

# Fool's Epitaph

By Stewart C. Best

It is dusk; the sky is clear, turning from a dark blue to black. The stars emerge from their eternal cocoon of darkness to dot the night sky; diamonds, sparkling against black velvet. A full moon hangs motionless, its giant silver disk flowing an eerie twilight upon the sea and deserted beach. The white sands reflect and magnify the glow, and it is silent except for the sea lapping at the shoreline. In the distance a lone seagull can be heard calling to his mate.

An Old Man stands silently by the shore, his hands cupped around the top of his staff, in deep thought. Long gray hair and beard betray his age as they reflect in the moonlight. His face is deeply lined, etched thin and tough by the acids of time. His features are sharp; he is tall and of thin build. His eyes are bright and piercing, as they constantly shift while he searches the shoreline. They are abruptly arrested as he finds four men approaching.

“Hello there, Old Man!” calls one.

“Who are you?” the Old Man asked, as they came up to him.

“I am Fiction, the smartest man in the world, for I fool many people who think I am Truth!”

“Ah yes, I suppose that could be true...” mused the Old Man, and then raising his staff, he pointed to the second one, “and who might you be?”

“I,” replied the second man, “am Opinion, truly the smartest man in the world, for Fiction, Fact, Spirit, and Truth are only Opinions, which makes me the leader!”

“A good and excellent point, my friend, but I, Fact, am the root of all Opinions, be the facts based upon Fiction, Opinion, Spirit, or Truth, and that makes me the leader and greatest in the world!” said the third man.

The fourth man chimed in at this point. “That is utter nonsense,” said he, “for all things come of the Spirit and that makes me the leader of them all!”

The other three immediately objected, saying in unison, “It is us, Fact, Fiction, and Opinion that comprise the Spirit of man, silly fool! How can you ever claim to be the greatest?”

The Old Man listened politely to the ensuing argument and then when they became quiet once again, he asked them, “What is it that you come for? What can I do to help you?”

“We are in search of Truth; they say he lives down here among the caves...” replied Opinion. There was an uneasy silence.

“And what are you going to do if and when you find him?” The Old Man stopped and gazed out over the vast expanse of the sea. The four men were silent for a short time, and stared at each other. The Old Man turned his gaze to the four visitors again, searching Fact, Fiction, Opinion, and Spirit with his eyes, waiting for their reply.

“Well...” replied Spirit, “we are going to kill him, for he is the only one that prevents us from ruling the world...” Spirit’s voice trailed off. He shuffled his feet.

“That is so,” replied the other three, “for Truth gets in our way; he confuses the people; and we cannot have him bother us anymore...”

Fiction reached out and placed his hand on the Old Man’s shoulder. “Would you please help us in our mission, Old Man, for you obviously live

down here, and we have been told that Truth lives among the caves by the shore. Could you guide us to his home?"

The Old Man delayed a moment, his piercing eyes surveying the beach ahead of him. He raised his staff and pointed down the beach, to cliffs in the far distance. "Certainly, I would be most happy to help you along the way."

"What is your name, Old Man?" asked Fact.

"I've been called many names in my time, but names do not matter in the final analysis, do they? Have you not all been called many names? He was silent for a moment and leaned against his staff. "So just call me Old Man, for that in truth is exactly what I am."

"A just and good answer," replied Fact, "let us go in search of Truth."

The five men began to slowly walk down the beach towards the cliffs that were many miles away. Each of the four strangers was puffing themselves up with pride and arrogance; each claiming that they were the greatest of all the world's great. The Old Man said nothing, but silently listened. It was not long before they came to a bed of quicksand. Here they stopped to discuss the situation.

"I believe it to be of only slight depth, not more than a foot or so at the maximum," said Fact. With that, he bent down and picked up a piece of driftwood and threw it into the bed. It sank only slightly.

"I agree with Fact," said Opinion. Both Spirit and Fiction quickly agreed with him.

The four of them turned to the Old Man, who had been silent all of this time. "What do you say Old Man, for you have lived in the area for some time?"

“It is a bed of vast depth, and if you attempt to cross it, you shall all perish...” There was silence for a moment after his remark.

