**Disclaimer**: I don’t own Percy Jackson and the universe which was created by Rick Riordan. I only borrow it for my own works and fun purposes. I don’t own the A Practical Guide to Evil series, which is currently written by an author far more gifted than I am.

**Chapter 1**

**A Hatred of Prophecies**

**18 August 2009, Olympus**

Kronos couldn’t believe it.

He had been close, so close...one minuscule step close from glorious and total victory!

The King of Titans had been about to destroy the thrones of his weak and treacherous children and grandchildren, disperse their power, and usher a new era where the Titans would reign upon immortals, mortals, and monsters.

Instead control over his body was disrupted, mere seconds before his final apotheosis was about to begin.

The Master of Othrys was the Lord of Time, and as such was aware that in a few minutes, he would have been to escape this reinforced mortal shell and regain his magnificent Divine Form. The enemy Demigods would have been incinerated. The Titans would be strengthened and the Gods massively weakened.

It would be in a few minutes. It would be too late to do any good, as the Lord of Titans saw his mortal host remove the protection covering the armpit of his left arm.

Some of his most foolish sons might have not noticed the significance of such an action, but Kronos knew what it implied intimately. It was the only part of Luke Castellan’s body which had not benefitted from the invincibility of the waters of the Styx. It was the fatal weakness of the body he possessed.

A dagger, a dagger cursed by prophecy and oath, arrived in his...in Luke’s hands.

The weapon approached from this small patch of skin.

Kronos roared internally and froze time.

Utterly.

Already his strength was vacillating as he felt the disgusting presence of these crones the Fates striking at him, doing their best to let his grasp falter.

But he was the King of Titans, the Master of the Golden Age, and Time was his Domain.

The time was stopped. The cursed dagger stopped its course. The Fates increased their pressure.

Despite knowing he was only moments away from death, Kronos felt strangely relieved. The Second Titanomachy was obviously lost. When his mortal shell died, and this dagger would make sure of it, Kronos was going to be disintegrated in a very, very violent manner, possibly powerful enough to make him impossible a return in this sphere of existence.

Yet this knowledge didn’t sadden him. Instead, the Titan felt rising anger.

This prophecy, the so-called ‘Great Prophecy’, had always been about his death. The wording suggested some hope of victory for his side, but immortals were clear-sighted, and the sire of the modern Greek-Roman pantheon saw for the first time the unaltered truth: there had never been any chance of victory for his cause. He had always been destined to fall here, one second away from apotheosis, when he was the most vulnerable.

Time was utterly still, and Kronos drank the knowledge of the past and the present, much as Fate tried to break his resistance.

Yes, he had committed great mistakes during this conflict. Yes, many of his brothers and his allies had reasons to be...displeased about his leadership.

But he had not violated the Ancient Laws, proclaimed by Chaos itself. He had not stolen the symbols of power of other immortals – that was what Demigods were for, really. He had not travelled to the domain of other immortals ‘uninvited’: Zeus and himself were waging war against each other for the control of the Skies and every part of the atmosphere, his usurper of a son to keep the realm he didn’t deserve, and he to be reborn as the legitimate ruler of this world.

The Olympians and the Fates had made this Titanomachy a preordained victory for their side. They had known, and shamelessly used Prophecies and their intricacies to engineer his doom.

They had ensured that for all his hatred, Luke Castellan was unsuitable as a host, since he would always falter at the end.

They had manipulated countless Demigods in supporting them no matter what happened, in spite of the ‘ancient laws’ proclaimed by Zeus who told their children shouldn’t be educated and trained by their immortal sires. But overall it was all about prophecies, and ensuring a few key Demigods stayed loyal to the end.

Kronos hated it...though ‘loathing’ was a major understatement of his true feelings.

And the assault on Time continued, the three crones continuing their assault with more vigour. No doubt they sensed they had him at their mercy.

And they were right, weren’t they? He had lost.

The Olympians, his pathetic children and grandchildren, would reign for millennia to come. The status quo enforced by Zeus and the Fates would continue for hundreds generations of mortals.

The name of the Titans, in time, would be forgotten.

Damn the Olympians. Damn the Fates. Damn the Prophecies. Damn them! Curse them! He would-

A troubling idea coalesced in the immortal power of the King of Titans.

He had lost, yes, but time was like a snake eating its own tail; it was...malleable.

Stopping the seconds and the minutes to come from happening was impossible, even for him.

But the past...in the past, nothing was so definite.

Something shook his power. Something...ancient. Or maybe something *Primordial* was the better way to accurately describe him.

Kronos began thinking how he could get his revenge.

The key would be to removing Fate and the prophecies from meddling into every Quest, battle, and immortal or mortal deeds. Their vision had to be at least temporarily blinded, or everything was doomed from the start.

Thanks to listening to the echoes of the future, Kronos knew there was a way to accomplish it: Python, the sworn enemy of Apollo, could usurp the power of the Oracles and Fate itself. Was it truly usurpation however when the power was originally his and the Gods had stolen it?

**You will pay a terrible price for this, Father of Time.**

Kronos shivered at Chaos’ declaration. It wasn’t a warning or a threat; it simply was the truth...in a painful and impossible-to-deny way.

And yet it remained...insufficient.

In this future, Python had lost...and in a thoroughly humiliating fashion, if he was generous. Losing against Apollo as a God was something, but losing against an acne-disfigured teenager possessing some meagre sparks of divine power? Even with a Prophecy at work, it was *pathetic*. No, the Lord of Titans couldn’t rely on an overgrown snake to topple Olympus.

Seven actions.

It was a symbolically powerful number, and magically it would serve his means.

