

Chapter 194: The Revelry

Jayce heart raced as he stood at the bow of the Stacked Hand, feeling the waves break beneath him as they sailed south as quickly as they could. It had been an entire year since the war came to an end. An entire year since the Sea Sovereign had seized the world. An entire year since he had had his title taken from him. Ships lined the horizon, all curious to see the arrival of the New Pirate Lords, but he ignored the prying eyes, locking his gaze onto the lone island ahead of him: the Sea Sovereign's lair.

The island was shaped like a huge cleaver, with a handle jutting out to the north on the east side of the island. A series of large piers sat in front and beneath of the main body, just in front of the colossal mansion that was the Sovereign's home. It was a soft eggshell colour, and looked like a mansion or a plantation house. It looked like two stories on approach, but as the Stacked Hand came to dock amongst the other ships, Jayce realised just how big the house was. It was at least thirty metres in height and about a hundred metres wide. Each floor had to be about ten metres high from the colossal windows placed along the front and the huge set of main doors.

Outside and around the island were numerous Null Legion, all patrolling or manning gun emplacements. They were guiding the guests towards the back, heading around the side of the mansion to the gardens beyond. One Legionnaire approached the Stacked Hand before calling up to Jayce. "Exarga, right?" she questioned. "Yeah," he called down in response. The Legionnaire nodded and beckoned over another soldier. Jayce ignored them and turned towards his anxious and excited crew.

"We're here. We're actually here," Zeta said in slight disbelief. Jayce nodded, struggling to force away his grin. "We are. I don't know how long this will take, or if it will go peacefully – so I need all of you to be on your guard. Bjorn, Astris and Caelie will be coming with me," he stated. The crew nodded, apart from Arthuria who looked distinctly disappointed. "Captain," she said quietly. He looked at her. "Can I come along? My sister may be here and this could be a good chance to talk to her," she stated.

Jayce thought for a moment before nodding. "Caelie, you'll stay here. I can't take everyone." She stomped her foot in protest. "I need you to get us out if something goes wrong," he reassured her. Jayce then pointed towards the handle of the island. "That looks like a perfect escape point to me. The Stacked Hand can fling past it and we can leap aboard from there. Be careful, all of you. Who knows what

games are being played.” Jayce placed a reassuring hand on the top of Caelie’s head. She grabbed him in a tight hug in response. “I’ll be fine,” he reassured, looking towards his lieutenants. “Ready,” they all stated.

They disembarked, following the guards around the side of colossal mansion. The rear of the mansion was decorated with a huge flower garden and hedges, a huge variety of colours arranged in neat rows. But it wasn’t the garden that they were being led to. A large circular building had been built in the middle of the area, a stone path leading up from it to the mansion. The building was made of a black-red stone and seemed in direct contrast to the mansion. It was massive in itself and countless guests were pouring inside, all eager to see the event for themselves.

“Jayce!” called a voice from the side, amongst the surrounding pillars that held up the wide conical roof. He smiled as a familiar face waved him over. Her tabby-coloured hair had been cut short and had the top tied up into a small ponytail, the bottom still over her neck. The small bell attached to her green choker rang as she waved to him. “Kitty,” Jayce stated with a big grin, as she hugged him tightly. “It’s good to see you!” he added earnestly, relieved to see her alive.

“And you! Bjorn, Astris... uh, who are you?” she questioned towards Arthuria. “Arthuria Pendragon,” she answered. Kitty raised an eyebrow but pushed her thoughts aside. “Here I was thinking you’d dress up for the event,” she stated, pouting as she looked at his simple shirt, trousers and combat boots. “At least you’ve done your eyes,” she added, looking intently at his blue contacts before pulling back.

She wore a simple grey leather jacket, a white tank-top, a short plaid pleaded grey skirt, and large heavy black boots. She had done her make-up, her green and yellow eyes adorned with a layered green finish. “Anyway,” she stated, gesturing behind her to the shadows. Somme Ankor nodded to Jayce, stepping forwards to shake his hand. He looked larger than Jayce remembered; the muscled man had put on considerable bulk – his arm even larger than before. He had light-brown skin, a bald head, and a black eye patch over his left eye. Jayce immediately noticed the upgrades to his metal left arm. “Good to see you,” he stated. “You too,” Jayce stated, before looking past him to Rebel Red.

He had a shaved head, his auburn hair barely more than a short fuzz on his scalp, but he had grown a considerable beard. He looked gaunt, almost ill, and his face had dark rings under his eyes. He had numerous new tattoos that immediately reminded Jayce of the fallen Delivery Kat – Anne Muerte. He didn’t smile, he

simply nodded to Jayce from afar. "Good to see you, Red," Jayce stated before looking at Kitty. She couldn't hide the anxious expression on her face from him. Jayce glanced back to Bjorn, both of them sharing the same worrying thought.

