

Unit of work – Varjak Paw

- To predict what the book will be about.

Varjak Paw

SF Said

Illustrated by

This cat must learn to fight

Varjak Paw

SF Said

Illustrated by
Dave McKean

WINNER OF THE SMARTIES PRIZE GOLD AWARD

BOOK KNOWLEDGE ORGANISER – VARJAK PAW BY S.F. SAID

Important Information

Plot

When the Contessa dies in the house where a family of Mesopotamian Blue cats live, a gentleman arrives with two mysterious black cats. Both Varjak and the Elder Paw realise something is wrong and Varjak begins to communicate with his ancestor Jalal, who trains him in cat martial arts known as 'The Way'. Varjak leaves the house on an unforgettable adventure into the unknown where he uncovers the 'vanishings'.

Themes

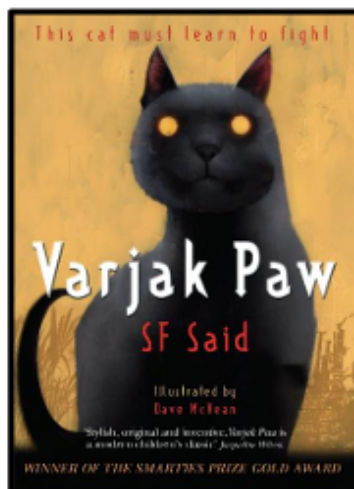
Rebellion, Perseverance, Courage, Family, Exploration, Friendship, Bullying, Open-Mindedness, Trust, Self-Awareness

Setting

The book initially set in the Contessa's house but Varjak climbs over the stonewall of the garden and escapes into the town where he has to contend with new characters, roads, cars and even dogs!

Characters

Varjak Paw	Protagonist - A young 'Mesopotamian Blue' kitten with amber eyes.
Elder Paw	Varjak's grandfather who is wise and knows something is wrong.
Jalal the Paw	Ancestor of Varjak who teaches him 'The Way' through dreams.
Father / Mother Paw	Father and Mother of Varjak Paw.
The Contessa	An old lady who feeds the cats who unexpectedly dies.
Julius	Antagonist - Varjak's brother who is always making fun of him.
Jethro, Jay & Jerome	Brothers of Varjak Paw.
Juni and Jasmine	Aunt and cousin of Varjak Paw.
The Gentleman	A man who turns up at the house with two black cats after the Contessa's death.
The Black Cats	Two mysterious cats who enter the house with 'The Gentleman'.
Tam and Holly	Two friends whom Varjak meets outside of the stonewall house.
Sally Bones	An unpleasant, thin, white cat owning some territory within the town.
Razor	Lieutenant of Sally Bones.
Cludge	A clumsy dog who Varjak meets on his adventure.
Ginger	Leader of a gang of cats who beat up Varjak.



What Can the Book Teach Us?

With courage and belief, anything is possible.

Listen to your elders for wisdom and advice.

Stay loyal to your friends.

Quotes

"Outside! For the first time since Jalal, a paw stood on the edge of the world."

"Believe something is impossible," said his ancestor calmly, 'and you will surely fail. But believe in yourself and you can do anything."



Name of Book: Varjak Paw

Date Published: 2003

Author: S.F. Said

Illustrator: Dave McKean

Reading 'Reconsidered' Spine:

