

Ostrich Odyssey
By Chase Carrell

Fredrick woke up. He looked to his side and saw that the dark of night was still outside, so he shut his eyes and tried to go back to sleep. He heard something, a thump. He opened his eyes and looked up, and another thump was heard. Dust fell onto his face from the ceiling. Fredrick got up wearily. With his fuzzy pajamas on, he pulled the door to the attic open and ascended into the dark, lantern in hand. A rat scurried by, as he poked his head into the attic. He didn't see much, so he climbed up and investigated further. He crept across the attic, and eventually found the spot above his bed. The only thing he found was a wooden box. He decided he was imagining it and went to bed.

Fredrick O. Strich woke up, not remembering the events of the night much. He strode over to his closet and soon walked out of his manor with a neat, brown suit and a matching tie. Fredrick was a selfish man, who walked past the poor without ever giving them a second thought. Everything he did was strictly for his benefit. Once again, on his way to work he walked past the people on the streets performing for donations, or simply asking for spare change. The day went by as usual, in Regitown nothing changes very much. Then, as he strode home as the sun was setting, he remembered the peculiar event of the night before. He opened the door to his house and went up to the master bedroom. He opened the attic, a fine wooden trapdoor in his closet, and ascended up. He walked across the room and went to the box. He grabbed it, and it was cold to the touch. Not wanting to spend much time in the dark, he climbed downstairs. The box was locked. Fred was also an impatient man, so he grabbed a hammer and snapped the lock. He looked down into it and found a scroll of paper neatly tied up with a scarlet ribbon. This box must be very old, Fred thought. The paper and box were severely aged and yellowish. He undid the ribbon and unrolled the scroll. As he read the contents, giddy excitement rose within him.

It was a map. A map of Regitown in one corner, labeled with black ink, and an X in the other corner, with small writing above it. "*The third largest supply of gold in the world.*" It elaborated that this was a temple, built so long ago the sand now nearly covers it entirely. Fred, upon reading this, realized it was in the middle of a desert. This desert spanned many miles in all directions, with some of the steepest canyons in the continent. This would be an incredibly dangerous journey if this map was to be believed. He thought about this for a while. No horse would cross a desert round trip, but he couldn't walk either. Then he thought of it. An ostrich. His name was O. Strich, of course. Now that he thought about it, it was pretty humorous. It was as if he was meant for this.

Fred woke up, and quickly remembered everything about the map and the gold. He zipped out of bed, hardly spending the time to put on a proper suit. He didn't even wear a tie. Back to his mission, he left the manor. "Gold like that and I can build five more companies if I wanted," he kept endlessly repeating to himself in his head. He went with the alibi that he was taking a vacation and left the vice president of Strich Industries in charge of his company. Now, all he had to do was find someone who sells... ostriches. He frantically asked anyone who looked important if they knew who sells ostriches. He was too busy thinking about his gold to realize that he looked insane to everyone he spoke to. After a while of answers like "I have no idea," he asked one more person. He said in a low voice, "Oddly enough I do, just read the day's paper, take a look." In the paragraph the person was pointing to, was an advertisement for someone who sells exotic animals. Ostriches were among the list, and Fred thanked the man and ran to go find this person.

An hour later, Fred was on the back of an ostrich. He rode horses before, so it wasn't too different. Using his map, he started to ride off. Passing the brick gateway marking the border, he was officially out of Regitown. Regitown was temperate, with little to no wilderness. But if you went even a bit away, it was pure forest for miles. He tucked his map away in a pouch on the ostrich saddle, next to the sword. The ostrich, which he named after the legend of King Midas, had trouble navigating the forest. Half an hour later and the trees receded. There was now only a great field between him and the desert. He took a swig of his water and ate one of the berries he packed along with his water. Food might be a problem, but he could deal with it.

Nightfall started to take the sky. Fred stopped at a valley and pitched a tent, which his ostrich was also carrying. The ostrich, Midas, went to sleep, tethered near his tent. He rested his head, and soon fell asleep. Fredrick woke up, and immediately started off, after packing his supplies. A few hours after embarking, he crossed into the desert. Although Fred had to change into lighter clothes, Midas seemed to be going faster across the flat desert. The heat was intense and never ending. Fredrick felt like he was going to faint, even though he wasn't even walking. Every time he inhaled; he was met with the strange scent of petrichor. He took a swig of water, but it was warm. Fred was exhausted, defeated, and tired. Then, as Midas waded the endless dunes which stung your eyes with brightness, he saw something remarkable.

