

24 Hours

Wind bit into my cheeks while teeth did the same to my lips, I needed to hurry. I moved swiftly through the doorway, slamming the door behind me.

20 minutes.

I had memorized the layout of the top floor perfectly, I can make it through in 5 minutes. I couldn't find anything about the lower floors though, I hope they can be finished so soon.

I ran forward, in twenty metres, the a grid of sensors will start, continuing for 50 metres. I moved to slide underneath the first sensor, but the floor gave way and I fell.

The floor is hard and wet. Firelight danced off the moisture on the floor and walls. There was a single door, unfortunately, it was on the opposite side of a great beast.

"You wish to go through the door, you must best me at a game of wits." Its gaping maw snapped harshly with each hard consonant.

"I really need to go, can't I just skip through this?" Its many eyes pierced me with their boredom and whispered no, but its ragged, wet beak said -"

"No. Battle of wits, or you are stuck here forever with me."

"Fine." I said "Riddles, I guess?"

"No, I am no sphynx, and I hate riddles." Half or so of its eyes drooped toward me in disappointment at the question, while the rest stared around the room and reflected firelight.

"What are you then?"

"A kraken."

"Krackens though . . . aren't they sea monsters, what are you doing challenging battles of wits in a great big room for?"

"Rough job market, OK?" Its tone was etched in finality.

"Alright, what is this battle then?"

"I am a kraken, my game is one of the sea." He fished a box from the gloom of the dungeon. "You must best me at battleship."

"That will take way too long!"

"Rules are rules, or did you want to spend eternity here with me?" Some eyes seemed hopeful.

"Fine, whatever."

We set up the board and positioned our ships, though the kraken took his own sweet time placing his pieces.

"Alright then, you may go first." he said.

15 minutes.

"A1."

"Do you even want to leave this room? No one ever puts vessel there, it is to obvious."

"Just pick something"

"A1."

“But didn’t you just say . . . ?”

“What the hell do I know? I am a kraken, not some genie or something.”

“Yeah, but . . . aren’t mythic things smart or something? Especially at there own games?”

“This is not my game. My game is a game of ships, but also of high seas, storms, and pain beyond your comprehension. It is far more enjoyable then this drivel.”

“You didn’t hit anything. A2, why are you playing battleship then?”

“Miss. Because, I am paid to do so. A3. Why did you come here?”

“Miss. I am here for something. Why don’t you just go back to sea, reign in the death and destruction and all that?” He stared blankly with his many eyes. “Sorry, B?”

“Miss. It is not the way of this world any longer. I fear I will expire in this room not so long from now. D3.”

“Miss. I hate that. I want the world that way again, so boring now. I will change that. Ummm, L10.”

“Change it? How do you plan on doing that?”

“There is something on the other side of that door that I think could help me do just that actually.”

“I see. Hmm, I had not noticed before, dear lady, but it appears you have sunk my battleship.”

“But I -”

“The match is yours, you may pass through the door.”

I leave the kraken behind and push forward through the door.

10 minutes.

The room was massive, and aside from the doorway behind me, none of its limits were obvious. Water lapped someone and a shadow the rough shape of a boat rested nearby.

I gulped. I do not know how to swim.

I climbed into the boat and pushed off the shore, heading into the direction opposite my door. I hope this room is that obvious.

After a while, it became apparent something in the murky dark depths was stalking me. Invisible eyes burned into my face everywhere I looked.

A great cacophony erupted to my right. A great clatter of rock on rock, then splashing and heaving. Clearly something was swimming towards me. I hoped it was farther off then it seemed.

The noise grew closer, and the splashing and heaving more desperate. A shadow was emerging across the surf.

“STOP!!” it yelled through gasps and puffs. I listened. The shadow became clearer, the shape of a man emerged. He appeared to be swimming well above the water, most of his torso showing, but it was also clearly a struggle.

“Are you what I think you are?” I asked.

“Well, if ye say moron, ye wunt be far off, neh? Oimma sent tar righ?” The centaur was clearly not a born swimmer.

“What are you doing in the water?”

“Strugglin’ ain’t I? Why arn ye halpin’ meh?” The desperate creature made a good point, and with much struggle I helped it into the boat. “Tank ye, naw veri good at swimmen’ ye know . . .”

“I noticed, what were you doing in the water in the first place though?”

“Getten’ ye, wunt I?” I stared blankly before I quite understood.

“What do you want me for?”

“Well, I gutta test ye, righ? Sue ye can pass.”

“What’s the test then?”

“I can’t quie member. Use ta ave the twinkles fer it, but now, jus this.” he staired sadly at the ceiling.

“Can I just . . . go then?”

“Guess so, this is the way.” We arrived at what was presumably another shore and got out of the boat. I went to the door.

“Thanks . . . I guess.” I opened the door and went through.

“Wai’, I’s s’pose te challenge ye te -” I slammed the door in the centaur’s face face. Stupid horse.

3 minutes.

This room was dark, like the others. A set of stairs ascended high, and at its peak an altar stood, with a box atop it. I began ascending the stairs as quickly as possible. A shadow appeared at the top of the box and hissed.

At the top of the stairs I recognized it as a kitten, with the beautiful face of a maiden.

“Behold the great sphynx!” its bellow reverberated across the room. “To pass you must answer this: What is black and white and red all -”

I knocked the stupid creature off the ledge and it yowled. Stupid cats.

With only a minute to spare, I was finally at it. The salvation I sought. I pushed the lid off.

A mad swirl of colour erupted from its lid and danced all around, below, the kitten grew into a great big sphynx and disappeared. From behind me I heard the great kaw of the kraken as it returned to the ocean, its home.

30 seconds.

I made it. I was lucky. I breathed the sweet air of freedom.

Flames formed all around me, and the room changed to the dark spires of the old dungeon. The stairs became hard marble floor. My freedom became imprisonment once more.

Stupid Hades.