

JIM JONES & JUPITER, King of the Gods

Jim Jones knew there was something odd about the old man.

He had been muttering and staring at Jim through the glass display cabinets.

Jim looked about. People were everywhere. It was Saturday, and the museum was packed. Mum said it would help with his history homework. But now he was playing ‘dodge the mad old guy’.

The old man smiled at Jim as their eyes met. Why did this always happen to him?

Just then Jim’s attention was drawn to the largest display. An ancient hoard of coins discovered near to the Roman baths.

‘The Beau Street Hoard,’ read Jim, gazing through the glass. The coins were all gathered into a large rectangular pile. ‘Found in a large sealed area...’ he whispered.

‘17,577’ said a voice in his ear.

Jim looked around. The old man stared at him, a golden twinkle in his eyes.

‘Pardon?’ said Jim.

‘That’s how many coins were found. But there were more – a lot more!’ said the old man, and stroked his big bushy beard all red and grey.

‘Right...’ said Jim. He looked at the sign on the wall. The old man was right. Held in eight pouches. The coins dated across hundreds of years. But there was a mystery. Jim read on:

‘Nobody knows how they got there,’ he read aloud. Jim loved a mystery. He bet he could work it out -

‘Oh, I know,’ said the old man. ‘We’re going to travel back in time and put them there!’

‘Right...’ said Jim again, moving away. Clothes shopping with Mum suddenly seemed very appealing. ‘I just need to go find...’

But Jim Jones didn’t finish his sentence, because the old man quickly took his hand.

Now, you’d think someone taking your hand wouldn’t do very much. It might grip you too hard, or be a bit sweaty. Well, this hand was different.

Because, in the instant that the old man’s hand touched Jim’s, a blinding flash of golden light filled the room making Jim screw his eyes up tight. A raging wind bellowed in his ears as if he was standing on a high mountain peak. And he heard an eagle cry. An eagle. In Bath.

Jim’s eyes were full of golden blurry shapes.

‘Hi Jim Jones,’ said a booming voice, like somebody from the bottom of a well. ‘I’m Jupiter. Ready for an adventure?’

Jim sighed, rubbing his eyes. He really needed to get away from... from...

Jim stared.

The old man smiled a dazzling smile full of brilliantly white teeth, his bushy beard now tight white curls, and dressed in a long glowing white gown, holding a golden staff shaped like a lightning bolt. On his bare shoulder, a very large golden eagle looked at Jim with huge yellow eyes.

Jim opened his mouth. But no sound came out.

‘Pleased to meet you!’ thundered Jupiter, shaking Jim’s hand.

Jim looked around. Nobody seemed to notice that the King of the gods was standing in the small, yet busy museum. A guard sauntered by whistling.

‘Ark!’ cried the eagle, stretching its long wings.

‘Later, Bright Eyes, work first,’ said Jupiter tickling the eagle’s throat.

‘Now, Jim, do you think bad people should pay for their crimes?’

‘I... well.. I...’

Jupiter smiled brilliantly at Jim. The eagle stared. Jim gulped, swallowing his million and one questions. ‘Y-yes?’

Jupiter nodded and slowly lowered the golden staff towards Jim’s head.

‘Woah! Wai-!’ cried Jim, but again he didn’t finish his sentence.

There was another flash, another icy blast of mountain air, another loud cry from Bright Eyes the eagle, and when Jim finally unscrewed his eyes, he and Jupiter were standing in the street outside.

Except it didn’t look like the street now. It looked exactly like the street in Roman times. In fact, it was the street in Roman times! People bustled past them, children cackled, chasing each other. Riders on horses walked up and down. Stall sellers cried out their wares. Jupiter pointed across the street to where a horse was tethered to a cart, on which sat a large ornate, wooden box with leather handles.

“In that box,’ intoned Jupiter, ‘lies your Beau Street Hoard. Nine bags of coins that Titus Augustus Porcius swindled from people very like that poor slave girl.”

‘Titus Augusty who-ius?’ stammered Jim.

A tired-looking girl, about Jim’s age, got down from the front of the cart, walked to the box and gave it a tug. It didn’t budge.

‘Hurry up, you stupid girl! I will be late for the offerings!’

Jim turned to see a large, bald man sitting in a strange kind of throne on long sticks, held up by four slaves. The bald man shook his staff at the slave girl across the street.

‘Behold,’ rumbled Jupiter, ‘Titus Augustus Porcius - one of the most unsavoury men to ever set foot in this city. A fraudster, a gangster, a...’

‘Aarck!’ cried Bright Eyes angrily, and speared a roast chicken from a passing stall seller.

‘Exactly,’ said Jupiter. ‘But, Jim, this is the fateful day, that Titus’ life changes. You see, when Jason gave me...’

