

Weesk's Greatest Trick

An Origin Myth – the trickster origins of civilization (hats off to D, Quinn and
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Part I

When the gods painted the Earth with life, they did so everywhere. Even in the coldest places, they brought life; in the driest places they painted life. Teeming life, expressed and blooming in multifaceted profusion of color. Dancing life, bulging out and receding in turns. Every species, distinct and yet dependent on all the other forms. They created a spiraling helix of tribes; tribes of plants, animals, stone, and earth. Not once did the gods withhold their lovely paintbrush from any one of their beloved tribes, nor did they miss a single spot not on the whole of the earth. They never favored one tribe over another nor one land over another. The gods loved all of it and never, ever intended for one species to glower or triumph over another. The blessed gods created life in an intricate, colorful, and sometimes subtle interplay a delicate spiraling cyclic dance. A celestial dance yes, but a dance nevertheless.

Everyone knows that in any dance no one person dances all the time; some must recede to rest while others exert themselves and express their joy, sorrow, or folly. It is the same with the Great Dance of Life: no single tribe can thrive at all times no species thrives all the time. When the beetle thrives and her numbers increase, the dandelion suffers and the deer's number decrease. Men, in their turn, must go hungry for a time. But the robin sees the beetles, gobbles them and flourishes ... for a time- her time of plenty. Every tribe has a time to thrive and a time to recede. This is known by the wise as the Law of Life. Every individual of Earth must accept this to stay sane. It is the only real law, and every cell in every creature knows this law. People, like robins and sea stars, know this law. Only fools and mad creatures resent the coming and going of the tide, and only misguided idiots slap gifts from the hands of the gods.

The world that the gods created was one of abundance, stability and acceptance. There was food to be found everywhere, just waiting to be recognized. Living beings never expected to suffer in exchange for it. When deer became scarce there were rabbits; when rabbits become scarce, there were salmon, grasshoppers, onions or acorns. And when the gods had nothing in their hands to give to the people, women and men, boys and girls shared the little they had with one another. After that, the people fasted together. There was to be no division between members of the tribe. Or so the gods willed it.

It's been said that to thwart the Law of Life is folly. To level headed people this probably seems obvious. Over the eons, the denizens of the Earth have worked this out for us; it is their gift to us. To break the Law of Life is never a good idea. But it does happen from time to time. I'm not certain how such an idea first starts, but occasionally a being attempts to grasp what was never meant to be his. Something has gone wrong. When it happens, the being is not contented with gifts from the gods' hands. Such a being grows increasingly greedy and selfish and becomes obsessed with controlling things and events outside of itself. It says to its inner heart: today, I will not take my turn to go hungry; I will never feel hunger or cold again. It is my will that matters and I will devour the food that belongs to the others. I am clever and will live forever. All others must suffer, so I alone can be master. When this happens to a wolf, it says to itself, I will eat the food that was given to the lion; I will also eat the food that belongs to the hyena and the lynx. If

his brothers don't stop him, this wolf may get the idea to kill the lion and the hyena he sees all others as competition. He sees competition as his sacred duty. He looks for and sees competition all around him. Everything he sees is his. When we meditate on his problem we can clearly see that this wolf has lost his way and gone mad; he has become the enemy to all life. He is blind to everything but acquisition of power and control. We can see that it will end badly.

When this happens in a man, his brothers become alarmed and naturally pull away. They need to protect themselves and the ones that they love. He has become infected with an idea. To him the beautiful land is mere real estate; the trees are lumber, animals are only a protein source. Nothing has spirit. To him the sacred mountains, are only a source of mineral wealth. His cousins are workers or slaves. The world is dead to him and his mother, the Earth is nothing... nothing but a basket of resources to pick through and exploit. Who, in his right mind treats his kin in such a way. This man says, I am the fastest and most clever- why must my life burn away so quickly? It's only right that I should have everything I can grasp. Let the others stop me, if they can.

In their compassion, the man's relations try to show him his mistake. The man's sisters tease him to embarrass him and demonstrate that he has begun a destructive and foolish path. He will try to convince others that he is right; he will fight for his new idea. If the man won't listen to common sense and continues in his error, the man's cousins may ignore his talk or laugh out-loud at his ideas in the firelight. Soon, no other person will have dealings with the man, and no one will share with him the blessings that the gods bestow. He may move away from the village and sulk, down by the river with no one to care for him. All joy has left his life; he has become an island. When this happens to a person, it's a tragedy. When an entire people does this... how could the outcome surprise anyone?

If the man sees his selfishness and his error, no more will be said. The act of sharing his food and his life with the others is accepted as a simple act of contrition. While it is true that he may have a greater share of strength, cunning and ability- he must not separate himself from the others. He is one of Earth's many children and he remembers it. His family never taught him to act in such a way. The truth is that he has no other family and no other home. He knows that when his life ends, he will stumble and fall into the wet grass. The worms will digest his remains and he will feed the those grasses which, in turn will feed the deer which in turn feeds his people and so on.

