

The Snowberry Fiasco

**Janis “Faraletth” Harrington
Connar “Xencraft” Green**

With Special Guest Appearances by:

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For the Nine Swords on their anniversary. Thank you for four glorious years of demon butt kicking, inspiring and motivating us for this vision. May there be more years to come. A gift to you all.

Fara leth

The Forward: ((OOC))

When I was getting started in TSW's RP community, Fara invited me to help her test-drive her Anima Cats concept. I was the original Bunky, described to me as a feline Eric Cartman (although I ended up playing him more like Bluto from *Animal House*).

It seemed like a lark, like something light and fun. And it was. But the longer we played, the clearer it became that it *wasn't* just light and fun.

There is a certain way that sentient, "talking" animals tend to be portrayed, a Disney-fied effect. Often cutesy and saccharine, and losing all sense of the animals as something other than humans in costumes. It's an understandable failing -- present something as too alien, and relatability goes out the window. But there's a balance that has to be struck, and too often writers and animators err in the direction of fluff.

Fara's Anima Cats have never been in danger of that. Cute and adorable, yes. Cutesy and saccharine, no. She's learned how to strike that balance, and maintains it admirably. The Anima Cats are fully realized, characters with developed and developing personalities, traits and motivations that are comprehensible without being necessarily human or even humanocentric.

Being a part of developing that was both a pleasure and a privilege, and I'm grateful to Fara for the chance.

-- Russell "Hit-Parade" Kobayashi

Disclaimer #1: This story is based on the MMORPG game, The Secret World. The characters in this story are playable and non-playable characters within the game; therefore, the cats, humans, rats and other animals are NOT REAL. #TSW-RP-IC #TSW #hivehum

Disclaimer#2: Google Translate was used in parts of the Russian translations which may not be accurate.

About the Story: ((OOC))

This story is about the two thousand, two hundred and eighty six lives of the Royal Felis Battalion of Templars (254 cats in total X 9 lives), of Templar Hall in Ealdwic. The Secret World to an anima cat is a little different from the human perspective. Even though, Gaia had

bestowed them the gift of human speech and empathy, some received the gift accidentally, while others were chosen, the feline view of the world is the same. Inspired by one human or a group of humans and one cat or group of cats which has captured the hearts of people, whether by cuteness or by heroic deeds, the anima cats were created. The point of all of this is to make the reader think of the reason why there are cats upon the steps of Temple Hall in the first place. This is the vision of one of the authors. From the humane societies, animal shelters and forever homes worldwide, a unique force emerges from the recent events of the Secret World to fight evil and maintain the rights and freedoms of animals everywhere. Any animal who had been left homeless, abused and neglected by these tragic events had found a new forever home and new hope among the Templars, battling the forces of evil as fighting, furry crusaders to the Templar cause. Commanding a legion of human counterparts acting as their pets and servants, rather than owners or taskmasters, and led by two aristocratic munchkins given the titles of “prince”, Prince Bigglesworth III and Prince Albert II. The Anima Cats have their own enemies and allies aside from the human ones that they encounter.

When the Anima Cats were introduced into social media two years ago, their first enemy was “Spotankhamun”, a very naughty filth puppy who was raised by the Atenists of Egypt to wage war with Anubis. That pilot had undergone a series of trials to find what would be the best way to communicate to the audience in live RP, although there were very few who understood the vision and attended the pilot to “be the cat” at that time, in which the contributor of the forward was among the members of the original cast who performed admirably as the character Bunky.

Months later, a new evil force rose from the Filth shadows of the animal Secret World, Browni Jenkin. A genetically engineered familiar that takes the form of a rat enhanced by a human geneticist, Dr. Helen West to do her scientific dirty work. Of all the genetic engineering and chemical processes this scientist had put this rodent through, it left Browni with a specific taste in its chops for poor, defenseless babies of the animal kingdom, including humans. His appetite for young blood and flesh is insatiable and vicious, and whenever he feeds, he multiplies into numerous clones of himself. Kind of like Gizmo from the movie, Gremlins. Don't feed them after midnight, do not get them wet or they multiply like wild... animals. It amazes me how Xencrafter developed this character to become such a worthy foe for my Anima Cats. Truly an honour and a privilege to have worked with him, and to work with him again on this one.

That is the background story behind the current one, because over the course of two years since the establishment of the Anima Cats on social media, there has been a new development to expand the vision that which was set in motion that time ago.. Four kittens were born to anima cat characters, Natasha and Alexei. A new generation of anima cats will join on the same journey to explore the world, and follow in the pawsteps so to speak of their feline warriors who they call their elders, and other kittens which call them their friends and peers. And who would be the worthy villain gutsy enough to bring chaos and panic to the anima cats again? Browni Jenkin. He will be at it again, this time he has evolved, become stronger, better, and more ferocious than the average rat, and all thirteen officers of the Royal Felis Catus Battalion, and some curious cadets go paws to claws to teeth with Browni Jenkin who is more hungry and more devious than ever.

Janis “Faraletth” Harrington

CHAPTER ONE: A Very Happy Litter Day - Night:

Borishkov Residence: St. Petersburg, Russia

Time: 10 p.m. Moscow Time

A quiet night falls over St. Petersburg, the birds have retired for the evening, and the humans return to their homes from walking their dogs and settled in for the night's slumber. The home of the Borishkovs is nothing close to being ordinary. Even though Mikhail and Galina do what the general public of the Russian people do in the presence of others as they are their peers, they lead triple lives. As Templars, as professionals, and as anima cat owners. And in their home, it is nothing extravagant, but still is a typical home adorned with their most treasured material things that they have accumulated over the years, as archaeologists particularly of occult origin. They have travelled together all over the world and have lectured in prestigious universities about their research and discoveries in archaeological digs. When the Drs. Borishkov travel, they took their Russian Blue kitten, Natasha Tiggerovna with them. When Natasha was met with the Gaian bee when she was six weeks old, even though that she was gifted with human speech, she was also gifted with the ability to acquire several human languages including Latin and Hebrew. So this is why you would always see her at Templar Hall in the Club library staring at the vast number of books... with lots of pictures. Then the Borishkovs thought that all the travelling was stressing out Natasha, so they have acquired Alexei Maximyevich, another Russian Blue to travel together. Little Natasha, at the time was very apprehensive at the sight of her family appointed male companion, but as time passed by, the two kitties lived their nine lives happily after. Without the humans knowing that they would soon become mates, and eventually pass their knowledge onto their young when the time had come.

And so it did. When Natasha and Alexei learned that they were expecting, the humans were delighted with the news. They kept it secret for awhile, until the signs became obvious. Until they had to "let the cat out of the bag" when the other female cats began to talk around Templar Hall about how chunky Natasha was getting over time. The whole entire Hall was excited over the news that one of their feline officers were to have kittens, even Prince Bigglesworth III, who always stressed that more recruiting was needed to maintain the Templar cause. Fight the good fight, there is always room for more champions, he always stated. Seemingly, the human Templars knew before the cats did, they were very gentle with her, patting Natasha everytime in passing at the library, treating and handling her very gingerly in her delicate condition. Making sure that she was fed properly with food that was rich in nutrients that was required for a feline mom-to-be. Besides, Natasha was eating for two, perhaps three, maybe four, or even eight, nobody knew. How many and what gender of the kittens, Natasha and Alexei knew, and of course Dr. Lox Snowball III knew, because he was present during the latest scan. Even though if Dr. Lox was paid in bits of catnip, he wouldn't tell. He is indeed the

only physician, and as all physicians, humans or not, must take an oath of confidentiality and practice discretion when discussing veterinary matters of other felines... with other felines. Natasha and Alexei had demanded that they would be in complete control over their own birth plan from beginning to when it was time to deliver. As it should be.

The Borishkovs retire to the living room after their evening meal with the family, the television in the living room airing a Russian drama while Mikhail reads his newsletter from Templar Hall from his recliner chair and his wife Galina at the sofa reading, the Russian version of Vogue Magazine with a vodka martini at her tableside. Mikhail took off his plain rimmed glasses from his face and rubbed his eyes, straining from the Templar propaganda and the cutbacks of funding to preserve all occult information. He frowned and groaned at the newsletter in disgust of these limitations the higher-ups of Templar Hall had imposed upon his department.

“Не могу поверить, нам не хватает ресурсов на собственные раскопки оккультных предметов!”

“I can’t believe that we don’t have enough of resources to preserve our own discoveries of occult items.” Mikhail slaps a hand at his newsletter that he was reading from.

“Нам приходится обращаться за инструментарием к лондонским институтам. А ведь это ведёт к увеличению риска того, что артефакты попадут не в те руки! Например, к Иллюминатам или Дракону. Начальству пора научиться получше распределять бюджеты. Пусть наконец избавятся от этой армии лакеев, хоть какая-то будет экономия, ну, будут Соннак и леди Юлия сами себе делать свой эрл грей с круассанами - и не трогайте Дженни и Дживса, им тоже котов кормить надо.”

“I mean, we have to rely on the universities in London for the tools that we need. Which means we would be taking a bigger risk of having whatever important discovery to fall into the wrong hands like the Illuminati or the Dragon. The Hall needs to find a better way to manage their money. Let all the butlers go, save themselves some money, I would suggest, let Richard Sonnac and Dame Julia get their own damn Earl Grey tea and croissants - no offense or any disrespect to Janis and Jeeves, they too have anima cats to feed.”

Galina nurses her martini glass for a brief moment and sets it down at her tableside, glancing over at the magazine that she was reading. Not paying much attention to what her husband's gripes are with Templar occult affairs. She flips over page after page her eyes following the flow of pictures of fashion models and her ears ignore Mikhail's complaints over the blaring television, she suddenly looks up with a near surprise in her eyes.

“Кстати, о котях, ты наших давно видел?”

“Speaking of cats, have you seen ours?” she inquires as she takes a sip of her martini.

Mikhail looks up and tries to recall when was the last time he saw Natasha and Alexei or even spoke to them and returns to his reading.

“Не встречал ни разу за весь день. Алексей наверняка опять охотится на мышей, а Наташа - неизвестно. Она вот-вот должна была окотиться, а от неё ни слуху, ни духу. *“Haven’t seen them all day. Alexei must be hunting for mice again, and who knows what Natasha’s up to. Could be having her kittens right now for all I know, she’s been real quiet all day”*, Mikhail shrugs out his answer while his eyes are glued to his smartphone to check his text messages. Galina glances over at the magazine and then at Mikhail sitting at his recliner chair, and then returns her eyes to her magazine and flips more pages for a brief moment, and then her eyes go wide and suddenly with the snap of her wrist, she flings it across the sofa and was on the edge of her seat.

“Ох, а вдруг она уже?”

“Oh my God, what if she is?” she exclaims and jumps off the sofa and scrambles all over the room looking under the sofa, in every corner. “Таша! Наташенька, где ты?” *“Tasha?” “Natasha darling, where are you?”* Galina calls to her Russian Blue animal cat in almost baby-talk as she runs from room to room, closet to closet then runs to the kitchen. She reaches into the cupboard and pulls out the electric can opener and plugs it in. Then depresses the lever and it makes a horrible metal shearing sound. Galina thought that if she would run the can opener, the cats will think it’s dinner time and come running, but no Alexei and no Natasha came through anywhere that led to the kitchen. The only cat was the human Mikhail who came through the kitchen with an annoyed look plugging his ears with his fingers as he walked in.

“Галина, ну что за бучу ты устроила! Хватит кричать!”

“Galina, why are you making such a racket?” while his fingers were in his ears and spoke loudly enough to drown out the sound of the electric can opener. *“Stop calling the cats!”*

“Наташа наверняка спряталась, потому что собралась рожать! Я должна её найти! Я ей нужна!”

“She’s in labour. I know it. Natasha’s hiding to have her kittens. I must find her. She needs me!” Galina replies in a panic as she stops the can opener, and runs to the broom closet. No cats there when she opened the door. She continues to call out for Natasha and Alexei as she runs to the laundry room downstairs. “Проверь наверху, у детей. Посмотри в каждом ящике, под столами, под кроватями, даже в корзинах для белья. Давай!” *“You go upstairs and check the kids’ rooms. Check every closet, under their desks, under their beds, even in their laundry baskets. Go! Now!”* she orders Mikhail as he exasperates a big sigh as he rubs his bald head in annoyance.

Mikhail runs up the bare-floored stairs as he approaches and knocks on the door of his son, Roman, then opens the door to peek in at his room while Roman was on his headphones and at his keyboard playing World of Warcraft. No sign of the cats, and he would take his son’s word that he hasn’t seen Alexei nor Natasha all day. Mikhail runs to the room across from Roman’s, and checks the room of his daughter Irina, who was laying on her bed, and busy talking on her cell phone. “Коты?” he whispers, then he nodded when he got his answer as Irina shook her head that they were not in her room. Mikhail runs over to the master bedroom and

opens the closet, checking under the bed and laundry baskets full of clothes, no sign of Natasha there.

Meanwhile from all the bustling upstairs and in the laundry room downstairs, Natasha tries not to stifle a meow from the pain that she was in, but she pants through the contractions, comfortably lying on her side, inside a white laundry mesh basket, softened by a pile of clothes to be laundered. Soon, very soon her kittens will be brought forth into the Secret World. Natasha is not alone, for with her is Alexei who is pacing around the room nervously like a human, Dr. Lox, a lilac point Birman, and nurses Oksana, a marshmallow white American Shorthair, and Mindy, a Calico-munchkin cross-breed. From all corners of the house and from all floors, both top and bottom, they could hear nervously the pounding rush of human footsteps. Eventually one set of footsteps in particular would be Galina's as she can be heard racing downstairs closing in to the laundry room area.

"You are doing wonderfully, Natasha." Dr. Lox reassures Natasha, "It won't be long now."

"Doctor? I hear human footsteps!" Nurse Mindy informs Dr. Lox as she perks her ears up and follows the vibrations of the sound as Galina clears the staircase leading to the laundry room. Dr. Lox listens to the sound of the footsteps closing in as he monitors Natasha's progress, and judging from her contractions and timing, the time to have the kittens is very, very near. Dr. Lox turns to Oksana, "Nurse, you must stall them quickly! By any means necessary!"

"Leave it to me, Doctor! I know how to handle nosy humans." Nurse Oksana replies as she turns to the corner of the room and picks out a chaos focus.

"This may be a little extreme, but in this case it is necessary", she mentions and she slips her white front paw into the focus and channels her anima into it. Then she waits as Galina races from corner to corner calling out Natasha and Alexei's names checking every corner, nook and cranny that she is known to see exists. The Russian language is not a problem to Oksana. Natasha was a very good teacher in the Templar Library, knowing Oksana's social tastes, she loves to converse with the anima people. Galina approached the room where the washing machine and clotheslines are located, she finds the door closed. Galina tries the door, but finds it locked tight from the inside. Strange, she thought. She reaches at the back of her elegantly styled hair, tied into a bun, and pulls out a thin, hairpin from it, and proceeds to work on the door lock. A few twists and pulls and Oksana bursts out of the door with her chaos focus, forcing the door to swing wide open, knocking Galina in the jaw and falling backwards onto her butt on the floor. While Galina still on the floor, she sits up and rubs her forehead with her hand, Nurse Oksana, the Templar anima cat, saunters up Galina's leg, giving her no chance to get back to her feet.

"Извините, но людям сейчас запрещено входить в родильную палату."

"I'm sorry - not sorry, madam, but no humans are allowed in the delivery room," Oksana informs the human female of the golden rule.

"Что? Да как ты смеешь указывать мне, в моём доме, куда мне можно, а куда нельзя!"

"What? How dare you tell me where I'm allowed and not allowed to go or what to do in my own home?" Galina argues. If a non anima human ever had seen a human speak to a cat like that, it

would be considered mentally insane. To one with anima, such as Galina and her husband Mikhail, it is considered normal.

“Эта комната временно вне вашей компетенции. У меня приказ защищать права и достоинство нашего пациента, Наташи, и никто её не потревожит, а теперь, не подождёте ли вы на лестнице...”

“For the time being, madam, this room is off limits. I have orders to protect the veterinary rights and dignity of our patient Natasha, and she will not be disturbed, now if you please go wait upstairs...” Oksana informs the human further as she points with her paw to exit the room. Galina forces Oksana to get off from her leg as she finally gets to her feet.

“Правда? Вообще-то это мой дом, если тебе вдруг не известно, а Наташа и Алексей - наши коты, мы их кормим, так что пропусти меня к ней.”

“Oh, is that right? In case you haven’t heard before, this is my home, and Natasha and Alexei are our cats, we feed them, so let me see Natasha.” Galina attempts to get her hand to the closed door, but Oksana casts a chaos pull onto Galina and pulls her away from the door and at Oksana’s paws. Galina makes a sickening thud as she lands back first onto the floor and then sits up and glares at Oksana.

“Мне, кажется, не нужно вам повторять, что у меня есть приказ защищать Наташины права и достоинство, это происходит согласно её родильному плану, и, таким образом, мы должны уважать её план. А теперь, пожалуйста, отойдите и ждите на лестнице.”

“Madam, I don’t think I need to inform you once again I have orders to protect the veterinary rights and dignity of Natasha, and THAT is according to her birth plan, and therefore, the birth plan will be respected. Now please go and wait upstairs.”

Galina wobbles to her feet and then with disregard, she staggers to kick Oksana aside, who was guarding the door. Oksana leaps over the sweeping foot of the human, and then shakes her head in disappointment.

“Ох, как же люди неосмотрительны”

“Ugh, humans are so inconsiderate”, she mutters.

“Вижу, информировать повторно уже бесполезно. ИМЕЙТЕ УВАЖЕНИЕ к родильному плану, и ОТОЙДИТЕ!”

“That’s it, I shouldn’t have to inform you again. RESPECT the birth plan, now OUT YOU GO!”

Oksana casts yet another chaos pull onto Galina, and a powerful blue tentacle throws her up against the wall about three times before dropping her, leaving her unconscious near the bottom of the staircase. Oksana examines the human by feeling the air going in and out of her nose, and concludes that yes, the human is still breathing. It was never her intention to kill the human in the first place. She had no reason to. Oksana turns away from the intruding Galina and cleans herself by licking her paws and ears, “Обожаю свою работу.”

"I love my job", she says as she saunters right back into the room to get back to what she does best, taking care of her own kind.

A few hours later...

Oksana was pawing on Galina's messed up hair trying to wake her from the chaos pull she took at the paws of the nurse. Galina slowly opens her eyes and notices the white cat who had just threw her up against the wall was waking her up. She nearly jumps and shrieks for her husband, as Oksana informs her.

"Мальчик... И девочка... И мальчик... И мальчик! Мама и котята чувствуют себя хорошо. Можете увидеться с Наташей, только ведите себя тихо."

"It's a boy... and a girl... and a boy... and a boy! Mama cat and kittens are doing great. Natasha will see you now, but you must be very quiet."

Oksana quits pawing on the waking Galina and saunters over to the laundry room and takes her spot next to Dr. Lox and Nurse Mindy. As Galina and Mikhail approach the room, in the middle lies a white, mesh laundry basket. They slowly sat down together on the floor and peeked inside the basket and there was the happy but very tired Natasha laying on her side, with four beautiful newborn kittens feeding on the milk of the new mother cat with proud Alexei looking on. Galina sits on the cold concrete floor with her husband as they watch quietly with tears in her eyes.

"Михаил, ты только посмотри. Такие милашки! Крошечные, как ягодки голубики."

"Mikhail, look at them. They're so adorable. They're so tiny like little blueberries."

Mikhail looks on while placing his arms around his wife and smiles, "Вон тот, четвёртый, такой сонный. Ему подойдёт имя Ленивец"

"That fourth one there on the end, looks kind of dopey. I think we should name him Squiggy."

Alexei perks his ears up and then whispers secretly to Natasha, "Ленивец! Ленивец? Не-не-не-не!" Then directs his attention to his owners.

"Моего сына не будут звать "Ленивец"! Ни одного моего сына! Это имя для рыбы! Мои сыновья -- НЕ РЫБА! Мои сыновья будут сильными, как медведи, и имена у них должны быть сильные, как у их отца, и как у отца их отца, и у деда их отца!"

"My boy will not be named Squiggy! Not any of my boys, human! Squiggy is a name for a fish! My boys are NOT fish! My boys will be strong as Russian bears and they will have strong names like their father, and my father cat before me, and my grandfather cat before him!"

"Ладно, ладно, не будем звать его Ленивец."

"Okay, okay, we won't call him Squiggy then," Mikhail chuckles and pats the Russian Blue male on the head and gives him a boop on the nose, and then he kisses his wife, wiping the tears of joy from Galina's cheek.

“Хочешь узнать, какую кличку мы дали тебе? Давайте глупые клички домашним животным, созданным, чтобы их гладили, тискали и играли с ними. Но наша семья -- семья борцов со злом, как ты и твоя жена, и мои котята будут настолько же сильными, как и я сам. Уважай это и я смогу уважать тебя.”

“Do you wish to know the true name of what we named you? You may give silly names to animals that are cute, playful and cuddly, like most cats and dogs are. But in my family, I am a warrior against evil like you and your mate, and my kittens will be as strong as me. Respect it, and you shall have my respect in return, when I feel like it.” Alexei explains proudly as he returns to the basket and watches his little ones nom on the milk of their mother as Mikhail and Galina shake their heads often wondering if **they** are truly the pets of the house.

CHAPTER TWO: Kitten Day - Part 1: Six Weeks Later:

St. Petersburg welcomes the sun in the morning, and all the human citizens rise to carry out their business of the day. The Borishkovs have already risen and tending to their breakfast in the kitchen. Alexei and Natasha are sound asleep still and a familiar pitter-patter of tiny paws enter their pet bed.

“День котят! День котят! Вставайте! Вставайте! Наконец-то! Мы едем в Темплар Холл! Мы увидим Темпларов! Мам, пап, вставайте!”

“It’s Kitten Day! It’s Kitten Day! Wake up! Wake up! It’s here! We’re going to Templar Hall! We get to meet the Templars! Mama, Papa, wake up!” yells out now six week old Dmitri Alexeyevich as he claws to the edge of their bed and pounces on Alexei’s side. Vitaliy, Shoe and Anya follow behind and join their eldest sibling in the fun. Alexei and Natasha oofing as the kittens continue to pounce on their parents to rouse them from their sleep.

Natasha yawns and stretches out her legs down to her claws, and nips Dmitri first by the scruff to give him his bath.

“MAMA!” screams Dmitri as his mother licks clean the bluish grey fur from his head, making it damp.

“Мам! Ты меня только взъерошила!”

“Mama! You’re messing up my fur!” then when Natasha stops then Dmitri tries to fix up his fur by himself but can’t quite reach the spot with his paw.

“Всё, всё, я чистый, теперь поехали?”

“Okay, okay I’m clean, can we go to Templar Hall now?”

After Natasha had bathed the four excited kittens and sent them off to Galina to feed them their breakfast, Alexei prepared to speak to his little darlings about the milestone that they are about to enter together as a family.

“Малыши, вы уже сильные как медведи, и я знаю, что вы все справитесь на своём пути, и, может, даже превзойдёте своих папу и маму. Есть кошки и люди со всего мира. Из мест нам не нравится. Они будут там, чтобы научиться бороться все плохие, злые вещи. Они

могут иметь разные цвета , чем мы делаем , или выглядеть странно и слишком пушистым снаружи, но внутри , они являются кошки , как и мы. Будь на вашем лучшем поведении и уважительно относиться ко всем кошкам и котят , которых вы встречаете сегодня. Вопросы , прежде чем мы отправляемся”

My little ones, you are strong like Russian bears, and I know that you will all do well in your journey to become even stronger, maybe stronger than your mother and father. Not only as just cats, but as Templar cats. And there will be humans and other cats from all over the world, some from places that we may not like, but they will be there to learn to fight all the bad, evil things the same just like you will learn to do. They may have different colors than we do, or look weird and too furry on the outside, but on the inside, they are cats just like us. So be at your best behavior and be respectful to all the cats and kittens you meet today. Questions before we set out for Agartha?”

Vitaliy paws the air as he asks his father, “Папа, американские кошки там тоже ?“
Papa, are American cats there, too?

Alexei replies, “Да, ее зовут Трикси. Это большая и жесткая дрель Сарджент. Вы не хотите , чтобы получить ее гнев . Она может быть snarly американская кошка . Не говори ей , что , любовь моя .”

Yes, her name is Trixie. She is a big and tough drill sergeant. You do not want to get her angry. She can be quite a snarly American cat.” Then glances at his mate, Natasha. *“Don’t tell her that, my love.*

Alexei and Natasha each nip one of the kittens by the scruff leaving the remaining two to climb on their backs. *All aboard for Agartha!*

“Все на борту для Agartha!” Alexei says as he and Natasha lift themselves off the ground and bright yellow swirls dance around their paws, and disappear on their ride into the Secret World.

Arriving on the other side in the middle of Agartha, the massive tree pathways were busy with human agents of the world coming and going. Some travelling with other animals, miniature golems and sentient creatures from a dimension unknown to the non anima, animal kingdom. Dmitri watched the busy human and animal traffic with awe as he clinged onto his father’s side. The atmosphere glowed bright yellow, like the sun, and the fresh air smelled sweet like honey. Natasha, Alexei and the kittens following very close by travelling under the feet of the humans, and the kittens marvel over the sights.

“Есть собаки здесь, папа!”

“There are dogs here, Papa!” Dmitri exclaimed as he watches a German Shepard dog follow his owner happily behind in passing.

“Да, мой мальчик . Люди называют их ” лучший друг человека.” У них тоже есть любимые люди , как мы делаем . Вы увидите несколько из них в Темплар Холл стерегли их людей ,

чтобы они не заблудились и в неприятности.” Alexei explains as they saunter through the busy walkways.

Yes, my boy. Humans call them ‘man’s best friend’. They too have pet humans as we do. You will see a few of them at Templar Hall keeping watch over their humans so they don’t get lost and into trouble.

“Мама , что это такое?”

“Mama, what is this?” Shoe asks his mother as he looks up on a giant construct.

“То есть хранителем Agartha . Они нежные и помочь потерянных людей и животных, найти свой путь и ответить на многие вопросы, которые они могут иметь о Agartha.” Natasha replies as she looks up.

That is an Agartha custodian. They are gentle and help lost humans and animals find their way and answer many questions that they may have about Agartha.

“Продолжай! Задать ему вопрос! Вы лучше надеяться, что вещь не топтать на вас , как ошибка” Dmitri dares his youngest brother and laughs.

“Go on, Shoe. Ask it a question! And you better hope that thing doesn’t stomp on you like a bug.”

While Vitaliy and Anya giggle at the comment, Shoe hisses at Dmitri and looks up. He gives the Agartha custodian a gentle paw on its cold metallic feet, and hears the mechanical squeaking of its head turning downwards and gazes blankly upon Shoe.

“Where is Templar Hall?” Shoe asks sheepishly in common speak. Then the custodian shifted its feet and body in the direction facing the London hub in the middle of Agartha with loud squeaks and creaks, it extends its arms and points in the direction to answer the kitten’s inquiry. The feline parents and their kittens saunter through the feet of many rushing humans passing forward from Agartha and into a portal leading to the heart of London.

Vitaliy, Anya and Shoe were so amazed by the bright welcome of Agartha they wanted to explore some more. They come to the edge of the path that overlooked the Council of Venice below, and the kittens gazed upon the intertwining tree branches.

“Все кошки мира приезжают сюда, чтобы подняться эти? Круто! Я хочу подняться на нее. Приходите кошек , вы думаете, что вы достаточно сильны, чтобы подняться на нее?

Попробуй! ” Vitaliy says as he places his front paws on the bark and pulls himself up

“All the cats of the world come here to climb these? Cool! I wanna climb it! C’mon you cats, you think you’re strong enough to climb this? I dare you!”

Shoe gives himself a little pounce and he catches his paws on the bark of one of the Agartha branches and climbs to chase his older brother. He looks a little ways down at his sister Anya,

“Да ладно Аня , ты сильный , как медведь , или вы боитесь?”

C'mon Anya, are you strong like a bear, or are you afraid?

"Я силен , погоди , я иду вверх." Anya growled at her younger brother Shoe, as she begins to climb to meet her brothers.

"I'm strong, just you wait, I'm coming up." They climb across the branches until they meet up directly above the entrance to the Council of Venice, with Vitaliy, Shoe and Anya following in order. Vitaliy and Shoe carefully claw through the branch on paw at a time and dismounts carefully on another branch before landing on all fours, as Anya was lagging behind, slowly clawing and hanging on her front paws, being unsure of herself.

"Аня , поторопитесь , прежде чем мама и папа начинают называть!" snarled Vitaliy.

"Anya, hurry up before Mama and Papa start calling!" Anya clawed and clawed her way across the branch and on her dismount she felt a little relieved that her achievement would be realized. Vitaliy and Shoe already landed on the ground on all fours, and when Anya let go of her claws, she barely missed the edge, and instead her claws failed to catch a rough spot on the ledge that if she had fallen, it would be a long drop for sure. Down Anya went.

"PAPAAAAAA!" Anya shrieked as she fell down and down off the branch and into the bottomless depths of Agartha. Natasha and Alexei look down in horror. Alexei cried out to his only female feline daughter and charged to the edge of the branch.

Alexei takes a running leap, he claws at the edge to a full stop and looks up. He saw a white, blurry figure dive down into the limitless clouds and Alexei follows the white poof down with his eyes in shock. From above Vitaliy and Shoe, and their parents above them, a white, furry figure soars down like a burst of light past the two brothers looking down in awe. The male, little ones ran, bouncing from branch to branch, to catch up to their parents and Dmitri who were watching the horror of their only sister feline, falling to her demise. At the center of Agartha, on a humanly crowded foyer in front of the hubs, another burst of light popped from the air, and the same white furry figure who was seen falling just after Anya, had appeared again in the light, and fell just on his fours, with Anya nipped at the scruff in his mouth. The humans look on as they give the heroic feline a round of applause. Natasha and Alexei ran to the site with the males in tow, and the one who had brought Anya back safe and sound, was a familiar comrade. Dr. Lox, a lilac point Birman and the first feline physician to the Templar cats, gave a quick glance over of his surroundings before releasing the stirred and shaken little Russian Blue female.

"Well, that was quite a ride, wasn't it?" Dr. Lox mews to Anya as he lets her go from his toothy grip and saunters around her, examining her for any injuries.

"Let's have you checked out shall we? Any broken bones?"

Nope.

Dizziness?

Nope.

How many claws am I holding?

Ok.

Shortness of breath?

Nope.

Do you feel like you wanna hack a hairball? Nope.” Dr. Lox bombarded Anya with his questions as he was giving his veterinary assessment before giving the little one a clean bill of health. Anya was shaking her head in reply to Dr. Lox’s questions while the rest of her feline family ran over to her panting breathlessly overcome by the panic.

“Dr. Lox! Thank you! Thank you so much! I wouldn’t know what I would do if Anya had... well you know! I’m so relieved!” Natasha mentions to the white Birman while Alexei attends to Anya and scolds at Shoe and Vitaliy for running off without them knowing.

“It was nothing. Good thing I happened by. But hey, I was in that situation myself, when I was a kitten.” Dr. Lox replied as he places a paw on Anya to give one last check before giving her a clean bill of health, “I remember it was Oksana who nipped me in the scruff when I fell off one of these branches.” Dr. Lox looks over at the shy Anya, who was hiding sheepishly behind her mother, “So this is little Anya. My, has she grown.” Then Dr. Lox looks over at the approaching Dmitri, Vitaliy and Shoe. After all, it was Dr. Lox who had attended the births. “My, have they ALL grown!”

“Мы собираемся день Котенок ! Мы собираемся быть тамплиерам , и быть сильным как папа!”

We’re going to Kitten Day! We’re going to be Templars and be strong like Papa! Dmitri speaks proudly with his two other brothers.

“И быть умным , как Мама !” interrupts Vitaliy as he pounces on the ground like he’s chasing a bug..

And be smart like Mama!

“Hey, hey in common tongue, Dmitri, Vitaliy. Dr. Lox doesn’t understand Russian!” Natasha chuckles, “Unless only the words that I taught him.”

Dr. Lox shifts his eyes over to the portal that leads to the London hub, then glances over at the new family, “That is awesome, you cats. I’m sure you’ll find a field that you would like very much and be strong at. Who knows? Maybe one of you will be a doctor just like me. Oh and be sure to check out the curiosity ward, and watch me and the nurses use super lightning anima to heal all the boo-boos. Catch ya later, Tasha, Alexei, kittens.” Dr. Lox gives a slight wave with the paw as he saunters and skips through the portal and the new anima cat family follows through.

CHAPTER THREE: Kitten Day - Part 2:

The Ealdwic Market Square didn’t seem to be busy at first. Humans gather at all points of interest and the vendors to partake in the daily sales: Food from all over the Secret World, fashion apparel, the must-have accessories both authentic and knock-offs, guns, grenades and focuses. Guns, grenades and focuses? Enough to blow up all of Ealdwic to smithereens. From the subway station, beneath the market square, lies the exit point from Agarthia. As the humans

run to wherever it is they need to go, the cats of Mikhail and Galina Borishkov saunter up the stairways into the market.

And the kittens of Natasha and Alexei were in awe. They never had been outside of the kitting box like this. No kittens have, and they didn't want to miss a thing. Curiosity washes over them and the four Russian Blue kittens set out away from their parents to begin to explore the new territory. Dmitri sniffs his path and the scent ends with freshly clean apparel being hung with care for the humans to purchase. He then lifts himself from his hind legs and gives a pink floral dress a slight bat with his forepaw.

“Я мог бы делать вид, что это высокое дерево . Я поднимаюсь на это.”

“I guess I could pretend that it's a tall tree. I will climb it,” Dmitri mutters to himself. And he claws the garment and lifts himself up, dangling on his claws with the dress swinging to and fro as Dmitri claws and climbs his way to the top on his would-be “tree”. A nearby human female shopgirl was attending to a client at the cash register, when she notices the dress swinging at the hanging rack, and a little furry familiar clinging onto it. The poor shopgirl's eyes widen and gasped at the glance as she gives the customer the change to finalize her sale, and bid him come again. She quickly rushed over to the racks filled with apparel, hailing little Dmitri, “Oy, oy, ya little moggy, no-no-no, those aren't curtains, get down from there!” The tall, slender, shopgirl with a Manchester accent, gently grabs Dmitri by his belly with one hand, and very softly taps his front paws to loosen his claws off the garment and sets him down on the ground.

“No, no, no, kitty. These are not for playing! No they aren't! Oh no they aren't, you little cutie-pie. No-no-no!” the shopgirl tells Dmitri in a baby talk fashion. Then the shopgirl takes her index finger and boops little Dmitri on his cute, little bluish-grey nose and then scratched his ears for a brief moment before letting him go. After that nose boop, Dmitri twitched his whiskers in bewilderment and confusion. He didn't know whether to claw the lady's hands off, or hiss at her and take off running to his Mama and Papa. That gentle boop on the nose was all foreign to him, and couldn't recall if the Borishkov Family had ever done that to him when he was just a furry little blueberry. Dmitri shrugged the dilemma off with a twitch of his ears, and returned to his family.

“Я думал, что женщина собиралась съесть тебя!” exclaimed Vitaliy.

Whoa, I thought that human was gonna eat you!

“Что она сделала, брат?” Anya asked his brother curiously.

What was that thing she did, brother?”

“Я не знаю. Он был так странно!”

“Beats me, it was so weird.” Dmitri replied as he sat down and scratched his ears with his hindpaw.

“Это называется нос буп. Люди делают это много , когда они видят нас.” Natasha explained to her confused kittens of the strange human behavior.

“That, my children is called a nose boop. Humans do that a lot when they see us.”

“Почему, мама?”

“Why, Mama?” asks Shoe who was nuzzling on his mother's side.

Natasha begins her explanation, “Люди бунт нас на носу, потому что они думают, что мы мило и очаровательны . Многие люди считают нас великими компаньонов . Для нас, люди замечательные домашние животные и рабы, и они тоже нуждаются любовью и заботой . Они кормят нас, они играют с нами, они говорят нам о своих повседневных человеческих проблем, и они думают, что мы хорошие слушатели, и они думают, что мы заботимся . Люди кормят себя и являются эффективными, и они служат многим из нас.”

Humans boop us on the nose, because they think we are cute and adorable. Many humans think of us as great companions. To us, humans are wonderful pets and servants, and they too need tender loving care. They feed us, they play with us, they talk to us about their daily human problems, and they think that we are good listeners, and they think we care. Humans feed themselves and are efficient, and they serve many of us.”

“Могу ли я взять женщину домой, чтобы иметь свой собственный домашнее животное? Пожалуйста!” asks Dmitri as he paws to the shopgirl at a short distance

Oh boy, can I take the woman home to be MY very own pet? Please?

“Нет. У нас уже есть четыре слуги, мы не можем позволить себе еще один. Но в Тамплиеров зале есть много человеческих слуг , готовых подчиняться нашей каждой команде.” Alexei replied.

Goodness, no. We already have four servants, we can’t afford one more. But at Templar Hall, there are many human servants, ready to obey our every command.

Dmitri’s eyes light up and perks his ears as he hears of the place where humans adore and worship them, “Я думаю, что я собираюсь нравится быть курсантом Templar!” *I think I’m going to like being a Templar cadet.*

CHAPTER FOUR: Kitten Day - Part 3:

Templar Hall is busy this time of day, as the human agents against the evils run in and out of the front steps to receive and be debriefed of their marching orders. The Borishkov family saunter down the cobblestone path, and they see a cat standing in front of a human guard in uniform. Adorned with a red leather collar and gold pips on both sides, dangling the Templar cross at its chest, Rosie, a white Turkish Angora, greets the Russian Blue family at the front steps, next to a human female Templar guard.

"Natasha, Alexei! Their Highnesses, Prince Bigglesworth and Prince Albert are requesting your presence at their play chambers immediately."

"Oh my, I hope we are not too late," Natasha said. "The festivities haven't started yet, have they?"

"Not quite, but you know how Prince Bigglesworth is when things are not done on time? He just throws a fit with his tail and knocks things over, and then the servants get all frightened and run away when the Crown Prince is not happy." Rosie commented.

"Then we shall not keep the prince waiting," mentions Natasha and proceeds up the white marble steps greeting all the feline guards along the way through the chambers of the Royal Felis Catus Battalion.

And inside the chambers was filled with playful mews of new, curious kittens from all over the world. The whole setup was like a trade show. Each anima cat with different field of expertise were on paw to display their skills in hopes that they would inspire the young ones to follow in the pawsteps of a Templar. Whether it is brains or physical prowess, each cat receives basic training regardless of field starting at six weeks old. At the end of their training, they would receive their Templar collar and a summoning from Her Majesty Queen Sophie, the oldest and wisest of all the anima cats, who would decide their destiny through the spoken word of the bees.

There were a lot of new kittens this year, including Natasha and Alexei's four little ones who were already sauntering the marble floor with awe. Passing by the nearby privy chambers of litterboxes draped with red and white, velvet mini-tents. About twelve of them, as Anya counted. Watching the human servants who guard the doors attentively keeping watch of all the activities, ready to serve at the royals' command. And at the end of the chambers, was a great red door, with a middle-aged human servant with a golden cane. Adorned with the Templar attire, with medals on his chest, commending his years of service to the Templar cause, Jeeves, the private butler to the Royal Clowder taps the end of his cane to the marble floor three times. The kittens ruffle their furs and stick closer to the adult cats as Jeeves announces.

"Presenting, Their Royal Highnesses, Prince Bigglesworth III, Brigadier General of the Battalion, and Prince Albert II - Ambassador to the Templars and Diplomatic Envoy to the Animal Kingdom! Gaia Save the Queen!"

Through the cat flaps below, emerges Princes Bigglesworth and Albert, twin black and white tuxedo munchkins and saunter with their noses in the air, over to their mini red leather chairs. Prince Bigglesworth meows to commence the Kitten Day festivities with Commander Ziggy, a silver and black tabby American Shorthair, guarding near the princes. Normally it would be the Sergeant-at-Arms responsible for the protection of the Royal Clowder, however Trixie is giving her presentation to the kittens for Kitten Day, and will not be available to carry out her duties.

“Bravo, Your Highnesses, this might be the most successful Kitten Day yet,” Ziggy congratulates.

“The festivities had only just begun, Commander. Each participating officer must test each kitten’s strength, agility, ferocity and intelligence. I do intend to watch and listen attentively and assess the new future prospects myself.” Prince Bigglesworth explains.

“I’m sure your judgement would be most accurate, Your Highness,” Ziggy adds with a slight bow with his head.

On the northeast corner of the chambers, lies a neat pile of five breaking boards beneath a high table. Alexei jumps up the tabletop with great ease and sunters to the edge above the breaking boards. And jumps down focusing with his anima, his paws turning bright red, screeching with a loud, “HIYA!” Breaking through the five boards one by one as he lands on his all fours through and on the ground without a flinch of pain. The kittens are alight with awe as they cheered with meows of delight, of the greatness of Alexei’s strength.

“Я капитан Алексей, главного следователя и номер один в баке!” *I am Captain Alexei, chief interrogator and number one tank!* Alexei introduces himself to the new cadets.

“Я Темплар третьего поколения . Мой дед кот Игорь, Кодовое “Bear Paw”, воевал против ста скорпионов с его голыми когтями во время миссии в Египте. И он жил, чтобы рассказать об этом!”

I am a third generation Templar. My grandfather cat Igor, codename Bear Paw, fought against one hundred scorpions with his bare claws while on a mission in Egypt. And he had lived to tell about it!

“Сила его , протекала через мой отец , Максим, кодовому Тигру , воевавшего пачку оборотней с его голыми когтями во время миссии в Бухаресте. Эти оборотни, возможно, нарушили почти каждую кость в его теле, но он жил, чтобы рассказать мне, когда я был маленький котенок.”

The strength of him, flowed through my father, Maxim, codename Tigger, who had fought a pack of werewolves with his bare claws while on a mission in Bucharest. Those werewolves may have broken almost every single bone in his body, but he had lived to tell the story to me when I was a little kitten.

“И я , Алексей , сын Максим, пошел коготь коготь с вредоносными “Spotankhamun” в самом сердце Египта. Он был очень непослушным, грязный щенок. Так что я показал ему

путь в пропасть с голыми когтями! И я жил, чтобы рассказать историю, чтобы все, что вы малышами сегодня.”

And I, Alexei, son of Maxim, went claw to claw with an evil Spotankhamun in the very heart of Egypt. He was a very naughty, filthy puppy. So I showed him the way to the abyss with my bare claws! And I have lived to tell the story to all of you little ones today.

“That’s my Papa. He is so brave and strong,” brags little Dmitri to the other kittens in Common speak as they marvel at the story of his family.

“Теперь, давайте посмотрим, что сила вас есть котята . Вы не можете быть в полную силу пока , но с надлежащей физической подготовки , вы будете так же, как сильный и смелый , как я!” Alexei proudly challenges the new cadets to a test of strength.

Now, let’s see what strength you kittens have. You may not be full strength yet, but with the proper physical training, you will be just as strong and brave like me!

Alexei meows to a human guard to reset the board display to just one single board on its rest, and brings in a lower tabletop and a little stepping stool for the little ones to climb.

“Есть ли у вас что требуется, чтобы прорваться через барьер ? Шаг вперед и показать свою силу!”

Do you have what it takes to break through the barrier? Step forward and show your strength!

The mews of “me, me, me” rings through the chambers from the kittens wanting to prove their response to Alexei’s challenge.

“Дмитрий , мой первый сын родился ! Шаг вперед , и проверить себя!” Alexei chooses Dmitri to be one of the first kittens to test themselves.

Dmitri, my first born son! Step forward, and test yourself!

Dmitri climbs up the tabletop and measures himself to the center contact point of the board below. He jumps down with a cute little “Hiya”, and his front paws with dead center with the board, breaking it in half. The kittens watching applaud him with happy mews.

“Впечатляет, сын мой . Ваше мастерство растет хорошо.” Alexei compliments his son on a great showing on his first try.

Impressive, my son. Your skill is growing well.

Then it was Vitaliy, the third born and Shoe, the last born son of Alexei’s turns and they had broken their single boards with ease.

“Аня , моя единственная дочь! Шаг вперед и проверить свои силы!” Alexei says to little Anya who was sitting behind Dmitri.

Anya, my only daughter! Step forward and test your strength!

Anya climbs up to the tabletop and stares down at the board below, she jumps down, but she hesitates in mid air, her paws didn't make contact with the center of the board and doesn't break through and instead she tumbles off and lands on all paws on the floor.

Anya shakes her head as Natasha nips her at the scruff and licks her ears and sends her back to the group.

“Это хорошо , дочь моя, может быть, в следующий раз , когда вы сильнее”

It's okay, my daughter, maybe next time when you are stronger. Alexei mentions as he nuzzles his head against Anya's as she disappointedly walked by..

“Stupid weak, sister! Why did you have to miss like that?” Dmitri bats at Anya's head as the presentation concludes. Anya sticks out her tongue and Dmitri claws at her face and a fight breaks out in the middle of the floor. Anya and Dmitri exchange paws and flurries of claws until Vitality and Shoe jump in to break up the fight, pinning Dmitri to give Anya the chance to escape her brother's anger.

“STOP!” orders Prince Bigglesworth as looks on at the commotion, the fighting and quarrelling kittens freeze and gaze upon the regal munchkin Prince. “Captain Alexei, they would do well, if you would teach your kittens to keep their paws to themselves in my presence.” Bigglesworth commanded in his short critique.

The slightly embarrassed feline parents, Alexei and Natasha, with their heads low and Natasha responded quietly on her mate's behalf, “Yes, Your Highness, it will not happen again, we assure you.”

Prince Bigglesworth nods and gives a wave of the paw to resume the exhibition, the kittens are guided into another part of the chambers which lead to somewhat of an obstacle course. A bluish-black portal swirls around and opens before the kittens. And Min-ji the half-traditional Siamese, half-Nermegal cat steps through the portal and disappears into thin air.

“Hey where did that cat go?” asked Shoe as he looks around the portal and the kittens joined together in looking for Min-ji. Then the bluish-black portal reopened and Min-ji steps through it again, reappearing before the kittens again.

“Ha-ha, thought I was gone, did ya?” Min-ji slightly chuckling. “Never fear, for I am Min-ji. Master of Intelligence, Ninja Stealth and Professional Yoinking, and your authority on cat yoga! So shalom, meowmaste, and all that peaceful suff!”

“A good scout and a thief, relies on instincts to stay hidden and to move quickly and gather information without getting caught. Who knows anything about Kaidan, huh? Huh? Lots of our greatest enemies are there. And it's called the Filth. The Filth are really bad news. They like to eat humans and mess things up, it's crazy out there, even for a cat like you and me. And I'm the

only one who with enough brains to go there and see with my own eyes what it's really about. Questions? Yes, you the Bengal kitty."

"How do you get around Kaidan with all the Filth running around?" the Bengal kitty named Ginger asks Min-ji.

"The same thing as I tell every cat else, with my own four paws. The Filth don't pay me no mind at all when I'm there, you see I'm half of what some humans call, a Nermegal. The Nermegal are an ancient breed of cats that goes waaaay back to ohhhh... the real ancient times, when my ancestors were great healers, and kept the humans away from sickness and disease, until one day, a deadly plague came along and wiped the whole empire of humans out and the cats got blamed for it and forced them all into hiding. Don't let the looks fool you, I may look like my momma's Siamese side, but inside me I'm poppa's Nermegal."

Min-ji suddenly pokes out her black tentacles from her spine at will and shows the kittens what her poppa's side of the family looks like.

"AHHHHHHH!" the kittens ruffled their scruffs with fright and all took off running in all directions, hiding underneath all the furniture they could fit into and some were climbing onto the red velvet drapes of the chambers and meowing for the human guards to get them down. Min-ji retracts her tentacles into her spine and laughs, "Ha-ha-ha. Gets them every time!"

After all the kitten cadets were found and gathered to the south side of the chambers. There stands a lone, brown and white mixed Maine Coon. She was big and towered all of the other cats in the room, even with the two feline guards beside her. Brandishing a mini gold mace in her mouth, she puts down the mace in front of her and screeched.

"ATTENTION!" she bellowed as the cats froze in place in silence, as the Sargeant-at-Arms paces about the formation lines of the kittens present, and was to give her presentation in her own Southern tone.

"Meow, see 'ere ya'll! All ya'll youngins 'ere ain't gon' be funnin' when I'm around! The name be Trixie. And I'm the Sarge who makes dern sure that nobody be breakin' the law."

"Это американский кот! Мы должны совать повеселиться здесь, "Vitaliy nudges Dmitri.

"It's the American cat! We've got to poke some fun here."

Dmitri nods as they listen attentively to Trixie's speech.

"Meow, all ya'll know what happens when one breaks the law. Ya'll get into trouble. Law 'n order are two things that keeps things runnin' like wild rabbits on a carrot garden. We gotta get in there, and show 'em who's boss, like this criminal right here!" Trixie brings out a human guard with a cage and the human places the cage on the floor. "Feast yer itty bitty eyes on this 'ere lil' lawbreaker. It's been caught doing sum no-goodin', so I'mma demonstrate how to make an arrest." Trixie peers her yellow eyes into the little grey mouse that was let loose from its cage and sternly warns, "You are under arrest!" The little mouse's beady eyes popped out and let out a squeaky shriek, and took off away from Trixie like a bat out of hell. "Stop in the name of the law!" bellowed Trixie as the Maine Coon gave chase to the little mouse all over the chambers. All the kittens ran over to help Trixie catch the little rodent, pouncing, pawing, clawing and biting

the little mouse, but the mouse was two to five steps away from all of them. Jumping, ducking and weaving through the barrage of young, kitten claws and paws throughout the court of the munchkin Royal Clowder. As Trixie and the cadets chased the mouse, the wild mouse chase caught the attention of all the other officer cats and their cadets. Licking their chops and bringing out their claws, they too began to give chase all around the thrones of the princes and the litter boxes to apprehend the little mouse running for its freedom from almost the whole entire Battalion of cats. It's only stop was back inside the cage where he would be safe. Next to its exercise wheel and noms.

The steel cage slams shut upon the escaping mouse and the breathlessly, panting Trixie as she returns to the group of kittens and points with her paw to an entrance leading to the kennels and it opens revealing a passage, "Meow all ya'll know when one breaks the law and gets caught, they git thrown in there!" The kittens become frightened when they stare curiously at the dark passageway leading to the most feared area of the chambers.

"Вот наш шанс , братья ! Давайте посмотрим, что на самом деле там внутри!"
Here's our chance, brothers! Let's go see what's really inside there! Vitaliy eggs on his brothers and sneaks past the other kittens off the side and slipped inside the kennels passage when Trixie's back was turned. And the door closes shut leaving only a large window frame to see beyond the dark side.

Dmitri, Vitaliy and Shoe skips on their paws down the hall.

"Ничего себе , это здесь темно . Будем надеяться, что наш котенок ночного видения быстро адаптироваться " .

"*Wow, it's dark in here. Let's hope our kitten night vision adjust quickly.*" Vitaliy says as he tries to navigate the kennels.

"Мы собираемся быть в большой беде , если мама и папа выяснить , мы перебрались в питомниках."

"*We're going to be in big trouble if Mama and Papa find out we've sneaked away into the kennels.*" Shoe says.

"Все будет в порядке, брат, давайте просто сделать это быстро. Быстро в быстро и вне!"

"*It'll be okay, brother, let's just do this quickly. Quickly in and quickly out, that would be what Min-ji the stealthmaster would say.*" Vitaliy replies.

They saunter down the hallway to a protective glass panel. Then they hear the moans and cries of all the most dangerous of all animals and familiars held here.

"Это жуткое!"

"*Whoa, this is creepy, yeah!*" Dmitri whispers as they move into a celled window. Dmitri and Shoe climb up on the window sill with their forepaws and lift themselves up to see for themselves, and inside the other side of the dark window covering, protecting them, they saw big, yellow canine eyes. Vitaliy stumbles below onto a control panel that gives the door control options.

"Ух ты , интересно, что это делает."

"*Wow, I wonder what this one does.*" Vitaliy mumbled as he places his paw unintentionally on the button for the the door release mechanism. And a warning sounded all over Templar Hall.

"Meow, meow, meow! WARNING! Unauthorized entry! WARNING! Unauthorized entry!" And

Vitaliy quickly panics and pounces on the buttons which finally shuts down the warning sequence.

"Это было близко! Я думал, что на мгновение все они будут прилетать сюда и ругать нас!"

"Whew! That was close! I thought for a moment they would all come flying in here and scold us!"

Vitaliy said in relief as a ferocious, escaped barghest breathes and drools from its chops and trickles down on Vitaliy's scruff.

"Дмитрий, вырезать это! Это не смешно!"

"Dmitri, cut that out! That's not funny!" Vitaliy scolds as he wipes off the drool with his paw.

"Я здесь, глупый! Я ничего не делал! "

"I'm over here, stupid! I didn't do anything!" Dmitri replied in front of him as he jumped down from the window with Shoe by his side.

Then Vitaliy got worried, "Если вы оба есть, то кто за меня?"

"If you're over there, and Shoe is over there with you, then who is behind me?"

As Vitaliy turned to find the giant, black barghest behind him, it roared viciously into Vitaliy's face, it pulled back his ears and ruffled his scruff.

"RUN FOR YOUR NINE LIVES!" Vitaliy yelled as he takes off running all over the kennels with the animals in lockup cheering on the barghest as it gave chase to the new Templar cadets.

Meanwhile during that commotion...

"When animals break the law, they git thrown in there. The kennels of Templar Hall is home to some of the most vicious and craziest criminals in the Secret World. A few chosen cats are allowed to go in there, without risking a mass escape or danger to the humans. And they are the Princes, the Commander and the Sargeant-at-Arms." Trixie adds finishing her explanation of the kennels, and turns her eye to the giant window to catch the chaos of the escaped barghest chasing after the three out of the four of Alexei and Natasha's kittens round the kennel foyer.

"What in the...? Guards to the kennels, RIGHT MEOW!" Trixie exclaimed as she and her guards race into the kennels and catches Dmitri, Vitaliy and Shoe inside a kennel, and immediately paws a button to seal the doors so the barghest wouldn't enter. Then she and her guards turned her attention to the barghest when she focuses her anima channelling into her claws and jumps up, striking it on the throat. Then the human guards race in, one holding a tranquilizer gun aims and shoots a few tranquilizer darts into the barghest. The entity fights off the sedative effects of the chemical before dropping onto the floor, knocking itself silly before being dragged back to its kennel. All the anima cats and kitten cadets race into the kennels and see the three, frightened furballs, Dmitri, Vitaliy and Shoe, their heads low, huddling at a corner, shaking like leaves, locked up inside the kennel.

Trixie adds in her final lesson to the class, "Meow, ya'll see what happens when any of ya'll break the law like these lil' knuckleheads?"

