

The War of the Garden

by Phillip W. Weiss

Synopsis: There is a garden. It is a utopia for the insects for whom the garden is home. Then praying mantises show up, then hornets, then stink bugs, and then cicadas, each new arrival upsetting everything. Fighting ensues. Finally, the Gepos, a species of insect-like creatures from another planet, show up to restore order. Order is restored but at a price, loss of freedom.

Once upon a time there was garden. It was a pretty garden which was the home to many small but active creatures. These creatures included bees, ants, butterflies, and spiders. All four of these groups lived in harmony. The bees pollinated and made honey, the ants enriched the soil, the butterflies observed the activities, and the spiders spun nets with which to capture debris. For these creatures it was utopia. Then one day, a new group arrived, the praying mantises. They had heard about this utopia, a place where all could live in harmony. So, the praying mantises asked to join. However, their request was denied. The bees feared that the praying mantises would scare other bees away from the flowers. The ants were terrified of a creature whose arms were covered with spikes. The butterflies feared they would be ambushed by the newcomers and the spiders were concerned that the praying mantises would destroy their carefully spun webs. The praying mantises scoffed at these rejections and vowed to stay in the garden and make the garden their home. This is how the situation remained for a while. There was an uneasy truce. The bees, ants, butterflies, and spiders went about their business and the praying mantises remained quiet, waiting to ensnare

passing insects in their cleaver-like arms. The praying mantises were tolerated but feared. Then one day came another new arrival, the largest hornet in the world, the Japanese hornet. The Japanese hornets had heard about the beehives and came to investigate and if satisfied with what they found, intended to attack and invade the hives and steal the honey. The bees, alarmed, prepared to defend their hives and the ants, butterflies and spiders took cover as tensions escalated. The praying mantises did nothing except carefully observe. They did not fear the hornets. Soon the hornets attacked the hives, killing many bees. Then one of the hornets attacked one of the praying mantises. A melee ensued which was joined by other hornets and mantises. Soon the mantises and hornets were killing each other. Then one of the hornets called for a cease fire, explaining to his fellow hornets that they should form an alliance with the praying mantises, and together take total control of the garden. The praying mantises agreed to form this alliance with the hornets. Under the terms of this alliance, the hornets would drive the other creatures into the waiting clutches of the praying mantises. The bees, ants, butterflies, and spiders were shocked and mortified. Their survival was at stake. What was once a utopia the hornets and praying mantises were going to transform into a killing field. The bees, ants, butterflies, and spiders had to defend themselves and their homes. So, they formed an alliance which they named the Alliance for Peace or AP. Under the terms of the AP, the bees would defend the hives by swarming the hornets, the ants would provide troops and logistical support to counter the praying mantises, the butterflies would provide intelligence, and the spiders would build webs to ensnare stray hornets and

mantises. The war broke out. Fighting was intense. Many on both sides were killed. The outcome was uncertain. The sound of battle attracted the attention of other insects who entered the fracas. The stink bugs used their odor to overwhelm all who were exposed to their pungent odors. Then thousands of seventeen-year cicadas emerged from the ground emitting a powerful noise that immobilized all the combatants. For a while the stink bugs and cicadas were dominating the battle. However, their advantage did not last long. Soon the other combatants took defensive measures. They folded leaves into gas masks that blocked the stink and stuffed their ears with mud to muffle the noise. So, the fighting continued. Then one day a new visitor arrived. They were from the planet Xyokyperacaloborada located 25,000,000,000,000 miles from earth. These new visitors called themselves the Gepolantenopterapolitanosians. In the garden they were nicknamed Gepos. The Gepos were eight inches long, had large bulbous heads with four pairs of eyes that rotated 360 degrees, and twelve arms to each of which was attached a blue ink pen which the Gepos used to fill out forms attached to their bodies. The Gepos were the bureaucrats of the solar system. Wherever they went, they projected authority. In their presence all immediately complied. Their intellectual superiority was unquestioned. They went from planet to planet bringing order from chaos. They accomplished this task by creating huge, complex and multi-layered bureaucratic organizations that referred all conflicts to appropriate committees for review, processing, and resolution. Gepos required all parties in their jurisdiction to submit their complaints in writing for adjudication, using a special blue ink pen approved by the Gepos. All who failed

to comply would be assessed fines and other penalties pursuant to section 425, subsection 234C, paragraph 4F, subparagraph 18b of the Universal Interstellar Compact signed by over eight thousand planets, members of the Interstellar Council of Planets representing 81,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 insects and other small creatures such as scorpions, sand crabs, hummingbirds, worms, and shrews, all of whom had their own separate communities. Thus duly authorized, in the garden the Gepos took immediate action to restore order, initiating a process known as Geptomania, a frantic effort by all to complete the necessary forms in blue ink using the special pen provided by the Gepos. Failure to complete and submit the forms meant immediate exclusion from the garden, which was a virtual death sentence. Soon a massive black market in blue ink pens emerged with the price of blue ink pens surging to astronomical levels, often leading to violent clashes as gangs of insects, bees versus ants, spiders versus butterflies, all locked in mortal combat, fought to corner the blue ink pen market. The Gepos brought the squabbling to an end by forming a consortium of interlocked offices known as the Office of Blue Ink Pen Services or OBIPS. The OBIPS ensured that all had equal access to blue ink pens. No longer fighting each other but desperate to comply, the bees, ants, butterflies, spiders, hornets, mantises, cicadas, and stink bugs completed and submitted the necessary forms to the Gepos who placed all the completed forms in a master file cabinet named the File of Life. After a series of hearings that lasted twenty-seven years, peace was restored to the garden, inaugurating an era known as Geputopia. The bees

took care of their hives, the ants dug their nests, the butterflies resumed their aerial observations, the spiders wove their webs, the hornets ventilated the beehives with their wings, the mantises stood guard and watched, the cicadas returned to their caverns, and the stink bugs graced the garden with their odors, all under the supervision of the Gepos who rule as benevolent despots ensuring peace and harmony as long as the forms were correctly filled out and filed.

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