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WARRIORS

TIGERSTAR & SASHA



RETURN TO THE CLANS



ERIN HUNTER

3

WARRIORS

TIGERSTAR & SASHA

#3: RETURN TO
THE CLANS



WARRIORS

TIGERSTAR & SASHA

#3: RETURN TO
THE CLANS

CREATED BY
ERIN HUNTER

WRITTEN BY
DAN JOLLEY

ART BY
DON HUDSON



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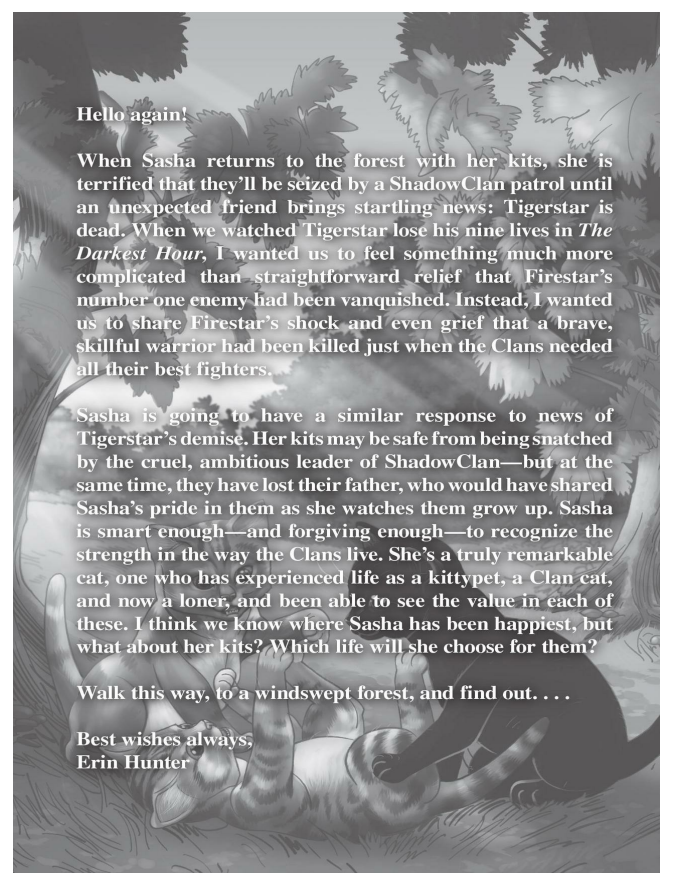
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First Edition



Hello again!

When Sasha returns to the forest with her kits, she is terrified that they'll be seized by a ShadowClan patrol until an unexpected friend brings startling news: Tigerstar is dead. When we watched Tigerstar lose his nine lives in *The Darkest Hour*, I wanted us to feel something much more complicated than straightforward relief that Firestar's number one enemy had been vanquished. Instead, I wanted us to share Firestar's shock and even grief that a brave, skillful warrior had been killed just when the Clans needed all their best fighters.

Sasha is going to have a similar response to news of Tigerstar's demise. Her kits may be safe from being snatched by the cruel, ambitious leader of ShadowClan—but at the same time, they have lost their father, who would have shared Sasha's pride in them as she watches them grow up. Sasha is smart enough—and forgiving enough—to recognize the strength in the way the Clans live. She's a truly remarkable cat, one who has experienced life as a kittypet, a Clan cat, and now a loner, and been able to see the value in each of these. I think we know where Sasha has been happiest, but what about her kits? Which life will she choose for them?

Walk this way, to a windswept forest, and find out. . . .

Best wishes always,
Erin Hunter

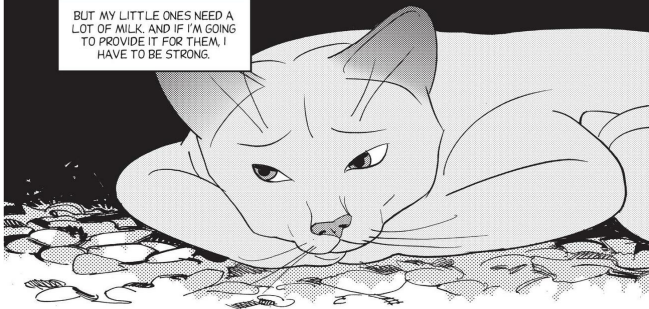




FOR A LITTLE WHILE...JUST A
FEW MOMENTS, REALLY...LIFE
SEEMS PERFECT.

I WISH IT COULD STAY
THAT WAY.

BUT MY LITTLE ONES NEED A
LOT OF MILK. AND IF I'M GOING
TO PROVIDE IT FOR THEM, I
HAVE TO BE STRONG.



WHICH MEANS I HAVE TO
HUNT. EVERY DAY.



AND PREY IS GETTING
SCARCER AND SCARCER.

THESE KITS ARE MY WHOLE
LIFE NOW. BUT...HAVE I DONE
THE RIGHT THING? I'M SO
COLD, AND TIRED...

AM I JUST BEING SELFISH,
WANTING TO RAISE THEM
IN THE WOODS?

I'VE NAMED THEM
WELL, I THINK.

HAWK...

...HIS SISTER
MOTH...

...AND THE OLDEST,
TADPOLE.

AS SOON AS THEY'RE OLD
ENOUGH, I'M TAKING THEM AS
FAR FROM SHADOWCLAN'S
BORDERS AS POSSIBLE.

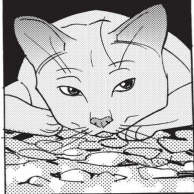
TIGERSTAR WILL NEVER SEE
THEM. HE WON'T BE A PART
OF THEIR LIVES AT ALL. I'LL
MAKE SURE OF THAT.

BUT I STILL WISH THEY
COULD SEE HOW STRONG
THEIR FATHER IS...HOW
COMMANDING...

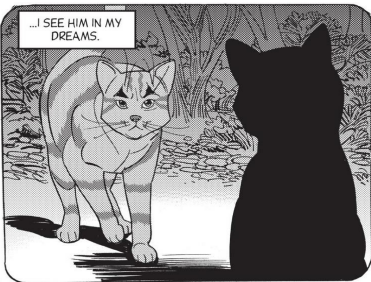


...HOW WONDERFUL
HE CAN BE.

I WON'T SEE HIM,
NOT EVER AGAIN, NOT WHEN
I'M AWAKE. BUT, MORE
NIGHTS THAN NOT...



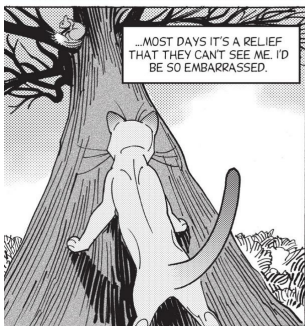
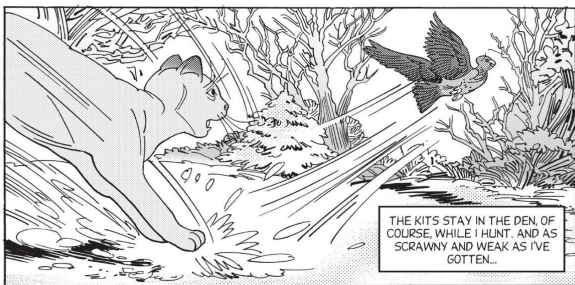
...I SEE HIM IN MY
DREAMS.



EVEN THERE, I CAN'T BEAR TO
TALK TO HIM. NOT AFTER WHAT
I LEARNED ABOUT HIM, ABOUT
HIS TRUE NATURE.



I KNOW IT'S ONLY A DREAM.
...BUT IT STILL HURTS.





THE SUN RISES AND SETS, RISES AND SETS...AND FINALLY...TOWARD THE END OF LEAF-BARE...



...I GET MY STRENGTH BACK.



C'MERE, YOU BUSHY-TAILED MORSEL...!



NO POINT IN RUNNING...

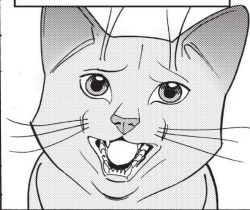


...YOU'RE JUST DELAYING THE INEVIT-



-ABLE

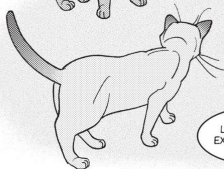
OH NO. OH NO NO NO, I'M IN
SHADOWCLAN TERRITORY! I DIDN'T
REALIZE I'D CROSSED THE BORDER!



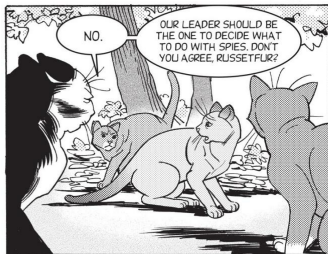
I THINK THIS MUST BE
THE WORST BLOODCLAN
SPY I'VE EVER SEEN. JUST
THREW HERSELF RIGHT
INTO OUR PAWS.



SEND HER BACK TO
BLOODCLAN IN LITTLE
PIECES.



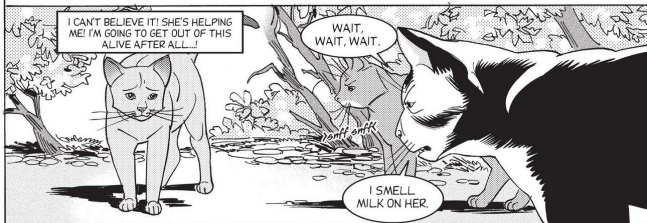
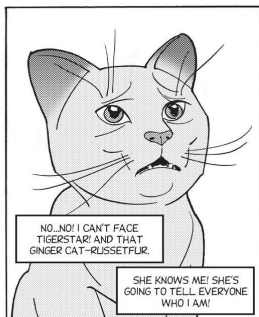
LET'S MAKE AN
EXAMPLE OF HER.



NO.

OUR LEADER SHOULD BE
THE ONE TO DECIDE WHAT
TO DO WITH SPIES. DON'T
YOU AGREE, RUSSETFUR?







OH, PLEASE, NO, DON'T...IF THEY FIND MY KITS, THEY'LL STEAL THEM, AND FORCE THEM TO BE SHADOWCLAN WARRIORS!



ESPECIALLY IF TIGERSTAR FINDS OUT THEY'RE HIS...!



I...I DID. I DID HAVE KITS.

THE COLD WAS...TOO MUCH FOR THEM.

THEY ALL DIED.



HOW HORRIBLE...!

YOU POOR THING, LISTEN...YOU CAN GO BACK WHERE YOU CAME FROM.

GO ON, NOW.

I CAN BARELY BREATHE,
MY HEART'S BEATING SO
FAST, BUT I TRY NOT TO
LET IT SHOW.



AT LEAST NOT SO
THE KITS CAN SEE.

MY CLOSE CALL MAKES
ME FEEL A BIT GENEROUS.
I DECIDE TO LET MY
KITTENS COME OUT AND
PLAY...

...A TREAT THEY DON'T GET
OFTEN ENOUGH.



