

MAGIC

The Gathering®

JEDIT



LEGENDS CYCLE • BOOK II

Clayton Emery





Chapter 1

Something fluttered, flittered, dipped, and bobbed in the clear desert sky like an addled bat driven into sunshine.

Amber eyes tracked the ragged shape struggling to stay aloft. A curious voice purred, “Keep up, flyer! Keep up, or you’re dead!”

The watcher lurked under a canopy of green leaves, for a lush jungle and parched desert lay side by side, their dividing line cut clean as if by a knife. The flyer was a drake, a small, bony dragon clad in fine scales the color of dried blood. Perched atop the drake hunched an equally bony man in dull robes who urged the exhausted beast onward.

No doubt, thought the watcher, the dragon rider wished to reach the safety of the jungle. For to touch the rolling bosom of the Sukurvia was to die.

The drake would never make it. Beyond exhaustion, the creature’s wings flailed like rotten cloth. Wracked by fatigue, the dragon steadily sank toward the scorching yellow sand. After flying valiantly too many miles on the hot desert winds, the rider and flyer would fall short of safety by a scant mile.

“Don’t!” urged the watcher from the cool jungle depths. “The sands never surrender—*Ach!*”

The last was a cat’s spit of disgust as the watcher took

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action. Vaulting from a spur of red rock in a long graceful bound, the jungle warrior landed in a high-canted saddle astride a lumbering monox. Big as a hill, the monox still grunted under the weight of the rider, nine hundred pounds or more.

Catching the reins from the pommel with clawed hands, the warrior called, "Get up, Questing Lip! A flyer's about to crash on the Sukurvia! Not my father, drat it, but he might know of him! Hie!"

Rider and beast bulled through the jungle, a fantastic sight towering tall as the big-fronded trees. The rider was a cat man, an upright tiger with limbs like a human's and a curving tail with a mind of its own. Splintered sunlight flashed over an orange-black hide and shone on his snow-white breast and belly. The warrior wore only a goat hide loincloth with a crude bronze dagger bobbing at his back. Clearly the weapon was unneeded, for the tiger sported black claws like chips of chert and white fangs that gleamed under the shortened muzzle. Curiously, the eyes were the most startling feature, a vivid glowing amber with vertical green slits. The eyes of this cat brimmed with a man's intelligence.

The monox was an ungainly brute half the size of an elephant with the ugliest features of camel and horse. Its only beauty came from the saddle and harness decorations, fat glyphs embossed and painted in bright colors like an arcane alphabet. The mount stank like burning garbage in the hot jungle air, a stench so bad the tiger's sensitive nose always rebelled. But goaded, the monox could eat up the ground, its thick legs and feet managing a stiff trot that broke brush with a steady crashing and thrashing.

Another advantage of the monox, the rider knew, would be its usefulness on the hot desert sands. The monox wouldn't survive the short journey, likely, but by then the cat warrior would have reached his goal. He hoped.

In a flash, a last wall of greenery burst before the monox's

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bearded chin and breast. Shreds of leaves spattered mount and rider, then dropped onto hot yellow sand and withered. Just like that, the tiger had invaded the desert, an arena of unseen death.

The failing drake would be the next to touch down. It struggled valiantly to stay aloft, urged onward by its bony rider, but the bird-thing spiraled like a dying leaf toward the scorching sand.

“Hy-aah! Go, Questing Lip!”

If the oncoming cat warrior worried about the dangerous sands, he didn't show it but kept the monox lumbering on like a wooden-legged ship. When he'd jogged within shouting distance, he craned in the tilted saddle, swaying side to side, and called on the thin desert air, “Make ready to scramble for your life, friend! This demon desert is rife with—”

Probably the rider didn't hear, for the fire drake gave a last gasp and flopped to the desert floor like an arrow-shot duck. Its blood-red scales plowed a furrow of powdery sand as it skidded to a halt. So spent was the creature, it didn't even tuck its leathery wings or coil its graceful swan's neck. It just let its hooked beak and wings drop to the sand for a blissful rest.

The cat warrior astride the thumping monox saw clearly what happened next. The robed rider skipped off the tiny saddle as if it burned his bottom, landed on scorching sands in bare feet, and immediately legged away from the drake. Just in time.

