

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 braded with the kings 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 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.

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