

The Tales of Alvin Maker: An America that might Have Been A Review



Contents

The Genesis of a Series	3
The Confrontation with Evil	5
Alvin's Path: Meeting the Native American Soul	9
Peggy's Path: Meeting the African American Soul	13
Gathering the Threads of Destiny	14
Building the Crystal City: America's Spiritual Future	15

As an anthroposophical author interested in North American history the imaginative element of myths and legends stands first and foremost as a tool for understanding American spiritual impulses. That is so at least until the time of the colonies. Quite simply put, there is no way to understand Native American history without bringing together left and right brain thinking. In the best of instances, when both lines of inquiry are pursued diligently, the language of myths and legends corresponds with and casts a deeper light on historical records. This is why the research I pursued on American history from 1500 BC to 1500 AD rests in great part on the work of Rafael Girard, a very diligent archaeologist/historian, who knew and understood the content of American mythology, primarily, but not exclusively, from the Mayan Popol Vuh. He also could see all of the imaginative reality reflected in current surviving traditions, linguistics, anthropology, cosmivision, etc. With that background it is possible to understand the North American Third Age of the Olmecs (15th century BC to year 1), Fourth Age of the Maya (year 1 to 15th century AD) and Fifth Age of Aztecs or Haudenosaunee (after the 15th century AD).¹ When I compare my work with the rare few who look at American history from an imaginative/scientific perspective I also find common ground. From experience I will refer to Jacob Needleman's *The American Soul: Rediscovering the Wisdom of the Founders*, whose insights often match mine and lend weight to the idea that imagination can be objective and work as a support to thorough historical research.

The imaginative approach can be pursued through purely artistic means and still lead to insightful and revealing results. In this case the necessary, thorough historical/scientific research falls in the background. This is what I believe Orson Scott Card's has done with his *Alvin Maker* series. I have met his work in the nineties and early millennium, and reread it twice since. The enjoyment has grown with the deepening of my own understanding of American history and spirituality. Little has changed in my appreciation of the spiritual/cognitive insights, if nothing this has grown. Rather I have reappraised the work from a literary standpoint, however little equipped I may be to judge objectively in that realm. Though I'm now more critical of the books in terms of their literary achievements, the series still displays for me a coherence in terms of historical and spiritual understanding of the United States, the impulses that brought it to birth and led it into its further history.

¹ See Luigi Morelli, *Spiritual Turning Points of North American History*.

The Genesis of a Series

The Tales of Alvin Maker is a series of six historical fantasy novels published from 1987 to 2003, with one more planned, yet unpublished. They explore the experiences of a young man, Alvin Miller, who realizes he has incredible powers for creating and shaping social reality around him. The stories take place in the American frontier in the early nineteenth century in what would have been the time preceding the Civil War. The books involve a number of historical events and historical figures but placed in a parallel America, as it were. The six books to which I will refer occasionally are *Seventh Son*, *Red Prophet*, *Prentice Alvin*, *Alvin Journeyman*, *Heartfire* and *The Crystal City*.

It is interesting to trace the origin of the character Alvin to what would seem a detour of little importance in young Orson Scott Card's writer early career. Card wrote the long poem *Prentice Alvin and the No-Good Plow* in 1981. The poem, along with the short novel "Hatrack River", became the basis for *Seventh Son* (1987), the first book in The Tales of Alvin Maker series. Already at the time a central theme of the series was conceived, that of Alvin Miller, a young apprentice blacksmith. While wondering in the woods Alvin meets a red-winged bird that teaches him how to be a "Maker." Following the bird's instructions he produces a plow of gold. Setting off with the plow Alvin comes to a river where he meets a certain Verily Cooper, who helps him build a plow frame. Adding the frame to the plow, the latter comes to life and plows the ground on its own. The plow and Verily Cooper reappear in the Alvin Maker series but only in the third and fourth books.

The series has been called a chronicle "of an America that might have been" (Booklist) and "a recasting in fantasy terms of the tall tale of America" (The Washington Post Book World). It is obviously based on a good amount of scholarly work and understanding of its deeper implications, and this is my reason for bringing it to public attention, in particular to all those who wonder about and seek a deeper understanding of the American folk soul and enjoy doing so along playful, artistic detours.

Orson Scott Card has chosen to trace an alternative sequence of historical events leading to a "beloved community scenario" within the timeframe of the Civil War, while also referring here and there to previous events. The device allows an evaluation of leading figures of American history, such as Washington, Franklin, John Adams, Tecumseh (Te Kumsaw in the books) the Shawnee prophet Tenskwa Tawa, Lincoln, Andrew Jackson, etc. Together with the major ones appear other figures such as Denmark Vesey, Daniel Webster, General William Henry Harrison, or the legendary Mike

Fink. Add to these some European figures such as Napoleon, Honoré Balzac, Jean Jacques Audubon, Lafayette, or John Milton—who takes a central role as Taleswapper—to name a few, without forgetting the importance or whole groups, such as the Puritans or French colonists on one hand or the Aztecs on the other. Little cameos speak of sub-segments of the initial settlers, such as German immigrants.

