

mournful camaraderie
By HungryOnMain

A follow-up tale for *heaven*, in which the individual members of the main gang travel with Psychopomp for their last ride over the course of a century.

Chapter One: and heart breaks

The doctor pulled the sheet up over Larry's face.

"Time of death?"

"5:40."

Nick held his father's still-warm hand. Tears dripped from his eyes as he felt the fingers begin to go cold, the warmth slowly leaving Larry's body.

He'd lived a good 93 years. Teaching a generation of students, directing a few international museums, and even remarrying at some point. That was all over now.

Nick heaved, letting Larry's hand go.

"Nicholas?"

Ahkmenrah and the others stood before the front desk. Nick had been the guard here for upwards of 40 years. He'd visibly aged - gaining weight, growing a beard, a few scars here and there. Ahkmenrah, however, hadn't aged at all. He was still the young adult he was when he was murdered and mummified.

"Hey, Ahk," Nick monotoned from the guard chair.

"...I can assume from your expression that things aren't well."

Nick's eyes watered again.

"Yeah."

"Quite monosyllabic tonight," the pharaoh sat next to the night guard. "That's unlike you."

Nick coughed to cover a sob.

"Dad's dead."

And he couldn't hold it back any longer. His voice raised in a wail, his forehead came to rest in his hands, his throat burned with sobs.

All the rest were quiet.

"Shit..." Jedediah removed his hat, holding it over his heart. He was on Roosevelt's right shoulder. "I... I'm sorry, Nick."

The president removed his hat as well.

"My condolences, lad," Teddy said, uncharacteristically quiet.

Attila couldn't speak, with tears and sobs escaping him. He reached out for a hug from someone, anyone - Larry was who he missed, though.

"We're here for you, Nick," Sacajawea consoled, her voice gentle as she approached the desk. "If you need to talk about it, please, tell us."

Nick nodded, as best he could.

Octavius was the one to wordlessly leap from her left shoulder and descend down to Nick, putting his arms around the man's forearm, giving the best hug he could at his size.

"I'm sorry," Nick wailed, "I wanted to bring him by, but, but I couldn't, I couldn't bring him before he needed the life support, I, I'm sorry, I'm sorry..."

Nick trailed off into sobbing apologies.

The pharaoh rested his arm around Nick's shoulder, not unlike he had done to him so many years ago.

"Cry as much as is needed, Nicholas. We..." the pharaoh wiped a tear on his shoulder. "We are a family. We will get through this. Together. All of us."

A silent, solemn nod, even from Attila.

"Don't accept that what's happening is just a case of others' suffering, or you'll find that you're joining in the turning away."

Larry woke up to the voice of the driver singing.

He was in a cab.

"Oh, damn it, and I don't carry any cash," he sighed.

"Ain't a problem, Lawrence," the driver said as David Gilmour made his guitar sing.

Larry sighed, and flinched as they opened the partition.

"Oh, uh, I won't, I won't-," he stammered. He wasn't sure whether to swear to not tell the cops or promise to pay them back later.

A black wing extended over the seats.

"I gotta say, I am a fan of this band. A hundred years ago, I followed 'em like the Dead," the driver said, before puffing their cigar.

Larry felt cold inside.

"Hey, you ever follow the Dead? Oh, wait," their wing fluttered a bit. "They broke up in '95, right. Right. Man, this job fucks up your calendar."

"This job?"

The driver looked back.

Larry felt electric fear run through his nerves.

Black feathery wings.

Long, flowing hair.

A black toga.

Burning eyes.

"Oh."

"Yep."

Larry looked at his hands, wrinkled with nine decades of life. "I'm..."

"You're dead. Happens to the best of us," the driver shrugged.

"You're Samael, right?" Larry asked, trying to remember the name of the angel of death.

"One of many names I've got, bub," the driver turned back to the road. "Just sit tight, we're almost there. And call me Sy."

"What's... what's going to happen to me, Sy?"

