

## The Disturbance

When Brebble returned from fishing, he lit both the stove and the fireplace, and made his way to the study. Once there, he grabbed anything he could find, regarding giants: Horace Maltbin's *The Largely Inclined*, Girn Zourpuddle's *Colossus*, and Berdum Molderpatch's *An Objective Study of Horrible Mammoths*, along with a few others, and spent a great part of the evening at the small table, pouring over them. At one point Brebble woke with a jolt as the cuckoo clock sang out its hourly melody, and he realized it was late. He left the stacked tower of books and went to sleep.

Later that night, Brebble dreamt he and Rani swam in an enormous stone Roman bath filled with tea. Rani wore a crown of vines, and her eyes were two shining, brilliant stars. White, green leaf covered pillars and archways encompassed the pool, and giants watched the two of them from a mountainous cloud, high above. The magnificent creatures laughed and sang, and every so often, they waved, and Brebble waved back. But then, one gray bearded giant appeared angry: somehow he knew about the book falling down the opening, and he frowned and shook his head at Brebble.

In the early hours of the morning, as the wind continued howling, and the rafters continued creaking, Brebble woke to a different sound: an odd shifting and thumping came from the hall outside. He sat up. His heart raced. He gently lifted the blankets and crossed the soft, woven rug. Pulling the ring, he cracked open the door and peered out. Much like the fireplace in the kitchen, one was built into Brebble's bedchamber, as well. It smoldered with warm embers, and heat escaped through the entrance, while a current of cool air, coming from other parts of the house, rushed in. He waited and listened. Again the sound, and this time, from the study across the hall. Brebble lit a lamp, threw on his slippers, and crept, until he reached the door with the brass knob. Again – a shift and a thump. Possibly in his haste to gather books earlier, some had gotten loose? He pictured hundreds of volumes slipping about on the shelves, as they made their way over the ledge and dropped into the endless void. *Bye, Brebble* (they seemed to say). *We'll be in touch from our new home: the dark and never ending, bottomless hole, from which there is no return. Doesn't that sound exciting? Sincerely yours, The Librarium.* The idea horrified him. He quickly swung open the door and thrust his lamp into the room.

At first everything appeared as usual, but then he raised the light. Along several high shelves, the volumes were shoved to one side, and there were now gaps in the otherwise neatly organized ledges. Someone had moved them, yet the ladder rested in its usual place, to the left of the door. And then there came a loud sneeze, and at this, Brebble tumbled back into the hall. Returning to the entrance, he slowly raised the lamp. Along the ceiling timbers was a thing most bizarre: an enormous eagle, head turned sideways, looked down at him with a gold, dark-centered eye. The rest of it, however, was unlike a bird. Its hindquarters, which clung to the upper stone shelves, appeared to have paws and a tail.

"Lion," Brebble said aloud, but then he thought: *This thing – which I know nothing about, watching from above, ready to swoop at any moment – might think of me as food!* And so Brebble took action the best way he knew how: he screamed. The creature howled and bounded to the farthest side of the room, while Brebble retreated into the corridor and slammed the door tight. Seizing his coat, he gathered timber from his shed and hammered planks across the study doorway.

Later, in his bolted chamber, lock double-checked several times, Brebble tossed and turned, until he finally drifted back to sleep. He dreamt of an eagle, its wings splayed as it rode a current of air; of a lion bounding over rolling fields, while a hot African sun beat down; and then before him lay a clearing, surrounded by a thick, shadowy forest. On each side of the field, eagles and lions waited in row formation with flashing armor and spears. One of each animal emerged and met halfway. The two reached a settlement, but Brebble, only meaning well, said: "That's odd – normally, lions and eagles have nothing to do with each other." His voice echoed across the landscape. At this, the sky turned dark, the lion general roared, the eagle commander cried out, and each returned to their post. Trumpets sounded, and the two armies charged and clashed into a spinning mass of feathers, claws, and teeth. Then, the gray bearded giant from the previous dream appeared, and he held *Gigantes Sit!*, now completely battered and torn to ribbons. *He knows*, thought Brebble. Again, the giant frowned and shook his head at him.

Brebble woke upside down, hanging from the edge of his bed, blankets twisted around him. The early morning sun shone through a crack between the curtains, which he flung open. He cautiously made his way past the barricaded door, into the kitchen, and put on the kettle. After some breakfast, he made preparations for his fishing trip, and added the books from the small table into a basket. He listened by the barricaded entrance before leaving, but the room was still.

