

## Zarm Backstory

**Name:** Zarm is his full name when he lives as a Spirit, however when he is trying to pass for human he recognises the need for a surname. At these times he registers himself as 'Zarm Spirit'.

**Species:** Spirit

**Description:** Appears superficially human. Tanned skin, black hair with white streaks, brown eyes. Has bony spikes on his shoulders which are jointed so that he can turn them down if need be and hide them under clothes to look like a regular human. Has several scars across his back, chest, and stomach.

**Sex:** ♂

**Orientation:** Homosexual

**Age:** Is psychologically 22 but appears older, as imprisonment damaged his Spirit form, causing him to form wrinkles. Was born in Ancient Greece (700-480BC) and spent many years in a magic-imposed stasis. He awoke from this several times through the years but always returned to his magical coma.

**Height:** 168cm

**Weight:** 55kg

**Siblings:** None

**Zodiac Sign:** Aries, Tiger

**Magic Power:** The ability to tweak existing creations; flight; enhanced interpersonal intuition

**Relationships:** In a romantic/sexual relationship with Looten Plunder (see other No Frills for details about him)

### Species Notes

Spirits do not need food or water in the way humans do and have no sense of taste. Instead they feed off magical energy, and this is particularly abundant on Hope Island. A Spirit can only be killed if their linked object is destroyed. For example, Gaia, the goddess of Earth, cannot be killed unless Earth itself is destroyed. Zarm never became the god of Earth as he did not prove worthy according to the necessary rituals for bonding with Earth.

Hope Island also hosts crystals which the Spirits can use to view any part of the Earth, and this, along with the magic that Spirits consume, make it an ideal home for Spirits.

Male Spirits in *Mars' Opposition* have bone spikes on their shoulders, in the same way as male lions have manes but females do not.

Zarm is a cannon character from *Captain Planet and the Planeteers*, presented here as an alternate version of himself as a member of the cast of the webcomic *Mars' Opposition*. He is a Spirit who was supposed to have become a guardian of Earth but instead became known among humans as the Spirit of War and Destruction. This led Zarm to a lot of grief and ultimately all he wanted was peace and emotional warmth.

### Trust & Confidence

(newborn)

Zarm's mother was Gaia, the Spirit who for a time served as goddess of the Earth. Gaia

was capable of conceiving and giving birth to children asexually and this is what she did to create Zarm. As a result, Zarm had no biological father. Zarm never met any other Spirits during his life.

Despite her general preference for being in control of a situation (which came naturally to her as the guardian of Earth), Gaia was naturally inclined to be nurturative and Zarm benefited from this. Gaia's tendency to nurture was acutely attuned to the care of a planet and the species that inhabited it, but less so for the care of an infant. Gaia was many thousands of years old by the time she had Zarm, so at times she found it difficult to truly understand his perspective and needs as a newborn. However, her style of parenting was boundaried, steady, and fair, and Zarm picked up on this as much as an infant can. It led him to see her as a strong presence in his life and he trusted that she would always be there. Her steady temperament also meant that she never flinched from him either emotionally or physically, so Zarm instilled within himself a deep trust in his own goodness and value as somebody that others wanted to be close to.

### **Freedom & Self-Determination** *(toddlerhood)*

Gaia had made Zarm so that she would have company on her home of Hope Island, and somebody to whom she could share and perhaps pass on the responsibility of caring for Earth. However, she understood from the beginning that Zarm was powerful, like many Spirits. She was firm with him from the beginning to make sure that he understood that he was powerful and had responsibility to use that power wisely. For as long as he remained too young to keep himself in check she took the task on herself.

Zarm became more active and curious, and this presented a dilemma for Gaia. While Zarm's curiosity meant that he could learn about the world around him, she personally preferred to stay on Hope Island and avoid interfering in human affairs, and believed that it would be best for Earth if Zarm remained on Hope Island also. His eagerness to test out the world around him triggered her overprotective feelings towards the Earth itself so she often curtailed him.

Naturally Zarm did not like this. Like any toddler, he tried to find ways around the problem - direct refusal to keep to himself, manipulation, crying, charm, and anything else his young mind could think of. This had an interesting impact on their relationship. While Gaia was wise to a lot of these tricks – she was not young, and had become wise to manipulation and power struggles – she was also lonely, and sometimes enjoyed these challenges from Zarm. She invariably became serious and shut him down whenever he used magic on the world around him but overall she encouraged his behaviour for her own ulterior reasons, which were after all innocent enough.

