

THROWING ROCKS AT DEER

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I run the trails at the foothills of the Wasatch Mountains bordering Salt Lake City on a daily basis and rarely do I fail to spot a deer staring at me a distance ahead with its doe eyes and radar ears directed toward me. As I approach the animal it turns tail and bounds gracefully away, disappearing over a ridge or behind a patch of scrub oak. In fact, at times I will see an entire herd grazing along a hillside suspiciously watching this odd human animal which—in their graceful eyes—so clumsily, almost painfully, trots along the path on two heavy legs for no apparent reason other than some strange daily human migration.

Once in a while I will rudely startle an unwary deer at close range as I round a corner or crest a hilltop and it will take off in full flight until it achieves a comfortable distance.

Of course, I could never hope to pursue and enjoy a good game of “chase the deer” as I have seen with some of the more fleet-of-foot dogs I have known. This is too bad, because trail running would then take on the character of a game and make the sport of running much more interesting. But alas, me chasing a deer is like a turtle chasing a cheetah and bushwhacking through the scrub oak would surely result in disaster as I trip over the deadfall, stumble over rocks and suffer innumerable scratches from the branches and bushes that the deer seem totally immune to.

And so I allowed myself to be subjected to a feeling of inferiority as these fleet, graceful animals so effortlessly move over the land whilst I sweat and jog along the trail, trying to make it look as effortless as possible, but never succeeding when compared to the surrounding wildlife.

I suppose in that sense I became jealous of the deer and as we all know, jealousy creates negative emotions and negative emotions cause irrational acts and so it has done with me.

Eventually I found a way to get back at the deer. I would use my human advantage—the thing that separates man from beast and makes humankind the superior species—namely my two free limbs and opposable thumbs.

And so, one bright day I hit the trail, ready to express my jealousy. I found a rock of sufficient size and shape that I might propel it through the air at a much faster pace than the deer. This would demonstrate my ability to contact the fleeing animal, thus proving my superiority.

With this primitive tool in hand, I began my obsession with throwing rocks at deer.

Yet with innumerable opportunities and despite what I feel is an accurate throwing arm—well trained in bygone days playing baseball—I seemed utterly incapable of propelling a rock to its intended target. I suspect one of my many throws may have succeeded on occasion as the rock appeared to be on target as the bounding deer disappeared over a ridge or behind a clump of scrub oak. But the animals never gave me sign that I had succeeded in my game. Never a bleat of pain or a flinch, or a slight check in stride did I see from the bolting deer to give me satisfaction that I was once again the superior species.

Nevertheless, I continued to pursue my evil game and harass the wildlife of the region with my futile attempts to demonstrate my human prowess.

Then, one fateful day, another seemingly innocuous opportunity presented itself.

The trail followed along the side of a ravine about 200 feet wide and there I spotted a number of deer—a harem of doe's and their noble buck—grazing on the opposite slope. Of course they were aware of my presence but obviously they felt secure in their distance from this slow moving man of ill repute.

As always, I had a well-chosen rock in my hand—prepared for the chance encounter with an unvigilant deer. I turned my attention to the six-point buck nonchalantly feeding on the side opposite side of the ravine and choose it as my next target—though it be at the limits of my throwing capacity.

Carefully estimating the distance, I drew back and gave a mighty thrust of arm propelling the object on a plotted course toward the unsuspecting buck. Considering the extreme distance, the trajectory of the rock sent it high into the air. I stood there watching my rock as it gained altitude against the background of blue sky, growing smaller and smaller, finally reaching its peak, then gradually gaining speed as it plunged down toward the intended victim.

I had little confidence in the throw considering the distance and my dismal record, yet as I watched the rock descend, my confidence grew. Then as the rock neared its destination it became lost in the backdrop of the rocky ground for a split second but it was then that I received sweet confirmation that I had indeed been successful on this day.

Suddenly the buck uncharacteristically and rather spasmodically leaped into the air, then, being ill-prepare for the jump, landed oddly on its hoofs and fell to the ground, rolling over and sliding clumsily a short distance down the side of the ravine.

“Yes!” I cried in joyous enthusiasm, thrusting my fist forward like an Olympian who has won the gold!

I laughed crassly at the thoroughly embarrassed buck as it regained its feet and fled the scene. I could almost hear the surrounding doe’s snickering at their lord and master as he fell so shamefully from grace.

After a good long belly laugh, I continue my run, chuckling all along the way, the victorious smile never leaving my face.

That was a good day as I experienced the realization of my malevolent goal and the re-establishment of the superiority of humankind.

Afterward I happily bragged the story to those who would listen and yet was often rebuffed when the more benevolent of my friends scowled and asked critically “You throw rocks at deer? How mean!”

