

Someone must have seen him, because the Dai Li were at his door. He heard their calm knock and was about to open it before a Siberian weasel blasted the wooden door off its weak hinges. Yarred leaped out of the way, pushing out with his hand to give himself a boost of air. The black fox looked wildly at them, feeling his heart pound in his chest and his fur stand on end.

"What are you doing here?" The fox asked immediately. A dark brown fruit bat, hanging upside down from the rafters, shot his eyes open after hearing all the commotion. He stayed on his perch, but kept his wings opened just in case he and the fox needed to escape.

But the only response the two, sand-colored weasels gave Yarred were two, simultaneous punches that fired their specialized rock gloves towards the fox to subdue him.

Yarred narrowed his stance and spun on the balls of his feet, barely dodging the attack. He quickly fired a large gust of wind towards the Dai Li agents to blast them back onto the street and made his escape. He panted a bit and motioned for his bat friend with a paw. "¡Vamos!"

Mike squeaked and flew right off his perch, following Yarred closely through the nearest window. They fled down the dirty streets of the Lower Ring, speeding past run-down houses, market stalls, shops, and any innocent passersby. The two of them looked over their shoulders and to their sides every so often; no Dai Li agents yet. They quickly ducked into an alleyway and backed into it, deep enough so they hid in the shadows.

Several of the weasel agents walked down the street they were just on, casually looking around for the fox.

Yarred and Mike backed away further into the shadows of the alleyway once they saw the Dai Li pass by. They both gave a sigh of relief and leaned their backs against the old, stone and wooden wall of the building behind them.

The fox hung his head for a moment, then looked back up to Mike. "I was careful...right?"

The brown fruit bat simply nodded. "You just wanted to give the people here a little entertainment, that's all." He nudged Yarred on the shoulder and grinned. "You did draw quite a crowd too."

Yarred smiled, but his ears drooped. "Then someone most likely reported to the Dai Li..."

Mike hugged his friend gently. "Don't worry about them, hombre; they'll get off our backs--"

"No, they won't, Mike!" The fox cut him off, trying to keep his voice down. "These weasels are relentless and will *not* stop until they find me." He looked behind himself and past Mike, then gripped the bat's shoulders, shaking him a little. "Look, if we can find...anyone around here who can help us--"

The fox suddenly stopped. His ears twitched as he heard soft steps slowly approaching him from behind.

Mike looked over Yarred's shoulder and squeaked. He quickly spun Yarred behind him and brought up a wall of rock between them and the Dai Li agent, not once caring about the damage to the adjacent buildings.

They both ran out the other side of the alleyway and onto the dusty streets again. Two Dai Li agents ran and leapt atop the roofs, easily keeping up with them.

Damn these weasels! Would so love to have a glider right now. The fox blasted a gust of wind at a rock glove coming down on him as they ran. He noticed Mike resorted to flying by now, adding to his frustration.

Then he remembered what he could try, yet only successfully did it one other time; ironically, he was being chased then too.

Yarred made a leap while forming a spinning ball of air underneath him. He made sure to keep his legs tucked upwards as he created an air scooter. Now he could catch up with Mike.

He looked upwards to his left and his right again, kicking up dirt and debris from the street. Those same two agents were still on them.

Then, Yarred noticed a large, metal vehicle up ahead. *A motorcycle! Perfect!* He looked up towards Mike, still flying fast above. "Hey!" He shouted as loud as he could, "Get on that bike up ahead! I think we can lose them easier!"

Mike kept his focus ahead, occasionally looking at Yarred when he spoke. He nodded and swooped down towards the motorbike.

Just then, a black German Shepherd with messy, red hair was exiting a nearby tea shop when he noticed the chase outside. He saw the fruit bat get on his motorbike, trying to start it up.

"Hey!" Kye growled, "Get off my bike!"

Mike looked to him and panicked, hoping Yarred will hop on soon.

Kye cracked his neck and his knuckles as he approached the bat. "Gonna make me do this the hard way, huh?"

Mike quickly got off the bike, holding his palms up and backing away from the canine. "K-Kye. Me. Yarred. Airbender. Dai Li. After us." He then pointed at what was after them.

Kye's eyes widened upon seeing Yarred being chased by not two, not four, but six Dai Li agents. He quickly hopped on his bike and motioned for the bat to hop on. He started up the engine and leaned forward, ready to speed away once the fox hopped on too.

Yarred felt relieved upon seeing Kye. Once he was close enough, he leapt off his air scooter, using the cushion of air to propel him forward. He slowed his descent so he wouldn't land on the bike too hard.

Once the fox landed on the bike, Kye kicked up the kickstand and sped off, shooting a burst of flame behind him to ward off any nearby weasels.

"Yarred! What did you do this time!?" The canine yelled over the roaring engine.

"I was just showing a few tricks is all! People love me down here!"

"Yeah? And how many times have you been caught airbending?"

Yarred went quiet at that as he clung on to Mike in front of him.

Mike stayed quiet as the two conversed, clinging on to Kye and keeping an eye out for any more Dai Li agents as they rode through the Lower Ring.

Kye snorted, annoyed that the fox will get caught one of these days. He kept focus on the road while occasionally checking for Dai Li agents; he knew just as much as the two behind him that they like to pop up out of nowhere.

They soon made it to Kye's home. It looked just as run-down and dingy as the rest of the Lower Ring, though he lived closer to where the Lower and Middle Rings met. He slowed his motorcycle to a stop just out front. He shut off the engine, put the kickstand back down, and locked and chained it up; he didn't want to risk another theft attempt, not in this part of the city.

Once Yarred and Mike got off, Kye quickly unlocked the old, wooden door to let them in and out of sight from the public eye. After entering himself, he closed the door part way, poking his head out one last time, just to be safe, before closing and locking the beaten entryway.

He sighed and rubbed his temples. "I'm so going to regret saving you two, aren't I?"

Yarred was about to speak but was interrupted by a loud knocking at the door.

"Oh, you've *got* to be kidding me," Kye growled. Balling a fist, he opened the door slowly and looked around to the other side. He opened his fist and started a small flame in his palm before opening the door the rest of the way. "What do you want?"

"Sir. Douse your flame," one of the weasel agents ordered, "If you comply with us, we won't arrest you." He looked past Kye towards Mike. "The same goes for you, bat."

Mike tried not to show his fear, putting his body right in front of Yarred's.

Kye scowled at the intruders. "You're not arresting my friend just for a dumb airbending trick."

"Queen's orders," replied the other weasel.

"Of course you wouldn't have a reason." Kye's flame began to get bigger and brighter. "Just like with us firebenders during the 100 Year War."

"Sir!" Yelled the first weasel, "Douse your flame or you *will* be arrested, along with the bat!"

