

King Solomon's Ring

by Ahimaaz, Court Historian



Translated and Annotated by
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Illustrated by Steve Solomon



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1. Ring

KING SOLOMON TRIED DIFFERENT KEYS, UNTIL FINALLY the padlock clicked open. He tugged open the door. And followed by Benaiah, who was carrying a torch, he entered the treasure chamber.

The bins and chests glimmered in the torchlight. Solomon located the chest his father had shown him. He withdrew the map and handed it to Benaiah.

The Captain of the Guard examined it closely. "Yes," he said, "I think we can find our way to this cave. When did you wish to go there?"

Solomon shrugged. "Tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow it is. At dawn I'll be ready with horses and provisions. And some trusted men to accompany us into the wilderness."



The sun was rising as Solomon, Benaiah, and the Singing Guards rode through the North Gate and headed eastward.

By midday they were entering a lunar landscape—a wilderness of parched earth and empty wadis.

As they traversed it, the Singing Guards regaled the wilderness with song.



They halted their horses at the entrance to a cave. "This must be it," said Benaiah, squinting at the map.*

*The cave may have been located on Mount Tabor. A medieval visitor to the Holy Land, Abbot Daniel, writes: "They show you upon mount Tabor, at a level place, an extraordinary cave cut in the rock, like a cellar, which has a small window in the roof. At the bottom of the cave towards the east there is an altar. The door

“I must go in alone,” said Solomon. Dismounting, he said a prayer and entered the cave.

Just inside the entrance a bear was dozing. It awoke, growled at the intruder, and went back to sleep.

Solomon crept past the bear and explored the cave. It was cool and craggy. A bluish glow seemed to emanate from the walls. From somewhere came a musical murmur, like that of water flowing in a brook.

In the rear wall he noted a cleft. Squeezing through it, he found himself in a passageway. The glow was brighter here. Groping his way, Solomon followed the passageway.

And he emerged into the Cave of the Ages.

The cavern that loomed before him had been fashioned into a residence. Lit by torches, it was carpeted from wall to wall. Set into one of the walls was a screen. The furnishings included an icebox, a couch, and a giant hourglass. Near the hourglass, in a thronelike chair, sat Melchizedek.

“Greetings, King Solomon,” said Melchizedek, his voice echoing from the depths of the cavern. “Approach.”

Solomon hesitated for a moment. Then he crossed the carpet and stood before the mysterious resident of the cavern.

Melchizedek regarded him from the throne. “I am Melchizedek, priest of GOD Most High,” he said. “Welcome to my abode. What brings you here?”

“The bidding of my late father, who once visited you in this cave,” said Solomon. “He told me to seek you out—to solicit your aid and blessing—when I was ready to build a temple.”

“And you deem yourself ready?”

“As ready as I shall ever be. My kingship is established. I have mastered the daily routines of governance. I have grown accustomed to donning the crown, as I tumble out of bed in the morning. Am I ready? I hope so.”

of the cave is very small, and you descend by steps from the west side. Small fig trees grow in front of the entrance, and around them are other kinds of trees; there was formerly a large forest there, but now there are only small shrubs. The holy Melchizedek dwelt in this small cave, and there Abraham visited him.” (quoted in Zev Vilnay’s *Legends of Palestine*)



“And what about your people? Are they ready for a temple? Should they have one?”

“Why not?” said Solomon. “The nation is prosperous and at peace. From Dan to Beersheba we have settled the land. No longer are we *habiru*—footloose wanderers. Yet we continue to worship GOD in a tent. I was told to provide Him with a more substantial dwelling place—one worthy of His greatness. I am prepared now to do so.”

“Does GOD really need a fancy dwelling place?”

“Our prophets seem to think so, and our priests too. Moreover, the plans were revealed to my father in dreams. Apparently GOD desires a new home.”

“Apparently so,” said Melchizedek, shaking his head at the idea. “All right, I’ll aid you. Though I have reservations about this ‘worthy’ dwelling place. Might not its opulence

distract from, rather than glorify, its Divine Occupant? Anyhow, listen. I am going to give you a tool. It will prove useful in the construction of the temple, and in other ways. Go over to that table.”

Solomon approached the table. On it was a brass bottle. “Rub the bottle. And stand back.”

Warily, Solomon rubbed it and backed away.

