

## HADES' REVENGE

After many years, countless wars, innumerable lost lives, and transformations that reshaped the world, the year 2012 finally arrived. At first glance, it seemed no different from the one before – the world was still divided. Greed and conflict ruled the planet, while human hope slowly faded beneath the weight of fear. But in the hearts of people, something had changed. The ancient message passed down through the centuries – the prophecy of the end of the world – had awakened a deep unease within them.

As December 20th drew near, the day the “prophecy” foretold the end, fear became almost tangible. People tried to forget the fate that might await them. They threw parties, gathered with family, and sought comfort in small things. Yet there was no escape from the sense that *something* was coming.

When December 20th passed and the world did not collapse, relief swept across the globe – almost euphoria. Cities became alive again; people laughed, planned Christmas celebrations, and cherished every second as if they were more precious than ever before. But in all that noise and joy, they could not know that their fear – that dark energy rooted deep within their souls – had not vanished. On the contrary, it had become a source of power for someone else.

On December 24th, New York was blanketed in snow. Gray clouds threatened to unleash even more flakes, while bright billboards illuminated the streets. Traffic crawled, and tension spread like a contagion. People rushed through stores at the last minute, searching for the perfect gifts, as the sound of sirens and hurried crowds echoed through the city. Everyone was in motion. Everyone – except one man.

On a sidewalk covered with a thin layer of snow, Hades walked slowly – as if time itself posed no obstacle to him. His tall figure appeared almost ominous in an elegant black winter coat that remained perfectly clean despite the snowflakes falling all around. Beneath the coat, he wore a black suit tailored with such precision that anyone would have thought him a wealthy businessman or some other figure of importance. His steps were light, almost silent, and his eyes gleamed with a cold, deep radiance – as if they held secrets older than time itself.

As he walked, the snowflakes that landed on his clothes vanished instantly, as though consumed by the flame burning within him. It was barely noticeable, but to anyone who might have paid attention, it would have seemed strange. Yet no one looked. People were too absorbed in their worries, their rush, their holiday anxiety. To them, Hades was just another passerby.

His face was calm, almost content. He watched the people with a restrained smirk – like someone who knew something they did not. For millennia, he had dwelled in the underworld, gathering power from human fears and suffering. Those fears had fed his strength for centuries until he became powerful enough to leave his dark palace and walk among men.

Now, as he observed the chaos of the city and the people lost in their own lives, he felt a deep sense of satisfaction. *How small they are*, he thought with a smile. *Small and fragile. And yet they believe in themselves mighty.*

As he continued his walk, people passed by without so much as a glance. He was invisible to their eyes – or perhaps he simply blended in perfectly with the scene. Yet his presence was there, radiating, even if no one could perceive it. People unconsciously stepped aside as he passed, as if they could feel the chill emanating from him.

Hades paused for a moment beside a street musician playing a Christmas tune on a saxophone. He watched as people walked by, dropping coins into the musician's case. Then he turned his gaze back toward the city. The lights flickered, the crowds pulsed, and the voices blended into one chaotic hum.

“Soon,” he murmured, his voice unheard by anyone, “you will all kneel.”

He continued walking as the snow kept falling and the city buzzed on, unaware of the ancient god moving among them, waiting for his moment. In the distance, sirens began to wail – their sharp cry cutting through the noise of the restless city. The streets of New York flickered under the red and blue glow of police lights as cars sped through, flinging snow from the roads onto the sidewalks. People stopped, trying to understand what was happening. Some looked around, while others brushed the snow off their coats, thrown up by the passing vehicles.

At the corner of an intersection stood Hades. His dark figure remained perfectly still, even as the city around him moved in constant motion. He didn't speak a word or make a single gesture. Then, suddenly – as if he had never been there at all – he vanished into a thick haze of black smoke. The snow beneath him melted, leaving a wet mark on the pavement. People who happened to witness the scene stared for a few seconds, bewildered, but couldn't explain what they had just seen. They merely shrugged and went on with their day, trying to forget the strange moment.

