**Chapter 2**

**Irritant’s Law**

“Irritant’s Law: inevitable doom is a finite resource, and becomes mere doom when split between multiple heroic bands. Nemeses should never simultaneously engage a single villain.” Extract from ‘The Axiom Appendix’, multiple contributors

**3 May 2006, Detroit, Michigan, United States of America**

This was the most exciting fun Perseus had in *years*.

After all these months of misdirection, hiding in the shadows, and meticulously assembling his trinkets, seeing all the servants of the Gods assembled to kill him was *extremely* satisfying.

The only thing that made it better was the fact that Zeus at the moment had to throw a legendary fit of rage on Olympus, being forced to acknowledge that his will of destruction had been denied again.

It was well worth the months it had taken him to find this amulet the Lord of Thunder had once given to the Goddess Persephone as one of her marriage presents. The amulet had drawbacks, as per the rules of these objects. It would take a month to regain this capacity of blocking a thunderbolt attack. But it would be enough. Zeus wouldn’t dare striking twice. The humiliation of trying and failing twice in a row aside – and the Gods definitely cared about that sort of things – he was entirely surrounded by red-armoured Amazons and silver-clad Huntresses. Trying to kill him would definitely kill a lot of them, and therefore anger Ares and Artemis respectively. Because yes, the champions of economic warfare were dedicated servants of Ares. Who knew the War God had such cunning in him?

“JACKSON! DIE!”

Truly if Zoë Nightshade had been a Named of Calernia, she would have been the Man-Hater. The son of Poseidon hadn’t been able to learn the full story of what Heracles had done to her – his network of informants was very tight-lipped on the subject – but as a master of irritating everyone, the ex-Tyrant had two hypotheses standing above all the other.

First, the Huntress had been already mentally unstable before Heracles tricked her. Since she was a Hesperides, a daughter of Atlas, and lived with a one hundred-headed dragon for sole companion, this couldn’t be dismissed out of hand.

Or second, Heracles had taken her virginity. The more times he met her, the more Perseus was thinking this was the correct option.

“My dear Nightshade,” he threw his orange clothes right in her face as she tried to impale him with her dagger. She avoided it easily, but the two Amazons coming right behind her didn’t. Yes, he had conventional armour behind said toga. He was a villain, not stupid. “You have forgotten a detail...”

“A detail, *boy*?” Damn, the girl was really good with her daggers. Better to not draw out the fight. The Huntress was less powerful than him, but she had millennia of experience and could count upon hundreds of allies. “You are going to die! Amazons, Huntresses, even the Minotaur! Everyone will cheer when we flay your skin and carry it on a shield to Olympus!”

“Now that’s just rude, my dear Huntress...” seriously, this poor girl had never heard about Irritant’s law. “But yes, details first. To begin with, the Minotaur’s name is Asterius. And *he* *is not on your side*.”

The next second over a dozen Huntresses went flying as the large double axe of his ‘partner’ struck them violently – though not lethally, Huntresses were tough and it was better to not antagonise too much the Goddess Artemis.

The horrified expression on Zoë Nightshade’s face was utterly priceless.

“You, you-“

“Yes, dear?”

“YOU ARE CONSORTING WITH BEASTS?” The black-haired huntress was so enraged even her followers took two steps back.

Perseus of course could not let that pass.

“This is an evident case of racist speech. The Olympus Subcommittee on Partial-Human Affairs will be informed of this egregious insult. Asterius has fifty percent of human genetic material in him, and thus deserves to be part of the grand family of humanity!”

“But...” An Amazon spluttered in anger, one of their platoon-leaders if he had to guess. “He’s a monster!”

“That my dear, is exactly the kind of ideas which are stopping Demigods from advancing to a new golden age!”

“The monsters are a bane upon all creation!” a Huntress shouted.

“Funny,” he smiled. “How many Demigods are killed by monsters every year? How many monsters are killed by Huntress every year for the sole reason of having nice fur the Lady of the Hunt wants to improve the contents of her wardrobes at Olympus?”

“Not just the fur,” one of the Heroes drinking heavily atop the rampart a flask of Kool-Aid declared. “Everything with scales can be part of a Quest. And not just their Lady. Several Goddesses love the snake-themed handbags thing.”

“Lord Ares is often asking us to go after wolves and boars,” one of the Amazons reluctantly agreed.

As predicted, the moment of indecision spread everywhere, as soon all Demigoddesses and other servants of the Gods had numerous stories to share about their patrons’...err...extremely weird fashion tendencies.

With a single exception, of course. A Huntress seemed very, very angry her soldiers and the Amazons were staring to talk instead of fighting.

“JACKSON!”

“Perseus Jackson,” he replied like these excellent movies of James Bond. He was watching them over and over regularly. It was splendid inspiration for his most audacious schemes. “Yes, this is my name.”

“THIS IS YOUR FAULT!”

“Guilty as charged.” The son of Sally Jackson smiled. “Oh, and you shouldn’t stand near this hole. I trapped the sewers beneath it with orange paint...”

“YOU LIE!”

Evading Asterius’ axe once more, Perseus used his hydrokinesis to prove her wrong once more.

Unfortunately, his calculations had been a bit wrong; instead of a respectable but limited flow of orange-coloured water, the explosion which occurred was...a bit larger. Like several times larger, beginning to drown the entire foundry in orange water, which, as it came from the sewers, was hardly the most pleasant-

Wait a minute. Why did it smell like roses and flowers?

“Asterius. We’re leaving,” he told his partner as Nightshade was trying to extract herself from the gelatine-like paint she had received everywhere. Stealing the familiar object from one of the stunned ‘treacherous lieutenants’, the green-eyed boy pressed the red button and immediately the buildings began to explode behind him. “Let’s begin our dramatic escape.”

“Right, short one,” the Minotaur approved, blasting apart a wall with his axe.

“I am not short, my friend! I will just need several years to reach my full potential of height, beauty, and irritation!”

In the sheer chaos created, no more than a couple of Amazons and Huntresses tried to pursue, and they were all easily dealt with.

“Yes, short one.” Perseus sighed before beginning to run to keep pace with his ally. Was it something the Band of Five of his former existence were famous for and he had missed by random luck?

“Well, this day was full of surprises,” he admitted. “The presence of the Amazons and the Huntresses was taken into account, but our spies hadn’t warned us Byzantium was going to send three Questers here. Someone will need to be reminded that we pay to have trustful information, not-“

Asterius and Perseus stopped running. Someone was barring their escape, and given the Mist engulfing this part of Detroit, it was certainly not a mortal cursed by tragic circumstances to be here at the wrong time.

