



Big
Cats
Today

All photos of real animals taken from the Encyclopedia of Mammals, A Comprehensive Illustrated Guide by Animal Experts, 2nd edition, Copyright 1998.

Table Of Contents

Cheetah...2	Ask Martha...17
Snow Cub's Adventure...3	Playing Tiger...18
Leopard's Song...4	A Majestic Beast...18
Travel Guide...5	Hunting Affair...19
Lion Park...7	A Difference Between...20
A Lion's Battle...7	Mary the Artist...21
Arabella's Gift...8	Dear Editor...21
Ryan the Gazelle...14	Buffering Cats...22
Antelope Surprise!...16	Fear in the wind...23
Treat...16	Odin's Hunt...24

Cheetah



Cunning thoughts

Hairy legs

Ever running

Ever crying

Teeth are bared

Allying death

Hiss

Snow Cub's Adventure

There once was a leopard
Who lived in the mountains
His fur was as white
As the foam on the fountains.

He disliked his father
He disliked his mother
He disliked his sister
His uncle, his brother.

He wanted adventure
He wanted some fun
He left his old home
And he started to run.

He walked many miles
Caught many a louse
When he stumbled upon
An old spooky house.

The floorboards were creaky
A chill ran through the air
He turned a dark corner
And a ghost was right there!

Its cold cruel hands
Extended quite near
When all of a sudden
The cat's Mother appeared!

She growled and snarled
And clawed at the spirit
The fight was so horrid
You don't need to hear it.

The battle was over
His mother had won
The leopard decided
He had had enough fun.

He looked up at his mother
A tear on his face
Then they locked slowly
In a silent embrace.

Leopard's Song

Mighty
Spotted cat sits
Groaning in the Life Tree
Pain exceeding within her then
Gives birth

Travel Guide: Leopard Park

I knew I wasn't going to forget ANYTHING! I was going to be on task. But of course, my alarm didn't go off.

I decided to go to leopard park. First, I had to depart for the Airport. That was fine. I made all the correct turns. But, apparently some guy decided it was a great idea to throw his glass bottle in the middle of the road. Great. I don't even want to talk about it. I guess a tip here is, know whether or not you have a spare tire before you try and change one. So, I had to walk to the Airport...

IT WAS A MIRACLE!!!! The flight hadn't left yet! And yet... it didn't leave for three hours... the flight was delayed. Perfect.

Finally! The flight was great... at first. I sat back in my soft chair, the smell of peanuts filled my nostrils. I was asleep and dreaming an unpleasant dream. A stewardess passed and startled me. I stumbled backward, flipped my foot back opening the emergency exit and tumbling back through it. I barely hung on to the window sill! I looked next to me. A Vampire bat? No. It was a jet coming straight for me. If the stewardess hadn't rescued me I would be as flat as a pancake.

I finally walked through customs. They didn't believe my toy gun was fake! I mean seriously? I stayed there for two and a half hours having people debate over whether or not it was real.

When I finally was in beautiful South Africa I decided to go on a Safari before reaching the Leopard Park. As I rode, I began to sweat. Bumpity, bumpity, bumpity, bump! My food churned inside my stomach. Mucus filled my insides. I felt dizzy. I staggered from the car into a herd of wildebeests which began to stampede! I did the first thing I could think of. I jumped into a blur of golden-yellow. That blur unfortunately turned out to be a lion cub next to an angry mother. I ran from the lioness, screaming, her claws tugging at my heels.

I finally reached Leopard Park. My journey had been worth it. Most of my limbs made it. I reached into my pocket for the tickets I had bought for the park. Nothing. I had left them at home.



Lion Park

A true story

The hot sun beat against Rachel's face as her family's car rolled across the bumpy roads of Johannesburg. She thought of her friends back in Abidjan. She hadn't seen them since her family had been evacuated. She wondered if she would ever see them again. They drove on. The rest of her family were talking.

Rachel was the oldest of three and the only girl. Her twin brothers, Matthew and Daniel, were two and a half years younger than she was.

They arrived at the lion park. Lions were pacing up and down and up and down. There were lions everywhere. It felt very unnatural. Rachel and her family were used to Kruger National Park where all kinds of animals lived.

A few lions were sleeping, their vast bodies heaving. Several lions were digging their piercing teeth into their dinner, blood dripping from their jaws. One lioness was regurgitating raw meat to its babies. A few lionesses were cleaning and nursing their cubs. One lion was panting and hobbled over to a watering hole.

A man walked up to Rachel's family. "Would you like to hold lion cubs?" he asked. They all became excited and said, "Yes!"

