

Of Olric and the Doom of the Giants

It was before the coming of Chaos, the sagas of our fathers tell us, that all the land was covered in ice and all the seasons were winter. No Humans walked the world as the gods had not seen fit to create them. The Jotuns alone peopled the ice-bound mountains and forests. Large as the largest trees, brutal as the deepest Winter, and cunning as the wiliest fox, they preyed upon the great beasts of winter and battled each other for the right to be High King. When at last the battles came to an end, just one Jotun stood unbowed and by his might he earned the kingship. His name was Yagamir the Strong and he ruled with an iron fist for years uncounted.

One day a stranger clad in the skin of the fearsome Giant White Wolf and armed with a mighty ax appeared before Yagamir in his Great Hall. Although smaller than any Jotun, the stranger radiated a power that any but the most blind could sense, and Yagamir's huscarls drew back in fear. But Yagamir was unafraid. "What is this mouse that has sneaked into my Hall? It bears no tribute, so it must have a message for me," grunted the Jotun king. "Spit it out and begone. I have other things to do. Tarry, and I will use your bones for grist in my mill."

"Look around you, O High King! Great changes are afoot! Can you not see that the ice is retreating northward and the days grow warmer?"

"What care I for such things? It is of small consequence. And who are you to bother a king with trivial matters?" Yagamir asked testily.

"I am 'Winter's Fury'," answered the stranger. "And I come to tell you that a time of testing approaches. The large-eyed gods that you worshipped have failed, doomed by their pride. Through their failure a great war is upon us, a war in which this world itself may die. Soon a mighty enemy will appear in the North. You and your kinsmen will be the first to feel the weight of their arms. Upon your shoulders will the conflict be borne and by your ax will the outcome be decided. Great will be your honor should you throw them back into the darkness. Far will be your fall should you fail. And with your fall, others will come to rule your realm."

"Begone, 'Winter's Fury'," roared Yagamir. "I care not for your warnings! They are just the ramblings of a woman or a drunkard whose bowels have turned to water!"

A blast of icy wind tore open the doors of Yagamir's stronghold and filled the Great Hall. Undisturbed amid the tumult, the stranger spoke in a cold, harsh voice edged with anger, "Fool! Mock me at your peril! Heed not my warning if you choose! It is by your own actions that your race will be judged – and found weak!" The stranger then vanished with the wind.

It was as Olric foretold: the Jotuns were the first to face Chaos when it invaded the world. Drunk with the pride that had doomed the Old Ones, the Jotuns were overwhelmed by the demonic hordes. The survivors were scattered, their minds snapped like brittle twigs by the horrors of Chaos and the shame of their fall. No longer would the Jotuns be noted for their cunning, nor

would they join together as a common people. Instead, they became the dying race we know as drunkards and dolts.

For days the lone warrior trekked across the Jotunheimen Mountains, seeking a sign – any sign – that his quarry had survived the onslaught of Chaos. He was almost oblivious to the frigid winds and driving snow which marked winter's fury. In fact, he seemed at home among the glaciers, moving across the slick ice with the confidence of a master in his hall. Now and then he stopped to sniff the air, searching for a familiar scent.

Finally, Olric came to an almost-hidden cave mouth on the north face of a great peak. His quarry's stench was strong here. Shouldering his great axe, Kaosfæmir, the Ræmir descended into the darkness. His journey into the heart of the mountain twisted ever deeper until Olric came upon a cavern illuminated by the fungi within.

“So you have come,” said a raspy voice from the darkness beyond the dim light. “Is it to gloat at my shame? Or, do you have some other business?”

“Shame is too light a word to describe your pathetic efforts against the Great Enemy. Nor do I care to gloat over a coward who hides in the darkness to lick his wounds, like a whimpering dog. I have come with another warning, Yagamir. Stay far away from the lands along the sea! I have given them to a far worthier race, one which will not fail.

Yagamir shouted. “The Dwarfs? Hah! I will make the sea run red with their blood. Those diggers and tinkers cannot withstand my wrath!”

“You once mastered the Dwarfs in your prime, with your army behind you. But now your huscarls are little more than beasts howling in the woods, and the Dwarfs laugh at you – they mock you and your name rather than fear you. Their Slayers seek you even now.” Contempt filled the god's voice. “Your kingdom is destroyed, Yagamir, your people struck dumb and scattered, and you hide here having fled battle.” He called to the shifting shadow, “but the Dwarfs are not the ones to inherit the realm you forfeited. A new race, one of my choosing, shall be the guardian of this land.”

The Jotun King leapt into the dim cavern light and cried “then they will be crushed by me as surely as the darkness swallows the light!” Olric faced the giant and saw how the fight against Chaos had warped Yagamir. His flesh was blistered and pustulant and his hair fell out in great clumps. Odd bones poked through his skin and twisting muscles squirmed and crawled under the giant's flesh. Yagamir's eyes burned with the fire of madness. “I was not weak like my kin. I grasped where the true power lay and knew that it was destined to be mine. A pact I made with the Ruinous Powers to see your precious race destroyed before you. But now I look upon you and realize how truly puny and insignificant you are – how frail all the Mother's Children are! How much greater would be my reward to kill you and give your skull as a gift to the Four Lords!”

A rainbow bolt raced from Yagamir's fingertips towards Olric. The Lord of Winter merely raised Kaosfæmir before him and dispersed the bolt into shards of colored light that flickered briefly along the blade and then were gone. "I had hoped to find you with some wit left in your head, but I see I was wrong. I cannot let you roam free, Yagamir, but to kill you now would be an undeserved mercy. There is, of course, a third way." From his sack, Olric brought forth heavy chains and said, "These were crafted for me by the Dwarfs you so despise. Mark you that these chains carry not only Dwarf runes of power, but also runes of my devising. You will be bound just in sight of the opening, and each day you will look out upon lands that are no longer yours. Each day you will whine and cry for your new masters, but they won't have the power to free you, let alone pass the wards I have scribed about the cave's mouth. You will spend the rest of your life chained like a beast, until the day comes when the Gates are closed and the Enemy is thrown back into the Void. And, on that day, I will come back and kill you."

Yagamir struggled with all his might, but he could not resist the judgment of Olric. The monster was bound and sealed in that cave by the God of Wolves and to this day we can hear his howls when the Winter wind comes from the North. The exact location of the cursed mountain was hidden from even Olric's most devout followers – we only know it by the name, "Steinfensor."