"Red, I think you should sit this one out. We'll be fine without you, rest up," Kitty suggested. He shook his head, stepping forwards. Kitty opened her mouth and then seemed to change her mind. "Right, well we should probably go in – don't want someone sitting in our seats," Kitty said with a grin, turning to Jayce before linking her arm with his. "Onwards then," he said reassuringly to her, leading on.

They passed through the extended entranceway, immediately taking note of the twin stairs leading upwards to a second floor and the ring that seemed to surround a central chamber. "Gods," Bjorn realised. "This is the old Pirate Lord hall, just rebuilt in a different way." Jayce's widened as he made the same connection. He looked towards the outer ring, deeply curious whether the monuments to previous Pirate Lords were there as well. "Later," Kitty stated, her demeanour hardening as she released Jayce's arm and pushed forwards to the main doors.

They were large, and carved from black wood, with imagery of the seas, swords and skulls. Kitty pushed the door open and headed inside with Somme and Red following closely behind. Jayce waited a moment before looking to his crewmates. "We're with you," Astris stated. Jayce nodded in acknowledgement and then stepped forwards. There was an eery silence inside, countless hushed voices all staring down from the gallery above.

The ringed room was dark, with numerous pillars full of concealed shadows for the Lieutenants to stand within. The centre of the room was lit with beams of light from above, landing on a long and colossal stone table. Eight throne-like chairs sat around the table, with four on either side. A final, more grand chair sat at the head, furthest from the door. A large wall with maps of the Old and New World sat behind the Sovereign's throne.

Jayce walked with deliberate confidence to the final empty seat, sat between Tim Kane and Kitty Deliver on the left side of the table. Tim nodded to Jayce, Mirabelle Delyth and another Lieutenant stood behind him. Jayce nodded back, sensing Bjorn, Astris and Arthuria taking their own positions behind him. Tim sat to Jayce's right, with Kitty on Jayce's left and Crach on her left, closest to the Sovereign. Crach's son Xerxes and the owl therian stood behind the old lion.

Jayce glanced across the table: directly opposite him was the Governor – his face hidden by the Engine's mask. Two Engines stood behind him, one bald male and one female with long black hair and white skin. The Governor nodded to him and Jayce was uncertain whether it was the Governor or the Engine greeting him. To the Governor's left sat the puppet of the Machinist, now with stitching around his neck. The true Machinist was between two automatons behind him.

To the Governor's right was a young woman Jayce didn't recognise. She had long braided brown hair and light-brown skin with narrow brown eyes. She wore strange clothes, animal hides of sorts with multiple colours and feathers decorating the edges. A hooded woman stood behind her, her face completely obscured. She twirled a knife in her hands and stared at Kitty with an expression of aggression. *The Dragonlord*. Jayce guessed. To her right sat a blue ocean crawler, whose eyes had not left Jayce's face since his entrance. Ningyo stared at him with a similar aggression, one of his headtails cut short and a few new scars across his body. Jayce faltered. *Where's Ruyn?* He was the only Pirate Lord not present.

A crying drew Jayce's attention to the head of the table, his eyes widening as he saw the Sea Sovereign nursing a small child in a bundle. His entire body reacted, and he could see amongst the expressions of the others in the room looks of hunger. A weakness. The Sovereign had a weakness, came the unified thoughts of the room. The child was small, perhaps only a few months old. Jayce then withdrew, questioning the horrific thoughts running through his mind. It was a baby, not a weapon.

He looked past the infant to Scáthach. She had a wide and crazed grin on her face, her brown eyes glowing purple. Moments of silence continued to pass before she took the infant off her breast and placed it on the table, between Ningyo and Crach. No one moved, no one dared to breath. She then lunged, drawing a knife and slamming it down onto the infant. "No!" Jayce and Crach both stated, reaching forwards.

But the infant had vanished. The Sovereign had vanished. Instead they saw a malicious grin from Sétanta as he sat sideways across the throne, his long brown hair dangling over the side. "What is the meaning of this?" Crach growled. "Where is Scáthach?" he demanded. Sétanta gestured lazily across the table, all heads turning and looking towards the door. Scáthach stood leaning against a pillar and Jayce could have sworn she hadn't been there when he first came in. He'd have walked right past her.

She'd grown out her messy dark orange hair, but looked no different than when he last saw her. Her brown eyes were almost invisible in the darkness, but a faint purple glow was visible within them. She wore dark clothes: a padded jacket and waterproof trousers, with boots underneath. She'd replaced some of her piercings, and had removed her lip ring, opting instead for a bull-like nose ring. The eldritch tattoos on her neck remained, and her dark makeup matched the attire. She tilted her head to the right and Sétanta immediately stood up before moving to the side.

