

TIME OF THE GORGONS

CHAPTER 4: THE PORTAL OF KHARON – GLYKERIA'S TOMB

The short corridor leading from the charnel pit ended in a pair of securely locked iron doors, their hinges well hidden in the surrounding stonework. Logan and Yanis approached cautiously and began to investigate them. The doors appeared to be smooth, grey and unadorned, the only break in their surface was that of the two locks. Yanis stretched out a hand and touched the door gingerly – they were cold, but no colder than the surrounding stonework. Fishing in his pack he pulled out his tool kit, and prepared to pick the lock.

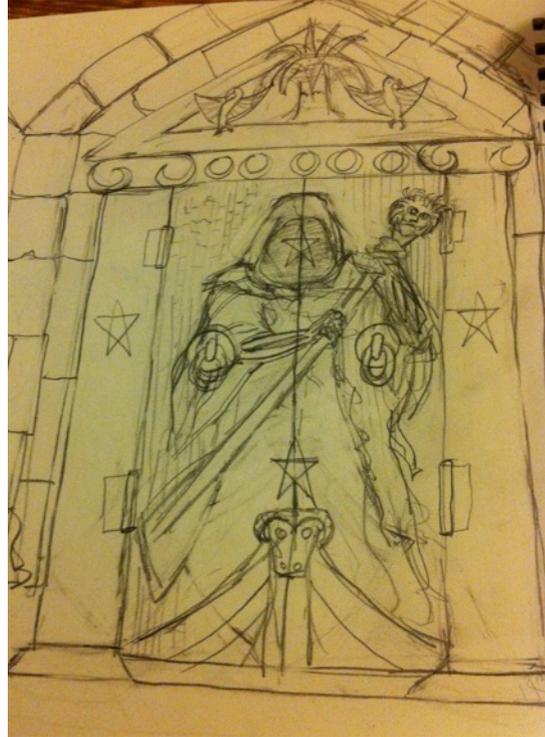
'Watch out. Once Logan gets this door opens, I think all kinds of trouble awaits us,' said Theocrates. The large man rubbed his hands dry on his tunic and watched Yanis work.

Atticus and Theocrates fitted arrows to their bows and took up a defensive stance. The Sorcerer fell back behind the others, and began to mutter and wave his hands about as he prepared his magic. The flurry of activity and the muttering broke Yanis' concentration, the lock pick slipped from his fingers

'Damn!'

The sliver of metal fell to the cold stone. As he bent down to retrieve it his head moved closer to the door and he could hear another fainter click, a 'click' from the room beyond – somewhere another lock was being opened. Yanis forced himself to take a deep breath, dried his sweating palms on his tunic, then tried to pick the lock again. With a satisfying 'clunk' the locks sprang back. Theocrates pushed past Yanis and kicked at the door, which flew open to Theocrates' well-aimed boot. The companions stared in awe at what they saw.

In the dimness of witchlight and iron sconces lay a circular chamber. The floor was flooded to an unknown depth, the surface of the water as smooth and black as obsidian glass. In the centre of the room was an island containing a large stone shape, a sarcophagus; stepping stones led from doorways positioned in each quadrant of the circular wall to the island. The doorway directly opposite the companions was carved with the figure of a hooded boatman



and Aes Sidhe symbols of the palm tree and the phoenix. The boatman appeared to represent Kharon, boatman of the river Styx. The door held four locks in the door at which a skeletal creature, stood silently. One of the locks already had a key in it and the skeleton was working at the second. Looking closer they could see something around its neck,

As they passed through the door they could see another archway, and through it a figure draped in decayed cloth. Its desiccated bones catching in the torchlight, they watched as the skeletal creatures strode surefootedly across the stepping stones to stand beside its companions a large key in its hand. The squeaking of its bones set Logan's teeth on edge and made Atticus wince.