First, his magic would erode the prison of Python in Tartarus, liberating the Oracle-empowering monster decades earlier than expected. One could only pray the enemy of Apollo would be careful and stay in the shadows plotting and preparing before causing plenty of damage.

Second...he was going to give ‘gifts’ to the Olympians. With hindsight, their unity was the biggest lie of their Council: without the Titans, they would have jumped to the throats of each other and began a great civil war which would have shaken this world for eternity.

Each move he thought over lengthily before preparing to allocate a gigantic portion of his power to it. It was an enormous waste, given that the influence were more nudges than true decisive actions, and that he couldn’t be guaranteed the pawns would react like he wanted...though one could count on his youngest son, Zeus, to react as predicted. People called him arrogant, but in this field, the ‘Lord of Olympus’ had surpassed him long ago. Pride, paranoia, and arrogance had almost led him to his doom before; it wouldn’t be difficult to push him towards Tartarus at the decisive moment.

Still, he wouldn’t have attempted it before. But what good his power was going to do to him when he fell? None.

And this left him the more unpleasant part of this desperate plan.

Percy Jackson, son of Poseidon...the boy couldn’t be allowed to stand against his plans once more. And the same was true against the Demigods. Prophecies or no prophecies, Kronos had seen how much delay they had cost him in the Battle of Manhattan. Many had died, but the Olympians would always breed more.

No, it was similar to the Olympians, it was better to destroy them from the inside while someone assaulted them from the outside. A few spies had not been sufficient for the former. Anyone who tried to topple his sons and daughters must have support from the progeny of the Olympians.

Fortunately, per his ‘alliance’ with Hecate, he could summon a soul from across the different dimensions of reality. Someone who would have his...far-sight and genius to see the Olympians for the usurpers they were.

Yes, yes, it was brilliant, if he said so himself.

At the instant of their victory, Kronos’ shards of power would find themselves to the past, opening the path to his revenge

For the one Fate wanted to be the Hero...his Soul.

For the one who had been sacrificed by the Gods...his Heart.

For the one who decided to betray him and spit upon his oaths...his Strength.

This was his last defiance, Kronos knew. Many manipulations, but would it be enough? Such intervention would enormously benefit his children and grandchildren in the short-term, for such a negative and blatant intervention would be compensated by more power and influence for Olympus.

It was entirely possible Kronos himself would not play a part in this new Titanomachy, as odious and horrible as the idea was.

But the vengeance would be his, even if no one saved his parts screaming in the pits of Tartarus remembered.

And that would be enough.

**Vengeance?**

“Vengeance. Vengeance for vengeance. You will pay for everything, *son*.”

Kronos released time and unleashed his power for his last grand move.

The dagger struck deep a second later. And then there was *nothing*.

Kronos, Lord of Time, King of the Titans, had perished. But before vanishing, he had changed the world forever.

**4 October 1999, somewhere near New York City, United States of America**

He was alive.

It was most surprising, because he was ready to swear on everything he knows that he had been struck by lightning thrice in the last minutes *and* drowned out by a tidal wave at the same time. Add the explosion of the car...

The black-haired boy grimaced and try to pass a hair in the aforementioned hair, realising nearly immediately he would have to let them grow...a lot...before they could reach somewhere near their proper length. And as he watched his appearance in this lake which had come out of nowhere, the seven-years-old boy also realised he will likely have to cut them first. What was on his head was a hirsute thing half-burned and half...well, he didn’t know if there’s a proper word to describe it.

All things considered, his appearance was still surprisingly healthy. Granted he looks like he had massive sunburns from head to foot, his clothes were so tattered they would inspire revulsion to a beggar, and a few wounds on his arms were likely going to scar.

But given the violence of the attack...and it was an attack, he intimately knew.

Something in his soul had woken up. Something kept asleep by seven years of a loving mother and as many years of average life have forced old memories to be unlocked. Because this was the first time the heavens had raged against him, and unleashed their thunder to end his life.

“Why?” the green-eyed boy asked calmly, in a tone which would astonish any witness, since anyone in such situation would likely cry or scream. “It can’t be my attempts to play with my hydrokinesis twice...I stopped when she asked. It can’t be anything I’ve done in this car...”

Even the cold green eyes vibrating with an energy far older than any seven-years-old should possess dared not look more than a few seconds at the enormous crater where the thoroughly carbonised wreck of a car was lying abandoned.

“It was not me. It was never about me. It’s what I represent.” Plunging his arm in the miniature lake, the young boy smiled when second after second the wounds plunged into the liquid healed at an accelerated rate. Soon even the lightning-induced sunburn disappeared like it had never existed. Knowing this was the cure, the solution was obvious and besides, it wasn’t like he was at risk of being wetter or less presentable. Ten minutes later or so he guessed, and everything was more or less healed.

“At least this confirms my theory. The lightning tried to kill me; the water protected and healed me. So I can only deduce this is a grand contest between Gods...Lightning versus Water.”

There is more thunder rumble far above his head, as if trying to threaten him beforehand.

“This is not about Perseus Jackson,” the green-eyed boy smiled. “It is about what I am the symbol of. You have made your point and killed my mother. Take your lightning and go away.”

His ‘suggestion’ was not well-liked, if the dark clouds summoned right above him were any indication. Of course at this moment the water soared again, a true wall of water forming a blue citadel to protect him.

There was a stand-off for a few heartbeats. And then the clouds vanished like they had never been here. The water began to recede too. The lake progressively disappeared, decreasing to the size of a pond, before being at best a big puddle. The nightly sky could be seen again, cloudless, like all the events of the last hour were just a dream.

But he was alone.

Alone, the car was a ruin, and his mother was dead, because they had been caught in a contest between two Gods and people with no endurance or special abilities were too fragile to survive this kind of attention.