"Piss off!" Kye threw the large flame right into the weasel's black face, only to have that wrist pinned to the wooden door frame by a rock glove from the other agent. He threw a fire blast with his free arm, but the other agent ducked and grabbed that wrist, pinning it behind the canine. The agent summoned his other rock glove, binding both of Kye's wrists behind his back.

Mike charged in to help Kye, only to get tripped up by a third Dai Li agent, and have his arms pinned and bound behind his back by a fourth.

Yarred was too caught up in the chaos to notice both his feet were bound to the floor by a fifth agent, who then arrested him as well.

All three of them were led into the back of a platinum-encased prison truck, with each of their captors following and entering with them. Two agents quickly slammed the doors shut and the truck was immediately on its way to the Palace.

A light grey, green-striped tiger stood in awe for a moment next to his cabbage stand. He quickly shook his head and pulled out his company's patented portable radio, attaching the jerry-rigged antenna extension his techy wolf friend gave him. *I hope this works.* He attempted to radio the only person he knew who could help; and he was currently stationed near the Northern Water Tribe.

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The harsh, cold winds howled just outside the barracks, blowing a fresh powder of snow on the training grounds and metal buildings protecting the Tribe's imported vehicles. Most of the Water Tribe soldiers stayed closer to the city, but there were a few outposts either just outside its icy walls or miles away. Spirits still roam the North Pole after Harmonic Convergence, but they've been far and few since that event, remaining in the undeveloped wilds of the icy landscape.

Things were quiet around the outpost; boring, but quiet. Zeal enjoyed the peaceful change after the civil war between the tribes and dealing with unruly spirits during Harmonic Convergence. While he was thankful the war allowed him to become a better waterbender and soldier, it made him a mediocre Pai Sho player, and his opponent would not go easy on him.

The purple shark sat hunched over, looking intently at the circular board. He glanced at his tiles and then his opponent's, stuck on what to move and where. He scratched his head and huffed. "I don't know how you kept up your skills, my friend. I think you got me beat."

The large bear that sat across Zeal smirked. "I'm thousands of years old, remember?" His head stopped a few inches short of the icy ceiling.

"Right. Right." The shark straightened back up on his stool, stretching his arms over his head.

Suddenly, the hand radio sitting on the table nearby began to buzz. "Minty Stripes to Shark Bait; do you copy?"

Zeal cocked his eyebrow and picked up the radio, pressing down on the PTT switch before speaking. "Yes Ricky."

It buzzed again. "It's Yarred. He's been arrested by the Dai Li. They got Mike and Kye too."

"How'd that happen? I know they can get mischievous but I know they're not...you know, lawbreakers."

"Zeal. This is the Dai Li we're talking about here; they could've been arrested for breathing for all I know."

The shark snorted. "That is true," he said to himself before responding. "Can you explain what happened?"

Ricky proceeded to do just that. He made a note that he only saw the incident from his cabbage cart, and that he just so happened to be outside of Kye's house when the three were arrested. There were no other witnesses he knew, aside from himself and other citizens who happened to be on the scene too. The two went back and forth about a rescue plan, but Ricky allowed Zeal to take charge; the tiger was willing to act as another pair of eyes, just in case.

They closed the call and Zeal stood up. He looked up at Bear. "Well, you ready to get off this ice block?"

The giant bear gave a low growl. "Alright...only for you, my friend. But we're coming straight back once we've finished our mission, alright!?"

"What's so bad about Ba Sing Se?" The shark figured what Bear's answer would be, even after asking the redundant question.

"Everything! It's a crowded, corrupted city of fools! And it's too close to the hot desert." He snorted before continuing. "I'll still join you, however; I don't like it when you go 'lone wolf' on me during missions."

"I won't do that to you; especially in a city like Ba Sing Se." He got up off his stool and headed towards the door outside, glancing back at Bear and nodding for him to follow. "Now com'on; we have some canids to save!"

Bear was about to get up, but remembered how close his head was to the ceiling. He looked around, figuring out how to get out. He growled at the thought of how silly he'd look: A giant, armored bear thousands of years old like himself, scooting along the ice on his rear? Such shame! He noticed Zeal was already outside and figured he was getting the airship ready. He closed his eyes and took a deep breath, focusing his energy on willing himself to stand just next to the airship's ramp.

The shark was not at all phased by Bear slowly apparating next to the ramp as he walked upwards. He grinned seeing Bear standing to his full height, the top of his head lining up with the bottom of the airship itself. "Showoff," he joked as he continued into the airship.

Bear was forced to climb the ramp on all fours, as to not bend it from his weight. He hoped he wouldn't weight down the airship too much during their trip to Ba Sing Se as well. He sighed, stopping on the ramp for a moment. *No shortcuts. You're not leaving my sight young one. You can't always do things alone.*

The airship's engines roared and the propellers began to rotate, the sudden noise jogged Bear out of his mind. A black and silver Oriental darter poked his long neck from around the ramp's entry way. "Hey big guy! You comin' or what?"

"Oh. Yes. Of course." He gingerly walked up the ramp, still on all fours as to not bend it out of shape. *This is embarrassing.*

As soon as Bear's bulk entered the airship, the darter pilot closed the door and pushed the button to call up the ramp. They were soon airborne and on their way to the impenetrable city.

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Yarred, Mike, and Kye were forcefully removed from the prison truck once they reached the entryway to the inner court of the Palace; not once did the truck have to stop for entry when passing through the outer court gate. The construct alone was massive, ornate, the stone walkway looked clean and open, and the atmosphere smelled cleaner than that of the Lower Ring. Its golden roof shone against the mid-afternoon sun, not at all blocked by a single cloud. The three fugitives squinted their eyes for a moment before taking in the new sights and smells.

They were immediately shoved forward as the Dai Li commanded them to start walking up the stairs that lead to the Palace. The Earth Queen's Grand Secretariat immediately greeted them as soon as they took a step up. The skiddish squirrel-mouse

hybrid explained where she was and offered to lead them to her, to which they silently complied.

The three fugitives glanced around, taking in the vastly different environment than what they were used to as they marched. Kye whistled softly. "While I'd rather be up here under different circumstances, I guess I should count myself lucky to be here."

"Don't," said Yarred, "I've heard the Queen can be...demanding," he groaned.

"I may have been a little sarcastic," replied Kye, "I despise the Queen just as much as, well, most people in this city."

"I've heard she's allergic to reptiles and amphibians," interjected Mike, "Don't know about avians, though."

"Well let's hope she's not allergic to dogs too," remarked Kye, "Or bats...or foxes...actually I'd love to see her swell up and--ow!"

The weasel agent holding Kye smacked the back of his head. "You best keep your mouth shut when you meet her majesty, pup!"

Kye whimpered and growled softly, keeping quiet until they would reach the throne room, where the Earth Queen was located.

