

TITANS OF CHAOS

JOHN C. WRIGHT



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Chaos

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Dramatis Personae

The Students

(Primus) Victor Invictus Triumph ❖ Damnameneus of the Telchine
(Secunda) Amelia Armstrong Windrose ❖ Phaethusa, Daughter of Helios and Neaera of Myriagon
(Tertia) Vanity Bonfire Fair ❖ Nausicaa, Daughter of Alcinoous and Arete
(Quartinus) Colin Iblis mac FirBolg ❖ Phobetor, son of Morpheus and Nepenthe
Quentin Nemo ❖ Eidotheia, child of Proteus and the Graeae

The Staff

Headmaster Reginald Boggin ❖ Boreas, of the North Wind
Dr. Ananias Fell ❖ Telemus, Cyclopes
Mrs. Jenny Wren ❖ Erichtho the Witch
Miss Christabel Daw ❖ Thelxiepia the Siren
Grendel Glum ❖ Grendel, son of Echidna
Dr. Miles Drinkwater ❖ Mestor of Atlantis
Taffy ap Cymru ❖ Laverna, Lady of Fraud

The Olympians

Lord Terminus ❖ Zeus
The Great Queen, Lady Basilissa ❖ Hera
Lord Pelagaeus, also called the Earthshaker Poseidon
The Grain Mother ❖ Demeter
Lord Dis, also called the Unseen One ❖ Hades
The Maiden, also called Kore ❖ Proserpine
Phoebus the Bright God, also called the Destroyer ❖ Apollo
Phoebe, also called the Huntress ❖ Artemis
Lord Mavors ❖ Ares
Lady Cyprian ❖ Aphrodite
Trismegistus ❖ Hermes
Tritogenia, also called Lady Wisdom ❖ Athena
Mulciber ❖ Hephaestus
Lady Hestia
Lord Anacreon, also called Lord Vintner and the Vine God ❖ Dionysus

Of the Four Houses of Chaos

*The Dark rule dreams and phantoms of Old Night;
Cimmeria their land, Morpheus their king.
The Fallen rage in Tartarus, lamenting lost delight,
And that virtue, which, betrayed, lost them everything.
The Lost fall through th' Abyss, silent and serene as rain,
Typhon is their eldest, and nothingness his whole domain.
The Telchine are their serfs on Earth,
Ialysus their golden isle, rich-laden with treasures fine.
The Nameless live before all birth,
In Labyrinths of Thousand-walled design,
And, prelapsarian, still laws recall
That Uranus knew before his fall.*

Ships of Sable, Dark and Swift

1.

It was our fault.

We fled the old gods; fleeing, we drew our pursuers after us, so that the frail and mortal men we hid among were in the shadow of destruction meant for us, to be whelmed by the fury of heaven, and malice of the deep.

Here was the great luxury liner *Queen Elizabeth II*, an engineering marvel of seventy thousand tons and nine hundred sixty feet, as wealthy as a palace afloat, more opulent than what antique kings in Nineveh lavished on their splendors. For many idle days we five children lolled among the passengers, giddy with freedom as if with wine, and the equatorial sun hovered, weightless gold, above calm, blue Atlantic waves.

That was then. Now it was night, and the stars hid, and the wind howled, and trumpets sounded, echoing across the black abyss of storm-lashed waters. Clouds like boiling floodwaters fell past overhead, and waves like thunderclouds rose and trembled and collapsed down below.

The gods we fled did not want men to see them. The *Queen Elizabeth II* was struck with slumber. As if that archangel who had entranced Adam on the day when Eve was born without pain from his side had shaken dark wings above the ship, the mortals were drowned in oblivion. No one, young or old, could stir, but lay where chance tumbled him, in cabins or passageways, or heaped at the bottom of ladders.

No one human. I was alert, gripping the broken rail and staring out into the utter darkness.

2.

“Why did you two come back?” I shouted. “I ordered you to abandon ship! We will all die if we don’t follow orders. My orders! Didn’t you vote for me as leader?”

I have heard that there are grown-ups who do not take seriously the ideas about voting, obeying authority, or acting with purpose and discipline. Lucky them. What soft and comfortable lives they must lead! Lives without foes.

Vanity Fair was shorter than me, a dress size smaller, but with more generous hip and bust measurements. We were closer than sisters, having been raised in the same, well, you can call it a jail cell, since that’s what it was. The freezing rain had plastered her hair to her head, and her thin coat tight to her body. She was shivering. Her real name was Nausicaa, of the mythic land called Phaeacia beyond Earth’s shore, but our real names had been taken from us in youth and, until recently, we had only the names we chose for ourselves as children.

“You are not going to run away and get killed!” She was a green-eyed redhead, and her eyes seemed to glow like emeralds when she was angry. I could see only her silhouette, but from her tone of voice I knew her eyes blazed.

“If the leader orders a retreat you retreat!” (I was screaming louder than regulation for a British

If the leader orders retreat, you retreat. (I was screaming louder than regulation for a British military officer, but I was still new at this, and was shouting the storm-wind.)

