

THE RISE AND FALL OF WADBOROUGH
FOREST

THE RISE AND FALL OF WADBOROUGH FOREST

John-John Markstedt

MY VERY OWN STUDIO

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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“My heart has joined the Thousand, for my friend
stopped running today.”

- 1920-2016

PREFACE

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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O1

WADBOROUGH FOREST

"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 patch of land. It's the only forest for miles and sticks out in the patchwork of farmlands surrounding the village of Wadborough. The forest was left untouched when the village was first founded many centuries ago and kept as shooting ground. Pheasants were imported and the villagers, to increase their yield, set out to remove their natural predators.

Pheasants are clumsy birds, used to roaming the Asian steppes undisturbed from predators - they had difficulty surviving in the forest of Wadborough. Over the years the villagers drove all major predators out of the region. The red fox was first to go as they seem to hunt the pheasants out of sport, killing more than they could eat. The stoat, wolverine and the mink followed shortly after. The weasels and badgers were hunted to low numbers but kept alive as

they mostly ate rodents, which consequently was booming without the predators.

Against the will of the Wadborough villagers the bill of wildlife preservation act was past in the county of Worcestershire which holds the legislative power in Wadborough. It contained many paragraphs but no one as stringent as §68.

'A person shall not hunt game birds such as the Common Pheasant by means of firearm or any form of projectiles unless bread in captivity under permission from state licensed breeder. A person guilty of an offense under this Act shall be liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding 5.000 pound sterling.'

- §68 Bill of Wildlife Preservation Act

Although the villagers did not abide by the law in the first few years after its initial passing, they eventually followed suit after a tens of hefty fines had been past witch, to the amusement of many locals, became known as the great shooting purge of '08.

And so it came to be that the forest of Wadborough was free of both man and predator - undisturbed by the natural checks that keeps the order of things.

02

LIFE UNDERGROUND

"Thus, under suitable conditions, cooperation based upon reciprocity proves stable in the biological world."

- Robert Axelrod

Deep underground in the comfort of a burrow a chipmunk woke with a jerk of excitement. He had waited for this morning all spring, working many extra shifts in the tunnels and picking blueberries on the weekends. His ambitions had always been to leave the borrows and move above ground and finally he had saved up enough to do so. Chipmunks who usually enjoy their time underground and had given him the name Supram. It's short for 'Et qui super terram' from the old scriptures which loosely translates to 'He who lives above ground'.

Supram rose out of bed and rushed out from the burrow, following the runs twist and turns until it widen into a great hall. A massive network of roots intertwined along the dirt walls and ceiling, supporting the large area. Many chipmunks had already gathered there and as soon as Supram entered a Chipmunk in the front of the hall turned

against the others, facing them, and began to speak. 'Early bird freight the world' he began with a loud but calm voice.

'Early worm freight the world' the other chipmunks answered in chorus.

'So..' the he continued promptly, 'There was another collapse in tunnel F2 last night'. He let the room sit for a bit to allow for the news to sink in before he continued 'A dumwit of a pheasant went chasing a magpie and, well, it caved'

'Again!? Really!?' the largest of the few, Greenberry almost shouted. 'This must be the third time these last couple of weeks, Ripell, you've promised they would behave'

The first chipmunk, Ripell took a deep breath before he answered 'I don't know what to tell you, I've talked to the crows and they assured the pheasants would keep in their perimeters'

'I for sure won't talk to the moles again' Greenberry mustered after a few moments of silence.

The deep network of tunnels under the forest was not just the chipmunks doing. Although excellent diggers, they still stood no match against the moles who mostly dug the wider paths like F2. Moles are however not so pleasant to deal with, they're grumpy almost like toddlers and seem to hate every second of conversations they must endure.

'No I will deal with them, I'll bring Shrub'.

Shrub jerked nervously as if being suddenly woken from a dream and simply nodded in a gesture of compliance.

'As you all know, we're still in the middle of berry sea-

son. The rabbits expects us finish the celery deliveries today and the flow of berries won't stop any time soon. Chop chop, get on with it' Ripell ended.

