

## A Trip to the Zoo

It's not at all like watching paint dry. It's like you're the paint being dried with a heat gun, curling from the toes up because someone didn't read the instructions and set the temperature too high, and is holding the gun a little too steady.

Except that it's worse than that, because your head is pounding and you're stuff-raw-cabbage-down-your-gullet bored. Alex is an hour late already, and the whole point was to get to the zoo before the kiddies made it impossible to see anything. Too bad you left your phone at home; you could have gone back to get it by now.

Whatever. You chuck a pebble at a parked car, and it *ploks* off at an angle. You slouch up, crack your knuckles, and march towards the entrance. No point wasting any more time; stupid Alex will just have to come find you inside!

But where should you go first?

*Definitely the tiger enclosure. Alex will look there first. Turn to page B.*

*The caiman pond, obv. It's almost feeding time! Turn to page C.*

*The goat enclosure has some big trees. You could use the shade while you wait. Turn to page D.*

*On second thought, screw this. End your story here.*

The tiger enclosure is the largest in the zoo, and home to two Bengal tigers. The enormous white one is investigating a watermelon on the bluff above the wading pond. It slinks around a bush before hunkering down behind a rock, belly to the earth and still as death. Its tail twitches before it pounces, batting the watermelon into the water and diving after it teeth-first, soaking everything nearby.

Whew, what a day! You wipe at the sweat beading on your forehead and cast about for a shady place to sit and watch. A nearby oak seems like a likely candidate, so you settle your bum into the moss beneath its canopy, watching the tiger carry its prize back up to the bluffs to try again. Idly, you wonder where the other tiger is.

You're exhausted. You close your eyes—just for a minute!—and lean your head back against the trunk, enjoying the breeze puffing at ground-level. The tiger growls playfully; the acoustics here are so good, you could have sworn it was right beside you. You sigh contentedly, and settle in to wait for Alex.

But wait—does a playing tiger growl, or chuff?? You open your eyes.

And look up to see seven hundred orange-and-black-striped pounds leap straight at you from an overhanging branch. Your life flashes before your eyes and you just have time to reflect that you seem to have made some pretty bad choices lately before the tiger lands on you with the *crunch* of splintering bone.

*Your story ends here.*

#### Moral vs. Aesthetic Value

If the tiger enclosure was your first stop, then it's no fault of your own. But if you got here from pages D or F, you ought to be thoroughly ashamed of yourself!

Which of these storylines made for the better story, aesthetically-speaking? Did the moral failings in D or F *decrease* the story's aesthetic value? Plenty of philosophers think so, and plenty don't. For a more detailed discussion of the relation between moral and aesthetic value, see:

1. Dadlez, Eva M. (2002). The Vicious Habits of Entirely Fictive People: Hume on the Moral Evaluation of Art. *Philosophy and Literature* 26 (1):143-156.
2. Eaton, A. W. (2012). Robust Immoralism. *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 70 (3):281-292.

You put a hand over your eyes and whimper. Man, does your head ever hurt!

The caiman pond is still, as always. One small prehistoric reptile has taken over a sunspot, but the others are nowhere to be seen. It's awfully cute, really: its lower jaw is banded in grey and its flanks are streaked with yellow, making it look like an overlong, toothsome frog.

There's a roar next door, and you hear a huge splash from that direction. You run to the low chain link fence, craning your neck to see what's going on, but you can't see a thing through all the bushes. The thick links cut into your palms as you haul yourself up to get a better look.

Unfortunately, your head's not in great shape, and it's been ages since you had anything to eat or drink. Blood rushes to your toes and you sway a little before tumbling down to the caiman pond's muddy waters.

You come to rest on your back in a couple feet of water, sputtering while you regain your bearings, when you notice that the reptile sunning itself has disappeared. And that reminds you—this is the caiman pond!

That's when you see a dark log with two bulbous growths floating your way...