Zarm himself interpreted all of this as mixed messages. As a result he felt that he had permission to continue challenging her, and recognised that she saw his behaviour (so long as he didn't use magic) as amusing, interesting, and not a serious issue. Therefore he continued testing her boundaries and only used magic when he was sure she wouldn't see. Of course, on occasion she saw what he had done anyway, and if she didn't, she often saw the aftermath of his efforts.

It soon became apparent that Zarm was not able to create life from scratch like his mother could. However he could change the nature of an existing life form. He worked out that he

could change the patterns on butterfly wings, add extra fins to fish, change the colours of birds' feathers, and other, similar changes. This is how the stranger-looking Birds of Paradise came to be.

Gaia tolerated these experiments on the understanding that they remained on Hope Island so could not influence the rest of the world. This in itself affected Zarm's relationship with his mother: he wanted her to be impressed and pleased with him, but she was always keen to impose limits on his creations or point out the flaws they would present if they were to be let loose in the ecosystem. Of course, she had the best of intentions when she did this: to make sure Zarm understood that the planet was fragile and needed to be kept in balance, but this was not the message a frustrated toddler received.

### **Ambition**

*(young childhood)*

Zarm continued with his efforts to impress his mother and to finally make something she would just enjoy and praise him for. This never happened. Always she would be skeptical and assess the damage that a newly redesigned creature might present to the Earth, if not outright dismiss it.

This was a time of life when Zarm sorely needed to indulge in his ambitions, hopes and dreams for the life he would go on to lead - along with learning what was truly beyond his scope and to mourn for his limitations. With Gaia curtailing, labouredly tolerating, or outright dismissing his efforts, this was difficult for him to do.

Part of his strategy for managing this situation included questioning the situation he was in, mostly privately where his mother couldn't debunk his questions. Zarm began to feel as if Hope Island was too small for him. He also wondered whether there were other Spirits beyond the island, whether any other life forms had the power of communication and what it would be like to share company with the humans of Earth. He tried to adjust a few animals' bodies so that they could talk, however this required intricate changes (and sometimes new creation) to their brains, so he lacked the ability to carry through his plan.

On the odd occasion he raised this subject with Gaia she made it clear that she did not consider him ready to leave Hope Island. With Zarm still being so young and as impulsive and energetic as any young child, he found it difficult to keep calm for long enough to convince her to introduce him to anybody off-island.

All of this led to so much frustration in Zarm that Gaia did her best to diffuse it. She told him about human culture, including showing him the night sky and stars. She showed him the constellations and told him the names the humans had given them. And, as an incentive for him to learn to use his powers responsibly, she promised him that when he was older she would show him the crystals that would let him see the humans for himself.

Little Zarm was very excited about that, and the promise kept him satisfied and reasonably well-behaved from a 'tweaking creations' standpoint for a while.

### **Productivity**

*(older childhood)*

As Zarm got old enough to 'attend' school she made good on her promise and showed him the crystals. He loved them, and they also allowed him to watch school lessons, which gave Zarm the opportunity to go to school, in a sense.

The Ancient Greeks were well-developed in their artistry for music, and this became Zarm's favourite subject. He learned to play the cithara by watching the teachers and students through the crystals. He also enjoyed history and literature, although if the truth is to be told, he enjoyed almost every lesson he observed.

These lessons included discussions about mythology and through these, he learned the legends related to his mother, and about other Spirits who he'd never heard of before. When he asked Gaia about those she told him that humans had vivid imaginations and that those Spirits didn't exist - that the legends were just tales given the same significance as the legends about Gaia. Yet there were no stories about Zarm himself, and he became keenly aware that the humans had stories about other, fictional children of Gaia but none about himself, whom he knew to be real.

Zarm and the children he was studying 'with' looked so alike - the only difference was his shoulder spikes - that he wondered more keenly than ever why he could not meet the other children in person, especially as he knew he would find studying with them in person helpful. Yet again, his mother refused as she believed he was not ready and as ever, Zarm didn't understand her reasoning and resented her for being arbitrary and overly controlling.

Secretly, Gaia worried about how that first contact would go. She did not believe that the humans would treat Zarm as an equal, which she believed he expected would happen. Instead she believed that they would treat him either as a deity or a monster. She considered both possibilities to be potentially dangerous, both for Zarm and for the world. She knew however that she could not keep him on the island forever and could only hope that when the time inevitably came for him to leave, he would behave sensibly.