Police cars screeched to a halt in front of a large bank, blocking off the street. Curious onlookers began to gather. Officers quickly exited their vehicles, drawing their weapons and taking cover behind their cars. The city was already on the edge of panic, but now the tension reached a breaking point. People crowded behind the police lines, drawn by curiosity and excitement, while the officers struggled to keep them at a safe distance.

Across the street, atop one of the tall buildings, Hades reappeared. His arrival was silent, almost imperceptible. He stood at the edge of the rooftop, hands clasped behind his back, watching the scene unfold below. His face was expressionless, but in his eyes glimmered a spark of satisfaction. This was the moment he relished – chaos, fear, uncertainty. Every frightened heartbeat, every scream fed his strength. He could feel his inner flame burning brighter.

Inside the bank, the situation was tense. Five robbers – all dressed in black suits, wearing masks and gloves – held hostages in the main hall. People lay on the floor, trembling, as the barrels of guns pointed down at them. Every movement could be a fatal mistake, and panic spread like a virus. Three of the robbers kept watch over the hostages, shouting orders and threatening them, while the other two dragged the bank manager toward the vault.

Inside the vault, the situation escalated. The bank manager, an older man whose glasses had fogged up from nerves, refused to open the door. His trembling voice – “I can't... I can't do it” – echoed through the room. One of the robbers, tall and muscular, lost his patience. A gunshot rang out, deafeningly loud. The bullet struck the manager's leg, and he collapsed to the floor with a cry of pain as blood began to spread across the tiles.

Upstairs, the hostages heard the shot. Screams and panic filled the hall. A woman began to cry hysterically while a man beside her tried to calm her, whispering something reassuring. The robbers shouted to regain control, but the situation was slowly slipping from their hands.

Outside, the police had set up megaphones and were calling on the robbers to surrender. “Release the hostages and come out with your hands up! This is your last chance!!!” – the commanding voice echoed through the street.

Of course, the robbers didn't listen. Inside the bank, they knew there was no way out – but they weren't ready to give up. Meanwhile, reinforcements arrived. Special forces surrounded the building, taking up positions, while reporters set up their cameras, broadcasting the event live. The city held its breath.

On the rooftop, Hades' lips curved into a faint smile. He knew this was only the beginning. He savored the sight of fear and uncertainty blanketing the city like a shroud. The people below had no idea that the true enemy was already among them.

“If you don't open it, we'll kill you!” one of the robbers shouted at the bank manager, his voice echoing through the cold room.

The manager, his face drenched in sweat and eyes wide with panic, pleaded for mercy – but there was no reply. The second robber grabbed him by the collar, yanking him to his feet and pressing the gun against his temple.

“Don’t play games with us, old man!” he snarled. The manager trembled, barely able to stand on his injured leg, leaning against the wall for support. Blood streamed down his pant leg, dripping onto the floor.

“Enter the code!” the robber yelled, slamming the butt of his gun into the man’s ribs. With tears in his eyes and pain in every movement, the bank manager slowly raised his hand and pressed the keys onto the control panel. With a chilling hiss, the massive metal door of the vault began to open, revealing stacks of neatly packed banknotes. The robbers exchanged glances, visibly pleased with their prize.

“Stay there and don’t move if you want to live!” one of them barked as they entered the vault. The manager collapsed to the floor, clutching his leg tightly, trying desperately to stop the bleeding.

Inside the vault, the robbers frantically grabbed bundles of cash, stuffing their backpacks to the brim. Their movements grew faster, almost manic, knowing their time was running out. “Faster, faster!!!” one of them shouted, while another struggled to close an overstuffed bag.

When they filled their bags, they left the vault and headed back up to the floor where the others were waiting. The tension upstairs was almost tangible. The hostages still lay on the floor, trembling with fear, while three of the robbers with guns paced around them. One woman sobbed quietly, trying not to draw attention.

“We need to get out of here fast!” the gang leader said, furtively watching the police through the window as they set up barricades in front of the bank. His voice trembled with nerves as he searched for a way to avoid the inevitable clash.

