

Gird the great helper

After months of sailing and losing a great number of crew members Gird ordered them to go ashore near, but not too close to, a small city. Tally and seven sailors rowed him to the beach and his utter delight about stepping on firm ground again made him oblivious to any emotions his crew had. Gird never was a man of much empathy, but the months of hardship on the sea had washed away what was left.

“Come Tally, let’s try to take a look at the city while my titan is still in the water,” Gird called to his first mate and longtime companion as he ran up a dune. No one answered. “Tally! Come Tally!” Gird called once again as he took heavy breaths. Gird was also not a very athletic man. “Tally!”

Gird stopped running. He took a moment to catch his breath again leaning a bit forward, his knees bent a little and his arms resting upon them. He looked backwards over his shoulder. The longboat was already a long way from shore. Tally didn’t look up and rowed with a grim look on his face. He had betrayed Gird, but was really really sure it was for the best, for everyone, especially for himself.

“Typical,” Gird sighed. He turned to watch the longboat row away. “If only I could remember its name. I could...,” he mumbled to himself and then screamed, “I could have you all killed!! Crushed, mangled and drowned and ehm... totally killed!!”

The longboat reached the warship and soon it made sail. It left in much of a hurry.

“You!! Kill them!!” Gird screamed to his titan. The gargantuan titan looked at him. “Master?” “Oh no! Not that again! Shut up, shut up, shut...UP!” Gird turned and ran away. He just ran to the city.

The city was of course empty when Gird reached it. Gird was happy his reputation preceded him and he no longer had to witness the death of thousands of people valiantly fighting and thus dying for their homes. On the other hand, it was also very boring and depressing not to meet anyone anymore. Perhaps that was one of the reasons his crew abandoned him. Sure it was nice at first to be able to pick the kind of treasures you liked and take the food you wanted, but the warship could at one point hold no more treasure and delicacies and so they stopped going to cities. They just sailed on.

“Screw them. I will just take this city and make it my home. No more sailing to nowhere!”

Gird looked around. It really was a nice little city. Unfortunately, the shadow of his titan took away much of the nice sunlight that made the white domes sparkle and stand out against the blue walls.

“Perhaps this city has a library. I could perhaps find the books I need to learn how to read and if I’m really lucky also one with the name of that monstrosity,” Gird said out loud to himself.

“Who are you talking to?” a voice asked. Gird jumped and nearly wet himself. “Shit!” he screamed. He had made nearly a full turn in mid-air and was now facing the owner of the voice. It was a young slender man, late twenties, with intense blue eyes. Those eyes had a

puzzled look in them. "Where?" he asked. Gird asked, now puzzled too. "What?"

"What where?" the man asked him, now totally confused.

And as fast as the man got confused his attitude changed. "Sir! You shouldn't be here. There is a wizard coming, an evil one. He has a great monster with him. Some say he delights in torturing people days on end," the man said, whispering loudly.

Gird did not say anything and just stared at the man. What was wrong with this man?

"You know," the man continued, "I heard the wizard has sent out his demons. They come to you at night and creep into your head through your ears. They listen to everything, read your thoughts and see your sights." The man leaned over to Gird and showed a nasty wound on his head. "I took one out. It was just under my skin. Swoop! Out with a knife. Little bastard!"

"Ehm, didn't that hurt?" Gird stammered. "Yes, of course, but you know, if you don't the wizard comes and makes your skin come alive and eat you!" "Ah, right, I didn't think of that," Gird stammered again. The man had been moving very much in the last few minutes. Erratic moves, big gestures and combined that with too many facial expressions. Just very weird all in all.

"Look, is there someone here who helps you out?" Gird asked in an attempt to get this man some help. "No! Oh, nooooo, there is no one here at all anymore. Very, very strange. I think the wizard made them disappear. I don't sleep at night to keep the demons away and so when I woke at noon, everyone was gone. You know, I don't mind. The people who took care of me were going to rat me out. They wrote all my thoughts down and were going to tell the wizard. So, good riddance!" The man stopped at once with everything and seemed to listen to something. Gird looked at him, still puzzled and wondering what he should do. This man was clearly very sick in his head. He might as well really have demons in his head, but that was nonsense. Demons don't want to live in your head. Gird could know. He had encountered one.

Perhaps a new strategy would help.

"Anyway, mister, if no one is here, could you help me with something?" Gird asked.

The man looked at him blankly and did not react.

"Mister? Did you hear me?"

The man nodded, but just sat down.

"Why are you sitting down?" Gird asked, astonished.

The man still did not say anything and laid his head down.

"What? Why? Oh, come on. We were getting along just nicely," Gird said in despair.