“You are wrong, Old Man, for we have seen that the driftwood did not sink but only slightly. If it were a bed of quicksand, the driftwood should have vanished from sight. Thus our experiment has proven out that we should not be in danger by crossing, as you can still see it setting out there!” Opinion replied. The others clamored with steadfast agreement.

The Old Man stood his ground. “Your experiment is founded upon a wrong premise. I have lived here for many years, and I tell you this is a deep bed, very deep; for to cross it would be perilous indeed. You would die...”

The four men found another heavy piece of driftwood and heaved it into the sand. It too only sank slightly. The four then turned to the Old Man. “The experiments prove that you are wrong, Old Man, and for all of these years you have been avoiding something that you could have easily passed over!” They laughed and pointed their fingers at the Old Man. “You silly old fool! Come, let us go now, and we shall trap Truth while he is asleep!”

“No,” replied the Old Man. “No, I will not go beyond this point, for what I tell you is the truth, and you shall die if you attempt to cross. I give you fair warning. I have told you the absolute truth of the matter. Attempt to cross this area and you shall die!”

The four were growing impatient. “Let us leave you here, Old Man, for we do not need you anymore,” said Spirit and the rest nodded in agreement. “You are but a silly old fool who has become senile from the hot sun!” They all laughed.

“Perhaps the Old Man is a friend of Truths, and is simply trying to stop us...” said Fiction.

“Is that true, Old Man?” asked Fact. “Is it true that you are a friend of Truth?” He paused, impatiently mounting, and finally demanding an answer. Again he asked, “Is it? Speak Old Man, or we shall kill you!”

The Old Man gazed across the bed of quicksand, and then at the four men. It was as though he had never heard their threat. “Let us reason together my friends. Let us not become angry but simply understand the truth of the matter. Truth, by His nature, has no friends! There are those who search for Him, with sincerity of purpose; they are one with Him, and are not really considered as friends. All the others are natural enemies, due to the nature of Truth. It could be no other way. You of all people should know that, for you have come to rid the universe of Him forever. So what I tell you is truth, and I have given you all the warning that I can, as your friend and not as your enemy.”

“The Old Man is telling his opinion,” said Fact, “that is as he sees it. We should not harm the Old Man because he is ignorant of the powers in the world. He is simply a doddering old fool that will soon die anyway. Let us show him how foolish he has been all these years; let us go forth,”

The four men proceeded out into the bed of quicksand. They began to settle into the sand, only slightly at first as they proceeded. “You see, Old Man? You see how stupid you are?” They shouted and laughed, continuing on their way.

“It will be most interesting to see,” the Old Man said, “if you have based your actions upon fact, fiction, opinion, or spirit!”

“Shut up, you silly old fool! We could not possibly be wrong, for between the four of us, we have the collective wisdom of the universe! You see? We have only sunk a few inches into this bed!” They marched forward full of confidence and laughing at the Old Man. Suddenly they sank up to

their knees, and the more they tried to escape, the deeper they sank. They turned to the Old Man screaming, “Help us, help us, for we shall all perish if you do not get us out! Help us Old Man, for you were right, and we were wrong! Please help us!”

The Old Man just stood there, silent. He leaned upon his staff and simply stared at them.

“Who are you Old Man, that you stand there and let us die? Who are you Old Man? You are certainly evil!”

“I am Truth,” said the Old Man, “and it is not I who placed you where you are; it is yourselves! Did I not warn you? Did I not plead with you and reason with you? By your own choice you ignored me and marched ahead, and now you turn upon me and say I am evil! Tell me, you men of the universe!” He raised his staff and pointed it at them. “You shall die in your willful ignorance. You shall perish in your foolishness, for you became proud and arrogant, and murdered millions for your own gain. Nay, it is not I who am evil, it is you!”

The four men became very frightened and now started to plead for their lives. Their faces were white with fear, for they knew that they were at the mercy of Truth as they said, “We are at your mercy.” Again they screamed at him, “We are at your mercy!”

“You have always been at the mercy of Truth,” replied the Old Man. “It is by the will of Truth alone that the universe and all therein continue...”

