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TYING UP THE WORLD

by Mary S. Bell

After Cristo tied up Biscayne Bay in 1989, the Brooklyn Bridge in 1991 and all of Australia in 1995 people said, "What's the purpose?"

"Everyone loves packages," Cristo answered. "Something good and they're delighted. These things—bridges, continents—are miracles and we need to be reminded of that." He then made plans for the next big tie up, Earth itself. More than just art was involved. The third millennium was coming which meant that, time wise, everyone would have been at least in the presence if not under the influence of Christendom for two thousand years officially. To commemorate the event, western civilization expected a happening of some sort.

By then Cristo had formed Cristo, Inc., a firm with a board of directors and personnel to take care of the many plans, permits, and procedures necessary for their projects. Xinthatius, a tall, tanned, grey-haired man who wore black jumpsuits, was the head engineer. He told Cristo that poly-poly destructured mobbyllium, an extrusion of steel one ten thousandth of an inch thick and weighing no more than a kilogram per square kilometer, was the best material for the job. The mobbyllium was translucent. When placed above land or sea it became luminescently reflective, dazzling the atmosphere. The panels, said Xinthatius, should be cut on the bias so as to leave gaps of twenty to thirty feet between each joining. In that way not all of the sunlight would be shut out and the patterns created could be intriguing.

Cristo was won over. In September of '94 he approved the plans and sent Xinthatius to Washington to obtain the first of the 135 national permits necessary to mount the project. "It won't work," the President, a democrat, said to Xinthatius. "To cover the world with extruded steel is pointless. For one thing, you couldn't find enough people to do the job."

Xinthatius held up his left index finger, the one he used to remind people of things they had neglected to consider. "It's not impossible. The world has a surface of 510,066,000 square kilometers. At one person per square kilometer, we will need only half a billion people, just one eighth of our population, many of whom will be happy to volunteer. Even though some countries don't celebrate the New Year when we do they're familiar with our calendar and have a vested interest in the passage of time."

The President had to admit this was true.

"At the corner of each square kilometer we will erect a three thousand foot high rod, also of poly-poly destructured mobbyllium but not the extruded kind," Xinthatius explained. "Between the pairs of rods we will suspend the sheets of extruded mobbyllium. At the stroke of midnight on December 31, 1999, volunteers in each time zone will

unfurl the sheets. The entire process will be timed to take twenty-four hours and, once it is up, stay in place for a day until the volunteers take it down again—all in all a three day spectacle."

"What about the cost?" the President asked. "We're still reeling from the effects of Reaganomics."

"Fifteen billion only. The United States' share would be one billion. Russia's would be one billion also. Each of the smaller nations would have their contributions prorated accordingly," Xinthatius said. "If you back such a project, it will bring in a lot of votes in the year two thousand."

"I don't do things to get votes. I do things that will be good for people," the President said.

"Of course, and this will be a good deed. But you have to remember that the millennium is going to freak folks out. Even a full moon drives some people crazy so you can imagine what the turn of a century, not to mention the turn of a millennium, will do. People will spray the streets with limeade, flood shopping malls with beer, cover each other with soggy dough, squirt orange juice during church sermons, play rock and roll in funeral parlors, smear hotel diningrooms with glue, and grease their grandmothers. You know it will be a mess. But with Operation Tie-up attention can be diverted and the cleanup will be quicker, perhaps unnecessary."

The President shrank into a curve of the oval office. "The mess. Right," he whispered. "Terrible to think of." He closed his eyes for several seconds, and opened them again. "What would you do with the poles and extruded sheets when the project comes down?"

"Mobbyllium is tough but light, developed by NASA for trips to Mars. NASA can use what they want of it afterwards and the rest can go for housing, bridges, railroad cars, automobiles, cameras, computer hardware, audio visual equipment, and the many yet-to-be-invented technological breakthroughs meant to enrich peoples' lives and provide challenging problems for them to solve."

The President wrote a check for \$1,000,000,000 and gave it to Xinthatius who took the next plane for Moscow. There the Russian Premier took Xinthatius to a champagne and caviar lunch at the new glassed-in Droschivovistya-Sol-somovski, explaining that he had given the matter of the millennium a lot of consideration and thought the tie-up was just the thing to keep Russians from splitting into even more countries than they already had.

In London Prime Minister Molly Newcome-Oldham contributed \$500,000 since the Empire was no longer rich and since the monarchs were planning their own diversionary parades in the Mall in a last ditch attempt to win back lost public appreciation. In Ottawa the Canadian head of

state, Dierdre McTartan, gave \$500,000,000, not much, but enough to help quell possible unrest among the French. In western Europe France topped the list of donors with \$300,000,000, Belgium was second with \$250,000,000, Italy fifth with \$150,000,000, and Spain last with an undisclosed amount.

