Horse Age

Pavičić, Lucija

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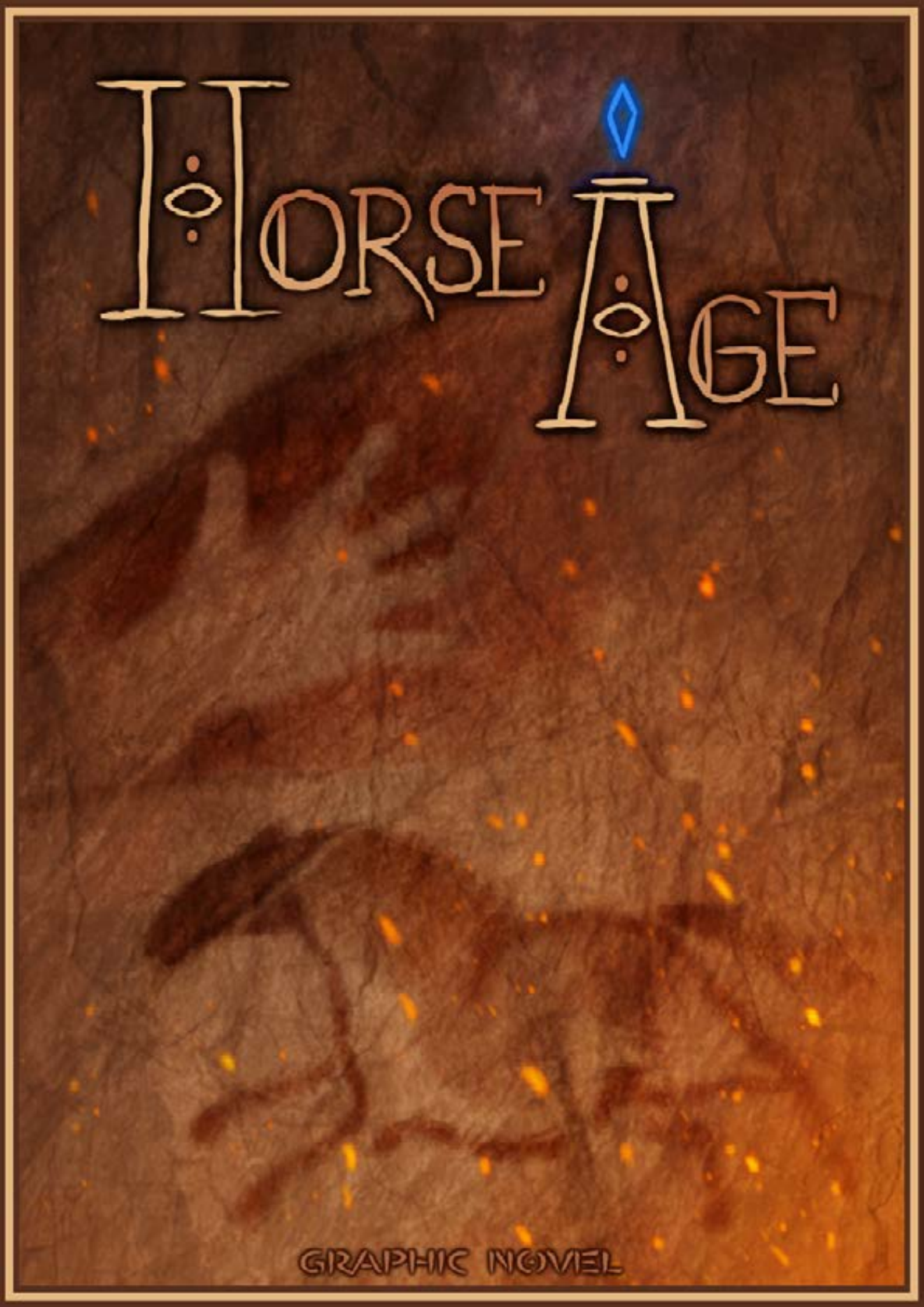
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HORSE AGE
GRAPHIC NOVEL

CHAPTER : 1

- CHILDHOOD'S END -

It is said that there are written stories in the stars.

I firmly hope that my story is hidden somewhere there too.

A story from era when the greatest mammals were ruling the Earth.

Some of them had huge horns...

...long tusks...

...large antlers...

...long fangs...

...or just their massive body was their benefit.

That of course didn't apply to every creature on the Earth.

It appeared my kind was destined for a much different path to greatness.

We are called horses.

Just a common sized grass-eaters.

