

GOD OF TRASH

Chapter 1. Trash God

Hunched over his desk, in the dark of his room, a pale man who hadn't seen the sun in too many days typed furiously. No one understood the beauty of Kasser, the beautiful cat-girl in the latest installation of *Absolute Apex*. Sure, she was trash, a character thrown out solely to attract the attention of horny men who had no other reason to exist in the series, and the series had *become* trash, but that was exactly what no one understood: the *beauty* of trash. The exquisite perfection in a series so trashy it had completely fallen apart at the seams. It wasn't good. He wouldn't dare accuse it of such a thing. But it was bad, tasteless and trashy in a way that tugged at the heartstrings and made him laugh at the same time. In other words, peak entertainment.

He hit enter and sat back, crossing his arms, his glasses reflecting the screen's light. With a final stroke, he finished his manifesto on Kasser's beauty, then added one more message:

god_of_trash: if you don't think Kasser is perfect, you can leave right now.

anyone321: he's gone. there's no saving him.

peaker-93: conversation's over, dude. no one likes kasser. she's trash.

god_of_trash: that's the whole point. trash is the best.

2face2u: hey, anyone remember when AA was good?

The conversation moved on. He sighed, shaking his head. The unenlightened would never understand. *Absolute Apex* had never been good. At best, it had peaked at average. It was only now that it truly transcended, as the author lost all the fucks they'd had to give and plunged into insanity. How else would they have gotten that scene where the Demon King forced a waiter to tap dance for fifteen hours? How else would they have received the gift of the main character, never a powerhouse but rather the weak, wishy-washy sort, literally turning into a fly on the wall for fifteen chapters so the characters everyone cared about could have a turn in the spotlight? If the series hadn't become trash, it would have been nothing.

A private message appeared in the corner of his vision. With no hesitation, he clicked it. Did someone still want to argue? Please! He welcomed the challenge.

absolutexistence: you love trash?

He snorted. Obviously this absolutexistence fellow hadn't been on the forum for long if he had to ask that.

god_of_trash: duh

absolutexistence: I have a problem with trash. can you help me?

Confused, he tilted his head. A problem with trash? What, like in his house? That was his business. He wasn't talking about cleaning some guy's room, he was talking about literary trash.

A second later, he chuckled under his breath. Why was he thinking of physical trash? Obviously, given the context, absolutexistence was talking about trash like Absolute Apex. So without hesitation, he replied:

god_of_trash: you've come to the right man. lay it on me. what can i do to help you appreciate trash?

The typing-message animation played, and played, and played. He sat back, knitting his fingers together to wait. At last, the response came back:

absolutexistence: it's best if I just show you

He lifted his hands to type, *show me? how?* but his fingers never found the keyboard. Bright light poured down on him, blindingly bright. He lifted his hands to block the light—and stared. Squinted. Turned them over, then back again. They were small. Too small. And the skin was tan, and soft, and supple, not pale and cracked from the dry cold. He peered against the bright light, only to find it emanated from one overwhelming round source in a pale blue canvas, instead of a big flat rectangle like he was used to. His arms were short, but something soft brushed against his cheek, and he touched it to find a long, well-kept, not at all greasy ponytail dangling behind his head.

His eyes widened. He sat up, only to find himself in ragged clothes, sitting on the edge of a massive field of rubbish. But not plastic rubbish. No broken cellphones and food wrappers filled his vision. Instead, he faced a mass of rotting foodstuffs, broken pottery, tattered clothes and shattered wood furniture. Beyond it, a medieval village clung to the side of a mountain, where a delicate, white city glistened at its top, impossibly constructed. In fact, he could almost swear some of the buildings were floating.

He took a deep breath. Clean, fresh air flowed into his lungs, cleaner than he'd ever known. He had a child's body, about ten, eleven years old, if he had to guess, and faced a vista totally unknown to him. That could only mean one thing. "Holy shit. I'm in another world, aren't I?"

But why? He delved his memories, but there was only one thing he could come up with. That strange conversation with absolutexistence in the chat room, immediately before he'd arrived. Pinching his chin, he frowned. It made no sense, but was absolutexistence maybe a god of this world? One who had somehow metaphysically connected to the internet, chosen the random forum he frequented, then somehow misunderstood him as an actual *god* god due to his username 'god_of_trash?'

It was so impossible that it boggled the mind, but he couldn't come up with anything else. He was undeniably in another world, in a brand-new body. No matter how he wracked his brain, he couldn't come up with another reason for him to have jumped worlds. He hadn't been hit by a truck, and if he'd had a heart attack or aneurism, it had come and gone so fast he hadn't felt a thing. It was possible he was in a coma, and this was all some extended dream, but well, in that case, he might as well enjoy it.

