

PART ONE: Oblivion

1—AGE OF TORMENT

2009, the Modern Era: inside Gaea's vault, the adyton.

“**A** daughter... Zeus and Nyx?” asked Themis, the blindfolded goddess of Justice, the only Titan not entombed in stone in Tartaros with her brethren. “How... inconvenient.”

Gaea, Earth Mother, had given her grandson Apollo and her daughter Themis special dispensation to enter her adyton, her most sacred repository deep inside the earth where the Scales existed, and he had just told Themis a most intriguing tale about how four mortals restored balance, and only he remembered what happened. The gods both of reason and justice seemed appropriate in this place.

The sun god, who strangely took great solace in the darkest parts of the underworld, stared at the scales that kept the shaky balance of order and chaos.

“Yes, inconvenient to say the least. The sky god and Night incarnate. Three thousand years ago, I had come to this place, if you can even call it that since it has no tangible mortal dimension, to find solitude and reflection after the gods imprisoned your brethren Titans after the Titanomachia, the Great War. In that heavy blackness, when I came here, with Gaea's consent, I spied my father and Nyx in an impossible embrace. They shared no words, and after he seduced her, had been with her as he had been with so many others, he spurned her—as he had so many others. Alone, her rage festered, and I didn't have to be the god of prophecy to know that that wouldn't bode well.”

Themis' expression remained unchanged; however, Apollo sensed a question brewing.

“I have... mixed memories of that day, however. One tells me that I saw this event unfold, that Zeus saw me, and then used that as a reason to banish me to Gaea, so that I wouldn't say anything to Hera. It was during that memory that Nyx destroyed the Sacred Scales after being scorned, or from being ignored after Zeus, Hades, and Poseidon established Olympos for the gods. Another memory, if that's what it is, tells me that I saw them, but then Zeus returned to Olympos, reluctant to linger too long in her murkiness, regretting his choice. Not long after, I chose to live a mortal life for a year, but then the prophecy about Nyx's daughter changed everything, and I uprooted my life and lived permanently in the mortal realm. Regardless, events that followed have not given me peace.”

“How do you know about this daughter of Nyx? Why wouldn't others know, too?” Themis asked.

“Within Gaea's embrace, the story remains hidden; such is her shame. The Earth herself told me the horrific story of the birth, and even she shuddered as she told me. This is what I know...”

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1019 B.C.E. or Ilikia Olympios (Olympeian Age)

A churning blackness, Nyx shaped herself in ways that would stagger the mortal mind, collapsing into maelstroms of dark, living clouds, ready to bear her offspring implanted in her by Olympos' adulterous king. With the catacombs of the dead for her nursery, Nyx wanted to bring forth her daughter in the company of the agonized, pitiable souls of those who had never made it beyond the gates of the underworld; they had a great deal to offer her child.

Sidetracked by her thoughts, she almost forgot her role in the cosmos and raced toward the exit of Tartaros, a cave entrance kissed by the air that mortals breathe. As she neared the opening, bright Hemera, her daughter—the Day itself, descended into the Hadean depths, and both Protogenoi, primordial gods, touched ever so briefly before Nyx bubbled forth into the air, becoming the blanket of obscurity shrouding part of the earth until Day would rise again—mother and daughter in a forever dance.

Taking her place in the sky, Nyx felt it was time: her newest daughter would enter the world in a way no other elder god had.

Two days later, in Megara, Greece, screams of torment and railing pain cut at the air like talons, ripping apart the peace of the healer's tent in the cultist's sanctuary, a humble place in the mortal world where those afflicted by madness came to embrace the darkness of Nyx. A woman, crazed with murderous thoughts and tortured dreams, reclined on a woven grass mat, her wrists and ankles bound with worn leather straps anchored to the ground to prevent her from hurting herself or others. Her eyes as black as Erebus, the darkness itself, she became the ideal choice for this birth, a living receptacle for Nyx. Her madness would mix well with the darkness. Ancient primordial entered her human host and the body took on the pregnant form, bloating the abdomen with life.