They were almost to the top of the stairs and reached the large palace doors that towered over them. Their brown and golden structure reached all the way up from ground to ceiling. Several royal palace guards stood at the ready, and began to open the massive doors for them with their bending. The Dai Li kept their pace as they went through.

They soon reached the main hall to the throne room. The walls and floor were decorated with green and white stone, and the entire walkway appeared uniform and orderly. The long hallway lead to two more large doors that reached all the way to the ceiling. The vivid, green doors still shone from their gold trimming, despite the dimmer lighting of the main hall. The two weasels who weren't holding onto a captive opened both doors simultaneously as the other three immediately entered the large, open throne room.

The three captives looked around the open throne room in awe, though all three felt a sense of dread once they saw the Earth Queen herself. They immediately looked down or glanced elsewhere when they noticed the old, Ussuri boar seated at the throne. Her emerald-encrusted, golden headdress, her lavish jewelry, and her elegant royal dress

did not hide the cold stare behind a graying snout. She glared at the fugitives, then relaxed her gaze and leaned her thinning elbow on an armrest.

"Well now," she began, "What did my loyal agents bring me this time?" Her tone was firm and commanding, yet there was a hint of what seemed like concern in her voice.

The sand-colored weasel who held onto Yarred spoke first. "We caught *this* one airbending again and finally apprehended him," he said flatly as he shoved the fox forward.

"Really?" Replied the Queen as she smirked.

"Oh come on! It was just a stupid tri--ow!" Yarred yipped as the weasel behind him kicked him in the back.

"Yes, your highness," replied the weasel. He ignored the fox's soft whines and silence after kicking him.

"I believe you know where to put our newest recruit," the Queen replied, "And don't lose sight of him either!"

"Of course, your majesty." The weasel yanked Yarred to his feet, leading him back out of the throne room. A second Dai Li agent near the throne joined him.

Yarred never said a word and his ears drooped as he was shoved out of the throne room. Fear took over his will to attempt another escape. He hoped that, wherever the Dai Li were taking him, he would find allies.

Once the fox and the two Dai Li agents left the throne room, the Queen turned to Mike and Kye. "As for you two...hmmm, what to do with you." She tapped her chin with a hoofed finger as she pretended to be deep in thought.

Kye growled as Mike tried not to show his fear. "You could let us go and we'll be out of your hair," barked Kye.

"I *could* do that," replied the Queen, "But you two know too much already." She looked past them towards the Dai Li agents behind them. "See to it these two rapsclions, shall we say...forget this ever happened." She grinned, showing off some of her white teeth and the roots of her tusks.

"Of course, your majesty," replied one of the weasels. Both Dai Li agents shoved their respecting fugitives around and back out of the throne room.

"What do you mean by that, you pig!?" Yelled Kye as he tried to direct his attention to the Queen.

"We bats have a very good memory, you know!" Mike wasn't sure if that was true or not, but he hoped it made him sound braver than he really felt.

"Silence them both!" The Queen commanded as she stood up and pointed a finger.

Two more agents appeared out of nowhere and fired their rock gloves towards the captives' snouts. They instantly attached, sealing their lips tight as the Dai Li continued to lead them out of the throne room.

Mike didn't fight back once he was silenced. He looked over to Kye, who was breathing hard and violently shaking his head, as if that would help rip the seal over his mouth. But the black dog eventually stopped, sighing as he allowed the weasel to lead him to wherever they were taking them. Mike looked ahead, trying to take note of where they would end up, despite his horrible vision; thankfully the palace had enough low lighting that he could use his nocturnal vision to his advantage. He hoped he could remember what he saw, and when the Queen referred to Yarred as her "newest recruit."

They wound their way through a series of dimly-lit, dingy corridors and stair cases after leaving the main hall to the throne room. The air felt moist against the skin under their fur, making Kye pant into the rocky seal over his mouth from the warm, enclosed underground. They passed a series of platinum doors that each led to a prison cell. From what Kye and Mike could see through the doors' barred windows, they appeared empty. They were soon lead down a long corridor with a single platinum door at the very end; unlike the cell doors, this did not have a barred window.

Upon reaching the end of the corridor, one of the weasels opened the metal door and pushed inward. The room was small and just big enough to fit all of them comfortably. It was empty, save for a wide, metal ring supported by four, metal legs that rose about waist-high. An oil lamp sat affixed to this metal ring along a track, which a fifth Dai Li agent ignited and positioned himself in the middle of the circuit.

The agent holding Kye stomped his foot to bring up a rock chair right out of that ground, and was positioned front and center, facing the brainwashing instructor. Kye had his arms and legs bound to the chair while his mouth was still covered. The lamp began to move along the track in a rhythmic cycle as the instructor began the brainwashing process.

Mike looked away until it was his turn.

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About three days passed since Zeal and Bear left their frozen bunker, much to Bear's discomfort. While the bear took pride in his size and strength, the airship's interior barely contained his natural and armored bulk. Not only after a couple hours into the trip did he start to feel claustrophobic and had a hard time keeping his panic under control. He was thankful the purple shark was there to remind him he could shrink himself down until they reached the city, but it wasn't without a high energy cost to sustain a smaller size for that long.

He kept his smaller size until the airship hovered past the outer and inner walls, past the Lower Ring and the Middle Ring, and landed on a stone pad just outside the Palace walls. As soon as the darter pilot began to lower the ramp for them to get off, Bear wasted no time and charged out of the airship, nearly knocking over Zeal and the pilot.

"Hey! Take it easy big guy!" Yelled the pilot, "I paid good money to give you guys clearance straight to the Upper Ring, let alone to the Palace itself!"

Bear didn't pay much attention as he grew back to his full size and stood up to his full, nine-foot height. He stretched his limbs and took in the fresh smell of the Upper Ring. He then glared at Zeal, who was making his way down the ramp and casually admiring the rich, beautiful scenery. "We're teleporting next time, whether you like it or not!"

Zeal just shrugged. "Fine by me. So long as you know where we're going."

Suddenly, a pulsating, soft, blue light appeared above them. Both Zeal and Bear looked at it for a moment before they both stepped back. Without warning, the spherical mass shot out a black dragon right into the air. He screamed as he hit the stone landing pad hard, but managed to ball himself up just in time to not eat stone. He was clothed in typical water tribe garb like Zeal's, but did not carry anything except a leather water pouch.

Zeal grinned and helped the blue-haired dragon up on his feet. "You're just in time brother."

Rylthon, or Ryl as his friends call him, rubbed his head as the shark helped him up. "Well it better be good if it was worth nearly face-planting on a hard surface...again." He then looked at the tattoo on his shoulder: a wheel pattern with eight arrows evenly arranged and sized in an alternating pattern. It faded from blue back to its original color, a darker black than his scales which made it somewhat hidden against the rest of his body. "You dragon dive on someone who enters The Pit, next thing you know you're

in..." He paused and looked around, noticing the Palace walls and the rest of the Upper Ring, then at his and Zeal's clothes. He groaned and rubbed the blue scales on his snout between his eyes. "I haven't been here a minute and already I hate this city."

