

Selene

A novel by K. E. Weind

Cast of Characters

(not including the *many* Gods and Goddesses)

Epirotes/Eleusinians

Miones: High-Prince and Lord Protector of Eleusis

Iaeiros: Seer

Aenicles: Miones' father (Anax of Epirus)

Thalassa: Miones' wife

Kephalos: Miones' brother

Iakobos: Miones' son

Iokaste: Miones' daughter

Phendeles: One of Miones' guards

Knemichos: Father of a fallen soldier

Sotirios: Soldier who is part of unit under Iakobos

Invaders from the Peloponnese

Iondus: Anax of Mycenae (leader of invasion)

Pankratos: Iondus' eldest son (one of seven archons)

Antiphoebus: Iondus' son (Archon)

Aginai: Iondus' daughter

Alkaios: High-Commander (Archon)

Lysimachus: (Archon)

Kallikrates: (Archon)

Lunios: (Archon)

Androcles: (Archon)

Damianos: High-Priest of Apollo

Gynett: Arcadian nobleman

Others of Note

Melampus: Magus

Naga: A young woman who is currently with child

Abeiron: Naga's husband

Pandoros: Gynett's uncle

Eudokia: Iondus' wife

Yasmene: Aginai's chaperone, and priestess of Artemis

Intro

Violet wreathed Polyhymnia, I beseech thee. May we sing a duet in honor of your mother? May she allow us to span back more than four millennia, to the end of an Age which we so oft call that of Heroes, when there were *at least* as many villains.

Hearken to the bellowing of the Bull of Heaven, which was so violent that Astraea fled to a lofty place. Before the advent of Taurus, the Dioscuri reigned over a race that set the bloody precedent. But prior to the rampant bellicosity, Cancer had an argent, though impious dominion. Men were different then; enjoying an extended adolescence, only to age abruptly, and give up the ghost.

The Flood of Ogyges brought that Age to an end.

Alas, but we forget the oldest, and brightest. Before the Crab ascended, the Lion's throne was golden. A young usurper drove Kronos to the lands of the Etruscans, but Time would go on to rule there exquisitely, and usher in that Golden Age.

Ages, and cycles, and genealogies of power. Recall a time when Chaos ruled, swirling amidst dark infinity. Tendrils danced and coalesced, black arabesques that beget both Erebus and Night. And Night beget Love, Love beget Light. Erebus is the void, but the Light grew brighter. Eos was born, consort to the ancient and venerable darkness; harmony prevailed.

From harmony, order; a coming together. The primordial waters parted, Gaia sprang up. She too had a consort, Ouranos, the firmament. The progeny of Ouranos were dreadful, powers inconceivable. Tremendous forces that quaked and roiled. Three were hideous, one-hundred and fifty heads, three-hundred hands; Ouranos hid them all.

And the Sky beget the Cyclopes, and the Titans. The youngest Titan, Kronos, challenged His father for supremacy, foreshadowing His own demise. Ouranos was thrown down and castrated by His son. The fecund blood from His genitals soaked the Earth, and She was impregnated again. She would birth the Giants, and even worse, the dreaded Erinyes.

Now Kronos beget the first godly generation, chief among which was Zeus, The Cloud Gatherer. Zeus sired a host of others, seven of whom would join him, along with four of his siblings, to rule on Olympus.

See how Mnemosyne has more than heeded our plea! She has taken us further back than was intended, as She is so often wont. But now we return to that *heroic* epoch. While the sun resided with Taurus at the vernal equinox, the Bull had little time remaining as pontiff; the Ram was waiting patiently in heavenly wings.

After the Flood of Ogyges, the gods beget a new race, weaker than those that preceded it, as successive generations fell further from the essence. Weaker than divine is not the same as merely weak though. Compared to the generations that would follow, they were mighty still indeed.

Mighty men, but the better part was blinded by their pride. They waged war constantly, victory the highest of ideals. The Taurean era saw the science of Ares consume the entire world.

Act I

Ch. 1

In the twenty-first year of Aenicles, anax of Epirus. In the third month, on the eighteenth day, Aenicles' eldest son Miones, Lord-Protector of Eleusis, led a third of his father's forces against an invasion. The combatants met on the Field of Xadic, which was located three kilometers east of the sacred polis. Although the equinox was only three days hence, Spring seemed far away still; above, the morning sky was like slate.

Miones stood upon Perinites' Hill, a low plateau on the northwestern edge of the battlefield, in a midnight blue chlamys that billowed on the wind like violent waves. He was accompanied by Iaeiros, his trusted seer and advisor, four warriors who were his royal guard, and a handful of standard-bearers, who relayed directives. The more complicated messages were sent via runners, who would scurry down so as to deliver the commands.

