

The King who Grew Fruit - a Fairy Tale

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Once upon a time there was a kingdom which was renowned far and wide for growing fruit.

Every neighbouring land bought fruit from the kingdom, and prices were high since demand often outstripped supply. Almost all the inhabitants of the kingdom concentrated on this enterprise, which was highly successful and profitable. However, once in a while, trolls would descend on the kingdom, destroying orchards, stealing tools and burning storehouses. To defend against this, walls were built around the fruit farms, and a few workers were appointed to keep an eye out for trolls when they were not busy tending the crop.

As time passed, the King gradually got the impression that the trolls were getting more persistent and doing ever more damage when they attacked. He also realised that some of his customers were beginning to lose faith in his ability to deliver the fruit they ordered, as the occasional losses meant that sometimes there was not enough fruit to go round. So he searched for people he could appoint to solve this problem. He managed to find a few trustworthy farmers who had survived troll attacks, although none of them had any detailed appreciation of troll tactics. He formed these farmers into a committee of advisors, with the feeling that he had accomplished something towards a solution.

The King's advisors recommended more walls, as they had heard that this was a good idea and everyone was doing it. Lots of wall-builders were offering their services, so extra walls were built in no time at all. Quite soon, triple walls surrounded each fruit farm. Each wall had a locked gate guarded by a gatekeeper, and everyone who went in or out had to declare who they were, be let through, and be locked inside while they worked. Nevertheless, the trolls continued to attack, and the additional walls did not always seem to offer quite as much protection as anticipated. But they did make working on the fruit farms much slower and more inconvenient. After a while many workers became fed up with the restrictions, and found ways to bypass them. The trolls were not slow to exploit these methods.

Finally, in desperation, the King sent out messengers to seek mercenaries who would protect the kingdom for payment in gold. Several bands of mercenaries responded by sending envoys with lavish presentations of their skills and past successes. The King and his advisors sat through the presentations, compared notes, checked the amount asked by each band, and picked one of them to protect the kingdom. Neither the King nor his advisors were quite sure why they made their final choice, based as it was on a vague combination of the price asked and the panache of the presentation. However, they now felt secure that the protection of their orchards was in the hands of "real experts".

One of the first things the new experts recommended was that a controlled attack should be launched by "reformed trolls" retained by them, to find the weak spots in the walls. The King and his advisors agreed to this, although the price was high. Soon after, a beautifully bound 500-page manuscript was brought to the court, in which every weakness in the walls was described in detail, with reference to recommended upgrades and repairs which the architects of other similar walls had found useful. The King and his advisors were mightily impressed, but realised that all this was far too technical for them, so they asked their new experts to decide which problems seemed most critical and fix them.

The new experts took control. For a while, things seemed to have improved. Several attempted troll attacks actually failed, and life was quieter. The continuing cost of retaining the experts was something of a drain on profits, but as time passed they became more and more necessary, as the King and his advisors turned their attention back to fruit growing and increasingly lost touch with the troll threat.

One day, the King decided to start a "pick your own" service for holidaymakers, as tourism had begun to take off in his kingdom. It was obvious to him and his advisors that changes would be needed to the defences surrounding the fruit farms, but as soon as they started to discuss this among themselves, they realised that they no longer knew enough about the current defences to come to any conclusion. The retained experts were by this time the only people with actual knowledge of the kingdom's farm and orchard defences, as they and they alone had managed their evolution for several years.

There was no doubt about the trustworthiness of these experts, so they were asked to consult. Unfortunately, they had not been briefed on the possibility of "pick your own", so they had not included it in their planning, which had concentrated on securing the walls to protect against trolls. As a result, the cost of adapting the defences proved prohibitive, so the King lost his chance of entering

the lucrative “pick your own” market. And the consultancy fee for telling him he couldn't do it was huge. The King was very angry, and spent the rest of his life blaming the experts. Sadly, no one ever told him he should have retained ownership of his own security strategy.

Of course, this is a fairy tale. It could never happen in real life, could it?

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