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I walked through the main thoroughfare of Astrapolis, heading without choice towards the Temple of the Sky-King. Ahead of me marched the Jaffa, no sign of reaction to me killing one of their number only minutes ago. At their head, the one with the armour that glowed. The First Prime of Zeus, I was certain.

At my sides, ensuring none came close, and behind moved the Custodes Fulminis. Each marched proudly, their steps crisp, their shoulders high. While before the Agon Fulminis, many had disliked or distrusted me, seeing my desire to take the challenge as arrogance, now they honoured me. To them, I was proof that they could defeat the Jaffa. That they were the chosen warriors of Zeus Basileus.

Closer to the centre, the priests and priestesses of Zeus moved with me, forming an inner ring around me. Protecting me not so much from the masses, but from myself. They worked to ensure I was brought before Zeus without delay.

Around us, those who saw us pass fell to their knees if they were not already there. My name, along with the title they had given me, Chosen of the Sky-God, slipped from their lips alongside that of Zeus Basileus. They placed me at his side, his humble, loyal servant. The symbol of Astrapolis and our worth to Zeus' glory.

"They honour you, Heuriskos."

The words came from Thaïs, the Goa'uld hidden as a Hiereia having a position of honour at my side. As close as any was allowed.

"They should not."

Damn idiots and fools, the lot of them, I thought. They were slaves, deceived and blinded by a parasite claiming to be a god. By one using advanced technology to appear magical and divine.

I was not like them. I knew what Zeus was. I knew exactly what I was being led to. I understood the danger that was growing ever closer, my mind racing to think of some way to escape.

If I had my weapons, I doubted I could defeat or slip away from so many Jaffa and Custodes. I did not, even my shield remained in the arena behind. That plan would only work if I took down Thaïs first and prayed there were no other hidden Goa'uld around me.

Even if by some miracle I could escape my escorts, I had nowhere to go. Everyone in the city had my name on their lips, and with Zeus' appearance, the gates would be sealed.

My only choice, as fucking horrid as it was, involved facing the snake-posing-as-a-god and hoping I could slip away without it realising that I knew the truth.

"Prepare yourself. Zeus will not tolerate your usual... impertinence."

Those words came from Hiereus Primus Olythros as he walked beside Thaïs to my left. To my right, Adamantios moved, head high and proud that one of his Custodes had taken down a Jaffa.

"I will heed your words, Hiereus Primus."

Yeah, I thought, I need to be careful. Thaïs, or whatever her Goa'uld name was, would've informed Zeus about my behaviour, opinions, and other things. I'd spent three years making sure to be careful of what I said and how around her, and she'd have compiled reports for Zeus based on that, so I had to stay within my script.

"Do not be so quick to dismiss my words, Heuriskos. Zeus Basileu-"

His words were cut off as from the still present thunder clouds that lingered over Astrapolis, a shimmer of light reached down. A beam, impossibly straight and accurate, rushed towards the Temple, binding it to the storms above.

There was no shift in the wind, no roar of thunder at the beam's presence as it joined the Temple and sky as one.

Along with those with me, I stopped and watched.

Along the beam, a flare appeared, one that raced down towards the Temple. The flare bloomed outwards as it descended, for a fleeting moment thickening the beam as it travelled down.

Unlike most around me, including the citizens of Astrapolis who had fallen silent as the beam formed, I knew exactly what that was. Ring transportation from the hidden Ha'Tak to the Temple. Zeus, or someone who would speak for him, had descended. My chances of escape growing narrower.

The flare raced skyward a moment later, and then, as Adamantios commanded all to move, it descended once more.

Based on what I recalled, the rings could take about eight if one jammed in, but normally, it seemed to be four or fewer that travelled. Assuming Zeus was on one of the two trips, then I expected no more than six beings to be present from the Ha'Tak.

Ten I corrected as the flare rose and fell.

No, fifteen as it moved again.

"Wonderful."

The word slipped from me under my breath. Thaïs and Olythros both glanced my way from the corner of their eyes.

I expected the first, not the second. Was the High Priest also a Goa'uld?

I had wondered that for many a year now, but had no proof to confirm it. Thaïs always stated it was because of Olythros that she could be the Hiereia assigned to me, but I couldn't be sure he hadn't received orders from another above him.

We walked in silence from there until we reached the main entrance of the Temple of the Sky-King. The large marble archway was engraved with symbols and motifs telling of Zeus' glory, his rise and fall, and how he would one day rise again to reclaim Olympus and cast down those who betrayed him.

