

SCACCARIUM

by AltaOrion

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(This is the Prequel to the Nymphrodite Story HP Fanfiction.)

PROLOGUE

Chapter 1 of 2

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TITLE

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PROLOGUE

Mårdük waved his hand over the waters of Npindē, turning its light blue surface into muddy gray. The Game was over—Mårdük had won. The others who had witnessed the Game stood and left the heavenly hall. Aum was last to stand; he looked down upon Zā-ar, mightiest among his sons, wielder of swords, who now faced the torment of watching the world that was entrusted to him burn and fall into darkness, for he lost in the Seat. Mårdük only needed one more world and the Game would be over. Aum had hoped that Zā-ar would vanquish the conquering menace, however, Mårdük had proven once more that he was worthy of the challenge that he had set for his creator.

Aum held out his hand, and the light from Aea caged Zā-ar in Tartarus where he would stay, powerless, awaiting the end of his father's gamble. Four had fallen among the twelve. Zā-ar's older brothers, all defeated by the thirteenth son, suffer in the prison to which he is now sentenced to remain.

Mårdük returned to the abyss where he had founded his kingdom of monsters, demons, foul beings, and deformed children. His Keepers hung in their chambers that rot with the remains of the last battle, waiting for him to release them from their mournful imprisonment. As he passed them, they reached out and begged for freedom, but he lashed them with a whip forged from lightning, scourging their sallow skin with long painful welts until they recoiled in fear and pain.

The demon Aveddon, his favorite pet, screamed upon seeing his arrival – a slave that stood twenty feet, with horns the size of pythons, and fangs sharper than swords, was a monster by any standard. Its face resembling that of a bull, covered in thick fur, twisted in furious anticipation for his master's humor. Covered in bright red hide, this demon had been summoned during the last match and had ensured his master's victory.

"Your reward," Mårdük said as he threw the convulsing fetus before his pet.

Aveddon thrashed violently to get the promised prize thrown a few inches beyond his reach. The demon screamed in anguish as the unborn warrior, who stared into his death with horrified eyes, waited by the dais of dark marble. Aveddon reached out his thick limbs but not a finger from his merciless hands—all six of them—could touch the meal he had waited an eternity to have.

Màrdùk, who sat upon his throne amused by the display of hunger, called upon his lesser children to help feed the hungry demon. They bowed their deformed figures before him, unable to defy his will; they pushed the fetus nearer so that the demon could reach the umbilical cord with its thick fingers. One of them, unable to judge the distance between him and the demon, had been added to the meal. As Aveddon reached out to grab the unborn child from the floor, his thick hands closed in on the 'server's' neck, breaking it immediately. The snarling beast took both him and the fetus deep inside his pen where they would be eaten slowly. This would be the last until the next player took the Seat and, unless his master's devices prove weaker, fail again.

Màrdùk enjoyed this kind of entertainment: Carnage, bloodshed, and destruction of life. However, the gory plays that filled his realm and provided pleasure left him yearning for more. It was this insatiable desire to fill his father's kingdom with death and suffering that drove him to challenge his rule. So far, he had been triumphant, defeating four of Aum's favored children. One more was needed, and the power to rule with darkness would be his.

He looked into the Kanōra and stirred its pool of silvery water. He tried to make the pool reveal the next world he must conquer. However, the waters hissed in violent mists of purple and silver—he doubts for a moment, unable to see the world beyond the silver wisps. Wondering to whom it was entrusted, he stirred again, and the Kanōra revealed its Owner.

"La'i," he said with a low snarl that sounded like the snore of a sleeping dragon.

His sister denounced the Game to which their father had gambled their worlds and existence for his sovereignty. Though she would never concede to his rule, she would never call upon Aum for aid. Proud and mighty, even among Aum's children, her downfall might not be as easy as her brother's before her. Màrdùk must play this Game with caution, for he cannot afford to lose.

He stilled the waters and returned to his throne where he would stay, deeply contemplating, carefully scheming, and deviously plotting his designs for triumph until he was called for the Game to begin. He knew he might call upon all his Keepers; many of them were not needed in the last Seat, for La'i was not an easy opponent, and her world was one that had been sheltered, save from Aum's eyes.

