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opening extract from

# Percy Jackson and the Last Olympian

written by

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# 1 GO CRUISING WITH EXPLOSIVES

The end of the world started when a pegasus landed on the hood of my car.

Up until then, I was having a great afternoon. Technically I wasn't supposed to be driving because I wouldn't turn sixteen for another week, but my mom and my stepdad, Paul, took my friend Rachel and me to this private stretch of beach on the South Shore and Paul let us borrow his Prius for a short spin.

Now I know you're thinking, Wow, that was really irresponsible of him, blah, blah, blah, but Paul knows me pretty well. He's seen me slice up demons and leap out of exploding school buildings, so he probably figured taking a car a few hundred metres wasn't exactly the most dangerous thing I'd ever done.

Anyway, Rachel and I were driving along. It was a hot August day. Rachel's red hair was pulled back in a ponytail and she wore a white blouse over her swimsuit. I'd never seen her in anything but ratty T-shirts and paint-splattered jeans before, and she looked like a million golden drachmas.

'Oh, pull up right there!' she told me.

We parked on a ridge overlooking the Atlantic. The sea is always one of my favourite places, but today it was especially nice – glittery green and smooth as glass, as though my dad was keeping it calm just for us.

My dad, by the way, is Poseidon. He can do stuff like that.

'So.' Rachel smiled at me. 'About that invitation.'

'Oh . . . right.' I tried to sound excited. I mean, she'd asked me to her family's vacation house on St Thomas for three days. I didn't get a lot of offers like that. My family's idea of a fancy vacation was a weekend in a rundown cabin on Long Island with some movie rentals and a couple of frozen pizzas, and here Rachel's folks were willing to let me tag along to the Caribbean.

Besides, I seriously needed a vacation. This summer had been the hardest of my life. The idea of taking a break even for a few days was really tempting.

Still, something big was supposed to go down any day now. I was 'on call' for a mission. Even worse, next week was my birthday. There was this prophecy that said when I turned sixteen, bad things would happen.

'Percy,' Rachel said, 'I know the timing is bad. But it's *always* bad for you, right?'

She had a point.

'I really want to go,' I promised. 'It's just –'

'The war.'

I nodded. I didn't like talking about it, but Rachel knew. Unlike most mortals, she could see through the Mist – the magic veil that distorts human vision. She'd seen monsters. She'd met some of the other demigods who were fighting the Titans and their allies. She'd even been there last summer when the chopped-up Lord Kronos rose out of his coffin in a terrible new form, and she'd earned my permanent respect by nailing him in the eye with a blue plastic hairbrush.

She put her hand on my arm. 'Just think about it, okay? We don't leave for a couple of days. My dad . . .' Her voice faltered.

'Is he giving you a hard time?' I asked.

Rachel shook her head in disgust. 'He's trying to be *nice* to me, which is almost worse. He wants me to go to Clarion Ladies' Academy in the autumn.'

'The school where your mom went?'

'It's a stupid finishing school for society girls, all the way in New Hampshire. Can you see me in finishing school?'

I admitted the idea sounded pretty dumb. Rachel was into urban art projects and feeding the homeless and going to protest rallies to 'Save the Endangered Yellow-Bellied Sap Sucker' and stuff like that. I'd never even seen her wear a dress. It was hard to imagine her learning to be a socialite.

She sighed. 'He thinks if he does a bunch of nice stuff for me, I'll feel guilty and give in.'

'Which is why he agreed to let me come with you guys on vacation?'

'Yes . . . but, Percy, you'd be doing me a huge favour. It would be *so* much better if you were with us. Besides, there's something I want to talk –' She stopped abruptly.

'Something you want to talk about?' I asked. 'You mean . . . so serious we'd have to go to St Thomas to talk about it?'

She pursed her lips. 'Look, just forget it for now. Let's pretend we're a couple of normal people. We're out for a drive, and we're watching the ocean, and it's nice to be together.'

I could tell something was bothering her, but she put on a brave smile. The sunlight made her hair look like fire.