The sand directly underneath the drake suddenly spawned a hole as if a giant plug had been pulled. Disturbed, the drake squawked once as its belly and legs tilted awkwardly on a skittering slope of sand. The hole sported rippling teeth like jagged glass. In the next instant, the rising ring of teeth clashed in a hideous circle on the drake's body. The drake's long-jawed head flipped one way and its spear-tipped tail the other as its body was gnashed to bits. Blood

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squirted a dozen feet, dark-red drops landing like bizarre rain on the parched desert. The cat warrior, and the running man looking past his shoulder, saw two leather wings fold like torn sails then disappear with the crushed body below the sands.

“Terrent Amese bless us!” called the cat warrior. “Run, man, and give me your hand!”

The tiger flicked its agile claws to nip the monox’s side. As the monox charged, the warrior leaned far from the high saddle to snatch the runner’s hand.

The monox had other ideas. Its brain was dim and slow, but it had clearly seen death and smelled blood on the wind. It knew menace lurked unseen. The brute swerved in an ungainly circle that almost tipped it over sideways, partially stumbling over its own feet as it swiveled back toward the jungle and safety. Feet big as barrels pedaled shifting sand in a wind-driven blur.

The abrupt swerve nearly unseated the rider as his foot jerked from the stirrup. Nimble and fast, the cat man hooked clawed toes into the monox’s hide, saving himself from pitching out of the saddle but raking the beast, so it jolted and jumped worse than before. The tiger spat and cursed as he struggled to stay mounted. The cat had risked his life to rescue this running stranger, and he refused to surrender him to an underground monster.

Time ran out.

The runner was still thirty feet from the monox, and both were still a mile from the cool jungle, when the sands exploded in three places. A perfect triangle of death boxed in the refugees.

The fiends that burst from the desert’s depths might have been geysers of steam, but they were solid as gray-barked trees. The soaring columns were topped by round mouths ringed with fangs and writhing tentacles like obscene fingers. Pink-gray fringes like bat wings backed the tentacles or perhaps

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shaded tiny blind eyes, if the creatures had any. All three living columns coiled unerringly to pounce upon man, man-tiger, and monox.

Prepared for the onslaught, at least mentally, the cat warrior didn't hesitate. Abandoning the reins, the tiger leaped from the saddle in a long shallow dive. He hit on both hands, rolled on a shoulder, and vaulted upright, already running, claws flicking sand in long plumes behind. Before the running man could even blink, the charging tiger was upon him. A black-clawed hand curled around the stranger's biceps and hoisted him off his feet. When the man's bare toes touched down, he was nine feet closer to the distant jungle.

The inhumanly strong tiger didn't waste breath. "Run!"

A slobbering groan throbbed as the monox was struck by three hammer blows from the sky. One worm slammed its ringed mouth onto the monox's broad flank. Hide tore as the mouth clamped like a lamprey's. Jagged teeth punctured the beast's hide, then curled inward to shear away a swath of muscle. As the monox gurgled and squealed, recoiling in pain, another worm nipped its front leg, clipping the limb off at the breast. Down tumbled the monox onto one bleeding flank, its front leg spurting blood. The third monster, larger than the others, opened a yawning ringed mouth and clapped it over the monox's head, swallowing it entirely. With a jerk of the immense columnlike body, the worm wrenched backward. Hide, bone, and muscle sheared as the brutish monox was beheaded. Already the other two worms had consumed most of the bleeding body, ripping away buckets of muscle and bone in single bites. Within a minute, all that remained of the monox was a gory smear on the desert.

With that morsel eaten, the worms immediately quested for more. The drumming of four feet brought the worms charging.

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The tiger and the man ran headlong without glancing back. A huge shadow curled over them where no shadow should be. The cat warrior shouted and shouldered the man sideways.

From the sky crashed a worm like a meteor striking. Fastest, the biggest worm had coiled its titanic body in the air, arching like some fantastic stone bridge, then slammed its ring of teeth right in front of the runners. The shock of the creature's strike nearly flicked both men off their feet. Their only luck was that the worm drove itself ten feet or more into the sand, so the deadly teeth were temporarily buried. Yet they were cut off by a huge stony body, and two lesser worms plowed up sand in pursuit.

"Run! That way!" panted the tiger.

Without quibbling, the robed man dashed on bare feet around the buried end of the worm. The cat watched him go, hoping he'd make it. One shrug would free the deadly mouth from the sand.

