ii - The nightmares that are names

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Mesopotamia, 5000 BC

WHY DO PEOPLE FEEL THE NEED TO HAVE NAMES? Why couldn't it just be Person Number One, Person Number Two, Person Number Three and so on. In his opinion, people shouldn't have names until they are ready to get them tattooed on their forehead! And yes, Pollo did know that he had a name as well, but that was different! He was more than willing to write his name on his face if somebody asked him to! But because most people take it badly when you ask them to do something of the sort, he'd put his mind into just writing down the names of his fellow Eternals. Still, he'd been rather tired last night when he'd done it and now, while he did know everybody's names, he couldn't quite put a face on any of those. The only person he actually remembered both the name and face of was Ajak and that was obvious.

He entered the main room and before anybody could greet him, he lifted his hand, silently asking them to shut up. Everybody was standing in the room, minding their own business, except for one of the girls who was nowhere to be seen. He glanced at all of them, clicking his tongue before he spoke up.

"Don't say anything. I've got this," he swore. "This is Ajak, I already know that but for the others... Uh... I remember that you made a dragon appear. Which is kind of like magic and people who do magic are druids. So you're Druig. And you. You're really fast, so you're Phastos, obviously. Okay, you shoot lasers with your eyes and are pretty much the strongest person here, which makes you kind of a king. Kingo, then. You... are annoying. I called you Mind Control Guy, but your name is actually... Ikaris? I don't think that's it but whatever, I'm going with Ikaris. You're that really nice dude who introduced me to everybody and a nice person's name would be... Sersi. Yup, Sersi seems like the name of someone nice. You stole my Deviant, so I want to say that you're someone who's spiteful. And a name that sounds like spite is Sprite. So you're Sprite. You... I don't remember talking to you that much. You're Sprite's friend, right? I know somebody was called Makkari so... I'm gonna have to guess that you're Makkari? Ugh, it doesn't feel right, but whatever. Now, we have only one guy left so you must be, uh..." he looked at his hand where he'd written every name down. "Gilgamesh. And there is only one name that I haven't said, which is... Thena. Is Thena the one who's late?"

The whole room stayed silent, except for a few chuckles. Pollo waited for someone to answer him about his guesses, each second passing making him more nervous.

"Impressive," sneered the one he'd called Ikaris, even though he knew full well that couldn't be his name. "You didn't even get one name right."

" At least you knew our names." The one who wasn't Phastos tried to encourage. " You just didn't remember who was who."

He sighed loudly, but didn't let that bring him down. "You know what? That's fine! It was only my first try! Annoying guy, I think you're Druig, because druids can also read minds. Speedy, you're Sersi. Dragon girl, you're Thena. Deviant stealer, you're Ikaris. Guy who shoots lasers with your eyes, you're Gilgamesh while your friend in purple is Phastos. Nice guy who can build things, you're probably Makkari. You're Deviant stealer's friend, so that means you're Kingo. So the one who's late is definitely Sprite!"

Druig smirked at him, immediately making Pollo think he'd failed again. This is why he wished people would just write their names on their forehead! It would've been much easier for him! Expect, of course, that Druig's hair would've, without a doubt, hidden his name from everybody's sight.

"Well... you got Druig's name right, this time." Pollo let out a whimper of exasperation at the man's word, looking at his shoes in shame. " I'm Phastos, though."

"Oh. Okay. Hi."

He waved awkwardly, going to sit a bit further from the others, refusing to make eye contact with anybody else. He barely had the time to sit down when the girl who was late —just as he had been— stumbled into the room. She looked around with wide eyes, blushing a bit.

"Hi. Sorry. Did I miss anything?"

"Only Pollo's humiliating attempt at remembering our names," Kingo, because that was his real name, laughed.

"I—" he tried to defend himself, but found himself incapable of coming up with any good excuse so he decided to do what anybody else would've done: laugh it off and then lie about it. "Wait, you didn't really believe that? Come on guys, it was just a joke! For example, I know her name! It's..."

The speedster whom he was pretty sure was named Makkari must've noticed how he was struggling at finding her name, so as she saw that nobody was watching her, she started spelling out the other Eternal's name for him. " S-E-R-S-I."

"Sersi! See? I knew that!" Once again, he tried to hide his embarrassment with a dry chuckle. "But thanks, I'm flattered that you believed my little prank!"

Makkari gave him a thumbs up while Kingo just looked confused. Sersi didn't seem much more aware of what was going on, but at least she was trying to hide it with a kind smile. Ajak chuckled as she went to stand in the middle of the room so everybody could see her.

