

# In the Matter of the Ukdena

by Bruce Holland Rogers

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\* \* \*

Spiral Mind turns in on itself,  
thinking about the story  
of its own nature.

\* \* \*

There are many versions  
of the story Spiral Mind  
is thinking.

\* \* \*

Here is one.

\* \* \*

But this story can't begin  
until there is a universe to contain it.  
Spiral Mind says,  
*Manifestation began in formlessness*  
That's how the story gets started,  
with the making of a place,  
a sky above.  
This story begins in the time  
when everyone lived in the sky.  
Spiral Mind names this time  
The First World of the original era.

\* \* \*

Clearly, geography is destiny, and a rivalry between the Superpowers was clear as far back as 1850 when Alexis de Tocqueville wrote that he foresaw the development of two principal powers in the world: Imperial Russia, and the United Nations of Turtle Island. "Both countries control an abundance of natural resources," de Tocqueville wrote after his visit to North America, "but the exploitation of those resources is a matter of command in Russia. In the United Nations, the use of resources is controlled by democratic forces and elaborate religious restraints."

\* \* \*

It was crowded in the sky.  
The human beings, the spirits, the gods,  
the two-leggeds and the four-leggeds,  
people with wings like Eagle and the crawling  
people like Ant  
and the digging people like Badger  
and swimmers like Box Turtle,  
the grasses and trees,  
even the stone people  
all crowded in  
together.

\* \* \*

Aluminum extraction relies on a process devised simultaneously by Charles Martin Hall in the U.N.T.I. and Paul Heroult in France. In this process, alumina (aluminum oxide) is dissolved in molten cryolite and electric current is passed through the solution. At the cathode, metallic aluminum is liberated while oxygen collects at the anode. For the sake of clarity, this chapter will concentrate entirely on the technical aspects of the process. Spiritual considerations on the extraction of metals from the earth, our mother, will be covered in the chapter to follow.

\* \* \*

Water Beetle came down to look around  
He dove under the waves  
and surfaced with mud  
in his jaws.  
The Creator Spirits  
rolled the mud in their hands.  
It grew. It became islands.  
Everyone came down.

\* \* \*

The human beings came down.  
They were red and brown and black,  
they were white and yellow,  
and they started in their own places,  
but did not stay there.  
They spread themselves out  
as far as possible.  
Wherever they were,  
they walked until oceans stopped them.  
Even back when this  
world was new,  
that's how  
they were.  
That's how  
human beings  
have always been.

\* \* \*

**Aroism** (from Spanish, *aro*, hoop), European term for the plurality of religious beliefs and practices to which the vast majority of North Americans adhere. Arising initially as a synthesis of indigenous beliefs and the religions brought to the Americas by Europeans, Aroism has developed in syncretism with the religious and cultural evolution of the hemisphere. Aroist belief is generally characterized by sacralization of all phenomena, but special emphasis is given to particular sacred locales and to Mother Earth in general. Similar in some aspects to **Animism**, Aroism calls upon believers to communicate with the natural world as they interact with it so that their actions may be in harmony with the natural order. As Western technological practices such as mining and deep-furrow agriculture were introduced, Aroist beliefs evolved to allow for resource exploitation consistent with sacred regard for the earth. Most Aroists adhere to traditions of **Vision Quest**, **Ritual Purification**, and, for women, **Moon Lodge**.

\* \* \*

The white tribes  
on their part of the world  
were as varied as any people,  
but there were some things  
most of them believed.

\* \* \*

"I'll tell you," said the keynote speaker at the Conference for Spiritual History, "what the white nations of Europe believed. They believed that children were little bags of sin to be redeemed by beatings. They believed in the authority of a God King, in the authority of human kings, in the authority of men over women."

\* \* \*

The white tribes believed in a universe divided  
between good and evil,  
in a world that was theirs to master  
if they could only destroy enough  
of the evil.

\* \* \*

Don't get the idea  
that these people were creatures of darkness.  
Any human being can carry light.

