

## **Beyond the Clouds: The Turtle, The Hares and The Race Towards the Future**

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### **“This Way to Hare Valley”**

“Blue, the most beautiful blue,” said Grandma Rose as she stared at the serene water which flowed through the canals of Turtle Lake. Alongside Rose sat her granddaughter, Tori, a young turtle. Tori had decided to take a walk in the middle of the night because she could not fall asleep. This was one of the last times Tori would see her grandmother for a while—for you see, Tori was leaving the next morning. She was going to make her way to the famed Hare Valley, a place where it was said animals from all over the world searched for the Truth. It was a search that many believed would unlock the deepest mysteries of their world, providing answers to questions that had long been unanswered. What exactly the Truth was, no one could say for sure, but those who sought it believed it held the key to understanding everything. As Tori gazed upon the reflection of the stars in the clear water, the pit in her stomach regarding the morrow’s travels seemed to ease, and a smile swept across her face.

The journey from Turtle Lake to Hare Valley was an arduous one. Tori had to climb mountains, navigate forests and swim across rivers. However, no matter the obstacle, she

persisted. She remembered the supportive faces of her friends and it fueled her determination to succeed. After crossing a seemingly never ending thicket of trees, Tori found herself on a hill overlooking her final destination, Hare Valley. She thought to herself that the stories had not done the place justice; the city was abuzz with loud and fast paced creatures. The hustle and bustle of this city was like nothing Tori had ever seen before.

As Tori approached the magnificent structures created by the residents of Hare Valley, she noticed multiple road signs directing newcomers to the middle of the city. Curious and not wanting to go against the wishes of a well placed sign, Tori followed the advertisements. After a good while, she arrived at a square the local Hares called the Starting Place.

As she drew nearer to the center of the square, Tori was startled by a Hare that jumped out of a tunnel in the ground. Landing in front of her he inquired if she was lost.

“I am not quite lost, I am here in search of the Truth. The signs all around say this is the place to start!” Tori said.

The Hare looked somewhat confused at her response. “Oh, well we don’t get many animals like you here. If you want to compete for the Truth, you’ll need a special pair of shoes called ‘Answer Initiators’, or AI shoes for short.”

Indeed, as Tori glanced away from the Hare in front of her she saw many animals around her, all of whom were wearing identical shoes. Not only that but some of the Hares had goggles on. She also noticed that it was mostly Hares running about, with few other animals to be found.

“You’ll need to go to the Shoemaker’s Shoe Shop just down the way if you’re to get a pair. The clerk there will help you out.” The Hare stated, nodding his head to the side in an indicative manner, all with a puzzled look on his face and hurried away before Tori could ask another question.

A bit frazzled, Tori headed in the direction the Hare seemed to motion towards. After walking a short ways she came across a huge building with a bright sign that read “Shoemaker’s Shop.” Upon entering the store, Tori’s mouth was agape. It was the largest store of any kind that Tori had ever seen! Though, confusingly, it seemed every item out on display was identical- the sale room was filled with rows and rows of the same shoe in exactly the same size. Walking down the center aisle, Tori thought to herself, “this seems rather redundant, to display the same item 100 times.” Before she could finish processing where she was, a quick and peppy Hare sporting a name tag that read “Harrison” in popped out of a trapdoor, handed Tori a pair of goggles and, before she could ask anything, hopped away while yelling, “Put them on, I’ll go get the shoes!”

Tori put on the goggles and the shop faded away—a sharp blue light formed around her and an image of the same pair of shoes that were on display in the store suddenly appeared. “Welcome to the Shoemaker’s Shop, Hare Valley’s place of choice to get your Answer

Initiators!” said a voice from within the goggles. “Created by the Shoemaker himself, these shoes will help you get anywhere at warp speed and will keep a comprehensive log of all your movements. It’s MAGIC!” Suddenly, the image of the shoes disappeared and text started to race across the screen faster than Tori could read. “Say any word to accept our terms of purchase!” “What?!” exclaimed Tori. “Thank you for accepting! We wish you the best of luck!” and with that the screen went black. Tori removed the glasses and saw Harrison rushing over.

“Joining the competition today are we?” asks the Hare with a hint of sarcasm.

“The competition? Also, what are the terms of purchase that the goggles asked me to agree to?” replied Tori.

“Yes! The competition for the Truth”

“I didn’t know the search for the Truth was a competitive affair, I thought I would work together with everyone else in the search for the answers.”

“Work together? If we did that, then how would we know who won?”

As this conversation took place, the fast paced Hare had already made Tori try on four different sizes of the shoe and none of them fit her. Harrison hopped into the backroom and brought out some more sizes, though none of those fit Tori, either. Stumped, Harrison scratched his head and told Tori that those were all the sizes there were.

“Is there a different store I could go to?” asked Tori.

“No, no, this is the one and only store where you can buy AI shoes,” said the Hare.

“Do I really need these shoes? Can I not look for the Truth without them?”

“Look for the Truth without AI shoes?! The Shoemaker is a genius and created these shoes to help everyone find the Truth faster! Anyone who attempts otherwise will be left in the dust!”

