

A Day at Species Relations Inc.

A Fourth Wall-Busting Crossover

Redwall/Watership Down/The Kine Saga/Implied Others

“Mate, you should *see* this. I’m gonna have major problems with the PR projects if this has gotten out.”

The Siberian weasel sitting at the breakfast bar with his goldish-furred paw on a cup of heady espresso turned, facing the speaker with his dark muzzle lax under hooded eyes.

“What is matter? I *don’t* want to look at more of your magazines, if you want to know.”

“This is not one of my... those magazines.” The mink shuffled on his broad paws, smoothing back his slicked headfur. After a moment of silence he drew a small paperback book out from the deep pockets of his waistcoat, “I’m talking about this, Szibiri, this dratted book! You should read some of this filth it’s been saying about us!”

The weasel grunted out a laugh upon seeing the familiar cover art and turned back to his cauldron of caffeine, “You want me look at child’s book? Some *Narnia* thing? I am too old for that, Visor. Just let me drink coffee, okay?”

“You fat old Russkie...” The mink shook his head, spleen blowing out of his voice as if steam were coming from his stubby ears, “This is not ‘some *Narnia* thing’—these books are blaspheming our race..! Well, our general taxonomic family, that is...”

The Siberian frowned over the wafting steam, “I am not fat. You are one with blubber for swimming, like the whale.” He took a sip, savoring the little shiver the hot beverage caused against his well-scorched palate. Visor the mink stared at him incredulously, wondering if the coffee-brown snout had started out that way or if Szibiri had just burned it so often the color had stuck.

“That’s not the point! The point is, someone wrote like, twenty of these books and they make weasels, stoats, martens and the like look like horrible, uneducated,

filthy, dirty, scummy, criminal... *scum!*”

Szibiri gave a wheezing chuckle and reached for the paper lying on the bar near him.

“That would not be first time, you know.”

“I know! But this guy is otherwise an awesome writer! These books,” the mink held up the beat-up and dog-eared copy of *Mossflower* as if it were a holy text, and he were about to recite an impromptu sermon on their sacred words, “These are going to be very popular. There’s no beating the simple ‘good vs. evil’ formula here. And there are riddles! And sea adventures! With badgers in medieval armor cleaving through thousands and thousands of demonized... well, *us!*”

“Oh!” Szibiri chuckled, “But I see badgers got some good press from it. Not all a bad blow for *Mustela*, yes?”

“Badgers aren’t *Mustela!*” Visor shrieked, planting himself in the seat right next to Szibiri. The yellowish weasel looked quite taken aback for a moment, watching the water-weasel picking his way feverishly through the various marked places, before shrugging and turning to face the other seat, “Don’t you turn away! Listen to this scene, if you can stand it—”

“I need to go back to working now, Visor...”

“Now just a second! Read this, please, just this, and see what I’m talking about.”

Szibiri blew a sigh through his whiskers, turning back to the mink.

“And you will leave me alone if I do?”

“Upon my honor as a water-weasel.”

“...Fine, where I start this..?”

“That line just there, where those goodbeasts are tied up... Gah, these blasted books have got me doing it..! Er, just there, start there.”

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With a noncommittal grunt and a scratch behind the ear, Szibiri spoke his mind

freely.

“Is not that bad, Visor. Just two stupid *mustela*, not bad.” He smirked, “Even I can think of two stupid *mustela* I know of, is not hard.”

“But this isn’t ‘just two stupid *mustela*’...” Visor snatched the book away from the weasel as if afraid the golden paws would taint something of this obviously well-used book, “This is what *every* freakin’ weasel, ferret, or stoat in the entire 22-book series acts and looks like! And is named like! Honestly, ‘Blacktooth’? What better way to spread lies about our hygiene! Doesn’t help that ‘Splitnose’ is right there with him, as if we’re biting each other’s body parts off all the time!”

“You are reading too far into this, friend. It is one British children’s series in thousands, remember.”

“Maybe I am, but if I can that means others can too!” Visor jumped from the chair and hit the floor in a crouch, “And it’s even worse if someone who knows nothing about weasels or others of our kind stumbles across this book while young and impressionable!”

Szibiri chuckled, “Ah, that would be horrible, would it not?” He took another fiery sip of the pure espresso, “Even worse that maybe they learn all mouse and mole and badger are good creature. Poor things be bitten on the fingers so horrifically, shame.”

“I do not appreciate this being taken so lightly!” Visor’s eyes grew bloodshot and he stood steaming with his paws strained out to their sides.

