

As dawn rose over the Ferrthian jungle of Tekit, the sunlight penetrated the thick foliage and illuminated a landscape of deep browns and bright greens; the sounds of birdsong rang out among the trees. It was a beautiful and tranquil scene that would have been able to pull anyone's heartstrings – a beautiful, tranquil and absolutely *temporary* state of a jungle that was alive with life and would certainly not be quiet for long.

As if on cue, a loud *bang!* and the surprised, territorial roar of Shane, a Siberian tiger, cut the quiet like a knife; somehow, a small hominid had suddenly appeared as if from nowhere in the middle of the small clearing that the tiger had kept as a home. The only thing that stopped the tiger from tearing the sleeping human to shreds was a much louder roar that only Shane could hear, followed by the sense of a heavy paw cuffing the tiger, throwing him to the ground like he was some kind of toy, as opposed to a growing but still powerful self-supposed master of the jungle.

Shane heard a booming laugh, and suddenly saw the form of the Tiger-God, Growrr, take shape in front of him; the god was made of colors brighter and deeper than should have been possible, and his presence somehow communicated a sense of *space*, as if he was far larger than he appeared. The considerably smaller, less real-looking tiger was promptly lifted up and set on his feet by his god, continuing his booming laugh at Shane's surprise. Growrr opened his mouth as if to speak, his words taking up space in the same way that his body did, except this time the god's presence was in his mind instead of the clearing he called his home.

“You have spirit, but you are arrogant; you must learn patience. This little one is unknown to you, but he is under my protection. Your must keep him safe; beware of wolves, but take help where it may come, for there others coming.”

With that, Growrr disappeared into thin air, leaving Shane alone with the small creature who appeared to be sleeping. He sighed; the Tiger-God did not often give tigers this kind of mission, but when he did, it was best to do what one is tasked with. He walked up to the weird, thin little thing with some caution – the first caution he'd ever used in his life -- leaning down to sniff it and sneezing, accidentally covering the smaller one's upper body with snot. The tiger then took some steps back and lay down, not taking his eyes off his new charge.

About five minutes later, the human awoke, coughing and sputtering and groaning as he discovered that he was somehow covered in snot. He groaned, rubbing the snot out of his eyes with mixed success before getting up, at which point he yelped and fell backwards, surprised by the seemingly huge body of the tiger less than a foot from where he had been lying.

This time, it was the tiger's turn to laugh as he leapt off of the ground, right on top of the human boy, with his face looking right into the boy's; he couldn't have the human running off when he was supposed to be protecting him.

“Dude, calm down!” He said. “The Tiger-God has asked me to protect you from something, and I cannot harm you, for his blessing is on me. Now: what is your name? I am Shane.”

The boy responded by scrambling backwards, his mind racing too fast to process what the tiger had said; the tiger shook his head and sighed. “If you're gonna be all flighty, I can't exactly keep you safe!

Chill!” Shane said, promptly settling his frame down on the small human, pinning him under his chubby chest and waiting for the boy to stop struggling.

Eventually, he did, and the tiger heard a muffled attempt at communication; “mmmfff!” The tiger got off of him. “Don’t run, or I’m going to have to do that again; now, what’d you say?”

“I said: my name is Mark!” Mark responded, gasping for air; the jungle was a naturally hot place, and he was sweating already; being pinned under his companion’s furry chest didn’t help matters any. “Who the hell are you?”

“I’m Shane; I’ve been tasked to protect you, and-”

“Yeah, yeah, I know that, but what’re you supposed to be protecting me *from*, exactly? And where the hell am I?”

“You’re on the planet Ferrth, in the jungle known as Tekit. I can’t tell you much more than that; I’m young for a tiger, and I don’t know very much.” If the tiger could blush, he would have been blushing; he’d never have admitted that to anyone, but his recent encounter with Growrr had made him more humble as well as cautious.

“Is there a stream, somewhere, where I can get cleaned up?”

This question, the tiger could answer; he nodded, and motioned for the boy to follow him; he quickly discovered that he had to slow down – Mark walked *very* slowly compared to the huge tiger’s strides – but he exercised his newfound patience.

Mark discovered that, while Shane was well-groomed, he wasn’t very pretty from behind; by his world’s standards, the tiger was noticeably fat, his rolls of fat jiggling slightly as he walked. The animal was very agile and lithe – his fat didn’t seem to get in the way – and, for a Ferrthian creature, he was quite lanky, but the human didn’t know any of this.