“Can I speak to the Shoemaker, maybe I can order a custom pair if they are that important? How do they even work?” asked Tori, who was now a little confused and making her way to being frustrated.

“The shoes work through MAGIC and nobody has ever spoken to or seen the Shoemaker - he sits and works on a cloud high above the valley.”

“What about the goggles that I saw some of the Hares wearing, and the ones you gave me earlier, can I just wear them instead of the AI shoes?”

“The goggles?! The goggles are only for those who are closest to the Truth and have traveled the most - they are mysteriously provided to a Hare when it is the right time. You cannot have them yet.”

“Who decides if it is the right time or not?” asked Tori.

“Why the Shoemaker does, by looking at your stats on your AI shoes. And based on the looks of you, well, let’s just say that even some very strong, fit Hares don’t get the privilege of wearing the goggles”.

“Oh....What should I do now?” inquired Tori, feeling discouraged.

“Looks like you are out of luck, maybe you can try to do something other than looking for the Truth”

As Tori walked out of the store she overheard another pair of customers snickering over her situation. Feeling very sad and rejected, Tori decided that she needed a breather and made her

way to a lake on the outskirts of the city. The lake reminded her of home as she sat there for a while, thinking. Suddenly out of nowhere, she heard a croak and a frog jumped out of the water towards her. “Animals have got to stop jumping out of the ground to greet me!”

### **“A Once Young Tadpole”**

The frog introduced himself as Frank - “Why the sad face, partner?”, he asked. After recovering from the shock of having an animal jump out of nowhere towards her for the third time that day, Tori began to tell him her story. As Tori progressed through her story, Frank’s expression changed from curious to that of empathy. Tori was quick to notice this and when she finished her tale, she asked Frank about what was on his mind. Frank responded with a story of his own that rang familiar to Tori’s ears.

Frank was once an ambitious tadpole who also dreamed of exploring the world and searching for the Truth. Once he was big enough to get out of the pond, he braved river upon river and hopped through forests to get to Hare Valley. He too was excited to start his journey but was stopped because he did not have the Answer Initiators. He went to the shop and tried on various different pairs only to find out that even the smallest size did not fit him. Moreover, even if they had fit, they would have hampered his ability to leap from place to place because they would have confined his webbed feet. Frank also told Tori that many other animals were turned away and discouraged to follow their passions because of the AI shoes - he was disappointed to see that nothing had changed.

Now, what one has to understand about Frank is that he’s a cowboy who’s got some spunk - he’s a little grouchy but dreams of bringing change. As he heard story upon story about

animals being unable to search for the Truth, he got angrier and angrier until he decided to make it his determination to show the Hares that they do not have all the answers.

Tori lamented about how the situation wasn't fair. Looking at her own situation, she felt sad and rejected but after listening to Frank, she began to feel angry. Frank was so agile and fast, he could hop from surface to surface faster than any Hare, yet he was still denied entry into the search for the Truth. Tori felt a rush of blood in her veins and demanded to know what needed to be done to make things better. Upon hearing this, Frank's eyes widen and he whispers, "You really want to bring change? No other animal has offered to join me on my quest, everyone feels so disregarded that they just want to pack up and leave". Then Frank began to tell Tori, "I met some folks out yonder who speak of a place where everyone and anyone can search for the Truth - without any AI shoes or those wretched goggles." Tori hopped up from where she was sitting and excitedly asked Frank to keep talking about this magical place where they can freely search for the Truth. He told her that this place lies upon a mountaintop called "Prospective Peak".

"The journey is very hard - they say it passes through the crashing waves of rivers, the dense forests, the excruciating desserts and frozen tundras. I would have gone and started on it myself if it was not so arduous. I am all but a small cowboy who does not even know if this place is real" said Frank. "I know a way we can find out! Let's go together, you can ride on my back when you get tired and you can hop from tree to tree to look ahead when the shrubbery gets too tall for me" exclaimed Tori. "Are ya sure partner? There's no guarantees, we don't even have a map, they say that once you draw nearer to the peak, you can feel it and you know it's close". "Let's do it", yells Tori!

### **“Through the Beautiful Pastures”**

The next morning, after a hearty breakfast and intensive planning, Tori and Frank set out. They started walking in the direction that Frank had heard would lead them towards the peak. They walked the whole day. They had no clue if they were getting any closer to the mountain or not - even though their journey started off with zeal, they soon realized that they had less and less to talk about as they got more tired. At the end of the sixth day of walking, they built themselves a nice fire in a small cave and decided to resume their journey in the morning. While Tori laid in her sleeping bag, she could not stop thinking about the fact that this whole adventure may have been an impulse venture on her part - all they had was a direction and some rumors to go off of. However, right before her eyes closed and sleep began to engulf her, she saw a small etching in the wall of the cave that read, “If you started at Hare Valley and what you seek is the peak, keep walking and talking till you hear all the trotting”. Tori shook Frank awake and showed him the etching.

Neither of them could sleep much that night, for they knew that they were going in the right direction - but who was the one guiding them, and what did they mean “till you hear them trotting”?

