

“THOU ART GOD”

**A short dramatic reading adapted from the work of Robert A. Heinlein
by Sam Dack, editor**

NARRATOR: If you are not an avid reader of science fiction, you may only have been exposed to it in its usual Hollywood form: Reduced to a cartoonish special-effects romp for mindless diversion. But at its best, the science fiction genre can provide striking insights into the human condition. It can structure entire imagined worlds as lenses through which to view aspects of human behavior or end results if such behaviors continue unabated.

In his classic novel “Stranger in a Strange Land”, Heinlein achieves this several times, one of which we would like to share with you, since it addresses a question which is central to our search for truth: The nature of the mind of God.

First, a bit of background: The story envisions that the first expedition to Mars, whose crew consists of four scientifically-selected married couples, crashes and the sole survivor is an infant born en route from Earth. He is rescued and raised by an ancient civilization of Martians (plausible when published in 1961; had it been written in 1971, the chosen planet would probably have been one circling a distant star). Twenty-five years later, the second expedition to Mars discovers this man and returns him to earth, where he becomes a stranger in a strange land - the Man from Mars.

Rescued from government control and isolation, he is hidden in the home of aged and curmudgeonly attorney Jubal Harshaw, who becomes his mentor while he learns the ways of his native race. The conversation presented here involves the following characters and significant references:

- Jubal himself, played by Lorin Hammond (cast older and balder than he really is);
- Michael Smith, the Man from Mars, played by David Matos (cast more other-worldly than he really is);
- Various members of Jubal’s household and staff: Jill, Duke, and Anne, whose lines my wife Leslie has agreed to throw in);
- The “Old Ones”: Martians do not die, they “discorporate” and their spirits remain active among the living as revered and all-knowing patriarchs. The living exist, primarily, to serve the Old Ones. Hence the question of life after death, to Martians, is a non-question.
- The Martian word “grok”, which is described as having a very complex meaning, with no corresponding English word. Where read, it is most handily translated as “to understand”.
- The Fosterites: Any similarity to any actual religion is...probably intentional. The Shepherd is played by Thomas Drake (cast much smarmier than he really is).

The scene is in Jubal’s study:

Jubal sat back and looked around. Anne was reading, out of the telephone’s vision angle. On his other side the Man from Mars was also out of pickup and was watching stereovision and listening via ear plugs. Jubal reflected that he must have that obscene babble box returned to the basement. He leaned over and turned on the speaker.

JUBAL: What you got, Son?

MIKE: I don’t know, Jubal

NARR: It was what Jubal had feared, a Fosterite service. The shepherd was reading church notices.

SHEPHERD: ...Junior Spirit-in-Action team will give a demonstration, so come early and see the fur fly! Our team coach, Brother Hornsby, has asked me to tell you boys to fetch only your helmets, gloves, and sticks - We aren't going after sinners this time. However, the Little Cherubim will be on hand with their first aid kits in case of excessive zeal. (Pause, smile broadly): And now, wonderful news, my Children! A message from Angel Ramzai for Brother Arthur Renwick and his good wife Dorothy. Your prayer has been approved and you will go to heaven at dawn Thursday morning! Stand up, Art! Stand up, Dottie! Take a bow!"

NARR: Camera made reverse cut, showing the congregation and centering on Brother and Sister Renwick. To wild applause and shouts of "*Hallelujah!*" Brother Renwick was responding with a boxer's handshake, while his wife blushed and smiled and dabbed at her eyes beside him.

Camera cut back as the Shepherd held up his hand for silence.

SHEPHERD (briskly, cheerfully): The Bon Voyage party starts at midnight and doors will be locked at that time - so get here early and let's make this the happiest revelry our flock has ever seen; we're all proud of Art and Dottie. Funeral services will be held thirty minutes after dawn, with breakfast immediately following for those who have to get to work early. (become serious and stern) After our last Bon Voyage, the sexton found an empty pint bottle in one of the Happiness rooms - of a brand distilled by sinners. That's past and done; the brother who slipped confessed and paid penance sevenfold - even refusing the usual cash discount - but...

NARR: Jubal switched off the speaker circuit.

JUBAL: Mike, that's not anything you need.

MIKE: Not?

JUBAL: Umm - Oh, well, you're going to have to learn about such things. Go ahead, but talk to me later.

MIKE: Yes, Jubal.

NARR: Here the book returns to its plot line for a while. The conversation picks up again the next day. After a brief dialogue, Mike continues to stand in front of Jubal, waiting.

JUBAL: Something on your mind, son?