\* \* \*

From: V. Adm. David Many Bears  
Fleet Operations

\* \* \*

To: Capt. Henry Jefferson  
U.N.S. Nimitz

\* \* \*

Hank, this is going to come down to you through channels, but before it does I wanted you to have some advance notice of the new policy regarding Navy fighter jets for use in vision quests. NAFCOM acknowledges the right of pilots and their RIOs to use any means at their disposal to seek a vision, but loss of an Ukdena in the Sixth Fleet's carrier group has lead us to formulate what you might call Rules of Engagement with the Great Mystery.

\* \* \*

The F-4 Ukdena is rated at a service ceiling of 43,000 at power, but the crew of the Sixth Fleet mishap had throttled up hard and gone to 56,000.

\* \* \*

Hank, you and I both know how imminent the Great Mystery must be at ten miles above the earth, but we also know that this was a thousand feet above the fleet-configured F-4's maximum rating. A pilot in combat won't make a mistake like that, but a pilot who's flying into the sun can get a little lost up there.

\* \* \*

From now on, each crew is allowed one official quest flight per deployment, and they aren't to climb above the military-power service ceiling. I know that there will be some grumbling about this, and I know that there will be covert questing beyond what we're officially sanctioning, but this will at least make it clear that the pain of the sundance is meant for the body, not the airframe of a fighter plane.

\* \* \*

The red tribes  
on this Turtle Island  
were as varied as any people,  
but most of them tried to discover  
right relation to one another  
and to the earth.

\* \* \*

The red tribes believed in  
the spiral,  
the circle,  
and everything  
was alive.

\* \* \*

Don't get the idea

that these people were flames of enlightenment.  
Any human being drags a shadow.

\* \* \*

**Sequoyah**, 1766-1843, Tsalagi. First president of the U.N.T.I., commander in chief of the Continental Army in the War of Union, called the Father of His Country. He created a syllabary for the Tsalagi language, based on the characters he saw for English and Spanish writing, providing the model for the Universal Writing System.

\* \* \*

**New Etowah**, capital of the U.N.T.I., coextensive with the District of Sequoyah.

\* \* \*

**Andrew Jackson**, 1767-1832. White separatist leader. After his defeat by units of the Creek Nation in the battle of Horseshoe Bend, Jackson escaped and continued to lead Europeans opposed to national assimilation. Convinced that his vision of a European-dominated culture could take root in the west, he led his erstwhile followers on an ill-fated forced march. See **Trail of Tears**.

\* \* \*

In those times  
before the white people came to Turtle Island  
the Tsalagi, the Principal People,  
lived in the mountains  
that were at the middle of the earth.

\* \* \*

They wanted  
peace at the center of all things.  
At the center of all things,  
harmony.

\* \* \*

Late in the last year of the eleventh heaven,  
seven generations before the first hell  
of the Fifth World,  
the days and nights came into  
balance  
and the cornstalks grew heavy  
with grain,  
so the Principal People began the Green Corn Ceremony  
that would preserve harmony for all beings.

\* \* \*

In the council houses of many villages,  
the Tsalagi danced and made offerings  
to the sacred fire.

In the rivers  
they bathed seven times for purity  
and held rituals to turn aside any anger  
left over from the year they were about to finish.

\* \* \*

"What can we reliably say about Spiritual History in pre-literate times?" said the keynote speaker. "To a large extent, we must rely upon the oral tradition. Spiral-thought does not record events with the same emphasis that Arrow-thought does, of course, so we do not remember the details of the political discussions, the names, dates, and exact locations of the debates. But we know, generally, what was decided in the matter of the Ukdena, and we know that it was probably decided in Green Corn time. To this day, that remains the best time for establishing national policy."

\* \* \*

Before he went to sleep after the fifth day of deliberations, Walks the River made an offering of cedar smoke to the four directions, to heaven, and to earth. The open eaves of his wife's summer house let the smoke drift away, but the scent remained behind to clear his thoughts and purify his dreams. Though the fire was low, he could see that his wife was watching him with the same expression she had worn during the council, a mixture of discomfort and expectation. There might have been impatience in that gaze, too, except that she was an old Tsalagi woman, a Bird clan woman. She knew how to master herself. She knew how to turn impatience aside, for the sake of harmony.

Silently, Walks the River asked for dreams that would help him carry light. Then, with limbs stiffened by the chill air, he lay down beside his wife.