We'd spent a lot of time together this summer. I hadn't exactly planned it that way, but the more serious things got at camp, the more I found myself needing to call up Rachel and get away, just for some breathing room. I needed to remind myself the mortal world was still out here, away from all the monsters using me as their personal punching bag.

'Okay,' I said. 'Just a normal afternoon and two normal people.'

She nodded. 'And so . . . hypothetically, if these two people liked each other, what would it take to get the stupid guy to kiss the girl, huh?'

'Oh . . .' I felt like one of Apollo's sacred cows – slow, dumb and bright red. 'Um . . .'

I can't pretend I hadn't thought about Rachel. She was so much easier to be around than . . . well, than some other girls I knew. I didn't have to work hard, or watch what I said, or wrack my brain trying to figure out what she was thinking. Rachel didn't hide much. She let you know how she felt.

I'm not sure what I would've done next, but I was so distracted I didn't notice the huge black form swooping down from the sky until four hooves landed on the hood of the Prius with a WUMP-WUMP-CRUNCH!

*Hey, boss*, a voice said in my head. *Nice car!*

Blackjack the pegasus was an old friend of mine, so I tried not to get too annoyed by the craters he'd just put in the hood, but I didn't think Paul Blofis would be real stoked.

'Blackjack,' I sighed. 'What are you –'

Then I saw who was riding on his back, and I knew my day was about to get a lot more complicated.

''Sup, Percy.'

Charles Beckendorf, senior counsellor for the Hephaestus cabin, would make most monsters cry for their mommies. He was huge, with ripped muscles from working in the forges every summer. He was two years older than me and one of the camp's best armour-smiths. He made some seriously ingenious mechanical stuff. A month before, he'd rigged a Greek fire bomb in the bathroom of a tour bus that was carrying a bunch of monsters across country. The explosion took out a whole legion of Kronos's evil meanies as soon as the first harpy went *flush.*

Beckendorf was dressed for combat. He wore a bronze breastplate and war helm with black camo pants and a sword strapped to his side. His explosives bag was slung over his shoulder.

'Time?' I asked.

He nodded grimly.

A lump formed in my throat. I'd known this was coming. We'd been planning it for weeks, but I'd half hoped it would never happen.

Rachel looked up at Beckendorf. 'Hi.'

'Oh, hey. I'm Beckendorf. You must be Rachel. Percy's told me . . . uh, I mean he mentioned you.'

Rachel raised an eyebrow. 'Really? Good.' She glanced at Blackjack, who was clopping his hooves against the hood of the Prius. 'So I guess you guys have to go save the world now.'

'Pretty much,' Beckendorf agreed.

I looked at Rachel helplessly. 'Would you tell my mom –'

'I'll tell her. I'm sure she's used to it. And I'll explain to Paul about the hood.'

I nodded my thanks. I figured this might be the last time Paul loaned me his car.

'Good luck.' Rachel kissed me before I could even react. 'Now get going, half-blood. Go kill some monsters for me.'

My last view of her was sitting in the shotgun seat of the Prius, her arms crossed, watching as Blackjack circled higher and higher, carrying Beckendorf and me into the sky. I wondered what Rachel wanted to talk to me about, and whether I'd live long enough to find out.

'So,' Beckendorf said. 'I'm guessing you don't want me to mention that little scene to Annabeth.'

'Oh, gods,' I muttered. 'Don't even think about it.'

Beckendorf chuckled, and together we soared out over the Atlantic.

It was almost dark by the time we spotted our target. The *Princess Andromeda* glowed on the horizon – a huge cruise ship lit up yellow and white. From a distance, you'd think it was just a party ship, not the headquarters for the Titan lord. Then, as you got closer, you might notice the giant figurehead – a dark-haired maiden in a Greek chiton, wrapped in chains with a look of horror on her face, as if she could smell the stench of all the monsters she was being forced to carry.

Seeing the ship again twisted my gut into knots. I'd

almost died twice on the *Princess Andromeda*. Now it was heading straight for New York.

'You know what to do?' Beckendorf yelled over the wind.

I nodded. We'd done dry runs at the dockyards in New Jersey, using abandoned ships as our targets. I knew how little time we would have. But I also knew this was our best chance to end Kronos's invasion before it ever started.

