

## Chapter 882

### Everything is Going to Be Fine

The residents of Jason's soul realm were sitting on the long deck of a treehouse. Furniture was set out in a long row for them to watch the swirling kaleidoscope of unmade reality beyond the tree city's boundary.

"Once this is done, I can finally move to the next stage," Carlos said.

"We're sitting here, watching a universe take shape," Melody told him. "Maybe you should just let yourself indulge in this extremely rare experience and let go of your other concerns for a little bit."

"Tell that to Gibson Amouz. The poor boy has been in a magically induced coma for a decade. Or to those idiots."

They both turned to look at another pair of Carlos' test subjects. Like Melody, they had the influence of the Order of Redeeming Light suppressed while in Jason's soul realm. Unlike Melody, they had been making plans to open an amphora shop.

"I'm telling you, Jaime, the time is now."

"Rhett, why would the time be now? There's what? A dozen people in this whole place?"

"We'll be getting the jump on the market!"

"With what? We don't have any amphorae."

"We can start a workshop. Dig up some clay, make a kiln."

"You want to make amphorae out of some guy's soul? Actually, that could be a real way to stand out, now that I say it."

A hand clapped down on each of their shoulders.

"You might want to wait until all this is done with, lads."

Gabriel Remore had been trapped inside Jason's soul since the portals to the outside had closed. He had been visiting his wife, who had spent considerable time with Melody and the other Order of Redeeming Light victims. This had happened several years ago, when Jason began the process of reshaping his soul realm into a full astral kingdom. In that time, Gabriel had not complained about having to give up all the tasks he'd been browbeaten into by his father to be trapped in carefree luxury with his loving wife. After chiding the pair, he joined Arabelle on a cloud couch.

"Are we sure it's going to end today?" Carlos asked. "I know Jason said it would, but didn't he say it would be quick when it started?"

“It will be today,” came a wooden version of Jason’s voice. “I can feel it. It has already begun.”

The others turned to look at the avatar of the tree city, standing behind them with one of Shade’s bodies. The avatar had been almost entirely absent while the soul realm reshaped itself. Before that, it had been somewhat like a curious child, constantly asking questions of the city’s few residents.

“I would also like to take this chance to announce something,” the avatar said. “After long consideration, I have selected a name.”

“Finally,” Gabriel said. “Did you end up going with Tim?”

“Are you certain?” Arabelle asked. “I know you thought you had the right one several times before.”

“After talking this through with Shade,” the avatar said, “I have made my final decision.”

The group collectively turned a worried look on Shade, then back to the avatar.

“Well, let’s hear it, then,” Melody said.

“My name,” the avatar said, “is Arbour.”

“I like it,” Gabriel said. “I would have liked Tim as well, but that’s good.”

“Arbour,” Arabelle said. “That’s a word from Jason’s world, isn’t it?”

“Yes,” Arbour said. “In his language, it refers to natural growth over an artificial framework to create a sheltering space. It is also derived from an older language where it means tree.”

Melody got up and wrapped the wooden avatar in a hug.

“We’ve both been messed with pretty badly by people, haven’t we?” she whispered. The avatar hesitantly moved his arms to return the embrace.

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Jali Corrik Fen had a rather lonely existence within the Asano clan. As unofficial leader of the messenger in clan territory, she stood apart from the people of Earth. The only friend she had was Tera Jun Casta. The firebrand messenger was living with Boris Ket Lundi and his Unorthodoxy messengers, which had been an interesting choice given her views on them. Tera would occasionally join some of Boris’ many visits to the Asano Clan, prior to the clan’s retreat into their astral spaces.

Although she had many messengers around her, Jali was not truly one of them, either. Her origins were different, as she had come from the orthodox messenger population and its indoctrination programs. She was older than them all, and far less

sheltered. She had to be guide, teacher and, in some ways, parent, and desperately feared making mistakes.