“Mother...”

He should not be *so* angry.

After all, the old Kairos Theodosian, his past self, led a coup against his own father and killed him. And his closest male relative after that, his cousin Dorian, had to flee his kingdom and become the Exiled Prince if he wanted to keep his head on his shoulders. The former Tyrant was not a teenager whose familial principles ran very deep.

But this was his ancient life. In this one, in this very body, he had a loving mother, and she was his world.

Now she was gone, disappeared in lightning and fury.

“And they say that lightning never strikes at the same place twice...” Of course lightning isn’t usually powerful enough to destroy cars and leave massive craters the like are only crated by demons and massive sorcerous spells bent on the destruction of everything and everyone either. “What do I do now?”

The young part of his soul, the scared part, urged him to flee. He, Perseus Jackson, could do nothing against this kind of power. If not for another divine intervention to oppose the first one, he would be dead too.

And to be honest, it was likely the intelligent choice, the sane choice...assuming fleeing was an option.

It likely wasn’t. This world didn’t appear to have formal Names and run on stories, but the ex-Tyrant could feel the pulse of something significant here. Even if this wasn’t about the life of Perseus Jackson per se, no self-respecting God would lose his time blasting apart someone truly unimportant. The hydrokinesis and the water healing were clues that couldn’t be missed. His new soul was not versed in the local mythology, but there was a high likelihood of him being tied somehow to a water deity.

This...this was personal. Someone had killed his mother and tried his best to kill him too.

And while Kairos didn’t think he had any Callowan blood running in his veins at any moment of his two existences...this time he really understood *revenge*.

It wouldn’t be today. Normal or precocious, no seven-years-old could go against the heavens and win.

But it would come.

“This I swear on everything I lost,” the memories of the old and new soul uttered together, merging in a violent emotion of loss, desire for retribution, and rage against the now thunder-empty skies. “I, Perseus Jackson, will have my revenge, whether be Gods, Demons, or all the armies of this cursed world stand against me.”

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No word was said when the young Demigod began to walk away from the road, marching without looking back westwards.

Several minutes later, the first of the three beings taking the form of old ladies sitting in rocking chairs spoke.

“The boy has challenged Fate.”

And they were Fate – or Fates, plural – went unsaid.

“Destiny is unravelling,” agrees the second. “It was already complicated to explore all the futures with Hades’ ridiculous curse upon the Oracle, and it is getting to get worse from there.”

“Shouldn’t blame be laid where it belongs?” the third asked. “The boy’s destiny has been brutally altered through no fault of his own. This is-“

“Something...dangerous...has awakened in Perseus Jackson,” Clotho, the Fate of Birth, declared. “When I watched him, it was like a dangerous serpent taking over. The actions of Olympus aren’t upsetting our threads. This boy is.”

“Sister, if the Lord of Olympus decides to reduce to ashes the mortal parents of many Demigods,” Lachesis, Fate of Life, protested, “their own destinies would be derailed too. Or do you expect them to go to New Byzantium and forget anything happened? In addition to this reality, I think we can’t forget that our father has a pattern of killing women and children who can be a source of danger to his throne, no matter how slim or unlikely.”

“This has not been forgotten,” Atropos, Fate of Death, reassured her two sisters. “But we are not the guardians of Olympus’ justice. We are Fate. We control and manipulate the life threads of every living being, and Perseus Jackson will not play the role we destined him to. And if he doesn’t play his role, there is no place for him in the great tapestry of destiny.”

Golden-silver scissors shining with divine power were seized in one hand, and approached the electric blue yarn.

And then something unprecedented, impossible, happened.

The scissors were unable to cut the life-thread of the Demigod.

**5 October 1999, Olympus**

Ares had bet on his uncle Poseidon announcing his arrival with several earthquakes and two or three gigantic tidal waves.

Evidently, it was a bet he lost...since unless the God of Seas had changed a great deal, it wasn’t him who entered the Throne Room of Olympus.

“You have not been summoned, Prince Triton of Atlantis,” Zeus rumbled. “Your father was.”

“My father,” retorted the God taking the form of a young green-haired man, albeit one who was three metres-tall, “is still paying the price for breaking his oath on the Styx. For six years he has been unable to rule either at Olympus or Atlantis, as the penalty for such oath-breaking demands. Since it leaves him three more years of exile, I was sent as his voice and arm today.”

“He is enduring the full punishment?” There was definitely surprise in his father’s voice now.

“The seas are many things,” the Heir of Poseidon replied coldly. “Wild, untamed, violent, and vengeful to name but a few...but we take oaths very, very seriously. If my father had not accepted the punishment of Styx, he would have lost the respect of every Atlantean.”

By the standards of criticism, it was not a subtle one. And being quick to take on any offense, of course his dear father’s face became angry and the Master Bolt flashed in his hands.

“Not every God can afford taking a ten years-long leave from his duties,” the King of the Gods affirmed.

“Not every God would have the gall to break so many times his oath while vilifying the other parties having sworn their words on the Styx,” the younger God replied with such bluntness that Ares was very tempted to cheer him. Alas his dear harpy of a mother gave him a withering look, and the God of Battles and Massacres had to limit himself to a mischievous smirk like Apollo did.

“This is different.” The Master Bolt wasn’t directed at Triton or thundered loudly, but it was still in Zeus’ hands. Too bad his father had both eyes on the Prince of Atlantis, because the expression of Hera was filled with pure loathing. “Do not waste my time. Why are you here, Prince?”

“I am here to inform you that following the unjustified assassination of his mortal lover, my father has decided all imports from his domains are going to receive a one hundred percent-increase in taxes. We have also decided to build several of the new generation of warships somewhere else than your Eastern Coast shipyards. Furthermore...”