The truth does not change because an individual develops a theory. Round and round, every being takes its turn. He remembers that every being must share in the ebb and flow of the gods' generosity. There are no exceptions to the Law of Life- none.

Humbled and sobered, he exhales his breath and relents. He decides to share the bounty of his foraging with the others. And the others share theirs with him. All his relatives embrace the man and life will continue as before. He, after all is their beloved brother and has made a mistake- and who has not made a misstep now and then? His myopic episode has passed. The life of the people has returned. A meal is prepared and shared. He admits his unfortunate mistake and has returned to the very bosom of life. That's all it that is required. The Earth exhales and draws another breath; she is spared again.

The man decides to help his niece and nephew in their passage to adulthood. Before their births, the souls of children choose to come to Earth for the simple reason that this place is where things are done...where projects are completed. The people know this and are willing to assist the children in all possible ways. They are born into the world surrounded by smiling and welcoming

faces. Before a birth, the elders perform a ceremony and lean in close to the mother's swollen belly. They ask the spirit of the newcomer to speak to them to tell them what task she wants to complete. In a trance, the mother responds to the elders' carefully worded queries. Children are given names to help them remember their missions. Children and the elderly treasure each other because of their shared proximity to the spirit world- one arriving and the other leaving.

Infants are held by many sets of loving hands and do not sleep alone. When they become hungry, they may forage or go to any adult for a meal. When they are thirsty, they can drink from any spring or creek because they are all clean. Children are encouraged to remember their nighttime dreams and if possible, to act upon them in the daylight. They are not placed in school to regulate or tailor their growth to notions of an expected educational result. On the contrary, children are left free to imitate or ignore their uncles, aunts, cousins, and the animals they observe during their play. Children are encouraged to emulate everyone and everything under the Sun. The grownups open doors and provide constant opportunities for the children to wander where they want unharmed and unhindered. Adult mentors resist inflicting undue difficulties or personal problems on the young.

The man resolves to build dream lodges in the forest, one for his niece and one for his sister's son. The children are old enough to choose their paths as adults. Their childhoods have been full, and their play has prepared them for a seamless transition into adulthood. Again and again the young people have observed the Law of Life demonstrated. In general, they are calm and happy people, though not without the usual amounts of pleasure and misfortune. The youngsters go away, and in a green, hidden place of silence and seclusion, they stop eating and begin to dream until each is visited by a spirit guide in the form of an animal. The spirit promises to guide the child along a specific path to a strong life-long connection to the other world.

The spirit offers to the boy certain powers with which to defend and heal himself. After his initiation, the young man ventures outside of the known world on solitary hunting forays. His guide never leaves his side as he walks beside mirror lakes or puzzles over the ways of the animals whose tracks he travels, whose ways he ponders, whose last, gasping breaths he shares. When he returns home with meat and medicine and tales of his travels, he in turn builds a dream lodge for his own niece.

If we understood the meaning of his life, we wouldn't ask why he fights the civilized men, the land thieves, and resists encasing himself in the grinding concrete, machine world we find ourselves in. We wouldn't ask why he'd rather die than live as we do. We wouldn't ask him to work in the factories or office cubicles as we do. We wouldn't ask why he refuses to drag his children into these classrooms and these prisons. Why he doesn't desert his elders in the parking lots of nursing facilities when they become infirm. Nor would we ask him to choose the best mobile phone plan or to compare new car options. If we fully grasped the content and meaning of his world, perhaps the flicker of life still smoldering deep within our own hearts would wake and flare up to give cause for us to shudder for all that has been lost to us. Truly, in comparison we have lost everything.

The man's sister, in the meantime, finds that like the gods, she is a creator, a painter of things. She turns tule reeds into soft sleeping mats for her relatives. She turns pine needles and sweet grass into watertight cooking baskets. Her dreams inspire the meticulous detail with which she finishes everything she makes. When her children find their own way to experience the world, the woman is neither disappointed nor surprised. She knows that the children are following their own dreams, as she herself had. She gravitates toward the center of the ritual life of the village,

to the council of elders, the learned protectors of the tribe. Nothing her people do or know is alien to her. Her life is long and filled with abundance, autonomy and symmetry.