The above lays out a general setting before entering the main reference frame, which is the collaboration between the races, mainly European, Native American and African American. Whether this has been intentional or not it is interesting to note that the first book (*Seventh Son*) speaks of the plight of new immigrants to the Midwest, the second begins and ends with the Native American, the third is entirely centered around the African American perspective and the plight of slavery.

As in many other attempts Card has shaped characters with exceptional gifts whose difficult choices carry important consequences. He resorts to showing protagonists with higher than usual psychic-spiritual faculties, called “knacks” in the series. Where the device plays effectively is in opening the doors to the spiritual backdrop of American history; where it becomes questionable is in the occasional “superman special effects,” or simplistic shortcuts. What Card calls knacks in their largest acception, become more than only supernatural gifts. They are the signature of individuality. Under this heading everybody and anybody has a knack, from as simple as making people feel at ease, or drawing absolutely straight lines without a ruler, to “seeing potential beauty as if it were already there, and by seeing it, let it come to be.” The litmus test of the whole endeavor, however, is whether Card reaches the goal of pointing to something more than history or a happy-ending saga, to the fabric of the American spirit, and for this author he undoubtedly does.

The highlighting of special qualities in one direction works hand in hand with the laying bare of the decadent impulses at work in the continent on the other, starting historically—though only marginally in the six books—with the decadent Aztec impulse, and continuing with what we could call the present Ahrimanic threat. In between Card reaches a balanced perspective on the Christ impulse across the three cultures, differentiating it from any given uniform racial group or institution, an achievement for someone who is a Mormon and a committed one at that. Card’s personal convictions do not transpire in his writings, nor is he moralizing or preaching Christianity. To this author his beliefs have only transpired out of natural curiosity at the writing of this article (internet sources), since

moreover he's not familiar with Card's science-fiction writings, which form the bulk of his writings and literary fame.

The Confrontation with Evil

Alvin, the main protagonist who gives the name to the series, is a "Maker," someone with special qualities of which we will speak as we go, and he is the one who can oppose the "Unmaker." Card unveils what such a Maker is in the words of his main Native American protagonist, Tenska-Tawa (modeled after the historical prophet Tenskwatawa, the Shawnee religious and political leader): "The bigger a man is, the more people he serves. A small man serves himself. Bigger is to serve your family. Bigger is to serve your tribe. Then your people. Biggest of all, to serve all men, and all lands."² Alvin serves the needs of a future America.

At the heart of the struggle between Alvin and the Unmaker and his emissaries is the age-old confrontation between good and evil, one that is played at two simultaneous levels; externally in the social forces arrayed for or against Alvin's mission, internally in the effort of the soul to transform and overcome the pull of the Unmaker, which is more than our conventional devil. About him Card says: "So in the great War between the Unmaker and everything else, God and the devil should be on the same side. But the devil, he doesn't know it, and so he serves the Unmaker as often as not."³ Without attributing to Card a whole theologically detailed vision of things, we can nevertheless sense that the Unmaker is something more than Ah-ri-man alone. In his destructive impulses he adds the qualities of the Asuras—those beings who attack the human ego itself—as we may see further on in the story.

According to Rudolf Steiner, the "Asuras are spirits of the very greatest egoism who remained behind during Saturn evolution. They want to condense matter and compress it ever more so that it can't be spiritualized and brought back to its original condition. They're the dregs of the planetary evolution that goes from Saturn to Vulcan. The asuras inhabit the moon and from there they work on the men whom they want to drag down into the eighth sphere and thereby tear away from progressive evolution and its goal—the Christ."⁴ In Card's views the Unmaker embodies completely destructive tendencies.

² *Red Prophet*, Chapter 10, "Gattlop."

³ *Seventh Son*, Chapter 10, "Visions."

⁴ Rudolf Steiner, *Esoteric Lessons I*, Number 15, January 29, 1907 (GA 266).

Seen externally the Unmaker approaches particular individuals in a lowered state of consciousness. Such are the self-righteous, highly educated Reverend Philadelphia Thrower, or the callous plantation owner Cavil Planter.

