AROUND THE KINGDOM

The Kingdom's Own Paper — Printed at the Stone Ground

ISSUE No. 1 **THE STONE GROUND, BENEATH A HOUSE IN SOUTH TEXAS** **PRICE: ONE LEAF**

First Day of the Falling-Leaf Season, in the Year of the Boy

THE BOY FROM THE SKY WORLD

A child of the upper world walks our tunnels — the first in ages

BY BRINDLE LEAFCUTTER, SKY-WATCH CORRESPONDENT

THE STONE GROUND — The leaf road brought home strange news at first light, and this paper prints it plainly: a boy of the sky world is among us.

He is called Ryan, a child of South Texas, in the land above. The boy was at his play in the yard over our roofs, sword-fighting the wind with a fallen branch, when he spied our cutters' column and followed the leaf trail to the great mounds by the house.

His friend called after him to leave the mounds alone. The boy would not be warned. He poked, he pranced, he swung his wooden sword — and then his foot found a loose stone, and the sky world let go of him. He struck his head, the light went out of the day, and when his eyes opened again, he was here: in the maze of caverns beneath his own house, where the fungus lamps burn green and the ants stand near as tall as he.



The boy and the King, face to face beneath the house. — The Ant Kingdom, Book One, Chapter Five

What followed, the guards themselves confirm. The boy hid behind a boulder as our columns marched past by the hundred. He pulled a branch that was no branch, and the earth opened a second time. And at the end of a long winding fall he came to a great stone door, with green light shining round its edges — and a voice on the other side said, "Come in."

It was the King himself. Anure received the boy — the first child to cross over in more ages than our tallies bother to count — and spoke to him the way kings do, which is to say, loudly. The boy asked only for the road home. The King answered that the road is guarded, that the Queen must not learn of him, and that he has fallen into a kingdom at war. "There is a war going on, you know," he told him. So there is — sixty million years of it. What one small boy can mean to so old a quarrel, no ant yet knows. But the tunnels talk of nothing else, and this paper will follow the story wherever it runs.

And there the matter rests tonight: the boy kept close under the King's own eye, the guard on the road home doubled, and a whole kingdom pretending, very loudly, to talk about anything else. The boy carries a round brass compass that points him ever toward the sky world, and he looks at it the way the thirsty look at a well. Whether the needle or the kingdom will win him, this paper cannot yet say.

THE WAR & PEACE BULLETIN · SIXTY MILLION YEARS OF WAR

Ask any ant why we fight the termites and you will get the same answer the King himself gave this week: that is the way it has always been. Sixty million years the cutter ants and the termite empire have waged their war under the earth — longer than the sky world's oldest story, longer than memory itself.



In the royal chamber, Queen Martia holds her war court, and General Cerpa — claw-topped cane, white plume, and no patience at all — lays the hard truth before her: the termites come on faster than our soldiers can hatch. Across the dark, King Mastoer plots in his purple cloak, and neither throne will bend. Far below, the deep colonies keep their own counsel and say nothing at all — which, the old ones remark, is sometimes the wisest silence of all.

Portrait: King Mastoer of the termites, in his purple cloak — from The Ant Kingdom, Book One, Chapter Three.

THE SIGN OF THE KINGDOM

Every colony of the earth carries a sign, painted large, so that a friend may be known from a foe at a tunnel's turn — and so that no one need ask whose ground he stands on. Here the Stone Ground Press sets down the sign of the kingdom itself, with its motto, exactly as its bearers carry it.



THE ANT KINGDOM

PORTAMUS INVICEM — "We carry each other."

The Great Root, the crowned King, the queens' coronet, and the pillars of the Stone — the kingdom beneath the house.

The signs of the other colonies — the Termites across the dark, and the Deep Colonies far below — will be printed in this place in next week's issue.



The Queen's court. — Book One, Chapter Two

FROM THE QUEEN'S COURT

Queen Martia received her commanders at the lamplit table this week, General Cerpa in attendance, and was heard to say that the kingdom will not yield one tunnel of its ground. The tally-keepers then rendered the week's count of spears, and the Queen heard it in silence to the very end. She ordered the garden shifts doubled, the fang-smiths to their benches through the night watches, and the leaf roads patrolled in pairs until further word. "Let the termites come and count us," she said. "They will find the counting slow." The court rises; the war goes on; the leaves, as ever, must still be cut.

THE NIGHT SKY OVER THE GROVE

BY OLD TAM, KEEPER OF THE HIGH ROOT

Readers write to ask why a paper of the under-earth keeps a sky column at all. The answer stands on the High Root any clear night: because the sky is the one road no army has ever marched, and the one roof over every colony.

Climb after dark, when the fungus lamps dim and the columns rest, and look up through the oak leaves. The Moon hangs there, a slim bright claw of light, growing a little fatter every night as she walks toward full. Below her runs the pale river of stars the sky world calls the Milky Way — a river so wide that our own great river is a puddle beside it, and full of more lights than there are ants in all the earth.

Watch for the wanderers, the bright stars that will not keep their places. The brightest of them all rides the evening sky like a lantern carried home, and the red one — yes, even we know the red one — keeps his own slow counsel among the constellations. Now and then a star falls, quick and silent, and the old watchers say: make a wish, but make it a kind one.

The boy from the sky world tells us his kind watch these same lights through great glass eyes, and write down what they see. Then we are not so different, the watchers above and the watchers below. The sky keeps no sides. It only keeps shining.



