

## 2 · Doubletalk, Triple Tongue and Theysay

**H**eralds stood on broadcast columns throughout Enchanted City and shouted news. They announced special events as well as the hours of the night. Because of power-outs, however, no one really knew the correct time. One herald might proclaim, “Midnight. All’s well!” while another shouted, “Ten-thirty o’clock. Half-night approaches!” No wonder citizens suffered from indigestion; they were always eating dinner at the wrong hour.

Doubletalk, Triple Tongue and Theysay were friends. The three boys had grown up in Moire Oxan, the tenement slums that stretched for miles, hovel stacked upon hovel. Together they endured illness, poverty, hunger and branding. When Theysay’s parents died, the other two helped him escape orphan dragnets by hiding him back and forth in their own tenement hovels, at great risk to themselves.

All three were now heralds of the Enchanter—and proud of their accomplishment. It was something for penniless young men to rise to heraldship, to stand on the tall broadcast columns, entrusted with all the news fit to proclaim. It was something for ragtag ruffians to wear the red-and-yellow jerseys with the Enchanter’s insignia of blazing fire. It was something to blow the herald horn whenever the wizard’s sleek black limousine moved ominously through the city streets, and to shout, “The Enchanter is coming! Make way for the Enchanter!”

Unfortunately, heralds frequently made contradictory announcements. One might shout, “Melons in the marketplace! First come, first served!” while the herald on the next post was shouting, “No melons today! Try rutabagas in your fruit salad!”

Some people suspected that heralds were chosen only if they had something wrong with their speech. Some heralds spoke backwards, “!gnimoc si retnahcnE ehT” Some had twisted tongues. Some had lockmouth, so that all S’s whistled through clenched teeth with a wicked *his-s-s-s-s-s*. Some even had very bad breath.

Doubletalk made positive announcements out of one side of his mouth. “The Enchanter is coming!”, for instance, or, “Melons in the marketplace!” would be announced out of the right side. Negative announcements, however, would be shouted out of the left side of his mouth: “The Enchanter is not coming!” “The melons have all been stolen!”

Trouble began when Doubletalk couldn’t decide if the announcement was negative or positive. Was the theft of rutabagas good news or bad? Or maybe it was a good thing that the Enchanter *wasn’t* coming.

Consequently, he began to make announcements out of both sides of his mouth. “The Enchanter is coming!” (on the right side). “The Enchanter is not coming!” (on the left). Then both at the same time. His tongue worked so hard it eventually split in two.

Doubletalk always worked up a sweat, but no one appreciated his great effort. People standing beneath his column shouted, “Hey, bub! Make up yer mind. Whatcha got? Wet-noodle brains?” And they threw rotten tomatoes.

Triple Tongue faltered over each word three times. “Th-th-the En-ch-ch-chan-ter is c-c-coming!” he would cry. His announcements took a very long time. After a while, he discovered that if he rushed his words, his tongue wouldn’t

triple so much. So he learned to shout, “Thenchtiscomn!”

Unfortunately, no one (except Theysay) could understand him. People standing beneath his post would wrinkle their noses and say, “Eh? Wha? Why don’tcha learn to talk plain?” Then they would rock his post.

The third friend, Theysay, had learned early never to state an opinion of his own. It was bound to get you into trouble. “They say the Enchanter is coming!” he would proclaim, or “They say the Enchanter is not coming!” He never took the blame for anything he said, because he only said what they said; and he said what they said even when he knew he shouldn’t say it, because he only said what he said because other people said it!

People beneath his column would look at each other and whisper in amazement, “Did you hear him say what they said?” He was the only herald of the three who ever won popular approval.

One day Triple Tongue said to Doubletalk and Theysay, “S-s-say, I’m-m-m get-get-getting ti-ti-tired of p-p-peop-p-ple s-s-saying, ‘Eh?’ and-d-d ‘Wha?’ and rocking m-m-my post.” Triple Tongue felt that maybe heralding wasn’t all it was cracked up to be.

Doubletalk answered, “That could be bad, or again, it might be good. It’s probably both, actually.”

“Well,” said Theysay, “they say that there are a new batch of heralds being trained. They say some of the old heralds will be put to street sweeping. I don’t know if what they say is right or not; all I know is that they say it.”

The next day Doubletalk had something to report. “An Enchanter’s man stood beneath my broadcast post all night. That could be good if I’m in any danger and need protection (right tongue section), or it could be bad if I’m not doing my job well, and they want to put a newer herald in my column”

(left tongue section). *Blo-o-oe-e-e!* He blew his lips to relax them. His mouth was tired.

Triple Tongue spoke very fast, “Whdyotnkthtsalabot?”

“Eh?” said Doubletalk. “Why don’t you just talk plain? I’m tired of *some* people saying things I can’t understand.”

Triple Tongue sighed. A small tear trickled down his nose and spotted his jersey. He was tired of never being understood.

“He said,” translated Theysay, “‘What do you think that’s all about?’”

“Oh,” said Doubletalk, “why didn’t you say so?” He blew out his tired tongue again. *Blo-o-oe-e-e!*

“They say that there’s a stranger in the streets talking about another kingdom, and how foolish it is to live in the night, and that we all should follow him and not obey the Enchanter,” said Theysay.

“*What?*” said both of his friends in amazement.

“I didn’t say it,” the third friend answered, shaking his head and backing away. “*They* said it.”

The very next night, Triple Tongue noticed a stranger standing beneath his broadcast column. A soft light surrounded the man. Blowing his herald horn, Triple Tongue made an announcement, very quickly, “Mlnsnmktplc! Mlnsnmktplc!”

Triple Tongue heard a nearby taxi honk its horn. *HARNK! HARNK!*

“Nyah! Nyah!” shouted the people, rocking his post.

As if he didn’t have enough troubles with citizens yelling at him and with the threat of new heralds, now the City Taxi Company was interfering. Every herald knew about the cabbies, who had banded together to help the citizens of Enchanted City discover the true news. What a nuisance. One beep meant yes; two beeps meant no.

He leaned from his column and peered into the shadows.