

WADBOROUGH FOREST



John-John Markstedt

This novel is entirely a work of fiction. The names, characters and incidents portrayed in it are the product of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or events or localities is entirely coincidental.

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PREFACE

This is the first out of two external revisions. So—although, I'd appreciate comments regarding grammatical errors, sentence structures and formulations—the focus is intended to be on the consistency of the story, the flow of the writing, the entertainment to the reader, and, most notably, the quality and feasibility of the book.

There will be, if this first one goes well, a second revision, where the focus will solely be on the language.

I've made an effort use British spelling and British words where there are multiple possibilities. E.g. brook over creek, autumn over fall, rubbish over trash.

Notably I've chosen to use whilst and amongst as the conjunction, preposition, adverb, and while solely for the verb. Similarly, I've chosen to use the somewhat increasingly archaic verb form of but.

This story is a satire; therefore, it touches on many ideas and references that is not entirely self contained within this book. It is my wish that the story is in itself self contained(in the same way Animal farm is self contained, albeit very boring if no association to the real world is allowed). However, much of the fun(or value) in reading it comes with the understanding of symbolism and the mockery within it. As part of this first revision, I've noted every outside reference(those that are

intentional at least) made in this work. I do not want to rely on obscure knowledge of trivia however, and those references should not harm the experience of reading—if so, they should be removed. Please note every reference you are able to find—even the ones that are almost too obvious. I’ve divided every outside reference in to three categories.

Category tier one, must be noted. Contains very few but obvious references that I think should be known by 80% of the populace aged 18 or over. They are also imperative for the tale itself. Failing to understand these would make a really dull read.

Category tier two, may be noted. Missing to draw these connections should not interfere with the cohesiveness of the tale; they should be passed over without the reader feeling a sense of missing out. Understanding none of them would probably diminish the reading experience. Most references are in this category.

Category tier three, unlikely noted. This category contains all obscure references. They must be completely passed over with no hiccup, i.e. you’d never guess it’s an reference if not told so. Some of these require some deduction, and I hope that even if they’re found, It’s not obvious that I put it

there intentionally.

Perhaps unnecessary remark 1: the chapter quotes are carefully picked and are all relevant to the chapter's text.

Perhaps unnecessary remark 2: the character names are carefully picked and are all relevant to the story(albeit some more than others).

Chapters:

- 1: Intro
- 2: Build up
- 3: Build up
- 4: Pay off
- 5: Neither
- 6: Pay off
- 7: Build up
- 8: Build up
- 9: Pay off
- 10: Neither
- 11: Neither
- 12: Pay off

Chapter 1

c3: Darwin quote, hints to a tertiary theme of the book: [REDACTED].

c3: published in 1859, it fits perfect being ruffly 10 years before la belle epoque.

cX: I'm a fan of Darwin's work

c2: 'Natural checks and balances': a very darwinian sentence.

c3: Locks of gold — Goldilock: both: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Goldilocks_ec

and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Circumstellar_habitable_zone

c3: The beautiful era: La Belle Époque: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belle_Époque

chapter 2

c2: inertia: tertiary theme [REDACTED]

c1: Increase in specialization, very well known phenomena.
Although I'd like to attribute to Adam Smith.

<https://www.investopedia.com/ask/answers/040615/what-are-economic-impacts-specialization.asp>

c1: Aorta, (arteriole), allegory(or metaphor, but I don't think so(?)) Circulatory system -> Logistics.

c2: Aequitus: Equality(Roman, but masculine form.) Also [REDACTED]

c3: Chief Chipmunk -> Adams's Chief Rabbit

c2: Br'er Rabbit, read Brother Rabbit.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Br%27er_Rabbit, also c3 reference to Adams's El-ahrairah(the multiple references to Adams should make this clear). Also Anansi and folklore. I've included it also due to the widespread censorship of him. It's absolutely ridiculous.

c2: Chipmunks' enterprise -> cooperative, it's a thing by itself:

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cooperative>

But also relates to unionization.

c2: Winter Fund -> private health insurance

c2: Ongenþeow: King of Svea. Egil Vendelcrow, makes sense since he is a [REDACTED], also literally means 'Against Slavery' which is also very fitting with the introduction of Br'er Rabbit in the exact same sentence.

c1: Glade of Representatives -> House of Representatives or

any form of Parliamentary structure.

c2: Pietus: [REDACTED](Roman, but masculine form.) Also [REDACTED]

c2: Veritas: Truth(Roman, true feminine form.) Also [REDACTED]

c1: Moles speaking Old English, also spins on tertiary theme [REDACTED]

Chapter 3

c1: Aritole, continuation.

c1: screw nuts -> gold.

c2: Death is the mother of beauty. Wallace Stevens Sunday Morning.

c2: Death is the mother, reciprocal altruism, screw nuts 'of other beauty', transcend death. All of same theme.

c2: Markets with everything available, woodpecker 'commercial interest', describing a Laissez-faire free market system. Or 'Capitalism'.

c2: Chapter quote, said 'emergencies' happens in the chapter.

c2: Having Hayek quoted tells quite a lot by itself.

c2: Heap and Stack, CS related.

c1: State of emergency.

Chapter 4

c1: Glade of Representatives, a republic 'democratic' institution

c1: Twig -> speaker, or chairman

c2: Eaglewing -> Franklin D. Roosevelt

c2: Eaglewing disabled wing can't fly, Roosevelt couldn't walk.

c2: Eaglewing's speech, Franklin's inaugural speech. Two paraphrased quotes, many uses of war like analogies to fighting the economy.

c2: Hroðulf -> [REDACTED]

c2: "Incentives trump ethics", said by Steven Eisman at a debate at Oxford about the '08 crash. Named Mark Baum in the Big Short, played by Steve Carell.

c1: Leaves -> fiat currency.

c2: Aesop -> It's a fable, Aesop being the father of fables.

c1: Stoats -> police or military, enforcing by force.

c2: invisible hand, very well known reference to a free economy, Adam Smith. Some Smith as previously referenced.

c3: laws of physics, rules described by Darwin, invisible hand, irreversible: [REDACTED] Chapter 5

Characters:

Chapter 2:

Kraerion(main, introduced), Aequitus(main, introduced), Br'er Rabbit(mentioned), Ongenþeow(mentioned), Pietus(support), Veritas(support), Cinnamon(mentioned)

Chapter 3:

Kraerion(main), Redrill(main, introduced), Greyhead(support, introduced), Spinestack(support)

Chapter 4:

Kraerion(support), Eaglewing(main, introduced), Hroðulf(main, introduced), Αίσωπος(main, introduced), Aequitus(mentioned), Pietus(mentioned), Br'er Rabbit(support)

Chapter 5:

Kraerion(main), Cinnamon(main, introduced), Hroðulf(main)

Chapter 6:

Kraerion(support), Eaglewing(main), Αίσωπος(main), Aequitus(main), Br'er Rabbit(main), Snowball(support)

Main:

Kraerion(2, 3, 4, 5, 6)

Aequitus(2, 6)

Pietus(2)

Veritas(2, 5)

Cinnamon(5)

Br'er Rabbit(4, 6)

Eaglewing(4, 6)

Hroðulf(4, 5)

Αίσωπος(4, 6)

Enjoy!

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“Some people talk to animals. Not many listen though.
That’s the problem.”

- A.A Milne



DEORDINATION

"Man selects only for his own good; Nature only for that of the being which she tends."

- Charles Darwin

The Wadborough forest is a peculiar collection of trees; it's shaped by an improbable set of circumstances, setting the preconditions of this unlikely tale you're about to read.

The forest has stood where it now stands for millennia, but surrounded by other trees and part of a much larger forest: it did not crave attention, nor require distinction by name. With the ever increasing sophistication—and population growth—of the main British isle, most trees were cut down for timber, and the woodlands were slowly turned to grazed meadows and tiled farmlands. The trees near the little village of Wadborough would most certainly meet the same fate, if it wasn't for a growing posh ritual of high British society. The Duke of Worcestershire—lest he lose pace with his peers—began importing pheasants to be hunted by his guests and his more distinguished subjects. He thus proclaimed that the trees near the Wadborough village would never be cut down, and ever solely be allocated to the hunting of game. These trees became

the Wadborough forest—standing tall and alone in the wild ocean of fields.

