

Soft Touch

A sci-fi short story

It took me a while to figure out why the aliens had tied my hands in front instead of back. The way their arms were set, they could not touch their own backs, so it never occurred to them to bind mine behind me.

Big mistake for them, though I did not appreciate it at the time. I assumed it would not matter. The size of those creatures was unbelievable, nearly three meters. Bulky, slightly reptilian, with large scales, bipedal, with a stumpy tail. Enough muscles to make King Kong jealous. Their teeth did not seem carnivorous, so that gave me a thin hope.

My hands were secured painfully tight, and I was being dragged at a brisk enough pace to keep me off balance and stumbling most of the time. After a while I managed to get the hang of hopping along in the low gravity, about 65% of Earth's normal.

About every third hop, I cursed my carelessness for getting captured. Leaving the scout ship without reporting my landing to the mother ship in orbit was error number one. The second was not watching my back. As huge as the aliens were on that planet, they walked quietly and managed to hit me in the back of the head and knock me out. Probably something thrown. They were accurate, whatever it was.

For a guy like me, with twenty-two years as a first-contact scout in the Galactic Colony Services, blunders like that were inexcusable. Well, mostly so. After you have landed on dozens of planets and encountered nothing but boredom, the fine edge of caution gets dulled.

The organoscanner had shown life on the planet but nothing sentient. Animal life, yes, but slow-moving, so we assumed herbivores. It looked like a world ripe for the taking, ideal for colonization.

No matter to me. My career with the company was in the process of termination either way. If the aliens didn't kill me, which seemed likely, the company would fire me for safety violations.

We hadn't trekked far when the group paused and formed a circle around me. They chattered at each other, and I assumed they were arguing over what to do with me. The circle was closing slowly, and the alien holding the other end of the cord tied around my hands was the closest. He stood facing me, chattering.

What I did next was not planned. Maybe instinct. Maybe a frustrated craving to fight back, however futile. Do something to show my species would not go down without a struggle. With my hands bound, I couldn't hit, so I took a step forward and jumped, the lower gravity helping me gain height. My foot shot out and struck the alien square in the lower left part of the abdomen and pushed in his belly like a soft balloon! I don't mean a little. I mean nearly all the way to his backbone!

The creature screamed and lashed out with his left arm. I instinctively blocked with my tied arms, and the block caused him to drop his spear. I couldn't believe it. Those creatures were soft as butter, and I thought them as tough as dinosaurs.

I withdrew my foot with a yank, and down he went, thrashing and howling.

Now that was encouraging. He dropped his spear, and I lunged for it. The other aliens approached, and I swung the spear, baseball bat style, at the nearest alien and missed. He backed off. I took a moment to cut myself loose with the point and hoisted the spear, ready for action.

Two aliens reared back to throw spears but were ludicrously slow. I anticipated the action with enough time for a cup of tea and easily smacked down the spears when they flew at me.

I charged the two who had thrown the spears. They tried to back off in time but could not. I jabbed at the bellies of each with the spear point, deliberately pulling up short, and then backed away without injuring them.

They were obviously at my mercy, slow and weak as they were. At first I was not feeling merciful, but as the fight continued, an idea was developing. I spun the spear over my head with a dexterity they could not match. I leaped from side to side as high as I could to show my agility, then jammed the spear point into the ground and let it stick. I stepped in front of the spear and raised my hands.

They got the idea. They realized I did not want to fight but could do lethal damage if I wanted. They chattered at some length while the alien I had kicked was carried off, attended by two companions.

Evidently we both learned a lesson. Small doesn't mean weak, and big might mean nothing at all. Appearances can be deceiving, and fortunately that old adage displayed itself before they cut my head off.

I simply turned and walked back toward my ship. At intervals I raised my hands, turning my head cautiously to check for flying spears. None came. The aliens raised their hands every time I did.

When I entered the ship, I reported to the company and said I had just landed. After waiting an hour, I described encountering semi-sentient aliens at the Stone Age level. They learned nothing of my capture, so I got to keep my job.

Since the planet was tagged as a sentient inhabited, the company disqualified it for human colonization. I agree. If those aliens had the brains to figure out that being friends is better than being dead, they have something going for them.

The lesson served me well. On the next planet, we ran into another kind of alien, only that time I was the big guy. I did not assume that made me the toughest. Good thing I remembered that, or I would not be alive to write this journal. But that is another story.

THE END