Alexei and Natasha peered through the window in shock and embarrassment, they ran inside the kennels, "Dmitri, Vitaliy, Shoe! Why did you go in here? You know you are not allowed in

here! Why you never listened to Sargeant Trixie?" Natasha scolded. "Your father will have words with you three when we get home!" Then Natasha turns to Sargeant Trixie, "I'm so sorry for all this, Trixie. You know we were once curious as they are."

Trixie answered understandingly as she released the door button for the kittens to leave the kennel, "Meow, ya'll know 'Tasha, we were once whipper-snipper youngins like these kittenfolk, but none of us ever thought for a split second about going into a kennel full of bloodthirsty familiars and rassle down sum barghests. Just sayin' darlin'."

The final leg of the exhibition directed the kittens to a chunky orange and white American Shorthair named Lt. Bunky who was sitting at a table filled with human tools. Pens, pencils, papers, coffee mugs adorned the table with Bunky in the middle scratching himself.

Bunky begins with a question, "Yo, kitties! If you like destroying stuff, then demolitions is the field you wanna be in! I'm Bunky, the number one feline demolitions expert here! And I'm gonna show you if you want something out of the way, almost all the time, you just gotta do it yourself!"

Bunky proceeds to knock over every single object off the table and crashing onto the floor with great ease. It took a little bit of Bunky's paw strength to get the coffee mug over and off the tabletop watching it crash and smash into tiny ceramic pieces below him.

"Now if you really wanna have some fun, but you don't have the time to knock it all over one by one, sometimes you might need a little help from these babies right here!" Bunky says as he pulls out a grenade. "This is what the humans call a grenade. When you pull out the pin with your paw, be on the other side of the world, because it'll go boom, and it'll be curtains for ya if you don't get out of the way quick enough." Bunky jumps over to another table filled with objects with the grenade in his mouth. He pulls the pin with his paw and leaves the grenade there as he quickly jumps off and instructs the kitties to move a safe distance away.

"Fire in the hole!" Bunky yelled as the grenade detonates leaving everything including the table that had been reduced to mere firewood.

"That sure was fun! Then you'll be able to work with C4's and breaching charges, but let's say there's a bomb that's ready to go kaboom, and you don't want it to. That's when you need to disarm it, which is a opposite from wanting to let it go blow everything up to smithereens. Whattaya do?" Bunky added and proceeds over to a bomb that's ready to detonate. He peers into the complex wiring of the ticking time bomb.

"I see a red wire, a blue wire and sometimes you'll see a black or green wire. Never, ever chomp down a single wire one by one, no matter what colour it is, chances are it could explode and it'll be curtains for ya and the whole chambers. So rule of paw kitties, is that if you ever have to make a decision which wire to chew off with your teeth, best to chomp them all down at once."

The countdown to detonation had begun and Bunky carefully sniffs out the red, blue and black wire on a massive makeshift bomb that is on yet another table. He claws out the three wires and begins to cut all three of them at the same time with his sharp teeth. The countdown stops and no detonation. Every cat in the vicinity breathes a meow of relief. Shoe, being the most curious kitty of the Borishkov family, wanders away from the rest of the attentive kittens, and sniffs the air. The scent took him to another table full of Bunky's grenades and C4's, the ones Bunky had used in his presentation. Shoe climbs on top of the table with the aid of a nearby crate and inspects the materials.

"Ничего себе , посмотрите на все игрушки!"

"Wow, look at all the toys!" Shoe mutters to himself as he sniffs each grenade and C4 that was displayed on the table.

"Я думаю, что я возьму это."

"I think I'll take this one." Shoe whispers as he mouths the pin part of the grenade and was about to dismount off the table, but the need to use the litterbox interrupted his curiosity.

Shoe whispers to himself with the grenade in his mouth on his way to the litter boxes. One of the many red velvet tented litter boxes welcomes Shoe as he steps through the tent and onto the finest sand that was laid out inside the box.

"Я не могу держать это и копать в то же самое время . "

"I can't hold this and dig at the same time." Shoe says and he sets aside Bunky's grenade on the edge of the box outside from the sand. He digs his hole to do his thing and when he was done, and covered up his business, he reached over the edge of the litter box to paw at the laying grenade. The little explosive device was caught at the outside wall of the box, as Shoe hooked his claws to the pin, and begins to pull it towards him. The laws of physics began to work against him as the pin let loose from the device and Shoe rolled backwards onto his butt with the pin at his paw.

"Будь на другой стороне земного шара... "

"Be on the other side of the world," replayed in the words of Bunky in Shoe's head as he darted out of his tent like anything faster than the speed of light, and BOOM! All the cats ran for cover in all directions, including Bunky. The grenade took out three litterbox tents, and blew up a whole bunch of fine sand all over half the room. One of the litter boxes had its covers taken off, exposing poor Nurse Oksana who was doing her thing, she screamed, "DO YOU MIND?" The red velvet tent was nothing but a pile of tattered, burnt cloth and poor Shoe was right underneath it, and that the cover saved him from losing one of his nine lives. Unfortunately, the shield wasn't going to save him from the lectures from Bunky, Commander Ziggy, Prince Bigglesworth, and not to mention his Mama and Papa for trying to blow up Templar Hall.

"Hey, what's wrong with you, man? You gotta train before they put a grenade in your paws."

Bunky says angrily to Shoe as he grabbed hold of the tent away. "You could have gotten a lot of cats killed!"

Prince Bigglesworth and Prince Albert look on at the commotion and assess the potential of every cat's behavior. Carefully weighing in on the potential versus the flaws that the four kittens had conjured up during the day's exhibition as it draws to a close.

"These new litter of kittens sure could use a lot of discipline training. Thank goodness for our basic training program, otherwise these kitties would be running amok like the rest of the kennel inmates." Prince Bigglesworth mentions to his brother Albert. "Though there is something about little Anya that I can't quite put my claw on."

"Natasha and Alexei's second born? How so brother?" Prince Albert asks as he licks his paws at his throne.

"Anya is surprisingly the weakest among her siblings, physically indeed. I'm more curious about what her mind would be like as she grows up with her training. My instincts tell me she might be more than what she will become. Even better than her brothers, despite her lack of physical prowess, though it will take some time to improve, what the result would be, I'm not certain. She has the qualities to succeed otherwise: agility like Min-ji, intelligence like Dr. Lox, charisma like Nurse Oksana, and they all outweigh her physical strength, so my instincts tell me that maybe... just maybe... Mumsy may have a different plan for her." Bigglesworth explains.

Prince Albert twitches his ears and shakes his head, "Indeed brother. Not all cats rely on their strength to get ahead in this Battalion. It will be curious indeed to follow her progress in the weeks to come and let the decision lie with Mumsy, should Anya graduate."

Meanwhile in St. Petersburg after Kitten Day:

The four kittens crouched with their heads low as Alexei paced back and forth all over the floor as he was scolding his little ones for their behavior and attitude during the Kitten Day Exhibition.

"Вы не вели себя хорошо сегодня! Мама и папа очень разочарован в вас всех."

"You have not behaved well today! Mama and Papa are very disappointed in all of you." Alexei towered over Vitaliy, his third born,

"Виталий! Как вы думаете, произошло бы, если Трикси и охранники не заметили, что вы работаете с этого баргест, и мы не смогли спасти вас? Вы могли бы получили себя и своих братьев убили, когда вы пробралась в питомниках без разрешения! "

"Vitaliy! What do you think would have happened if Trixie and the guards haven't noticed you running from that barghest, and we were unable to rescue you? You could've gotten yourself and your brothers killed when you snuck into the kennels without permission!" Alexei turns his attention to his first born, Dmitri.

"А ты! Мой сын! Вы его слушали, как вы следовали вашего брата в эту смертельную ловушку! Вы мой первый родился, вы можете быть самым сильным, но вы должны использовать вашу голову тоже. Будьте примером для своих братьев!"

"And you! My son! You had listened to him as you followed your brother into that death trap! You are my first born, you may be the strongest, but you must use your head too. Be an example for your brothers!"

"Да, папа!" Dmitri whispers as he lowers his body more to the ground

Alexei paces around to turn his attention to Shoe,

"И ты мой последний родился сын, ты чуть не взорвал весь зал храма! О чем вы думали? Я удивлен, что вы не перегорел себя, когда гранатами Bunky без его разрешения вы обработки.

"And you my last-born son, you nearly blew up the whole Temple Hall! What were you thinking? I'm surprised you haven't blown yourself up when you were handling Bunky's grenades without his permission. From here on, paws off unless they tell you! Got it?"

Alexei paces further over to little Anya,

"И ты мой второй родился, я не думаю, что вы можете уйти от того, лекции, потому что вы женщина. Вы не могли бы победить на том же уровне со всеми ее ног. Я не знаю, кто из вас был смущен нас больше всего, но слабость к тамплиеров является наиболее неловкое всех."

"And you my second born, do not think you can get away from being lectured, because you are a female. You had failed to break a single board with all of your paws. I don't know which one of you had embarrassed us the most, but weakness to a Templar is the most embarrassing of all." Anya begins to cry in meows as she clumsily runs away from the room to find her mother. He sighs and furrows his whiskers as he watches his only daughter run away, and directs an order to the rest of his kittens to go to their kitting box. The little brothers go to the kitting box upstairs, as Natasha looks on by the staircase leading up the main floor. Alexei notices his mate up the stairs and says to her while in passing up the steps.

"Они помещают нас на поезде в Сибирь," Таша ! "

"They're putting us on a train to Siberia, 'Tasha!"

Natasha scratches her ears as if she wasn't listening to what Alexei had to say on his scolding situation with their kittens. After Alexei leaves up the stairway, little Anya comes out of hiding and nuzzles to her mother, crying.

"Папа меня ненавидит! Я старался изо всех сил, я сделал, я сделал, я знаю, что я сделал!"

"Papa hates me! I tried my best, I did, I did, I know I did!" Anya sniffs.

Natasha listens attentively as she licks Anya's top of her head and scruff,

"Что ты говоришь, моя дорогая, папа любит тебя. Он говорит миру о вас, потому что ты единственная наша маленькая девочка. Он просто хочет, чтобы вы сделать лучше."

"What are you saying, my darling, Papa loves you. He speaks the world of you, because you're our only little girl. He just wants you to do better." Natasha cleans up Anya's top of her head a little more as Anya cries,

"Там, там сейчас, не плачь! Это только первый день, боже мой. Это нормально делать ошибки в первый день."

"There, there now, don't cry! It's only the first day, my goodness. It's okay to make mistakes on your first day." Natasha assures Anya.

"Вы знаете, что я делаю, когда я делаю ошибки, Аня? Я раздавить их с моей лапой. Я думаю, что из моих ошибок, как ошибки, которые ползают по земле. Когда я вижу один, я наброситься на них и раздавить их в землю, чтобы заставить их уйти."

"You know what I do when I make mistakes, Anya? I crush them with my paw. I think of my mistakes as the bugs that crawl upon the ground. When I see one, I pounce on them and crush them into the ground, to make them go away." An ant was crawling on the floor near the cats, "Смотри , Аня? Там он, в настоящее время идут наброситься на него. Измельчите его под лапами. И ваши ошибки уйдет."

"See, Anya? There it is, now go pounce on it. Crush it under your paws. And your mistakes would go away."

Anya follows the little ant with her nose, and pounces on the ant, but it keeps ducking away from her paws and running away in all directions. From the staircase where it was seen to the bathroom on the main floor, the ant ducked and ran away from Anya's wrath. But Anya never gave up, she kept pouncing, and pouncing, and pawing on the little ant, until it was eventually flattened under her paw. She pauses for a little bit then slowly opens up her paws in front of her and notices a squishy done ant, and a feeling of satisfaction fills her with pride as she calls to her Mama, to assess the damage she had done.

"Теперь вы видите, мой маленький, вы сильны в конце концов."

"Now you see my little one, you are strong after all." Natasha celebrates her second born's catch, as Anya eats the ant and licks her chops clean.

"Хм, на вкус как курица."

"Hmm, tastes like chicken." Anya gives her mom a little wink of an eye while tasting ant for the first time.

Natasha chuckles and paws Anya gently gently on her head as they moved side by side together up the stairs, as the electric can opener blared as the signal for dinner.

CHAPTER FIVE: Basic Training: The Preparation:

All of the cadets line up nervously in a row in front of the visiting veterinarian's office. At the age of six weeks old, kittens must have their first vaccinations before going further with their basic training. And no cat trio can make vaccinations any less freakier than Nurses Oksana and Mindy, and of course, Dr. Lox. The dynamic nursing duo Oksana and Mindy will be especially busy today, assisting the human veterinarian and Dr. Lox in making sure that no kittens run away from the presence of the needles. They are also good at keeping the morale amongst the new cadets that would help them prepare for their journey into Templar felinehood.

The first few kittens were already in the office getting their first shots. Anya was one of the first three called. She cried and mewed the first time the needles went through her scruff, but Nurse Oksana was there all the way reassuring her that it would only last a short time.

"There, there! That wasn't so bad wasn't it?" Nurse Oksana places a paw on little Anya as the human veterinarian withdraws the last syringe of vaccine from her scruff. Then the veterinarian gave her a little pat on the head and gave her a little toy mouse to play with for comfort, and sent her on her way.

As Anya and the other two kittens emerged from the open door, she was already ambushed with questions by her brothers.

"Неужели это действительно больно?"

"Did it really hurt?" asked Shoe.

"Есть ли у вас головокружение?"

"Does it make you all dizzy?" asked Vitaliy.

"Чувствуете ли вы сильнее?"

"Do you feel any stronger?" asked her brother Dmitri.

Anya paused for a second. She put down her toy mouse and tried to scratch her ear, but couldn't quite reach it.

"Это было нормально. Первый выстрел был худшим, но он становится лучше после. И люди раздавать игрушки. Удачи!"

"Umm, It was okay. The first shot was the worst, but it gets better after. And the humans are giving out toys. Good luck!" Anya replied and nipped her toy in her mouth and went out to play with the other kittens. Her brothers stood there watching her saunter and skip away.

"Какая счастливая сестра!"

"Sheesh, what a lucky sister!" Dmitri muttered as he watches his sister saunter away into the next room.

The office door suddenly swings open. A tall, middle aged Asian woman by the name Dr. Alice Chung, who is the resident veterinarian for Templar Hall, and the Ealdwic Humane Society, steps out the door with her clipboard in her hands. She flips over the pages a few times and gets ready to call the first group of names who will be receiving their first shots. With two human guards to assist with the collection of the kitties if need be.

"Shadow..."

"Daisy..."

Dmitri waits calmly next to his two other brothers who were sitting nervously and shaking like leaves. He paws at the head of Vitaliy, *"Don't tell me you're a scaredy-cat in front of those humans?"* Then Dmitri scoffs at him and Shoe and boasts proudly, *"I ain't afraid of humans with their pointy things. Besides, Papa said if you don't get your shots, you'll get sick and turn into little, ugly Filth! And if Anya could get a toy for good behavior..."*

"...Dmitri..."

"AHHHHH!! HIDE ME! HIDE ME!" Dmitri screamed as he tried to run, only to get scooped up by a human guard and was taken into the office with the two other kittens.

CHAPTER SIX: PT Never Looked So Awesome

Trixie bellows, "ATTENTION!" as she stands guard at the main chamber exit of the Royal Felis Catus Battalion. The cadets fall in and sit attentively as Captain Alexei, commences his duties to whip these little kitties into shape. Alexei paces in front of the entire cadet squadron, about to give his next lesson.

"Хороший Тамплиеров кот, должен держать себя в верхнем физическом состоянии . "

"A good Templar cat, must keep himself in top physical condition."

"Тело кошачьих должен быть всегда готов к бою в любой данный момент . "

"The feline body must always be ready for battle at any given moment."

" Вот почему упражнения очень важны . И что мы должны быть дисциплинированными .

Сопротивление любому искушению съесть больше, чем нужно для нашей энергии " .

"This is why exercise is very important. And that we must be disciplined. Resist every temptation to eat more than what is needed for our energy."

"Сделайте это, и все вы будете очень сильные, выдающиеся солдаты Тамплиеров. "

"Do this, and you will all be very strong, outstanding soldiers of the Templars."

"Сделай это неправильно, и вы все будете в конечном итоге жир, как он. "

"Do it wrong, and you'll all end up fat like him." Alexei ends his beginning speech as he points the reference down Bunky's way.

"HEY! Why are you pointing at me for?" Bunky yells as he wakes up from his nap with a half eaten snack and a pile of C4's next to him..

"Вы готовы войти в форму, чтобы вы могли все быть воинами против зла?" Alexei asks the cadets as he pounces like a kitten.

"Are you ready to get in shape so you can all be warriors against evil?"

"YEAH!" The kittens cry in unison, as Alexei's directs them out of the chambers with Natasha leading the way into a very vast room with many smaller rooms, called the Ladies' Room in human terms. And in each of the smaller rooms came equipped with a treadmill for cats. Who knew? Which in human translation, the treadmill is another word for a roll of bathroom tissue on a very practical holder. And each kitten had their very own step stool to get on just enough height to reach with the front paws. All of the kittens took turns enjoying themselves while pawing at the apparatus, right-left, right-left, faster, faster, until either they got really tired or the apparatus ran out of tread. Or ran out of bathroom tissue exposing the cardboard. They continued to work until all the treadmills were depleted all over the floor, so that they would have to relocate. This time to another similar room with the same amenities called, The Men's Room.

Immediately the same workout was done again, every kitten took turns pawing away at the treadmills. The bathroom tissue shredding and unravelling faster to the floor than before. Faster and harder the kittens worked out until again, all the treadmills were depleted and couldn't go on anymore. Alexei and Natasha had praised each of the little ones for a job well done on their PT lesson. The cadets celebrated with each other by pouncing, batting and playing games involving the fallen, shredded toilet paper that laced all over the floor.

Suddenly, there was a shout and a knock on the doorway leading to the Men's Room, "Housekeeping!" Janis Harrington, the head butler of Templar Hall stuck her head inside with her carriage of maintenance supplies in tow. Her eyes blinked, but they didn't deceive her when she saw the carnage and destruction of all the toilet paper from every stall in the entire room. Her eyes blinked again and widened, and her jaw dropped almost to the floor it seemed like, gasping when she saw all the cats and kittens getting their jollies all over the toilet paper.

"What in the bloody hell? You kitties aren't supposed to be here! Out! OUT! SHOO-SHOOT! ALL OF YOU!"

Alexei and Natasha with the kitties scattering bolted from their stalls for the exit faster than the train to Cairo. An angry Janis storms into the end of the men's room to chase out the remaining furballs that were hiding, "Shoo! Scat! Shoo!" she yelled as she was opening the stall doors and chasing every cat out of the washroom. Shoe was the last kitten to leave but pauses..

"You called?" asked Shoe, only that he had thought that she was calling him by name.

Janis looked at the little one, and pointed to the exit, "Oh wise-kitty eh? Shoo means out of here! Go on! Out-out-out! Double time!" she yelled as she clapped her hands at low level as Shoe and rest of the kittens ran out of the men's washroom. Janis turns around and looks around at the mayhem that was wrought in her presence, she buries her face deep in the palms of her hands trying to stifle her scream and shakes her head as she gets out her flamethrower to make her clean sweep.

CHAPTER SEVEN: The Secret Societies Study:

"ATTENTION! OFFICER ON THE FLOOR!" Sargeant Trixie commanded as the kittens fall in and were all at ease on the red carpet near the throne of Prince Bigglesworth. All the kittens cheered and meowed as Natasha, the Russian Blue historian and archaeologist entered the chambers. Natasha parked herself in front of the cadets and scratched her ears and licked her underside before giving her lecture on the societies of the Secret World.

"Here, in the Secret World, when we are in the presence of other animals, we are all friends and help each other in our time of need." Natasha began. "Yes, we get chased up a tree by dogs every day, and we chase the rats and mice everyday, and it's all in our nature, we can't help it. But in other really secret places, we can turn from great friends to bitter enemies in a flash."

"How, Mama?" asked Dmitri in common speak as he listens with his class.

Natasha looked at him with a annoyed look, "Now Dmitri, you may be my son at home, but here in Templar Hall, you may call me Dr. Natasha. Do I make myself clear cadet?"

"Yes, Ma- err I mean, Dr. Natasha." Dmitri answered with his head low, but still listening attentively as the kittens stifle some chuckles..

"Very good." Natasha compliments and continues with her lecture.

"Now, cadets. There are three known secret societies in the Secret World, but little known to some, there are actually four if you are counting the humans." Natasha glances to her right side and realizes that there is something in her teaching, and paws at one of her pips on her collar, "Hmmm, Lieutenant Phil, would you please come set up your computer and bring up the secret societies file?" Seconds later, black and white Persian cat, with a real fluffy tail skipped towards a waiting laptop and tapped a few keys. Then he ran away from the laptop and through a small corridor on the side of the chambers, up the stairs and through yet another small walkway on his right. He walked and balanced carefully through one of the beams above the chamber where there was a little hook and chain attached to the projector film. Phil manages to get his paws around the hook and drops carefully down to the floor as he unrolls the projector film screen and returns to his computer station.

"Oui, it is ready!!" The French Persian cat responded as he taps a key with his paw to reveal the title screen called, "History of the Secret Animal Societies" was displayed in cat scratches and paw prints. The cadets watch the vast introduction, as Natasha explains the history of how each society came to be according to the felines.

"In ancient times, in a temple in Fusang, the Queen Bee of the Animal Kingdom, proclaimed there would be a race in the coming days to crown three animals as great leaders of the Illuminati, the Templars and the Dragon of the Secret World.

The dog, the cat, and rat were the best of friends and neighbors, having always helped each other in their time of need. The cat said to his friends, "We really should get a head start in this race, but I have a hard time getting up, because you know me, I like to sleep in."

"Not to worry, my dear friend," replied the rat, "I'll wake you up just before the race starts, I promise."

The dog said to the cat, "Hey that is unfair. We should all be there at the race together. After the rat wakes you up, how about you wake me up?"

"It's a done deal," said the cat, "You are my friend and I would never let you down."

The day had come for the race to start. The rat had woken up first, but he was so excited and psyched up for the race, he totally forgot his promise to wake up the cat. Then when the cat woke up, and realized the race had already started, he was so angry at the rat that he forgot about his promise to wake up the dog. Then when the dog woke and realized that the cat left without him, he was so angry at the cat, he took off like a bolt of lightning to the race by himself.

There were twelve contestants vying for only three spots on the Queen Bee's court: The wendigo, the barghest, the padurii, the ak'ab, the faun, the zmeu, the scorpion, the wisp, the

giant locust, and the dog, the cat and the rat all were racing like mad to the finish line. Something had happened on the way to the finish line, when the zmeu went berserk and stomped on the giant locust and ripped the venomous tail out of the scorpion with its teeth. When the wendigo, the ak'ab and the barghest had witnessed this, they tried to avenge over the fallen scorpion and locust by attacking the humongous zmeu together. Their attempt had failed, resulting in the most painful of demises, but weakened the zmeu considerably. When the faun noticed the largest entity of the race being downed for the count, the faun, finished him off with a powerful headbutt with his thick horns. Then the faun was met with a vicious double back leg kick to the head by the padurii and knocked him out to the next centennial.

So all that were remaining in the race were, the padurii and its wisp, the rat, the cat and the dog. The rat was horrified of the unfortunate things that had went down in the race, so he went to confront the padurii.

"You cheater!" screamed the rat to the padurii, "Cheaters never prosper, and I will make sure you will not win!"

"You call ME cheater?" asked the padurii, "At least I woke up my friends the faun, the wendigo, the ak'ab, the locust, the scorpion, the barghest, the wisp, and of course the zmeu who all died valiantly and honestly for the sake of this prestigious race! What friends did YOU wake up before this race? Nobody, because you are a selfish rat and you only use your friends for your own gain!"

The rat considers the padurii's words carefully and yes, he realized that he was a bit of a jerk. Yes, he wanted to win this race for himself. Yes, without waking up his friends, it was an advantage for him to increase his chances of winning. Yes, it was a slimeball way, but it to him it was necessary. And yes, that if given another chance, he would do the same thing all over again, by any means necessary.

"Then I'll use you and the wisp as my next stepping stone to glory", the rat defended. The wisp flits behind the padurii and casts a ray of shielding making the padurii impervious to wounding. The rat scurried under the padurii to try to make him trip itself, but he was very smart and aware of his surroundings. The cat was not far behind in the forest as he turns up the hill and sees the rat, the padurii and the wisp going head to head. The rat climbed up the padurii and rode on its back to bite him, but the shielding of the wisp was protecting the padurii from harm. If the rat went after the padurii, the wisp would protect it. If the rat went after the wisp, he would be instantly killed by one of those back leg kicks if he turns his back on it.

The cat saw the fighting going on and pondering whether it is just best to let the rat get killed or help him escape. "I can't leave my friend like this," sighed the cat, and he races down the hill and found a nearby tree to climb. He climbed and climbed the tree, high enough to get above the wisp and waited on a tree branch. The rat sees the cat sitting on a tree branch, and positions himself so the wisp is directly behind the padurii and under the tree where the cat was. The cat saw his chance and jumped off the tree branch and got his paws on the wisp as he

landed and pinned him to the ground, breaking the ray of shielding. The dog was not too far behind the cat, and he saw the commotion as he turned up the same hill. The dog charged into battle like a hungry wolf, biting the leg of the padurii and eventually finishing it off as he went for the throat.

Now, there are only three remaining in the race, the rat touched the finish line first, and the Queen Bee congratulated him.

“Because you were cunning and would do anything to win, I bestow thee the leadership of the Illuminati.”

The cat followed close behind the rat, and the Queen Bee said to him as he crossed the finish line.

“Because you are cute and adorable, you helped your friends fight against evil even in the face of betrayal. I bestow thee leadership of the Templars.”

The dog finally crossed over and the Queen Bee had said unto him.

“Because you sowed chaos upon that padurii in the midst of all that chaos, I bestow thee the leadership of the Dragon.”

So the dog, the cat, and the rat looked at each other furiously and exchanged words. Then those exchanged words turned into a flurry of paws, claws, and teeth. The dog and the cat and the rat waged war on each other for hundreds of years from then on. Why? Because one didn't look out for the other until the end. However, in the Secret World, because of so much strife and bloodshed, The Queen Bee forced them to call a truce in the eyes of civilian animals. The three leaders pledged their causes to work together and to help those that are weaker than them in exchange for Fusang to become their place to settle their differences and wage their own Secret War. “

The mews of ‘whoas’ echoed through the chambers as the short film finishes.

“That was so cool!” cheered Ginger the Bengal kitty who was sitting next to Shoe.

“I wanna see Fusang, so I can smash some rats!” says Dmitri trying to say it in a gruff meow.

“Ha-ha. Not until you are 6 months old, little one.” corrects Natasha for the kittens are still too young to endure the Secret War yet.

Anya ponders about the history of the Templars and wonders about the relevance between animal behaviors and the recent situation that she has heard stories of in the Secret World.

“But how can we save other animals when we're killing each other?” she asks.

"Dummy, did you listen to what Ma- err... I mean Dr. Natasha said? They were forced to call a truce to help the animals in trouble." Vitaliy sneered into Anya's ears.

"Yeah, we can chase the rat, but we can't kill them. The dogs can chase us, but they can't hurt us, unless it's in one place and one place only. Fusang!" Dmitri recalls.

"It's the law of the Queen Bee." says Li-Li, the Chinese Li Hua kitten.

"Very good cadets. You listen and learn very well. Keep up the good work, and very soon, you will all be joining us on our field trip to Moscow to an archaeological dig site." Natasha says as she praises the cadets for a good lesson learned.

Lieutenant Phil the Persian anima cat motions Natasha with his paw and Natasha catches it cueing her to end her lesson, "I do believe that is all the time we have for today. It is almost time for noms and naptime. You are all dismissed."

As the kittens leave to go to the mess hall for their noms, Natasha calls out to remind the kittens.

"Don't forget to meet at the chambers with Commander Ziggy and Lieutenant Bunky. You're all going to the Council of Venice tomorrow for your animal rescue training."

CHAPTER EIGHT: The Great Animal Rescue:

The Council of Venice, Agartha

At the Sunken Library, a few tree branches down from Agartha is home to the Council of Venice. Due to Prince Albert's princely influence and diplomatic skills, he had obtained special permission on the Templar's behalf to send felines here to train and be evaluated in different scenarios before assigning them to the field. Now comes the most gruelling and most intense test of all feline basic training. The kittens are tested in an animal rescue scenario sponsored by the Council of Venice. Alexei and Natasha, and some of the other cat parents were on hand to watch their kittens' progress from day one to the end. Alexei nervously paces back and forth, motivating his little ones of their great challenge as the kittens sit before him. .

"Вы все сильны, мои маленькие , но в то же время , вы должны использовать ваши головы. В ваших лапах, будет жизнь другого животного. Вы должны защищать их всеми силами твоими. Там нет места для ошибки здесь. Жизнь этих животных в этом случае зависит от всех вас. Теперь иди и будь сильными, как медведи! Мама и папа есть вера в каждой и каждого из вас, потому что мы оба любим тебя."

"You are all strong, my little ones, but at the same time, you must use your heads. In your paws, will be another animal's life. You must protect them with all of your might. There is no room for mistake here. The lives of these animals in this scenario depend on all of you. Go now and be strong like bears! Mama and Papa have faith in each and every one of you, because we both love you."

"Мы любим тебя, папа! Мама!"

"We love you, Papa! Mama!" Dmitri nuzzled into the chest of Alexei and Natasha. Then Anya, Vitaliy and Shoe joined in. Then they returned to join their comrade Li-Li, the Chinese Li Hua, with Lieutenant Bunky and Commander Ziggy waiting for them at the console near the open holodeck, who will be evaluating them on this test. As the previous group of five kitten cadets leave the holodeck from the other side, they met up with Dmitri's team.

"Well, how was it?" asked Dmitri to Ginger the Bengal cadet who was leaving the holodeck with her group.

"That was so tough! We only lost two survivors, but I think we did okay", Ginger replied, "Good luck to all of you", as Ginger left to report to Lieutenant Bunky who was waiting at the console. "Uhh, thanks", Dmitri said as he took one last gulp before heading inside the holodeck with his team consisting of his three siblings and the Chinese Li Hua named Li-Li. Li-Li is a very rugged little kitten for her age. Belonging to one of the oldest breeds in China. A highly respected breed and the pride and joy amongst the humans there. Descended from the mountain cats in the wilds, she is one of the very few that has had human intervention in regards to her breed's development. Though raised in a Shaolin Temple by human monks, she received her fighting skills training in the wilderness by the greatest of kung-fu masters. By possessing the martial arts prowess, she wants to prove that she is a valuable member of her team. Her brown, mackerel tabby coat and diamond shaped head, gives the humans the impression that she is built like a tank. Her extra large, bright almond shaped, yellow eyes are a symbol of her ferocity and combat readiness.

Five kittens wait under the bright lights in a blue and white holodeck at the Council of Venice. The blues and whites disappear, and is replaced with a more realistic view. On a street view, there is a garden, a few flower beds near the front porch, and a typical human dwelling called a house. About two levels, a main floor and a top floor with a fenced back yard coupled with human children's entertainment apparatus', a swing and a slide. A computer voice chimes in and explains the scenario to the kittens as they run around to explore the terrain.

"This is a seek and preserve scenario. Your role is to find and fortify survivors into groups, and keep all their nine lives alive for the next few minutes."

"The location is unknown."

"The local time is unknown."

"You chose to complete this scenario with a group."

"Cue action scenario. Level one. Countdown 10 seconds," commanded Ziggy to the console operator as he, Bunky and all the felines in attendance observe through the monitors. The countdown began from 10 to 0, And the survivors, about 12 cats and kittens, and the hostiles, who happened to be zombie dogs who used to be from different breeds, spawned at random points of the scenario. The cadets huddle up very quickly on the street side to figure the best way to eliminate the zombie dogs.

"My brothers and I will find them, lure them and take them out all at once! Anya, you escort the survivors and stay with them. Got it?" Dmitri gives out the orders.

"Got it, brother!" replied Anya, but Li-Li had a different idea of the plan.

"What about me? What can I do?," asked Li-Li who was slightly annoyed with her lack of team involvement.

"You're with Anya. Stay with her and escort the survivors." Dmitri answered.

"That is not what I do! We Chinese Li Hua are proficient in engaging our enemies with deadly martial arts skill." Li-Li retorted.

"We have plenty of strength here, Li-Li. My brothers and I are strong enough to take care of all of them at once."

"These are not ordinary dogs, Dmitri! These zombie dogs are fifty times the strength now. We need to work together as a team!"

"Since when did the Chinese Li Hua ever fight anyway?" snapped Vitaliy in defense of his oldest brother's plan when Shoe scurries behind Vitaliy and lets out an "Oooh, meeyowch!"

From the other side of the scenario, Bunky and Ziggy's ears twitch and look at each other and they take their eyes and paws off the monitor they were observing.

"Uh-oh, I got a bad feeling about this, bro!" muttered Bunky to his brother Ziggy who were evaluating the cadets' performance.

Ziggy scratches his ear, "If they don't stop this petty argument soon, the survivors will surely die. This will be quite embarrassing for them when this gets to Prince Bigglesworth."

The cadets continue to argue when the screams of the hostages turn louder. The computer voice chimes in.

"A survivor has died. Making the term "survivor" ironic!"

"SINCE THE SHANG DYNASTY, YOU FOOLISH KITTY! MY ANCESTORS WERE PROTECTORS OF THE IMPERIAL PALACE AND THE EMPEROR LONG BEFORE THE WORLD HAD COUNTRIES!" Li-Li yelled angrily at her teammates, "WE ARE WASTING PRECIOUS TIME!"

Dmitri, Vitaliy and Shoe stare slightly up at Li-Li, who is slightly bigger than all the other cadets. The cadets pull back their ears and their eyes grow wider and pull into a ready fighting stance and stared each other down.

"YOU DARE TO INSULT OUR STRENGTH, STUPID FEMALE?" Dmitri stares nose to nose with Li-Li.

Ziggy facepawed from the other side of the holodeck as he saw the impending showdown. "Oh, this is not good. Not good!" He places his front paws on the monitor and hissed at the screen, "GET YOUR ACT TOGETHER, CATS! MAINTAIN DISCIPLINE!"

The computer voice chimes in its gentle reminder: "A survivor has died, making the term "survivor" ironic!"

"Oh crap in a litterbox, bro. Another hostage is gone!" Bunky facepaws at the monitors with Ziggy. Ziggy was so mad already that he started knocking over nearby objects off the console.

The family of Russian Blue cadets surrounded the Chinese Li Hua while Li-Li maintains stance and waits patiently as Dmitri tries to use his leadership to maintain order in his team, "YOU ARE DEFYING A DIRECT ORDER, LI-LI. YOU MUST BE MADE AN EXAMPLE!"

A cat fight is brewing. The cadets all at once, pounce on Li-Li, but she flips backwards out of the way, and the four siblings collide head first in a pile. Li-Li waits patiently for them to regain their bearings, as the computer chimes in reminding them that another survivor has died, but the cadets seems to be ignoring that at this point.

Dmitri, Vitaliy and Shoe get up on their paws and lunge to attack Li-Li with a flurry of claws. Li-Li, despite her size and her thick tabby coat, she can counter lightning fast and take punishment. Li-Li blocks the three males' attacks and counter attacks with a flurry of hind leg kicks. One which was a spinning roundhouse hind leg kick to Dmitri's back of his head which sent him flying into the nearby garbage cans. Vitaliy wrestled Li-Li down to the ground, but was clawed at a pressure point, and squealed as he loosen his grip. Giving Li-Li the chance to throw Vitaliy over her side to meet with Dmitri into the garbage cans. Shoe couldn't believe his eyes that how can a female kitty be so tough to defeat even with him and his siblings at full strength. Didn't matter, Shoe was already angry at Li-Li and went after her claws first. After a few exchanges of paws, claws, and hind legs, Li-Li was way too skilled and too fast for Shoe. She sent him flying to visit his brothers at the garbage cans with a flying side kick.

Then all that was left was Anya who was watching the whole thing, when Li-Li came cat's eye to cat's eye with her. Li-Li's ears start to point as she relaxes, and licks her paws and her cuts to her body. Then she sits up and studies Anya.

"I have no desire to fight you. But I will if you throw the first paw." Li-Li said to Anya then the computer voice mentions yet another survivor has died. "We need each other, a lot of survivors are dying. Soon there will be none left to save, if we don't stop fighting and hurry."

Anya nodded and she and Li-Li set off the save whatever cat that hasn't been eaten alive by the zombie dogs. They race off onto the street, a car was driving in the opposite direction and didn't acknowledge the presence of the two cadets.

"Quick, get away from the round, spinning, things!" Li-Li told Anya as they ducked in between the wheels of the passing car, huddling together as the car drove away. Li-Li and Anya raced across the street and into the garden in the backyard. Where a cat was stuck up on a tree with a zombie dog below snarling and barking to get to the survivor. Li-Li and Anya pounced on the zombie dog and eliminated it together, freeing their first survivor. And they do so again, and freed two more survivors before the timer ran out and the whole environment, including the survivors and the hostiles, turned from a beautiful street scenery to a bright blue and white holodeck with wires and consoles.

As all five cadets left the holodeck, Li-Li and Anya were the last ones to step off. They pause for a moment before reporting back to Commander Ziggy and Lieutenant Bunky. Anya

was pleased that she had gained a friend during her animal rescue scenario, despite the dismal failure in the teamwork department, but in the end she felt uneasy and sad.

"What's up, my friend?" asked a very curious Li-Li.

"I know my brothers are going to put the blame on me for what they did." Anya said sadly with a deep sigh. "Because I'm the only female, and that I'm too stupid and weak to stand up for myself."

Li-Li thinks about her situation for a little bit, however she couldn't really empathize with Anya, because she's the only kitten in her family.

"Your brothers think they are the Queen Bee's gift to Templar Hall. They are jerks, Anya. No offense. But they needed to be taught a lesson about respect."

The two new fast friends sauntered off the holodeck steps when Alexei and Natasha were checking over Anya's brothers in the main foyer of the Council of Venice. Alexei glances over to his daughter, and barges past Li-Li and scolded Anya.

"Аня? Это правда? Ваши братья сказали нам, что вы вызвали провал вашей миссии спасения животных."

"Anya? Is it true? Your brothers told us that you caused the failure of your animal rescue mission."

"Нет, папа. Это был Дмитрий, который начал борьбу! "

"No, Papa. It was Dmitri who started the fight!"

"Не ври твой папа, Аня!" Alexei hissed with a stern paw.

"Do not lie to your papa, Anya!" Alexei yelled as Li-Li interrupted.

"She didn't start it Captain! It was Dmitri and Vitaliy's pride and egos got in the way of the mission."

As Natasha translated Li-Li's words to Alexei, he pawed the Chinese Li Hua aside from the quarrel,

"Вы! Пребывание из нашего бизнеса ! Уходи!"

"You! Stay out of our business! Go away!" Alexei resumed his tirade with Anya.

"Теперь, моя дочь, вы собираетесь быть в такой серьезной проблемой, когда мы тебя домой! Я не могу поверить, что ты меня смущала и ваша мама целенаправленно не сумеет свою команду! Вы хотите быть дом кошку к людям для остальной части вашей естественной девять жизней?"

"Now, my daughter, you are going to be in such serious trouble when we get you home! I cannot believe that you have embarrassed me and your mama by purposefully failing your team! Do you want to be a house cat to the humans for the rest of your natural nine lives? Do you? Huh?"

Alexei continued scolding as Anya began to cry out loud in front of the other cats and the humans looking on. Anya's cries were so loud that it caught the attention of Commander Ziggy

and Lieutenant Bunky as they go and listen to the commotion. Ziggy was most certain who was to blame for the failing of their mission. Certainly wasn't Anya. Besides the recording of the mission from the main console proved otherwise, Ziggy and Bunky, both outranking Alexei, they stop his tirade before going further.

"Alexei, stand down!" Ziggy commanded as Natasha furiously pawed at her mate to stop, but Alexei continued to scold his crying Anya.

"CAPTAIN, STAND DOWN AND THAT'S AN ORDER!" Ziggy meowed furiously as Natasha too was becoming more furious as she translated. Alexei turned away from his little kitten and stood down to Commander Ziggy.

"SHE IS HER FATHER! YOU CANNOT ORDER HIM HOW TO PARENT OUR KITTEN!" Natasha shot back at Commander Ziggy, and Anya ran away into a corner crying with Li-Li running behind to console her new friend.

Commander Ziggy hissed as if he was ready to claw his officers for insubordination, "I MAY NOT BE HER PARENT, BUT I AM YOUR COMMANDING OFFICER, AND I CAN HAVE YOU IMPOUNDED RIGHT HERE, RIGHT NOW!" Hearing an earful, as more feline officers gather around the argument between Alexei and Ziggy, Alexei and Natasha back down from the meowful confrontation. Ziggy continued to explain what truly happened.

"Your kitten spoke the truth, Captain. It wasn't her that caused the failure of the mission. If you want an accurate explanation, we can replay what we saw. Then you can see for yourselves who is truly responsible for this disaster!" Ziggy explained and went over to the console, but turned to Alexei, "Furthermore, Natasha, you may tell Alexei that he may scold your little ones at home, but he will not do that in the presence of the Council of Venice nor the Templars. If I ever catch him abusing the cadets again, I'll have him scratched up and submitted before Prince Bigglesworth. For the Queen's sake, maintain self control!"

Natasha translated the commander's words to her mate, and she and Alexei joined Ziggy as he replayed the recording what transpired inside the animal rescue operation. Alexei and Natasha were in completely shock, but Alexei was starting to feeling quite embarrassed of his lack of judgment against Anya and jumped off the console podium and sauntered away without acknowledging any cat in his passing.

Alexei was silently walking alone on a tree branch in Agarthia with Natasha and the four kittens following behind. They come to the end of the road and Alexei stood alone gazing into the bottomless depths of clouds and mist below. He sighed and cast his eyes down for a moment pondering whether the stresses of being a new parent had made him lose his temper with Anya. Or embarrassed that his expectations on his little ones were too much for them to bear, being so young. Or perhaps that Alexei couldn't accept their failures as experience. He realized was the same way too when he was a cadet. Brash, young Russian Blue said some

wrong things, did things that were wrong, and he learned from his mistakes the hard way, just like his kittens are learning right now, the hard way. As a cat parent, he realizes that he too was learning things the hard way. Alexei turned his head and glanced over to Natasha.

"Наташа? Возьмите Аню домой. Я должен научить наших сыновей урок."

"Natasha? Take Anya home. I must teach our sons a lesson," Alexei asked his mate.

Natasha went over and nuzzled on Alexei's chest and gave him a nose kiss, and went off with Anya to the portal on the side. Dmitri, Vitaliy and Shoe quivered in their paws over to sit by their father's side. They all looked down the vast drop below them, and gulped in unison and looked up at the face of their father.

"Мои мальчики, ты ослушался меня."

"My boys, you have disobeyed me." Alexei growled in a firm, but calm manner.

"Папа ... мы сожалеем. Мы были просто ..."

"Papa... we're sorry." Dmitri mewed, *"We were just..."*

"Вы были полностью ослушался меня. Я видел, что произошло в вашей симуляции миссии! Ваше невежество с Ли-Ли было непростительно. И что еще хуже? Вы кладете все те выживших в опасности, и вы обвинили Аню за это!"

"You had totally disobeyed me." Alexei interrupted. *"I saw what happened at your mission simulation! Your ignorance with Li-Li was inexcusable. And what is worse? You put all those survivors at risk and you blamed Anya for it!"*

"Я просто пытался быть хорошим лидером. Ли-Ли не будет слушать меня".

Dmitri sniffles the air as he tried to explain to his father. *"I was only trying to be a good leader. Li-Li wouldn't listen to me."*

"Быть хорошим лидером, не обязательно означает, что ваши товарищи по команде начальствование вокруг. Будучи хорошим лидером означает понимание того, что ваша команда может сделать, чтобы получить работу. Ли-Ли предложил ей когти, и ты отказал ей в помощи, потому что вы думали, вы были достаточно сильны, с братьями вашими в одиночку. Нет, она не работает таким образом. И вы, к сожалению, стало известно, что трудный путь, когда Ли-Ли показал вам все свое мастерство в бою. Как вы отказываетесь помощь, как это?"

"Being a good leader, doesn't necessarily mean bossing your teammates around. Being a good leader means understanding what your team can do to get the job done. Li-Li offered her claws, and you refused her help, because you thought you were strong enough with your brothers alone. No, it doesn't work that way. And you unfortunately had learned that the hard way, when Li-Li showed you all her skill in battle. How do you refuse help like that?" Alexei explained as best he could, but couldn't help to release a chuckle.

"вы получили ваши окурки ногами от девушки-кошки."

"Hehe, you got your butts kicked from a girl cat." Alexei chuckled.

"PAPA!" the male kittens screamed, as Alexei laughed with his teeth.

"Но это правда, и вы должны извлечь уроки из этого. И ты, сын мой, что вам нужно, чтобы ваш язык вычищены от всех этих непослушных вещей, которые вы сказали, чтобы Ли-Ли."

“But it is the truth, and you must learn from that.” Alexei turns his attention to Vitaliy, “And you my son, you need to have your tongue cleaned out from all those naughty things you said to Li-Li.”

Alexei tries to dig his tongue into Vitaliy’s chops and licks his tongue hoping that it would stop him from badmouthing anycat. Vitaliy whining and meowing, “Папа! Папа , язык ваш вкус противный ... Хорошо, хорошо это чистый, я не буду говорить плохо о каком-либо кошка снова , обещаю! прости!”

“Papa! Papa, your tongue tastes yucky... ok, ok it's clean, I won't speak badly about any cat again, promise! I'm sorry!”

Alexei nods and looks over at Shoe who is crouched low to the ground feeling bad for what happened, placed his paw on his head. “А ты! Ну, вы просто выполняли приказ, но вы, ребята, должны работать как одна команда. Девочка кошки или нет. Независимо от того, откуда они. Борьба, кусая и царапая друг на друга не собирается, чтобы получить Вас где-нибудь здесь. Особенно, когда есть животные, которые должны быть спасены от зла , которые скрываются за Agartha. Они нуждаются в нас, поэтому мы должны быть готовы . *“And you! Well, you were just following orders, but you boys need to work as a team. Girl cats or not. No matter where they are from. Fighting, biting and clawing at each other is not going to get you anywhere here. Especially when there are animals that need to be saved from the evils that lurk beyond Agartha. They need us, so we must be ready.”*

Alexei moved from his perch and headed for the nearby portal the same way Natasha and Anya went to go back to St. Petersburg.

" Ну-ка , пойдём домой и думать о том, что мы узнали сегодня. У вас есть поездка в Москву идет вверх. Мы все должны быть возбуждены, чтобы присоединиться к вашей матери в своей лекции. Это будет ее величайшее открытие еще.”

“Come now, let us go home and think about what we learned today. You have a field trip to Moscow coming up. We must all be excited to join your mother in her lecture. This will be her greatest discovery yet.” Alexei said as he motivates his sons to catch the portal home for noms.

CHAPTER NINE: The Field Trip:

George, Natasha, Dmitri, Vitaliy and Anya, find themselves in the backseat of a Black SUV driving through the countryside of Moscow. As the Kittens look out the window and watch the farmland fade into forest, they wonder what they are doing out out this far from the city. Vitaliy turning to Natasha, he asks, “Mam...I mean Dr. Natasha, what did you discover out here in the forest?”

George Answered instead, “Dr. Natasha, has discovered the remains of a old research facility, that use be used by a group of humans called the red hand.”

Natasha continued, "It was thought that the locations of all red hand facilities had been disclosed after the fall of the soviet union, but this one does not appear any records before or after the formation of the red hand."

Dmitri stretched out on the seat before sighing, "So humans build things and forget about them all of the time. What is so special?" Vitaliy spoke up, "The red hand use to make vampires dummy, don't you remember Papa's stories? I remember! And don't call me dummy, dummy!" "Both of you stop it, now!" Natasha hissed.

"This facility seems to have been a secret lab dedicated to biological warfare. We are going here to secure any dangerous materials that may have been left behind and recover any documents that may still be there." Dmitri rolling over on his back seemed unimpressed, "That still sounds boring, can't we go somewhere more exciting? Like Solomon Island or the Carpathian Fangs?" "But this is exciting Dmitri!" George responded, "No one has been in this facility for at least 60 years, When Dr. Natasha found it, it was sealed shut. She was only able to get in by squeezing through a vent, and even then she had seek help from Temple hall to open the door."

Anya watching the forest past by them with a worried expression on her face turned to Natasha and asked "Why wasn't this one in any of the records?"

"Put simply we don't know," said George.

Natasha continued, "But usually when humans hide something like this, it means they are doing something they are not suppose to be doing."

"How big is this place?" Anya asked.

"Very" replied Natasha.

George elaborated on the subject, "Based on what Dr. Natasha told me, I estimate the facility is at least a 2km wide and has at least 3 levels deep."

"They must have been doing something really important, if they had it so big. But if it was so important to them why did they forget it about" Anya asked.

"That my dear is one of the things we are here to find out."

The SUV slowed to a stop as they pulled next to what looked like a cave in the woods. I man in black trench coat climb out from the driver side and opened the door for them.

"You are officially here to help with rats, though I don't expect they will ask you for reason. still it is best to have a cover story," the man said as the cats hopped out of the car.

"Of course, of course, replied George, always best to be prepared." Natasha thanked the agent that had brought them to the site before her leading the kittens to the air vent, where she had entered the facility.

As they past a university research crew near the entrance of the facility, Anya couldn't help but overhear the conversation between two of the researchers.

"The power lines been replaced, I have no idea what keeps chewing through them though."

"Probably just" "must be awfully big rats than, those cable are almost 5cm thick and it bit it clear through it."

"Maybe it's a badger then, maybe we dug into its den and now pissed off."

"That's what I thought too, but then I realized that those cables were live, so there should have been a body next to the severed cable, but there is nothing."

"Might be activist of some kind, or maybe just bored teenagers."

"Whatever it is we should start locking the entrance at night, while the cats are doing their thing."

Anya had seen both her mother and father scold her brother for chewing on electric cords, since it was "a good way to waste a life" as her parents had said and she wondered what kind of animal could bite through an electric cord and live.

They finally came to the vent next to the facilities entrance. As they crawled one by one through the vent, they emerged in a concrete corridor dimly lit by construction lights. George turning to the kittens began to give them their orders, "Natasha and I will explore the lower levels of the facilities, I would like each of you to choose a room here on the top level and begin searching for folders, papers and anything that may be able to tell us what happened here." Dmitri and Vitaliy stared at George with growing disappointment, "That's it!?" Dmitri said, "No Vampires, no werewolves, not even lousy rats?"

Natasha answered "None of you are ready for anything close to a combat experience yet, and this is an incredibly important task, if something dangerous has been left behind here we need to know about, that is why George and I will be exploring the lower levels before bringing you down to search." Vitaliy managed to stammer out a "But.." before Natasha could shoot him a deadly look tell him to do as he was told.

"We will back up as soon as we determine that the lower levels are secure, until then please do your best to find anything that may tell us what the red hand was doing here." George and Natasha then began to walk down the corridor to another vent near an abandoned elevator shaft.

Dmitri, Vitaliy, and Anya chose to begin their search in what might have been a nursing station when the facility was occupied but was now no more than moldy beds and rusted frames. "This is so stupid" Dmitri said as he darted under one of the rusty bed frames, "Looking for paper is not what Templars do."

Anya spoke up from a counter top near the back of the room, "Isn't this what Mama does most of the time though?"

Vitaliy answered her, "Da, but this isn't like the city of the Sun God, or Blue Mountain or Transylvania, this is just some old bunker where people used to hide, nothing important or exciting ever happened here."

"We don't know that" Anya shot back, "That's why George, and Mama want us to help them search." Dmitri emerged from under the bed "What do you think's in the lower levels, Vitaliy?"

"Probably the same stuff up here, more junk that the humans left behind and maybe some bugs."

"There are also rats" Anya blurted out remembering the conversation she overheard.

"Rats?" Vitaliy asked curiously, "...Yes" Anya answered, "The man at the front of the facility was complaining about how they were chewing through the wires."

Dmitri and Vitaliy looked at each other with a sly smile, "Illuminati conspiracy? A Templar raid?" Maybe the dragon played everyone against one another. We should go find these rats," Vitaliy said as he raced to the door and began racing toward the air vent.

"Wait for me Dmitri " howled as he raced out the door.

"But what about our search" Anya cried.

"You can stay here finish it." Vitaliy snapped back.

"But we are suppose to stay together" Anya wailed, "And what if the lower levels aren't secure, Mama said we are not ready for combat yet" Anya said as she chased her brother down the hall. "You aren't, but we are!" said Dmitri as he disappeared in the vent. Anya peared into the dark vent before calling to her brothers, "We are supposed to stay on the first floor.... Dmitri, Vitaliy, come back!"

"We are just going to see if there are any rats, this place is so big, it will take Mama and George hours to come check on us, plenty of time for an adventure." Dmitri said as he descended further into the vents. Anya not wanting be left alone in the strange facility reluctantly followed her brother into the air vent.

The kittens made there way down into the lowest level of the facility and just as Anya had said, they found the chewed wires that use to power the lights. "Wow!" Vitaliy exclaimed as he examined the chewed cord, "That must have been some rat, it bit clean through the cable and in one bite too, look Dmitri there are tear marks." As Dmitri and Vitaliy looked at the cable, Anya examined the dark corridor carefully, and found nothing, no footprints, blood, fur or event the scent of another animal, it was almost as if they cable had bitten it self.

"We should go back up" said Anya nervously.

"And why is that?" asked Dmitri as he looked around for any sign of the big rat. "Because the man who fixed these lights said he couldn't find a body of the animal that chewed through it, that means whatever bit through the cable is still down here."

Dmitri and Vitaliy's eyes lite up at the prospect, "Now we are definitely staying," said Vitaliy.

"This will be my first great victory," he said as imagined himself dragging the huge rat back to the surface, "Only if you beat me too it" said Dmitri.

"But..." Anya started as the sound of distant laughing echoed faintly through the corridor, Dmitri and Vitaliy looked at each other before running down the corridor in the direction of the laughter.

The kittens came to what looked like an old medical lab, filled with test tubes full of old blood samples and an old computer with a what looked like a cassette player, attached to it. As the kittens poked their heads in they saw a large rat like creature on top of the lab bench sniffing the test tubes one at time before throwing them to the floor. The kittens hid under a nearby desk, and continued to watch the creature shamle across the bench looking for through the test tubes.