The High-Prince had ordered the standard defenses set, which included shallow trenches, and many sharpened wooden pickets. But these were serving as little more than annoyances, barely slowing an onslaught that seemed unstoppable.

"Tell me what you see." Miones implored of his wizened advisor.

The two had stood in silence for a good while now, observing the ensuing battle; Iaeiros saw much further.

"The Titanomachy wages on." Replied the platinum haired seer. "Allegiances changed; alliances broken."

Another period of silence followed the seer's words.

"And what would She have us do?" Miones asked.

Euros' breath blew in from out over the Saronic Gulf, frigid and salty.

Iaeiros pulled his sackcloth robe tight against the chill before answering, "We are to remain vigilant, young Kadmiloi, and to protect the sanctuary."

* * *

Alkaios pointed left with his spear, and Diokles, his driver, deftly maneuvered the chariot in a sweeping arc. Now they headed straight for an enemy formation. Alkaios stood behind his fellow passenger, a hand on the man's shoulder to steady himself, while he took aim.

He sent his dory flying; the spear struck a man in the upper arm, whipping him round, full circle.

“The spirits demand blood!” Alkaios roared, rallying the mounted soldiers who followed behind him.

He took up another dory, and held it above his head, “For Nike!” He shouted with total confidence.

One of seven Mycenaean archons who had accompanied the anax on the campaign, Alkaios held the esteemed title of High-Commander. He was leading a charge with an abandon that appeared almost reckless, but his confidence came from a recent epiphany. Four nights prior, Selene was fully waxed, and beneath Her gleaming eye, the High-Commander had participated in a hallowed ceremony.

The rite was held at a crossroads just north of the isthmus, and had commenced with Aginai, youngest daughter of Iondus, and novice priestess of Artemis, leading out a fawn by leash. The child’s hair was pulled back in a single braid, and she wore the vestments of her holy office, a flowing black robe with a white ruff collar. She led the animal toward a large bonfire that blazed in the midst of the gathered Peloponnesians.

Around the fire waited her father, her two brothers, and the other five commanders which included Alkaios. Also present was Damianos, high-priest of Apollo, and senior Mycenaean prelate. The fawn struggled desperately against the leash, attempting to pull away from the fire. Aginai bowed before her father, who nodded slightly in acknowledgement.

In Iondus’ left hand he held a copper sica, the blade curved like half a crescent moon, gleaming sharp and true in the firelight. Aginai extended her right hand to her father, offering him the leash. He stepped forward, steadied his daughter’s tiny forearm in his powerful grasp, and cut the tether, freeing the fawn to dart off into the darkness; for the deer is sacred to Artemis.

Then one of Damianos’ novitiates came forward, carrying two tan and white puppies by the scruffs of their necks, one in each hand. One of the puppies was relaxed, while the other whined and squirmed in the young priest’s clutches, as if it sensed its impending fate. Iondus was handed the squirming puppy first, and he summarily ran his dagger across its throat.

The animal’s limbs went still, all but its little tail, which wagged on vigorously for a time. Damianos stepped forward with a stone bowl, collecting the blood as it leaked from the wound. The process was repeated with the other puppy, with its blood being added to the bowl as well. The prelate dipped his right thumb in the liquid, which appeared almost black in the darkness.

Walking up to Iondus, he placed his bloody thumb to the anax’ forehead, smearing a red swathe down between his eyebrows.

“Bull and Eagle.” Said the priest reverently, dipping his thumb back in the bowl.

He then placed his thumb on the right side of Iondus’ forehead, smearing a line horizontally, which intersected the first line midway, “Man and Lion.” He completed the blessing.

Damianos went on to bless the others who were assembled, starting with the anax’ sons, who also held the titles of archons. Pankratios was eldest of the two, while the younger was Antiphoebus. Next came the other five archons, and Alkaios was first among them.

When the prelate placed his wet thumb to Alkaios' brow, it was as if a palpable silence descended. Alkaios could *feel* that he was in communion with the divine. Tilting back his head, he breathed deeply the smoke, and the ferric odor of blood, which together were the sweetest bouquet to a warlord.

Aginai began to speak, not in her usual, nine-year old voice, but a resounding timbre that was awe inspiring. So the Waxing Goddess enthused the child, and spoke through her, and the Peloponnesians were asked to commit an atrocity. But with the task came promises of glory and conquest; as such, a covenant was struck.

Ch. 2

Kephalos gleamed in full copper panoply. He sat astride a red and white warhorse, commanding three lokhoi of Eleusinian infantry. His cuirass was engraved with the insignia of the House of Aenicles, depicting a serpent and a basket. A javelin came flying at him, but he managed to save himself by deflecting the missile with his shield.

“You must do better than that, you spawn of Pelops!” He berated the enemy horde.