“And I think you take it too seriously. Calm down and think.” Szibiri’s voice hardened for a moment, the weasel sensitive to the furious change in the mink’s voice, “Now, there, you are calmed down. Better, you see? Your trouble is simple—you think this trend is attack by one man who writes these books onto you. But maybe you need to think of why these things are there in the book instead of assuming things are attack, take things slowly and think on them.” He peered over his coffee with a sage expression, “And not explode.”

“But it’s *hard!*” Visor slumped into the lower-set, more cushioned chairs positioned around the lounge’s television, “And it’s not like I’m seeing something that isn’t there, man. It’s right there! And it makes weasels look like monsters to any

ten-year-old who picks that up without ever so much as seeing a picture of a real weasel before!”

“Maybe.” Szibiri nursed the cooling beverage, swirling it to bring the volcanic dredges up from the bottom of the cup, “But think that maybe it is in there because that is all the writing man knows.”

“You mean the guy didn’t research a frickin’ weasel before he decided to pump all this out?”

“Maybe he think he have enough research. Most do think so without the ‘walk for talk’, per se, and that’s why Species Relations company exists. Maybe he think because this is fiction he follows the idea—‘anything is possible’... And so he uses weasel and stoat as symbol, not as an *actual* weasel or stoat.”

“Well, Blacktooth is a ferret, not a weasel—”

“Same difference in our business,” Szibiri swigged the rest of the coffee and stood up. After giving his button-up shirt and sharp slacks a good look-over for wrinkles and stains, he headed for the door towards the offices. “All that matters is, whatever author thinks, he puts in his words. If the author knows nothing about stoat, he will not know how to create stoat in book. But,” he turned back for one moment, hovering in the open portal. “If author thinks he knows what stoat means as an animal, then he will put that preconception in book, not reality. It is the same bum deal as snakes and hyena. And that is your job to find this, yes, but not be surprised about it.”

“And then fix it?” The mink’s heart sunk at the momentous task.

“And fix it, yes.” Then the weasel had left the room.

Visor was left slumped on the couch, clutching *Mossflower* between his slick paws like a parishioner whose faith was in question. Peering down at the scrolling red cover, his gaze wandered to the brave figure cut by the illustration of Martin on the cover, his cloak turned ethereal with that broken sword about his neck. Then, as always, he turned the page to Chapter 16, where he cringed at the inked depiction of three bumbling mustelids (their exact species nebulous and unimportant) in tatty medieval-wear, tripping over each other, warped snarls and Shakespearian-style tragedy masks stamped all over their “brutal vermin features”. Visor pawed his own

sharply tapered face, comforted by the plushy waterproof fur and handsome snout, damp little squishy and objectively adorable nose. He sighed.

“Ah, maybe the Russkie’s right.” He set the over-used book down and smiled as he instead reached for the TV remote controller, “Maybe I should just, eh... let the books be what they are. It’s not like they can change reality. I mean, look at me—I’m a fine piece of work, and I’m not even a great example of a mink.”

There was, as usual, nothing of interest on the telly, but there was a fair amount of vacuous crap to take one’s mind off of deep thoughts. The mink let himself ooze into a laying down position, his long brushy tail dangling off the edge of the couch and his slinky torso conforming to the rough angles of the cushions and arms. Within the next twenty minutes of The Today Show’s latest mid-show gimmick portion, Visor was whistling with little snores, and the remote dropped out of his paw and to the carpeted floor.

Moments later, a young rabbit in a clean-cut polo shirt and tie strode in, looking about to orient himself. He appeared to be new there, which made his slight jump in alarm at seeing the snoozing semi-aquatic predator on the couch more understandable. He sniffed briefly in Visor’s direction, not going within a few steps of the mink.

“Hnnh. No one told me I’d be working with elil...” The rabbit tip-pawed away and fled to the fridge, opening it with care that none of the jars of condiments on the top rack clanked together, “Look at him there, horrid demon. Lazy too.”

Szibiri had forgotten to take his newspaper with him. Hustling back in, he reached out a paw to snag the paper from off the top of the bar before the rabbit’s strange reaction to his appearance gave him pause.

“*U Hrair..!*” The rabbit flattened himself up against the open fridge, freezing in place with paws splayed wide across the door, eyes fixed on the Siberian. The weasel blinked, taking up the newspaper quietly and tucking it under his arm.

“Good morning, friend,” he said, tone poised on the edge of bewilderment, suspicion and amusement. “New here, I think?”

The rabbit gaped, then nodded, having no idea how to react to the friendly banter from a deadly hunter like a weasel... or wait, was this a polecat? No, too light

colored... Ferret? No... couldn't be—it had a weasel's face!

