



Children's Writing Competition 2010
Year 6 Winner: Finlay MacKenzie

The Night of the Silver Willow

Hooves thundered on the moon-bleached earth. Nine stallions were gathered by a frozen river – four on each side. The ninth was a blue roan, much older than the rest and with an air of authority and glory. White hairs tipped his muzzle. He stepped forwards and announced:

"We have gathered here tonight upon the Silver Willow Shore to fight for Maple, Shadow and Brook. Who will fight first?"

There was a moment's hesitation. The horses' breathing created misty clouds as the mares shifted nervously.

"I will fight first!" a great, black stallion cried, as if there should have been no question as to who would fight. His pure white mane glimmered as he tossed it like snowflakes in the wind.

"And I will challenge him," a bay replied from the other side of the river. He looked around nervously, as if he expected the blue roan to oppose him.

"Very well," the blue roan neighed. "Leave the bank, both of you, and stand in the centre of the river. The winner may add Maple to their herd."

The two stallions obeyed. The bay, who was much smaller than his opponent, eyed the black stallion's hooves. They were huge, and could easily knock the breath out of a smaller horse. The ice cracked where they hit it.

"Commence!" roared the blue roan.





The black stallion charged at the bay and reared, but the bay was too nimble, and danced out of the way just in time. A screeching sound hit their ears as the black stallion's hooves ploughed into the ice, breaking it. Stars sparkled coldly above them as the black stallion charged. This time, however, he didn't stop in time, and skidded on the ice when he tried to stop too quickly. This blunder bought the bay time, and he darted past his opponent, weaving through the dents and cracks in the ice made by the black stallion's charge. Light needed the darkness as the battle wore on. The bay was tired, but the black stallion was exhausted. Each of his limbs were like lead, his blows growing slower and weaker. Finally, he lay on the ground, panting, watching the ink-black water rushing beneath the ice, weakened by the fight and the warmth creeping through the sky.

The bay looked around the bank and saw that other horses were likewise defeated. As the sun dawned, the blue roan turned tail and disappeared through the willows.

The Night of the Silver Willow was over.

History of the Night of the Silver Willow

Established by Willow I, king of the Erequus Island Kingdom, the Night of the Silver Willow was established to determine the new herd of mares whose mate had died. Willow I decreed that "If a herd leader dies of old age, illness, hunger, cold, predators or any rogue horse, their mares will be fought for on Silver Willow Shores at the next full moon." If, however, a stallion is struck down by another herd-owning stallion, then the mares go to the victor.

In the battle between Sedge and Moonlight (Sedge being the bay, and Moonlight the black), the blue roan is King Willow III, born seven generations after the establishment of the Night of the Silver Willow and twelve generations after the settlement of horses on Erequus Island.

King Willow III was the son of Pine II, and knew much about the Night of the Silver Willow as a foal, for his own father died when he was very young and he was put into the herd of





Snowflake, a pure white stallion. Because foals will always go with their mother in the Night of the Silver Willow, Willow III stayed with his mother, having no idea of who he was, and not living in the territory that was rightfully his. However, the regent currently in power had banned the Night of the Silver Willow, and it was not until the crowning of Willow III, 12 season-turns after he was born, that the Night of the Silver Willow became common practice again.

