

As recently as 1914 four ancient copies of **The Book of Eucalyptus** still survived. They were regarded as national treasures by the governments that owned them, and, fearing the power and avariciousness of radical political and religious movements, these regimes safeguarded the manuscripts through airtight policies of secrecy.

The first manuscript to be destroyed was the so-called "cornskin paper", owned by the Prussian royal family. Shortly after the beginning of the Great War, British commandos raided the castle wherein it was kept, believing from the extent of the fortifications there that they had discovered the site of Germany's gold reserve. Instead of huge piles of ingots, though, all they found was a mouldy collection of crumbling papers. Turning the mass over to Winston Churchill, then First Lord of the Admiralty, they were astounded to see him releasing it to **The Times** of London, which ran **Eucalyptus** as a crossword puzzle from September 14th to December 3rd. That effectively dissolved the manuscript, because to this day not one crossword enthusiast has been able to decipher a single clue, and the puzzle editor of **The Times** soon went incurably insane.

A second manuscript met a similar fate. Seized by the Bolsheviks during the Russian Revolution of 1917, Lenin intended to issue it as a full confession of bourgeois-imperialistic crimes against the people, ascribing the authorship to Tsar Nicholas. But before it could be published, White Russians captured the printing plant, and when they learned what publications had been planned, they put the entire place to the torch and shot all the employees.

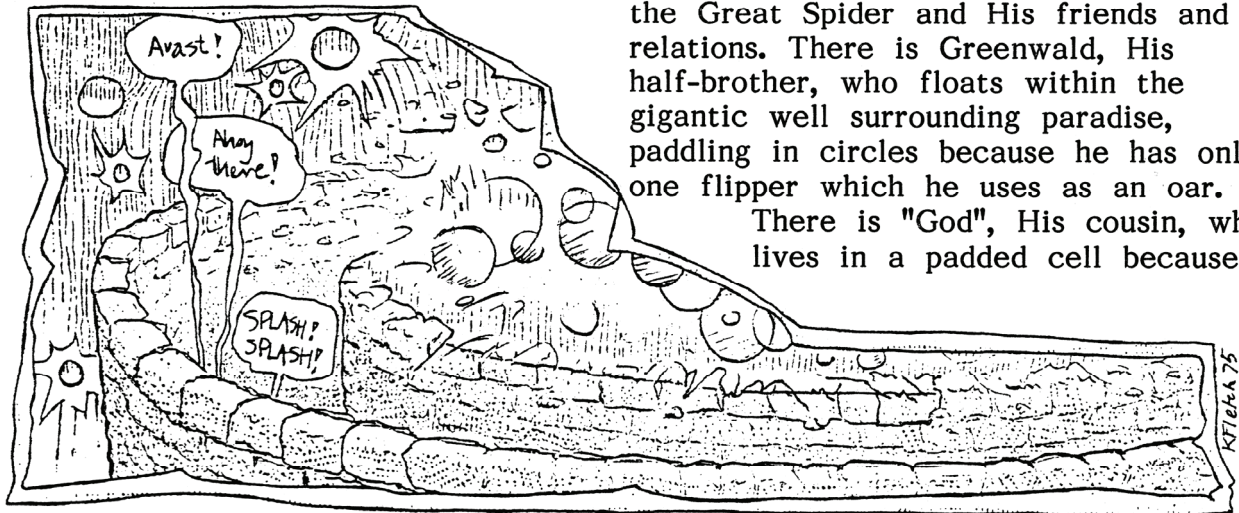
In 1926 the third manuscript perished in the Great Norway Fire. This conflagration destroyed that entire unhappy Nordic country, and the slaughter there was so great that it was decided to ignore the entire tragedy and proceed under the assumption that it had never happened. That is why, if you ever visit Norway, you will be struck by its similarity to Sweden. They change the street signs at night for the benefit of foreign tourists.

Perhaps the history of the fourth manuscript is the most interesting, though. Copied on rare Chinese silk in an obscure Mongolian dialect, it was liberally illustrated by an ancient who did passable imitations of Robert Crumb, and, in addition to being the most beautiful **Eucalyptus** ever to exist, it was also the most informative. Bearing the personal autograph of the Great Spider, the "Scarlet" edition was the prize possession of the Japanese emperor and was housed deep within the lower confines of his imperial palace. When American planes began bombing Japan in the Second World War, it was transferred for safekeeping to the village of Sobe, Okinawa, where it was lost during the invasion of that island in 1945.

