PEREGRINE QUINN

AND THE MASK OF CHAOS



ASH BOND

Piccadilly

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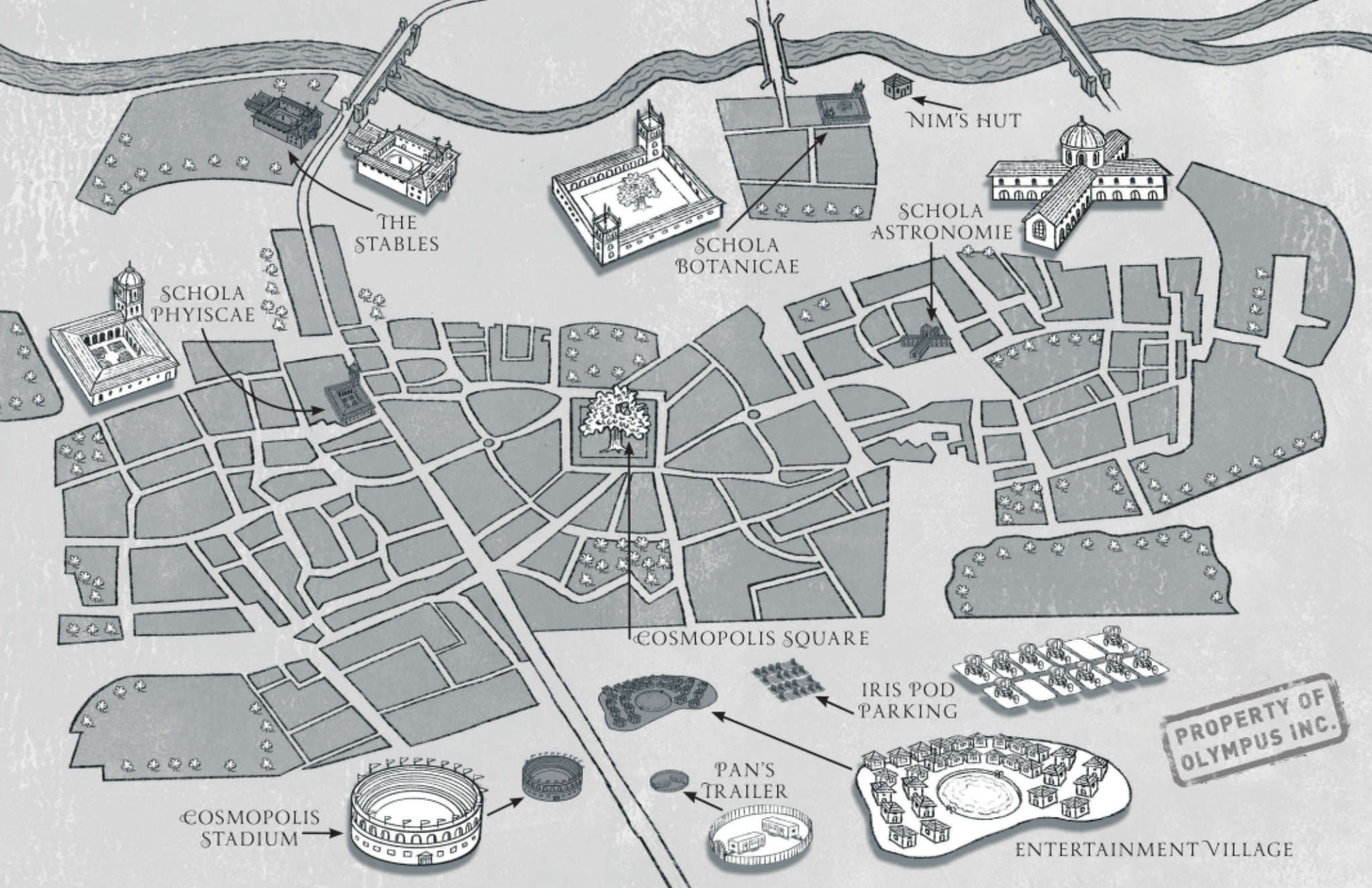
To all the women who teach us how to fight,
and to my niece Anna, who fought so hard to be here.



COSMIC GAMES CHAMPIONS

COSMIC	OFFICIAL GAMES COLOUR	CHAMPION
Apollo	Lilac	Tappis Holmes
Artemis	Violet	Tia Holmes
Hephaestus	Orange	Faizan Khan
Dionysus	Maroon	Belladonna Knox
Poseidon	Sea blue	Petra Luda
Hermes	Green	Cormac Rodriguez
Aphrodite	Yellow	Cassius Rose
Athene	Storm blue	Peregrine Quinn


NIM'S HUT
THE STABLES
SCHOLA BOTANICAE
SCHOLA ASTRONOMIE
SCHOLA PHYISCAE
COSMOPOLIS SQUARE
IRIS POD PARKING
PROPERTY OF OLYMPUS INC.
PAN'S TRAILER
COSMOPOLIS STADIUM
ENTERTAINMENT VILLAGE

Girl with wings who soars so far
You do not know yet who you are.



