

Chapter 62: Have Some Damn Adventures

“Hello,” Jason said, waving at the crystal floating in front of him. “I’m not sure if, or when you’ll be seeing this, but I didn’t die, or whatever you think happened to me. You probably know that, since the only way you’re likely to see this is if I give it to you.”

He let out a dissatisfied groan.

“Maybe I should have scripted this. Oh, well. Where should I start? It’s been about two months since I arrived here. Where is here? That’s complicated. I’ve made some friends. I just got a new job, although I haven’t started yet. They’re meant to be sending my ID over today. The application process involved sort of a week-long retreat, which I got back from a couple of days ago.”

He took a deep breath.

“I suppose I should start with that complicated question of where I am. Right now, as you can see, I’m in an expensive hotel suite. It isn’t actually mine; that’s across the hall. This one belongs to some of those friends I mentioned. They went three-bedroom, which came with this nice, open living area.”

Jason had purchased recording crystals that gave him a lot of control about how they moved. He got up and led it out to the balcony, where he panned it over the ocean view.

“Nice, right? One of my new friends is kind of a big deal, so he got the best room in the house. We’re on an artificial island, which is pretty crazy, given the size. At some point I’ll do a tour video. The subways here are amazing.”

“Jason,” Farrah’s voice called out from inside. “Who are you talking to?”

Jason went back inside. Although he hadn’t been out on a job yet, having passed muster with the Adventure Society prompted Rufus to declare Jason ready to guide his own training. Although he and the others would provide occasional guidance, the hours of intensive oversight was a thing of the past, leaving the others with more time for their own pursuits. Farrah and Gary had been working on the rune tortoise shield they were going to sell off, while Rufus was preparing to expand his family’s interests into Greenstone.

“I’m talking to my family,” Jason said as he walked back inside. Farrah and Gary had just returned.

“Your family?” Farrah asked.

“It’s a recording stone,” Jason said. “I’ve decided to make a record of my time here. Something I can show them, if I ever get home. Family, this is Farrah and Gary.”

“Er, hello,” Farrah said, giving the awkward, home-movie wave that apparently transcended realities.

“Hey!” Gary said, waving enthusiastically. “Hello, Jason’s family!”

“Didn’t the goddess of knowledge tell you that you definitely would get home?” Farrah asked.

“I’m not wildly trusting of authority figures,” Jason said, deactivating the crystal. He took a carousel out of his inventory, full of recording crystals in little trays. He stowed the crystal away in an empty slot and returned the carousel to his inventory.

“You do realise the Adventure Society you just joined is a world-spanning organisation, right?” Farrah asked. “A global authority.”

“I’m anticipating the odd bit of friction,” Jason said. “I know I’m not to everyone’s taste, but coming to this world is a chance to be who I am, take it or leave it.”

“Even if it kills you,” Gary said cheerfully. “You decided to keep the thing that’ll randomly send you home, then?”

“I did,” Jason said. “I could always change my mind, but being here has given me some perspective on what’s really important. I hadn’t seen most of them in a long time.”

“What happened between you?” Farrah asked.

“The love of my life cheated on me with my brother, then they got married and my mother basically told me to shut up and take it like a man.”

“Harsh,” Gary said.

“We never really got along,” Jason said. “My brother is everything she ever wanted in a son. It was kind of the other way around with Dad. It was always him and me, but after the way things were, I didn’t see him so much.”

There was a knock on the door and Gary let in Vincent. They all sat down in the lounge area and Jason put out a tray of snacks he took from his inventory.

“You just had those ready?” Gary asked, picking up a candied grape.

“Turns out my storage space maintains freshness and temperature,” Jason said. “Which is lucky, because I had that tyrannical pheasant meat in there for almost two months.”

“You mean, the meat I had the other day?” Gary asked.

“That’s the one,” Jason said.

“Is that why you didn’t want any? Were you testing it out on me?”

“It wouldn’t worry me,” Jason said “I resist poison.”

“But I don’t,” Gary said.

“You’re bronze rank,” Jason said. “It’d be fine. If you’re worried about the food I make, you don’t need to eat any of these snacks,” Jason said.

Gary looked at the candied grape in his fingers, then put it into his mouth.

“We don’t have to go that far,” he mumbled.

Vincent watched the exchange with raised eyebrows.

“Are you two quite finished?”

“You sound like Rufus,” Gary said.

“I don’t think Rufus could pull off that moustache,” Jason said.

Jason liked Vincent. He was a very serious man with a very outrageous moustache, which Jason appreciated.

“There’s been a slight problem with your Society badge,” Vincent said.

After receiving confirmation that he had passed the assessment, Jason had undergone the final process of becoming an Adventure Society member. Each member had a badge that served various functions beyond proof of membership. It let members claim adventure notices and allowed the Society to track members in case they went missing. It also let the Society know immediately when a member died.

Badges were managed by the Adventure Society’s Member Logistics Department, of which Vincent was one of the chief officials. In addition to the assessment and induction of new members, their responsibilities included the dispensation and monitoring of membership badges.

Although the badges were managed by the Adventure Society, it was the Magic Society that created them. Jason had been sent to the Magic Society so they could take an aura imprint from which to make his badge. It was a simple process, just standing in the middle of a magic circle for about a minute.

“Every time a badge is made,” Vincent said, “it’s paired with a tracking stone. It tells us if your alive or dead, and lets us find you if you go missing or die. Yours doesn’t work, though. The stone can’t track your the aura imprint.”

