

## Basking on Bombshells

Men were nothing but destructive; every animal knew that.

I knew that they were more cunning than any viper, but had no need to lie in wait beneath the sand, for there was not one creature that knew for certain that they could evade man, no matter how loud or impulsive a predator he was. However, knowledge, particularly of the dangers of the world, held no worth in comparison to experience, and, being little more than a hatchling only a few moons ago, I had never come into close contact with a man. Blissfully naïve and, admittedly, arrogant, I expected that life would continue in this manner.

That was, of course, until one grabbed me.

I froze in shock, not quite sure what I could do to save myself. Lizards were swift, but enclosed in the fist of a predator who could all but crush me if he pleased, that was of no use. I had no real means of defence. I squirmed and thrashed about, even resorting to wrapping my tail around his huge fingers in an attempt to prise them off, but, to my dismay, it was all seemingly in vain. I went still, though it was far too late to play dead, and simply resigned myself to my fate. And yet, it never came. The man just stood there, staring at me with an expression of what I had believed to be malice, but later identified as mere curiosity. After a moment, he muttered something in a man-tongue unlike the one I had heard nearby settlers speak, and before I had a chance to react, he dropped me into the pocket of the strange over-skins covering his hind legs, and began to walk.

While the trek was relatively long, the man stopped frequently to give me water from the bottle he carried, and the pocket turned out to be pleasantly cool. Eventually, I was brought back out into the familiar blistering heat of the desert, but what I saw was unlike anything I had even imagined man to be capable of. Hundreds upon hundreds of strange mechanisms, made of what looked like oddly polished stone, sat about the area, which was teeming with more men than I thought existed in the entire world. Ignoring the 'weaponry', as I later heard them referred to as, the sheer amount of the same species in one place was foreign to me. Animals in the desert only ever seemed to come together to fight, whether that be over food or mates, and yet, these men were co-existing quite peacefully, in a manner I had not witnessed since before my nest-mates and I had left our mother.

And so, I spent the next couple of moons in the man-nest, and gradually grew less skittish around its inhabitants. I was fed and watered generously, and I feel no shame in admitting that nothing outside of the nest could have tempted me back to the wild. I lived in one of the large, strange nests, which weren't nearly as secure as those buried made in the sand, and flapped about violently when the desert winds got high, with the man who had brought me here. He called me by many endearing names (or, what I assumed were endearing), though I understood none of them, and the other men called him by many as well. However, he had one name which I noticed most frequently, and was used solely by the most assertive and brash of the men (who I was always careful to avoid), and this name was 'soldier'. While he called many of the other men by the same name, I always supposed it was a little more important when he used it for my 'soldier'. We grew somewhat close, for a man and a lizard, and I began to notice his more odd, personal habits. One of the more notable behaviours was, every moon or so, he would come into the nest with a flat, pale thing that flapped in the wind and was decorated with curious inscriptions. He would look over these, often more than once, and while this confused me, I knew it brought him some sort of happiness, and left him be.

The calm before the storm can never last forever, and this was no exception. One night, seemingly like any other, I was roused by a noise louder than any crack of thunder I had heard, and I opened my eyes to a bright light flickering violently outside the nest. I began to scurry about in a panic, and this eventually woke the man who my Soldier shared his home, who seemed to realise what was going on immediately. He grasped me in one hand, and with the other, shook the Soldier where he lay, roaring at him in what I could only assume was terror. Before I could even begin to comprehend the situation, I, along with the Soldier, was flung out of the nest, and the loud noise came again, only much, much closer. I blinked hard, and where the nest had once stood was a crater, and nothing more. I did not see the Nest-Mate again.

Another moon or so passed, and while the Soldier had seemed dejected at first (which I could only link to the disappearance of the Nest-Mate, though not comprehend why this would have such a profound effect on him), he soon regained the willpower I had almost missed. I knew something was about to happen; that was clear enough. Men were beginning to deconstruct their nests, and the strange metal camels with odd, spinning hooves and worryingly stiff tails coming out of their heads were beginning to depart. This continued for a few sun-cycles, and when the large nest was almost deserted, my Soldier dropped me into his pocket, much like he had the day I'd first set eyes on him.

And, then shouldering the stick-that-spits-death, he began to walk.