

## Chapter 7

It took me two days to run from Angel's Crest to Hyperion moving with all due haste. Clean air filled my lungs and made me want to move. Manna kept me going. The mountains of the west dwindled. North of me, other mountains would be rising though I couldn't see them. Mallens had drawn the privacy veil around Mount Attarckus, thick white clouds that rolled with wind and thunder.

Of course that had nothing to do with me...well, it had everything to do with me (Yay! I mattered!), but I hoped no one figured that out.

My master plan to become famous seemed to have some rather significant problems.

I put them out of my mind.

When I arrived, I had one of those moments of indecision where I knew whatever I chose, I'd choose wrong. The heavy cloud cover blotted out the sky, and Hyperion, Beloved of Light, lay dark. I felt like I had a bag over my head. I could head in at night, but I wouldn't be able to see what I was entering. If I waited until dawn, that was time wasted.

After unpleasant hesitation, I waited. The city beloved by light lay dark. That didn't look right. It didn't sound right in my head. It didn't feel right on my skin. I slept and started with a full stomach.

In the morning I couldn't see the Sun, but dawn came anyway. The world went from dark gloom to light gloom.

Mount Attarckus rises north of Hyperion, the eastmost and tallest of the Broken Fangs. Other, lesser kings who had ruled Heaven before had built their mansions on those peaks, and Mallens had thrown them down when he heaved Attarckus up. In clear weather, it's a cone that reaches the sky. A pennant of stars trails behind Attarkus' summit at night, and at the summer solstice the Sun has to change his path to avoid hitting the peak. Now it looked like a funnel or a wagon stand. The green of trees had turned to dingy gray, and the cone of the base had barely begun to taper when it hit darker gray clouds. They spread outwards and rolled like the top of a pot of water just coming to boil.

The Headlands of Ju rose above the Dawn Sea on white sandstone. To the east they met the ocean with marble cliffs. Hyperion took up most of the headland, a rumpled plateau where white hills jutted up from manicured forests and table-top mesas held marble palaces. Every

forest had been perfect, every stream bed sculpted. Spirits of water and rain came from the ocean or the fast flowing rivers nearby to tend the springs of the city. Sandstone is a dry rock, and only constant attention by the spirits made Hyperion livable by the gods.

I say by the gods because Hyperion was a city for the gods. No one else was welcome. The spirits were tolerated and Celestials allowed, but they both received cold welcome even as they kept it running. Being mortal in the capital city of Heaven was a capital offense.

So's treason.

Earthquakes had shorn the edges of the plateau off, and golden palaces and magnificent lawns lay in rubble fields. Idyllic rivers tumbled over marble cliffs and ran through broken houses. The main roadway had fallen apart, and the sign that said 'No Mortals' had been torn apart. I scrambled up a scree-field and entered the city without ever passing a sign.

There were no guards. Sometimes I saw movement in broken palaces, and a few timid people moved on the streets. Mostly I saw no one. I'd catch a glimpse of someone a few blocks ahead, but by the time I got there, the streets were empty. A few times I came upon someone, but they pretended not to see me. I did what I could to take advantage of this.

From my mother's side, I knew that spirits did live in Hyperion, more of them than even the gods knew. Many dryads came here to tend the perfect forests. Nereids warded the beaches and watched the waves like shepherds. Naiads sculpted the crystal rivers that flowed between houses, kept the deep pools clear of pond scum, and ensured the wild life didn't get wild enough to inconvenience the gods of the city, much less the titans who ruled it and all.

Also from her I knew of the deep frictions between the spirits and Celestials. The Celestials, mostly born of titans and the great powers, but occasionally the forgotten offspring of gods, were powers of themselves, atavistic beings of might. Hoarfast was one. They had skins of steel, they breathed snowstorms, they wore capes of rain, or their bodies were goats or boars. Some were extremely powerful. Death was a Celestial. Some were mere animals. The Boars of Herindon pulled the chariot of Regulus and ate the corpses of his victims. There were many of them. Mallens had fathered five hundred sons. They were not gods and not titans, but somehow less.

Which put them in the ranks of spirits, but they had to be better than somebody.