The tiger, meanwhile, took a shortcut toward safety. Leaping high, the cat man snagged claws into the scaly hide and scrambled upward like a squirrel. The monster was so massive he felt the heat of its body in waves, felt the desert floor quiver from pulsations within its body, even heard gurglings and creakings from inside its gut. Wurms were decadent dragons, so the legends said. Once mighty, long-ago elder wurms had, for cowardice or sloth, been stripped of their wings and memories and magic and cursed to live underground where no one would see them. To escape even a degraded dragon was an impossibility, went the wisdom, but the cat hoped to get lucky. Reaching the ridge of the great back, he flexed his toes to leap—

—and tumbled as the worm ripped its head free of the sand. Flicked off like a fly, the cat instinctively twisted to land on his feet, but the distance was too short. With a grunt, the tiger slammed shoulder-first onto sand and gravel and

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bounced painfully. Still, the warrior rolled instantly to four feet.

Not in time. Fast as a cobra, the worm punched its round mouth at the tiger-man. He ducked the onrushing blast of hot stinking air but was clipped across the scalp by flesh hard as a millstone. Stunned, the cat flopped flat as the ominous shadow loomed across the brassy sky.

Sand spattered in the tiger's eyes as the human stranger skidded to a halt just as the worm buckled low to scoop the staggered cat man into its mouth. Cursing at the hurry, the man dipped a long bony arm and scooped up a fist-sized rock on the run. Chanting "*Ain-desh, ain-fore!*" he set the rock ablaze as if it were straw and lobbed the flaming wad into the monster's open jaw—an easy target eight feet across.

White-hot, the rock immediately charred flesh. Scorched, the worm flinched, arching skyward from the searing pain. Not far and not for long, but long enough.

Too stunned to move, the cat man felt bony hands, surprisingly cold and strong, snag his arm.

The magician hissed, "Come! Quickly! Or we're lost!"

Dazed but energized, the tiger dug in clawed toes and sprinted. Groggily he saw the jungle less than a quarter-mile off.

The cat mumbled, "You saved my—"

"Don't talk! Run!"

"No, split!" countered the cat warrior.

Instantly the two fugitives sprang apart, and between them zoomed a stony column as big as a galloping horse. A smaller worm, only six feet thick, had squirmed past its bigger cousin. The writhing body thumped and thudded along the sand, fifty feet long. It thrashed like a giant inchworm, and as the men split, it rolled completely over like a sausage, rather than turning.

With the vitality of youth and the added incentive of

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panic, the cat had regained his senses in a flash. Now he lashed out with the only weapon handy. Four black claws, sharp as flint, slashed the worm's hide. Purple goo welled in the gash, but the worm only twisted closer to assault the cat man, taking the touch as a promise of living food. The cat man hopped like a frog rather than lose a leg to rippling knife-like teeth.

The smaller worm was crushed as if by an avalanche. The biggest worm had rejoined the chase, striking at the biggest target. The tiger and the magician redoubled their running as the huge monster chopped its smaller cousin in half. Wurm blood splattered in an arc like purple rain. The two severed halves of the dying creature twitched, coiled, writhed, and spun in aimless circles. The killer worm's teeth curved inward to shred and swallow flesh in chunks big as an ox. Gore littered the desert as the dead was consumed by its elder. From jungle treetops, vultures soared upward on long-fingered wings to study their chances of getting food.

Tiger-man and magician, meanwhile, pelting headlong, finally quit the fearsome desert and plunged amidst greenery. A hundred feet into the leafy depths they bulled until they were sure of safety, then both collapsed like puppets with cut strings. On hands and knees in a patch of bright mimosa they hunkered, sobbing for air, drooling with mouths open, thirsty enough to drink a river dry. But safe.

"Jedit Ojanen!"

Furry striped legs surrounded the refugees. Craning back, still panting, the tiger and stranger beheld three more cat warriors.

Tribal scouts, they wore blue-painted loincloths and blue headbands entwined around their ears to dangle by their whiskers. Each scout bore a stout stabbing spear tipped with a jagged worm tooth.

Ruko, chief of scouts, pointed his wicked spear for emphasis.

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“Jedit, you know our laws! Man-strangers are not allowed in Efrava! You and he are under arrest!”

* * * * *

The two prisoners were marched along at spear point. The path twisted past white-flowered bushes and shingled trunks of palms and teak trees. Sunlight came and went, filtered by the high green canopy. The air was hot but dry. A blue butterfly flitted past. A beetle bored by their ears, busy at some insect task. Underbrush rustled.

