

The Judges Chronicles: Rebirth of Shavron

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Introduction: How it all Began

When time began a world was created; formed from the very fingertips of God. Life was given to the creations He made and they lived among each other. God loved his creations and he called it good: for all he made was good and there was no evil among them. However, there was one creature that hated the very essence of his Creator and everything that he made. This creature sought to bring evil into the world. Thinking that it was out of God's watchful eye, this creature tempted the others in the world. Slowly, all kinds of evil began to brew in their minds. At that moment that world was changed and it would never be the same again. This is a tale of a world quite different from ours, but also the same in some ways. It's a tale of good and evil, a tale of faith in, and a tale of the redemption of that fallen world.

In the far regions, past the high mountains and beyond the *Cinnamout Woods* (a place where all the trees' barks smelled of cinnamon), there is a small land called *Shavron*. It's a special land abundant with riches beyond any creature's desire. Because of this, *Shavron's* past was filled with chaos and turmoil between its citizens and other nations. Jealousy rose and wars, famine, enslavement, and plundering soon followed. Bloodshed stained the ground leaving *Shavron* a desolate wasteland. However, within the chaos there was a small group of creatures that sought guidance from a higher means. For years they prayed without ceasing, crying out to their Creator for help. Sometimes their prayers could be heard for hours into the night. Some didn't understand the actions of the few: Why would they pray at such a time? Fighting wars seemed more sensible than praying for a miracle, but the few continued to pray, never giving up.

As the years went by, the number of creatures who prayed became less and less. It seemed hopeless to continue, but they did continue; and after many years of prayer and faith, only one was left to continue the plea for the Creator's help. On a starry night, the prayer was answered.

"Namus, Namus wake up."

The small creature was startled by the voice. He stood quietly, looking around fearfully.

"Namus, don't be afraid. I have heard your prayer and will deliver Shavron and its citizens from this chaos. This country will be a gem to this world and through this land a great blessing will come upon all creatures. Send the word to all the cities; tell them to bring Mary of Cadius, Joan of Flora, and Elijah of Eldos. Bring them to me here at the hillside in the Cinnamout Woods."

"But who should I say has sent for them?" asked Namus.

"I have many names, but for now tell them the Holy One has heard the prayer and now I will act."

Namus carried out the Holy One's command. He went near and far spreading the news bringing many creatures with him along the way. Mary, Joan, and Elijah met at a hillside. A large rock sat at the top of the hill. The Holy One made his presence know to the multitude as a radiant light. The multitude was stunned; they had heard stories about a great being that had made the world, but now they were experiencing all His glory before

them. The multitude along with Mary, Elijah, and Joan bent their knees in reverence. The Holy One spoke.

"Do not be afraid, stand. I have blessed you to guide this land from the hands of evildoers, wars, and famine. Your ancestors turned their hearts towards evil, but I will free you and this entire world in due time. Mary, I will bless you to judge over commerce. You will trade only with the nations of Judi, Seir, and Calus."

The Holy One pulled a small stone from the ground and carved it with fire. The stone became an orange gem and was engraved with a symbol of fruits and grain.

"Joan, I will bless you to instruct this land in my ways. Choose creatures of noble heart to help you. Let all of Shavron know that I love them, that I will never forsake them, and that they are chosen creatures."

The Holy One also gave Joan a crest; it was a green gem engraved with a scroll.

"Elijah, I will bless you to defend this land in times of war, but you must always consult me before you enter into battle. I will do your fighting for you; but if you take battles into your own hands, victory will never be given."

The Holy One gave Elijah the crest of battle. The blue gem was engraved with a picture of a warrior holding a sword.

"All three of you come forward to the rock."

The three did so.

"Here is what I command from all of you: follow this and my blessing will be upon you."

Suddenly a ray of light touched the rock. A hand appeared and inscribed four sayings:

Worship only me.

Love others as you would yourself.

Don't follow the practices of other nations.

Follow the judges that I have called.

"No other creature is to tamper with my words, only I have the authority to add to my words. Here I call this place Tribless Hill: for it is where I blessed three of you. If my creations follow my commands and listen to the wisdom that I give to the judges, I will bless you. But if you chose not to, then your paths will be crooked and harsh."

After that time, the Holy One granted favor over Shavron for many years.

Two hundred years later, the Holy One called three new judges to look over the land: Gideon of Eldos, the judge of battle; Deborah of Moran, the judge of instruction; and Samson of Old Sim, the judge of commerce. Here the first chronicle begins.

Chapter I: The New Idea

In the town of Eldos, past the marketplace and the lake, there is a house quite small in manner. Its pale color and slightly rotten door doesn't give the appearance of a judge's home, but for Gideon this couldn't be a better place to live. He had a location near the marketplace, just in case he decided to first in line, and he was just a mile away from Eldos Lake, a popular resting spot for the citizens. The white haired rabbit was sleeping in his room, dreaming of great adventures and victories, and snoring louder than the frogs at the lake. Suddenly, he heard someone knocking at his door

"Gideon, Gideon! Wake up you're late for our meeting with the council. Wake up you lazy

rabbit!"

