



The Plant Eaters Fight Back!

By John, William, and Connor McCormick

On the savannas of South Africa, there was a herd of plant eaters living peacefully together. This herd included giraffes, cape buffalos, zebras, rhinos, peacocks, hippopotamuses, all sorts of gazelles, and even a few monkeys. While they had enough food to eat and water to drink most of the year, they still lived a pretty rough life. Because of the predators. Meat eaters—

like cheetahs, leopards, crocodiles, hyenas, and especially the lions—were constantly hunting the plant eaters.

When the meat eaters were hungry, they stalked the plant eaters, circling them to pick off the weakest animals. They went especially for the old, the young, and the sick. The parents among the plant eaters worried about their babies, and the babies worried about their parents. The plant eaters had no rest.

One day, the plant eaters decided they'd had enough. They met under a big acacia tree to talk about what to do. The giraffe led the meeting because she was the tallest and could talk over everyone else. "Does anyone have any ideas?" asked the giraffe in a commanding voice. No one answered. The giraffe grew frustrated. "Doesn't someone have a plan for protecting us from the meat eaters?"

Still, no one answered. The plant eaters just looked at one another. Then, they began arguing among themselves over how to fight the meat eaters.

"Pipe down," shouted the giraffe. "It does no good arguing among ourselves." This did little to quiet the plant eaters. Finally, the giraffe let out a piercing whistle. That got everyone's attention. The animals grew quiet.

"That's better," said the giraffe. "Why don't we do this? Why don't we go around the circle and each of us will say what we do to protect ourselves from predator attacks? Who will start?"

"I will," said the monkey. The monkey was always a jabberer. "One of us sits in a tree as a lookout. Whenever the lookout sees a predator, he shouts out a warning to everyone else. All the other monkeys then hightail it to safety in a nearby tree."

“That’s great,” said the giraffe, her ears twitching in excitement. “Who’s next?”

No one volunteered. “How about you, Gazelle?” asked the giraffe.

The gazelle was very shy. In a soft voice he said, “We gazelles really don’t do anything special. As soon as we smell or hear or see a lion, we just run as fast as we can.”

The giraffe said, “That *is* very special. Gazelles are some of the fastest animals on the Serengeti. Running is a very good defense against predator attack.”

“How about you, Zebra,” asked the giraffe. “What do you do?”

“I run too,” said the zebra. “But I also use my stripes as camouflage. I run very close to the other zebras in my herd. The sight of all our stripes swirling together makes it hard for lions to single out one of us for attack. The lions sometimes get confused. All those stripes moving in and out of focus makes them dizzy. It’s pretty funny to watch a dizzy lion stumbling back and forth after he has tried to catch one of us!” Everyone laughed.

The giraffe said, “I run, too. But if I get the chance, I give the predators a kick in the chops with one of my hooves.” The other animals cheered. “So do we,” said the zebras, kicking their back legs high to show the others.

The giraffe asked the rhino, “Do you ever run from predators?”

The rhino’s lip curled in a snarl. “Never. If one of those lions tries to bother me, I charge. The sight of my big horn makes them run away pretty fast.”

“We have powerful horns too,” said the cape buffalo. “But our best defense is to gather our calves in a group. Then the adults circle them for protection. We create a fortress around them, all bristling with horns and bad tempers. That scares off the predators!”

Giraffe asked, “Hippo, what do you do about lions?”

The hippo, who was always rather grumpy, yawned, “Nothing.”

“What do you mean, ‘nothing’?” asked the giraffe.

“The lions never bother us,” said the hippo. “We could care less.”

“Well, don’t the predators ever try to harm your babies?” pressed the giraffe.

The hippo thought for a moment. “Sometimes the crocs try to grab one of the young hippos when the adults aren’t paying attention.”

“So what do you do then?”

“I charge the crocs,” snorted the hippo, “that’s what I do. If I catch one, I bite and stomp him. And that’s the end of that croc.”

