

Olympus Squeaks

M C Neuffer

It's all Greek to me, doesn't mean what people think it does. This Sprite has buzzed around my bedroom all night, tipping over the Zen tower, tossing my D& D dice, and throwing out snide comments on how Batman isn't a real superhero. Her stream of bad-dad knock-knock jokes finally crumbled me.

"Let me see your press credentials," I said. "I don't give interviews to just anyone."

The sparkling thing produced a Delphi-certified press card for the *Muse News*. "Yeah, heard of them," I said. "Kinda tabloid, isn't it... Miss Damian?"

"Hey, a girl's gotta eat. Just a temporary gig until something better comes along. Waddaya say, Benny? A smart sixteen-year-old boy like you can leverage an interview into a BIG DEAL. Merch and fame await."

Screw that. My future is never more than a few days in front of me. No responsibilities, no plans except getting elbow deep in fun. "What's the upside for me?"

"Lifetime subscription?"

I batted the little conniver off my shoulder. "It's free on the net for everyone."

She flitted back and grabbed my collar to bend my ear. "Not the Members Only stuff. Real juicy. AND it gives you inside info about the future. Some of it's legit, straight scoop, real steam heat. Besides, as a Titan-tagged human, you also get..." She looked around as if any normal could see or hear her, "...a seat for any new release you chose from Athena Pictures."

Not bad. When I'd been a resistant guest of Coeus, he took me to the screening for *Twelve Angry Nymphs*. "How long do you need?"

"Three days, a week tops. Starting tomorrow morning. Gotta get my editor's final on it."

"I want a Zone Controller, too... for the summer." I knew she couldn't shoot me a ZC on permanent loan. Coeus had pounded that in my head. Stay in your lane. No uppity aspirations unless you want to be cast into the River Styx.

"You drive it hard, buddy boy, but okay. Just so happens I have a spare one."

"Blue, and not a Roman knock-off." Already have enough junk from there.

"Sure, any color. It's ah... a rental."

This is too easy. ZCs are not something you barter away. "Deal's off if it's not Greek. Now buzz off. I need some sleep."

—

Mom and Dad are still Saturday wallowing in their California King, sleeping in, giving me free rein on the slopes. That gives me at least an hour before thunderbolts from on high announce Hizzoner wants breakfast.

I took the stairs two at a time, then flamed out the front door, slamming it hard enough to shake the pillars of our McCropolis. Fuck 'em. Let my dribbling-siblings deal with them. Got better things to do than stick around waiting for chores to be handed out.

Today's first big decision, left or right. Pick an escape route before the fairies open their wings to spray bitterness and doubt all over the weak-minded. They know where I live, and having them hover over my house all day is a pain. Rather stick my nose up a skunk's ass than catch a whiff of their breath.

My flip-flopped feet are wet from the diamond dew Phoebe cast last night. Morning shadows spread from Mom's wine and cheese wagon next to Dad's low-slung, needy-speedy thing. Mom told her bestie that he bought it because he didn't think his dick was big enough. Giggling conspirators, they clinked their wine goblets.

The Fairies aren't up yet. So, yeah, left or right? South, three doors down curb-bound Harmony Drive, Mr. Harrison is riding his mower in lazy laps, carving yard-wide sweeps with precise four-inch overlaps. He's a disgusting, gorge-bellied goat man. They should pass a law to make him wear a shirt.

North is Ms. Frieda's house. Her husband's a dead warrior, a captain killed in one of those countries that end in stan. He's not cast a shadow for a couple of years now.

Never seen that yellow Hummer parked in her driveway before, one of the big rigs, its ass hanging over the sidewalk. Another short pecker, I bet. The wives of Harmony Drive give her the glare-stare when she ponytail jogs around the neighborhood with her mongrel dog. Gotta admire those Lululemon strides, coming and going.

Damian's buzz sounded a second before she collided with my head, grabbing a fistful of hair to arrest her landing. She leaned over my forehead, big-eyed face upside down two inches from mine.

"Howza my new best buddy today?"

I swatted and missed. "Thought you weren't gonna make it," I said. When I woke up this morning, I prayed she wouldn't or that her editor had better sense than to let me have a ZC. "You got it?"

"Yep. Here you go."

The controller materialized in my right hand. Nice fit. The buttons are right under my fingertips, and the thumb ball is just a witch-twitch away. Sweet. I didn't care much about the promised subscription or the theater ticket since I'd need a Titan to take me there. If this ZC is the real deal, my summer's gonna be awesome. "Hey, the red button's missing. The one Coeus let me use had a red button."

"You kidding me? You want a red button? Why not wish for Zeus's harem? Only gods get the red button." She grabbed my ear and swung down, landing on my shoulder. "You ready to start? I've got an early press time and can't wait around all day."

