

Without comment or reaction, MaraDara chugged down some orange liqueurs, washed up at the creek, gathered up the horses then stared at Wyl.

“-so... Foulds it is then?” Wyl ultimately concluded.

Tying off the horse Tamel rode out of Enet to his own saddle, Wyl mounted up alongside MaraDara then the party headed south at a leisurely pace while the sun shined and the overnight snow melted away. Long low rolling hills sprawled out covered with woodlands of broadleaved trees still bare from the winter and wide expanses of flat fields lay between the contours. Barely dry enough ground lay underfoot for horse traffic near the canopy of the woods while all other open areas consisted mostly of marshy bog and no hint of a trail or any sign of humanity occurred in any direction.

Leaning their heads back, MaraDara closed their eyes as speckles of shadow and sunlight drifted across their faces under the branches. Wyl keenly appreciated the feeling he felt the day months earlier when he escorted MaraDara on a tour of Edyn on a pleasant autumn day with time to indulge. Examining the landscape and appreciating the view, Wyl inquired, “Why didn’t he run before you saw him? Why did he try to bluff like that? Why were your identities and intentions not painfully obvious to him?” Speculating to a degree, Wyl asserted, “Nelles called you Mazan. It seems pretty obvious to me that’s his word for witch. I would guess long before Tamel ever showed up for dinner, he heard all kinds of talk of witches in town harassing the king and probably sat in on a few councils as well. Why wouldn’t he run away then, before you ever saw him?”

“Perhaps because she focuses attentions of king on his economies,” “her strategy works as she plans” “and advisor believes kings and economies only interests of Mazan.” MaraDara remarked, “In Enet, king knows when Red Witch calls,” “king extends hospitality to Red Witch or king dies.” “Advisor and probably all his kind know. For these reason,” “perhaps he believes of him they are not suspicious but many other reasons possibly explain.” “He suffers from uncertainty and these impairs his judgments.” “Perhaps he believes himself too clever for them” “or perhaps he believes they think him of no consequence,” “or perhaps he truly believes he assists them” “and his efforts they appreciate.” “These are the vulnerabilities of his kind.”

“His kind.” Wyl repeated then nodding slowly, he gazed up at the clouds for a moment and stated as if to no one in particular, “His kind - Your kind - My kind - Her kind...” Wyl smiled in the direction of MaraDara until they returned smiles then he shared with them a reminiscence, stating, “My first captain I ever had in the militia told me once, a day will come that men won’t know what food is anymore unless somebody tells them, and even starving, they won’t recognize food right in front of them if it’s not in the form of a product, maybe even with text on it that says, *‘FOOD’*. He described it in terms of men one day starving to death while apples fall from branches above and bounce off their heads. At first, I thought he was just trying to reinforce a point with humor then later I thought it was metaphor but a long time has passed and I’ve since come to understand he always meant it literally outright. Today, I also believe it literally outright. It sounds kind of silly when you say the words aloud but I think it’s actually inevitable. After all, an obviously educated and intelligent man told me not three days ago, **food is an invention** and only the products of a market are fit for eating. If Nelles were alone out in the wilderness, would he know an apple is food? I imagine he would figure it out easily enough today but... he honestly believes food is an invention, so maybe if he had another fifty years to reinforce his beliefs, would he know an apple is food then?”

With something of a sigh in bitter laughter, Wyl further recounted, “Nelles mentioned wheat as an example of what he calls a ‘raw material’ that isn’t food until after it’s processed into an ‘invention’ by men. You know, it may not be a particularly pleasant meal and takes some effort to separate and discard certain portions of it but you can otherwise pull wheat right out of the dirt and eat it. It’s food but Nelles thinks it’s an inedible raw material like rocks. Now, Nelles is just plain outright wrong about that so he already doesn’t know any more that wheat is food. If Nelles was alone out in the wilderness and wheat was the only vegetation around, would he eat wheat or would he starve to death then drop over face first into a mouthful of food? That question isn’t as easy to answer as the question about apples, is it? Nelles would no doubt recognize an apple in the wild today and he presumably knows what wheat looks like, so maybe starving he would still figure out a way to survive on wheat... **today** that is... but in a future where all food is so processed into invention, even if the name of the product is ‘APPLE’ or ‘WHEAT’, men will not necessarily know what apples and wheat look like in their natural forms so in the wild, they would have no experience on which to rely to distinguish the apple from the rock... -so... how far really are Nelles and the men around him from starving to death while apples fall from branches above and bounce off their heads? I figure these men are only maybe a couple generations of reinforcement away from not knowing what food looks like in its natural state, from not understanding that food is not something you invent out of rocks.

