

The State of Justice

The Story of Irsland, a Children's Fable

Once upon a time there lived a bored King, the King of Irsland, who for want of anything better to do drew a fantastic maze of lines, circles, squares, numbers and letters all over the floor of the palace. There was no design to the plan, but the King thought it would be fun to tell his subjects that this riddle did indeed have an answer, and that anyone who discovered it was destined to become King of all the land. His idea was to convince his subjects that only those with the wisdom of the King could possibly comprehend the puzzle.

Announcing his plans for a continuing competition, the King summoned the best minds of the realm to proctor the event, and if it would please them, to take part themselves. (The King knew that best minds almost always think themselves also wise). Of course, the King was shrewd as well as bored, and he knew that as long as the competitors had their heads down looking intently at the floor, no one could challenge his power. More profitably, however, was the King's idea to steal holoops (measures of wealth in Irsland) from the competitor's pockets while they were bent over and busily surveying the maze.

Meanwhile, each day before the populace would be

admitted to the palace floor the King would arise at dawn and add a few more stars or numbers, or erase others, so that the perplexed would-be Kings with figures adduced during one day would arrive bright eyed the next day only to throw their hands in despair and begin again their study.

One day, as the King was going about his usual business of picking the pockets of his subjects, a young child happened past the palace guards and wandered into the room which, at that time of the day was swarming with bespeckled adults on all-fours with ledgers, slides, pencils, and many colored notebooks. While he was somewhat amused at the way all these adults crawled around the floor, he was more fascinated by the learned scholars who spoke in a curious language to the new groups of people constantly arriving at the palace hall. Soon, however, the child was bored by the whole scene and looked up to see the startled and red-faced King hastily slip a holoop into his pocket. The child, not understanding dishonesty, smiled at the monarch and politely asked him why the people were so busy studying the multicolored floor. The King, further embarrassed by the fact that no one had ever directly asked him that question before, mumbled that "it has been said that he who figures out the maze will be King of all the land". With this the child laughed. He was much too young to be interested in being

a King, and besides, he was rather hard put to understand why anyone would want to spend their time gazing at the floor when the sky and the trees on the palace lawn were more amazing sights to ponder.

After the child left, the King called a great conference of the palace staff, and demanded that security be tightened to prevent children from being admitted unto the palace floor. The King reasoned that perhaps the best way this might be done was to set up a special office through which people who wanted to study the floor had to be screened. The staff unhesitatingly agreed that the King had a great idea, assured the King that the office would only increase the mystery of the floor, and immediately devised tests—using portions of the floor as model problems, to measure the aptness of the incoming students. In addition, the King decreed that the brightest students of the floor should be paid fantastic amounts of holoops (which he nevertheless would steal back from them while they studied) to encourage increased dedication to the riddle's solution, and to encourage parents of the realm to teach their children how important it was that the floor be studied.

And so the years passed, and the people of Irsland went from childhood to adolescence and then to the

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floor. But despite the King's careful precautions, every once in awhile a small child would slip past the guards and run laughing and playing into the palace hall. When this happened, the surprised people would do their best to regain their composure, and would look to each other to assure themselves that no one acknowledged the presence of the child, and to register their disapproval and annoyance that this young ignorant had not the good sense to get down to work. But since the king was getting older and the people knew his heart could not much longer stand the strain of such disruptions, such occurrences always disturbed the people of the floor more than they let on, and always made them return to their work with increased vigor. After all, the riddle needed to be solved. Before the King died. For the sake of Irsland. 