"What do you think it is" whispered Dmitri, "It's too big to be rat, don't you think?" said Vitaliy, "Maybe it's a monkey, look at its face, no rat has a face like that," Dmitri replied. Anya watch the creature carefully its short black fur and hairless tail made it look like a rat, but its hands and face look disturbingly human. As it approached one rack of old test tubes on the end of the bench it picked up a test tube and sniffed it before opening its mouth full yellow fangs and

allowing a tongue coated in spines to dart in and out of the dried up fluid. "This is the one," the creature said to itself as it started loading the tubes into a pouch it carried on its back, before a ringing sound came from the same pouch. The creature withdrew an old iPhone that it grimaced at before typing something into it and then putting the phone back. "Butt-man," the creature giggled to itself, "That good one, use it later."

Dmitri watched the creature jump from that lab bench and begin approaching the computer on top of the table. "So how do we want to do this" whispered Dmitri.

"We wait for it to jump down, then turn its back, that's when we pounce," Vitaliy replied. Anya listened to the creature leap up onto the desk and pop something out of the computer before shoving into its pouch.

"We shouldn't try and take it all at once, you draw its attention, then I'll sneak up behind it," Dmitri whispered back.

"No one of us both need to hit it at once, else we will never be able to take it down." Vitaliy angrily whispered back. That's when Anya saw a pair of gleaming black eyes materialize out of the dark in front of her before hearing her the creature whisper to her brothers.

"Maybe Browni should come to you," the creature whispered in their ear.

The kittens screeched in terror as they fled from under the table, Dmitri's just barely escaping Browni's teeth. "I told you two, this was bad idea." Anya screamed as she raced out of the lab and back down toward the air vents. Browni quickly rematerialized in front of her lunging with his mouth full of yellow teeth. But instead of turning around and running, Anya darted behind the creature and kept running for the vents. Browni turned his attention to Dmitri and Vitaliy, lunging forward, he seized Vitaliy by his tail lifting him up to his gleaming black eyes.

"Baby Cat is tasty, like baby with fruity aftertaste," as Browni opened his mouth and prepared to stab Vitaliy with his hideous, spiked tongue, Dmitri leaped forward and bit Browni on the side of his head, as Anya snuck up behind Browni and grabbed the pouch on his back. Sensing that the pack had gone missing, Browni flung Dmitri and Vitaliy aside.

"Give Browni back!" the creature snarled as he rushed after Anya, who was dashing for the vent only to have her tail snagged by the creature's human-like hands. Before Anya could react a white flash seemed to knock the creature away from Anya, as gray blur assumed the form of her mother with Dmitri and Vitaliy by the scruff of their necks.

"Return to the surface, NOW!" Natasha growls, as George begins hissing at the creature as it pulled itself back to its feet and charged George and Natasha. As the kittens ran through the vent, they could hear the hissing and yelling of the battle unfolding behind them. Anya, with the creature's pack still clutched tightly in her teeth, closed her eyes and tried not to look back.

After reaching the surface, Dmitri, Vitaliy, and Anya wait for George and Natasha for what seems like eternity. Hours pass as the sun moves through the cloudy sky and still there is no sign of either of the cats. As the sun begins to set, George and Natasha emerge from the vent, their fur matted with blood and mouths full of black fur pulled from the creature. Natasha looking at her sons whose heads were hung in shame, followed her back to the SUV. George sitting down next to Anya asks "Do you still have the pack?"

Anya nodding her head points to the black pouch next her. George liming over to the pack looks through it and finds a plastic rectangle that Anya can't quite identify, the sight of it though causes, George to smile.

"This makes it all worthwhile."

"What is it?" Anya asked.

"It's is a data tape, an old way of storing information on a computer, this should tell us exactly what happened here, and now I am more curious than ever before. If Browni came here then it must be important genetic research."

"What's a Browni?" Anya asked, George winced as he set the tape down.

"A long story my dear, but I will tell you all about it back at Temple Hall, come bring the pack with you we have much work to do."

Picking up the tape in his mouth George returns to the SUV, as Anya picks the pack contains the blood samples up by its string she hears her mother calling to her, "Anya come here, we need to talk." Anya had been dreading this moment ever since they reached the surface, they had all put themselves in danger, by disobeying her and Dmitri and Vitaliy have likely tried to pin the blame on her. Lowering her head she carried the pouch over to where her mother had been calling her, closing her eyes she took deep breath before raising her to face her mother but when Anya opened her eyes, there was no one there. As she turned around looking for her mother, she felt something sharp strike the back of her neck as she lost feeling in the rest of her body. Standing over her was the creature called Browni, its mouth open and spikes on its tongue vibrating to create a perfect replica of her mother voice. "Don't worry Anya" the voice said, as the creature retrieved its packs and pick up her limp body. "Browni will take good care of you." As the world went black the last thing Anaya could remember was her and the creature falling through the void.

Near the parked SUV, Dmitri and Vitaliy hung their heads low as Natasha scolds them for taking off from the nursing station without her knowing. George was waiting from the opposite side as he was asked to be a few meters away from the family discussion. He could be seen muttering to himself. "Browni? Gotta be him, but nein! NEIN! We got him in Wales!" Natasha paces back and forth as she lectures her sons.

"You could have gotten yourselves killed down there! What were you thinking?" Natasha started. "Whose idea was it for you to disobey my order and taking off running like bunch of wild cats like that?"

Dmitri and Vitaliy looked briefly at each other, but their heads were still low, until they winced at the sudden, "Speak quickly!" Vitaliy raises his head to face his mama.

"It was Anya, Mama! Anya wanted to go see if there were any rats down there! We tried to stop her, really we did. But she didn't listen!" Vitaliy replied in a bald faced lie, once again pinning the blame on their sister.

Natasha looked at Vitaliy and Dmitri closely in their bright yellow eyes, "You my boys, have lied to your mama and papa before. How would I know you are speaking the truth?"

Vitaliy had to think of something real quick. His eyes shifted from right and left thinking of a good way to answer his mother. Then thinking back of how she was physically not strong enough to break a board, or not strong enough to fight through a bunch of zombie dogs to save a hostage. That would be the perfect way to answer his mama, with another lie.

"She just wanted to see if there are any rats to fight and be strong." Vitaliy replied.

Natasha looked into the eyes of Vitaliy and Dmitri for a few seconds then breaks her gaze. She paces around and checks her distance from George. Then she returns to the little ones.

"As you know, there are three sides to every story. Anya? Anya, come here this instant!"

Natasha called. No answer from Anya.

"Anya? Anya! Where are you? She has run off again!" Natasha calls out to her only female kitten. No answer from any distance.

"George, have you seen Anya?" Natasha asked as she skips over to his side of SUV.

"Ya, ya she's right over..." George turned around to find that Anya wasn't near when they spoke a few moments. "Well, that's funny! She was here a moment ago!" George replied with slight embarrassment.

"Where did she go, Brother?" Vitaliy whispered to Dmitri before Natasha suddenly appears and paws their heads from behind.

"Help find your sister! Now! Go!" Natasha commanded.

Dmitri and Vitaliy scurry up the camp calling out for Anya. Looking at every inch under the SUV, and the surrounding camp, still no sign of their sister. Dmitri and Vitaliy thought that she may have gone back inside the compound, but after all of that, they knew right away that Anya wouldn't be that dumb to go back. She may not be strong, but not stupid. They follow down the hill as George and Natasha scurry down ahead to a camp that seems like it is being occupied by humans. How many humans is unknown to them, still they are too far. The two adult cats with the two kittens approach the camp, crouching low as they look furiously for Anya.

"Remember to meow!" George reminded them in case the human does not have anima within them.

Dmitri and Vitaliy found a pile of crates up against one of the tents. Maybe Anya got so scaredy-cat that she climbed inside the crates and hid herself in one of them. Perhaps they would find her in there. They sniffed the crates from the outside carefully for her scent, nothing. Not even a tuft of fur to be noticed. They claw on the sides of the crates and use the strength of their hind legs to help pull themselves up and into the crates. They peered inside and sniffed. It was found to be some boxes of ammunition, grenades and flash bangs. Natasha returns from a tent and catches the kitten males going into the crates.

"Paws off! Do not touch or eat anything! What's inside those boxes can hurt you." Natasha warned.

"Anya's not in this box." Dmitri said when he and his brother were told to get out from inside the box.

"Do not stop looking. She can't have run far from here so quickly!" George said collecting the little ones as he scouts for more possible hiding places.

Dmitri hopped off from one crate and into another crate, but this time he had detected a scent he couldn't quite identify. His brother Vitaliy hops in and sniffs around the plastic force fields and metallic casings.

"I think these are noms," Vitaliy says as he concluded his olfactory analysis of the items. He brings out his best claw, his first one and slices through the force field and out came the food that spilled all over the bottom of the crate. The sound of the scattering, dried food had alerted George and Natasha, and they raced to climb into the crate.

"What are you doing?" whispered Natasha obviously annoyed. "I told you not to eat anything..." Then she had noticed the scattered food all over the crate. She took a sniff and gives one little morsel a lick. "Hmm, could these be Temptations?" George the seal point Himalayan scientist hopped in and had a little taste test. He licked and munched, sniffed and licked, then munched again, and then he gave his analysis.

"Hmm, chicken! Well I guess dinner is served." George said.

"Well I'm sure little ones are hungry, let's quietly eat before some humans discover us." Natasha mentions while looking outside the box for anything that have taken attention to their presence.

The anima cats and kittens nommed on the delectable morsels that we scattered inside the box. George and Natasha climbed out after they were done and set off to look for Anya again. A short distance away but still in sight of Dmitri and Vitaliy. Moments later Dmitri and Vitaliy could hear a loud pop outside. It scared the whiskers out of the kittens.

"Who's there?" yelled a voice in a distance.

Dmitri and Vitaliy were hiding inside the crate with their furs sticking up on ends. Before they could make a run for it to their mama and George, another loud pop sounded and something shook the ground near their position.

"Come out, come out, wherever you are!" yelled the same male voice in the distance as he loads his bullet into the shotgun barrel. The man aims for the crates, "Don't make me come find out, I'm gonna count to three. One... two... two and a half..." And from the edge of the crate, the lone male human couldn't believe his eyes when he saw two little kittens meowing and emerging from the crate slowly, that he only saw their little paws, ears, and eyes. "What in the...? Holy crap!" whispered the young man and quickly slinged his weapon, and slowly went over to the box and grabbed Dmitri and Vitaliy out of the box and onto the ground. "Hey little fellas, what are you doing here?" the man asked. He gave them pets on the head and scratched their ears and gave them a bowl of his bottled water. Dmitri was sniffing at the male human and detected a sweet scent of sweet honey. And it wasn't the scent of the man's cologne, it was the scent of anima. He remembered the lesson his Papa taught him and his siblings before Kitten Day. If the human has anima, they speak, if the human doesn't, they meow. The scent of anima is the only way to tell friend or foe. And this man was definitely a friend.

"We are looking for our sister." Dmitri replied to the human, of whom, was judging by the red and white sports jacket, the human Russian male was indeed a Templar.

“Yeah, have you seen her?” Vitaliy asked after he had lapped up some cool refreshing water from the bowl..

And the Templar human grew white to the face in shock as Dmitri spoke. The man had looked into his bottle of vodka and thought to himself what the hell is in this stuff. Whether he should start making resolutions to quit drinking or perhaps it is something that he ate that made him hallucinate. Nevertheless, this is something a little more serious than the Secret World stuff that he had been exposed to. He had seen singing ravens, raving spirits, sasquatches, ghosts and he thought they were the most fascinating creatures, but not talking cats. He had always wondered why are there so many cats hanging around at Templar Hall from dawn until dusk every time he paid a visit to his superiors for a debriefing. He had heard stories from veteran Templars about a group of cats in the Hall who fight for justice of other animals, but he scoffed at them thinking it was all just the anima going into their heads. Now he knows.

“Your sister?” said the human male. How many of them are here, he thought. Then he saw Natasha and George running into the camp from the nearby shrubs, and Natasha carefully checking the kittens over.

“This is our Mama, err... Dr. Natasha. And that is Dr. George.”

“Err... pleasure to meet you Dr. Natasha. Your kittens are really adorable.” the man complimented.

“Yes, Yes, thank you. I know. We are looking for Anya, my kitten. She looks like me, only smaller.”

“And she looks like us, only she’s a female and she’s our sister.” Dmitri added.

“And not like George over there, he looks kinda funny.” Vitaliy added and pawed to the seal-point Himalayan. “Umm, no offense, Dr. George.”

“Nein, nein, nein, she doesn’t look like me at all, but she was carrying a small pack inside her mouth” George added to the description, “And none taken, little one.”

The man listened to the description of Anya, and astonishing enough, he did see something that had the striking image of their detailed description of her.

“Holy crap, she was running around over there before I went back to my tent to take a nap after my patrol,” the human said. He added as he recalled his patrol earlier.

“Bluish-grey kitty, about yay high, had something in its mouth, I couldn’t make out what it was. It was chasing some kind of... I have no idea what the hell it was chasing... something really horrible looking... like some kind of rat. It was black, and had a real ugly fleshy tail. It was weird though, because, there was something that opened up just near the facility entrance pretty close to this camp. It was like something that I had seen when I was in Romania a few months back. It looked like space. You know, the kind of outer space like the stars and the moon, and when space shuttles fly to Mars, that kind of space. And then poof...” the man gestures with his hands, “They disappeared. Both the rat and the cat... like they just... disappeared into space.”

“Where did you see this space? Where did you see them go? Please take us there.” Natasha asked.

“Mama? What is space?” Dmitri asked his mother.

“Not until your next field trip to Romania, my darling. We must find your sister.”

The Templar male lead the cats to the nearby front entrance, where he had witnessed the whole thing. Natasha and George examined the ramp leading up, carefully searching and sniffing around for clues. A tuft of fur, a drop of blood, or a pack, they want to find something, anything. But nothing turned up.

Natasha grew clearly worried for Anya's safety, being so young. Barely eight weeks old and barely possessing the training Anya needed to survive on her own. Knowing that she was physically weak and often teased by her brothers of it, and Alexei constantly scolding her for it. If she was indeed taken to another place, or another time, by this Browni rat, then the urgency to find Anya is even far greater.

"I recommend we get Malcolm and Phil over here as soon as possible," mentioned George.

"Even though he is an engineer, he has a greater idea of this space more than other cat. And we will certainly need Phil's computer technical skills."

Natasha blinks in approval, and George pawed one of his gold pips on his Templar collar. "Tell me human, where is the nearest anima well from here?" Natasha asked.

The man pointed southeast from his position, "I say about 75 meters from here. There isn't anything much to worry about as far as hostiles are concerned."

"Good, Malcolm and Phil shouldn't have any problems getting here," Natasha spoke trying to remain strong and calm for the sake of Anya's siblings near her.

Malcolm and Phil burst out from the nearby shrubs. A light pack of tools and an iPad were in their mouths as they approach the worried Natasha and George. The Scottish Fold, Malcolm was brandishing a pet sized kilt representing the colours of the Wallace clan colors. He approaches George with Phil behind him..

"Aye! Got ye tweet, laddie! Whatta we have 'ere?" Malcolm asked.

"We just ran into Browni... or I think we ran into Browni... this human thinks Browni took Anya!" George explained.

Malcolm stared into George's eyes in disbelief and calmly placed a paw on George. "Och, laddie. I think ye been dippin' inta ye own concoctions a wee bit too much. That wee scunner's been a gonner fer months now."

"Oui, we destroyed him in Wales, remember? How can zee dead rise? Err... unless he happened to be zombie rat or demon possessed." Phil mentions.

"Enough of this chatter! What George says is true! We did see Browni, he has changed again!" Natasha growled angrily.

Malcolm and Phil looked each other and glanced over to George. "Look, I believe ye, laddie, but I wouldn't go throwing that idea around so freely. It is unseemly.

"Not even a tuft of fur or a spot of blood. It's terrible, Malcolm! We must find my Anya." Natasha cried out in a near panic and lead them to the front entrance where the human saw the incident. Malcolm and Phil sniffed the area and looked on the ground for any clues. Natasha and George were right, the ground is clean from all that. They hadn't found anything worth saving as far as diagnostics and analysis can conclude.

"Can ye describe this space? What did it look like?" Malcolm asked the human male.

"Well, it was just like a black portal of swirling nothing, mostly." the man replied after he sipped his mug of coffee that he has just brewed from his campfire.

Malcolm stood beneath the man and licked his paw in deep thought for a moment, having knowing the differences between actual space and nothing space is all familiar to him.

Obviously to him that because there are no traces of metallics or gases that might have emitted after the portal closed, he concluded that this portal that Browni had made up was indeed natural.

"Aye, so this is not actual space that we are dealing with 'ere. And the human didn't see anything other than black, and no stars or any other astronomical objects floating about, so it is safe to say that Anya is not floating in some sort of time warp." Malcolm concluded. "However, this is similar to something like Min-ji's portal capability. All natural, and can take us into any place at any present time. Short or long distance. Basically, Anya can be anywhere in the world right now. Finding her would be something like... finding a needle in a haystack in human terms." Malcolm mentioned as he examined the site of the portal opening. "We'll hafta go back to Templar Hall and report this to Prince Bigglesworth and Prince Albert."

"I am NOT leaving here without finding Anya!" Natasha screamed as she held her two other little ones close to her. "We are not leaving her!"

"Lassie, if Browni is indeed still alive, then we'll need every cat on board to bring Anya home, including any little ones he may still have before preying on Anya. And if he's alive, who knows how much he has changed over the past few months since Wales. If he's alive, and it is he who has Anya, who knows what Browni will do to her, and we all know, the Luminatti family, and the Dragon dogs know what he is capable of doing. But for now, there is not much we can do 'ere." Malcolm signals with his collar for the SUV to pick up the cats and set course for London.

Natasha was so distraught hearing the news of her only little girl, she wanted to stop at nothing to find Anya. The SUV pulls up and the two Templars open the doors for the cats to hop in the back. Malcolm and Phil went in first, then George. Then George felt something caught in his throat, "Blech, excussh me," he muttered and dropped to the floor of the SUV coughing. He coughed and coughed, until he gagged up a huge, black hairball. He examined it carefully after expelling it from his system, trying to think why it is so dark. Of course, he thought, recalled his short battle with the rat when Natasha caught him chasing her kittens. The hair must've been Browni's, it has to be. It seems George had bitten off some fur in the melee encounter.

"Whoa, eww! That was a good one!" cried Vitaliy as he examined the hairball. "Smelly too!" George recovered from his episode quickly and grabbed his satchel to collect a slide to get a good sample of the black, hairy, hairball.

"Well, looks like ye may have proof of Browni after all." Malcolm meowed as he looks at the disgusting composition of the hairball.

"I should get this to the laboratory for a DNA analysis." George mentions as he sticks the slide back in his satchel.

Natasha sauntered last over to just a foot of the open door, and sadly looked back at the entrance and turned her body away from the SUV.

"Natasha, what are ye doing? Get in!" Malcolm asked as he extended his paw to her.

“Not without my daughter!” Natasha yelled in Russian and darted back towards the facility leaving Dmitri and Vitaliy with the others. “Anya! Anya! Mama’s coming!” she yelled and the two Templars jumped out of the SUV and ran after the distraught Natasha. She was caught by the female human, and Natasha lashed out at her with a few scratches and claws, as she tried to squirm herself out of the human’s arms and escaped running for the facility. The other male driver loaded up a mild tranquilizer dart into his gun, and aimed at the running Natasha. He fired a shot, but narrowly missed her, but fired a second shot and the dart struck her in the hind leg. It didn’t take long before Natasha succumbed to the effects of the sedation, the female wrapped poor Natasha in a soft blanket and put her in the car with the rest of the cats. “Take care of her, yeah!” the human female said as she got into the passenger’s side of the SUV with the man in the driver’s seat and drove off, leaving the ill-fated facility... and little Anya.

CHAPTER TEN: The Audience in the Chambers:

George the seal point Himalayan scientist was giving his report before the presence of Prince Bigglesworth and Prince Albert at their princely chambers at the east wing of the Crucible. All the feline officers were there, except for the absence of Natasha who was in the veterinary infirmary after her tragic breakdown at the digsite in Moscow. George spoke on her behalf of the terrible news surrounding Anya’s disappearance and the return of Browni Jenkin, who had cultivated a myriad of crimes against human and animal species before his would have been demise in Wales. At the mention of Browni and the witness accounts of creating a natural portal that helped him execute the catnapping of Anya, and the significance of the data that was charged to George for collection was indeed the highlight of the audience. In mid sentence as George concludes his report, Prince Bigglesworth angrily interrupted the proceeding.

“BULLOX!” hissed Prince Bigglesworth angrily. “We destroyed Browni Jenkin in Wales at the Bryn Gwyn Stones! How is this possible?”

“Mein Herr, much has changed in his physical appearance since Wales. He has grown much larger, and possesses a human like face, and his fur is now black.” George added.

Prince Bigglesworth thought for a moment and his twin brother Albert had whispered something to him. “And do you have any evidence supporting that Browni is indeed still alive, Captain?”

George replied with a slight bow of the head, “According to the DNA analysis of this hairball that I hacked up on my return from Moscow, and compared the data to the other DNA charts, I’m ready to conclude that this black hair in the hairball indeed belongs to Browni Jenkin.” He motions with his paw to Phil to upload the old data and the current lab results of numbers and diagrams of the DNA codes from his computer onto the giant projector screen. George saunter over to the elaborate table in front and jumped up to resume his explanation.

“As you can see here, we have the data record of Browni Jenkin’s DNA sequence before the encounter in Wales. Notice the pattern of the proteins within the second half of the helix here and here. On the current data results that I have calculated earlier with the hairball specimen, human and new rat DNA has been introduced to replace 70% of his genetic code. I have broken

down the list of proteins which has to do with human and rat DNA. With the exception of one group of proteins within the helix here, that hasn't yet been touched by the genetic engineering. Those proteins that still exist are the exact match to the old data that we have on record, Mein Herr. In conclusion, that the evidence collected from the facility is indeed Browni... He is still alive." George said as he dropped the gray data tape onto the table. "As to what he was after, we can not say for sure. The tape recovered by the cadets contains a series of sound files and locations and times they were recorded. There was no apparent pattern save that all of the locations where in the Pacific Ocean. "

A lengthy pause as Princes Bigglesworth and Albert confer with each other, then Prince Bigglesworth gets off his princely pet chair made from red leather. "LEAVE US!" he commanded. All the humans guarding the chambers exit the room, Sargeant Trixie turns her body to head for the exit but she was stopped, "Not you Sargeant!" Prince Bigglesworth demands. Trixie the Maine Coon, returns to guard the Princes from the main double doors leading to the Crucible. Jeeves the Butler of the twin munchkins, thought he had to take his leave from behind the throne of the princes, "Not you, Jeeves! We might need noms and cuddles after!" Prince Bigglesworth mentions. As their personal butler, Jeeves returned to his station, Commander Ziggy and Alexei enter the chambers. Alexei and Shoe had just came from their forever home in St. Petersburg, he was clearly very worried. Dmitri and Vitaliy ran up to their father and nuzzled on Alexei's chest.

" К сожалению, мы опаздываем. трафик Agartha был просто сумасшедший с людьми. Где Наташа? Где Аня ?"

"*Sorry, we're late. The traffic in Agartha was just crazy with humans.*" Alexei said as he looks around the chambers and doesn't see his mate, nor his daughter. "*Where is Natasha? Where is Anya?*" he asked the cats in attendance.

"What's going on?" Commander Ziggy asked as he had just returned to London from a meeting with Huoy, the Aspect of Anubis, at the City of the Sun God in Egypt.

George, Malcolm and Phil looked at each other trying to find an easier way to explain to Alexei what happened without resulting in a paw and claw fight.

"Мы увидели большой уродливый крыса, папа!"

"*We saw a big ugly rat, Papa!*" Dmitri told his father and Shoe who was absent from the field trip due to his shenanigans at the Hall during the obstacle course training.

"Его зовут Browni."

"*His name is Browni.*" Vitaliy recalled his name after he tried to snatch the pack of old data from them.

" И он взял Аню прочь от нас!"

"*And he took Anya away from us!*" Dmitri confessed. His papa grew astonished and angry.

"Какие? Невозможно! Мы раздавил его в Уэльсе!"

"*What? Impossible! We crushed him in Wales!*" Alexei growled as he turned his attention to George and Malcolm. Then he looked at the giant screen displaying the evidence.

"Browni?" Alexei asked as he pointed to the giant screen with his paw. George and Malcolm gave a slight nod.

"Где твоя мама?"

"Where is your mother?" Alexei asked his sons calmly.

"В лазарете, с д-ром Lox и медсестра Оксана."

Dmitri's head was still low almost laying down by his papa's side, *"At the infirmary, with Dr. Lox and Nurse Oksana."*

"Она пошла все с ума, потому что Browni взял Аню прочь. Люди положить что-то в ней, чтобы заставить ее пойти сонные."

"She went all crazy, because Browni took Anya away. The humans put something in her to make her go sleepy." Vitaliy added.

Alexei grew even more angrier as he listened to his sons' story. He was hoping that this would all be a lie and that his mate would waltz in through the chambers, but what his kittens said was the truth. At last. Normally, he would expect something like they got in trouble and it was all Anya's fault, so his sons would blame. It wasn't, so and it has escalated far greater than just a curious incident.

"Я должен видеть Наташу."

"I must see Natasha." Alexei bowed to the princes as he took his leave from the chambers with his boys following behind. Following the long corridor to his left, Alexei ran, hung a right and a left again, and he was there. The curiosity ward is Dr. Lox's domain. Dr. Lox came up with the name to dedicated this to injured anima cats while on the field. The bright lights illuminating the veterinary section of the chambers nearly blinded Alexei. He scanned every pet bed in the large room, but his boys who were following behind see a familiar little face, but it wasn't Natasha. It wasn't Russian Blue like Natasha, it was Li-Li. The kittens gulped as they saw the Chinese Li Hua asleep, but all bandaged up around her tail and one of her forepaws. They carefully kept their distance from Li-Li, just in case she woke up, jump out of her pet bed and kick their butts just like she did at the animal rescue simulation at the Council of Venice.

"Папа, это Ли-Ли там! Можем ли мы пойти посмотреть ее?"

"Papa, that's Li-Li over there! Can we go see her?" asked Dmitri.

Alexei was sniffing about for Natasha's scent then glanced to the male felines, "Вы можете идти, но быть на вашем лучшем поведении здесь, и помните! Драться запрещено!"

"You may go, but be at your best behavior here, and remember! No fighting!" The three brothers watch their father follow his nose to look for their mother. The cadets huddle just before going to see Li-Li.

"Should we tell her? About Anya?" Vitaliy asked his brother Dmitri.

"Might as well. She is Anya's friend after all." Dmitri replied, and carefully approached her bedside. The three brothers stood for a few seconds until the draft caught Li-Li by the ears and they twitched in front of them. Li-Li opened her eyes and let's out a big yawn, the kittens saw her sharp teeth, as she stretched but she mewed in pain as she put a bit of weight on her broken paw. Li-Li sat there curled up on her pet bed as she saw her three of the four Russian Blue teammates standing before her. She grew a tad annoyed.

"Well if it isn't the Three Furry Stooges!" Li-Li snarled to the three, "What you goofs want? You find me here, now you want rematch? Get in line behind stupid dog at Haitian Market!"

"Wow, you fought that dog? That thing is huge! So, the dog broke your leg and tail then?" Vitaliy asked.

"Dog didn't chomp my leg, no. A miscalculation of distance between the tree branches and the ground when the dog chased me up there. I broke it when I landed." Li-Li confessed. "So what you doing here then if you not look for me?"

"Our mama is here, our papa went to see her." Dmitri answered, "And... we have some news." Li-Li scratched her ear and she listened attentively to what happened at the field trip, and how Browni the Rat had catnapped her friend and their sister, Anya. Li-Li tried to stand up, but she mewed in pain and laid back. She leaned over and grew clearly angry with her ears pulled back and grabbed Vitaliy with her good paw and looked him deep in the eyes.

"And let me guess, you blame Anya for your curiosity? You fools! And that evil, crazy rat who catnap my friend who is your sister? You leave her for dead?" she growled and released him.

"And this Browni Rat, yeah! If it weren't for this broken leg and tail, I would have been there with you making General Tsao chicken out of him!"

"How do you make chicken out of a rat?!" Shoe whispered to Vitaliy. Vitaliy dismisses his brother's stupid idea quickly.

"We didn't think it would end like this, Li. Honest!" Vitaliy whispered as the noise was waking up some of the injured cats. "Just think, Li-Li, if we hadn't gone down there and found him, he would have found us first, and attacked our mama and Dr. George."

Li-Li wanted to just get up and beat some sense into the three, she could, but if she ever did, she would re-injure herself even worse and it would alarm the nurses, Dr. Lox and the human guards nearby. "You so lucky we in no fighting zone, but finding Anya more important now, hmm... if Great-grandmaster Shang-Lao were here, he would know what to do!"

"Great-grandmaster Shang-how-who?" asked Shoe in his silly way as usual.

"Shang-Lao. My teacher in the art of Kung-fu. He trained many cats. Many. I learn from him when I was old enough to stand on my own four paws. He live in Shaolin temple with humans who follow his beliefs. He not anima cat like us, so he meow, or roar and growl like all big kitties do. He look gentle like kitty cat, but he got wicked double paw strike like white tiger." Li-Li explained.

Dmitri listened carefully to Li-Li's story about her time in the Shaolin Temple as a kitten, "Are you thinking that we should go see this great-grandmaster?" Dmitri asked.

"Great-grandmaster old and wise, but still has moves like kitten like us." Li-Li said. "Perhaps he teach you to use your head a little, because you need it if we want to get Anya back!" Li-Li growled.

"But I heard that China is very far away. Is there an anima well to get us there and back. How in the world are we going to do this?" Vitaliy asked. He raised his head up to see if there are any cats nearby that would be listening to their plans. Dmitri, Vitaliy and Shoe looked at each other, wondering how in the world are they going to ask their mama and papa if they would go China with Li-Li to see the great-grandmaster. Surely they would not let this fly, everycat is on edge as is. With Anya missing, and possibly soon to be dead at the hands of Browni, the answer would surely be a big, fat *nyet!* Anima well geography doesn't get taught until after they have received their commission numbers tattooed on their left ears, so there was no idea if they could get there and back within minutes without incident. They would have to find somecat who would know a lot of about it.

Meanwhile Alexei enters another wing of the curiosity ward, where Oksana and Mindy were doing their care rounds, checking on every injured and sick feline. Mindy glances upon Alexei and approaches him after she comforts a cat who had been run over by a motorcycle in front of Temple Hall. Alexei speaks to the nurse quietly, trying not to disturb the other patients.

“Где Наташа, я должен видеть ее.”

“Where is Natasha, I must see her?” Alexei asked the calico-munchkin nurse.

“I’m sorry Alexei, but she is not fully awake yet from her sedation by the humans. She is very groggy and mustn’t have any form of stimulation right now. Dr. Lox’s orders,” Mindy replied. “The last thing we need is to set her off as soon as she wakes up.”

Alexei pulls his ears back and pushes Mindy aside with his paw causing her to flip over backwards into a cat dish full of food, “Alexei, what are you doing? You can’t go in there!” yelled Oksana as she heard the commotion and tried to block Alexei’s way. Channelling his anima into his forepaws and struck a powerful right paw onto Oksana’s face and sent her flying into an empty bed, “Security to the Infirmary!!” Oksana painfully meowed as she managed to tap her collar to call for help before she fell unconscious. The altercation woke up all the feline patients in the room who hobbled, wobbled and hopped off their beds to stop Alexei from his physical tirade with the nurses. He also sent those six other felines flying and reinjuring whatever they have injured and most likely will have new injuries at the hands of Alexei’s anger. Hisses, screeching and meowing were heard from the other room as other felines perked their ears up to hear the fights break out. Alexei assessed the damage he had done, but at this point he didn’t care, he charges up his anima as he charges through the cat flap, blasting it forward off its hinges and found himself in the dark room where Natasha laid on a pet bed in the corner, groggy and disoriented. He nuzzled on his mate’s face with his head and licked her nose and chops as he tried to rouse her, desperately looking for answers before Sargeant Trixie and her security team arrive. He nuzzled her get out of the bed, Natasha still wobbling from the sedative the humans shot her with, and she fell onto the floor a few times, and Alexei roused her again with even more nuzzling. Alexei and Natasha slowly rounded the corner to collect the three brothers who were still visiting Li-Li, before they start to realize what their father had done, but it was too late, Sargeant Trixie and three other Maine Coons were already waiting at the front door, with focuses on paws to take Alexei into custody.

Four Hours Later... After the Natasha’s sedation wore off...

Well, how news travels fast. The news of the altercation in the curiosity ward had caught the attention of Prince Bigglesworth and Prince Albert. Sargeant Trixie and two Maine Coon guards were posted at the double doors of the chambers. Commander Ziggy was standing before the throne with his three guards, growling down Alexei’s way, because he was ready to pounce on him for assaulting his sister, Oksana. Alexei and Natasha were standing before the Prince. Fully out of her sedation, Natasha opened her statement in giving the princes her report from the field trip in Moscow. The events that have happened were consistent to George’s report, minus the DNA analysis from the hairball he hacked up. According to the accounts of the

four cadets before Anya got snatched up, Browni was scouring the facility looking for something. Obviously, he was not expecting to have company when they arrived.

"What was discovered in that human installation?" Prince Bigglesworth asked.

"An old data record of some kind, Your Highness. The cadets picked it up before they were chased. I can't describe what it looks like. Phil would have a better idea of it if he saw it," Natasha explained.

"Where is this old data record now? Better yet, I'm curious to know what's in it. Have Malcolm and Phil analyzed it yet?" Bigglesworth asked.

"Our analysis is not complete, Mon Liege! Zere is still much data to go over at zis time."

"Disturbing indeed. Whatever Browni was looking for, was for someone else. And that data record is the key to what he is up to," Bigglesworth said while thinking that this catnapping was indeed unplanned.

"If I may," George interrupted politely, "Browni is a minion, Mein Herr, surely he must be working for that Dr. West again. Don't forget he is genetically engineered to do that human's dirty work and is a result of that dirty work. Browni is just a victim as any other animal abused by this human's conquest, all in the name of science."

"And unfortunately for us, George, we would not be able to engage with this human, Dr. West even if we wanted to. We would have to leave that up to the human Templars to deal with her. Ugh, this animal kingdom - food chain thing is surely a complicated matter!" Prince Albert added while he scratches the back of his head, sitting through the court.

Natasha grew frustrated as her ears twitch and pull back swishing her tail. "Surely you don't have any compassion for this Browni Jenkin? He is nothing but a cold blooded criminal, and must be punished according to the laws of nature. He has our Anya for meowing out loud!"

George looked at Natasha, "Ya, ya, but you forget, Natasha, our pledge to not only banish evil with paws and claws, but we must also not forget that we are merciful as well. Browni is an animal after all."

"An animal that must be mercifully put down like the rest of those he killed, both human and animal!" Natasha hissed.

"Silence!" Prince Bigglesworth interrupted with a commanding presence. "Let us argue this another time. There's still the matter of Alexei's temper tantrum in the infirmary."

Alexei whispered in Russian to his mate and Natasha straightens up as she speaks, "Your Highness, my Alexei regrets his actions towards Dr. Lox, Mindy, Oksana and all our unfortunate, injured comrades, but he cannot promise that it wouldn't happen again. He would make amends with those he hurt in due time."

A tap on the golden cane of Jeeves interrupts the cats, "Presenting Dr. Lox, Chief Veterinary Officer, Your Highnesses," Jeeves announced with a bow. The chamber cat flap had opened and the white Birman, Dr. Lox had entered. He sauntered on the red carpet leading to the front of the thrones and he was growling with disgust like somecat did something to his Meow Mix.

"Ahh, welcome once again Dr. Lox. Our apologies for interrupting any house calls you may have had before this incident occurred." Prince Bigglesworth acknowledged his presence.

"I just came from the curiosity ward," Dr. Lox replied with a slight bow of the head. "What a mess! It is meowful mess in there! The nurses and I had to settle all the patients down and reassess their injuries! Thanks loads, you brute!" he glared at Alexei, "I hope it was worth it, assaulting my patients and my nurses!" Dr. Lox growled with his feline sarcasm and pawed after him. A scuffle breaks out between Alexei and Dr. Lox until Sargeant Trixie and her two Maine Coon guards lowered the boom and pinned the both of them, "SHADDAP N' KNOCK IT OFF, YA'LL!" Trixie meowed loud enough for the chamber walls to vibrate, pulling all the stops, and pulled them apart, sending them to the sides of the red carpet.

"No further outbursts in the chambers! Dr. Lox, we have all witnessed Alexei's regrets for wrecking your curiosity ward, and he will pay restitution to those he harmed in due time. But for now, we have more pressing matters with our cadets." Prince Albert commanded from his throne and sighed. Knowing that fighting amongst themselves would not help the serious situation at the moment. Anya is still missing, and we have a hard job to do in finding her. "Anya is still a cadet within this organization, therefore it is our responsibility to get her back," Prince Bigglesworth spoke, "Even though she does not wear the Templar collar yet, there is no GPS chip on her scruff, which cannot be placed until after her calling from Her Majesty. This will make our job in finding her even harder, since without it, Temple Hall and the global Humane Societies cannot track her movements. We must work together in finding her the hard way." Prince Bigglesworth glanced over at Alexei and Natasha, "You may have my princely dispensation to find Anya by any means necessary, Captain, but you will not do so at the expense of putting your comrades in harm's way in the process! Understood?"

Prince Bigglesworth had given Natasha a moment to translate his words to Alexei, and Alexei let out a growl of "Da" that he would have to work his anger through alternative means. That would mean taking the frustrations out on those who may have Anya and must save his rage for Browni should they ever meet again.

Prince Bigglesworth lapped up some 'creme de la creme' that Jeeves had laid out for him, and nommed on a side of tuna mignon before he returned to the other cats to speak.

"It is best that we recall back Min-ji, our stealth specialist stationed in Kaidan. I need all her resources to scout out key areas, I want feline operatives under her command to scout out that facility to record any movements in and out of that installation, both human and animal. I also want to know what else Browni is looking for in that facility, and somehow my instincts are telling me there is more to this fiasco than we know. Plus we will need Min-ji's expertise in breaking and entering if needed."

"Furthermore, I want Phil to check into the records of this human, Dr. West. I want to know where this human has been in the past few months since our encounter with Browni in Wales, what research she has been doing, and where she is hiding now. I give Phil permission to hack into any databases if need be." He turns his attention to his twin brother, Prince Albert.

"Brother, I need you to get in touch with our allies in Egypt, Norway, India and America and give them the heads up. Nefertari the Younger, His Majesty King Erik of Norwegian Forest Cats,

Indrah the Benevolent, and Savannah Honour Guard Commander Max. They need to know what is happening so they would take measures to protect their own should Browni and Anya have been sighted.”

“Finally, no further field trips with the cadets are to be planned without our princely dispensation first! We don't want any more of our cadets harmed or catnapped or Gaia knows what else.”

“Now, let us reflect on our productive meeting with nap time! Jeeves, leave us!”

Bigglesworth commanded as Jeeves takes his leave, and the cats in attendance each took a spot within in the chambers to relax and nap away their worries of the day. Alexei and Natasha snuggled together with the three kittens as they fell asleep, Alexei was already suspecting that rats are involved. And who else other than the Illuminati who would provide safe haven for these rats, perhaps including Browni, because he is a rat, of course they would protect him.

Regardless of his crimes against the animal kingdom. He just had to find a way to get in there to find, even if he had to bust a few rat heads to get to Browni. The Illuminati stronghold would be worth a shot. Should he succeed, he would take first honors as being the first Templar to break through the barriers leading to the Illuminati. Kind of like bringing down the blue curtain so to speak, he thought. He would have to find the right cat who knows the location, and to find the right cats to help him achieve his greatest offensive.

CHAPTER ELEVEN: Bringing Down the Royal Blue Curtain:

“You gotta be kitten me right meow!” Min-ji meowed to Natasha hiding under the bar at the Crucible, “Are you out of your kitty brained mind? Do you have any idea how much trouble you can get into if you infiltrate the Illuminati stronghold? Do you have any idea how much trouble we can get into for even MEOWING about infiltrating the Illuminati stronghold? None of my stealth cats aren't even that crazy to do that! Not even me!” Min-ji bellows at Natasha while the two felines were hiding underneath the empty bar at the Crucible.

“Please Min-ji, just quickly in and quickly out, we promise we won't engage with the rats there. We just need to go see if Anya's there and that's it! Just tell me how to get there, and Alexei and I will take care of the rest!” Natasha reassured her.

“I dunno, Prince Bigglesworth will have our collars for this if he ever found out we've been sneaking around Illuminati territory without any proof that Anya or even Browni is even there for that matter!” Min-ji said as the human bartenders' feet were passing by from under the bar.

“That place is crawling with animal catchers! I heard that place has a massive holding facility called The City Pound for animals who run around like wild things without the proper clearance. They get caught and get thrown in there to get peed on from every passing dog. I heard sometimes they kill them too.” Min-ji informs Natasha. “If you're not gonna listen to me and go there anyway, then it's best to have a team go with you. At least you have a greater chance of one of you escaping to the other side to get the word out in case any of you get caught. I guess I better give Bunky and Malcolm the heads up in case I gotta break you out.” Min-ji sighs.

“Alexei had already thought of that.” Natasha mentions. “In fact, our family is meeting us tonight at our forever home to discuss an insertion plan. We hope to get to Brooklyn by dawn. Wish us

luck!" Natasha says as she saunters from under the bar and goes through the chamber cat flap. Min-ji watches her leave and sighs.

"They're certainly gonna need it!"

At the Borishkov's residence later that evening...

The cats family were crouched low as they eat their noms together in the kitchen. Dmitri couldn't help but sniff at his food throughout the sitting and think about how he would ask his parents to go to China with Li-Li to visit her great-grandmaster Shang-Lao. The young males look at each other, poking one another with their paws, and from the other side, their mother grew annoyed with their manners. "Boys! Eat your noms!" Natasha hissed. With much hesitation, Dmitri finally worked up his courage to ask his parents.

"Мама? Папа? Можем ли мы поехать в Китай?"

"Мама? Папа? Can we go to China?"

"Китай? Что там, в Китае? Наташа, я знал, что что-то происходит о том, что китайские кошки. Что она до сих пор?"

Alexei looked up from his food and morsels were dropping out of his mouth as he licked his chops, "*China? What is there in China?*" Alexei growled and then glanced at his mate. "*Natasha, I knew something is up about that Chinese Li Hua cat. What is she up to now?*" Alexei glances over to his three males.

"Ли-Ли говорит, что мы должны идти в Китай и встретиться с ее большой гроссмейстера Шанг Лао. Он очень старый и мудрый кот. Она думает, что он может помочь нам бороться с Browni и быть достаточно сильным, чтобы спасти Аню."

"Li-Li says we should go to China and meet her great grandmaster Shang Lao. He is a very old and wise cat. She thinks he can help us fight Browni and be strong enough to save Anya."

Vitaliy replied.

"Мои мальчики, что не разумно! Вы достаточно сильны, но вы не достаточно сильны, чтобы нанести удар в Queen Bee знает, где по своему усмотрению без надлежащего надзора. Ли-Ли является котенок сама независимо, как уличный смарт она и знает местность. Вы, ребята, и ей, не должны идти в одиночку. Ответ: нет."

"My boys, that is not wise! You are strong enough, but you are not strong enough to strike out to Queen Bee knows where on your own without proper supervision. Li-Li is a kitten herself regardless how street-smart she is and knows the terrain. You boys and her, should not go alone. Answer is no." Alexei meowed as he dismissed the idea with a paw.

"Но, папа! Аня в большой беде. Это наш долг, как братья, чтобы следить за тем, кто физически слабее нас. Вы сами сказали! "

"But, Papa! Anya is in big trouble. It is our duty as brothers to watch over those who are physically weaker than us. You said yourself!" Shoe replied.

"Да, я не сделал, и я мяукал правду, но мой ответ до сих пор нет! Не мяу из вас троих дальше. Тема закрыта! "

"Yes I did, and I meowed the truth, but my answer is still no! Not a meow out of you three any further. Subject closed!"

"Но, папа ... "

"But, Papa..." Dmitri quivered at his noms.

Before Dmitri could get in a meow to reason with their papa, Alexei interrupted,

"Но что? Дмитрий, ты мой первенец, вам необходимо установить пример для своих братьев, повинаясь мяукает вашего отца , теперь вы трое прогуливаться до вашей игровой комнате, сейчас! "

"But what? Dmitri, you are my first born, you need to set an example for your brothers by obeying the meows of your father, now you three saunter up to your playroom, NOW!" Alexei growled to the point of a hiss, as the male kittens whined and meowed up to their playrooms without finishing their noms. Natasha looks at Alexei with disappointment in her whiskers, as the two are left alone eating. She excuses herself to abandon her noms to go talk to the boys who were curled up like puffballs on the pet bed. Shoe was mewling,

"Почему папа ненавидит Ли-Ли так много?"

"Why does Papa hate Li-Li so much?" Shoe whined as Natasha cuddled and comforted the three.

Natasha sighed and purred for the little ones as she explained.

"Твой папа не ненавижу Ли-Ли . Нет, нет , он просто не понимаю ее . Она очень сильная и стоит за то, что является правильным для каждой кошки . Все кошки одинаковы . Независимо от того , насколько сильным или слабым , или какие цвета у них есть, или откуда они берутся . Ваш папа просто ... забыл, как мы привыкли путешествовать , как котят , то есть все " .

"Your Papa doesn't hate Li-Li. No, no, he just doesn't understand her. She's very strong and stands up for what is right for every cat. All cats are equal. No matter how strong or weak, or what colors they have, or where they come from. Your papa just... forgotten how we used to travel as kittens, that is all."

"Вы и папа путешествовали вместе?"

"You and Papa travelled together?" Dmitri asked out of surprise twinkle in his eyes.

"Конечно, мой мальчик, как ты думаешь, я встречался с ним? Я знаю, сколько вы хотите , чтобы узнать все о внешнем мире и исследовать."

"Of course, my boy, how do you think I met him?" his mother adds. "I know how much you want to learn all about the outside world and explore."

"Да, но все, что папа всегда говорит, что идет."

"Yeah, but whatever Papa always says goes," Vitaliy sobs.

"Сейчас, сейчас, не плачь! Вы знаете, ваш папа может быть главой семьи, но мама это заговор, и она может повернуть голову так или иначе она хочет, а? "

"Now, now don't cry! You know, your papa may be the head of the family, but mama is the scruff, and she can turn the head anyway she wants, hmm?" Natasha's advice goes well received as she saunters off the bed and to return to the kitchen to rejoin Alexei.

"Не забывайте также, этот урок, когда вы решили взять женскую половинку, когда вы достигли совершеннолетия."

"Remember well, this lesson when you decide to take a female mate when you come of age."

Natasha returns to the kitchen and stares Alexei in the eyes.

" Честно говоря, спариваться, вы бы позволить наших котят ехать в Москву в нашей России-матушки и Аня получает catnapped. Теперь, вы бы не позволить им поехать в Китай ? Зачем? Потому что Ли-Ли является китайский кот? Является ли это, как это , Алексей? Как вы думаете, наши котята будут иметь успех, как тамплиеры, если они не путешествуют, чтобы испытать внешнего мира?"

"Honestly mate, you would permit our kittens to go to Moscow in our Mother Russia and Anya gets catnapped. Now, you would not permit them to go to China? Why? Because Li-Li is a Chinese cat? Is this how it is, Alexei? How do you think our kittens will succeed as Templars if they do not travel to EXPERIENCE THE OUTSIDE WORLD?"

Alexei grew seemingly confused at Natasha's question,

" Вы знаете, маленькие . Некоторые собаки будут говорить им. Все, что вы можете съесть мышей на местном места человека пищи, и они будут идти туда и стать съеден заживо людей. "

"You know little ones. Some dog will say to them, "All you can eat mice at the local human food place, and they'll go there and become eaten alive by the humans."

Natasha pulls her ears back and ruffles her scruff,

"Они не дураки! Они умные, и они достаточно сильны, чтобы исследовать мир сами!"

"They are not stupid! They are smart AND they are strong enough to explore the world by themselves!"

"Они сильны, как медведи, но то, что там нужно идти исследовать мир на таких, как молодом возрасте?"

"They are strong like bears, but what is there need to go explore the world at such a young age?" Alexei retorted back.

Natasha's eyes go wide and hisses in a fit,

"Ой? Вы думаете, что вы умнее меня , да?"

"Oh? You think you are smarter than me, huh?"

"Гм, я никогда не говорил ... Я имею в виду ... "

"Uhh, I never said... I mean..." Alexei muttered but was interrupted by his mate's frustration.

"КАКИЕ? ЧТО ТЫ ИМЕЕШЬ В ВИДУ? Я путешествовал по всему миру, я изучал археологию, я боролся зло, я позаботился о вас, и я родила четырех котят! Вы знаете? Это мне повезло, я у вас нюхать мой зад!"

"WHAT? WHAT YOU MEAN? I travelled all over the world, I studied archaeology, I fought evil, I took care of you, AND I gave birth to four kittens! You know? It's lucky for me I have you to sniff my butt!" Natasha yelled and ended her argument abruptly as she sauntered off to rejoin the kittens, leaving Alexei confused,

"Natasha?" Alexei called out to her then in embarrassment, he planted his head into the bowl of Fancy Feast. Mikhail and Galina gawked at each other at their dining table with a smirk on their faces and facepalmed their mouths to muffle their giggling. Natasha returned to the sullen kittens and snuggled with the little ones as she purred.

Outside the Borishkov Residence:

Time: 2 a.m. Moscow Time

It was a moonlit night and Alexei was pacing on top of the brick walled fence of his forever home in St. Petersburg as if he was expecting someone or something most urgently. A distant, but familiar meow is carried out into the night breeze, prompting Alexei to come down from his kingly perch and onto the courtyard low ground. He met up with three other Russian Blues: two males, going by the names of Boris and Sputnik, both who are Alexei's brothers and one female named Svetlana, who is Natasha's sister from the same litter. They each are carrying a little something in their mouths. All three members of the Battalion, and all Templars. They greeted each other with the wave of their tails, and followed Alexei up and along the brick wall to the end where there was an open window. One by one, they climbed into the house through the window and landed on the carpeted flooring beneath the sleeping teen Irina. From the upper level, they quietly sauntered down the stairs to the main floor to meet up with Natasha. Their natural night vision adjusted accordingly from the moonlight to pitch darkness. They gather around the kitchen floor. Sputnik studied Alexei with his bright yellow eyes, and can easily sense his brother's anguish over the catnapping of his second born kitten Anya.

"Ты выглядишь подчеркнут, брат мой. Я принес вам то, что может помочь вам."

"You look stressed, my brother," Sputnik mewed with worry, *"I have brought you something that might help you."* Sputnik dropped a small vial of yellow powder from his mouth and Svetlana stuck her claw into the cap allowing the yellow powder to trickle freely onto the kitchen floor. Alexei smelled it first then took a couple of longer sniffs with his nose.

"Эй, эй, успокойтесь большой парень, не так много, так быстро! "

"Hey, hey take it easy big guy, not so much so fast!" Sputnik warned, then Alexei started to sneeze and twitch his whiskers and ears.

"Что это за материал? Яд? Вы пытаетесь убить меня здесь?"

"What is this stuff?" Alexei growled as he placed a paw on Sputnik, *"Poison? Are you trying to kill me here?"*

Sputnik gave a toothy grin and reassures his friends,

"Расслабься, Алексей. Люди называют это котовник. Люди дают нам это, когда мы раздражает или очень напряжен, и нужно расслабиться. Это действительно работает!"

"Relax, Alexei. The humans call it catnip. Humans give us this when we are annoying or very stressed out and need to relax. It really works!"

Alexei releases his paw and immediately begins to feel the effects of the catnip running through his system. Then he lays down, "Я понимаю что ты имеешь ввиду," Alexei replied. Then Natasha and the rest of the cats each sniff a little of the powder, then sneezed and twitched at the ears before relaxing to plan their next move.

"Так и все мы согласны с планом здесь? " Alexei asked if every cat was in agreement..

Boris smashes his paws and licks his chops,

"Наконец! Наш единственный шанс вторгнуться в крепость иллюминатов на их собственной земле, эти крысы не буду знать, что их поразило! Ха - ха! Поцелуй на прощание Иллюминатов, Америка!"

"At long last! Our one chance to invade the Illuminati stronghold on their own soil, those rats ain't gonna know what hit them! Ha-ha! Kiss the Illuminati goodbye, America!" Boris cheered as he sniffed some more catnip.

Thumps were heard from above as the cats look up and follow the vibration from the human, Mikhail Borishkov's foot slamming three times on the floor on the upper level.

"Кошки! Тише там! Мы пытаемся, чтобы спать!"

"Cats! Knock it off down there! We're trying to sleep!" yelled Mikhail from above them.

The cats resume their planning in whispers, Alexei reveals the plan,

"Как вы все знаете, как только мы получим в крепость иллюминатов, ожидать серьезное сопротивление, и быть готовым ко всему. Мы должны быть сильными, как мы нести флаг нашего дела на американской земле и получить Аню из их когтей. Эти иллюминатов крысы дорого заплатит за свое преступление, совершенное против нас!"

"As you all know, once we get to the Illuminati stronghold, expect heavy resistance, and be prepared for anything. We must be strong as we carry the flag of our cause onto American soil and retrieve Anya from their clutches. Those Illuminati rats will pay dearly for their crime committed against us!"

Sputnik looks blankly at the pounding paws and claws of his friends, gleaming by the eyes about how they are going to take it to the Illuminati, but Sputnik being strong, yes, and a smart one, he questions the insertion point.

"Так как вы сказали нам ожидать серьезное сопротивление, как мы получаем в крепости Иллюминатов, не попасться и бросили в городе фунт?"

"Since you said for us to expect heavy resistance, how do we get into the Illuminati stronghold without getting caught and thrown in the city pound?"

Svetlana paws the object she had in her mouth to the middle of the cats, and unrolls it, revealing a map of Brooklyn, New York and the lettering is in cat scratches.

"Мы идем через склад здесь. Место просто кишит крысами. Ведь есть по крайней мере одна крыса, кто иллюминатов. Все, что нам нужно сделать, это ждать, пока нужный момент и вырвать его. Возьмите свои знаки отличия и прикрепите их к нашим воротничков подвесками. Вход в крепость через там, на другой стороне, то есть, где сопротивление. За несколько лестничных пролетов есть старый вход в канализацию. Мы должны сделать много работы лапу, чтобы получить там и остаться вместе, мы могли бы легко потеряться. Заключительный отрезок пути, где безделушки приходят, с теми, мы можем получить через главный вход в иллюминатов оплот без надлежащего люди подозревая, что мы Тамплиеры."