No horns, no claws,
nothing strong we could defend with.

But we've got a strong soul.

Mother Nature changes and evolves all around us.
But sometimes it's not enough...

...and you need to make some changes on your own.

And so I did.

It was just the begining...

...of the time my kind chose...

...to not be just a prey anymore.

CHOMP

And you're down!

But a stronger stallion comes to a heroic rescue!

Don't break your legs, you little thunders!

Haha! Where do you see him?

Not everything is about strength, guys.

You also need to have a responsibility... ...which is something that I doubt you could even pronounce properly-

OOF!

And the most evil mare is going to have her revenge!

This was my home.

My family.

I was growing up in a beautiful world. Amazing place full of beauty and variety.

I didn't have to care about more than my mum, my siblings and what dad and great mother ru tells us.

But the older I became ...

... I had more questions than answers ...

... about the world around us.

Mum...?

Yes, sweetheart?

Why does dad always look so worried?

Worried...?

He is not worried, he's just being cautious.

He patrols our herd through days and nights, and so he protects us.

...Protects against what?

Moving to Green Lake!

Sigh... well, I guess you need to know this anyway.
But promise me you won't be scared.

Okay...?

Your father, the leader great rau,
doesn't only check to see if we've walked
too far from the herd, but he also
pays attention to every movement around us.

He's checking whether it's not karza.

...What's karza?

Some living beings are possessed by karza spirit.
They ... try to catch other living beings to take **their** spirit.

Once they take the spirit, they never ever give it back.

Karza can possess anyone.

Howling creatures

flying creatures

crawling creatures...

...sometimes even horses.

The world around us can be scary at times,
but we have a special power
against the danger.

Look around you. Do you see how many of us are here?

That's our power.

More eyes means better sight.

More muscles means bigger strength.

With herd you are protected.
Always stay close.

And if the herd ever should begin
running fast, run too and always get
close to me as quickly as possible.

This is how we win against karza.

And remember these words:
Always stay cautious, but never live in fear.

Later that day

Our herd is doing great. Good job, Tiris. Strong leader makes the herd being strong and happy. And that makes strong and happy offspring.

Thank you, great ru.

Only thing that worries me is that except one foal only males were born last years. Oldest ones are near the time they must leave the herd. I don't like dealing with this and it's three of them at once.

From the youngest males one doesn't seem to be strong enough to be on his own...

... and the mother of the only one filly doesn't seem to look after her most of the time.

Ever wondered why those horses over there are growing trees on their heads?

Antlers.

Eh?

It's called antlers. Males of those ... tree-horses are growing antlers as a weapon to fight other males to get a girl. Then when they don't need it those antlers fall off their heads. Next year they grew new ones.

And so no matter who was successful or unsuccesful last year, everyone of them has a brand new chance.

Wow. You are so smart! How do you know all these things?

Thanks! Great ru told me.

I like spending time with her and no matter what I ask she knows like ... everything.

I want to be just like her when I grow up.

Uhh... Siatra... I ... you know ... I- I am sorry for the morning. For being so unrespansble.

I mean irnaspo- iress-

You cannot run forever!

I cannot run forever but I can run for **long**!

W-what?

What happened?

I cannot move!

Something is holding my leg!

Why can't I-

Let me go!

It hurts!

MUM!

Help, mum!

KARZA!

KARZA!

Karza!

Karza!

Sorika! Our kids!

Uuh... What are you doing? Are you ok?

It- It wants to take me! Karza will take my soul!

What...?

THUD

STOMP

STAY AWAY FROM MY FOAL, KARZA!

Not my fault!
Not my fault!
Not my fault!

What did I tell you about watching over your legs?!

Tell me you didn't break anything!

N-no, I did not, mum...

Tikeron! I am here! Are you alright?

What were you even doing? You scared the mane out of me...

Mum! That bush tried to catch me and take me away!

Oh no, honney. Don't worry. A bush is not karza.

Karza?
Karza?
Karza?

Tell us, great ru. Should we run?

That's not karza.

Round the herd up and I will deal with those who cannot behave.

Oh no.

Get up, get up, get up! Quick!

Ouch! Mum!

Stop fighting back! I am your **ru**!

I know, great ru, But there is no authority I would let hurt my foal!

I get what you mean but I didn't intend to hurt your foal.

There's a problem with **you** about not teaching your foal enough manners!

And you?

What were you thinking? Yelling about karza like that?!

There is a reason why matured horses are quiet. By yelling like that you could cause the **real** karza to find us!