King Nelles and the men around him believe reality is subjective and in explaining their subjective reality, they speak words that **mean** water flows uphill if you only just decide to **believe** water flows uphill. I don’t imagine any one of them literally expects water to flow uphill just because they decide to believe it but they at least **believe the words that mean** water will flow uphill if you only just decide to believe it, and they clearly have already talked themselves into believing that food is food only because you decide to believe it, not because you discover it. When Nelles and his kind talk about their subjectivity versus objectivity, what they’re really saying is that truth is something you decide to believe, not something you discover, and when they say you’re deceiving yourself if you form objective conclusions, what they’re really saying is you can’t trust nature and you can’t discover truth. They’re saying there are no discoveries, only inventions and beliefs, and nothing objective, no truth they ever discover, no lessons nature ever teaches them will ever alter their belief because they interpret all the objective reality of nature, all truth and all discovery mere equal belief of no greater significance or merit than any other invented belief.

Where I live, we also have a coin just like in the other world but unlike the other world, the value of our coin is not subjective - It represents a quarter of an hour of effort and that value is not variable. It’s an imperfect system but we use the coin to represent that value because it’s easier than the hours of discussion that would otherwise occur when the grain farmer wants a pair of shoes, the shoemaker wants a table and the carpenter wants bread. We recognize the relationship between the quarter hour and the coin, and we recognize that proportion. In the world of King Nelles, men don’t recognize any proportion or any relationship between the value of the work you performed today and the value of the currency in your pockets. In the world of subjective reality, the value of your labor effort is a value someone else **decides to believe**, not its actual direct value to you, and the coins in your pocket have no relationship to the material result of your actions.”

Although they obviously appreciated the sincerity of his convictions, Mara and Dara examined Wyl with expressions that suggested apparent amusement over his preference of contexts but firmly dismissing all pretense of humorous intent, he furthermore advised, “In my world, we stamp coins then just hand them out in exchange for the direct material result of constructive action. You work an hour to produce wheat, you contribute that wheat to what men like Nelles would generally regard as a ‘marketplace’ then you collect coins worth one hour of constructive action, and whoever wants that wheat pays coins worth one hour of constructive action for it. It involves no haggling or negotiation, no subjective interpretation of scarcity and surplus, weakness and strength, circumstantial fortune or misfortune. That is the origin of our coin value, it is actual and objective, not subjectively interpreted, it never appreciates or depreciates with perceived or imagined factors and it never represents any value that an individual just decides to believe.

In the other world, even though it clearly contradicts their assertions about subjectivity, they keep gold reserves locked in vaults and they say the ‘actual’ value of the gold is the origin of the value of their coin currency. Both the gold and the coins are metal objects but they call one metal object ‘actual’ and the other metal object ‘representative’ then they say if the value of the ‘representative’ object should falter, the value of the ‘actual’ object will salvage and secure all their subjective values. They intuitively recognize the contradiction so they compensate by saying the value of gold varies by the subjectivity of a dynamic market, and that is perhaps the most preposterous belief of all their beliefs. They insist the value of the gold conforms to the criteria of ‘subjectivity’ because the value varies based on market factors, yet they still insist that value is ‘actual’ and permanent. What they’re really saying is their belief in the subjective value of the coin is no more or less absolute than their belief in the subjective value of the apple, but their belief in the subjective value of all other material is less absolute than their belief in the subjective value of the gold. They’re saying if the subjective value of the coin falters, they will not trade their apples for coins but if they are starving to death, they will trade their apples for gold. They’re saying the subjective value of the gold is not determined by at what point of starvation they will no longer trade their apples for gold but determined by the **number** of their apples they will trade for gold... while they starve to death.

