

Havoc Rising

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Not a word of retreat. You'll never persuade me.

It's not my nature to shrink from battle, cringe in fear

with the fighting strength still steady in my chest.

I shrink from mounting our chariot—no retreat—

on foot as I am, I'll meet them man-to-man.

Athena would never let me flinch.

—Diomedes to Sthenelus on the battlefield at Troy,

The Iliad, Book V, Homer

Prologue

May, 2011, New York City

It was Tuesday, and the city was alive on a pleasant spring afternoon—a perfect day for Mazeen Fawaz to become a god. After weeks of training and months spent isolated from those he loved, his sacrifice was about to pay off. After peering out the dirty window of his dingy apartment at a ratty patch of grass covered by bags of garbage, the young man placed an innocuous-looking metallic disk into a recess on the bottom of his watch then gathered his backpack and left his rathole of an apartment in the Red Hook housing development in Brooklyn. Though he was scared and nervous, and perhaps even a little excited, a sense of purpose and duty kept him focused on his task.

This is it. He pulled his backpack's straps tight, locked the door behind him, and braced himself for the thumping bass that always reverberated through the hallway no matter the time of day. The noise wasn't as bad as the acrid and pungent smells, though.

The first water taxi to Manhattan wouldn't leave until 2:20 p.m. That would give him two hours to pick up a small but significant package that awaited him at a hotel and get to the museum nearby. The seemingly innocuous device inside the package would take him just a few minutes to assemble. He ran through the steps of the plan repeatedly in his head as he made the short ten-minute walk in the bright sun down Dwight Street toward the ferry docks.

As usual, the terminal and the water taxi were crowded with shoppers from the furniture store, which allowed him to pass mostly unnoticed. Mazeen was in his early twenties and not bad looking by Western standards, but his dark complexion was unmistakably Middle Eastern. He regularly shaved to further remove himself from scrutiny, but just being Arabic in New York got

him sideways glances, and people often moved away from him on the ferry or subway. He didn't care. It fueled his courage for what he was about to do.

He didn't try to avoid eye contact, even though most of the people he encountered did. Maybe it had nothing to do with his appearance—just New Yorkers being New Yorkers—but he knew that if he tried to look away he would come off as shifty and suspicious. He was already concerned that his constant tugging at his shirt because of his profuse sweating would attract attention.

Just act casual, he kept thinking as the ferry made its twenty-five-minute journey across the turbid water of the East River to Manhattan. The cliché made him smile a bit as he walked up to the upper deck for "fresh" air. He found the idea ridiculous—that the foul air out on deck would be any better than in the stuffy salon below—but at least there would be a breeze.

Everything about New York City made him uneasy, from the odd-looking twin-hulled ferryboat, painted like a giant yellow taxicab, to walking the crowded streets amongst the giant buildings that blocked all sunlight and sense of direction. He had to keep reminding himself that his ordeal was nearly over as the ferry docked at the foot of Lower Manhattan's vast concrete monstrosities.

At the Wall Street subway station, Mazeen caught the Five Train north to Grand Central and then the Six Train to the East Seventy-Seventh Street station as he'd done so many times before. In an effort to calm his racing heart, he tried to focus on his mother and sisters, picturing their faces. When he found that giving way to thoughts of his mission, he redirected his thoughts to the promises that had been made both by him and to him. The entire trip passed by in a blur.

He climbed the stairs from the Seventy-Seventh Street station and emerged in front of the massive redbrick façade of Lenox Hill Hospital. He glanced into the emergency entrance as he

passed under its green awning. The hospital was calm now, with only a few people waiting and a vacant gurney in the hall, but he suddenly imagined the bloody chaos and broken bodies that would soon overwhelm the small facility. He tried to convince himself that what he was about to do was of little consequence compared to the reward he'd been promised.

The constant noise from the endless stream of vehicles, the ubiquitous construction, and the whistles and sirens echoing among the buildings faded to a dull hum over the next block and a half, and the never-ending throngs of humanity disappeared from view. He tried to refocus on his task, but he couldn't get past the images of a man carrying a limp young girl with a bloody stump for an arm or a small boy, covered in his mother's blood, screaming inconsolably. He shook his head to try to clear it. Sweat began to dampen his shirt again, and doubt started to creep back into his thoughts. It took considerable effort to force back the growing uncertainty as he continued.