Colin mac FirBolg was blue-eyed, with unruly hair and ruddy skin, built like a wrestler. He gave me a stiff-armed Roman salute. “*Sieg Heil, mein Obergruppenfräulein!* But we thought you were dead! Didn’t Echidna kill you?”

Vanity hissed, “Stupid! No matter how far away, she hears whenever her name is spoken! Speaking summons her!”

Colin shrugged. “Is she going to get through that fleet?” To me, he said: “Besides, Leader, we came to report that your dumb order could not be carried out. We are entirely surrounded, cut off, doomed, so we can’t retreat! There may be time for a quickie, though, so if I can suggest, without seeming insubordinate, ma’am—I mean, you don’t want me to die a virgin, do you?”

Thunder drowned out any words I might have spoken back. I slapped him. I could hear the smack of my palm on his not-quite-shaven cheek even above the storm.

“Thank you, ma’am! May I have another!” he barked out, unperturbed, still holding his Nazi salute. His real name was Phobetor, son of Morpheus, and he was a dream-lord of Cimmeria, the sunless world.

Even if he meant it in mockery, his stiff bearing reminded me I had no time for anger. We were within minutes of recapture, and if I was the leader, I had to invent the plan and give the orders.

If we failed, we failed under my leadership. It would be my fault.

3.

Giddy with freedom, we had been! Because all our lives had been spent on the orphanage grounds, behind pitiless walls, under strictest watch, beneath the tutelage of Boreas. He could pass for human, but Headmaster Boggin, as we called him, had been the North Wind himself. My real father, a sovereign of some ulterior dimension, never knew his daughter, did not raise me: Boreas, my enemy, did.

A flash of lightning lit the sea for a frozen moment, dazzling, burning.

I was expecting to see Echidna. Echidna, the mother of all monsters, who had dragged the giant luxury ship into these unearthly waters, had been looming over the rail just a moment ago, her beautiful maiden’s face cold with tearless grief and scaly snake-tail swollen with scorpion poison. She had raised that sting to kill me, but had spared my life because I shed a tear for her dead son. Then, she turned and dove beneath the waves when I whispered the name of the war-god who had slain him.

Perhaps she was somewhere in the deep, brooding on revenge, her huge bulk drowned in fathoms below fathoms, her long snaky body, furlong after furlong, writhing. But my special powers were blind, and I did not see her.

Instead I saw the fleet. There were at least a dozen barges, larger than oil tankers, built like stepped pyramids, with shields on every deck, and cannons, arbalests, catapults, and ballistae behind every shield, and both upper and lower decks had raised gangplanks with iron teeth built along the bottom, like a siege-tower at sea. The barges were made of some black wood or metal that shone darkly in the lightning flash, mountains of iron. Even from here I could hear the drumbeats counting time for the oars. At the apex of each tall barge, strung between two tall poles that jutted up and diverged, was a triangle of storm-beaten cloth. The cloth was black and on its field, in red, was a circle

with an arrow coming from it at an angle.

It was the armada that Lord Mavors, whom the Greeks worshipped as Ares and the Romans as Mars, sent for us. Perhaps he was here, and Echidna hunted him; perhaps it was merely his men, and the unearthly flesh-eating I aestrovonians

Between these barges and the ocean liner, slender as spears in the water, was a flotilla of black ships. They were as light and swift as racing sculls, but each one held fifty men or more, with shields hung along the rail, Viking-style. Each one had a sloping nose ending with an iron-beaked ram, and red eyes painted on the narrow hulls to each side of the ram.

4.

Boreas raised us, I should say, in a second childhood. Either by magic, or by science unknown on Earth, we had been forced out of our original forms and made into children. Having robbed us of our memories and homes, the Olympians held us hostage against uneasy peace with Chaos. The plan would have worked, except that we adapted to human shape too well; the impersonation was so perfect that normal human biology, normal emotions, began to grow in us. The plan would have worked, except that we grew up.

The orphanage had been designed to contain monster cubs from Chaos: five children. It could not hold five adults, raised as human, with the dreams and ideals of humans, but armed with the strange powers of adult chaoticists. We grew up. We wanted our freedom. By stealth and cunning and violent battle, we had won it.

And the first thing we did when we won our freedom was... Well, we took a cruise. (Come on. Wouldn't you?)

We should have just fled to a desert island. All these humans were about to die, and it was our fault.

My friends were about to die, and it was my fault.

5.

I said to them, "Where are Quentin and Victor?"

Colin said, "Ma'am! They took off in a lifeboat, like you said!"

Victor had always been the one in charge, back at the orphanage, back when we were young students together. (How long ago had that been? A week? Less?) He was the logical one, cold-bloodedly brave, dispassionate, determined. Somehow I had won the last show of hands, and the group was now counting on me. So I had to be Victor.

So get a grip. Square your shoulders and start barking out orders. They don't have to make sense, they just have to get the group moving. Tell the troops the leader is leading. Say something.

So I said, "Vanity! Call your magic silver ship over to the other side of the liner. Once the three of us are on your ship, have her find the lifeboat Victor and Quentin are in. If they haven't been captured already."

