

“I, Messire Horvendile, with your permission, am for the North,” said Miramon Lluagor. This sorcerer alone of them was upon any terms of intimacy with this Horvendile. “I have yet upon gray Vraidex my Doubtful Castle, in which an undoubtable and a known doom awaits me.”

“That is true,” replied Horvendile. “Let the keen North and the cold edge of Flamberge be yours. But you, Guivric, shall have the warm wise East for your direction.”

That allotment was uncordially received. “I am comfortable enough in my home at Asch,” said Guivric the Sage. “At some other time, perhaps— But, really now, Messire Horvendile, I have in hand a number of quite important thaumaturgies just at the present! Your

suggestion is most upsetting. I know of no need for me to travel east.”

“With time you will know of that need,” said Horvendile, “and you will obey it willingly, and you will go willingly to face the most pitiable and terrible of all things.”

Guivric the Sage did not reply. He was too sage to argue with people when they talked foolishly. He was immeasurably too sage to argue with, of all persons, Horvendile.

“Yet that,” observed Holden of Nérac, “exhausts the directions: and it leaves no direction for the rest of us.”

Horvendile looked at this Holden, who was with every reason named the Bold; and Horvendile smiled. “You, Holden, already take your directions, in a picturesque and secret manner, from a queen—”

“Let us not speak of that!” said Holden, between a smirk and some alarm.

“—And you will be guided by her, in any event, rather than by me. To you also, Anavalt of Fomor, yet another queen will call resistlessly by and by, and you, who are rightly named the Courteous, will deny her nothing. So to Holden and to Anavalt I shall give no directions, because it is uncivil to come between any woman and her prey.”

“But I,” said Kerin of Nointel, “I have at Ogde a brand-new wife whom I prize above all the women I ever married, and far above any mere crowned queen. Not even wise Solomon,” now Kerin told them, blinking, in a sort of quiet scholastic ecstasy, “when that Judean took his pick of the women of this world, accompanied with any queen like my Saraïde: for she is in all ways superior to what the Cabalists record about Queen Naäma, that pious child of the bloodthirsty King of Ammon, and about Queen Djarada, the daughter of idolatrous Nubara the Egyptian, and about

Queen Balkis, who was begotten by a Sheban duke upon the person of a female Djinn in the appearance of a gazelle. And only at the command of my dear Saraïde would I leave home to go in any direction.”

“You will, nevertheless, leave home, very shortly,” declared Horvendile. “And it will be at the command and at the personal urging of your Saraïde.”

Kerin leaned his head to one side, and he blinked again. He had just Dom Manuel’s trick of thus opening and shutting his eyes when he was thinking, but Kerin’s mild dark gaze in very little resembled Manuel’s piercing, vivid and rather wary consideration of affairs.

Kerin then observed, “Yet it is just as Holden said, and every direction is preëmpted.”

“Oh, no,” said Horvendile. “For you, Kerin, will go downward, whither nobody will dare to follow you, and where you will learn more wisdom than to argue with me, and to pester people with uncalled-for erudition.”

“It follows logically that I,” laughed young Donander of Évre, “must be going upward, toward paradise itself, since no other direction whatever remains.”

“That,” Horvendile replied, “happens to be true. But you will go up far higher than you think for; and your doom shall be the most strange of all.”

“Then must I rest content with some second-rate and commonplace destruction?” asked Ninzian of Yair, Who alone of the fellowship had not yet spoken.

Horvendile looked at sleek Ninzian, and Horvendile looked long and long. “Donander is a tolerably pious person. But without Ninzian, the Church would lack the stoutest and the one really god-fearing pillar it possesses anywhere in these parts. That would be the devil of a misfortune. Your

direction, therefore, is to remain in Poictesme, and to uphold the edifying fine motto of Poictesme, for the world's benefit."

"But the motto of Poictesme," said Ninzian, doubtfully, "is *Mundus vult decipi*, and signifies that the world wishes to be deceived."

"That is a highly moral sentiment, which I may safely rely upon you alike to concede and prove. Therefore, for you who are so pious, I shall slightly paraphrase the Scripture: and I declare to all of you that neither will I any more remove the foot of Ninzian from out of the land which I have appointed for your children; so that they will take heed to do all which I have commanded them."

"That," Ninzian said, looking markedly uncomfortable, "is very delightful."



### 3.

## How Anavalt Lamented the Redeemer

THEN Madame Niafer arose, black-robed and hollow-eyed, and she made a lament for Dom Manuel, whose like for gentleness and purity and loving kindness toward his fellows she declared to remain nowhere in this world. It was an encomium under which the attendant warriors stayed very grave and rather fidgety, because they recognized and shared her grief, but did not wholly recognize the Manuel whom she described to them.

