

The Mask of Apollo, Part 2
by James Wylder

Ten Days Earlier

Kinan fiddled with the mask, and made a soft sound of annoyance.

“It doesn't fit... Do I really have to wear this the whole time?”

“Kinan, can I remind you whose plan this was? This plan you made up?” Kinan looked at her through the mask, and shrugged.

“Get me some padding foam and some glue.”

John and Miranda looked at Lametrius who was crossing her arms.

“I'll fix it later, can we go ahead and get this done?” Kinan nodded, and casually threw a handful of crystal dust into the air, stepping into the swirling portal she created as though it was a living room door. The portal led right into a massive hall, the main hall of a temple from the looks of it, where a throng of worshipers was standing in line to make libations to a statue of Apollo. Everyone stared at her. In a few moments, a proud looking Lametrius entered, wearing a very nice Hermes costume that looked a bit more like a superhero outfit than a period costume, Jenny who had barely changed to make herself look like Artemis (she had a bow, and had put a crescent moon on her hairband), and John and Miranda who were both on their phones. A man pouring a libation stood holding the cup, his mouth agape.

“Hi.” Kinan began. “I'm the god Apollo. The God of your city. Glorius as the morningtide.” She held her arms out wide. “Behold me mortals, and be afraid. Behold me and be glad.”

“You're not Apollo!” A priest shouted from next to the libation area, pointing wildly with his finger.

Kinan sighed, and pointed at a vase, which exploded. Then she pointed at the ceiling and a swirling disk of fire appeared in it. Then she pressed a button on her belt and the Disco Remix “A Fifth of Beethoven” began playing from a speaker in her bag. Then she blew up another vase, just in case. The priest lowered his finger.

“Okay then... All hail Apollo! Welcome to our city! All hail his sister Artemis! All hail Hermes! All hail...” He looked at John and Miranda. “Their helpers!” John gave a thumbs up.

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Kinan entered back in through the walls, the sounds of the Greek army falling into confusion following loudly behind her. Jenny, or rather Artemis, hopped down from the wall and caught up with her.

“Was it really necessary to be that dramatic?” Kinan didn't answer, just handed her the stool. Jenny chucked it to the side of the street where one of the adoring throng grabbed it, and held it above her head in triumph yelling about having the stool of a god.

“Where's Hermes?” She finally said.

“Consulting with King Priam.”

Kinan just nodded, and they made their way to the royal palace. Troy was a magnificent city, but it was a much smaller one than most people would think. The world was much smaller then, its whole population dwarfed easily by colonies on other worlds considered tiny by the standards of Earth, which had tens of billions of people. Mars only had around 1 billion, and it still outdid the whole of this past. And yet, for its time it was grand. A time when single warriors could distinguish themselves so much in battle that armies trembled at the thought of them. Not because they were such incredible warriors compared to the present, but because every death was such a larger percent of humanity. Outside the walls, the Greek camp seemed to writhe in the wind, a mess of tarps and cloth fitted into the dirt and sand.

King Priam was an old man, but a fit one. He had the kind of muscles that were built into his frame over too many years to really ever get rid of all of them. His son, Hector, had the kind of muscles you saw in a body building magazine. Lametrius sat talking to both of them as Jenny and Kinan entered

into the chamber.

“Ah, Apollo, Artemis. I was just telling the King about how we plan to relieve the food woes of his people.” Apollo nodded.

“Have you informed him of why we're here?” Lametrius looked at Kinan like she was going off script during a stage play.

“...No?”

Apollo looked at Priam.

“I'm going to fight Poseidon and Zeus. They should arrive to aid the Greeks soon.” Priam rose.

“My Lord Apollo... I can't imagine a battle of the gods will leave much left for us Mortals.” Apollo stared at him.

“Hermes.”

“Yes my Lord?”

“Let me know if you detect the arrival of other gods.” Lametrus frowned.

“Yes my lord.” Kinan began to exist, and Lametrius followed her till they were out of earshot.

“Kinan, what are you doing?”

“Luring Zeus and Poseidon here, exactly what I said.” Lametrius grabbed her by the arm.

“Don't give me that crap. What are you doing. This city is counting on us!” Apollo leaned down to stare into her eyes.

“This city is as good as dead, and always has been.” They didn't look away from each other.

“You might think its fine and dandy to walk into other people's lives and treat them like numbers on a spreadsheet, but people's lives are worth more than that Kinan. These people's to.” Kinan straightened her back.

“They're a means to an end. Do you see the worn walls of this city? They'll crumble. The Greeks will massacre this city in ten thousand realitites, commit crimes unspeakable, and yet so easily spoken. Would you have me save them all?” Lametrius scoweled, and walked over to a window, where she pointed out at the rows of buildings. Some children were kicking around an inflated sheep's bladder.

