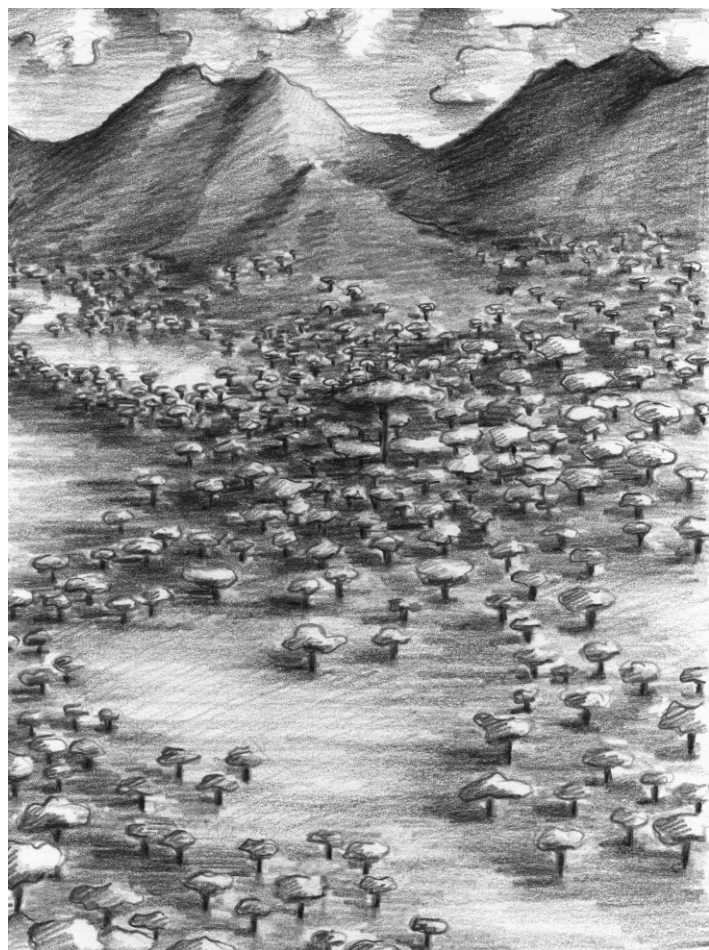


Nest County

by Rudy Ibarra



Illustrated by Carmen V. Carvajal



Nest County

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Summary: If you are a bird working with the air marshal of Nest County, like Fleo does, the lives of many birds are under your wings. When a routine seagull flight reports a snake migration crawling towards Nest County, Fleo and his air squadron flap into action. It is up to Fleo to organize the help of his friends and the Featheral Government to face the challenge of a lifetime and save their paradise.

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Illustrated by Carmen V. Carvajal

“This book is dedicated to my daughters Jenny and Alina. Thank you for igniting my imagination and for sharing this wonderful journey.”

Rudy Ibarra

Contents

1	The Exchange	1
2	The Tower	5
3	The Migration	11
4	The Mayor	17
5	The Squadron	21
6	The Beaver Dam	25
7	The Hungry Eagle	36
8	Big Rock	42
9	Snaking Detour	46
10	Missed Signals	49
11	Debriefing the Beavers	58
12	Headed to Las Huevas	62
13	The Squadron Returns	67
14	The Celebration	74
15	Fleo's New Mission	84
16	Snakes by the Falls	90
17	Squiza	93
18	Night Shift at the Tower	107
19	Falling Snakes	109
20	The Morning After	112

21	Wisey and the Mayor	.....	115
22	On Top of the Falls	.....	120
23	Landy and the Mayor	.....	129
24	Snake Eyes	.....	134
25	The Bats	.....	137
26	Fleo Returns	.....	142
27	Snake Democracy	.....	155
28	The Featheral Government	.....	162
29	The Crossing	.....	170
30	The Condor	.....	175
31	The Caverns	.....	186
32	B-Day	.....	192
33	Recovery	.....	205
34	Back to Work	.....	209
35	Back to the Beginning	.....	218

1 – The Exchange

“As I was saying, that day started like any other day in Nest County. The sky was bluer than ever and the birds were all singing and going about their day as happy as they could be,” said Uncle Jayson to his nephew, Flappy.