A cavalryman’s shield was smaller than the cumbersome hoplon, but the deficit in coverage was made up for by the difference in weight; Kephalos was quick and agile. He and his men were fiercely engaged with an enemy unit near the center of the battlefield. Off to his right, a fellow hoplite was trading sword blows with an invader.

The Peloponnesian soldier shot an armor-plated shoulder into the sternum of his opponent, knocking his wind out, and throwing him off balance. Another soldier came running at Kephalos, screaming and thrusting a pike up at his face. Kephalos expertly parried the attack with his trusted shield, then raised his kopis, and chopped.

The weapon cleaved down into the warrior’s right clavicle, spraying Kephalos with the soldier’s hot lifeblood. The man cried out, and immediately dropped his weapon. He followed the pike to the ground, and he laid still.

Kephalos looked up to see his comrade struggling with the same foe as before, and still receiving the worst of it. Digging his feet into the flanks of his mount, the animal sprang forward, running down the man’s attacker.

“Many thanks, my lord!” Shouted the hoplite.

“Thank the Great Mother.” Replied Kephalos, looking down at the soldier from atop his fidgeting mount. “Be that She see us victorious!” With that, Kephalos headed off.

The clouds above the battlefield parted enough to allow a horizontal ray of sunlight to penetrate the gloom. Kephalos was riding with intent now, focused on a particular foe who had just caught his attention. Before him there, a fellow prince, twenty meters off.

* * *

Antiphoebus rode in a silver-plated chariot, drawn by a mare the color of smoke. He wore an elaborate eagle head helmet, the broad beak jutting out over his brow. Brandishing a razor sharp xiphos, he cut a swathe of destruction, while his driver, Regulus, maneuvered the craft to-and-fro.

“You are like Hera with the reins.” Said Antiphoebus to his driver.

“And you are Trophonius with the blade, my lord.”

“Then pray ye not fall into snare.”

Regulus smiled at the remark, but Antiphoebus went silent; something else had caught his eye. Then Regulus noticed what had captured the attention of his passenger. A royal Epirote on a red-and white steed was charging their direction. And so the Mycenaean prince's blood boiled, and his was the cursed ichor of Tantalus.

Above, the gap in the clouds closed up, and Helios was occluded once again.

“Ride.”

The single word from his master was all Regulus needed to hear. He jerked the reins, and the chariot shot forward. And the distance between them was like the gap in the heavens, disappearing in an instant.

Shining Kephalos, with gore drenched kopis. Quick and agile, he struck, but not quick enough. His enemy was quicker. In his final moments, Kephalos closed his eyes, and offered an apology to the Goddess for his failure.

Antiphoebus' attack was precise, seizing upon a split-second opening in his opponent's defenses. His xiphos flashed, and the Epirote prince lost his head. The red and white warhorse continued on, galloping away with headless rider. Antiphoebus thought about capturing the steed, having appraised the animal's fine quality. But he was of another bent, and instead bid Regulus halt.

Descending from the chariot, he retrieved the decapitated head that lay on the ground still strapped in its helmet. He gripped the helmet-with-head by the horse-hair crest and held his trophy high in display.

“And so *all* your princes!”

* * *

“And this is the will of the gods?” Miones questioned Iaeiros upon the plateau.

The High-Prince was stricken with grief, having just witnessed his younger brother get decapitated.

“Their will is not ours to question,” answered the seer, “nor ever fully to understand.”

“I understand the dirt before me is soaked, with the blood of my *brother*. Yet here I remain, on high and hidden, whilst his remains are treated pitifully.”

The High-Prince was referring to the actions of Kephalos' killer, who had dismounted from his chariot, and was now holding the severed head aloft.

“It is required I rescue his psyche, from the clutches of dreaded oblivion!” Miones continued, fearing for his brother's posthumous journey.

For every man has a place on a level in Hades, save for those murdered, or denied proper burial. Those poor souls are doomed instead; to forever wander.

“You would expose self to harm, and risk the entire battle? Risk the very fate of the Great Mother's abode?” Asked the seer.

“I fear the day lost, whether I fall or not.” Answered Miones, as the invaders were fighting as if possessed.

“Then see the remainder saved,” Iaeiros pleaded, “sound the retreat, and salvage what is left.”

“You would have me run from one place of hiding here, to a new one behind fortress walls at Eleusis?”

“There are times that call for bravery, and times that call for wisdom. Have faith, Kadmiloi; the entire world shall be as Eleusis, when the Megaloi Theoi return.”

Miones stood there weighing the seer’s words. Iaeiros had been his teacher, and mentor, all his life, which was more than three decades. He had come to greatly value the old man’s counsel.

The High-Prince recalled his vows, and bridled his rage.

“We retreat!” He called out to his signalers, who began waving flags, to convey their lord’s order.