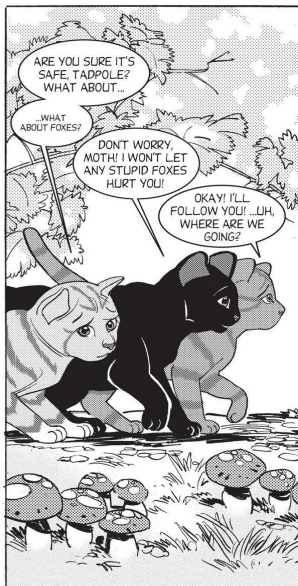
WE'RE FINALLY
OUT OF THE DEN!
COME ON, COME ON!

ARE YOU SURE IT'S
SAFE, TADPOLE?
WHAT ABOUT ...

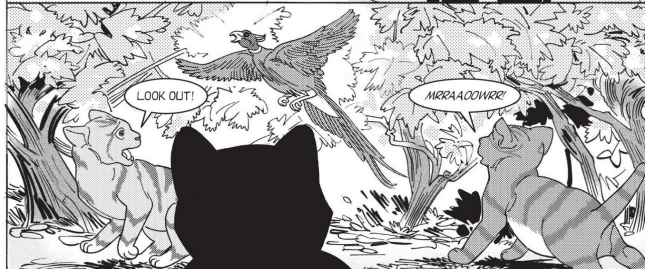
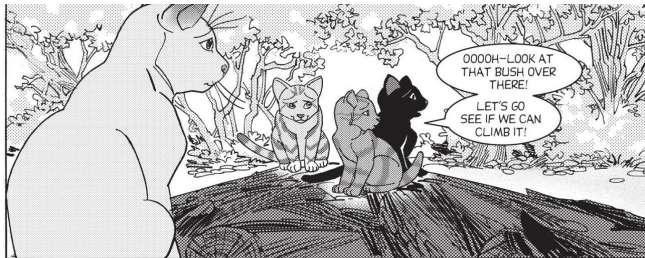
...WHAT
ABOUT FOXES?

DON'T WORRY,
MOTH! I WON'T LET
ANY STUPID FOXES
HURT YOU!

OKAY! I'LL
FOLLOW YOU! ...UH,
WHERE ARE WE
GOING?













THEY REALLY
ENJOYED
THEMSELVES
TODAY. BUT NOW
I WORRY.



WHAT IF THEIR SCENT
DRIFTED ALL THE WAY
TO SHADOWCLAN? WHAT
WOULD I DO THEN?

TELL US A
STORY, MAMA!
PLEASE?




DO YOU WANT TO HEAR
ABOUT THE FIRST TIME I
CAME TO THE FOREST?

YEAH!
YEAH!

ALL RIGHT...WELL...
I WAS SIX MOONS OLD,
AND I SNUCK AWAY FROM
MY HOUSEFOLK DURING
GREENLEAF.

I WALKED ALL THE
WAY TO THE EDGE OF THE
WOODS, AND I SAW MY FIRST
RABBIT...

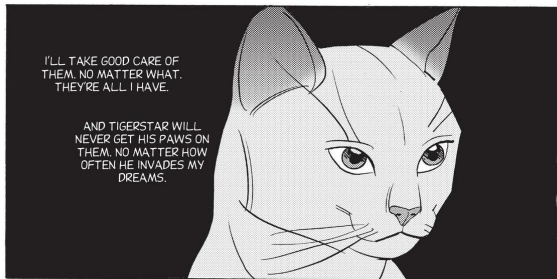
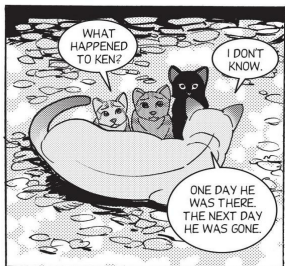



I ENDED UP
HIDING DOWN A HOLE...
BUT THEN KEN, ONE OF
MY HOUSEFOLK, CAME
LOOKING FOR ME.

HE FOUND ME WITH HIS
WALKING-STICK AND HE
CARRIED ME SAFELY BACK
HOME.



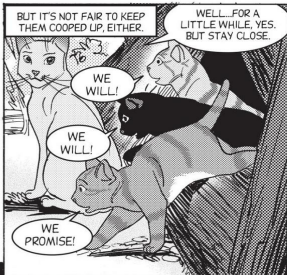
...BUT THEN I GOT CHASED BY
A FOX. I THINK NOW IT WAS
JUST A CUB, BUT I WAS VERY
SMALL, AND THE FOX WAS
SCARY!





THE NEXT DAY,
I CAN'T SHAKE
THE FEELING
THAT SOMEHOW
TIGERSTAR
KNOWS ABOUT
HIS KITS. I'M
SCARED TO
LEAVE THEM.

AWWWW, MAMA,
CAN'T WE JUST GO
OUT FOR A LITTLE
WHILE?



BUT IT'S NOT FAIR TO KEEP
THEM COOPED UP, EITHER.

WELL...FOR A
LITTLE WHILE, YES.
BUT STAY CLOSE.


WE
WILL!

WE
WILL!

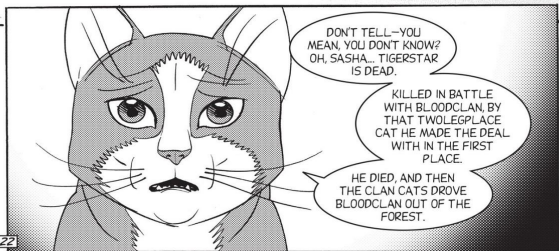
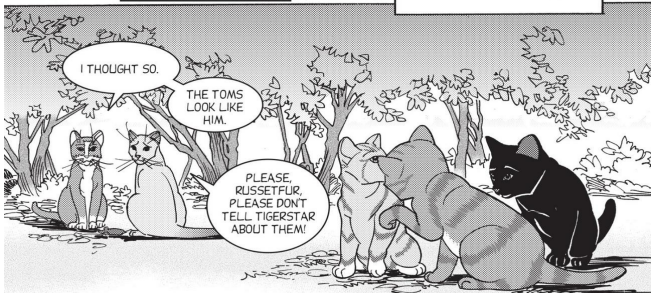
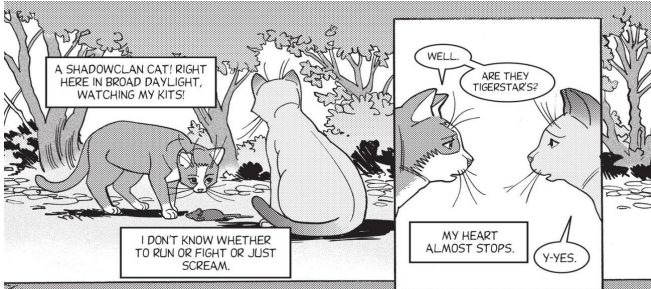
WE
PROMISE!



AND THEN...
ALMOST THE
VERY INSTANT
THE KITS GET OUT
OF EARSHOT...

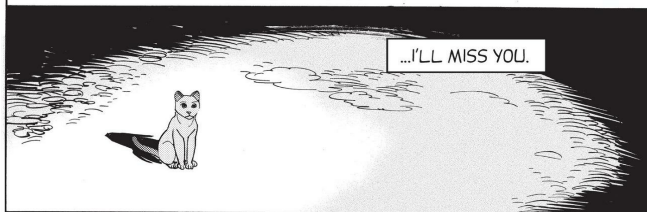
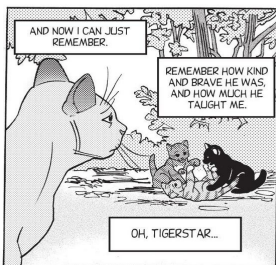
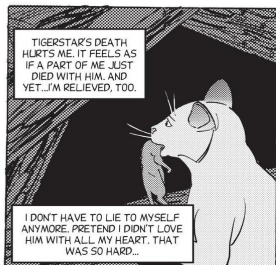


...MY WORST NIGHTMARE
COMES TRUE.









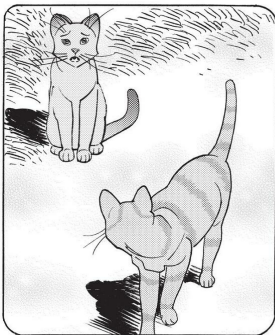
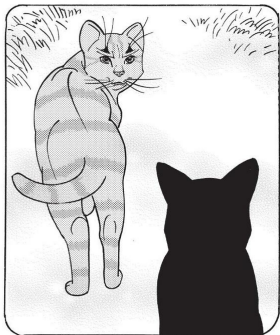


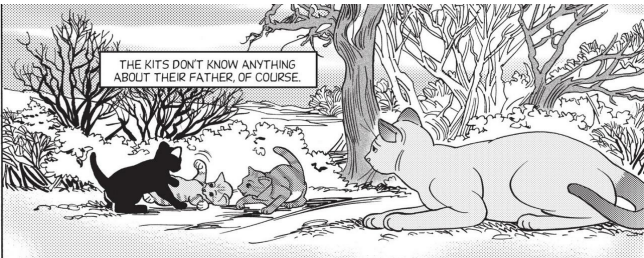
THAT NIGHT, WHEN I
FINALLY SLEEP, I TRY TO
SPEAK TO TIGERSTAR IN MY
DREAM...

...BUT HE
LEAVES ME.

I DON'T KNOW
WHAT IT
MEANS.

...I WISH
HE'D STAY.






THE KITS DON'T KNOW ANYTHING
ABOUT THEIR FATHER, OF COURSE.



I THINK ABOUT TELLING THEM.
CONSTANTLY I THINK ABOUT IT.

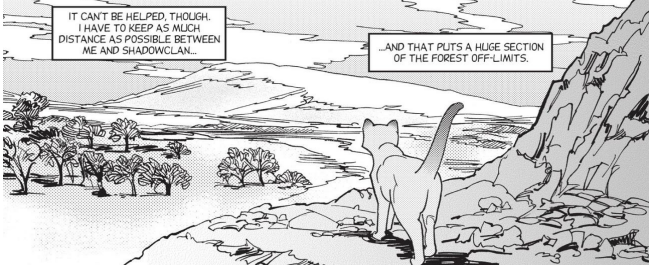
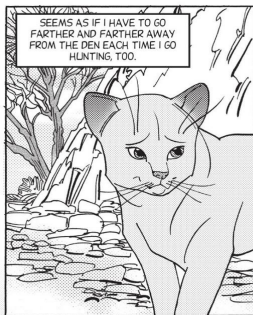



BUT THE TIME NEVER
SEEMS RIGHT.



INSTEAD I CONTENT MYSELF
WITH WATCHING THEM GROW.

THEY'RE SO PERFECT.






AT LEAST I KNOW I HAVE A
WARM DEN TO COME HOME TO,
AND THREE PRECIOUS LITTLE—



—MY OLD COLLAR? NO ONE'S
SUPPOSED TO SEE THIS—I CAN'T LET
ANYONE KNOW I USED TO BE
A KITTYPET.