Pardon him, great ru. He slipped and got scared is all.

Sigh ... All I want from you is to not make it happen ever again.

Didn't your mother tell you to be careful about your legs?

...

Y-Yes, she did.

You may answer if you want.

Does it hurt a lot?

Well- it pinches, is itchy and-

Can you even walk?

Of course he can! There is no problem. He can walk and run just fine. I am sure!

Alright then. I'll see if we travel around some anti-inflammatory herbs.

Until then, keep the wound clean.

In any way, that is **your** responsibility.

Now get back to the herd and be both of you aware the herd **can't** wait for those who cannot keep up.

M- mum...?

This time stay close to me.

And all of you remember this, especially new mothers and foals:

Keeping legs strong and healthy is one of the top priorities of our kind.

Because when the worst times come ...

... this is the only thing you can rely on.

We are moving back.

It's not safe to stay here longer for today.

I was confused back then... What is the actual assurance of our lives?

Is it the leader stallion? Is it the herd? Or our legs only?

In the end, I didn't have to wait long for an answer.

I understood the concept just a few months later.

I've got your mane!

I've got your stability!

And you're down!

...

Let go that mane!

Never!

So you didn't win yet!

Hey, where is that stallion comming for the rescue? We would really need one here!

Mch. The strongest stallion is kinda busy right now...

Karza...

KARZA!

On the North!

RUN!

Run NOW!

And if the herd ever should begin running fast,
run too and always get close to me as quickly as possible.

Guys?

Guys! Quickly! Run with your mums and hide in the middle of the herd!

...But why?

What is happening?

Siatra!

Siatra, here!

MUM!

No way!

Hold on, old girl!

FIGHT!

Look forward or you'll fall!

Ru?

Great ru!

Ru,
are you alrigth?

I am getting
too old for this...

I am so sorry, great ru!
I didn't expect more of them around.
These ones never hunt in pack.
Never!

Tiris...

If only I was thinking
faster it looked too young
to hunt alone.

Tiris!

I was the one
who led the herd
right towards the trap.

Calm down, ru. We both did what we could.
Nobody could have known it was a trap.

You said yourself
karza always plays with
our expectations to get our souls.

What's important
is we are all safe.

I hope so.
Please, check the herd.

Of course.

Sikota ...

... Tuvaia

and Verkau ...

Sorika, Vaetiri and poor old Kativa.
Hopefully the wound will heal soon.

Right,
good to check
all the foals.

Tikeron ...

... Lorko ...

Siatra?

Siatra!

S-Siatra!

Have you seen my daughter? Siatra?
...Anyone?

Umm...
I'm afraid we haven't.

No, not since
the karza appeared.

Oh no...
It can't be--

SIATRA!
NEIIIIGH

NEI

IIIIII

IGH!

Shush, what are you doing!
Do you want another karza
to know where we are!

I- I cannot find my daughter!
She might've got lost
or she is far behind.
We were running too fast and she-

Majiva... I ...
I think she didn't make it.

... and after I went around karza,
I didn't see her anymore.

... alone ...

I saw her far behind
the rest of the herd ...

No... this is
not possible.

I- I swear she was--!

I was calling her ...

I slowed down to be
certain she could catch me.

... she was running to me.

NEIIIIIIIGHH

What is happening here?

Her daughter, great ru.

Great ru!

My daughter Siatra
is missing!

When karza appeared
I was running to get
closer to her.

I saw her rustling nearby so I called out to her, and she was

Gweit wu?

Mm?

Eh? Oh!
That's a frog.

Gweit wu,
what is this?

Fwog.

Hahaha!
Never lick it,
applesweet!

Fwog!

Fwog!

... but then another karza attacked just in front of me!

I tried to avoid it from the right ...

... and I saw Siatra turn to the left.

There were a bunch of horses running with her so I thought she was safe there!

Have anyone of you seen Siatra?

I- I thought she was still running with us...

...hidden in between the grownups.

That doesn't sound good. If she was near karza and then she disappeared, the karza probably ... took her.

No!

She was **not** alone! She was with the others-

Yeah, if she was alone-

Every mother must protect her foal by herself.

A mother must be close to her own foal.

Yeah, that's the rule.

No, that's common sense.

You must teach your foal to follow you; otherwise it cannot survive.

But- she was- I- I did-

It was your first foal, you will learn for the next one.

Yes, Majiva, these things happens, you will be more experienced next time.

She was too weak.

This herd has lost many foals before.

She lost many foals before, great rau.

Good luck, great ru!