In the world of subjective reality, this kind of man knows the difference between the apple and the rock only because the text on the product of invention says, ‘*FOOD*’ or the text says, ‘*ROCK*’, but in the natural world -- the **objective** world -- these men don’t know the difference between the apple and the rock, and that is why, **even while starving to death**, they will trade the last of their apples for gold... and **that** is how they will starve to death while apples tumble from branches above and bounce off their heads...

In my homeland, we talk about this great last war of men that will someday occur to determine the inheritance of the earth. My captain said it will be difficult to identify the opposing forces because everyone will look and act about the same, they won’t wear uniforms and it won’t involve a lot of weapons. I see that as inevitable now. I see the great last war of men to determine the inheritance of the earth as an epic contest between opposing forces that all believe the same things, arguing while they starve to death over their perceived and imagined subjectively interpreted value of the gold... and I see now that to survive this contest, we don’t have to gather arms, we don’t have to prevail in a fight, capture or control material... To survive this war and inherit the earth all we have to do is simply always remember... that gold... is a **rock**... and apples... are **food**...”

Perhaps for no reason other than dramatic emphasis and perhaps that much only by journalistic habit or observance of cultural tradition, Wyl paused as if to accommodate a moment of contemplation then concluded, “You asked me once why I write in journals nobody will ever read and that is why I write in journals. I write in the hope that one day, when men no longer recognize opposing men as opponents, when all men equally regard the products of invented belief such as gold and economics as the only opponent of men, someone will stumble upon my journals then read that gold is a rock and apples are food, and then those men will realize that the men that tell them gold, rocks, apples and food are worth only whatever men subjectively decide to believe, are the true and only opponents of all men and the only real enemy of humankind that ever occurred upon this earth. It applies today and will apply forevermore, when the real humans of this earth finally weary of the torment and tyranny of their invented imaginary obstacles and prohibitions, they will easily overwhelm, eradicate or otherwise subdue these subjective men and their poisonous beliefs by whatever means necessary then real humans will at last live in the real objective natural world, just as the perfection of nature always showed them they should.”

Contemplating the substance and quality of his thoughts, Wyl easily concluded based on the arguments conducted by Mara in the chambers of the king versus the champions of subjectivity that neither Mara nor Dara would ever learn anything from observations in which he might confide. Perhaps Wyl more or less simply intended to demonstrate that he learned from experience, he discovered universal truths through objective observation and although perhaps in no single lifetime might he ever accumulate wisdom or truth discovered equal to that of any witch, he at least essentially understood the nature of the conflict and he chose his side. With fond smiles, Mara and Dara indicated apparent appreciation of the effort and nodding in acknowledgement, Wyl then cheerfully advised, “I’m going to tell you something about witches you, yourselves may not even know... then I’m going to ask you a question.”

Mara and Dara reacted with immediate annoyance if not a degree of relief as well that at last, the predictable inquisition finally commenced and Wyl even derived somewhat demented pleasure from the awkward tension he caused with the anticipation of invasive questions but without regard for consequences or discomfort, Wyl stated, “Of all the great fears in encountering witches, chief among them is the expectation that witches will eat human flesh and collect skulls. In my lifetime, I have made the acquaintance of four presumed ‘witches’ with three of whom I would characterize my acquaintanceship as relatively intimate and in all cases, I would have to say perhaps the very first peculiarity I observed is that witches consciously and explicitly reject the practice of eating any form of flesh at all. Furthermore, in our travels together, you’ve encountered numerous opportunities to eat human flesh and collect skulls but you consistently demonstrate no remote inclination to engage in either of these activities so consequently, I consider it quite ironic not to mention laughable that Geaelen mythology so insistently portrays witches as so relentlessly intent on these practices. I ultimately conclude all reports of witches eating human flesh and collecting skulls are in all likelihood the product of gross exaggeration. Now, the reason I say ‘gross exaggeration’ as opposed to outright fabrication is that I remember someone I admired and respected telling me once that every element of faerie and myth no matter how patently absurd always occurs as the result of gross exaggeration of some shred of original truth.”

