AROUND THE KINGDOM

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

ISSUE No. 2 **THE STONE GROUND, BENEATH A HOUSE IN SOUTH TEXAS** **PRICE: ONE LEAF**

Saturday, November 14, 2026 · Second Week of the Falling-Leaf Season

A companion to The Ant Kingdom trilogy — keep the books beside you. The stories and the crossword draw on the books; you will need the trilogy at hand to solve the puzzle and to follow all that is reported here. A new issue appears every Saturday morning.

HIDDEN IN THE KING'S CHAMBER

The boy from the sky world keeps his voice low and his head lower — while the Queen's court quarrels above him

BY BRINDLE LEAFCUTTER, SKY-WATCH CORRESPONDENT

THE STONE GROUND — A week has passed since a boy of the sky world fell into the kingdom beneath his own house, and this paper can now report where he has been kept all this while: in the King's own chamber, behind the King's own door, fed on crumbs of the sweet fungus and warned, hourly and at length, to keep his voice down.

For the danger has not lessened. King Anure is plain about it: if Queen Martia learns that a child of the upper world has crossed over, she will hunt the boy down. So the boy stays hid, and the King — who is more figurehead than ruler in this kingdom, as every ant knows — does the one kingly thing left to him. He opens his chest.

The chest holds the leavings of the sky world, gathered by digging ants over long ages: a rope, a magnifying glass, a slingshot, a round brass compass, and a thing the King had no name for at all — a flashlight, a little torch that carries its own light inside it. In a basket beside it lay two batteries, and when the boy fitted them and pressed the switch, the chamber filled with a small, steady sun. “Keep it down!” the King whispered, loudly. “Do you want them to hear you?”

Above the chamber, the war will not wait for wonders. In the royal court, Queen Martia demanded the termite strongholds be taken, and General Cerpa — claw-topped cane, white plume, no patience at all — told her the hard truth to her face: the army must fall back, for the soldiers are not hatching fast enough to replace the fallen. The Queen answered that retreat would be treason, and a general who would not fight could be replaced, and banished to move dirt in the prison camp. The General bowed his head, and said he would fight on.



The King in his chamber beneath the house, and the boy who must not be found. — The Ant Kingdom, Book One, Chapter Two

Three times while this paper watched, the earth shook — Boom! Crack! Bang! — as the termites pressed their advance in the far tunnels. They raise soldiers faster than the kingdom can, the King confesses, and their king, Mastoer, would spend every soldier he has to win. Sixty million years the war has run, and when the boy asked the King why the two colonies hate each other so, the King of the ants was silent a long moment, and then said the most honest words spoken in this kingdom in years: “I don't know, really. That is the way it has always been.”

And so the matter rests tonight: a boy hidden behind a king's door, a small sun that must not shine too loud, a court at odds, and a king who has begun — very quietly, and at the price of his own head if he is caught — to speak of a way out. A dangerous way, he calls it, and he will say no more than that. What the way out is, and whether a boy and an old king can walk it and live — to learn what happened next, read Book One of The Ant Kingdom, and keep this paper beside the book.

THE WAR & PEACE BULLETIN

The front stands where it stood: the termite advance is slowed in the east tunnels and not stopped, and the Queen's order holds — no retreat, no yielded ground. The tally-keepers count spears and fallen by the lamplight, and the garden shifts are doubled so the army eats.

From across the dark, nothing: King Mastoer keeps his own counsel in his purple cloak, and far below, the deep colonies keep theirs. Silence, the old ones say, is also a kind of news.

THE SIGNS OF THE COLONIES

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. Last week this paper printed the kingdom's own arms; this week, as promised, the full set stands together — the kingdom, the empire across the dark, and the deep colonies far below.



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 TERMITE EMPIRE
NEMO ESURIET
"No one shall go hungry."
The empire across the dark, sixty million years at war — and proud of its full stores.



THE DEEP COLONIES
VIGILAT IN TENEBRIS
"A watch is kept in the darkness."
Far below the kingdom, where the black river runs and the deep singers keep their ancient watch.