THE KITS KNOW BETTER THAN TO
TAKE IT OUT OF THE DEN...THOUGH I
HAVE TO WONDER, *WHY BOTHER?*



I'VE TOLD YOU ALL
BEFORE. DON'T TAKE
THIS OUT OF THE DEN.

THAT'S FINE. IT'S FINE.
JUST...DON'T DO IT
ANYMORE.

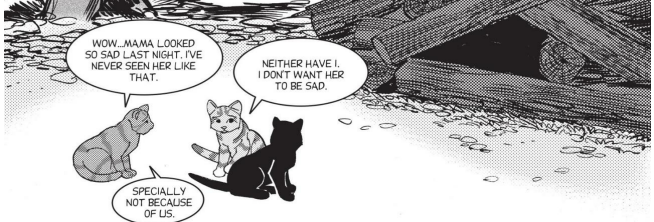
WE'RE SORRY...WE
DIDN'T MEAN TO—

ALL RIGHT?

EVEN WITH MY KITS
HERE...SOMETIMES I
FEEL SO ALONE...SO OLD
AND HELPLESS.

I WANT TIGERSTAR BACK.
I WANT KEN BACK.

BUT THE BEST I CAN HOPE
FOR IS JUST TO MAKE IT
THROUGH EACH DAY.



WOW...MAMA LOOKED
SO SAD LAST NIGHT. I'VE
NEVER SEEN HER LIKE
THAT.

NEITHER HAVE I.
I DON'T WANT HER
TO BE SAD.

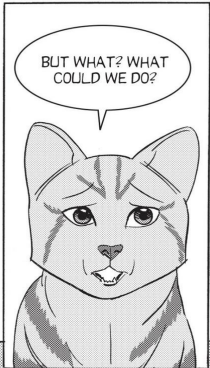
SPECIALLY
NOT BECAUSE
OF US.




I DON'T THINK
MAMA WAS SAD
BECAUSE OF US.
I JUST THINK
SHE FEELS BAD...

...CAUSE SHE HATES LIVING
IN THE WOODS, AND SHE
MISSES HER OLD HOUSEFOLK
FROM WHEN SHE LIVED IN
TWOLEGPLACE.

WE'VE GOTTA DO
SOMETHING.



BUT WHAT? WHAT
COULD WE DO?

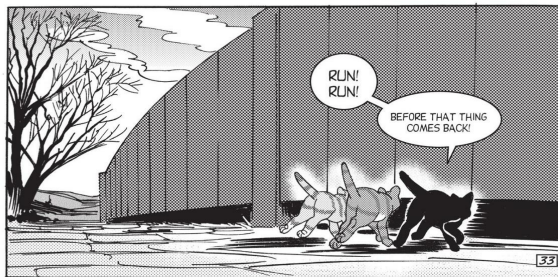
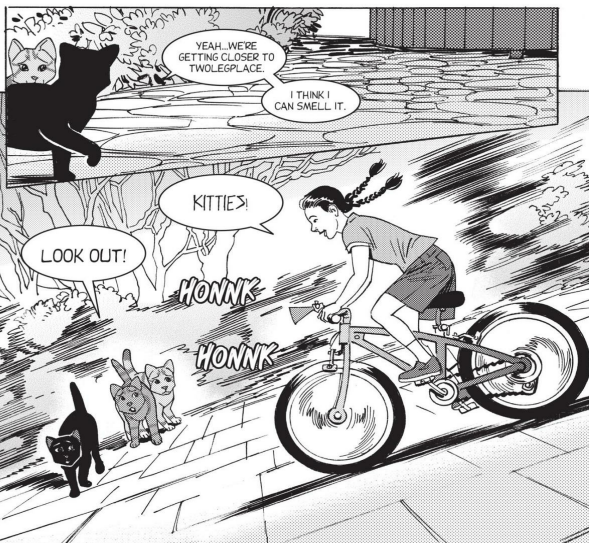


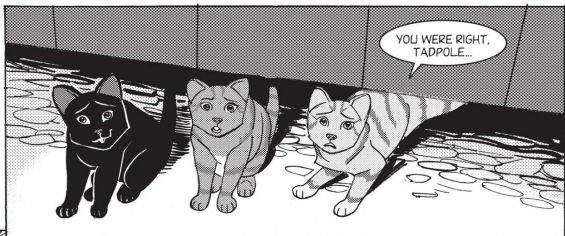
I KNOW! NEXT TIME
SHE GOES OUT TO
HUNT...

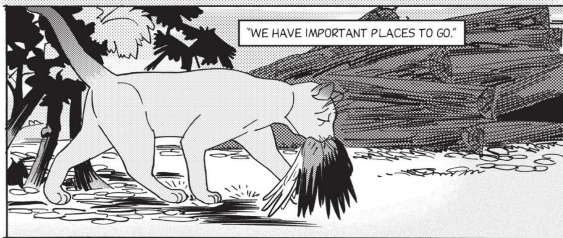
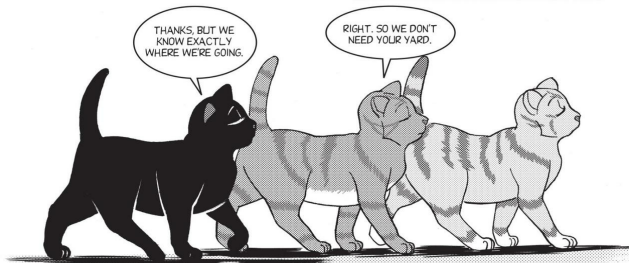
...WE COULD GO
AND FIND KEN!













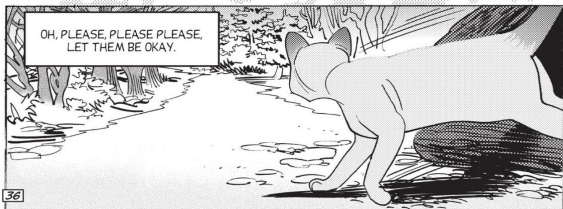
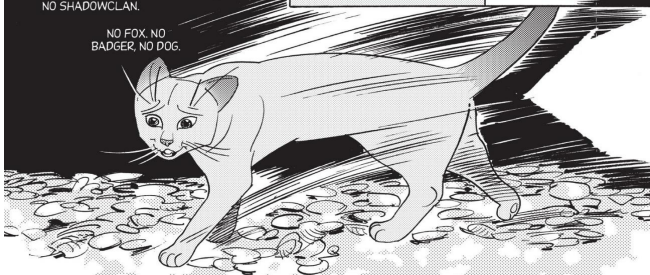
NAPTIME'S
OVER, KITLINGS.
MAMA'S GOT A
NICE BIRD FOR Y—



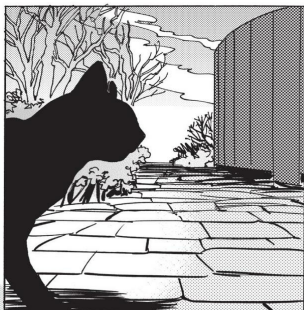
KITS?

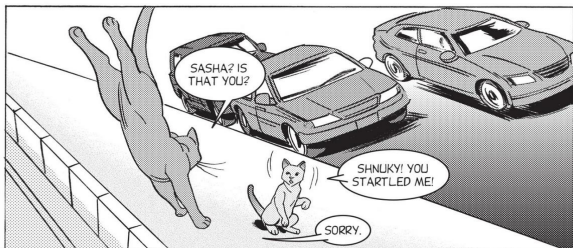
NO SHADOWCLAN.

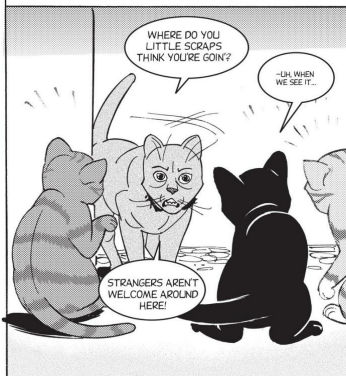
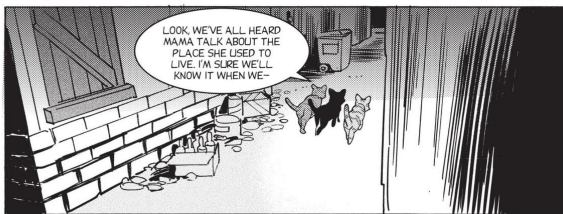
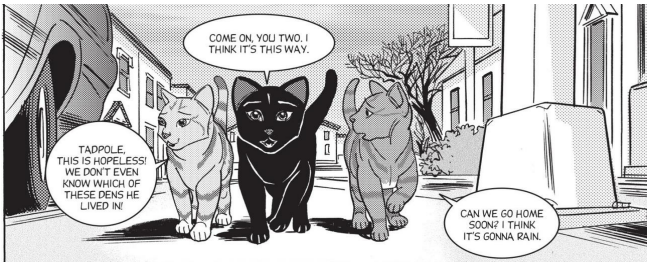
NO FOX. NO
BADGER. NO DOG.

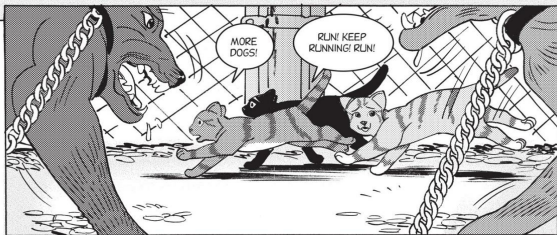
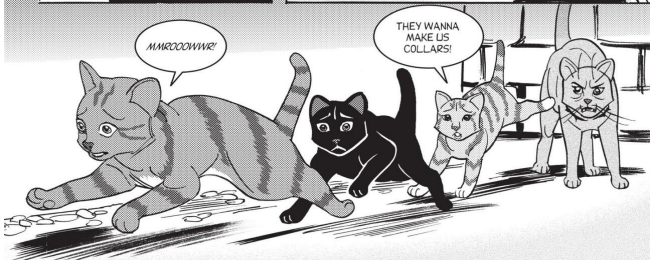
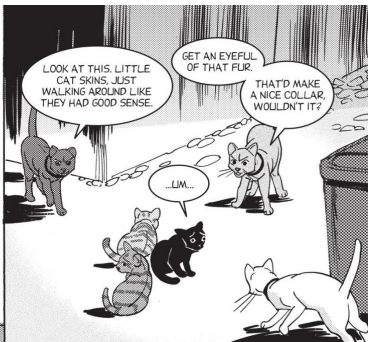


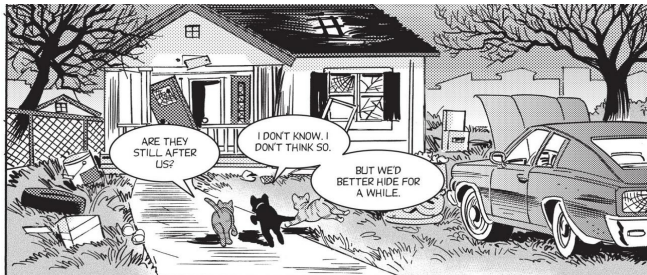
OH, PLEASE, PLEASE PLEASE,
LET THEM BE OKAY.