But before they could devise a plan, a figure appeared behind them who was not part of the group. Hades stood in the dark corner of the room, silent as a shadow, his arms crossed over his chest. His black coat seemed to absorb the light in the room, and his eyes glinted with a sinister sheen.

“You’ve really put in a lot of effort!!!” Hades spoke, his voice rumbling like thunder. The robbers flinched and turned toward him, instinctively raising their weapons. The hostages lifted their heads, staring at the stranger with a mix of fear and confusion. Hades took a step forward. “But today is not your day,” he said with a smile that chilled the blood. “This day is a day of revenge, and it belongs to me.”

Before the robbers could pull their triggers, the light in the room suddenly dimmed, and a cold wind swept through the space. Hades’ presence became unbearable as the robbers trembled in fear, realizing they were facing something far more terrifying than the police. All five of them reflexively raised their weapons and opened fire on Hades. The gunshots echoed through the room, but the bullets simply bounced off him, dissolving into a cloud of black smoke. Not a single scratch marked his body.

Instead of reacting with fear, he smiled – a smile that was anything but human. His elegant black coat began to transform, turning into armor that looked as though it had been forged from darkness itself.

“What is this?! What are you?!” shouted one of the robbers, his voice shaking as he emptied his magazine.

Hades took a step forward, unfazed by the gunfire, and spoke in a voice that rumbled like thunder: “I am Hades, God of the underworld! And now, you are mine!”

With a single sharp breath, he exhaled a dense black smoke – the darkness of the deepest abyss. The robber didn’t even have time to move before the smoke filled his lungs. His body convulsed, his eyes turning an eerie, pitch-black color. “What is your name, mortal?” Hades asked, standing over him, his voice cold and cutting.

“Hector,” the robber managed to whisper, his body stiffening like a puppet on strings.

Hades smiled darkly. “Hector, like the Trojan prince? Interesting. You will serve me well,” he said, raising a hand and pressing his finger to the man’s forehead. “From now on, your will is my will.” Hector nodded mechanically as black mist coiled around his body. The remaining four robbers could not believe what they were witnessing.

“Murderer! Demon!” one of them shouted, opening fire again – but Hades barely moved. In the next instant, he appeared right in front of another robber, as if he had emerged straight from the shadows.

“Your resistance is meaningless,” Hades said before repeating the same process, turning the robbers one by one into his servants. Black smoke, bodies convulsing, pain – and then total submission. When he was done, all five knelt before him, unarmed and completely transformed. “Now you are mine!” Hades declared, his voice was booming like thunder. “I have given you power, for the time of great conflict is coming. Human weapons can no longer harm you, and you will serve my design.” He raised his hand and spread his palm, where a sphere of black smoke formed, pulsing ominously. “This is your power. When you open your palms, you will be able to summon orbs like this. They are your strength – and your weapon.”

The five servants, now entirely under his control, obediently spread their palms. As they did, their gloves melted away, and thick black mist erupted from their hands. The pain was instant and unbearable, but it faded quickly, leaving behind spheres of smoke and glowing marks on their skin – the sign of Hades’ dominion.

“Also,” Hades continued, “you can move from place to place by thought alone. Imagine where you wish to be – and you will be there.” His voice grew darker. “Now vanish. Hide yourselves and await my command.” Hades turned toward the hostages, floating above the ground. The people trembled with fear, frozen to the floor. Some closed their eyes in prayer, while others stared motionlessly at the god of the underworld, unable to comprehend what they had just witnessed. “Who will save you now?” Hades asked mockingly, his sinister smile cutting through the silence – and then he disappeared, leaving behind a chill that seeped deep into their bones. In the silence that followed, only faint sobs and ragged breaths could be heard. One woman fainted from terror, while the remaining hostages stayed paralyzed, unaware of what would happen next.

While Hades was creating his new servants inside the bank, the special forces were taking positions in front of the building. The snow was falling heavier than before, obscuring visibility and making it difficult to assess the situation. The flashing lights of police cars pierced through the snowy curtain, while the voices of the unit commanders rose above the roar of the wind as they coordinated their next move.

