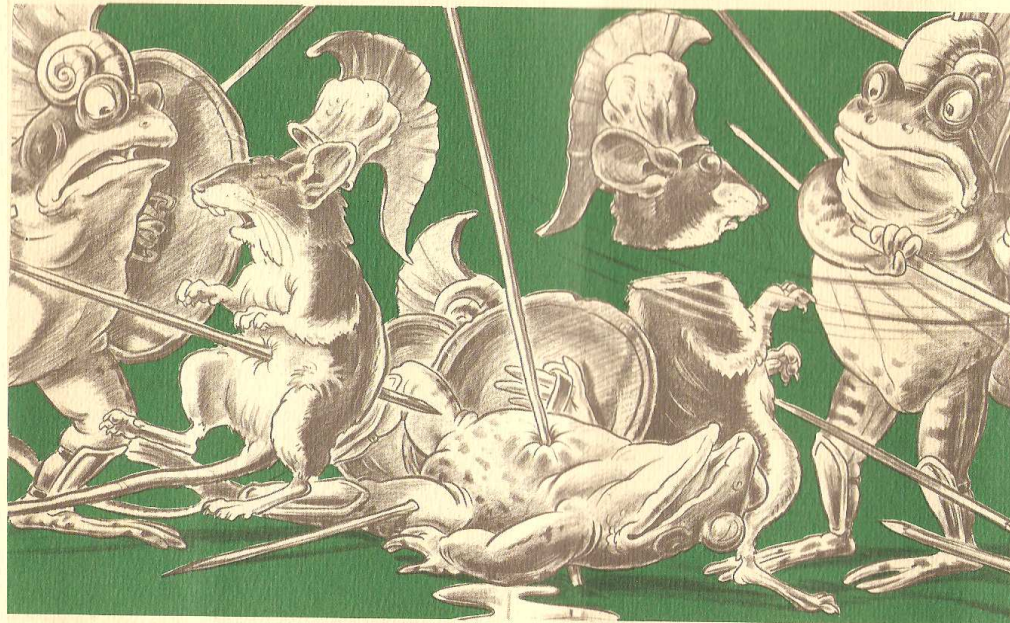


THE BATTLE OF THE FROGS AND THE MICE

An Homeric Fable



BY GEORGE MARTIN

ILLUSTRATED BY

FRED GWYNNE



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*"But before I praise the dead, I should
like to point out by what principles of action we
rose to power, and under what institutions and
through what manner of life our empire became
great."*

—PERICLES (Funeral Oration)

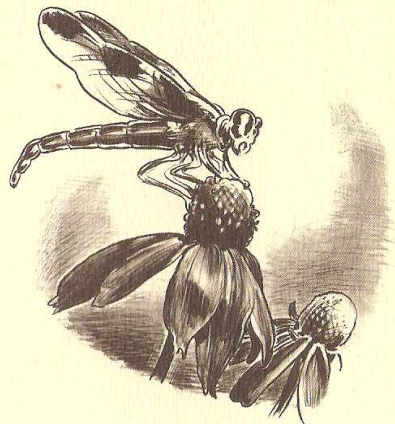
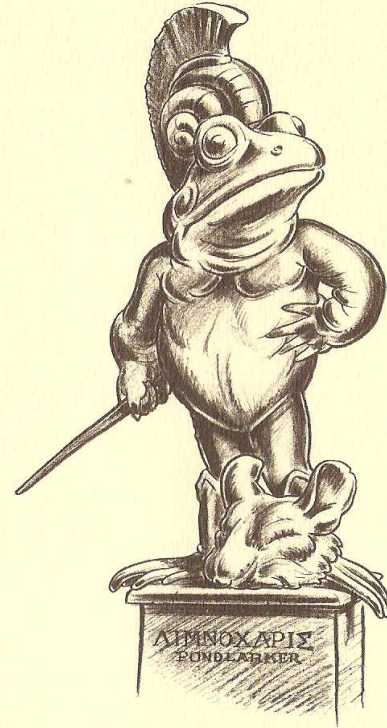


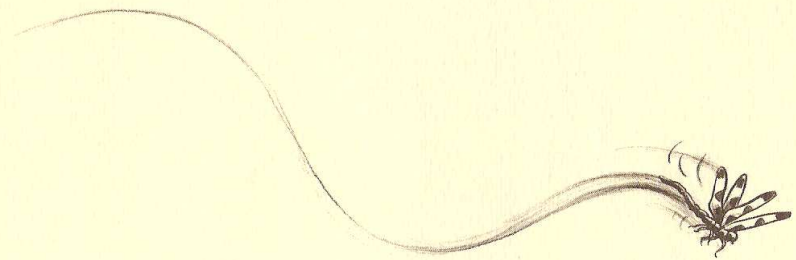
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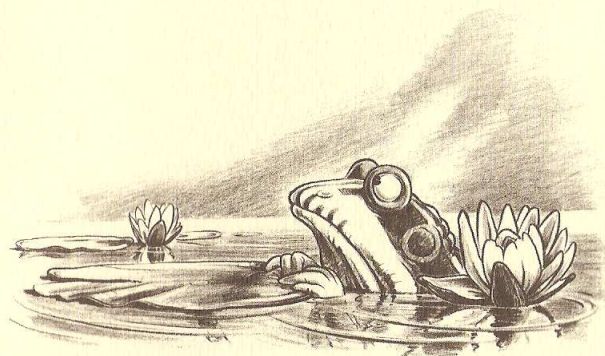


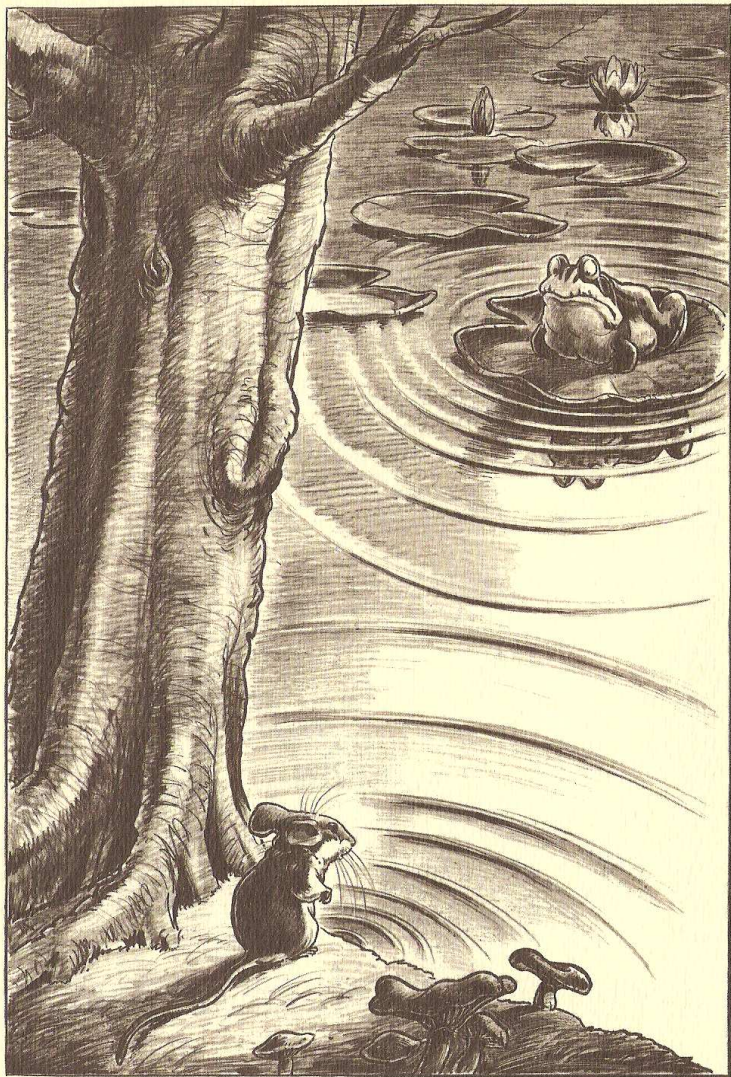
LET History record: 'Twas Puff-jaw
First the war did start though later
He denied it.

It happened thus:



THE INCIDENT



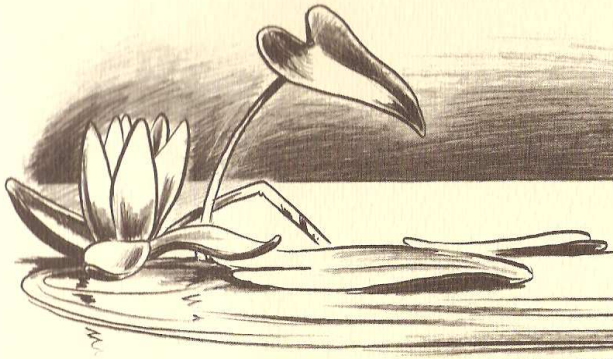


ONE day a Mouse, hot and thirsty,
Just from a weasel's jaws escaped,
Crept to the edge of the pond to
Cool his muzzle in the water.

