

# Charmides

**Glurak**, a perfect shiny Charizard (as *Critias*)

**Glumanda**, a perfect shiny Charmander (as *Charmides*)

**Apollo**, a perfect Charizard (as *Chaerephon*)

**David**, a Mewtwo (as *Socrates*)

I love to visit Goldenrod, but every time I return to our own Academy, I find myself beginning to relax again. The longer I'm gone, you see, the more likely I'll find some interesting conversation waiting, and this time I happened to know from my staff that some friends had arrived in my absence. No sooner had I seen the fire-dojō door when Apollo, who came to see another fellow but stayed on longer to catch me, was already rushing out into the lobby. I'm not as small as when we first met, but that doesn't stop him from hoisting me up as though I were his prize dish at the Games.

He took my bag and said, "We weren't expecting you till this evening, you rub! How'd you get here so early?"

"I didn't fancy waiting at the airport," I said, "so I used my own resources."

"Ah!" he said. "You must be famished! Come put your legs up over here and we'll get you something. You can tell us all about your time in Goldenrod."

"Well, some tea and wafels wouldn't hurt. But who else is here to talk?"

"A great friend of mine, whom you've got to meet. I think he's one you've been expecting!"

"Then, as I'm famished, I'll follow your lead."

The fire dojō was just now near the end of a demonstration, and as the last groups finished their sets, already coming out into the lobby was the instructor, Glurak, the black Charizard of Kalos. This was his first time at the Academy, though I'd met him before at Apollo's Games. Remember it's an honour we can't refuse when such a decorated veteran comes to teach: when his trainer retired just before the Games were founded, he became the first mon in Kalos to lead a team, and he was the first recipient of Apollo's dish. When he saw me he came over, and we shared the usual sort of formalities as we waited for the tea and wafels.

When they were satisfied about the happenings in Goldenrod, I asked what I'd missed in Castelia, especially whether any new mon had appeared who seemed exceptional in mind or skill. At this Glurak turned and said, "It's bad of me to say, I know, but there's one I think you'll be taken with. You'll forget all about the rest and need a jug of sake to clear your mind of him."

"Now you've interested me," I said, "but who is he? Not a trainer I

assume."

Glurak laughed and said, "Not human, no. Let's say he looks like I did once, but with double the fire on his tail and three times in his stomach."

"They might have warned me earlier," I said, "if you've brought none other than Glumanda here. Isn't he your own offspring? I heard he sends every checker's head spinning."

"This is why it's bad to say," he said, "even if it is true." And as the last of the dojo filed out, Glumanda the Charmander emerged.

Now a person without practice in this sort of thing, seeing a young mon like that, would notice he was a different colour than usual but otherwise perhaps not think much about him, hanging at the back as though he followed. Any champion could have told you, however, it was nothing like that; it seemed to me he was directing them, as if in Glurak's absence he took over the reins and lingered to check they were orderly. So felt the older ones as well, I thought, who made space for Glumanda, so that even the young ones knew to look after him.

Apollo leaned toward me and said, "Isn't he fine? They say he's a perfect six."

"I believe it," I said.

"One day he'll be a famous champion," he said, "and break all the records, and we won't be good enough to stand near." And I was inclined to believe it, being the opinion of both him and Glurak, two of the top Charizard in the world—certainly, I thought, this little Charmander was to front the next generation.

I leaned toward Glurak and said, "He may very well be the finest here. But you know, there are things statistics miss which still affect one's quality. Or is his mind as fit in that as the other?"

"Let me save you the worry," he said: "he's the sharpest little mon I know."

"Well," I said, "this is very fortunate, then. Still, why don't we examine him? The humans may have missed something, and it won't do not to help him if it's possible."

"Klar," he said. "And I think you'll find he's not only a champion in heart already, but has a battling genius that will leave me known as nothing but his forebear."

"That is rare," I said, "and that's not, if I may say, the sort of thing breeding passes on, though the name genius isn't a stranger to your own in articles. But why don't you call him over, and let this more common mind take a look at something of the sort it lacks, this genius?"

"You insult yourself," he said, laughing, "and before long you'll find he only wants your company, and that's your plan, isn't it?" Then he waved to

Glumanda, who had been watching, and the little Charmander started toward us. "And you should know, David," Glurak said, for it seemed already we were good friends and he was confiding in me, "Apollo's said so much about your qualities, that I'm eager now to see one of your famous discussions." I suppose this talk of Apollo's must have been going on for days, as all the newcomers I didn't recognise were gathering about us, now the word had spread that I was back from Goldenrod—Apollo stood beaming at my side as if to say he fetched me.

Glumanda had to stop more than once for others to let him through, so I had a moment to imagine what I'd say; but when he took his spot in front of me and Glurak said the head of the Academy was here to inspect his quality, and he looked right up into my eyes, suddenly I found myself at a loss for words. Here was a very young mon, summoned before the head of the whole Academy—a great and powerful psychic, they must have told him, with a habit of exposing minds in conversation—yet with such confidence as he looked up at me that I really felt it was he who judged, and rather I the novice. I remembered the day that Mewtwo came and impressed on me the importance of improving my mind, and felt quite insignificant, like every weakness returned. And so in part to cover this, for I'm not used to meeting such people, and in part because Apollo was holding my arm rather tightly, I shifted and leaned as though I was judging him, and eventually settled back as if I'd reached my conclusion.

"Is it what they say?" Glumanda said.

And I said it was, that he really appeared to be a perfect six, as the checkers would say, and he seemed to hear it without surprise, as though this sort of report was only common and he wasn't sure, in fact, whether I flattered him or not—then I knew how to proceed.

"But I'd close the Academy at once," I said, "if I couldn't do more than tell a rare mon like you the sort of thing he's heard before."

And he said, "What more? Do it, please."

"Now, Glumanda," I said, "should you do anything first unless you know it may help?"

"I guess not," he said. "But I'm sure you will help."

"Then I'm blessed to have your trust already," I said, "or do I only look soft and trustworthy?"

"You look like a legendary," he said, and Glurak laughed, and everyone was pleased that two mon they respected had met and become friends, and they looked left and right and felt warmer toward their neighbours. "It's like they say," Glumanda went on. "Everyone here's talked about you and they say you're the best one to help, and that all your writing on raising mon is the best. I'll do anything you say."

"Well," I said, "I'll endeavour to honour the image you've imagined and keep on writing rightly. Now when they say you're a perfect six, do you know what they're referring to? All mon have certain individual qualities, and humans have a method of judging them. In a Charmander, firstly they look at the tail, to check its fire, then the texture of the skin to check his health, then the points of the claws, and so on. They'll turn him over and come up with a list of numbers, and say that because of this and because of that, some Charmander is relatively superior to others, with a great vitality and fire, or another is decent all round. Some of the more elaborate ways of judging quality involve advanced technology, connecting a mon to a machine and using calculators to check him as he eats rare candies, and then quickly wiping out the effect with an anti-pill. But the thing to remember, Glumanda, is that these only measure the six physical qualities, the battling energies as they call them, and everything else goes unexamined. When they say, for instance, that the most important thing to success in battling is the bond between members of a team, they're right—and that's not a thing they can easily measure. For it would be strange, I think, if things like that could be graded at once on so little information, as if your whole nature could be put in a word like they do on the information papers. Two timid mon, say, or two adamant ones hardly behave identically: it's these hidden qualities that make the difference, and one important enough to decide between a mon who never battles versus one who becomes a champion. Or doesn't it seem that way to you?"

"No, you're right," he said.

"You agree, then," I said, "that even perfect-six Pokémon must have other qualities that vary?"

"They must," he said, "but what?"