"Well, that's a bit prickly. Rabbis are still arguin' about the specifics to this day," Psychopomp explained, nonchalantly flicking ashes off their cigar. "But let's not worry about all that. You n' I, let's talk. There's somethin' you gotta say to me, before we're done here."

Silence.

"C'mon, bub, I'm going as slow as I can here. I'm almost at the speed of light."

Larry thought for a moment.

"A finite joy that outdoes heaven itself...?"

A spark.

He remembered.

"I-!! I was there, at, at Arcadia!"

Psychopomp slammed the gas pedal, and reality flashed outside the windows faster than one's mind could comprehend.

"Damn right you were!"

Chapter Two: internal bewildered world

"Mr. Daley, this is Director Chen. Nick hasn't answered any of my calls, and he's four hours late. Is everything all right?"

...

"Oh."

...

"Oh. I... Yes. I'll send his last check as soon as I can."

Click.

"...Fuck. He's..."

"Dr. Chen?"

Roosevelt trotted up to her office's door on horseback.

"Mr. President, I... have some bad news."

Teddy furrowed his brow.

"Gather the rest. Bring them in here."

Ahkmenrah, Attila, and Octavius were huddled in a small group, heaving and sobbing.

"Nick-, Nicky," Attila repeated between cries.

"I'm sorry. They found him this evening."

"What..." Sacajawea shivered, masking a sob. "What happened to him?"

"The Bridge. It... it collapsed earlier today. And..."

Dr. Chen rested her head in her hands.

"And they found him washed up on the shore in Nolan Park."

Roosevelt and Jedediah were silent. The former placing his arm around Sacajawea's shoulders, the latter completely numb, staring out the window.

"We'll need a new guard, and soon."

Silence, save for the sobbing.

"I'll... I'll try to find one for you. I promise."

Jedediah took in a breath.

"It ain't fair."

He gripped his Stetson tight, crumpling the leather.

"First we lose Gigantor, and now Nick's..."

"Us and them, and after all we're only ordinary men."

Nick coughed, and a splash of water came up, drenching the seat in front of him.

"Oh, come on!"

Nick flinched.

"S-sorry! I'll clean that up-!!"

"Ugh, don't bother. You're already soaking everything."

Nick looked down, and sure enough, he was. His body was still wet, droplets of water falling from his beard and his hands prune.

"What happened to me?"

"Brooklyn Bridge collapsed earlier today. You were unlucky enough to be on the bus when it did."

"Shit... are you taking me to the hospital?"

The driver laughed.

"No, we're way past that, Daley."

Nick furrowed his brow, and tried to open the partition. His wrinkled hands gripped the handle, and pulled open the glass.

He felt feathers stick to his hand.

"And my glass, too? Nick, Nick, you're killin' me here."

The driver went up in a laugh.

"Ah, 'killin' me,' Sy, you ol' rascal."

"Sy...?"

"Well, Samael's probably what you'd call me. But Sy is the name your buddy gave me."

"My buddy?"

"The little one, with the gloves!"

A spark.

"I was there at Arcadia."

Psychopomp took in a deep breath.

"Two down, then!"

And slammed the gas pedal.

The void outside the windows fractalized, deep and infinite patterns swirling at speeds faster than light or comprehension.

Nick's vision was filled with the light of infinity.

"Let's get you on, bub - you ain't the only one that was on the Bridge today!"

Chapter Three: long term dusk glimpses

"Damage report."

Dr. Chen took a breath as she read the contents of the email aloud.

"Transport vehicle broke down en route to Atlanta. Driver unharmed. Two hours on the roadside."

She scrolled down. Her stomach twisted.

"Dr. Chen?"

Sacajawea gripped the hem of her dress, her brow furrowed.

"Please continue."

Dr. Chen only nodded.

"...Items lost: One... oh, god," Dr. Chen removed her glasses to cover her eyes. "...one waxwork, Theodore Roosevelt."

"Lost...?"

Sacajawea's eyes filled with tears.

"He... the heat. Atlanta's down south, it's, it's much hotter. When they opened the truck, he was..."

