

# MASTER OF THE JUNGLE

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*Sabor had ruled the jungle for many years without  
dispute—until the little Hairless Ape came along!*

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**T**HE AFRICAN JUNGLE has existed for millions of years virtually unchanged. The animals of the jungle understand the natural order, whether taught by those who raise them or acting on instinct. The fly avoids the darting tongue of the tree frog. The tree frog takes heed when in the presence of the snake's fangs. And the snake slithers away when the feet of larger animals threaten to trample it. This is the nature of things—to hunt and be hunted. With this comes the fear of being hunted. Nearly all animals are united by this fear. However, as Sabor the lioness crept among the lush vegetation she knew nothing of fear.

Sabor was master of the jungle. There were other lions in the region, but her age and experience made her superior to them. She looked about, ever observant for any motion that could signal the presence of a meal. The thrill of the hunt consumed her, and fear was the last thing on the muscular cat's mind. However, little did the beast realize that two of a completely foreign species had recently encroached upon this sacred ecosystem for the first time, setting into

motion events that would upset the balance of Sabor's world.

Sabor was resting in the shade of a tree near the Great Water. It was a blistering afternoon, and the jungle cat panted, preparing to drift off to sleep until the cooler hours.

She abruptly heard a leaf rustle. Massive muscles could be seen tensing under her glossy tan coat as the cat became immediately alert, ears raised and eyes peering. There were many sources of sound in the jungle: a sea of insects, a flock of parrots, and a family of small primates. There were other sources, such as a precipitation-laden leaf finally giving way or a coconut dropping from above. Even in her dreary state, Sabor knew it was not one of those sounds. Her precise senses saw through the maze of stimuli, easily discerning something worthy of her attention. She narrowed in on an area obscured by shadow just ahead of her, looking for a sign of whatever lay there. Scent was also on her side. As the humid air entered her nostrils, the aroma of rotting vegetation and blossoming flowers was ignored. Then, a trace of something... It was one of her kind. All of this happened nearly instantaneously.

Sabor knew she had a worthy adversary. She knew it was one of her species, but not from this region. All of the cats in this part of the jungle feared and respected Sabor. Only an

outsider would be foolish enough to stalk the mighty lioness. The fact that the cat had stealthily reached such close proximity was a testament to its ability. Abruptly there was the barely distinguishable sound of paws scraping upon fallen leaves, along with a slight movement in the air. Sabor knew her stalker had just lunged. Her attacker, also a female, was unveiled by beams of sunlight as she leapt through the air intent on destruction. In one sudden movement, the ever-ready Sabor shot to the side as her mighty paw lashed out, striking her aggressor in the neck and stealing her from the air. The enemy was pinned. The foe snarled viciously, struggling in vain against the noticeably larger and much stronger Sabor. Sabor roared back in challenge, pressing her claws slightly deeper into the assailant's neck. No words passed, but under Sabor's awesome power, the look in the invading cat's eyes transformed from ferocious to submissive. Sabor could have easily crushed the enemy's neck and consumed her, but that was against the Law, and she wasn't hungry anyway. She lifted her great paw. The other cat scrambled away, hanging low in defeat but still snarling as it backed towards the shadows. Sabor unleashed a triumphant roar for all of the jungle to hear and dread. The beaten female scurried away, never to be seen in the region again. Sabor had

again proven her dominance, and it was to remain so for some time.

Sabor had known of the great ape tribe that occupied the region for as long as she could recall. She feared nothing, but the lioness held much respect for the apes. Were she to face an ape separated from its brethren, there would be little challenge on her part. However, the way of the apes was unity, and with this unity they had checked Sabor's power. She had little desire to confront a mob of angry primates. The two authorities of the jungle had an understanding: so long as the apes were as one, Sabor would respect their sanctuary. However, any ape foolish enough to become separated from its kind would not be shown mercy.

It was seasons later that Sabor noticed a peculiar member of the ape tribe. The hunter didn't think much of it, only noted the anomaly and thought of it henceforth as the "Hairless Ape." A short time after that she had her first encounter with the Hairless Ape. It was a sweltering day during the dry season. She was stalking up behind the strange creature, who was drinking with another. The tribe was some distance away, and the two primates did not notice her stealthy approach. It would be an easy meal. She vaulted towards them, claws outstretched menacingly.

Upon her fearsome scream, the Hairless Ape jumped with surprising agility into the cool

and despised water. He seemed to be immune to the paralyzing effect of the terrifying shriek. By this time, the large cat had pounced upon the other ape. Sabor began tearing at her unfortunate prey. She watched the smaller of the two swim away, and when he did not return from the pond as expected, the predator realized she had underestimated him. The apes did not journey into the water, yet this one was escaping by doing just that.