Now at this I saw he was no longer fully confident in his qualities, thinking perhaps he wasn't perfect; but like a most excellent character he handled his uncertainty itself with confidence, not refusing to consider it, and I rejoiced that whatever his whole quality it could only be pretty fine. "Well, Glumanda," I said, "let's see if we can find them together. Because this doesn't seem some simple matter of checking claws and the like—I mean if not even human devices can spot them—but the end of some larger investigation. Now supposing we put the question of hidden qualities to the same humans who run the calculators, and they threw up their hands and said it's impossible, then, to ever know a mon's quality, I would say they missed the point. The thing is—and you correct me if this sounds outrageous—I'm convinced these qualities aren't set, but evolve over one's lifetime. For if they were already physically perfect with six thirty-ones in a good balance of effort, there wouldn't seem to be any point in training, and yet we all see as someone seriously practises something their ability for it keeps improving, even after

their body reaches its peak potential. It may be these mental qualities are partly affected by genetics, so some have an easier time than others, and this becomes part of the nature of quality; but the ability, I think, for any mind to improve is always there. But what improves it, you may ask? It can only be experience—I mean the sort one has by living, not the source of evolutionary energy. And here, as a psychic, I might help you more than some other mon or human, because I’ve seen glimpses of other experiences and have perhaps a different insight than the calculators. Now, I can’t draw a picture of your mind from just a moment’s watching any more than I could draw your shape from the six numbers. So what I suggest is this: I’ll ask you questions, and as you answer and exercise your mind, I’ll observe how it behaves, and see if I can’t at least come up with a phrase like those checkers for the hidden qualities and say whether they’re decent or altogether outstanding. But if you aren’t comfortable with this, that’s all right, and I’ll only say right now that you seem to have a fine mind as well, and leave it at that.”

When I finished this speech, Glurak stepped close to Glumanda, and leant in confidentially. “It’s a boon for you, Glum,” he said, “if David questions you for any length at all. He knows exactly what he’s doing.”

“I really don’t,” I said. “In fact if I told you everything I know for certain, this tea would still be hot at the end of it.”

“*Quatsch!* And if he judges your mind to be anything less than perfect he’ll be able to tell you at once how to improve it, and you’ll be perfect before long. For I’ll have you know, David,” he said, stepping back toward me, “it’s possible there’s never been a mon of higher quality, and this is the day you prove it.”

“Well, let’s not build me up as a bearer of bad news,” I said. “But it would be fitting if either of you was among the finest in mind in all the world of battling; I hear the Kalos breeding programme surpasses anything in Unova or Hoenn, with both male and female breeders able to pass their hidden abilities, and these are things connected to mind more than body, so it’s very possible he has your hidden qualities as well. So let’s examine your mind, Glumanda, through questioning, and I’ll see if I can’t at least coin a helpful phrase like those judges of quality. Tell me, do you believe you have a high quality, or do you think Glurak only speaks well of you in his pride?”

Now some people claim that the Charmander line doesn’t get flustered, but let me tell you they’ve never seen this little Glumanda sitting on the rug with his claws together, whose golden skin only made the pink blush more difficult to hide. At length he looked up to say he couldn’t answer. “I can’t,” he said, “because if I say I do that means I’m big-headed and a bad judge, but if I say I don’t, that’s the same as saying I’m bad quality, and that Glurak is a bad judge. So I don’t know.”

"Well, Glumanda," I said, "you're not far from it, because this is the just sort of answer we expect from one with good quality. I think being willing to doubt this way even if others may think you look indecisive is a quality any mind ought to cultivate, and I'm more inclined to say you have a fine mind when you say it. I think the trouble is that I asked what's really an impossible question. You see, we haven't even decided yet what quality itself is, and I asked if you had it in abundance, which is surely the opposite way about it. Don't you think?"

"Oh yes," he said. "And, different people say different things about what's good quality, or not, so I don't know."

I could see he was getting worried, thinking I was somehow already walking through his mind, and feeling more aware of Glurak and the others watching, so I made up another cup of tea and gave mine to him. "Well," I said, "as they say such different things, it's pretty clear they don't actually know, do they? So let's not worry about big-headedness or anything they say about high quality, at least not while we're investigating. Let's try and work out right now what it is, and if it seems right we'll instruct them later."

"All right," he said, and presently he relaxed again and that confidence, I saw, began to return.

"Tell me, Glumanda," I said, "as if you do have it, your opinion about it must be worth hearing ... what do you think good quality is?"

The Charmander had a good idea already, I think, but he pretended to think for a few moments because answering that sort of thing quickly would look rash. Finally he said good quality was to have a strength in many powers. "Because that's what every champion has," he said, "so it's got to be part at least."

I thought this very grand for such a young mon, hardly four months old, don't forget, and I said, "Perhaps you've struck it at once, you bright one. But let's investigate to be sure. Tell me, by powers you mean just the powers we've mentioned earlier, don't you? I mean like speed and strength, for the physical, or some capacity to focus or to understand things, for the mental. These are the kinds of things we mean by powers?"

"Yes, those."

"Would you say a mon of good quality, insofar as battling, ought to perform well in battle, more than any other?"

"Definitely."

"In all powers, or only some? Let's just examine a few. Is it completely good quality to have, say, a memory for facts and figures, but not to understand what they mean?"

"Oh, no."

"What about strength and sprinting? Is it all right to be able to carry an

Avalugg down a whole track without a sweat even though, in a race, you can barely keep up? Is that the highest quality?"

"That's silly. You have to be quick to win."

"But surely, Glumanda, you're not saying it's a Torchic or a Ninjask we're looking for, and that's the top of quality?"

"Those! There's no point being quick if you can't stick."

"Well, let's forget them, then—maybe with Glurak's instruction you know more about them than I do. But do we have a clearer thinking now? A mon of the highest quality, we say, will have all powers in abundance: they'll be the fastest, strongest, and most focused. And if they're a battler they'll enjoy the strongest bond with their leader and teammates, as that's from their nature and affinities as well, and surpass in all those powers that are useful in battle. Is this what we're saying?"

"*Genau*, that's it."

"Now, see if you don't know what I'm getting at here. I'll bet you've seen a few battles and know, as everyone does, that many mon can raise their energies in some respect in battle, to improve their strength or speed and so on. Some, however, can pass these changes onto others with a particular move. Do you know what I'm referring to?"

"Isn't it ... the Baton Pass?"

"Very good. But see what happens here. Suppose a very fast mon, one of the highest quality, acts to pass his effects to another, one not so perfect in the numbers, because of type advantage or the like making him better in the circumstance. Now having a very high quality, he's faster than his opponent, and takes his action first, passing on the effects he worked to build—and now, because he swapped out with the other so quickly, his opponent's attack lands on his teammate, who he was trying to help, who being weaker is knocked out at once and all the energies lost. This would be terrible for the team, wouldn't it?"

"It's very bad."

"Would the team have benefited more if the one with great quality were actually a little slower, and absorbed the first attack so that the next, swapping over, wasn't struck at all and survived to enact the great plan?"

"That would be better."

"So by being faster, in this circumstance, he didn't benefit the team, but rather harmed it."

"I suppose."

"Well, what about this ... Do you know there are certain moves that work better in some conditions, and poorly in others? I mean the sort of moves that are stronger if they come after their opponent releases energy in an attack, or the sort of defences that depend on one's weight and things like that. There's

even one that feeds on an animosity between a battler and team leader, to give a very powerful attack even though the harmony of the team is weak. Have you heard of it?"

"Yes. But it's wrong to use, they say."

"That's right. But you know also certain moves can lock out others, so that a battler can't use just any move. In this case, if one happens only to have these sorts of moves available, all their qualities—whether their speed, their skill training, or the bond they've worked to develop with their leader, all marks of good quality in our notion—what do you think they'll do for him?"

"He won't make it. It's really bad when that happens."

"But now we have a case where, if these are the only moves left that can win a battle, a battler with great speed or affection for his trainer or leader, the one with better qualities, actually would do worse than an unhappy, slow one?"

"I suppose."

"And didn't we say the battler ought to exceed in all powers, and moves like these—the ones that do better with a fond relationship or a difficult one, or with a great or little weight—isn't it impossible to have the greatest power in both, as one gets weaker as the other strengthens? Or I don't suppose we can weigh as much as a Spritzee and a Snorlax at the same time."

"It's not possible."

"Well, didn't we say the battler of highest quality has all the powers useful in battle, that is, both at once?"

"We did."

"So either the battler of highest quality in the world, since there must be one, isn't the one with a maximum of every power, or we're mistaken in thinking they'll always perform the best in battle. Now I think we could pick away at the second a bit, and say the one of highest quality will only perform best more than any other, and will sometimes be outperformed in some cases by even those of weaker quality. But I see you're more attached to that one, and that going over this has made you doubt the answer you gave, and now you'd like to say something else. Or am I reading wrongly?"

"No—you're right," he said.

"Well then," I said, "let's try again, and in examining quality don't think we must go too far from talk of powers all in a maximum, because I'd be surprised if it wasn't something close. Think carefully, Glumanda, and try and say what marks a mon of excellent quality."