The young messengers had been born into enslavement, albeit a different one from hers. They had been brought into being by a corrupted birthing tree, then mind-wiped and sealed away in a transformation zone. They were subsequently altered by the power of those who awakened them, and the wielder of that power had complete control of them. Some had treated them decently, keeping them out of the fighting. Others had used them ruthlessly. Ultimately, the survivors were all freed by Jason Asano.

One group amongst the messengers stood out from the others. They had not been awakened into enslavement because it was Jason himself who woke them up. He had outright rejected their subjugation and had the power to undo it. As they had awakened, he had guided their half-slumbering minds to mark their own souls, instead of being branded by others.

Jali had come to realise, however, that their link to Jason was not entirely eliminated. Even on Earth, they had a vague sense of him. One day, several years ago, that connection had grown stronger. They had come to her and informed her that Jason was in the final stages of becoming an astral king. They even sensed the presence of his avatar in the astral space.

Now, they had come to Jali again, telling her the process was almost complete. Jali immediately headed to inform the Asano Clan matriarch that things were about to change.

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The tree city, now named Arbour like its avatar, was not the only stable place in the unformed reality of Jason's soul realm. The other was a fortress in the shape of Jason's head, floating on a cloud. In the deepest part of the fortress was a round room with catwalks set into the walls around a magma pit. Jason stood on the catwalk, leaning against the metal railing.

"This is taking way longer than I thought it would," Jason complained. "The transformation zones took hours at most. This has been years."

"A transformation zone is a small addendum to reality, being reattached to the place it always belonged," Shade said. "You are taking a soul and using it to build an entire universe, Mr Asano."

"You could have said something."

"I did not know. This is my first time experiencing the ascension of an astral king, and you are outside the norm of even that. There is some question as to whether you will become an astral king at all. You already have the power to claim domains like a god, and

then there is your connection to the Cosmic Throne. Even the great astral beings cannot say what the impact of that will be.”

“They aren’t worried about the throne’s impact on me,” Jason said. “They’re worried about my impact on the throne. I’ll admit that I’m a little concerned myself.”

Jason stood up straight and walked to one of the doors set into the stone sides of the shaft. Aside from the way back up, doors led to his the astral throne, the astral gate, and soul forge. The final door led somewhere else entirely, and that was the one Jason went to. Like the catwalk, the door was heavy industrial metal that looked decades old. It slid aside with a groan as Jason approached.

Beyond the doorway was a cosmically large void. Originally, it had held vast and distant nebulas, and nothing else. Now there was a path of blue and orange light, leading to a gothic castle floating in the dark.

The castle was marked by a single, dominant feature: it was split down the middle, as if struck with a giant axe. That massive gap was now filled with same blue and orange light as the pathway.

“I don’t suppose there’s access to five robot lions through that,” Jason said.

“It was made by you, Mr Asano. Even if the details were determined unconsciously, the possibility is dismayingly high.”

With a surge of Jason’s aura, Gordon manifested into being. Bloody mist rose from Jason’s body and coagulated into a bloody clone of his body. The blood dried and took on more colours, becoming a perfect copy of Jason except for his eyes. Colin’s were crimson orbs where Jason’s were orange, blue and nebulous.

A shadow portal archway rose from the catwalk and a wooden replica of Jason emerged.

“Arbour,” Jason said. “I like the name choice. You weren’t worried it was a little on the nose?”

“I was, but Shade said it was fine.”

Jason looked over at his shadow familiar.

“Why are you looking at me like that?” Shade asked.

“It’s kind of like Jason deciding to name himself ‘Smug,’” Colin said.

“Ah, I see your point,” Shade said.

“You see *his* point?”

“Even so, I believe the name works,” Shade said.

“It does,” Jason agreed. “It’s a good name, Arbour. Will you be joining us?”

“I am a part of this, now,” Arbour said. “Forever.”

“Yes,” Jason said with a huge smile. “Yes, you are.”

Colin slapped Jason on the back and started walking along the glowing path.

