

# ARGOL THE BARBARIAN

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Argol remembered what Professor Noveski had said when they landed on this planet, and found that it was passing through a period of evolution roughly between that of the Jurassic and Cretaceous periods of Earth. He also remembered what the Captain had said when he'd found that the main rocket drive had developed a major fault. But most of all, he remembered how one by one the crew of the ship had been killed off, as they'd waited for help from one of the nearest Terran bases; help that never came.

It was over five years ago now, that they'd been marooned here. The hull of the 'Explorer 12' had sunk into the soft marshy ground over three years ago, but he still remembered. He had to remember, for it was all that remained of his links with Earth and civilisation. His clothes were pieces of animal skin, and the food he ate was harvested or hunted. Even the Terran weapons had become useless over the years, and now all he had to defend himself with was a bow and arrow and a long handled spear, though little use they were against the mighty reptiles that ruled the planet.

Strangely closely following Terra's pattern of development, the planet, known only as a grid reference on Earth's exploration maps, was passing through the period when huge reptiles ruled the planet and smashed everything else, and each other to pieces in their violent struggle for existence. Argol had seen many species that were virtually identical to those that had trampled across Earth many millions of years ago. The only difference seemed to be their size. He had seen a Diplodocus type creature in the interior swamps that must have been five hundred feet long, and had himself narrowly escaped from a Tyrannosaurus that had towered a hundred feet in the air. Fire was his only defence against an attacking reptile, but some, despite their size, were so stupid, that they trampled forward regardless of the danger. That was how Professor Noveski had met his death. Having survived a year against the meat eating monsters, whose claws could rip your body apart in one motion, he had finally been trampled to death by a vegetarian reptile that was trying to escape from a Tyrannosaurus.

Usually Argol remained close to his cave, whose narrow opening protected him at night from all but the smallest creatures, and these were kept at bay by a row of atomic powered searchlights that he had salvaged from the ship.

But at the moment, he was rushing through the fern covered swamplands, heedless of any danger that lurked in the dense undergrowth.

While he had been standing at his cave mouth, he'd heard a sound that he hadn't heard for five years - the roar of atomic motors. When he'd looked up into the sky, he'd seen the unmistakable trail of a ship's landing jets blasting. Had the rescue party arrived after all these years?

Suddenly a chill ran through his body as he heard a roar of animal hatred close by, followed by a crashing of undergrowth. He looked around. From where the sound came, a Megalosaurus charged towards him. His heart sank. Having survived five years in this prehistoric hell, was he now to be killed when possible salvation was perhaps only a few minutes walk away?

He realised that it was futile to try and run, the huge ninety foot creature could take one step to his ten. As he looked around, he heard an answering roar, and accompanied by a crashing of undergrowth, another reptile came lumbering through the spongy fern covered marshland. Argol's hopes were raised as he realised that he was just a bystander to a battle between two Megalosauruses. For a moment, he wondered which way he should run, as the two reptiles charged towards each other, roaring snarls of war. He was about halfway between the two warring creatures, and obviously this wasn't a very safe

place to remain. He ran to what he considered to be a marginally safe distance, and turned to watch in fascination, as the two creatures, each standing on hind legs, collided, ripping at each others necks, trying to penetrate their enemy's thick horny layers of armour with their rows of evilly pointed, foot long, teeth. The two creatures locked into each others necks, and clawed each others backs with their tiny hands, while their tails thrashed about trying to inflict further punishment on their rival. Usually the meat eaters preyed only on the huge vegetarian reptiles, that were too large and cumbersome to protect themselves, and Argol assumed that this was some sort of territorial battle. He heard a crashing of branches and twigs. He gasped in dismay, as he saw that a tree had been uprooted from the soft marshy ground by a swipe of one of the creatures powerful tails and was toppling towards him. Before he had time to move, the mighty trunk had fallen into the marshy ground only a few feet away from him, with a dull, thudding, squelching sound, spattering him with vile smelling slime. He quickly looked back at the battling reptiles and decided that it was not very healthy to remain in the vicinity, and remembering the original aim of his journey, he moved on.

He managed to cover another mile of swampy forest without further incident, and finally emerged into a rough clearing. He sniffed at the air, and his nose picked up the unmistakable odour of a fire. He scanned the area, and saw a thick cloud of black smoke belching up into the air, about half a mile from where he stood. He looked puzzled. He was sure that the ship he'd seen had come down west to the point where he now stood, and this ship was to the east.

