**Chapter 8**

**Saving Private Hades**

*Tartarus is the darkest and deepest part of the Underworld’s realm, and the mere fact of someone unaffected by the Mist saying its name is enough to generate uneasiness in anyone’s heart. It is the place where the Olympians imprison their enemies. And it is also the Primordial of the Abyss.*

*Obviously, Demigods, Demigoddesses, and most beings living in the world of today were – and still are – utterly forbidden to go near it.*

*It is an interdiction all heroes were very happy to obey.*

*It was a very understandable position to adopt. After all, if by a series of superlative exploits you managed to evade the armies defending the outer perimeters of the Underworld, the various rivers of Hell on your path, Charon, the Erinyes, and of course Cerberus, you likely had other things to do than trying to visit a place which is both a prison and the place where monsters go to reform once killed.*

*But Tartarus wasn’t the reason the Suicide Squad was here. And the same was true for the Lightning Thief.*

*At the edge of the abyss, standing impossibly over a precipice which defied even the laws of the Gods by its very existence, was an ancient temple.*

*It was ancient beyond reckoning. According to the few information-brokers who were aware of its presence, this mass of collapsing columns and cracked stones was ancient before Lord Hades claimed the Throne of the Underworld.*

*No one remembered who the architect responsible for its construction was, and if the Olympians were aware of it, they never revealed his or her identity. Rumours, rare as they were, whispered this was a joint effort between Nyx and Tartarus, but some sources pointed to an earlier origin, or to someone linked with the Titans now imprisoned in the pits below this ruined edifice.*

*What was certain did not fill an entire book. One, being found anywhere near it was a death sentence for anyone not approved by the Rich One and his wife. Two, the forgotten temple had been in such a miserable condition that when the Lightning Thief decided to renovate it for her purposes, there was not a lot of things left standing. One might easily acknowledge that for all intent and purposes, an entirely new monument was built to replace the ruins of the old one.*

*This delay, if one was to be honest, was certainly the only reason the Suicide Squad arrived in time.*

*It was the end of a journey which had seen the Demigods survive the Labyrinth, the Phlegethon-flooded Asphodel, Styx, Cerberus, and several armies of skeletons and monsters.*

*There were no more realms to set aflame and cause devastation upon. There was just a temple, the bridge leading to it, and the abyss promising a fall of nine days and nine nights if you were unlucky enough to fall into it.*

*The last battle of the Great Quest was about to begin.*

Extract from the Chapter 12 of *Chronicles of the Suicide Squad*, by Malcolm Pace, son of Athena

**31 May 2006, Approaches to the Pit of Tartarus, the Underworld**

The moment Ethan crossed the portal, the son of Nemesis found himself regretting the decoration of Hades’ palace. Yes, there had been a lot of skulls and hell-themed decorations. But there also had been light, if only in the form of the Underworld flames and bones structure bearing large lanterns.

There was none of that here.

They had arrived on a sort of...belvedere, if that was the adequate word. Under his boots, the ground was uneven, grey, and dusty.

It was a really sinister atmosphere. After a few seconds, his eyes adapted to the penumbra surrounded them, and he could see their arrival ground was large enough to welcome twenty or thirty Demigods, never mind eleven, one Minotaur, and one Hellhound.

But no electrical or magical lights were switched on. The sound of animals or enemies didn’t arrive to their ears.

There was just a long, gloomy silence of bad omen.

The location they had just been transported to was dead.

“**Burn**,” Jackson murmured, and one of the torches the son of Poseidon had grabbed out of his never-ending artefact bags erupted in flames, allowing the seven who had crossed the portal first the opportunity to see where they were.

And personally, Ethan immediately regretted it.

“By the Gods...” The belvedere had only one more access besides the portal: dusty stone stairs which had clearly seen better days. Minor consolation, they were very large. Five or six Demigods could walk them together. The problem was what waited after.

There was a bridge. And it was suspended above an ocean of blackness.

“Is it what I think it is?” the black-haired swordsman asked.

“The fastest method to reach the Pits where an eternity of torment awaits,” the son of Poseidon cleared his throat. “In the interest of continuing our long and fruitful cooperation, may I suggest everyone avoid falling into *that*? According to the legends, you experience nine days and nine nights of free fall before being killed...and I doubt anyone wants to verify it the old-fashioned way.”

Naturally, this moment of seriousness didn’t last.

“Of course, how someone can distinguish between night and day when being prisoner of a space absorbing all light is one of those interesting mysteries no one has ever told me the answer to.”

“Jackson...” Zoë Nightshade growled, her new silver armour giving an appreciable amount of light in this obscurity. “This is a cursed place. We aren’t supposed to be there.”

“On this point, I completely agree, Huntress.” The boy who had become their leader in every way which counted replied. “It is not a place for the living. But it is the Lightning Thief who has apparently decided to organise her little usurpation ritual here, not me.”

“Do we have a plan of attack?” Clarisse La Rue smirked after hearing Jackson diverted the blame onto someone else’s shoulders...again. “I’m not saying we should try to equal Wellington at Waterloo or another masterful tactician, but a simple plan dividing up the roles would be fine.”

“We kill everything that stands on our way, the only exception being the Lightning Thief.” The son of the Earthshaker immediately answered. “We find where Hades is imprisoned, and by the hell rivers which shouldn’t be named, don’t free him until I have had the time to negotiate an amnesty for our past actions.”

“You’re always going to put your desires before those of the Quest, don’t you?” the blonde daughter of Athena snapped. Sometimes Ethan was surprised her mother wasn’t the Goddess of Vindictiveness and Military Retaliation.

“Your Owlishness,” because Perseus Jackson was never missing the opportunity to talk back. And he articulated the words with a tone which was very close from saying ‘your Foolishness’. “If it is your wish to pay for the flooding of the Asphodel Fields and the small sum of collateral damage we might have caused since our arrival into the Underworld, far from me the idea to discourage you. In my humble opinion however, a negotiated amnesty backed by a Styx Oath is a far less dangerous option than relying upon the generosity of the Dark One.”

“Lord Hades...might reward us.” Dakota McDonald said weakly. “We are to make sure the Lightning Thief doesn’t cause a huge war between the Olympians, right?”

“Right,” and nearly everyone rolled his or her eyes at the ironic voice of their green-eyed leader. “Aside from the amnesty, we must recover the Trident as fast as possible. It is likely the only thing which will allow us to stand against a daughter of Hades fighting in her home realm.”

“We swore a vow we couldn’t act against her, except in self-defence.” Ethan reminded him.

“True. But she doesn’t know that.” The mad boy’s smile was back. “And it only applies to the Lightning Thief anyway. The rest of her accomplices are fair game.”