“I’ll give you credit, Jedit Ojanen,” said the chief scout. “I’ve never seen anyone stand snout to snout with a sand worm and survive.”

“This is a hero’s welcome, Ruko?” returned Jedit.

“You know the laws,” Ruko insisted. “Best you’d left this smooth-skin ape to be eaten. He’s not worth a monox turd, let alone a whole beast and a warrior’s life.”

“I disagree,” said the stranger mildly, and to Jedit, “I’ll thank you, hero, for saving my life.”

“Did you know of the danger?” asked Jedit. “The sands of the Sukurvia look placid as a pond but prove a busy place to any who dare step there.”

“I’ve seen sand worms at close range before.”

The man’s face and voice remained devoid of emotion, seemingly fearless at being captured by armed animal savages. As he walked the jungle path, the magician pulled a milky crystal from a pocket and idly turned it in his bony hands.

Jedit found the man’s manner cold and queer, but then he’d never met a human before. Nor had any of his tribe.

Mildly irritated by the man’s insolence, young and hot-headed, Jedit said, “You know, for a stranger in dire straits—”

Something clicked in Jedit’s mind. To his eyes, the magician suddenly seemed small and frail, harmless as a tiger cub, even in need of protection. The tiger had no way of knowing

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he'd fallen under the spell of the crystal in the mage's grasp. The three scouts felt the change too and abruptly flipped their spears to their shoulders, as if it were ridiculous to mistrust so scrawny a captive.

Jedit Ojanen shook his head, which felt muzzy. Perhaps the letdown of battle madness made him sleepy. Still, Jedit was cursed with curiosity that more often than not landed him in hot water.

Stifling a yawn, he asked, "So. Whence have you come? And how? And why?"

"I came from the west. On the drake." The man's eyes roved over the jungle, studying, learning.

Jedit recognized the signs: The man totted up observations like a scout sent to spy out the enemy. Yet so feeble, surely he was no threat.

Jedit snorted, "Your answers tell me naught I didn't know."

"I'm sorry." Yet the man didn't expand. "Where are we bound?"

"The village. This is Efrava." Even with his mind muddled by the crystal's subtle charm, Jedit still burned with questions. "Are there many men like you in the west? How many? How far off?"

"Efrava . . ." The magician frowned as if irked. "How far does this oasis extend?"

"Some thirty leagues east to west, not so many north to south." Jedit backhanded a green snake hanging over the trail. "How large is your land?"

Continuing to ignore questions, the man asked, "Your spears are tipped with wurm teeth, yet your daggers are bronze. Are your people skilled at metallurgy?"

"At what?"

Jedit touched the empty scabbard at the small of his back. Ruko had lifted his dagger. One of the scouts cocked an ear at the prisoners, silently asking if they should be gagged. Ruko shrugged a negative.

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Jedit went on, "You mean, can we forge? Yes. Our smith pours daggers in a stone mold. Puddling, she calls it. Tricky work, and the daggers still need days of honing with stones. Why do you ask?"

"How many tigerfolk inhabit this land?" The bony man ducked his head to peer up the trail.

"There are nine clans." Idly Jedit wondered why he felt so talkative. "The Dull Tooth Clan, the Red Rock Clan—"

"Hush! I asked how many *people*, you—" The man bit his tongue, barely civil, then tried again. "I mean . . . My fine host, I appreciate your enlightening me about your homeland."

Jedit gazed into the alien's black eyes, "And I asked where lay your homeland. You have yet to say."

With his face shadowed by greenery overhead, the man conceded, "My land is Tirras, where the mountains meet the plains, north by northwest. A goodly distance. The drake flew for four days to arrive here."

"Four days?" Jedit wrinkled his muzzle. "How can a flying lizard stay aloft that long? Certainly a bird can't."

"Some birds fly a thousand leagues without lighting on land or sea. But I aided my mount with magic."

"Ah. That was a good trick, sparking that rock alight."

"Lucky it worked. That was about my most powerful spell."

Feeling chatty, Jedit made idle conversation. "My mother works magic. She is clan shaman."

"Is she?" For the first time, the black eyes almost sparkled. "And her name?"

"Musata." Jedit narrowed amber eyes. Why did he play cat-and-mouse with this queer man? Were all men so reticent, so jealous of their knowledge? "Yours?"

