

Dancing the Shadows

Persephoneia's Revenge

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Kapitel 1: A Message Boding Ill

Chapter 1: A Message Boding Ill

*Back in the past when the Gods were alive
Men were no more than playthings to their whim
Though it didn't take long for boredom to arrive
And the Gods disappeared beyond the world's rim
("Loneliness", S.Quest)*

* * *

"And you *really* think we should watch *Masters of the Universe* in the cinema?" Hyoga asked.

"Sure. It's said to be *the* movie of the year," Seiya replied.

"But this doesn't say anything about its quality," Shiryu cautioned. And of course, he was pretty sure that Shunrei wouldn't like it.

"We'll only know if we watch it," Seiya shrugged.

"I'm sure it's pretty brutal," Shun said, who abhorred senseless violence.

"Nonsense! The movie is funny. It's even for children!"

"Hm, but this means we won't be able to convince Ikki to join us," Shun said sadly.

"We wouldn't be able to convince him anyway -- or do *you* know where he hides right now?" Hyoga pointed out.

"He would only spoil us the fun," Seiya suspected.

"But he's my *brother*!"

"Ours, too," Hyoga reminded him.

"Brother or not, he doesn't have to come along all the time," Seiya said.

"But Shunrei will accompany us," Shiryu decreed.

Seiya and Hyoga rolled their eyes, but decided not to comment on this.

But then, Hyoga thought, he might ask Eri out again. She was cute, blonde, good-looking and since she was rid of the influence of the Goddess Eris', she was very nice again.

"I want to go *now*," Seiya nagged. "We don't have the time to collect any girl-friends before the next showing is due."

"Shunrei will be furious if I go out without telling her where I am headed."

"Can't you do anything without her consent anymore?" Seiya sighed.

"My Old Master told me to watch out for her and vice versa."

"How boring..."

"Not at all." Shiryu smiled soulfully.

"Well, I certainly wouldn't want to settle down with one girl so soon when there are so many other cute girls around," Hyoga said with a grin.

"Let's get going now," Seiya demanded. "I wouldn't want to know what Shunrei would do to Shiryu if we had to wait for the late showing..."

"You're right," Hyoga grinned. "But I hope we won't have to pay your ticket again."

Seiya pulled out a bank note. "Nope, folks. Not today!" They walked into the direction of the movie-theatre.

"Oh, did you get some more pocket-money by Saori this time?" Hyoga teased.

Seiya gave him a deadly look. "And where do *you* get your money from?"

"No comment."

"I *knew* it!" Seiya said. "I'm sure you borrowed it from one of your girl-friends!"

"What girl-friends are you talking about? I'm a dedicated single," Hyoga claimed, echoing the words of his Master Aquarius Camus.

Shun looked open-mouthed at him. He still hadn't dared to ask June out for a date for fear of being rejected, but Hyoga didn't seem to have any such worries... It was somehow unfair.

They went to the box-office and bought tickets. To their amazement, they still had five minutes before the movie started and so they managed to get in while the lights were still on. Shun bought a large portion of popcorn for them all, and Seiya wondered again how Shun managed to keep his money together so well that he always had some to spare.

As he had just enough for one of the cheapest tickets (he really should talk to Saori about their monthly allowance), they now sat in the first row and waited for the movie to begin.

The lights dimmed and the begin of the monumental music almost threw them out of their seats. Desperately, they held their ears.

"Why do they have to turn the volume so high?" Shun asked with a pained expression.

"Hey, we survived Saga and Poseidon and Hades -- we won't be killed by a movie soundtrack!"

Shiryu looked doubtfully at Seiya. Obviously he had already forgotten that he was only alive right now because the Great Mother Gaia had decided to bring him back from the dead along with the other Saints so that they could justify themselves for the deeds done in Athena's name.

They adapted to the noise and even enjoyed the movie after a while. It was one of those childish super hero flicks from the United States about some guy called He-Man who had to fight a devilish opponent who looked like a skeleton in cloak. After their serious encounters with truly evil Gods, this was some nice, light entertainment.

The movie slowly came to its end when finally the fight for the cosmic key which allegedly opened dimensional doorways came to its conclusion. The key was activated and within spectacular sound and light effects, a colourful dimensional opening appeared on the screen. The sky began to blur, and suddenly a blue and red energy spiral appeared that filled the screen.

As they didn't expect anything bad, the Saints were totally surprised when suddenly the special effects turned to reality, and a powerful Cosmo sucked them to a mysterious *somewhere*. They whirled around within the colourful energy spiral, until they abruptly fell down to the ground.

After the incandescent colour eruptions, they felt almost blind in the gloomy place where they found themselves now. The ground was black, porose stone and covered with decaying black moss. Still dazed, they began to stumble to their feet, only to be greeted by a tall man with dark green curls who held a golden staff in his hands. They were so stunned that they didn't react when they were lightly touched by the staff and immediately fell asleep.