'Blackjack,' I said, 'set us down on the lowest stern deck.'

*Gotcha, boss,* he said. *Man, I hate seeing that boat.*

Three years ago, Blackjack had been enslaved on the *Princess Andromeda* until he'd escaped with a little help from my friends and me. I figured he'd rather have his mane braided like My Little Pony than be back here again.

'Don't wait for us,' I told him.

*But, boss –*

'Trust me,' I said. 'We'll get out by ourselves.'

Blackjack folded his wings and plummeted towards the boat like a black comet. The wind whistled in my ears. I saw monsters patrolling the upper decks of the ship – *dracaenae* snake-women, hellhounds, giants, and the humanoid sea-lion demons known as telkhines – but we zipped by so fast none of them raised the alarm. We shot down the stern of the boat and Blackjack spread his wings, lightly coming to a landing on the lowest deck. I climbed off, feeling queasy.

*Good luck, boss,* Blackjack said. *Don't let 'em turn you into horsemeat!*

With that, my old friend flew off into the night. I took my pen out of my pocket, uncapped it, and Riptide sprang

to full size – one metre of deadly celestial bronze glowing in the dusk.

Beckendorf pulled a piece of paper out of his pocket. I thought it was a map or something. Then I realized it was a photograph. He stared at it in the dim light – the smiling face of Silena Beauregard, daughter of Aphrodite. They'd started going out last summer, after years of the rest of us saying, 'Duh, you guys like each other!' Even with all the dangerous missions, Beckendorf had been happier this summer than I'd ever seen him.

'We'll make it back to camp,' I promised.

For a second I saw worry in his eyes. Then he put on his old confident smile.

'You bet,' he said. 'Let's go blow Kronos back into a million pieces.'

Beckendorf led the way. We followed a narrow corridor to the service stairwell, just like we'd practised, but we froze when we heard noises above us.

'I don't care what your nose says!' snarled a half-human, half-dog voice – a telkhine. 'The last time you smelled half-blood, it turned out to be a meatloaf sandwich!'

'Meatloaf sandwiches are good!' a second voice snarled. 'But this is half-blood scent, I swear. They are on board!'

'Bah, your *brain* isn't on board!'

They continued to argue, and Beckendorf pointed downstairs. We descended as quietly as we could. Two floors down, the voices of the telkhines started to fade.

Finally we came to a metal hatch. Beckendorf mouthed the words, *Engine room.*

It was locked, but Beckendorf pulled some chain cutters

out of his bag and split the bolt like it was made of butter.

Inside, a row of yellow turbines the size of grain silos churned and hummed. Pressure gauges and computer terminals lined the opposite wall. A telkhine was hunched over a console, but he was so involved with his work he didn't notice us. He was about a metre and a half tall, with slick black sea-lion fur and stubby little feet. He had the head of a Dobermann, but his clawed hands were almost human. He growled and muttered as he tapped on his keyboard. Maybe he was messaging his friends on uglyface.com.

I stepped forward and he tensed, probably smelling something was wrong. He leaped sideways towards a big red alarm button, but I blocked his path. He hissed and lunged at me, but one slice of Riptide and he exploded into dust.

'One down,' Beckendorf said. 'About five thousand to go.' He tossed me a jar of thick green liquid – Greek fire, one of the most dangerous magical substances in the world. Then he threw me another essential tool of demigod heroes – duct tape.

'Slap that one on the console,' he said. 'I'll get the turbines.'

We went to work. The room was hot and humid, and in no time we were drenched in sweat.

The boat kept chugging along. Being the son of Poseidon and all, I have perfect bearings at sea. Don't ask me how, but I could tell we were at 40.19° north, 71.90° west, making eighteen knots an hour, which meant the ship would arrive in New York Harbor by dawn. This would be our only chance to stop it.

I had just attached a second jar of Greek fire to the control panels when I heard the pounding of feet on metal steps – so many creatures coming down the stairwell I could hear them over the engines. Not a good sign.

I locked eyes with Beckendorf. 'How much longer?'