It was too late now. However he'd been transported to another world, it had happened. Here he was, in a place that was very much not in front of his computer, in his sad little apartment, up too late chatting on the internet about

anime he didn't even like very much, even if Kasser was the absolute pinnacle of catgirl design.

He stood, dusting off his ragged clothes. He wore patched, threadbare brown trousers and a simple sort of robe-slash-tunic, tied at the side. The robe might have been white, once, but sweat and dirt had turned it the same shade of brown as the trousers. His head ached, and when he lifted a hand to it, it came away sticky with dark-red blood. He looked back. A short cliff loomed over him, and under his back had been an expanse of hard, gray stone. A blood splatter marked where his head *had* been, moments ago.

He pursed his lips, understanding. This kid had been dead. The god, or whatever had brought him here, had seen fit to toss him into this kid's dead body, and he'd brought the kid back somehow. He didn't understand it, but he didn't understand anything about what was just happening. God shit, probably.

As it was, the fierce ache in his head assured him this was no dream. Casting left and right, he looked around for a way back up the cliff. The medieval town was before him, but it was up a somewhat-considerable lip. In fact, all the trash around him had been thrown into the depression that he also found himself in. If he had to guess, he'd spawned in the town's trash pit.

Looking around, he chuckled under his breath. He really was the god of trash, wasn't he? Born in the trash, stuck in the pit...

"Learned your lesson now, Rhys?" a child's voice asked petulantly from atop the cliff.

He looked around. Seeing no one else in the trash pit, he pointed at himself. "Me?"

Two boys, about the same age as his body, peered over the edge of the cliff. One was fat, and the other was thin. A third boy's face joined them a few moments later, burly in comparison to the first two.

The fat one scoffed, and the same voice sounded again. "Hit your head so hard you forgot your name? Yes, you. No one else here named Rhys, is there?"

He considered for a second. Amusingly, although he could remember his username clearly, and most of his past life, his name slipped his mind. It felt like that should bother him, but for some reason, it didn't. Maybe it was because he'd been reborn. His name was attached to his old self, so shedding it felt appropriate in a new world and a new body. He nodded. Rhys was a good enough name. "I suppose not."

The skinny one cleared his throat. "So? Learned your lesson?"

"No," Rhys replied earnestly. How could he, when he didn't know what lesson he was supposed to be learning?

The fat one scoffed. "As if he could. Duller than a brick and smellier than a pig, that's Rhys."

The burly one looked on, a disapproving frown on his face. He crossed his arms and said nothing.

Rhys turned away from the boys, taking in the pit once more as he tuned out their voices. It wasn't as if he cared what they said about him. He wasn't actually an eleven-year-old, and their weak attempts at bullying didn't so much as annoy him, let alone actually sting. Better to focus his energy on escaping the pit.

These boys had probably killed his body. Not intentionally, he didn't think, but neither had they acted in a way that preserved human life and dignity. Putting someone in a position where their actions could accidentally kill them was still manslaughter. He would have to punish them somehow, but he didn't know

how yet. Still, he put it on the backburner for later, looking up for just a moment to commit their faces to memory before taking on the pit once more.

There was no real break in the pit's walls. They were almost unnaturally smooth, as if they'd been dug by human hands, but not even modern tools could have left such a perfectly round, smooth-walled bore. It was as if a hammer had struck down once from heaven and left the impression of its strike in the soft earth. Either that, or it was a sinkhole, but he preferred the fantasy answer. He was in a new world, after all. He was allowed to dream.

He twisted his lips. The walls were six feet tall. If he were an adult, he could probably reach up and scramble over the lip. As it was, he barely cleared five feet, and although he could barely reach the edge, he didn't fancy his chances clambering over it. His arms and legs were stick-thin, with barely any fat or muscle on them. If he had to guess, his body came from a poor family, if he still had a family at all. Pulling himself up over the edge of the pit was a pipe dream.

He turned, taking in all the trash. He was god of the trash, wasn't he? Might as well get started. Plenty of raw materials, right here. And he'd watched enough DIY videos to get the gist of basic construction.

Leaving the boys behind, he set off into the pit, picking over the trash. There was a chair with two legs, and a shattered table with a single intact leg. A few

rusty nails stuck through a scrap of wood nearby, and those joined the pile. He dragged all of it through the trash, away from the kids and toward the town.

“Hey! Get back here!” the fat kid shouted.

“Yeah! Get back!” the skinny one repeated.

The burly one jumped up and ran along the outside, chasing after Rhys.