"Climb aboard," I said.

"You're gonna feel a little pressure," she warned.

It felt like she was squeezing a zucchini into my head. With a final push and pop, she was inside. Her voice echoed.

Lots of room in here. Okay, I'm ready. Go on with your day and pretend I'm not even here.

I wish-tossed the controller into the bag I keep just to the left of reality, then let my mind idle so she could pick through my files.

The Titans swooped down and abducted me when I was fifteen. They bent my brain so I could see Fury Fairies and gave me some talents and senses they said would come in handy in keeping their world and ours at arm's length. My Titan mentor, Coeus, told me to consider those abilities as Fairy repellent. Fucking liar.

Can I use that?

Yeah, you can quote me. He knows what I think of him. You sure you want to hear all this old news?

Yep, raw like that. Gives it punch for the readers.

Since my release, Coeus has been sort of my handler, the kind spies have. There are twelve original Titans, and I guess that means eleven others like me are out there, keeping the edges from curling up, tacking human perception solidly against the underlying tapestry of Olympians, Titans, Nymphs, Fairies, Sprites, and all the other half-breed creeps behind the veil of misty mystery.

Hey, some of those half-breeds are my friends.

You said you wanted raw. Either leave or shut up. I don't need your mouth running. It throws me off.

Now, where was I?

I wasn't missed all those months I was with Coeus. For Titans, time is a cloud, not the one-way stream that traps mortals inside its banks like bumper guards at the bowling alley. They're above all that. Way above, or it may be way out. Doesn't matter.

He instructed me on the finer points of wine pouring. For Coeus, everything from physics to medicine to the nature of all things can be learned through wine pouring. But he didn't give me those lessons. Instead, he taught me how to screw with the Fairies. He's supposed to be the god of wisdom and shit, but I wasn't impressed. Mr. Johnson, my tenth-grade chemistry teacher, seems just as with it as far as that goes and way cooler to boot. I found a baggie of weed in his desk when I was

supposed to be sweeping classrooms after hours as a part-time student job. Righteous stuff. Blew my head off.

Fairies are not the Peter Pan, garden variety type, all long-legged and gossamer winged. Oh, no. They're vicious, dark-soul little shits, with more teeth and claws than brains, the source of chaos in this world. Pandora's vindictive children. You need to get up early to beat them to the punch. Otherwise, they'll scratch the hell out of your brain until sundown. That's what it's been for me since I'm dead or close enough until my contract is up. The difference doesn't matter when you're in the zone, late of Tannersville, New Jersey, where I walk through, but not in.

My musing fractures like sugar glass when Quentin runs up in his chariot, honking a custom horn that sounds like the Titanic coming into port.

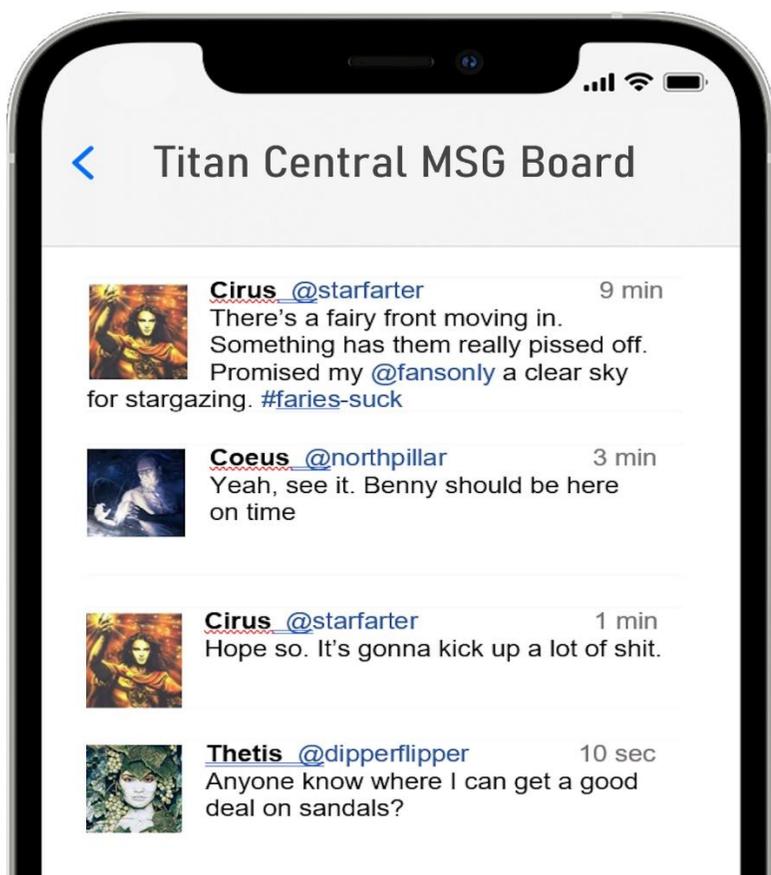
"Hey Benny, you ready to reap and sow?"

