

Chapter 582

Quite Enough Transcendent Beings

“That looks good,” Jason said, eyeing off the pink liquid in the delicate crystal bottle. It was sitting on the low table in front of the cloud couch where Jason and Dawn were still sitting, outside of Jason’s pagoda. Jason’s own drink was a tall bottle where the liquid rested in rainbow layers, magically enchanted to retain the separation when poured into a glass.

“You just want to drink anything colourful,” Dawn responded.

“What’s wrong with that?”

“If you drank mine, it would kill you.”

“I’m pretty good at handling poison.”

“You wouldn’t have time to get poisoned. The magic in it would make your body explode.”

“I’m pretty good at handling that, too.”

“The last time you handled a lot of high-grade magic, it took about eight miracles to keep you alive and now you’re too weak to do a chin-up.”

Dawn sank back into the cloud couch and sipped at her glass.

“I’m not sure if today’s events are good or bad for you,” Dawn said. “There’s going to be a lot of people paying attention to you, now.”

“You think there wasn’t before?”

“Not like this. Anyone who knows about what happened here will be wary of coming after you, but the people who do come after you will come ready.”

“I know, but what was I going to do? Out here we get eavesdroppers, but I couldn’t do it in my... I couldn’t invite them in, as you well know.”

Knowing there were eyes and ears on them, Jason refrained from discussing his spirit domain. He was involved with too many diamond-rankers to believe it was still a secret, but he wasn’t going to go divulging further details or attracting yet more attention. Both of those ships had sailed, sunk, been salvaged and sold for scrap but he wasn’t going to go making it worse. The events of the day had done more than enough already.

“There was a way to do this quietly,” Dawn said. “The World-Phoenix would have traded for the authority.”

“I didn’t entirely trust your boss before this,” Jason told her. “And after this, I really don’t. And it’s alright. Or maybe I should say that it’s worth it. If the Builder keeps his end and really does pack up, that’s good for everyone, not just me. It means a lot more people

will make it out of this monster surge than otherwise would have. It means more time to prepare for whatever those messengers are doing, along with the remnants of Purity or Deception or whatever's going on there."

"Fortunately," Dawn said, "you don't need to be at the heart of it for once."

"I don't?"

"No. You've done your part for this world and more. You need to get the information you need from the messengers and establish the bridge so your world can start to recover, but I have no doubt that you and your team will accomplish this. The larger concern of actually dealing with the messenger threat is not yours to deal with. You will doubtless be involved as an adventurer, but just as an adventurer, once your own goals have been met."

"Just an adventurer? I like the sound of that. I like it a lot."

"For a time, yes. Enjoy these years, Jason. Take them to grow strong and find out who you are when the pressures of the world aren't grinding you to powder. Because the day will come when those pressures come back."

Dawn bowed her head.

"I don't like keeping this from you. But something has to happen and you can't be allowed to try and stop it. The price would be too high."

"You really think I could do something you didn't want me to?"

"More powerful entities than I have bet against you and lost, Jason. I'm not foolish enough to join them. So I'm asking you to stop yourself. To trust me and not try to find out what's coming. All I can offer you in return is a chance to do something in the aftermath."

"You know I've already made that choice, just as I know you've already been working to give me that chance."

Jason shook his head, drained his glass and poured another.

"This is turning into sad drinking," he said, "and colourful drinks are for happy drinking."

"I'm happy," a third person said. "In fact, I'm downright delighted."

A chair, more like a throne, had appeared across the table from the couch. Lounging in it was a man with a toga and a laurel wreath crown, plus a goblet held casually in one hand. Unlike the last time Jason saw him, the god was projecting the form of a celestine with brassy eyes and hair.

"I have to say, Mr Asano, today was a genuine treat for me. It's a delight having you back."

"Really?" Jason asked with a groan. "You're just going to pile it on?"

“Oh, you should be grateful it’s me. The Builder is already withdrawing his forces from around the planet. Battles abandoned, airships withdrawing. Whole fortress-cities dimension-shifting out. Guardian wants to throw you a parade.”

“Yeah, well, if one of you is called subtlety, maybe get them to have a chat with him.”

“There is, but she’s a much lower tier than guardian. She’s also Deception’s sister and there’s a whole history with Disguise, so things are a bit complicated with the Purity affair still ongoing.”

“You actually have family relations?”

“Those of us who embody mortal concepts tend to have more mortal attributes. Knowledge, Deception, Vengeance. Me, obviously. I’m the important one.”

“Of course you are.”

Dominion chuckled.

“You’ll find that Ocean or Storm aren’t the conversationalists that I am. They are connected to the wind and the waves, where as I am connected to people. And what is more mortal than things getting tense when the family starts talking politics?”

Jason leaned forward, head bowed as if he were going to be sick.

“Dawn, is there a third version of Earth you could drop me off on?”

“I’m afraid you still have things to take care of on this one,” Dawn said with an amused smile.

Jason groaned again.

“Don’t you have somewhere to oppress?” he asked Dominion.

“I don’t oppress,” Dominion said. “I’m just oppression-friendly.”

“Look, I appreciate you holding back your aura so I don’t get squished like an overripe peach, but I’m kind of trying to relax after a heavy day, and there’s been quite enough transcendent beings running about on my lawn. Could you go? Maybe tell any of your friends that I’m not really looking for visitors right now?”

“You think you’re so important that gods will start just turning up?”

Jason gave him a flat look.

“Point taken,” he said, with no sign of shame. “It’s a little rude, but fine.”

Dominion looked up at Jason’s pagoda.

“I do love what you’ve done with the place. You’re coming along nicely, Mr Asano.”

The god vanished, as if he’d never been there at all.