“There shouldn’t be many of them,” Luke Castellan was visibly unconvinced. “Why would they be? The portal is the only way to come here unless you have wings or teleportation skills.”

“There must be at least a few skeletons,” Perseus Jackson smiled. “If Hades’ cage is the size of Persephone, it had to be dragged across the bridge the old-fashioned way.”

“You know something we don’t.” Miranda Gardiner accused him.

“Guilty as charged,” the younger Demigod said cheekily. “Now where were we-“

A loud, relentless rumble broke the silence, and from the obscurity clouding the other extremity of the bridge, a monstrous red lightning materialised.

It was so bright that for a few seconds, Ethan thought the phenomenon could truly chase away the supernatural darkness of Tartarus.

It didn’t, though. Instead it was like a sort of gigantic bell rang, and a powerful reddish halo shrouded the sinister temple revealed by this explosion of light and thunder.

“Well,” Lou Ellen searched her words. “That was...spectacular. We are going to...fight the Demigoddess capable to do that?”

“We are so going to die...” Jake Mason brayed.

“The Master Bolt has been attuned for the ritual,” Perseus Jackson commented as if he saw something like that every day. “I suggest we eat and drink there-“

“The Lightning Thief is about to begin her ritual, and you want to drink and eat?” Annabeth Chase looked completely furious, and the son of Nemesis didn’t think the light of the torches had anything to do with that.

“Look at the length of the bridge and its inclination, your Owlishness. We will need a good twenty minutes to cross it...and we don’t know what kind of welcome we will receive on the other side. It is not improbable we will have to fight for our lives before we can enter the Temple of Tartarus...so yes, we rest. We eat. And we drink. Because with the enemy having someone blessed by the Styx and able to capture several Gods, we are going to need everything we need and more to succeed.”

“This is it, then?”

“Yes. This is it.” Jackson caressed the Hellhound before giving her what had to be one of his last cookies. “It’s time to shake the world one more time.”

**1 June 2006, the Bridge over the Pit of Tartarus, the Underworld**

Miranda didn’t like the Underworld. What was there to like in such a realm of death for a daughter of Demeter?

Yes, the Demigoddess recognised the existence of Hades’ realm was a necessity; it didn’t mean she had to appreciate the landscape and everything the Rich One had built over the last millennia.

Yet compared to the edge of Tartarus, Hades’ realm was a delight to behold. The animals were undead and were made of bones, but there was some semblance of life, be it in dead skeletons, shrieking souls, and undead flora.

There was none of that here.

Save guttural noises made by the ritual of the Lightning Thief, the bridge they were walking upon was greyness and impossible silence.

Everything was dead.

Daughter of Demeter or not, Demigoddess or not, Miranda knew everything in this god-forsaken realm was unnatural...and evil.

What could you expect from a large amount of life where no flowers, no trees, no seeds, could grow?

And here there weren’t even the souls of the departed to create an illusion of life?

“Shouldn’t be there more traps?” Luke asked the son of Poseidon as the two had taken the lead and routinely paused to verify the disabled skeletons on the bridge were not waiting to stab them when they weren’t looking.

“They should and they shouldn’t,” the other male Demigod unhelpfully replied.

“Sometimes I think you should have been a son of Janus.”

“You’re wounding me,” Perseus Jackson gasped before clearing placing his hand above his hurt like he had been shot by an arrow there. “Fine. I think that as long as the God of the Underworld was prisoner in his own palace, there must have been a considerable amount of traps here. But since our enemy was forced to drag her genitor’s cage here, many enchanted arrow flights, poison clouds, and other unpleasant surprises were dismantled. The Rich One may be imprisoned, but he isn’t going to cooperate with the Lightning Thief. Look at how many unanimated skeletons there are on this bridge. At a guess, the Olympus King’s brother tried to leech off their power while they transported him across the bridge.”

“If I was the Lightning Thief, I would have created new traps,” Blackstone pointed out.

“If *I* was the Lightning Thief,” Jackson smiled, “I would proceed like she did. If someone inimical manages to defeat the entirety of your defensive preparations before the Dark Palace, two or three skeletons and half a dozen traps aren’t going to be enough anyway. It’s best to keep your strength for the main event.”

The next minutes were spent in relative silence. Be it the silence or the malevolent appearance of the temple ahead, there was something in the air which didn’t encourage you to talk.

It was only as they arrived on the other side – and many Questers sighed in relief at the fact they hadn’t been forced to fight with the abyss so close to them – that Miranda felt something...disgusting close.

“Jackson, there’s something ahead.”

“Yes. **Observation**.”

A weak light of blue pulsed from his left hand, and in the space separating them from the first large columns modelled on the Athenian Acropolis, a sort of...tree revealed itself.

It was very ugly. Whatever sap this black shrub used, it had to be something inimical to life.

Its branches were filled with thorns and the things they carried were more akin to daggers than anything which could be described as ‘leaves’.

“What is that?”

“If you’re asking for a name, I’m afraid I have no idea,” Jackson admitted with a childish joy. “It must be something from the Fields of Punishment, or something dragged from...below. What I am rather sure of is that if we try to go closer, it will sound the alarm.”

“Even if I burn it with Hellfire?” Lou Ellen wondered. Damn, the daughter of Hecate was truly becoming an unchecked pyromaniac the longer this Great Quest lasted...

“Especially if you burn it with Hellfire,” the son of Poseidon chuckled. “Mind you, it would definitely destroy the trap, but I want to preserve the effect of surprise. It is better to ambush an enemy in the middle of a ritual than let him or her ambush you, especially as we have no idea as the layout of this temple.”

This sounded really reasonable, by the standards Jackson had shown so far. Why had she the feeling she wasn’t going to like what came after?

“And how do you intend to do it?” Drew Tanaka raised her eyebrows. “You are going to use another artefact ‘borrowed’ from a deity store?”

“I detect a small amount of mockery in your tone, my seducing lieutenant,” the younger Demigod was prompt to tease her. “And as a matter, I have something I think I will deal with this obstacle. The problem is that I can’t use it. I have no skill in Chlorokinesis.”

Of course not, you needed a son or a daughter of Demeter for that. Her feeling she wasn’t going to like it was verified very easily, no?

“Tell me what I have to do, Jackson.” She doubted anyone was going to say her reluctance was unjustified. “We aren’t going to dance around the subject all night.”

The mad Demigod searched inside his bags for a while before handing her a small shield, one representing a sort of brown ivy which was way too small to be of any use militarily.

“Err...yes? Do you intend me to use it like a boomerang?”

The creator of the ‘Suicide Squad’ gave her one of those expressions one only gives to the people with very limited intellectual capacities.

“The plant you use as a weapon is inside the shield. By using your Chlorokinesis, you will able to grow it and direct it against this black seed without raising the alarms.”

