

Bird of the Swamp

Mystery of the Dodo Unwrapped

NOTE: This is a graphic novel. Graphic novels are written in the style of a movie script so that the reader can envision the full picture of the characters, setting and what is taking place.

INTRODUCTION

SETTING: A library in a Tambalacoque tree. Through a doorway shelves of books can be seen.

PLATE 1

NESO and PSITTA, are sitting, reading and note taking. They are oblivious to all around them. The table is made from a large palm leaf. The table is messy, covered in papers.

PLATE 2

NESO looks up suddenly and jumps slightly.

NESO: OH, hi! I didn't see you there! *[Addresses the reader.]*

PLATE 3

NESO nudges Psitta. Her pen slips.

NESO: Hey! Look who's here.

PSITTA: OH! What? Hello there. *[Looks at the reader.]*

PLATE 4

NESO stands and bows. Causes papers to fall from the table.

NESO: Nesoenas mayeri at your service – and this is Psittacula eques.

PLATE 5

NESO is surprised.

NESO: What? Our names are too hard, you say?

PLATE 6

NESO is cupping his chin as he thinks.

NESO: Hmmm, let me see.

PLATE 7

PSITTA holds her index finger up and has a lightbulb moment and speaks to the reader.

PSITTA: I know! Would Neso and Psitta work!

NESO: Terrific!

PLATE 8

NESO speaks to the reader.

PSITTA: Now, what can we do for you?

Page 4

PLATE 1

NESO speaks to the reader.

NESO: You want some information about a Mauritian animal?

PLATE 2

NESO cups his wing to his chin.

NESO: Mmmmmm. Now let me think.

PSITTA: How about an extinct Mauritian tortoise?

PLATE 3

PSITTA is deflated. NESO is eager.

PSITTA: Oh! You know about that one.

NESO: I have it. A Blue Pigeon!

PLATE 4

NESO sits down dejected. PSITTA holds her finger up as she excitedly states her next idea.

NESO: Not unusual enough!

PSITTA: I have it! A Raven Parrot!

PLATE 5

NESO has his chin cupped in both hands as he continues thinking. PSITTA looks disappointed.

PSITTA: You know about that one too!

Page 5

PLATE 1

NESO jumps up, upsets his chair and sends more papers flying as he knocks the table.

PSITTA is knocked over as the table bumps her.

PSITTA: OHHH!

NESO: I have it! How about an animal everybody THINKS they know?

PLATE 2

PSITTA looks at NESO.

PSITTA: What a terrific idea!

PLATE 3

PSITTA: What do you think?

NESO: You like it?

PLATE 4

NESO rubs his wings together.

NESO: Fabulous! We have a friend who will be eager to help.

PLATE 5

NESO grabs hold of PSITTA and begins to drag her off.

NESO: Come on. Let's go ...

PLATE 6

PSITTA holds NESO back.

PSITTA: Wait! We have to set the scene, first.

Page 6-7

Prologue 1

NESO and PSITTA are in the library. Both stand next to a globe, NESO with a pointer in hand. NESO is pointing to Mauritius.

PLATE 1

NESO:

Long, long ago,
way out in the sea,
on an island small and warm,

PLATE 2

NESO and PSITTA look at the two-page spread of an open book. The view is from over their shoulders. The setting is Mauritius about 600 years ago and silhouettes of dodos are feeding on seeds and fruits. ¹ NESO points to one of the silhouette birds.

NESO:

roamed VERY strange birds,
that dined on the fruits and their seeds,
in the forests dark and green ...

PLATE 3

NESO looks at the reader. Psitta is drawing a larger image of one of the birds.

NESO: Did you know these birds could fly when they arrived on Mauritius?

PLATE 4

PSITTA

Some scientists say they arrived about 8 million years ago, others say 80,000 years ago. They are still looking for evidence that supports these theories.

PLATE 5

NESO looks at the reader.

NESO: That's hard to do when lots of land animals and plants once lived on is now underwater.

Page 8

Prologue 2

YESTERDAY

SETTING: A PLANE.

An international flight is landing at the airport near Mahébourg. In the plane which NOOR and RAJ are on the left-hand side where no rainforest is in sight. ²

PLATE 1:

RAJ looks out the window. NOOR reads a book.

SOUND: NYEEEEERRRRRRHH! [*Jet*]

RAJ: Wow, Noor! Look!

PLATE 2

NOOR has joined RAJ. From the window, all they can see are the small township of Mahébourg, fields of sugar cane, and what could be a swamp.

NOOR: Oh! Where's the rainforest?

Page 9

PLATE 1

NOOR and RAJ are looking at one another.

