Forging Divinity

Remus hesitated for a long moment before massive stone double doors, reaching out with a hand to caress the intricate knotwork that laced every inch of the vast slate surface. The knots seemed to shift and distort as he stared straight up at the precipice of the massive arch where an exquisite aquamarine crystal lay embossed in the stone. He stared for a few moments more before steeling himself with a careful breath. The enormous doors glided away from each other with deceptive ease as he placed a palm on each slab and gave a solid heave. As the doors swung open a massive chamber greeted him, detailed etchings along the circumference of the space spiraled in waves up to the peak of a gargantuan dome so high that the intricate details became all but imperceptible as they flowed up the arcing surface. Every opulence in the vast room paled in comparison to the hundreds of crystal flowers and trees that spread out before him. A pristine garden wrought entirely from aquamarine crystals, the waning evening light splashing swathes of flame across the faceted foliage. Small chimes resonated through the great room as tiny crystal leaves clinked against each other in an imperceptible breeze. It was quite possibly the most beautiful thing he had ever laid eyes upon.

Laid out between glistening trunks, Remus could see a winding path of etched marble cobblestones that meandered beneath boughs of crystal leaves, inviting him to follow it’s curving path. A tight knot fermented in his chest as he drifted past varied crystal structures and branching avenues. The dense formations grew in size and complexity as he passed, by the time he rounded one final bend the trees and flowers coalesced into a vast and intertwined canopy of radiant crystal, swathing the ground in dappled rays of turquoise and sapphire light. Before him, the maw of the path opened into a wide clearing dominated by an ellipse of pristine water. Arcing over the placid surface stood a hunched crystal willow tree, small compared to the greatest trees he had passed, but infinitely more complex. It radiated with an ethereal glow that drew him forward like a wandering moth. He would have marched directly to the dazzling structure to marvel at it if not for the lone figure slouched atop a simple slate bench perched at the water’s edge, his gaze firmly locked on a ragged tome in his hands.

“It’s even more beautiful than he described, isn’t it?” Thumos asked without lifting his gaze.

“It’s incredible.” Remus acknowledged before pausing, “I wish he were here.”

Thumos looked up from the tome without replying, still gazing out over the crystal pond, his face remained hidden from view.

Remus allowed another few moments to slip past before he cautiously spoke again. “We’re starting to evacuate the fortress. Silas is overseeing operations as we speak.”

Again, Thumos ignored Remus and shifted his attention back to the tome in his lap. His fingertips bleached where they gripped the smooth black surface.

“Listen, I know why you felt you had to do it, I get it, but this isn’t going to change anything, you won’t bring anybody back by getting yourself killed.”

Thumos remained fixated on the tome, refusing to acknowledge Remus.

“Please, just come with us.” Another long pause before Remus began again, “I understand Thumos…”

“What exactly do you understand? That this is exactly what needs to be done? That this is the one moment in my life where I have felt clarity?

“I…”

Thumos finally stood and pivoted to face Remus, his streaked face coming into full view, eyes red and ragged.

“Have you ever felt your entire life fade into a backdrop? Every mistake, every wrong, all the suffering wrought. Everything leading to one moment, THIS MOMENT! For my entire life I have been a tool of war, a weapon forged to destroy. Today I have a chance to undo everything, to do something good, for once! This is my chance at redemption, and you would rob me of that?”

“Thumos… please. You don’t owe this world anything. You bought us our time, the armies at our doorstep have honored your challenge, now run away with us. You change nothing by dying.”

“You, a man of honor, would advise me to break an oath of battle?” Thumos scoffed out the question before Remus rebutted.

“You have said yourself that you have no honor.”

“And now I am a slave to it.”

The two men stared at each other for a long moment before Thumos spoke up, “If you are done trying to convince me to cowardice like you then leave me be, I need to focus before tomorrow.”

Remus scowled, “Call me a coward if that’s what helps you deal with this, I’ll get the rest of our people to safety.”