Pheasants are clumsy birds—used to roam the Asian steps undisturbed by predators—and found it difficult to survive in the forest. To protect their precious game: the Duke’s men drove, over the years, all major predators out of the region. The red fox was first to go (to the chickens’ rejoice) as they seemed almost offended by the ease of hunting pheasants. The weasel family: the stoat, the wolverine, and the mink; followed shortly thereafter. The badgers were also hunted, but they soon understood that the pheasants were off limit and began to ignore the foreign bird; thus, a few badgers remained alive. As with all human interventions: they’re seldom without unforeseen consequences; the rodent population boomed; which, incidentally attracted more birds of prey to the region. These birds—mostly consisting of various hawks and species of owls—did not danger the life of pheasants; however, they possessed another threat entirely. The ornithologists of the time had a fierce reputation of enacting conservation legislation; the rumor of the birds broad prevalence reached the group and soon they took interest in the forest. The Duke thus had a choice: spare the birds and risk the ornithologists’ influence, or kill them and risk the outbreak of rodents; he chose the latter. The rodents did explode in numbers, but they did not carry disease with them, nor overrun the neighbouring fields and the Wadborough village. As a matter of fact—the rodents did not at all conform to the behaviours so often attributed to them. No one could explain why.

Eventually the time of serfdom met its end; and the society slowly morphed into something approaching the appearance of a representative democracy. Ownership of land trans-

ferred from lords and ladies to the establish municipalities, and so too did the ownership of the Wadborough forest. Although hunting remains a tradition of the well-off, its clientele slowly shifted to in time mostly consist of ordinary rural villagers. Innovations in agriculture and growing manufacturing greatly shifted the populace from rural to urban. The growing cities lost touch with the rural arts. Hunting—especially when performed as sport as it is with game—became viewed as cruel and barbaric. The urban population greatly outnumbered its rural counterpart in voting power; activists rallied and tallied support—the Bill of The Wildlife Preservation Act soon passed through the county of Worcestershire; which, incidentally holds the legislative power in Wadborough. The Act contained many a paragraph, but only one concerned the Hunters of Wadborough.

‘A person shall not hunt game birds including but not limited to the Common Pheasant, Grouse, Goose, Turkey, Duck or Pigeon by means of firearm, or any form of projectile, unless bread in captivity under permission from a state licensed breeder (§95b). A person guilty of offense under this Act shall be liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding 5,000 pound sterling.’

- §68, The Wildlife Preservation Act

The Act angered the villagers; “what does city folk know of hunting!?” could be heard at the local drinking holes. Wild conspiracies was liberally spread along with wild guesses on the probabilities of actually getting caught. To the villagers dismay, the city clerks had foreseen their unwillingness to abide by the new law and were ruthlessly prepared to hand out many a salted fine during the first year of the bill’s passing.

And so it came to be that the forest of Wadborough was free of both predator and man alike—undisturbed by the natural checks and balances that keeps the order of things. Even the locks of gold couldn't compare to the beautiful era that would follow.



DOUBT

“I have never made but one prayer to God, a very short one: Oh Lord, make my enemies ridiculous. And God granted it.”

- Voltaire

“One day is today—”, Kraerion whispered to himself as his tired eyes slowly widened to an open state. The chimpunk had woke—like all mornings—to a loud unpleasant banging sound, echoing around the run outside the comforts of his small burrow. The sound carried with it the news of a new day, and with it: the message that all who wanted a day’s pay ought to drag themselves to the great hall, the Aorta, presently. The frowsty air this deep underground usually made him rise as soon as he woke—to seek a more pleasant ambiance—but today he lingered in thoughts.

“One day is today.”, he repeated, to reassure himself and still his doubts, as if repeating the words would make them more true. The power of inertia is strong; Kraerion full well knew of its insidious nature: that tomorrow and never were but equal measurements of eternity. He had longed—even dreamed—for this day to come for as long as he could remem-

ber; so he wondered why—now when the day was finally here—he had so suddenly lost his strong convictions.

Chipmunks may be genetically poised for a life underground, but not the chipmunk Kraerion. Even as a little kitten, he had loathed their exists: the damp runs and burrows, the second-hand air, the ever present darkness, and about everything else underground just by association. He hated—as only an adolescent can hate—that which most of his peers called home. Instead, he wished for a strong wind in his fur, sunlight that uncovered all the beauty that is Nature, but most of all the chaotic buzzing of life above, that so contrasts the routines down below. He yearned to run the branches of trees, not the ever branching network of runs dug in the forest soil. His father had many a time japed that his son was born more a squirrel than chipmunk—and he had not been wrong. When he was younger, he had stated that one day he was going to live amongst the trees, but received feedback which would otherwise only be appropriate after a well executed joke.

Kraerion eventually mustered the will to rise from his moss coated bed. He went over to a corner of his burrow and began scratching away at the dirt.

”Good, still here.”, he confirmed anxiously, as he felt the steel of seven steel screw-nuts—which would surely appear beautiful in the sunlight—laying before him. He covered them up again and left his burrow into the run, and followed its twists and turns until it widened into a great hall: the Aorta. It was dug under a great willow; its massive network of roots—intertwined with the walls and ceiling—supported the weight of the dirt and kept it from caving in.

Since the time of Man, the forest had steadily increased its

economic output. One of the contributing factors was the increased specialization of its inhabitants. Whilst many a specie have some certain advantage in the gathering of some specific type of feed, none is as great a carrier than that of the chipmunk. In their elastic cheeks, they are able to carry loads of feed—and other goods for that matter—efficiently around the forest; their small size and great numbers gave the operation a granularity to it, which made it difficult for larger and stronger animals like the roebuck to compete. When other animals began to hire them for their service, they began to expand their network of tunnels and runs to cover whole forest—connecting all its major hubs. Therefor—every morning—the chipmunks gathered in the Aorta to share news and plan the day ahead.

Most chipmunks were already present when Kraerion entered.

“One day is today.”, he thought again, as he headed towards his usual spot in the front. But he hesitated suddenly and reconsidered; instead, he decided to begin his new life with breaking this habit and found a place in the back.

The murmur of conversation disappeared in an instance when an old chipmunk appeared in the Aorta. His name was Aequitus and was the chief chipmunk, gray spots of fur spoke of his age, yet his features were easy on the eye and he bore his age proudly. Everyone knew the chief and saw him as something akin to a revered hero. When he was but a kitten, he’d taken interest in the chipmunks’ livelihood and noticed irregularities in their billings; after some further deliberation with his friend Br’er Rabbit, he realized that they could likely double their prices with little to no churn. He put forth the motion to the then chief chipmunk, who surprisingly listened

to the youngster and approved it. When their income subsequently increased, he was very vocal about its occurrence, and made it impossible for the chief chipmunk not to pass it forward to the chipmunks' daily wage.

When Aequitus a few years later became unanimously chosen as the next chief, he took it a step further. He transformed the chipmunks' enterprise to a sort of cooperative, with by-laws dictating that a fixed percentage of the total revenue would be earmarked for workers' wages. As well as other rules limiting the influence of his own office—not only for himself but setting the precedence for his eventual replacements.

Together with Br'er Rabbit—who had by then become the implicit leader of the rabbits—and with the help of the by then Glade of Representatives Twig Ongenpeow, he started the Winter Fund. A collective fund that functions similar to that of human insurance: its members contribute feed during the spring, summer, and autumn as a premium; members that find themselves short during the winter may then make a claim and receive feed to sustain them until winter's end.

A cynic human might proclaim the flaw in this scheme, that an animal might take advantage of it by wasting his wage and making a claim every winter—but he forgets two things: most animals can't count; and although possible, making a claim is very stigmatized, and that most animals would rather starve than to broadcast their destitution. Aequitus also—being a co-founder of the fund—made sure that all the work related to the logistics—moving and storing of the feed deep underground, where the soil is grainy, cold, and preserves the feed from pest and rot, and hidden from prying thieves—went to the chipmunks—further boosting the demand for their services.

The fund was a great success; winter deaths decreased drastically the first year, and then slowly year after year. The chipmunks got a more steady stream of sophisticated work from the fund and thus means for a better life. For all the contributions Aequitus made, none could match the feeling he instilled in every chipmunk: the intangible sense of worth; the standing he brought them to in the forest; and the care he fostered between chipmunks by treating them all as equals.

When Aequitus reached the front of the Aorta, he turned and faced the scurry.

"Before we go through today's agenda, I have news—both good and bad.", he began, "And, as you may not be able to appreciate the good in anticipation of bad, I'll begin with the bad.", he took a tactful pause, as anyone with his level of experience would in this situation.

