

Dancing the Shadows

Persephoneia's Revenge

Von abgemeldet

Kapitel 3: No Boom Tomorrow - Boom Today!

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The doors blow open.
"You've arrived!
Now why do you kill, bring diseases and plight?"
I sigh.
Silence - Cold icy air
Black manic stare
Wait! - A reply
"No, not !!"
It's a lie, it's a lie
I wouldn't do these things
It's she, she's sin!"
(*"The Packt", T.Willcox*)

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Ikki was glad that he was able to teleport like the Gold Saints and so he teleported from one active volcano to the next, to see whether he would encounter Typhoeus somewhere.

The God of Violent Storms and Volcanoes was a bit elusive, though.

Ikki tried to concentrate on the energy flows of the Earth. He never understood exactly why he of all Saints seemed to be attuned to the flow of the Earth currents, but it was not his nature to worry too much about it. Probably it was a property of the Phoenix Cloth which had some kind of special status among the other Cloths anyway.

Suddenly there was an eruption of forces that felt wrong, out of tune with the natural flows; like the one he had felt when the volcano at Canon Island was blown up.

Ikki concentrated and teleported into the vicinity of the disturbance. He knew at once where he was - the evenly formed cone of the Mount Fuji with its sprinkling of white snow against the clear blue sky was beautiful like any print or postcard.

Unfortunately this picture of solemn peace turned into a blasting furnace when the top of the mountain suddenly erupted, first spitting out dark grey smoke and rocks, before bright yellow flames and glowing orange rocks turned the area into a violent show of volcanic powers.

Ikki's mien darkened. He wasn't exactly religious, but the desecration of the holy Fujisan by some minor Greek God infuriated him nonetheless. Who were these Greek Gods anyway, always to meddle in the lives of the humans? They didn't have the slightest respect.

He closed his eyes and called upon the Phoenix power. He would challenge Typhoeus and he would vanquish him!

«I waited for you,» a voice spoke directly into his mind. The thought had the feel of flowing magma interspersed with the cold raging of a hurricane. Typhoeus, who else?

Ikki homed in on the location of the thought-sending and teleported into the God's back (he hoped). It might not be wise to tackle a real God on his own, a little voice in his mind tried to tell him, but Ikki brushed the warning away. He had been victorious over Shaka who was known as the Man Closest to the Gods and he and his friends had triumphed over Gods more powerful than this guy!

When he materialized, Ikki floated right above the churning molten rock flowing out of the crater. He had calculated correctly, Typhoeus was right in front of him, sitting nonchalantly on the stony rim of the crater, waiting.

The God had flowing long turquoise hair and wore a shimmering, golden armour that reminded Ikki a bit of the Gold Cloths, but contrary to them it didn't emanate a warm Cosmo glow, but felt sharp, prickly and cold compared to them... Somehow ...crystalline? Ikki tried to give the feeling a name.

Before he lost the moment of surprise, Ikki decided to attack. This guy didn't deserve any warning. "Phoenix Gen Ma Ken!" he shouted and dived at the God from his floating position, his Cosmo flaring and trying to catapult Typhoeus into the depths of some personal hell.

When Ikki had passed him and turned around to see the results of his attack, he gaped at the God.

Typhoeus still sat on the crater's rim, held his hand before his mouth and yawned audibly. «Boy, I have spent an *eternity* in the Tartaros,» he sent telepathically. «You really can't shock me by those illusions of some hell *you* consider to be somewhat frightening.»

"What?!" Ikki blinked. Okay, he had had some other opponents who claimed something similar, but no one of them had looked *that* imperturbed.

«Wanna see something *really* frightening?» Typhoeus' greenish yellow eyes flared

once, and an icy whirlwind took Ikki and threw him right into the crater where the magma boiled in a reddish orange light.

Now it was Typhoeus' turn to gape at Ikki, when the Phoenix Saint emerged with roaring wings of burning Cosmo out of the fiery grave. "Gosh, the roast turkey is tougher than I thought," Typhoeus muttered to himself.

With a cry of rage, Ikki thrust himself at Typhoeus again...

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The earth shook again. In her command center, Saori and the others tried to avoid falling ceiling plates and tumbling furniture.