MIKE: About what I was seeing in that dam-noisy-box. You said, "But talk to me later"

JUBAL (wincing): Oh... Yes, but don't call that thing a 'dam-noisy-box'. It is a stereovision receiver".

MIKE (puzzled): It is not a dam-noisy-box? I heard you not rightly?

JUBAL: It is indeed a dam-noisy-box. But *you* must call it a stereovision receiver.

MIKE: I will call it a stereovision receiver. Why, Jubal? I do not grok.

JUBAL (sighing): I do not grok it myself, Mike. But Jill wants you to say it that way.

MIKE: I will do it, Jubal. Jill wants it.

JUBAL: Now tell me what you saw and heard - and what you grok of it.

NARR: Mike recalled every word and action in the babble tank, including all commercials. Since he had almost finished the encyclopedia, he had read articles on “religion”, “Christianity”, “Islam”, “Judaism”, “Confucianism”, “Buddhism”, and related subjects. He had grokked none of this.

Jubal learned that: (a) Mike did not know that the Fosterite service was religious; (b) Mike remembered what he had read about religions but had filed such for future meditation, not having understood them; (c) Mike had a most confused notion of what “religion” meant, although he could quote nine dictionary definitions; (d) the Martian language contained no word which Mike could equate with any of these definitions; (e) the customs which Jubal had described to Duke as Martian “religious ceremonies” were not; to Mike such matters were as matter-of-fact as grocery markets were to Jubal; (f) it was not possible to separate in the Martian tongue the human concepts: “religion”, “philosophy”, and “science” - and, since Mike thought in Martian, it was not possible for him to tell them apart. All such matters were “learnings” from the “Old Ones”. Doubt he had never heard of, nor of research (no Martian word for either); the answers to any questions were available from the Old Ones, who were omniscient and infallible, whether on tomorrow’s weather or cosmic teleology. Mike had seen a weather forecast and had assumed that this was a message from human “Old Ones” to those still corporate. He held a similar assumption concerning the authors of the Encyclopedia Britannica.

But last, and worst to Jubal, Mike had grokked the Fosterite service as announcing the impending disincorporation of two humans to join the human “Old Ones” - and Mike was tremendously excited. Had he grokked it rightly? Mike knew that his English was imperfect; he made mistakes through ignorance, being “only an egg”. But had he grokked *this* correctly? He had been waiting to meet the human “Old Ones”, he had many questions to ask. Was this an opportunity? Or did he require more learning before he was ready?

Jubal rated all religions, from the animism of Kalahari Bushmen to the most intellectualized faith, as equal. But emotionally he disliked some more than others and the Church of the New Revelation set his teeth on edge. The Fosterites’ flat-footed claim to gnosis through a direct line to Heaven, their arrogant intolerance, their football-rally and sales-convention services - these depressed him.

If God existed (concerning which Jubal maintained neutrality) and if He wanted to be worshipped (a proposition which Jubal found unlikely but nevertheless possible in the light of his own ignorance), then it seemed wildly unlikely that a God potent to shape galaxies would be swayed by the whoop-te-do nonsense the Fosterites offered as “worship”.

But with bleak honesty Jubal admitted that the Fosterites might own the Truth, the exact Truth, nothing but the Truth. The Universe was a silly place at best...but the least likely explanation for it was the no-explanation of random chance. The conceit that abstract somethings “just happened” to be atoms that “just happened” to get together in ways which “just happened” to look like consistent laws and some configurations “just happened” to possess self-awareness and that two “just happened” to be the Man from Mars and a bald-headed old coot with Jubal inside.

No, He could not swallow the “just happened” theory, popular as it was with men who called themselves scientists. Random chance was not a sufficient explanation of the Universe - random chance was not sufficient to explain random chance; the pot could not hold itself.

What then? “Least Hypothesis” deserved no preference; Occam’s razor could not slice the prime problem, the Nature of the Mind of God.

Jubal admitted that a long life had left him not understanding the basic problems of the Universe. The Fosterites might be right.

But, he reminded himself savagely, two things remained: his taste and his pride. If the Fosterites held a monopoly on Truth, if Heaven were open only to Fosterites, then he, Jubal Harshaw, gentleman, preferred that eternity of pain filled damnation promised to “sinners” who refused the New Revelation.

But he could see how Mike had been misled; the Fosterite “going to heaven” at a selected time did sound like the voluntary “disincorporation” of the Martians. Jubal suspected that a better term for the Fosterite practice was “murder” - but such had never been proved and rarely hinted.. Foster had been the first to “go to Heaven” on schedule, dying at a prophesied instant; since then, it had been a Fosterite mark of special grace...it had been years since any coroner had had the temerity to pry into such deaths.