Chipmunks are usually gatherers and known to eat seeds, nuts, berries and even grass, shoots and other plant material. With the event man leaving the forest, a sort of calmness had arose letting the animals cooperate and specialize to a greater extent. Many animals are great gatherers, but no specie is as great at carrying feed as the chipmunks. In their stretchable cheeks they may carry large quantities of feed without slowing down their speed and while other animals gathered feed, the chipmunks transported it almost like the freight industry of man. In the winter they stored food for the whole forest deep underground and rationed it to last the winter.

The chipmunks started to slowly wander out from the hall. Ever since Ripell had ended his speech he had fixated his eyes on Supram. Supram lingered, waiting for the others to leave. When the last chipmunk left the hall, Ripell took a couple of hops until he was standing right next to Supram.

'Supram' Ripell began.

'Father' Supram answered stubbornly.

'So it's true then, you're really leaving your burrow?'

'You all say it like its news, haven't I planned for this the whole summer? You if anyone knows of all my extra shifts...'

'I suppose..., I never truly believed this day would ac-

tually come, I just thought it was something you needed to get out of you system.'

'I mean, I'm the only one in the family not named after blueberries?'

...

'What about Shrub then? He is a better planner than any of us have ever seen'

'You and I know that, but the others don't respect him. Heck he even gets pushed around even when I'm present. Even if you leave to live above ground you can still work here, think about it at least..'

'I don't know what to tell you, this is what I need to do and to do it fully. I'm sure I can manage to gather my own food, maybe it's not as efficient but I'm not looking for that.'

"Well," Ripell said at last as if he had accepted the finality of Supram's decision. 'Your always welcome back, but now you need to excuse me I've got moles to deal with'.

Ripell took the few hops left to leave the hall and disappeared around the corner leaving Supram alone in the hall. 'That could have gone way worse' thought Supram as he stood there in silence.

Supram had procured a piece of a great Silver Birch overlooking a clearing central in the forest. It was pigeon territory, but they had been easy to persuade with the many screw-nuts he'd brought. He had made an appointment with a woodpecker known as Redrill, who was to excavate a home high in the birch. They had agreed to meet when the sunshine stood in line with a tall spruce at the entrance E3 to the tunnel network. The sun had far

still to travel to that point and Supram felt at unease as one does with the prospect of the inevitable life changing event ticking closer. "I might as well get my things ready" he thought and left the hall in direction for his burrow.

*Rippel had always been mature for his age, which eventually made him head over the chipmunk operations. He had earned his 'Ripell' from 'Ripe' and 'Bell' to symbolize his maturity and bell from the bell shaped flower of the blueberry shrub. His bigger brother on the other hand had in contrast came to bear 'Greenberry' in the most opposites of meanings.

03

THE INCIDENT

"Money is a formal token of delayed reciprocal altruism."

- Richard Dawkins

Supram had gathered his three remaining screw-nuts and was now standing still by the entrance to his burrow. Moments before he had eaten the last of his emergency rations. "God I hope I never see this damp soil ever again" he muttered to himself in silence. The sun had made its routinely voyage across the sky and was soon to pass over the great spruce. Supram took one last glance back at the burrow before he leaped into the run heading towards his new home.

When Supram peaked his head out from the run, he immediately saw Redrill who was standing there cautiously waiting in the far end of the meadow. He crawled out the hole into the meadow basking in the mid-day sun and greeted Redrill courteously. The woodpecker nodded without altering his gaze. Supram took the few hops between the two. In one swift motion the bird turned his head and uttered "You really sure 'bout this?".

"Yes" answered Supram a bit to quickly, not expecting the question "I – I've never been more sure."

Redrill chuckled amused "Don't worry, I won't argue with the hands that feed me" He said, "you brought payment, no?"

Supram nodded, turned south and said "You know where it is?"

"Sure I do" Redrill said, "I'm thorough you know."
and off they went in southern direction.

