

## The dying giant

As I sit here contemplating my life past and my life to be -- well, life to be for a lack of better words, that is -- I feel my life's energy fading. It is evaporating. I know why this is happening. I even know when it all will be gone. I also know what will happen then. I dread it. I am appalled by it, but it is inevitable.

I can tell you what happened. It may lighten my soul. Perhaps enough to make it float out of the underworld, but I'm afraid I myself have burdened it too much for that. It always has been a question where my soul would end up after my death. But anyway, it won't burden it more by telling you my recent history.

I am Gomar, king of all giants, the overlord. This makes me, for now, that is, or perhaps for now and forever, the supreme leader of giants on Orbin and of all giant-kin, creatures that are offspring of giants with other creatures or created by the Gods with trades of giants. So, anything very big standing on two legs.

This position I never asked for, but inherited, makes me the most desirable giant to kill.

I was, I mean, I am a good king. I believe that at least. I have brought peace to most of the twelve kingdoms and have stopped many races from hunting us, enslaving us or driving us from our lands.

But that doesn't stop those who crave for power.

I knew this. I expected this, and I had my measures to stop those envious onlookers. Of course I had my bodyguards, fiercely loyal bodyguards, but not immune to wealth and lust. So I had golems as a second line of defence. I had the creators killed so they couldn't turn the mindless things on me. I also had the most powerful magical items to protect me. I had a spy network to find my enemies before they found me and I had a network to spy on my spy network. I actually had everyone doubled and sometimes tripled. No one was without his or her check-up. Except my family. Well, my son had his sister and my wife my mistress, but they were not obligated to check what the other was up to.

I hear myself speaking in past tense. Well, all the things I said I had I still have except my family. They are responsible for my demise and paid the highest price for it.

They were the ones who by-passed my defenses and not because of my love for them. No! They were smart. Of course! Well, actually, they were stupid, I'll come to that later.

I haven't told you of a line of defence I'm pretty proud of. My food tasters. I had, because, they all died, one hundred food tasters. 'Are you mad?' You could have asked me. No! The royal dining chamber was not laden with people tasting my food. Well actually it was, but they considered themselves quests. Not that they were particularly welcome, but, hey, that's what happens when you're king, you know. No, my food tasting army were humans and two demented giant grannies, who were there for the giant specific nastiness. The humans only ate minute portions and would die instantly from things that would only make me ill. Pretty smart, wouldn't you say? Yes, you would or you should, because I say so.

So how did they surpass my brilliant defence, my magical food cleaning armor, which I also wore? They turned to the most vile creature on Orbin: Asgarmad. A creature so evil it was banished from the underworld. Asmargad is a demon who choose to become a lich. I understand it when a mortal chooses for eternal life, but an immortal doesn't need it. He did it anyway.

My son wanted the throne for many years now, secretly encouraged by his girlfriend Wanda, who happened to be my mistress. He let his greed, his hunger for power blind him, cloud his judgement. He was guided in the right or, may I say, wrong direction by Wanda. Wanda hadn't become my mistress by merely being gorgeous. She was smart and devious as well and a great manipulator I found out the hard way. She had her own spy network and paid her own information brokers very well. She came from a very wealthy family and, and I should have suspected something, had lost her whole family in some freak accident. And thus Wanda had found out where Asgarmad's lair was.

On the first day of the harvest moon month when I left for Oesgarmaroth, the sacred city of the Gods, where all races convene in peace, my son, my daughter and Wanda left for the Garminaid Mountains with an expedition of a thousand giants.

I later heard what occurred.

The lair of Asmargad was a perilous place. No, it was a lethal place. Numerous traps and monsters killed over half of the expedition before they even entered the chambers of their host.

Their host, Asgarmad, dwarfed his guests. It was an enormous demon so terrible to withhold that the weak minded lost it immediately. Raving mad they jumped into pits or bashed their heads in with rocks or their bare hands, laughing as they perished.

Asgarmad was a real gentleman. He was very kind and welcoming. He was happy to have guests and eager to know about the world outside. He would have offered them food and drinks if had known they were coming.

'O, but you brought your own, I see,' he said.

And then, the somewhat stronger minded started to slit their throats or cut pieces of meat out of their chests.

'Eat! Drink!' they said with their dying breaths.

'Asmargad!' my son commanded. 'Stop your games! I've come with real, serious business. I come with a proposal and with a request. Hear me!'

Asgarmad looked at my son, who continued:

'I need a poison to kill my father.'

Asgarmad was of course very interested.

'A poison that will not kill humans or elder women giants and is not rendered harmless by magical wards.'

Asmargad gestured to continue.

'I offer a steady supply of slaves to kill or torture.'

'No, I want something very important to you.'

'I could give you a whole kingdom. One of the twelve.'

'No, really important to you. A life.'

My son fell silent. My daughter and Wanda stared at the demon and contemplated the demand. But not my son, my son was waiting for the right moment and then he took his knife

and slit the throat of his sister. Her look of utter horror put a smile on the demon's face. The demon applauded as the girl spilling gallons of blood plummeted to the ground.

'You even thought of this, a nice dramatic gesture. So nice, but did you think of your father missing his lovely daughter?'

'You can animate her. And I'll make sure she will be in bed very sick when he comes home.'

Asgarmad laughed out loud, a terrible nerve wracking sound.

'O my dear boy, I'll do business with you. Give me a thousand slaves a month and I'm happy as a dead demon can be.'

My son smiled. Asgarmad continued:

'I'll give you a poison so special it'll do exactly as you asked. I've made some eons ago.