Rachel picked up one whose soft fur warmed her skin. "Oh no!" said Dad jokingly. "We are going to get eaten." Rachel laughed but she thought it would be worth being eaten to have this experience. One of the cubs walked straight up to Daniel and swiped. Blood trickled from his arm. As Rachel watched her Mother clean her brother's wound she felt as happy as an unhappy person could possibly be.

A Lion's Battle

A lion said "Wait here, child
 Wait here, and don't be afraid.
 For though hunters have entered our precious wild,
 They shall soon be greatly waylaid."

So the lion cub sat with full green eyes

Looking up at the pale, bright moon
But the thing that met its untimely demise
Was the thing the cub wanted so soon

Arabella's Gift

“Would you...give her a gift?”

“What do you mean?”

“You know, powers!”

“I could, but at a very high price.”

“I’ll pay whatever the cost.”

Caesar’s brown eyes looked pleadingly up at the wood nymph.

“Very well. Where is the child?” the dryad asked.

Caesar lead her down a long hall and into a nursery. In a gold crib, draped beneath a pink canopy, lay a beautiful infant. The nymph pulled back the curtains and whispered gently in the girl’s ear, “Understand lions. Speak to lions. Be one with lions.” Then the dryad swept away.

The next year the child’s father was assassinated and her mother grew deathly ill. Her uncle became Emperor over Rome.

The girl’s name was Arabella. Her only mother figure was her housekeeper, Gretel. On the princess’s eighteenth birthday a feast was held in her honor. “Go on, open your gift,” Gretel exclaimed excitedly as Arabella’s lily-white fingertips were handed a brown parcel. With tender care she unraveled the wrapping, not wishing to damage it. In her hand was a sharp, sleek, silver dagger.

“Oh, it’s lovely!” cried Arabella.

“I thought you’d like it.” Gretel said.

But their conversation was cut short. Arabella’s uncle stood up to make a speech. “In honor of this special occasion, I have organized a gladiator tournament

next week!” As cheers flooded the banquet hall, Arabella sighed. Arabella thought gladiator fights were vulgar and gruesome, if not disturbing.

Arabella sat in her bedroom brushing her hair.

“Ah, did you have a good birthday?” inquired Gretel.

“Yes. It was delightful. Though I don’t know why my uncle always organizes gladiator fights. He knows I don’t like them.”

“I know. But, there’s nothing we can do about it,” the housekeeper replied.

“Well, good night” Arabella said.

“Good night,” said Gretel, walking down the long hall.

The next morning, Arabella went for a stroll. She sat quietly down on a rock.

“Please. We need to eat,” she heard a male voice plead.

“You won’t be able to eat if you don’t pay,” growled another male voice.

Arabella got up in a flash. She approached the man with the gruff voice.

“What are you doing?” she asked briskly.

“ My dear miss, please do not get involved in matters that do not concern you,” said the gruff man

“But, this does concer-”

“I’ll be back. And ya better pay double next time,” he said, addressing the other man. Then he stalked off.

Arabella then said to the other man “Who are you?”

“I’m Godric,” he said.

“Good morning,” said the princess. “What happened?”

“Last night,” said Godric, “ Caesar bumped up the tax price.”

“What?”

“Yep. I had a hard enough time paying the taxes as they were. Especially since...” but then his voice faded.

Arabella was dying of curiosity but she held her tongue.

“You never told me your name,” said Godric.

“Oh, well, I’m Princess Arabella.”

Godric had a bitter, almost fearful, look on his face which quickly faded.

“I’m sorry...I guess I just don’t have good experience with the courts...”

“Oh?” asked Arabella.

“Yeah. I was accused of theft by someone close to the royal family. They said I would ‘regret my foolish acts’ but I never did anything wrong.”

“I’m sorry that happened to you. My uncle can be pretty harsh sometimes.”

“Oh yeah, I forgot,” said Godric brightly “your parents are dead.”

“Well there’s no need to get upset over nothing,” said Arabella with an air of indignant sarcasm, seeing the shining look on Godric’s face.

“Huh? Oh, sorry It’s just my father.... he, uh...died a few years ago...” said Godric, “It’s not easy supporting a mother and six younger siblings.”

“Oh,” said Arabella in quite a different voice. “Sorry about that...” Both of them were silent for quite some time.

Then Arabella said, “Well, I best be going.” And she whispered, “I’ll bring you food tonight.”

When she went to dinner that night she brought a bag. When she had finished half her meal, she slowly and undetected by most, scraped the contents into it. Gretel was the only one who noticed.