And She was not.

As the light of the late afternoon, both warriors did their best not to gape at the vision of martial beauty which was advancing towards them.

During his reign where he was called Kairos Theodosian, he had seen beautiful women, not all of them Queens or even of noble birth, but still. His new life as Perseus Jackson had allowed him to see more of them, especially as the Huntresses and other ‘pursuers’ had often the odd children of a deity among them, and few of them could be described as ugly. Yet none could stand the comparison against her.

She was wearing violet armour lavishly decorated with golden symbols of dove and roses. An enormous amethyst just below her beasts was encircled by two golden doves. Everything seemed to be made to mix seduction and war, for Perseus didn’t doubt it was functional war equipment. And her face...Gods – the call seemed appropriate – her hair were like woven platinum, her skin tone was the kind of elegant pink most women were known to kill for, while her pure blue eyes could and had likely broken millions of hearts.

Despite the strangeness of the sword in her right hand – an Asian sabre, if he had to guess – there wasn’t much doubt who had decided to intervene. That she was three metres-tall was a slight clue of her divine power, after all.

“Aphrodite,” Asterius growled.

“Venus,” the son of Poseidon corrected. “Venus Victrix or Venus Genetrix,” the most militant forms of the Goddess of Love in the Roman Pantheon, Victory by and for Love, and the Mother of Rome. This was...a problem. Even someone blind and deaf could have seen the sheer power burning in this extraordinary appearance, and he was sure this was only a small portion of the Goddess’ power...trust a deity to add insult to the injury. “We didn’t sacrifice enough goats, I guess.”

“This isn’t about sacrifices, infernal duo.”

“Good. That will make it easier to do-“ no, he hadn’t been able to monologue. Just to throw an explosive stolen in one of Apollo’s storage facilities, one supposed to illuminate an entire city with a fraction of the sun’s brightness, hopefully giving them the moment to escape.

Vain hope.

He managed to avoid the first pink blast which came at him, except it was a feint all along.

In a sword move that was so fluid and elegant it was almost considered an art...the Goddess separated Asterius in two neat parts. The wound instantly began to burn in pink fire and a second later there was nothing left of his ally.

“Do you realise how much investment it is to bribe someone in Hell to let him escape?” He asked in exasperation, summoning two gargoyles and trying not to be eviscerated by these pink lasers. “This is not-“

Suddenly, She was there, touching his forehead with the armoured finger that she had increased in appearance with dark red-purple long gloves of some divine velvet.

“Drop your weapon and your amulets.”

Perseus dropped his weapon and his amulets. Given how she had killed Asterius, Perseus could easily guess what a finger push would do to his head, and it wouldn’t be pretty.

“We need to have a serious conversation.”

“Lady Venus, I do not doubt your words, but the Huntresses-“

It was then he realise that the surroundings of this unexpected battlefield were...not frozen, but pulsing, like they were flies caught in some sort of viscous material. The Goddess of Love had used her powers to alter the march of time...what a terrifying power.

“Love is both ephemeral and eternal,” the platinum-blonde Goddess said as if she could read his thoughts – which she probably did, now that he thought about it...”No, I can’t read your thoughts, son of Poseidon. There is no connection between us...yet.”

The green-eyed Demigod didn’t like the last words for obvious reasons.

“I’m going to take your word for it, my Lady,” a fake smile later, he made an ironic salute and searched for another discussion to flee. “Now since it was a pleasure to meet your peerless presence and I hope to not have offended you in any way,” at least he shouldn’t have, the Demigod he was stayed far away from Aphrodite-Venus temples and worshippers, better avoid the unpleasant consequences of those who badmouthed her. “I am going to be on my way, the Huntresses are going to want to plant my skull on their banners and-“

“Your plans will fail.”

The words were uttered in such a melodious voice it was almost a sin to listen to it.

“I assure you,” the ex-Tyrant smiled roguishly, “I have anticipated every betrayal.” Since the only beings he trusted moderately were his gargoyles and Asterius, it was not like he could be betrayed that much.

“But you underestimate how much the Master of Olympus wants you dead,” Venus said in her angelic voice. “Your calculus is that as long as he needs your father to wage war against your uncle, he won’t act against you. It is prescient...and false.”

For the third time of the day, Perseus was disagreeably surprised.

“It will cost him the war and possibly his throne, if he do that,” Poseidon had never tried to contact him directly, it was far too dangerous for his life-expectancy, but there were...assurances, yes let’s call them assurances, that if he kicked the bucket, war between Seas and Skies would be the next seasonal event.

Of course, in the last three years, the Lord of Olympus had so far refrained to blast him with his lightning bolts...

“It may. You will still be dead.”

The Goddess of Love, much as he didn’t want to vocally admit it, had a good point there.

“And honestly, dear Perseus,” the son of Poseidon tried to not flinch when the purple gloves touched his face, “you must realise you are far from ready to confront a lesser God, much less one as powerful myself. You are clearly one of the most imaginative and powerful Demigods since the Fall of Rome, an extraordinary feat since you have yet to celebrate your thirteenth birthday. But there is no way you can beat the cup-bearer of the Gods, much less their Master, whether you are prepared for it or not. You are intelligent, you know what will happen if you fight against an Olympian like myself.”

Perseus Jackson gritted his teeth. Some part of him, the Tyrant One, wanted to scream at her, proclaiming it wasn’t a question of winning or not, it was a question of style and villainy. The more vengeful part of him didn’t agree. Zeus had buried countless Demigods having delusions of overthrowing him.

“I bow to your superior information-gathering resources,” the bane of many Huntresses and Amazons bowed again cheekily before swaggering like a professional athlete having just won a few medals at the Olympic games. “However, there’s still a little problem, Your Rosy Divinity. Goats or not, doomed to failure or not, the strategy I’ve chosen is the only game in town.”

As amusing or not-amusing was the reality of being one of the most wanted Demigods in the whole world, it was the only game in town.

Venus was amused, at least.

“You used goats next to Rosy Divinity on purpose, didn’t you?” The purple-gold armoured Goddess chuckled. “But you’re wrong. There is a way. You need to go to New Byzantium.”

It was an irregular occurrence where Perseus found no retort, but this one definitely qualified.

“Out of the question,” the green-eyed boy immediately declared, trying to ignore how the longer he stayed in her presence, the faster the rings supposed protecting his mind against outside influence seemed to lose potency. “The Lord of Olympus has already proven his own laws can be discarded in the name of expediency,” which was a monumentally stupid thing to do, in his opinion, since violating one law weakened all of them, “the moment I pass the city’s boundaries, he’s going to incinerate me...if I’m lucky.”

