

Chapter 631

Where We End

Farrah and Jason emerged from his soul space, through the archway located on the bridge.

“I can kind of feel the bond, if I go looking for it,” Farrah said. “It’s way more subtle than my power bond ability, though. To be honest, I was expecting more.”

“I know that story,” Travis said from the doorway to the bridge. “Women tell me that all the time.”

“Oh, bloke...” Jason commiserated. “You need to work on that self-confidence.”

“That’s never been something that worked for me,” Travis said. “You may recall the pistol I was trying to use when we met was called the compensator. That’s what it was compensating for: a lack of self-confidence. Not, you know... the other thing.”

“You shouldn’t worry about it,” Farrah told him, jabbing a thumb at Jason. “Everyone has their mindset problems. My primary job of the last few years was making sure this guy didn’t murder everyone – or refuse to murder anyone – because he was a sad boy.”

“Hey...” Jason whined.

“I was looking for you, Jason,” Travis said, giving Farrah an odd look. “Since you intend to start seriously going after messengers, I have something I’ve been working on to give you.”

“Oh?” Jason asked. “Alright, come into my cabin.”

They moved into Jason’s cabin, the cloud furniture reconfiguring as they entered. The cloud material flowed and reshaped itself, eliminating the bed and pushing back the lounge area in favour of a round table and chairs.

“Iced tea?” Jason offered and the others nodded. Jason took out a tray and three glasses from a cabinet, then a pitcher from a refrigerator that emerged from the wall.

“What do you have?” Jason asked as he sat the tray down and waved the others to seats.

“Well,” Travis said, “I know that when you portal us back to Rimaros, you’ll be picking up the designs and materials from House de Varco to spice up the vehicle forms your cloud flask can produce.”

“That’s the idea,” Jason said. “Not sure how much they’ll bring to the table, but it can’t hurt.”

“I was thinking about supplementing those designs,” Travis said. “As you know, my specialty is magitech guns. I can work with any kind of gun or large ordnance, but great big guns are my sweet spot.”

“You’re talking about putting some guns on my yacht?” Jason asked.

“I know your cloud house can use magic to replicate complex technology like live televisions screens,” Travis said. “I also know that you have internal defence systems, but thought that you could benefit from something more externally-focused. Didn’t you wonder why I was asking all those questions about how your cloud flask worked?”

“You mean the 0.003% of questions that Clive asked? After him, a Magic Society interrogator would just seem naturally curious.”

“The Magic Society has interrogators?” Travis asked.

“It’s complicated,” Farrah said. “The interrogators are specialists that are part of the Magic Society, but there are rules against the Magic Society using them. They work for the Adventure Society and civilian authorities, not the Magic Society itself.”

“Lara was using them to try and make the Order of Redeeming Light prisoners talk,” Jason said. “Having their souls coated in vampire gunk repurposed for hardcore zealotry made them tough nuts to crack, though.”

“Yeah, I’m not really interested in the whole brainwashed fanatic stuff,” Travis said. “I’ll stick to giant guns and trying to invent the magic phone, thank you very much.”

“How are you going to do that?” Jason asked. “This world already has a few different forms of distance communication, right?”

“Yeah,” Farrah said. “There’s the water link system, but that’s complicated, expensive and requires access to a body of water connected to all the others. Inland lakes that don’t feed into an ocean or river anywhere can’t support a water link station, for example. Then there’s the record systems that the Adventure Society and Magic Society use to keep their records updated across branches. That system is too slow for real-time communication, though.”

“It also can’t transmit enough information,” Travis said. “I looked into it and while it is used for communication, it’s like an inefficient telegram system. It’s to the point that most communication that isn’t regular record updates are shared through the water link.”

“Our plan,” Farrah said, “is to leverage the bones of that magic and enhance it using Travis’ understanding of magitech. We’re taking inspiration from the Earth’s magical detection grid to set up relays to extend the range.”

“Magical cell towers,” Travis said. “Maybe even satellites.”

Travis took on an expression Jason knew and feared from Clive.

“Did you know that each of this world’s moons has very different magic levels?”

Travis asked enthusiastically.

“I vaguely recall,” Jason said. “The magic one is called the Mystic Moon, right?”

“Yeah,” Travis said. “I’ve been looking into it ever since I started thinking about satellites. It turns out to have a weird regulatory effect on the tides.”

“You know, I keep wondering about that,” Jason said.

“I know, right?” Travis said. “The tides here are a bit more complex than on earth, but nowhere near the level they should be with two moons...”

Once Jason and Travis started enthusiastically discussing tidal forces, Farrah went to the drinks cabinet and found something to spice up her iced tea. Jason watched her topping up her glass from a liquor bottle and mixing it in with a stirring rod.

“You don’t think it’s a little early?” he asked.

“Hey, I’m not the one going off to fight evil,” she told him, completely unrepentant. “If you don’t want to see day drinking, maybe don’t make your headquarters a pleasure yacht?”

“That’s a fair point, I guess,” Jason said as Farrah experimentally sipped at her drink and immediately poured in more booze.

Farrah and Travis made their farewells on the roof deck.

“It looks like you’ve found a place for yourself here, bro,” Taika told Travis as he enveloped him in a huge hug.

“There’s not a lot waiting for me back on earth,” Travis said. “My family were never entirely reconciled with the choices I made and what that meant for them. I think that maybe it’s better for all of us if I’m just gone.”

“If that’s what you feel is best. But Earth is still home for me.”

“I hope you get back. Mate.”

“Don’t use New Zealand slang. It always sounds wrong in an American accent.”

