Maz Evans

# BEYOND THE ODYSSEY

WHO LET THE GODS OUT? BOOK 3

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*For my Lili*

*Who makes every single day a voyage of discovery.*

*Thank you for a magical journey, baby girl.*

Also by Maz Evans

*Who Let the Gods Out?*
*Simply the Quest*

# 1. Fail to Prepare, Prepare to Fail . . .

'. . . and no one is to froth cappuccinos with a thunderbolt, no one is to turn anyone into a warthog and no one is to fart the national anthem. Are we clear?'

Elliot spoke sternly to the array of ancient Greek immortals cleaning his kitchen. For most people, this might be odd. But for Elliot Hooper, this was just another Friday.

'Roger that – receiving loud and clear, old boy,' said Zeus, King of the Gods, scraping the grease off the oven with the tip of a golden thunderbolt. 'Bestest behaviour. You can count on us.'

'Elly, we wouldn't dream of making today any

harder for you,' said Aphrodite, Goddess of Love, spraying her 'Freshly Baked Bread' air freshener around the kitchen. 'We know everything has to go well. We'll be as silent as Athene's fan club.'

'Absolutely,' said the Goddess of Wisdom, shooting her sister a death stare while crocheting a lace tablecloth from leftover spaghetti. 'We won't let you down.'

Elliot smiled gratefully. He'd been dreading this day ever since he received the Latest Really Scary Letter. Actually, he'd been dreading it a lot longer than that.

'So, I have a few notes,' said Virgo, shuffling a deck of index cards. 'Now when you say I'm not to be – and I quote – "an epic butthead", please clarify, am I allowed to share my peerless opinions?'

'No,' said Elliot.

'Lighten the mood with some well-observed humour?'

'Definitely no.'

'Prepare some refreshments?'

'The carpets still haven't recovered from your last catering attempt.'

'My pigs in blankets were highly optimal!' Virgo huffed.

'They were actual pigs!' Elliot cried. 'In real

blankets! And no.'

'Perhaps I should arrange some entertainment? I could sing . . .'

'No. And please, God, no.'

Virgo's brow furrowed.

'I do not understand,' she said. 'It's almost like you don't want me to say or do anything today.'

'Noooo – you've got it all wrong!' cooed Elliot. 'It's *exactly* like I don't want you to say or do anything today. Epic. Butthead. Don't be one.'

'But I . . .'

Zeus's gentle hand on Virgo's shoulder silenced the former Constellation. It always did. Of all the King of the Gods' divine powers, Elliot was particularly grateful for this one.

Elliot closed his eyes and tried not to think of all the ways today could go wrong. It was all going to be fine. Everything was fine. He just had to convince *them* of that. Who was he kidding? He had to convince *himself* of that . . .

Elliot ticked off a couple of items on his list and put the pencil in his pocket, where it immediately fell through the large hole growing inside.

'When will you let me fix those trousers?' sighed Athene, as she had for weeks.

'When I put them in the wash,' answered Elliot, as he had for weeks.

‘Morning, son,’ yawned a voice from the stairs.

Elliot smiled up at his father. He immediately felt better. In fact, everything had felt better since Dave Hooper had arrived at Home Farm two months ago. He’d told Elliot so many cool stories about being in prison, he’d taught him how to pick locks, all the places you can safely hide sweets you shouldn’t have . . . but most of all, he had insisted on looking after Josie at night.

‘You don’t sleep much in prison. Besides, I’m more of a night owl. You need your beauty sleep. Lots of it,’ he’d said with his cheeky wink.

Elliot didn’t know how he’d managed before Dave came home. Now he was getting more sleep, everything seemed more manageable. His moods were brighter, he was doing better at school, his mum was . . .

He tried to ignore the fear that prickled in his throat. It was hard to say what Mum was now. She was so far away from herself, he hardly recognized her. Most of the time she simply sat staring into space. She barely spoke any more. She barely did anything any more.