Year 5 Pie Corbett Spine

Genre: Fantasy / Adventure



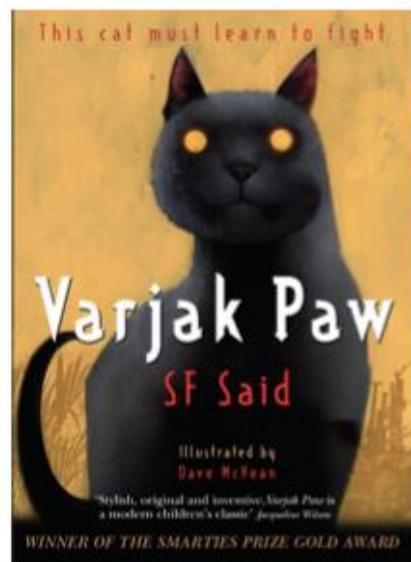
Key Vocabulary

ancestor	a person from whom one is descended (great relatives)
bristled	when hair is or becomes short and stiff on an animal
tutted	a noise used to express irritation or impatience
corrupted	someone that has become disloyal or dishonest
deliberately	to do something on purpose
cackled	a wicked laughter, often made by at someone's expense
spluttered	to make spitting noises or unable to get words out
bellowing	to make a deep, loud shout or cry
cowering	to hide, often protecting the head by keeping it down
desolate	an empty, abandoned area
potent	having strength or power (often used for smell or taste)
rancid	un pleasant odour or taste due to it rotting
swaggering	over confident mannerisms
forage	to hunt and look for something
enthralled	excited and captivated by something
intoxicating	an experience which takes over the body and mind

Context - S.F. Said took 5 years to write the book and created 17 drafts of his story before it was published. He was inspired by watching his own cat (whom he named Varjak Paw) when it was a kitten and its adventures of going outside the house for the first time. Mesopotamian Blue is a made-up cat breed (although there is the Persian Blue). Mesopotamia is the historical land between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers where the oldest known civilizations and stories began.

Varjak Paw:

by SF Said



Key vocabulary

Contessa	A woman of wealth – usually from Italian heritage.
Ancestor	A relative from many, many years ago.
Council	A group of people meeting and discussing issues.
Caviar	Pickled fish eggs. A delicacy (special) food.
Cinnamon	An aromatic spice.
Tom cat	A male cat.
Velvet	A fabric that is very soft to touch.
Generations	Members of a family living in different times.
Awareness	The knowledge of a situation or fact.
Sprawled	To sit or lie with arms and legs spread out in an odd way.

Term 1 Knowledge Organiser

Plot summary:

Varjak Paw is a pampered pet cat who knows there's more to life. His family tease him and they don't understand his adventurous spirit. He is soon forced to venture beyond the garden wall to save his family from the mysterious and dangerous 'gentleman' and his two evil hench-cats.

Themes:

Belonging

Main Characters

Varjak Paw	He is the titular character and he must learn to fight to protect his family.
The Gentleman	A mysterious man arrives in the Paw household, Varjak suspects he is dangerous.
Julius	Varjak's brother and bully. He is always mean to Varjak because he is different.
Holly	Varjak's first acquaintance on the Outside. She helps him to learn about the city.
Tam	Another friend on the Outside. Tam is always hungry.
Sally Bones	The gang leader. The thin, white cat who moves in the shadows.
Jalal	Varjak's ancestor who inspires him to be a 'true' Mesopotamian Blue Cat.

Mesopotamia



Mesopotamian Blue Cats



- **Varjak Paw** (2003) is a novel by the British author [S. F. Said](#) and illustrated by [Dave McKean](#).^[u] The illustrations in this book have a dark "gothic" quality. The novel received the 2003 [Smarties Gold Award](#) for the 6–8 years range^[2] and has been adapted for other media.

• Characters

- Varjak Paw, a very young kitten and the main protagonist of the story
- Jalal the Paw, A Mesopotamian blue cat who ventured out into the Outside and found a home with the Countessa.
- Elder Paw, Varjak's grandfather and one of the few who remembers (part of) The Way of Jalal
- Sally Bones, the mysterious white cat who lords over the West Side of the city. She knows "The Way"
- Razor, Sally Bones' lieutenant
- Ginger, the ruler of the East Side of the city
- The Contessa, The old woman who owns the family of Jalal
- The Gentleman, a mysterious man who appears one day at the Contessa's house
- The Black Cats, two black cats that accompany The Gentleman; perfect fighting machines that are almost invulnerable
- Cludge, a dog who Varjak meets and who saves him from the Gentleman
- Julius Paw, Varjak's older brother
- Father, Son of Elder Paw, Father of Jay, Jerome, Jethro, Julius, and Varjak
- Aunt Juni, Mother to Jasmine, Aunt to Jay, Jethro, Jerome, Julius, and Varjak
- Mother, Mother of Jay, Jethro, Jerome, Julius, and Varjak
- Holly, Varjak's future mate.
- Tam, a tabby cat and Holly, and Varjak's best friend
- The book's title and protagonist's name come from Said's own cat named Varjak, whose name is a reference to the film [Breakfast at Tiffany's](#). In the film, one of the main characters, Paul Varjak, has written a book called "Nine Lives". When he and another character look for the book in the library catalog, it is listed as "Nine Lives by Varjak, Paul".

