

Leveling up the World

Chapter 6: Acknowledged

You have impressed the Ring Guardian with your behavior!

The Colossus has granted you a future boon.

In the blink of an eye Dallion found himself back in the hall of the village chief. The ring was still in his hand, only it was no longer ordinary metal. The surface had become the color of warm bronze, and that wasn't the only change. Looking at it, Dallion could swear that it had become thinner, more refined, better suited for jewelry than it was before.

I hope this pleases you? Dallion placed the ring in the blond girl's hand. As he did, the redness on her cheeks deepened.

That's for you, mom and granddad, Dallion thought.

Is there anything else you wish of me? he asked.

The sense of euphoria filling the boy's very being was so great that Dallion felt as if it were pulsing through his veins. In his mind, he could easily take on the village chief and his entire family right there and then. However, his grandfather's warning echoed in the back of his mind. All it took was a single excuse for the Aspion to have the guards and everyone else charge, and some of them were probably stronger than the ring guardian.

Village chief? Dallion asked again.

You're Kraistens grandson, no doubt about it. It took only a moment for the chief to regain his composure. Well done. The old man offered a slow clap. At least now my granddaughter will stop nagging me.

Judging by most of the people's expressions, they were anything but pleased. The face of Aspion's son was purple with anger that there was genuine fear his head might pop. A few seats away the chief's grandson was staring in disbelief, uncertain whether he should give in to anger or fear. Even most of the granddaughters were giving Dallion the stink-eye, annoyed that he was keeping them up in the room longer than they had to be.

Did your grandfather teach you that? The chief leaned further forward, the tips of his fingers tapping against each other.

I wouldn't know if he had, village chief, Dallion replied. But I don't believe so.

Either way, you did well. Say hello to him and your mother. The mans face twisted back into a grin.

Thank you, village chief. *Stay calm.* I will do so. Im sure they will be glad.

The final provocation failed, Aspion dismissed the boy with a wave of his hand. The two guards, dumbstruck up to now, rushed to escort him out of the hall. Unlike before, none of them dared be too close or make any offensive remarks. Once Dallion left the mansion, the massive doors almost slammed behind him.

Damn it, that was close! The boy let out an internal sigh of relief. By this time the euphoria had worn off, making him realize how fortunate he had been. The guardian had been a trap, that much was obvious, just as it was obvious that he would have been beaten to a pulp if he had tried to use his newfound skills. If nothing else, the chief had made his rings copper. In Dallions old life bronze had been considered more valuable than copper, but the way things worked here copper was likely the next level of awakeningbronze alloy minus the impurities.

With one last look at the mansion, Dallion decided not to think of it too much and just go home. The awakening had worked up a delayed appetite.

No soul was visible as he walked through the village. Had it been harvest season, that wouldnt have been considered strange. Even now, there was nothing to cause any suspicion. After several minutes, when there werent even any sounds of human activity to be heard, Dallion began to wonder.

The house he and his family lived was on the village outskirts, furthest away from the chiefs mansion. Originally, Dallions grandfather had his own abode, neighboring the chiefs, but that had been knocked down decades ago. The pain of having an un-awakened daughter had driven the family away. The house had been destroyed soon after opening space for Aspions to grow. Several others had followed, ensuring that only one family had awakened of the younger generation. Well, now there were two.

Hello? Dallion said as he neared the door of his house.

There was no answer.

Hello? He creaked the door open and peeked inside.

His immediate family was all there, sitting at the table somber expressions on their faces. Even Dallions brother who usually was so energetic and full of life just stood there struggling to keep tears from trickling down his face.

Did something happen? Dallion blinked.

Its okay, son, his father said, with the largest forced smile Dallion had seen in both of his lives. Sit down. Theres some food left.

Okay? *What happened now?*

Here. His grandfather pushed a mug in his hands. The alcohol fumes were so strong that the boy thought he might get alcohol poisoning just by inhaling them. Drink up. Itll do you good.

Err, can I not? Dallion wanted to say, but obediently took a sip.

The drink was definitely strong and as bitter as burned liquorish.

Was it the ring trial? his mother asked in a whisper.

Mhm. Dallion nodded, wondering what to do with the drink.

Its always the ring trial Curse that family! I had hoped that hed have shown mercy given the state of the village, and still she looked away. Im sorry you had to go through that.

It was tough alright, but everything worked out in the end.

Dallions words had the effect of a lightning bolt on a cloudless day. The surrounding people froze, then stared, then looked at each other, so as to confirm they hadnt misheard.

You you completed the trial? Dallions grandfather asked, his hands shaking.

It wasnt easy, but I did it. The boy smiled. It was mostly luck, but

You completed the trial! The old man grabbed Dallion, lifting him from the chair in a massive bear hug. Have you any idea what that means? The village finally has an awakened that isnt from the Luor family! And that awakened is my grandson!

Not for long if you dont let me go

It was at that moment that Dallion discovered that victory also has its cost.