For 23 years the world believed the "Scarlet" edition to be destroyed, and with it the last remaining trace of the ancient religion of Great Spiderism. Research groups from Harvard, the Sorbonne, and Grambling College combed Okinawa hunting for traces. The Japanese Emperor declared a reward of 500,000 yen for information leading to the discovery of only a fragment. But all efforts were futile. Apparently it had completely vanished, and, one by one, the intellectuals of the world reluctantly gave up hope.

This situation remained static until 1968 when your author, on an expedition financed by the United States Army, stumbled over the manuscript in a sugar cane field three miles north of Tori, Okinawa. Realizing at once the importance of my discovery, I tried to have it copied, but for some reason -- perhaps having to do with the exact chemical composition of the ink employed on the "Scarlet" edition -- a Xerox machine refused to reproduce the pages. Nevertheless, I memorized it as much as possible, and, on returning to this country, immediately began the laborious process of translation. Owing to the battered quality of the manuscript and the difficulty of the language, I have been able to complete only one chapter at the present. Additionally, my progress has been hampered by the final destruction, only four months ago, of the "Scarlet" edition itself in a gay rights demonstration at the University of Minnesota. From now on I will have to proceed using only the resources of my fantastic memory. However, from the amount I have already translated and from the notes I've gathered on the rest of the book, it is possible to comment on **Eucalyptus** as a whole. (Other commentaries include **Eucalyptus, Its Life and Times, Myth and Reality in Eucalyptus, Eucalyptus and the Unborn Child, and The Joy of Eucalyptus**. All four works were destroyed during the sack of Carthage.)

**Eucalyptus** is as fine a work of history as it is of religion, encompassing, as it does, the origin of the Universe, the creation of mankind, the rise of agriculture and the eventual industrial revolution, the atomic age, star travel, and the ultimate fate of the cosmos; mixed in with specific day-to-day predictions and including twelve appendices explaining the languages of the elves, dwarves, hobbits, and orcs. It is filled with poetry and passion. Great men enter and exit through its pages. **Eucalyptus** is divinely inspired, every word being written by the Great Spider himself.



Central to the work is the character of the Great Spider and His friends and relations. There is Greenwald, His half-brother, who floats within the gigantic well surrounding paradise, paddling in circles because he has only one flipper which he uses as an oar. There is "God", His cousin, who lives in a padded cell because

he believes he created the universe and occasionally gets violent about it. There is Mura, who lays eggs and tries at odd times to unsuccessfully seduce the Great Spider. She usually fails and therefore lays a prodigious quantity of fertile ones. But dominating them all is the personality of the Great Spider.

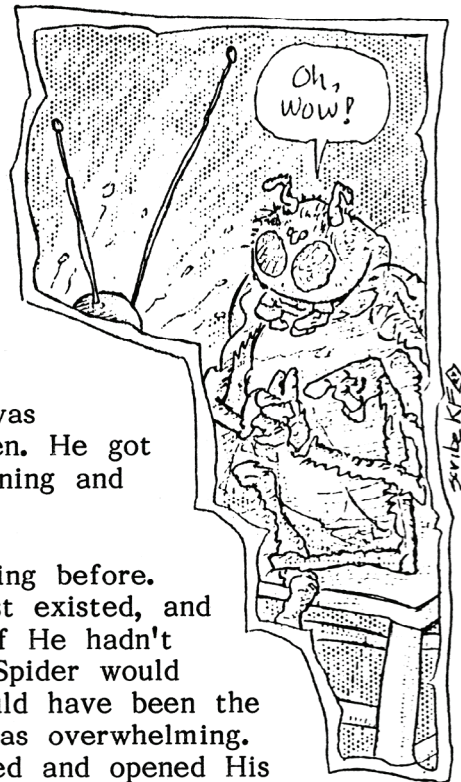
Creating Himself on a whim, He sat around in isolation for an undetermined length of time until He got bored. It wasn't exactly company that the Great Spider desired, just activity. So He made matter and watched it float around, combining according to laws He didn't even know He had established. It formed into atoms and then into molecules and pretty soon into suns and planets and galaxies. For a while that was interesting. But then just about every possibility for matter had been accomplished, and the Great Spider got bored again.

So He created the various beings around Him -- half brothers and cousins and even His own mothers and fathers. But they were all predictable, and His interest in them didn't last long. Greenwald never stopped paddling, "God" never stopped raving, and Mura was just too unsuccessful. But then He became aware of a process which had started called "evolution" and a creature called "man" who was developing, and from that moment on the Great Spider has never again been bored. He just sits back and watches the show.