His nostrils then filled with the potent smell of fresh urine. Gird looked down at the man, who clearly just emptied his bladder. Gird hesitated a moment and then just turned and left.

He walked further into town to look for a library. As he walked he thought about the man.

That poor bastard. Gird did not like the way his life was going. Having a titan he could not command, because he could not remember its name, gave him a lot of problems but still he conquered much of the known world and was king, khan and emperor of many lands. He had riches, wives by the hundreds if he so desired and he also had his health. This man had nothing, not even the people who took care of him. Gird should...

"No, no, I need to find a book with the name of that damned titan. I can fix this guy in a second when I do," Gird said to himself.

That was that. He had a good reason to leave the man to himself. The library was the key.

The library first needed a key before it could be the key. Gird had found it quite quickly. It was a big and splendid building: white as snow with a dark blue roof. High arched windows with beautiful stained glass adorned the facade. A huge oaken door could give way to the big rooms in this oasis of knowledge. A door that could just as well have been a solid rock wall.

“Oh titan, help me, the door is attacking me...,” Gird tried half-heartedly. The titan was still standing right outside the city and saw no attacks coming from the door. It did nothing. Gird walked to and fro next to the building in a desperate attempt to find a secret entrance he did not see the first time, but there was no such entrance. The building was a fortress .

Gird leaned against the door, buried his face in his arms and weeped for minutes. With all his might and power he was no match for this door and that really hurt.

After his last tears had dropped he felt a hand patting him on the shoulder.

“There, there, no need to cry, the frome is for the goings and therefore no one is,” the man said.

“What?” Gird asked bewildered.

“I said, do you need to get in?”

“Ehm, can you do that? Help me get in?”

“Yes, of course, I’m the keeper of this building.”

“You are?”

“I am,” the man said, gleaming with pride.

“Right, of course you are. Do you have a name you go by?”

The man fell silent. Gird looked at him, wondering what was wrong with this man.

“Ehm, I think my name is Vaja. Vaja Abi,” the man said hesitantly.

“You think or you know?” Gird asked without thinking further about it.

The man, Vaja, got a troubled look on his face. He looked like he was sure, but someone was arguing with him about it.

“You know, I believe you, Vaja. Of course that’s your name. Well, Vaja, nice to meet you. My name is Gird,” Gird quickly said to save the situation.

Vaja bursted out in laughter. “Gird? Really? That is the weirdest name I have ever heard. What was your mother thinking...” Vaja fell silent again. He just stood there. Nothing seemed to be happening in his head, but Gird was a bit hurt by the burst of laughter and appreciated the lack of sound.

Still, Gird was no step closer to entering the library and that had been his goal.

“Listen. Vaja, I need your help. I need to get into the library and find a specific book. Can you please help me,” he asked

Vaja woke from his slumber and looked fresh again.

“Of course, Gird,” Vaja snickered again and started to rummage through his pocket. By the gods that man had a huge number of pockets. Finally he found a tiny key. Gird wanted to tell the man he had gotten the wrong key, but the man tapped some panels on the door and opened a tiny keyhole in which the key fit just fine. The door unlocked and Vaja pushed the doors open much easier than one would expect.

“Enter in my domain, my good man...” Vaja said, bowing elegantly.

Gird stepped through the door opening into a large room with numerous bookcases. That

looked very promising at first, but then Gird remembered that he still couldn't read and comparing the burned remains of the book he had found at the magisters was going to take ages. His spirits fell.

"What's wrong, Gird," Vaja asked, patting Gird's shoulder.

Gird thought long and hard before he answered.

"Well, Vaja, the thing is... ehm... you know... ehm... I am like... ehm..." Gird stammered trying to find the words to say that he was that so-called wizard Vaja was afraid of. Gird needed this man to find the book he required, but he also didn't want to scare Vaja. They were getting on nicely now and it occurred to Gird that he hadn't had that for quite some time.

The memories of times long past when he had people he called friends rushed through Gird's mind. The expedition to the resting place of the titan with Canan, the wizard, and Agor the fighter. Gird was just a helping hand then. Sharian, the priestess, had asked him to come along. Gird had fancied her and had said yes. Sharian had been a very, very attractive woman, who treated him kindly, but in the end she had perished along with the others. They had been betrayed by the succubus, who they had needed to revive the titan. Gird had slain her and so had become the master of the titan. That had been the start of a bizarre life in which Gird became the most powerful man in the world and also the most lonely. Almost everyone who he had entrusted with his secret had betrayed him and died. Others, like Tally, just betrayed and left him. Gird only needed one person to help him find the name of the titan so Gird could command it and tell it to fuck off. Gird wanted to be amongst people again in just the normal, regular way without them betraying him and dying for it or without them running for their life.

