

CHAPTER 1

An Auspicious Start

August 11, 2026

Author's Note

There is a (perfectly legitimate) tendency to dislike a certain kind of surprise being sprung on the reader—where what they think is happening and what is actually happening are quite different.

As such, I am making a note of it right now that there are basic things Nathan thinks are true that are not. Consider this a warning.

The 3rd of Ascending Water, Marsday, Realm Year 762

“Drink, drink. You were human, right,” The Dreamer stated more than asked, “Humans love drinking.”

“Ah, thank you,” I replied, taking a careful sip. To be frank, I didn’t like drinking; it was not a moral objection. I just didn’t like the loss of control. But I wasn’t going to tell my companions that. My appointment could have gone badly, and I wasn’t going to risk it so soon by offending them.

The taste was intensely mineral, which isn’t normally how I would describe something pleasant, but honestly the only reason I wouldn’t call it the best thing I had ever drank was that the private festival I attended as my introduction to the Court had a tea that I could only compare to a religious experience. With fear, to be clear; I didn’t want to want *anything* that much.

“It’s delicious,” I said truthfully.

The Court of Seasons was currently quartering within The House of the Nine Hearths of Emerald and Silver, the home of the Ennead, the patron gods of some nation called the Haslanti League. Evidently choosing them as our hosts was minorly scandalous, a way of pushing back on the authority Heaven had so recently applied to them. Since my appointment was part of that self-same exercise of authority, I was unsure how to feel about it.

We were currently... well, holding court, basically... within a great hall that had been repurposed to hold us. Most of the pantheon giving us shelter were not home. I still was getting my head around the local seasons, but evidently the

Month of Ascending Water was a busy one for the Ennead. It kind of seemed strange to me that we were being given the run of the place, and it was considered a big honor *and* transgressive of us to pick them as our hosts, yet at the same time it wasn't an insult for none of the Ennead to be here.

But then, I had been a god for all of three weeks. So what did I know? Truly, I was grateful and more than a little overwhelmed still. Things could have been so much worse. That said, we were hardly alone. The Ennead had left servants to take care of us, and we were making full use of their home to hold a gala. While by tradition only the god of the preceding, current, and next month needed to be present, there were more of us than that.

For Descending Air, that was The Dreamer, who it seemed had been assigned as my first teacher. Maybe they took up the role themselves? They were friendly enough, but they seemed friendly to everyone, so I wasn't sure how real it was. They were androgynous, and I wasn't sure of their current gender—maybe masculine? While their form did change depending on which way they were feeling, it wasn't always on a level where it was obvious. I was trying to be careful about it. They looked like a hospital patient wasting away—maybe fifty pounds soaking wet, at a respectable 5'8. Though their hair was wine-dark and lush, and they were well groomed. I always got the feeling they were stoned, too. Not just from the name.

The gods of the current month, the Calendar gods of Ascending Water, were the Cold Roars. They were a pair of giant bears. But while the Dreamer was playing host and teaching me the ropes, the Cold Roars had excused themselves the night before to hunt... I think dogs? I didn't quite understand that part, though I felt vaguely horrified about it. But I felt vaguely horrified by many things.

The gods of Resplendent Water, of the next month... They were The Three. They were like a genderflipped witches' coven—The Boy, the Father, and the Codger? Whatever. They were made from ice, and if this was a DnD session I would have guessed they were some kind of elementals. Luckily, I hadn't *said* that, because I'm pretty sure they would have been insulted. And to be frank they gave me witchy vibes, and I didn't want them angry at me.

They were the ones 'in charge' of the current court. But they weren't the only ones present.

I was sure The Whisperer—the god in charge of Descending Earth—was positively

inclined towards me, but mainly because I was essentially told as much. That his support had been arranged. But as he rarely talked, and he seemed to be putting most of his efforts into rebuilding his connections with the hangers on of the Court, we had barely interacted.

