

*164 million years ago; London*

Waves crashed upon the beach. Each succeeding wave spread its way to slightly dampen the grains of sand that lay there, before retreating back to the sea. The skies above were gray; perhaps there would be a storm in a few days. The sun poked through the clouds, illuminating the bennettite-rich forest that lined the beach. No birds flew in the sky – they hadn't reached this island yet – but a lone pterosaur flew over the waves, searching for a good spot from which to fish.

There the *Eustreptospondylus* walked, toes digging into the slightly damp sand. Dinosaurs were a common sight along this beach; stegosaurs in particular seemed to favor this part of the coastline (perhaps it was the salty sea spray that attracted them here). This lone male was about six years old; he had recently attained breeding age for his species, and with it, a large macaroni-yellow patch on his face. The sharp contrast of this yellow patch with his black-tipped snout would make him an attractive partner to any females, but today, food was a higher priority. His last couple hunts had failed due to misjudged timing. Easy pickings were surprisingly slim this time of year, and there was no guarantee that he'd find something suitable.

But today would be a good day for him.

A dead *Muraenosaurus* lay upon the beach; it probably died near the coast and was pushed onto the shore by the waves. Already the carcass had begun to attract flies, crabs, and a pair of proceratosaurids from the nearby forest. The *Eustreptospondylus* picked up into a jog as he neared the carcass. His size easily scared away the smaller theropods, who ran barking back into the bennettites.

And into the dead plesiosaur he tore. The meat was salty, tasting not unlike a raw halibut, but it hadn't rotted too much. Residual bits of blood left a few drops of red on his face. The fatty acids within its blubbery skin would provide the megalosaur with plentiful energy. As he tore pieces of flesh out of the carcass, small chunks flew off and landed in the sand; the crabs poked at these, removing even smaller chunks to eat. The *Eustreptospondylus* looked up to see if the carcass had attracted any other predators, but other than a couple rhamphorhynchines and the two proceratosaurids waiting their turn, the beach remained empty. A perfect setting in which to feast.

The *Eustreptospondylus* eventually stopped his eating and sat down on the beach next to the carcass. He was full for now, but there was still enough meat on the carcass to justify guarding it. One of the proceratosaurids cautiously strutted onto the beach, but a grumbling roar from the *Eustreptospondylus* kept it on the forested side. He considered sleep, but knew that were he to do so, other theropods may take advantage of the carcass. Maybe later. So there he sat, and kept watchful guard over his find.

About an hour passed. The sun passed behind some clouds, and so the beach darkened and cooled a bit. These moments of peace were relatively rare in the life of a macropredator like *Eustreptospondylus*, so this moment he savored (or at least the best that a dinosaur brain could do). Every so often he would rise to take another bite from the dead plesiosaur, before returning to rest at the edge of the receding tide, the lapping of which provided a smooth current of white noise on the otherwise quiet beach.

This was a rather nice day.