They started off the next morning fairly early and kept walking in the same direction as the previous few days, this time at a faster pace and with better spirits. They crossed over some streams and through a few shrubbery filled areas before they felt the ground shake and thinking that it was an earthquake, took cover. A few minutes passed before they started walking again and came out of the forest into what was a beautiful, vast landscape of sand and grass. And way



over in the distance, they saw some horses running - and “trotting!” exclaimed Frank, while Tori stared at the beautiful horses in awe. They began running excitedly towards the horses.

One particularly pretty horse, Hadley, noticing a slow moving green mound walking towards them, trotted over to Tori and Frank and introduced himself. Hadley started, “We don’t see many folks like y’all out here. What brings you to this field?”. Tori replied with excitement: “We’re traveling towards Prospective Peak! and -”, Frank interjected, “This young lassie wanted to help the Hares in their search for The Truth, but was told her feet were too big for any of those new fandangled boots they got.” Hadley neighed, gesturing their head for the other horses to join and told the group of Tori and Frank’s journey. The atmosphere in the herd became a little tense at the mention of the Hares. After a few moments of awkward silence, Tori volunteered some information, “We were walking in that direction” while pointing forward. Hadley lit up and informed Tori and Frank that the herd was heading over to a new pasture to graze and would be happy to offer them a ride. This new pasture was where the rest of the herd was currently grazing. Tori and Frank, realizing how much their bodies ached, were grateful for the offer and happily hopped up on Hadley’s back.

Hoping that the horses would gallop to the next pasture, Tori and Frank got comfortable before they heard the words, “Hang on!” and Hadley started sprinting into the plains. It was almost impossible for Tori to talk at this speed, so she just stayed put and enjoyed the ride from their new friends. “Almost there!” said Hadley before they slowed down a little. Tori then noticed a huge thorn on the ground right in Hadley’s path but before she could say anything, Hadley had already stepped on it. However, to Tori’s surprise, Hadley didn’t even seem to notice - they kept walking on as if nothing happened. Tori had to ask, “Are you not hurt?”. “Hurt? By what? The thorn” replied Hadley while letting out a chuckle. “No no, you see, we horses make

our own horseshoes, and once we put them on, they protect us from the harsh terrain and keep our hooves nice and comfortable”. Tori began asking a lot of questions about the horseshoes and Hadley happily answered all of them.

As they spoke about the horseshoes, another horse approached them and he whispered to Hadley “Don’t talk about the horseshoes so much, you know Malik does not like that.” Noticing that his whispers were not so discreet, the horse turned to Tori and Frank and inquired, “So you tried to join up with the Hares, huh”. Tori responded, “I was trying to join their search for the Truth. I wanted to help make the world a better place.” The horse neighed in understanding. He then motioned to an older looking mustang that was barely visible in the distance at the new pasture - “Malik there used to be real close to the Hares. He won’t say this himself, but I don’t think they would have thought up their fancy shoes if they hadn’t met horses like him.”

They drew nearer to the rest of the herd in the new pasture and once everyone was introduced to each other, the Horses asked if Frank and Tori would like to spend the night in their pasture before leaving the next morning - Frank and Tori thought this was a wonderful idea. As they got ready to sleep, they heard some hooves walk towards them in the dark and heard the words, “Walk with me” - it was Malik; Tori and Frank obliged. Malik then told them a story:

“We used to live in a pasture very close to Hare Valley and there was peace amongst all animals. The children in their school used to take field trips to our pastures and we would talk all about our horseshoes and give them rides on our backs - it was a very harmonious community. But one day, a group of Hares arrived in the pasture and requested that they take some of the pastureland on the outskirts of our territory to expand their town. We agreed, but it was a grave mistake for once they took a little bit of it, they wanted all of it. Over the next few years, we had

barely any pastureland left and no matter how much we objected, they kept on building onto our territory. We decided to leave, but before we left, we noticed that the Hares had started to wear shoes just like ours while they ran around. I knew they had stolen the idea from us and I realized we had made a mistake by sharing our knowledge and land with them.”

“I am so very sorry to hear that”, responded Tori with a solemn expression on her face. “Do not be sorry, continue your search for the Truth without those ungodly shoes and goggles. There is something I need to know though - when you find the truth, do you promise to share it with everyone?”. “I do”, replied Tori, “Aye”, replied Frank. “Very well, you must keep traveling the way you came until you reach another forest. Within the forest you will find a grand old rock - look at it closely.” “What’s on the rock, partner?” asked Frank. “I do not know, but some years ago, a Hare passed through here - she said she was searching for the truth, but without the shoes and goggles. A few weeks later, she came back and asked me to direct all those who share her affinity towards the huge rock in the forest.” replied Malik. “A Hare?, why would a Hare want to look for the truth without the AI shoes and goggles?” Tori whispered to herself.

### **“Tracking the Peak”**

Two weeks later, Frank and Tori found themselves standing in front of and staring at a humongous rock in the forest. The rock was bigger than some trees and had moss covering almost all of it. There were vines connecting the rock and the trees and the spotty sunlight lit the forest bed as it peaked through the forest ceiling. “It’s been three hours that we’ve been staring at this rock, partner” declared Frank. “It’s here, our next stop is here somewhere” replied Tori, admittedly a little frustrated herself. “Maybe this is the wrong rock”, suggested Frank. “It cannot be, it’s the biggest one we’ve seen....AHA!”, exclaimed Tori. Right there, behind a few blades of

grass and under some moss were the etched out words, “You found those who trot and reached the big rock. Now you must turn to the sun and track the pack. If it is too hot, you are too late, and one whole month you will have to wait”. “Turn to the sun? Towards the sunrise!” exclaimed Frank and Tori together. They had no idea what the rest of the riddle meant.