Lastly, the Golden Stars were present—six identical women. Their complexions and features struck me as being Arabic—except there was no such thing here in Creation, so I supposed I needed to update my ethnic library. While they were decidedly average in appearance, they all had a vivacious air to them, and I would have been charmed to have a girl like that pay attention to me. Just not *them*, because they low-key terrified me.

And then there was me. The new calendar god, the god of Calibration, the five days that weren't part of any season, a 'month' unto themselves. Theoretically, this was my formal public introduction to godly society. Since I'm pretty sure we would be throwing a festival anyways, I didn't take it very seriously.

The Dreamer picked away at a shallow bowl they had at their side, rolling together a ball of something gray and stringy, before popping it in their mouth, and returning their attention to me.

"So, what you have to understand," they said, resuming our earlier conversation, "is that our job is to represent and inspire."

They languidly gestured at all the strangeness gathered in the hall, the gathered gods milling about the other members of the Court. While the Ennead weren't home, their home was full of people wanting to meet us, along with some of the Ennead's servants taking care of our needs.

"The Bureau of Seasons might make everything run, but they're staid and humorless. See, they don't make people believe that things should keep running. They don't get people invested in the system. People need symbols, patriotism for reality, you might call it."

They threw a few more strands in their mouth, musing over their thoughts before speaking, "The seasons aren't just physical. We might not make it snow, but we make snow a time for families to come together and celebrate. You aren't going to go and fix the Loom during Calibration, no. But it's your job to make it a celebration, rather than let everyone be terrified that a demon is going to crawl through their shadow and eat their spleen."

They took a long draw from their pipe, and the smoke they blew out smelled foul, before even more languidly continuing, “They make nature run. We make people happy that nature’s running. The seasons turn according to the design of Heaven, but we make it so that’s something to celebrate.”

Yeah. My isekai cheat? Literally godhood. As in, I was a god when I wandered, confused, out of that stupid hole in reality. And hey, while I didn’t start out a god of anything in particular, they made me a Calendar God. That had to be a big deal, right? It had to make me a big deal, right? This was the start of my adventure, right?

No. No it didn’t. Instead I got an official apology of ‘whatever hole from beyond you fell through has been *officially* recognized as our fault’, and then whisked off to a position where I couldn’t damage anything with my complete lack of qualification as that apology.

Maybe it was way better than I had any right to expect. Maybe it was an actually prestigious position. Maybe it came with some real respect. But I couldn’t get over the fact that I was a *cheerleader*. As in, my job was to hype up the change of seasons, and run a bunch of parties. Only not actually run the parties, because that was too much responsibility. Enliven them by my presence and claim responsibility for the work more qualified people did.

“Calibration really is terrifying if you think about it for more than a minute,” I said honestly, because it was. “I hope I can live up to the expectations you’ve all placed in me by trusting me with the responsibility.”

The trust in this case was ‘The Bureau of Destiny will help you make a fall guy to cover for your crimes in return for solving one of their problems.’ While I might be misunderstanding the situation somewhat—in fact, I’m sure I was, simply because everyone involved was a lying criminal and I lacked context—the basic gist of it was this. The whole Court of Seasons did *so much crime* that there were binders worth of blackmail material against them gathering dust. They broke Heaven’s laws left and right, and got away with it on account of being popular enough that no one wanted the headache.

And like all things ‘no one wanted’, it was a homeostasis that lasted until someone *did*. Evidently, The Whisperer’s court had been used to launder a little bit *too* much money from Heaven for it to be overlooked. I didn’t really get the context, but for some reason no one who mattered thought the Whisperer himself had

anything to do with it, but it was being held against the Court as a whole. The Unseen—the Calendar Gods of Ascending Air—had stolen something (never named) that they really shouldn't from the Bureau of Humanity. The Seven Fangs—they were these giant maneating foxes, and the gods of Ascending Wood—had killed the godblooded scion of... I didn't quite catch the name... and he had actual legal protection that actually mattered for reasons that escaped me and wouldn't apply to all their *other* murder. And those were only the opening act.

