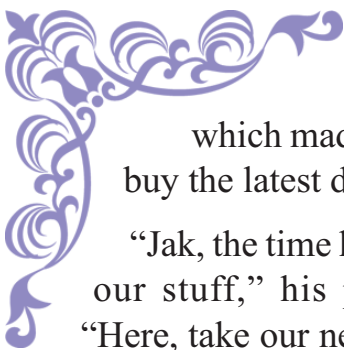


**A Fiscal Fairy Tale**

*By Tom Brown*

# *Jak And The Bean Counter*

Jak and his mother were poor — well, maybe not *poor*; they were just badly overextended. It wasn't the overpriced apartment they shared, or their trendy minivan, or even the booming, eye-busting home entertainment center. It's just that one too many tickets to the N.B.A. playoffs (and plane tickets and hotel) can really strain one's line. Jak and his mother ultimately found themselves with *zero* available on



their credit card,  
which made it exceedingly hard to  
buy the latest digital video.

“Jak, the time has come to sell some of  
our stuff,” his poor mother moaned.  
“Here, take our new preamplifier to town

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*I wonder if anyone holds a  
patent on those beans?*

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and see what you can get for it. Maybe we  
can exchange it for a couple of filets.”

Jak was beside himself but had to concede  
the need. He, too, couldn't see any other way  
to replenish their dwindling supply of frozen  
twice-baked potatoes. So, off he went.

On the way to town, he encountered a  
strange man. “I'll give you five magic beans  
for your preamp,” the wizened oldster  
offered. “Do you know how many that is?”

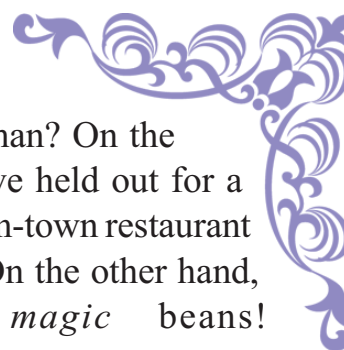
Jak took affront. “Sure,” he shot back, “it's  
five more beans than I now have.” The elder  
paused, struck by the youth's, well..., youth.

Jak headed home feeling exceedingly  
smug. “Ha! That old geezer didn't even ask  
me to sign a bill of sale! Boy, if that preamp  
blows when he hooks it up, that'll just be  
too bad!”

Mother felt otherwise.

“Five lousy beans — *for a brand-new  
preamp?* Are you DENSE? It'll be no filet  
and double-baked potatoes for you  
tonight. Go to your suite.”

Jak was miffed but he knew his  
mother's punishment was moot;  
the fridge was bare.



Hmmm, *did* he cut a  
bad deal with the old man? On the  
one hand, he might have held out for a  
gift certificate to a fine in-town restaurant  
along with the beans. On the other hand,  
hey, they were *magic* beans!  
“Ahhhhhhhhh...”

So Jak tossed the beans out the apartment  
window; they landed in some rich loam  
coincidentally roto-tilled by another tenant  
that same afternoon. Then Jak snoozed.

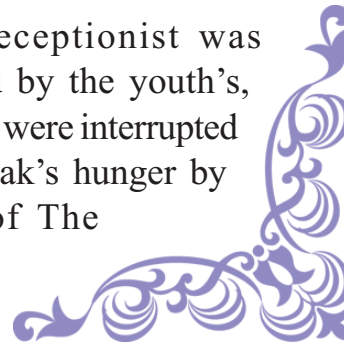
When he awoke the next morning, there  
was a mammoth beanstalk growing outside  
his bedroom window, growing all the way  
into the clouds. “I wonder if anyone holds a  
patent on those beans?” he thought to  
himself. However, there wasn't time for  
speculation; the beanstalk (and its unknown  
destination) beckoned. With mom asleep,  
Jak climbed. And climbed.