Tori and Frank decide to spend the night near the rock and set out in the morning. All the while they were traveling after meeting the horses, Tori could not wrap her mind around the fact that there was a Hare out there who decided to search for the Truth without using the shoes that were made specifically for them - Frank and Tori talked about this a lot as well. Suddenly, \*sniff sniff\*, “what was that?!”, \*sniff sniff\*, it was a sound coming from the bushes up ahead. Frank being the cowboy he was, made the impulsive decision to jump right at the bushes and stare into them until he saw a happy little face pop up with huge floppy ears that seemed to have a mind of their own. “Hiya! I’m Luke, nice to meet you!” greeted the painted dog, “What brings you to our neck of the woods?”. \*sniff sniff\*, before they knew it, they were surrounded by the whole pack of painted dogs sniffing them and greeting them - Frank and Tori could not make anything of what anyone was saying because all of them were speaking at once.

Right then, a slightly larger dog appeared from behind a log and everyone fell silent. “I haven’t sniffed you around here before, and oh, I see you’ve met the horses that live up in the pastures neighboring this forest”, she said. “Yes, my name is Tori and this here is Frank and we are searching for the Truth. We came from Hare Valley where none of the shoes fit either of us, so we decided to search for it without those things”, explained Tori. Yet again, the mention of Hare Valley cast a gloom upon the pack. The leader of the pack spoke again, “My name is Kat, did Malik send you to this rock? I see, well, you’re a long way from Hare Valley, but you’re going in the right direction. Your next stop would be the Foggy Forest up that way - find your

way to the largest brownest tree. We are going that way as well, to slightly higher ground to escape the heat wave approaching, come along with us". Tori and Frank followed them.

These dogs were remarkably happy ones and got over the Hare Valley mention fairly quickly. "How did you know that there is a heat wave approaching?" asked Tori to which Kat responded, "We can track such things, our generational experience and senses, especially our noses are equipped to make these judgments". We head towards the hills and mountains around this time of year every year for about a month, and you caught us at the perfect time to join in." The whole riddle at the base of the rock made sense to Tori and Frank now.

It was not long before they had exited the forests and were walking up and down lush green hills, ultimately gaining elevation as they went on. Tori wanted to ask Kat more questions but Kat was busy with leading the pack and teaching the young. The only time Kat was available to talk was when they stopped for the night and even then they could not speak because Kat was too tired from the day. However, Tori got the feeling that it wasn't so much that Kat was tired but more that she was avoiding her and Frank. Tori tried speaking to other dogs about Malik or the search for the Truth, but nobody seemed to know much about it. After a long few arduous days of climbing and climbing, they reached a huge clearing with two paths leading in opposite directions. "Here is where we leave you, we need to go slightly higher to reach our destination, but the Foggy Forest is right down that way - look for the oldest and tallest tree", said Kat pointing in the direction of a dark and battered road. "Do you mind if I ask you a few questions?", asked Tori. "I do, I made a promise to guide those who seek the Truth, but I do not have to explain to or answer any questions about it", she said as she led her pack away.

As the pack walked away, Tori was pulled aside by Luke and he said, “I know what you want to ask, and I do not have much time till they notice I’m not with the pack so listen carefully. Long ago, before I was even born and when Kat was just a pup, some Hares came by this area and were fascinated by the fact that we could track so efficiently and effectively. We use our tracking to fend for our pack and make sure our family stays safe, but the Hares wanted to know if it could be used for other purposes as well. The pack leaders said that it could, but what could be more important than looking after your own. A few years passed by and we got news of this place called Hare Valley where animals were using our tracking techniques in some sort of weird shoe and claiming to search for the Truth. Kat says they stole our skills and knowledge and she does not like the Hares very much. A few years ago, our pack met a Hare who was traveling through the forests and hills and Kat asked her to stay away from the pack. But that night, I saw them, when the pack was sleeping, I heard them talking. The Hare talked about change and how there was some mountain to climb and asked that Kat guide all who looked for the Truth without the shoes to the Foggy Forest. Kat was apprehensive - she still is, which is why she doesn’t like to talk about it, but she did make the promise. Oh and finally, there was something different about this Hare, she was smaller than the other Hares I had seen”. With this, Luke said his goodbye and before Tori or Frank could ask further, ran behind his family.

### **“The Guide”**

Tori and Frank decided to spend the night at the fork in the road where the painted dogs had left them since they did not want to venture into the Foggy Forest at night. The next morning, they packed up their belongings and started walking the rough path into the forest. “The name does this place justice”, said Frank as fog engulfed the pair and before they knew it, they were surrounded by fog and trees, and everything looked gray. “How are we supposed to

find the oldest and tallest tree in this forest? I can't even see more than five feet in front of me" said Tori. "We follow the trail, partner", exclaimed Frank as he noticed that some of the trees had small etchings of arrows at their base.