There from a lily-pad Puff-jaw spied
Him and called in such words as these:
"Stranger, who are you? By what right
Do you take water from the Frogs' pond?"

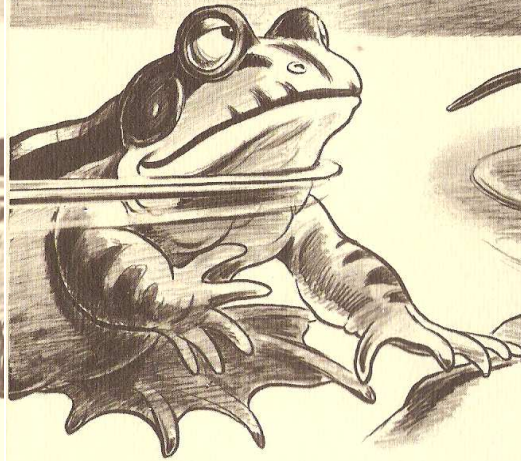
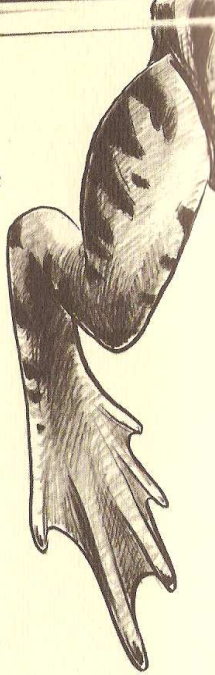
To which the Mouse, his strength still spent,
Remembering the weasel and
Uncertain of the Frog, replied:

"Crum-snatcher is my name, son of
Cake-eater, the stout-hearted, and Quern-licker,
Daughter of Ham-gnawer, the King.
In the mouse-hole she bore me and
There nourished me with figs and nuts.
I drink now to slake my thirst as
All creatures must. Nature's law it is,
And Nature the pond provided."



Puff-jaw, observing the Mouse to
Be alone, pushed off from the lily
And with long, slow strokes, so the Mouse
Might admire the strength of his legs,
Stopped just short of the shore and said:

“I am Puff-jaw, King of the Frogs,
Reared by my father, Peleus,
Who mated with Waterlady
On the banks of the Eridanus.
This pond is the Frogs’; the shore, too.
For we have tamed the air and learnt
To leap on land as well as plunge
Beneath the surface of the water.
In return Nature has enlarged
Our realm.”



“But drink,” he urged, hopping
Up the bank beside the Mouse.

Crum-snatcher sucked in the water slowly
While he surveyed the Frog whose sleek
Green skin glistened with the water’s sheen.
Then raising his head and straightening
His whiskers he observed simply:
“Nature has twice blessed the Frogs
In granting life on land and pond.”

Then Puff-jaw answered with a smile:
“No need for caution; I’m your friend
And eager only to exhibit
The many marvels of our realm
Both in the pond and on the shore.
If you would see them, ’tis easily done:
Mount my back, and I will carry you safe.”



The Mouse, glancing at the water
Which he disliked and at the Frog
Whom he mistrusted, was about to refuse
When he remembered the sharp-nosed weasel,
Balked and hungry, in the brambles
Behind him. “As I am passing
Your way”—he bowed and without more
Climbed carefully onto the Frog’s broad back.

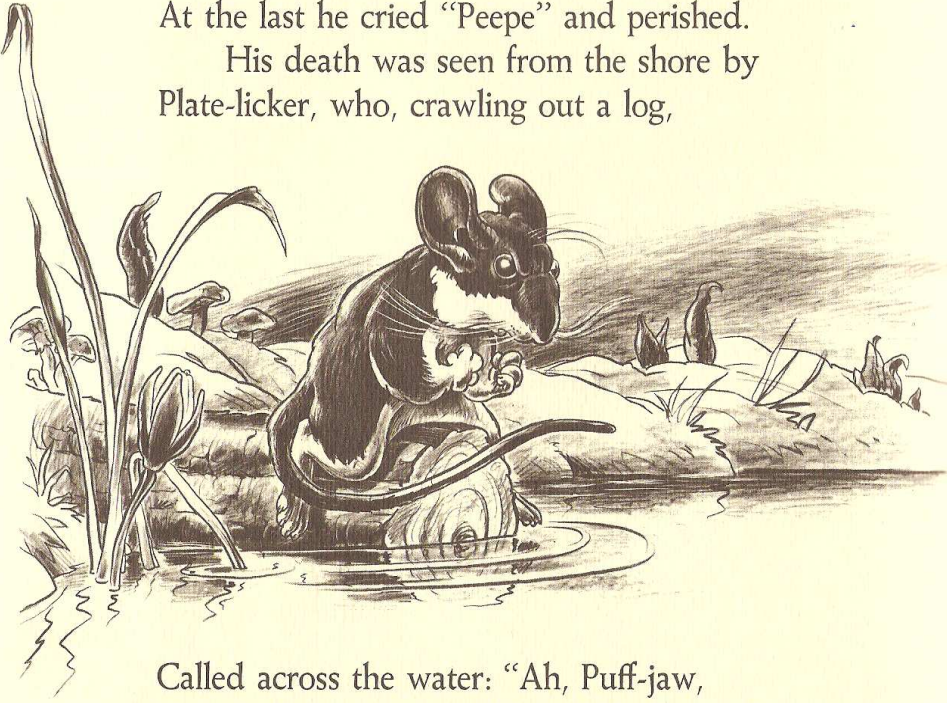
Now at first while he still saw the shore
Near by, Crum-snatcher was pleased,
For there were marvelous sights sufficient
To stupefy a grandchild, and Puff-jaw
Swam easily and well.

But then a horrid
Spectacle appeared, a terror
For both—a water snake thrust its
Freckled neck above the water.



Puff-jaw, forgetting his helpless
Friend, dove to the bottom and escaped
Black death. But Crum-snatcher, so deserted,
Struggled in vain, sank oft and with
His sprawlings came afloat, breast up,
Hands grasping the air, but the water
Weighting his fur washed over him, and
At the last he cried "Peepe" and perished.

His death was seen from the shore by
Plate-licker, who, crawling out a log,

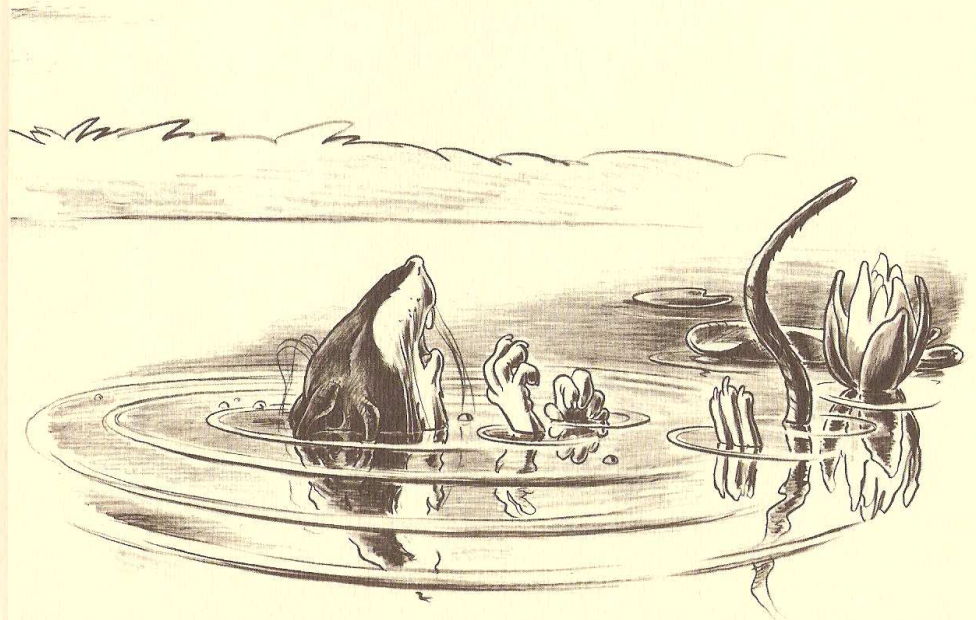


Called across the water: "Ah, Puff-jaw,
You shall not go unpunished. Vile Coward!
You slipped him from your back and let
Him drown like any castaway.

