

The Judges Chronicles: The Silver Horn

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Introduction: Returning to Sin

Gabriel, the first king of Shavron, led Shavron in righteousness. As long as Gabriel was king the Shavronites followed God whole-heartedly. However, after the death of Gabriel and after the death of all children that Holy One delivered from the world of night, there was another generation who forgot God. The Shavronites once again returned to sin by erecting a statue of Gabriel to worship it. In its hands they placed the silver horn, once a possession of Slavebourne, believing it was Gabriel who opened the world of night. They called him the "Great Deliverer" and bowed down to it. They also returned to worshipping Iya's moon goddess, sacrificing young and old to her. It was a wicked in the Holy One's eyes and he sent prophets to warn the Shavronites, but they would not heed to the word of God. It is here that the third chronicle begins.

Chapter 1: Day of the Tigers

For one hundred years the Holy One watched the wicked practice of Iya reign in the land. The king over that land was Jerid, a black panther who became king through deceit and malice, and he ruled by those means as well. His poison spread through the land so that the citizens of Shavron followed their own desires; far worse than the days of Jezerah and the devil fox. However, even in all this wickedness there was a creature, an old badger named Tilmis, a judge of commerce that remembered the Holy One and his ways. The old badger was sitting at his desk, by candlelight, with his head planted upon one of his hands. He was frustrated and pain-stricken by the sounds around him. He heard a scream of terror, and then it stopped suddenly in the night. The badger's face turned to the sound, as tears filled his eyes. Instantly, he heard a chorus of chanting. Tilmis ran to his window, and far into the city he saw an amber light. He knew what it meant: a citizen had just been sacrificed to a Iya's moon god. Anger burned inside him and he shouted into the streets: "Murders! God sees what you do! This sin will destroy us!"

His call was never heard under the incessant chanting in the night.

Righteousness was snuffed out throughout the years and few remembered the stories of courage and repentance. Tilmis looked up to the heavens with watery eyes.

"Why won't they listen? O Lord, do you mean nothing to them anymore?"

It came to pass on that summer night, while the badger continued to wail over the recent occurrence, that the Lord came to Tilmis and said,

"Tilmis, Shavron has become a stench in my nostrils. The king has left me and in the process has led the country in dark pathways instead of light. I will bring upon this land a dreadful plague, it will be known as the day of the tigers. On that day, many will be taken into captivity, while others will fall to the sword and the arrow. They will go to a land far from here. Since Shavron bows to dead gods, I will show them what it means to serve one. But I will show mercy to Shavron again. Therefore, go to the king and tell him this message:

If you continue in your ways of wickedness, I will destroy your reign and the land itself. The Shavronites will be mocked and scorned. But if you would turn back to me and follow My ways, I will not destroy you. I will remove the day of the tigers from you."

When the morning came, Tilmis went to the palace of the king. He was nervous. He rubbed his hands together as he repeated the Holy One's message to himself. He had good reason to be nervous. He had brought a message, like the one last night, six times before not only to the king, but to the Shavronites as well. With every message he got the same response: indifference. Now this was the seventh time; and Tilmis was afraid not only for his life, but for Shavron too. Once he entered the palace door, the guards escorted him to the king. Jerid was reclining on a long chair, eating a bundle of grapes. He paid no attention to the old badger. Tilmis had to clear his throat to get a response from the king. The panther placed the bundle of grapes on a silver platter and purred before speaking.

"Oh! My faithful judge of commerce, have you come to annoy me again? Or, have you come to tell the news from the merchants' grove? Have you brought me more riches?"

"No, but I have brought you something." said the badger nervously.

When Jerid heard this, he was thinking of a special gift that Tilmis may have brought him. He was also hoping that Tilmis had forgotten about the messages from the Holy One. He sat up in his chair, with wide eyes, and demanded his gift.

"There is nothing to show, but I have something to tell you."

"Not one of your silly messages from the Lord," the panther said slouching even more than before, "Shouldn't you be traveling or something?"

"Jerid, the Lord spoke to me last night. Shavron is in grave danger. The Holy One is angry. He threatens to send a dark plague among us if you and the Shavron do not turn away from the evil you do."

Jerid rolled his eyes.

"I speak of truth!" he said sternly, "The idolatry in this kingdom surpasses those in others. It has even gone beyond the days of the past rulers. Do you not hear the screams in the middle of the night?"

"I have and still do," said Jerid, "But as long as it doesn't bother me why should I interfere? If their gods demand sacrifice I see no harm in that." he said hunching his shoulders, "The law I gave states that any Shavronite may worship anything as long as it does not affect the well-being of the monarchy. It keeps them happy, Tilmis, and it keeps me secure on my throne."

"It's a foolish law!"

Jerid shot straight up from his reclined position. His eyes were fixed on the badger as he spoke.

"Be careful how you speak to me. Although you are a judge, I am still king. To call the law foolish is to call the king foolish. Besides," he said as his temper subsided, "why can't you be like the other two judges? They don't bother me about matters of the Holy One. All that stuff is so long ago. Hey, maybe you need a little more revenue to calm yourself,

eh?" he said rubbing two fingers together.

Tilmis made his way to the door, but before he left he turned and said,

"Take the words of the Holy One to heart. Do as He says or your reign will end."

"Is that a threat to the king!" shouted Jerid.

"It is not a threat from me; it is a command from our Creator."

"Get out I will not see you face again and if I do it will be you last day alive."

"You have spoken correctly on this matter," said Tilmis, "You will not see my face again. The badger left the king's palace. The Holy One came to Tilmis during the night.

"I will tolerate this no longer," said the Holy One, "Shavron has forgotten Me and treats Me as a jester. The tigers are coming. They will destroy the buildings, the statues, and the livelihood of this land. You will leave tonight---take nothing with except the silver horn the Shavronites placed in the statue of Gabriel. I will settle you down in peace in your remaining days; but for the others, either death or captivity will be their option. However, I will not forget my love for the Shavronites. There will come a time when they will return to serve me again, but until then they will serve evil and know its sting."

The badger obeyed the Lord and he went up to Gabriel's statue unawares and took the silver horn. When the day of the tigers came to Shavron, king Jerid was taken by surprise. A soldier from the east gate sent a message stating that a multitude of tigers were marching in their direction with all sorts of nasty war devices. Jerid sent as many soldiers, at least those that weren't too lazy to respond, to counter the force of the tigers, but this was pointless. By the time the soldiers reached the east gate, the tigers had already broken through the wall and were pillaging everything in sight. The tigers wiped out Jerid's army, leveled all of the building in Shavron, killed Jerid and the two judges, and took the crown and crests as part of their spoil. Over the next few days, the tigers did the same thing to the other cities. The conquest was made easy: for the Lord used the tigers as His instrument of judgment.

The tigers took prisoners and those that they could not, or those who refused, were killed. It was a dark day for the Shavronites. They were chained and led far away to a land called Tajir. Even some died because of the long journey. So it came to pass that the Holy One's judgment fell upon Shavron. Nothing was left in the land that was of value; Shavron became a wasteland. But as God promised He would not let his wrath burn against the Shavronites forever.

Chapter 2: The Land of Tajir

Two hundred and seventy- four years passed since the mournful day against Shavron. In the land of Tajir, in a city call *Bal-Malfest*, a kitten dashes through the stone paved streets, carrying a package on his back. He ducks and dodges between tigers to get to his destination. He turns his head frequently to glance at his friend who is right on his heels.

"Stay close and hurry up we're already late." said the kitten.

Now this kitten, which seems to be distressed over his punctuality, is called Yohan.

Yohan was born in the land of Tajir. His parents called him the *spotted-child* because although his siblings' fur was of one pure color, parts of his fur were dappled with black, white and brown. His red jacket flapped in the breeze as he continued to run. His friend, who was also carrying a sack on his back, is a young kangaroo named Maligo. Maligo

was born in Tajir as well, but he was treated quite differently than Yohan because he was a Shavronite. Both children were becoming winded from the athletic effort, but Yohan spotted a tiger pulling a cart full of clay jars. He signaled for Maligo to follow him. The kitten ran up to the back of the cart, being careful as not to be seen, and jumped in. He looked to see if Maligo was behind him.

"Maligo," he whispered, looking over the sides of the cart, "Maligo where are you?" The cart hit a dirt road and dust rose from its wheels, but there was no sign of his friend. Yohan continued to look over the sides of the cart like a mother who had lost her child. But little did he know that behind him Maligo climbed quietly aboard. He tipped toed over and pulled Yohan's tail. The kitten gave a short shriek just before he got control of himself. He grabbed the kangaroo by his cloak and they hid amongst the jars, just in time to avoid the tiger's glance. The tiger was unaware of the hitchhikers. He snorted and continued his trotting.

"Hey next time you want to get my attention just call me," Yohan whispered.

"Oh there's no point in that after seeing the look on your face," Maligo said with a giggle, "I think I'll be doing that more often."

"Very funny. If that tiger saw us, or should I say you, you would have been in deep trouble."

"Those tigers are a bunch of cruel misfits," said Maligo. "One day we Shavronites will revolt and kill all of them,---at least that's what my mom says. I hate how they treat us, and I hate them Yohan."

"I wish it wasn't so. I also wish that one day you can walk free in this land. But let's just keep our focus on dropping this delivery off. I feel we are already late and I don't know how the tiger will react when we get there."

"Probably grumpy as usual." said Maligo.

"Exactly, that's why I'll do all the talking."

The cart went on for some time, longer than the children wanted it to, until it passed close to their destination. Both children jumped out. The cart went away in a cloud of dust until it was out of sight. When the dust settled, the town in front of them was luxuriant. Most of the homes were of brick or of decorative wood. The tigers there wore fancy clothes and their attitudes were quite fancy as well. Yohan proceeded in, and Maligo followed. The tigers paid no attention to the youngsters, although some of them gave the young kangaroo a nasty look whenever they saw him.

"Hey, do you remember the address?"

"Yup, I'm good at remembering things," said the kitten, "It should be the home up yonder. Let's hurry!"

It was not long before they reached the house. Yohan and Maligo proceeded with caution onto the porch. Yohan went forward and knocked on the door. There was great grumbling and stomping inside. Maligo was not feeling well at all. He was hoping that no one was home, but he was soon disappointed. The door swung open and an old tiger stood at the door with a drowsy look on his face. His fur was graying and a tooth stuck from out of his mouth. Yohan took two steps back to his friend.

"Hel—hello sir. Uh, we have your packages right here," he said taking the bag off his back, "That will be twelve silver coins please."

The tiger, who was already annoyed from being awakened from his sleep, was not inclined to give them anything.

"Coins?" said the tiger wiping the sleep from his eyes, "Do you know how long I've been waiting?"

"Waiting? You've been snoring you old coot," Maligo said under his breath. Suddenly the tiger caught sight of the kangaroo.

"What is this Shavronite doing on my doorstep? Scoot, before I have the authorities take you away!"

"Hey he's with me," said Yohan stepping in front of his friend. "We're both working during the summer months at the letter house. We're just trying to make a little money." "Where are his papers? I want to make sure this Shavronite is legal," said the tiger. Maligo was reluctant to comply. He stood strong with a crossed look on his face. The tiger's voice rose as he demanded to see the papers again.

"Come on. Just show him the paper so we can leave," said the kitten.

Maligo reached into his pocket and pulled out a slip of paper. The old tiger snatched it out of his hand and began to inspect it. Now I must explain the meaning behind the paper if you have not already figured it out. You see when the Tigers conquered the Shavronites they did everything in their power to belittle them. So laws were made to make the tigers feel that they were above them. One law permitted that every Shavronite upon his or her seventh birthday was to be branded with the king's seal on his or her hand. The papers were another law which limited the travel of a Shavronite in a single day. The tiger, after finding no mistakes on the paper, gave it back to Maligo; but just before he placed the paper in Maligo's hand, he let it drop to the ground. The young kangaroo was stiff as a plank of wood.

"You better pick it up," said the tiger with a challenging look. "That is if you want to be legal."

Maligo picked up the paper and placed it in his pocket. As he did, the tiger noticed that his hand was wrapped in a bandage. It was a custom in Tajir that every Shavronite was to be branded with the king's seal on their seventh birthday.

"Well, well looks like it's your birthday," said the tiger with a proud smirk. "Tell me how does it feel to be the king's property?"

"Please sir, can we just have the twelve coins and leave?" Yohan said trying to change the subject.

"Watch yourself little cat," said the tiger. "Although you are not a Shavronite, this is my home and I'll tell you to leave when I'm good and ready. Now," looking back at Maligo, "Tell me what do you think?"

"It--it feels good to be owned by the king and to wear his mark," he said almost coming to tears.

"You wear that mark well. As you grow older we tigers will treat you well or at least how we feel that you should be treated," the tiger said with a grin.

"That will be twelve silver coins," Yohan said quickly to changing the subject again. The tiger went in, without closing the door, and returned presently with a few coins in hand.

"Here are six coins for you young cat---and two for the Shavronite."

"Hey we get paid twelve coins with every delivery made," Yohan objected, " six for me and six for him!"

"Come now. This Shavronite would probably waste the other four on candy and foolish things. He wouldn't use it for better things like you and I. Isn't that right, young cat?" he said with a wink of his eye.

Yohan said nothing.

"Isn't that right?" the tiger repeated more sternly.

"Yes, sir," he said cringing from having to utter the words.

"Now hurry along and enjoy your day. And young cat, don't get to friendly with this Shavronite. They are conquered creatures. We are a step above them, keep that in mind."

"Yes sir. Come on, Maligo."

Later that day, they went to a lake where many of the inhabitants went for rest and relaxation. Today the lake was empty, which was a comfort to Maligo. Yohan went to skip a few pebbles. He noticed that his friend was sitting along the bank a few feet away.

"Don't let that tiger get you down. Things will get better." said Yohan.

"Yeah, when? In five years? How about in fifty years?"

Yohan took the eight silver coins out of his pocket. He divided the sum up evenly and handed Maligo his share.

"Thanks. You're a good friend." Maligo said smiling.

"One day I'll be old enough to help you and all the Shavronites. I could become a senator and change the laws. Or I could start a revolution and overthrow the tigers," he said as he balled his fist and punched in the air.

"Yeah," the kangaroo said jumping up. " You and I could secretly free everyone right under the tigers' noses. That will show them who's the wiser."

Both began to laugh.

They were nice playful dreams, but dead ones. Both settled down again and then Maligo asked Yohan something.

"Can you pray for me?"

The kitten stood bewildered by his friend's proposal.

"Can't you do it yourself?"

"Well yeah, but the Shavronites do it to show that friends care for one another. I pray for you, can you do the same for me?"

"Yeah!" Yohan said excitedly. " We're best friends. Is it like what the tigers do with their nightly rituals?"

"No. It's like--well you just talk to God."

"God? The tigers teach me to bow to many gods. Which one will I be dealing with?"

"The real one," said Maligo.

"So I just talk to him?"

"Yup." said Maligo.

"No dancing, shouting, or fire to make him listen to you?"

"Nope, just talk."

“I think I understand. Consider it a done deal.”

“You Promise?” said Maligo.

“Cross my heart.” said the kitten doing the motion across his chest.

With that promise in his heart Yohan returned home. His house was a nicely built home on the outskirts of town. Yohan's family did well for themselves. His father worked at a trading post, while his mother stayed home. Yohan was not the only child. He had two brothers and an older sister. Yohan opened the door; and before he knew it, he was tackled by his brothers.

They tumbled and wrestled on the floor, and in the process they broke one of their mother's vases. All wrestling came to a halt when mom came in the living room.

“Timothy, Nathan, Yohan, what did I tell you three about roughhousing in the house? Up all of you! There is nothing worse than hard-headed children! When your father gets home from work he'll hear of this. Now you three clean up this mess, and come to supper.”

Their sister was standing to the side with a smirk on her face. Timothy, Nathan, and Yohan stuck out their tongues. Their sister rolled her eyes, sucked her teeth, and followed her mother into the kitchen. That night, just before Yohan went to bed, he remembered the promise he made. He crept out of bed and stood in the middle of his room. He was looking out of his window into the night's sky. It was awkward for Yohan, especially having never prayed at all. So he started slowly, but surely, and began to talk.

“Hey how's it going up there? It's Yohan, your lovable kitten from Tajir--- no that sounds stupid! Let me try again Your Great Eminence,” he said in a deep voice, dropping to his knees and bowing, “I bring you my prayer, O Great One.”

This wasn't any better and Yohan sighed in frustration

“I don't know how to address You,” said Yohan looking upward. “Maligo used God so I guess that's your official title. He asked me to pray for him and I will because he's my best friend, I care about him. He had a hard time today, God; in fact his whole life has been that way ever since I've know him. The tigers treat all of the Shavronites horribly. Can you help Maligo? Can you help all of them? I don't know if you hear me, but I really hope you do.”

Yohan returned to bed. As the night went on, he began to dream a strange dream of a picture, and then the picture became more fluid and looked like a map. It was so clear and crisp to Yohan, but little did he know that this dream would begin the freedom of the Shavronites.

Chapter 3: A Discovery Made

The next morning, Yohan was in a hurry to continue his summer trade. He rushed out of the house, not before receiving some advice from his father and hugs and kisses from his mother, towards the letter house. The letter house was busy and unruly as usual. Tigers and a few other cats ran to and fro, grabbing letters and packages without any thought. Once he arrived he checked in with the boss. He was an old tiger named Boegal, but he was fully energetic: for whenever he received a bad report about one of his messengers, he would promptly cuff them with his cane. Yohan, although new at the trade, avoided

the old tiger's discipline. Boegal was glad to see the young cat. Deep down he regarded the new employee as if he was his son. A big smile came over his face as Yohan entered the office.

"Yohan come in, come in. How are you today?" said Boegal.

"Fine, sir."

The old tiger propped himself up with his cane and walked over to Yohan.

"A young cat with so much potential. I wish all my messengers were as diligent as you. It's a shame you are only with me for the summer months. Ah, but I digress. I have a very important assignment for you. It seems that I have received a letter that is address to the king's palace. Have you ever been there?"

"No, sir." said Yohan.

"Good. Then this will be a treat for you. I have only been once myself. The king is quite particular of who knocks on his doorstep if you understand me."

"So I'll be able to meet the king himself," Yohan said, overjoyed by the thought of it.

"Uh no. But the letter is address to his chief scribe, and going to the palace is good enough."

"Great! I'll go get Maligo and --"

"Maligo will not be going with you," Boegal said cutting Yohan off.

"Why?"

"I have been getting complaints about hiring a Shavronite, too many complaints. I had to fire the young kangaroo. I sent him home, now--"

"What! Maligo didn't do anything wrong."

"You're young, you don't understand the way things are yet," said Boegal. "When you are older your way of life as a Tajirian will be evident. No more arguing, Yohan," he said hitting his cane on the floor with a sharp blow.

Yohan gathered his emotions and stood quiet.

"It is very important that you mind your manners in the palace of our great and mighty monarch. If you happen to cross him on your way, do you know what to do?"

"Yes, sir. My parents told me to fall prostrate until he passes out of sight." said Yohan.

"Good, your parents have done you justice. Now off you go."

Yohan left the letter house distraught over Maligo's termination. He did not believe he would ever understand the way things were, but maybe Boegal was right. After removing any bad thoughts of the tigers, he continued to the palace to deliver the letter. The young kitten, enjoying the sunny day, had a whistle for his tune and a spring in his step. He had heard of the king many times from other tigers. They spoke of him as a great warrior, a noble leader, or the Czar of the jungle lands. Yohan was hoping to meet him, if only to get a glimpse of this great tiger. The palace was about ten miles away from his hometown. To lessen his burden he received a few rides from tigers that were headed in his direction. At the palace gates he was met by a line of armed guards. They were clad with silver helmets and golden-plated armor. Each carried a lance by his side. None of the tigers addressed Yohan when he tried to talk to them.

"Well if none of you are going to talk I'll just show myself in," the kitten said walking over to the gate.

One of the soldiers jumped in front of him and pointed the lance at him.

“What business do you have here?” said the guard.

"I'm here to deliver this letter," Yohan said pushing the spear slowly away, "It's for the King's chief scribe."

The tiger took the letter, looked at it, and gave it back to Yohan.

"Follow me."

The guard escorted the cat up a long marble stair case. Along the sides of the stairs sat orange trees that held the finest oranges in the land; the smell of the orchard's fruit filled his nostrils, tempting him to grab one of them to taste the sweet juice inside. At the top the tiger opened a large golden door. Inside, Yohan was taken into the most beautiful building he had ever seen. To begin with, the floor itself was made of marble; the walls were made of stone, but the motifs of tiger soldiers and weaponry gave the walls balance with its cold, strong appearance. The ceiling was painted with colorful frescos, depicting romantic scenes of chivalry. Yohan was in awe. He circled the grand hall as he gazed at every vibrant image, but his admiration was soon interrupted.

"You are not here to lollygag," said the guard. "Keep up!"

The guard took Yohan through another hall, up a staircase, and into a corridor. There were so many twists and turns that he wasn't sure if he would ever get out. Finally, the guard stopped and tapped on a door. There was no answer. He tapped on the door once more, and then a growl came from inside.

"What do you want?" said the voice behind the door. "I am in the middle of my studies. Do not disturb me! Leave me alone!"

"But sir there is someone here with a letter--" replied the guard.

"LETTER!" came the excitedly.

"Yes sir. The young cat says it is for you."

"For me! Well send him in."

"Once you are done I will take you back," the guard said pushing the door open.

Inside the room was filled with pillars of books and paper stacked nearly to the ceiling. Yohan could hear someone mumbling, scratching, and writing vigorously. He made his way around one stacks of books; and, sitting at a desk, was a skinny tiger. He was flipping through a large book while he scribbled notes in another. The tiger paid no attention to the cat. Yohan tapped on the desk to get the tiger's attention; he received no response. He tried again with the same results. Finally he spoke up.

"Ex--excuse me sir."

"WHAT," the tiger growled, baring his teeth.

Yohan was speechless; but upon seeing the letter that the cat carried under his arm, the tiger removed his savage look and closed his book.

“Sorry, young cat. Sometimes my studies preoccupy me,” said the tiger pardoning himself. “My name is Vladimir. And who are you?”

Yohan gave his name.

“Well Yohan what do you have for me. Oh a letter! Let me have it.”

Yohan gave the tiger the letter. He quickly tore away the envelope and read the doctrine. His eyes traveled along the page with fervor. Vladimir started laughing.

“THIS IS IT, THIS IS IT! My studies are nearly complete.” said Vladimir shaking the letter with elation.

Yohan had no idea what he was talking about. All he wanted was to get paid for his work.

He asked for six silver coins, but the tiger was already busy with writing and scribbling in his book once again. Yohan thought that if he started conversation with the tiger he may be able to get paid in the process.

“Sir, what are you studying anyway?”

“The mind, dreams to be exact.”

“Hey I’ve had a strange dream last night that is clear as the day in my mind.” said the Yohan.

Vladimir’s ears perked with excitement. The tiger was a connoisseur of the mind and he was always took interest in the dreams of others. He turned his book to an empty page and asked to hear the dream.

“I’ll tell you for six silver coins.” the kitten said smiling.

“You clever little cat,” Vladimir said giving Yohan the coins, “Now tell me your dream”

“Well, it’s a map. I see a trail on the map across Tajir into a region that is unmapped. I also see scenery that may be apart of the map. It’s really eerie. Also in my dream, I saw a horn that you could play---a silver horn. It’s like a rams horn decorated with five holes for the finger’s. The end of the horn is fashioned in the likeness of a wild cat--sort of lie a cougar. And the funny thing is I know which way to go to get it. Do you know what it means?”