“What next?” Jason wondered out loud. “Is my mum going to turn up?”

Almost immediately a portal opened up.

“I had to say it, didn’t I?”

Jason was just revving up a stream of complaints when he realised he recognised the portal. Essence users with the same abilities often had their powers differentiated visually, even when the effects were identical. This was especially common with distinctive visual elements, such as portals. In most cases they started out looking the same and became more unique over time.

Clive's portal ability was made distinctive by the glowing runes surrounding its edges, which were different in form and colour from other essence users with the same power. Jason's portal had likewise evolved over time. It had started as an arch of obsidian, identical to the ones in the order of the Reaper's astral space. This was because the power had been used as a basis for the portal network there. Now Jason's arch was smoky crystal with speckled light, just like the pagoda looming over him at that moment.

Jason's team had continued to participate in the monster surge while Jason was convalescing and were returning from their latest contract. As they trudged from the portal, Jason could see that they were caked in mangrove mud. It didn't look to have been the most fun endeavour.

"I don't know what you're complaining about," said Sophie, who was the only one not filthy. In fact, she was wearing new armour that looked like white, supple snakeskin.

"Of course you don't," Belinda said, "but not everyone can move that fast when it's shooting mud out of it's... whatever that orifice was. I'm really hoping it wasn't what it looked like."

"Who can tell?" Neil asked. "It had three of them."

"I still don't understand how we looted armour that white and clean from a monster that aggressively dirty and brown," Clive said.

"I still think it's weird Sophie came out completely clean," Neil said. "Has your mum been giving you purity tips?"

"Oh, bloke, don't go there," Jason said with a wince.

"Are you looking to get slapped?" Sophie asked Neil.

"Sure," Neil said. "Are you offering?"

"You are such a sleaze," Sophie told him.

"I'm the sleaze? How's that recording crystal collection coming?"

Sophie's face took on a caught-out expression.

"I have no idea what you're talking about," she said quickly. "Humphrey, lets go in and I'll help you clean off."

"Is anyone else sensing some weird lingering auras?" Humphrey asked. While the others were chatting, he had been looking around.

“All I’m sensing is the dire need of a shower,” Belinda said. “I can’t believe that no one brought crystal wash.”

“Jason normally has it,” Neil said. “You know what he’s like with the stuff.”

“I’m not that bad,” Jason said as the group all nodded their agreement with Neil. “I’m not. Look, you don’t know what it’s like to be trapped in another world without any crystal wash. Dawn, you were there; tell them.”

“Oh, I had crystal wash,” Dawn said. She was still curled up on the couch with her glass of pink beverage.

“What do you mean, you had crystal wash?”

“Well, I couldn’t send my body through the dimensional membrane of your world, but I could send some crystal wash. It’s not like I was going to go without.”

“You’re telling me that whole time we were running around Earth, you had a secret stash of crystal wash?”

“Yes.”

“And you never told me?”

“I know what you’re like with the stuff.”

In a lounge that opened to a balcony in the towering pagoda, Jason and Dawn took his team and his other friends living in the cloud house through the events of the day and was told off for doing it all when the team was away.

“It’s fine,” Jason assured them. “It’s not like any of us could stand up to any of the people who showed up today in a fight.”

“But we can stand beside you,” Humphrey said.

“Beside and slightly back,” Neil clarified. “There’s no point in *all* of us getting blown up by a lightning bolt from some god.”

Belinda slapped him on the arm as Jason chuckled and then continued the story.

“And that’s when the god turned up?” Rufus asked.

“No, the... Carmen arrived first,” Jason told him.

“The Carmen?”

“She’s some kind of super-Gordon, I don’t know. I think she might be in the space police.”

“The space police?”

“Like the Green Lanterns?” Travis asked. “That’s awesome.”

“I don’t know anything about it,” Jason said. “Dawn can probably tell you.”

“I can,” Dawn said, “but unless any of you are turning into astral beings, there’s not a lot of point. Ask Shade.”

“I will refrain from providing an explanation. Every time Mr Asano learns about a vast extradimensional power, he gets it into his head to do something absurd and provoke it.”

“I do not!” Jason said, even as the others all nodded in agreement.

“You’re hanging out with gods,” Travis said. “The magic factions back home would think twice about stabbing you in the back if they knew that.”

“No,” Jason said. “They’d just be more careful.”

“Sad but true, bro,” Taika agreed. “Speaking of Earth, though, you need to go look in on those people that got sucked through with me and Travis. I’m pretty sure the Adventure Society would have dragged you there already if there wasn’t a monster surge on.”

“No one will be dragging him anywhere,” Dawn said. “He may not have the power that comes with being a high-ranker, but he moves in higher circles than any mortal on this world. People have to be very careful about pressuring him now.”

“But that pressure can still crush me,” Jason said. “I can’t just go around throwing other people’s weight. I tried that in Greenstone to disastrous effect. My soul almost got plundered and if I hadn’t hid under Emir’s skirt, Sophie would have wound up in a slave Leia costume.”

“I don’t know what that means,” Sophie said, “and I’m pretty sure you don’t want me finding out.”

“Why today?” Farrah asked. “You’re the one who called these people here, right?”

“Effectively,” Jason said. Once he took the authority out of his spirit domain, transcendent beings were able to sense it’s presence.

“When did you decide that today was the day to deal with the great astral beings?”

“Well, I’ve had this authority banging around since I got knocked onto my butt by the magic thing, but it’s not something I can really handle. I was talking to Dawn and—”

“Oh, that’s how it is,” Farrah said.

“No,” Jason denied firmly. “That’s not how it is.”

“It’s a little bit how it is,” Dawn said.

“That’s not helping.”