This time not only the foal but **both** of them may not survive.

Sigh ...

We've tried so many times that we don't care about our own lives anymore.

What other purpose to life could there be if not for trying to give a life to offspring until the last breath?

But great rau-

-We are tired of worrying. What will help us **now** is hoping for the best.

Above the sun, she is beautiful!

Congratulations, great ru!

She survived!

Our first foal that has survived!

You are your mother's little miracle, my dear.

You are **Majiva**.

Your whole family will protect you.

I will do anything to keep you alive.

You will be capable of great things.

I will take care of you.

My herd will be your home.

Your new family.

What a horrible loss. We feel for you, Majiva.

Siatra was such a remarkable filly, our foals loved her.

We know it's going to be hard now...

We will be here for you if you need any help.

Lorko!

We better get going.

Lorko...

Kids, now it's not the best time to wander off!
Lorko! My dear...
Come, sweetheart. Get up. Your mommy is still here...
Vaetiri! Kativa! Quickly, take your kids and go back to the herd.
We need to move!
A storm is coming!
We were supposed to be a family...
Why did nobody help her! Why did nobody protect her from karza!
YOU!!
You saw her being in a dangerous position, why didn't you help her!
What?... It was not **my** foal!

Yeah, not **your** foal, that's right!
Why do we even live in a group! We create herds to get protection but when the time of the real need of it comes, everyone is only thinking of themselves!
We live in a group with a thought of letting others to die and saving our own hides!!
Nobody looked back!
Nobody!
She was so young and you grown marcs just let her die there!!
Majiva, I understand losing the first foal is hard but don't you even try to put the blame on us when it was just your own bad parenting!

Enough you two!

AGH!
Alright! Now see here-!

I said - **enough**, Daruutha!

What? Why are you stopping **me**?
She's lost her foal, give her some space!
But... She was the one who started the fight!
And you the one who provoked her to.

You still don't understand me.
I was **protecting** the herd! Like I always did!

This ***mother*** is blaming us for not taking care of her and her precious foal though I've never seen **her** care for the other foals or the herd's wellbeing.
If karza caught a foal of anyone else, would she rush to defend it?
I am doubtful, seeing as she didn't even make sure her **own** foal was safe.

And the thing about noone looking back? Neither did she!
Daruutha, last warning.
She didn't even look to see if her foal was still running with us until now.

So get it together, my dear Majiva, and don't you dare challenge me ever again!

And don't you, dear Daruutha, dare to ever again challenge **me**.

Great ru?
We must end this for now and move onward!
The snowstorm is upon us! We need to hide in that forest ahead.

That's right.
You've heard great rau!
Now everybody, follow me!

About an osia ago...
...you promised you would protect me.

But...
...that's exactly what I am doing.
Do you feel otherwise?

I warned the herd about karza, I risked my own throat to slow it down to give you all more time to get away. Then, I rushed to the one who got attacked.
There was nothing more I could do. I cannot protect every single member of the herd all at once. I could end up being the one who's caught or too weak to keep the herd away from other stallions.
Do you understand what am I trying to say?
If I sacrifised my life for one foal, this herd would be taken by another stallion and the first thing he would do is kill all of the foals in it.

Yeah. **Every** horse knows this.
What kind of dumb mare were you dropped from?
My mother was a **great ru!**
Probably not so great when she didn't teach you how to be a **horse.**
Daruutha...
You know **nothing** about me!
I swear to you, one day I will rip you apart!
A mare of your rank should know when it's the right time to stop.
And a stallion of **your** rank should know what is the right thing to do now.
...what do you mean?
Well, our herd lacks young daughters now and so far I gave you two.
I am ready to give you another, if you'd want.

Mum, why did no one actually look back?
Um? Say again, sweetheart.
Mare Majiva was saying nobody looked back, but I-
Ah, my dear... Horses don't look back.
Why?
We need to keep on moving **forward.** No matter what is or was happening behind.
But-
Looking back slows us down and our kind cannot afford that.
It's... a bit complicated, darling.
I believe you'll understand when you're older.

I am certain that was the day that began to change my life and the way I've seen the world around me.

I understood that the world is not only a place for all the diversity of beauty, elements and creatures living together in harmony.

It also has it's laws and a lot of rules...

...including the cruel ones.

The life of peace, joy and happiness changed...

...and it became about the fight....

...fear...

...pain...

...loss.

As the osiai, the season cycles, were getting closer to the day when me and my brothers will be chased away from our herd,

I began to think about if I could somehow **change** the way of life of our kind.

