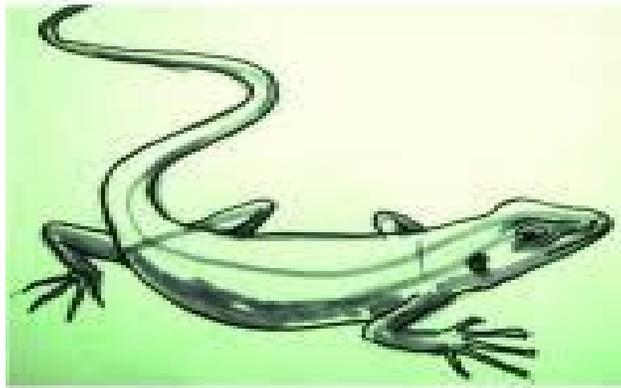


The Story of the
Salamander



By: Evan Johnson

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Dedicated to Bryce

Never forget that you are the strongest
in your life, and never forget your own
unique strengths.

Long ago, a child just as young as you and just as handsome too was quite curious about that slithery, sneaky green thing on the ground, dashing all around.



So the child picked it up, took it to his grandpa, and asked, “Grandpa, what’s this?”



The grandpa replied, “Don’t you know? It’s a salamander, the strongest creature of all!”

“But it looks kind of weak and tiny,” the boy said. “Is it really the strongest?”



“Anything can be strong, my boy, even if it doesn’t look like it. Here, let me tell you a story about the original Salamander.”



Once upon a time, when all the creatures of the Earth were just beginning to find out who they truly were, four of the animals- A salamander named Ignis, a water strider named Undine, a monkey known as Gnome, and a cockatiel called Sylph- each proposed a challenge, a series of tests designed to find out their strengths.



These tests were some of the hardest these creatures could think of, and this would be no easy feat. But they were ready to learn what they could do, and they began to go at the challenges with much energy.

The first challenge they decided upon was a swimming contest. They went to the mystical Lake Kournas for the challenge, a swim across the lake in the fastest time.



Almost immediately, it was clear who would win. Ignis, the salamander was quite ahead of the others, only the strider, Undine was able to keep up, the others struggling. But suddenly, Undine found much strength and pulled ahead into the end of the lake!

Undine won!

Ignis was a little sad, for he had not won, but there were still other challenges ahead, and he would find out who he was meant to become. Fortunately, the next challenge would test him well.

A race across the Foloji forest floor was just what he needed to disperse all his worries.



Ignis slithered fast across the ground, determined at all costs to be the victor. But alas, again someone pulled ahead! It was Gnome, the monkey! And with a great burst, Gnome finished the race strong.

Ignis was feeling quite down now. He had lost two races, and there were only two more challenges!

The other animals noticed he was down and came over to cheer him up.

“Don’t worry, we still have two more trials,” said Gnome.

“There will still be plenty of chances to find what you’re good at!” Undine exclaimed.

Sylph the cockatiel chimed in, “Even I haven’t won yet, but I still have hope!”

Ignis was given more hope and nodded. “Come on friends, we still have two more tests to finish!”

The third test was a climb up the tallest tree the group could find, the Mystical Oak.



Once more, Ignis made great haste up the tree. He sped up quickly, around the branches and through the leaves.

He was almost there!

But again, a terrible surprise! Sylph was also making her way up, and Gnome as well!

As Gnome speedily climbed up the tree, and Sylph hopped swiftly from branch to branch, taking great flights in between, Ignis fell in third, the only other one with difficulty in the challenge being Undine!



As the race ended, Ignis was left feeling more and more depressed. He felt as if he were nothing.

The other animals again noticed his gloomy face and came over to try and cheer him up.

“Come on Ignis, there’s still one more challenge!” They all said.

Now making their way down the tree, Ignis replied in a very melancholy tone, “What’s the point? You all will just win the last one too. I’ll just sit in the shade and watch.”



The other animals looked at each other with much thought. They wanted to finish the final challenge, but would leaving out Ignis really be okay?

After much talk alone amongst themselves, Ignis sadly moping under a pile of fallen leaves nearby, they devised a clever change to the final challenge. It was something that they they were all certain they could never win, and they hoped that Ignis, who still had not found what he was the best at, could rejoin and triumph in the final competition.

It was a log breaking contest.



Now, as the other animals began, they discovered that it was even harder than they had thought. Gnome scratched his claws off, Sylph's beak was in quite a lot of pain, and Undine didn't even know where to begin!

As they kept on with the difficult task, they attempted to call Ignis back over.

"Get over here, Ignis! This is just the challenge for you!" Gnome shouted.

"Come on over and give it a shot!" Sylph exclaimed.

"Oomph, this is difficult," Undine remarked,

"Hey Ignis, this is your time!"

As Ignis watched his friends and heard their pleas, he thought, *Maybe I can do this!*

"Alright, I'll give it my best!"



As he began, he too found he was having much difficulty trying to break his log. He tapped, he pounded, he bit, but nothing worked!

But he saw his friends trying just as hard, and he kept on going.

He worked as hard as possible, going twice as hard, thrice as hard, and eventually, both he and the other animals made headway with the cracks in their logs.

But something else was happening as well!

As they all worked hard, they of course started to sweat. But what set Ignis apart from the others, was that his sweat was making weird hissing noises on the logs! The other animals, startled and surprised, watched as the wood became softer, weaker, and even lit on fire as Ignis worked even harder!

The other animals were scared and yelled and screamed, “Watch out, Ignis! The log is on fire!”



But Ignis kept going. The heat of the fire only made him work harder, faster, greater, and eventually-

Snap!- The log broke!

Ignis stepped back, unaffected by the flames. He was finally victorious.

All the animals were amazed, and cheered loudly.

“Ignis! Ignis! Ignis!”

He was proud. He had finally found his calling, who he really was.



“But even that was only the beginning of what salamanders could do, and eventually, they became that little guy there.” The grandpa said, his story finished.

“Wow, is that really true?!?” the child asked in wild amazement.

“Yup! And even though that little guy may not look that tough, sure enough, he has many strengths in other areas, too.”

After a while of sitting and contemplating, the old man asked, “Say, why don’t don’t ya keep that little one and give it a name?”

And so the child decided to adopt the small amphibian and named it Ignis, after the first and the strongest salamander.



The end!

Evan Johnson lives in Lowell, Mi, a developing community near Grand Rapids. His interests are children's stories, anything even slightly silly, and, of course, chill lizards.

