**Chapter 9**

**Triumphant**

“*Dread Empress Triumphant – may she never return – was widely held as the greatest diabolist to ever live, above even the Dead King. She’d summoned and bound entire legions of devils, put demons at their head and her bindings had been so well-crafted they had held for centuries after her demise*.” Akua Sahelian the Diabolist, on Dread Empress Triumphant.

“*In glorious old days, there was once a woman who broke in Evil as one would break in a stallion. From triumph to triumph did she march, west and ever pursuing, until by the shores of a great lake she met in strife a hundred priests-elect of the Hallowed. And these holy souls did scour themselves to bring forth the great spirit they worshipped, one that cast judgement upon all it beheld, and behold her it did. For that presumption she slew it, bearing tall banner, and wrote her rage in blood across a hundred trembling tribes*.” Kairos Theodosian, Tyrant of Helike, on Dread Empress Triumphant, First and Only of the Name.

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

In hindsight, Bianca admitted it had not been an intelligent idea to carve the Tower’s stanzas on her father’s throne.

But how could she have guessed there would be someone else able to discover the true meaning of the Miezan words?

There had been no one in the Lotus Casino who knew about a continent named Calernia, of the importance of Named, of diabolism and sorcery as she practised it a lifetime ago. And the Lotus Casino was certainly a beautiful prison, but in all the years she had spent here, the former Dread Empress had learned it was one particularly important information-gathering node, much like several cities lived for trade.

No one on Olympus or in the Underworld had a clue about who she was in a previous life.

Hells, until today there hadn’t been a single clue someone had ever come from Calernia or another continent of Creation.

Of course, her assumptions had to be proven wrong the day she began a ritual of godly ascension.

“A lifetime ago, I ruled and I was Triumphant.” The Demigoddess reluctantly admitted, taking a gamble. The son of Poseidon was evidently no conventional ‘hero’ from what she’d seen, and judging by his recent actions, he was unlike to scream and run away...well, maybe not very far, since this useless courtesan Goddess had closed the gates of the throne room.

“In this case, I have to say...you are very disappointing.”

Bianca di Angelo, former Dread Empress, former Diabolist, gaped.

“Excuse me? I was about to become a Goddess when you intervened and ruined my ritual!”

“Yes, and?” the audacity of this black-haired Demigod left her speechless. “With the time you spent in the Lotus Casino and around one year of preparation, this plan is barely enough to reach the lowest threshold any aspirant world conqueror takes for granted.”

The green-eyed boy stamped his foot against the red carpet, and the ground trembled slightly.

“Where are the flying fortresses darkening the skies? Where are the Legions of Terror sacking and looting hundreds of cities? Where are the demons you were so famous for?”

This Named knew a lot about her, and if there had been even the shadow of a doubt he was bluffing when he opened he cursed mouth, there was none at all left now. He had been born in a Calernian nation too, and likely long after her death, otherwise she would recognise his irritant grin. That much wasn’t in question.

“Do you have any idea how much it cost to raise a single flying fortress when the sorcery educational system is so ridiculously limited in this world?”

“Eh!”

She ignored the blonde witch’s sound of protest. The daughter of Hecate may be stronger than the average mage, but even she was decades away from being able to be considered a half-passable warlock.

“And since my dear father prevented me from using his funds as long as he was the ruling God of the Underworld, it was either building the sarcophagus for my ascension, or spend a lot of enchanted metal I wasn’t going to see back on some experiments I was far from sure they would crowned with success eventually. You might have noticed, but there’s no demon in the Underworld.”

“That,” the infuriating spawn of Poseidon smirked, “looks very much like an excuse.”

The expression of the once-Named boy returned to something approaching seriousness after a few seconds.

“Still, the absence of demons as we know it is a valid point and-“

“**You will finish this conversation once you are in the Fields of Punishment**!”

The Goddess of Spring – which doubled as the Queen of Hell, of course – flared up dramatically and Bianca cursed loudly. Seriously? She was going to incinerate them by revealing her divine form and then massacring whoever survived the first seconds of that?

The ex-Diabolist had her doubts about how seriously the so-called ‘Ancient Laws’ were enforced, and today was going to answer her question in a very-

“There will be none of that.”

The Trident’s power washed over the entire throne room – it wasn’t an imaginative turn of sentence, they were really all washed up by a great wave of water, though it somehow only washed them, they weren’t projected everywhere by the impact.

The spells she was preparing were extinguished.

But the effect on the Goddess she had only called ‘step-mother’ when she wanted to taunt her was far more dramatic.

Every warning sign her divine form was about to come out was gone.

“**What...what have you done, Demigod**?”

Bianca honestly chuckled as she saw the sheer hatred her father’s wife looked at Perseus Jackson. And in the blink of an eye, there also was a tiny moment of uncertainty.

Ah, the arrogant bitch of Spring had really thought this would be like clicking her fingers and exterminating the insects in front of her without an effort.

And now it was no longer the case.

“I have forbidden you to use your divine form,” the black-haired boy who had ruined her plans – and now was in the process of destroying Persephone’s too – courteously explained. “The moment I recovered the Trident, I tried to guess which sort of power my father had imbued in it. I mean, creating earthquakes, bolstering his macro-hydrokinesis and everything like that are certainly useful stuff, but I wondered if there was other functions like Zeus’ Master Bolt is supposed to have. Well, I was right. As long as this function is activated, I can stop you from unleashing your divine form.”

“Wait a minute...” Bianca was beginning to be really, really angry. “The Master Bolt is capable of that too?”

“Of course! Didn’t Hera inform you of this power before she let you use it in your ascension ritual?”

No. No, she hadn’t.

And now she wondered how ‘easy’ it had been to manipulate the Goddess of Marriage into accomplishing her objectives. Not to mention how quickly the wife of Zeus had arrived despite the little problem neither her little brother nor Bianca had summoned her!

There was however one important question to be asked.

“If the Trident has indeed such a power, why didn’t you use it on Hera a few minutes ago?