Then, before she had a chance to enjoy her food, the amphibious ape let out a scream. This promptly brought forth the other apes, who were enraged over the death of one of their own. Sabor knew their numbers held her at a severe disadvantage, and she angrily retreated into the brush. This was just the first of her setbacks.

Further encounters with the Hairless Ape occurred as the moons progressed. The general outcome of these meetings was rage on the part of Sabor. The wiry creature had deftly escaped all of her attacks and, on top of that, insisted on mocking her. Sabor was more often than not reduced to prowling below, snarling angrily at the odd ape as he roared back at her and occasionally threw fruit. It was when the Hairless Ape first used his magic upon her that she suffered the greatest indignity.

The lioness had been moving tranquilly through the underbrush when she noticed a

sound in the air, like that of a bird in flight, but different. Something passed over her head. The infuriating ape possessed a vine to tighten itself around her neck much as the boa constrictor.

The great beast first ran to evade this unknown foe, but was denied by a potent choke as the vine caused her to flip about and land hard on her back. Then she noticed the origin of the torment. Though she was able to escape the snare with her massive teeth, she still suffered frustration and rage beyond comparison as every effort to crush the little ape was fruitless.

The enraged hunter lurked for hours beneath him, enduring his jeers and roaring in return. The Hairless Ape then fled through the treetops as he always did.

After her anger subsided, the reason in Sabor's animal mind forced her to accept that this primate was a worthy competitor. Yet the lioness was unaccustomed to an equal. This creature was not stronger or faster, but he had access to the trees and other means that somehow allowed him to elude her time after time.

She did not feel fear towards this thing she could not comprehend, as Sabor the lioness was absolutely above fear. Anger took the place of fear. With this new challenge, she was overtaken by the thrill of the hunt as well. In this mindset, she found closure only by setting

herself upon a pleasing image: her fangs sinking deep into the Hairless Ape's neck.

Some time later, Sabor was walking slowly along a path in the deep jungle. This trail originated from the dwelling of a new group of interlopers that very much resembled Sabor's loathed Hairless Ape, but that is a different story. As the large cat moved gracefully down the trail, beams of sun highlighting her smooth fur, it was apparent that age was taking its toll. Her gait had lost some of its spring, and her vision wasn't as acute. Despite this, the lioness kept a watchful gaze and was taken aback by what lay ahead.

It was her sworn enemy, the Hairless Ape. He had not yet seen her, a rare occurrence, and was distracted by the search for morning sustenance. Despite this, Sabor knew caution was necessary. Her prey had grown over the years and, while a fraction of her size, she knew he was capable of many things. There had been myriad confrontations since the day she came to respect him as an adversary. Throughout this time she had not laid a scratch upon him. This was a truly magnificent opportunity.

Her senses were on high alert. She began stalking towards him, visualizing tearing into his burly carcass. He looked over to see her. To Sabor's surprise and delight, he did not scurry for the upper canopy as usual, but rather stood his ground. Good. Perhaps she had finally



managed to paralyze the creature with fear. The predator salivated at the thought of hot blood, and her muscles tensed in anticipation. Her yellow eyes glistened menacingly as she targeted him. The prey's unflinching eyes glared back. For what seemed to be seasons the two engaged in this silent duel.

Then the moment was right.

Sabor suddenly exploded forward, her mighty strength and speed culminating into one moment of terrific power. So intense was her focus on the Hairless Ape's neck that she failed to notice the odd object he wielded. There was a blur of motion in her prey's hands. She perceived a whizzing sound over her intensely beating heart. Then there was a violent bite in her chest as the ape dodged to the side with unexpected swiftness.

Sabor landed a short distance away upon unsteady feet, and, as she turned, another whizzing-bite struck her loin. Coldness began to creep in over the strange and extreme pain, but Sabor let her rage overcome this as she leapt again with every iota of mighty strength she could muster. Her power would overcome the Hairless Ape's foul craft and trickery. As the hunter narrowed in, she realized her prey had no chance of evading her this time. Within a heartbeat, his neck would feel her teeth. Despite her wounds, the proud beast felt noth-

ing but euphoria as she closed on the Hairless Ape for the kill.

Sabor did not have time to perceive the final arrow as it pierced her eye. Though she was still alive as she crashed upon the Hairless Ape, the upper brain functions ceased immediately upon the arrow's penetration. The final feeling that went through the great beast's mind was the elation of victory.

Never did she succumb to the fear that marked all those below her. However—for the first time in eons—the jungle had a new master.