

The Golden Fool #Chapter 114 114: The Monster's Awakening - Read The Golden Fool Chapter 114 114: The Monster's Awakening

The massive stone doors parted fully, releasing a flood of dappled light that spilled across the threshold like liquid gold. Apollo shielded his eyes, the sudden brilliance momentarily blinding after the temple's blue gloom.

As his vision adjusted, he found himself staring into a vast flooded cavern that stretched beyond comprehension, its ceiling lost in shadows while its floor disappeared into azure depths.

"By the Forge," Thorin whispered, his voice uncharacteristically small.

Apollo stepped forward, drawn by the bow's insistent pull. The weapon had fallen silent, but he could feel its anticipation thrumming against his spine as they crossed the threshold.

The moment his boot touched the water on the other side, the pressure hit him, not crushing, but unmistakable, as if the weight of an entire ocean pressed against his skin despite the breathable air.

'Poseidon's domain,' he thought, recognizing his uncle's touch in the impossible physics of this place. 'The sea's essence without its drowning embrace.'

The cavern stretched before them like an underwater cathedral. Massive columns rose from the depths, their surfaces encrusted with corals that glowed with inner light, not the bioluminescence of ordinary sea life but something more deliberate, more ancient.

Between them, stone carvings depicted oceanic scenes of such detail that they seemed to move in the dappled light, leviathans and sea serpents, tritons and merfolk, all rendered with reverent precision.

"It's beautiful," Mira breathed, stepping deeper into the chamber. The water rippled around her ankles, sending concentric circles across the previously undisturbed surface.

Cale moved with newfound confidence, his earlier hesitation replaced by something approaching familiarity.

The water responded to his presence, swirling gently around his legs as if in greeting. "This place..." he began, then shook his head, unable to find words.

Apollo understood. The chamber radiated power, old power, the kind that had existed long before mortals had names for it.

Light filtered through the water in shifting patterns that reminded him of sunlight penetrating ocean depths, though no sun could possibly reach this subterranean sanctuary.

The bow trembled against Apollo's back, a subtle vibration that sent warning pulses through the gold in his veins. Not danger, not yet, but anticipation of it. 'Something waits,' he realized, scanning the seemingly peaceful chamber with renewed caution.

"Spread out," he suggested, keeping his voice low despite the vastness of the space. "But stay within sight of each other."

They moved deeper into the chamber, water rippling around their legs.

Unlike the sea that had parted for their approach to the temple, this water maintained a consistent depth, always ankle-deep regardless of the obvious drop-off into greater depths beneath.

Another impossibility in a place defined by them.

Apollo studied the chamber as they advanced, noting how the columns formed a rough circle around a central area where the floor appeared to drop away entirely, leaving only dark blue depths.

The water there reflected the dappled light like a perfect mirror, unnaturally still compared to the gentle ripples their movement created elsewhere.

"What is this place?" Nik wondered aloud, his earlier fear seemingly forgotten as he traced his fingers along a carved serpent that wound its way up a nearby column.

"A sanctuary," Renna suggested, her hunter's eyes missing nothing as she scanned their surroundings. "Or a throne room, perhaps."

"A trial chamber," Mira corrected softly. She had paused near one of the wall carvings, her fingers hovering over an intricate scene that Apollo couldn't quite make out from his position. "Look at these markings. They tell a story, supplicants coming before the sea god, being tested for worthiness."

Apollo moved closer, the bow's vibration intensifying with each step. The carving showed figures kneeling before a massive throne of coral and pearl, while below them, something massive rose from the depths, a creature with tentacles that wrapped around pillars similar to those surrounding them now.

The gold in his veins chilled at the implication.

"We should go back," Thorin declared suddenly, his boots splashing loudly as he took a step toward the entrance. "Whatever this place is, we've seen it. No need to linger where we're not welcome."

"But we are welcome," Cale countered, his voice carrying a certainty that hadn't been there before. "Can't you feel it? The water... it guided us here. It wanted us to find this place."

Apollo said nothing, but the bow's trembling against his spine told a different story. Its vibration had become more insistent, no longer merely anticipatory but urgent. Warning.

The water, which had been rippling gently around their movements, suddenly stilled. Not gradually, but in an instant, as if the entire chamber had been flash-frozen into perfect stillness. The dappled light continued to play across the surface, but nothing disturbed the mirror-like reflection, not even their breathing.

"What—" Nik began, then stopped as the floor beneath them trembled.

It wasn't the sharp jolt of an earthquake or the groan of settling stone. It was rhythmic, deliberate, like the pulse of a massive heart beating somewhere far below. The tremors came again, stronger this time, sending faint ripples across the otherwise motionless water.

"Something's coming," Apollo said quietly, the bow all but thrashing against his back now. He reached for it, fingers closing around the familiar wood as the gold in his veins surged with warning.