“It only works on lesser Gods and Goddesses clearly,” the son of Poseidon shrugged. “Hades and Hera are far too powerful to be affected by the power of the Trident. And while it’s only a guess, I’m ready to bet the other symbols of powers of the Olympians have the power to counteract this very useful ability. The Elder Cyclopes built the Master Bolt, the Trident, and the Helm of Darkness to be equal instruments of war; it would be surprising if they hadn’t added powers like that just in case one was stolen.”

“I see,” another blonde boy cleared his throat as Persephone threw a sort of nasty black-coloured spell at Jackson, who negated it without effort. “And does it have other powers which are really useful against a Goddess wanting you dead?”

“As it happens...” the grin was back, and Bianca felt her anger rise up once more, “it creates a direct link between my current location and my father’s private rum cellar.”

It wasn’t anger anymore. It was just...an urge to strangle this damned ‘hero’. Especially as the Minotaur took a crystal glass from somewhere and one second later, one of the Trident’s three prongs was filling up the glass with an amber-colour liquid.

“Four hundred years of age,” the monster rumbled after emptying the crystalline container in less time than it took to say it. “There aren’t making rum like that anymore...makes me remember the times I was hunting sons of Zeus in the Sea of-“

“**I don’t like your mockeries, *heroes***.”

“Bah, all will be forgiven when we swear each other eternal friendship,” Perseus Jackson replied, visibly unconcerned by the furious expression of Persephone. And a second crystal glass appeared from...somewhere. A second later, it was in the process of being filled. “Are you perchance interested in a glass of rum?”

“**ALECTO! MEGAERA! TISIPHONE! KILL THIS DEMIGOD...SLOWLY**!”

Bianca turned her head, and sure enough, the petrifying spell she had used to neutralise the Erinyes had just ended...

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A Goddess wanted to kill them, and Jackson and the Minotaur were busy drinking rum.

Ethan wanted to say it was his mother’s curse striking, but he was realistic; more likely, it was the fault of the son of Poseidon from beginning to the end.

“Jackson!” He barked. “If you don’t stop drinking and help us fight the Furies, I am going to stab you with a poisoned dagger!”

“My treacherous lieutenant, you aren’t required to fight those BDSM ladies...hey, be careful!” the red-clothed Fury had tried to strike the crystal glass in his hand with her nine-tailed whip. Somehow, the son of the Earthshaker had managed to evade.

“You won’t have rum where you are going,” the scantily-clothed servant of Hades bared her teeth, and as she smiled, her visage and her body transformed. Wings grew on her back, red-covered boots became monstrous talons. “I am Alecto, and I am going to enjoy breaking you once you will be in the torture pens of the Fields.”

Her irisless dark red eyes fell upon the daughter of Hades.

“Especially you, usurper. You repeated countless times what humiliations you were going to inflict upon us when you became the Underworld Mistress. But you have failed. And now you are going to pay the price.”

“Since I am the reason she failed,” Perseus didn’t miss this opportunity to intervene and spread chaos, “shouldn’t we be considered best friends? I mean, I did your job while you were very charming statues and-“

“You,” the blue-clothed Erinye hissed, “SHUT UP!”

“Murderer,” the third ‘sister’ mumbled. “Murder, murderer, murderess, murder.”

“Come on, I have not killed that many people recently...” the son of Poseidon complained.

“There were those mortals in Caligula’s Circus Maximus,” Jake Mason helpfully brayed.

“Do the skeletons before Hades’ fortress count?” Miranda asked while inspecting her nails.

“We boiled a few billion shades in the Asphodel Sea,” Lou Ellen Blackstone mentioned while yawning.

“You’re all terrible subordinates!” the mad Demigod proclaimed while feigning to have his heart mortally injured. “Since you are so critical of my efforts, I have decided none of you ingrates will fight these nice old ladies!”

“MURDER?” Ouch, apparently the green-clad Erinye appreciated...err...moderately...been called ‘old’.

“And how do you intent to fight us, son of Poseidon?” the white-haired Fury stretched, making sure to expose most of her body since her blue BDSM attire wasn’t up to the job of hiding it. Ethan winced, because it was evident this one was nothing but muscles and lethality in one infernal shell. No wonder the three were Hades’ top enforcers. “We were mistresses of martial arts while your great-great-great-grandparents were yet to be born. We slaughtered armies before the first European conquistador arrived to the American shores. You intend to fight us with the Trident? We have seen it into action hundreds of times. We have analysed its weaknesses. And I seriously doubt you are able to master its considerable powers in a few minutes...”

“You are right, my dear Megaera, I have not.” Perseus breathed out, and presented a tormented look. “May the Gods forgive me for what I am about to do, for it is their role and I have no morals. **Dakota, open your mouth**.”

“Eh?” the son of Bacchus was caught by surprise like Ethan. “Why...NO!”

“I’m sorry, but desperate circumstances will only be solved by desperate measures.”

And the Minotaur began to pour the barrel of Eleutherian wine into Dakota’s mouth.

“That’s your strategy?” Alecto the Fury snorted. “Forcing a human to drink wine? Yes, how dreadful. I am absolutely terrified. Megaera, you owe me a favour. I’m using it. I want first blood.”

“Fine...do it quickly...it stopped being funny long ago.”

The red-clad Fury lunged, and the Minotaur plunged to avoid the barbed whip.

Ethan shouted something, all the while drawing his sword and avoiding being skewered by another whip and-

The action mostly stopped as Alecto had stopped her attack.

The arrogance of the bloodthirsty Fury had vanished, and it wasn’t hard to discover why: Dakota had seized her whip bare-handed, and for all her strength, the enforcer of Hades’ will wasn’t able to force him to release her weapon.

“How? You are not a son of the weakest Olympian, you are-“

A fist hit her right just below her breasts and put an end to this questioning.

The Fury was thrown in the air like she had been struck by the fist of an angry God.

Alecto slammed into the throne’s room gates, and made a significant dent into them, though they didn’t collapse. Somehow, the red-clad Erinye – and several parts of her attire fell due to the shock – managed to land on her feet, despite the numerous bleeding cuts she was showing.