The tiger was writing vigorously. At certain times he would look up and think as if he knew of something in Yohan’s words, but when he was finished he simply said,

“Your dream is probably a deep desire for you to seek success in your life nothing more.”

“Oh, well I guess I’ll be going.”

“Bye, bye now,” said the tiger.

When Yohan left, Vladimir continued to ponder over the little cat’s words. The tiger left his room and made his way through the palace. Through one of the doors in the corridor, he entered into a dark stairwell. The stairwell ended in a room full of books and annals of Tajirian history. There were two other tigers reading over old scrolls. They stood up as Vladimir became present. Vladimir paid no attention to them. He went up and down the many isles looking for a particular history book. Once he found it he sat down and careful flipped through the pages. The book was about Shavron’s history. Vladimir flipped through the pages until he got to the place where Gabriel was made the first king of Shavron. The silver horn, which was placed in the hand of the statue of Gabriel, was mention and that took Vladimir to another book, which he read voraciously. As his eye scanned through the pages a cruel yet tantalizing grin appeared on his face.

He closed the book and returned to the first floor of the palace. He came across one guard that was sleeping on the job. Vladimir stomped on the tiger's tail. The guard, after yelling, returned to his position of attention.

“Where is the king, lazy bones?”

“He is the royal garden, sir.” said the guard.

In the garden walked a large, white tiger. He looked as if he was contemplating future military strategies or new ways to rule over the kingdom; but no one truly knew the thoughts of the king, and he was very cautious in whom he confided in. The tiger wore a

dark blue jacket threaded with gold. On his arms he wore golden arm braces and on his tail he wore a golden tail ring to show his royal status. He was a potent tiger; there was no other tiger that could match his stature or strength. His name was Aznar and he was the sixth king of Tajir. The tiger paused for a moment, standing still as stone among a bed of roses. Vladimir approached the tiger carefully, trying not to make a sound, but he didn't do a very good job. The tiger addressed him to Vladimir's surprise.

"Why are you disturbing me, Vladimir?"

Vladimir chose his words carefully. He knew that the king hated being disturbed during his time in the royal garden; another scribe did the same and was never heard from again. He spoke very softly and prudently.

"My great king, may you live forever, I have news that cannot wait."

Aznar turned around slowly. The look on his face made Vladimir cower inside.

"It better be good. I hate when my thought pattern is disturbed and right now you're on my bad side."

Vladimir cleared his throat.

"O king, I have discovered something about the Shavronite history that would be a great asset to our land. Under my studies, of many days you see, I have come across mystical treasure and it is quite extraordinary if I say so myself and --"

"Get to the point!" shouted Aznar.

A chill went throughout Vladimir's entire body, he nearly dropped the journal.

"In short, there is a treasure known as the silver horn. History says that it can open a different world than our and in that world the Unicorn---Dranus dwells there. With the power of the dragon---"

Aznar stomped up to Vladimir, who quickly shut his mouth. Aznar began to circle him as if he was about to strike his prey. Vladimir clutched the old journal awaiting the king's words.

"I know about that the world of night from school teachers---and you telling me that horn actually exist? When my forefathers conquered the Shavronites, they made sure not to leave anything of value behind. Therefore with those facts established, I came to two conclusions: the silver horn is a myth, or the Shavronites have destroyed it. I have tortured many of them and none have revealed the whereabouts of it."

"But sir," he said trying not to sound offensive, "I believe there is someone who knows exactly where it is."

Aznar scratched his chin; Vladimir made a good point and Aznar wanted to capitalize on it.

"Fine," Aznar said rolling his eyes, "Bring the Shavronite to me immediately. I will torture---"

"He is not a Shavronite, sir," said Vladimir. "A young kitten, native born, knows the way or at least he says he does. He was here just a few moments ago."

"My royal scribe seems to be a royal idiot. The kitten made it up. It was a childish daydream, nothing more."

"But the kitten," Vladimir said getting over the rude comment, "said he saw a silver horn

and described the features of it to the exactly!"

"If that is true, why didn't you bring the cat to me immediately?"

"Because you just told me sir that you hated being disturbed during your –"
"Silence!" said Aznar. "I must think."

Aznar paced his flower bed for what seemed like hours. Vladimir wasn't sure if he should leave. Just before he decided to go, Aznar spoke up.

"How right do you think you are, Vladimir?"

Sir, I stake my life on it. The Shavronites, although conquered, have a history that is solid and true."

"Well in that case we shall have a grand ball to celebrate your discovery, Vladimir. Every tiger is invited and I will bring that young cat and his family to the ball as well."

The scribe bowed and thanked his king as he retreated from the garden. He was approaching the garden's door when Aznar called to him.

"Vladimir, I will not be embarrassed before the masses. If it turns out that this cat knows nothing and you were wrong, I will kill that cat, his family, and hang you high among the gallows. Is that understood?"

"Yes, my great king," he said clutching his throat.

Chapter 4: At the Royal Ball

The king ordered to send thousands of invitations throughout the land of Tajir. Tigers everywhere were talking about the discovery of the silver horn. There was good reason for this. The Tajirians, throughout their history, celebrated the white unicorn, who once roamed in the world of night, and they heard of a rumor about the silver horn being a key to seeing the beast once again. It was a warped idea, but deep down the tigers wanted nothing else in the world than that wish. When Yohan's family received their invitation, the whole household was filled with glee. It was a rarity that any cat, especially a common cat, was invited to a tiger's ball. Yohan and his family held a small party to celebrate the occasion.

Two weeks passed by and the night of the ball was at hand. Yohan and his family rushed out of the door in a hurry as not to be late, for there is nothing worse than being the guest of honor and showing up at the last minute. As they approached the dirt road towards the palace, it was lined with bright lanterns that hung from posts. A few tigers were on the pathway as well and they quietly greeted the family. The entire family was looking their best. Yohan wore his best dress jacket and he wore a bow tie (which he hated wearing) that made him look very sophisticated. At the palace gates, Yohan showed the tiger guards his invitation. Upon seeing that he was the guest of honor, they told him to follow the other main guest through the back door so that they could be announced properly. Once inside, Yohan and his family stood in the back of the line among the other tigers in a small hall. Yohan's brothers took a great liking to the palace; and because of their youthful energy, they were more fidgety than fish out of water. The palace was new to them and all the paintings, music, and the overall awe of the occasion made Timothy and Nathan excited to explore the surroundings. The young ones were able to get away from

mom, whose attention was diverted by fixing her husband's tie; and with mischief in mind, the cats began to pace through the hall of tigers.

They pointed and laughed at all the tiger tails as they whipped through the air like snakes. Timothy and Nathan were tempted to pull one of the tails; and so, that's what Yohan's brothers did. The tiger turned sharply at the kittens; but upon see that it was a childish ruse, that great cat smiled and patted the young ones on the head. Their mother rebuked them sharply. There was a lot of talking going on, most of it had to do with the praise for the king and the great party, but within all the voices Yohan could hear his name being called, and then he saw someone he knew, it was Vladimir.

"I'm glad you are here. You must be his father. Your son has a great ability that can serve the king. You must be very proud of him?"

"Hello, my name is Brin. And yes, I am proud of my son."

The rest of the family introduced themselves. Suddenly there was a trumpet call and all talking came to a halt. The doors to the hall were opened and an orator called the names of the guests into the throne room. Yohan's family was the last to leave. The family passed through the middle of the tigers, which were standing on both sides of the hall. This made the family feel out of place; and adding to the fact that it was quiet, didn't help either. Yohan looked up to spot a wife whispering something in her husband's ear that caused him to produce a nasty smile. The tigers' faces were not inviting at all. Many looked prideful and conceited as they watched the family pass by. It wasn't until the family took their place that they felt better. There was another trumpet sounded and at the front of the room, near the throne chair, stood a tall, skinny black haired wolf. He looked intelligent from the way he stood with his sword in hand. He was wearing a red shirt and a red cape that nearly touched the ground. In a great leap from the stage, the wolf landed near Yohan and his family. He was crouched down, his eyes were closed, and he was still as stone. Yohan saw that the left side of his face, around his eye, was scarred with three claw marks. One of the tigers in the crowd shouted,

"Hurry up Shavronite! Show us your sword tricks."

The crowd burst into laughter. After waiting for the laughter to die down, the wolf slowly opened his eyes. Yohan was startled at what he saw: The wolf's eye was gold, not a gold pupil, but his entire eye was solid gold. It was so shiny that Yohan could see his reflection. Then, in a burst of energy, the wolf began his routine. He swung his rapier with speed and potency. He was fast, very fast, and at times Yohan could not even see the blade of the rapier itself. The wolf's cape would follow him with grace, and in his finale he threw his sword in the air, twirled in place, and caught the rapier behind his back, posing for effect. There was a round of applause. The wolf saluted the crowd with his sword and left the scene. The orator returned, said a few words of praise for the king, and directed everyone's attention to the front of the throne room. The doors to the small hall were opened again and there, in commanding stature, was Aznar. Every tiger bowed as the king came through. Yohan and his family did the same. The king wore a white coat with silver buttons. His back was covered with a red cape, and it was so long that two young tigers had to carry the ends. On his right hand he wore a gold ring with a studded jewel. Aznar enjoyed this part of his parties; he enjoyed looking down on the others. He took his place near his throne and told everyone to rise.

"Now my fellow cats, we are gather here on this fine night to celebrate a most historical occasion." said Aznar. "My scribe, Vladimir, has found the whereabouts of the mystical treasure, the silver horn."

There was a great murmur in the throne room. Aznar held up his hands and all became quiet again.

"How?" the king said looking at the scribe briefly, "Well there is a young native here tonight who knows. But these facts will be given light soon enough. Until then enjoy the night."

Aznar clapped his hands and suddenly from a side door a group of musicians, all Shavronites, came in playing a happy tone. Food was brought out and the party began. Aznar and Vladimir made their way over to Yohan and his family. When Aznar stood in front of them all the cats fell prostrate before him.

"No, no," he said laughing, "that time is over now. Get up."

"My dear king, this is Yohan the cat I was telling you about. He is the one who knows." "I would like to talk to you privately. That is, if it suits your parents."

"I would rather be there with him." said Brin.

"It is quite necessary you see. The king's request should be honored in full," he said eyeing the family with a persuasive look."

"Yes, well," he said looking at his wife, "the king is right in his supplication. Yohan, mind your manners. We'll see you soon."

Aznar left the family. Yohan's mother kissed him and he left with Vladimir. They went away from the party so that they could not hear the voices. Aznar was waiting in his bedroom. The king was sitting at a table, resting his elbows on top. He stared at the two as they entered.

"Come here, small cat, and sit."

Yohan complied. Vladimir stood to the side.

"Now Rohan--"

"It's Yohan, sir," the kitten said correction him.

Aznar was still as stone. He never liked to be corrected even when he was wrong. He took a deep breath and continued.

"Vladimir says you know how to find the silver horn. Do you know what that horn means to the tigers?"

"No not really."

"You see, Yohan, we tigers hold the white unicorn in high regard. He's a power beast who once ruled over an entire world. That is why we have a feast in his honor once a year. We believe the white unicorn to be powerful, powerful enough to grant wishes. The potential of it, Yohan, think of it. The silver horn is the key and my father and his father before him have desperately searched for it. It seems that I am so close, and you can help little cat. Now, Yohan, I'm going to ask you a simple question," Aznar said glancing over at Vladimir, "Could it be possible that you made this all up?"

"Sir," Vladimir interjected, "You have to---"

"SHUT YOUR MOUTH!" the king shouted, slamming his fist on the table.

Yohan jumped from the king's voice, it was the most frightening this he had ever heard.

"I will not go off on some expedition based on a dream-- I want to make sure. I want to

see that unicorn more than any beast alive. My father and his father before him never knew where it was and now the horn seems so close. If I am embarrassed, Vladimir, in any way," he said pointing, "you know what happens."

Vladimir touched his throat and looked at Yohan.

"Answer my question, Yohan."

"I'm not making it up sir. I know where this treasure is. I don't know how. I went to sleep and--I just know."

"Humor me," said Aznar, "tell me what's in your dream."

The dream began in the kingdom of Tajir. To the west was a paved road that led to a grassy plain. Past the plain was a river that stretched far into the region of the tigers' land. After the river, a jungle waited to be explored. Yohan saw many perils, but there was one danger that terrified Yohan more than the others. He could only describe it as a hissing sound; a deep hissing sound. He saw eyes of fire from this malignant appearance, but then the apparition faded away. When the jungle ended, an abandoned city appeared. The city was built along the side of a deep gorge. There were bridges that stretched from one side to the other; it was an engineering achievement that would have rivaled any city in the world. From within the deserted city, Yohan heard sounds of howling and growling as if a melee was happening. After that he saw a badger who stood at the entrance of a cave and a voice told him to toss the silver horn inside, and then the dream ended. The dream ran in Yohan's mind every time he went to sleep. Aznar sat back in his chair with his hands folded. He was speechless. He looked over to Vladimir for help.

"It has to be true. There are many things in his dream that we already know about: the river and the jungle."

"The River you spoke about is the Titan River," said Aznar. "It travels deep into the regions of Tajir. As for the jungle, it's the only place we tigers dare not to travel. I have sent soldiers in that jungle to break the spirits of the creatures there; none of them have returned. However, I believe you Yohan. That horn means a lot to the tigers. I'm ready to put together an expedition to find the horn. After that we will bring it back to Tajir and we will see if the unicorn comes to us."

There was a gaze in Aznar's eyes after he spoke the words. Yohan could see that there was more to the unicorn's horn than the tiger wanted to tell. The room was silent for some time. Aznar stayed in his stupor until Yohan addressed a question.

"Will you wish for the Shavronites to be free?"

The great tiger shook himself out of the trance and sat back in his chair once again.

"What did you say?"

Yohan repeated the question.

"The Shavronites are beneath us small cat," said Aznar. "Why do you ask for them?"

"I have a friend sir, named--"

"Friend?" the king said with a chuckle, "A Shavronite is not your friend. They are your toys, they are your slaves, and they are your property. As a cat you must understand that you are better than them. Make no friendships with them."

There was a deep burning in Yohan's insides. He had heard this same reasoning so many times, and he never considered Maligo lower than himself. Whether it was sheer madness or courage, Yohan spoke up.

"You're wrong, sir! My friend Maligo is a good creature. I don't know what's wrong with you, but I don't think you are as great as the other tigers say you are!"

The king's face showed little emotion from the cat's words; although, deep down his rage called for the kitten's life.

"Yohan, watch your mouth in the presence of your king!" Vladimir said angrily.

"Vladimir it is quite all right," said Aznar waving his hand. "He is a child; I expect him to feel differently. He'll learn soon enough. Go on, Yohan, return to your family."

Yohan left the two tigers alone. Vladimir started to speak, but Aznar held up his hand.

The king rose from his seat. He walked over to the door, cracked it, and watched the kitten run down the hall.

"He's a very lucky child."

"Lucky my king?" said Vladimir.

"Yes: for if he had not the map to the silver horn, I would have crushed his skull with my bare hands for that remark. Return to the party. I will follow in a few minutes."

Yohan's family left a few minutes afterwards. He didn't speak of the conversation he had with Aznar. The party went on and Aznar made plans for the coming treasure hunt.

Chapter 5: Dry departure; Wet arrival

After the party, Aznar made precise plans for taking on such a great feat. Nothing like this had ever been done in Tajir's history, and it may well be the last time. Letters were sent throughout the kingdom depicting the future prosperity of Tajir once the horn was found. Each letter had a decree from the king stating the wish list that would be read to the unicorn. The list was compiled of fifty wishes. All of them dealt with either the king or the land itself. At the palace, the royal guards were practicing battle tactics, ensuring that they would be ready for any danger in the jungle. Vladimir was gathering books to take with him, while Aznar was overseeing the building of ten caravans. Each was elaborately decorated with the king's approval. The caravans had handles so that it could be pushed or pulled from the front or back. Every caravan contained a week's supply of food and a long canoe that could hold five tigers easily. The treasure hunt was scheduled to leave the next day.

A letter arrived at Yohan's home. The letter stated that Yohan was invited to join the expedition by the direct order of King Aznar himself. Being the good citizens that they were, Yohan's parents did not refuse and they prepared his belongings. Most of the day was spent with Yohan's parents telling him how to act on his extended stay with the king; and if it was impossible to find help, to run whenever danger was near. Evening approached and Yohan wanted to speak to someone else before he left. His father went with him to the slums of Tajir. It was a place where the tigers placed the Shavronites in unsanitary conditions. It was gated off from the rest of the country. Two guards stood at the front gate as the two cats approached. Brin and Yohan explained their situation. The guards opened the gates; however, one of the guards whispered something to them as they crossed the threshold.

"We cannot be responsible for happens to you in there, said the guard, " Knock on the

gate when you come back, that is, if you come back at all."

The gates were closed and the cats stood in the slums of the Shavronites. It was a grotesque ghetto. Homes were shabbily built with the cheapest of material and the streets were filled with garbage. Some shady characters hung about the streets. Many of them spat on the ground as the cats passed by, and others grinned with the intention of causing harm to them. Yohan's father embraced his coat as if he was protecting himself from a disease. Yohan saw this but said nothing.

"Did your friend tell you where he lived?" said Brin. "I don't want us to stay too long."

"He once told me that he wasn't far from the gate. He said go up two streets make a left and his home is the last on that block."

"Good. Now don't make a conversation, son, just wish him well so we can leave."

Father and son went forward. Voices rung out in anger as the cats sped up their travel. They heard cursing after cursing.

"Look at the cats," one voice said, "let us take out our anger on them!"

"Yes!" said another voice that seemed far away, "If we can't get a tiger, skinning two cats will do just fine!"

Yohan and his father began to run. More voices shouted and cursed them as they ran through the streets. Some creatures threw garbage at them out of their windows. Yohan's father did his best to protect his son, but both were belted a few times by debris until they reached Maligo's home. Inside Maligo's mother, who was named Lena, heard an incessant knocking at her door. When she opened it, she was surprised to see two cats running in, almost knocking her down.

Cats! Get out both of you! You're not welcomed here, " said Lena.

By this time Maligo had come from his room. Once he saw Yohan, the two shook hands as if they had not seen each other for years. Their parents were flabbergasted by the sight.

"You know him?" said Lena.

"Yeah, he's my friend."

Lena placed her hand to her head in amazement.

"A cat and Shavronite best friends, what is the world coming too?"

"Okay, son, say goodbye to your friend and make it fast. I want to leave this horrid place," said Brin.

"And who might you be?" said Lena.

Yohan's father grabbed his coat once again.

"My name is Brin, I am Yohan's father."

Yohan, ignoring his father's wishes, was telling Maligo of the current events. Maligo's eyes grew as he was told of the horn and the expedition.

"Horn? The silver horn, is that what you said?"

"Yes, ma'am." Said Yohan.

"The tigers are fools for searching for an evil device such as that."

"I will have you to know that the tigers are good creatures and the horn is a device of blessing. When they find it they will wish peace upon this world and all shall live free and abundantly."

A hoarse laugh came from Lena. She sat down as she held her belly.

"That is one of the funniest things I have ever heard," she said wiping a tear from her eye, "Did they teach you that in the schools? Does your son believe that poppycock too? That horn, if it's still around, was an instrument of one of Dranus's minions. That horn will bring no good and the tigers wish good only for themselves."

"I have never heard a Shavronite speak so lowly and cruelly about the tigers," said Brin highly insulted. "I will report you to the guards when we leave. They will hear of your treasonous tongue! And further more--"

Yohan grabbed his father's coat. The action calmed his father's tirade.

"Dad let's go. See you around Maligo."

"Good idea son, the atmosphere is quite stifling," Brin said with a look of apathy.

"So are the guests." Was Lena retort.

Brin, not to be outdone by an insult, shot back with one of his own.

"The tigers are right in what they have done to you. You Shavronites are foul creatures not fit to govern yourselves. It is right and just that we stand above you and may we keep you under our feet for many years to come!"

The words fell heavily on the two kangaroos. Brin caught sight of Maligo, who was at the point of crying. Brin regretted what he had said, but it was too late for apologies. Both cats left the home in silence.

"I don't want you to ever talk to that cat again, you hear me?" said Lena to her son.

"But mom!"

Suddenly there was yelling in the streets and before Lena had time to inspect, both cats rushed back into her home, cowering behind her.

"What now? Leave us alone!"

"There's a group of creatures coming after us," said Brin.

Lena opened the door and looked down the street. A group of thirty creatures were coming toward her home. She slammed the door shut and called to her son. Maligo jumped into his mother's pouch. The crowd formed outside chanting the death of the two cats. Some had clubs, and there was one creature that had a rope for a hanging. After a few moments, the shouting died down and a lizard stepped forward to speak for the group.

"We know you're in there," said the lizard. "We won't kill you. We'll just rough you two up a little bit," he said as the crowd laughed.

Lena stepped outside, closing the door behind her. She made herself known to the group.

The group asked for the cats again.

"What will you give me if I let you have them?"

"Mom, no!" cried Maligo.

"You'll have some entertainment at the cats' expense," said the lizard. "and we'll even give you the first chance at hurting them. You can use this club or a rock if you prefer."

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inside, Brin and Yohan could hear the whole conversation, the thought of torture ran through their minds. Lena came back inside. She glanced at Brin and his son.

"I should let them have you. You and the tigers have treated us like dirt for far too long. Maybe you should feel what we feel."

The kangaroo's hand went to the door knob. Brin and Yohan were speechless; nothing they could say would change her mind, but Maligo looked up to his mother and when she

caught a glimpse of his eyes Maligo's words fell heavily on her conscience.

"Mom, he's my friend."

Lena's hand slowly slipped away from the knob. With a deep sigh she looked at the cats and had pity on them. The group outside called out again. Lena turned away from the door and told the two cats to follow her. They were led to the back door of the home.

"Take the back street. It will take you back to the front gate. I'll stall the group as long as I can."

Yohan and Maligo said their last good-bye.

"Thank you," said Brin.

"You're welcome, now hurry," said Lena.

They hurried down the back street as fast and as quietly as they could. Yohan and his father made it back to the front gate without further trouble. Brin knocked on the gate and the tiger opened it with a smile.

"How was your time?" said the guard sarcastically.

Brin didn't even respond to the question. The trial of the ghetto was enough for Brin, and he cared not for anyone's mocking remarks. He took his son and made their way home. It wasn't long before the sun rose again and a great bubbling of cheers filled the streets of Tajir. The king's parade went into the streets showing off the grand caravans and the soldiers' military might. Each caravan was pushed by Aznar's soldiers. To the tigers it would have made more sense to bring a few more Shavronites to handle the labor, but Aznar made it clear before hand that only three Shavronites would be on this trip. Three wolves were chained to a caravan; two pushed from behind while the other was in the front. Their faces showed no concern for the great spectacle. They did what they were told and no one paid any attention to them. Aznar was at the head of the parade; he was being carried on a litter. Tigers bowed as the king passed by. There was a minstrel yelling at the top of his lungs. His verse fell on the crowd's mind like the morning light:

"AZNAR, THE CZAR OF THE JUNGLELANDS. CELEBRATE HIS POWER AND CELEBRATE HIS MIGHT. CHEER HIS VALOR WITH THE GREAT TREASURE IN SIGHT."