"We go in through the warehouse here. The place is just crawling with rats. Surely there must at least one rat who is Illuminati. All we have to do is wait for the right moment and snatch him. Take their insignias and attach them to our collar pendants. The entrance to the stronghold is through there on the other side, that is where the resistance is. Beyond a few flights of stairs there is an old entrance to the sewers. We would have to do a lot of paw work to get there and stay together, we could easily get lost. The final leg of the journey is where the trinkets come in, with those, we can get in through the main entrance into the Illuminati stronghold proper without the humans suspecting that we are Templars."

"Как насчет аппаратуры наблюдения, используемой людьми, так и Мин-джи сказать что-нибудь об этом?"

"What about surveillance equipment used by the humans, did Min-ji say anything about that?" asked Alexei to Natasha.

"Не совсем, отчеты говорят, что есть камеры наблюдения, установленные по всей площади, ведущей к крепости. Ничего страшного, люди будут думать, что мы кошки некоторых иллюминатов агентов, возвращающиеся с охоты в Brooklyn Park. Хотя есть один гигантский экран окно на складе, который показывает все, что происходит на главном входе в организме человека, то есть то, что может быть тревожным. Лучше всего, чтобы принять, что прежде, чем мы над головой для нападения."

"Not really, reports say that there were surveillance cameras installed all over the area leading to the stronghold. Nothing to worry, the humans will think we are some Illuminati agents' cats returning from a hunting trip in Brooklyn Park." Natasha replied. *"Although there is one giant screen box in the warehouse that shows everything that happens at the main entrance to the humans, that is something that might be worrisome. Best to take that out before we head over for the attack."*

"Хорошо. Давайте есть и немного отдохнуть, мы будем нуждаться все наши силы, если мы хотим победить!"

"Good. Let us eat and get some rest, we are going to need all of our strength if we are to be victorious!" Alexei declares as he motivates his paw-chosen team.

"Конечно, мы будем туда специально, чтобы спасти нашу маленькую девочку из лап иллюминатов."

"Surely, we are going there specifically to rescue our little girl from the clutches of the Illuminati," Natasha questions her mate as she hopes this is a rescue mission, and not a conquest mission just to beat up some rats.

"Что-нибудь для вас, моя маленькая голубцы. Завтра вечером мы должны наметить лабиринт с кровью крыс для тамплиерами и Матери России, и мы должны когда-нибудь встретиться с этой Browni крыса, он мой. Шахта за убийство ! Понял?"

"Anything for you, my little cabbage roll." Alexei replies, *"Tomorrow night, we shall chart the Labyrinth with the blood of rats for the Templars and Mother Russia, and should we ever meet this Browni rat, he is mine. Mine for the killing! Understood?"*

And the pitch dark in which the cats were conspiring their plans underneath was uncovered from the turning of the lightswitch, as all the cats turned in unison to face Mikhail Borishkov in his traditional white A-shirt and navy sleep pants. He squints as he fights the blinding light and sees five adult Russian Blue cats, catnip all over the floor and a map that is undecipherable even to him. They stare down with the human for a short time, then Mikhail rolls his eyes, then slaps his balded forehead with one hand and scratches his butt with the other. Then the lights turned out by the flick of the lightswitch then Mikhail's footsteps were heard returning up the stairs as he interjected to himself all the way back to bed.

The Next Night:

Place: Brooklyn, New York City, New York

Time: 1 am.

Shortie Luminatti was patrolling for scraps of food the human agents might have tossed out at the bend of the sewers when he heard the skittering vibrations beneath his feet.

Dismissing the idea that Lil' Paulie and Figaro were behind him, he finds morsels of a chocolate bar and eats the trail as he scurries backwards, "Figgie, that you?" he asked weakly. Then he returned to eating his trail of chocolate bar on the smelly sewer concrete floor. Backed up and ate some bites, backed up and ate some more bites, until he felt something big and furry behind him. "Geez, Big Paulie, I didn't think you were on scrap duty with me tonight." He turned around and looked up face to face with Alexei. He could have sworn that he felt his grey fur turn five shades of white when he saw the big Russian Blue cat Alexei breathing down on him along with Boris, Svetlana, Natasha and Sputnik circling around him, measuring him up for the kill. Shortie realized there was no time for fight or flight, but for now, flight would be a great option right now. He screamed like bloody murder and ran underneath Sputnik's legs, ducking every swipe the five cats attempt to catch him, taking off like a bolt of lightning to the end of the hallway. Lil' Paulie and Figaro Luminatti were chatting up about next day's order of business from their brother who is the Don when they heard screaming from down the hall. They break from their conversation to turn their attention to the long hallway and saw Shortie turn round the bend their way, flailing his paws like a wild, crazy monkey and screaming as he is running for his life and at the same time warning the other rats.

"Aw geez, look at the idiot, I think he's been into Dr. Aldini's trash can again!" Lil' Paulie chuckles to Figaro. Shortie runs closer enough to warn Lil' Paulie and Figaro that trouble is coming fast. He screams out, "HEEEEEEEEEYY! CAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAATS! HEEEEEEEEELP!" while zipping past Lil' Paulie and Figaro. They watched Shortie run like a crazy rat past them, prompting Figaro to reply, "Yup, ya never know what kind of stuff that human throws out these days. That's the stuff that can kill ya." They look to the opposite direction as they feel the vibration of more pawsteps, and around the turn, blazed five Russian Blue cats charging at their direction. Lil' Paulie and Figaro feel their fur turn five shades of white too and gasp, "GEEZ!" squeaked Figaro as they run like hell down the hallway to catch up to Shortie. "HEY, WAIT FOR US!" The other two rats finally caught up to Shortie as they ran for their lives, but Svetlana and Sputnik were charging up their anima to all four of their paws, planning to take a huge pounce on the rats.

"НЕТ! Пока не атаковать! Продолжайте давать погоню, крысы приведет нас к остальным из них и Ане! "

"NO! Do not attack yet! Keep giving chase, the rats will lead us to the rest of them and to Anya!" Alexei commanded to the feline team.

The rats Figaro, Lil' Paulie and Shortie ran screaming into a large room leading to the main Illuminatti labyrinth proper. Jimmy "The Don" Luminatti and his brother-lieutenant Big Paulie were sitting at their desk chairs giving orders to the lackey rats when Shortie screamed, "BOSS! WE HAVE A PROBLEM! CAAATS!"

Jimmy the Don looked at Shortie blankly and asked his youngest brother, "Shortie? Have you been into Dr. Aldini's fucking trash can again? Ya know that fucking stuff can kill ya!"

The rest of the Luminatti brothers laughed as Figaro screamed, "It's true, there are cats in the labyrinth, Boss!"

"Templar?" Jimmy the Don asked.

"I dunno!" Figaro replied, shaking in his fur.

"Well, what the fuck do they look like?" Jimmy yelled as he was clearly annoyed.

"They look like... cats!" Shortie yelled back.

"I mean what kind of cats, you fucking moron, what color are they?" Jimmy asked further what did the cats look like when they saw them.

"They were all bluey-grey and spoke Russian, I think!" Shortie screamed.

Jimmy the Don and Big Paulie looked at each other nose to nose and stood up and shock took over both of them, "Gaia forbid! It's a fucking Russian invasion! The chitter from Jimmy the Don's teeth had alerted all the rats in the Luminatti family and all rats, about a hundred at least had converged into the room to listen to their Don, "Looks like the Russian mob are here and we got ourselves a turf war, boys! Let's fucking get 'em!" They rats chittered and cheered as they piled up guarding the only passageway to the Labyrinth proper. The Russian Blue cats entered the end of the road as they sauntered slowly and stalked the rats, marking their preys one by one to clear the way efficiently. Alexei growled leading the way to charge, "FOR OUR DAUGHTER OF MOTHER RUSSIA!" The cats growled and hissed in unison as they all pounced on four or five rats at a time, and the massive war broke out in the middle of the Labyrinth's foyer. Claws, teeth, paws and tails were lashing out as Alexei overpowered down at least seven rats in one paw strike into the ground and pounced for the attack. Boris grabbed Lil' Paulie by the throat in the fight, "Where is Anya?" he spoken in Russian.

"Hehehe, huh? Ich spreche kein Ruskyyy!" Lil' Paulie screamed as he's been thrown up against and through the wall by Boris's paws burrowing a hole with his body. The rats circle around Alexei in a corner, as Alexei bares his claws, he gave a toothy grin to the rats to take their best shots, one by one he paws, clawed and threw every rat who wanted a piece of him out of his way, more rats came at him and again he bounced them out in victory. The other cats had flanked the incoming rats from behind clearing the path for them to get to the Labyrinth proper. Alexei may have easily broken the records of his grandfather cat and his father cat before him, but he wasn't done yet. All these rats under his collar and still no progress in finding Anya. The cats and the rats have taken their all out war down the lonely elevator lift in the sewers in Brooklyn, fighting inside the open elevator as more rats pile in to join in on the sewer-clearing brawl. The elevator closes up as thumps are heard from the other side of the doors of rats being too late to get in on the action. All the cats and the rats broke combat for a second to adjust their bearings to the elevator going down, and the fighting started again.

Past the labyrinth entrance as human agents in passing are going, "What the...?" The elevator doors open wide and all the rats and the cats have all tumbled and spilled to the outside of the elevator, into the Labyrinth proper, and the war continued to spread throughout the front foyer. Alexei and Boris were catching rats by the tails, as they were trying to make their escape onto the royal blue drapes. The brother cats gave chase as they climbed up the massively thick double panels to catch and throw down as many rats as they could so Svetlana and Natasha could finish them off. They had climbed and climbed until they had reached the top of the curtains, and with such weight upon the panels, with the rats and cats, the curtains hooks started to bend and the material started to tear. Alexei and Boris saw this, and thought it was an

opportunity to seize them all in one fell swoop. They taunted all the rats they could to attack them to add on more weight to the curtains, and eventually, the last curtain hook snapped. Uh-ohs were heard from the rats up top, as both of the blue curtains tip and start to fall, the rats from the back flank below were scurrying for cover. Alexei and Boris found a soft landing on top of a few rats down below, but they and an army of rats were caught as the curtains fell over them as they landed both feet first. The war didn't stop, but instead the fighting continued underneath the fallen curtains. All the hissing, screeching, squealing, meowing, crying, squeaking, chittering, anima-charging, biting, clawing, pawing, scratching had interrupted the daily routines of the human Illuminati agents as they rush out from their duties to pull the curtains from over the rats and cats, dragging some of them off as they tried to break up the mass animal brawl. Some agents were watching and placing bets on which cat and rat is gonna walk out alive tonight, but three high ranking operatives in blue, black and white exoskeleton uniforms and gas masks arrive with shotguns and one fired a warning shot into the air, putting a stop to all the hoo-haw that had spilled into the Labyrinth.

"Now, what... in... the hell... is going on here?" the human Illuminati agent asked all the rats involved.

"We were minding our business when these Rusky cats invaded us!" Shortie replied angrily.

"You have Anya! Where is she? Tell us and you will not be harmed anymore!" Svetlana demanded as she panted in exasperation from all the fighting.

"Why would we have any cats here? Nothing but rats here, doll face!" Figaro exclaimed.

"Because your comrade Browni catnapped her, that's why? We saw him at an abandoned Red Hand facility in Moscow, and your Browni Jenkin snatched up Anya and disappeared into the dead of night!" Natasha fired back

"Fucking Browni Jenkin? We whacked him in Wales! The rat's been dead for months!" Shortie screeched as he flailed his paws at Natasha.

"We got nothing to do with that cannibal rat! We hate him just as much as you do Rusky cats! This is our turf! Now step off!"

"Return Anya to us and we will!" Natasha snapped and snarled. "We will not rest until Anya is back safe with us!"

"Whoa, whoa, wait, wait, wait! Shaaaddaaap!" The masked agent said as he put a hand up,

"You're anima cats, right?" The agent turned to his two other members and whispered, "Holy crap, these cats are fucking Templars, grab them!" The human Illuminatis grabbed the cats into their arms as they all tried to claw and squirm their way out of the tight squeeze.

"PUT ME DOWN, YOU BRUTES!" Natasha hissed and attempted to bite into the gloved hands of her captor, but to no avail. The thickness of the leather was impenetrable to her vicious bites.

"Calm down, kitties! We ain't gonna kill you, we just wanna talk to you." The Illuminati humans took the five Russian Blue cats up the elaborate stairs and in a very spacious office run by a female human in a tight business skirt suit. All the cats were struggling until they were released but held by the paws on the desk of the one and only Kirsten Geary. The blonde woman approaches her desk and takes notice of the cats. She calmly approaches Natasha and takes hold of her Templar cross pendant and lays it gently in her hands, then releases it to dangle freely at Natasha's collar and gives Natasha a scratch on the ears. She inserts her two fingers

underneath Natasha's collar and an electrical current jolts her prompting her to release her fingers from the collar. The woman shakes her hand to release the pain from the shock, "Well the Templars have really done their homework in protecting these little guys. It's no wonder they have all the backing of the humane societies." The woman in the business suit takes her seat and grabs her cigarette box out from the desk drawer and lights one up. She exhales her drag in the cats' direction and admires all the five cats before her.

"This is way too fucking cute!" the faction leader said shaking her head.

"Shall I do the deed, Ma'am?" asked the agent who pointed a gun to Sputnik's scruff.

Kirsten Geary's eyes widen and her well-kept eyebrows furrow and snaps, "Are you fucking out of your mind, put your guns away, you're not killing any floof today, honey!" she demanded and began her judgement on the cats, sitting back at her chair and crosses her legs.

"Killing these adorable cuties is bad business, the last thing we need is publicity spewing out on the tabloid headlines on how yours truly is linked to animal cruelty. This organization does not need any animal rights groups or PETA involved in our affairs, banging down our door or protesting on topside on our turf. This is a business on occult phenomenon, not a fucking zoo. If we kill them, the Templars will indeed know about it and it will be an all out Secret War on neutral ground, which will be really bad for business and not very cost effective," Ms. Geary explained to her agents then turned her attention to the cats.

"As for you my little adorable fuzzy-wuzzies, major kudos to you for infiltrating Illuminati HQ. You-got-serious-balls. Especially this little beast here!" the faction leader said and places a hand on Alexei and pats him on the head and runs her fingers through the ears speaking baby talk in close range to Alexei's face, "Oh yes you do, oh yes you do, ohhh yes you do! You're just fucking adorable little kitties. Major kudos to you." She finishes her baby talk and switches to a more serious tone. "Really, major kudos, but you're going back to topside with your cutie patootie, little nine lives intact! You really are so cute, I just wanna hug you and squeeze you, count the jelly beans on your paws, scratch your ears, and give you all tummy rubs - wait, maybe not that because you'll probably just go nuts and kill us all and it'll be the end of this organization. Aside from all the lovely things that I wanna do to you little adorable darlings right now, you are on the wrong side and that would make us look bad. So I'm going to be a very, very, nice human lady and let you kitties go to where you will be cared for properly and humanely, so that Mr. Corporate Blue Guy over here doesn't blow your little brains off all over my nice carpet."

"Take them to the pound!" Kirsten Geary concluded as the agents grabbed the cats to be taken off the premises.

"Отпусти меня, ты с ума, иллюминаты варвары!"

"*UNHAND ME YOU CRAZY, ILLUMINATI BARBARIANS!*" Alexei hissed as he squirmed and clawed into the gloved hand of his captor as he and his comrades were all carried off out of the labyrinth through a secret passageway and into a cage at the back of a waiting black van outside.

Jimmy the Don and Big Paulie were listening outside the office of the faction leader, and took off scurrying over to assess the damage the cats had done near the labyrinth main

entrance where it all spilled out. About thirty-seven of Jimmy's cousins had some minor injuries to them and Figaro was attending to them. Twenty of his package rats have been knocked unconscious, fifteen of his brothers from seven litters had suffered broken limbs from being tossed into the walls at the paws of Alexei and Boris. Three of his junior lieutenants under Lil' Paulie, had been scratched to near death, lucky for the anima, it saved them. Seventeen lieutenants under Big Paulie had been choking on cat floof since the human Illuminati had interrupted the battle. Jimmy chitters his teeth in disgust. "We've been had Paulie! We've been fucking had! How we didn't see this coming?" Jimmy the Don and Big Paulie scampered near Figaro and Shortie who were busy attending to the injured rats scattered all over the floor. "So what was all that about?" asked Jimmy to Figaro.

"Browni's at it again! They said he snatched up one of their kittens." Figaro weakly replied.

"What? Their kittens? What the fuck would Browni want with them?" Jimmy scratched with his hind legs.

"I dunno, Boss. To eat them? Maybe get revenge for whacking him in Wales. I dunno," Figaro replied.

"All this because of Browni? These Russian Templar cats come here and attack the heart of the Illuminati, this Labyrinth, our fucking turf, because of Browni? Something fucking serious is going on here! Browni's up to something! If Browni had pissed them off, this is serious business! This could lead to the Secret War on neutral soil, and the Queen Bee would not be a happy camper!" Jimmy the Don looked over the laying rats around him and slashed his tail onto the floor and chittered.

"Scout out the entire Labyrinth and take Shortie and Lil' Paulie with you. Find his sorry rat ass and where he's hiding out! Don't go alone! If you see him, tell me, don't be a fucking hero taking him on by yourself. He's not to be trusted, even though he is on the same side. Capeche?"

Jimmy squeaked out his orders and scurried off into the crowded human traffic in the Illuminati Headquarters.

Temple Hall, Ealdwic, London

Time: 4 am

Phil the black and white, Persian technical expert ran as fast as he could, from his house to the chambers of the Battalion nearly tripping over every human from under them in passing. He burst through the cat flap so hard that he alarmed the Maine Coon security guards and didn't pay them no mind, he needed to get to the Prince and get to him fast. He ran down the red carpet, flailing his tail, meowing, "Mon Liege! Mon Liege! Wake up!"

Prince Bigglesworth and Albert were asleep in their little thrones, and slightly opened their eyes for a moment stretched out his legs and yawned..

"Five more minutes, Mumsy." Bigglesworth muttered as he flopped over the arm of his throne, his front legs relax and dangle and falls back to sleep.

"Mon Liege, it's Natasha and Alexei! They have been captured by the Illuminati and thrown into the city pound!"

Prince Bigglesworth perks his head up and rises quickly to his paws not bothering to yawn or clean himself, "Bloody Hells! I didn't give them permission to go there!"

"Natasha must have activated the distress pip on her collar before they were taken. There are more. Sputnik, Boris and Svetlana. Their GPS signals stopped at the New York City Pound, they're being held here for at least an hour now!"

"This will be most embarrassing to the organization if we don't get them out of there soon! Send an alert on all frequencies, Lieutenant! Get Bunky, Malcolm and Min-ji over there immediately! I want a blueprint of the entire layout of the pound, and the cats' exact position. We need to break them out before the Illuminati find a way to remove their collars and GPS chips... Or worse!" Bigglesworth commanded.

New York City Pound, New York City

Time: 5 am Eastern Standard Time

The constant noise of whining cats and yappy, barking dogs have kept the battle-weary Russian Blue cats from much needed sleep. Even the drippings from the peeing dogs had woke them from time to time. The dull yellow concrete walls and gray concrete flooring wasn't very much of a welcome sight even for the truly lost animals who needed shelter that get sent here. The humans who work at this place have so far treated them respectfully and humanely. Checking every detail about them: overall health, markings and identification of breeds, before processing them into the holding cages. Alexei was so furious with either himself or the situation they are currently in, the events has sure made him into a sourpuss. For a bit of fun and a boost of morale within his family, Alexei, Boris and Sputnik climbed up the steel mesh of the cage and egged on the caged up dogs for a fight. It worked for a little while to lift their spirits up temporarily and the three males have climbed back down to see to Natasha and Svetlana.

"Я не вижу, как дразнить американских собак поможет нам выйти из этой тюрьмы быстрее!"

"I don't see how taunting American dogs will help us break out from this jail any faster!" snarled the feisty Svetlana.

Natasha was examining the food on the stainless steel dish, she smells the cat food served here, it was not to her liking, so she doesn't have the appetite to go further to eat it.

"Пища -то вроде это подается из тюрьмы. Что это за еда?"

"The food is something like it's served from a jail. What is this gruel?" Natasha paws at the dry, boring chow.

"Уф , я попробовал, что, никогда больше, мне хочется съесть свой собственный мех и взломать комков шерсти, пока не вырвет себя до смерти."

"Ugh, I tried that, never again, makes me wanna eat my own fur and hack hairballs until I gag myself to death." replied Svetlana coldly.

"По крайней мере, их еда чаши хорошо выглядеть, я не думаю, что у нас есть это в России. По крайней мере, это делает какую-то музыку после ужина. Ха! Ужин и шоу кто-то , как говорят люди?"

"At least their food bowls look nice, I don't think we have these in Russia." Natasha tries to find positive things about the place there are in, when she taps and paws at the bowl on the

concrete floor making a clanging sound. *"At least it makes some kind of music after dinner. Ha! Dinner and a show anyone, as the humans say?"*

Svetlana looks at her friend blankly and with a snarl,

"Таша, я люблю тебя, но для этого, я , возможно, придется чесать глаза и кормить их к этим американским дворняги там!"

"Tasha, I love you, but for that, I may have to scratch your eyes out and feed them to those American mutts over there!" she growled as Natasha looked across from their cage and noticed a dippy Heinz 57 type dog and a small, hyperactive wiener dog drooling and panting at the sight of her. Their tongues hanging out of their mouths nearly touching the floor.

Alexei, Boris and Sputnik climbed down from the cage onto the cold concrete, and scanned around the walls and floor, sniffing and looking for a way to make their escape.

"Подумайте, товарищи, думайте! Конечно, должно быть неисправность в стене где-то, что мы все могли бы просто выкопать себя из этого беспорядка."

"Think comrades, think! Surely there must be a fault in the wall somewhere that we could all just dig ourselves out of this mess." Sputnik meowed as he sniffs and paws on the concrete wall.

"Спутник , брат мой, если у нас нет гигантских Orochi бомбу , мы не стоим шанс в вырваться из этих стен , "

"Sputnik, my brother, unless we have a giant Orochi bomb, we don't stand a chance in breaking out of these walls," Alexei regretfully informs his younger sibling.

Sputnik couldn't believe his ears. Could it be that his older brother is losing hope of getting out of here alive? Would he rather submit himself to the mercy of euthanasia than go down fighting? This is not the Alexei he knew since they were kittens and cadets at six weeks old, he thought. At their Kitten Day, three years ago, Alexei at six weeks old, he challenged a Rottweiler at Templar Hall to a fight, because it bullied another kitten up a bounded demon at the Crucible. It was there, he reduced the vicious Rottweiler to a yelping puppy that sent him to the veterinarians with second degree gashes to its throat. That is the Alexei, Sputnik knows. He had never backed down from a challenge, but he played it smart. If Alexei were to fight a hopeless battle at the cost of one of his nine lives, he would do it, why? Because he has a heart of a Templar. Templars are Templars to the bitter end, even when all your nine lives are spent. Sputnik realized that as his brother and best friend, it is his responsibility to set Alexei straight. He marched up to the concrete wall, and went on a tirade. A very strong vibration was felt beneath their feet and a powerful screeching noise was coming from near the wall which Sputnik was near.

" Вы знаете, что, Алексей? Вы получили мягкие! Все это мяу о пойманным и бросали нас здесь превратили ваш мозг в кашу!"

"You know what, Alexei? You've gotten soft!" Sputnik began. *"All this meow about getting caught and throwing us in here had turned your brain into mush!"*

As Sputnik went on his hissy fit on Alexei, Natasha nudged Svetlana as she looked up,

" Видите ли вы , что ? Вверх на окне."

"Do you see that? Up on the window."

Svetlana and Natasha looked up at the small, lonely window high up to see a Siamese cat tapping on the window pane with the claws.

" Ха! Сумасшедшие американские кошки!"

"Ha! Crazy American cats!" Svetlana scoffs.

Natasha watches the cat up on the window tapping furiously on the glass pane, and realizes that is not just a cat, it was Min-ji the Siamese-Nermegal stealth specialist. Her tapping on the window is like a feline version of morse code.

"Это не американский кот! Это Мин -джи! Она посылает нам сообщение."

"That's not an American cat! That's Min-ji! She's sending us a message." Natasha whispered watching Min-ji tap and paw at the window pane.

As Sputnik, Boris and Alexei argued amongst themselves, Natasha and Svetlana studies the tappings Min-ji made on the window.

"Я не понимаю, что она пытается сказать нам!"

"I don't understand what she is trying to tell us!" Svetlana growled in frustration trying to make our the first word.

Natasha listens to the tapping and scratching,

"Потому что в кошачьей коде Морзе, я буду видеть, если я могу разобрать первое слово."

"Because it is in feline morse code, I'll see if I can make out the first word." Min-ji taps and scratches onto the window pane the first word, and Natasha spells out, "STAND." Natasha nods to Minji assuring her that she understands. Then Min-ji taps and scratches for the second word, "BACK," Natasha translates,

"Это оно! Сообщение Отступают!"

"That's it! The message is STAND BACK!" she exclaims to Svetlana, prompting them to pull Alexei and Boris aside to the farthest of their holding cell, away from the wall.

"Спутник , заткнись и иди сюда прямо сейчас!"

"Sputnik, shut up and get over here right now!" Natasha hissed at their raving friend, but all words had fallen on the deaf ears of Sputnik as he was too busy with his lecturing spiel.

"Да, ну и что? Мы сделали некоторые ошибки. Все кошки делают ошибки. Так же эти собаки! Так же эти кошки здесь! Мы все, как животные не делают ошибки в нескольких точках в нашей жизни, независимо от того, какая жизнь! В нашей первой жизни или четвертой жизни - шестой жизни, может быть, в нашей девятой жизни! Так что давайте все вместе получить себя и взорвать эту тюрьму до вдребезги, так что мы можем все Сохраняйте спокойствие - И - Мяу - ON!"

"Yeah, so what? We made some mistakes. All cats make mistakes. So did these dogs! So did these cats over here! We all as animals make mistakes at a few points in our lives, no matter which life! In our first life, or fourth life - sixth life, maybe in our ninth life! So let's all get ourselves together and blow this jail up to smithereens, so we can all KEEP CALM - AND - MEOW - ON!"

And that's what happened next. A small section of the concrete wall exploded right behind the cowering Sputnik, leaving a nice hole to the outside of the city pound. Bits, pieces and huge chunks of rubble were flying towards the cages, causing a huge uproar among the sheltered animals nearby. Two felines peek into the giant hole from the outside as the clouds of powdered concrete dissipated, it was Bunky and Malcolm, the kilted Scottish Fold who had engineered some special C4's to orchestrate a controlled frontal explosion so the impact wouldn't harm the cats on the other side..

“Hey, hey, everybody!” Bunky, the orange and white American Shorthair cat greeted Alexei, Natasha and the rest of the crew. “The calvary is here! We better hurry up and get you cats back to London. Prince Bigglesworth has been throwing hissy fits since he learned that you took on the Illuminati on their own turf. Hehe, way to go, guys! You’re the talk of Templar Hall!” Bunky went inside the big hole and addressed all the dogs and cats, “Remember folks, Templar Hall is -the- forever home of choice. Peace and love to you all!”

“WILL YOU JUST STOP AND LET’S GET OUT OF HERE!” Min-ji yelled as she grabbed Bunky and ran into a waiting SUV to be taken back to London.

CHAPTER TWELVE: Crouching Kitties, Hidden Kitties:

Dengfeng County, Zhengzhou, Henan Province, China

Li-Li stands over a bridge staring down at a very overcrowded roadway below, packed with human-occupied automobiles, motorbikes, scooters, and bicycles battling one another for a spot in the multitude of lanes. Dmitri, Vitaliy and Shoe look down at the vast traffic, the wind beating over their faces and Shoe gulped in a touch of fear, just by watching all the heavy, slow moving traffic go by. The road to the great grandmaster will be a long and arduous road ahead indeed. They need to put their full trust in Anya’s friend Li-Li and let her guide the way. This is her territory, so she knows how to get to their destination. If they wish to see their sister Anya again, they need to be strong and just get it done. They realize now that this is no game of silliness and kittenhood shenanigans. Time to grow up for they will be soon officers of the Templars. It is their duty as brothers, from oldest to the youngest that they must endure this task in order to save Anya from the clutches of the evil Browni Jenkin.

“How in the world are we ever going to cross this road? This place is crawling with humans and their steel, mechanical pet monsters.” Dmitri asked Li-Li as he looked down on the heavy rush hour traffic.

Li-Li looked at Dmitri and she scanned the street below to find an easier route to get to the Shaolin Temple. She had found a scooter with a basket, that some human had left behind in front of a restaurant. If they are to avoid becoming victim to a catnapping or worse off, becoming roadkill and become part of a stew for the humans, if they do decide to cross on paw, Li-Li needed to think of a plan and fast.

“Follow me and keep up! We don’t want to be roadkill.” Li-Li said and she lead the three male Russian Blue kittens down the walking trail off the bridge and onto the roadside. They followed Li-Li down the street ducking and weaving through the scores of busy mobile people, and found the parked scooter close by. She placed her paws upon the exhaust pipe of the scooter, it was okay because it was quite cooled, and opened the basket nudging the lid with the top of her head, and looked inside the basket. Empty. “Looks like we have found our way to get there,” she said and climbed into the basket and the lid closed shut. The cats gasped as Li-Li disappeared from inside the basket as if it was an occult magic trick, but Li-Li popped the lid opened and peeked out with her head and motioned with her paw.

“Come! Hop in! There’s lot of room for all of us!” Li-Li told the rest of the cats, and one by one, the Russian blue males had climbed into the basket and Li-Li closed the lid and they waited. Several minutes later, a young kung-fu student, about in her early twenties, sporting her kung-fu attire and her long, black hair was braided down to her back, came out of the restaurant and didn’t bother to check the basket. She didn’t suspect that the basket was occupied by four furry hitchhikers. The young woman got on and started the scooter and away they all went to their destination.

The traffic was quite fierce. Getting out of Dengfeng County and into the outskirts to Mount Song would be quite a task if you’re a human. Harder if you’re an animal hitching a ride in the back of a scooter. Shoe grew very curious to know what travelling on the road is like if he lifted the lid of the basket just a touch. Just to see. While every cat is asleep inside the basket, Shoe slowly lifted up the basket with his head. He looked straight ahead from the back of the scooter and he could see a massive mechanical monster closing in on them, and on both right and left side is the lanes, and other monsters following behind them. The monster constantly growled from its engines. Metal grills looking like four thousand teeth, ready to sink them into the curious feline. Shoe’s ears pulled back and his eyes grew wider as a gust of wind from the motor scooter’s speed, flung the lid of the basket wide open. Shoe screamed off the top of his lungs, “AHHHHH! MONSTER! MONSTER! We’re gonna die! We’re gonna die!” alerting Li-Li, Dmitri and Vitaliy out of their brief slumber. Vitaliy and Dmitri grabbed hold of Shoe and pulled him out of sight of the white, delivery truck directly behind them, while Li-Li grabbed hold of the lid of the basket and closed it shut.

Li-Li and the other cats breathed a sigh of relief, panting, “Rule number one: Never! Ever! Open basket when hitching ride on road in China!” Li-Li hissed at Shoe and every cat settled down in the basket to resume their catnap.

The scooter comes to a full stop at the stone archway leading up to the Shaolin Temple. The cats wait patiently until the young woman dismounts her vehicle and leaves for the Tagou Kung-fu School, located below the Shaolin Temple. When it was all clear, Li-Li opened the basket lid and all the cats hopped out one by one. They scurried over to a tree to hide themselves from the prying eyes of the humans. Many humans from all over the world come to visit this place. They find the Shaolin Temple beautiful and is a place of peace and tranquility. The cats scurried under the feet of humans, bypassing the toll gates, ticket checks, and head into the grounds of the Kung-fu school where humans have been practicing their skills in an open playground in front of a massive building. Li-Li and the others watched attentively at humans practicing where she explained what they were doing.

“Wow!” exclaimed Shoe. “I didn’t know humans learned this stuff.”

“My great-grandmaster told me every martial arts skill is invented by animals, silly,” Li-Li replied proudly. “Even insects have invented kung-fu.”

Dmitri asked, “What kind of insects? Better yet, what are insects?”

Li-Li bursted out into a meowy laugh, “Insects? Bugs, things like fly. Things that bite through your fur. Things that buzz, like the bees that make us like we are. Things that crawl on the ground even below our paws! Like mantis here.”

Li-Li shows a praying mantis upon a tree shrub, camouflaged in the greens of the tree leaves. Its long, lanky front legs together in a human prayer-like position, as Dmitri and his brothers watch closely without interrupting it, Li-Li explains, "You see, it seems like it is a gentle insect minding its own business, but in reality, it's a very agile, natural assassin. Watch this!"

A nearby fly was sitting on a very thin branch not suspecting that the mantis is stalking it. The mantis slowly moved closer and closer, as if preparing for an ambush. Close enough to the fly, his front legs lunged at it and totally disabling it with its razor sharp spikes on its legs at a blink of a cat's eye. Dmitri, Vitaliy and Shoe witnessed the split second swipe with total awe.

"Whoa! That was cool!" Dmitri exclaimed.

"I never thought an insect so small could strike so fast!" Vitaliy agreed while watching the praying mantis eat the fly alive in its grasp.

Li-Li's almond shaped yellow eyes light up, on her diamond shaped head with her toothy grin, she accepts the compliments proudly, "All animals, even humans have natural energy force called chi, it gives us power and will to survive the most terrible of battles, even when the odds are stacked against us."

The cats saunter away from the kung- fu school and pass a lake not far from there. It was peaceful and beautiful. Plenty of wild lotus flowers of pinks and whites, adorn the clean, bright blue body of water on a sunny day. Frogs hop happily from lily pad to lily pad. An adult crane stands near the water line, catching any small fish that swam near it. The cats watch and admire curiously from a distance as the crane displays her graceful stance. On one leg, wings spread fully about the length of a small car. "Even the crane helped us invent Kung-fu." Li-Li mentions. "All animals helped. The grace of the crane, the cunning of the mantis, the patience of the snake, the silliness of monkey, the focus of the dragon, ... and you would be very surprised that even cats helped."

"Cats?"

"Not cats as small as us, but our bigger feline cousins. The strength and power of the tiger, and the speed and stamina of the leopard are very well known for their deadly paw strikes and fighting strategy, like this." Li-Li channels her anima and delivers a right paw strike to Shoe's head that sent him rolling into a puddle of water nearby, he quickly flipped himself out of the water and ran for dry ground. Dmitri and Vitaliy meowed laughing at him.

"HEY! WHAT WAS THAT FOR?" Shoe growled angrily and shook his head as he cleaned himself off with his paws sitting down under a flower..

"For being silly, silly!" Li-Li replied, "You best listen well in front of Great-grandmaster Shang-Lao and the other masters. He not take kindly to wandering minds." Li-Li looked up at the darkening evening sky as the sun had almost left the horizon. "We must get to the Shaolin Temple, Shang-Lao waits patiently for us there!"

It had seemed like they have been forever travelling on their paws, the road to the Shaolin Temple had been very long. All of this talk about all the animals who made this martial art so great, it built great morale for the kitties to look more forward to reaching their destination and get to work on building their strength for their biggest challenge to come. Dmitri was curious to know everything he could.

"Just how many great-grandmasters are there, or is Shang-Lao the only one?"

"Five. The great-grandmaster and grandmasters before him are descendants of the first five animals who came together and made Kung-fu many, many centuries ago. There were other animals thought it was so cool, they too wanted to learn from the great grandmaster, and moved on to make their own fighting style." Li-Li answered as they came before a couple of bluestone lions facing the south, safeguarding the temple.

"We're here!" Li said as they came to the stone lions, "The mountain gates are this way, hurry! Before any humans see us!" They ran through the mountain gates and entered the courtyard between the Hall of Buddha Trinity and the Scripture Hall. Dmitri, Vitaliy and Shoe explored along the marvels of the majestic wonders of the Temple. Vibrant colors of reds, greens and blues glowed so bright along the outside walls of buildings, it cut through the dusk easily. Li-Li found a place to rest and eat some noms underneath the steps leading to Scripture Hall. The cats will have to stealthily hunt the old fashioned way at night, when the human monks are asleep, and before they meet Shang-Lao. It's not exactly the pet bed luxuries that they have in their forever homes in Ealdwic or St. Petersburg. For now, this will have to do, and get as much shuteye as they can, for they will soon meet the one who would teach them the ways of the animals when pitch dark falls.

The Temple grew very quiet. All the gongs ceased for the night, all the human movement have stopped for the time being, and now the courtyard belongs to the animals in the moonlight. Mice was the evening meal for the kitties, but Li-Li said that they would have to hunt outside the Temple, because all life is sacred inside the temple walls, food or not, so she was told, and killing prey within the grounds is not permitted.

They ate their mousey noms in silence for the sake of enjoyment as observed in Li-Li's culture. Any noise of chatter, Li-Li would paw them on the head as a gesture to shut up. A shrill roar was heard from a distance below their lodging. They perked their ears up and Li-Li looked out as the rest of the cats ate their last bit of mouse.

"He's here!" Li-Li whispered, and all of them hurried to the main courtyard of the Temple. The male kitties look around but couldn't seem to see the great grandmaster figure that they heard so much about.

"I don't see anything! Do you?" asked Shoe to his brothers.

A strong vibration is felt on the ground that something big is approaching near the cats. They look around the courtyard, indecisive to be eager to meet whatever is coming at them, or deathly afraid and ready to run away in total fear. Around the side bend of the Scripture Hall, the moonlight casts a shadow of a vast, four legged figure. Perhaps maybe twenty or thirty times the size of the four kittens combined. Li-Li felt this presence before, she knows her great-grandmaster has come. Shoe looked around cautiously, but curiously he follows the new scent with his nose and moves backwards and stops at the gargantuan paws about the size of his whole feline body. Shoe looked up to be face to face with bright tiger eyes, and whiskers that looked like spears. Unable to stifle a meow or a hiss, the tiger exhaled through his nose that sent Shoe tumbling forward into Li-Li and his awestruck brothers who also stood a distance before the majestic figure. Shang-Lao has arrived.

Shang-Lao towers over the four kittens in his regal sitting stance. Li-Li crouches her body low to the ground and slowly bows her head as a gesture of respect for her mentor. Her Russian Blue comrades are still frozen like little statues they are so much in awe about Shang-Lao, gasping over the size of the great-grandmaster who would be teaching them. They certainly didn't expect an important figure this... big. "Bow, you fools," Li-Li whispered to them in hopes of breaking them from their frozen state, and the Chinese Li Hua placed a paw on the three brothers to assist them in bowing and crouching low before Shang-Lao while still shaking in their fur. Li-Li returns to her spot to bow before her mentor and opens dialogue with Shang-Lao.

"Greetings, Shang-Lao.
Descendant of the first five animals of Kung-fu.
Great grandmaster of all grandmasters.
We fully submit to your strength and wisdom."

Satisfied with Li-Li's open courtesy, Shang-Lao roared. He circled slowly behind the three brothers, as if he appeared to be measuring them up, and sniffed each kitten, starting with Dmitri, then Vitaliy, and Shoe was the last. Shang-Lao returns to his regal stance, and roared again.

"I sense strength in you, little ones," the great-grandmaster roared. "But I also sense much weakness. Weakness is very elusive thing which stalks its prey and hides itself deep within the very core of our chi. Stalking. Moving so fast from place to place within ourselves, we cannot see it. Hiding. Watching. Waiting. To strike your strength down to nothing in a split second when your back is turned."

"Fear, doubt, pride, anger, impatience, ineptitude, even pain. All are natural agents of weakness. To become a master of the paw. You must first master your heads. Only there, may you find it and strike it down before it does. However, you will not learn the ways of the grandmasters here, far too many prying eyes of the humans should they be roused. Come, let us leave them to their slumber. Your first lesson begins at the next stop." With one swish of his tail, he motions the cats to climb up the tail and onto his back, and set off through the mountain gates, past the stone lions, out of the temple and through the mountainous forest.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN: The Way of the Leopard: Zhou

The Pagoda Forest:

Great-grandmaster Shang-Lao leaped over the stone fence with the kittens on his back, and sauntered through the forest. It was a vast, and sacred place, but instead of green trees, with leaves and blossoms, there were trees of pure stone. Hard. Cold. Stone. Dmitri, Vitaliy and Shoe looked around as they rode, marveling at the quiet stone pagodas wondering to themselves, if the forest was even alive or dead.

"A forest made of stone, Great-grandmaster?" Dmitri asked with curiosity, this place looks spooky yet it is a place of serenity, he thought to himself.

"Not all forests are green with blossoms and leaves," Shang-Lao replied. "These are the graves of humans who defended the Shaolin Temple many centuries ago from the evils who sought to destroy them. They endured many difficult battles, the humans fought with nothing but their hands and feet, while the enemy fashioned weapons out of sticks and metals, and the Shaolin humans prevailed. These humans buried here were our students and masters of our ways. Long ago, humans watched us from a distance, studying how we think and fight. And in time, even they too emanated our skills and mastered the five ways of the animals. They still do in the present and taught our ways to their young for countless generations."

Shang-Lao stopped at the tallest pagoda and he swished with his tail, as a sign for the cats to get off his back. They jumped down landing on all fours, and walked around the stone grave, looking up so high, they almost fell backwards, the pagoda was so tall. Shang-Lao approached the edge of the pagoda forest out to the mountains as he commanded in a roar.

"Step forth, Grandmaster Zhou." From the mountain range overlooking the stone forest, a leopard dashes out from the trees and pauses full stop before the majestic tiger. He bows respectfully to Shang-Lao and turns his gaze to the four kittens who also bow before Grandmaster Zhou. Li-Li begins by reciting her opening salutation.

"Greetings Grandmaster Zhou.
Descendant of the five animals of Kung-fu.
Grandmaster of the Way of the Leopard.
We fully submit to your agility and precision."

The Way of the Leopard Grandmaster Zhou snarls and brings forth his two best students. Leopard twin male cubs, Zhi and Zhang approach the cats and sniff each one. Studying their chi carefully. Shoe was the first to be sniffed and they turn to each other, communicating in growls, then Vitaliy and Dmitri. The cubs return and bow to their grandmaster and give their initial impressions.

"Easy pickings on the second and third one, but maybe not the youngest one, he has potential." Zhang reports.

"I agree. But even with the help of Li-Li, I can still take them all on in one fell strike." Zhi added. As they were listening, Dmitri and Vitaliy took their impressions as an insult and growled and hissed at the two leopard cubs who were three times their size. Grandmaster Zhou glared at the two angry kittens, and Zhi and Zhang turned around to face them.

"Is that a challenge? We shall graciously accept!" Zhang roared and took himself and his twin brother cub to a clearing away from the stone pagodas and wait patiently for their little

opponents. Grandmaster Zhou directs Dmitri and Vitaliy with his paw while Li-Li facepawed over their insolence, "Fools!" she whispered. Li-Li tried to sneak away from the leopard grandmaster and approach the battleground to give Dmitri and Vitaliy a paw, but Great-grandmaster Shang-Lao roars in disapproval, forcing Li-Li to obey and back away from them.

The fight was very quick and barely a challenge for the leopard cubs, but a hard, painful lesson for Dmitri and Vitaliy. The cubs' speed of their angular paw strikes, and hit and run tactics proved too much for Dmitri and Vitaliy. If Great-grandmaster Shang-Lao hadn't given the roar to break the fight, and if Grandmaster Zhou hadn't pulled the cubs away from them, Dmitri and Vitaliy would have been easily killed. Luckily, very luckily for their anima, they heal their wounds quicker. Under a small pavilion in the pouring rain, near the stone pagodas, The kittens lay in the middle while Dmitri and Vitaliy tend to their wounds.

"Ugh, I could have sworn Zhang just showed me my own jugular! Meeeyowch!" He squealed in pain as he licked his wounds to his side. "OW! Shoe! Easy brother! Ow! That hurt!" He cried as Shoe was attending to the gash to his hind leg when Li-Li raced to get out of the rain and approached the steps of the pavilion. She looked over at Dmitri and Vitaliy, completely ashamed of their actions which brought them to their condition.

"You fools! What were you thinking?" Li-Li hissed. "Challenging Zhi and Zhang like that? You could have easily had your nine lives killed off in an instant!"

Dmitri winced as he licked his own wounds, "They insulted us, Li-Li. You heard them! They called us easy pickings! We Russian felines are not that. We are strong."

"Not strong enough to overcome speed and precision of two leopard cubs? They know when and where to strike!" Li-Li retorts as she pointed with paw to all the wounds sustained in their brief sparring match. "Your anger got best of both of you!"

"Did not!" Dmitri snapped back.

"Did so!" Li-Li shot back.

"Did not!" Vitaliy hissed in Dmitri's defense.

"Did so!" Li-Li hissed back at both of them.

"DID NOT!" Dmitri and Vitaliy growled.

"SILENCE!" Great-grandmaster Shang-Lao roared, carrying into the wind and echoes through the mountains and the cats cowered before him. "Li-Li is correct, little one. Your pride in your strength was challenged and allowed anger to claw you from behind like a panther in the night. Clear your minds, let us meditate to reflect our lesson for tonight. Before we move on to the next journey." The cats have all sat together in a pile and meditated about their lesson. Poor Dmitri and Vitaliy were too sore and too pained to concentrate. Later that night, when all the kittens were asleep under the shield of the pavilion. The pouring rainfall had stopped. Dmitri and Vitaliy were awakened again by the twin leopard cubs. Zhang gently pawed the two older brothers, Vitaliy slowly woke up, but Dmitri didn't take their rousing very kindly. "We smaller cats don't like to be interrupted in our sleep!" Dmitri snapped at Zhang. Zhang pulled back his paw at the grumpy Dmitri and replied, "Grandmaster Zhou wishes to see you all, now." The kittens yawned and stretched their legs as they followed the twin cubs to see Grandmaster Zhou by the tallest pagoda of the entire stone forest. The night was in pitch darkness, the felines were thankful for

their uncanny night vision as their eyes adjusted quickly. On the way there to see him, they could see the luminous dancing of fireflies around them. A brilliant sight to see, but serves as a slight distraction from the pain and soreness Dmitri and Vitaliy endured at the paws of little Zhi and Zhang. Li-Li picked up her pace as she met Grandmaster Zhou at the tallest pagoda of the whole stone forest as the three brothers followed. Grandmaster Zhou sat tall in the front of the pagoda and studied each of the kittens with great ease in pitch darkness. The only source of light were the fireflies flying about their business.

"It is written in the laws of nature. The smallest always suffers from the one who is bigger. Stronger. Quicker. More cunning. You little ones are against all odds here. You would not survive in these great lands without the proper teaching and discipline. Not even that your natural defenses would save you when you come face to face with your most deadly enemies. Even the smallest of all, would have an advantage against you," Grandmaster Zhou growled as he went face to face close up with Shoe who was quivering with fright in his presence as he gave his opening lecture. Grandmaster Zhou then motioned with his paw over to a clearing surrounded by smaller pagodas, "A small reward for the one who brings me a firefly by your paws. Go. Now!" Grandmaster Zhou commanded and sends the four little ones with Zhi and Zhang, to catch a feisty firefly in the dead of night. In the clearing, there were so many fireflies that the kittens thought that they were invaded by a swarm of them. All four of them set out and tried to catch a firefly. They were so quick as they buzzed past their heads, buzzed under their bellies, and buzzed past their tails behind them. Dmitri was nearly exhausted for trying so hard to catch one, that he nearly tumbled into a shrub from flailing his paws so much. Dmitri shook himself off from his tumble and then he felt something nip at his scruff and was carried off to the side in a split second. "Hey!" meowed Dmitri as he looked up behind him and his nose was nearly at the face of Great Grandmaster Shang-Lao. Dmitri lowered his head quickly in a slight bit of shame thinking that he had disrespected him. Great-Grandmaster looked at him and roared above him, "Why for block, when you can strike?" Then Shang-Lao motioned with his paw for Dmitri to try his paw again at the legion of fireflies flying about. Dmitri considered his words carefully, and looked out into the clearing where Zhi and Zhang were making short work out of the fireflies, ducking and striking them down, catching them with their paws. Dmitri regained his courage with a deep breath and set out into the clearing like a hunter. Dmitri sat patiently waiting for a firefly to show itself near him. One flew at his head, Dmitri ducked out of the way, and struck at him with his paw, but he missed as it dodged and flew away. Another one swarmed at his backside, and Dmitri flipped over like an acrobat and attempts to strike it furiously with his paws as the firefly buzzed near its ears. Perhaps he was too impatient and desperate to catch one too quickly, he thought to himself. Dmitri then decided that it was time to change to another tactic without Grandmaster Zhou roaring down the fur of his neck or Great-grandmaster Shang-Lao nipping at his scruff. While his younger siblings and Li-Li were busy on the other side of the field, Dmitri sat there minding his own business. Watching. Waiting. Then he licked his paws clean, and scratched behind his ears, washed his whiskers with his dampened paws just like any cat grooming while keeping his ears and eyes focused on the fireflies. A big firefly that glowed more brighter than the others buzzed near Dmitri's face. "I will have you!" Dmitri growled to the firefly as he flipped back, landing on his hind paws barely touching the cool blades of grass and with one swift paw strike, the firefly dropped to the ground and Dmitri pounced on him in the final

takedown. The bright glow of the firefly was burning Dmitri's paws beneath in a desperate attempt to escape from under him. "I got one! I got one!" Dmitri meowed as the others came running towards him. Grandmaster Zhou followed behind the leopard cubs, and growled for Dmitri to remove his paws from the ground that was pinning his catch. Dmitri slowly removed his paws one by one and all the kittens and leopards bore witness to Dmitri's achievement. A big firefly glowing so bright that it illuminated their faces in the night. Dmitri's catch had earned him the respect of the night, even from the leopard cubs were very impressed as they looked down at the firefly.

"A catch well done!" Zhi said then turns to face Grandmaster Zhou, "Does this satisfy the grandmaster?"

Grandmaster Zhou chuckled as he smiled with his eyes and twitched his whiskers while examining the fly, "I am satisfied! Dmitri, little one, you have done well. Now I believe that it is time that you have earned your reward."

Dmitri eyes light up as he looks up at Grandmaster Zhou, waiting eagerly and curiously wondering about his reward.

"You have demonstrated the way of the leopard satisfactory, grasshopper Dmitri. You may now eat the firefly," Grandmaster Zhou declares as the younger cats chuckled behind him.

"Wow! I'm so honoured to receive this huh-whoa-whoa-what?" Dmitri asked with surprise as he turned to face each of the cats around him.

"You may now eat the firefly. As you cats say it in the West, Bon Appetit!" Grandmaster Zhou replied.

As the rest of the cats gasped and chuckled in silence at Dmitri, Shoe batted his paw at his brother Vitaliy.

"I thought it was Приятного аппетита, brother?"

"Shut up, Shoe!" hissed Vitaliy to his little brother and dismissed his silly observation with his paw, as he watches his eldest brother do the deed of respect to the elders of Kung-fu. This he had to see.

Dmitri grew very hesitant as he looked down at the firefly that used to glow so bright that is now dead, as he looked around and gulped to find his peers who haven't taken their eyes off him, waiting patiently, like he was expected to eat his catch. Li-Li bowed and excused herself in front of the Grandmaster to grab Dmitri by the scruff with her paws and flipped backwards into a tumble together, ending with Li-Li pinning Dmitri on his back and whispered angrily in his ear.

"It is custom to eat your catch in front of Grandmaster, and enjoy it as a token of respect! To not eat is disrespectful and an insult to the elders, especially to Great-Grandmaster! Now eat and show appreciation!" Li-Li released Dmitri of her pin and pawed him back to the dead firefly.

Dmitri reluctantly looked down at his catch and he moved closer to pick it up with his tongue and began to chew on it. He had never eaten bugs before. Not even in St. Petersburg that he had ever thought of eating such things. Dmitri would rather have a morsel of kitty snacks out of a bag, but for now this will have to do. He picked up the dead insect and chewed on his firefly, breaking it down with his tongue. It tasted a little bit stringy at first in his mouth, it might have been the one of the wings he crunched on, licking his chops and chewing some more. Then the

taste went from crunchy to juicy. He realized that he had broken down the body of the firefly. He was unsure of how to describe the taste of fly innards. It sure wasn't citrusy, sweet and sour or spicy and sour flavored. It had a warm, bland, unflavorful taste in his mouth. Dmitri's peers were watching him, studying how he reacts to the different textures, tastes, and witnessing the ritual done with the final swallow.

"Well, whattaya think?" asked his brother Vitaliy with curiosity.

Dmitri continues to lick his chops as he tries to speak, "Mmrph, nom, nomph, om-nommmph, tastes like... like chicken!"

The kittens, leopard cubs and the Grandmaster looked at each other and began to laugh. They rolled around on the ground in laughter, as they had never heard of that idea before.

Grandmaster Zhou rolled from side to side and laid on the grass relaxing from his good laugh. "Grasshopper Dmitri, I have never heard of such a response like that in my entire life. Though your token of respect paid to the grandmasters of Kung-fu pleases me." Grandmaster Zhou rises to his all fours and saunters over to the pagoda where Great-Grandmaster Shang-Lao looks on and gives a roar of approval. Signalling that the lesson of the Way of the Leopard is finished. Grandmaster Shang-Lao roars with Zhou and commanded.

"Go now and play leisurely with your new friends, little ones. And as we leave here soon, be sure to remember your lessons well."

Then all was well and silent in the night at the Pagoda Forest where all was heard was the rustling of running paws in the shrubs, tall grasses and trees nearby. Meowy laughter from all the younger kittens and cubs, as they were happily playing a kung-fu version of tag into early dawn while the two grandmasters watched.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN: The Way of the Crane: Mei-Xiu

Jiuzhaigou National Park, Sichuan, Northern China

Great-grandmaster Shang-Lao travelled northeast from the Pagoda Forest. It has been a long journey, traveling for days, it seemed like forever to the cats. The kittens were sound asleep on the tiger's back. The tiger's balance and graceful jumps over mountain rocks and fallen trees haven't fazed them from their sleep, a smooth ride so far. At the paws, the solid ground in which Shang-Lao travelled, had gradually turned to shallow water. They are almost there. The ponds of Jianzhaigou stretched out as far as the cat's eyes can see. Truly magnificent. The crystal clear water, blue as the skies, breathtaking waterfalls, lakes and rivers they had passed. The backdrop of the snow-capped peaks near the Tibetan border, forest lands of greens made the scenery a colorful spectacle. Pandas hanging and nomming on the leaves on the trees and bamboo sticks of the groves bowed before Shang-Lao as he passed by them, for their ancestors were students in the ways and created their own brand of fighting. Several species of birds flew overhead and the golden monkeys bowed as they swung from tree to tree, following the path of the tiger and the cats on his back. The takin looked on with curiosity in the dense thickets and the bamboo groves they share with the pandas, but did not pay the feline visitors no mind. Shang-Lao sniffed the clean, crisp, early morning air as the sun rises, he stops at some damp ground outlining several shallow ponds and drops the cats to its feet. Li-Li yawns

and stretches her legs in a feline version of the yoga downward dog pose. The thin water line under Dmitri and Vitaliy's paws was very strange to them, Dmitri shakes his paws trying to get used to the watery texture. Vitaliy squealed and scurries off onto drier ground.

