

Lost Gods

by Drew Beatty

Chapter Fourteen



I hopped out of the truck, stuck a finger in my mouth and held it up, checking for the breeze. I was lucky, it was blowing almost directly towards the server farm. I stood as close to the truck as possible, hoping the pile of clothing I would have to leave behind would be unnoticed if it was mostly under the truck, and spidered myself, yet again. I let out a strand of webbing and was picked up by the breeze. I drifted gently towards the building, got lucky, and landed about halfway up. Not many people know that *Tegenaria gigantea* was the fastest spider in the world, but I do, and that is what I became, shooting up the wall at almost two meters per second. Time was of the essence. Coyote could only screw around for so long in the server room before someone noticed something was up. I shot over the top and paused, seeking out a vent, some access point. I was in luck, there was an air conditioner compressor, unused in the winter, but still connected to the inside of the building. I scurried along the roof, and down into the vent system, grateful for the warmth I found there. This is where things would get tricky.

Coyote was unable to get a detailed blueprint of the entire building. He knew where he had to go, but he wasn't able to give me directions from the roof. This was the one critical aspect of our plan that we hadn't really thought out. I was just flying on hope, and a prayer. As a God, I'm allowed to pray to just about anyone. I usually rotated through the big three, God, Yahweh and Allah, just to keep things in balance for myself.

I scurried through dust-lined air vents, still travelling as fast as possible, stopping at every opening, peeking through. I travelled down rapidly, looking to get into the bowels of the basement quickly. Once there I hoped that I would be able to find the electrical room easily, I really didn't relish running around a strange building naked.

Again.

I did that too much already. I really needed to think of a way to keep my clothes with me while I changed, it was getting ridiculous.

Finally I came to the end of the line, the basement, as dark, dank and dripping as any high school basement that you would find in a cut rate horror film. You would never imagine that just one floor above this was a multi-million dollar security system. Apparently there were two weaknesses in this building, the people and the basement. I snapped back to human form, lucked out and found a janitors closet with a pair of coveralls. They were made for a bigger man than I am, but they were better than nothing. A pair of scuffed up workbooks were under the moulded plastic sink, damp and well worn, but uncomfortable is better than naked, so I counted my blessings.

I found my way to the electrical room, it wasn't locked or guarded. A shocking oversight on the part of the security of the building, but given the difficulties in gaining admission to this level if one isn't a God with the power of transforming oneself into a spider, the designers should probably be forgiven. I could only assume this, as I was such a God.

I hoped that Coyote had had enough time to install the software onto the server. He said it would take a little while to get everything ready, but the biggest problem would be resetting the system. It couldn't be done manually by Coyote in the server room. This is where I came in.

Sort of like killing a mosquito with a handgun, in order to reboot a single workstation we were going to kill the power to the entire building. The backup power would kick in almost immediately, but the system would have to reboot itself, the computers cascading on one at a time, finishing the install procedure that Coyote had set up.

I searched for the main power switch. Surprisingly it was pretty obvious. I entered a room that looked not unlike a mad scientist's laboratory, walls covered with breaker boxes, twisting cable, and large graphics proclaiming the electrical danger of this room. The main power switch was about halfway up the wall, as long as my arm, and almost as thick around. It was clearly marked ``Main Power - Do Not Touch``, which was rather helpful, I thought. I reached up and pulled down on it.

Nothing.

It didn't budge, didn't move in the slightest. I yanked at it, using my weight. I thought it moved slightly, but I couldn't be sure. I took hold of the very end of the switch, lifted my feet off of the ground, hung there for a second, suspended in midair, feet dangling over the floor. Finally, with a resounding bang, the lever dropped down, snapping into the off position, and throwing me to the floor for good measure. The basement was engulfed in total darkness for a moment.

That's when I felt what I could only assume was a barrel of a gun pressed to the back of my neck. This was not a good development.

