

## Chapter 322

### A Wizard Did It

Amy and Kaito watched Farrah go back into her cabin.

“Do we know who that was?” Kaito asked. “She seemed kind of familiar.”

“It was hard to tell with the Japanese horror movie hair, but yeah.”

“Wait,” Kaito said. “What about that woman from Jason weird hologram recordings?

The one he said shoots lava.”

“I think you’re right,” Amy said. “What the hell has Jason got himself involved in?”

“Was she meant to be in another universe?”

“You realise how insane you sound, right?” Amy asked.

“Ames, I don’t know what’s happening. We went through a doorway that led to the other side of town. How do you explain that away?”

“That’s all I’ve been thinking about for days,” she said. “The problem is, every explanation I come up with seems less plausible than the last. If we’re talking about Jason setting up a wormhole generator in Erika’s bedroom, magic seems less ridiculous, somehow.”

“It’s past time that Jason gave us some answers.”

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The arrival of Jason’s mother had not worked to alleviate Jason’s stress. With everyone in the bar lounge, he strove to explain things thoroughly. The constant stream of questions kept derailing things until he held his head between his hands and let out a groan.

“Mum, the answer is the same as it has been for your last five questions: because magic. You want to know why? Because a wizard did it, that’s why. And that wizard is me! I’m the wizard. Magic is real and I have it. I’m a magic man.”

He conjured his sinister dagger of red crystal and black obsidian.

“See this?” he continued his rant. “This is my magic knife. Don’t touch it because it’ll kill you super dead. Why? Because it’s magic.”

He casually tossed the blade away and it vanished in the air. He then tossed his sunglasses aside in the same manner.

“My eyes turned silver yesterday. That’s just what my life is now. Can you guess why? No, you can’t because it was magic, which hours of explanation is apparently insufficient to drill it into your tiny frigging brains! Asya. Could you explain how I saved us

when someone detonated a bomb in our plane? Actually, let me: it was magic. And awesomeness. All of you look around. You're sitting in chairs made of clouds."

He gestured down with both hands and all the cloud furniture sank into the floor, dumping the occupants. Jason gestured up and the furniture returned, lifting the fallen people as it arose.

"This whole houseboat is A: magic, and B: not a houseboat. It's a big magic cloud that I keep in a bottle like it's a genie."

At this point, everyone was looking on with scared expressions as Jason continued to fly right off the handle. He gestured to his left and Shade emerged from his shadow.

"This is Shade. Some of you have met Shade. His dad is what happens to you after you die, which is especially relevant to me because I've died twice already. The second time I came back from the dead, I even brought a friend. I should be with her right now because she spent the last two weeks getting tortured, but instead, I'm here teaching Intro to Sorcery to people who think I've got nothing better to do than answer their questions about the nature of the bloody universe. Well, I do and I'm sorry about catching you up in all this, Asya. I didn't realise I'd be having quite so many guests when I asked the Network to send someone. I should just let my friends take care of them. This is Gordon."

Gordon manifested on Jason's right with a surge of Jason's aura that washed over the room like a wave.

"I'm not even sure what Gordon's deal is," Jason said, "except he loves Judy Garland and he's a reality assassin. I don't know what that means, exactly, but it sounds really scary once you start to learn about reality, which I have because I'm an interdimensional warlock ninja."

Jason held out his hand, which became wet as blood seeped through it. Everyone in the room recoiled as leeches started spilling out of his hand to pile up on the floor. Bloody rags emerged from the pile to start binding it into shape.

"This is Colin," Jason said. "He needs a moment to gather himself together. When a super god was trying to possess me, he's the one who had my back. He's been with me from almost the very start and he has two purposes in life: adorable little dances and devouring every living thing on a planet."

Jason threw his arms out to his sides.

"I try to be a good guy, but it turns out I'm really bad at it and kill a lot of people. I've been back less than three weeks and I don't know how many people I've put in the ground. Asya, do you have numbers on that?"

"Uh... somewhere between thirty and fifty is the estimate," she said.