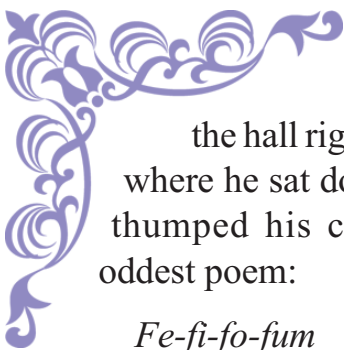
And climbed.

He eventually found himself standing in  
front of one heck of a corporate  
headquarters. “Huge,” he thought, not being  
one to embellish the obvious. In he went,  
only to find that “huge” understated things.

The entrance to HQ led Jak to a  
receptionist desk immense and daunting.  
The receptionist towered over Jak as, say,  
Jak towered over an ant. “What do *you*  
want?” she shrieked. “Got any espresso?  
Perhaps an éclair?” he replied.

Not amused, the receptionist was  
nonetheless challenged by the youth's,  
well..., appetite. Yet they were interrupted  
in their discussion of Jak's hunger by  
the thudding noise of The  
Giant, who huffed past





Jak and plodded down the hall right into the CEO's office, where he sat down in the CEO's chair, thumped his chest, and chanted the oddest poem:

*Fe-fi-fo-fum*

*Glad I'm not an ordinary one!*

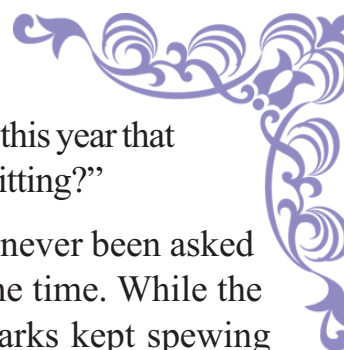
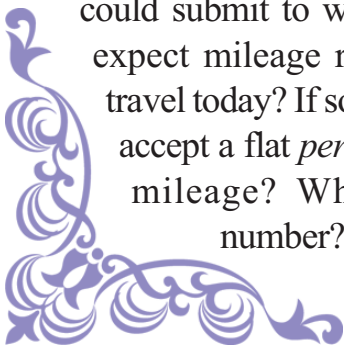
*I know numbers up and down:*

*That's why I command this town!*

Jak, however, slipped past the receptionist (who was on the phone trying to find a nearby source for eclairs) and introduced himself to The Giant. "Where'd you come from?" the CEO bellowed.

"Well, I know you won't believe this, but I climbed up here on a beanstalk," Jak yelled, as loud as he could, noting that The Giant had to cup his hand over his ear to pick up Jak's tiny voice. What Jak said mattered little. The Giant took the gist of his response and just kept firing more questions.

"How high did you climb? How many branches did you actually engage? How many others could climb that same beanstalk in an hour? What could we charge each climber? Are there excessive maintenance costs attached to the beanstalk? How was this number calculated? How many other climbing beanstalks are there? How many others hold the rights to them? What's the lowest bid we could submit to win these rights? Do you expect mileage reimbursement for your travel today? If so, how much? Would you accept a flat *per diem* instead of variable mileage? What is your employee number? What are we paying you



now? To the penny, what is the smallest raise this year that would keep you from quitting?"

Jak was agog. He had never been asked so many questions at one time. While the fusillade of question marks kept spewing from The Giant's mouth, Jak noticed that

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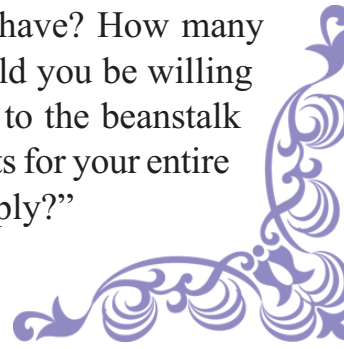
*...why, The Giant even oversaw the design for the new virtual reality helmets.*

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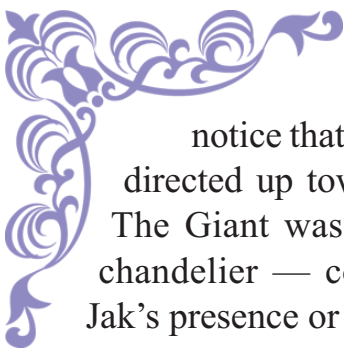
the wall was ornamented with hats, *all kinds of hats*. Then he saw framed documents on the wall, revealing that The Giant was chief of the company which made all the hats for all the people down below. Dress hats, baseball hats, beanies, all the hats at all the amusement parks — why, The Giant even oversaw the design for the new virtual reality helmets.