Honestly, given the sum of Drachmas stolen in the last five years from Zeus’ tax-collectors, Perseus wasn’t going to trust him farther than he could throw the Lord of the Sky, and since the God was certainly taller than Venus, this wasn’t far at all.

Yes, he knew where New Byzantium was, he wasn’t going to pretend the contrary to a Goddess. But there were a lot of excellent reasons he avoided the city and everything inside or near it, including the fact it was on the doorstep of Olympus.

“He won’t now, as a new agreement has been signed with your father,” a golden clock materialised from nowhere, “the agreement should be active...now.”

“How convenient,” Perseus mocked. “And I suppose that the Master of Olympus is going to accept me among the other Demigods, one of them being his prized Roman son, with a fond smile and a tap on the back?”

“He will,” Venus purred, “if you prove your loyalty to Olympus.”

The twelve-years-old Demigod was tired and not in his best mood...but it didn’t take him long to realise what the Goddess of Love implied.

“You’re joking...” seeing no retort to confirm it pretty much gave him some really, really bad vibes. “Recovering the Master Bolt and the Trident on my own? Really?”

It was true that if he was successful, Zeus would have to tolerate his existence for a few months...at worse. For all his paranoia and arrogance, no God could punish those who saved the day without the whole edifice crashing down in the next minutes.

“On your own? Not exactly. A Great Quest has been called.”

For all the good it was going to do, he wanted to shout, but since there was a Goddess in front of him...

Nevertheless, the existence of a Quest didn’t surprise him, nor was the fact it was a major one supposed to include twelve full Demigods. This was logical, the Gods always preferred to bleed their very mortal children than wage an open conflict themselves.

But there was a reason this Quest had not begun, while the whole ‘Mist-world’ knew the symbol of powers had been stolen at the Winter Solstice, which was more than four months ago. Invading the Hells ruled by Hades was something few Heroes had ever attempted, and most were still in the Underworld to this day.

“No, I will have to decline, Lady Venus. As enjoyable as it would be to avoid lightning bolts for the next year or so, I prefer staying out of Hell for some time, and it isn’t going to happen if I happen to accept this Quest, I-“

The Goddess was suddenly behind him, whispering directly in his ears so close there was no way anyone would ear, and the violet Mist grew so thick one couldn’t see two metres away.

“**You aspire to be a Godslayer**?” the blonde Goddess hissed. “**I desire to get rid of a husband. Bring back the Symbols of Power from the Underworld, and I will make you my Champion**.”

“Ah...betrayal...you should have begun with that, my Lady...” the son of Poseidon had believed at first the Goddess was standing for Order, but in fact she was closer to the Hell Gods of Below of his previous life. “I will want a more...formal discussion to negotiate the terms of our alliance.”

An alliance he was ironically sure, none of them had really any interest in betraying. Zeus would be less than amused if someone told him the Goddess of Love was conspiring against him, and he unfortunately had not so many Gods supporting him he could afford throwing one to the pits.

“You will have one...provided you succeed in your Quest.” Venus raised a platinum-blonde eyebrow. “You will abide by this new plan?”

“And treacherously continue my journey of chaotic schemes every step of the way,” he swore solemnly.

“I predict interesting love adventures ahead of you, dear Perseus,” the Lady of Rome smirked before dissipating the Mist. “Now I apologise in advance, but I have to present a loyal mask to the Council.”

“It involves beating me up, I suppose?” This day absolutely sucked, and in more ways than one. “You can tell him I know who Asterius’ real father is...by the way, how old are you?”

He hadn’t the time to count to ten before his world exploded in pain.

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Ethan had to admit it, until today, he had thought the children of Aphrodite were useless in a fight, and the children of Venus were not far behind it. As for Aphrodite or Venus Herself? No, the son of Nemesis would prefer practically any deity in a serious fight, thanks.

Okay, everything he had said about Aphrodite or Venus before? Ethan withdrew it. Immediately. Unconditionally.

The sight of a purple-armoured Goddess administrating a merciless beat-down to a Demigod who had handed them their heads on a tray was a shivering reminder that no Goddess was powerless and that when you angered them...well, that was the result.

This part of Detroit had suddenly become an apocalyptic war zone. Venus’ opponent had tried once more to summon the water from the sewers, and the damage to the streets and the houses was absolutely catastrophic. Yet for all these efforts, the Goddess had not a scratch on her doves of gold, nor was her pink cape had a single mark or blemish upon it.

As for the Minotaur, who had against millennia of traditions decided to stand with a Demigod, he was nowhere in sight. Ethan was ready to bet he was on his way to Tartarus’ pit by now.

The Huntresses laughed as the battle ended. They rapidly shut up as the vision of purple, platinum, and gold glared at them before turning back her attention to the Demigod crawling at her feet.

“Well, Perseus?”

“Your arguments,” the boy managed to joke while half of his body was simply *broken*, “are absolutely *shattering*. I am submitting to your wisdom, you will have no more loyal servant than I!”

And then the black-haired boy closed his eyes and stopped moving.

“Good,” the blue-eyed Goddess purred, and Ethan suddenly had an urge to rush towards her and prostrate himself in the blossoming desire she granted him a smile. “Son of Hermes!”

Luke immediately jumped forwards. Ah so the great hero of the Hesperides Quest wasn’t immunised to Her power.

“Lady Venus?”

“I and this Demigod have reached an accord, backed by his father, who if you had failed to realise, is Lord Poseidon Himself.”

Ethan had his suspicions, but the announcement felt like a cold shower...no bad pun intended after what they had just endured with all the sewers drowning them.

The deity threw the favourite son of Hermes a box of Ambrosia and Nectar.

“Heal him and bring him to New Byzantium. Your Director has been informed of his upcoming arrival. There is-“

“NO!”

Ethan tried very hard to stay immobile and be as insignificant as possible. For when she had been interrupted, the eyes of the Goddess had began to burn in purple fire, and the ground near her feet was suddenly melting and transforming into golden doves with...err...aggressive blue eyes.

“Zoë Nightshade...” the commander of Artemis’ Huntresses was suddenly very alone as the Amazons took several step backs...many step backs, as the Goddess of Love uttered her name like it was poison. “You of all people should know better than interrupting me.”

“This boy has stolen from Lady Artemis! The penalty for this crime is death!”

“And your demise will be excruciatingly long if you try to enforce it with your arrows or your daggers,” the blue-eyed immortal promised. “Neptune has many flaws, but he loves his family. Diana’s blessings would not save you for a single minute from his wrath.”