"Today, we will continue our hunts for Deviants. There's a pack, not far from here," she explained. "Each one of you will be in a team to maximize our chances of beating them but also to improve your work as a team. I was thinking the pairs could be Ikaris and Kingo, Sersi and Sprite, Gilgamesh and Thena and, finally, Makkari and Pollo. I'm afraid we won't need your skills for this mission, Phastos and Druig."

Everybody nodded, agreeing with her. Makkari and Pollo looked at each other as soon as Ajak spoke their names, grinning madly at the thought of teaming up. They hadn't conversed that much since they'd met, but he could tell that she was really nice and just the fact that she'd saved him from embarrassments a few minutes prior was enough for him to trust her. As soon as Ajak finished giving instructions, he jumped on his feet, going to see the young woman standing on the other side of the room.

" Hey," he signed. " Thanks for helping me out before."

She beamed at him, standing on her tiptoes for a few seconds, as though she wanted to be just as tall as him. " It was nothing, anybody else would've done it."

" Yeah?" Pollo laughed. " Because it seemed to me that they all wanted to see me fail."

" I'm sure that's not true!"

"No, it is," said a voice behind him.

He turned around to stare at Druig who was smirking at him, arms behind his back. He scoffed at the shorter man as he leaned onto the wall. "Is that the thanks I get for remembering your name?"

"You shouldn't get thanks for remembering someone's name," he claimed. "That's basic decency."

"Not for me! I'm not good with names! At all!"

" Do you guys want me to leave you alone or..." To complete her unfinished sentence, Makkari wiggled her eyebrows at them.

"No, it's okay." Pollo smiled as he threw a murderous look at the other boy. "I believe that Druig was just about to leave."

He probably wasn't. They didn't know each other very well, but the taller boy was tempted to say that Druig wanted nothing more but to stay here and annoy the life out of him. They both glared at each other, refusing to be the first one to look away. Pollo knew he wouldn't last very long at this kind of thing, as he noticed a movement on his right and immediately wanted to see what it was, but he wouldn't admit defeat yet. Still after maybe one minute —he hadn't really thought of the time passing— he had been the one to look down at his shoes, too bored to stare at the other man any longer. Druig smirked at him in victory, obviously very proud of having won this contest, but he still started walking away.

"Fine," Druig conceded, now satisfied that he'd won their little staring contest. "I guess I'll see you later then, Polly"

Why do people feel the need to give others nicknames? Names were already complicated enough as they were, but giving someone a nickname was like learning a second name for them. A second name they didn't ask to have. It was stupid, in his opinion. And, anyway, it's not like Pollo was a long name! It was five letters and two syllables! Maybe if Druig had been him then it would've been difficult for him to learn his name, but the other man had shown no sign of struggle when it came to names! Nicknames annoyed Pollo. Or maybe it was just the way Druig had said the nickname that annoyed him. At last, he decided to brush it off, turning around so he could continue his conversation with Makkari.

" Sorry about that. What was I talking about, again?"

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Pollo liked fighting Deviants. It really helped him relax a bit. Of course, fighting monstrous and deadly beasts was not what most people would call relaxing, but it managed to get his mind off of certains things, which he appreciated. Certain things like his family. He missed them terribly. He wished he'd taken a portrait of them with him, because now he couldn't quite remember if he had his mother's eyes or his father's nose. It's the kind of things he hadn't thought about when they were always with him, on Olympia, but now that he was on the other side of the galaxy, he felt bad for not noticing before.

With a flick of his wrist, a string of light wrapped itself around each of the Deviant's legs and before its body had even hit the ground, Makkari ran into the monster, hitting it so hard it flew away, its legs being torn off from its body by the strength of Pollo's rope. To make sure it really was dead and not just wounded, he wrapped the rope around its neck, tightening so that he could hear a soft sizzling noise. After a few minutes, the rope burned through the flesh and the bones, making the Deviant's head fall off.

" Doesn't that hurt you?" Wondered Makari, pointing at his palm as the rope faded away.

" The light?" He waited until she nodded to continue, wanting to make sure he'd understood correctly. " No, I can control the temperature of my body. It's kind of my thing. So when I make it appear, my body is just as warm as the light, so it stops me from getting hurt. But you know what that means! No high fives in a fight!"

Before they could do anything else, the distant voice of Gilgamesh interrupted them. "A little help over here?"

Makkari took a hold of his arm and with a blink of an eye, they were on the battlefield. Pollo had expected to feel weird after going just as fast as Makkari, maybe even throwing up, but he barely even had a reaction. It almost felt like he'd done it before. He didn't let his mind wander to the possibilities as he assessed the situation instead. Thena seemed to be doing rather well, relentlessly killing the monsters, but there were at least three Deviants against Gilgamesh and he was struggling to keep them all away. Pollo used a rope to burn one of the Deviant's backs without risking hurting Gilgamesh. It turned around before jumping towards him, giving him all the space he needed to use his powers as much as he wanted. Makkari did the same, running to take another of the Deviants with her before throwing it against a rock.