Miranda didn’t feel it was going to work. To grow a plant until it could be something large enough to take the repulsive ‘tree’ in front of them, she would need a lot of light and water. This wasn’t going to work.

She grabbed the shield from Jackson’s hands and pushed the power every daughter of Demeter possessed into this block of metal. The reaction was instantaneous. Before she could do more than blink, a colossal mass of bronze-coloured ivy tore the shield apart and it was only instinct which allowed her to mentally push it to attack the twisted thing from the Underworld.

A second later, Miranda Gardiner realised it wasn’t bronze-coloured ivy at all; it was an ivy made of bronze, the metal, period.

The shield was torn apart. And so was the plant of the Fields of Punishment. The ivy grew at a fantastical rate and acted upon her urging like a colossal snake snuffing out whatever ‘life’ had been given to this awful thing.

“Miranda...your arms!”

The young Demigoddess stopped using her power, but it was too late. While she had been focused on destroying the trap, the ivy had covered her hands and her forearms. Now she had...it was like she was wearing long gloves of bronze. Her arms were now covered in leaves of metal!

“How?”

“Jackson! Remove it!” Nightshade barked.

Past the initial moment of stupefaction, Miranda felt it was...astonishing. The bronze ivy was tied to her in an...intimate way. She could control its thickness, how fast it grew, and many other things that had ever been denied her even with the most obedient plants.

It was a weapon no one would be able to remove from her, not without ending her life first.

“I like it,” the daughter of Demeter directed the recently ‘carpet’ of leaves and metallic vegetation at the roots of the enemy creation, and as the black roots were devoured, Miranda felt herself gaining strength. The bond with the bronze ivy grew stronger, and she acknowledged it would be a symbiotic relationship between them. “Thank you, Jackson.”

“Great,” Dakota moaned. “One more soul lost to Suicide Squad madness...”

**1 June 2006, Tartarus Temple, the Underworld**

From the outside, the ‘Tartarus Temple’ looked very much like a miniature replica of the famous Acropolis of Athens.

Once you were inside, this resemblance faded very quickly.

It was as the further you stepped in, the pretense of civilisation was eroding and eroding until nothing was left.

The rare statues of Greek heroes went on to become particularly repulsive and monstrous, until the things carved in onyx and dark metals couldn’t be described as anything but demons.

The columns were initially Greek, but abandoned fast this noble aspect to look like something you found in your darkest nightmares.

Unfortunately, while the ritual site was calling for something dark and primal, it wasn’t exactly difficult to defend. The further they advanced, the fewer the columns and the more difficult it was to be unseen.

At last they weren’t anything to hide behind, and the Suicide Squad was forced to stop.

They had found the Lightning Thief and the Master Bolt.

Unfortunately, they were far from alone.

“Jackson,” the Huntress whispered angrily, “who is the boy?”

“Unless my contacts lied to me, this is Nico di Angelo, Bianca’s younger brother.”

“Tell me it’s a joke...” Ethan Nakamura spoke grimly. “We have to face two children of Hades?”

“Don’t forget the fifty-plus skeletons he commands,” Clarisse intervened.

“Oh yes, how could I forget them?”

“We must attack immediately,” Annabeth urged. “The ritual has begun, but Hades is still in his cage. If we free him now-“

“You will die long before touching his cage,” Perseus Jackson interrupted. “Do you see what Bianca di Angelo has in her right hand?”

“It is rather difficult to miss it,” Luke rolled his eyes.

It was true. The Master Bolt was continuously generating enormous red sparkles, and at irregular intervals, it was becoming far more than that, being used as a powerful red instrument to carve the Greek runes into the very ground of the temple.

Suddenly, the sheer magnitude of the effort necessary for this ritual was making her half-sister’s usurpation of the Labyrinth look like a minor challenge. Because the columns had all the symbols of the Antiquity alphabet plus others she didn’t recognise. The ground had been carved by thousands, maybe tens of thousands glyphs and complex geometrical figures.

And given how fast Bianca di Angelo was working, Lou Ellen was ready to bet all the money promised by Jackson and then some that the daughter of Hades had done it alone and unsupported.

The skeletons certainly had been of no use, and her brother didn’t look like he was there for more than the moral support. However, there was something interesting about him.

“He has the Trident.”

“I could...distract him.” Drew proposed.

“Yes, you could,” by the way he was behaving, Perseus was struggling not to laugh. “I’m sure the son of Hades won’t have any problems succumbing to your Charmspeak. Alas, I don’t think it would last long enough for you to catch the Trident. The Master Bolt can strike and kill faster than you say it.”

The last sentence was uttered deadly seriously, and the sorceress had no doubt it was because Jackson had already seen it in action.

“Besides, the boy might be homosexual.”

“What makes you say that?”

“The way he’s looking at his imprisoned father. Either he’s hesitating a lot at the moment of triumph, or the appearance of his genitor is impressing him for all the right reasons.”

“It’s true Hades is...impressive.” Clarisse recognised.

Lou Ellen had to acknowledge both she and Jackson weren’t wrong. Even trapped inside this ‘Orichalcum cage’, Hades had a presence which managed to be attractive and terrifying at the same time.

He was not muscular like a professional athlete. He wasn’t saying anything. But everything they could see from here was radiating menace and dark charisma like no one had. Despite wearing black clothes which had seen better days, no one would be able to mistake him for a mere mortal, even if he wasn’t more than two metres tall.

There was no doubt he was the father of the Lightning Thief. She had olive skin while he was impossibly pale of face, and his hair were short, almost to military regulations where her dark hair flowed over her shoulders, but there was the same...dangerous aura around them.

“Jackson,” the Huntress of Artemis whispered, “tell me her ritual isn’t going to work.”

“It is going to work if we don’t sabotage it,” the son of Poseidon immediately went to on disappoint Zoë Nightshade. “I wasn’t lying when I spoke to Persephone. Bianca di Angelo has Hades prisoner. She has a ritual site of great power: do you see the two pillars which are so close to the temple’s edge? This is where Hades is going to be dragged once the preliminaries are over. One also needs something to hurt a deity and serve as the altar dagger. The Master Bolt of the Olympians is more than sufficient for that purpose. Being his illegitimate daughter, the Lightning Thief is a suitable claimant. Being imprisoned in the Lotus Casino for several decades, hers is a story of legitimate vengeance. As for the patterns and all the minor details, I’m sure she has thought of everything. This is not a hasty and cheap plan which is unfolding before us, Suicide Squad.”

“You leave one detail aside: how she is going to survive coming into contact with the divine ichor of a powerful God?” Ethan spoke. “Seriously, when Lou Ellen bathed in the Styx, she looked half-dead just after she came out!”

