



12. The God of Fashion

Where are we now?' Elliot asked Virgo, struggling to see anything through the nebulous gloom.

'The Asphodel Fields,' Virgo announced, 'the realm just beneath the Earth. When the Olympians ruled, it used to be where the souls of those who were neither particularly good nor particularly bad wandered for eternity. It was a bleak place, where those with unremarkable lives spent infinite hours roaming aimlessly with no particular purpose or end in sight.'

'So what is it now?' Elliot asked.

'A shopping centre,' said Virgo as they emerged

into a brightly lit building.

At first, Elliot thought it looked like any normal shopping centre. Countless shops were arranged on several floors with a glass lift running up the centre. It was only when he noticed that many customers didn't require the lift because they were able to fly, and that there were shops for wing repair, snake-hair blow-drys or spare feet, that Elliot could see this was something different.

They passed a huge furniture shop where two giants were having a ferocious argument over whether they should buy some flat-packed furniture called a Wongledonk or a Fluberstink.

'I don't know what it is about that shop – it brings out the worst in everyone,' muttered Virgo. 'Mind you, Elementals have no idea how to behave in public ...'

'You're a snob,' said Elliot.

'I assume that this is a mortal word for someone whose head is screwed on correctly?'

'It's a mortal word for someone whose head is somewhere,' muttered Elliot as they arrived outside Café Hero.

Inviting aromas floated out of the door as he and Virgo made their way inside the coffee shop, past a large bar steaming away with bubbling machines and surrounded by glass cases full of



tempting cakes and pastries – and the occasional slimy insect with elaborate icing on top.

But a quick look at the inhabitants revealed that this was no ordinary café. The tables were filled with extraordinary creatures, from dragons to fairies, to trolls, to ... he didn't even know what half of them were. To his left, a couple of elves were doing word searches over an espresso, while on his right, a unicorn fed her foal a giant blueberry muffin on the end of her horn.

The two members of staff had long necks supporting at least a dozen heads each and countless arms sprouting from their torsos. This allowed the server to take umpteen orders simultaneously and prepare them all at once, while the waiter could clear at least ten tables at a time, chatting merrily to several different customers. Elliot thought of Mavis in the Little Motbury tea rooms. He and Mum used to time how long it would take her to bring a cup of tea. Her personal best was twelve minutes and six seconds. She could learn a lot from this place.

'Hecatoncheires,' Virgo explained, 'hundred-handed ones. They run the most successful chain of coffee houses in creation – they're springing up everywhere. Ah – Hermes.'

Virgo pointed out a tall, tanned man standing

between a vampire and a pixie in the long queue for the counter. He was dressed from head to toe in designer labels, from his trendy T-shirt to his fashionable jeans. The outfit was topped off with a trilby hat and designer trainers, both of which had small wings on the side.

'Hermes! Hermes!' yelled Virgo over the hustle and bustle, but Hermes carried on singing to himself and gently dancing on the spot.

'Great,' huffed Virgo, as she and Elliot worked their way down the queue, narrowly missing a bite from a grumpy werewolf and apologizing to a Hydra for stepping on one of her tails. Having irritated most of the queue, they reached the winged messenger and Virgo tapped him on the shoulder. Hermes turned around coolly and peered over the top of his designer shades.

'Virgo! Babe! Shut up!' he yelled warmly, waking a nearby pram full of baby goblins. 'Hold tight. I am, like, totally plugged into my iPod – The Sirens have released a new album and I can't switch it off. I'm not even joking. Hang on a sec.'

Hermes fiddled around in the small leather satchel slung across his body and produced a golden screen, about the size of a paperback book, in a tortoiseshell case. He pulled two golden earphones out of his ears and hugged Virgo.



'How are you, darlin?'' he smiled. 'Babe – it's been too long. Love what you're still doing with your hair, totes Golden Age. And oi oi! Who's this then? Finally giving a thousand years of spinsterhood the elbow, you cheeky mare?'

'You two know each other?' asked Elliot.

'Of course – Hermes comes to Elysium all the time,' said Virgo. 'He's the Messenger God.'

'Not to mention – God of Fashion,' announced Hermes, winking into his iGod and taking a picture of himself.

'It's good to see you, Hermes – this is Elliot.'

'Mate!' said Hermes, giving Elliot a massive high-five. 'Nice one.'

'I'll introduce you properly later,' said Virgo. 'But listen, we need your help.'