Aznar sat proudly as the community repeated the words. The parade made its way to Yohan's house. Aznar's litter was placed on the ground. The king looked to his left and pointed to the black wolf that was at the feast a few nights ago. The wolf was chained to the caravan and a tiger guard released him. The wolf went up to the house and knocked on the door. Inside, Yohan's family hugged and kissed him good-bye. Yohan's mother went to open the door. Upon seeing the wolf she let out a screech and soon gained her composure.

"The king is waiting," the wolf said taking a bow.

Yohan stepped forward. The wolf glared at him with his good eye. Aznar called Yohan over to his litter and told him to hop aboard. The wolf was taken back to the caravan and chained. The parade continued through the streets. Yohan turned back to wave good-bye to his family. He sat back down and Aznar had a cheerful look on his face.

"You miss them already don't you?"

"Yes," said Aznar.

"Do not worry I will be your family until this expedition is over," said the king. Out of the corner of his eye, Yohan saw the wolves chained to the caravan.

"Why are they chained like that?"

Aznar took a sweeping glance at his wolves.

"I have to put my baggage somewhere," he said unconcerned. "They are my slaves. Well to be more exact all the Shavronites are my slaves. But the three wolves are my personal ones. I do as I please with them, and that's the end of the conversation. If you want to talk, talk about the horn. Is that understood?"

"Yes, sir."

Aznar went back to his cheerful mood as he waved to the crowd as they chanted praises upon him. Yohan did not feel well at all. He turned his attention back to the wolf with the golden eye. He wore a black cape and Yohan saw that his hand was branded. Suddenly the wolf saw that the cat was spying him. The wolf bared his teeth savagely at Yohan. Yohan quickly turned away. The grand parade ended as the train of caravans rolled off into the distance in search of the silver treasure.

The tigers took the road to the west that led into the grassy plain. The soldiers kept a watchful eye for any hidden dangers, but all went well on this front of the adventure. The journey of the caravans ended at the Titan River. Aznar ordered his soldiers to load up the boats. The three wolves were unchained to help. The two wolves that Yohan had not met were two exact opposites of the first. One was taller and powerfully built. His fur was dappled with gray, black, and light brown. He did twice the work as one tiger and in ten minutes he had six canoes fully loaded. The other wolf was short and stocky. He was a black wolf as well, but because of age his fur was beginning to grey. The short wolf had a fat, little belly. Whenever he would run to get supplies, his gut would bounce up and down. Yohan could not help but to laugh at the humorous sight. The kitten took notice of the dress of each wolf.

The big one wore a Tajirian cloak patterned with the shape of diamonds. He wore no weapon by his side; but by the looks of him, he didn't need one. The short wolf also wore the same type of cloak, but the color was blue. Around his waist was a cord that acted as a belt to hold a short sword by his side. The wolf with the golden eye was suited with a black cape, which was embroidered with the Aznar's family seal, consisting of two tigers holding up a shield. Two swords crossed over the shield which symbolized the tigers' military appetite. The wolf also wore a black shirt, and around his waist he had a golden belt, which was decorated with a long rapier. Aznar came over to Yohan and placed his hand on his shoulder.

"Don't worry someday you'll have a Shavronite for your own."

Yohan said nothing. He stood idly by listening to Aznar.

"Conquered creatures; they are spoils of war," said Aznar proudly. "I've owned them since I was a child. Those wolves have grown up with me, and they will die with me. The wolf with the golden eye, the one with the rapier, I call him Sebastian. I've trained him to use that blade with the utter most expertise, but he knows not to use it against me or any other tiger for that matter. I had to teach him a lesson about his place when he was younger; he knows better now. The taller one there, that is strong as two tigers," he said directing Yohan's attention, "I call him Brute. I have taken him to other kingdoms to fight in games. He has won me a few hundred coins here and there. He is as strong as a tiger, but he dares not to raise his hand against me. The middle aged wolf, the short one, I call him Sly. He has tried on numerous occasions to escape, but I took my claws to his back a few times. He doesn't think of it anymore."

The tigers were ready to leave shore by noon. Aznar called his soldiers together giving them their orders. They all scurried away to any boat that was available. The river ran smoothly as the sun sat high over the horizon. The river opened up into a massive lake. A group of small islands passed by as the tigers paddled rigorously through the current. Yohan could hear the heavy breathing of the tigers that were out pacing the canoe he sat in. Onward the rowing went until one of the lead canoes sent out a horn call. This meant it was time for a break, and all retreated to the nearest coast they could find. The canoes were brought on shore and the group rested; ten minutes by Aznar's command. The soldiers talked about past expeditions against other countries and some of the things that they did there. Yohan found the conversation vulgar and went out of ear shot of the talking. Suddenly from his left, a butterfly swooped in front of the young cat. The thrill of trying to catch it took his attention away from where he was headed. Suddenly he tripped over a tree root, or so he thought. When he brushed himself off from the fall, he saw that he was in the midst of the three wolves. The first thing he noticed about the wolves was the marks on their hands. The mark consisted of a basic pictogram of a shield with the letter "A" in the center of it. His eyes met with Sly's; the wolf showed no emotion. Then his eyes went to Brute. The large wolf sucked his teeth and began to extend his hand to grab him. Yohan retreated as far as he could until he bumped into the third wolf, Sebastian. The wolf's golden eye hit the sun's ray at the perfect angle, and a quick streak of light blinded Yohan temporarily. The young cat rubbed his eyes and dropped his quivering hands. Sebastian sneered at Yohan. Yohan's eyes were filled with terror. His bottom lip twittered from the anticipation of the wolf's next move. Then Sebastian jumped into Yohan's face.

"BOO!" he shouted.

With a shout, Yohan dashed out of sight after tripping over Brute's leg. The three wolves had a good laugh at the kitten's expense.

"That's enough resting," the king said commanding his troop. "Load up and move out!" Into the water the canoes went with a great splash. The hard rowing continued; even more vigorous than before. Hours went by and there was no sound from the lead canoe to stop. The tigers continued to row into the night, not stopping for anything. Yohan eyes began to feel heavy and it wasn't long that he was asleep listening to the calm passing of the canoes through the water.

The next morning, after a quick breakfast, the tigers continued to row. After ten minutes of paddling the group was met with a problem: the river was forked into two. A gigantic rock formation stood boldly in the river's path. Each branch ran in between two crevasses. A canoe slowed down and ran beside Yohan's. Vladimir addressed the young cat in a worrisome tone.

"Which way did your dream tell you to go? Do we go left or right?"

Yohan was thinking hard. The dream only gave him the river, but the tiger gave him no time to think.

"Quickly, answer now!" said the tiger aggressively.

"To the right," Yohan said nervously, "We go to the right."

Vladimir's canoe moved forward until it arrived by Aznar's canoe. The command was

given and the group steered to the right, unsure of the present outcome. The rock's wall towered high above them. The river narrowed and the pace quickened. Half way into the crack, the walls were closing in. One tiger was able to touch both sides of rock by stretching out his arms. The speed of the river continued to increase. The canoes whipped through the narrow crack as they were tossed about like small toys. It was impossible now to use oars, the group was at the mercy of the water. The great crevasse had all together removed the sky from their sight, and now the shadows led them into the darkness. Commotion spread throughout all ten boats. The tigers in Yohan's canoe looked at him sharply. Yohan hid his eyes from their rebuke and pretended that he was not there. Echoes of thunder resonated off of the walls and a mighty gale began to blow. The wind was so strong that the tigers shielded their faces from the winds piercing gale. Suddenly the river dropped, pushing them down further into the dark; and a choir of terror came from the group, but the voices were inaudible as the wind and thunder raged on. The crevasse had finally let them go into a wide open cavern. Above them a skylight peered down on a majestic whirlpool. The raging water twirled quickly under the sunlight Its fatal currents had seized other victims in the past, and today it may well have many others.

Before the tigers had a chance to gather their senses, the whirlpool drew the small boats inward with its potent vacuum and it was not inclined to let them go from its clutches. The lead boat tried to rally a signal to tell the others of what to do, but the horn's call could not overpower the thunderous sound of the river's eye. In a desperate effort, the king screamed his command,

"PADDLE!" shouted Aznar. " PADDLE FOR YOUR LIVES! PADDLE TO THE CAVERN WALL!"

The soldiers, although unaware of their king's command, grabbed their oars and rowed with all their might. The white foam drew them in closer. The circular current was perplexing; no one knew which way to stir. Some tigers found themselves stirring right into the center of the eye, while others thought they were gaining ground. The water and wind worked as a team to keep the prey in sight. Yohan was nearly drowned by a splashing wave. The canoe that he was in was fairing better than the others, and he was nearly out of the eye's grasp. Anzar's boat made it safely to the cavern's wall; the wolves' boat was there too. Two boats were in a struggle against the eye; however, without hope, the water consumed them and they were quickly taken under. One boat was propped up into the air and the canoe, with its occupants, came crashing down into the center of the whirlpool. Two other canoes were fighting hard against the raging water, but the river's eye had already lost five boats; it would not lose two more. The remainder of the group cautiously made their way around the whirlpool. They took the nearest opening, hoping it was not the way they came in. The tigers fought the current back out into the open. The new area was unfamiliar to the tigers; it was as if they had been swept away to a new world. The hills ran higher than the simple lowlands of Bal-Malfest. The trees were taller, and the smell of the air was as fresh as the first day God had blown it into existence. Some of the tigers did not like the area; they wanted to return home; but under Aznar, dreams of home were far gone.

The group landed upon shore. Half drowned and half petrified, the tigers ate some of the drenched supplies. Most of the food was inedible now. Anzar looked for his chief scribe, Vladimir, but he was no where to be found. Anzar called once again, a fellow soldier

addressed him.

"Sir," said the soldier, "he was in one of the boats that did not get away."
Anzar did not show any remorse for the lost. He simply rolled his eyes and said,
"A few lost for a great cause, it is expected."

When Aznar took note of Yohan's presence, he was overjoyed that he still had a way to the silver horn. Yohan on the other hand thought that the king would chastise him, but he was surprised when he came up beside him and said,

"I don't know if you were right or wrong in your decision," said Aznar, "but if it has taken us one step closer to the treasure, it was done for the good of the tigers."
Aznar patted the young cat on the back. This did not help Yohan feel any better. Further away a group of ten soldiers had gathered together to speak about the unfamiliar territory. Some were afraid of the stories of the jungle, they had heard tales of lost tigers who never returned once they entered. Others doubted the kitten's knowledge of the silver horn, saying that Aznar had gone mad in believing a naive daydream. One soldier addressed the rest of the group.

"You all know how I feel now." he said in a whisper, "Our king is off his rocker, and that kitten is lying; he doesn't know the way. Besides, we all know the stories of the jungle: once you go in, you don't come out. I say we stand our ground and head back home. I'm in no hurry to die. Who's with me?"

The seven tigers nodded in agreement, the other two were not sure.

A plan of mutiny was beginning to form, but the plan was cut short. Aznar emerged from behind the group. He had heard little of the conversation, but he knew what was going on. Aznar stood with his hands behind his back.

"What are you talking about?" asked the king.

The soldier found it hard to speak. One of the tigers fumbled with his words, but was interrupted by the king.

"You ten are far away from the rest of the group. That worries me, and I don't like to be worried. I might begin to think a mutiny was at hand. I might have to make examples out of some of you. Do you think that's fitting?"

All ten tigers shook their heads quickly. Suddenly, Aznar grabbed one of the soldiers by the throat. The tiger gasped for air as Aznar's hand tightened down.

"Now, you ten are going to wipe those silly ideas about the jungle out of your heads. We're going in and we're not leaving until I find the silver horn, YOU HEAR ME! NOW HEAD BACK TO THE GROUP, BEFORE I TAKE MY BLADE TO ALL OF YOU!"
Aznar threw the soldier to the ground. The remaining tigers helped their comrade to his feet and returned to the others. Aznar looked over his shoulder. He peered into the distance, sampled the air, and blew it out of his nostrils. There was a malignant smell in the breeze, it gave Aznar thoughts of nasty things that might lie ahead, but he showed no emotion. All he wanted was the horn, and he was willing to sacrifice anyone to find it.

Chapter 6: Welcome to the Jungle

The next morning brought an eerie silence. No one spoke for most of the day. Even Aznar, with his commands, was speechless at times. With most of the canoes damaged,

the group was forced to head out on foot. The tigers and the three wolves lined up to march along the remaining stretch of Titan's river. Yohan walked along side the king; he couldn't help but notice a fear in Aznar's eyes, in fact, that fear appeared on every tiger's face. The wolves were quiet as well, but their demeanor showed more strength than cowardice. The river ended at a rocky embankment. The rocks stood on top of one another and created an unstable knoll that they had to climb. Aznar sent the wolves first. The wolves managed to make it to the top, nearly slipping on few stones, and signaled for the others to come up. Once at the top, the tigers were able to look above a vast valley of trees that grew far into the distance; so far, that it almost seemed to be a country in itself. How deep it went, no one knew. Sly sniffed the air. A low growl came from deep inside him. The tigers took note of Sly's reaction and it spooked them further than they already were.

"Quiet wolf," said Aznar, "or I'll give you something to growl about!" he said in a shaky voice.

Sly lowered his tone. He had never seen his master so frightened before; and frankly, he was enjoying it. Finding the horn in the great jungle was going to be more difficult than they had imagined. Aznar kept Yohan close to him. The kitten was the map in that uninviting realm of wood, and Aznar was going to keep him close to be sure not to lose him. A beaten path led the way to a small opening in the jungle. The tigers went down from the rocky slope and began to slowly travel along the dirty strip. Aznar halted his soldiers twenty feet from the opening. The tear in the jungle looked like a mouth ready to gobble up the entire group. He sent a soldier forward.

The soldier nodded and ran forward into the mouth of the jungle. The king took Yohan aside from the rest of the party. Aznar knelt down to Yohan, putting his hands on his shoulders.

"You have done your king a great service. Now, which way does your dream tell you to go to find the horn?"

"I don't know." said Yohan.

Aznar shook the kitten once to force an answer out of him. Aznar's voice became aggressive.

"It's just like the whirlpool, you knew the way. It was dangerous; and lives were lost, but we're closer to the treasure. You're not holding out on your king, are you? What would your parents think? Tell me, Yohan which way do we go? Is it straight through, to the east, or to the west? Which way do we go?"

Yohan was confused and terrified by the tiger's onslaught of questioning. So once again, he said the first thing that came to his mind.

"We go straight through."

"Very good---that's right-- you're just nervous from the whirlpool. Its o.k., you're just a child."

The soldier came back. His armor and face was wet from the dew among the leaves. The soldier took his spot back with his companions, and the group moved languidly into the jungle. Inside, the trees were covered with moss and liverworts; no tree was bare from it. A thick mist hung heavily amongst the treetops. The mist sent down airy moisture that quickly dampened everyone's armor, jackets, or cloaks. A labyrinth of roots grew large

and abundant on the jungle floor, causing the group to climb over or to pass under the growth.

The air was quiet and still; and, with the occasional call of a distant creature, nothing crept, crawled, or slithered along the ground from what the tigers could see. Aznar, with Yohan next to him, stayed at the back of his force. The tigers that had claimed superiority and great courage were now scared, insignificant cats in this foreboding kingdom. The wolves, however, stood tall and courageous. Aznar took note of this; the jealousy inside him bubbled, but he could do nothing to the wolves, so he tried to give his troops a boost of morale.

“Stop looking like children! We are tigers, no forest can scare us. Stop hunching over. The Shavronites stand tall, aren’t you better than they?”

The soldiers gained some confidence, but only for a moment. Slowly each tiger returned to his hunched position as they clutched their weaponry tightly, looking to the left and right as not to be surprised. The marching inched on. The opening to the forest had disappeared behind the vegetation. The day was becoming old and what light the mist had let through was fading away into the dusk. The main concern now was to find a camping site. After another hour of walking, the group stopped by an enormous tree. The ground was flat, except for a few stones, and would do for a bed. The tigers had nothing to place on the ground (losing most of the supplies at the whirlpool) so they were forced to sleep on the muddy floor. Aznar, with the help of three more tigers, chained his slaves to the trunks of smaller trees further away from the campsite. Yohan did not like the way the wolves were treated. Sly was chained by both legs. Brute was chained by the neck. The brace around his throat was so tight that his breathing was spastic at times. Sebastian was placed right up against a tree; the only way he could have slept was standing up. The daylight was gone and it seemed that the forest came alive when night fell. Hoots and hollering buzzed from all directions. Frogs croaked in the background and a bird’s call resonated throughout the tree tops. The tigers looked earnestly for the perpetrators of the noises, but nothing was seen. The creatures were hidden by the jungle, away from the tigers’ fears.

The noise of the forest died away and a few tigers gathered together to tell stories about the silver horn. Yohan, although not apart of the group, lay nearby to listen until he fell asleep.

“My father told me that the silver horn is worth more than all the money in the world,” announced one tiger, “And when our king gets it, he’ll wish all of us into great riches.” Another tiger cleared his throat to speak.

“Ah you speak truth my friend,” said another soldier, “yes, truth indeed.”

There were other stories the tigers told into the night, but you and I know they were not true. They were only lies their forefathers made up to cover up what really happened. Who could have ever thought that a mere rabbit would stand against the white unicorn? But with the Holy One’s help it did happen. Now after the tigers were fast asleep, the three wolves were having a discussion themselves.

“Sly!” said Sebastian, “Hey are you awake, Sly?”

“Yes, what do you want?”

“Remember what we talked about once we reached the jungle?”

“It's time?” said Sly looking around.

“It's the perfect time, but first we have to get away from these trees. Brute are you o.k.?”

“Barely,” he said gasping for air.

“Look our best time for escape is now. I need you to push your tree over, Its not that large and I know you can do it.”

“No good,” said Brute. “ When it falls the noise will wake up the tigers, and then Aznar will teach us a whip us, you know that.”

“Well can you break your chain?” inquired Sebastian.

“Not without a tool.”

“Dig for a rock--two flat ones,” said Sly, “and break the chain that way.

Brute began to dig furiously, throwing some dirt in the face of his companions. It wasn't long before he found two rocks just large enough to help him break the metal. He placed one rock on the ground, placed his chain on top of it, and used the remaining rock as a hammer. His first strike had no effect. Brute gather all his strength for the second strike, and when both rocks met the chain snapped in two.

“YES!,” replied Sly elatedly.

“Shhh!,” came Sebastian to quiet him, “Don't celebrate yet.”

Brute was still gasping for air, but he managed enough strength to break Sly's chains. Sebastian was a harder case. The tree wasn't good for breaking the chain, so it took Brute a few minutes to break them. Once Sebastian was free, there was one more task before the escape.

“I want my rapier. I'll be back, you two stay here.”

“Leave it.” said Sly.

Sebastian ignored the command and made his way into the camp. The wolf spotted his master sucking his thumb; the wolf had to cover his mouth to keep from laughing. Beside Aznar slept Yohan; Sebastian had plans for him, but first he had to retrieve his blade. The wolf was able to get his sword without causing any suspicion and returned to his companions

“Well Brute, we're going to have to do something about that brace of yours,” said Sebastian. “ No point of you passing out on us.”

“Yes,” he said clutching his throat, “It would be appreciated.”

The lock was placed behind the brace. The shackle of the lock was large enough for Sebastian to break it without hurting Brute.

“Now, you kneel down and keep you head steady. My nerves tend to get the best of me at these critical moments.”

Brute saw Sebastian's hand shaking.

“Forget it,” he said moving out of the way. “ I'll take my chances with the brace instead of a sword in my throat.”

“Calm down, I was just kidding,” replied Sebastian smiling, “ I'm steady as a rock. Just hold still.”

The wolf raised the sword and brought it down quickly. The shackle broke, Sly went to

remove it, and Brute took a few breaths of fresh air.

"Let's go." said Sly.

"No, not yet. There is something in that camp that is very valuable to us and to the tigers."

"That being?"

"The map---the kitten!" replied Sebastian.

The wolves inspected the scene, planning the best way to get the cat.

"How are we to get him? He's right by Aznar." said Brute.

"It's just like getting the sword; all I have to do is grab him and run, there nothing to it." Sebastian slowly made his way back into the tiger's camp; his companions watched on with shaken nerves and silent prayers. The kitten was sleeping behind Aznar, which made the deed easier to be done. Sebastian went to pick up Yohan, but the kitten squirmed and nearly woke up. The wolf waited a few seconds before his second attempt. He placed his hand under Yohan's head; the cat purred, laying snugly in the wolf's palm. The second hand went under his legs. The kitten was lifted from his place; and with the map secured, the wolf dashed into the shadows of the jungle with the other two close behind him. It was silent like it had been before; not one tiger awoke, all dreamed of great riches and the silver treasure.

Chapter 7: The Wolf Pack

In the morning, Aznar awoke in a panic. The young cat was nowhere to be found and he was becoming uneasy with every second. The king went over to his soldiers, who were still sleeping, and kicked them in order to wake them up.

"Where is he?" he said scanning at the group. "WHERE IS HE?!!"

The soldiers stood dumbfounded, Aznar's patience was running out.

"Go get the Shavronites, move!"

Three soldiers went back to where they had chained the wolves. When they saw that they were not there, they told Aznar of the circumstances. The king put all the pieces together and there was such a rage in his heart that he was ready to kill all life in that jungle to find the kitten. Aznar led the tigers through the jungle in pursuit of the runaways.

Further away, the wolves were leading their captive through the thick brush of the morning. Sebastian held Yohan by his jacket, and whenever the cat would struggle to get away, Sebastian would shake Yohan in order to suppress his will to escape.

"I wish I was there to see the look on Aznar's face." Said Brute.

"If you were, you would probably regret it." Replied Sly.

"Stupid tigers!" said Sebastian laughing, "Taking kitten right under their noses was too easy, it is almost as if we had some help," he said glancing up.

Yohan continued to fidget to get away from Sebastian's grip.

"Let go of me!"

"Stop squirming, squirt." said Sebastian.

"I said--- let go-- of-- ME!"

Yohan, in an aggressive tiff, broke away from the wolf's grip. He hissed at his three captors, bearing his teeth and extending his claws ready to fight. The wolves were taken by surprise.

"Well, looks like we got ourselves a little firebug," replied Sebastian crossing his arms.
"What are you going to do, little cat?" said Brute.

Yohan, regretting his present action, remembered what his parents told him to do when he was in trouble; so, he turned and ran with all his might through the thick vegetation leaving his troubles behind, or so he thought. The wolves wasted no time in pursuing Yohan. The kitten could hear one of the wolves heavy on his heels. He turned to the left; then made a sharp right, and it seemed that he had gotten away. A grin came over his face as he ran along side a group of bushes. Suddenly the bushes gave way to a clearing, but when Yohan turned to dart through, Brute met him. Yohan ran in the other direction. Sebastian, hiding among the bushes, lunged in front of him. Yohan tried to scurry away, but the skinny wolf grabbed him. Sebastian hung the kitten on a tree branch by his coat. "Put me down, put me down!"

"You've got spunk kid--I don't like spunk," said Sebastain. "I'll put you down on one condition: that you don't run away again."

Yohan squirmed and twisted himself to break the branch. Sebastain addressed him again.

"Look cat, it would be in your best interest to stay with us. A youngster like you won't be able to survive on his own here. You will die. You want to go back to your family don't you?"

This got Yohan's attention. He calmed down, and directed his attention on Sebastian.