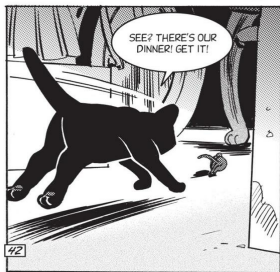
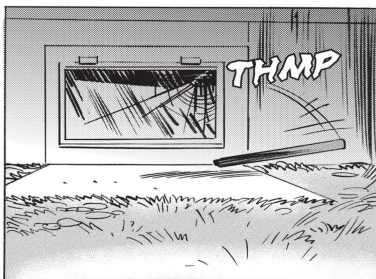


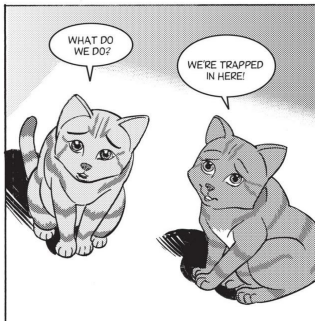
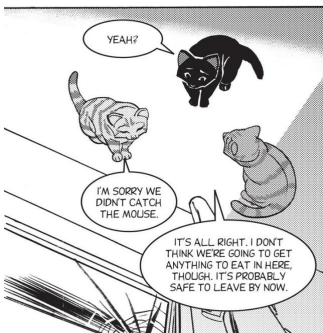


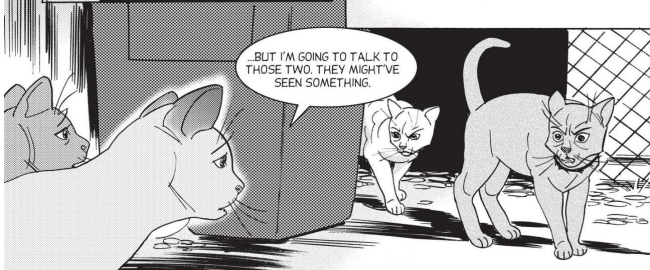
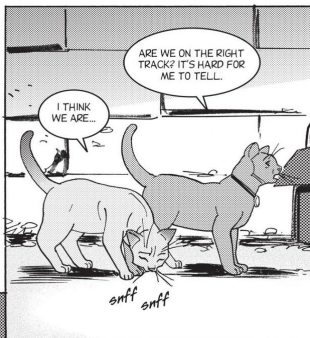
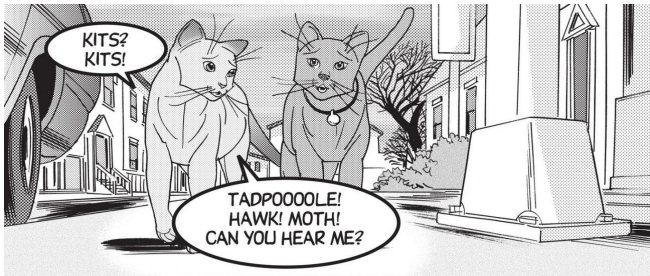















WELL, LOOK,
SEE? IT'S RAINING
NOW.



MAYBE IT'S GOOD
THAT WE'RE IN HERE.
THIS WAY AT LEAST
WE WON'T GET WET.

HEY...DO YOU HEAR
SOMETHING?

YEAH-I THINK IT'S
COMING FROM THAT
LONG METAL THING
OVER THERE.



SWSHH
SWSHH
SWSSSH

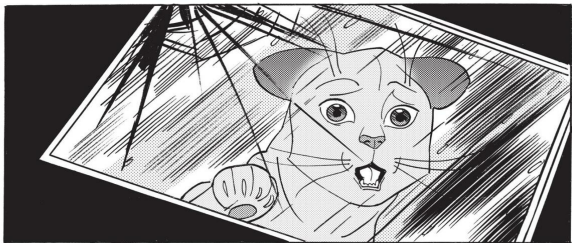
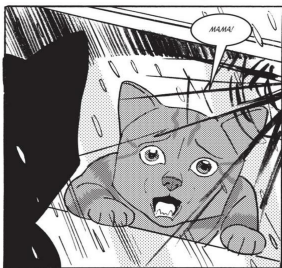
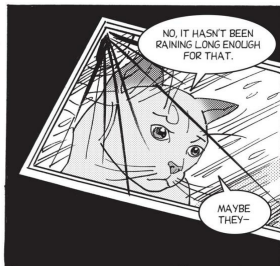
WHAT IS IT?

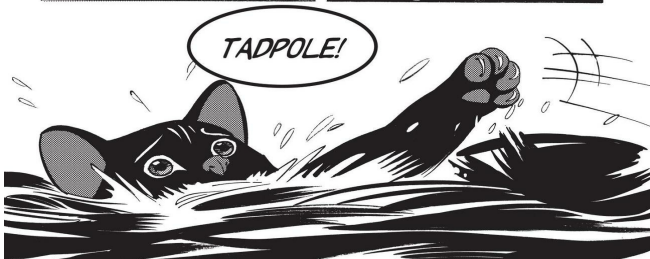
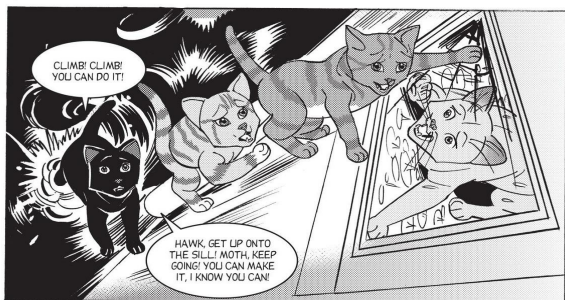
TADPOLE?



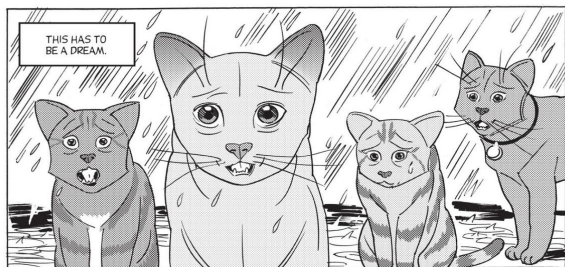
CLANK

WOOSSSSHH









SUDDENLY I'M NOT
SURE...EXACTLY...
WHERE I AM.

HOME. HAVE TO
GET...HOME. TAKE
MY KITS...

MY KITS...

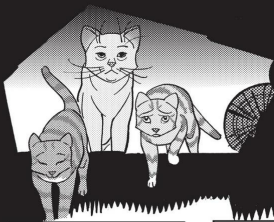
SASHA, I AM...I AM SO
SORRY. I, I DON'T KNOW
WHAT TO SAY.... WOULD
YOU LIKE TO COME
BACK WITH ME?

MY HOUSEFOLK
WOULD, UH... PROBABLY
LIKE TO MEET YOU...
GET THE KITTENS SOME
GOOD FOOD...

NO. THANK YOU,
BUT NO. WE HAVE A
HOME. IN THE WOODS.
HAVE TO GO HOME...

TAKE MY KITS.

GO HOME.



I CAN'T FEEL ANYTHING.
NO PAIN...NO HUNGER...NO
GRIEF...NOTHING.

I CAN'T GO OUT TO
HUNT. ...
I CAN'T EVEN SPEAK.

NEITHER HAWK NOR MOTH
SEEMS TO WANT TO TALK,
THOUGH. I KNOW WE SHOULD...

...BUT FOR NOW I'M
GRATEFUL FOR THE
SILENCE. I JUST DON'T
HAVE THE ENERGY.

I FEEL SLEEP COME
FOR ME. I DON'T TRY
TO RESIST.



AND I GO TO THE PLACE I
ALMOST ALWAYS GO. I'M
GLAD HE'S THERE THIS TIME.

TIGERSTAR...
YOU KNOW ABOUT
TADPOLE?

...YES.

IS HE...IS HE
HERE WITH
YOU?



NO, SASHA.

BUT HE IS
SAFE NOW.


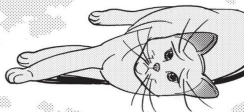


BUT-IS
HE-WAIT!

WAIT...

IN THE DAYS AFTER TADPOLE'S
ACCIDENT, I START TO FEEL
CLOSE TO DEATH MYSELF.

I HAVEN'T EATEN IN SO LONG...
AND WHAT LITTLE I CATCH, I GIVE
TO HAWK AND MOTH. I'M GETTING
WEAKER AND WEAKER.



HOW CAN I FEED MY
KITS IF I HAVEN'T THE
STRENGTH TO HUNT?

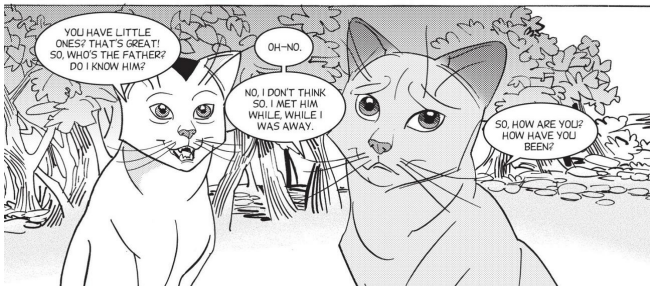
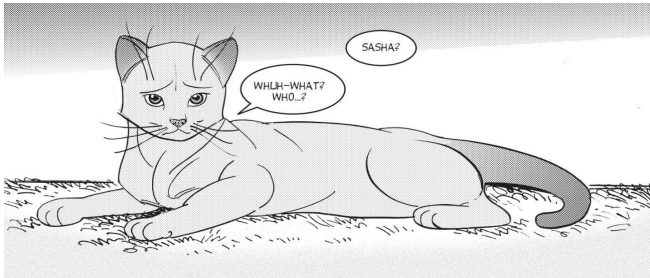
I'VE FAILED. I'M A
TERRIBLE MOTHER.

FIRST KEN... THEN TIGERSTAR...
AND NOW TADPOLE.

IT'S TOO MUCH. I CAN'T
TAKE IT. I JUST...



...I JUST DON'T HAVE
ROOM ENOUGH FOR
THE HURT.





OH, IT'S BEEN SOMETHING, LET ME TELL YOU! YOU GOT OUT OF THE FOREST JUST IN TIME!

YOU KNOW ABOUT THE WHOLE BLOODCLAN THING, HOW THEY TRIED TO TAKE OVER THE FOREST, ALL OF THAT?

I'VE-A LITTLE. I'VE HEARD A LITTLE BIT.

"I WAS THERE! WELL, I DIDN'T FIGHT, OF COURSE, 'CAUSE, Y'KNOW, NOT IN A CLAN, RIGHT? BUT I SAW THE WHOLE THING!"

"THERE WAS THIS HUGE BATTLE, CATS FIGHTING ALL OVER THE PLACE..."