Zarm resumed tweaking lifeforms to 'create' new creatures. This is where the strange creatures of Ancient Greece came from including Pegasus, griffins, harpies, and many more. Once again, Gaia refused to let them loose on Earth's ecosystem and instead kept them on Hope Island.

As time went by Zarm found himself surrounded by more and more of his 'failed' creatures, and these served as unwelcome reminders of his situation. Again and again, as he found himself feeling angry and defeated, he would decide not to make anything else. And yet he would invariably rediscover his passion and redesign another living creature. The cycle continued in this way for a long while.

One of his favourite creations, regardless of his mother's opinion, was Pegasus. The horse seemed happy to fly, and as a Spirit he was capable of flying with it. Whenever he watched Pegasus fly he thought the same question: "What's wrong with my creations? Aren't I improving on what Mother has made?" Most of all he felt that he had created a friend and that the more socially-minded creatures he had made were his friends also. Despite the fact that Pegasus could not talk, Zarm liked talking to him and many of his other creatures.

Gaia made a deal with Zarm: that she would allow him to leave the island when he turned 15, if he refrained from using his powers any more. More specifically, she forbade him from using his powers while off-island, and demanded that he prove that he was capable of avoiding using his powers by not using them during the remainder of his time on the

island.

## **Child to Adult Transition**

*(adolescence)*

Adolescence was not easy for Zarm. While puberty didn't affect him in quite the same way as it would a human, he did experience some severe mood swings. Thankfully Gaia was able to contain and diffuse them at least reasonably well (especially given that she was so often the trigger), and with Zarm stuck on Hope Island, there was little genuine damage he could do. After a period of re-adjustment in their interpersonal dynamics, Gaia and Zarm learned to tolerate and manage Zarm's moods more smoothly.

Zarm's honoured his promise not to use his powers, right up to his 15<sup>th</sup> birthday, and then he went down to Earth.

The humans worshipped him, and he loved it. Gaia did her best to warn him that worship was not love, but Zarm was so excited and happy that he failed to understand what she was trying to tell him. He spent most of his time with the humans. The humans held festivals in his honour and he attended these.

Zarm's new proximity to the humans brought his attention to a talent he'd never realised he had: he could sense a person's emotions. From this, he quickly learned that he could take an educated guess at their fondest dreams. The humans who were so quick to worship him simply wanted somebody to worship, somebody powerful to see as their figurehead and leader. This seemed an easy task to Zarm so he happily fulfilled it. The humans more or less did the work for him by putting him on a pedestal.

However, he gradually noticed that life was not always easy for the humans. They were tribal and territorial in nature, and separate groups often had conflicts with one another. As a popular new Spirit, the humans often prayed for his support in their conflicts. Again, his mother warned him against using magic, but Zarm was so keen to stay in the humans' good favour that he felt he couldn't turn them down. The way he saw it, using his magic to give them an edge in battle was his way of saying thank you for worshipping him.

He used his magic to tweak their bodies, turning them into animalesque versions of themselves. Collectively, he called these creatures chimeras, and they were very successful in using their new abilities to overcome their human foes. Gaia was shocked by this but was unable to undo the transformation. She refused to kill them as she valued life above all else.

The chimeras fought the humans at the edges of their lands and successfully protected their territories. However, they didn't stop there and strove for more power. They developed a taste for conquest.

This was when Zarm realised that he had made a terrible mistake, and he tried to talk the chimeras into being more merciful to the humans. This did not work as the humans had begun to retaliate, seeing the chimeras as abominations. They did everything they could to exterminate them.

Rattus, a mage and leader of the rat clan, heard Zarm's pleas for better leniency towards the humans and intervened. He presented himself as a confident and trustworthy figure.

Rather than worship Zarm himself, he modelled himself as Zarm's first ever father-figure.

This was remarkably effective in securing Zarm's support. Zarm read Rattus' emotions and saw only confidence. He had never experienced anybody being so sure of themselves while in his presence so he paid attention to the rat-chimera, keen to experience more of it. So keen was he for this new experience that he neglected to look any deeper in Rattus' intentions.

Rattus explained to Zarm that it was natural for the strongest to survive, and that Zarm's chimeras were superior to Gaia's creations. Zarm could see no weakness in this argument so believed it, albeit uncomfortably. His desire to feel validated that yes, his creations were improvements on his mother's work, was strong and he found Rattus' sentiments hard to reject.

