

# Jarvis the Duck

Kurt Venables

## Warnings to Heed

*Jarvis is a young duck that lives on a small pond in The Great Poplar Forest. These are the chronicles of his adventures.*

Jarvis, Angeldown, Jay, and Sage were sitting in Aristotle's nest with Dalai, Imhotep, and Talon. They had all had dinner together earlier at the lake. The ducks ate aquatic plants and some roots. The owls and Talon had various bits of meat. Jay had some insects. They all had berries for dessert. They were now relaxing and having some evening tea. Jarvis was feeling less gloomy now that he had agreed to help. He felt that at least he was doing *something* to try to relieve all the suffering. Feeling a little better, he now noticed the beautiful fall foliage at The Great Lake. The leaves were approaching their peak colors.

"It's scary sometimes how smart you are, Jarvis," said Jay.

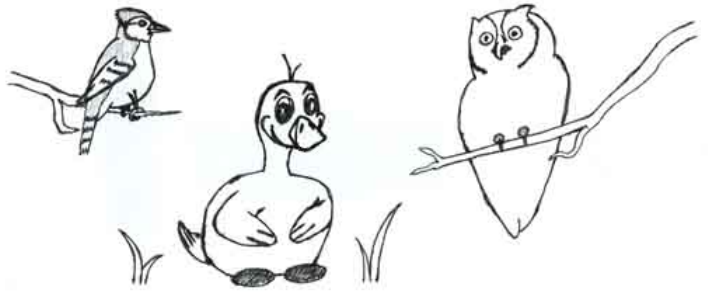
"You scare me sometimes as well, Jay," said Jarvis with a smile.

"Is it my stinging wit?" asked Jay playfully.

"Well, yes, your humor is frightening sometimes," replied Jarvis.

"These two make my head spin sometimes," said Sage to the elders. "Of course, for me, it doesn't really take much."

"Such clever banter- high spirits will be needed, for the party will face many dangers," replied Aristotle kindly. After a pause, he said, "I don't mean to dampen the



mood, but there are some things we must tell you, now that I seem to have brought it up."

Imhotep began seriously, "Many threats lurk in The Black Forest. First, beware of the Harpy Eagles. The party must fly low, just above the tree canopy. Otherwise, the eagles' sharp eyes will pick out your forms against the sky."

Talon added, "I know the area we will be traversing. I will try to steer clear of the areas they frequent, but one can never really know where they will choose to hunt."

After a brief silence, Aristotle began, "There are even more insidious creatures in The Black Forest of which you should beware." After another brief pause, he continued, "They are called Cravens."

"I've heard of eagles but not Cravens," said Jarvis weakly.

Aristotle continued gravely, "A Craven has the body of a raven, birdlike and deep black- but it has the head of a jackal. Cravens were once guardians of the underworld and attendants to the dead. Their brethren are good-hearted creatures that faithfully serve Osiris. Their brethren guide the dead, trying to teach them to understand themselves and become wholly good. The Book of the Dead tells us these things. But the Cravens became corrupted

by the evil with which they worked. They began to think only of themselves and crave worldly pleasures: possessions, power, prestige, fame. Their worldly desires brought them into our world in search of these things. They cower in the darkness of The Black Forest, away from the eye of Ra.”

Dalai continued, now with his usual smile absent, “Never look a Craven in the eye. They are hypnotic. Their gaze induces the same crazed lust that they themselves possess, and once the mind of the victim reaches that frenzied state, the Cravens consume his or her soul. Now listen very carefully, if you are unfortunate enough to run across Cravens, sit down quietly and meditate with peace, kindness, and humility in your heart. Cast your gaze down at the ground. Do not look at the Cravens. They are spiritual beings. They cannot hurt you physically. Fear is their weapon. They use it to catch your gaze. One’s focus on self and worldly desires bind one to this earth. This is what they crave. If your heart is pure, they will have no interest in you.”

A long pause followed. Jarvis, Angeldown, Jay, and Sage just looked at each other, each afraid to say anything for fear of hearing any more frightening news.

“Hopefully, we can avoid these dangers,” said Talon, “and I will guide you to Temple Mountain, home of the Snowy Owls, where we will find Gnosis.”

After some brief small talk, the foursome thanked Aristotle for his hospitality and went to bed down in the bulrushes by the lake. Talon joined them for what promised to be the first of many nights together. Later, after they had settled in, Angeldown spoke in a low voice, towards Jarvis but so

that everyone could hear, “Jarvis, I don’t know about you guys, but I’m afraid, and I have doubts ... doubts that we can make it or what we can do if we do get there.”

Jarvis replied in a quiet, very sincere tone, “Angeldown, I’m not going to pretend that I’m not scared too. But when I look at the ravages of this tragedy, I feel like I just have to do *something*. There are only a few of us left that can even make the trip. Someone needs to be able to talk intelligently to Gnosis, and if not solve the Riddle of Osiris, at least bring back something that might help somehow.”

“If anyone can solve the riddle, it’s Jarvis, or you Angeldown,” added Jay confidently.

“If you don’t want to go, Angeldown, you don’t have to. No one will blame you for it. It’s certainly going to be very dangerous,” offered Jarvis sincerely. “You think about it and let us know.”

A long silence followed as the five settled again into their beds, then Angeldown said, “Jarvis, I’m *in* ... and you’ve got a strong heart.”

“Thank you, Angeldown.”

Although no one could see it, Talon, whose face had been expressionless the whole day, wore a look of kindness and understanding, with a little smile of knowing confidence.