That night was nearly the same routine as the night before, only this time half an hour after Gretel had left, Arabella snuck out. She stole across the hall and crept along the darkest shadows. When she reached Godric’s little hovel, she whispered “Godric? Psst! Godric, I brought you food.” Godric emerged from the darkness.

“I didn’t think you’d come,” he said.

“Of course I would come,” Arabella said. “What made you think I wouldn’t?”

“I don’t know. I mean, I wouldn’t expect you to remember lowly peasant.”

“Well, fortunately for you, I have a very good memory. Bye.” she said.

As she crept back into the hall she heard something. It sounded like voices. She froze. It sounded like Gretel’s voice. Arabella only heard parts of it.

“Maybe if...I don’t know...do you want...mixing with...”

Arabella stayed there until she heard Gretel say, “Thank you for listening to me.” Then, she dashed to her room like a cat.

The next morning she went for another stroll. But this time the streets were different.

“Please, please. Quiet down now.” said a tall, thin, man. “You.” he pointed to a young man. “You can be a gladiator.”

“And you. And you. You too. And I think you’ll do. And lastly, you.” This time the man he pointed to was Godric.

That night Arabella paced in her room. Godric was to be thrown to a bloodthirsty lion! What was she to do? Gretel was visiting her sick aunt so she had no advisor. She had to save him. But how? She made up her mind there was only one decent thing to do: Confront her uncle.

“Arabella, how wonderful it is to see you,” cried her uncle as soon as she walked through the door.

“If only I could say the same,” she said heatedly.

“My dear, whatever is the matter?” said her uncle, concerned.

“You knew Godric was my friend, didn’t you? And you made him a gladiator on purpose.”

“I did it for your own good. I don’t want you associated with commoners.”

“You filthy, prejudiced, varlet! You know very well you are leading an innocent man to death!”

“Arabella!” Caesar had risen to his feet, his eyes ablaze with fury.

A painful guilt stabbed Arabella. “Forgive me. I lost my temper, but that’s no excuse for disrespect,” Then, she regained composure. “That doesn’t change the fact that Godric is going to die and it doesn’t change the fact that you must release him!”

“I will do no such thing. Go to your room this instant.”

Arabella decided that her uncle was set on Godric’s death and there was no use trying to convince him otherwise.

The night before the gladiator tournament, Arabella took her silver dagger. She pulled back her shining dark hair. She walked swiftly down the long hall. She crept along dark roads and snuck into the Coliseum.

In a cage lay a battered and beaten golden lion. Open wounds adorned it. It looked as though its sides were hollow. Its breathing was heavy and rattling. It looked so pitiful, as if no living thing had ever loved it. It seemed as though a tranquil dream he was having was his only escape from a land of grief and tremendous sorrow.

She did not want Godric to face this beast. And yet she felt more empathy for the lion than she did for Godric. She tried to remember all Godric's troubles. But with one look at the lion Godric's woes seemed smaller. She didn't know why, but she felt a deep connection with the creature. As a child she had always been fascinated with the great cat. Now that she had come face to face with one, the beast seemed like an old friend. But no task was too great for Godric's life. She raised her dagger high and-

"AAAHHHHH!" The lion screamed. Screamed? Lions don't scream. It must have been a roar. Arabella would have thought so if the lion had not said, "What are you doing with that dagger?!?!?"

Arabella dropped the dagger and said, "You can talk?"

"Yes." he said confused, "Wait, you can understand me?"

"I guess so."

"Now, what were you about to do with that weapon?"

"I...It's my friend."

"What do you mean?"

"He's going to be a gladiator and I want him safe."

"So, you were going to kill me?"

Arabella hesitated.

A tear glistened in the lion's bright green eye. "The reason I do attack the others is my hunger. They never feed me. I'm just used to entertain. They don't care whether or not I'm happy."

"I'm sorry..."

"Well, I'm used to it. Ever since I became an adolescent lion I've been starved."

"I'm going to free you."

"What?"

"I don't know how, but I will."

"Thank you."

"As long as you promise me one thing."

"What?"

"Don't hurt any gladiators, unless in self defense."

"But it's to the death."

“Just trust me”

“I-I promise.”

The next morning was the Big Gladiator Fight. Arabella came to this one. She had told Godric to pretend to be dead. He told the other gladiators in the tournament to do the same. Many of them were skeptical, but they agreed to do it.

