

The Sorcerer and the Plague: A Children's Tale

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- › This story was inspired by the Soviet dissidents who often managed to convey their messages by using the genre of children's tales
- › It's fiction – but it tells us about the real world that we are living in today
- › Power-hungry individuals have a million tricks up their sleeves, at all times – but without our compliance, their power is short-lived
- › Together, we can stand up for our dignity and expel the tricksters from our lives
- › It may feel dark today – but this darkness will end, and in order for it to end in due time, our work to expel it needs to be done now and every day, until we win

This story was inspired by the work of the Soviet dissident writers and film makers who often managed to convey their messages by using the genre of children's tales.

“The Plague, the Plague! Beware of the Plague”

Once upon a time, in a fictional far-away kingdom, the authorities announced a big plague. King's messengers on horses and in beaked masks, were sent to every town and every village, demanding that the citizens drop whatever they were doing and go back home.

King's messengers looked very menacing and serious in their beaked black masks, and they sounded strict. They insisted that the order to go back home in the middle of the

day and to stay home was for the citizens' own good, and that it was not to be questioned in any way.

When some feisty citizens inquired how they were going to feed themselves and their families while under the new "royal lockdown" rule, the messengers told them that they were endangering the country and that they had to immediately shut up, comply, and just let the king do all the thinking for them. Unless, of course, they desired to go to jail and ask all their remaining questions there.

"It won't take more than two weeks anyway, have some patience," the masked messengers said. The threats and the promises worked like a charm, and the citizens in every town and every village begrudgingly complied, expecting to resume their normal daily lives in two weeks or so.

Perfect Timing

The timing of the plague was perfect for the king and especially for the treasurer of the Crown. For years, the king has been mostly partying and not paying attention to what was going on, while the treasurer has been dutifully stealing everything from the treasury — every piece of gold he could find — and even inviting his children and his closest associates to partake in the theft.

The treasurer was stealing so shamelessly that no amount of citizen taxes and no loot from foreign wars could make him satisfied. The gold just kept disappearing into his bottomless pockets, with no trace. And it so happened that shortly before plague, he had stolen the last piece of gold from the treasury and discovered that there was nothing left there, except some dust, a few mouse droppings, and a whole lot of old spider webs.

A Perfect Storm: Sustainability and Plague

The Treasurer didn't despair though. He had a resourceful mind. He set out to convince the King that spider webs and mouse droppings were, in fact, the new gold — the trendy

and sustainable kind. He prepared his “pitch” and — just as he was rehearsing his pitch, the plague announcement came.

“Great timing!” the Treasurer thought to himself. “This plague is such a Godsend.” And nobody ever asked the Treasurer if the course of events had anything to do with the private conversation he had the day before with the Chief General and the Sorcerer of the Crown.

War-Time Economy

The news of the plague was brought by messengers from a foreign land who arrived at the steps of the royal palace with stories and drawings of people dropping dead. The foreign messengers looked tired and pale. The King, annoyed by the fact that he was dragged out of a party that he very much enjoyed, ordered to immediately behead the foreign bearers of bad news — but he also took note.

The King then promptly summoned the Treasurer, the Chief General, and the Sorcerer of the Crown and asked them what they thought of the news. All three looked convincingly concerned. They told the King that the news sounded very serious indeed, and that plague was war, and that war-time measures needed to be taken in a haste.

They advised the King that royal messengers needed to be sent to all villages and towns to notify the people of the plague — and that, to ensure obedience, the messengers needed to wear scary black masks with beaks. The King nodded his head.

At the very end of the meeting, the Treasurer also said, “My King, this is all horrible but in better news, I have a great economic plan for the times of the plague. How about, due to plague, we stop relying on outdated gold, a material that is unwieldy hard to obtain — and switch to renewable and sustainable mouse droppings and spider webs, easily available to us without strain?”

What do you think? Not only will it be good for economic growth of the kingdom due to the sustainable nature of the new “gold” but also, If we do that, my King, you can

continue partying all day and all night and not change a thing. Should we do it, my King?”

The king thought for a second, nodded his head again, and said, “Fine. As long as I don’t have to personally touch the mouse droppings with my hands, and as long as I can party like I always did, do what you think is best.”