1

ROWAN

Location: HekTek Laboratories, Level Seventeen,
Olympus Inc., the Mountain, the Cosmic Realm
CosDate: 300.23.257

It should have been easy to stay awake at a crime scene, but Trainee Librarian Rowan Strong was taking no chances. This time. She took a long sip of her Cospuccino and slid another pile of paperwork towards her.

Since the Alexandria Incident, Rowan's primary job at Cosmic Sprite Investigations had been to sort through what was left of Hekate's lab and put it into two piles: 'Suspicious?' and 'Suspicious!' It was a fiddly and incredibly mundane assignment.

A smile spread over Rowan's tired face as she typed the archive number into her CosPad. After so much excitement, this was exactly what she needed: calm, structure and stationery. Fighting back a yawn, she picked up a piece of lavender-scented paper

from the top of the nearest pile.

'Ow!' A thin green line appeared on the ridge of Rowan's thumb. She blinked back tears as she pulled a PaperPlaster from her portable first aid kit. 'All part of the job,' Rowan muttered sombrely as she wrapped the plaster around her thumb. Paper cuts, after all, were the Librarian's battle scars.

She was about to drop the offending paper into the 'Suspicious?' box when she saw an equation scribbled in the margin. 'Hmm.' Rowan paused. This was likely CosTech-related, but might also be a spell of some kind. Best to be safe.

Wiping Cospuccino froth from her nose, Rowan snapped a clip onto the paper and dropped it gently into an almost-full box marked 'Suspicious!', where it landed with a satisfyingly sensible *swish*.

Rowan's gaze skated over the chrome-topped benches to a poster showing a perky, gap-toothed weather sprite demonstrating the correct way to hold a beaker. Rowan narrowed her eyes. The longer she spent in the lab, the more she understood that underneath all these clean lines and chrome was a hot mess of paperwork, potion vials and (evil) artefacts. Turns out, not only was Hekate a psychopathic super-villain, but she was also a teensy bit of a hoarder.

Rowan unclipped a roll of blue-and-white CSI evidence tape from her belt. It was amazing that the wider population still thought that Hekate was just 'missing'. Somehow Sibyll's team had managed to keep the truth out of *The Muse Letter* – the truth being that Hekate had been using her position as Grand Architect to bring back the chaos goddess, Discord.

Rowan closed the box and stretched the tape across it, holding the end out. 'FlutterBug?' She tapped the CosBug that was napping on her collar. 'If you wouldn't mind . . . ?'

The CosBug clicked then, without moving, shot a laser beam towards the end of the tape, which sizzled, then split.

'Thank you.' Rowan nodded as she smoothed the tape down. A job well done. This might not be the most glamorous of tasks, but somebody had to do it, and she was glad it was her. It had to be, really, as Rowan was one of the very few people who knew about Hekate's betrayal. Plus, all other CSI staff were busy with preparations for the Cosmic Games.

The Games. Rowan rolled her eyes. She seemed to be about the only one in the whole of Cosmopolis who wasn't excited.

Her sisters Hazel and Willow had already picked their favourite champions; they'd returned home last week proudly sporting Games T-shirts with flashing apples – Hazel's orange and Willow's blue. They'd hardly made it through the door before Rowan's dad demanded that they take them off.

He was right. Olympus Inc. officials weren't allowed to show their champion allegiances before Games Day. It was favouritism, and as senior CSI operatives the Strong Sisters really should be setting an example.

Rowan sighed. She *knew* these Games were important, she *knew* that they only came around every couple of decades, but surely her sisters had better, more important things to do than wave flags at champions running around arenas after apples?

'WARNING. WARNING.' The CosPad on the desk vibrated.

'Aargh!' Rowan jumped, knocking the 'Suspicious!' box in front of her, which then knocked into one of the crystal vials Rowan had lined up on the table. The vial wobbled, making the bottle next to it wobble, and the one next to that. Rowan held her breath, as the tinkling slowly stopped.

She exhaled. That was close.

'THIS IS YOUR PARTY REMINDER,' the CosPad trilled into the room. *'PORTAL TRANSPORT IN FIFTEEN MINUTES.'*

Rowan's mouth opened. 'What the –'

'THIS IS YOUR PARTY –'

'Yes, I heard you.' Rowan jabbed the button to silence the bleeping CosPad. She would have to have a firm word with Daedalus. They'd just got rid of one rogue Grand Architect with a penchant for messing with official CosTech; they didn't need another one.

As she heaved the sealed-up box off the bench, the vial – which had been still just a Cosek before – tipped, and rolled along the desk.

'NO!' At that moment, the box Rowan was holding split and defecated its load of papers onto the lab floor. *'Flooharght!'* she swore as she dropped the box and scrambled to grab the vial. 'This is *not* –' she threw herself onto the worktop, clawing her fingers along its surface – 'happening.'

This unfortunately, but most definitely, *was* happening. The vial rolled further, just beyond her reach, fell, then smashed onto the floor.

Rowan groaned. *'Flooharght,'* she repeated quietly.

The liquid hissed in reply.