Any reasonable warrior would have acknowledged the not-so-subtle hint and stopped antagonising Venus. But Nightshade had either a death wish or fanatically believed Artemis would protect her, because she persisted.

“Jackson has challenged the Hunt and sacked uncountable depots! He deserves to be punished!”

An invisible force seized her by the throat and threw her to her knees as the sky began to turn purple and gold. The divine shell of the Goddess also began to get taller.

Ethan did what every reasonable Demigod would do in such circumstances. He helped Castellan taking care of the badly-hurt son of Poseidon, and began to move away.

“DO NOT SPEAK OF ME OF ‘DESERVES’, HUNTRESS! DO YOU EVEN REMEMBER OF HOW MANY DEMIGODS AND DEMIGODDESSES HAVE BEEN KILLED BY YOUR ARROWS BECAUSE THEY HAD THE TEMERITY TO DISPLEASE YOU?

Zoë Nightshade tried to answer, but with Love doing a very convincing imitation of Darth Vader, it was impossible.

The Huntresses would have maybe intervened...except in a second, the Amazons’ eyes had begun to turn purple. By the Pits of Tartarus, how had Venus-

There was a flash of green and gold. The purple sky disappeared.

And one second later, the lone figure of a teenage girl wearing an impressive number of dead animals for clothes was there, a bow taller than she was in her hands.

“Venus. Release my lieutenant.”

“Not before she learns her lesson,” the Goddess of Love denied Diana – or Artemis. “Her disrespect won’t be tolerated anymore.”

“It isn’t your prerogative to decide the fate of my Huntresses.”

“But it is theirs to pierce of arrows my sons?” The son of Nemesis couldn’t say he was a divine expert, but it was clear this was the confrontation of two forces which weren’t and wouldn’t tolerate each other. After several more seconds of silence, the man-hater Huntress was released. “Your Huntresses are strongly **encouraged** to move out of Detroit.”

“They will,” the Goddess of the Hunt and the Moon replied coldly, “for they are going to escort the Demigods to New Byzantium. My Lord Father is concerned Jackson will try to escape his part of the deal before the Quest officially begins. The Hunt’s presence will make sure he does nothing...regrettable.”

Given that said Demigod couldn’t be older than fourteen, Ethan was really curious how he had been able to generate so much interest in so few years of life...

**6 May 2006, New Byzantium, New York coastline, United States of America (de jure)**

Perseus’ felt oddly refreshed and healthy when he opened his eyes. Of course, one second later, a bottle labelled ‘Nectar’ entered his field of vision and the mystery was resolved. So the food and the drink of the Gods were that good, uh. Being on the run since he was seven, he’d never been able to take any...the locations which served it were far too heavily defended to pull the kind of stunts he routinely tried against the Huntresses.

Slowly, just in case, something hadn’t healed well, the Demigod rose...and looked directly at a honey blonde-haired girl who looked to be about his own age.

“You drool in your sleep.” Oh, he was already enjoying this one. Grey-eyed, athletic, an attitude of ‘I’m better than you’...a child of Athena or Nike, that one.

“And you’re blonde,” the son of Poseidon said with a vicious smile. “We have all challenges to overtake on the path to glory.”

“You, you-“

The former Tyrant did what he did best; he feigned to ignore her, a task made easy by the fact his new treacherous lieutenant had entered what had to be the healing centre of wherever-they-had-transported-him. Seriously, with his black hair, black eyes, his frowning expression, the sinister sword and the black armour, the guy deserved the job! He was only lacking the black eye-patch and he would be perfection incarnate!

“My treacherous lieutenant! I presume we have arrived at Camp Byzantium?”

“My name is Ethan Nakamura, not treacherous lieutenant,” the other boy corrected. “And now that I think about it, wasn’t the Minotaur your treacherous lieutenant?”

“Nah, Asterius *is* my *Muscular Lieutenant*,” the green-eyed Demigod revealed with a smirk, pleased the older Demigod had some spirit in him.

“Is? I bet with the others that the Goddess had killed him...”

“Oh, she did,” Perseus confirmed. “But it’s not the first time in our long and fruitful collaboration this has happened...I’m afraid the poor guy spends more time escaping certain jailors of Below that he stays on the surface...” a nasty idea came to the forefront of his mind, though. If Venus did nothing without a reason, sending Asterius back to Tartarus was her way to ensure he would have an ally once he reached the Underworld. He could work with that.

“The Minotaur!” oh, the blonde had finally caught up. “He’s devouring young women!”

“These were odious rumours propagated millennia ago, Blondie,” the black-haired son of Poseidon knew he was going to love pushing all her berserk points. “King Minos wanted to have more lovers than the Lord of Olympus himself, and what better way than to request ‘blood tributes’ for your half-bull of a son?”

“That’s completely stupid!” yeah, definitely a child of Athena, that girl. “And my name is Annabeth, not Blondie!”

“Whatever you say, Alexandra,” Perseus assured her magnanimously, presenting an expression of nobility as her grey eyes illuminated with the desire to murder him on the spot. “But frankly, I think it makes perfect sense. At least if someone sacrifices his daughter to a monster, he can mourn his lost child, knowing the cherished person is dead...not so much if you know she is used as a sex slave and repeatedly raped by a Demigod.”

The austere face of his treacherous lieutenant frowned deeper, if it was humanly possible. He was about to speak but the blonde was faster.

“Of course! And next you are going to tell me the Minotaur isn’t the son of Pasiphaë and a white bull?”

“Don’t be ridiculous,” Perseus chuckled. “He is.” Now for the...what was the French word? Ah yes, time for the coup-de-grace. “That said I have it under good authority the bull may have been a God under disguise. A God who had already sired children the same way. I think King Minos was the result of such a union.”

“This is a lie!”

“Actually, it makes a lot of sense,” Ethan Nakamura agreed surprisingly quickly. “I was always wondering why Poseidon, a God of the Sea, would offer something prestigious to a Demigod who wasn’t sired by him...”

“An excellent point, my treacherous lieutenant,” he took the opportunity to disappear behind a wooden bulkhead to change, because alas, both clothes and armour he had worn were completely shredded by the divine beat-down he had received. Positive side, the T-Shirt and everything else provided as replacements seemed to be of high quality. It was going to be a monumental chore finding new armour of equal protection value, though.

When he was half-way presentable, the daughter of Athena had disappeared.

“You enjoyed riling her up, didn’t you?”

“What could possibly give you that idea?” the son of Poseidon asked innocently. “You are a son of Nemesis.”

