

Storyboard-29

The whole building was in an uproar, with men and women escorting prisoners to the cells in Steel Link's basement. Only a few had been teleported in, the woman with the lantern staff, because she seemed to be in charge, two of the known Chamber who had wielded staves, because Grant wanted to question them about them, and a handful of others for reasons Paul hadn't been made aware of. The others would come via cargo plane.

Paul had been surprised the prisoners were held by Steel Link until he remembered this had been a magical fight, something the general public didn't know existed. So it wasn't like they could be handed over to the police with a list of crimes.

That there had been no argument between the two security company as to the division of the tasks had also surprised Paul, considering the rivalry. He'd called Ernest once he was in Denver as part of the first group Thomas teleported, and updated him on what had happened and the prisoners. The man had informed him things were already in motion for Royal to handle the clean-up of the area while Steel Link housed the prisoners until a decision was made as to how they were to be handled.

It made sense that someone had called earlier. Paul probably should have, but until he'd been in Donal's house, smelled the dusty air instead of the humid sand and foliage, things hadn't been entirely real. Some of the memories he knew to be implanted by Henry felt more real than what he'd just lived through.

Paul took over a conference room and sat. No one argued against it. No one came in to tell him he needed to get out there and help out. Maybe it was because he was the official representative of a family with a reputation for busting the balls of anyone who bothered them. Maybe it was because no one thought he could help in what needed to be done.

He was happy for it, because he had something to do.

He took his phone out and brought up the list of the men he had been entrusted with. Twelve, four of whom had made it to El Salvador. Two of whom hadn't come home.

Eric Liebel, and Franklin Cooke.

He had their information, including the contact information for their families. He had no idea how he was supposed to break the news to them, but as the one who had been in charge, it was his responsibility.

He was still staring at his phone when someone knocked at the door, then opened it.

Roland looked in. "Thomas is about to take Yahui to his family. If you want to take to him, now's the time."

Paul opened his mouth, but nothing came. What was he supposed to say, to tell the surviving twin? He was so not equipped for this. He shook his head.

Roland stepping and closed the door. "I was going with them, but if you want me to stay and keep you company I will."

"You go. You're folks are going to want to know you're okay. Did you call Niel?"

“Yeah, it’s wavering between being pissed we didn’t call him in and happy he missed the battle and relieved we’re all okay.”

They weren’t all okay. Paul wasn’t even sure if he was okay.

“Did you call your mom?”

“No. She fainted when she found out I was an Orr. Knowing I nearly died will give her a heart attack.”

“You know you’re welcome to come to Taiwan with us. My parents would love to see you again.”

“Thanks, but I can’t. I need to stay here and represent my cousin’s interests.”

“I’m sure they can manage without you for a while. Thomas won’t be all that weak since he’s used to that landing spot, and there’s going to be plenty of guys to help him recharge. He can have you back in Denver pretty quick if you’re needed.”

“I appreciate it, but it’s best that I stay.”

“Okay, if you’re sure.” Roland stepped outside, then looked back in. “But Paul, don’t stay cooped up in here. What we went through’s rough, but it’s not going to be made better by being miserable by yourself.”

“That’s pretty wise.”

The rat chuckled. “I’m just repeating Neil’s advice. He’s had his running with the Chamber too and I think he learned from it better than I did.”

Paul nodded, looked at his phone and stood. The calls could wait. “I’ll walk around the building, make sure I stay where’s there’s people.”

Roland squeezed his arm. “You’ll be okay. We won, and we’re going to stop the Chamber.”

Paul nodded, but he wondered about the cost they were going to pay to make that happen.

The further cost, since they’d already started paying.

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The raised voices pulled Paul toward another conference room. This one with people at computers, standing in groups or bringing food and drinks to those working.

Grant was at the screen on the back wall, moving a map as names of cities were called from people at computers. The map was zoomed out enough Paul made out it was England, then the kangaroo was studying another city.

“I do not understand why you are spending time with all this,” Wassa said, gesturing around the room. “When what we must find is where they will be holding the ritual.”

