

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.

Revision 1 Edit. November 20, 2022

ISBN 0-000-00000-2

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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.

First category: Contains very few but obvious references that I think should be known by 80% of the populace aged 18 or over. Failing to understand these would make a really dull read. Second category: The category that contains most references made, they are not necessary to read the story but understanding a few of them would certainly increase the joy of this book.

Third category: This category contains all obscure references. They should 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

Characters:

Introduced Chapter 2:

Kraerion, Aequitus

Mentioned:

Br'er Rabbit, Ongenþeow, Veritas, Pietus

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 circumstance, 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 of 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 load 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 more pleasant ambiance—but today he lingered in thoughts.

“One day is today.”, he repeated 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 remember; so he

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

Chipmunks might be genetically poised for a life underground, but not the chipmunk Kraerion. Even as a little kitten, he had loathed: 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 differed from 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 three 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. And 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 certain 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 an 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 his 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 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 it and made it impossible for the chief chipmunk not to pass the forward to the chipmunks' daily wage.

When Aequitus a few years later was 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 and other initiatives 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 become the implicit leader of the rabbits—and helped by the then Glade of Representatives chair Ongenþeow, he started the Winter Fund. A collective fund that functions similar to that of insurance: its members contributes 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 destitute. Aequitus—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 nosy 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 decreased year after year. The chipmunks got 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—treating them all as equals.

When Aequitus reached the front of the Aorta, he turned and faced 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 forest. Therefor, the deliveries to the rabbits' hill must be postponed."

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

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

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

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

”I’ll do it.”, responded Pietus, ”But next time send someone else to the moles—they don’t even speak the common tongue...”

”Nā, hēo seċgaþ þone ealda sprāċe. 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 gets the news of the postponement personally. As for the good news, the rumors going around are true: the Glade have decided to institute a 2% tax on all our shipments. It’s only a temporary experiment with us as the pilot service.”

”How is this good news??”, squeaked Veritas, a tiny runt of a chipmunk 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 get the contract for its logistics; secondly, we don’t pay for our own services—we’re essentially exempt!”

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

”Enough.”, grumbled Aequitus, ”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 work-

force. 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.

””



DILUTION

“The long run is a misleading guide to current affairs.
In the long run we are all dead.”

- John Maynard Keynes

”This has been the worst Winter of our generation.” Zefrafa cried with an unusual high tone, ”We’ve all sacrificed, we’ve all rationed, an most of us all - by some miracle - have survived to see spring again.”

Like salt to injury, the spring came late to the forest that year. The warm sunrays - when it finally came - was met as a saviour. They bathed in its warmth, and they kneeled to the it. They had survived. It was a battered, bony, and thin group of animals that gathered in the glade beneath the Old Oak to, as they always do in early spring, assess the winter’s damage. The oak itself seemed a bit battered too, and it did not stand with its usual might.

”That said”, Zefrafa continued with his more usual tone. He had spent many a night thinking and rethinking the time he had spoke in the glade, where he’d froze with the introduction of the stoats and he’d failed to make his point. He was not about to make the same mistake. ”This must never be allow

this to happen again! And we must look closely at the actions that put us here. Eaglewing, I'm looking at you. We took all the actions you asked, we followed through on every policy you suggested. Yet, we're standing here as survivors with the most dire of outlooks. There's no food, prices have stumbled, and there's no jobs - even for the most hardworking animal - in sight. What do you have to say for yourself Eaglewing!?"

"This be non sense...", Eaglewing began, but he was interrupted before he got any longer.

"No, my dear Eaglewing", Snowball said, "I've only heard sense from Zefrafa. He speaks what we all think."

"Ic efencye mid Zefrafa." said one of the moles.

"Nā, we efencymaþ mid Zefrafa.", another mole corrected.

A low murmur of ayes started going around the glade, and it could be not mistaken: Zefrafa had a clear majority.

When Zefrafa was about to speak again, a black shadow swept down from out of nowhere.

The shadow gently landed on a branch of the Old Oak. And when he became still, the animals realized that it was none else than Hroðulf. The black crow looked around the glade with disgust, and began to speak.

"The snow have not yet melted, and you all are already pointing fingers and seeking a scape goat. When I - in my folly - was beginning to see us as civilised Animals, you all just have to disappoint and regress to the brutish beasts your ancestors were."

"I'm not seeking to be punitive", Zefrafa said hurt, "yet we must hold Eaglewing accountable for his actions. And it's through this - albeit harsh - discourse, we must ventilate our disapproval in order to set a new course for our Forest."

"But Eaglewing's cute little play at policy did not cause

this.”, Hroðulf said waving his wing, ”And although I’m sympathetic to Eaglewing’s attempts at social reform, and I by no means impugn on such reform, they were too miniscule in scale and too late in implementation to have swayed our Forest one way or another. But - unlike you Zefrafa, or any other Animal for that matter - Eaglewing made an attempt to spur stimulation; and to simply attack his person is not the criticism of democratic discourse you believe it to be. If you however could offer constructive insights of how Eaglewing’s actions caused this winter’s supply shortfall, I highly urge you to do so.”

”Well”, Zefrafa said with hesitation, ”I can’t explicitly describe in detail the cause and effect of this winter’s shortfall; however, no Animal can. And Eaglewing’s changes are the only difference from the generations of plentiful winters preceding this one.”

”There you are wrong. I can explain; and I will explain.”, Hroðulf said, and took a little break, retucked his black wings, and let the glade linger before he began again.

”My dear Zefrafa, answer me this: Is water water?”

”What are you playing at Crow!?” , Zefrafa hissed frustrated, ”is this what you call an explanation!?”

”Well yes!”, Hroðulf exclaimed, ”Riddles are these precious little things, tender and digestible with reality abstracted, to afford even the dullest of minds - like yours - some amount of comprehension. I ask you again: Is water water?”

”Yes.”, Snowbal said after at length, when it was apparent that Zefrafa wouldn’t respond. ”Water is water.”

”Ask the salmon, who dares his life on his heroic journey upstream, only to get from water to water?

Ask the beaver, who spends his days creating dams, only to form a pond in the brook - to live in water instead of water?

And ask the doe, whose fawn drank from a stale puddle
born with disease instead of the running brook as she was taught
- whose fawn drank water instead of water?

No, water is not water if life is not death. Water is a canvas,
a medium that can be altered, shaped, or most importantly:
controlled.”

”Craaax”, Eaglewing interrupted, ”as facinating this tale
of thine might be, how does it surve us? If it supposeth to
be a parable, or allegory, or whatsoever of meaing, it’s rather
incomprehensable.”

DILUTION

THE END