THE SEAT

La'i stared blankly at her opponent as they both waited for the Game to begin. Màrdùk, unable to stand her piercing glare but too proud to lower his gaze, stood quivering at the other side of the Hall. Even from a distance spanning thousands of feet, he could feel the power to which La'i had founded her pride and arrogance on. He knew he had very little time to discover how she would unleash the Warrior, and even less time to ensure his plans would defeat this Warrior before the waters of Npindē turned white.

Aum took his place right in the middle of the heavenly court upon a throne made of jasper and pearls and dark onyx and pure jade, its wheels a collection of stars. He lifted his hand and summoned the others, his remaining unchallenged children who waited for their turn in the Seat. They entered the heavenly hall—willing and unwilling witnesses.

Aum stood and stretched forth his hand. "Reveal your world," he ordered.

La'i waved her hand over the expanse before them, and Màrdùk was shown the world he was about to claim. He gasped at its beauty. He immediately sent forth Wista to sniff the world and its inhabitants. In a few short moments, the Keeper returned, whispering to Màrdùk what had been gathered from the world below. The Dark son roared in protest.

"You cheat!" he growled. "The Vessel cannot be altered!"

"It is my world. I make the rules," La'i answered calmly.

Màrdùk's face turned livid; he knew that Aum would show him no mercy should he fail. His father made it clear when he agreed to his challenge: fail but once and the Game is over. Unsure of his next move, he sent forth Wista one more time. Upon its return, a smile erupted from his fanged mouth, and he sneered at his opponent.

"Now, I see your folly!" he jeered.

"Summon your Keepers," Aum commanded.

As Màrdùk took his seat, the smile meant to taunt his sister disappeared. He stretched his hand, and the scepter of Death glowed bright red.

"I summon Nin, Ji, Th'Mar, Rah-Duk and Hib-Nah," Màrdùk cried. Five figures appeared before him, waiting for his command.

La'i, who appeared unfazed by Màrdùk's display of arrogance, took her seat and held out her hand, and the Scepter of Magic glowed with a soft, golden hue.

"I summon Kroï, Clishà, Aij, and K'Yun," she calmly said, and the figures appeared before her, waiting for her hand to move them.

Aum stood from his throne and placed Npindē above the expanse, and its waters were again deep blue. He took his seat again and tapped the calm blue surface of the timekeeper. "Let the Game begin," Aum announced.

Màrdùk moved his hand, and his Keepers invaded the world below.

the Crone Discs

Chapter 2 of 2

The First Great Crossing. The Phaestian Order scatters and Epimendis takes the last Disc and the last of the Knights of Kroï across time.

Validated by: RobisonRocket

the Crone Discs

"The temple is under attack!"

Persius had prepared for such a day as this. All his life, since his parents died, he had stayed in the Temple, training endlessly, passing every test, and had been regarded by many as an expert in weapons and fighting. No one dared to challenge him in armed combat, not even those who trained him, and he had proven his might in battle many times.

However, as he watched the demons and creatures that were only mentioned in books of legend come alive, all the training and preparation, all his experiences became useless.

"Our weapons melt like ice in its fire!" cried Emeritus, throwing the round shield that had been bent in half, running for cover as a green dragon swooped down upon them. "Persius, we cannot win this!"

"They have come for the Crone discs!" Persius said. "We need to protect them! I must warn Master Epimendis!"

"They already know! Look!" Emeritus pointed at the six members of the Phaestian Order who were hobbling towards the Temple.

"We need to give them time!" Persius exclaimed, taking the crossbow and the large shield he had won from last year's tournament. Emeritus had no choice but to follow his lead even when it was obvious they were fighting a losing battle. It didn't take long for the beasts to breach the Temple walls.

"You have to go into the Core and warn the Phaestians!" Emeritus ordered.

"We can go together!" Persius cried.

"No! I cannot!" Emeritus insisted.

"Emeritus!"

"PERSIUS! If I run, they will overcome us before we reach the doors! Think about the Vessel! If we both die, then the Vessel will not stand a chance!" Emeritus growled. "Now go!"