Soon, echoing cries interlaced with unintelligible mutterings escaped the woman's lips while the healer, his white chiton stained from years of patient's blood, knelt ready to extract the newborn, eager to come forth; he was certainly ignorant of what would come. He preferred the bloody patches on his garment to help him remember each forced amputation or sutured wound, usually brought about by a stony fragment or stick used during an arcane ritual to Nyx. Anarchy bound the cult, it would seem, and spontaneous fights were commonplace. Night incarnate had selected well, largely to reflect the chaos within, but also to see what it would feel like to push her progeny forth as a mortal would. That connection to humanity would prove so very useful.

Following a pain-induced shriek, a volcanic spray of blood and placenta erupted forth as the part human, part primordial being pushed her way into the world of Humankind without the benefit of the healer's aid. Wiping the sanguine discharge from his face, the healer caught a glimpse of this child, and as he felt his psyche melt, he gouged out his own eyes with his fingers, mumbling as his intellect fragmented, foaming at the mouth like a rabid beast.

A mortal mind could not comprehend such a primordial in her true form. Soon, he lay still, and the entity moved over to the lifeless body, draining it of its soul as a child takes sustenance from its mother. Not even Hades would want the sack of skin and bones, as it had no spirit to wander the underworld.

Nyx exited the woman's spent body—now a lifeless, vacant, fleshy shell—and coalesced around her daughter, ready to take her back to Tartaros where the newborn would mature among the imprisoned Titans, Gaea's children buried beneath stone and Zeus' curse, and there she would feed off ancient energy originating from Khaos, the mother of the cosmos herself. In such a place of despair, this child would find solace near yet another tomb, a place no mortal could ever see, and no god would ever go. She would grow accustomed to the dead chill of one whose presence no one spoke, for fear even saying his name would rouse him—Kronos, the Titan king.

As the Moirae wove the fate of Humanity and the immortal gods, so too did they spin the threads of those who came before them. Part of this tapestry would form a path for the daughter of Nyx, who would be known by all as the Nebulous One, for uttering or knowing her true name would bring on madness. Bony fingers on the loom, bound by duty and a yearning, trembled with each pass, and the fabric it brought forth for Zeus' daughter bore the color of blood.

"That was all," Apollo said. "Gaea would tell me no more, but I could tell she knew more. It was not like her to be fickle. With what I do know, and what every prophetic bone in my immortal body tells me, I feel my ichor run cold, colder than the tomb of Kronos."

"Where is she now?" Themis asked.

"I don't know. But, I need to see Zeus and pray that he believes me."

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Gaea indeed knew more about this child's early days.

Nyx waited in Tartaros for the return of Day so she might become the night sky once more, an eternal cycle she had entered long ago. While the Nebulous One drifted around the Titans' rocky tombs, she absorbed even the faintest traces of energy from within the encasements, energy tainted by hatred of the other Olympeian gods—especially Zeus, her father. She felt their rage, their unremitting, seething rage against the youngest son of Kronos. Like mother's milk, this life force leached through the stone into her, and her form churned like a storm-battered sea with every acerbic drop. Each of the Titans remembered the day Zeus' scythe took their lord's life, returning his energy to all-encompassing Khaos. Each remembered the sacrosanct pact of Zeus, Poseidon, and Hades, the one that turned their own mother, Gaea, against them. Mother Earth was nothing if she was not loyal to prophecy, the very one that foretold of Kronos' demise by his son's hand.

The Nebulous One glided further away from her mother, tumbling over the rock-strewn floor until even she felt the gelid tomb, the one place in all of creation not even the gods visit. Surrounding the earth sarcophagus, she wait-

ed to feel that familiar electric sensation of life, but... nothing. Her frustration subsided, as she slowly comprehended what she had learned from the Titans: Kronos, the son of Gaea and Ouranos, the king of the Titans, truly was no more.