Name _____ Date _____

Novel Study: Making Predictions

Before you read your class novel, look at the cover of the book. What clues can you see that help you predict what the story might be about?

Book title: _____

Author and illustrator: _____

Title

What ideas does the title of the book give you?



Cover Design

Look at the design of the cover. What does it suggest about the story?



Thursday 25th January

To read and respond to a text.

[Link to chapter 1.](#)

Who is in Varjak's family?

What do we learn about Varjak's family?

Elder Paw

Father Paw, Mother Paw,

Juni, Jasmine,

Julius,

Jay, Jethro, Jerome and Varjak.

For some reason all the young cats except for Varjak have names starting with the letter J.

Mesopotamia

What are the 3 countries in Mesopotamia?

Today, Mesopotamia is known as present-day Iraq. In the broader sense, the historical region of Mesopotamia included parts of present-day Iran, Kuwait, Syria, and Turkey.

Mesopotamia is thought to be one of the places where early civilization developed. It is a historic region of West Asia within the Tigris-Euphrates river.

Mesopotamian Blue



Cousin Jasmine giggled again. This time, Varjak's litter brothers Jay, Jethro and Jerome joined in.

'It's because of his eyes,' added Julius. 'The colour of danger. A Mesopotamian Blue whose eyes aren't green – it's an embarrassment.'

That did it. Julius was bigger than him, and older, but Varjak couldn't help it. He faced up to Julius, fur rising with anger.

'I don't believe you,' he said. 'You're a liar.'

'Varjak!' said Father. 'That's no way to talk to your brother!'

'But Julius said—'

'Whine, whine, whine,' sneered Julius. 'Listen to the little insect whine.'

'Julius, you shouldn't tease him so much,' said Father. 'The Contessa's upstairs because she's ill, nothing more. But Varjak Paw – you have to learn to behave like a proper Mesopotamian Blue. We're noble cats, special cats. We don't run around calling each other liars. We don't talk about disgusting things like hunting. And we don't get our paws all muddy in the garden. That's *not* what being a Blue is about. Do you understand?'

Varjak's tail curled up. It was always like this. Julius could get away with anything; but everything Varjak did was wrong.

'Your father's talking to you,' said Aunt Juni sternly. 'Do you understand?'

The rest of Varjak's family are very clear about what makes a 'proper Mesopotamian Blue' (page 11). Write a list of entry requirements to be part of the family based on what they say.

Guided group work

To be a great pet cat what features does a cat need?



Mesopotamian Blue Cats

Create a word bank to describe Mesopotamian Blue cats.
Draw your own picture.



Guided group work

To be a great pet cat what features does a cat need?