And the Fellowship of the Silver Stallion was decreed to be disbanded, because of the law of Poictesme that all things should go by tens forever. There was no fighting-man able to fill Manuel's place: and a fellowship of nine members was, as Dame Niafer pointed out, illegal.

It well might be, however, she suggested, with a side glance toward Holmendis, that some other peculiarly holy person, even though not a warrior— At the same instant Coth said, with a startling and astringent decisiveness, "Bosh!"

His confrères felt the gross incivility of this interruption, but felt, too, that they agreed with Coth. And so the fellowship was proclaimed to be disbanded.

Then Anavalt of Fomor made a lament for the passing of that noble order whose ranks were broken at last, and for Dom Manuel also Anavalt raised a lament, praising Manuel

for his hardihood and his cunning and his terribleness in battle. The heroes nodded their assent to this more intelligible sort of talking.

“Manuel,” said Anavalt, “was hardy. It was not wise for any enemy to provoke him. When that indiscretion was committed, Manuel made himself as a serpent about the city of that enemy, girdling his prey all round: he seized the purlieus of that city, and its cattle, and its boats upon the rivers. He beleaguered that city everywhere, he put fire to the orchards, he silenced the mill-races, he prevented the plowers from plowing the land; and the people of that city starved, and they ate up one another, until the survivors chose to surrender to Dom Manuel. Then Manuel raised his gallows, he whistled in his headsmen, and there were no more survivors of that people.”

And Anavalt said also: “Manuel was cunning. With a feather he put a deception upon three kings, but the queens that he played his tricks on were more than three, nor was it any feather that he diddled them with. Nobody could outwit Manuel. What he wanted he took, if he could get it that way, with his strong hand: but, if not, he used his artful head and his lazy, wheedling tongue, and his other members too, so that the person whom he was deluding would give Manuel whatever he required. It was like eating honey, to be deluded by Manuel. I think it is no credit for a private man to be a great rogue; but the leader of a people must know how to deceive all peoples.”

Then Anavalt said: “Manuel was terrible. There was no softness in him, no hesitancy, and no pity. That, too, is not a virtue in a private person, but in the leader of a people it may well be a blessing for that people. Manuel so ordered matters that no adversary ever troubled Poictesme the second time. He lived as a tyrant over us; but it is better to have one master that you know the ways of than to be

always changing masters in a world where none but madmen run about at their own will. I do not weep for Manuel, because he would never have wept for me nor for anybody else; but I regret that man of iron and the protection he was to us who are not ruthless iron but flesh.”

There was a silence afterward. Yet still the heroes nodded gravely. This was, in the main, a Manuel whom they all recognized.

Dame Niafer, however, had risen up a little way from her seat, when the pious gaunt man Holy Holmendis, who sat next to her, put out his hand to her hand. After this she said nothing: yet it was perfectly clear the Countess thought that Anavalt had been praising Manuel for the wrong sort of virtues.

A fire was kindled with that ceremony which was requisite. The banner of the great fellowship was burned, and the lords of the Silver Stallion now broke their swords, and they cast these fragments also into this fire, so that these swords might never defend any other standard. It was the youth of these nine men and the first vigor and faith of their youth which perished with the extinction of that fire: and they knew it.

Thereafter the heroes left Storisende. Each rode for his own home, and they made ready, each in his own fashion, for that new order of governance which with the passing of Dom Manuel had come upon Poictesme.

## 4.

# Fog Rises

NOW Guivric and Donander and Gonfal rode westward with their attendants, all in one company, as far as Guivric's home at Asch. And as these three lords rode among the wreckage and the gathering fogs of November, the three talked together.

"It is a pity," said Gonfal of Naimes, "that, while our little Count Emmerick is growing up, this land must now be ruled by a lame and sallow person, who had never much wit and who tends already to stringiness. Otherwise, in a land ruled over by a widow, who is used to certain recreations, one might be finding amusement, and profit too."

"Come now," said loyal Donander of Évre, "but Madame Niafer is a chaste and good woman who means well!"

"She has yet another quality which is even more disastrous in the ruler of any country," returned Guivric the Sage.

"And what hook have you found now to hang a cynicism on?"

"I fear more from her inordinate piety than from her indifferent looks and her stupid well-meaningness. That woman will be reforming things everywhere into one gray ruin."

"Indeed," said Gonfal, smiling, "these rising fogs have to me very much the appearance of church incense."

Guivric nodded. "Yes. Had it been possible, I believe that Madame Niafer would have preserved and desecrated the fellowship by setting in Dom Manuel's place that Holy Holmendis who is nowadays her guide in all spiritual matters; and who will presently, do you mark my prophesying, be making a sanctimonious hash of her statecraft."

"He composed for her, it is well known," said Gonfal, "the plaint which she made for Dom Manuel."