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"There are only four of them!" The black-clad woman frowned at the man. She had long, wavy, scarlet hair that was held by a black tiara, and her turquoise eyes shone angrily.

"Well, I didn't promise to bring your Mistress a certain number, Lady Hekate," the man laughed. "Be glad that I brought *some* of them."

"Well, let us carry them into the Castle," Hekate said. "They have to be properly caged before they wake up."

"Well, *you* can do as you please. *My* job is over for today." Hermes gave her an insolent smile and his bright yellow eyes sparkled mischievously before he disappeared.

Hekate made an obscene gesture in the direction where he had stood, before she raised her powers and let her prisoners float deeper down into the gloomy demesne. Fortunately she was the Goddess of Witches and Demons and her powers were enormous, even when caged in this human body.

When Persephoneia learned of her husband's current defeat, she immediately prepared for a new war that should revenge and free him. And as the new war was meant to be held in the world of the humans again, she decided to do it according to the rules set by Zeus. After all, then he couldn't complain when she triumphed over Athena and sealed *her* away this time when it was done the proper way.

Thus Persephoneia sought out human shadows from the City of the Dead, cleansed them from the last remnants of their former selves and returned them to life by her powers to give them to her minions as hosts. Hekate wasn't exactly satisfied with this solution, but as it was the will of her Mistress, she had to cope with it.

Finally she reached the City of the Dead where the shadows dwelled. Hades' black palace towered over the bleak city, and Hekate brought her prisoners to the monumental castle. It had been completely destroyed in the former fight, but Persephoneia, who had just returned from her visit to Demeter, decided to rebuild it. As Queen of the Underworld she refused to live in a heap of rubble, and her mood had been truly murderous when she undid the destruction, using her powers.

Persephoneia would certainly want to torture them for their audacity to seal up Hades, but until then she had to keep them safe. Hekate directed the unconscious forms into the dungeons of the castle, where an immense storage room held cages of *adamas*, the indestructible grey metal that Gaia created for the punishment of Uranos.

Each of the boys was put into one of the cages that hung from the ceiling, before Hekate sealed the *adamas* prisons with a powerful spell.

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"Seiya!" Athena shouted in horror. Not again... This was the second time she felt his Cosmo disappear and it hurt as much as the first time.

What had happened?

Frantically, she searched the vicinity for a sign of his sparkling Cosmo, then the farther regions -- to no avail. And moreover, not only Seiya's Cosmo had disappeared, but also the Cosmos of Hyoga, Shun and Shiryu.

"Saori-san!" Shunrei's voice was filled with terror, but still her knock sounded timid when she tried to make herself known at the door to Saori's suite in the spacious Kido Mansion.

Deeply worried, Saori opened the door to let the petite Chinese girl in. "You felt it, too?"

Shunrei nodded and tears streamed from her huge dark eyes. "Something bad befell my Shiryu."

"Not only Shiryu. Seiya, Hyoga and Shun were affected as well."

"Oh Goddess," Shunrei sobbed. "Wasn't it said that with the victory over Hades all of us could lead a peaceful normal life now?"

"I hoped so as well," Saori sighed. When she looked at the upset girl, she was aware that at least she had to be strong enough to uphold a certain dignity. After all, she was the reincarnation of Athena, Goddess of Wisdom and Just War, and thus she should be able to handle situations like this.

"But what could have happened?" Shunrei looked at her and her gaze betrayed the desperate hope that Athena would *know* and she was able to solve everything.

"I don't know," Saori said wearily. Even after the battles against Saga, Poseidon and Hades, she was still a teenage girl whose body housed a Goddess' soul, but this didn't say anything about her personal experience. She didn't dare to confide in Shunrei or anyone how much she longed for someone to tell her what to do, to solve things for her. But Grandfather was dead, his soul dwelling among the stars, and he hadn't been there to give her advice for a long time now.

"But... Aren't you the Goddess of Wisdom, Athena?"

"Wisdom? Maybe. Infinite knowledge? Certainly not."

"So how can we find out what happened?"

"Well, I will check if the men in the command center manage to dig out something that leads to an answer." Saori led Shunrei down into the basement of the Kido Mansion where the large information center was located. Here all kinds of news and information were collected and evaluated by the most state-of-the-art computers available and a crew of erudite specialists.

As most of the time, one of the Steel Saints was there in the info center. The boys were very good with computers and thus Athena allowed them to stay here and try to help the team.

"Daichi," Saori called the young boy with the shock of green hair who surveyed one of the monitors. He was the Earth Saint and the youngest of the three, and when he heard Saori's voice he looked up and beamed at her.

"Ojou-sama!"