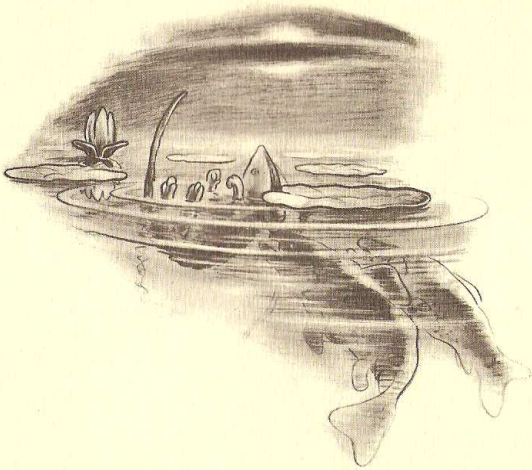
On land you were not the better man.
Heaven and we Mice will punish you."

Then tearing at his fur so that
Tears spilt from his eyes and piping
"Woe, woe," he ran to tell the Mice
What he had seen.

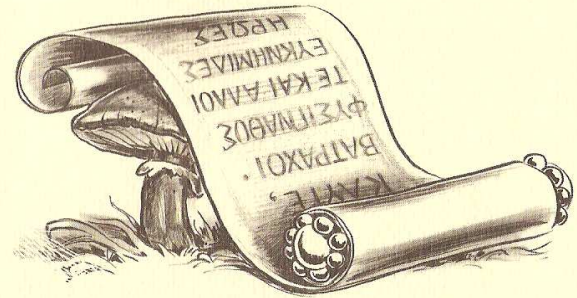
And when they heard
Of Crum-snatcher's brave death and how
Even as they spoke his corpse, face up,
Floated on the pond unable still
To make the safety of the shore,
They were seized with a furious anger

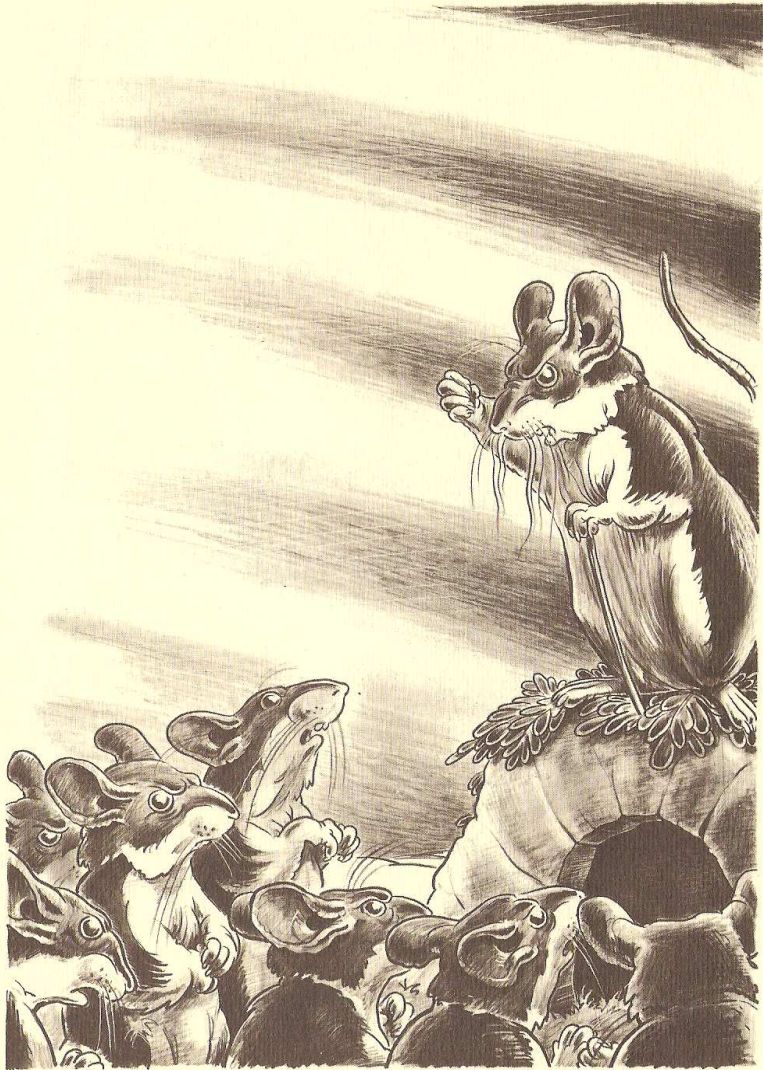


And bade their heralds summon all
To meet at dawn before the hole
Of Cake-eater, the wretched father
Of the ill-fated, ship-wrecked Mouse.



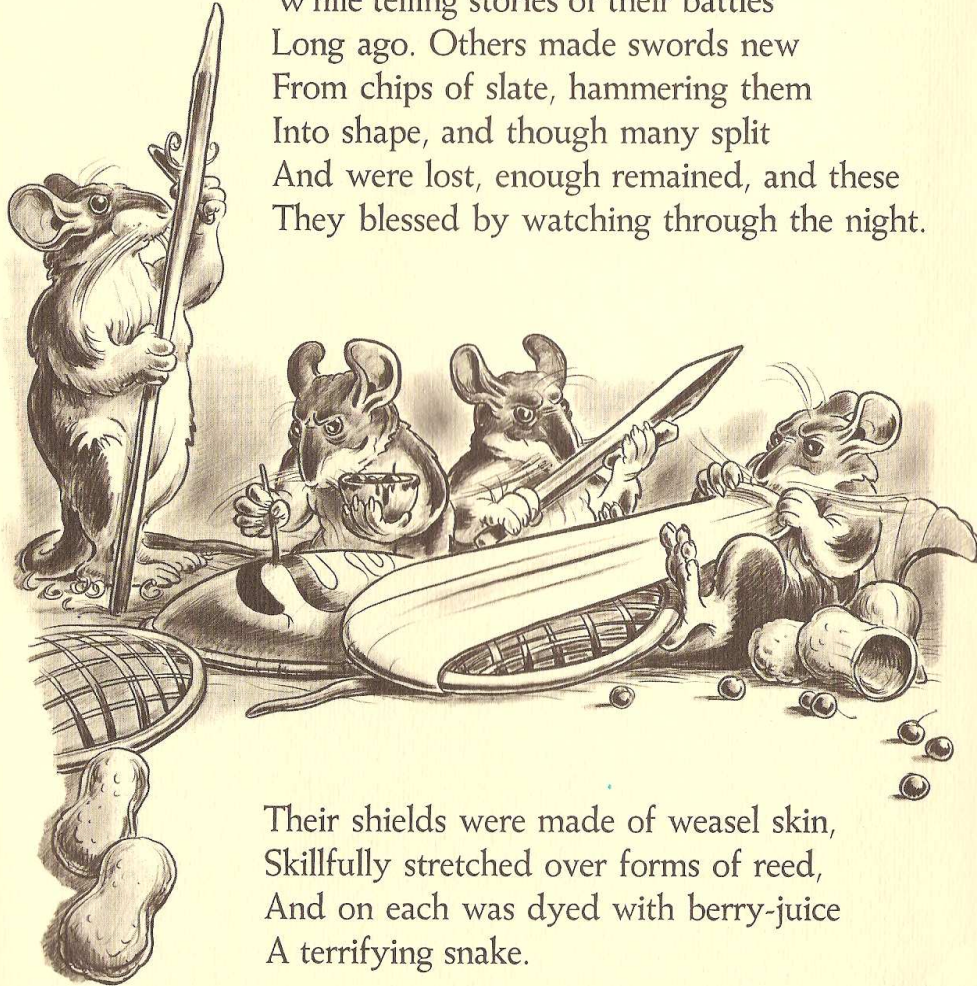
THE COUNCILS OF WAR AND THE ARMING





WHEN the Mice in haste had gathered,
Cake-eater, his whiskers wet and drooping,
Addressed the crowd in words like these:
“You all know me: I had three sons.
The first the sniffing weasel killed
Outside the hole. Another died
Of agonizing poison.
Today I lost the last and best,
Crum-snatcher, whom Puff-jaw has carried
Into the deep and drowned. If I
And Quern-licker, a mother thrice-bereft
Of rightful joys and blessings,
If we two alone appear to suffer
From the Frogs, do not be deceived;
They plan some mischief for us all.
They will come, hopping out of the pond,
Smooth-faced and hairless, using their
Front legs merely to rest not to run.
So arm yourselves and follow me,
And we will meet them on the shore.”

With such words he persuaded them,
And they began at once to arm.
Those that had swords cleaned and honed them
While telling stories of their battles
Long ago. Others made swords new
From chips of slate, hammering them
Into shape, and though many split
And were lost, enough remained, and these
They blessed by watching through the night.