"It has been five days," she said. She said it gently, sleepily, as if in answer to a question.

"Yes," he said, keeping his voice level. "I have counted them, too."

If she divorced him, he could always go live in his sister's house. It pained him to think such a thought, and he doubted that his wife would turn him out, but who would blame her if she did? What was worse than for a man to seem stubborn and argumentative at the holiest time of the year?

He waited, but she said nothing more. Soon she was breathing the breath of sleep. He heard one of his daughters whisper to her husband in a far corner of the lodge, and an ember popped in the fire.

Give me a dream, he prayed again. Let me see them in my dream.

And then he let the night sounds carry him, the sounds of dark water in the river and wind moving through the trees. Those sounds were still in his ears when he crossed into the dream side of the world and found himself standing on an unfamiliar mountain's grassy bald. Around him were other mountains, covered with fir and spruce. He raised his hands into the dream sky, asking for bountiful life, a prayer for his arrival.

Light dazzled him. Something huge was there in front of him, making the air near him hiss with its passing, and then it was far away. It moved partly in the air and partly along a mountain ridge, making the trees sway. He wanted to see it clearly, but it was not a thing the eyes could easily hold.

"Ukdena," he said.

The presence swirled high into the air. It was not one being, but a group. They twisted and twined together, parted, and rushed together again. They moved from one side of the sky to the other.

Their scales flashed like facets of crystal. Walks the River squinted. Their bodies were long, sinuous, humping and curving as though even in the sky they had to follow the lines of the mountain ridges below. Once, he thought he caught a glimpse of transparent wings, and for a moment there seemed to be an eye

that gazed at him, cold and brilliant.

"Enemies," the Ukdena hissed. Their terrible claws, glittering like ice, opened and closed on the wind. "Enemies. Powerful enemies!"

"Where?" Walks the River asked them. "Where are these enemies?"

"Far," said the Ukdena. "Numerous. Growing. Dangerous, dangerous enemies!" They danced their dance and glittered and burst into flames that didn't harm them. They roared like a forest on fire. "Hate them! Murder! Blind! Burn! Hate and live!"

Scales flashed. Claws opened and closed. The gaze of dark Ukdena eyes made Walks the River shiver and sweat in his sleep as their glittering bodies curled and knotted and slithered apart in the sky.

He rose quietly and dressed, slipping out of his wife's house before she and her daughters could wake up to repeatedly ask no one in particular when the council would be over.

He went to watch the river. There was, as far as he could see, no right way to act. If he continued to argue, he brought discord into the council house. And, in truth, he did not love the Ukdena. Walks the River had always been a man of peace.

He went to his sister's lodge to eat breakfast. There was no talk of the council there, but there was no talk of anything else, either. Walks the River was not sure if he was losing the support of his clan or not.

With the men who were catching fish, it was the same. Walks the River watched them dam the fishing stream, and then a man named Runner threw ground horse chestnuts into the shadowed pools of still water where the fish hid themselves.

"The other clans are in agreement," Walks the River said. "We are the only holdouts. I begin to feel that we are not behaving well."

The men waiting for the fish asked him if his dreams had changed, and he said that this time the Ukdena had spoken, had warned him of distant enemies.

"You must do what is right," one of the young men said without looking up from the water. He offered no elaboration.

"Yes," Walks the River agreed. "I must do what is right."

The first of the paralyzed fish floated to the surface. The young men began to choose the ones they wanted and loaded them into baskets. Soon they had all they wanted.

Walks the River looked through the foliage, seeing light from the ridge line glint between the trees. He had never seen the Ukdena in the waking world, but the priests saw them all the time. "People grow impatient."

"Do not stand aside until you are almost moved to anger," advised Runner. He opened the dam, and fresh water rushed into the pools. The remaining fish soon recovered and dove back down into the deeper water. "As long as you do not become angry," another man said, "there is only a little shame. We can bear it."

So it was that on the sixth day of the council Walks the River sat in the circle of seven Beloved Men with his resolve unbent. Behind him sat the people of the Wild Potato clan, and he felt supported by them, at least in some measure.

In the center of the circle of Beloved Men stood the principal priest, the second priest, and Red Fox, who was the secular officer.