Man was such an interesting fellow that the Great Spider grew fond of him. He used to roar with laughter at the wars and break into tears during the famines and plagues. It was like watching a soap opera 24 hours a day. Eventually He became so fond of man that He gave the species an immortal soul so that man could share paradise along with Him. For a while that provided a good show also. Individuals died, their friends and family weeping up a storm, and in an instant their souls would be transmitted to paradise. At first they would be scared of this huge black thing, but soon they'd see He meant no harm, and they'd settle back to watch the circus along with Him.

It all started one day when somebody got pushy. The Great Spider had noticed that paradise was getting crowded -- a fellow didn't even

have room to stretch His eight legs any more -- and He planned to enlarge the place. But the Egyptians were invading Babylonia again, and He didn't want to miss any of the action. Naturally as the invasion progressed paradise got more crowded. People kept popping in all the time, and it was getting so that there wasn't any place to pop into. Finally this rather large Etruscan fellow became cramped and decided to change his position. Only trouble was that he didn't have the space. He shoved a bit here and a bit there and finally got desperate and **really** pushed. A little kid was standing right in front of the Great Spider then. He got shoved in just when the Great Spider was yawning and ended up right in His Mouth.



The Great Spider had never eaten anything before. He didn't digest and He didn't excrete. He just existed, and He had never felt the need for nourishment. If He hadn't been so interested in the invasion, the Great Spider would probably have spit the child out, and that would have been the end of it. But His interest, at the moment, was overwhelming. Before the Great Spider knew it, He had closed and opened His mouth several times, and the poor boy was mashed into a pulp. Worse yet, the Great Spider loved the taste. It was fabulous. The paste, which had been the child, spread all over the inside of His mouth, and the sensation was exquisite. Forgetting entirely about the invasion of Babylonia, the Great Spider began stuffing Himself with gobs of humans, and before long paradise was considerably less crowded.

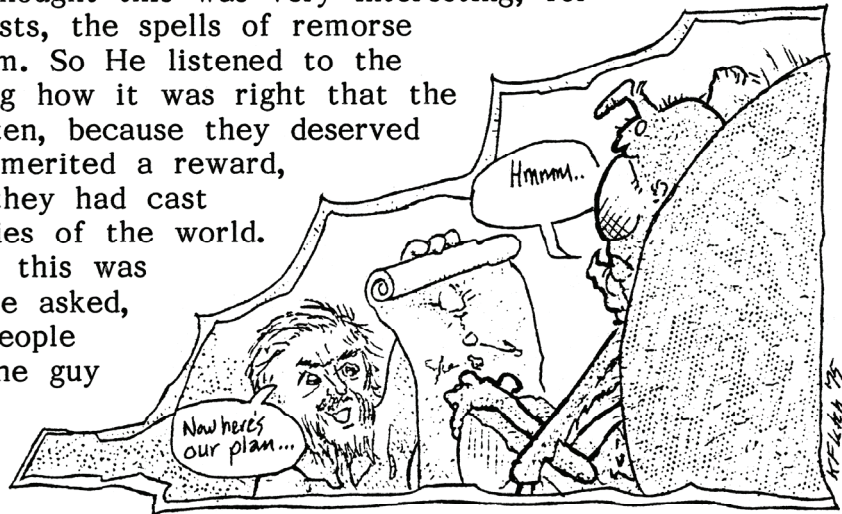
Even the vilest have a conscience, though. Soon the Great Spider had eaten and eaten and eaten and was about full. As a matter of fact, He couldn't have swallowed another infant, even. His stomach hurt. Just as He had never before experienced sensual pleasure, so too had He never felt pain. I mean His stomach **ached**. So the Great Spider began feeling guilty. Poor people, He thought. During mortal life all they had ever known was pain, and now too, after they had died, He was torturing them. He had a veritable orgy of self-recrimination.

For a while He was good. Since paradise had a lot more room now, the people had huddled together into the fringes, shaking and trembling and wailing. For a long time they wouldn't come near Him, even though the Great Spider offered them all kinds of things. He had really made up His mind to stop eating people, and He was terribly sorry for what He had done and wanted to make amends. Mankind has a short memory, and after a few days of shaking and trembling and wailing in the corners, most of the people came out. The new arrivals had helped things too. They didn't know about the Great Spider's peculiar gustatory habits and consequently showed no fear of him. So what the hell, the veterans thought. Maybe I'll escape next time too.