*Swim for your life! Turn to page E.*

*"Eeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee!" you shriek, and you must have gone into the hypersonic register because the incoming caiman disappears into the murky depths with a thrash of its tail. You scramble out and run for the fence with the goat paddock. That was fun, let's do it again! Turn to page D.*

*You can't swim! Your only hope is to grab hold of yonder log.. Your story ends here (it's for your own good).*

### The Paradox of Fiction

The **paradox of fiction** is that we regularly experience strong emotions in response to fictional things which, of course, aren't real. To learn more about our emotional response to fiction, see

1. Kroon, Fred and Voltolini, Alberto, "Fiction", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2019 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = [<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2019/entries/fiction/>](https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2019/entries/fiction/).
2. Walton, Kendall L. (1978). Fearing fictions. *Journal of Philosophy* 75 (1):5-27.

The goat paddock is home to a dozen Nigerian Dwarf goats which are especially fond of climbing the oak that dominates their paddock. Its branches stretch out in all directions, casting much-needed shade over the visitors clustered at the fence.

Poor planning has placed the paddock between the tiger enclosure and the caiman pond, but the goats don't seem too troubled. Because the oak extends well past the fence, however, the occasional goat has been known to slip into someone's dinner. In fact, one goat is currently munching contentedly on some leaves above the tiger enclosure, while another seems hell-bent on some acorns just above the caiman pond.

They're awfully pretty. Their short coats range from gold to chocolate, with striking slashes of white cutting through like a flash of rib beneath muscle...

Wicked thoughts slink in, unbidden. Maybe you should clamber up the oak and push the goat into the caiman pond, to see what happens? Or maybe you should throw stones at the other goat until it falls into the tiger enclosure. Hmm...

*You pull out your trusty slingshot, load several small pebbles, take aim, and—thwap! The goat gives a startled bleat and falls into the tiger enclosure. Get there pronto, before the action starts! **Turn to page B.***

*Chuck the goat in, it'll be hilarious! You climb the fence and scale the tree. The goat stares at you balefully. You cackle and give it a shove—but the goat's stepped away, and you tip over, falling headfirst. **Turn to page C.***

*OMG who are you, even? That's messed up! Just enjoy the goats, and **end your story here.***

### Imaginative Resistance

If you chose to end your story here, you probably experienced a phenomenon called imaginative resistance, which happens when we either refuse to imagine what a story is asking us to imagine (often on moral grounds), or have a hard time imagining what it says we should. To find out more, see:

1. Tuna, Emine Hande, "Imaginative Resistance", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2020 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), forthcoming URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2020/entries/imaginative-resistance/>.
2. Liao, Shen-yi and Gendler, Tamar, "Imagination", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2019 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2019/entries/imagination/>.

Luckily, you're a marathon swimmer with several medals to your name. You flip over and down into the water, zig-zagging to evade your pursuers. They may be big and fearsome, but as ambush predators, they're not the most agile swimmers around.

And then, up ahead, you see the yawning mouths of what must be two maintenance tunnels. The right-hand tunnel is closest, but you catch a golden glint from deep inside the left-hand tunnel... which way should you go?

*Righttight! Turn to page G.*

*The right-hand tunnel looks awfully dark... Besides, there's gold to the left! Turn to page F.*

### Background

It's normal to think that whatever a story claims is true, is true in that story. But this story doesn't tell us whether the protagonist has gills, so how do we know they don't? Philosophers mostly accept that what's true in a story depends on what's true in the real world—unless the story stipulates otherwise. See

1. Lewis, David K. (1978). "Truth in fiction." *American Philosophical Quarterly* 15 (1):37-46.
2. Friend, Stacie (2017). "The Real Foundation of Fictional Worlds." *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 95 (1):29-42.

You push on through the inky water, kicking rhythmically. The only indication of where you're going comes from your knuckles scraping across the tunnel walls. You can't see anything, and your lungs are begging to breathe but it's too late to turn back and which way is 'back' anyway you'll never make it you're going to d—suddenly your head breaks the surface and you almost forget to drag in a breath.

You tread water, recovering and trying to adjust to the dark, but there's no light at all so it's hopeless. You feel your way forward like a mummy mermaid, pointedly ignoring a nearby rumble. One thing at a time.

Soon your toes hit what feels like sand, and you scramble out of the water and lie on the bank, panting. You pull out your phone, praying it still works. Happily, it does, and you squint at your surroundings in its weak glow.

With a startled hiss, a huge shape crashes into the water and immediately slips under, but not before you catch a glimpse of dozens of enormous yellow interlocking teeth and powerful flipper-arms.