Their shields were made of weasel skin,
Skillfully stretched over forms of reed,
And on each was dyed with berry-juice
A terrifying snake.

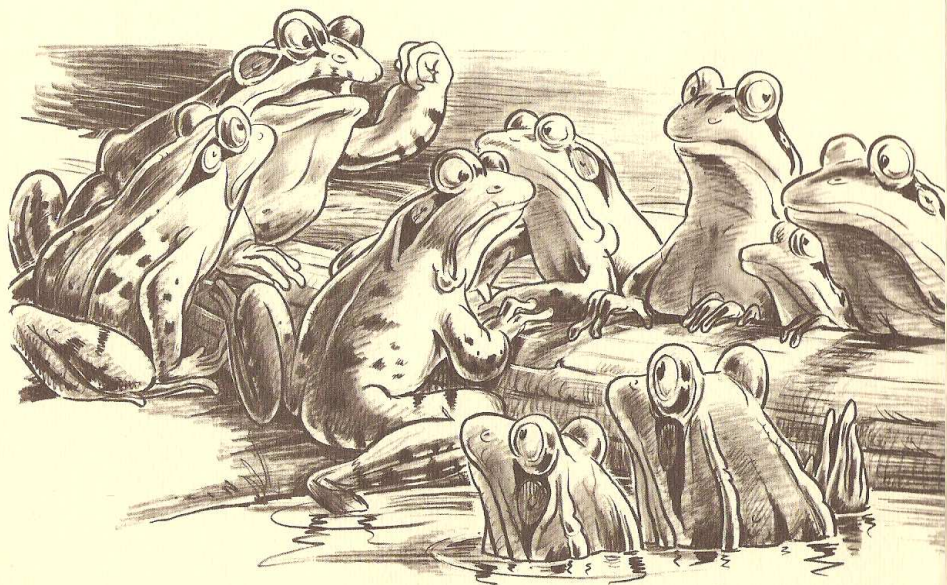
The spears
Were of two kinds: the light for far-
Throwing were fashioned from pine-needles,
The heavy, which only the strongest could wield,
Were made of stubble, smoothed and sharpened
To a pitiless point. For their heads
The helmets were of peanut shells.

So the Mice armed, and when the Frogs
Heard of it, they rose from the water
And gathered round the log in council.
And while each asked the other whence
The quarrel rose and why the Mice should arm,
A herald from the Mice drew near,
Pot-searcher, son of great-hearted Cheese-scooper,
Bearing a wand of peace and parley
But speaking thus grim words of war:

“Frogs, pay heed and then take counsel
With yourselves. The Mice have armed and
Send me with their threats to you.
For they have seen the noble Crum-snatcher,
Dead and drifting in the water,
Drowned by your King, Puff-jaw, a vile
And treacherous Frog. So fight then, Frogs,
As many as are warriors
Among you.”

At such words the proud Frogs
Croaked and clamored till the log rang.
But some few questioned Puff-jaw,
And to answer these he rose and said:

“Friends, I killed no Mouse. Nor did I
Even see one perish, though like you
I too have seen the dark carcass
Course with the wind across our pond.
I think he drowned while wantoning
Upon our waters, aping us
And practising to swim.



“I swear
I did not see him drown, and yet
These worst of Vermin dare to charge me,
Your King, who am in no way guilty
But am as pure today as when
With spring water you anointed me.
Therefore I urge we arm in answer
To the wily Mice and drench their
Arrogance by driving them along
The shore and into the death-dealing
Waters where Frogs alone survive.”





Then up rose Pond-larker, beloved
By some but despised by more for
His quiet manner and reasonable ways.

“Think first,” he urged, “that many Mice
Will die; then think again that Frogs,
Not a few, will also perish.
And the pond for many summers
Will be polluted with their rotting
Remains, leaving no cause to sing
Even to those who may survive.
And for what? The death of one Mouse,
Killed, no one knows how for sure.
Better it would be if we drove
The corpse ashore, covered it with

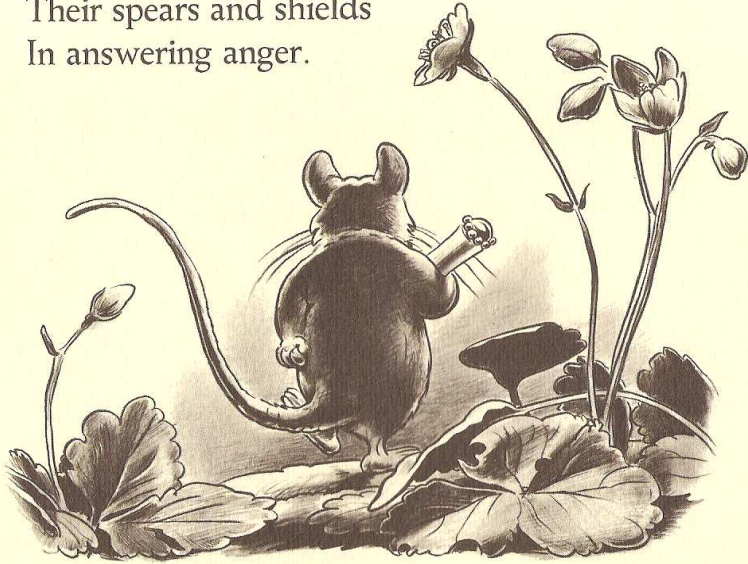
A lily-pad and honored it
With a chorus. For this quarrel
Has no cause save choleric blood which
Floods our brains with angry words.”

But the Frogs were not with him, and
Puff-jaw, breaking in, cried aloud:

“This is teatime talk when what we
Need is action, swift and certain,
That leaves its mark, plain, for all to see.
Pollution is a threat but not
As Pond-larker pretends to paint it.
Better to say the danger lies
In letting the Mice approach the pond,
For in their fur they hide disease
And dirt; often they pass poison
Through their bowels. Who knows how this one,
This Crum-snatcher, may have died, or
In what filth he may have frolicked?
But howsoever, his puffy corpse
Already spoils our pond for us.
Therefore I say we arm to drive
Them from the shore and set up there
A trophy to commemorate
Our Victory and their leaving.”

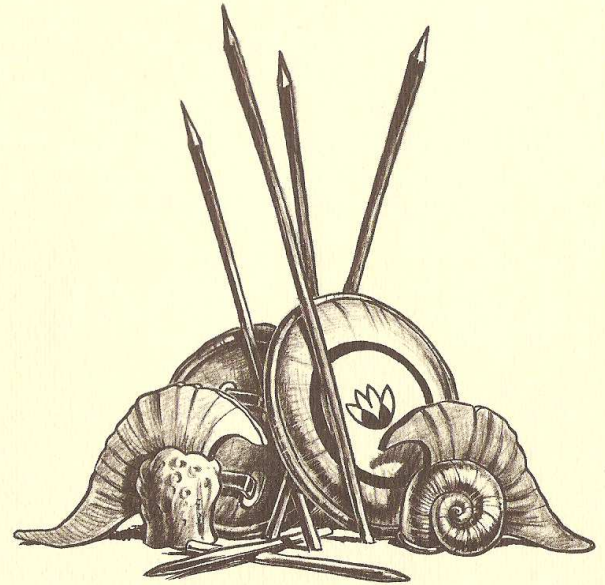
At this all but Pond-larker cried aloud,

And these words the herald, Pot-searcher,
Bore back to the Mice who clanged
Their spears and shields
In answering anger.



