

Chapter Fourteen: The James Island That Once Was - Part Two

James raised his brows. He somehow knew what Sam was talking about.

The eagerness in Sam's eyes told James he had sensed his thoughts. "How about it?"

James's stomach tightened as he nodded and cleared his throat. He had been waiting two years for this.

"A tale?" Evan asked.

"Oh, aye." Sam sat on the far end of James's bed, turning to face him. "I have to tell James how he lost his memory."

The words sent another chill through James. On the other bed, Evan hugged his knees. He looked like a child who really was settling in for a good story.

James resisted saying anything, not wanting to prolong what Sam had to say. He waited, mentally preparing himself.

"The James Island that once was," Sam began, "was a gifted Oneron soldier. He attended the Allied Starfield Training Academy, and graduated to join a military fleet, serving on their largest ship as part of their guard squadron. His father, Hayden Island, was a well-known and highly respected war hero, having fought in some of the galaxy's most recent notable wars. But that achievement came at a price, and Hayden made many enemies along the way. His most powerful rival, a warlord named Doon, decided that he would strike a definitive blow against his sworn enemy. A personal blow. He set out to kill Hayden's son, James Island. What happened next was told to me by several people, their accounts piecing together the following events, as I understand them.

"While returning from a diplomatic assignment, the warship James served on, The Keystone, was attacked by Doon's forces. The ship was breached and Doon's men set out to kill everyone on board. Severely outnumbered, James and a few of his surviving guards commenced a daring counter attack. Knowing the warship better than the invaders, they managed to infiltrate the command deck and gain control of the ship. A distress signal was sent out, while James aimed the ship towards the nearest planet. His bravery and fortitude landed that ship, saving the lives of all the remaining survivors on board. But the attackers persisted, taking the fight onto the planet.

"As James and his men fought back, another ship arrived. Doon. Accompanied by hundreds of his guards, along with his personal guardsman, Garland Vas. Another ally of Doon's showed himself that day. Valdragannon, also known as The Dark Sorcerer."

"The Dark Sorcerer," James said quietly. "The one that's been looking for me." He shuddered.

Sam nodded gravely. "The very same. He has been looking for you by command from Doon."

James's brows furrowed. Doon. He thought he had heard the name before.

"Seeking the advantage," Sam went on, "James and his men ascended a surveillance tower that reached dozens of kilometres in the air. As Oneron soldiers, climbing the tower was little effort to James's squad. It was on the summit of the tower that they made their last stand. Using their grapple hooks, they swung in and out and around the tower, picking off Doon's men as they approached them.

"When only James and two other men remained, another ship broke atmosphere. Hayden had arrived, accompanied by his mentor and war friend, the Oneron sorcerer Ghannim. The two of them joined the battle that would later be known as the Dalgredda Valley Attack. During the chaos, the fight was broken up, and James found himself faced alone with Doon. While James was a trained and talented Oneron soldier, his sword and magical skills were no match for the powerful warlord. James suffered devastating injuries and was left mortally wounded. Before Doon could finish the kill, he was pushed back by a great force summoned by Ghannim, which allowed them time to gather James and get away.

"Back at a secret hideout of Hayden's, they found that James's injuries were beyond healing, and he was minutes from death. Determined not to lose his son, Hayden did the only thing he could to save James. Use the ultimate power in the galaxy. Coincidence or fate, it happened to be that, at that time, Hayden was in possession of all fourteen Gynen Crystals. An unprecedented event that has not often occurred in history. But as it was, with the means and knowledge to wield the power of all the crystals, Ghannim helped Hayden conduct an unprecedented healing spell to save James. His body waning, James Island was brought back from the edge of death. But Hayden and Ghannim found that they were partially too late. James's mind had already begun to fade, and when he was restored, his mind remained in the state it had been. It resulted in James losing all personal memories of himself, save for the last piece to go, his most powerful personal knowledge—his name.

"Fearing another attempt on his life, and not knowing what else to do, Hayden made the difficult decision to send his son away, to begin a new life of anonymity, away from Doon's reach. He saw James's amnesia as a sign for him to start afresh. Perhaps a decision made by the gods. Whether Hayden made the right choice or not is open for endless debate, but he did what he thought was best. To give his son a life to continue to live. In some way."

Sam paused his story. He looked off into the distance with unfocussed eyes and fell into thought. A heavy silence filled the room. James sat there, numb, taking everything in. Eventually Sam turned back to him.

"The James Island that once was, ceased to exist, and a new James Island, you, was born. Now you are both the same person, of course. But it is important to differentiate the two of you, as you will not return to the person you used to be. You are now a whole new person who will, by definition, be a unique individual based on your own experiences and

knowledge. Which will be different to the person you would have become. No one can say if that's a good thing or not, of course. Only you can determine the path you will go on."

James's core had gone numb. He absorbed everything and tried to parse them into some kind of coherence. He could feel Sam's eyes on him, but could only stare at the floor right then.

"Whether you like it or not, it's the right way," James muttered, his voice barely audible. The words echoed his conversation with Sam yesterday in Tyken Town, about events in life happening for a reason. Whatever happened, for good or for bad, was the right way for your life to progress. That was the belief of the philosopher, Nephagaroi Elms, and was what James also believed.

Evan's bed creaked as he shifted his position. "The Gynen Crystals," he said. "I have not heard of such a power."

James continued to stare at the floor, unable to move or talk. He was vaguely aware of Sam talking.

"They are crystals that hold the power of each Universal God," Sam told Evan. "Formed before any records of time began, each god created their own crystal, which are believed to strengthen their own power in the mortal realm. The Voarn may know them by a different name."

"I do not believe I have heard of any such thing. But I am surprised that such godly possessions exist."

"Most have remained undiscovered for millennia," Sam explained. "One Gynen Crystal can be devastating. Someone who possessed a crystal, and was strong enough to utilise it, would instantly become a Master of its magical source. Having more crystals can create a power strong enough to destroy planets. With all fourteen under your control..."

Sam let the thought linger and went on. "It is believed that a person in possession of all the Gynen Crystals can summon any kind of power imaginable, as they are able to manipulate the combined powers of all the gods. This is true, to an extent. While it doesn't make the owner more powerful than all the Universal Gods combined, if their infinite power can even be quantified, it would still make a person the most powerful force in the mortal realm. If they were strong enough to wield such power."

"And James's father happened to be in possession of all fourteen of these crystals?" Evan asked. "Godly artefacts that have been missing for millennia?"

"While the law states that any found Gynen Crystal be handed in to the nearest governing body, to be issued to the Uri-Thuren Council, Hayden took it upon himself to hoard all the crystals he came across. It took him the better part of eighty years, by some accounts, and

he eventually gathered all fourteen. He must have felt they were safer locked away in his secret locations."

Their voices faded as James fell deeper into his thoughts. A familiar black hole of uncertainty threatened to devour him. All sense of his body and physical presence fell away as his vision blurred, his entire being existing in an immeasurable state of oblivion. It was all too much for him. Hearing about who he used to be. How he had almost died. The incredible power his father had wielded in order to save him. And he still wasn't safe. It wasn't over yet. He may not remember his old life, but his old life hadn't forgotten him. His mind swam in a chaotic mess.

James endured the mindless state for some time, before he snapped back to reality.

He looked at the concerned faces of Sam and Evan, who were watching him now. *I can't do this*, he suddenly thought. *I can't be here any more.*

He found himself rising from the bed, moving as if in slow motion, his feet solidifying on the floor. His companions did not speak as he strode to the door and left the room.