Past the fields of sand and cacti, there was something green and tall. It was a tree! Multiple trees, they looked like palm trees. And to Fredrick's bewilderment, a small creek. Water in the middle of the desert. Midas saw it too. Midas ran over to the oasis, and there it was. Fred has never felt so hungry. He was just made aware that his stomach has been growling like a beast, constantly. He had never been this hungry before, he always had food made for him by butlers. He trotted to the oasis, desperate for anything. He went to the creek, and saw that Midas was drinking from it. He took a sip, and it was refreshing beyond what Fred thought possible. Fred splashed his face with the freshwater. He managed to grab some blueberries from a bush and ate them happily. He set up the tent again and slept.

The next day he was riding again, with his map. He was closer than ever; in a few hours he would reach where it should be. He also had a lot of time to think. He felt the desperation for food, the immense hunger. He now felt what those people begging for food felt. Fredrick felt something he had not felt for a very long time: empathy. He decided right on the spot, that he would spend the gold on homes for the homeless. He thought to himself, "what if I could change the world by finding homes for everyone so no one ever has to be homeless?" As the sun beat down on him, he regretted all the times he was selfish. He now realized that he has been selfish for most of his life. He rode faster and eventually he was there. After all this time, he was at the X. He had found the treasure. But he saw nothing but sand. Fredrick felt sick, what if this map was wrong? He had never considered it. He saw how irrational he had been, going on a journey across the desert because a map told him to. Desperate to find something, anything to prove that this was worth it, he noticed something strange about where he was. There was a cactus that looked like all of the other cacti, except that it had no pricks. There was nothing pointy on it, a small detail but very strange. He got off of Midas and was shocked at how the sand hurt his feet, even with his shoes. He also realized how bad he smelled. He trotted over to the cactus and touched it. It was hot, like the sand that burned his shoes. He heard the tiniest crack, so faint he thought he imagined it. He pushed the cactus, using more force. It fell over, as one whole piece, and crumbled like it was made of dust. Underneath was a hatch. He opened the hatch, and the sunlight filled the space below. There was a small drop onto a sandstone floor.

Next to the opening there was a wall with indents in it, so you could climb back up. He jumped into the opening.

It was dark, very dark. Beyond the spot of the sunlit floor that he jumped onto, he could see nothing but vague shapes. He continued forward, regretting that he didn't get a flashlight. He felt his way forward, taking small steps and sticking his arms out to see if there were any walls around him. From what he had gathered in the pitch black, it was a narrow hallway. He looked back, and saw the opening, wondering if he would return. He sprinted back to the opening, noticing something. On the floor there was a torch, with no flame. He held it up in the light, and he used a scrap of wood to start a fire. With his torch, he walked down the hallway.

After what felt like an eternity, he reached the end of the hall. He had lit the burnt-out torches mounted on the wall on his way. At the end sat a door, it was tall and looked like stone. He hit his fist on the door in frustration. *Crack!* The door now had a crack in it. Like the cactus, it was also brittle. He kicked it, and part of the door fell off. He looked into the opening beyond, and tossed his torch in. With a metallic clunk, it fell on something shiny. Gold. Fredrick walked in, and he was walking on gold. He lit the torches along the treasury walls. He laughed out loud. "I found it!" he shouted. The floor had gold bars on it and the walls were lined with chests. He opened the chests, and they were filled with golden coins.

A week later, he returned to his town. Three weeks had gone by since he originally departed, and he came back lugging a pallet with several chests on it. There was a long walk between Regitown's entrance and his manor, but he was happy to walk it. He tossed gold coins to every performer or beggar he saw. He bought homes for everyone that needed one and made sure that no one in his town had to ever be hungry again. He came back a new man, and he gave all of his coins away over the course of his life. He always remembered his struggle that day on the back of that Ostrich and he vowed to never let anyone in his town struggle and be without help again!