* * *

The clouds above Iakobos went back together, and the ground he and his men had only recently gained began to be lost. He too had the serpent and basket on his cuirass. His helmet hid the better part of his face; aside from his beardless chin, all that you could see were his eyes. Miones’ sole male heir, Iakobos commanded a lokhoi of cavalry, and twice as many infantrymen.

Iakobos was lethal with his kopis; many an invader had been felled, yet they kept advancing. Upon the slaying of his uncle Kephalos, soldiers had fallen into disarray, and needed some help *fast*. Iakobos charged in with his cavalry, to deliver his fellows from their precarious predicament.

So, the tide was turned; the invaders were put on the defensive, but the turn did not last long. Soon, Iakobos and his deliverers were in need of deliverance, but there was none to be had. When the call to retreat was received, the Eleusinians were relieved. But retreat was not easy, it never is, and dozens more fell on the way back.

Once they reached the acropolis, the retreating soldiers were able to take up defensive positions, making further pursuit impossible. The hallowed grounds were enclosed by walls of granite, a cubit thick, and seven high. The fleeing Epirotes were like a flood through the gate in the eastern wall.

Ch. 3

In Boeotia, a magus called Melampus made his way through the northern foothills of Mount Helicon. Parnassus dominated the western horizon; a snow-capped Leviathan. He had travelled all the way from Chios, heeding a summons he read in the starry vault. According to the magus' calculations, he should be nearing his destination.

Blue hyacinths and azaleas in striking crimson dotted his path, their aroma permeating the crisp air. The magus wore a Phrygian-style cap, a chlamys made of silk, and a pair of voluminous pantaloons. He also had on sandals that were terribly worn-out, as he was ever traveling; such was his lot.

In his right hand he carried his walking staff, which was made of fennel, and topped with a pinecone. He crested a ravine, and a tiny hamlet came into view, consisting of no more than thirty, or so, modest dwellings. These were all the structures he could see, but no community would be complete without a temple for observances, usually constructed on heights.

Helios had risen several hours ago, and the villagers were well into their workday. Most were in the surrounding fields, looking after crops, while a few shepherds tended to a flock of goats. Melampus stopped for a moment and leaned on his staff; he was almost three-hundred years old, and beyond *tired*. Inside the veins of men, lies a vestige of ichor, that when properly nurtured, can extend one's mortality. The magi were among those few who were privy, to that most illustrious arcanum.

Regardless of whether he was feeling weary or not, his was a mission of gravest import. He studied the villagers, hoping to spy the woman for whom he had come searching. She would be with child, expecting any day now. In fact, the magus knew the *exact* date of her labor, as it was to coincide with the coming equinox.

* * *

The Peloponnesian dead were all gathered up promptly, and dues were paid accordingly. Scores of funereal pyres were erected on the battlefield, and they all were lit up at once. Soldiers honored the fallen with frankincense and wine, their offerings caused the flames to crackle and hiss. The Epirote remains were left to languish in the elements, while negotiations were held for their release.

In the meantime, vultures feasted.

Anax Iondus triumphantly dismounted from his steed. He was an imposing figure, tall and powerfully built. He stood resplendent before the acropolis, in a suit of bronze and silver that looked as if the Lamé-Legged One had crafted it Himself.

He sported a helmet with two large horns like those of a bull, and carried a jewel encrusted scepter. Upon his breastplate, a hideous visage of Euryale glared menacingly with

puffed up cheeks. His blood-lust was unquenched as of yet, but he dared not violate Demeter's sanctuary. Although he held the favor of Zeus Almighty, sacrilege never went unpunished.

Iondus was currently on a holy pilgrimage, his mind set on worshipping on the slopes of Mount Olympus. He had dreamed of as much for as long as he could remember, and he would let nothing get in his way. Of course, he meant to acquire a bit of treasure as he went, and spread his own name far and wide.

"You were a whirlwind today, boy!" Said the anax proudly to Antiphoebus, who stood there beside him.

Iondus towered over his son, who was but fourteen years old, and short even for his age. But Antiphoebus was quite stocky, having inherited his father's broadness; he also had inherited his father's love of war.

"You honor me, father."

"Victory is honor, and honor is glory. Never forget that." Said Iondus.

"I will remember it always."

"This night, we shall stage victory games, and I would see your trophy prominently displayed."

"Your will, father." Said Antiphoebus, beaming with pride.

Now picture the Infernal Goddesses plotting. Draped in rags that were torn and filthy, grey hair unkempt, matted and greasy. The three Erinyes all carried bronze-studded scourges, and their eyes were all blood-shot, and all full of madness. At the moment, they were observing Antiphoebus.

The champions of wretched souls; Kephalos would *not* be forgotten by them.