On the same day as Zarm had this conversation with Rattus, a human attacked Zarm to avenge his fallen comrades. Zarm heard the human call him "the Spirit of war and destruction" and Zarm found this label horrifying. The Spirit didn't want to kill him but he was frightened and unfamiliar with combat. He reacted in self-defence, using the full strength of his magic, and killed the human.

Zarm was devastated by his own actions. He believed that Gaia would never forgive him for killing one of her creations and decided not to tell her. Rattus took this opportunity to convince Zarm that if he could not be loved by Gaia, then he could be feared instead – and that the chimera community needed him to be a ferocious figure to inspire them in their struggle against the humans.

Gaia tried talking with Zarm, but by this point Zarm felt so defensive that he wouldn't allow himself to hear her words. As he saw it, he had undermined her creations, disobeyed one of her most sacred rules, and damaged the world of which she was guardian. He didn't imagine that she could see beyond these transgressions and still recognise him for the confused and frightened young man he was.

This was how Zarm found himself as he neared the end of his adolescence: worshipped by some, feared and hated by others, estranged from Gaia, and with Rattus always on hand to give him advice. This was how Rattus claimed power.

Over time Zarm gradually became the terrifying figure that the humans considered him to be. He became crueller, more callous, and harsher. He didn't like the ways he was changing but felt he had no choice but to be consistent.

A steady stream of humans came to him asking to be turned into chimeras so that they could join his 'family'. This took magical energy. Zarm experienced another problem at this time: a dwindling of his power. His power had always come from Hope Island and, since his self-imposed exile, he hadn't returned to replenish his reserves, so he searched for another source.

He discovered four sources of power on Earth and began to draw from these instead. Using these sources threw off the delicate balance of Earth and caused a series of natural disasters across the planet. Rattus convinced him that this was a good thing, and that he could use these natural disasters against the chimeras' enemies and that it was only right that Zarm take the resources he needed from the Earth so that he could put the needs of his people first. Once again, Zarm believed him.

When Zarm turned 18, female zealots started coming to him to offer to become the mothers of his children. This threw off Zarm's focus for several reasons.

The first was that he found this offer genuinely disturbing.

The second was that, until now, he had been so focused on leading his people that he hadn't considered his romantic or sexual life. This new situation prompted him to think about who he was attracted to, and once he gave it a bit of thought, he realised that he was attracted to males. However, no males came to him as suitors so he had no opportunity to explore his sexuality with men.

The third reason was that the womens' offers underlined the difference between worship and intimacy. Zarm hadn't experienced closeness with another being for a very long time, with mutual trust, acceptance, and curiosity about the similarities and differences between self and other being more important than any power differential, since he had left Gaia on Hope Island. Even then, his mother had retained a sense of mystique and of leadership. In being with the humans he had begun to see, if not personally experience, love and intimacy.

Aware that he was unable to experience intimacy for himself, Zarm became colder of heart still. He remained aware of his loneliness and put a lot of effort into not acknowledging it, believing that if he could ignore it hard enough then he could banish it forever. Of course, all this did was render him tense and irritable.

Gaia watched all of this from a distance and began to put counter-measures into effect. She gave powers to humans so they had what they needed to protect themselves. She also knew that she would have to neutralise the threat Zarm posed to Earth.

She couldn't bear to kill him, so she decided to put him into stasis instead. Gaia had begun to prepare for this when Rattus approached her. He told her that despite the power that Zarm wielded, he saw that the young Spirit was losing the overall war, and offered his help to Gaia in return for her promise to protect the rat-clan.

Gaia agreed to this plan.

His true plan was very different to this: he intended to interfere with the stasis spell by leaving an artefact in the tomb, which would allow a chimera of the future to steal Zarm's powers for himself. He intended for this chimera to be a descendant of the rat-clan, and for this descendant to use Zarm's power to rule the planet.

Gaia struck Zarm down with her magic to weaken him while Rattus and four other mages (whom Rattus had enlisted to help with the subversion) performed the spell necessary to bind him into the tomb. From Zarm's perspective, he was betrayed by both his mother and his father-figure at the same time, and this came as a terrible shock.

He fought back, and Gaia struggled to keep him in the crypt until the stasis took hold. She couldn't afford to be sympathetic to Zarm and hardened her heart against his rage and despair. By the time Zarm succumbed to the stasis, he had injuries from his mother's desperate efforts. When the spell was finally complete she left, unaware of Rattus' subversion of the spell.