She could summon her ship by thought alone. The Phaeacian ships had neither pilot nor rudder, but understood the unspoken wishes of their masters, and sped as swift as winged falcons, swift as thought, to their destinations. Vanity had discovered the *Argent Nautilus* was her very own ship, a Greek trireme with painted eyes port and starboard, and she did not need to be aboard to give commands to her.

Vanity said, "I don't know. The ship goes where I tell her. But if I say, 'Find Victor,' can she find Victor?" Vanity shook her head sadly and, for a moment, looked very sober and grown up. "We should have performed experiments, found out what we can and cannot do, instead of spending New Year's Eve on a cruise ship, living it up with the money you stole from Taffy ap Cymru!"

Taffy had been one of the staff at the school, a member of one of the several factions of

Early had been one of the staff at the school, a member of one of the several factions of Olympians seeking to take possession of us away from our headmaster, Boreas.

“I didn’t steal it!” I protested. “I blackmailed him fair and square! Her. Whatever.”

Taffy was a shape-changer like us: her real name was Laverna, the Roman goddess of Fraud. She had been the henchman (henchwoman?) of Trismegistus, the trickster god the Greeks worshipped under the name Hermes.

But I hadn’t actually blackmailed the money from her. She had scoffed at my attempt and given it to me. Strange. That had happened just after Lamia, the Queen of Vampires, had attempted to murder Quentin. As if Laverna had wanted to help us escape. Why? And was she really working for Trismegistus or Mavors? Did Mavors want us to escape?

At some point, when I had time to think, I should puzzle that one out.

I turned to Colin. “Are your powers working?”

“Locked and loaded and ready to rumble!” Colin grinned, flexing his big rawboned hands as if eager for mayhem. Who understands boys?

Who, for that matter, understands any of us?

6.

We each came from a different version of Chaos, a different paradigm. Our minds somehow interpreted the supernatural with mutually exclusive explanations. What looked to me like fluctuations of mind-body monads of time-space in the fourth dimension, Colin saw as passions, Quentin saw as magic, Victor saw as matter in motion.

We each could manipulate the Unknown in our own way: Colin’s anger made him strong, his elation made him fly, and his disbelief made him able to unmake deadly wounds and brush them away; Quentin summoned up fell spirits from the night world with words of power, and bound them to his service in circles of chalked sigils and the scents of talismanic candles; Victor could electromagnetically reorganize matter and energy in his environment; I could deflect gravity, walk through walls, or send my many senses ranging through the higher dimensions.

Each one could negate one other. I could reach through the fourth dimension to alter the internal nature of any atoms Victor programmed, and he could neither see nor understand what I did. His Newtonian universe did not even have words for the relativistic principles I used. An azure ray from Victor’s third eye could banish Quentin’s thaumaturgy as quickly as a skeptic’s question quiets a tab tipper. With a wave of his charming wand, Quentin’s unseen familiars could banish Colin’s passions. And Colin could simply will my powers to stop.

Vanity was different. She was not a princess of Chaos held hostage, but a princess of allies the Olympians did not trust, an ancient and immortal race called the Phaeacians. She (and, we had reason to believe, her people) could find secret doors through solid walls, and passages beyond leading to distant realms. These secret paths always looked as if they were natural and contemporary, as if they had been built there long ago: And yet I suspected they were made, as suddenly as the details in a dream are made.

And the laws of nature varied from realm to realm, and the Phaeacians could erect barriers to prevent one set of laws from being enforced out of its realm, or part the barrier to permit it. One other power they had, stranger than the others: Phaeacians could tell when someone was watching, no matter what means were used.

Yet even all these superhuman, supernatural powers did not make them supreme of the races of Cosmos. They were a conquered people.

The Olympians could manipulate destiny as adroitly as the Phaeacians manipulated space. A σ

The Olympians could manipulate destiny as deftly as the Thracians manipulated space. A god of Olympus need only decree the outcome he desired from the future, and somehow the step-by-step details, the coincidences needed to bring that chain of events about would be created to suit. With this power, they could dictate the desired outcome of battles and love affairs, the progress of industry, the direction of philosophical and scientific inquiry, the verdict of trials or negotiations...anything there was for a god to control, they could control. They conquered lesser races who had powers like ours, cyclopes and sirens, maenads and meliads.

In the same way I could overrule Victor's paradigm, so could a siren; in the same way Victor could negate Quentin's powers, so could a cyclopes. We were really safe only when we were together and used all our talents in combination.

Which meant that the first order of business was...

Colin. He was the only one whose powers worked here, now. Colin was our best hope.

There was a sobering thought.

7.

"Colin! We need to find the others, if we have any hope of escaping this blockade. That means flying

He blinked at me. "So? Can't you pop out those energy wing-thingies of yours? Oh, wait. We are not in the waters of Earth any longer, are we? We passed over a boundary when Echidna pulled the ship off course. Like when one dream turns into another, and a flying dream becomes a falling dream. Am I right?"

Instead of answering, I said, "If I run and jump off that rail, is your inspiration enough to turn into something that can fly, so that you can grab me before I hit the water and die?"

I started running for the rail without waiting for an answer.

