

Rusty Fears 7

“GIGANTOMACHIA”

BY ALUKARD

PROMPT: GIANT

[Music]

ANNOUNCER:

Roses by Abi Kinsella

[Music]

NARRATOR:

Report of Lt. Woodsworth on the preliminary investigation into subject ATLAS-2.

Personnel: Lt. Richard Woodsworth, Sgt. Annabelle Goethe, Corporals Maximilian Edward Stevenson and Carlisle Howitzer.

Actions: Recognizance and sampling of materials for further research.

Conditions: Unexpected, read attachment.

Orders: Access through the designated opening determined by the Bioengineering Squad. Utilize as few tools as possible to prevent loss of valuable instruments and ensure quick departure, committing only to a preliminary assessment.

Summary: The squad fulfilled the preliminary investigation as ordered, finding expected setbacks as per the sitrep, recovering the necessary samples.

A full report in detail can be read in the Attachment provided by Sgt. Goethe per request of Col. Louis Ryder.

Attachment:

This is the extended report of the mission into subject ATLAS-2, charged to the squadron led by Lt. Woodsworth. By request of Col. Ryder it shall be detailed and civilian oriented, so I will spare military terminology unless necessary:

It is odd to be writing this way, I'm no journalist. I don't understand why Col. Ryder wants it this way but it is not on me to question such orders.

As a short preface for those unaware: ATLAS-2, colloquially known as Devourer, is laying dead in the middle of a metropolitan area. Like its predecessor, it took a lot of resources, time and lives to bring it down. Unlike ATLAS-1, we had access to a carcass we can study. Command ordered an investigation into it, providing us with very little resources and shipped us off.

Once my eyes set on it, the word “titanic” came to mind. My wife, Elizabeth, is a mythologist. She often tells me how we don't actually have any indication that the titans of Greek myth were any different in size from the gods.

I wonder if Zeus ever trembled like I did when fighting his own terrifying enemies.

We entered through a cavity cut by the bioengineering squad on its abdomen. Both corporals stayed at the entrance, Stevenson reported from the outside while Howitzer did so on the inside. Lt. Woodsworth and I went into the belly of the beast, so to speak.

The first thing that hit me was the smell. We didn't know if decomposition would affect it. Taken by millions of bacteria, fungi and insects, expelling that familiar sweet, awful scent.

It smelled fresh. The only thing compared to it is eucalyptus. Clean and overpowering.

Then there was the silence. Our march on its flesh made a squelching beneath our boots, some sound proofing quality prevented us from hearing any echo in the distance.

Our flashlights guided us through the dark, checking with Max and Carlisle every ten minutes. The meat was soft, but in the way a waterbed mattress is. Giving way easily to the boots for a moment before the tension would risk breaking.

Walking became a matter of constant motion. We couldn't stay idle or fear a rupture, releasing its potentially toxic fluids.

Every once in a while I would find support on a solid portion of the walls. Patches of what looked like rocky slates, similar to scabs on the skin.

It was something we could sample. We pulled our tools out and scraped some of it. They felt sandy to the touch, even with gloves on. I could smell it through the mask, rotten sweet, falling like thick sand on our tools.

Richard was excited that we were “already making progress”. The smell was stronger the farther we got, until we found an access to what looked like a breathing cave. The scabby plates covered almost everything not unlike a scaly lung.

It was...eerie. A room big enough to hold three trucks, inhaling then exhaling. The smell of rot was everywhere, but nothing seemed to be decomposing.

Richard was ecstatic, I wasn't. He argued that some activity after death was expected. But if there was even a chance of it still living, I had cause for alarm. We checked with the corporals. Both confirmed subject ATLAS-2 was still.

Richard insisted this was what we came here for, so I took our cameras out and began compiling documentation.

I couldn't shake the feeling of being captured. As if this place was a flytrap eager to digest us in her jaws.

Worse, I feared this whole thing was playing dead, uncaring about what our tools would do to it, just waiting for its time to kill again.

“Perhaps its sleeping.”