"The eastbound run collapsed late last evening; we're completely cut off from the eastern part of the forest. Therefor, the deliveries to the rabbits' hill must be postponed."

"Why did it collapse?", Aequitus younger brother Pietus asked, who stood at his regular place just right of his brother.

"Well—", Aequitus dragged, "a pheasant went chasing a maggot again and crossed above the shallow no-zone."

"Again!?", Pietus cried, not hiding his contempt, "Did the pheasants not promise to be more careful—that last time would be the last? Will they honour our agreement and pay for the damages?"

"They did indeed. As you all know, the pheasants are not the most organized of animals and will only blame each other if we make a claim for damages. We may bring it to the Glade, but what—other than appearing petty—would we gain? Lit-

tle and less, I'm afraid. Nevertheless, I want you, Pietus, to go to the moles and have them dig a deeper eastbound run this time—that is, at least, a factor we can affect.” ”I'll do it.”, Pietus responded, ”But send someone else to the moles next time—they don't even speak our language...”

”Nā, hēo seċgaþ þone ealda spræce. It is we that don't speak theirs.”, Aequitus paused, waiting to see if Pietus had a response. When his brother only mumbled something inaudible, he continued.

”I'll make sure Br'er and the rabbits get the news of this postponement personally. As for the good news, the rumors going around are true: the Glade have decided to institute a 2% tax on all Forest shipments. It's only a temporary experiment with us as the pilot service.”

”How is this good news?”, Veritas squeaked, a tiny runt of a chipmunk who were also standing in the front close to Aequitus.

”Two reasons: firstly, the funds are marked as aid for destitute animals who can't afford the Winter Fund, and we'll surely get the contract for its operation; secondly, we don't pay for our own services—we're essentially exempt!”

”No! That's not how it works.”, Veritas snapped angrily, ”this will force an increase in our prices—hurt our margins; to only burden one industry, and ours at that—it's... it's incredibly unfair.”

”Enough.”, Aequitus grumbled, ”That's enough, this is neither the place nor time, we may discuss this later in private.”

Veritas did not answer, but she turned her head sideways—showing everyone her disdain.

The old chipmunk moved on to the day's normal agenda,

dishing out more routinely orders before dismissing his workforce. However, his eyes were fixed on Kraerion—the dismissal did not apply to him. When the last chipmunk had left the Aorta, he began to speak.

“Kraerion—”, he said.

“Father.”, Kraerion responded, equally enthusiastic.

“It’s true then, hiding in the back like that; you’re actually leaving what we worked so hard to create?”

“What you created you mean? You cannot pretend this is news—I’ve been more than forthcoming with my intention to lead a different life. You of all chipmunks should know of my extra shifts to afford this move, and my refusal of the managerial responsibilities you so blatantly pushed on me.”

“We all have dreams, Kraerion. I know you might *feel* like a squirrel, but you’re not one—I promise you that you’ll end up miserable, dearth of resources, and completely alone in a world of wings if you try to live as one. Dreams are a lesson in growing up: learning how to smother them in favour of what’s truly important in this life. And, you’ll get other dreams—realistic dreams—like forming a family, building a future for our specie, and contributing to the betterment of the Forest at large.”

“I’m sorry—”, Kraerion said at length, “but that’s not me, and quite frankly, that’ll never be me.”

“Don’t you feel any sense of responsibility? What about your sister Veritas? You expect Pietus and I to go on forever?”

“What about her? She’s smarter than us three combined; she could take over tomorrow if you’d only let her.”

“You know full well that intelligence isn’t everything. You saw how she acted today: she lacks the social conduct to lead other chipmunks.”

"Maybe you should have spoken with her before announcing your decision to the whole Aorta?"

"It's not only today and you know it. Never mind. If not for us, then what of you and Cinnamon?"

"Don't", Kraerion said flustered.

"What, you haven't told her!?", Aequitus said truly surprised; he was just about scold his son, but hesitated when he saw Kraerion's face and realized it would be superfluous. Before he had time to say anything more, Kraerion turned around and ran.

Kraerion ran, and he ran, and he kept on running until the pain in his lungs, and muscles, numbed the thoughts that so rudely had occupied his mind.



DREAD

”’Emergencies’ have always been the pretext on which the safeguards of individual liberty have eroded.”

- Friedrich Hayek

Kraerion eventually stopped running; once his emotions cooled off, he felt embarrassed for how he had acted.

”Well, good riddance—”, he thought, ”at least I can’t go back now. One day is truly today.”

The chipmunk returned to his burrow one last time, to fetch his screw nuts and say his goodbyes. He had stood there for a very long time; not knowing how to say farewell, and he somehow felt that the moment required a solemn pause. When he made an attempt to leave, his legs refused; he felt an annoyance for his own nostalgia. Life underground was all he had known; nothing would ever be the same.

When he exited the networks of runs through the exit known as the Northwestern Arteriole, a large woodpecker were already waiting for him. His name was Redrill, and he had an especially pronounced red crest. Woodpeckers made excellent woodworkers, but most of them worked in small teams and only took on larger construction projects. But not Redrill,

he was a loner and preferred to work alone and had hence accepted Kraerion's rather unorthodox request. The seven screw-nuts he had fetched were awkwardly wrapped around his front legs, and caught the sunlight and glimmered harmoniously.

"You're really sure about this?", Redrill asked.

"Yes!", Kraerion answered, maybe a bit too quickly, as if he was caught with his paw down a honey pot, "I—I mean, I've never been more sure."

"Don't worry," Redrill chuckled amused, "I won't argue with the hand that feeds me. I see you've brought payment."

"Well, only one is for you though. Better get going."

The woodpecker smiled, nodded, and unfolded his wings and set off north with Kraerion—with all his might—trying to keep up the pace through the thick undergrowth.

The Wadborough villagers—in a time before environmental concerns—dumped much of their *undesirables* in the forest. Everyone denied it—of course—yet batteries, plastics, electronics, and everything else one can imagine found itself in every nook and cranny of the forest floor. Even a run down car or two occasionally joined the detritus. Most animals—after a good whiff—would not bother with these alien contraptions. But, in a magpie a curiosity grew; soon, he conjectured: these objects of Men may teach a thing or two! The magpie began to take them apart; study their intricate design and their innate structures. He felt an unnatural compulsion towards to the weird family of human fasteners: the screw nuts. Death may be the mother of all beauty, yet these imperishable hexagons of cast steel were of different kind. Sun rays bouncing off their plain silver surfaces caught the magpie

in awe; the beauty consumed him, and he eventually took to hoarding. The desire for these little things spread like wild-fire; first amongst the magpies and the other birds in the crow family, but soon all animals had taken a fancy to them—a treasured commodity was born. But it wasn't like any other commodity: it endured where blueberries rot, it was portable where trees stood firm, but most significant was its limited supply—a thing of Man. It couldn't be produced like the spines of a hedgehog's back, nor grown like the acorns of an oak tree. Naturally, the young economy was tired of barter and sought a system to keep better score: an informational instrument to keep track of favours; a fair system of time allocation. And thus, for the first time in the kingdom of animal, go beyond reciprocal altruism—transcend death—and let a money be born.

But to Kraerion, the screw nuts were but a means to an end: to purse life anew.

The day was a beautiful one; the sun shone bright on a blue canvas sky with only a few dots of white. His seven screw-nuts around his legs made it difficult to run, and he soon lost sight of Redrill. He did not worry though, the woodpecker would not drop his client for a lousy tempo. His anxious feelings from earlier that morning eased somewhat by the fine weather, like the miraculous cure weather so often can be.

"What a great day!", he said out loud to no one in particular, "What a shame it would be to have it spent underground."

The sun's rays told of high noon, yet the forest was uncharacteristically quiet. Noon was a time of activity, when the animals left their nests, burrows, lairs, and vocational duties to seek out trade. To buy or sell feed; to offer or acquire ser-

vice. Anything imaginable were up for sale: a blackbird could be hired to sing, a joyride could be enjoyed from the back of a magpie, fresh blueberries—or stolen cabbage from the neighbouring fields—could be bought. Therefore, on any other day, a distant voice in his ears would not have sparked his curiosity. When he reached a clearing in the trees, he leaned back on his hind legs and saw—past the overgrowth—a hedgehog and a robin arguing intensely. He recognized the hedgehog as an acquaintance of his fathers, he knew him as Spinestack, and closed the distance to them.

