
YOMI
AND THE CURSE OF GROOTSLANG


Eksteensfontein
Port Nolloth
THE ATLANTIC OCEAN


NAMIBIA
Noordoewer
Vioolsdrif
ORANGE RIVER
SOUTH AFRICA
Steinkopf
Nababeep
O'Kiep
Springbok
AFRICA

**For Yasmin, for always believing in me.**
**– D. T.**

**To Bekah and Josh my great big siblings for always being my great big inspirations!**
**– A. D-B.**

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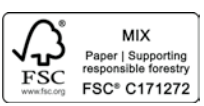


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LITTLE TIGER
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# YOMI

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CHAPTER 1

# THE ELEPHANT AND THE SNAKE

Yomi was surrounded by Nkara. She stared up at their fearsome fangs, enormous tusks and feathered wings. She felt her heart rate speed up as she thought about the power of these incredible creatures.

Moving closer to the life-sized statues that filled the waiting room, Yomi marvelled at the solid gold, silver, bronze, glass, wood and even crystal used to bring the Nkara to life. Her younger brother Kayode hovered close by, looking at the Tabun rearing its claws at the onlooker. Its bright yellow eyes warned them to be on guard.

This collection of Nkara statues was the closest Yomi had got to these powerful African beasts since

arriving in Springbok. The town sat within a valley surrounded by rocky mountains and copper mines. Yomi knew there were real Nkara out there for her to find but she was yet to see anything ... nothing ... zilch!

"Uncle Olu, who are we meeting again?" Yomi turned to where her uncle stood, inspecting the feather-covered body of a Pamahago. His work researching Nkara for the Sacred Beast League meant that Yomi and Kayode got to meet some fascinating people.

"An old friend of mine works here," Olu answered. "Her name is Onalenna and she is an artefact specialist with the S.B.L. She is an expert in Yinza relics."

"Yinza!" Yomi was excited. The more she saw of this amazing moon magic, the more questions she had about it.

"Didn't I promise you I would give you more answers when we got here?" Olu said with a smile.

"After everything that happened in Senegal, we definitely need those answers!" Kayode traced his

fingers over the claws of the Tabun.

"So she knows how Yinza ties to the moon?" Yomi asked.

"Grandma knows *everything* about Yinza." The words were followed by a bright flash of light. Yomi turned in its direction to see a boy around her age, carrying a camera.

Yomi's eyes widened – here was a kid who knew about Yinza too!

"Sipho!" Olu greeted the boy. "It's been such a long time. Good to see you."

"It's good to see you too," Sipho answered, before turning to look at Yomi and Kayode. "*All* of you. Grandma sent me to come and get you."

Sipho grabbed Kayode's hand and took hold of Yomi's arm. He led them to another room further inside the building, where they found an older woman with thick grey braids. Behind her desk was the regal purple emblem of the S.B.L.

"Olusola Adesina." The woman broke into a big smile and opened her arms wide.

"Onalenna Magosi." Olu stepped into the hug.

"It's been too long! You need to come to South Africa more often," Onalenna told him.

"I do! Let me introduce you to my niece Yomi and nephew Kayode."



Yomi and Kayode shook hands with the senior S.B.L. member then Yomi cut straight to the chase. "We want to learn everything about Yinza."

Onalenna's eyes brightened. "The greatest energy in existence starts on the moon but ends up on Earth and takes many forms: weapons, moonstones, Nkara and even people."

"People!" Kayode gasped.

"How does that work?" Yomi enquired. She knew

that Nkara were connected to Yinza, but humans? She wanted to know more.

"Little is known about the descendants of the moon but they are the strongest users of Yinza. Some Nkara even worship them." Onalenna's hands became expressive as she explained.

Yomi couldn't imagine Nkara worshipping people, but then she realized they weren't exactly human. *Maybe they're like moon humans*, she thought.

"The descendants can harness Yinza for other purposes, and exactly how they do that is what the S.B.L. are trying to understand. This is where Olu comes in!"

Olu smiled. "I only just got permission to look into Yinza properly. I'm trying to figure it all out. Once I am done, you will be the first to read my report."

As the adults spoke, Yomi noticed Kayode wandering around the room. He was looking at Onalenna's Nkara ornaments and paintings of scenery from across South Africa.