The Unmaker approaches the obvious kind of individuals, such as Cavil Planter, the relentless slaveowner, who lusts after his female slaves and yearns to find a religious justification for his violent acts and racist views. Cavil meets spiritually the "Overseer," who instills in him the idea that he can impregnate his slave women and in so doing ameliorate the black race. The Overseer plays on Cavil's knowledge of the Old Testament, such as the stories of Abraham, Sarah and Hagar—Sarah's Egyptian handmaiden—and the idea of redemption of the black race from its original sin. Here is Card's attempt then at tearing the veil of the senses and show us what operates behind the scenes of history.

With Reverend Philadelphia Thrower it is an altogether different matter. Here's an individual come to America to root out all that he holds as superstitious belief in the supernatural. In him, we could say, operates the shadow side of the Puritan impulse. He has beheld the "Visitor" for the first time in his life in a Belfast church. To Thrower the Visitor embodies a calm, detached scientific mind, offering him in way of confirmation that "There's a life's work for a man of God." In a second meeting the Visitor asks Thrower to win over Alvin's trust. "But in your heart, you'll bend everything toward this remarkable child, to win him to my cause. Because if he does not serve me by the time he's fourteen years of age, then I'll destroy him. ... I know you will do well. And as for the devil, you must feel no fear of him."⁵ Here a spiritual meeting takes place which can remind us of the sophistry and alluring call of the adversaries in Rudolf Steiner's Mystery Dramas, obviously in a minor key. The rest of the story also bears this out.

In Cavil and Thrower the picture of the human being is obliterated at the level of will and thinking. This is particularly consonant with America's situation on the eve of the Civil War. Decisions like the 1857 Dred Scott v. Sandford landmark Supreme Court decision decreed that no people of African descent could enjoy the rights and privileges conferred by the Constitution upon American citizens. Lincoln rightfully understood the decision as a Trojan horse for the expansion and eventual legalization of slavery throughout the whole nation, a decision to effectively wipe out the spiritual value of the Declaration of Independence. To confirm his fears were the southern extremists loud claims to recognize slavery as a constitutional right. At this time in US history the image of the human being

⁵ *Seventh Son*, Chapter "Visitor."

stood at its lowest. And the years 1840 to 1860 correspond with the time which Steiner characterizes as the “fall of the Spirits of Darkness.”⁶

When the plans of either Cavil and Thrower are thwarted the two wandering individuals are mysteriously drawn to each other in a larger scheme to justify slavery as the means for the blacks’ advancement, not knowing that they are pawns in a larger game, in which a multitude of individuals play a larger role.

Card hits upon a dynamic which Steiner has illustrated in his *Karma of Untruthfulness*. The adversaries carry their work socially through the disguise of naïve people who can easily be manipulated, the ones he calls the “0s.”⁷ Reverend Thrower and Cavil Planter are examples of these 0s who fall prey of the Unmaker in states of lowered consciousness. They believe they can use destructive powers occasionally while remaining untouched in their deeper being. The Unmaker can deceive these people and subjugate them in believing he doesn’t exist.

Behind the 0s stand individuals, who in Card’s estimate “already love [the Unmaker’s] destructive work and engage in it freely of their own accord,” though they too are deceived about the final aims they really serve. These would be those whom Steiner calls the 1s, who operate behind the 0s, taking advantage of their naivete. And the author opens a window of understanding in how such an individual operates in his rendition of the fictionalized Daniel Webster.

The Unmaker fosters groups of interest and discredits those he opposes, using all means to create public perceptions. Alvin is brought to trial under false charges through Daniel Webster on account of supposedly stealing a plough and the trial is used to interweave a second spurious accusation of Alvin seducing a minor. Winning the trial itself is not as important as having it in the first place, because it will serve to tarnish Alvin’s reputation, no matter what the legal outcome could be. Webster is a master in manipulating key witnesses into fabricating shreds of circumstantial evidence from which inferences and assumptions can be spun and form “evidence” in the eyes of the jurors. He does this by suggestion, without getting his hands dirty. But this is only one aspect of the whole.

⁶ Rudolf Steiner speaks of this among other places in the lecture of *October 14, 1917*, “The Battle between Michael and the Dragon”: “I have frequently spoken of the significant break which occurred in the spiritual development of the peoples of Europe and America in the middle of the nineteenth century, and especially in the 1840s. I have pointed out that this was the time when the materialistic point of view came to its peak, when a peak was reached in what we may call a way of grasping dead, outer facts with the intellect, refusing to enter into living reality.”

⁷ Rudolf Steiner, *The Karma of Untruthfulness*, volume I, lecture of December 26, 1916.