Hoe. Lee. CARP! Is it—could it be?—was that... a NOTHOSAURUS?!

Nah, just a freshwater sea lion, you tell yourself. And then you see that it's left behind a clutch of white, cantaloupe-sized eggs. So... probably not a sea lion, then.

*Grab a few eggs to sell to the highest bidder and scramble through a nearby tunnel, which leads to... the tiger enclosure!*  
**Turn to page B.**

*You've read 'The Lost World. Leave the eggs behind and swim back out unencumbered.* **Turn to page H.**

*Take a single egg back for science! Otherwise, nobody will ever believe your story.* **Turn to page J.**

### The Psychology of Text Processing

Did you notice the contradictions? **If not, go back to page A or E and try again!**

Evidence from the psychology of text-processing indicates that we don't usually notice contradictions unless they're right in front of us. It also suggests that our ability to understand a text depends, in part, on our ability to believe its claims—and noticing contradictions inhibits our ability to integrate texts with our background beliefs about the world. See:

1. McKoon, Gail, and Roger Ratcliffe. "Inference During Reading." *Psychological Review* 99, no. 3 (1992): 440-66.
2. Prentice, D.A., R.D. Gerrig, and D.S. Bailis. (1997). "What readers bring to the processing of fictional texts." *Psychonomic Bulletin and Review* 5: 416-20.

Discretion is the better part of valour, so you go right. But no matter how far you swim and swim it never seems to go anywhere. And then it ends in a solid wall of rock. You start to swim back, but it's too far. You claw at the water, kicking increasingly feebly. And then it happens.

Your chest spasms and you suck in a breath, the silt catching as it sluices down your trachea, and now you really *are* drowning, your chances of making it back out sinking as fast as you can drink.

You stop struggling, close your eyes, and breathe in, and the water is a cozy blanket and you're so, so tired...

As you drift off, one last thought bounces round your skull, but you can't quite focus on it. You've read about your life flashing before your eyes as you're dying. But what are you trying to remember?

Ah. Right.

*"It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife."*  
**Turn to the first page of *Pride and Prejudice* and continue your story there.**

*"No one who had ever seen Catherine Morland in her infancy would have supposed her born to be an heroine."*  
**Turn to the first page of *Northanger Abbey* and continue your story there.**

*"Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence..."* **Turn to the first page of *Emma* and continue your story.**

*"The family of Dashwood had long been settled in Sussex."* **Turn to the first page of *Sense and Sensibility* and continue your story.**

*"Sir Walter Elliot, of Kellynch Hall, in Somersetshire, was a man who, for his own amusement, never took up any book but the *Baronetage*..."* **Turn to the first page of *Persuasion* and continue your story.**

*"About thirty years ago Miss Maria Ward, of Huntingdon, with only seven thousand pounds, had the good luck..."*  
**Turn to the first page of *Mansfield Park* and continue your story.**

*"My dear brother, I can no longer refuse myself the pleasure..."* **Turn to the first page of *Lady Susan* and continue your story.**

### Genre and Seriality

Didn't you get that this story is set in Regency England? Hmm. That changes things a little, doesn't it? Could this story be an appropriate prelude to Jane Austen's? To find out more about the influence of genre and seriality, see:

1. Friend, Stacie (2012). Fiction as a Genre. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 112 (2pt2):179--209.
2. McGonigal, Andrew (2013). Truth, Relativism, and Serial Fiction. *British Journal of Aesthetics* 53 (2):165-179.

It's lucky you brought your phone, since you can use the screen to find the tunnel entrance. You could have sworn you didn't have it on you when you got to the zoo, though. You take a few gulps of air to prime your lungs for the return journey then suck in one deep, deep breath and dive back under, heading for the tunnel's mouth. With any luck, you won't run into the... freshwater sea lion... in its natural habitat.

Your knuckles scrape the tunnel's ribs, on and on and on and on and on and... how long did this take last time? Your lungs are burning and your movements grow sluggish—what is it you're looking for, again? Where are you going?

A half-formed memory from Dr. Penfield's logic class drifts in.

You saw and didn't see something. Or... no, wait. You didn't have your phone, but you have your phone. Which means that either you have your phone, or this is a dead end. But you didn't have your phone, which means that—

You hit the wall headfirst. It's a dead end! Your story ends here. Except...