The fights were amazing and epic. At least, from a distance. They were completely fake. The lion would slash at the gladiator and then the man would stumble back, crying out in severe agony. When Caesar stood up to make a speech, what the crowd thought were corpses, got up. In Caesar’s merriment, he did not seem angry at the ersatz gladiator fight, though he was astonished. In fact, Arabella’s uncle was pleased with the stunt, for all the townsfolk loved the show. When he found out the whole thing was Arabella’s idea he was positively giddy, (although much of his euphoria was likely due to being under the influence of spirits) and said, “Why, my dear, I will grant you anything you please.”

“Well,” she said thoughtfully, “Can I ask of you three favors?”

“Well, since it’s in celebration of your birthday, I suppose I can manage it,” said her uncle.

“Firstly, I’d like you to lower the tax prices,” Arabella requested calmly, “Next, I’d like you to set one of your lions free.”

“And, anything else?”

“Yes.” she said, “As long as Godric is willing, I would like to marry him.”

And so all the villagers had much more to eat. The lion, she kept in her own house, and he never devoured anyone. Godric and Arabella were happily married and all seemed to be coming to a happy ending.

One night, Arabella sat by a stone basin. She splished and splashed and splashed water all over her face. As she dried her face with a towel, she picked up her flickering candle and proceeded to the bedroom. When she walked through the doorway she saw someone bending over the bed. She would have thought it was Godric, if she had not seen Godric *in* the bed.

Something silver glimmered in the intruder’s hand. It was Arabella’s dagger. “Godric!” Arabella cried in a choked voice

“Huh?” mumbled Godric. He looked up and in a flash, grabbed the would-be-murderer.

“Is this the one who said you’d pay for stealing?” Arabella said, signaling the guards.

“I think so.” said Godric.

“What is going on?” snapped Caesar, when he rushed into the hall.

“This person tried to murder Godric!” exclaimed Arabella.

“What?!? Who would do such a thing?” said her uncle.

“Let’s find out,” Arabella said as she lifted her candle. Everyone fell dead silent. As the dim light shone on the would-be-murderer’s face, Arabella saw that Gretel had come back from visiting her aunt.

Ryan

There once was a gazelle named Ryan
Who thought he could eat with a lion
It turned out the feast
Was just for the beast
And now all his family is cryin’



Antelope Surprise!

Today, I'd like to introduce you to Antelope Surprise! What's the surprise, you ask? Well, surprise! There are no antelopes! But, it'll taste just as good to you as an antelope would to a lion.

You'll need a skillet, pepperoni, butter, Dijon mustard, and sliced cheese. Now, when you have all your stuff in place, set the stove's temperature to medium-high. Now, place a small amount of butter on the skillet. But, make sure not to put too much! Not that *I* would have put who knows how much on there, and when I tasted it I grew sick to the stomach, but you know *somebody* might. Next, place cheese and pepperoni on the tortilla. Spread the mustard on and place the tortilla on the skillet. Flip carefully! I speak from personal experience. When the butter has soaked in and the cheese is melted, put the supplies away. Then get ready to enjoy a delicious meal.

I had fun making it and I hope you do too! I also hope you have more fun eating it than I did. Bon Appetit!

Treat

The cat stalks like a
Grumpy panther then a bag
Shakes; he licks his chops



Dear Martha,

I'd like to ask you, how do Big Cats demonstrate their intelligence?

Please help me,

Alley Raymond

Dear Alley,

Big cats demonstrate their intelligence in several ways. They are magnificent hunters and are very stealthy. House cats have been known to recognize human vulnerabilities and can manipulate them easily. I theorize big cats could do the same.

Sincerely,

Martha Wilkins

Playing Tiger

Pretending to be a tiger is so fun. They don't hunt using their vision, so I was blindfolded when I had to catch my prey (my brother). My uncertainty made it fun, because the mystery made it more intriguing than frustrating. Although I had been in the same room about 100,000,000 times, it was hard to keep from bumping into stuff.

My brother also played tiger, and I was the prey. He heard me and went straight for me. I tried to get out of the way, but he cornered me. When I was blindfolded, I made a run for it. I bumped into our cedar chest, then found my brother who was close by. Now comes the nasty moment when when I tell you the problem. I had too small of a space. If you do this, I advise you to make sure you have a proper amount of space. But do not let this stop you from using obstacles. I just wanted it to last longer and to and to be a better challenge.

Otherwise, the experience was filled with laughter, joy, and pure fun. If you are ever bored, all you have to do is wrap a scarf around your eyes and try to catch someone else. Pretending to be a tiger is enough to make you want to be one.