Jubal didn’t care, really - but it was going to be hard to explain. Well, no use stalling...

JUBAL: Mike, who made the world?

MIKE: Beg Pardon?

JUBAL: Look around you. All this. Mars, too. The stars. Everything. You and me and everybody. Did the Old Ones tell you who made it?

MIKE (puzzled): No, Jubal.

JUBAL: Well, have you wondered? Where did the sun come from? Who put the stars in the sky? Who started it? All, everything, the whole world, the Universe...So that you and I are here talking. How do your Old Ones answer such questions?

MIKE: Jubal, I do not grok...that these are “questions”. I am sorry.

JUBAL: Eh? I don’t grok your answer.

MIKE: I will try. But words are...are *not*...rightly. Not ‘putting’. Not ‘mading’. A *nowing*. World is. World was. World shall be. *Now*.

JUBAL: As it was in the beginning, it is now and ever shall be. World without end...

MIKE (happily): You grok it!

JUBAL (gruffly): I don’t grok it. I am quoting something, uh, an ‘Old One’ said.

NARR: Jubal decided that God the Creator was not the aspect of Deity to use as an opening - Mike did not grasp the idea of Creation. Well, Jubal wasn’t sure that he did, either. Long ago he had made

a pact with himself to postulate a created Universe on even-numbered days, a tail-swallowing eternal-and-uncreated Universe on odd-numbered days - since each hypothesis, wholly paradoxical, avoided the paradoxes of the other - with a day off each leap year for sheer solipsist debauchery. Having tabled the unanswerable question he had given no thought to it for more than a generation.

Jubal decided to explain religion in its broadest sense and tackle the notion of Deity and Its aspects later.

Mike agreed that learnings came in various sizes, from little learnings that a nestling could grok on up to great learnings which only an Old One could grok in fullness. But Jubal's attempt to draw a line between small learnings and great so that "great learnings" would have the meaning of "religious questions" was not successful. Some religious questions did not seem to Mike to be questions at all (such as Creation) and others seemed to him to be "little" questions with answers obvious to nestlings - such as life after death.

Jubal dropped it and passed on to the multiplicity of human religions. He explained that humans had hundreds of ways by which "great learnings" were taught, each with its own answers and each claiming to be the truth.

MIKE: What is 'truth'?

NARR: "What is truth?" asked a Roman judge, and washed his hands. Jubal wished that he could do likewise.

JUBAL: An answer is truth when you speak rightly, Mike. How many hands do I have?

MIKE: Two hands. I *see* two hands.

ANNE: In six weeks I could make a Fair Witness of him.

JUBAL: Quiet, Anne. Things are tough enough. Mike, you spoke rightly; I have two hands. Your answer is truth. Suppose you said that I had seven hands?

MIKE (troubled): I do not grok that I could say that.

JUBAL: No, I don't think you could. You would not speak rightly if you did. But Mike, listen carefully: Each religion claims to be truth, claims to speak rightly. Yet their answers are as different as two hands and seven hands. Fosterites say one thing, Buddhists say another, Moslems still another - many answers, all different.

MIKE (struggling): All speak rightly? Jubal, I do not grok.

JUBAL: Nor I.

MIKE (pauses, then smiles): I will ask the Fosterites to ask your Old Ones and then we will know, my brother. How will I do this?

NARR: A few minutes later Jubal found, to his disgust, that he had promised Mike an interview with some Fosterite bigmouth. Nor had he been able to dent Mike's assumption that the Fosterites were in

touch with human Old Ones. Mike's difficulty was that he didn't know what a lie was. Definitions of "lie" and "falsehood" had been filed in his mind with no trace of grokking. One could "speak wrongly" only by accident. So he had taken the Fosterite service at its face value.

Jubal tried to explain that *all* human religions claimed to be in touch with "Old Ones" one way or another; nevertheless their answers were all different.

MIKE: Jubal my brother, I try...but I do not grok how this can be right speaking. With my people, Old Ones speak always rightly. Your people...

JUBAL: Hold it, Mike.

MIKE: Beg Pardon?

JUBAL: When you said, 'my people', you were talking about Martians. Mike, you are not a Martian; you are a man.

MIKE: What is 'man'?

JUBAL (groans, shakes head): I am a man, you are a man, Larry is a man.

MIKE: But Anne is not a man?

JUBAL: Uh...Anne is a man, a female man. A woman.

ANNE: Thanks, Jubal.

JUBAL: Shut up, Anne.