“You're going to come with me now, Anansi,” a familiar voice from behind me said. The emergency power was kicking in now, bathing the room in a dark red glow. I turned slowly, looking into the eyes of the weak chinned man in black who had attacked me previously. “Don't try any silly little tricks now, like changing into a spider. You might find yourself getting stepped on if you were to try that. And that would be terrible, no?”

“You, what the hell are you doing here?” I asked, trying to buy some time, figure out an angle.

“You broke into my employers building and ask me what I am doing here? That is a foolish question. But now, you must come with me, I will not stand in a dirty basement all day.” He gestured with his gun, pointing me towards the door. I could see no other alternative but to follow his directions. I stepped out into the hallway, eyes getting adjusted to the dim lighting. Here and there fluorescent lights were beginning to flicker on, but the majority of the basement was still in darkness. I considered making a run for it, fleeing into the shadows and transforming in the relative safety I would find there. But with a gun inches from my neck, it didn't seem to be a very good solution. My captor led me to a bank of elevators, four doors reflecting the dim light, their cleanliness incongruous compared to the general shabbiness of the basement.

“Press the button,” he commanded. I leaned forward, pressing the plastic up button. I wasn’t sure if the elevators would still work without power, but sure enough after a beat or two, the elevator doors opened silently. I was pushed into the gleaming interior, the mirrored surface creating hundreds of me’s, going off into the infinite, all with the same look of terrified resignation, all with a small calibre weapon pressed against their necks, all caught. Without taking his eyes off of me the man in black pressed the topmost button. He reached into his suit jacket pocket and extracted a small, silver key and inserted it into the elegant keyhole that was beside the button. It was unmarked.

“You should consider yourself lucky, Spider. Very few people get to see the executive floor here.”

“I’m sure it’s amazing,” I replied. “But if you wanted to just drop me off at the first floor, we could always reschedule this meeting.”

“I’m afraid that is a complete impossibility,” he replied. “I simply must insist.” The doors opened, revealing a stylish corridor. The power had been restored to the building now, elegant wall sconces, silver, with art deco influences brightly lit the hall. Marble floors met stucco walls, adding to the general aura of elegance that the building emitted, tastefully. It was impressive, but almost desperately so, as though designed by someone who tabulated a list of what people would find notable, and designed based upon that. Doors lined the hallway, thick looking oak, again stately and impressive, but without any character, any soul.

The man in black led me down to the last door, and instructed me to open it. I did so. Behind the door was a conference room, decorated in a similar fashion as the hallway. Sitting at an impressive mahogany table were a sheepish looking Coyote, and the remains of Iktomi’s gang. There was a seat open for me beside Coyote. Iktomi glared at me as I entered.

“You should have killed him immediately,” he said to the man behind me.

“Now now, Iktomi, if you could control your little group better, we wouldn’t have had the trouble with the fairies, and Baron Samedi. The fact that he was able to defeat the best your gang had to offer is an indication that we need him on our team. Not dead.” Iktomi grew silent, crossed his arms and pouted, looking like a two year old who didn’t get the candy. I settled in beside Coyote.

“I don’t remember this in our plan,” I said to him.

“No, this is definitely outside the parameters,” he replied. “It was going really well. Up until the time Iktomi and the rest of this riff-raff burst into the server room. Nice job with the power, by the way. I had just finished installing the software. Perfect timing.”

“Silence,” shouted the man in black. “You and your petty little schemes. Trying to steal the dregs of the bank.” He sat down at the head of the table. Coyote's equipment lay before him. He picked up the disk that held the software Coyote had engineered. “You two are Gods, literally Gods

among men, and you cannot do better than this?" He stroked the disk, fingers circling around like a laser reading the data. "You steal pennies at a time, when you could all powerful?"

"Well, all those pennies add up pretty quickly," answered Coyote. "Not that it is any of your concern. Who the hell are you?"

The man in black smiled, a cruel, malevolent smile. "You haven't figured it out yet?" he replied. "Think about it. Look around the room. It is perhaps the greatest collection of tricksters the world has ever seen. I know you have figured out who the rest of the team is, but what about me? Who is missing from the puzzle?"