The grove at night: the pale river of stars above the great trees, and the watchers on the root. — A watercolor made for this paper

ASK THE KEEPER

The King keeps a letter-box by his chamber door. Young ants write; Anure answers. He wishes it noted that he answers briefly.

“Dear Keeper — why do we carry home leaves we never eat?” — A Cutter of the Third Road

“Because the gardens eat them for us, girl. We farm the fungus; the fungus feeds the kingdom. Everything in this earth eats something. Mind you eat your share.”

“Dear Keeper — is it true a boy fell out of the sky?” — A Nervous Hatchling

“It is true you should mind your trail, keep your line, and not poke at things half as big as a house. Next question.”

“Dear Keeper — why do we fight the termites?” — An Old Soldier

“Sixty million years, and you ask me. The truth? We have fought so long that the reason wore out before the war did. Carry your leaf, soldier, and be kind on the road. That much, a king can still order.”

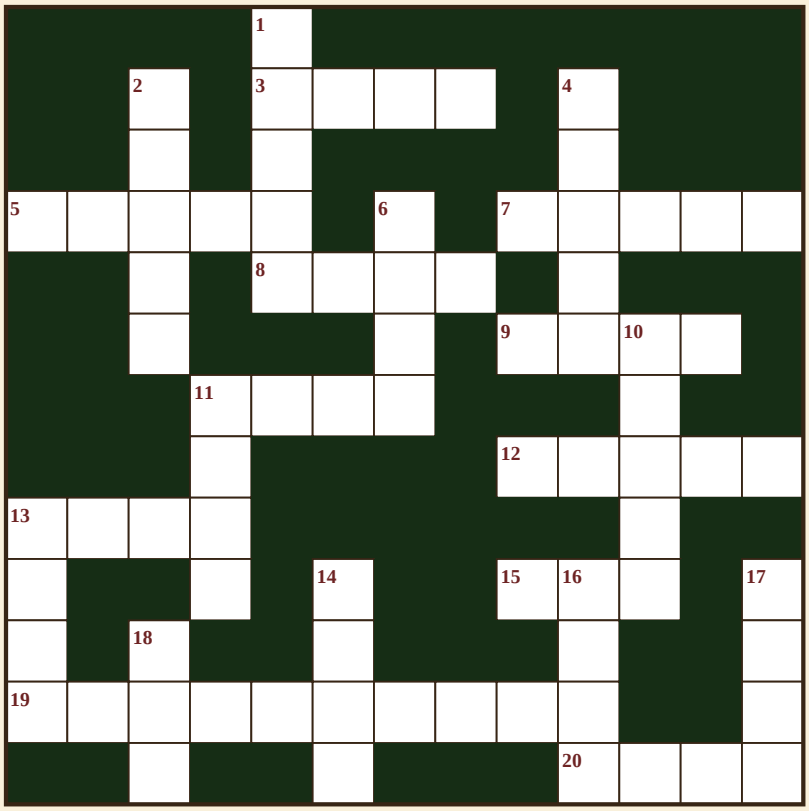
TALES TO COME

BOOK TWO — THE DEEP EARTH: The kingdom above is only the beginning. Below it lies a deeper dark, where a black river runs and the deep colonies keep their ancient watch — and the next tale goes down. (The Deep Earth, Book Two of The Ant Kingdom.)

BOOK THREE — THE POISON RAIN: And in the third tale the danger comes from the sky world itself, to a grove of whispering oaks — and a boy who fell into the earth must stand for the trees. (The Poison Rain, Book Three of The Ant Kingdom.)

THE KINGDOM CROSSWORD

Every answer hides somewhere in the tales of the kingdom — in the tunnels, on the road, or under the Great Root. Take up your pencil, reader, and mind you don't poke the mound.



ACROSS

3. Whispering _____, the grove of the third tale
5. King Anure's gold crown, topped with a cross
7. A scented path that ants follow to food
8. The _____ Earth, the second tale of the trilogy
9. A brave guide of the deep earth
11. The Great one shelters the whole kingdom
12. Ryan's best friend, who plays at swords in the yard above
13. A queen in an olive-green cloak
15. Ants and termites have waged it for sixty million years
19. Ryan's little torch that shines in the dark
20. The deep singers raise it in the dark

DOWN

1. A heaped home of earth, raised mound by mound
2. The great carved stone at the gathering ground
4. The ants' bluff old general, known by his claw-topped cane
6. The colony's home chambers
10. The _____ of Night runs black through the deep earth
11. The South Texas boy who falls into the kingdom
13. Cut pieces are carried home like green sails
14. An ant _____, the colony's low roof of dirt
16. Ryan finds a kingdom of them beneath his house
17. Anure's rank — and Mastoer's, too
18. A mighty tree — the Great Root's kin above ground



Where it all begins: a South Texas yard, a wooden sword, and a trail of ants. — From The Ant Kingdom, Book One, Chapter One

NO ANSWERS IN THIS PAPER!

Answers in next week's issue — and in the books. Every clue in this puzzle is a door, and the doors open into The Ant Kingdom trilogy: The Ant Kingdom, The Deep Earth, and The Poison Rain, by Robert Dilley — tales for readers of eight and up, and for anyone who ever wondered what the ants are doing down there.

Find the books here: https://amazon.com/dp/B0HPB7QL7P

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