"The pond isn't that deep, silly!" Li-Li meowed.

"Cats hate water! I hate water! You should hate water too" Vitaliy hissed as he cowers on a dry patch of sand trying to find an alternate way to reach his brothers.

"Not all cats hate water, you dummy! Look at your brother over there, he's actually swimming in it." Li-Li shot back at the scaredy cat Vitaliy.

Dmitri was leg joints deep in the blue pond water, the surface just touching his under belly.

"Come on, Brother! The water is fine! Nice and warm."

Shoe was looking down at his reflection in the water, and was curious to see himself, as if it was a mirror, he touches it with his paws and suddenly steps back as it made ripples. "I think this water is not a threat to us. It's too shallow for us to drown."

Vitaliy stops looking down at the water surface, ruffled his scruff and glares at his youngest brother. "How can you say something like that?" Vitaliy growled. "Have you forgotten Mama's story about the great feline tragedy in Kingsmouth?"

"No I haven't forgotten that! And besides, they were killed in a sea, not in a pond." Shoe answered.

"Sea, rivers, lakes, oceans, whatever! They look and feel the same as this pond! You must tread lightly, brothers! For we all might suffer the same fate as Dolly, Ponch and Friday!" Vitaliy warned.

"Here we go again!" Li-Li meowed as she sits back and watches the argument unfold between her Russian Blue comrades.

"Sea, rivers, lakes and oceans are much deeper than these ponds!" Shoe growled.

"Very impossible for them to defend themselves while bounded in a sack!" Dmitri shot back at Vitaliy.

"Besides, those kittens were catnapped and murdered by a human. Some humans can be evil to us animals. To any animal. Mama said so. Did you truly believe that those kittens are that stupid to go there by themselves? How do you think they got there?" Shoe retorted to support Dmitri's argument.

Li-Li listens from the edge of another cluster of ponds as she licks herself clean and shakes her head, "You're afraid of water, aren't ya?" she asked Vitaliy.

Vitaliy looked at her and snarled as he places his paws in the water hesitantly, "What? Don't be silly Li, I'm not afraid. I'm not afraid of anything. I'm the third born kitten of Alexei Maximyevich and Natasha Tiggerovna. I am strong like bear."

"Then why are you hesitating?" Li-Li asked with a wiggle of her whiskers.

"Am not!" Vitaliy squealed.

"Are so!"

"I am not!"

"You are so."

"AM NOT!"

“SILENCE! Not this again! Not a meow out of any of you or it’s a hundred claw strikes off the bamboo trees. Is that clear?” Shang-Lao roared as he turns his head to the west of the ponds and catches a scent of presence. “She is here!”

Shang-Lao sits back and roars out his command. “Step forth, Grandmaster Mei-Xiu!”

A tall, white crane glided low from its flight and landed gracefully onto its feet. Mei Xiu approached through the ponds as if she was a human diva on a fashion runway. Her long, slender legs and webbed feet tread through the water without any fear. She is master of the ponds. The nearby cranes that feed and build their nests here are within her family for generations. She approaches the felines and lowers her long, strong beak to the great-grandmaster acknowledging honour and respect. She swims for a small distance and stands tall and elegant again, to stretch out her wings up to the gleaming skies, revealing her beautiful, long wingspan of white and black colors which carries up to seven feet at full spread. The little felines bow their heads and crouch low at the feet of this grandmaster.

“Greetings, Grandmaster Mei-Xiu.

Descendant of the five animals of Kung-fu.

Grandmaster of the Way of the Crane.

We fully submit to your grace and balance.”

Mei Xiu bows her head, satisfied with the token of respect, and trumpets to the waterfall behind her. Two juvenile female cranes, Mei-Lin and Mei-Xi, emerge to the shore from the pond to join their grandmaster, who are also her students in the way of the crane. They bow gracefully before Shang-Lao and the kittens, and they turned to face each other. Mei-Xiu dips her beak into the muddy shoreline and catches some worms in her beak. She places them in the middle of the two juvenile cranes who were about to face other in a little sparring match. Grandmaster Mei-Xiu blares out yet another trumpet while spreading her wings, and the two little cranes battle it out. Their moves as ones so young were graceful, yet smooth and explosive altogether. To be a crane is to become the envy of the animal kingdom. Patient. Elegant. Graceful. Mei-Xi opens with an attack with her beak. Mei-Xi opens up with a chop down - flick technique. She squawks wildly and catches her partner’s beak with her wing and strikes it down out of the way, catching Mei-Lin off guard. Quickly, Mei-Xi uses that same wing to flick her opponent to the top of her head sending Mei-Lin back, flapping her wings furiously to keep herself balanced on the pond.

Now for the demonstration of the beak. Mei-Xi attempts a forward beak strike to Mei-Lin’s head. Mei-Lin squawks and flaps her wings as she blocks the attack with her beak and using her own, she strikes Mei-Xi in the head. After another round of step sparring, now comes the block down - rapid wing attack. Mei-Xi squawks as she attempts to beak strike Mei-Lin. Mei-Lin blocks down with her beak and explodes into her opponent with a flurry of wing strikes to her head and eyes. Grandmaster Mei-Xiu trumpets again to end the sparring demonstration, and the juvenile cranes turn to each other to bow in respect and face the kittens to join them in a little lesson of crane movements.

Mei-Xiu couldn't help but squawk into somewhat of a laugh in the presence of the Shang-Lao regally sitting at the shore watching the practice, she says, "Since you have four legs, and we have two wings and two legs, I guess my students have a slight advantage." Dmitri and Shoe looked at their paws curiously. "Having said that, and this is the way of the crane, your front paws should become the wings and your hind legs become the legs."

"But Grandmaster? We can't stand on our hind legs!" cried Shoe.

Vitaliy tries to stand on his hind legs for a few seconds and lands on his fours back down, "This is a little difficult for kitties like us."

"But we've seen little dogs do this all this time. They stand like this, then they twirl round and round, and they stop and the human gives them noms for a good show!" Dmitri mentions as he falls over in an effort to twirl.

Li-Li stands on her back legs and walks a little bit around the kittens, then rests, then back on her hind legs again, "It's not that hard when you practice, Vitaliy."

Grandmaster Mei-Xiu observes the kittens taking on the crane stance briefly and she is pleased with their curious enthusiasm, "Well done, little fur ones, now to master the most important strike of the way. The crane kick."

She gestures with her wings to call back Mei-Xi and Mei-Lin to the front of the watching kittens. Mei-Xi stands on one leg, with her wings spread out and flapping. "Beautiful!" shrieks Shoe as he watches her gracefully hold her form. She continues this stance as the grandmaster explains, "There are four important elements of this kick," she added. "One - misdirection. When you see Mei-Lin like this, what do you think she will do?"

"Strike me with her wing?" Shoe answered.

Grandmaster Mei-Xiu shakes her head.

"Kick me with her bent leg?" Dmitri answered after Shoe.

Grandmaster Mei-Xiu shakes her head again. "No, you must look harder."

Vitaliy pondered the question and decided to wing it, "Hit me with her beak?"

Li-Li facepaws and studies the crane stance carefully, then she concludes, "I think you are all wrong."

"Li-Li, I'm most surprised at you, you are most experienced than all the others, what do you think Mei-Lin will do?" Mei-Xiu asked.

"Ahh, she will kick with the leg she's standing on!" Li-Li interjected.

Grandmaster Mei-Xiu flaps her wings, satisfied with Li-Li's answer, "Splendid! By becoming the crane, you will make your opponent think too much by looking what is above, and not what is below. Yes, we are most beautiful and charismatic from the head to the torso, but we are deadly on our legs and feet. Second element - Blind rage." Mei-Lin still demonstrating her crane stance, "You would want to make your opponent so angry, it will want to charge at you beak first - or nose first for you furry ones," Mei-Xiu explains and calls forth her student. Mei-Lin, demonstrate the second element of the crane kick."

Mei-Lin was still on one leg and flapping her wings, and she picks one of the kittens from the shore to egg on. So she chooses Dmitri. "So you wanna be stronger? You're going to have to get through me, furry face! We fine feathered ones are much more graceful than you, shrimp, look at you, you got four feet!"

"You will pay for that!" Dmitri hissed and growled and charged to pounce at her. Li-Li quickly got to her fours and dashed a few steps and leaped for Dmitri to get him out of the way before Mei-Lin winded up for a swift crane kick to the kitty behind. Mei-Lin looked at the cats with surprise as the two ran through the water.

"My student had barely begun to taunt you and you went in for the charge? You are strong enough to stand up for yourself and fight, but you are not strong enough to control yourself, little one." Grandmaster Mei-Xiu lectures Dmitri and then bows to Shang-Lao watching from a hilltop near the shore, "Perhaps Grandmaster Qing-Xiao teach him a lesson when you meet with him, Great-Grandmaster!"

"In due time, Grandmaster Mei-Xiu, but for now they must focus on the training of the present." Shang-Lao replied.

"Indeed, Great-Grandmaster! Now, the third element of the crane kick is balance. Our personal favorite." Mei-Xiu gracefully glides over to a log on top of the water's surface, long enough for the four cats. "To have great balance, you must first find your proper center of grounding. You must find it and plant your claws firmly into the ground. Only then, nothing can move you. Nothing. Not even the wind could knock you over. Balance is key. Balance is good. Make the way of the crane good. Last element is energy. Notice how Mei-Lin is flapping her wings? She is focusing on her chi, sending it from her wings to her beak, to her torso and lastly to her deadly kicking leg. Also don't forget to trumpet when you do the kick. Oh, I forgot you don't have beaks, but you can growl or roar like Great-Grandmaster." Mei-Xiu points to the log with her wing, "Now let's all get up on these logs and practice our balance!"

Grandmaster Mei-Xiu scoops up the kittens one by one and places them on the log with each other before taking leave to join Shang-Lao in conversation. Dmitri with Shoe, Li-Li with Vitaliy, and Mei-Lin with Mei-Xi. All in one long log. The cats have tried to balance with their one leg, but they kept stumbling. Dmitri, Shoe and Li-Li have compensated their crane form with both hind legs firmly planted on the bark of the log and extending their front paws mimicking the wings. Vitaliy was so unfocused, he was too busy concentrating on how deep the water was underneath and not on his practice.

"C'mon you scaredy cat, stop looking down at the pond and focus on your crane stance!" Li-Li growled.

Vitaliy turned to focus on the cats doing well in their practicing, so he weakly got up on his hind legs while looking at them and not down. Good. Now for the paws. "C'mon, you can do this, I am strong. I want to beat up the rat who took my sister," he muttered to himself as he pushed up with his hind legs, and slowly but awkwardly steadied his front paws to copy the flapping wings of the two juvenile cranes next to him. Finally, he had done. How his mama and papa would be able to see them now. They would be so proud of them. Vitaliy pounced for joy, for once not thinking of the water underneath the log he was standing on, then his claws didn't catch the bark and slipped and fell into the water. Vitaliy scrambling with his paws to grab hold of the log before he went down again. "HELP! I CAN'T SWIM!" His brothers and Li-Li watched in horror as Vitaliy hissed and meowed for help. Wishing that they would have hands like humans, they would have made a line, and Dmitri would have grabbed hold of him.

"Oh no, not another tragedy like Kingsmouth!" cried Dmitri.

“Claw onto the log, pull yourself up, Brother!” meowed Shoe.

Vitaliy couldn't hear the yells of his brother, Shoe, he was so afraid of water, and so desperate to get out of it, that he exhausted himself and the water sucked him in. The cats mewed for the Grandmaster, but she was nowhere to be seen.

Assuming that Vitaliy was near drowning, Mei-Xi and Mei-Lin jumped off the log and into the water to assist the cats in find him. And they need to find him fast. A sign of a tail, a whisker, anything. They trumpeted most loudly for Grandmaster Mei-Xiu that it echoed many times through the park in between dipping their beaks and their calling for help. Mei-Xiu was seen overhead, flapping her wings powerfully and running on her long, gracefully, so close to the water and landed on the log without any disturbance to cause the other cats to fall in. She jumped in the water, the surface just touching past her feet, desperately dipped her beak into the water. The two other younger cranes joined in finding Vitaliy, and Mei-Xiu gave one last squawk and scooped Vitaliy out of the water with her long beak, and onto the log. Poor Vitaliy, fur all drenched and whiskers all in disarray, he hugged the log belly sprawled out first with his paws, wheezing, sneezing, gasping for air and gagging as his brothers and Li-Li patted him on his spine with their paws, licking Vitaliy clean of all the excess water that soaked his very feline self. Great-Grandmaster Shang-Lao heard the commotion and ran to see what was happening with the cats.

“Vitaliy! Vitaliy, speak to me! Brother! Please say you're okay!” Dmitri mewed.

Vitaliy coughs a bit more and looks up at Dmitri.

“He's alive! He's alive! Holy cats, brother, that was so cool, you were swimming in the water like a pro!” Shoe exclaimed as he was patting his brother on his back. Dmitri smacked Shoe on the head with his paw and Li-Li did a facepaw and shook her head, “Shoe you are such a silly kitty!” she said. If cats could ever do a double facepaw, Li-Li would have done it by now.

“It seems that much was learned today for young kitten, Vitaliy. You have learned the way of the crane and learned to confront your fears.” Shang-Lao stared into Vitaliy eyes.

“Nice going Vitaliy!” Dmitri congratulates.

“Well,” Vitaliy said as he sneezed, “I really did good have I?”

The Grandmaster Mei-Xiu had some words of wisdom, “For one thing, you have achieved a lot during your visit here. You had walked, you had fought, you have stood and breathed like us white cranes. You and after all those good things, you will all live a long, peaceful life. Go now and journey through the next way. However, I must warn you little ones, the next way will be much more perilous.”

The kittens bowed in respect to Mei-Xiu's presence and climbed on the back of Shang-Lao to continue their journey of the five way to the east.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN: The Way of the Snake, Or Is It?

Near Emeishan Mountains, Sichuan Province, China

The long road to the next way was bumpy and rugged. Shang-Lao travelled through the rocky and grassy hillsides climbed to Mount Emei, his brilliant night vision not missing any detail that would endanger him or the precious feline cargo on his back. A beautiful sunset of deep purple wash over the seaside as the sun waves goodbye until another dawn. The massive paws

of the great grandmaster had taken him to the western slopes crossing over a wooden bridge walk. It was very sturdy, and not a creak was heard through the trek. Along the way to the pavilion to meet the next grandmaster, who is a cobra snake, he had met the macaques hanging around the fence lines in twos and threes, some with their young, they had bowed in his regal presence, and looked on what is on his back with curiosity, before he passed by. The Guangfu pavilion awaits near the summit. They are unable to go to the summit proper, because of humans practicing their ways at the temple above. The kittens were assured that it is a place of great divine beauty and serenity. Following a walking trail leading to the pavilion shared by the humans, Shang-Lao swishes with his tail signalling the kittens to get off. The looked around at the surrounding majesty of the mountainside and Shang-Lao directed them to the middle of the pavilion, where Shang-Lao announces his presence and summons the next grandmaster.

“Step forth, Grandmaster Wong-Ho!” Shang-Lao commanded.

The air pounded as it echoed in the wind as if a gong was nearby and Grandmaster Wong-Ho was nowhere to be seen slithering below his paws. Surely, this must be the right place, Shang-Lao thought, as every feline had waited patiently, he commands again.

“Step forth, Grandmaster Wong-Ho!” Shang-Lao commanded again.

Not a single slither, nor a hiss, warning of his presence. Shang-Lao was puzzled and looked around the pavilion, perhaps Grandmaster Wong-Ho had taken yet another den for the night and is ignoring his calls, so Shang-Lao looked round the perimeter but no Wong-Ho in sight. Li-Li asks as she looks for the snake under the feet of her master.

“Where did he go, Great-grandmaster?” Li-Li asked.

“Ha-ha! Grandmaster Wong-Ho don’t wanna teach us! Yay, we get to have a rest and play all night!” Shoe cheered in his silly way until Shang-Lao roared, his brothers and Li-Li glared at Shoe and hissed at his arrogance and disrespect to the Great-grandmaster.

“It is quite a drop from here, grasshopper! Would you like me to show you?” Shang-Lao offered Shoe to show him the edge of the cliffside if he did not cease his silly antics. A macaque leaps from the trees surrounding the pavilion and perches himself at the foot of the pavilion where Shang-Lao was standing. The macaque had no tail, and its fur is well suited to the withstanding of cold environments. It had a long, dense sandy yellowish brown coat. Hairless on the face, but only sporting a pale buff beard and long whiskers, unlike the whiskers of the cats. He comes before Shang-Lao with a bow in respect. This macaque is also a student of the ways. Not the way of the snake, but of the monkey. Shang-Lao stops him in his tracks.

“You there! Where is Grandmaster Wong-Ho? Grandmaster of the Way of the Snake?”

Shang-Lao demanded to the macaque with a growl.

“Grandmaster Wong-Ho not home right now! He out in Fujian, visiting Ox. I am Master Ding-Ling, master of the way of the monkey! Welcome Great-Grandmaster!” saluted the monkey master with a bow with his hands together.

Shang-Lao furrowed his bright yellow eyes in disappointment that one of his grandmasters is absent.

"Most disappointing," Shang-Lao replied, "Though I'm sure Wong-Ho's visit to the Ox is of great importance. Though your way of the monkey is from the Five Animals of Kung-fu, and I have seen your kind in action. Perhaps you would like to teach these little ones the way." Shang-Lao suggested to Master Ding-Ling.

The macaque scratched himself in deep thought and ponder Shang-Lao's idea. Even though that he has accomplished a great deal in the way of the monkey, and that he is indeed a master of his martial art, Master Ding-Ling agrees.

"I would teach these little ones," the monkey master replied, "Although I'm curious to see just how serious they are as students of the ways. Mastery of monkey fighting is very serious business, as all animal masteries are." Shang-Lao returns to the pavilion and lays down to relax as he observes the master's teaching methodology of his martial art.

The kittens bowed and recited the opening salutation.

"Greeting Master Ding-Ling.

Master of the Way of the Monkey.

Descendants of the First Five Animals of KungFu.

We fully submit to your wild and crazy antics."

Shoe couldn't help find the humour in running the master's name in his head after the salutations. Ding. Ling. Ding. Ling. Shoe chuckled as he looks around to make sure nobody was listening in. He muttered that to himself a dozen times over and over, until he accidentally spewed out, "Ding-a-Ling" so loud he made himself burst out laughing he was rolling over the dirt ground.

"AHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA! HAAAA! Ding-a-ling! AHAHA! Get it, cats?" Shoe laughed as he was still rolling all over the ground.

The other animals present in the pavilion didn't take kindly to Shoe's sense of humour. "Shut up, Shoe! What's so funny about that?" Dmitri whispered in a hiss as he pawed Shoe over the head, but Shoe continued laughing.

"AHAHAHAHA! Ding-a-ling? I've heard that word before. It means stupid in commonspeak. AHAHAHAHAHAHA!"

"Shoe, seriously you can shut up right now!" Vitaliy growled as he swished his tail in his annoyance with his brother, but Shoe still keeps laughing.

"Get it? Ding-a-ling? AHAHAHA, get it? C'mon cats, why are you not laughing with me? AHAHAHAHAHEEHEEHOHO!"

The Chinese Li-Hua, Li-Li looked at Shoe as if she wanted to back kick him over the cliff,

"Because it not funny, you silly cat! You want Master to teach you lesson? Show respect!"

"AHAHAHEEHEEHAHAHAHOHOHOHO! Check this out, Master Ding-a-Ling, master of being silly and stupid, OHHOHOHOHOHO! This should be soooo easy!" Shoe continued to laugh and laugh and roll around in the ground until Master Ding-Ling grows annoyed and beats his chest ready the fight. But instead of the Master taking the fight on the ground, he takes himself to spring upon a nearby tree and swings from tree branch to tree branch over the unsuspecting Shoe and the other cats. Shoe continued to laugh and laugh until his sides hurt him, and then it was time for Master Ding-Ling to engage in a battle of wits with him. He swings from the

branches to the left and to the right and swoops down while hanging on with its one hand, he slaps Shoe lightly on the head and quickly swings away.

“HEY!” cried Shoe. “What was that for?” Shoe growled as he jumps up to catch Master Ding-Ling with his paws, but the master was swinging way too fast in all directions for him to catch him. The master swoops down again at the unsuspecting Shoe and this time he quickly grabs him by the tail. Shoe hisses.

“OW! WHAT DID I DO?”

“You think you’re so funny? Let’s have a silly sparring match, do you think you can out-silly Master? My kind are masters of silly!” Master Ding-Ling replied as he swooped down from the branches and grabbed Shoe’s ear nearly picking him off the ground. The cats and Shang-Lao start laughing.

“HEEEY! STOP IT! Dmitri? Vitaliy? Li-Li? HELP ME GET HIM!” Shoe hissed angrily as he tried to catch Master in the air but twirled around dizzily to the Master’s erratic swing direction. The rest of the cats looked on from the pavilion as they were entertained by the antics of Master Ding-Ling and this interesting little sparring with the Russian Blue’s youngest brother in a goof-off match. Li-Li didn’t have any sympathy for Shoe, as the Master picked on him from above, and he deserved it for being so disrespectful in making a mockery out of his name. Li-Li scratched her ears and replied back, “You got yourself into mess, you get yourself out of mess!”

“Shoe, I think you’re strong enough to handle this!” Dmitri meowed as his eyes were focused on the swinging Master from tree to tree.

“Yup!” Vitaliy agreed with Dmitri when he nommed on mouse that he had caught while the sparring match was happening.

Master Ding-Ling was swinging over Shoe and somersaulted down to the ground and sneaked up behind him when Shoe wasn’t looking, and slapped him in the butt. He jumped on a branch and swung off. Shoe turned around as he saw the Master retreat to the trees.

“HEY! QUIT IT! THAT’S NOT FUNNY!” Shoe cried. The Master swings from branch to branch in all directions and hangs upside down like a bat in the night and faces Shoe.

“Really? You think you can fight by being funny? Yes, yes! Our fighting skill is funny, being funny is being silly, but fighting is serious when someone wants to eat you or eat your brothers or sister for lunch! I tell you! When someone eats you for lunch, it NOT funny!” Master Ding-Ling lectures Shoe and smacks him on the head. “I smack you over head, it not funny!” he yells as he takes off to the trees again. Shoe is already getting mad at the Master’s antics and brings out his claws.

“You can swing, but I can climb!” Shoe jumps up the tree and starts to climb. “Oh it’s on, as the humans say!” muttered Shoe to himself as he climbed up the tree. The higher Shoe climbed, so did Master Ding-Ling. As soon as the Master had found an opening in Shoe’s defense, he would seize the moment and strike him with a tug of his ear, or his tail. The higher the monkey swung, Shoe climbed. Higher and higher they went up the trees until the other cats watching the match couldn’t see them from below. And neither can the two combatants see them from above. Not even Great-Grandmaster Shang-Lao and he’s a big tiger. They were atop of the trees, higher than the summit of Mount Emeisan, the Master stopped taunting the youngest of the cats. Shoe couldn’t see him. Shoe tried to find a way to get back down to low ground, but he realized how

high he was and grew very afraid of the long drop down below. It was like the cliff side the Shang-Lao showed him when he misbehaved earlier before the greetings. Perhaps even a longer drop than he could imagine. If he dropped down, he wondered if would still land on all of his fours. Would he break a paw? Or perhaps a leg? Or two or three? And so far away from his forever home in Russia or in London. If he didn't make it down, he would starve, and if he dropped, he would be flattened and would never see his feline family again. Not even his brothers, or Li-Li would see him again or know whether his sister Anya would be still alive and she would know that Shoe would be gone. How Anya would be heartbroken if her brothers or Li-Li would tell her what happened to Shoe. Shoe meowed and meowed from the top tree branch from the tallest tree hanging on for his nine lives.

Shoe's meows for help had been carried by the winds, moving through the leaves of every tree, rustling. Carrying the message for help, the wind never stops, that it must be delivered. The wind carried the frightening meows of Shoe from the top to the bottom where the cats were, and Shang-Lao caught ear of the wind as he was meditating. He grew very disturbed and looked around for Master Ding-Ling, but he too was also nowhere to be found. Eventually Shang-Lao spotted the Master swinging down from the trees and onto the steps of the pavilion. Shang-Lao quickly rose to his four paws and asked eloquently, "Where is Shoe, Master Ding-Ling?" Master Ding-Ling stubbornly answered the Great-Grandmaster, "What? The little furry one? Look up. Look waaaaaay up. And you'll find him there. High up in the trees. All claws to the tree branch, scared to come down."

Shang-Lao's eyes grew wide in shock and growled, "What? You left him up there? Alone? Why did you do that?"

"To teach him humility, Great-Grandmaster," replied Master Ding-Ling with a respectful bow. "He embarrassed Master in front of Great-Grandmaster, so I taught him lesson about the consequence of being silly without thinking. I think I did good job! Yes?"

Shang-Lao began to growl louder more furiously as he approached him, "Get him down, Master Ding-Ling! I believe that he has learned his lesson, but you leaving him up there to die is pointless and not the way."

Master Ding-Ling sat under a tree and scratched his belly and tilted his head, "When I feel like it," he replied.

Shang-Lao's growls turned into roars as he exploded at Master Ding-Ling at the tree. The monkey Master defended himself with slaps to Shang-Lao's chest before the Great-Grandmaster focused his chi onto his right paw and swiped him, pinning him to the trunk of the tree. Master Ding-Ling slithers down the bark onto the ground and Shang-Lao plants both his paws right on Master Ding-Ling's chest. The macaque pleads for mercy as Shang-Lao looks him square in the eyes with a piercing glare, while the kittens hide behind a tree watching, "YOU WILL FIND HIM NOW OR I WILL SHOW YOU WHY I AM GREAT-GRANDMASTER OF ALL GRANDMASTERS!"

"ALRIGHT, ALRIGHT! JUST PLEASE SHOW MERCY I BEG OF YOU, GREAT-GRANDMASTER!" cried Master Ding-Ling and as Shang-Lao released his paws upon him, Master Ding-Ling scales upon the trees once more and swung up and up the branches until they could no longer see him.

Because of the altitude in the tree-tops, the night was bitterly cold. The frigid air was nearly piercing through Shoe's bluish grey fur as he remains clinging to the tree branch, shivering. Unable to fall asleep it was so cold, and he was so afraid to fall asleep knowing that guaranteed that he would never wake up again and see the sun rise or the sunset again. He perked his ears to hear the rustling of the top tree branches as Master Ding-Ling scales them one by one towards Shoe, and hangs around on the same branch which Shoe was clinging onto all this time. Ding-Ling looked at him with a sorrowful expression, and tries to grab him off the tree and put him on his back. Shoe squeals and claws angrily at Master Ding-Ling as he was too scared to get off the branch that was he was on. Both animals struggled briefly with each other, "You relax, furry one! I try get you down!" Ding-Ling screeched as he tries to pry Shoe off the tree by yanking him off, but Shoe was scared, his claws were deep in the tree bark.. "You crazy cat, if you want to die, stay here then. If you don't want to die, climb on my back and trust me!" Master Ding-Ling extended his hand to Shoe.

Shoe looked down, and yes it was a very long down, but it was cold and he didn't want to stay where he was either. We wanted to see his brothers and Li-Li again, so he let go of one claw and placed the paw on Ding-Ling's hand. Then the master time it precisely when Shoe let his other claw go and Ding-Ling scooped him up onto his back. Then he instructed Shoe.

"Now hang on tight, going to be bumpy ride!"

Shoe digs his claws into the back of Master Ding-Ling, and draws out a bit of blood. Ding-Ling lets out a loud, screechy ouch, and Ding-Ling quickly begins his descent down from the altitude. He swung from the branches in a downward zig-zag fashion. A huge gust of wind blew the tree branches and Ding-Ling's timing of catching the next tree branch off causing him to fall a few feet straight down. He and Shoe managed to scan quickly for another tree branch to grasp hold of to continue swinging down. Down and down they swung and the ground grew closer and closer in sight. On the last tree branch they swung, they both touched down to the ground, feet first. Shoe lowered himself to ground to rest his mind from the torment of the heights he experiences up in the trees, as Dmitri, Vitaliy, and Li-Li tended to him. He nuzzled against his brothers chests and sides symbolizing that he is okay and waved to Li-Li with his tail. Ding-Ling bowed to Shang-Lao upon landing as the Great-Grandmaster looked over Shoe, who was staring directly at him.

"You are a clever feline, grasshopper Shoe. But when you are provoked, and sometimes it is not worth your anger to follow, it might lead you to humiliation and perhaps worse. I hope that this experience has taught you something?" Shang-Lao advised to Shoe.

"Yes, Great-Grandmaster, I must never tease anyone who is bigger or more experienced than me."

Shang-Lao pondered on his apologetic resolution, but still he was puzzled by his antics, "It is wrong to disrespect your masters of the ways. They, such as I, have worked long and hard, with their physical and mental selves over many, many years to earn that respect. Not only you do not disrespect and dishonour the code of conduct between student and master, you must also respect the younger students, your parents, your commanders, your teammates, and especially... your sister."

Shoe ponders the wisdom of Shang-Lao carefully and lays his head low at the mention of his sister Anya, where she is, is unknown and catnapped by Browni Jenkin. Shoe casts his eyes down to the ground as he lays prone at the feet of his Great-Grandmaster, for he know deep down, that even though for her own flaws, he clearly misses her. Dmitri and Vitaliy each place a paw on his back and consoles their brother.

"We'll find her, Brother! We must be strong and work together as one! Even if it means not to quarrel with you, Li-Li? About the rescue mission back at the Council of Venice? I'm sorry that I said you were a stupid female. You are very strong. For a girl cat." Vitaliy apologized.

"Yeah, I'm sorry too, for challenging you like that back there! I was just trying to be a good leader." Dmitri added.

Li-Li's almond shaped, bright yellow ears light up, but sighed and pawed on Dmitri and Vitaliy while looking down on Shoe, for Anya's sake, she had no choice but to forgive the boys about what happened back at the Council of Venice. What happened after the Council of Venice, what happened she stuck up for Anya when she was getting blamed by her brothers and scolded by Alexei for their lies. How they left Anya open for the taking when they scurried off into the tunnels of the archaeological digsite when their mother told them not to. If it weren't for the scuffle with the dog at the Haitian Market, she would have made it to Russia for that field trip with them, and it would have made some difference in that outcome.

"Yeah, yeah, it okay. But think with your head, not your claws! That your problem." Li-Li replied. As the cats bowed before Master Ding-Ling and said their goodbyes, they climbed upon the back of Shang-Lao for yet another trek east to see the final Grandmaster.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN: The Way of the Dragon: Qing-Xiao

Long Men Grottoes, Luoyang, Henan, China

The stars revealed themselves over the clear night sky, as the Great-Grandmaster embarks on another journey to the northeast. Through the mountainous terrains, and lonely dirt crossroads, they nearly end their journey along the riverbanks of the Yi River. Shang-Lao had told them that they were going to a system of caves, which is believed to be the home of Grandmaster Qing-Xiao. The kittens were listening to the stories along the way of how Grandmaster Qing-Xiao is a master of the mind, rather than a physical entity like most of the descendants of Kung-fu. He can find his way through minds of the most hardened of warriors, and have changed their way of thinking. A resident psychiatrist of some sort to the animal kingdom. Kung-fu fighting is indeed a mental and physical martial art, therefore the training of the mind is essential to survive even the most dangerous of battles.

The kittens marvel over the vast flowing Yi River as they travel along the riverbank and the first few caves have been spotted to their left. The caves were beautifully crafted with ancient art by human hands, dedicated to Buddhism, the religious faith of most humans in China. The felines can do their sightseeing after they have spent their time with Grandmaster Qing-Xiao.

"We are here!" Shang-Lao announced prompting the cats to get off and proceed into one of the caves.

The one cave that houses the Grandmaster is in Wanfo Cave, which means Ten Thousand Buddhists Caves to the humans, and home to the smallest grottoes in all of the Long Men grottoes. It is a very significant cave, it has the smallest Buddhist statue, about 2 meters tall, and has about fifteen thousand small statues of Buddha chiselled into both sides of the walls in Wanfo cave under a very exquisite lotus painting on the roof. Many humans travel during the day to observe, study and seek enlightenment here. A marvel to behold indeed. The felines stand at the stone courtyard of the Wanfo Cave. Every wall is crafted and sculpted with many, tiny caves. Shang-Lao wasn't kidding, the kittens thought as they were told that there were so many grottoes to be explored, and one of them contains Qing-Xiao.

"Which one is he in, Great-Grandmaster?" asks Dmitri?

"Better yet, where do we start looking?" Vitaliy added looking up and around the view of the walls so high it hurt his scruff.

"There are so many of them. They are holes in the walls like a piece of cheese the humans eat for noms. I don't think cheese has that many holes," Dmitri said as he reminded of the story Natasha told them once.

"That is called Swiss cheese, Mama said so in one of her stories in her kitten days. She tried it once, but she didn't like it. Made her run to the litterbox all night." Shoe mentioned.

Li-Li stared blankly at Shoe and Dmitri and scratched his ears with her paw, "And that this Swiss Cheese has anything to do with this place because...?"

"It has so many caves?" Shoe answered. "Swiss cheese have holes like this." Dmitri agreed.

"Though I was told that human food is not good for cats."

"That is ridiculous! These caves are not made of cheese! They are made from stone." Li-Li interjected.

"Does so!" Dmitri yelled back.

"Does not!" Li-Li shot back.

"Does so!" Dmitri countered.

"Ugh, here we go again!" Shang-Lao whispered as he stood there listening to the petty arguing unfold.

"Does not!"

"Does so!"

"Does not!"

"SILENCE!" commanded Shang-Lao. "Has your experience in Mount Emeisan taught you anything? You all had resolved to stop arguing! You are students of the martial arts, at least conduct yourselves like one!" From the tiny caves, a piercing roar was sounded that was even greater than Shang-lao's, it shook the walls and the foundations in which they stood. The kittens looked around frantically and huddled together, shaking in their fur from the vibrations of the stone wonder.

"He is here!" Shang-Lao whispered and sat on the cold stone floor in a tall, majestic stance. The kittens bowed as the roars grew louder announcing Qing-Xiao's presence.

“Greetings Grandmaster Qing-Xiao.
Descendant of the first five animals of Kung-fu.
Grandmaster of the Way of the Dragon.
We submit to your will and power of the mind.”

A small, mystical figure peeks out from one of the high top grottoes above the Buddhist statues. His ethereal, misty appearance is the color of pure gold with blue eyes. His movement was powerful like the wind for one so small, and golden mist trailed behind him with his movements. Zig-zagging with his body, the little dragon, descended downward and parked himself upon the lap of the center statue of Buddha Amida who sits cross legged upon the lotus Sumeru throne. He hovered at the seat of the center statue scanning through the minds of each feline as they bowed before the grandmaster. Starting with Li-Li, Dmitri, Shoe and Vitaliy, all in that order, searching their minds for flaws, making their ears twitch and their nose and brow whiskers wiggle about their faces.

“I sense... anger in this one!” says Grandmaster Qing-Xiao as he flits around Li-Li’s head, trailing golden mist behind him as he’s casting a spell with magic dust and explains to Great-Grandmaster.

“Their flaws and imperfections were carried by the four winds and into my ears, long before they stand here before me. I said to the four winds that when the time comes, I would see this for myself. I will be their judge, I told them. Now that I have finally have the chance to look inside the very corners of their minds, what the four winds said to me were true.”

“Are they really?” asked Li-Li, looking above and turning her head to keep in eye contact with the little dragon.

“Yes, your mind told me. Just like your friend’s mind told me he is impatient, easily bored, and self centered! But you? You are strong in the ways, and maintain being still in your head. This is good!”

Dmitri growled and his ears were nearly pulled back, “HEY, who asked you for an opinion? And I’m not impatient, and errr... easily bored and... what was the other one?” he asked Qing-Xiao.

“Self-centered! Yes, that is you, grasshopper! I, Qing-Xiao can help you, but you must help yourself.” Qing-Xiao turns his attention to Shoe, “And you? You are very, very undisciplined, silly and really silly!”

“What? You said silly twice!” interjected Dmitri.

Qing-Xiao ignored Dmitri’s comment like the wind and explained his reason, “Being silly and really silly are two different things. Silly is acting like you’re a funny cat, and real silly mean making fun out of your masters. Yes, the winds told me about your little brother’s lesson in the Emeisan Mountains. Master Ding-Ling’s ideals might be a bit ding-a-ling, but when he want lesson to be learned, he goes off the deep end, or the top branch! He take his pick.” Qing-Dao turns his attention to Vitaliy who was grooming himself.

“And you! And especially you, little one! You are mouthy, undisciplined, you’re a compulsive liar. Not to mention a crybaby and a blamer. HA! You call yourselves students of the ways with behavior like this? Not in my time.” Grandmaster Qing-Xiao growled to Vitaliy in a child-like voice and he leaps up and down spinning his miniature body in a delicate somersault.

“Hey, I’m not one of those things and I can prove it!” Vitaliy shot back at the dragon grandmaster.

“Too late, but if you can convince the four winds otherwise, then it will be so.”

Shoe couldn’t help but ask, “Why is that? Grandmaster?”

The Great-Grandmaster explained as best he could to Shoe, “Qing-Xiao is an ethereal and mystical creature, he turns invisible during the day. It protects him from being sighted by the humans.” Shoe gawked at the little dragon with awe as he stood with his brothers upon the stone floor. Qing-Xiao being so miniature, he flits off with his little wings to be eye level with Shang-Lao. Golden mist trailing behind him as he flies.

“Grandmaster Qing-Xiao, perhaps with your unsurpassing will and focus, you may teach them to think with their heads a little better.”

Qing-Xiao ponders the Great-Grandmaster’s request, since he is a descendant of the five ways, though mystical, he graciously accepts the task.

“I would love to teach them.” Qing-Xiao replies happily as he spins around in a upward-downward spiral, “Although it won’t be tonight that I begin to teach the way of the dragon, soon the sun will greet us, and I will disappear for the day. These furry students cannot see me when the sun is out.”

Qing-Xiao bows to the Great-Grandmaster and offers his home to the cats for the night as he flits away to retire in one of the tiny grottoes above the walls, “Make yourselves at home, everyone is welcome. Oh, since you are cats, and I know you are very curious about my lovely abode, but please try not to knock down the statues over here, I hate to breathe fire on all of you.”

The Next Night... Under the Longmen Bridge

Shang-Lao had retired to the adjacent cave to the training ground. It would be a peaceful night’s sleep, so there wouldn’t be any noise coming through the thick walls of stone in these grottoes.

The cats meet outside the Wanfo Cave and began to trek along the riverbanks until they met up with a vast construct that spans a few hundred meters above to what appears to be a bridge. Below, is a small waterfall flowing out through the bottom of the bridge and into a small pond with colorful fish and white lotus flowers. The water was crystal clear that you can see them asleep behind the rocks. The cats sit at the edge of the pond, checking out the sleepy fishies, licking their chops as peer down into the water. Qing-Xiao floats to the center of the pond and hovers there as he would instruct his new students in the way of the dragon by exploring their minds and what brought them here from so far away from their home.

“No, it is not dinner time yet grasshoppers! Don’t even think of swiping any of those fish.”

Qing-Xiao ordered as he catches Dmitri dipping his paws into the water to swipe a tiny fish from its slumber. Dmitri pulls back his paw, so that he wouldn’t provoke the wrath of this grandmaster and returns to sit attentively for Qing-Xiao.

“We will learn meditation to quiet the chatter that is in your minds.” Grandmaster Qing-Xiao commanded. “Let us close our eyes and relax until you only hear your own heart beating.”

“How can we do that, Grandmaster? Our brains don’t talk!” asked Shoe as he scratches behind his ear with his paw..

Qing-Xiao zips over to Shoe in a zig-zag and explains, “Truly, our brains CAN talk! When you do something and your minds are thinking too much of other things, and that make you lose focus, then yes, your brains can talk. Your brains can think about a million things all at once! Meditation is the way to tell whatever your brains are talking about to shut up, and make it think about one thing. Everyone relax and clear away the chatter.” Qing-Xiao returns to the center of the pond as the cats relax in a sitting position and close their eyes.

Grandmaster Qing-Xiao hovers quietly not to disturb the cats’ meditation. He meditates with ease and could only hear the soothing, tranquil waters rustling below him, it was like sweet music to him. The cats are fully relaxed, but not quite sound in their minds. The chatter in the felines’ minds were not as strong as they first met. Qing-Xiao senses this and he is pleased with their progress, except for one whom he catches Vitaliy falling asleep a few times during the meditation. Prompting the grandmaster to interrupt his own focus and go jab him with his golden tail to wake him up.

Qing-Xiao couldn’t help but stifle a chuckle when he hears the focus of the cats nearly achieving their balance in their minds. Well, he did instruct the cats to focus on one happy median. Dmitri was focusing on his sister, Anya, but at first he thought that he should think of noms, and then Anya, then back to noms. Vitaliy was thinking of noms. Shoe was thinking of noms, too. Li-Li was thinking about how she would love to get her paws on some Browni rat and make General Tsao chicken out of him, and thinking of noms. Then the mind chatter from all the four cats combine themselves and they begin to grow. Qing-Xiao thought that Shoe whispered, “Shut up.” during the meditation to chase the chatter to away. The chatter from all their minds grew and grew, and the more it grew from them, the louder Shoe was telling it to shut up. Eventually, when the cats were losing focus they also began to meow for them to shut up.

“Shut up!”

“Shut up!”

“Shut up!” They all shouted intermittently.

“No, not you! YOU shut up!”

“Little ones, maintain focus of your happy thoughts.” Qing-Xiao instructs, “It’s getting noisy here!”

The whole entire commotion had been so noisy that their quarrels with their minds had awoken Great-Grandmaster Shang-Lao from his slumber in the cave. He shakes his head and lays back, as he places a paw to his ear. The argument with themselves still rages on at the pond.

“Hey knock it off out there, I’m trying to sleep!” Great-Grandmaster Shang-Lao roared in his cave.

“You shut up! Don’t tell me to shut up!” Dmitri growled at Vitaliy.

“Don’t tell me to shut up! You shut up!” Vitaliy hissed back at Dmitri.

“You shut up, all of you shut up!” Li-Li shouted back in her trance to drown out the other cats.

"You are really trying my patience, grasshoppers! Maintain focus!" Qing-Xiao asserts with them as they argue amongst themselves again.

Shang-Lao rises to his paws and swishes his tail, fuming, "Not again! When will this ever end?" he takes his leave from the cave and heads for the pond.

"You shut the meow up right now!" Shoe snarled.

"SHUT UP! SHUT THE MEOW UP!" Dmitri shouted.

"Whattaya telling me to shut the meow up, I didn't say nothing!" Shoe hissed at Dmitri.

"Shut up or I'll shut it for ya!" Vitality yelled at both of them.

Shang-Lao approaches the edge of the pond and notices the commotion as he glances over Qing-Xiao's way, who was hovering and cowering behind the waterfall realizing that he had completely lost control over the meditation lesson. Turning his way to the cats as they were hissing, meowing, and screeching shut up into the air and to each other, Shang-Lao roared, "SILENCE!" so loud that it shook the walls of the bridge and broke every cat's focus, bringing them out of their meditative trance.

All the kittens turned to face the massive tiger in awe, and shake in their furs, and Shang-Lao spoke, "What is all this shouting and arguing? I demand to know at once!"

"Grandmaster told us to focus on one thing and tell everything else in our brains to shut up!" Dmitri answered.

Shang-Lao pondered on Dmitri's reason for a moment and jumped into the water and found the cowering Qing-Xiao behind the small waterfall. He swiped the little mystical creature with his paw and brought him out to face him.

He roared and growled at the dragon, "Is this what the little one says true?"

"A thousand apologies, Great-Grandmaster!" Grandmaster Qing-Xiao begs repeatedly as he bows. "Dmitri says true. I did tell them to quiet their minds for them to concentrate on one happy thought. Please, I beg mercy, please don't eat me or do anything unnaturally powerful."

Shang-Lao releases Qing-Xiao from his tigerly stare and turns to walk away with his head low, he turns around and warns the dragon grandmaster, "I demand that this be corrected by dawn!" as he turned away from the pond and their presence to return to his cave to slumber in peace.

Nervous and afraid to reawaken Shang-Lao again, Qing-Xiao realizes that he may need to try a different approach. They had stayed at the pond underneath the Long Men Bridge, and Qing-Xiao spun himself in an upward motion and spiraled down to the water line, sprinkling his golden mist trailed into the water. The golden mist trail doesn't dissolve underneath, instead it spreads across the pond in lines all over, beautifully flowing from the center to the very edges of the pond, disappearing as it reaches there. The cats watched the golden mist combine itself within the water with great interest.

"Each of you must confront your fears and your past, and see what the future holds for you if you do not control them." Qing-Xiao instructed the cats. "Look into the water, Li-Li!" The Chinese Li Hua approaches the pond and peers into the crystal clear water.

"I don't see anything," Li-Li replies and she perks her head up to the grandmaster dragon.

"No, but you will." the little dragon said, and showed Li-Li how to gaze deeply into the water, not at the surface. A few moments after some coaching, Li-Li returns her gaze into the water without moving her head, looking deeply as she should until she actually could see the bottom of the

pond. Li-Li was twitching her ears with excitement, as she maintains her focus inside the water. A few seconds later, the bottom started to change. Instead of a fish sleeping behind a rock in the bottom of the pond, it was a scene from her arguments with Vitaliy, Dmitri and their father Alexei at the Council of Venice. The images and sounds from Li-Li's reflections were revealed in the pond.

(From the mission simulation in the holodecks)

"These are not ordinary dogs, Dmitri! These zombie dogs are fifty times the strength now. We need to work together as a team!"

"Since when did the Chinese Li Hua ever fight anyway?" snapped Vitaliy in defense of his oldest brother's plan when Shoe scurries behind Vitaliy and lets out an "Oooh, meyowch!"

"A survivor has died. Making the term "survivor" ironic!"

"SINCE THE SHANG DYNASTY, YOU FOOLISH KITTY! MY ANCESTORS WERE PROTECTORS OF THE IMPERIAL PALACE AND THE EMPEROR LONG BEFORE THE WORLD HAD COUNTRIES!" Li-Li yelled angrily at her teammates, "WE ARE WASTING PRECIOUS TIME!"

(The bottom of the pond revealed another image of what happened after the mission.)

"I know my brothers are going to put the blame on me for what they did." Anya said sadly with a deep sigh. "Because I'm the only female, and that I'm too stupid and weak to stand up for myself."

"Your brothers think they are the Queen Bee's gift to Templar Hall. They are jerks, Anya. No offense. But they needed to be taught a lesson about respect." Li-Li replied

(The pond reveals Li-Li's confrontation with her friend's parents, Alexei and Natasha)

"She didn't start it Captain! It was Dmitri and Vitaliy's pride and egos got in the way of the mission." Li-Li barged in front of Anya in her defense of the failing of the mission.

"You! Mind your own business! Go away!" Natasha scolded Li-Li on Alexei's behalf as he paws her away from his sight.

(The pond reveals the veterinary infirmary visit)

"Our mama is here, papa went to see her." Dmitri answered, "And we have some news."

Li-Li scratched her ear and she listened attentively to what happened at the field trip, and how Browni the Rat had catnapped her friend and their sister, Anya. Li-Li tried to stand up, but she mewed in pain and laid back. She leaned over and grew clearly angry with her ears pulled back and grabbed Vitaliy with her good paw and looked him deep in the eyes.

"And let me guess, you blame Anya for your curiosity? You fools! And that evil, crazy rat who catnap my friend who is your sister? You leave her for dead?" she growled and released him.

"And this Browni Rat, yeah! If it weren't for this broken leg and tail, I would have been there with you making General Tsao chicken out of him!"

(The pond reveals the fight between Li-Li and the dog at the Haitian Market which the bottom of the pond slowly fades into reality)

"It's your turn, Dmitri. Let us see your side of the story." Qing-Xiao said, and motioned with his tail for Dmitri to look into the water. The bottom changed again, but in a different setting, as Dmitri gazed into the water.

(The pond revealed a scene from Dmitri's trip to Agartha for the first time, and meets Dr. Lox.)

"We're going to Kitten Day! We're going to be Templars and be strong like Papa!" Dmitri speaks proudly with his two other brothers.

"And be smart like Mama!" interrupts Vitaliy as he pounces on the ground like he's chasing a bug..

(The pond revealed Dmitri scolding Anya on Kitten Day at Templar Hall.)

Anya shakes her head as Natasha nips her at the scruff and licks her ears and sends her back to the group. "It's okay, my daughter, maybe next time when you are stronger." Alexei mentions. "Stupid weak, sister! Why did you have to miss like that?" Dmitri bats at Anya's head she almost flips backwards.

(The pond reveals Dmitri at the archaeological digsite in Moscow. Before Anya was taken from them.)

"That's it!?" Dmitri said, "No Vampires, no werewolves, not even lousy rats?"

"This is so stupid" Dmitri said as he darted under one of the rusty bed frames, "Looking for paper is not what templar do." Anya spoke up from a counter top near the back of the room, "Isn't this what Mama does most of the time though?" Vitaliy answered her "Ya but this isn't like the City of the Sun God, or Blue Mountain or Transylvania, this just some old bunker where people use to hid, nothing important or exciting ever happened here." "We don't know that" Anya shot back, "That's why George, and Mama want us to help them search." Dmitri emerged from under the bed "What do you think's in the lower levels, Vitaliy?" "Probably the same stuff up here, more junk that the humans left behind and maybe some bugs." "There are also rats" Anya blurted out remembering the conversation she overheard. "Rats?" Vitaliy asked curiously, "...Yes" Anya answered, "The man at the front of the facility was complain about how they were chewing through the wires." Dmitri and Vitaliy looked at eachother with a sly smile, "Illuminati conspiracy?" "A Templar raid?" "Maybe the dragon played everyone against one another." "We should go find these rats" Vitaliy said as he raced to the door and began racing toward the air vent. "Wait for me Dmitri!" howled as he raced out the door.

(The pond quickly erases the bottom and returns to its real form.)

"Now Vitaliy! Time to look into your past!" Qing-Xiao order him to gaze into the water. The bottom changes once more to reveal some interesting things about his past.

(The pond reveals Vitaliy sneaking into the kennels at Templar Hall.)

"Here's our chance, brothers! Let's go see what's really inside there!" Vitaliy eggs on his brothers and sneaks past the other kittens off the side and slipped inside the kennels passage. And the door closes shut leaving only a large window frame to see beyond the dark side. Dmitri, Vitaliy and Shoe skips on their paws down the hall, "Wow, is it ever dark in here. Let's hope our kitten night vision adjust quickly." Vitaliy says as he tries to navigate the kennels. "We're going to be in big trouble if Mama and Papa find out we've sneaked away into the kennels." Shoe says. "It'll be okay, brother, let's just do this quickly. Quickly in and quickly out, that would be what Min-ji the stealthmaster would say." Vitaliy replies.

(The pond reveals his telling of lies to his mother at the field trip to Moscow, after Anya went missing.)

"You could have gotten yourselves killed down there! What were you thinking?" Natasha started. "Whose idea was it for you to disobey my order and taking off running like bunch of wild cats like that?"

Dmitri and Vitaliy looked briefly at each other, but their heads were still low, until they winced at the sudden, "Speak quickly!" Vitaliy raises his head to face his mama.

"It was Anya, Mama! Anya wanted to go see if there were any rats down there! We tried to stop her, really we did. But she didn't listen!" Vitaliy replied in a bald faced lie, once again pinning the blame on their sister.

Natasha looked at Vitaliy and Dmitri closely in their bright yellow eyes, "You my boys, have lied to your mama and papa before. How would I know you are speaking the truth?"

Vitaliy had to think of something real quick. His eyes shifted from right and left thinking of a good way to answer his mother. Then thinking back of how she was physically not strong enough to break a board, or not strong enough to fight through a bunch of zombie dogs to save a hostage. That would be the perfect way to answer his mama, with another lie.

"She just wanted to see if there are any rats to fight and be strong." Vitaliy replied.

(The pond returns to its natural state.)

"It is all starting to come together, Shoe it is your turn. Gaze into the water and learn." Qing-Xiao commands as he hovers in the center of the pond. The youngest kitten of the Russian Blue brothers approach the water in gazes in a trance inside, and the bottom level begins to shift as it shows the first image.

(The pond reveals Shoe playing with grenades at Templar Hall)

"I can't hold this and dig at the same time." Shoe says and he sets aside Bunky's grenade on the edge of the box outside from the sand. He digs his hole to do his thing and when he was done, and covered up his business, he reached over the edge of the litterbox to paw at the laying grenade. The little explosive device was caught at the outside wall of the box, as Shoe hooked his claws to the pin, and begins to pull it towards him. The laws of physics began to work against him as the pin let loose from the device and Shoe rolled backwards onto his butt with the pin at his paw he looked at the grenade in shock..

"Be on the other side of the world," replayed in the words of Bunky in Shoe's head as he darted out of his tent like anything faster than the speed of light, and BOOM!

(The pond reveals his curiosity on the roadway to the Shaolin Monastery.)

Shoe grew very curious to know what travelling on the road is like if he lifted the lid of the basket just a touch. Just to see. While every cat is asleep inside the basket, Shoe slowly lifted up the basket with his head. He looked straight ahead from the back of the scooter and he could see a massive mechanical monster closing in on them, and on both right and left side is the lanes, and other monsters following behind them. The monster constantly growled from it engines. Shoe's ears pulled back and his eyes grew wider as a gust of wind from the autobike's speed, the lid of the basket flung wide open. Shoe screamed off the top of his lungs, "AHHHHH! MONSTERS! MONSTERS! We're gonna die! We're gonna die!" alerting Li-Li, Dmitri and Vitaliy out of their brief slumber. Vitaliy and Dmitri grabbed hold of Shoe and pulled him out of sight of the white, delivery truck directly behind them, while Li-Li grabbed hold of the lid of the basket and closed it shut.

(The pond shifts to reveal Shoe being teased by Master Ding-Ling at Mt. Emeisan.)

"AHAHAHEEHEEHAHAHAHOHOHOHO! Check this out, Master Ding-a-Ling, master of being silly and stupid, OHHOHOHOHOHO! This should be soooo easy!" Shoe continued to laugh and laugh and roll around in the ground until Master Ding-Ling grows annoyed and beats his chest ready the fight. But instead of the Master taking the fight on the ground, he takes himself to spring upon a nearby tree and swings from tree branch to tree branch over the unsuspecting Shoe and the other cats. Shoe continued to laugh and laugh until his sides hurt him, and then it was time for Master Ding-Ling to engage in a battle of wits with him. He swings from the branches to the left and to the right and swoops down while hanging on with its one hand, he slaps Shoe lightly on the head and quickly swings away.