They followed these etchings to a huge tree that definitely looked the oldest and tallest. As they approached the base of the tree, they noticed a plaque. As they got closer, they read, "Residence of Owl the Old, the wisest and wittiest of all the Owls" with a picture next to the plaque of Owl the Old. Tori immediately noticed that the Owl's eyes looked a lot like the goggles the Hares wore. Tori began, "Frank, just like the shoes from the horses and the tracking from the dogs, I think the idea for the goggles was stolen from...-".

"The Owls" a voice echoed from behind them and at the entrance of the cave opposite to the tree stood an old Hare. She continued, "The owls don't live here anymore, they left after the Hares stole their knowledge. The constant flapping of their wings kept the fog away from this beautiful forest but once they left, the fog came back and the trees lost their leaves, the soil its fertility, and the water its taste." "You're the Hare that guided us!" yelled Tori. "I am not a HARE, I merely look like one, I am in fact a Bunny. We have a lot to talk about, come into my cave."

The embers and light of a fire filled the small cave, illuminating both the house and workshop of the Bunny. On one side of the cave sat a small rock with a flat top with papers and books sprawled across. Right above this rock were intense writings that continued on and on until they reached the ceiling and around the cave. "It's my years of research", said the Bunny as Tori struggled to make sense of the writings. On the other side of the cave, there was a bed and the essentials such as food, water and clothes. "My name is Harriet, and I have been expecting

someone brave and curious to make the long journey from Hare Valley to here for years now. Nobody until you has done it before - and this trip became especially harder after the fog took over the mountain and forest around it died; making it impossible to even know there was a mountain here.”

“Why did you have all those signs for us, and how did you know someone would come?” asked Tori. “Because I found this peak, and I knew that there would be others who were cast out of Hare Valley who sought the Truth and were courageous enough to look for it themselves, without the AI shoes”. Frank, upon realizing that Harriet too had been turned away from Hare Valley, asked about her story.

Then Harriet told them what happened. “I was born near Hare Valley, and I grew up in a time when all the communities around us lived in harmony. The tortoises would slowly roam the meadows, the frogs would croak together by the ponds, the owls watched over the woods, the horses galloped freely in the fields, and the dogs played by the riverside. We would often gather for field trips where we learned about the world, each group bringing their own unique perspective. I was always fascinated by how everything around me worked, and I dreamed of becoming an anthropologist.”

“But then, just before I finished my education, talk of the Truth began to spread—everyone started to search for it. They even began selling shoes for the search. When I heard about it, I couldn’t resist. I hurriedly joined the search, eager to uncover what everyone believed to be the answer. The shoes were uncomfortable, but I wore them, determined to find the Truth. After a little bit, they said new shoes needed to be bought and the old ones would not



work anymore, so everyone bought the new shoes - these new versions became more and more frequent till one day they incorporated Stats Tracking into them.”

“After a few days of wearing those shoes I was told that the tracking was not functioning properly for me and then they found out I was a Bunny. I looked like them, I walked like them and ran like them, but I was not a Hare - and they took away the shoes from me and told me I should go do something other than search for the Truth and that I was never supposed to be part of the search in the first place. I was furious, I ran away from Hare Valley and started to search for the Truth without the shoes and goggles, like you have. I met the horses, the painted dogs and owls - and many other animals who had been exploited by the Hares. I left a trail of breadcrumbs for anyone else like me and spread whispers about Prospective Peak - then I waited. While I waited, I did more research and tried to find the Truth. I think Prospective Peak might have the answer, and now that you are here, I can be sure that if something happens to me, you can carry on the search.”

“Have you ever been to the top?” asked Tori to which Harriet replied, “I have not, it is impossible for most animals since the mountain is so steep, but I met a herd of Mountain Goats who used to live on this mountain and their leader offered me a ride to get to the top and back when I told him my story. However, he told me that he would only do it once, since it was so dangerous for his herd to reach the top. I think it is time that I call upon their word to take us to the top - they have settled on a mountain not far from here.”

Harriet set out immediately to go and bring the Mountain Goats while Frank and Tori rested in the cave overnight. The next morning, she returned with Rami, the leader of the Goats and two of his most efficient climbers. The group then set out to climb the mountain. Tori could

not see anything at all because of the fog, but the Goats knew exactly where to step and where to go. They climbed for three days straight while taking breaks in between - they stopped in caves overnight and set out the moment the sun rose. Finally, Tori could see the fog become lighter and lighter and the sunlight become brighter and brighter. "This is where we will wait for you", said Rami as they reached a small flat rock about fifty feet below the peak. As they kept climbing, the air became heavier. Approaching the top of the mountain, Tori and Frank could barely see as the cloud layer thickened. "The Shoe maker must be here somewhere? I have so many questions for him, he must be so knowledgeable!" exclaimed Tori. She could hardly keep in her excitement; this whole journey had led her here, and she was finally going to get some answers. Frank and Tori continued through the hazy clouds carefully, as they could barely see a few feet in front of them, but as they climbed, they both saw a light poking through.

"We are almost through the clouds!" shouted Frank. They picked up speed and broke through the cloud barrier, making it to the peak out of breath and eager to speak with the Shoe Maker.

