

“Alright, Athena has given us specific instructions on how to get the star to the top of the Mount Olympus tree.” shouted Odysseus to his men, “Now, let’s go through the checklist: Milk jugs, check. Candy canes, check. Rope and hooks, check. Noble Star, check. Ok. Here we go.” Odysseus and his men started climbing the colossal Mount Olympus Christmas tree. The gods and goddess had entrusted him with the Noble Star that would signify to all of Greece that Christmas has arrived. Once atop the tree, the shining star could be seen for thousands of miles.

They approached. “Remember, men, that Athena mentioned some difficult tasks and creatures, but I know we can get through, and I’m sure that we can beat whatever we come up against.” They started climbing up the tree. The pine needles were as thick as their fingers and as long as their arms. As their journey dragged on, they ate their candy canes slowly. The sun started going down and the sky was red and pink, highlighted with tints of orange and yellow. They found a small opening in the tree. “In here men. Here, we will rest and I can smell some gingerbread. We can give gifts to whoever lives here, and we can all feast.” They slowly and carefully entered the cave.

As they lay down on the soft branches, they looked around and saw no one. Where was the owner of this cave? They shrugged off the fear of a monster living in the cave and fell fast asleep.

They awoke to a crunching sound. *Crunch. Crunch. Crunch.* The crunching grew louder. They stood up and pulled out their swords and spears and stood frightened. The shadow of the upcoming figure appeared on the wall of the cave. As the figure entered into sight, they looked at the disgusting monster. A rotting gingerbread man came into view. The brown creature was at least three heads taller than Odysseus and had moldy green and white splotches covering areas of his body. There was a circular outline where his right eye should be. His hands and feet had chunks missing. The stale cookie let out a surprisingly high roar. “Who are you and what are you doing in my cave, mortals?”

“I am...uh...Tony...yes, Tony. I am the mighty Tony, sent by the gods to deliver the Noble Star to this fine tree you have for a home. And you are...”

“I am Iscilles. I was left in this tree by the gods over 387 years ago.”

“Why do you not just simply leave?”

“I’ve grown to like it here. Now, mortals, why are you here?”

“We are looking for somewhere to stay. We’re tired travelers and were hoping you would let us stay here.”

“I ALLOW NO GUESTS!!!” With that, he grabbed one of the men and ripped his arms off. He shoved the rest of the man into his mouth and used the arms to smack each soldier.

“We have brought you gifts, Almighty Iscilles.”

“What kind of gifts?”

“We have brought you the drink of the gods.” Odysseus said, holding out the large jug of milk.

“Hmmm...GIMME!” shouted the spoiled cookie. He tipped up the jug and drank. “That tastes good. GIVE ME MORE!!!” As he said that, a hole appeared in his stomach and milk flowed out. Then, another hole popped open in his head. All of a sudden, holes gushing with milk opened all over the gingerbread man. “AHHH!!! You tricked me!” he shrieked. He reached out to grab Odysseus but as he did, his soggy arms sunk off his body. His head soon became too heavy for his now spongy and wet body to hold up. “AAAgllp” He cried as his head slid off his body. It was the last thing he said before he was nothing but a pile of mushy, lumpy gingerbread.

His men stood in awe, staring at the gross brown pile with white and green spots. “Alright, let’s go.”

They left the cave and continued climbing. As they did, they finished the last bit of their candy canes and came across some unattended gingerbread. Odysseus took it and broke into equal pieces and handed it to his soldiers to eat. They heard branches rustling and wood squeaking, but paid no consideration to it.

As the sound passed through their heads with no concern, three figures jumped out and surrounded them. Three. Giant. Nutcrackers. One nutcracker jumped out and grabbed a soldier. The nutcracker reached back and pulled the lever attached to him and stuffed the man’s head in his mouth. He dropped the lever down with a snap. A

sickening crunch filled the air as the brave man's head was crushed like a grape. Blood spurted from the nutcracker's mouth as the once-struggling victim came to a halt and hung limp from his mouth.

The nutcracker shoved the rest of him into his mouth and said with a hoarse voice, "Who's next?!" All at once, the other nutcrackers reached for the men-shaped delicacies. Odysseus thought fast and grabbed the string of white lights. He crouched behind a nutcracker, who was devouring another man, and tore off the disgusting nutcracker's arm. It turned around, infuriated and blood dripping from its mouth. Odysseus quickly smashed the bulb, letting off a spark onto the wooden arm. The arm immediately caught fire. He shoved the inflamed arm into the nutcracker, who proceeded to catch on fire. He smacked the burning nutcracker across the face with the arm and sent him soaring over the side of the tree. As fast as he could, he did the same for each nutcracker.