I knew the story well, having had to hear it daily for a cycle and a half as a recruit, then again through three years in the Custodes Fulminis.

As we entered, my eyes watched carefully, noting the way everyone acted. There was a nervous, excited energy to those we saw, faint, half-sentences and words reaching my ears that spoke of a God descending.

It seemed I would be dealing with Zeus directly and not a representative. I wasn't sure if that was better or worse than the other option.

The Custodes stopped as we neared a passage I had never ventured down before, the floor angling downwards gently.

"Chiliarchos Heuriskos. You have brought great honour to the Custodes Fulminis. An honour that sees you summoned before Zeus Basileus. Do not forget your place in His presence."

I clasped a hand to my chest.

"I will heed your words, Tagmatarchos."

With that said, Adamantios turned, moving to stand guard with his warriors. Bar the Jaffa, Olythros, and Thaïs, no other accompanied me into the new corridor.

As we marched downwards, the slope a gentle incline, my mind ran through the hundreds of scenarios and plans for facing off against a Goa'uld, of interacting with Zeus himself, before I could escape this world. None were great, only a few offered even a glimmer of a chance to kill the false god, and none of them would see me live.

If I wanted to escape today and find a way to stay in Astrapolis out of the Goa'uld's direct control, the path that lay before me was narrow, insanely so. As if I were trying to cross from one mountain to another while walking on a thread.

The steps of the Jaffa, each in perfect unison, caught the tiles of the ground, filling the air with a regular, clipped beat. As we sank deeper, the walls began to glow, the same cold blue I knew from lights near and in Thaïs' chambers. Lights powered by naquadah, as I could feel the Sigil of the Storm in my arm glowing in response to the presence of that rare element, the one that powered most or all of the Goa'uld technology.

My eyes danced around, mapping the walls, noting side passages and doors, none of which were open. I didn't know if or when I would be down here again, in this section of the Temple I had never entered before, but I had to add everything in sight to the map I had of this place in my mind. If the stargate was anywhere, it would somewh-

My thoughts stilled as we entered a large chamber, and I felt my breath caught in my throat.

The hall was decorated finely, banners for Zeus hung freely, between them ornaments and displays of grandeur and majesty. Yet it wasn't those that drew my focus. No, it was the object that stood at the far end of the chamber, dominating it as it sat there silent.

The stargate I'd spent years searching for was right before my eyes, torches burning with that impossible blue leading to it, lining the route to be taken. The path of my escape lay there silently, almost teasing me with how close it was. I could see the symbols on the gate, some jogging memories in my head, but the coordinates for Earth, for any world, escaped me still.

There was also no sight of a DHD. Without that, even if I had coordinates, I couldn't escape from this world, couldn't seek refuge on earth, Abydos, with the Tok'ra, the Tollen, or anyone else.

Even as two Hiereus stood beside the stargate, silently watching over it, I fumed internally. Zeus had no idea that showing it to me would invoke such a response, that its mere presence when I couldn't use it, nor know where to go, was an act of mental torture more effective than anything I'd endured in nearly twenty years in this new life.

"I see you are drawn to the Astróthyra. You may look upon it, as all do when they are summoned here, but do not approach. Only the Sky-King can command it to open, to reveal the path of the gods."

I inclined my head at Olythros' words, noting the name used on this world. Astróthyra. Gate of (or to) the Stars. A fitting name.

We walked across the large chamber, towards an archway lined with gold, silver and other jewels. No words were born on the arch, nor the walls beside it, but the fact that four Jaffa stood guard outside it. Those who had escorted us down moved to join them, save the figure with the glowing bolt on his chest. The one I assumed with Zeus' First Prime.

That figure led us into the next chamber, Olythros and Thaïs remaining at my side. If I did not know the truth, I might feel assured by their presence, since I did they were instead wardens to watch over me. Servants of the superior Goa'uld guiding me like a lamb to be devoured by an eagle.

My eyes slid over the room first, not seeking out the throne where Zeus sat. Both to pretend to show awe and fear of him, and to gain an understanding of what was around us. The room was grand, though not as grand as I would expect from a System Lord, or former one in Zeus' case.

It was not primitive, nor lacking in decoration, but there was a lingering sense that it lacked scale and reverence. As if speaking of one whose power had been diminished, but they did not wish to draw attention to such a fact.

Massive pillars flanked the central aisle, which we walked down, each inlaid with dull gold and streaked with faint cracks my eyes detected. Hints of either damage suffered once, or where the power could no longer surge through them to add a truly godly light to the chamber.