After her marriage, she participates in the planning of rituals and parties. One of the festivals involves reenactment of the expulsion of a certain trickster figure from her village. Weesk, the Promethean trickster who has a fondness for sly jokes and malicious pranks. Weesk, the smasher of boundaries. Weesk, who sneaks in and sows the spirit of disorder with his bargaining and his sack of useful and amusing toys and sweets. Parents warn their children about long-eared Weesk and his sack of schemes. His diversions never fail to be amusing and tempting especially to children... and simpletons. The people must be ready for his tricks. It is tempting to listen to him, for his suggestions create efficiencies in food distribution and negate shortages during the dry months. After all, it was he who taught hunters to call game and use the bow. It was Weesk who pointed out that the contents of the deer's skull was the exact amount of material needed to tan the deer's hide. His tricks, however also teach the people to defy the Law of Life, to become isolated, sad, and selfish beings. The tribe knows Weesk and his ways. They know that with all of the Trickster's offers, there is a price to pay. The tribe wants to remain autonomous, free beings not inmates at a labor camp. Yes, Weesk does fool people, but he can be fooled by them as well. It is best to be on one's toes when dealing with the Trickster. And remember: accept nothing he offers at face value; keep your eyes and ears open and above all, be prepared to negotiate.

Every few years, people don masks to personify the ritual characters in the domestication drama. In the reenactment, Weesk leads the passive, dreaming tribe away from traditional life and into servitude, into the hierarchy of strongmen and priest-kings: toward an ever spreading, poisonous civilization. Nobody wants that. The Trickster attempts to dazzle the tribe with gifts, exotic theories and justifications for atrocities. In their play, the elders stand ready, shoulder to shoulder to face the Domesticator. During the reenactment, the elders cleverly suggest that Weesk offer his competitiveness and innovations elsewhere to a people less autonomous, to a people more needy and more vulnerable to suggestion. It's well known the he has a special fondness for cold and hungry people. On this occasion, thankfully, the seed of domestication has failed and finds no purchase in the hearts of the people. The joy is palpable after the ritual/drama ends and the pretend Civilizer leaves the village. Broadly grinning, friends take off their masks, embrace and share a meal together.

Part II

Long ago, this is how our ancestors lived. Food was held in common; the air, land, rivers and sea were the collective home to all life. All requirements for food, clothing, and shelter only required a few minutes of devotion per day. The majority of the day was spent talking, kissing, visiting, playing, and making things. No one person or group was lord over the others. What sort of person would think of toil in such a pleasant life? How can the air needed for breath, become a commodity, to be traded away or deprived? What sort of person could conceive of such an absurd evil? The idea of exploiting the land, animals or each other as resources was unthinkable; a kind of near-sighted madness. Would any sane person treat the mother of his father in this manner? Of course not!

One tribe let their guard down and while vulnerable, were unable to negotiate with the Trickster. Instead of gaining valuable secrets and poking fun at this divine clown, they lost everything. Here is how it happened. The Trickster was visiting villages along the Great river and not finding much luck while plying his trade. A wily grandfather approached Weesk and while they were sitting there, the man reached up, picked an apple and offered it. They relaxed and began chatting to pass the time, the old man suggested that there was a tribe called the Marsh people who were said to be greedy, foolish and lazy. He slyly implied that perhaps the Trickster might find some success down there with the Southern Marsh people because they were foolish and helpless; they might be able to use what he had to offer. Whether or not it was true, I can't say. But, I think they must have been ordinary people who happened to have been caught unaware, at a bad time. I do know this: Weesk liked the sound of these rumors and hurried to go and try his luck there. He followed the Great Trail, guided by the southern stars. The Trickster slipped down into a lush river valley. With his sack of tricks slung over his shoulder, he approached the Marsh tribe's village. Unlike his many other unsuccessful attempts to infiltrate an autonomous village, in this community Weesk was welcomed and revered. For whatever reason, they welcomed him and his complicated schemes and amazing gadgets. Actually, it was the children who rushed out to greet him first. Before anyone knew it, he moved right in. Parents went to retrieve their lost children and they, too, looked into the sack; they fell into his sack of tricks. Oh, the wonders in that bag! If you're wondering what was in that magical bag, simply take a look around you, at our world.

In one of his schemes, Weesk taught the women to save the choicest, fattest grass seeds and plant them into the black soil. It worked. Tiny green shoots ripened into fields of yellow swaying grain dotted with scarlet poppies. At harvest, the women sent up a joyous shout and brought out their flint sickles, baskets and grinding stones. Taking such an active role in creating this huge bounty felt powerful! With a rhythmic thump, they began to sing the Grinding Song. Their men were so proud of them, they positively beamed!

In another scheme, the tribesmen were shown how to trick their brothers, the game animals. Members of the tribe, whom Weesk called his beloved nephews, trapped the animals alive and enclosed them in woven wattle pens. They bred the herds for docility, meat, and dairy production. They asked the younger brothers to mind the herds as they placidly grazed the hills surrounding

the valley. Controlling the animals and plants made these people feel more powerful. Feeling the power and control over others felt really good. One thing led to another. Soon maintaining control over others seemed like the most natural way for a good and refined people to live. They told themselves that they did it for the general good.