“I don't expect you to achieve miracles. I expect you to finish what you've started when you start it. These people expect us to save them. We can't just let them die.”

Kinan cocked her head to the side, the weighty mask glimmering off the light from the window. “You don't expect me to fight for them?”

“I expect you to be willing to sacrifice the city to meet your goals.”

“Don't badger me with this Lametrius. This is a trolly problem. If a city dies to save a universe, would you be so averse?” She was about to respond, but Kinan cut her off. “Regardless, that isn't my plan anyways. I'm drawing out gods.”

“And by gods you don't mean like, actual gods?”

“Close enough.”

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Agamemnon had drunk a lot of wine tonight. His finest warrior had fled with his boyfriend, and many troops had followed them. The war was not going well, not at all. He downed another goblet of the stuff, and snapped for his wine boy to bring him more. He snapped again. Nothing. Turning around, and the first sound of a yell beginning to seep out of his lips Agamemnon saw a pair of figures in black robes, each with a colored stripe running up one side of their garment. He set the cup down, and fumbled for his blade.

“Name yourselves. Where is my wine boy and how did you...”

He didn't finish. They pulled down their hoods, and he dropped to his knees.

“My gods.” He said. Poseidon and Zeus looked at each other. One rubbed their beard, having not shapeshifted from a clean shorn female form for the last few years, this thick beard was a stark change.

“Agamemnon,” Zeus said, “Poseidon and I have instruction for you, which you must follow to the letter.” Agamemnon nodded.

“Whatever you ask. Any sacrifice will be supplied.” Zeus waved a hand dismissively.

“That won't be necessary.” When he described what would be, Agamemnon was certainly confused.

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Kinan had slept in Apollo's throne, and woke up to a temple priestess bringing her a breakfast of cheese and grapes. It wasn't bad eating at all, though Kinan doubted the hygiene of the kitchen staff. She was lounging in the throne, kicking her legs back and forth, when Hector came running into the temple completely out of breath. She stopped kicking her legs and got immediately erect and godlike.

“What is it?” She asked. Hector bowed, and then fell to his knees.

“My lord Apollo, the Greeks have given us a gift, a giant wooden horse, the symbol of their god Poseidon.” Kinan rose to her feet. They weren't supposed to be doing that yet, it was way too early in the war for that! Then again she had messed up history... But then her mind snapped into place.

Of course. She'd gotten what she wanted. They'd noticed her.

“Take me to it.” She ordered. Hector rose, bowed again, and led her to the horse, which Jenny and Lametrius were already inspecting. Helen was walking around the horse, imitating the voices of Greek soldier's wives to draw them out if they were inside it.

“Why did you bring it inside the city walls?” Kinan asked Hector.

“The King ordered it my lord, the Greeks have packed up their camp and--” She walked past him.

She'd read the book. The horse was big, and looked just like you've seen in the movies. She approached it, and ran her hand along the wood. Jenny and Lametrius approached her.

“There's no one inside it.” Jenny said.

“Are you sure?” Kinan said.

“Nearly positive.” Lametrius replied. “I'd have to crack it open to be sure.” Kinan nodded.

“I'll take a look inside it myself. Is there an entry point?” Lametrius pointed to a spot on the horse's belly. Kinan walked below it, and testing her legs for a moment, jumped straight up to grab onto the spaces between the planks of the wood. Lifting her legs up, she kicked out the hatch, as the crowd around the horse gasped, then swung inside it with an acrobatic leap. Kinan stared around in the darkness, and pulled out a flashlight, which she shone around the empty center. There was only one thing in the darkness: a single metal capsule. Approaching it, Kinan examined the markings on it, bringing the flashlight close to read the words.... Then stepped back, dropped the flashlight, and scampered backwards nearly falling out of the hole. Composing herself, she elegantly dropped down out of the hole, and tried to look as calm as she could as she walked towards her comrades.

“So what's in there?” Jenny said, throwing a rubber ball she'd somehow aquired up in the air over and over again.

“We have a situation.” Kinan said softly.

“What kind of situation?”

“They put a nuclear bomb inside of the Trojan horse.”

“What!?!” Jenny and Lametrius said in unison.

“Not so loud.” Kinan whispered, “The crowd is still here.”

“And why hasn't it gone off?” Lametrius asked.

“Because they wanted to wait till we were right next to it in case we-- Oh.” Kinan reached into her bag, and began running, she started pouring crystal dust in a circle, and Jenny and Lametrius followed. John and Miranda, who had been lazily sipping wine over by a haberdashery, leapt into action as well. The five of them make a circle of crystal dust around the horse, which Kinan struck with her sword, and a white swirling portal appeared inside of. The horse fell through, as Kinan crossed her fingers it wouldn't

go off. Not yet, at least. As the ears of the horse sunk through the ground, she let out a sigh of relief. "Hector, tell your father not to trust Greeks bearing gifts." Apollo yelled as the swirling hole in reality closed.