He walked down East Seventy-Seventh Street toward Park Avenue, feeling a bit better because he had something else to focus on—he would pick up his package just up the street at The Mark Hotel. Security on the subways and ferries was too tight these days to risk carrying even the arcane type of bomb he was about to use.

Even he didn't fully understand the explosive his benefactor wanted him to use, and he had trained in bomb making with those al-Qaeda zealots for weeks in Yemen before coming to New York. Of course, it was one of his benefactor's creations, which meant it had little in common with normal explosives.

Part of the device, a featureless metallic disk about the size of a silver dollar, had been on a shelf in his apartment when he'd first arrived—right where she'd told him it would be, in plain sight. He didn't even need to build the bomb. All he had to do was keep the disk under his watch

until he put it into the disk drive of a laptop that would be left as a package for him—under a false name—near the target, place the computer in his pack, and walk into the museum. There would be no obvious detonation device, no external wires, no timer, nothing suspicious. She'd told him it would trigger automatically once he entered the building.

Mazeen suddenly recalled with vivid clarity the first time he'd witnessed her power. The man had failed to deliver a message due to the presence of police activity in town. Despite his pleas for forgiveness, she simply extended a hand, and the man folded in on himself as if he were a paper cup being crushed. What remained was smaller than the soccer ball Mazeen had carried as he watched in horror. Then, he learned, she killed the man's family, too. That act stood in stark contrast to the lavish generosity she was also capable of when people achieved the goals she'd set for them. It was said that she was immortal and could even grant immortality if she chose. In fact, if he wasn't sure she would never lie to him, and if he hadn't witnessed her power firsthand, he might have doubted the bomb would even work. But she'd assured him that he was chosen specifically because the reward would be significant—not an afterlife with some number of virgins, but one in which she promised he would be reborn as a god, maybe even like her.

Mazeen might have looked like a Muslim in appearance, and in public, he acted like one, but he wasn't one. He couldn't have cared less about Allah. His benefactor, not Allah, had saved the lives of his mother and sisters. To protect them and keep them safe, he'd have given anything to be like her.

Mazeen would never forget the terror he'd felt the night the earthquake had killed his father and destroyed his family's small mud-brick home just outside of Bam. He couldn't find his father in all the rubble and began to panic. He felt weak and helpless when he finally found his mother and tried—and failed—to lift a collapsed wall from her crushed legs. The memory of

her weak voice urging him to dig through the rubble to get to his baby sisters, whom her body was protecting, haunted him. Even now, years later, he had nightmares about it. If not for her—his savior, appearing as if from nowhere to effortlessly toss the broken wall away and then take them in and provide for them—they never would have survived. But while it was true he owed her a debt, taking care of his family far outweighed any gratitude he felt. The reward she'd promised him for this act would ensure that he would never be so weak and helpless again. He quickened his pace, renewed. Today was going to be a good day.

Mazeen crossed Park Avenue and veered toward the elegant brown-brick edifice that housed The Mark Hotel on Madison Avenue. As he entered the stark, ultramodern lobby, he pulled a clipboard out of his pack and walked across the garish black-and-white-striped marble floor to the austere black reception desk.

"I need to pick up a package for a Mr. Anthony Mendez," he said in exactly the way he had practiced for weeks, trying for an air of New York nonchalance.

The apathetic young woman at the desk, wearing a severe black blazer with white trim, ducked behind the counter and produced a flat package, slightly less broad than a pizza box, with a tag on it. She didn't bother to view the tag or even glance up at Mazeen. He took the box and walked out. *I could have had a third eye and green skin.*

Less than half a block later, he stopped between two buildings and walked down the outside stairwell to the alley below to duck out of sight. He opened the box and took out a laptop, pulled the metal disk from under his watch, and placed it into the disk drive. It fit perfectly, which made him smile and instantly erased any doubts he'd had. He put the computer into his backpack and zipped it closed, left the clipboard and box behind in the alleyway, and climbed back out to the street. The instant he walked back onto the sidewalk, he became paranoid that

someone might have seen him. It took an act of sheer will for him to calm his fears, reminding himself that, so far, he'd done nothing wrong as far as anyone could tell. Even so, he couldn't stop his hands from trembling.