When an intelligent young woman stood up and mocked the new practices, the supporters of Weesk frowned but stopped themselves from striking her down. Instead they waited to act, just as the Trickster had instructed them to do beforehand. “Don’t worry, we need this to happen”, Weesk hissed in their ears. Everyone looked on as the girl asked why any sane person would bother to toil and sweat to obtain food because after all, she argued the blessed Earth provided abundance to everyone with almost no effort. All the plotting and deception was totally unnecessary for people to live a pleasant and meaningful life. The idea of seeking to control the lives of others seemed not only unnecessary, but also dangerous, aggravating and potentially corrupting. She was shouted down by the crowd and painfully pinched for the embarrassment she caused Weesk and for the trouble she caused to the Trickster’s newly empowered nephews. The incident caused the nephews to smirk and glance nervously at one other. Her arguments, although unanswered were not raised again after that humiliation. Again, Weesk had been correct.

The first harvests were enormous and Weesk winked at his supporters. He told the people to collect clay from the river to form coiled pots in order hold the grain. He taught them to burn the pots in great banked fires. He softly suggested that all grain be stored in the baked clay vessels. Of course, the grain would be kept in his hut...for safekeeping. Centralizing all available food stocks would be most efficient, he purred. It was true, having control over their food supplies gave the tribe a special feeling... a feeling of security. A feeling of control- of power. We’ve all seen how seeking power can be addicting as well as maddening and that is just what happened.

One calm autumn evening, some time after the Trickster had settled into village life, a rumor began to spread. Weesk invited everyone to his hut to enjoy a feast of delicious baked bread and soft cheese. When everyone had eaten the crispy treat, the Trickster sat down on his blanket and crossed his legs. Everyone also sat. He indicated that he wanted to speak to the group by holding up his hand, palm outward. His dignity and bearing were like that of an elder chief. This is what he said.

My dear adopted family, my chosen people. I have never been as happy as I am in this moment. My heart is so full! You have welcomed me here as one of your own – into your homes; into your hearts. I am so grateful to have found such a home. A home where I can settle in and really grow into myself. My journey has been a long one and a tiring one. But that is all over, and I can spread my wings. Now that I finally found you, my beloved nieces and nephews, I intend to show you everything needed to open your eyes- to awaken to your own nobility. Let us call this night’s talk the beginning of your education as a species, distinct from the lower forms. As I’ve been sitting here , with you in this lovely land, I’ve been watching the little children in their busy playing. I noticed how they love to watch the animals moving about in the wild.

I’ve seen the way in which the young ones mimic the behavior of the wild animals in their play. Several children gallop in a herd like wild ponies. Others will shiver and sway like the wild irises in the breeze. Still others set up to feed each other like the nesting robins nurturing their young chicks. It appears to me that this is how humans learn- from observation, from mimicry. Like the young ones, let us so also heed what our eyes make plain. Let us begin to learn from the animals’ wisdom and put it to real use- to noble purpose. Let us do so and let it be recognized as our holy mission, our true destiny as superior beings. Look friends...believe what your own eyes tell you.

See these cousins of man. And as we look upon their examples, let us leave the innocence of the nursery behind us... and begin the lessons of life. Observe the honeybee. We all know how she collects a sweet treasure, how she hoards it against the weeks of sleet and cold rain. She defies nature by doing so. She doesn't resign herself to the verities and whims of the seasons. Yet, is she afraid of the gods' wrath? The answer is no. The bee takes control of her destiny. And in doing so she finds her greatness. Let's explore how. We all have seen how her daughters rush out to defend their queen's honor from the brown bear and when small boys attack her hive with a hail of dirt clods and stones. Those bees are wise because they band together and sacrifice their individuality. They are not a group of mere warriors; they become an powerful army. Witness this: they plan for the future; they don't simply trust in nature as our "so-called" elders tell us to do. But it is not right that our children go hungry while wolves feast on deer less than a mile from here. For we are smarter and thereby better than the wolf. Truly, we are better and thus more worthy. Yet our elders tell us that we are brothers to the animals- that all beings must take their turn to go without- to endure nights of discomfort and gnawing hunger. They encourage us to sit, dripping with cold rain and adapt with cheerful hearts; to accept what scraps the gods give us. All the while our children whine in our ears. Sisters... Brothers, the old ones are wrong. Their gray heads mean well, but just as their eyesight dims, their minds falter and fail to grasp the bigger picture. We were not made to be so passive. We are proud, and have every right to be so. Let us add other voices to our hearing. Let these animals be our advisers in this. They are wise because they want not! They are free because they give over their wildness for the good of their race. Every single bee willingly gives her life and labor for the honor of her ruler, the queen. They are free because they rightfully give up their lives and fight to the death for the honor and fealty to such a royal monarch. They don't hesitate to give up their so called autonomy to defend their sovereign. Such is the secret to their success as a nation. Those bees form a great cloud of domination wherever they go and bring on a trembling and quaking fear to the knees of their attackers. To challenge their nation is folly. May our enemies see us in the same light! There are many other examples of how we might live a better and more honorable and refined life. We need only look as far as our own South Hills. Even the smallest child knows about the beaver who fells trees to dam the streams and rivulets to sculpt their world. They make a better world with the ponds and lakes they create. They improve on the rough gifts of nature. These laborers of the forest fearlessly bear fruit with their earthworks. They create sunlit water pasture for storks to spear the silvery trout; where the mothers of moose and elk can suckle their young. They create a woodland paradise. Friends, isn't this- the kind of life the guardians of the universe meant for us? Aren't we more creative than beavers. How much better will the world become under our thoughtful husbandry? Even so, the beaver has to overcome the fear he feels of offending the gods. Why should we, who walk on two legs, recoil at the notion of altering our world? The oldest among us have been laboring under the mistaken assumption that the gods don't want us to thrive and take command of our inheritance. But the gods, who created us, truly love us because we are the greatest and most noble of all their artworks. Indeed this place was made for us. Look at it! Everything we need to be great- is just lying around. Up till now, the earth has only been a playpen for man. But, we are no longer children and we are not sheep. We are men. Let us step up and claim our rights! Let us use these hands to shape the world that the gods gave. Let us wield our minds like sharp weapons to cleave the earth and improve upon it. Let us bend the earth to our noble will. We must move forward.