"What is this? I'm confused, is this the right place?" Tori was puzzled as she stared at the largest, greyest building she had ever seen. Surrounding the building were tall fences with only one gated entrance. "I thought we were coming to see the shoe maker?" Tori started towards the building, beginning to notice the lack of vegetation surrounding the space. She thought that there would be magic atop this mountain, but it looked anything but.

"Well I'll be damned, maybe the shoemaker is in the building." Hesitant, Frank hopped through the fence and over to the doors at the front of the structure, which scaled him three times

over. Frank, with the help of Tori and Harriet, pushed the door open to see a dimly lit warehouse with hundreds of animals all working.

“What is going on?” Tori questioned. This is not what she imagined she would find; horses were pulling large cargo around, smaller squirrels were sitting working diligently on sewing machines. She had never seen something so bleak in her life.

Frank hopped over to one of the horses passing by, “Excuse me? Do you think you could direct us to the Shoe Maker?”

“The Shoe Maker? Ha!” The horse laughed and neighed, “Do people still believe that? The Shoe Maker? Really? I bet everyone thinks he’s magic too huh? Well, let me tell you something. There is no Shoe Maker.” Tori’s jaw dropped and she leaned in closer to the horse.

“You mean to tell me I have come all this way to meet this powerful Shoe Maker and he is not even real?!”

“Look kid, there is no Shoe Maker; he does not live in the clouds and make shoes for all the Hares, we do. It’s tough up here, away from everyone, but someone has to do it. I guess it’s easier to sell shoes when you believe that it’s magic rather than hard working animals.” Tori was taken aback. How could everyone believe this lie? And how could the Hares believe they were searching for the Truth when in reality they did not even understand what the Truth was in the first place?

“I need to step outside for a moment”, Tori raced out of the warehouse and into the open air. The wind was strong, testing her strength. To calm herself, she began to take in the view from the peak; she looked over the valleys, forests and streams down below. She saw the horses

gallop and the painted dogs run through the fields. She even saw Turtle Lake and all of its relaxed citizens. The Hares could also be seen from the top moving around rapidly and jumping from place to place. She began to wonder—was there ever just one Truth? Then, like a ripple across still water, it came to her: the Truth wasn't singular at all. Each animal carried a piece of it, shaped by their own stories, struggles, and hopes. There was no magic answer, no perfect AI shoe or shortcut. The Truth had always been there, reflected in the ways different communities lived, understood the world, and made meaning of their lives.

### **Ending #01 - First Ending**

Tori tells Frank and Harriet about her newfound understanding and all three of them return to Hare Valley. They try to tell the Hares of their new discoveries but none of the Hares listen to them and still carry forward with their search using the AI shoes and goggles. The Hares that do take the time to listen, reject Tori's claims and dismiss her since she did not use the AI shoes and goggles to find the Truth. The Hares ignore the exploitative manner of their race and fail to recognize the reliance on fetishized labor from other animals. The Hares continue on their path and hold onto the centralized power dynamic that already exists. Through the years, the land in which they harvest and produce their food deteriorates, forcing the Hares to expand their reach and exploit animals from other lands. In order to fuel their search for truth, the Hares continually abuse their technology creating factories throughout the land and converting beautiful hills and valleys into barren wastelands imprinted with the trails that the Hares use in their race.

### **Ending #02 - Second Ending**

Tori tells Frank and Harriet about her newfound understanding, and all three of them return to Hare Valley—this time not just to share what they've learned, but to name those who

made the journey possible. They bring with them stories, maps, sketches, and fragments of memory—testimonies from horses, painted dogs, and owls. These fragments show that the technologies which helped fuel the Hares’ race—like the Answer Initiators and the goggles—were not their creations alone. Tori speaks not just of multiple truths, but of hidden truths: of labor erased, credit withheld, and knowledge appropriated.

At first, the Hares are skeptical. “What matters is what works,” one says. “Not where it came from.” But soon the wider animal community begins to rise and protest, their voices echoing long-held frustrations. Other animals agreed with Tori and started sharing their own stories—of their ideas ignored, of their skills and talent exploited, and them being cast aside because their feet didn’t fit the AI shoes. Change begins—not quickly, and not everywhere at once. But it begins.

The Shoemaker myth falls out of favor with the public. Factories start including the names of every animal who contributed to the tools being made. New roles emerge for animals to sit on design councils—not as guests, but as decision-makers. The goggles are redesigned to include fields of view shaped by different animal experiences. The Hares continue to race, but now the shoes tell a fuller story: of where they came from, who helped make them, and who was excluded along the way. The Truth is no longer just a destination—it’s a process of recognition.

### **Ending #03 - Third Ending**

Tori tells Frank and Harriet about her newfound understanding and all three of them excitedly return to Hare Valley. They tell the Hares about their new discoveries and they are intrigued by this. They acknowledge their opinions and commend them for their journey. They retire the AI shoes and goggles and look to finding their own Truth rather than one Universal

Truth. This practice spreads to different regions and more and more animals begin to share their understandings. The Hares came to accept the concept of multiple truths and understand the dangers caused by their fetishization. As factories closed, animals throughout the land took on more holistic meanings of their experience and reverted back towards more egalitarian forms of existence. As the drive to search for truth decreased, so did the power the Hares had acquired.