## **Closeness in Relationships**

*(young adulthood)*

The mages' subversion of Zarm's imprisonment, led by Rattus, allowed them to release him many times. Throughout the centuries Zarm was woken up multiple times by mages who wanted to use his powers and influence to further their own goals. However, Gaia's followers were aware of this situation and whenever they learned that Zarm was free, they would work together to put him back into stasis.

Every time that Gaia's followers found Zarm they used similar magic to hurt and weaken him, so that they could return him to his sarcophagus. The magic left more scars on his body and made him look older than his experiential age would have suggested.

In between Ancient Grecian times and the current day Zarm spent a total of 20 years free of his crypt – which, as the centuries ticked by, became known as the Crypt of Destruction. Every time Zarm awoke, it was to a new era with a new set of moral values, new technology, and sometimes, new conflicts and problems. But some of the problems were perennial and never seemed to change.

Zarm found this cycle of release-imprisonment-release unpleasant for the obvious reasons, but it also presented a set of dilemmas, power struggles, and lose-lose situations he found difficult to negotiate but felt that he had to, in order to escape the cycle.

Firstly, the sheer brutality with which Gaia had attacked him during his first imprisonment, along with her obvious desperation to subdue him, was in stark contrast to her usual composed, dignified, and boundaried approach. This had scared him and damaged, on a very fundamental level, his ability to trust. This fear of trusting made it even harder for him to allow himself to seek and develop a trusting relationship with any of the humans he met. He still wanted a trusting relationship, but found that his memory of Gaia subduing him like he'd been some evil to be purged from the Earth undermined this goal.

Secondly, Zarm became acutely aware that whenever he was released it was for selfish reasons, that the person waking him up always wanted something from him - usually access to god-like levels of power. Moreover, the myths that had accumulated around Zarm generally implied that he was easy to manipulate, so they often posed as friends or allies. Zarm became wise to this and manipulated them instead, partly to get the energy from them that he needed to wake up out of hibernation properly, and partly to further his own goals, which he developed over the ages.

This goal was to create a better world, but he had no clearly-defined idea of what this meant. He knew that his idea of 'better' was 'more peaceful', and he believed deep in his heart that a world that contained his creations would be a more harmonious one than the one that currently existed, but this was the extent of his planning. Ultimately, Zarm's conception of a better world was one that would be more peaceful for him personally.

Zarm made the best of this situation, given his life-long desire to immerse himself in a community of others. He took notice of the details of the cultures into which he grew up and sometimes adopted them for himself.

He also wanted to destroy Gaia for what she had done to him, but he also recognised that this would be difficult: she was a stronger Spirit than himself, had her own followers to



protect her, and was not subject to frequent incarceration like he was. But his difficulties with killing Gaia went further than that: he recognised that she was the only other Spirit around and therefore, one of the very few people who would neither treat him as a god nor a monster due to their power differential, but as an equal. This made her a promising source of the emotional intimacy he craved, and the barriers that had been created between them made even that intimacy a difficult goal to achieve.

Rattus' descendants were involved with each awakening, however as time went by they became more subtle about it, often using other mages, or even non-mages.

Zarm's awakenings each lasted between a few weeks and several months, and were as follows:

### **356 BC: Alexander the Great**

The first time Zarm was released was during the time of Alexander the Great. Not much of psychological significance happened during this period despite Zarm's bitter disappointment at being found by Gaia's followers, recaptured, and re-imprisoned.

### **450AD: The Roman Empire**

Zarm's second release was during the time of the Roman Empire. He became interested in the new culture that had developed, their approach to art, their new inventions, their improvements in understanding of the sciences, and so much more of their culture. Once again however, he had to leave it all behind and was put back into his sarcophagus.

### **1478 AD: The Spanish Inquisition**

Zarm woke up during the Middle Ages and was dismayed to learn that the culture he had known had been all but destroyed. As sad as this news was, it wasn't the worst of it, as the Inquisition was happening at this time. He saw evidence of witch hunts, and the magic that the mages had used had been touted as "Black magic". Being released at this time only worsened Zarm's attitude towards reconciliation and the building of trust: it seemed that even the humans of the world had fallen into an irreconcilable fight. When he was forced back into his prison he went into stasis in a particularly bitter mood.

### **Approx. 1550 AD: The Renaissance Era**

Zarm's release into the renaissance age went some way to relieving some of his pessimism. Humanity had developed an interest in beauty and art, and he found this reassuring. Better than this, the Heart mage who was involved in his release telepathically provided him with full, fluent use of the English language.

