

# THE GREAT (GODDAMN) HERO OF SELERIA

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# Chapter 1 - The First Chapter

I *was* the Great Hero of Seleria. In all the world, no other warrior could match my skills. People depended on me to create hope when there was none. They called me the Demon Slayer; the Bringer of Peace; the Master of Beasts; the Performer of Impossible Feats. They have written the stories of my countless epic quests in the books of legend: in truth though, there is only one story I wish to tell—only one story that is worth telling at all.

This story starts with me staring out an arched window while standing in a cold stone room on the highest floor of the castle of the King of Seleria. I stood there with my left hand resting on the back of an empty wooden chair—quite simple in its design.

I was still wearing my bathrobe, made of the finest silk and lined with feathers from the legendary golden goose. There was perhaps nothing else in this world as soft as that robe and I would often wear it all throughout the day.

The window I looked out of offered a stunning view of the castle's garden; it was both a beautiful and practical garden, growing many spices, herbs, fruits, and berries that the chefs of the castle used to prepare the finest of feasts. Flowers of all colors and designs were also scattered thoughtfully throughout the more edible plants.

There was, however, one type of flower that was much more prominent than any other; it grew on shrubs that outlined the entirety of the garden, decorating the borders in hues that ranged from a crimson red, to a soft, brilliant pink, to a comforting violet. There were even a couple of the white variety that offered a calming contrast to the strong colors that surrounded them.

As I stared at those flowers, I imagine that I had the slightest hints of a smile forming on my face; my eyes, on the other hand, surely did not have a brightness to match. I would not be surprised to learn that tears had been forming within them.

I spent much of my time standing in that spot. It was quiet and the garden below was one of the most wonderful sights in all the world. Azaleas truly were the most beautiful of flowers—on that, King Mardro and I had always agreed.

“Sir Felix,” I jumped as the voice of a servant disturbed my thoughts. “Breakfast is ready; it is a big day; you must get ready as well.”

I had forgotten. This was the day of my festival.

The festival of the Great Hero had been established as an annual event, a celebration of all my achievements held in my honor. This was the tenth year that this festival was being thrown: it had started after I saved the Capital from the Giant Galapogan Turtle-beast—a massive creature who felled entire armies before I had slain it by striking a single strike between its two eyes.

Not responding to the servant’s words, I stepped away from the window and headed towards my room. The servant rushed ahead of me, opening every door in front of me.

Upon being alone once again in my room, I looked in the mirror. There was some grey now speckled inside my jet black hair, as well as the beard; I kept my graying beard well trimmed around the rim of my chin. A couple of wrinkles were starting to form on my face as well.

I began to change my outfit, looking at the scar across my muscular chest as I did so. It was faded now, still clearly visible but more of a pale remnant than the purple reminder it had once been.

I dressed myself in a diamond encrusted chain mail that hung down to my knees. It was an outfit that had been crafted for me by the dwarves of Illindar after I saved their mine from a Golem that lurked deep in the depths.

On my back, I donned a thick purple cape that was lined with a shimmering silver. The inside of the cape was dressed with a golden fluff; it was fur from a giant lion who I had slain in the city of Tempria. The elves of the city had sewn and blessed the cape after that fight and since then wearing it always eased my mind.

The last thing I did after dressing myself was to sheath my sword at my side. It was an incredible blade, crafted out of the weightless material of Embrium and lined with golden veins that twist and turn all throughout the weapon. An emerald was encrusted within its hilt.

Fully prepared for the day, I stepped outside of my bedroom. My royally appointed servant still awaited directly outside my door.

Again, I said nothing to the servant-boy as I walked down the hallway towards where the stairs sat at its end. I made my way down the stairs and to the dining hall: my servant continued

to follow me all that way and rushed ahead to hold open the doors for me. I nodded at him in thanks as I entered the dining hall.

A massive feast was laid out at the table. Freshly baked bread, an entire pig cooked to perfection, and fruits that had been picked from the king's own garden that very morning were all fully prepared for me. You may think this was a special meal, but the truth is that I was offered a feast like this almost daily. I sat down and looked blankly at the food.