## Appendix A: Methodology

“They debunked the myth that truth is a monolithic entity. ‘Truth is a myth,’ they said. One person’s truth is often privileged over someone else’s. This is dangerous. The White Patriarchs privileged their worldview over all others. This distorts knowledge and an accurate description of the world” [Banu Subramaniam 2000, 303–304].

This project was inspired by the work of Banu Subramaniam. “Snow Brown and the Seven Detergents: A Metanarrative on Science and the Scientific Method” plays on the 1812 Grimm’s fairy tale, “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs” to expose the prolific racism, sexism, and colonialism in science. Twenty-five years later, Subramaniam’s critiques remain pertinent.

Throughout our fable we analogize themes that occur in real professional settings in technical fields that were brought to light through a series of literature reviews, personal stories, and original data. The story challenges power paradigms that currently exist and uses critical theory in order to deconstruct as well as bring to light the experiences of underrepresented groups in the workplace. The goal of this fable is to illustrate the unspoken truths of technical fields like engineering and computer science that have historically been demographically homogeneous and the cultural impact this phenomenon has had for people looking to enter the field. We work to create parallels between the fable and the real world that call draw real issues regarding the use of silencing, prospecting, and centralized power that are often unheard by public ears.

The rhetoric and stories of characters within the fable are grounded in trends found in the data collected within our lab that consists of interviews, participant observation and content analysis of media sources. Our authors are part of a five-year project, *Valuing the Social in Computing*, which performs ethnographic exploration of two subfields within computing—

Human Computer Interaction and Theory & Algorithms. By following the process of [Spradley 1979] domain analysis formulated around creating semantic relationships between trends within the data, we were able to create codes or themes that encapsulate the current paradigm within computing fields. These codes have been used to guide our fable and are represented within the experiences and backgrounds of each of our characters.

### **Prospecting**

The term “prospecting” is important to define in order to understand the power dynamic that exists between the Hares and the rest of the animals. Throughout her journey Tori is led to discover the imbalance of power that exists throughout Hare Valley by speaking to different animals and hearing about the physical, mental, and emotional changes that the Hares have caused. We derived the concept of prospecting from the paper “Prospecting (in) the data sciences” [Slota et al. 2020]. Prospecting is used to describe the intrusive and exploitative manner that data science attempts to extract value from other markets not directly related to data science itself. This highlights the fact that data science relies on the knowledge, theory, workers, and history of neighboring markets to create data which data scientists can then quantify in order to create a profit [Slota et al. 2020]. The labor used to create this data is often disconnected from the product and rendered in a way that makes such labor invisible to the public. The lack of continuity between labor, data, and the products they help produce helps maintain a centralization of power for those who are deemed the most qualified or those who outwardly represent institutions or companies. Our goal throughout this fable was to realize this phenomenon and turn it around so that the voices of the workers; or in this case the animals, are credited for the contributions they make in creating technology only the Hares can use.



In our story, Tori sees that animals throughout the land are having their labor extracted for the benefit of the Hares. She also makes the connection between the data and its final product in the ‘Answer Initiator’ shoes, which help the Hares look for the Truth throughout the story. On the Prospective Peak, Tori sees a number of different animals working in factories that is reflective of low wage technological work around the world today. Prospecting in tech more heavily relies on the implementation of data science to help extract ‘untapped benefits’ for companies outside of the field [Slota et al. 2020]. The reality however, is that once these systems are in place, smaller companies may become reliant on data science, creating a skewed relationship that benefits one side more than the other.

Another aspect of prospecting used throughout the fable is one that consists of the appropriation of knowledge and theory. This manifests itself through the different animals that Tori comes in contact with who tell stories about how the Hares took characteristics of their bodies or skills and implemented them into their own technology. We see this with the initial concept of shoes and the ability to track that is used to create the ‘Answer Initiators’ which were first used by the horses and the painted dogs. Inventions within data science use the same methods like artificial intelligence which has often been described as a reflection of the human neural network based on language models fueled by the data collected by consumer interaction. The tendency of anthropomorphism is evident not only in the story but in reality as well. We use our fable to highlight the prospecting that occurs and the dangers that go along with it.

## Learning Objectives

- Understand that the quest for knowledge can take many forms, and the answers one finds are shaped by the tools one uses to find them.
- Analyze how certain forms of knowledge are valued over others.
- Evaluate the assumption that there is only one “Truth” or one “Answer.”
- Discover the possibility of multiple truths, which can be illuminated through qualitative research.
- Apply the understanding that the collaboration and communication Tory employed allowed for the creation of a community of animals that wanted to learn and grow together in protest of dominant regimes.
- Comprehend “prospecting” as it relates to the creation and applications of AI and gain a more holistic view of science.