His pulse quickened again when he saw the trees lining Fifth Avenue, and the closer he got to the museum, the more his hands shook. He grabbed the loose ends of his shoulder straps and daydreamed as he walked in the shade of the trees along Central Park and Park Avenue. He imagined what kind of god he would become. Would he be able to manipulate matter and energy the way she could? Maybe he would have the power to see into the future, or fly, or both. No matter—as long as he didn't end up like that monstrosity Kesed that she kept around like a pet.

As he approached the queue of school buses and tour buses on the street in front of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Mazeen paused. This close to his target, the full weight of his mission hit him like a brick. She had promised him he would be reunited with his family soon. Only then would he be able to protect them properly from any disasters that might ever happen again. He focused on his twin sisters—now ten years old—and his crippled mother and forced himself forward.

The gray-stone, monolithic structure of the museum loomed ahead like a mountain. Its imposing neoclassical façade was dotted regularly with small black windows at street level and high, arched windows between colonnades above. Street vendors and artists lined the wall under the windows along the south wing of the building but stopped just before one of the long, narrow fountains that flanked the stairs at the main entrance. The museum was not as crowded as it would have been earlier in the day but was still teeming with parents chasing—or dragging—kids and pushing strollers, museum patrons, groups of schoolchildren, and throngs of visitors in

tour groups. He stepped into the security line just inside the door to have his backpack checked, and as he waited, he worried about when it would happen.

The longer he waited, the more his pulse and mind raced. The whole world slowed, and he began to sweat and shake more violently than before. He fought the doubt that began to creep into his mind. He noticed one mother, just inside the Great Hall, trying desperately to convince her screaming boy that the museum would be fun, while just beyond, a group of young girls near his sister's age gathered hand in hand, singing, as they waited near a queue of maybe twenty more children and their chaperones. Dozens more faces of all ages and races stared down at him from the balcony above. When he finally glanced up the line to the spot where he would check his pack, he suddenly couldn't handle not knowing when the bomb would go off.

What would happen if she'd lied about the bomb, or worse, about his reward? No. She would never lie. What if it didn't go off, and she thought it was his fault? Would she take it out on his family?

He took a few leaden steps closer to the guards' station. When his turn finally came, he stopped short of the table and wiped sweat off his forehead with a shaky hand. All at once, questions entered his mind—questions he had not until this point even worried about: why here? What was her purpose?

A tall African-American security guard walked over to him. "You okay, son? You don't look too good. Why don't you come over here and sit down for a second and catch your breath."

He stared at the guard and lost his composure. His eyes wandered past the columns and down the Great Hall again as he felt the adrenaline build. She had her reasons, and he had his. He had to trust her.

Mazeen thought of his sisters playing near their mother one last time then bolted past the security guard into the Great Hall of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, shoving people and knocking over a stroller as a blond woman screamed.

He made it only a few steps before a tremendous pressure began bearing down on his entire body, and then all at once, the world folded in on him in a blinding flash of light that enveloped the entirety of the Great Hall.

Chapter 1

The Same Day, San Diego, California

As a thirty-two-hundred-year-old guy who protected humanity from all manner of brutish and nasty creatures, dealing with sea lions and obnoxious wannabe fishermen should have been a cakewalk, right? *Yeah, not so much.* At least, not that day.