He thought it over, I saw, appearing to think of how I'd put it and how these things affected battlers—not, however, quite as I'd imagined it. For quite soon he said, "I think the great champions, when you look, all really trust their leaders and know what they want. It's as they say: the bond between them is



the most important thing. So I think maybe the highest quality means having the strongest bond."

I could see Apollo didn't like this answer, and I nearly invited him into the conversation, but I kept my eye on Glumanda. "Well," I said, "this isn't Goldenrod Academy, but we do follow its method of teaching independence. But isn't it true there were many mon and trainers of high quality, the highest perhaps, before us?"

"There must have been," he said.

"And with all these trainers, still commanding almost every mon as Pokémon today, they give every direction in battle, don't they?"

"They do."

"So these Pokémon don't exercise complete judgement in battle, but leave some of it to their trainers."

"Yes."

"Maybe you've heard these words in the manifesto there—I think they're a bit obscure, to be honest—'the shackled champion is an egg.' Do you know what she means by that?"

"It ... it means until you decide for yourself you won't grow properly. It's better to make your own choices."

"Very good! But if she were here, I think she'd say there's a condition. She'd say so long as you're only following orders, you won't improve as much; but still, until you're more mature, it's sensible to follow one with wiser judgement. What do you think?"

"Oh, I agree."

"There's really nothing else to do. But imagine this: our hopeful champion, our mon of highest quality and bond who always trusts and follows his leader, finally and after many tribulations succeeds to win the championship. And no one doubts they have a wonderful bond, nor that this was instrumental in their victory. But supposing, for a minute, this champion didn't use a strong trust in direction—not to say they didn't trust or love, only that they didn't use it—but rather like the new style of team they trust in a mon's own judgement, do you suppose they might win a championship?"

"Well, yes."

"Or supposing they had a bond and trusted their leader's direction, but the leader, being of a worse quality, made slips and gave bad direction, the battle might be lost—even though the bond was just as strong. Do you see what I'm getting at?"

"I guess. It won't always work, then."

"Because in one case we don't require the bond to win, and in the other, it doesn't help because it's trust in bad direction. And both, we must admit, still need that they have some sort of other battling qualities to defeat much

stronger battlers—I mean aside from that old fable about the Ratatta who tricked Arceus. So you see a strong bond isn't the same as high quality, if the battler of high quality is bound to be victor—it's a good thing, of course, and surely a part of all-round quality, but not the mark of quality itself."

"I guess I didn't think it through," he said; but already he was thinking hard again, now recalling something, and seemed to forget I was listening. "But I just remembered something a don lizard told me. He said the best quality was something to do with genius. Do you think that's it?"

"You devil," I said, "you're going to feed me other answers and have me work it out myself, and judge my mind by some special quality I didn't detect, you rare one."

"Don't be hard on him," Glurak said—"you know he only wants your help." But it was obvious he was irritated with Glumanda, for letting slip so easily who had said the thing about genius.

"Please," Glumanda said, and he got up to clasp my toes. "Can't we investigate?"

You know I can't resist things like that. "Well," I said, "I don't like that you're plucking ideas now from strange lizards and testing those instead of your own, but I'll do as you ask. I wonder, though, whether the fellow who told you that meant quite what you think by it. Tell me, Glumanda, what is genius, do you think?"

And he said at once, as if he knew, "Genius is when a mon is better at something than anyone else."

"Better than anyone?" I said. "It sounds like this genius is pretty close to your first answer about powers. Or perhaps it's more different than that, and this is the connection we needed to find our notion of highest quality."

"Maybe that's it."

"Well, here's my thinking. I think genius is a very abused word, and people like to use it as a badge of quality or to explain one's exceptional ability in a thing, as if it was born in them and beyond all understanding, when really they got it by long and difficult practice—the sort of thing they'd never call genius. The trouble is we're as dark about what genius is as quality, it seems, with all different ideas about it. But you'd like us all here to investigate it and see if they aren't somehow connected?"

"Yes, do," he said, settling back again, and Apollo handed me another cup of tea and sat right beside me.

"All right," I said, taking a drink to marshal my thinking. "Let's try looking at it this way. Do you think it's possible, Glumanda, to have more than one genius in a thing? I mean two different people, both having a genius in, say, fire making, or mathematics. Is that possible?"

"It must be."

"So a genius might not be the very best at a thing, because of another, better, more experienced genius; but they'd still have a remarkable skill that deserves to be called genius?"

"That makes sense. That's a better way to put it."

"Now I've heard many people say, when someone asks if genius is a thing you can gain later or if it's something you are born with, that genius is and only is born. Have you heard anything like it?"

"Yes—you're born with it."

"But they also say genius is a great ability in something."

"They do."

"But hold on. Isn't there another way to get a great ability in something? I mean just the thing that people who take about genius avoid: long and hard practice. Don't we say that's bound to produce a great skill? Isn't that the whole idea behind training?"

"It wouldn't help otherwise."

"And would a genius in a thing—someone born with a great ability—actually be helpless in that very thing until they had at least some practice? I mean, say, a mon who was secretly a genius for writing human languages: if they were a wilder who never saw a human language in their life, they can't possibly have a great skill in it, can they?"

"There's no way."

"But I'm guessing the fellow who told you about genius said it was just that: a great ability you were born with."

"Something like that," he said. "Maybe he wasn't thinking the same way." And then he looked at Glurak.

Now all this time Glurak seemed to have a fire burning in him that a fine idea of quality and genius was being discussed and he couldn't join to defend it while Glumanda failed to say the proper things. So when Glumanda looked back as if to say his thinking was wrong, or perhaps wanting to be rescued, his irritation boiled over and for just a moment I was afraid I'd have to hold Apollo in between us. But the black Charizard only sniffed, and said to the little Charmander, "Disappointing, Glum, that if someone's advice doesn't help you, you assume it's a failing of them. It is not a fine quality to doubt your elders when they've pondered matters more than you."

"Well, don't you be too hard now, Glurak," I said. "In fact, I have an idea. Are you happy, Glumanda, to only listen to the conversation for a while? That way Glurak can take up the reins, since he knows much more about the matter. I can still watch how your mind follows the arguments and give a judgement, provided you listen closely."

"Yes, listen," said Glurak, looking at Glumanda, "and we'll all of us learn today." And Glumanda agreed, and looked between us and Glurak.

"I do hope there's some learning," I said, "for myself most of all, if it's not selfish to say, for I feel this is just the sort of thing I ought to know if I expect to be of any use at the Academy. One could harm a lot of people by thinking wrongly about such matters. Let's start, then—I'll ask questions, Glurak, and we'll see where understanding leads us. Do you agree that in all things people do, some people do them better than others?"

"How could anyone say no?" Glurak said.

"And when they complete a work, or perform an action, if they tend to do better than someone else it is because they have a greater ability, if nothing else outside affects them?"

"A greater ability, yes."

"Now anyone can gain at least some improvement in ability in a thing by some effort of practice or study. Or do you think these things don't change?"

"It would be odd if I said it didn't help."

"And training helps to the extent that it improves ability, and more training will foster more ability."

"Yes," he said, "but that's not what this fellow meant by genius."

"He didn't?" I said. "But, Glurak, don't you call genius an incredible ability in something?"

"It's not the same," he said, "and this is where all the confusion's affected you, as Glumanda might have explained if he were older and knew a bit more. There's an old saying we have in Kalos: great in deed, great in spirit. I'll tell you what this means. It's saying great things are done by great people, but not in effort, as you might suppose, or even ability. It's spirit, it says, that sets the greatest ones apart, and spirit is not like other qualities because nothing whatever can change it—and I take genius to be just the same. I say it's different from just a great ability in something; anyone can train and follow the well-worn path to mastery, but genius is something else—a completely different path one takes to the same end, a short-cut only certain people ever find and which can't be taught to others. This is why geniuses seem so precocious in a thing, especially when they are too young and inexperienced to have travelled the longer path. They find things along the way the others would never spot, and show what others call originality."

"Glurak," I said, "I know I'm being very dense, but I probably need to hear each part of that again and explained a bit further. My first instinct is to agree at once with such an original idea, but I must resist until I understand it better. You don't mind if I appear at first to question it, even if I really want to agree? If it's correct, such a definition of genius must, after all, stand up to any questioning."

"It will, you'll find."

"I gather you're saying genius is a different sort of ability from others,

those that come from mere practice. Tell me, how is it different, and how does it come about?"

