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about 695 words

**GROK AND THE DODOS, 499,982 BC-**  
*(another story about cavemen)*  
By Paul Lambrecht

The vast and lonely steppes, plucked from the pages of some Siberian novel.

Ranging ravening wolves, swirling winds, tentacled trees, spectacled ponds.

Dense thickets of spruce. Deep hidden-away primordial lakes. A stark rugged landscape, perfect for a stark rugged man.

Or a dodo. Or a bunch of dodos. A whole flock. The dodo emerges from behind a frosted tuft of tundraed hillock. Its plumage splayed up and bright vermilion, like a coxcomb.

Hoar frost on the ground.

Endless white domes as far as they eye can see. A sky-blue patina on the ground, as faint as an albino iris. God's eyes frozen open. The spruce shifting in the wind like whiskers of an enormous arctic cat.

Grok sat before his fire. No one else around for a thousand square miles. No spirits even. Just pure virgin unknown territory. Yet he was not alone. There were ptarmigans, hares, owls, marmots, foxes, wolverines, she-bears, he-wolves, and dodos.

Yes, dodos. The pride of northern Pangea.

They roamed our ancestral supercontinent in enormous packs like avian locusts, sending up plumes of dust, gouging the ground with their sharp claws. Their swarm sending all their woodland creatures scurrying away from their frightening warlike clucks.

Grok had tracked the dodo horde for over 30,000 miles he figured. He was currently camped in the shadow of Gunsight Mountain. Listening. Always listening.

His heart lusted after the elusive dodo; his incisors ached for their tender gamey flesh.

A dodo sighting meant good luck. To be trampled underneath their fierce talons was bliss itself. A one-way ticket to Bog's eternal bosom.

So Grok listened. And wept.

Wept and listened. He was weeping because he felt so darned out of place. He had no idea why he'd dragged himself so far out into the hinterlands. The temperature had dipped exceedingly since he crossed that last set of mountains. In recent months, the trail of the dodo had become proportionately cold.

He couldn't even remember what a darned dodo looked like. Pert supple beak, standoffish demeanor, strong squat haunches. Bloody beautiful bird.

A rain now crossed over the peak behind him and pelted him into the springy tundra. His matted hair and loosely draped flea-infested furs soaked up the bitter rain like a sponge.

The fire flickered and sputtered for dry air. Grok's bones ached from the wind and the cold. An overture of thunder and lightning crashed against the sopping storm clouds now and illuminated the backdrop of mountain outcroppings like deranged gargoyles.

He was now terminally miserably ill. The gargoyles grinned at his misery.

The rain turned to a drenching snow. Dark colorless clumps. It settled debris-like around him and warmed him up a little, like a signal of peace.

The night closed in like fingers massaging his massively pronounced brow.

At that moment, Grok saw in the almost invisible light, an inky blackness making its way down the slope of Gunsight. Grok recognized the dot further ahead than the blob as the alpha dodo. They had come!

In the light of the ascendant moon, Grok saw the churn of snow strewn up in their wake.

He heard a low rumble of thunder far away accompanying the last wisps of lightning from the departing storm. The dodos drew closer, uniform, soldierly, precise, disciplined. Grok grasped for his club. A dodo swarm descended like an all-powerful all-controlling and dreadful chimera: head of a goat, paws of a lion, legs of an antelope. Breathing fire.

They set upon him parting on either side like the Reed Sea, pecking at his shins, drawing blood and chunks from his flesh like prefiguration of stigmata. They squawked

loudly, their feet splayed out to keep from sliding away in the slippery snow.

The dodos all passed by, and all that remained was the rapture of one tiny man. A man far from home, cold and snowy and alone, stranded on an island in a crush of effaced footprints. Grok took in the matter of the moment as best he could muster, and then headed off south towards his abandoned home.

**END.**