'Too long.' He tapped his watch, which was our remote control detonator. 'I still have to wire the receiver and prime the charges. Ten more minutes at least.'

Judging from the sound of the footsteps, we had about ten seconds.

'I'll distract them,' I said. 'Meet you at the rendezvous point.'

'Percy –'

'Wish me luck.'

He looked like he wanted to argue. The whole idea had been to get in and out without being spotted. But we were going to have to improvise.

'Good luck,' he said.

I charged out of the door.

Half a dozen telkhines were tromping down the stairs. I cut through them with Riptide faster than they could yelp. I kept climbing – past another telkhine who was so startled he dropped his Li'l Demons lunchbox. I left him alive – partly because his lunchbox was cool, partly so he could raise the alarm and hopefully get his friends to follow me rather than head towards the engine room.

I burst through a door onto deck six and kept running. I'm sure the carpeted hall had once been very plush, but over the last three years of monster occupation the wallpaper, carpet and stateroom doors had been clawed up

and slimed so it looked like the inside of a dragon's throat (and, yes, unfortunately I speak from experience).

Back on my first visit to the *Princess Andromeda*, my old enemy Luke had kept some dazed tourists on board for show, shrouded in Mist so they didn't realize they were on a monster-infested ship. Now, I didn't see any sign of tourists. I hated to think what had happened to them, but I kind of doubted they'd been allowed to go home with their bingo winnings.

I reached the promenade, a big shopping mall that took up the whole middle of the ship, and I stopped cold. In the middle of the courtyard stood a fountain. And in the fountain squatted a giant crab.

I'm not talking 'giant' like $7.99 all-you-can-eat Alaskan king crab. I'm talking 'giant' like bigger than the fountain. The monster rose over three metres out of the water. Its shell was mottled blue and green, its pincers longer than my body.

If you've ever seen a crab's mouth, all foamy and gross with whiskers and snapping bits, you can imagine this one didn't look any better blown up to billboard size. Its beady black eyes glared at me, and I could see intelligence in them – and hate. The fact that I was the son of the sea god was not going to win me any points with Mr Crabby.

'FFFFfffffff,' it hissed, sea foam dripping from its mouth. The smell coming off it was like a garbage can full of fish sticks that had been sitting in the sun all week.

Alarms blared. Soon I was going to have lots of company and I had to keep moving.

'Hey, crabby.' I inched around the edge of the courtyard. 'I'm just gonna scoot around you so –'

The crab moved with amazing speed. It scuttled out of the fountain and came straight at me, pincers snapping. I dived into a gift shop, ploughing through a rack of T-shirts. A crab pincer smashed the glass walls to pieces and raked across the room. I dashed back outside, breathing heavily, but Mr Crabby turned and followed.

'There!' a voice said from a balcony above me. 'Intruder!'

If I'd wanted to create a distraction, I'd succeeded, but this was not where I wanted to fight. If I got pinned down in the centre of the ship, I was crab chow.

The demonic crustacean lunged at me. I sliced with Riptide, taking off the tip of its claw. It hissed and foamed, but didn't seem very hurt.

I tried to remember anything from the old stories that might help with this thing. Annabeth had told me about a monster crab – something about Hercules crushing it under his foot? That wasn't going to work here. This crab was slightly bigger than my Reeboks.

Then a weird thought came to me. Last Christmas, my mom and I had brought Paul Blofis to our old cabin at Montauk, where we'd been going forever. Paul had taken me crabbing, and when he'd brought up a net full of the things he'd shown me how crabs have a chink in their armour, right in the middle of their ugly bellies.

The only problem was getting to the ugly belly.

I glanced at the fountain, then at the marble floor, already slick from scuttling crab tracks. I held out my hand, concentrating on the water, and the fountain exploded. Water sprayed everywhere, three stories high, dousing the balconies and the elevators and the windows of the shops.

The crab didn't care. It loved water. It came at me sideways, snapping and hissing, and I ran straight at it, screaming, 'AHHHHHHH!'

