

April 26th 2016 Mt. Olympus, Temple of Zeus, 9:00 PM EDT

Zeus's temple complex was...kind of tacky. There was a lot of gold, which would have paired well with the white marble in an accenting sort of way, but in the quantities it was present in just made the whole place look like King Midas tried his hand at designing the world's gaudiest casino.

Hermes snickered as he saw my expression. "It's awful right? No one has the heart to tell him, or if they do they're afraid he'll rip it out. The old man may have mellowed with age, but people REMEMBER Prometheus. All the new kiddies get doting imperious kindhearted dad, they don't remember what he USED to be like."

Which explained a lot about Cassie. I wondered how much of Zeus's new nature was culture dilution. More and more people forgot the old stories and learned about the Greeks from Disney bullshit. How much of the change was because of that new perception? How much of a god came from their worshippers?

It was something to think about. I might very well BECOME a god someday, I was pretty sure dragon god was on my path to...whatever I'd be at S rank. Not the next step mind you, but it was something I'd reach someday. Would I become susceptible to contamination like that?

Sadly, my introspection would have to wait, because after a bit of shit shooting with the guards, Hermes got us into the complex. Once we were inside, he excused himself after slipping the guard...something. The guy, dressed in full hoplite armor, escorted us to the area we were trying to access, taking us directly to the steam pools.

When we arrived, we stopped at the corner and waited. Within a few minutes, the air split with a wail of panic and the guards standing outside the steam pools bolted off in the direction of the noises. Our guard gestured toward the pools and then took off after them, clearly not wanting to miss when the shit finally hit the fan for this.

Laverna stepped from the shadows seamlessly, holding a finger to her lips as she walked to the doorway. She raised a hand, went through a complicated series of gestures and whispered a few words, and the steam at the entrance parted for us. Shrugging, we both stepped through the gateway and into the pools.

The steam pools in Zeus's temple were...pretty nice to be honest. Much nicer than the rest of the place, if also more understated. Bare stone as far as I could see, with calm steaming pools of water at various levels. Some in the ground, some in raised stone craters like stalactites that had been hollowed out.

Obviously steam was thick in the air, having congealed into solid form behind us to close Laverna off again. Guess we were on our own, but that was fine, I was prepared, and I called the map to mind as I grabbed Cherry's hand and dragged her after me in a seemingly random

direction. She had a hand flared, having lit her hand of glory first thing when we entered as an added guarantee of safety, so we should have been unnoticeable.

Which was why I had to stifle a curse when we ran into someone who obviously knew we were there. A creature, golden scales covering a spindly body, pointed ears, bald head, red eyes and a forked tongue. As we came close it froze where it crouched on top of a nearby rock, hissing and sniffing the air. I grimaced, not sure what the fuck it was, and appraised it.

[Appraisal function activated. Treasure detected. Valektris-C rank. A gluttonous monster of Pluto made from the gathered fragments of bronze armor harvested from drowned greek soldiers, the Valektris hungers for the blood it's former wearers were denied.]

What the fuck? Was that even a real thing? What kind of magic made THAT? I looked down and saw the flame on Cherry's pinky go out. The sniffing got more intense. "Meat!" The thing hissed, in a voice like the scraping of metal on bones. "Meat for Ipsos! Show yourself meat! Reveal your flesh for Ipsos to taste. We will not consume. Only taste. Ipsos swears this!"

I didn't need a PHD in greek history to know that whatever this fucking thing was, it definitely WOULD eat us. I could almost definitely kill it, but we would fucked if I did. We couldn't afford that kind of notice. There were a LOT of gods here that could fucking murder me. This was a heist for a reason.

My eyes widened and I slipped my hand into my bag, pulling out the Plutonic Veil. This thing was some kind of metal demon, which meant it was under the command of the god in charge of that kind of shit. I slipped the mask on, then let go of Cherry's hand, appearing in front of it.

It hissed, jerking in surprise, then it's teeth bared in glee. Before it could attack I stepped up and slapped it in the fucking mouth. It was stunned, especially when I didn't follow up, just loomed over it. "A Valektris dares impede the servants of Pluto? Do you forget the earth that bares the bronze from which you spawn?"

Ipsos was talking in english, for some fucking reason, so I figured doing the same would work. To my delight, the creature reared back, curling around itself. "Mercy!" It shrieked. "Mercy great one! Mercy for poor Ipsos!"

I sneered. "Mercy for one such as you? A waste. Perhaps though, I can focus on more...worthwhile pursuits. But speak not of my generosity to others. Unless you wish me to carry word to our master of a despicable cur who steams itself within the temple of his brother?"

"Ipsos sees nothing!" It shrieked. "Ipsos speaks of no servant, no masks. Ipsos sleeps and only wakes in many hours!"