A Majestic Beast

I looked out the window
 I saw the Bengal tiger
 I put my hand to the glass
 I stared at the great cat
 Such majesty!
 Such superlative grace!
 Nothing could compare to this masterpiece
 In God's wondrous creation
 As it paced I saw its bulging muscles
 Its territorial stride
 Surely, nothing in its right state of mind
 Would wish to cross paths
 With this magnificent beast
 For what it meant was a violent death!

Wanna Big Cat?

You'll get one with our Cat Costume Kit!
It's like a big cat is right in the room with
you! Dress up more than one house cat
and have Cat Costume Parties!

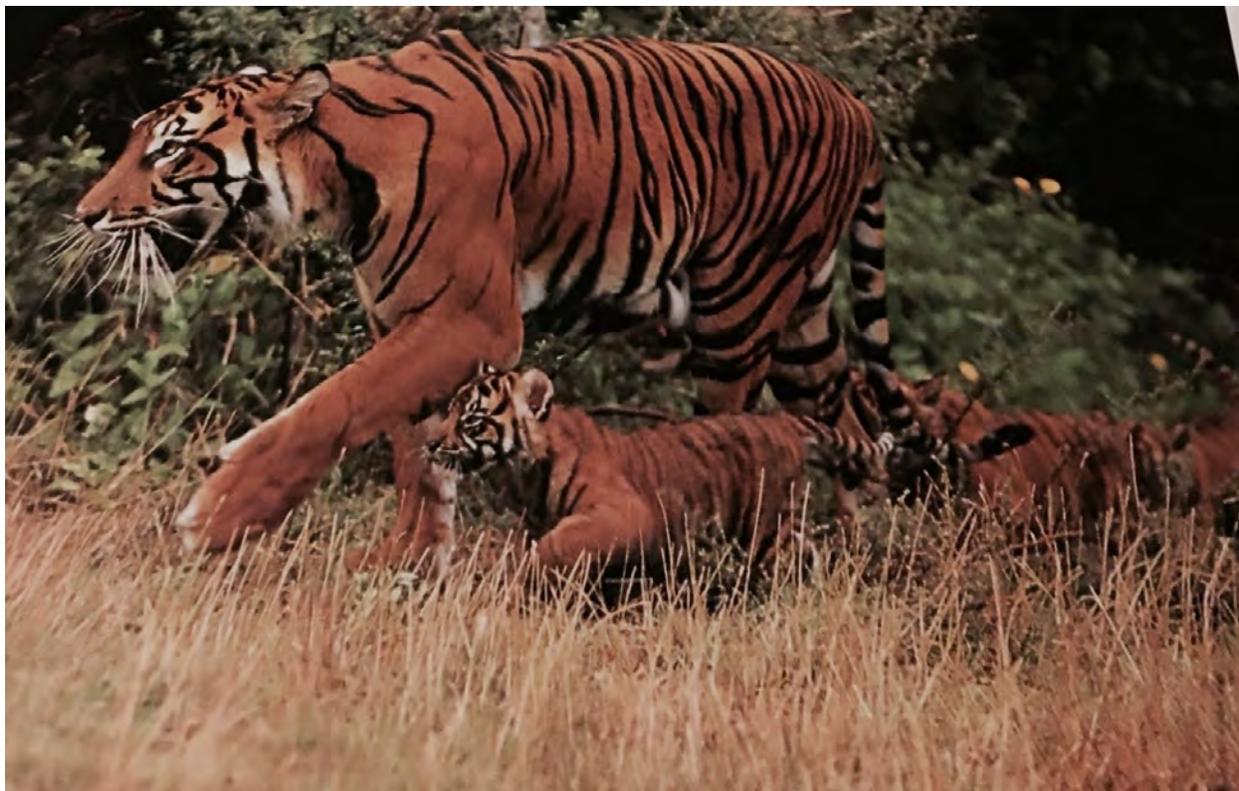
www.stacknivram.com

Don't wait!
Check out our
website.

Hunting Affair

Every night she pondered
What be the outcome of this hunting affair.
What if her lover wandered
Into an evil snare?

What if a tiger's cruel fang
Gave him a grinding bite?
The shrieks! The blood! The horrible pain!
So she pondered every night.



A Difference Between

Tigers are fierce creatures. They are the most deadly big cats in the world. Many people in India are mauled by them. These nocturnal beasts are endangered, so in many places it is illegal to hunt them.