He was quite certain there were no other beings capable of producing fire on this planet apart from himself, and so he headed towards the rising smoke. As he ran, his heart began to pound faster. If there was smoke, it probably meant that the ship had crash landed, and therefore might be incapable of leaving the planet again. If this was to be the case, then fate was playing a very cruel trick on him.

He skirted round a high clump of thorny bushes and saw a medium sized spaceship laying amid an area of smashed trees and undergrowth. It's front was crumpled, and at the rear, the fires from the exhaust had ignited a clump of bushes which were now smouldering, the humidity of the swamp having stopped the fire from spreading further.

Suddenly, a shock of realisation hit him in the stomach. This was a different ship from the one he'd seen in the sky. Could it be after all this time that two ships had landed at the same time. Having got out of touch with developments on Earth, Argol was not sure if this ship was a Terran one or not. Although the design was unknown to him, it could well have been developed in his five years of enforced exile.

He stood at the edge of the disaster area, unsure whether to move nearer the ship or not, when an airlock opened, and a spacesuited figure emerged uncertainly. Argol realised that this was not an Earthman. the creature had four arms. He dimly became aware that some sort of gadget was being pointed at him, and the next second, his whole body was covered with a cramp that paralysed him. He realised with a certain amount of dismay, that he was being pulled towards the ship by a beam of force, which he was unable to resist. It was hard to make out the race to which the alien belonged, because his helmet seemed to reflect the light, and Argol could see his own face, strangely distorted in it, as the beam of force drew him to a spot a foot or so away from the spaceship's airlock.

"We watched you approach," the creature informed him, using the Galactic tongue somewhat doubtfully, wondering if Argol could understand him. "We shall require a force of your people to help us get our ship out of this swamp. What state has your civilisation reached?"

Argol felt the beam removed from him. "Where are you from?" he asked.

"We asked the first question," the alien replied, somewhat taken aback by the 'caveman' knowing the Galactic tongue. "If you answer our questions satisfactorily, we may consider answering any you may

have. Your knowledge of the Universal tongue suggests you have intelligence. You must therefore realise that we have the upper hand. It is within our power to destroy you at our will."

"Very well," Argol decided. He related the whole story of his disaster from beginning to end. Sometimes he hesitated, searching for the words he wanted. It had been a long time since he'd held a conversation with anyone.

"I see," the alien replied when he had finished. "Then you are the only intelligent living creature on this planet." Argol nodded. "If you help us," the alien continued, "we may repatriate you with your home planet, when we have completed our mission."

"Your mission?" Argol asked.

"Yes," the alien replied. "We are trying to track down an insane murderer who has escaped from a penal colony. We were sure that the ship used in the escape was landing on this planet, but we lost it when we hit a magnetic storm in the outer reaches of the atmosphere. As you can see it not only rendered our tracking devices inoperative, but also damaged our steering system. I am not totally reliant on this ship, but it is my preferred option for travel."

"Perhaps I can help you," Argol decided. "I thought I saw another ship land over there, but when I saw the smoke from yours, I wondered if my eyes had been playing tricks on me."

"Then takes us there," the alien requested eagerly.

"You'd better want him dead," Argol replied, "for if he steps out of his ship unarmed, he'll fall to the monsters of the forest."

"Oh dear," the alien replied. "We must hurry. We would not like any harm to come to the creature."

"But you said he was a murderer," Argol replied, somewhat bemused.

"The creature is ill," the alien replied. "We do not punish. We correct. When the creature is recovered, we will return it to its home planet."

"Then it is not of your race?" Argol queried.

"No," the alien confirmed. "In fact, it may well be a creature of the same origin as yourself, although there are certain differences."

"Where DO you come from?" Argol enquired.

"I believe on Earth, our planet is known as Ytrew."

"Ytrew," Argol exclaimed.

"You have heard of us?" the alien enquired. Argol nodded. There were very few people on Earth that had not heard of the Ytrew, though few had ever seen one. The Ytrew lived on a planet somewhere in the Andromeda Galaxy. They were an ancient race and extremely powerful, ruling nearly all of that Galaxy. They were not dictators but benefactors. They had become legendary on Earth through space mariner's tales of the Ytrew's incredible powers.