Colin took five huge steps and threw his hand around my waist. "Never mind!" he said. "I feel pretty damn inspired as it is. Upsy daisy!"

He tossed me up onto his shoulder Tarzan-carries-Jane style, so the world was all dizzy and upside down to me, and my rain-soaked hair was slapping his firm little butt. He had his hand pretty near the top of my thighs, and creeping higher, so I said, "Watch the hand!"

"Oh," he said, and, "Sorry!" And he clamped his hand to cup one cheek of my buttocks instead. "Hey!"

He said, "Kick your legs. It looks cute. You've got great gams."

Gams? Colin had been corrupted by Yank terminology.

Colin now came after Vanity. From the confused view I was getting (sort of a Colin's lower-back-eyed view) it looked like she was backing up and had her hands out in protest.

Colin said, "Leader! Will you tell the redhead to hold still so I can grab her? There is no time for games right now."

I am certain that my dignity as a leader could not be questioned while I was being hauled around helpless and bottom proudly held high, like a cavewoman on the shoulder of your friendly neighborhood Neanderthal.

I said, "Vanity! Let Colin grope you! No time for games right now."

I saw Vanity biting her lips in disgust, but she came forward and held up her arms. Colin stooped (dizzying from my point of view) and put his shoulder into the small of her stomach. With a *woof!* of

effort, he straightened, two fair captives slung like booty over his back. (Actually, one fair and one redheaded.)

I put my arms around his waist (an odd sensation, since his belt was upside down to me), and Vanity did the same. The bare skin of our arms brushed up against each other. As well as we could in

vanity did the same. The bare skin of our arms brushed up against each other. As well as we could in that reversed position, she and I huddled.

I turned my head so that my other cheek was pressed against Colin's back. Vanity was now hanging head-down only inches from me, her longer hair, also wetted and limp in the rain, slapping around Colin's knees. She was breathless. Her emerald eyes were so wide, so close to mine, and so alarmed, that for a moment, whatever the real purpose of letting Colin pick us up this way had been lost to me.

For a moment, a moment with no context of before or after, I actually felt like a cavegirl who had been captured. I could feel the tense, strong muscles in Colin's body where I was pressed up against him, I could smell the clean, masculine scent of him, a young, strong animal, innocent and ruthless.

I am sure Vanity was only afraid of the prospect of being carried through the air by Colin, who had not flown before. But that is not what I saw. I saw a girl, like me, my friend, being carried off by strong young man, frightened at her own helplessness in the face of his savage will and lawless lusts. Seeing it in her communicated it to me. In that one mad moment, I was certain with terror that Colin was going to carry us off to some place of his own choosing and ravish us, first one, then the other, then both.

A silly fear, and it was gone the next moment. But even after it faded, the echo left behind made me feel small and delicate.

Colin spoke, and sounded so pleased with himself that I somehow knew Colin knew my fears and inner feelings, and he smiled in his masculine pride, relishing the sensation of my vulnerability: as if by carrying me, he had gained the power to know what quaked in my fast-beating heart.

Colin said, "Okay, ladies! We'll do the games later. Please! More kicking and squirming! Now, concentrate! Remember, girls, your job here is to inspire me, right? You are both Roxanne to my Cyrano, got it?" And I felt him rub his cheek first against my hip, then against Vanity's.

"Hey!" exclaimed Vanity, who began kicking and squirming in earnest, and pounding her fists into his back. I do not think of Vanity as being all that weak, and there are places on a man's back where one can do serious damage. I was sure he was going to drop us.

Instead he laughed. I felt his arm that clamped my legs, his hand that clutched my buttocks growing stronger, almost as if I could see muscles swelling, bunching up, growing like the limbs of a giant.

And suddenly we were not in Colin's arms anymore. The talons of an enormous eagle—or I should call it the bird from the Sinbad tale, the Roc—the talons of the Roc were around our waists, and his wings threw out hurricanes in a frenzy of beating.

There was no transition to it, no logic. Colin was gone and the Roc was here. We moved from being over his shoulders to under his talons all at once.

The deck dropped away down—or from our point of view, fell up and away from our heads. I could have kept my cool and been delighted with the sensation of flying, even in this foul weather, if Vanity hadn't screamed.

Vanity let out a piercing shriek, and suddenly I was not Amelia the leader being carried by loyal Colin, I was the helpless cavegirl again, except this time, it was not the Neanderthal who was carrying me off to the cave for some savage mating ritual; it was the pterodactyl monster who was carrying me off to eat me. (I realize that pterodactyls and cavegirls were not actually contemporaries, but I am saying how I felt.)

Well, I screamed, too. She screamed, I screamed, and the Roc raised its terrible cruel beak into the lightning storm and let out a shrill and blood-freezing cry that echoed from the clouds.

We all screamed. It was just a screaming sort of moment.

The Silvery Ship, luminous in the rain-swept dark, and winged with streaming foam, came darting like an arrow into view below us

cutting like an arrow into view below us.