affectionate

Friendly

Gentle

Active

Vigilant

Curious

Inquisitive

Inventive

Smart

Playful

Sleepy

Quiet



Mesopotamian Blue Cats

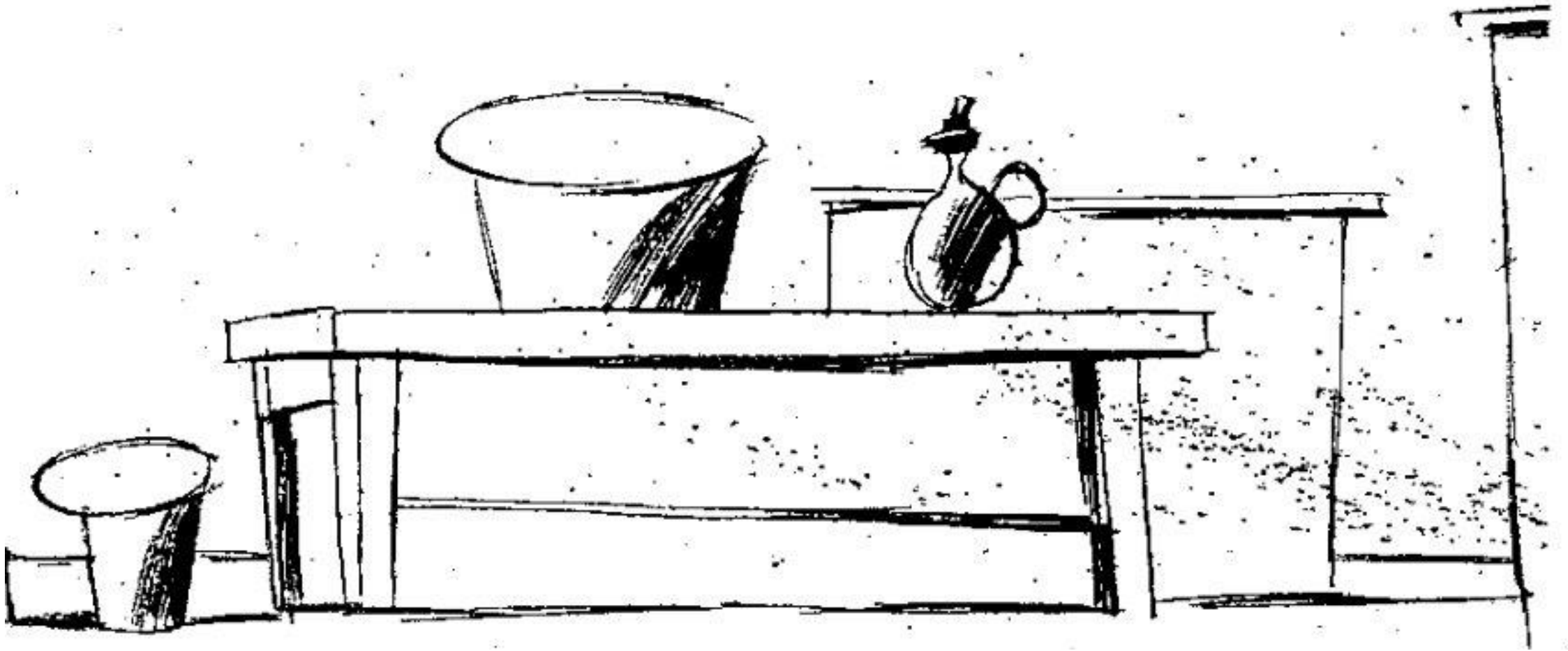
Create a word bank to describe Mesopotamian Blue cats.
Draw your own picture.

Grey blue in colour, green eyes, special cats, silky, clean



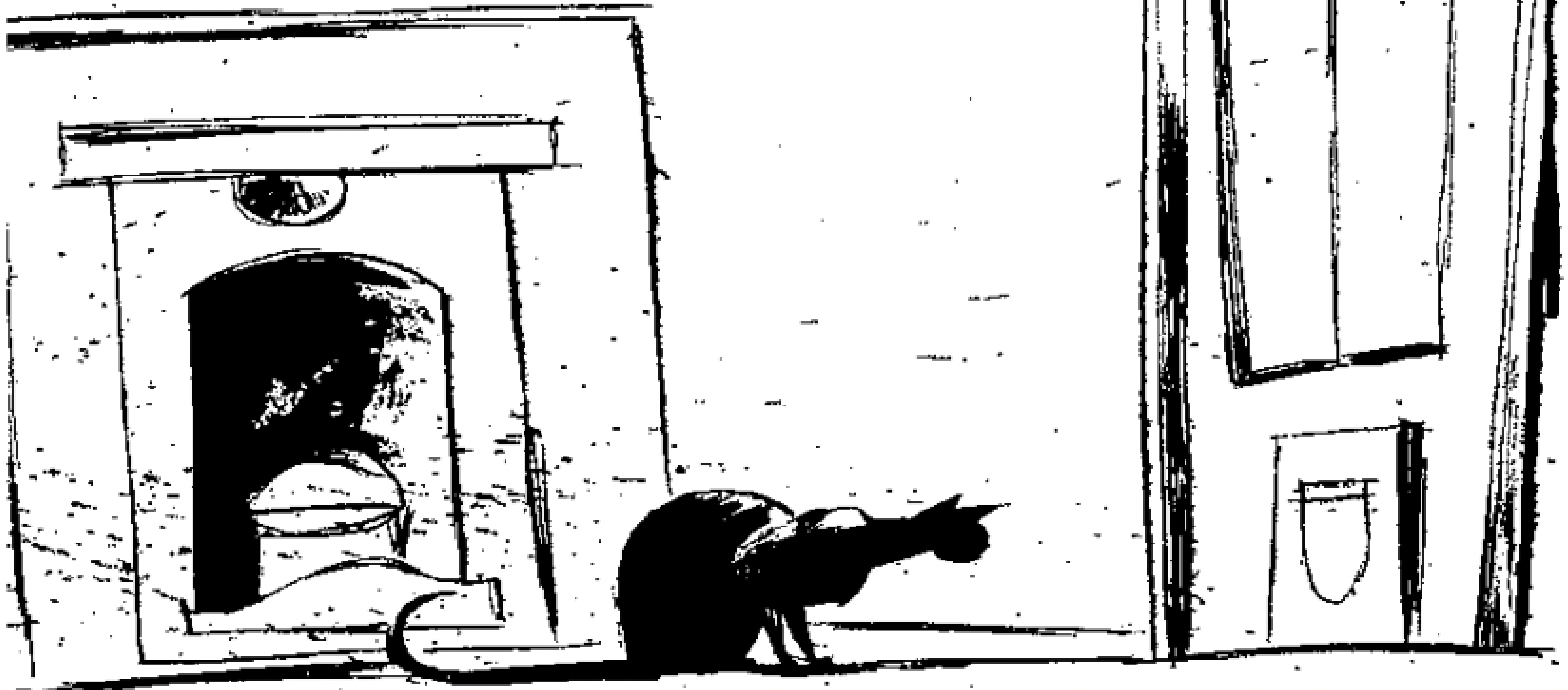
2. Why do you think the Elder Paw's tales make Varjak feel restless?
3. Name at least two ways Varjak is different to his litter brothers (page 8).