Reap and sow is Quint-Squint's tagline for adventure. He doesn't understand the reference, just likes the way it rolls off his tongue. My best friend is a bit blimpy-wimpy and needs to wear bigger tee shirts, so it doesn't take much to fall into the adventure category. I lean that way too, not interested in contact sports except the kind Frieda schooled me in last summer.

Quint leans over to open the passenger door for me. He points at the left side of his head, pure shaved, a big grin plastered under his big nose. Bet that drove his mom ballistic. His dad probably just grunted. The handle on the passenger side door is gone. There's lots of things missing from his old Toyota, no radio, no back seat, but a ride is a ride. Inside it smells like rancid French fries. "Pool," I say.

For demi-petty wannabe teen gods, summer begins on the first hot day of May, a jailbreak until September when the net catches us, tossing the whole lot back into high school to finish our sentence. We're lotus eaters, lolling around like seals at the William's Street Community Center. The local Aphrodite holds court there under the lifeguard umbrella in her red one-piece with the white cross stretched over her left boob like a bombing target. Even the streak of silver-paste zinc ointment on her nose doesn't break the spell. She's an older woman, a college junior blasting her siren song. It's like watching porn when she's up there, slathering on the Coppertone.

"Too early," Quint says before whipping his four-banger asthmatic steed east toward the beach. Skaters congregate there before the crowds choke up the boardwalk and smush ice cream in their faces, not caring where they walk. Quint's not a skater, and neither am I. Tried it once and got knee scabs for life. Our lure is the air-conditioned gaming dens strung along the same concrete promenade the boarders use to show off their painted planks, smooth moves, and attitudes.



Three boarders sweep by, wheels grinding like pepper mills. Broken-hearted, Quint laced his fingers through the steel dropdown grate. "Awe crap, Big Bob's closed."

"There's always Fancy Nancy's." He's gonna bitch about that. The games there are for girls, but a few are okay, and the girls wiggle their asses when they play.

Quint's face bunched. "Nancy's is a mile down."

"It's not that far. We can catch the golly-trolley when it loops back."

He looked at his phone, shoved it in my face, showing me the time, huffing, "Not running yet."

"We can stop halfway. I'll buy slushies. Grape ones."

Quint's pigeon-toed, so walking isn't tops on his snappy-happy list, but he's addicted to grape slushies. Won't need to bring out my joystick. I can use that to prod people but not get them to do anything they wouldn't ordinarily do. You need a red button for that.

What do you see in that freak?

Quentin? He's been my buddy since third grade.

You could do better.

Shut the fuck up, butt face.

I'm finding a lot of dusty junk in here. What's with the pile of old candy wrappers?

Leave my shit alone.

Quint's got his shades drawn, sucking down a grapey while trying to look cool for the girl wheelers. They've got legs way out of his league, but he gets a few smiles on the bench. A creepy feeling runs up the back of my neck. Across the boardwalk, an attendant at a tee shirt stand is waving his attention flag. Coeus looks like a homeless eighty-year-old muscle beach reject. I give Quint the old *I'm gonna check it out* signal. He shrugs and keeps slurping.

"Whatcha doin, old man?"

"Watch your mouth, boy, or I'll fade you into a stuffed elephant on the Midway. Who's your rider?"

"Damian from *Muse News*."

Hey, Coeus. Portend much?

"Keep that Sprite out of my hair. We have a problem."

I hate it when he says we. It means I'm gonna be busting my ass while he takes some shade. "What?"

"Fairy front's moving in. Big one. Going to hit this beach in," he checks his non-existent watch, "thirty minutes."

"What's their buzz?"

"Don't know, but it looks bad. Could mess things up for the whole summer."

"And as usual, you Titans are just going to sit back and watch it happen."

He gave me a practiced pained look, his bushy eyebrows turning inward. "You know Zeus would clobber us if we did. Those are his fairies." He steps to the middle of the boardwalk, waving his banner, bellowing, "Teeeee Shirts, Teeeee Shirts. Get 'em here, Teeeee shirts."

I snatched my controller and called up a scanner. Sure enough, a ball of those beasties is headed straight for us. Looks like Quint is going to be on his own today. I did a quick catalog check on Greekapedia to see what fairies hate the most. Okay, bottle-fly bombs are the weapon de jour.

Nothing but dropping and running for me. I rolled my neck and shoulders, then did a few deep knee bends. The controller will help, but if I could skate, it would be easier. My first drop is in the trash can next to Quint's bench. Beginning at the boardwalk midpoint, I'll have to double back to cover it all.

