

WATERSHIP DOWN  
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*'All the world will be your enemy, Prince with a Thousand Enemies, and whenever they catch you, they will kill you.'*

At the heart of Watership Down is the quest every society embarks upon. The rabbits in the story search for a home that will provide them with quality of life, where they are safe, have abundant food and good government.

The story begins when FIVER, a rabbit with strong intuition, receives a vision showing his warren destroyed. Although his call to flee is dismissed by the leader of the warren, his brother HAZEL believes him and manages to convince a number of rabbits to leave with them.

The rabbits who join FIVER and HAZEL are BIGWIG, SILVER, BUCKTHORN, PIPKIN, HAWKBIT, BLACKBERRY, DANDELION, SPEEDWELL, and ACORN. Each have strong and distinct characters, reflected in their appearance and actions.

The rabbits are forced to be both ingenious and brave on their journey as they face realistic dangers. Even before they reach Watership Down, the site of their new warren, they must use a board as a raft to cross a river and escape a dog, evade a society of complacent rabbits being 'farmed' by a human and rescue one of their number from a snare.

During these adventures HAZEL emerges as a strong, fair leader and gains the trust of his companions, including BIGWIG, a skilled fighter with strong opinions of his own.

Soon after the rabbits arrive at Watership Down, CAPTAIN HOLLY and BLUEBELL arrive from their old warren with a harrowing tale of destruction and murder. CAPTAIN HOLLY describes how humans dug up the warren and filled in the holes, killing the rest of the rabbits. Realizing that FIVER's vision was accurate, they join in the effort to establish Watership Down.

One problem the rabbits face is a lack of does to breed with. They enlist the help of two friends, a mouse and a seagull, in liberating does from hutches in a farm building and from another warren so full of rabbits that they have stopped breeding.

In liberating the does from the farm, the rabbits face a vicious cat, a speeding car, and HAZEL is shot. In freeing does from the other warren, Efrara, however, they start a war.

Efrara is ruled by a tyrant named WOUNDWORT. He has established a totalitarian dictatorship, and runs his warren as a police state. BIGWIG infiltrates Efrara and helps a small party to escape.

WOUNDWORT is enraged by the departure of his citizens, and leads an army of rabbits against Watership Down. The Watership rabbits call in help from their friends: a mouse warns them of the Efrara army's approach, KEHAAR the gull fends off the first wave of attack, and the rabbits lead ROWSBY WOOF the nearby farmer's dog to fight WOUNDWORT. After WOUNDWORT's death the rule of Efrara falls to an intelligent, steady rabbit named CAMPION who governs peacefully.

Throughout the story are woven myths that establish a rich cultural context for the rabbits' lives. We are introduced to legendary rabbits of long ago, tales of whose exploits are both enchanting and instructive.

By the end of the tale, Watership Down is a well-established warren run by the venerable HAZEL, who has grown into his role as a great leader. The final scene describes how HAZEL is summoned to join El-ahrairah, Prince of all rabbits, to become a legend himself.