

Chapter 592

Why Anyone Would Pick You

The elevating platform stopped at the top floor of the pagoda, depositing Jason and Dawn at one end of a long throne room. Dawn turned to look at Jason.

“I know,” he said, wilting with shame.

They looked to the far end of the room, both taking on surprised expressions as they saw the throne itself. The room around it was ostentatious and perfectly designed for pomp and ceremony, with decorative weapon racks and tapestries depicting Jason doing better in certain fights than he strictly speaking had done in reality. At the end of the room, stairs led up to a platform, above which hung the astral throne.

“A hammock chair?” Dawn asked.

“I feel much better about this whole thing, now,” Jason said. “All this other nonsense will have to go, though.”

With a sweeping gesture, everything around them dissolved and started swirling around like colourful glitter caught up in a chaotic wind.

“You don’t have to wave your arms like a magician every time you change things,” Dawn pointed out.

“Yes, I do.”

“No, Jason. You do not.”

“Are you an astral king?”

Dawn’s only response was a weary groan.

“Exactly,” Jason said. “One of us knows what he’s talking about.”

“Are you actually attempting to gaslight me over your need to look like a magician?”

Jason’s clothes dissolved like the rest of the room and reformed as a tuxedo and top hat. He waggled his eyebrows at Dawn.

“Abracadabra.”

Dawn shook her head.

The room reformed, this time taking on the form of a long hall. There was a row of tables with sunken, felt-covered surfaces, like snooker tables without the holes. There were also comfortable couches, along with glass-fronted cupboards and refrigerators filled with drinks and snacks. The walls were no longer lined with tapestries and decorative weapons but square shelf cubbies, except where space was occupied by cupboards, fridges and a section down one end that looked like wine racks.

“Are those Kallax shelves?” Dawn asked, looking at the square cubbies.

“Yep.”

“You have the power to remake this world, right down to the laws of physics, and you installed Ikea shelving.”

“It’s what Greg would have wanted. I guess we could check. Shade?”

“Mr Asano,” Shade’s voice came from Jason’s shadow. “I am not going to attempt to contact the Reaper in order to have him ask your deceased friend how he would like the board games he left you stored in the realm over which you have god-like power.”

“Please?”

“No.”

Board games started appearing, stacked onto the shelves, sweeping along the wall like a wave.

“This place still serves as storage for my inventory,” Jason said. “It always used to store items in a kind of stasis. Now it’s more like the stuff I store exists in a potential state where I can reproduce it, in the condition in which it entered. Am I a Star Trek replicator?”

Dawn smiled.

“I was wondering when we would get to this part,” she said. “If we’re going to discuss the specifics, we should take a closer look at the astral throne.”

They walk down the long room as the shelves continued to fill.

“How many games did Greg have?” Dawn asked. “I didn’t realise it was anywhere near this many.”

“That’s because you’ve only seen the part of the collection I leave in the games room of the cloud house,” Jason said. “These are the extra ones I’ve been keeping in my inventory.”

“There aren’t really enough to fill this entire room, are there?”

“Of course not. See down the end, that section that looks like wine racks? It’s storage for playmats.”

“Why anyone would pick you to save an entire planet I have no idea.”

“You think I’m maybe a little more frivolous than you’d expect from an agent of your boss?”

“You can be quite ominously serious, but yes. I’m used to dealing with people who are a bit more... predictable in their approach. ”

“You think I’m inconsistent.”

“Honestly, yes. But, to my great surprise, I much prefer your fun side to your dangerous one. I’m not sure why the World-Phoenix chose you, however. You aren’t exactly the most predictable operative.”

“Your boss prefers my fun side too. Or sees it as a necessity, at the very least.”

“I’m not sure I follow.”

Jason held his arms out, gesturing at the walls around them.

“This is why,” he said. “Because I’d turn a throne room into a games room. I’m willing to bet that for all I try to do the unexpected, everything has fallen within the calculations of your boss. Infinite experience means the ability to calculate infinite contingencies. The World-Phoenix realised that whomever it used as a cat’s paw would get their hands on power that maybe they shouldn’t. Such as winding up as an astral king, three ranks too early.”

Dawn nodded to herself.

“The power to fulfil our deepest desires reveals what those desires are,” she mused, then looked at Jason with a smile. “And you have the desires of an idiot.”

“Yep,” he agreed proudly.

They reached the end of the room and the short set of stairs leading to the platform where a wicker hammock chair was hanging from the high ceiling on a rope, padded with plush cushions. They ascended the stairs and stood in front of it.

“The astral throne isn’t like the door you absorbed from the builder,” Dawn told him.

“I know,” Jason said with a nod. “I can feel the difference. This is a part of me. The system message didn’t say I absorbed the astral throne; it said I established it. I stripped something called a fundament core out of the door and consumed it.”

“That door was designed to remake reality of a fundamental level,” Dawn said. “You somehow took the core mechanism from it and your soul deciphered the means to do that, at least within your soul realm.”

“My soul seems very adaptive,” Jason said. “In the transformation zones, it effectively learned how to remake reality. Is this something the World-Phoenix did to me?”

“No. Every soul is adaptable like that. Think of a soul as an infinite mass of shapeless potential. It has the power to effectively do anything, but because it’s formless, it can’t do anything. But show it how to take a shape and it can mould itself into that form. Some forms are relatively simple and limited, like most racial gifts, so they reach most of their potential quickly and show little to no growth. Others grow stronger as the soul better understands how to take that complex form.”

“Like when I was learning the spirit domain power. Or essence abilities.”

