

Chapter 453

Salus Mundi Suprema Lex Esto

“Do you have any idea how hard it was to get the materials for a category four suppression device?” Gerling asked, jerking the spear again. “I’m impressed that it takes something this strong to shut your powers down.”

Jason collapsed to the ground, the spear still running through him. He groaned through gritted teeth. The surviving vampires and Mr North gathered around.

“Fortunately,” Gerling continued, “there’s been an upswing in category four proto-spaces. So while you were running around killing superheroes and playing with your magic door, I’ve been getting ready. Even so, I never could get the materials for a suppression collar. It had to be something implanted.”

Again he twisted the spear.

“To my delight, the implantation was allowed to be quite rough. As you’re experiencing.”

“You have no idea what you’re doing,” Jason said. “I’m the only one who can—”

Jason was cut off by Gerling’s boot to the back of his head, crushing his face into the wet asphalt.

“You think you’re so special, Asano. The chosen one, destined to save the world because no one else can.”

Gerling ground Jason’s face into the street with his foot.

“You’re not special,” Gerling said. “The stuff you have is. So I’m going to take it from you. I’m going to take it all.”

“You can’t.”

“Impossible just means you haven’t taken the time to figure it out,” Gerling said.

“While you were running around, claiming to be the Messiah, I was making preparations, as I said. This spear...”

Jason groaned with pain as Gerling yanked it sideways like a boat tiller.

“...was only the start.”

Gerling open a small leather pouch on his belt and took out a rainbow orb, the size of a large marble.

“This,” Gerling said, “is much more impressive than its size denotes. I’d even say it’s the most impressive thing on this planet, for the simple reason that it can claim possession of anything else.”

“Contingencies on contingencies,” Mr North said. “The spear was a failsafe, in case whoever ended up with the door proved unreliable or uncontrollable. I should congratulate you, Mr Asano, on being quite thoroughly both. Mr Gerling and I have come to an equitable arrangement where he will be my agent, and the face of saving the world going forward.”

“You can’t,” Jason said. “The door is a part of me. It’s part of my soul, now.”

“And this will draw it out,” Gerling said. “I really hope it hurts.”

“Do you even realise who made this thing?” Mr North asked. “The power of a great astral being is literally beyond your mind’s ability to comprehend. It lacks the frame of reference to contextualise it.”

The pained expression on Jason’s face vanished as his eyes went wide.

“Oh,” he said. “I knew I sensed something I recognised.”

The spear blurred and vanished, along with Jason’s injuries as he got to his feet.

“I may not be able to contextualise the power of a great astral being, but I know even they can't violate a soul. Maybe you could have sold me on it since I don't know that much about great astral beings. Except that I've lived through the proof. The Builder huffed and he puffed but my soul was built out of bricks.”

Jason pushed out with his aura at full strength. The diamond rank power that had him in its grip was reliant on his accepting the scenario, but even so, it was hard to push away. It was like being trapped under an unconscious person, who wasn’t actively trying to keep him down but was so heavy they were hard to escape. Jason gave it everything he had, straining to push back. Only due to his abnormal strength and the unique traits of his aura was he able to force away the oppressive power.

Title: Indomitable

- Your repeated defiance in the face of more powerful enemies and willingness to sacrifice everything for a cause has marked your soul. Your resistance to aura suppression is further enhanced and ignores rank disparity.
- Your aura signature has changed. Your unwavering resolve floods your aura and can be detected if your aura is examined by an aura sensing power or when projecting your aura. Allies within your aura have increased resistance to aura suppression.

Gerling, Mr North and the vampires shimmered and vanished as the true scene was revealed. Jason was lined up next to Gerling and the vampires. In front of them was a nightmare hag, a diamond-rank entity that had little direct power but could manipulate

fears. It looked a lot like Shade if he's been put through a heavy wash cycle; a ragged, shadowy figure. It had one arm outstretched, connected to Gerling and the vampires with three beams of silver-blue light. The luminescence of the light that had just been severed between Jason and the creature was still fading away.

Mr North was also in the line of nightmare victims but had broken free of the trance state even quicker than Jason.

"You threw it off," Jason said, bending over with a weary groan, hands on knees.

"I have accepted my fate, Mr Asano. I have nothing left to fear."

"Sure," Jason grunted. "How the hell are we supposed to kill a nightmare hag?"