 “You are not going to get away with-“

Dakota was already on the move, and the son of Nemesis feared the worst. The Circus Maximus’ rampage had not been that long ago to forget-

Ethan was honest enough to acknowledge true despair as the son of Bacchus grabbed Megaera...and then went on to languorously kiss her.

Yes, he was kissing her. Megaera. A Fury. A ‘Kindly One’, one of the chief enforcers of Hades’ realm. Sure, he had done it with women summoned by Caligula, but...this was one the three Furies.

And...

The kiss was long and deep. And the Fury, after looking like she was going to kill him with her eyes alone, returned the kiss.

“Sanity is dead,” Ethan commented and began to wonder how many barrels of Lethe water it was going to take for him to forget this ‘Great Quest’.

“REMOVE YOUR UGLY PAWS FROM MY SISTER!” Alecto shouted.

“MURDERER! MURDER! MURDERER! MURDER!” Tisiphone shouted.

Dakota, who had been so far concerned about putting his tongue into the Fury’s mouth, abandoned his conquest, kissed her hand, and then tore his new armour and the T-shirt under it.

Oh...by all the Hells...

“You want to stop me?” for the first time, Ethan noticed how many common points the Roman Demigod had with his father the Director of New Byzantium. His face...there was just madness awaiting them. Please, please, please Gods! Please, let there be another exit...

“Definitely,” Alecto’s monstrous face replied.

“Murder!” Tisiphone shouted.

“Sisters, it isn’t-“

“COWABUNGA IT IS!”

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Drew was already giggling as Dakota kissed and forced a Fury to submit with an exchange of tongues.

“COWABUNGA IT IS!”

The daughter of Aphrodite began to laugh hysterically as the Roman charged Alecto and Tisiphone wearing absolutely nothing above the belt.

For anyone sane, this would be a death sentence.

But Dakota McDonald wasn’t sane anymore, courtesy of having drunk so much Eleutherian wine that it was certainly a capital offense on Olympus.

The whips of the two Erinyes missed, and-

“Ouch, that got to hurt,” Luke winced.

“Isn’t it illegal to do that?”

“All’s fair in love and war,” Drew giggled, before grimacing as...oh, no.

“Look elsewhere, Nico,” the Lightning Thief ordered. “You’re too young to watch this kind of fight.”

“But sister...why is this Demigod spanking Alecto?”

“Look elsewhere, I said!” the daughter of Hades commanded with a voice of steel. “You’re too young to understand.”

“The censorship is soon going to classify this adventure as a porn movie,” Jake commented sadly. “Jackson, where did you find a camera?”

“Hmm? Oh, I just wanted a souvenir of our adventures, and there were so interesting techno-magic devices in the Circus Maximus...”

“You want blackmail, you mean,” Drew took two step forwards and grabbed the camera. “Let the professionals do this, son of Poseidon. You need to show all reactions to this formidable...sexual assault...I mean sexual fight.”

Including the one of Persephone, who, on her throne, was in a state of shock. And...was the daughter of Demeter *blushing*?

Anyway it was evident that for all their ‘experience’ against Demigods, the Furies were not used to fight a Demigod doped on Eleutherian wine.

As it wasn’t a handicap enough, Megaera wasn’t really fighting; oh sure once or twice the white-haired ‘Kindly One’ was using her whip – the blue dominatrix clothes to distinguish her were no longer on her, that was all she was going to say – but if she was scratching Dakota’s skin with her claws, it wasn’t because she wanted to injure him severely.

“Murderer! Murderer!” The rage of the green-clad Tisiphone was volcanic...and didn’t end up doing anything, as the member of the Suicide Squad put her asleep in a sort of martial move...err...it had to be illegal to do that in a lot of US states...as far as Drew was aware.

“Tisiphone!” Alecto reacted even more violently. “Criminal! I condemn you to a million years of torments and-“

Once again, her whip was stopped by her enemy’s grabbing it with his bare hands, and then forcing her to come closer to him as Dakota pulled and pulled until even an Erinye’s strength failed.

And when Alecto was finally at sword’s range...Dakota used his head as a hammer and the belly of Alecto as the anvil.

Fuelled by the madness of a drunk Demigod, the ‘projectile’ was irresistible, and soon the red-clad Fury was unconscious on the very damaged carpet of Hades. If they hadn’t already caused billions of damage and been granted an amnesty, the daughter of Aphrodite would likely be a bit worried.

As it was, Drew was too busy giggling.

Dakota embraced Megaera, and whispered a few words in her ear before once again kissing her deeply.

The Fury unfurled her wings, blue smoke coalesced around them...and one instant later, the two were gone.

“Err...Jackson?”

“Yes, my treacherous lieutenant?”

“What...what do you think will happen once the Eleutherian wine’s madness effect will disappear?”

“First, it’s not a madness effect,” the son of Poseidon had grabbed a notebook from somewhere and now was writing frenetically a lot of things on it. “The Eleutherian wine doesn’t turn you mad; it just suppressed the chains of inhibition that civilisation and all these pesky cultural imperatives are desperately trying to enforce upon us. And second...to be honest, I think the Eleutherian wine’s effect is cumulative.”

“You knew this, and you forced him to drink *that*?” Jason brayed.

“Released from the foolish idiocies society is trying to impose upon him, Dakota is a far more interesting heroic figure than when he isn’t drunk.”

“I don’t think we can call what he did *heroic*, Jackson,” Luke intervened.

“Well, by the standards of the Trojan War, it was heroic,” the son of Poseidon insisted.

“Your standards are completely-“

“**Perseus Jackson...**” the furious voice of Persephone was back. Ah damn. They still had a Goddess to fight, right? “**I’m beginning to see why my father hates you**.”

“Let me reassure you, oh Lady Persephone,” the Demigod replied while playing with his Trident and activating something which once again conjured a shower-sized jet which struck the Queen of Hell right in the face. “The feeling is perfectly reciprocal.”