For a moment nothing happened. Then a wisp of smoke rose from the bottle. It grew into a cloud that coalesced into a shape. And a jinni—bald, rotund, and clad in a vest—hovered in the air. In his hand he was holding something.

“Give Solomon the ring,” said Melchizedek.

The jinni handed it over and zipped back into the bottle.

“This ring has great power,” said Melchizedek. “Use it wisely. Go ahead, put it on.”

Solomon slipped the ring onto a finger and peered at it. “How exactly does it work?” he asked.

“Rub the bottle again.”

Solomon rubbed it. Like a jack-in-the-box, the jinni reemerged. This time he was holding a scroll.

“Take the manual,” said Melchizedek. “Study it before using the ring. Now go, youthful king of Israel. May the Lord guide you. And may He dwell within you—in that least fancy of temples, the human heart.”

Solomon left the Cave of the Ages. Retracing his steps along the passageway, he tiptoed past the bear and rejoined his companions.

They listened eagerly as he described his meeting with Melchizedek. And they admired the ring he had been given.

Flashing in the sun, it was set with four jewels. In each was engraved a letter—spelling out the Ineffable Name of GOD.*

* Ahimaaz’s description of the ring confirms what is known from other sources. According to the Talmud (Gittin 68a, b), Solomon’s ring was engraved with the *shem ha-meforesh*—the Ineffable Name of GOD. And Islamic authors tell us that it contained “the Most Great Name of GOD,” along with four jewels

that had been given to Solomon by angels.

In the Islamic accounts, however, the jewels are said to be inscribed with phrases. The first jewel gave Solomon dominion over the winds, and was inscribed "To GOD [Allah] belong power and greatness." The second gave him dominion over birds and beasts, and was inscribed "Let all living things praise GOD." The third gave him dominion over earth and water, and was inscribed "Heaven and earth are the servants of GOD." The fourth gave him dominion over the jinn, and was inscribed "There is no god but GOD, and Muhammad is His messenger." (Muhammad, of course, was not born until many centuries after the angels brought Solomon the jewels. The anachronism can be explained by the fact that angels exist outside of time.)

The ring served King Solomon as a signet ring, for sealing letters and decrees. But it was also the source of his supernatural powers. With it he was able to control the winds, and to fly about on a wind-borne carpet. It allowed him to communicate with animals (and even with flowers). But its most notable use involved the jinn. By means of his ring, Solomon could summon these otherworldly spirits and make them do his bidding. He could also exorcise them from possessed persons. (For the earliest mention of the ring's power over jinn, see Josephus, *Antiquities*, viii, 2.)

Did Solomon's ring actually contain jewels given to him by angels? After a fashion, reports Nicholas Roerich, a Russian mystic who traveled in Tibet during the 1920s. According to Roerich, the ring was set with a fragment of the Chintamani Stone. This ancient stone (described as a chunk of moldavite with glowing striations) had been preserved in a lamasery that Roerich visited. The abbot presented Roerich with a fragment of it, and revealed that the stone had been brought to earth by a messenger from Sirius. Another fragment, said the abbot, had been presented to Emperor Tazlovoo of Atlantis, and another to King Solomon.

So the ring may have contained a fragment of the Chintamani Stone. What it did not contain was a so-called Solomon's Seal. A hexagram or pentagram, Solomon's Seal is the magical symbol *par excellence*. But it did not arise until medieval times, appearing on amulets that sought an association with King Solomon and his ring.

And one final description of the ring has come down to us. It is found in a Yiddish folk tale. The tale goes as follows:

King Solomon was sitting on his throne one morning, And he

decided that Benaiah, the captain of the Palace Guard, needed a lesson in humility. So the king summoned Benaiah and gave him an impossible mission to fulfill. "I have heard rumors of a fabulous ring," said Solomon. "It has a unique power. When a sad man gazes upon it, he becomes happy. But when a happy man gazes upon it, he becomes sad. Find this ring and bring it to me."

Benaiah set out in search of the ring. He traveled from town to town, inquiring as to its whereabouts. But no one had ever heard of such a ring. And he was about to give up when he spotted a junk shop, whose proprietor was sitting out front. Benaiah approached the man and described the object of his search.

"A ring that cheers the sad and saddens the cheerful?" said the junk dealer. "Come inside."

They entered the shop. From a boxful of baubles the junk dealer took a plain, silver ring. He engraved some words on it and gave it to Benaiah. Benaiah read the inscription, nodded sagely, and headed back to the palace.