"I say that genius is something you're born with, and it is a different way of thinking that no one who isn't born with it will ever understand. Someone who only learns the normal way will never acquire genius."

"But let me straighten this out a bit. Are you saying, now, that geniuses can be less effectual than non-geniuses in the thing for which they are a genius?"

"When did I ever say that?"

"Well, remember the young and inexperienced genius who stood out as precocious? I take it by that you mean they hadn't yet gone through all the normal training."

"Yes—what about it?"

"Because I wonder if this doesn't force a lot of geniuses—if there are many at all—into being worse off than the common ones like us. Let me be clearer what I'm saying. You know Apollo here has a good friend, a Golduck called Jeanmarie, whom everyone says has a wonderful ability with ice. Her attacks are among the most powerful you'll ever see, even though she lacks the affinities of ice types in handling ice, what makes it second nature to them, so that they say if anyone has a genius for ice, it's her. But—and maybe Apollo can back this up—she's told me before she doesn't like making ice in the same way, because it's difficult to her, and she prefers her own method. Is this the sort of thing she's told you, Apollo?"

"Exactly that," Apollo said. "And she's told me even if she could do it both ways, she'd still prefer her own of lifting up water and turning that to ice, rather than generating ice itself, because it feels more natural, and there's more volume as well."

"Maybe we should have involved Apollo earlier," I said. "He seems to have had access to some secrets of genius, if he's not secretly one himself. But what I'm saying, Glurak, is that while Jeanmarie has a great ability producing ice in her way, she seems to lack it making ice the normal way, compared to an experienced ice-type."

"I've only met her once," said Glurak. "If she says this herself I cannot contradict her."

"She's a case, then, of a genius who, in the common way of producing ice, is less effectual than a non-genius."

"But her genius isn't for the regular sort of ice—it's not ranking the same thing. She's an unusual case."

"Like every genius, perhaps. Well, let's imagine she was, then—say some stone in Kalos was discovered that gave her a new water-ice-type form. I suppose she'd find she had an increased affinity with ice that made everything involving ice better, both by her way of genius and by the normal way. She'd

find the common way easier than it was, but also her own way of genius, since she's now more familiar with handling it in general. Does this seem like it would be the case?"

"Well, my Dragonbreath at any rate improves with the stone."

"So her special way would still be more powerful, as it was better before and both would improve similarly. Do you think she'd bother, then, with a weaker way of producing ice?"

"It would be odd if she did."

"So if she doesn't spend as much time practising ice the normal way, and she hasn't a genius for it, isn't it likely she'll have a weaker technical understanding of it than a pure ice-type practitioner? And isn't this a result of her genius?"

"Now hold it," he said, putting up his hand, "and listen. If this is where you're taking my words then let me correct myself now and save you the trouble, because I won't accept that a genius who's not at some disadvantage like Jeanmarie will have a weaker technical skill. You see, there's another part I didn't mention before—I'll tell you now. I say genius is like a path of learning toward some end that is different from another; but just like a master who's completed all the normal training can look back and consider it simple, so too a genius who reaches that same mastery by another way can look back and see the whole normal path, in fact having seen glimpses of it from the higher road, a path invisible from the lower one, and so he'd observe everything in it and think it's trivial. Your Golduck can't do this because she's a water type and certain things are obscured on that ground, so there's an extra barrier in understanding; but if she were an ice-type as well, having already reached a mastery of ice at such a level, I say she'd find all the normal ways simple, even if she hadn't gone through years of remedial training. Having then a mastery of not just her own sort of ice but the common one as well, she's bound to have a greater technical skill of the normal generation, not a lesser one, than any other ice type. And the different path she followed is impossible to teach or learn, as if a genius tries to teach a non-genius how to think like he does, it will only be like he sees with different senses and every common point of understanding is missing, with the student always looking back to the normal way and getting no distance down the path at all; or, even if he did somehow reach the end of it, his understanding would be abstract and flimsy and helping not the slightest bit. So I think, having said this, we should start again from this definition of genius as a thing apart from and improving one's ability, and agree that by the way it writes off nearly everything else and gives the greatest possible sort of ability, this is more or less what it is to be of the highest quality. Maybe that's the note that was missing when you said you felt like accepting it at once, and you'll do it now."

"Glurak," I said, "it's become obvious you have a very clear idea of genius, and this clearness, I expect, will spread and fill us all in every way: I still hope at some point to catch it. It's just that I'm feeling more and more raw as you speak, and it seems more likely than ever that genius is a thing we'll never get at ourselves—for I can't believe it's not a good thing—nor help Glumanda profit from it if he really has it. But even if, as you suggest, there's no hope for us non-geniuses, we ought to continue—and please don't think I'm trying to tear genius down if we criticise it in some way, as if I were jealous, if our conclusions only appear that way. You won't be mad if I keep thinking it over?"

"If it's necessary to continue the discussion, do," he said.

"Thank you," I said, and as I asked, Apollo was pleased to reheat my tea. "It seems to me, whatever's the case, genius is a kind of understanding. This is just the sort of thing you've said, isn't it?"

"Yes—an understanding of a different kind of thinking," he said.

"You'll forgive me if I'm ill at ease thinking about other forms of thinking, understanding they're outside understanding. But let's take something one of us understands thoroughly. Producing fire, of course, is down to accessing a kind of energy. Mon who can't do it are those who can't command the energies; even mon who can aren't as capable as those who have the type, whose affinity makes it easier. Is this correct so far?"

"*Genau.*"

"Now a genius of fire, who might not even be a fire type, as we say, a sort of counterpart to Jeanmarie—if he's doing it a different way that others find unusual, isn't it likely he's using a different physical mechanism? I don't want to embarrass myself in this company with talk of fire, but you understand: the fire's not produced from the same source energy exactly, say from electricity or dragon's fire, just as Jeanmarie's ice is born of water. Is that fair also?"

"I expect that's it."

"And it's possible as well to have a genius whose method is more or less conventional—I mean those who don't have a special source like Jeanmarie but who generate ice in the normal way, yet do it with a skill on the order of genius."

"I expect it is possible, yes, and is still genius—a much swifter and far-seeing journey down that path, as if any grass or barriers didn't affect them."

"That's a fair way to put it. Still, no one, I think you'll agree, becomes at once a genius in one method just because they become a genius in another—it may be they have a genius in both incidentally, but not necessarily. For looking at other kinds of genius this seems to be the case: a painter known for genius may be less sensational in a different style, and a virtuoso in one musical instrument may have no mind at all for another. Is this how it seems to you?"

"Very well, but what about it?"

"Only that we're trying to cast light on genius and find out what it is precisely, and how it relates to quality—and isn't this interesting? For it doesn't seem that there's such a thing as genius all on its own, but that it must be of a thing—a genius for ice or for art. And further this means means not for ice in general, but some form of producing and handling it, or not for art in general, but in some particular style, and so on. We said genius was a thing apart from and improving some ability, and we see it only exists in relation to an ability, providing a different and improved understanding of it—but what, we have yet to find out, is this kind of thing that genius is? For presumably it's not a skill itself, some skill of other skills."

"This is your trouble, David," he said, folding his arms, "that you keep cutting up and examining an issue and dismiss what's directly in front of you as too obvious! All these abilities and talents are of things, but genius itself is of abilities themselves: a sort of talent for a talent. And I know you don't like that—you think you might learn any skill, a psychic like you, and it ought to be possible to learn genius, when in truth genius is unlearnable."

"Oh, Glurak," I said, pouring another cup, "you really overestimate my self-identity. If you knew how timid and small I felt inside, how aware at every moment of my own ignorance and inadequacies relative to the confident ones about me, you wouldn't say such hard things. All being psychic does is underline all that and make it inescapable. So given that I'm already not a genius, all I can hope for is purging my own ignorance about it—and wouldn't you be delighted, Glurak, if it should turn out you were wrong, and perhaps we could pin down its nature and find genius is after all a thing we can discover and cultivate in ourselves? Certainly that would help even the ones who are already a genius, and especially Glumanda here to find the secret when he's still so young."

"Now you're just appealing to my hopes for him, you talker."

"I'm appealing to my own, that with him I may yet improve and learn, and be something more than terribly ignorant."

"Ja, ja. Let's continue our examination, then."

"Danke, Glurak. What was it, again, you said genius was? I suspect you'd like to tell us clearly one more time."