The pest, as Gideon believed him to be, was a short, stubby red fox named Thomas. He was Gideon's childhood friend; and since Thomas was Gideon's close friend, he saw it his duty to keep the rabbit punctual whenever the occasion called for it. Gideon squirmed in bed, trying his best to drown out Thomas's incessant knocking.

"Get up!" cried Thomas, "Look if you're not up at the count of five, I'm knocking the door down."

Thomas counted to five and made a mad dash for the door; but before he could force it open, the door had swung open. The fox toggled inside knocking some books of a table. Gideon was standing by the door with a smirk on his face.

"Thomas, glad you could drop by." said Gideon laughing, "Please make yourself at home."

Gideon continued his look of cleverness; Thomas did not approve.

"The reason I dropped by was to wake you up. You're late Gideon, again!"

Gideon walked by Thomas unconcerned about the present situation.

"Hey, I'm sure the council will understand. Now where did I put my sword?"

"How did the Holy One ever choose you to be a judge?" replied the fox sitting down, "Your house is a complete mess (one of the pictures on the wall fell down) you always sleep in, and--"

Before Thomas could say another word, Gideon calmly went to his room to change.

"You know, Thomas, the Holy One doesn't judge by external appearances, but from the heart, you should know that. Besides, my house isn't messy its--umm-- its--"

"It's a dump!" he shouted, "Will you hurry up and come out."

Gideon emerged in full Shavron fashion. He wore an off white shirt that had a big, bulgy turtle-neck collar, and over that he wore a sky blue vest. Around his neck hung the crest of battle; he turned it over to read the inscription that was on the back.

I will fight for what is true and rely on God Himself.

On the front of the vest was a scene depicting the event of Shavron's rebirth, which took place two hundreds years before. It was done in red silk stitching; it almost glittered when the sun's rays touched it. On his back he carried a sword and sheath. The sword that was inside had a sharp tip that looked like a rabbit. Shur of Moran, a mighty warrior who died a few years ago, gave it to him to remind him of his service to the chosen land. Thomas stood by tapping his foot.

"Are you ready?"

"Yes, let's go. Oh, I want to stop by the marketplace for some fruit. We can eat it on the way to the meeting."

The marketplace was booming with business. There were fruits of all colors of the rainbow. Children were running about and the merchants were bargaining for the best prices. Gideon and Thomas arrived at a fruit stand. As they turned to leave, Gideon bumped into one of the more popular figures in town, and one of his best friends, Barewolf. The grizzly towered over Gideon, but he was one of the smaller grizzly bears in Shavron. They shook hands and greeted one another.

"Sorry, old friend, I wasn't paying attention."

"Think nothing of it." replied Barewolf happily, "I was looking for you anyhow. Looks like you have important business."

"Yes we do," said Thomas annoyed by the bear's presence, "Now just mosey along so we can--"

"Gideon, can I have a word with you in private?" Barewolf said cutting the fox's words short.

"Sure. Thomas, this will only take a minute."

"You always say that." replied Thomas, "First its one minute, and then the next thing you know it's been ten."

Barewolf guided Gideon a few feet away so the fox couldn't hear what was being said.

"Gideon, I know you're headed to the council meeting. I also know that they will bring up the new idea: a king in Shavron."

"That is what I fear." said Gideon nervously, "We never needed a king before. The Holy One--"

"If you would just listen to them. They were chosen by the Holy One himself to be advisers for you. Listen to their advice; it may be helpful during these turbulent times. The citizens will have high regard for you as well as the other judges. You know it's a shame that the popularity of the judges has been declining. Agreeing to have a king will put you back on top."

"I value your opinion my friend," said Gideon "but I must do what is right even at the expense of popularity. I've made tough decisions before. The citizens will understand in the long run."

Barewolf put his heavy hand on Gideon's shoulder.

"You and I grew up together and we have seen Shavron survive horrible times, but this time is different. An abominable enemy is on the prowl and its jaws are ready to clamp down on us. The citizens are fearful and a king would appease that fear. Don't worry, the Holy One understands these things. I'm sure the council will set up a king temporarily. Will you listen to them?"

"Kings are not placed temporarily they--"

Thomas suddenly jumped in on the conversation.

"Didn't your mother ever teach you it's rude to break in like that," replied the grizzly bear.

"She also taught me not to be late for anything." said Thomas with a tipping his nose in the air, "Times up we have to go. Good-bye, Barewolf, I'm sure you have other business to attend to; and if you don't, find some."

Thomas quickly pulled Gideon away.

"Think about what I said!" Barewolf yelled, as the two scurried off.

The two proceeded to the council located on the south side of Eldos. The walk took them about an hour, which made Thomas more agitated than he already was. When they arrived, it seemed like a whole new world. Most of the streets here were not made of dirt like northern Eldos, but the roads were made of flat, well carved stones placed evenly together. The council building, also known as the Eldos Guild, was made of a beautiful green marble. Thomas and Gideon made their way down the long corridor to the meeting room. Along the way, Gideon glanced at the motifs of the judges that had come before

him; he wondered if his face would be on the wall some day. Thomas noticed that Gideon was lagging behind, and snapped his fingers to hurry him along. As the rabbit entered the room, he did not bother to look at some of the council members' discontented faces. He calmly sat down as if he had arrived on time.

