

Jarvis the Duck

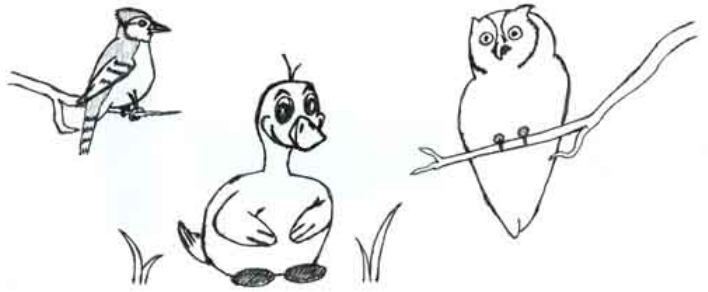
Kurt Venables

Bloodthirsty

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

Talon knew of the gorge, The White River Chasm. He explained that The White River is the major river that runs through this territory and that they now would follow it north most of the way to Temple Mountain. He said that the river was named for the white foam from the numerous rapids that ran along its length. The party continued to travel at night. It took them another week to bypass the gorge and rejoin The White River further upstream. They had no further incidents with Harpies; Sage's sharp night vision and Talon's knowledge of the area served them well. The air was becoming bitterly cold now. The ponds they passed were frozen over and even the mighty White River had thick ice extending far from the banks towards the middle of the river. The forest, it seemed, had taken on an even darker shade of black.

Talon had been thinking constantly about the encounter with Thor. He had become convinced that the Harpies were massing an army at The White River Chasm and that they were preparing to attack Heliopolis. He desperately wanted to warn his people. They were now roughly two weeks from Temple Mountain. He told them that he had given his word that he would take them to Gnosis and he would do so. Once they arrived at Temple Mountain, however, he would travel back southeast to Heliopolis to deliver his warning while the rest of the party had discussions with Gnosis. He would then return for them.



On a cold evening, just after sunset, the party was foraging for morsels along the river bank and preparing for another night's journey. The scene held an eerie beauty under the full moon.

"Isn't the river beautiful with all the ice shimmering in the moonlight," said Angeldown to Jarvis. The two were foraging a little ways away from the others. They had been sort of wandering off together in the evenings since they began the night flying.

"It really is," replied Jarvis, and after a moment, "and you're beautiful Angel." He couldn't believe he said it. He wanted to say it, but he couldn't believe he did.

"Thank you, Jarvis. You're a really sweet duck," replied Angeldown. She felt her face flush.

"Remember when I threw you into the water at your grandmother's at The Pond? It seems like an eternity ago."

"Yes, it really does. Please don't do that now."

The pair enjoyed each other's company a little while longer; then the party began their night's journey. They all flew peacefully for

several hours in the eerie stillness, but this was not to last.

“Do you hear that?” called out Sage suddenly. The party tightened their formation so that they could converse more easily.

“I don’t hear anything,” replied Jarvis.

“Man, we need to move on, as fast as we can,” yelled Sage, clearly disturbed.

“I hear them now too Sage,” yelled Talon.

The party flew on, as fast as they could. Within a short time, all of them could hear the high pitched screeches, and they were getting louder. The party flew on desperately for a while, but the source of the squeals continued to close, almost as if it was somehow homing in on the fleeing party. The hearts of the birds were now racing. They flew on, but the squeals seemed to surround them. Then they could see black forms zigzagging wildly in the moonlight.

“Vampire bats,” yelled Talon as they swooped down on the party, “fight them off with your wings.”

The bats were very fast, weaving this way and that. They seemed to be everywhere. They drove the party apart. Several bats each were occupying Talon, Sage, Jay, and Jarvis. A larger group, led by a particularly large bat was targeting Angeldown. She bobbed and weaved as the screeching mass flew on. Finally, she rolled and caught the leader with her wing, knocking him away. The larger group flew off with the leader momentarily.

Talon, Sage, and Angeldown were now occupied by several bats each. They bobbed and weaved, managing to hold off their pursuers. Jay, however, was doing quite well. He was out-flying the bats. He was zipping in and out around the bats with some ease. His interest in aerial acrobatics was now clearly paying off. On the other hand, the larger group and the leader were now targeting Jarvis. He was flying on, weaving and spinning to fight them off, but he was beginning to tire. The bats flew at him more viciously, as if they could smell victory.

“I can’t hold them off,” yelled Jarvis, but Talon, Sage, and Angeldown were too busy to even hear. Jay was gone. Then, the lead bat flew directly over Jarvis and spread his wings wide in preparation for a dive onto the flailing duck. At that split second, Jay rocketed down onto the bat in a power dive, striking the leader right in the spine with his shoulder at full force.

“OOOffff,” yelled Jay as he struck the bat. His voice trailed off as both he and the leader fell through the dark canopy. The other bats flew down after their fallen leader, and a moment’s later Jay popped up above the canopy. “Got that mother!”

The party flew on for a while in shock, just trying to get away from the place where the bats went down into the canopy. After they were quite clear, Talon yelled, “We’d better find a place to bed down, before we meet another pack!”

After they flew down to a giant pine next to the river, Talon explained in punctuated sentences, gasping for breath: “Those were Vampires. They hunt in packs. They target an individual and wear him or her down. Then they bite. Their fangs are poisonous. Once bitten, a victim will be down and paralyzed within minutes. The pack drains the victim’s blood. ... What Jay did was very brave. He could have broken his wing. He probably saved one of our lives. We should no longer travel at night.”

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