"Are you mad?", the robin asked flustered, "Have you completely lost your mind? You know I need more than two measly spines."

"Spines are not weeds you simply pluck from a field of your choosing; they take effort and care to grow.", Spinestack answered calmly, "And these recent—although tragic—events have created a wonderful demand, as you surely understand."

"But... But that's more than trice as expensive than just a couple weeks ago. This is war profiteering! I'm down to my last screw nut; you must understand."

"I mustn't anything.", Spinestack reassured calmly as he saw Kraerion approaching and waved, "I could ask any of your neighbours, who, I'm sure, would find the price both fair and appropriate."

"Wait, hold on.", Kraerion interrupted as he took notice of the small heap of spines, sharp and keen, laying between the two animals, "What do you mean war? And what on earth would you need spines for?"

"Oh haven't you heard!?", the robin squeaked, "It's terrible—*Terr-i-ble* I say: just this morning a nightingale in the same tree as me got her screw nuts stolen. And it's not an isolated inci-

dent either, it has happened all over the forest in the last few days. I refuse to sit idle by; we must take up arms and defend ourselves—just like in the tales of the time of Man!”

”Hrmf”, Redrill uttered from a twig above the group, seemingly appearing from nowhere, ”I heard a few rats have similar complaints earlier this morning, apparently a few of their burrows had been raided. And they are *rats* after all, who dares mess with them?”

”Yes, very sad indeed. Now could you take your discourse elsewhere?”, Spinestack said glaring at the two newcomers, ”We are conducting serious business here, go waste someone else’s time—preferably someone whose time is of less value than mine.”

Redrill gave Spinestack a sharp look of disgust, ”You’ve always been more heap than stack, don’t you think?”, he jested, untucked his wings, and took off. Kraerion had not much choice but to follow.

When they reached the silver birch—which was to become Kraerion’s home—a fluffy wood pigeon greeted them with a coo.

”Welcome Kraerion, to our humble and peaceful corner of the Forest.”, the pigeon said. His name was Greyhead; this pigeon landlord owned a score of birches and had agreed to sell part of one to Kraerion. It was very unusual for one animal to only own part of a tree; most animals paid rent. Kraerion had first been offered to rent, but refused—he was ready for a life free from the burden of economic dependence and thus the need of a steady wage.

”The meter directly above the first twig is yours. I’ve etched in some markings, you may, of course, measure it yourself.”

Kraerion nodded and handed over three of the screw nuts to Greyhead. The pigeon thanked, and having errands elsewhere—excused himself and flew away.

Redrill had received instructions many days ago, and wasted no time consulting Kraerion on what to do. He flew up and landed on the south facing side of the birch and began drilling. The woodpecker's head jerked back and forth, transforming his appearance into a red smear. Kraerion felt very silly when the origins of Redrill's name suddenly dawned on him, he could not believe how he hadn't realized it sooner.

Woodpeckers were not made to carve homes in the trunks of trees. Their strong chisel-like bill and shock-resistant head had slowly been selected by Nature for its ever increasing ability to prey on termites, beetles, and various other larvae dwelling behind bark and wood. But—like most animals—with the rise of a market, their abilities found a vastly greater commercial value elsewhere. And, the woodpeckers found it in carpentry.

Kraerion didn't know how to act whilst Redrill worked. He felt that he would only be in the way if he tried to help, and there was nothing else there he could occupy himself with. He had not stood there long before he was saved by a loud screech from a neighbouring birch.

"Wait here.", Redrill yelled urgently from up above; he dashed—without hesitation—towards the sound. Kraerion paid no heed; instead, he lunged to the tree and rushed up its trunk. The trunk divided evenly into three large limbs; between them lay a pigeon's nest. He continued up one of the limbs as to look down and see it. Redrill was perched on a branch opposite of Kraerion—they were the first on site. And as pigeons came flying from all directions, they looked down

and saw a terrified mother and her three newborn squabs, naked save for their scrawny, near undeveloped down.

"They're gone," she said despondently, "They're all gone. Oh dear, how will we survive?"

"Won't nest insurance cover it?", a pigeon asked after a long moment of silence.

"No," another pigeon answered, "theft has not been an issue since the time of Man. Why would anyone even think of including it in coverage?"

"It may yet be rectified, as far as I'm aware, nest insurance has always been implied to cover these kinds of things. I'm sure there's some broad clauses in there that might be stretched to cover this situation.", Greyhead broke in, sighed, "Otherwise, we'll come together and cover it ourselves; solidarity is not yet lost on us. Regardless, the best we can do for now is to give her some room and time to breath, especially by those not yet part of our community."

The insinuation was not lost on either Redrill or Kraerion. Nevertheless, it was a reasonably request, and the two animals vacated the tree.

"We're not particularly popular today.", Redrill muttered jokingly.

The moon had long since appeared when Redrill finished his work. The woodpecker sailed down to Kraerion at the foot of the birch.

"I guess I'm done!", he proclaimed, "Are you sure it's deep enough? It's barely more than an entrance."

"Well, you know I can't afford more of your time.", Kraerion answered. "Besides, me teeth should be strong enough to carve out the rest. Take the screw nut before I regret it."

As he handed over one of his screw nuts to the bird, Greyhead appeared again.

"Good evening, excuse my rude remark earlier," the pigeon began, "these are strange times; I hope you don't take it as a reflection of your person."

"No offense taken.", Redrill said whilst Kraerion simply nodded.

"I have some news that might not have reached the two of you yet.", Greyhead continued, "The crows have called for a state of emergency, there's going to be a meeting in the Glade, tomorrow at noon. Thought you'd like to know."

"Okay, thanks.", Redrill said tiredly, yawned, and turned to Kraerion, "It's getting late, are you sleeping here?"

"Not like I have a choice, the new tenants have most likely already moved in to my old burrow."

"Well then,", the woodpecker said and untucked his wings, prompting Greyhead to do the same. The two birds took off and disappeared into the blissful summer night. Kraerion was left alone with his hollow, his new life, and his ever intruding thoughts. Still unsure if he had made the right decision, he climbed up the tree to his entrance.

"One day was today.", he concluded solemnly. The hollow's floor was still rough and unyielding, but it wasn't the brown soil of a burrow—that was all that mattered. With time, he would widen the hollow, grind the walls and floor sleek, carry up moss and lichen to make a bed, and slowly be able to call it home. That night, he slept uneasy; his body and limbs were heavy and exhausted, yet his mind was unbridled and completely awake. When sleep finally came, it was with an unusual satisfaction that only major life decisions produces—it scared him to know that he'd almost gone a whole life with-

out it.



DEPUTATION

“the only thing we have to fear is fear itself.”

- Franklin D. Roosevelt

The crows watched as the animals poured into the glade—the Glade of Representatives. The murder sat comfortably tucked all along the branches of the ever reaching crown of the Old Oak. From afar it looked as if the Oak bore large, black acorns. Since the time of Man, the animals had gathered here to discuss public matters, to air opinions, and to converge on decisions. Although the glade bore a suggestive name, it wasn't a republic in the most human sense of the word. It wasn't a selected office: no animal spoke for a predefined set of members; instead, non present members usually had someone whom they trusted there, who could speak on their behalf if needed. In fact, the meetings in the Glade was open to everyone; and anyone who wished to speak could. The animal species differed widely in their eagerness to follow and participate in the discourse. Many of the crows and the rabbits were actively engaged in the discussions, and the presiding officer—responsible for the agenda and order—had been a crow for generations, and became referred to as the Twig. The rats and

the blackbirds on the other hand, took little to no interest in the proceedings. The pheasants did not even attend; their concerns were more of worms, than with words.

Kraerion entered the Glade when it was almost full and opted—in the spirits of his now arboreal life—to join the birds amongst the trees. He was taken aback by the might of the Old Oak—its powerful branches and colourful leaves seemed as powerful and green as ever. As he found a comfy twig in a beech, he saw Aequitus and Pietus standing next to the rabbits; and his heart dropped. He felt at once uneasy. He knew he'd done nothing wrong by leaving, yet his body felt otherwise.

When the last roebuck straggled into the glade, a crow signaled for them to start. The crow took a few awkward skips out on the oak branch, so as to be seen by all. He bore the name Eaglewing. His right wing was unevenly discoloured: half the wing's feathers were of a peculiar colour of brown, not unlike the wings of an eagle. He had been an unlikely candidate to the office of Twig; although, he was the son of the previous one, Ongenpeow, but been born very much the runt of the litter. His discoloured wing was also rumored to be broken, and only a few crows could claim to have seen him fly. The crow began to speak:

"I am not the fool to deny, nor delay, the pretext by which we have so promptly gathered here today. It is ever so important—in times like these—to be blunt: attack the issue unto us—with naught but truth—frankly and boldly.

