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The Errant Sea Hawk.

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by Matias Travieso-Diaz.

After years of squabbles that had led to many animals dying or getting seriously injured, the beasts of the jungle finally listened to the advice of a learned owl: “Instead of fighting each other for the right to rule the forest, you should run a popularity contest and select the strongest and most likeable among you to be your leader.”

The concept was appealing in principle but its application proved as contentious as the disputes that had led to its formulation. Several beasts made strong arguments in support of their own candidacy: the bear made an impassioned defense of his prowess, but could not point to any evidence of his likeability. The wolf, a physically imposing creature, was uniformly mistrusted based on prior instances of his mistreating lesser beings. The fox was undoubtedly charming when she chose, but lacked the physical presence to impose her will on her would-be subjects. Other candidates exhibited weaknesses in one or both respects.

Matters remained at a standstill until a potential solution appeared literally out of the blue: a large unknown bird dropped on a clearing by the lake where the beasts were gathered. The upper

parts of his body were brown except for a couple of orange patches; underneath, he was light gray. He had an impressive curved beak and gleaming yellow eyes surrounded by a black band that gave him a sinister look. His talons were large, sharp, and curved, and his outer toes were reversible, which would allow him to grasp prey with two toes in front and two behind.

“I am what is known as an osprey or sea hawk. I am formally called *Pandion Haliaetus Carolinensis*, but I usually go by Pandy” he announced to his stupefied audience. “I live far way, across the big waters, but was blown off course by a storm and ended up here.” He suddenly interrupted himself and took to the air on a short flight that carried him to the middle of the lake, where he plunged talons first into the waters. He emerged a moment later holding a squirming fish, which he devoured in three furious bites before landing again at the clearing.

“As I was saying, where I come from there are many bodies of fresh water where I can get my food – mostly fish, although sometimes I will eat small things like rats, rabbits, snakes, turtles or frogs, nothing of any consequence.” He surveyed the circle of animals that had gathered on the clearing and declared: “you are all safe from me, I tell you.” He then uttered a *cheep, cheep* sound that his interlocutors soon came to identify as a smile.

Before long, Pandy had made himself a member of the circle of beasts that roamed the jungle. He treated the others with courtesy and showed respect, but no deference, to any of its members, who in turn afforded him equal respect. Even the gruff bear dealt with him gingerly, for Pandy’s sharp talons could pierce the toughest hide and inflict serious, even fatal wounds on an adversary.

The same owl that had identified the potential solution to the squabbles among the jungle beasts suggested how the problem might be remedied: “How about letting Pandy lead us? He does not compete with any of us for food, since he only eats lesser creatures that nobody cares about. He is friendly enough and does not seem to have any desire to rule over us against our wishes. Why not select him as our leader?”

Most animals found merit in the owl’s recommendation and agreed to offer Pandy a leadership role. Even the bear, who would never voluntarily yield to anyone, sullenly accepted Pandy’s sovereignty, while vowing to oppose him at every possible turn.

The owl, on behalf of the jungle’s denizens, offered Pandy the equivalent of a crown, and the sea hawk replied modestly: “I will be honored to lead such a distinguished group of animals. I accept on one condition: I must be obeyed without dispute from anybody, and my requests or suggestions are to be faithfully executed.”

After consulting as many of the interested parties as possible, the owl returned to Pandy and announced: “The jungle is willing and ready to accept your leadership. Let the powerful overseas bird’s era begin!”

Pandy’s rule over the jungle started peacefully and continued more or less the same way for many turns of the moon. There were the inevitable squabbles between beasts, which Pandy resolved successfully, although often leaving one or both participants dissatisfied. Everyone was at one point or another unhappy with Pandy’s interventions, but the other beasts were willing to live with an imperfect system rather than reverting to the chaos that had reigned prior to the bird’s advent.

As years went by, however, the nature of Pandy’s governance evolved in an undesirable manner. They say all power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts completely. There came a time when Pandy had become imperious in his treatment of the other beasts, and more demanding on the benefits accruing from his status. He stopped fishing and required that food be delivered to him by his subjects, who had to spend increasing amounts of time securing the delicacies he demanded. Also, as the bear noticed the loosening of Pandy’s control, he started abusing some of the lesser beasts and his rampages were unmet by Pandy, who seemed to have forgotten his obligation to keep the bear in check and ensure that peace prevailed in the jungle.