Sitting already at the table was the mighty King Mardro of Seleria. He was an aging man, looking about ten years older than I. In reality though—despite his thinning grayed hair and wrinkled skin—we were the same age.

“A fine morning, Felix.” The King nodded his head. “Are you ready for the festival?”

“Of course.” I answered gruffly.

“You should eat something this morning. It is a long day ahead.”

“I'm not hungry.” It was the same answer I gave on most mornings. “However, I would like some mead.”

I went to gesture towards my servant, but he was already handing me my cup. As I said, this was a normal morning routine. While I took my drink, the King spoke again:

“I hate to bother you on this day, but King Derin of Klazak has requested your services.”

“Not interested.”

Klazak was the neighboring country to the north of Seleria. Relationships between the two had always been tense.

“Felix,” King Mardro looked solemnly into my eyes. “This would do such good for our countries—our world. Please, at least consider it.”

“I am growing too old to keep fighting.” I shook my head as I spoke.

“Old?” The King's eyes twinkled. “Why, you're no older than me!”

I smiled softly at the king, but said nothing more. The only words I had were ones that we both knew he wouldn't want to hear.

“Very well.” He sighed. “I know better than to push you further on this. I must get ready for the day.”

Without waiting for any more discussion, Mardro stood and walked out of the room. I was left alone with a feast I had no interest in eating. It was after my second glass of mead when the servant spoke:

“We should get going soon, my lord. The festival approaches fast.”

I stood slowly and stepped out of the door which my servant held open for me. Not long after that, I made my way to the front yard of the castle.

My horse—a truly beautiful creature covered with dark black fur and a gray mane—was waiting for me in front of a wagon decorated with statues of a few of the enemies whom I had conquered. There was the decapitated head of a minotaur, a giant knocked down on its knees, a Cerberus whimpering in fear, and—of course—a dragon with a sword dug into its chest.

King Mardro was standing behind the wagon and waved up to me.

“All you have to do is stand here and pose. Alistar will guide your horse.”

Not saying a word, I headed down the stairs and climbed onto the wagon. I stood in the center of my defeated enemies.

“Thank you for doing this.” The king said to me, “I know you don’t like it, but it is important. The people need a hero—just as they always have.”

“Of course.” I answered. “Inspiring the people is my job.”

And so I was paraded around the city, striking various poses as people around me screamed and cheered. I stood on that wagon, maintaining my balance as it shook beneath me, and looked out over them all.

*Why do they care?* That was the question that kept echoing in my head. *Don’t they have better things to do than watch me stand here?*

My horse pulled me all throughout the city and then back around to the castle courtyard. It was probably almost 4 hours before we finally returned—we must have rode past tens of thousands of cheering citizens in that time. I climbed down from the wagon and sat on its back, putting my head into my hands. It was exhausting putting on a show like that. All I wanted was to rest.

“I have another favor to ask.” Mardro’s voice sounded next to me. I looked up to see the king had joined me.

“What is it?” I asked, trying to let only some of my frustration through in my voice.

“I am meeting soon—with the group of heroes we plan to send to Klazak in your stead. If you will not join them, could you at least meet with them—offer them some advice?”

“Why are we sending heroes there at all?” I questioned the king in response. “Doesn’t Klazak have their own warriors?”

“The enemy is a necromancer.” Mardro explained. He needed to offer no further information: a necromancer used powerful magic that only the most skilled and experienced warriors stood any chance against. There were few who were qualified in Seleria and none in Klazak.

“I see.” I thought for a moment. “Then who are you sending in my stead—Sir Niko?”

“Sir Niko is no longer strong enough for this. We are sending Lord Veris.”

“Lord Veris?” I couldn’t hold back my distaste. “How could you let him represent Seleria?”

“We have no other choice.” Mardro insisted. “He is the only warrior who I could possibly trust with such a mission—besides you, of course.”

“I still won’t do it.” I recognized the game Mardro was playing. “I don’t care if Klazak falls—I’m not the hero anymore.”

“Klazak won’t fall. The team we’ve assembled is more than capable of doing the job.”

