

Chapter 589

Deeds of Legend

Liara's family was sitting around a dining table filled with food. Liara had a glower as Baseph held her hand under the table, his eyes sparkling with amusement.

"...little did I know that your mother had leaked information about my route to use me as bait to try and catch some Builder cultists," Jason said, continuing his story.

"She didn't!" Zareen said with a laugh.

"Oh, she did. Except it wasn't Builder cultists that ambushed me, but Purity fanatics."

"Why were Purity fanatics after you?"

"Well, ostensibly they were doing it as part of a deal with the Builder. I have a few tricks up my sleeve for dealing with the Builder's own goons, so he gave the Order of Redeeming Light a—"

Liara coughed pointedly.

"...undisclosed asset, in return for going after me," Jason finished.

"They were just doing it as part of a deal with the Builder. It's all very complicated."

"You realise," Liara said to Jason, "that all of this is, strictly speaking, restricted information."

"Send me a fine or something," Jason said. "Anyway, they weren't going to kill me – at least, not yet. As it turned out, a friend of mine is the long-lost daughter of the leader of this order of Purity fanatics and they want to use me as bait to get their hands on her, before dealing with me for the Builder."

"You're kidding," Zareen said.

"It's all true," Jason said. "You'd have to be a real hack to come up with something that outlandish. So, I get jumped by these Purity nutbags, and the Builder had clearly been talking out of school about my powers because they were prepared to counter my abilities."

"That was when mother stepped in to save you?" Joseph asked.

"Oh, you'd think so, wouldn't you?" Jason asked.

"You fought them off then?" Dara asked. "How many were there?"

"I gave it a go, but no," Jason said. "There were three of them and I copped a drubbing. They chased me through the jungle until they finally pinned me down. Now, I'd already realised that your mother, or someone working for her, was probably watching. I knew she viewed me as expendable and these people had been a little too well-prepared. I couldn't be certain she was actually there, though, so I fought until I didn't have any other

options. So, there I am, on my knees in the jungle, covered in mud. The only option I've got left is to point out your mother, who I was *relatively* confident was there."

"Why hadn't you shown yourself already?" Joseph asked Liara.

"Yes, Princess," Jason asked, his tone a gleeful twist of the knife. "Why hadn't you?"

"She wanted to see how well he could fight," Dara guessed. "If you are going to have an ally, you should understand their capabilities and limitations."

"No," Zareen said. "Mother wanted Mr Asano captured, so she could follow the Purity adherents back to the others. Which Mr Asano realised and ruined by revealing her presence. Even if mother hadn't revealed herself at that point, or he had been wrong and she wasn't there, it would make them a lot more cautious about returning to wherever they were based. That would give Mr Asano more chances to escape captivity."

"I told you to call me Jason."

Jason continued to amuse the siblings with anecdotes as Liara looked on with disapproval and Baseph with amusement. As Shade was clearing away the plates from the dessert course, Jason looked down at the floor, then turned to Baseph.

"It looks like my team is arriving home from a mission," he said.

Baseph was an experienced spouse to a politically important person and did not miss the signal.

"Great, I'll be able to thank them again. Come along, kids."

"Dad, I'm thirty-seven," Dara said.

"Of course you are, sweetie."

Shade led them away, leaving Liara and Jason alone. Jason got up and cloud stuff emerged from a wall before solidifying into a wooden drinks cabinet. He opened it up and started mixing drinks.

"You have a lovely family," he said as he worked. His voice was sincere, without the tinge of amusement that usually underpinned his tone.

"Did you have to bring them into this?"

"I would have preferred a purely social engagement, it's true. But that isn't an option for either of us, is it Princess?"

"No," Liara said. "No, it isn't."

Jason moved back to the table, setting one glass down in front of Liara and sipping at another as he sat back down.

"Did they tell you to try and getting something specific out of me, or just whatever you could?" he asked.

"They want you to come in to the Adventure Society for a debrief."

“I bet they do.”

“You know that you can’t hide in here forever.”

“I know. But I’m sure you’ve noticed that my life can get very complicated, very fast. Until I’m fully recovered, I have no interest in exposing myself to the next unexpected event or person making decisions for me for the greater good.”