“Funny you mention this,” the mad boy smirked. “I think she has bathed in all the Rivers of the Underworld as part of her ritual preparations. Bathing in the Oceanid’s domain considerably increase the resistance of your body, the Phlegethon keeps you alive no matter the wounds and the ordeals as long as they aren’t lethal, and the Acheron absorbs the sins of humanity in the service of greater power...but that’s just my speculation, evidently.”

“Evidently,” Drew nodded. “What are-“

“It is time. Bring me the Sarcophagus!”

The voice of the Lightning Thief echoed in the Tartarus Temple, and Lou Ellen shivered, for if this voice was definitely belonging to a teenager mouth, it was a tone of command. It was like Authority itself was making its will known, and the skeletons must have felt it too even in undeath, because ten of them ran to obey her orders.

Behind a sort of tent which had remained at the edge of their field of vision, the undead warriors worked fast and soon the sarcophagus Bianca di Angelo had called for appeared under the reddish lights created by the Master Bolt and the enchanted torches of the ritual.

“By the pits...”

It was far too big for a human sarcophagus. It was easily three metres long, and that was a conservative estimate.

It was made in the same golden metal, the ‘Orichalcum’, which was used to imprison Hades and Persephone.

But somehow, despite it shining in golden light, the more it approached from the carved circles and the Demigoddess waiting, the more the air got colder and Lou Ellen thought she heard screams of agony echo in the distance.

On the side of the monumental sarcophagus waited a fortune in rare metals and precious gems, but it somehow was an afterthought, because elaborate scenes of atrocities and massacres had been magically added into the golden metal.

Somehow, the daughter of Hecate knew nothing good could come from using something like that.

It really didn’t matter if one was loyal to Olympus or not.

The Lightning Thief had made her intentions clear by ordering the construction of something so abominable. Heiress to Hades she might be, but Lou Ellen had no doubt anymore her reign would be ten times bloodier than anything Hades had ever done.

And the way the olive-skinned girl was standing was confirming her worst nightmares. In her simple black robe, Master Bolt in hand, the simplicity of her clothes and behaviour made evident she intended to establish a reign of terror.

“**It is not too late to abandon this folly, daughter**.” Hades said, and for a second she slightly panicked, fearing the God was going to reveal their presence, but his daughter did turn towards him and did not appear to consider this possibility.

“I preferred when you were staying silent,” the Lightning Thief frowned. “Be quiet, or I will gag you. Nico? I am ready to begin the next phase of the ritual.”

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The former Dread Empress wasn’t disappointing, oh no.

It could be a former Dread Emperor trapped into a female body assuredly, but Perseus didn’t think so. First, because he had been a man a life ago, and been reborn a man. It stood to reason that if the same thing was repeated in the case of Bianca di Angelo, she was a woman too.

So yes, the ex-Tyrant estimated the odds were of ninety-nine percent this was a former Dread Empress in a Demigoddess body.

And she wasn’t one of the ‘walking disasters’ which turned the Dread Empire of Praes into the joke of the continent.

It wasn’t Dread Empress Sinistra the First. The woman had been damned good at sorcery, but her grand goal of ‘stealing the Callowan weather’ had been an unmitigated disaster in its execution. If Sinistra was reborn as Bianca di Angelo, the Palace of Hades would have already been torn apart by some powerful explosions and lighting would rain randomly everywhere in the Underworld.

It couldn’t be Sinistra the Fourth. The woman had the ambition to become a Goddess – something Perseus deeply respected – but her inability to see story patterns screwing up her plans would have made sure she failed long before stealing the Master Bolt of Zeus.

It couldn’t be Dread Empress Sanguinia the First, also known as the Gourmet. In the contrary case, there would be scenes of cannibalism playing out in this temple, and a lot more dried blood everywhere.

Dread Empress Atrocious? There had been no man-eating tapirs anywhere in the Underworld, more the pity. Dread Empress Malevolent the Second? She would have already invaded the United States with an invisible army. Sanguinia the Second? Being taller than her and having cats hadn’t been outlawed anywhere near Hell. Sanguinara? Cerberus would have been well-fed if it was her, since she made any and all law-breaking a capital offence. The two Dread Empresses bearing the Regalia name? He hadn’t seen any flying fortresses so far. Vindictive the Third? She hadn’t shown any inclination she wanted to turn into a giant snake.

No, given the skill shown to create the ritual grounds and prepare all the ‘ingredients’, the Suicide Squad truly faced a mistress of planning and a talented sorceress knowing her limits. This left three major possibilities: Dread Empress Maleficent the Second, best known for her invasion of the Free Cities and great sponsor of major sorcery works, Dread Empress Maledicta the First, whose plans to consolidate her power with armies of undead and near-impenetrable wards made her feared for countless generations, and...*her*. But it couldn’t be *her*. They would be fighting for their very lives against a tide of demons if it was *her*.

“Jackson! When do we attack?”

“Patience, Augustina,” he told the impatient daughter of Athena in a whisper. “One might almost think you want the Master Bolt to carve a big hole in your chest.”

“Surely you have an artefact which will allow you to survive the lightning of this weapon long enough to disarm her.”

“Your faith in my abilities is touching, Clarisse...but no. I have an artefact for myself and my sorceress lieutenant disposes of a consequent immunity since she bathed in the Styx. But I have no idea if it will last ten seconds against one of the foremost magical practitioners of this world.”

Even on Calernia a lifetime ago, there wouldn’t have been many sorcerers who had the ambition and the skill to prepare a ritual of the scale of the one they were seeing with so little manpower.

“It’s better to wait.”

“Jackson. They have brought this...this sarcophagus.” The Huntress of Artemis whispered angrily. “There is no time to waste!”

“There isn’t.” The ex-Tyrant was forced to admit. “But the very reason why this sarcophagus is here is that *someone* will be inside soon. I’m betting it will be the Lightning Thief herself.”

“And if you’re wrong? If it is the Rich One who is thrown into this...abominable container?”

“I find it unlikely. But if I’m wrong, we will have no choice but to attack before the God is trapped inside.”

This wasn’t a scenario which filled him with eagerness. Not only Bianca di Angelo had the Master Bolt, she had the Styx pseudo-invincibility, the Underworld-presence boost, and they wouldn’t get the effect of surprise, not with the skeleton warriors forming a security perimeter.

“I don’t see the ‘accomplice’ Persephone spoke about.” The son of Nemesis commented. “The one who helped the Thief gain access to the throne room of Olympus.”

“He or she is certainly still on Mount Olympus, playing his or her role of loyalist. That’s why my plan to wait is excellent. If the Lightning Thief is in the sarcophagus, there’s no way she will summon her ally.”

“Can we destroy the sarcophagus once she’s inside?” Lou Ellen Blackstone asked.