Zeal clapped the dragon's shoulder and gave a toothy grin. "Hey, I'm glad you're here. Ricky told me three of our friends were captured by the Dai Li."

Rylthon sighed and dropped his claw, looking towards the Palace gates with some disinterest. "Well, you can tell me more along the way." He glanced over and waved at Bear, not once feeling intimidated by his size.

The bear simply nodded at the dragon, putting a claw to his chin. "Your tattoo still fascinates me. I know you wouldn't like it, but I would enjoy exploring its abilities further."

"Maybe some other time dude." Rylthon focused his attention to Zeal. "So, what did our tiger friend say?"

As they made their way closer to the gates and felt the need to threaten on of the Palace guards via a jagged ice blade against the throat, Zeal gave Ryltohn the run-down as they headed closer and closer to the Palace. They reached the gates of the Inner Court, needing to banter with the guards here as well, and were soon stopped by the Queen's Grand Secretariat. The squirrel-mouse hybrid made haste to greet them, but shuddered at the sight of the trio.

He looked to Zeal and Ryltohn. "U-Uh, pardon me, sirs. But the Queen is quite allergic to you scaly types." He quickly raised a paw and backed away some. "N-Not that I mean any disrespect. I-I just ask you keep your distance, should you wish to be in her presence."

Zeal shrugged. "Not a problem for me, actually." He backed up to give himself some space and closed his eyes. He took a slow, deep breath before grunting loudly, trying hard to keep his body under control as he quickly grew taller and hairier. His limbs, tail, and ears simultaneously changed to a canid shape, while his back fin shrunk and disappeared into his back. His buzzed hair grew an inch longer, and became greyer and shaggier. He kept a tight, hunched position for a bit before slowly standing up in his werewolf form, brushing off any shredded pieces of his clothing.

Gun stood there in awe at what just happened in front of him, not sure how he should react in that moment.

"See? Problem solved," the werewolf said in a deeper, huskier voice.

Ryltohn nudged Zeal's side, glancing around at who was beginning to surround them. "Hey, I know you like showing off and all, but we...might have a problem."

Several palace guards began to surround the trio, all of whom were various species, though none reptilian or aquatic. Meanwhile, Gun skittered away to safety, not wanting to be a victim of the impending fight that was about to occur.

Zeal barred his canid teeth and crouched, looking around at the guards in front of him. They stood their ground, but did not dare approach the werewolf further.

Ryltohn flicked open his water pouch and pulled out a stream of water, readying it to use it as a whip as the guards on his side approached him.

Bear simply stood there, snarling with his arms crossed and loomed over the guards who began to think twice about attacking the giant, armored beast.

"Leave the premises now, or we will forcefully remove you!" One of the guards who faced Zeal ordered. He crouched and widened his stance, ready to attack the werewolf.

"That goes for you and the bear too!" Another guard facing Ryltohn ordered.

Bear kept his intimidating demeanor towards the hesitant guards in front of him. He gave a low growl. "Not until we find our missing friends."

"S-Sorry but th-there not here," stuttered a guard that began to back away from the bear.

"Then I guess we're doing this the hard way!" Suddenly, Zeal snarled and leapt towards one of the guards, claws barred.

The guard instantly put up a smooth, stone wall, making Zeal crash right into it.

Ryltohn glanced over at what happened. When he looked back towards his attackers, he just missed a rock disk heading straight for his head. He immediately spun on his toes and knocked over all three guards in front of him with his water stream, then looked to help Zeal.

Bear growled and stumbled forward after getting hit with a rock disk straight to his lower back. He glared behind him, but only found those guards were dazed in a pile. He immediately looked towards the four guards in front of him, opening his mouth and producing a bright, orange glow inside, then spewed a large, orange flame towards them.

The guards began to flee, but were all knocked down from the fire blast, leaving the back of their green and yellow uniforms singed.

Meanwhile, Zeal shook off the throbbing in his head and leapt over the wall at the guard who put it up. He tackled the guard when he was just about to fire a rock disk at the werewolf. Zeal raised a claw, but screamed after his wrist was hit by another rock fired at him by the other guard. He glared at his assailant and immediately charged at him, though only on his hind legs to spare his injured wrist.

Zeal raised his good claw as he charged, only to get hit on the shoulder by an orange-sized glob of mud. He growled and huffed, looking at who threw that.

The guard charged at took advantage of this and set up a boulder to kick at the werewolf. But the boulder immediately dropped before he could fire it. He screamed and was knocked over when another glob of mud smacked him right in the face, then instantly hardened over his eyes.

"Sorry...I don't have the best aim," Jeb said as he dropped his stance and his ears drooped.

"Well, you best work on that then!" Remarked Zeal as he brushed the mud off his shoulder.

"When I can." The brown marsh wolf glanced around at the scene, noting not a single guard was getting up anytime soon. "Look, I don't care why you're here. You *need* to get out of this city." He then looked around and behind him. "Let's hope no more guards show up...or the Dai Li."

"Aye." Zeal rubbed his injured wrist some. "But we aren't leaving without Yarred."

"...What?" Jeb said with a hint of concern.

"And Mike...and Kye."

Jeb was about to ask again, but decided against it. "You know what? Explain later. Follow me." He waved a paw and started to walk backwards until he was sure the trio could keep pace.

"Where are you taking us?" Asked Bear.

"Away from here. Specifically, my place." He got into the driver's seat of his Future Industries delivery truck. It was a standard model with wooden posts and safety rails attached to the bed, which also contained several small flowers neatly placed and tied down in their pots.

He looked at Zeal and Ryltohn. "Ryl, you can sit next to me. Boss, you could squeeze up front with us or sit in back with the flowers." He pointed a thumb towards the back of the truck. "Just don't sit on any of them or you'll owe me."

"I'll sit in back," said Zeal. He calmed himself enough to transformed back into his normal, shark appearance, then headed towards the back of the truck. He climbed right in, careful not to step or bump against any of the flowers.

"Sweet! I get shotgun!" Said Ryltohn as he went towards the passenger side, opened the door, and hopped right in. "Oh wait. What about the uh...the walking carpet?" The dragon whispered the latter statement.

"Hmm? Oh! Right! Um..." Jeb thought for a moment on what to do with Bear.

Bear poked his head down enough so he and Jeb were eye-level. "I will teleport and meet you there; I don't wish to damage your vehicle."

"Right, right. Oh!" Jeb shuffled around in the truck for a pad of paper and pen. He scribbled down something and ripped off the sheet to give to Bear. "I have no clue how that teleportation stuff works, but maybe this will help."