"We have been waiting for over an hour." said the first council member, "It's quite rude to be late Gideon, especially if it's the third time this week."

Gideon got up and took a small bow.

"I apologize for my tardiness. May we proceed with the meeting?"

Gideon hopped back into his chair just before the first council member spoke.

"I hereby call this meeting to order. We are here to vote on the kingship of Shavron--"

"I thought we might be talking about this, no one mentioned a vote," said Gideon.

"Gideon, you know the rules." whispered Thomas, "No jumping in."

Gideon rolled his eyes and the member continued.

"This has come up because of a nation that wants to conquer us. They are destroying everything in their path. They are the new conquerors, so to speak, pushing those dreadful lions further away beyond our borders. Now they intend on attacking us. I have a scroll from the commander of the army."

"What is the name of this country?"

"Chetz," said the third council member.

"What does the scroll say?" asked Gideon.

The member cleared his throat and read the scroll.

Although you are a small nation, we will show you mercy. We, the nation of Chetz, know of you god. However, other nations have put their trust in their god or gods, and we have destroyed them all. You have three choices: Give us a sum of forty thousand gold pieces a year for tribute, give up, or die.

"Those fools think they can scare us? I'll gather the forces to wipe them out if they attack." replied Gideon excitedly.

"Wait there is a much more prominent matter to discuss: The nations around us have all established monarchies in some way and the Chetzians have left them alone. We should--"

"If you're considering--"

"We have to understand that Chetz is a powerful military force, Gideon." said the second council member, "They'll stop at nothing until they destroy everything. We need a king!"

"No! We have never had to compromise before." Gideon said assertively, "Chetz doesn't understand what their up against. The Holy One hasn't forsaken us before and he won't now."

"We won't be able to beat them, Gideon!"

"Why are you so afraid?" Gideon asked as he scanned them, "We don't have to beat them the Holy One will fight our battle for us just like before with the other nations that came against us."

"Yes," said the sixth council member slightly flustered, "but Chetz defeated several nations that were in alliance with each other. Chetz is taking ever land they come

upon. My words are from the citizens: they want a king.”

"More like from cowards to me," was Gideon's harsh remark.

"HOW DARE YOU!" the sixth member yelled jumping out of his seat, "I have the mind to come over there and box those big ears of yours!"

"You're welcomed to try," Gideon said standing from his chair.

"Sit down, both of you." said the fourth member. "Gideon, the citizens are beginning to feel vulnerable with a war on the horizon. You and the other two judges are not helping by denying their will. They want something new. They want to be like the other nations. They want a king. If we follow the other nations, by having a king, Chetz will turn away from us. Can't you understand that?"

"There is no assurance of this. How do we know that Chetz hasn't bribed those kings? Compromising our ways will lead us back to the old Shavron, and I know none of us wants to return to that. We are not like other nations. The Holy One's paths are straight; that's why we have enjoyed peace for the past two hundred years. He has shown Himself to me and the citizens through his wonderful works. This is not the time to go off on our own."

"We are not asking you to relinquish your position for long," said the third member.

"I said no."

The sixth member pointed directly at Gideon.

"We are no longer asking, we are telling to step down. We have the power to overrule your judgment."

"You are advisors. The Holy One had not given you the authority to overrule me." There was silence. Finally, one of the members spoke.

"Think about this, Gideon," said the fifth member.

"There is nothing to think about. I will not turn my back on God. He was there when we needed him, why not now?"

Gideon stormed out of the room, Thomas followed, smiling at the members as he left. Once Thomas was gone, the members made their final point.

"This was pointless." said the sixth, "We don't need his approval we have already made the decision."

"I know." said the first, "I was just hoping that it would go a little easier if we got him to agree."

Outside, Thomas caught up with Gideon.

"Gideon, wait!"

"The politics are playing too much into this."

"What are you going to do?" replied Thomas.

"What I always do at these times," he said leaving Thomas in the corridor.

Gideon returned to northern Eldos. As he walked, he mumbled under his breath; and just before he reached the marketplace, Barewolf stopped him.

"So how did it go?" the bear said with eager anticipation, "You and the council are all in agreement, right?" he said with a grin.

Gideon took a deep breath and said:

"No we are not in agreement. I spoke against the kingship. I made my point very

clear."

The bear's grin turned to a frown.

"Gideon, you must go back and change your mind."

"There's no reason to. I did what was right," Gideon said triumphantly.

"As your friend I'm asking you to go back. The citizen's voices must be heard. We desire a king!"

"The only voice that needs to be heard in this matter is our Creator's."

Gideon began turn away, but then Barewolf grabbed Gideon's arm and jerked him completely around.

"Not going back is just the same as turning against the citizens."

"I would never do that, you know this." the hare said yanking his arm out of Barewolf's hand, "I am following my call as a judge. If that means turning a deaf ear to all the citizens to please the Lord, then that is what I will do."

"So be it," the bear said angrily, "So be it."

Back at his home, Gideon prayed. At times he was on bending knees and at other times he paced the room for end to end. Thoughts of anguish passed through his mind, and out of his window he heard some talking about the new kingship. Gideon closed the window and went back to praying. Hours went by; day became night as the rabbit reclined in a chair, nearly asleep. When his eyelids closed shut, the Holy One spoke to him as calmly as the summer wind.