The Roc folded his wings, and suddenly we were without weight. Down we plunged. Vanity ran out of scream-gas, or maybe the talons, the zero-g fall, or the prospect of instant death by splattering drove the breath out from her. I do not think I was screaming at that moment, either, although I would not testify in a court of law to that fact. I was paying somewhat more attention to the silver deck that was shooting upward at terminal velocity toward me. *Terminal*. There is the operative word in the sentence.

But I heard more screams. Someone was answering the Roc's fierce challenge cry. It was horns: shrill horns and trumpets. The men on the swift black ships were shaking the air with horn-calls and challenges of their own, horns so loud that even the storm seemed quiet.

The black ships were leaping like sharks over the waves toward the silver one. If our *Argent Nautilus* was as swift as an arrow, they were at least as swift as javelins.

Had she been required to stop or slow, or even to drive through the waves in a straight line, sure the speeding black ships, racing on white trails of high-flung spray, would have overtaken her.

But the Roc cupped its titan-wings, creating a gale to catch us, and dropped to the tilting deck even as the silver ship jumped across the air from one mountain-size wave crest to the next.

Splooosh! Foam and cold spray showered in every direction, and I would have fallen, or been flung overboard, except that Colin (where had he come from?) had one strong arm around me. I was standing tiptoed on the deck, my face pressed into the neck where it met his shoulder, still weak and trembling with fright. Vanity was clinging to him, too, crushing her body into his, her arms tightly around him and tightly around one of my arms that was trapped under hers, since we were both using the selfsame man's torso as our anchor point. Vanity was screaming, still. Take two girls who have never been on a roller coaster before, sit between them, and make sure they are not brave when it comes to heights, and you will get an idea of the situation. We clutch and scream. It's a reflex.

"Ta-da!" exclaimed Colin. I could not see his face in the dark stormy air, but his tone was cheerful. "Nor rain nor storm nor dark of night, will stay this messenger. Whaddya think? Wasn't that great?"

I would have let go of him, except that the ship chose that moment to leap like a dolphin in the sky and jump to another rolling wave in the distance. I heard something scrape the hull below. In the confusion and gloom, I was convinced we had just passed over the masts of a pursuing ship.

In terms of keeping my footing, imagine having four Russian acrobats in tights grab the section of floor you are standing on and toss it to their cousins, who are also Russian, and also wearing tights some hundreds of feet away. Being Russian, of course, they are morose acrobats, and do not care much one way or the other if you live or die.

Vanity said, "I hate you, Colin mac FirBolg!" And then she screamed again and grabbed him tight.

I held on to him, too. "How come you are not falling over?" I called out to him.

He replied in a loud, calm voice: "I do not want to fall over. And I am psychokinetic, or something, remember?"

He put his arms gently around us, hugging the wet, soaking girls in their wet, clinging, see-through shirts to his manly chest. Yes, yes, I bet he was inspired to stay upright. Very upright.

"Psychotic, you mean!" Vanity said. "Get us out of here!"

I assume the first comment was meant for Colin, and the second for *Argent Nautilus*, because the ship launched herself across the waves like a bolt from a crossbow, and we skipped like a stone from wave to wave.

Suddenly the storm grew quiet and the sensation of motion dampened. I could still see with my eyes that the ocean was bucking and leaping like an untamed horse, but the magic spell or the forcefield or whatever it was that had been protecting us from our own supersonic speed had appeared

...which of whatever it was that had been protecting us from our own superluminal speed had appeared around the ship, enfolding us like a blanket.

I saw the light from my hypersphere. The laws of nature I knew had just turned back on. We had crossed back out of the ward. These were the waters of Earth.

Colin, answering Vanity's comment, said, "I am sure there is a place to go to get out of this rain."

She was still huddled up against his shoulder. I did not hear her muffled comment, but I heard Colin's reply: He laughed a loud laugh and said, "This is a Phaeacian ship! Do you really think there are no secret passages aboard?"

Vanity looked up, a glint of surprise in her eye.

I was about to ask Colin (now that the ship's bucking and jumping were no longer affecting us) to let go. His warm, strong, protective arm was still trapping my shivering body against his, and I wanted him to let me go. I think I did.

I never got the chance. Vanity smiled and moved her foot. Her toe clicked some hidden switch. Maybe it did not exist until she looked for it.

However she did it, Vanity made a trapdoor open beneath our feet. We all screamed, except Colin, who laughed, and we fell from a seven-foot-high deck twelve feet to a large chamber that was simply too high and too wide to fit in a ship as small as Vanity's. With a loud *poof!* we landed on a mattress, which jumped and puffed around us.

There lay Colin, looking up as the leaves of the trapdoor clattered shut and cut off the rain, in the dark, two girls pressed up against him, still clutching him and shrieking (roller-coaster reflex, remember?), with his arms around us, in the dark. On a mattress.

Colin said in a voice of perfect satisfaction, "This is the best day of my life. Ever."

8.

I did not even bother to try to move out of Colin's grasp. Instead I said, "Vanity, have the ship bear toward Victor and Quentin. If she cannot see where they are, have her go"—I pointed—"that way." With my powers back on, I could see strands of moral energy, perhaps representing the mutual obligations of the group, streaming off in that direction.