“You love to tell that story, don’t you?” remarked Clawdio, who is sitting on the wire next to Uncle Jayson. “Shouldn’t you fast forward a little so we could all go home earlier?”

“Please, keep going Uncle Jayson,” added Flappy with a mesmerized look.

On this day, Uncle Jayson brought along Flappy to the Wire Tap Exchange as part of his formal training.

The Wire Tap Exchange is located at the intersection of Nest County Road and Las Huevas

Boulevard. Hundreds of birds from all over the territory get together at the Wire Tap Exchange to swap information and monitor bird traffic. The telephone wires crisscrossing the intersection make for a perfect gathering place for the birds.

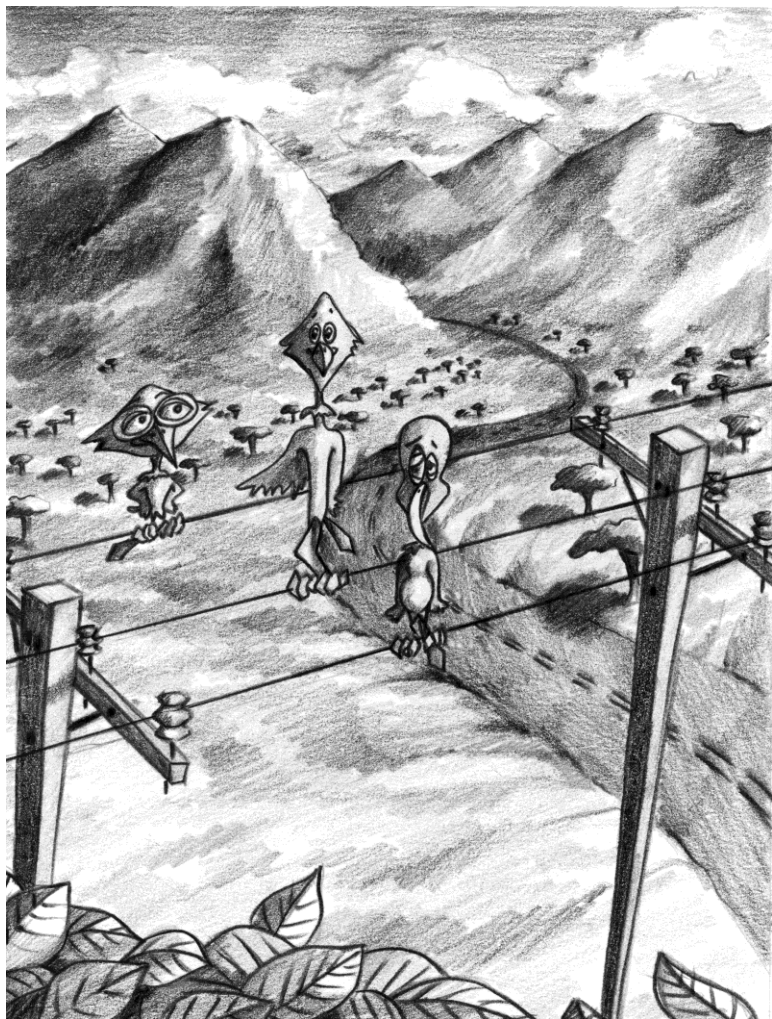
“Go on, Uncle Jayson,” added the little bird. “Tell me more about Fleo and Nest County.”

“The Woods is the most beautiful area of Nest County,” continued Uncle Jayson...

From a bird's eye view, it looks like a dense green mantle of gorgeous skyscraper trees. As you fly closer, you begin to see their gentle sway caused by the fresh wind, as the singing symphony of the birds gets louder and louder.

Tower Square is located in the middle of The Woods, and it has the tallest trees in Nest County. You get the feeling that you are in the middle of something big. Everything seems to happen around Tower Square.

The highest branch in Tower Square is called...well...the Tower. From here, the birds can spot incoming bad weather and monitor bird traffic. Once a flight is spotted, they immediately dispatch



Rudy Ibarra

the interceptors to find out who the visitors are and welcome them to Nest County, or chase them away.