"Yes, to clear up all this confusion. I say genius, in terms of your talk earlier, is a quality of other qualities, like a talent for a talent, that enhances and brings them far outside the bounds of normally attainable experience, and this genius is a thing that is inborn. And this is precisely why it leads to top quality, as it makes the crucial difference in the most gifted mon."

"I see. We're claiming something about the nature of quality itself, then: after all our talk of good quality, we've done what really should have come first



—saying that these skills or talents or attributes are qualities themselves, and to have good quality is to have them in some sort of abundance. This is what's nested in our notion of genius, isn't it?"

"Yes, doesn't it seem that way to you?"

"Well, you gather I'm never sure of anything. By genius, then, we mean another kind of quality enhancing some faculty like fire production, or painting, or mathematics, and so on."

"Yes—all the sorts we discussed and all the ones we didn't, too."

"And what about a genius for something mundane? Might we have a genius, say, for going unnoticed in a crowd, or for appearing to lack genius?"

"Aren't those pretty simple? Those are things just about anyone can do well."

"But none so well, you could say, than those who have a genius for it."

"I suppose not."

"Might there be such a thing as a genius for lacking genius? I don't mean that in a way that contradicts itself: I mean a genius for lacking any other sort of genius. If a genius in any quality is possible, and to lack a quality is a quality itself—I mean in the sense that for something to lack a certain quality is a quality of that thing—and genius is a quality, isn't it possible to have a genius in the quality of lacking genius?"

"But what use is a thing like that? I'm pretty sure almost everyone would have it. Don't say you're trying to make yourself feel better by having at least that kind of genius!"

"It's just a flourish in our examination, my friend, to excite the young ones. To continue probing the inglorious depths of genius before returning to the bright and sweet, it's possible, then, that a genius can be in not just a quality itself but the absence of a quality. For example, there might be an ice type who has a genius for not producing fire, in that unlike other ice types who can at least imagine it, he cannot even do that, as his own understanding of fire—possibly even through a finer intuitive understanding of its nature than other ice types have—makes it more or less inconceivable, so that in not producing fire he is better than them. We say the inability to produce fire is a quality, and one has a genius in that for not producing it best of all. What do you think?"

"Go on—tell me where you're taking this."

"Only as far as that; for now we have a thing, genius, which is a quality of other qualities or absence of qualities, and is itself a part of highest quality. Genius, then, through all the useless or negative sorts about the lack of something or something mundane, might in fact be very common, since it's only the positive ones providing a benefit that we notice and rightly honour. What I'm curious to know, Glurak, is if there's anything else like this we know about, or if genius is the only thing that works in this way, because it seems to

me very odd if it is."

"What do you mean?"

"Would you say a talent in something must involve an understanding in that thing?"

"Naturally, yes."

"And understanding involves knowing something, or learning something and then knowing it, and in either case involves thinking about that thing."

"How could it be an understanding otherwise?"

"But now, consider this. Is there such a thing as a knowledge of other kinds of knowledge, or lacks of knowledge, that does not itself involve knowing about what those knowledges or lacks of knowledge are about?"

"I'm not sure I follow."

"Well, suppose we didn't know what fire and ice were, that we had never seen them in our lives and had no concept of them. Could we know anything about fire and ice production, then, or conceive of not producing them?"

"No, it's impossible, if we didn't know about fire, to know about their production."

"What about learning? Can we learn about different kinds of learning and a lack of learning, without as part of it learning what those kinds of learning are about?"

"That'd be just a gibberish, then, not really learning anything."

"And thinking? Can we think about different kinds of thinking, or not thinking, without thinking about the different thoughts that sort those modes of thinking apart? Or must we have thought about them all before?"

"It's like the others too—unless you count thinking as a thing you do without thinking about it, as very young humans do before they're what they call conscious."

"Now that's a large topic we'd better avoid today, defining consciousness as thinking of thinking. All I'm saying is, if understanding involves either thinking or learning or knowing, and all of these need further thinking or knowledge of a thing to think or know about that thing, is it very likely understanding is any different? I mean if there's such a thing as an understanding of other forms of understanding, and of a lack of understanding, that does not itself involve understanding what those understandings are about."

"It's all the same."

"But we said talent must involve an understanding in what it's about."

"We did."

"And genius was a talent for a talent."

"Yes."

"So it seems impossible, then, that our genius could be this: a quality of

other qualities or lack of qualities, without itself involving the object of the qualities it applies to but only the quality itself—like a talent for understanding fire production as a notion, but which does not involve an understanding of fire. And so our genius cannot be just a quality of another quality, but is partially that other quality itself—that which is the talent or understanding of a thing like ice itself.

“I ... didn’t forbid that, did I?”

“But, you strange fellow, weren’t we trying to clear up all confusion, and now we find our genius isn’t all a second-order quality of others but must be partially the first as well? But look—never mind me. This isn’t cause to abandon our definition; perhaps now you better understand my confusion, but you know, my friend, if I were you I wouldn’t trust my judgement on this when all the rest was so questionable. Let’s amend our definition of genius and keep investigating.”

“Yes, let’s do that.”

“Genius, we say, involves some understanding of a quality, and a part of that is understanding of the thing of that quality itself, but all this is bundled up in genius as it was. Very well—we’ve loosened up genius and allowed more into it, which really makes it more substantial. So genius is about a quality or perhaps more than one, or an absence of qualities, which is really a quality itself—and all these qualities have to be of something, don’t they? Because the nearest thing to a quality not of a thing itself, we seem to argue, is genius, which is most of all qualities of other qualities themselves and least of what they’re about.”

“Right, of course.”

“Oh, but now we’ve another problem, Glurak! Now I wish I hadn’t spoken so much earlier.”

“Why? What is it?”

“We agreed it was possible to have a genius for a lack of genius, didn’t we? We said it wasn’t a contradiction at the time because it was a genius for lacking any other kind of genius.”

“Yes, and it was an odd thing to say.”

“And you were right to think that. Because tell me, is it possible to understand the lack of knowledge of a thing without first knowing that there is such a thing? Isn’t it necessary to have an idea of it first, to know you lack it?”

“It must be.”

“But suppose we have a genius in lacking knowledge—a sort of anti-genius, who knows nothing whatever about anything, as I confess to feeling many times a day. If he has a genius in lacking knowledge, he must understand what it is to lack knowledge, and hence what knowledge is and the lacking of it from non-lacking, and now, we find, he knows things after all.”

"What about it? That's not the case we argued before."

"But, Glurak, we know that in any case genius involves understanding. So to be a genius for lacking genius, he has to at least have some understanding of each possible avenue of genius in order to understand he lacks them, which are more or less unlimited in number, and hence some understanding of each thing. And now to lack a genius in anything becomes the same as knowing something about everything, including all the forms of understanding limited to original geniuses—which is just the long way around saying that having a genius for a lack of genius involves understanding genius, and in all its forms."

"I don't know, David. This seems like a rather dippy process to me. At any rate I don't mind if it turns out there's no such thing as a genius of nothing."

"You'll mind this next part."

"What's that?"

"You see the problem runs away from here, and with it our solution seems to follow. Would you say it's possible to know whether someone is a genius or not, or even better, for that someone to know it themselves?"

"Surely it's possible."

"But for someone to know he's a genius in a thing, he has to have an idea of that thing."

"Obviously."

"And people are born with genius, we say?"

"I believe so, at any rate."

"We're saying, then, that anyone who has a genius is born knowing, on account of that genius, something about what it's in? Maybe that could work with some things—we're fortunate as men to be born with language already, unlike humans, and all sorts of knowledge to understand things—but is this what we're saying is the case for anything, that a genius in, say, playing the violin is born already knowing what it is?"

"But that's not what I meant, David. You're thinking into things too far—I mean they're born, in some sense, knowing they've this faculty, and when they first grip a violin, I imagine, they'll find themselves drawn to it and come to understand its working in a special way."

"Perhaps that's it—why don't we take this as another emendation? Then we won't be distracted from the argument. You see, Glurak, those were just the preliminary difficulties I saw when I had my little outburst then. What's left is the real barrier, what I don't see any way through."

*"Ach, nicht schon wieder ... What is it?"*

"I'm quite as upset it's escaping us again, Glurak, but we have to follow the argument faithfully. We say genius is a quality of other qualities, like a facility for understanding a thing, and to the extent at least that we need to know what that understanding is about, it also involves a knowledge of the thing itself, but

not as much. This is what we said, isn't it?"

