

The Larger Reptile (excerpt)

After several days of crossing through the tall grass that grows high above his head, the larger reptile emerges into the meadow. Not long after, the youngest hatchling comes out of the grass from the same spot.

The smaller reptile must have followed his path through the tall grass.

The larger reptile studies the new area. In the meadow, there should be some small food, but there's nothing big to eat.

Other reptiles find their way out of the grass.

There are many new reptiles in the band. Most of the newer reptiles are younger than the one he thinks of as the Youngest Hatchling, though none of them have been hatchlings for a long time.

The Larger Reptile notices a twinkling in the distance. It reminds him of the bright shine from when he was not much older than a hatchling. The original band of hatchlings were unable to reach that bright shine.

This bright shine is coming from the mountains on the other side of the valley. It's not far away, but between him and the bright shine is another large field of the tall grass.

The Larger Reptile hesitates. He doesn't like the tall grass.

He wants to see what makes the bright shine, but in the tall grass, it's difficult to catch even small food, and there are those little biting creatures.

The biting creatures are a concern.

The creatures look like a small, bluish-gray fruit on a flat rock. Six long, stick-like legs extend from the flat part.

The biting creatures can move very fast.

Sometimes you run into a few of the creatures when moving through the tall grass. Sometimes, a biting creature drops onto you from the grass above your head.

It's very annoying how the little biting creatures scurry straight to the scars on his left arm and shoulder. They like to bite at his scars.

More reptiles appear in the meadow between the tall grass fields.

The Larger Reptile doesn't see many of the original hatchlings. It's difficult to know if some of them are still in the band.

Since the early days of the original hatchlings, many more reptiles like them have joined the band.

In this area of the meadow, the small food is scarce.

Some reptiles begin moving toward the edge of the next field of tall grass. Some reptiles drift toward another area of the meadow.

The reptiles know they can't stay here. The Larger Reptile does not want to go back into the tall grass, but he does want to know about the bright shine. What is it?

That is the direction he goes — toward the bright shine.

The Larger Reptile quickly discovers that this field of tall grass is unusually difficult to walk through.

The grass is very thick, and extends to well above his head. There are areas where the grass stalks are like small trees and patches that are too dense to get through.

As they get deeper into the field of grass, the band of reptiles are having to go around dense patches at an increasing rate.

The reptiles reach a point where they find themselves boxed in by impenetrable growth. They must backtrack out.

The reptiles exit the impassible area and drift to the right side.

A few of the biting creatures appear. The clicking legs of the biting creatures is disturbing.

The reptiles walk faster.

More creatures appear. The biting creatures are bad in this place.

The reptiles quicken their pace again.

A distant sound rises. The unpleasant sound continues to get louder.

Then, the reptiles begin to realize that the unsettling sound is an approaching chorus of clicking legs. The buzz of the clicking legs continues to get louder.

The frightening sound is moving quickly toward the band from behind, and the left side.

The creatures are coming at them fast!

The reptiles glance briefly at each other. Then they all bolt!

The reptiles take off running as fast as they can move through the grass.

A shiver goes up the Larger Reptile's back as he runs. The loud buzz of clicking legs is closing behind him.

The Larger Reptile tries to run faster. The buzzing sound expands past him on both sides.

The reptiles are struggling to run fast through the grass. Some reptiles get into thicker patches of tall grass and fall behind.

The buzzing sound is closing in from both sides. Searching for the easiest paths, the Larger Reptile scans ahead as much as possible while running at high speed.

From above, a creature lands on the Larger Reptile's left arm. The thing immediately bites at his scar.

The Larger Reptile smashes the bug against a thick stalk as he hurries through a dense patch of the grass.

Ahead of him and to the left, he sees a reptile getting swarmed by the biting creatures.

At first, the running reptile thrashes around and sheds some of the creatures.

Then the reptile slows and stops running. It briefly stands on two legs before dropping forward to four legs.

The reptile instantly disappears under a massive swarm of biting creatures as the Larger Reptile sprints past.

Several biting creatures move into the path in front of him.

The Larger Reptile side-steps and leaps through a gap in the grass.

The Larger Reptile feels one of the creatures crawling up his back. He lowers his head and pushes through some thicker grass.

The Larger Reptile expects the creature on his back to go for the scar on his left shoulder. It does.

Without breaking stride, the Larger Reptile swings his right claw over. He stabs the disgusting creature through the bulbous top part of its body and into the hard, thin part where the legs are attached.

The Larger Reptile points his arm, with the impaled creature, straight out in front of him as he races through the tall grass.

Another biting creature lands on his extended right arm. He expects the creature to run straight up his arm and onto his face.

Instead, the creature skitters *down* his arm.

The second creature pounces and bites frantically at the squirming creature stuck on the Larger Reptile's claw.

As he dashes through the grass, biting creatures scurry up his body from below and land on him from above.

All the biting creatures run straight to the injured creature on his claw.

A spastic, heaving mass of biting creatures forms at the end of his arm, voraciously consuming the shrinking lump of the impaled creature.

While still running full-on, the Larger Reptile whips his arm to the side and flicks the remaining part of the creature off his claw.

The whole mess of swarming, feasting creatures flies into the grass.

Surprisingly, all of the surrounding creatures pursue the tumbling, gruesome frenzy.

The Larger Reptile doesn't see any more biting creatures in front of him. He lowers his head and focuses on running.

The buzz of clicking legs fades behind him, but the Larger Reptile doesn't stop running for a long time.

*