“Ah, welcome. You come over from *Watership Down* world to work here?” Szibiri cocked an eyebrow, beginning to piece together the reason for the lagomorph's startlement, “I assume so because you speak Lapine when I come in.”

“Yes...” The rabbit edged one paw into the fridge, seeking a weapon. The weasel took a shuffled backwards.

“Erm... Yes... Well...” With a grimace disguised as a grin, the golden-furred weasel gestured towards the sleeping mink with his free paw, “This is Visor, your project partner, and I am called Szibiri. I supervise the project, right under the Manager.” He shrugged, backing away towards the door, “So... when he wakes up, you can ask him where you have shared office. And if you have more questions, you come to corner one, is mine. Umm, what are you—?”

The rabbit, eyes wide and wild, had closed his paw around a bottle of ketchup and brandished it like a heavy short club. He took a shaky step out from behind the breakfast bar.

“Stay back, elil.” The rabbit waved the ketchup club in the weasel's direction, “Don't make me hurt you.”

“Ummm.”

“I'm warning you! I come of Owsla stock and my warren will be most unhappy if any weasels try and make off with me!”

“Sir rabbit, I am your boss and this is not a hunting ground.” The weasel padded backwards to the door, “Please put down the ketchup. It really needs to stay cold in refrigerator.”

Wakened by the volume of the shouts, Visor stretched and yawned squeakily before shaking his head and popping upright. Scratching an awkward place on the top of his ribs, he swiveled his head and spotted the rabbit on offensive, but drowsy as he was he ignored the bunny and turned over to Szibiri instead.

“Ack, sorry bossman. I'll get back to work, I promise. No more telly.”

“Visor,” Szibiri kneaded his yellow, sloped forehead with two claws. “Wake up

and smell the ketchup.”

“What?” The mink panned around again, spotting the jittery rabbit and his unusual armament and giving a long quizzical look, “Oh. Well, what’s his deal?”

“*Watership Down*.”

“What?”

“Is a book, very famous, something like your *Mossflower* there,” the weasel pointed out the ragged copy with his folded newspaper. You should read it sometime, very interesting depiction of weasel and stoat in there.”

“I don’t see what it has to do with—“ The mink’s eyes lit up, he cocked his head and gave the rabbit another long look, then back to the *Mossflower* cover, then to Szibiri, then quickly to the rabbit again, “Ohhhh... Is he from another series’s world? This *Watership* you’re on about? Are there sea adventures?”

“No, that’s part of the issue he’s meant to be working on. When he is done menacing us with condiments.” Szibiri glared at the puzzled lagomorph, whose ketchup arm had lowered somewhat, “He’s a *Watership Down* rabbit. He’s also your partner for the new project.”

“He is?” The mink groaned, flinching away from him.

“Well... don’t look so disappointed, elil!” The rabbit grew his nerve back, letting the ketchup drop to his side, “You have something against rabbits, or what? Oh, right, of course you do. You’re one of U Hrair...”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about.” Visor grinned, showing his pointed eyeteeth, “But I don’t think it’s a compliment.”

“He just called you a demonspawn, basically.” Szibiri’s forehead-rubbing increased with a sigh, “And rabbit, sir, we are equal opportunity employer here.”

“Here?”

“Yes ‘here’, or are you not new hire for Species Relations?” The weasel glanced up, “Your name?”

“I’m Coltsfoot,” the rabbit glared back. “And yes I’m supposed to be here. I

just didn't think this company hired so many eli—carnivores.”

“We are *equal... opportunity... employer*.” Szibiri sighed and leaned up against the door, “And that means we must take on many predator animals to team. There is more work to do with carnivores—PR not as good.”

“Oh, I couldn't possibly imagine why.” Coltsfoot sneered. Visor sniffed towards the rabbit and gave an unsavory grimace.

“Y'know, maybe I don't want to read *Watership Down*. Sounds like a PR disaster for you bunny rabbits.”

“Well, that is your job now, friend. Fix it with Coltsfoot here.” Szibiri's face spread open in a slow grin, “After all, that is your part of the project. Jointly raise awareness of real-world rabbit and weasel relations.” Then Szibiri turned to the door to go. Visor gaped and pawed the air, as if begging the Siberian weasel not to go, but it was too late, the door shut with a resounding and firm click.

“Okay then...” The mink turned back around slowly, “So... I take it you're not gonna call me 'elil' or 'U Hrair' or any of those other weird rabbity names, yeah?”

“Not unless you start acting like one,” the rabbit snorted.

“Not likely, didn't you read the job description?” Visor scooped up the copy of *Mossflower* and tucked it back into his deep pocket, “Our job is to promote reality, not fictional rabbit mythology which makes me and my diabetic grandma look like the Devil.”