The dais at the end of the aisle was made of black stone that glistened. I'd think obsidian, but I'd never seen that stone in such size nor so polished. Three broad steps rose up the dais to where the throne rested, Zeus' feet there, open in classical sandals of the Grecian style, though made of far higher quality than anything I'd seen in Astrapolis before today.

At the base of the dais knelt a cluster of slaves- five women, each no older than Thaïs, I believed, their garments of pale blue silk doing little to cover their lithe frames nor hide the purpose for Zeus having them. At either side of the dais, two dozen Jaffa stretched out, hands grasping their staffs tightly, those unholy lights for eyes in their helms watching me, seeking any sign of disrespect or threat towards their lord.

As for the throne and the one who sat upon it, they commanded the room with a quiet, domineering presence.

The throne was crafted like bolts falling from a storm cloud. The back arched with the bolts, leading down to the rests for the Goa'uld's arms. Cloud and bolts inlaid with gems and precious stones that spoke of power, influence, and demanded respect. Behind the throne hung silk drapes, bearing his mark along with images of him seated at the top of a great mountain: a reminder that this snake had once styled himself as Ruler of Olympus.

As for the man, or alien, himself, he watched me calmly. An amused, dismissive, but curious smirk danced on his lips. He was not an immense figure, the host older, frailer than I had expected for one who called himself Zeus, yet still he commanded attention and devotion from those who didn't know better, or those who sought his favour for advancement.

His hair, silver and flowing, was bound in a circlet shaped like two great bolts made of gold. On his chest, he wore armour of darkened bronze, silver veins in it pulsing faintly under a robe that was the colour of the clouds.

As my eye found his face, the smirk grew and his eyes flashed gold: the look of an ancient, assured predator.

As the suspected First Prime and the two Goa'uld at my side fell to their knees, I did likewise, making sure to keep my eyes down. I had stolen a glance at the would-be god, and it didn't seem to offend him. I did so again, or let my gaze linger, I likely would, and my life would be all but over.

"Lord Zeus Basileus, King of the Sky and Keeper of the Storm. We bring before You the warrior Heuriskos, Chiliarchos of the Custodes Fulminis, the Shield of Your dominion. Champion of the Agon Fulminis."

I kept my head down, staying still, awaiting the response from the snake posing as a god.

"Rise."

A single word, in the voice of a Goa'uld.

We did as commanded, me once more towering over Olythros and Thaïs.

"Let me look upon the mortal whose name My people chant alongside My name."

With those words, the two Goa'uld servants and the First Prime stepped back, leaving me exposed before the former System Lord's sight. My back straightened as his eyes stared at me, that familiar golden glow of a symbiote flashing in them. I could sense the intelligence of the slug at work behind those Human eyes. That ancient intellect stared down at me, weighing, judging me with an invasive stare.

Around us, the chamber was silent.

Zeus shifted on his throne, the metal rasping against stone. His lips curled upwards further, a devious smile gracing his face.

"So, you are the one they called Electus Regis. The man who killed one of My Jaffa."

I stayed silent, sensing he wasn't yet finished.

“My priests have whispered to Me about you. How My people talk of you as if it were new scripture. Something you are worthy of, I feel. The mortal who killed an Immortal.”

He chuckled.

“Such deeds demand that even the King of the Sky must take notice.”

I lowered my head, the words to respond, to keep the truth of what I knew hidden, already formed.

“You immortal Jaffa fought with honour... my lord.”

I hesitated, not sure how exactly to address him. Perhaps I should call him a god, but I couldn't quite bring myself to do so. With reports from Thaïs having reached him, he would, I hoped, expect me not to be a simple-minded fool, cowered by his presence.

“The victory was Your will made manifest. I am but Your Instrument.”

Those words hurt to say, to place as much honesty and reverence into the idea that I belonged to this fake deity. The deep, rumbling chuckle that came from the Goa'uld suggested my words had been pleasing.

“An instrument. Yes – tempered, sharpened, and still obedient to the hand who wields it. An instrument of such craft that it might almost think itself alive.”

I bit my tongue, holding back a counter. I kept my face impassive, submissive even though my body raged at the idea I was his to control, his to wield, his to guide.

As I stood there, he rose slowly, the robes draping down, his armour making light sounds as one section brushed against another. As he descended the dais, his slaves scampered, clearing a path for the one they served, worshipped, prostrating themselves as they pulled back.