But first, fellow Animals, I would like to say this: it is in difficult times we get to show what we have been

made of—our true colours and morals. And I am certain, our colours shall burn true and its brightness prevail! Our Forest shall endure, as it always hath endured: since the time of Man and the founding of this very Glade. I promise ye, we shall—once again—unite against our common foe, and earn a second wind with this imminent victory!

If thou hast lost thy screw nuts, dost not worry; dost not attempt revenge—or any other folly—by thyself. Thou shalt be revenged—in Time—by a collective effort. I hold the firm belief that the fear itself is more dangerous than what we fear—wicked, dark, unsettling terror that have paralyzed every important function of our Forest. A few stolen screw nuts in themselves: are insignificant in the greater scheme of things; an empty forest, a lack of trade, a hoarding of goods, a canceling of service, and an arming and guarding of thine own: are significant. Our beloved Forest hath reached a complete standstill in the fear of theft; it ought to fear the lack of feed come winter. Fear of trade undealt. We have retreated back into our humble nests and spartan burrows; now we must advance with full force! Our Forest asketh for action, and action thou must allow us to take.

We may wage war against this unknown perpetrator: a war of suspicion with accusation as ammunition. Or we may not. Even a victorious battle against this enemy amongst us may lead us unto defeat—the loss of Time; to while whilst winter marcheth.

In policy—as in life—it is difficult to seeth but the short term. To value tactic over strategy. Doth catching our foe red-handed—spending all our time and resources in the process—prevent any future crisis of this kind? Our reforms must gain strength from our

history and turmoil; they must adapt from our scar-tissue, and our Forest evolveth by it.

It saddens me to acknowledge: this Glade is not prepared for this challenge. It's in a sad state indeed. It's currently but a mere group of volunteers!

It hath no funds to relieve its victims.

It hath no office to investigate this matter.

And, —

it hath no mandate to prevent this—nor anything of equal weight—to happen in the future.

Our Forest hath grown, but our Glade hath not grown with it, and that must be set right now. We are prepared to exhaust our full arsenal to meet this crisis. To go beyond what hath seen constitutional—and deemed reasonable—in the past. Our first step, thou wilt shortly learn from Hroðulf, yet that is but a beginning. So, I ask this Glade—and its Animals within it—for this final instrument to face this challenge—broad executive power, to wage a war with this crisis, the power that would be given unto me if our Forest was indeed invaded by Man once again.”

The glade was in silence when Eaglewing receded backwards on the Oak branch—leaving room for Hroðulf—who quickly took his place. Whereas Eaglewing spoke with a confident, well-paced certainty, never missing an emphasis; Hroðulf spoke with a twitchy, irregular pitch, as if he never given the spoken word a forethought. The crow with his two perfectly black pair of wings was renowned for his wit, yet was somehow very unpopular with the rest of the animals.

”There was once a man who proclaimed: incentives trump ethics every time.”, Hroðulf began, ”And we’re not even Men; Men are creatures of sin, the only specie known capable of

doing harm without direct benefit to his person—truly the purest form of evil. Us Animals are simpler: we're not driven by hate nor envy. Remove the incentives and you remove the act itself."

Hroðulf took a pause. He didn't lack confidence nor certainty in his message, but he lacked confidence however—especially in the aggregate—in the animals' intellectual abilities. He knew he had to go slow, never leaving out a simple deduction of reason.

"If we remove the incentives for thievery, we remove thievery itself," he repeated thus, "The thief steals only with the prospect of spending his spoils in the future; but what if what he has stolen could be rendered unspendable? Theft would be moot to him. Our screw nuts—which undoubtedly contains a diverse set of colour and shape—are still too fungible to trace with any certainty. We can't efficiently tell them apart; we can't ban a particular stolen screw nut from ever being spent. Fungibility is certainly an admirable quality, but it and traceability are not necessarily contradictory traits; on the contrary, a traceable mark issued by the Glade could only serve as a valid baseline for the fungible unit itself. If an unique mark was inscribed on our screw nuts, and remarked before stolen: spending it would accomplish naught save the admission of guilt."

The crow took another pause, he knew his finale could create controversy and he made sure to get every word correct.

"There is however, no way to mark the screw nuts themselves; but, we can mark leaves. We suggest that the Glade temporarily issues leaves in place of our screw nuts, until this wave of crime calms down."

"I'm not sure I understand", Br'r Rabbit said after a moment of silence, "You want us to replace our screw nuts with

leaves? But leaves are everywhere—you could just pick them up?”

“The leaves will be but a certificate of ownership of the real screw nut. The leaves will have an unique sequence directly corresponding to a screw nut safely stored elsewhere. The quantity will thus remain the same: one screw nut, one leaf.”

“But, could you not simply copy the sequence, and spend it twice?”

“Yes, if not for our new secret process to fortify them, effectively making the leaves impossible to counterfeit.”

“Do I need to remind you all that leaves have a tendency to rot!?”, a new voice bellowed from the far end of the glade. It belonged to Αἰσωπος, the forest’s last remaining badger. He emerged from the crowd and headed towards the center of the glade, and with him followed a strong, foul smell. The animals he passed jerked away from him; they did so however, more out of reflex than actual disgust.

“No, thou dost not.” Eaglewing responded before Hroðulf had a chance to, “Thy apprehension saddeneth me. In the same process where we make the leaves counterfeit proof, a silkworm addeth a thin, almost transparent hue around the leaf: protecting it from wear, tear, and as thou hast so kindly contributed: rot.”

“All but a gullible disposition would sadden you, I’m sure.”, Αἰσωπος roared, “This plan has so many flaws, where do I even begin...Let’s begin with this: how can we be sure that the amount of leaves remain at a one-to-one ratio with the screw nuts?”

“Before I respond to these ridiculous questions of poor judgment, let me remind ye that Αἰσωπος is not your friend: he might have some ulterior motive with these questions—

maybe his interests align with letting this issue remain unresolved. Nevertheless, I shall address every rabbit of straw thou callest forth.”, Eaglewing took a deep pause, showing off a sly grin, as if he had waited for exactly this moment, “We shall arrange regular audits of the amount of screw nuts in custody; as frequent as to give no doubt of any discrepancy.”

”How shall the screw nuts be protected? To whom shall this significant burden fall upon? Perhaps this might be what the thief—who you ascribe so much influence—wants? Now they’ll be gathered together in one place—one massive pot of honey.”

”We did not intend to disclose our plan to guard the screw nuts today. But, as a gesture...”, Eaglewing didn’t get further before being cut of by *Αίσωπος*.

”See Animals, as always these crows only reveal what suits them for the moment! I categorically doubt their competence to implement this scheme, but I doubt even more their reasons to go through all this trouble! The screw nut have served our Forest well; a guide towards efficiency, a creator of wealth. The screw nuts became the means of exchange not by decree, but by an organic force of Nature. And, who are we to intervene with forces we do not understand? And, who are you, Eaglewing, to conspire against us and Nature herself?”

”But, as a gesture...!”, Eaglewing repeated louder than before, ”of good faith: I will tell thee now. A few days ago, a few crows found a litter of stoat kittens—clearly abandoned by their mother—as they flew over a neighbouring meadow. They be but blind and furless; their Animal still plastic, unformed by their natural instincts. We will raise them with a singular purpose: to guard and protect the screw nuts—with their life if necessary. And, let me answer thy incomprehen-

ble drivel about Nature with a question: Whence came that peculiar odor of thine, if not from Nature herself?"

"Ssss—Stoats!?", Br'er Rabbit shrieked, trembling like a shackled leaf on the wind, "I—I must have mistaken, did—did you say stoats?"

"You crows have gone completely mad!", Αἰσῶπος thundered as he stormed off, "I will have no further part in this folly."

"Yes..., stoats", Eaglewing almost whispered in contrast, "But dost not worry Br'er Rabbit, we're long past the days of predation. I promise thee: they shall conform to our ways of life and abide by our laws—I shall make that my personal mission. If anyone doth not object to the idea, of course?"