Behind Webster stand the enigmatic "Property Rights Crusade." In the forefront of the group we find people like Philadelphia Thrower and Cevil Planter, who have old wounds to nurse. Behind the scenes are prominent people who are part of the pro-slavery faction, either openly or in disguise. Most of their money goes to help the racist, historically borrowed, presidential candidate General William Henry Harrison. The popular candidate campaigns on an openly anti Native American platform and is very likely to succeed in his bid. The same people behind the Property Rights Crusade want Alvin killed. The whole can remind us of how Ahriman meets his goals in using people as numbers, in trying to create constellations of twelve who unwittingly serve his purpose in destroying those working at furthering the Christ-imbued social impulses.⁸

However, the external aspect of the Unmaker's work is only half of the equation. The other side is the challenge he poses in people's hearts and minds. The Unmaker has been opposing Alvin since his birth, first of all through the elements, particularly water. Once Alvin has reached manhood, it is people who oppose him through the Unmaker. Last, but not least, it is his presence in the soul that is the greatest cause for worry as an example will illustrate. As an apprentice Alvin falls under a taskmaster who wants to exploit his free work and keep him subservient to his interests. In one occasion Alvin meets with the antagonism not only of the smith, but also of a visiting dowser. When he is asked to perform a thankless task after a full day's work, it seems the last straw has been reached. The apprentice's work is filled with resentment and hatred and an initial desire to humiliate the antagonist dowser. This is the entry point for the Unmaker in Alvin's heart. Although it is summer the apprentice experiences a deep cold affecting him to the bone. All of a sudden he stands in the hole he's digging, paralyzed with fear, experiencing the nothingness of familiar nightmares. Only with effort does he shake off the shackles of the Unmaker.

Alvin progresses in the understanding of his work. He realizes he is bringing forward the work of Benjamin Franklin who, the story reminds us, has fashioned the term American, and rendered it a reality that united people of all races and creeds at the time of the original colonies. He ponders at the place in which destiny has placed him. "If there's any reason to my life at all, then there's a reason I was born here and not in England or Russia or China or something. Here is where my work's to be done."⁹ From continuously confronting him Alvin acquires a nuanced understanding of the

⁸ For an understanding of Ahriman's way of working socially see Rudolf Steiner's *The Soul's Awakening*, Scenes 12 and 13.

⁹ *Alvin Journeyman*, Chapter "Love."

Unmaker's place in the scheme of evolution, an understanding that blurs the old feelings of pure antagonism. He goes as far as to think that they are partners, then shudders at the thought. This is when he is attacked by the alligator that the Unmaker has occupied and given the thirst to kill Alvin.

Alvin's Path: Meeting the Native American Soul

Alvin Smith has a knack and it has two facets. On one hand he can get within inanimate or living things and see how they can be inwardly shaped to serve particular needs. This he uses to hew stone out of the rock, to work with the inner structure of lumber or to heal the body. He can create order within the lattice of the atomic structure of matter in the realm of mineral substance or of the living. When he is apprenticed to become a smith he realizes he can both work with the fire and the forge, or through his understanding of the inner structure of the metal. He decides to keep one strictly separate from the other, and only with his journeyman project will he use his hidden faculties to produce a golden, living plough, which responds to his command and his command alone. Overtime he will develop something similar to this knack but in the realm of the human, a sort of deeper social art of making people work together harmoniously. This will be the object spurring him toward the understanding and building of the Crystal City, toward which the whole book series tends. But before reaching this goal he has a series of apprenticeships to follow: learning to use his gift responsibly and learning what he can from the Natives and the enslaved Africans.

In the first task he is assisted by one of Card's most successful character creations, Taleswapper, a John Milton in American version. He has become an itinerant storyteller, offering his own visions and personal experiences and writing down stories he collects and then shares. His biography intersects with that of young Alvin in such a manner as to be present during his major childhood and adolescence challenges. He is a spiritual mentor who awakens Alvin to an understanding of his mission and its challenges.

The Maker's Native American teachers are the prophet Tenska-Tawa and his brother Te-Kumsaw. From them he learns to internalize the consciousness of the Tau/Great Spirit. It materializes with the ability to live in the "greensong," the feeling of being one with nature and not having to struggle with the physical body in performing a multitude of strenuous tasks. Te-Kumsaw exemplifies the consciousness of the greensong, the oneness with the realm of the living: "As he moved, Ta-Kumsaw felt soil, wind, river, and lightning all moving with him; the land within him, all things living, and the

hands and feet and face of the land."¹⁰¹¹ The greensong exemplifies what Steiner calls the Consciousness of the Tau, or Great Spirit.