"Gideon, I have heard your prayer."

Gideon slowly opened his eyes and stood from his chair.

"I knew you would. Things are not going well at all."

"Shavron is turning its heart against me, but I will spare them for now. Travel south; do not take anything but your sword. Go to Moran to consult Deborah."

"But how does this help with stopping the kingship?" Gideon said perplexed by the request.

The Holy One did not respond. Gideon understood what it meant.

"O.k. I got it. I have my orders."

The next morning brought a cool, pleasant breeze. Gideon rushed to start his task. He ate a quick breakfast and ran out the door nearly knocking over Thomas.

"This is a first." the fox said nearly stumbling backward, "Where are you off to so quickly?"

"Sorry, no time to explain." Gideon said hastily, "I'm a rabbit on a mission!"

"Slow down. What's the rush?"

Before Thomas could follow up, Gideon was over the horizon racing towards the city Moran. Along the journey, he met a badger; and seeing that the rabbit was the judge of battle, the badger invited him to his home for a good meal. Gideon slept at the badger's home that night and continued his journey the next day. Most of the area that he saw was new to him. The grass was as tall as his shoulders and the different flowers and shrubs he saw could never survive in Eldos. Gideon rarely traveled and when he did it was usually to the east or north. The path Gideon took was large and loop-like; sometimes he felt that he was going in circles. After a long walk, he took relief near a waterfall, taking a few drinks of water, but out of the corner of his eye he spotted a figure approaching him from behind. Gideon took hold of his sword, turned around sharply, and pointed the blade at the creature's throat.

“Who are you?”

“Calm down, you rabbits are jumpy creatures aren't you?”

“Answer my question.” said Gideon

“I just wanted to know who you were. Many creatures don't travel this way. I live around here.”

Gideon apologized for his reaction and lowered his sword.

“My name is Gideon of Eldos.”

“The judge of battle? Wow its an honor to meet you,” the creature said shaking Gideon's hand excessively, “My name is Zeek.”

“Easy there Zeek.” the hare said pulling from the grip, “Well since we have introduced ourselves, I was wondering if I could use your accommodations tonight for sleep.”

“Sorry I don't have room, but there is an inn up ahead. It's very high class.”

Arriving at the Inn took another hour or so. When Gideon stepped inside, the atmosphere was ghastly. The air was stagnant and many of the costumers looked unpleasant as well. Gideon began to wonder if Zeek had and good taste at all. All eyes were on Gideon as he approached the innkeeper.

“Hello, I need a room for tonight.”

“It'll be seventy five pieces of silver.” said the innkeeper.

Remembering that he only brought his sword, Gideon spoke softly about his financial standing.

“I don't have any money.”

“Then you don't have a room.”

One of the customers spoke up.

“Hey, don't you know who that is? It's one of the judges; see the crest around his neck?”

Gideon quickly covered the crest with his hand. He was hoping to avoid being recognized. His refusal to allow a kingship may have spread to the area. He did not want any trouble, but his fears were put to rest.

“The judge of battle!” said the innkeeper excitedly, “ Well I must say I've heard of all your great campaigns. My son is a great admirer of you. Here, the room is free for the night. It's on the third floor to the left.”

Gideon was glad that his presence didn't cause any suspicion on the matter of the kingship. The rabbit headed to his room for some sleep. The room was small and the air had a bad odor, a smell of moldy wood. There were no pictures in the room and the spaces in the wall allowed the cold air to come through.

“I guess this will do.” replied Gideon looking around.

During the week, the Moran Inn received many shady guests that would pass through from time to time. That night brought a coyote that dressed was dressed in a black cloak. He wore an eye patch, which added a greater disturbing presence to his character. The coyote looked around and caught sight of the innkeeper. He walked up to the counter and spoke with him.

“Good evening, sir, how are you?”

“I'm fine, and how about you?”

“I'm doing just fine, but my night can go much better if you would answer me a question.” replied the coyote.

The coyote gave the innkeeper an icy stare with his good eye; the innkeeper took a deep swallow.

“What is it, sir?”

“I’m looking for a rabbit. He has white fur and his left ear flops over in half.”

“Many rabbits fit that description,” the innkeeper said nervously.

“Let’s not be difficult. His name is Gideon, Gideon of Eldos.”

“What do you want with him?”

“Just to talk,” said the coyote with a smirk.

“He might be sleeping.”

“Don’t worry he’ll wake up for me. Where is he?”

“Third floor; last door on the left. You’re not going to cause trouble are you?”

“I’m just here to talk.” replied the coyote with a big grin.

The coyote went upstairs. From Gideon’s door came a constant knocking that grew steadily louder. Gideon got up and staggered to the door.

“Who is it?”

There was no answer. As the rabbit opened the door, the coyote pushed him to the floor. Before Gideon could react, the coyote pulled out a knife and lunged towards him. The intruder pinned Gideon to the floor. With all of his strength, Gideon kept the coyote’s knife from penetrating his chest, but the coyote was stronger and slowly pushed the knife closer to the rabbit’s chest. In a last hope at life, Gideon punched the intruder square in the nose. The coyote stumbled backwards holding his nose.

