

## Chapter 313

### Of Course It Was Him

Jason came to his senses, which were an incoherent storm of sensations as he tumbled wildly through the air. His head was ringing, wind roaring over his body and through his ears. All he could see was a spinning blur of sky.

His starlight cloak manifested and he righted himself with a jolt as he moved from a tumble to a controlled glide, the cloak spreading out to either side like wings of night. Getting control of his descent was far from a smooth process as he was so far above the clouds that the very concept of up and down was elusive in the blue expanse and the chaos of the disintegrating plane.

He could only have been out for a few seconds, since the plane was still falling out of the sky around him. It had broken into two main pieces but was also a cloud of loose debris. The cloak started intercepting stray shards of metal but his body was already a roadmap of cuts and bruises, along with two more significant injuries.

One of those injuries was from a scrap of twisted fuselage impaled into his abdomen. He was largely unconcerned, no longer having internal organs there. The scar the metal was digging into was proof he'd suffered worse and he paid it no more mind than the time it took to yank the chunk free of his body.

The other major injury was a deep slash to the side of his neck. If not for the combination of his exotic physique, bronze-rank power attribute and Colin's healing, it would certainly have killed him. The confluence of those factors made what would otherwise have been lethal an inconvenience at most. The magic imbued into the plane had already allowed it to inflict damage like an iron-rank weapon, and without his bronze-rank damage reduction, it may have taken his head clean off.

The remaining bruises, abrasions and lacerations were inconsequential to him, although not to his suit. It did not self-repair anywhere near as quickly as his armour and would be out of rotation for a while. His injuries would heal much faster, Colin's regenerative power already hard at work. It was most likely the reason he regained consciousness so fast after being knocked senseless by the blast.

Dark mist appeared around his body, clinging tenaciously to him even through his downward glide. When it vanished a few moments later, Jason was garbed in his full battle attire. Rather than the loose outfit dragging, the magic shifted it to act almost like a wing suit as it recognised the conditions and adapted. Once more he was delighted by the care Gilbert had put into the bespoke garb.

Grabbing a healing potion vial from his belt, he shoved the whole thing in his mouth and crunched down, the healing potion trickling down his throat. He didn't want to spill it and his bronze-rank damage reduction prevented the glass from cutting the inside of his mouth. He felt the healing power flood his system, supplementing Colin's efforts as the two major wounds started closing.

Spitting out broken glass and the small stopper, he pushed his aura senses to the limit as he looked around. There had been thirteen people on the plane, including himself, but he was only sensing four other auras. He had awakened immediately, so they should all be within his sensory range. The ones he couldn't sense were most likely dead.

He couldn't sense any normal-rank auras. The pilots and the flight attendants had probably died in the initial explosion. There had been six bronze-rankers, including himself, Keith and the four-man security team. Ironically, all but one of the other bronze-rankers seemed to have died, while all the iron-rankers survived.

Jason guessed that the source of the explosion was close to where the security team had been sitting on the plane. The other bronze-rankers, himself and Keith, were with the iron-rankers in different section of the plane.

Jason looked closer at the auras. At fifteen kilometres up, the air was freezing and it would be hard to breathe, if that was something he needed to do. The iron-rankers who did would have a harder time of it.

He sensed the only other bronze-rank aura close by. It was one of the security people, against Jason's expectation, which probably meant that Keith was amongst the dead. That man was in a similar position to Jason, having survived the blast due to his powers and luck. The atmosphere didn't appear to bother him and he was now using a slow fall power.

The three iron-rankers had fared much worse. He could tell from their auras that they were all injured and unconscious, plunging uncontrolled through the air. At least their incredible altitude gave Jason time to act.

"Your cloak's slow fall drains your mana exponentially as you include more people," Shade reminded Jason, who was angling his glide descent in the direction of the closest iron-rank aura. The parameters of Jason's weight-reduction power was something he had tested extensively in the course of his ongoing training to explore the limits of his abilities.

The wind roaring past his ears should have made Shade's words unrecognizable but Jason heard him clearly. His bronze-rank spirit attribute enhanced his perception enough that he could pick up the sound before the high-altitude winds and their rapid descent

carried them away. No only that, it could filter out the extraneous noise, allowing Jason to ignore it and focus on what he wanted to hear.

This was not something anyone could do and was a result of sensory techniques that Farrah had taught him during his initial training. They had not had any real effect at the time, but his trust in her led him to diligently practise until he reached bronze rank and the results spoke for themselves.

Since he had found out she was alive, he had found himself constantly reminded of everything she had done for him. Much of it was groundwork he never understood the value of until months after her death. Even as he was falling from an exploded plane, he couldn't help but think of what he owed her. He was going to make sure that no one stole his chance to show his gratitude, regardless of what they put in his path.