"Johan. And your father's name?"

"My sire is Jaeger Ojanen." Jedit watched the man closely. "He traveled to the west. Did you ever hear of him?"

"Never," said the magician. "I'd remember a tiger-man."

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“No doubt.” Unease stirred in Jedit’s mind like a coral snake. “Johan is an odd name.”

“One to remember,” said the bony man enigmatically.

“Jedit, stifle your jabber!” A scout pricked both prisoners in the kidneys with a worm tooth. “You’ll spill all our secrets to this chicken-stinking flat-snout!”

“Let them talk,” said Ruko, the leader. “What little the manling learns he can tell his gods at moonset.”

Calm as ice, Johan glanced back at the towering tiger scout. “Do you threaten my life?”

“Life is a gift from the gods, stranger,” said Ruko. “Yet how long a man keeps it is up to him.”

Jedit growled, purring low in his throat, an unvoiced warning for Ruko to back off. Wondering if he’d get any square facts from this twisty visitor, he still persisted, for only by asking questions could he learn of the world his father had gone to explore.

Jedit continued his conversation. “Our legends claim men are a lost race.”

“Send your storytellers back to school. Men inhabit the west in countless droves. Do your people inhabit only jungle, and are these your westernmost reaches?”

“Yes. We’ve moved steadily west since the last days of Terrent Amese.”

“Who?” The man’s ears pricked. “Why the last days?”

Before he answered, Jedit studied the man like some exotic animal, as indeed he was. He wore a drab brown robe and went barefoot. His head was tanned and hairless, his chin pointed, his eyes flat as a snake’s. The mage idly rubbed his brow with the milky crystal—why, Jedit couldn’t guess. Despite the close heat under the trees, Johan didn’t sweat. All in all, he seemed as helpless as a boar piglet. Especially compared to the tigerfolk, who were all near seven feet tall and weighed up to nine hundred pounds. Jedit Ojanen was the largest. Like men, the jungle warriors had a flattened

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muzzle, upright stance, and paws elongated into almost-fingers and -toes with dark claws. But they were more tiger than man.

“I asked,” Johan repeated, “why the last days?”

“Eh?” With questions buzzing in his brain like a hive of bees and this infernal sleepiness, Jedit was distracted. “Uh, the legends are not clear. My mother can recite the stanzas, but disaster struck the Ancients, so they spread out from our homeland.”

“Your tribe halts here,” reasoned Johan, “because you can go no farther. That desert heat would kill man or tiger in a trice, if sand wurms didn’t snap them up first.”

“True. Yet my father dared to venture—”

“Jaeger Ojanen.” A crocodile’s smile. “I listen well.”

Jedit was not reassured by sudden friendliness. “Yes. My father left to explore westward to seek other speaking races. A brave warrior I wish to imitate. I’ve watched for him these many months. Your fluttering drake seemed an omen.”

“I am glad you spotted me,” said Johan, “else I’d be food for sand wurms.”

“Better the wurms caught you than us,” Ruko hinted darkly from behind. “Now shush, both of you. We don’t want this skinned pig frightening the cubs.”

The trail gave way to a clearing illuminated by golden-green light from the forest canopy. Jedit frowned, for though the village spread for miles, it constricted him. He watched the stranger Johan study the community with black eyes that gleamed like oiled obsidian. A river rippled through a valley bottom, a glittering expanse sixty feet wide but only a few feet deep, which whispered off into dense vegetation to the southwest. Solitary creatures, tigers liked elbow room, so their huts were strung along both sides of the river and stippled up the gentle slopes under trees and brush. Most were separated by a hundred paces. Little more than poles and

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thatch, the huts were just crawlspaces for sleeping. Two monoxes could be seen cropping brush with their questing lips. Stout ropes of hemp hobbled one massive leg. The village center was only a square of packed earth before a long, ramshackle common house.

As if compiling some mental list, the stranger murmured, "No . . . firepits?"

"Fur and fire don't mix." Jedit looked up as a flock of yellow-headed parrots flapped overhead, all squawking at once. Tigerfolk, singly or in pairs, trickled into the village square. The warrior wondered if they scented the man's wet-chicken odor on the wind or if some other premonition drew them like an oncoming storm. Certainly this manling, a thing never seen by this generation, a race thought extinct, would bring changes to the tribe. And changes, Jedit knew, were an abomination, an insult to tradition, a violation of the sedate sense of foreverness his people smugly enjoyed. This day, for good or ill, would be more than a jotted line in the history of the tribe, and here stood Jedit, dead center in the circle. A troublemaker, they'd say, just like his father.