“Stupid rabbit you broke my nose!”

Gideon ran over and grabbed his sword. When he turned to strike, the coyote was gone. Gideon rushed out of the room, ran to an open window, and saw the intruder running away. Gideon did not sleep for the rest of the night. He kept watch over the door with his sword in hand, knowing that he had nearly been killed. In the morning, Gideon did not wait to make friendly conversation. He knew he had to reach the city of Moran or he might not reach it at all.

After a few miles the rabbit came to Moran. It was a small town, one of the smallest in Shavron, and it was here that the judge of instruction made her home. As he entered the city, he heard many voices, mostly shouting, coming from a building to his left. The place in chaos; everyone was talking and it was hard to make out what was being said. Suddenly, one voice was louder than all the others.

“SILENCE! QUITE I SAY! Let us have order here. Let our judge speak.”

A tall cheetah sat wearily in a small throne in front of the crowd. She was daydreaming, rolling her eyes, and hoping that everyone would go away. She wore a long blue cloak and held a wooden staff in her hand. The cheetah sat up and took a deep breath.

“Why must you pester me?” she said with a gloomily, “ You know that my mind will not change over this matter. I will not lend my support to the council in Eldos.”

One of the citizens spoke up.

“Why? You know that Chetz can destroy us if we don’t change. Having a king

could deter them from attacking us. Don't you even care?"

"Of course I do," she said, "but we change for the right reasons not out of fear."

"You're the one that is afraid." came another voice in the crowd, "If you were a real leader you would listen instead of sitting up there all high and mighty."

"Hold your tongue!" the cheetah said baring her teeth.

"I'll hold my tongue when you use yours to support the citizens' cause!"

The rest of the crowd join in with a round of insult against the cheetah. Gideon had heard enough and spoke up.

"Hey, show some respect!"

All eyes were on Gideon; every glance was like a dagger. There were a few citizens that wanted to cuff him. Once they saw the crest of battle, they turned their mockery to him.

"Well, well if it isn't the judge of battle," said one citizen in the crowd, "Have come to save Deborah?"

A great murmur spread throughout the building. Deborah tapped her staff on the floor.

"This meeting is over," she said quickly walking over to Gideon.

The sudden dismissal put the crowd in a bigger uproar than before. Gideon followed Deborah to her home. Inside, the cheetah started a fire and placed a kettle over it for some tea.

"Much more peaceful than the other building, huh?" she said placing a cup of tea in front of him.

"Much more thank you." replied Gideon taking a sip.

"I needed to talk to you privately. It's been awhile since I've seen you. The last time was a Tribless Hill for the ceremony. I've also heard of your battles and victories, knowing you consult the Holy One before every battle."

Deborah gave him a small smile.

"Always. A rabbit fighting, we are timid creatures, we run first and find any way not to fight. I guess the Lord has a sense of humor."

"The Lord chooses who he chooses and it's always for the best."

Deborah took the kettle from the fire and poured some tea into their cups. Gideon didn't know what to say. He rarely spoke to the other judges. He tried light conversation to help him along.

"Uh—this is personal question, but I always wanted to know something. Our Creator bestows a strange gift to those who instruct. Is this true?"

"Strange gift?" she said with a smile, "What do you mean?"

"It's like well—I've seen it before—it's like—"

Deborah snapped her fingers and the spoon that was resting beside Gideon's cup flipped into the air and landed in the cup. Gideon nearly jumped out of his seat.

"You mean like that?" she said with a grin.

"Yeah," Gideon said with a big smile "exactly!"

"A great gift from a great creator," she said. "It's miraculous powers or to use the slang term, magic. Everyone has a gift. I just have one that carries great power and greater responsibility, but some have it that are not instructors of His ways at all."

However, there is always a dark side to any gift. I've seen creatures corrupted. All they think about is becoming stronger and more powerful until they end up hurting others to obtain those means."

"How?"

"By fighting," Deborah said shaking her head. "It's called 'dueling'. Sad when you think about it. That's why we all must use our gifts, no matter how great or small, to bless rather than to hurt others."

"Are you tempted—I mean—you know, wanting to fight?" asked Gideon.

"At times," she said slightly lowering her head.

There was a short silence. Deborah took a sip from her cup and continued.

"Well let us get back to the matter at hand. I'm sure you already know that Shavron wants a king?"

"Of course," said Gideon.

"And that you, I, and Samson are looked down upon because we will not support this decision."

"The council was quite aggressive on this matter. I don't understand. I think this king business is a cover up for disobeying our Lord. I'm sure you've heard of Chetz already?"

"Yes," the cheetah said, "The Chetzians are leopards that are merciless and apathetic to any creature. Chetz has already terrorized the nations around us. The citizens are afraid. Sometimes our fears led us to make bad decisions. I guess we have no other choice but to wait on the Holy One."

The cheetah's wisdom has always been a source of inspiration to many, and Gideon was no different. He finally found the avenue to mention his meeting with the Holy One.

"I heard from the Holy One a few nights ago."

Deborah looked slowly at Gideon, placing her cup on the table.

