



AS THE DAY IS LONG
a fable by Jimmy T. Hand

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THE THINDLES LIVED IN THE BROKEN SHELL OF A FORTRESS, tending their lands with care, caressing crops from the dead soil. They were a stubborn, angry group of giants, as old and twisted and cruel as the land itself.

Their ruler, King Grah, feared nothing by day. He carried a whomping stick as tall as himself and soundly whomped any Thindles that dared step out of line. None of his two-score subjects dared oppose him, nor, for the most part, did it occur to them to try.

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Every night at sunset, however, King Grah stepped into the large closet attached to the courtyard of his small castle. He laced chains across the massive double doors, laid his head well away from the window or the cracks under the doors, and waited for sleep—waited for Shaduza.

He hid because every night, Shaduza rose up from the bowels of the fortress and tried to kill him. She had killed each king before him, spanning back the six hundred years of Thindalia's verbal history. Every night, her sharp, swift

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claws slid through the space between the doors, and her small, strong body pushed against them with all of her might. She howled as a cat, screamed as a child, and the king was never well rested. Even his subjects were kept awake with fear.

Many have argued that it was this perpetual sleeplessness that made the kings of Thindalia so cruel, so damn *grumpy*.

Some nights his body would stray too close to the

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cracked window or too close to the doors, and dozens of white scars ran across his otherwise ruddy skin. These scars were his royal robes, the whomping stick his crown.

Every morning King Grah woke and proceeded to whomp and shout his subjects into work, as if fear of starvation were not incentive enough.

THE KING'S SON, Jorgo, thirteen years old and newly adult, emulated his father in almost every way. But where

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his father had had no friends, Jorgo had one; Ter. Where Jorgo was strong, Ter was wise--wiser by half than any Thindle of his generation.

(You may have guessed by now, but the Thindles were all men. The tale of how they came upon mates for their reproduction is too lamentable, too despicable, to reveal in this tale.)

Ter, thirteen as well, applied his mental acuity to his work, the only work: the growing of food. He studied the

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rot of fruit and chaff; he compared soils between the various fields of Thindalia. He reached no conclusions, mind you; he was wise for thirteen years, but simply had not enough experience to apply his observations.

Now, when a king of other parts of the world steps down, they may name a successor. They will pick one that will either (if they are a decent king) rule the most intelligently, or (if they are like most kings) one that will continue their bloodline on the throne. (Of course, if he were

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a *good* king, he might end the monarchy completely, but this happens more rarely still.)

Thindalia, however, had a simple tradition. Every morning, all of the Thindles gathered in the courtyard, to hear their king lambast them inspirationally. One day, each successive king would grow frustrated with life, with the constant battle for food and with the nightly torment.

One morning, King Grah tossed his whomping stick into the assembled crowd, threw his hands in the air, and

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stormed away from Thindalia. “Good luck,” he said, saving them the string of expletives that so often accompanied a king’s abdication.

The Thindles knew that the next morning they would find Grah’s body at the edge of their fields, tattered and clawed, a look of anger set into his massive dead face.

Ter, in the crowd, stared at his massive, hairy feet, considering the nature of the seasons, ignoring what he figured to be the day’s scolding. The whomping stick hit him

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on the temple, and instinctively he grabbed for the offending object.

As simple as that, he was king.

Jorgo was angry, offended. Why had his father thrown the stick so carelessly, that it might not land in *his* hands?

All day the Thindles worked in the fields, as they did every day. Ter stood at the edges, watching his people, his mind running through the complexity of the situation, leaning against his whomping stick.

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In the morning, Jorgo shot dirty looks at Ter. By lunchtime, he stared angrily only at his bread. By the afternoon, he was proud of his friend, and knew that he would stand by King Ter. The other Thindles seemed to pay no mind at all, being completely overworked and underfed. (For you see, it takes a massive amount of food to feed someone as large as a Thindle!)

The twilight was nearly done with by the time that Ter remembered to lock himself in the closet. Shaduza had

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completely slipped his mind. At first he sauntered towards the massive double doors, but as fear gripped him, he ran. He slammed the doors behind himself and had drawn the chain across one set of rings when Shaduza slammed into the doors. Shaking with the impact and with fear, Ter brought up the heavy, ancient padlock and locked it.

The chains were not as tight as they should be, he realized. But to unlock it and try again was not an option. Shaduza was outside, forcing the doors as far inward as

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she could with her small frame.

He saw her, her head like a cat's, her eyes strangely Thindlish. Her fur was golden like summer wheat, and her claws were faster than a sickle. She slashed her paws through the air, trying every angle, every crack she could find, swift as a hummingbird.