Out in the middle of the pit, Rhys stopped. It was a large pit, larger than he’d expect for a town of the size he’d seen on its edge, probably about twenty feet in diameter. Some of the materials in it were far finer than he’d expect, too, richly carved furniture broken into tiny pieces and sumptuous robes stained with red-brown fluids and torn asunder. A small, glittering vial caught his eye. He paused, kneeling to pick it up, and gave it a sniff.

A strong, astringent scent wafted up, strictly medicinal. Blue liquid clung to the walls of the vial, just a few small drops. It looked like a potion. Smelled like one. Could it be? This really was a fantasy world, with gods and the like, and this really was a healing potion?

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Only one way to find out. Rhys swirled the vial, collecting the drips into one larger drop, then fished it out with a fingertip and licked it.

The pain in the back of his head instantly abated. Warmth flowed over the back of his head, and when he tried touching it again, his hand found crusted blood, sticky hair, and smooth, unblemished skin.

His eyes widened. He looked at the vial in his hand, then turned back to the trash. His construction project sat to the side, forgotten, as he dug desperately through the layers of refuse. This, what he held in his hand, was gold. Pure gold! Potions were always worth exorbitant sums in fantasy worlds—at least compared to the money the average mortal could make. If he found enough bottles, who knew? He could even combine all the drips of potion into one whole potion and sell it. Given his destitute state, he'd need that kind of desperate action to make it as an adventurer—obviously his goal. He didn't even need to say it. He'd been reincarnated in another world, so naturally, he had to become an adventurer. But adventuring took money, money he didn't have. Money that was sitting right here, in the trash heap, for anyone to come along and grab. Even the vials had to be worth something, crafted as they were out of fine crystal-cut glass.

Wonder why the original Rhys didn't do this? Then again, Rhys was a kid, scared of silly things. And people tended to look down on picking through the trash. What a waste, honestly, when there was so much good stuff in the trash.

Maybe he was wrong, and no one wanted the vials. Maybe they really were nothing but trash. But in that case, all he'd done was waste some time. He lost nothing, and he potentially gained much. That was the kind of gamble he was willing to take.

"Tam, I think Rhys has finally lost it. He's digging through the trash like a rabid dog," the skinny one commented.

The burly one returned to the other two's side, jogging back without ever breaking a sweat.

The fat boy—Tam—looked up. He chuckled. "We already knew he was a dog. He's only showing his true nature. Bast, watch over him while Den and I check in with the matron. If we don't show our faces soon, she'll catch on that something's off."

“Since when have I been your servant? It was your idea to push him in, anyways. I told you not to. I’m not sticking around to take the fall while you go make an alibi,” the burly one, Bast, returned. With that, he walked away.

Rhys raised his brows. Interesting. Bast was smarter than he looked. And not the ringleader. That’d be Tam, the fat one, which made skinny Den... his toady? He watched the two remaining boys over his shoulder. The skinny one, Den, followed at Tam’s heel, quietly nodding along with the other boy’s suggestions. Now he fretted, looking between the retreating Bast and Tam, who scowled at the burly boy’s back.

“What do we do?” Den asked nervously.

Tam scoffed. “We aren’t going to stick around to get caught, either. Let’s go check in. If Rhys doesn’t show up, no one will bat an eye. That empty-headed day dreamer never shows up for lunch, anyways.”

Upon learning that he would be left alone, Rhys turned all his attention back to the trash. The spot he dug in was a hotspot of the little vials. It seemed that someone had chugged a bunch of them all at once, then dumped them away all at once. Many of the vials had droplets in them, which he collected into one of the fuller bottles, one that had a whole dreg in it. He gathered the fully emptied vials into a pouch he’d made out of the ragged fabric strewn around the trash heap. Bit by bit, the vial slowly filled. One drop at a time, so little it

was impossible to see it grow, and yet, it still filled. He ran out of vials in his original potion well and moved on, searching out more vials. They were easy to find, glittering in the sunlight.

Abruptly, he stopped, holding up a vial to the light. Orange liquid sloshed in the half-full vial. His brows furrowed. That wasn't a healing potion. Healing potions were blue. His eyes narrowed. If it wasn't a healing potion, what was it? Mana? Some kind of strength or speed boost, maybe?

Only one way to find out.

Very carefully, he tipped out a tiny droplet onto his skin. When his skin didn't react, he sniffed it, then delicately licked it and held it in his mouth, on his tongue. The orange liquid had a strange scent—medicinal, but also spicy and mysterious, somewhere between cough medicine and a spice cake. Its flavor was somewhat similar to licking a dry spice mix, as if he'd snuck a taste of dry gingerbread cookie mix before adding the liquid. Very strange, to say the least. It had a powerful clearing effect, too, as if he'd bitten into a pepper, and his nose began to run. He swallowed. The droplet rolled into his stomach, tracing warmth all the way down, and then a message appeared before his eyes.