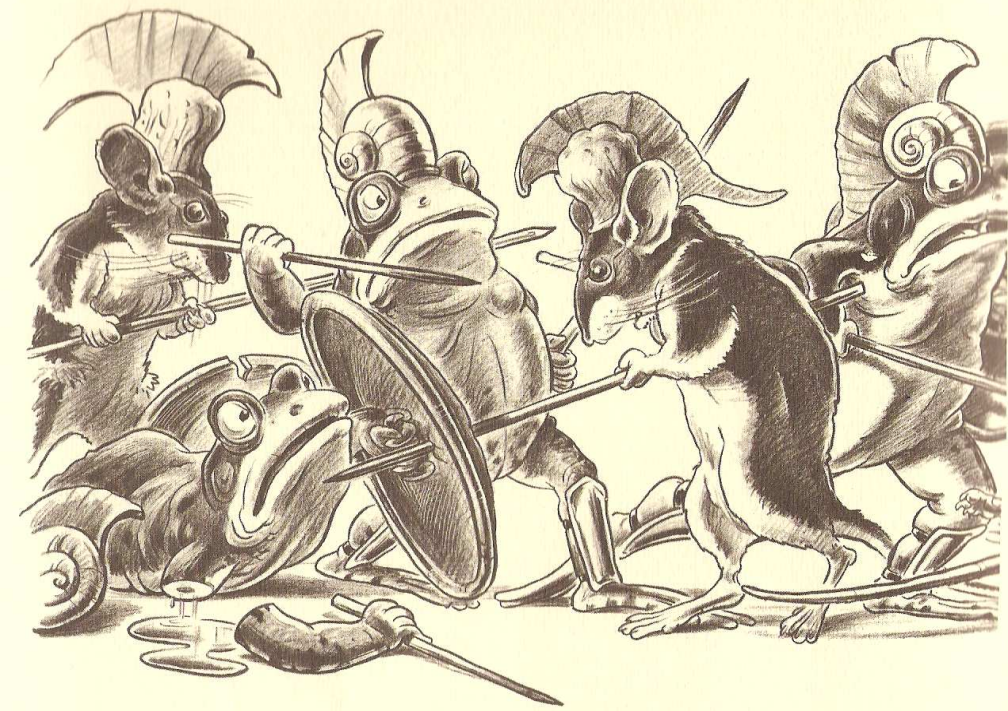
Then the Frogs armed, guarding their shins
With skillfully fashioned lily-pads,
And tough cabbage leaves were their shields.
Each had a sharp rush for a spear
And a smooth snail-shell to cover
His head. And as they stood in rank
Along the shore, waving their spears,
Courage filled the heart of each.

THE BATTLE





THEN the Frogs, with a great cry, called
On their Gods and sounded the fell
Note of war, while up the bank each Mouse
In place knelt by his spear and prayed
To the God of the Fields for Victory.
Then each side, shrieking, rushed at the other.

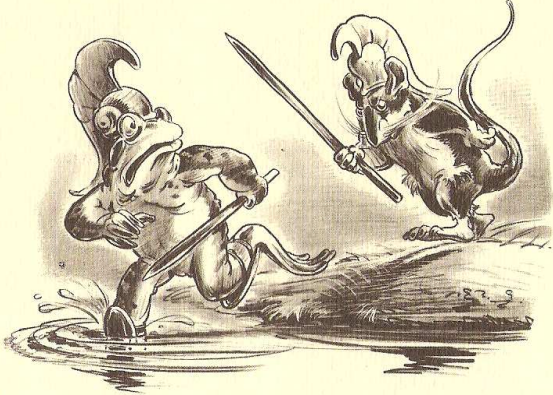


Mud-man was the first to fall, speared
Through the chest so hard he fell back
And was pinned to the ground. Pot-searcher,
The herald, was the Mouse that did it,
But Pond-larker saw and struck him
In the belly, right through the mid-riff.
Down he fell on his face, and his
Soft fur filled with degrading dust.
Then Plate-licker smote Loud-croaker so that
His soul souged from his lips, and by him



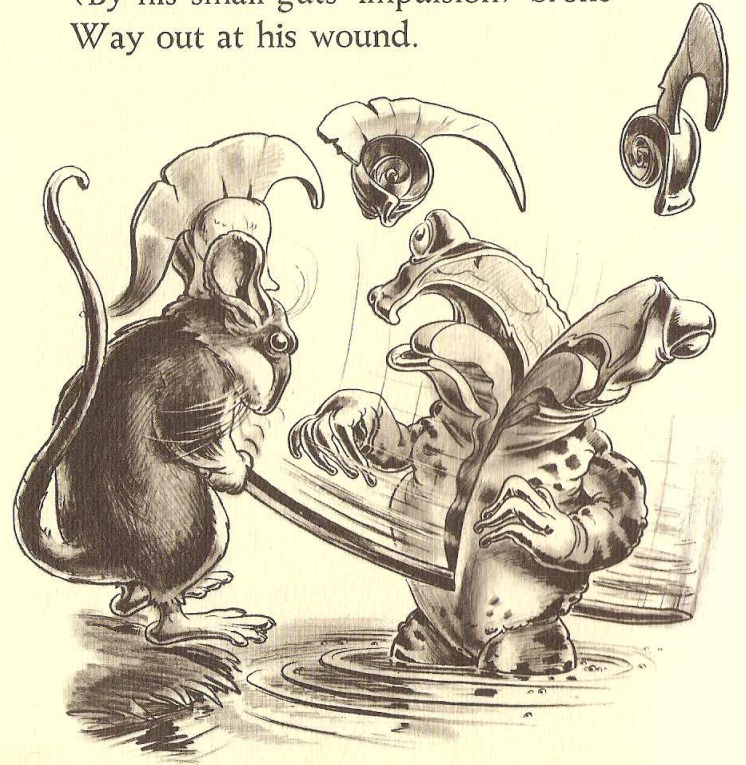
Died many more with none to know
Their last words. Then the giant Frog,
Cabbage-eater, picked up a large pebble,
Smashed it on Plate-licker's helm
And blood gushed from the Mouse's nose
And ears while his soul flew forth from
His Mouth. Meanwhile Cheese-nibbler hurled
His spear at Puff-jaw, but the aim
Was poor, and before he could recover,
Puff-jaw severed his head with a stroke.

THE DEATH OF CABBAGE-EATER

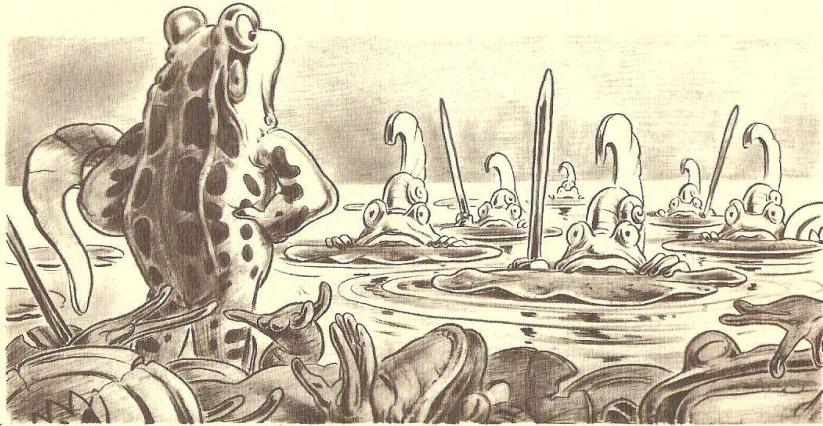


AT first the God of War seemed to favor
The Frogs, and the fight flowed against
The Mice who retreated up the bank.
But Troglodyte, a Prince of Mice,
Rallied the despairing and, killing
Two Frogs with one blow, led the charge
Along the bank. Even the giant Frog
Cabbage-eater fled before him, retreating
Down to the water's edge where he
Turned,

but too late. For Troglodyte,
Whirling his sword overhead, slashed
Him from his head to his soft stomach
So that he never more drew in air,
And his sticky blood stained the sand.
He was truly a giant among Frogs,
And as he lay, his fat entrails
(By his small guts' impulsion) broke
Way out at his wound.

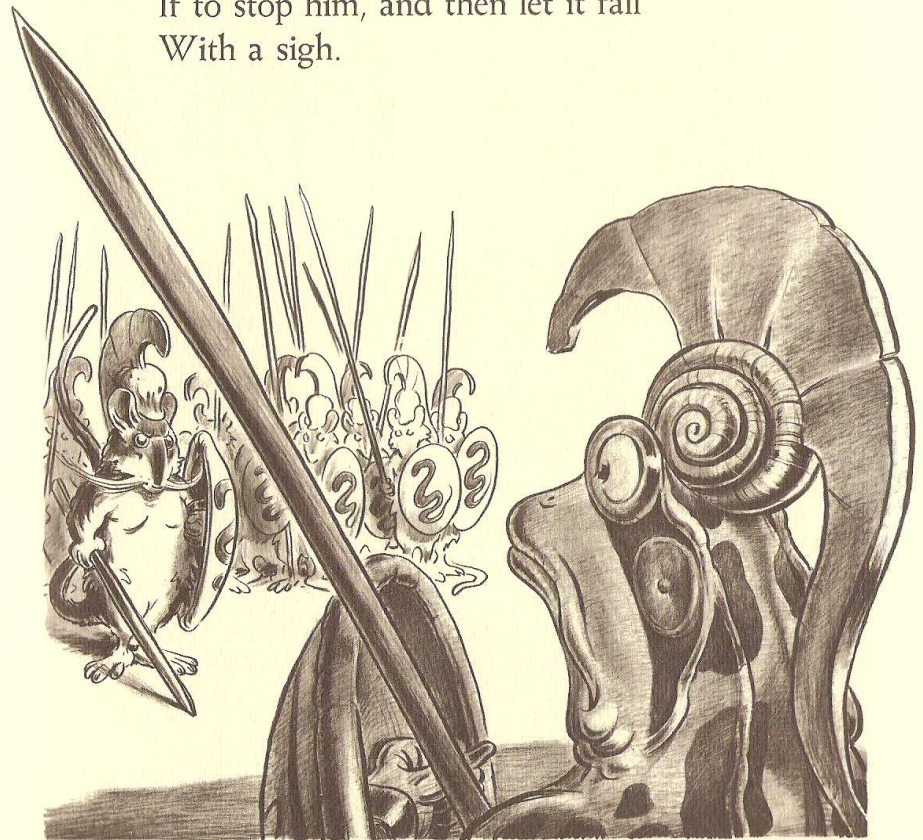


Then were the Frogs
Afraid; some took to the water,
Others hid among the lilies,
Even Puff-jaw crouched irresolute,
His neck-skin quaking in and out,
And with the others looked to Pond-larker,
Standing alone on shore among
The dead.