After her feeding, she wanted to explore her new home, like any curious child, and found the path to the place where she knew she could find the one she needed to meet, the one she needed to see, the one she needed to kill—Zeus—for he not only had abandoned her mother, as he had so many others, but he also was despised by the Titans, and it was their hatred that fueled her. The journey to high Olympos from Tartaros, even for Nyx's daughter, would take time. Immune to mortal constraints, she could not be bound by chain or rope, by solid or ether, but time had neither shape nor form, neither matter nor mind—and it could affect her. She would eventually reach the sacred mountaintop, and she would ensure that Zeus understood what it meant to abandon her. Making her way through Hades, though, would teach her much, if nothing else, how nourishing souls could be.

Through the fields of gray asphodel, she wended her way, rolling like a black tide. Spirits of the dead—pale mist swirling with no human resemblance—paid her no mind, neither knowing nor caring who she was, and they wandered through the fields as the billowing daughter of Nyx wafted around them. Near Hades' palace of inky marble columns, striated with wispy bits of white, she stopped, looking like a storm cloud that had lost its buoyancy. This was Hades, she thought, the underworld where the dead found their solace or their suffering. She had already felt the deep, aching torment from the Titans, raw emotions able to carve into the densest stone, and now she felt at home. Onward she moved, undulating, rolling across the realm, and finding her bearings, until she saw her kin. Hovering on scaly black wings behind the Hall of Judgment, their arms and legs entwined with sleek serpents, three sisters tormented a soul not yet ethereal, but no longer corporeal. Having drowned his newborn child, this once-mortal man would spend eternity in Tartaros, enduring punishments not fit for humans to comprehend. Such was the will of Rhadamanthys, Aeacos, and Minos, the three judges of the underworld. Each had been mortal, and a son of Zeus, rewarded for his good deeds with this post, and so they spoke in one voice, "Tartaros shall lay claim to you, and none shall discern your screams amid those whose voices you join."

Despite lacking a body, this former human felt every talon strike ripping through what was left, every snakebite and the venom it released, every contemptuous gesture, and he would never again know peace. One of the three winged goddesses, Tisiphone, took perverse pleasure in bringing anguish to him, the murderer of the innocent; the other Erinyes, Alekto and Megæra, assisted in his torment. Daughters of Nyx, by Ouranos, and sisters to the Nebulous One, they only relented when their cloud-like sibling moved closer. Through thought, she conveyed her contempt for Zeus and all of Olympos, relaying how the god of the sky had abandoned their mother. She was going to Olympos seeking vengeance, to tear down the oligarchy of the gods one by one,

starting with her father who had wronged the Protogenoi. The Nebulous One had few emotions known to her for one so young, but the Erinyes saw her deep pain, felt her yearning. To demonstrate what she would do, she swirled around the tortured soul before them, exacting her own revenge on him for his heinous crime. None who knew him would ever remember he existed—such was her power—but his spirit would remember the egregious harm he had done to his infant girl. How appropriate, the Nebulous One thought, that he had tripped on a stone after committing the deed, cracking open his skull. As his blood leached into the earth, Hermes dragged his soul to the underworld to face judgment. And now what was left of him would go to Tartaros, to endure whatever agony he deserved, knowing no one would ever mourn him or feel the finest shred of pity.

The Nebulous One left her sisters and headed directly for the meandering caverns that stretched out beneath Olympos. Magaera and her sisters followed. Others found their path with the Erinyes, too, and those who inhabited the darkest realms of the underworld saw opportunities to glorious and plentiful torment with the daughter of Night.

It would take time to find the right path to Olympos, the new home for the gods; spirits sometimes wandered from their eternal existence, and it would be easy for some to find their way beyond the underworld. Blind caverns and labyrinthine paths meander through the caves, some harboring creatures that dine on lost souls. It could take eons or seconds to find the Olympeian gods. Nevertheless, she would find her prey.