"Hey man, are you okay? You look unwell," Vaja asked with concern.

Gird put on a smile and gave Vaja a pat on the shoulder. "Yes, Vaja, yes, I am. I am just happy to have met you. Can you show me your library?"

"Yes, Gird, but you were about to say something to me and then stopped. What was it?"

"Nothing, Vaja, it was nothing. I was just a bit embarrassed to say I appreciate your presence."

Vaja smiled. "Well, you are in luck. I am well today. No demons yet."

Gird knew better, but just nodded.

Vaja walked into the library and gestured to Gird to follow. As the two men walked through the big central room the sunlight formed a multi-coloured spectacle as it came through the stained glass windows. This library wasn't just a building for books. It was a church for the written word. Gird was hoping it was also that for the word he was looking for.

"Ehm, Vaja, do you have anything on ancient titans?"

Vaja froze in his steps and whispered under his breath: "Why?"

"Ehm, well, you know, I am just interested," Gird tried to explain with an air of nonchalance.

Vaja turned to face him. "You shouldn't be meddling with that kind of evil. Titans were meant to die off," he said with a stern look on his face.

Gird knew what a mess a titan could make, but was not really convinced by the word of a kind but mad man and Vaja was a real madman. Gird had heard him talk utter nonsense and now the same man was putting all the words in the right order. You can't talk normal and abnormal in such a short period of time unless you're taking in a lot of booze. 'Better not

poke the angry bear,' Gird thought. "You seem to know a lot about titans. Perhaps my curiosity can be satisfied with your stories."

Vaja's mood took a turn for the better. "Ah, right, perhaps you are right. You know the king used to have me around for my stories. I can tell you such delightful stories about knights and fair maidens or about exotic places from all over the world," Vaja told Gird.

"No, no thanks, I am very keen to hear more about titans and why they perished..."

"Okay, I'll tell you. Long, long ago when the First Gods still walked the Earth they created beings in their image. These beings were very gifted and evolved very rapidly. Soon being mortal wasn't enough and these beings started to look for ways to beat death. The First Gods punished the beings for their arrogance. The closer the beings would come to immortality the sooner they'd die. The beings would kill themselves when they would nearly find the key. Stopping in time and letting others continue would not matter. The others would just kill themselves quicker.

Three of the wisest and most grudgeful of these beings came up with a way to take revenge. They found a way to fuse into one being: a titan. They were Xaeren, Thoulia and Tismas. Together they formed Xaerenthoulantismas, a mighty and foul being. The First Gods could not stop them in time and were facing a terrible enemy, for Xaerenthoulantismas could form other titans. It did so and when the titans numbered seven hundred and seventy-seven they attacked. The battle was ferocious and almost destroyed the world itself, but lucky for us the First Gods won or at least the last First God standing killed Xaerenthoulantismas. He thumped his open hand through the open mouth of the titan and pulled almost its entire brain out. The last part remaining unfortunately makes it possible for the titan to be revived and commanded. So the God buried it where no one could find it and there it remains. Now when someone would find it and blurdiblut cornicornicorn..."

Gird grabbed Vaja. "What? No no no, and what. What were you going to say? Come on Vaja, don't start acting crazy on me again..." Gird called while shaking him, but nothing happened. Vaja's mind was lost again.

Gird cursed and looked around. Was there a way to find the book himself? He saw books, bookcases and barrels, lots of barrels. That was odd. Gird gazed at them for a moment. Were they storing books in barrels? He examined a barrel and saw it had a plug. When he pulled it small, black grains came out: gunpowder.

"Vaja, why are there barrels with gunpowder in your library?"

Vaja looked at him with horror in eyes that transgressed normal concern.

"It's the demons!"

"Right, of course, the... ehm... demons."

Gird thought about the situation for a moment. How was he going to get out of this stalemate? And then it hit him. He knew the name of the titan. Vaja had told him.

"Xaerenthoulantismas! Hear me. Heal this man of his mental disease!"

The titan bellowed: "Yes Master, I will."

Gird watched Vaja and saw his eyes clear, his posture changed and knew it had worked.

"Vaja? Is that you?"

“Ehm, yes, I think so.”

“Yes! It worked!”

“What has?”

“I cured you. The demons are gone,” Gird said smiling.

Vaja looked at him baffled. “How did you do that? No doctor was able to do that,”

Vaja asked, astonished.

“Well now, I’ll tell you if you don’t get mad at me,” Gird said hesitantly.

Vaja nodded.

“I am the one with the titan. You told me its name and I could command it.”

