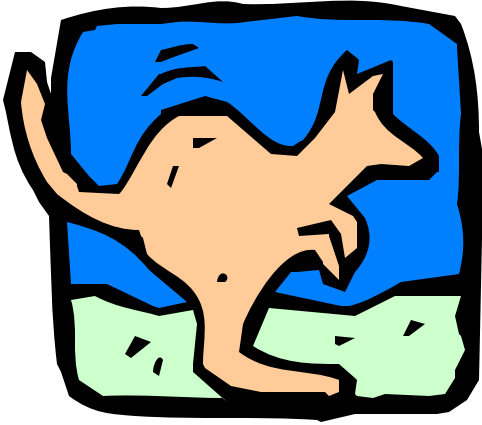


The Dreamtime

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There is a tribe of Aboriginal Australians that has never integrated into any other community and still roams the outback on foot. As they fan out across the desert every day foraging for their livelihood, sometimes separated from each other by considerable distances and natural obstacles, they keep in touch by telepathy. They say that long, long ago, in the dreamtime when all things were created, this form of communication was common to all mankind. Everyone's awareness was in a constant state of receptiveness and everybody could drop in on each other's minds at any time and exchange information. More like a group mind than a local area network, it was a survival system among people who believed that the tribe was more important than the individual.

As human beings grew more civilized, they also became more complex and developed a desire for privacy. There were now things in their minds they preferred to keep hidden from the rest of the tribe, parts

of themselves they no longer wished to reveal. They learned to block access to their minds and in so doing, of course, initiated the deterioration and eventual collapse of the ancient system of nonverbal communication. But there are signs that all is not completely lost.



Pecans were everywhere this fall. They say the good crop was due to all the rain. The wet weather did wonders for the autumn leaves as well. Their chorus of red and gold was more exuberant than usual.

The back yard was densely packed with fallen nuts. Under every footstep, every shrub. We'd been picking them up for a week or so, storing them in cardboard boxes to dry out under cover. We crawled around, plucking pecans from the ground, squeezing them gently to see if their shells were still strong. Lillian thought they'd make great stocking-stuffers. I was thrilled to think of them as free food, just lying around in the yard. I imagine we can look forward to a crop of plump little squirrels chasing each other around tree trunks next summer.

One afternoon as I picked up a pecan, I saw another one lying very nearby. As I reached for the second pecan I saw a third just beyond the second one. As I reached for the third one I remembered a dream I've had off and on for years. In the dream I see a bright, shiny coin lying on the ground. As I pick up

the coin, I see another lying nearby. As I reach for the second coin, I see a third just beyond it. Then I see a cluster of about five coins, then further on, there are six or eight in a line, then about a dozen scattered off to one side, and beyond that there are deep drifts of coins and then huge hills of coins. . . . At this point I usually wake up screaming and thrashing around wildly.

My plastic bucket was almost full when Lillian came out of the house to join me. She was walking towards me when she stopped suddenly, her eyes on the ground. She bent down and as she picked up a pecan she saw another. She reached for the second pecan and saw a third. As she picked up the third she said, "This reminds me of a recurring dream I've had for years."

Her dream was identical to mine, except for the actual booty: my coins came in various currencies while hers were always quarters. And none of them tasted anywhere near as good as those pecans. ★