Persius looked longingly at the man who had become a brother to him and knew that this was their last time together. Nevertheless, Emeritus was right; he needed to go on and pass the teachings of the Knights to those who were willing and able for this was the purpose of their Knighthood...Protect the Vessel. If both of them died today, the line would be broken and the Prophecy might never come to pass.

He grabbed Emeritus and embraced him tighter than he ever had, kissed his brow, and ran with all speed towards the Core.

The Temple shook with violent explosions brought upon by the fiery breath of the dragons outside. The monstrous Minotaurs and giants that had descended from the mountains pounded its ancient walls until they crumbled. Basilisks slithered beneath them, drilling holes into the sacred floors. A large gap in the ceiling revealed the Taggers that attacked the giant Eagles, last of the noblest breed, rulers of the wind, and Persius saw them fall down like flies. His world was disintegrating right before his very eyes, and he was powerless. Shaking away doubt and fear, he ran faster towards the Core. He fell down many times, bruising his arms and knees until they bled, but always he stood up and continued. He had to make sure that the enemy would never take the Crone discs lest the whole world become like this Temple... a piled heap of destruction.

The Temple shook again, its treasures destroyed to nothing more than worthless debris, scattered all over, covering the dead bodies. At last, he reached the entrance to the Core. He stopped a few feet from two ancient beasts and bowed first but another violent explosion rocked the Temple, and Persius fell to his knees. Almost kissing the floor, Persius dared not meet the gaze of these guardians until they gave him leave. Qirins they were called; Gigantic, nearly matching the height of the enormous bronze doors, multi-coloured, and very proud, these beasts have steadfastly watched over the doors to the heart of the temple where the most valuable treasure lay for nearly five thousand years. It was only because of heavy magic that they had been tamed and captured. Although, some say they were gifts from the one who formed the Order of Phaestos. His master, Epimendis, was the Grand Master of the secret fellowship of the Crone, servants of La'í, Goddess of the Golden Light, owner of the Temple in Crete.

The Qirins made a low groan. Persius looked up and saw that the Qirins had allowed him entrance. The bronze doors swung open, and he gasped as it revealed a golden room. He had been here before, yet every time he was granted audience, Persius could not help but marvel at its magnificence. The ceiling above had a circular opening so wide ten dragons could fit in at once. Beyond it was a piece of the night sky, glittering with many stars, moving as the world moved. Directly beneath it, in the very middle of the round room, was a basin made of gold. The rim of the basin was divinely proportioned to the large gaping hole above. Inside it was liquid gold, and La'í was said to appear upon this basin to speak to her servants. Around its girth, there were seven large poles where the Crone discs were hung. The golden walls had runic engravings...the history of this Temple...left for the next Order to read and continue. There were golden orbs floating all around, and Persius noticed that they had lessened in number since last he was here.

Stumbling inside, Persius found the High Phaestians hobbling out secret doors that opened with the tapping of their staves. Each of them carried with him a disc and a scroll. His master was also preparing to leave.

"Master?"

"Persius! Come here and help me!" Epimendis was trying to dislodge the last disc with difficulty.

Persius ran towards him and pulled at the disc until it was removed.

"Quick, follow me!" Epimendis cried, taking the scroll that was on a golden table.

Another explosion shook the Temple viciously, and Persius was about to fall over.

"Persius! Do not drop the disc!"

Persius turned around just in time, landing on his back. Grimacing on the impact of his fall, Persius grunted as he checked the disc for damage. Finding none, he ventured to stand though it was rather difficult; Epimendis kept crying out to him but something locked him in place. His eyes caught sight of the expanse above; no longer were there stars beyond it for it was now pitch black. Something made the hair on his nape stand on end, gripping him with a fear so great that he could hardly breathe. Beyond the darkness, there was a power, dark and malevolent, that filled him with dread and foreboding. He could feel his heart slowing down and his sight dimming fast. He wanted to scream but could not, and large unseen hands were gripping his lungs until they hurt. The world had dissolved, and all he could see was the pitch black hole above him that was now strained with long shimmering white hair.