He stood and surveyed his captive audience. “Which among you is of great wisdom?” he mocked. “Where is it that your collective wisdom of the universe has placed you? And how in your great wisdom do you propose to escape from your predicament? Nay, I tell you, you had access to Truth but you denied it; you embraced the lie instead. Then you said that the lie was

the truth; with it you enslaved and murdered millions, mocking the name of Truth; but you did it all for your personal gain and your pride. The Land of Lie is nothing but vanity and pride; Truth has neither, nor needs either one. I sent people to you and you killed them when they proclaimed the truth. You persecuted, scoffed at and ridiculed them because they did not conform to the rest of the world. Did you not wonder what this truth was?"

"You are an insane old fool!" screamed Spirit. "For all the people who you claimed to have come from Truth, always set themselves against the great leaders and thinkers of mankind, and against the governments and the traditions of mankind. Not one of them had proper credentials, or positions of leadership, nor knowledge sufficiently large enough to be making such claims; thus they were liars of the first magnitude!"

"Ah yes, so you say, so you say..." said the Old Man. "And if what they said did not agree with the Land of Lie, then of course they are liars! By your wisdom you have been made fools, and by your foolishness you have passed your own death sentence. Let me tell you the reality of life so that you might understand why it is you must die; that I and those that I have returned to collect, will live for ever and ever, and learn the true secrets of the universe. Yea, ye killed them, and in killing them they rested and bore fruit for their labor. You fools, you are blind and stupid, declaring yourselves keen, sighted, and wise!"

"Many thousands of years ago there were two lands. One was called the Land of Truth, and the other, the Land of Lie. The two lands were presided over by two masters. One was called Truth and the other Lie, hence their names. The Master of Truth was a kindly, benevolent spirit; who held within himself the secrets of the universe, and knowledge without limit, so vast and so great it would be unsearchable. This master was one of love,

being meek and submissive in his knowledge and had no fear. The master of the Land of Lie, on the other hand, was a spirit who was evil, intolerant, arrogant, and dominating.”

“In the Land of Truth there was no knowledge of evil, for those that lived in that land believed and trusted their master. They accepted all of what He had to say as Truth, and they did not question anything at all. There were only three laws in the Land of Truth, which allowed all therein to have perfect and total freedom. They were to love their master, for he was Truth; and they were to love their neighbor as themselves; and they were not to know inside of their souls any evil, lest they be destroyed...”

“How could they know if the Master was telling them the Truth?” asked Opinion. “How is it that you can stand there and say the Master was good when he refused to let his people know of evil, so they could be sure their master was telling them the truth? You are a silly Old Man, who has indeed been made senile from the hot sun...”

The Old Man continued as though He had heard nothing. “The Master of the Land of Truth knew that evil was so powerful a force that it would destroy him also if he allowed it to enter into his own kingdom, for by his nature he was love, and love is submissive and meek. Thus to protect himself, he formulated a barrier long before he created separate beings with free will; so that if they should become contaminated with evil, and KNOW OF EVIL, they would be cast out and separated from his kingdom. Separated by the barrier of TIME, unseen but so powerful that none can penetrate it; all but those who live with the Master. These do not know of evil, for they trust the Master.”

“That is absurd!” screamed Fact. “It is well known in all science that evil simply is, and it is part of life, and has been so forever. It is part of the universe, part of what is; relativism fills the universe...”

“No...” replied the Old Man. “That is the wisdom of fools who deny the eternal; who are blind to everything except that which they can see. That is the wisdom of the Master of Lie, who has blinded many to the Truth, but that does not make Truth go away.” He paused momentarily. “How do you measure change unless you have permanence to measure it from? How do you measure speed unless you know what is stationary? How do you know what is night, unless you have day? How do you know what is up, unless you have established what is down? How do you know Good, unless you know Evil? It is the last of these questions that has made you prisoners, caged up by time itself.”

The four men were speechless, for they had no answers to these questions. They protested weakly, and the Old Man became visibly irritated.

“Nay, you are the fools, for all things must be measured from something, and the Master from the Land of Truth is the eternal measuring point of all things...” He raised his staff and pointed to Opinion. “The Master of the Land of Truth, in order to be fair to all who lived in his land, placed a tree that contained the knowledge of evil within their grasp. He did so because it is also part of the universe. He also gave them fair warning as to what would happen if they took of this knowledge. He told them that they would be separated from his protective care and turned loose in the Land of Lie. He told them that they would die because evil cannot be allowed eternal existence.”