Remus made to turn away before Thumos spit at his back, “Running away, just like you did last time Renthir came to tear down our home.”

“I’m not running.” Remus stood his ground as Thumos moved to stand over him, his immense stature coming into full relief.

“Then why? Why don’t you let the people go themselves, do they need your presence to shepherd them oh great warden?” The words dripped out with vile sarcasm.

“BECAUSE I WON’T WATCH ANOTHER BROTHER DIE!” Remus shoved hard into Thumos’ large chest as he screamed the words, a single tear etching a dark line down his cheek.

“Is my fate so thoroughly sealed?”

“Thumos… He is a god!”

“What makes a god?”

Remus shook his head in frustration as he slowly backpedaled away from Thumos. For a brief second, it looked like he would say something else but instead whirled on his heels, the billows of his midnight cloak catching a clutch of crystal flowers and dashing them against the marble walkway in shower of glass. Remus ignored the ruin and marched away without looking back.

Stranded alone among the elegant boughs, a final tear slid from Thumos’ eye as the echoes of Remus’ footsteps faded from earshot. The sound of massive stone doors settling into place filtered through the chamber before he finally moved from where he stood like a statue. The windows rimming the base of the vast dome had dimmed as the two men argued, now only a soft gray light shone down through the crystalline foliage, sending long shafts of twinkling blue radiance dancing along the floor. Thumos stared down at the dancing lights as he made his way to the small pond and sank to his knees. Seated before the glistening water he closed his eyes, brought his hands together and let out a long, shaking breath, trying to subdue the turmoil of his mind. Thumos centered himself, pushed the raging armies from his mind and took another long breath, steadier than the first. Torgaru’s teachings settled his mind and body, the passing of time halted as he held the balance for a moment before his mind faltered, he remembered the argument with Remus, the fall of Torga, the death of Finn. His focus shattered, the balance swept away as his anger flooded back. He let out a guttural yell before slamming a fist into the marble beside him, a small spiderweb of cracks exploding from the point of impact. He sat there for a moment, breath heaving from his chest as emotions raged against his will.