Solomon was expecting an unsuccessful—and humbled—Benaiah. So when Benaiah strode in and handed him the ring, the king was taken aback. Inspecting it, he read the inscription—and let out a melancholy sigh.

King Solomon removed his costly rings and slipped on the ring from the junk shop. "It was I who needed a lesson in humility," he said. "This ring has reminded me that wealth and power are fleeting things."

For inscribed on the ring was a Yiddish phrase:

GAM ZU YAAVOR ("This too shall pass")

2. Manual

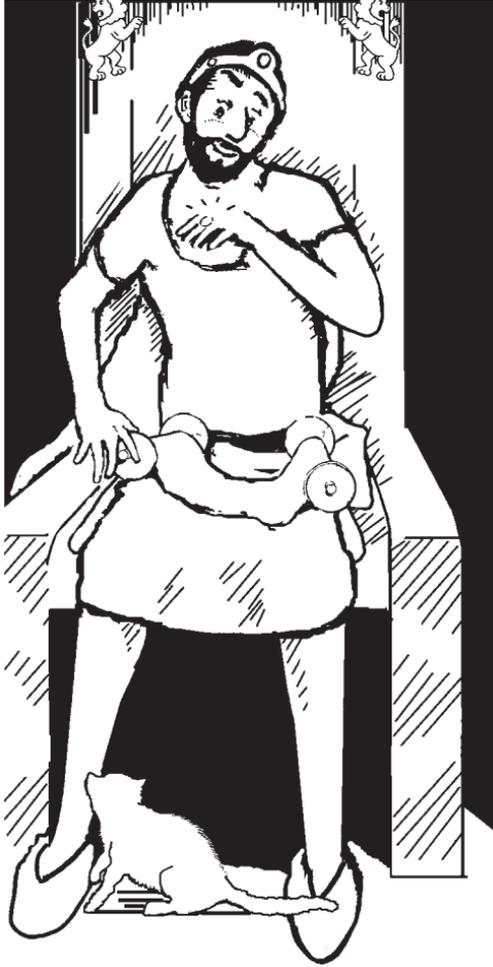
KING SOLOMON WAS ALONE IN THE THRONE ROOM. Perched on the throne, he was contemplating his new ring. Its four jewels glinted in the torchlight. In his lap was the manual. Finally he unrolled the manual and read aloud:

"To the user of this ring:
Beware! 'Tis not a harmless thing
That on thy mortal finger glows.
Beware the gifts this ring bestows.
For it has powers from Beyond,
This little band that you have donned.

In its jewels a cosmic force
Like a fiery stream shall course;
And from the Holy Name thereon
(Than which more potent there is none)
A mystic energy shall surge
And with thy own volition merge.
Beware! Like fire this potency:
If used for good, a friend to thee;
But put to purpose otherwise,
Shall burn the hand that thus defies
The will of GOD, who has decreed
That men should lives of virtue lead.
Use this ring with good intent;
For mischief, friend, it is not meant!
What are its powers? Lend an ear
And of their nature you shall hear.
To start with: Simply say the name
Of any animal, wild or tame;
Thus summoned, shall that creature speed
Into thy presence and proceed
To *speak* with you. For yes, this ring
Doth wondrous understanding bring
Of the sounds—the squeaks and howls,
The fervent squawks, the threatening growls,
The yaps and roars, the quacks and coos,
The twittering and hoots and hoos—
Of all the world's beasts and birds,
As if they spoke in human words.
Chat even with a minotaur
Or unicorn! But wait, there's more.
For with this ring upon thy hand,
You may summon and command
The *mighty winds* that roam the air—
Summon them from anywhere!
From north or south or east or west,
The blustering winds, at your behest,
Shall like a loyal minion trek.
Yet more than winds be at your beck.
For spirits too—the unruly *jinn*
(Of angels the less reputable kin)—

