

*Alpha Trine* by Lexi Ander published by Less Than Three Press

Zeus knew he was dreaming, trapped in that space between deep sleep and wakefulness. He attempted wake from the kaleidoscope of long buried memories he did not wish to relive, but his body, his mind, ignored his insistent demands.

“The past is important,” Shaneva whispered in his ear. Stunned, Zeus quit struggling, wondering how his sister spoke to him in his dream. “It is time for you to recall what you have forgotten.”

Zeus sensed a hand grasp his and pull him backward.

He was blind again ... no, not again. He was young, maybe ten summers, and he followed the voices of his arguing brothers, Azaes and Mestor. Father had scheduled Azaes and Mestor’s military training with the Warlord Sohm’lan when they turned fifteen summers. Earlier, the warlord almost caught Azaes and Mestor breaking the rules, and Zeus knew he was at fault.

“We should not be teaching him anything. Zeus has not reached the appropriate age for training,” Mestor whispered angrily. “If Sohm’lan finds out we have been secretly instructing Zeus, Father will not only restrict us to our rooms, but deny our own training.”

“It is your fault. You bloodied him!” Azaes hissed back. “You let your temper get away with you, and now Zeus has a split lip. There is no way we can hide that.”

Zeus’s heart beat wildly in his chest. He did not want to lose his lessons with his brothers because he had not ducked quickly enough. He would do better next time; he just needed to make sure they understood so he would not be shut out of lessons again.

Even blind, Zeus knew there were distinct differences between his family and himself. When he touched their cool skin, his fingertips slid over the fine, delicate scales that covered their bodies. They did not have hair like him, but a single row of triangular barbs that ran from the crown of their heads all the way down the center of their backs to the tips of their thick tails. He was jealous that he did not have a tail of his own. Theirs were strong and heavy. His brothers often used it to prop themselves up as they stood. The twins would learn how to use the appendage in close combat soon.

Yet with all of the differences, and despite the discreetly-whispered comments by a few of the court nobles, Zeus considered himself Mar’Sani. They would too if he could only prove himself to be as skilled as a Mar’Sani warrior. But he would need to be able to train in order to do so.

When the twins turned fifteen solar years, their father, Emperor Valdor Vondorian, assigned Warlord Sohm’lan to tutor Azaes and Mestor in combat and strategy. Azaes would be the next emperor and Mestor his Chief Warlord. Their father refused to commit Zeus’s future as a warlord for his brother, instead bidding him to wait. Valdor assured Zeus his talents might lie in another direction. Zeus was desperate to be allowed to fight alongside his brothers. As the twins argued, he could feel his chance begin to slip away.

*Alpha Trine* by Lexi Ander published by Less Than Three Press

Zeus brushed his fingers along the molding, the irregularity letting him know he was in the doorway of his Meme's yellow room. The rustling of clothing along with the aggressive hisses and grunts told Zeus the arguing had turned into a fight. Without thinking about the consequences, Zeus ran across the room and used the spindly solarium settee as a launching pad, soaring through the air toward his siblings.

People thought of him as blind, but he truly was not. No one listened when he explained he could see, only in a different way than they did. Each noise, huff of air, every vibration, and even the scents he inhaled created a canvas, redrawing a picture for him every passing second.

He was determined to show them, make them understand he was no weakling. Zeus bore the twins to the ground under him and gave a yell of triumph. He had snuck up on them and caught them unawares. They rolled around on the floor trading quick strikes, most of which Zeus evaded. He bit Mestor on the ankle, causing his brother to howl and attempt to shake him off. Azaes laughed at Mestor's discomfort. Zeus would have none of it. He was affronted by their perception of him and would go to great lengths to teach them both a lesson. He bit the tip of Azaes's tail hard. The scales were thicker there, but he was determined to make his brother stop giggling.

He vaguely noted Shaneva's exclamation at the entrance to the salon, but they all ignored her. Zeus knew the moment Warlord Sohm'lan entered the room because the air crackled with electricity. The scent of an angry bull swamped Zeus's senses. He and his brothers continued to roll around on the floor, trading steady blows, wrecking the room as furniture buckled underneath them. Heirloom ceramics shattered when bumped from precarious perches.