“HEY!” cried Shoe. “What was that for?” Shoe growled as he jumps up to catch Master Ding-Ling with his paws, but the master was swinging way too fast in all directions for him to catch him. The master swoops down again at the unsuspecting Shoe and this time he quickly grabs him by the tail. Shoe hisses.

“OW! WHAT DID I DO?”

(The pond shifted again and showed Shoe being stuck on the tallest tree, high in the sky, Shoe meowing and crying for help as he got stuck, before the bottom of the pond returned to its normal state.)

Qing-Xiao appears again in the center of the pond, “Now you know what the four winds carried to my ears. I saw these in your minds. For this is because your sister and friend were taken from you. Yet, you four still argue over petty little things, when this Anya is should be first and most important to you. Do you wish to see what will happen if you don’t stop this needless chatter and quarrelling in your minds? Look and see, all of you!”

The bottom of the pond shifted for a final time, and revealed a dead Anya about to get eaten by a pack of Filth rats for dinner. Natasha and Alexei meow out in horror and anger as they were made to watch their only daughter get eaten so fast beyond recognition, she wasn’t fit for a proper burial in a pet cemetery. The Anya that they knew, didn’t look like Anya after she was eaten. The kittens meowed, whined and sniffed as they watch very sadly the future of what will happen if they do not change their way of thinking, and start to learn how to work together as one unit, rather than arguing out their own ways. The bottom returned to its natural form as if nothing had happened, the rocks and the fish had returned undisturbed, and the cats grew very sad and sorrowful over the mistakes that they had made over the weeks from the time they had spent in basic training, to the kaffuffle at the Council of Venice, to their time here with Great-Grandmaster Shang-Lao.

Shoe collapsed on the ground crying, whining and meowing his heart out, as sadness ran through his whole body. His brothers Dmitri and Vitaliy race from their sides of the pond, to try to console him.

“I miss Anya! I miss my sister! I want her back, I want her back, I want my sister back!” Shoe cried so loudly that it once again woke Shang-Lao from his brief peaceful night’s sleep.

“We will get her back, Shoe! We just have to work together better!” Li-Li said, crying with Shoe. Shang-Lao sprang up from his cave he was slumbering in, and roared, “What is going on here? Why are the little ones crying? What have you done, Grandmaster Qing-Xiao? I thought I had commanded you to correct this!”

Qing-Xiao swished his tail and fluttered his little wings, “Stay your fury Great-Grandmaster, I believe I have made a breakthrough.”

Shang-Lao remained silent for a moment before backing off on the aggression and observes the little group intervention.

Dmitri glanced over at the water and then at Li-Li and Shoe, and then cried and nuzzled against the both of them, "I should have been nicer to my sister. Oh, Anya! I'm so sorry, I doubted you! I'm sorry I never believed in you! No more arguing, cats! We have to get to work!" Dmitri said. Vitality piled on the other cats feeling so horrible and he cried on the back of Dmitri, who was on top of Li-Li and Shoe, "All my fault. All my fault! If it weren't for my lies and placing blames on someone else instead of me, Anya would not have been taken from us! No more lies! No more blaming each other ok?. NO MORE BLAMING ANYA!" All cats were meowing and crying at the edge of the pond, but all of their mind chatter slowly went away to almost near silence as one. Shang-Lao glanced at Qing-Xiao with a critical eye, but relaxes and congratulates the grandmaster dragon.

"Well, Grandmaster, I never thought that you would be able to get through to these cats, well done!"

Grandmaster Qing-Xiao glanced over at Shang-Lao then watched the kitten pile on the other side of the pond, "After this, I think I would need a head healer myself." The tiger and dragon chuckled amongst themselves as they watched the kittens cry, pile and play with each other before retiring to go sightseeing the rest of the Long Men Grottoes before saying farewell.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN: The Way of the Tiger: Shang-Lao

Near The Shaolin Monastery
Dengfeng, Zhengzhou, Henan, China

The journey finally ends from where they began. The Shaolin Monastery and Temple had been quite a memorable sight for the kittens and their grandmasters would had taught them over the days. It has been a wild few days indeed. The kittens couldn't wait to get home and help their mama and papa get their paws on Browni Jenkin so that they could bring Anya back. Then hopefully, if they find her alive, she too may find herself in China learning from the grandmasters when her turn comes. All of this planning and reassessing from the kittens had sure filled Shang-Lao's tiger heart with satisfaction. He could only meditate that they would be smart enough not to mess up. Shang-Lao ends his journey to a field of balance posts, used by the Shaolin monks to practice balance through their stances, most particularly the way of the crane. The field had eight rows of eight balancing posts, one black and one white, making the field of these posts equal in width and length.

The kittens were dropped off at the field, as Shang-Lao speaks to them pointing to the balancing posts, "Your final test begins here. Everything that you have learned from the grandmasters will be put to the test here on these posts. Your opponents will be fast, cunning, powerful, graceful, and witty. How you perform here tonight, will be important as how you learned, so you must use your strategy wisely." Shang-Lao entered a pavilion on the other side, containing a small altar with five, burnt reeds of incense poking out of an ancient burner containing the shapes of the five animals of Kung-fu. With the wave of his paw, all the incense sticks were burning again. He bowed low to the ground to pay homage to his ancestors who had invented the martial art, and summoned forth all the grandmasters to the pavilion.

Grandmasters Mei-Xiu, Wong-Ho, Qing-Xiao, Zhou, Master Ding-Ling, all converged near the pavilion with Great-Grandmaster Shang-Lao. All grandmasters had gathered around the field surrounding the cats, and took their meditative seating positions.

The cats bowed to the grandmasters with great respect, as Shang-Lao proclaimed as he remained at the pavilion, "Let the final test begin!" At the wave of his paw, Qing-Xiao, Grandmaster of the way of the dragon approached the field and flies around, spraying trails of golden mist onto the ground, and then leaves to his spot. The Shang-Lao motion again with his other paw, and Grandmaster Qing-Xiao breathed fire onto the entire section of ground causing it to become pure flames spreading like wildfire. The kittens watched the ground become red and orange with awe and in horror as they looked at each other as to what is going to come next. Shang-Lao roared into the air, and a bright light opened the sky, and he summoned stone creatures from the heavens to the opposite sides of the balancing posts. A tiger and tigress, two dragons, two cranes, two leopards, and eight monkeys, all crash down and become stone upon the balancing posts in their animal fighting stances opposite the cats. Shang-Lao had ordered the cats to take their positions. Li-Li had agreed to become the tigress, so she hops from post to post to take the spot, Dmitri went to take the tiger spot, Vitaliy took the one of the leopard spots, and Shoe took one of the monkey spots. To fill the empty balancing posts, Shang-Lao summoned stone creatures to the cats' side of the field and took on the position of the Tiger on the opposing side..

"We're playing against the Great-Grandmaster?" Shoe asked while balancing on his post.

Dmitri looked on and saw that this is very familiar to him, "Vitaliy, Shoe, Brothers! I remember this! This is like the human game of chess!" he exclaimed.

"Huh?" Vitaliy made a face with his whiskers as he asked.

"Don't you remember?" Dmitri recalls, "Our humans play this every now and then, especially the young male one, I saw him play often in his playroom with other male humans. And... I think I can do this."

"Begin! You are first!" commanded Shang-Lao to the cats as all the grandmasters watch. Dmitri looked at every animal on his battleside, and bellowed his first command, "You there! Monkey on E2 to E4. The brown monkey jumped from his position and takes control of E4 and balances on his feet. Shang Lao commands one of his monkeys of stone on D7 to disappear and move to D6.

"Monkey, D2 to D4!" Dmitri commanded.

"Leopard G8 to F6!" Shang-Lao commanded one of his leopards. And each took turns at one move, with Dmitri.

"Leopard B1 to C3!"

"Monkey G7 to G6!"

"Dragon, C1 to E3!"

"Dragon F8 to G7!"

Shang-Lao wanted to set the perfect defense before he could strike with everything he had. Dmitri seems to setting up to castle onto the Tigress side of the posts and so he orders his tigress, which is occupied by Li-Li.

"Li-Li to D2!" Li-Li pounces over to D2 and waits.

"Monkey to C7 to C6!"

“Monkey F2 to F3!” Shoe moves from his spot to F3 post.

Monkey B7 to B5!

Vitaliy! G1 to E2! Vitaliy moves from his spot and pounces to the other post.

Leopard from B8 to D7.

Dragon E3 to H6.

Dragon G7 to H6, Shang-Lao’s dragon flits off to Dmitri’s dragon and they battle each other at the same post. The two moved in a zig-zag fashion on such as small ground, and attempted to breathe fire upon each other. They battled furiously with their teeth and tail. Shang-Lao’s dragon catches Dmitri’s dragon with a tail sweep, and the dragon falls, screaming into the fiery, bottomless ground. The cats watch and look at each other in horror. Dmitri’s dragon had been checked, “So much for castling on the Tiger’s side,” he muttered to himself. Then turns to the cats, “It’s okay cats, it’ll be okay.” Dmitri gulped as he looked at the balancing battlefield, and muttered out, “I hope.”

The battle raged on. All the monkeys, the cranes, the leopards and dragons, both tigresses and tigers had all moved from post to post trying to avoid confrontation from either side, and avoid a fiery death should they hit the bottom. Somebody or some cat has to make a mistake. Someone has to leave themselves open for the kill, and move on. Vitaliy who was covering for one of the leopards was ordered to move. “Vitaliy, to D5.” Dmitri commanded. Vitaliy pounced from post to post to post to D5, and waited, but there was another leopard from the other side that was waiting for him. Shang-Lao had ordered his own leopard to attack where Vitaliy was standing. Vitaliy knew that he was not going to go down into the fiery pit without a fight. So he gave his all. The leopard and Vitaliy fought claw to claw on the same pillar. The leopard was very quick with his strikes, but couldn’t move much only on a limited amount of space. It wasn’t big enough for the both of them. Vitaliy nearly fell off the post a few times, luckily for his claws he could get back up and keep fighting, but a lucky strike by the leopard caught him to the side of his face and swung back off and down to the fiery ground he went. Vitaliy screamed as he went down and down. “VITALIY!!” cried Li-Li and she looked at Dmitri in horror. “Why did you sacrifice him?” she asked meowfully.

“Trust me, Li, I know what I’m doing. Seriously.” Dmitri assured her and Shoe was already in position to make a legal move and having his sights on the leopard who eliminated Vitaliy.

“You will pay dearly for that, Leopard! Shoe, avenge our brother! To D5!”

Shoe pounces and growls furiously on the trail of posts to get to the leopard who was waiting for him, Shoe landed on all fours then got up on his hind legs and got up on his hind ones and started to emanate the psychology of a monkey. He goes totally bananas and proceeds to pounce and jump all over the leopard, pulling his tail, pulling his ears, and batting him on the nose and ended his rage over the loss of Vitaliy with a flurry of paw slaps and claws to the eyes and throat of the leopard and the leopard lost its paw step, then Vitaliy sent him falling and roaring to his doom below. “That’s for my brother!” Shoe hisses and takes fighting stance on the post.

Dmitri lost a crane, and Shang-Lao lost both of his dragons, Li-Li took out a monkey as she was chasing Shang-Lao across the post field.

Dmitri's army has almost got the Tiger pinned and ready to be checked by Li-Li multiple times. So Shang-Lao needs to do something. Dmitri's cranes were harassing the monkeys who were trying to protect the Great-Grandmaster. His tigress has moved into stalk Shoe's group of monkeys from their flank. From Shang-Lao's side, had taken out one monkey off the balancing post, then another one within close range, and now had his sights on Shoe. Dmitri thinks that sacrificing him to the fiery pits below, would be a not so good idea, but not a bad idea. He would so love to draw the attention of the opposing tiger so that Li-Li could keep the pressure on. He knows Dmitri has the Great-Grandmaster beat, and so do the rest. Shoe was in position for elimination when Shang-Lao attacked at Shoe's flank. Shang-Lao pounced on Shoe and pinned him to post. Shoe wiggled his way out of the tight paw, and climbed on the tiger's back. Shang-Lao tried to turn around to try to throw him off, but Shoe was striking him with a flurry of claws and paws until he was finally grabbed by the claws of the tiger and thrown off the post and into the lake of fire. Another monkey is gone! Dmitri shakes his head, but he still is in the game, he still has himself as the tiger, Li-Li the tigress, the crane, and three monkeys, and they are all in hot pursuit of Shang-Lao and his tigress, and knows he has this game licked. Dmitri commanded his one dragon to move into F1 to get involved in checking the nosy, stalking tigress. Shang-Lao orders one of his cranes to move into the next post to protect the tiger who was in dire peril. Then Dmitri ordered his only crane to come and perch a little ways behind the opposing crane who was threatening to take Li-Li, forcing the opposing crane to move back and attack Dmitri's crane from that far post, and throws her into the fiery pit for elimination. Dmitri says with a touch of frustration, "That's it, we're finishing this! Dragon, F1 to C4!" The Dragon flew to the post when the tigress stood upon and they fought to the death, concentration versus power was happening at this post, and the dragon stunned her with his tail and breathed fire onto the tigress, ignited her whole feline body as she fell violently to her demise in the pits below. The Grandmasters watch and meditate with anticipation. The monkey from jumped on the victorious dragon from behind, and threw the dragon off the post and into the fire, and Li-Li, posing as the tigress had retreated to the farthest corner of the field. A few moves from Shang-Lao and Li-Li resumes her pursuit with him. The remaining stones on the field of balancing posts, explode and turn into mist. The bottom was no longer red, orange and hot. It was a lush, green ground which can be seen again. The post were no longer black and white and the sky was moonlit again. Dmitri and Li-Li climbed and raced to the pavilion and they saw Vitaliy and Shoe waiting for them. Surprise had come to them.

"Shoe! Vitaliy!" Dmitri cried as they all nuzzled together, so happy to them alive.

"We thought you were both dead! We had seen you fall! But I'm happy to see you both." Li-Li meowed and nuzzled on their heads..

Shoe and Vitaliy looked at each other, "Well let's just say that some bees were looking out for us when we fell into the fire."

"What? Gaian bees? In China?" Dmitri asked as he looked at Li-Li, "How is that possible?"

Li-Li pawed at herself, "Well it is possible, my friend. A bee got me when I wandered away from my litter when I was five weeks old back in the mountains. I never told my mom or my siblings what had happened to me, and Shang-Lao took me in as his student. I was how you say... curious at the time. Oh, and the Shaolin Temple? That's my forever home. The humans took me

there when I was lost. Fed me, played with me, and protected me. All life is sacred there. Whenever you are in trouble? My forever home is sanctuary for all.”

Shang-Lao roared as he and his grandmasters approached the pavilion, congratulating the four kittens, “Well done, little ones, you have now mastered the five ways. You must be very proud, and you should be. You have earned the respect of all your grandmasters here tonight, including myself.” Shang-Lao said as he bowed along with the other grandmasters in full respect. The kittens bow in return. Shang-Lao has produced something under his paw and held an object in his hand, which looked like a petrified bamboo shoot.

“We have something for you, when you journey back to the place called London with your new friends, Li-Li. A token of our pledge to fight alongside you, wherever there is danger that you need us.”

Li-Li looked at the petrified bamboo shoot and looked at her great-grandmaster, “Your anima will channel into this bamboo shoot to summon myself and the other grandmasters to fight by your side.”

Li-Li bowed at the paws of Shang-Lao, as she gave thanks for the unexpected gift. “We promise when we find Anya, we will bring her here.” said Li-Li as she joined her friends to depart back for Agartha.

“Yes, a big time “Spasibo” to you Great-Grandmaster, for putting up with us. “Oh, “Spasibo” means thank you in Russian.” Dmitri added and bowed in respect.

“Yes, and thank you for putting up with all of us too, Grandmasters!” thanked Vitaliy excitedly as he takes his leave with his brothers.

“And we promise to visit everyone, including you Master Ding-Ling!” Shoe added as Master Ding-Ling hobbled and eeked happily, and scratched his ears like a monkey.

The four cats have said their thanks and goodbyes, but they guarantee that it will not be goodbye forever. They saunter over to the middle of the pavilion and Li-Li focuses her anima into the Agartha conduit stone embedded in her collar, while having the petrified bamboo shoot in her mouth. They bow for a final time to everyone before Li-Li taps the conduit. The cats’ paws turn bright gold, and leave the floor as the conduit hums louder and louder before disappearing from sight.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN: What Lies Below:

Anya awoke feeling light headed as if she had just come back from the vet. As she slowly opened her eyes it all began coming back to her, the field trip, the creature in the facility and how she had been lured into the corner by the creatures trickery. “How did I get here?” she groggily thought to herself. As she looked around her cage, she could hear other animals but she could not smell any anima, here fellow prisoners were as helpless as she was. Across from them was a steal table were more then one of the her fellow prisoners likely meet a gruesome end and to the right of the table was lab bench covered in computers and other lab equipment (much like the kind that temple hall had in the infirmary.) The screens were covered in what looked like blush squiggles with a lines coming out of them and one the biggest screen there was a map of the world covered in red spots.

"What are these big, giant boxes?" Anya wondered. Anya could not see what was to the left of the table but she could hear it, some kind of rhythmic grunting accompanied by something pounding on a glass wall.

"What is all that racket? Surely that is not a cat!" she thought as she turned around to follow the vibrations from the pounding. Before she could get a better look at her surroundings a metal door opened and in walked a short slender woman in her early 50's, followed by a pack of the creatures she had seen at the facility. Anya rose to her feet and ran to the cage door locked with a chain and key and perked her ears up. The woman was speaking on her phone though Anya could hear to whom.

"I know you are taking a big risk, I..." she stopped and listened to the person on the other end, "You'll just have trust me, I am close a breakthrough, just keep the committee off my back." The creature from the facility hopped up on the metal table as the other moved over to the lab bench.

"Wakey, Wakey, stupid cat" the creature said smiling with its yellow fangs. Anya's eyes grew more awake at the sound of the creature trying to rouse her with its babble, and when she was more awake, she was staring into the eyes of a shaggy-like figure. Then as she grew more awake, she noticed there were more... a lot more shaggy-like creatures tapping and rousing her, and some who were just too curious but to stare at her.

"Ha-ha! Stupid cat, real funny! Who are you, stupid shaggy... like... things..." Anya feistily asked. A roar of laughter came from the creatures as they listened to Anya, "Browni don't tease the specimens!" the woman said as she turned back to the phone call.

"...No not you, it was my familiar...yes I will try and keep it under control in the future...thank you sir.. I will...bye." She set the phone down before rubbing her eyes.

"Please tell me you got the samples."

The creature on the table opened its packs, "Browni have skill and pay bills, then chills." the creature said as it took the blood samples from its pack. The woman took the samples from the creature before rolling over to white box and putting the samples inside.

"Aurora, begin analysis on each tube, find sequences K1, K3, GAC7-C, and KA-4", a voice from somewhere answered. "Beginning analysis."

"So... you're the rat we saw at the field trip!" Anya inquired to Browni, "What are those humans doing?"

"It's important work, from the dreaming ones, stupid baby cat wouldn't understand."

The woman began looking through the pack that the Browni had given to her, "Where is the tape?"

A grimace spread across the creature face as the ones below it began sharpening pencils at the lab bench. "Stupid cat interrupted Browni and took tape before Browni could finish, but Browni have plans to fix it." The creature said as it pointed at Anya's cage. Anya swipes a claw at Browni, and lets out a quick, low meow.

"I interrupted you? What about you? You interrupted us!" Browni snapped at Anya before stick out his spiked tongue.

"I am listening." the woman said skeptically.

Clearing its throat, "Browni have stupid baby cat, stupid cats go, "Oh no, where is baby cat?", then Browni go on Twitter and say give Browni hot-ass mix tape, and then Browni trade stupid baby cat for hot ass mix tape," the creature said proud of itself.

The woman put her head in her hands, "You brought an anima cat here?" Anya was more annoyed of being addressed as a stupid baby cat than the whole mess of how or why or what they are doing that got her locked up in a cage in the first place. *"I am seven weeks old, for meowing out loud! I am a seven week old Russian Blue kitten."* she thought to herself and yelled out to Browni, her Russian accent rang like music, "HEY, THIS BABY CAT HAS A NAME! AND IT'S ANYA!" Browni turned to Anya, "Shut up! Browni talking!"

"YOU SHUT UP! STUPID AMERICAN RAT!" Anya fired back into Browni's face between the bars of the cage.

"You know that they are out looking for her right now Browni and that if they find out where we are, the human Templar will get involved" Dr. West said rubbing her head.

"Browni have it covered, Browni..."

"Browni has screwed us! But no...no...it's my fault, you weren't properly equipped for the mission," the woman said as she pulled out a syringe from the a drawer to the left of the table. The creatures face went white as he saw the syringe. "Nonononononononononono", The woman pick the creature up by the scurf of its neck as she injected him with a green solutions. Browni let out ear piercing inhuman screech as blood began to leak out of his head as his skull expanded in size. Anya watched the event unfold with awe, attempting to put her paw to her ear to muffle out the rat's screams. *"What is that human doing? What is that green stuff?" she thought to herself. "This rat is no ordinary rat, he is a monster, and this monster is being created by this human."* The woman step out of sight for a second as the other creatures returned from the pencil sharpener surrounding their modified brother.

One of the creatures took a freshly sharpened pencil in its hands and took aim at Anya cage. As the pencil embedded itself in the wall behind her, the creatures began to laugh, as another one grab another pencil and threw it like knife into her cage.

Anya ducked out of the way from the second flying pencil and glared at the laughing rats, "You are all going to have to do better than that!"

A line was beginning to form behind the creatures, only to have dissolved as the woman returned with a pitcher of what looked like blended meat. "Lunch time everyone!" the creatures followed her out of the office, chanting "Baby! Baby! Baby!"

As they left a golf cart pulled up outside the office, in steps a man is man in his late 50's with fine white hair, large coke bottle glasses and an abnormally round red face, carrying a trash bag. As he empties the bin, Anya can smell Anima on him underneath aqua velva aftershave. Anya knew that scent from before, it reminded her of her trip to Agarthia for the first time, and her first day of Kitten Day at Templar Hall. She reflected on a lesson her mama and papa taught her before she enlisted at Templar Hall, *"Remember, we only talk to humans who have the same anima as we do, the rest we just meow. Always remember to meow."* Anya approached the cage door bars and got the man's attention. She had never done this before, should she talk or should she meow. She placed her paws on the bars of the cage and opened the dialog.

"You're just like me, aren't you?"

The man looked up from the trash can, "Oh! Hiya little lady, you're new here aren't ya?" The man didn't seem to be disturbed by her speech. "You can say that. I'm some sort of a guest here, an unwilling guest for that matter." Anya replied.

"Dr. West has a lot of those, she's helping my dad out though so I got to be nice to her and Browni. But you are not like the others, you're like the bees, that talk to me."

Anya looked up at the man on the other side of the cage, "I am one of them, I was born like this. My parents are bees too, and my brothers, like the bees on the snowball tree that spring "kalinka" blossoms."

"Where are your parents now? Did you get lost in the park?" The man said as he sat down next to the cages.

Anya sniffed enough to get close proximity of the mix of anima and unknown cleaning supplies the man had been using. "It's a very long story, sir. My brothers decided to take off without our mama's permission so I went after them. Then some bad... rat chased after us... and my brothers and I got separated and... I was brought here. Do you know my mama and papa?". The man looked sad for a second, "I don't know them personally but Kids get lost down here all the time, was Browni that brought you down here?"

"Yes, it was Browni." Anya replied with a sad look in her bright yellow eyes.

"Figures, little bugger been told he's not allowed top side, and not allowed to snatch gust. Cuts into dad's profits and makes the share holder anagery. One sec, I'll have you out here and top side in no time."

As the man fumbled with a key ring on his belt Anya heard something hiss behind him. He turned around to see Browni on the table baring his fangs at the man, "Back away from stupid cat, Will-tard." The woman steps in shortly after with the pack of browni behind her. "Mr. Disney, can I help you?"

The man look down at his shoes, "Sorry to bother you Dr. West ma'am, but your Browni took on of our guest and I got take her top side before dad's shareholders raise a stink."

"She is not from the park Mr. Disney, she is being held here until I figure out what to do with here. She is a crucial part of research and you will not release her without my permission is that clear." the man back into Anya's cage, his key ring dangling between the bars. Anya follows the dangling of the keys, and moves directly behind the man, she quickly jumps up and catches the keys with her teeth, then she hid them far in the corner behind her and laid there with the keys out of Browni's sight as she tucked them under her makeshift pet bed.

"Understood Dr. West, I should at least let dad know, there is another anima critter in the park though what's her name?" "That's not important, finish the trash and go." The man, picked up the trash bag and began to leave, he turned to the cage one last time as he climb in the golf cart, "Name's Will by the way, he called out."

"Go!" Shouted Dr. West. As the man drove away, the line of Brownis began to form in front her cage again, they now had rubber bands in addition to the pencils.

CHAPTER NINETEEN: The Rats in the Labyrinth:

Shortie Luminatti made his way across the cold concrete floor of the labyrinth ducking behind a trashcan as another guard walked by. It was difficult to blend into such a sparsely populated environment but not impossible, humans never check in the tiny corners behind

things, as long as he could find something to hide behind he could remain undetected. They had long ago been banished from the “official” corridors of the labyrinth, “improved the organization's image” they said, though they never abandoned them, and they were too useful for that. But because they were no longer allowed in the office, operations like this had become necessary from time to time. As Shortie peeked out from behind the trash can he could see the way to Kristen Geary office was open.

“Geez, I gotta get in there somehow without being seen!” Shortie muttered to himself as he looked around the walkway looking for a place to hide. In something. Anything. Then Shortie's little ah-ha moment came when he noticed a trash can in the corner of Kirsten Geary's office. “Bingo!” Shortie said, and scurried for the trash can and climbed in, “Ahhh that's more like it,” he said to himself as he got comfortable waiting for somebody to just waltz into the office and spill the beans.

As he settled in he could hear an unfamiliar sound approaching the office, the heavy sound metal clicking against the concrete, followed by the clicking of high heel shoes. “You're taking a big risk with her Walter, she has betrayed us once and she will do it again.” Kirsten entered the room and tossed an empty cigarette pack and starbucks cup in the trashcan. Shortie felt the empty cigarette pack bonk him on the head, “Geez!” he whispered and snooped inside the cigarette box and sniffed. Nothing good there, he thought. Then saw the empty Starbucks coffee cup. He carefully and silently as he could, he pried open the plastic cup cover and sniffed. His eyes bugged out, and gave a weak *whoa* and dove right into the drippings of the leftover mocha latte. “Mmmmm, this is heavenly,” he thought as he lapped up the remaining drippings of coffee as he listened to the conversation. A man in metal exoskeleton followed Kirsten into her office, his ghostly white mustache and wrinkled face hidden behind an oxygen mask looked familiar but he could not place him.

“We are the verge of a breakthrough Ms.Geary, Dr. West's previous work for Third Sunday has been a boon to our R&D efforts, we can now grow the humans we want and soon we will be able to control them.”

Kirsten turned to the man, with an angry look on her face, “And what about her personal project? We just finished pissing off Orochi, the last thing we need to escalate a pissing match into a full blown war.”

“It won't come to that, even if she somehow manages to find where Lilith's...pet went to, she would never be able to control it.” The man's exoskeleton knocked over the trashcan by accident.

Shortie takes a tumble as the trash goes down onto the floor, confronting the mass avalanche of cigarette boxes, coffee cups, hamburger wrappers and crumpled pieces of paper. Shortie grabs hold of the edge of the trash can with his claws helping him to remain inside the trash while it is tipped over.

“That's not our only worry Walter...that thing she keeps with her, it's getting out of the control, Temple Hall had their fucking cats here looking for a kitten it probably ate...Diamon put us in weak position, we are not ready to go to war with them yet and we are sure as hell going over some fucking cat.”

“They won't get involved, they are in the same position we are, worst case scenario, we will confine Brown Jenkin to the park until Purity is ready.”

Kirsten, opening her desk drawer and taking out a new pack of cigarettes, "It was a mistake for the committee to bring you back into the fold. There are far too many variables in this scheme of yours." The metal hands of the man's exoskeleton grasped the trash can as he turned up right, "Nothing ventured, nothing gained Ms. Geary, I didn't get where I am today by being cautious." Shortie grasped onto the edge of the trash can, pretty tight as he got flipped over the right side up, and dropped quietly to the bottom.

"Geez! What could Browni possibly be up to? No wonder those Russian cats were here all pissed off! And what about this Lilith's pet they keep talking about? What does this thing have anything to do with us? We're into controlling humans now? Whatever it is, it can't be any good? Boss is gonna be pissed at Browni even more when I tell him this. Especially now, we know that... that crazy doctor is still alive."

"A dreamer is not a risk we are comfortable with Walter, Orochi was barely able to contain the remains of one and Helen is looking for an intact one, if she. "

"She won't, Ms. Geary, in all likelihood her personal project will take her into the middle of the Pacific where she will be eaten alive by draug, after she finishes her work for us of course."

Kirsten sitting down at her desk and putting her hands in her face, "At least give me a body I can give Temple Hall. If they think Browni went rogue, they won't draw us into this mess."

The man in the exoskeleton turned to leave the office, "Dr. West has the kitten, something about her being important to her "refinement" of Browni. Personally I think the little beast dragged it home and failed to kill it. She then panicked and now doesn't know what to do."

"Dammit, that little rat bastard DOES have that kitten!" The man in the exoskeleton turned and looked at the trashcan before turning back to Kirsten.

"Once Dr. West is done I will send the body to Temple Hall and we will say...raccoons got her or whatever it is that preys on house cats."

As the man turned to leave, he turned back to Kirsten one last time. "And that dress makes you look like whore! Show was damn respect for our order."

Kirsten calmly taking a puff off her cigarette, "I guess you would know, wouldn't you Walter. By the way, say hi to Will for me." The man sneered as stormed out of the office. Kirsten sitting down at her desk, "Did you catch all that Shortie?"

Shortie rustled from inside the trash can, making it rattle and shake from the outside as Kirsten Geary watches it with humour.

"Aw geez, how the hell did ya know I was in here?"

"I could smell the sewers from outside in the halls, by the way what did I say about coming here?"

"Not to come here again, yeah, yeah, we heard that time and time again, but this shtick is also important to us, since it was US who took the beatings from those CATS thanks to that fucking no good Browni Jenkin, that piece of garbage! Wait til we get our teeth on him and whack him good!" Shortie screeched and scurried onto her desk angrily.

"I am glad to see you're so enthusiastic about your new assignment...I am not about to let Walter draw us into a war we can't win. We pick the time and place for our battles and we leave nothing to chance when we do go to war. So I need you to take a message to Jimmy the Don."

Taking another puff, "You will all go to Agarthia and find the branch for Anaheim, California, you will then go to Disneyland infiltrate Walters base and bring the kitten back here."

"Whattaya got plans with the kitten? Aw geez, we can't afford another beatdown by those cats again!" Shortie replied bashfully after she picked up Shortie by the scruff of his neck.

"There will be no beating, not today, we will return this kitten to Temple Hall and then we will wait and we will rebuild, and when the time is right we will strike. But right now we can not afford to be drawn into another war. So we must minimize risk wherever possible, this kitten is a risk."

Pulling a black plastic card out of her desk.

"Get your crew whatever they need to get the job done. This won't be a easy task but it is extremely important, there is more at stake then you realize," She said as she put Shortie on her desk.

Shortie ponders on the major assignment that is soon to be ahead of them, "I'll be sure to tell the boss, Dollface!" he replies as he grabbed the plastic card with his teeth and scurries off out of the office and onto the lift exit the labyrinth proper to carry his message to his boss Jimmy. Kirsten sinking into her chair and looking out over Brooklyn before sighing.

"What a fucking mess."

CHAPTER TWENTY: The Hot-Ass Mix Tape:

George stared at the computer monitor, trying to make sense of the coordinates extracted from the tape. 6 in all, all in the middle of the south pacific, all of them corresponding to sound recorded on soviet hydrophones. The sound itself was nothing remarkable, a simple bloop played out over a couple of seconds. The sound would repeat itself twice and then vanish. 'It's not a whale, not Draug, bubbles maybe?' perched atop one of the computer towers, George began to doze off as the clock sounded 3:00am.

When he opened his eyes, he found himself in a stone room surrounded by books in the lap of magi in a blue robe.

"Surely this is not my laboratory, and you who are you?" he muttered to himself and woman, as he stretched out his paws with a big, fat yawn.

The magi was speaking with a women who head red hair, "You're making too much of the this, just because you disagree with the chancellor on the status of slaves from the mainland, doesn't make her some ghoul."

"Don't you think that it's a little strange when Mu is facing an anima shortage, that we are able to light the entire city?" the woman said. The magi set gorge down as, he continued his argument. As George looked for place to lay down he could hear a hissing sound coming from the hall, followed by what sound like laughter.

"Could that be a cat? Nein. A human? Nein, it can't be. But could it be?" The hall seemed to stretch in front of George as the magis library fell away. At the end of the hallway was dim orange light, the hissing seemed to be replaced by static now, that hidd a voice, "Here puss, puss, puss," before fading to silence. "Mich? Wer ruft mich an?"

The voice only chuckled, "Come here, puss, come see what bloops."

"Alright, alright, this better be something good, I don't like to play mind games." George replied. The dim light grew into a metal chamber at the center of which sat a great aquarium containing what looked like a mass of blue gel giving off a dim orange glow. In front of the aquarium stood another woman with red hair, this one gave gorge a bad feeling, even in dream she felt

dangerous. The woman spoke a language he didn't recognize. George twitched with ears and scratched himself with his paw, "I don't understand a word that woman is saying. How I wish Natasha would be here to hear this, she is very masterful at languages." Looking up the aquarium George could see a tentacled face to starting to form, as the glass began to crack. As the glass cracked, alarm went off as time seemed to freeze.

"What's wrong puss, confused?" as George turned his head, he could see a black ooze leaking out of the floor.

"Don't think we have met yet, names Jon, just Jon. Nothing fancy, Puss, and you are listening to my signal."

"Hi, John! Errr... wait a minute, have we met before?"

"Difficult to tell Puss, I meet a lot people. Some of them walk on two legs other on four, it gets hard to tell you apart sometimes. Bet your wondering what that creatures though, and what made the sound on that tape, and why Nahab wants it so bad."

"That would be one of my queries. Ya. And who is Nahab?" George inquired in his dream state.

"Sorry about that Puss, difficult keeping synch with your meat. Dr. West is that name she gave you. It's the name she gave the dreamers too and return they gave her the name Nahab. That thing in the Jar was suppose to be a vessel, but Lilith didn't quite get it right." George pondered through the mumbo-jumbo of this John and caught some details that was running through his mind, that we would so love to find out. *Who would this Lilith be?* Obviously none of his cats ever encountered this female before, not even Min-ji who was stationed in Kaidan acting as the eyes and ears of the Templars, but she had been recalled back due to the catnapping of Anya. The voice laughed and seemed to shake the entire world, "She would be soooo angry she heard you say that, the last time a cat made her that angry she flung into the stratosphere. She was the first of the humans, brought forth by the host and she was...a curious sort, to put it mildly, always pushing the boundaries of what is possible, even managed to awake one of the dreamers. Tell me Puss what do you think dreams sound like?"

"They sound like the jingles of a cat toy, or music after a hit of catnip?" The voice laughed again, "You are a simple man Puss, I like that...so I am going to let you in on a secret. When dreams are in the deepest part of the ocean they go Bloooooop, and they call out to all who are sensitive, begging to be woken up. Nahab hears these Bloops but she doesn't know where to look only that the dreams are somewhere way down in the earth. Some place neither her or Brown Jenkin can get too." The room seemed to dissolve as the blackness was replaced a single pedestal in beam of light, on it was wrapped gift. "Take it Puss, a gift for a man of simples taste like yourself." George looked at the wrapped gift and dug his teeth into the ribbon, trying not to tear the little box. He let out a polite "Vielen Dank" and asked, "Shall I open it?"

"If you like" the voice answered, the box seemed to whisper to George as he undid the the ribbon.

"Did you say something John?" he asked as he was untying the ribbon. As he clutched the ribbon in his teeth his mind was flood with strange images, castles and palm trees, strange humanoid beings marching in a parade, screaming and man in a metal suit yelling in board room. Some where near the end, he saw Anya in a cage and Dr. West, looking into glass case rubbing her forehead. Then finally the smiling yellow teeth of Browni.

This was the last thing he saw before he was awoken by a paw nudging him. "Huh? Who? Nein-nein-nein-nein-nein-nein..." George muttered in a crescendo in his sleep state.

Ziggy pawed George even harder and meowed, "GEORGE!"

George nearly jumped off five feet into the air and landed on the computer towers, the fur on his back standing on ends and glared at Ziggy. "Augh! Ziggy! Don't you sneak up on me like that! Who do you think your are?" George growled at Commander Ziggy as he pulls his paw away from the back of George. Ziggy looked at him as one of his pips on his collar was flashing bright orange, indicating something important, "We just got a tweet from Browni Jenkin. Take a look at this!"

"Here is the deal stupid cats, Give Browni hot ass mix tape that stupid cats stole and browni will give back stupid baby cat." The tweet was accompanied by a picture of Anya in what looked like a cage.

George looked at Ziggy blankly and wiggled his whiskers, "That's all he wants?" exclaimed George to Ziggy. "If he wanted a hot-ass mix tape, we could give him one of Phil's 50 Shades of Catnip videos that he downloads off Youtube! That cat has a nasty, nasty mind sometimes! Always thinking that he's in heat! It's disturbing!"

George thought back on his dream and wonder if he should tell Ziggy what he had seen.

"So I was doing the crazy dream thing, before you started smacking me with the paw. It was very weird. I saw palm trees, and strange humanlike beings, like humans with mouse-like heads, and ducks and dogs walking upright, some human in a boardroom and then Anya in a cage, and Dr. West, and last Browni with his ugly yellow teeth. It was all too real!"

As George finished he noticed something Anya's eye in the picture a reflection of vehicle with a logo on it.

"Warte eine Minute! What is that on the vehicle. Make the picture bigger, will ya?" George asked. Ziggy swiped the holographic screen in front of him and made the picture bigger, and adjusted the lines so it would be made more clearer.

George had a closer look and his eyes grow wide like golf balls, and let a big meowy,

"Disneyland? EUREKA! OF COURSE! DISNEYLAND! IT ALL FITS! Darn, this John is good!"

George exclaimed, "We have to tell Prince Bigglesworth at once!" George and Ziggy leaped from the computer station onto the floor and darted out the room, across the hall ducking under the feet of human Templars passing by, "Out of the way, out of the way, humans!" they yelled as they ran towards and through the Crucible doors and into the Royal Chambers in the west wing. George nearly tripped over the cat flap, and Ziggy flowed through his door like a clean fiery hoop jump in a circus.

Running on the red carpet, "Mein Herr, mein Herr! "Aufwachen! Aufwachen! We have news of Anya and Browni Jenkin!" George cried out to rouse the Prince from his sleep.

Bigglesworth was meowing and growling on his princely throne as he woke up and stretched his legs, "What is it? Speak quickly!"

Ziggy showed the tweet on his holographic screen that project from his collar, "Browni's demands, Your Highness!"

Prince Bigglesworth quickly reads the tweet message from Browni Jenkin's account, and gasps, "A hot-ass mix tape? What in the bleeding dickens is a hot-ass mix tape? Doesn't this rat speak any sense?"

George hangs his head low and explains, "Well, mein Herr, a hot-ass mix tape is... umm... well um... have you ever heard of the Animal Planet channel or the Nature channel per chance?"

Bigglesworth grows annoyed with George's rambling, "Go on, out with it!" he growled.

"Well, it's mostly about a female and male animal... um... well umm... find a comfy spot to... you know... get it on!" George explains with an embarrassing tone.

"And that's what a hot-ass mix tape is, Captain?" Bigglesworth inquires, "Well, in that case, if Browni Jenkin demands a hot-ass mix tape, he shall receive one, he can have one of Phil's 50 Shades of Catnip movies that he downloads off of YouTube. That show is dreadfully graphic for my princely tastes, but they say it is the best animal porn movie ever made!" Bigglesworth mentions although he couldn't dare to stifle a laugh.

Ziggy facepaws while listening to the conversation and interrupts the two to clarify, "Sire, I believe Browni Jenkin means the old data recordings George and Natasha recovered from the old rundown facility in Moscow. Where Anya was taken."

"There is more, mein Herr, we have reason to believe that Anya is being held in Disneyland."

"Evidence?" asked Prince Bigglesworth. Ziggy shows the photo of Anya in a cage, and Ziggy enlarged the photograph to reveal a reflection from her right eye, of a vehicle with the Disneyland logo on it.

Bigglesworth paws for the photo to be put away, and ponders for a moment, "Then it seems that we have to find the exact location of this Disneyland, and mobilize our teams for an insertion plan. I will have my brother contact Commander Max of the Savannah Honor Guard of Santa Monica Mountain, and let him know what we found. This is their territory, so they have a need to know that we will be coming soon, and may wish to join us in our operation. They know the terrain like the back of their paws and they are the fastest buggers I know. Commander Ziggy, call an emergency meeting at 0500 and make sure that all officers are present in my chambers no later than that. If we are to get Anya out of there safely, we are going to have to plan and act fast! Now leave me! I wish to snooze a little more before the briefing!"

CHAPTER TWENTY ONE: Boldly They Rode:

Scene Theme:

Templar Hall, Ealdwic, London
0500 Hours, London Time

All feline officers have assembled in the ready room of Prince Bigglesworth's private chambers. They gather in the middle of the red carpet, studying the holographic image map of Disneyland, displayed on the floor screen. The room is a little smaller than the actual chambers, adorned by the twin munchkin princes' most treasured occult items collected over the time of their service to the Templar cause. Bookshelves upon bookshelves of occult items were displayed and maintained daily by Jeeves. Some were cat toys that squeaked. Some were

items that rattled when you go near them. Some that can set an entire room on fire, when you scare them. Bigglesworth and Albert do name their stuffed animal toys. A sign that is placed on the front door to the ready room states, "Beware of Dog." It was referring to their stuffed white and black toy dog by the name of Snoopy, that the cats swear that when squeezed, it set the ready room on fire. Four times.

George takes the floor first before the feline officers. He explains how a human entity named John came to him in a dream while studying the data tapes at his computer station in his lab. He sauntered every cat through the dream with great detail as the officers listened attentively. Alexei, not understanding a word of common speak, Natasha was whispering the translations to him. George explained how John showed him the visions of castles and palm trees, humans with mouse-like heads, dogs, ducks and chipmunks walking upright, Anya being held inside a cage, Dr. West, and lastly their arch-nemesis, Browni Jenkin. The evidence of the photograph of Anya gave away the location through the reflection in Anya's bright yellow eyes. This prompted an emergency recon mission stationing Min-ji and her best feline stealth masters to the location to map out the area before organizing a plan of insertion, attack, and extraction of Anya and perhaps other animals that may be held captive there. As George leaves his front position to return to his seating aside, it was Min-ji's turn to take the floor. Min-ji nods for Phil to upload the map of Disneyland. The detail of the "happiest place on earth" was indeed a massive stronghold. Who knew that Browni would have been holed up in there all this time? The whole map was displayed all over the floor, as Min-ji explains the recon details.

This is not the Templars first encounter with the Disney Corporation, George has searched the archives and discovered that since it's creation, the Disney corporation has been one of the largest surviving front for the Illuminati. The castle in the hologram shrank as massive maze of tunnels under the park. These tunnels stretch underneath the entire city of Anaheim. Anya could in theory be Anywhere in the tunnels though if I were to guess where she is being held, I would estimate the center of the compound near this castle here, Min-ji said point towards a tower near the center of the park. Commander Ziggy squinted at hologram, what do we know about its defenses. A series of blue holograms appeared over the map. Min-ji continued, the surface is covered in several decades of anti anima barriers, the park is patrolled by both covert and uniformed guards and the tunnels are house close to 10,000 Illuminati agents. Outside of the labyrinth it is the best guarded Illuminati stronghold. Prince Bigglesworth's eyes widen and he was feeling that his whiskers were getting in knots. "The Illuminati. I should have known they would have their hands on this corporation. They were always power hungry individuals both humans and a gold mine for the Luminatti family." Min-Ji continued, "These are just the defenses that we know about, There is only one recorded Templar who has ever breached the tunnels, a human woman named Kate Michaels. Here reports indicated that the Disney Corporation has long had an interest in genetic engineering and has technology comparable to the Orochi group." Min-Ji paused for a second, "If we attempted to go in through the front gate we would be spotted and taken in the custody almost immediately. But I have identified a way in." The hologram shrank again and green dome appeared over the park. The ward only reach about 200 meters

off the ground and the anti-anima wards only extends around the park not above it. In theory we should be able to deploy from the air.”

Commander Ziggy pointed at Malcolm with his paw, “Mal, what about your flyboy? We could probably get there with your flying machine.”

“Och, me flyboy, it’s not ready yet. We’re still waiting for emergency mechanism parts in case something goes wrong in mid-air. We cannae’ risk it right now. And it’s certainly only made for single pilot, I cannae take any passengers on it, we would need a lot of them to fly over there.” Malcolm meowed.

“Can you commandeer an airplane in the meantime?” Natasha asked.

“There’s a place called Heathrow Airport, but it’s always crawling with humans, and plus they will stick us in the cargo bay if we try to get in there.” Malcolm replied.

“How about a military base? Those aren’t crawling with humans as much and it’s much more private.” Bunky asked curiously.

Malcolm licked his paw and scratched his ears, “If we knew a human here who would get us into those planes, and then parachute us off the plane all at once, that would be more efficient.”

George’s eyes and ear pull back as he heard of parachuting off a plane as an insertion point,

“Nein, nein, nein, how in the world are we ever going to parachute off the plane without any parachutes. Ya, humans can use them, but not cats. They are too big, and we would crater into Disneyland and to our deaths. Kiss our nine lives, auf wiedersehen!”

Bunky pondered on the idea, and came up with one by himself. It’s a long shot but it could work, “Not if we have humans to break our fall! Why not the humans parachute *us* down there with them?”

Min-Ji started again, “During the day this would blow our cover, but we might be able to do it during the night. Intel says that the park is less densely populated during the night and if we come in at the right altitude, we should be able to slip one or two humans pass their sensors...there is also one last thing I think we should cover.”

The hologram of the castle disappeared and footage from the last major battle at Disneyland began playing. In it they saw a team of human agents attempting to defeat a bird of the zero point pathogen in a large chamber that collapsed shortly after.

“This is just one of several creatures that agents claim to have encountered in the tunnels. We don’t know if it’s still there or what else may be waiting for us down there. We should proceed with extreme caution, animals have been in this place and those who have, haven’t come back.”

Min-ji informed the officers in the ready room.

Prince Bigglesworth ponders at the map of Disneyland, and assesses what will be truly at stake here should he sends his officers to what is possibly called a suicide mission or their greatest excursion yet. Bigglesworth looks over at Natasha and Alexei. Knowing full well for what they have been through over the last few days, it hasn’t been easy for them get over the catnapping of their only daughter Anya. Bigglesworth knows all too well that Alexei and his family would love to get their paws on those creatures that may be getting in their way of achieving their objectives. Most likely that Alexei would save his strength when he most needs it when he faces Browni Jenkin in battle, and hopefully that he would finally bring Browni down and send him to the abyss where he belongs. As of now, the priority here in Bigglesworth’s mind is, finding Anya and bringing her home safe.

“Alexei and Natasha, I suggest you call upon your family, and mobilize yourselves as the Alpha team in this mission. You’re all going in, but the first priority is finding Anya.” Bigglesworth commanded as Natasha translates to Alexei of his orders. He then turns to the others.

“Min-ji, I suggest you bring your stealth team in first into the insertion point and through the tunnels. Kill anything that may stand your way to clear the path for Alexei and Natasha’s team to go through and get their job done. Dr. Lox, Oksana, and Nurse Mindy will station a veterinary treatment camp at the extraction point. Ziggy, Bunky, Malcolm, George and Phil, you’re Bravo team, you will get down there and you will find the computer terminal of Dr. West. Hack into it and extract whatever information that this human has stored there. The rest of you will provide cover until all data is gathered. I want to know how this old data tape is related to any of her research. Oh and Oksana my dear, perhaps you can turn on that wonderful charisma of yours and see if you can persuade some humans to take us down on the parachutes? Cheers, dear.” As the map flickered off, the cats left to begin preparing for their mission. George however couldn’t shake the feeling that he was being watched by some unseen force. Perhaps it was only a cold though.

The old cargo plane hummed through the night sky as it began to circle over park. The agents prepared themselves for a drop, strapping their cats into their harnesses. As the plane began to descend to just above the opening in the barriers. A radio transmission began to come through the radio.

“Attention, unknown aircraft you are entering restrict space, leave at once.”

Janis Harrington had served on private jets before, but certainly not in a cargo plane. She sat quietly with her trusty flamethrower and pistols. The smell was very different, if not pleasant. The scent of old cargo, ammunitions, and perhaps maybe food items that might have gotten moldy or stale while on flight. The air quality wasn’t the best. She sneezed a few times, as she grabbed her tissues from her pocket and blew her nose. “Bless you, Mom!” consoled Bunky as he nuzzled his head against her left arm as he clawed onto the padding that protected her from the claw marks. “Thank you, sweetie! Now you and Ziggy be careful and quickly get this done, so we could all go home safe and sound.” she replied softly as she sniffled some air into her lungs and calms down. Unsure whether it is the smell that is getting to her or the nervousness that she is feeling from this task. She has never parachuted off an airplane before. She had to take a really crash course in parachuting from Templar Hall. The strain from the learning and physical demand of it really made her quite sore and stiff. The radio chatter in the background ordering them to turn around and fly back really concerned her, hoping that this would not escalate into some sort of aerial assault from the ground. The cats’ ordeal and mission is very crucial to them and she was very happy to accept the invitation to help get them to their insertion point. Victim or not.

“Perhaps we should get off now?” she inquires.

“Don’t worry. Not until they tell us, Mom!” said Ziggy as he pawed his mom on her right arm, with Phil and George, clinging onto her legs, and Malcolm at the chest.

Klaus von Richter huddled in a corner of the cargo bay while in the shape of a large, eldritch raven with bright blue eyes. He squirmed, padding on all sides of him. The tentacled cats of the Stealth squadron began their cautious ascent on to the protective equipment that so aided him

from the infinity of cat cuts he would otherwise suffer. It was tauntingly cute to him, but he had to focus, despite the tentacles of the Nermegals tickling so very much at every feather. "Are you sure?" Klaus knew he had to do this despite his hesitation – for the kittens.

Angel continued to tighten and recheck each strap and padding in place. She stood ready and looked to the felines known as "Team Alpha" with a quiet upnod. She was a human of little words during such an event, as even an experienced jumper tended to worry continually about safety and equipment. When she was done, she ensured that the others' equipment was secured and properly fastened as well. Despite her professional gear, the woman smelled of the faintest trace of catnip.

Diana is sitting rather nervously in the plane by the Cadets smiling slightly at them reassuringly if only to mask her nervousness. Her red hair and green eyes sticking out but otherwise looking fairly normal. She would have on her gear that would look similar to Orochi armor only the front showing the letters S.I. on the front. Would have a few different items like an elementalism focus and a high tech assault rifle with her as well as an odd looking bracer on her hand that every once and awhile lets off a slight hum. Adjusting it slightly she holds her parachute pack by her.

"This is your final warning unknown aircraft leave this air space at once," the radio said as the rear of the cargo plane began to open. The air pushing the agents forward as it left the plane. "Remember teams, claw down and eyes on your exit buddy!" Ziggy commanded to the cats strapped onto their human for their descent.

Janis approached the edge of the aircraft and felt the rushing need to pass out, but she had to fight that urge, the cats needed her. "Remember to keep form on the jump," she muttered to herself as she looked at the night sky with the white and yellow lights reduced to dots down below.

"You can do this, Mom!" assured Ziggy. Janis smiled at all of them clinging to her and with ease, she jumped off. Down and down they all went and stiffened her body to keep her from flailing about in mid-air, then the time came to let loose the parachute. Janis tugged on the string of her parachute and the projectiles of strong material and ropes eject from the pack and form up into a graceful parachute above her head. She glides into the air, like a free bird in the daytime sky. "TOP OF THE WORLD, MOM! WOOOOOHOOO!" cried Bunky as he clinged onto his mom and feels his face against the wind.

"I BELIEVE I CAN FLYYYY!" Bunky starts meowing into song.

"I BELIEVE I CAN TOUCH THE SKYYYY!" Ziggy joins in with Bunky.

"Je pense à ce sujet chaque jour et la nuit!" Phil adds in on the meowing.

"Strecke meine Flügel aus und fliege weg!" George bellows out his own version of the familiar tune.

"I BELIEVE I CAN SOAR!" Malcolm meows as the song, comes to an end, as they approach landing.

At the command, the bird that was currently Klaus made a running jump and leapt out for his feathery, controlled flight from the plane as they made their descent toward the designated destination. Each flap of the wing is strong and determined, even if he himself is riddled with fears for his purring passengers. The mood was certainly lightened for the cowardly corvid as the cats on his compatriots began to sing to their hearts' content on descent. Oh, how they

could touch the sky at that moment. Klaus, however, stayed quiet despite the persistent need to join in the sing-along, for his job was of a more quiet nature – the inconspicuous, quiet landing of a number of espionage-enabled felines. Despite the overwhelming fear from the frazzled raven, it was still a graceful flight as he expertly aimed for his landing, black claws out and ready for the ground beneath him. Klaus was determined not to fail.

After the corvid, Angelique unhooked her line and ensured that every cat was secure. With a cautious eye, she leapt into the air and splayed out to slow the descent, then began to maneuver towards the intended destination. She kept an eye on the coordinates on the HUD on the helmet and angled them towards the target. The wind made the singing oblivious to her ears.

Diana gulps slightly and exhales looking a bit better afterwards as if steeling herself. Standing up and looking to the cats "Ok here we g-go. Grab on and I'll keep you safe during descent." saying in a detectable French accent, strapping her gear to her back as well as her parachute she would kneel down to let the cats on her. Looking determined to them but when no one's watching definitely having a nervousness about her having a fear of heights. Exhaling again she makes her way towards the others

"Stay as close to me as you can on the drop," making it to the edge stuttering slightly as she reaches the edge peering over and turning even more paler than her skin usually is. Exhaling and closing her eyes as she plunges out of the plane. Falling a normal distance keeping form as she drops. Deploying her parachute doing the best to keep the sheer terror off her face. The bracer and her earpiece beeping slightly.