Across the water a small ripple caught Thumos’ attention and he rose slightly to peer at the disruption along the placid surface. The ripples inched ever closer before Thumos finally glimpsed a small blemish paddling through the pristine water. He almost caught his breath as the creature came into full view, the turtle was made entirely of the same crystal as the garden but moved just as if it were a flesh and blood creature. It paddled delicately through the water towards Thumos, soft, webbed claws pushing it gracefully through the sapphire pond. The turtle’s head sat atop a long, winding neck with an extended snorkel shaped nose that breached the surface with an occasional spout of bubbles. Thumos stared at the elegant creature as it swam up to the bank where he kneeled, it brushed against the cobbled path and slid its neck over the rim of the pond before it levered its smooth shell onto land. Unobscured by the water, Thumos could finally see the creature in full. Its long neck and limbs slid along the ground without the clink of glass that Thumos would suspect. The faint light shone directly through the creature’s torso, a solid piece of unblemished crystal. As if finally noticing Thumos for the first time the creature stopped abruptly and raised its neck in his direction, the curious creature tipped its head to one side as it appraised him, small crystal gems just slightly darker blue than the surrounding crystal looked at him with incomprehensible intensity. The creature stared at Thumos and he stared back, he could feel the raging seas within him calm as those eyes pierced through him. Finally, Thumos eased his breathing and sat back onto his rear. The turtle, seemingly satisfied, drifted away from Thumos and slid back into the glassy pond, disappearing almost instantly from view. The passing of the creature left Thumos calm, in the wake of fury he felt only serene clarity. After remaining seated on the smooth cobblestones for a long moment he relocated himself to the bench where the journal sat, its pitch-black surface standing out against the pure marble. Thumos took the neatly bound book into his hands and caressed the outer spine while he flipped it open. With the pages bare in his lap he ran a finger along the inner spine, feeling the many wounds where pages had been ripped from their bindings over many years. He could see the contents of each page torn away in his mind’s eye, achingly clear. The shell of a journal still bore five pages, brittle and delicate with the yellow of time. The first of the few remaining pages glared at him with onyx eyes, a scaled visage only partially complete staring at him as he shifted the thin parchment. The adjacent page bore jagged scars undisclosed by any real geometry. For the briefest moment, his hand made to turn the page but he was drawn to the stark imagery laid out before him. A few sharp strokes defined the shape of a faint humanoid silhouette and a wicked blade. Carefully, Thumos lowered himself to the cold marble floor and set the ancient tome before him. Sharp chills penetrated the thin garments he wore where they were pressed against the ground, Thumos ignored the discomfort and pulled his ink font from his pack. Tool met parchment and Thumos guided its progress effortlessly across the page, shapes and shade came into clarity as the page was consumed by sharp lines of onyx liquid. The final crimson hues of dusk had long since dissipated and Thumos toiled beneath naught but the ethereal blue gleam of the gathered crystal boughs. For hours the only sound to be heard was the tinkle of delicate crystal leaves and the erratic scratching of Thumos’ ink font. By the time Thumos stood with the journal clutched between his fists full dark had come and gone, the faint yellows and pale blues of early light peered into the vast chamber just enough to send a kaleidoscope of illumination dancing off the refractive branches. The dancing light fell upon coarse lines that blocked in a rough helmeted figure defined by jagged shards and swaths of dark ink. Beside the figure an intricate sword and shield soaked the arcing light into their midnight outline. With his creation visible before him Thumos steeled himself and tore the page violently from its bindings and threw it to the ground at his feet. The moment the page tore loose, ancient magics coursing through the tome burst forth, lashing Thumos’ fingertips where they met the black leather. The falling page warped and ripped at space, coalescing into a glistening onyx suit of armor along with a long, straight sword and accompanying shield. The armor was spiked along each arm and across the back with two horns extending from the crown of an open-faced helm. The triangular shield was similarly coated with protrusions along its outer face while the sword supported just one large spike that extended from the base of the hilt. Thumos stooped to retrieve the newly generated equipment and threw it into place over his shirt and pants. The gear was incredibly light despite its bulk and the seemingly obtrusive spikes all fit perfectly between one another, never colliding regardless of how he contorted his frame. With bright orange light now filtering through the windows, time was beginning to wane. Before leaving the crystal gardens Thumos stared once more at the pristine waters of the pond in hopes that he might see the ephemeral turtle a final time. The elusive visitor did not resurface but Thumos instead was greeted by his own reflection, mirrored perfectly by the placid pond. The reflection stood coated head to toe in wicked onyx armor and wore a helmet open in the front save a wide column that traveled from the middle of his forehead to the base of the helmet at the top of his lip. The helmet bore two curved horns that arced up and back from Thumos’ ears, his dense dark beard extending below the sharp cheek plates. Finally, Thumos turned from the pond and left the dark reflection in his wake. Broken glass crunched beneath his feet as he passed the shattered flowers Remus had left behind him. Thumos felt his knuckles go white against the grip of his sword as the debris ground to dust beneath his boots. The massive arched doorway to the crystal gardens stood in his path and he pushed their enormous mass to the side with a grunt. The doors swung free of their mooring and Thumos walked out into the empty hallway. His footsteps reverberated through the wide avenue as he passed extravagant tapestries and colorful paintings. Before long Thumos met a wide set of spiral stairs, with the torches all extinguished he crept carefully down the dim staircase. The stairs opened into a vast court where subjects would have come to air grievances before the now obsolete crown. The space normally filled with angry politicians now stood placid as the pond upstairs, not a single soul in sight. Thumos could hear his footsteps echo across stone facades as he passed rows of wooden benches and vast columns. Finally, he reached the truly immense wooden siege doors that blockaded the entrance to Tyr Sudha. The impenetrable doors would never cave inward but Thumos placed a large hand upon each and heaved with every bit of strength he had. Achingly slowly, the massive wooden slabs began to drift apart. Unmanned machinery clanked as the siege doors crept open under the force of Thumos’ effort. Finally, a gap the width of a man was cleared and Thumos stepped through into the radiant midmorning sun. He raised a hand to cover his eyes as the brilliance left his sight useless. The sweeping dunes of the Ujurang Desert stretched out before him, blinding light searing the entire landscape. As the light finally normalized Thumos’ heart sank, the sands before him finally coming into focus. Arrayed along the undulating ridgeline of dunes were rows of red and gold tents, thick pikes waved crimson banners emblazoned with shimmering gold gryphons, the edges of which flapped lazily in the slow-moving air. The Anurian Empire. Thumos spit into the dry dust, his saliva literally sizzling away as it hit the ferociously hot sand. Mid way between the rows of tents and where Thumos stood, a lone man sat alone on a short plateau, lounging to one side and picking at his cuticles in a thoroughly bored fashion. The hard-baked earth crunched beneath Thumos’ feet as he approached the lounging figure and the familiar features began taking shape. Strikingly pale skin stood out from short, jet black hair swept to the left in perfectly manicured spikes. The man looked to be in his mid-twenties and wore nothing over his leanly muscled torso, a short, armored skirt covered his thighs with dozens of leather strips. Attached to the leather skirt was an incredibly intricate dagger made of some yellow white material that looked akin to bone. Lying next to him in the sand was an elegant, curved khopesh with glowing runes arcing down the flat faces. The man was much shorter than Thumos, only average in height. The one thing Thumos would always remember were his eyes. Black pits devoid of any light save for a small pinprick of crimson fury emanating from the pupil of each midnight socket. Thumos’ footsteps ground to a halt some ten yards from the lounging deity. Renthir looked up at him without shifting from his reclined position and grinned wickedly before chirping out in his reedy, high-pitched voice.