She stepped forwards, walking up to the table before leaping up onto it and walking across the surface. Jayce watched her walk before he turned his head back to where she had been. He squinted, trying to use his Focus, but he saw nothing. Begrudgingly he looked back to the head of the table as she sat down cross-legged in her throne. "Right, go on then. Where's the proof you have a right to claim these seats?" she questioned.

Jayce, Kitty and Crach all instinctively sat up in their chairs. The Governor mirrored them, his breathing laboured and raspy beneath the mask. Ningyo then reached down beside him, grabbing something before dropping it onto the table with a splat. Jayce's eyes widened as he stared at familiar orange hair. Ruyn's last expression was one of horror – his partially rotting face staring at Jayce. "That's more like it," Scáthach said plainly, before looking beyond towards Thákane and the Machinist's puppet. Both of them simply shrugged, looking around for any challengers. Scáthach then turned to Tim, looking curiously at Mirabelle behind him. "Does it matter who sits in this seat?" Tim challenged. Scáthach shrugged and let it go.

She turned and looked across the room, at the Pirate Lords before her and their Lieutenants beyond. "You have all chosen to take these seats, is there anyone else here who believes they should have the seats instead?" she questioned with a sadistic grin. "This is-" Crach began, before Xerxes stepped forward and slammed his head into the table hard enough to send a crack throughout the stone. Crach pulled his head back, dazed and confused before Xerxes pulled him up to his feet. He threw a punch into the old therian, dropping him to the floor before throwing another and another. The heavy hits changing from thuds to wet impacts. Xerxes then reached down and pulled, a tearing following before with a heavy thud, the lion's head was placed – dripping – onto the table.

Jayce and Kitty stared in horror as a blood covered Xerxes sat down. There was then movement from across the table as the Governor stood up. "No," he said

softly. “No?” he questioned, his mask glowing as he stepped back before he reached up and placed both hands to his mask. He groaned, in severe pain as he pulled. The fused flesh tore underneath as he slowly tore off his new face, his body gargling underneath as huge metallic tendrils were pulled out of his eyes, nose and mouth with a sickening and wet sound. He pulled it free and dropped it, his faceless form staring directly at Jayce before he toppled over – most certainly dead. The female Engine then stepped forwards and sat down.

Tim, Kitty and Jayce stared in horror, mortified by the deaths of their Old World allies. Jayce looked towards Kitty, her eyes widening as she sensed movement behind her. Rebel Red stepped forwards. Her face darkened, her eyes going cold before she shut them, accepting her fate. Somme Ankor then lunged forwards, grabbing the back of Red’s head with his metal hand before slamming it down fast onto the table. With tears in his eye and a look of grief, he raised his right arm before dropping his elbow as hard as he could down onto Red’s neck. There was a loud and audible crack as Red dropped limp to the floor. Somme then stepped back. Kitty didn’t look down, her lip trembled and eyes were blurry but she forced it aside as she turned and looked defiantly towards the Sea Sovereign.

A silence fell as no more moves were made. Blood dripped from the edge of the table and the room waited on edge, but eventually the Sovereign let out a sigh. She turned towards the Machinist, looking not at the puppet in the chair but at the actual Machinist. “I asked for Pirate Lords to sit in the thrones,” she said coldly – the head of the puppet exploding suddenly and violently before the corpse was tossed out of the chair by invisible hands. The entire room sat up, terrified by the sudden violence out of nowhere. The Machinist edged forwards before sitting down.

“Good. Well, the eight of you are now my Pirate Lords. Congratulations, I’m very proud of you,” Scáthach stated. She then stood up and grabbed her throne, dragging it aside to show a better view of the map wall. “Now, as your Sea Sovereign,” she stated, pulling a gold crown out of thin air and placing it on her head. “Everything in this world is mine. However, I can’t be everywhere at once and ruling isn’t quite as fun as it initially sounds. So, I suggest you all divvy it up into territories that you all own. You can do whatever you like to those regions as long as it doesn’t cause trouble for me. If it does cause trouble...” She clicked her fingers and the doors opened, the Betrayers other than Sétanta all stood beyond. The doors then closed. “So, who wants what?”

"I take the centre line of the New World," Jayce stated immediately, urgently making his point. "I take the left of Jayce's territory," Kitty immediately followed up with. "I take the Right. The New World is ours," Tim declared, the three agreeing to an immediate and silent alliance. "I disagree with that," Xerxes growled. Jayce leant forwards to look directly at him. "Tough. Take your new kingdom and the west. Pirate King Xerxes," Jayce growled back. Xerxes nodded in begrudging acceptance, looking towards Scáthach. "I will take the Frontier," Thákane stated quickly.