Zeus and Poseidon were enjoying the attention from the Greeks, but they also very much just wanted to get on with trying to fix the mess in chronology that Kinan had caused.

"May we offer you more wine?" Meneleus asked.

"No, we're fine." Poseidon said.

"Look, uh, my Lord. This whole war was started because my property, you know, my wife Helen ran off with this guy named Paris because he 'treated me like a person' or something silly. Anyways, she's really really hot, and I know you're going to wreak vengeance on the city, but is there any chance you could get her back and make her into me again?" Poseidon and Zeus looked at each other, and each of them sighed internally.

"Look..." Zeus began.

"No." Poseidon finished.

"Okay, yeah, that's cool I mean..." Poseidon shoved him away and walked to the portcullis of the ship. There was something falling from the sky.

"Arbiter." She said, giving up on the beard, "We have a problem." Zeus shoved her aside, and looked up at the falling nuclear horse.

"Well that's not good."

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The mushroom cloud could be seen for miles. It had taken all of their efforts to shield the city from radiation, mainly with a portable shield generator they'd rigged up, but the truth was that they were low on crystal dust as it was, and very short on time. The city would likely die of radiation poisoning, and their crops and the fish in the sea were all either dead or poisonous. They'd have to evacuate all of Troy somewhere else. The blinding white flash had stunned the city, and they watched the Greek fleet vaporized from afar, not entirely aware what they had even just witnessed. The streets of the city bowed before them, and Lametrius and John looked fairly uncomfortable with it.

"Jesus Christ Kinan. You dropped the nuke on them. Jesus."

"Maybe I finally have their attention. I was hoping the harp would be enough."

Several minutes passed in silence, and then two black robed figures stepped out of a suddenly appearing swirling portal. Kinan looked into the crowd and saw a woman clutching a wooden stool to her chest. She gestured for her to come forward, and she did so. Kinan took the stool from her, sat down, and pulled her harp out of her bag to begin playing it. The figures approached her, the city surrounded them.

"You moron. You killed every Greek who went into this war. You've ruined the history here. The Nuclear fallout alone..."

"You did that, actually."

The other figure cut in, "We wanted you to run away! End your pointless game. We had safeguards in place so it didn't extend outside the city... But you ruined that!" Kinan kept strumming the harp.

"You seem to be at a complete loss as to what I want." The two figures looked at each other, then crossed their arms in tandem.

"Okay, then, what do you want?" The male figure said.

"This." Kinan replied.

"What do you mean, 'this', an ecological and chronological disaster?"

"No, for you to actually show up and listen to me. Do you even realize how hard it is to talk to you?"

"Dawn is a criminal and illegal army not recognized by the Last Firmament." The female figure said.

“Yes, and thus, its very hard for me to get to speak to you.” The strumming continued. It sounded like 'Smoke on the Water.' “I called you, I sent ambassadors to you, I made friends with groups who you kicked out like the Knights of Sky. I tried over and over, yet you're willing to talk to a Council that burns whole worlds rather than me. So I did the only thing you couldn't resist: I burned history to the ground, and I did it dramatically. I played god, and got ontop of the high horse you reserved for yourself. Isn't it fun?” The Arbiter was becoming angrier.

“No, its not fun. The damage to this reality is nearly irreparable!” A humored sigh escaped the mask of Apollo.

“Now now gods, we all know that isn't true. Dawn is more than willing to help. As long as the resulting fix doesn't involve the casualties or war crimes that it would if it had run its course naturally.” The Arbiter gritted his teeth, then got himself new teeth and gritted those instead for a more satisfying sound.

“Fine. We'll fake the Greek army's memories. But for you to change history, you yourself will now have to go back in time before you went back in time and stop your own actions.”

“I'm not a newbie, I know how it works.”

“Only you can-”

“Yes. But for me to do that, you have to listen.” The Arbiter threw up his hands.

“Fine, what exactly do you want to talk about?” Kinan set down the harp and stood up. Her blue eyes shone through the gaps in the mask.

“You have a treaty with the Council. A Council who will burn whole worlds worse than the Greeks would burn this city. What if I told you I could make that treaty null and void, would you be willing to sign a new pact, one against their Empire? After all, they've basically made you into their tribute state. You're poor gods as it is.” The Arbiter crossed his arms.

“We might.”

“Good.” Kinan said, her face was the sun, and it reflected all things. The Firmament changed before her. “Then lets talk. An end to our war, if I bring you an end to your own subjugation.”

“Fine, but could you take that mask off already?” Apollo cocked his head.

“I'm not sure I understand, this is my face? Or perhaps you should go first. After all, I've always been the sun.”