The two of us were silent for a moment. I found myself wondering what had become of this country that Lord Veris—a man who only ever sought to boost his own wealth and reputation—was now its chosen hero. Were all these festivities really worth it? Mardro claimed that these would inspire a new generation of heroes, but I saw no evidence of that.

“Very well.” I eventually spoke again.

“Very well?” Mardro echoed my words in the form of a question.

“I will speak to this group.” I explained. “I will at least make sure Lord Veris is not going to cause any trouble with this mission.”

“Thank you!” The king knelt down to look me in the eye. “This quest is extremely important. Anything you can offer to help them would be a huge favor to me.”

“I will do what I can.” I answered simply. It still didn’t make sense—I felt I had nothing to offer—but if me speaking to them put Mardro’s mind at ease, I would do so. I respected the man deeply after all.

Some time after that, I gave a speech from the castle’s wall. I’m told it was a wonderful speech—truth be told, I don’t remember any of it. Most of it was made up on the spot. After the speech was finished, I went back to my room and laid in my bed with my eyes closed. I drifted

back and forth between the world of dreams and reality. It's impossible to know how much time had passed before I was brought back into focus by a knock on my door.

"My friend," King Mardro's voice traveled into my room. "The adventurers are in the dining hall waiting for you."

"One minute." I called back before sitting up and putting my head in my hands. I stood up slowly, headed over to my mirror, and quickly combed my hair before heading out the door. Mardro quickly ushered me to the dining hall.

At the dining hall, the king directed me to sit at one end of the table before he himself headed to the other. There were only three others sitting in between us.

First I saw a young girl; her long black hair pulled up into a ponytail, and her outfit was rather unusual for a visitor in a palace—a slightly tattered and wrinkled dress shirt made of a thin, light cloth dressed her top and beneath it she wore a long, dark green-tinted skirt with what looked to be grass and flowers woven along her waist. She looked between me and the king with her grey eyes open wide. When I looked back into those eyes, I saw something that unsettled me though I could not quite recognize what it was.

Beside her sat a boy, even younger than that girl. His skin was a light brown and he was dressed in chain-mail: his armor was old and worn, though I could tell it had been polished diligently for the occasion. The boy did not seem to even notice Mardro's presence as his eyes were firmly locked upon me. I could practically hear his heavy breathing even though I sat a fair distance away from him.

Across from those two sat a man I had had the displeasure of meeting many times before—a man ten years younger than myself, dressed in elegant blue robes. Despite the man's younger age, his hair was already fully silver. He bowed his head at the king and then turned to smile at me. I knew very well that smile was fake, and my blood boiled just looking at it.

"A pleasure as always." The man—Lord Veris—spoke to me. "I am honored that the Great Hero would grace us with His presence."

"You are about to embark on a quest that will help this country to grow." I answered. "It is the least I could do to come and help King Mardro to ensure you understand the *importance* of this mission."

“Well, there is no need for you to worry.” The experienced warrior replied to me. “Klazak is a country full of untapped riches. We all understand very well what it means if Seleria can help them to tap into their potential—what it means for all of us.”

“I’m glad to hear it.” I forced a smile before continuing to speak. “Because if you decided to take some of those riches—”

“E—excuse me!” I was interrupted by the young boy who must have only just found the courage to speak and now needed to do so before he lost that courage again. “I’m sorry, I just wanted to say it’s such an honor to meet you. I look forward to proving myself on this quest!”

As the boy finished speaking, he quickly stood up and bowed deeply—basically sticking his nose into his dinner as he did so. I looked across the table at King Mardro; the king was smiling slyly.

I felt I should say something but didn’t know what to say. It wasn’t unusual for someone to greet me with this attitude, but this *boy* was supposed to be a hero. How could that possibly be?

“And I look forward to hearing of your adventures.” I eventually recollected myself enough to reply. “I am sure they will be extraordinary.”

“Do you—” The boy was growing excited now, practically shaking as he returned to his seat. “Do you have any advice for me? I want to be like you—strong and fearless!”