“My, my, you really are quite mean looking, aren’t you?”

Thumos glared at Renthir and forced his boiling blood to settle before taking another careful step forward, sword and shield now raised before him. Renthir leveled the type of look an exasperated parent gives a child towards Thumos before continuing.

“How bout’ you just reign it for a second there chief, I’m trying to savor this a bit! It’s been so long since anybody did something so foolish as you’ve done here. Tell me friend, what made little ol’ you think this was a clever idea?”

Thumos could feel his rage boiling beneath the surface, he hadn’t been this close to the god of retribution since the sack of Tyr Chaia. He could smell the same sickeningly sweet perfume he had been wearing so many years before. Finally, Thumos growled a response.

“You killed my brother.”

Renthir raised his eyebrows mockingly and twisted his mouth into a sarcastic little o.

“Oh-Ho! Did I now? Please do tell me, I’ve killed so many of you mortals through the years.”

Thumos didn’t respond, instead glaring at Renthir before taking another measured step forward. Renthir shrugged nonchalantly.

“Well, if you won’t entertain me I don’t think we will be entertaining this farce.” Renthir smirked at Thumos before letting out a long, high-pitched siren of a whistle. Abruptly, like shells launched from cannons, three massive gryphons launched into the sky from behind the Anurian tents. Each gryphon was laden with netting, shells and a full crew of Anurian airmen. The lead gryphon, a massive tawny beast twice the size of his compatriots, screeched loudly as the leviathan beasts tore through the air above Thumos, agitating a small sandstorm in their wake. A brief spike of panic spiked through Thumos, hopefully Remus and Silas were well into the caves by now.

“So… shall we?”

Renthir cocked his head to the side, still lounging on one hip as he awaited a reply. Thumos gave him none and simply crouched lower behind his shield, sword raised in preparation. Renthir pouted comically at Thumos and shrugged.

“What a bore.”

