

Circular Storytelling

An international creative writing project

Three Engineering students from TU Delft and three French students from Université Lumière Lyon 2, Université Jean Moulin Lyon 3 and Université Paris 8 explore the world from the animal perspective while becoming first-time authors. An exercise in storytelling, creativity and empathy. Here are their stories.

Creative Writing Workshop held during the **International Forum on the Novel** (Lyon) by Matthew Neill Null, author of *Honey from the Lion* (Lookout, 2015) and *Allegheny Front* (Sarabande, 2016)

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We Are Our Own Survivors
by Yaata (TU Delft, engineering)

The Predator

The blazing sun wakes me up. I slightly open my eyes, try to adjust to the sudden light. Where is my shelter? I was sleeping inside it. Out of nowhere, a burning smell registers in my nostril. I quickly raise my body and look around for my cubs. They are still cuddling up together ten paces away from me. I hurry closer to check on them. I nudge my paw to one of them and lower my head to wake them up. One of them opens their eyes slightly and the other is still not moving. I nudge him again. He is not budging, not even the slightest move. Again, I nudge him and lower my body and try to wake him up. He is still not moving. I hold my cry, I lose another one. His only sibling appears to intuitively realize that he loses another one. He widely opens his eyes and wails his heart out. I pick him up and start to walk towards what I believe away from the haze. Am I too cruel to leave my dead cub? Probably.

Our journey to find a new forest started some moons ago. When the forest started to turn black and our prey have become less and scarce. At the beginning, we started our journey with five cubs. However, every time the sun shined, I lost another one. So, has it been only four moons? As I walk along the bush, I keep my instinct on its maximum level. I know we need to eat. I couldn't remember the last time we ate fresh meat. Scrapped carrion that we've found during our trip was not enough for all of us. However, that was the best that we could find as no preys were nearby. I am hungry and so is my cub. I need to find a prey as soon as possible. Otherwise, I would die and I am not sure whether he would make it alive. I cannot die. I need to survive and so does he.

The Prey

One Hop. I stop underneath a crooked tree with colors of black and brown. It does not even stand straight and it is leafless. Thankfully, its branches still provide me with shadow. As I lay down, a sudden surge of heat escapes from its trunk. Ouch. I hope it won't leave a bald spot on my bottom. Even though I am resting, never have I let my guard down. Fear. One word that always lingers in my mind. Being almost at the bottom of the food chain pyramid, fear has always been the biggest part of my life.

Looking back, I have always been by myself. There was a time where I had my parents with me. One day they were there, but the next day they were gone. Nowhere to be found. Sometimes later, by luck, I met my kind of group. They, as well, slowly vanished. Now, I chose to live by myself, use my instinct as my primary mode of survival. And I've survived. Until now.

After resting for a while, I continue my quest for finding a better place. The last place that I resided had run out of food that I fancied. At first, I could easily find green areas with a scent of rain and forest. The last few days, all I could see were black and grey areas with little sunlight. I am not really sure what went wrong. I am only a small creature. I do not eat as much as what a wild elephant eats daily. Maybe only one hundredth. So why did I run out of food?

As I hop, I smell a hint of fresh grass. It is definitely better than the previous one. I hurriedly hop to the direction of the smell. It has been a while since I've smelled something fresh. I do not think of anything else. Just the thought of getting fresh food makes my pace faster than usual. Unfortunately, all good things come with a price tag.

I sense an enemy; its eyes are trained to follow my movement. I run as fast as I can. I blame it on myself for not recognizing it earlier. An empty stomach brings me troubles. It always has.

While running away, I have an epiphany. I was in the same situation a while ago. It was probably the wettest day on my entire life. Rain was pouring throughout the night and did not stop until the next day. I was running out of food supply and was too afraid to go out. When I took a small step outside my shelter, the water level was around my tail. The color was a combination of black and brown. If a

smell could kill, I would have been dead. It was atrocious. Still, I gathered all the courage to start my journey to find food. I did not know where I was during that time. I just followed my gut feeling. Slowly, I saw a patch of colorful land up in the hill. I happily went to that land with my last remaining energy. Hoping that I could get decent food for my empty stomach. Little did I know that it became my first near death experience.

Just like that, my consciousness clicks. I made it out alive last time. This time? I am certainly not a cat which is rumored to have seven lives. Have I exhausted all my luck? I hope I survive this one. I do not want to die on an empty stomach!

The Wrecker

The coffee is tasteless. I brewed it too long. I put my cup next to my only friend, a radio from the 80s with two gigantic buttons to set radio frequency and volume. Its antenna is broken halfway. If I am lucky enough, I could listen to radio broadcast clearly, otherwise there would be an unwanted background noise. Still, I am thankful that I have it. Living alone on the outskirts of town can sometimes drain my energy.

I gaze at the rusty clock laid next to the table on my right. 8.30 AM. I only have half an hour before I need to start working on the forest. I collect all my "must have" items, a spear and a chainsaw; and place those on a blemished cart that I got yesterday from the nearby farm. Today's journey will be a bit longer than usual. And one of the most unforgettable events in my whole life.

I stare at him. Should I call it "him"? I am illiterate; therefore, my knowledge is limited. I do not know how to differentiate the gender of its kind. I remember my father lectured me about this creature, but I was too young to even recall it. I grew up in seclusion based on my tribe's tradition. Deep in the forest where only three of us depended on each other. There was no luxury, I didn't even know books, television, handphone, and even radio existed. Not until both of my parents died and I was left with no choice but to accept an offer from a big shot company. I did not have a choice, I was alone by myself. They told me I would get the world under my feet. So, I agreed and I lost the world.

As I pointed out my spear, I reminisce the past. My greed. My lost world. All mixed up together. Is it because of me that he hunts outside the forest?

EPILOGUE

The Lion and The Rabbit

The prey was in front of me. At first, he did not register that I was nearby. He was busy munching, what it looked like a fruit, under a big oak tree. When he realized I was nearby, time seemed to stop ticking. We stared silently into each other's eyes. He dropped his food and ran for his life. Fortunately, I moved faster. As I prayed for the safety of my child. I ran.

The Lion and The Human

I have never met anyone like the living creature in front of me. He stood on his two feet. He wore something unusual that covered most of his body. He stood straight, unlike those slouchy monkeys. Though, he did not have as much as fur as monkey. And the stuff that he held in his hand, was it dangerous? I dropped the cub and marched to him.

Aftermath, The Human

Should I bury him? That's human tradition, but is it also applicable to this creature?

