

NOCAT MORNING

Original title: *Šemačkino jutro*

by *Andrej Ivanuša*, translated by author, proof reading *George Yeoman*

Jan was lying on his bed wide-awake, with his arms behind his head, staring out of the window. Nocat lay curled up at his feet, her fur glimmering and displaying grayish-blue colored hues.

“Nocat morning,” thought Jan. This is what people called the time between the sunrise of Biran and that of Airan, the suns of the Guardian planet. It was during this period that nocats always went their own ways. Very few people knew where they went during these times. Apparently, the first settlers who came to the planet attempted to study their strange behavior but the subsequent generations have never bothered themselves about this. To them it was just necessary to simply survive, and as far as Jan knew they had barely done that. Strange things had apparently happened before the Great War, so subsequent history has only concerned itself with post-war happenings. After all, the war had happened a few hundred years ago, and only a few people survived. After the war the nocats had moved into peoples’ dwellings. They were obstinate, stubborn, lovely ...

As if nocat had been waiting for a certain signal, she rose up, stretched her three pairs of legs whilst fully extending and then retracting her claws. Then she quietly slid through the flap in the front door.

When she had disappeared, Jan threw-off the blanket and stood up. He quickly pulled a white tunic over his head, walked on tiptoe to the door, opened it, and went out. As he was leaving he caught a glimpse of which house she had slid behind, and followed her.

Nocat was heading for the *farol* wood. Jan smirked and muttered:

“*Softhair*, now you're mine!”

He went quickly to the garden shed where Jan and his father kept their tools for harvesting and processing *farol*. He took an axe, and some leather gloves that also protected his elbows. He put-on leather headgear that covered his head and shoulders, and a visor that protected his eyes. He had followed nocat once before for quite some time, so he had prepared himself by storing the equipment on a rack next to the door. He hoped that his tunic would suffice, as *farol* trees have large thorns that can cause almost unbearable itching. However, nocat moved so fast that the leather protective might obstruct his pursuit.

Nocat was following the lumberjacks’ path. Jan sneakily moved after it. Suddenly he heard some nocats wheezy barks behind him. He quickly slipped behind a *farol* tree piercing himself on some thorns and, cursing through his teeth he turned the axe handle toward himself. He unscrewed the

cap of the hollow axe-handle, captured some lye with fingers and smothered his skin. This relieved his burning itch. When he had finished, he noticed that neighbors' nocat had silently followed him.

"I will find out where you go, damned nocats," he stubbornly murmured, and continued to pursue them despite the itching.

Suddenly they turned into dense farol undergrowth, which was composed of young farol plants. At least the soft spikes were not as annoying as the adult ones. Spikes were obviously not an obstacle for nocats, as they seemed to be unaffected by farol acid. This is why humans had always been amazed by them, making them even more mysterious creatures. He pushed his way through the undergrowth, using his hands for as long as he could. The gloves protected him well but when rubbed against the farol they made a sort of whining noise. Jan was lucky because the wind blowing against him, so he hoped the nocats wouldn't discover him too quickly.

The farol trees were getting lower, as was the undergrowth. In order to avoid the more mature trees, he bent down, and in an almost crouching position moved forward. Now the tunic dangled between his legs and impeded his movement.

Suddenly, the farol trees disappeared and he was blinking his eyes to avoid Biran's light. Amazingly, before him was a glade full of nocats, which really surprised him because a clearing in the middle of a farol forest was something unusual.

Such a cleared area of woodland could only have been made by *farolcutters*, but no tracks appeared to lead into this clearing. The glade was perfectly circular and on a slight incline, so that it was fully illuminated by Biran. Jan leapt up and down above the farol trees but the village roofs were nowhere to be seen.

He sat at the edge of the glade and stared around. The nocats were gathering together from all around the clearing. They formed concentric circles by squeezing tightly together. Suddenly, their squealing and barking stopped. A mist arose above the clearing, and the first image that came into Jan's head was that of his nocat purring and of him softly scratching the hair on her back.

"Magically," he thought, realized that these images were lining up one after another and seemingly faster and faster. For some time it seemed as though he was staring into a kaleidoscope, then suddenly he became aware in reality that the nocats were actually exchanging information amongst themselves. They rotated in his mind as though they were in filmed pictures. Suddenly he realized that these 'pictures' represented the village and villagers. During 'projection' he saw blue-gray spots and also blurry and fuzzy scenes. They were actually nocat 'words' that he couldn't understand. They displayed absurd patterns of alien thought could not be 'translated' into human

thoughts. He was fascinated. He had discovered something perhaps no-one else had done before him. He resigned himself to a continuous flow of images.

It was if he were watching a movie being show by a projectionist once a week at a traveling cinema, but this was even better. He enjoyed it even though it gave him a headache. Suddenly he realized that the images before his eyes were conquerors from outer space. They were some kinds of lizards that ate not only nocats but humans also.

“So that happened in the Great War!” he thought and squirmed in mute horror.

Then the nocats formed an alliance with the people ...