“Come on, Smug. Let’s get a move on.”

“My name isn’t Smug!” Jason called after him as the others followed, leaving Jason behind.

“Smarmy?” Colin called back.

“That’s worse!” Jason and set off after them. “I liked you better when you just made gloop noises and ate people.”

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The five followed the long path into the void, slowly making their way towards the castle. The glowing road brought them to an open drawbridge. The massive split in the castle was so deep that even the top of the archway had been sundered.

They went inside, following a hall that looked to have once been glorious, but long left to ruin. Once opulent red carpet was now threadbare. Sculptures, tapestries and other display pieces were tarnished, chipped and torn. The hall was washed in blue and orange light that swirled above in place of a ceiling.

“I like it,” Jason said. “There’s an appropriate otherworldliness, rather than those regular ruined castles you always see.”

“Mr Asano, when exactly do you see so many ruined castles?”

“All the time. You’re not always watching.”

“Yes, Mr Asano. I am.”

“Not going lie, Shade; that creeped me out a little.”

The hallway led to a throne room that also had swirling light for a ceiling. It was a cathedral-like space, large and high, leading to a dais at the end on which rested a throne. While the rest of the room shared the hallway’s dilapidation, the throne itself was gleaming. With large gemstones and rich purple cushioning set onto an ornate framework of polished gold, the throne has the look of an oversized crown. It was marred, however, by a split identical to that of the castle, as if cleaved by a massive axe. Also like the castle, the gap was filled with blue and orange light.

“Not my style,” Jason said, looking at it. “Except for the glowy bits.”

The orbs floating around Gordon shone brighter and voices sang from them like a celestial chorus. The words, unfortunately spoiled the effect.

“I like the glowy bits too.”

Doors opened at either side of the throne room and great astral beings entered, once more in mortal bodies. This time they were using their own prime vessels, not the ones

Jason had provided. From one side came most of those who had fought in Jason's rigged battle, joined by a few others. This included Raythe, vessel of the many-named great astral being of time. Another vessel was of a species Jason didn't recognise. It was an orb of leathery flesh, larger than a person and draped in a dark green cloak. The front of the orb was an open mouth, ringed with long needle teeth. From inside the gaping maw, a single huge eye peered out.

Only one figure came from the other door. It was Dawn's replacement as prime vessel of the World-Phoenix. Jason hadn't met her before, but knew from Dawn that her name was Helsveth. At that moment, however, she was the embodiment of the World-Phoenix.

Another figure stood out to Jason even more than Helsveth or the All-Devouring eye's strange vessel. The Builder's vessel was a messenger, heavily modified with artificial parts but Jason could feel the soul inside. His flesh had been replaced with pristine alabaster and his wings with silver. His eyes were amber orbs and he had no hair at all. His outfit was a toga of interlaced metal shards that shimmered in the blue and orange light.

"So," Jason said as he looked around at the gathering. "Is there a ceremony or something or do we just get to it?"

"Ceremonies are pointless mortal practices," said the Reaper through his vessel, Velius.

"I rather like them," the Seeker of Songs said.

"It's fine," Jason said, then marched up to the throne and looked down at it.

"It's not like I'm going to make a fundamental change to the entire cosmos, right?"

He sat down.

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Very few events happened on a truly cosmic scale. Of those, even fewer were noticed by mortals. All across the cosmos were people whose worlds had magic enough to manifest essences. On all of those worlds, in all of those universes, the same thing happened to every person who either had essences, or had the potential to get them.

An intangible screen popped up in front of them. To some it looked like an illusion, and to others a hologram. Many had never seen anything like it. Every screen had the same words, more or less. For those that didn't communicate through words, they didn't use words at all. They made sounds, released aromas, pulsed with aura or employed whatever other means the species in question used to communicate.

The meaning, however, was always the same.

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Don't Panic.

Everything is going to be fine.

Welcome to the System.

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**BOOK 11 END**