Ares winced as for the next two minutes, a thorough plan to hurt Olympus’ economy was explained point by point. Outside war, he couldn’t exactly give his opinion, but the shipbuilding and the weapons lost touched his domain, and it wasn’t going to be painless.

His father’s expression, understandably, was more thunderous than ever, not less.

“Your father is ready to derail an entire sector of Olympian economy for a mere mortal?”

Triton didn’t seem very impressed by the outburst.

“You, Lord Zeus, struck down Sally Jackson, my father’s lover, because she was an easy target for your wrath after you were forced to transform your daughter into a pine tree. Don’t shift the blame where it doesn’t belong.”

These were not the words you said to the Master of Olympus if you wanted to calm him.

“My daughter was innocent and *someone* summoned a horde of Hellhounds and monsters to kill her!”

The Prince of Atlantis scoffed and looked at his nails.

“No sword of Atlantis or any loyal servant of Atlantis would participate in such a cowardly operation. When we want to kill someone, we do it on a proper battlefield and we don’t use intermediaries...and you know it perfectly.” The Master Bolt grew twice bigger...an effect that was completely theatrical and unable to cow Triton into a respectful expression. “No, everyone knows Hades sent his hounds again your precocious Demigoddess. Why would he react like that, I wonder?”

None of the other ten Gods and Goddesses dared whispering after this very rhetorical question was uttered.

“I prevented a threat from-“

“You are a hypocrite,” Triton interrupted him, and the tension in the Throne Room reached new heights. “And the facts speak for themselves. Once is a coincidence, twice is a pattern. Maria di Angelo and Sally Jackson have been incinerated by your Master Bolt, only last-minute intervention saving their children from death. Yet you continue to sire more children and impregnate more mortal women. We are aware of four right now...and we’re still waiting for you to show some penance for the first transgression of the Pact.”

“Are you threatening my children?”

Ha! Ares smiled internally, because his dear mother was seething. Not surprising, she was aware of Thalia and Jason Grace, but not the ones who came after that.

“As I said before, we Atlantean warriors have honour.” The green-haired God calmly answered in a voice where the storms of the seas found their echo. “We won’t blame children for their parent’s mistakes...though no son or daughter of yours will be welcome for many years in Atlantis’ halls. No, we are warning you that if you continue threatening my father’s son or act against the Seas’ interests on the surface, there will be war.”

“My brother’s son represents a clear danger to Olympus!” Zeus roared. “The Fates have confirmed it. He must be sent to the Lotus Casino or another holdout where he won’t be able to age.”

“You are in no position to make this demand, Lord of Olympus,” the son of Amphitrite icily retorted. “And I question very much the danger a seven-years-old boy can pause to the Council ruling this world...especially when the attempted murder happened less than twenty-four hours after your daughter was lying mortally wounded. This isn’t a question of Olympus’ security or survival. You were angry my uncle sent his monsters kill your daughter, but unfortunately for you the Lotus Casino is not something you can destroy on a whim. So you unleashed your wrath on someone which had done the same mistake as the Lord of the Underworld.”

“I will not forget this.”

But the Heir to Poseidon wasn’t done.

“In the name of the Throne of Atlantis, I also urges to agree upon a summit of the Great Three to release everyone from the Great Oath. The events have proved it is useless to try to avoid this Great Prophecy if everyone continues to sire Demigods right and left and-“

“GET. OUT!”

**18 July 2003, Charleston, United States of America**

Luke Castellan would remember the expression of surprise on his father’s face for as long as he lived.

It was good to have the confirmation you could astonish an immortal...though after the so-called prophecy was more than useless on his journey, the son of Hermes had already entertained thoughts the mummy was obsolete.

“Yes, this is one of the golden apples of the Hesperides,” the blonde teenager said as he posed the priceless fruit on the restaurant table where the meeting was taking place. “Freshly picked from the tree.”

“You have done very well, Luke,” Hermes praised him, and despite having a lot of issues with the God, the Demigod felt better than ever hearing the words. “No problem with the dragon?”

“If I had problems with Ladon, I think I wouldn’t be here to speak with you today,” the thief said drily. “I think he’s bigger than several rockets...not that I wasted my time measuring them, I’m sure you understand. No, I make sure he remained deep asleep. If Heracles wasn’t able to beat the dragon in single combat, why should I take the risk? The problem was more knocking out the Hesperides, they tried to sound the alert behind by my back. Speaking of which...” the blue-eyed Demigod showed a thoughtful expression to his father, “is there a reason why these nymphs could be mistaken as twins of Nightshade, Artemis’ chief lieutenant of the Hunt?”

“They are her sisters,” Hermes’ smile was nowhere in sight when he spoke again, his two serpents continuously hissing behind his back. “Zoë Nightshade was exiled after Heracles used her to steal the golden apples and discarded her immediately afterwards.”

“Ah,” Luke grimaced. “So that’s why she hates boys.”

There had been many questions asked by Greek and Roman Demigods alike when the Hunt had visited New Byzantium for the last time. Many of them had turned around the evident disgust the most powerful Huntresses felt for any person not a girl. Maybe disgust was not accurate, though. It was more fury bordering on hatred. If the followers of Artemis had their way, they would all be eunuchs before the year was out.

“It’s a good reason, don’t you think?” and the young Castellan had a feeling his father wasn’t speaking only about Nightshade.

“It was long ago,” he breathed out, “and our lives are too short to stew on hatred.”

“Well said son,” Hermes gave him a solemn smile. “Well said. Now for your reward...I can buy you this apple for five million Drachmas.”