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When Brebble returned home, he was shocked to discover the bound doorframe completely undone, and timber scattered about the stone floor. He ran to the shed and grabbed a garden spade. Wielding it was another matter, but at least it provided *some* comfort. *That thing is anywhere, waiting to pounce*, he thought. This time he checked each corner of the kitchen, examined the ceiling beams, and then, peered into the pantry – anywhere the light seemed to miss. Aside from the strewn covers from that morning, his chamber was undisturbed, and again, no monsters hid along the ceiling. Balancing the spade under his arm as he held the lamp, he turned the librarium knob and cracked open the door. His legs weakened, and his body trembled. The study lamp was already lit. The creature, no longer up in the rafters, had repositioned itself left, along the northern wall, midway along the stone shelves, and it held onto the ladder's rungs with its hind claws. In one talon was Brebble's lit pipe, and in the other talon was an opened book, which it examined, head tilted to one side. Brebble gently shut the door and boarded up the opening. This time he used extra planks, more nails, and at the far end of the hallway was a wooden chest filled with heavy things, and he dragged it against the entrance. "There," he said, wiping his brow with his sleeve.

Several days passed without incident; however, by the third day, Brebble felt uneasy. The stack he kept on the small table was revisited, flipped through, worn, and all that was left was to pace through the house. *An Objective Study of Horrible Mammoths* now *looked* like a horrible mammoth, and although reasonably written, it grew stale by the minute. There was one small victory, however: after a quick rummage, he uncovered Rani's leftovers on a pantry shelf. He made tea and spread preserves on the bread. There was enough fish, so he could skip today, and besides that, it was raining outside: normally the perfect condition for browsing in his study. Again, he paced, and each time he traversed the hall, he glanced at the bound door. Finally, after reaching an unbearable state of boredom, Brebble shoved the chest to one side, pried off the boards with the spade, and looked inside. He was relieved to find the room empty. *It left back down the hole*, he thought. He returned each book to its proper location: north wall,

sixth shelf; he gathered more subjects, including several volumes on mysterious creatures; and after reinforcing the doorway, he made for the kitchen.

Several hours passed, and after a second pot of tea, there it was: *griffin – A creature made up of both animal and feathers, found in the onlyworld (see onlyworld pg. 298). Often watches over high priced objects, such as important metals or gems. Sometimes likes to read and collect books. Griffins are seemingly friendly.* “Seemingly?” asked Brebble. “Two-ninety-eight – two-ninety-eight – two-ninety-eight.” *onlyworld – A realm which exists in our time and place, yet is outside our time and place. Where unnatural things reside, such as ghosts, elves, or griffins.* (see ghosts pg. 192, elves pg. 204, griffins pg. 58). *Query: Is onlyworld safe for humans? Response: Unknown.*

A knock came from the front door, and Brebble grew excited, since it had been several days, and usually, Rani made her delivery around the middle of the week. However, he found a man on the porch. The dark eyed, sunken cheeked caller was average height, slightly shorter than Brebble, and wore a three piece suit, a long, gray coat, and a black top hat. “Good day,” the visitor said.

“Good day,” said Brebble.

“Mr. Broxworth?”

“Yes. That’s me.”

“Of course. Of course.” Squinting, the man examined the house, and spying the books through the doorway on the table behind Brebble, he paused. “Mr. Broxworth, it’s possible you’re already acquainted with me. I’m Maltbin – Horace Maltbin.”

“The name sounds familiar.”

“Forgive any intrusion, but you seem to be an avid reader – or so they say in town.” Horace glanced toward the small table again. “I authored several books, including *The Largely Inclined*, a well renowned work about giant culture. Perhaps you’ve heard of it?”

Brebble’s eyes widened. “Yes! What an honor! Please come in, and let me take your coat.”

Brebble fed the stove; put on the kettle; took out the last of Rani’s bread, along with some preserves; and set down two plates and two cups. He transferred the stack of books to the larger table to make room. Again, Horace’s eyes followed them, which Brebble thought made perfect sense. After all, wasn’t he a famous author?

“It was brought to my attention several days ago, through a certain source, that a certain text was recently uncovered, Mr. Broxworth—”

“It’s okay to call me Brebble.”

“Right – Brebble. The volume that I speak of is of the highest importance. You see, over fifty years ago, the creatures fell into a great conflict – the Year Long Giant War – and while this occurred, precious archives were destroyed and burned. There was one article, however, that was spared, but its exact whereabouts was never entirely confirmed, until now. Mr. Broxworth—”

“Brebble.”

“Um – Sorry. Brebble. Are you familiar with the term onlyworld?”

“Where ghosts and elves exist?”

“Well put. Few humans, let alone those living near The Forest of Mahrm, ever speak of it. Some believe it’s all made up. The giants had their mythology, so why wouldn’t we have ours?”

Brebble nodded.

Horace dropped a cube of sugar into his cup and stirred it with a spoon. “This might be difficult to believe – Onlyworld reveals itself, now and again, by a subtle means.” He took a sip. “Mmm. Good

brew.” His dark eyes glazed over. “And sometimes when you look, things have a way of finding you back.” He glanced over to the stack of books again. “Are you familiar with *Lux Sit! Gigantes Sit!*?”

