

Chapter 64: Take My Wife, Please

Luckily for Jason, most of the contracts in the jobs hall were for areas close to the city. Unless the threat was urgent, those further afield were posted on each town or village's noticeboard. Every month, the Adventure Society would send out a number of people to patrol those areas and resolve those notices. It was not a popular task, as it meant a full month away from the city and any opportunities that might arise.

Jason started taking one or two contracts a day, depending on the location. He would then try and clear a notice or two off the local boards while he was out, even if it meant spending the night out in the delta. People were more than welcoming, especially as he took the time to help any sick locals.

In the jobs hall, Jason placed a notice on the desk. Albert was on duty again today, making a record of the contract.

"Badge, please," Albert said.

Jason took out his Adventure Society badge and touched it to the contract. There was a shimmer as the badge touched the magic paper and Albert filed it in one of the desk drawers.

New Quest: [Contract: Bog Shambler]

A bog shambler has appeared close to the village of Hule. You have accepted a contract to eliminate the creature.

- Objective: Eliminate [Bog Shambler] 0/1.
- Reward: Spirit coins.

The Adventure Society rewarded iron spirit coins for an iron-rank monster-slaying contract. The amount depended on number of monsters, travel time and perceived difficulty, from ten, anywhere up to a hundred. If the contract proved more difficult than was originally assessed, bonuses would be given. They went from extra coins, all the way up to an awakening stone, although such a reward was extremely rare.

Jason himself could loot coins from each monster, while the quests that appeared for each contract would give more coins again, and sometimes other valuables. He was effectively being paid three times for each contract.

“Your armour is looking a big ragged,” Albert observed. “That thorny-tongue frog from yesterday?”

“It certainly was as thorny-tongued as advertised,” Jason said. “The armour self-repairs, but it got torn-up pretty well. It’ll be fine in a few days.”

“I imagine you got torn-up as well,” Albert said.

“I self-repair too,” Jason said. “You on tomorrow, Bert?”

“Nah, they’ve got me on the admin desk, tomorrow.”

“I’ll see you in a few, then.”

Jason made to leave, but found someone standing in his path. It was a tall, gangly fellow who looked a few years older than Jason. He had an iron-rank aura, so he was probably the age he looked. He was wearing robes that were a size too big, with the emblem of the Magic Society prominently placed.

“Mr Asano?” the man asked.

“And you are?” Jason asked.

“Standish,” the man said. “Clive Standish, of the Magic Society. To be precise, I am Adjunct Assistant to the Deputy Director of the Magic Society, Greenstone branch.”

“That must make for a long desk plate. Is there a reason you’re standing in my way, Standish?”

“Actually, Mr Asano, I’ve been looking for you for some time,” Clive said.

“Well it isn’t my fault,” Jason said. “I had no idea she was your wife, so you can’t blame me.”

“What?” Clive asked. “I’m not married.”

“She told me the same thing,” Jason said, shaking his head ruefully. “I wouldn’t worry about it.”

Clive’s brow creased into a frown.

“I’m not entirely sure what’s going on here,” he said.

Jason patted him consolingly on the arm.

“Welcome to my life,” Jason said, then walked past Clive and out the door.

Left standing inside the jobs hall, Clive stood on the spot, confused.

“What just happened?” he asked.

“That’s Jason,” Albert said. “Nice enough guy. A bit odd.”

“Bert?” Clive said, turning to the man behind the desk. “I thought you sold fruit?”

“You’re probably thinking of my brother, sir.”

In the delta, Jason had been given a room at the only inn in the village. After clearing out a monster and healing some of the sick, the innkeeper refused to take payment. The room was humble, but clean, and Jason sat on the floor performing his evening meditation.

Jason had yet to arrive in Greenstone when Rufus told him the three foundations of building his power as an essence user. Training, to prepare himself; danger, to push his limits; and meditation, to consolidate his efforts. For months, Jason worked on two of the three pillars, under the guidance of Rufus Farrah and Gary. Without all three, however, his abilities made little progress.

Jason was driven to take contract after contract, fighting monster after monster. He was caught up in the heady rush of danger, his skills and powers the line between life and death. It was one of the three pillars Rufus scribed as the foundations of power advancement, and Jason was starting to see results.

The fastest was his vision power, which Farrah told him was normal. After all, it was constantly in use. The next fastest was the spell he used to cleanse sickness and poison, feast of absolution. It had been crawling slowly but surely upwards as he used it over and over at the clinic. Once he started using it in combat, the slow climb turned into a regular upwards tick.

Feast of absolution was more useful in combat than he anticipated, as many monsters spawned in groups. He could use it on a monster right before finishing it off, replenishing himself on the afflictions he had placed on it himself. The injection of mana and stamina gave him the endurance to go full-bore through an extended fight, instead of needing to pace himself.