“**I am going to take great pleasure watching you die! Winds of the Mortis plains, hear my command! Earth of the dark devastation, listen to my anger! Transport to this very palace the being whose hatred of Perseus Jackson surpasses all other mortal and immortal souls**!”

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**“Winds of the Mortis plains, hear my command! Earth of the dark devastation, listen to my anger! Transport to this very palace the being whose hatred of Perseus Jackson surpasses all other mortal and immortal souls!”**

Zoë Nightshade, senior lieutenant of Artemis, felt for the first time of the fight hope.

At last, Persephone had done the intelligent thing and summoned Zeus.

Perseus would be severely punished – hopefully with something that was going to ensure a painful demise – and Artemis would be able to intervene and remove this ridiculous silver armour.

Dark smoke billowed and darkened half of the hall.

And when it cleared, it revealed-

“**What**?”

“Oh, no...” she murmured. “It has to be a nightmare...”

“Dear Persephone,” because of course Perseus Jackson was the first to react in a coherent manner. “I thank you very much for bringing back the missing member of the Suicide Squad.”

The millennia-old Huntress closed her eyes for a second, before reopening them, hoping it had been a hallucination.

But no, there still was a large, *pink crocodile* between them and the thrones of the Underworld.

“So it is the being in this world whose hatred for me know no bounds,” the son of Poseidon chuckled, “hello, Scipio, I was wondering where you had fled to. Met plenty of saurian friends lately?”

“This...” the Lightning Thief said in a tone which was drowning in incredulity, not that Zoë was blaming her, “this crocodile is a member of your group.”

“*Former* member,” the madman leading the ‘Suicide Squad’ corrected. “I had to punish him for his pathetic assassination attempt. I’m sure you understand; this company has standards. I tolerate one or two murders per adventure if it’s truly necessary, but I don’t like the people who swear to be the daggers of Thunderous Big Head.”

“You dare disrespecting the Master of Olympus?”

“I dare disrespecting a lot of people,” Perseus answered calmly. The Huntress had to admit that this was nothing but the truth. “Scipio, if you attack, I promise you a fate worse than the one which transformed you into a crocodile...”

Obviously, the Demigod transformed into a pink reptile didn’t listen to the warning, and lunged forwards with a speed normal crocodiles were unable to sustain for long.

As fast as ‘Scipio’ was, Jackson was faster, and the Trident of Poseidon hit the snout violently before the crocodile’s jaws could close on Jackson’s limbs.

There was a shockwave and for several seconds, water clouded the fighting scene.

When they were able to watch again, Zoë gasped.

Scipio Varus was still a pink crocodile. That much had not changed.

What had...there was no good way to say it...the changed son of Janus was trapped into a block of ice.

“The powers of the Trident are very impressive,” the Earthshaker’s son commented like he was doing this every morning. “I’m really going to have to ask my father if I can borrow it a few months the time to solve a few mysteries of this world...”

Zoë Nightshade shivered. Perseus Jackson unleashed with the Trident of Poseidon. This poor innocent world wouldn’t survive a month.

“Now I’m thinking to transport our dear Scipio somewhere snowy near Siberia. That way, once scientists discover him, we will have a lot of fun reading the newspapers’ articles and-“

“**You will do nothing of the sort**!” Persephone snarled. A monstrous telekinetic attack blasted away the iceberg cube like it was a toy until it struck the hall’s doors. Fortunately...or unfortunately, everyone had managed to evade in time.

Everyone excepted the two unconscious Furies. Alecto and Tisiphone were unconscious, and couldn’t run away. When the ice cube finally stopped, there was nothing but monster’s dust left of them.

Jackson, in the mean time, had conjured a wave and an ice surfboard to taunt further the angry Goddess.

“The final boss is authorised to enter the arena.”

“**Your screaming skull will ornate a pike above this fortress’ entrance**,” Persephone promised while standing from her throne.

This time the divine daughter of Demeter truly conjured godly armour the very colour of the night to protect herself. It managed to be elegant and cruel, with plenty of dark spikes and skulls used for the decoration.

Her blonde hair disappeared under a helmet representing a screaming Banshee, and an aura of despair and darkness engulfed the throne hall.

“At last you have recognised what every apprentice-Tyrant learns on the first steps of his or her journey. If you have to really kill someone, do it yourself.”

“**You will not laugh when you will share Sisyphus’ eternal torment**.”

“A pity,” Perseus Jackson continued, “you haven’t learned the second lesson. Don’t give time to a sorceress, because they will use the opportunity to prepare a powerful spell against you.”

And the daughter of Hecate summoned her black flames once more.

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Clarisse struck the moment Lou Ellen’s hammered Persephone with her fancy hell-flames.

She immediately regretted it.

The armour was a bit damaged, yes, but it just meant *Carnifex* was unable to pierce the Goddess’ skin.

“**Did you really think this pathetic attack was enough to hurt a God? Let me show you how it’s done**!”

The enemy punched her. Hard.

Clarisse saw the blow coming, but as the black-armoured harpy seized her arm impossibly fast, she was unable to throw herself to the ground.

There was a monumental CLANG!

And then she was flying...until a large mattress-soft water wave stopped her from receiving the crocodile treatment.

“Jackson, your spear isn’t able to hurt Gods!”

“Your protests have been duly noted, and I will send them to your father as soon as possible!” Perseus replied hastily while dodging many arrows of darkness sent by the angry Goddess.

“**DIE**!”

This time, the attack was like a million plants corrupted by hell were thrown at the same place to form something...very dangerous.

It didn’t work.

When the water washed the darkness away, the Lightning Thief, Lou Ellen, and Perseus were still standing. In the daughter of Hecate’s case, her armour was completely ruined, as were the clothes underneath her.

“**One more traitor which bathed in the Styx**?” Persephone’s eyes burned in black fire, and it wasn’t her imagination describing things which weren’t there.

“What can I say, your step-daughter has some powerful subordinates which aren’t taking ‘no’ for an answer...”

“**SHE IS NOT MY STEP-DAUGHTER**!”

“DO YOU THINK I CONSIDERED YOU MY MOM FOR A SECOND, TOOTHLESS CRONE?