Weesk settled back on his blanket, looked down and was silent. But secretly, his eyes shifted from side to side and he watched their responses. Surprisingly, all remained silent. The Marsh tribe seemed unconcerned with the implications of all that the Trickster had said. They were dazed and distracted by all the new ideas, theories and gadgets that were entering their lives so quickly. In another of his talks, Weesk went on to say that that the forest was full of evil things. He insisted that the people must shut their ears to the wildness of the forest voices. They must dominate the wildness within their own hearts. In this speech, he used a new word, master. The people, he hissed, are masters of the forest and everything in it. They must create a new world—a man made world. A world of logic, control and production.

Then the Domesticator said something that struck all the listeners like a blow. He lowered his voice to a hoarse whisper, and here is what he told them. Some people were little more than beasts and not unlike camp dogs they needed masters to manage and control their lives. The best, fiercest and most clever among the tribesmen could gain great advantage by arranging the opportunities and perceptions of their less intelligent, less mighty cousins. Men could, for example, own and manage the lives and fertility of women. Tragic yes, he said, but hard choices had to be made. It was necessary for all the old social structures of tribal autonomy to be split up, atomized and utterly destroyed. He told them that new classes of people needed to be formed into more efficient units based on competition, efficiency and production. The old outmoded family allegiances must be sacrificed to make way to a new, better life based on ability, gender and other divisions. He maintained that the new ways were actually the most humane because more food, better housing, improved health and greater security would surely follow. Furthermore, good people were fools to share what they could keep for themselves. The best and wisest people, he told them, hoard goods for the hungry times. Let the best people, he said become my nephews and let the weak and hungry fend for themselves. It teaches people to care. Everyone should be responsible only to themselves.

His arguments were convincing, and the village elders were confused by his talk. They argued among themselves, unable to agree about how to react to the strange ideas and tempting inventions from this new god, Weesk. Some elders grumbled. One healer waxed nostalgic about life in the old days when the world was a garden filled with creatures who were like dear relations to the tribe. “Back then”, she said “no one fought over food or toiled for want of it. Everyone took their turn in sharing the gifts of the gods”. The oldest among them leaned forward on her walking stick and suggested that the people return to the old ways and wondered if it was still possible to expel the domesticator and return to the Law of Life. Weesk overheard this talk and shook his head. “Please stop whining”, he snapped. “How will we care for all these new little ones? Do you intend for them to starve? Think about it...we can never go back -only forward—that is progress!” He did, however, offer the elders a walled garden of their own. The Trickster presented the elders a scented paradise where they would spend long, relaxing days discussing the nature of the cosmos away from the distracting troubles of ordinary men. The elders liked their new temple garden with its handsome servants, trickling fountains, paths, wind chimes and fruit trees. They turned their faces away from the world and retired within its ivy-covered walls.

In the meantime, the astounded villagers were left without the wisdom and presence of their elders. When grateful people asked Weesk what he desired as his reward for the gifts he had bestowed on their world, the trickster said that he desired nothing. He cleared his throat and then in a humble and sincere voice, he spoke, I am a mere servant of the people my needs are simple.

He did indicate, however, that he might like to be carried around in a sedan chair, supported by his strongest, handsome nephews, away from the muddy ground. "Also perhaps", he whispered, "I would enjoy a soil mound piled up in my honor...but only if that's not too much trouble."