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- Ability [Feast of Blood] (Blood) has reached Iron 1 (100%).
 - Ability [Feast of Blood] (Blood) has advanced to Iron 2 (00%).

It was usually during meditation that Jason's abilities broke through. He smiled with satisfaction, breaking his meditation and taking a sandwich from his inventory to munch on.

His abilities grew stronger with each rank, although it was easier to see with some than others. His vision power, for example, not only increased his ability to see through darkness, but also his normal visual acuity. Colours were brighter, distant objects clearer. It was a concrete reminder of what all his efforts were for.

He decided that after pushing himself so hard, he would take a few days to rest on returning to the city. He also wanted to look into obtaining more awakening stones. Until he awakened all of his abilities, he couldn't make any true progress toward bronze rank.

Jason Asano

- Race: Outworlder.
- Current rank: iron
- Progression to bronze rank: 0% (0/4 essences complete)

Attributes

- [Power] (Blood): [Iron 0].
- [Speed] (Dark): [Iron 0].
- [Spirit] (Doom): [Iron 0].
- [Recovery] (Sin): [Iron 0].

Racial Abilities (Outworlder)

- [Interface].
- [Quest System].
- [Inventory].
- [Map].
- [Astral Affinity].
- [Mysterious Stranger].

Essences (4/4)

Dark [Speed] (2/5)

- [Midnight Eyes] (special ability): [Iron 4] 39%.
- [Cloak of Night] (special ability): [Iron 3] 08%.
- [Path of Shadows] (special ability): [Iron 3] 21%.

Blood [Power] (4/5)

- [Blood Harvest] (spell): [Iron 3] 04%.
- [Leech Bite] (special attack): [Iron 2] 89%.
- [Feast of Blood] (spell): [Iron 2] 00%.
- [Sanguine Horror] (familiar): [Iron 2] 16%.

Sin [Recovery] (3/5)

- [Punish] (special attack): [Iron 2] 85%.
- [Feast of Absolution] (spell): [Iron 3] 96%.
- [Sin Eater] (special ability): [Iron 3] 21%.

Doom [Spirit] (2/5)

- [Inexorable Doom] (spell): [Iron 2] 67%.
- [Hegemony] (spell): [Iron 2] 67%.

He would only start down the path to bronze rank once all his essence abilities were awakened. Jason didn't feel put upon by his lack of awakening stones, as even Humphrey didn't have his full set of powers yet. According to Humphrey, it was Geller family tradition to supply their scions with enough awakening stones to get started, while the rest had to be earned.

The Adventure Society was known to give out awakening stones for exceptional service, although rarely. Usually it was for unexpected success when a contract proved more difficult than expected. Some open contracts also offered stones as rewards for those with the greatest contributions. The competition would strongly drive performance.

Otherwise, awakening stones could be purchased through brokers, almost always at auction. They came up semi-regularly, but the prices were exorbitant. Rufus advised him to be patient and work hard. The Adventure Society made sure stones found their way into the hands of good adventurers.

Returning to the city in the morning, Jason stopped in at Jory's clinic before returning to his lodgings on the Island. Jason's inn was expensive, closer to a luxury hotel than the inns and hostels of the delta towns. Downstairs was a sumptuous lounge, dining hall and bar. When Jason entered the lounge from outside, he spotted the landlady, Madam Landry, berating a tall man in scholar's robes.

"...think you can sleep in my lounge area like it's a common flop house!"

Clive was profusely apologising. Somehow his gangly height seemed lesser than the tiny woman scolding him.

"I fell asleep while awaiting an acquaintance," Clive said. "I'm happy to pay the fee for a night," he said.

"So you do think it's a flophouse!"

"No, good lady I can assure you that..."

Clive continued struggling until he spotted Jason, his eyes lighting up.

"Mr Asano!" he called out.

Clive fled Madam Landry in Jason's direction.

"Here, good lady," Clive said. "This is my acquaintance, Mr Jason Asano."

"Who's your acquaintance?" Jason said, voice and expression full of offence. "After you slept with my wife?"

"What?" Clive said, flustered, head swivelling between Jason and Madam Landry. "Wait, you're not doing that to me again."

He jabbed a finger in Jason's direction.

"You don't even have a wife."

"Not anymore," Jason said. "She ran off with this tall bloke from the Magic Society."

"You absconded with Mr Asano's wife and have the nerve to use my inn like some cheap tavern!" Madam Landry said.

"I never touched his wife!"

"I'm off upstairs for a rest, Madam Landry." Jason said. "Probably best if you showed him the door."

"You have a good rest, Jason dear," she said. "I know you've been working hard."

Clive watched Jason disappear up the stairs, and was shuffled outside by Madam Landry. He stood out on the street, looking at the door that had been closed in his face.

"What in the world is going on?"