

Beasts

There was no sound made as the two beasts approached the grazing herbivore. The first paused and smelled the air, while the second, slightly smaller beast, stopped and waited. No fear could be detected from the huge armored behemoth, which was ten times as large as the crouching beasts. After the beast was sure that the herbivore had not detected him, he slowly crept forward. The second beast, which was waiting for the dominant animal to continue, followed closely behind.

The herbivore was trying to dislodge a particularly tasty mushroom out of a fallen tree when its instincts first warned it of danger. On this world, the fauna had evolved to know that as soon as you sensed danger, you didn't wait around to find out what it was. It broke into a run, heading back to its herd where it would be somewhat safe. But the lumbering behemoth wasn't half as fast as the two beasts that stalked it.

The smaller of the two beasts sprang towards the herbivore. It almost seemed to be smiling as it bared its teeth. It ran up behind the animal and seemed like it meant to pass along side of it. But just as it ran up to the herbivore's midsection it sprang up and at an angle away from the herbivore to land on the trunk of a large tree. Almost in the same motion, it sprang again towards the herbivore and landed on its back. Digging its talons into the armored shell of the behemoth, it started to ferociously claw and bite into the creature's neck.

It could do very little damage up there, but that was not the intent. The beast had placed itself where the behemoth could not see it, but could hear its growls and snarls quite clearly. And the beast was making the most of it, enticing the behemoth to panic. The smell of fear from the herbivore was like a drug to the beast, causing waves of pleasure as the beast continued to torment its prey.

The herbivore was in the grip of panic. Its only desire right now was to get that thing off of its back and get back to the safety of the herd. The thrashing around it had already tried had little effect, as the beast's talons were firmly implanted into its back. The behemoth's instincts told him that the next thing to try was a roll. While continuing to run erratically and rubbing into the occasional tree to try and scrape the attacker off, it moved towards a small clearing in the forest.

As it entered the clearing it abruptly pivoted to the left, and let its right legs collapse beneath it. It fell to the ground and the roughly cylindrical shape of its body started to roll. With the momentum it had gained while running, it rolled onto its back, over to its other side and back up onto its feet again. Some part of its brain had registered the sharp pain in its belly as it was rolling, but the behemoth ignored it, starting to run again. It couldn't detect the beast that was previously on its back.

When the herbivore has started the roll, the beast on its back jumped upward and let the behemoth roll away from him. The larger of the two beasts was in motion now, sprinting at top speed toward the herbivore that had just hit the ground and started the roll. As the herbivore was in mid roll the beast leapt over it and swiped a sizable claw at the behemoth's belly. A section of the belly was unarmored and the beast knew exactly where to hit to sever a major vein. The beast was rewarded with a splash of thick purple blood as it landed to the other side of the herbivore. The two beasts continued to chase the wounded herbivore. Blood was steadily pouring out of its wound, but it continued to run until it weakened and eventually collapsed.

The second of the two beasts approached the fallen giant and started to lick the gaping wound. The larger beast growled and leapt onto the other, taking a swipe at the other's face. Its claws were retracted so no serious damage was done. The second backed away, snarling, and the two beasts started to circle each other. Occasionally one would lash out, or try to tackle the other. It would continue until one would relent, probably the smaller one. Among these animals it was customary for the dominant beast to feed first, but if the other didn't challenge that right at all, it would be a sign of weakness.

There was a gleam in the old Human's eyes as he watched the two beasts fighting over their fallen prey. He spared a quick glance to his scanner to make sure that it had recorded the entire incident.

"These animals are perfect." he spoke aloud, to no one in particular. "They are vicious, ruthless, and intelligent. They will make excellent subjects."

"Have you completed your preliminary tests on them?" another voice asked. The Human turned to see that the Groten had joined him. The human was so caught up in the drama before him, he hadn't detected the other's presence.

"Yes.... The two samples we dissected showed me that they are indeed compatible with my methods - almost exactly compatible in fact. It was as if God himself created them here for me to find." The Human chuckled to himself, knowing that the Groten didn't share, or even believe, in the calling that had brought him to this world. No matter. It didn't matter why they were on the same path, just that they were.

As the Groten was mentally considering the state of the Human's sanity, his communicator received an expected signal. He listened for a moment as he was given a report.

"The Frigate De Venger has arrived and will be in orbit momentarily. They report that the stealth field is still operating as expected. They were able to approach the Confederation station unnoticed.

"Excellent. Soon, soon my friend, all the pieces will be in place. Soon we will show the Confederation the error of its ways."

The towering Groten glowered at the Human. "It had better be soon. I grow weary of this waiting." A Crocaloid appeared and approached the two from the direction of base camp. He glanced fearfully at the Groten, which was easily five times his mass, even considering that the Crocaloid was a large member of the Crocaloid Major species. He moved towards the old Human.

"Sir. Here are the results of the final tests on the specimens." He handed a small computer pad over to the Human, who glanced at it briefly.

"As I expected. Perfect." He was lost in thought for a moment, but then turned towards the Crocaloid.

"Hansox, you will coordinate with the commander of the De Venger and immediately start the harvesting of the animals."

"Yes sir. How many of them do you require, sir?"

"All of them."

"Yes sir. You mean all of this herd, sir?"

"All of them." The Human had turned and was glaring at the Crocaloid. The Groten recognized a hint of amusement in the old man's eyes.

"Sir... Um, could you be a bit more specific, sir?"

The Human took a step towards the Crocaloid. "All. As in every... single... one."

"You're kidding. That would take- "

The Human closed the distance to the Crocaloid with a surprising speed considering his look of frailty. All amusement had vanished from his face, which now had a look of fevered intensity. Despite the fact that the Human was half the size of the beefy Crocaloid and looked frail enough to be pushed over by a stiff wind, his intensity and apparent fearlessness was intimidating. He stood toe-to-toe with Hansox and stared up at his face with the look of a madman.

"ALL... OF... THEM. Which part of all don't you understand, you worthless vurm? I want all of them. In every forest, in every jungle, on every plain of this entire planet. Every single animal is going to be mine. Now you are going to go back to the De Venger and coordinate it. DO YOU UNDERSTAND?"

The Crocaloid, who usually did the intimidating, managed to retaliate somewhat from the verbal assault. "But there could be millions of them! It could take years. Have you gone completely ins- "

He stopped short as he notice that the Groten had approached closer. His flame red fur was bristling and his arm was way too close to a slung assault rifle. The Groten and Crocaloid locked eyes for a moment, and Hansox, knew exactly what the Groten's eyes were trying to convey. It went something like 'Do you know how close you are to having your arms ripped out of their sockets?' It wouldn't be the first time, as the Groten's temper and great strength were well known. Hansox glanced towards the Human, who was now grinning.

"Yes sir." he said stiffly. He backed a few steps and then turned and walked towards base camp.

The Groten let himself relax and turned to watch the two beasts that were still feeding on their prey.

"Will they be as capable as you've indicated?"

"Oh yes. Yes, indeed. More so. They are truly fantastic animals."

"We shall see." The Groten could see the potential, but decided to remain unimpressed.

"What do you plan to call them?"

"I'm so glad you asked." The Human's eyes gleamed. "I call them... Batori."