The translator's knees gave out. She fell to the floor.
And her cry broke Dr. Chen's heart.

"People are strange when you're a stranger, faces look ugly when you're alone."

The dripping wax from Roosevelt's face landed on plastic-wrapped seats.

"I think that's the best investment I've made in a long time. Shoulda wrapped those seats decades ago."

Roosevelt tried to push up his glasses, but his still-dripping hands only divoted, the small impression of his frames embedded in what used to be his knuckles.

"Oh, goodness. Pardon me, can you please turn the heat down?" he asked the driver.

"Of course, bub. Sorry 'bout that," the driver said, opening the partition. They positioned their cigar between their index and middle fingers as they adjusted the heat.

Teddy noticed that they were old, wrinkled, and glowing with holy light.

"Oh, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph."

"Damn, three tries wrong!"

The driver looked back. "You feelin' the AC back there, Roosevelt?"

The president would be shivering, if his sticky form allowed for it.

A bald, older man was driving, the holy light of heaven shining behind his whole form.
His beard white and fluffy, a blue robe over his being.

And burning eyes.

"Saint Peter?"

"Oh, THAT'S a surprise!" The driver laughed. "I thought you'd see the Reaper like most folks!"

Teddy's softened brow furrowed with a squish that made his waxen spine shiver as the driver laughed.

"Man, I've lost a bet. Ah, well," they shrugged. "You can call me Peter if you want. Though, you already know my true name, Mr. President."

"I do recognize your laugh," Teddy said. "I think there's something I was supposed to say."

"Yep."

"I... hm, I've forgotten."

"It'll come to ya," they turned back to the road. "One way or another."

Roosevelt looked out at the rainy void.

"I've died. I don't want to believe it."

"It's already dealt with, Ted. Ain't no escapin' it."

"Hypocrisy is a sin, Psychopomp."

They raised a brow with a smile.

"You already helped someone escape it."

"Oh, have I now?"

"For his... for his..."

Come on, Ted, you're basically standing on the point.

"For... his Arcadia! Yes!" Teddy grabbed the partition window, his melting hand splattering wax into the front seat. "I was there at Arcadia!"

"Fuck! Roosevelt!" Psychopomp griped, trying to wipe off some of the wax from the stick. "Ugh, I protect the back seat, now I've got to worry about the front seat, it's every *DAY* with you people!"

On "day", they slammed the gas pedal. Reality fractalized. And Roosevelt's soul truly left the mortal realm.

Chapter Four: bewildered in other eyes

"Jesus, look at this guy!"

The sanitation worker prodded the statue with a pair of grabbers as it passed them on the conveyor belt.

"Looks like the kinda guy that'd rip your limbs off."

"Yeah-- wait a second, I know this dude! He was on display at the AMNH for, like, ever!"

"Oh, shit, he's an exhibit? Why'd they toss him out?!"

"Hell if I know. Man, it's a shame to see him all grody like this."

"You wanna take him home?"

"Yeah, sure, keep a six-foot Hun statue in my one-room apartment, see how that goes."

The movement of the conveyor belt continued, bringing the old sculpture of Attila to the end of the line.

"Awright, press it!"

With a loud alarm, the compressor began to descend.

The Hun's body ceased to be, as it cracked and burst, limb by limb, along with a day's trash in New York City.

"It's getting dark, too dark to see, I feel I'm knockin' on heaven's door."

Attila opened his eyes.

It was very strange, having them break apart before coming back together. Every blink slid chunks of plastic over his vision.

"Mornin', sunshine," a familiar voice teased.

Attila lifted his hand. It was shattered into pieces, broken to the point where it shouldn't exist - yet, here it was, moving as normally expected.

"*What magic is this?*" asked the Hun, his gaze moving from his hand to where he heard the voice.

Before him was a man, blue-skinned, long-haired, adorned in a crown with two large feathers as white as snow itself. In his right hand rested a cigar.

"*Lovely to see you, Attila.* You got it bad, didn't ya?"

