

Dungeons & Dragons

Astroth

As a young man Zothern enjoyed toasting monsters with his new wizarding skills. One day he fought a band of ice trolls which nearly cost him his life. After defeating them he released a female golumn they had trapped in a glacier. Her name was Blodwyn Earthmother.

Zothern and Blodwyn became good friends and travelled together for a while before parting to pursue their separate goals, although they reunited to fight together with two other companions against a dangerous wizard later on, but that is another story.

Before they parted, one night Zothern was surprised to find that Blodwyn had come to his bed but the surprise didn't stop him. When he was done he was about to go to sleep when he realised that a golumn would never have gone to bed with him and he immediately jerked himself awake to find it was a female orc who'd found a spell that allowed her to steal the magic of any wizard she slept with as long as he went to sleep.

Having jerked himself awake meant the Orc would not be successful this time. She planned to kill him but after taking a beating from his spells she retreated back to her home and gave birth to a half-Orc son nine months later.

Astroth Salemwort's mother brought him up to believe that Chaos was the reason for being. She had been seeking magic but really wanted Chaos magic. Her interpretation of Chaos was in being evil.

Astroth's human side showed him as being different from an early age. From early on he was taunted about not being a full Orc. A common misconception of humans is that Orcs sometimes accidentally eat their own children. This is not true. They sometimes eat their own children when they are really hungry, but then it is quite deliberate. The other children would tell Astroth that his mother would only need to miss one meal to eat him since his was half human. In truth Astroth's mother noticed that his human side gave him imagination that was usually absent in Orcs.



Most Orcs wanted to be warriors but Astroth felt the opportunities were better to capture slaves for slave traders. He got to know all of the Orc slave traders and when he was fourteen he joined Orcs who were raiding defenceless or poorly defended villages and towns and taking prisoners as well as getting his share of the loot. The other Orcs got more pleasure out of killing the people but Astroth preferred seeing the looks on the faces of the prisoners when they thought about what lay ahead of them for the rest of their lives (which for a lot of slaves was not very long).

Astroth found that most slave traders would pay more for humans or elves and his human side drove him to capture mainly elves but as time went on he found his human side questioning what he was doing but since he felt it was the way of Chaos, he ignored his doubts but they continued to plague him.

Astroth heard of some opportunities at a place called The Shaar where there were lots of poorly defended Elf settlements and people wanting to sell Elves right the way along the Golden Road which ran through The Shaar and stretched from The Shining Sea in the west to the Great Sea in the east and to the Vilhorn Reach in the north.

He got together a group of Orcs and they took a ship through The Shining Sea to The Lake of Steam and got off at Derlusk.

It didn't take long for Astroth to wish he could remember who had recommended The Shaar to him because it was nothing more than a vast wasteland. A desolate place where the only inhabitants were nomadic humans and the few cities were dry and dusty and nothing more than trading centres. Most of them lay in ruins. However on the north and west sides of the Lake of Steam were more options and with exports including brass, bronze, chains, dyed wool, dyes, fruit, gems, ink, magic items, mercenaries, mirrors, pearls, seafood, sheepskins, spellbooks, sturdy books, vegetables, wagons, weapons and wine there would be places worth invading even if he couldn't find any elves or indeed any slaves at all.

After finding out where to find slave traders willing to buy slaves Astroth continued to journey with the Orcs so he could get the same benefits as before - getting slaves to sell and getting his share of the pillaging. In this area that arrangement could make you very rich, very quickly.

One of the first towns they passed looked like it had nothing of value but the Orcs wanted to raid it anyway. Astroth thought this was because it was unprotected with the only kind of defence being a three foot high wall.

Most of the Orcs went round the front but Astroth and another climbed over the wall at the back to take the people by surprise. They saw two female elves talking unaware of what was about to happen. One was about to be married and was telling her best friend what she planned to do with her new life.

Astroth came up and grabbed one of the girls. The Orc grabbed the other. It was clear the girls had nothing of value with them but would get a high price with any slave trader. Astroth was shocked when the other Orc almost in the same movement as grabbing one of the girls, slit her throat, laughed and pushed her body to the ground and continued into the village without even checking if she'd had anything of value. Astroth saw the look in the eyes of the girl he was holding, being forced to watch her best friend be murdered right before her eyes for no reason.

Seeing the look on her face along with the shock caused his human side to come to the surface where it immediately took control. He nearly let go of the girl but said "I'm sorry," in a voice his vocal chords had never been called on to produce before.



In normal circumstances the girl wouldn't have believed him but something in his voice told her that it came from his heart. She said nothing and just stood there thinking that there was little he could do now that was worse than what had just happened.

Astroth however didn't know where to go from here and so in the end the girl had to ask him if he was going to sell her and she told him his reputation preceded him.

Astroth thought about what he'd been planning today but with his human side in charge now, what he saw was, what lay ahead for the girl as a slave. He knew he couldn't do that. He relaxed his grip on her a little but not enough to let her escape.

"If I let you go, the other Orcs in the town will kill you," he said. "Now that one has seen you, if I let you escape they'll hunt you down. The best option I can give you is to make you my personal slave."