"That's what we decided."

"To be clearer for the rest of our audience—and for my own sake—we're saying there are three levels associated with a thing. First, there's the thing itself, say fire; second, there's the first and most direct art or faculty involving that thing, say fire manipulation or production, which involves an understanding of that fire; and third, there's what we call genius, a faculty of that faculty, a second level of understanding which looks at both fire and fire manipulation together—at least some understanding of fire itself or it wouldn't make sense, but mostly it's of the art of fire. Am I misrepresenting it at all?"

"No, this is how we put it, in short."

"Now, does an understanding of a thing contain any knowledge which is not of that thing?"

"What do you mean?"

"Like this. When a Charameleon produces fire by the conventional method, he presumably thinks about the medium, what it feels like, what he may do with it, how to generate it, and so on. When he's actually producing it—when he's engaged in fire production itself—is there any part of his understanding that is not connected to fire, or is it all of fire?"

"I suppose it's all of fire."

"And when Jeanmarie produces ice by her method, making it from water—production itself, then, the first understanding and not the genius—she's presumably doing the same, with all understanding connected with one or both of two sources, water and ice. Is this right?"

"I expect, if it's just the production in both, it's so."

"Now if she has a genius for producing ice from water, that is, an understanding of an understanding, where the first understanding is of the production of ice from water, we say all the knowledge tied up in that second understanding that is not of ice or water itself is of her special method of production."

"It seems so."

"But all the knowledge that is a part of that method, as when Jeanmarie is at work on the field, is of ice or water or both."

"Naturally."

"Then her genius, in all its understanding, only handles either knowledge of ice or water itself or production of ice from water, which involves no knowledge outside ice or water. All the knowledge involved in genius for a thing, it seems, ultimately finds its meaning in that thing itself, if we only carry on the argument."

"Well, what about it? Wasn't that really an obvious conclusion all along?"

"But, you astonishing one, this doesn't bother you at all? Because now it

seems there's not a bit of understanding in genius that is strictly outside the first understanding, this understanding the thing itself, and the whole second level collapses—this that was meant to be a quality of a quality giving an understanding of an understanding, something very different from our conventional qualities. Instead it turns out to be just another understanding of the first sort—a special one, no doubt, but like the sort brought about by practice; and now I can't help but fear we're back to the beginning, with no other idea as to what genius is to explain why it keeps escaping us."

"But it isn't possible," he said. "This can't be our conclusion—genius is not a thing like practice!"

"I don't believe it is either," I said, "but from the properties of a quality of a quality, as we defined genius to be, it doesn't seem possible to demonstrate, at least not without a better mind than mine on the job. Now I think you gather—where's the tea?—if I'm supposed to be the font of all fair reasoning, we're in a very sorry condition. For myself, I never trust my first or even second conclusion on a matter, for, I think, I usually lack the minimum insight to decide. What we really need is one who has such insight, some genius of knowledge in general who can steer us toward the correct definitions; but lacking that, as this all springs from your notion of genius, Glurak, perhaps you've a better vein of ideas how to find it."

Now when he heard this I knew Glurak's first concern, as always, would be how to guide Glumanda and not disappoint him, who all the while was listening and trying to follow the argument and, I'm happy to say, doing better than most. Just as you often get people who, if it's expected of them, appear to head off strongly in some direction when really they haven't the slightest hint what to do next, the idea being this will hopefully land on the correct course, Glurak began to reiterate the points, so that he might escape suspicion from the others and keep Glumanda's admiration. But as the line began to run out, and as all his talking was about to show up as a stall that made him look clueless about how to proceed, then I took up the conversation again and said, "Do you know what, Glurak? I think all your clarifying here has shown up the strength of what was said, and that what I said last has to be a lot of nonsense, or at any rate not a thing to dissuade us. So why don't we leave all this talk of a quality of qualities aside. That's easier to spot than as a quality mixed in with other qualities, but perhaps genius doesn't deign to be so simple—let's not lose resolve if now we have to find a needle in the long grass, or we'll lose the grip entirely and a great thing will escape us. Your recalling genius as a separate path to understanding brings to mind a point that bothered me earlier, and I think it may just break our impasse." And as Glurak heartily agreed, and would be less inclined, I thought, to argue against anything I said so long as I carried it away, I said, "Tell me, Glurak, do you think it is possible to know a

thing without at some time learning it?"

"Yes, David," he said—"that's a simple question. All mon are born with an ability to understand speech and certain concepts; they exceed humans in that respect. We can't say it's a thing learned from hearing in the egg, because even newly hatched wilders can understand forms of speech they never could have encountered. And to understand a thing one must have knowledge of it, so they must have been born with knowledge and didn't learn it at any time."

"Very well, then," I said. "A little while ago you said genius was like another path toward a thing, following its course until attaining mastery, from which the normal path is clear in its entirety."

"You mean to get at how a born genius would have a special knowledge of things, don't you, like the one with the violin? We already considered that: genius can produce a greater knowledge later and not at the time, we said."

"I hope you can save that foresight, Glurak, and use it to make the leap where it will save our whole argument—I'm afraid that's not what I was thinking. It's not so much whether someone can know something without learning it that worries me, as we agree on that, but whether someone who knows a thing without learning it will know what he knows or does not know, without that process of learning to make it clear."

"But how could he not know what he knows, if he knows it?"

"Well, I'll tell you now what's been distracting me. When you said genius was like another path to understanding, some of those around us saw a river and a forest trail, others a long route with roads and tall grasses, both easier and harder paths, as fit their experiences. For myself, I imagined Castelia City covered in a low-lying fog, which settled thick around the people on the streets so they could hardly see a thing, but with the taller buildings sticking through it. Now usually when I'm going out I take a route somewhat higher than the streets, and so I imagined a genius being different like that—not to pretend I am one, of course, just that a genius would behave differently, and this higher path represents their removal from the common mode of thinking. Now if one set off to travel from Skyarrow Bridge to Viola Tower, the shrouded walker, travelling the streets, would be aware of things passing and the course changing, but wouldn't see clearly what was coming up. The flying genius, on the other hand, would have a collection of landmarks for guidance, and some idea always where to go and find the tower swiftly; and if at any moment a lost walker called out to find the way, the flier might be able to call down and suggest this way or that because from above the pattern of the streets was clear. And in similar style I imagine a genius, as part of having a different sort of understanding, having also an outer perspective on the normal way of learning that did not just appear at the very end but gave an insight all the while. After all, you'd expect a genius who isn't yet a master to still have some idea of what

was going on if they landed on the road somewhere in the middle—like a mon on an elevated forest path, we could say, seeing the slow-moving river below. Does this all seem sensible to you?”

“If what you’re saying is that a genius perceives both paths and so builds up a better understanding, then yes—that’s far better than before. Perhaps this is genius, then?”

“Well, don’t be so easily fond of it—we’ve seen how bad my sense of things is, and there was more I imagined to it. Once either reached the top of the tower, I thought, they could look back and make out the path they took from spotting landmarks they passed; and in this, I think, the genius doesn’t stand out so distinctly. In fact, while the genius would know all about the city in general, and the buildings and rooftops, things never seen from the ground and only barely visible or impossible to see from the tower’s vantage, so too the walker would have a greater knowledge of the look of things from the ground, and the store fronts and doorways and so on, all of which, if they didn’t land nearby, the genius misses from the fog. Now such a genius, being clever about it, might assemble all the towers in a map and collate the insights of many different walkers, and so work out their paths and get a better understand of the ground below without ever landing, like those scientists who learn the evolutionary history of mon by reconstructed fossils. But this sort of thing only gets one so far, and requires really more effort than to examine personally. If, on the other hand, our genius avoided all such examination of the popular paths and only stuck to familiar skies, their knowledge of Castelia City would be a sort of gross outline, so that even a simple question of where’s the closest wafel shop couldn’t be answered, and that’s really an extreme condition. They would never know where the walkers walked and what were the empty or peopled paths, nor much at all about the city beneath the fog, just as the walkers know little of that above it. What do you think? Does all this make any sense?”

“Some sort of it, yes. But still the genius knows more, in any case, as he saw every building clearly, and that’s the great bulk of the city or, in this analogy, whatever art genius applies to.”