“Isn’t that Australian slang?”

“Do you want a smack, bro?”

After the more general goodbyes, Farrah, Gary and Rufus gathered together at one end of the deck.

“So, this is where we end,” Rufus said, looking and sounding uncertain. “We came together in a town overrun by zombies, fire lighting up the dark, the air filled with ash and smoke. Now we’ve come to the end, on a magic land-boat on a sunny day.”

“Better that than steel and blood,” Gary said soberly. Their minds all drifted back to Farrah’s death in an astral space, Rufus and Gary helpless to stop it.

“This way,” Gary continued, his voice growing more cheerful, “we can still get together and tell stories, have a few drinks. And a few more. Now I find myself wondering why I ever thought I needed adventuring to be able to do that. All it added was the need to kill things and the chance to die.”

“There’s the travel,” Farrah said. “You can do that without adventuring, sure, but I don’t think I ever would have seen another world without it. The price was high, but here we are, more-or-less intact.”

“It’s a long way from what we expected when Emir asked us to go to Greenstone,” Rufus said. “I’m not sure any of us expected to be on the paths we’re taking from here.”

“I don’t know,” Farrah said. “Gary was always going to be a craftsman, and I’ve always wanted to do some real magic study in between blowing things up. The only real surprise is you, Roo.”

“You know I don’t like it when you call me that,” Rufus said. “And what do you mean, that I’m the surprise?”

“We never imagined you running a training centre for adventurers,” she said, Gary nodding in agreement.

“Why would that surprise you?” Rufus asked. “My family runs a... oh gods dammit.”

Farrah and Gary both took shot glasses from their dimensional pouches and down the contents at a gulp.

“Are you ever going to let that go?” Rufus complained.

“I’d say not until the day I died,” Farrah said, “but even that didn’t stop me.”

“Don’t worry,” Gary said. “A couple of centuries from now, when you’re dead from old age and your memorial plaque reads ‘his family runs a school,’ we’ll be there, having a drink.”

“Why am I the first one to die of old age?”

“We just have healthier diets,” Gary said.

“You’re constantly eating your body weight in anything warm and dead,” Rufus complained. “Your idea of salad dressing is anything not worse than mildly poisonous.”

“Exactly,” Gary said. “I’m robust.”

“You can’t argue that’s not the case,” Farrah said to Rufus, who shook his head.

Rimaros in general had excellent defences, along with tracking systems for any teleportation or similar means of travel. This was even more true on the island of Livaros,

and the Adventure Society campus itself had defences second only to the royal sky island. They were not as obvious, but no less formidable.

One of the most magically sophisticated arrays in Rimaros was a room deep in the Adventure Society campus. Setting up a place where all the defences and detection of dimensional travel did not take effect was more complex than the defences themselves. The room was also one of the most secure in the Storm Kingdom, with layers of physical and magical defences. Various fail-safes could be enacted in emergencies, from collapsing the room to exposing it to all the defences and tracking it otherwise avoided.

Just portalling into the room was tricky, requiring both magical devices and specific rituals. Jason had been supplied with both, allowing his portal arch to appear in the room. The arrival room was an empty cube, with neither doors nor windows, only flat, unbroken surfaces. After stepping out of the arch, Jason recognised the dark metal the room was built from. It secured various underground portions of the Adventure Society campus against intrusion by magic perception. As with the first time he encountered the enclosed feeling, he was tempted to push out with his senses and test how strong the sense suppression was, but he suspected the consequences would not be worth sating his curiosity.

The cube room was entirely blank, with not even any lighting. That didn't bother Jason or Farrah, who followed him out and had her eyes start glowing like embers. Travis pulled out a glow stone and tossed it into the air, but instead of floating and lighting up, it fell to the floor like a normal pebble.

Curious, Jason pushed not his aura senses but his magic senses, paying more attention to the suppressive effects permeating the room. It occurred to him that he should ask Amos about training them as well, as their strength was fine but their active uses were far less developed than his aura senses.

Jason used his aura as a platform to reach out to the inert glow stone. He suspected that it was not a normal expression of aura projection, as it felt rather like using his aura to produce physical force. Adapting the method he used to disable suppression collars, he pushed back against the suppressive effect of the stone and it lit up, floating into the air.

The moment it did, openings appeared in the walls. Portions of the hard metal turned to liquid and flowed through the gaps left as it did. This left doorways through which a small army of silver rankers poured through to surround the trio, led by a gold ranker. Each was dressed in practical black, with the crossed sword and rod emblem of the Adventure Society stitched in gold. Jason held up his hands.

"We surrender?" he said casually, just before Liara marched in.

“Please don’t poke at the society’s defences for fun, Mr Asano,” she told him wearily.

“Hey, I was trying to fix a busted glow stone,” Jason said. “If the Adventure Society is that afraid of a little light illuminating the darkness, you might want to consider what that says about it, as a metaphor.”

“And I wanted to check if I missed your presence at all,” Liara said. “Unsurprisingly, the answer is a resounding no.”

“That’s a little hurtful,” Jason said.

Liara sighed, then made a sharp command gesture. The guards wordlessly started filtering out of the room.

“Come along then, Mr Asano,” she said primly. “Let’s get this done so you can be back on your way.”

“How’s the family?” Jason asked.

“Fine,” Liara said curtly.

“So stern,” Jason said. “Trying to keep things professional in front of your work friends?”

Liara looked around as the guards finished filtering out and all the doors but one were resealed. Her mouth crinkled unhappily.

“Baseph and the children asked me to say hello,” she said, like a prisoner in a hostage video. Jason let out a laugh.