Suddenly, Renthir burst into action. Thumos barely registered movement before an immense force slammed into his raised shield, the force toppled him and sent him skidding across the hard earth. Without hesitating Thumos used the momentum of his slide to pop himself back to his feet and swiveled to find Renthir. Find him he did as a fist came spiraling down into his face, sending Thumos plummeting back into the dirt. Thumos’ ears rang and his knees felt unsteady as he levered himself to his feet frantically searching for Renthir. Cold metal tapped the base of his neck just below his helmet and he batted it away urgently before a stiff arm slammed into his opposite shoulder. Meanwhile, the blade that had just been at his throat hacked down into the back of his calves. His newly wrought armor deflected the blow but the immense force still sent Thumos to his knees. Renthir circled before Thumos before sneering down at him.

“You mortals are truly quite pathetic, you know that, right?”

Thumos ignored the taunt and focused inward, he dismissed his worries and his doubts, allowed calm to slide over him like a guiding hand. Just as Renthir’s left foot planted itself for an assault Thumos felt serenity unexpectedly wash over him and time faltered. Renthir, who had been a blur just moments earlier seemed to slow to a crawl. Thumos easily bashed Renthir’s incoming strike to the side before pushing through his guard and chopping down with a devastating strike towards Renthir’s exposed neck. Just before his sword would have met the soft flesh of Renthir’s neck his focus shattered and time resumed its normal flow. Renthir reacted just in time and jerked his neck away from the whistling blade but was unable to stop the tip from raking across his cheek and splitting his upper lip. Renthir dashed away and brought his hand to his bloody cheek and lip before glaring with evil conviction and emitting a cackling laugh,

“You’re dying slowly now boy.”

Almost immediately Renthir was on Thumos, slamming his sword into the onyx armor repeatedly as the curved blade flashed past his guard effortlessly. Despite the battering, the armor held before Renthir finally kicked Thumos hard in the chest, an explosive shockwave of crimson energy emanating from the point of impact. Thumos was sent sprawling into the dirt, his sword and shield finally falling from his grip. Renthir was there immediately to grab Thumos by the collar and slam him onto his back, knocking the little remaining wind from his aching lungs. A spiderweb of fractures covered the breastplate of Thumos’ armor where the energy had struck and Renthir pounced on the weakness, slamming one fist into the fracture furiously as he held Thumos down with the other by crushing his face into the blistering sand. On the fifth strike the breastplate finally shattered. Renthir fit both hands into the newly wrought hole and ripped the carapace from Thumos’ body, discarding the broken shards to the side before turning away. Renthir held his khopesh to the side calmly but his once flawless demeanor was clearly shaken, dust caked pale skin and blood dribbled down his chin and neck. The pale dagger previously secure on his waist hung precariously by a single flimsy leather strap and the god’s eyes belied his mounting fury. Renthir finally turned back to Thumos.

“Pick up your sword.”

The furious god stared at Thumos where he lay on the ground with a swollen eye. He scrambled over to his fallen sword and shield. As Thumos stooped to grab the shield, Renthir slammed into him again, punctuating the tackle with a shallow cut to the back of his calf.

“I said your sword.”

The coal-like eyes focused mercilessly on Thumos while Renthir sneered at him.

“The gryphons should find your friends soon don’t you think?” He paused to look at the sky before turning back to Thumos. “I wonder who will die first, you, or them?”

Remus stood atop a small ridge overlooking a shallow valley filled with prairie grasses and a few sparse trees. A column of almost a thousand refugees trudged past with their heads down, many of them glancing at the horned Torga warriors with looks of distrust. Remus tried to look reassuring and nodded encouragingly at those that met his gaze. He was staring out towards the head of the line when the screaming started. Remus turned to see three massive gryphons bearing down on the line of refugees. As the winged beasts careened in towards the back of the procession Remus began sprinting to meet them, yelling at the few Torga warriors still standing to join him. Remus slid to a stop as he reached the base of the column, refugees now sprinting past him in full on terror. The gryphons were rapidly approaching, Anurian men could be seen hanging from the netting along the gargantuan creature, brandishing weapons as they rode in. Remus quickly put together a rudimentary plan and turned to the gathered Torga, pointing to the opposite ridges that enclosed their shallow valley.