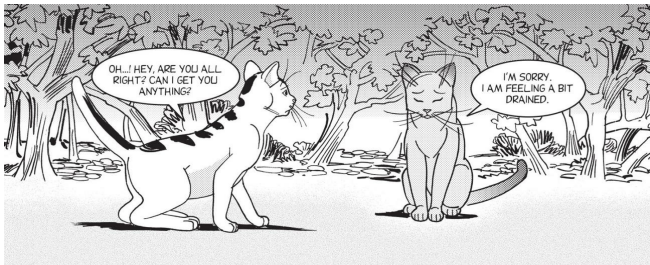
AND THE LEADER OF THE TWOLEPLACE CATS, RIGHT? WELL, THIS CLAN LEADER, THIS BIG HUGE CAT, WAS ABOUT TO TRY TO KILL HIM...

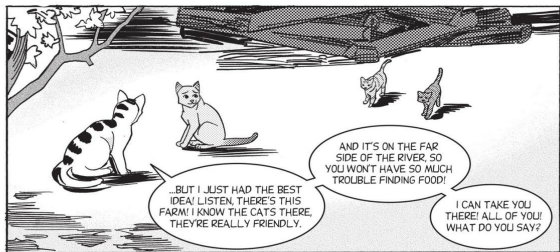
...AND HE JUMPED—BUT EVEN THOUGH THE OTHER CAT WAS LITTLE, HE HAD SOME KIND OF CRAZY LONG CLAWS...

...AND THE LITTLE ONE JUST RIPPED THAT BIG BROWN CLAN CAT RIGHT OPEN! ALMOST TORE HIM IN HALF!

THAT'S TIGERSTAR—HE'S DESCRIBING TIGERSTAR'S DEATH!

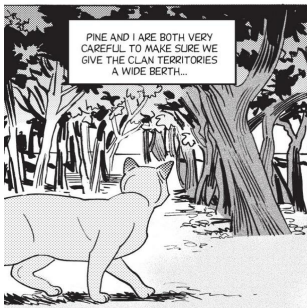
I CAN'T LET PINE KNOW THE TRUTH...!



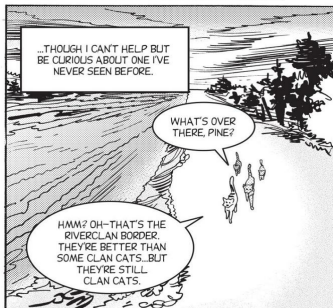




IT FEELS GOOD TO MOVE
AGAIN. AND TO HAVE A PLAN.



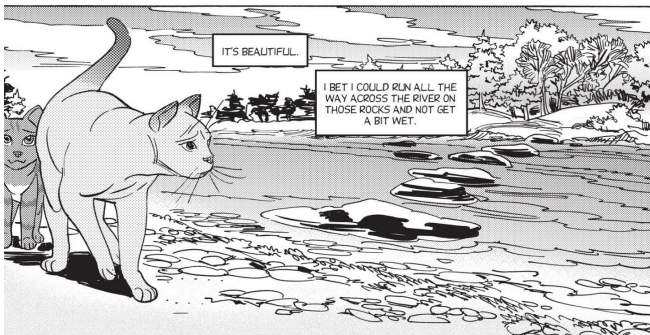
PINE AND I ARE BOTH VERY
CAREFUL TO MAKE SURE WE
GIVE THE CLAN TERRITORIES
A WIDE BERTH...



...THOUGH I CAN'T HELP BUT
BE CURIOUS ABOUT ONE I'VE
NEVER SEEN BEFORE.


WHAT'S OVER
THERE, PINE?

HMM? OH-THAT'S THE
RIVERCLAN BORDER.
THEY'RE BETTER THAN
SOME CLAN CATS...BUT
THEY'RE STILL
CLAN CATS.



IT'S BEAUTIFUL...

I BET I COULD RUN ALL THE
WAY ACROSS THE RIVER ON
THOSE ROCKS AND NOT GET
A BIT WET.



BUT WE LEAVE THE RIVERCLAN TERRITORY
BEHIND US...AND EVENTUALLY PINE SPIES OUR
DESTINATION AHEAD.

WE'RE ALMOST
THERE!



JUST CROSS THIS
BRIDGE...



...AND
THERE
IT IS.

WHAT'D I TELL
YOU? HAMMM?



ISN'T IT
SOMETHING?



HE'S RIGHT. IT IS
BEAUTIFUL..

HEY, IT'S
PINE!

GOOD TO SEE
YOU, PINE!



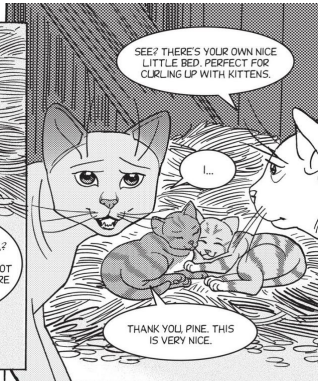
AND THE CATS DO LOOK
VERY HEALTHY HERE.



BUT IMMEDIATELY I GET THE SENSE THAT
PINE'S PERFECT FARM IS FAR TOO GOOD
TO BE TRUE.



AT LEAST FOR MY KITS AND ME.



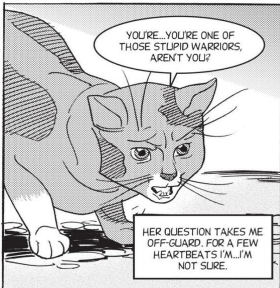






BESIDES.

I'VE JUST GIVEN
HER A LIFETIME'S
WORTH OF
HUMILIATION.



YOU'RE...YOU'RE ONE OF
THOSE STUPID WARRIORS,
AREN'T YOU?

HER QUESTION TAKES ME
OFF-GUARD. FOR A FEW
HEARTBEATS I'M...I'M
NOT SURE.

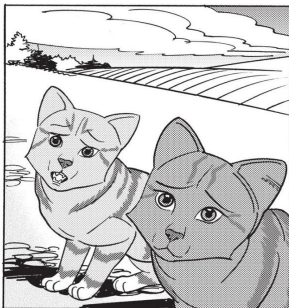
WARRIORS...AM I A
WARRIOR? MY KITS
ARE HALFCLAN, BUT...
WHAT AM I?

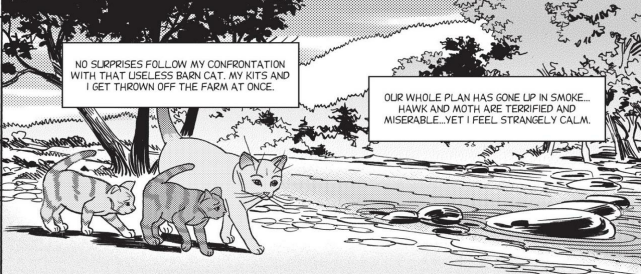
BUT THEN...THEN MY
TIME IN SHADOWCLAN
COMES BACK TO ME.
AND I KNOW.



THAT'S
RIGHT.


I AM A
WARRIOR.





NO SURPRISES FOLLOW MY CONFRONTATION WITH THAT USELESS BARN CAT. MY KITS AND I GET THROWN OFF THE FARM AT ONCE.

OUR WHOLE PLAN HAS GONE UP IN SMOKE... HAWK AND MOTH ARE TERRIFIED AND MISERABLE...YET I FEEL STRANGELY CALM.



BECAUSE, FOR WHATEVER REASON, IT'S BECOME CLEAR TO ME WHAT WE NEED TO DO, AND WHERE WE NEED TO DO IT.

MAMA! MAMA, ISN'T THIS WHERE THE RIVERCLAN CATS ARE?



WOULDN'T THEY BE MAD AT US FOR SNOOPING, MAMA?

I DON'T WANT ANYBODY ELSE MAD AT US. AND HAWK'S EAR HURTS.

IT'S NOT THAT BAD, MOTH.

...IT ONLY HURTS A LITTLE.



THE TWO OF YOU NEED TO BE QUIET NOW, AND LISTEN VERY CAREFULLY.

IT'S TIME TO TELL YOU ABOUT YOUR FATHER.



"HE WAS A GREAT,
STRONG WARRIOR. HE
WAS THE LEADER OF
SHADOWCLAN..."



"...AND HE WAS THE
BRAVEST CAT I
EVER MET."

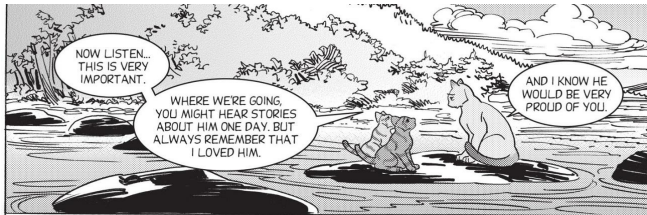


HEARING ABOUT THEIR
FATHER IS HELPING THEM.
THAT MUCH IS OBVIOUS.

ALL BY HIMSELF?

I JUST HOPE THEY'RE
BRAVE ENOUGH TO FACE
WHAT'S COMING NEXT.

WOW...





UH...MAMA?



I'M NOT CRAZY ABOUT THIS WHOLE IDEA...BUT I'LL DO ANYTHING TO PROVIDE A GOOD HOME FOR MY LITTLE ONES.

AND SINCE THE FARM IS OUT OF THE QUESTION NOW, IT'S NOT AS IF WE HAVE A LOT OF CHOICES.



I AM LEOPARDSTAR, LEADER OF RIVERCLAN. YOU ARE TRESPASSING ON RIVERCLAN TERRITORY.

WHO ARE YOU? AND WHAT DO YOU WANT?

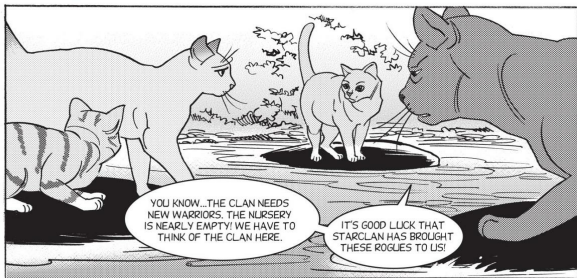
SPEAK!



MY NAME IS SASHA. THESE ARE MY KITS, HAWK AND MOTH.

I'M A ROGUE FALLEN ON HARD TIMES...I'VE ALREADY LOST ONE STRONG KIT THIS LEAF-BARE. WE HAVE NO HOME.

I OFFER MYSELF AND MY KITS UP TO RIVERCLAN.







...OR JUST ANOTHER STOP?



EVEN THOUGH IT DOESN'T LOOK THE SAME, THIS PLACE REMINDS ME SO MUCH OF SHADOWCLAN.

IS THAT A GOOD THING? I HOPE SO.



SASHA, HAWK, MOTH.

WELCOME TO RIVERCLAN!

IT'S A LITTLE LIKE A WHIRLWIND, ALL THE NEW CATS, ALL THE NEW NAMES.




FIRST IS RIVERCLAN'S MEDICINE CAT, MUDFLUR.