I told Richard, but he kept saying the bio-squad had taken every measure to make sure we'd be safe.

“It is dead.”

I reminded him that the bio-squad could only do so much with limited data, which was why we were there.

I shouldn't have, that made him forget about everything else. It wasn't mere scientific curiosity, he had confirmation that we couldn't use our knowledge of biology to understand how it worked.

"Which proves my point," I said. "We don't know if its dead."

He waved it away, which was expected. He'd dismiss anything that could deny him this opportunity.

We did two more check-ins and advanced. After some searching, I spotted an opening that went down a slithery slope.

Immediately Richard wanted to go but I refused, better if just one person fell down. He could have ordered me to stay, but we both knew it'd be a waste. He was going to go there eventually.

As soon as I stepped down, my boot slipped and I was rapidly descending. Whatever wall I was falling along was slick with a substance that smelled like rust. I flailed around to grab for anything.

The sound of my body splashing its way down echoed. Whatever sound proofing this thing had did not exist in this chamber. Even through the fear, I could tell this one was way bigger than the rest.

I tried to stand up but could...barely get to my knees. The strange substance that pooled in this place made it impossible to get on my feet.

After an interminable minute of tripping over and over I decided to simply slid on my hands and knees. It was humiliating but it worked.

Thankfully my shoulder mounted flashlight hadn't broken, so I used it to inspect this new chamber I was in.

It was massive, larger than the tunnel and the cave we'd seen, covered in this slimy substance that had a reddish brown coloration.

On closer inspection, it didn't smell so much of rust, more coppery with a strange hint of ozone, like a broken stage light.

I tried to communicate again but my hands were too slimy. I couldn't use any of my tools, both in practice but also because I feared soaking and damaging them.

I kept sliding on that strange surface, looking for a way out. Research be damned, if the bio-squad and Richard wanted to investigate this place in more detail they could do it by themselves.

That is assuming I wouldn't die there.

I could see it already. A stupid obituary with the least flattering picture of me in my uniform, showing on the news, talking about my noble sacrifice for two minutes before getting to the new fashion trend.

My scoff echoed through the chamber. It was a stark reminder of my solitude, of a death that would be witnessed by none. Even if this slime was not toxic enough to rot my insides, the lack of food and air would eventually take me out.

I laughed. Here I was, crawling on all fours for a way out of a cavernous, fleshy building that performed who knows what function to the titanic being that was either fully asleep or still functioning after death.

That word again, "titanic." But it wasn't the titans that were gargantuan in size. That was the next set of enemies the gods faced. The giants, created specifically to kill the Olympians.

Colossal horrors that made the earth shake with each step, crushing mountains with their hands, powerful enough to kill the immortal gods of the sky, the seas and the underworld.

That place felt like the underworld, but without vast cities full of shades or monsters guarding it. Instead it had tall walls drooling with a red and brown substance.

I had no climbing equipment but even with it this sick slime would make it impossible. I looked up in desperation.

I don't want to relay what I saw up there. I understand those are my orders, so I'll do it. But Col. Ryder, just know I resent it. No one else should suffer it, even through text.

Richard was right, there was no way to understand it. An animal could not support its own circulatory system of that size. Could not feed on such a tiny amount of food, even if that was cities worth of humans.

An animal did not digest its food from the top of its stomach to the floor. But there it was, the melting mass of millions of still living people stuck to the ceiling of this colossal stomach.

Clothes fused to liquefied flesh. Bones indistinguishable from the marrow once inside them.

Skin mixed with plastic or metal. Muscle and sinew stretched to its limits, forming knots of fibrous tissue.

Eyes with teeth inside. Nails pierced by eyelashes. Few things in there resembled human limbs.

If you're reading this report you're probably wondering how I could know they were still alive. It's simple really, because they were begging for death.

No colonel, I don't know how. By all rights they should have been dead, their bodies barely holding *because* they were stuck together. Throats that shouldn't be able to make sounds, eyes that should be blind, awakened by my flashlight.