“That’s very likely—certainly the genius will pick up more at once and get about quicker. But consider this. Can a genius, who only knows the city from a view high up and the reports of the walkers encountered, can this genius know the look on the streets very adequately? There may be barriers, or subway tunnels, all sorts of things affecting the walkers’ paths that just don’t make it into the scattered reports. One who only flies above a city might be said to know the city like no other, might in fact identify their place on the ground from cues that no one else would notice, but this is not the same experience as one who knows it by walking unless the genius stops to accompany the



walkers, dipping constantly below the fog, and constraining to the common view. Or am I only rambling here, Glurak, and making no sense at all?"

"Well, it's not as bad as you say, I think, but I understand you. He won't see everything—but still, he'll know more."

"We've agreed, however, my friend, that while a genius's path may lead to greater knowledge, they aren't born with more than others, which only comes in through learning?"

"Yes, very well."

"And one can hardly know whether they know a thing without knowing what it is, can they?"

"Hardly."

"So the genius, we find, who takes this different path and comes to know every tower familiarly, may have some idea of the surface ground but, short of landing and walking itself, will not know it in any detail, not like the walkers."

"I suppose not."

"The genius, then, if someone emerges at the tower and claims to be a genius from a flying route, might by asking about specific rooftops work out if the other really did make it the same way or whether they were a pretender—one perhaps who knew nothing of the city but hired a taxi and wasn't really a student at the Academy. Our genius would figure it out at once, is that right?"

"*Genau.*"

"If, on the other hand, the arrival only claimed to come by some route on the ground, some path like the others, could the genius be sure by questioning whether they were lying?"

"Well ... he'd have some clue, surely."

"Perhaps, if one claimed to have passed through an obvious barrier. If an arrival couldn't answer where the most obvious buildings or streets were they'd show up more or less at once. But remember, the genius, too, cannot answer many basic questions about the city—a walker might actually suspect them of pretending. Will they be very good at spotting pretenders?"

"No, it seems not."

"Well now, what are we saying, Glurak? For it seems that, on words alone at least, a genius mon can't distinguish a walker from a surreptitious taxi-taker, nor true knowledge of a thing from fakery, apart from the most obvious cases. Our genius, it emerges, has really a worse power of judgement than the common ones, with their conventional ground-level learning."

"It's— Well, I don't know."

"What's that? Don't hesitate to speak, if you have a thought."

"Well, I was just wondering if we hadn't built our analogy wrongly. We assumed a fog ..."

"Which, to the genius, might appear transparent?"

"Something like that, yes. That could be the power of genius, to see through it."

"It's an attractive notion, certainly. But remember this analogy is for understanding in general, where a total lack of experience prevents even a genius from understanding—otherwise this would be free knowledge, and earlier we said that genius didn't provide new knowledge without learning, though it perhaps helped in getting it. In this case to get the same understanding the genius must look toward the ground and study it, and land to touch things and examine them thoroughly, and with judgement this is probably faster than a non-genius learning but it's not a free knowledge in any way. And perhaps this conventional way is inferior, and the genius's understanding exceeds enormously, as we may imagine; but the genius won't palpably know this, or in what ways it exceeds, without also study on the ground as well, correct?"

"Well, this isn't how I imagined it at all. But hearing you describe it I don't know how to contradict."

"It's not to contradict things, Glurak, only follow our reasoning if I haven't abused it. But let's take a real example, then: our old friend Jeanmarie, who learned to make ice by a flying method and not the common crawling mode of production. Supposing she never tried once to produce it the normal way, would she nonetheless have an informed opinion as to which she found easier or more effective? Or are we saying this sort of judgement stays shrouded in snow?"

"It seems more likely the latter."

"In truth, of course, she has some experience—isn't that right, Apollo?" I turned to him. "Jeanie's not a complete innocent to the common mode of ice, is she?"

"She's not innocent at all," said Apollo, laughing—"not in any dragon's view! She can pull an Ice Beam without water; it's just not as powerful, is all, since she lacks both the typing and the volume. She jokes about it, really, having a reputation for something she lacks a true affinity for, and she finds the normal way difficult and dull."

"Interesting," I said. "I'm guessing at some point she made it her business to harangue an ice type into teaching her, some other genius."

"You mean her trainer did!" he said, laughing again. "Yes, she's tried a few times; they never got very far, in either direction, both trying to learn the other's method. Let's just say there's no new school of ice she's cracked open, not yet at least. Anyway she says she'd look a fool, teaching ice types—that's the only reason she hasn't come to the academies, you know."

"Well," I said, "it's a shame we're without her genius. But her judgement, we can only assume, is better than ours: she doesn't feel she can teach them, not

knowing their way of doing it better than the non-genius masters. Experience in battle and training, I suppose, informs her that the water-ice method suits her better, and the pure-ice suits the rest. And Apollo, just out of curiosity ... how long would you say Jeanmarie trained, to reach this command of ice?"

"You don't want to know," he said, looking gravely across the young Pokémon because, if I know him, he wanted to seem extravagant. "I don't want to discourage our young audience with thoughts of all the work before them. Let's just say she's put in her hours, and had many years to do it."

"Thank you," I said, turning back to Glurak. "Well, this was just an anecdote, what one genius finds in her field and what she knows she doesn't know, having shown it up with learning."

"*Sicher*," said Glurak, "but what are you getting at? What are you seeing?"

"Well," I said, "nothing very much—only that our idea of genius, as seems always to happen when I examine it, turns into something weaker than we thought. For our genius, it seems, though she may dominate her own corner of something as her genius directly pertains, she isn't guaranteed to mastery in any other part of it, and genius alone won't sort out the mediocre from the great: learning still must enter to make the difference. But then what great benefit does genius provide? For now instead of short-cutting the need for normal learning and effort, the genius, if she wants to exercise good judgement in battle or succeed in art or science or whatever she's interested in and so achieve the highest quality, must still study and understand the normal methods as well. Genius may help along with this; but then, so may a strong ethic, or circumstance."

"Yes, of course, but it's surely still a great benefit to be a genius!"

"I do hope so; it's no fuzz off my back as I know I'm not a genius, but for Glumanda's sake we can't assume it isn't useful. So I think we should continue—but, you know, I'm starting to have a sickening doubt."

"What do you mean?"

"Well ... we agreed a genius has a different perspective on things. And this is not likely to harm any learning of the normal method, but to help, so that they would master the normal path in a fraction of the time it took the non-genius, and at the end understand much more, having knowledge of several paths, and this can only be a strong benefit. Is this the sort of benefit we say genius provides, an aid to learning?"

"Yes, and it will help enormously."

"An incredible boon, you'd say? Because you know, I'm starting to see that odd things emerge if this is true, and maybe it has the same problem as we thought we just avoided. I don't think this sort of thing, as we've put it, is well said."

"Why not?"

"Should I even continue, Glurak? It seems everything I try to get at falls apart, and a thing of the highest quality, genius, only becomes something useless and rotten. And this isn't the sort of thing young mon need to hear, when they ought to look forward with high hopes of quality. I should just shut up before my doubts infect all of them like a Pokéerus, and doubles their rate of confusion forever."

"*Nichts da*," he said, stepping over and taking my arm, and Apollo took the chance to hold the other as if they would restrain me. "You'll talk, or we'll all be saying David was so tired from his trip to Goldenrod that he couldn't carry on a conversation and failed to benefit his students."

"Well," I said, "when you put it like that it's even worse than I said. But I'll try and finish it for you, and I hope you won't all be disheartened."

"Yes," Glurak said, and released me. "We'll forgive any answer we don't like, so long as you finish it properly."

"All right then," I said. "My worry was that, after all this talk, we've been trying to see how great genius may be when, to answer our question of quality, it might have been clear from the start it was either so rare it was hardly worth admitting as a factor, or so relatively weak as to hardly benefit. For as to rarity, how many geniuses, do you think, are in the very top ranks of battlers? We have those like Jeanmarie, whose genius shows up easily, but what about the great champions in history? People don't point to genius to explain their success, but to great experience and perseverance and physical qualities, and to having good leaders and trainers as well. If genius were common, or very useful, the top ranks of every field would be full up with geniuses every moment, each standing like a colossus over the rest; but the reality, in battling and all other spheres, is that the figures are always changing, and those who persist longer are universally those with a great ethic—precisely what's most useful to the non-genius. You see, then, I'm worried if genius will really be the quality of all qualities that marks them as the best, and whether we haven't been distracted from the real issue this whole time."