"Beyond the Frontier is my territory, I will not accept chaos in the New World," Jayce laid out plainly. "Same here," Kitty and Tim mirrored, the three of them presenting a united front. Thákane held up her hands. "Understood, won't be a problem for me as long as you leave the Dragons be." Jayce nodded. *Already got mine, thank you very much.* The Engines, the Machinist and Ningyo all looked at each other. "Oceans are mine," Ningyo stated, the other two nodding. "You may have the centre, as that is already your domain," stated the Engine. "Thank you, you may take the rest," the Machinist said civilly, but with layered threat.

"That was smoother than I expected, good," Scáthach stated, retaking the room. "Now, on the note of the New World, it has come to my attention that some rats have crossed the Frontier. The Republic has been intruding, getting into my business and that's something I cannot tolerate. So, my Pirate Lords, you have an assignment. Your first of many, I'm sure," she stated. Jayce's blood ran cold, his eyes widening as he realised what she was saying, who she was talking about. "Wipe them out, send a message about intruding into my domain. Do whatever you see fit, I don't care for the details, but do not test me." There was a moment of silence. "Go."

The Pirate Lords immediately got to their feet, most heading towards the door. Jayce looked instead towards Scáthach who stared back at him before sticking out her pierced tongue. She winked at him and then vanished, further adding to his concern that she hadn't been truly in his sight from the get-go. "Come on," Kitty stated, unwilling to look at Red as Somme carried him in his arms. "Tim, let's talk outside," she stated.

"One moment," Jayce stated, stepping slowly towards Crach's abandoned corpse with Bjorn. "I'll take him to the ship," Bjorn said softly, "give Thalia a goodbye before we bury him at sea – it's what he'd want." Jayce nodded with approval, leaving him to it before following after Kitty and Tim. He walked around the

back of the hall, finding Kitty wailing loudly as she knelt over Red's corpse. Mirabelle was sat next to her with her arm over her shoulder.

Jayce looked down before looking towards Somme. He was looking away towards the horizon, silently shedding his own tears. Jayce approached him and placed a gentle hand on his arms. The big man nodded before wiping his eyes. "Kitty..." he said softly. She nodded and took several deep breaths before looking towards Jayce and Tim. "What the fuck was that?" she questioned. Jayce and Tim shook their heads. "I don't know," Tim answered.

"We have a theory that the Sovereign can use curses. She targets those closest to you and tries to turn them against you," Jayce stated. Tim nodded in agreement. "Something like that happened to Dorn," he stated, looking towards Mirabelle. She nodded in agreement. Kitty looked down at her fallen friend. "Red never recovered from Anne. He was still mourning her, even now. She must have used that against him."

"I'm sorry your man betrayed you," Tim said earnestly. Kitty and Somme both shook their heads. "He would never betray Kitty," Somme said softly. "It was suicide. He killed himself to protect us from his own perceived weakness." Jayce nodded, uncertain of the truth, but not willing to disregard their perspective. "What about the Pirate Lord attack on the Republic? Alara, my siblings," Astris inserted, changing to the topic.

Kitty and Jayce both looked to her. "She's right," Jayce stated. "We have to stop the Pirate Lords from wiping out the Vanguard Fleet. I'm going to send them a warning, hopefully that will be enough," he stated, looking towards Kitty and Tim. Kitty sighed. "You've dragged us into it now, if word gets back to the Sovereign we'll be in trouble for not stopping you. Guess I might as well help." They looked towards Tim. "Was there ever a doubt?"

Seize the Seas Tales: The Scourge

Falconer watched Bjorn, Astris, Arthuria and Jayce depart for the Revelry from above. He flew through the skies aboard Wren, enjoying the peace of the winds and the warm sun. They circled for a bit before Falconer turned his attention towards the south, a red haze on the horizon. "Come on, Wren," he told her, the pair of them flying onwards. A buzz filled his mind, his lungs starting to clog up as they approached. His arm ached, the wood twisting uncomfortably as they flew. Wren cooed. "I'm okay, keep going," he stated, reaching up to touch Horus' gemstone, still tied to a string around his neck.

They flew closer, the green tinge of Leylines to the north blending into the red haze ahead as Falconer looked around. Eventually an island came into view, although it looked more like a huge crater in his eyes, with high walls and a barren pit inside. "How odd," he stated, sensing beyond the crater the makings of a Leyline, one that was weak and flickering. Wren let out an alarmed screech as they passed, promptly turning to angle away from something. "What is it?" he questioned, his eyes widening as he saw the ocean end.

It was like nothing he had ever seen before. The ocean stopped just past the island, falling straight into a huge waterfall that fell straight down onto an expanse of red sand as far as the eye could see. There was nothing, no visible life, only a scourge on the world. A land of death, where the Leylines had been killed. Falconer stared at the sight in horror, his entire being repulsed by the sight ahead of him. He stared at the necrotic part of the world before turning away. "What could have done something like that? What could have killed part of the world?"

How can I fix it?