"You will show us where the spaceship landed?" the alien asked.

Argol nodded. "Have you a hovercar or some such similar flying machine?" he asked. "And plenty of weapons. This is a harsh planet."

"We have both," the creature replied. "Wait." A minute or so later, a hovercar landed by Kr, the alien, and he motioned Argol aboard. He climbed up the steps and once inside, settled in a luxurious chair. The alien took another seat, and as the door closed, the machine rose silently in the air. Argol noted with some wonder that there were no visible controls. He had heard that the Ytrew guided their smaller machines by thought impulses, but had never believed it.

"That way," Argol pointed. "About a mile. It should be quite obvious. It's all dense forest, and a spaceship landing in it, should have caused a considerable amount of damage."

"Ah yes," the alien murmured, "I see."

"Already," Argol exclaimed.

"Yes," the alien confirmed. "I'm surprised I didn't see it before." He pondered silently. "Perhaps my ship came down first," he continued. "It's difficult to work out exactly what happened in that magnetic storm. It was of an unusual violence."

"I must admit that I only saw one ship come down," Argol replied, "and on reflection, I'm certain that it wasn't yours."

"That could explain a lot," the alien replied. "You are proving to be very helpful. I think you have earned your return to your home planet."

Argol glanced out of the window and saw that the ship was hovering over the other ship, which appeared to have created even more chaos when landing than the alien's ship.

"I think I have located the life source," the alien decided. "I'm just out of range. I'll have to go a little lower. For some reason, I can't quite make contact -"

Suddenly the ship lurched, and began to spin towards the ground. The alien was convulsing in pain, frantically twiddling with the dials on the helmet of his spacesuit.

"What's the matter?" Argol asked, as the alien went limp in his seat. Any further questions were silenced, as the impact of the crash threw Argol out of his seat, and brutally tossed him across the floor of the ship and out of the door that was smashed off on impact. He squelched down into a clump of twisted vines that had entwined around each other on the marshy surface. Cursing, he staggered to his feet and looked at the crumpled wreckage of the hovercar. He heard a gasp of surprise from behind. He looked round and saw a girl aged about twenty, dressed in white, spattered with mud and slime. She had long blonde hair, and intense looking black eyes that stared at him in amazement.

"A human," she gasped. "Where's the alien?"

Argol was lost for words and gaped at her speechless.

"Have you killed him?" she gabbled. "Have you saved me? He's mad. He's trying to kill me. He's chased me half way across the Galaxy."

Was this the mad murderer that the alien had told him about? Looking at the girl, he just couldn't believe it. She was like an angel in this hell.

"We must escape," she continued, breathlessly. "He's killed my husband, and now he's after me. I saw him you see."

"Not really," Argol muttered, but he was beginning to.

"Have you somewhere safe to hide?" the girl asked. "He'll recover soon, and then he'll get me."

"Yes," Argol decided. "He'll never find us in my cave." He took the girl's hand, and began to run through the swampy ground back towards his cave. As he ran, he cursed himself mentally for being tricked so easily by the alien. He must have appeared pretty gullible. The creature had probably been laughing behind its helmet, all the way to the ship.

They arrived at his cave panting, and they collapsed on the floor, breathing heavily. When the girl had got her breath back, she began to explain what had happened.

"Me and Juk, my husband, lived on Tyuish 4, a planet near the Galactic rim. Juk was in charge of one of those automatic mining stations. One day this alien landed on our planet to effect an overhaul on his ship before he left for deep space. He seemed okay, and when we found out he was a Ytrew, we were honoured to take him in. We treated him like one of the family. Then, one day, he said he would be leaving the next morning, as he had completed the repairs on his ship.

I remember hearing something being knocked over down stairs, and when I came down to investigate, I found this alien standing over Juk's dead body. He'd opened our precious metals safe. He tried to take a shot at me, but missed. I managed to escape in the spaceship that the Company had loaned us, and he's been chasing me ever since. I've managed to lose him for a while every now and then, by creating a powerful magnetic field. They can't stand that, you know. That's how I brought his hovercar down."

"I see," Argol replied grimly. "What state is your ship in?"

"It's wrecked. It'll never fly again. I tried to land in a clearing, but I overshot it."