Pausing to examine their faces, Wyl anticipated with a degree of confidence that rather than escalating discomfort, Mara and Dara experienced relief in the form of amusement with his commentary just as he in fact intended, and in the interest of advancing the pleasant surprise of entertainment value, Wyl extended his commentary explaining, “The theory I suppose is even when folks outright make up a story, they presumably at least subconsciously draw from some experience or observation, or even from other stories they’ve heard which presumably draw on experience or observation. Sometimes the story is so absurd and implausible, no reasonable person would ever guess the fundamental element of truth behind it but later, if you discover that truth, no matter how surprising, you will find that fundamental element. I was never entirely convinced of the theory due mostly to the kind observations like I just enumerated relating to the absence of any eating of human flesh or collecting of skulls... but then I just happened to incidentally notice that you drank Tamel’s blood then decapitated him, and these immediately occur to me as actions arguably similar, even if only by gross exaggeration, to eating flesh and collecting skulls and so contrary to all my expectations, I suddenly discover something that appears like plausible ‘shreds of original truth’ behind faerie and myth.”

Glancing at Mara and Dara as if to gauge their reaction, Wyl indeed detected they even braced slightly as he confided, “Now, I have a reputation for inquisition bordering on the extreme of indelicate invasiveness, and don’t think I didn’t notice that *‘here he goes again’* look in your eyes when I introduced the current subject. It’s completely reasonable for you to react that way because it’s pretty predictable that after observing two witches drink blood, I’m going to ask some indelicate and invasive questions...

Under any other circumstances, I’m sure I would probably be real curious about the blood drinking, the decapitation and burning the body and all that. I was much younger than I am today when I knew another witch, and I observed a number of things that made me real curious about her. I asked her a lot of questions and she was always real evasive with me just like you are always evasive with direct questions and curiosity. I don’t know if I understood it at the time or if I selectively remember it now but I think essentially, what she wanted me to come to understand from her evasiveness is that truth discovered is more valuable than truth believed. Maybe if she or you simply answered my questions directly then my truth would consist of belief and therefore possess no value. Under any other circumstances, I’m sure I would probably ask you a lot of indelicate and invasive questions about drinking blood but the funny thing is, it just so happens that right before all of that occurred, some guy told me... **reality is subjective**... *truth is something we decide to believe, not something we discover*... *objective truth discovered is a form of self-deception*... *water flows uphill if I just decide to believe water should flow uphill*... *apples are not edible*... and... **food is an invention**...

I said I would conclude with a question so now I’m going to ask that question. What is the most absurd and implausible story I have heard, told or witnessed so far -- that witches drink blood... or that **reality is subjective** and **food is an invention**?” MaraDara even giggled slightly as Wyl concluded, “See what I’m getting at? You’ve lost all novelty value for me, you’re just not all that mysterious an enigma any more. All you did was drink blood - Nelles said **reality is subjective** and **food is an invention**. You can’t compete with that! I’ve discovered the truly greatest most enigmatic supernatural mystery of all the earth... and that mystery is me! It’s normal average humans! It’s **my** kind, not your kind that is the perversion of nature, the anomaly, the supernatural occurrence.”

With perhaps a hint of anger over his revelations, Wyl dismissively declared, “I’ve got no further questions for you. You’re too obvious and easy to figure out. I’m just going to assume you’ve got a reason to drink blood and whatever it is, it will certainly never rival the absurdity and implausibility of subjectivity.”

Mara and Dara smiled at Wyl with smiles that clearly demonstrated their appreciation of his sense of humor in preparing them for provocative questions then dismissing his own curiosity without so much as a single restrained inquiry. Perhaps even moreover, Mara and Dara smiled with a quality that demonstrated possibly the greatest degrees of appreciation and fondness for Wyl than any before they ever yet felt, and he derived immeasurable satisfaction from a newfound level of trust and understanding between them. In good measure and at a peak in his confidence, Wyl concluded his council with an additional reminiscence and he confided, “The people I’ve always been most fond of are the ones that never answer questions directly. I think it’s temping to judge the type somewhat arrogant like they think they know some valuable secret they’ll only share with the worthy, but I think the truth is they only answer questions directly to the people they don’t regard as of much consequence because they don’t expect those people to understand anything else.

