

Wordcount: 1350

**Alexandra: Schools day out
Tales from the Stormthrower**

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The guide pointed out to her the discoloration on the steppe which slowly grew bigger and took form of a large scar. With their destination in sight the guide adjusted their course, used a large dark spot in the sky as a reference or so it seemed. The stain split slowly in large black vultures and other carrion-eating birds. Right next to the hill, Above which the birds circled, the earth split, like a giant just tore it in two, like paper.

She stopped at a big long pole in the middle of the steppe and dismounted her war horse. It towered far above her, and you could not call her little. It would certainly be able to manage here on its own. Loosened saddle and rigging and rubbed the horse with a cloth and a bit of air dry. Gave an encouraging pat and watched while he went in search of a bite of juicy grass. Finally nodded and conjured a up a small twister, blew the sand from the storage, opened a small hatch, slipped saddle and rigging inside, closed the hatch, with a marker hanging out and used the slowly decreasing whirl to blow sand in the newly created hole. Looked for a while in the direction of her horse, but he was already submerged in the mass of grazers that fed on the many pockets of grass which had worked itself above the ground in this part of the steppe.

Walking she had more trouble to follow her four-legged guide, knew that if he walked more slowly the sizzling sand would burn through the protection on his paws and so she used some air to widen her step. Therefore had no difficulty to jump out of the falling road onto a plateau and then nodded to her guide when he looked back to see if she had found her place.

She avoided the view of the heap the vultures were circling above, waiting for what the residents of this place would discard, but was however well aware of the food in her bag, created a small fire spirit and played with it as long as her guide was busy announcing her to the leaders of his residence. Let it jump as one of the smaller carrion birds landed on the platform, dancing around, slowly pushing it to the edge, until the bird decided to take off again.

The guide was accompanied by two, for her, familiar faces. Both sand cats were a head taller than her guide and had the, for their position, characteristic dark band over their backs. She jumped back on the road and bowed to the cat, that had the band split at his neck and like a necklace draped around throat and shoulders, nodded to the other, bowed once more when she had received the images of greeting and followed the king and his adjutant into the gorge.

Each step lower made the temperature more bearable. Water dropping in the many pools of the gorge, slowly drowned out by the waterfall which carried the water from the basins into the lake in the bottom of the gorge. They ignored the paths, which split off right and left, to ledges along the walls of the gorge, had no business in the residential areas of this sand cat community.

The topic of her assignment was playing along the banks of the lake. The almost full grown cats looked very healthy this year. A few still remembered her from a year earlier when a ball romping baby kittens accidentally had disrupted the presentation. The king made a roar and quickly put an end to all play, the cats placed themselves before their ruler. The small fresh lings in front, the cats in senior-year behind. She took a few steps forward and sent images around to introduce herself. Sent an image of herself and then let everyone repeat the image. Warned that it could only be used to get her attention during emergencies. Continued with a speech about the elven city, where everything was bound in rules, where they had to keep right in the streets as was the custom in their gorge, that paths of water were there for being pretty, not as convenient water bowl where thirsty young cats could drink. Warned about the floating platforms that went faster than a cat could run and asked to keep a safe margin behind the horses, who were accustomed to desert cats, but the elves appreciated their horses not being startled by sand cats who were not paying attention.

The head of the training group let all of the cats repeat a few warnings and then called the seniors forward. One by one they bowed before the king, their teacher and gave her their name in image, every time she repeated it to show how it looked in her language. After all fifteen went by, she bowed before the king and promised to bring them safely back, gave a sign to her guide and followed him, occasionally glancing back to see if all fifteen followed.

Even before they arrived at the store her horse came strolling up to them, was totally not intimidated by the group of young cats and walked right through them. She gave him a pat on the shoulder and saddled him, put the somewhat anxious group of cats to ease explaining that many animals worked together with the elven race and that although he was monstrously large, he would not hurt them. Indicated that in the city were also much smaller horses and again asked to keep their distance from them.

Bored by the long trip had the young cats engaged in play fight games. She let them play, although the forest edge was approaching, knew from experience the impressions of the city, would very quickly let them fall in line. The gate was made of two jungle giants, with from both a main branch stretching across the road, it offered a view at an avenue lined with small trees, whose tops were intertwined above the road, so giving protection against the ever-bright shining sun. She went through the gate on the grassy road and walked, with the cats now indeed neatly lined up, into the city, towards the busier roads.

The ever communicating youth were kept in check by the guide, who was now at the back. Had not much to do. The elves were almost never seen in the sand and had only built the gate as gesture to the sand cats. Soon however the streets became busier, the trees became higher and the lanes wider. The high hedges indicated, they were still in residential areas. An angry warning made one of the cats jump over, just in time to not be overrun by a floating platform.

The canopy above them disappeared and the road opened on a square. She let them stop at the fountain in their corner of the square, gathered the group around it and let them get

used to the crowds moving on the main avenue. Only after she had received a call from the guide everyone had overcome their initial surprise, she led them in single row passing through the rest of the city. The avenue ceased, the trees along the road blended in with those on the crossing bypass and in front of them on the other side were broad lawns, intersected by low hedges with flowers in every color you could imagine. The trees surrounded the grass, each time interrupted by the next avenue leading out onto the park. She halted the traffic and let the group cross, followed them when they ran onto the grass and sent them with a few commands in the direction of a school class, who had stood up when they approached the park. Walked along with the guide to the teacher on duty and watched the youth trying to communicate with each other, until it was time to go back, each to his own home.

The end