"But it can't possibly hurt, can it? And what does it matter anyway if the rest don't think they're geniuses? Didn't we agree that a genius can't spot a non-genius from a genius until they learn the normal way? Surely the average sort, who never comes close to genius, will be even more hopeless at spotting their special quality. It could be they do have genius, and it only isn't obvious."

"You're right, of course—this is why I need you guiding me in conversation. But let's be clear again what we mean by their special quality. Will a battler with, say, a genius for ice or fire, have a genius insofar as that particular energy but for other energies be like the rest, having the same faculty for learning as a non-genius?"

"Yes, if they lack a genius for those."

"And so on for every talent and quality? Do we say a genius may be a genius in one or perhaps two qualities, and otherwise is normal?"

"Not normal overall, but normal in those other ways, yes."

"And to battle well presumably involves more than just one talent, but ties together all sorts of things, including communication, anticipation, and all the mental qualities we say are part of it. Hardly anyone is born with a genius for even a fraction of these, let alone all of them."

"Well, there are certainly those who excel across the board. But a genius for only one or two, yes."

"I suppose if they did exist, this hypothetical one with a universal genius for all things would be someone really exceptional, and no one would ever doubt they were the best and of the very highest quality and that they would succeed in all things."

"*Jawohl*—they'd succeed entirely."

"I suppose the only reason we don't see a genius for many things like this together is that a genius for even one thing is rare, isn't it?"

"Very rare, we're assuming."

"So rare, in fact, even an actual genius isn't likely to find it very useful."

"What? How do you mean? If they've got a genius, they have that power, whether others do or not."

"But, my strange friend, didn't we just say that they were otherwise normal? But let me be clearer. You know, of course, such ranks of quality tend to fall on a spread: there are a few who are really exceptional; quite a lot with middling potential, whether by balanced strengths and weaknesses or average ability throughout; and a few who again have a rough time with genetics and chances, those who rank all zeroes or ones against the thirty-ones you know about. Now a genius with a genius for only one or two things, though they may turn out unparalleled in something like fire production or understanding of their leader and so on, will still have, on average, an average ability in the rest—those marked out by genius forming just a tiny sample with about the same distribution of other qualities. Then only a fraction of geniuses in the world, a crumb of a slice, would have the double gifts of both genius in some thing and high qualities elsewhere—like our own Jeanmarie. Isn't this how it must fall, according to the numbers?"

"If you're saying that to have high physical qualities is rare, and to have genius is rare, and so having both at once is extremely so, then I follow, yes."

"And the hidden qualities too, don't forget—that's another factor on top of the thirty-ones. Suppose, then, we took a clutch of non-geniuses with excellent battling qualities—I mean those skimmed off the very top of the crowd, the sort close to perfect in every characteristic. They're rare, but not so rare, perhaps, as even any sort of genius. Now their ability will be much inferior to the genius of

a thing in that thing; but in every other respect, they're likely to exceed substantially. Tell me, who is more likely to succeed in battle, if it came to that: the average genius, or the exceptional non-genius?"

"It depends on the circumstances, David, how useful the genius's power is. But from what you've said, I suppose it's more likely the all-rounder wins."

"Now don't we say a genius is naturally inclined toward their quality? I mean a prodigy of music, for example, is inclined from a young age to play music, and so on. Isn't this how it's reported?"

"Apparently so, in mon and humans."

"So it's likely a genius in fire production, without other direction, will incline toward practising fire."

"Yes."

"And so less of the other qualities? If they have only so much time in training, and they focus on fire, won't they get less of it?"

"Somewhat."

"So in these other qualities, in which they are normal, they tend to have less training than one without a genius for fire."

"Perhaps."

"We expect such a genius to perform worse in those things than even the perfectly average non-genius, then."

"I suppose."

"So the possession of genius, in a way, may have made the genius worse in these than otherwise might have been."

"Yes, but it's still a great gift, David."

"I think so too. But nonetheless it seems not to have made a better battler, has it?"

"Apparently not."

"And didn't we say right at the start that a mon of highest quality would be the one who performed best in battle, or at any rate performed better?"

"That's what was said."

"But now it seems genius doesn't help here, and even if it turned out we found it in those of the highest quality it cannot be what high quality is."

"But we just agreed now it might extend their quality beyond anyone!"

"What's that, Glurak? You don't mean the super-genius we mentioned in passing, the one with a genius for all things, whom everyone else would surely think incomprehensible? You're saying that this impossible Pokémon is the peak of quality we set this whole investigation after?"

"That's exactly what I mean—he'd be like a god among mon, and challenge Arceus himself."

"You devil," I said, putting down my tea—"you planned this all along, didn't you? You suggested I speak to Glumanda, and now you've lead our

definition to this, putting such a standard on quality he could never reach it, and now you'll say it's a lesson for him to work hard because he'll never succeed just riding on genius. Or do you think that such universal geniuses are so common there is likely to be even one, and he could hide in the form of this little Charmander? I just assumed all this time we were talking qualities of mere mortal men; but if godhood was your standard, I might have contacted Mewtwo and started you on a proper investigation."

"But David," he said, "why can't a single genius be enough? What if it's a genius in a very useful thing like intelligence, or persuading people, so that it helps many other skills? Why can't we have a genius for battling in general?"

"Well, those would certainly be powerful," I said, "but isn't this precisely what we mean by a non-singular genius? For battling is such a large sphere there's no one skill that eliminates a need for excellence in others to succeed. Perhaps there's been a genius in, say, some sort of music who turned out to be a genius in mathematics as well; but a genius for intelligence and thinking in general or for battling in any circumstance is only a genius for many different things, and so many different geniuses. And the same for persuasion without oratory, which would involve a genius for understanding many different kinds of people and thinking, if it isn't going to be some sort of pandering to others and appearing to be wise without a ground in true understanding."

"Well, David," said Glurak, "if you're going to say a genius in more than one thing is too rare to be possible, how can I continue? It seems with you no one can possibly argue that genius is the mark of quality."

"There you go," I said, "and now I doubt myself all over again, when you put it like that, and when I say genius may be a part of high quality but not the thing itself, I sound ridiculous and people think I'm trying to use oratory on them and lead the issue as I pretended you were earlier. I think the problem is that I have a reputation as someone who can carry out a good discussion, as if I had a genius for it, when I only claim to practise; they look at me and see Mewtwo, who really is exceptional, and suppose I have his qualities when we could hardly be more different. So our search may have turned out differently, and genius rightly vaunted, if only you weren't saddled with a useless searcher."

"But there's a bright side to this, if we're right, little Glumanda, which is that you don't have to worry about whether you have a genius or not: the quality to exceed most genius, it seems, already exists in those who lack it, provided they've a certain measure of quality and, more importantly, they cultivate it properly. In that case, you're in a fine position, not just for having outstanding physical qualities but also a very fine teacher in Glurak who'll train you, as well as any benefit this Academy can offer. Still, it seems I've failed in my meaning to measure your quality of mind, as in the end we couldn't even pin down what quality was. Now I'm not going to patronise you

by saying you look decent; but through all this I was following your thinking and saw you did have a good handle on what we said, even though you're young and we were talking obscurely. In my judgement this puts you somewhere very high in mental quality, and if I was not being careful because all this is unclear to me, I would call you outstanding in that respect as well. And since I know my own quality of mind is not outstanding, if what I've been saying seems ridiculous to you and full of errors, I think you should only ignore it, and if you discern that you have any kind of genius you should cultivate it as a definite way to improve your quality. Because if you should really have genius and yet not develop it because of what we've said here, I'd consider that the biggest tragedy I can imagine."

And Glumanda said, "If you were reading my mind the same time you said all that, I think you're better than you say. If neither of you can figure out genius I'm sure I can't either—but even if you can't, I know I want you as my teacher as well, so I can learn from everything you say."

"That's a fine idea, Glum," said Glurak. "We came here to train and we'll stay as long as it's a benefit—that's how it works here."

"But we can't stay too long," Glumanda said. "The New League starts soon. We'll have to train every day, and discuss things every chance we get."

"It's not a problem," said Glurak, "not if I've a say in it."

"Now hold on," I said, "you're saying it's to be my first priority to train you, over everything else at the Academy?"

"Yes," said Glumanda, looking up at me. "And if you don't agree Glurak is a very powerful battler and he'll persuade you." And at this Glurak took my arm again, and Apollo took the other.

"Well," I said, "this is what they call being very forward."

"Call it what you like," said Glurak; "you won't escape us while we're at the Academy."

"Very well," I said—"after breakfast."