“Yes. Afraid?”

“No, no, just thinking how appropriate it is for you to be my treacherous lieutenant.” The twelve-years-old whistled as they exited the healing bungalow-house. The view of the coast and the landscape was...sublime. “You aren’t beginning to sprout ideology how the Gods are infallible and we deserve to lick their shoes, don’t you?”

A silver arrow immediately slammed a metre before him.

“I forgot to mention it, but the Huntresses have accompanied us here...”

“Formidable. Is Nightshade still remembering me fondly?”

A second arrow joined the first, and this one was closer to his feet.

“She wanted to kill you, you know...”

“Sorry, oh Prime Huntress,” Perseus shouted. “If it helps, know it was completely personal!”

This time he had to evade, because the shot had definitely been for his throat. Of course seconds later, the Huntress was washed out by a miniature river summoned out of nowhere. The Sea watched, and did not tolerate transgressions from godly accords.

This matter dealt with, Perseus Jackson contemplated New Byzantium, also called by the Roman Demigods new Constantinople.

For all his cynicism, he had to admit this was something to be seen before dying. The magical and non-magical defences were such that the space available formed a rather long crescent against the Atlantic coast, a rather sizeable amount of land which was divided in two by a rather large river. And on each bank, there was a large city shining under the sun. The different shades of marble and colourful mix of Antiquity and modern villas glittered under the sun, and it didn’t take a guide to know the southern part – which wasn’t the side they were on, naturally – was the Roman part, the ‘New Constantinople’ part of the Demigods’ haven. The familiar Roman structures of a Coliseum, a Senate, a Hippodrome, a large aqueduct, public baths, and what had to be large Legion barracks made the guess way too easy.

Not that the Greek ‘quarter’ lacked splendour, oh no. Perseus could see six main avenues with the biggest marble statues you could imagine, enormous villas with suspended gardens, private vegetable gardens coexisting next to amphitheatres, and apparently the notion of public baths was contagious, because the Greek Demigods had converted to them, in addition to a profusion of cisterns and fountains. On the periphery though, the Greek side had immense strawberry fields, not a trashed plain which looked like several Gods had hammered the terrain until the grass no longer grew upon it.

Naturally, these two sides were linked by a massive golden bridge which was...a bit too much...and he was the one who had built golden statues of his favourite ancestor across Helike a lifetime ago. That had to be the Golden Hellespont, built for the glory of Zeus and Hera.

The bridge was naturally not there just to be pretty. It was the only way to access the island in the middle of the river, at least the son of Poseidon supposed it was an island, because the vertical constructions used so much of the available ground, it was more like a mountain of temples was rising from the earth to challenge the skies.

You had two guesses to tell whose couple of temples were at the top of this vainglorious sum of religious monuments, and the first didn’t count.

 “Okay, that’s rather impressive,” the ex-Tyrant admitted. “I suppose the rent is hellishly expensive the closest you approach from the river?”

“Yes,” the son of Nemesis replied curtly, “Though many families aren’t renting, they own outright the palaces you see.”

“Legacies of the Gods?” This was the logical conclusion.

“Plenty,” his treacherous lieutenant confirmed. “Of course, since many Gods often visit and certain families are not big on marriage vows...err...”

“Yes, the Legacies create plenty more Demigods.” To be honest, that certainly explained why his estimates about Byzantium’s size were off by a factor of two or three. It was not surprising that in the only city where they could walk and be themselves without covering everything in Mist, Gods and Goddesses would do what they did best: awe the mortals, encourage their worship...and copulate with them.

“You aren’t asking me about the Legions?”

Perseus chuckled.

“The whole world knows you have three Legions in active service, one defending the camp and two campaigning. I know for sure Legio Gemina, the Thirteenth, is in California, I saw their camp on my way to rob the Amazons of their ill-gotten gains.”

“Are you sure you’re not a son of Hermes?” A Huntress exclaimed behind him.

The green-eyed Demigod raised a questioning eyebrow.

“She’s not wrong, really,” the grim-faced child of Nemesis confessed, “stealing everything which isn’t nailed down and provoking a maximum of disorder on their way out is rather what the boys and girls of Bungalow Eleven are about.”

“Bungalow Eleven...” It was an elegant elevated temple-quarter with quantity of bird decorations and symbols of coins, caduceus symbols, and even golden apples. “It looks it has been recently been renovated.”

“Yeah, Luke’s donation to the cause,” his treacherous lieutenant was dying of jealousy, a blind man could see it. “He invested part of it in a massive rebuilding effort, and got the leadership of the Bungalow for it.”

“That sounds like a big deal,” better to have some information than none.

“It is,” the other Demigod revealed. “The leaders of each Senior God Quester’s cabin are guaranteed a seat in the Councillor’s Meeting, our more liberal arrangement than the Senate. The thirty-six cabins get a vote, plus one for the non-aligned barracks,” which were certainly the massive bland structure on the right of all these temple-quarters. “So yeah, Luke’s Quest gave him lot of influence. The previous Councillor wasn’t too happy about it. He swore he would do better than him and left for a Gold-class Quest.”

“And how is it going for him?”

“We haven’t heard from him in a while...” Ethan Nakamura frowned again. “But it isn’t out of the norm. Lamia’s curse is a pain on our communications. There’s always a Quest or two which are about locating her, but most return in failure, and in general it puts you in the Lady of Magic’s black list.”

A noise of hooves was heard, and the reason his treacherous lieutenant had been displeased was revealed to have nothing to do with a missing Demigod and more with a centaur trotting to meet them.

“Chiron, our Trainer of Heroes, Senior Councillor and Senior Healer,” the son of Nemesis introduced them. “Is it too much to hope you aren’t going to antagonise him?”

“My dear partner-in-crime,” the child of the Sea God declared, “I am always the very symbol of politeness and friendship to people I respect. You have nothing to fear, I’m sure Charles and I will get along splendidly.”

“Chiron, his name is...you know what, I don’t care.” Ah, so his treacherous lieutenant was learning, very good.

Regrettably, the brown-haired centaur was already wary as he stopped a good metre away from him.

“If this is about the ‘Pony War’ of last year, I was only tangentially involved,” Perseus said in a virtuous tone.

“You shouldn’t be here. There are prisons for monsters like you, and they are nowhere near New Byzantium.” The Trainer of Heroes wasn’t glaring too much, but since it was an immortal centaur, he certainly had good control over his emotions.

“Prison? Come on...your Hermes Questers are making their fortune in stealing things right and left and selling it right after for fun and profit.”