"What's this?" Kayode held up a pencil sketch of a Nkara that Yomi had never seen before.

"That is Grootslang, the mighty elephant-headed serpent. One of the oldest Sacred Nkara," Onalenna answered.

"She is also an Ancient, right?" Yomi remembered the sub-groups of Nkara from the Beast Atlas.

"Yes, that's right. The story goes," Onalenna began, "that at the beginning of the world, many Grootslangs roamed across Africa, harvesting the wealth they found. Then the gods realized how smart they were. They didn't want anyone more intelligent than them running around so the Grootslangs were split into two creatures – and

that's why we have elephants and snakes. However, one Grootslang survived the great splitting. She was smarter than the rest and managed to slip away into a deep cave in the Richtersveld."

"What does she eat?" Kayode asked quietly.

"Anything, but she likes elephants best."

"She must be pretty strong," Kayode pointed out.

"She's not only strong and smart, but cruel as well," Onalenna murmured.

"Cruel?" Yomi repeated. She had never heard that word used to describe a Nkara, no matter what sort of trouble it may have caused.

"But enough of that." Onalenna changed the subject. "Let's talk about Vilha."

"What's Vilha?" Yomi asked.

"Vilha is a town here in the Northern Cape," Olu answered.

"A place tied to Yinza," Onalenna added. "For hundreds of years, meteorites have landed there, but many of them were really moonstones crashing to Earth."

"And it's where we're going for your first S.B.L.

expedition – well, the outskirts at least – on the South Africa branch's yearly mission," Olu announced.

Yomi could hardly believe her luck. Finally she would be able to see some Nkara!

While the adults talked about plans, Yomi noticed Sipho had been pretty quiet but now he was murmuring into his mobile, talking animatedly in a language she recognized as Tswana. When he spotted Yomi staring, Sipho ended his call and moved closer to them.

"We've heard all about you two," he said.

"We?" said Yomi.

"How you rescued Ninki Nanka and saved the Yumboe city from the hunters!" he added.

Yomi felt a flush of pride to hear other people sharing the stories of their adventures.

"One World for All," he said.

"Are you in the S.B.L. too?" Yomi asked.

"Yes," Sipho replied. He looked at his grandma and Olu still in deep conversation. "There is more to Grootslang's story than Grandma told you, but

we can't talk about it here – in front of them." Sipho stopped and called over to the adults, "Grandma, I'm going to take Yomi and Kayode outside ... to play."

"Have fun!" she answered.

"And behave," Uncle Olu warned.

"Always." Yomi grinned, following Kayode and Sipho outside.

Like the rest of Springbok, the gardens of the S.B.L. office were engulfed with spring flowers like red spider lilies and yellow pietsnots which bloomed throughout the summer. Underneath a leafless quiver tree in the middle of the gardens, Sipho stopped and looked around, making sure no one else was about.

"The town of Vilha was cursed by Grootslang," Sipho began.

"A curse?" Kayode's voice dropped.

"It is said that if people return there, it will be consumed by the earth."

"Why would Grootslang curse a town?" Yomi questioned.



"Because of 'the boy who stole'. A child once took some treasure from Grootslang. She followed him home and then started to destroy Vilha." Sipho shook his head. "That was fifty years ago."

"She destroyed a whole town?!" Yomi exclaimed.

"She would have done, but to save the boy's life, and themselves, the people of Vilha gave Grootslang the Tusk Diamond," Sipho replied.

"What's so special about the diamond?" Kayode questioned.

"It's a Yinza relic. It made the land bloom with life and wealth," Sipho answered. Yomi's ears pricked at the mention of that. "Handing it over was the only thing that satisfied Grootslang and stopped her from completely destroying the town then and there. You see, Grootslang isn't like the other Nkara. She gets gem hunger, or diamond thirst, as some people call it. Once she saw the Tusk Diamond, she had to have it. But she cursed the village, to make sure the people of Vilha could never return."

"And that's where we are going on this expedition? To the edge of a place that's been cursed!" Kayode blurted out.

"Don't worry, it will be fine. But now to the best bit – I have an invitation for you both," Sipho announced.

"From who?" Yomi and Kayode asked together.

Sipho grinned, a glint in his eye. "I can't say yet but all will be revealed at the S.B.L. meeting in Steinkopf."