The question silenced the glade, yet the air told of unrest. Even though no animal in the glade had been alive in a time of predation, many of them still felt like prey; the innate: that which no constitution, nor glade, can amend. No one spoke, not necessarily due to cowardice, but rather due to the limited time to come up with a reasonable objection. Br'er Rabbit opened his mouth, but spoke in Silence. The beautiful language of Nature, but also the language with a thousand ways to say what you later come to regret. The moment passed, Br'er Rabbit had not said a word—yet everyone had heard what he said.

"Good.", Eaglewing concluded, ignoring the silence, "It's decided. We are done here."

The forest had not—since inception—been without a guide. First, of course, it was aided by the laws of physics; thence, by the rules so elegantly described by Darwin; and eventually, by a certain hand which could not be seen. That hand was now

feathered and coloured black, and it would remain visible—
irreversibly—forevermore.



DELIGHT

“If a man does not keep pace with his companions,
perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer.
Let him step to the music he hears, however measured
or far away.”

- Henry David Thoreau

The sun slowly rose in the eastern sky; innocent rays of morning trickled through the dense forest canopy. The sparse beams reaching for the undergrowth, fighting off the morning mist like a potent antidote. The daily struggle between dew and vapor began anew. Kraerion sat awake in his hollow, hunched on his forepaws, gazing contently out through the morning air. He had woke—like most mornings—to the varied orchestra of nightingales and blackbirds, tirelessly competing for the vibrations of the humid air. The beautiful song was now and then disrupted by the distinct cooing of one of the neighbouring wood pigeons.

Kraerion had managed well: gathering his own feed, supplemented by the odd job here and there when such opportunities arose; but—of course—he was less efficient now than when he was gainfully employed. Yet, he enjoyed his new savage life, what he lost in produce, he gained in beauty. The

absence of the natural irregularities of life—which a steady piece of produce, from an even steadier wage, had smoothed numb—was to him by itself: disutility. And, waking before the sun instead of with it—there’s disutility there too.

Before he left his burrow and former life, he had saved for a long time. He had manage to obtain his small fortune of seven screw nuts by sheer hard work; three for the birch, one for Redrill, and the three remaining to act as a safety net during the transition to independence, and to cover any unforeseen uncertainty that his new life surely could entail.

But, that summer, he was blessed with something magical: prices began to fall. First little by little, and then all at once. By the time the sun reached its summer solstice, the prices had dropped to about half of what they had been during the spring—making his savings not only ample for his transition, but ample for anything the future could possibly bring.

No cause could be attributed to the sudden drop in prices, but thought or concern did not burden the Wadborough animals; instead, they feasted as if the abundance of summer would never deplete.

The exchange to leaves had happened as the Eaglewing had dictated exactly one week after the meeting in the glade. The animals had formed a queue before the Old Oak, to attempt an orderly, pedestrian proceeding. Although the animals had increased in affluence, queues are still as innate to them as a sheep stalking a pack of wolves, or a chicken snagging a fox for dinner; thus, it was short of a miracle that no major incident occurred. Kraerion—ever so careful—had waited until the absolute end to avoid most of the expected tumult before exchanging his remaining screw nuts for a thin stack of leaves.

A sound of scratched bark broke his thoughts. As so often happened to Kraerion, his thoughts remained but half processed—he was flung back to reality with a mind in an unfit state. He leaned his head out of his hallow to see down the trunk and saw a familiar shape standing at the foot of his birch.

"I'm not climbing this *thing*!", Cinnamon cried mockingly. Kraerion moved—in response—down the tree and stopped a rough meter from the ground, in a manner not dissimilar to that of a nuthatch.

"You never said goodbye.", she said at length when Kraerion failed to speak.

"What could I have said?", he answered, knowing full well how stupid it sounded, "Besides, I don't think I could—it was difficult enough as it was."

"Well, if it was too difficult—might it not be the wrong decision?"

"No!", he cried harshly as by reflex, "It was truly the best decision I've ever made." As usual, he spoke before thinking and missed to consider the product of his words—now Cinnamon looked rather hurt.

"I miss you.", he added quickly, "You know what I mean. You know how miserable I was; I wouldn't have been good for you or for anyone if I had stayed."

"I guess you're right.", she whispered, mulling it over.

"Do you want to walk somewhere?", he asked, more to get out of the awkward silence than anything else.

"Somewhere?"

"Anywhere."

"And here I thought you were the one to distinct between walk and wander; but sure, we can walk." she remarked, mak-

ing something that could be construed as a smile, before turning. She began walking eastward, before he had a chance to reply and he was thus left with no choice but to follow and catch up with her.

Kraerion had long made an effort to distinguish between walking and wandering. "Walking is active and with purpose—you *walk* with the purpose to get somewhere," he would preach, "But wandering *is* the purpose, done for its own sake—an end in itself." To Kraerion they were more than just definitions, they symbolized the two different outlooks of life: the former, the ambitious numbness of habit; the latter, the very beauty of life itself. He reasoned that one's quality of life could be deduced from this innocent choice of words. That someone who walk instead of wander, would eventually meet with the Thoreauvian fear: to wake up one day and discover they had not lived. The chipmunks—and thus also Cinnamon—had built their existence around transportation, schedules, and habit; so, whilst she would always listen, he feared she would never truly hear.

After wandering for some time, Cinnamon broke the silence.

"I'm worried about your sister," she began tentatively, "she's changed."

"Veritas?", Kraerion said.

"I... — I don't know. Well, maybe not changed per se. She's herself alright, only more so."

"Honesty, can you too much of that?", Kraerion chuckled, "I think I see what you mean though. She can get stuck in her mind sometimes, not letting thoughts go—like caught

in a never ending loop. But she's sharp, I'm sure she'll figure it out."

"I don't know, maybe...", she said slowly, "Maybe that's why we call someone smart sharp, they cut wherever they turn—themselves too if not supervised. Whilst, someone dull couldn't hurt a fly if they tried. But you know what Kraerion, you were always her whetstone; always there to keep her on track. And well, you're not there anymore..."

"Nonsense, you talk as if she's crazy!"

"Maybe she is! She's at least beginning to be perceived as if she is. But, there's more, she's started talking about our economy as if there's some great danger to it. She's not terribly coherent in the best of times, but now she's regressed to repeating...—repeating these incomprehensible phrases."

"What do you mean phrases—what phrases?"

"There's a bunch of them, but there's a couple in particular that she keeps repeating which I managed to remember: 'feed is dialectic; hunger is constant', and 'The delta must eventually reverse'", she paused, "Do they tell you anything?"

"Well...", he thought for a while, "The first is clearly about winter. Feed is cyclical: from the first rare morels that nigh beat thaw, to the late autumn tubers that's accessible until the ground freezes. And, hunger is..., well hunger: constant and independent of season. But why would she bring it up now? That's always been the case, and the Winter Fund was invented to fix it. She's *practically* running the fund now, in all but name.", he took another pause, "the other one I don't understand though."

Their conversation did not end, but transposed to one in Silence. With words omitted, they traversed through the forest. Animals communicates more with their bodies than hu-

mans, and the two chipmunks soon fell into the comforts they so many times before had felt in each others presence. Nevertheless, there was much left unsaid between them and a tension slowly grew. Cinnamon had not shown up but for a sense of duty: to tell of Veritas well-being; both new it, yet they left it unresolved.

"You are never coming back, are you Kraerion?", she said when she finally had had enough of the silence, stopping abruptly, her two chipmunk eyes—glimmering, like black pearls caught in sunlight—glaring straight through him.

"No.", he said staunchly after some thought, "I'm sorry, but I don't think I ever will."

"But why—why would you leave? I'm not asking for Veritas, or Aequitus, or anyone else; I'm asking for me, Kraerion. For me. What about us—what about the life we were creating?"

"I don't know what more I can say...", he said sadly, "I can explain how awful I find life in darkness with that damnable filthy soil all around, how it's like my body completely rejects it; as you seem to reject the notion to live in the trees. No matter how much I want to be with you, I can never be in consonance with a life underground. I assure you, it hurts me as much I think it hurts you, to not see you everyday."

Once again, they regressed to Silence. Exhausted by their imposition, they wandered along.

They wandered past the rabbits' great hill, thence past the clearings which constitute the central parts of the forest. Many an animal laid leisurely basking in the morning sun, and they watched as the two chipmunks quietly wandered past. "That's queer," Kraerion thought, "aren't they suppose to be working at this hour?", but he soon dismissed the thought.