Chipmunks can quickly bolt if in danger, unthreatened however, they move slowly through the tall grass, weeds and thistle making up the forest floor. As they walk on their forepaws, their field of vision is limited and they usually stop every few step to stand up hind legs to see their surroundings.

The odd pair traveled slowly through the thick undergrowth. As usual during noon the forest was steaming with activity. Entering a loosely dense area of mainly beech trees, they saw a robin in a heated conversation with a hedgehog.

"You can't be serious, Im only asking for two spines..", said the robin.

"Sir, you see, we only drop a few spines a week", the hedgehog responded calmly, "and you see, there is a great demand. I could just go ask any of your neighbors."

Supram took the remaining few hops separating the two odd pairs,

"Why do you need spines, anyway", Supram said.

"Haven't you heard? The nightingales in a tree close to mine got their screw-nuts stolen from their nest yesterday. I'm making som improvement to ours so we don't become the next target.", said the robin.

"Hfm", Redrill uttered as he caught up to the group, "I heard Zrefrafal and a few others of the rabbits complain earlier this morning, apperantly their burrows had been raided as well."

"Sirs, this crime wave has certainly been good for business, but strained my time. You'll have to excuse me. Either you make a purchase or you move along."

Redrill muttered some indistingeable plesentries best unherd, untucked his wings and took of. Supram followed as best he could bound the the ground, whilst the robin gave away and finilized the deal.

The woodpecker soon landed and they continued southwards.

When they reached the clearing, they herd a loud screech from a surrounding birch tree. The sound was coming from a pigeon nest in the lower part of the canopy. Redrill hesitated for a moment and spoke, "Wait here", he again raised his wings and took off towards the sound.

The wide silver birch tree, which Supram were to call home, was only two trees away from where the sound had emerged.

Supram didn't wait. He sprung up the side of the birch following a branch running past the nest so as he could look down into the nest. Redrill was standing on a

branch opposite the nest. A few other pigeons had heard the sound as well and joined all around the nest. They all had their eyes fixated on the nest and they saw a terrified mother standing over three newborn fledglings.

"They're all gone", she said at last, "all gone."

04

A MURDER OF CROWS

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

- Milan Kundera

The crows sat eerily hunched along the vast network of branches in the ever reaching crown of the old Oak tree. The animals had gathered in the glade in front of the tree. Not all animals could fit in the glade but all had some one representing them, except for some of the smaller rodents and moles who barely spoke the common language. The pheasants were not there either, as they barely could comprehend the ground in front of them any conclusion would pass over their heads anyway. The song birds had found comfortable twigs in the elms surrounding the glade. Supram clung among the birds and he had noticed Ripell standing with a hare near the rabbits. They were the only two chipmunks present. A few laggards arrived one after another and with the arrival of a large stag, known to speak on behalf of the deers, the meeting could start.

One of the crows took a few deliberate steps far out

on an oak branch, so as he became visible for all in the meadow. The crow was named Eaglewing, for he had a miss discoloured right wing flashing of light brown like a white-tailed eagle. No one in the forest had ever seen an eagle, but stories of the mighty creature had been past down through generations.

"Craax" Eaglewing began to remark his intention to start the meeting, "We all know of whats transpired, prompting us this vital gathering. A few of us, good and decent animals, have gotten their screw-nuts stolen from otherwise secure dens and burrows. Theft, as I might remark, is unprecedented in our short history since man left us alone and the founding of this council and forest law." He spoke with a dark solemn tone, pacing himself to give weight to his words.

"Nonetheless, these recent events will require us to act, and to act swiftly we must to insure our continued safety which we have had to privilege off for so very long. We have a suggested recourse which we, if no one objects, are willing to implement. The geniality of this plan however, I cannot take any credit for, so its best to leave the floor to Vlahir." He unfolded his wings, showing his strong and wide wingspan of black and brown. Thrusting his wings he flew off to a neighboring branch slightly high in the Oak. Vladhir, a smaller and young crow, made his way out on the branch where Eaglewing previously stood.