“I’ve seen this before,” Farrah said. “Some people have abilities that block magical tracking.”

“That was the Magic Society’s assessment as well,” Vincent said.

Farrah turned to Jason.

“You have the dark essence, right?” she asked him. “A lot of hiding abilities can protect you from location effects.”

“It’s not the dark essence,” Jason said. “It’s one my other abilities. My, uh, out of town abilities.”

Ability: [Mysterious Stranger]

➤ Immunity to identification and tracking effects.

“It seems that I’m completely immune to tracking effects,” Jason said.

Vincent nodded.

“That’s fine,” he said. “Just as long as we know there isn’t someone messing with our membership systems.”

“So what does that mean about getting my badge?” Jason asked.

“There’s not much we can do,” Rufus said. “Your badge will still work fine for your adventuring activities. It just means we can’t track you if you go missing,” Vincent said. “Or find your body, if you die alone.”

“I can live with that,” Jason said. “Tracking everyone seems a little dystopian, anyway.”

Vincent plucked an object out of thin air. Many essence users had abilities to store objects in dimensional spaces, like Jason’s inventory, or Farrah’s bottomless stone chest. Vincent handed a square, leather object to Jason. It was a badge wallet, which Jason flipped open to see the badge inside. It was a circular medallion made of iron, embossed with a sword and rod crossed over a shield; the emblem of the Adventure Society.

“Congratulations,” Vincent said. “As of this moment, you are officially a member in good standing of the Adventure Society. That badge represents your membership, and the authority that represents.”

“I have authority?” Jason asked, flipping open the wallet like a TV cop flashing his badge.

“Not really,” Vincent said. “There is a certain level of prestige that comes from membership, but any actual authority comes from the contract you are carrying out. A common example is when the city puts out a contract to capture a wanted criminal. Whoever is assigned that contract has the power to investigate and arrest bestowed by the city, but only so long as they are on that contract. You don’t have the rank to take on a contract like that, however.”

“I have a rank?” Jason asked.

“Your rank can be seen on your medallion,” Vincent said. “One-star, iron rank.”

Jason looked down at his new badge. On the iron medallion, underneath the Adventure Society emblem, was a single star.

“The ranking system of the Adventure Society has two parts,” Vincent explained. “The first element is not assessed at all, being a reflection of your rank as an essence user. You’re iron rank, so you’re an iron rank member.”

“Simple enough,” Jason said.

“The second part is not an assessment of your power, but your judgement. That’s the star ranking, and is wholly determined by the Adventure Society. Everyone begins at one star, with the maximum number of stars being three. The number of stars determines the kinds of contracts you can take. One star contracts are pure monster hunts, with no complicated elements to deal with.”

“What’s your star rating?” Jason asked.

“Society officials operate outside the rating system,” Vincent said. “It helps us to work with members, irrespective of their rank.”

“Makes sense,” Jason said. “If you’ve got a two-star official running an operation with three-star members, they might start taking things into their own hands.”

“Precisely,” Vincent said.

“So what about you two?” Jason asked Gary and Farrah.

“Two star,” Farrah said. “Rufus, as well. We were kind of hoping to get bumped up to three after the Vane contract, but that didn’t work out.”

“Rufus gave an honest report,” Gary said. “We didn’t come out looking great.”

“Ironically, you did,” Vincent said to Jason. “I saw that report.”

“I don’t suppose that counts for my promotion chances?” Jason asked.

“Not directly,” Vincent said, “but it may be taken into account in the future. Once other achievements have the Society considering you for promotion. Achievements made while actually a member.”

“So what do two and three stars actually represent?” Jason asked.

“In short,” Vincent said, “two and three stars represent a level of confidence in your judgement on the part of the Adventure Society. Two stars means the Society recognises your ability to undertake at least some level of actual, unsupervised responsibility. You’ll be able to take different kinds of contracts, such as investigating potentially dangerous situations or unknown phenomena. It also means you can lead small expeditions of one-star members.”

“We never got to two star at iron rank,” Gary said. “In the high-magic areas there isn’t a lot of chance to shine. You spend the whole time following more powerful adventurers so as not to die.”

“Three stars is much the same as two, but more so,” Vincent said.

“Three stars means they trust you to handle yourself when things get political,” Farrah said.

“That’s a fair assessment,” Vincent said. “Three star members are expected to anticipate and manage consequences at a higher level than other adventurers.”

“How do you go for promotion?” Jason asked.

“You can apply,” Vincent said, “usually on the back of some accomplishment. The Society prefers to choose for themselves, however. When they think you’re operating at a higher level than your current rank, they’ll do an assessment. We don’t like to see useful assets wasting themselves on work any idiot could do.”

“I think he’s talking about you,” Farrah said to Gary.

“You’re not any higher rank than I am,” Gary shot back.

“There is one important thing to be aware of,” Vincent said, ignoring the pair. “The stringency with which promotions are considered scales upward with power. What is good enough for two stars at iron rank is not the same as at bronze or silver rank, where the stakes are higher. As such, you can expect to drop a star rank each time you increase a tier in power. Unless you’re still one-star, of course. No one really expects anything from you if you’re stuck at that level.”

“He’s still talking about you,” Farrah said.

“I have two stars,” Gary said. “We’re the same rank,” Gary said.

“So, what now?” Jason asked.

“That’s easy,” Gary said. “You’re an adventurer, now. Go to the jobs hall, get a contract and have some damn adventures.”