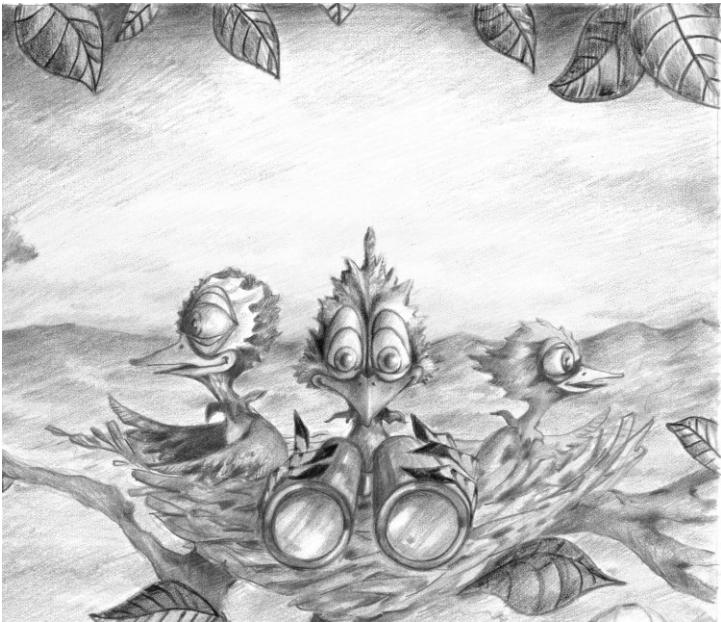
As you can see, Nest County is no ordinary bird flock. Nest County is a highly organized bird town in balance and harmony with Mother Nature. But that harmony was about to be disturbed in Nest County...

2 - The Tower

A bird named Landy, a robin, is the Air Marshal of Nest County. His job is to coordinate the air traffic and surveillance team at the Tower. Landy's team is made up of five birds. Four of the birds are cardinals, and their job is to look over the north, south, east and west skies. The fifth bird, Fleo, is a blue jay. As a deputy, Fleo is the interceptor that Landy sends out to check any visitors entering Nest County's bird space.

On this particular day, Easberd is looking to the east as usual, when he spots a flock of seagulls heading their way. And this is really where the story begins...

"Sir, I think we have visitors, Sir," points Easberd with a military tone.



“What kind of visitors, Easberd?” asked Landy while stretching his wings this early in the morning.

“They are seagulls, Sir,” replied a confident Easberd.

“Really?” asked Landy as he prepares to play a practical joke on sleeping Fleo.

“They look like big hawks to me!” shouted Landy as he gets closer to Fleo.

“Hawks!” shouted Fleo while jumping up in the air and flapping his wings as fast as he could, losing a few feathers from the shocking news.

“Just kidding,” said Landy. “They are just seagulls.”

“Stop it Landy, one of these days you are going to give me a heart attack!”

“Go ahead and check them out,” ordered Landy, “I am sure they are off course. Just be careful out there.”

Fleo takes off like a rocket and flies towards a gorgeous sunrise. As he gets closer, he changes his course and begins a wide turn, gliding from the back and left side of the seagulls, aligning himself with the leader of the flock. This is a standard pro-

TOCOL used by interceptors to welcome friendly birds that happen to fly over Nest County bird space.

“Hello Sir, my name is Fleo. I am an interceptor and you are entering Nest County bird space.”

“Hello Fleo,” replied the older seagull, with several stripes on his neck. “My name is Gullie and I am leading this group to Worm Island.”

“Worm Island?” said Fleo opening his eyes wide and looking surprised by the answer.

“You are off course, Sir! The corridor to Worm Island is ten thousand flaps from here,” replied Fleo with most certainty in his tone.

“I know, kid, I know,” replied Gullie.

“And?” asked Fleo expecting a very good explanation from him.

“Well, we saw a very strange migration on the ground, about fifty thousand flaps ago, and I decided to run a parallel course to be safe,” said Gullie. “Mostly for insurance purposes, you know?”

“A migration?” asked Fleo with a worried face. “What kind of migration?”

“Well, it looked like snakes from up here,” said Gullie with a sorry face.

“Snakes!” screamed Fleo while losing a few feathers from his wings. “That is terrible! Do you know what that means?”