“Those people had it coming,” Jason said. “Some of them really had it coming and the only thing I feel bad about is that I don’t feel bad about killing them. So here’s what’s going to happen now. Anyone who has questions can go to the media room and watch the recordings as much as they like. There’s about a hundred and fifty hours of them and no one gets to ask any more questions until they’ve watched them all. If anyone tries asking me questions before then, they’re getting a demonstration instead of an answer, and I showed you my portal ability instead of my other powers for a reason. You do not want a demonstration.”

Jason gestured and a portal arch rose from the floor, which he stepped through and vanished. His familiars followed, leaving a room of shell-shocked people staring at the arch, which remained in place. Erika was the first to recover, turning to Asya.

“So you and Jason went to school together?” she asked pleasantly.

“Um, yes,” Asya said.

“It’s nice to reconnect with old friends,” Erika said, her voice then taking on the same flinty tone as Jason’s. “Now tell me about the exploding plane.”

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Jason stepped out into his soul garden. The sky reflected the sunny day outside his spirit vault, a warm breeze carrying the scent of flowers. He was glad that the garden didn’t smell of blood and death, which he would have expected.

What it did smell like was Farrah. He knew that outworlders had a distinctive scent to them, which had been described as being like springtime, but it was hard to notice his own scent. It was only after catching her smell, once she was cleaned off, that he really experienced the fresh, clean scent for himself.

The garden had the same clean aroma, which combined with the unseasonal warmth to give the feel of a spring day. He took a deep, cleansing breath, something he hadn’t done in a long time, and let the stress wash out of him.

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The rear of the bottom deck had been lowered into the water to allow Ian and Emi to ride their jet skis directly onto it. The jet skis both burst into dark clouds that coalesced into the form of two of Shade’s bodies. One disappeared into Emi’s shadow, while the other vanished into the shadow of the upper deck. Ian and Emi were towelling themselves off when Erika came out, blatantly ogling her husband as he wiped down his wet body.

“Do it slower,” she said, a lecherous smile on her face. Ian started pulling the towel back and forth across his back to create what he mistakenly thought to be a sensuous look.

“Gross,” Emi said, wrinkling her nose at her parents making eyes at one another.

“Where’s Uncle Jason?”

“He got a bit frustrated with everyone,” Erika said. “I think we forgot while dealing with all the craziness he brought with him that he is dealing with his own stuff. He went through one of his arches but it won’t let anyone else in.”

“That must be his special place,” Emi said.

“Special place?” Erika asked, turning her attention from her husband.

“He told me about it,” Emi said. “It’s a place that’s not really real that only he can go to. I’m going to go have a look.”

Emi left her parent behind to go into the bar lounge, still wearing her swimsuit and rash shirt, with a towel slung over her shoulders. Ken had arrived with Kaito and Amy’s girls, the older of which, Hana, was telling her parents about her day with Poppy. It was a story with all the clinical accuracy one would expect from a four-year-old.

“...and then we ran under the sprinkler and a hippo came out.”

“A hippo,” Kaito said. “That must have been exciting.”

“No!” Hana said, stomping her foot. “She was a stupid hippo!”

Everyone was actively avoiding the darkness-filled obsidian arch with their eyes as if ignoring the weird magical thing in their midst could make it disappear. The only exceptions were baby Jace, who was straining her arms in its direction from within her mother’s firm grip, and Asya. Her eyes were locked thoughtfully on the arch as Emi wandered in. Emi didn’t recognise her, so immediately wandered over and stared at her.

“Who are you?” Emi asked.

Asya turned a curious gaze on Emi.

“I’m Asya. You must be Emi.”

“According to who?” Emi asked, voice filled with suspicion.

“I work for some people who’ve become very interested in your uncle. Also, you brought snacks out to our security people in their car. That was very nice of you.”

“They were healthy snacks, so it wasn’t that nice,” Emi said. “You’re one of the men in black? Aren’t you meant to try and blend into the background?”

“You think I don’t?” Asya asked.

“Oh, please,” Emi said. “No one wears an outfit that makes them look that good by accident. I like your shoes, though. They’re nice, but you can still run in them if you have to.”

“That’s the idea,” Asya said with a dry chuckle.

“Why are you here?” Emi asked.

“I was meant to be going over some points of an agreement with your uncle and my organisation, but I wandered into a family reunion.”