## Our decision-making process

The team of researchers performed a close reading of [Subramaniam 2000]. Then, inspired by Subramaniam’s retelling of a classic tale, a team member combed through classic western fables and fairytales to identify a small set of potential works which could be reimaged to explore the experiences of the research participants in the *Valuing the Social in Computing* project. The lab then discussed the potential of each story and came to a consensus to utilize Aesop’s Fable, “The Tortoise and The Hare.” The first author then drafted a short outline of the tale, drawing upon major thematic elements in our work. The research team then expanded this outline over the course of a few months, holding focused group discussions to further develop the story. During this process, we selected a set of pertinent codes to include as major themes in

the story and to guide our creation of the learning objectives. These codes were already utilized in the larger project, *Valuing the Social in Computing*, which analyzes the role culture plays in the desegregation of Computer Science and Engineering. For each code, we identified specific characters, plot points, and settings which serve to embody the real-world phenomena each code serves to document in our ethnographic work. This included substantial thematic analyses related to magic and religiosity. We used an expanded version of [Spradley's 1979] domain analysis to elucidate the connections between individual codes and concepts within preexisting literature. We then expanded this domain analysis by including supporting evidence from our original data set, as well as publicly available media.

At this stage, the team developed a concise list of learning objectives derived from our codes. These objectives are intended to be a reader's key takeaways. They dually functioned as guideposts in the writing of the story, as each element of the story directly corresponds with one objective.

### **Declaration of Conflicting Interests**

On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

### **Data Availability Statement**

All data underlying the results are available as part of the article and no additional source data is required.

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## Appendix B: Symbolic Significance of Characters

Each character in the fable serves as an allegorical figure representing contemporary dynamics in technoscientific systems, data capitalism, and epistemic power. Collectively, they reflect tensions between dominant knowledge systems and marginalized ways of knowing. At the same time, they emphasize the transformative role of qualitative research in uplifting lived experiences, fostering solidarity, and challenging exploitative models of technological advancement.

### Character Descriptions

1. **Tori's Grandmother:** Symbolizes the foundational support that Tori receives, which catalyzes her dedication to qualitative inquiry. Her encouragement serves as the backbone of Tori's ethnographic journey, inspiring her to challenge dominant systems of knowledge production and seek diverse perspectives.
2. **Tori:** Tori mirrors an anthropologist who embarks on an ethnographic exploration of the world around her, gathering qualitative insights through interaction with other animal communities. Her pursuit of the Truth emphasizes that there are a multiplicity of truths, grounded in each animal's lived experiences.
3. **Hares that Tells Tori About the AI Shoes:** Embodies the unquestioning embrace of technological determinism. This character represents the pervasive, uncritical acceptance of AI technology and quantitative methods, which often exclude alternative epistemologies and marginalized voices from the production and dissemination of knowledge in technoscientific fields.
4. **Clerk at Shoe Store:** Represents the commercialization and capitalist-driven nature of technological advancement. The clerk's interaction with AI technology is motivated by

financial gain rather than ideological commitment, illustrating how technology is often marketed as a consumer product with little regard for its broader societal implications.

5. **Snickering Hares at Shoestore:** Symbolize the elitism and exclusion within high-tech fields. Their derision toward outsiders reflects the systemic inequities that shape knowledge hierarchies, particularly in technological domains. These Hares also highlight how certain forms of knowledge and professions are valued, while others are marginalized or dismissed within our society today.
6. **Frank:** A guide and support for Tori, who has experienced the harm caused by the Hares. While Frank is less invested in the pursuit of singular truth, his relationship with Tori revitalizes his drive. Frank represents the power of relational solidarity and collective learning in social movements, showcasing how shared support can fuel efforts toward social change and the importance of fostering community in qualitative research.
7. **Hadley:** A cheerful character who serves as a connection between Tori and Malik. Hadley represents the quieter forms of resistance and care that emerge from those who have been marginalized by exploitative systems. As a character who has experienced exploitation, Hadley underscores the need for empathetic engagement in the process of navigating power structures.
8. **Prospected Animals:** These animals personify the exploitative patterns inherent in technoscientific fields, where individuals are commodified for data extraction and corporate gain. They are based on work done by [Slota et al. 2020] who coined the term “Prospecting” which explores the heterogenous mode of applying data science to solve real world problems. We were also inspired by the work of [Thomas, Nafus, and Sherman

2018], which looks at the fetishization of products and data for the benefit of technological companies.

- a. **Malik:** One of the creatures who were exploited by the Hares, and serves as a guide for Tori and Frank.
  - b. **Luke:** Represents the youthful nature of the painted dogs and is one of the animals exploited by the Hares.
  - c. **Kat:** One of the creatures who were exploited by the Hares, and serves as a guide for Tori and Frank.
  - d. **Owl the Old:** one of the animals exploited by the Hares.
9. **Harriet:** A bunny who is often mistaken for a Hare, Harriet symbolizes both kinship and difference. Her exclusion from AI modeling reflects the racialized and gendered biases embedded within technological design. Harriet’s role critiques the narrow demographic focus of algorithmic systems and the exclusion of marginalized identities from AI technologies, such as those seen in facial recognition and surveillance systems.
10. **Rami:** The leader of the Mountain Goats who guides Tori and Frank through the fog up Prospective Peak, symbolizing the power of lived experience in navigating complex challenges. Her practical, embodied knowledge—often overlooked by dominant epistemologies—underscores the value of community-based wisdom excluded from formal research and technological design.