Mean? I never thought of it as mean. It was merely good sport! Yes it may be backed by a somewhat pernicious intention, but so is a linebacker’s intention when he viciously sacks the quarterback. Does he not receive accolades from the cheering crowd and an outrageous monetary reward for his work?

I chose to ignore the negative comments and continue to run the trails, rock in hand, prepared to fling it at the next unsuspecting victim.

And yes, I may have cast a rock or two at other animals, birds, squirrels, even a chance encounter with a fox. Furthermore, I may have justified this with the consideration that my aim was certainly not accurate enough to actually achieve success. But I must confess to you now, I was indeed making an honest attempt. Had the rock—by mere chance—struck its mark and left the poor animal dead or hopelessly maimed, I will indeed have that to answer for when I arrived at the pearly gates. A sin is a sin.

I can tell you now that no sin goes unpunished for now I have the proof.

A short time later I was on my mountain bike pedaling up the road adjacent to the ravine where the fateful encounter with the buck occurred.

It was near dusk. The road bordered the foothills and as sometimes occurs at this time in the evening, a small herd of deer were moving across the road to the lower slopes—seemingly disregarding the one thing they should perceive as a foe—the automobile. On this

evening, as often happens, the few cars on the road had courteously stopped and allowed the animals to traverse the road in peace, undisturbed by roaring engine or blinding light.

Not impressed by what the others thought was a lovely wildlife scene, I continued on past the cars, intending to continue my ride, unimpeded by the crossing herd. To one side, the bulk of the herd stood alongside the road, presumably intending to cross, on the other side, a few doe's had completed their crossing.

It was then that I spotted the herd master buck standing amongst the doe's preparing to cross the street. Likewise, the buck spotted me.

In retrospect, did I spot a slight scowl on the face of the buck? I am sure it was there because at that moment the buck inexplicably turned toward me and began to sprint. Within seconds the beast was galloping at my side! I found myself in the uncharacteristic position, not as the pursuer but the persuee!

I don't know how to act when being chased by a heavily antlered buck on a bicycle. It's seemed so surreal. What was I to do in self defense? Do I swear at it? Do I growl, or scream? I certainly wouldn't venture to grab its horns and, like a calf wrestler, bring it to the ground! No this was foreign territory—tantamount to trying to determine one's actions when an alien spaceship appears hovering overhead. There is simply no programmed social response for the situation.

I could hear the clack of his hooves on the pavement as buck and biker continue down the road. His horns were inches from my legs as they frantically churned the pedals, trying to outpace a deer that I couldn't possibly hope to evade on a mountain bike.

"Yeeah! Git! Ho! Yaa!" Is all I could manage in my semi-panicked state as the buck matched me pedal for pedal, hoof for hoof.

I recall in the instant wondering what would be its next move? Would it turn suddenly and impale me with its rack of sharp horns? Would it knock me off my bike and attack me with a flurry of sharp hoofs, then skewer me on its rack? All these possibilities ran through my mind as bike and deer engaged in what appeared to an incident of tooth and claw—of survival of the fittest—myself not being the fitter of the two on this playing field.

Then, suddenly, effortlessly the buck moved ahead of me, veered in front and came thankfully to a stop alongside the road as I continued on by, pedaling frantically down the road glancing back often to confirm that my fleet pursuer had not resumed the chase.

As my pounding heart once again returned to a normal beat and the adrenaline faded from my bloodstream I thoughtfully contemplated the events that had just unfolded.

Somehow, it must have been the same buck that I so rudely embarrassed a few days before!

I couldn't help but admire the irony. I had embarrassed the buck in front of its peers earlier that week. Now the buck had just embarrassed me in front of my peers parked along the road. I could just hear them laughing uncontrollably in their cars as they saw a man on a bike frantically fleeing a charging buck.

It was merely karma? Did the buck know I was the one who had thrown the rock? That's crazy! But how can a human presume to know the perceptions and the cognitive powers of a deer? Maybe he recognized me from that embarrassing day and saw the opportunity to take his revenge upon me and thereby regain his dignity and the respect of his harem of doe's.

I think not. I reason that it may not have been the same buck. It was just an arbitrary dominant male protecting his herd. That to me makes more sense.

But I simply cannot deny the maxim that *payback is a bitch* and in one way or another, that which you reap, you too shall sow.

Will I continue to throw rocks at deer? Yes, I believe I will. And will I have to bear my comeuppance if another successful act should occur? Probably. But I will continue to throw my rocks and I am prepared for the consequence of that act—be it karma or the conscious revenge of a deer or possibly the wrath of Mother Nature.

Consider this my confession and let those who seek to rid the world of sin engage me in their attempt at my rehabilitation. I welcome it. I can change.

For now, I carry a rock in my hand on my runs. Forgive me Mother Nature, for I know not what I do.

It's just a fun game.