“I know,” said Gullie. “You could be in a lot of trouble if they make it all the way here.”

“How many of them?” asked Fleo.

“At least one hundred of them, I would say.”

“One hundred!” shouted Fleo. “I have to go!” said Fleo with a worried face.

“Sorry for the bad news kid.”

“Listen, if you are ever in town, feel free to wing by and land for a while. Make sure you eat at the Hungry Eagle and stay at the Tree Top,” said Fleo with a big smile.

“One of these trips I will, kid. Thanks for the wingvitation!”

“You are welcome!” smiled Fleo as he breaks away from the flock.

“Snakes, snakes. I hate snakes. Couldn’t it be elephants, horses, polar bears?” said Fleo, while flying back to the Tower at top speed.

“Landy, Landy!” screamed Fleo on approach to the Tower.

“Well, what happened?” asked Landy with a worried face. “It took you forever to check these seagulls out!”

“Landy, we are in deep trouble,” said Fleo with a panic face.

“What do you mean, we?” replied a worried Landy.

“Not us, I mean Nest County!” added Fleo.

“Nest County? What about Nest County? What’s wrong?” asked Landy.

“There is a snake migration heading our way!” said Fleo with a terrified look on his face.

“A snake what?” asked a shocked Landy.

“Snakes Landy, snakes are heading this way!”

“Not good! Not good!” repeated Landy with a worried face. “I must tell the Mayor immediately.”

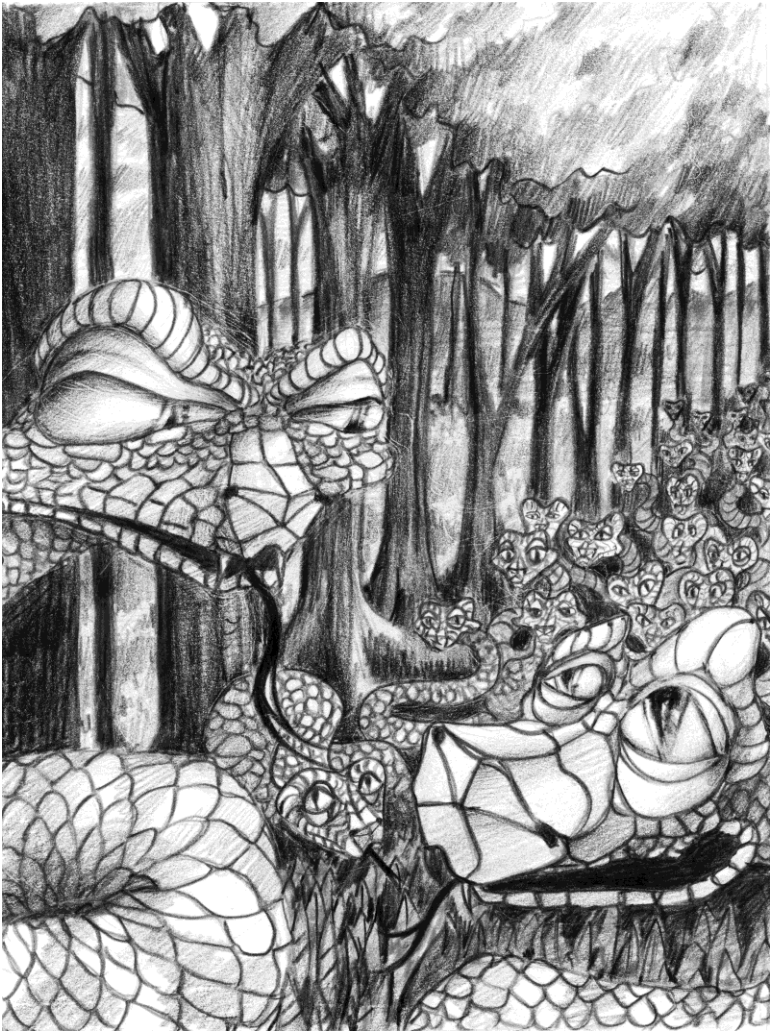
3 - The Migration

In the meantime, fifty thousand flaps away, the snake migration was on its way to Nest County. The snakes were running out of food in Serpen Town, where they live, and their leader, Sneako, decided to take all the males on a crusade to Nest County.

