

21. Torresian Crows

No creature in the bush ever had a good word to say for the Torresian Crows. The general feeling was that they were a noisy, aggressive and mischievous species, always poking their strong beaks into what did not concern them, and never so happy as when they were annoying others. Whatever parent crows taught their chicks, civility and good manners were not included in the lessons; they were accomplishments for which none of the family had the slightest use.

It did not, however, trouble the crows at all that they were regarded in this light. Indeed, they rather gloried in the amount of ill feeling they were able to excite among the other bush inhabitants. Just like their far-flung relatives in Africa, Asia, Europe and North America, the Torresian Crows in Australia were powerful and intelligent birds. They were well able to hold their own in any quarrel with birds their own size, and so quick and daring that they would even steal from animals, or attack weak ones, secure in the advantage given them by their strong wings. They made so many enemies, however, that they took to going about in flocks, so that no one dared harass them - not even eagles, magpies or cockatoos.

The eagles, especially, detested the crows. The eagles were always proud, as the kings and queens of the birds. Among all birds that fly, their word was law. They liked to keep good order, and if any bird displeased them, a few quiet words were usually enough to bring the miscreant to their senses.

One day, an eagle admonished a crow who had stolen a Mopoke owl chick's meal from its mother. The crow, furious, flew away and told the other crows in its flock what had happened. They, equally furious, flew in a mob to the high crag where the eagle had its nest. There were no eagles in the nest at the time, so the crows amused themselves by pulling it to pieces.

When the eagle and its partner came home from hunting, the crows hid among the bushes, and screamed all sorts of insulting things at them. The eagles, who could see the white irises of the hiding crows, took no notice. It would have been beneath them to go hunting smaller birds in bushes - which the crows very well understood. The two eagles merely folded their wings and, perched on the edge of the rocky shelf where their nest had been, stared out across the hills below, their yellow eyes full of silent anger. Gradually, the crows grew tired of "uk-uk-uk-uk-ing" and "ok-ok-ok-ok-ing", and, becoming hungry, they all flew away.

(Adapted from *The Stone Axe of Burkamukk* by Mary Grant Bruce)

1. Where do Torresian Crows live?
 - A. In Europe.
 - B. In Asia.
 - C. In Australia.
 - D. In Africa.
2. Which words in the story mean 'wild or uncultivated countryside'?
 - A. *the bush* (line 1)
 - B. *North America*
 - C. *high crag*
 - D. *rocky shelf*

22. The Coming Wave

In the south-west the clouds were dense and black, indicating the approach of heavy rain. In the east, just as dense and black, was another mass of clouds; and the two storms seemed to be building to their zenith. The dense black clouds approached slowly. As the evening gloom increased, the lightning became more vivid, the zigzags of electricity darting from the inky masses of cloud which obscured the sky. The heavy thunder sounded nearer and nearer, indicating the imminent approach of the two storms. Scarcely did the lightning - almost instantly followed by the crash of the thunder - blaze and peal on one side of the ship, before a flaming bolt and startling roar came from the other side, as though the two tempests were vying with each other for the mastery of the air.

The Captain nervously walked his quarterdeck, after he had taken every precaution which a careful sailor could. He had done everything he could for the safety of the ship, but he blamed himself for coming into the bay when it was so near night. He had no reason to think this, as the change in the weather had been sudden and unexpected. It had been a summer day, and until late in the afternoon, when there was no wind to help him, the change could not have been anticipated.

The Captain was nervous, even though he was as familiar with the bay as he was with the rooms in his own house. He knew every island and headland, every rock and area of shallow water, every hidden sandbank only visible at low water, and the position of every lighthouse; but the barometer had warned him of nothing less than a hurricane. The *Waldo* was an old vessel, and not as seaworthy as she had been in her glory days, especially in a region prone to hurricanes.

So he had many misgivings as he paced the quarterdeck, watching the angry bolts of lightning, and listening to the deafening roar of the thunder. Occasionally he stopped at the rail round the ship's stern and gazed into the darkness in the west, from which his experience taught him the tempest would come. Then, at the foot of the mainmast he halted again, to listen for any sound that might come over the waters from the eastward; but his glances in this direction were brief and hurried, for he expected the storm to come from the other side.

(Adapted from *The Coming Wave* by William Taylor Adams)

1. '*The two storms seemed to be building to their zenith.*' This means the storms were...
 - A. getting weaker.
 - B. reaching their most powerful time.
 - C. combining together into an even bigger storm.
 - D. moving away from each other.
2. Another word for '*storm*' is...
 - A. tempest.
 - B. blaze.
 - C. peal.
 - D. mass.
3. The Captain of the ship was....
 - A. conscientious.
 - B. careless.
 - C. calm.
 - D. inexperienced.

4. The change in the weather was...
 - A. predictable.
 - B. forecast.
 - C. unexpected.
 - D. expected.

5. How often had the Captain sailed in the area the ship was in?
 - A. Rarely.
 - B. This was the first time.
 - C. Sometimes.
 - D. Frequently.

6. The Waldo was...
 - A. a new ship.
 - B. in excellent condition.
 - C. showing signs of damage.
 - D. a very reliable ship in stormy weather.

7. From which direction did the Captain expect the storm to come?
 - A. The north.
 - B. The south.
 - C. The west.
 - D. The east.

8. The ship's barometer (weather instrument) indicated that the storm would be...
 - A. weak.
 - B. very powerful.
 - C. quite strong.
 - D. over quickly.

9. What was dangerous about the ship's position?
 - A. It was too far away from the shore.
 - B. It was close to a lighthouse.
 - C. It was too near the shore.
 - D. It was in deep waters.

10. Complete the following analogy: Lightning is to bolt as thunder is to _____
 - A. flash.
 - B. clap.
 - C. explosion.
 - D. quick.

11. What kind of word is 'quarterdeck'?
 - A. A noun.
 - B. An adjective.
 - C. A verb.
 - D. An adverb.