BREAKING NEWS

An angry Fairy horde of mythical proportion is on the loose. Sprite Damian Dally, our on-scene reporter, says the swirling mass is gaining strength over the Western Atlantic.

Titian Cirus issued a statement saying he suspects the breakout is in response to half-nymph Helles spreading happiness and joy ahead of the annual Eleusinian Festival set to begin tomorrow at the Pillar of Hercules Arena in Paramus, New Jersey.

Organizers say the pre-celebration Wine and Debauchery Tent Event will be held as scheduled. Tickets are on sale.

A Fairy spokesperson had no immediate comment on the looming crisis.

Stay tuned for future updates.

Film at 11.

When I got back to Quint, a cute little skater babe was leaning over the back of his bench, giggling at him for all she was worth. Suspicious, very suspicious.

What the fuck is SHE doing here?

Who is she?

Antiope, daughter of Ares. The little bitch horned in on me when Demeter and I were just about to hook up at the last spring rites.

The slim thing, rigged out in knee, elbow pads, and not much else, looked at me. "Is that a controller in your pocket, or are you happy to see me?"

"I'm sort of busy. If you would just—"

"I know. That's why I'm here," she said. "Hi there, Damian."

Fuck you.

"Such a mouth. Anyway, Benny, I'm mad at daddy and want to prove I'm my own goddess. Sooo... I'm your ride today. I hate those little stink bug F'ers."

Majestic wings blossomed from her shoulders; gossamer feathers ruffled in the breeze. She gave her board a toe tap, shaping it larger, sprouting handrails.

Quint, missing the attention he'd been getting, twisted around. "You two know each other?"

His lips were as purple as the bleeding streak on his tee shirt. I pressed the green button, wiping memory of the last five minutes and blanking us from his brain. He turned back to his previous visual pursuits

"Climb aboard. Not much time left."

Don't trust her. Those tits are fake.

Shut up.

"Yeah. What he said."

Coeus was nowhere in sight, the coward. Swallowing my justified fear of heights, I stepped on the flyer. "South," I commanded just before *holly shit* thoughts squeezed my brain.

In five minutes, we'd bombed every municipal trash can on the boardwalk with hidden buzzers, waiting for rolling thunder to swarm across the horizon.

"We need to find a stable high point," said Antiope.

"Fat chance of finding that on the Jersey Shore."

"The Ferris wheel looks good."

"You said stable."

Antiope's wings took on a furious beat, launching us skyward. "Have you no faith in American steel?"

The damn thing swayed and bucked when we landed in the top car. I peeked over the edge. Bad move. My Pop Tart breakfast plunged to the concrete.

"See ya!"

"Wait!"

"Sorry. Got tickets to the orgy in Paramus. Can't be late."

Panic, yes. Mild, no. Horror, yes, when I looked seaward at a sky black with Fairies rolling in like concert fans to an open seating venue, but without the politeness.



Do you know what you're doing?

Sort of.

SORT OF? Hang on, I'm zipping outta here.

I aimed the controller, sweeping the boardwalk.

Blue button

Left

Up

Left

Down

Nothing. It was like I was holding a Magic 8 Ball. *Try again later.* I looked up. Fairies had crossed the surf line, roiling waves of the little snits.

Blue

Up

Left

Down

The eruption along the boardwalk unleashed ten billion bottle flies. Each trash can was like a mini-Mount Vesuvius, unnoticed by tourists and locals who skated, sauntered, slurped, licked ice cream, and scratched their asses. Their moods are in for a seismic shift.

The sky battle sounded like a jam-jarred bumble bee amplified a million times as the flies sought out the fecal stench of the Fairies, gnawing their hind ends. Waves of the warriors on each side buffeted the Ferris wheel, pitching it left and right. I wedged myself in the too-wide seat to keep both hands on the controller. Green->Up++ unleashed slicing swats the size of garage doors against the horde as they dropped like flies, and the flies dropped like flies, and the crowd below dropped like, well, not like flies, more like they crumpled under the descending misery. I'll have to clean that up later.

The wheel tipped, then came back upright as the black storm tornadoed around me. Then it tipped again. This time it kept going in a slow-motion plunge over the edge of the boardwalk, American steel failing. I let go of the controller as the beach rushed to meet me.



Hey, I'm not dead yet.

Just a contingency in case... well, you know.

I scraped beach mung off my face and spat out sand and salt water. My eyes met Coeus' ugly mug staring down at me.

His lips were moving, so he was lying. "You've got only four lives left, kid. Better choose wisely in the future. Three years left on your enlistment, kiddo."

Damian chimed in,

You owe me for that busted controller. It was a rental.