"See, the problem stems from the screw-nuts themselves", Vladhir said hastily with a twitchy, irregular pitch very unlike that of Eaglewing. If one did not know of his

incredible ingenuity, which had come to be expected in the forest, one could get the impression that he was nervous. "The screw-nuts is terribly fungible, there is no way to tell them apart..." He paused, as if he had said something significant.

"What do you mean?" Zrefrafal, one of the rabbits, asked at last. Some of the other animals nodded in agreement with the question.

"Don't you see? We can't tell them all apart. We have no recourse to hinder the thief..." Vladir abruptly paused again.

n "So..." asked the Stag, growing weary of this indirect explanation.

"If we were to mark the and trace the ownership of each screw-nut" He continued, "and if anyone were to be stolen we simply tell everyone and if someone then tries to trade with stolen nut we know of his guilt" As Vladhir paused for the third time, Eaglewing had enough and flew down to the ground and standing in the middle of the meadow and continued

"There is no way to mark the screw-nuts themselves, we've tried. But we have experimented with leaves and we're certain we can mark them distinguishably. Its just a matter of replacing the screw-nuts with these new marked leaves."

"Wait, you want to do what? Wouldn't the leaves just rot. Don't tell me this is.." The Stag was cut of mid-sentence

by Eaglewind who continued "No, of course we aren't that stupid, in our experiments we have had help from some silk worms who adds a thin transparent hue around the leaf making it robust against both wear and rot. In a few days we will have made enough leaves to replace the screw-nuts. We gather up the screw-nuts in this hollow in the Oak for safe keeping and get some stoats to guard it. When the crime ends, we simply return the screw-nuts for the leaves."

"SSStoats" Zrafrfal said with a great fear in his throat, "I must be mistaken, did you say stoats?"

"Yes, you heard correct. We know stoats hasn't been in this forest for eons, but we found a few injured ones flying over the farmlands to the west. They've promised not to hurt any rabbit or any other animal in the forest. Any other objections?" Eaglewing

The rabbits wasn't totally assured but they weren't the kind to complain. "I don't like this" Zrafrfal thought to himself "But what do I even say, the crows had been trustworthy before and are simply solving a problem. I can't argue with that". The rabbits stayed silent and so did all the other animals as well.

"Good" Eaglewing concluded, "Let's meet here in a week and make the replacement"

05

TWIST

"Civilization is a hopeless race to discover remedies for the evils it produces."

- Jean-Jacques Rousseau

The sun slowly rose in the eastern sky and innocent rays of morning light 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. Supram sat awake in his hollow, hunched on his forepaws, gazing contently out on the morning landscape. He had woke, like most mornings to the varied orchestra of nightingales and blackbirds tirelessly competing for the vibration of the humid air. The beautiful song was now and again broken up by the "ho-ho-ho-hoho" call of a wood pigeon. Gone were the days of rising before the sun, he enjoyed his morning routine.

Supram had managed well without the reliable feed from transporting goods and although it took longer for him to gather all the necessary feed himself he found him-

self enjoying the process. Efficiency had not been his reason for moving.

The swap over to leaves had happened as planned one week after the meeting. The whole forest had gathered in a long line, and all things considered, it had gone well with only a couple scraps. Pray animals are usually very risk averse and always like to have an escape route and tend to be quite unpredictable in numbers. Supram had waited in a nearby tree to avoid the tumult and only entered the line when most animals had left. He kept his stack of fresh leaves in the back of his hollow. The theft had stopped immediately after the switch had taken place and the crows had received much praise for their ingenuity.

A sound of scratched bark broke his thoughts

06

THE FIRST FROST

The autumn had passed in a hast,

07

WINTER

08

SPRING INITIATIVE

(Create more jobs)

09

PLAY

10

REVELATION

Hill introduction Man left land

Chipmunk bought birth real estate

Tink

Meets woodpecker start work on the vila Sleep in non
silk interior

Meeting Chief crow Eaglewing murder of crows

Wadborough heights little forest

Chipmunk

Woodpecker red crest

Crow Eaglewing Vlahir Zrefrafal