When he finished, he had lost seven brave men. He and his men trudged on, the needles poking at their skin. It soon became difficult to go on. "Boy, you sure look beat." "Huh? Who goes there?" said Odysseus.

"Guys, arm yourselves, we're going to be prepared this time." Whispered Achilles, who'd promised to accompany them on their journey. As he said that, everyone raised their swords and spears and prayed to the gods, begging them to spare their lives.

"I'll give you a hint: No, never mind." Santa Claus came around from behind a big branch.

"What? How did you get here?"

"No, no. I am just an ornament, living here on the tree; I am not the real thing. But this isn't about me, it's about you. You guys look like you could use some help."

"Yes. Please help us." Begged Odysseus and his army.

"Alright, take my present bag. It will fly you and your men up a few branches. But, only use it every thirty minutes or so or else it'll do something bad. I'd tell you what but it's different every time." The Santa ornament explained.

“Thank you so much!” Achilles and Odysseus shouted as Santa disappeared. Odysseus opened the bag. He and his soldiers were lifted from the ground and shot up twenty feet and landed on a small branch. They all stood in awe. They started climbing up the tree once again. As they did, two greedy snowmen watched them climb by. “Look,” said one, who was plump and very short for a snowman. “The one at the front has a gem bag.”

“Let’s grab it!” Whispered the other, a tall and rather thin-looking snowman. They jumped out from behind the branches. Then they grabbed the bag and opened it. “NO!” shouted the warriors all at once. They rose into the air and dropped down fifteen feet. Odysseus turned around and grabbed the bag out of the snowman’s hand. “Hey! There weren’t any gems in there! You tricked us!” shouted the short snowman.

“Get out of here! C’mon soldiers. Let’s start climbing AGAIN.” Achilles commanded, though he was not the boss. The snowman huffed away.

“Look! It’s Siri Ballerina’s hut!” exclaimed one of the men.

“Go in and ask her for some food. We are all out.” said Odysseus. Six men went to her hut and entered. Odysseus heard them scream. He rushed into the hut. There stood Siri and six red ornaments, the six men he had sent in, no doubt. “Siri, what have you done? They were innocently asking for help.”

“They require no help from me. Why does everyone expect me to help them?! First, those two snowmen wanted me to make them rich. Then, Santa wanted a bigger present bag. Now you *beg* me to help you. I’m magic, but don’t intend on wasting it for others.”

Odysseus raised Santa’s bag. “Do you know what this is?”

“No. What is it?”

“This is a gift from Athena herself,” he said, hoping to scare her into letting his crew go, he only had one more guy left, “She said that it would release a magic that will kill any enemy we come up against. Shall I use it on you?”

“No, mighty Odysseus, have mercy!” she cried, falling to her knees. “Please, be the noble warrior I know you are! I will change your men back, and guide you in the right

direction! Please!" She flicked her wrist and the red ornaments turned into the six strong men they were before. "Fine, Come on men."

"Yes sir."

"Wait," called Siri, "There are three angels, they sing. Their voices are majestic and will pull you towards them. Once you are in reach, they will push over the edge of the tree and you will fall to your death. To prevent your demise, stuff your ears with pine needles and do not loosen them."

"Come on, Odysseus! You're taking forever!!" complained Achilles

"Hold on! Ok. Anything else?"

"Yes, there is a long string full of popcorn and cranberries, do not eat them, for they belong to a Gingerbread man. If you eat them, you will be destroyed. There is a creature, a horrible creature. One half of her is a large, ugly green ornament that sucks in all of the ornaments in the area then vomits them back up. If you get sucked in, you will never come back up. The other half of her is a mutated snowman with six heads. She will reach for six of your men and eat them faster than you can ever run." "I would suggest sacrificing six of your men instead of you and all of your men."

"Thank you for your help."

Odysseus left with his remaining men.

As they climbed, they heard beautiful singing. "Come to us, Odysseus. We are sent by the Gods to guide you. Come to us, Odysseus."