"What is the message?"

"I was sent here to see you. Now I don't know what to do next."

The two sat quietly for a moment. Both were thinking of a plan, and then Deborah spoke.

"We should see Samson before we proceed any further," replied Deborah pensively, "Last time I heard he was over in Judi. He's probably discussing trade agreements."

"We should leave as soon as possible."

Deborah slouched in her chair. She had a painful look on her face.

"There lies the problem."

"What problem?" asked the hare.

Deborah got out of her seat and looked out the window.

"The citizens have been watching me very closely. They've been pressuring me to support the kingship. I tried to leave once last week; but before I could leave, I was stopped by some of the villagers."

"You could have pushed them out of the way with that special gift of yours."

“I will not use the gift the Lord has given me for that,” she said sternly.
“Sorry,” Gideon replied, surprised by the cheetah’s reaction, “Well...we could leave tonight while everyone is asleep.”

“Tried already. Some of the villagers are on guard during the night. It’s impossible.”

“Hey, nothings impossible with the Holy One. We’ll be gone before any of them are aware.”

Deborah saw something in Gideon’s eyes that made her believe him.

“You’re very bold for a rabbit, a little crazy too. All right let’s have another go at it.”

As the time came, Deborah grabbed a bag and her staff. Gideon opened the back window and went out first, Deborah followed. As they made their way through the streets, they hid between alleyways to stay out of view. Both of their hearts raced with apprehension, hoping to make it to the gates unseen. The gates were now in view, but the journey was in jeopardy. A few villagers were hanging out by their homes, and they had a good view of the road leading to the gate. All hope seemed lost, but one by one they went back inside. Gideon and Deborah made a quick dash for cover only a few paces from the gate.

“There’s one house left. “ Gideon said, “We’ll pass and make a run for it.”

The two crept slowly past the house. Suddenly a light came on at the top window. Both dove behind the nearest tree. One villager came out to pick a bundle of flowers near the tree. Gideon and Deborah’s hearts were racing. The villager picked the last flower and walked away.

“That’s weird, who picks flowers at a time like this?”

“Shush or she’ll hear you!” Deborah said putting her hand over his mouth.

The villager was almost inside. However, Deborah managed to step back on a sharp stick and gave out a small yelp, but that was not what got them caught. The fact that Gideon decided to jump up to cover her mouth turned Deborah to the side and caused her leg to stick out from the tree. The villager took her lantern to inspect this strange sight. Both judges could see the light getting closer, there was no avoiding the inevitable. The villager made the discovery. Gideon, fearing the worst, spoke in a nervous tone.

“Madam please, I know this seems awkward—“

“She’s trying to leave and you’re helping her.” said the villager.

“That’s true, but—“

The villager stood with her arms crossed. She did exact what they didn’t want.

“HEY, SHE’S TRYING TO LEAVE,” shouted the villager into the streets, “
DEBORAH IS TRYING TO LEAVE!”

The judges made a mad dash for the gate. The gatekeeper locked the gate and now was advancing towards them. In a scuffle, Gideon knocked the gatekeeper in the bushes. The village wall was low enough for Deborah to scale it. Gideon turned around and saw the entire village running towards him. Deborah leaned over and pulled Gideon up by his ears to safety.

“Looks like we made it.”

“Seems that way... and next time pull me up by the arm or something,” the hare

said rubbing his ear.

As the judges began to leave, the gate slowly became ajar. The villagers appeared and there was a moment of silence.

Deborah, where are you going?" said one from the crowd, " We need you here."

"I have business to attend to in Judi."

"What business?" asked another, " Your place is here in Moran!"

"Her business is to see Samson!" Gideon said stepping forward, " We have to discuss—"

"Quiet rabbit!" the villager said cutting him short, " Deborah there is no reason to discuss anything with anybody. If you are trying to stop the kingship—"

"There are no ifs about it," she said, " I am trying to stop this."

After the cheetah finished her sentence, one of the villagers picked up a small stone and hurled it at her nearly hitting her. Then without warning, the group came against them. Gideon grabbed Deborah's hand and took off running. The cheetah took the lead and it wasn't long that Gideon had to tell her to slow down. Some of the villagers continued to throw sticks and stones. The two judges did their best to throw the mob off their tracks. They both hid in the shadows of a wooded area along the road. The mob continued in pursuit unaware that they had passed the cheetah and rabbit. Deborah told Gideon about a small port not too far from where they were. They would have to travel through the Moran Wood to get there, but they would avoid anymore trouble. Deborah's knowledge proved useful; they at the tiny port within an hour. Fortunately a boat was docked. A scruffy, old tree shrew came out from his boat. He was wearing a bandana; had a gold tooth. He saw the two creatures coming to him.

"Do you have any money?"

"Here." she said handing him the money.

The tree shrew and the judges talked over the matter of leaving on a dark night. The shrew refused to leave; but after some more persuasion of the financial kind, he relinquished his stand and told them to hop aboard.

"That was all my money. I smell a thief."

"Thief or not he's our ticket to Judi."

The boat ride would take three days. Most of the time, Deborah found herself leaning over the side of the boat. The movement of the waves made her queasy.

"I don't think my stomach can take anymore of this." the cheetah said holding her stomach.