Nodding, I stepped around it. "Good. Return to your lurking, creature."

Ipsos nodded quickly, bowing and scraping as it scrambled off into the steam. Taking Cherry's hand, I vanished again from the senses of those living here. We followed my mental map to the back wall, where the steam pools touched up against the divination chambers. Looking to my Crypt Queen, I gave a nod, and her eyes blazed up a lambent blue as she turned us intangible.

We stepped directly through the walls, and ended up in...well, the only real term I could think of was locker room. I'd removed my mask and slipped it into my pouch, but I had to replace it with another of beaten bronze as we changed into the robes of the oracles.

Like Hermes had said, not all the oracles were gods, some were mortals brought up here to train, and I was as strong as a high end minor god right now anyway. Neither of us seemed out of place here once we dressed the part.

Stepping out of the locker room area, we found ourselves no longer alone. The massive chamber we'd stepped into was full to bursting with other people dressed like we were. Some sat in front of braziers, some in front of the corpses of birds or other animals. Some threw wands, or bones, or runes, none of which were greek in origin, but apparently they went with the scattershot approach here.

Knowing it would be suspicious if we did nothing, I pulled Cherry along towards the area we needed to be, signalling her to put out her hand. Walking with purpose will dissuade most people from questioning where you're going or what you're doing. We made a point to walk briskly but not fast enough to be interesting, strolling with intent towards what we needed to find.

The area in question was situated behind a tea making station, where a small red haired oracle was fumbling with a tea set. She had her mask off so she could drink, but was clearly unfamiliar with the brewing process. When she saw us arrive, she swallowed hard, glancing around. "Oh, I'm sorry, was my time with the tea leaves over? I've had such trouble with them today. My last divination told me I was going to be eaten by weasels, which doesn't seem...accurate. I think I'm doing this wrong."

I smothered a chuckle, holding out a hand. "No rush, we can sit with you for a bit until you're done. I'm Essus, and this is Aranea. We're new." Sitting down and being unobtrusive would be a good way to be overlooked.

She brightened. "Alright! I'm Cleo. It's nice to meet you both. Oh! Maybe I can divine your futures? Would you like a cup of tea?" I gestured for Cherry to take one, if only because she could drink it through her mask with her ghostly abilities. Cleo filled a cup with leaves, let it steep, then passed it to Cherry, who sipped deeply from the clay vessel. At Cherry's pleasant hum, Cleo grinned at her. "It's good isn't it? Dreamshade tea. I traded it from one of the shrine keepers."

"It's delicious." Said Cherry with a chuckle. Cleo seemed unbothered by the phasing, which made sense, she DID spend all day in the company of gods. "So, what does my future hold." I'd

told Cherry to go ahead because the suspect nature of Cleo's predictions could explain away anything she came up with. Even if she got the prediction right we could just act like she failed again. Once that happened we could send her away so we could use the tea station ourselves, then Cherry could do her thing again now that everyone would have gotten used to us.

Taking the cup eagerly, Cleo squinted down into its depths. She inhaled sharply, trying to catch a scent or something, then her eyes flicked to Cherry. Her face was blank, remote, and her voice was devoid of all the previous cheer and perkiness. "You walk with death. A constant companion. She treads your steps. Finds you...interesting. Of her world but not."

Her face became animated again and she grimaced. "Ouch, ouch, ouch. Feedback. I hate when that happens." Frowning down at the tea leaves, she looked upset. "I'm not supposed to trance with leaves. I'm the worst at this. I'm going to switch to fire reading. Sorry to take up the table, you two have a nice day."

Giving us an apologetic look, she forced a smile and scurried off. She seemed to be far too caught up in her own problems to notice anything off about us. I poured some tea for Cherry and I, and let it steep before gesturing for her to light her hand again. Her fingers blazed and suddenly we were beneath notice.

The hand of glory was a wonderful invention, because it took advantage of existing circumstances to shroud the bearer. Sleeping people in a house, fog or steam, even lack of interest. It redirected, it didn't obstruct. It was why I was so convinced that combined with my own mantle and Eros and Psych's mental resistance it would form a coherent whole that would let us slip by the defenses.

Sure enough, no one looked at or noticed us after the hand was lit. We waited another minute or two, sipping tea, but once that was done, Cherry took my hand and phased again, leading us right through the wall behind us and into a large empty chamber.

At the far end of the chamber, I could see a massive loom, a tapestry draped across it. Next to it sat dozens of spools of absurdly bright and eye catching threads, with a few darker shades thrown in here or there. Next to THOSE, sat a pedestal, upon which lay a purple cushion, with a pair of golden shears perched atop it. I grinned as we stepped forward. We'd found what we came for. These were the shears that would free Raven.