

# Animal Farm: Chapter 8 - Napoleon's Cult and the Battle of the Windmill

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## Summary

Some animals think they remember the Sixth Commandment saying that animals should not kill each other. Clover asks Benjamin to read it. He refuses. Muriel reads instead: "No animal shall kill any other animal WITHOUT CAUSE." Clover thinks perhaps the commandment always included this clause. She cannot be sure.

Napoleon is rarely seen in public now. When he does appear, it is with ceremonial pomp: an escort of dogs, a black cockerel that marches ahead to trumpet his arrival. He eats off Crown Derby china. He is referred to as "our Leader, Comrade Napoleon" and by an expanding list of titles. A poem by Minimus is painted on the barn wall beside a portrait of him. Animals credit Napoleon with good weather, high egg yields, and clean water.

Napoleon negotiates the sale of the timber pile. Rumour alternates: he is selling to Pilkington; then to Frederick; then back to Pilkington. Snowball has been reported sheltering at Pinchfield, which makes Frederick a suspect. Then Snowball is reported living in luxury at Foxwood. Three hens confess that Snowball inspired them to plot Napoleon's assassination; they are executed.

Napoleon announces he has decided to sell to Pilkington and declares Frederick an enemy. The pigeons change their slogan to "Death to Frederick." Then, two days later, Napoleon announces he has sold to Frederick after all. He has negotiated Frederick up twelve pounds and will be paid in cash. The animals admire the banknotes. Three days later, Mr. Whympers arrives with devastating news: the notes are forgeries. Napoleon sentences Frederick to death.

Frederick and fifteen men attack the following morning. They have guns. The animals cannot stand up to the weapons and retreat to the farm buildings. Frederick's men plant explosives at the base of the windmill. The windmill is blown up. Enraged, the animals charge. They are outgunned and suffer casualties. Eventually they drive the men out, but at cost. Boxer notes that they have won back only what they had before. Squealer insists it was a great victory. Napoleon awards himself the "Order of the Green Banner."

A few days later, the pigs discover a case of whisky in the farmhouse cellar. That night the animals hear loud singing from the farmhouse, and Napoleon is seen galloping around the yard wearing Mr. Jones's old hat. In the morning, Squealer announces that Napoleon is dying: he has been poisoned. Napoleon's last order, Squealer says, is that drinking alcohol shall henceforth

be punishable by death. By the following afternoon, Napoleon is entirely recovered. He orders Mr. Whymper to purchase books on brewing and distilling. The pasture set aside for retired animals is to be planted with barley instead.

Later, at about midnight, the animals hear a crash from the barn. They find Squealer lying stunned on the ground next to the Seven Commandments, a paintbrush in one hand and a pot of white paint nearby. No one can understand what this means. A few days later, Muriel notices that the commandment she thought forbade drinking now reads: "No animal shall drink alcohol TO EXCESS."

## Analysis

The chapter is Orwell's most concentrated treatment of the cult of personality and its machinery. Napoleon's titles, his ceremonial appearances, his portrait, his poem, his credit for every positive event on the farm: all of this mirrors the iconography of totalitarian leadership as Orwell observed it in the Soviet Union and fascist Europe. The animals who credit Napoleon with good weather are not stupid; they have been conditioned to see his authority as total, so his authority must extend to everything.

The timber negotiations show Napoleon's strategic intelligence and its limits. He has played the two neighbours against each other effectively; he has driven up the price. But he has also been deceived by forgeries, which demonstrates the weakness of operating without any independent verification or counsel. He has eliminated everyone around him who might have told him Frederick was untrustworthy.

The Battle of the Windmill is the chapter's action centrepiece. The windmill, representing years of the animals' labour and Napoleon's claimed vision, is destroyed in minutes. The animals win the engagement but lose the windmill. Boxer's assessment -- that they have won back only what they had before -- is the chapter's honest summary. Squealer's counter-claim -- that it is a great victory -- is the chapter's dishonest one. Napoleon's self-awarded medal is the chapter's most sardonic detail.

The alcohol episode is the chapter's darkest comedy. Napoleon mistakes a hangover for poisoning and orders that drinking should be a capital offence. By the following afternoon he is well and ordering brewing supplies. The commandment is amended to read to excess, the sixth significant amendment. The falling Squealer with the paintbrush is the only direct evidence in the novel that the commandments are being altered at night.

## Themes

- **The cult of personality:** Napoleon's titles, ceremonies, portrait, and poem are the institutional expression of the regime's claim that all good things flow from the leader. The animals who credit him with the weather are not being satirised for stupidity; they are demonstrating the success of a conditioning programme.
- **The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact:** The timber sale to Frederick, followed immediately by Frederick's attack using forged banknotes, is the novel's direct parallel to the 1939 non-aggression pact between Stalin and Hitler. The forgeries represent the worthlessness of Hitler's guarantees; the attack represents the invasion of 1941.
- **Victory and its performance:** The Battle of the Windmill is presented by Napoleon and Squealer as a great victory. Boxer's honest observation that they have won back only what they had before is the chapter's realist counter-claim. Orwell uses the tension between these two readings to illustrate how authoritarian regimes manufacture triumph from failure.
- **Language and the sixth amendment:** The amendment to to excess preserves the form of prohibition while abolishing its substance. Napoleon was drunk and initially said drinking was a capital offence; by the next day, drinking to excess is the offence. The amendment allows the regime to do exactly what it prohibited itself from doing, without formally reversing the prohibition.