Clarisse watched in amazement as once again Jackson found himself somewhere few people wanted to be: on one side, he had the Lightning Thief, on the other side, a Goddess who wanted all of them dead.

“**If my husband had listened to my advice, you two would have been killed before you celebrated your first birthday**!”

“And if *you* had listened to my advice, you would have not begun this fight.” Jackson pointed the Trident like one pointed a portable weapon of mass destruction at the enemy...which it certainly was, admittedly. “Seriously, do you think Lord Hades is going to be very happy how this little disagreement damaged his throne room?”

“**He will forgive me**,” the Goddess affirmed as she tried to skewer Jackson and her husband’s daughter. The rest of the Suicide Squad, in the mean time, made a tactical retreat towards the ice cube and the blocked exit. It was just to avoid being caught in the magical collateral damage, she swore it on her father’s spear...

“Ah, but he forgave Miss di Angelo too!”

Sometimes...okay, most of the time, Perseus Jackson really sounded like he had a death wish.

“He did,” the Lightning Thief struck the Goddess with a sort of red aura, and for the first time, there was a minuscule wound where Persephone’s armour had failed. “I wonder if he would the same if you are killed?”

“I would prefer if you didn’t,” the green-eyed boy smirked just before conjuring another big wave which nearly drowned the blonde Goddess. “One of my best plans to make sure Zeus doesn’t see the end of this century is to unite Hades and my father into a big anti-Olympus coalition. Killing the Master of Underworld’s wife would certainly considerably delay if not outright ruin my schemes.”

“**I won’t let you trigger another war against my father**!”

“At the risk of enouncing some monumental truths...killing me while I’m sworn to return the Trident to Atlantis, would be akin to declaring war to Poseidon,” Perseus joyously declared before striking Persephone in the head. The head of the Goddess was pretty much undamaged. The helmet protecting said head was however going to need a lot of repairs before it played this role again. “And may I suggest you be careful when your husband’s opinion is involved? After all, the Goddess of Marriage’s throne is soon going to be vacant.”

“**I don’t know what you’re implying, but he is my husband**!” Persephone snarled as unlike Clarisse herself, Bianca di Angelo danced around her attacks effortlessly.

“I’m implying that it is going to be *divorce season* on the new Olympian TV Show once our revelations are made public. I foresee a few difficulties in the royal couple of the great mountain, if you know what I mean. Are you sure you want to add your union on the list of those in need for some old-fashioned lawyer’s guidance?”

“**Forget the Fields of Punishment**!” The Goddess erupted in hatred. “**I will torture you myself, and then your shrieking soul will be sent to the Pits of Tartarus**!”

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Before the madness of this ‘Great Quest’, Lou Ellen had thought that she was definitely among the three most powerful practitioners of New Byzantium.

Now the teenage daughter of Hecate was rather certain she wasn’t. Or if she was, it was at because she was ranked third. The first two seats were not available.

Perseus Jackson may swear he wasn’t a sorcerer or someone who practised magic, but the way he conjured waves, ice spears and a lot of liquid and solid attacks to prevent Persephone from killing him...well, it was obvious his proclamation was nothing but a lie.

The black-haired son of Poseidon wasn’t always surrounded by water, but he was clearly mastering Hydrokinesis to a point it was difficult to believe it couldn’t be anything else but sorcery. And when he combined it with enchanted fire, weapons, and other things...

Nevertheless, Lou Ellen wasn’t exactly jealous. In the many days they had spent with Perseus Jackson, be it in the Labyrinth or the Underworld, she had learned that the boy had great powers, but also great insanity inside him too. How else did you explain the sheer number of artefacts he had stolen from divine-owned shops and warehouses?

When the Olympians were going to review what they did during this Quest, the only thing Perseus was going to be able to be declared innocent with was that he hadn’t plunged into the waters of the Styx.

Everything else he had done. And in the case of infuriating Gods and Goddesses, it was almost a tradition by that point.

“**So you haven’t bathed in the Styx**,” Persephone realised when the son of Poseidon began to bleed – it was a minor cut on his right arm, but apparently the Goddess of Spring had finally managed to wound him slightly. “**Good. This will make things easier**.”

“So you are completely unable to discover if someone has taken Achilles’ Curse upon himself without hurting him,” Perseus taunted her by imitating her voice. “Good. This will make things more interesting.”

“**You aren’t going to live another day, never mind this month**.” His enemy promised. “**Do you really think any Olympian is going to raise his voice to defend you? Do you really think anyone will care about your survival**?”

“Congratulations, you understand nothing,” Perseus fended another attempt to decapitate him as Persephone’s hands became enormous claws radiating darkness. “It isn’t about surviving the Quest...though frankly, I am a bit puzzled why you think your mother, uncles, aunts, and cousins are going to be successful killing me your father and his agents have a few years of failure under their belts.”

“**You won’t be able to hide**-“

Unfortunately for Persephone, she had focused too much on her first opponent, and the second used it viciously. Bianca di Angelo imitated the ‘hands-turning-to-claws’ effect, and her new natural weapons successfully pierced the divine flesh in Persephone’s back.

The Lightning Thief was quick, but not so quick that everyone didn’t see her licking her new claws, drinking the drops of the golden ichor of her ‘stepmother’.

Then her claws became human fingers again.

The Italian Demigoddess seemed more disappointed than anything else.

“Damn you for interrupting my ritual so early, if I had a few more minutes of divine essence-“

“You know, when I dreamed about a hypothetical meeting, I didn’t think you would sound like a spoiled child, oh daughter of Hades.”

“Excuse me?”

 “I mean, we all know Persephone is Daddy’s little girl, whose main claim to fame is being kidnapped. Then the duo Sky-Underworld duo tried to decide or not if she was suitable as a breeding mare or not-“

“**You have just increased your session of torture by**-“

“But you, my dear, you were the greatest conqueror among the Dread Empresses. The chroniclers believed it was your boundless ambition which was guiding you, but more recently, I have come to believe you are simply a spoiled child.”