The dappled light that had illuminated the chamber began to dim, not all at once but in patches, as if something massive moved between them and the source of illumination. Shadows rippled across the walls, distorted and elongated into shapes that writhed like living things.

"Look," Lyra whispered, pointing toward the central pool where darkness had gathered most intensely.

Something moved beneath the perfect mirror of the water's surface, something vast and sinuous that disturbed nothing yet displaced everything. The shadows lengthened as it rose, stretching across columns and carvings like grasping fingers.

"The guardian," Mira breathed, backing away from the central pool with small, careful steps. "The trial spoken of in the carvings. To prove our worth, we must face the sea's warden."

Apollo nocked an arrow, the bow humming with anticipation in his hands. The gold in his veins burned cold now, preparing for what approached from below.

He saw the others readying their weapons, Thorin's axe gripped white-knuckled in massive hands, Lyra's knife gleaming in the fading light, Renna drawing her bow with practiced precision.

The water in the central pool bulged upward, a perfect dome rising higher and higher without breaking the surface tension. It stretched impossibly, defying natural physics as it swelled to the height of a man, then two men, then higher still.

Then it shattered.

Water exploded outward in a deafening crash as something massive breached the surface. Tentacles thicker than ancient oaks and longer than ships unfurled in a terrible blooming, crashing down around the chamber's periphery with devastating force. Columns cracked under their impact, sending fragments of stone and coral raining into the water below.

In the center of this writhing mass, a bulbous head rose from the depths, its skin a sickly blend of grays and greens that shifted like oil on water.

A single, massive eye opened, larger than a cart wheel and glowing with the same blue luminescence that had guided their path through the temple. It swiveled with deliberate slowness, surveying the intruders who had disturbed its domain.

The eye locked onto Cale, its pupil contracting with recognition.

"Kraken," Thorin spat, the word half-curse, half-prayer as he raised his axe defensively.

The monster's response was immediate and devastating. Tentacles lashed out with impossible speed, sending walls of water surging across the chamber floor.

The gentle ankle-deep liquid transformed in an instant, becoming a roaring tide that swept toward them with crushing force.

Thorin and Nik disappeared beneath the first wave, their shouts cut short as the water closed over their heads.

Renna managed to loose an arrow before the surge reached her, but it bounced harmlessly off the kraken's slick hide, no more effective than a thorn against dragonhide.

Apollo leapt atop a fallen column fragment, the gold in his veins singing with battle-heat as he drew his bow.

The familiar warmth of divine power gathered in his fingertips, ready to form one of his arrows of light, but he hesitated, remembering the eyes that watched him. 'Not yet,' he decided, loosing a normal arrow instead. 'Not unless there's no other choice.'

His arrow struck true, burying itself in the flesh where tentacle met body, but the kraken seemed not to notice. Its attention remained fixed on Cale, who stood with arms outstretched, his face a mask of concentration as he attempted to command the surging waters.

For a moment, it seemed to work. The waves calmed around Cale, forming a small circle of relative stillness amid the chaos.

The water responded to his bloodline, recognizing Poseidon's distant descendant even as the guardian of his temple attacked.

"Help me!" Cale shouted, strain evident in his voice as he fought to extend his control beyond his immediate vicinity. "I can't hold it back alone!"

Thorin had regained his footing, water streaming from his beard as he charged toward the nearest tentacle with a roar that echoed through the chamber.

His axe glinted in the dim light as he brought it down with all his considerable strength, expecting to cleave through flesh and sinew.

Instead, the tentacle flexed, absorbing the impact before whipping sideways with such force that Thorin was lifted off his feet.

He flew through the air like a child's toy, crashing into a column with a sickening crack before sliding into the churning water below.

"Thorin!" Mira screamed, wading toward where the dwarf had fallen. The water rose to meet her, not with the violent surge that had claimed Thorin but with an almost gentle embrace.

It swirled around her hands as she raised them, responding to her will in a way Apollo hadn't seen before.

'She has a touch of power,' he realized, watching as she shaped the water into a protective barrier around Nik, who was struggling against the current threatening to drag him under. 'Not Poseidon's blood, but something else. Something that speaks to water.'

The kraken's eye swiveled toward this new display of power, its pupil contracting further. A tentacle rose high above Mira, poised to strike, but Cale shouted something in a language Apollo hadn't heard him speak before, words that carried power despite their speaker's mortal limitations.

The water around Cale surged upward, forming a barrier between Mira and the descending tentacle. The impact when they met sent shockwaves through the chamber, water exploding outward in a spray that momentarily blinded Apollo.

When his vision cleared, he saw Cale on his knees, blood trickling from his nose, his barrier shattered but Mira still standing.

The kraken's attention returned to Cale, its massive eye blazing with blue fire. Tentacles converged on the young man from all directions, the water surging to assist their approach rather than heeding Cale's commands.

Apollo felt Lyra's gaze before he saw it, sharp, accusatory, cutting through the chaos to find him where he stood atop the fallen