### **Approx. 1600 AD: The Life of William Shakespeare**

Zarm woke up in the early 1600s – at the time of Shakespeare. At the time it was fashionable for a man to wear earrings. Zarm had his right ear pierced before he was forced back into his Crypt.

The renaissance that was happening at this time also included a lot of art influenced by Ancient Greek culture, and this gave Zarm an unusual opportunity to indulge in nostalgia. He was sorely unamused when Gaia's followers imprisoned him once again as he didn't want to leave this world behind.

### **Approx. 1850 AD: The Victorian Era**

He awoke during the Victorian era and had the opportunity to see a ballroom dance take place. He was enchanted by the dancing and expressed a wish to dance like this too, but

was incarcerated yet again before he could make this a reality.

When Gaia came for Zarm this time he begged her to either not imprison him again and implored her to kill him so he didn't have to go through this cycle any more. Zarm hated getting to know people and explore new cultures, only to have it all ripped away from him. He threatened that if she didn't kill him then he would kill her upon his next awakening. Given the nature of the Spirits' invincibility, he would have to destroy the Earth to achieve this, so Gaia took his threat very seriously indeed. She swore that there would be no next time and imprisoned him again. Her followers heard this and passed the message among themselves and down the generations until it became a prophecy by virtue of Chinese whispers.

Despite Gaia's assertion, Zarm was indeed released again, this time in 2003 and by Verminous Skumm and four other people.

### **2003 AD**

This was the time when Zarm first met Hoggish Greedly, Dr. Blight, and Looten Plunder, a descendant of the cat-chimera clan, whose chimera lineage had long since mixed with humans. All of these were mages, and the latest to have opened the Crypt.

When he awoke he looked at each of them, using his emotion-reading power to determine what they wanted. The first four were greedy, and for the usual things: money, recognition, power. However, the last of those people was Looten Plunder. Zarm read his emotions as highly elevated, and Looten Plunder clearly wanted something very much, but greed wasn't the emotion that motivated it. As he looked at Looten, Looten betrayed himself by thinking about what he wanted.

Looten wanted a kiss from Zarm, and considered him beautiful. Zarm also recognised that Looten Plunder was the strongest of the mages and made a decision then and there to nurture his relationship with this one. He announced to all of the assembled mages that if they helped him to fully recover his strength he would grant each of them a wish. They all agreed to this.

With this formality taken care of, Zarm left the Crypt to spend some time exploring the modern world, usually with one or more of the mages as his guides. Given his recognition of Looten Plunder as the strongest, he spent the most time with him. It helped that Looten was clearly eager to be around him and shared Zarm's passion for culture, so Looten was more than happy to show Zarm all that was new in the world.

Privately, Zarm reaffirmed his plan now that he had been released: to kill Gaia. The best way he could do this would be to destroy the world, with which she shared a bond. Seeing the richness of the culture of the world made the thought of his plan taste bitter, but he couldn't see any better way: the choices were to let Gaia live and risk returning to the Crypt, or destroy the world and her with it, and at least know that it was all over.

As a cultural choice during his 2003 awakening Zarm kept his right-ear piercing, unaware that for a short time prior to this era (during the 1990s), a piercing in the right earlobe of a man meant that he was attracted to other men.

The five rituals required to bring Zarm into his full power took time to complete and the group took breaks, sometimes of several weeks or months, in between each. This meant that Zarm got to know Looten rather well during this time period.

One day, Zarm mentioned his regret at having missed out on Victorian ballroom dancing. Greedly arranged for Zarm to be able to have the experience he wanted, and Looten Plunder led him as his dance partner.

As they got to know each other better, Zarm noticed something about his relationship with Looten. Zarm had never been able to find an equal, nor a kindred Spirit before. The only other Spirit he knew, his mother, was a queen on the chessboard while he was a less powerful piece. She and he were not equals. Humans had never treated him as an equal, instead treating him either as a god or a monster, and that had inherently implied a lack of mutuality that he had ultimately chosen to reject, as much as was possible given his situation with the Crypt of Destruction. Even if he tried to pass himself off anonymously as a human he would know that he was an imposter, so that didn't appeal to him either.

Looten was an antidote to that. Looten knew what Zarm was. Looten, as a chimera and as a powerful and villainous figure on the world's stage also knew what it was to be the outsider, the powerful one on a stage of humans, and a monster. This mutuality is what bonded Zarm to Looten.