To read and respond.



Varjak's family lived in the Contessa's house and had lived there since Jalal's time.

want out there!



Varjak wanted to go outside to explore the garden which his family thought was not like a true Mesopotamian Blue.

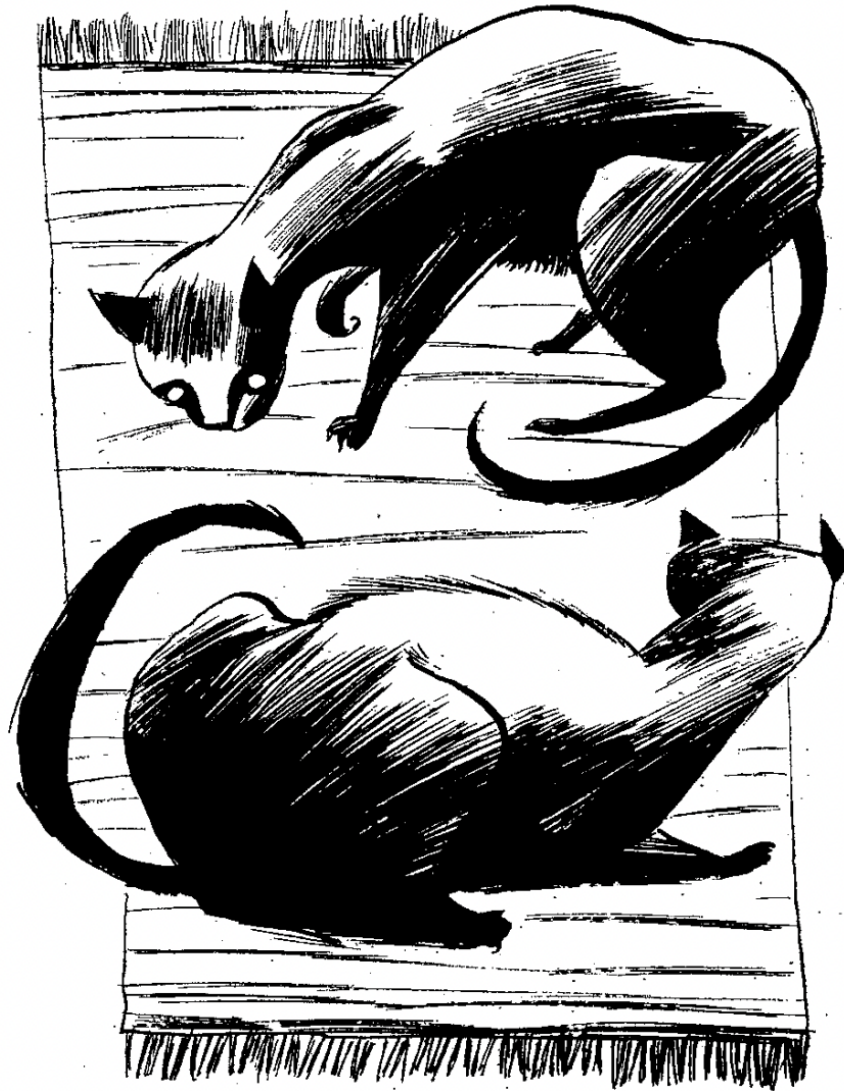


Varjak saw a mysterious gentleman with two sleek black cats but no-one would believe him.