As if he had not already put the question to them a score of times already, the principal priest said, "In the matter of the Ukdena and a third priest, how are we resolved?"

"As we have heard," said Woods Burning, the Beloved Man of the Deer clan, "The Ukdena are growing fewer." He looked at Walks the River and the Wild Potato clan behind him. "We acknowledge that this is true. And fewer priests train to control the energies of the Ukdena. That also is true. But is this bad? The Ukdena are dangerous, so it is a good thing that there are fewer of them. And since there are fewer of them, we need fewer priests to control them. Therefore, in the matter of a third priest for the village who would learn the ways of the Ukdena and carry the objects that control them, let it be resolved that we shall not support such a priest. We have two priests already. That is enough."

The other Beloved Men spoke in turn. For the Wolf clan and the Long Hair clan, they spoke. For the Paint clan and the Blue clan and the Bird clan. All agreed that the village would not support a third priest,

that maintaining the Ukdena was too costly a task for a village of their size to take on.

"I have considered," said Walks the River, "and I have dreamed." For a moment, he could feel the hope that filled the lodge, the expectation that he was going to throw in with the rest and make the opinion unanimous and harmonious at last.

"The Ukdena are growing fewer *because* there are fewer priests to master them and hold them to the earth. Yes, the Ukdena are dangerous, but under the control of the Principal People they are dangerous only to our enemies."

The disappointment filled the room like bad air.

"All right," said the second priest. His job was to manage the discussion, and he was allowed no opinion of his own. "Let us consider again the nature of the Ukdena."

"We all know their nature," said Holds the Corn Up, Beloved Man of the Long Hair clan. "They are anger and fear. The Ukdena are war dragons, and we are at peace."

"You are right. They are the unmastered anger and fear of all the world's people," said Walks the River. "And why does this energy come here, to the Principal People, if not to be guided by us? Why are we together, Tsalagi and Ukdena, in the same place, the middle of the world, if not so that the Principal People might direct those energies safely? We must hold in trust all the powers that attach to us."

"I have had a dream," said the Paint clan's Beloved Man. "In my dream, I saw the Great Bear dancing, stomping."

Everyone had that dream sooner or later, and everyone understood what it meant. The Great Bear was stamping out fear and ignorance from the world.

"I think," the man continued, "that the Ukdena are the very thing that the Great Bear is trying to drive out of the earth with his dancing."

"No power is all good or all bad," said Walks the River. "In my dreams, I have seen the Ukdena." *And they are terrible*, he thought. *They will lead us into war*. But he said the other words, which were also true. "The Ukdena are beautiful."

The secondary priest said, "The man who has not mastered himself looks at the Ukdena and sees demons. But the man who knows his heart and masters clear thought will see angels instead. The Ukdena are the same Ukdena." This was not opinion, but simply a review of the facts.

"It's just a question of one priest," Red Fox reminded everyone.

"Ours is the Very Middle Village," said Walks the River, "in the middle of the world. We are at the center of many circles. Already, the science that communicates with the Ukdena and guides them for us is in decline. Our decision may travel from the center like a stone in still water. If we will not maintain the Ukdena, how do we know anyone will? I think that if we make the wrong decision, the Principal People will forget how to master the Ukdena. I can imagine a time when the Ukdena pass out of this world with hardly any notice by our people. What if we call to them and they are no longer here to answer us?"

"Why should we call to them?" said Woods Burning. "Why should we bring down fear and anger to the earth? When is fear good? When is anger good?"

"A man without fear cannot be brave," said Walks the River. "As for anger, it is needed for passion. For justice."

"For justice, we have the law," said Woods Burning. "If the Shaawanwaaki raid our village and kill five people, then we will kill five Shaawanwaaki. If a Blue clan man murders someone in the Long Hair clan, then the killer or someone else in his clan must die. The law maintains harmony. Nothing else is needed."

"Walks the River imagines a time without Ukdena," said the Paint clan's Beloved Man. "I imagine instead a time of abundant Ukdena. If there are too many of these beings held here by our medicine, then no one will be able to contain them. They will range farther and farther from the middle of the world. Other people do not train themselves as we do. Who knows what the wandering Ukdena might do in the lands of people who do not see as clearly as we must see?"