"Hang in there," said Gideon. " The captain has cooked you something special. Try some of this "*Jumpin Jive Stew*, its pretty good."

"What's in it?"

The captain appeared with a bowl.

"One part seaweed, ten tomatoes, some liver, and pinch of seawater to make it nice and tangy."

The captain placed a bowl of stew up to Deborah's face.

"Get that away from me!" she said running to the other side of the boat.

Although the ride was dreadful for Deborah, it was pure bliss for Gideon. The dense fog that surrounded the waters flowed over the ship as it passed through. This placed a sense of adventure in his heart. It was almost a memory of an adventure he had when he was younger. The second day was better for the cheetah. She was able to tolerate the

movements of the ship. Gideon pulled a stool out for her.

“That was scary. I never thought things would get out of hand like that.”

“Neither did I,“ he said concurring. “By the way, how is Samson?”

“All right. I visit him often in Old Sim. He handles his business very well.

“How come you never visit me?” Gideon said crossing his arms.

“I try but most of the time you’re were in meetings or off battling our adversaries. Plus, I’ve been prisoner in my own town, remember? How come you didn’t come to see us?”

“Laziness I guess.” Gideon said hunching his shoulders.

Gideon glanced over the side of the boat. He looked heavily in the abyss below.

Looking down reminded him of the darkness of the old Shavron. He did not want to see it again.

“We’ll get through this, Gideon,” she said to encourage him, “and so will Shavron.”

Just then the captain broke the conversation.

“There’s going to be a delay in reaching Judi. I sense bad weather up ahead. We’ll have to stop at the nearest port.”

“Which port?”

“The nearest is Korsica,” he replied checking his map.

“Great,” replied the hare throwing his arms in the air with frustration, “the last thing we need is a delay.”

Again Deborah gave an encouraging word.

“Don’t worry everything will be fine.”

Chapter 11: Gideon and the Great Lizard

The boat was stationed at a small port at Korsica. The surrounding area looked civilized, but the judges were unsure of their surroundings.

“Captain, when will we be leaving tomorrow?” said Gideon.

“At ten. Be out here precisely at that time. I got a bad feeling about this place.”

“I’ve got a bad feeling about you taking my money,” the cheetah said eyeing the shrew, “maybe there is a leader here that will have pity on us for one night since we have no money.”

The shrew ascertained that the comment was directed towards him.

“You’re a sassy creature aren’t you?” he said giving her an askance.

Deborah sucked her teeth and Gideon followed her into town. The inhabitants were iguanas and the judges felt out of place every moment they were there. The lizards looked at them with haunting eyes. Both judges tried to avoid contact with the natives. What was also an eerie sight was a certain statue that appeared along the way. The statue was of an iguana which wore a crown and sat in a chair that a king would. They passed at least five of them; each one was different than the last. One of them showed the lizard flexing his skinny frame, the other showed the lizard dressed in armor with a sword over his shoulder, and the rest of the statues followed suit.

“Talk about a power trip.”

“That must be the king,“ she said, “Should we talk to him?”

“I see why not, a room in a palace would be nice. I’ll ask this creature where to find the king. Excuse me, could you tell us where your king’s palace is?”

The lizard gave Gideon a stare that sent a chill down his spine.

“Just follow that path there,” the lizard said pointing with his long finger, “The king will be very delighted with your presence.”

The weather became cloudy as the judges continued. The architecture in the land was brilliant. The buildings were as beautiful as Shavron’s; however, the iguanas did not do a very good job at housekeeping. Moss and fungi began to grow in the cracks of the buildings. There were also a series of frescos painted on the walls depicting gladiator battles. There was a bear fighting a lion, another showed a dog fighting a jackal, but most of the frescos showed a lizard as one of the opponents. Finally the judges reached the king’s residence. It was a large castle with four towers. The stairway to the entrance was split in half by a stream of water. Its walls were a cold, dead gray. The two sculptures placed near the door were large and daunting. Gideon was fearful and began to lag behind Deborah.

“Come on, there’s nothing to fear.”

“I don’t trust this place,” said Gideon nervously looking around, “Let’s not give our true identities here. Take off your crest and put it in your bag.”

“You can put yours in but I’m leaving mine on.”

“Fine, just follow my act,” the hare said, “If they ask who we are we are merchants, got it.”

“Merchants? Is that the best you can come up with?”

Gideon was annoyed by her comment.

“At the moment yes. If you have any better ideas you’re free to let me know.”

“Being honest it a good idea,” she said giving the hare a serious look, “but I’ll play it your way---we are merchants.”

Approaching the statues, the judges were overwhelmed by their size. They were sculpted with armor that covered their chest, arms, and lower legs. When the judges tried to pass between the statues their path was blocked. The statues were not statues at all, but two guards on duty. Gideon took a deep swallow.

“Excuse me we need to speak with your king.”

“We have to see him right away.” stated Deborah secondly.

The guards gave no response. They continued to look down on the judges. Deborah nudged Gideon in the side for him to speak.

“We are merchants who have come to trade.”