However, Epimendis was quick, and he covered his eyes with his robe. Incantations were spoken into his ear, shaking him from the trance, calling him back from death. As if a blinding light had passed over his eyes, Persius closed them, and the fit passed. He inhaled deeply, and only then was he able to move. His old master was dragging him towards the opening. Persius inserted his hand through the hole of the disc, carrying it like a basket and supporting his weight with the other; he stood and walked through the dark hole where Epimendis was waiting.

He turned around just before the wall closed and saw the Qirins bursting through the doors. Both grabbed the basin with their large claws and spread their magnificent wings. Then a bright light filled the tunnel as the walls closed, sealing the sound of war and destruction on the other side.

"Persius! Hurry!" Epimendis cried, holding his staff aloft, its tip blazing with a bright blue flame. They were inside a low and narrow tunnel that seemed to stretch for miles.

Both had to walk sideways, for the tunnel was not wide enough for a full grown man to walk straight. He followed Epimendis, who walked fast for his age.

Just when Persius was about to ask how long the tunnel was, they reached the end. Epimendis held his staff higher, and Persius caught his breath as the light revealed an enormous cavern, yawning at them. They were standing on a ledge not more than five meters wide. A chasm was between them and the other side where another cave loomed dark and ominous.

"We need to cross," Epimendis said, still breathing heavily.

"Cross?"

"Yes, cross. Or would you rather stay here?" Epimendis said irately.

"How?"

Epimendis gave him a look he had learned to hate and love at the same time. The same look a father gives his child when he is being stubborn.

"I was getting to that," Epimendis said, turning towards what looked like a pillar made of three large rectangular stones.

"What is that?" Persius asked.

"This is a doorway," Epimendis answered. "Come, we don't have much time."

Persius walked closer and felt the wind blowing wildly on his face from the other side. He saw the inscriptions engraved on the stones, and Epimendis was writing down parts of it on the scroll he held in his hand. Persius saw that there was nothing beyond it, just the dark, gaping abyss.

"It's a drop to an endless pit!" he exclaimed.

"What?" Epimendis grunted.

"There is nothing beyond this doorway, Master," Persius said.

"I have founded another Temple beyond it, as did my brothers with theirs. Now, be quiet! There will be enough time for tales once we are on the other side," Epimendis chided.

Though his heart raced, and his mind filled with doubt, Persius knew his master would not lead them here to dive into their deaths. He bit his lip and waited. Then Epimendis rolled the parchment and placed it deep inside his tunic, flipped his hand, and the quill disappeared into thin air. He pointed his staff on a rune, said an incantation and the doorway filled with a water-like substance. Persius gaped at the glimmering entrance before them.

"Now, hold onto me tightly and close your eyes, keep them closed. I will guide you through," Epimendis instructed.

Persius grabbed the disc tightly under his arm and wrapped his other arm around the old wizard. Then they walked slowly forward, and Persius felt a forceful tug in his belly before a rushing, falling sensation followed. He knew he was falling, and afraid that they were falling into the chasm, he opened his eyes and saw that they were about to collide with a huge body of water. Persius screamed and clung to the disc tightly, nearly letting go of Epimendis' arm. His screaming was cut short when they landed on a bed of soft straw.

"Did I not tell you to close your eyes?" Epimendis scolded.

Persius was still trying to breathe properly. He slowly sat and found himself inside a square, dimly lit room. The low ceiling was made of stone, and no engraving could be seen in its pale gray, rough walls. The lone door made of wood lay a few meters to their left.

"Stand up! Hurry, we need to destroy the doorway!" Epimendis said.

Persius stood and took the disc and examined it once more. Not a scratch could be found. The runes on it were easy enough to read but only the enlightened could understand what they meant.

"Wait by the door," Epimendis said.

Persius walked towards the door and turned to see his master aiming his staff at the doorway. It only took seconds for him to realize that his master was about to make a mistake.

"Master..." Persius warned.

Epimendis pointed his staff at the stones, a ray of bluish white flame streaked from its tip, razed the stones until the doorway exploded with a loud crashing sound. Epimendis was thrown the other way by the force of the light, and when Persius saw what had happened, he slowly placed the disc on the floor and ran towards him.

"Master!"

Dust and debris covered the old wizard, and he coughed and choked on them.

"Bloody staff!" Epimendis cried. "Age makes a mockery of everyone!"