“That was Mum,” Emi said. “Nanna found out about all the magic stuff only for Uncle Jason to run off to Europe. She’s been constantly pestering Mum ever since, plus she’s figured out that Grandnanna was healed with magic.”

“They sent me because I went to school with your uncles and Aunt Amy,” Asya said. “I grew up in Castle Heads.”

Emi narrowed her eyes at Asya.

“Did you make out with Uncle Kaito?”

“No, I did not,” Asya said, affronted. “I was hoping Jason would have time for me today before I left,” Asya said, “but I don’t think things will be very productive today.”

Emi turned to the archway.

“He’s in there? It looks just like his teleport archways,” she said.

“Have you ever gone through one?” Asya asked.

“Lots of times,” Emi said. “Fourteen. I think that’s a lot compared to most people, though.”

“I’ve never travelled like that,” Asya said wistfully.

“You haven’t? Don’t your secret magic people have a bunch of teleporters or something?”

“No,” Asya said with a chuckle.

“Ask Uncle Jason. I’m sure he’ll take you.”

“What’s it like?”

“Kind of like a theme park ride, except you get the whole ride in one second. You’ll probably throw up the first time. And the second time.”

“Did you?” Asya asked.

“Of course not,” Emi said. “I’m not a scrub.”

“Emi,” Erika said with an admonishing tone as she walked into the bar lounge. “Leave Uncle Jason’s friend alone, go shower off that saltwater and put on some clothes.”

Emi glanced at the archway sitting dominant in the middle of the room before trotting off without another word. Erica moved closer to Asya, joining her in observing the arch.

“I always wondered how Jason ended up the way he is,” Asya said absently. “After meeting your daughter, I’m starting to suspect that it’s you.”

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Farrah didn't have Jason's connection to the cloud house, so her senses were unable to penetrate the walls to see if his family were still around. She'd been sitting in a cloud

chair in a daze, aside from the curry Jason had delivered for lunch that had briefly roused her with its vibrant scents and startling, complex flavours.

She suddenly found herself restless and left through the exterior wall that shimmered as she passed through. Jason's cloud house was far smaller than Emir's palace but the basic functions were the same. Meandering slowly around the lower deck, she contrasted the exterior of the houseboat to the interior.

The inside was familiar to her, not just from knowing Emir but from a magical aesthetic. The exterior of the houseboat, like Jason's world itself, was a façade belying the magic it secretly held.

She leaned against the wall, feeling lost in so many ways. She finally understood what Jason had felt when they first met. Captured by people with poor intentions with no understanding of what was happening or why. He had done the rescuing in both cases, which irked her, although the thought drew a smile in spite of herself.

The world around her had felt alien, as if its very nature was to reject her. The zone of magical density created by the houseboat was comforting, feeling more like home. It was an impressive feature, like a giant, perpetually active mana lamp. Emir had always been reticent about letting her poke around but perhaps Jason would be more amenable.

She resumed her slow wander, the glass exterior of the houseboat darkened from the outside to prevent anyone from seeing in. One of the walls shimmered and a dripping wet, naked child passed through it, pointing a finger at her.

"You're dead. Well, obviously you're not dead, but you died. You are Farrah, right?"

"I am. And you're naked."

The child yelped and ducked back through the wall, returning moments later with a towel wrapped around her.

"How are you alive?" Emi asked.

"I..."

"You must have come back with Uncle Jason right?" Emi interrupted.

"Yes, I..."

"But he didn't know because you didn't arrive in the same place," Emi reasoned, against cutting off Farrah's response. "You're the friend he needed to help in France, which he must have only just found out about, which is why he rushed off all of a sudden."

"You don't really need me to answer, do you?"

"You must have been in trouble and then he found out and got super-intense, which I could tell even when he was talking through Shade."

"Shade?"

“Something really bad must have happened to you.”

Emi clasped Farrah in a fierce hug as Farrah looked down at the tiny dynamo before awkwardly patting her on the head.

“I’m guessing you’re Emi?” Farrah said.

“Uncle Jason told you about me?” Emi asked, still violently comforting Farrah.

“He did,” Farrah said. “I see now that he might not have been telling me as much as warning me.”

Emi’s towel came loose and dropped onto the deck.