Zarm enjoyed this new-found sense of having something in common with the other so much that he began to relax around Looten. At times he even flirted with Looten and enjoyed the chimera's bashful - yet clearly delighted - reaction.

One of the treasures Looten was able to show Zarm was a private library at his mansion. Zarm enjoyed looking through the books there very much.

Looten surprised Zarm all the more one day when the Spirit sensed that Looten was worried about him. They talked, Zarm admitted that he didn't have access to magical energy, and Looten asked him how he felt. Zarm had never experienced a human being concerned about his welfare before. Looten further surprised him by offering to share his store of magical energy with him to make him feel better. Zarm sensed Looten's motivations, expecting to see that Looten wanted something in return, but he didn't.

This relationship with Looten was certainly pleasant and cathartic for Zarm, however he had made his decision a long time before about what he would do if he was ever released again. He began to feel a sense of conflict between his plan to destroy the world, and the pleasure he felt at enjoying it with Looten. Whenever he noticed himself thinking about it he shut his thoughts down so that he didn't have to weigh them up.

During the fifth ritual of the Crypt he revealed his plan to all of the mages, to kill Gaia. He sensed Looten's feelings about this. However, he quickly moved past his feelings of betrayal and despair and tried to reason with Zarm.

Looten pointed out that Zarm was unable to create life so would be alone forever if he destroyed the planet, and that the torture of permanent solitude while drifting in the cosmos would be an even worse torture than the one Gaia had subjected him to.

Zarm had known this deep within his heart for a long time but had refused to think about the problem head-on; Looten's direct articulation of it made him stop and think. He admitted he had never thought about the situation like that. As he hesitated Skumm attacked him, sabotaging the ritual to remove the powers that Zarm had had at his disposal as the Spirit of Destruction, and aligning himself to take the powers for himself.

Zarm would have to die for that to happen. Finding himself robbed of his most treasured powers, defenceless and in mortal danger in an instant, Zarm went into shock.

Looten intercepted to protect Zarm and carried him out of immediate danger, back to the site of the sabotaged fifth ritual. Greedly, Blight, and Looten, who still carried Zarm, got into Looten's helicopter to head for his mansion so that they could decide what to do next without the immediate threat of Skumm.

Zarm felt unable to contribute to the conversation but he listened to the conversation that followed between the three mages. Greedly and Blight were furious at Zarm's betrayal, but Looten wasn't. Instead he argued that Greedly and Blight should protect Zarm because if they didn't, Skumm would get to him, and if he managed that, Skumm would become the next Spirit of Destruction, which would be disastrous for all of them, and probably for the whole planet.

Greedly and Blight reluctantly agreed with this, and when they reached Looten's mansion, left, leaving Zarm and Looten alone.

By this time Zarm had recovered from his shock enough to talk again. He demanded to know why Looten had saved him after Zarm had betrayed them all. "Why did you not just let me die?" he asked, "I was ready to destroy everything! Why do you not hate me like the others do?"

Looten answered that he couldn't hate somebody he understood.

For all of his anguish, Zarm understood what Looten meant, but he was far from being in a good mood. He said sullenly: "At least you didn't say something stupid like, "because I love you"".

Looten answered him with: "I thought that went without saying".

The moment Zarm heard that, he crumpled and burst into tears. He couldn't remember a time when he had been loved enough to be forgiven, protected, and comforted like this. It turned everything he thought about himself upside down and put into a few short words the feeling that had been behind Looten's eagerness to spend time with him.

In those few words, Zarm understood that he was loved.

This was how a period of over a year began in which Skumm continually hunted Zarm, and Looten put all of his resources into protecting him. Both Looten and Skumm had considerable resources and the time was far from uneventful. During that time Zarm saw again and again how Looten wanted to protect him, but not just out of some selfish notion of self-preservation: he cared about Zarm too, and sought to make him not only safe, but happy. There were many times when Looten could have gotten into a sour mood and blamed Zarm for the hardship of having to protect him, and Zarm felt ready for this, but it never came.

For a while Zarm became afraid that Looten might force himself on Zarm. Now that Zarm was only human, he was physically weaker than Looten was and would have no chance to protect himself; indeed, Looten was stronger than him, given that he was an expert fighter who still trained every day and was also a mage. He was so used to seeing others act

selfishly that he remained guarded and uneasy about this for some time, but Looten showed him nothing but respect, and eventually this allayed Zarm's fears.