Attila's heart leaped into his mouth. His own language, one he hadn't heard from anyone that wasn't his men, one he hadn't heard in a long time.

"*Tengri.*"

"*That I am.*"

The Hun knew the god before him, somehow. He'd worshiped him a thousand years ago, and yet, this was not the deity he'd cultivated. This was someone else, someone familiar, someone much more recent.

"No, you're not."

The driver turned back to the Hun.

"Tengri... who are you, really?"

"An old friend. I visited long ago, don't you remember?"

Attila tried to recall when he'd last heard that voice.

The song on the radio changed.

"Echoes of reggae, coming through my bedroom wall..."

It clicked as the chorus came up.

"I was there at Arcadia!"

Psychopomp punched the gas.

"And we're halfway done, big guy!"

Chapter Five: burning despair does ache

"And how do you expect me to teach this part of our history without Lewis and Clark?!"

"Replace them with wax or wood - we need the plastic."

"But--!!"

The men hoisted the old trackers over their shoulders. Their hollow plastic forms weren't heavy, but they were rather cumbersome to move.

"Dr. Chen, this is a matter of national security. You're going to jeopardize the nation for a few exhibits?"

Chen couldn't reply. She knew she'd sound insane if she told them the truth.

One of the men lifted Sacajawea up from her podium.

It took everything in the director's power not to burst into tears.

"Thank you for your understanding, Dr. Chen - on behalf of the army."

"Where has she gone?"

Dr. Chen couldn't answer Octavius.

"I... I heard that the shortage called for polyurethane."

The Roman tried to beat back the dawning realization.

"Please. Please tell me she wasn't..."

Silence.

"I want something good to die for, to make it beautiful to live."

Sacajawea's body felt lighter. Less stable.

She noticed the holes dotting her body - the plastic chipped and broken away.

"What happened to me?"

The partition was already open. A woman in traditional Shoshone wear drove the vehicle.

"Same thing that happens to every American. War machine took away everything."

Sacajawea thought for a moment. She knew that voice.

"You're the one that brought back Octavius."

"Aw, you remember me. You're the latest in this line I've gotta pick up. I think the next one I've got is..."

"I was there at Arcadia," she interrupted.

Psychopomp choked on the smoke of their cigar.

"Yeesh, you're the fastest one to get it so far!" They coughed. "Smart as a whip!"

The translator smiled as they stepped on the gas.

Chapter Six: an empty bliss beyond this world

Jedediah woke in a familiar place. The smell of the leather brought back memories he forgot he had. Open fields, wild winds, blood and eyes.

"Hey, Sy."

Psychopomp turned back to their old friend. Only static on the radio.

"Good to see you too, bub."

Jedediah looked down at his hands. His fingers were melted together.

"How'd I bite it this time?"

Psychopomp opened the partition. Purple smoke floated in from their half of the car.

"Some shit kid reached in and yanked you out. Dropped ya. Got stepped on a few minutes later. *Then* you melted, in the fire a few years later."

Jedediah cringed. "Yeesh."

"Yep. Considering the amount of the dead down there, it'll take me a minute to get up to your toga boy."

Jedediah felt his heart shatter.

"Oh. Ocky's...?"

"Still over there. Not for much longer, though," they took a drag. "He's on my schedule for today."

Jedediah felt his eyes water.

"Hey, no blubberin' on my seats. Just had those cleaned."

"I just... I love him, Sy. I've already been without him once before. You..." he swallowed a sob. "You said I was gone for years?"

"Yeah. Would've picked you up sooner, if that tablet didn't get in the way again. Little bastard wouldn't let any of you minis go, had to wait a decade or two until it got destroyed."

"It's been destroyed?"

"Fire spread there, and that was it. Finally got to grab you and the others."

Jedediah let out something between a sob and a laugh.

"You've seen it all before, haven't cha? Can't even extend a helpful word to an old friend?"

Psychopomp's cigar disappeared into mist.

"Can't say anythin' that would be of any help at this point, bub."

Jedediah rested his crumbling hands on his forehead, leaning forward to stare at the floor.