Just before we collided, I hit the ground baseball-style and slid on the wet marble floor straight under the creature. It was like sliding under a seven-ton armoured vehicle. All the crab had to do was sit and squash me, but before it realized what was going on, I jabbed Riptide into the chink in its armour, let go of the hilt and pushed myself out the back side.

The monster shuddered and hissed. Its eyes dissolved. Its shell turned bright red as its insides evaporated. The empty shell clattered to the floor in a massive heap.

I didn't have time to admire my handiwork. I ran for the nearest stairs while all around me monsters and demigods shouted orders and strapped on their weapons. I was empty-handed. Riptide, being magic, would appear in my pocket sooner or later, but for now it was stuck somewhere under the wreckage of the crab, and I had no time to retrieve it.

In the elevator foyer on deck eight, a couple of *dracaenae* slithered across my path. From the waist up, they were women with green scaly skin, yellow eyes and forked tongues. From the waist down, they had double snake trunks instead of legs. They held spears and weighted nets, and I knew from experience they could use them.

'What isss thisss?' one said. 'A prize for Kronosss!'

I wasn't in the mood to play break-the-snake, but in front of me was a stand with a model of the ship, like a YOU ARE HERE display. I ripped the model off the pedestal and hurled it at the first *dracaena*. The boat smacked her in

the face and she went down with the ship. I jumped over her, grabbed her friend's spear and swung her around. She slammed into the elevator and I kept running towards the front of the ship.

'Get him!' she screamed.

Hellhounds bayed. An arrow from somewhere whizzed past my face and impaled itself in the mahogany-panelled wall of the stairwell.

I didn't care – as long as I got the monsters away from the engine room and gave Beckendorf more time.

As I was running up the stairwell, a kid charged down. He looked like he'd just woken up from a nap. His armour was half on. He drew his sword and yelled, 'Kronos!' but he sounded more scared than angry. He couldn't have been more than twelve – about the same age I was when I'd first arrived at Camp Half-Blood.

That thought depressed me. This kid was getting brainwashed – trained to hate the gods and lash out because he'd been born half-Olympian. Kronos was using him, and yet the kid thought I was his enemy.

No way was I going to hurt him. I didn't need a weapon for this. I stepped inside his strike and grabbed his wrist, slamming it against the wall. His sword clattered out of his hand.

Then I did something I hadn't planned on. It was probably stupid. It definitely jeopardized our mission, but I couldn't help it.

'If you want to live,' I told him, 'get off this ship *now.* Tell the other demigods.' Then I shoved him down the stairs and sent him tumbling to the next floor.

I kept climbing.

Bad memories: a hallway ran past the cafeteria. Annabeth, my half-brother Tyson and I had sneaked through here three years ago on my first visit.

I burst outside onto the main deck. Off the port bow, the sky was darkening from purple to black. A swimming pool glowed between two glass towers with more balconies and restaurant decks. The whole upper ship seemed eerily deserted.

All I had to do was cross to the other side. Then I could take the staircase down to the helipad – our emergency rendezvous point. With any luck, Beckendorf would meet me there. We'd jump into the sea. My water powers would protect us both, and we'd detonate the charges from a quarter of a mile away.

I was halfway across the deck when the sound of a voice made me freeze. 'You're late, Percy.'

Luke stood on the balcony above me, a smile on his scarred face. He wore jeans, a white T-shirt and flip-flops, like he was just a normal college-aged guy, but his eyes told the truth. They were solid gold.

'We've been expecting you for days.' At first he sounded normal, like Luke. But then his face twitched. A shudder passed through his body like he'd just drunk something really nasty. His voice became heavier, ancient and powerful – the voice of the Titan lord Kronos. The words scraped down my spine like a knife blade. 'Come, bow before me.'

'Yeah, that'll happen,' I muttered.

Laistrygonian giants filed in on either side of the swimming pool as if they'd been waiting for a cue. Each was two and a half metres tall with tattooed arms, leather

armour and spiked clubs. Demigod archers appeared on the roof above Luke. Two hellhounds leaped down from the opposite balcony and snarled at me. Within seconds, I was surrounded. A trap: there's no way they could've got into position so fast unless they knew I was coming.