They say horses don't look back...

...but every time I did...

...I've seen much more than the others.

It made me **realise**.

We should not turn our heads and run from what is happening.

We should do something to **prevent** it from happening.

If no other horse thought about trying to make our lives better,

then I will be the first one.

I will create a herd where everyone will work as one.

Everyone will protect each other.

Everyone will share the care and resources.

Dal...

No one will be chased away.

Dal?

Everyone will be able to-

Dalteri!

Um?

You know, normal horses usually sleep with their heads **down**.

I was watching the sky to help me fall asleep.

Heh! Your mother really knew what name to choose for you.

Yeah...

Every mother does.

True.

My mother told me they name us after what tells us apart from any other in the herd on the first day we are born

and since I apparently learned how to stand and even trot very quickly she called me--

Brothers, please...

The strongest stallion needs enough sleep to come to the rescue later.

Lorko is right.

We all three need to gain some extra strength.

More than ever before.

Do you think it's a good idea to leave today?

I mean- rau didn't kick us out yet. I- I mean- the longer we stay with the herd, the better, right?

Would you rather be chased away by a fierce stallion full of muscles who's trying to bite your hide?

During the Spring he's not the calm and wise father as we know him.

I want to say a proper farewell to my mother and leave this place in **peace** while it's still possible.

Mother?

Nom! Karza got you!

Be gentle, Tikura.

...Can we play ru and rau instead?

No, it's fine.

Moooom...

She's teaching you a very important lesson, Karvea.

You need to grow your legs strong and learn to keep balance.

Then you won't let karza take you from me.

Mother, we are ready.

Oh look.

The herd is going to be a few members smaller again.

I know you probably feel left behind, Rarika, but there simply must be someone to take the leadership after me...

I know.

...and there is no one else I would find fitting for this responsibility.

You are a fruit of the strongest tree.
A daughter of the herd leaders.
I've taught you all I could.
I know you won't disappoint me, dear.
I won't, mother.
We'll see about that.
We'll see what?
Ah, nothing, little one.
Follow me ... *sigh* ... son.
It was about three osiai ago when I gave you life, and you opened your eyes.
It was windless, warm night
and the stars were shining bright...
...and when you first saw the night sky, you coudn't stop staring at it.
From that moment, I knew what name
was going to be **perfect** for you.
Dalteri.
Star wisdom seeker.

And then **my** little rascal
came to this world.
He was so full of life and joy
from the very beginning.
He stood up on his clumsy legs
the fastest of all of my foals
and when we were returning to the herd
he was already attempting to **trot**.
I am sure the name Tikeron was the best choice.
Happy legs.
Ah. This is the exact look you had
the night you were born.
Your eyes of peace
are what you've been named after.
The eyes so calming and comforting
telling me it was worth all the pain.
Sigh...
Well...
Since you're grownup
I think I can tell you this.

When **my** mother brought me to this world she didn't even give me a name.

I was very weak and ill looking foal and my mother thought I will not even stand up and just die on the same spot where I was born.

She was surprised and relieved I got up and was able to feed myself after all.

While she was thinking of some name for me we got found by karza.

In situation like this many foals had been taken...

...but I wasn't.

Before knowing how I just ran ... I **fought** ... and survived.

In a safe place in my family herd I got a name. Miraculous strength of a tree.

However, it was not over.

During my life I was constantly put into a test especially by karza smelling an illness from me.

I fought. I got wounds. I healed. Over and over again!

...It also kept preventing me to have foals.

Sigh... It made me to age much faster and I can already feel I am tired.

My wounds are not healing how they used to be...

... and ...

...I feel you are probably my very last foal.

My **only** one.

You, my dear Lorko, have a blood of someone who never gives up.

Especially not **before** a fight.

You have a blood of a **survivor**.

So **fight**!

...For me.

Uhh... I think it we should start moving.

Are we going to go to the Green Lake today?

Oh. Not today I am afraid.

You will have to be patient if you are thirsty.

Father?

How come?

Well, it's too windy today and forest trees would make too much noise.

I would have troubles with hearing karza.

Ahh... What would we do withouth you?

Listen how wise your father is, Rarika.

Ah, great ru...

I've never had any doubt about it.

This is it.

We cannot follow you further.

I must say, for young hearts like you it's not that usual to decide to leave on their own, but ...

...you were always kind of a special colt.

Besides, it's making it easier either for you, rau and... ...and us, I guess.

Better early than too late, right?

Behold, brothers!

This is the begining of our journey.