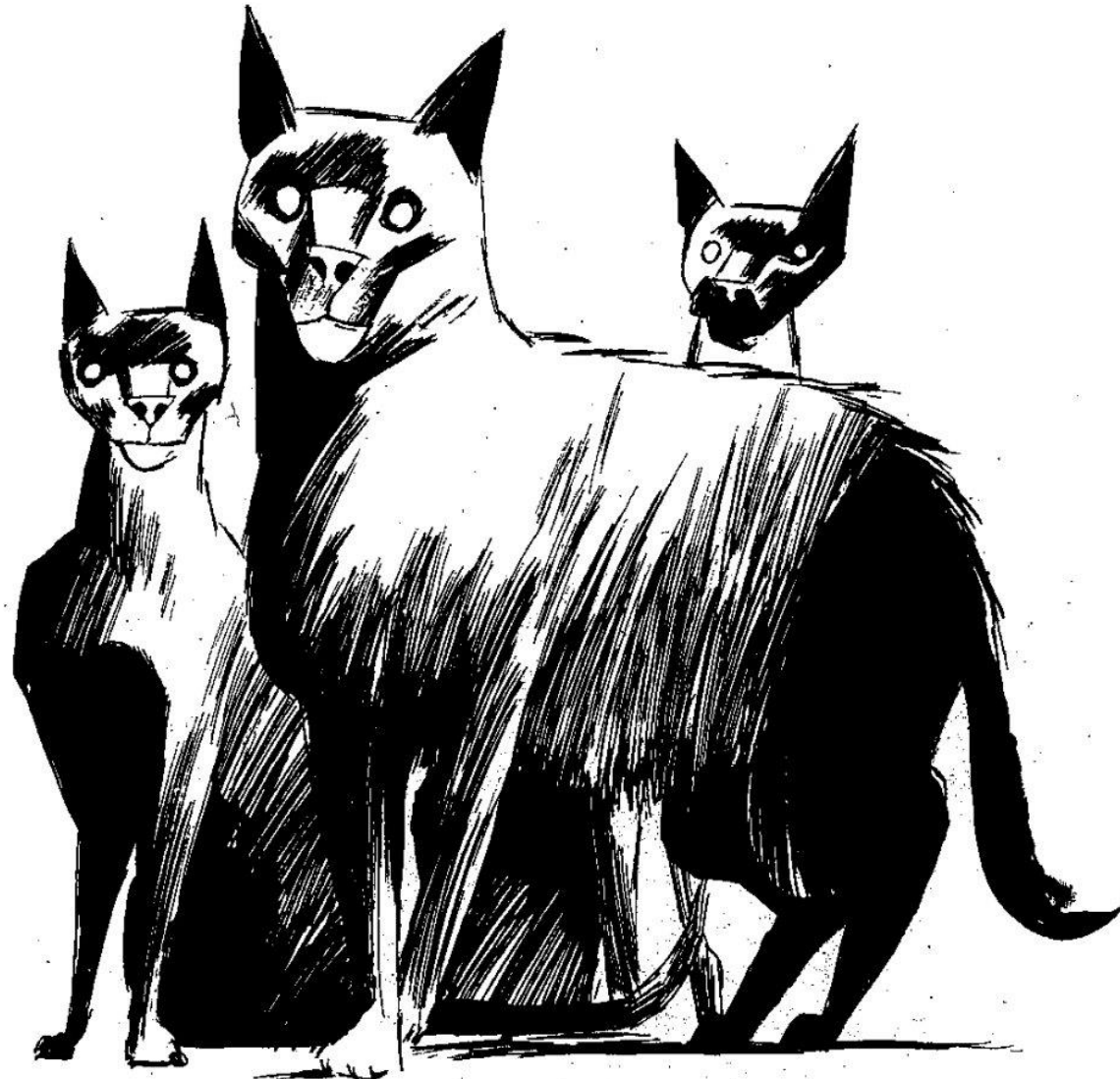
Chapter Three



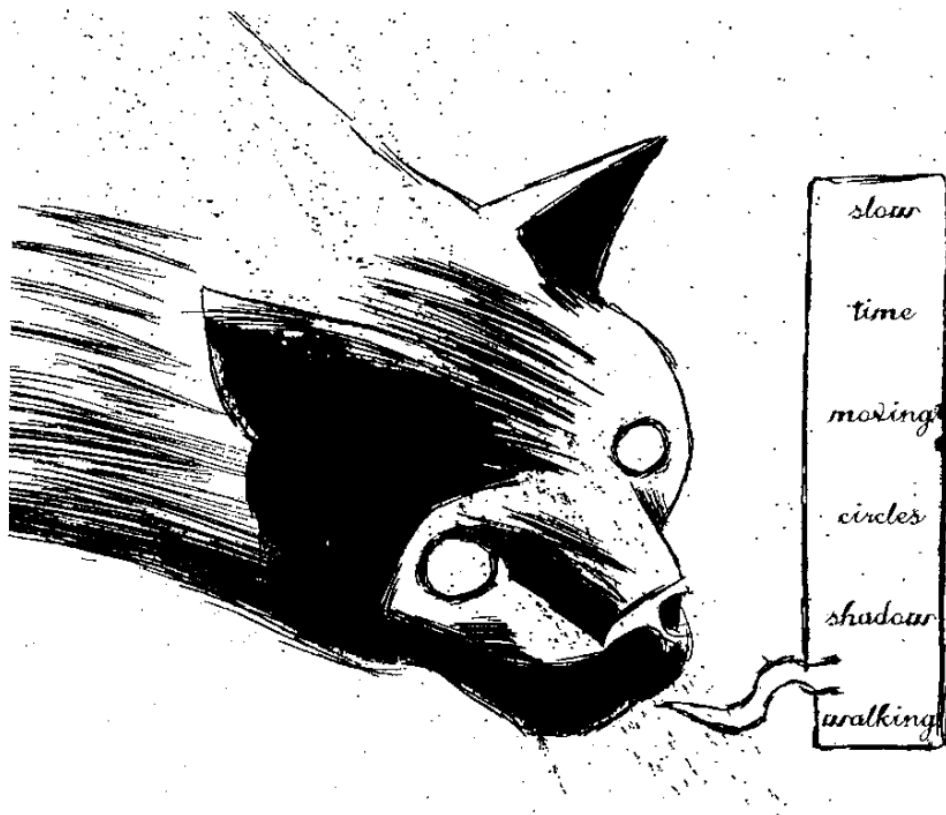
Elder Paw held a family council meeting to discuss important family matters.



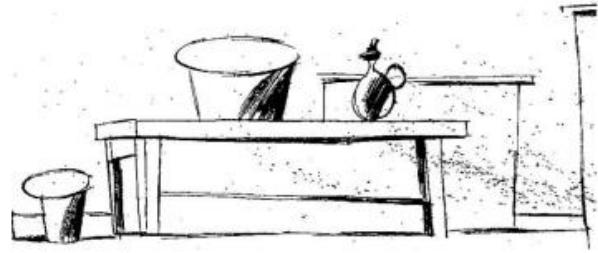
Elder Paw and Father Paw fought over who would be the leader of the family .



Varjak's litter brothers watched as Julius and Varjak fought.



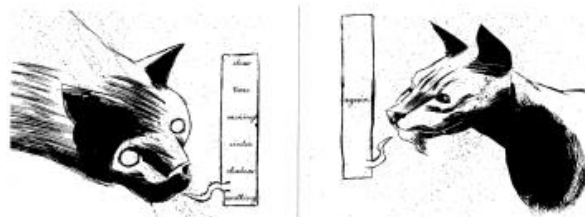
Elder Paw taught Varjak the first three out of seven skills in "The Way of Jalal" until he had remembered them.