The agents landed in what looks like an old town in the western US, it was mostly deserted but in the distanced they could hear people celebrating. Ziggy looking around him noticed a blinking red light on black box hidden in the bushes nearby. Overhead a quadcopter seemed to buzz around the agents making sure to maintain a safe distance. Janis notices Ziggy eyeing on the red light, and cautions everyone, whispering.

"Guys, be careful, I think that's a motion sensor panel over there!"

Bunky crouches low closer to the box, "Can it be disarmed?" he asks.

"I don't think that touching anything would be wise." Janis replies as she watches the red light go on and off. "Surely there must be a way around it."

The sensor appeared to be sealed shut, but there was an exposed wire at the base, disabling the sensor may draw attention the area but it could also by them time.

"Maybe that wire over there can be cut. What could possibly happen? It's not like it's an explosive device." Malcolm the Scottish Fold meows as he assesses the situation from a safe distance. Bunky sniffs at the exposed wire as he got closer, "Well, what have we got to lose?" he says. Bunky digs out his claws and brings the wire closer to him without tripping the sensor. Baring his teeth, he grips the center of the wire and gives it a good, clean chomp. The red light stops blinking.

"Ok, now we need to test it." Bunky added. He finds a small rock nearby and bats it to the motion sensor range. Nothing happened. The red light went out as the quad copter flew off into the night. "I think it's cleared here, guys." Janis added.

Klaus did not at all like the idea of drawing attention to themselves to buy some time, but he was nonetheless quiet, for he had no better alternative in such an unusual area as they

were. He turned to the sound of celebration. It could only be one thing: Disney. He wanted so very badly to see the land of magic again. While the others busied themselves with wires and the aftermath, Klaus crept closer to the foliage in an effort at seeing what precisely the state of affairs close to them was, but it was a short-lived curiosity, as Klaus' attention returned to the group with the completion of their own bouts of wire-related subterfuge. It was only discontent that filled the ruffled raven as he watched the quadcopter float elsewhere, unsure of its final destination and entirely wary as worries of new dangers filled his head. "Now may we move on...?" whined the sometimes-bird with ever-growing fear. "I do not think standing still will help us for long." Impatience filled him – impatience and worry. The billowing mass of the parachutes left a large trail, and were quickly gathered up and sequestered behind a bush.

Angelique unsnapped and unfastened rapidly, then checked on the status of her feline riders. Tentatively, she spoke to them.

"Y'all ok to lead the way?" Natasha, one of the female Russian Blues, and mother of Anya, asked if every cat was ok, in Russian and her mate Alexei responded, then Natasha nods.

"We should be okay, we know where to go from here. Spasibo! Thanks, it was quite a smooth ride." Natasha replied on behalf of her family and graciously thanked Angel for the lovely trip. Diana upon landing on the ground would immediately exhaled in relief at having her feet on the ground once again. Kneeling down to let the cats off her her checking if they are ok.

"Are all of you well? Nothing go wrong on decent?"

Noticing the noises around them though the area is not one she has ever been to she would recognise what it was. A series of quite enthusiastic beeps would emit through her headset to her from her drone checking on her status.

"It's fine Squeeky we landed well" muttering into her headset continuing to take in her surroundings.

"Who is Squeeky?" Shoe, the youngest of the cadet kittens asked the nice lady who gave them a parachute ride down there, "Do you have a mouse? Squeeky is definitely a name for a mouse!" Diana smiles over at Shoe "Oh no I don't have a mouse zat is my drone, he couldn't come along for this mission but he is however able to analyse and work with me or rather through some of my systems to aid me. Er if zat makes sense?" Shoe looked up at Diana and gave a little smile, which kind of looked like a toothy exposure of the chops as he yawned.

"I would like to meet Squeeky someday." Shoe said and he thanked her for the ride and joined the others as Ziggy gathers them up for the insertion.

The sound of a hydraulic door could be heard in the distance followed by the sound of boots against the sidewalk. The cats could hear rustling in the nearby bushes, and the buzzing of two other quadcopters. Janis hears the sound of rustling boots pounding on the sidewalks and gaining close proximity to their position, "Someone is coming this way. Ziggy, we need move fast!" Janis whispered to the others. Janis took cover in a nearby shrub as the other cats either hid under objects, or climbed up the nearby trees and waited for the all clear. Startled at the frantic motions, Klaus leapt to the tree and did the only thing he could think of: played bird. With a flighty motion he was in a tree, sitting still as can be as he pretended to be a bird roosting away in the dead of night. An oversized bird, but in the magical world of Disney, who could truly tell? Klaus hoped nobody would pay too much mind to it. Angelique crouched low, finding cover

in the shadows behind a nearby retaining wall. Her outfit was a black tactical suit and it blended seamlessly with the shadows. With her night vision goggles in the helmet, she watched quietly. Diana would try to find a patch of land of a tr to mask herself in the night to hopefully catch a glimpse of the one approaching. Looking more hardened suddenly.

Out of the bushes, pounced an old black cat, with one good eye and no tail, wearing what looked like a Kevlar vest. He was followed by two robotic cats.

"You were told to turn back, lower your weapons and come with me for interrogation," the cat growled. Alexei, Ziggy and Bunky who were hiding under the parked vehicles together, crept out from their hiding spot and hissed, Ziggy drew his focus at the robotic cats as his paws turn red, "You're gonna have to get all of us first, old cat!"

Klaus peeked his head out from the trees at the unusual sight of the cybernetic feline foes and their vest-wearing commander. The Illuminati had their own talking cats and never told him? He felt both insulted and immensely curious and immediately hopped out of the tree to wave a wing to the cats with cheerful gusto. "Haaloo! Might I opt out of interrogation, please?" He offered in his odd ways to try and woo the Enlightened cats into not torturing him horrifically.

The old cat turned his attention to the trees, "Take that one to the boss! Last thing we need is one of Kirsten's people in the park." he shouted. Angelique, for her part, was already quite overwhelmed by the sight. Her wariness gave way to wide-eyed fascination as the tailless one-eyed feline addressed them in its cute little Kevlar vest.

"Klaus, look! Look at the cute black kitty in the vest, can we take him home? Can we keep him?" The old cats fur bristled at the commit as he growled under his breath. Diana mutters a curse word under her breath unshouldering her assault rifle though not pointing it directly at the older cat just yet. It seems she's taking a more defensive stance.

"Who are you? I'm afraid I can't just go with someone like zis. Perhaps you should stand down and let us speak first, no?" The bracer on her arm would make another beep noise.

The old glared at Diana, despite being less than 2kg, the cat seems oddly intimidating. "All you need to know is that I am security, and you are trespassing on private property," the old cat growled. Diana glared in return at the old cat though she was quickly cut off from asking more questions.

"Fine" snarled the old cat, "This Commander Tigger in sector 3, we 4 rouge humans and a pack of unauthorized cryptids, send a type two squad, no need be clean about this." the cat pointed at Bunky and Ziggy, "Units 03 and 04 take these ones, I'll deal with the Blues." The old cat leapt forward ramming Alexi and driving him against a store front. Diana instinctively pulled up her rifle aiming it at the two robotic guards as Alexei dealt with Commander Tigger. Alexei slowly got up and shook his head as he brought out his claws on both paws. Shouting at the old cat in Russian, Alexei pounced and tackled Commander Tigger to the ground and to clawed at his ears and face. The old black cat kicked Alexi off him before biting his tail and attempting to haul him into the bushes, as the two cats paired off, a flash of light could be seen in the distance, the light only barely illuminate disney guards in full armor rushing to the site. Before Diana could rush to help, she caught sight of the armored security advancing on their location. Turning to the others "We got a problem!" choosing instead to raise her bracer hand sending a bolt of lightning at one of the robotic guards to hopefully shoot curcuit it. As she did so the bracer lets

out an audible beep and a hiss noise. Some yellow looking substance ejecting from an exhaust port on the advanced device. The jolt did not seem to affect the robotic cats, after a few more attempts to short circuit the cats, Diana decided to break off with the group if only to out maneuver the security squad on it way.

Alexi's two brothers, Boris and Sputnik cheer on Alexei as he struggled to get back to his all fours, very surprised that a cat that could be this old, can fight like a wild animal. He realized that he should not underestimate those felines who are the elders, but in this case respect is disregarded, for Tigger's on the wrong side and must be dealt with... expeditiously, but humanely. Alexei remembered seeing a lake when they landed with Angel, and since Tigger was blind one eye, he might be able to use this disability to his advantage. Alexei rose and stuck his tongue out at Commander Tigger and then took off running for the lake like a banshee with his teammates running with him.

Ziggy and Bunky were left behind fighting the two robotic cats, throwing everything they could with paws and claws, but to no avail, the robotic cats were very impervious to physical punishment. "Mon Dieu! What do we do?" Phil exclaimed, but instead of waiting for an answer Phil readied his chaos focus that looks like a purple toy mouse. He readied to use his famous chaos pull to yank one of them off the two robotic cats and perhaps slam him to the ground repeatedly until nuts and bolts came flying off. Phil the French Persian cat pauses when he aims his focus, he hesitated and rethought his decision, "Sacre Bleu! I am better than zis!" he cries, and he paws on one the golden pips on his red and white collar to bring up his computer screen and online keyboard. Phil, scrolled through the code to find a flaw within the firmware of the robotic cats. "I zink I have it! There is a flaw in ze authentication mechanism, I can hack into it and take control over both of zem! Malcolm see if you can distract them while I assume control. Malcolm nods and runs over to the fight and climbs the nearby tree. As soon as Ziggy and the robotic cat passed over, Malcolm jumped on its back and rode 'em until he found a main control panel on the scruff. The robocat tried to buck Malcolm off its back like a horse with a cowboy on bareback in a rodeo. Ziggy escaped his robotic captor and ran to help his brother, Bunky who was having his own problems with the other one. Phil frantically searched the files on Disney's robotics directories until he found the main executable, Phil quickly de-compiled the executable and found the subroutine that regulated the cats thought processes. Queuing up an SQL injection from his own system, Phil targeted the files in robotic cats credentials directory: "Execute c:/templarcat/hack/control/target A-312789/codebreak."

As the injection executes the resources that shape the cats neural networks are compiled and the robotic cats targeting process are rewritten, deeming it no longer controlled by the enemy. The robotic cats who were fighting the three live anima cats meowed, "SUBJECT VERIFIED, BREAKING PURSUIT and ASSISTING NEW HOST!" The robotic cats stand in a neutral stance as they break their engagement with Ziggy, Bunky and Malcolm.

"Haha! Not quite the lean, mean, pudgy cat machine, aren't ya! Way to go, Phil, you smart little floof!" Bunky said as he pawed on the scruff of one the big metal cats. Malcolm still road on the back of the other cat as he glances at Phil, "Let's see what kind of stuff these big baddies can do!"

Meanwhile, Alexei was still having his issues with Commander Tigger as the team ran to the lake in Frontierland. The lake was quite deep, but Alexei didn't mind water at all. In fact, whenever Alexei ever came home all dirty and muddy after a cat fight near his forever home in St. Petersburg, Galina would put him in the bathtub of warm water for a bath. He's had a lot of practice swimming in bathtubs for most of his nine lives. Alexei and Tigger were exchanging paws for claws and vice versa, Alexei ducked and weaved in a way so that Tigger wouldn't see the lake behind him. Noticing that Tigger was vulnerable on his right side, believing that he would be where his blind side was, Alexei used his quick reflexes to move and deliver a flying drop kick into Tigger's side, knocking him into the lake. Tigger thrashed furiously in the water as he meowed, whined and cried looking for a way out, or looking for something to grab onto and pull himself out of the lake. Alexei looked on with a slight smile on his face. Normally his comrades would cheer at his success, but watching another cat, enemy or not suffer at the hands of a natural enemy is not what they stand for.

Alexei looks to his brothers Boris and Sputnik. "Это не наш путь! Мы лучше, чем это!"

"This is not our way! We are better than this!" Boris growled in Russian. Alexei nodded and ordered Svetlana to use a chaos pull to yank out the struggling Tigger from the cold lake. Pinning the sopping wet old cat onto the ground as Natasha demanded. Alexei, Boris and Sputnik drew their claws and put them to Tigger's throat, Alexei shouted "Где находится вход в туннели?"

"Where is the entrance to the tunnels?" Startled, Klaus leapt back up to the air and witnessed the spectacle from above. He couldn't possibly bring himself to harm a cat, especially when there was such high potential for friendly fire in the short quarters the felines fought within. As the cats made their mad dash toward the lake, he followed, but not without giving Angel a nudge of an offer on the way in their frantic pursuit of the party. He could do little without causing massive damage to the park as they were then, or traumatically burning a poor cat, and had no knowledge of Russian to know what the cats were demanding of the illuminating cat Commander. All Klaus could do was watch. With a graceful tug and slip of her leg, the warrior swiftly mounted the large bird. "Klaus, do something! The cute kitties are fighting! They're wet so I don't think a spray bottle would work right now." Angelique thinks, wishing for all the world she had a spray bottle full of water. As it was, she did manage to pack a few of her own cat toys, as well as a cat harness. She held out the harness to the fighting cats. "We could make him come along with us?" Her voice changed, adopting the cadence of a typical cat loving person upon meeting a new cat and addressing it for the first time. "TiggTigg, would 'ums like to ride on the big, fluffy bird?" Commander Tigger only growled at the offer, much like an ordinary cat would when confronted by a stranger. Before turning toward Alexei.

Coughing up water Tigger replied, "Bite me outsider." The robot cats began to beep as a red light flashed in their eyes, turning towards splash mount, the robotic cats began to run. Ziggy and his technical team rode with the robocats over to the direction of Splash Mountain. Alexei looks at his brothers, Natasha and Svetlana as they pinned Tigger to the ground. "Бросьте его обратно!"

“Throw him back in!” Alexei commanded as Svetlana prepared for another chaos pull on Commander Tigger. “Wait, wait wait! You said you are better than this!” Tigger exclaimed. Natasha glanced over to him as she looked at the lake, “You’re right! We are! Светлана бросить его обратно! *Svetlana throw him back in!*”

“С удовольствием, моя сестра!”

“With pleasure, my sister!” Svetlana replies in Russian and casts a chaos pull on Tigger’s legs and throws him into the cold lake once again, and followed Ziggy and his team to Splash Mountain.

Aghast at the feline-on-feline violence, and with his beloved wife in tow, Klaus dove toward the lake where the cat had been maliciously left to the elements. The nervous nachtkrapp was outright appalled at the sight of the cat being tossed back in – especially one of his own allegiance – and utterly shocked at the carelessness of his current allies. “We will have to make him!” Klaus shouted back to his wife as he went headlong for the cat. ‘TiggTigg’, as she put it, would be coming in Klaus’s claws whether he wanted to ride the big fluffy bird or not. She held on tightly, keeping herself steady in case there was trouble but ready to fish out the poor old cat. It broke her heart to see any cat hurt. “Save him, Klaus! You can do it!” Diana watched the scene as they threw Tigger back into the lake watching the old cat sputter and struggle against the water looking a bit forlorn.

“No.. You will find I have a beet more mercy... I am sorry.” Raising her bracer hand once again she would send another arc of lightning at the old cat aiming put him out of his misery rather than let him suffer “I am.. Sorry,” before turning back and following the others. The arc struck the surface of the lake but there was no sign of the struggling cat. With frantic fear, the artifact-enabled shapeshifter watched in horror as Diana electrocuted the lake and potentially the cat inside. Klaus was determined to save the cruel cat and, with a heated glower at Diana and hefty encouragement from Angel, swooped in to try and grab any cat that may have been close to the water. Every inch was scoured frantically as he soaked himself and his poor passenger in his search. But Klaus’s action were not in vain as he pulled the wet the cat from the lake by its hind legs before bringing it ashore. Commander Tigger, while unconscious, was still breathing. In the distance Klaus and Angel could see cats running toward Splash Mountain.

The robotic cats ran towards the side of splash mount where a large metal door was already open. As they disappeared inside the metal doors begin to close as a squad of heavily armored Disney guards begin closing on the location of the agents.

“Phil, we’re gonna need your skills again!” Malcolm yelled as they ran towards the doors.

Phil pawed on the back of his robocat and found a switch on the main console. He flicked it open and out came two rocket launchers on the sides.

“Wow, I zink I have it! The white switch in the main console!” Phil yelled back as Malcolm found the switch on the other robocat.

“On me signal, fire at will!” Malcolm gave the order as they get closer to the doors. The metal doors had nearly shut, when Malcolm ordered the robotic cats to fire. The riding cats both press the black launch button and four rockets were deployed straight outward from their launchers heading straight for the metal doors. A direct hit. All feline teams hung back as an explosion rocked the ground they stood on. Metal fragments, fire and bodies were flying out from the

impact. Janis ran like hell behind the cats towards the tunnels as she was flagging for Klaus, Angel and Diana.

"Hey, the tunnels are here! Come on!"

Commander Tigger's safety assured, Klaus gently laid the commanding feline officer down. Before he could do anything more for the angry cat, the sight of the rushing felines finally caught up to him. He gave the cat one last look and rushed off in a flurry, unwilling to lose the group so early into their escapades. "Don't die!" shouted Klaus to the unconscious body of Commander Tigger as he, with Angel in tow, raced to the tunnel entrance to regroup. His scurrying was made even more frantic with the explosion that came from the same exact area as the cats. "How do you all keep managing to get yourselves nearly killed?!" Angel had no time to heal the grumpy cat, but she did the only thing she could, reaching into her vest to deploy a tactical cat toy, a tiny woolen mouse stuffed with catnip. "Sorry!" She shouted before being rushed off with Klaus towards the explosion and other kitties. Now running along with the group "Right! On my way" running towards the tunnels and reaching the group. "We will need something to slow zem down, yes?" breathing a little heavier though not looking winded.

Janis met up with Diana at the gates of the blasted doors, "I think the cats are already a step ahead of us here... somehow I find that a little odd." she replied as they finally enter the open doors to the tunnels.

CHAPTER TWENTY TWO: The Great Escape:

Dr. West shutdown the computer for the night as she prepared to leave. She whistled for Browni but he failed to materialized, "Fine sleep down here again" she muttered to herself. As the light went out Anya went to get the keys from the corner of her cage. Anya looked down on the keys as if they were all placed like a hand of playing cards, "Which one is it?" she muttered to herself as she carefully pawed on the keys trying not to get any unwanted attention from the creatures nearby. Since the lights had gone out, Anya could finally make out what was in the cage to her left. A pair of green luminescent eyes were staring out of the darkness, on what appeared to be a vaguely human head. The creatures was now calmer than it had been but it appeared to be watching Anya closely. Before she could break eye contact with the creature, she heard Browni skitter past the lab door. Anya's fur stood up on ends a little by the scruff, and right away, she hid the keys again, in case Browni ever came down her way. Yet Browni never came, it almost as if something else had his attention. Anya then heard another sound, this time it was an electric motor, the kind you might find on golf cart. She turns towards the cage door with curiosity, like waiting for Galina in St. Petersburg to come home from the university and bring them snacks. She was hoping it would be the same man who had spoke to her before Browni woke up from his injection.

A flash light clicked on in the dark and there was Will's round red face staring at her from the dark. "Do you still have my keys?" Anya nodded slightly and showed him with her paw to the corner of the cage.

"It's the one with the little mouse ears on it, if you give it here I can get ya out." Anya went to the corner of the cage and hooked the keys with her paw and slid them over to Will.

Fumbling with lock for second, Will opened the cage and took Anya in his hands, "Come on, let's get you topside." As they turned to leave, the creature with the luminescent eyes began to scream and kick the side of its cage, Only once it began to scream was Anya able to identify what the creature was. She had heard this scream on TV and over the internet but never in person, this scream belong to a Chimpanzee. As the creature screamed and kick, Will and Anya could hear Browni muttering to himself as he made his way down the hall.

"Oh no, Browni's coming back, hide me!" Will began to panic as he looked around for a hiding spot, not seeing one, he stuffed Anya in the pocket of his overalls and ran for the door.

Stepping over Browni who had not yet see the open cage door, Will threw Anya in the back of the cart and sped away. Seconds later, an inhuman howl came from Dr. West's lab as Browni's flooded out of the vents and the began spreading out in every direction.

"We've got company!" Anya told Will as she looked for something that she might be able to use to fight off the speeding Brownis. As Anya serached, she spied a toilet plunger in the back of the cart along with an oil can and box cutter.

"I wish there was an elemental focus somewhere, so I can fry them all for being such big bullies." Anya said as she looked sadly on the plunger.

The Pack of Browni had spotted Anya in the back of Wills cart and were redoubling their effort to catch them.

"Hold on, I know place where we can hide." Will took a sharp left as a Browni latch on to the back of the cart. Anya took her plunger from the cart and started whacking all the Brownis that got on the cart and tried to gain a grasp hold of Anya. She would have loved to have created a whack-a-Browni game out of it, Anya wished. That would have been a heck of an amusement park game. Many fell off the cart a few clung to the sides of the cart. Anya could see what looked like another lab up head.

As she turned though a Browni finished climbing, "BACK IN CAGE STUPID CAT!" As the Browni reached for Anya, an unseen force seem to knock him from the cart caused him to explode in shower of filth, as they passed through an anima barrier. Pulling up next to a dark office, Will picked Anya up and hurried inside, locking the door behind. Outside they could see the Brownis pacing back forth on the other side of the barrier. Looking for a way in.

"They can't get us, can they?" Anya said, as she jumped to the window and stuck out her tongue at all the pacing Brownis.

"I don't think so, but he's tricky son of gun, I find him everywhere. But we're safe here at least for a little while." As Anya looked around she was relieved that they were in Lab of some kind, this place looked similar to the weapons labs at temple hall. "Jackpot!" Anya jumped for joy as she found herself a focus, an elementalism and a chaos one. She loved those classes in basic training.

She went to the box and found each on and showed them to Will, "Can you put these on for me?" Will moved to clip the talismans to her collar.

"Glad your happy, little lady but I think we need get you top...."

Will froze as he looked out the window and saw a pair of glowing eyes staring back at him, the chimp had escaped or been let out of its cage. It began pounding on the wood door that was quickly giving way

"This way, there is a maintenance tunnel over here." Will cried as he rushed to the back of the lab.

"Good idea, now would be a great time before that big ape breaks the door down!" Anya said. Will opened a metal door near the back of the room before slamming it shut and locking it, as the door wooden door gave in and the infected chimp began to charge. Anya and Will could hear it pounding on the other side as well as the titing of Browni on the other side of the barrier.

"This is going to be little trickier than I thought" Will said forlornly, "I think we can get out if we go to the bottom of the park and then use the old tunnels to find our way up. But I don't know if those tunnel still have barriers so they might be able to get us."

Anya licks her paw and shakes her head, "Right now, I think that would be a good plan. Better than being stuck in a cage with a line of Brownis trying to shoot sharp things at you." Will clicked on an flashlight and began leading Anya down the tunnels.

"It's this way."

CHAPTER TWENTY THREE: And It All Break Loose:

The tunnels appeared to be deserted but the somehow the lights are still on. The robotic cats shake their flesh and blood counterpart from their backs and duck inside a compartment in the wall that closes after them. The corridor they entered, lead to a fourway corridor, directly in front of them there is an elevator leading further down into the base. To the left is a series of offices and to the right there is nexus of tunnels leading all over the park. Phil brought up a map of the tunnels as Ziggy did a headcount of the felines, all of them had made it to the other side safely, breathing a sigh of relief, Ziggy began to deliver orders.

"Stealth Team clears the first few hundred meters from the elevators. All other teams must wait for the all clear, then one Nermegal will join each team to heal and shield any filth you may get in contact with, after the all clear from Min-ji, Min-ji will join Russian Blue team and will assault the tunnels here, here and here, kill all Brownis and find Anya. Technical team will enter and clear the offices and hack into the laboratory computers, Prince Bigglesworth wants all the data we can find on Dr. West's research and everybody must provide cover for Phil as he hacks the computers. Cadets will follow the Russian Blues and provide support, and don't you little ones get any ideas about running off like wild animals like you did in Moscow, we don't want any more kitties missing. Understood?" Ziggy commanded as the cadets nodded. As Ziggy meowed his orders, Janis pondered about what is to be done if the humans come in contact with the scientist, Dr. West. Unfortunately, Dr. West hasn't been spotted yet amongst all of this chaos. How she would have loved to just take that crazy bitch into custody, lock her up for all the scientific atrocities she had wrought upon the humans and the cats. That would have been quite a bonus in addition to a hopefully successful rescue mission. Having not seen her, she realized, that wish may not be possible at this time. Rest assured, she thought, Dr. West will answer for her crimes in a matter of time. Just not tonight. Finally inside the tunnels with the cat troupe and the Stealth Team no longer needing flight, Klaus stood tall and allowed Angel her moment to dismount. In a swirl of feathers that threatened to swallow his form and swirl, Klaus was once more in his natural, human form. Hugging him was a long black iridescent cloak, the source of

the form he wore during their initial acts of subterfuge. Underneath, Klaus was in a long white Howie lab coat enruled with black futhark running down the entire lining and collar. It hummed with the subtle magics of enchantment and rang with the conspicuousness of Klaus's specialty as a scientist of the Labyrinth. Klaus raised a gloved hand into the air as the cats delivered their instructions to their fellow felines. "What do we do?" he asked eagerly, hopping on his feet as he bobbed his hand for the attention he didn't need.

"I'm all for shootin' rats, so long as they ain't no one's pets." Angel slid gently off her husband before the transformation, again adjusting her equipment and unholstering a smallish G19 from a thigh holster. She stuck close to Klaus, holding the tiny compact pistol up.

Diana pondered for a moment. "I am used to gazing research data and have brought my own tools for extraction. If you want I could go wiz zem to get the data?" Ziggy pondered the human's suggestion, "We could use all the help we can get, but once you extract the data, you won't be able to engage if any Brownis decide to pay us a visit. We'll cover you," Ziggy replied. "Very well." Diana replies.

The technical team failed to find Dr. West's office on this level though they did find plans for several straight to home video Star Wars movies centered around Jar-jar binks. They also found a map of the facility, according to the map Dr. West's office was on the third floor down, via the main elevator. The other teams failed to find any sign of Browni or Dr. West, though by listening to the closed doors, they could hear an increased security presences in the park. "It's really quiet, a little too quiet!" whispered Ziggy as he lead the teams through the first level with Janis walking behind them. Janis looked at the tables to examine the plans, "Here are some plans, but not the plans that you think that they are." Janis showed the Star Wars videos to the cats and her human counterparts. "Star Wars! Me favorite!" Malcolm exclaims as he looks at the cover but her winces at the picture of Jar-Jar Binks. "Ugh, Jar-Jar! Why do they make a video with that stupid, witless character?" Janis laughs to herself of the conversation of Star Wars among the cats and readies her flamethrower with full canister in case any of Browni's pack decide to join in on the fun.

It did not take long for Klaus, despite his previous apparent confusion, to find himself with the Nermegals and Min-ji, sticking with his new-yet-old stealthy feline friends as they headed toward the elevator to ensure the path for the others. He knew he needed to remind himself he was with Stealth even after their dangerous descent. The cloaked scientist crept along as he followed the agile and tentacle felines to the elevator, watching worriedly for sudden surprises that he feared would pop up even with the short distance in front of them. Klaus trusted Min-ji and the Nermegal crusade and their sense of danger as they quietly approached the main instrument of descent and ascent in the tunnels.

For her part, Angelique kept with the Russian Blues, the Alpha Team. She did her best to stick close, but could only do so much as a human. Her lack of being able to speak Russian kept her silent, but she followed suit with the assault team like the professional she was. As the male Blues huddled together for their plan of attack, Natasha sensed a tinge of uneasiness in her human designate for this mission. Perhaps the human Angelique was uncomfortable

because of the language barrier. If they had spoken in meow, the result would have been the same undesirable result. Natasha sauntered over at Angel's feet and looked up at her with her bright yellow eyes and spoke in common.

"Madam, do not be discouraged because of our language, I understand many human tongues, including common speak."

Angelique nodded brusquely. "Understood, ma'am. Military callsigns work just fine, an' I hopefully can figure 'em out with paws an' not fingers."

"I'm sure Alexei has great knowledge in callsigns." Natasha meowed, "He's very used to ordering the humans around what he wants using the interpretational song and dance. My Alexei would have no difficulty communicating that way to you." Natasha looked up at Angel, hiding her own sorrow behind her eyes. She really missed her little Anya, and would not rest or stop at nothing until Anya is found. It has been a painful few weeks at least, which seemed forever to Natasha. Natasha let out what would be almost a sigh from her breath, and nuzzles against Angel's ankles.

"Being a mother is very rewarding, but when your little one is taken from you, you want to tear the whole world apart and kill those in your way, while you look for your young until it is found. Evil does terrible things to you, even though you have done nothing deserving of it." Natasha said in almost a growl.

The nuzzling caused Angelique to take her eyes off scanning for threats and truly focus upon the feline at her feet. Almost instinctually, Angel crouched down and attempted to stroke Natasha in a comforting manner. "Don't worry, ma'am. I don't harm no cats. And we'll find yer kitten an' get 'em back safe." Natasha followed the comforting hand with her eyes and then accepted it politely without having to paw it away or nip at it. The touch of Angel's hand eases her physically of all the stress that takes a toll on a cat's body, but very little emotionally. She knew that this doesn't get Anya home any faster, but she appreciates the comfort and understanding by her human companion for the time being.

"Do you mind if I ask a personal question, Madam?" Natasha asked politely.

Angelique nodded. "Shoot."

Natasha pondered how to ask her question carefully, "You have much empathy for our situation. Do you have little ones?"

"Several," Angel mentions after a mild return to examining their surroundings. "One of my own, my son, but I've some adopted cats also. Well, between Klaus and I we have three cats. And two cows, if we're counting them, too. They're all important, just like Brandon."

The conversation of little ones and other animals co-existing with humans brought a little grin to Natasha's chops. Natasha was sure that her instincts told her that Angel had something in common with her, though she was very surprised that Angel and her mate has a bigger family than her. "Ha, ha, and here Alexei thought four kittens were too many! Ha! Take that Alexei!" Natasha returned to her straight face and stared into Angel with joyfulness for her, "Your little ones must be very strong. With days like these, they must, even the cows. They are lucky to have you as their family, as we are glad for ours."

The human risked a brief smile before going back to work, replacing it with her usual stonelike gaze. Alexei returned from the corner to find his mate and the human companion in conversation. His impatience was growing, but after having been through for a few weeks,

Alexei understood Natasha's need to vent and wouldn't dare cross his mate or it would be a meowful tongue lashing for him. Alexei motioned the two females with his paw.

"Наташа, Женщина, пришло время, чтобы идти по этому пути!"

"Natasha, Human female, it's time to go this way!"

Natasha looked up and rose to her four paws informing Angelique, "Come now, it's time to move out from here."

With a final sympathetic look towards the mother cat, Angel hastily followed.

Diana followed the technical team her rifle readied but not pointing it around. She reached into one of the pockets on her jacket pulling out a silencer, screwing it onto the end of the barrel. "Can I see ze map real fast? Perhaps I can get Squeeky to analyse it might be able to get it projected onto anyone who has a H.U.D. display" Phil presented the plans to Diana, who scanned them and uploaded them to the team.

As the cats investigated, they could hear something coming from the elevator, something was banging around at the bottom of the shaft, it almost sounded like a chimp, though angrier. Janis turned her ear to the elevator, "What the hell is that noise? Listen!" Janis said as she motions pointing down at the elevator and unholsters her pistols. All feline teams converged at the elevator with focuses drawn with the Russian Blues at the front lines. It was with great relief that Klaus and the Stealth Team found the coast clear and met at the rendezvous. Nervously, he stood behind many of the feline parties and winced with every loud bang that came closer and closer and the primal sounds resonating from the shaft. The coast may have been clear, but the elevator itself certainly wasn't. His relief hardly lasted long. Electricity began to dance upon Klaus's gloved, insulated hands as he frantically anticipated certain doom from an elevator in his panic. Along with the soldier cats, Angelique stayed wary and investigated. She had no wish to shoot any felines they met, but surely there were some rodents that needed elimination. When they heard the sounds from the elevator, she kept her weapon raised, prepared to meet any enemies. Diana kneeled raising her gun slightly as she moves with the group slowly.

As the banging grew louder, the sound of guns being cocked behind them broke their concentration. In front of a row of guards was Commander Tigger, baring his teeth. "None of you are ever leaving this park. On my command execute the trespassers, ready!" Before he could finish, the elevator doors flew open and out swung the infected chimpanzee, tentacles wriggling in its glowing eye sockets as it leapt on the first guard and broke his neck before biting into another's face and pulling the arms off another. Before finally grabbing Commander Tigger by his legs and slamming him into the wall, before jumping back down the elevator shaft, the dead cat's body still in hand. "What ze? Y-you how did y-" is cut off as the chimpanzee burst through the elevator shaft, her eyes widening seeing the filth monster. Though it isn't the first she's seen this definitely surprised her. "Shit Shit!" As the infected chimpanzee starts killing the guards she raises her rifle starting to fire on the location the automatic rifle sending a spray of bullets down the corridor "Go! I'll cover you!" "GO-GO-GO!" Ziggy commands as all the felines descend down the elevator shaft after the chimpanzee with the dead Commander Tigger. Janis descends down the shaft with the felines

and waits on one knee below with her guns drawn checking the surroundings as everyone falls in.

That relief of Klaus's was certain to come washing back at the sight of a surviving Commander Tigger. He even grinned, despite the danger he was in. Relief turned to shocked horror as a Filthy chimpanzee of all things murdered the cat he tried so hard to save. That grin was gone in an instant as he watched the chimpanzee and his allies jump down an elevator shaft. "NO!" he shouted, dramatic as ever as the feathers swept over his form, replacing it with that of an eldritch raven of approximately similar size. The electricity previously gathered in anticipation in his hands jolted across both wings and concentrated at his beak in a frenzy. In a mad dash, he ran through Angel for a hasty mount and leapt down the shaft. The plasma sparked every which way, no longer tightly controlled as it streamed across his face and arced in his ruffled feathers. That, however, did not last long. In a furious last ditch effort to stop the murderous primate, the bolt was let loose down the shaft when Klaus leapt down. Angel didn't think. It was her training that had her firing shots towards the Filth chimp before she knew what was happening. Klaus' frantic transformation and shout was enough to make her brace for his brash take-off. She smoothly took her place on his back and held on tight, gritting her teeth as small jolts of electricity coursed painfully through her. The divebombing raven spread his wings in the shaft, skillfully decelerating his dangerous descent as to not land with a gruesome splatter on the ground. Towards the bottom of the well, Angelique let go as she felt her husband's descent begin to slow, indicating they were near the bottom. With the mild push of her legs, she was able to twist in mid-air and ricochet from the walls of the shaft to slow her descent before touching boots to the ground. The smallish soldier stood, weapon readied and heedless of the mild smoke and electrical damage to her fatigues. Her gaze was stone as she sought out the enemy. It was with a thud that the eldritch bird landed at the bottom in an only somewhat graceful landing, having followed the dispersed plasma down. Vestiges of the overzealous current arced over his features, only to dissipate into the air, harmless once more. A shake and an amorphous swirl of midnight black iridescence later, he was human again. A scowl was clear as day on his face. Klaus was not happy.

The halls at the bottom of the shaft are also deserted, but the lights are currently out and the only sign of life is a trail of blood leading down the hall to the left. According to the blueprint they found above Dr. West lab is to the right.

With his fury mostly expended on the way down, Klaus looked to the fork, his attention enthralled by the bloody mess left behind the scene. He hardly saw or remembered the blueprint, so no thoughts of scientific espionage entered his mind. Instead, worry wormed its way in as he split from the elevator and began off, following the team of expert stealth cats along the way. Klaus turned around and gestured toward Angel and the tactical Russian Blues, oblivious in the darkness to the smoking of Angel's fatigues – the smoking he himself caused unwittingly from his panicked actions.

Angelique had recovered, walking to the gesturing gentleman. Her gun was unslung. She looked beyond him to the blood and began to scan the area. When Angel came nearer, Klaus knew. Oh, Klaus knew something had gone wrong on the way down, and he had a sinking

feeling it was his fault. Angel was scorched – smoking even as she closed the distance, and it was his fault. His hand fell flat to his side and he instead worriedly approached his wife. “...Angel? Are you...” he trailed off in his thoughts, frowning as he fumbled feebly for his words. “Did... I do that?” This wasn’t a time for weakness nor pain. Angelique nodded stiffly, confirming his error, but focused on the blood. “What happened here? This is fresh, and we need to keep moving to stay on target.” Klaus nervously nodded as he muttered a number of ‘Sorry’ under his breath. It was only when Angel spoke about the blood and their focus on their task at hand that he stopped his sniveling and whining for a moment and followed her gaze down the hallway. Without another word, Klaus followed the trail alongside the Stealth Team and Russian Blues.

Meanwhile, Phil and George place their paws upon the window at the lab and notice a wide variety of petri dishes, vials and test tubes all in a row, and a computer at the counter, “Bingo!” exclaimed Bunky, as the technical team enters and clears the room. “Aye! All clear ‘ere Phil, do ye thing!” Malcolm said.

Phil climbs up onto the computer and brings up his own hacking programs from his holographic computer screen from the pip of his collar and begins to execute the hacking file while starting up Dr. West’s computer. At the command prompt, he had to break through a few codes and load up a virus onto the computer to find the password for Dr. West’s research. When he was all done, he informed the team, “It is now downloading, estimated time twelve minutes!” Janis entered the room and waited at the counter while petting Ziggy. “Do you need any extra space?” looking at Phil, “I got plenty of room for any files if it’ll speed up the process.” raising her bracer arm and scanning the various objects around the room to gather some more data. Phil twitched his ears and pawed at the screen, “I have already thought of zat, I had cleared zee cache on my computer back at Templar Hall, I should have enough room for a complete data transfer.”

As the data streamed through Phil’s program, the color of the hologram changed from red to blue. The form of a woman appeared where the code used to be, as she looked up, the lights click on and turned red, as an alarm sounded.

“Sacre bleu, another firewall alert, this shouldn’t take long.” Phil whined as he typed in the some codes with his paws and then on Dr. West’s computer to stop the alarms. As they cats turned around, in the window they could see Browni standing in the flashing red light, waving at them with his bony claw like fingers, every time the lights flashed, another Browni seem to join them titering in the dark. Bunky saw all the Brownis swarming near the windows and closed door to the lab, his ears pull back as he alerted the team.

“WE GOT COMPANY!” Bunky exclaims and Malcolm, Ziggy, and George each draw their focus at the Brownis and bullets, grenades, chaos and elements fly from their paws towards the Brownis’ position. Janis readies her flamethrower and screams and begins to fire upon the Browni. “Ugh, it’s that friggin Browni again!” Phil monitored the screen, but he couldn’t engage with the Brownis even if he wanted to, “Download twenty-five percent complete!” he yells. Diana shouted a couple of swear words in French as she moves beside Phil at the computer station, “We’ve got to move zis along! Here I have resources to help tunnel through whatever you need I

will grant. I don't know your program so you tell me what you need to speed zis up and I'll do eet!" Phil continues to fight with the constant interference of the firewalls, he taps on his screen with his paws, "Four paws are better zan two, I guess! Deez firewalls are a pain in zee tail! I need something to either eliminate deez, or get around deez, zey are slowing down zee data transfer!"

The Browni's began throwing themselves against the window in attempt to break it. The lights continued flashing as something began probing Phil's program and trying to find the files he had taken.

"Sunny biscuits, someone wants a piece of zee great Jean-Phillipe Marchallande, non?" Phil exclaims at his computer screen, "Take zat!" Phil brings up his antivirus program to eliminate the probe and monitors the download bar. "Download thirty percent complete!" As the program continued to download the data another woman appeared in the hologram, only to momentarily flash a set of biological data. Outside the the window the cats could see in between the red flashes, the grinning face and red teeth of the infected chimp among the tittering Brownis. As the download reached fifty percent, the glass began to give way as the chimp began to kick it in. "Fire at will!" commanded Ziggy as the tech felines blasted a fury of bullets through the glass. Glass shattered all over the lab as Phil ducked from the shrapnel of test tubes and vials near the computer's proximity.

"Hey watch your fire, you'll blast zee computer and zee connection. Sixty percent downloaded!" The glass covered in in filth as the chimp ran off and the Browni's began to fall to the hail of bullets and magic. "Stealth team! We need backup NOW!" cried Ziggy as the cats watched the filth creep up for from the windows. As a third woman appeared in the hologram the download appeared to speed up before the Browni's began to flood into the lab. As the cats looked around they could see the broken cage from which the cimp had escaped and the open cage from which Anya escaped. "Hey, that's where Anya was held!" George mentions as he was crushing several Brownis with his hammer, before catching a glimpse of the fur on his tail, his tail caught some Filth. He moved away from the other cats to not contaminate them in the battle. A black-Bluish portal swirls in the corner of the lab and a Nermegal stealth cat appears and his tentacles poke out from his spine, "Someone call for a shield?" the Nermegal said and a black shield like dome hangs over the felines as he takes to the front lines, sneak attacking the Brownis with his long, extended claws.

"Seventy percent... Seventy-five percent..." cried Phil as the download was reaching its end. As the download reached seventy five percent, something seemed to catch the Browni's attention, they all turned down the hall and began to run. As the download finished they found themselves alone in Dr. West's lab.

"Download complete, mon amis! Ha ha! Everything is now at Templar Hall," Phil informs the Commander who is assessing the windows and door while the Nermegal stealth operative attends to George to clear the filth from his tail.

"What could possibly have diverted their attention so abruptly?" Ziggy asked as he wandered from the door looking at the direction of Brownis exit from the lab.

As the cats looked down the hall where the Browni's ran, they could see an open vent leading into a section of the offices protected by an anti anima barrier.

"Well, looks like we can't follow them through there, it's got an anti anima barrier thingy in there!" Bunky said.

George sniffed the air with Bunky and asks, "Could it be disarmed?"

"Not really, with anti-anima, it would either just kill us or eject us out. We can't take that chance!"

Bunky replies. "If we can power it down somehow, we could dismantle it and take it back with us to Templar Hall and run some scenarios with it."

"There's a power box at the end of the hall." Janis stated, "All you gotta do is flick a couple of switches and see what happens." Janis walked from the open vent and proceeded to the end of the hallway where there was a power box. She read the legend from the cover, "This must be the one," she muttered to herself and flicked the corresponding switch. All the power from that floor went from light to dark.

"Ok, now test it out, see if it will do anything." Janis yelled as she returned to the open vent. By the time she got there, the backup power came on.

"Well, so much for testing it then, there's gotta be a generator somewhere. She looked in the laboratory and the office across the hall, sure enough there was a generator in the other room hidden by a desk. Removing the desk to the side, she took her pistols and gunned the generator down until spark started to fly and until the generator was no longer functioning.

"Mom, it worked! The anti anima barrier stopped!" Bunky meowed and Janis went to the open vent. She tried the next door near the vent, but it was locked. The cats slipped through the open vent with ease and landed in the other room with the malfunctioning barrier. Ziggy went to the door on the other side and gunned down the chains barring it and jumped to open the door, allowing Janis to get inside. Malcolm and Bunky were examining the anti-anima barrier, sniffing around for an opening.

"'Tis 'ere machine is quite a piece of work. We have to open it and check it out." Malcolm said sniffing and trying to pry open the cover with his claws. Janis felt around the cover and found two tabs she depressed to hear a click, and then she slid off the cover revealing the most sophisticated piece of technology they had ever seen. The cats meowed with awe. Malcolm looked at the circuitry and instructed the cats, "No time to be kitten around, let's git ta work on taking this tin can apart!"

Inside they found a touch screen panel with a map of the office on it, over the map in big red letters was the word lock down. At the bottom of the screen though was a usb port that could be used to access the breaker. "Lockdown? Could this mean... wait a minute, let me plug this in!" Malcolm pawed on the inside of his satchel attached to his kilt, and takes out a USB. Janis plugs it in for him into the socket. Diana's face lights up as they get the panel of "Oh wow.. zis is amazing." Taking her bracer and scanning the equipment, "If given a little time I can gazer some data on zis. Won't be as good as prying the device off and carrying it back wiz us, but I can at least scan a model of eet."

"Go fer it!" Malcolm replied. Diana continued to scan the outside components of the technology.

The screen reset to an android operating system and asks for a password. Malcolm paws in a random password, but fails to proceed further. He tried and tried again, typing in more codes from his computer, and again he kept failing, "Let me try!" Phil said as he pawed Malcolm out of the way. He brought up his computer screen and hacked into the main systems, sending

in a trojan to reveal the passcode. His screen fills in the word "Lockdown" and the access to the break was opened before him. Malcolm sighed knowing that he may be an engineering genius, but not a computer genius.

The lights clicked on over head as the doors to the offices opened and the anti anima barrier fell. As the lockdown lifted, the breaker screen crackled with static for a second as an audible laugh filled, the corridor.

"They went that way Puss." Janis looked around the room and saw no one other than her or the cats, she whispered, "That voice... sounds awfully familiar!" down the hall they could see a shattered window and an abandoned golf cart filled with cleaning products. Little bits of the glass were covered in fresh blood indicating that something recently passed through.

Commander Ziggy put a paw to halt his team to be cautious when approaching the cart. He sniffs around the cart and spots the drops of blood on the glass, "They passed through here. I see blood too, it could be Anya's, but I can't be sure." He sniffs around the seats of the cart with the abandoned cleaning supplies and the plunger that was covered with Filth.

"Yep, the Brownis were after them all right." Ziggy sniffs around the seat at the driver's side.

"Anya's not alone. There is another scent. Another human. Male or female, I don't know, but whoever it is, must have helped Anya escape and they were outrunning the Brownis." Ziggy adds. "Maybe that's why the Brownis turned away from the lab so fast!"

Near the back of the room, the cats saw what looked like a storage room with a kicked in metal door. It looked like the chimp had been pounding on it before giving up and looking for something else.

The trail of blood lead to the kicked in door. "Wow! Could it be the blood from that chimpanzee that we saw at the elevator? That thing was mean and huge! He could have killed all of us!"

Ziggy inquired about the blood on the door and the big foot print that was left on the metal door.

"Doesn't look like much here, but look. In the other room." replied George. They raced inside the storage room and sniffed around the tools and electrical equipment, and the focuses that were laying around. George spotted a small tuft of greyish-blue fur, "They were here alright! Now the question is, where did they go afterwards?" As they examined the back of the storage room, they found another door that opens up into series of services tunnels with the trail of blood leading down them. As they look down the tunnels, they could hear something fluttering outside the office.

"Did you hear that? This way cats!" Ziggy commanded as his technical team raced through the tunnels following the sound. A glowing light flutter down the tunnels and into the walls, as the light disappeared into the wall a portal opened up beside them and out popped the stealth team with a yowl.

"You're not supposed to be here!" the light said in a chipper voice. Ziggy followed the light and spoke for the team.

"Umm, we're looking for one of our own. She was catnapped and held prisoner here. We've come to rescue her," replied Ziggy to the talking light.

"I am afraid I can't answer your questions, Mr. Disney insists that all employees sign a strict non disclosure agreement. I have also informed security of your presence." Another set of light emerged from the wall as the cats watched, "Please leave peacefully, we don't want use force." Ziggy confers with his teammates in a little huddle and returns to the talking lights, "We don't

care about your human issues. We want to know where Anya is and get her out of here. So, to answer your suggestion? Umm, no, we're not leaving until Anya is safe with us! So there! Nyah-nyah!" The light buzzed around to Ziggy's tail and grabbed him as the light began dragging the cat back towards the elevator, other lights began to multiply and grab the cats by their tails and drag them back to the elevator. The feline technical team hissed and meowed as they clawed the floor to slow down the lights approaching the elevator, Janis zipped around the corner with guns drawn. She aims carefully for the moving lights and shoots one of them down, releasing Bunky from it's grip. Janis cocks her pistols and points them at the other lights, "PUT MY FUCKING CATS DOWN RIGHT NOW OR THIS MAMA IS GONNA SHOW YOU SOME REAL LIGHTS!" The light buzzed in front of Janis's face, she could now make out the silhouette of a tiny woman. "Please remember that have you violated about dozen treaties to which the Templar are party Ms. Harrington. I Suggest you..." Before the little woman could finish, Browni lept out of the wall and devoured the light in gulp. He then turned to the others and snapped them out of the air before turning to the cats.

"Browni have stupid baby cat. Browni have Will-tard too, you bring Browni hot ass mix tape in old tunnels and Browni will give you back Stupid baby cat and seventy percent of Will-tard." Browni then seemed to walk through the wall and despair.

"Charmer that one..." Diana replies with a scoff looking where Browni disappeared through. The only the sign that he had been there was the fragments of wings from the tiny women he had eaten. "Seventy percent of Will-tard, what in the nine lives is a Will-tard?" Bunky asked Ziggy who was nuzzling and purring with the other cats around Janis' ankles, being grateful for the save. "It must be the human who tried to help Anya escape, but how did Browni recapture them is beyond me." said George as they regained their strength from being dragged several metres by their tails."

"Great, Browni, how in ze nine lives are we supposed to find ze old tunnels?" Phil asked as he was checking over his tail that got dragged around.

"He could be bluffing too. Maybe Anya and this human're still on the run n' he just wants the tapes fer himself." Malcolm suggested as he licks himself with his paws. Ziggy looks around as he thinks of a plan to get Anya back while paying the ransom of the hot-ass mix tapes, he and his team would have to find the old tunnels the hard way. Wishing that Alexei and the Alpha team could be there to watch the exchange take place, hoping that Browni would not try anything funny like eating Anya alive before the exchange happens. As the cats talked among themselves, they could hear something that sounded liked singing...the Marriage of Figaro to be exact. "What's that, Mom?" Ziggy asked Janis as the cats were following the music. Janis listened to the melody of the music, "I know this. Sounds like The Barber of Seville? No no... umm, I know it's a Rossini tune. Perhaps Marriage of Figaro? Wait, that's Mozart isn't it? I'm not sure." As the cats listened, a much smaller rat came around the corner, seemingly oblivious to them, singing the opera as he made his way through the halls. Obviously it wasn't looking like the Brownis they had seen earlier in their battle in the laboratory. It was Figaro Luminatti, singing the famous chorus line, dedicating the chords to himself.

"Figaro-o-o! Figaro-o-o! Figaro-Figaro-Figaro..." Figaro sang, completely unaware that the cats were right behind him.

“FIGARO!” Ziggy yelled into the rat’s ears, finishing the chorus line for him. Figaro turned around to find Ziggy breathing down his neck and screamed.

“GEEZ! What are you cats doing here? You tryin’ to scare me outta my whiskers?”

Ziggy knew most of the Il Luminatti Family from the war games in Fusang. Jimmy the Don, Big Paulie, Lil’ Paulie, Shortie, Snaps and Figaro. A cunning group of rats that rival any human Italian mafioso.

Ziggy was about to put a paw up to his throat, “We were gonna ask you that same question.” Figaro was shaking in his fur, his tail quivering in bad nerves, “Now-now-now don’t rush me fellas, hehehe, you-you-you know... conducting some business here. Th-that’s right. Just checking out some business opportunities while we’re in Disneyland eating like kings and hanging out with the fine ladies, y’see?”

“I don’t dig him, bro!” Bunky said to Ziggy as he brought out his claws one by one.

Figaro cowered before the five growling anima cats and pleaded with them for mercy, “Now, now, let’s not do-do-do anything r-r-rash here. I’m telling ya... “ Then Figaro paused and let out a big sigh, “Aw geez, you ain’t buying it aren’t ya?”

“Nope!” Ziggy answered him bluntly as he looks down at him.

“Aw, who am I foolin’ here? Come on, I think you better hear this from the boss himself.” Figaro chittered and lead the cats down the tunnels into a small hole leading to a rather large room near a small storage area. Jimmy, and Big Paulie along with his lieutenants were sitting at the table along with their lackeys and package rats scurrying about on the floor. Figaro shouted, “Hey Boss, look who I got here!”

All the package rats and lackeys glanced at the well-armed cats and screamed for their lives scurrying in all directions into hiding while the core members of the Il Luminatti Family looked on. Big Paulie and Lil’ Paulie were side by side, guarding behind Jimmy when he rose to his all fours and greeted Ziggy.

“Ziggy! Buona sera, my old friend!” Jimmy the Don greeted Ziggy and his team.

“It’s been awhile, Jimmy! How did you get into this whole mess?” Ziggy asked curiously while his teammates started staring at the rest of the rats, licking their chops.

“Orders from the Boss Lady herself. What Browni is doing is bad business. I’m telling ya it’s bad business! They should never have trusted that filthy rat and that Frankensteiny doctor in the first place. And now we have this big mess in our paws cuzza them, with one of your little ones in the middle, and those damn Russians right up our tails!”

“We know. All because of these.” George showed the data tapes that were recovered from the facility in Moscow. “Do you know anything about these sound files? Whatever this thing is, is coming from the Pacific Ocean. Deep within the ocean. Know anything about it?”

“A little bit, after some eavesdropping here and there, and whatever that thing is, is huge, and I mean real huge. If Browni gets a hold of those tapes and he already has the blood, and finds the location of this creature, the whole animal kingdom, the cats, the rats, the dogs, even humans could go downhill to nothin’ in seconds flat. All business would go down the toilet, just like all the other rats!”

“Look paesano, I hate that filthy disgusting rat just as much as you do. We all do! If I were you, if you want that little one back alive, you gonna have to pay up with those tapes. Sooner the better. Let idiot Browni have his fucking way and bring out whatever that is hiding in the ocean,

and hope to the Queen Bee, that fucking thing eats him up where he stands. Now I can show you where those old tunnels are, we've been here longer than most of you, so we have a pretty good idea of our way around here. After that, you're on your own, we're sticking to shadows with this one, especially if those Russian cats are here, geez! You with me on this?"

Ziggy ponders Jimmy's advice and turns to him, "Umm, a little huddle with my friends over here if you don't mind, Jimmy." Ziggy said as he motioned the cats with his paw and they huddled close together a few pawsteps away from Jimmy.

"Well whattaya think? Can we trust Jimmy on this one?" Ziggy asked his team.

"How do we know that Jimmy and Browni are in cahoots? They are rats AND they both work for the same side?" Bunky shared his two bits of catnip into the conversation as he looks up towards Jimmy and Big Paulie to see if they were listening to their huddle.

"Don't forget, they helped us eliminate Browni in Wales when we first encountered him. They have kept their word since then." George stated as he licked his paws and his tail.

"I don't like zis at all," Phil whispered in a meow, "What if zey turn on us at ze tunnels?"

"Laddies, laddies, ye missin' the whole point 'ere! Ask yerself this question, Ziggy, who would ye rather trust, a mafioso rat, or a wee yin eatin' cannibal rat?" Malcolm asked Ziggy sincerely.