“One day the Master of the Land of Lie came into the Land of Truth to talk to those living there. He told the people that their Master was fooling

them; that they should be able to know and compare for themselves; that they should be able to judge the Master and his actions. He claimed they should not simply believe the Master of Truth, for their belief would certainly lead them to trouble. He told them that to accept what someone else has to say is dangerous and they must be able to define for themselves both good and evil. Thus they would know inside their souls if the Master were telling the truth. They did not realize the danger involved even though they had been told. They did not understand that evil is a dominate, insidious cancer that grows upon and destroys all that is good, then turns upon itself! They did not even grasp that their Master, who is the most powerful force in the universe, must protect himself from such a force. And so it was they were tricked and knew what evil was. Instantly they were severed from the Land of Truth. Thus they found themselves in the Land of Lie.”

“Soon the Land of Truth became but a distant memory. The Ancient Fathers would sit around the campfires as the night fell upon them, and tell stories of this beautiful and ancient land from which all of them had come. And the sons and daughters grew up and also told their children; and so it went. But as time passed, the memory of the Land of Truth began to fade; and soon to many it became just a legend, and then a myth. They did not believe their fathers and mothers anymore; they thought it was all just a dream, a trick of the imagination. It was not long before the people accepted the Land of Lie as the only land there was; so they said the Land of Truth was nothing but a lie! After all, there was no proof of such a land, because none in their generation had ever seen it!”

“Thus many accepted the Lie as the Truth, the Temporal as Eternal, and Change as Permanent. They accepted Sickness as Health, Evil as Good, and Wrong as Right. As time went by, strife and division spread throughout

the land, for there were those who still did believe in the ancient land of Truth and its Master. Many believed and understood their predicament, but the vast majority did not. Soon they labeled those that believed as troublemakers, strife makers, and carriers of insanity; thus they justified the ridicule and persecution that they heaped upon them. They destroyed the records of the Fathers who knew of this ancient land that would one day be restored. They took counsel among themselves, saying, “This is all utter foolishness, for there is no such land, and never could be, nor ever has been; since we evolved through time, out of the primordial slime pits...”

The Old Man stopped, becoming angrier still, and pointed his staff at the four men who were becoming very frightened. Then he continued, “They took their council and they agreed that they arose from the slime; that by chance alone did they exist, thus making them nothing more than slime that speaks. Thus they contradicted their premise of how great they were. They became numb and vain in their wisdom and they courted disaster as surely as you shall die! And there came many evils upon the landscape of history; great beasts of government arose and destroyed millions of innocents in the name of progress and finding a promised utopia! They did not realize they had left it far behind in the distant unseen Land of Truth. They perverted themselves and defiled themselves with their foolish wisdom. Their leaders ran around saying, “Believe in me, trust me, and I shall lead you to the promised kingdom.” The people, not realizing that all their systems would fail, ran after these leaders. They made their leaders AS GODS; worshipping them as Gods, although they fell into utter destruction.”

“As time went by, each leader collected many people; thus there arose kingdoms and nations who warred with each other. Each one claimed he had the Truth, not knowing there is no truth but lie in the Land of Lie! They did

not believe the ancient Fathers who had told them that the Spirit of the Land of Lie was blinding them and holding them captive. They reasoned among themselves, saying, “We have eyes, and we can see; we have ears and we can hear; and there are no bars, neither chains, nor weights, nor have our minds been darkened because we know of evil. We are not sick, but well; thus change is permanent, and truth is lie! There is only man; there is none else, there never has been, and never will be a Master; for man is HIS OWN MASTER...!”

“That is a silly old wives tale and we have heard it all before,” said the four men. “Why do you not save us? For it is obvious that you do not know Truth, and are not Truth; for what you say simply cannot be so. You have lived too long down here by the sea and your brains have become scrambled. Come, get us out of here and we shall take you with us and show you why this is so...”

