

Gort and Mrick grinned as they crossed the final bridge that separated the disquiet of urbanity from the calm of the countryside; the city trapped fine smoke particles in the air that stifled their lungs, and the traffic burdened their ears with rancorous, honking pollution.

Their hearing was strikingly sensitive, for the denizens of Maurus were adapted to hunt the swift-footed ungulates that inhabited the planet. Gort and Mrick, both Maurians, were terrifying looking creatures with enormous, pointed ears and great canines which protruded beneath their lips like stout tusks. But these adaptations, once helpful when primitive Maurians roamed the planet in search of prey, were of little use in the bustling metropolises where they now lived.

As they entered a land of green, rolling hills, Gort and Mrick glimpsed the roaring city vanish in their rear view mirror, and soon enough, their destination loomed before them like a sprawling empire: The Hinterlands of Sohr, whose sharp peaks resembled palatial spires.

"Damn," grumbled Gort. "I forgot to bring a pillow."

Mrick chuckled, deep and rumbling, like Maurians do. "You poor bastard, how will you ever survive the night?"

Gort fought to ignore the insult, but his rough, clawed fingers gripped the steering wheel tighter.

"Watch out!"

Gort swerved to avoid a bounding deer-like creature as it dashed across the road and dove into the woods. Their car bounced turbulently along the shoulder as Gort regained control of the vehicle. Distracted by adrenaline and acute thoughts of death, Gort and Mrick failed to notice an event of interest - a feral bipedal creature, with an unkempt lock of hair hanging from its face, had apparently been in vigorous pursuit of the dashing ungulate, and charged into the woods behind it.

Trembling, Gort pulled the car back onto the smooth highway. The near accident unsettled him, and his menacing claws clattered against the steering wheel.

Mrick's gaze, meanwhile, was absorbed in the rear view mirror, although the road was empty. "What were those spears about?"

Gort squinted. "What are you talking about?"

"Didn't you see? The long poles—they resembled spears, sticking out from that animal's back."

Froth had collected on the side of Gort's mouth, an outward expression of Maurian frustration. "Of course not! I was immersed in the task of avoiding a collision with a tree!"

"There were two long spears, stuck in the animal's back. Odd, so odd."

The two Maurians continued to contemplate the uncertainties of the wild as they ascended into a cryptic, unfamiliar place. Queer trees leaned into the highway, and their gnarled limbs reached overhead like frozen skeletons, darkening the road.

Mrick spread his scaled, reptilian arms before him. "The Hinterlands of Sohr—certainly a humbling place. Where our ancestors lived, they say."

"And hunted. They were wise. These thick woods must teem with prey. I just hope we don't encounter any more on the road."

Thankfully they did not, and both Maurians, whose rumps were numbed by the long ride, were delighted to arrive at the Sohr Valley Campground. They selected a comfortable site near both potable water and toilets, for these were city folk, and the trip here was adventure enough. There they pitched a cavernous tent, for Maurians were awkward, hulking creatures, who demanded ample space.

Exhausted from the journey across bridges, through hills, and up mountains, Gort and Mrick retired early, but not before preparing a great stew of steaming, fibrous pods, which sedated them further and readied them for a deep, snoring slumber.

But their slumber was often interrupted, for their hypersensitive ears heard whispers throughout the night. The whispers seemed far off; they came and went, like a struggling radio signal. Sometimes they came in heated, flurried, exchanges, and other times they were sparse and placid.

By dawn the whispers had subsided, and Gort arose early to relieve the stress in his abdomen. He exited the tent and let loose a lamenting wail.

Mrick's eyelids shot open. "What is it!?"

"It's the stew-it's all gone!"

And the two Maurians realized their irresponsible error: They failed to secure their food in place where wild ravenous creatures scurry all through night, and can even deceive the perceptive ears of a Maurian.

After scolding one another for their ineptitude in the outdoors, Gort and Mrick thought it prudent to acquire a trail map, lest they lose themselves in the murky woods. A far-off campground in the deep hinterlands of Sohr lacked a traditional visitor center, but the two Maurians did find a helpful informational board which allowed them to select a comfortable trail, of both moderate difficulty and moderate length, that led to a heavenly waterfall.

Also posted prominently upon the board were a series of suggestions and warnings. One of these stated, in bold letters:

**BEWARE:
HUMANS MAY BE FOUND IN THIS AREA. THEY ARE CONSIDERED TO BE
IMPORTANT MEMBERS OF THE NATURAL COMMUNITY. THEY WILL NOT ATTACK,
BUT IF DISTURBED OR CORNERED THEY WILL DEFEND THEMSELVES.**

The two Maurians finished reading, and then made sure to top off their water bottles before embarking on a trail of moderate difficulty, through the enchanting hinterlands of Sohr.

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