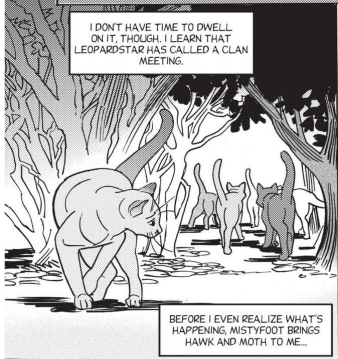
NASTY LITTLE RIP YOU HAVE THERE, HAWK.

IT DOESN'T HURT. I'M TOUGH. I'M NOT SCARED!





...AND IN THE MORNING, MY HEART IS SO HEAVY WITH GRIEF AND LONELINESS, IT FEELS LIKE A STONE IN MY CHEST.



I DON'T HAVE TIME TO DWELL ON IT, THOUGH. I LEARN THAT LEOPARDSTAR HAS CALLED A CLAN MEETING.


BEFORE I EVEN REALIZE WHAT'S HAPPENING, MISTYFOOT BRINGS HAWK AND MOTH TO ME...



...AND THEY SHEPHERD US RIGHT UP ONTO THE ROCK NEXT TO LEOPARDSTAR.

TODAY WE WELCOME THREE NEW ADDITIONS TO RIVERCLAN!

HAWK AND MOTH ARE STILL TOO YOUNG, BUT ACCORDING TO OUR TRADITIONS...



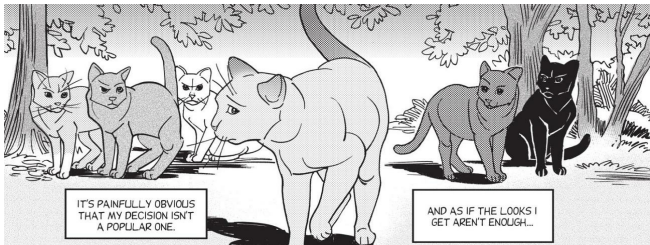
...SASHA, YOU NOW HAVE THE CHANCE TO GAIN YOUR OWN WARRIOR NAME.

I SAY I'M NOT READY, BUT IT'S A LIE. I CANNOT TAKE A WARRIOR NAME.



WELL.

WELL, YES, THAT'S QUITE ALL RIGHT. THERE'LL BE PLENTY OF TIME FOR SUCH THINGS.



IT'S PAINFULLY OBVIOUS
THAT MY DECISION ISN'T
A POPULAR ONE.

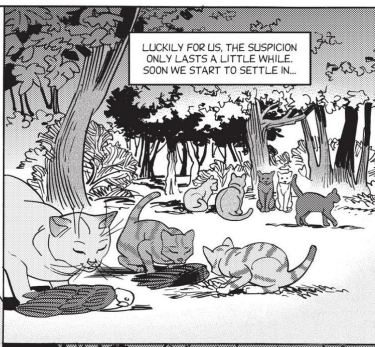
AND AS IF THE LOOKS I
GET AREN'T ENOUGH...



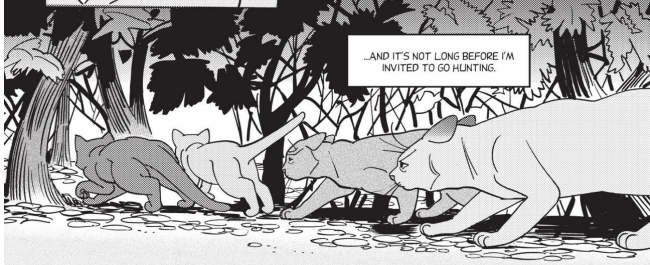
...SOME OF THEM WHISPER LOUDLY
ENOUGH FOR ME TO HEAR THE
WORDS.

...OUTSIDERS...HOW DO
WE KNOW THEY'LL BE
LOYAL?

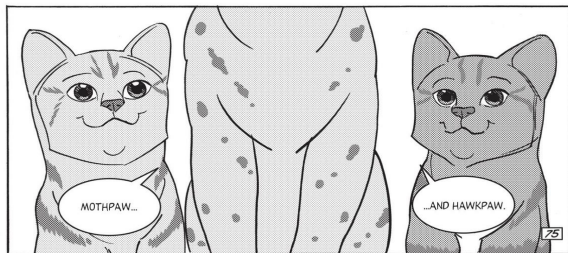
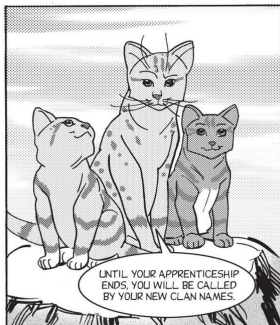
THEY COULD BE
BLOODCLAN SPIES!

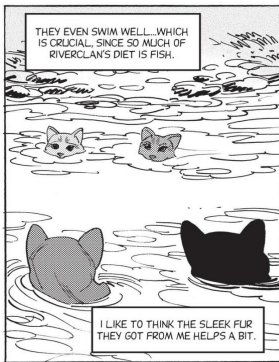
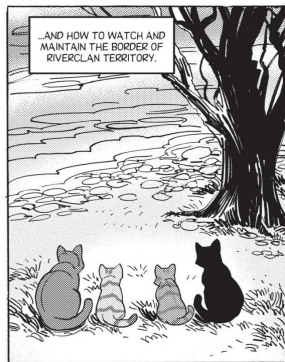
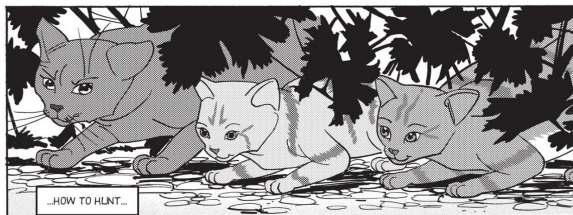
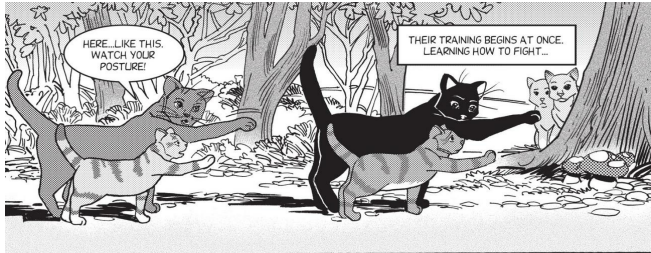


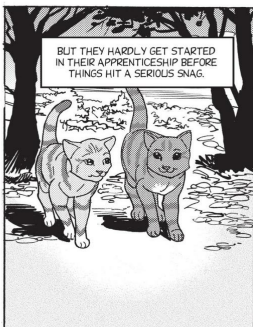
LUCKILY FOR US, THE SUSPICION
ONLY LASTS A LITTLE WHILE.
SOON WE START TO SETTLE IN...

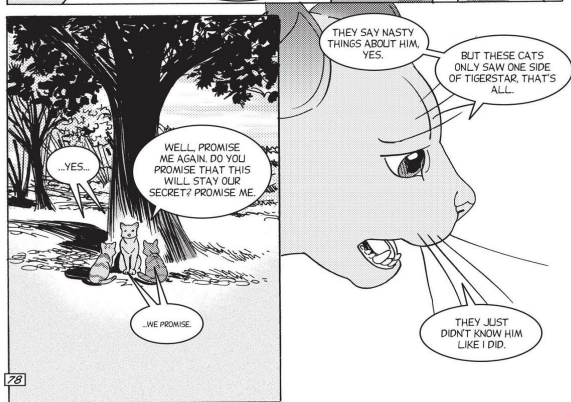
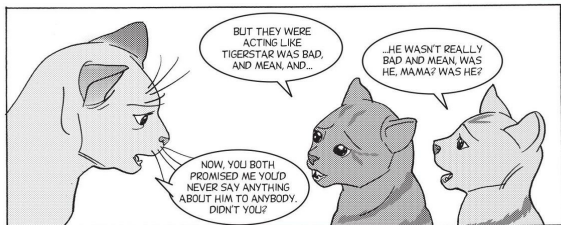
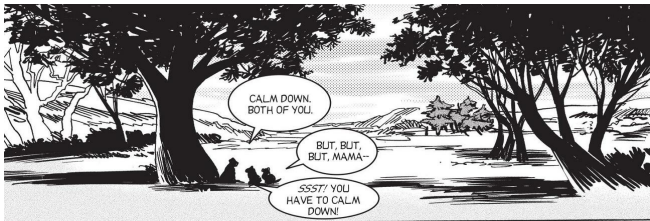


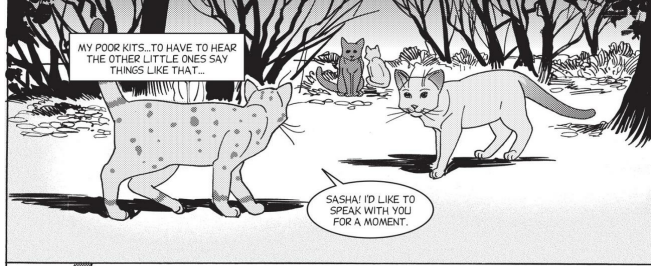
...AND IT'S NOT LONG BEFORE I'M
INVITED TO GO HUNTING.











MY POOR KITS...TO HAVE TO HEAR
THE OTHER LITTLE ONES SAY
THINGS LIKE THAT...

SASHA! I'D LIKE TO
SPEAK WITH YOU
FOR A MOMENT.



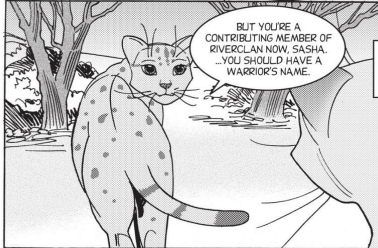
YES,
LEOPARDSTAR?

I THINK IT'S TIME
WE GAVE YOU
YOUR WARRIOR
NAME.

THE GATHERING IS
COMING UP SOON, WHEN
ALL FOUR CLANS GATHER
AT FORTREES. WE COULD
DO IT THEN.



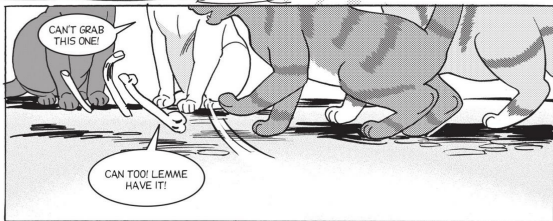
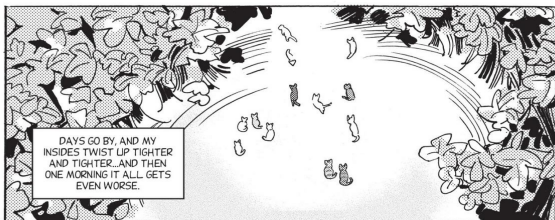
I SAY THAT I'M IN
MOURNING FOR MY LOST
KIT TO BUY SOME TIME.