"You know what this thing is?" Mr North asked.

"I've faced one before, but Shade knows more than me."

One of Shade's bodies emerged from Jason's shadow.

"For diamond-rank creatures," Shade said, "nightmare hags are breathtakingly weak, at least in direct confrontation. They are, however, almost impossible to eliminate. More typically, they are bound and used for various purposes, as happened with the Order of the Reaper."

"I thought they manifested your fears as a weapon," Jason said.

"That is their means of fighting, and what makes them so dangerous," Shade said. "They can manifest diamond rank spiritual constructs in the form of people's fears. Their method of feeding, however, is to place people in a scenario where their fears consume them."

"If you've encountered one of these in the past," Mr North asked, "how did you handle it then?"

"Other people's fears are like a box of chocolates," Jason said. "You never know what you're going to get. It created a diamond-rank version of me that was a lot more like you. One that no longer sees lines to cross. Apparently, these hags being hard to kill doesn't apply to their own manifestations."

"It killed that hag so that you would eventually become the same as the manifestation?" Mr North asked.

"No," Jason said. "It killed the hag because it refused to be controlled."

"The manifestations are accurate, then," Mr North said.

"I hope not," Jason said. "Shade, any idea on how to handle this thing?"

"To anchor itself here, it will need to feed on at least one physical being," Shade said. "You and Mr North have denied it, leaving the others."

"We have to save them?" Mr North said. "Help them escape, somehow?"

“Shade, if this thing gets denied, it goes back through the rift, right? Job done?”

“That would be my understanding,” Shade said. “I would like to be clear that this is not a scenario in which I am comfortable making definitive statements.”

“We stick to the plan, then,” Jason said, pulling an object from his inventory.

Item: [Travis' Big Rocket] (silver rank, rare)

Definitely not compensating for anything (consumable, bazooka).

- **Effect:** Launches a rocket containing vast and destructive powers of solar and kinetic energy.

Jason slung the huge rocket over his shoulder.

“Curse my sudden, yet inevitable betrayal.”

“What is that?” Mr North asked.

“A sun nuke, by way of astral reconfiguration. I thought I'd have a Godzilla monster or something as an excuse to fire this thing off, but having Gerling and the vamps just stand there in a trance is fine too. Can't dawdle, though. Got to get this done before any of them die or break free.”

Jason opened a portal, which Mr North stared at.

“So, you can,” he said.

“Yes,” Jason said.

“You shipped us all back and forth via vehicle to reinforce that you couldn't portal?”

“Got to have an escape plan. Are you going to fight for your life, Mr North?”

“No,” Mr North said, his voice weary. “You won't let me go and the world can't afford to lose you. The welfare of the world must be the supreme law. I knew from the moment I was trapped here that this moment would come, and perhaps it's for the best. I do have a conscience, you know. I suppose it's time to pay for my many mistakes. I do love my adopted world, you know.”

“I believe you,” Jason said. “Sometimes the things we love are the things we hurt the most.”

A window appeared in front of Mr North.

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- [Jason Asano] has invited you to form a party. Accept Y/N?

“Why?” Mr North asked.

“I’m about to leave a henchman to kill all my enemies while I go away, assuming everything went to plan. Classic villain move, so I want some assurances.”

“That I die.”

“Yes. I considered letting you live, you know. I do believe you want to help.”

“But you can’t trust the way I might choose to help in your absence.”

“I like you, Mr North, in spite of everything. But I also fear turning into you. And I can’t leave that behind me when I’m gone.”

➤ [\[Noreth\] has joined your party.](#)

“Noreth?”

“The name my essence user gave me. It was very precious to me, once.”

Jason nodded and handed the rocket to Shade.

“There is a vault,” Noreth said. “It’s hidden under one of the remote magic accumulators Miss Hurin set up to accumulate and feed magic your village in Australia.”

“How did you manage that?”

“With great difficulty. Even lacking the main village defences, Miss Hurin was not incautious about its protections.”

“How do I open this?”

“It will only open for two people. You and I.”

“Is it a trap?”

“It has traps. I advise you to have Miss Hurin assist you. Speaking of which...”

“Barbou,” Jason said.

“Please ask her to make it quick and clean. Call it a final request.”

“I’ll ask. If she says no, I won’t push. She’ll probably say no.”