"Well, I don't know what state the alien is in, but we'd better hope that a monster gets him before he comes to. It seems to be our only chance. Don't worry though, I won't let him get you, without taking me first."

"Thank you," she said. She threw her arms round him, and hugging him tightly began to kiss him passionately. It had been over five years since he'd been near a girl, and he found her hard to resist.

That afternoon, Argol sat at the mouth of the cave, looking anxiously around for a sign of the alien.

"As far as I can see," the girl suddenly said, creeping up from inside the cave, "we've got just one chance of survival."

"What's that?" Argol asked.

"Well," the girl replied, sitting down next to him, and snuggling up close. "The way I see it, my ship'll never fly again, and you've no way to escape, so the only one who has a chance, is the alien."

"Assuming he can get his ship out of the swamp," Argol interrupted.

"Yes," the girl agreed, "but neither of us could fly it, because it's powered by his thought waves."

"So what's your idea?"

"Destroy his ship as well. Then we'll all be stranded. That'll put us on equal terms. then perhaps we can bargain with him and reach some sort of compromise."

"Well, I don't know," Argol replied, sounding hesitant.

"Do it for me," the girl replied, kissing him lightly on the cheek.

Argol pondered the situation. What was he to do? Believe the word of an alien, or this helpless and attractive young girl. At the end of the day, he had to put his own people first. These aliens might have high ideals, but what did anyone really know about them. "Very well," Argol replied, "but to put his ship out of action would take weapons-"

"Like these?" the girl asked, pulling two little objects out of her pockets. "Close range missiles. The impact is restricted to a hundred yards."

"Okay," Argol grinned, "let's get going." They made their way to the alien's ship and found that it was apparently still deserted. Either the alien had not, or could not return.

The girl skilfully aimed the two bombs and with amazing force, she threw them high in the air. They landed directly on target. When the smoke had cleared, the alien's ship was damaged beyond repair.

By the time they had returned to the cave, it was getting dark, and Argol agreed to take the watch, while the girl got some sleep. He wondered why the alien had not found them yet, with his amazing sense of perception.

About midnight, Argol heard something moving. He had not switched on the bank of searchlights for fear of giving away his position, and strained to make out what was moving outside. Unsure of whether it was an animal or the alien, he went over to where the girl was laying, and gently shook her arm.

She awoke with a start, and gazed at him blankly for a second, then her eyes blazed with anger. "Get your hands off me, you swine," she screamed. "I've seen the way your eyes have looked at me! I've seen the lust on your face. You sex mad bastard!" Her arm swung up, and her long fingernails ripped across his face. "You won't defile me," she screamed. Kicking him in the stomach, she ran towards the cave mouth.

Argol staggered back to his feet, feeling sick, all the wind knocked out of his body. "Wait," he gasped, "there's something out there."

As he reached the cave mouth, he heard a high pitched scream, and switched on the searchlights just in time to see the girl smashed to death by a half grown Tyrannosaurus Rex. He turned away sickened, as it ripped at her body with its claws. He dully staggered forward, in a futile effort to save her, and realised that he had opened himself to danger. A crackling of bushes to his right, revealed another monster, incensed by the smell of blood, come charging towards him. He realised there was no escape.

Suddenly the two creatures were frozen where they stood, and the alien walked slowly into the light cast by the searchlights. He shook his head slowly.

"You fool," he sighed. "You poor human fool. Didn't I tell you she was mad. What is known on your planet as a schizophrenic. One half of her craved for love, the other half hated men. That is why she killed her husband. Because I arrested her, in her twisted mind, she placed the blame on me. I only recovered from the magnetic trap a few minutes ago, and then I returned to my ship. It appears that I am too late." He paused. "I shall save your life from these creatures, but you have betrayed me, and in punishment you must remain here. Return to the 'safety' of your cave."

"But what of you?" Argol asked. "You cannot escape either."

"Although it is extremely tiring, when necessary, I have the power to teleport anywhere I like," the creature replied coldly. "We have many powers you do not appreciate," he continued. "Another is that, unlike you humans, we are unable to lie." He paused again. "You should have listened to me. You knew of our reputation, yet you chose to believe the one of your own kind instead. You will have a long time to

ponder your error," he concluded.

He vanished, leaving Argol alone.