Slowly Zarm came around to the idea of being human. One pleasure that he hadn't been able to enjoy as a Spirit was that of eating, and he developed a love of fruit, especially grapes.

A few events during this time caught Zarm's attention. A long-lost relative, a nephew of Looten's named Robin, came about. He was clearly in league with Skumm and made threats to Looten to publicly out him as homosexual. During discussions about this between Looten and Zarm, Looten pointed out that neither Robin nor Skumm had any proof of this and were likely only making an educated guess. This highlighted the sexual tension between Looten and Zarm, which had not yet been consummated.

After this, Skumm brought another new adversary into the fray: Stalker Slaughter. Zarm sensed, and watched from a distance, as Stalker tried to seduce Looten. While Looten showed signs of feeling tempted, he ultimately refused Stalker.

As time went by Skumm began to grasp at thinner and thinner straws to get at Zarm. His final attempt was to lure Gaia and Zarm together under the guise of having Gaia reinstate Zarm's status as a Spirit. When they all met Skumm attacked and tried to imprison Gaia and Zarm both in the Crypt of Destruction, but Looten joined in the fight.

Skumm may or may not have died that day; his body was never found.

Gaia considered that Looten had saved her life so in return she offered to grant him a wish. Looten wished for her to give Zarm a second chance to become the Spirit of the Earth again. She was surprised by his wish but agreed to it.

Zarm was even more surprised by Looten's actions than Gaia was, and went to Hope Island with Gaia so that they could discuss the reinstatement of his Spirithood. Gaia revealed that he would have to die and be reborn as a Spirit in order to regain his Spirithood, and that he would have no memory of his previous life. Zarm asked her whether he would be reborn as a Spirit if he lived out his life and died naturally. She answered yes, so he decided to live the life he already had as a human - with Looten if he wanted it too.

Returning to Looten was one of the happiest moments of his life. He explained to Looten what had happened, and as he did he sensed that Looten become unburdened too.

By the time he had finished explaining, both of them were in a happy, playful mood. Both had chosen each other and both knew that!

Looten asked him: "So... do I deserve to kiss you?"

Zarm's answer was: "Oh, I think you deserve even more than just to kiss me, Mister Plunder." He pulled on Looten's cravat to encourage him closer, and pulled him into their first kiss.

They went further than that first kiss, and that was the night that Zarm lost his virginity. Zarm had always wondered whether Looten would become rough with him if this ever happened but it didn't, and their night together was gentle, respectful, and mutually

pleasurable.

From that night they considered themselves a couple. They lived harmoniously and continued to enjoy the cultural pleasures of the world together.

They never heard from Skumm again. Neither knew whether or not he was dead or whether he considered himself to have lost the war, but either way they enjoyed their freedom.

Looten's riches meant that they were always able to travel, and to some beautiful parts of the world too. Zarm recognised that Looten got double pleasure out of this: Zarm himself enjoyed the places they went to and the experiences they had, and Looten enjoyed seeing him enjoy it - as well as taking pleasure in their holidays himself.

When they were at home they enjoyed being comfortable together. They didn't have sex every night and often simply went to sleep in each others' arms. Looten never lost his shyness in these matters and it often took encouragement from Zarm to get him to be more 'pushy'.

Zarm also enjoyed several aspects of home life in Looten's mansion: Looten had a pet, a cat named Kitty, who enjoyed having two attentive dads. He also had games consoles, so Zarm had the experience of learning the pleasures of video games, and they both enjoyed cuddling up together to watch a movie.

### **Passing on Responsibilities**

*(older adulthood)*

Zarm settled into the world of humans as one of them. With his first-hand experience of having lived in Ancient Greece Zarm went to university to study history, and specialised in his era and country of origin. He began to work in the field and thoroughly enjoyed it. Looten had always been interested in learning so the pair of them enjoyed Zarm's academic pursuits together.

He and Looten also buried the hatchet with Robin and developed a warm, familial relationship with him. While Zarm had no desire to compromise Looten by openly acting like Looten's partner, Robin worked it out for himself and accepted the two of them.

### **End of Life**

*(old age)*

Despite turning into a human Zarm knew that he would return to life after his death as a Spirit. He fully intended to use what he had learned and become a good Spirit of the Earth. For this reason he felt calm about the idea of his own death.

### **Credits**

Based on theory by:

Erikson, E., (1951) 'Childhood and Society', W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. chapter 7.

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~Hayley, The Character Consultancy