The Old Man became highly infuriated. “You utter degenerates and fools! It was then that man left behind all concepts of good and evil, right and wrong; saying that there could be no such thing, for how does one measure them? Great thinkers arose, probing these problems, all of them rejecting the obvious before their noses. They laughed and ridiculed Truth, knowingly embracing the Lie. They forgot they were born of their Father Lie. Thus all of them were liars, just as you are liars, and they puffed themselves up with great pride by saying they held the Truth!”

“The Master of Truth then sent into the Land of Lie many people that were called Prophets. The people of Lie, not understanding their condition, stoned and killed the Prophets. These Prophets brought back memories of the ancient Land of Truth. The leasers of Lie were very disturbed by what they heard, for the Prophets all said the Master of Truth would soon come

and purchase all those who believed in him out of the Land of Lie. Further, they said he would take them with him to the Land of Truth. He would purchase them; they were told without money, but with death! And soon the Master came into the Land of Lie, just as the Prophets had said. He taught them many things, and showed them great deeds to prove who he was, and what his mission was for. The Leader of Lie, the evil spirit who was unseen, tried to kill the Master, and finally did so. But in his death he was victorious; for the Master of Lie did not realize that death was victory; that death was life for all those who believed in the Land of Truth.”

“Many people saw Truth as he was killed; saw the soldiers pierce his side to be sure he was dead; then allowing his followers to bury him. But because Truth is eternal and is not subject to death or decay, as is Lie, the force of the Master brought the body back to life! A cry spread throughout all of history; a cry above all the darkness, sickness, suffering, and death; a cry of victory: **THE MASTER HAS RISEN, HE HAS RISEN! THE MASTER HAS DESTROYED THE POWER OF DEATH; HE HAS RISEN!** The cry echoed and rebounded off the walls of the universe, and the Land of Lie became sharply divided. The leaders all took council. First they decided to kill all those who spread such nonsense, and when that failed, they decided to pervert the teachings of the Master. The wild fire grew, and the world became polarized and split into two camps; those who believed, and those who did not. Thus has the battle raged, down through the corridors of history, to this very day.”

“The Leaders of the Land of Lie reasoned that if they could destroy the family, the schools, and the teachers of the Land of Truth; then ever so slowly they could eradicate the importance of it. They could, in fact, make it appear to be a total lie, just exactly as you have done! They reasoned that if

such a belief was really allowed as the Master had taught it, that their powers would be destroyed. Thus they had no choice but to pervert and twist the message of the Master; then to ridicule all those who believed in the ancient Land of Truth. But in spite of all that the leaders did, many believed; great and small, wise and stupid, intelligence not being needed to know the truths of the great Master. Even the imbecile or moron, who is laughed at and scorned, may know their Master and his truth. Yet intelligence have they not. And the poor also know the truth, for money cannot be used to buy the truth. Truth is free; free to all who will listen, to all who will receive it; and it will be poured out without measure, without charge. For love cannot be conditional, or else it is not love! Thus it was that all peoples everywhere had access to Truth, and needed only to BELIEVE IN THE MASTER. For the Master knew that it was unbelief that caused the problem in the first place, and thus only belief would solve it!”

“Now there arose many who professed to believe; but they did not in their heart, leading many astray. They used the hopes, fears, and guilt of the people to gain power and glory over them. Then they formed huge congregations of sincere and honest people, and lead them into chains and slavery. They made a business out of the word of Truth, and many became rich and prospered. They made their Temples of Truth into Temples of Lie; becoming engrossed in obtaining power and favors from the Leaders of the Land of Lie. These Temple people were powerful, and covered the whole world. They had many names; all professing the Master and his ancient Land of Truth; but in many ways and in many different names. But they knew not the Truth, not its strength. Those who did, slowly left the Temples, and became isolated for there was no place to go. The Temples became flooded with people who believed in the Land of Lie, and who denied the Land of

Truth. As they became more powerful, they turned upon those who knew and understood about the Land of Truth. They killed them without mercy. Their Temples were perverted and twisted, and billions of dollars were spent in making them beautiful and large. Each Temple bragged and boasted about being better than the next one. Soon it became just a game, for now the Temples were transformed into the Master of Lie. They became money exchangers, and traded in the souls of men; although they had millions of dollars, just around the corner one could find people who were destitute and poor. Thus it was that while the people from Lie would spend millions of dollars upon new idols, or new temples to glorify themselves; just down the street children and widows starved, and prisoners in jail were not visited. The Temples of Truth had become a hideous Lie, and one who followed them would not escape the fires of Hell.”