SOUND: NYEEEEERRRRRRHH! [*Jet*]

RAJ: I don't know. Do you think they ever had any?

Page 10

PLATE 1

NOOR looks at RAJ.

NOOR: It doesn't look like they did.

PLATE 2

NESO looks at the reader.

NESO: Of course they did! *[Wings on hips.]*

PLATE 3

PSITTA covers most of a plate with sand.

PSITTA: Before 1638 almost the whole of Mauritius was covered by rainforest.

PLATE 4

PSITTA removes most of the sand until about 5% remains.

Today only about 5% is covered in rainforest.

Page 11

Prologue 3

THIS MORNING

SETTING: *NOOR and RAJ stand on the edge of a narrow bitumen road next to a field of sugar cane. The entrance to a narrow dirt path is nearby. Sugar cane borders both sides.*

They are with two local children of Indian heritage, PIERRE & ISHANI.

PLATE 1

PIERRE draws the shape of the swamp and the path leading to it in the dirt on the side of the road. RAJ, NOOR and ISHANI lean over watching.

PIERRE: There's a lamar.

PLATE 2

RAJ looks at PIERRE.

RAJ: What's that?

PLATE 3:

ISHANI scratches her head as she tries to come up with the English translation. PIERRE interrupts and taps his finger to on his head. NOOR and RAJ watch on.

ISHANI: A b-- , b -- , er --

PIERRE: I know! It's a swamp!

PLATE 4:

RAJ looks at PIERRE.

RAJ: Where? *[Thought balloon: picturing an Australian swamp.]*

PIERRE: Down there! *[Pointing down the dirt path.]*

PLATE 5

ISHANI leans towards NOOR and RAJ. NOOR looks unsure.

ISHANI: It's spooky!

PLATE 6

RAJ takes off down the dirt path. He turns to look at NOOR who hangs back.

RAJ: You coming Noor?

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PLATE 1

A thought balloon shows NOOR remembering a story about a headless ghost person in a swamp. RAJ has come back to NOOR.

NOOR: G-g-ghosts.

RAJ: There's no such thing!

PLATE 2

NOOR looks at RAJ with hope. RAJ takes hold of her hand and pulls.

NOOR! Really?

RAJ: Yes! Come on!

PLATE 3

PIERRE & ISHANI remain at the entrance to the path and call out. NOOR is resisting RAJ as he pulls her down the path.

PIERRE: Don't go there!

ISHANI: You're crazy!

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PLATE 1

RAJ is impatient as he pulls a still resisting NOOR. They disappear between the sugarcane.

RAJ: C'mon! There's nothing to worry about.

PLATE 2

NESO speaks to the reader.

NESO: Did you know that some scientists studying ghosts believe there is a link between mould and ghosts?

PSITTA: When enough mould grows thick enough, this can make people hallucinate.

PLATE 3

NESO looks at the reader.

NESO: Or see things that aren't there.

PLATE 4

PSITTA starts to fly off. She calls to NESO.

PSITTA: Hurry up. It's time.

Page 14-15

MORNING

PLATE 1

Main setting: swamp: Mare aux Songes. The log and swamp is the setting for up to, and including page 34.

The swamp has a mix of native and introduced plants.³ These are surrounded by sugar cane fields.

A log large enough to hold THE CHILDREN, RAPH, NESO and PSITTA lays partially on land, partially in the swamp. A PONG emanates from the swamp. Heavy moisture floats in the air and makes it very misty over the swamp. NESO and PSITTA fly towards a Casuarina equisetifolia (she-oak).

NESO: *[Points toward the swamp.]*

It is strangely hushed
in the hot, moist air.
that drifts across the
dark, brown swamp.

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PLATE 1

PSITTA is down on the ground. She draws a diagram of the swamp.

PSITTA: Mare aux Songes is a swamp in Mauritius and is about 2 hectares in size.

PLATE 2

NESO has a stick in his hand.

NESO: That's about as big as five soccer fields joined together. *[Draws 5 soccer fields into the map of the swamp.]*

PLATE 3

PSITTA creates and fills a hole with water.

PSITTA: It was a large freshwater lake,

Page 17

PLATE 1

The water has drained. NESO leans over and watches PSITTA. As she places a stick in the muddy hole NESO overbalances.

PSITTA: until a long drought dried it out and left a muddy, boggy landscape that animals became stuck in.

NESO: WHOOPS! *[NESO overbalances and falls in the hole.]*

PLATE 2

PSITTA tries to pull NESO out of the hole. The mud stretches like slime.

PSITTA: Juuuust like Neso.

NESO: OHHH! *[PSITTA pulls at NESO.]*

SOUND: SQUELLLCH!