"Could you please check all peculiar occurrences that happened in Tokyo during the last hour?"

"Of course." His fingers flew over the keyboard with a speed that was certainly superhuman. "Anything special I should be looking for?"

"Well, the Cosmo of Seiya, Shiryu, Shun and Hyoga vanished and I would like to find a possible reason for this."

"*What?!*" Daichi looked at her in shock. "Their Cosmo simply vanished?"

"Exactly." It was more and more difficult for Saori to uphold a composed manner in the face of Seiya's disappearance, but it would be highly unbecoming for her to break down in front of her underlings. She was the one who was in command and who had to lead the others. Shunrei, on the other hand, almost drowned in her tears while she worried about Shiryu. Saori wished she could let her tears run as freely as well, but she had to be the one the others could look up to.

"I just got a note that there was some 'whirlwind' in a movie-theater downtown and several persons are reported to be sucked into it."

A deep frown creased Saori's forehead. "A whirlwind? Are you sure it's not some kind of advertising gag?"

"I'm not sure. You see, Seiya talked about going into some new fantasy action movie all the time the last days -- he pretty much got onto my and Sho's nerves with it -- and it seems that exactly that movie was shown in said cinema."

"A whirlwind..." Saori repeated thoughtfully. "I wonder what might have caused it."

"Aliens?" Daichi suggested. He was an avid science fiction fan and knew every important novel. "You know, aliens do alien things..."

Athena gave him a withering stare. "That's nothing to joke about!"

"Sorry, ojou-sama..." Daichi tried to look appropriately serious. He was sure that Seiya only tried to get some privacy away from the Goddess. Certainly he wanted to spend a nice vacation and thus hid where Saori couldn't find him for a couple of days, just like the Phoenix Saint always did.

"But we *have* to find them!" Saori crashed her fist onto a table.

"Indeed," Shunrei sobbed. "My poor Shiryu!"

"Well, why don't you send someone to that cinema to check first hand what happened?" Daichi suggested.

"Good idea." Saori rubbed her hand and called for Jabu, who lived in the mansion like the other four of the less successful Bronze Saints.

When the Unicorn Saint got Saori's order, he felt somehow ambiguous about it. Okay, it was great that Saori actually remembered that he existed, but that it was only to investigate *Seiya's* disappearance nagged at him. Nonetheless, it was Saori who ordered him, and he would do everything for the subject of his undying adoration.

The movie-theater was crowded with police and press, and it was no simple feat to appear innocuous and still try to find out something of use, Jabu discovered, but he would be successful for *her*.

In the meantime, Saori called Tatsumi, the other Steel Saints and the remaining Bronze Saints into the command center to design a plan to find Seiya and the others.

"Ojou-sama," Tatsumi began, "it might be a good idea to call some of the Gold Saints from Sanctuary. With Seiya and the others gone, you are virtually defenseless."

Nachi, Ichi, Ban and Geki exchanged sulky glances. It was so mean -- they were Bronze Saints, too, but Athena never accepted them truly as such.

"That's a good idea," Saori nodded.

Finally, Jabu returned. "I sensed residual traces of a truly powerful, strange Cosmo," he reported. "But there was no trace of a gateway anymore and even less a direction where it might have led."

"But we have to find out where it led, or it's an act of futility to start a rescue mission," Saori exclaimed.

"I only hope that Shiryu is still well, wherever he is now," Shunrei sniffed.

"I wonder whether it was some accident or a planned abduction," Tatsumi mused. "If it turns out to be the latter, we might get a ransom note that tells us more."

Saori began to walk up and fro. What was she supposed to do now? Ah yes, the Gold Saints... Maybe one of them knew what to do. She concentrated and sent a message to Leo Gold Saint Aiolia, whom she trusted most of them all.

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Aiolia was sneaking into the kitchen to find out what Marin cooked for him today, when suddenly Athena's Cosmo reached out to him and a message formed in his mind. He was to teleport to Tokyo right away to assist in the search for Seiya, Shiryu, Hyoga and Shun, whose Cosmo had mysteriously disappeared.

"Sorry, Marin, I won't be able to sample your delicious lunch today," he called while he grabbed the box of his Cloth.

"Aiolia? What's up? Where are you going?" Marin looked out of the kitchen. Even here she wore her mask, lest one of the other Gold Saints might visit. Her face was only Aiolia's to see.

"Athena called. She told me that the Cosmo of Seiya, Shiryu, Shun and Hyoga disappeared."

"What?" Marin concentrated. Indeed, she couldn't find any trace of Seiya anywhere on Earth. "I will accompany you."

Aiolia looked at her. Athena's call was meant for him, but then, Marin had been Seiya's teacher for several years, and her tone had this decisive finality he knew so well that said she certainly wouldn't be convinced to stay here, no matter what.