BUT YOU'RE A
CONTRIBUTING MEMBER OF
RIVERCLAN NOW, SASHA.
...YOU SHOULD HAVE A
WARRIOR'S NAME.

WHAT DO I DO NOW? I'D ALL
BUT FORGOTTEN ABOUT
THIS NAMING.

AND IF I GO TO A GATHERING,
SHADOWCLAN WILL
RECOGNIZE ME. THEY'LL
TELL EVERYONE...AND MY
KITS WILL BE IN DANGER!

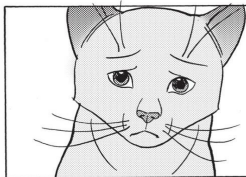
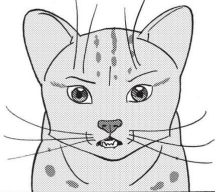




LEOPARDSTAR EXPLAINS THINGS TO US FOR A LONG TIME. ABOUT HOW MUCH PAIN AND SUFFERING TIGERSTAR HAD CAUSED THEM.

I HAD NO IDEA HE WAS SO CLOSELY INVOLVED WITH RIVERCLAN.

I'M RELIEVED—AND PROUD—THAT NEITHER OF MY KITS MAKES A SOUND WHILE LEOPARDSTAR TELLS US THESE THINGS.



I WAS GOING TO FIGURE OUT SOME REASON NOT TO GO TO THE GATHERING.

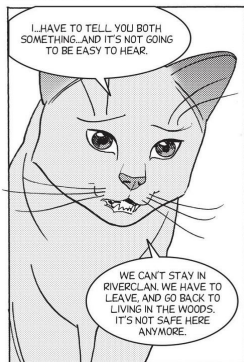
I THOUGHT I COULD KEEP THE SECRET OF MY KITS' FATHER AS LONG AS I COULD STAY AWAY FROM SHADOWCLAN.

BUT NOW...



NOW I KNOW WE CAN'T STAY
HERE. HAWKPAW AND MOTHPAW
ARE TOO VULNERABLE.

I DON'T LOOK FORWARD TO
TELLING THEM.



I HAVE TO TELL YOU BOTH
SOMETHING...AND IT'S NOT GOING
TO BE EASY TO HEAR.

WE CAN'T STAY IN
RIVERCLAN. WE HAVE TO
LEAVE, AND GO BACK TO
LIVING IN THE WOODS.
IT'S NOT SAFE HERE
ANYMORE.



NO! NO! I DON'T WANT TO LEAVE!
I WANT TO STAY, AND BE A
WARRIOR! MAMA-MAMA, DON'T
MAKE ME LEAVE...!

MAMA, I CAN'T
LEAVE HAWK. I
MADE A PROMISE.

IF HE
STAYS...I NEED TO
STAY, TOO.



WE WON'T MENTION
TIGERSTAR'S NAME.

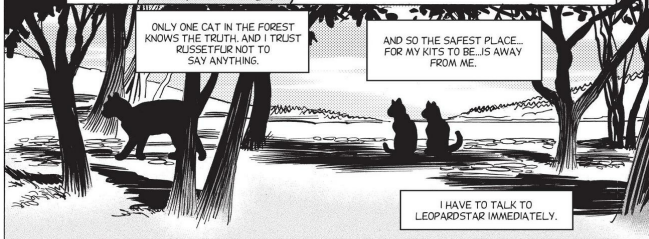
WE WON'T,
EVER!

AND...IF WE DON'T TELL...
HOW ELSE WOULD ANY
CAT FIND OUT WHO OUR
FATHER WAS?



I START TO TELL THEM WE'VE
GOT NO CHOICE, AND THAT WE'RE
LEAVING, NO MATTER WHAT...
WHEN IT HITS ME.

NO ONE WILL EVER KNOW
TIGERSTAR IS THEIR FATHER...IF
I'M NOT AROUND FOR ANYONE TO
RECOGNIZE.



ONLY ONE CAT IN THE FOREST
KNOWS THE TRUTH. AND I TRUST
RUSSETFLUR NOT TO
SAY ANYTHING.

AND SO THE SAFEST PLACE...
FOR MY KITS TO BE...IS AWAY
FROM ME.

I HAVE TO TALK TO
LEOPARDSTAR IMMEDIATELY.



WELL, LEOPARDSTAR...
YOU SEE...I'M SORRY, THIS
IS HARD FOR ME TO SAY. I
OWE YOU SO MUCH.

BUT LIVING BY THE
WARRIOR CODE ISN'T
FOR ME. HAWKPAW AND
MOTHPAW WILL STAY.

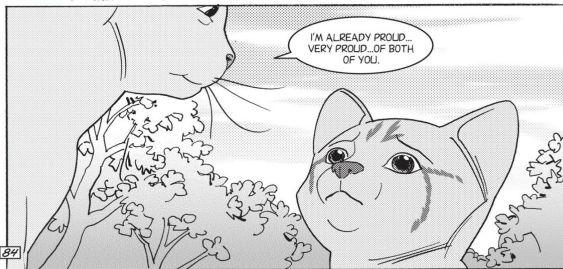
BUT I THINK IT WOULD
BE BEST THAT I GO.




I DON'T WANT TO LOSE
YOU, SASHA, BUT...
I KNOW MY CATS.

WITH ALL THE
SUSPICIONS AMONG THEM
NOW, I DON'T KNOW THAT
YOU'D HAVE EVER BEEN
TRULY ACCEPTED.

YOU HAVE MY
APPROVAL TO LEAVE.
AND MY THANKS...FOR
LETTING THE TWO LITTLE
ONES STAY WITH US.






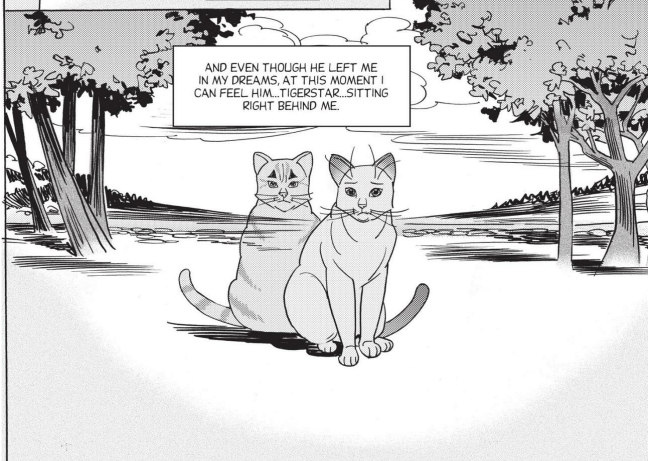
THERE GO THE TWO HALVES
OF MY HEART.

IT'S KILLING ME TO LEAVE
THEM BEHIND.

BUT I KNOW THEY'LL
BE STRONG...



...BECAUSE THEIR
FATHER'S BLOOD RUNS
IN THEIR VEINS.



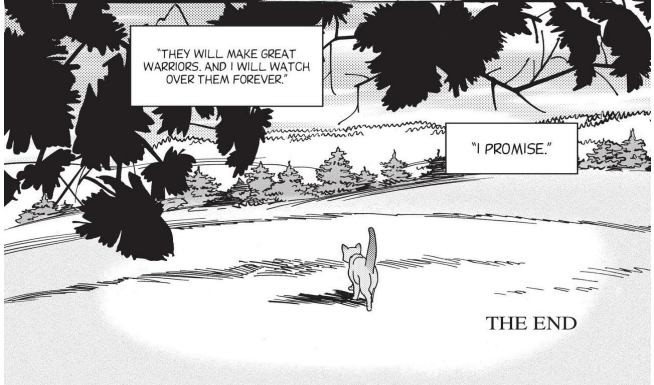
AND EVEN THOUGH HE LEFT ME
IN MY DREAMS, AT THIS MOMENT I
CAN FEEL HIM...TIGERSTAR...SITTING
RIGHT BEHIND ME.



AND AS I TURN TO GO, HIS VOICE
COMES TO ME...WHISPERING IN MY
EARS AND IN MY MIND.



"I AM PROUD OF MY CHILDREN."



"THEY WILL MAKE GREAT
WARRIORS, AND I WILL WATCH
OVER THEM FOREVER."

"I PROMISE."

THE END

ERIN HUNTER

is inspired by a love of cats and a fascination with the ferocity of the natural world. As well as having great respect for nature in all its forms, Erin enjoys creating rich, mythical explanations for animal behavior. She is also the author of the Seekers series.

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WARRIORS

RAVENPAW'S PATH



SHATTERED PEACE

HARPER COLLINS

ERIN HUNTER

1

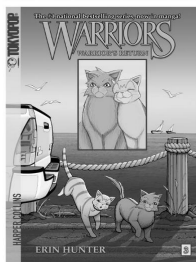
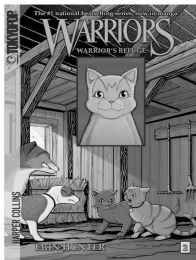
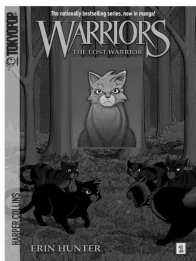
K E E P W A T C H F O R

WARRIORS

RAVENPAW'S PATH

#1: SHATTERED PEACE

Ravenpaw has settled into life on the farm, away from the forest and Tigerstar's evil eye. He knows that leaving the warrior Clans was the right choice, and he appreciates his quiet days and peaceful nights with his best friend, Barley. But when five rogue cats from Twoleg-place come to the barn seeking shelter, Ravenpaw's new life is threatened. He and Barley must try to find a way to overpower the rogues—before they lose their home for good.



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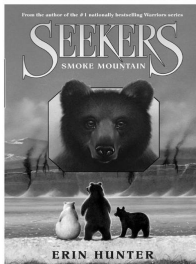
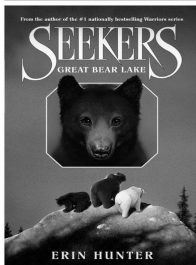
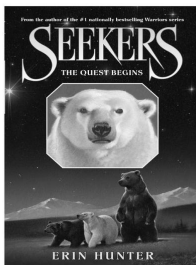
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The secret of Hollyleaf's, Jayfeather's, and Lionblaze's true identities has been revealed, but one shocking question remains unanswered. Now, in the harshest days of leaf-bare, Clanmate turns upon Clanmate, danger lurks behind familiar faces, and one more warrior may be lost forever. . . .

Dead bracken rustled beneath Lionblaze's paws as he stalked through the forest. Above the leafless trees, the sky was dark and empty. Terror raised the hairs on the young warrior's neck, and he shivered from ears to tail-tip. This is a place that has never known the light of StarClan.

He padded on, skirting clumps of fern and nosing under bushes, but he found no sight or scent of other cats. *I've had enough of this*, he thought, tugging his tail free from a trailing bramble. Panic sparked in his mind as he stared at the darkness that stretched away between the trees. *What if I never find my way out of here?*

"Looking for me?"