I stayed still as he stood before me, his height matching mine. That fact drew another amused sound from him even as he moved to circle me. His hand came up, grasping my forearm, my shoulder, my back and buttocks.

“Strength. Discipline. Pleasing symmetry.”

He came to a stop before me once again, that devious, unsettling smile dancing on his lips.

“Perhaps even a spark of divinity. My divinity, reflected dimly in flesh. Truly, I have chosen well in allowing My Servants to shape you.”

I kept myself outwardly calm. Inwardly, I raged like the storm he claimed to be. The desire to grasp his throat, to crush the back of his neck where that slug resided, called to me, demanded I do so. I resisted, only just. Such a move, here and now, would bring only death for me.

“Your praise is greater than I deserve, my lord.”

Zeus chuckled again.

“Modesty. A quaint human trick, useful for hiding pride. Yet pride is no sin when it serves Me.”

He stopped closer, so close that I could smell his breath, catch hints of ozone and naquadah.

“Tell Me, Chosen on the Sky-King—when you faced My Jaffa, did you feel fear?”

“Only fear of failing you, my lord.”

My words seemed to please him once more.

“Good. Fear keeps lesser creatures in their place. But remember—fear of Me is wisdom; fear of death is weakness.”

He turned, looking at Olythros.

“You see it too, Hiereus Primus? The purity of the frame, the balance of form. Flesh ready to bear glory. A vessel worthy of My storm.”

Olythros bowed deeply as a shiver raced up my spine. A vessel for him?

I felt my nails dig into my palms, my knuckles no doubt white as bone. I had feared this idea for years, expecting it was likely. I had prepared my mind for the battle that such a thing might mean, yet hearing this motherfucking snake talk about taking over my body as if I was nothing more than a tool for him to use and then, once bored, discard for another, filled me with a rage that I could feel everywhere.

My blood burned, my eyes simmered, my skin smoked, and my limbs flickered. Everything in me called on me to lash out, to try and take down this monster before me. Yet I remained still. As much as I wanted, no, needed to, that would only bring death. Or more likely, a trip to a sarcophagus, followed by my weakened mind being shattered by the Goa'uld.

No, I had to remain in control, alert, in full readiness for the battle that now seemed inevitable.

“Indeed, my lord. Your Chosen is the finest of men.”

I tensed, hearing for the first time the High Priest confirm his Goa'uld voice, removing my last embers of doubt. Even as he spoke, I lowered my head, hiding my face from these damn monsters.

“I live to serve. To fight where You Command, and die if You will it.”

The words came from my lips, but they held no meaning. I didn't believe them, nor wish them to become true.

Zeus laughed, the low, rich sound filling the chamber. Amusement edged with mockery.

“Die? No, little one. Death is a gift for failures and enemies. You are shaped to endure. To carry what lesser flesh cannot. When I march to reclaim the heavens again, I will not march alone. I require champions—vessels—through whom My thunder can speak. Those who hold a fraction of My power without coming undone.”

His finger came into view, his hand, encased in the hand ribbon, gripped my chin, lifting it so he could stare into my eyes.

“Would you bear such a gift, if I deemed you worthy? Would you carry My Lightning in your veins, if it meant becoming more than the dust you are?”

I swallowed, fighting the war in myself. I knew exactly what he was asking, what he was offering. I knew no matter how I answered, he would take what he wanted, and it filled every fibre of my being with an unholy rage. Yet, with that damn weapon so close, with dozens of Jaffa and other Goa'uld around us, and the chance this fucking monster had a sarcophagus on-hand, all doing that would bring would be pain, torture, and then, with my mind broken and shattered, death as he consumed my soul to dominate my body.

“I... I would bear whatever you command, my lord.”

Zeus stared at me, his eyes cold, clinical.

Had he seen through my lies, had he realised that I knew what he was, what he intended?

He laughed again, the sound cold, certain, sovereign.

“You will. The time for training has passed, my Shield. You are already shaped, perfected. It is only fitting that I now complete what I began.”

He let go of my chin and turned, marching back to his throne.

“The thunder must have a conduit... the storm, a vessel.”

I heard a sound from my right. A sound I knew well.

In an instant, I turned, bracing for the fight, searching for the zat.

I saw it in Thaïs' hand, a cold, clinical smile on her lips. In her eyes, a flicker of remorse.

My legs pushed me forward, carrying me to one side, seeking to escape the energy that crackled from the tip of the small weapon.

I grunted as the lightning-like surge rampaged over my body. Limbs shuddered, joints locked, and I fell to the ground.

"Impressive."

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