Mana awakened!

Less is More 0 > 1

Rhys' eyes widened. It *was* a mana potion! And not only that, but he seemed to have unlocked something by using it. He poked the floating blue message bubble, and it went away, replaced with a larger one.

Rhys Foundling | 12 | Mana Gathering (Tier 0)

Title: Trash-born

Skills:

Hunger Resist 5

Survivalist 1

Pain Resist 1

Scavenging 2

Less is More 1

He pinched his chin. After a bit of investigating, most of the skills did about what he'd expect. Hunger and Pain Resist let him overcome those two common troubles, while Survivalist helped him survive the elements and Scavenging made it easier to find valuable items in trash—it was a passive skill that functioned by giving a boost to the same kind of instincts an experienced thrifter might have, when paging through junk in a thrift shop. Less is More was the most mysterious skill, but also the most obvious: when he used items, they became more effective at smaller quantities. In other words, he could gain more mana from a drop of the mana potion than most people would, and more healing from a drop of a health potion.

His eyes drifted to the top, to his name and title. *Foundling* wasn't a family name. He'd spent long enough delving free encyclopedias to know that in medieval eras, a name like that would be given to orphans. He'd been found somewhere, not born into a loving family. It tracked with his experiences so far, so he didn't dwell long on it. He was twelve, too, and not eleven; never would have guessed, from how small he was, without even a hint of growth. Mana Gathering, Tier 0... was that his strength level right now?

Rhys smirked to himself. *In other words, trash-tier.* He was in his element. Literally and figuratively.

Finally, he glanced at his title. Trash-born. It was rather mysterious, and one he didn't understand, unless it literally meant he'd been born in the trash. Given that he'd been reborn in the trash, he didn't discount it as a possibility. It suited him, however, so he didn't complain.

I really am the god of trash, huh. Rhys looked around him. Although he'd been talking about literary trash when he'd spoken to that mysterious absolutexistence, he didn't really mind real trash, either. When he'd been a child, he'd enjoyed building things out of discarded cardboard and cans. Even as an adult, he would repurpose materials others would throw out for crafts. Never mind that he used them building cheap armor for his cosplay, the point was—he was a resourceful kind of guy, who had always seen value in every kind of trash, material or literary.

Although others might use the word *trash* to dismiss a work, to him, it was only the beginning of the discussion. Yes, it was trash, but what *kind* of trash? And just because it was trash, didn't mean it lacked value, or beautiful moments, or great characters. Just because the overwhelming sentiment of public opinion stood against something, didn't mean Rhys would dismiss it too. No—he refused to. If someone called something trash, to him, that was an invitation to find the diamond in the rough. Sure, sometimes there was a lot of rough. Sometimes there was even nothing *but* rough. But if no one was willing to polish up the rough and go hunting for the diamonds, they'd never have any diamonds in the whole world.

That metaphor kind of got away from me, but anyways. The point is, I'm not going to overlook the trash just because the townsfolk think it's beneath them. He'd already advanced by leaps and bounds just by crawling in the trash. He'd unlocked a system, and even gained a skill! And in his hands were two half-empty, no, half-*full* potions, one of health, the other of mana, that could either help him advance further or that he could sell for money that he could then use to grow stronger.

There was no doubt in his mind that he needed to get strong. This wasn't the kind of society where one could live a good life as a weakling. Right from the moment he'd entered it, spawned into the poor dead body of weak Rhys who had been killed for no other reason than because the other boys could overpower him, he'd been face to face with this truth. No, the other boys hadn't meant to kill him, but that only made it more frightening. He was in a world where the weak would be accidentally killed by the strong, trampled on with all the more care as though they were insects underfoot. He might love trash, but he didn't want to be a bug, stuck beneath everyone forever. Trash was going to propel him upward, to the top of society, and who knew? Maybe even all the way to becoming a true god of trash, in more than username only.

Rhys kept going, all thoughts of escaping the pile totally forgotten. His potions slowly filled, though the health potion made far more progress than the mana potion. Apparently mana potions were more valuable, which only made him treasure the vial of orange liquid more. Between selling it for coin and using it to advance, his heart slowly drifted toward using it to advance. The health

potion he could hold in reserve to sell or use, depending on the situation, but if the mana potion was so valuable that there were only a few in the trash? He couldn't overlook this kind of heavenly luck and toss all his advantages away.