You're not the first heir of a throne in history wanting to rid himself of his predecessor.'

The demon walked over to a desk as large as an average building and retrieved a tiny vial from a drawer.

'One drop in every meal and he'll be dead in three days. I'll expect my slaves when the moon is full again.'

'O, great Asgarmad, I thank you. It has been great doing business with you.'

My son left with the corpse of his sister and with Wanda. The rest of the battalion was stationed near the mountain.

At home Wanda and my son made sure the charade was in order for my return.

And then I did return. I was very happy with the progress I made with the elves. But my happiness waned quickly. My daughter had returned from a vacation trip mortally ill. She was indeed unhealthy pale and seemed to hardly breathe. I summoned the best doctors from the lands and wanted to stay with her until she was better.

But dire affairs needed my attention. A battalion was attacked near the Garminaid mountains. The exact circumstances weren't clear, but the location was most disturbing. Very strange.

That evening, to celebrate my return, my wife, my son, Wanda and I had dinner together.

'Tell me, my son, where have you been on vacation with your sister?'

My son busy with his thoughts stared across his plate to mine.

'Son!'

He looked up startled.

'Sorry father, you were saying?'

'Where did you have your vacation?'

He was still not really paying attention.

'O, erm, Garminaid mountains.'

'What!?' I asked very surprised as I wanted to take another bite from my dinner.

Wanda clearly kicked his shin.

'O, ehm not the, erm, where the soldiers were attacked. By the Gods no! Of course not.'

I was very alarmed by the conversation. Something was up, but I didn't know what.

Contemplating what the dead soldiers, my sick daughter and my son's trip had in common, I took a bite.

As I was chewing my dinner, I looked at my human food tasters. Today I only used them .

They had eaten their first portions much earlier and hadn't shown any sign of illness. But now they looked very ill in a most strange manner. They started to look gaunt, their flesh shriveling.

I jumped up and grabbed my son by his collar. I nearly lifted him from the ground.

'What have you done!'

He was too startled to answer.

His mother looked at the humans.

'You've poisoned him! You bastard!'

I took hold of the throat of my son to choke the truth out of him. But then a maid came running in.

'My lord, my lord, your daughter, she is dead. She's been murdered!'

I looked from the maid to Wanda and then looked my son in his eyes. I knew it right away.

He had done it. All my muscles went limp, and I looked away.

His mother screamed and started to climb over the table. Wanda stabbed her in the gut.

'Yes, he did you worthless bitch.'

Wanda pulled the knife out of her and stepped closer to me to slit her throat. Before I could intervene a golem did what it had been programmed to do. It defended me. A sword swung and Wanda's head rolled over the table.

'No!' my son and I yelled too late.

I sank into my seat as I saw the head of my mistress come to a stop in the pool of blood from my wife.

'Seize him,' I said to the golems.

My son was taken hold of by three golems and could not move anymore. My wife bled out very quickly. I did not love her and that may have prevented me from doing anything.

I sat some time in total silence. The maid was too afraid to move a muscle.

'Please tell me what you have done.'

I looked at him with genuine tears in my eyes. I hadn't wept since the birth of my daughter and it had a huge effect, much more than violence could have.

'I went to Asgarmad and bought a poison from him. But he lied. He betrayed me.'

'Of course, you stupid, stupid boy, he betrayed you. Asgarmad has betrayed each and everyone he encounters. He betrayed the Gods and even life itself.' I panted. 'Did you know that I locked him in that mountain? That's why he betrayed you. He actually made you betray me as his greatest triumph. What poison did he give you?'

My son wanted to pull something out of his pocket, but couldn't because his arms were seized.

'You, maid, take that from his pocket.'

The maid jumped into action and retrieved the vial. She handed it to me. I read what was written on it.

'You can't read the Ancient Language, do you, boy?'

'No, father.'

My skin crawled by his words.

'Don't call me father ever again. We've left that stage of life.'

I took a breath.

'This vial contains the blood of Asgarmad. You haven't just killed me. You damned me for eternity.'

My son stared at me in disbelief.

'I'll die very slowly and become an undead monstrosity like Asgarmad. Look at the humans.'

He did and saw the shrivelled corpses walking around radiating the kind of evil Asgarmad had. He looked puzzled.

'Why have they died and you not, fa.. ehm my lord?'

'They ate their stomach full, and I only took two bites. How much did you put in my food?'

'Only a drop.'

'Nice, now it will take a week for me to die.'

'How come you know so much about this poison?'

'Ah, wouldn't you like to know that? But alas, time is up. I'm fed up with you. I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll put you in magical force field restraints and feed you with a magical ring and then bury you in a dungeon where you can wait for your death. No one will ever visit you or even know where you are. You may hope I think of a more lethal punishment when I'm dead.'

The maid still stood next to me her eyes wide open in the realisation of the horrific consequences of my words for her. I realised that too.

'Seize her!'

The golems grabbed her.

'My dear, I can't have you tell anyone what has happened or what I will do. But you are one of my favorites and that may be very useful for you.'

I stood up, grabbed all my undead humans and stepped towards a secret door.

'Now we leave for the dungeon. We all have a lot to think about.'

The golems carried the maid and my son to the dungeon and I followed. We left our lives behind.

Well, that's that. I poisoned everyone in the palace and put a sign up with a warning for the plague. After my death I'll resurface in an armor. I'll explain that I'm hideously deformed by the plague and will not show my face to the world again. I can rule for another decade or so and then I'll have thought up a new plan.

Agrama, the former maid, preferred undead over dead and is now my partner for eternity and my son... well he'd better think of something to do in his head, because he has little else.