*Anything and everything (and its opposite!) follows from a contradiction. **Simultaneously turn to pages A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, and J, and continue the story from there.***

### Contradiction and Universal Fictions

The principle of explosion is a law of classical logic which shows that you can validly infer anything at all from a contradiction. But what happens when a story contains a contradiction? Can a contradiction even be true in a story?

Most philosophers accept the possibility of contradictory stories as a distinguishing feature of fiction. Some even think that we can use explosion to generate a (technically, *the*) universal fiction, a story according to which everything (and its negation) is true. Others argue that fiction is bound by the *law of non-contradiction*. To find out more, see:

1. Wildman, N., & Folde, C. (2017). "Fiction Unlimited." *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 75(1), 73-80.
2. Xhignesse, M.-A. (forthcoming). "Exploding Stories and the Limits of Fiction," *Philosophical Studies* 1-18.



“...and that’s the last thing I remember,” you tell the Detective Charon.

He stares at you, incredulous. “I don’t understand,” he says, furrowing his brow and scratching his temple. “Was that supposed to be a story? Are you tripping, or what?”

*And you lived (mostly) happily ever after. The End.*

### Narrative

Stories are things we tell, and we typically believe that the same story can be told different times (it’s ‘transposable’). But... what did you just read? Did it have one story or narrative, or many? What should we make of all of its weird twists and turns and alternate endings? Was it even a story in the first place, or just a collection of vignettes strung together? Similarly, what does it mean to say that *10 Things I Hate About You* (1999) and *The Taming of the Shrew* are the same story, or that two different versions of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* are? Indeed, what’s so special about stories and the narratives that represent them, as opposed to other representational forms? What makes a story a *story*? To find out more, see:

1. Smuts, Aaron (2009). Story Identity and Story Type. *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 67 (1):5-14.
2. Currie, Gregory (2010). *Narratives and Narrators: A Philosophy of Stories*. Oxford University Press, esp. Chs. 1-2.
3. Lamarque, Peter (2014). *The Opacity of Narrative*. Rowman & Littlefield International, esp. Ch. 1.

You take off your t-shirt and improvise a sling, then delicately place one of the smaller eggs inside. Unlike the others, this one is pleasingly mottled with brown and green speckles. You cast a nervous glance over your left shoulder in case Momma returns, and consider your exit strategy.

You could swim back out the way you came, but that's where Momma went. On the other hand, you can hear a faint rushing sound somewhere ahead of you. Upon closer inspection, the light from your phone reveals another tunnel. The water from the pool behind you seems to flow into it, which at least suggests that it's not a dead end, so you grit your teeth and wade in, holding the phone in front of you so you can see what you're doing.

Pretty quickly, though, the water is neck-deep, and you have to swim for it—carefully. You try to go slowly, but the current picks up strength the further in you go, until it's doing all the work and it's all you can do to stay afloat and hope there are no rocks or sudden turns.

After some time you can feel the tunnel narrowing around you, until WHAM! You hit your head on something—a stalactite?—and you try to blink the pain away but it's too dark and the water is starting to churn around you and everything would be so much better if you just closed your eyes. Just for a second, just a quick rest. You let the current carry you further down and let your eyelids rest—

—and open them again in alarm when a powerful force grabs you by the belt and hauls you out of the water to lie, sputtering, on the bottom of a canoe.

You scramble into a sitting position and look out over the bow in time to see two large sticks float past. You touch the back of your head and wince, then notice that the river drains into a large marsh.

You turn your attention back to the other end of the canoe and focus on the man there, paddling you towards the other bank.

“Thank you,” you croak. “I thought I was a goner there.” You pat your pockets to give him something as a token of thanks, and your fingers curl around a largeish coin. “It's not much,” you say, handing it over, “but here. Thanks again for fishing me out.” The man bites the coin with an exaggerated wink and drops it into his breast pocket.

“What's in the sling?” he asks. You show him, and he whistles appreciatively. “Smuggling exotic species, eh? And here I thought I'd have a quiet day on the river.” He pulls out a badge. “Detective Phlegyas Charon. Why don't you tell me what you've been up to upstream?”

...

**Turn to page I.**