

Imaginary Places

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IMAGINARY PLACES VII

Spawning Ground

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Spawning Ground

We hear the theme music building steadily—a Strauss waltz hummed by a lone green **heron** perched on a rock overlooking the river. Faint sounds of pumping steam engines and gnawing saws can be heard in the distance. Then, suddenly, there are loud clanging noises, earth-shaking thuds, and steam whistles, and a monolith rises out of the water midstream. As the scene fades to black, a steam calliope plays a jaunty rendition of *The Robert E. Lee*.

The cause of the destruction was a **sudden, massive infestation** of human beings. The infestation was local, but it came on the heels of successive infestations that are responsible for the loss of more than two-thirds of the old forests on the planet.

From the diary of an eyewitness comes the following:

As the forest became more heavily infested with these insidious parasites, the more pathological individuals (natural born thieves) began to appear in greater and greater abundance, and ultimately they burdened the whole of the structure to the point that it broke down; the forest was no more. It reminded me exceedingly of the infestations of racketeers, who, with the utter contempt for others and indifference to the consequences for themselves, invade our cities to devour entire households, neighborhoods, districts, and communities.

It is a fact that human beings enjoy the widest world distribution of any parasite, both

SPAWNING GROUND

geographically and in respect to the types of environment which they can exploit, and their conquests both of territory and of other animals and plants, not to mention members of their own species, are the most complete and successful. They have no equal.

The diarist continues:

It was an eerie sight; birds and animals of every description fleeing the advancing army. These refugees crowded in on their neighbors in the most unwelcome fashion, invading home and hearth, claiming as their own the food won by others. The less fit perished in the stampede.

Again we hear Strauss—a waltz played backwards.

The parasitic invaders destroyed the nucleus of their own support system, thereby chaining a succession of cataclysms to the first.

The diarist writes:

*It was obscene; the head eating the tail. But none seemed to grasp the meaning of their actions, and this went on to the **bitter end**. We were helpless to intervene.*

The history of this place ends here. The diarist ran out of paper. The heron miraculously grew opposable thumbs, then went mad trying to figure out what to do with them. Where thousands of species of plants, animals, and micro-organisms had once shared common ground there were only rotting stumps, wood rats, and deer mice.



Morning on the River

Necessity and habit brought her there. She always arrived at first light, lingered long enough to watch the comings and goings, do a little fishing, and then returned home before the sun reached its zenith.

When it happened one day that she saw the fish swimming backward instead of forward, she thought it curious. When on another day she saw the fish floating belly up instead of swimming, she was surprised and a little confused. But when it happened that she came to the river and saw no fish at all, and even after waiting a long time still saw none, she was alarmed. And when she felt the first twinges of hunger deep in her belly a sense of panic grew within her, causing much anguish and fright.

She was not accustomed to thinking deeply about matters that had not heretofore required much thought. Moreover, when it came to interpreting symbolism, she felt utterly at sea. What any of these events might mean she could not know.

A chorus of nattily dressed shrews rise slowly into the air, singing:

*De boll weevil et all de cotton an' lef' us only sticks.
We ain't got no home, we's got no home.*



Pioneer Phase

The removal of certain obstacles in this newly opened territory—in this instance, the natives—was followed promptly by an invasion of highly specialized parasites fully alert to take advantage of the opportunities which their less enterprising congeners failed to appropriate. The new land thus became the heritage of the most alert, hardy, and daring types, allowing them to maintain almost exclusive possession through several generations. Their hold was broken only after the last tree fell and was carted off to be digested in the bowels of their machinery.

It would be useless to discuss evolution and its processes here. There is nothing in this brief history to illuminate the matter beyond the fact that today we do not feel we can, in any way, associate evolution with progress. We can no longer comfort ourselves with the cheerful nonsense that *ends* are necessarily better than *beginnings*.

Shouting:

Our politics is simple. Our politics is grand. It all comes down to the value of the bird in hand.

Whispering:

The populist manifesto was penned by a San Francisco poet with more gall than experience.



The Waste Piles

Here, in the hinterparts of the parasitic organism, we can see the extent of the destruction. For a single species of tree the whole of the forest is wasted. The clacking of the conveyors is constant. As the waste piles grow in size and increase in number, one can estimate, not just the rate of loss, but also the size and character of the missing mass.

Sitting at a child's toy piano, a boreal owl plays an ode to carbon. In a meadow, several critters attempt an interpretive dance, one of them playing the part of the tragic fairy Mycorrhizae.

At a Presto-log distribution center a sales rep holds aloft in his right hand a plastic-wrapped monolith. A Strauss waltz played on an electronic keyboard begins to build. The scene fades to black.