“It’s not easy.” I began to answer, but then I looked into the boy’s eyes. They were practically shining; so full of excitement and hope. I moved my gaze across the table and locked eyes with Mardro. “My lord, can we have some words outside?”

“Very well.” The king sighed before standing up and looking down at the three adventurers. “I apologize. We will be back in just a moment.”

With those words, the two of us stepped through the door and out into the hallway of the castle. Mardro began to shake his head before I even began speaking.

“They’re not too weak.” He said immediately. “Lord Veris is incredibly strong despite what you may think of him, Brielle is a fiercely capable witch, and Trenon—well, Trenon reminds me a bit of you to be honest.”

“That weakling?” I couldn’t help but ask. “And that girl? They’re too young. This would be a suicide mission for them.”

“If you’re that worried, then you’re welcome to join them.” I took a step back at the king’s words as I realized I had fallen into his trap.

“I won’t.” I shook my head vehemently. “I told you that already.”

“I am the King of Seleria.” Mardro stared straight into my eyes as he spoke. “You know I always get my way in the end.”

I knew he was right; at that point I probably had already decided to go on the quest. I just couldn’t admit it to myself yet. Instead, the two of us returned to dinner.

“To answer your question, Trenon,” I spoke to the boy as I sat back down. “It isn’t easy. To become a true hero isn’t easy. You will need to be prepared to lay down your life—and in most cases, you will give that life up. But if you can act without fear—and if you are lucky—then you may survive to fight another day; to lay down your life a second time. Very few make it that far though; in fact, it would probably be better for you if you just give up now.”

“If I could die a hero,” Trenon spoke with more confidence than he had that entire night. “I would gladly lay down my life.”

As I looked at the glimmer in the boy’s eyes as he spoke those words, a distant memory arose in my mind—perhaps it was only a dream.

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When I was nothing more than a poor young boy, the country of Seleria was at war. At least once a week I would stand on the streets of the Capital and watch hundreds of soldiers ride out through the gates. So few of them ever seemed to return.

I swear I remember looking up to those knights—wishing that I could be one of them. I wanted to know what it felt like to ride out into battle, to fight to the bitter death in the name of my country.

But it felt so impossible back then, that I could ever be one of them. I wasn’t trained as a fighter, nor was I born of noble blood. There was no way *I* could ever be among the Knights of Seleria.

That feeling didn’t sit right with me—surely there had to be a way for me to be among those who rode out to war. And so, one fateful morning, I snuck through the gates of the castle by hopping on to the back of a royal caravan.

Once in the castle walls, I wandered stealthily around until finding my way to the armory where I was able to find enough spare pieces of armor to piece together a suit. As I was dressing myself up another young man came in.

“You got here a bit early too?” He asked. “Hard to believe it’s already our day to ride out.”

“Yeah.” I had to grip my left arm tightly with my right hand to stop myself from shaking as I spoke. “I’m really excited!”

“Excited?” The man laughed softly before continuing. “What’s exciting about throwing your life away?”

“We get to fight for Seleria!” I exclaimed in response. “What greater honor can there be than to lay down your life for your country—to make the world a better place, and ensure Seleria’s continued role in it—to etch our names in the stories of history.”

“Perhaps you’d be right, if Seleria was a country that sought to make the world a better place.” The other young man looked solemnly at me. “But I’m afraid that it is not so. This whole war: it’s all for naught.”

“Then why are you here?” I had to ask. At that point my body had stopped shaking entirely. “Why would you ride out to war for a cause you don’t believe in?”

“I am trained as a Knight of Seleria.” The man answered. “That is my role, and so I will obey the King’s commands.”

“I don’t think that’s right.” I objected almost without thought. “If you fight for Seleria, then you must also fight to make Seleria better; our duty is to country, not king. It is for the future of Seleria that we proudly lay down our lives.”

The two of us continued to get dressed in silence after that. As we finished getting ready, many other soldiers filtered in. None seemed to notice that I didn’t belong among them. When the time came to set out, the man I had been speaking to offered me his hand.

“I look forward to fighting with you.” He said. “My name is Mardro.”

“I’m Felix.” I replied with a smile. “And I look forward to it as well.”