When they reached the Glade of Representatives. Kraerion could scarcely recognize the glade without it being filled by the forest's animals. The glade however, wasn't empty; on the contrary, woodpeckers were swarming the Old Oak—pecking away at its trunk; sturdy roebucks were hauling loads of dirt away from the glade; and, crows were all around, talking amongst themselves—making plans.

They had nigh entered the glade before a voice called out for them.

"Good morning!", the voice cried, which they now saw belonged to Hroðulf, as he waved them to come over. He was standing next to a straight stick standing perpendicular to the ground; stones had been laid out around the stick to form a semi-circle. In between every stone, lay a couple of couple of pebbles.

"Morning," Cinnamon responded as they approached, "What is this?", she continued as she pointed at the stick and stones. Hroðulf only smiled for a while, then he spoke:

Our sun be eternal bound,
 Alone she goes around;
 Her shackles that of natural law,
 Yet she smiles; and thy bones thaw.

And trees the east salute,
 To whom that bears them fruit.
 Although raised in different glades,
 They cast but similar shades.

What an angle may disclose,
 To thee, and she who knows;

With stick and stones to be precise,
Of where a shadow bound to slice.

Our sun be eternal bound,
To us distant yet profound—
To tell the pace of the Sublime,
And thus thou know about the Time.

Just when he stopped talking—as by a bespoke request to God—the sun appeared behind the lone cloud in the sky. Its rays of sunlight gave birth to a shadow running from the stick to the second westernmost stone.

“Wait—”, Cinnamon said astonished, “do you mean that this thing—this *contraption*—tell us the time?”

“Yes!”, the crow hooted with delight, “And here I thought *rodents* were void of wit! Whilst the sun travels above us from east to west, its shadows travels from west to east. The stones simply enumerates the Time of day.”

“And this shadow, is it precise?”, Cinnamon asked, ignoring the slight, “Is it at the same stone at the same time every day?”

“Not only is it precise, it’s also completely independent of location. No matter where in the forest, the angle of the shadow is exactly the same. We can just raise the same structure in all parts of our Forest, which I presume you chipmunks—with your vocation—see the value in.”

“This is truly *brilliant*, nothing will be the same!”

“No, this in nothing. It’s a simple iterative improvement.”, Hroðulf concluded, albeit with a tone free of humility, his smile from before appeared again as he considered if he ought

to say what he was thinking. His urge to tell won over his prudence to keep shut:

"But I will tell you what is: sentiment. There are so many of these silly believes that by themselves becomes the agents of its own truth. For us, as individuals, spending less than we earn is the only viable strategy for long-term wealth; hence, it's thus assumed, that the same strategy ought to be applied at the aggregate level of total spending, and spending regarding the public. Naught could be further from the truth! What's true in the singular, might be the complete opposite in the aggregate.

Consider for example: if each animal saves more, then each business would receive less and subsequently have less to pay out in wages or earnings, which in turn would only decrease what each animal have to spend in the first place. Good individual decisions could thus cause a vicious spiral of less and less spending rendering a huge dent in our economy. Frugality would make us all the poorer!

Savings bear no meaning in its aggregate, if you really think about it. If someone reduces his savings by way of consumption, it will become but the savings of someone else. Aggregate savings must always equal the total supply of money.

And, that leaves us with sentiment. It has been shown that animals saves less if they believe in a strong economy; and more for a weak one. How backwards is it that our economy is at the whim of fools' belief! What if I told you, there might be other ways for us to control demand?"

When Cinnamon responded to Hroðulf's conjectures, Kraerion

had long stopped to listen. "The need to know the Time *is* the problem.", he muttered, "No one makes plans to smell the hillside flowers, nor watch the glimmer of the morning dew; when the day's activities becomes shackled to Time, the wonders of the world does not cease to exist, but becomes imperceptible with no Time available to stumble upon them. The solution to Time, is indeed no solution at all."

Instead, he chipmunk admired the woodpeckers hard work. He was hit by sudden realization: weren't there too many a woodpecker for just one tree; and the roebucks were hauling dirt, but there was no sign of digging—whence came the dirt? But, what did Kraerion know about the process of industry; a subject he had so eagerly ignored to understand.

When great ideas are discovered—those seemingly obvious in hindsight—they appear imperishable. There's no way to put the genie back in the bottle. They propagate from mind to mind—like a virus—only by the perceived virtue of the idea itself, until it's safely kept in the collective mind of society. Yet great ideas do perish; they slowly change, transforms, and morphs until it's something completely new and nothing of its original beauty remains.

We humans of today have learned to tell time in base 60, because long ago, when the ancient Babylonians created their first sundial they had in turn inherited a sexagesimal system from the even more ancient Sumer. Much of the meaning, its innate substance, of their system of mathematics have long been forgotten—or fallen out of relevancy, or transposed to what we consider math today—yet here today the arbitrary number 60, written in decimal, remains inert. Now is but the cumulative residue of legacy; the fabric of time woven with

fragments of lost meaning.

Or is anything arbitrary—60 is a fortunate number for mathematics—maybe the Babylonians discovered how to measure time *because* of their inherited numbers. Their discovery but the product of the trajectory of their past—propelling them to take the next progressive step of human understanding: could Newton, or Leibniz have developed calculus, if they were burden to do their long division with Roman numerals?

The survival of ideas have by some been associated with Darwin's Natural Selection: knowledge—that is useful to its carrier(or not so useful, predatory even, as with the spreading of a cult)—is remembered and passed on. Information that is easily shared, like an infectious joke, or a compelling fire-side tale, survives the erosion of time. And just like in biology, numbers like 60, like our useless appendix, still remains inert—a relic of the past without function but for the telling of time. The phenomena might best be exemplified with language, they slowly change, become dialects, merge and borrow words, some die and others spread to conquer the earth! But as with any stochastic process, they appear—insofar as we are capable to discern—as noise; and only when we zoom out, over the vast frames that is our history, we are able to see the undeniable signal.

Whatever our history has to teach, when Hroðulf saw a shadow and realized what it meant—finding a deeper truth. Did he consider the future crows, who would grow up burdened to learn his clock—that the arbitrary numbers of stones he chose for his sundial would be the last piece to remain from his existence on earth? Did he consider the implications of his societal economic experiments, what society it would create, and that it, once set loose, would be unstoppable and irre-

versible when reaching motion?

By the time Cinnamon finally exhausted her curiousness, the sun was about to go down. The two chipmunks began their journey back to Kraerion's hollow. They took another way back, as to see other parts of the forest than on their way there. They wandered once again in silence, but this time it was different and free from tension. It was their silence, the one they had shared for so many years; a silence to grow old in. Both felt it, yet they likewise knew that their paths would soon diverge.

"You know, it's not that far between your borrow and my hollow...", Kraerion began cautiously.

"I know.", Cinnamon said slowly.

"You think we could give it a try?"

"I don't know, maybe...", she almost whispered, but then she nodded, "sure.". They didn't exchange any other word the short distance back to the hollow, they didn't need to. Kraerion thought back to Hroðulf's line, 'our sun is eternal bound', entertained the idea, and smiled a solemn smile at his own folly.



DIVERSION

“The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting.”

- Milan Kundera

It might be easy—in places of kind latitudes, or times of modern comforts—to forget the implications of seasons. The beautiful autumn fires had raged for weeks in the forest’s canopy, and now the leaves were falling; a red and orange royal carpet to invite the forth and final season.

When Man first left the forest many a generation ago, the animals came together in the glade of representatives with a sole objective: to survive winter. It was an unprecedented time, never before in the history of animal had they been free and able to meet as equals. It was a frenzy of excitement, a glade drunk on future prospects, a crowd eager to hear the words a crow uttered: “No flake of snow shall fall, til every Animal seeth a path to spring”. Words that once said could not be unspoken, irrevocably written into the cultural fabric of the forest—a phrase that became known as the Crow’s Law. But, more importantly, it became *legend*—the essential moral in the tales that every mother told their kitten, pup, squawk,

or bunny.

No matter how beautiful the law appeared to the first animals, reality seldom bends to beauty; the law was rather burdensome to implement and straight insipid in practice. There were simply too many an animal to listen to them all; but even so, the small fraction of animals that did speak, had a tendency to refrain from the truth. It requires little difficulty to imagine why an animal would not want to stand up, in front of the whole forest—and all potential mates—and declare himself incompetent: to advertise his inability to survive winter without aid.

Nevertheless, it was *law*. So the day after the first frost, the animals gathered—as the first animals had done—in the glade for their annual pre-winter meeting.