It did not take long for the beasts that chafed under Pandy’s dominion to seek redress of their grievances. A committee visited the owl and laid out their dissatisfaction. The owl appeared unsurprised and replied: “When you were at each other’s throats I did not detect any willingness on your part to find a common ground to resolve your disputes, so I suggested that you find a third party to govern you, and that is how Pandy became your dictator. Now that you have tasted the bitter fruit of relinquishing your independence to a third party, my advice is that you examine yourselves and determine whether there is enough strength of character in your group to allow yourself to join in self-government without resorting to the whims of a foreign ruler. Go figure that out!”

The embarrassed beasts withdrew and reassembled as a group that included the wolf, the fox, the wild horse, and other beasts of lesser power but similar interests, but excluded the threatening bear. After a prolonged discussion, they agreed to form a new compact and dispatched the spiral-horned eland, one of the largest yet most even-tempered members of the group, to deliver to Pandy the news that his rule was at an end.

Pandy did not take the message well. He had become used to unchallenged rule and the benefits of his favored status, and threatened to visit fire and brimstone on his ungrateful subjects. The eland phlegmatically replied: “Time will tell what works best for all of us. For now, it is best if we go our own way. You are free to stay with us, but if you do, you will have to become just another member of our compact.”

It took a long time and effort on Pandy’s part to repair the damage his high-handedness had caused. He came to realize, a bit late, how foolish it was to squander a privileged position and antagonize his best friends, and tried to correct his errant ways. Animals are intrinsically forgetful and forgiving, and some recovery was possible, but the reign of the foreign bird of prey was over, and the world was probably much poorer by the ending of that era.

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IN THE NEWS.

That cult classic pirate/sci fi mash up GREENBEARD, by Richard James Bentley, is now a rollicking audiobook, available from Audible.com. Narrated and acted by Colby Elliott of Last Word Audio, you'll be overwhelmed by the riches and hilarity within.

“Captain Sylvestre de Greybagges is your typical seventeenth-century Cambridge-educated lawyer turned Caribbean pirate, as comfortable debating the virtues of William Shakespeare, Isaac Newton, and compound interest as he is wielding a cutlass, needling archrival Henry Morgan, and parsing rum-soaked gossip for his next target. When a pepper monger’s loose tongue lets out a rumor about a fleet loaded with silver, the Captain sets sail only to find himself in a close encounter of a very different kind.

After escaping with his sanity barely intact and his beard transformed an alarming bright green, Greybagges rallies The Ark de Triomphe crew for a revenge-fueled, thrill-a-minute adventure to the ends of the earth and beyond.

This frolicsome tale of skullduggery, jiggery-pokery, and chicanery upon Ye High Seas is brimming with hilarious puns, masterful historical allusions, and nonstop literary hijinks. Including sly references to Thomas Pynchon, Treasure Island, 1940s cinema, and notable historical figures, this *mélange* of delights will captivate readers with its rollicking adventure, rich descriptions of food and fashion, and learned asides into scientific, philosophical, and colonial history.”

THE SUPERGIRLS IS BACK,
REVISED AND UPDATED!



IN THE NEWS .

Newport Public Library hosted a three part Zoom series on Visionary Fiction, led by Tod.

And we love them for it, too.

The first discussion was a lively blast. You can watch it here. The second, Looking Back to Look Forward can be seen here.

The third was the best of all. Visions of the Future, with a cast of characters including poets, audiobook artists, historians, Starhawk, and Mary Shelley. Among others. Link is here.

IN THE NEWS .

SNOTTY SAVES THE DAY is now an audiobook, narrated by Last Word Audio's mellifluous Colby Elliott. It launched May 10th, but for a limited

time, you can listen for free with an Audible trial membership. So what are you waiting for? Start listening to the wonders of how Arcadia was born from the worst section of the worst neighborhood in the worst empire of all the worlds since the universe began.

IN THE NEWS .

If you love audio books, don't miss the new release of *REPORT TO MEGALOPOLIS*, by Tod Davies, narrated by Colby Elliott of Last Word Audio. The tortured Aspern Grayling tries to rise above the truth of his own story, fighting with reality every step of the way, and Colby's voice is the perfect match for our modern day Dr. Frankenstein.

IN THE NEWS .

Mike Madrid dishes on Miss Fury to the BBC . . .

TOD ON THE IMPORTANCE OF VISIONARY FICTION

Check out this video of "Beyond Utopia: The Importance of Fantasy," Tod's recent talk at the tenth World-Ecology Research Network Conference, June 2019, in San Francisco. She covers everything from *Wind in the Willows* to the work of Kim Stanley Robinson, with a look at *The History of Arcadia* along the way. As usual, she's going on about how visionary fiction has an

important place in the formation of a world we
want and need to have.

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