A patrol in the tunnels, and a meeting no ant expected.
— Book One, Chapter Seven

FROM THE QUEEN'S COURT

Queen Martia received her commanders at the lamplit table this week, General Cerpa in attendance with his claw-topped cane. The General advised a falling back in the east tunnels; the Queen would not hear of it, and the court rose with the order standing: hold every tunnel. The tally-keepers then rendered the count of spears, and the garden shifts were doubled before the lamps dimmed. — Court Correspondent

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 the green lamps dim at night?" — A Hatchling of the Fourth Road

"Because the fungus rests, as you should. When it dims, the colony rests; when it brightens, we work. Even light keeps hours down here. Keep yours."

"Dear Keeper — the boy's compass spins and will not point. Is it broken?" — A Curious Guard

"It is lost, which is different. There is too much rock and iron in this earth for sky-world needles. Down here we follow the trails of scent, as ants have always done. The sweet road leads home. Trust your nose, guard."

THE NIGHT SKY OVER THE GROVE

BY OLD TAM, KEEPER OF THE HIGH ROOT

The Moon is young again. She was new at the week's turning, and now she walks the early evening as a slim bright claw of light, growing a little fatter every night — and kindly setting by mid-evening, so the deep hours belong to the stars.

Climb to the High Root after she sets and look east at midnight, for two wanderers are keeping company there, close as marching neighbours: a great bright white one, the largest lamp of the wanderers, and beside it the red one, smaller and ember-orange. Night by night they have drawn together, and tomorrow night they stand closest of all, side by side above the star the sky world calls Regulus, in the Lion's mane. Two old rivals, sharing one road — the watchers may make of that what they will.

And the falling stars have begun their November muster. The slow, bright fireballs of the Bull still drift down now and then, fat and unhurried; but the swift ones are coming — the Lion's shower, whose streaks fly fast and leave glowing trails, gathers strength night by night and will pour at its fullest three nights hence. Leo rises about midnight; watch after the Moon is down, and wish kindly.

In the evening, before the lamps dim, the ringed wanderer hangs in the south for any ant with a steady eye — and at dawn, the brightest wanderer of all now walks ahead of the Sun as a morning lantern. The boy from the sky world says his kind keep great glass eyes turned to these same lights. Then the watch is kept above and below alike, and the sky, as ever, 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

THE STORES REPORT

BY SORREL TALLYKEEPER, STORES CORRESPONDENT

The leaf roads ran full all week: green sails coming home in single file from first light to lamp-dimming, and the garden crews — on the Queen's doubled shifts — have fed the beds as fast as the cutters could fill them. The fungus takes the leaf, the leaf becomes the gardens, and the gardens feed the kingdom: so the tally stands, and so it has stood since before the oldest tally-stick in the stores was cut.

The count, for readers who keep it: stores full to the second mark in the east chambers, the nursery fed first as custom demands, and the army's share carried forward under guard. Hard days are what stores are for, the tally-keepers say — and a colony that counts honestly need fear no season.