"You ain't committed any atrocities since we last spoke, have ya?"

Jedediah shook his head.

"Then there ain't nothin' to worry about."

The first night since Jedediah's funeral.

He had been buried in the West, the only one of the little graves to have a name engraved on it.

Octavius did not move when the magic filled his plastic form with life. His stance remained still as tears dripped from his eyes.

The only thing he did was sing.

"I should be happy with someone new, but my heart aches for you."

With that single line, Octavius went silent.

He did not move from his position.

The second night.

"*Imperator*, come, you're worrying us."

Octavius did not move. His arm continued to hold his sword aloft. Septimius called from below, Trajan at his side.

"*Imperator*?"

Tears streamed down his cheeks in rivers. It took all his strength not to look at Septimius, to meet his crestfallen gaze.

"*Imperator* Octavius, please, tell us what ails you!"

Septimius felt Trajan's hand on his shoulder.

"He didn't respond to me either."

Septimius's eyes filled with tears of his own.

"Why isn't he moving...?"

The third night.

Life breathed into the exhibits, as it had for a century.

Trajan and Septimius awoke as they always had, swords clashed in training.

They said nothing.

Carefully, they turned towards the podium.

"*Imperator*..."

Octavius stood frozen, still plastic. His stance unchanged, his face now dry of tears.

"He isn't... he's not..."

The pharaoh cradled the figurine in his hands. His face twisted in agony, sobbing quietly. His abdominals hurt from the heaving. Tears dripped down onto the frozen general.

"I... I am sorry, little ones."

"What's happened to *imperator*, your majesty? Please, tell us."

"He... he has returned his life to the magic."

Neither soldier dared to speak.

"It is... it is a form of... of suicide," Ahkmenrah explained through his tears. "The most grueling way I can imagine."

Septimius grabbed Trajan's hand. He could feel the trembling in his fellow munifex's fingers. For a moment, they looked at one another, the same thought in their minds. With a small nod, Septimius turned his gaze to Ahkmenrah.

"...Tell us how."

Ahkmenrah met their gazes.

"What...?"

Trajan nodded.

"Rome is changing. It's about to be rearranged for the Crisis of the Third Century. We're not from that time," Septimius explained.

"We have invented all we can," Trajan joined in.

Ahkmenrah's heart broke all over again.

"Please, no. I cannot lose you as well. You..." The pharaoh begged. "You are all I have, now."

The two held one another's hand a little tighter.

"Please, your majesty. We cannot stay."

Through their welling tears, Ahkmenrah saw determination. These two little ones had brought him endless entertainment in his time here, their antics always causing a laugh. His favorite over all the years had been the recreation of a scene from a film they had watched as a group. Electrocuting the senate was a hilarious sight. A shame that immediately afterward, they were banned from watching Jackass.

At this moment, their mischief was dead. Only a cold, determined purpose reflected on their tears. Their hands held, their bodies stiff.

"...Remain still," Ahkmenrah sobbed. "And your lives will return to the magic on the third sunset."

The two munifexes looked at one another.

"The one thing I've never been good at," Trajan laughed.

"A true challenge indeed," Septimius joined, laughing as well.

Ahkmenrah couldn't understand. He couldn't understand why they faced eternity with such joy on their faces. Why they would want death. Why they would want it for one another.

"Come, Suleyman - it's a beautiful evening," Trajan held up his friend's hand, kissing a knuckle.

"That it is, Taran," Septimius accepted the kiss with a grin. "That it is."

Octavius opened his eyes. The smell of the leather cleaner brought back so many memories.

"Lord Mercury."

"Thought you dropped that name for me back there, bub."

The Roman chuckled, looking at his melted hand.

"Another fire, it seems."

"You tend to die that way a lot, Ock. Must be fate, or somethin'."

Using the melted mass, Octavius adjusted his toga. He didn't have anything else to say.

"Now, you know what you gotta say to me, 'Tavius."

"Oh, yes. I..." he looked out the window. His mangled hand tried to grasp his heart. "Arcadia."

