

BIRDMAN

There was nothing. Not a word. Mystery surrounded the disappearance of The Bird last week. Speculation mounted as concerned Bird watchers preyed that fowl play wasn't to blame. It couldn't be...no, not The Bird.

The pecking order was well established in this world. The world of birds. They lived in their own world beyond the reach of most. However, there are a minority of colourful characters in the bird world that are bigger, richer and more powerful than the rest. The largest and most colourful are found in South America although these behemoths are elusive and sightings rare. These guys are the real deal and these birds prey on the weak, the vulnerable and the indulgent. They carry their payload aboard Cocky messengers who don't really have much to Crow about because they're just Galahs. The squeaky wheel gets the oil but, in this world, it pays to keep silent. Too much noise from Cocky Galahs brings unwanted attention. Any dissent by the underlings or anyone else is met with Swift silencing. The Parrot heavyweights can ill afford to have their livelihood grounded.

One such victim was a Fruit Loop known as Tucan Sam who'd drawn too much attention to himself. He talked too much and his loose tongue guaranteed a one way ticket to extinction. The Macaw family had to get to him before the authorities got him to sing.

Tucan Sam pleaded for his life. He stated he was just an ordinary Parrot which was a pretty lame appeal for clemency. The reality was that he was a loose underboss, a colourful big

By Adrian Payne

Parrot making headlines in a foreign land and this was bad for business. He argued that he'd been setup as part of some sinister conspiracy.

The assassin smirked and inquired, "Just an ordinary Parrot eh?" After a brief moment of contemplation, he continued, "Then I'll be pleased to hand you a Garrotte."

Tucan knew this wasn't the time for humour but what the heck... "What's that," he said, "a cross between a Galah and a Parrot?"

Tucan got tongue tied. He may have wished for a Windsor but this was a Colombian Neck tie and that was that.

Wayward birds often ruffle feathers. Birds deemed to be flight risks had their wings clipped and if they continued on the wrong flight path ended up in the cage. And if the Dodoes persisted to make trouble, they just disappeared and only had themselves to blame. But The Bird in this story is different. He wanted to spread his wings and see a bigger picture. Hanging out with Pigeons and Wood Ducks at street level had little appeal. The everyday hum drum was for the Bush Turkeys. The Bird wanted to scale lofty heights and high altitude exploration resonated with him. It was the way to get another perspective, an alternative topography on life. So The Bird took off. Without a destination, much less a flight plan, he took to the air and was free. Up, up and away.

With his head above the clouds, The Bird saw the disturbing juxtaposition of humanity. That man is sometimes kind but often cruel and self-serving was a fact. The environment and its culture was a proxy for the human condition. On the one hand were poverty and the daily struggle for survival while on the other hand was the daily quest for happiness. And standing in between this great divide is a passport.

The value of water and diamonds reflects the dichotomy brought about by random birth rights. The “quiet desperation” of mankind was pitiful in a world of abundant wealth as material vanity was stockpiled as personal values were depleted.

The Bird observed life on the street from far above and it was so pedestrian. Amongst the chaos and depravity of city life were pigeons and the homeless. They were the lowest common denominators of their respective worlds however it was necessity that brought them together and they formed a bond. It was an alliance that represented an underclass starved of affection. However, there was a subset within the pigeon class that were treated differently. White pigeons, also known as Doves were revered. They became mascots for Christianity as the messengers of peace and hope. Despite the inequity and preferential treatment these peace loving birds received, they were still pigeons and hopelessly deficient in stealth and speed. They could barely get out of their own way much less harm’s way. They were easy targets and were simply Mockingbirds. They made a mockery of the real birds.

Enlightening as The Bird’s eye view was, other more pressing concerns demanded attention. Before he knew it, The Bird had been swept up into the Gulf Stream which effortlessly transported him into the middle of a No Fly Zone high above enemy territory. Instead of soaring with Eagles he was circling with Turkeys and Drongos. This wasn’t part of the plan. And that was precisely the point. There was no plan. Only a Raven lunatic would take off without a flight manifest. But that was the thrill of destination unknown. This was indeed a mystery flight as the Bird had veered dangerously off course. This was a bad trip.

The situation was bad. Had there been a Flight plan, it would never have charted this course. This was South American air space. The environment below was rugged and was home to the biggest colourful birds of prey and a reminder of Tucan's nemesis. Trouble was all around. Above and below, the struggle for survival took centre stage as the Vultures gathered to prey on the hapless birds that didn't make it.

Higher altitudes became increasingly hostile to the sustainability of life. The higher the birds climbed, the quicker they fell. Only the toughest of birds pushed on through their various fears in a bid for freedom. Once they hit the Troposphere, the beginning of Space, there was no turning back. Poisons in the atmosphere and a lack of oxygen sent many birds crazy. Some plummeted back to earth while others never came back and drifted into the eternity of Space.

Assimilation and re-entry back to Earth would require careful planning and meticulous task execution. The odds were against the Birds given the significant barriers to entry. They would need support on the ground to assist in their transition from one world to the real world. But it wouldn't be easy and the Birds had to be fair dinkum about a new life. Compared to the kaleidoscope that was life above the clouds, everything else was beige.

Sadly, the chook had been cooked for many of the Birds and they'd stand little chance in the real world. The lucky ones fell stone dead back down to earth while the unlucky took a dive

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at terminal velocity straight into the cuckoo's nest. No more sorties for these Birds. They were done.

The surviving Birds were stuffed. Far above them, it looked as if the darkness of Space was following their descent to Earth. The agonising truth was coming home to roost as the black beasts of the sky circled and hovered like a blanket of death. The Vultures landed to feast.

The gangly birds with their wretched long necks were revolting in every department. But they were only servants called upon to do a job. The Bosses from Bolivia never left evidence and within minutes only the skeleton remained.

There were many birdwatchers all around the globe keeping an eye on things. The business had to keep humming along with all the appearances of legitimacy. And lining up were the next generation of Birds determined to fly wherever they wanted. After all, why have wings and take away the sky. The Big Colourful Bolivian Birds were only too happy to peddle, push coax and coerce to meet demand. And when the sky falls in for the next troop, another flock of feathers will be ready to take flight on a wing and a promise.

Sorrowful tales of woe would not claw back time. The aviary was full of Larks and Drongo's brooding over lost opportunities thanks to the deceit of Lyre birds. There were plenty of bad eggs in the jail bird nest however not this Bird. The Budgerigar returned from an extended sortie alive and with plenty of tales. But into the vault they go because The Bird is the word.

And so it came to pass. The Bird was spared the fate of becoming a feather duster... on this day anyway.

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