Shall come to you when called by name.
The ring shall rule them, make them tame—
Compliant, docile, helpful creatures!
So there you have the major features
Of this tool *extraordinaire*,
This instrument beyond compare.
And it has other uses, too;
Let us mention just a few.
Should you wish to walk about
And stealthily some area scout,
Just raise your hand and say aloud:
'Invisible!' The ring shall cloud
The minds of men, whom you shall pass
As if you were a thing of glass.
Or have you lost some item dear?
Pronounce its name—it shall appear!
While traveling, you've gone astray?
Use the ring to find your way.
Some knowledge that you've sorely lacked—
Some information, gossip, fact—
Some inside dope you wish you knew?
Listen, friend, here's what to do:
Just conjure up, with lifted ring,
The jinni who knows everything—
The *Info Imp*, as he is known—
And ask your question. He'll intone
The answer from the endless store
Of knowledge that he's famous for.
Okay, that's it. You've heard the spiel.
(And one thing more: the ring's a seal;
Just lay it onto wax and press.)
So are you ready—no or yes?
And are you willing to agree
To use these powers righteously?
To indicate agreement, turn
The ring three times. Then whisper: *'Fern.'*
(That's the password you must state,
This magic ring to activate.)
And lo! the ring is yours to use.
Beware its powers. You're the fuse."

Solomon put down the manual. With a wary eye he gazed at the ring. Finally he turned it three times, as instructed. "Fern," he whispered. The four jewels came alive, glowing and pulsating.*



* Its manual has described in detail the powers of a magic ring. Another such account is found in *The History of Reynard the Fox*. In that medieval fable, Reynard claims to have inherited a magic ring. On its band, he says, are three Hebrew words that protect against lightning, witchcraft, and temptation. And it has a jewel, he says, which is divided into three sections. One section is fiery

red, and shines so brightly as to serve as a torch. The second section is white, and cures illnesses. The third section is green, and makes one invincible. Alas, Reynard is unable to produce this fabulous ring. He has sent it, he claims, as a gift to the king—having deemed himself unworthy to wear it.

The fable suggests that, by medieval times, magic rings were viewed with skepticism. In our own era, of course, they have been relegated to fairy tales and fantasy games. Or have they? On hand after hand may be spotted a good-luck ring (set with a birthstone or other lucky gem); a school ring (for mystic rapport with the institution); a ring with a healing crystal. And if a magic ring is one that does amazing things, or that glows with an unearthly light, what about the radio-show rings? These were offered as premiums to the youthful listeners of radio shows. To receive one (along with a set of instructions or a “secret manual”), you mailed in a box top from the breakfast cereal that sponsored the show. Here’s a sampling of such rings:

TOM MIX TIGER-EYE RING. Advertised as glowing in the dark “like a ferocious animal eye....Amaze all your friends with this magic ring.”

TOM MIX SLIDING WHISTLE RING. For secretly signaling your friends.

TOM MIX MAGNET RING. Picks up pins, paper clips, etc.

JACK ARMSTRONG DRAGON’S EYE RING. “Yours! This mysterious ring that glows in the dark!”

JACK ARMSTRONG EGYPTIAN WHISTLE RING. Comes with a card that lists the Secret Whistling Code.

ORPHAN ANNIE MYSTIC EYE RING. Equipped with a diagonal mirror for peeking around corners. (This same ring was later offered as the **LONE RANGER LOOK-AROUND RING.**)

CAPTAIN MIDNIGHT MYSTIC SUN-GOD RING. “Their best-known god called Tonatiuh, the Sun God, is shown as the Aztecs pictured him on the side of your ring....The red plastic stone of your ring symbolizes the altar of the Sun God’s temple. Its rich, brilliant color simulates the deep red glow of a genuine ruby....Press gently and watch the stone slide out, revealing the hidden compartment underneath.” (From the manual, written by Captain Midnight himself.)

SKY KING TWO-WAY TELE-BLINKER RING. Has a flasher-light for sending Morse code messages, and a telescope for receiving messages. (Different from the SKY KING SIGNASCOPE RING, which signals with a mirror.)

LONE RANGER WEATHER RING. Changes color if rain or snow is imminent.

TOM MIX LOOK-IN MYSTERY RING. Look through its peep-hole and see Tom Mix and his horse Tony.

BUCK ROGERS RING OF SATURN. According to its instructions, this ring “has magic qualities that make it glow in the dark with mysterious blue light....the magic power of the Ring of Saturn is yours!”

(Source: *The Overstreet Toy Ring Price Guide*, 3rd Edition)

3. Trying It Out

LIKE A LIVING THING, THE RING GLOWED AND PULSATED. King Solomon peered at it closely. “Let’s see if it works,” he said. “I’ll start by trying to summon—and speak with—a bird or beast. Now then, which bird or beast?” He thought for a moment, then raised the ring and said: “Hoopoe.”*

* The hoopoe is a bird with elegant plumage and a needlelike bill. Its name in English derives from its cry: a soft, musical hoot. The cry is echoed as well in its Arabic and Hebrew names: *hud-hud* and *dukhifat*. Even its Latin classification, *upopa epops*, suggests that musicality.