PLATE 3:

NESO lands next to the hole.

NESO: OUCH! *[Rubs his rump.]*

PLATE 2

NESO looks at the reader.

NESO: Did you know the swamp was a lake until about 4,000 years ago?

PLATE 3

PSITTA looks towards the sugar cane which is swaying.

PSITTA: Shhh. It's starting!

PLATE 1

SETTING: *The view is looking from the swamp towards the sugar cane. NESO and PSITTA have landed on the branch of a Casuarina equisetifolia (she-oak).*

NESO leans forward and looks in the direction of the sugar cane as he speaks to PSITTA. He almost tumbles off the branch.

NESO:

The silence is broken,
the sugar cane sways,
and voices sound loud in the air.

NOOR: OUCH! *[Off the page]*

PLATE 2

The view is from above the sugar cane. NOOR and RAJ work their way through the thick sugar cane towards the swamp. The sugar cane sways. We can't see RAJ and NOOR, but we can hear them. We can't see the swamp.

SOUND: SWISH! SWISH! SWISH! SWISH! *[NOOR and RAJ in the sugar cane.]*

NOOR: Where's the swamp?

RAJ: I don't know. It can't be far!

PLATE 3

There is a small swirling movement in the centre of the swamp.

SOUND: Gurgle! *[Very, very faint.]*

On her branch, PSITTA turns her head towards a miniscule movement in the swamp. She nudges NESO.

PSITTA: He's coming!

Page 19

PLATE 1

NESO sits on the tree branch. PSITTA prepares to fly.

NESO: With a push and a shove, *[Shows the actions.]*

PLATE 2

NESO does an acrobatic flip as he leaves the branch.

NESO: a tumble and roll,

PLATE 3

PSITTA and NESO are hovering in front of where NOOR and RAJ fall out of the sugar cane.

NESO: Noor and Raj ...

SOUND: SNIP! SNAP! CRACK! *[Some sugar cane breaks as NOOR and RAJ emerge.]*

PLATE 4

Raj lands on his back. Noor lands on top of him. She faces the swamp.

Raj: Oomfff!

NOOR: Are you sure this is it?

PLATE 5

Both children are still in a heap on the ground. RAJ looks around at the swamp and answers NOOR.

RAJ: I think so.

PLATE 6

NESO and PSITTA hover just in front of the children. NOOR looks at the trees as she begins to stand. Although we can see NESO and PSITTA, the children can't.

NOOR: There's no bird song. *[Concerned.]*

SOUND: GURGLE! *[From off page.]*

Page 20

PLATE 1

RAJ starts to stand and holds his nose. NOOR stands to the side of RAJ. She tries to wave the smell away.

RAJ: Pee-ew! Smells like a swamp, too.

PLATE 2

NESO speaks to the reader. PSITTA watches him.

NESO: Did you know the PONG in swamps is caused by dead plants and animals decomposing?

PLATE 3

PSITTA: Looks to the reader. A thought balloon for PSITTA shows a palaeontologist holding a dodo skull bone.

PSITTA: The remains of plants and animals in the swamp are also helping palaeontologists understand the ecosystem Mauritian wildlife lived in.

PLATE 4

NOOR trembles. She edges closer to RAJ.

NOOR: There's no wind. It's spooky! *[Imagines a human ghost.]*

PLATE 5

NESO and PSITTA come into land on the log. They look towards the middle of the swamp.

SOUND: GURGLE! GURGLE! *[Swirl in the centre of the swamp is a little larger, noise louder.]*

PLATE 6

PSITTA and NESO look at each other.

PSITTA: He's almost here. *[Whispers]*

PLATE 7

The creatures making the buzzing sound cannot be seen. NOOR looks around and searches for what makes the noise.

SOUND: BZZZZZZZZZ ...

Page 21

PLATE 1

NOOR whacks her arm to kill a mosquito.

SOUND: THWACK!

NOOR: Mozzies! I detest them!

PLATE 2

RAJ turns and moves towards the log. NOOR looks up.

RAJ: Hey, that's a great log.

PLATE 3

PSITTA and NESO walk further along the log. RAJ leans over the edge of the log and looks below. He sees a dodo claw.

RAJ: LOOK! What's that?

PLATE 4

A much larger swirl of ripples is visible in the middle of the swamp.

SOUND: GURGLE! GURGLE! *[Around the swirl. Louder.]*

PLATE 5

NOOR performs a gymnastics balance on the log. She looks towards the sound. RAJ leans further out from the log to get a closer look at the claw.

NOOR: Can you hear that?

RAJ: Hear what? *[Looks at NOOR.]*