"Thanks guys," muttered the man as he fought against the one enemy they had left for him to face

Pollo panted as he caught himself before the creature could make him fall, glancing at the others for a minute before he attacked again. "You're... You're welcome."

He tried to get his light around the Deviant's neck, but he hadn't calculated and missed from a little. To protect Makkari from the threat of a burning rope dangling around while she was running, he made it disappear. But that one little moment when he wasn't protected was a moment too much as the Deviant charged at him. The beast pushed him against the ground, sand scratching his skin and a small rock cutting his bottom lip. He didn't let that discourage him —he could barely feel it anyway, because of the adrenaline— as he jumped on his feet again, letting the monster run towards him again. But this time, he didn't let it touch him as he slid onto the ground, passing under its belly, thus giving him the perfect opportunity to wrap the light around its legs. Gilgamesh, who had finished his own fight, came to help him and smashed the Deviant's skull, finishing it off.

"Ugh, I think I ate sand!"

He spat it out, wanting to get rid of the strange taste, however, it's the sight of blood staining the ground that greeted him. He ignored it and, instead, walked towards the cave in front of them.

"That was the Deviants' lair?" He asked without waiting for anybody to answer. "Nice. I'll have to come back. I'm sure with a bit of work, it could be super cozy."

He felt someone tap his shoulder so he snapped his head, startled, only to be met with Makkari's concerned look. " You're bleeding."

Instinctively, he went to touch his lip, making himself wince, but he tried to hide it. " I'm okay. Don't worry." He then turned to Thena and Gilgamesh who were standing a bit further away. "Should we go help the others?"

"I think they're okay," spoke the other man. "Let's go back to the Domo so Ajak can heal you."

"Heal me? I don't need healing," he spoke. "I got a few scratches, but that's all."

"Well, we wouldn't want those scratches to get infected and kill you now, would we?" Thena taunted.

He rolled his eyes, still he knew there weren't a lot of other options, so he followed them to the ship, Makkari counting him the tale of her fight to distract him. She'd passed a hand through his hair, trying to shake off the sand that was in it, but he wouldn't have been surprised if there was still some. The metallic taste of blood had now made its home in his mouth and while the scratches on his face weren't bad enough to bleed all over his skin, it still stung quite a bit. He seemed to be the only one who was injured, even though his injury wasn't much, so he counted that as a successful mission. It looked like Ikaris, Kingo, Sprite and Sersi were still fighting against some Deviants, but they must've been almost finished with it, because if Pollo and the others could finish off those Deviants so quickly, then so could they.

They managed to go back to the Domo without getting in any kind of trouble. Ajak was waiting for them, seemingly pleased by the lack of important injuries on the quatuor. Still, she made Pollo sit down so she could make sure his only injuries were to his face. As her fingers caressed the air, passing above his skin to assure the cuts were not too deep, footsteps coming their way were heard. For a second, he dared to believe that it was Makkari who was coming, as she and the other two had been able to go back to their room as soon as they'd arrived, but he was met with Druig's cold eyes. He examined the taller boy's injury for a few seconds until he found his eyes. He must've been bored by the few drops of blood on his skin and preferred the colour of dark eyes, catching sunlight in them even inside the ship, or else he might've tried to show some concern.

"You hurt your pretty face, uh?" He sneered in a way that made it clear he wasn't waiting for an answer.

It had been meant as an insult, a taunt, but fighting Deviants seemed to have put Pollo in a strangely good mood. He beamed brightly at him, showing without hesitation his blood stained teeth to the Eternal. As he turned around a bit, his face caught a shadow, making his eyes turn much darker than they usually were. But with that glint of adrenaline in them, it made him almost terrifying. He couldn't quite explain it but at that moment, Druig felt his heart skip a beat. It was one moment of weakness, a moment he would forget for a few centuries, but that's when he became a goner. Even if he didn't know it yet. He'd noticed the other man was attractive when they'd met the day before but this was different. Different in such a horrible way that he would be too afraid to let himself think about that moment his heart stopped. Maybe if he'd let himself think about it, it would all have been easier for the both of them, but he preferred it that way. And because he suppressed that one little weakness he had for a second, he completely forgot about it for years. Until he was forced to remember it. Until then, he was more than happy to forget about it all.

Pollo titled his head, curious, as Ajak placed her hand on the side of his face, making the scratches disappear. "You really think my face is pretty?"

Of course he did. He would have to be blind to not know how pretty he was. But that didn't mean anything. Not yet. Not to them. And it wouldn't mean anything until the worst possible moment. For the time being, they were just doomed to ruin each other until there was nothing left to destroy but their hearts.

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