I looked up at Luke and anger boiled inside me. I didn't know if Luke's consciousness was even still alive inside that body. Maybe, the way his voice had changed . . . or maybe it was just Kronos adapting to his new form. I told myself it didn't matter. Luke had been twisted and evil long before Kronos possessed him.

A voice in my head said: *I have to fight him eventually. Why not now?*

According to that big prophecy, I was supposed to make a choice that saved or destroyed the world when I was sixteen. That was only seven days away. Why not now? If I really had the power, what difference would a week make? I could end this threat right here by taking down Kronos. Hey, I'd fought monsters and gods before.

As if reading my thoughts, Luke smiled. No, he was *Kronos.* I had to remember that.

'Come forward,' he said, 'if you dare.'

The crowd of monsters parted. I moved up the stairs, my heart pounding. I was sure somebody would stab me in the back, but they let me pass. I felt my pocket and found my pen waiting. I uncapped it and Riptide grew into a sword.

Kronos's weapon appeared in his hands – a two-metre-long scythe, half celestial bronze, half mortal steel. Just looking at the thing made my knees turn to Jell-O. But before I could change my mind I charged.

Time slowed down. I mean *literally* slowed down, because Kronos had that power. I felt like I was moving through syrup. My arms were so heavy I could barely raise my sword. Kronos smiled, swirling his scythe at normal speed and waiting for me to creep towards my death.

I tried to fight his magic. I concentrated on the sea around me – the source of my power. I'd got better at channelling it over the years, but now nothing seemed to happen.

I took another slow step forward. Giants jeered. *Dracaenae* hissed with laughter.

*Hey, ocean,* I pleaded. *Any day now would be good.*

Suddenly there was a wrenching pain in my gut. The entire boat lurched sideways, throwing monsters off their feet. Four thousand gallons of salt water surged out of the swimming pool, dousing me and Kronos and everyone on the deck. The water revitalized me, breaking the time spell, and I lunged forward.

I struck at Kronos but I was still too slow. I made the mistake of looking at his face – *Luke's face*, a guy who was once my friend. As much as I hated him, it was hard to kill him.

Kronos had no such hesitation. He sliced downward with his scythe. I leaped back and the evil blade missed by a millimetre, cutting a gash in the deck right between my feet.

I kicked Kronos in the chest. He stumbled backwards, but he was heavier than Luke should've been. It was like kicking a refrigerator.

Kronos swung his scythe again. I intercepted with Riptide, but his strike was so powerful my blade could only

deflect it. The edge of the scythe shaved off my shirtsleeve and grazed my arm. It shouldn't have been a serious cut, but the entire side of my body exploded with pain. I remembered what a sea-demon had once said about Kronos's scythe: *Careful, fool. One touch, and the blade will sever your soul from your body.* Now I understood what he meant. I wasn't just losing blood. I could feel my strength, my will, my identity draining away.

I stumbled backwards, switched my sword to my left hand and lunged desperately. My blade should've run him through, but it deflected off his stomach like I was hitting solid marble. There was no way he should've survived that.

Kronos laughed. 'A poor performance, Percy Jackson. Luke tells me you were never his match at swordplay.'

My vision started to blur. I knew I didn't have much time. 'Luke had a big head,' I said. 'But at least it was *his* head.'

'A shame to kill you now,' Kronos mused, 'before the final plan unfolds. I would love to see the terror in your eyes when you realize how I will destroy Olympus.'

'You'll never get this boat to Manhattan.' My arm was throbbing. Black spots danced in my eyes.

'And why would that be?' Kronos's golden eyes glittered. His face – Luke's face – seemed like a mask, unnatural and lit from behind by some evil power. 'Perhaps you are counting on your friend with the explosives?'

He looked down at the pool and called, 'Nakamura!'

A teenage guy in full Greek armour pushed through the crowd. His left eye was covered with a black patch. I knew him, of course: Ethan Nakamura, the son of Nemesis.

I'd saved his life in the Labyrinth last summer and, in return, the little punk helped Kronos come back to life.

'Success, my lord,' Ethan called. 'We found him just as we were told.'