Standing beside the sarcophagus was the ethereal form of a woman who could only be Glykeria. The sorceress seemed intent on controlling her minions, her fingers twitching as if she played a lute or balalaika. They watched her move the two skeletons as they fitted keys to the star shaped locks

The travellers gazed at the scene in horror for a few seconds and then leapt into action. Theocrates loosed an arrow at one of the skeletons, Estevar fired a light bolt at Glykeria. Both attacks failed but the Companions noticed that her Estevar's blue light was tainted with black. Logan uncrooked his fingers releasing the spell and a bolt of green-black energy struck the sorceress squarely in the back. The woman screamed in pain and turned to face them revealing a face that was at once that of a young woman and a rotting corpse, the two aspects phasing in and out in a nauseating way.

"Kharon aid me!" she screamed.

In answer to her unholy plea the water began to roil and heave. From the murky depths a shadowy hooded figure emerged, water dripping from its robes and wickedly sharp spear. Theocrates recognized the creature for what it was, a Boatman of Charon. Charon the deathly pilot whose tomb this was. Logan whispered to the clockwork owl and it took to the air fluttering past the head of the hooded figure trying to distract it. The figure in the water turned to regard the owl for a moment, then turned back to face the Companions.

Theocrates jumped to the first stepping stone, missed his footing and fell with a heavy 'splash', disappearing below the black surface of the lake, the water closing over his head. The Boatman stabbed down with his spear, narrowly missing Theocrates as he hit the bottom of the pool. He surged upwards, discovering with relief that the water was only chest deep. Lashing out with his flail Theocrates struck the figure but did not appear to have harmed it. Yanis jumped onto the stones and tried to help with his spear. His feeble attack was totally ineffective and he saw Atticus arch an eyebrow in surprise. The Boatmen just turned to look at him, his head tilting as if giving him a curious glance.

Atticus successfully crossed the first set of stepping stones and the island, but slipped as he attempted to cross the second set. Rising from the water, he smashed one of the skeletons with his Greatsword, shearing away part of its rib cage. At the entrance to the tomb Logan had managed to twist the Magic energy in the tomb into another spear of light which he hurled as a spell at the already weakened Sorceress. The spell struck her, the green and black energy seeming to envelop her totally before, with a despairing wail, her ghostly figure dissipated. The two skeletons collapsed where they stood a heap of disarticulated bones. Atticus pulled himself from the water and carefully locked the portal, removing the

keys and carefully pocketing them. As the last lock clicked shut the figure of the boatmen was dragged back unwillingly into the turgid pool disappearing from sight.

After much self-congratulations and mutual back-slapping, the Companions began to explore the chamber; levering the lid from the sarcophagus they discovered Glykeria's bones lying on a bed of gold drachma. Around her neck was a rose amethyst pendant and on two of her bony fingers were jewelled rings. The light flickered as Logan grabbed the items of arcane jewellery. A strange look of avarice and darkness in his eyes... Yanis saw that the rings seemed to have sparks of light in them that seemed unnatural. He shuddered and tried to forget it, turning instead to the large wooden chest. Whether it was the sight of his friend's curious expression or his own greed for gold he was never quite sure, but Yanis failed to check the chest for traps properly. There was a ratchetting noise, and an iron spear leaped from the chest and struck him in the torso. There was a lot of blood, but the armour had stopped the worst of it. Yanis grimaced as he removed the armour to see the bruising and then grimaced again at the taste for the foul potion Atticus forced down his throat.

The four of them looked at each and grinned, they had made it! Despite all the odds they had defeated the sorceress, and stopped the demigod Kharon from escaping his tomb. They were battered and bruised, but they had begun to learn to work as a team and were starting to understand the secrets of the Shee, the despotic Elves who ruled this land with a merciless fist.

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As they climbed to the surface, the night air had never tasted so sweet, the Moon had never looked brighter, the sight that met their eyes though turned their hearts to stone. There, nailed to the doorframe of Taverna Stefanos, was the head of the Jereko, the man who had befriended them and sheltered them from harm. They swore then that they would avenge him and kill FeatherStone, the Elf who had killed him. It was a reason to survive, if they became strong enough, maybe they could drive the bastard Elves from this part of Greece, send them back across the wide sea. If they were brave and lucky enough, maybe they could even discover the whereabouts of the last of the Minotaur Architects and their servants the Dwarrow.

The End.