The girl had been hiding her emotions and continued to do so but Astroth knew she didn't think much of his offer.

"This will only be in public," he told her. "If you do a few simple tasks for me when others are around, you'll be as free as can be behind closed doors, but if you try to leave I won't be able to protect you. I give you my word that I will treat you well and in private as an equal."

The girl still wasn't impressed but then realised that if Astroth hadn't been there, she would be dead by now. He was doing the only thing he could do to save her life, so she accepted his offer and he asked her to try and help him keep his human side on top.

After that raid the Orcs felt the need to celebrate. With an Orc festival two weeks away the Orcs decided to celebrate all the way through.

Astroth at first allowed the elf to relax in his chamber while he went to the banquets but he found that the festivities were drawing on his Orc side and so he left them early before it took over.

One day he invited the elf to join him. He was troubled that his human side and his belief in chaos were not compatible and hoped if she came to a celebration, she could give him some advice since she had talked to him very logically.

At the banquet the elf sat with Astroth and fetched his food and drink for him to make it appear to the other Orcs that, that was the reason she was here. She didn't like the look of the Orc food and so opted to eat something when she returned from the banquet. Most of the Orc ales were lethal to humans and Astroth had to be careful which ones he drunk and so the elf decided only to drink water but she paid attention hoping she could give Astroth answers to his questions.

At the end of that week was the first of the two major Orc celebrations. The Orcs wanted to celebrate in the evening and raid a village during the day so they could enjoy the festival more by killing elves. Astroth came along and took the elf with him but as they were looking over the town Astroth suggested, instead of killing the inhabitants, they should just steal all their ales and food to enjoy at the festival, and then come back to kill them after the festivals were finished as a way of extending them. The elf was wondering if Astroth's Orc side was showing through but he explained to her that it was the only way of saving the people without the Orcs suspecting that he was having second thoughts and killing him and the elf.

After the Orcs left the village Astroth sent the elf back to warn them that they needed to get away within the next two days and asked her to come back before she was missed.

That festival was an outdoor one but with elf ale there, the elf was able to have a mug of foaming beer that she would be okay with. The Orcs

had mixed all the elf ale with Orc ales but Astroth had kept some back, but it had to be foaming beer to look similar.

The elf wondered, although not too hard, whether the cups were normal cups shaped to look like human skulls, or if they were human skulls that had been made into cups. She was glad that she was given a standard flagon for her ale. That night the elf told Astroth that she thought she knew a way for him to follow his human heart and his beliefs in chaos but he couldn't do it while living with orcs. The best idea was for him to remain until the festivals were over and then disappear.



Astroth decided that the elf would need to escape a few days before he left because if he ran into the orcs again, they'd kill him if they thought he'd left at the same time as the elf.

The next festival would be inside but would be the easiest time for her to escape unnoticed if she could pull it off. Astroth told her, if she could get past the entrance to the great hall, he could give her directions to a place where she could meet him in the catacombs where he could show her a way out.

This would be extremely dangerous though. The orcs would be crowded on the stairs waiting to get into the banquet hall. If she left earlier there would be orcs wandering around who would see her and if she left any later, the last Orc to get into the hall would be thrown out to guard it and the guard would see her.

All it would take would be one Orc on the stairs to look down to see her and she'd be killed on the spot or eaten alive at the banquet depending on which Orc saw her. If she could creep past she'd be able to get to the catacombs. The orcs would be focused on getting into the hall and wouldn't have a reason to look down but there was every chance one might.

Looking at the path she had to cross made the elf's blood run cold but she was prepared to risk it. Not simply because she would be able to get away but because she felt sorry for Astroth. With the different beliefs of his mixed races conflicting, she wanted to help him and also thought that she could reform him.



As she crept past the elf thought that her pounding heart beat would give her away or bring the castle down. She had to move slowly and quietly not even daring to breath and was blue in the face by the time she got past the steps and out of the hall to somewhere where she could rest and catch her breath unheard, after which she ventured into the catacombs and followed Astroth's directions to a large area and waited in a hidden alcove for him.

When Astroth came to meet her, he led her deep down until he revealed a secret door leading outside some distance from the castle. He told her he'd probably be the 'orc' left to guard the banqueting hall but that would help him keep his human side on top and he'd leave a couple of days later.

He told her that she had to get as far away from the castle as she could before it got light but there was torrential rain and the area round there would be dangerous to travel in, in the rain and darkness even with infra vision and so the elf went to find somewhere that was hidden where she could shelter.

Astroth guessed what the elf was going to do so the next evening he came out where he had left her and went looking for her. When she saw him she was terrified, assuming the only reason he'd have to come back was if he wanted to make her his slave again. In the end she saw in his face that his Orc side was still not in control and waited for him to catch up with her.

