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The Maze

Toward the end of the third year of wandering in the midst of a dense forest, the editor of a prestigious medical journal emerged from a high privet hedge into a clearing. The old wise man whom he had encountered previously elsewhere in the forest was sitting on a large rock at the far end of the clearing.

"Hello there", the old man said, "I've been expecting you. Well, it's been another year. You've been wandering in a maze, the maze of medical publishing. I had hoped that you would avoid it, but sooner or later, every medical journal editor gets caught up in it. I should have warned you. In any event, you're in a clearing now. Why don't you tell me about it?"

"Well, I thought I had become accustomed to the dense vegetation. I was beginning to see the forest instead of just the trees. Then I encountered a strange group. They were swinging axes, destroying everything in their path... trees or a project that had been left unprotected. They were ferocious and apparently insatiable. Then they saw me. They told me how glad they were that I had arrived, and they offered to help...they would provide resources, whatever I needed for the job they wanted me to do."

"That sounds pretty good."

"Yes! and then they said that my project was their highest priority; nothing else was as important to their group."

"Well, what happened next?"

"Almost immediately, they started to chop up whatever I made. They said that they couldn't help it. They just needed to do it. They told me to keep up my work on the project. After all, it was their highest priority, but 'perhaps I could do it with less resources'. And, 'what was the possibility of increasing the scope of the project?'"

"What a dreadful experience! I guess the maze hasn't gotten any easier. All of your predecessors told me the same story. That group is known for their ability to chop and cut. They can be destructive to wandering editors."

"Oh, you've heard of them before. What unnatural force is this?"

"Young man, they're known as the budget committee. At least you survived the encounter. They're pretty nasty, but that's what they're supposed to do. Where are you going?"

"Back into the maze. If I'm ever going to get through this forest, I had better get on with it."

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