"Good little cat, very good." he said placing the cat on the ground, "Now we need your help, there is a reasons why we took you away from the tigers."

"Why?" asked Yohan.

"The Horn." replied Brute.

Sebastain gave the details.

"You see little cat, there's no doubt that Aznar is greedy for that treasure; and since we've taken his map, that means you, he's lost. When we find the treasure, we will sell it and split the profit three ways. All of us have decided to gain some wealth with our new found freedom. Now, if you do your part, we will return you to your family without harm. Cross us or run away and one of us will be certain to lose you, understand?"

Yohan crossed his arms; the wolves did the same.

"Think fast, cat," said Sebastian.

Yohan nodded his head reluctantly, knowing that he wanted to see his family again; and the wolves, for the time being, were his only avenue back.

"What is your name?" asked Sly kindly.

"My name is Yohan," he said indignantly.

"Yohan," said Sebastian making a frown, "that name doesn't sit right with me. I'm going to call you "*Map*" for short," he said, as he tapped Yohan on his head.

"What do we do now, Sebastian?" said Brute.

"Map is going to tell us where to go next."

Yohan thought for moment.

"Well, after the river, there was the jungle, and then after that there was--"

"Was what?" said Sly.

“Something very nasty is next; something that makes a hissing noise, and it’s very loud.”

“You mean a snake,” Brute said with a chuckle, “those little reptiles, if that is all we have to worry about, the horn will be ours in no time.”

“What about Aznar?” inquired Brute.

“What about him? He won’t find us. We’ve traveled far in this jungle in one night.”

“But a tiger’s senses are just as good as ours. They could probably catch our scent.”

“He has a point, said Sly. “We should move as quickly as we can.”

So off they went through the deep jungle. The pace was fast and Yohan found it hard to keep up. Brute gave him a lift upon his shoulders. Yohan found that although the wolves came off as nasty creatures, they seemed to be kind despite their cold demeanor. The trail they left in the jungle was nearly impossible to follow. The wolves would travel in a straight line for a few minutes, and then they would either steer to the right or the left in order to throw off any pursuing tigers. The notion of breakfast was far from their minds until their stomachs began to speak to them. Nothing was in sight that was fit for eating. The pace began to lag, and the wolves found it hard to continue. The area around them looked the same as it had before. There wasn’t a real break in the vegetation; it seemed to smother them under the humid temperature. Yohan was able to find a few insects that were edible. A cat of his nature considered insects, although a second rate meal, the best nourishment for the moment. His father had taught him a little rhyme that reminded him which ones to eat:

If the crawler is green or brown; go and chow down. If it’s other than that; you’re one dead cat!

He offered some of his findings to the wolves, but Brute and Sebastian rejected it. Sly tried six; and, after feeling sick, swore never to try another one again. Yohan needed to understand that wolves needed some type of meat, cooked or raw it didn’t matter to them. Brute and Sebastian left for a hunt, while Sly stayed with Yohan. The stillness of the jungle left an unsettling mood for the two; neither of them had anything to say to each other. Yohan made drawings in the dirt to stay entertained.

“You’re doing it all wrong,” Sly said looking at Yohan’s drawing, “A house doesn’t look like that.”

“It looks fine to me.” he said hiding his work.

“Come now, no reason to be unseemly. You might as well get use to traveling with us. Here, let me introduce myself.”

“I already know your names,” the kitten said as he continued to draw in the dirt.

“Aznar has been talking to you. Whatever he told you about us is a lie. Those names are not our own.” said Sly

“Then what are your real names?”

“I’m Uri, Sebastian is called Nahu, and Brute; well, Brute goes by the name B.A.D.”

“What does B.A.D. mean?”

“Big and Dumb.”

Sly held his belly as he laughed. Yohan’s hard attitude slowly softened and he began to laugh too.

“That’s so wrong---funny---but wrong.” said Yohan laughing.

“See we wolves aren't that bad. Besides, I'm just joking. We really call him "*little Samson*" for his strength, but his real name is Durgon. However, we preferred the names our master---”

Sly paused for a moment, looking up at the sky. Yohan had to call Sly twice in order to break the trance he was under.

“It's a funny thing,” said Sly, “I'm free and I still call that wretched tiger my master. Anyway, we like the names we were given. There easy for you to remember and it's about the only good thing Aznar has done for us.”

“Is it true what he did to you, I mean, your back?”

Sly sat idle once again, and in a very calm, yet brittle voice he said,

“It's true.”

A few moments later Brute and Sebastian came back. They had nothing to show for their efforts and both looked more famished than when they had left.

“Fine anything?” said Sly.

“Nothing, but more bugs.”

“For a jungle its sure barren of any good food,” said Sebastian, “ There must be a water source around here somewhere.” he began sniffing the air and after some time he caught the scent. “ I think I've got it! Over here, let's move.”

The hiking continued in the same manner throughout the day. The heat of the day reached its peak and it was hard to breath under the humidity. Resting was frequent, and it was harder to start again with every stop. The jungle was relentless. Every turn led to more trees, shrubs and roots; however, due to the wolves' sense of smell, their direction was not hampered by the jungle's oppression. The wolves' hunger soon overpowered them, and they were forced to follow in the footsteps of their captive. Brute grabbed a handful of insects, placed them in his mouth, and held his snout together so he would not spit up the crawlers. Sebastian struggled to get one down his throat; the insect would fumble in his mouth, and he had to use his tongue to keep the crawler inside until he had the nerve to clamp down on it. Sly's vow, which he had taken earlier, was broken the minute his stomach ached for food. The wolf gobbled down more insects than the entire group.

"We can't keep this up. Map might survive, but we won't unless we get some proper food."

Sebastian began to sniff the air. He paused for a moment and tried again.

"We're close" he said taking another sniff, "Very close."

"Are you sure?" said Sly.

"As sure as I am a wolf."

" And when there is water--"

"There is fish!" said Sly happily.

Sebastian led the way like a bloodhound, stooping down occasionally to get a better scent. He frequently told the group to stop whenever he felt he had gotten lost; but soon he would gain the smell of water again, and off they went deeper in the jungle. A few paces ahead laid a massive tree that had fallen over. It had cleared a path in the forest; and for the first time, in about two days, the group got a whiff of fresh, cool air. The wolves jumped on the tree and walked forward to see what was up ahead. Yohan

struggled to get on the tree. He had to call for help and Brute assisted him. Sebastian moved slowly forward to the tree's branches. The tree collapsed on a cliff that was fifty feet above a watering hole, whose source was a small waterfall. The branches hung over the sides of the cliff. Sly quietly snuck up behind Sebastian.

"Hey!" he shouted.

"Ahhhh!" Sebastian yelled, grabbing a branch, so he wouldn't fall over the side, "Are you mad? Never do that again!"

"I see the water, how are we to get down?"

"Jump, what else? The water looks deep enough."

Brute and Yohan came forward.

"Who's going to jump first?"

"Sly," said Sebastian, "since you like sneaking up behind your friends and scaring them half to death, you can first."

"Uh---no!" said Sly.

From behind them, Yohan took a few steps back to get a good running start. He rolled up his sleeves, swiped his feet, like a bull ready to charge, and ran forward toward the edge.

"Out of the way!"

The kitten ran up the thickest branch he saw and jumped clear out into the open. As he fell, a flock of birds appeared out of the surrounding trees to flee the sound of Yohan's joy, and then he splashed into the deep water with a great thud. The wolves hurried to the edge to search for the cat, he was no where to be found.

"Its that punk again!" said Sebastian looking over the edge, "Crazy kid! If we lose him we lose the treasure!"

Suddenly, the cat emerged from the deep and began to swim playfully in the pool.

"Come on down! There's fish in here!"

"Fish!" cried Sly as he jumped over the side.

When he came up he had a fish in his mouth. Brute went over next and the splash he made showered over Sly and Yohan.

Sebastian stood still as stone overlooking the others.

"Come on, Sebastian, you're not scared are you?" replied Brute.

"I'm afraid of nothing," he said pointing.

Now the truth of the matter was that Sebastian wasn't afraid of the height at all, he was just concerned about the drop. He inched very slowly out among the branches and looked over the side, his vision blurred. He shook his head and took a deep breath.

"I thought I'd never see the day that a wolf would be afraid." Said Brute.

"Oh, be quiet!" shouted Sebastian.

"Looks like he needs a little help. O.k. Sebastian," Sly said after taking a bite out of his fish, "When you jump keep your body as straight as possible, just like an arrow."

"Like an arrow," he repeated to himself.

Sebastian took a deep breath and stepped off.

"Oh, here he comes," said Yohan.

"His form looks good, uh- oh he's breaking up! He's panicking! He's not taking the arrow analogy very well." Replied Brute.

"Wow, I haven't seen anyone flare their arms and legs like that before!" said Yohan.

With a plop, and a lot of shouting, Sebastian hit the water with full force. The sting of the water left him stupefied momentarily as he sank under the water. When he came to his senses, the wolf spotted a school of fish swimming around him. The speed of his reflexes rewarded him with two fish with one blow from his rapier, and he returned to the surface to eat his catch. The wolves tore through their food quickly; and without hesitation, returned to the water to get more fish. They ate as many fish as they could; nearly finishing off every fish that was there. Yohan had his fill of two fishes. He threw the remains to the side and went over to the wolves, who were discussing further plans.

"Selling the horn to the highest bidder is the best thing to do," said Sebastian.

"We only know how to deal with the tigers," said Brute. "We don't know about any other kings or queens who will want the treasure."

"Well it's time to learn new things. Who wouldn't want the horn of a mystical beast at their fingertips? You've heard how Aznar spoke about it even before the expedition. There's royalty out there that would give up kingdoms just to touch it."

"How far do we have to go?" Sly said addressing Yohan.

Yohan hunched his shoulders.

"How do you know the way to the silver horn anyway?"

"I only have bits and pieces of it, I know the general way. My friend, Maligo, asked me to pray for him. So I did. Now, I have this dream every time I sleep."

"If you don't know all the details and since we've seen how far the jungle goes, we could be here for awhile. Let's get some rest."

"I'll get a fire going," said Sly.

"Skip the fire," replied Sebastian quickly, "We don't want to take the chance give our position away."

"Wait, I've been thinking. Aren't you going to help the other Shavronites?" Yohan said looking at the mark on their hands, "I have a friend who wants to be free."

"All Shavronites want to be free," said Sly, "It just so happens that we got an opportunity."

"And what is this friend business?" said Sebastian with a grimace. "A Tajirian is not a friend to a Shavronite and Shavronite is no friend of a Tajirian."

"That's not true!" shouted Yohan.

Sebastian had a smirk on his face.

"Let me tell you a story that may change your mind. You may have heard how Brute was used as a gladiator and how Aznar tore Sly's back open. Now let me tell you how I got my golden eye."

The wolf paused for a moment to clear his throat, and then he continued.

"I was born in Tajir, just like you, but I didn't have the freedom other cats have. *A cat is free; any other is a slave* is what I learned from my parents. Even though we had nothing, our love was abundant during my childhood. At the age of seven, I was given this mark," he said holding up his hand, "I cried and screamed as they pressed that hot iron on my flesh, Brute and Sly can vouch for that. My mother and father only could console me, for

they knew the pain too.

When I thought that life could not give anymore pain, I was sadly mistake. During that time Aznar's father was still alive and it was his son's birthday. His parents decided it was time for him to have a Shavronite of his own, as is the custom of the Tajirians. And so; whether it was ordered or cruel fate, the tigers came to the slums and broke into my home. My parents, although no match for the soldiers, stood their ground to protect me; but the tigers took me away. I have never seen them since, so don't ask if I will see them again. I was brought to the palace, wrapped in chains like a present and stood in the royal hall. Aznar, who was about my age at the time, didn't understand why a wolf was in the palace. His father explained to him what I was. It was around this time that I met Sly and he taught me how to obey orders, and to be on my mark when called. Ten years went by and Aznar celebrated another birthday as before, I was taught how to use a blade to become an entertainer for the party.

At least one- hundred tigers where watching me that night. Aznar and his parnets were watching from their thrones. I was good, but not as good as I am now; and in a moment of hesitation, I dropped my sword. The crowd laughed and jeered me. Aznar was in a rage and came down towards me in a fit. He called me names, he slapped me in the face, and then; whether it was insanity or courage, I mustered all the strength I had and pushed him on his back. Aznar sat up, mortified by the action. It was silent; it was worst than any sound I had ever heard before. From the throne chairs, Aznar's mother stood up, walked up to her son, and helped him to his feet. It was still quiet, and Azanr's mother whispered this phrase into his ear. It was so simply, yet it struck death into my heart: "*Show him his place.*"

She came up to me, took the sword out of my hand, and returned to her chair. Aznar shook with violence. He lunged at me with teeth drawn. It was a fierce battle, the tigers cheered Aznar on; and I could have sworn I heard my name in praise, but a tiger's strength is above a wolf's and Aznar knocked me to the floor. The crowd cheered him; his parents hugged him in admiration. I returned to one knee, filled with hate. I spat at Aznar's feet. His father gave him a look. Aznar understood what he had to do, and then he came up to me, took his claws, and ripped into my eye. It was damage beyond healing. It was removed and the gold you see is the replacement. So now you understand why I have this eye. You also should understand why a Shavronite will never be a friend of a Tajirian. I hate the tigers and I wish the death to their kind."

Yohan was shaken by the story, yet deep down he knew the wolf's hate was wrong and spoke up in confidence.

"Things can change," said the kitten. "My friend told me of a god who does change things. I've talked to him and I think he'll do something."

"God--- you mean the Holy One? What does a Tajirian know of Him? You stupid cats worship iron and stone!"

Sebastian quickly stood at his full height. Yohan began to back away.

"The Shavronites have been praying for years for the Holy One to do something, he doesn't care about me or your friend."

"All right, Sebastian, that's enough," said Sly.

The wolf quickly glanced at his friend and continued his tirade.

"The Holy One will do nothing because he can't do anything. Your friend will end up just like me: a slave fit to serve at the feet of a tiger. When he's done serving and kissing the tigers feet, he dies a slave. There is no hope and our God doesn't listen to some simple minded child's blabbering!"

Suddenly, Brute grabbed Sebastian by his shirt.

"ENOUGH!"

"Get your hands off of me!" Sebastian said struggling with Brute.

"I don't care how much you hate the cats. You and I are Shavronites. I will not stand hear and listen to you defame our Creator's name."

"Fool, that's what you are. We've been praying for well over a hundred years. You think God is going to listen to a kitten; a Tajirian who doesn't know the first thing about him?"

"I don't know, but his friend knows Him," said Brute. "The Holy One could be acting on his behalf, not *Map's*."

"Maybe, but the cat needs to know who he is and what he will become. I'm the only one with the guts to say it," he said, breaking away from Brute's hold.

"All right maybe you do," said Sly. "Now just calm down; it's been a long day. Let's get some sleep."

Sebastian slept far away from everyone else. Brute and Sly slept near the water, while Yohan stayed awake a little longer than he would have. He was disturbed by Sebastian's words, and was beginning to feel that his prayer wasn't worth anything at all.

Chapter 8: Hollow Haven

There wasn't much fish left for breakfast the next morning; and if there was, the fish were hiding very well. After a cool drink of water, the four continued into the jungle like the day before. There wasn't much talking from anyone. Tempers were still high, and no one spoke to avoid bringing up last night's quarrel. It was cooler that day, which made the pace faster. Suddenly, to their surprise the jungle's floor sloped at an extreme angle, it was hard to tell if it was purely vertical or not. The trees that grew down the slope provided a means of going down, and it wasn't long before all made it to the bottom safely. The rest of the day was spent the same way; yet when the moon rose, neither of them thought of stopping. The half moon sat high in the sky and Yohan saw that the wolves would lift their heads and give a small howl. Yohan did not understand this ritual; it must have been an old tradition for the species of the wolf. The night looked as if it would give no surprises or dangers, like the previous night before; but in the corner of his eye, Sly spotted a little creature that had been watching them from afar. Its big green eyes were comical, yet it left a feeling of unfamiliarity of its intentions. Sly did not want to alarm anyone over this, he was sure it was just an inhabitant making sure that they would move along their way, not disturbing its territory; however, when the creature appeared closer in a tree, Sly alarmed the others.

"Hey, someone's watching us," replied Sly fearfully. "Over there in the tree."

The others looked, but the creature was gone.

"This is no time for games," said Sebastian.

"This is not a game."

"By the way can we stop," said Yohan. " We've been hiking all day. I'm hungry and tired."

"We'll travel for another hour, and then we'll rest after that." replied Sebastian.

The group continued and the creature with the big green eyes followed them a ways off among the bushes. Sly, keeping a keen eye on the creature, decided to play a little game. As he walked, he picked up a few rocks; and whenever he spotted the creature, he tossed a stone at it. He was hoping to send the animal away; however, the creature would only dodge the projectile, returning to follow them from a different area. When Sly's game failed its desired result, he tried to inform his friends again.

"I tell you someone is following us. Go over and look in the bushes."

"Sly we see nothing and besides, "Brute said taking a deep swallow," you're -you're scaring Map. Isn't that right, young cat?"

Yohan saw the fear on Brute's face and rolled his eyes.

"I'm telling the truth. Go and see for yourself."

"All right if it makes you feel better," said Sebastian.

Sebastian crept over to a group of bushes and began to inspect it.

"I don't see--"

When Sebastian turned around he saw his friends standing still as stone and what they were looking at took his breath away. In the tree tops appeared at least one hundred pair of big green eyeballs. They blinked at the strangers below, wondering what they should do with them, and wondering who they were. It was about five minutes before anyone spoke. Brute gathered the courage to speak.

"What do you want with us?"

"The question is what you're doing around here?" said a voice within the trees.

None of the wolves were inclined to tell about the silver treasure.

"Our business is our own," said Sly.

"Hopefully not the business of throwing rocks," replied another voice.

From the treetops, one of the creatures came down and walked towards them. All they saw, for the moment, were two eyeballs advancing towards them. Sebastian took a fighting stance, but the effort was pointless. The creature was very small, about twelve inches in height; it had long skinny fingers and toes. Its eyes were large and the creature had a long, hairless tail, except at the end, that it flipped from side to side as it looked upon the strangers. Around this creature's neck rested a ruffle made of leaves and jungle vine, and in his hand he wielded a stick with a pointed edge. The wolves and Yohan, not ever seeing a creature like this before, were thinking about the same question, but Yohan was the only one who addressed it.

"What are you?"

The creature looked up at the trees, pointed his stick in the air, and answered the question in a jubilant cry,

"Tarsiers!" the creature replied, as the rest of his kind gave a high pitched call.

One of the wolves went to speak, but the tarsier continued.

"I am Girgan, chief of this clan. It is an honor to see the four of you. You all look weary. Please give us the pleasure of showing you our hospitality."

While Girgan was speaking, Yohan kept a look out at the tarsiers that stayed among the branches, for some reason the eyes of these small creatures hid a secret that Yohan could not deduce; and occasionally he would see a smirk that said something different than what Girgan had proposed. Yohan pulled on Sebastian's cape.

"What?" said Sebastian leaning over.

"They're up to something."

The wolf thought about the warning as he stroked his whiskers. He turned his attention back to Girgan.

"This sounds very generous, but we four have been doing quite well for ourselves. Seeing a bunch of fur balls with big eyeballs coming out of nowhere leaves me and my friends worried. I think we will pass on your offer."

Girgan was insulted by the wolf's description of himself and his tribe, but he held his composure.

"It's a shame. All that food: the fruits, the sweet meats, and the desserts will go to waste. There would have been a nice warm fire for all of you to sleep by instead of the cold jungle. And yes, we were going to put on a play for you too. But if you prefer the coldness of the trees, then proceed on."

Girgan's persuasion worked. The wolves took some time to debate whether or not to trust them.

"I don't know, Sebastian," said Brute, "they seem nice to me."

"There are many things that seem nice, but are deadly. Remember the great saying: *Do not be fooled by strange generosity, for it may be malice in disguise.*"

"I never heard of that before," said Sly. "Did you just make that up?"

"Maybe---It doesn't matter. All I'm saying is that we have to be careful."

"Look, we have traveled for days in this jungle," replied Brute summing up the events. "I'm tired and hungry. I don't know about you, but that fish was not very filling and some sweet meat will do me good."

"Good point," said Sly. "Besides if any of those fur balls get out of line, we'll just leave. They look like they can't do much harm anyway."

The wolves agreed and told Girgan the news.

"Most Excellent! Please follow us. Your food waits not far from here."

The tarsiers' village was only a mile away. The village itself was very simplistic; the area was a large flat opening that was surrounded by trees. A slope, that was nearly impossible to see in the dark, led them inside. Some of the tarsiers disappeared into the darkness.

The chief invited his guests to sit down. At the chief's command, a host of fruits and desserts were brought in front of them. Water contained in wooden bowls were brought out as well. Yohan's hunger controlled him and he gobbled everything he saw in sight, the wolves did the same. The tarsiers, who had disappeared, returned with wood to start a fire. Within moments there was a grand blaze and the warmth made the guest content.

"Would you like more?" Girgan asked with wide eyes.

"Yes, the sweet meats!" said Brute giving his order.

Girgan clapped his hands to signal the entrance of the meat. The meat was cut in thin slices and it was carried on a large wooden slab. The tarsiers tossed the meat into the flame; and when it was saturated with its enticing aroma, they removed it with their sticks and gave it to the wolves. The wolves never questioned what type of meat it was, they thought it was better not to say; the meat was too tasty to put down. Two hours went by and the chief ordered more fruit and meat to appear, it kept coming in droves as if by magic until the guests were full. Yohan, Brute, Sebastian, and Sly stretched themselves out on the ground by the toasty fire. Their bellies were now full, and sleep began to pass over them. Girgan grabbed a fruit. He held it up to Brute's nose.

"More? Eat more!"

"Have mercy---no more food."

"I agree," Sebastian said picking some food from his teeth, "You have done us well, Girgan. How about that play you told us about?"

"We'll handle that in the morning. We'll keep the fire burning until you all are fast asleep."

But Girgan's words were not heard. His guests were already in their slumber. The chief order the fire to be put out and the mess to be cleaned up. The chief came up to Sly and stroked his head.

"That's right, sleep my delicacies, sleep," said Girgan smiling. "Enjoy your dreams of comfort, for tomorrow you die."

As the guest slept, the tarsiers sung a lullaby that would put chills down the spines of those who heard it. They danced in a circle around the guests, and as they did they repeated this song in a wicked whisper:

Snapper-Jaw, Snapper- Jaw dinner is near.

Snapper- Jaw, Snapper- Jaw we will not fear.

We feed them and treat them with what we think is nice.

So you can feast on them like itty bitty mice.

Many beasts have you eaten and my how have you grown.

You're the greatest terror that this jungle has ever known.

Snapper- Jaw, Snapper- Jaw dinner is near.

Snapper-Jaw, Snapper-Jaw we will not fear.

The next day, the guests awoke to find that the tarsiers had prepared for the play. There was a contraption made of wood, leaves, and held together by vines that sat a few feet away from them. It looked like an animal of some kind, yet it was hard to tell because of the crude craftsmanship. Before the play would begin, the chief ordered a round of fruits to be brought out for the guest, "We wouldn't want you to get hungry," he said as he called twenty of his tribe members forward. The twenty tarsiers ran up to the wooden pile and began to straighten it out. When they had finished, a long puppet emerged. It looked like a worm, but it was too long and big for that. The puppet was built into twenty segments and in those segments were holes for the tarsiers to climb in. Suddenly the crude wooden puppet came to life. The tarsiers moved the puppet in an "S" pattern and finally the guests (and I'm sure you have too) figured out what animal it was.

