

The Existential Adventures of Crazy Man and the Dog, Sidestepper



Episode 79: Wherein Crazy Man and the Dog Sidestepper, meet the shape that knows.

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A large burly man walks towards you at night, in an alley, a smelly otherworldly alley in the wrong part of the universe. He's wearing a black overcoat that drops down to his ankles and his eyes almost glow red

inside the darkness of his hood. You sense aggression in his walk, the way he hunches in your direction. You suddenly wish you had a flame thrower. You can hear his deep breathing as he comes closer and, just as he comes within a few feet of you and you're ready for him to pounce, he says, "Beautiful evening, isn't it." From the light of a streetlamp, you see his smile and have just enough time to nod agreement before he passes by. Suddenly, you feel foolish and judgmental and realize that this man would never put peas in Shepard's pie. What the hell were you thinking?

Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, were in just such a situation except that the large dark object they approached wasn't walking towards them...it was blocking the path of adventure and new meanings and they had no choice but to confront it.

"Stop!" said the large dark object. It looked like it had broken through the crust of the earth, showering dirt, roots and broken branches. The air reeked of humous and dead plants.

Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, stopped quick enough that Crazy Man's round red nose continued forward about three inches, possibly a foot, before realizing that it's face was about three inches, possibly a foot, behind it and shot back to its rightful position on Crazy Man's face. I made a *plop* sound that would give him nightmares someday.

"I am the shape," said the shape. "You can go no further down the path of adventure and new meanings until you have defeated me."

The dog, Sidestepper, was not going to back down from a shape. Not in this lifetime. Not here, not now. "And how should we defeat you?" he said in a calm, deadly canine voice.

The shape was silent for a minute or two before saying, "Snakes & Ladders. You must defeat me at Snakes & Ladders."

"Sure," said the dog, Sidestepper. "Where's the game?"

"You don't have one?" said the shape.

"I'm a dog," said the dog, Sidestepper. "I played with bones and balls when I was a puppy. And I ate snakes."

"And you?" said the shape, gesturing towards Crazy Man with a tangle of root and dirt.

"Haven't had one since I was a kid," he said. "And I think I traded it for bubble gum."

"Alright then," said the shape. "We have no choice...we have to fight to the death."

"But there's two of us and only one of you," said the dog, Sidestepper.

"You're right," said the shape. "You both have to tie your hands behind your backs. That includes paws."

"Easy for the big guy," said the dog, Sidestepper. "Not so easy for me."

The shape, after evaluating the impossible geometric constructions that would allow the dog, Sidestepper, to tie his paws behind his back, changed its mind. "Then, you both have to close your eyes."

"But how will we see you?" said Crazy Man. "We'll just wander off into the deep dark scary woods and be eaten by squirrels and bears."

The shape thought about this. "You're right. OK then...you can close just one eye."

"But we may as well have both eyes open in that case," said the dog, Sidestepper.

"OK then," said the shape. "I'll close both my eyes. Are you sure you don't have the game?"

This made no sense to Crazy Man, the dog, Sidestepper and the shape, so the shape decided to change tactics.

"Tell me something I don't know and I'll let you by."

Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, considered the shape's request. They discussed the possibility of the shape setting a terrible trap and possibly being in cahoots with the deep dark scary woods. They examined various scenarios in which the shape tricked them into revealing classified information and decided that the shape could be trusted because it hadn't called them bastards.

"OK," they said in unison.

"I'll bet you don't know this..." said Crazy Man.

The shape's roots shook with anticipation.

"I might have a kitchen," said Crazy Man.

"I knew that," said the shape.

“How did you know that?”

“I just knew it.”

“Prove it,” said Crazy Man.

“Prove I didn’t know it,” said the shape.

Crazy Man was flummoxed. Either the shape really did know about his possible kitchen or it was lying. He searched his mind, dendrite by dendrite, synapse after synapse, and came up with the perfect every-body wins solution: “Do you know where to find a map to food?”

The shape quivered. Bits of dirt and dried lichen dropped from the shape’s surface like existential sweat. Its roots began to undulate slowly. Twisted boughs and lifeless twigs shook and splintered. Clumps of dirt liquefied into mud and slid off the shape.

“No!” screamed the shape. “I don’t know where you can find a map to food and you’re both bastards.”

The shape’s roots and boughs reached out like terrible arms, slammed down and lifted the shape out of the ground. They pushed the shape up and became legs out of a nightmare’s nightmare and the shape ran, crushing bushes and sleeping moles, into the deep dark scary woods.

Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, stared in awe.

“Good thing I didn’t mention my mother,” said the dog, Sidestepper.

Crazy Man nodded. “At least it’s not blocking the path anymore,” he said.

“Yep,” said the dog, Sidestepper. “And did you see how fast it ran off. Must have been in really good shape.”

It took a few minutes or hours for the joke to sink in and once again laughter rang out from the path of adventure and new meanings as it snaked through the deep dark scary woods.

To be continued...

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Check out the blog at: www.crazymanadventures.com

BTW.....

My third novel has been re-published. There’s no giant ant...it’s actually a computer virus called the War Bug. The artist didn’t read the novel before creating the cover. Later, I wrote a short story about a cover artist who is eat alive by one of his covers. It was published in an anthology by the same publisher.

You can buy the ebook version in a variety of formats here:

<https://doubledragonbooks.com/>

Or you can get the Kindle version here:

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B08W8KZZXF>



The novel is about a man trying to find his virtual wife and daughter as the internet begins to crash from a war between online city states. His only ally is the virus that started the war.