Sneako used to tell them stories about how beautiful Nest County was and that it had lots of birds, which made it a perfect place for the snakes to hunt for eggs and get an easy meal.

By now, the entire group is crawling in the wide open prairie and they look exhausted, dirty and tired.

“Sneako please, let’s stop for a break. My flat hungry belly is hurting already!” said Crawly who is always by Sneako’s side.



“You guys are a bunch of wimps. We just had a pit stop a few curls back!” shouted Sneako.

“That was two days ago!” replied Crawly. “Give us a break, please!”

“OK, tell everyone we are taking a short break.”

“Pit stop!” shouts Crawly as the entire herd stops crawling and they start to relax their long tired bodies.

“You are squeezing them too hard Sneako. Remember that they need to be in shape by the time we get to Nest County. Otherwise, who is going to do all the egg hunting for you?” remarked Crawly, expecting to get a compliment back from Sneako.

“That’s a good point. I sure don’t want to be chasing eggs around for a living. A leader like me does not do any of that, you know?” replied Sneako with royal pride.

“As the main assistant to the smartest snake that ever crawled this dirt, I agree boss,” added Crawly.

“This is my first time back to Nest County in a long time,” mumbled Sneako. “After the humans drove the snakes out, the birds settled in and made Nest County what it is today.”

“How did that happen?” asked Crawly.

“A snake bit a human child and the entire village went on a crusade against the snakes. We underestimated how much humans care for their children,” replied Sneako with a serious look.

“Was that a human?” asked Crawly while pointing to a big scar in Sneako’s tail.

“Yes. That was a human indeed, and I shall bite the first one I see in revenge!” shouted Sneako while opening his mouth and showing his big fangs.

“Stop! Stop!” cried Crawly. “You are scaring me!”

“I’m not going to bite you, you fool,” said Sneako after snapping his tail across Crawly’s face.

“You make my skin crawl at times, you know?” replied a relieved Crawly.

“Enough of this,” said Sneako, “let’s rally the troops.”

“May we have your skinny attention, please?” shouted Crawly.

“I know some of you may feel a bit tired,” said Sneako with an authoritative deep voice.

“A bit tired?” shouts Tummy from the first row with a frustrated looking face, “we are peeling like crawling bananas here!”

Sneako snaps his tail, hitting Tummy, and flipping him in the air, landing him on the back row.

Tummy begins to charge back, but his friend Tailor grabs him and says: “That was pretty dumb, but funny. I would not do it again if I were you.”

“I can’t stand him anymore. I just can’t,” mumbled Tummy as he settled down.

“As I was saying, I know some of you may feel a bit tired,” continued Sneako with a slower, deeper voice, while staring at the snakes in the front row who were all shaking by now, “but we must not fall behind schedule. Our own existence depends on this trip.”

“You see, the rainy season is coming soon and...” begins to utter Crawly, when he notices Sneako staring at him with a puzzled expression.

“Sorry,” mumbled Crawly.

“We must take over the Caverns at Nest County before the start of the rainy season,” continued Sneako.

“The Caverns?” shouted someone from the middle row while sticking out his head with a dreamlike and mesmerized expression.

“That’s right, the Caverns!” continued Sneako. “Some of you may have heard your parents talk about the Caverns of Nest County. That was our snaking ground until we were driven out by the humans a long time ago.”

“Talk about peeling off, eh?” said Crawly, which draws another stare from Sneako.

“This time is going to be even better. The bird population has grown ever since, which means there are plenty of eggs to go around. This will be the biggest egg hunt in snake history!” shouted Sneako rallying the crowd.

“Eggs, Caverns, eggs, Caverns!” shouted half the gang at a time.

“Stop it!” shouts Sneako as everyone freezes.

“Everyone crawl in and get some rest. We have a long day tomorrow,” concluded Sneako while retreating to the bushes, as everyone else crawls around to find a spot to rest their long tired bodies.

4 - The Mayor

That night, back in Nest County, the council meeting was in full session at Tower Square. The Mayor was presiding the meeting, and he was pounding with his hammer asking for silence.