"[The greatest thing to the Native American] was that he was still able dimly to sense something of the ancient greatness and majesty of a period which existed in the old Atlantean epoch, in which the division of the races had hardly begun, in which men could look up to the sun and perceive the Spirits of Form (Elohim) as if through a sea of mist. Through an ocean of mist the Atlantean gazed up at that which to him was not divided into six or seven, but which acted together. This co-operative action of the seven Spirits of Form was called by the Atlanteans the Great Spirit who revealed himself to man in ancient Atlantis."¹²

Alvin learns from his mentor to take part in the greensong. However, for Tenska Tawa this corresponds to a state of deeper presence, for Alvin something more akin to a state of dream. The theme of the different spiritual gifts of the races is one to which the author devotes a good deal of attention.

Alvin has to come to know not only the greatness of the Native American consciousness but also the tragedy resulting from meeting with the European settlers. At the end of his long journey of Native American initiation Alvin recognizes with his brother Measure: "and for a moment they just stared into each other's eyes, each knowing how far down the long road of the Red man's suffering and exile the other had walked; no other White man could ever know what they knew."¹³

At the other end of the greensong and the consciousness of the Great Spirit there is the sobering reminder of the shadow side of Native American spirituality—the Aztecs, who do not trust in or connect with the greensong. "They took their powers from the pain and blood of their enemies. It's a way of power that was practiced among other people too."¹⁴ Card refers to the Irrakwa (Iroquois) culture, which before the founding of the League of Five Nations lived under a spiritually decadent culture that could have ushered in an impulse similar to the Aztec.

It is in the figure of Tenska-Tawa that the gifts of the Native Americans stand most aptly represented. The people who gather peacefully around

¹⁰ *Red Prophet*, Chapter "Ta-Kumsaw."

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Rudolf Steiner, *The Mission of Folk-Souls*, lecture of June 12, 1910.

¹³ *Red Prophet*, Chapter "Homecoming."

¹⁴ *Red Prophet*, Chapter "Mizzippy."

the Prophet are surrounded by hostile forces. The message of the Prophet is tested and the future of the Natives itself is threatened. It is through the willing sacrifice of the “Tippy-Canoe massacre” of Prophet Town—where a multitude of the Prophet’s followers have gathered—that a new path opens up. Before the massacre the Prophet can only see blocked pathways into the future, leading to the extinction of the red race or its confinement within reservations, implying a complete loss of their culture. Having accepted a harsh fate he sees that there could be a future after all if the red man remains true to himself—a future leading to a living land. He promises his people. He says to his people: “The earth will not soak up your blood. It will flow into the river, and I will hold it there, all the power of all your lives and all your deaths, and I will use it to keep the land alive, and bind the White man to the lands he has already captured and begun to kill.”¹⁵ This path of sacrifice through the blood forms the thread of the Native American spirituality that Card describes.



It is the Prophet who teaches Alvin the path to the building of the Crystal City, when he takes him up into a tornado that has formed over the waters of Lake Michigan. Even before entering the tornado Alvin realizes that he can see much wider and farther than before.

¹⁵ *Red Prophet*, Chapter “Flood.”

The Prophet spreads the blood from his feet unto the surface of the water. Under his feet the water surface turns flat and smooth like a glass surface. When the tornado approaches, the Prophet calls on Alvin to join him and the two are sucked into the middle of the vortex.

Alvin sees back to the time of his own birth, the sacrifice of his brother Vigor for the mother to give birth, and the part played by his future wife, Peggy. Tenska-Tawa takes Alvin by the hand and together they rise higher.

“What Alvin saw was a city, shining in sunlight. Towers of ice, it looked like, or clear glass, because when the sun set behind the city its light didn't so much as dim, and the city cast no shadow on the meadowland around it. Inside that city there were people, like bright shadows moving here and there, going up and down the towers without stairs or wings.... Not peace, no, there was nothing quiet about what he felt. It was excitement, his heart pumping fast as a horse in full gallop. The people there, they weren't perfect—they were sometimes angry, sometimes sad. But nobody was hungry, and nobody was ignorant, and nobody had to do something just because somebody else made them do it.”¹⁶

This is a vision the Prophet has already had before. Alvin, however, sees the city differently from Tenska-Tawa. He sees it being built at one end and destroyed at the other.

After the two separate Alvin has a lengthy vision; he sees all of Earth's evolution leading to human evolution. Then his view focuses on America and the vision leads him from the original indigenous people to the arrival of the white man and the sickness of the land he brings with him. With this whole background now clearer, Alvin is ready to take the long view of his project of the Crystal City.

Card muses about the difference between the two races. He sees the White people “[using] these powers individually, binding them tightly to some in-born talent or preference or need. ... While the Reds, they open their powers to the world around them, becoming less and less alone, more and more tied to the power of nature. It gives them great powers, but cut them off from the natural world and it's gone.”¹⁷

Although Alvin also has to learn from the African slaves, this test falls primarily upon Peggy, his future wife, and a woman with a very strong and burdensome knack.