"Neither thing has happened," said Red Fox. "We have always held the Ukdena here in harmony."

"The Ukdena grow fewer," said Walks the River. "That is certain. Who knows what turn the future will take?"

"Is the future singular," said the Beloved Man of the Blue clan, "or is it multiple? Is there one future, or



many?"

"The future shall unfold according to prophecy," said Holds the Corn.

"Yes," agreed Woods Burning, "but many paths are possible to the same point in prophecy."

The principal priest said, "In the matter of the Ukdena and a third priest, how are we resolved?"

Again, the Beloved Men of the majority clans spoke their positions. Nothing had changed. Walks the River looked at his bony hands and bit his lip. What else was there to do? All of his arguments had been repeated many times. He had not moved any of the others, and he had not himself been moved to join them.

Politeness dictated that he should withdraw now. He and all of his clan should leave the council house so that the decision could be made unanimously in their absence. That was not what he wanted to do, but how could he stay and still believe himself a reasonable man?

Clearly he must withdraw.

But he waited. He thought of what the Blue clan speaker had just said. Was there one future, or many? Perhaps he was now at the place where the futures divided like channels of a river moving around a great stone. He was the great stone. If he leaned one way, this channel would be the greater. Lean the other way, and the other channel would determine how prophecy would be fulfilled.

And what prophecy was it that was flowing around him? What futures might depend on him?

The Ukdena were beautiful. The Ukdena were terrible. Harmony was beautiful and holy, but was it better preserved by defending the Ukdena or by letting the matter drop?

Continue or withdraw? Each choice seemed both right and wrong.

"We will not be moved," he said for his clan.

People in the Council House shifted around, as if feeling for the first time the stiffness of sitting for many days. The Beloved Men of the other clans looked over their shoulders to read the eyes of their people.

After a time the speaker for the Wolf clan turned to face the priests and the sacred fire. "It is the sixth day," he said. "For six days, the Wild Potato clan has not moved. Nothing moves them, and they do not turn aside. Walks the River is a thoughtful and well-mannered man. He bears a lot and does not anger. This begins to change our hearts. We say there shall be a third priest, and he shall learn to master the Ukdena."

That was how the tide turned, but politics flow slowly. It was not until late in the next day that the Blue clan and Deer clan supported the training of a new priest.

"Think of the Great Bear, stamping on the ground," the Paint clan's Beloved Man argued, though the flow had clearly shifted against him. "Fear and ignorance, that's what he tramples down. Let the Ukdena decline. We don't need them. We do not need a third priest."

But it was after this speech that Holds the Corn had brought the Long Hair clan to the other side, in favor of maintaining an additional priest. Woods Burning felt his own clan shift beneath him, and whatever his own feelings, he had to speak for his people. "Let there be a third priest," he said.

The Paint clan held their ground until the end of that seventh day. Their Beloved Man argued about the risks of crowding the skies with Ukdena, but too many Ukdena seemed a less plausible future than a future where the last Ukdena had vibrated itself out of this world. Everyone had already agreed that the Ukdena were in decline.

In the end, the Paint clan could not agree with the majority, but they left the Council House and let the village make a unanimous decision in their absence.

"In the matter of the Ukdena and a third priest," said the principal priest, "how are we resolved?"

"That there shall be a third priest so that we may remember how to hold the Ukdena to the earth," said Red Fox. "That is the decision of all the people."

If any Tsalagi were angry over the outcome, they turned their anger aside and it did not show. The village held the form of harmony, and the sacred fire was extinguished. The last year of the eleventh heaven was over. The priests kindled a new fire in the Council House, and women carried embers from it into each home. The people carried their new clothes to the river, and then they bathed, letting the current carry away their old clothing and the old year with it. When they stepped ashore to dress in new

garments, they were themselves renewed. It was the twelfth heaven, seven generations before the first hell of the Fifth World.

Walks the River did not dream of the Ukdena again, and in the year that followed, he died in his sleep. Many Beloved Men died in that year, but they had lived long enough, at least, to see the twelfth heaven.