One of the objects that had been kept from me during my youth and imprisonment was a child's toy from my home, which could unfold from a point, to a line, to a disk, to a globe, to a four-dimensional hypersphere. It gave off, not light, but some heavier particle of hyperspace, which allowed me to sense the over-reality around me with senses that can barely be explained in three dimensions.

Hyperspace is dark. Energy falls off, not as an inverse square of distance, but an inverse cube. Hyperspace is thick. Each particle has both volume and hypervolume, and therefore has much more mass crammed into a smaller area than its 3-D counterpart. Sound and light don't travel there very far.

But I had four new sense impressions, because the subject-object relations are very different in overspace. If an object was useful to my will, I could see the distortion in the time-energy caused by that object having more futures than a useless object had: Vanity's silver ship was ablaze with possibilities.

Likewise, if a person had a reciprocal moral obligation with me (for free will also distorted the time-frames), I could see it like a thread tying us together. Immoral acts were visible as tangles or snarls.

Every object had an internal nature: I could see the drunken anger of storm clouds, or the gentle melancholy of deep water, the placid ferocity of fish.

Every object-energy-event combination had a monad—a unity of mind-matter that could be rotated

Every object-energy-event combination had a monad, a unity of indeterminate that could be rotated along four axes to produce more free will or less, open up pearly gray shining zones of quantum uncertainty, or collapse into hard bright lights of no-probability.

I did not try to open the hypersphere into its five-dimensional aspect. I have three additional senses operating there, fit for the harder-than-neutronium density of that environment, which can detect extension, relation, existence.

9.

Looking “past” the hull of the ship, I could see we were in a vest-pocket dimension attached to the slim hull, in a little bubble of wood (containing the air and laws of nature of Earth) surrounded by the waters of the dream continuum, where distances and directions had no fixed measure. The intersection back into normal space was contiguous with the area of the trapdoor above us.

Outside, the seas of Earth met the seas of some other sphere of existence, and storms raged through both. There was no light, but I could dimly sense, at the far end of the strand representing the group, two internal natures: one methodical, self-controlled, calm, virtuous, fearless, tinged with a mild humor; the other quiet, thoughtful, resourceful, intuitive, confident. Confident...? Quentin’s internal nature had changed since last I had seen him. Humor...? Victor was changing, too.

Both of them had an aura of masculine power, which had not been there before; it was a nature that at once both sought to cherish, and sought to dominate; it was both gentle and fierce in a way I cannot describe. It was more forthright and forceful than anything I knew in myself, bold to the point of madness. There was something frightening about it. To think of the placid, icy-calm Victor or the polite, mild-spoken Quentin charged with such vehement, masterful, potent nature, not merely for a moment or two, but at all times, made me feel awed and aghast, and secretly delighted.

Colin said, “Leader! Can you see the black ships?”

Oops. In my voyeuristic peep into the male inward parts of Victor and Quentin, I had forgotten the danger.

“There are five of them closing in on us. One is within a score of yards, and men—lizard-men, really, Laestrygonians—are casting grapples. Have the ship jump to the starboard, now! Wow...”

“What are you seeing?”

“Those black ships are as fast as we are. Like speedboats. There are also men in the water. They are in green and blue and ultramarine scale mail, and they swim merely by pointing their toes and having space-time bend around them. Atlanteans. They are pretty fast, too. I just saw some go past Victor’s lifeboat.... That’s funny. I bet they cannot see them.”

Colin said, “Vanity, can you ask your ship to stop glowing in the dark? That has got to be the only reason why they can follow us—”

I shouted, “Vanity! Hard to port! Damn—”

Vanity said, “What happened?”

“One of those black ships shot past us while we were sliding down a pretty big wave. It shot over our heads like a rocket. I think we did that to one of them a moment ago. Boy, that looked scary. Oops! There are Atlanteans aboard! Four of them! No—jeez—eight. They are swarming up the side, negating the distance to climb in one bound...”

Colin said, “Vanity, can you turn off the force field around the boat?”

Vanity said, “It’s not a force field. The boundary for the laws of nature—”

“Can you?”

“Yes. It’s done.”

I said “Two of them just got swept overboard ”

I said, "Two of them just got swept overboard."

Colin said, "Leader, with your permission, I'd like to go topside and repel boarders."

I said, "Granted. Don't get yourself killed, or your one-fourth of Chaos will attack the universe —"

He bent his head and kissed me.

He kissed me. Just like that.

It was warm and nice. His internal nature was as dark and fierce and masculine as any of the other boys' (I suppose I should call them men, considering) but he had a streak of loyalty, of wolf-pack love of comrades, that made his male power gentler than the others'. You would never guess it by looking at his outside, but Phobetor, the prince of dreams, had the soul of a poet, an almost feminine desire to be caught up and swept away by his emotions.

I yielded to that sweet hot kiss, and, before I knew what I was doing, I was pressing up to his hard, stern body with eager hunger, a yearning to surrender to him. There was a long, low moan in my throat I could not believe came from me. Only girls in movies, during kissing scenes, made that noise. Didn't they?

He kissed me till I was out of breath, and then he relaxed his arm, so that I collapsed onto the mattress, too warm and too happy to move.

