

Perspectives
Edward McKeown

The Digitalartist by Pixaby

Tasca the Hunter moved on all fours, in the way of the People. His lean, smoke-gray body blended with the predawn grayness. Today he hunted not for food, but for something far more important—knowledge. Knowledge to weld his solitary kind into something greater than nomadic hunters.

He'd not yet been born when the big ones came to his desert world. Strange beings many times the height of the People; they seemed indifferent to his kind. Tasca believed they meant his folk no harm, but some of the People had come to grief, crushed by the strange bellowing animals the Giants sometimes rode. The People avoided the Giants, giving them a wary, respectful distance. Only Tasca ventured near.

Lately he had come to suspect the bellowing things were not alive, but something new. Something like the rocks he strode on—yet somehow animated. *They were something the Giants made.* It told him of powers, ways of thinking undreamed of by his kind.

Tasca shivered and not just from the cool breeze. The old ones told stories of brilliant flashes in the desert flats beyond the low hills he lived among, followed by a burning wind of the Giant's making. The terrible blasts never came again, but Tasca saw the awful, mushroom-shaped clouds of the old one's stories in his dreams.

For this, he dared the valley of the tall ones again. Each time Tasca moved among the Giants, he felt closer to a breakthrough. The Giants gave him food and drink during his last visit. They spoke to him in their incomprehensible tongue. Tasca tried to make them understand the speech of the People, without success. In an effort to achieve understanding, he even suffered their hands on him. To his surprise the sensation had not been unpleasant.

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Now he could see the home of the Giants, a structure hewn from earth and stone. One Giant came out; the same one who'd laid hands on him yesterday. The Giant made a soft, calling sound and slowly came down from its two-legged stance to a less intimidating height. It reached out a hand, a curious hand, furless, with blunt, almost vestigial claws, so unlike his own more lethal armament. Tasca allowed the touch on his head, neck, and back. As before, it proved pleasant and the rhythm of it kept the big creature's attention on him.

The Giant left briefly, returning with food and precious clean water. Tasca ignored the food, intent on his mission, but took the water with relief. The journey here had not been easy.

Tasca repeated the sounds he had made the other day, simple speech of the People, the sounds of a child. He knew the being before him was intelligent, perhaps omnipotent, yet speech seemed to elude it. When it could be coaxed into repeating a sound, it came back without meaning. Abruptly, the creature seemed to lose interest in the lesson and Tasca. It towered up on its two back legs. Tasca did not even dare a growl of frustration as his plans collapsed.

Damn, he thought, for a second, just for a second, I thought we were getting somewhere.

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Colonel R. Kemp Sander, Delta Force, US ARMY stood, finished with petting the scarred tomcat. The cat didn't seem as interested in food; it seemed more intent in looking up at Sander.

"What's up warrior?" he asked the cat, looking in amusement at the tom. It stared back at him, meowing repeatedly.

"Did you say something, sir?" asked Lt. Daley. The tall ranger came out of the bunker.

"Just talking to my new friend," Sander said.

Daley laughed. "Get any answer, sir?"

"May have better luck with him than with our new immigrants," Sander said, a touch of grimness in his tone. Both men turned looking out toward the 100-acre, silver dome the aliens had erected near Los Alamos. Bunkers like theirs sprinkled its perimeter, manned by Delta Force, Navy Seals and even SAS from the UK. Civilian scientists rounded out each team. Theirs, a physicist named Beverly Gulden, labored over her instruments in the bunker, cursing some shortcoming monotonously.

The aliens showed no sign of hostility, indeed they seemed unconcerned with humanity. Occasionally, the five-meter tall, tripod-like, insectoid aliens left the dome, piling strange objects on the plain. Scientists spent endless hours pouring over the devices, if devices they were, to no avail. No one dared move them after the first disastrous attempt.

Suddenly the small, intense woman rushed out. "Power spike," she yelled, "it's coming out!"

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Lennedle the Quint strode out of the clan habitat onto the plain. His mate had become insistent about his removal of the glarb from the habitat. His six mouths grumbled, but not in the range of the ultrasonic she might hear.

The silver force curtain parted as he approached it with a load. He emerged under the system's small yellow primary, shivering a bit in its inadequate heat. Lennedle turned toward the dump and saw three of the small bipeds scampering about the foosh and glarb he'd thrown away before. Playing with the small bipeds had become his secret vice. His mate would doubtless see it as a waste of time she could fill with more valuable tasks.

The creatures gestured for his attention and he paused as they flashed lights and squeaked barely audible noises. He watched them with pleasure for a few minutes, then drew out a few pieces of choice glarb, placing them near the bipeds. They seized on them avidly.

Lennedle quickly sent a thought pulse to deactivate a deedle the smallest biped picked up, before the machine could harm it.

Cute creatures, he thought, but unintelligent, with no awareness of the Quaren, the mind force.

After a few more seconds, Lennedle the Quint lumbered back toward the force curtain, wondering if he might somehow convince his mate that one or two of them would make wonderful pets.

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“Damn,” cursed Beverly, watching the immense, tripodial alien hover back toward the silver dome. “I thought for a second, just for a second, we were getting somewhere.”