The argument was lost long before it reached the old horse’s ears to be sure.

“This Great Quest will be your last chance-“

“With due respect, *Charles*, what do you know of *chance*?” The black-haired boy kept a tone of courtesy, in spite of being furious enough to drown this four-legged creature in the nearest river. “Where was my *luck* when the Master Bolt was used to murder my mother when I was seven? Where was the *chance* of Asterius where he was thrown into a Labyrinth and punished for the sins of others? There is no chance, luck, or coincidence. There is the will of the Gods, and the choices of Men; nothing less, nothing more.”

“I see.” Not that it was unexpected, but Perseus knew this upstart pony would never turn against Zeus. He had spent too long under Zeus’ thumb, and was too fond of enforcing the status quo, training waves after waves of heroes, and enduring the crippling rates of casualties Demigods and Demigoddesses took Quest after Quest. “With an attitude like that, *Perseus*, do not expect to find a lot of support at New Byzantium.”

“Don’t be ridiculous, Christopher,” it was time to be in ‘correcting mode’, something he always loved, especially when it was guaranteed the truth would hurt more than the lies. “I was never supposed to get **any** support beyond the little things no one is supposed to be denied. This Great Quest is not supposed to succeed. The Lord of Olympus wants a war; if he really wanted his symbol of power back the Demigod way, hundreds of arrow-fodder fools would have already been sent a couple of days after the Winter Solstice.”

“You know a lot of secrets, for a Demigod not of New Byzantium.”

Perseus Jackson snorted.

“Don’t flatter me. When a guy screams so loud most people on the Western Coast hear him, the secrets you’re speaking about are known to the entire world shrouded by the Mist.” He sighed theatrically. “I suppose you aren’t going to offer me a legendary weapon, like Excalibur or something, to show me it is possible to return to the Light?”

“You have stolen many weapons during your crime heists. You don’t need one of the Quester’s blades. Now I think it is best you go to Bungalow Eleven...and stay here until dinner.”

“Bungalow Three is the Bungalow of Poseidon,” the hill where the temple-barracks were was disposed on three layers of elevation, with the big leagues at the top, and you couldn’t exactly miss the one for the Lord of Oceans and Earthquakes.

“It is, but you haven’t been claimed. And the rules are the rules.” The centaur said without a trace of apology in his voice.

Ah, the old horse wanted to play it that way, did he?

Silently, Perseus contemplated his rings, before deciding to sacrifice the one preventing the Gods from locating him as long as they hadn’t their servants in direct sight. It wouldn’t be of a lot of use in the coming days, and it was worth a lot...close to forty thousand Drachmas, according to the Telekhine merchant he had paid to estimate it.

“Oh, father,” the green-eyed boy began while throwing the ring in the closest fountain, which had four stone statues of dolphins and thus could be safely be considered to be consecrated to the Sea, “I know you are listening to me. Yes, this is sheer bribery, but I don’t want to sleep in a manor of thieves for my stay at new Byzantium, no matter how short this rambunctious period will prove itself to be. I offer this ring in offering, estimation forty thousand Drachmas, now please claim me so I can irritate the old pony more than I already did.”

“I am right here,” Chiron told him angrily.

“I know, Carver,” Perseus turned back after the grin disappeared into a flash of blue-green power, and suddenly he was bathed in a halo of the same colour, while an enormous ball of light with a trident symbol flashed in existence above his head. “I believe this is the moment you **kneel**.”

“The claim is recognised,” the centaur seemed to hate it, sure enough. Until now, he had certainly dreamed this was a mistake, that Perseus was a usurper or the son of a lesser Sea deity. But with this move, there was nothing else to do but voice it...and kneel. “Poseidon...Earthshaker, Stormbringer, Lord of Horses, Hail Perseus Jackson, Son of the Sea God.”

If a son or a daughter of Hades had arrived at this moment, the ‘Trainer of Heroes’ and the hundred-plus Huntresses forced to kneel would have likely gone into frothing berserk rage. Fortunately for them, it didn’t happen.

“Good,” the young Demigod smiled. “I believe we were speaking about my Barrack?”

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Whatever the future and the Fates had in store for them, Luke Castellan believed this day would become forever remembered by the inhabitants of New Byzantium.

It had been a long time since there hadn’t been a son of Poseidon at camp, but the son of Hermes felt reasonably certain that even if there had been dozens of them, all of them would have been made irrelevant by their new addition’s arrival.

His name was Perseus Jackson, and for all the blonde-haired Demigod believed the boy was going to get himself killed long before he was sixteen – therefore getting no chance to fulfil the conditions of the Great Prophecy – there was a rising belief this crazy half-blood was going to leave a deep mark in Byzantium’s and the world’s history.

Few people had the courage – or the insanity – to directly steal from the Gods, Quest or no Quest. Even fewer had the audacity to showcase their thievery achievements right in the middle of a camp where the Olympians could directly materialise and kill the offender.

Yet that was exactly what the son of Poseidon was doing, leading a gigantic convoy of stolen goods beginning with marble statues, golden amulets, coffers filled with Drachmas, and priceless gemstones to rifles, electronic devices, and several things which had to be Hephaestus-made instruments of war.

Doing it when your sole protection was Poseidon’s favour and your own sense of entitlement was just...just mad.

And yet Perseus Jackson was doing it, in the middle of afternoon, with a quantity of stone gargoyles for servants which proved beyond doubt that the Huntresses’ boast they had eradicated the ‘beasts’ had utterly been in error.

“He can’t do that!” Annabeth hissed. The son of Hermes did his best to not chuckle. If there was something ‘classical’ about Perseus Jackson, his ability to infuriate the daughter of Athena he considered like a little sister was it. The two appeared to have reached maximal levels of antagonism in mere minutes of first meeting each other.

Luke had a feeling their story was going to end with them either as arch-nemesis or married to each other.

“He can,” the thief who had stolen the golden apple from the garden of the Hesperides disagreed. “Fact is, he is doing it right now. And really, it’s not that much different than what we children of Hermes are doing: we use the embassy status of our Barrack to avoid divine retribution.”

This convoy was on a completely different level of magnitude, though. If one accumulated the spoils of the entire barrack, counting his and the senior Questers, they would maybe reach two-thirds of what was towed in the three dozen chariots and modified trucks.

Luke had thought the Amazons’ and Huntresses’ claims about Jackson’s claims were a bit exaggerated. Seeing the evidence with his own eyes, the experienced Quester was beginning to think they had if anything underestimated the ‘problem’.