His nephews organized the task. A mound was duly constructed for Weesk. Baskets of soil were dumped and piled up one upon another, and the pile grew into a small pyramid that overlooked the river valley. Everyone, all the people, joined in these herculean labors. When certain persons became bored with endless toil and wandered away to rest and make music under the shade trees, Weesk rolled his eyes and exhaled loudly in exasperation. When the evening mealtime came, the food was withheld from these shameless shirkers. When it happened, he narrowed his eyes, gave a knowing smile and a sideways glance in the loafers direction. Everyone saw it in the firelight and the incident changed everything.

At harvest the strongest nephews collected and stored all the grain. Weesk's most ruthless nephews went to guard the food lest undeserving and ungrateful wretches steal some of it. Since all the game animals had been driven away by the violence and clamor, some people went hungry or subsisted on a diet of grass seed alone. The hungry begged the their leaders for small handfuls of the grain. The nephews granted the wishes of those they found pleasing. Those who were not as pleasing suffered greatly.

Some people became weak on the new diet their bones became brittle; teeth were ground flat and abscessed or fell out; their children were sickly and stunted. When a desperate parent took what was needed, the nephews caught her by the wrist and detained her in a sturdy, locked hut. They called this special hut prison. The woman did not seem to regret her actions and they wanted to teach her something. Weesk's nephews wanted to teach her that only they had the power to control the flow of food- and by extension, control her life. Then they noticed an even more significant benefit of prison. More importantly, it frightened the common people. The concept of incarceration demonstrated the complicated and contradictory new logic of morality and honesty. It taught the people to be humble and frightened, but also to be thankful for the "generosity of their superiors". It taught them to fear the nephews' unpredictable wrath. Furthermore, it taught them to be watchful of each other; to be mistrustful of those not as fortunate as themselves. By doing so, it subdivided the tribe even further, making them even more governable.

Poverty and hunger were effective punishments, yes but not always enough to deter the hardened criminal. More severe deterrents were designed and given. Weesk's most arrogant nephews convened and formed panels. These men adorned themselves in dark robes and elaborate head-dresses and sat at special tables flanked by ruthless and obedient spear men. In ominous voices they condemned the errant villagers to harsh and arbitrary punishments. It was widely circulated that these wrongdoers had no common sense and were dangerous to themselves and others. After all, the nephews sniffed, who else but a dolt or willful criminal would attack the interests of the powerful nephews? These magistrates labored continuously to make examples of pitiful and desperate offenders. It was all very educational for tribe.

Weesk bellowed orders and directives from atop his dirt mound. With his nephews standing all around him, he made his proclamations. The common folk appeared down below.

The land, according to Weesk, was to be called property and was not to be used without special permission. In fact, all land was now owned by his chosen ones, the nephews. Others must pay rents and tribute to them. Common or low people were to be called zeks. The zeks were to do all the painful physical labor and fed as little as possible- to reduce overhead. The majority of a zek's labor effort went away and up the hierarchy, for the nephews benefit. Weesk's nephews

were appointed to shepherd the zeks through their dull and painful lives. Zeks must defer to nephews. Obtaining food, clothing and shelter was to be called work. These activities would take the majority of a zek's waking hours. The remainder of a zek's time was to be spent in recuperation from work and in preparation for the following day's work. The nephews controlled the flow of all necessary resources. Everything from fresh, clean water to work tools and leisure time were metered out in small, measurable increments. In short, all human activity was to be devoted to production. All effort outside of production was to be in support of production. All work was to be determined and assigned by the nephews. Refusing to work or shirking was said to be stealing and therefore immoral and punishable. Hard work, on the other hand, was said to be right and moral. Cooperation with the plans of the nephews would be rewarded with extra rations and privileges.

The logic was self evident. It was easier to follow their plans than to withstand the violence and starvation that the nephews imposed... even the smallest of infractions or slightest deviations were noted as criminal and punished. These principles were said to benefit everyone equally and were recorded as just laws. However, it was plain to see that the seemingly light punishments given to the well off, fell crushingly on the worker's heads. In truth, the laws were as light as cobwebs to the rich and powerful. From the nephews' point of view, justice was blind and liberty, wealth, opportunity and freedom were everywhere. They commissioned patriotic songs about all the liberty and freedom they saw around themselves. All of this joyful noise confused the tired and distracted zeks. Some zeks joined the festivities.

Any zek who demonstrated above-average ability or intelligence was given special privileges as a preventative measure. The upgrade in status was conditional upon exclusive service to the nephews. The best minds and bodies from the ranks of the zeks gravitated upward and toward service to and development and refinement of the hierarchy. The more utility to the nephews, the higher the status granted to these talented zeks. They also saw opportunity and freedom inside the hierarchy.