“Thank you, my King!” the Treasurer exclaimed, made quick eye contact with the Chief General and the Sorcerer of the Crown, and sighed a sigh of relief. The problem of being exposed for relieving the treasury of gold was solved.

Of course, he had no plans to actually use the mouse droppings and the spider webs in place of gold, at least not in his own life. But the cover story was good enough.

And so it became the Sorcerer’s job to take care of the “perception problem,” to update the Royal Dictionary’s definition of “gold,” and to make sure that the citizens became so scared of the plague that they wouldn’t even ask why there were ridiculous-looking pictures of spider webs and mouse dropping everywhere, captioned, “Sustainable gold.”

Two Weeks to Flatten the Curve

During the first two weeks of the Royal Lockdown, lots was done. While the Sorcerer was working day and night to put fog and terror in people’s heads, the General sent his men to every village and town to install the All-Seeing Eye. The citizens were too scared and mesmerized behind the closed doors of their homes, so they didn’t even notice that the All-Seeing Eye was installed. And in rare occasions when they did, they were told by the masked men that it was for their own good.

The New Normal, Here to Stay

After the two weeks of flattening the curve, the citizens everywhere wanted to resume their lives – but the old normal wasn’t available anymore. That was when both the General and the Sorcerer upped their game. The Sorcerer did a special magic spell to

put a lasting cloud of uncontrollable fear over people's heads. At the same time, the General sent his masked-and-beaked men to all towns and all villages to erect black "plague tents."

They also recruited the Minister of Entertainment who then dispatched trained musicians to take over church bells and perform Plague Symphony all day.

From his past operations in foreign lands though, the General knew that his theatrics could only go so far. He knew that actual casualties were needed to ensure lasting fear. So he talked to the Treasurer who, in turn, talked to the King – and was able to convince the King to ban all medicinal herbs (except for Royal Needs). The King quickly signed the new rules.

And so, just like that, all medicinal herbs in the kingdom were banned, and the doctors were prohibited from giving them to the sick. The Sorcerer then did a special spell to put a cloud of arrogance over the doctors' heads, while the General sent more of his men to police the doctors and make sure they complied.

Some doctors resisted. They just weren't arrogant, and so they were immune to the spell. They clear-headed doctors vocally objected to the ban and continued giving medicinal herbs to the sick. Those doctors, however, were called all sorts of bad names, and some were arrested and taken away by the General's men, while their friends and colleagues just watched.

The dragging away of the dissidents killed two birds with one stone. On the one hand, it got rid of the opposition – but also, the act of betrayal changed the chemistry of people's hearts, and they became a lot more prone to Sorcerer's future spells.

Chaos and Death

Predictably, once the herbalists and the dissidents were dragged away, chaos ensued. People seemed to be getting plague left and right. Scared and pale, they rushed to the tents – where the doctors tied them to their beds, didn't give them any medicinal herbs – and walked away. Many died.

And many of those whose family members and friends perished in tents, lost their hearts and minds. Little by little, by complying with slightly more ridiculous and abusive rules each day, they turned themselves into easy Sorcerer's toys. Many got to the point where they started waiting for the beaked men to show up and bark at them some more. It made them feel safe and loved.

Some even started drawing beaks and mouse droppings and hanging the drawings in the sacred place of their homes, next to the All-Seeing Eye.

Thus, the plague accomplished a lot. However, the wicked trio – the Treasurer, the Sorcerer, and the General – wanted more. After all, the scared citizens weren't producing a whole lot, and the treasury was not going to fill itself.

Sustainable Theft

The answer to that problem was clear: the citizens owned too much stuff, and they had to be relieved of their property asap or, as the Sorcerer put it, "freed."

And so the Sorcerer updated the Royal Dictionary definition of "freedom" and got to work on his spells so that people didn't resist being gradually relieved of the land and other property they owned, under the guise of plague measures and the new sustainable life. The General, on the other hand, was tasked with sending more of his men to foreign lands to "free" the citizens over there, for loot.

Additionally, a thousand alchemists were recruited by the Treasurer to actually try and turn mouse droppings into gold. Or was it a trick that the Sorcerer played on the Treasurer's head, to eventually "relieve" him of his stuff, too? The Sorcerer didn't say.