Another big cat in India is the lion, although they are mostly portrayed as being in Africa. While tigers tend to be more solitary creatures, lions live in big groups called prides. When a male cub in the pride is 4 years old, he leaves to join another pride or start one of his own. If he cannot find one, he will either become a loner or join a group of lions who will try to bring down a pride.

I hope you find this useful.

Dear Editor,

I am writing because of a dreadful error I found in your magazine last month. Your haiku about the tiger had only six syllables in the second line. I believe the law of haiku is clear when it states “7 syllables for the second line.” I am seriously considering cancelling my subscription.

Very, very infuriated,
Tesla Shont

Dear Reader,

I am very sorry about my mistake. However I cannot erase the past. I will make sure this does not happen again.

With the greatest of sincerity,
Bea Godner

Mary the Artist

Mary looks around
Can't find a tiger to paint
'Cause it's Africa

Impress Your Friends With Your Artistic Technique

With the Big Kitty Draw you can advance your talent *and* your knowledge, with 100 drawing projects and big cat facts on every page! Call now and we'll throw in a FREE Big Kitty Pencil! Call 1-800-ME-LOVE-DRAW-CATS.

Buffering Cats

I couldn't believe my ears. I must've been dreaming. I just had to be. But sure enough, no matter how many times I asked my friend to slap me, banged my head against the wall, (which I do not recommend to do more than thrice in a sitting, or you may lose several brain cells) or doused myself with water, Mrs. Flounder had asked us to watch cat videos for our science homework. Of course it was to help us understand their behavior, blah, blah, blah, blah, and all that jazz, but at least we weren't doing horrid algebra problems (Hint-hint, math class).

The only really big problem that irked me, was we were supposed to give a brief oral report the very next week. I mean, who has the time and energy to watch two short cat videos and compose a one minute oral report? People actually have lives! Seriously, it's extremely outrageous!

So, the day before the oral report was due I got my phone out from under my bed, sat on my comforter, and looked up funny cat videos. One was a black panther who had escaped from the local zoo and was meeting a house cat. I clicked on it and only after a few seconds it buffered. I waited. And waited a little bit more. And

waited a few more moments . And waited some more. Then, just when I was just about to fall asleep, I discovered that the wi-fi was disconnected.

After what seemed like forever (which I'm not sure it wasn't), I started the video back up again. After only a few more seconds it buffered. I quickly checked the wi-fi. It was in absolutely perfect condition! I decided to watch another funny video of a cat who was tumbling over jungle-themed birthday decorations. It was wearing a bright neon green birthday hat in the shape of a lion's mane with the words "C'mon! Let's ROAR real loud for the Birthday Kid! Yippee!" printed on it.

After a few seconds-you'll never, ever, ever guess this one- it buffered! Boy, was I angry. In fact, I was so infuriated that I threw my phone across the room and it shattered into 5,307,468 pieces. Trust me, I suffered the tedious count myself. (That was my horridly cruel punishment.) And that was before I kicked it out my big bedroom window, making it ricochet off our trampoline and bounce into the back of a stinky garbage truck.

The next day, we were to give our oral reports. I was so very nervous. Science class came much, much too soon. There was so much tension, so much pressure. I had no idea what to do. I had no clue what to say. My plan A was to say that the cats were conspiring against me. My plan B was to say my poor cat got offended by the videos and give a speech about feline rights. You don't even want to know what my plan C was. Then Mrs. Flounder opened her mouth to say, "Sorry, class, I just realized I skipped over a week. The reports aren't till next week."

Fear in the Wind

The cat sits in the
Windy chilling air; runs like
A frantic puma

Earth is teeming with Life.

But It's Not the Only Planet...

Meet Melaina and White Soar. Be transported into a world of life on other planets, big cats and magicians. Stay up late into the night trying to find out what happens next. Buy the book *Into the Stars* and meet a sorceress and her white tiger familiar.

Odin's Hunt

The first rays of light fell upon Elkwood Valley as the birds began to chirp their morning songs. The beams crept towards Bear Creek Hill, revealing several rough stones and sharp rocks. The sunlight was now advancing toward Bear Creek Woods which stood just beyond its hill. As the rays ascended, the peak of a small mountain became visible just above the treetops.

Upon this peak, lay a puma by the name of Odin. His sleek golden fur was dazzled by the sun's light. At this moment he awakened, yawning and opening his mysterious green eyes. He trotted down the mountainside and started to the center of the forest where a pool resided. His throat was feeling very dry before bending down and quenching his thirst. As he took a breath he gazed down at his reflection and saw three claw marks on his left cheek that he had had ever since he was eight (in cat years). The reminder of this scar enraged him and he slashed at the pool sloshing water this way and that. His fury energized him to hunt for a deer, and combining his great anger and amazing hunting skills, it was not a difficult task.