“Quiet, please! May I have your attention!” shouted the Mayor.

“As you probably heard, we have a snake migration heading our way,” said the Mayor, as everyone erupts talking loud again.

“Quiet, please!” shouts the Mayor while pounding again with the hammer, losing his grip, and hitting a bat who was hanging upside down. The bat spins a couple of times in the branch like a wheel, until his friend stops him with his wing.



“How many are they?” asked one of the birds.

“We are sending a squadron tomorrow to verify, but there could be close to one hundred,” said Landy who is next to the Mayor.

“That’s right. The seagulls spotted at least that many on their way to Nest County,” added Fleo.

“Why us, why Nest County?” shouts another bird from the upper branches.

“We think it has to do with the Caverns. Remember, this used to be their home before. Maybe they want to move back in,” explained the Mayor.

“The Caverns?” asked another bird, “wasn’t that place abandoned?”

“Yes and no. The Caverns were abandoned for a while until the bats moved in,” replied the Mayor.

“What can we do? How do we stop them?” shouted another scared bird.

“We are going to work on a plan as soon as I have all the facts,” said the Mayor.

“Let’s wing it for now, and meet again tomorrow. Go back to your nests and get some rest,” said the Mayor as everyone begins to fly out of there.

“I guess this is it for now, Fleo. Let’s go back to our homes and think about tomorrow,” said Landy.

“Since you mentioned that, can I lead the squadron tomorrow?” asked Fleo.

“Fleo, this could be a long and dangerous mission. I think I should lead the squadron tomorrow,” replied Landy, always protective of younger Fleo.

“But Landy, I really want to do it. You are the Air Marshal. You are in charge of the Tower. You need to stay here. I really want to lead this one, please.”

“OK then,” said Landy. “I’ll let you do it, but you must follow high risk mission protocol at all times. Is that clear?”

“Sir, yes, Sir!” replied a happy Fleo.

“Let’s get some rest. We have a long day tomorrow,” said Landy as he prepares to take off.

“Thanks, Landy. See you tomorrow.”

5 - The Squadron

It is morning in Nest County and the squadron is getting ready to take off to survey the incoming migration. Up to ten birds are lined up in a branch, waiting for the signal to take off. Among them, stands a very old bird who wants to go, but everyone knows he is not fit for the mission.

“Grandpa, what are you doing here?” asked Fleo as he lands on the branch next to him.

“I’m going with you of course! I flew many missions you know,” said Grandpa, whose name is Rooster. “I even flew with General MacWings back in the J-Bird invasion of Cornmandy.”

“I know Grandpa, but this may be a very long trip and...” was saying Fleo when he gets interrupt-

ed by Grandma, who is screaming from a far away tree.

“Rooster, your nurse is here for your therapy!”

Grandpa looks down and sees a beautiful girl bird nurse standing next to Grandma, which makes him start to flap his old wings.

“Sorry flock, but I must excuse myself. I forgot that I cannot fly for a week while Gigi, I mean the nurse, works on my upper wings. Good luck flock. I’m coming! I’m coming!” shouts Rooster as he glides down to his nest.

“Oh well, are we missing anyone?” asked Fleo.

“I think this is it, Sir,” replies one of the birds.

“Wait! Wait!” shouts Landy as he joins the crowd.

“Landy, I thought you were birding the Tower?” said Fleo. “What happened?”

“I just wanted to wing you guys off and wish you good luck. Just remember that this is a high risk mission and you must follow protocol,” remarked Landy with a serious look.

“I know, I know. Don’t worry. We’ll go by the book.”

“One more thing Fleo, I was thinking that you might as well fly over Beaver Dam to check it out. Remember what happened the last time it came down,” said Landy.

“We sure will,” replied Fleo.

“Gentlemen, start your flappers!” shouts Fleo while everyone starts flapping, and loose feathers start flying everywhere.

“Oh Lord!” says Landy as they take off and everyone follows Fleo, all bumping into each other.

After they leave, Landy flies back to the Tower where the four cardinals are staring into the horizon, looking to the four corners of the earth. Landy sits in the middle of it, which is slightly higher, and gets right to work.