Bear speared the paper with a claw just under the scribbled text. It was Jeb's address in the Middle Ring as well as a brief description of what his place looked like and its surroundings. He took the paper off his claw and crumpled it up, then focused his energy to begin the teleportation process as the truck sped off.

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Yarred allowed the two Dai Li agents to take him wherever they planned on putting him. He dared not attempt to transform into his werefox form on his own; that will have to wait until he could absorb the energy from a full moon, whenever the next one will occur. In the meantime, he kept his head bowed, occasionally glancing forward and sideways. He hardly noticed when they left the throne room, nor when they exited through the main hall. He only noticed a change in the smell, going from that dry, clean smell, mixed with an occasional scent of incense, to a damp, muggy feeling against his skin, and cool air tickling between his fur. What he could see was nothing but stone bricks, the only lumination coming from green, glowing crystals embedded into the

walls. Corridor after corridor was nothing but this, that is, until they reached an iron door with a barred window near the top.

One of the weasel agents held tight onto his wrists, while the other opened the cell door. The one holding him released Yarred from his bonds and shoved him into the dark room, making the fox yelp as he hit the cold, stone ground. The other weasel slammed the door behind him. He grinned. "Welcome to the Queen's personal Airbender Regiment, cadet," he taunted after locking the cell door. The weasel slowly turned and left with the other agent.

Yarred winced from being thrown on the ground and managed to get on all fours. He growled low, wanting to transform already. But after being chased, arrested, and dragged to this moldy dungeon, he wasn't sure if he had enough energy to sustain his werefox form for long. He looked up and noticed several other faces in the cell with him, all various species. They looked at him with tired, hopeless faces from their stone-carved bunks in the walls. It was easy to tell how long each individual have been imprisoned based on how dirty their fur, scales, or feathers were and how disheveled and dingy their clothes were.

Soon, a pair of white, reptilian claws grabbed around his waist to help him up, but Yarred instantly batted them away. He yipped and quickly turned around, ready to attack whoever grabbed him, but breathed a sigh of relief when he saw the raptor's face. "Oh...Devin, it's just...you," he said between heaving breaths.

Devin sunk back, his snout pointed towards the ground as he looked up at Yarred with his yellow and blue eyes. "Sorry, just wanted to help you."

After taking a moment to calm himself, the black fox sat up and leaned forward to hug Devin. "I'm just glad that you're here."

The white and grey raptor felt his arms get locked to his sides by the hug, but it didn't bother him one bit. He smiled softly and blushed some when Yarred let go. "So...airbender too, huh?"

He nodded, but frowned and lowered his head. "I wasn't careful this time, though...and I got two of my best friends involved in this mess." He sighed. "Who knows what's happened to them..."

Devin placed a hand on Yarred's shoulder. "Hey, man, I'm sure they're alright. Look, I bet they managed to escape the Queen's clutches and went to find help. Although...I'm not quite sure who all lives in Ba Sing Se."

The fox looked up, trying his best to smile. "I know Ricky and Jeb are in town...but that's all I know who lives in the city, aside from Mike and Kye."

He tried to encourage the fox, giving a soft smile as he spoke. "Then I'm sure those four are meeting up and planning something; I know it!"

Yarred chuckled. "I bet they are...but I'd rather have it be sooner than later." He then got in low and spoke quietly. "Listen, I have an idea, but I doubt it'll work with us being so far underground." He spoke quieter. "Have I told you about my...other self?"

* * *

The marsh wolf pulled his truck up near his home and got out after killing the engine, with Ryltohn getting out of the cab as well. Zeal broke out of his meditation when he felt the truck slow down and hopped out of the bed, stretching out from sitting for so long. He crinkled his nose from having nothing but the flowers' smell and pollen penetrating his senses the whole journey. He noted their location; not too far off was the University and what would appear to be a downtown district. He made his way towards Jeb and Ryltohn and followed them into the house, where Bear waited patiently for them to arrive.

The house was like most of the other buildings in the Middle Ring: sized right so it would have a roomy interior, grey stone walls, dark green shingles and golden-brown trimming on the roof, and the street outside appeared to be kept clean and decorated with simple trees. It was also designed to be a two-unit condominium, which Jeb lived on the right side of the building.

All of them entered the unit except for Bear. Not wanting to risk damaging the building, and trying to squeeze himself in a smaller space again, he decided to stand guard outside and be a lookout.

The building's interior was about the same as its exterior: well-kept overall with simple furniture and décor that appeared well-used, but not damaged. When the three entered, Jeb offered his guests a seat at the low table in the dining area while he prepared some jasmine tea for them.

Zeal quietly lowered himself onto the cushion on the floor by the table, sitting with his legs crossed. Opposite of him, Ryltohn slumped onto the cushion, letting out an "Ooof" as he stretched his legs out under the table and nearly knocked over the vase centerpiece when he bumped his knees against the table.

Ryltohn spoke first as soon as he sat down. "So how we doing this? Obviously, we can't just...barge right into the Palace."

"No, you couldn't," replied Jeb, "You'd be arrested right on the spot, and not by Palace guards, mind you."

"The Dai Li?" The dragon asked.

Jeb nodded. "If you three were surround by them, I wouldn't have bothered to come get you." He paused a moment and shuddered some.

"What is it?" Asked Zeal.

"Uh, nothing. Nothing," replied Jeb, "I know they're just weasels but...I never feel safe when I see them on patrol. I've heard they're quite skilled and can appear out of the shadows." He let out a deep breath as he made their tea.

"Then we best be extra careful then," said Zeal, "This is my first time in this city, but I have read up on its history and on those Dai Li." He sighed and pursed his lips in disappointment. "It's not a government I would be willing to fight for, that's for sure. Maybe after this rescue mission we could over--"

"Don't try to be a war hero, Zeal," the black dragon interrupted, "I know you would *love* to change this city for the better, but I just got here and even *I* know that would be a bad idea with this rag-tag team of ours."

"You're right; I should stay focused. I'm sorry."

Ryltohn snickered. "Aren't you glad I showed up out of nowhere, brother?"

Zeal chuckled and smiled.

Jeb started pouring four small cups with the jasmine tea, distributing one to Zeal and one to Ryltohn. He then walked towards the front door, poking his head through to offer Bear some tea as well. After heading back inside, he went to get his own cup and seated himself between his two guests at the table, mimicking Ryltohn's relaxed posture. "So, now that you two had a chance to chat," he took a sip of tea, "how're we gonna free our foxy friend?"