“Which I’m happy to go back and tell them. Honestly, you should get out of the Storm Kingdom. You’ve generated a lot of goodwill, here, but there are a lot of people who see you as an asset more than a person.”

Jason chuckled.

“I’ve become quite accustomed to local authorities taking that particular stance. You know, if some of your fellow gold rankers do decide to offer me a very firm invitation in person, don’t discourage them too hard. It’s been a while since gold rankers showed up looking for trouble and I’ve made a few upgrades since then. I’d be interested in seeing how it works out.”

“I can never tell if you’re being serious.”

“It’s a funny thing. I never used to be serious and now I always am, yet I’ve been the same level of ridiculous the whole time. When your life is outrageous, you have to be outrageous to live it.”

Jason frowned.

“I’m starting to sound like a book about finding yourself in Tuscany. I may be about to meet a nice man. Also, I think vampires may have ruined Tuscany.”

Liara shook her head.

“You’re not getting any easier to deal with, Jason.”

He chuckled.

“What do you need to go back to your people with a win, Liara?”

“You could hand over Melody Jain.”

“Not happening.”

“No one knows what you’ve got going on, Jason, and holding that woman is a signal that you’re operating on some agenda of your own.”

“Everyone is operating on some agenda of their own, Princess.”

“Not everyone has as much impact when they do, Mr Asano. The last thing we need is another interdimensional threat while you’re holding meetings with great astral beings.”

“That’s fair,” Jason conceded.

“I’ve already gotten quite a lot out of you. I know those titbits you were dropping as you entertained my children were not in there by accident.”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about,” Jason said innocently. “If you managed to glean something from my sparkling lunch conversation, that’s down to your political prowess.”

“We didn’t know that they wanted to keep you alive because of Sophie Wexler.”

“Her mother shared that little nugget.”

“You’ve got her talking?”

“Her daughter has. Not what you’d call an interrogation, but we’ve managed to pick up a thing or two.”

“I would love to listen in on those conversations.”

“Shade,” Jason said.

Jason still wasn’t using his own dimensional abilities, so he’d been using Shade’s dimensional storage as an ancient wallet from beyond reality. He took out a folder and pushed it across the table to Liara.

“You’ll have to settle for transcripts,” Jason said. Liara moved to open the folder and Jason put his hand on it to stop her. “Social event, Princess. You can take your peek once you’re on the way home.”

Liara gave Jason a flat look but placed the folder in a dimensional pouch at her waist.

“You know this won’t be enough,” Liara said. “You rattled a lot of windows when you had gods and great astral beings coming by to chat on your lawn.”

“Okay, a few points. One, there was only one god, and he wasn’t invited. You know what gods are like.”

“No, Jason. I do not know what gods are like.”

“And besides, the result of that meeting was the Builder going away. What do I have to do to get people on side?”

“What were you expecting? You made the Builder leave. What kind of silver ranker can do that?”

“You know that there’s context to these events.”

“Yeah, because that’s how legends go. Deep dives into historical context.”

“I think legend is a stretch.”

“No, Jason; it isn’t. Some guy told the Builder to go away and he did. People will be telling that story for a long time, and they won’t be going into the contextual nuances. It’ll just get grander in the telling.”

Jason let out a tired, wincing laugh.

“You know, that’s exactly what I imagined when I became an adventurer. Deeds of legend.”

“And now?”

“They’re a lot more fun from far away.”

Jason drained his glass.

“The powers that be are looking for some assurance that I’m not some herald of the next big threat, yes?”

“There are also the ones who want to know how you got into this position so they can exploit it for themselves, but we try not to let them talk too much at meetings.”

Jason laughed.

“What does Soramir say? He’s going to set the tone.”

“Yes, he is.”

“And?”

“He says that someday, you’re going to be diamond rank, and you’ll remember how you were treated at silver.”

“I thought diamond rankers were meant to be above petty vengeance over the past.”

“They are,” Liara said. “Because they get all their petty vengeance out of the way early.”

She smiled as Jason laughed again.

“You seem less weighed-down,” she told him. “You were quite intense when you first came to Rimaros. Like an alchemical bomb that could go off if it was shaken too hard.”

“I went through a lot in the other world, and I didn’t have my team with me. Now, most of my affairs are settled and what I want more than anything else is to spend some time being as ordinary an adventurer as I can manage. With my friends. Which, right now, means getting away from Rimaros.”