"Shit," said Coyote under his breath. I looked over at him. He looked pale, like he had seen not just a ghost, but the ghosts of every person he had ever tricked in his long lifetime come looking for revenge.

"Loki," he said weakly.

"Give that man a prize!" roared Loki, sounding like a carnival barker. "Of course. Who else would have the ability to command the forces of the tricksters, who else would be able to ensnare the last two holdouts in the web of his own making. Do you like that spider reference there, Anansi? That was special, just for you"

"How did you know about us?" asked Coyote.

"I keep track of every last one of the remaining Gods, tricksters or no," Loki replied. "It's easy to command surveillance teams when you run one of the largest private security firms in the world." He smoothly reached into his jacket pocket and removed a business card. Lawrence Keys, it read. President and CEO of Ragnarock Security.

"People don't find the name a little obvious?" asked Coyote. Loki smiled.

"People see what they want to see. You should know that, Coyote. And what they see with me is someone who can keep their information safe, someone who can protect them. I have contracts with all of the major banks in the world, the American government, even some Middle Eastern principalities have contacted me to provide them with some," here he paused, considering his words, "unconventional assistance. It has paid off enormously in the past, having these connections. And now, I find it has paid off yet again. Welcome to my little group."

"Do you seriously think that we will have anything to do with you?" spat Coyote. "There is surprisingly little stopping us from walking out of that door right now."

The other tricksters shifted in their seats, bristling at this thinly veiled insult. "Just try it, Coyote," said Iktomi. "See how far you get."

“Like I said, Iktomi,” replied Coyote. “Surprisingly little. The spider here has already shown what he can do in a fight, it isn't pretty to be on the receiving end of one of his bites. And I'm sure you remember my fangs as well as they remember the taste of your blood,” he growled slightly as he said this, snout elongating, teeth sharpening as though he was about to transform, claw his way out of the room.

“Enough,” said Loki, raising his hand. “There is sufficient reason for you to join us without all of these dramatics.”

“Such as?” I replied.

A giant flat screen monitor slid down from the ceiling behind Loki. He touched a small button on his chair, and the television started to display images of our break in, captured on video cameras spread throughout the building. The scene changed, I was looking at myself breaking into the bank again, this image much clearer, my face visible. “If you do not help us, I will use these to prosecute you to the fullest extent of the law. Or, perhaps I will use some of my government connections, you can disappear into the system. And remember, I have lots of government connections, some of them are not quite as, let's say, kind and forgiving as the Canadian government. Why, in some countries water boarding is seen as being just a warm-up to the serious torture.”

Coyote let out a derisive laugh. “Do you really think there is a jail in the world that can hold either of us?” he asked, chuckling.

“Well then,” said Loki, “there is always the matter of the women.” The images on the screen changed. Instead of Coyote and I playing desperate criminals, Judy and Kanene's faces started to fill the frame. Random street shots, shots from shopping centres, from the library. Dozens and dozens of photos of Kanene and Judy, living their lives. Some of the surveillance photos of Kanene went back months, before Coyote and I had even met. More recent photos of Judy appeared next, photos of her alone, her in the library, her with us. “It would be terrible if something happened to either of these girls.” Loki said. “Toronto can be a dangerous city. People get raped, cut up, left for dead.”

“You wouldn't,” I said.

Loki burst out laughing. “You obviously don't know me very well, spider. I would do that personally, with a smile on my face, and then leave their broken bodies behind while I went out for a nice dinner. I'm Loki, I'm chaos,” he was shouting now, spittle flying from his lips, dribbling down his weak chin. “That's what I do best. So, are you with me, or do you disappear forever while I slowly torture and kill your wife?”

I looked up at the screen, images of Kanene and Judy flicking past.

“It pays to have groomed some fine young talent on the Toronto Police force,” said Loki. The penny dropped, and I finally understood Prichard's role in this.

“The cop works for you?” I asked, just to be certain.