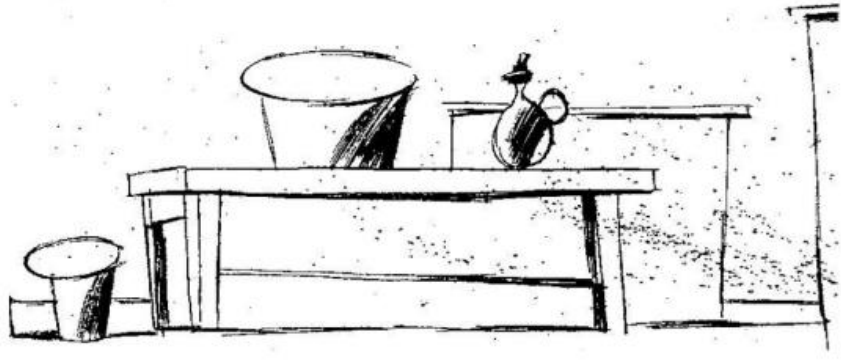


Mesopotamian Blue. What do you want out there?’

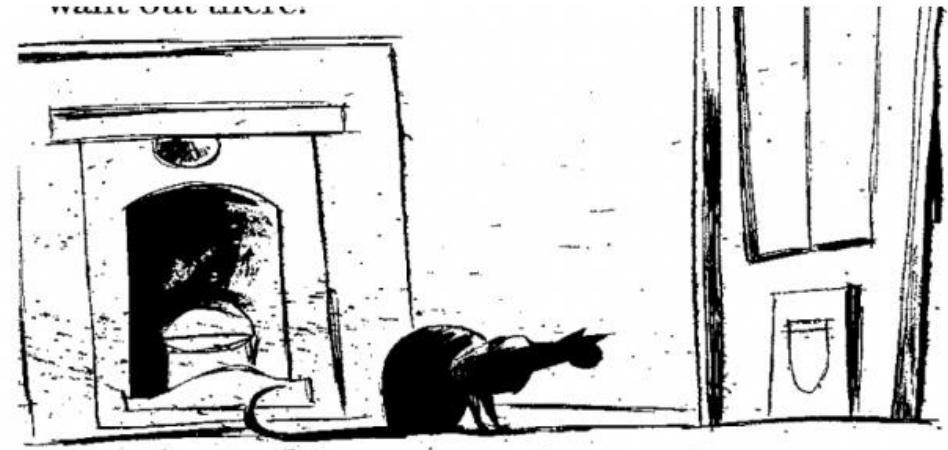


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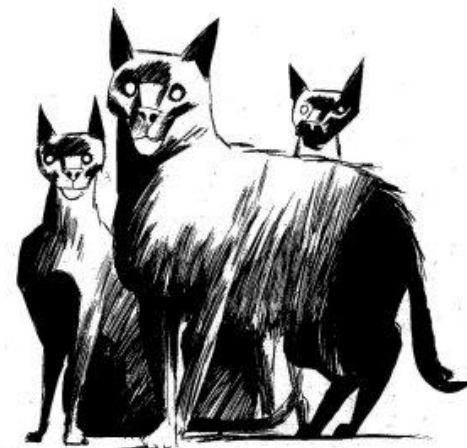
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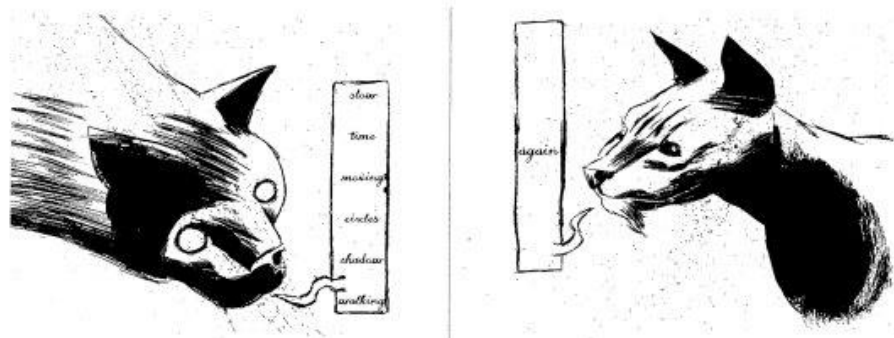
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