In schools, the youngsters were first separated from their parents, then sorted, graded and evaluated by a series of mental and physical hurdles. Upon graduation, each was awarded with a position in the hierarchy based on his usefulness to the interests of the nephews. Some became scribes or clerks, calculating the rate and flow of resource wealth to and between their various masters. Some became priests, rationalizing the inequities of the social structure. Others showed a talent for engineering or innovation, to help streamline production. Some became entertainers, glorifying the valorous, daring deeds and values of their overlords. All young people, whatever their talents, abilities or genius were bent to serve the will of the mighty nephews. Any zek graduate who was intellectually capable of constructing an effective critique of the hierarchy was co-opted and lifted above his fellow zeks. Effectively buying off all meaningful opposition and any potential critics of the new social hierarchy. In this way, the framework of the social structure was always being refined and infused with vitality but never dismantled or even challenged. Weesk called it total buy-in.

The mighty nephews did not attempt to deny that their hierarchy was inherently unfair and cruel. Since they had taken control of the telling of history itself, they created a sense that their ascendance to the top of the hierarchy was inevitable; the unstoppable rise of nobility. They framed this concept as the will of the gods and the evolution of Man. They also maintained that the pyramid was the most holy form in geometry. That it's societal counterpart was desirable and even unavoidable in a refined and civilized world. And as resources and wealth flowed freely to the top

of the pyramid, their lives, rituals and burials became conspicuous, elaborate, opulent and self justified. The highest status nephews were entombed with entire households of slaves, tapestries, boats and even gilded furniture to ensure a pleasant experience in, what the nephews envisioned would be an even more opulent experience in their afterlives. They maintained that there were hierarchies above in the heavens; as well as below, in the bowels of the Earth. These celestial structures mirrored the nephew's earthly constructs- complete with kings, judges, overseers, slaves and jailers. They witnessed hierarchy everywhere they looked; they overlay-ed these ideological hierarchies on every aspect of existence- from the human body, with the brain as king and the muscles as an unwilling slave workforce- to theories about the so-called animal kingdom with humans strutting around the top of some absurdly imagined zoological pyramid. They also worked hard to erase any trace that people had ever lived in better or even different social and economic conditions. They commissioned fictional time lines, histories and mythologies about the past. They slowly changed the vocabulary of language to ensure that certain ideas about self-sufficiency and joy couldn't be uttered in conversations between individuals. They obliged everyone to use these constructs in the language. The wise and powerful nephews of Weesk asserted that any alternative theories were mere superstitions, unsophisticated and offensive conspiracy theories, or even ill-advised blasphemies.

The machine of civilization began to grind forward and spread. Its fuel was forests, animals and mountains, and the peoples it encountered. Everything was changed by contact with this machine. Rivers and streams were redirected and channeled. Forests were cleared away and meadows were overgrazed by the relentless herds. Topsoil simply washed away leaving behind an acrid smelling desert. The nephews told themselves and the zeks they ruled- that it was under their careful husbandry that the desert bloomed. But the desert did not bloom the land was in fact withering. No zek dared to state the obvious- it was the tampering with nature which had caused the deserts to begin in the first place! Zeks continued to graze the herds owned by the nephews. Zeks continued to plant the nutrient greedy grains. Who could blame them? The alternatives were even more grim.

Because of the increase in the food supply, the population doubled and in time doubled again. The valley and surrounding hills became very crowded. Food shortages, jealousy and violence became common. There were periodic famines and droughts. From this time forward, the nephews values of, hoarding, deprivation, efficiency and watchful suspicion became core virtues of even the lowest zeks. The valley was changing becoming domesticated and fouled. The people were violent, corrupted and ill at ease. The most common theme for their fireside stories, songs and rituals was escape from the bonds of the unfair and cruel Earth. At night, their sleep was fitful and monsters plagued their minds. The only wildness in their lives occurred at night, when they dreamed. The people dreamed of nothing but escape.

From the top of the pyramid, the cunning nephews now demanded that the people work even more productively. They attempted and largely succeeded in making productivity a high human virtue. Zeks commanded themselves and each other to work ever faster to build towering monuments to the nephews' hubris. Dense concentrations of people created conditions suitable for outbreaks of sickness and plague. Old, weak, and feeble people were being told that their misfortunes were their own fault; they must earn the favor of the gods and the powerful nephews of Weesk to prosper. In fact, they were told, that the more unquestioningly they followed their superiors' wishes, the greater their reward in the next world, the pure spirit world. Only by making oneself pleasing to the nephews could a zek be pleasing to the sky gods.

In the eyes of Weesk's clear headed nephews, it was all very orderly and logical; a progression. It was all a matter of control versus chaos. In the nephews' minds, zeks were the very embodiment of chaos. They wanted zeks to think of them as mighty but caring, distant and godlike. Zeks, however tried simply to stay out of harm's way. Which meant to remain in the good graces of their mighty superiors. Zeks attempted to alter their own behavior and appearances so as to be more pleasing to the mighty. Some were found pleasing and were rewarded with food and mercy. Others simply lived and died in pain, humiliation and squalor. Wilier zeks were rewarded with teams of their own zeks to command. Regardless of food stocks, nephews encouraged zeks to have more and more children. The holy books, written by the nephews commanded it.