The guide raised a brow.

"My Arcadia."

Memories flowed back into his mind.

"Where..."

"Come on. Finish your sentence."

"I... was there. At Arcadia."

Octavius's senses were overcome with flashes of time and reality. His heart, broken in his chest, ached for someone. Someone he couldn't remember the name of.

Judgement was easy, this time around. Octavius was able to stand on his own.

The door, when he opened it, did not reveal his domus.

Octavius stepped through, and his bare feet touched dew-dripping grass. The door disappeared into mist.

"Here again?"

"Thought you'd like to see him first," Psychopomp's voice whispered in his mind.

Octavius's eyes welled with tears.

He remembered how to call Arcadia close.

With a deep breath, he sang to the open hills.

"I can still see your face!"

It echoed through paradise.

"Although the years may have forced some change!"

There was a crunching of leaves, and thuds of footsteps.

"And I know I'm no longer the same!"

Free ginger locks broke over the hill, framing teary blue eyes. A familiar voice sang with him.

"And I hope I don't show it!"

Jedediah was running as fast as he could. Octavius held out his arms to catch him.

"I hope I don't show it!"

At last, they connected. Jedediah hugged him with all of his limbs, tight as he could.

Octavius hugged back, keeping him held against his body. The two men cried joyous tears at their touch, chests heaving and voices breaking.

At last, their weeping eyes met.

"But my heart's the same."

Jedediah cupped Octavius's cheeks with both hands.

"My Jedediah. My Arcadia."

"Welcome home, my 'Tavius."

And their lips met.

Psychopomp rested their head in one hand.

"Damn it, you two, OK, I get it! Relax!"

A Moroccan with long locs and a green sash was rummaging through the glove box, supported through the partition by a Welshman with bright red hair and a wreath crown of holly berries.

"You got the manual?!"

"Hold on, hold on...! Yes!"

Sulayman was gently pulled back into the backseat.

"Oh, how did they deal with you for so long..."

"Forgive me, Lord Mercury- oh, look, there's the make and model!"

"A... Mercedes 280 TE. Year, 1984. Oh, this ol' girl is from the 80's, Gwynn?"

"Considerin' you two literally lived for a century and a half, you really should be asking 'which eighties'."

Taran and Suleyman looked at one another with knowing smiles.

"To me, there are only ONE eighties," Taran said in his best impression of Zapp Brannigan.

"Oh, fuck, please, no," the guide begged.

The Welshman took in a deep breath, and embraced Suleyman around the shoulders.

"Smell like I sound!"

"Ugh."

"I'm lost in a crowd!"

"Stop."

"And I'm hungry like the wolf!" Suleyman joined in for the iconic end of the chorus.

Psychopomp slammed the partition shut. Of all the things to sing, Duran Duran was one they could live without for at least four centuries.

Chapter Seven: drifting time misplaced

Ahkmenrah watched the needle drop. Of all the artifacts in the new Technology Through the Ages exhibit, the record player was his favorite. With it came a few records - one of which he'd come to love in this lonely time.

Violins, piano keys, and horns began to play through the crackling grooves.

"Cradle me where Southern skies can watch me with a million eyes..."

With his now usual stillness, he remained before the record.

"Sing me to sleep, lullaby of the leaves."

He took in a breath, and began to sing alongside the long-dead group.

"Cover me with heaven's blue and let me dream a dream or two..."

His voice hitched as he tried to cover a sob.

"Sing me to sleep, lullaby of the leaves."

This was mostly what he did these days. Listen to old records, older than his time at the museum, and grieve.

On occasion, he would visit certain exhibits in particular. The front area presented a brontosaurus now.

The horse of Roosevelt now held a wooden mannequin dressed in Teddy's Rough Rider outfit. Ahkmenrah had learned one very harsh night that it wasn't Teddy at all.

The Huns had been changed out long ago, now presenting some figures from the Renaissance. Ahkmenrah had found himself in some lovely conversations with Da Vinci and Raphael, though Michelangelo was a bit haughty. Those days were long past.