”Craax—Hares!”, Eaglewing cried tiredly, without any of his usual passion for the spoken word, as the fifth hour in the glade began, ”Thou art next, Snowball.”

”Okay,” the hare—who looked nothing like a snowball—said. But over the coming weeks she would—as would the forest—reveal her dormant beauty and gain a gorgeous white coat. ”Our burrows are filled to the brim, we’ve estimated that we have collected approximately 10% more produce than yesteryear. And, like always, most of us have paid into the Winter Fund as well.”

”And dost thou speak for all hares?”, Eaglewing asked, as he had done—verbatim—many a time before, as that was the exact phrasing that was deemed to comply with the Crow’s Law.

”Inasmuch as I’m aware.”, Snowball answered, which equally was the custom hedging response every animal who spoke for

more than herself used.

"If any hare doth not feel spoken fore—speaketh now!"

"...let the record show that the hare seeth a path to spring.", Eaglewing continued in the still heavily scripted language before moving on to the next speaker. And, so it went on for hours.

The species in the forest varied greatly in their independence; whilst the hares, the rabbits, and chipmunks only required one speaker each, there was just as many on the other side of the spectrum. For instance, all magpies and roebucks represented themselves, each outbragging the next. The roebucks were particular notorious for their bragging, since their natural horn jousting had been outlawed, their need to dominate each other had found its way to this moment and their tales bordered on the ridiculous. The moles—who spoke their own peculiar language and seldom partook in the forest's functions—also lined up individually. Although, they went quickly by, each proclaiming a variation of the same sentence: "Ic hæbbe fōða nôg."

The sun was setting by the time all had been accounted for, save for the crows themselves who never spoke. Now but an update from the Winter Fund remained before the animals could head back to their burrows and nests.

"Before I leave the word to Aequitus and the Winter Fund, let me leave this final remark.", Eaglewing began, as he regained his usual tact,

"It looketh like we have successfully prepared for another winter. And it warmeth my heart that nigh every year we gather here, we are better along than

the year before. Incrementally our quality of life improveth. Each year's improvement might appear invisible to the naked eye; nonetheless, over generations—in aggregate, since our humble beginnings—these changes be breathtaking.

Ought we not be content with our progress? Oughtest thou not stand back in awe and admire our accomplishments? No, our pace be lousy at best! We have by no means inherited a perfect system. We are at the whims of markets—it ebbs, it flows—but it be never stable; and we suffer for it: wasting value in good times; erasing value in bad times—capricious jobs created; honest jobs lost, and progress resets. And, even worse: unfairness be an innate quality of markets, its abundance be distributed—by the sick wiles of Nature—according to a power law. To wit, as the book of Man saith: whoever hath, more shall be given; whoever hath not, even that shall be taken away.

No, we ought not be content. Thou oughtest not stand in awe. And the first steps have already been taken: to ease the ebbs and flows of our markets; to reserve parts of our forest solely for recreation; to aid the Animals of our poorest percentiles—to eradicate destitution. Last namely: as ye already know, we imposed a small tax on transportation this previous spring which will aid a new institution; a program which will help animals who caneth afford to participate in the Winter Fund. Never again shall an Animal find herself in destitution—the only lack: a dearth of hunger.”

The crow with a brown wing looked around for a while, gauging the response from the animals. He seemed pleased, and he continued:

"Thou hast waited patiently, Aequitus. Let us conclude this gathering with thy Winter Fund—have we naught to fear these coming winter months?"

"Thank you, Eaglewing.", Aequitus said formally as he took a few steps forward. With those steps, it became apparent to certain animals, including Kraerion, what he wasn't—in the company of Veritas. "Uhm, yes, we have indeed a record level of produce in our stores. And our low year-over-year churn have dropped even further. The fear of churn with the once rumored—now proclaimed—forest program, have thus, albeit early, not materialized."

"So thou sayest—to be explicit—we have naught to fear this winter?"

"Yes—that is indeed what I am saying."

"I thank thee! If no one else hath something to contribute, I regard winter as welcome and this meeti—"

"HOLD IT CROW!", Αἰσωπος cried assertively from somewhere out of sight. The animals around him moved away hastily; again, less from his hideous stank, but rather to show no doubt of any association with him. "I do believe you're forgetting something."

"Oh, dost thou?", Eaglewing answered glibly, "What have I forgotten, please enlighten us!"

"Quit the theater Eagleshit; you've not become senile and you—and everyone else in this damned Glade—know to what I'm referring to."

"Oh, I do?", the crow chuckled amused, "Well then, couldst thou not be a lamb and remind the rest of us of what we already know?"

"So it's theater then—I'll give you theater, but let the record show that this was never my intent.", the badger said, he crawled

up on a rock next to the Old Oak as to be closer in height with Eaglewing, but instead of facing the crow, he turned to Br'er Rabbit. "I hold Br'er Rabbit to be an honest and trusted member of our Forest, do the Animals in this Glade agree?"

Some of the animals nodded, others muttered something akin to a 'yes', or 'aye', and someone chimed in with a 'hear hear'. There was no doubt: Br'er Rabbit was trustworthy.

"I thought as much.", Αίσωπος said, "Br'er Rabbit, can you answer me this: the leaves we exchanged for our hard earned screw nuts, wasn't it but a temporary means to stop theft?"

"Yes, I suppose that's true.", Br'er Rabbit said puzzled, unaware of what Αίσωπος might have planned.

"And, haven't crime been absent for quite a while now—not even one recorded case of theft since spring?"

"Yes, that's indeed also true."

"Well, isn't it then in order for us to return to the screw nuts as it was decided—or Eaglewing, was this never intended to be temporary?"

"Seizeth him!", Eaglewing bellowed, and within seconds Αίσωπος was surrounded by stoats. The stoats were still merely more than kits, yet their fierce nature were without question: their weight but red in tooth and claw. "Dost thou take us for fools? The theft has stopped *because* of the transition to leaves; if we return to screw nuts, thou couldst but begin steeling again. Here, fellow Animals, the evidence be self evident—the screw nut thief be standing before ye. Why else would he careth so deeply about the reinstatement of screw nuts?"

"BECAUSE—", Αίσωπος roared whilst slowly spinning around in a circle—claws unsheathed—as to not expose his back to the same stoat for more than a moment at a time, "I DO NOT TRUST CROWS!"

Then everything happened very quickly. The stoat behind Αἰσωπος leaped forward, his claws reaching for the badger's back. Αἰσωπος spun around, but not fast enough, and the blow caught him in his right cheek, the claws cutting deep. Blood appeared, but the badger did not flinch; instead, he leaned his body and face into the stoat and—before the stoat had a chance to flee—caught its neck in his teeth. A loud crack filled the glade as the neck gave way and the brave youth was no more. The now injured badger saw his chance: he bolted for the opening in the circle that the dead stoat had left behind. Before the dead body had touched the ground, the other stoats were on him from all angles. He ran for his life, away and out of the glade; the stoats in full pursuit like that of a tail chasing its kite.

The dead stoat just laid there in the center of the glade. The grass soaking itself red. Dead silence entered the glade, and it screamed like never before.

"Craax.", Eaglewing croaked, but instead of speaking he calmly put his beak under his discoloured brown wing and started cleaning it. He took his time and showed no hint of haste—he appeared completely detached or undisturbed by the event that just transpired. He told his threat with silence. "Let this be a lesson ye learn as it's nonce taught. Αἰσωπος be guilty, as witnessed here today. He be beyond law—an Enemy of the Forest—free to be killed by whomsoever feebleth desire. Yet screw nuts are like oxygen to Αἰσωπος and those similarly inclined; he might lurk in the outskirts of the Forest for months without trace or risk of capture. Therefore I must decree that henceforth:"

All forms of private hoarding of SCREW NUTS—

including those usages as ornamentation, holding for sentimental value, or otherwise tertiary application—shall be forbidden. All Animals are hereby ORDERED TO DELIVER, on or before the FIRST SNOWFALL, to this GLADE OF REPRESENTATIVES, or to me, or to any crow directly in my service, all SCREW NUTS now owned by them, or SCREW NUTS coming into their possession. Upon delivery the SCREW NUTS shall be redeemed an by equal worth in LEAVES. Omission to comply to this Order will: if deemed unintentional, be subject to a FINE not exceeding FIVE LEAVES; however, if deemed willful, the subject shall be sentenced to a DEATH BY STOAT.

DIVERSION

THE END