Hoopoes are recognizable by their distinctive crest: an array of yellow, black-tipped feathers that is fan-shaped when erect. The crest unfurls itself whenever the bird is surprised or excited. The result is a kind of crown, reminiscent of the feathered headpiece of an Aztec prince.

It is said that a hoopoe can detect underground water. The notion was probably inspired by its feeding habits. With its long, narrow bill, the hoopoe systematically probes the soil for insects—as if searching for a hidden spring. With its head bobbing, it hops about like a mechanical toy.

(One such toy may have been inspired by the hoopoe: the Dip-

He leaned back in the throne and waited. The hall was silent, save for the crackling of a torch. A night breeze wafted through the windows.

Then a fluttering broke the silence, as a hoopoe flew into the hall. It landed on the dais and hooted a greeting. Solomon nodded in comprehension and hooted back.

And the two engaged in a conversation—a melodious warble that echoed from the walls of the throne room. Exchanging hoots, they chatted together. Then the hoopoe delivered a monologue. Solomon listened intently, interrupting occasionally with a hooted question.*

py Bird [also marketed as the Happy Drinking Bird]. The body of this novelty is a tube filled with fluid; the head is absorbent felt. Sporting a top hat, tail feather, and sneakers, the Dippy Bird has a zany look; yet it knows its purpose. Placed before a glass of water, it begins to bob its head and drink the water—thanks to a repeated cycle of absorption, evaporation, and cooling, which affects the fluid and alters the center of gravity.)

In North Africa the hoopoe is eaten for its supposed curative and aphrodisiac properties, and nicknamed “the Doctor.”

* Solomon’s hooting is reminiscent of the squawking of Konrad Lorenz. The Austrian naturalist was able to communicate with wild ducks, geese, and a pet cockatoo. Although his book on speaking with birds is titled *King Solomon’s Ring*, Lorenz claimed no special powers. Rather, intuitive abilities and a dogged persistence were the key to his achievement.

Did King Solomon actually communicate with birds and beasts? A passage in the Book of Kings—1 Kings, 4:33—may refer to such an ability. The passage is ambiguous, however, and has been the subject of scholarly debate. Some translations construe it to mean “[Solomon] spake *to* beasts and birds and creeping things and fishes.” But most render it as “spake *of* beasts and birds and creeping things and fishes”—a reference to his wide learning. The latter meaning is affirmed by Josephus, who says of Solomon: “He spoke...about beasts, about all sorts of living creatures, whether upon the earth, or in the seas, or in the air; for he was not unacquainted with any of their natures, nor omitted inquiries about them, but described them all like a philosopher, and demonstrated his exquisite knowledge of their several properties.” (*Antiquities*, viii, 2:5)

Yet Ahimaaz does portray him as communicating with birds. And

Finally, the hoopoe bowed to Solomon and fluttered up into the air. Hooting loudly, it circled about the throne room. Then it flew through a window and disappeared into the night.

“This ring works,” said Solomon, marveling at the instrument on his finger.

A cough sounded. Solomon looked up and saw a figure standing in the doorway.

“Benaiah? Is that you? Come in.”

“I heard noises, Sire.”

“I was conversing. With the hoopoe that just flew out of here.”

“Conversing?” said Benaiah, entering the throne room and approaching the dais. “With a bird?”

“Yes. Thanks to this ring from Melchizedek. It enabled me to understand the hoopoe’s language.”

“That’s incredible. What did the hoopoe have to say?”

“We chatted about the weather. Then he told me a tale—about the origin of his crest. Would you like to hear it?”

“Surely.”

Solomon pressed his hands together, in the manner of a storyteller. And leaning back in the throne, he recounted the tale.

“One morning the angel Gabriel was flying to Mount Gerizim. In a blissful state he was flapping his wings and passing among clouds—when he realized he was lost. Spotting a hoopoe, Gabriel caught up with the bird and asked for directions.

“Follow me,” said the hoopoe. And he escorted Gabriel to the mountain.

“Gabriel was grateful for the assistance. And as a reward, he offered the hoopoe a choice of gifts. The hoopoe thought it over and asked for a crown of gold.