In Hyperion, Celestials formed the interactive working class. They

ran forges, carried bags, pulled rickshaws, and served food. Spirits tended their domains: forests, rivers, and parks. Celestials tended the works of the gods.

No one cared about mortals. We weren't even a thing.

If they could, spirits and Celestials belligerently ignored each other. They could walk face-first into each other on a corner and move on without either recognizing the collision happened.

After crossing the outer walls, I headed east. If I approached someone among the trees, I walked near the roads. If someone with iron skin or bee's wings approached, I stuck to the forests. Everyone put me in the 'other' group, and if questioned later would have a hard time identifying me.

Soon I found the waterfront facing the Dawn Sea. The Sun Palaces lay in tatters with roofs stomped in and grounds torn with canyons. Mallens's stomps had driven the ground down to bedrock, and the tops of great trees stuck out of sand traps. Whole buildings were driven underground or smashed flat. Over this place a curse of dark skies hung.

But there were no signs forbidding me to enter. I suppose the clouds and curse of dark skies meant that, but they didn't say so.

This was it. If someone found the scepters before I did, I was dead. I'd tattle on Koru immediately, and we'd be tortured together. My death would be agony, but his would last forever. I'd win.

Self! Stop!

I didn't want to die in agony. Death in agony wouldn't be better if Koru's was worse. I needed to find the weapons, dispose of them, and I didn't know what to do next, but there wouldn't be a next if I didn't get find the scepters first.

I thought of two utterly blistered summers at Fate, filing unread documents in the bowels of an office building. It's beautiful and majestic office building. It's built on Firmament of the Sky, behind the stars of the Mask! But you know what a basement in a scenic building looks like?

It looks like every other basement.

High stress, someone always checking my work but no one ever needing it, no promotion potential, I had almost nothing to show for those two summers. I'd already spent my wages on rent.

But I had four little bits of luck.

I prayed to the Pattern Spiders and asked for one of my favors. I needed to find those weapons.

I glanced around. No one watched. I jogged down to the sea and started searching.

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It took me several hours to figure out what was where. The New Light Cape had detached completely from the mainland, and Mallens had stomped lagoons into the beach, making a false shore. Wooden towers for lowly gods to greet the dawn had toppled over. The deeps east of the Cape bred tall waves that rolled on or collapsed, depending on what took place beneath the surface. A morass of beach houses, scrub trees, and rocks hid under calm water.

I looked for Heridite's Crest. It was, or had been, a low prominence where yellow rock stuck up through the beach, a famous picnic spot surrounded by small pagodas and pavilions. Mallens had stood there the last four years when he'd greeted the dawn at First Light. That's where we'd planned the hit to occur, so it would be a good place to start searching. However the geography of the place had been rearranged.

While I was poking around on a spur of boulders, splashing noises suddenly broke the otherwise dead silence. They didn't sound like fish or whales surfacing, and after a moment, I made out shouting from the other side of a line of dunes.

"We've got it," said someone.

"You mean I got it."

"Oh, shut up. We got it."

Wondering what it they got, I ran over.

Two heads were splashing and yelling in the middle of a black lagoon, and several more were swimming for the beach. The swimmers resolved themselves into three climbing out of the water and fell, gasping, onto the sand. The two in the lagoon were still yelling.

"Would you both shut up?" yelled a guy on the beach. He held up something. "We got it!"

'It' had a blade as long as an arm with a two-hand handle. It had no hilt. The cutting edge formed a stretched S; the other was straight

and blunt. The blade wept a kind of darkness when the man waved it, a faint staining shadow like ink in water. But it would cut like razors. It would cut gods. It was a godly weapon.

It was a magnificent copy of Death's All Things Ending, and Hasso, who'd made it, knew exactly who I was.

My jaw clenched.

I looked over the five of them, three if I could get there quickly enough. They were tired; I was fresh. I could probably hit them from ambush.

Was I really about to kill three people to take that sword?

The idea bothered me, and yet, what did I face at Mallens's hand?

I ground my teeth like I was chewing rocks.

Maybe I could get the sword quickly. I'd take it without killing anyone.

Yeah. No one had to die. It would be fine.

I stayed low and started around the rocks.