In the meanwhile, in town and villages, life was in disarray, the paranoia was up, the camaraderie was down, the food was scarce, no work was getting properly done, and, without medicinal herbs, people's health was in decline.

Mouse Dropping Vaccines

The wicked trio then decided it was time to change the tune and roll out the so called “plague vaccines” (made from mouse droppings, of course), and then “open up the economy” at last. They quickly announced to the people that the alchemists, after much hard work, had come up with really good vaccines against the plague, and that it was everyone’s responsibility to “take one for the team.”

A lot of people, exhausted to no end by the Royal Lockdowns, the isolation, and the disarray – not without the help of the Sorcerer’s spells – lined up to get the “plague vaccine.” Some pesky citizens were suspicious but that was an easy problem to fix. They were called all sorts of names and then dragged away by the General’s beaked men, as others watched.

But then, even as the vaccination campaign was going seemingly well, more people started getting plague, and some started dropping dead shortly after they rolled up their sleeves.

The citizens expressed concern but messengers were quickly dispatched to reassure the people that only “bad apples” could blame the tragedies on the perfect Royal Vaccines, and that the deaths were happening strictly due to the self-inflicted and ungrounded fear of the vaccination campaign, through unnecessary stress. “By fearing the Vaccine, are putting a spell on yourself,” King’s messengers preached.

The updated campaign worked for a little longer, but not for very long. All in life takes time and, once the time was ripe, the spell of the Sorcerer started to wear off, and people started to wake up from the trance.

Concerned, the Sorcerer made a new spell, a powerful one. It re-captured some – but no Sorcerer can trick all people forever, and, as more were waking up from the trance and finding their courage at last, the spell was losing its juice.

Wailing to the Skies

As the spell was losing power, and clarity of vision was coming back, people realized what had been done to them. And so, many people cried salty tears into the skies over

the harms done to them and the harms they themselves allowed to happen on their watch. They felt both let down and ashamed. And even the musicians-for-hire stopped playing the Sorcerer's Plague Symphony and joined the wailing crowds.

The General's men were promptly dispatched to all towns and villages to stop the dangerous trend, but nobody listened to them anymore – and when they tried to disperse the crowd by force, the local men grabbed the pitchforks and drove them away. It turned out that the General's men were not very brave and only knew how to harass those who complied.

Upside-Down Language of the Finest Grade

The Sorcerer, who knew very well that he had no power over those who weren't afraid, decided then to try his most impressive trick.

He promptly put a spell on the King, on the Treasurer, and the General, made them fight with each other in the back, with knives, and then came out to the people, telling them how all along, he was working to help them be free and stand tall. He spoke with passion. He used all the right words. He was a sorcerer, after all.

"It's a new day," he said. "A new dawn. A life of freedom, a life without plague. Are you ready to crown me King?"

And he was almost able to pull this off and become King – but out of nowhere, a little boy with shiny eyes and a clear heart shouted from the crowd, "Liar! Liar! You are a bad sorcerer, aren't you? I can see your ways! Go away and leave us alone!"

And because the boy was so pure and so unimpressed by the Sorcerer's tricks, his melodic voice cut right through the spell, and the Sorcerer could no longer hide the darkness of his face. For the first time, everybody saw him as he was (not a pleasant sight). For the first time, he stood there naked, his evil deeds reflecting on his skin.

How This Ends

People then turned to the boy. “What should we do with this ugly man, wise child?” they asked. “Just expel him into the woods and don’t worry about him anymore.” The boy said in his melodic, fearless voice.

“Tricky sorcerers like him can only command your mind in a lasting way if you agree to do what doesn’t feel right. Don’t agree to that. Forget about this sorcerer of the past, but please, heal your hearts without your tricky adult pretense, and don’t ever allow evil to happen on your watch.”

And this is how the great plague in a fictional kingdom came to an end. And yes, the dissidents were freed from the jails, and people started using medicinal herbs again. And the sorcerer? He is still roaming in the woods like a lonely beast, serving his purpose of reminding us that our power is in never agreeing to do what doesn’t feel right.

About the Author

To find more of Tessa Lena's work, be sure to check out her bio, [Tessa Fights Robots](#).