'Babe,' interrupted Hermes. 'Whatever you want. Gossip. Scandal. Hair that suits your face shape – you name it.'

'We need to find Zeus,' said Elliot. 'It's urgent.'

'Babe – I'm your man,' said Hermes. 'But I'm not being funny or nuffin', you're not going to get any sense outta me until I've had my nectarchino. Hold tight.'

Elliot wasn't confident they were going to get a word of sense out of Hermes at all, but waited patiently while Hermes ordered a skinny-double-

frappa-something-or-other and then followed him to a nearby booth.

'Bosh!' shouted Hermes after draining his cup. 'OK – I have a total nightmare keeping track of everyone, I've had to download a new app – it's called Look@Me!'

'What does it do?' asked Elliot.

'It means that friends can show each other where they are every minute of the day. Mate, seriously – dunno what I did without it,' said Hermes. 'I can spend hours just . . . looking at where people are – it's amazing. Look, I can add you as a friend . . .'

'But I . . .' Elliot protested as Hermes grabbed one of his fingers and pressed it on the screen. A heart icon appeared under his finger.

'Sweet as!' Hermes cheered. 'That's you. Now if I look on the map . . . here we all are!'

On a map of the Asphodel Fields, Elliot's heart icon flashed in Café Hero next to a star representing Virgo and a pair of wings for Hermes.

'I've got all the family on here,' said Hermes, typing 'Zeus' into the iGod. 'So where's Dad?'

A thunderbolt icon pinged up on the map.

'Apparently, he's in a golf club in the New Forest,' said Hermes.

'What's he doing there?' asked Virgo



'On a Saturday? There's usually only one thing my old man is doing ...' said Hermes.

He reached into his leather bag, and pulled out a rolled newspaper which he handed to Elliot.

'Go to the Gossip section – he's nearly always there.'

The newspaper was printed on browning parchment, with a large central banner across the top. *The Daily Argus* was inscribed in classic Greek type, *Keeping an Eye on the Immortal Community*. Small boxes around the edges advertised the paper's contents, from the weather forecast by the Meteoracle Office to horoscopes by Cassandra.

Hermes leant over Elliot's shoulder, and read:

DADDY DAYCARE?

BY CATULLUS, BIRTHS AND RE-BIRTHS CORRESPONDENT

The Minotaur is proud to announce
Twin baby girls, five pounds and one ounce
His wife isn't happy, it's only been days
He's already lost both the kids in the maze

'Aw, bless 'im ...'

'Hermes!' chided Virgo.

'Oh, yeah, sorry babe, attention span of a goldfish. Blah, blah, blah – hold tight, here we are:

Engagements. Listen to this:

JUST MARRIED ... AGAIN

BY HOMER, SOCIETY EDITOR

You've gotta admit it, old Zeus has some faith
He's married more women than Henry the Eighth
His heart has been won by the mortal Petunia
Who's roughly twelve thousand and four years his junior
They're planning a wedding, it's true love of course
Zeus promises this time he's got a divorce
Given his record, the bride must be plucky
You know what they say, three-hundredth time lucky
The honeymoon's planned for the island of Malta
Provided they make it as far as the altar ...

'The sly old dog,' said Hermes with an admiring shake of his head.

'Why aren't you at your dad's wedding?' asked Elliot.

'Mate – not being funny or anything, but if I went to all my dad's weddings, I'd have spent more on toasters than a sea monster spends on swimming hats.'

'I really need to see him,' said Virgo. 'Can you get us there?'

'Are these cheekbones chiselled?' Hermes announced confidently, positioning a pair of



expensive sunglasses on his nose and admiring his reflection in the window.

'Can Charon come with us?' asked Elliot. 'After we've seen Zeus, I really need to get home.'

'Where's home?' asked Hermes.

Elliot pointed to Little Motbury on Hermes's map.

'Oh, it's on the way,' said Hermes. 'I'll get you there much quicker than Charon, bless his salty sandals. We'll drop in on Dad, we'll get you home, bosh.'

'Well, if you're sure . . .' said Elliot.

'Not even joking, mate,' winked Hermes. 'Let's motor!'

'Ah – Hermes?' chimed Virgo, picking up the messenger's forgotten iGod.

'Babe – you're a lifesaver,' sighed Hermes. 'I'd forget my head! Then who'd be on the front cover of Messengers' Health? . . . Anyhoo – Kottos! I'll take another nectarchino to go. We've got a wedding to get to! BOOM.'