“We’ve got gunfire from inside the bank!” shouted one of the commanders, listening to the constant rattle of weapons within. “No more waiting! Team A – move on the main entrance! Team B – take the side door! Hold your positions until the hostages are clear!” The special forces advanced quietly and with precision toward the building.

“Watch the doors!” yelled Hector, spotting the approaching officers. “Throw the orbs at them!”

Before the special forces could respond, black smoke projectiles shot out of the building in all directions, shattering doors and windows in a series of small explosions, scattering debris everywhere. The interior of the bank was consumed by darkness as the officers, trying to protect themselves, threw smoke grenades to create cover. The scene descended into chaos. The special forces tried to dodge the attacks, but several were struck – the powerful blasts hurled them backward onto the street, their bodies hitting the ground like rag dolls.

“Fall back!” shouted the commander, as the team scrambled to retrieve the wounded and retreat behind the police vehicles.

Chaos consumed the street. Black orbs continued flying through the shattered doors of the bank, striking police cars. One of the vehicles exploded and flipped over, forcing the officers to pull the

barricades even farther back. The police tried to contain the situation, pushing bystanders and reporters away from the scene, while the special forces regrouped to plan a new assault.

From the wrecked entrance of the bank emerged the servants. Their armor looked terrifying in the firelight as they carried rifles in their hands. The police immediately shouted: “Drop your weapons! Surrender!”

But the servants didn’t even flinch. Instead, they raised their rifles and opened fire. Officers’ dove to the ground behind cover as bullets tore through the air, shattering cars, streetlights, and building facades. Gunfire echoed through the street as civilians fled in terror and the police struggled in vain to contain the attack. When the servants ran out of ammunition, they tossed their weapons to the ground, staring at the bewildered officers with mocking grins. The special forces returned fire instantly – but it was useless. The bullets simply bounced off their bodies. The servants stood motionless, their faces showing amusement.

“This just got interesting,” one of them said with a grin. “One more attack, then we head to Chicago,” said their leader, Hector, in a grave voice. “Hades told us to hide and wait for his command.”

“Hades isn’t here,” another servant sneered. “We can do whatever we want!”

Laughing, they all stepped forward. Raising their hands, they unleashed black orbs that shot in every direction. Explosions followed one after another, destroying everything on the street – overturned cars burned, shop windows shattered, and the snow melted beneath the flames. The police tried to fight back, but nothing worked. When the battle finally fell silent, the street was utterly devastated. Bystanders lay wounded, while firefighters struggled to extinguish the fires raging across the area.

“Enough!” Hector said coldly. “We’re leaving.”

They all stood in a circle as black smoke began swirling around their feet, wrapping itself around their bodies. It lifted them upward, scattering the snow from the ground and leaving the spot where they had stood completely empty. The officers watched in stunned silence.

“Where did they go?! Did they go back inside? Check the building!” the commander ordered. The special forces quickly moved in, storming the bank, while medics tended to the injured and firefighters battled the flames.

Inside the bank, the atmosphere was eerie. The medics immediately rushed to the bank manager, who lay motionless on the floor, covered in blood and pale as a ghost. They worked frantically to save him while the special forces secured the rest of the building. Outside, the police exchanged bewildered looks, searching for answers.

“What the hell did we just see? Who are they?” one of them asked, as the wind carried smoke and ash down the ruined street.

Chicago lay buried beneath a thick blanket of snow as the wind howled through the streets, carrying flakes like sharp blades. The city was nearly deserted – only a few pedestrians hurried along, hunched against the cold, while street cleaners struggled in vain to tame the winter chaos. Cars rarely passed, their tires fighting against drifts and ice.

A dark sedan carefully maneuvered down the snow-covered street. The driver squinted, frowning as he tried to see through the quickly sweeping wipers, while the radio played softly in the background. As the song reached its chorus, he reached over to turn up the volume. That brief moment of distraction was all it took. When he looked up, he saw a black mist descending like a sinister cloud. The wipers briefly cleared the windshield, revealing five figures standing motionless in the middle of the road. Their dark silhouettes looked ghostly against the white, frozen street. The driver slammed on the brakes, stopping the car just a few feet away. He honked and waved frantically from behind the glass.