“Oh yes,” replied Loki. “I have been working with him for years now, so very handy to have close ties to the force. He was such a rough character when I met him, but Prichard has grown into such a heroic type, don’t you think?”

I watched images of Judy and Kanene flick past. “What do you want us for?” I asked quietly.

“That’s easy,” he replied. “Actually, Coyote, I think you’ll like this. It’s just about time for the end of the world.”

“Oh,” said Coyote brightly, smiling like a playful puppy. “Why didn’t you say so?”

I looked over at him, shocked to hear the sudden levity in his voice. “What?” he asked defensively. “I told you that I was going to be there at the end of the world. It’s my prophesy. It’s not like I can fight that.”

The atmosphere in the conference room changed dramatically. Coyote was obviously interested in what Loki had to say, our plans for wealth and retirement, our partnership dissolved, our friendship shattered, all because of one word from Loki.

“Sorry, man,” he said, noticing the way I was looking at him. “I told you that from the start. I just didn’t expect it would happen so quickly, is all. Prophesy, man. Foretold and everything.”

“Yes,” said Loki, “and that is the reason why I went to such great lengths to get you with me.”

“You could have just asked me,” he said. “You didn’t have to do all this threatening and stuff.”

“Well,” said Loki, “the threatening wasn’t just for you. I thought that your partner would need a little more convincing. So, I had to let things play out as I did.

“Fair enough,” said Coyote. “So, what’s the drill? You are finally going to get off your ass and start Ragnarock?”

“Yes, the prophesied time is upon us. The end, as they say, is nigh.” The other gods nodded their heads in agreement, smiling, obviously happy that things were finally ending.

“I don’t get you, Iktomi. Or you, Puck. How can you be so happy about the end of the world? Your life will end as well. Do you really want that?” I asked.

Loki laughed his chilling, horrible laugh. “Oh, foolish spider. It’s not the end of everything, just the end of man’s time here. We are going to wipe this earth clean, and start again. The time of Gods will be reborn. I don’t want to destroy everything, I want to make everything new. That is the true nature of chaos. Destruction, and then rebirth. But a birth of our deciding, a birth that

will recreate the land in our image, and these mortals, these upstarts who took over, they will be gone. A new race of Gods, led by me, will be the new order. It will be the perfect place.” The other gods muttered their approval, obviously happy with the plan, content to be pawns for Loki's mad schemes.

“What now?” I asked. “What's the next step?” I had to assume that Ragnarock would not be started on the top floor of a bank's suburban office building. That was just too pathetic, even for Loki.

“Now, we prepare the final stages. There are still some preparations that need to take place. You wait. I'm going to give you a gift, show you my benevolent kindness. You and Coyote can leave, return home. I will find you when I need you.” He stood up, looming over me. “Do not be foolish. I am giving you your freedom, yes. There can be a place for both you and Kanene in the new world. Or, she can die an agonizing death while you watch, suffer the cruelest, most horrible indignities of my imaginings, and Iktomi's, and Sets' and perhaps even Coyote's. And then, I will pull your legs off one by one, little spider. The choice is yours. You are caught. Ensnared more tightly than any of your prey has even been. Coyote, go with him. Keep an eye on him.”

Coyote nodded, stood up. “Come on partner,” he said, scorn filling his voice. “I'll drive.”

I was in a daze as we left the building. I felt Coyote's hand on my shoulder not to steady me, as it once would have done, but to direct me. The old work boots were rough on my feet, I could feel blisters rising on my heel as the leather rubbed up and down while I walked. I kicked them off in the hallway, not caring anymore. Coyote called the elevator, we rode down in silence. At the truck I paused long enough to pick up the clothing I had left behind when I had changed. Back when I still had a partner, still had a friend. I climbed in beside Coyote, stared out at the road ahead.

“Why so glum, buddy?” he asked me. “Didn't you hear Loki, we can be Gods again. Real Gods!”

“Shut up,” I said. “I thought you were my friend.”