All the beasts were intimidated by him and he took advantage of this by making a rule that no creature could eat his fill until Odin had his share. One fox

had once tried to hunt for himself, but he paid for it dearly. But he took more than his share. In fact, he took berries and things from the herbivores just to spite them. And he thought of all these things as he dragged the doe to his usual feeding spot after defeating his kill. The doe reminded him of a friend he had when he was a child before he had taken up hunting. And then he remembered Lenny the mink who had teased him, stolen his food, and made Odin watch him eat it. But worst of all he had given Odin his scar. And with that thought, he ripped open the deer with more force than usual.

Many woodland creatures were now awake and gathered to await breakfast. The barbaric puma dug into the lifeless doe, blood spilling and splattering. A raccoon ventured forward. The great cat let out a low growl. As the raccoon hobbled back, a mink said “Don’t worry, Quinton, that stupid oaf will reap his own reward.” In a flash of anger Odin was reminded of Lenny, and without thinking about it, he pounced. He bit and scratched and fought nearly as hard as he could. Blood was shed and tears were spilt. Then Esmeralda the fox snapped in order to get there attention. “Stop!” she exclaimed.

“What is it?” Odin snarled.

“Nathan, I know Odin’s oppression towards us is inexcusable, but-” began Esmeralda.

“Inexcusable? It’s unforgivable!” Nathan cried.

“No matter how horrible it is, insulting and fighting won’t solve anything. Do you agree?”

After a pause Nathan said “I guess so.” Odin was too angry to speak, so he just grunted and stalked off.

A few days later Odin trotted toward the pool to get a drink. But, this time Esmeralda sat, beady eyes fixed upon him. “What are you doing here?” asked Odin.

“I was going to take a drink,” Esmeralda replied indignantly.

“Yes, but you’re never up as early as I am.”

“Oh, I didn’t know you had made a rule about that too.”

Odin was so bewildered he didn’t know what to say. “I was merely asking,” he said. “Now if you’ll excuse me, I think I’ll go hunt for a deer.”

He had started to walk off but he stopped short because Esmeralda said “For one of those meager little things? Ha!”.

“What do you mean?”

“Bear Creek’s deer are teeny morsels. I wouldn’t eat one for an appetizer!” Esmeralda said. “You should see the ones in Elkwood. And the ones at Olive Trail are as big as whales!”

“Really?” demanded Odin, failing to hide the greedy excitement from his voice. “How do I get there?”

“Well to get to Elkwood valley, just walk down Bear Creek Hill and when you get to the clump of blackberry bushes in the valley, turn right. Right there is a meadow and after you’ve walked for thirty paces, turn left.”

“Then what?” snapped Odin.

“Then you’ll be at Olive Trail Brook, right outside of Olive Trail Forest.” And with that Odin bounded toward the hill.

As he trudged down the hill, a rumbling in his stomach came. He hadn’t eaten all morning and by the time he would be at the bottom of the hill it would be high noon. All of a sudden, while he was walking, a sharp pain cut through his paw. He examined it and saw a trickle of blood running down it. Where had he stepped? Underneath him was sharp stone. And several sharp stones followed all the way down the hill. Now the tiresome journey became tedious and painstaking. He usually avoided the rocks but every so often he would let out a howl of pain from trodding upon one. By the time he reached the bottom he was so hungry, so tired, and so cut open, he plopped onto the softest patch of grass he could find. But because he was so hungry, he could not sleep. So he got up and looked around. All he saw was a thicket of strawberries and a patch of lettuce a few feet away. He tried a few strawberries, and although they were revolting, they would sustain him for the night.

When he was finally rested it was still the middle of the night. He glanced up at the stars. A tear rolled down his cheek. He remembered a happy part of his childhood when he and his mother would sit on the mountaintop together, look up at the stars, and look for constellations. Tonight he saw the Big Dipper. It made him hungry and sad. No longer able to bear it, he rolled over and resumed his slumber.

He awoke to the sound of grass being chewed. He looked up and saw a small, brown hare gnawing at the patch of lettuce. The hare saw Odin and shrieked “AAAHHHHH! Please-no-I beg you-no-don’t-please-don’t hurt me-no.” The hare trembled as he said this.

“I won’t hurt you” said Odin secretly thinking a hare would make an easy breakfast once it calmed down a bit. “What is your name?”