It was necessary for zeks to exchange their day's labor for food and shelter -for a night's rest. It seemed that, for zeks there were no longer very many choices. They had become strangers in their own land, unwelcome and begrudgingly tolerated by their masters. Feared because of their number, they were pacified with spectacles, self-loathing and religion or stupefied with intoxicants. Most zeks chose to submit to large and small humiliations in order to avoid the worst of the violence. Others couldn't face the reality of living out their lives as inmates and committed suicide or buried themselves with intoxication or the perpetual fantasy of somehow ascending to a higher rank within the established hierarchy. One thing they all held in common was that they forgot that conditions had been any other way. Survivors worked just to stay alive. Terms such as equality, freedom and autonomy ceased to yield their former meanings. The words themselves had been co-opted, inverted and turned against the zeks. The language would no longer support the notion of autonomy and true equality. Their former freedoms were literally unthinkable.

To stay alive and out of trouble meant to serve their masters, plain and simple. To commit harm to others yet to remain unharmed oneself, became the new definition of freedom. This freedom only flowed in one direction: down the hierarchy. Under this new definition of freedom, the nephews were the most free. Furthermore, to remain unmolested and have a safe place to sleep at night, meant laboring for and paying tithing to the very ones who continued to exploit them. It was all very confusing. In stories, games and songs, zek parents taught their children the ethics and values of self control, hard work and captivity. Work makes you free, work makes you happy rest is for the afterlife, they hummed to the little ones. Zeks obsessed on visions of a just and more equitable afterlife. All the while the priests droned, "let us look to the skies and give thanks..."

The constant grumbling of the zeks was perplexing and an annoyance to their shepherds. The confused nephews faced each other: Why do these zeks hate us? We are their protectors. We give them everything. We are the very best people and the world balances on our broad shoulders. Look at us... we are beautiful! We are brave, mighty and noble. Why shouldn't they admire us? Shouldn't we be rewarded for our cleverness, intelligence and hard work? Of course we should! The nephews devised additional laws to protect their own privilege from the ungrateful zeks.

Certain zeks came to the attention of the nephews and were recruited and trained in the use of arms, punishment, and efficient detention; they kept order over their fellows. These zeks were good at their jobs and felt good about their work. "After all", they repeated "order must prevail over chaos". They now had official sanction to harm without being harmed in return. "Isn't that the very definition of freedom?", the growled to each other. They acted quickly and efficiently and fear of their brutality rippled throughout the shanty areas. In creating and unleashing this internal army, the nephews reasoned, the zeks would be punishing their own kind. The majority of the blame and ill feelings would be displaced away from it's real source. "Why shouldn't they

deal with the problems that they create? Why must we always be forced to discipline them? Let their own fellows subdue their violence. These villains can't tell right from wrong."

When food again ran short, the nephews assembled a standing army to head north and seize a neighboring tribe's land for crop planting, mining and tree felling. After all, the nephews reasoned, planting crops and resource extraction are the only good use for land. "Besides, the Northern tribe is uncivilized", the soldiers joked, "a little culture will do them good." The zek army brought home captives and exotic new resources from the north. From the nephews, new orders came. The orders said that Weesk's mound would have to be rebuilt, this time in white limestone. A stone mountain with a golden pinnacle. It would serve as a symbol of God's holy will on Earth. Only this act would please the one and only creator of the universe: Weesk.

God, they said, was angry with the ungrateful and lazy zeks; it was their fault that the Earth was increasingly barren and unproductive. He had become wrathful and jealous; He was punishing everyone for the bad deeds of a few villainous zeks. When the flood waters receded and spring planting time again returned, Weesk was not found inspiring his armies or in repose on his stone mountain or celebrating in his temples. Neither was he in treasure vaults, or even in the darkest corner of his many full prisons. The Domesticator seemed to have finished his work and vanished into thin air. From atop the battlement walls, the nephews who had become the armored kings, generals, priests and entrepreneurs looked out upon the land and muttered into their braided, perfumed beards, There is wilderness to subdue, zeks to rule, and no amount of time-wasting and loafing will speed this sacred work.

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M. Megaceros

Weesk's Greatest Trick

An Origin Myth – the trickster origins of civilization (hats off to D, Quinn and Fredy Perlman)

12/21/11

fiction

I wrote this piece to help dispel some harmful myths that my high school students had already acquired. at the time we were plodding through a dry, lifeless textbook account of the birth of civilization at Jericho. I asked them why would anyone give up a life of relative leisure and joy for one of servitude and technology.

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