



Strategic Tale 4.3

(On competition and cooperation in industrial districts)

The pond

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My favourite place in the world is located a few metres outside the kitchen window at my grandparents' house. It's a pond.

In this aquatic paradise, which is surrounded by leafy trees, life revolves around a primordial activity: the search for food. Each inhabitant in this microcosm plays a unique role in their life cycle, but also in that of others, contributing in a unique way to the ecosystem's equilibrium.

The pond is home to a frog called Nita, an expert hunter who uses her tongue, as long as it is deadly, to trap the mosquitoes and dragonflies that flutter over the water and occasionally land on the lilies that grow there. The water is also home to the fish Cito, who is responsible for keeping the pond in pristine condition by grazing on all the algae that thrive there, and thus ensuring the water remains bright and clear.

Along the banks, Guita the turtle skilfully sculpts the mud, creating small channels that allow the free flow of water, oxygenating it, and benefiting all the inhabitants, especially Cito and all the other fish. On the surface, the water lilies, with their large white flowers blooming between May and October, offer most of the inhabitants a welcome resting area. They double up as a perfect cover for those amphibians less skilled than Nita, providing the camouflage they need to stalk their prey. Yet what they undoubtedly are is the perfect shelter for Cito's family.

Closing the circle, the dragonflies that have evaded Nita's attentions are the ones that pollinate the surrounding flowers, ensuring the continued survival of plants that provide shade and shelter. Each morning, when the sun illuminates the pond, all the inhabitants begin their day. Although they all have different purposes and diets, each one knows that its work is crucial to the well-being of its habitat.

Like the rain, peace is seasonal in the pond. The dry season shrinks the pond. The previous season's abundance is now reduced to scarcity. Cito's family, divided into two groups, shares what they have. Known for their speed and foraging prowess, the first-





movers quickly arrive at places where insects and algae gather. The heavier last-movers use their strength to move stones and find the food hidden underneath.

At the beginning of the dry season, both families try to share resources, but the longer the drought lasts, the more acute the rivalry between the clans becomes. The rivalry increases over several days, and the tension in the pond increases. The fact is there is not enough food for everyone.

When the rainy season arrives, everything changes; the pond is full of life. This is the time when the first-movers and the last-movers club together to use their skills to explore new areas and access difficult places.

One night in April, with the water lilies yet to bloom, the sky was crisscrossed by lightning and shaken by the rumble of thunder that, like a giant drum, made the whole community tremble. A violent storm swept through the pond, bringing with it fear and clogging it with broken branches and leaves that obstructed the flow of water. Nita raised the alarm. She frantically croaked instructions while hopping from side to side, moving the smallest branches. The toads, with their sturdy bodies, answered her calls, using their hind legs to push the larger branches. The younger frogs, though frightened, followed Nita's directions and helped clear the small channels that formed between the water lilies.

The fish joined forces to push the leaves out of the water. Cito's fellow fish flipped their tails rapidly to create waves that helped move the smaller leaves towards the edges, while the turtles, with their slow but steady rhythm, pushed the heavier leaves with their shells. The bright-winged dragonflies, allies of the fireflies, used their agile and circular flight to guide the others to the areas that required more urgent attention.

The storm seemed endless, but the pond community did not give up. They worked together, each one contributed what they could, doing their very best. When the last clap of thunder faded into the distance and the rain began to subside, the pond regained its calm. Silence.

Hours passed, the sun rose once more, and with it the first rays of dawn revealed the extent of the damage: branches and leaves scattered everywhere, sunken water lilies, and narrow clogged channels. Every animal, no matter its size or ability, applied themselves to the task of rebuilding. As the sun rose higher in the sky, the pond began to regain its shape. The water lilies, though damaged, began to resurface, and the water flowed more freely again. The animals worked in harmony, as the storm had also left them with a stronger, more united community.

It was not easy for the pond to return to being the calm and harmonious refuge it always had been; it took days of intense cooperation between the inhabitants to restore it. Once they had succeeded, they all gathered to celebrate by the light of the full moon. The frogs croaked joyful melodies, while the dragonflies and fireflies lit up the sky with their luminous dance. The toads, with their deep voices, told stories of bravery and solidarity, dramatically recalling the most difficult moments of the storm. The fish





jumped out of the water in a show of acrobatics, while the turtles...oh, by that time they were already in bed asleep.

The celebration lasted until dawn. When the first rays of sunlight began to illuminate the crystalline water again, they returned to their homes, aware that everyone was, is, and always will be an essential link in the circle of life.

Even today, when I close my eyes, I imagine them as a large mosaic where each tile is crucial to complete the image. As in an orchestra, each instrument participates in the creation of musical harmony, the harmony of the pond.

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