“How are things going so far?” asked Landy.

“Well Sir, it looks pretty normal, except a passing vulture reported some activity by Beaver Dam,” replied Easberd.

“What kind of activity?” asked Landy.

“Well, he saw a flock of birds take off all of a sudden in that area, which is not normal. Usually that is a pretty quiet place,” explained Easberd.

“How far is the Beaver Dam from here?” asked Landy.

“It is about five hundred flaps to the east, Sir,” answered Easberd. “It is exactly in that direction, Sir,” while pointing with his wing.

6 - The Beaver Dam

In the meantime, Beaver Dam is under attack by the snakes. They seem to be ahead of schedule after crawling a lot of ground the night before.

Crawly and a few other snakes are trying to round up a couple of beavers, Chewy and Cutty, who are hanging from a tree branch, as the snakes keep jumping up and down trying to catch them.

Suddenly, Sneako crawls out of the bushes and screams: “What are you doing?”

“We are trying to have breakfast, Sneako!” shouted Crawly.

“Beaver for breakfast?” shouts Sneako. “We don’t like beavers, remember?” said Sneako while staring at Crawly, which makes all the snakes freeze, confused about what they have just heard.



“We don’t?” asked Crawly. “You are scaring me Sneako. Are you OK?”

“I’ll explain later, just follow my lead now,” whispered Sneako.

“That’s right guys,” shouts Sneako. “I almost forgot we don’t like beavers. I mean we like them, but we don’t eat them for breakfast, right?” shouted Sneako, while clearing the area of a bunch of very confused looking snakes.

“How about for lunch, skinny head?” says Chewy, still clinging to a tree branch.

“Or dinner, for that matter!” added Cutty who is clinging to Chewy’s tail.

“No, no, we just don’t eat them, period,” replied a calm Sneako.

“How long is that period?” asked Chewy.

“A day? An hour? A couple of minutes?” added Cutty.

“We are a very special kind of snakes. We are birdgetarians,” replied Sneako with a scientific look on his face.

“We are?” says Crawly as Sneako wraps his tail around his neck, so he stops talking.

“Our apologies. My name is Sneako and we are just passing by. And your names are?”

“I’m Chewy,” replied one beaver, “and I am Cutty,” added the other beaver.

“Hi Chewy. Hi Cutty. Pardon our intrusion and confusion. I am sure my friends here were just playing around. If you excuse us, we must continue our journey. Good day,” said Sneako while turning his back and releasing Crawly, who was turning blue by now.

“By the way, I love your dam,” added Sneako, as if to compliment the beavers.

“Thanks. It has been in the family for ten generations. By the way, you look familiar,” added Chewy. “Do I know you from somewhere?”

“I don’t think so. Good day!” replied Sneako as he sneaks back into the grass, coming out on a clearing on the other side, followed by the confused snakes which still don’t have a clue about what have just happened.

“Sneako, what was that all about?” asked a confused Crawly.

“What do beavers do?” asked Sneako after he pulls Crawly to the side, so the others can’t hear.

“They run like crazy and jump up and down before you catch them and then...”

“Not that, you sponge brain! I mean, what do they do for a living?” asked Sneako after snapping his tail across Crawly’s face.

“Oh well, they build dams, Sneako, everyone knows that. I still don’t get it,” said a confused Crawly.

“This river happens to go right through Nest County. Without the dam, the Caverns would flood. And if the Caverns flood, it means we have wasted this entire trip, get it?” explained Sneako.

“Now I get it! Is that what happened when you were driven out of Nest County a long time ago?” asked Crawly.

“Yes and no,” said Sneako. “It was a bit more complicated.”

“Wait a minute. Is that the story about the child that was bitten by a snake?” asked Crawly.

“That’s right, the child, the child,” replied Sneako with an angry looking expression and staring into empty space.

“It was you, wasn’t it?” asked Crawly as Sneako snaps out of it. “You were the one that bit the child, weren’t you?”

“I did,” added Sneako, “I wanted to try it just for fun, but I didn’t know at the time that humans were so protective of their children. After that, they made our lives miserable, until the big flood washed us out of the Caverns.”

“I had a feeling you were involved,” added Crawly.