This time Perseus had gone too far. Both the Lightning Thief and the Queen of Hell had enough, and blasted him with sorcerous attacks at the same time.

The Trident allowed him to survive, but the shockwave threw him away from the throne’s stairs where most of the fighting was done.

In fact, the son of Poseidon managed to crash just on her left, narrowly missing the ice imprisoning the pink crocodile.

“I am going to feel it tomorrow,” he definitely wasn’t injured badly by it, since his grin was back.

“**You will feel nothing but the whips of the Furies cutting you piece by piece and**-“

Perseus ignored Persephone – as always – and instead went closer to her...and kissed her?

What? Why was he-

Her thoughts went completely...chaotic.

“For luck,” the green-eyed boy smirked before charging once again in the melee.

“That was my first kiss, bastard!” Lou Ellen shouted. The daughter of Hecate threw an orb of fire after him, but of course he avoided it...

“Let see the positive side,” Ethan Nakamura commented.

“There’s a positive side?” Luke wondered loudly.

“Sure. I just won a bet. Jackson definitely likes girls...maybe less than he try to infuriate people, but he likes them.”

“That, or he simply tries to antagonise every powerful sorceress he meets,” Miranda smirked, sticking her tongue at Lou.

Olympus and the Underworld damn it, now everyone in New Byzantium was going to know what had happened...

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About an hour ago, or so it seemed to her senses, Bianca had been told by her father that if she had not gone with a sneak attack to neutralise Persephone and him, she wouldn’t have won.

As much as she wanted to deny it, the former Dread Empress knew it was true.

Even with the...let’s call it ‘help’...yes, the help of Perseus Jackson, Bianca was unable to vanquish Persephone.

This was maddening.

Persephone was a weak Goddess. Her equipment was sub-par; it had been too easy to demolish it, and evidently she had no replacement available.

But all for her weaknesses, her lack of skill with a spear, and the son of Poseidon preventing Hades’ wife from incinerating them with her divine form, two Named weren’t able to defeat her.

They had made the pale skin bleed, but the trickle of golden ichor was insignificant.

Persephone wasn’t fatally wounded. By all the demons of Creation, if they continued to fight like this, more likely they were going to die of exhaustion before Persephone lost a hundredth of her strength.

“Jackson! Do you have a strategy to bring her low?” the former ruler of Praes asked as she struck twice more the chest of Persephone, ruining what was left of the divine-crafted armour. “And stop laughing!”

“I thought you had one, given how enthusiastic you were stabbing her!” Of course, while the Demigod stopped laughing, he still had his eternally-cursed smirk.

“**I’m here, you know**,” the harpy grimaced, before trying to stab her once more. “**And I won’t let you drink my power again, bastard**.”

“You might not have noticed given your titanic sense of self-righteousness,” Bianca retorted, “but I did it only once. I won’t do it again. I don’t intend to replace the claim I made on father’s throne, thank you very much.”

“**What do you imply, bastard**?”

If Persephone thought she was going to hurt her by throwing her illegitimacy in her face, the Spring Goddess was going to wait a long, long time.

Every time she had been born so far, Bianca was born a bastard. The only thing which had changed the second time was that her genitor was divine, not that her mother had given birth outside the ‘sacred bonds’ of marriage.

“She implies,” Perseus Jackson smiled, “that your power is too weak to be worth usurping. I totally agree with her.”

The Trident-armed Demigod summoned another wave to extinguish the flames and the spells Persephone had sent in his direction.

“Your power is incredibly weak. I think that if Hades hadn’t bolstered your power by giving you the Crown of the Underworld, you wouldn’t be able to fight us seriously.”

“**But he did, and the moment you will make a mistake, your souls will be mine**!”

“Promises, promises...”

Was the other Demigod fundamentally unable to taunt her? Bianca had met hundreds of Heroes and Villains, plus hundreds of other Named during her conquests, and she didn’t remember one being half as annoying as Perseus Jackson.

“I have a strategy. Are you able to cast a variant of the Nightmare’s Secret?”

“Yes,” the teenage girl whose soul had once been Dread Empress Triumphant answered. “I can. But what good it will do?”

The Nightmare’s Secret revealed to the caster the greatest fear of the being you wanted to target.

When she had been Triumphant, Bianca had used it several times, mainly against heroes who managed to survive a skirmish against her.

But she had never tried to do it against a Goddess or someone of that level of power. What good would it do? Persephone was a Goddess, assuming her greatest fear was Typhon being freed or something else, it wasn’t like they could even conjure an illusion of the deed to frighten her father’s harpy...

“My dear, if I knew the secret behind that question, I wouldn’t ask you to cast the spell, no?”

The gates chose this moment to be reopened, forcing the idle Demigods to stand against a tide of halberd-armed skeletons.

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“That’s cheating! I approve!”

Annabeth grimaced and imagined she was stabbing Jackson instead of the animated skeleton her short sword had decapitated.

It appeased her anger a bit...and the daughter of Athena went on to stab and sever more animated bones.

“Jackson!” Luke called out. “Could you please stop antagonising the Hell Goddess? Some of us are trying to fight the skeleton waves while you’re fighting her!”

On her right, the son of Hades summoned more skeletons, creating a miniature fratricidal undead battle.

“I deeply apologise, my heroic lieutenant!” The son of Poseidon of course did the very opposite thing he promised. “You heard that, Spring Goddess? Sending useless skeletons isn’t working!”

“JACKSON!” Zoë Nightshade shouted.

Annabeth gritted her teeth and increased the pace of her strikes...and if her weapon struck viciously the skeletons between their legs when she could do it safely, then it was a mere coincidence.

The blonde Demigoddess needed that stress-reliever, especially as more skeletons were storming in. Persephone had realised she wasn’t up to the job, and the barred gates had opened...revealing the small army waiting outside.

Fortunately, the Minotaur had thrown itself in the melee first, meaning the Demigods had just to kill the bone warriors which had survived the son of Pasiphaë and his enormous big axe.

“This is the Nightmare’s secret, Jackson!” the Lightning Thief exclaimed while doing a near-impossible acrobatic move to avoid being roasted by the infernal flames of Persephone. “Now your strategy!”

