

Aeschylus and the Black Jewels of Hades

There was once a man called Aeschylus, who dreamt of being as powerful as the gods. Every day he wished to light up the night, to eat strawberries in winter, to travel faster than the birds. One cold, dark day, as he gazed gloomily at the weather, the goddess Ate appeared to him. "Now listen to me," she hissed. "In the underworld there are treasures that will grant your every wish!" She showed him the way to a dark opening in the earth, where a lonely boat was waiting. "Take this and row yourself across the waters," she told him. On the far shore, he found himself in a huge, echoing cavern lit dimly by flickering, green torches. Before him stood a table laden with glimmering black stones and a large barrel of black, greasy liquid. At once, Aeschylus rushed forward and stuffed his pockets full of jewels and filled his bottle with the liquid, before making his escape to the mortal world above. With his new treasures he had the power to light up the night, eat strawberries in winter and travel faster than the birds. But soon, his neighbours noticed his powers, and one, dark night another man followed him down to the underworld and also took jewels and liquid for himself. Soon, many people were stealing the treasures and the gods began to notice and became very, very angry. Notus, the god of the hot, southern wind, increased the Earth's temperatures. Zeus, the sky god, made more terrible storms. Poseidon, the god of the sea,

made ocean levels rise. Artemis, the goddess of nature, made animals start to die out. And Hephaestus, the god of fire, made wildfires scorch the land. Aeschylus was horrified! He grovelled before the gods and pleaded with them to make it stop. Eventually, some of the gods felt sorry for him and decided to help, if Aeschylus would do as they said. First, Apollo the sun god spoke to him. "If you like, you can use my powers, instead of the jewels and the liquid. The sun creates so much energy, that you can use as much as you like, and I will never have any less. In return, you must persuade everyone else to do as I have told you." Aeschylus thanked Apollo greatly and set out to try to do as he had said. Next, Aeolus the wind god offered his help. "You are welcome to use the power of the wind if you want. No matter how much you use, it can never run out. But you must also persuade everyone else to do that too." Aeschylus was very happy and agreed at once. Finally, the Nereids (the sea-nymph daughters of Nereus, the old man of the sea) came to advise him. "We are known for giving aid to those in distress and you are certainly in need of our help. If you persuade everyone else to do as we tell you, then you can use the power of the waves, for that has no limit." Aeschylus promised he would do that and began his work the very next day. But however much he pleaded, no-one wanted to stop using the stones or the liquid. He showed them that the power of the sun, wind and waves was just as good, but they were convinced he was just wanting more of the jewels and liquid for himself. They called him a thief

and a liar, and refused to believe that the destruction had anything to do with the jewels and liquid. With time, though, people began to realize that Aeschylus's new powers seemed to work. Fewer and fewer people used the jewels and liquid. However, humans are not gods and Aeschylus soon became an old man. The gods were worried that when he died, all his work would be forgotten. But not all hope was lost. Aeschylus had a granddaughter called Elpis and she was determined to follow in her grandfather's footsteps. The gods couldn't help but doubt this idea.

'Who will listen to a little girl?' laughed Zeus. But the ways of man are sometimes even stranger than the ways of the gods and the people did listen and did as Elpis said. Some even marched across the country, blocking the roads, and waving banners until everyone was persuaded. The gods were pleased and gradually began to punish them less. There weren't as many storms. The sea levels were more stable. Fewer animals died. Wildfires weren't as common. Years later, when Elpis herself was an old lady, Zeus came to speak to her.

"I am finally ready to forgive your ancestor," he said. "No-one has stolen the jewels for many years now."

"And they will never take them again," Elpis promised.