He clapped his hands and two giants lumbered forward, dragging Charles Beckendorf between them. My heart almost stopped. Beckendorf had a swollen eye and cuts all over his face and arms. His armour was gone and his shirt was nearly torn off.

'No!' I yelled.

Beckendorf met my eyes. He glanced at his hand like he was trying to tell me something. *His watch.* They hadn't taken it yet, and that was the detonator. Was it possible the explosives were armed? Surely the monsters would've dismantled them right away.

'We found him amidships,' one of the giants said, 'trying to sneak to the engine room. Can we eat him now?'

'Soon.' Kronos scowled at Ethan. 'Are you sure he didn't set the explosives?'

'He was going *towards* the engine room, my lord.'

'How do you know that?'

'Er . . .' Ethan shifted uncomfortably. 'He was heading in that direction. And he told us. His bag is still full of explosives.'

Slowly, I began to understand. Beckendorf had fooled them. When he'd realized he was going to be captured, he turned to make it look like he was going the other way. He'd convinced them he hadn't made it to the engine room yet. The Greek fire might still be primed! But that didn't do us any good unless we could get off the ship and detonate it.

Kronos hesitated.

*Buy the story*, I prayed. The pain in my arm was so bad now I could barely stand.

'Open his bag,' Kronos ordered.

One of the giants ripped the explosives satchel from Beckendorf's shoulders. He peered inside, grunted and turned it upside down. Panicked monsters surged backwards. If the bag really had been full of Greek fire jars, we would've all blown up. But what fell out were a dozen cans of peaches.

I could hear Kronos breathing, trying to control his anger.

'Did you, perhaps,' he said, 'capture this demigod near the galley?'

Ethan turned pale. 'Um –'

'And did you, perhaps, send someone to actually CHECK THE ENGINE ROOM?'

Ethan scrambled back in terror, then turned on his heels and ran.

I cursed silently. Now we had only minutes before the bombs were disarmed. I caught Beckendorf's eyes again and asked a silent question, hoping he would understand: *How long?*

He cupped his fingers and thumb, making a circle. *ZERO.* There was no delay on the timer at all. If he managed to press the detonator button, the ship would blow at once. We'd never be able to get far enough away before using it. The monsters would kill us first, or disarm the explosives, or both.

Kronos turned towards me with a crooked smile. 'You'll have to excuse my incompetent help, Percy Jackson, but it

doesn't matter. We have you now. We've known you were coming for weeks.'

He held out his hand and dangled a little silver bracelet with a scythe charm – the Titan lord's symbol.

The wound in my arm was sapping my ability to think, but I muttered, 'Communication device . . . spy at camp.'

Kronos chuckled. 'You can't count on friends. They will always let you down. Luke learned that lesson the hard way. Now drop your sword and surrender to me, or your friend dies.'

I swallowed. One of the giants had his hand around Beckendorf's neck. I was in no shape to rescue him and, even if I tried, he would die before I got there. We both would.

Beckendorf mouthed one word: *Go.*

I shook my head. I couldn't just leave him.

The second giant was still rummaging through the peach cans, which meant Beckendorf's left arm was free. He raised it slowly – towards the watch on his right wrist.

I wanted to scream, *NO!*

Then down by the swimming pool one of the *dracaenae* hissed, 'What isss he doing? What isss that on hisss wrissst?'

Beckendorf closed his eyes tight and brought his hand up to his watch.

I had no choice. I threw my sword like a javelin at Kronos. It bounced harmlessly off his chest, but it did startle him. I pushed through a crowd of monsters and jumped off the side of the ship – towards the water thirty metres below.

I heard rumbling deep in the ship. Monsters yelled at

me from above. A spear sailed past my ear. An arrow pierced my thigh, but I barely had time to register the pain. I plunged into the sea and willed the currents to take me far, far away – fifty metres, a hundred metres.

Even from that distance, the explosion shook the world. Heat seared the back of my head. The *Princess Andromeda* blew up from both sides, a massive fireball of green flame roiling into the dark sky, consuming everything.

*Beckendorf,* I thought.

Then I blacked out and sank like an anchor towards the bottom of the sea.