“We have all heard that foolish story,” said the four. “It is absurd and ridiculous beyond imagination. There is no such thing as a Land of Truth, or a Master. Man by himself will become the Master of all things!”

“Have it your way...” said the Old Man. “But what if I am Truth, and what if I have told you the Truth? What if?” He turned to walk away.

“Stop, Stop, Old Man! Do not leave us here! We know you are Truth! We know!”

“No, you do not know it! You have never known it. You said in your hearts that you would not have Truth rule over you. You embraced the Lie and denied Truth. But I have come to collect my peoples, and leave you behind. The story I have told you is the reality behind everything you see...”

The Old Man paused and pointed to the far horizon. There were tremendous flashes of light, pillars of smoke, and the earth began to tremble and shake. Speeding arrows of light went over the night sky! “Thus it is,”

said the Old Man, “that I shall set you free of your chains. For you have been prisoners and did not know it; you were slaves and thought you were free men. You were liars and said you spoke the Truth. You did evil and said it was good. All of your thoughts are out there...”

The four men looked in that direction, their faces deadly pale with fear, for they knew now that the Old Man was who He said He was. But they also knew they would never share in the secrets and mysteries of the universe. They screamed, wailed, and gnashed their teeth. They clinched their fists and screamed at the Old Man, “You are evil; you are a despicable Tyrant; you never were around when we needed you...”

The Old Man had tears in His eyes. They formed tiny pathways down His weathered face and slowly dropped to the ground. “Nay, you fools, not I. I was always here; you would not listen, you would not listen...” Anguish gripped His heart. “Had you only believed; had you only ONCE called on My name, you would have been saved; but no, no you would not have Me to rule over you...”

“We never saw you, Truth!” The four screamed in their death cry, “We never ever saw you...” The distant rumbles grew louder and the land began to roll and heave in great swelling waves. The four were instantly buried. Huge volcanoes broke forth and earthquakes shook the planet from one end to the other. The earth became a great ball of fire, literally torn to shreds from one end to the other. Suddenly it stopped its rotation in space and tumbled as a top, reeling to and fro. Fire and brimstone were everywhere, and deadly sulfur fumes spread around the globe. The cries and wails of the people from the great Land of Lie arose and pierced the night sky. Their screams of agony and pain split the silence of the heavens and rebounded without answer. Soon all was quiet and the earth was covered by

gigantic clouds of smoke; darkness and gloom were upon the face of the earth.

The Old Man stood upon the heavens with His people, who had loved and died for Him throughout all of history. They watched the scene below. Their agony and pain was written on their faces, for they knew many of those who had perished, and why it had to be so. But they wished them a second chance. The Old Man turned to them, His arms outstretched, and He gathered them together.

“You who have loved me from the foundations of the world; you know that I loved them also...” He waved his staff towards the now silent planet earth. “You BELIEVED, and they did not. How can I help those who refuse to believe in me? How can they turn to me if they believe I am not there? How can they cry out for a God they refuse to acknowledge? Had they only believed! But no, they relied upon their own wisdom and their own faith to guide themselves, totally blind. The blind lead the blind and they all fell into the ditch. Had they even tried at all, they would have seen, but their pride and vanity prevented them.”

He paused, and they knew that He was right. Yet, even so...

“From unbelief sprang all of evil. What you have lived through, and what you have now seen, is all the result of evil and not of good...” He waved His staff towards the earth. “This is their epitaph,” He said, “it is the epitaph of fools.”

And so the Old Man turned, pain still heavy in His heart; He gathered together His flock from the four corners of the Heavens, and He lead them through the stars; showing them the secrets of the universe. Then He took them above the stars, and into His secret place, where only love is allowed to be. And there were no more tears, and no more sickness, and no more death.

There was only love and beauty; and each and every one pursued his wishes for knowledge and truth, so vast and deep that it never ceased; and all were fulfilled. His people dwelled in a new heaven and a new earth, for the old had passed away...