“We probably can’t. It’s Orichalcum, this stuff has resistance to Hell waters, though it’s not absolute. Fortunately, we won’t have to try. I’m sure a certain God will be more than happy to blast this sarcophagus to oblivion once he will be freed.”

“I don’t like your plan, Jackson.” Jake Mason brayed, fortunately the sound as light as it was, was completely made irrelevant by the Master Bolt carving stone and projecting power everywhere with its loud shrieking.

“Come on, my defeatist donkey lieutenant. Isn’t it a better story to interrupt the *evil plan* of the Lightning Thief when she is convinced *nothing* can stop her anymore?”

And Hades likely found it very funny too. Despite being prisoner, there was no way the eldest brother of Zeus hadn’t felt their presence. For all the severe restrictions on his power, the chances were good the imprisoned Master of the Underworld had noticed their presence the moment they crossed the portal and arrived in this sub-realm.

“**Bind**.”

The simple verb was filled with overwhelming power, and in three seconds the cage melted to transform into antique golden chains around Hades’ godly essence.

There were a lot of them...and an enormous collar and several ugly bracelets around his wrists made sure escape wasn’t possible.

“So that’s how you dragged him here...” It made more sense than the cage...and Perseus increased once more time his estimations of the danger Bianca represented.

“How the hell did she magically forge something like that?” the blonde-haired daughter of Hecate murmured with an astonished expression. All the while more skeletons crawled out from a hole next to where the cage had stood, and they began to drag Hades in direction of the twin pillars waiting at the very edge of the temple, mere feet away from the abyss.

“She is resourceful.”

The olive-skinned girl began to sing a complex song of power, and Perseus was ready to freely admit he didn’t understand a single word of it. It was not English, Greek, or any language he’d ever learned in a past life.

The effect, however, was instantly visible. The very air and earth of the Tartarus Temple brimmed with power.

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There was something weird about seeing dozens of skeletons use their bone strength to drag away a God in chains. Dakota might have been almost tempted to smile...if they weren’t a hundred metres away from the darkness leading to Tartarus.

Oh, and if the cold hard floor of the Tartarus Temple wasn’t pulsing in crimson light around them. The world was shining crimson in fact. Every symbol carved on the pillars, the ceiling and everywhere else was shining red, there was so many red lights it appeared the walls and the roof were bleeding upon them.

Fortunately, they didn’t...yet.

Dakota looked at the sarcophagus, and noticed the lid had been opened, and now a few skeletons were pouring in it the content of several jars.

If their surroundings shone red, the evil thing at the centre of the ritual ground was somehow emanating a golden light...and it gave him the urge to vomit just by looking like it. It wasn’t something *natural* which caused the phenomenon, Dakota was sure of it.

“Nico, are you ready?”

“Yes, Bianca. I am ready.”

“Good.”

And then the Lightning Thief did something that made him cough a lot. And if by the warmth he felt everywhere was any indication, the son of Bacchus knew he had to blush like a tomato.

The daughter of Hades had removed in a hurry the black ‘sorceress dress’ she wore...revealing she had absolutely no piece of cloth underneath.

“**For the record**,” Hades remarked with an undertone of amusement. “**I am not into incest**.”

His daughter’s voice was prompt to give him a retort.

“That’s why you chose Persephone as your wife. Because a niece is better than a sister? Don’t worry, *father*. I am not Zeus.”

The Lightning Thief marched and sang all the way to the crude teeth-pillars where the golden chains keeping Hades’ powerless were solidly fastened.

There was something oddly...primal and disturbing about seeing this Demigoddess walk alone, naked, as the skeleton warriors prostrated themselves on the floor of the Tartarus Temple.

Save the Master Bolt shrieking and shining crimson red in her right hand, she had no jewellery, no artefacts, nothing formidable...and yet somehow Dakota was convinced this was a Demigoddess at least as dangerous as Perseus...before she bathed in the Styx.

A few seconds later, the younger son of Hades followed her, though he didn’t walk up the narrowing path leading to the ‘prisoner’s pillars’ where his father was immobilised.

“**Your grievances are justified, but you can’t win**.” Hades tried one more time, and Dakota knew the God must have felt them...somehow.

“I disagree,” his daughter said darkly...and then she placed the Master Bolt directly against his forearm.

A small cut was made...and the wound immediately began to close.

Holy...even against divine weapons, the Olympians could regenerate *that* fast?

“**Bleed**.”

The Master Bolt’s pressure increased, and this time a small trickle of golden blood began to pour out, immediately falling into the miniature channel which connected the pillars and the sarcophagus.

Bianca di Angelo turned back. Dakota had expected to see something like a gleeful expression of triumph on her face, but the mood of the Lightning Thief was best summed-up as ‘darkly determined’.

On her way back, the Demigoddess gave the Master Bolt to her brother.

“Don’t falter, Nico. We need to be strong.”

“Yes, sister.”

Bianca di Angelo breathed out, and then finished closing the distance with the sarcophagus, as the golden flames of Hades’ ichor continued flowing in the channel and soon would reach the Orichalcum ‘coffin’.

The Lightning Thief climbed over the monumental carving of wars and slaughters, and lied down inside it. She couldn’t repress a small scream of pain when she did, however.

“Sister?”

“Don’t...falter.” Whatever had been in the urns, it was obviously something incredibly bad...bad enough to cause pain to someone having received the Curse of Achilles.

The skeletons put back the lid of the sarcophagus in place, and a new blast of golden light followed, with loud noises of some infernal machinery ringing out for a few long seconds.

“It...it worked!” The son of Hades sounded *very* relieved.

The bleeding off Hades’ wound intensified, and in a couple of seconds the first drops of golden ichor touched the horrible sarcophagus, making it shine like a miniature sun.

The channel between Hades and the ‘coffin’ of the Lightning Thief was a line of golden ichor...a straight line of golden flames.

“**Son**...” The Lord of the Underworld did his best to keep his voice calm, but for the first time, it was obvious he was really in pain. “**I forgive you. And I will do my best to keep you alive from Zeus’ wrath**.”

“What?” Nico di Angelo had obviously not expected these words from his father. “But you...but we...you are our prisoner. You are powerless, and Bianca is going to take your throne and-“

“**Heroes. I think you can intervene now...please**.”

“Well if it is so nicely asked,” Perseus Jackson chuckled before raising his sword. “SUICIDE SQUAD! ATTACK!”

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“SUICIDE SQUAD! ATTACK!”

“AT LAST!” The daughter of Ares screamed.

Speaking and waiting may be fine for the children of Athena, but the sons and daughters of the God of War needed far more than that!

They needed violence, clash of arms, and challenges.