* * *

They waited until close to midnight before heading back to the Palace to execute their rescue plan. Bear was already just outside the outer court walls, waiting for the other three as the moon's white illumination shimmered against his armor. Jeb pulled the delivery truck up to the giant bear, but he was the only one inside the cab this time. Zeal and Ryltohn remained hidden during the whole trip under the cover of foliage in the truck bed. As the truck slowed to a stop, the two quickly hopped out and scanned the area for any guards or Dai Li. Jeb did the same before opening the door and getting out of the driver's seat, careful not to slam the door shut behind him. They all crouched low right up against the wall. Bear got on one knee in hopes he could lower his profile enough, yet still jump into action if he needed to; he was still about a head taller than the other three.

As they went over their plan one more time, Zeal looked up into the cloudless sky. He nudged Ryltohn. "Brother, look," he said as he pointed upward.

"Full moon..." murmured the black dragon as he looked up as well. He looked towards Zeal and snickered. "I don't know about you, but I can feel so much power welling up inside me because of it."

Zeal looked back to Ryltohn and grinned. "You don't know how bad I want to get in there and let loose right now." He then noticed Bear and Jeb glaring at him. "Don't worry. I'll keep him held back until we get Yarred, *unless*," he pointed at the two, "it's an emergency. Alright?"

They both nodded.

"Alright. Now," the shark looked at the tall wall from top to bottom, then looked at the brown wolf. "Jeb, tunnel under that wall for the three of us. Bear will meet us on the other side in a flash, literally."

Jeb stood up and rolled his shoulders. "Or I could literally open the wall for you guys." He then widened his stance, readying himself. "Can't make any promises it'll be quiet."

"Whatever will get us on the other side. And if they hear us, they hear us."

The wolf shrugged. "Alright." He looked straight at the wall in his stance, stomping forward while simultaneously bringing his arms out and up, trying to keep his grunting down. An evenly cut portion of the wall opened up; it was just wide and tall enough for them to walk through, including Bear.

The makeshift door stayed open as they all jumped through while still trying to keep quiet. Jeb turned around and quickly put the stone wall back to its original appearance.

The Palace Temple was within their eyesight, its intricate, round structure surrounded by a web of scaffolding. They quietly ran towards it, hoping to get out of the open area of the courtyard before any guards or spotlights could catch them.

"Hey! You four! Stop where you are!" A distant voice shouted.

They all stopped dead in their tracks just a few yards from the Temple, looking to where the voice was coming from.

Two Palace guards walked towards them, one of whom held a lantern. His face could easily be made out to be a black dog of some breed. The other's face was mostly hidden by darkness, but his face could be made out to be fox-like, yet his outfit appeared to have either specially tailored sleeves or no sleeves at all. They made no effort to slow down or run from the four, despite Bear's intimidating height behind the other three.

All four crouched low, as if they were planning for a brief fight and a quick getaway.

"Do not attack and we won't have any need to harm you!" Shouted the guard carrying the lantern.

"That voice..." Zeal murmured. He relaxed himself and approached the guards, waving a hand for the others to follow.

As they approached the guards, they immediately recognized the two.

"Kye? Mike?" Asked Ryltohn, "How're you two..."

"You could say we got a promotion," Kye answered.

"But I thought you two lived in the Lower Ring," said Jeb, "There's no way you would've been able to get up this far in the city."

Zeal cocked an eyebrow. "I'm curious about that as well."

"W-Well," the fruit bat began, "The, uh, the Dai Li saw how well we, um..." Mike struggled to remember.

The German shepherd continued for him. "How well we helped apprehend a runaway thief they've been after for a few months."

"Really?" Replied the shark.

"Y-Yes, yes!" Mike continued, "They reported our good deed to her majesty and she offered us guard positions. Life up here's way better than down in the Lower Ring."

"I don't mind the robes too much; they're a little bulky but roomy. But the helmets...eh, they look a little too silly for my taste," said Kye, "And they're a little too snug aslo; it is what it is I suppose."

Bear looked down on them and crossed his large arms. "That's a bold claim. Sounds too good to be true."

"You're not hiding anything from us...are you?" Asked Zeal.

"Wha--What do you mean?" Kye asked, shifting his eyes between the group members.

"Yarred," Jeb stated plainly.

Mike bowed his head, as if he was briefly mourning someone close. Kye kept his focus on the group, but the bat kept his head lowered, murmuring to himself. "That name..."

"We don't know this 'Yarred' you speak of. Although, the criminal we helped apprehend was a black fox." Kye shrugged. "That's all we know...sorry fellas."

Mike kept talking quietly to himself, rubbing his temples on occasion as a flash of memories rushed back into his mind.

"Yo...Mike. You ok?" Ryltohn looked over towards the bat.

"Guys! I just remembered!" Mike shouted, drawing more attention to them by nearby Dai Li agents. They observed carefully as the two parties conversed, specifically on the bat and the dog.

"What? What is it?" All of them asked near-simultaneously, turning their attention on Mike.

He shifted his eyes between all their faces, feeling his heart race at the sudden attention he drew to himself. His ears instinctively rotated some as he heard several agents slowly approaching the group. "U-Uh...why don't I just...show you." He then turned his head back and forth, noticing the Dai Li weasels approaching the group in a large circle. "Liiiiiike, right now."

The others soon noticed the approaching agents; all four crouched low and got in their stances. "I think that's gonna have to wait, bat," said Zeal.

"Mike! What are you talking about?" Yelled Kye, "There's nothing to show them here; it's just a palace and nothing more!"

The Dai Li got in thier stances, waiting for the right moment to attack.

"Kye! How can you not remember Yarred!" Mike grabbed at Kye's robes and shook him as he shouted. The helmet on Kye wiggled back and forth until it was tilted at an odd angle on the back of his head, almost loose and about to fall off.

The black dog shoved Mike off him then grabbed to readjust his helmet with his free paw. "Whoever you're talking about is--owww!" He yelped as something small but hard shot into his exposed temple, making the helmet fall off his head entirely. The lantern fell out of his paw and shattered on the ground, briefly spreading flames as the glass broke and started a small fire to the bottom of his robes. He tried to bat out the flames, but then waved a paw over them, condensing them to a smaller one that floated in the same paw. "Alright! Who did that?" He growled.

"Remember now?" Asked Jeb.

"Yeah...Thank--gaaaah!"

Two rock gloves suddenly grabbed each of Kye's wrists, forcing them behind his back and putting out his flame. He threw a series of kicks towards his attackers as best he could, shooting bursts of flame from his feet.

Mike screamed as well after the same thing was done to him, but he quickly widened to make a piston out of the stone ground below him, shooting himself high enough out of range. As he did so, he forced the rock gloves off him and fired them back down at the Dai Li, soaring through the night sky so he'd stay out of range. When he could, he flew down near Kye and removed the rock gloves from him, also firing those back at the Dai Li.

As soon as Kye was freed, he let loose a flurry of flaming punches and kicks to keep the weasels on their toes.