Saori wondered whether it had always been that bad when some other Gods attacked her domain. The last times she hadn't been around to experience the effects on the Earth, after all, she had been unconscious or in other dire straits.

Obviously Gaia hadn't been wrong to chastise her for the punishments the Earth had to take during her quarrels with the other Gods. This was the first time she felt the effects herself, and she didn't like it at all.

"Ojou-sama, are you okay?" Jabu asked in worry and helped her up from the ground.

"Yes, Jabu. Thank you." Saori straightened her dress. Maybe she should look for something more practical, she thought. The long skirts were definitely in the way. She looked at Shunrei who stood in a corner and tried to overcome her fear. The Chinese girl's light blue silken tunic and trousers combination wasn't the worst choice.

"Ojou-sama," Daichi called out in alarm. "This earthquake was a side effect of an eruption of Mount Fuji!"

"Mount Fuji? But that's only 100km away from here. There are people in danger..." Saori felt hopelessly overtaxed. She knew she should do something, but what? When Hades challenged her, he had sent out his Specters to attack the Saints, and the actions had seemed clear. But this time her most important warriors were prisoners and she had to assume all responsibility to solve the situation.

Saori wondered whether she should kill herself again to get into the Hades, but then she would leave the world unprotected once more. And it wasn't sure if it would work another time. No, this time she couldn't leave her friends here to worry alone. She had to trust in Aiolia and the others to free Seiya-tachi, while she tried to give the ones around her confidence.

Shunrei still stood in her corner and looked at the partly damaged control center. She hated to be useless baggage and admired Saori who seemed to be so calm and composed. But then, Saori was a Goddess, while she only was an ordinary girl. If only she could do something to help! But all that was left to her was pray for the safe return of Shiryu and his friends. She really hated herself for that. But then... Maybe it

was time to do something about it when this was over.

"And you are sure we can't do anything?" Jabu looked at the violet haired girl he admired and loved, even though he knew she would never return his feelings. All because of this accursed Seiya... But no, he shouldn't think like this, after all, Seiya had sacrificed his life and everything to serve her, while he, Jabu, only stayed behind and wasn't allowed to do anything of importance. It was not fair!

"No, Jabu," Saori said wearily. "Aiolia and the others are en route to Hades. We have to have faith in them."

"Of course." Jabu sighed. How could he compete with a Gold Saint when he wasn't even able to compete with Seiya who was a fellow Bronze Saint? But he wanted so much to prove that he was worthy, too!

"But we *have* to do something," Daichi urged. "Why don't we call in some more of the Gold Saints? After all, Persephoneia is a Goddess, and we should be wary of her."

"But we can't leave Sanctuary unprotected," Saori frowned.

"Why not?" Daichi wondered. "You are here, so the Gold Saints only protect what remains of their temples, and that's mainly rubble anyway after the last battle."

"We have called in stone masons to repair the temples," Tatsumi pointed out. "Although it will still take a while until they look like new again."

"Hm. You have a point," Saori admitted. "We could send another team to that cave sacred to Artemis in the south of the Peloponnes, where another entrance into the Hades is located according to the ancient scriptures." She only hoped the old writings were correct in that respect. With DeathMask gone, there was no other Death Saint available since Eridanus Charon was killed and Ara Lethe took her life after her lover's demise from DeathMask's hand.

Saori made a mental note that Astreya had to find a sufficient number of new candidates to fill up the depleted numbers of her Saints. Unfortunately, Triangulum Silver Saint Astreya, Sanctuary's talent scout, claimed that there were fewer and fewer suitable kids around who were fit for training, but somehow Saori couldn't believe this.

"And who should go?"

"I will send Milo, Aldebaran and Aphrodite, and I think should ask Dohko to join us here in Tokyo. He is the most experienced active Saint after Shion retired to Jamir to take care of the Cloths. This leaves..." She counted them by her fingers, "Mu, Shaka, Kanon, Saga, and Aiolos at Sanctuary and ready to assist if need be here."

"Mu isn't an active Gold Saint anymore," Daichi reminded her. "You yourself agreed to his election as new Kyoukou."

Saori suppressed an expletive. Of course. Unfortunately, Phrixos was still too young and inexperienced to be sent on any mission on his own. But then, Aiolos was also back at Sanctuary, and he could be trusted. Which couldn't fully be said of Saga and Kanon who currently shared the Gemini Cloth.