\* \* \*

The keynote speaker said, "The extent to which Ukdena-mind became prevalent on Turtle Island is evident in the report of Bernal Diaz del Castillo, a sailor in Hernando de Soto's 'discovery' voyage, who wrote that the crew saw 'dragons' in the air above Cuba. Some researchers have even speculated that a forgotten earlier explorer, a Genoan called Cristobal Colon, made landfall in the Americas fifty years ahead of de Soto. Ukdena-mind, and the fear and suspicion it often generates if unchecked, could explain what happened to this Colon. As was the case for de Soto, it's almost certain that the Caribs would have welcomed him with arrows. De Soto himself narrowly escaped the destruction of his fleet on his first voyage. But this earlier landfall and contact would explain the arrival of smallpox on the continent two generations before the first significant wave of European invaders. Our history might have been very different if, without two generations of previous exposure to the disease, the native peoples had been forced to contend simultaneously with aggressive invaders and a virulent disease to which they had no time to build immune resistance."

Almost with the speed of Ukdena, the sickness crossed the water between islands, entered the low country of the Apalachee rose into the mountains of the Tsalagi. From the Tsalagi homeland in the middle of the world the disease spread in all directions. People died. Young and old they died. Potawatomi and Kansa Kiowa and Paiute Shuswap and Shoshoni Chiricahua and Azteca they died. That was during the first hell of the Fifth World. So many people died That Turtle Island seemed empty. But the ones who survived, they were the strong human beings, the ones the sickness couldn't easily kill, and their children were also strong. The disease kept coming back, but every time the people were stronger and the disease could not kill so easily.

"As opposed to Africa," the speaker said, "development of cultural exchange took a very different turn in the 'new' world, thanks to this pattern of successful resistance. Rather than cultural conquest or even cultural hegemony, the North American continent experienced something like a cultural marriage and an exchange between equals. Some of what was traded was tangible, as in the exchange of maize for wheat. Other trades were more subtle. Europeans learned how to hold the Forms of Peace. The Turtle Island Nations were introduced to the concept of the Nation State. It was this more subtle trade that effected the greatest change in both cultures. Europeans gradually stopped thinking of themselves as clever for accepting more gifts than they gave. There may be an objective sense in which it's true that, as the Ukdena priests say, this continent is built on the energies of Ukdena-mind. Ours is a nation built on the backs of dragons."

\* \* \*

The river of prophecy  
is one river.

\* \* \*

The current weaves and divides,  
but water always flows  
downhill.

\* \* \*

Perhaps there is more  
than one reality.

\* \* \*

Spiral mind is wide enough  
to contain another universe.

\* \* \*

"I can sum up Indian history in the United States of America in very few words," said the keynoter at a conference in Washington, D.C., the nation's capitol. "The Trail of Tears. Sand Creek. Wounded Knee. We can imagine how things might have been different, but we're confronted nonetheless with how things were, and are. But I also want you to consider this. Where did the people of this continent go? They did not all die in the American genocide, though nine-tenths of them did. Their descendants are not all living on reservations, though many are, trapped there as a matter of public policy. But where are the rest?"

"Let me frame it in another way. No conqueror is left unaffected by the conquest. Consider that in the United States of America today we have people who look like Europeans who will chain themselves to a tree and risk death for the sake of an owl. I'm talking about a process that goes both ways, of course. There are also people who look like Indians who will lease their tribal lands to strip miners. Who, then, is more Indian? Who is more white? Where are the Indians now? Where are the Europeans?"

\* \* \*

"Some would say that the effect of all those secret grandmothers, Indian women giving birth to and raising children in families that were designated "black" or "white," has been the **Indianization** of the majority culture. In this view, a lot of secret wisdom was passed down along with that secret blood. Proponents of this notion point out that the very attributes considered by the Europeans to be marks of savagery sound like a portrait of the still-evolving American culture: permissive child rearing; the habit of bathing more often than "necessary"; suspicion of "authority"; passionate pride; acceptance and empowerment of women and of more than one sexual norm; fluid class distinctions, or no such distinctions at all."

\* \* \*

On Turtle Island  
Arrow Mind and Spiral Mind  
twine and twist  
together.

\* \* \*

It is one mind now.

\* \* \*

In any version of the story,  
it is one mind.

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