After visiting Greece Xinthatius got depressed. He had collected a lot of money but not enough to tie up the world. But then he was blown away in Arabia when Ibn Saud V promised \$5,000,000,000 in matching funds if other Middle Eastern nations would contribute the same amount. The king said he did it to shame Israel which would probably not want to contribute anything. He was right since Israel was not expecting much acting out behavior for the millennium from its own citizens but wrong since Israel wanted to contribute toward a tranquil celebration world wide and gave \$3,000,000. Syria gave \$2,000,000, Iran \$800,000, plus some gold requisitioned from the former Shah and a few hundred thousand left over from the arms deal with the United States in 1986. Egypt gave \$381,278,956 plus gold leaf from a newly discovered pharaoh's tomb.

It still wasn't enough. Discouraged, Xinthatius phoned Riyadh and asked the king if he would be willing to match funds from African countries too. The king agreed. Xinthatius struck pay dirt immediately in Zimbabwe, a new nation east of Ghana and west of the Poltroons. Emperor Ngorumbozo had just crowned himself with a headdress in the shape of a condor encrusted with gold, platinum, sapphires, rubies, and several large diamonds from a recently discovered mine twice the size of Kimberley. "Your Majesty," Xinthatius said, "I'm here to present you with an unprecedented opportunity to assist the world and mankind."

Ngorumbozo jiggled the pearls on his sceptre.

"Instead of damaging the environment and adding to the oppression of humanity, your beneficence will help billions to increase their spiritual awareness."

Ngorumbozo jiggled more pearls. "I worked hard to get what I have. My adversaries still nip at my heels and claim they are my equal even though none of them has got a sapphire this big." The emperor pointed to a ring on his thumb with a stone the size of a lima bean and the color of Lake Geneva at twilight.

"Then give them something they can never surpass—a donation to the Cristo Foundation for Tying Up the World." Xinthatius explained the project to Ngorumbozo who wanted nothing more than to go one better than rival heads of newly sprouting African nations. He wrote a check for \$4,000,000,000.

Xinthatius flew back to Arabia, collected the promised money from Ibn Saud, and wired Cristo, Inc. that they now had nearly enough money to start the project. A few more countries and the funding would be complete. Quick visits to China, Australia, India, New Zealand, the Philippines, Borneo, Malaysia and Viet Nam netted another \$2,000,000,000. So as not to imperil their growing trade

deficit with the U.S. now that Americans had started paying their own chief executive officers lower salaries and giving workers expense accounts and fringe benefits, Japan contributed only \$125,000,000. South America, still saying "no" to non-coca based economics, contributed only \$726,000, with Costa Rica giving the most at \$128,586, and Columbia the least with \$12,858 plus three mortars (from a prior U.S. arms donation) which their fund chairman said could bring \$50 each on the used guns market. But by then Xinthatius had enough.

In January, 1997, construction started with the first pole raised in Antarctica. By March that continent was staked out along with Tierra del Fuego and lower Argentina. By September of that year all of South America as well as several million kilometers of ocean on either side bristled with poles. Moving to the eastern hemisphere, the personnel and volunteers of Cristo Inc. staked out South Africa, ending apartheid there as pole after pole went up. By December, 1997, the southern hemisphere was finished, with molybdenum rods sticking out of land and sea all the way up to the equator. Beginning next at the North Pole, Xinthatius and his crew covered the Arctic circle, Novaya Zemlya, the Bering Straights, the Beaufort Sea, Greenland, and all the icebergs. By March of 1998 they were down as far as New York City and by May they had reached Mexico in the West and Bombay in the East. When the last pole was raised at latitude 155 45', longitude 19, in the Hawaiian Islands, Xinthatius didn't pause a minute but declared that there was no time to waste since they were behind schedule and only had a year left to cut the sheets of molybdenum and suspend them from the poles.

It began to seem as if they wouldn't finish on time. Here it was May, 1998, with what looked like at least a couple more years of work. Approaching radio and television networks, Xinthatius broadcast the plight world wide. With the poles in place it would be a shame, he said, not to finish the job by midnight, December 31, 1999. And people agreed. Programs set up to oppress the poor, despoil the environment, and lower educational standards were temporarily disbanded and regrouped into Operation Tie-up brigades. With ranks swelled by these new volunteers, Xinthatius charged forward and by December 16, 1999, everything was in place. Each pole had a wire and each wire was connected by long beam electronic circuitry to the central bureau, situated in North Dakota near a town called Lastup whose population had spurted from 15 to 150,000 in the last three years because of the tie-up.

