

ne morning in 852 CE, a man climbed to the top of a minaret of a large mosque in Cordoba. Why can't I?" So, for several years, Firnas worked on improving his design. Finally, his new flying machine was ready. The wings were made of silk and eagle feathers. This time, the nearly 70-year-old Firnas climbed to the top of a mountain in Cordoba that looked out over the city. Once again there was an audience who had gathered to watch him. Firnas was nervous. Were the wings strong enough to carry his weight? Would he really fly? He checked the wings carefully for the last time. Then he looked up at the sky, took a deep breath and leapt into the air. There was a moment's silence and then a cry went up, "He's flying!" He was already well known as a poet, astronomer, musician, engineer, scientist and inventor. 10 The man was Abbas Ibn Firnas and he was attempting to fly. The crowd that had gathered below were eagerly watching and waiting to see what would happen. The minaret shone in the sun and the crowd fell silent as the man stretched open his arms and prepared to jump. Shouted one man in the crowd, and true enough, Firnas began to fall quickly to the ground like a bird with 25 an injured wing. However, as he fell, his cloak spread out like a parachute and slowed his fall. Firnas realised, too late, that birds use their tails to help them land safely. He had already tried to fly over the desert, and hoped to fly successfully in Cordoba. The crowd held its breath as Firnas 20 launched himself into the air. He flapped his arms frantically up and down. Firnas 30 was shaken but not badly hurt. Minutes passed and still he flew – high above the ground, high above the people as cheering below. He was wearing a cloak with pieces of wood attached. The crowd rushed to help him. 'Next time I will fly,' he said. Firnas was a brave man and, despite this failed attempt, he was determined to try again. Firnas was flying. He was soaring like a bird! A full ten minutes went by, but suddenly, Firnas felt himself falling. He landed heavily on the ground. 'He's falling!' Birds can fly