“What are you doing?! Get off the road!” he shouted, his voice half afraid, half angry – but they didn’t move. They stared back with cold, terrifying eyes.

A chill ran down his spine as he noticed the cruel smile spreading across one of their faces. He tried to shift into reverse, but before he could flee, black orbs shot toward the car. The explosion flipped the

vehicle onto its side, sending it tumbling through the snow. It came to rest upside down, windows shattered, the driver trapped inside, hanging from his seatbelt. Through the haze of shock, he saw one of them approaching – grinning with sadistic delight. The injured man trembled, too terrified to look.

“Look at that!” one of the servants said, pointing toward a large shopping mall nearby, glowing under Christmas decorations. “We’ve got backpacks full of cash – let’s go spend it!” he added excitedly.

“Nico! Hades ordered us to stay hidden,” Hector said coldly. “This isn’t part of the plan.”

But the others laughed at him.

“Relax, Hector. Let’s enjoy ourselves a little! We have powers ordinary people can’t even imagine,” Nico said, slinging his backpack over his shoulder.

The others nodded in agreement, urging their leader to give in. At last, reluctantly, Hector agreed – and they headed toward the mall, intoxicated by their sense of invincibility.

Inside the shopping mall, the atmosphere was tense but typical for a late pre-Christmas evening. People hurried from store to store searching for last-minute gifts, while employees dreamt of the end of their shifts. Lights twinkled on giant Christmas trees, and holiday music floated softly through the speakers. Hades’ servants had taken a spot in a fast-food restaurant, their hands full of burgers, fries, and soda cups. They ate and laughed, talking about how best to use the powers Hades had granted them. Hector remained silent, occasionally glancing out the window, uncertain whether this was a good idea. When they finished eating, they stood up from the tables and, without a word, began hurling orbs across the mall. First one, then another, then dozens. Explosions shattered storefront windows, toppled Christmas trees, and sent the lights bursting in showers of sparks. People began screaming and running toward the exits in panic, shoving each other in hysteria.

Mall security reacted quickly, but their bullets did nothing to the servants – they simply bounced off as if hitting steel. The servant leading the assault threw a black orb directly into a group of guards, blasting them back against the wall with a thunderous impact. Those were the first orbs to strike people directly. It didn’t take long before more began flying toward groups of civilians who hadn’t managed to escape in time. Cries of pain echoed through the chaos as the mall descended into complete destruction. Outside, sirens suddenly wailed. Red and blue lights flashed through the snowstorm. Police cars skidded to a stop in front of the mall, and units stormed inside.

“It’s time to disappear,” Hector said seriously, looking at the group that was still throwing orbs around. Black smoke began to rise around their feet – and in an instant, they vanished, leaving only devastation behind.

The officers rushed inside, stunned by the sight – Injured people lay scattered across the floor, shattered storefronts smoked, and the air reeked of fire and dust. Paramedics followed, carrying stretchers and tending to the wounded. Thankfully, everyone was alive, though many were unconscious or terrified. Firefighters entered last, checking for signs of spreading flames. As the police secured the area, one question hung heavily in the air – who were these people, and how could they be stopped?

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On the other side of the world, in the heart of Greece, high above the clouds, rose the magnificent Mount Olympus. Its peaks touched the heavens, and at the very top, hidden from mortal eyes, stood the home of the gods – breathtaking palaces of stone, wood, and marble, each more splendid than the last. This was the realm of the twelve most powerful gods of Olympus, who ruled over the fates of mortals from above, granting them joy or suffering, prosperity or ruin.

The greatest and most beautiful of all the palaces belonged to Zeus, the king of the gods. Built from the purest white marble carved by the Cyclopes, it gleamed in the sunlight, while its enormous golden gates stood as a symbol of power and authority. In front of the gates, four imposing columns rose toward the sky, supporting a roof beneath which eternal flames burned. From the columns stretched a grand staircase that descended down the mountain to a wide platform, where two statues of Zeus stood –

depicting him strong and bare-chested, captured in the moment of hurling lightning bolts toward the earth.