“I know. Now, leave. You’ve tarried too long already.”

Jason nodded.

“Goodbye, Noreth.”

“Goodbye, Mr Asano. Do better for this world than I did.”

Jason moved to step through the portal when Noereth called out to him.

“Actually, Mr Asano, there is one more thing I’d like to do, if you’ll permit me.”

Jason stepped out of the portal into the mezzanine lounge of the pagoda. Barbou and Gerling’s men rushed up as Jason walked towards the elevating platform. Jason didn’t so much as glance in their direction, instead, holding out a hand slick with blood. Leeches

sprayed out over Gerling's men but left Barbou untouched. He skittered away fearfully as the others collapsed, screaming and yanking leeches off themselves. Jason rode the elevating platform up as his portal sank into the floor as the other end of it was destroyed.

"Thank you, Shade."

"You are welcome, Mr Asano," Shade's voice came from his shadow.

Jason reached the top floor master suite, went into the study and took a red crystal from a drawer. It was the one that Elizabeth had given him, in order to survive whatever attack she assumed he had planned. It lit up as it activated, a beacon to draw in the soul after the vampire died. Jason took out a reclamation orb and touched it to the crystal. The crystal started growing dim as the orb started filling with rainbow light. It did not fill all the way before the crystal blackened and crumbled.

➤ You have defeated [Georges Albon].

"Georges?" Jason muttered. He extended his senses throughout his domain, which covered the entirety of the transformation zone. Neither Elizabeth nor her blood crystal appeared anywhere within.

"Shade," Jason said. "I believe I've been played. Could a disembodied soul successfully leave the transformation zone, even while it's sealed like this?"

"The only way to trap a soul, Mr Asano, is in its own body, as with the flesh abominations. A god of death can guide a soul, but not bind one. The Reaper can open passages for a soul, but also cannot bind one."

"Open passages?"

"I will not be drawn into speaking on the role of my progenitor, Mr Asano. You know this."

"Fine. I think Elizabeth had her blood crystal outside the transformation zone this whole time. She somehow got Georges' crystal, maybe even made it herself. She passed it off as hers so I'd think I had her at a disadvantage."

"Then she has likely escaped."

The blast zone of the nuclear solar rockets was a crater. Ash and dust blocked out the sky and the former gothic cityscape had been levelled for kilometres. Noreth dug his way out of the ground from where he had buried himself deep, inside a cocoon of magical webbing. It was just enough that he survived given that, while the force of the rocket was

immense, it was still only a silver-rank power. Noreth was gold rank, as were the preparations he made to shield himself.

Even with his preparations, his cocoon had been crushed, as had Noreth himself. Buried underground, he had to wait for bones to snap back into place before digging his way out. Once he did, he started laying out a ritual circle with webs.

There was a rush of rainbow light in the crater, not unlike the manifestation of a monster, but this was something else. Gerling appeared from the light, bare naked, his immortality power having brought him back even from full bodily annihilation. He was still coming to his senses, when webs started whipping out from a series of nearby ritual circles, binding him between them.

“I was a little worried you’d come back before I was ready,” Noreth said. “I was lucky, in this regard. Also, in that you never unsealed your strength power. You won’t be able to pull yourself free, not without more tricks than you have in your bag right now.”

“What do you want, North?” Gerling snarled.

“You know I only came to this place for you, right? You took my friend.”

“Someone like you doesn’t have friends.”

“I may be a monster, Mr Gerling, but not an unfeeling one. You took my friend and I came to get him back. Because of this, he and I will both soon be dead. I can’t save either of us, Mr Gerling. Or you. When you think about it, you have led all three of us to our doom in this place.”

“We can team up. Fight Asano.”

“No, Mr Gerling. Mr Asano was kind enough to let me take a small measure of revenge on the man who brought us here. After that, I will take my own life.”

“It doesn’t have to be like this,” Gerling said.

“It didn’t, Mr Gerling, but now it does.”

Jason opened his eyes and his vision departed from the crater where Gerling died.

➤ **Party member [Noreth] has died.**

“So, that’s it then,” Jason said.

“Will you pursue Elizabeth after reintegrating the transformation zone?” Shade asked.

“No,” Jason said. “I’m done with vampires and magic factions. It’s time to finish the job and go home.”

“Home, Mr Asano?”

“Yeah. This world isn't it anymore.”