"Quick! Stuff as many pine needles as you can in your ears and don't loosen them, unless you want to get thrown over the side of this, extremely tall tree." demanded Odysseus. Immediately, pine needles were yanked off the branches and shoved into the ears of the weary travelers. All, except for one. They walked past the majestic angels. One man, eyes wide, walked stiffly towards the angels. Odysseus noticed that his ears were empty. One of the angels turned her head with an impish grin on her face and grabbed him and lifted him above her head. Eyes still lifeless, he was thrown over the side of the tree. Suddenly realizing what was happening, he screamed and landed with a thud.

“See?” Odysseus shouted to the rest of the group.

“What?” they shouted back.

“I said, ‘See?’” He shouted again.

“What?!” they screamed back.

“Nevermind!” If they can’t hear the angels, then they’ll never hear him.

They trudged on. When they were out sound range, they pulled out the pine needles. Many had scratches or cuts in their ears now. “Can’t we stop for a little bit?” complained Procetheis, a young boy, about the age of seventeen.

“Not yet! We have to be there tomorrow! Four more hours.”

Odysseus looked up and could see the top of the tree. “So close,” he thought, “Wait, I have Santa’s bag.” He quickly pulled out the bag and opened it. They flew up what seemed like a mile. They were about to celebrate when they were sucked up by an unseen force. “It’s the monster!” he said.

“What monster? Where? Is it gonna get us?” they said all at once. “Calm down. There is a way to avoid the one that will eat us all. But, to make it past, we need to sacrifice six soldiers. Who will volunteer?”

No one stepped forward at first, then one man, a small wimpy-looking one, stepped forward. “My name is Archerius, and I will.” He said, his voice strong.

“I will,” said another, a strong man.

“I will.” came four other replies.

Odysseus nodded. “Thank you. Athena will surely know of your sacrifice.” They nodded back and stood bravely at the front of the group as they walked towards the now visible six-headed snowman. “Hello, my friends. Would you like to stay for dinner?” said one head.

“We’re having Roast Warrior!!” said another. The creature’s heads reached for the six men at the front and chomped and crushed them while the rest of the warriors ran past.

“Good job. Now, we will pass a long string of cranberries and popcorn. If you want to see the Noble Star atop the tree, DO NOT eat the food on the string.”

Commanded Odysseus.

“But Odysseus, I’m hungry! What makes you think we’ll die?” said Achilles, who had been complaining the whole trip.

“Listen, I have some gingerbread that I stole from the moldy gingerbread man. We can take a rest at the end and eat.” They walked forward and soon saw the string of treats. They walked by cautiously, as if afraid to even breath on them.

“If we run, it’ll go by much faster.” They started to run, pine needles whizzing past them. They heard a crunch and stopped dead in their tracks. Slowly, they turned around and saw Achilles standing there, holding a cranberry with bite marks in it. “YOU IDIOT!!!!” Shouted Odysseus. They both stood frightened, unsure about what was going to happen. “Look!” Achilles shouted, pointing to a tiny gingerbread, no bigger than their hands. “Hello!” it said in a squeaky voice.

“Awwwww, a wittle bitty gingewbwead man! Are you going to kiw me, wittle man?” said Achilles. Not being able to believe the fact that he was actually scared for a moment.

“Yes,” it said, in a suddenly raspy, grim voice, “but not alone!” Thousands of tiny gingerbread men flooded in and piled on top of Achilles in a wave of gingerbread. Odysseus watched in awe as the tiny sweets disappeared along with his only traveling companion. “I TOLD you this was going to happen! Listen to what I say!” shouted Odysseus after the gingerbread men.

Odysseus carried on alone. He had seen enough dying to last him a lifetime. So, he was careful to do exactly what Siri said. With no if’s, and’s, or but’s. His journey went smoothly and quickly, with plenty of help from Santa’s bag. Until, finally, he had made it. Odysseus slowly pulled out the big, golden star. He watched as he placed the star on top of the tall, and dangerous Mount Olympus tree. As soon as it was in its place, blinding light shone out from every part of the Noble Star. Athena appeared and said in a voice like the singing angels, “Well done, Odysseus. You’ve brought light to Olympus and all the world.” She disappeared in a flash of light. Though he wished his

companions were here seeing the beautiful tree, he also wished he could say that they were in a better place now, but gods know that the Underworld is not a better place. Odysseus was now on the ground below the shining tree. Finally, his journey was complete.