It didn’t take more than a few minutes for Shane to sigh and stop, stoop down and order the human to climb on his back as best he could; while Mark weighed around 150 lb, the tiger weighed about 10,000 lb, and the size difference was more than noticeable. Mark found himself having to hold on to the fur and pushed back and forth a little in a rhythm set by the tiger’s gait; it wasn’t exactly tiring, but it wasn’t a whole lot of fun, either.

After a few minutes, they came to a little river that came up to about Shane’s neck; this means that it was a head deeper than Mark was tall, and it was arranged that Mark would sit on Shane’s back and scrub himself to try to get the snot off of himself. Shane saw the shirt as a silly waste of time, but Mark was reluctant to discard it, and they ended up waiting several minutes for the human to scrub it clean.

The tiger, depositing the boy on the shore of the river first, exited the river and shook himself dry, covering the ground – and the already soaked human – in a shower of spray.

“Now,” Shane said, looking at Mark with his tongue lolling out to the side like a friendly, panting dog, “we’ve got to decide what we’re going to do. The Tiger-God told me to beware of wolves, and that means that we’re probably being hunted; I think we should go deeper into the jungle, where the

larger creatures roam and the foliage is thicker. Wolves aren't from here, and they'll have to start from the outside of the jungle working in; at least I'm familiar with the jungle, and we've got a head start."

Mark nodded; it was a good plan, and he would have to rely on Shane's superior knowledge of the land. The tiger stooped, and Mark got on top of him so they could continue their journey.

As the pair went deeper into the jungle, Mark began to appreciate the tiger's digestive system; he had some awful farts that stank like rotting meat, and every few hours he had to stop and take a dump that was waist-high on the human. He was frequently *very* thankful that he didn't have to walk behind the tiger: his gas stank enough when he was somewhat away from the source!

After walking from dawn to dusk, with Shane picking up the pace whenever the progressively thicker foliage allowed, they were forced to stop for the night; the tiger had found a cave, but did not know if it was occupied, and made Mark hide under a thick bush while he went in to find if anyone had claimed the cave, and if they would let the pair intrude for a night.

The tiger had the eyes of a cat, but the cave had a deep darkness, and even his eyes had trouble penetrating its depths; he saw and heard nothing, and went to retrieve his human companion. As they settled down in the cave, Shane rested a heavy paw on his charge to make sure that he could not leave without his supervision; as he had said that morning, if the boy wandered off, he couldn't protect him.

Far behind them, working without sleep and in the open moonlight, a pack of Dire Wolves led by a wolf named Arthurius hunted the tiger and the boy; there were two dozen of them including their leader, the best trackers and bounty hunters on Ferrth, and Mark, for reasoned unbeknownst to him, was the largest bounty known to the pack in its entire history.

Arthurius sniffed the ground and growled, ordering his scouts to run ahead and try to find more signs of the pair; they were far away from here, but the wolves were faster than the tiger, and they knew they would catch up eventually, despite the fact that they were a day and a half behind.

As dawn once again lit up the jungle of Tekit, and Shane awoke, getting off the floor and shaking himself awake. Mark woke up soon after, as the tiger was too wild to quiet himself, and while Shane observed their surroundings Mark decided to explore the cave.

Despite what Shane had thought was a thorough look at the cave, there was, in fact, another creature there with them; a grizzly bear that was *at least* twice his size, with brown fur so dark that it was almost black; they had intruded into the grizzly's home. The bear was barely awakening with the dawn, and had just opened its eyes when Mark had spotted it.

The grizzly growled and heaved his bulk off the floor, and then swiped at the boy with a massive paw, in order to crush the intruder's skull. Thankfully, Shane had spotted the grizzly before Mark had, and leapt at the bear, shielding his charge; the bear's blow flew him back into the boy and left the tiger in a

daze.

The dizzy and confused tiger landed rump-first on Mark, whose face was stuck under a mass of tigerbutt; Shane released his 'morning thunder' on Mark, covering him in a sizeable fart that would have gained the tiger admiration among any of his equally uncouth peers. The tiger had been intending to fart on Mark anyway, seeing how he reacted to his typical bodily functions, but he hadn't intended for it to be something this huge or stinky, sticking to his clothes and making his butt a very sweaty, smelly place to be stuck under.

When the tiger had begun to come to his senses, the bear finally spoke: "I am sorry for attacking you, but I had to be sure of who you were; the great Bear-Mother appeared to me in my dream and told me that one such as you would come to me, but that you were being hunted and that I must be cautious. It was a necessary test."