“Stop glaring at him...or try to order silently the Huntresses to intervene,” he advised to the younger Demigoddess, trying to ignore how the sheer number of the Goddess of the Hunt’s servants made him uncomfortable. Seriously, he had known Artemis recruited heavily among the young girls before mentally brainwashing them and letting them grow slowly until they reached about sixteen in age...but it was still frightening to realise that at a word, over *three thousand* female archers were unleashed against a target.

That Jackson had voluntarily gone to war against them for three years and thrived proved the son of Poseidon meant business...

“Zoë tried to convince me to join the Hunt again,” Annabeth admitted, biting her low lip.

“Did she mention how the Goddess of Love nearly killed her for her arrogance when we got away from Detroit?”

“No, but I’m sure this is the fault of this son of Poseidon!” her voice decreased to a whisper. “Perhaps the only immortal besides his father who is really on this jackass’ side...”

As if someone had heard her, a large circle of light burst into existence, and a cascade of violet and bronze flew for a second before Dionysus, Byzantium’s Director – a post he made no secret of holding against his will – stepped through.

Except he didn’t look like the Questers’ Director.

No, no, it wasn’t exact. He didn’t look like the ‘Mr D’ persona they were used to. He was the picture of what a God, capital D, should look like. His biceps and his body were those of an Adonis, with his violet air flowing majestically, and grapes were used as hair ornaments. His Greek clothes were half-way removed, as if to show even more of his chest, a part of his body which would have not raised an eyebrow if it was Heracles’. A leopard cape was entangled on his shoulders, and golden torques were on his forearms.

Disappeared was the image of the cantankerous, grumpy and sullen Director. The God of Wine was here in the might of his power and looks.

Half of the Questers gaped and were utterly stunned. Luke supposed he was doing the same. And what followed didn’t help soften the blow.

“Peter Johnson! My great friend!”

“Douglas! My second favourite God!”

And the Immortal and the Demigod embraced each other like they were two old friends.

“Olympus’ foundations,” Annabeth moaned, “now they are two of him...”

The daughter of Athena was so busy trying to look away, like most people, that she missed Jackson placing a small flask in the God’s hair.

Of course, the next moments were a bit distracting...as Dionysus intended.

“After my children, you are definitely my favourite Demigod!” the God of Wine exclaimed, which had the merit of being probably true, if Jackson had brought contraband enchanted alcohol with the rest of his loot. “A true Champion of Madness, your exploits have been watched several billion times on Madness Tube! I encourage you to continue-“

There was a massive rumble and Luke like every resident of the settlement realised that there were big, nasty dark thunder clouds arriving from the South...which was to say, from Olympus.

“I mean to say, these were very bad, bad things, you did,” the God of Folly and Insanity said in an accusatory expression which convinced absolutely no one. “Don’t try it again.”

And the Olympian disappeared, quickly followed by the Demigods.

“Luke,” and for the first time Annabeth looked really, really afraid. “What the hell Perseus Jackson is doing? You told me you saw the Love Goddess ready to go war, now it is the turn of Mr D...what is happening?”

“Madness,” the son of Hermes spoke quietly, knowing the truth was neither comforting nor something one could solve with a sword. “Madness is on our doorstep.”

“We won’t let him,” a voice which had no business sounding so arrogant affirmed.

In his humble opinion, Zoë Nightshade had failed to neutralise the monumental threat before it reached its cruise speed, and now they were all going to pay the price of it...

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It was against the rules for a Demigod to not eat his meal at his Bungalow Table.

Ethan was wondering if Perseus Jackson had ever done something wondering according to the rules.

But by the standards of what he had done this week, sitting with Nemesis children, especially since Dionysus didn’t care, wasn’t that risky or mad.

By Jackson’s standards. Gods, what had his life become in a week?

“You’re not going to last long, Jackson,” his half-brother Damian White said with the dangerous tone all sons and daughter of the Goddess of Vengeance used to intimidate their enemies. Obviously today, it missed completely its mark. “You already greatly overreached three days ago, it’s a matter of time-“

“Overreached?” the infuriating Demigod snarked. “I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

“You were lucky the Amazons and the Huntresses did arrive at the exact same time, one or the other would have killed you if not.” The words were spoken sufficiently loud to generate plenty of approval at Artemis’ table and several others.

“Dudley,” Jackson and Dionysus had the common point to always call the persons they spoke with by the good initials but totally different names, “it’s cute you think something as random and imprecise as *luck* has something to do with my survival.”

The dinner grounds suddenly became very silent.

“You’re bluffing.” Damian had paled. “Nobody could... I mean nobody is that good at planning...”

“This is the noble law first put into practise by His Most Dreadful Majesty Irritant,” the madman grinned as he ate his part of his pizza. “When someone courts inevitable doom, the best way to disarm it is to split between different enemies. Then you are merely doomed, and the chaos you created is enough to deal with them.”

Perseus poured himself a generous quantity of pineapple juice, disregarding totally the bottle of wine. It was weird, because with all his friendship with the new aspect of their Director, the son of Nemesis had imagined the crazy boy would have no problem emptying cup after cup of wine...but he had been wrong. The scion of the Seas had not drunk a single drop of alcohol since he had come at camp.

“So you say.” The sarcasm was evident, but Perseus Jackson ignored it and treated it like a proof of his undeniable superiority.

“So I say,” the green-eyed half-blood sipped his drink before giving them an even wider smile. “The difficulty is of course to keep an excellent supply of enemies available. Fortunately, there are many Huntresses, and Miss Nightshade’s hatred is extremely reliable in that regard. Everything I need them for a dramatic escape, the servants of the Hunt can relied upon bungling something while she attempts to kill me.”

Two silver-clad girls had to calm their leader before she grabbed her bow and broke most of the rules governing one’s conduct at the camp.

“You’re utterly crazy, Jackson.” Yes, welcome to the club of the people who had realised that. “You realise Nightshade is going to murder you the moment you leave camp?”

“It’s nice of you to worry about my security,” Perseus placed his hand above a region where most sane humans kept their heart, “but I assure you the servants of the Hunt won’t be my end. I know the exact moment of my death, and it is not today I perish.”

“And when will you die, oh Great Oracle?” Ethan asked with great scepticism.

“Why, never, my treacherous lieutenant,” white teeth were bared in something as dangerous as it was insane. “Because soon, I will be invincible! BWAHAHAHA!”

The thunder of Zeus rumbled over their heads for the sixth time today. It had to be a God-level record, no one had ever learned of the Lord of Olympus showing such focus on New Byzantium in years...

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The ‘Councillor’s Meeting’ was convened several hours after dinner, with quantities of spies, pardon of councillor Demigods and Demigoddesses present.