"Are you alright?" Persius asked, brushing off the dust and small rocks from his master's robe.

"Yes, I am all right, my son. We are safe now," Epimendis replied, his beard and hair were frizzled at the ends filled with straw and white with dust, and there was a large gash on the tip of his long, crooked nose.

Persius looked at him and, as the old wizard sighed in relief, he began to chuckle. Soon, they were both roaring in laughter until the sound of scurrying feet caught his ears, and he turned around to see many hooded men at the door.

"Master Epimendis!" one of them cried.

"Ahh! Claudius," Epimendis greeted.

Persius stood and helped the old wizard to his feet. Epimendis and Claudius embraced each other, and the others came forth and did the same.

"Well met," Claudius said.

"Well met, indeed," Epimendis smiled, and then he turned to Persius and said, "This is the Brotherhood of the Stone, my son."

Persius looked at them, seven young men, wearing brown hooded garments and kind faces. Wizards.

"We didn't think you'd do it," Claudius said.

"There was no other choice. They have attacked the Temple. It is destroyed," Epimendis sighed. The look of sadness in his eyes told Persius that there was no going back. Then he noticed one of the wizards holding the disc; he walked towards him, and the wizard handed him the disc without question.

"Is that...a disc? A Crone disc?" the wizard asked.

Persius held the disc close to his chest and nodded at the young face before him. Persius could tell that the wizard was no older than he. Tall, with deep green eyes and long thin fingers, this wizard keenly looked at him while he gingerly fingered the runes on the disc.

"Aye! It is!" Persius answered.

The wizard gaped at him and looked at the others. "What is your name?"

"I am Persius."

"Persius..." he echoed with a sincere smile. "William, I am called, been ordained in the Order less than two moons ago, and here I am, a Crone disc in front of me. I am greatly honoured. Are you...a wizard?"

Persius looked at his excited face and wondered whether he should say yes or no, for he was born with magical abilities, which he chose not to enhance. Then he decided to be the choice he made many years ago.

"Nay! I am a Knight, William."

"A Knight!" William exclaimed, his eyes wide with enthusiasm, strolled across the room, gathering nods from his fellow wizards as he repeated the words to them. Then he looked back at Persius with renewed interest. "This day is blessed indeed! My honour has grown tenfold, for not only was I privileged to see a disc, but before me stands a Knight of the Kroitian Order?"

Persius was now perplexed, for William acted as though he was a precious and ancient thing newly discovered from the ground. The others were looking at him with the same look. Epimendis will be telling a very long tale it seems.

"Yes, my brothers, he is the last! Now, let us leave sad tales and grim stories for later, for Persius and I are famished and in need of rest. Shall we go upstairs where, I presume, food and drink has been laid?" Epimendis said, breaking the many thrilled murmurs that inundated the room.

"Yes, master, the finest we could muster. Bread with honey, roasted mutton and fine wine, and the freshest vegetables and fruits from the fields," Claudius announced.

"Excellent! Come, Persius."

He followed them through the door, up the winding stairway, and Persius knew that with every step he made, a piece of his life in Crete was left behind. As they came to the topmost landing, Claudius took out a large bronze key and inserted it into the keyhole, turned it, and pushed the heavy wooden door. Persius shivered as he walked through it, knowing a different life was now before him whether he was prepared for it or not.

As his eyes got used to the bright light of the sun through an opening in the roof, he saw that comparatively, this temple was smaller and more modest than the one they had in Crete. The walls were made of gray, mud-like material, there were no ornaments and the only thing hanging on the walls were torches. Persius also saw a familiar set of stones: three rectangular shapes forming a door...just like the doorway that Epimendis destroyed. There were archways that opened to chambers, and many hooded men walked around and greeted them as they passed. There was a table at the centre of the hall and an obelisk behind it where a pole protruded in the middle. Epimendis took the disc from Persius and placed it in the pole.

"We can now rest," Epimendis said, heaving a sigh of deep relief.

"Master, where are we?" Persius gasped.

"This, my son, is my second home. I founded it since I read the inscription in the second disc," Epimendis explained.

"You founded this place?" Persius asked.

"Aye," Epimendis answered. "Welcome to Stonehenge."