On top of potions, he also came across strange wrinkled papers with powders clinging to their creases. He tasted a few of them, only to be beset by a dozen strange effects, everything from strength increases to a sudden bout of drowsiness. The papers, therefore, he collected separately, carefully tucking each one away on its own for later observation. Whatever pills or powders they had contained, there was clearly a far greater variety of those than the potions, so he couldn't carelessly combine them based on color alone.

As the sun set, he gazed upon his gatherings with the warm joy he usually reserved for his figure collection. Dozens of bottles glittered back at him from the pouch, alongside a stack of wrinkled paper. And his pride and joy, front and center: one full health potion, a second quarter-full one, and a three-quarters full mana potion.

Since his first awakening, he'd not dared to try the mana potion further. There was still a sensation of great heat in his stomach, as though he were on the verge of being overwhelmed by the little mana he had. Besides, the potion was such a valuable and rare resource that he didn't want to carelessly drink too much in one day and overlap the effects. Better to take a drop a day, and experience the full effect of one drop before he went on to try a second drop. Plus, he got the feeling that he could level up Less is More by,

well, *experiencing* that less was more, rather than taking on the whole potion at once.

He tucked the vials with potion in them deep in his robes, hiding each individually. As someone who'd formerly been bullied, he knew the kind of depths kids would go to in order to harm one another. If the three bullies knew he had something valuable, they'd take it from him even if they didn't understand its value themselves. And when it came to potions, he was pretty sure they'd recognize the value immediately.

It almost made him want to drink the whole mana potion, but he held back. Leveling his skill was more important—and that heat in his stomach. It really was on the verge of overwhelming. He'd only taken a drop of the potion, but between the skill and being totally untrained, it was too much for him. He didn't want to die in the trash from mana overdose, or whatever other hazards mana held in this world. Until he knew more about how mana worked, he intended to listen closely to his body and stop when it experienced the least discomfort. Once he knew more, he could start pressing the boundaries of how much mana he could absorb. Start expanding his horizons, as it were.

He was a bit concerned that he ended up full of mana from such a tiny drop, but that was a concern for later. Then again, if he thought about it, he wouldn't be the god of trash if he didn't start with trash-tier stats. The thrill was in overcoming the trash to shine himself into a diamond anyways, not in starting with overwhelming power.

...And maybe that was him coping *just* a little bit, but who was to say? Who was to say.

In any case, he wasn't afraid of hard work. As long as it meant he'd end up with powerful magic this time around, he was happy to work hard. Back when hard work just meant he weighed a little less, it wasn't particularly appealing. But now... hell, now hard work meant he could fly and shoot fireballs from his hands, or something. *That* was what he was talking about.

As he contemplated his magical future, he pried the nails out of the piece of wood, then used a nice thick piece of wood to hammer them through the chair's seat and into the table leg. The resulting three-legged chair wasn't the sturdiest, or steadiest, thing ever built, but it held, and when he tested it, it held his twelve-year-old weight. Being twelve was less of an asset when it came to hauling the awkwardly-shaped construct back across the pit toward the town-side to climb out, but he managed it. One step at a time, he dragged it toward the edge. The pouch clanked on his hip, and that heat glowed in his stomach.

Abruptly, he paused. Why was he doing this the hard, non-magical way, when he had magic literally burning a hole in him? He reached out to the mana and called it forth.

The mana leaped out and raced through him, pouring through his body. His strength instantly surged, but so did the heat. A fever blush spread over his cheeks. Rhys huffed and breathed slowly, pushing through it. His body rebelled against mana, and he rebelled against his body.

He was sure of it now: he was trash. Inexcusably, unrelentingly, trash. But the thing about trash, the thing that he really loved about it, was that there was always something that shone in the very bottom of the trash. One joke he could enjoy, even if the rest of the entire series was nothing but a convoluted excuse to display fanservice. There had to be something about this new body of his that shone. Some aspect that it succeeded at. He just had to find it, somewhere under all the trash.

Fever raged, beating against his forehead, but he pressed on. For all that it hurt, the fever didn't constrain his newfound, mana-powered strength. The chair's shape was still awkward enough that his short arms couldn't heft it, but he dragged it with ease and had no trouble lifting it for short times when it snagged on something else in the trash. The encroaching night made it hard to see too much of the details of the trash around him, but he mentally tagged any promising regions as places to come back to later.

And then he froze. Slowly, he turned.

Metal glittered in the darkness. Sharp, pointy metal.

Rhys' eyes shone. A dark chuckle sounded from his throat as his revenge against the bullies took shape. He knelt and snatched it up, sliding it into his robes with the potions. It would be a good time tonight. A good time for everyone, but mostly Rhys.