“Five million?” the son of the God of Trade and Bartering raised his voice in an offended tone, his instincts to gain the upper hand in the negotiation to come were all at high alert. “Did you see the size of the dragon? Ten million Drachmas, and not a coin less!”

“I have to sell it back to Hera, you know, and she’s going to be less than pleased I didn’t warn her about this Quest,” the God of Thieves replied back. “Six million.”

“Let the Queen of Gods pay a bigger price, then,” the Demigod said unrepentantly. “Ten million.”

“Son, you really need to learn to properly bargain...let me show you how it’s done...”

**22 December 2005, Olympus**

Dionysus loved December. So many parties happened that time of the year, how could it be otherwise? To make things better, consumption of wine was always at an all times high, and this was both pure source of worship and delight for his accounts...that he could invest in more parties. Third point and not the least, this gave him the opportunity to let his attention and divine presence spread away from Byzantium-Constantinople for a few hours. By the horns of the Minotaur, dealing with thousands of these rascals on a day-to-day basis was a torture. Was this what Sisyphus was feeling in the depths of Tartarus?

Bah, better forget it. This was one more Winter Solstice over...meaning his punishment would end in precisely sixty years minus one day. This nymph had really cost him dearly. Sometimes, the God of Wine was really tempted to say the truth to his kingly genitor: seducing the beautiful lesser goddess had been Ariadne’s idea and things had escaladed quickly after that. But knowing the legendary punishment of the ‘God of Justice’, it wasn’t a good idea. The infidel husband was already peeved enough someone slept with the nymph before he could, to know two deities had fun with the sweetheart he coveted would not improve his mood.

“Ah, Lucien Clark!” The Demigod he called out was called Luke Castellan, but Dionysus had a reputation to maintain. “Was your band of dangerous cutthroats and thieves not supposed to return to your barracks before midnight?”

“We were, Mr. D.,” the son of Hermes coughed in embarrassment, “that’s the problem I wanted to talk to you about, in fact. Ten minutes ago, the lift stopped working. Half of our group is still blocked on Mount Olympus-“

“You will have to try something better, Leeroy,” a pity the last name of the boy didn’t begin by a ‘J’, otherwise Dionysus would have added Jenkins. “This divine lift is neither early nor late, and arrives always on time. The only God who is able to block it is my divine father, and I see no reason why he would-“

“**WHO DARED? WHO HAD THE AUDACITY, THE STUPIDITY, THE DEATHWISH TO STEAL MY MASTER BOLT**?” The furious scream was so sonorous the God of Wine and Madness was rather sure everyone on Olympus had heard him. Hell, even with the Mist, Dionysus was ready to bet a few mortals and monsters had heard it in the streets of New York City.

“With due hindsight, maybe there is a good reason after all, Leon,” the Olympian God nodded. Seriously, father? If the news of the thievery weren’t known from San Francisco to Boston by dawn, he was ready to serve as Charon’s replacement for the next year.

Idly, Dionysus pushed a minuscule portion of his power on Castellan to sense if he had touched the divine weapons. The prophecies were more wrong than right these days, but the blonde boy was still a son of Hermes and a prime candidate for whatever apocalypse was in store for the short-term future.

But this rapid evaluation came back perfectly negative, and for all the thief of the golden apple’s talents, he could never have ran away to a sacred source of water, erase all magical traces of his crime, and come back within a few hours.

“Tell the Demigods still here to be patient and return to the party,” or what was left of it, anyway. For some unfathomable reason, the King’s outburst had slightly crushed the party’s ambiance. “I am going to the Throne Room and will return as soon as possible to return you to Byzantium-Constantinople.”

Dionysus flashed out at high velocity and arrived in the Throne Room where, as he feared, the six metres-high doors were wide open and the majestic tables where the symbol of power of Zeus should be presented was desperately empty.

“MY MASTER BOLT HAS BEEN STOLEN!” Minor good news, this time his divine genitor wasn’t screaming with all his divine voice’s power...he was just screaming, which meant the effect was ‘merely’ unpleasant.

“And my Trident has been stolen too,” Uncle Poseidon grunted, because of course, a bad news couldn’t come alone. Dionysus wanted to bash his head against the nearest wall. The first time the God of the Seas came to Olympus in twelve years, and this happened? What a wonderful event to improve relationships between the Sky and the Ocean...

“This can’t be a God or a Goddess’ work,” the Lord of Thunder growled like his elder brother had not spoken. The Ancient Laws make it impossible for us to steal our respective symbols of power...”

Apollo and Artemis arrived at the same instant and the King of Gods’ didn’t waste any time interrogating them.

“Tell me what you’ve found.”

“All the Demigods Dionysus and Chiron took with them to the Winter Solstice’s Party are accounted for, either at Olympus or near the Empire State Building. None of them have wielded a divine weapon in the last one hundred hours, and all of them are ready to swear on the Styx,” the hellish power was heard in the distance, as the Goddess of the Huntresses spoke, “that they have not entered the Throne Room.”

“Evidently, one of them is lying,” Zeus said, clearly unconvinced and ill-humoured.

“How?” Dionysus was not the only one to be fairly surprised as Ares intervened. “The doors of the Throne Room were closed by your own strength’s father before the party began. While there was no magical seal to prevent intrusions, no single Demigod could have opened them on his own. And if I am ready to admit we may have lost sight of one to two Demigods during several minutes, we didn’t forget about them for hours or days. They certainly didn’t have time to run to the Underworld and drink the waters of the Lethe.”

“Opportunity or not, one of them did do it,” the Master of Olympus insisted. “We invited one hundred and twenty Demigods, escorted by Chiron and Dionysus. No one else has the means and the ability to steal my symbol of power!”