“Well, since you asked...a mass illusion will be sufficient, I think.”

The entire world became blue for several seconds.

And when it ended, everything had changed.

“YES!” Annabeth shouted, as her old body was gone, and now she was a magnificent arachnid.

But why was she feeling like she was in her human’s body?

And why were the others looking like spiders too?

Only she had a spider’s soul!

No. No, this was just an illusion. Annabeth hadn’t eight legs. She hadn’t the physical means to weave spider silk. The Demigoddess couldn’t spread her web.

Damn him.

“I hate you Jackson!” But her voice unravelled to be inaudible.

“**SPIDERS! I HATE SPIDERS**!” Hades’ wife shrieked and threw multiple orbs of hell-flame, poisonous spikes, and multiple arrows of darkness. “**SPIDERS! DON’T APPROACH ME**!”

All missed of course, but part of the throne room was set aflame...just as Perseus-spider struck.

Persephone, Goddess of Spring, was injured near her left shoulder. Instantly, all skeletons summoned froze instantly – something which transformed the battle in a one-sided Minotaur-made thrashing.

And then the Lightning Thief added her own magic to the inferno.

“**If Creation is not mine, what need is there to be a Creation at all**? **Dawn of the Abyss**!” Bianca di Angelo hissed in Ancient Greek, and as the flames burned, the Demigoddess looked very much like a madwoman. A fissure opened in the middle of Hades’ fortress, and flames and hells were summoned.

Persephone didn’t avoid the attack.

And as the battle ceased, the sound of Zeus’ daughter hitting her own throne and collapsing in a fashion which had nothing to do with grace or elegance struck like the death knell of an era.

In the seconds after, the only sound to break the silence was the lapping of the wave Perseus Jackson had conjured to extinguish the fires before they were too out of control.

The illusion of their spider-selves broke. Annabeth felt a twinge of unease...and then decided to ignore it.

There was more important at stake.

The madman had done it. Sure, he had the Lightning Thief’s help. True, Persephone was not a martial Goddess. And yes, the son of Poseidon had the Trident to balance the scales and prevent the immortal from revealing to them her divine form.

But even after taking into consideration the strategic and tactical advantages...

Perseus Jackson had engineered the defeat of a Goddess.

Gods, how were Olympus and New Byzantium going to react?

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No one laughed or cheered as the Lightning Thief took golden manacles out of her pocket – most likely built from the same metal she had used in the cages and her unholy sarcophagus – and used them on Persephone’s unconscious divine body.

Maybe there should have been, Miranda acknowledged.

But by the harvests of her mother, how do you react when someone has done something you knew was utterly impossible?

The Demigoddess calmed her bronze ivy and tried to think calmly. It was more difficult than expected, and it wasn’t because her self-control was bad or she was astonished by the level of destruction they had unleashed on Hades’ hellish-themed decoration.

Winning against a Goddess or a God was something which was utterly and completely impossible if you weren’t a divine being yourself...or empowered by one.

And yes, it didn’t stop every Demigod and Demigoddess to have thought about defeating a member of the Greek-Roman Pantheon. The immortals were jerks – if you wanted to stay polite – and their behaviour often made the worst dictators in history look like models of humility, reason, and tolerance.

But everyone at New Byzantium and outside knew armed rebellion was pointless. There always were some whispers that some Questers were searching for allies like the Titans and the Elder Giants of the legends, but that was all they were: whispers.

The reality, and nothing during their Great Quest had convinced Miranda to change her mind on the subject, was that the Olympians were far too powerful to wage war against.

Yes, Pasiphaë, Caligula and her sister, and some other people had dreams of usurpation. And because they had, they hid in a Zone Mortalis for centuries, and they would likely do so for centuries after they were all dead. Jackson hadn’t said it, but Miranda was convinced that for an Olympian to overthrown, there would need to be a climatic fight between Apollo and Caligula. And the rest of Olympus was not going to stand aside and let the Roman pretender take the seat reserved to Zeus’ son.

The son of Poseidon spread a lot of chaos in his wake, but one had to face the truth: every time he had to fight a deity, it had been a contest of manipulation, trickery, lies, and deeds which required a great deal of ingenuity.

But now Persephone was defeated.

And that changed...*everything*.

The daughter of Demeter was almost afraid to think about all the repercussions of this battle. They were too gigantic to not be worrying.

As the silence reigned, Bianca di Angelo continued putting golden metal on her ‘not-stepmother’. Hades’ daughter in fact went so far as to levitate the Goddess’ huge body back on her personal throne before chaining her hands, legs, and neck.

“I think you can stop,” Perseus obviously had to comment. “Without outside intervention, she isn’t going to escape those bounds.”

“Excuse me if I don’t want to fight her a second time!” the dark-haired Demigoddess retorted.

“I don’t think it has anything to do with our dear Persephone being able or unable to escape these manacles. I am more of the opinion you have a grudge against your stepmother.”

“For the last time, she is not...” the girl who had stolen the symbol of power of Zeus frowned before realisation lit her face. “You’re not going to stop aren’t you?”

“What could possibly give you that idea?” the voice was so virtuous everyone among the Suicide Squad should be convinced of its falsehood. “Now we have to prepare our version of events about what happened here.

“Oh, and how are you going to convince my father?” Bianca di Angelo asked sarcastically.

“It’s simple,” Perseus Jackson played with the Trident before seizing another crystal glass, which he promptly filled with rum and handed it to Asterius the Minotaur. “It’s all Hera’s fault.”

A gigantic circle of fire opened several feet above the carpet in the middle of the throne room, and as if her name had summoned her, the Queen of the Gods jumped through it.

But it wasn’t the warrior Goddess they had seen what felt like one hour ago. This Hera had immaculate armour, golden spear, and an arrogant stance.

This one however looked very much like she was been broken. Her armour was blackened in several places, when it wasn’t presenting major holes in the divine-forged metal. The spear was broken...badly.

Most of her face was covered in black dust and minor wounds.