"Our play is about to begin," replied Girgan. "but there are four more props that we are bringing out."

The chief clapped his hands and four wooden cutouts were placed in front of the puppet. The first looked like a kitten.

"That looks a little like me," said Yohan.

The second looked like a strong wolf built for power.

"And that one looks like me." Replied Brute raising an eyebrow.

The third cutout looked like a thin wolf and there was a blotch of yellow pigment to represent a golden eye. Sebastian caressed his jaw in deep thought.

The fourth one was a cutout of a fat wolf; because of the girth of the piece, it looked more piggish than wolfish.

"I'm not that big am I?" asked Sly.

"I don't know, looks pretty accurate to me," Sebastian said poking Sly in the side.

"Ha, ha, ha very funny." Sly said swiping Sebastian hand away.

Girgan stepped forward to start the play.

"Let us begin! Let me tell you a story about the great *Snapper-Jaw*."

The tribe repeated the name three times, and then the chief continued.

"Long ago a snake came upon a village; and hungry for food, it began to eat our ancestors. They were helpless against him. Every year the same snake would return to feed on them again, so our forefathers moved from place to place, but the snake would only follow them. One day the snake came again and the tarsiers tried a hand at diplomacy. They found out that the snake was reasonable. On that day the tarsiers and the snake made a treaty. Today the treaty is alive. The treaty states that every year we offer a meal to the snake."

The tarsiers moved the puppet around the cutouts of the guests.

"When we do he leaves us alone to live free. Today is the year of feeding."

The tarsiers opened the mouth of the puppet and clamped down on the cutout of Yohan. The kitten flinched from the sight. The cutout went into the puppet to symbolize the eating process. The tarsiers sprung from the trees to join the chief; they surrounded the guest chanting the name of the snake. The guests jumped up and tried to break through the crowd to get out. A few tarsiers were kicked into the air, but it did little to help. The chanting continued. The sound irritated the wolves. In a fit of rage, Sebastian swung his blade striking a few tarsiers. The blows were not fatal and the tribe continued their chanting. They needed to feed Snapper-Jaw, but the meals were fighting back. The tribe had a way of controlling the meal. Within the crowd the chief took a blowgun, made of bamboo, inserted a small dart and fired it at Yohan. The dart made its mark and the pain in the cat's voice put the wolves on edge. Yohan stumbled, his vision became blurred; and whatever substance was on the dart, caused him to pass out. Immediately the tribe began to pull the cat away, but Brute jumped in to protect him. He bit and swung at the tribe violently; however, his efforts were short-lived. In a tree, another tarsier shot a dart into his arm, and another went into his leg. Soon he fainted; some of the tarsiers climbed him like a mountain and celebrated.

"Sly!" cried Sebastian, "I need--"

Sly could not answer. He was taken down as well. Sebastian was alone, the chanting continued, and his anger rose. Sebastian chased the tarsiers into the trees and continued to swing his rapier to kill as many as he could. The tribe laughed and jeered him, baring their teeth like a wolf. This enraged Sebastian even further, and he took a rock and threw it into the branches. The chief shot a dart, but Sebastian blocked it with his sword. Another dart was fired, and then another, but the wolf continued to block every attempt; yet, his skill could not save him from the constant bombardment. Finally, he was struck in his arm and back. He stumbled over to the chief, his sword swayed lazily at his side. Gorgan looked up to Sebastian, as David would have Goliath, made his hands into a mouth, and repeated the snake's name. Sebastian tried to raise his sword to strike the chief dead, but his arm would not respond. He stood there like an open target. Then to his left a dart was fired. It landed in his neck and the wolf dropped to his knees, yet he would not fall.

"I hope you like our play," Gorgan said loading another dart, "I got nothing against you wolf. So don't take it to heart when you get eaten."

With a last effort Sebastian raised his sword high into the air. The dart flew, the sword fell, and the wolf lost all consciousness. The tribe overtook him, and dragged him away to a place far away from the village where many had been taken before. The treaty was to be fulfilled and Snapper-Jaw waited hungry from a year's wait.

Chapter 9: Snapper-Jaw

"Sebastian!" cried a voice, "Sebastian, are you all right?"

The wolf slowly opened his eyes and the sun's ray caught the metallic pupil to cause it to glimmer. Sebastian slowly came to his hands and knees. Sly and Brute stood beside him; they helped him to his feet.

"Are you all right? Can you walk on your own?"

"Yes," Sebastian said shaking his head, "By the way, where are those fur balls? I'm going to kill every last one of them."

"I think that's the least of our worries," said Sly. "Look around you."

A very strange thing had happened while the wolves were under the toxin of the tarsiers. This place, where they now stood, looked far different than the jungle that they had ventured through a few days before. The landscape around them was an open prairie of bones and other dead things. There were few trees that grew here. Leaves did not grow on them, and the bark, which was once a healthy brownish red, was now discolored by fungus and disease. The air was stagnant and a strange fog loomed in the distance. The ground was moist, which allowed a few puddles of dirty water to become a breeding ground for a host of mosquitoes. The insects buzzed around the wolves, and they swatted the pests away with their cloaks. Near a breeding puddle, a corpse, of what looked like a tiger, lay rotten. The corpse was dressed in scratched armor and by its side was a broken sword. It was a Tajirian soldier. The body had not been torn, but there were two large holes that pierced the armor. From it oozed a stinking, foaming substance. The flies had already taken command over the body so the wolves moved on. There was a leg bone of another animal to their left and a pile of skulls to their right. The scene repeated itself as the wolves scouted the area. Weapons lay scattered along the barren prairie. There were lances, swords, war clubs, helmets, and shields. Sebastian spotted his sword placed a few

feet away from him. He picked it up and swung it to make sure that the blade was still good. Sly went to inspect the other discarded weapons.

"Look at this! This lance is from Tajir and the shields too, in fact, all this stuff is from Tajir."

"Well, that is what happened to some of Aznar's soldiers," said Brute. "gobbled up by a snake."

"But what kind of snake is it? I've never known a snake to eat a tiger, what kind of snake could do that?" Sly replied concerned for their welfare.

"I don't know and I'm hoping we'll never have to find out," said Sebastian. "By the way, where is Map?"

The two wolves hunched their shoulders.

"Do you think he's--"

Brute caught himself before he said the word.

"Maybe, but let's look for him anyway. Without him the treasure is lost."

"I'm concerned more about him, Sebastian, than the treasure."

Sebastian thought about Sly's remark and nodded his head in agreement.

"You're right. Let's go."

Sly equipped himself with a lance and a shield, Sebastian only carried his rapier, and Brute grabbed a war club. They went further into the wasteland and found more skeletons, cracked armor, and broken weapons. The wolves walked slowly over the hills and valleys in search of Map. The kitten; however, was very close. Over the neighboring hill there was a hole, it was a burrow to be more exact, and deep in this burrow laid the kitten, still under the influence of the dart. The sunlight made its way into the burrow to shine enough light on him, but it stopped short of the darkness before him. Yohan came out of his deep sleep. He rose to his feet and brushed himself off. He looked around to see where he was and what had happened to the wolves. He rubbed his eyes from the blinding sun and began to make his way out of the hole, but something prevented him from doing that. A deep hissing came from the darkness; it resonated throughout the whole burrow.

"Where are you going?" said the voice within the darkness.

Yohan turned his head around slowly; fear came into his eyes, and his body trembled from the voice's malignant call. Yohan tried to leave again, but the voice called to him this time in a more peaceful tone.

"Where are you going? Come closer, it is all right."

Yohan stepped back.

"Come now let's not be difficult," replied the voice.

Yohan turned to run.

"I wouldn't run if I were you. I don't think you want to be eaten do you? That's right, I thought you wouldn't. I'm willing to give you a chance to survive; you know a little game of *"cat and mouse."*

A long, slender black tongue shot out into the light. Yohan fell backwards, the voice chuckled.

"Those tarsiers have been *ssslacking*. A small morsel like you will not satisfy my hunger. After finishing you, I might have to eat a few of the tarsiers to remind them of the old treaty."

"I'm not the only one--"

Yohan quickly placed his hands over his mouth, hoping that he was not heard, but he was wrong. The snake let out a deep hiss that shook the inside of the burrow; dirt and dust fell from the ceiling.

"Not the only one?" inquired the voice, "Who else is with you and why are they not down here?"

Yohan did not know the answer to the second part of the question. The tarsiers after putting the guests into a deep sleep, found it hard to drag the wolves all the way to Snapper-Jaw's burrow; so, they left the wolves behind and took Yohan instead, hoping that the snake would find the wolves. Yohan addressed the first part of the question, but hunched his shoulders to the latter.

"Wolf! I never had that before. There's a first time for everything. I guess the game will be *"cat and mice"* as usual."

"Why do you play these games?" he said nervously.

"To tell you the truth, I like seeing the fear in my dinner's eyes. I like hearing the *sssscreams* of terror as I break the bones of their bodies. It fills me with *sssssuch* pleasure. Now go out of the burrow and find the wolves, and then our game will begin." Yohan, feeling very bold and somewhat foolish, tried to be courageous. He stood up tall, pulled on his coat, and pointed at the darkness.

"I'm not afraid of you Snapper-Jaw!" Yohan said boldly. "If I don't run, we can't play the game; and if the game isn't played, you won't eat us. So it looks like I'm staying right here."

Yohan sat on the ground and crossed his arms. He was quite proud of himself. You should have seen him smile and tilt his nose high in the air, but Snapper-Jaw was not to be duped by a kitten.

"There is no fear in that, little cat," he said with a malicious laugh, "I will make you afraid."

The slender black tongue continued to flicker back and forth; and then from within the darkness, a massive head emerged. Its color was a muddy brown; and there were so many bumps and sores on the snake's face, mainly because of the rotten things that he had eaten, that it distorted his facial features horribly. His skin had the nature of an alligator more than of a snake. His eyes were blood red, his pupils were slit black, and whatever courage was in Yohan disappeared. He ran out of the burrow, screaming like a lunatic. A vile grin came over Snapper-Jaw's face as he proceeded out of the hole.

Outside, the wolves continued to scout the barren area for any sign of Yohan.

"See him yet?" asked Sly.

"No---Wait, I hear something! Up here!" said Brute pointing.

The three wolves climbed a hill covered with torn cloaks and broken bones. At the top, they saw the kitten running frantically toward them. They went down to meet him. Yohan jumped on Brute and climbed onto his shoulders.

"SNAKE, SNAKE!"

"Calm down, what's going on!" said Sebastian.

"Snapper- Jaw! He's over there!"

Sly scanned the landscape.

"I don't see him," replied Sly.

"Neither do I." said Brute.

"Let's move before he turns up," Sebastian suggested promptly.

"Now why would you want to *sssspoil* the fun," replied a voice from behind them. The group turned around in unison. Snapper-Jaw eyed his dinner; his head jerked from side to side, deciding who to eat first. His long, immense body was stacked upon itself high in the air. The hard bumps that formed along his entire frame, made his skin nearly impenetrable. There were numerous gashes along his body from previous encounters, but there was an Achilles heel to the snake's armor. It was a pale, white band near the top of his neck that was soft and permeable. However, none of his meals ever figured out the secret; if they had, they wouldn't have been eaten by him.

"I'm going to count to ten, and then the game will begin," said Snapper-jaw. "One--"

"Wouldn't you like a couple of tarsiers to eat?" said Sly.

"The meat is a little tough," said the snake briskly, "Two."

"We saw a corpse back there, eat that!" Sly said, pulling his shield closer to his body.

"Sseven."

"You're skipping numbers," replied Yohan. "You can't do that!"

"TEN!"

"RUN!" shouted Yohan.

The three wolves went in different directions. Snapper-Jaw pursued the slowest of his meals, Sly. The short, stocky wolf ran with all his might, dropping his lance and shield in the process. Snapper-Jaw was gaining ground on him and Sly could feel the beast's hot breath on his tail. A tree was Sly's only safe haven now; and as quickly as he could, he climbed into the leafless branches, hoping that the snake would pass him by. The tree would have been a good hiding spot from a smaller predator, but compared to Snapper-Jaw that tree was just a mere toy. The snake slowly coiled around the tree, keeping his eyes on the wolf, until he towered over it. He looked down on his dinner, as it cowered, and began to squeeze the tree. The plant was crushed between the snake's body. Sly jumped onto the ground and ran for his lance and shield, the snake followed. Sly held the lance like a javelin and hurled it straight at Snapper-Jaw's face. The snake evaded the attack quite gracefully by twisting his body in the air. With a diabolical laugh, the snake went in for the kill. He spread his mouth open to reveal the long, thin fangs, dripping with venom. Snapper-Jaw darted forward, Sly held his shield close to him, and with a great crash they came together.

The snake got his jaws around the wolf. Sly struggled to get out. His friends came to aid him, but Snapper-Jaw used his head like a battering ram and pushed Sebastian and Brute away. The snake propped himself high in the air. He continued to swallow Sly whole. Brute and Sebastian did their best at cutting and hacking at the beast's body, but it did little to disturb his enjoyment of his meal. The wolf's tail hung out of the side of his mouth and he snickered at the futile attempt below. Sebastian caught sight of this and climbed up onto the snake's body. He ran along Snapper-Jaw's frame like a staircase; he went up towards the head to save his friend. The snake took one last gulp to finish devouring Sly and waited for the skinny wolf to get close enough to him. Suddenly, Sebastian went into a free fall, as the snake slung his body from under his feet.

Snapper-Jaw quickly positioned himself so that the wolf would fall directly into his mouth. Sebastian found himself looking into the trap of the beast, but fortunate for him

Brute was at Snapper-Jaw's head; and, with all of his strength, punched the snake in the face. His skull traveled about ten feet along the ground until it came to a halt. Brute caught Sebastian in his arms. The snake shook off the attack.

The two wolves retreated, but Snapper-Jaw dashed in front of them, cutting their flight short. He circled around his prey, stacking his body like a wall to keep the wolves within his sight. The snake took liberty to strike down at his food. The wolves fought back, but most of the time they either jumped or ran out of the way to evade Snapper-Jaw's deadly fangs. From afar, Yohan watched the snake at work; he also saw something else that grabbed his attention. He saw the white band; and Yohan, being a smart cat, began to wonder if that discoloration would be the snake's undoing. The kitten crawled along the prairie, finding a dagger that he could wield, and made his way over to the beast.

Snapper-Jaw continued to play with his food, and the wolves' fate would soon be fulfilled: for they could not keep up with the snake's speed of attack. Yohan climb up the snake's body as one would climb the side of a mountain; and once he was on top, he saw the battle below to stay alive. Onward the kitten went; pacing himself very carefully as not to be caught by the blood-thirsty eyes of the snake. However, Yohan had no need to worry; Snapper-Jaw was too concerned about the wolves to notice him. Near the snakes head, the kitten found it nearly impossible to get to the white band. The snake moved his head so quickly that only a break in his pattern would offer a chance for a counter attack. Below, Brute's war club and Snapper-Jaw's nose were introduced to each other. The snake pulled his head back quickly from the painful impact; a trickle of blood ran out of the snake's nose. Yohan saw his opportunity and took it without hesitation.

Up to the white band he went; and just when Snapper-Jaw decided that playtime was over, the kitten took the dagger and drove it into the soft, penetrable skin. For the first time, Snapper-Jaw knew the feeling of pain. A ghastly screech echoed throughout the dead prairie. The snake swung his head back and forth wildly to throw his assailant, but whipping his head like that would be his demise. When Yohan lost his balance, instead of just falling onto the ground, he grabbed the dagger; and when he went over the side, the dagger traveled all the way around the white band until it finally slipped out. Yohan fell among the wolves. Snapper-Jaw flung his head backwards on the ground and he began to twist and turn is his body violently; until, with one last muscle spasm, the snake was still. With all the tiger warriors Snapper-Jaw had encountered and eaten, his end was brought about by the hands of a kitten. The snake's scuffle left a bloody mess over the prairie. Sebastian went over to Yohan. The kitten rose to his feet, he was shaken from the scene before him, but overall he was all right.

"Are you all right?" asked Sebastian

"Yeah, I'm fine." said Yohan.

"We owe you our lives. It is a great thing to save the life of a wolf. We will never forget this."

"I wish I could have done the same for Sly."

At the mention of Sly's name, Brute and Sebastian ran over to the dead carcass. Up at the head, the deep gash from the dagger was seen. They went along the body, inspecting it closely. A few feet down the snake's carcass, something had lodged itself in the body.

"Sebastian, help me to cut this open."

The wolves proceed to open the snake and what came out of him was a bloody mess of fur. They laid Sly on the ground; he was breathing, but he showed no other signs that he

was alive. After minutes of trying to get him to open his eyes, Brute and Sebastian decided to carry him the rest of the way. Brute went along the land scavenging for any lances or long poles. Yohan gathered as many cloaks as he could and returned to Sly's side. The poles and cloaks were used to make a stretcher.

"Do you think he was bitten?" asked Sebastian.

"I don't think he would be breathing if he had." said Brute.

They placed Sly on the stretcher. The group made their way across the wasteland with heavy hearts. In the quietness of the walk, Sebastian was able to force a question from his mind,

"Map, which way do we go now?"

Yohan looked up to the wolf; and not having the courage to tell him the truth, lowered his head. The silence gave Sebastian his answer. So into the distance they went, leaving the great snake dead and unknown adventures ahead.

Chapter 10: Lone Tiger

If the wolves were in a dire position, the tigers were not fairing any better. Their current pursuit of the slaves was not going well at all: two tigers came under a strange illness and were slowing down the rest of the group, one of them twisted his ankle, and another tripped over a tree root; his head was wrapped in a bandage due to the bad fall. Aznar walked ahead of the group, he would constantly look back at the soldiers and he was reminded how the Shavronites walked tall in the jungle, while his own kind cowered from the towering trees and the stillness of the jungle air. The tiger king frequently turned on his soldiers, yelling at them and cursing the cowardice to their faces; and yet there were moments where he tried to encourage them by putting down the Shavronites even further, but it was too late for petty words of delight; they wanted to return to Tajir; to feel the cool air; to eat the delicious food, but Aznar would have no one to mention it, the horn was first; all else came second.

The inner workings of Aznar's mind had locked on the deceitfulness of his slaves. The fact of being tricked and embarrassed by creatures he considered less worthy than himself, put vengeance in his heart. Even the young cat would feel some of it, since he believed the kitten's participation was voluntary. The tigers marched on and finally the trees parted and a shallow river ran in between the separation. The tigers went to quench their thirst; but upon tasting the liquid, they found it to be undrinkable. As the tigers continued, Aznar could see that the ground up ahead was unstable. He needed away to get across. He took a sweeping glance at his troops. He was beginning to feel that traveling alone would be a better option in finding the horn; not only would it eliminate the possibility of mutiny, but he could take the credit all for himself. The king devised a plan to get rid of his troops and immediately put it into effect.

"Ah!" yelled Aznar, grabbing his leg.

Aznar was a good actor and played the part well. He dropped to one knee and cringed in pain. His troops came to his aid and inquired of him

"I'm fine," said Aznar. "I think I need to walk behind the group to take a easy on my legs. The rest of you go ahead."

"My king," said one soldier. "You are our king--- we will not leave you."

Aznar was nearly impressed with their loyalty, but loyalty wasn't enough for him now.

"I'm not staying here, I'll just follow. Let's move."

"Do you need any help?" replied one soldier.

"No, no I can walk on my own," replied the king rising.

The troops regrouped and continued down the shallow river. Aznar quietly made his way to the back of the group, taking baby steps to gain some distance between them.

"KEEP MOVING AND STOP COMPLAINING! IT'S ONLY A LITTLE MUD!"

Further they went; deeper the water rose. The marching became harder with every step, and finally it came to pass that none of them could move another inch. Strangely enough, they began to sink into the mud. Aznar's soldiers figured out that the quagmire that they were in was indeed a true quagmire. Panic over swept the group. The more they fought to get out, the further they sunk in. Aznar watched as one by one his soldiers were taken under. To get to the other side of the quicksand, Aznar used his soldiers like stepping stones. He jumped from soldier to soldier, aggressively moving across, until he made it safely over. On stable ground, Aznar watched the rest of his company swallowed into the sinking mud. Cries of help rang throughout the jungle; they pleaded for their king's help, others cursed him for saving. One soldier held out his lance for Aznar to grab; it was a final plea for life.

"My great king, don't leave me. Help me please!"

The king tilted his head, looked at the lance, and proudly glanced down on the sinking soldier.

"Like I said before, sacrifices must be made. I am a king I must go on. I shall remember all of you in my heart. Tajir will hear of your sacrifice. It is better for you to die than for a king to suffer your fate."

The mud was up to the soldier's neck. Knowing that there was no hope, the soldier screamed his monarch's name in a terrible roar. The mud consumed him and Aznar stood quietly as the last tiger. He brushed himself off, kicked the mud from his feet, as best he could, and continued in his quest. Aznar wasted no time in leaving the deadly scene. Running through the jungle lands proved to be wearisome for the tiger. Every turn presented a new enigma. The trees and the thick vegetation gave no clues of where to go or what to do. He hated the wolves for taking the kitten. In his mind he knew who the ringleader behind the plot was, and the hatred for Sebastian drove him on. The tiger's running continued until it was abruptly stopped by a rock; he fell flat on his face. He laid on the soft, moist jungle floor, exhausted from his flight. In his tired state, his mind fed off of the thoughts of trickery at the hand of the Shavronites. He could hear the laughter; he could see the grins on their faces, and it all became too much for him. Aznar rolled on his back, stretched out, and closed his eyes. Slowly he went to sleep: "Tomorrow," he thought, "tomorrow I will find them. Tomorrow I will break them." These last words passed out of his mind and Aznar drifted off into dreamland.

The attention, now, must be directed upwards into the trees where two squirrel monkeys were watching the tiger toss and turn as he slept.

"So what do you think, Alejo," replied the monkey to the other, "What should we do?"

"Well I'm going to get that tail ring off that tiger, Camilo. Did you see how sparkly it is?"

The monkey proceeded to climb down the tree; his friend grabbed him by the tail to stop him.

"Are you crazy?," said Camillo. "That tiger will tear you from limb to limb."

"Not if I'm careful."

Down the tree he went. His friend called him to come back, but he paid no attention to the warning. The ring was before him; the sparkling of the gold captivated him. The monkey crept up slowly and stretched out his hand to touch the ring, but the tiger yawned and it sent the monkey scurrying out of sight. It wasn't long before the desire of the ring took hold of the monkey again. His second attempt proved better than the first. He took hold of the ring and pulled and twisted it to remove his prize from the tiger's tail. His friend watched nervously from above.

"Stop pulling so hard, you'll wake him up."

"Yeah, he'll wake up if you keep on blabbering," said Alejo. "Look, he's not going to wake up."

The monkey slapped Aznar on the head.

"See, he sleeping like a baby."

The monkey was wrong. Aznar was not sleeping, he was playing the fool. He did not like the physical attack on his skull, but he thought that it would be better to play for awhile, in the hope that the monkeys could lead him to food and a place to bathe.

"Come on down here and help me," Alejo said to his friend.

Camilo joined his companion at tugging at the ring. After a great effort, it slipped off.