"Okay. But hurry."

"Sure." Marin fetched her Cloth box and returned to the Leo Saint who immediately homed in on Athena and teleported them both to the Goddess.

They materialized right in the middle of Athena and the others.

"You asked for me, Athena?" Aiolia greeted her. "Please tell me what exactly happened."

Saori told him what they had found out so far, which wasn't much.

"Hm." The brown-haired Leo Saint frowned. "I'll be right back..." He teleported to the cinema and investigated the place personally, too, before he returned. It hadn't taken more than a couple of seconds. "The Cosmo residues seem to stem from a divine power," he reported, his voice slightly worried.

"A divine power? But who could it be?" Saori wondered.

Aiolia wrinkled his forehead. "You vanquished Poseidon and Hades, not to mention several other minor Gods and Goddesses -- I think it's quite likely that you prompted someone among the remaining Gods to challenge you now."

"But why did he or she abduct four of my Saints?" Athena asked in utter confusion. She was used to be the target herself.

"Well, maybe they want to send you a challenge that way," Aiolia mused. He was

slightly peeved that this unknown power started by kidnapping a couple of *Bronze Saints* when there were now twelve Gold Saints around at Sanctuary. Okay, eleven and half, when he acknowledged the fact that Mu was now the Master of Sanctuary and had passed on his Cloth to Kiki. But then, probably the enemy had been afraid to take on the Gold Saints so that they only dared to attack the Bronze Saints.

"They are to give me Seiya back," Saori demanded haughtily.

"And I want my Shiryu back," Shunrei added.

Aiolia lifted one eyebrow. No takers for Hyoga and Shun? Ah well... "I will find them for you and bring them back," he promised, and in the same instant he wished he hadn't spoken that rashly. After all, he didn't have the slightest clue where to begin.

"Athena, I suggest you return to Sanctuary now," the Leo Gold Saint said. "I fear for your safety if you stay here. As long as you remain in your temple, any attacker would have to take the route of the Twelve Temples, and we Gold Saints stand there to protect you."

"And how am I to gather intelligence there? Here's my command center! It may be true that Athena stayed in her temple all the time in the past, but I have been reincarnated in a time where information is of greatest importance, and I intend to use every advantage I can get."

Aiolia frowned deeply. "Still I think it would be safer..."

"I will stay here."

"As you wish." Aiolia bowed his head. "I will protect you wherever you are."

Athena gave him a radiant smile, when suddenly the ground began to shake violently. The lights flickered and the computer monitors went dark for a second, before the emergency power supply cut in.

"An earthquake!" Tatsumi shouted over the noise. "Take cover!"

Everybody tried to find a safe spot somewhere, and as it befit his role as Saint of the Goddess, Aiolia protected Athena with his body.

When Jabu realized that Aiolia had been faster, he sighed inwardly. Obviously it was his fate to be only second best, whatever he tried. It was getting really frustrating.

Only seconds later, the earth quietened. Anxiously, Saori peered upwards to a ceiling light that hung only half in its socket and threatened to fall down.

"Are you alright?" Aiolia helped her to her feet.

"Yes, Aiolia. Thank you. -- This was no ordinary earthquake. I'm sure you felt the surge of a powerful Cosmo, too..."

The Saints nodded.

"Look!" Tatsumi pointed to a scroll of parchment that lay on the floor. It was sealed with golden wax and shimmered in an unearthly blackish light.

Aiolia activated his Cosmo, but didn't sense any direct threat. As highest ranking Saint, he decided to pick up the scroll and looked to Athena. The Goddess nodded impatiently, and Aiolia opened the message.

"What does it say?" Saori asked curiously.

"Hm. It's written in Old Greek," Aiolia reported. Fortunately it was required that all Saints learned to read Old and Modern Greek. "It says:

*My dearest Athena,
thou wilt pay for sealing mine beloved husband away for another two centuries. As first
step I shall make thee suffer the loss of the one closest to thine heart.
Kisses, Persephoneia*

That's all."

"Pardon?! She must be joking..." Athena paled.

"I'm afraid that's what is written here on this scroll."

"So this means *Persephoneia* kidnapped Seiya?"

"She or her minions," the Leo Saint nodded. "We may have killed the Specters of Hades, but it seems his Queen has a certain following, too."

Saori looked thoughtful while she tried to recapitulate the genealogy of her divine peers. "Indeed, there were ample amounts of minor Gods and Goddesses who had one or the other problem with the Olympic Gods. Unfortunately we only have two choices: either wait until they show themselves and fight them here, or carry the battle into the Hades again. I'm convinced *Persephoneia* brought Seiya and the others into her domain."

The Saints exchanged apprehensive looks when they remembered what had to be done to enter the underworld realm.

Continued in Chapter Two: Journey through the Twilight World