I do not know if he was using a magic power on me to make me feel this way, or if all good kisses have magic in them.

Wow. I sort of forgot that I didn't like him.

Be careful about looking into the inner nature of people you know. It might surprise you. Close your eyes when kissing, and your higher senses, too.

I did close my eyes for a moment.

My lips were tingling. So was my whole body. Wow.

"Now, you," I heard. Then, a kissing noise.

I sat up. I sort of remembered that I didn't like him: "Hey!" I said, outraged. What a cad. What a slap in the face.

I heard the noise of a slap in the face, right at that moment. "Mmmmmph! Get off! Get away! I belong to Quentin!"

"Oho. Never mind. Just hearing any girl say 'I belong to' is inspiration enough. Open those topside doors, Vain One, before I leap and make a hole through them."

"Hey!" I said. "I am not done yelling at you—! Bloody git! How dare you kiss me—!"

The doors opened and rain splashed down, and the laws of nature of Earth, including such things as momentum, must have splashed into the room as well, because suddenly we were shaken and pressed against the mattress by some wild acceleration, as if the ship were doing an Immelman.

I could see Colin in the splash of silvery light from the deck. The laws of momentum were not affecting him. I suppose he could stand upright in a roller coaster doing a loop-the-loop, without getting his hair mussed, if he were inspired.

I saw the flash of teeth from his devil-may-care-but-Colin-does-not grin, and heard the chuckle in his voice: "There now, lass. Keep yourself simmering for me. I'll be back to claim my reward when I'm done knocking heads together."

And he jumped, in one leap, fifteen feet or more in the air, straight up and out of the hold. It did not look like a jump. It looked like a superhero taking off, or warrior angel taking wing, rushing to fight with the rebel angels.

(What am I saying? Colin Iblis mac FirBolg would be fighting alongside the fallen angels, not against them.)

Fight and Flight by Sea

1.

The battle was exciting for everyone but me. It was over before I did anything; not that I mind not being exposed to more danger, thank you. Staring into the eyes of Echidna might not seem like much compared to what else the others did during those next ten minutes, but it was enough for me, that day.

Our Silvery Ship came upon (and sped past) the lifeboat containing Victor and Quentin in the waters of Earth. They had rowed to outside the ward, and their powers had come back on.

There were black ships burning to every side of Victor. I think he was precipitating pure oxygen out of the atmosphere or up from the water, and gathering trace amounts of phosphorous together from the glowing lamps of the undersea torches carried by the Atlanteans to make an incendiary. There was apparently enough chlorophyll in the plankton for him to make chlorine gas, and streamers of poison were issuing from the boiling water around him, green and horrid in the light of the burning ships. The trace chemicals in the enemy ornaments and weapons had been disintegrated out and recombined to make toxins and acids.

Despite all this, I did not see the moral energy snarls one would expect to see from committing murder. The Atlanteans were staying well away from the areas of water frothing with poison, and it looked as if the Laestrygonians aboard the burning ships were immune to fire. All this visible horror and destruction Victor was shedding was distraction. His real attack were groups of small molecular packages distributed widely over the area, which, if inhaled, influenced the central nervous system to send panic and fear signals to the brain, release adrenaline, cause selective shutdowns in the cortex and higher-reasoning centers. Apparently, there was a mechanical cause for determining which way a flight/fight reaction would go, and he was setting it to “flight.”

Quentin was invisible—in all this confusion, he still was carrying the ring of Gyges, which Coli had handed him to perform his astronomy experiments. I never saw what he did, and he did not talk about it later, but I do not think he was simply hiding and letting Victor do all the work. Once or twice I saw a shadow moving on the black ships, silhouetted by the flames Victor was spreading, and it bent over any Laestrygonian whose helmet contained more plumes than the others. Those to whom the shadow spoke did not look at it, but cast their weapons away and jumped into the sea. Every time I tried to look at the shadow, my higher sense bent away, and I lost sight of it.

And Colin—it really was a good day for Colin. He picked up the first Atlantean he came across by the legs and used him like a baseball bat to knock the others reeling. They shot arrows into his arms and legs and he just laughed and ignored them, plucking them out and wiping away the red ink from his untouched limbs. They threw nets on him and he threw them back; they belabored him with truncheons and he plucked the staves from their hands and broke them over his knee. He was like one of those absurd characters from Irish folklore who doesn't need armor, cannot be hurt, and can toss around trained soldiers like dolls. He threw them off the ship one after another, shouting out my name each time he made a throw. I had become his battle cry.

They were not trying to kill him and he returned the favor. Tossing Atlanteans into the water

they were not trying to kill him, and he returned the favor. Tossing Atlanteans into the water would not drown them; they were amphibious. I do not think he ever broke any limbs, except on people whom he recognized as having climbed back up the gunwales more than once.

Colin got his hands on the commander of the squad, or, at least, an Atlantean with nicer looking blue-and-green scale mail than the rest, and was holding him up in midair, shaking him by the throat, shouting at him.

Storm-winds and thunder crashed all around him as he paced the reeling, rain-washed deck, hauling the struggling man toward the rail. Then Colin mounted the prow, dangling the man over the water, shouting again at him.