“Are you sure you want such a thing?” asked Gabriel.

“Yes, I want a crown of gold!”

for a final word on the matter, let us turn to the Qur’an:

“Solomon was David’s heir. He said, ‘O people, we have been endowed with an understanding of the language of birds, and all kinds of knowledge have been bestowed upon us. Verily, this is a blessing.’” (al-Naml, 16)

“Then you shall have one. In fact, *every* hoopoe shall have a crown of gold.’

“The crowns were distributed. And the hoopoes were delighted to have so splendid a headpiece. Puffed up with self-regard, they began to frequent puddles and streams—peering into the water to admire their reflection.

“But men too had their eyes on the crowns. And coveting the gold, they began to hunt hoopoes. Traps were set, baited with a fragment of mirror. The mirrors were irresistible to the hoopoes, who were caught and killed in large numbers.

“Finally, the hoopoes sought out Gabriel and begged him to rescind his gift. So he changed the crowns of gold to crowns of feathers. And that’s how the hoopoes acquired their crest.”*

“They should still be proud,” said Benaiah. “Their crown of feathers is quite handsome.”

“So it is,” said Solomon. “And surely to be preferred to a crown of gold.”

With a grave look, he gestured toward his own crown and said:

“Heavy on the head, a monarch’s crown.
Would that it were made of lightweight down!
Our burdens are already hard to bear.
Why add another in the hat we wear?”

* Or was it? According to another tale, the hoopoe was invited to attend a wedding. But he lacked the appropriate dress. So he went to the cuckoo, who had a fancy crest, and borrowed it. Afterwards, the hoopoe decided that the crest suited him, and refused to return it. And that’s how the hoopoe acquired his crest.

Why does the hoopoe make the sound it does? Greek mythology has an explanation. It seems that Tereus, king of Thrace, had determined to slay his wife and sister-in-law. Before he could do so, however, he was transformed into a hoopoe. Thereafter, Tereus continued to seek the pair, who had likewise been changed into birds, calling out: “*Pou pou pou?*” (“Where, where, where?”)

These are what folklorists call *pourquoi* stories—fables that explain how something came to be. Why does the zebra have stripes? The giraffe a long neck? The lion a fearsome roar? The *pourquoi* story tells—in a fanciful, humorous, or didactic manner—how the thing came about.

O what a list of woes do plague a king
(That shall not be dispelled by any ring):
Surly subjects, vassals that rebel,
Invaders that his armies must repel;
Envious brothers, who pace the night and frown,
Plotting how to snatch away that crown;
Day in, day out, decisions to be made,
Opposing plans of action to be weighed;
Bizarre, perplexing lawsuits to be tried;
As head of state, wisdom to provide,
Decrees to issue, ambassadors to greet
Who cloak in honeyed words their rank deceit.
We monarchs are, in short, with cares beset,
Beneath whose weight like slaves we groan and sweat.
And to this ponderous load, what do we add?
Eight pounds of gold upon our head! 'Tis mad!
Be thankful, hoopoe, that thou bear instead
A crown of feathers on thy empty head.
And thou, Benaiah, that thou art free from care.”

“My portliness—the major weight I bear,” said Benaiah.

“Indeed! But I’m glad you’re here, Captain. I want to try out another power of the ring. I want to *summon the wind*.”

“Summon the wind? The ring can do that?”

“Apparently. And I’d like someone with me—in case a problem should arise. Shall we give it a try?”

Benaiah grunted noncommittally. He looked up at the windows, through which a light breeze was blowing.

Solomon raised the ring. “Wind,” he said.

Immediately the breeze quickened. Curtains began to flap. The torch flickered. And gusts of wind—moaning like ghosts and swirling about—filled the hall. Benaiah held onto his helmet.

A face, bloated and heavy-jowled, emerged from the swirl. And a deep voice sounded.

“Greetings,” it said. “I am the Wind. I am that force of Nature that animates the air. I huff and I puff. I make waves on the sea and dunes in the desert. I propel your ships—or tear them apart! As hurricanes I destroy; as breezes, I cool the night. I drive clouds through the sky, like herds of sheep.

I scatter seeds. I rustle leaves and whistle in eaves—I groan and growl, bluster and howl! You have summoned me. I am at your beck. What would you have me do?”

“Nothing, really,” said Solomon. “I was just trying out this ring of mine.”