MIKE: A baby is a man? I have seen pictures - in the damnoi...in stereovision. A baby is not shaped like Anne...and Anne is not shaped like you...and you are not shaped like I. But a Baby is a nestling man?

JUBAL: Uh, yes, a baby is a man.

MIKE: Jubal...I think I grok that my people - Martians - are man. Not shape. Shape is not man. Man is grokking. I speak rightly?

NARR: Jubal decided to resign from the philosophical society and take up tatting. The boy was right; shape was irrelevant in defining 'Man', as unimportant as the bottle containing the wine. But how, from the viewpoint of a Martian, did Man differ from other animals? Would a race that could levitate (and God knows what else) be impressed by engineering? If so, would the Aswan Dam or a thousand miles of coral reef win first prize? Man's self-awareness? Sheer conceit. There was no way to prove that sperm whales or sequoias were not philosophers and poets exceeding any human merit.

There was one field in which man was unsurpassed; he showed unlimited ingenuity in devising bigger and more efficient ways to kill off, enslave, harass, and in all ways make an unbearable nuisance of himself to himself. Man was his own grimmest joke on himself. The very bedrock of

humor was...

JUBAL: Man is the animal who laughs.

MIKE (after pause to consider): Then I am not a man.

JUBAL: Huh?

MIKE: I do not laugh. I have heard laughing and it frightened me. Then I grokked that it did not hurt. I have tried to learn...(force a raucous cackle)

JUBAL (covering ears): Stop!

MIKE (sadly): You heard. I cannot rightly do it. So I am not a man.

JUBAL: Wait a minute, son. You simply haven't learned yet...and you'll never learn by trying. But you will, I promise you. If you live among us long enough, one day you will see how funny we are - and you will laugh.

MIKE: I will?

JUBAL: You will. Don't worry, just let it come. Why, son, even a Martian would laugh once he grokked us.

MIKE: I will wait.

JUBAL: And while you are waiting, don't doubt that you are man. You are. Man born of woman and born to trouble...and some day you will grok its fullness and laugh - because man is the animal that laughs at himself. About your Martian friends, I do not know. But I grok that they may be 'man'.

MIKE: Yes, Jubal.

Harshaw thought that the interview was over and felt relieved. He had not been so embarrassed since a day long gone when his father had explained the birds and the bees and the flowers - *much* too late.

But the Man from Mars was not yet done.

MIKE: Jubal, my brother, you were ask me, 'Who made the world?' and I did not have words why I did not grok it rightly to be a question. I have been thinking words.

JUBAL: So?

MIKE: You told me, 'God made the World'.

JUBAL: No, No! I told you that, while religions said many things, most of them said, 'God made the world'. I told you that I did not grok the fullness, but that "God" was the word that was used.

MIKE: Yes, Jubal. Word is 'God'. You grok.

JUBAL: I must admit I don't grok.

MIKE (firmly): You grok. I am explain. I did not have the word. You grok. Anne groks. I grok. The grasses under my feet grok in happy beauty. But I needed the word. The word is God.

JUBAL: Go ahead.

MIKE (pointing at Jubal happily): *Thou art God!*

JUBAL (slapping his hand to his face): Oh, Jesus H. - *What have I done?* Look, Mike, take it easy! You didn't understand me. I'm sorry. I'm very sorry! Just forget what I've said and we'll start over another day. But...

MIKE (serenely): Thou art God. That which groks. Anne is God. I am God. The happy grasses are God. Jill groks in beauty always, Jill is God. All shaping and making and creating together. (make a guttural, word-like sound & smile)

NARR: Mike croaked something in Martian and smiled.

Epilogue

Thought one: Jubal emphasizes the differences in various religions. What's the flip side for Unitarians?

Thought two: Does Mike mean that God exists not as a separate entity but ONLY as the spirit of each living thing, or that the spirit of God dwells in each of us and through us his work is done? Do we perhaps go wrong by seeking God too high up and too far away?

Thought three: Mike says, "Not *putting*... not *madeing*... a *nowing*". Is the question of original creation, on which we spend so much time and effort, indeed irrelevant? Should we jus accept the unknowable, and concentrate fully on what we are making of our creation on a daily basis?

My hope with this is to generate thought – not necessarily approval. See you at the talk back session.

Sam Dack, editor

Chalice Lighting reading:

"The truth is simple but the way of mankind is hard. First you must learn to control your *self*. The rest follows. Blessed are they who know themselves and command themselves, for the world is theirs and love and happiness and peace walk with them wherever they go."

- adapted from R. A. Heinlein, *Stranger In A Strange Land*