“Wait a second,” interrupted the peacock in a shrill voice. “Not all of us have horns to charge a lion, or teeth to bite a crocodile. Each of us here is very different. I don’t see any way for us to come up with a plan where we can all be safe.”

“Oh yes, there is,” said the giraffe. “Listening to you has given me a great idea. Here is what we do” She bent down to whisper her plan to them. The other plant eaters gathered close to hear what the giraffe had to say. Once she had finished, they talked together in hushed, excited voices.

The gruff hippo said, “You call that a plan?”

“You got a better one?” said the wildebeest.

The ostrich was cautious. “Can we really do all that?”

“Why not,” said the warthog. “What do we have to lose?”

“This won’t scare Brutus,” said the antelope.

“Who’s Brutus?” asked the monkey.

“He’s the top lion,” replied the gazelle. “And the meanest, scariest predator of all.”

The giraffe calmed everyone. “I’ve got just the answer for Brutus. Listen up.”

The group talked some more. Finally, they agreed to the plan. The only question was, would it work?

The plant eaters didn’t have to wait long to find out. The very next day, they got their chance.

Late in the afternoon, a pride of lions approached and started stalking the plant eaters. The lionesses led the way, followed by Brutus, the leader of the pride. Brutus sported a great blond mane and was the biggest lion on the savanna. The lionesses crouched with their bellies near the ground, careful to stay downwind so the plant eaters couldn’t pick up their scent.

In fact, the plant eaters wouldn’t even have known the lions were approaching had it not been for several of the monkeys acting as lookouts in a nearby tree. When the monkeys spotted the lions creeping in the tall grass, they called out a warning to all the plant eaters.

“EEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE!” they shouted, and pointed in the direction of the lions.

“Quick,” shouted the giraffe, “circle around me just the way we planned!”

The cape buffalo gathered the most vulnerable members of the herd—the young, the old, and the sick—into a tight circle. Those animals with horns, teeth, and tusks, such as the buffaloes, rhinos, and the hippo, formed a wall around them for protection.

Then, the giraffe gave a command to the zebras, gazelles, antelopes, and ostriches. “Fast runners, you know what to do!”

The fast runners ran around and around the rest of the herd. The dust they kicked up drifted into the lions’ faces. It irritated their eyes. It made them cough and sneeze. Worse for the

lions, the sight of all the plant eaters' different spots and stripes swirling in and out of the dust cloud made them dizzy.

Just when the lions were losing confidence, Brutus charged forward. "Everyone, listen to me," he growled. "The plant eaters are making fun of us. They hope to confuse and trick us. But the trick will be on them. They're no match for our combined strength, teeth, and claws. Let's attack!" The other lions picked up the roar. Together they charged toward the heart of the plant eaters' herd.

But the plant eaters didn't move. The giraffe watched the lions charge. She waited. And waited. At last, the giraffe gave the order, "Horned animals . . . CHARGE!"

The buffaloes, rhinos, and the hippo walked at first. Then they trotted. When the giraffe shouted a second command, "Horns down," they broke into an all-out charge.

The buffaloes lowered their heads and shook their giant horns from side to side. The rhinos bucked their horns up and down in a stabbing motion. The hippo opened his mouth wide, exposing nasty looking tusks.

What a collision it was! When the rhinos and buffaloes hit the lions with their horns, the lions went flying. Even the hippo, who, to tell the truth, had a little trouble keeping up, managed to bite Brutus on the behind. Brutus and the other lions wasted no time getting out of there. No meal was worth the kicking, biting, goring, dizziness, and confusion they had to endure to get it.

The plant eaters couldn't believe their eyes. They—humble plant eaters—had chased away some of the biggest, baddest predators in all of Africa. Even Brutus proved no match for them. All at once, they broke into cheers. The monkeys cackled. The rhinos snorted. The gazelles

and antelopes kicked their heels. The peacocks spread their plumage. Even the hippo cracked a toothy smile.

That night, they threw a big party for themselves. They enjoyed all their favorite foods and drink, and danced the night away underneath the starry skies. But even while they partied, they still had the monkeys keep a lookout in the trees . . . just in case.