“Perhaps you’d like a ride?” asked the Wind.

“A ride?”

Spread before the dais was a carpet—a Persian rug of intricate design. Suddenly it rose into the air, borne by the Wind.

“Hop on, gentlemen,” said the Wind. “I’ll take you for a spin.”

Solomon came forward to inspect the carpet. It was hovering a foot above the floor. “Why not?” he said, and hopped aboard. Benaiah hesitated, then joined him.

“Crouch down and hold on,” said the Wind.

With the two men clinging to it, the carpet glided out a window. It emerged from the palace and rose swiftly into the night sky.

Solomon and Benaiah peered down at an aerial view of the city. Beneath them was a patchwork of rooftops and lanes. Cisterns glinted in the moonlight. Windows glowed with lamplight.

The carpet circled over Jerusalem. Then it returned to the palace, glided through the window, and landed with a thud.

Solomon wobbled to his feet. “I enjoyed that,” he said.

“Not me,” said Benaiah. “Men are not birds. We were meant to stay on the ground. I’m dizzy.”

“So am I. But what an experience!”

“You’ll get used to flying,” said the Wind, “and to traveling about on a carpet. When you wish to go somewhere, just summon me. I am at your beck.”

With a whoosh the Wind departed through a window.

Solomon returned to the throne. “Isn’t this an amazing ring?” he said. “With it I am able to summon the wind and fly about. And there’s more. According to the manual, I can also summon jinn—and control them. I’ve got to try that.”

“I’d stay away from jinn,” said Benaiah, wobbling to his feet. “They can be trouble.”



“They can be useful, too. I’m going to try summoning one. But which? There are thousands upon thousands of jinn.”

“*Try me,*” came a high-pitched voice.

Startled, Solomon looked at his ring. The sound seemed to have come from it.

“*Me, me. Summon me.*”

“Who are you?”

“*I am the jinni who resides in your ring. Summon me, that I may serve you. Pronounce my name and I shall appear.*”

“All right. What’s your name?”

“*Info Imp.*”

Solomon raised the ring and said: “Info Imp.”

There was a flash and puff of smoke—and on the dais stood a jinni. Dwarfish in stature, he wore a fez and tunic. A pair of spectacles were propped on his nose.



“So, Your Highness,” he said, “finally we meet. I’ve been waiting to pop out and introduce myself. I’m the Info Imp—your personal jinni. I reside in your ring. I was placed there by Melchizedek, on account of my specialty. As you know, every jinni has a specialty. Mine is providing information. I am a master of facts, lore, statistics, quotations, lists, trivia. I can tell you the population of a town—the clan of a warrior—the exchange rate for foreign coins. Ask me a question and I shall answer it. Any question. On any subject.”

“You know everything?”

“More or less. Test me.”

Solomon thought for a moment. Then he asked: “What is the capital of Babylonia?”

“Babylon.”

“Whence the name of the city?”

“From *Bab-El*, ‘Gate of God.’”

“Who is the chief god of Babylon?”

“Marduk.”

“How many gods are worshiped in Babylon?”

“Nearly 4000.”

“Name the five last kings of Babylon.”

“Eamash-shakinshumi, Ninurta-kudurusur II, Shiriqtushuqamuna—popularly known as Tushu—Marbitiapalusur, and Nabu-mukinapil.”

“I’m impressed. So—I can consult with you at any time?”

“That’s the idea. Just summon me.”

“And you reside in the ring?”

The Info Imp shrugged. “One has to live somewhere.”

“No doubt I shall be availing myself of your services.”

“I urge you to do so. You are a learned man, King Solomon. But take advantage of what I have to offer. Keep in mind the quote from Dr. Johnson: ‘Knowledge is of two kinds. We know a subject ourselves, or we know where we can find information about it.’”

“Who is Dr. Johnson?”

“A sage of the distant future.”

“Your store of information extends into the future?”

“Time is a human limitation, to which we jinn are not subject. Though I won’t always be at liberty to reveal such information. Any further questions for now?”

“No, thank you.”

“Then I’ll be returning to the ring.”

With a flash and puff of smoke, the Info Imp vanished.

Solomon examined his ring. “By dint of this marvelous ring,” he said, “I can communicate with birds and beasts—fly about on a carpet—engage the services of jinn. How did I get along without such a ring?”

“Quite nicely,” said Benaiah. “And I’d still be wary of those jinn.”