Zeal and Ryltohn teamed up, dodging and weaving past the flying rocks from the Dai Li, while returning fire with water streams when they could.

"Hey! I got an idea!" Ryltohn shouted, "But I need more water to work with!"

Zeal nodded and did so as much as he could while holding off the Dai Li attacking them.

They could both feel the full moon's energy giving them power, and Ryltohn was the first to take advantage of this. The dragon collected any water that was in his pouch and on the ground to form a circle of flowing water around him, which soon turned into eight water tentacles he could use. They reached about a foot taller than Bear, sustaining that height; normally, the dragon could only have them reach just above his own height when using this technique. He snapped away any incoming rocks from the Dai Li while simultaneously whipping at or throwing any of the agents within reach.

The shark grinned at seeing his brother use such an intricate technique as he fought alongside him.

Meanwhile, Jeb and Bear fought off their assailants, both fueled by pure aggression and anger.

Bear tossed fireball after fireball at the Dai Li attacking him, not caring one bit if his attacks were blocked or missed. He ignored the sharp rocks that pelted his large body; this only fueled his anger.

The marsh wolf was doing much of the same with his earthbending, though he wasn't used to such an intense fight. He tried to counter as best as he could by tossing back anything that was thrown at him or counter-bending the attacks away from him entirely.

Bear finished off any agents that still stood and shouted above the chaos. "Everyone! Get inside the Temple! Me and Je--gaaaaahhhh!!"

A large bolder suddenly struck the back of the bear's head, jerking it forward some. But it only angered him further.

He spun around and quickly threw a large flame straight at the poor weasel who snuck up on him.

Everyone stayed on their defense as they backed up towards the Temple. They soon stopped attacking and made a run for it.

Zeal figured now is the time to use his werewolf form. He transformed much quicker this time since he and Ryltohn had the power of the full moon on their side. He waved a furry claw as he ran alongside his team. "Let's go people!"

He, Jeb, and Bear guarded the others as they ran inside, keeping the remaining Dai Li distracted as best they could.

As soon as the others were inside, and noticing the Dai Li were beginning to hold back their assault, Zeal grabbed both Bear and Jeb to get their attention. "Bear, stand guard while we get Yarred! Jeb," he sighed briefly, "I know we don't get along, but I'm glad you're helping me on this mission. That's why I'm giving you two options: one, stay out here and help Bear guard the temple until we return. Or two, come inside with us and help look for Yarred."

Jeb did not hesitate to respond. "I'll stay out here and keep watch. I trust you'll get our foxy friend in no time."

The werewolf went quiet for a moment. "I'm genuinely surprised at that..."

"I try to put others before myself." He quickly looked around and noticed the weasels were nowhere to be found. He began to feel uneasy and started nudging the werewolf. "Now go. Go! Before they show up again," he commanded, though did so in a hushed tone.

Zeal nodded and headed inside. The others waited for him and kept themselves hidden from any Dai Li who might still be outside.

Jeb turned back around and glanced side to side. He noticed how Bear just stood there: calm yet intimidating, keeping his eyes focused beyond what's immediately in front of him. Despite being a third less than the bear's height and lacking the layer of fat he had, Jeb attempted to mimic his posture and demeanor.

They stood there quietly for a few moments until Jeb attempted to make small talk.

"...Sup?"

Bear growled at the wolf in annoyance as they both stood guard.

* * *

Zeal led the charge into the Temple construct, running every which way and desperately trying to find some hidden entrance that might lead to the airbenders. The others behind him struggled to keep up as to not get separated. After only a short time not finding anything, the werewolf growled loudly and slammed his fist against a wall, leaving a cracked, circular imprint in the masonry. "Where the hell are they!?"

Ryltohn shushed and spoke in a hushed tone. "Hey! Keep it down, will ya? We've already attracted enough attention as it is."

Zeal breathed deeply, trying to relax himself a little. "Sorry..." He then looked to Mike. "Hey bat, how good is your earthbending?"

The fruit bat thought for a moment, then shrugged. "Decent I guess. Why?"

"Good enough to detect where Yarred may be hidden?"

Mike went quiet for a moment. He knew his skills were good enough in a pinch, but he doubted he was powerful enough to detect objects through the earth's vibrations. "I-I could try..."

Zeal put a paw on his shoulder. "That's all I ask." He wanted to sound encouraging, but his tone came off as stern and commanding.

Mike took a moment to remove the shoes on his feet that came with the temple guard uniform; he remembered he never liked wearing footwear to begin with, as it hindered his ability to perch. While he was used to detecting minute vibrations in the air with his ears, he knew some earthbenders can detect them in the ground with their bare feet. *Similar concept; different methods. I got this.*

Zeal started to get impatient and crossed his arms, watching the bat like a buzzard wasp.

The bat breathed and closed his eyes as he widened his stance. As soon as he firmly planted his foot on the ground, powerful vibrations rippled from his foot and spread until they bounced off an object and back to him. He could accurately detect where Kye, Ryltohn, and Zeal stood, as well as Jeb and Bear outside and all of their pulses. He detected the small insects and spiders crawling in the crevices of the Palace Temple and outside. In that instant, he also had a blueprint of the structure, of every wall, floor, ceiling, decoration, and the scaffolding outside.

And that's when he detected a faint maze of tunnels and chambers beneath the Temple and the rest of the Palace, along with several entry points throughout. Once he found one they could get to, he opened his eyes and relaxed himself.

"That was quick," remarked Zeal, "You found anything?"

Mike waved a winged arm and ran towards the hidden entrance. "¡Vamos!"

They immediately followed.

The bat took them around more corners and through more hallways and rooms; it felt like the same situation they were in when they first entered. But Mike knew exactly where he was going, and a part of him hoped he wasn't right. Needless to say, he found where the entrance was and moved the flushed wall that concealed the staircase behind it. It was completely different than the rest of the Palace buildings: all stone bricks with moss and mold growing on them and between the cracks, the muggy smell and feel of the air emanating from the staircase penetrated their sensitive noses and brushed against their fur and, in the case of the water dragon, his scales.

"After you," said Zeal.

Mike nodded and quickly, but quietly, made his way down the stairs, but stepped aside as soon as he entered so the others may enter as well. Once they did, the bat closed the wall behind them and shuffled his way up front, leading them into the bowels of the Temple, not knowing what other secrets the Earth Queen may be hiding.

Being the only earthbender began to take a toll on him; combined with his natural ability to use his ears as a sixth sense and his feet as a seventh, he had difficulty keeping himself focused on their mission. He became overwhelmed with the amount of walls and tunnels and rooms beneath the Palace, not to mention the occasional Dai Li agent on patrol, or the bugs crawling within the cracks. The only thing that kept him going was getting his fox friend out of here, safe and sound.