"You have a suggestion?" Jason asked.

"I can help them arrest their fall," Shade said. "I cannot fly as fast as they are falling, however. You will need to get my bodies to them."

"On it."

One of the advantages of Jason's cloak obtaining a gliding power was an instinctive grasp of how to navigate a fall through the sky. Otherwise, he'd have been reduced to skydiving technique he'd picked up from watching action movies.

He angled himself to plunge down, employing his cloak just enough to impart the control he needed, along with deflecting tumbling debris. Compared to the insensible flailing of the unconscious iron-rankers, he was able to easily outpace them.

His first target was the most injured, which was Annabeth's assistant, Ketevan. All of the iron-rankers were in a very bad way, but he could sense her aura dim as her life teetered on the edge. She had a chunk of fuselage stuck in her gut, like Jason had suffered, but worse. She also lacked his rank and other advantages, making her wound far more dangerous than his.

He was careful in his approach, so as not to slam into her, getting a tap in the unmentionables from a wind-thrashed arm for his trouble. Pulling her close, he shoved a bronze-rank potion into her mouth and clamped it closed with his hand, smashing the vial as he'd done in his own mouth. The glass might cut her, but it was damage that would soak up very little of the potion's healing strength.

He kept his hand in place over mouth until he sensed the magic start to reinvigorate her waning life force. One of Shade's bodies crawled from Jason onto Ketevan, taking the form of a black parachute pack.

"Nice," Jason said. "Can you control the parachute while they're unconscious?"

“Of course.”

“Wait until she recovers some more before pulling the chute,” Jason said. He himself waited a little longer for the healing potion to do some repairs before reefing the chunk of debris from her abdomen. She woke with a scream, eyes confused as she gasped in the thin, rushing air.

“Go for it, Shade,” he said and a black parachute opened up, yanking her away from Jason who continued to plummet downwards. He spotted Keith, who had suffered a similar slash to the neck as Jason but didn’t enjoy Jason’s advantages. He was a third of the way to decapitated, his clearly dead body trailing blood as it fell.

Aram and Asya received the same potion-parachute combo as Ketevan, except that Jason gave them iron-rank potions instead of over-ranked ones. Their injuries were not as life threatening, so a bronze-rank potion that would prevent them from using more potions for a good while was a poor choice. The stronger potion had helped pull Ketevan out of immediate danger, but until her body processed the residual magic, potions would be unable to heal her further.

Jason fed potions to each of the three iron-rankers and equipped them all with Shade parachutes. By the time he was done they still had not yet descended to the cloud layer. Shade controlled the parachutes to keep the iron-rankers close, while the bronze-ranker used his slow fall power to match their descent speed. He had strong lateral control that reminded Jason of Sophie’s gliding power and he suspected the man to have a wind essence.

While the three iron-rankers recovered their senses, Jason sent the bronze-ranker a party invitation so they could communicate over the rushing wind. He didn’t bother with the others because even though they had regained consciousness, they were too disoriented to accept the invitation. The bronze-ranker had participated in the incursion event with Jason, so he wasn’t surprised by it.

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➤ [Bruce Corwin had joined your party.](#)

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Jason and Bruce discussed what to do next.

“That was a conventional explosive or we would have sensed it,” Bruce said through voice chat. “If I was hitting someone without using magic, I’d have a follow-up team with magic aplenty to make sure the job was done.”

“Sounds reasonable,” Jason agreed. He was far from his field of experience and was willing to defer to the trained expert, even if they had missed the bomb.

“My guess would be a second aircraft, someone on a boat, or both,” Bruce said. “They may have even been tracking our transponder and triggered the explosion remotely.”

“We should hope for a boat,” Shade said. “I don’t have enough bodies to make a boat viable for the open ocean if we hit rough weather. If our antagonists have chosen to supply one, then you will need to pacify them and seize it.”

“I like that plan,” Jason said. “Bruce, you keep an eye on this lot. The parachutes will take care of themselves, so you’ll just need to handle any airborne threats. Is that in your skill set?”

“I have the powers for that,” Bruce said confidently. “Should I be the one to go, though?”

“Can you take on a boat full of magical hostiles alone?” Jason asked.

“Can you?”

“I’ve dealt with sand pirates before,” Jason said. “The water variety should be about the same, right?”

“Sand pirates?”

“Alright,” Jason said. “I’m going to drop down and see if I can’t secure you a landing zone.”

Jason turned off his slow fall and angled his body down.

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Jason’s sharp eyes picked out the yacht as soon as he dropped below the cloud layer.