Alejo caressed the tail ring as if it was a baby. He rocked it back and forth saying things like,

"You're a pretty little thing aren't you. Yes you are, yes you are!"

Camilo asked to see the ring.

"No it's mine. I saw it first."

"But I helped you. Without me you would be still struggling with that stupid thing."

As the monkeys debated, Aznar quickly stood up. His shadow overwhelmed them and he stood contently overlooking the bickering. Finally, both monkeys caught sight of the tiger, the ring slipped out of the Alejo's hands; and before Aznar could speak a syllable, the monkeys retreated to the nearest tree they could find.

"Wait!" cried Aznar. "Wait my friends. Please don't leave me!"

Aznar dropped to his knees and buried his face in his hands. Tears streamed from his eyes, crocodile tears that is, and he sobbed heavily. The monkeys came back down the tree. Aznar's performance was spectacular; he would have made any actor proud.

"Are you all right?"

Aznar let out a few more sobs before he spoke.

"No," he said wiping his eyes. "I'm lost in this strange place. I'm hungry and I'm dirty. I'm so afraid."

He laid on the waterworks even further. It had become so bad that Alejo felt bad for taking the ring.

"Sorry for taking the ring," said Alejo. "Here, you can have it back."

"Thank you," the tiger said as he placed the ring back on his tail.

"Why are you here anyway?" said Camilo. "The only tiger we know about are those that came to conquer the jungle-lands."

"No, I'm a good tiger. I only came to look for my friends."

Aznar cried some more, and then continued.

“Have you seen them? There are four of them: three wolves and a kitten.”

“Wolves? What are those? I’ve seen tigers before, but wolves?”

Aznar saw that his questioning would be limited with these two; so, he reverted back to his pitiful state.

“It doesn’t matter. I am lost, lost I tell you!”

Camilo and Alejo watched as the tiger sobbed and sobbed until they began to cry as well.

“We can help you,” Alejo said rubbing his eyes, “there is a small village a few miles from here.”

“Yes, please follow us.” he said sniffing.

The tiger went with the monkeys. After an hour, a small village emerged from within the jungle. There, Aznar was bathed and feed with delicious fruits; his jacket was washed, and he did such a good job at his chicanery, that the villagers groomed his hair and cleaned his claws. After his rest and relaxation, Aznar inquired about his lost property. None of the monkeys knew what he was talking about, and Aznar was very careful not to mention the silver horn. However, he was given directions to another village. He was told that this village was inhabited by runaway slaves.

“Maybe you’ll find your friends there?” said Camilo.

“Oh, I think I’ll find a lot more than that.” replied Aznar with a snarl.

The tiger did not waste anytime with sappy good-byes; he had already had enough of playing a crying fool. The monkeys gave him fresh water to carry and a few tasty morsels for his journey. Camilo and Alejo waved good-bye; yet for some reason, of which they could not completely understand, they thought they had done something very dangerous, and they watched as the tiger disappeared among the bushes and shrubs in search of his property.

Chapter 11: The Runaways

Yohan sat with Sebastian under the moonlight. Sly was still out from the snake's attack. A full moon sat in the sky and Sebastian could not resist the temptation to howl proudly. As he did, Yohan listened to the graceful tone. The sound put his heart at ease, and Yohan found himself mimicking the wolf's howl, although it sounded more like purring than anything else. After Sebastian finished his display, he sat down beside the injured Sly. The blood had already dried, leaving his fur clumped together in blotches. His breathing was becoming weaker by the minute and Sebastian feared the worst. He took a cloak and placed it over Sly to keep him warm.

"Do you think that will help?" said Yohan. " We're in a jungle."

"I'm doing all that I know."

It was some time before any of them spoke again. Yohan was becoming worried about Brute's absence.

"Brute has been gone for awhile."

"Don't worry he'll be back soon enough," Sebastian said reclining on the ground.

The wolf saw that the kitten wanted to say more; he gave the kitten liberty to speak his mind.

"Why do the wolves howl at the moon?"

"Most of the wolves do it for ritual's sake, at other times it was used to warn other wolves of danger. However, my parents taught me that a wolf should use his howl to thank our Creator for the celestial bodies he has placed in the sky: the moon to give us light, the sun to keep us warm, and the stars to direct us, but I have used mine to mourn for Sly."

"He's not gone yet," replied Yohan. "There is still hope."

"If he was younger, I might agree with you. If Brute doesn't return with good news, we may have to bury him tomorrow."

Three miles away the large wolf looked desperately for help. Brute had thought that the idea of finding help on his own would only waste time, but Sebastian demanded the individual effort, and now he found himself running blindly into the dark jungle. To keep from getting lost, he would use his claws to scratch a tree; this would be an indicator for him that he had come that way before. As Brute continued his search, he gave a silent prayer for help. There seemed to be no aid in sight, but just before Brute decided to give up, a bright ember light appeared further westward from his current direction. The wolf quietly followed the light as it got brighter with every step. It glowed steadily; and, what was better he heard voices, many voices laughing and speaking of tales that were quite familiar to him. Brute listened for a few moments and finally his mind was made up. "Shavronites, could it be. My prayer has been answered," he thought to himself.

He proceeded to draw near to the joyous laughter of his own kind. The ember light, that had given the wolf a burst of hope, also provided the wolf with more help than he imagined. Up in the treetops were two guards armed with a bow and arrows. They were placed there to keep out any intruders that might attack the creatures below. The guards were trained to shoot first and ask questions later. The light barely made them visible; Brute shuddered at the thought of being foolish enough to walk right up in between them without any strategic plan. Brute did not risk an encounter alone, and he wasn't sure if those two guard were the only ones around. Seeing the ember light was enough. So he slowly backed away to return to his friends. When he arrived, he told Yohan and Sebastian what he had found.

"How far?"

"Three miles." Said Brute.

They quickly gathered Sly and rushed towards the village. They followed Brute's markings back to the appointed spot. Along the way, Sebastian continued his interrogating,

"Is that all you saw?"

"Yes, I couldn't go further, there are two guards posted near the light.

"And you say they were Shavronites?" inquired Sebastian.

"I'm very sure. They were speaking of the stories in our history."

They came to the spot where Brute had seen the light; the guards, however, were not present.

"Strange they were here before."

"That's better for us," said Sebastian. "Let's not waste time, come on."

Before they got within five feet, an arrow flew through the air and struck a tree near Sebastian's head. To their left sprouted an archer, and then from the right another came

forward. The archer looked over the group, the one to the left spoke,
"Your names quickly," said the first archer aiming his arrow at Sebastian.
Names were given without hesitation.

"What's wrong with him," the archer said referring to Sly.

"He's sick, he needs help," said Sebastian.

"Is this a trick?" said the second archer.

"No, he's hurt badly."

Sebastian saw that the archer had Aznar's brand on his hand.

"I am a Shavronite, just as you," he said holding up his hand displaying the mark. "My word is my bond."

"That seal and your word mean nothing to me," replied the second archer

"Please, sir," cried Yohan, "he'll die if you don't help."

The kitten was out of eyesight of the second archer, but upon seeing him, the archer saw some truth in the kitten's eyes. The archer waved the group towards the ember light. Over a hill a great fire blazed upwards into the starry sky. A large multitude of creatures sat in a circle around that fire listening to a storyteller speak about ancient days and great adventures. Yohan, Sebastian, and Brute did not join the audience, but they heard every word. The storyteller spoke about the white rabbit that, with the help of the Holy One, defeated a thousand leopards. He told the tale of Shavron's disobedience and God's wrath by taking their offspring into the world of night. He talked about Gabriel the first king of Shavron. As the story went on, there was a creature that caught the attention of the audience more than any other. The very mention of his name put joy into their hearts of greater days to come. Glory was the last creature the storyteller spoke of. He told them how he put fear into the unicorns very soul and how he freed the captives from the darkened world. He told of his power, of his mercy, and his love. Yohan was astonished by the tales. The tigers had always stressed to him that the unicorn was a good natured creature, but these stories were different. He had never heard of a creature greater than the white unicorn, but now the name of *Glory* rested on his mind and he wanted to know more. Slowly the fire died out and the audience returned to their homes for a night's rest. None of them took notice of the new arrivals, save the storyteller.

"Bring them over," said the storyteller. "Let me take a look at them."

What stood near the dying fire was a chubby beaver. The look on his face was apathetic as he scanned the strangers. The beaver wore a brown shirt with a geometric emblem made up of triangles and pentagons. The hair on the top of his head stuck up and he would frequently wipe his scalp to reverse the effect. The beaver looked at the two guards.

"Why didn't you shoot them on the spot?" said the beaver.

"Shavronites sir," said the archer, "one of them is gravely ill."

The Beaver went over to Sly, and upon looking over the pitiful sight, he removed the cloak, and placed his hand on the wolf's forehead. The beaver caught a glimpse of Yohan.

"What about the cat?" asked the beaver.

"He's with us," replied Brute.

"What are your names?"

"I would gladly give the names of my friends as well as mine," said Sebastian, "but my friend is dying. Please, help him if you can."

"Meladeck, Gardos!" cried the beaver, "Meladeck, Gardos come quickly!"

From out of one of the homes, two black bears appeared. They took Sly and disappeared from whence they came.

"What are they going to do to him?" said Brute.

"They are going to do what you have asked. Now give me your names."

Sebastian cleared his throat.

"I am Sebastian, well; actually my real name is Nahu. The big wolf here is Durgon, and this is Yohan."

The beaver sent the guards away.

"What are three slaves doing with a Tajirian?"

Sebastian gave most of the details, leaving out the pursuit of the silver horn. The beaver showed approval over the wolves escape from the tigers. He clapped his hands and started laughing. The three were taken aback.

"That's a great story," the beaver said swatting his knee, "Right under their noses you say? Amazing, but why take Yohan?"

It was quiet, far too quiet. The beaver waited for an answer and it looked as if he would not change the subject until he got one.

"There are some things that we cannot reveal," replied Sebastian.

The beaver stood up straight with a very insulting look on his face, and then, like the changing of the wind, he smiled and said,

"It's none of my business anyway. You can sleep in an empty room I have in my home, follow me."

The beaver led them down the beaten path between the villager's homes. The houses were built with the touch of a great architect. The roofs were flat, allowing one or more homes to be stacked one upon another. Long ladders led to other homes that sat high in the trees.

"I always wanted a tree-house, but the tigers cut down most of the trees." said Yohan.

"The tigers are fools," was the beaver's curt response.

The beaver's home was like the others; however, once he lit a few candles, the interior represented a creature that had impeccable taste. There was a rocking chair placed in a corner of the main room. On the floor, sat a rug; and with a closer look, they saw that it was made of bird feathers. There was a hammock hanging at the other side of the room, which provided a bed for the beaver. Sebastian, Yohan, and Brute were taken into the empty room. The beaver excused himself and returned with a small table and a candle. He placed the table and the candle in the room.

"Sorry about the accommodations, but this is the best I can do for now. Tomorrow we'll get some hammocks together, good night."

"Wait, can we have your name?" said Brute.

"My name is Lobin."

"Lobin, what a strange name?" said Sebastian. "What does it mean?"

The beaver turned his head just before closing the door and said,

"There are certain things I cannot reveal."

The door was shut, the kitten and wolves went to sleep; and for the first time, they felt safe in this runaway village. The next day, Sebastian found himself alone in the room. His first thoughts were of trickery on the side of the beaver. He rushed out of the room with his sword drawn. Lobin, surprised to see the wolf so agitated, was reluctant to greet him. Sebastian stomped over to Lobin. He pointed his finger at the beaver's nose and demanded the whereabouts of his friends.

"Where are they? What have you done with them?" said Sebastian pulling his rapier
Hurry up and speak or I'll---

"Well, look who got up on the wrong side of the floor this morning," said Lobin. "Calm down, look out the window."

Outside Sebastian saw a group of children playing a game of tag, Yohan was among them. A little further away, Brute was helping the villagers with building a new home; he was carrying a tree trunk all by himself. The villagers gave him a round of applause; Brute flexed a muscle to show off.

"Their enjoying themselves," Sebastian said laughing, "Lobin, tell me more about this place."

Lobin gave Sebastian the short story of how a few Shavronites escaped from Tajir into this jungle. They started the village to live in peace and called it the "New Shavron".

"I was born free here, my parents were once slaves. Now that they are gone, I am one of many here that look over this village. I tell stories often to remind the creatures here of their heritage. Maybe one day the children will pass it along to their children; and just in case, I've been writing the stories down.

Lobin showed Sebastian the papers. It was very crude in quality; not as fine as the paper from Tajir, and the ink, which was made from blackberries, started to fade into the paper. "That won't last long."

"I do the best I can. So are you four going to stay here?"

"Until Sly is better," replied Sebastian, "and then we have other business to attend to. Please don't ask, I see that curious look in your eye."

"Like I said last night, it's none of my business, but I might be able to help you out."

"What you can do is tell me about the story of the unicorn and the silver horn. I like it very much."

"Any particular reason why?" Lobin said raising an eyebrow.

Sebastian gave Lobin a dissatisfying look.

"All right, all right I'll start. Before time had begun the Holy One--"

"Just get to the unicorn and the horn," Sebastian said cutting him short. "I'm not interested in what the Holy One did."

"Well you should be. If it wasn't for Him you wouldn't even exist."

This bothered Sebastian; for he never was open to God because of his life as a slave.

"Oh just forget about it," he said walking away. "I'm going to see if Sly's o.k. Which house is he in?"

"The one with the two bear prints on the side of the door."

Sebastian made his way over to the bears' home. Inside he found an assortment of items that looked to be used for medical purposes: there were bowls full of different types of seeds, dry plants were laid out on a table, and there were numerous bottles full of elixirs. Sebastian picked one of them up and read the inscription,

"S-e-s-a-m-a-l-i-x-

"It's pronounced Sesamalexir," replied Gardos, "It's a potion made of walnuts, sesame seeds and two parts water; it helps with a sore throat."

Gardos extended his hand to greet the wolf.

"I saw you last night. I guess you're looking for your friend, follow me."

In an adjacent room, Maledeck was giving Sly some water. The wolf had trouble taking the water, but slowly the water alleviated his dry mouth and Sly sighed in relief.

"He looks better," said Sebastain.

"Yup, we've been working on him since early this morning. We cleaned up all that nasty dry blood. What happened to him?"

"Let's just say he had a run in with a snake."

"Well, we've given him some Cocotine, Moxzlin, and some Oranlixir for good measure."

"I don't know what you just said," said Sebastian giving the bear a perplexing look, "but if it gets him walking again that is all that matters."

Suddenly Sly called out for Sebastian; the wolf knelt beside the bed.

"Where- where am I?"

"You're safe; we're still in the jungle; its o.k."

"Are Brute and Yohan all right? All I remember is getting eaten and then-- the saliva and the smell," he said groaning.

"Take it easy. We're lucky we found this place."

"Blessed to find it. I don't think the silver horn is worth all of this--"

The wolf groaned once again from his pain. Maledeck jumped in and gave him some more elixir, it seemed to help; the wolf's temperament calmed.

"You hang in there," Sebastian said placing his hand on the wolf's shoulder. "You'll be thanking me when you're wearing fine silk and living in a palace."

Sebastian was beginning to leave when Gardos stopped him.

"Did he say the silver horn? That's strange, why would he mention that?"

"He's delirious," Sebastian said nervously, "Just take care of him."

The rest of the day went by and night came once again. Yohan and the wolves retired to their room. This time three hammocks were prepared for them. Sebastian laid above Brute, although he preferred the bottom hammock, and Yohan rested cozy on the other side of the room.

"You two looked like you were enjoying yourselves today."

"Yup!" said Yohan excitedly.

"I saw Sly today."

"How is he?" said Brute.

"Good, he's talking. However, I believe he's losing the heart to finish our treasure hunt."

"Can you blame him?" said Brute pausing, "We could stay here. We're with our own kind

and it's safe."

"It is," Sebastian, said rocking his hammock from side to side.

"What about me?" asked Yohan. "I've got a family back in Tajir."

Oh yeah," said Sebastian smiling, I almost forgot. The kid has a point; his family will not wait for him forever. We have to find the silver horn and to make sure Yohan returns to his family safely. However, I think we can change our plans slightly."

"What do you mean?" asked Brute.

"We have been going about this all wrong. We were going to sell the horn to a foreign monarch, when we already have a monarch who wants it."

"You're speaking nonsense."

"Wait, hear me out. You know how Aznar paced the great palace once he heard that Yohan knew where the horn was. That tiger would give his soul for it; and even better, he would give us his kingdom for it."

"I don't know, Sebastian, greed may drive the tiger, but he's not stupid."

"True, but greed is a powerful thing, yes, very powerful."

Sebastian and Brute went to sleep, but Yohan left the room to find Lobin. The beaver was sitting in his rocking chair, writing in a book. He would frequently stop writing and think about some thought that had crossed his mind. Yohan decided not to disturb him, but Lobin called out to him.

"Yohan, is there anything that you want?"

"Well, I wanted to know more about God. Is he real?"

The beaver was surprised by the question; for he had never know a Tajirian ever interested in the Holy One.

"He's very real." said Lobin.

"How do you know?"

"Remember when I was talking about when He freed all those creatures from the darkened world?" said Lobin. "Out of all those creatures came stories from witnesses that were there. The bears, birds, elephants, monkeys, and other creatures have their stories about Holy One.

"But have you seen him?"

"No."

"I don't understand," Yohan said shaking his head, "How can you believe in something you cannot see?"

"Yohan have you ever seen the old tiger kings of Tajir?"

"No, their all dead"

"But how do you know that they have existed?" said Lobin.

"Because of the history, the writings, and the tigers talk about them all the time."

"Well it's the same with the God. There are writings, history, and many creatures, other than the Shavronites, that speak of him. In fact, I've been doing some writing myself."

"About what?"

Lobin showed Yohan a few of the words, this is how it ran:

The Unseen will be seen.

*To come to die for all sins.
His life for ours; our poverty will be His
And His righteousness will be given to us to cover our wicked deeds.*

Yohan had a perplexing look on his face.

"God will come physically one day," said Lobin, "I don't expect you to understand, but it will come true."

Yohan got up to return to the room; but before he closed the door, he looked back at Lobin and said,

"This God seems greater than the gods of my land."

"Yes," the beaver said nodding his head, "Yes, He is."

The village grew quiet as one by one the candles that sat in the windows were blown out, but a present danger was drawing near. It moved quickly through the shrubs, not stopping for rest until it had its prize. In the morning Yohan, Brute, and Sebastian were at Sly's bedside. He was sitting up now and looked almost in top form.

"The bears have treated me well," said Sly. "I'm feeling better."

"You gave us a scare back there."

"It's all right. I'm glad God invented physicians or I would be a goner."

"It's good to see you up again, old wolf," said Sebastian.

Suddenly there was a scream from outside. Brute and Sebastian rushed to the window.

Lobin rushed out towards the cry.

"TIGER, TIGER!" shouted one of the guards.

"How many?" asked Lobin.

"One."

"Let him pass, if he tries anything you know what to do."

The villagers went into emergency action. The villagers, who lived in the tree tops, stood on their roofs with bows and arrows; the villagers below held spears in case there was an ambush in the works. Lobin stood in the direction of the village's entrance so he could get a good look at the tiger. Back at the bears' home the wolves watched the scene.

"What's going on?" said Sly.

"I think we've got trouble," replied Sebastian.

Aznar slowly crossed the threshold into the village. Lobin stood strong in the presence of the king. Aznar saw the villagers with spears; he stopped a good distance away from the beaver and began to talk.

"Prepare for a little war are we?" said Aznar. "Who is the leader here?"

"You may address me."

"Well beaver, I was told that this village was inhabited by runaways. I will ask you one time only to hand any slave, which has my father's or my seal, over to me immediately. My name is Aznar. I am the king of Tajir. I have rights to those slaves."

"First of all you will address me by my name, Lobin. Secondly, you own nothing in this village. I would never trade over my own to that filthy nation."

Aznar was surprised at the beaver's boldness, especially finding out he was a Shavronite. The tiger cleared his throat, spat on the ground, and spoke again.

"I didn't know I was talking to a creature lower than myself. Look, I'm a fair tiger. All I want to know is if you've seen four creatures that may have passed by here?"

"Many pass by." said Lobin.

"To be more specific there were three wolves: two black ones, one with a golden eye, a grey wolf, and there was a kitten."

When Sebastian and Brute heard the description, they decided to leave immediately.

"Can you walk?" said Brute.

"Yes," said Sly, "I think I can."

Meladeck came into the room.

"Why are you leaving? Lobin will not turn you in."

"We believe that, but we have to leave now," said Sebastian. "I don't have time to explain."

"In that case, Sly will need two days worth of our elixir. I'll give you a few bottles."

Meladeck gave the bottles to Brute.

"Thank you." said Brute helping Sly to his feet.

The group quietly snuck out of the village. Aznar was still talking to Lobin.

"They are my property, beaver---in fact---all of you are!" he shouted. "I see the royal mark on your hand. I'm beginning to believe your hiding them somewhere. If you are--- I'll kill everybody in this village, you understand me?"

"You're wasting your time, tiger."

"Curse this village," the tiger said, spitting in the beaver's direction, "I will take my leave, and I will pass through."

"No, you will go back the way you came and take your hatred with you."

"HOW DARE YOU TALK TO ME THAT WAY! DO YOU KNOW WHO I AM?!!!" Aznar stomped towards Lobin with his claws drawn, but an arrow flew through the air, stopping Aznar in his tracks. The tiger looked at the arrow planted squarely in the ground. He saw other archers above ready to make him a pin-cushion at the beaver's command. Aznar kicked the arrow from the ground and left the village. The villagers returned back to their normal way of life. Lobin went to the bears' home.

"Where are they?"

"Gone, they left." said Maledeck.

"Why didn't you stop them?"

"I tried, but they insisted on leaving."

Lobin lowered his head.

"May God protect them. Whatever they were hiding from us, I hope it doesn't destroy them in the end."

Chapter 12: The City

The four ran as quickly and as quietly as they could. It had only been ten minutes since they left, yet they missed the comfort of the runaway village. No one had time to think

on the sudden loss, what was important now was to get as far away as possible from the tiger. At times the wolves could have sworn they caught Aznar's scent nearby, this only made their pace to quicken. One hour went by and then another; the wolves stopped for nothing. Yohan was thirsty; although he was riding on Brute's shoulders, the sensation of watching the wolves run caused a spell of dryness to pass over his mouth. The kitten did not dare to ask to stop, for the wolves seemed not to notice anything at all; their gazes were straight; their bodies were hunched over; and when Yohan finally decided to speak up, they paid him no mind.

Finally, the wolf pack came to rest. They sat down under the coverage of the thick brush as not to be seen. It was quiet except for the heavy breathing and the wolves looked earnestly for any sign of the tiger.

"I think we got some distance on him," said Sebastian.

"I hope we finish this journey soon," replied Brute. "It has been over a week and this forest remains the same."

"The trees will end soon enough," Sly replied taking a sip of elixir, "Map's dream says so."

Yohan nodded his head in agreement. Suddenly a droplet of water fell on his head, and then another until a light drizzle began to fall. The rain was a blessing in the sweltering atmosphere that the trees had created. The wolves relaxed under the cool shower, while Yohan covered his head with his jacket.

"Oh no it's raining. I hate water!"

"It's only a little drizzle," said Brute. "It will be over soon."