“Exactly. And this is why a great astral being’s blessing can’t impart any negative influence; all a blessing does is show a soul a pattern it can take for itself. The blessing doesn’t actually impart anything.”

“And that’s what happened with the astral throne,” Jason said. “My soul devoured the fundamental core and used it as a blueprint for the astral throne.”

“Exactly. The function of the astral throne is to allow you to rewrite reality. Within your soul, that power is limitless. Outside it, you will have some ability to do so within your spirit domain, but your soul’s influence is also clashing with an entire reality.”

“Making the results a lot more limited.”

“Yes.”

“That authority I used,” Jason said, frowning as his mind was making connections. “It came from the Builder’s door and had construction and dimension aspects. I think when I used it on the cloud flask, my soul figured out how to influence those aspects through my spirit domains. It learned the shape of how to do that. Or maybe it already knew how. I had a sealed ability that was unsealed when I used the authority. I think my soul sealed the power away because I wasn’t ready for it, and the authority cracked that seal.”

“Understanding the mechanisms is important,” Dawn told him, “but more for the future than today. I just wanted you to understand the basics before moving on to the practical aspects of what the throne can accomplish.”

“Like how stuff gets stored in here now,” Jason said.

“Yes. You have full control over this space, matter and energy. We’ve discussed how the soul takes shapes. This place exists within your soul, so you can shape it as you please. And because your soul is also a physical thing, so is this a physical space. You can bring things in and remake them.”

“But there are limits, right? Not on me, but on things other than me that enter this space.”

“Your intuitive understanding is good,” Dawn said. “You can change things you’ve brought from the outside in here, but those changes will only remain when the object leaves if the changes are consistent with the objects in question.”

“If I bake an apple pie in here, with normal apple pie ingredients, it’ll still be an apple pie once it’s back outside,” Jason said.

“Yes. But if you turn those apples into apricots and bake those into a pie, it will break down once it is removed from this space.”

“And I won’t be able to change souls.”

“No. Just as the Builder could not invade yours, you cannot invade another’s. Unless they invite you to.”

“Which the Builder tried to torment me into doing,” Jason said.

Jason and Dawn shared a look, but neither voiced that Jason could do the same to someone trapped in his soul realm.

“What about things I create here?” Jason asked. “Can I make spirit coins?”

“I don’t know. Can you?”

Jason held out his hand and six coins appeared; one each of a lesser spirit coin through to a diamond one.

“These aren’t quite right,” he said. “I can feel it. Let me try again.”

The coins vanished and another set appeared.

“I tapped into the magic veins running through this place to fill them with magic,” he explained. “I thought about what you said about external forces needing to change within their own natural parameters. Spirit coins are just congealed magic, effectively, so I grabbed some that my soul pulled in from the outside and turned it into coins.”

“They don’t seem any different from the first set.”

“They are, I can feel it,” Jason said. “Everything up to the silver coin should be fine to take out. I don’t think the gold and diamond ones will hold, though.”

“Limited by the rank your soul has learned to use?”

“Yeah. I can loot higher-rank coins from higher-rank monsters because they serve as a rank template for my looting power, but my soul by itself can’t do the job.”

Dawn looked at Jason thoughtfully.

“What?” he asked.

“You know, there’s something I’ve been waiting to do for a long time, and now might be just right.”

“Oh?”

Dawn’s fist crashed into Jason’s face with all of her diamond-rank strength and speed. She reeled back, clutching her fist as Jason stumbled back, startled but unharmed.

“What was that?” he asked.

“What are you made of?” she asked, still rubbing the hand she hurt punching Jason ineffectually.

“I’m not sure. Infinity? Is that something you can be made of?”

“Why did it hurt?”

“My house. My rules. You should just wait until I’m diamond rank, like you planned. And maybe don’t do it somewhere that I’m the alpha and the omega.”

Jason made the pain vanish from Dawn’s hand, shaking his head as he turned his attention back to the coins in his hand.

“Even without gold and diamond coins, I can effectively make infinite amounts of money like this. I’d better, you know, not do that. I don’t want to go collapsing economies or getting any mercantile gods cranky at me.”

“Very sensible,” Dawn said. “They won’t mind you injecting a little extra money into the economy here and there, so long as you restrain yourself. You’re far from the only person to get some quirk of power that allows them to produce effectively infinite money. They only get stomped on if they abuse it, since the gods don’t like to deny people the use of their abilities. With some notable exceptions.”

“It’s not like I was hurting for money in the first place.”

“We should get back to discussing the potential of your astral throne.”

“Good, because I have a lot of questions. What happens if I feed someone some dodgy spirit coins that I didn’t inject magic into properly? It would sustain their body while they were in here, but what happens when they leave and the magic that was sustaining them turned out to be fake?”

“That would be fine because the changes they underwent in your soul space were in accordance with their nature.”

“And if I changed their eye colour?”

“You couldn’t make that change soul-deep. Their body and soul would be in conflict. A normal-ranker would be able to sustain that because their bodies are less closely linked to their souls. This is how something like the Alzheimer’s affecting your grandmother can afflict a normal-ranker without killing them. An essence user’s body becomes much more a projection of their soul as they rank up, though, so the conflict would cause greater problems.”

“Once they were out of my soul space where I control everything.”

“Precisely.”

“Okay, so what about if a normal ranker ate a magic apple? Do the nutrients they’ve digested go away?”

“How many of these questions are going to be about eating things?”

“I’d say a good seventy to eighty percent. What if I bring in real flour, but conjure up all the other ingredients and bake a cake?”

Dawn ran her hands over her face.

“This is going to be a long night.”