As he led their group through the underground maze, taking them down alternate routes to avoid further detection, they soon made it to the iron cell door where the airbenders were supposedly located. He was about to look into the barred window near the top, but was soon shoved aside by Zeal.

Without warning, the werewolf punched and shunted the metal door several times before it finally flew off its hinges. It clanged against the hard ground, the noise echoing within the chamber.

"Hey! Can you be louder next time?" Remarked Kye, "I don't think those weasels could hear us!"

Zeal snorted and stepped inside; he went quiet a moment.

"It's...empty..."

Ryltohn blinked. "...what?"

The werewolf screamed and slammed his fist against the wall, firing chunks of rock that made up the door frame and left a hole. "I thought you knew where they were!" He directed his anger to Mike.

"L-Look, I tried my best, ok?"

"Well that isn't good enough!"

Ryltohn stepped closer to Zeal. "Hey! Don't get mad at him! Maybe they've been relocated."

"That must've been it, actually," remarked Kye, "When Mike and I got captured, the Earth Queen mentioned an airbender regiment. There must be someplace down here where they train them."

"That could be it," replied the dragon, "And Zeal, you need to calm down before you hurt yourself...or one of us."

Zeal huffed and slowed his breathing enough to calm himself. "For your sake...I will...but I will not rest until we get Yarred back."

"Fair enough."

"Mike," he commanded, "Find them again with that ability of yours; they shouldn't be too far."

The bat nodded and stomped his foot again, focusing on any vibrations that would indicate where the airbenders are. He soon found a number of bodies some distance away in a larger chamber and noted their heightened pulses. They were active, moving, fighting, and distressed. He also detected two other bodies in what appeared to be a small, confining well-like chamber nearby. One was clearly canid and vulpine; the other appeared reptilian and theropod, from what he could tell. He opened his eyes and smiled. "I found Yarred! Devin too!"

"Really," said Kye.

He nodded.

"Well let's go then!" The werewolf did not wait for Mike to lead the way, making the bat run in front to guide them.

Soon enough, they found the top part of the well-like chamber, which the Dai Li called 'The Pit.' Zeal looked down and, sure enough, a black fox and a light-grey raptor sat at the very bottom.

The two airbenders looked up as soon as they heard shuffling from above. "Zeal?" said Devin.

"Head's up!" He instantly slammed a fist against the grate above 'The Pit,' making it fall and clang against the ground on the bottom.

Both airbenders jumped up and out of the way to avoid getting hit. Yarred instantly looked up. "Hey! Watch it!"

"Can you get yourselves out?"

"Sure thing!" Yarred jumped, pushing air beneath him to give him a boost towards a higher point on the wall. After wall jumping up and out of 'The Pit,' he stretched his stiff muscles and looked down. "Ok bud! Your turn!"

Devin looked up, still sitting against the wall. "I-I dunno man. You know I'm not all that good."

"Hey! What's going on in there?" The Dai Li trainer looked in the cell door when he heard the commotion.

The raptor sunk lower into his posture as the weasel began to open the door.

"I got him!" Kye jumped down into 'The Pit,' trying to slide down the wall, but ended up falling flat on his face in the dirt below.

Devin giggled, but he jumped up once the door was fully opened. He quickly shot a gust of air at the agent to buy a little time for the German shepherd.

Once Kye got up and brushed the dirt of his tattered clothes and fur, he grabbed Devin by the wrist and yanked him close. He put that arm over his shoulder and held the raptor by the waist. "Ok! Ready?"

Devin quickly got his other arm around in front of Kye so that he was hugging him from the side. "R-Ready!"

Just when the Dai Li agent recovered, Kye held Devin with one arm, and pointed his other fist towards the ground. He soon spewed out a constant flame from his fist and

his feet, propelling them up and out of the hole. Once they were out, he let go of Devin, who still clung on.

"Umm...you can let go now," he said, giving a nervous chuckle.

"Sorry, sorry!" Devin instantly let go and threw his arms up, which he eventually relaxed.

Kye grinned. "It's alright, man."

"Alright!" Zeal interrupted, "We got what we came for, so let's get outta here already!" He began to head towards a direction which he thought was the way back.

Mike spoke up. "Uh, Zeal?"

He turned around and noticed everyone else heading in the opposite direction, to which the bat pointed with his thumb.

"This way?"

He snorted and followed the rest.

They were all surprised to exit the hidden maze under the Temple without conflict, though some suspected the Dai Li were busy getting the airbenders back in line. Soon enough, they were about to head outside the Temple when they heard Bear and Jeb yelling and growling outside. Their rage was accompanied with the sounds of spitting fire and rocks flying around. They also noticed an airship struggling to land near the Temple entrance, as if whoever was piloting it didn't know how to operate the craft.

Zeal charged out into the fray. Several temple guards were already knocked down, and the Dai Li had difficulty dodging and blocking Jeb and Bear's onslaught.

Meanwhile, the rest attempted to head straight for the airship, which eventually landed with the engine still running. They only made it a short distance without detection and were soon under attack as well.

Ryltohn and Kye held off the attackers while Mike threw up walls to block incoming rocks and still keep a path straight to the airship. Once they got close, the cabin door flew open. Ricky and a white Anglo-Nubian goat with brown head markings instantly ran out of the cabin. They both helped anyone who was nearby into the airship, while warding off attacks as well.

Jeb and Bear eventually made their way to the airship, though Bear wanted to keep fighting alongside Zeal. The marsh wolf entered the cabin, but the goat noticed Bear and Zeal were still fighting.

"Alright! That's everyone!" Yelled Jamie, "Zeal! Bear! Come on!"

The large bear heard him and toned down his aggression, but he noticed Zeal was on the brink of an animalistic rage, clearly not paying attention to the goat.

"I'll get him!" Bear ran towards the werewolf, knowing full-well his comrade was drawing too much power from the full moon and his rage. He roared as he ran, not caring who was attacking him by this point.

Zeal turned towards the charging bear at the last minute, only to be met with a solid punch to his face, followed by a head-butt.

Bear immediately grabbed the dazed and confused werewolf and hoisted him over his shoulder, running back to the airship as fast as he could. He was about to place Zeal into the cabin, but thought against it. "Where will you go from here?"

"The Northern Air Temple," replied Ricky, "Know where that is?"

Bear nodded, knowing it wasn't too far from their current location. Without a word, a sudden, bright flash appeared and he and the werewolf were gone.

The tiger shrugged. "Guess they'll meet us there then."

After he made sure everyone else was in, he shut the cabin door and went straight for the cockpit. He gave an irritated look to Jamie. "I'll drive this time."

"Dude. You *know* I can't pilot these things."

Ricky scoffed and leaned over the controls, getting the airship ready for takeoff. "I'm so thankful this wasn't made by Future Industries," he said to himself. Soon enough, they were airborne with a course set for the Northern Air Temple.