That was why Clarisse charged the enemy, raised her spear and-

The Minotaur slammed into the line of skeletons like it didn’t exist.

“Kill-stealer!” She screamed while plunging her spear in the dead chest of a skeleton and pulverising it.

“I don’t steal, loud one,” the bull-headed monster snorted. “Not my fault you are too slow.”

“Oh, you want to play it that way...”

“Rise, fallen scions of Sparta!” the son of Hades exclaimed, and the few skeletons who remained were reinforced by at last sixty more. “Kill the intruders!”

“The first to reach one hundred wins!” the daughter of Ares used *Carnifex* to become a storm of death and violence, demolishing wave after wave of skeletons faster than they appeared. To her displeasure, the Minotaur was accelerating too and keeping her pace...

“No! Tormentors of the Fields of Punishment hear my summons!” the black-haired brother of the Lightning Thief shouted, but nothing appeared. Clarisse laughed...only to grimace as a powerful red bolt struck Lou Ellen.

“YES!” Nico di Angelo exulted only for his smile to turn into horror as the blonde Demigoddess stood up unwounded, with only a large hole in her armour to prove the attack had been real. “No! This isn’t fair! This isn’t-“

The enemy boy stopped speaking, maybe because Jackson had placed his sword against his throat. At the same time, Nightshade’s silver arrows were raining down upon the skeleton battalion, and the survivors were strangled by the metallic ivy.

“This isn’t fair,” their leader agreed. “The Trident, please.”

“You can’t-“

“I can’t? I think a few Gods would reward me greatly if I brought them your head, *Nico di Angelo*.”

“**Please abstain, Perseus Jackson**.” Hades intervened. “**I only have those two children, and unlike my idiot of a brother, I will not sire any as long as the Oath I made after World War II stands**.”

“They are trying to usurp your power and your realm.”

“**I did not say I wasn’t going to punish them**.” The black eyes were...you could feel the menace from there where she stood. “**I just demand you don’t kill him**.”

“Oh, good. **Sleep**.”

And the son of Hades collapsed like he had suddenly been awake for several days and was now realising he needed to catch up with an invisible pillow. Jackson was really a bastard to fight when he did that.

“Now where were we?” the son of Poseidon smiled while grabbing the Trident of his father from the hand of Nico di Angelo.

Clarisse finished the last skeleton which was still standing, and tried to seize the Master Bolt of Zeus...but before she could seize it, she felt something really bad crawling on her skin.

“Shit, the Oath...”

“The Oath,” Jackson nodded. “Fortunately, a certain Oceanid was really neglectful and in her haste did not even bother waiting for someone to return from his sabotage operation. We Demigods can’t touch the Master Bolt. But Asterius can.”

And indeed the Minotaur proved it a second later, leaving the sleeping Demigod with no godly symbols of power.

“And so we have successfully completed the Great Quest!”

“**I present you my congratulations**,” Hades’ voice boomed in a very terrifying manner. “**Now are you ready to free me from these chains**?”

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“**Now** **are you ready to free me from these chains?**”

As amusing as it would have been to let one of Zeus’ brothers get a lesson of humility, Perseus decided he still needed a relatively good relationship with the Lord of Hell, as part of his ever-changing plan and associated contingencies.

After all, while it was doubtful Hades would be so grateful as to protect him from Zeus’ wrath forever, having him as a long-term enemy was kind of counter-indicated.

And so he walked towards the bound God, Trident in hand.

It was hardly something easy. The symbol of power of his father was like he had received ten Names in his body, to the point he believed it was something nearly equal to receiving the Styx Curse. But for each step taken in this direction, the air burned in his lungs. And as he finally walked near the ‘ichor channel’, it was like he was standing above an ocean of lava and other hellishly-hot things.

This was truly the power of Hades torn from his grasp, a substance commanding the fires of the Underworld, billions upon billions of dead souls, and every radioactive stone sufficiently under the surface to not be claimed by another deity.

“I want an amnesty for every member of the Great Quest participating in your...rescue,” the green-eyed Demigod sweated profusely as at last he arrived in position to strike and immediately began his attempt of breaking the chain tying Hades’ intact arm. The other was a cascade of flame-ichor, it was best to leave it for the second round.

Normally he would have delayed the ‘negotiations’, but the longer he stayed here, the longer he was going to stay here, and being cooked alive like an ordinary crustacean was not his lifetime ambition.

“**Don’t you think you are forgetting something**?” Hades asked quizzically.

“Something? Oh, Asterius, be a dear and place the Master Bolt in the channel to interrupt the ritual.”

“**Excellent work**,” Hades grinned as the flow of ichor significantly increased when his ally blocked the progression of the deity’s blood, lessening the temperature. “**But I was not referring to that. You see Perseus Jackson, I am the Lord of the Underworld. I was prisoner and thus unable to intervene, but the moment you stepped out from the Labyrinth, I was aware of it**.”

Ah...damn it. It was way more range than he had thought the Rich One would ever have once it was certain neither Hades nor Persephone would intervene directly against them.

Well, nothing to do but smile and be brave in front of his ‘uncle’.

“Would it help if I say it wasn’t personal?”

“**It does**,” the Dark God nodded as the Trident managed to slice the first chain out of six binding his arm. “**And yes, you will have you and your fellow Questers will have your amnesty. I swear it on the Styx**.”

A rumble sounded in the distance, an unbreakable vow being accepted.

A second chain snapped as the blue-green power of Poseidon tore the crimson-infused Orichalcum binding.

“Why, if I may ask? I’m glad of your...leniency, of course. But I caused a bit of collateral damage...”

“**The damage will be measured in billions of Drachma**,” the God corrected. “**And yet you have changed my domain forever. Something I was unable to do, restricted as I was by the Ancient Rules. Styx and Phlegethon have a new rivalry, and the pensions of Asphodel draining my finances have suddenly been reduced to zero. I may very well instead install a system where rich deceased pay for being invited to luxury cruises on the new Asphodel Ocean**.”

Perseus was impressed. So far, all the Gods he had met were not and would likely never be shrew businessmen. Yet even imprisoned, Hades was already taking advantage of something he had neither engineered nor been able to account for before.

The power flowed in the Trident and himself. The more he used it, the more it was...intoxicating. Especially as the infernal temperature decreased and the ichor ceased to project this volcano-level warmth everywhere.

The last chain snapped for the unharmed arm. He shifted his efforts to the left leg – from Hades’ perspective that is – while the Rich One went to use his freed limb to strike the chains binding his other arm. It was quite...fascinating seeing the fingers leave their imprint into the harder-than-diamond metal.

“**It is not a complaint**,” Hades spoke as he broke another chain, and the Trident tore into another one centimetre by centimetre. “**But why were you sent so late? Unless the Labyrinth delayed you by months?**”

Oh, the truth was going to be fun.