In fact, there was only one thing that seemed to wake Josie from her conscious slumber.

And that was Dave.

Dave’s return might have made Elliot feel

happier, but for Josie, he'd had quite the opposite effect. Every time Dave came near her, she'd snarl and shout at him.

'You're not my husband!' she'd screech. 'You're an imposter! Get out of my house!'

It was so sad. But, Elliot reasoned, she wasn't herself. She was so confused now, and it was over ten years since she'd last seen her husband. All the time Dave had been in prison, Josie's mind had been steadily getting worse. She'd remember him eventually and calm down again, he told himself. Of course she would. She had to.

'How's Mum?' he asked hopefully.

'Asleep,' said Dave. 'Best thing. Listen – I'm going to make myself scarce today. Y'know – like we talked about . . .'

Elliot nodded. His dad knew best. Dave had explained that coming out of prison was a big shock and he needed time to adjust. Besides, he wasn't sure how the Little Motbury community was going to respond to a convicted armed robber returning to the village, so he'd suggested they keep his return quiet for now. It made perfect sense. Elliot hadn't told a soul.

'Good luck today, son,' said Dave, putting his hands on Elliot's shoulders. 'You've got this.'

'Thanks.' Elliot grimaced. He was going to

need a lot more than luck. He wished his dad could stay with him – he could do with his support. But today was not the day to tell the world that his ex-offender father was living with him.

Because today was the day that the school welfare team was coming to assess Elliot's home life.

According to their letter, this was an 'informal visit' that was 'nothing to worry about'; it was purely to make sure that Elliot had everything he needed 'to feel happy and safe'. Dave said that if the authorities knew that a recent convict was living at Home Farm, it would make a lot of things very 'formal', give them 'plenty to worry about' and Elliot would not feel 'happy and safe' if he were taken into care. So Dave was going to stay out of sight in the fields beyond the farm.

'Laters, all,' Dave chirped at the Gods, who waved cordially.

Dave had taken the news of his son's new life surprisingly well. Once he'd got his head around the fact that a family of ancient Greek Gods were living in his home, that an evil Death Daemon would rule the Earth unless Elliot beat him to four Chaos Stones capable of controlling the elements, and that the fate of the world rested on

his thirteen-year-old son's shoulders, Dave had slotted into life at Home Farm with impressive ease.

Elliot looked at the Gods' frozen smiles as Dave walked outside. He couldn't quite put his finger on it, but if anyone was struggling to adjust to the new arrangement, it was them.

Elliot returned to his checklist.

'Have all the household devices been sorted?'

'Nearly there,' growled two feet sticking out of the downstairs loo. Elliot peered in to see Hephaestus, God of the Forge, adjusting the toilet with a spanner. 'Dishwasher, fridge, cupboard and oven are all deactivated,' he growled. 'Upstairs loo don't play Mozart no more, but this one still belts out a bit of Beethoven if you do a number two. I'll sort it, never you mind.'

'Thanks,' said Elliot. He was relieved that the kitchen wasn't going to spontaneously cook a roast beef dinner and clean it up, but he really didn't want today's visitors to poop to Beethoven either.

'I've transformed everything in the shed to look like it belongs on a farm,' said Athene, 'and Aphrodite has sprayed her Positivity Potion so that the welfare officers see everything in a good light. Fortunately, it won't be required to work on her outfit. No potion in the world could help that.'

Aphrodite pouted. 'I'm going to check on

Hermes,' she said. '*He* always appreciates my unique style.'

'Especially now he's asleep,' muttered Athene, returning to her crocheted spaghetti.

'I'll come with you,' said Elliot. He needed some fresh air.

He followed Aphrodite up to the shed, where the Messenger God was lying unconscious on a sumptuous feather bed.