He paused, seeming to collect his thoughts. "I am Benny, but before you introduce yourself, you may want to remove your rear from that boy's face. He appears to be quite ruffled." Benny's eyes revealed a twinkle of humor at Mark's unfortunate situation that wasn't lost on Shane, but which Mark didn't have the chance to witness, stuck under the tiger's rump as he was.

The tiger responded with a grin, releasing another big fart on the boy before getting off him. Mark was fairly disheveled after these events, and his hair was blown back as if by a powerful wind – one that could only have come from the five-ton tiger's backside. He was rather dazed, covered in sweat from his companion's furry rear and giving off a slight but noticeable smell that was awfully similar to the farts he had smelled from Shane the day before. He wasn't in any state to introduce himself, so Shane did the honors with a bit of a wink.

"I'm Shane; the smelly one here is Mark."

It took a while for Mark to come to, and in that time Shane and Benny had become quite friendly; the bear was ten tons and built like a tank, while the tiger was quite agile and, frankly, *catlike*, but they got along like best mates. The bear had told Shane of an ancient creature who would know how to help them keep Mark safe, and it had been decided that Mark would ride at least some of the way on Benny's back; whatever happened, the bear thought he'd be more than a match for any adversary, and Shane – in his woeful inexperience – couldn't help but agree. Still, the two creatures stayed close, wary of danger even as they were ignorant as to its magnitude.

It wasn't long before they came to a river and forced Mark to have a wash; the human probably would have gone along with it, but they didn't have time for any discussions or arguments, and he ended up being roughly dragged through the water, scrubbed clean of the smell of Shane's rear end, and deposited right back on Shane, all without any consent from him.

From the vantage point of the tiger, Mark had quite a full view of the grizzly bear that walked in front of them, with nowhere to look at but the bear's enormous, swaying belly; Mark quickly became thankful that they were a few dozen feet apart, because the bear loosed some ferocious farts that

were pretty strong even from that far away.

About two and a half hours after noon, the tiger saw something in the distance – a grey-furred wolf that looked as big as Shane – and reported it to Benny, who promptly told the tiger to run as fast as he could to find their wise friend and bring help before finding a den to hide in; Shane was much faster than Benny, and it would be very difficult for anyone to get past Benny's ten tons of muscle, fat and ferocity.

Mark would have chosen to go with the tiger, but he wasn't given much of a choice in the matter: the bear found a closed space in which to hide and lay down with his humongous, furry arse on Mark, totally pinning him down. It appeared that when the grizzly had spoken of an enemy getting through his ten tons of weight, he meant that *literally*.

The boy quickly found out that Benny's rump made the tiger's look like heaven; he would have begged to be a recipient of the tiger's smaller, *much* cleaner rear end and his correspondingly smaller digestive system. As the grizzly released waves of noxious, cloudy farts, the boy's hands futilely sank into the bear's rump, protesting his stinky mistreatment; however, it soon became too exhausting to do that, and all he could do was complain whenever the bear released something *really* awful.

Eventually, he just started yelling, caution be damned; this was when he realized that one, the bear didn't want him yelling, and two, he *really, really* didn't like his cussing. No sooner than a second passed after the word '*arse*' left his mouth than an incredible, rumbling fart left the bear's anus, pummelling Mark and pinning him to the dirt wall of the hole the bear had dug,

After this, the bear released rumbling farts every couple of minutes, and it was covered in sweat and streaks of muck that Mark *hoped* was mud but which was almost certainly bear poop. As the hours went on, Mark discovered that what he'd thought were dry streaks were actually quite wet ones, and they easily transferred from the bear's butt to his face.

After a few hours, the bear's belly began rumbling greatly, and it appeared that he had digestive issues; however, Benny couldn't move an inch without revealing their location to Arthurius' wolves, and he was forced to fill what room there was in the back of their hastily dug den with fresh, steaming, *stinking* bear poop. It stuck to Mark, too, but there was nothing he could do at this point; he dared not speak or move, he was so afraid of the wolves -- he barely knew what was going on, but something had somehow pressed upon him not to move or speak, regardless of what Benny's bodily functions decided for him.

The bear had settled down for the night to wait for help, and it appeared that his bodily functions didn't stop with sleep; Mark settled down as best he could in the wet, awful pile of muck under Benny's rump, but since he couldn't *move*, that didn't appear to be much of an issue. It appeared that he'd have to wait out the night like this.

Arthurius's scout reported back an hour after he had been spotted by Shane, and reported that there was no sign of the boy anywhere, but that the highly suspicious pair of animals had probably been

protecting him. The leader of the dire wolves ordered half of his pack forward, to eliminate the tiger, while he and the rest of his pack combed the jungle for the bear who had no doubt expertly hidden himself.