Scarcely a second later she was at the back window, her face pressed against the strange, unbreaking glass, her paws swiping through the tiny crack that the window

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simply would not close.

And then she was gone.

Ter lay down, his head on his whomping stick, and his over-active mind was soon pondering the harvest, so as to avoid the terrors of his closet.

When she returned, she whispered to him, through unnoticed cracks between the stones in the wall: “You are different, king. You smell different. There is no fresh blood upon your stick.”

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Her voice was so melodious, so like a bird's, that his fear melted instantly to curiosity. "Shaduza?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Who are you?"

"Six hundred years, I have never been asked. First, king, who are you? You are young, yes?"

"My name is Ter. I didn't ask to be king. But someone must be, I suppose."

"Well, King Ter, I am Shaduza. I am here because no

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king should lay untormented at night. And I am here because your first king made me, when he made these lands.”

“How did the first king make the land?” Ter asked, curious to unlock the secrets of the dead earth.

“I can’t hear you well from out here. Open the window, that I might climb in.”

Distracted from the danger, Ter did so. Her voice was simply too beautiful to refuse, her words steeped in too

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much intelligence to deny. As swift as death, Shaduza scrambled in through the window. Her body was like a mountain lion, only thinner and longer. Two tails sprouted where there ought be one. She was on top of him, pinning him down, her claws drawing blood from his shoulders.

“The first king made the land with his gluttony, his folly, and his pride. He worked the soil until it bled. He studied the insides of plants, and he warped them to his ends, in an effort to feed his people more easily. He scorched

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the forests with science, to expand his fields. And in the process, he made me.”

“I don’t understand.”

“You only need to understand this: there should be no king. You should be the last.”

“If the people don’t work?”

“Then they will go hungry. They will work.”

And so that night Shaduza taught Ter the secrets of the soil, so that he might breathe new life into the land,

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through crop rotation, composting, and irrigation. In return, he promised to step down in a few years, after acclimating his people to the new bounty.

“I HEARD HER,” Jorgo said to his friend the next day.

“You heard her?”

“When the screaming stopped, when the clattering and banging and howling stopped, I decided to check on you. I came out to the courtyard and stood at the door.”

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Ter looked at Jorgo, clearly impressed by his friend's bravery.

“Her voice is like the first thaw of spring—it tells us we need to work, but it tells us we won't die. It's as beautiful as that early flower. And what she says, it makes sense.”

“You think so?” Ter asked.

“I do. We should work together on this. If there isn't supposed to be a king anyway. I will sleep in the closet tonight, and talk to her.”

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And so Jorgo spent the night in the closet, the closet that was his father's torment, and spoke to his father's tormenter.

TWO YEARS WENT by, and the two friends directed many projects that enriched all of Thindalia. Windmills were erected, drawing water up from the earth and spreading it over the fields. Food wastes were gathered and heaped together, so that they might fertilize the land. Food was

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smoked and salted, so that the Thindles did not go hungry in the winter.

And while Ter was better able to make sense of most of the improvements, Jorgo caught on quickly as well. He was better at speaking to the other Thindles, better at making Shaduza's ideas seem like *everyone's* ideas.

Of course, the pair never spoke of their communion with Shaduza, the devil of Thindalia.

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EARLY ONE SUMMER morning, Ter walked down into the courtyard to rouse Jorgo from the closet and prepare for the day's work. But as he knocked, there was no reply.

He pressed his weight against the doors, opening them the crack he needed to see inside. Jorgo lay dead, torn to ribbons, the window still open where Shaduza had escaped.

Ter roared, strode backwards ten paces, and ran at the door, throwing his considerable might against it. The rings through which the chain was laced ripped free from

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the wooden door, and Ter collapsed inward, onto the body of his boon companion.

He bore Jorgo and placed him in the compost pit, as the two had discussed doing, and King Ter spent the day in thought while his subjects toiled in the fields.

That evening, at dinner, he gave a speech: "Remember subjects, that Jorgo and I have brought you this reduction in labor, this improvement in the standards of our living. And remember that I have always spared the whomping

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stick. But do not forget! I am King Ter, and I will whomp any of you who slack or challenge me.”

At dusk he strode into the closet. He closed the window, but left the doors ajar, the chain-loops unmended. He stood full height, his whomping stick held firmly in hand, and faced the doors, faced the devil.

“I will be a king untormented,” he whispered to himself, bolstering his courage, “and I will have vengeance.”

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IN THE MORNING, the Thindles took his body to the compost pit. And, over breakfast, they discussed what to do.

In the bowels of the small fortress, Shaduza slept soundly.

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