

## The Giants

Ryan Woods

The giant bellowed, "Set fire to the leaves on the branches and the brush beneath the trunks." He turned back toward me, kneeling down on one knee and staring at my face about two feet away. "What are you saying, little human?"

"Why are you burning these trees? This forest is old and respected by the people of the village. You can't just light it on fire like this!"

The giant's enormous features contorted into a frown, not a shameful frown, but a puzzled frown, a frown that says, *why don't you understand what we're doing?*

"Do you not want a show, little human? Why do you not want to see this?"

"This is no show; it's destruction! Utter, malicious destruction! Don't you realize it is upsetting the villagers?"

The giant cocked his head to one side then straightened it again. "I feel you have no understanding of what this is. It is a show of nature, of power. There are few things more likeable. I am certain your villagers will enjoy it. Besides." The giant stood back up. "The fires are already lit."

And they were. Bright orange flames sprang up all around every tree, devouring every tiny and insignificant leaf that came across their path, turning them to ash and shamefully dropping them to the forest floor or setting them loose to the whims of the wind. The fires licked at the trunks of the trees, springing up from the undergrowth. Soon, the entire forest was ablaze in bright orange and red. And smoke poured into the sky, blowing westward and ever expanding, darkening what was once the blue purity of a calm afternoon. The air below the treetops was suffocating.

"Come now, little human." The giant held his hand down for me to climb in. "It would do you no good to be singed down here as if you were a part of the show." I very willingly climbed into his strong, protective grip, and he placed me safely on his shoulder.

"And what a terrible show that would be. I couldn't bear to see a sentient being baked alive." He began walking toward the hill and away from the woods following the other giants. And I was certain I saw tears welling up in his eyes and even running down his cheeks. At least they respect human life, I thought.

He ascended the hill where the giant clan was waiting. The audience was in a rapture of joy. They cheered; they leapt up and down; tears of joy poured from their eyes. This sight was wonderful to them.

I turned and looked. Below me stood the old forest turning to ash in a single, enormous blaze. The smoke would be seen for miles. I saw the old village. It was safe from the fire, but, nevertheless, I saw the residents fleeing, like tiny, scurrying ants, toward the lake. At least they would be safe, as long as none die of pure terror.

I felt a certain sense of distrust toward these mad beings. How could they do this with such joy? Have they no thoughts for the villagers? They do care for their lives, but their desires? Perhaps these enormous men and women have no such ability. Perhaps they cannot understand the mind of man.

When I looked at the poor people fleeing in terror, I was sickened. But at the sight of the fire, its power and its majesty, I could not help but shudder in awe. I felt goose bumps on my skin. There *was* something amazing in these extreme shows of nature's power.