Gaia's intervention had been welcome when she resurrected Seiya and the Gold Saints 100% loyal to her, but that the Great Mother also resurrected Saga, Kanon, DeathMask and Aphrodite had been less fortunate.

Admittedly, during the Hades War they had ultimately fought on her, Athena's side, but DeathMask's wanton cruelty made him at least a dubious choice for a Saint, Saga's personality disorder could turn him into a loose cannon at any time, and Kanon had once manipulated a God - who said he might not consider it a valid career option again.

And then there was the matter of Saga *and* Kanon as twins -- they both were attuned to the Gemini Cloth, but rightfully only one of them could be the Gemini Gold Saint, but to make things more interesting, they had decided they would share the Cloth for now.

Saori inwardly shook her head when she remembered how they had asked for an audience together and then Saga told her with a broad grin that he liked the idea of having six months of vacation every year while his brother served as Gemini Saint and vice versa. This Cloth-sharing was unheard of, but then, why not? And if they misbehaved, she could still order Milo in his function as Sanctuary's Nr.1 assassin to take care of the problem and make the way free for a new Gemini Saint.

«Milo, Aldebaran, Aphrodite, Dohko -- attend!» Saori sent out a telepathic call. To send Aphrodite along with Dohko, Milo and Aldebaran should work, as the latter three were 100% on her side and this left one less questionable Saint back at Sanctuary.

Without hesitation, four shooting stars went on their way from Sanctuary to Tokyo, the Gold Saints' burning Cosmo tracing a glittering line over the firmament.

When they appeared before Athena, they sank to one knee in deference.

"Be greeted, Lady Athena," Dohko said formally. Even though he appeared to be younger than Milo, Aphrodite or Aldebaran, his far greater age gave him a more or less uncontested leading position among the Saints. "Why did you call us?"

Athena briefed them on the current situation, and Dohko nodded wisely -- which looked a bit odd with his youthful body and within minutes the three others were en route to Tainaron in the South of the Greek mainland, where the entrance to the underworld was located in a sacred cave on the peninsula Maina, while he stayed by Athena's side in Tokyo.

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Camus, Shura, Aiolia, DeathMask, Marin and Shaina ran over the frozen path that

Camus created on the river Styx. Finally they reached the other side, and Aiolia grinned at the Aquarius Saint.

"This was a real stroke of genius!"

"Well, I prefer to find a way to get things done, and it appeared as if DeathMask's argument with Charon just went nowhere."

DeathMask gave Camus a dark look. He would have achieved the goal, too, if he had gotten a little more time.

"I have the impression the layout of the underworld changed a bit from the last time we were here," Shura observed when he looked around. At least he didn't recognize any of the landmarks.

"Well, we just have to get to the place where Persephoneia dwells, and I assume she will reside in that castle over there." Camus pointed to an imposing dark building that stood clouded in mist in a considerable distance.

The path in front of them split into three ways that seemed to lead roughly into the direction of the castle. The Saints exchanged thoughtful looks.

"I think we should split," Aiolia suggested. "That way we should reach our goal faster than if we stick together and maybe choose a wrong way."

"Sounds fine with me," DeathMask said. He felt more comfortable on his own anyway. The others agreed.

"Okay, Marin and I will take the path to the right" Aiolia pointed into the direction he had chosen for himself. Camus and Shura looked at each other, nodded and chose the left path. They immediately went on their way.

This left Shaina with DeathMask, a fact she wasn't exactly enthusiastic about, but at the moment it couldn't be helped.

The Cancer Saint immediately took the lead. He was a bit annoyed that he had to take the female Silver Saint along and hoped that she wouldn't get into his way if he got into a fight. He preferred to make his kills alone.

The path wound through gloomy vegetation at first, then they arrived at a stairway that led underground.

They made their way through shadowy corridors that were dimly lighted by faintly greenish glowing fungi, and DeathMask vented his annoyance at the situation by killing whoever servants or other personnel got in his way.

Shaina sighed silently. Maybe they should have tried to get some information from the hapless creatures first, but she decided not to argue with the Cancer Saint about this. He might decide she was in the way, too, and get rid of her as well as DeathMask

wasn't known for an understanding or merciful nature. Inwardly she bristled with anger as she hated having to restrain herself in such a way. But for now they had a task at hand, and that was saving Seiya and his friends, so she had to bear with it, like it or not.