As Johan and Jedit were paraded by the scouts, fifty or more tigers gathered. No one spoke, not even the cubs.

"Jedit!" A voice piped from the doorway of the common hut. "Jedit! What have you wrought?"

"Mother," said the towering warrior.

The tigers looked much alike, though some were more tawny than orange. Older ones were gray about the head and muzzle. Males wore loincloths of goat hide or pigskin painted with bright angular designs. Females wore halters that covered their flattish breasts and loins, though no one knew why. Some were decorated with armbands of parrot feathers and beads of painted bone. Everyone carried a bronze dagger, a tool used for eating, rarely for fighting.

Jedit's mother, Musata, was tribal shaman. She lived in the

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common hut and wore a collar hung with many strands of bone beads that clattered and clacked. A girdle of bronze disks set with rubies circled her waist over her halter. Her eyes were sharp pools of amber and green. Like her son's, they missed little.

Now the shaman peered at Johan, coming so close her white whiskers brushed his face. Sniffing, she circled and studied him, as if buying a monox.

"So it's true. Men live. He came from the west? How?"

Briefly Jedit told of the failing drake and the double rescue from the sand worms, with Johan and Jedit toiling together.

Musata nodded. "Does he know any news of your father, my husband?"

"I can speak, madam." Johan was civil but neutral. Again he toyed with the milky crystal. "Your son spoke of Jaeger Ojanen, whom I know not."

"No? Methinks I smell traces of Jaeger upon you." The shaman's amber-green eyes drilled into the prisoner. "Jaeger and more, for you stink of carrion and corruption and cruelty, or else I'm no seer."

Coolly the stranger rubbed his forehead with the ensorcelled stone, which the tigers couldn't know was an aid to projecting harmlessness.

He told the shaman, "Perhaps your son's scent and the worms' lingers about me, madam. We two grappled repeatedly in escaping the desert raptors."

"Perhaps."

Musata sniffed, but Jedit knew his mother was still suspicious, same as was he.

"Our only real question is—What shall our tribe do with a man-stranger in our midst?"

"No question at all," rumbled Ruko. "He dies at moonset."

"He does not!" rapped Jedit.

All eyes fell on the two tigers. The tribe murmured, and

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many shook their heads, fully expecting trouble.

“Who are you, whelp, to oppose tradition?” demanded the scout chief.

“How can you invoke tradition against a being not thought to exist?” countered Jedit.

Tigerfolk perked their ears. A hundred or more had gathered by now. From the corner of his eye, Jedit watched the stranger he was defending. Not surprisingly, the man asked a queer and oblique question.

“May I fetch a drink from the river?”

Ruko blinked at the request, then nodded to the scouts, warning them to be wary lest the man escape. Johan padded on bare feet to the river, knelt, cupped water, and drank. Jedit watched him closely, bubbling with curiosity about this odd stranger. Yet the man seemed simply satisfied with the cool draft and sat back on his heels gazing at the water in both directions.

“Men are evil!” resumed Ruko. “Tracherous, back stabbing, skulking. You know the legends. Your own mother recites them. Have you never attended?”

The last was a sneer, for Ruko and Jedit had disagreed on everything since cubhood.

“Your ancient legends lose ground to present facts,” retorted Jedit. “Your source of wisdom is a cracked gourd that won’t hold water any more than your head. Behold! A living, breathing *man* comes among us, and you can only crush him like an adder?”

“Ach!” Ruko spat on the dirt. “I’m smart enough to heed the legends, which warn us to *beware* men. T’was men drove us from our homeland! We mustn’t—”

“We mustn’t cast away a chance to learn of the outside world!” roared Jedit. His black claws flexed as Ruko shifted his stabbing spear from hand to hand. Instinctively tigers gave them room. “My father journeyed west to see if men existed! For if so, he argued, some must possess good hearts—”

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“Jaeger is lost to worms!” interrupted Ruko. “He pursued a fool’s errand, and like a fool—”

“Watch out!” bellowed an onlooker.

With a roar, claws hooked to slash and kill, Jedit attacked.