‘Ah, Jason!’ cried Jim brightly, ‘...of the Argonauts?!’

Jupiter and Bright Eyes stared at him. ‘No,’ said Jupiter slowly, ‘of the Stables.’

He pointed across the street at the horse who winked at Jim and lifted his lips into a toothy grin. Titus urged his throne carriers into the busy street, shouting at the poor slave girl as she heaved at the heavy box.

‘...when Jason tipped me off that Titus was intending to offer his swindled money to buy eternal salvation from the goddess Sulis Minerva... We thought something should be done, didn’t we Bright Eyes?’

‘Arck!’ said Bright Eyes, flipping the last of the chicken into her sharp beak.

‘You stupid slave! Get it to the Great Temple – now!’ screamed Titus and threw his staff at the girl.

Jim’s hands became fists. ‘We need to help her!’ He didn’t like this Titus Porcius one bit. His screaming had now drawn quite a crowd.

‘Oh, have no fear of that, Jim Jones,’ said Jupiter.

‘Arck!’ said Bright Eyes, fluttering her wings urgently.

‘You’re right, my sweet,’ said Jupiter, stroking her powerful feathered chest. ‘The time is...Now!’

Jupiter raised his golden staff into the air. Jim smelt something hot and metallic, like when a train slows down for a station. A group of children playing chase bumped into a throne bearer who stumbled, bringing Titus and throne tumbling to the road.

‘Help! Help!’ cried Titus, and the slave girl stopped pulling at the box to dash towards her bullying master. At that, Jason the horse gently rolled the cart and the box away, as the crowd pushed forward to gawp at the struggling Titus.

‘Quickly,’ said Jupiter, taking Jim’s hand in his. It was warm and soft and wrinkly, a bit like his grandfather’s. ‘You’ll enjoy this bit,’

‘What bi-‘

But Jim didn’t get his words out again, as they rose into the air and sped like lightning across the street.

‘Whoopee!’ laughed Jupiter, his laugh echoing around the stone buildings as they zipped between the crowds, past a screaming, red-faced Titus and arrived at the back of the cart.

‘Nice job, Jason!’ cried the King of the Gods and Jason gave a nod and an ear flick.

‘Quick Jim, give me a hand,’ said the King of the Gods. With a wave of his golden staff, the box containing Titus’ swindled fortune lifted magically, silently into the air and slowly edged off the cart. Jim put a hand on the box, feeling its rough wood moving under his palm. He seemed quite matter of fact about things now - talking to gods, going at the speed of light, helping to push floating boxes through the air.

Jupiter took a look behind them. The slave girl and Titus’ bearers were pulling their bulky, red-faced master from the throne, as the crowd pointed and children laughed.

‘This way, I think,’ rumbled Jupiter.

‘Arck!’ said Bright Eyes

The three quickly guided Titus’ box down the street, and Jupiter made a sudden left hand turn into a dark alley. They were half way when he turned.

‘Look!’ said Jupiter, and they looked back through the dark silence of the alley.

They heard horses’ hooves, and then Jason cantered past, pulling his empty cart. A few seconds later, Titus followed shouting, trying not to fall over his opulent gown. A few seconds after that, his chair carried by the four slaves, and last the now even more tired-looking slave girl.

‘Arck!’ cried Bright Eyes.

‘You said it,’ said Jupiter. ‘Now, to the last part of my plan’ He brandished his staff in the musty gloom. Jim smelt that coppery smell again, and felt heat on his face like a warm summer’s day.

‘Actually, why don’t you do the honours, Jim Jones?’ said Jupiter, and his white teeth flashed bright as he handed the staff to Jim. ‘Just tap it against that wall.’

Jim took the staff. It was surprisingly light and cold to touch, not warm at all. With the air of someone who’d been doing this a long time, Jim dipped the staff and it ‘tinged’ on the stone wall.

The wall rippled like the surface of water, circles radiated from where the staff had touched it and then with a ‘POP!’ a perfectly circular hole opened in the wall.

‘And now the box, if you would be so kind,’ said Jupiter, motioning to the floating box with his piercing blue eyes.

Jim tapped the box and it sprung forward, floating across the alleyway and through the hole. Its lid snapped open, it rolled over, and with jangle and jingle the pouches slid out, landing with a ‘thud’ inside the hole.

‘Scram!’ said Jupiter, and the box, clattering its lid, shot out of the hole and disappeared down the dark alley, like a giant dog running off to play.

Jupiter gently took his staff from Jim and waved it. With a ‘gulp’ sound, the wall completely sealed, along with Titus’ money.

‘Arck!’ cried Bright Eyes.