Hades had obviously not managed to defeat Hades – given how frenetically Hera looked in every direction, the Master of the Underworld was only seconds away from returning here – but the Master Bolt remained in her right hand.

On the other hand, Miranda admitted that when her eyes fell upon Persephone’s unconscious body, the Olympian’s expression was really comical.

It was only a guess, but...

Maybe the weakening of the prison that Jackson had done wasn’t the only reason Persephone had freed herself so quickly.

“**What happened here**?”

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It was hard not to cackle.

But there were compensations: the daughter of Aphrodite had the camera, and Hera’s astonishment had been duly recorded for posterity and New Byzantium.

“**What happened here**?”

It was true their little spat had...caused some collateral damage. Not that he thought Hera cared much about it. It was Hades’ fortress-palace.

No, most of her stupefaction came from the fact Persephone was once more neutralised, despite Hera having certainly been involved in the breaking of the Orichalcum cage. The Spring Goddess shouldn’t have been able to release herself so easily; the former Tyrant had used a single vial of Styx water, not a bucket or a bath worth of the dangerous substance.

“We had a little disagreement about the true definition of the verb ‘forgive’.” He smiled at the...damn, Hades had truly smacked Hera like an unwanted goblin child. “It’s nothing to worry about, oh, mighty Queen of Olympus. I think we have several things to-“

Only a lifetime of dangerous battles and various disasters allowed him to parry the bolt Hera unleashed to kill him.

Even then, he felt a lot of pain. Damn, Zeus’ wife really wanted to kill him, eh? Well, if the Queen of Olympus didn’t want to negotiate...she was going to be the sacrificial goat for everyone who mattered.

“That was a mistake.”

“**I don’t think so**.” Blue eyes glared at him. “**You are a nuisance which must be eliminated**.”

Perseus chuckled, just as he activated the combination of coral which revealed one of the most dangerous powers of the Trident.

“And you,” he took great pleasure in replying, “should be aware the Trident has a lot of interesting powers. And I’m not taking about its capacity to access the rum reserves of Atlantis.”

“**And what pray tell, is this extraordinary power**?” Hera mocked him. “**If it’s about stopping me from incinerating you, you can save your saliva, Demigod. This magical skill works only on lesser Gods**.”

“The Trident is the personal symbol of power of the God of the Seas, Oceans, and all watery immensities,” it wouldn’t be a monologue, but it was going to be as satisfying as one. The blue aura grew in terrifying intensity, and three seconds later, an immense wave came into being. “It stands to reason that invitation or not, someone who calls the Lord of Waves and Earthquakes this way can summon Him.”

The waves coalesced into a human figure, who rapidly revealed himself as a man who...well, it was definitely his father in this life. There was something impossible to describe properly. His clothes were of good facture, but there was something both calm and yet terrifyingly dangerous about him.

The leader of the Suicide Squad threw the Trident, and Poseidon greeted its return like one welcomed an old friend back.

“**Thank you, my son**.” The God’s green eyes – at least he knew who had given him this particular colour – shone with amusement as he inspected his surroundings: Persephone’s unconscious and chained body, the Lightning Thief Bianca di Angelo, plenty of skeletons in many bone parts, the extensive damage of the throne room, and of course, last but not least, Hera in possession of the Master Bolt. “**I’ve seen you’ve been really, really busy. I don’t think I caused such a ruckus at your age**.”

“I’m going to take this as a compliment.”

“**As well you should**.” The Lord of All Oceans smiled before returning to deadly seriousness. “**Good afternoon, sister**.”

“**Poseidon. You should**-“

“**Before beginning your confession, you should be aware Hades is about to make his grand entrance**.”

The timing was truly excellent. There was just enough time to acknowledge the words, and then the Master of the Underworld stepped through, the Helm of Darkness levitated in a red corona by his side.

Unlike Hera who looked visibly defeated, there wasn’t even a scratch upon his equipment. It was good to know. Even among Olympians, it seemed there were different power thresholds...that or Hera was like Persephone, she relied too much on immolating people by revealing her true divine form when she couldn’t get her way.

“**Thank you, brother**.” The black-haired God gave a thin smile which could have given a few nightmares to thousands of living creatures. He uttered a word, and a black whip grabbed the arm Hera was using to wield the Master Bolt. “**I’m really curious about what happened here during the last...thirty-six minutes, was it**?”

“This is an interesting tale,” Perseus began, only to be interrupted by his father. Damn it, he had the monologue ready in his head!

“**It will have to wait for a few minutes, my son**.” Poseidon cleared his throat. “**This combination of the Trident didn’t just summon me, you know. It also opened a direct communication line with Olympus. As such**-“

The Trident swirled with new colours.

“**I thought it would be far more prudent to summon the rest of the Council**.”

They all flashed into the Underworld one by one. Hermes arrived first, which was only natural, God of Speed and everything, but he preceded only Apollo by two seconds. Then there was Artemis. Dionysus. Ares. Athena. Demeter. Aphrodite. Hephaestus.

And last but not least, just as Persephone opened her eyes again, an enormous storm of gold-silver revealed *him*.

“**Hera**...” The name was uttered with so much horror in it that it took all Perseus had and more not to explode in laughter.

No matter how long he would live after today, it was worth it.

Hera had been shocked discovering they had beaten Persephone.

But it was nothing, absolutely nothing, compared to the disbelieving and horrified expression of the ‘Master of Olympus’.

“**Zeus**.”

“**HERA**!”

“**Zeus**.” Several beings – including Gods – began to chuckle nervously. “**It is not-**”

Naturally, he couldn’t let such an opportunity go unanswered.

“Yes, it *is exactly what it looks like*.”

**Author’s note**: You should have listened to Perseus’ proposal, Hera. No matter what he promised, it would have been less painful and humiliating than being caught red-handed with the stolen Master Bolt.

Officially, the Great Quest to recover the missing symbols of power is not over. There’s still one more chapter to go...and after that there will be an Interlude, detailing some big and small changes the ‘adventure’ of the Suicide Squad has made upon the worlds of the living and the undead.