Giving a bellow of exasperation, Sohm'lan pulled them apart. He kept a fist in Zeus's robe to prevent him from responding to his brothers' taunts. Slightly squashed and battered, Zeus grinned devilishly and laughed once everyone had calmed down. Nose bleeding, his eye sore and probably blackened, Zeus stood proudly next to his brothers for he was Mar'Sani, a member of a strong warrior race who proudly displayed courage in battle.

"What goes on here? What have the three of you been doing that would terrify Shaneva so much she ran through the corridors calling for help?" their father's voice demanded.

Zeus tilted his head higher, falling into the stance the twins had taught him, proudly displaying his battle wounds. He sensed someone approach, by the scent his father, who halted before Zeus before stepping over to Mestor, then Azaes.

"You boys have destroyed your Meme's yellow room."

Zeus hid his smile.

"I cannot have you roughhousing within the palace if your manners are going to be left by the wayside. Warlord Sohm'lan has already expressed his concern about the two of you

*Alpha Trine* by Lexi Ander published by Less Than Three Press

sharing your knowledge with Zeus. I was willing to ignore the breach as long as the three of you acted responsibly. This display was not what I had in mind.”

Zeus frowned. He had upset his father instead of making him proud.

“They are young yet, Valdor,” his mother intoned politely.

“Yes, they are, but it is time they should learn to hold their tempers and not hide their actions from their elders.”

Valdor laid a heavy hand on Zeus’s shoulders. “You placed your brothers in a precarious position, son. You convinced them to teach you after I forbade it. They will receive punishment for disobeying me, but it will not be severe because I understand that my reasoning was partly to blame. I underestimated your determination and drive. As my youngest child, I only wished to keep you safe. For disobeying me, you will attend to your mother for two weeks while your brothers continue to train. When the discipline period has expired, I will allow you to be instructed along with them. If you try to train before then, I will retract the promise, and you will wait until your fifteenth summer.”

Zeus’s busted lip throbbed as he beamed at his father. “On my honor, I will attend to Meme and wait the two weeks. Thank you, Father!”

Valdor gave a low chuckle. “Do not thank me yet.” The hand slipped off Zeus’s shoulder, and he sensed his father stepping away.

“There is no honor in battling over frivolous issues. You must think first then exercise wisdom and restraint when men depend on your command,” Valdor admonished his sons. “Sohm’lan will take the three of you to the physician to treat your wounds, and then you will be assigned chores in the regiment latrines and mess hall.” Zeus moaned along with the twins, detesting the punishment even as his heart was light as air at his father’s concession.

Following his brothers out of the salon, Zeus trailed purposely behind. He wanted to express to his parents how thankful he was. He listened intently to make sure no one stopped to wait for him before he backtracked.

“Are you sure he will be all right?” his mother asked.

“He is brave and brash,” his father replied, a hint of pride in his voice. “His blindness does not deter him.”

“But he is not built like us, love. If he had fought with anyone other than his brothers, he would be more wounded than he is. They may have been angry, but they did pull their punches.”

That was the first time Zeus heard his parents worry about his lack of sight, or how they were afraid it would cause him to be killed. Zeus startled when Sohm’lan grasped his neck.

*Alpha Trine* by Lexi Ander published by Less Than Three Press

“Do not add eavesdropping to your list of infractions today, son.” Sohm’lan paused as he steered Zeus toward the physician’s office. “The best thing you can do is prove them wrong.”

The dream started to fade and change. Zeus held his mother’s hand. His father strode before them, a strong force of determination emanating from him. This place—Zeus refused to remember and attempted again to pull out of the dream.

“Do not struggle, Zeus,” Shaneva chastised. “It is time for you to claim your destiny, but you cannot do so until you acknowledge the past.” She pushed him this time until he collided with a cloudy wall.

He could practically smell the magic surrounding him. Zeus did not want to be there on the strange ship. He did not want to change, but his parents were frightened for him, even after he reassured them that he was fine. It was his fault that he had been injured. He ignored his senses, his instinct, and now his parents thought the only way to safeguard him was to give him sight.

But he did not want to see.