By the way his genitor always insisted on ‘his’ Master Bolt and didn’t even mention Poseidon’s, the God of Wine could feel the annoyance of the God of Seas and Earthquakes from here.

“Not exactly,” Hephaestus arrived in a cascade of energy more similar to viscous magma than pure red light. “I examined the lift as you commanded, father. There weren’t one hundred and twenty Demigods who took it last evening. They were one hundred and twenty-one.”

“And the alarms and other systems of security didn’t destroy him or her instantly?” Hera questioned with this snobbish and haughty attitude she always reserved for the ugly God of Smiths. “I believed you insisted about the latest military overhaul that the defences were flawless and impregnable.”

For sole answer Hephaestus clicked between his fingers, and a large screen bearing the logo of Vulcan TV Incorporated materialised in the Throne Room. The quality of the image was hardly prime material, but it was enough to see a young woman with black hair and olive skin hand to the receptionist the golden authorisation one had to possess if one wanted to be admitted to Mount Olympus.

There was a fast forward of nearly two hours, and then the anonymous Demigoddess, a girl which had to be between twelve and fourteen given the video available, returned to the lobby of the receptionist, except this time she carried a massive backpack, one she seemed to be eager to show before the cameras of Hephaestus.

If this wasn’t a clue enough, the last seconds saw the black-haired girl outright stick her tongue out in a clear symbol of mockery.

“So that’s our thief,” Hermes chuckled, “I love her style!”

“Hermes...” Poseidon seemed to take it with good humour. Alas, it wasn’t the case of Zeus. “If I learn you have helped her, Dionysus’ punishment at New Byzantium will be funny and short-timed compared to what you will receive...”

“Err....sorry! Sorry!” The God of Thieves and Celerity realised the peril he had unwittingly come so close too. “No! I mean, no, I didn’t help the thief to steal your Master Bolt!”

The wing-helmeted God was sweating profusely, to the great amusement of Ares and Aphrodite.

“Dionysus! Who is this Demigod?”

“I haven’t the faintest idea, father.” The God of Wine replied honestly and truthfully. “As numerous as the rascals, brats, and good-for-nothing vandals you are sending me are, I don’t remember any girl looking like that. This isn’t a Demigoddess under my authority.”

“How could it be?” Apollo was more astonished than trying to contest his words, but Dionysus promised to spike his drink with something horribly embarrassing at the earliest opportunity. “She had the proper clearance to make sure the alert wasn’t sounded. Only...”

“Yes,” Zeus started in a grim voice, “only one of the Council has the authority and the power to deliver these documents.”

“I think I saw someone looking like this girl before...”Demeter frowned.

“This isn’t completely exact,” Athena countered. “Fourteen of us have the authority to open all the doors, lifts and temples we want. And while Hestia is above suspicion,” the Goddess of Hearths’ presence somewhere nearby was pretty noticeable, like a comfortable source of warmth, “the last of the Fourteenth was here early tonight, and he certainly didn’t mention his symbol of power was stolen before leaving.”

“Hades,” Zeus said darkly.

“Yes,” his favourite daughter said with the detached calm she was always using during Council sessions.

“Wait a minute,” Apollo protested. “I mean, our Uncle isn’t the most charming God, not like me, but he’s still taking his oaths very seriously. Why would he do something so brazen?”

Ares smiled widely.

“While the Lord of the Underworld has not access to legions of Cyclops like my Lord Father and Lord Uncle here clearly have, the ownership of the Master Bolt and the Trident would allow him to make copies. After all, no matter his aspects and appearances, our eldest Uncle has all the wealth of the Underworld and the deep earth at his disposal. He can certainly find thousands of artisans, smiths, and weapon-makers to build himself an arsenal.”

“Ares speaks true,” Zeus approved.

“And yet what good would it provide him?” Poseidon disagreed. “Our eldest brother could theoretically build himself an arsenal of divine weapons...but at great cost and in a matter of years, while those of Olympus and Atlantis are ready to be used at a moment’s notice. My own stockpiles have improved Tridents which make the one who was stolen a child’s toy. No, Hades isn’t the one we must looking for-“

“Hermes,” Athena rudely interrupted the God of the Seas, which everyone knew was deliberate. “Go to the Lotus Casino immediately. I think I know why this girl feels so familiar to Demeter.”

The God of Celerity and Messengers raced away in silver light, and most of the Council was paling as they began to take the implications of what had possibly happened tonight.

Dionysus understood the implications too. Hades had sworn his children would stay at the Lotus Casino for as long as the Great Prophecy was active. If they weren’t there anymore...

Hermes came back and his livid tone told the Gods and Goddesses everything they needed to know.

“The di Angelo children are gone. I couldn’t get a precise timetable, but I think they were removed three months ago. I don’t know who managed to get them out. All those who were there had their memories of the event erased.”

 “By the pits...” Apollo swore, and no one told him his reaction was wrong. Three months of real time had passed since effectively the Great Prophecy had accelerated towards its explosive climax. Granted, there were a son of Poseidon and a son of Jupiter who could be candidates too. Still, a daughter and a son of Hades had grown three months older...and nobody had been the wiser.

“Hermes.”

“Yes, father!” the God of Thieves understood it wasn’t the time for jokes as he snapped in a military stance, temporarily taking the form of his Roman avatar Mercury.

“You are going to send an ultimatum to the Throne of the Underworld,” Zeus growled threateningly. “Hades is to return the stolen symbols of power to Olympus and his spawns are to be delivered to Dionysus’ care at New Byzantium...or the armies of Olympus will take them back with thunder and sword!”