‘Lunchtime? What a fine idea!’ said Jupiter, and a deep growl sounded from beneath his gown, echoing around them. ‘Jim - care to join us? I know this-‘

‘Hang on!’ said Jim. ‘What about the girl? What about Titus? What happens to them?’

Jupiter pondered for a moment then smiled his dazzling smile.

‘Let me show you.’ He moved his staff once, Bright Eyes flapped, and Jim held his breath. Having spent the past hour with the King of the gods he knew what to expect.

One lightning bolt flash later, they all appeared in the Roman Baths. This time they were actually in the Sacred Spring. Warm steam rose off the green water.

The same museum guard, still not seeing them, passed by whistling, as his radio squawked on his shoulder like an electronic parrot.

*At least we’re back in 2016*, thought Jim as he looked into the water. Then it bubbled, and a head rose from beneath the murky green water and grinned up at him. A body emerged behind the bouffant, moustachioed man who frog kicked away on his back.

‘Was that...?’

‘King Charles II, yes. He’s often here,’ said Jupiter.

Then slowly, all around the pool, and along the enclosed walls, more figures started to appear. Some bobbed gently, some splashed about, some played and shrieked. It was a huge pool party full of very strange-looking people - some in Elizabethan dress, some in Roman, some from the Victorian age, some just wearing furs.

‘This isn’t historical fancy dress is it?’ said Jim, finding his voice at last and peering at the splashing, bobbing crowd. An Elizabethan gentleman dunked the head of a laughing Roman woman. A man looking a lot like Charles Dickens read, lying on his back, wearing striped long johns.

‘Oh no,’ chuckled Jupiter, and his throaty laugh was like a small avalanche, ‘They’re all spirits. They’ve been coming for centuries, well before the Romans.’

They watched a family of cavemen in the water. A little cave girl jumped into the arms of her cave daddy, as cave mum splashed her cave son.

‘My wife, Juno, says it’s the sulphur they like, but I think people just love the baths - dead or alive,’ chuckled Jupiter.

‘Ah there’s old grumpy boots,’ said Jupiter, and pointed across the green water where stood the spirit of Titus all on his own. He peered glumly into the green water, wisps of steam lifting off its surface.

‘I had a word with the goddess and she thought of a fitting punishment, given Titus was trying to buy her eternal blessing with stolen goods.’

‘And?’ said Jim as he nodded to a lady looking very much like Jane Austen. She stepped slowly into the water making sure to keep her bonnet free of the splashing.

‘Well, it was her idea, understand,’ coughed Jupiter. He let Bright Eyes hop from his shoulder and soar over the waters, screeching happily. A few of the spirits noticed the bird, then waved to him with cries of ‘Jupiter!’ and ‘Come in! It’s lovely!’

‘She cursed his spirit to remain here always, doomed to search for his lost hoard in the waters forever. Er...which of course we hid!’

They watched Titus pace, stop and stare into the water, and then pace again, ignoring completely the spirits who chatted, swam and splashed around him.

Jim nodded. It was harsh, but he could understand the goddess’s anger if Titus was trying to trick her.

‘What about the slave girl?’ said Jim. ‘What happened to her?’

Bright Eyes flapped and landed silently upon Jupiter’s shoulder and they did that thing again of looking at Jim sternly. Jim wasn’t scared of them though.

Jupiter broke into his big, dazzling grin. ‘Ha! I can never keep that stern god stuff up for long. Behold, Jim Jones – yonder!’



Across the water, sitting at the poolside dangling her legs in the green water was the slave girl, now a young, beautiful woman. Two spirit children bowled into the woman. She hugged them tightly, and then greeted a young man who sat down beside her.

‘Somehow the ninth pouch of Titus’ money appeared under her pillow,’ whispered Jupiter, ‘Drusilla bought her freedom and found love and family,’

They watched the young couple raise their two children into the air. Drusilla saw them and waved. Jim Jones and Jupiter, King of the gods, waved back.

‘Aarceck!!’ cried Bright Eyes, kneading Jupiter’s shoulders with her talons.

‘Alright, hungry bird!’ laughed Jupiter. ‘Lunch, Jim? I know this wonderful little place in sixteenth century Venice.’

Jim smiled. ‘Ok! But can we collect my mum? She loves Italian food.’

‘Of course!’ boomed Jupiter, and his thunderous voice echoed around the spring.

‘And where is your mother?’

‘Marks & Spencer,’ said Jim, ‘the clothes department’.

Jupiter brandished his staff and that familiar heat hit Jim’s face and he smelt that familiar coppery smell, as Bright Eyes screeched with glee.

‘To Marks & Spencer!’ cried Jupiter, King of the Gods. With a flash of lightning, a rumble of thunder and an eagle’s cry the friends embarked on their quest to find Jim Jones’ mum.