This remark got the guards attention. One of them whispered in the ear of the other. The guard left momentarily and then came back. The judges were allowed to pass. They were escorted directly to the king. The judges stood silently before a throne. A lizard wearing a crown and red cloak came in and sat down on the throne.

“I’ve been told that you are merchants,” said the king of Korsica, “What do you have to trade?”

“Uh—spices”

“Spices?” Deborah said looking at Gideon.

“Yeah spices!” he said bobbing his head at her, “You know...the ones we brought with us?” he said pointing outside.

“Your lying is going to get us in trouble” she said whispering.

“If you would follow along like I said we’ll be fine,” he whispered back. The bickering continued until the lizard king spoke up.

“What kind of spices?”

“All kinds!”

“Sounds appealing,” replied the king, “I will take you up on the offer.” Suddenly the king’s eyes caught sight of Gideon’s sword hilt. He sat straight up in his chair.

“Is that a sword? Do you know how to use it?”

The lizard king’s glare was disturbing. Gideon touched his sword, trying to move it out of view.

“Yes. But we have something else we need from you. My friend and I need a place to sleep. We don’t have any money. Could you help us?”

“But of course. I have two open rooms upstairs. My servants will show you to your rooms.”

The judges paid their respects to the king. Gideon and Deborah followed one of the guards upstairs. The king held his hands together and twiddled his fingers. He had a different plan for the two creatures. He was thinking hard until a guard addressed him.

“My king do you understand the opportunity before you?” the guard said hastily, “You could—“

“Silence fool!” shouted the king, “Stand at attention--- I totally understand the situation far more than you do. We haven’t seen a gladiator game in months. I know that rabbit is lying. Whoever heard of merchants that carries no money? His folly will be my footstool. Get the word out that there will be a game tomorrow morning.”

“But will the rabbit fight?” asked the guard.

“Don’t worry that will be taken care of. The rabbit will fight no worry in that.”

Gideon and Deborah had dinner with the king. The meal was delicious and after that they went to bed. The next morning Gideon knocked on Deborah’s door. He got no answer. He tried again and the door cracked open.

“Deborah, are you all right. I’m coming in”

Deborah was not there. The room was made as if no one had slept there. Gideon inspected the scene and found a letter placed on the bed. This is how it ran:

Don’t fret, merchant, your companion is safe for now. If you want to see her again, just hop your way over to the coliseum. Follow the cheering. You will fight and fight you must!

Cartzgil, the Lizard King

Gideon immediately went to Deborah’s aid. The palace and the entire city were deserted. As Gideon approached the coliseum, the cheering became louder with every step. Inside, the rabbit walked down a long tunnel with soldiers positioned on both sides. One of them whispered to the other,

“Once Dolius gets done with him, some of us will be dining on rabbit stew tonight.”

Gideon broke the threshold and stepped into the center arena. He was looking in all directions as the crowd's cheering grew louder. Finally, the crowd grew silent. Gideon spotted the Lizard king and Deborah off to his right. The cheetah was tied by her hands to prevent her escape. She was struggling to get free. Suddenly, the lizard king aggressively took her by the arm.

"If you move again, I'll do worst to you than that rabbit down there."
Deborah got the hint and stopped moving. The lizard king stood up; the deadly game was about to begin.

"Welcome my fellow creatures to the game. You've waited for a fight and now the wait is over. It's a fight like no other. A mere rabbit will take on our champion."

Cartzgill pulled out the crest of battle from under his cloak. He read the inscription on the back.

"Ha! I wouldn't want you to go into battle without your full attire," Cartzgill said throwing the crest into the ring, "Maybe your god will help you."
Gideon picked up his crest and placed it around his neck. The king continued his speech.

"Our first gladiator is a mere light weight. I present to you the foe that has to go; the hare from who knows where; I introduce you to the *righteous rabbit*."
The crowd booed. Some of them threw rotten vegetables and fruit at him. Gideon dodged the raid. A shadow was cast over the arena floor by a group of lizards pulling a canopy over the coliseum.

"Now my friends I present to you the savant of speed; the hustle of muscle; I give you our undefeated champion, Dolius!"

Suddenly, the canopy was pull back. All eyes were on the arch at the end of the arena. Gideon's heart pounded rapidly. He stood to see the beast that would emerge from the darkened tunnel. A tall potent figure stepped in between the arch. As the iguana came forward, the crowd cheered. The iguana played to the crowd, blowing kiss and he posed on all fours for an enormous barrage of cheers. Gideon rolled his eyes. The lizard was three times the size of Gideon. Its muscles seemed to have been carved by an artist. The lizard wore a silver breastplate and heavy arm bracelets.

"How does it feel, rabbit?" said Cartzgill happily, "It's going to get ugly down there."

"Yeah, just like your face!"
The crowd went hysterical; they were laughing and it wasn't at Gideon. The king was mortified. He stood up, raised his head, and produced a roar that brought the crowd to silence. After regaining some dignity, he gave Dolius this command.

"KILL HIM!"

The lizard approached; Gideon raised his blade for a strike. The two opponents came to a stare-down. Gideon attacked first, aiming for the lizards face; but Dolius was quick and came upon Gideon in a fury. Gideon was able to dodge the biting and clawing. He jumped back and took his fighting stance again. The iguana posed; the crowd

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