“We’ve got a boat,” he told Bruce through voice chat. “I’ll probably drop out of voice range before I reach it, given the low magic. Seriously, though, who takes a luxury yacht to shoot down an aeroplane?”

“The French?” Bruce suggested. “We can’t be certain that the boat you’re seeing is involved, though.”

“True, but I’d take those odds. I’ll check it out before I do anything drastic.”

He descended further as the ocean below and the boat floating in it became clearer to see. As he dropped down to a low altitude he spotted a swarm of small objects rising from the yacht. As they rose up to meet him he realised they were drones.

They were not just technological objects but also magical, lighting up to his magic senses. As they drew closer, he spotted the shimmering magical bubbles around them and the glowing sigils carved into their surface.

“Are they little, magic attack drones?” he wondered. “That’s kind of cool. Still, can’t be having that. Pop out, if you would please, Gordon.”

Gordon manifested beside Jason, keeping pace with Jason using a continual series of magic dashes. As Jason suspected, the drones moved up and started attacking, projecting rapid-fire streams of tiny needles imbued with lightning magic. The drones were, impressively, bronze-rank constructions, but their inundation of attacks proved a poor tactic against Jason. His cloak sheathed itself around him and his descent was not slowed at all as the attacks were expended harmlessly against his cloak.

The drones were steel wrapped in protective bubbles, on which Gordon went to work. His disruptive-force beams cracked the magical shields while his resonating-force beams made short work of the reinforced drones underneath. The four beams swept through the drone swarm in pairs, efficiently wiping out what Jason hoped was an outrageous wealth of magical devices.

As he drew closer to sea level at a rocket pace, more attacks launched from the boat below. These were not light attacks but a trio of shoulder-mounted rockets imbued with silver-rank magic. At first, it looked like they were going to fly right past him, and not even that closely. It seemed like they were quite carelessly aimed. Then they locked onto not Jason but Gordon.

Jason immediately recalled his familiar, not trusting Gordon’s intangibility to endure the silver-rank magic he sensed from the rockets. As soon as Gordon was gone, the rockets stopped adjusting their trajectories and flew straight, making them easy to dodge. He was worried that they would go after the people above, but was out of voice range to warn them.

“Gordon, see if you can’t grab the attention of those rockets and dog fight them down. Their tracking systems can’t be that complicated.”

Gordon reappeared and started dashing up after the rockets. Jason pulled out his old non-magical telescope. Slowing his descent into a glide for stability. He eyed off the yacht below, which he realised was even bigger than he originally thought. It was the class of profoundly expensive super yachts that even all his gold might not be enough to buy.

He picked out a shadow on the sun deck made by an awning, then used his cloak to shadow jump directly onto the yacht. He immediately reconjured his cloak, which blended him into the shadows as he listened to voices coming from the deck below.

“Where did he go?” one voice asked. “Why didn’t the rockets go after him? They have magically enhanced tracking systems.”

“How would I know?” a second voice asked. “You made a big deal about these weapons to the Network man and they don’t do a thing.”

“They’re powerful weapons!” the first man insisted.

“Then maybe you got broken ones because these didn’t do a thing,” a third man said.

“You’re taking his side? You told me just this morning how impressed you were with the drones.”

Jason recognised that the three men were arguing in French. It was the result of his practise at actively listening to people to recognise the languages his power translated for him. It had been a reason to watch some of the foreign films he always told himself he should be watching instead of trashy action films. He ended up compromising by watching trashy, foreign-language action films.

The three men talking were silver-rankers, but not essence users. Their magic had the same feel as the EOA thugs that Vermillion had once talked him out of fighting. There were others around the yacht, which was no smaller or less well-appointed than his houseboat, at least from a non-magical perspective. The yacht was an ordinary vehicle, unlike the plane that had been taken out.

The bulk of the auras were bronze-rank, except for the three silvers continuing to argue on the deck.

“Where did he go?” one of them asked.

“You think I know? Maybe he turned invisible or teleported onto the boat.”

“We need to find him before the boosts wear off. We shouldn’t have taken them so early.”

“We needed to fire the rockets.”

“For all the good they did! I don’t want to come back down in the middle of a fight. They said he was dangerous.”

“We don’t even know it was him.”

“Of course it was him. You think we got lucky and he died in the plane explosion? If that was going to kill him, they wouldn’t have sent us out here to finish him off with all these weapons that don’t do a damn thing. Now we do it our way, so get everyone to start searching.”

The three split up and started yelling orders to search the yacht to the other dozen crew Jason could sense, but it was unnecessary as Jason emerged from the shadows and dropped lightly to the lower deck, landing in front of the three men.