This time, the thunder was less, and I heard what the shouts were about. Was it something like, *Call off your men?* No. Nothing so sensible.

“WHO IS THE PRETTIEST GIRL IN THE WORLD? SAY IT! SAY IT! SAY THE NAME I TOLD YOU TO SAY!”

“A-Amelia! Amelia Windrose!”

“PRETTIER THAN YOUR GIRL?”

“Ye-yes sir! Much prettier!”

“GOD BLESS YOU FOR AN HONEST MAN!” roared Colin over the storm. “YOU GET TO LIVE!” And he threw the man headlong into the raging sea, a hundred yards if it was an inch.

How sweet. I mean, really. It was sweet.

2.

If you are wondering why, during all this, the Atlanteans and Laestrygonians did not unleash horrific magic upon us all, or blast us with space-age weapons from some futuristic parallel dimension, or even unlimber their deck-guns and blow a hole into our ship, the reason (as far as I can tell) is that Vanity saved us.

The Silvery Ship was skipping like a wild dolphin from wave-crest to wave-crest, and the sleek black ships were darting like dark sharks in her wake. But the moment we crossed the invisible line (invisible to all but me) separating the waters of the other sphere from the waters of Earth, the ward blocking our powers was crossed, and the green stone hanging around Vanity’s neck began to glow. I was beneath her shirt, and only I saw it, I, whose vision was not stopped by merely three-dimensional surfaces.

It was glowing when she and I, wrapped in Colin’s arms, fell through her secret trapdoor and landed on that mattress. It was glowing when Colin tried to molest her and she slapped him, and he went bounding like a super ninja movie hero on wires up out of the hold to battle the Atlanteans.

Before another word was spoken, Vanity, without bothering to stir from the mattress, clasped both hands to her bosom and bent her head, concentrating. The Silvery Ship skipped back across the ward, shutting down my powers; I went blind. I could hear the noise of rushing waters, and felt the bucking and leaping of the deck beneath me, and that was all.

Then, on again. The Silvery Ship was once more in the waters of Earth, and our pursuit, streaming fans of spray rushing from them as they passed the speed of sound, came bearing down on us. But, at the moment, the ward was between them and us. They were still in the waters of the other place.

Vanity did something. I saw lines of energy fold and sway; the intersection of the two universes quivered. Beyond that, I was not sure what it was she did.

Vanity said, “When they cross, their powers will shut off. I just did to them what Echidna showed me how to do.”

“Will it slow down their ships...?”

“I cannot do that without slowing down this one. I can make the gunpowder forget how to burn when it crosses from one jurisdiction to the next.”

“How?”

“It is all based on attention. I can feel something look us over when we cross the line. It is something that makes objects act the way they are supposed to. The something gets confused when you cross things from one jurisdiction to another. It does not know which laws to apply. During that moment of confusion, I can make the decision for it.”

“Jurisdiction...?”

“Um. Dreamscapes? Universes? What do you call a set of laws of nature?”

“Continuum. Can't the Atlanteans do the same thing?”

“If they have a stone like this, I suppose. And they would have to get in the first shot. Watch me. Did it work?”

“I can't tell. What am I looking for?”

“Are the bad guys using guns or casting spells?”

“No.” I peered through the walls. I could see Colin and Quentin in the distance.

“Then it worked. Do you think they can beat us just with normal weapons?”

Guess what the answer to that one was.

3.

Five minutes later, we were all up on deck. Victor dropped down out of the sky, his chain mail crackling with ozone, and Quentin faded into view, twisting the gold ring on his finger. The storm was behind us, slowly shrinking backwards over the horizon, and we were skimming along the water surface under the moonlight.

Off our port and starboard stern, like arrows with fletching made of white foam, came the black ships of the Atlanteans.

Colin said, “They are gaining, Leader. I suggest we let them catch up and we trash more of them.” He was panting and shining with sweat and rainwater, happy as a player who has crushed an opposing team after a hard game. His eyes danced. He needed only a bottle of champagne to pour over his head to make the picture complete.

Even Victor seemed in good spirits. He stood on the stern, hands clasped behind him, watching the moonlit pursuit with a tiny smile on his lips. “Leader, I suggest not. We must assume that Mavor, the god of war is somewhere among them, and we have no experience to tell us how to overcome his powers.”

Quentin was leaning on his white staff, his dark cloak flapping and folding around him in the sea wind like the wings of a bird of shadow. He spoke without raising his head, “Leader, our defeat is inevitable. I have seen the signs. When I was in the air, in the storm cloud, one of the thunder-children turned and spoke to me. Lord Mavors can control fate. There will be ships ahead of us, no matter which way we turn.”

As if his words had summoned them, tall black triangles appeared on the horizon ahead, the mountain-shaped barges of the war-god. Dimly, in the moonlight, I thought I saw rippling trails of white foam issuing from ports along their bases, the slim black ships of the Laestrygonians cutting like torpedoes through the waves.

I sat down on the bench at the stern of the ship with my elbows on my knees and my fingers

slowly massaging my temples

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