I'm going to kill him. I watched the other boats anchored and drifting around the kelp beds off La Jolla and shook my head. *I'm going to strangle his fishy ass and use him for chum.* *What the hell is with all the damned sea lions?* Everywhere I looked, there was another one, including two bulls, six cows, and at least that many young ones—and that didn't include the seals that pestered us. *There are at least thirty boats out here, and I'm the only one dealing with the damned dogs.*

Things weren't going well on that particular charter. First off, my clients were late. Secondly, the wind was up, blowing at least ten to fifteen knots, which was about double what the forecast had suggested. Wind made casting a fly tricky, especially for amateurs. I had already untangled flies a dozen times from the antenna on the canvas-covered top that shaded my steering console, and I'd unhooked flies from my jacket another half-dozen times. Fortunately, no hooks had penetrated skin. Then there was the guy puking off the bow as his two buddies laughed at him. There was no mercy in fishing.

The fish were cooperating when the guys could actually get the fly beyond the engines, but the damned sea lions were playing havoc with the fish once they were hooked, plucking them off my anglers' lines as if they were freakin' raspberries at a U-pick farm. Mercifully—for the fish, anyway—they weren't getting hooked often.

Holy crap. I hate these days. Thank Zeus it's almost over. “We got about twenty minutes left before we need to head in,” I said, ever hopeful that the guys would have some sympathy for their seasick friend and just call it off early.

“I sure would like to have caught one of those yellowtail while we were here,” replied the bulkiest of the trio of clients, with an attitude. He had a belly that his very expensive and scientifically developed fishing shirt—fresh from a catalog—strained to contain, and his cigar breath made me a little queasy. His pudgy face was the color of a cooked lobster, and every time he took his hat off to wipe back his thinning hair, the stark tan line nearly made me laugh. I could deal with that crap, but the guy hadn't managed a cast longer than fifteen feet all day, and now he wanted one of the most demanding fish you could catch in Southern California. *Yeah, right.*

Of course, it was always a guy like that who set a world record—no concept, no clue, and no skill, but all the luck in the world. That was fishing, and that was why I usually loved it: anything could happen. But today, it was just irritating.

When we finally got back to the charter dock at the landing on Mission Bay where I kept my boat, the sick guy stumbled away even before I'd finished tying her off. His fancy fishing shirt was stained colors never seen on anyone healthy, and the odor that wafted off him as he staggered up the dock was indescribable.

The other two gathered their rods, cooler, and camera gear, and the beefy guy handed me a ten-dollar bill, giving me a half smile. “It sure would have been nice to land a few more fish, Steve.” His tone suggested I hadn't done enough—a sentiment backed up by the measly tip. “But I guess that's why they call it ‘fishing’ and not ‘catching.’”

That was the statement of someone ticked off about not catching any fish but wanting to seem like an experienced angler—I knew that from my many years of fishing all over the world.

Being stiffed on the tip didn't bother me because I didn't do that job for the money, but I freakin' hated that saying. "Well, maybe next time we won't have so many dogs to contend with," I said as I began to stow loose gear and collect the day's trash in preparation for cleaning the boat. "If you'd have hooked that yellowtail you wanted today, you never would have landed it."

"You may be right, but it still would have been fun. See you next time." He waved dismissively as he walked down the dock.

If there were any justice in the world, he would jam that seven-hundred-dollar four-piece fly rod into the railing on the way to his rental car and turn it into a ten-piece toothpick. That didn't happen. I spent the next few hours cleaning out the custom twenty-six-foot center console boat I chartered, trying to figure out how the guy had gotten vomit underneath the cap rail. I mean, jeez, I had to contort myself just to get at it with a brush.

As I scrubbed, a familiar voice came from behind me.

"Rough day out there, Cap'n Dore?"

The boat rocked a bit, but I chose to continue scrubbing rather than turn and face him. "Now, how the hell would you know that, you squid's dick?" I scrubbed just a bit harder. "Why on Earth were we the only ones harangued by sea lions all day? There had to have been three dozen boats off La Jolla, and I got to host the Pinniped Fest, you fishy-smelling jackass. And get your slimy hands off my clean boat."

"Aw, come on, dude," my visitor said in a conciliatory tone. "Those guys would have killed anything you landed today, and you know it. Clymene was just making sure they didn't get any spawners."

“Well, how come you didn’t at least warn me about the wind? I mean, I expect NOAA to get the weather wrong, but for cripes’ sake, don’t you control it or something, being an all-powerful Sea Titan and all?”