“Which they’re going to have shielded to damned hard it’s going to take one of their gods dropping by and pointing use to it to find.”

“We do not need their gods, Grant. We are strong enough to accomplish it.”

“Which is exactly what I’m trying to make happen. If I can find one of the place where they’ve warehouses the staves before they’re moved, we can use them as they are transported to find where they’re going to try their stupid ritual.”

She grabbed his arm and turned him away from the screen. “You do not understand how strong you are, Grant. We do not need this. We can find them ourselves. We simply

need build the proper talisman.”

“Dman it, Wassa.” Grant shook his arm out of her hand and grabbed the hilt of Excalibur, which was now in a sheath someone had made or found at his hip. “This doesn’t make me some long lost king with the power to fix everything. I’m not King fucking Arthur. And Magic isn’t always the solution.” The sword got stuck as Grant pulled on it, but instead of getting further exasperated, he paused and took a breath. “I get that all this seems beyond strange to you. And I really wish I had to time to explain how it works, what science accomplished and how there are things it can do that magic can’t even touch, but you said it yourself. We’re short on time. Information is the power we’re going to use to find where the Chamber is hiding that ritual place.”

“Wouldn’t that be something Donal be useful with?” Paul asked.

“The squirrel is off,” Wassa said dismissively.

“Donal got a sense of where Shila’s phone needs to go, so Denton assigned him a detail and they’re looking for whoever that hacker’s going to be.”

“Speaking of Denton, any idea where he is? I’d have expected him here.”

“Last I heard, he was dealing with the prisoner that came via Thomas and making arrangements for those who are going to be flown in.”

Paul turned to head out—Denton would have an idea how to deal with informing next of kin—and his phone rang. He stopped, staring at the long number. That is was an international call was the only reason he didn’t dismiss it outright. Thomas was out of the country right now.

“Hello?” He answered cautiously.

“Finally! Someone’s got his fucking phone on.”

“Chima?” Paul asked. “Chima! You’re alive! It’s Chima!” he yelled over the voices in the room. “Where are you? What happened?”

“If Grant or anyone is there, put me on damned speaker, because I don’t want to have tell this again.”

Paul found a slot on the conference table and inserted his phone, then sent the audio to the speakers in the room. “We’re listening,” he said as Grant joined him.

“I’m here,” Grant said, “so is Wassa.”

“The Chamber took over the Diamond particle accelerator and did the kind of stuff to the building like I’ve seen you do to your trucks, Grant. I figure they plugged in talismans and stuff and that’s what let them make the portal to the lake.”

“Chima, listen to me,” Grant said, as information appeared on the table’s surface about the particle accelerator, including a few news feeds showing it, and vehicles positioned to fight off anyone trying to get close. “How sure are you that it’s like my trucks.”

“How the fuck do I know?” the hyena replied. “Talisman aren’t my kind of magic, but they all seemed connected in one way or another, like you did with all the stuff you put on your truck.”

“Chima, are you safe?” Grant asked, but to Paul he looked ready to panic.

“Yeah, I ran like a maniac once I disrupted their portal ritual and got to the Ogdens

before I dropped. Woke up only minutes before I called Paul because to lot of you don't have your Damned phone turned on!"

"Mine got destroyed in the battle," Grant said, tove forcefully calm. "Thomas and Roland are out of the country dealing with Yahui. Kuno is asleep."

"Oh. I guess things didn't just end when I closed the portal."

"No, Chima. Things did not simply end then. You're safe, that's the important thing. Stay with the Ogden, I need to figure things out, but I think we're going to be joining you." He ended the call.

"You look perturbed, Grant."

The kangaroo nodded. "My trucks, they aren't a series of talismans I link together anymore. Once I'm done, the truck is one large talisman." He looked at the news feed showing the large circular building in the middle of what looked to Paul like a running track around it. "If he's right, the Chamber turned that entire thing into the largest talisman I've ever head of. Possible ever created. And I can't even begin to imagine the concepts that a particle accelerator can bring into play. Fuck, one of them revealed the existence of the god particle."