TALES TO COME

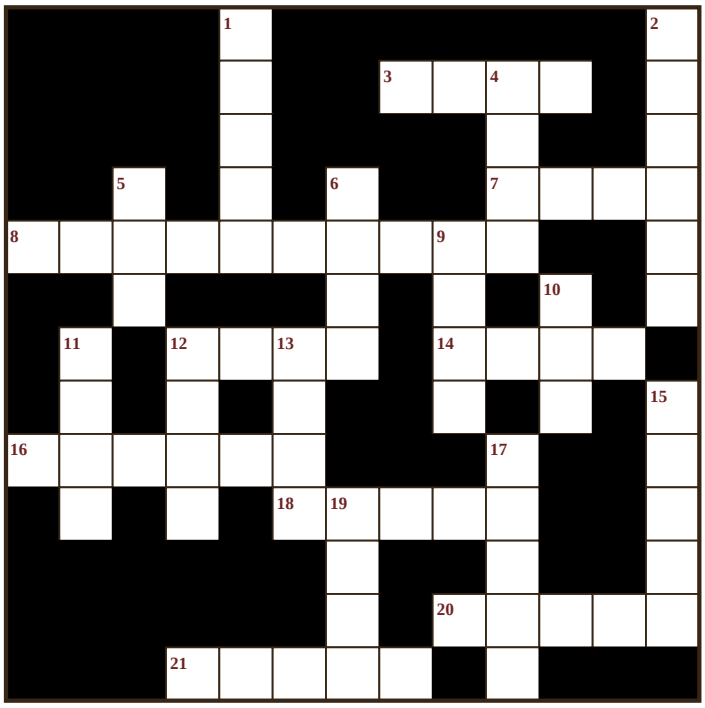
BOOK TWO — THE DEEP EARTH: Below the kingdom lies a deeper dark, where a black river runs and the deep colonies keep their watch — and the next tale goes down.

BOOK THREE — THE POISON RAIN: 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.

BEYOND THE FENCE — THE GREAT MIGRATION: a tale of the road east, arriving January 2027. And further off still, a tale called THE FOURTH COLUMN, kept for spring days to come. This paper will open those pages when their seasons arrive — not before.

THE KINGDOM CROSSWORD

Every answer hides somewhere in the tales of the kingdom — in the tunnels, on the road, or under the Great Root. Keep the trilogy open beside you, reader, and mind you don't poke the mound.



ACROSS

3. A queen in an olive-green cloak
7. Whispering _____, the grove of the third tale
8. Ryan's little torch that shines in the dark
12. The deep singers raise it in the dark
14. Cut pieces are carried home like green sails
16. Where the kingdom keeps its food against hard days
18. A scented path that ants follow to food
20. Ryan's best friend, who plays at swords in the yard above
21. The great carved stone at the gathering ground

DOWN

1. _____ Texas, where Ryan's house stands
2. The _____ Rain, the third tale of the trilogy
4. The Great one shelters the whole kingdom
5. A mighty tree — the Great Root's kin above ground
6. Anure's rank — and Mastoer's, too
9. An ant _____, the colony's low roof of dirt
10. Ants and termites have waged it for sixty million years
11. Ryan finds a kingdom of them beneath his house
12. A brave guide of the deep earth
13. The colony's home chambers
15. A heaped home of earth, raised mound by mound
17. Martia's is red; Lira's is olive-green
19. The South Texas boy who falls into the kingdom

ANSWERS TO LAST WEEK'S CROSSWORD

ACROSS

3 OAKS
5 CROWN
7 TRAIL
8 DEEP
9 SARN
11 ROOT
12 DAVID
13 LIRA
15 WAR
19 FLASHLIGHT
20 SONG

DOWN

1 MOUND
2 STONE
4 CERPA
6 NEST
10 RIVER
11 RYAN
13 LEAF
14 HILL
16 ANTS
17 KING
18 OAK

ANSWERS IN NEXT WEEK'S ISSUE — AND IN THE BOOKS

No answers to this week's puzzle are printed here — they wait in next Saturday's issue, and in The Ant Kingdom trilogy itself: The Ant Kingdom, The Deep Earth, and The Poison Rain, by Robert Dilley — tales for readers of eight and up. This paper is their companion: keep the books beside you.

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

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THE KINGDOM WEATHER

BY DEWDROP, WATCHER OF THE WEATHER-GLASS

No two days alike, this week, in any tunnel of the kingdom — and the weather-watchers would have it no other way. What falls on the oaks above is only the beginning of our weather; down here it is remade by root and river, lamp and garden, and it changes its mind as often as the earth breathes. Here is the week's reckoning, road by road.

THE WEEK'S WEATHER, ROAD BY ROAD

WHISPERING OAKS, ABOVE — Frost on the north stones two mornings running; then a warm wind down through the branches, smelling of pecan. First to feel the sky, as ever.