The decoration was definitely leopard-style, which was a deliberate thing since they were meeting in the unofficial barrack of Dionysus. It was not too bad, really. As long as you liked leopards, that is. Perseus did, but not every Demigod did. In fact, the majority of the participants looked like they hated it, which sucked...for them.

There were three members of the camp leadership at the places of honour at the end of the rectangular table. The first two were Dionysus and Chiron, of course. The third was more unexpected: Marcus Ulpius Traianus, better name by the diminutive name of Trajan, ex-Roman Emperor, son of Mars, and now officially an immortal, ordered by the God to administer Triumvirate Holdings, a strategic board which evaluated the risks of Legion deployments and Quests’ assignments.

What he had to say about the ‘Great Quest’ was definitely the old gloom and doom, evidently.

“There are only five doors for direct entrance to the Underworld, and the closest is to California, close to Hollywood as we speak. I strongly discourage using it. Due to the proximity of the Thirteenth Legion, the Rich One has garrisoned it heavily with over one hundred thousand skeleton warriors. Nothing living can escape their vigilance.”

The lesser God watched him straight in the eyes, and his lips didn’t bother hide the disgust he felt for him. Apparently, this poor Trajan was a die-hard supporter of Zeus.

“According to the reports we have been collect, Triumvirate Holdings judged likely the other entrances have been similarly reinforced. If you want to access the deeper layers of the Underworld, you will have to use the unstable entrances.”

“Awesome,” someone muttered, “the closest one is near Cape Horn, I believe.”

Trajan shrugged as if it wasn’t his problem. And to be fair, it wasn’t.

“This will be the choice of the Questers volunteering for this Quest. Bear in mind however, the expedition must return with the stolen symbols of power before the ultimatum expires, which is on the Summer Solstice.”

It was good to have the full confirmation Zeus wanted this war and this mission was just a thin sheet to proclaim himself ‘just’ and ‘benevolent’ in front of his progeny.

“Dear Strategos,” it was his time to speak and reveal the monumental hypocrisy of this entire system, “I believe it is just the first step of the Lord of Olympus trying to make this Quest a disaster beyond any redemption. So come on, do your best, I’m all ears.”

“You shouldn’t insult the generosity of-“

“You and I both know his generosity arrives only by accident,” it was surprisingly easy to ignore the thunder after a while. “Let’s see...you were going to announce the budget for this costly expedition would be of a grand total of zero Drachmas...or is it zero Denarii? The time limit is already extremely hard, but I suppose there’s a limited time for recruiting, I guess? We will have no prophecies or access to any Oracles, not that those of Olympus function well since 1945...and I suppose land and naval support will be totally inexistent. How I am doing so far?”

“You are rather accurate, surprisingly,” the Roman commander told him. “You have forty-eight hours to build your Quester team. Since it is a Great Quest, it can’t be more than twelve strong, and can’t have a Demigod of more than one divine parent included.”

It was completely easy to smirk at the assembly and at Chiron, who for all his mental fortitude seemed a bit...ill-at-ease that his supreme boss was so childish and petulant.

“Is that all?”

“You won’t be the leader, Luke Castellan will be. And Lady Zoë Nightshade will accompany you, to ensure your loyalty doesn’t waver.”

This time Perseus really looked at the ex-Emperor with the look he reserved to the imbeciles.

“You realise she isn’t going to survive this Quest, right?”

“I hope this wasn’t the first sign of disloyalty shown against Olympus-“

“Oh, please, Strategos,” Perseus smiled. “You know exactly how deep my loyalty towards Olympus is. And I withdraw my objections. Clearly a girl who has been under an immortality blessing for several thousands of years is the best candidate to lead a Quest into the Underworld. I’m sure it is *absolutely* not going to anger the Lord of the Afterlife.”

The son of Poseidon turned towards Castellan.

“Sorry, friend, it looks like we will be collateral damage at Ground Zero when everything will go to hell.”

Impressively, Castellan maintained a dignified face and his limbs didn’t flinch. Maybe there was hope for him.

Trajan, to his credit, seemed to realise the sheer stupidity of sending a lieutenant of a Goddess where she was more or less sure to be slaughtered for what she was. But the orders of his superiors bound him, and so the freshly-shaven twenty-five-looking immortal didn’t come back on the orders said.

“Anything outstanding to do?”

And sure enough, Zeus couldn’t miss an opportunity to be a fool.

“Since the Lord of the Underworld has refused to acknowledge the Council’s demands, you must also return with the thief herself.”

“Understood,” he said immediately before the little god could add conditions like ‘alive’, ‘intact’, or ‘prisoner’. Seriously, it showed these peoples never tried to deal with the Demons or Devils on a daily basis. They would not last one hour. “Now except for Lord Dionysus, of course...everyone who doesn’t want to be involved in this Great Quest, where we will invade the Underworld, fight enemies which will make Asterius the Minotaur look small, and challenge a God in his very domain...you can leave.”

In twenty seconds, save Nightshade and Castellan, the only Demigod who remained was the representative of the Ares Bungalow, a tattooed boy of twenty-years-old who was smiling back.

“We’re going to organise a tournament first thing next morning to decide who will come with you, Jackson!”

“Good, very good,” the ex-Tyrant congratulated him before turning towards the two other Demigods, who seemed extremely displeased to be here. “To improve morale and increase the chances of finding eight new individuals for our joyous Quest, I suggest renaming our group.”

“You really think there is a possibility of fulfilling this mission, Jackson?” Castellan’s face had become grimness incarnate.

“Naturally,” the son of Poseidon reassured him. “You see, you’re worrying too much about the rules and the odds. They’re made to be trampled under our feet. But before that, the change of name is necessary. I feel this Quest is so unfair, so tyrannical, so prepared for us to die...”

The thunder roared again over his head.

“That I have no choice but to give us a vibrant name which will stay for us for eternity.”

A pause, because speaking a monologue was an art by itself.

“The Suicide Squad.”

**Author’s note**:

I had plenty of fun writing this one – it helps to have a writing hobby when the side-effects of a second vaccine force you to stay back in a chair for most of the day because you’re tired quickly.

The title of the next chapter, evidently, will be *The Suicide Squad*, if you hadn’t guessed.

I have decided to post this timeline will be posted, for as long as it continues to amuse me. The rhythm of update will be as follows: when chapter N+1 is updated on pa treon, chapter N will be on the different sites where I usually post my literary efforts.

Now let’s assemble the insanely glorious team which will follow Perseus Jackson to hell and back...