Vaja lost all colour in his face and Gird could tell he’d gotten physically ill.

“Nooo, you did not! What have you done? You cursed me even more than I was!”

Vaja cried.

“No, no, now you can help me find the book so I can get rid of it.”

“What? Get rid of it?”

“Yes, Vaja, my life has been a living hell because of it,” Gird said and he grabbed

Vaja by both arms to emphasize his message.

“But, you rule half the world,” Vaja stammered.

“Yes, but with no one to share it with, with no people around me and no way to make the things the way I would want them. I come, the titan destroys and everyone flees.

That is a lonely world to live in.”

“Okay?”

“So, please help me find the book. I just know it must be here somewhere.”

Gird did not wait for the answer and started to look around. He heard Vaja walk around too. Book after book was taken out of the cases. Gird held them up and asked Vaja if they were the one he was looking for. After an hour and half Gird did not hear a response. He looked at the book in his hand.

“Is this the one I’m looking for, Vaja?” he asked and turned around. Vaja was standing some ten yards from him with another book under his arm.

“No, Gird, it isn’t. I am holding the one you’re looking for,” he said. His look showed guilt and concern. Gird’s face brightened and he took a step forward, but he stopped immediately. Vaja drew forth a gun.

“Stop there, Gird.”

“O no, please don’t, Vaja, you don’t know what’s going to happen. Please don’t say anything...”

“Shut up, Gird! I can’t let you have this book.”

“Okay, okay, but...”

“Shut up!”

In the corner of his eye Gird saw the eyes of his titan starting to glow. Any moment Vaja was going to be burned to a crisp.

“Please Vaja, put down the gun. We...”

“Shut up or I’ll shoot you right now. I am going to save this world no matter what the cost.”

"No you're not," Gird sighed and pointed to the titan.

A ray of scorching heat rushed from the eyes of the titan. But, that did not what Gird thought it would. The stained glass in the midst of the trajectory of the ray was not made of stained glass, but of crystal and that dispersed the ray into countless smaller ones.

Vaja and Gird looked at it in amazement and even looked at each other for a split second before dozens of gunpowder barrels exploded. Vaja was blown to tiny bits and Gird had a couple of seconds to realize that before he lost consciousness. The blast couldn't kill him. The titan had taken care of that during a previous time that Gird could remember its name. It was when he had nearly died. Fully airborne he went limp and that did in the end save his life.

"Captain! Captain?" Gird heard a familiar voice call. He opened his eyes and saw Tally hanging over him. "Tally! What a sight for sore eyes. What are you doing here in hell?"

"No, captain, not hell. Well, perhaps rather, yes hell, but not the one you're referring to," Tally said grinning. Gird grumbled. "You're still a smug , Tally!"

"Yes sir," Tally said as he helped Gird stand up. "What happened, Tally? You left me and now you're back again?" "Yes, sorry, sir. I did and it was disgraceful. You need help, not betrayal. I came back to help you, to ask you to forgive me." "I am so very happy to see you. I forgive you. But I am still mad at you. Anyway, what happened?"

"Well, I was rowing back to shore when there was a huge explosion. Half the city went up in flames. I thought I lost you, but you came flying. I think you'd be dead if you hadn't made it to the sea. I rescued you and brought you back to the ship."

Gird looked over the stern to the city. Heavy smoke clouds rose from it. A blazing fire roared through it. Tally leaned over the railing next to Gird and together they watched the city burn.

"What happened over there, captain? If I may ask?"

"I found and lost a friend. I met a man there: Vaja. His mind was sick and I helped him. He then tried to save the world. The titan blew him up."

"A friend, that's a real pity, sir. You don't seem so sad about it," Tally remarked. Gird shrugged. "Perhaps." "And the book? Did you finally find the book?"

"Yes, Tally, but that was blown to bits as Vaja was."

"So, no commanding the titan then, I guess."

"Well, I don't know. I did hear its name and that it is made up out of three names. Let me think... ehm, eh Xaeren. That was doable and then Thoulia. That one was easy. It reminded me of my father's name: Tooliar. But the last is lost to me. I am so much further than I was, but still a long way from getting my freedom."

"Well, captain, that may be so, but at least you had a friend again. Someone to care for."

"Yes, well, look at what good it did him."

"And you have me to help you again."

"Thanks, Tally. I appreciate that. You know. I realized over there that I was not much

better of than Vaja. He was mad and lonely and I was lonely and going mad.”

“Going, sir?”

“Don’t push it, Tally.”

“Aye, captain. Where to now?”

“Anywhere, Tally. It brought me so much the last time. So let’s try that again.”