I think that’s another one of those essential things and it’s an essential type of human. I’ve probably never really been that type but I always wanted to be. I think when that type answers a question with an evasive or suggestive indirect answer, it means they think you asked a good question, and if you have enough intelligence to ask a good question then maybe you ought to have enough intelligence to figure out the answer for yourself. I think that type expects any direct answer they give you will always only diminish the value of the truth and I take it as a compliment when someone I respect won’t answer a question while I take it as an insult when someone I don’t respect eagerly answers any question at all without hesitation.

I like to think the people that don’t answer questions want you to discover the truth while the people that answer questions want you to believe what they believe. I think more often than not, the answers to the greatest mysteries of all are never true explanations because the true answer to the greatest mysteries is always... **just because!** -just because that’s the way it just happens to work out... -just because it just has to work out **some** way...

The best questions and answers about things of true substance and value are complex and intricate, and take lifetimes to comprehend. Only a colossal fool would ever expect an answer to a single question to possess that quantity of information or that quality of wisdom, and any answer that ever did possess such quantities and qualities, surely that kind of colossal fool would never understand.

I think maybe most questions do not so much solicit the truth as much as they expose already established belief, and the best most accurate answer is never necessarily a comprehensive explanation, because the best most accurate answer is almost always... **just because...** just because, the answer **has** to be... something.”

~

*In the end time, the last humans ever to walk this earth will starve to death while apples tumble from branches above and bounce off their heads.*

*In the world of subjectivity, the apple is not food by virtue of truth I discover but food if I decide to believe and if the apple is food because I decide to believe then the rock is food if I decide to believe. When men starve without food it is only because they have not the imagination to decide to believe the rock is food. In the world of subjectivity, no relationship or proportion occurs between constructive action and material result, actual material substance is not intrinsically valuable and subjective imagined value might just as well astronomically exceed the actual value of all material substance upon the earth. When one day, men deplete all actual material substance and reality finally jolts them into the realization that all of their subjective imagined value represents absolutely nothing of material substance then the great last war to determine the inheritance of the earth will at last commence.*

*In the great last war to determine the inheritance of the earth, men will have already long since lost all sense and proportion of any relationship between the naturally occurring apple and the invention they name food. Men will have already long since lost all sense and proportion of any relationship between constructive action and material result. Men will no longer know the difference between the apple or the rock and so even while starving to death, gathering apples will never occur to them as any more or less essential as gathering rocks but moreover, no constructive action that might predictably result in material substance will ever occur to them as action likely to restore material substance. In times of escalating desperation, men will propose invented beliefs in desperately escalating subjective values and with passage of time, men in progressively greater numbers will gather no food, conduct no constructive actions then clash over which invented belief ought most likely stimulate incentive, enterprise, occupation, wage, beneficial product and the invention they name food... and then...*

*In the end time, the last humans ever to walk this earth will die from deprivation of essential material substance because they will have long since decided to believe that the rock is more valuable than the apple, that their constructive actions are worthless and only subjective interpretation is the origin of all material substance.*

*Is this a prediction of the future or is this a description of the present?*

~

~

*men choose the most difficult destructive and painful things because men are wrong*

*and for every story I once might have dismissed  
as fanciful tale for amusement of child  
and every history obscured by dark legend of event only whispered  
finally at long last I realize I am now and will forever remain  
an alien in an alien world not my own*

*for every curiosity or suspicion I might once have entertained  
I now discover the great forces of the supernatural  
in the last place I might ever have suspected*

*I discover the great colossus of invented belief  
with incomprehensible supernatural powers  
it opposes all humanity  
it resists every constructive intent  
and disrupts the occurrence of every potential material abundance*

*and I am awestruck by the magnitude of this epic conflict  
between cosmic forces of malevolence and benevolence  
the enduring paradox of subjective humanity  
bestowed with the awesome and insurmountable supernatural powers  
of economic belief*

~