“I’m afraid your Lordly brother, the Master of Olympus, was entirely convinced your daughter acted upon your orders when she stole the Master Bolt and the Trident. The last months have been essentially been spent preparing the forces of Olympus for war. If not for my father, this Quest wouldn’t have been sent as a face-saving measure.”

The pale face of Hades became extremely angry, and his eyes turned crimson red. The might of his blows to free himself doubled or tripled in intensity.

“**The paranoiac imbecile**,” the Master of the Underworld hissed. “**What is in his head? Why would I order something so blatant and so stupid**?”

There were moments where as much as quipping something, it was best to stay silent.

The flow of ichor was now a mere trickle, and after four or five seconds, it was even less than that.

Hades broke the last chain tying his second arm, and immediately cauterised the wound his daughter had used in her attempt to drain his power.

Perseus noted that unlike what had happened before, an ugly dark scar remained on his pale and muscled forearm where the Master Bolt had hurt him.

“**Not really pretty isn’t it**?” the question was obviously rhetorical, and he didn’t answer as the leg chains broke one by one. “**It has been a long time since anyone wounded me that badly. Fortunately the ritual was supposed to last seven days and seven nights where claiming my ichor was concerned, thus the portion of power lost remains insignificant for a God of my power. Now**-”

Perseus wondered why Hades had stopped talking and turned his head...right in time to see Luke Castellan evade the lid of the sarcophagus thrown in his direction.

Bianca di Angelo emerged from the Orichalcum Sarcophagus the second after, and to say she was happy to see them would have been the greatest lie of the year.

“Heroes...” the musical voice was filled with hatred. “Why do they always ruin everything?”

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They were all facing the Lightning Thief.

She was naked and weaponless, watching them from her position on the edge of the sarcophagus’ top.

Luke didn’t give the signal to attack. He wasn’t sure if anyone would have obeyed it anyway.

The black eyes of the daughter of Hades seemed to stare them into submission, promising only death if they attacked.

There was a small cloud of darkness which fell from nowhere, and in a second, the Demigoddess was covered in a sort of light armour plus other black clothes which wouldn’t have been out of fashion for a Huntress of Artemis...provided they love the black theme.

“**Better**,” Hades said in a satisfied tone. “**We are not going to behave like we’re in Aphrodite temple. You are too young to share the exhibitionist tendencies of the Goddess of Love**.”

“Of course you would worry about that,” the dark-haired teenager who had stolen the Master Bolt scoffed.

“**I worry about a lot of things**,” the Master of the Underworld told her politely.

“Just not those who are important to your children,” the Demigoddess muttered before barking a word of command. The Minotaur, who had until now been guarding the Master Bolt, saw his hands close on nothing. In the blink of an eye, it reappeared before the Lightning Thief’s who seized it with a dark smile. “It’s always easier to give your children water from the Lethe than rising against the God who regularly kills your lovers.”

“**I have not forgiven Zeus for the death of Maria**.”

“Then do something!” And for the first time, the rage truly seemed personal for the Lightning Thief. “We were sent to the Lotus Casino when the Great Prophecy was uttered. More than fifty years have passed, and what did you do to punish the Master of Olympus? Nothing! Why should Zeus care about your forgiveness when they are absolutely no drawbacks to be on the receiving end of your wrath? Cursing the Oracle? It must have been a good joke for him! Prophecies are Apollo’s domain, and even if they weren’t, the Lord of Olympus would respect them as much as he abides by the oaths he swears on the Styx!”

“**You are right**.”

“Yes, you...what?”

“**You are right**,” Hades answered slowly. “**I should have found a way to punish my arrogant brother long before you were released from the Lotus Casino. The deaths of some of his children before their time, in hindsight, have utterly failed in their goals. He simply doesn’t care about enough to stop siring them, no matter how tragic the demises of their predecessors**.”

The God of Hell advanced, and with each step, he grew taller and more terrifying.

Luke shivered at the sight of the five metres-tall giant, now covered in dark armour and drawing an enormous sword of Stygian Iron.

“**Now please drop this Master Bolt and abandon this folly. I am ready to forgive you, but the longer you continue opposing me, the harsher your final punishment will be**.”

“You speak as if you are able to beat me easily. I won against you once.”

“**By underhanded tricks and a remarkable sneak attack**,” her father agreed. “**You will learn that unlike Zeus, I learn from my mistakes**.”

“That’s what we are about to-“

The thin Demigoddess had not the time to finish her sentence...or even to throw a lightning bolt in defence of herself.

One second was all it took for the God to throw her like a broken doll in the air.

Most of it went far too quickly for mortal eyes like all the members of the Suicide Squad.

But there was one thing evident. Bianca di Angelo, a Demigoddess who had bathed in the Styx, was armed with the Master Bolt of Zeus, and had an enormous talent in sorcery and plenty of other fields.

She had not a tiny chance in Hell to beat Hades in a fair fight.

The ‘battle’ was completely one-sided. It was extremely violent.

Bianca di Angelo was thrown to the four corners of the Tartarus Temple, utterly dominated, and unable to do anything but assist in her total defeat.

And it ended in the Demigoddess crashing down not far from the sarcophagus, the Master Bolt too far to help, and her skin visibly steaming as the Styx Curse had nearly faltered in front of the deadly assault.

The large sword of Stygian Iron was soon pointed at her throat.

Luke thought she whispered a few words under her breath, but if someone other than Hades heard them...

“I...tried to usurp your divinity.”

“**So you did. And I have found the perfect punishment. I forgive you and your brother**.”

The Italian-named girl seemed extremely surprised. No, maybe ‘surprised’ was too weak a word.

“No....no! No!”

“As much as I want to praise your clemency, Lord Hades,” Jackson intervened with his damned smirk. “I think a few of your siblings and fellow Gods are going to argue for far less forgiving fates when they are aware of what happened here. Not to mention the traitor in the Council who-“

The Rich One cast his sword against a pillar and swore something extremely insulting in Greek.

The explosion was phenomenal and several pillars broke. The Tartarus Temple, probably not the most resistant structure in the Underworld or outside of it, began to show signs of imminent collapse.

All of this was immaterial as a Goddess in armour was revealed now that she had removed her helmet...the Helm of Darkness, likely stolen during the imprisonment of his owner.

“**Good evening, Hera**.”

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The Goddess, Ethan thought at first, did not look like Hera at all.

She was clad in armour of bronze and gold, and she had armed herself with a spear. Her looks were of an incredible youth. She was blonde-haired and beautiful. If Hades had not called her by her name, the son of Nemesis would have thought it was Athena dressed like one of the ancient hoplites, though the large traditional shield was missing.