Lionblaze jumped and spun around. "Tigerstar!"

The massive warrior had appeared around the edge of a bramble thicket. His tabby pelt shone with a strange light that reminded Lionblaze of the sickly glow of fungus on dead trees.

"You've missed a lot of training," Tigerstar meowed, padding forward until he stood a tail-length from the

ThunderClan warrior. "You should have come back sooner."

"No, I shouldn't!" Lionblaze blurted out. "I shouldn't have come here at all, and you never should have trained me. Brambleclaw isn't my father! You're not my kin!"

Tigerstar blinked once, but he showed no surprise, not even a flick of his ears. His amber eyes narrowed to slits, and he seemed to be waiting for Lionblaze to say more.

"You . . . you knew!" Lionblaze whispered. The trees seemed to spin around him. *Squirrelflight isn't the only cat who kept secrets!*

"Of course I knew." Tigerstar shrugged. "It's not important. You were willing enough to learn from me, weren't you?"

"But—"

"Blood isn't everything," Tigerstar snarled. His lip curled, showing the glint of sharp fangs. "Just ask Firestar."

Lionblaze felt his neck fur begin to bristle as fury coursed through him. "Firestar's a finer warrior than you ever were."

"Don't forget that he's not your kin, either," Tigerstar hissed softly. "There's no point defending him now."

Lionblaze stared at the dusk-lit warrior. *Does he know who my real father is?* "You knew all along that I wasn't Firestar's kin," he growled. "You let me believe a lie!"

Tigerstar twitched one ear. "So?"

Rage and frustration overwhelmed Lionblaze. Leaping

into the air, he threw himself at Tigerstar and tried to push him over. He battered at the tabby warrior's head and shoulders, his claws unsheathed, tearing out huge clumps of fur. But the red haze of fury that filled his head made him clumsy, unfocused. His blows landed at random, barely scratching Tigerstar's skin.

The huge tabby tom went limp, letting himself drop to one side and hooking one paw around Lionblaze's leg to unbalance him. Lionblaze landed among the bracken with a jolt that drove the breath from his body. A heartbeat later he felt a huge paw clamp down on his shoulders, pinning him to the ground.

"I've taught you better than that, little warrior," Tigerstar taunted him. "You're out of practice."

Taking a deep breath, Lionblaze heaved himself upward. Tigerstar leaped back and crouched a fox-length away, his amber eyes burning. "I'll show you who's out of practice," Lionblaze panted.

He forced his anger down, summoning a cold determination—all the fighting moves he had ever learned were at the tips of his claws. When Tigerstar sprang at him, he was prepared; he dived forward and hurled himself underneath his opponent's belly. As soon as Tigerstar's paws hit the ground, Lionblaze whipped around and landed a couple of blows on the tabby tom's hindquarters before leaping out of range.

Tigerstar spun to face him. "Better," he meowed, mockery still in his voice. "I have mentored you well."

Before Lionblaze could reply, the huge tabby darted toward him, veering aside at the last moment and lashing out with one forepaw as he passed. Lionblaze felt Tigerstar's claws rake along his side, and blood begin trickling out of the scratches. Fear stabbed at him. *What happens if he kills me here? Will I be really dead?*

His mind cleared. Tigerstar was hurtling toward him again. Lionblaze scrambled aside; he aimed a blow, but felt his claws slide harmlessly through the tabby's pelt.

"Too slow," Tigerstar spat. "You'll have to work harder, now you know that prophecy wasn't meant for you. That was for *Firestar's kin*, wasn't it?" Lionblaze knew that the tabby tom was trying to make him too angry to fight. *I won't listen! All I need to do is win this battle!*

He sprang at Tigerstar again, twisting in the air as he had been taught during those long nighttime visits, and landed squarely on the massive tabby's broad shoulders. Digging in with his claws, he stretched forward and sank his teeth into Tigerstar's neck. Tigerstar tried the same trick of going limp and pulling Lionblaze down with him, but this time Lionblaze was ready.

He wriggled out from underneath the heavy body, battering with his hind paws at Tigerstar's exposed stomach fur. "I'm not falling for that trick twice!" he hissed.

Tigerstar struggled to get up, but blood was pouring from a gash in his belly; he stumbled down again, rolling onto his back. Lionblaze planted one forepaw on Tigerstar's chest and held the other, claws extended, against his neck.

The tabby glared up at him; for a heartbeat, fear flashed in his blazing amber eyes. "Do you really think you could kill me?" he growled. "You'd never do it."

"No." Lionblaze sheathed his claws and stepped back. "You're already dead." He turned and stalked away, his pelt still bristling and all his senses alert in case Tigerstar followed and leaped on him again. But there was no sound from the dark warrior, and soon he was left behind among the endless trees.

Lionblaze's mind whirled. He had beaten Tigerstar! *Maybe I do have power after all . . . but how can I, if I'm not one of the Three?* He paused, scarcely seeing the tangling undergrowth and the trees of the dark forest all around him. *Do I want to know who my parents really are?* he wondered. *Does it even matter?* Maybe it was best to let his Clanmates accept him for who they thought he was, so he could go on striving to improve his fighting skills. *I'm already the best fighter in ThunderClan. I know I can be a great warrior.*

"Ashfur is dead," he meowed out loud. "And Squirrelflight won't reveal her secret to any other cats. It would hurt her Clanmates far too much if they knew she'd been lying to them for so long. Why not let everything stay the same?"

Lionblaze woke to the sun on his face. Most of the cats had already left the den; Lionblaze spotted only the gray-and-white pelt of Mousewhisker, who had kept guard over the camp the night before. Lionblaze's jaws stretched in a

yawn. "Thank StarClan I wasn't on the dawn patrol," he muttered.

When he tried to get up, every muscle in his body shrieked a protest; he felt as if his body was one huge ache, from his head to his paws. Down one side, his golden tabby fur was matted with blood. *I hope no cat has noticed that!* he thought as he bent his head and began cleaning up his pelt with swift, rhythmic licks. The fight with Tigerstar had been a dream, hadn't it? Lionblaze didn't understand why he should feel just as much pain and exhaustion as if it had really happened. And he had been cut, as if a living warrior had raked his claws across Lionblaze's flank. . . . He tried not to think about it. *It doesn't matter, because I'll never go back to that place,* he told himself. *It's over.*

He felt better after his grooming, with his fur fluffed up to hide the gash in his side. When he finished, he could hear the voices of several cats just outside the den, though not close enough for him to make out what they were saying. Curious, he rose to his paws, arched his back in a delicious stretch, and pushed his way through the branches into the clearing.

Thornclaw was standing a couple of fox-lengths away; Spiderleg sat close by, while Cloudtail paced up and down in front of them, the tip of his white tail twitching. Cloudtail's mate, Brighthouse, watched him anxiously from where she sat with Ferncloud, Brackenfur, and Sorreltail. Honeyfern and Berrynose were crouched nearby, their eyes fixed on Thornclaw.

"Ashfur was killed by a WindClan cat!" the golden brown tom was declaring. "It's the only possible answer." A few of his listeners nodded in agreement, though Lionblaze saw others exchanging doubtful glances.

"Firestar said he thought that one of us did it," Honeyfern mewed, sounding nervous to be contradicting a senior warrior.

"Clan leaders have made mistakes before," Cloudtail meowed. "Firestar isn't always right."

"I'm sure none of us would kill Ashfur," Ferncloud added more gently. "Why would we want to? Ashfur had no enemies!"

I wish that was true, Lionblaze thought.

However much he tried to forget, that night of fire and storm was seared into Lionblaze's memory. He could hear the roar of the flames on the cliff top, and could see them licking hungrily around him and his littermates as Ashfur blocked the end of the branch they needed to scramble toward safety. Squirrelflight's confession rang in his ears again: She had told Ashfur that Lionblaze, Hollyleaf, and Jayfeather were not her kits. It was the only way to save their lives, by pretending she did not care what happened to them, but she had handed Ashfur a weapon more terrible than any flaming branch. Lionblaze knew that the gray warrior would have announced the truth to all the Clans at the Gathering; only death had closed his jaws forever and kept the secret safe.

"Lionblaze! Hey, Lionblaze, are you deaf?" Lionblaze

dragged his thoughts back to the hollow to see Spiderleg waving him over with his tail.

"You were Ashfur's last apprentice," the black warrior prompted as Lionblaze padded reluctantly up to the group. "Do you know if he'd quarreled with any cat?"

"Especially any WindClan cat?" Thornclaw added, with a meaningful twitch of his whiskers.

Lionblaze shook his head. "Uh . . . no," he replied awkwardly. He couldn't lie and say that Ashfur had quarreled with a WindClan cat, even though he wished with every hair on his pelt that it was true. Letting his Clanmates believe such a thing could cause an all-out war between ThunderClan and WindClan. "I hadn't seen much of Ashfur just before he died," he added.

To his relief, no other cats questioned him.

"We'd know if Ashfur quarreled with a ThunderClan cat," Brackenfur insisted. "It's impossible to keep a secret around here."

If only you knew! Lionblaze thought.

"Brackenfur's right." Sorreltail touched her nose to her mate's ear. "But all the same, we can't be sure that a WindClan cat—"

"Ashfur died on the WindClan border," Spiderleg interrupted. "What more do you want?"

Sorreltail turned to face him, her neck fur bristling at his scathing tone. "I want a bit more evidence than where his body was found before I start blaming any cat."

Honeyfern and Brackenfur murmured agreement, but

Lionblaze could see that most of the cats were convinced that a WindClan warrior was responsible for Ashfur's death. However much he worried about what that could lead to, he couldn't bury a guilty sense of relief.

"Are we going to let WindClan get away with this?" Thornclaw demanded, his ears lying flat as he dug his claws into the earth.

"No!" Berrynose leaped to his paws. "We have to show them they can't mess with ThunderClan."

Lionblaze's belly churned as he saw the warriors cluster more closely around Thornclaw. They were behaving as if the golden brown tom was their leader, and seemed ready to follow him into battle to avenge their Clanmate's murder.

"It would be best to attack by night," Thornclaw began. "There'll be enough moonlight to see by, and they won't be expecting trouble."

"We'll see they get it, though." Spiderleg lashed his tail.

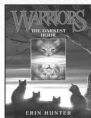
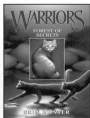
"We'll head for the WindClan camp," Thornclaw continued. "It'll be best to split up: One raiding party can attack from this direction—"

"What?" The low growl came from just behind Lionblaze. Startled, Lionblaze glanced over his shoulder to see Brambleclaw; he, along with all the other cats, had been so intent on what Thornclaw was planning that he hadn't heard the Clan deputy approach.

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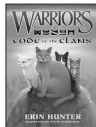
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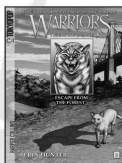
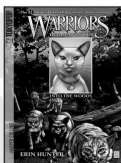
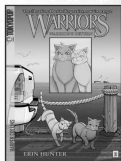
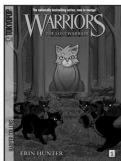


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