Further down the steps, clouds veiled the path, concealing the Olympian domain from the curious eyes of mortals. Around Zeus's palace, like jewels scattered along the slopes of Olympus, stood the palaces of the other gods – each with its own unique beauty and symbolism. And when the last ray of sunlight touched the mountain, the torches placed throughout the complex ignited on their own, bathing Olympus in a mystical golden glow.

Behind the golden gates of Zeus's palace lay a vast hall, at the center of which stood an imposing stone table surrounded by twelve chairs – each belonging to one of the Olympian gods. Yet one stood out in both size and grandeur – Zeus's throne. Positioned against the western wall, it faced a massive window stretching from floor to ceiling, opening up to a view of the endless heavens. To the left, a great balcony extended beyond the hall, overlooking all of Olympus. In one corner of the palace, upon a tall pedestal, stood a statue of a golden eagle – the symbol of Zeus's power and divine form, for he often transformed into an eagle or other creatures when descending among mortals.

Zeus, king of all gods, lord of lightning, thunder, and the sky, sat upon his throne, leaning against a backrest carved from dark marble. His presence was both terrifying and majestic – tall, broad-shouldered, with thick gray curls and a long beard cascading down his chest. His body radiated strength, while his eyes, powerful yet weary, carried the weight of ages. At his right side sat Hera, his wife and queen of the gods, draped in a magnificent silk robe, a golden diadem resting on her brow. Her beauty was unmatched, but her gaze was cold and stern as she looked across the hall. To his left sat Demeter, goddess of fertility and harvest, graceful and serene. Her very presence emanated peace and wisdom.

On the remaining chairs sat Zeus and Hera's children – the powerful gods and goddesses of Olympus: Athena, goddess of wisdom, cloaked in the robe of a sage; Apollo, god of light and music, with a lyre that shimmered faintly beside him; Artemis, goddess of the hunt, with a quiver of arrows slung over her shoulder; Ares, god of war, arms crossed, impatiently awaiting the next conflict; Dionysus, god of wine and revelry, a half-smile lingering on his lips; Hephaestus, god of the forge, with rough hands and a piercing gaze; and finally Hermes, messenger of the gods, whose winged sandals fluttered lightly as he leaned on his golden staff.

Their garments reflected divine splendor – the men wore himation cloaks of the finest fabric, draped loosely over the left shoulder, while the women were dressed in silken ceremonial gowns adorned with golden embroidery and jewels.

Two chairs remained empty. They belonged to Poseidon, ruler of the seas, and Hades, the dark god of the underworld. Their absence carried a silent understanding among the gods – each knew where they were and why they were not present.

The Olympian gods sat around a table overflowing with a feast – roasted meats, fruits, and golden goblets filled with wine and mead – all in celebration of their divine power. Zeus, Hera, and Demeter, though only slightly older than their children, radiated authority and grace, while the younger gods – especially Dionysus – brought laughter and chaos into the hall. Dionysus poured himself more wine, stuffing handfuls of meat into his mouth as his brothers and sisters laughed. It resembled an ordinary family dinner – but in a manner only gods could make possible. Even the eagle, which often flew beside Zeus, now pecked at the meat its master had tossed its way.

Dinner was slowly coming to an end. Dionysus, completely drunk, had fallen asleep slumped in his chair, while Apollo and Ares amused themselves by tossing grapes at him, competing to see who could land one in his open mouth. Everything seemed like just another ordinary Olympian night – until suddenly... pain.

Zeus clutched his chest, feeling an invisible force pierce his heart. The same agony struck Hera and Demeter. Fear swept through their bodies – none of them had ever felt anything like it before. Their children leapt from their seats, rushing toward them in confusion, unable to understand what was

happening. Dionysus, lost in his drunken numbness, could barely recognize his own hands, let alone what was unfolding before him. But just as suddenly as the pain had come – It vanished.

The younger gods hesitated, uncertain whether their elders were truly all right.

“My king, what was that?” asked Hera, grasping Zeus’s hand.

“I don’t know...” he replied thoughtfully. “Never before have I felt such pain.”