Rowan slid off the worktop and checked the label still visible on the broken bottle: *Cobra spit.* 'Perfect,' she grumbled. If left, that venom would eat through the floor – or at the very least leave a nasty stain. Party reminder or no party reminder, she would definitely be late, and Rowan *hated* being late.

She trudged over to the cleaning cupboard, swung it open and pinged on some plastic safety gloves. Rowan had taken to keeping Nim's CosGogs on her Librarian's hat. They weren't officially part

of her uniform, but they *were* very handy. She snapped the goggles down. And there was no point getting cobra spit in your eyes if you didn't have to, even if it meant bending the rules a little. She frowned. She *had* changed.

Rowan reached into the cupboard again. With just one more year left at the Academy, she was a very-almost-fully-trained Librarian. Why was it, then, that she ended up with a mop in her hand more frequently than, say, a book? Grabbing the bucket, she dragged the mop sulkily along the floor towards the oozing liquid.

FlutterBug buzzed at her collar.

'Yes, I *know* birthdays are important.' Rowan flopped the mop into the spit. 'But it's not like I can leave this, can I?'

A scuffling sound from somewhere nearby made her pause in her scrubbing. FlutterBug clicked, shook its four dragonfly-like wings, then hovered into the air. Rowan nodded. With CosCams covering every inch of the labs, Level Seventeen had some of the best security on the Mountain, but there was no harm in being cautious.

The lights in the laboratory flickered.

'WARNING. WARNING.'

'Yes, I *know*, fifteen –'

'SECURITY CAMERAS DEACTIVATED.'

'What?' Rowan let the mop clatter to the floor, just as the lights went out. 'Oh no.'

Laser light ripped through the air over Rowan's head. She whipped around, to see that there was now a hole seared into the wall where the weather sprite's face used to be.

Rowan ducked behind the workbench, grabbing the mop handle as she went. Fast, light footsteps ran past her. They seemed to be

heading towards the cupboards. There was a click and then a slam as the cupboard doors were hurled open. Rowan's heart pounded. What was this person *doing*? There was nothing valuable in here – OPS and Daedalus had seen to that. What could they possibly want?

She stared at the mop in her hand, then thought about the CosPad on the desk. Instead of her only communication device, she had chosen to grab *this*? She groaned inwardly. Maybe 'making better choices' was something they would cover in her last year at the Academy.

Shifting so she was squatting, Rowan peeked out over the bench. She couldn't see the intruder, but her CosPad was just an arm's length away, its surface a square of light in the otherwise dark room. If she could reach it, she'd be able to call someone and –

Another laser beam whizzed over her head, narrowly missing her hat.

She darted her hand back. OK, new plan. Rowan blinked twice, turning the CosGogs to night vision. She looked up and could just make out FlutterBug's delicate mechanical wings flapping above her. Hope flickered in Rowan's chest. Maybe the CosBug could fly and get help?

The intruder, whoever they were, had apparently had the same thought. Another laser beam shot into the air, then another, aiming directly at FlutterBug, who was veering around the lab as if drunk.

'HEY!' Rowan yelled. She looked around the side of the bench, then ducked back quickly when another laser beam shot out. The workbench fizzed. *Don't be a Flittertwit,* she chided herself. What was wrong with her? One tiny adventure and now she thought she was – what? Some kind of hero? She was a Librarian, for Hera's sake! Everyone knew that was a *much* more difficult job.

There were more footsteps, a slight muttering, and a . . . rustling? Rowan's expression darkened. They'd shot at her CosBug and now they were disrupting her *filing*? She risked another look.

A cloaked, hooded figure was standing with their back to Rowan in front of a row of cupboards. They were using a torch to illuminate the contents of the drawer that they were rifling through. Anger surged within Rowan as they pulled out the drawer, scattering a fountain of paperwork, before dropping it onto the floor with a clatter.

Rowan flicked her gaze back towards the door, which still had CSI evidence tape wrapped across it. Maybe, if she was quiet, she could get there before the intruder found what they were looking for. But she would have to be quick. She inhaled and, on all fours, edged out from behind the workbench. Her sweaty palms slid across the sterile floor as she crept carefully, quietly. She was almost there, she was going to make it, she was –

The intruder's torch swung so Rowan was caught – mid-crawl – in its spotlight. *Flooharght.* Vibrating with fear, Rowan turned her head to see the figure staring straight at her; their eyes mere glints behind a mask. Through the glare of the torch Rowan could see that the figure was clutching something in their gloved hand – something small.

'I am a CSI agent.' Rowan's voice quavered, matching the tremor in her knees. This was almost true, she was very *nearly* an agent. 'And there are others on their way.' This was very much *not* true, not true at all, not with the CosCams out.

The figure began to jog towards Rowan, the torch bouncing in their hand.

Run, Rowan thought, and then immediately shut her eyes and

curled into a ball. She could hear the intruder's footsteps racing towards her. *Thud, thud, thud* and then . . . *THUD.* The figure had leapt *over* her. Rowan uncurled just fast enough to see the hem of the intruder's cloak disappear as they ducked under the CSI tape.

The lights flickered back on. Rowan scrambled up. 'What was *that*?'

There was a low hissing behind her. She whirled around, but it was just the sound of the cobra spit, seeping steadily into the floor.