

Chapter 837

Not All of Us Are Demigods

“That was hard,” Gary said. “Normally the boss anomalies are huge monstrosities, but this thing...”

He looked down at the odd, seemingly innocuous creature. It was round and purple with stubby arms and legs, like a child in a grape costume. It had a purple top hat and a face that was a couple of dots and a line, in the middle of its body, as if drawn on with a marker.

“What was that thing?” Miriam asked. “It’s like it could remake reality.”

“It came back from the dead more than Jason,” Gary said.

In the end, it took Arabelle draining the creature’s mana and using powers that impeded healing and even resurrection magic. That finally cut off its reality-warping powers and allowing them to kill it without it coming back to life.

They looked around the landscape that normally would have been pleasant, if rather odd. The territory was comprised of bold, simple colours, like a children’s drawing. Hamlets comprising only a handful of little cottages were nestled amongst rolling hills. There was an unreality to it all, like an obviously false image somehow made real. The sky was too blue; the hills too green. The clouds too perfectly white and fluffy.

It was like standing in a child’s dream, but one turned to nightmare by the living anomaly corpses scattered across the meadows and slumped against the yellow cottages. They were, like their surroundings, creatures that seemed more imaginary than real. Anthropomorphised shapes with stubby little arms and legs, their bodies shaped like circles, squares and triangles. They were all bright, bold colours. Red, blue or yellow; purple, pink or green. For most, their bodies and heads were the same thing, their faces drawn in simple dots and lines. Some had hats, others hair with pigtails or hairclips. One had bright red, high-heel shoes.

These were creatures of a child’s fancy. It had felt wrong to cut them down, but their strange powers had made them dangerous. A purple triangle with a yellow hat and shoes moved so fast that gold-rankers had trouble keeping up. A square with a green hat hit Gary so hard he was buried metres into a hillside. More dangerous were those whose powers were more esoteric.

A yellow circle man induced euphoria in anyone who went near him. Emir had stood lost in happiness as a pink heart-shaped creature almost squeezed him to death in a crushing hug. A blue circle with a flower in her hat told Gabriel to attack his wife, which did

not end well for him. As she was healing him up after the fight, he was looking around at the strange landscape and its now dead inhabitants.

“Belle,” he said, “do you know what I’m thinking about?”

“How you’re going to make up for trying to stab your wife?” Arabelle asked.

“What? Oh, uh... yes? Yes. That’s absolutely what I was thinki—”

He let out a yelp of pain.

“Is healing magic meant to hurt?” he asked.

“No,” Arabelle said innocently. “Any pain you may be experiencing is likely a mental issue. Possibly brought on by guilt.”

“Yes, dear. But, uh, the *other* thing I was thinking about was the Standish boy’s explanation about Jason shaping this transformation zone. And a mountain shaped like his head.”

“Mmm,” Arabelle said as she rubbed her chin thoughtfully. “It would make sense for Jason to be responsible for... whatever is going on here. It does have his signature mix of whimsy and gruesome violence.”

“It’s creepy, right?” Gabriel asked.

“I think it might have been nice. Before we showed up and everything went berserk, anyway. Speaking of creepy, though...”

“Arabelle, you wound me,” Boris said as he floated their way.

“Want me to wound you again?”

“Apologies, *Mrs Remore*. I can confirm that young Jason certainly had a hand in this place being as it is.”

The three gold-rank messengers were too strong to not use in clearing territories but kept a wary distance. Like the Builder cultists, their alliance with the adventurers was uneasy. Only Boris Ket Lundi regularly approached the adventurers outside of combat.

“You know what these things are?” Gabriel asked the messenger.

“Indeed I do, Lucky Husband.”

“Stop calling me that.”

“Oh, you don’t think you were lucky in marriage? My dearest Mrs Remore, I’m afraid your husband’s opinion of you is not as high as I’d hoped. If you and I—”

“I wonder how long messenger wings take to grow back,” Arabelle casually mused.

“I’m just going to go over there,” Boris said and floated away.

“That’s right,” Gabriel called out after him. “You keep walking. Or hovering or whatever.”

“Gabriel?” Arabelle asked sweetly, her distracted spouse missing the warning sign.

“Yes, dear?”

“Do you really not feel like a lucky husband?”

Gabriel blinked, then blinked again, his face blank.

“I hate that guy so much.”

Arabelle went to fetch Jason who had portalled into a neighbouring territory he already controlled. The territory was a beautiful one filled with rolling hills and open plains filled with colourful wildflowers. The living anomalies belonging to it had been carnivorous plants and poison-spore fungi, and the place was much better for their absence. The sun shining from a blue sky made things just warm enough that the slight breeze was perfectly refreshing. The smell of flowers drifted on the air, pleasant without being pungent.