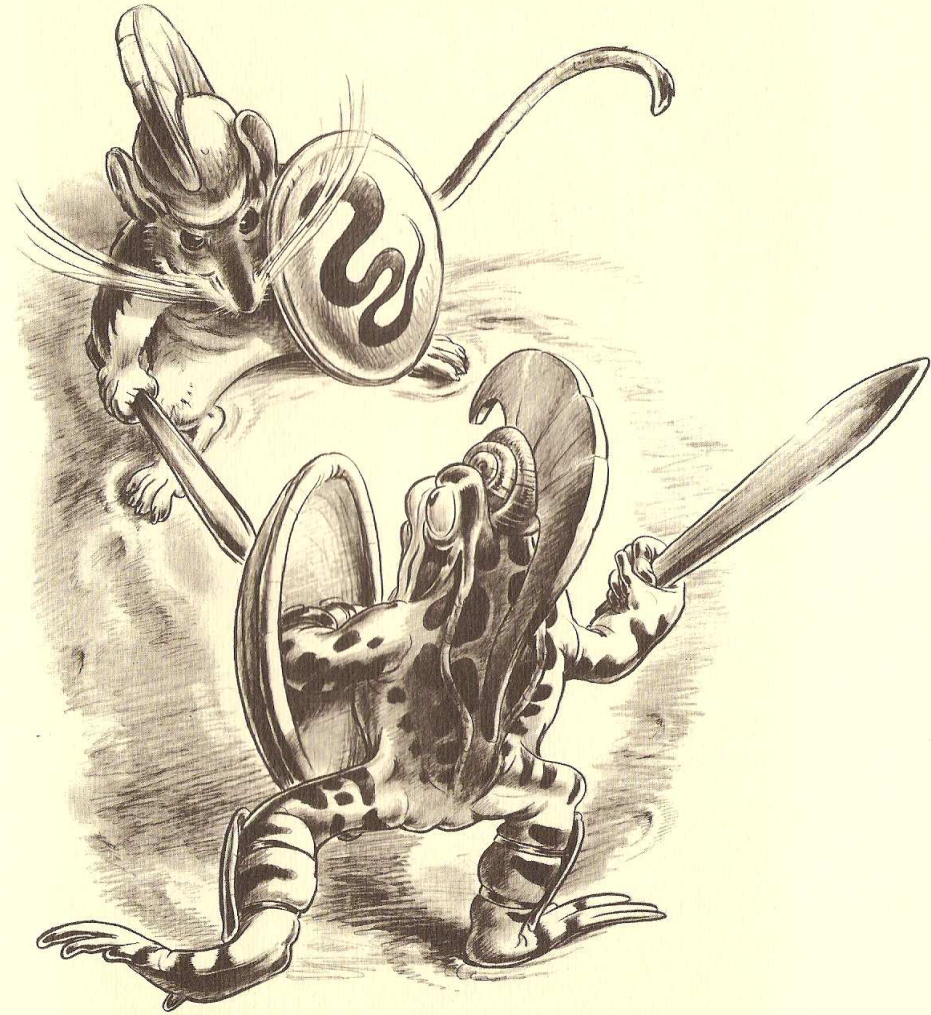
That Frog looked long at them,
At the pond with its tranquil lilies
And the sky reflected in its surface,
Then he turned and, taking the sword
From the limp hand of dead Cabbage-eater,
Called to Troglodyte in these words:

“Great Prince, come. For you or I must
This day die. We cannot both survive.”
At these awesome words all other Mice
Save Troglodyte fell back and cleared
A space. High on the bank the old
King, white-whiskered Ham-gnawer, saw his
Son step forward, raised his hand, as
If to stop him, and then let it fall
With a sigh.



POND=LARKER AND TROGLODYTE

THE two warriors
Faced each other, saluted, then warily
Began to circle. Troglodyte struck first,
A quick thrust at the neck which Pond-larker
Parried even as he slashed at Troglodyte's
Shoulder. But the Mouse was too quick
And leapt from under the blow.
Then the strokes came thick and fast, till
Those around did later swear the
Very ground began to tremble
At the sound. But neither could the other
Scratch; the Mouse was too nimble,
And the Frog, too strong.





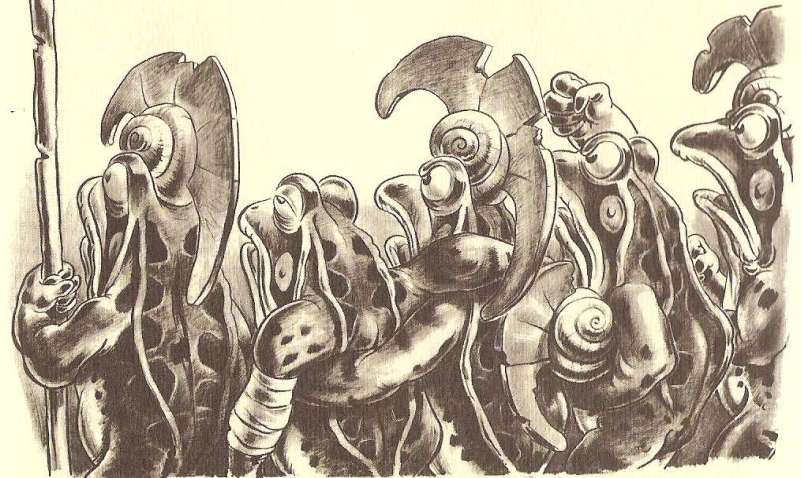
So they stopped
To catch a breath, and in that instant
The crowd around began to cry
“Again” and cheered to urge them on.

“You fight far better than your cause
Deserves,” gasped Troglodyte.
Softly Pond-larker replied: “Bad
Causes have only courage to
Recommend them.”

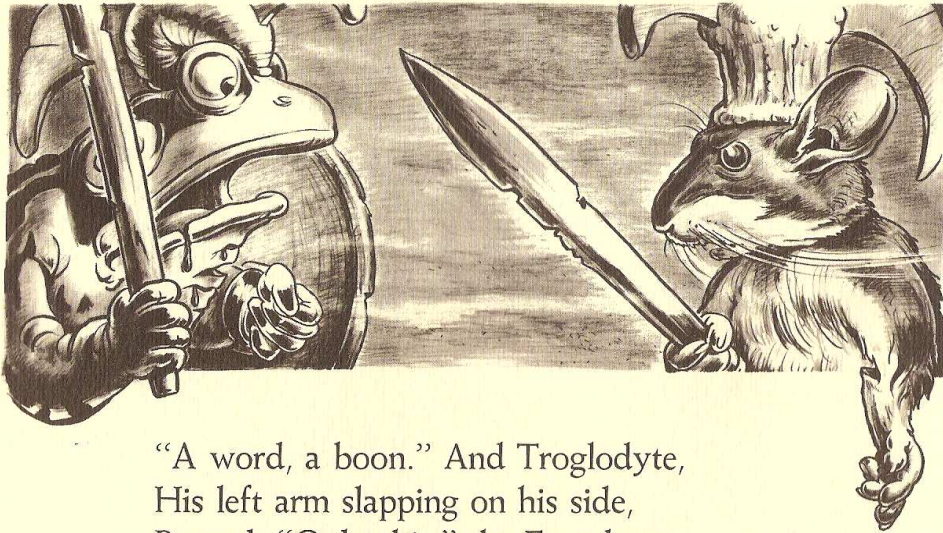
Then grasping his
Sword he struck at Troglodyte who
Warded with his shield, bent double
And thrust up. His sword point scored
Pond-larker’s arm, and the bright blood
Sprang out for all to see. The Mice

Cheered, but the Frogs groaned and some
Called Pond-larker “Coward.” But he, not
Pausing or protesting, smashed his shield
Against Troglodyte’s with such force
The Mouse staggered and only just recovered
To avoid the sword, but even so
His shield lay shattered and his left arm
Hung loosely at his side. Now the advantage
Was Pond-larker’s, and the watching Frogs
Clamored for the Mouse’s death while
The Mice, fearful, fell silent.