With the announcement, the rain began to fall faster and harder, until it had become unbearable.

"Me and my big mouth."

"It must be the rainy season," said Sly. "We better keep moving, no point in staying here."

"Can't we wait until this is over," replied Yohan. "I'm wet enough."

"Come on, little cat," said Sebastian smiling, "let's go."

The running continued to Yohan's dismay. Riding on Brute's shoulders was a joy before; but now, because of the rain, he was frequently slapped in the face by wet ferns and leaves. A few minutes afterwards, the trees finally gave way and the wolves now ran on a smooth prairie of rock. The rain continued to pour down, causing the stony ground to be icy along the way. Occasionally one of them would slip making the pace sluggish and tedious; the rain fell faster still until it felt as if the droplets would send them to their knees. Sebastian used his cape to keep the rain from his eyes, it was hard to see in the distance; and to keep together, the wolves took hold of each others tail. The stony ground went on and on just as the jungle did. Sebastian, as well as the others, did not have the patience for this again, but nothing could be done. In the front, Sebastian kept his eye focused on the ground to avoid the downpour. A crack appeared on the stony prairie and Sebastian followed it to keep entertained from the drudgery of the weather. The crack was small at first, but the gap gradually widened until it became a canyon. Sebastian careful lead the others along the edge until he saw something quite strange yet familiar at the same time. There was a series of stone steps that were barely visible a few feet below. Sebastian whipped his tail from Sly's hands.

"What's going on?" said Sly.
"I think I've found something," replied Sebastian.
Sebastian showed them the step.
"I can easily get to it."

Sebastian sat down and scooted to the edge. He pushed himself over and landed on the steps. He looked up to the others, giving a thumbs-up. He waved for them to come down; and after Yohan, they walked along the curious steps. The staircase went deep into the canyon. There were at least a hundred steps, and they had to be careful where to step: for there was no railing to offer support. At the end of the steps was a marvelous sight. A city, entirely made of wood, the buildings, the bridges, support beams, etc., was built along the walls of the canyon: half of it on the left wall and the other half on the right wall. The two halves were joined together by two bridges.

"I wouldn't call this a mountain," Brute said commenting on Yohan's dream.
"Well it might as well be. Look how far down we are, and look how far down the rain falls," said Yohan looking over the side into the abyss.
The group made their way through the city carefully. Although the city was spectacularly built, the weather was taking its toll on the wood, making it rotten. The four discovered this when Brute nearly fell through one of the planks. The wolf was fine, but the four made their footing the main priority. In the background, stood a pantheon built squarely at the back of the city.

"We'll head for that temple," said Sebastian, "The horn is so close--- I can feel it in my bones!"

There was something in Sebastian's voice that made the others very suspicious. As they walked through the city, they heard him mumbling quietly about the silver horn and how beautiful it must be; it was all that he thought about. Sebastian constantly asked Yohan if he knew precisely where the treasure was.

"For the fifth time, no I don't."

"Are you sure?"

"Sebastian, what's gotten into you?" asked Sly.

"What?! I just want to make sure that I—I mean we," he said clearing his throat, "That we get the horn that's all."

At the pantheon's entrance, Sly thought he saw Aznar standing at the top of the canyon looking down on them. The tiger gave a grimace and dashed out of sight.

"Aznar is here!"

"What!" Sebastian said scanning the sky, "I see nothing. Maybe those elixirs are getting to you, and besides all cats hate the water, right Map?"

"Well cats like me do, but the tigers are quite fond of the water you should know that."

"It's not the elixir," said Sly walking up to Sebastian. "Was I making it up the last time?"

"All right, all right--- let's get out of the rain."

In the pantheon, the four found a dry place to shake the excess of water from their bodies. Their clothes, for the present, would have to remain drenched. A fire could not be started: for a fire in the pantheon would surely put the city ablaze. The temple was partial filled

with carts, wooden slabs, and other material for architecture.

"We'll wait here until the rain stops or until Aznar comes, whichever ever comes first, but things will be different this time; he'll be on our terms."

Suddenly from outside, they heard the tiger roar.

"He's close, we must hide!" said Sly looking for a hiding place.

"No, we face him," replied Sebastian. "If we hide we'll be doing exactly what he wants. Let him come, I will be ready for him."

"So will I." said Brute.

Sly gradually nodded his head and took his place beside his friends. Sebastian looked at Yohan as the young kitten looked up to him.

"Yohan, this isn't your fight. Hide among the wood, we'll take care of the tiger."

"I'll stand with you. I'm not afraid of him either."

The four stood in the middle of the temple and waited for Aznar. The tiger presently made his way up the pantheon's stairs and stood at the entrance as a silhouette. His eyes shined brightly like stars against the midnight sky, yet they did not present peace, but war. The king took a step forward; and although the wolves had been free of the tyrant's heavy hand, the power over them still rested a great deal on their souls. Aznar shook the water from his fur. The pantheon was silent except for the rain; no one thought to speak, and then Aznar started.

"You little worms," Aznar said with a snarl. "When we get back to Tajir, I will open your backs, especially you Sebastian. I know it was you who came up with this so called plan. Did you think I wouldn't find you? Do you think I am as stupid as you thought?"

"I was hoping for it."

"We'll see how smart your mouth is when I knock your teeth out," Aznar said pointing his finger, "Now, Yohan, come to me."

Yohan stood his ground with the wolves. Aznar tilted his head slightly as his eyes grew; he was highly insulted by the cat's disobedience.

"WHEN I SAY MOVE, YOU MOVE! GET OVER HERE NOW!"

Yohan started to move forward; but before he was out of reach, Sebastian pulled him back and put his rapier to Yohan's throat.

"Sebastain, what are you doing?!" said Sly "Are you crazy?"

"Not exactly---just follow my lead."

The wolves made their way over to the pantheon's entrance; Aznar kept close watch on them.

"One of your plans again, Sebastian? Your predictably pathetic!"

"Keep you distance or—or I'll cut his throat," he said in an unconvincing tone.

"O.k," said Aznar laughing, "I'll play you little game."

At one of the pillars, Sebastain withdrew his sword and gave Yohan to Brute.

"You two take him and head out without me. I'll catch up."

"This is nonsense. What are you up to?" said Brute.

"No time to explain. I'll keep Aznar at bay for as long as I can."

Sly snatched the rapier from Sebastian hand.

"This is madness. Aznar will kill you."

Sebastian took the rapier back.

"Leave me---go!"

Sebastian's voice was like a commander's to his troops. Sly, Brute, and Yohan went back out into the rain. Aznar's eyes followed them until he could no longer see them. He turned his attention back to Sebastian.

"Sebastian, Sebastian, Sebastian, you look tense--- you look agitated," he said laughing, "How about a friendly handshake to make things better, huh?"

"Shut your mouth!" was Sebastian harsh remark. "If you think your going to get that horn before I do—"

"So this is what this is all about, " Aznar said putting his hand to his forehead, "You stupid little slave. You thought you could out wit me, your master? I think when my father gave me that look when we had our first fight, you remember it don't you? I think he wanted me to tear your throat out instead of that eye of yours. I was so young, maybe I need to make up for that mistake."

"I'm going to put my blade right through your heart."

"Come, why do you wait?" Aznar said taking his fighting stance.

Sebastian drew his sword and approached Aznar. The tiger had a slight height advantage over the wolf, but the tiger crouched down to better situate himself for Sebastian's attack. The wolf raised his blade and waited for the right moment to plant it true. The two adversaries eyed each other with the uttermost of hatred. They moved in a circle; it was as if watching a matador and a bull facing off in the final act of the battle. Sebastian went to stab Aznar, he missed. The tiger swiped at the wolf's legs, but Sebastian dodged the attack. They returned to the deadly dance. Sebastian went to strike again, but Aznar took hold of his arm and smacked the wolf backwards unto the floor. Aznar took the blade and broke it, tossing the hilt across the pantheon. The wolf jumped up in a rage and began to throw a myriad of punches. The tiger dodged the punches with ease, but his cavalier attitude was his downfall and Sebastian landed three punches squarely on Aznar's face. Aznar broke the wolf's rage by picking him up and throwing him ten feet across the floor. The tiger brushed himself off and swaggered over to the wolf.

"You hit like a sissy."

Sebastian staggered to his feet, shook his head, and took his fighting stance. Aznar approached, stopping a few feet in front of him. The wolf came to strike, but Aznar kicked him in the leg; Sebastian nearly lost his balance, but he quickly regained it before the tiger could follow up with an attack. Now it was Aznar's turn and he came viciously upon Sebastian. Whenever Sebastian blocked a punch, it was like fighting back against an opponent made of stone. Every punch Aznar gave was painful to the wolf. He was pushed back all the way to the pantheon's side wall. Aznar raised both hands with claws drawn to rip the wolf in two. Sebastian jumped out of the way as Aznar's claws left their distinguishable marks in the wood.

Outside, Yohan and the wolves were back at the stone staircase.

"We can't just leave him."

"It's his choice." said Brute.

"Even if it kills him."

"You're too young to--"

"I am not!" said Yohan shouting, "I'm old enough to understand that you shouldn't leave your friend in danger. Aznar will kill him. I thought you wolves stick together."

"When a wolf is in a battle, he fights alone," said Sly. "It's a matter of pride, and no matter what the outcome, he must accept his fate."

Yohan looked up to Sly.

"That's the dumbest thing I have ever heard. Your fate was death once. Sebastian didn't leave you in the snake."

It was quiet in the rain for awhile. Sly looked to Brute in silence; Yohan spoke again.

"If you wolves follow pride that gets you killed, then you're no better than those tigers that use pride to keep you enslaved."

"You're very wise for your age; sometimes wiser than old wolves like me," said Sly smiling. "Come on, Brute, let's head back."

At the pantheon the fighting continued in full fury. Aznar could have easily finished off the wolf with two strikes, but he enjoyed punching and smacking the wolf around. The last punch Aznar gave sent Sebastian to the floor. The wolf's mouth was bleeding profusely.

"Just like it was when we were younger," said Aznar walking towards Sebastian. "You were nothing then, and you're nothing now."

Aznar walked up to the wolf with the intent on kicking him, but the tiger did not expect the wolf to have one last burst of energy; and with everything he had, Sebastian threw five punches: the first one went into Aznar's side, which bruised a rib; the second one went to his stomach, which bent Aznar over for an upper-cut. The punch was so powerful that it knocked one of Aznar's teeth out. The final two punches were directed at the tiger's face, a gash was left above his right eye. When Sebastian went for another punch, Aznar blocked it and brought his elbow across the wolf's shoulder with such force, that the shoulder was separated.

Sebastian dropped to the floor in pain. He laid before Aznar like a helpless prey ready for the deathblow.

"My tooth," he said touching his mouth, "You Shavronite trash!"

Aznar stomped down on Sebastian's separated shoulder. The wolf screamed out in pain. Aznar finally extended his claws for the deathblow. Across the chest would be the spot and the tiger pushed Sebastian on his back to deliver it.

"NO STOP IT!" shouted Yohan.

Aznar glanced over at Yohan and the two wolves. The tiger changed his mind and lifted Sebastian up apathetically. He held the wolf like a hostage and made his way out of the pantheon. The others followed, keeping their distance. Aznar stopped by a railing; he looked over the side into the deep of the canyon.

"You want to play games! It's either the cat or the wolf. Trick me and I'll throw him over!"

"You three get out of here!" replied Sebastian.

Aznar pulled on his shoulder, the pain kept Sebastian from talking again. Yohan pulled away from Sly and slowly made his way over to Sebastian. With the innocence of a child, Yohan looked up into Aznar's eyes.

"Let him go."

The tiger took a deep breath and smiled at Yohan.

"As you wish, small cat," the tiger replied letting go of Sebastian, "As you wish."

All seemed over; all seemed done; but before Sebastian could even take two steps, Aznar grabbed him and tossed him over the side into the canyon.

"SEBASTIAN, NO!" cried Yohan in desperation.

Sly and Brute attacked Aznar with full force. Yohan stood to the side. It wasn't long before Aznar positioned the wolves near the ledge and with one great push he sent Brute and Sly over the side. Before Brute went into the abyss, he made one last effort to take Aznar with him. He extended his hand and took hold of the tiger's jacket, but Aznar kept his balance, but barely, leaning over the side on one leg. In a fit of rage, Yohan ran and jumped on the back of his king. He climbed up to his head and began to punch him.

"Stop you little brat!" Aznar replied trying to pull Yohan off of him, "We'll fall!"

But Yohan did not care. His deep feelings about how the tigers treated the Shavronites had come to light and Aznar would take what aggression he had to dish out. In the scuffle, Aznar lost his balance and both fell with the rain into the deep.

Chapter 13: The Silver Horn Found

With a great splash, the water below broke his fall, but the force of it nearly left Yohan senseless. He tried swimming to the top to get air, but his legs and arms would not cooperate, and slowly he began to sink deeper; losing more air in the struggle. Strangely he began to move upward; it was as if someone or something was helping him. Yohan continued to swim until he was free. The water ran into his eyes, he was unable to see who had saved his life. On shore he wiped his face and thank his rescuer,

"Thank you," he said spitting up some water.

"Ah, you are welcome small cat, but your king still has need of you."

Yohan quickly wiped the water from his eyes and there was Aznar with a grin on his face. Yohan went to run, but Aznar pinned him to the ground.

"We are at our journey's end. Where is the horn? Speak up!" Aznar said squeezing his arm.

"Ouch! I don't know!"

"You lying right to my face worthless cat!" spoke Aznar menacingly. "You better speak; the wolves aren't here to help you."

The tiger looked around and saw a cave nearby.

"How about we look in that cave over here? That was apart of the dream, wasn't it? Come on, get up."

The tiger yanked the kitten to his feet. He quickly made his way over to the opening. Yohan did his best to keep up with Aznar's pace. The cave was dark. They had no torches per say, but cats can see quiet well in the dark, and after a few seconds Aznar and

Yohan were able to see all the rocky formations, and the dangerous steps that we once hidden by the dark. Along the ground were a set of three footprints; they were wolfs' tracks.

"SEBASTIAN, SLY, BRUTE, HELP ME!"

Aznar grabbed Yohan's face with such force that he thought it would be crush by the tiger's strength.

"Do that again and I will break your neck, you hear me?"

Yohan took a deep swallow and said nothing the rest of the way. The cave went deeper and deeper until Yohan had no idea of where the beginning was. Stalagmites and stalactites grew on the ground and the ceiling of the cave; some where large as trees, while others grew like strong columns of an ancient building. Water ran down the formations and the constant dripping was enough to drive madness into a creature's mind. The stalagmites were grouped close together and getting around them proved to be a challenge. A settlement of water was seen in the background and Aznar would have paid it no mind if he did not see something sparkly in it. He made his way over to the water. Upon a rock that sat by under water like a pedestal was the silver horn. Aznar was flabbergasted. It in the open. There were no traps or obstacles from prevent Aznar from grabbing the horn out of the water---it was as if it wanted to be taken.

"Amazing!" he said in rubbing his hands together. "My father and grandfather dreamt of this moment and now I can achieve it!

In his awe, Aznar let Yohan go. The kitten stepped backwards until a hand came out of the darkness and grabbed him. Aznar walked into the water and stood at the foot of the stone. The silver horn shined in the darkness and it wasn't long until Aznar was enchanted by its beauty. The tiger placed his hand in the water removing the horn from the stone. Aznar lifted the horn high above his head with the joy of victory.

"I've done it---- I shall be the greatest of all the kings."

"If you live to see it," said Sebastian coming out of the shadows, holding his shoulder. Brute emerged from Aznar's left and Sly, with Yohan, was on his right.

"It's mine!" Aznar replied shaking the horn at Sebastian, "Now the unicorn will come to me. With this horn Dranus will be at my command---the world will be mine!"

Sebastian went to confront Aznar, but Sly did something that was unexpected.

"Sebastian, stop---don't move."

The wolf briefly looked at the short wolf and turned his attention back to the tiger.

"Give me the horn Aznar!"

"NEVER, I KILL ANYTHING TO KEEP IT!

"Fine have it your way. Once we kill you, I'll take the horn from your dead hand. I have spent all this time searching for it. I put all of my energy to retrieve the horn. I believed in it just like you, Aznar. All the times you tortured the Shavronites to find it, I knew it wasn't just a myth. Now I will take the horn. I will be rich. THAT HORN IS MINE!"

"I thought it was ours, Sebastian?" asked Brute.

"BE QUIET!" he shouted.

"Sebastian, just let him have that thing," said Sly. "Our freedom is enough treasure for

me. Just let him go, Sebastian.”

“That’s a good little slave, Sly,” Aznar said concurring. “I’ll take the horn, you three can go your separate ways. I can always have better slaves anyway.”

“You’re a fool old wolf,” Sebastian said growling. “Come on, Brute, let’s get the horn.”
“No, you’re on your own.”

Sebastian’s face slowly showed signs of confusion.

“Are you stupid, HUH!!? BRUTE, I NEED YOUR HELP! IF WE WORK TOGETHER WE CAN BRING THIS TIGER DOWN!”

No one moved for quite some time and then in a quivering voice Yohan spoke the words that they all wanted to hear,

“I want to go home.”

Sebastian growled at Yohan.

“YOU SHUT UP! YOU NOT GOING HOME UNTIL THAT HORN IS IN MY HAND. YOU DON’T KNOW HOW LONG I’VE THOUGHT OF IT! YOU WANT TO GO HOME? I SHOULD HAVE GOTTEN RID OF YOU IN THE JUNGLE!”

Yohan, deeply hurt by the words, ran over to Sly and cried quietly.

“What’s wrong with you?” Sly replied holding Yohan.

Sebastian ignored the question.

“Brute, let’s go. We’ll take him together.”

“No, I won’t be apart of your greed. You fight him yourself since you want that horn so badly.”

Sebastian was caught. He knew he had no strength to beat Aznar; and with his shoulder it was impossible to even attempt another fight with him. The wolf backed away and leaned against one of the stalagmites. The tiger slowly made his way from the scene. Sebastian took a step towards Aznar and the tiger turned with a hiss. After a quick stare down, the tiger disappeared into the darkness. Sebastian dropped to his knees, he was breathing deeply as he looked at Brute and Sly.

“I hate you----both of you! You took advantage of me. You know I was hurt; you knew I could not take him by myself, and when I asked for help you abandoned me.”

“You had no intention of sharing the horn with us, did you? This was all for you.”

Sebastian laughed at Brute’s comments. He continued to laugh openly like a madman.

“My words were not meant for a joke.”

“We could have been rich beyond our dreams,” Sebastian said shaking his head. “The palaces we could have slept in, the food we could have eaten. I was a fool for trusting you two, I should have gone in alone.”

Sebastian rose to his feet. He was clutching his shoulder tightly.

“We’ll talk about this later,” said Sly. “You need to get that fixed. Let us help you.”

“Get away from me!” throwing a punch. “Don’t touch me!”

The Sly jumped out of the way avoiding the blow.

“Calm down, Sebastian, calm down!” said Brute

“Don’t tell me to calm down! We could have been rich beyond our dreams,” he said backing into the darkness, “Fools, all of you, fools!”

Sebastian’s voice echoed throughout the cavern, he continued to back away, shouting, until they could no longer hear his cry. Yohan, Brute, and Sly went back out of the cave; the rain had dwindled down to a light shower. The tiger was no where to be found.

“How are we to get back up?” said Yohan.

“There must be a way,” said Sly. “Aznar must have found something.”

“What about Sebastian?”

Sly lowered his head and closed his eyes. He took a deep breath before he spoke.

“The treasure hunt is over and we must take you back home. Don’t worry about him.”

“Hey, look over here!” said Brute point over the water.

Sly and Yohan looked across the water. A long ladder was placed up against the canyon wall; it led back up to the city. They swam across the water; and after reaching the top of the ladder, they left the abandoned city. Returning back to Tajir involved returning back into the forest, but the wolves retraced their steps back to the Runaway village. They were greeted warmly and taken care of. The next day they departed to Tajir, and Lobin sent three escorts with them for safe passage through the jungle. The escorts carried with them a large canoe. Once they arrived at Titan’s river the three took their places in the boat and waved good-bye to the jungle- lands forever. Passing across the river was just as peaceful as it was before; and although they did not meet the great eye of the river, there were feelings of great loss in the canoe.

“Will Sebastian be o.k.?” asked Yohan.

The two wolves continued to paddle without speaking.

“I really don’t like it when you two get quiet on me.”

“I say again,” said Sly, “the journey is over. Don’t worry about us or Sebastian. Your job now is to get back to your family. We’ll take up camp upon the shore. We should be on the border of Tajir in two days.”

Over those two days, the wolves said little and when they did speak it was not to Yohan. Once at the Tajirian border, the wolves walked with Yohan over the same path the caravans had taken. It wasn’t long when the city gate was seen over the hill.

“This is as far as we go.” said Brute.

Yohan looked at his home and was overjoyed to see his family again and to tell them what happened. He darted forward without any worry, but a thought popped into his head to say goodbye to the wolves that had protected him. He turned around to wave goodbye, but Sly and Brute were not there.

“Best wishes,” he said silently.

Tajir was buzzing with business as usual, but along the way home, Yohan frequently heard of a feast being planned in the few days coming. Most of the tigers spoke of it as being the biggest and greatest of the entire feasts in Tajirian history. Yohan also heard something else that startled him. A group of tigers were talking about how Aznar was the only survivor. Apparently, the story was that the soldiers, the wolves, and Yohan himself all died due to a strange infection.

“They think I’m dead.”

Yohan ran for his home. A recurring scene appeared throughout the streets of Tajir. Black

flags with an embroidery of a white rose hung from the doors, balconies, or store windows. Yohan knew exactly what it meant, the death of a loved one. There were so many flags that flew, and it made Yohan even more anxious to get home as soon as possible. At his door, the black flag hung still. Tears flooded his eyes, his emotion held him fast due to the unbelief of the moment; and then with a burst of stricken fear, Yohan lunged himself at the door and began to pound it mercilessly.

“Mommy, Daddy! Mommy, Daddy!”

He hit the door with all his strength, and he even got the attention of a few bystanders. One tiger came up to the kitten to inquire of him.

“What troubles you, young cat?”

“My mom and Dad think I’m dead,” Yohan said wiping his eyes, “They won’t even open the door.”

“Oh,” the tiger said, after putting the pieces together, “you must be their—well maybe if you go to the cemetery you might find your family. Most of the mourners are there.”

Before the tiger had a chance to say goodbye, Yohan made his way to the cemetery. The cemetery carried two large black flags at the entrance to the cemetery. It was a very large cemetery, and Yohan had no idea where to go. He found a grave-digger preparing another site for a new body and asked him if he saw a group of cats passing through.

“Why yes,” said the grave-digger. “They went down to plot number seventeen. To your right, you can’t miss it.”

Yohan ran down the road; he saw one family huddled over the grave of a deceased family members. He passed plot number ten, and to his left he saw a group of soldiers paying respects to a fallen soldier (although his body was never recovered, due to the previous episode with Aznar). Finally, Yohan came to plot number sixteen and stopped dead in his tracks. He hid behind a large tombstone. There he saw his family, all dressed in black, consoling themselves and there beside them stood Aznar. The tiger was putting on his best act ever. He wore a long black dress coat and presented Yohan’s father with a golden medal studded with diamonds. The medal had an inscription that ran as thus:

To Yohan, a loyal servant of the king of Taji; may his memory never be forgotten.

Brin took the medal and held it close to his chest; the family gathered around.