Arabelle had run to the rendezvous spot Jason had portalled to, gold-rank speed and stamina making a vehicle unnecessary. She found him standing next to what looked like an especially unnecessary vehicle: a fixed-wing glider trike with a large fan on the back for propulsion. It had two side-by-side seats and was entirely black.

“Wouldn’t a skimmer be more efficient?” Arabelle asked as they looked at it sitting in the grass. “Or that aeroplane thing Shade often turns into? The one with a bar. I quite like that one.”

“This is better,” Jason said.

“I have my doubts. Until just now, I had been starting to believe that your world had universally superior vehicle design, despite the lack of magic.”

“And there’s the rub,” Jason said, turning to point a finger at Arabelle. “A complete lack of magic, yet we still invented flying tricycles and you are somehow unimpressed.”

She shook her head as she let out a chuckle.

“I shall concede the point. I am glad that you are thinking more positively about the world you came from.”

“Yeah,” Jason said. He reached up to rub his neck as his face took on a contemplative expression. “I’m even catching myself not dreading the idea of going back. I left a lot of unfinished business there. Emotional baggage. A vampire army. Do you ever stop and think that your life is weird?”

“Not since meeting you.”

“Fair enough. Oh, and, I have to take back Taika and all those people from Earth that Humphrey’s mum took in. I keep forgetting about them.”

“You’re silver-rank,” Arabelle pointed out. “With a silver-rank memory, you can’t forget about them.”

“Not with that attitude.”

He grinned as she shook her head.

“Still,” he said. “We have to deal with what’s right in front of us before we look to the future. No reason we can’t have a little fun while we’re at it, though.”

He claimed one of the seats in the trike glider and waved for her to join him.

The cartoonish landscape fascinated Jason. There were rolling green hills, roads that looked drawn in crayon and towns straight from a colouring book. Then he started seeing the anomalies left dead from the rolling battle with the gold-rankers. Colourful shaped with little arms and legs. Some wore hats, others had hair the same colour as their bodies with clips or ties.

“I don’t like this,” Jason muttered. “This is just wrong.”

“You know what these things are?” Arabelle asked as she fell into step with him.

“Yeah.”

“The messenger said you would. This place is an echo of you, isn’t it?”

“I wouldn’t use the word echo.”

Jason looked down at a thick shaft of frozen blood jutting diagonally from the ground. Dangling from it, impaled, was the body of a yellow circle creature with yellow hair and pigtails.

“Did she have some kind of light powers?” he asked, pointing.

“Yes,” Arabelle said. “Searing beams of light. Not that dangerous alone, but she wasn’t alone. This was the most dangerous territory we’ve cleared so far. Many of the anomalies had mental influence powers and tried to control us. Make us vulnerable to those with more conventional attacks. They had a lot of mental influence abilities, which is rare, and not often useful against gold-rankers.”

“Because you can resist them with auras?”

“Yes. Vampires have strong mind-influencing powers and they still prefer targets two ranks lower than them. But the anomalies here have gotten so strong that only Gary, Boris the messenger and Lord Pensinata were able to fully resist them. My husband proved unfortunately susceptible.”

“Is Gabriel alright?”

“The only thing my husband needs to be worried about is me.”

Jason laughed, but lost his humour as he looked at the hanging body again.

“Her name was Sunshine,” he said. “It’s hard to deny that I influenced this territory, but I don’t like the implication that this is somehow a reflection of me. Except, perhaps, my unconscious mind reflecting my habit of not properly thinking things through.”

“How so?” Arabelle asked.

“The idea of a territory where these things are all just getting along on their own is nice. But they’re still anomalies, so they turned bad once our people came here. It’s necessary to claim the zone, so my nice idea turned into a horror show.”

“What are these creatures?”

“For once, I’d rather not explain it. No fun in it. Should have been Care Bears.”

“Care Bears?”

“Yeah. Those sinister little pricks have it coming.”

The trike neared the ground where the adventurers and their allies were gathered. The final conflict with the boss anomaly and its minions had taken place on an open field that was too uniformly green to look natural. It had the largest collection of anomaly bodies, scattered across the ground.

The trike dissolved into a cloud of darkness rather than landing, dropping Jason and Arabelle to the ground and they landed running before slowing to a walk. The shadowy cloud resolved into Shade who moved alongside Jason. Boris moved quickly to join them.

“I have to say, Asano,” Boris said, gesturing around them. “This is rather messed up.”

“Agreed,” Jason said.

They reached Gary, standing over the grape-like boss anomaly.

“Makes sense,” Jason said looking at it. “His name was Impossible. I’m a little surprised you beat him.”

“He kept coming back from the dead,” Gary said. “He’s worse for it than you.”