The Giant, however, was oblivious to Jak's spying, and just kept asking. "How much return could we yield if we controlled the beanstalk only five years — then spun it off with no tie-backs? *With* tie-backs? After aggressive amortization, would the tax write-offs, plus projected cash flow, achieve the minimum corporate hurdle rates for business profit?

"Are you demanding a finder's fee for bringing this idea to the company? How many relatives do you have? How many hats do they own? Would you be willing to relinquish all claims to the beanstalk for a year's supply of hats for your entire family? Two years' supply?"







Jak couldn't help but notice that the questions were now directed up toward the ceiling, where The Giant was staring at a twinkling chandelier — completely oblivious to Jak's presence or movements.

“What if we trimmed every other branch off the beanstalk? How much would we save in annual upkeep versus the costs of maintaining those extra leaves? Okay, okay... now what if we chopped off *two* of every three leaves? Oh, yessssssssss... now the numbers are starting to work for me!

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*Okay, okay... now what if we chopped off two of every three leaves?*

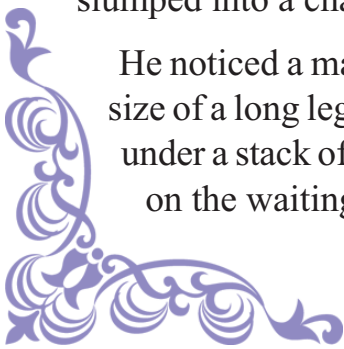
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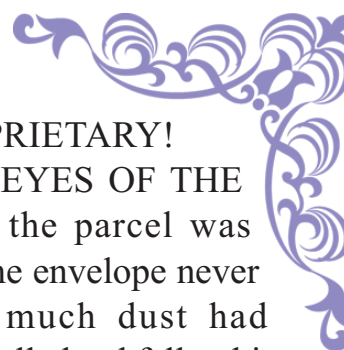
“Maybe *this* will reverse our current profit slide!”

Jak ambled back to the receptionist's area, overhearing her debate with the bakery's policy that it would simply not deliver only *one* éclair — no matter who the buyer was. Jak, pretending not to take any notice, took in every word. “But this is The Giant's office!”

Quickly tiring of the give-and-take over the estimated costs of having the éclair delivered by the baker, sent by taxi, or picked up by the receptionist herself, Jak slumped into a chair.



He noticed a manila envelope about the size of a long legal pad sticking out from under a stack of magazines and journals on the waiting room table.



The envelope was starkly labeled “PROPRIETARY! URGENT! FOR THE EYES OF THE GIANT ONLY!” Yet the parcel was unopened; the seal of the envelope never broken. In fact, so much dust had accumulated on it, a small cloud fell to his feet as Jak accessed the contents: a single sheet of letterhead.

It was a legal document of some sort, with a strange entreaty from the founder of the hat company to his yet-to-be-named successor:

“The person who signs below will own outright all assets of this firm, but by his or her signature he or she must pledge forever to honor our workers as if they were family *and* to recite each day that the best way to earn our customers' business is by winning their hearts.”

Though Jak took an “Incomplete” in his second semester of Business Law, he was nonetheless savvy enough to know what he had to do — *and fast*: “I gotta find a notary!”

Jak scurried back to his beanstalk, rappelling down the vine with The Giant in hot pursuit. “Hey,” he bellowed, “would you sign this non-compete?”



The End



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