Ziggy ponders for a moment and responds, "You're right Malcolm, Jimmy's the lesser evil here."

"Ya!" George agreed.

"Oui!" Phil answered.

"Aye!" Malcolm said, "Meow that's the spirit, laddie!" And the cats had broken off their huddle to tell Jimmy that they had agreed to go with them to the old tunnels below.

Diana simply watched the entire exchange looking a bit surprised thinking, shrugging at the end and making her way with them towards the tunnels looking more apprehensive as they move into them.

CHAPTER TWENTY FOUR: The Exchange:

The old tunnels underneath the park were unlit by any kind of light, the light bulbs that use to cover the gray walls in a yellow glow had long ago been scavenged for newer parts of the park. Jimmy lead the cats to a just outside of a dead end, that use to house the parks air conditioning. Jimmy pointed, "Through there, you have a wide range of view, nobody goes over there anymore, but with the dead end you'll have an advantage. Buona fortuna, my friend! We got your backs." Jimmy said as he scampered off into a hiding spot with his lieutenants waiting on him. The cats wait patiently for Browni or a swarm of Brownis while George had the satchel of data tapes in his mouth. The humans, Janis and Diana weren't far behind with weapons drawn at the empty corridor in case Browni decided to pull the element of surprise and try anything funny.

In the corner near the a old air conditioner, the cats could see the glowing tentacle eyes of the chimp staring into the corner, soon they were joined by Browni, seeming to appear out of the ground. "You bring hot-ass mixtape?" Browni said as he sniffed the air suspiciously.

"First, where is Anya? We will not give the tapes until we see her!" Ziggy demanded to Browni.

Browni snapped his fingers and the chimp disappeared behind the air conditioner, when he returned, he held Anya in his hand by her neck, baring his big white teeth. "Put hot-ass mix tape

on the floor and Bubbles will put stupid baby cat on the floor.” George steps forward and placed the satchel containing the tapes on the floor and stepped away. The chimp lumbered out to where the satchel was and set Anya down, grabbing the tapes and bring them back to Browni. Browni hops on the chimp’s back, opened the satchel and sniffed the tapes. Browni inspected the tapes closely as Anya ran back to the cats. Ziggy tapped the pips on his collar, “This is tech team, we have precious cargo. Repeat, we have the precious cargo!” Sniffing the tapes, Browni appeared satisfied that he had what he needed.

“Yuk stupid cat smell, go Bubbles, back to West home. But first to Ball pit and tasty baby!” The chimp turned to run down the dark hallway only to be blocked by an anima barrier. A man badly hurt and bleeding from a bit mark on his forehead crawled out from the behind the air conditioner. “The bees say you can't have that Browni!” Will said laboring to breathe.

Browni’s face began to smile as he looked at the hurt human, “Will-tard is tard for reason.”

Browni snapped his fingers again and the chimp he had named Bubbles began to charge. Five black portals begin to swirl behind the injured human and when Bubbles had reached at full speed, the Nermegal stealth team flew from their portals and Min-ji the Siamese-Nermegal opened the assassination with her long extended claws piercing the throat of Bubbles. The other four Nermegals with tentacles poking out of their scruffs followed Min-ji as they attacked Bubbles lower body, severing any important veins and arteries they may have targeted at blinding speed. The chimp collapsed throwing Browni off from his back in the process, as Browni hit the floor and rolled, he rushed back to the chimp but rather than trying to help, he began to eat it. Soon several more Browni came out of the wall to join him, sinking their teeth into the dead chimp. Multiple heads sprouted from the feasting animals, as more of them began to appear. What started as dozen soon became twenty and twenty became fifty, until the soon the room was filled with multiple clones of Brownis. They turned their attention to the cats, “Bring Browni their bones,” one of them called out as they all came rushing forward. Janis unshouldered her flamethrower and pulled the trigger, she yelled, “HOUSEKEEPING,” as she burned several Brownis to a crisp with a long burst of flame, whittling down the numbers a bit, but not enough to cause them a full retreat. Following the stealth team in his own statically erratic portal was Klaus, once more in the shape of an eldritch corvid to facilitate his hasty assault. Lightning arced dangerously among his feathers as he dived down and released a charged bolt from his beak on to the ever-growing Browni mass below. At the onslaught of sudden violence, Angelique unslung her Tavor and fired several bursts of full auto into the clone pile. Diana took aim with her bracer hand starting to shoot flame from her focus burning several more as she spreads the flame across the Brownis, the bracer beeping faster. Diana aims her fire at the mass in the aiming to draw its attention and possibly to fry it. Her attack does not seem to have effect though, as mass continues to grow. Behind the wave of Brownis, and the wall flames that was quickly consuming the room, the cats could see the chimp corpse rising off the ground with swarm of Brownis apparently stuck to it, their fleshy tails writhing like tentacles. From above them, the floor started to glow a bright anima yellow and began to crack from above. In a split second, the floor caved in and the tech and stealth teams ducked out of the way. Five more cats descended to claw the ground which they landed on to lend the tech and stealth team a hand with the swarm of Brownis. The proud new father cat Alexei, their number one tank, and his mate Natasha, mother of Anya along with Sputnik, Boris and

Svetlana, the fierce Russian Blues have arrived just in the nick of time. The bird dashed out of the way from the crumbling ceiling and hideous ape-Browni-conglomerate with a start. With the growing flames, he was beginning to panic, and shot more futile lightning at the writhing mass of corruption. Watching the theatrics of the floor above, Angel held fire, scanning for any straggling targets.

CHAPTER TWENTY FIVE: And It All Breaks Loose Again:

Alexei and Natasha looked behind them as they landed and found little Anya hiding behind Commander Ziggy.

"Mama! Papa!" Anya cried in a shrill mew as she ran to them.

"Anya! My baby! Are you alright?" Natasha cried as Anya ran to her parents, nuzzling at her mama and papa's heads, then snuggling at her Uncle Boris and Aunt Svetlana, and then Uncle Sputnik. She was so very happy and so very thankful that she still had her nine lives intact to see them again. Surely Anya wished that her siblings and her friend Li-Li would be here too.

"Yes, Mama!" answered Anya very weakly. She pointed with her paw to the male human who was badly wounded and laid unconscious near the power generator.

"But this human is not," Anya said sadly, "He tried to save me."

Natasha and Alexei glanced over at the wounded man and Natasha said nonchalantly, "How unfortunate. Nevermind him then."

There wasn't anything that any of the cats could do for him. Even though that they could dispatch Dr. Lox into their position, but being a physician of a veterinary aspect, treating a human would be obviously beyond his skill. The humans that accompanied them from their descent into their current position would have the responsibility to get him the help that he needs.

The family reunion was short and sweet unfortunately, and Alexei, Natasha and their comrades headed the cats' side of the battle lines, scanning through all the Brownis that have swarmed at the corridors in the old tunnels. They had never seen so many Brownis in close quarters like this before. Not even at the encounter in Wales were this many Brownis. Alexei growled at all of them, and the ferocity showed on his adorable face. Even his whiskers wanted a piece of Browni. His loving fatherly face when he was nuzzling with Anya, turned into a raging battle soldier at the sight of the Brownis waiting for the moment to charge into battle. Even with Anya returned to them, he and Natasha were still furious and desired revenge. He was once a fun-loving, good natured cat, until Browni came between him and his kittens. Natasha is more calm and collective, but ready for battle. She would love to make Browni pay for his crimes against them. As a mother, it is the law of nature that the mama cat has the right to draw blood first when the transgressor comes between mother and kittens. If Alexei and Natasha were both to die on this day, they would die together as forever mates, and they, knowing full well that their kittens will have a future regardless of the outcome.

"Well, at least we know that the little one is safe. She's so cute, she's looks just like her mama kitty." Janis marvels over little Anya who is now safe for now with the elder cats. Noticing that Anya looked a little scrawny for her cat age, perhaps from the lack of food or too much unhealthy food that she had been eating while she was held captive, "I have some Temptations

and a kitten formula in my pack. I could give some to her to keep her energy up.” Natasha looked at Janis and nodded, giving her permission to feed her little one. Janis unzipped her pack and took out a handful of cat snacks from the bag. She gently picked up little Anya and sat down at a corner and hand fed her little by little at a time. Anya was so hungry, she had almost forgot what noms tasted like. To her it was the most refreshing thing that perked up her grayish fur coat and brightened her yellow eyes. She thanked Janis with sound of her own purrs and it filled Janis with joy and hope of getting all of them out with their nine lives intact. The Sheer adorableness of the reunion momentarily distracted Klaus from the issue at hand, but feline’s parents’ vehement determination for vengeance was quick to strike both the importance of their mission and the fight at hand back into him. These cats had fought so much for this. Klaus couldn’t bear the idea of letting them down.

Angel had given the cats their space and private moments, but focused on finishing what they started, and prepared for more to come. She slammed a fresh clip into her bullpup and waited for the next wave of targets to appear.

“Главный Browni это мое! Это Browni моя! Это Browni моя! Все они мои! Я раздавлю их всех!”

“The main Browni is mine!” Alexei hissed and he was pointing to all the other Brownis. *“This Browni is mine! That Browni is mine! All of them are mine! I will crush them all!”*

“Вы крысы людоедов дорого заплатит за нарушение мою семью! Никто не портит с матушки России и живет, чтобы сказать об этом!”

“You rat cannibals will pay dearly for disturbing my family! No one messes with Mother Russia and lives to tell about it!” The swarm closed on the cats, breaking into multiple streams as they tried to separate the cats from one another. While the cats attempted to remain unified, the mass of Browni’s who has been eating the chimp, continued to rise into the air. The battle cats remain in their claw stance as they witness the “king of rats” forming up and up as the Brownis continue to eat the remains of the dead chimpanzee, and rise in unison to the ceiling above them. “So, this is how they multiply,” exclaimed Ziggy as he bears witness to the Brownis unpredictable capabilities.

George looked on in awe, “Amazing! Seems that the filth that they eat, they grow and multiply. Kinda like those little furry creatures in the goof box movies. Feed them after midnight, get water all over them, and they multiply like wild rabbits. I don’t think I had ever seen rabbits multiply like this!”

Phil was looking around past the row of air conditioners in the hallways and sniffs around them and runs through a few calculations in his holographic screen computer. He looks around up top and down at the broken glass from all the light bulbs, it seems, he thought that it is possible to restore power here to the area, but how. As Phil looked over the systems, several Browni ran into Alexei trying to shove him against the wall, biting at his fur the entire time. Several more surrounded the other teams, as Phil continued to look for a way to restore power, he noticed the bleeding human still in the corner. Phil snuck away from the battlezone and ducked behind the airconditioner with the injured human. He pawed the man’s shoulder, “Monsieur, how do we restore power here?”

Will looking at the cat while holding his bleeding head, “I took the fuses out of the power breaker a long time ago, I don’t know where I put them, but if you got something metal, that will jump

start things in a jiff. The box should be near where you came in.” As the two talked to one another Browni leapt over the air conditioners and bit the man's neck opening another wound.

Phil hissed at the Browni and pointed his chaos focus at him, charging the anima to a very bright blue color and a projectile tentacle thing grabbed the Browni by its neck and threw it against the concrete wall. Phil guided the tentacle, channelling his anima to never lose its grip, the tentacle from Phil's paw repeatedly slammed and bounced the Browni's body into the concrete wall multiple times, like a tennis ball before Filth started to spray out of it. Will holding his neck pointed at the rusted metal box near the doorway where the cats came in.

“You need something metal to connect to the two metal bits near the bottom and that should get the power back.” Overhead, the mass of Browni's seemed to be growing larger as more of them leapt up and began gnawing on one another. Phil rushed into the storage area in which they first came in to deliver the old data tapes. He jumped in and out of boxes sniffing and pawing anything that could be and might be metal, but he needed something that is metal. He jumped on the table and found some silver cutlery that had grown mold from the bits of food that were left unwashed since Gaia knows when.

Phil bites into it and carries it to Will, “Eeesh, zeesh good enough?” Phil asks with a mouth full of metal.

Will, struggling to stand under his own power, he picks up the silverware, “This oughta do it” Will said. Limping towards the fuse box, another stream of Browni's, broke off from the mass and began running towards Will. Phil turned to see the charging Brownis and lets out a mew of “Sacre bleu!” Phil runs up to the air conditioner and sticks out his rear end against the power conduit with his poofy Persian black tail up in the air as if he was ready to “mark his territory”. All the charging Browni's come to a full stop in their tracks, with the Browni's behind them slammed on the brakes with their paws and ended up bowling over the other Browni's in the front line. The Brownis stared down Phil and growled, as Phil gestured with his paw like a “Nuh-uh-uh!” and shouted.

“One more step and I'll spray!”

The Brownis pause momentarily, taking the Persian cat's direct threat seriously and reverted back to the mass in the air, as Will made it to the rusted breaker. Opening the breaker, he shoved the cutlery where switch should have been, a puff of smoke went up from the breaker as the room crackled to life. The broken light bulbs began arcing across the room, zapping the mass of browni in the air. As the electricity passed through them the mass began to shrink and seemingly vanish as the excess Browni's were drawn into the mass. With the light that has overcome the darkness, the cats bring out their claws and rage into battle, “Charge!” cried Commander Ziggy as the rest of the cats attacked the front line of Browni's. Alexei charged into battle and manhandled several Browni's at the front line, with one swipe of his claws and moved into the next barricade of rats, with Natasha and their siblings Boris, Sputnik and Svetlana right beside them, crushing, pounding and beating up all the Browni's they could handle. As the cats surround the remaining Browni's and begin to squeeze them into the center of the room, Will begins limp away from the fight. As hard the cats fight, the denser the group of Browni's become. As they are about to start biting each other again, a black lighting bolt seem to come from nowhere are a hole in space cracks open. The cats look up to see tentacles seeming to come out of nowhere and revenants solidifying in the room, their rusted blades rubbing against

the concrete walls. "What in the world is that?" exclaims Ziggy as he looks up to the swarming tentacles coming after them. He frantically looks around and finds Min-ji, "Take your team and do something about those things!" Min-ji nods and signals her stealth Nermegals to portal out of the battle and reappear upon the walls and short way, and began slicing and dicing all the tentacles that they could. As Diana continues burning the Brownis that get anywhere near her, her bracer busses an alert as her veins start to slowly glow yellow. "N-no damnit not *here*.." Diana ran with the cats, she seems to be wincing in pain slightly as the glow in her veins has not receded "Damnit.. Keep it together.." firing more blasts of fire at the Brownis as they advanced. For every tentacle that Min-ji and her stealth team cut down, two appeared, the tear seemed to be growing bigger as the Brownis compressed themselves into a rat like revenant with long metal claws. The tentacles were beginning to crowd the cats out of the tunnels and back up into the base. Realizing that the tactic to slice and dice the tentacles wasn't working, Bunky channeled his anima and produced two grenades. He pulled the pins with his teeth and pawed them in front of the tentacles, "Fire in the Hole!" he cried as the cats moved out of the way to avoid being caught in the explosion. The explosion clears the room of tentacles and revenants, but the breach still remains, as the cats look into the nothingness opened by the Brownis, they see what looks like a writhing ball of tentacles floating in the blackness of space, they can hear the piping of an other-worldly flute playing a song that was never meant for organic ears. They can see the wall of tentacles reforming as the Browni revenant steps out front of it. "It's too late stupid cats, the door is open, Browni win." Alexei steps forward to the revenant and shakes his paw angrily.

"Глупый крыса! Сумасшедший лунатик! Боясь встретиться со мной, Алексей, сын Максим, внук Игоря, один на один? Что скажешь, трус? Я раздавить вас голыми когтями за дело Тамплиеров и для России!"

"Stupid rat! Crazy lunatic! Afraid to face me, Alexei, son of Maxim, grandson of Igor, one on one? What say you, coward? I crush you with my bare claws for the Templar cause and for Russia!" Browni responded by disappearing and reappearing behind Alexei, biting him on the neck and throwing him into the breach. Shock - shock and disgust – those are the things that filled Klaus at the hideous sight of the revenants who dared to take the form of such grotesque rats. It soon morphed to revulsion as Klaus kept his distance and respectfully avoided the particular Browni that a certain cat was deadly determined to destroy. Instead, Klaus focused his fury on the remaining abominations. Any Browni foolish enough to come close to Klaus was scorched with a livid lavender-blue flame as Klaus's frantic panic overtook the fluid control of his bolts and paved way for frenetic flames. Klaus did not want a single one of those vile things touching him. With a more professional air, Angelique had found a nice perch among a pile of rubble and was picking off more revenants. Instead of her gun, however, the woman was forming spikes of her own solidified blood and launching them precisely at where the corrupt creatures' hearts should be.

"Alexei!" cried Natasha in horror as she witnessed her mate being thrown into the dark abyss. Svetlana and Sputnik tried to rush in to assist Alexei, but Boris held them back, "Нет, это его борьба! Мы не должны вмешиваться!"

"No, this is his fight! We must not interfere!" Boris commanded. The two creatures locked in a mid air battle as they fell through the void. The two animals floated through the starry abyss biting and kicking one another in flurry of claws, anima and anti anima as they orbited the mass of writhing tentacles, their blood pooling in rings around the strange body, bits of fur and flesh tearing from the combatants as they faded in and out of view of the other cats. Hours seemed to pass as they looked on in horror unable to do anything. Until finally they faded out of sight only to come back into sight within seconds, Alexei being thrown from the void bleeding and missing large patches of fur as the revenant Browni huffing for air jumped out and prepared to deliver the final blow. Janis unholsters her pistol and focuses her aim carefully at Browni's head readying to pull the trigger. "I only get one shot at this," she whispered to herself, but not for long before she hears the charging paw steps from the far corridor. She turned away from Browni and looked straight ahead to the empty corridor and saw four little creatures racing towards the battle. Janis saw the slightly bigger cat charging into the chaos and fearing that she would end up shooting one of the little ones by accident, she lowers her weapon. Through all of the chaos and the spectacle of the cat-on-revenant royale, Klaus's frantic fires slowly began to disperse as he once more had a moment to collect himself. He looked worriedly to the injured feline who has just been effectively mauled and couldn't help but bristle in his returning panic as the revenant reared. She wanted to interfere, Angel had the beast dead in her sights, but with the barked warning from the feline companions, she chose other targets to expend her frustration. Diana by this point is backed into a corner by the Browns unable to get over to their friend to help as she is doing all she can to keep herself alive while visibly in pain from the anima that is overflowing into her veins. Her bracer beeping in warning as it powers up to expel the excess anima.

CHAPTER TWENTY SIX: Deus Ex Tigris:

Out of nowhere, a small, but rugged feline figure, with three other small ones following behind, they race through the corridor and flies through the air channelling anima until bright red appears on the paws and none other than Li-Li, the Chinese Li Hua, delivers a flying hind leg side kick to the revenant in her battle cry, knocking him out of place preventing him from delivering Alexei the final death blow. The revenant Browni picked himself up and prepared to rush the little creature only to be kicked again, and hit once more by two separate pairs of paws, both by Li-Li and Dmitri. Vitaliy and Shoe descended from the breach in the ceiling like a pair of monkeys. Browni snarling readied himself for a counter attack as he opened a vein with one of his long claws spilling filth on to the floor and summoning another set of rat like Browni's. The smaller rats rushed the cadets as the revenant kept cutting itself bringing forth another wave of Browni's as the tentacles began to reappear from the breach. Li-Li rises to the occasion and holds up the petrified bamboo shoot in her paw. "Cover me!" Li-Li tells Dmitri and his brothers, "This will take some time and anima to channel the portal." Dmitri nodded, and the first born of Alexei glanced at his near broken father lying on the ground, and mother Natasha was trying to heal his wounds, and Min-ji shielding him from further filth exposure. He saw another Nermegal cleansing out the filth internally from Alexei with his tentacles. Alexei was meowing in excruciating pain as the tentacles were digging into his wounds to cleanse the black poison from

him. "We will avenge you, Papa!" Dmitri yelled then he looked back at all the Brownis and then at Li-Li readying herself with the petrified bamboo shoot, "Arise, great forever-home! Arise for a fight to the death!" Dmitri commands as he assumes the leopard stance, with Vitality taking on the way of the crane, and Shoe, the monkey stance. Their uncles Boris and Sputnik, and their aunt Svetlana stand with them in the battle line assuming their stance. Little Anya stands beside Li-Li with her new found elemental focus that she picked off the storage boxes during her attempted escape into the tunnels with Will. The rest of the cats with anima flowing through their paws formed a circle protecting Alexei and Natasha behind Li-Li as she readies to perform the summoning. The bamboo shoot was carved into five sides each representing the first five animal ancestors of Kung-fu. Li-Li drives the petrified bamboo shoot into a disturbed patch of dirt on the floor and the object takes root like a growing plant. She lifts herself into the air channeling her anima into the object. The first side of the bamboo shoot begins to glow a bright red and illuminates the carving of 虎 meaning tiger.

The second side of bamboo shoot begins to glow a bright blue, revealing the Chinese lettering of 豹, representing the leopard.

The third side of the bamboo shoot begins to glow a bright yellow, revealing the carving 起重機 engraved downward, representing the crane.

The fourth side of the bamboo shoot begins to glow a bright green color, revealing the carving 蛇, representing the snake.

The fifth and final side of the bamboo shoot begins to glow a bright orange color, revealing the carving 龍, representing the dragon. All the colors from each side had faded and the object burst a golden light that blinded all the Brownis. A huge portal opens from wall to wall behind Li-Li, revealing the vast Shaolin Temple in Shaoshi Mountain in China. The Brownis looked on, licking their chops with curiosity as to whom would emerge from the great portal that stands fluid before them. The first animal to come out was Grandmaster Mei-Xiu. The beautiful and graceful crane stepped forward and assumed her wingspread, one legged fighting stance on the far left before the Brownis. The second animal was Grandmaster Wong-ho, the grandmaster of the way of the snake. The iridescent, black cobra slithers through the portal to the immediate right, raises its forebody and spreads its hood warning those who oppose him that he is ready to fight. The third animal was the leopard Grandmaster Zhou, he leaped through the portal and assumed his ready position to the immediate left. The fourth animal was so tiny, neither the cats nor the Brownis could see Grandmaster Qing-Xiao clearly, the golden little ethereal dragon zig-zagged through the portal and took his stance to the far right. Trails of golden mist followed behind him and tossed into the air in his movements. The final animal emerged with his big cat nose and whiskers first, and then his big fierce yellow eyes and huge paws with orange and black stripes all over his feline body. The Great-Grandmaster himself Shang-Lao enters into the tunnels and lets out a ear-piercing roar and steps forward, almost as if he was stalking his prey and takes his regal place in the center. The great-grandmaster

glances over at his fellow grandmasters and greets them with a low growl, "Grandmaster Wong-ho! It is good to see you once more!" Shang-Lao addresses the cobra.

"I was ssslithering in my den in Mount Emeisan minding my own business when all of a sssudden, the sssummoning portal shows up on my morning breakfassst! To whom you gave the Five Animals Stone to?" Grandmaster Wong-ho complains, but maintains his respect for Shang-Lao with a bow.

Great-Grandmaster Shang-Lao shows Wong-ho to the direction of Li-Li with his paw, "One of our exemplary students."

The revenant Browni rushed forward digging its enormous metal claws into Grand master Zhou's side as he tried to push him through the portal. The swarms of Brownis broke up into multiple streams attacking the crane's graceful legs and leaping to try and snap the dragon from the air, as they surrounded the snake. Qing-Xiao zigged and zagged, dodging his way out of trouble with the Brownis that were trying to pull him off the air, but before the masses could catch him, Qing-Xiao breathed a cone of fire all over the swarm. The Brownis caught in the blaze screamed in burning agony as they slowly burned to a crisp and crumbled into a heaping pile of ash. As series of tentacles attempted to pull Shang-Lao through the breach, The final stream surrounded Li-Li, Shoe, Dmitri and Vitaliy and separated them from their masters, a particularly large Browni had cornered Anya near the entrance to the room, it's spiked tongue slithering over its yellow fangs. Anya was shaking in her fur, fearing for her nine lives as she saw the spike tongue spearing for her. She glanced over at her elemental focus attached to her paw, and somehow in the midst of all these battles, she came up with an idea. It is a gruesome, yucky idea, but in a dire situation, gruesome and yucky ideas are necessary. She paid very much attention to the spiked tongue about to impale her cute, little furry body. As the Browni shot out its tongue, Anya ducked out of the way and ran through the Browni's legs. The spiked tongue impaled itself into the corner of the wall. The Browni struggled as he tried to dislodge his tongue out from the wall, Anya slipped behind it and screamed into its ears.

"TAKE THIS YOU BIG BULLY!" Anya hissed and her paws began to glow a bright ice blue and casted a chain lightning onto the Browni electrocuting him, frying away everything in the rat's body. The Browni sizzled and smoked as it fell over dead and seemed to dissolve into ashes, Anya could see the other attempting to corral the herd of Brownis into the center of the room as Grandmaster Zhou and revenant seemed to trade blows at the edges of the fight. Grandmaster Zhou fought the revenant with all his speed and agility, trading blow for blow, then the hit and run tactics, hit and then run again looking for a vulnerability within the revenant. Wong-ho slithered from a hiding spot to hiding spot, striking out every time a Browni got stuck someplace, his venom is working its way through their veins causing them to slow down and limp. Any normal animal would have died almost instantly from a single bite, but the Brownis only seemed to die after ten minutes. Wong-ho struck quickly at a single Browni and dug its fangs into it, letting the venom work through its body to paralyze it. In a split second, Wong-ho rose his body over the Browni and opened its mouth wide to swallow him whole. Grandmaster Mei-Xiu hopped from one foot to another, impaling Brownis on her beak as she tried to avoid being pulled down by them. Shoe monkeys his way, stepping on the heads of every Browni in his way to Grandmaster Mei-Xiu as he grabs a hold of one of her wings and swings up onto her back.

Shoe goes completely bananas and starts slapping the Brownis off of the crane. All the while, Shang-Lao fought to hold back the fold of tentacles from the breach.

As Li-Li fends off Brownis from all directions, she noticed something about the fight between the revenant and Grandmaster Zhou, no matter where they go, the revenant never turned his back to either Zhou or the portal, the revenant has limited the battle to corner of room where no one can get behind him. Li-Li tries to get Shoe's attention, but the screams and battle cries of the fights were so loud, no one could hear themselves think. The Chinese Li-Hua races over to Shoe who was fighting Brownis alongside his Aunt Svetlana and Grandmaster Mei-Xiu and paws at him, "Over there, come with me I have an idea. See if you can get that big Browni to turn his back on Zhou." Shoe monkeyed over the wall and stomped on the Browni heads to get to the revenant who was focused on fighting Grand Master Zhou, the leopard master. He noticed some metal bars upon low ceiling above the two combatants. He leaped up and grabbed hold of the metal bars and started swinging from left to right to warm up. If Shoe was going to get someone's attention, he will have to be silly as silly can be. Shoe swung around above Grandmaster Zhou and the revenant, and hung down and grabbed the revenant's ears and gave them a firm tug. The revenant turned his attention to Shoe, its claws reaching up and snatching him from the bars, as he prepared to bite off the cat's head he turned his back to Zhou and in doing so gave him the chance to pounce. Zhou knocked the revenant to the floor and tore into his throat killing him instantly. One fourth of the human agents, Diana, does what she can amidst the chaos launching her fire at the filth infected rats. It seemed to become more potent as her veins glowed. Not long before she yelps audibly in pain as the anima starts burning her as the bracer recovers, and expels anima from her system in a long, bright, yellow plume, burning everything in its path as it violently discharges from her. As the revenant died, the Brownis stopped in mid fight and began clutching their heads, the cats turned their attention to the breach where Shang-Lao had valiantly attempted to hold back the tentacles, but the breach had only widened as the battle progressed, black tentacles were now pouring into the room absorbing the Browni pack. Janis widened her eyes and dropped her jaw, as she witnessed the rare event such as this and her acquaintance she had only known for a matter of hours. She lowered her flamethrower and extended her hand to Diana who was laying on the floor, exhausted from the purge of anima. Diana nodded and grabbed Janis' hand and was pulled up to her feet. As they watched the scene in horror time seemed to slow down and finally stop. A voice came from the filth spilled on the floor.

"Well done Puss. I am impressed, five out of five, fun for the whole family." The voice said as time slowly began to speed up again. "I see you're in a bit of pickle right Puss, but don't despair help is on the way...just not for you. See Walter is upset about the break in, and he sent some of his own Chucks to patch the breach opened by Brown Jenkin. If I were betting man I'd say they are going to kill everything this room before filling it with enchanted concrete. But letting you die Puss isn't in my interest....after all you introduced me to my new friend, Bubbles." A chimp skull seemed to fly out of the breach and into the filth on the floor. "You see while you were chasing Browni, me and Bubbles here got to talking and I have grown quite attached to the little face ripper, so much so that I have a special errand for him. As thanks for my new found friendship Puss, I am going put you guys on the other side of Walter's goons, you will only get one shot to get out here alive Puss, make it count."

The room went black as the animals all suddenly found themselves behind a squad of humans in illuminati armour preparing to seal the breach. As time began to speed up again, They could see the entrance to the tunnels and the Agents waiting for them. Dmitri and George look at the entrance and the Illuminati agents on the other side. Alexei is still not in the best of shape to run fast enough on his own to reach the exit in time, Dmitri turns to Grandmaster Zhou and bows respectfully, "Grandmaster, my papa is injured, can you take him?" Grandmaster Zhou nodded and he hoisted Alexei and Natasha onto his back with his tail. Commander Ziggy and the rest of the cats banded together, "Alright kitties, let's do what the mouth in the Filth says, run for your nine lives! GO-GO-GO, HUSTLE!" The cats ran as fast as they could for the exit, including the five grandmasters of Kung-fu, with the kitten cadets on Great-grandmaster Shang-Lao's back. The human agents, the cats and the grandmasters stormed through the halls making their way up the maintenance tunnels and into back into the park. Diana doing what she can amidst the chaos launching her fire at the filth infected it seeming to get more potent the more her veins glowed before long she yelps audibly in pain as the anima starts burning her as the bracer recovers and expels anima from her system in a long bright yellow plume burning everything in its path as it violently discharges from her. The glowing going down substantially she was able to recover somewhat to assess the situation as time slows picking herself off the floor she struggles to follow the group as they are transported out of the room that would be filed with concrete. Making it onto the streets she does her best to hide her injuries acting like they haven't happened as the cats father was in much worse shape than herself but also she was ashamed at just how close she got to losing herself. She limped behind the group without a word exhausted not enough anima in her system to help herself let alone their father.

A door hidden in building in main street burst open as the animals and agents stormed into the crowded streets of Disneyland in the morning. They made their way down the street and out of the park gates, the oblivious crowd clapping and cheering the entire time. They had no idea of what had transpired below or how close the world had come to ending. Or that they owed their lives a group of kittens who had simply been too curious for their own good.

All the animals were at the extraction point outside the gates of Disneyland when a helicopter touches down at the scene, carrying a few agents and Dr. Lox and his nursing team of Oksana and Mindy. Alexei was hoisted up in the helicopter first as he needed veterinary attention right away. Alexei was hooked up to a few machines as Dr. Lox proceeded to examine his injuries, then Alexei was starting to flatline.

"Doctor, his vital signs are failing!" cried Nurse Oksana as she monitored from the machine.

"Нет, нет Алексей, не оставляют нас. Вы воин Тамплиеров, вы должны бороться с этим!"

"No, no Alexei, don't leave us. You are a Templar warrior, you must fight this!" cried Natasha mournfully as Alexei begins to slip away.

"Quick, I need an elemental focus! I need a blood and anima transfusion working to clear the Filth out from him, STAT!" Dr. Lox meowed as Nurse Mindy hurriedly applies an elemental focus to Dr. Lox's paw and Dr. Lox puts his forepaws to Alexei's side. "CLEAR!" Dr. Lox meowed and a round of chain lightning sizzled from his paws onto Alexei's heart. Oksana began to transfer clean blood into Alexei while Nurse Mindy performs feline CPR. A few seconds after the electrical defibrillation, transfusion and a few manual pumps into the side of Alexei, his heart began to beat and come around from the anima healing capabilities. Natasha breathed a sigh of

relief as she watched thinking that Alexei was slipping away for everything that he fought for. He fought very valiantly against Browni, and that their love for each other and their kittens grew stronger than ever before. All the other cats hopped on the chopper and then the human agents who accompanied them during the insertion. Li-Li and the rest of the cadets stayed behind, to speak with the animal grandmasters who had lent a paw during the battle. All of them thanked them and bowed low with great respect, as the cadets boarded the chopper, so did the bigger animals slowly disappeared back to their peaceful realm of the Shaolin Monastery. Janis watched the animals below slowly fade into their realm as she slouched on the helicopter, physically and mentally drained from all the horrors down below. She pets her anima cats as her therapy from all the chaos, her cats Ziggy and Bunky, "Mommy's so proud of you, my brave, adorable furbabies," Janis breaks into baby-talk as she scratches behind each of their ears. Oksana and Lox were not far away, but they were too busy as they had their paws full with nursing Alexei back to health. Now that this whole fiasco is over and done with, Janis sat back at her seat, and thought how she would have loved to stay and explore Disneyland with her anima cats. Kind of like a mini holiday, but after this fiasco, with the cats and the rats, and chimpanzee to boot. Right now though she was more content with getting back home to London to event planning and polish the gold banisters of the Temple Club. In a swirl of amorphous feathers, Klaus once more became human. It was with awe that he saw the monks depart, but swiftly was he overcome by relief and trepidation as he clambered up the helicopter and looked to his wife, Angelique, with exhausted eyes. The cats were finally safe for now, but for how long would that last? Klaus didn't even know for sure if things were truly over. Those cats had gone through so much in the supposed happiest place on earth. One thought, one question, ran through Klaus' mind as he slowly shrank into his seat: Just how much trouble would be coming? He didn't know and that terrified him. He needed to get back to the breach – to return to the park – and see the rift and the damages in reality. Klaus knew that both he and Angel would require quite the meticulous report to ever justify breaking into their Illuminati territory like that, and the punishment that could be inflicted on Klaus for his follies was nigh unimaginable. He could only hope things would be alright. Klaus could only hope.

When the other Illuminati arrived, Angelique had gone off seeking the highest commanding officer in a vain attempt to smooth over any potential setbacks this little altercation would create. Panic filled her mind at the thought of Disney becoming one of the next global battlegrounds between the factions or worse, another cordoned off Filth infection zone. In the haste and hurry, there wasn't time to do more than alert the current boots on the ground to the immediate dangers. She promised to write a fully detailed report back at Headquarters in New York as soon as possible. Ushered into the helicopter in a whirlwind of activity, she set off to escort the cats safely home.

Angel sat back wondering if she'd done enough, and if the Illuminati would be able to contain this breach as efficiently as they contained the one in New York, or if their resources were becoming thinner in the losing battle of trying to save this reality.

Turning to Klaus, she saw his look of concern, and reached out a hand to smooth his ruffled feathers. She also looked on to the family reunited once again. Paws or hands, it didn't matter. The cats were safe and they saved the world together. It made her smile despite the background of worry.

Bunky jumped off of Janis' lap and sauntered around the chopper. He checked in on Dr. Lox, who performed a short and sweet checkup on the rest of the cats, now that he had stabilized Alexei. Bunky goes to the front of the chopper and cheers on the cats and humans for a job well done.

"WE ALL KICKED SOME BROWNI BUTT! HA-HA! You see, that is the beautiful part of human/cat relations. Paws do go hand in hand, or paw and hand, or paw in paw... anyway, we all rocked that little town! Let's party up, cats!"

The cats cheered as the humans look onward to the feline celebration while seemingly preoccupied with their stresses and worries. Bunky walks over to a bag of premium cat food, personally delivered courtesy of their organization. Min-ji offers her claws and swipes at the bag, allowing a burst of delicious noms to pour out from the bag onto the floor. All the anima cats involved in this fiasco were drawn to the yummy goodness of the food. Revelling and eating. Some cats ate to the point that some of the Nermegals were curling up next to Klaus at his seat for a little bit of naptime. Hoping and dreaming that one day, when this whole damage situation from this fiasco is squared away, that they will come to visit the happiest place on earth again. As Janis, with Ziggy and Bunky napping on her lap, she leans her head at the window, gazing onto the sea of lights below, the helicopter flies in the direction of the sun as it begins to rise, signalling the dawn of a new day.

CHAPTER TWENTY SEVEN: Anya's New Human Friend:

His face and neck covered in stitches, Will made his way down mainstream in the park empty the trashcans and replacing their bags, before placing the full bag the back of his cart. As he stopped at the next trashcan near the entrance of the park, a tiny gray head popped out from around a corner and meowed. Will instantly recognizing the cat, waved and to her and said "Hey Anya!" Anya slowly sauntered, then broke into a running skip, and warily approached Will. She placed a paws on Will's shoe that clothed his foot, and she nuzzled around and around his ankles, "You, look a lot better I see. I am glad." Anya mewed.

"Thanks, I'm little banged up but nothing I can't handle," he said as he thump his chest, a move he instantly regretted, "Dad's guards did rough you guys up did they? Cuse told them not to, but sometime dad tells them to ignore me."

Anya shook her head and sat down at Will's foot to scratch her ears with her paws. "Nyet. Not too much, we were way too fast for them." Anya meows with a hint of a laugh.

Wiping his forehead will let a sigh of relief, "That's good, I was scared that you guys were going to get caught in the crossfire, Dad was pissed about the break in...but he's always kind of mad, Umma use to say it was something about how the pumps hurt him. But he was a grumpy son of a bitch even before the suite. Him and mom would fight all the time about everything, guess that's just they way he is though."

Picking Anya up and setting her in the front seat of cart, "I got keep a schedule else way the trashcans lock." As they drove to the next trash can, will asked "You ain't heard from Browni around since you guys left have you?" Anya glanced over at the humans lining up at the concession stands near the cart. The smell of hot dogs and hamburgers caught Anya's nose.

Mmmm, protein. They smelled yummy, but Anya didn't take much interest into people food enough to make her want to eat them. Well maybe pick at the meat and leave the bread and condiments out for the birds. After all, she is a cat, and she loves her meat to grow big and strong just like her mama and papa. She was thinking of Browni Jenkin after the catnapping, being held inside a cage, the escape and the battles have left her weary in thought, but more curious as to what's next in her future. Not knowing enough about Browni that he is just a victim of Dr. West's gruesome experiments, she only thought of him as one giant, rat bully. Perhaps that she will understand someday when she is fully commissioned and trained better that sometimes there's more to it than meets the eye.

She turned to Will and replied, "No, no, I haven't seen him. I think that's a good thing. I don't ever wanna see his ugly teeth again. And if he does ever show himself anywhere again, we'll be ready for him. I'll be ready for him. Stronger than ever."

Will stopped the cart and emptied another can, "That makes me nervous, Dr. West hasn't brought him into work since you guys broke in. Not that I mind, he use to get into every open trash can that you could find. But it makes me think he is up to no good."

As they spoke, Anya could see the old woman in the lab coat disappearing into one of the park's many hidden tunnels.

Anya points with her paw, "Would that be her, or another one of your papa's guards?"

Will adjusted his glasses looking at where Anya pointed, "That's her alright, no cat carrier this time, so she didn't bring Browni in. I'm guessing she's got him locked up at home to keep him out of trouble. Still think he is up to no good though." As they made their way back around to the entrance of the park, a woman stopped by the trash can holding an open drink only to drop in front of the trash can. "You missed one," she hissed at him, "I'm on it mama," Will said with a smile as he picked up the drink carton and tossed in the bag.

Anya watched the woman pull her son behind her, she couldn't help but notice the boys sickly appearance. Anya's little heart sank a little upon seeing the young child, "There's something wrong with that young male human, isn't he?"

Will adjusting his glasses again, "Looks like he is coming down with something, not sure what though. We just got done with a nasty measles outbreak. You'd think people would get their shots, but no, they are all afraid of ending up like old Will. But it ain't so bad being Will, don't you think Anya?" Will said with grin.

"I don't think being anything is bad, as long as you love yourself." Anya replied as she stares at Will's eyes.

Will tossed another bag in the back of the cart, "Umma use to say the same thing to me when I was little. She was a nice lady, you remind me a lot of her Anya. Anyway, you and your friends every plan on coming back to the park?"

Anya blinks and her bright yellow eyes glowed as she purrs at the passenger side of Will's maintenance cart, "Not for awhile. Maybe when things calm down a bit, we might come to this place again. Not to become prisoners inside a cage, but to have fun with all these humans, and maybe their animals they may bring."

Will brought the cart back to where he first found Anya, "I'd like that Anya, the surface is much more fun than the tunnels and I had hate for you guys to get the wrong idea about us. We're not all like Dr. West or even my Dad. They are just the high strung types, ya know." Anya watched

the dogs on leashes greet each other by sniffing their butts as they played near the park, "I hope there won't be any more animals getting catnapped, or dognapped or chimpanzee-napped now that we have been through there. My mama always said that there are more good creatures out there than bad ones."

Will scratched his head as thought came to him, "You guys didn't happen to see Bubbles on the way out did you. He never really cared for me, and I would hate to think he is hiding somewhere in the park waiting to jump me." Anya almost forgot about Bubbles the chimpanzee. The poor thing, they had to do away with him at the paws of Min-ji and her Nermegal stealth team. The voice inside the Filth puddle was so happy that he had found a new friend.

Anya knew that the best way to answer this would be to tell the truth, "Don't worry, Will. Bubbles is in very good hands right now. He won't be bothering you anymore. He's in a better forever home now," Anya replied.

Will let another sigh of relief as he set Anya back down where he found her and scratched her behind the ears. "More good news, I'd love to stay and chat Anya, but I got get to the castle and clean the bathrooms. The site manager get real grumpy if I'm late. But you and your are welcome here any time, as far as I am concerned. As for my dad, well, we'll just not tell him about it." Will said with a wink.

"I won't meow a soul." Anya promised and she glanced behind her in the corner to see her parents, Natasha and Alexei waiting for her. She was very sad to go, but Anya knows in her heart that she has gained a new human friend, "до свидания, Will! I'll never forget you." Anya bid her farewell solemnly as she extended a paw, and then disappeared from the corner to join her family on their journey home.

The End

EPILOGUE:

Temple Hall, Ealdwic, London

Time: 2 p.m., London Time

Graduation is upon Temple Hall. The vast room on the west wing of the Crucible, which once was Prince Bigglesworth and Prince Albert's private chambers, is now open to the public. Once a year, when a new feline cadet graduates, their human servitors are invited to witness their ascension from cadets into full-fledged Templars. Many people are present in this room today. Janis Harrington and James "Jeeves" Mansfield III, the two prime butlers of Temple Hall, were on hand to make sure that everything is all in place, from the delectable noms, to the finest of sand for the litterboxes, to the pristine condition of the Royal Clowder thrones. Pet parents and human servitors have gathered in suits and ties, and in Templar uniform, with their little fur-darlings upon their laps, grooming them with their own brushes and making sure that their collars and cuffs for both the fore and hind paws are straight and shiny. The Drs. Borishkov, Mikhail and Galina in Templar dress uniforms were cuddling Anya and Shoe in their arms and mingling with Jean-Luc Marchallande with Phil, who was talking to Natasha and Alexei down below their feet. An exquisite throne of red and pure gold was placed in the center of the

audience stage before the three princely and princessly thrones, and the sight of an unfamiliar feline who sits upon this throne is a rarity indeed. A beautifully groomed, yet not a big fan of Elizabethan collars, a tabby-munchkin of regal stature, Her Majesty Queen Sophie I. A Templar herself, and one of the first few felines to be established into the organization, she is rumored to be capable of communicating with the Gaian bees directly. Though according to some older felines, that it is not her who decides the destiny of these new graduates. It is spoken word of the bees that is carried into Her Majesty's dainty ears in regards to codenames and fields of expertise that a feline would most succeed in. All the feline officers were groomed in their best cuffs on their paws, as they take their sitting positions flanking the thrones, the right side signified a union of strength, with Ziggy, Bunky, Min-ji, Alexei (recovering well from his injuries), and Trixie bearing the golden mace, and the left side signifying the union of intelligence, with Natasha, Malcolm, Phil and George, Oksana and Dr. Lox. Jeeves walks over to the set of red and gold doors and taps his cane onto the floor three times. Silence fell all over the chamber and the spectators rose to their feet as he announced the presence of the Royal Clowder. Her Majesty Queen Sophie have entered the chambers by the open doors on the left side of the chambers and had taken her throne. The three Royal Highnesses, Prince Bigglesworth, Prince Albert and their sister, Princess Cookie have all entered the chamber through the triple cat flaps on the right and have taken their seats, as the guests and cats all bowed before them.

First, there were a few boring speeches from Prince Bigglesworth and Albert, then the Queen's address to follow. They each had congratulated the cadets on a fine job they did in maintaining strength and discipline at the most recent difficult time as they trained very hard as Templars. All those involved were commended for their bravery and sacrifice in bringing Anya home safe and sound where she belonged. Especially the four, brave cadets who risked their nine lives in improving themselves to help take down their most vicious enemy, Browni Jenkin. It seems that shortly after the rescue mission, Prince Albert had received an invitation from Great-Grandmaster Shang-Lao himself, to visit China to open dialogue and establish relations. Dmitri, Vitaliy, Li-Li and Shoe were called forth before the Prince, they were each given a medal of honour for their outstanding achievement in China and their bravery in Disneyland.

"No cadets have ever received a high honour such as this!" Prince Bigglesworth added as the medals were presented. "Shoe, you have earned this medal because you have used your greatest strength against your enemy, your curiosity to act out of sheer mischief in the line of fire." Then he turned to Vitaliy as Jeeves placed his medal around his neck, then Vitaliy's name was called forth, "Vitaliy, you have earned this honour because you have finally learned to act with integrity, and you have confronted your fear of water while training in China." Bigglesworth turned to Li-Li, "And you my dear, have started it all, you have acted like a leader. Your strength, and your mastery and integrity have brought these other three to shape up and become the masters and Templars they were destined to be... and with credit to Great- Grandmaster Shang-Lao of course. They will thank you for what you have inspired them to do, and we thank you with this honour." Bigglesworth then turns to Dmitri.

"Dmitri, I have heard that you have had a very wicked game of Kung-fu chess - animal kingdom style. Your tactical skills have greatly improved since your time in China, and your leadership was absolutely astounding in Disneyland. Accept this honour, Dmitri. And we salute all of you!

Stand and be recognized!" Bigglesworth commanded as cheers and applause rang throughout the chambers.

"ATTENTION! PAW SALUTE FRONT!" Sargeant Trixie ordered from the right of the chambers and all 254 cats in attendance had moved to regal sitting position and placed paws to their chests in respect of their young heroes.

Then the most important task had come to pass for Her Majesty to assign the destiny of the cadets. Twenty-five new cadets had officially become Templars this day. Queen Sophie just proclaimed Shoe's destiny to become a chaos demolitionist under Lieutenant Bunky. His mischief has finally paid off. Her Majesty had placed her royal paw on Shoe's head, and the bees had spoken the codename "Spunky Monkey" in her ear. When Dmitri was called to approach the throne, he was destined to become codename "Blueberry", a team leader in training under Commander Ziggy. Although he was not chosen to become the number one tank, the bees didn't speak of it, but they did speak when Li-Li was called to the throne. There, Li-Li was commissioned "Tiger Paw" under Captain Alexei as the team's front line specialist and martial arts trainer to the Templar cats for her outstanding mastery of Kung-fu. When Vitaliy's name was called to the throne, Her Majesty Queen Sophie had a little difficulty with the bees, as they would conclude that because of his outspoken attitude, and overcoming his fear of water, he would be best placed as a chaos biologist, codename "Raspberry" under Dr. George. George was filled with glee, since this will take some of the workload off his paws. He mentioned after the commissioning that it would be a joy to have Vitaliy under his watch. Then there was only one cadet left to commission, and that was Anya. She had been through so much to get this far, surely little Anya is deserving some sort of recognition.

"Templar Cadet Anya Alexeyevna, to approach the throne." proclaimed Sargeant Trixie. The little Russian Blue darling slowly approached Her Majesty and crouched low before her queenly presence. Queen Sophie meowed softly in congratulations for her, "You have been through so much, little one. Today is your very special day. Are you ready to see what the bees have planned for you?"

Anya nervously shaking her fur were standing up on ends as she nodded, and slowly Queen Sophie placed her paw on Anya's head. Anya began to relax at the Queen's touch of the paw. The Queen went into a trance like she just had a wiff of fresh catnip and heard the buzzing of the bees in her head, "Yes?" she mumbled.

"Oh yes." she mumbled as she tranced at the buzzing in her head even further with her paw still on Anya's head.

"Of course, it is perfect. Yes! It will be wonderful!" exclaimed the Queen feline, and trance was broken and released her paw from Anya.

"How do you feel about being a psychologist?" asked the Queen to Anya.

"You mean like an archaeologist like my mama?" asked Anya.

"Something like that, you get to learn how to get into the animals' and maybe humans' minds and learn what makes them tick. I'm sure Dr. Lox would be a fine teacher and mentor to you in your new field. Isn't that right, Dr. Lox?" Queen Sophie answered regally while very relaxed at her throne.

Dr. Lox stepped forward and presented himself with a slight nod of the head, "Of course, Your Majesty. Anya will be a wonderful addition to our veterinary team. The events that are happening in our world is getting worse each day and sadly, cases of mental health issues are on the rise. I maybe a doctor of healing physical boo-boos, but with Anya, I'm sure she would be great at healing whatever ails them in the mind."

"Yay, I get to travel with Mama and Papa too!" exclaimed Anya as she waved her paws with joy.

"Hey, I get to go with you too!" said Vitaliy.

"Oh, and the bees said your codename will be... Kalinka."

"Kalinka?" Anya asked as she was delighted and looked at her mother.

"Kalinka?" Natasha whispered as she glanced to Alexei.

"Kalinka?" Alexei asked as he tilted his head to glance at Natasha.

"Yes, Kalinka!" the Queen proclaimed.

Natasha and Alexei looked at each other from across the floor and Alexei mentioned something in Russian. Natasha asked politely to approach the floor with Alexei, the Queen nodded.

Natasha bowed and calmly addressed their complaint..

"Your Majesty, with all due respect of your unchallengeable wisdom and the spoken word of the bees, Kalinka means snowberry in Russian. Anya is a blueberry. Not white as the snowball like Dr. Lox, or the marshmallow like Nurse Oksana. Both are beautiful and charismatic, but it is not quite the blueberry like my little Anya.

Her Majesty Queen Sophie gazed at her with her baby blue eyes and answered, "If the bees command it, it shall be so." Natasha stared at the Queen blankly and tried to keep her growl to a minimum to avoid embarrassing Anya in front of the Royal Clowder.

"I like Kalinka, Mama! We have a snowball tree at our forever home. We play there all the time."

Anya recalled when she was just a few weeks old. Her servant Galina would put them in a basket and take them out under the snowball tree to play and explore with her brothers and Natasha and Alexei.

Prince Bigglesworth rises to his all fours and declares to those present, "So it has been said, so it shall be done, Natasha."

All the four kittens nuzzled on both of their parents and purred around them and it pleased the Royal Clowder when Prince Bigglesworth adjourned the ceremonies. Everybody including the cats all dashed for the noms. Even Bunky and Shoe tried to go after the human noms but they were being chased away by the butlers serving the hors d'oeuvres on trays. Dmitri sheepishly approached Anya as she was munching away on a little nom handed by Galina. He nudged her at the head, and congratulated her, "Umm, yeah... umm... you did good!"

"So I guess you don't have to be strong like bear to make it as a Templar?" Anya quipped with a little twinkle in her eye.

"No, I guess not." Dmitri answered, still sheepish about how he, Vitaliy and Shoe treated her before the whole fiasco began. Vitaliy approached Dmitri and Anya as they were talking, he added as Dmitri complimented their sister.

"Yeah, and we're sorry for sticking the blame on you all the time. We thought you were just weak and stupid because you're a female, but Li-Li showed us otherwise, and you showed us that you don't have to be strong to be smart. Hey, Li-Li was the one who kicked our butts!" Vitaliy said.

Li-Li crept up from behind the three and pounced on Anya and the two friends play fought happily as Li-Li gave a gentle noogie on the head of Anya with her paw, "Hey, hey, Anya! Congratulations, my friend, you did it! I knew you be strong enough. Maybe not strong-strong in paws yet, but hey Great-Grandmaster fix you right up. You are strong, in your head. I wouldn't fight you in a battle of wits. One day we all get together and make Kung-Pao chicken out of evil monsters!"

"You got it, Li." Anya looked around the chambers for Shoe, but he was nowhere in sight, "Now where did Shoe disappear to?" Anya wondered, as Vitaliy came over.

"Aw gee, I hope Shoe is not getting himself into all kinds of trouble again." Vitaliy hissed. Shoe was practicing his monkey fighting skills on top of a set of red velvet curtains in the chambers directly the thrones of the Royal Clowder. He swings from loop to loop pawing the air as he swings, but the more he does, the thin curtain rods bend. He swung and he swung until he felt the rods bend and break from above him. "Uh-oh," he muttered and the red velvet panels that he clawed upon were falling down and landed upon the thrones, with Princess Cookie and Queen Sophie sitting upon them... as the whole scene fades to black, the famous words of Prince Bigglesworth, "Oh dear me," could be heard throughout the chamber as the cats caught underneath and Shoe scurry and struggle from under the curtains.

[End Theme](#)

Reference Info, Credits and Thanks: ((OOC))

[The Siamese](#) (Min-ji)

[The Himalayan](#) (George)

[The Munchkin](#) (Prince Bigglesworth and Albert)

[The Russian Blue](#) (Alexei, Natasha, Sputnik, Boris, Dmitri, Anya, Vitaliy and Shoe)

[The Maine Coon](#) (Trixie)

[The Bengal](#) (Ginger)

[The American Shorthair](#) (Ziggy, Oksana and Bunky)

[The Birman](#) (Dr. Lox) The concept and character Dr. Lox Snowball III was created by Gin "Djinggi" Synrio.

[The Persian](#) (Phil)

[The Scottish Fold](#) (Malcolm)

[The Chinese Li-Hua \(Li Hua Mau, Dragon Li\)](#) (Li-Li)

All videos are from Cats 101: Animal Planet. Made by Frank van der Horst and Sp!d3r_Channel.

Kalinka: Written by Ivan Larianov 1860, Sung by the Alexandrov Ensemble (The Red Army Chorus)

[The Shaolin Monastery](#)

[Jiuzhaigou National Park](#)

[The Pagoda Forest](#)

[Mount Emeisan](#)

[Long Men Grottoes](#)

Feel free to leave any comments, constructive criticisms, and feedback in all our Twitters [@TheAnimaCats](#), [@Browni_Wall_Rat](#), [@KlausvonRichter](#), [@InseinAngel](#), and [@DianaSenis](#). Please be sure to tag us all when submitting.

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