Astroth told her that since she was still likely to be here, that he could help her out. The flimsy dress which was all she was wearing wasn't going to protect her much and he gave her a backpack he'd prepared. It

had a large blanket, some strong leather boots, a woollen cloak, a dozen candles, a knife, a tinder box, warm mittens, a grappling hook, a lantern, a woollen tunic and a small tent with a length of rope attached to the side. He also gave her some food and a pouch with ten gold pieces. The elf still did want to help him but wasn't sure where she was going to go so she said if he wanted her help then she'd meet him at the Bay of Dancing Dolphins.

A few days later when Astroth found an excuse to be away for a few days he headed East as far as Delzimmer and then South past the Hills of the Dead Kings. The Bay of Dancing Dolphins was quite a large place but Astroth guessed the elf would find him rather than leaving it for him to find her.

When the elf did find Astroth he told her about how his human conscience told him that he was going to have to try and atone for what he'd done, but that conflicted with his belief that chaos was the way the universe worked, but the doctrine of chaos was evil. The elf told him that she could help him but he'd need some time alone and asked him where he planned to go.

Astroth thought the best place he could go was Winterkeep in the Endless Wastes of the Hordelands, west of Glittering Spires and next to the Great Ice Sea. It was in ruins but the underground chambers were intact and these halls were comfortably furnished.

The elf said she'd travel part of the way with Astroth and try to give him the best council she could offer. Along the way she told him the chaos was a natural force of the universe but followers were usually shunned or feared because they misinterpreted the doctrine of their god. Killing your own kind when necessary was also true of chaos but there were no problems with being good and fighting evil. She also told him that he would need some long time alone to think things through and learn to keep his human side in control. He should also embrace his Orc side. If he could control it, it could be a valuable asset.

When they reached Almorel by the Lake of Mists on The Golden Way, the elf and Astroth parted ways but the elf promised him she hadn't finished helping him and he would see her again.

Sometime later Astroth was disturbed by a knocking on the door of the underground room he was staying in. There were rumours about ice troll war bands and Astroth ignored it until he heard the voice of the elf calling out. He let her in and noticed how much more healthy and happy she looked now and how much better her clothes were. She told him

she'd brought someone to meet him and introduced him as Oberon the Archfey!

The Archfey dismissed the elf and watched her go and then left. A couple of hours later he returned obviously wanting to be sure the elf was long gone. He explained to Astroth that he knew of his mother's desire to possess magic and could provide Astroth with magic in exchange for a fey pact which would allow him to become a warlock. However instead of offering Astroth the pact, he told him that Astroth was worthy of power but not his.

The Archfey told Astroth that he should contact the Fiend. If he had his Orc side on the surface the Fiend would probably grant Astroth his powers and Astroth would then have the responsibility of using his new powers for good.

As the Archfey made to leave Astroth begged him to remain a moment to asking a favour. The Archfey was angered and explained that he was not in the business of granting favours for mortals but listened to Astroth's request. Astroth asked him to ensure that the elf would never visit him again if he couldn't reassert his human side and if he could to make sure he was able to do so before she visited him again if she ever decided to. The Archfey on leaving told Astroth he should embrace his Orc side, which the elf had told him before.

It was some time before Astroth felt he could risk allowing his Orc side to take over, to summon the Fiend. When he did, Wendonai appeared to him. Seeing the evil nature of Astroth with his Orc side in control and appearing much more evil than ever before after being suppressed for so long, the Fiend offered powers to Astroth but wouldn't let him have them unless he used them for evil. Astroth's Orc side agreed and the Fiend left. When Astroth received the powers he felt them enter him and felt like the strands of his being were being separated for an instant. Grabbing hold of one he grabbed his human side and when he recovered, found he'd brought his human side to the surface. He could see that it was just as well. The power his Orc side had after being suppressed for so long would have been impossible to suppress again in normal circumstances. Unfortunately, he was now in the intractable position that he had powers that he had agreed to use for evil. He didn't want to imagine what the Fiend would do to him if he broke his word.

Astroth was worried about venturing out of his new home. He was paranoid that his Orc side would awaken again. He knew that if it took over, getting his human side in control again would be almost impossible

and with his Orc side in control he would be doing great evil with his powers.

In the years that followed however, Astroth found he could combine his Orc side with his human side still being in control and felt his Orc side was becoming less evil. Just as his teachings from an early age taught him to be evil, his human side was re-educating his Orc side. He thought he'd be able to control his Orc side if it surfaced but was still worried about the responsibility not to use his powers.

After ten years the elf came to visit him again and was surprised to find he was still there and he told her about the meeting with the Archfey and the Fiend. The elf saw that he had changed. He might still get bloodthirsty thoughts but had developed a great empathy for others. She told him that he could fight against evil and use his powers. If he gave evil the unpleasant results of his powers then he was using them for evil. The Fiend would only know about his breaking his word if he used his powers for good more than evil but if he interpreted using it for evil differently, the Fiend wouldn't be alerted.

Astroth told the elf that he owed her a great debt and he would pay her back one day. She told him she'd find him again one day and they left together along The Golden Way towards The Sea of Fallen Stars. Shortly before arriving at Telflamm the elf left for her new home while Astroth headed for the west coast but this time much further up the coast than The Shining Sea.

He resolved he would either atone for what he'd done or spend the rest of his life trying.