¹⁶ *Red Prophet*, Chapter “Lake Mizogan.”

¹⁷ *Heartfire*, Chapter “Names.”

Peggy's Path: Meeting the African American Soul

Peggy can read into people's "heartfires," the heart of their soul, their deepest wishes and desires and also their personal history. It is through this hidden capacity that she has been aware since childhood of all the dangers besieging Alvin and threatening his life. She has been able to ensure his survival. Finding herself aware of all the dark secrets of other souls robs Peggy of the delights of an innocent childhood. It also creates the inner challenge of being able to direct her skill, rather than succumb to it, to be able to live her life without knowing of the most likely outcomes of her or other people's actions. Peggy learns how to take distance from her knack in order to live her own life rather than being spread out over the lives of others at the expense of her own. Along the way, having lost her mother to the fight against slavery, Peggy makes her apprenticeship under the wing of the German-born, recent immigrant, Mistress Modesty.

Peggy learns to become a full woman through the teachings of Modesty. And she learns how to love Alvin's task of Making. She wants to be at his side because she desires to be part of what Alvin wants to achieve. She wants to unite her life task with his. Peggy learns from Mistress Modesty the art of feminine, but really "inner beauty." From what she learned from Modesty "Peggy chose her words to be true, therefore beautiful, and therefore good." Quoting her mentor she repeats: "A woman's wisdom is her gift to women. Her beauty is her gift to men. Her love is her gift to God. Mistress Modesty shook her head as she listened to her own maxim from Peggy's lips."¹⁸

Peggy decides to pursue her higher education in Philadelphia and then sets off on an unofficial diplomatic mission to the south to try to avoid the coming bloodshed of a Civil War. She directs Alvin, who finds himself in New Orleans (Nueva Barcelona in the story) during an outbreak of yellow fever. When the situation precipitates he helps the captive slave population, together with the French and other stragglers to escape to the north. He meets with Denmark Vesey, Gullah Joe a spiritual leader of the slaves, and the slave Fishy, who teach him about the African soul and the magic they are able to practice.

The powers of the black people is not carried in the blood, like that of the Native American. It is taught from parent to child. Card describes it as "... a kind of desperate courage that if worst came to worst, a person could sacrifice something to the fire and save what was most dear to him."¹⁹ An

¹⁸ *Prentice Alvin*, Chapter "Goodwife."

¹⁹ *The Crystal City*, Chapter "La Tia."

example of it is the mother of Arthur Stuart, another central character of the stories. The frail young woman, abused by Cavil Planter, acquires by magic the capacity to fly, but can only do so at the cost of her life, in order to carry her son to free land. It is Peggy, once more, who senses their heartfires and sends a rescue their way.

At the end of their tribulations Peggy and Alvin gather the seed group that will build the Crystal City. The Native Americans are not included only because they look to the city from the other side of the Mississippi.

Gathering the Threads of Destiny

Alvin is constantly wondering what his strength can amount to in the seemingly hopeless struggle against the Unmaker. And he is led to what seems a detour after another and no clear-cut, obvious avenues of action leading him to his goal. Only with time does it emerge that there is meaning in every single encounter and the people he meets are the ones meant to move forward the goal of the Crystal City. The links of destiny lead Card to one relevant reflection after another.

The story itself starts with the unlikely meeting of Alvin and Peggy at the point in time in which Alvin could not survive at birth were it not for Peggy's capacity to sense the need of the mother, who is struggling nearby against the elements in the wagon trapped in the raging waters of the river. And after the birth Alvin cannot survive if not because of his silent, unknown and mysterious connection with Peggy, who can watch over him with her knack as a "torch."

In his struggling to understand his gift of Making and its function Alvin has come to create the living, golden plough, but even this seems a dead-end goal. Why would a plow be important? And yet it is the proof of this plough which attracts many people around Alvin's leadership. They have seen it and touched it and it leads them to ask questions. Many of them have, like Alvin, special gifts for which they don't see an immediate, obvious use, or for which they are ostracized, or are obliged to hide. Now they sense a way ahead for their yearnings, something worth trying even if it doesn't offer ultimate certainties.

To make things more interesting and complex, Alvin has a great love for his younger brother, the eighth of the family. And Calvin has powers very similar to those of Alvin, but no disposition to cultivate and discipline them. He seeks power for power's sake and is resentful and envious of his brother, whom he deems a coward because of all his moral constraints. Peggy perceives him as a constant threat to Alvin's survival, and yet Alvin does not

defend himself from his brother, nor even avoids him. At one critical juncture, Calvin's rescue comes in fact from Peggy's reluctant call to higher duty when Calvin's rashness has put his soul in peril.