Everyone prayed for good weather. A couple of high pressure areas near Easter Island threatened to become hurricanes and a nagging Arctic wind, it seemed, would not calm down. But there was no stopping Operation Tie-Up and when the mean time in Greenwich was 12:00 p.m., December 31, 1999, Cristo pressed the lever activating all the poles along the line from north to south with signals to unfurl the molybdenum sheets. Up they went. With a silvery crackle sounding like a cross between a church bell and a cannon, each one zipped out smartly to connect with other poles a kilometer away. Zap! Right in place like it

was meant to be there, no bones about it, no arguments made.

The sky turned milky. Dressing the starry navy blue sky in a shimmering film of silver, the mobyllium fluttered in the winter wind, rustling like fat leaves on a tropical tree. In northern countries people bundled into parkas and mittens and sat in the snow to watch the sheets and count stars that twinkled in the gaps between. They gave wassail parties to welcome the new millennium and bathed their babies in warm rum. In the South people lay on the ground and fell asleep gazing at the fluttering sheets. They ran through opalescent air, told extrusion jokes, and floated in mobyllium seas.

Three days passed and the sheets came down. Cristo and Xinthatius appeared on TV to receive the newly formed Le Bon prize for art donated by the French painter-politician, Derfla Le Bon. To give himself surprises as a child, Cristo said, he had wrapped things up and asked his mother to hide them. When he came across the packages it was like getting toys for Christmas since the bundles never failed to contain what he really wanted.

Editions Demonique published the book on Operation Tie-up, a \$75.00 volume with color plates throughout. At 47 pounds the book was too heavy for most coffee tables so a dolly was marketed to haul it around. The dolly cost \$40.00 but sales were brisk; despite the added expense and inconvenience, people were more than willing to make a

commitment to the memory of how the planet was discovered once again.

A PASTORAL SONNET

by Joe R. Christopher

On ancient hills of Arcady, in Greece,
the shepherds watched their sheep, each flock alone;
the goatherds herded goats, and made their moan—
both played their flutes and sang of love's increase.
Those lonely herders, for months without release,
with only sheep and goats about them strown,
played on their pipes, and sighed, and gave their groan,
and dreamed of love upon a simple fleece.

An early, rustic time, a natural time,
when songs soon led to bestiality—
and herders fell from primal urgings fell;
then sheepish ewes had fauns, in mythic prime,
and goatish dams had satyrs, rare progeny—
whose outward forms their inward spirits tell.

THE WHITE GEESE

by D. Lynn Smith

"Myths reveal the structure of reality, and the multiple modalities of being in the world...they disclose the true stories, concern themselves with reality."

-- Eliade

The geese have come early this year. They flew in before the rains stopped, before the weather warmed. They always hated the dreary grey skies of the California winter so I was surprised to see them.

I first saw Robert in Reseda Park seven years ago. His hair stuck together in greasy, brown spikes. He wore a drab army jacket whose shoulder seams hung halfway down his arms and faded blue jeans that hadn't seen the inside of a washing machine in quite some time. He was skinny as a rail, had serious, dark brown eyes, and was wiser than a body should be at twelve years old.

It was a beautiful spring day and the pond was filling up with noisy ducks attempting to attract a mate. He came and stood beside me as I untwisted the top of a bag of stale bread. I handed him a piece of crust to throw to the gathering flock. He ate it.

It's sad to see how many children go unwanted these days. Oh Robert had a mama. He also had a stepfather who hated him. Robert's mama preferred the stepfather. It's not that she was a bad woman. She just felt that her responsibility lay with her husband rather than her child. She gave Robert a place to sleep. But he had to be gone by the time his stepfather got up in the morning and couldn't come home until all the lights were out at night.

"Just stay out of his way," Robert's mama told him.

And Robert did.

So on that fine spring day I found myself with this dirty stray pup eating the crumbs I had brought for the ducks. I always was an easy mark for strays.

I gave Robert three meals a day, made him take a weekly bath, washed his clothes when he took them off to bathe. He gave me much more. I didn't get around very well even in those days. Arthritis, you know. Hit me when I was twenty-three; lived with it for fifty-four years. So he did my mending when my knuckles were so swollen I could no longer grasp a needle. He brought hot water for my feet when I'd done too much walking, then set off to do the