They spoke almost in unison, broken only by a painful individuality that took away any chance to lose consciousness.

As I said they begged for death. They didn't ask for help. They sang, like a Greek chorus begging the Fates for release. Conscious enough to *suffer*, to know even if they were rescued, there was no way to survive this.

We all knew that their lives were supported by a horrifying mass of living tissue, keeping them in eternal torment.

I could distinguish some of them. An old woman crying for someone to blow her head with a rifle. A policeman screaming in terror for his brother lost somewhere around that mass of flesh. A tourist unlucky enough to be at the wrong beach and time, now mixed with dirty sand in his veins.

I could tell which cities they'd lived in, even their neighborhood. I could take a goddamn census of that monster's eating habits.

The worst part was when I realized something else. I recognized these people.

The sweet old man I bought flowers from. My high school math teacher. My wife's Yoga instructor. My mother's best friend.

I thought myself lucky, pulling strings to get my friends and family out of the carnage. I hadn't technically lost anyone.

So now the Gods were punishing my hubris. Making me witness the eternal horror this Devourer had brought upon us.

I saw my old Capt., a brave man who had insisted on fighting against this otherworldly monster from day one.

He'd been one of the first, years ago, when it decimated a whole city without suffering a scratch.

I had mourned this man. Armed myself, determined to do my part to honor his sacrifice by saving as many lives as I could.

But he wasn't dead. He was looking deep into my eyes, begging me to *end his misery*.

I screamed louder than I ever have. Until my throat was sore, my lungs burning. All the air inside me burst through my lips. Mouth up to that fleshy sky, prostrated like a penitent realizing no god would have mercy on her.

It was so loud I didn't feel the chamber shift. I slipped on my back, desperately grasping, finding no purchase. No way to stop my descent into my next unknown, horrible fate.

It did not matter whether this creature was dead, or if it had ever been alive. I was not meant to be inside it. So it would correct that.

It pulled me through tunnels made of wet meat, bumping me around its walls, tossing me from chamber to chamber.

My suit ruptured. I lost my watch in the first five minutes. I hit my head so many times it was ringing after ten. My arm broke at around the twenty minute mark. I know this because my comms came back. Max and Carlisle called desperately to know where I was. Richard was eager to learn what I had found.

After thirty minutes of beating around those fleshy caverns, it spit me out.

I broke a leg and some ribs on the concrete. I definitely had a concussion, considering the blood dripping from my forehead.

With whatever strength I had left I called back, told the corporals to triangulate my location through my signal. I couldn't tell where I was as my eyes were covered in the liquified remains of the people inside that *hell*.

The last thing I remember were the blades of a chopper coming down while my body finally collapsed on the floor.

Carlisle was next to me when I woke up, that blessed boy, making sure I was alright. The doctors informed us I had no major injuries but neither of us bought it.

I'm sure there was some lasting brain damage, but that'll be a nightmare for later. He told me I was ejected out of subject ATLAS-2 ten blocks from the entrance, through a previously unknown orifice on its throat.

Regardless, I am out of that monster, and I'm not coming back. Lizzie is taking care of me and it'll be a while before I get back into action, if I ever do.

That's alright. I'm thinking of changing careers, maybe moving to a different country. I know Lizzie would appreciate it, she wasn't as

lucky as me. Now this land has memories we both would rather forget.

I didn't tell her I saw her cousin there. What he said to me. That is something I will never forget, and she doesn't need to know.

Richard contacted me a few days ago, telling me about the Colonel's orders. I'm guessing he asked Ryder to make some arrangements, have me give an official report on the matter, to have all the gruesome details.

Well, there you have it. I went into the meaty Avernus that holds millions of souls in pain and I'm telling you, I will not go back. Unless to blow it all the way to kingdom come, see its body turned to trillions of pieces scattered.

I am not going back. Gods willing, *it* never will.

Please, God, Gods of Olympus, the Demiurge or Satan himself. Whatever being that's capable of creating such a thing, if there is any mercy in your heart, take it back.

And please, please, *kill them all*.