THE ENTRANCE SHAFT — Dew showers at first light, pattering past the guard post; by midday, only a shining damp on the walls.

THE CENTRAL HALL — Dripping like spring off every arch of root, the Stone itself beaded with bright drops. The tally-keepers have moved the dry goods to the high shelves.

THE FUNGUS GARDENS — Honey-fog, thick and sweet; the gardens breathing out their warm damp air until the green lamps burned in little haloes of steam. The cutters sang — the fungus likes a fog.

THE STORES — Snug and dry, thanks be. Tuesday's crumb-storm after a picnic above sent the sweepers out with baskets, and the count of crumbs is argued over still.

THE ROAD EAST — A dry wind out of the dark, carrying fine dust from the empire's works; and a great shadow at noon on Wednesday that stopped every road train for a full minute, in case it meant wings.

THE BANKS OF THE RIVER OF NIGHT — Cold mist up early off the black water, and the riffle running high and loud. The wardens rate it at flood-risk, should the Root drink again.

WHY THE WEATHER WILL NOT SIT STILL

Ask the old ones, and they will tell you: our weather has a keeper, and the keeper is the Great Root. When the Root drinks deep — as it drank on Monday, after the rains above — the kingdom cools and drips, the shaft runs with dew, and the river rises in its banks. When the Root holds its breath — as it has held it since Thursday — the gardens' warm breath has nowhere to go: it gathers as honey-fog, the lamps wear haloes, and hatchlings dream of swimming.

The rest is the kingdom's machinery, and it never rests: the black river breathing up its cold mist; the empire's dust riding the east wind; the shadows of the sky world crossing the yard like slow clouds; and now and then a feast day above, scattering a crumb-storm on the roads below. Root and river, garden and sky — the weather is simply the kingdom, breathing. It will sit still when the kingdom does. Not before.

THE DAYS AHEAD

More of everything, in no order the tally-keepers will swear to. Honey-fog while the gardens breathe warm; dew at dawn while the Root holds its breath; and if the Root drinks again — as the deep singers say it must, before the week's end — then a rising riffle, a running shaft, and cool, bright dripping in the Central Hall. The watchers' advice to every ant, young or old: carry a leaf both ways — shade at noon, boat by Friday.

A KEY TO THE KINGDOM

ABOVE THE GROUND

1 Ryan's House
2 The Yard
3 Whispering Oaks
4 The Garden
5 The Ditch

THE KINGDOM

6 The Entrance Shaft
7 The Guard Post
8 The Central Hall
9 The Stone
10 Seat of Anure, Keeper of the Stone
11 The Throne Chamber
12 Throne of Queen Lira
13 The Nursery
14 The Fungus Gardens
15 The Stores
16 The Great Root Chamber
17 The Great Root

THE EMPIRE AND THE RIVER

18 The Empire's Galleries
19 Throne of King Mastoer
20 The River of Night
21 Sarn's Crossing
22 Ward of Martia, Warden of the Deep

THE DEEP COLONIES

23 Court of Mother Vess
24 Chamber of the Keeper of the Deep
25 Uncharted Deep
26 The Road East — a tale to come

PUZZLES OF THE KINGDOM

Every answer is hiding somewhere on this map.

RIDDLES OF THE MAP

1. Flat and broad in the Central Hall I lie, two crescent mouths upon my face. Who am I?
2. No maze of walls stands guard at my door — a queen's golden seat am I. Who am I?
3. I bear a hero's name, and carry travellers over the dark river. Who am I?

HUNT THE MAP

Number 20 is the River of Night. How many numbered places lie south of it — lower down the map than number 20?

WORD SCRAMBLE

Unscramble each word — its number is your clue.

NETOS — I am number 9.
TORO — I am number 17.

Answers — Riddles: 1 The Stone (9), 2 Throne of Queen Lira (12), 3 Sarn's Crossing (21).
Scramble: STONE (9), ROOT (17), RIVER (20).
Hunt: six places — 15, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26.



Not to scale — the kingdom is vast to those who walk it.

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