Hermes approached his mother, concern written on his face. “Mother, are you alright?”

“I am, my son. But please – take your brother to the palace to rest,” said Hera, nodding toward Dionysus, whose head now rested in his plate.

“I’ll help you carry this fat one,” said Hephaestus, stepping forward. Together with Hermes, he lifted the staggering Dionysus, supporting him under the arms as they carried him away.

At that moment, the great doors of the palace swung open, and Poseidon stepped into the hall. His presence brought instant silence. Hermes and Hephaestus, startled by his sudden arrival, dropped Dionysus, who once again landed face-first into his plate.

Though close in age to Zeus, Poseidon appeared vigorous, strong – almost ageless. His dark blue armor, made of small metal plates resembling fish scales, shimmered in the torchlight. A long cloak trailed behind him, and in his hand, he held his mighty trident firmly. His heavy footsteps echoed through the grand hall.

As soon as Athena saw him, her silken robe transformed into the colors of war – bronze armor gleamed across her body, a helmet appeared upon her head, and in her hands materialized a spear and shield bearing the image of Medusa. She glared at him with disdain. Her anger toward him had never faded – not after what he had done to Medusa in her temple.

“I see I’ve missed dinner,” Poseidon said, stopping before the table and striking his trident against the floor. Zeus rose from his seat and spread his arms.

“Join us, brother! There’s still plenty of food.”

“It’s been far too long since we’ve seen you,” Hera added, as a plate appeared on the table before the empty chair.

Poseidon glanced at Athena and smiled faintly. “Athena, my dear – are you still angry with me?” She gripped her spear tighter, saying nothing. “I come in peace,” Poseidon continued, and in a gesture of goodwill, released his trident. The weapon did not fall – It remained floating upright beside him. Then he sat down and reached for a goblet.

Zeus looked toward his children and said, “Leave us.”

“But Father...” Athena began.

“I said leave us!!!” Zeus’s voice thundered through the palace, shaking its very walls.

The gods obeyed, carrying the drunken Dionysus away, confused by everything that had happened. Once they were alone, Poseidon filled his plate with food and began eating greedily. Hera approached and poured wine into his goblet, which he emptied in a single gulp.

“I’ve grown tired of seafood,” he muttered, tearing into the meat with his teeth.

Zeus watched him for a moment before asking, “Why are you here, brother?”

Poseidon set down a piece of bread and wiped his mouth with his sleeve. “I assume you felt what I did.” The gods exchanged glances. “So, you did feel it,” Poseidon continued, shaking his head. “A pain in the chest – like something stabbing straight through the heart.”

“But what does it mean?” Demeter asked anxiously.

“I don’t know,” Poseidon replied, thoughtful. “Something is happening on Earth,” he added, while Hera pressed her lips together and whispered,

“The prophecy said this was his year...” She too had a gift for foresight. In one of her dreams, she had seen Perseus – a vision that had foretold what was to come.

Zeus crossed his arms and said, “We can’t be certain. Maybe it’s just a lie. Maybe the prophecy doesn’t exist.”

“Could it really be *him*?” Hera asked, trying to hide the fear in her voice.

“We’re not sure. But I don’t want to believe it,” Zeus answered, running his hand through his hair before turning toward the balcony. “I don’t believe the prophecy is real. I felt the same way during the great wars on Earth.”

“And what do you intend to do?” Poseidon asked suspiciously.

“There’s only one way to find out,” Zeus said, stepping onto the balcony. The clouds above began to swirl, covering the light of the stars. In Zeus’s hand, a lightning bolt materialized, crackling with raw, divine energy.

“Be careful, brother!” Poseidon called out, draining another goblet of wine.

In that instant, lightning struck Zeus – and he vanished in a flash of blinding light.

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In the darkness of the underworld, Hades sat upon his throne and waited. His castle, dark and magnificent, towered at the very heart of the realm of the dead. Though it lay deep beneath the earth, light was never entirely absent – a cold, pale glow lingered eternally, dim and distant, like an endless dawn without a sun.