Things went on like this for a few hundred years. The Great Spider

would stuff Himself and then feel guilty. He'd vow to kick the habit. The people would hide from Him and eventually return. Then He'd get hungry again. It was getting to be a sad situation, and some of the originals became pretty tired of it. Finally one man decided to do something. Waiting until the Great Spider was in a fairly good mood, he approached. "Oh Illustrious One!" the man said. "For too long have you been vexing my people!" And the Great Spider said yeah, He had been vexing the people, but He couldn't seem to help Himself. "It is not right that all meet the same fate!" the man said. "What you need is a system."

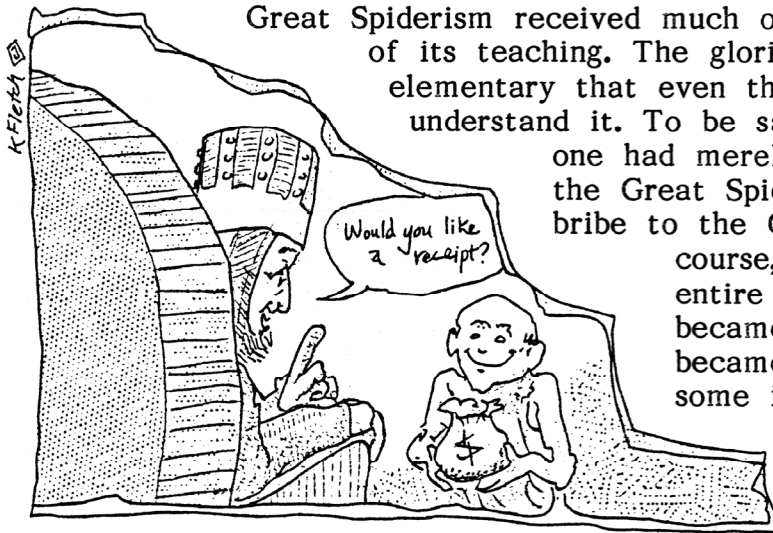
The Great Spider thought this was very interesting, for while He enjoyed His feasts, the spells of remorse afterwards really hurt Him. So He listened to the fellow, who was explaining how it was right that the Evil People should be eaten, because they deserved it. But the Good People merited a reward, not a punishment, after they had cast aside the cares and worries of the world. The Great Spider decided this was a fine idea. Only how, He asked, could He tell the good people from the bad ones? So the guy explained the principles of religion. Those people who truly believed in the Great Spider and who supported His church should be blessed after they died, and those people who did not should be eaten. The Great Spider thought the system was fantastic.



Much speculation has centered on the character and origin of this first of the Chief Prophets of the Spiderist Church. Plato asserted that he was a twig from the mythical Tree of Life which had been blown off in a windstorm and taken root and somehow survived on the barren and rocky soil of earth. Nietzsche claimed he was the original German Overman who had, by his actions, established the foundation of the German Empire. More recently a popular poet has stated that he was the spirit of Young Love who inhabits seashores and gaily tinkling waterfalls when the moon is right. The only facts we have are those handed down by the Chief Prophet himself, and they are slightly less than credible.

He maintained that he had been a famous and victorious general who, between brilliant victories against overwhelming odds, composed the Iliad and the Odyssey, constructed the Taj Mahal, formulated the laws of Hammurabi, and invented 203 new positions for sexual intercourse. After achieving everything possible in life, the Chief Prophet maintained, he noted that his body was becoming old at 27 years, and, despairing at the limitations of both the human form and creative spark, stoically surrendered himself to 726 poisonous bumblebees.

Many scholars have doubted that one man could invent 203 new positions for sexual intercourse, so they have tended to disbelieve the more astounding claims that the Chief Prophet put forward, but the immediate success of the Spiderist Church testifies that this man's abilities were by no means ordinary. After persuading the Great Spider to reincarnate him, the fellow went to work converting the population of earth away from their old Gods. It was certainly not easy in those days to establish a new religion. The priesthoods of those already in existence were jealous, and they resented any newcomer sneaking into the action. After his reincarnation, the Chief Prophet ended up being sacrificed a number of times, but he always popped back into existence shortly thereafter, much to the consternation of the priests. One time, in desperation, the High Priest of Baal caused him to be trampled by elephants, drawn and quartered, and burned at the stake. His ashes were then dissolved in wine, which was drunk by the assembled multitude, and after the process of digestion had taken place his remains were expelled into the Tigris river. Shortly thereafter, the Chief Prophet presented himself to the crowd and asked how he had tasted.