“I’m not sure that ordinary is ever going to be a path you get to walk, Jason.”

“Yeah, well if anyone in your circle has any ideas to make that easier, let me know. Seriously; I think everyone would be happier if I stood out less.”

“I’ll put it to the Adventure Society.”

“Thank you, I apprecia...”

“What is it?” Liara asked after Jason trailed off.

“It seems that your eldest has taken a liking to my boy Humphrey.”

“Oh dear.”

“Yeah,” Jason said as he stood up. “His girlfriend doesn’t have a lot of approaches to conflict resolution, so we should probably get down there.”

“You can see what’s going on anywhere in the building?” Liara asked, also getting to her feet.

"Nothing is hidden from me, in this place. Come on; we can use the fireman's pole."

"The what?"

Dara rubbed the side of her head.

"I'd have had her if she'd stop moving for one damn second."

"I imagine that's why she didn't sweetie," Baseph told her. "Now, get in the carriage."

He led her out through the double doors. Gathered in the Atrium was Jason and his team, minus Humphrey and Sophie, along with Liara and her other two children.

"It was lovely to meet you," Jason told Zareen and Joseph. "And while I'm very flattered, I'm not looking for the entanglements a political marriage would bring."

"Mother, what did you tell him?" Zareen asked.

"Oh, you need to watch what you say in this building," Belinda said. "Jason sees and hears everything. I'm still convinced he watches Humphrey and Sophie—"

"Lindy!" Clive admonished.

"What?" Belinda asked. "You think he does too."

"Yes, but we don't discuss that kind of thing in front of company."

"Oh, sorry."

"Would you two please stop?" Jason asked them. "You're making me look bad in front of the royalty."

"Since when do you care?" Neil asked. "I remember you saying that royalty were all a bunch of—"

"So lovely of you to come by, Liara," Jason said. "Please give my best to the king or whoever."

Jason stepped out on the balcony from his bedroom, stretching his arms in the morning sun. Shade emerged from a shadow to stand beside him.

"I'm sure I'm fully recovered," he said. "I feel fine. Better than fine. You know I always come out of these scrapes stronger than when I went in."

"You promised Priest Quilido that you would not start using your dimensional abilities until he conducted final tests," Shade said.

"I thought you didn't like him."

"I have no idea what you are talking about. And even if that were the case, it has no relation to his abilities as a physician."

"Fine. When is he coming by?"

"He sent his regrets, as his research has delayed him. He will be along in the evening, rather than the afternoon."

Jason groaned.

"There are other ways to occupy your time, Mr Asano. Princess Zara Rimaros has invited you to visit the memorial put up for Miss Vesper."

"They were close, weren't they? Vesper was Zara's escort to Greenstone."

"Then shall I respond positively?"

"No, it smells like a trap."

"I don't think she would do that, Mr Asano, although perhaps others might seize the opportunity. I shall extend your regrets."

"Thank you. Anything else?"

"The Adventure Society seems to have taken Princess Liara's visit as a positive sign and asked for you to meet a representative."

"Liara is an Adventure Society official. A high-ranking one, at that. Who are they sending in my direction?"

"Richard Geller."

"They're sending Rick? I thought he went back north."

"It would seem not."

"He's not even an Adventure Society official, is he? I thought he was just an adventurer."

"Perhaps you can ask him in person. I assume you will permit his visit."

"I'm certainly not going to turn him away, which is presumably why the society is using him."

"Miss Warnock asked me to set aside some time so she could speak to you."

"She mentioned there was something she wanted to discuss. Go ahead and find a free moment."

"Very good, Mr Asano. There are quite a number of other social overtures, but nothing that warrants your attention. I will point out that Callum Morse has been making daily requests to talk to you for some time. He briefly started approaching your team members when they were on the job, but Mrs Remore put a stop to that."

"What about others? I know the team isn't telling me everything because they don't want me to feel bad, but they're getting pressured when they're out and about, aren't they?"

"Young Master Geller has made it quite clear that it is nothing they cannot handle."

"And you'll listen to him over me?"

“Of the two of you, Mr Asano, whose judgement would you trust?”

Jason gave Shade a long look.

“Yeah, fair enough.”