“Ga-Ga-Galahad” quaked the hare. Odin was happy to see he was slightly less tremulous. “Wh-what’s yours?”

“Odin. I’m here because I’d like better food. I’m traveling to Olive Trail Forest.”

“All the deer are faster there. The only one who can catch them is Leo.” Then Galahad bounced off which was perfect timing because Odin was too busy thinking of what he had said to catch up with his breakfast. Were these deer really too fast for the Great Odin, or just for regular mountain lions? Who was this Leo and would he be a challenge for Odin if they met? All these questions bubbled inside Odin’s head as he turned right at the clump of blackberry bushes and moved on.

The meadow was beautiful. Many flowers danced in the sunlight and a cool breeze swept his face. But he discovered he was too thirsty to enjoy it. He had not stopped to drink since his conversation with Esmeralda, and his throat was very parched. But worst of all he could smell fish which made him hungry and thirsty at the same time. As he passed the last patch of rich smelling roses, he turned left and with deep relief saw the brook.

He slurped noisily but then, from the forest, a deer emerged. It bent over the babbling and gushing stream. Odin crouched low. But as he pounced, the deer dashed away in fear. Odin heard a faint chuckle. He turned and saw a badger. “Can’t even catch a deer.” the badger said. Anger pulsed through Odin. “Think you can?”

“No it’s just I expect more from a cougar, considering Leo is one. Perhaps I couldn’t catch a deer but I’d wager I could win a fight with you.”

“I’d like to see you try it,” said Odin, his mysterious eyes now deadly as they flashed in the sun.

“Oh not today, perhaps some other time,” called the badger as he disappeared into the forest, laughing at his own jest, before Odin could catch up with him.

It seemed as though the hare had told the truth. The deer here were simply too fast. But Odin refused to admit defeat. The next morning he saw some brown fur sticking out of the large bushes. He snapped at it. He heard a strange whine and standing on two legs was a mother bear. If it were not for his great fear combined with excellent speed, Odin would not have found a hiding spot quick enough. As the frantic feline leapt into a particularly thorny briar patch he heard the mother bear shouting that if she ever found him again he would not be so lucky.

From that point forward, his stay at Olive Trail Forest was limited to the half of the forest that the bear did not generally visit. It was much denser and slightly creepier. Fortunately, there was a pond here, so Odin did not go thirsty but, even with eating a few berries every day, his problem of hunger followed. He would just have to catch one of those juicy deer.

March ended. April began. The bucks were riled. And all Odin had had to eat were berries. He was going to catch some form of meat, even a squirrel would be alright. He was walking through the forest when he saw it- a little gray field mouse. It wasn't even stirring. Odin crouched and crept toward it. He pounced. He caught it. His paw was on it. Then out of nowhere two bucks charged at each other clanging, clashing, and snorting. The field mouse was so scared he ran off.

One morning, as he was strolling through the trees towards the pond, he decided that if he didn't get back to Bear Creek soon, he would either adapt to eating vegetation or starve to death. When he reached his destination he saw another puma sitting there. First, he saw that the puma was gray, black, and white. Then, he saw that the puma was eating a buck. Lastly, he saw the puma had ominous bright blue eyes.

“Good morning,” said Odin.

“Good Morning,” said the other. “I am Leo.”

“May I have some of that buck?” Odin inquired. Leo growled, a low deep growl. But Odin did not lose his confidence. “I can make you wish you'd never been born.” he hissed. At this Leo smiled, and unsheathed his long silver claws. Odin made a snatch for the kill, but Leo was faster. He slashed Odin in the ribs

with a casual swipe. The pain was excruciating. Odin leaned up against a smooth boulder. How dare that wicked puma refuse Odin meat? Didn't he have compassion for this poor creature? And with a pain of guilt, Odin understood.

“Leo?”

“Yes?”

“I wish to go to Bear Creek but I don't want to pass that bear. What should I do?”

“Through those pine trees,” Leo gestured north, “is a short cut that few creatures know of.”

Odin staggered forward.

“But first, you should take a dip in the pool. It should treat those wounds. And I am sure you are hungry.” Leo tossed him the buck and then disappeared into the forest.

His homecoming was not exactly a joyous occasion. On his first day back he heard many grumblings. He caught a deer as usual. But this time when the little raccoon named Quinton came forward, he nudged a piece closer to Quinton. Then he flung the deer into the crowd. “I erase the rule!” Odin cried.

That night he sat on the mountain and looked up at the stars, he saw another constellation. This was the one of the lion. At first, he didn't see the mane so instead of a lion roaring, he saw his mother smiling.