"A piece of the gods?" Wassa asked.

"No," Paul said, trying to remember what the actual name of the particle was. "It's just what people called it because they thought it was one of the underlining particle, so it's not really going to help them, right?"

"Concepts, Paul," Grant said. "Our magic works on the concepts things contain and what we can do with it." He looked at Wassa. "You wanted to know where they were going to perform their ceremony?" he pointed to the news feed. "I can't think of a better place to kill gods than one whose purpose is to collect particles name for the collective."

The room fell silent.

Paul tried to wrap his mind around the idea that the Chamber could use something's name as a tool, a weapon, to kill actual gods.

Denton stepped into the room and grimly looked at the people there. "Grant, can you spare Mister Heeran, or is this where the world is about to end and we need to be running to keep it from happening?"

The kangaroo waves Paul away. "We have time. If I'm right and this is one talisman, Chima's disruption of the portal will also have disrupted the integrity of the whole, so they aren't about to blow up all your gods." He looked at the cheetah, "but I highly advise we start mobilizing, because I doubt they're going to drag their feet doing the repairs and they have to know the information will reach us."

"Maxwell," Denton told a chincilla at a computer. "I want an inventory of all our assets, if Tom calls, reassure him I'm sitting this one out." He motioned for Paul. "If you'll come with me, there's something I need you to help resolve."

"I should call Thomas and let him know Chima's okay."

"On it," the chinchilla said, as Denton opened his mouth.

Paul joined the cheetah, then followed him.

"Are you okay?" Denton asked.

“The worlds about to end, so not really.”

“It’s not going to end.”

“How do you know?”

“Because if it was going to end, I doubt He’d settle for turning my dreams into his message board. He’d be right here reminding me I’m his champion and expected to do something about this.” He looked up. “Which we already are, so I would love one night where I can sleep. I need proper sleep still, remember?” He sighed. “This might get really messy, world changing kind of messy, but as a collective, we’re going to get through it.”

“I wish I shared your confidence.”

“Hey, I’m a champion, so you know I’m right.” The cheetah’s smile faltered. “But not to diminish your importance here, but fixing this won’t fall on your shoulders. This is why gods have champions, and people like those two, whatever they are.” He massage the top of his muzzle. “You have to handle more down to earth problems.” And opened a door.

Paul stepped into an observation room out of a police TV show. On the other side of a window was a bare room with a mattress on the floor and a naked doberman writing on the floor, rubbing his ass against a crease on the mattress.

“What are you doing to him?” Paul asked, dismayed.

Denton shook his head. “That isn’t us. He was found on the beach after you got here. He was pantless, begging to be fucked.” The cheetah looked at Paul expectantly.

“Okay?”

“I’ve seen this before, but I called Arnold to make sure. That is what someone who’s been on the receiving end of the full Orr influence looks like if he doesn’t get fucked by the person who influenced him.”

“Okay, so why aren’t getting him to do it.”

Denton faced Paul. “You did this, Paul.”

“No, I can’t. That isn’t how mine works, you know that. You can feel it, right?”

“Evidently, it is, and yes I can tap your ability, and now that you’re not radiating constantly, I do know it very well.”

Paul shook his head. “No. It can’t be. I haven’t been interested in anyone while I was there. Fuck, you think I was able to get horny in the middle of that fighting?”

Only he had gotten horny. Forced himself to do it. It had been to help Raoul, but there had been an interruption, one of the Chamber. A dog. A... a doberman.

Paul staggered back.

He couldn’t have done this.

“Paul.” Denton reached for him, but the golden tiger jerked away.

“That’s what they do?” He swallowed the bile. “That’s the power they’re all so fucking proud of?”

That was what he did.

They weren’t entitled assholes who just believe they were entitled to sex. If they wanted a guy, they just took away his will to resist.

They were fucking rapist.

Paul was one of them.

He looked at the man on the other side of the window.

Paul ran out of the room, trying to outrun the rising bile at what he had done to that man.