But now
Troglodyte fought more brilliantly
Than before. Like an angry gnat
Upon the water he darted



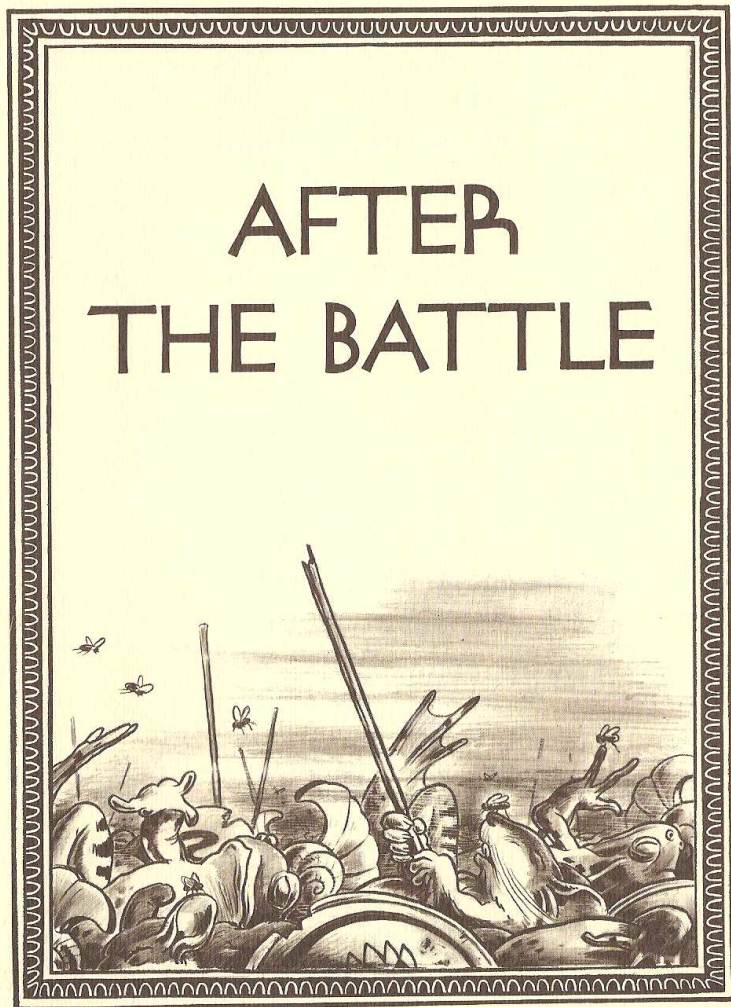
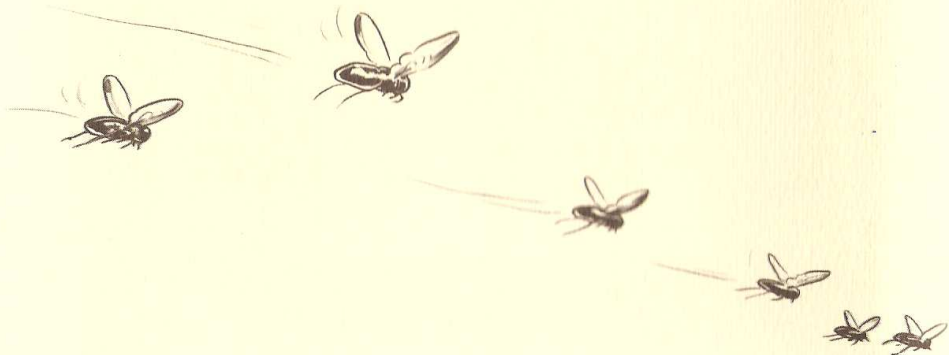
In and out, thrusting, parrying,
And always high so that Pond-larker's
Gored arm grew tired and the Mouse's
Sword began to flick Pond-larker's soft
Throat till it seemed he sweated blood.
Then Pond-larker stepped back and cried



“A word, a boon.” And Troglodyte,
His left arm slapping on his side,
Paused. “Only this,” the Frog began,
“When you kill me, let no one speak
Over my body but yourself.”
“And thou for me,” the Mouse responded.

Then Mice and Frogs around the pair
Cried “Villain,” “Traitor” and “He’s not
Our kind.” But higher on the bank
Troglodyte’s father began to weep.

The two saluted, sighed, stepped back
And crouched again to kill. This time
Pond-larker struck first, a mighty blow
But one which missed its mark, and
Troglodyte returned with a thrust
To the side. Then followed thrust and
Parry, parry, thrust, all so swift
That in a second none could see
Troglodyte’s sword cut through the Frog’s
Throat to the back bone and the blood
Splashed over the Mouse. But even in that
Instant Pond-larker with a last
Mighty effort of his legs leapt
And fell against Troglodyte, stabbing
Him through the breast. As each fell he
Gripped the other, and they rolled in
An embrace till all their blood was mixed.



THE Frogs at once declared they'd won
As also did the Mice. And each
Taking up its warrior carried
His corpse a bit apart to do
Him honor. Then Cake-eater, the father
Of Crum-snatcher, strode forward to speak
Over Troglodyte. But as he started
A murmuring arose in the
Farthest ranks which parted to let
Ham-gnawer, the dead Prince's father,
Pass. Slowly, looking neither to
The right nor to the left, he came
Forward through the crowd till
He stood alone beside his son.
Dry-eyed he stared down at him.

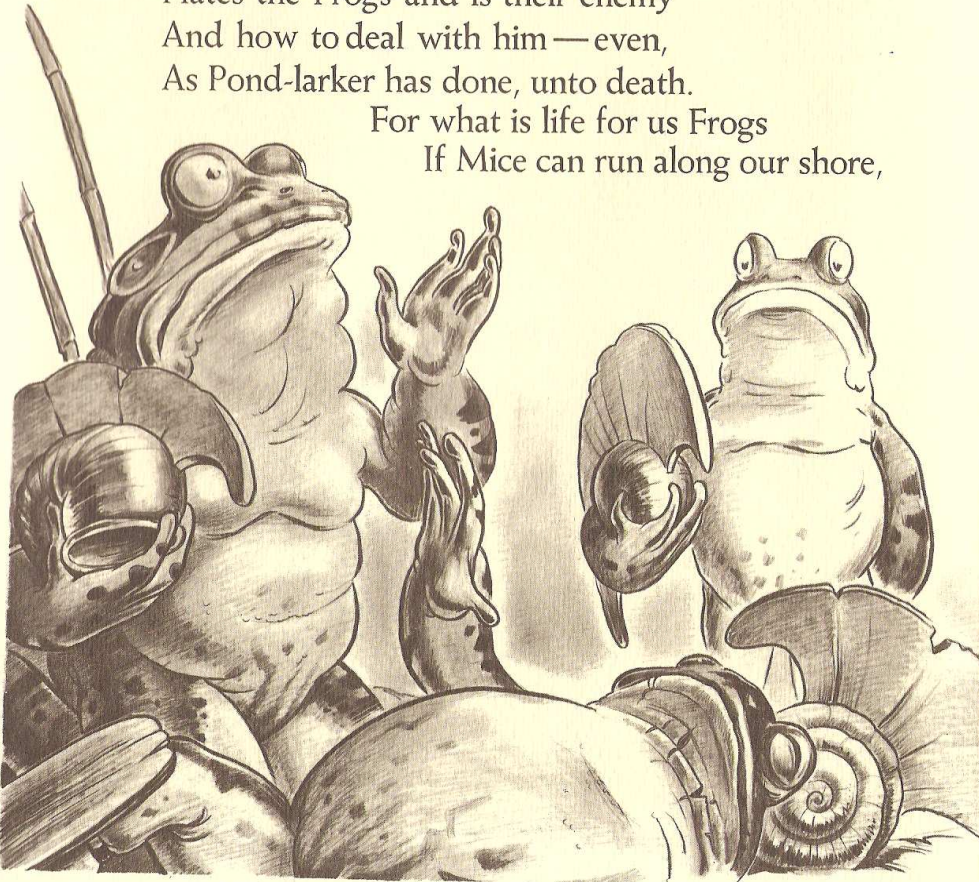


Then carefully he folded the corpse
In his arms and carried it away
Without a word to anyone.
Those who dared, murmured against him
For preferring his private grief
Over their public spectacle.