"That was a cataloguing of ecclesiastic virtues," Guivric said, dryly, "which to my mind did not very immediately suggest the tall adulterer and parricide whom we remember. This Holmendis has, thus, already brought hypocrisy into fashion."

"He will be Niafer's main counselor," Gonfal speculated. "He is a pushing, vigorous fellow. I wonder now—?"

Guivric nodded again. "Women prefer to take counsel in a bedchamber," he stated.

"Come, Guivric," put in pious young Donander of Évre. "Come now, whatever his over-charitable opinion of our dead master, this Holmendis is a saint: and we true believers should speak no ill of the saints."

"I have nothing against belief, nor hypocrisy either, within reason, nor have I anything against saints, in their proper place. It is only that should a saint—and more particularly, a saint conceived and nurtured and made holy in Philistia,—ever come to rule over Poictesme, and over the bedchamber of Dom Manuel," said Guivric, moodily, "that saint would not be in his proper place. And our day, my friends, would be ended."

"It is already ended," Gonfal said, "so far as Poictesme is concerned: these fogs smell over-strongly of church incense. But these fogs which rise about Poictesme do not envelop



the earth. For one, I shall fare south, as that Horvendile directed me, and as I had already planned to do. In the South I shall find nobody so amusing as that fine great squinting quiet scoundrel of a Manuel. Yet in the South there is a quest cried for the hand of Morvyth, the dark Queen of Inis Dahut; and, now that my wife is dead, it may be that I would find it amusing to sleep with this young queen.”

The others laughed, and thought no more of the light boastfulness of this Gonfal who was the world’s playfellow. But within the month it was known that Gonfal of Naimés, the Margrave of Aradol, had in truth quitted his demesnes, and had traveled southward. And he was the first of this famous fellowship, after Dom Manuel, to go out of Poictesme, not ever to return.

# BOOK TWO

## THE MATHEMATICS OF GONFAL

“He multiplieth words without knowledge.”

—JOB, XXXV, 16.

## 5.

# Champion at Misadventure

NOW the tale is of how Gonfal fared in the South, where the people were Fundamentalists. It is told how the quest was cried; and how, in the day's fashion, the hand of Morvyth, the dark Queen of Inis Dahut and of the four other Isles of Wonder, was promised to the champion who should fetch back the treasure that was worthiest to be her bridal gift. Eight swords, they say, were borne to the altar of Pygé-Upsízugos, to be suitably consecrated, after a brief and earnest address, by the Imaun of Bulotu. Eight appropriately ardent lovers raised high these swords, to swear fealty to Queen Morvyth and to the quest of which her loveliness was the reward. Thus all was as it should be, until they went to sheathe these swords. Then, one champion among the company, striking his elbow against his neighbor, had, rather unaccountably, the ill luck to drop his sword so that it pierced his own left foot.

The horns sounded afterward, through the narrow streets and over the bronze and lacquer roofs, and seven of Queen Morvyth's suitors armed and rode forth to ransack the world of its chief riches for a year and a day.

He who did not ride with the others was Gonfal of Naimés. It was three months, indeed, before his wound was so healed that Gonfal could put foot to stirrup. And by that time, he calculated regretfully, the riches of the world must have been picked over with such thoroughness that it would hardly be worth while for a cripple to be hobbling out to

make himself ridiculous among unsympathetic strangers. His agony, as he admitted, under this inclement turn of chance, was well-nigh intolerable; yet nothing was to be gained by blinking the facts: and Gonfal was, as he also admitted, a realist.

Gonfal, thus, remained at court through the length of a year, and lived uneventfully in the pagan Isles of Wonder. Gonfal sat unsplendidly snug while all his rivals rode at adventure in the meadows that are most fertile in magic and ascended the mountains that rise beyond plausibility in the climates most favorable to the unimaginable. But Gonfal's sufficing consolation appeared to be that he sat, more and more often, with the Queen.

However, the Margrave of Aradol, alone of Morvyth's suitors, had overpassed his first youth; the aging seem to acquire a sort of proficiency in being disappointed, and to despatch the transaction with more ease: and so, Queen Morvyth speculated, the Margrave of Aradol could perhaps endure this cross of unheroic tranquillity—even over and above his natural despair, now he had lost all hope of winning her,—with an ampler fortitude than would have been attainable by any of the others.

Besides, their famousness was yet to be won, their exploits stayed, as yet, resplendent and misty magnets which drew them toward the future. But this Gonfal, who had come into Inis Dahut after so much notable service under Manuel of Poictesme and the unconquerable banner of the Silver Stallion, had in his day, the young Queen knew, been through eight formal wars, with any amount of light guerrilla work. He had slain his satisfactory quota of dragons and usurpers and ogres, and, also some years ago, had married the golden-haired and starry-eyed and swan-throated princess who is the customary reward of every champion's faithful attendance to derring-do.