Peggy and Alvin perceive the mystery of this joint incarnation of the "brother enemies." Calvin has found passage to England and then to the court of Emperor Napoleon, who has returned to Paris from America. By healing Napoleon's gout pain each day, Calvin spends a few hours a day learning how to rule without scruples. That Calvin's path may have been laid out for him by previous choices is hinted at by Peggy and Alvin. Alvin hypothesizes that Calvin was already the enemy of his own work before he was born.

At the end of his journey Alvin has been led by fate to gather a very diverse group of people, representing in fact the American melting pot. He has been taken under the wing of the Prophet, Tenska-Tawa, and of his warrior brother, Ta-Kumsaw. He has willfully risked jail in order to unite his destiny to that of the Puritan girl, Purity, accused of witchery, meeting in the process with the lawyer Verily Cooper and with Reverend Hezekiah Study, and tangentially with the lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson. In conducting an escape of slaves and French-speaking residents from New Orleans he has gathered the souls of Denmark Vesey, Gullah Joe, the slave Fishy, La Tia, or the French woman Dead Mary, etc. Others, including Verily Cooper or Abraham Lincoln support his goals from a legal standpoint. Alvin has done more than just uniting a diverse group; he has added a vast tapestry of very different knacks or spiritual abilities to the founding of the Crystal City.

Building the Crystal City: America's Spiritual Future

Where Card's insights become fascinating is in the direction of America's ideal future, that of the Crystal City. The thread of apprentice, journeyman and master builds in between books and should reach a climate in the yet unwritten *Master Alvin*. We see two themes closely interwoven. Alvin learns his craft as a smith without appealing to his hidden powers. But he pursues the art of Making in parallel, and this leads him to producing a golden plough, a plough of living gold that responds to his own directions but to nobody else's. And in the process we are brought to discover the contrast between crafts and Making.

The crafts are a sort of "Making". Alvin muses "where the earth is forced by fire. ... the cost is high, and the iron aches when it's been transformed like that. ... we should only use [steel] when it's worth the cost of such

suffering.” And he explores about other ways to bring the iron up to strength: “I've been inside the flame. I know that the iron can live in it too, and come out unhurt.”²⁰



The golden plough has the fire of life, not just the fire of the forge. And Alvin truly becomes a Maker in producing his plough, just as he finishes his apprenticeship. But the building of the plough itself requires a sacrifice on the part of Alvin who realizes “The Maker is part of what he makes.” The smith has to physically enter into the fire to teach the molecules of metal to conform to a new pattern, that of a newly behaving metal with the appearance of gold but with whole new properties. He has to endure the suffering of the elements.

The willful, impulsive Alvin is often at pains to understand his real mission and in finding a way ahead. He is helped by Peggy’s calm, detached intellect. At a key moment of Alvin’s struggle she says: “The world you actually see is nothing more than an example, a special case. But the underlying principles, the order that holds it all together, *that* is forever invisible. It can only be discovered in the imagination, which is precisely the aspect of

²⁰ *Alvin Journeyman*, Chapter “Cooper.”

your mind that is most neglected."²¹ This view that transcends science and religion, though far from systematic in the whole opus, is restated by another key figure in the stories, that of Verily Cooper, a cooper become lawyer. The young Englishman tried to read philosophy and listen to the preachers but found that all the philosophers or scientists had to offer "was a vast sea of opinion with a few blocks of truth floating here and there like wreckage from a sunken ship. And Newton and the scientists who followed him had no soul. ... Most truths lay outside the neat confines of science; even within those boundaries, Verily Cooper,... soon found that while the pretense of impartiality was universal, the fact of it was very rare. Most scientists, like most philosophers and most of the theologians, were captive of received opinion. To swim against the tide was beyond their powers, and so truth remained scattered, unassembled, waterlogged."²²

Without giving away the creation of the Crystal City, two elements are brought together, that of the social art, of people coming together with a spiritual aim, and that of bridging technology and the natural world.

In the realm of the social art, the bridging of the melting pot through the web of destiny is the key—the recognition of the mystery drama of the encounters of the streams, primarily the bridging of White, Native American and African American impulses. But other, more specific, impulses are added through the Puritanism of new England, or the French colonists of new Orleans (New Barcelona in the stories). This leads to the laying of the foundations of the Crystal City in the heart of America, between Moline and Cairo (Illinois) on the Mississippi, through the appropriate key contribution of lawyer Abraham Lincoln.

The Crystal City can be equated to a modern temple: "... this extraordinary palace or... or library, or theater ... and when it was built, then for a few hours a week you go inside and look at what you see there, what the walls of it show you, and you learn from it what you can and try to understand what it means."²³ For others the Crystal City is a tabernacle or an observatory.