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

Ethan Nakamura had few reasons to be happy these days. As everyone who was not deaf, blind and stupid, the son of Nemesis knew war was imminent. Not a small war between two mortal-ruled countries or a war game the Legions played regularly, oh no. It was civil war between the Gods of Olympus who was on the horizon. And since Ethan was not dumb enough to trust the proclamations coming from Apollo and the other Olympians, they were all pawns in this conflict.

A good strategist knew that pawns were always made to be sacrificed in the end. Oh, one or two may have the chance to win immortality when the battles were won, but this fate never was the lot of the children of Nemesis...or any of the Gods’ children not having a seat at the Council of Olympus, really.

This was the sort of millennia-old injustice which made his blood boil. But today, it would have to wait. The Quest came first, and it looked like it was going to be a hell’s pit of its own.

“The *Exploratores* have massively underestimated the scale of the enemy’s foundry,” the black-haired Demigod commented as he lowered his magical binoculars.

“Or they have expanded it in the last two months,” Dakota, son of Bacchus, added on his right.

Ethan didn’t glare, but it wasn’t the motivation which was missing for him. He wasn’t one of the purists who believed Greek-born were destined to become Questers before they were able to walk and Roman-born were sired to become Legionnaires, but he didn’t like having the son of Bacchus as a fellow Quester.

“Let’s see the positive side,” their fearless leader smiled. “We are certain this is the location we’re looking for.”

“Four Cyclops and more than two hundred and fifty skeleton warriors in the middle of a Detroit factory supposedly dismantled by the Olympians after World War II?” Ethan shook his head. “The Mist-burners alone make this operation a colossal expenditure for the enemy.”

“Officially, the Rich One isn’t the enemy.” Luke Castellan affirmed.

Ethan snorted.

“Somehow, I don’t think the shipments coming out of this Cyclops industrial zone are paint guns.” The son of Nemesis said sarcastically.

“It could be a false-flag operation.” The black-eyed teenager gave the son of Hermes his best dubitative expression. “I do not see the seal of his House anywhere on the containers.”

The Demigod who had established the record of Quests for the last two centuries before his eighteenth birthday had a point.

“I will give you that. Still, whether the Dark One is behind this or not, this foundry-factory is clearly operated by non-allied Cyclops, and this make it a legitimate target. Do we begin?”

Luke Castellan examined the defences of the Cyclops’ base for a few more seconds – two walls, and numerous inimical death engines plus of course the skeleton monsters – before giving his assent.

“Yes, we begin. We must infiltrate this base and locate the Stygian Iron shipment before they use their skills to forge it into Demigod-slaying weapons.”

This was the foremost reason they were here today. Unlike Celestial Bronze and Imperial Gold, which the three Demigods were currently armed with, metal forged in Stygian Iron were capable of injuring everything they stabbed, monsters and humans, mortals and immortals. The latter would survive, but they would nonetheless feel the pain.

And the Cyclops of this foundry were rumoured to have received a ‘sizeable’ shipment weeks ago.

“Dakota, the western complex is yours. Ethan, you sabotage the eastern complex. I am going to cripple the central Forge. We meet here back in one hour. And Dakota...stop drinking this Kool-Aid. You’re going to attract monsters by the scent of your drinks alone.”

The son of Nemesis couldn’t repress a snicker, because Castellan, favourite son of Hermes or not, had definitely a point there.

Infiltrating the complex wasn’t hard. The patrols of the skeletons were so predictable climbing the walls with rope and sneaking through their defences was simplicity itself...maybe too easy.

The foundries and all the industrial apparatus was not exactly defended by impressive things. Ethan had to stab in the back a skeleton warrior which hindered his progression, but the Cyclops were so loud you heard them coming minutes ahead, and once you had tested yourself against the traps of Hephaestus’ children, the so-called ‘Cyclops’ traps’ were easy to avoid.

The sabotage of the tools and everything was done in record time, the demolition charges awaited only his activation of a detonator. There was only one problem.

There was no trace of any Stygian Iron. Not an ingot, a medallion, or a short sword. Chiron had showed one tiny shard of this cursed metal to them, and the presence was pretty much impossible to forget or to mistake for something else, with this unnatural cold and this nasty purple Mist-aura.

And Ethan had a sick idea why. The enormous hammers, magma vats, and the hyper-advanced Cyclopean machinery was left inactive while it was the middle of the day...this was not these monsters’ common behaviour. There was only one reason why they would not be at work. They were shipping out the Stygian Iron weapons out.

Sure enough, as he left the complex behind him, the four massive Cyclops were busy loading enormous containers on something looking like the very picture of a ‘chariot of damnation’.

Ethan began to run faster, and on his left, he saw Luke was running towards him too. Good, if they united, they could-

A training of several years proved its worth, as suddenly all his instincts told him to find cover, which the son of Nemesis did by hiding behind a tractor.

One second later, a meteor smashed into the courtyard, disintegrating most of the Cyclops into golden dust – true gold, the monsters once they died were an enormous source of income – and throwing the contents of the ‘chariot of the damned’ everywhere.

“What in my mother’s whip?”

A chariot descended from the skies. That in itself was not too unusual when you lived among Demigods, but *what* towed the chariot was. Because Ethan knew Pegasi could do the job, and the same was true about special breeds of divine horses, dragons, and bulls. But he had never thought a chariot could be towed by *stone gargoyles*!

“Luke,” he coughed, as the explosion had spread around plenty of smoke, and not the benevolent kind. “I think I’m beginning to have hallucinations...”

“Hallucinations where a boy in orange toga is driving a chariot towed by grimacing gargoyles?” the blonde son of Hermes asked.

“Yes...”

This wasn’t the most ridiculous attire he had ever seen, not with Mr. D overseeing barracks and city – or not overseeing them, if one was to be honest.