The Frontier was now exhibiting pottery of the Hopi. They had found a way to fire their clay with as little oxygen as possible, making beautiful black pottery as dark as the night. Ahkmenrah had mistaken it for obsidian at least once.

The diorama hall had been changed. Now in Rome, instead of the Empire, it was the Crisis of the Third Century. The sealed area rioted against barbarians. The new guard had found these Romans far too rowdy. Ahkmenrah looked in, towards a particular spot - the statues at the Forum of Augustus. He'd surreptitiously taken the frozen forms of Octavius, Trajan, and Septimius from the storage pile, and spent a night carefully painting over them. No longer were

they old friends of his - they were now statues meant to inspire young Romans with visions of the past.

In the West, it had changed to the Gold Rush. The railroad was now a river, filled with prospectors panning for any gold at all. Ahkmenrah could care less about the greedy little ones - he was busy looking at the graveyard, which had been left intact. He let out a soft prayer for Jedediah.

He was alone, very alone. The exhibits he knew had been gone for decades. No one cared to get to know him these days, even with the knowledge that he was the reason for their lives.

A king of a dead empire in decay.

One device, old and rusted, remained. A small invention, whirring at sundown every night, that unlatched the pharaoh's sarcophagus.

One last Daley Device.

Ahkmenrah had named it Larry, and it was starting to come apart.

"Someday, you too, will stop working," he spoke to the little box on the sarcophagus's lock.

"I wonder if any of these exhibits will care to release me when you break, little Larry."

He pet the contraption gingerly, letting the rust run along his fingers.

"I fail to see the point any longer. I..."

The pharaoh trailed off. What was the point of any of this? No one was there to listen.

Smoke.

Ash.

Heat.

Fire.

It began downstairs. Everything on the lower levels was melted, ashen, or otherwise on fire. The dioramas were locked up, but that only trapped the heat, melting the weeping citizens in their glass boxes. The statues left in Rome of Octavius, Trajan, and Septimius collapsed into silicon. The graveyard in the West was scorched to ash, a small collection of old broken plastic melting into itself under the burning sand.

The Presidential podium was eaten by the wild flames. For a moment, the old markings of dinosaur tracks could be seen, before they too were devoured.

Ahkmenrah beat against the top of his sarcophagus. He could feel the skin of his hands bring rubbed raw.

The flames licked at his tomb.

Evaporating tears streaked down the pharaoh's face.

"Someone! Anyone! Help me!!" He begged through the roaring flames.

But no one was coming. He knew it, deep down.

The conflagration reached the tablet's holster.

The gold began to drip from its structure, along with Khonsu's magic.

Ahkmenrah felt that dripping pain, more than he felt the agony of the flames.

The fire had burned enough of the sarcophagus to let him see outside.

The moon was beautiful-

IIIIII

"A tragedy tonight. The Natural History Museum has gone up in flames. While the fire has been extinguished, we have lost priceless amounts of artifacts, including the museum centerpiece - the tablet and mummy of the Egyptian pharaoh, Ahkmenrah. We will report back with more information as this story develops. This is WNBC News at 11. Do you know where your children are?"

Ahkmenrah opened his eyes in a place he did not recognize. This was not his sarcophagus. It was something else entirely. Tinted windows, leather seats, rain on the roof. A car.

"Pardon me-"

Ahkmenrah tried to speak, but his voice was raspy and burnt. He could taste smoke in his mouth.

"I'd rest if I was you, bub..."

Music Used

- Everywhere at the End of Time (Stage 3) - The Caretaker (chapter titles)
- On the Turning Away - Pink Floyd
- Us and Them - Pink Floyd
- People are Strange - The Doors
- Knockin' on Heaven's Door - Bob Dylan
- Go With the Flow - Queens of the Stone Age
- Heartaches - Seger Ellis
- My Heart's the Same - Jukebox the Ghost
- Hungry Like the Wolf - Duran Duran
- Lullaby of the Leaves - George Olsen
- Watching Dead Empires in Decay - The Stranger