Alvin sees the city as a "city of Makers," not because everybody has acquired skills comparable to his own but because everybody contributes to rendering Making possible. It can be compared to a cathedral, which is much the product of an architect, but also of stonecutters, masons, carpenters, glassmakers, the rich donors, the bishop who wanted it in the first

²¹ *Prentice Alvin*, Chapter "Spelling Bee."

²² *Alvin Journeyman*, Chapter "Cooper."

²³ *The Crystal City*, Chapter "Plow."

place, but then even the women who brought food to the workers, etc. Overtime the cathedral becomes the property of each person in town and the generations that follow. What matters in the Crystal City are its people, who "... can dwell inside it all the livelong day and see great visions and small memories according to our own desires."²⁴

Alvin starts building the crystal blocks and already at this stage notices "You walk among them and it feels like you're in a place larger than the whole world, with all of what was and is and is yet to come beside you on either hand, and the ordinary world looks so small and narrow, when you see it at the end of the glistening corridor."²⁵

The theme of Freemasonry is broached in the book in many ways. Linking the building of the cathedrals with the new social order in which individuality shines within new social forms, hints at the continuation of an old impulse, which now takes a new form in the English-speaking West and in the US in particular: the rebirth of Freemasonry, at least in its lower degrees.

In the cycle of the *Temple Legend* Steiner speaks of the impulse that led to the building of the great cathedrals in the Middle Ages, and of its continuation and metamorphosis in later times. Here two concepts go hand in hand: anonymity and immortality.

"In the building of the great cathedrals the masons contributed anonymously to the spiritualization of matter: "... the Freemasons' aim is this, as far as possible, to do their work in the world in such a way that it is concealed in the cathedrals, in social institutions and organizations, in charitable foundations. For selfless deeds are the real foundation of immortality—the latter is the reflected image of selfless deeds in the outer world."²⁶

In the Middle Ages the cathedral introduced a new dimension of cultural and social life in the place where it was built, first of all through the kind of efforts that Card rightly underscores, secondly and most importantly through the spreading of the culture of the School of Chartres and its Platonic Christianity.

The building of "social institutions, organizations and charitable foundations" is the aim of a new Freemasonry.²⁷ The spiritualization of our

²⁴ *The Crystal City*, Chapter "Foundation."

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Rudolf Steiner, *The Temple Legend*, lecture of December 23, 1904.

²⁷ See Luigi Morelli, *Searching for the Spirit of the West: A Hidden History of the USA and the Twentieth Century*, Chapter 9 "America and the Transformation of the Will," also

social relationships through a very wisely devised social architecture is echoed in the spiritualization of matter through a new impulse, symbolized by the golden plough.

Where Card stands at his most fascinating is in his intuition of linking the golden plough to the social impulse of the founding of the Crystal City. When first using the golden plough for its future city Alvin muses about the experience:

“For the moment the plough leapt into place, there came such a music as Alvin had never heard before. It was the greensong... And yet it was another music, too. The music of worked metal, of machinery, of tools made to fit human needs and to do human work. It was the beating throb of the engine in a steamboat, and hissing and spitting of a locomotive, the whine of spinning wheels, the clatter and clump of power looms. Only instead of the cacophony of the factory, it all blended together into a single powerful song, and to Alvin's joy it fitted perfectly with the greensong and became one music that filled the air all around them.”²⁸

Here one cannot but see that Card is intuiting one of the missions of the West and America in particular, that of mechanical occultism and its resulting moral technology. Through mechanical occultism vibrations in the human etheric body enter in connection with mechanical vibrations and thus can power machines. Not surprisingly the clearest example of the beginnings of such technology, mentioned by Steiner, was that of the American Worrell Keeley (1827-1898): “It is perhaps known to you that Keely invented a motor which would only go if he himself were present. He was not deceiving people about this; for he had in him that driving force originating in the soul, which can set mechanical devices in motion.”²⁹

Whether moral technology would take the form of the living plough of a novel is a matter of total conjecture. Remains the fact that what the Alvin series describes in *The Crystal City* is very consonant with the spiritual aims of the West. In spite of some qualitative ups and downs, I can but praise Card's work. I conclude this review in the hope of one day soon seeing the author's completion of the saga with his *Master Alvin*.

available at <https://millenniumculmination.net/america-and-the-transformation-of-the-will.pdf>.

²⁸ *The Crystal City*, Chapter “Plow.”

²⁹ Rudolf Steiner, *The Temple Legend*, lecture “The Royal Art in a New Form,” of January 2, 1916.