“Half of you on each ridge and get ready with those slings, I’ll pull them into the middle.”

Remus paused for a moment to conjure a mote of liquid fire into his palm.

“Silas, you’ll need to hit them from…”

Remus glanced around in confusion.

“Where the hell is Silas!?”

Thumos lay sprawled on his stomach in the sand, bright red blood seeping from hundreds of tiny lacerations across his torso and arms. Thumos’ midnight sword lay out of reach a few yards away, its point embedded deep into the golden sand. The earth surrounding him was dark red where blood had saturated the ground. Renthir paced in front of him mockingly as he struggled to get off his hands and knees. Thumos slowly began to push himself to his feet before he toppled backwards onto his rear, barely supporting his torso upright with his left arm. A wicked grin crept onto his face despite his swollen cheeks, hot blood gushed past his teeth to trickle through his beard. As he sat there bleeding out before the god of judgement he almost wanted to laugh, it was a fitting end to die this way. Coal burnt eyes glared down at Thumos and he felt at peace, he did not fear death, he did not fear the dimming of the night or the passing of the flame. As calm washed over him his training returned in force and this time he did laugh truly. As time slowed practically to a halt he laughed past shattered ribs, life was cruel, he thought as he sat there, watching immobile as Renthir and his sword inched ever closer. It was ok.

From deep within the recesses of time, Thumos watched the curved blade as it finally began its descent towards his exposed neck. From seemingly nowhere, a faint glint of light shone from Renthir’s other side. A single arrow crept from the desert mirage, achingly slowly, before slamming into Renthir’s ankle. In a moment Thumos felt everything change, felt the cosmic scales tip like some tangible entity. With every ounce of life left in him Thumos ducked beneath the now off kilter strike and watched Renthir begin a lethargic pirouette as he followed through the swing. With Renthir’s back facing him the glistening bone dagger shone like a beacon and Thumos snatched the blade from Renthir’s belt while heaving himself to his feet. With Renthir’s back still facing him, Thumos thrust the dagger into the exposed flesh. The blade plunged through Renthir’s back and he screamed, a guttural, animal scream of absolute terror. Thumos collapsed against Renthir’s crumpling body before trying to pull the blade from his back. The blade wouldn’t budge, nor could Thumos remove his hands from the carved grip. Confusion took over and his focus finally left him, time slamming back into place with nauseating ferocity. Then it began. From the point where the bone dagger met Renthir’s flesh the tissue began rapidly rotting, spreading in a nova around the wound. Renthir continued to scream and claw at the ground as the rapid necrosis ate at his flesh at an alarming rate. The reaction only gained momentum as pearly white bone was exposed to air while the flesh peeled away. The decomposing tissue finally coalesced at the tip of the carved blade and Thumos was left atop a bleached skeleton, stripped entirely of flesh. He stared in horror for a moment before the dagger leapt from his grasp and began rotating furiously in the air before him. Thumos was powerless to move as the rotations slowed and the dagger came to rest with the point just above his heart. Staring at the carved dagger inches from his heart he finally realized what it was, a fang. The fang slammed into his chest and fire began coursing through his veins. He feared his skin was melting the way Renthir’s had but the pain was too great to even think. He collapsed into the sand, writhing against the coarse granules. Just as the physical pain was beginning to subside his psyche was thrown into shock as images and experiences bombarded his mind. He saw himself kneeling before a man made entirely of gold, he saw himself carving through hundreds of elves on the slopes of a fiery volcano, and he saw himself stab Finn through the heart. Finally, the onslaught subsided and he sat there kneeling in the sand panting hard. Silas came sprinting up to him from behind before skidding to a halt.

“Can you walk?” He glanced around skittishly, “I think it’s about time we got the hell out of here.”

Thumos hesitated before replying, “Yes I can wa…”

As if realizing that he could walk he look down, the cuts were gone and his bones felt solid, he felt more than just good, he felt amazing.