I finally turned around to see my weathered old friend straddling the cap rail of my boat with one foot on the dock and the other dangling inside it. As usual, he was wearing a hideous shirt, unbuttoned to his navel. The shirt was some bizarre combination of yellows, reds, and greens, like something out of Picasso’s acid trip, but at least it fit him. A massive, bushy, dingy-white beard covered his chest.

“Could that shirt get any more obnoxious, Ned?”

My beach-bum friend—Nereus the Titan, Protector of the Sea, in self-imposed exile in Southern California—always made me think of Santa Claus at the beach after a two-day tequila bender. And it figured that Clymene, one of his many sea-nymph daughters, was encouraging the fish-stealing pains in the ass we’d encountered that day.

“Did the dudes leave any beer behind?” Nereus asked, ever hopeful.

I’d never been much of a drinker because, frankly, I just never liked the taste, so any spare beers would have gone to Nereus. However, he was out of luck. I shook my head, and he sighed.

Despite being a Protogenoi, or Old One, one of the many powerful otherworldly beings that came to our world from time to time, I considered him a friend and always gave him the stuff that got left behind.

“You got any cheese puffs left in your bag, then?”

“No beer and no cheese puffs, Ned, but I think I have some corn chips if you want them. And I’ve got water if you want it,” I added, trying to sound generous.

Ned had laid himself back to bask in the sun on the wide cap rail along my boat's starboard bow and closed his eyes. "Water? Ugh. No way, man. You know what fish do in that stuff?" He made a face as he got comfortable. "But I'll take them corn chips. Oh, you hear about the bombing earlier today?" he asked as I tossed the bag at him.

I expected it to smack him and then bounce onto the dock beyond, but instead, he caught it as if he'd been watching me the whole time, though he never even opened his eyes. His action made me smile, and I shook my head, impressed, as I resumed cleaning.

"No, you know I don't have a regular radio onboard. Middle East somewhere?" I just assumed he was making conversation, but I probably should have known better, given who he was.

"Nah, man. New York City." He opened the bag of chips. "Metropolitan freakin' Museum of Art. Suicide bomber. Kablooiie. Took out seventeen people, injured another thirty-three. They can't find any remains of the bomber or the bomb. Not even residue, man. Nada." He was munching loudly as he spoke. "Happened right at the entrance. I guess none of the art got damaged, but some kinda cool old cup was stolen while they were sortin' stuff out. Thief totally ransacked some sheik's private collection that was on loan to the museum. Curators said it was the least valuable item in the collection and just a simple bronze cup, but I'm hearin' different, dude."

I climbed off the boat with my gear and began to spray the two rods I'd brought and break them down. I loved days when people brought their own gear because the cleanup was fast. The only problem was today it gave me time to wonder about the bombing. I'd seen a lifetime of bombings, many lifetimes in fact, but Ned wouldn't have brought up a mere suicide bombing if it didn't relate more directly to him and, by extension, to me.

“So?” I asked. “What are you hearing? And I assume you don’t mean on the news.” I finished the rods, zipped up my gear bag, and walked off the dock.

Ned flip-flopped along behind me, talking through a mouthful of corn chips and getting crumbs in his long beard. I could smell them upwind. *Ugh.*

“Cup was special,” he managed to spit out with a spray of crumbs. “And, dude, you know I don’t watch TV or nothing. You humans sensationalize everything, man. I just got a vibe that somethin’s happenin’.”

I had been involved with seemingly benign situations turning out to be ominous—and vice versa—for millennia, so I knew better than to jump to conclusions just because Ned had a hunch. Heck, for all I knew his hunch was a reaction to too much skunky beer, sun, and stale cheese puffs.

“Well, if you’re right, I’m sure I’ll hear about it soon enough from Athena.” I put the gear in my truck. “I’m heading home and getting some rest. And, hey, find out where I can get a couple of nice white sea bass for my guys on Friday, would ya? They’re good guys, and I know they’ll release them.”

“I dunno, dude. I’ll see what I can do. Take ’em easy.” He strolled off toward the seawall at the end of the marina, munching as he went.