But when you watched her face, you realised it couldn’t be the Goddess of Wisdom, Strategy, and Architecture.

There was a sort of madness burning in the blue eyes, and it didn’t diminish as the Helm of Darkness fell apart in a cascade of black sand.

“**You are ready to destroy your original symbol of power** **just to stop me**?” the wife of the Master of Olympus asked coldly.

“**Please**,” Hades scoffed loudly, “**do you really think it was the original work of the Cyclopes? This helmet was destroyed long ago in the war against the Giants. I fabricated multiple copies which have surpassed the first Helm...as you are going to verify by yourself**.”

A new ‘Helm of Darkness’ materialised before the God of the Underworld, and a second later the brother of the Olympians’ terrifying aura turned into...something else.

Sheer terror overwhelmed his senses. It was more and more difficult to breathe. Ethan saw monstrous shadows leap and dance at the edge of his vision. By the vengeance of his mother, what was that power?

The effect decreased after a few seconds. Jake Mason tried to use his strength of donkey to stand again, but his legs were convulsing, and he wasn’t the only one to have collapsed and suffering from the Helm...no, from Hades’ power.

“**I can’t allow you to return to Olympus** **and warn my husband**.”

The worst part in this sentence was how...emotionlessly Hera said it.

“**I am afraid you don’t have the choice, *sister***.” The eldest male deity of their generation replied. “**You don’t exactly have an Orichalcum cage to imprison me again, and trying a ritual of the same level would require you to wait until the Winter Solstice...and my brothers aren’t going to let you wait for that long before asking difficult questions you won’t be able to explain**. **And at the risk of sounding a bit arrogant...you are strong Hera, but you do not have the strength to fight me in a duel**.”

The Master Bolt flew in Hera’s hands the next second.

“**I disagree**.” The Goddess who didn’t look at all like the living grace of happy marriage snarled, a dangerous golden aura beginning to increase around her body.

“**You want to challenge me with a symbol of power attuned to my daughter’s sorcery**?” Hades seemed amused. “**So be it. Demigods, brace yourselves. My sister and I need to have a little conversation about her treasonous motivations**.”

Ethan felt like something horribly slimy was swallowing him, and the vision of the Tartarus Temple faded away.

But not before he saw the God and the Goddess charge each other.

It might be his imagination, but the son of Nemesis thought the clash of their weapons shattered reality itself.

**1 June 2006, Hades Fortress, the Underworld**

The moment he saw the red and the black colours, Perseus knew Hades had sent them back to his throne room.

It was a judicious choice on the part of the Master of the Underworld. The ex-Tyrant had never seen two Olympian-level deities unleash everything they had against each other, but he had a feeling it was the sort of things best watched from thousands of kilometres away.

Gods revealing their divine form to mortals was enough to incinerate you, what would an all-out fight do their mortal bodies? The answer, in all likelihood was nothing good.

“Well,” the son of Poseidon chuckled, “we are all alive and we were successful. Mission accomplished, Suicide Squad.”

“Mission accomplished?” Zoë Nightshade exploded, which was anything but a surprise. “We were supposed to take back the Master Bolt!”

“Ah, yes, that Master Bolt,” Perseus played with the Trident in his right hand. “If you desire so much taking it back, who am I to stop you? Just to warn you, I don’t think Hera is a mood to return it to Olympus...not without incinerating all the witnesses first.”

“**That sounds like my aunt**.” And all the eyes of the Suicide Squad and the Demigods present turned towards the thrones...and one was evidently occupied.

The Goddess Persephone had changed a lot since their last encounter. Now she wore a royal black robe decorated with golden skulls, and her hair and her eyes were piercing black. A sceptre decorated with many skulls was used as symbol of her powers, and she definitely looked the part of the Queen of Hell.

“**I was not expecting for so many of you to return alive...along with guests**.”

This was the moment most of the Suicide Squad looked behind them...directly at the two children of Hades. Bianca di Angelo had woken up her brother, and was trying to push him in direction of the doors.

Persephone made a move of her hand. The hell-themed gates were slammed shut in this kind of sound which always preceded a good tragedy or an important monologue.

“Lady Persephone, I don’t understand-“

“She intends to kill us right here, right now, Annabeth,” Perseus explained while rolling her eyes. Seriously for a child of Wisdom, the progeny of Athena often missed the obvious. “Hades promised us an amnesty. His wife didn’t swear any binding oath.”

“**Indeed**,” the daughter of Demeter and Zeus gave them an expression of pure loathing. “**Did you really think you were going to leave so easily after ransacking our realm, spawn of the Earthshaker? Did you think I was going to leave you alive after imprisoning me, bastards**?”

“Well to be honest...yes.” He answered as honestly as he was capable.

“**Then you are far stupider than you look**.” The Goddess of Spring insulted him.

“I am hurt,” the former Tyrant gasped theatrically. “In fact, I am utterly devastated!”

Persephone didn’t bother leaving her throne while she conjured an orb of cursed fire in her hand.

The instant after, she received a wave of water in her face, extinguishing the flames and giving her the appearance of a drenched hag.

“In case you forgot, oh Goddess, I have the Trident of my father, and I can wield it against you. I would advise to-“

Persephone snarled and tried to throw something very close to hellfire at the illegitimate children of her husband. That answered the question of who she hated the most.

It didn’t work.

Bianca di Angelo shouted a spell incantation, and the flames stopped in mid-air before being thrown back in her direction. Persephone was a second away from being roasted by her own spell when she managed to cancel the attack.

“What I have done to be surrounded by buffoons and incompetent stepmothers?” The Lightning Thief grumbled as she advanced once again towards the thrones.

“I don’t know who you’re speaking about...unless you’re insulting my donkey lieutenant?”

“Are you sure you weren’t a Bard in a previous life?” the olive-skinned daughter of Hades hissed. “I hate Bards. I crucified a lot of them long ago.”

“Now that’s just rude,” Perseus grinned. “I was a Tyrant. Tyrant of Helike, *your Most Dreadful Majesty*.”

This caught the dark-clothed Demigoddess completely off-guard.

“What? You...you are an old soul, just like me!”

“I am guilty of that, yes. Your reigning name before we challenge a Goddess?”

The hands of Bianca di Angelo began to burn in black flames and all the members of the Suicide Squad were in defensive stances, ready to evade whatever Persephone would send their way.

“A lifetime ago, I ruled and I was Triumphant.”

**Author’s note**: The title of the next chapter will be *Triumphant*, obviously.

The other links were the story is available:

ww w .alternate history forum/ threads/ an-impractical-guide-to-godhood-a-percy-jackson-x-a-practical-guide-to-godhood-crossover .513032/

archive ofourown works /32339365 /chapters /80167612

ww w .pa treon Antony444