When they turned into another corridor, a majestic woman stood right in front of them. She was tall and wore a Crystal Armour of deepest black under a likewise coloured cape that contrasted perfectly with her long, wavy blood-red hair and milk-white complexion.

"Well, well, whom do we have here?" the Shadow Knight said and her voice had an edge of steel. "I'm not amused that you decimate the servants of Our Majesty Persephoneia in such a callous manner."

"I am Cancer Gold Saint DeathMask," he said with a dangerous sparkle in his deep blue eyes, "and I doubt your name is of major interest as I intend to kill you right here and now."

"Big words for a little human." The woman smiled at him, but her aquamarine eyes showed no mirth. "Behold Hekate, she who is the Goddess of Witches and Demons."

Shaina thought it was prudent to stand back a little. If DeathMask thought he was able to pull this through - well, she couldn't stop him anyway. She wasn't as confident, especially as she had heard how easily he had been defeated even by Aries Mu during the Hades war. She decided to wait for a better opening to launch her own attack.

"So what? I will let you experience the true power of the Cancer Saint!" DeathMask put on a feral smile, pointed his finger at the Goddess and unleashed his *Sekishiki Mei Kai Ha*, a wave of shimmering Cosmo energy that should send her soul on a journey of no return.

Hekate narrowed her eyes and a faint barrier shimmered around her in a weird translucent shade of black against the darkness of her Onyx Crystal Armour. The *Sekishiki Mei Kai Ha* was simply absorbed by the veil of darkish energy, and the Cancer Saint stared at the woman in utter disbelief.

Shaina was impressed and congratulated herself on her restraint. Obviously there was a more sophisticated tactic needed to vanquish this enemy.

Hekate made a step towards DeathMask, and he discovered horrified that he couldn't move anymore. Frantically he tried to get out of the grip of Hekate's mental powers, but the woman simply smiled and closed the distance, until she could touch the side of his face with one of her slender, pale hands.

"You dared to lift your hand against a Goddess, little one?" She tucked a reluctant strand of her scarlet hair behind her ear.

DeathMask struggled to say something, but it seemed that he was all paralysed. Suddenly he had the feeling as if the woman in front of him sifted through his

memories - from the earliest recollections of his childhood to his training in Sicily, then the moment he won his Cloth at that terrible price...

Hekate smiled. "An interesting life you had, little one. I think killing you wouldn't be half as amusing than giving you a fitting punishment." She still held him with just her gaze. When she went through his past with her powers, she had discovered that an important part of his had been forcibly suppressed by an attack he had suffered during his Test of Cloth. "You were made to forget your humanity," she said conversationally, "which resulted in your acting unchecked of any common human morals. I'm really curious how you will deal with your deeds when I undo the *Wave of Oblivion* which took away your humanity."

Shaina listened fascinated. *Wave of Oblivion*? She faintly remembered that this was the major attack of the Ara Saint, but she only heard about this in the history lessons at Sanctuary. In her time there hadn't been an Ara Saint. But she was very intrigued about the information that DeathMask had been taken away his humanity - now his callous acts and cruelty were at least understandable.

When Hekate drew a pentagram of black energy onto his forehead, DeathMask wanted to evade the cool touch of her fingers, but he couldn't move a muscle. Never before in his life had he felt that powerless, not even when Wyvern Rhadamanthys took him and threw him into the abyss. At that time at least he had been able to struggle.

"*Unweave*," Hekate finally whispered, and the black pentagram flared in dark violet and seemed to sink into DeathMask's skull. He wanted to scream, but he was completely paralysed. Yet he felt how tendrils of energy painfully wormed their way through his brain loosening connections and reweaving lost paths.

If he hadn't been frozen under her gaze, he would have sunk to his knees from the onslaught of long lost emotions. A wave of self-reproach washed over him when finally feelings of remorse and guilt were allowed to him again.

Hekate prepared to savour his anguish, when a telepathic call reached her. Persephoneia insisted that she join her. The black clad woman sighed and let go of the Cancer Saint who couldn't help but collapse into a miserable heap onto the floor.