“But that's *my* rabbit mythology, and according to that you and your diabetic grandma are devils. Frith-approved and created devils, but yeah, you're all evil.”

“I beg your pardon!”

“Well, I'm just stating the beliefs, um... Visor, was it?” The rabbit clinked the ketchup bottle back into the fridge, “And since you've never read the book, you might need to know the details before we start.”

“Hmmp.”

“Well you do. By the way,” Coltsfoot sat down on one of the breakfast bar's stools, wobbling unsteadily as if unused to an anthropomorphic body structure.

“What series are you from? There’s not a lot of call for minks in literature with anthro’d characters...”

“I’m not from a book series,” Visor blinked. “Oh, there’s one or two books that have minks involved, but we’ve already got an American mink from the best-known ones. He’s got a hard sell getting minks to be appreciated in the British isles now... that book did minks no justice at *all*. Good for *weasels*, though. Figure *that* out...”

“But the core of the business is real-world guys, like me and Szibiri, or how else would we spread the truth about our species?” The mink grinned and picked a seat near the rabbit, but not directly next to him, “We call in guys directly from books and movie versions to help understand what the media’s doing with our images, so we can fix the damage. And from what I can tell, your Watership book thingy didn’t do Genus *Mustela* much good...”

“It didn’t do rabbits much good either. That’s what I’m really here about.” Coltsfoot drew his pouched cheeks into a frown, “I mean, once you read the book, you might get the idea that a rabbit’s life is all about subterfuge, violence, being a religious fanatic, and not being very knowledgeable about the natural world... hence the, er, religious thing.” He slumped slightly, “I mean, it’s great that it’s written well, and there’s good guys, bad guys, neutral guys, complex characters and loads of truthful information... but I’m pretty sure any beast that can *plan a rebellion* or *speculate on the nature of the universe* can count higher than four and understand that light things float on water.”

Visor blinked and looked up from admiring the *Mossflower* cover art again.

“You’re serious? They made the rabbits both smart and stupid? How does someone even reconcile that?”

“I don’t know how the author did it, but he did.” Coltsfoot took a peek at the book in the mink’s paws, “I love that I come from such a realistic world, but...”

“There are things that could bear some clearing up?”

“Yep.” The rabbit seemed stunned at how alike his line of thinking was with a water-weasel’s, “I think maybe the ‘elil’ would benefit too.”

“Yep!”

“Alright then. Not sure how this will work out between a rabbit and a... weasel, but...”

“Don’t worry about it! I pack a lunch when in anthro form!” The mink waved a paw towards the fridge, “And even if I wasn’t in anthro form, have you seen those Youtube videos with labels like, um, ‘Unlikely Friendship in Animals’ or ‘Mamma Cat Raises Orphaned Squirrel’? It’s not like friends and family naturally tear each other’s throats out, eh?”

“No... well, not in well-adjusted burrows.” Coltsfoot couldn’t help but grin. The mink was an animal that became a great deal more pleasant when on friendly terms, and this particular mink was young and spunky enough. Well, enough for a young spunky buck bunny. “First things first, I think you should read about my people...”

“Okay then,” Visor hopped off the stool and strutted with musteline grace to the fridge. “I’ll get underway over lunch. While I’m at it, maybe you could study up on mustelid public relations...” He popped the over-beloved copy of *Mossflower* out of his pocket and tossed it over the bar. Coltsfoot fumbled with the spine a bit but caught it shakily.

“What’s this?”

“Another animal series—Redwall series. Takes place in medieval times like a lot of them. Supposed to be meant for kids—way too gory for seven-year-olds in my opinion. Maybe nine or ten. It’s got a lot of ‘weasel trouble’... and, er, rabbits aren’t doing too great in it either.”

“Oh?”

“Well, they do better than I would. But they’re just popped in like ‘lesser versions’ of hares or something.”

“Ouch!”

“I know, right.” Visor’s voice was echoed and frosty, his face muffled in the fridge. Pulling out a large Tupperware container with some half-frozen chili slush within and a plastic-wrapped turkey (hopefully it was turkey) sandwich, the mink

snuffled around for a while before speaking again, “I say, this your spinach salad? Oh, never mind, got Log-a-Log written on it. Pity that guy’s trying to go vegan. It’s *clearly* not working for him, scrawny shrew...”

“Whoa.”

“What’s ‘whoa’? A shrew living on salads? Yeah, he’s from those books like the one I gave you. We must have three of every species from *those* books working here now...”

“Well, I was talking about Chapter One...” Coltsfoot winced as he came into contact with the very first description of the vermin soldiers, “You were right. I think you and the weasels need more PR help than I.”