Down the shore Puff-jaw spoke over
Pond-larker. "We must never forget
Nor let our eyes grow dim nor our hearts
Impervious to this great example of
Pond-larker in battle with the Mice.
From it our children will learn who
Hates the Frogs and is their enemy
And how to deal with him — even,
As Pond-larker has done, unto death.

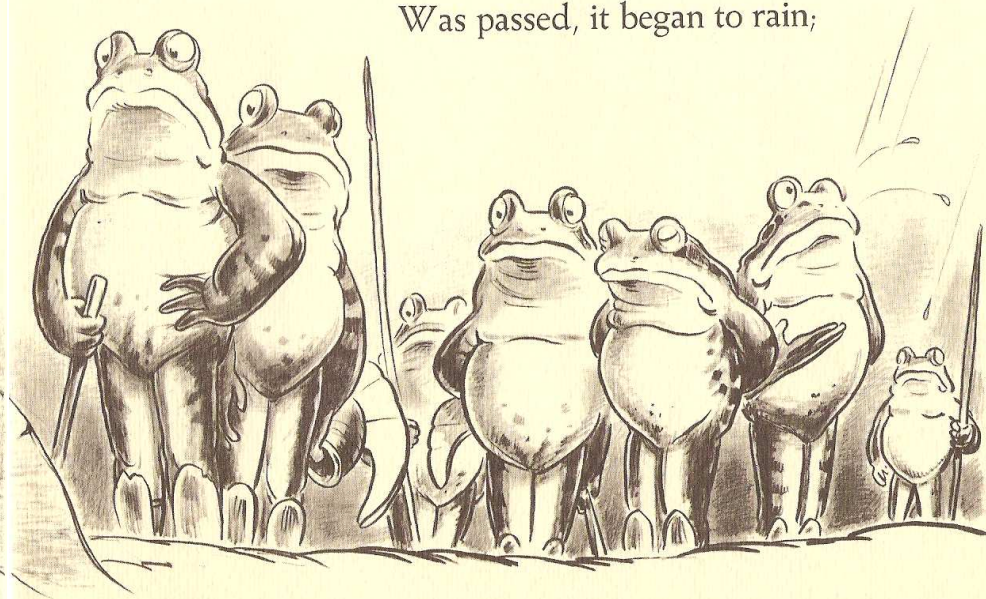
For what is life for us Frogs
If Mice can run along our shore,



Drink of our water and come to our
Councils with arrogant threats of war?
We must make secure our claim to
All the shore and preserve our pond
From pollution by others. — And now
In memory of our own Pond-larker
Let us bare our heads and bow them
In silence for two minutes."

Each frog
Uncovered and bowed his head. Many wept
While others stood stiff and straight with pride
In their bearing.

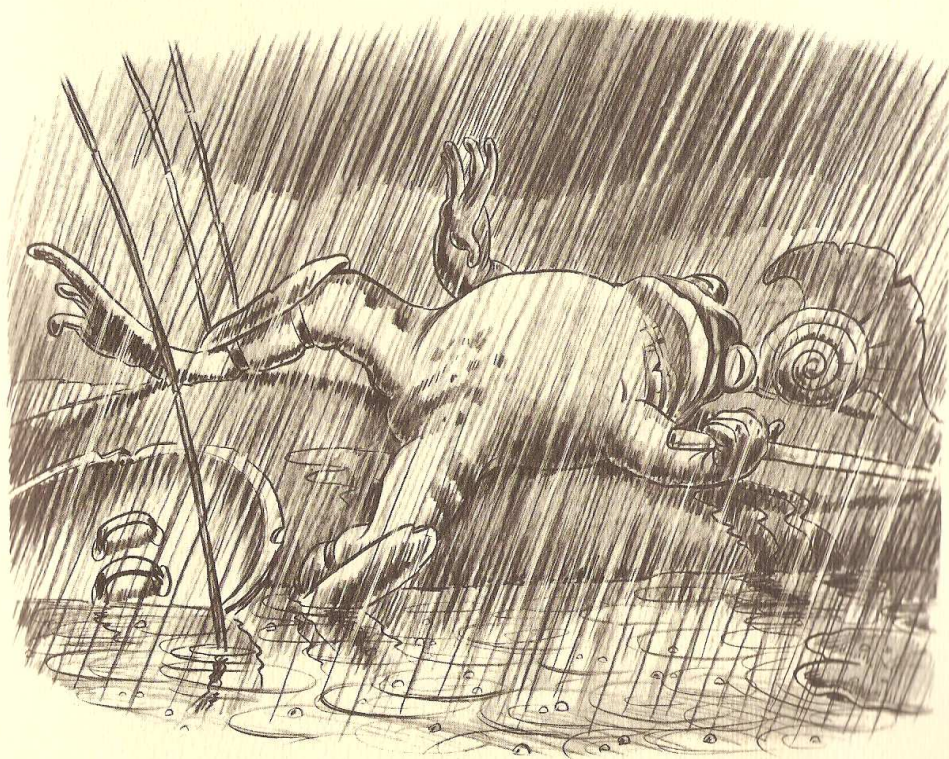
But before the time
Was passed, it began to rain;



Large drops, singly at first, and then
Pelting, till Frogs and Mice alike
Fled for cover.

Till night it rained
And longer as though the soft sand,
Abashed at the stain of blood, had asked
The Heaven to scour it. And on the shore
Alone and in the dark lay Pond-larker
Staring at the Heavens with open eyes
As the driving rain cleansed his corpse

So on that day ended the Battle
Of the Frogs and Mice.



NOTES

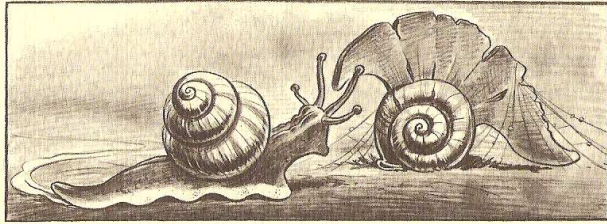
1. Learned readers will recognize that the present poem has an ancient predecessor, *βατραχομυομαχία* or in the Latin alphabet, *Batrachomuomachia*, either of which translated is *The Battle of the Frogs and Mice*. The older poem exists in fragments but enough of them so that it presents a complete story in 300 odd lines (the number of existing lines is uncertain as scholars rage over which are original and which later Alexandrine or Byzantine additions). For centuries the poem was ascribed to Homer, but today most scholars place it later, about 480 B. C. or almost 300 odd years (another scholarly argument) after Homer. The author is unknown.

The present poem follows the older through the death of Crum-snatcher and in the description of the arms. Thus far it is a translation with free additions; thereafter it is quite different.

The older poem is a parody on *The Iliad*. It begins with an invocation to the Muse, continues with an incident and much geneological ranting, and has a witty scene on Olympus in which Athena refuses to help the Mice (the Trojans). She complains that in her Temple they nibbled at her garment, and to have it repaired she had to borrow money and pay interest, a humiliating experience for a Goddess. The Battle closes with Zeus, when his thunderbolts fail to halt the Mice, sending an army of crabs which nip off their tails and feet.

The poem has never lacked translators. Two of the best are the great Elizabethan, Chapman (whose translations of Homer so stirred Keats), and in this century H. G. Evelyn-White (for the Loeb Classical Library edition of *Hesiod, The Homeric Hymns and Homerica*).

2. Puff-jaw speaks of the Eridanus as the place of his conception. This was a small stream in Athens so that the Frogs were Athenian Frogs and Puff-jaw came by his talk naturally.





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THE BATTLE OF THE FROGS AND THE MICE

An Homeric Fable

BY GEORGE MARTIN

ILLUSTRATED BY
FRED GWYNNE

THE BATTLE OF THE FROGS AND THE MICE tells in words and pictures a classic tale of the folly of war. When Crum-snatcher, a Mouse, cautiously mounts the back of Puff-jaw, King of the Frogs, to explore the Frogs' pond, the Mouse meets with a disaster which soon brings the two nations into mortal conflict. The course of this tempest in a teapot is developed with wit to assume heroic proportions, and the battle of this small world becomes the story of wars through the ages.

George Martin has made an imaginative, free adaptation of a fable originally ascribed to Homer, but now believed to have been written about three hundred years after him by an unknown author. With his brilliant drawings, Fred Gwynne has depicted this chronicle from its pastoral beginning to its bitter end. Together, they have made a book of grim delight for young and old alike.

GEORGE MARTIN, the author, was born in New York City, where he now lives. He graduated from Harvard College in the Class of 1948 and from the University of Virginia Law School in 1953. Between the two, he attended Trinity College, Cambridge, England, for a year. He resigned a partnership in a New York law firm to write his previous book, *The Opera Companion*. He is a Director of the Metropolitan Opera Guild and is currently at work on a biography of Giuseppe Verdi.

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