Great Spiderism received much of its success from the simplicity of its teaching. The glorious "two-fold path" was so elementary that even the most stupid of humans could understand it. To be saved, the Chief Prophet taught, one had merely to say that he believed in the Great Spider and, in addition, pay a bribe to the Chief Prophet himself. Of course, as time wore on and the entire population of the ancient world became believers, additional bribes became necessary -- which caused some individuals to renounce their belief in the Great Spider. Pleasing the Great Spider while saving the largest number of human beings from His wrath turned out to be a

delicate task indeed, and the accomplishment of this can be said to be the Chief Prophet's greatest achievement. It is surprising that he managed to balance the tension for so long.

As more and more people became believers, the Great Spider's meals became sparser and sparser. He complained to the Chief Prophet, ordering him to subdue his efforts for several centuries until an adequate stock of souls had been built up. But the Chief Prophet could not bear to lose such a large source of income for such a long period of time, and he suggested that the Great Spider merely regenerate those souls which he had already consumed and eat them again. This appealed to the Great Spider's love of justice, for being eaten many times is certainly worse than being eaten once, and those people evil enough to refuse to believe in Him deserved the most terrible of punishments, in His opinion. But then an even more difficult dilemma threatened.

Since being converted to Great Spiderism, humans lost their love of

warfare, and no longer did the Great Spider have gigantic spectacles to watch. Why fight the Huns when they already worship the same deity that you do? Antagonistic traits disappeared from the human soul, and people discontinued their bad habit of invading neighbouring territories and putting the entire countryside to the torch. As a matter of fact, bad habits of all kinds began to disappear. Nothing was forbidden anymore. The "two-fold path" taught that a person had only to believe and pay in order to achieve salvation. With their sins receiving, so to speak, official sanction from the church, they soon ceased to be exciting. Men stayed home and raised huge families of believers, none of whom would ever grace the Great Spider's table, and He became discontented again. The world had become an unexciting place for the Great Spider to watch.

What thoughts passed through the Chief Prophet's mind at this moment? How did he feel seeing his generations of labor on the verge of being wasted? What agony stabbed his breast as he contemplated the fate which his fellow human beings would presently suffer? We have his words, recorded by a temple janitor, as the Chief Prophet addressed a convention of his various underlings. "I fear," he said, "that the number of bribes will drop off sharply in the near future, and I advise stringent economy measures."

He made a number of half-hearted attempts, apparently, to regain the Great Spider's interest. He encouraged the "Black Widowite" heretics and did his best to build up a crusade against them. But since all the heretics were beautiful women, it was rather difficult to persuade the men to hate them. He renounced the faith himself and attempted to form a rival religion, which paid particular attention to human sacrifice and conquest, but the people were so happy with Great Spiderism that he was unable to find followers. Finally the Chief Prophet surrendered to disgust. He bought a farm in the country and retired to write his memoirs. It is the autobiography, distilled from the bitterness and failure of the Chief Prophet, which forms the basis for **The Book of Eucalyptus**.

As the years rolled by, people remembered less and less of the Golden Age which had held sway under the tender and beneficial rule of the Great Spider. New prophets arose with greater public relations skill, and they gradually weaned the population away from the True Faith. Warfare began again, and, because of intemperate personal habits, so did disease and hunger. All knowledge of the True Faith died, except for the sacred documents stored in the holiest of holy places in each temple, basilica, mosque, synagogue, and cathedral. The Great Spider was again happy. And the former Chief Prophet of the Spiderist church, now poor and heartsick, endured reincarnation after reincarnation, given to him out of the gratitude of the Great Spider's heart.

While I translated the pages of this astounding book, a strange feeling of sadness and frustration came over me. I began to pity the poor creatures that we all are. I felt anger that there is nothing we can do to better our lot. At times I surrendered to marathon bouts of despair, during which time I hardly spoke to anybody. It was during one of these black times that I felt the memories return. I forgot what my name is

this time, which century this is, or where I am living. Scenes from my past lives filled my brain. I recalled the Spiderist Church as it had been during its days of glory, and all the secret rituals and signs that had been parts of its worship. I remembered the Golden Age of mankind and how war had been ended, as well as hunger, disease, and cheating at cards. I recollected the achievements of my first life, the brilliant victories, the fantastic poems. I especially recalled the 203 positions for sexual intercourse.

Maybe this time, I thought, the Great Spider will do better. He's older now, and perhaps He has seen everything. Perhaps the fullness of time has changed His nature. Perhaps He is once again ready to share His paradise in peace with the creatures He loves so well. Why not? It's worth a try.

In case any of you are willing to end war and disease and death, to eliminate sickness and hunger and human rapacity, to institute a new golden age for the people of this sad planet, send your bribes in care of the New First Arachnid Church.