But it was...gaudy. It was impossible to say something about the boy’s body, for everything was hidden behind this sort of altered toga, which as the chariot landed in a thunderous series of clangs, was revealed to be indeed orange, though there were golden hems too, and here and there, sinister skulls shone in a malevolent light.

None of this mattered because for a fraction of a second, Ethan stared at the green eyes...and recoiled like he was avoiding a dangerous monster.

Nemesis and her children were supposed to make sure people couldn’t rely entirely on luck alone to win. True success had to come by long preparations, vigorous efforts, and painful sacrifice. It wasn’t popular. But such was life.

Yet this was the first time Ethan met someone who absolutely *didn’t care*.

The skeleton warriors tried to kill him, of course. They charged him or tried to use their modern assault guns. A swarm of gargoyles fell upon them, while several tried to recover the Stygian weapons.

Luke was faster than the stone monsters, and in a display of swordsmanship beyond Ethan, managed to explode two of them. Judging by the expression of disapproval, these were indeed the ones the orange-clad boy had come for.

“You two are gifted, no doubt about it!” the black haired, green-eyed boy guffawed. “I have a proposition for you. Your talents as Heroes are clearly not paid to their just value given your obsolete equipment. Join me. I have great need for a couple of treacherous lieutenants. What do you say?”

The guy wanted them...as treacherous lieutenants...why kind of drug was he smoking?

“And what are you going to say if we say ‘no’?” Ethan answered.

“I would say you’d better run fast.” The crazy gargoyle-master said while petting one of the biggest stone monsters.

“Threats, while you’re already trying to recruit us?”

“You mistake me-“

A series of red-barbed arrows went to slam against several gargoyles, which didn’t seem to be hurt, but shrieked in outrage.

“I wasn’t speaking about myself.” The mad boy joyously said as he returned to his chariot. “I have the Amazons on my tail after a tragic misunderstanding in one of their depots about some mishandled property. There’s also-“

The eastern wall broke apart, revealing a three metres-tall monstrous creature that every Demigod had heard about. Bull head, human-bestial body, armour of skulls, bones and dark metal, a double axe larger than a human was tall, and a pestilential odour of death.

Yes, it was the Minotaur.

“My dear Uncle seems to consider my existence a blight for all creation.” The green-eyed boy who had to be a Demigod for all his insanity declared cheekily.

“You’re utterly-“

An arrow took the Minotaur in the chest and the last several skeletons on the walls were pulverised by silver arrows shining with moon-light power.

“And I may have stolen a shipment of bows destined to the Huntresses,” if the previous statements hadn’t convinced Ethan the foundry’s invader had lost all his marbles and survival instinct, this proved it without question. You didn’t anger Artemis’ Huntresses...never...and certainly not when you were a male.

“JACKSON!”

“Ah, the sweet voice of Miss Nightshade...”

“She’s going to castrate you...if you’re lucky.”

“If she can catch me, you mean,” the crazy boy laughed. “Spread the words, heroes. Today, you have, almost, just almost, derailed my plans. But this isn’t over! This isn’t the end of my story! Gargoyles! Take-Off!”

A rain of arrows fell down on the stone creations. It failed to destroy them. And the chariot rose again in the sky...

There was a gigantic flash and the sound of thunder, Zeus’ wrath made manifest.

The chariot fell and crashed as hundreds of Huntresses invested the Cyclops’ foundry.

Impossibly, the orange-wearing boy was still alive, as he emerged uninjured from the divine punishment.

“That was the best you could do, Zeus?” The insane – no, insane wasn’t enough to describe this madness. Hundreds of Amazons and Huntresses were taking position on the walls, the Minotaur was charging to kill him, and the thunder clouds were gathering in a very, very threatening manner above his head. “Try again, if you dare!”

**Author’s note**:

For the record, I am a big fan of the Percy Jackson series (and the books which came after in the same universe too) and I am properly awed by the world-building Rick Riordan did.

Yet (because there is a yet) during all books, I think it is fair to say that while the heroes answer the call, the Greek-Roman Pantheon is entirely bungling the whole war effort, whether the enemy is Titans, Elder Giants, or megalomaniac Roman Emperors. Unprepared, reacting poorly and in the wrong order, the good decisions are often taken months too late and as the circumstances have changed so much they are in many ways irrelevant. And it has to be said, between Zeus, Dionysus and the other Olympians, the Demigods have a lot of reasons to hate the Gods’ guts.

I mean, you can count the number of times your divine parent visit you on your two hands, and in exchange you get an extraordinary dangerous life, filled with monsters a potentially horrible death, when said demise doesn’t happen because a God decides to change you into a dolphin or incinerates you on the spot.

Let’s be realistic for a single minute: the Gods are not the good side against the Titans and the other side, they are just the lesser evil, and that’s because the ‘other side’ is *very* evil. Fortunately for Olympus, they got Percy Jackson, a Demigod whose fatal flaw is Loyalty. Why fortunately? Because when most deities discuss calmly to kill you after you saved the day several times, in general one’s loyalty should slightly waver.

So I asked myself the question: what if the Gods truly got the Champion/Hero they deserved by their blunders and fits of jealousy and unbridled destruction?

Of course, the more I thought about it, the more I realised the Greek-Roman Gods and Goddesses didn’t really deserve a Hero given the kind of stunts they regularly made. They deserved a villain.

Enter Kairos Theodosian, Tyrant of Helike, one of the ‘classical villainy’ guys of the A Practical Guide to Evil series.

Some research later and a truly entirely different plot from canon, and I decided to give it a try for a week. And so begin the wild ride of *An Impractical Guide to Godhood*...