“Can I have permission to loot all these bodies?” Jason asked.

“Please do,” Gary said. “Something about seeing these things subjected to violence like this is unsettling. The sooner they’re cleaned up, the better.”

Jason nodded and Shade left, more Shade bodies pouring out of Jason’s shadow to spread out and touch all the bodies so he could loot them. Jason reached down to touch the boss anomaly himself. Everyone stepped back and the body dissolved into rainbow smoke.

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- [\[Stable Genesis Core\]](#) has been added to your inventory.
 - [\[Greater Miracle Potion\]](#) has been added to your inventory.
 - 10 [\[Gold Spirit Coins\]](#) have been added to your inventory.

- 100 [Silver Spirit Coins] have been added to your inventory.
 - 1,000 [Bronze Spirit Coins] have been added to your inventory.
 - 10,000 [Iron Spirit Coins] have been added to your inventory.
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“Oh, hey,” Jason said, pulling out the potion he just looted. It was a small vial filled with pale blue liquid and swirling silver sparks.

Item: [Greater Miracle Potion] (iron rank, legendary)

Salvation in a bottle (consumable, potion).

- **Effect:** Fully restores health, mana and stamina. Negates all afflictions and effects of gold-rank or lower that prevent cleansing or are triggered by cleansing. This potion is only effective on gold-rank and lower individuals. If administered to an individual of silver-rank or below within moments of death it will revive them. The magic of this potion lingers in the body longer than normal potions, meaning additional recovery health and recovery items will not be effective for a longer period.
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“I haven’t seen one of these in ages,” Jason said. “The higher-rank ones are good.”

“Miracle potion?” Gary asked.

“Yeah.”

“I’ve heard the gold-rank ones are impossible to make. You get them accidentally, very, very rarely when brewing really high-end healing potions. And only while overdoing it with using exceptional materials or energy. Divine power and the like.”

“You take it,” Jason said, holding out the vial. “If something goes pear-shaped clearing these territories and a healer can’t get to someone in time, you’ve got the best chance of not having been taken out. You could save someone, or maybe get a healer back on their feet.”

Gary took the vial, pinching it with his thumb and forefinger. It looked tiny next in his massive hand. Gary slipped the vial into an empty loop on his potion belt.

“It’s getting on time you and I had a serious talk,” Jason said. “About what comes next.”

Gary looked away.

“Have to get on to the next territory,” he said.

“Not right now,” Miriam told him as she approached. “Asano, claim this territory and we’ll all head back to base. We’ve been going hard and this territory was the worst yet.”

“I can keep going,” Gary said.

“I’m sure you can,” Miriam told him, “but not all of us are demigods. Gold-rankers have a lot of stamina, but the mind needs rest as well. I think that’s true even for you. I’m not asking, Xandier.”

“Yes, Tactical Commander,” he murmured. It sounded like thunder with his rumbling lion voice, resonating with divine power. He strode off, his long legs quickly eating distance. Jason watched him go with a sigh.

Gary’s booming laugh echoed through the massive hallway in the mountain fortress. With Rufus and Farrah at his side he pushed open a set of massive double doors and stopped. The bar was empty aside from one person, the furniture pushed to the sides of the room. Only four chairs were left in the middle, set around the last remaining table. Of the chairs, three were normal wooden chairs while the last was a massive, throne-like affair. It was the only one that looked like it would hold Gary.

The chair opposite held the room’s only occupant. Jason was pouring drinks into three glasses and one mug. The bottle held something bright red and, Gary guessed, sickly sweet. When he was done with the red liquor, he added a few drops of another liquid to each glass, and a splash to the mug. The red liquid started swirling with black, dancing inside each glass like living things.

Gary turned to leave, only to find Rufus and Farrah in his way.

“I can make you move,” he growled.

“And I can make you stay,” Jason said from behind him. Gary turned to look at him.

“You really believe that?” Gary asked.

“No,” Jason said with a grin. “But it was a good line and I don’t think you’ll make me try.”

Gary looked at Farrah and Rufus like they were traitors and stomped over to the large chair. He dropped himself into it, opposite Jason. The others joined them and the double doors closed on their own. The only light came from a glass wall and the lava waterfall beyond it, washing the room in red.

“What kind of madman has a lava waterfall as an indoor feature?” Gary rumbled. Jason just grinned. Gary took his mug and drained it.

“Not bad,” he begrudgingly acknowledged.

Jason smiled. It was soft and warm compared to his usual amused smirking.

“It’s time to stop dodging this conversation, Gary,” he said.

“You had to get them involved?” Gary asked, inclining his head to indicate Farrah, then Rufus.

“You kind of made me, buddy.”

Gary growled.

“Fine,” he grumbled. “Let’s talk about how I die.”