Elliot tried to swallow down the sadness he felt every time he saw Hermes. Every day he – they all – hoped that the Messenger God would wake up, after Nyx, Goddess of the Night, shot him with a poisoned arrow at Stonehenge. Since that dreadful night, there had been no sign of Nyx, nor of her sons, Thanatos, Daemon of Death, and Hypnos, Daemon of Sleep. But the Messenger God slept soundly on. Would he ever wake up? Elliot missed his 'bruvva from annuva muvva' so much.

'Hi, bruv,' he whispered, giving Hermes an unrequited fist bump. 'Sorry I've not been up today. It's been a bit . . .'

*E, mate,* he knew Hermes would say if he could. *Not being funny or nothing, but today's gonna be like a porcelain piñata. You're, like, totes gonna smash it! BOOOOOOOOOOM!*

But Hermes didn't say anything. Just like he hadn't yesterday. Just like he probably wouldn't tomorrow.

'Sweetie,' Aphrodite whispered to her brother, 'I just need to hide you away for a bit. I'll be right here. Sleep well.'

The Goddess of Love kissed Hermes softly on the cheek, before removing a translucent spray bottle from her pocket. She sprayed it gently around the Messenger God, and as the vaporous mist settled over him, he slowly started to fade from view.

'Invisibility Potion,' Aphrodite winked at Elliot. 'Remind me to brew you up a batch.'

Before Hermes disappeared entirely, Elliot gave him another gentle fist bump and made his way back towards the farmhouse. He shook the sadness out of his head. He had other things to worry about today.

'Virgo, have you evicted the gorgons from the downstairs bathroom?' Elliot said, consulting his clipboard.

'Absolutely,' said Virgo stiffly, grabbing her school bag and walking quickly towards the stairs. 'Now if you'll just excuse me . . .'

'Open the bag,' sighed Elliot.

'No,' said Virgo firmly. 'I have private things in

here. Girl things.'

Normally Elliot would have run a mile. Girl things were . . . gross. But he wasn't falling for it today.

'You're about as private as Wembley Stadium,' he said. 'Open the bag.'

'I will not, I—'

'Virgo,' said Zeus softly, but firmly. 'Do as he asks. Please.'

Virgo stood motionless as she figured out what to do. She reminded Elliot of the computers at school when they froze with the little wheel spinning in the middle of the screen.

Eventually – reluctantly – she handed Elliot the bag.

'Thank you,' said Elliot, pulling back the zip. 'Now what have you—'

'PLLLLLLLLOP!' squealed a thin little voice. What looked like an enormous green bogie leapt from the bag and started bouncing around the kitchen.

'Gorgy!' said Virgo sternly as the bogie jumped across the Gods' heads like stepping stones.

'Gorgy?!' Elliot winced, swatting the bouncing bogie off his head. 'You don't mean you've—'

'GORGY!' Virgo shouted, bringing the bogie to an abrupt halt. 'Come here at once!'

Gorgy sheepishly unfurled and shuffled back towards Virgo. Elliot looked at the curious creature. He was small, no bigger than a football, and almost as round. His green pot belly stuck out over his ragged trousers, while his wild green hair flowed around his little round face and snouty nose.

'Virgo!' chided Athene. 'That's an infant gorgon! They're dangerous! You can't keep one as a pet!'

'He's not a pet,' said Virgo condescendingly. 'Gorgy—'

'Gorgy the gorgon?' scoffed Elliot. 'Original name for a pet . . .'

'He is *not* a pet!' Virgo huffed. 'I am merely studying Gor . . . this . . . creature to further understand Elementals. Our relationship is purely professional, not emotional. Why, I have no more regard for this creature than—'

'Mama!' cried Gorgy, holding his arms out to Virgo.

'A-ah,' stammered Virgo nervously, 'I am teaching Gor . . . the creature . . . the basics of language.'

She held up a cup.

'Gorgy – what is this?'

'Plop!' squealed Gorgy.

'You see!' Virgo said triumphantly. 'He said "cup"!'