“That is ancient history, anyway” said Sneako while standing up and addressing the troops. “Listen up, everyone. If these beavers are hurt by any of you, in any way, I will personally turn you inside-out and you will crawl backwards for the rest of the trip. Any questions?”

“I have one,” says Tummy. “Why all of a sudden these two beavers are so special that we must spare their lives?”

“Yeah boss, what happened back there?” shouts another one.

“Well, I know these two beavers personally and they practice yoga, which means they can be inside your stomach without breathing for a week, and then come out like nothing ever happened,” explained a sarcastic Sneako.

“Amazing!” shouts a funny cobra from the second row with a strong Indian accent. “Talk about a big *india-gestion!*”

“That’s right boys. Stay away from these beavers,” said Sneako as he crawls away.

“I’m not convinced,” said Tummy. “But I don’t like the idea of being a crawling sleeping bag for anyone, anyway.”

“Let’s get twisting!” shouts Sneako as the snakes turn away and continue on their march towards Nest County.

In the meantime, the air squadron headed by Fleo is getting closer to Beaver Dam. From the air they can see how the river trickles up into the base of the dam, far away into the distance.

“There it is. Beaver Dam. Let’s head that way and check it out!” commanded Fleo.

The air squadron corrects its course and begins heading towards the dam. On the ground, the snakes are crawling into an open field when Crawly shouts: “Air patrol!”

“Duck!” shouts Sneako.

“Duck?” shouts another one. “Where, where, I love ducks!”

“Duck as in hide, you idiot!” shouts Sneako as he sneaks back into the bushes.

“Everyone! Full camouflage, on three!” shouts Sneako as everyone begins to climb up the trees and bushes. “One...two...three.”

At this point, all the snakes are curled up around the branches and you can hardly see any of them.

From up there, the air squadron looks down and sees nothing suspicious. They circle the area a couple of times, but decide to continue as everything looks normal.

“It looks clear to me,” says Fleo.

“No migration here,” says another.

“Let’s keep going!” commands Fleo.

At this point, the beavers look up and see the air squadron and they begin to try to call their attention by jumping up and down and screaming.

“Hey, look at the beavers, they seem to be happy to see us!” said one of the birds.

Back on the ground, Chewy and Cutty are screaming and waving their arms and shouting: “Snakes! Snakes!” as Cutty tries to imitate a snake, by crawling on the ground on his belly.

“Hey look at that. I have never seen a beaver crawling like that!” said one of the birds.

“They think we are seagulls. They are calling us mates,” says another one.

“Are we going down to say hello?” asks Glidy, the second in command.

“Let’s keep going,” says Fleo as the air squadron flies over Beaver Dam.

On the ground, Cutty gets up to find out his belly is on fire from all the crawling. He tries to put it out in between screams, but he ends up jumping in the water, which makes a simmering sound as a column of white smoke rises above the surface.

“I don’t think they got it, Cutty,” says Chewy.

“You didn’t shout loud enough, that’s why!” shouts Cutty as he comes out of the water with a smoking belly.

“Well, maybe you didn’t crawl hard enough!” shouts back Chewy.

“I didn’t? Look at me! I look like a used sandpaper on fire! Next time I’ll do the shouting and you do the crawling!” shouted Cutty as he walks deeper into the water to cool down his smoking belly.

After a few minutes have passed, Sneako feels that the air patrol is already far away, and gives the signal for all to come down from the bushes.

“OK guys, untangle yourselves!” commanded Sneako as everyone begins to come down from the bushes with a sign of relief.

“That was close, Sneako!” said Crawly with a relieved face.

“We must hide real well for the rest of the trip. Otherwise, they are going to spot us on their way back,” replied Sneako.

“But how do we know when they will turn back?” asked Tummy.

“We don’t Tummy, that’s why we must crawl at night,” replied Sneako.

“I hate crawling at night!” said Crawly.

“You are a snake Crawly, for crying out loud!” shouted Sneako while snapping his tail across Crawly’s face.

“Let’s wait for the night to continue. Put your bellies down boys,” said Sneako. “We are taking a long break until dark.”

**** End of Sample ****

“**Nest County**” is available at:

<http://www.nestcounty.com>