

Interview With An Ogre

He fell in love with a princess, stopped a wicked witch and won the hearts of the kingdom with his loveable nature. Now he has opened an orphanage, preparing for fatherhood and discovering new taste buds. Has Gree the Ogre changed the way we perceive these big creatures?

During the annual celebrations of Once-Upon-Kingdom's, Princess Maria and her new husband, Sir Gree walked in the royal precession behind her parents, the king and queen. The crowd were still getting used to her new appearance, for she was no longer the woman she once was. She was a foot taller, her brunette locks were a shade lighter and her skin matched that of her partner's—olive green. Hand in hand, the two ogres waved at the crowds with big grins on their faces and it looked like they were talking to each other through their teeth. Gree bellows and tells me what they were saying. "Maria was trying to ease my nerves," he says. "It's strange, you expect them to be chasing you with pitchforks. I'm not quite used to the clapping and cheering yet. I felt bad for the king and queen. People were calling my name instead of theirs."

In all of my time as a fairytale corespondent, never did it cross my mind that I would be sitting down to dinner with an ogre. We are in his swamp residency, located in the depths of an enchanted forest. His home is an old oak tree, refurbished into three rooms—a bedroom, a storage room (soon to be a second bedroom) and a shared space for a kitchen and living area. He kneels down to light the fire, places a rod over the rising flames and asks me, "I hope you like giant rat stew. It's a speciality of mine." Eating giant rats is a new one for me, but Gree says this is a weekly meal for him. He wipes soot from his cotton poncho and offers me a glass of caterpillar juice. I take it politely, and he chuckles—I am certain a small bug scurries across his gum-line. "I've got tomato if that's more appealing to you? Maria's got me familiar with some new foods."

Born in a far away land, Gree grew up without a mother. He was left in fear of his father who tried to eat him at any given moment. "My dad used to put an apple in my mouth and hang me upside down over a fire," he says, whilst pouring water into a big pot. Gree had no big aspirations. He wanted to live a reclusive lifestyle and so he did, running away from home, he made a name for himself as a fearful ogre. He tells me that he used his anxieties to his own advantage, terrorising the local villagers for his own bemusement. "I used to hide in the bushes and wait for them to walk past—that always gave them a fright. The best one was the time I dressed up as a barber. The look on that man's face when I got carried away with the clippers (*laughs*)." He adds that he never went in with the intention of harming anyone. When he wasn't doing that, he was lounging in the mud pool outside, or spending hours preparing dinner. If there is one thing I have learnt about this ogre, he has a good appetite—though I'm not sure ear wax candles would sell well in Storybook Kingdom.

He tells me that dinner is almost ready, offering me a seat at the wooden table he crafted himself. "Everything in this place has come from the forest. I've always been careful which trees I cut down. You just don't know what's living in them without knocking. I once disturbed a bunch of fairies during their winter nap. When I say they weren't happy!" It is fascinating to hear an ogre talk about being 'cautious'. The ones we get told at bedtime are careless and enjoy smashing things. So this bodes the question: Have our bedtime stories misinterpreted the reality of these big creatures?

"Everything changed when I met Maria. I no longer wanted to just be the ogre that lived alone in a swamp."

I notice the wedding ring on his finger as he stirs the bubbling pot. The story of his marriage to Princess Maria was covered in *The Hourglass Times*. At this point, no one really knew who Gree was. The only word was that an ogre had been assigned a mission by the late Lord Lysander to rescue the princess from a troll lair. "That Lysander sent a school of orphaned fairytale creatures to my swamp. He wanted to marry Maria, but wasn't up to the job of rescuing her. So I agreed to go, in exchange for the orphans being moved." Gree's quest took him across a desert that most would have perished. Along the way he gained the friendship of Billy-Goat Gruff—together they tricked the troll into knocking himself out and rescued the princess. "Maria thought I was a human like her."

I had a helmet on you see. I could see the disappointment on her face. She wanted a handsome knight, not some scary ogre. That's why I always preferred to live by myself, you don't get judged." Despite Gree's judgements about himself, Maria saw Gree differently and it wasn't long before she was confessing her own truths to the ogre. She carried a curse that turned her into an ogre come nightfall, and on the morning of her wedding to Lysander, she chose Gree, living a new life as an ogre.

He might come across as sheltered, but his kind nature is shown in the scrapbook he has just given me. Inside are drawings for the home he built for the orphaned fairytale creatures. "I let the fairytale creatures stay at my swamp whilst me and Maria were on our honeymoon. But we needed the space when we returned. So I decided to build the home. Billy-Goat and Rabbit are helping me with that." Work on the orphanage began just over a month ago, but construction got delayed due to an inconvenience from the Wicked Witch of the Well. She was furious when Maria chose the ogre over her son, and put in all the stops to ruin Gree upon his arrival in Once. "The witch tricked Maria into drinking this potion that reversed her appearance. She turned back into human form and Lysander tried to win her over. Did it work? No!" Gree chuckles, and places a bowl and spoon in front of me. "The witch then tried to 'get rid' of me by trapping me in her well. Luckily I had the help of Billy-Goat and the other fairytale creatures to rescue me."

The Wicked Witch of the Well took her fury out on Once, recruiting villains in her gain for power. I was in my study when an imp broke in and stole my talking clock. At this point the witch had imprisoned the king and queen, accusing them of treason and gave Lysander the throne. However, their ruling was short lived. Gree and his friends stormed the castle and defeated the witch. Lysander was banished and for the first time in tale history, an ogre became a Sir. Now this knighted gent is pouring me stew, living a quiet life away from the royal castle. "I found it hard living there. Everyone was so welcoming after the witch's downfall. But it still didn't feel like home. Maria wanted me to be happy, and wanted our kid to grow up in an environment suitable for an ogre."

Gree tells me to dip the roasted slugs into the rat stew, he is right—it does taste good. I must admit I was a little hesitant to do this interview. Although Gree's heroics have given me a new perspective, I never would have gone out of my way to meet an ogre. I have been wrong. This dinner has been tremendous and Gree's company is welcoming. He is going to be a wonderful father. He shows me the cot he has built for his unborn child. "I made it a little wider. Maria reckons it's gonna to be twins." I look out the window. You would expect there to be a garden, maybe a wishing well, but I can only see a weedy pond and a mud slide. Gree explains that dirt is good for their skin and stops teenage spots. "That was my first major issue when I left home."

It was not long before word got out about Gree the ogre. The folk in the kingdom and the distant lands have started opening up their doors to ogres. No longer did they need to live in exile, fearing that their existence was a burden. And now they are opening bars and restaurants and mud spas. But they are not the only beings to come out of hiding—orcs, elves, nymphs and even dragons have found themselves new homes. There is a breath of fresh air coming to the lore of the lands. Our fairytales are expanding and new stories are coming into the fold. Last week, *The Tale of Barnaby the Bad*—a brownie turned boggart that caused mischief throughout the kingdom last August—hit bookstores after he signed a contract with Judge Rump for his misdoings.

I thank Gree for dinner and bade him farewell for the night. He closes the door and I take one last glance through the window. He lights a candle and opens a book. There is a warmth to his smile as he falls into his book and waits patiently for his wife to return from Once. This is an ogre that is content with his life, which brings me to one final thought:

For too long we have gone day-to-day with this misconception that ogres are out to eat us. This is false, taken out of hand by the industry that is meant to inspire and showcase a world for everyone. Simply, ogres are lonely creatures, who might enjoy a little bit of mayhem, but this is only to gain the attention of others. I, like many others, have been judgemental. Instead we should have remained curious and asked questions and discovered what ogres really want—and that is to be loved.