“Your son,” Aznar said shedding a tear, “has done a great service that can never be repaid. He would have been a great citizen of this land.”

“He is great,” replied Yohan’s father staring into the distance.

“But of course. I will take my leave now. I understand you all will be at the presentation of the silver horn. The unicorn will come to us, and when he does he will bless us all. Who knows, maybe you’ll be able to get a wish in for your son. The Dranus is quite gracious.”

The family said nothing and Aznar left the cemetery. Yohan stayed hidden until the king was out of sight. He slowly appeared and walked over to his family. He wanted to shout to them, but the emotion was too strong. The tears ran faster until he couldn’t hold back any longer. His family turned to see their son; their brother. Only the force of God could have prevented the meeting. There were shouts of joy as well as tears and there would be at least one family in Tajir that would celebrate that night.

Back home, Yohan explained what really had happened.

“That liar!” Brin said angrily. “He has the audacity to give me a medal, by the way, where is that thing? I’ll make sure to trash it!”

“Now, dear, just because we’re angry there’s no reason to lose our heads,” replied Yohan’s mother, “We’ll have the medal melted down, and the jewels removed. We will certainly get some good money for it.”

“I’m glad I married you.” said Brin giving his wife a kiss on the cheek. You’re right, especially when it comes to money. I’ve also decided that we will not be attending the presentation.

“But Dad,” replied Yohan’s brothers and his sister in unison.

“No buts about it,” said Brin sternly. “I will not give that dirty creature the pleasure of seeing us there and that’s final. And besides, I have this strange feeling that something isn’t right about all of this. I’ve been taught since I was a kitten that the unicorn was good, but—I don’t know---- something just isn’t right about it.”

Brin's words had more meaning than he knew at the moment. At the palace, Aznar stood in his room looking at the treasure that was placed on a silk pillow. He marveled the design and how shiny it was. He stood in place for hours looking at it, yet it was not the horn itself the enchanted him, but only the darkest regions of his heart that had ensnared him.

Chapter 14: Terror in the Night

The festival was to be held within one week. Preparations were made precisely to the king’s orders: all the buildings in the capital city were to be decorated with green tassels, and the stadium would be affixed with the national flag spanning the entire structure. Inside, workers were putting together a stage for the king to present the treasure to the public, and around the stage would be Aznar’s soldiers holding torches. Aznar also made the preparations for every Shavronite to attend; they were to stand in front of the stage during the presentation.

The king had his royal weavers to design elaborate garbs. Every soldier, servant, scribe, musician, and chief was to be decked out in silk, nothing less would be tolerated. During the week, Yohan, with his father, decided to take a trip to see his friend Maligo; but upon reaching the gate of the slum, he found that he could not enter.

“What do you mean I can’t see him? I could before.”

“By the king’s orders: no Tajirian is to see any Shavronite in the slums.” said the soldier.

“Why?” asked Brin.

“I am not the one to hold the answer. I only do what I am told. Now go away.”

Time went by quickly; the buildings were decorated, the stadium was prepared, the clothes woven, and the time had come for the Shavronites to leave their homes. A full moon sat in the sky and the tigers filled the stadium in droves. Aznar was standing on stage watching the crowd. He was wearing a green, silk cloak. It was embroidered with his family’s crest. He stood proudly in his dainty clothes, marching back and forth like a victorious commander from battle. After Aznar saw fit that it was time to begin, he held up his hands and the crowd grew silent.

“How truly great I am,” Aznar thought to himself, “Generations shall adore me, no king

will be able to match my accomplishment, no not one.”

Aznar’s soldiers quickly came forward and took their places around the stage.

“Bring in the Shavronites!” Aznar commanded.

The Shavronites were led in being pushed and sometimes cuffed to keep them in line. There were well over five hundred Shavronites that were crowded into the small arena, the spacing was tight. Everything was ready; everything was set. Aznar cleared his throat to speak. Five orators were positioned throughout the stadium to repeat the king’s words to the crowd.

“The time has come, my fellow tigers and small cats, to rise beyond a mundane existence,” said the king, “I have traveled into the jungle and faced great danger, and yet there was a deep loss for all that traveled with me. Let us not dwell on sorrow, but let us focus on the victory that is at hand. We all know the legend of the great unicorn, Dranus!”

The crowd went into a mighty cheer. Aznar revelled in it for a few moments, and then he quieted the crowd.

“We believe in him and his great power. We worship him. He will grant us what we want. Tonight, my fellow citizens, the unicorn will come to us and I have the key that will do it.”

The crowd went into another stir of joyous fervor as a young tiger, with perfect precision, walked on stage with a silver box; the young tiger took his place by Aznar. The crowd began to clap. The sound rose to a deafening beat. Aznar held his hands up again to silence the group.

“Now I present the key to all our desires,” Aznar said opening the box, “I present to you the silver horn!”

Aznar lifted the horn high into the air. Although most of the crowd was unable to see it distinctly, the shine that came from the horn was blinding when they looked at it directly. The crowd cheered and shouted praises to the king. Aznar waited and absorbed every syllable to feed his ego. When the cheering died down, he spoke.

“It was once said that to see the unicorn one must be present during a full moon and blow into the horn. So now I call to us Dranus, come to us!”

It was silent; no one moved or spoke. Aznar placed the horn to his lips and blew into it. It produced a high pitched sound that mimicked a flute. After he was done, he moved his eyes back and forth searching for any signs. He blew again into the horn once more and the same stillness returned. Aznar tried once more, this time with the crowd’s help, the chanting went on; the Shavronites were very unnerved.

“They’re crazy,” replied one of them.

“The Holy One’s wrath will be upon us, we’re done for,” replied another.

The crowd slowly returned to peace, yet nothing changed. Suddenly the great chanting that desired the presence of the unicorn was now turning into laughter. Aznar watched as his glorious moment was melting away like salt in the rain. The tigers booed and pointed at the king’s embarrassment. Aznar’s mind was searching for a scapegoat and the Shavronites were the perfect candidates. The tiger king sent a chilling roar throughout the

stadium; the crowd grew silent.

“There’s only reason why the unicorn has not beckoned to our call,” he said, “The Shavronites have lied to us. It’s their history that we were following. They made fools of us all by telling us that this horn would bring the great unicorn to us!”

All eyes were directed on the group that was below. Mothers clinched their children, and fathers stood boldly, ready to fight to the death if necessary.

“If I cannot bring the unicorn to you,” he said to the crowd with murder in his eyes, “then I shall give you blood! My soldiers kill all the Shavronites. Do it now!”

At that moment, unheard to anyone, the Holy One spoke from heaven to initiate the exodus that the Shavronites had been praying for:

“Go forth dragon and have your fill. Touch not the Shavronites. And spare no Tajirian, except the kitten and his family. They have found favor with me.”

Aznar troops pulled their swords from the sheaths. Terror filled the stadium as the Shavronites sought a way of escape. The blades were raised and just before the first blow was given, a sharp and powerful chill filled the stadium. Frost appeared on the creature’s fur and whiskers; the stadium was frozen. The heat of the summer disappeared as this strange winter had arrived. The tigers and Shavronites held themselves tightly as the air reached freezing point. Aznar dropped to his knees in pain.

“W--W-What is this?” Aznar said as his teeth chattered.

The tiger king turned around and before his eyes was a white cloud. The cloud was shapeless at first, but slowly a head was formed, then the head rested on a neck. The neck was connected to a large torso; and on that torso, wings were formed, and finally the legs and tail appeared: Dranus had appeared.

“You have come!” Aznar said raising the horn in the air. “The unicorn is here!”

Dranus stood like a titan against the tiger. His skin was ivory white, his hoofs was gold and he looked very heavenly to Aznar and the tigers, but of course Dranus always chose this form to deceive any if not all. Dranus directed his attention at the Shavronites. The look gave the Shavronites.

“Get out.” he said coldly.

The Shavronites slowly left the stadium without any problems. All the tigers were mesmerized by the beauty of the beast. Dranus snorted and the cold mist descended on Aznar, forcing him to leave the stage. The unicorn grinned, as he scanned the entire stadium. A long black tongue came from his mouth to wet his lips for eating.

“I--I command you,” said Aznar stuttering, “To bless our desires and answer my call as king of Tajir. My father and grandfather----”

“Oh,” said Dranus taking a thundering step forward, “I know both of them very well.”

Aznar produced a half smile that.

“Bless me---bless my desires---I command you by the silver horn.”

Dranus made no facial expressions, and spoke.

“There are only three things I do: I kill, I steal, and I destroy!”

The unicorn transformed into a thick black cloud in the image of a dragon. Aznar cowered as he fell to the ground. Dranus opened his mouth and devoured Aznar and the silver horn. During this time, Brin and his family were having dinner; and hearing the

screams of terror, they went out to see what the commotion was all about. The tigers ran in the streets for their lives as Dranus pursued eating any tiger in his way. From one town to the other Dranus went devour any and all tigers. Brin pushed his family back inside the house. Suddenly the black cloud rested on Yohan's home. Out of the window an eye formed as it scanned the cats that were there. The family held each other closely.

"Do not fret, God has spared you," said Dranus. "For without Him your very lives would be mine.

A scream came from afar and caught the unicorn's attention.

"Now if you excuse me, I have some more eating to do."

The eye disappeared into the cloud and it left the home rattling the entire structure. Dranus continued his onslaught until every Tajirian was gone. The next morning, the black cloud was nowhere in sight as the Shavronites walked the streets; and upon seeing that all the tigers were gone, the Shavronites celebrated, praising God. Some of the Shavronites went to Aznar's palace and took many of the jewels, furniture, rugs, and other delicacies that suited them. All the sacred treasures for Shavron were recovered from the palace. Yohan and his family watched from the window as the Shavronites danced and sang in good cheer.

"We should all stay here until it's safe to leave," said Brin. "Who knows what the Shavronites will do to us."

Suddenly there was a knocking at the door.

"Don't answer it."

"Hello, hello, is anyone there? It's me, Maligo."

Before his father could say another word, Yohan ran up to the door and opened it. Maligo was with his mother. The two youngsters celebrated their reunion.

"Hurry up, Maligo," said Lena

"What's going on?" replied Yohan.

"We're leaving soon," said Maligo. "My mom and I are going back to rebuild Shavron."

"But the tigers laid waste to it over a hundred years ago," said Brin. "How will you start again?"

"What happened last night was obvious to every Shavronite," said Lena. "When Dranus appeared he did not come by the tiger's call. It was the Holy One's doing. But why are you here, every Tajirian is gone?"

"It seems that your God had mercy on us," said Brin, "and I'm glad he did."

It was time to say goodbye. The kangaroo and the kitten, that had no prejudice bone in their bodies, had to separate.

"Well, I guess I won't be seeing you again," said Yohan.

"Looks that way," said Maligo.

Maligo and Yohan embraced; it brought a tear to everyone's eye. Maligo and his mother turned to walk away, but Maligo turned back.

"By the way, thanks for praying for me."

"You're welcome," said Yohan, "You're welcome."

Yohan watched as a host of Shavronites gathered their belongings to leave. Maligo and his mother disappeared into the great multitude. Yohan turned to his father, planted his face in his jacket, and cried.

Chapter 15: Making Amends

With the disappearance of the tigers, Tajir could not function as a great country as before. Brin moved his family out of the territory immediately and found a pleasant area to live in. Twenty years went by and Yohan grew up to be a well to do cat. As he grew up, he remembered the conversation he had with Lobin in the Runaway Village. Every time since that night when the unicorn arrived, Yohan's desire to seek out the Shavronites' God burned inside him. What stories were out there? What truth could be known? One day he decided to take Lobin's advice and go on a personal quest. He went to his parents to discuss the matter.

"Well, son," said Brin, "if that's what you want to do I won't stop you. How long will this take?"

"Don't know. I have a lot of searching to do. Something inside is drawing me to do this, I believe the Shavronites call it "The Spirit of God."

"Well, you're going to miss all your new nieces and nephews, your sister will give birth soon. And your mother will miss you too."

"I know, but I won't be gone forever. I'll wait until mom comes in to say good-bye. Hey, do you want to come with me?"

"I'm too old and besides your mother will have a fit if I even mention it," said Brin. "You go alone; you'll travel faster and safer without me."

The next morning Yohan said good-bye to his parents; and after a big breakfast, on which his mother insisted, he headed out into the world to seek out the knowledge of the Lord. He traveled to the land of the birds and they told him of how the great leader Tion and Astra stood against the unicorn's forces. They also told him of Glory and how he made a dead world new, and how it was a living parable of what he would do to any creature that believed in him. He traveled to country after country receiving new information about the Holy One. He wrote down everything he heard in a journal. During the nights he went over the pages, reading every word; pondering every story. He looked up to the heavens and knew that he was being led by this "Spirit of God."

After all his traveling, Yohan came to a sign post planted squarely at an intersection of a dirt road. The sign had three arrows. The first pointed him west to a country called *Baldos*, the second arrow pointed him back north from where he came, and the third arrow intrigued Yohan greatly. It was a name of a country that he had heard before.

"Shavron!" he said excitedly. "Well what do you know their back on the map! I'll surely hear plenty of the Holy One here."

The cat made his way to the country. The country gates, which were destroyed before, were completely restored. A host of guards were posted along the top of the gate; many of them were sleeping, daydreaming, or not doing their jobs at all. But one gatekeeper spotted the cat.

"Who goes there?"

"Just a traveler... a peaceful traveler." said Yohan.

"What is your business here?"

"I'm on a personal quest. I just want to stay in your city for awhile, and then I'll be on my way."

"Well, I don't know. I'm not sure that I should let you in. We are quite particular of who

we let come through. Let me check with the captain first.”

The gatekeeper walked along the gate looking for the captain. He was sleeping soundly with his helmet resting comfortable on his snout. The large wolf was snoring and the gatekeeper was anxious in waking him up. After three attempts, the captain reluctantly rose to his feet.

“What do you want?” said the captain yawning.

“There is a traveler that wants permission to enter.”

“Not another traveler,” the wolf said rolling his eyes, “They say their peaceful and then within a day they cause some trouble and we have to throw them out. Come, let’s see what he wants. All of you wake up,” he yelled to all of his troops, “Look lively, you don’t see me sleeping do you?”

At the gate, the wolf looked down at the cat.

“All right traveler, I have no time for the likes of you. Go about your way or there will be trouble.”

“I don’t believe it,” Yohan said to himself, “Brute!Brute ! It’s me, Yohan!”

A great grin came over the wolf’s face.

“Let him in, open the gates!”

The gates were presently opened. Brute met Yohan below.

“Well, well you’re all grown up aren’t you? It’s good to see you again.”

“It’s good to see you too. A captain, I didn’t know you had it in you.”

“Yup,” Brute said quite proud of himself, “Someone had to do the job. It’s a job of high responsibility, and plus they give me all these pretty medals. How long will you be staying here?”

“A few days.”

“My watch is over in about two hours. We can talk then.”

“I’ll hang around here until you’re done.” said Yohan.

After Brute’s watch, he took Yohan to his home. He told him of how he came to Shavron ten years ago and how he became a captain. Brute had a wife and two sons. He and Yohan sat at a table discussing further happenings.

“So Shavron is on its way to becoming a great country again.”

“By God’s hand it will,” Brute said pouring some water into his and Yohan’s cup, “We are rebuilding the old cities one by one. It will take time, but God is with us.”

“Have you heard from Sebastian or Sly lately?”

Brute took a sip from his cup before he spoke. His face was somber.

“What’s wrong?”

“Sebastian lives near here, just down by the open fields. I’ve seen him in town, but we don’t speak. He is still is angry about the horn, by the way, what happened to it?”

Yohan told him about the unicorn and the disappearance of the tigers.

“So the story is true.” said Brute pensively.

“What about Sly?”

“It’s been twenty years, Yohan. He’s a very old wolf now. He’s not doing well. The physicians have done all that they can, they give him a month at the most.”

Yohan lowered his head.

“Can I see him?”

“Of course, seeing you may bring up his spirits,” said Brute. “We’ll go in the morning.”

“Does Sebastian know about this?”

“He would have if he would let me talk to him. That prideful wolf, he’ll—”

Brute gripped his cup, spilling some of the contents on the table. Yohan thought it would be good to offer his help.

“I’ll try to talk to him tomorrow.”

The next day, Yohan went in search for Sebastian. He asked a few creatures about his exact whereabouts.

“Oh the wolf with the golden eye, he’s a stinker if I ever saw one,” replied one creature, “But if you really want to see him you’ll find him down that road. His home is on the left. He runs a swordsman training camp for all ages. You can’t miss it.”

At the training camp, the black wolf stood tall in front of his ten students. They ranged from the ages of five to twelve.

“What is our motto?” said Sebastian.

The children came to attention, standing tall and proud and repeat the motto that was written on a sign on the training grounds:

A swordsman’s duty is honor not disgrace.

He stands his ground looking fear in its face.

Whether young or old we all must do what is right.

In all types of battles we never run from a fight!

Swordsman stand tall, swordsman strike true.

Others before ourselves is what we must do.

“Um-um that’s so pretty!” replied Sebastian. “Now all of you grab a wooden sword and let’s pick up from yesterday’s lesson. Remember your steps. Ready! Mark one!”

The children pulled their toy swords from pretend sheaths.

“Remember quickly and high in the air. Ready! Mark two!”

All the children took a step back and grabbed the sword with both hands.

“Now on mark three swing your blade upwards with force. Ready! Mark three!”

The children did as they were told; one of them nearly hit Sebastian in the face.

“Be careful. Remember, controlled swings. Don’t let the sword control you; you control the sword.”

“Sorry,” replied the child.

“It’s quite all right. I know as your teacher many of you would like to deck me, but let’s save that until we’re further in the course. Now let us try this again. Beginning from mark one.”

Yohan came up to the gate to see the lesson being taught. He watched as the wolf worked with his students like a master. The wolf was graying on certain spots of his fur, but he had that same fire as before. Yohan watched the entire lesson. When the day was over the class repeated the motto and hurried home. Sebastian gathered the wooden swords and placed them in a barrel near his door. Yohan jumped over the fence; he wanted to surprise the wolf, but Sebastian caught sight of him.

"Off my property cat---this is private property. Don't let me have to say it twice."
Yohan stood idly by.

"Either you have a death-wish or you're completely stupid," Sebastian said stomping towards the cat, "Get of my land or else!"

"I will do no such thing," he replied folding his arms. "You're a big softy."
Sebastian sprung at Yohan. He took the cat by his jacket and lifted him up in the air.

"Is this how you treat the *map* that led you to the silver horn."
Sebastian lowered the cat to the ground carefully. He stroked his chin contemplating the cat's identity.

"Yohan? Yohan is that you?"

"Indeed it is," Yohan said taking a bow.

"My, my you've grown up, " said Sebastian looking over him, "and ugly too. Ha ha ha ha!"

"I see you still have your sense of humor," replied Yohan smirking. "So you're teaching children to be swordsmen?"

"Yes. I get paid one hundred silver coins for every student. Its good money and good training that may come in handy one day. Who knows what wars Shavron will go through? They must be ready to stand. So what brings you here?"

"I'll tell you if you invite me in for something to eat."

Over some bread and jam Yohan explained his reasons for coming to Shavron. Sebastian told his story of how he arrived in the country. When Sebastian mentioned the hunt for the silver horn, Yohan was reminded to tell him about Sly.

"You look like you have something on your mind. What is it?"

"It's about Sly he--"

Sebastian jumped in, cutting Yohan off.

"I don't want to hear anything that wolf has to say, and don't mention Brute either. You probably saw him at the gate, didn't you?"

"I don't understand how you can be still angry over the horn. It's gone! The three of you have lived in the same town for years and have never spoken to each other. It's nonsense."

"I think it would behoove you to mind your own business, Yohan." said Sebastian. "I don't need some kitten to tell me what's wrong or what's right."

"First of all you will address me as an adult. Secondly, if you are so foolish as to believe that it's fine and dandy to treat others like nothing because you couldn't have your way, then you're only hurting yourself."

Sebastian shot out of his seat in a rage. Yohan rose to his feet as well.

"HOW DARE YOU! WHO ARE YOU TO SHOW UP AFTER TWENTY YEARS THINKING YOU'RE MY JUDGE, HUH?!!! YOU BETTER WATCH HOW YOU TREAD WITH ME BECAUSE--"

"SLY IS DYING, SEBASTIAN!" Yohan yelled cutting Sebastian off.

The very words caught hold of the wolf. He backed away from the cat, turning his back.

"Creatures die all the time," he said crossing his arms, "it's a way of life."

Yohan made his way to the door. Sebastian took notice.

"That's right you better leave. And don't come back and if you see me in town you better make sure you don't cross my path. You let Brute know that too, you hear me?"

Yohan stopped before pulling the door open.

"You're just as bad as Aznar---probably worst."

Sebastian spun around with a surprised look. Yohan left slamming the door as he went. Sebastian sat down. It was one thing to be called a fool, but to be compared to Aznar was something that he could not stand. Sebastian looked up and gave a short prayer,

"Lord, help me."

Yohan returned back to town. He met Brute and both went to see Sly. Brute took Yohan to a small community of homes built near a pond. There was a white home that sat closet to the water it was there that Sly was waiting. Upon knocking on the door, a Koala, that had been a servant for the wolf, answered and led them inside. Sly was lying in bed with a blanket covering him from his neck to his feet. His fur was silver gray and he had lost a few pounds because of the illness. Yohan was afraid of going closer. Brute stepped forward to see Sly. The large wolf was whispering something in Sly's ear. Yohan couldn't make it out, but whatever was said made the old wolf look younger. He sat up in bed and stretched his arms out to the cat. Yohan came forward. Sly was too weak to speak, but the grin on his face made the point.

"It's good to see you too, Sly." Said Yohan.

Suddenly there was a knock at the door. Brute went over to answer it; Sebastian was standing on the other side. No words were exchanged between the two. Sebastian slipped by and walked over to Sly.

"I would like to be alone with him," replied Sebastian.

Yohan left the two wolves alone. Sly and Sebastian's eyes met. Sly's eyes were moist and could have made a heart of stone into pure flesh.

"What are you looking at?" he said sniffing. "You're making my good eye tear up." Sly returned a smile.

"All right, I admit it---I---I was wrong for treating you all of you this way. My greedy heart was just as black as Aznar's.. I wish we had more time to make up for what I've done. I'm sorry."

With all the strength he had, Sly was able to put together three words,

"I--forgive--you."

Sebastian leaned over and gave Sly a hug. Yohan and Brute came over to join the gesture. All three stayed with Sly by his bed for most of the day and then before they knew it they were standing by his grave. There were twenty other creatures at the grave that thought well of Sly. Even the new judges that were appointed were among the crowd. After the ceremony only Brute, Sebastian, and Yohan remained.

"Leaving so soon, Yohan?"

"Yes, I have to continue my quest. I've been learning a lot about the Holy One. The stories are quite convincing. But I still have many questions."

“I have a question,” said Brute. “Do you believe God?”

Yohan lowered his head. A smile came over his face and his head came up.

“I do.” he said confidently. “I do, but I still have questions.”

Yohan left Shavron and continued his search. He visited many other countries and after six months he returned home. He read over all his notes, all the comments, and all the stories, and in time the Spirit of God changed his heart. He composed a book from all his travels and when Yohan died his work was placed in the annals of the Shavron as a testament that the Holy One isn't just the God of the Shavronites, but the God of all who come to Him.