Although Brebble was eager to reply, something odd took place. He originally intended to explain everything to Horace at once: the book, the librarium, and its tragic plummet into the abyss, but instead, he blurted: “No, I haven’t.”

Horace’s brow furrowed. “Are you sure?”

Again, Brebble tried to talk about the most marvelous thing he’d ever come across, about the enveloping sadness anytime he thought about the librarium, but instead came: “Yes, I’m sure.”

“Well,” said Horace somberly. “It appears I’m mistaken.” He quietly ate the last of his bread and finished his tea. “If you’ll excuse me, I have other matters to attend to.” He made for the doorway, then halted and turned. “I’m here for the week, and I’m giving a lecture on giants in town, Friday evening at the main hall. In the meantime, I’ve taken lodging above The Shabby Mongoose Pub on Hickory Lane, which I’m sure you’re familiar. It is of vital importance. Please don’t hesitate to send word, if you happen to find anything.”

With that, the two said farewell, and the man mounted his horse and rode off.

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As Brebble tidied the kitchen later that same evening, he wondered if Horace believed his story, about not knowing about the book. He thought about elves and ghosts and the griffin, and how Horace knew about *Gigantes Sit!*: perhaps by some type of unearthly, onlyworld magic, or perhaps by some *subtle way*, as Horace had mentioned. He pictured a ghost hovering at the foot of Horace’s four-poster bed in the middle of the night. *Maltbiiin!* The phantom appeared to say. *Don’t be afraaaaid! There’s a book I must tell you aboooouuut! And, by the way, I really like what you’ve done with the plaaaaace! Are the curtains cashmeeeere?* Brebble shivered. Perhaps something inside *Gigantes Sit!*’s pages kept him from telling Horace the truth. This last idea was disturbing, since it suggested something either controlling or possessing him: neither of which Brebble found amusing.

A series of rapid knocks came from the hall, and the plate he had been cleaning slipped to the floor and shattered. He hurried to his bedroom to retrieve the garden spade and pressed his ear against the study door. “Heeelp!” came a woman’s voice from inside. “Heeelp!”

“Hold on! Hold on!” shouted Brebble. The whole thing was bizarre. Someone was attempting to escape? *Seemingly friendly – so much for that idea*, he thought. He imagined the griffin’s deadly golden eyes, its sharp talons, its merciless beak, as it advanced on the helpless woman, who could only cling to the shelves and wait. Somehow she had climbed up from the opening? That was absurd. But there was no time to dwell. Despite his trembling, he quickly removed the chest, tore away the boards, brandished the garden spade, and swung open the door.

Expecting darkness, Brebble was instead greeted by a well-lit room. The study was transformed: a narrow spiraling staircase wound upward from the dark opening in the floor, and the silver structure twisted like vines around a pole, until it reached the rafters above. Each rotation had several square landings, and on the one across from him, stood a green eyed, blonde haired woman around Brebble’s age. She wore a white dress, and her skin was unusually pale. She smiled and pointed upward.

Now speechless, he followed her gesture and saw the griffin had returned: it thoughtfully looked down at him from one of the higher landings. “Aloha,” it said. “I’ve run out of tobacco for my pipe. In my desperation, I had my assistant call out – I surmised that her voice would be the quickest way to have you

dislodge the door. I was able to breach it before, but your recently added fortification was a tremendous success.” It continued sorting a stack of books as it spoke. “And as for the spade, I can assure you it wouldn’t stop me, although you have nothing to fear. I’ve satisfied my allowance for dining on fishermen this week.”

The woman giggled.

Still unconvinced, Brebble gripped his weapon. He studied the pale lady as she grinned back at him, and he felt himself flush. “You, you, you’re a griffin?” he asked.

“If not, then I should visit a doctor at once,” said the griffin, dramatically placing a wing against his chest. “Perhaps I’ve a rare case of griffinitis? Hopefully there’s a cure for that.”

The lady giggled again.

“What are you doing in my librarium?” asked Brebble.

“*Your* librarium,” said the griffin.

“Yes. *My* librarium. And could you please stop rearranging the books?”

“I see you’ve made no attempt to retrieve the tobacco. Shall I send my assistant?”

With a huff, Brebble stormed into the kitchen and sat at the small table, glaring at the hallway. Then, cautiously stepping over the broken plate, he entered the pantry, dumped tobacco into a pouch, and returned to the study. “Here – for *my* pipe you took without my permission,” he said, and dropped the bag on the landing by the door. “Now, please leave. You have until the morning to get out.”

“If you could be so kind as to close the door tight behind you,” said the griffin. “It’s difficult to concentrate with noise coming from the hall.”

The woman in the white dress sorted through another pile of books. She didn’t laugh this time, but turned and looked warmly at Brebble.

Brebble slammed the door, and after replacing the boards and the chest, he locked his chamber and went to sleep.

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