"I'm sorry, I can't keep you company any longer as I have more urgent matters to attend." Hekate made her exit, and nothing of her remained but a shimmer of violet darkness that dissolved within scant seconds, too.

'Damn', Shaina thought, 'this was just too fast.' She was annoyed that she never got an opening to launch an attack at the Goddess - but then, even DeathMask hadn't stood the slightest chance against her. Speaking of DeathMask... The Ophiuchus Saint frowned when she looked at him still cowering on the ground. He hid his face behind his hands and shook violently.

"DeathMask?" No answer. Shaina's frown deepened, and as she didn't wear her face mask anymore, her impatience was clearly visible. This was neither the time nor the

place for him to break down and dissolve into some misplaced self-pity, she thought angrily. "DeathMask!"

"Leave me." It came out as a hoarse whisper.

"Certainly not! We have a job to do," she hissed. "Now get up!"

"Leave me!" DeathMask didn't know how to cope with the torrent of remorse he suddenly felt for the cruelties he committed. "Maybe I should just end it here and now..." His voice was barely audible.

When she heard that, Shaina virtually exploded. "You despicable coward, will you snap out of it?" Her Cosmo flared crimson red in anger as she launched her attack at him. "*Thunder Claw*."

DeathMask was caught totally by surprise when Shaina's attack connected, and it was mainly thanks to his Cloth that he escaped mostly unscathed except for a minor scratch on his cheek. But the assault did manage to break the spell of depression as hot rage replaced his self-loathing for a moment, and he struck back with a powerful punch that catapulted Shaina into the next wall where she left a visible imprint before she slid down to the ground.

DeathMask looked at his fist in horror, when the first impulse of anger abated. Shaina panted and struggled back to her feet. She should have seen that coming, she thought wryly. Fortunately her Saint training had left her with quite some stamina and a robust constitution.

"But I can't..." DeathMask's inner struggle was even visible on the outside as his eyes mirrored the violent emotions battling inside of him. He looked at his hands.

"You idiot crab," Shaina hissed. "I will not allow you to take the coward's way out like Saga did, and if I have to die to beat some sense into you. You are needed for this task as you are the only person who can open a gate to the forecourt of underworld at will." She assumed her attack stance again, well knowing that she didn't have a chance against DeathMask if he fought in earnest. But she had a higher goal - she had to see to it that Seiya could be saved, and she was well prepared to give her life for this goal if need be.

"But there's so much blood on me..." For the first time in his life, DeathMask felt revulsion when he thought about the thousands of faces of the dead that formerly adorned his temple.

"Yes, and that is supposed to be news to me?" Shaina retorted acidly. "What is done, is done. You think there isn't blood on me? The only difference between you and I is that I haven't enjoyed it as much as you did."

DeathMask looked at her as if he saw her for the first time. The fury raging in her bright green eyes was genuine, and it seemed that she really meant business. She was quite impressive for a female Saint, he had to admit with a grudging respect.

"So what will you do now? We have an important job to accomplish." Her voice held an undertone of steel.

DeathMask closed his eyes and nodded wearily. "I think I'm okay," he claimed. Of course he wasn't, but he would cope for the time being, he thought.

"Good." Shaina relaxed and the crimson glow of her Cosmo faded. "But be sure I will kick your sorry butt if you don't pull yourself together."

"I wouldn't even think of this if I were you," he growled back. True, he might be wounded to the core, but that didn't mean he would allow this Silver Saint to take advantage of his state. It was bad enough that she had been a witness to his momentary lapse, but he swore to himself that he would never again show such weakness in front of anybody else. Normally he should have killed her for having seen it, but right now he realised that he just couldn't do it - and he didn't like this fact at all. If there was one thing he abhorred, it was weakness.

"Now this sounds a little more like you," Shaina commented half relieved and half apprehensively. No matter what had happened to him, she would have to tread very carefully with him now as she just couldn't fathom how he might react. She scrutinised him, and even though he tried to put on his usual nonchalant mien, his deep blue eyes were clouded with a deep running pain.

Nonetheless they continued on their way, and Shaina hoped sincerely that Hekate's attack hadn't destabilized DeathMask so far that he would be useless for the upcoming fights.

Continued in Chapter Four: Shadows Walking the City of the Dead