From the balcony of the highest tower of his fortress, one could behold the full expanse of the underworld. To the west, through wastelands and shadow, flowed the icy river Styx, across which Charon, the ancient ferryman, carried the souls of the dead in his old, cracked boat – but only those who had a coin to pay the fare. Those without such an offering were left to wander the riverbank, condemned to wait endlessly between worlds.

Far beyond the river, black poplars stood like silent sentinels, marking the boundary of the realm of the dead. The first region to which souls arrived was the Asphodel Meadows – vast and foreboding, forever blanketed in a pale sheet of snow. There, the spirits of heroes and lesser souls alike wandered aimlessly, lost in the silence of eternity. The snow fell without end, yet brought no cold – only a lingering sense of quiet melancholy.

The path through the Asphodel Meadows led to a crossroads – a place where three roads met. There waited Minos, Rhadamanthus, and Aeacus – the three judges of the underworld, seated behind high judicial thrones, whose duty was to determine the fate of every newly arrived soul. When a verdict was passed, the soul would take one of the three paths. One road led back to the Asphodel Meadows, where the spirits continued their endless wandering. The second road descended into the dark chasms of Tartarus, the fiery realm of punishment where the worst evildoers were condemned to eternal torment. There, the souls of sinners wailed in the darkness, tortured ceaselessly by monsters and invisible forces of retribution. The third road led to the Elysian Orchard – a paradise valley where those worthy of eternal bliss dwelled. There, it was forever day; the breeze carried the scent of flowers, music never ceased, and the feasts were unending. The immortals danced beneath the starlight, far from suffering and oblivion.

Hades watched it all from his high balcony. The underworld was in perfect order. He sat upon his throne in a vast gray hall illuminated by the pale flames of torches. His helmet of invisibility, a gift from the Cyclopes, rested on a black marble pedestal by the wall, while his two-pronged spear leaned carelessly against the cold stone.

On the other side of the fortress, beside the still, dark waters of Lethe, Persephone sat beneath a white cypress tree, watching the souls as they approached the lake. Each one drank from its waters, surrendering to oblivion, vanishing into the eternal flow of the underworld. Mesmerized by the sight, her eyes followed the drifting shadows of the lost, while Cerberus, the three-headed hound whose tail was woven of living snakes, padded around her, unable to draw her attention.

The silence of the underworld was suddenly shattered by a clap of thunder. The walls trembled, the dark rivers stirred, and Persephone jolted from her waking trance. Hades did not even blink. He already knew – Zeus had arrived.

The great doors burst open, and a storm of lightning illuminated the hall. From the brilliance, like the silhouette of a god, Zeus stepped forward – his mighty form wrapped in a golden radiance.

“Welcome to my kingdom, little brother!” Hades’s voice echoed through the hall, dripping with cold irony. “After all these years, you finally remembered I exist. To what do I owe this unexpected visit?”

Zeus took several slow, deliberate steps forward, his blue eyes flashing like a storm. “Do you have anything to do with the chaos unfolding on Earth?” he demanded angrily, raising his lightning bolt and pointing it at Hades. “Are you the one who led the attack on mortals?”

Hades merely laughed, unafraid, then leaned back on his throne as if savoring his brother’s rage. “I’m truly glad to see you, Zeus,” he said calmly. “But you can lower your thunderbolt – I haven’t set foot on Earth in centuries. As you can see, I’m... occupied, fulfilling my duties as lord of the underworld. Duties which, I might remind you, *you* assigned to me. Through deceit. After that great war.” His tone grew colder as Zeus glanced around the hall, as though searching for signs of a lie, then slowly lowered his lightning bolt.

“If I find out you had a hand in this...” Zeus’s voice was dark and distant, rumbling like thunder. “I’ll return – and I’ll kill you!” he said, raising the lightning toward the ceiling of the hall. A moment later, a thunderclap enveloped him in light – and he vanished.

Hades remained seated on his throne, his gaze cold and unflinching. A faint, meaningful smile curved across his lips. “We’ll see about that, brother...” he murmured under his breath, while far off in the depths of the underworld, Cerberus’s growl blended with the fading echo of dying thunder.