“I am,” he replied, merging into the already heavy early rush hour traffic. “That's why I think this is a great idea. The whole earth as our playground. And you heard him, Kanene can stay with you. Maybe forever.”

“At the cost of billions of lives. All of humanity, gone in a flash. That doesn't give you pause?”

“Humanity has spent a great deal of time trying to do that job itself. Have you forgotten what the Europeans did to my people? Or to yours? Given half the chance humanity would have killed off both of our races centuries ago, and then they probably would have finished the job.”

“They are not perfect, but they don't all deserve to die.”

“That's where you and me differ, partner. Now, cheer up. I'm coming over for dinner. I think I had still better keep an eye on you. It looks like you are having ideas. Dangerous ones.”

“Screw you,” I muttered. I had never felt so defeated in my life, so unable to do anything. I was trapped. Loki was right, I was as stuck as any prey I had ever snared in my web. I didn't like the feeling. “I thought you wanted to get rich, retire, move down south and live a life of leisure,” I said.

“That's nothing to being a major player again,” Coyote replied. “Now shut up and let me drive. And you better smarten up and stop moping about, if Kanene suspects something is wrong I might just have to take care of her myself.” He looked over at me, licked his elongated tongue over his fang-like teeth. It was all I could do not to punch him in the face right there. Throwing the car out of control on the highway wouldn't really accomplish that much, and I needed some time to think. I turned my body around as far as I could comfortably get, and looked out the passenger window, showing my back to Coyote. We drove in silence the rest of the way home. Back to my apartment. We walked up the stairs slowly, the weight of today pulling me down. I just wanted to collapse on the stairs and weep. I had had enough. Coyote gave me a little push, I stumbled on a stair, nearly fell down.

“Don't touch me again, beast,” I said to him.

He laughed at this. “Sorry, Mr. Arachnid. I hope my hairy paws didn't offend the precious bug man.”

“Shut up.” I was slightly relieved to find that Kanene was not home when we arrived. The apartment seemed a shell of itself, needing the warmth of Kanene to imbue it with purpose, with meaning and life. Coyote threw himself on my ragged couch, put his feet up on my coffee table. “You could at least take your shoes off,” I said to him. He laughed again. I was growing to hate this sound, once so filled with life and mirth, now a cruel echo of the laughter I had shared with him.

“What's for dinner, Spider?” he asked.

“You know where the kitchen is,” I said. “If you are hungry, make something. I'm going to lie down.”

“Fine, fine. Just, don't try anything stupid.” He tapped his nose. “I can smell when you become a spider. You didn't know that, did you? Well, I can. And I can track you. And a Coyote can go a lot faster than a spider. And a coyote can eat a spider up just like that,” he snapped his fingers. “So don't be an idiot. You go lie down, relax, by tomorrow we will live like kings again.”

“Kings of an empty kingdom.”

“Don't be a drama queen, spider.” He pushed some books out of the way, found the remote control for the television. “You go relax. I'll be fine.”

I went to my room, sat down on the bed I shared with Kanene. I lay back, could smell her delicate scent on the blanket. I closed my eyes, tried to relax, tried to figure out a way around this, a way to fix this. I was more tired than I thought, I drifted off, waking an hour later to hear Kanene and Coyote laughing in the living room. I bolted out of the bedroom, slid to a stop when I saw them standing together in the dining room, setting the table.

“Well, hello sleepy head,” said Coyote, a jovial smile on his face. “We were afraid you were going to sleep through dinner. Kanene and I ordered some Thai food.”

“I hope that is all right,” said Kanene, still sounding cold and formal. But at least she was home, was here with me.

“That sounds delightful,” I said. “Do we have to pick it up?”

“No, no,” said Coyote. “It will be here in just a few minutes.” I looked at the clock. Almost six. The library would still be open for a few hours. I hoped Judy would be safe, surrounded by people looking for books. I wished I had never gotten her mixed up in all of this. I looked behind me at the front hall cupboard. I knew what to do. I hoped and prayed it would work.