Silas did not seem quite as calm as Thumos felt and he quickly realized why as a few hundred soldiers could be seen bearing down on the two of them from the distant dunes.

Thumos ran to the sword he had dropped earlier and handed Renthir’s curved blade to Silas before roughly grabbing Silas by the back of the neck and jostling both of them forward together. For a split second the world disappeared and was replaced by cold darkness before they stepped back out into a shallow valley being stormed by Anurian soldiers. Silas looked around in shock and then at Thumos with confusion, “Did you just…?”

Thumos ignored the question and began climbing the ridge towards Remus. Remus stood in front of two lines of Togaru where he had surrounded himself with a fleet of rotating fireballs, firing one at the gryphons overhead every few moments. Perspiration clung to his face from the heat of the inferno he maintained around him, the fringes of his midnight cloak whipped into a fury by the rapidly rotating motes of fire. Thumos and Silas jumped over some sparse rock cover and could feel the heat of Remus’ arsenal by the time he finally noticed them and extinguished a few motes, sending the rest to float lazily behind him.

“Thumos… You’re…”

Thumos cut him off before he could finish, “Can you bring one of them down?” Thumos pointed up at the tawny gryphons.

Remus shook his head, “I mean, I could… simple kinetic linking with the ground. But what do we do when they hit? They’ll just be pissed that we killed half their crew!”

Thumos continued to stare at the massive beasts, “Just do it.”

“Thumos, I really don’t know that we’ve thought this through. What even happened, how did you get here? And where have you been!?” Remus stabbed a finger at Silas who glanced at the ground then up at Thumos before he returned his gaze to Remus and spoke softly.

“I think we should do it.”

Remus hesitated but after seeing the seriousness in both men’s eyes he turned to look back up at the circling gryphons.

“One bird coming down then, I hope you know what you’re doing.”

Remus turned to scan the valley below them and quickly pointed to a massive boulder.

“I’ll be using that.”

Thumos nodded and Remus focused his mind to link the massive boulder’s weight to the smallest gryphon overhead. As soon as Remus bound the enchantment in place the massive beast began plummeting towards the earth, squawking in shock while its wings frantically beat the air to no avail. The impact felt like a meteor had slammed into the desert. Sand exploded into the air and half the terrified screams were instantly silenced as the men huddled in the under netting were crushed on impact, while the airmen on top were dashed into the creatures back painfully. The beast itself shattered one of its massive wings on impact and rose holding it gingerly off the ground. A few men clambered down and began sprinting at Thumos, who was walking calmly towards the injured gryphon. Three men reached Thumos simultaneously and he moved blindingly fast. The first soldier took a fist to his chain mail clad chest, blood exploding from the point of impact as a dozen shattered links punched through his breastbone. The second fell to a swift jab in the neck, shiny white bone left sticking out of his collar as he crumpled to the desert sand. The third saw his comrades fall and turned to run but Thumos was already there, with both hands he grasped the soldiers steel clad head before crumpling the man’s helmet like thin aluminum, head still inside. Remus gazed in shock as Thumos continued to saunter towards the gryphon. The bloodstained creature screeched at Thumos and began charging with its broken wing tucked into its side. Remus moved to help before Silas reached out a hand to still his action, Remus looked at Silas incredulously but stayed where he stood. The giant beast finally reached Thumos and dove at him with its beak outstretched. Thumos sidestepped the strike and grabbed the gryphon’s beak with both hands before slamming the creature’s head into the ground. Without hesitating, Thumos plunged his bare hand through the flesh at the base of the monster’s neck and ripped out its spine from where it met the skull. The creature didn’t even have time to scream. The gryphon’s massive weight toppled to the side in a final spasm. The two remaining gryphons wailing in the air as they watched the brutal slaughter of their wing mate. Panicked beyond measure, they hastily flew south, screeching as they fled. Remus stood along the valley ridge, staring dumbfounded at the carnage strewn about before him. Silas settled in to stand next to him before muttering in a shaky breath.

“I think we might have a god in the family.”