'He said "plop",' said Elliot. 'As in, "You are a great big plop."'

'Gorgy,' Virgo continued, raising a plate. 'Tell Mam . . . Tell *Ms* Virgo what we call this.'

'Plop!' Gorgy squealed again.

'Come along, Gorgy, we practised this.' Virgo scowled, holding up a fork. 'What do we call—'

'THIS!' yelled Hephaestus, charging towards the young gorgon with his bronze axe. 'Come 'ere, you little blighter!'

'Gorgy! No!' cried Virgo, standing defensively in front of her pet gorgon.

But Gorgy had other ideas. He instantly rolled back into his bogie-ball and bounded around the kitchen while Hephaestus charged after him, axe aloft. Within seconds, the neat and tidy kitchen was destroyed: food, plates, mops – anything that Gorgy could lay his hands on – were thrown at the immortal blacksmith, who heaved his axe to no avail.

'STOP!' Elliot yelled, just as Gorgy found a safe spot beyond Hephaestus's axe on top of the cupboards.

Hephaestus froze with his axe above his head and looked apologetically at Elliot. Everyone in the kitchen surveyed the carnage.

'Sorry, young'un,' he said. 'I'll tidy it up. Honest.'

'Gorgy!' Virgo cried. 'Gorgy – come to Mama!'

But Gorgy wasn't going anywhere. He screwed his little face up into a ball, which made him look like an angry pea. Strands of green hair started to wave around his face. Elliot noticed that they weren't hair at all – they were little thin snakes. And they were hissing at Hephaestus.

'Bad! Man!' shouted Gorgy, pointing at Hephaestus's axe.

'You see!' beamed Virgo. 'I taught him that!'

'BAD PLOP MAN!' Gorgy shouted. The snakes stood on end and gave a deafening hiss. The sound travelled in a mass of swirling air, encircling Hephaestus's axe in a blizzard of hissing, until the bronze head started to flop, like butter on a barbecue. The stout wooden handle wilted in Hephaestus's hand, rendering his axe as deadly as a wilted daffodil.

'WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?!' he shouted at Gorgy.

'Er, Gorgy – time to go in your cage,' said Virgo, bundling the baby gorgon into her arms and rushing him upstairs.

'You should count yourself lucky,' sighed Athene. 'An adult gorgon can turn anything to stone. A youngster like Gorgy can only muster softer materials.'

'He turned a wasp into a lump of chalk yesterday,' yelled Virgo proudly from upstairs.

'You see!' shouted Elliot. 'This is exactly what I'm talking about! This is what cannot happen today! You guys have got to stop . . . being you!'

The Gods looked mortified. The gentle ring of Hermes's iGod pierced the tense silence.

'Er, shall I?' said Athene quietly.

'Why not?' sighed Elliot, surveying the devastation in his kitchen. How was he ever going to persuade the authorities everything was normal? He couldn't remember the last time it had been.

'Hello?' Athene said into the phone. 'She is . . . Yes, of course . . . Yes, I'll inform her immediately.'

Everyone looked quizzically at the Goddess of Wisdom.

'Virgo, that was the Zodiac Council,' she shouted up the stairs. 'They need you up in Elysium, right away.'

'Now?' said Virgo, reappearing in the kitchen. 'But I can't possibly leave Elliot at this critical time. My presence here is vital. He needs me to support him. He needs me to advise him. He needs me to—'

'Go!' said Elliot forcefully, pushing her towards the door.

'Are you sure?' said Virgo. 'I was planning to

serve some fairy cakes. With genuine fairies . . .'

'Take Peg,' said Zeus, opening the door before Elliot pushed Virgo straight through it. 'We'll see you later.'

'Well, if you think you can manage without—'

The slam of the front door confirmed that he could.

'One down,' muttered Elliot under his breath. He sighed and looked around the chaos as the Gods started to clean up after an angry baby gorgon. Today was going to be a very, very long day.