On the flip side, the Bureau of Destiny was always happy to help execute more gods, because dead gods could be turned into some kind of super-special magical metal called 'Starmetal.' Which was an amazingly happy thought to discover, you know, as a new god. And while the crimes were serious, the Court would have been able to avoid being executed. But if they were allowed to *shift* the blame...

Still, shifting *that* much blame around, doing that much of a frame job, was more than the Bureau of Destiny would do *just* for a handful of minor gods getting executed. What they wanted was this:

The Court of Seasons had an open slot. It was prestigious and harmless, and it let them wash their hands of me. There were fifteen months plus Calibration. All fifteen seats had been fighting over getting Calibration, even though Calibration is only five days. Handing it off to me denied everyone the chance to expand their own domains, but I would be weaker and less prestigious than the rest, *and* none of their rivals would get it.

In return, *binders* worth of crime disappeared. The freaky destiny wizards in the Bureau of Destiny got a nice toy. The status quo of the Court of Seasons got slightly more stable without the infighting over Calibration. And Heaven could officially say they did right by me for whatever ripped me from earth to, to... To this messed up fever-dream. Like something between a bronze age Conan-style horror show, and Asura's Wrath.

I set my half empty cup on the dais beside me. "If we're supposed to be inspiration, shouldn't we be out there in the world?"

"Oh," a perky voice interrupted our conversation. One of the Golden Stars was climbing up the steps of the dais, before plopping herself down on one of the floor cushions, "we will be!"

She picked up my cup and swallowed most of it down, before using it to gesture to

the rest of the crowd, “We’ve agreed to hold court within the territory of the Ennead till the next Carnival of Meetings. That said, we don’t want a bunch of mortal petitioners dying in the snow before they even meet us—it would look bad.”

The Dreamer started preparing her a pipe of whatever they were smoking as she continued talking. “We don’t want to be cheap, and some of them dying is good for that. People value something risky more than something safe, you know? And some of us just run very dangerous courts. That’s all fine. But if they start dying before they even reach our court...”

She shrugged as the Dreamer reached past me to hand her the pipe. The smoke briefly made the angles of the room twist, and I held my breath to avoid inhaling any more of the stuff. She took a drag before finishing her speech. “It might hurt how many petitioners we get in the future. It would make more people think they didn’t have a chance, which isn’t what we want.”

She let out a sigh, as she sprawled deeper into her cushion. It would have made for a tempting sight—something I sort of suspected was intentional—except for the part where she scared me, and her statement about the appropriate number of deaths disgusted me.

But I held my tongue as the Dreamer’s lethargic voice picked back up, walking me through all the festivals we were officially responsible for. It made for quite a list. It felt intimidating. The fact that there were no real expectations for me didn’t help.

I had expectations for me.

The 4th of Ascending Water, Mercuryday, Realm Year 762

I looked around my current bedroom. Sometime between going to bed last night, and waking today I felt... better. More grounded. It was the second time that happened. Something about my messed up way of entering this universe fixing itself? Something like that.

I felt good. Great really, physically speaking. That was pleasant, but not so pleasant that it made me want to actually finish getting out of bed, so I sat, half covered in the fur blankets, enjoying the crisp chill.

Against one wall was a dresser with the handful of clothes I had hanging from it. My outfit from the day before hung there—already cleaned by the Sanctum’s

scarily efficient servants. Most of the rest of the room was piled with gifts. Boxes spilling over boxes, forming into drifts that—while maybe not deep enough to drown in—had certainly graduated from ‘tripping hazard’ to ‘navigation hazard.’ Which was fine with me, since I didn’t really want to go anywhere. Though it probably wasn’t to be, since...

My door banged open. Lird Melo, the middle figure of The Three, entered with a purple haired goddess I hadn’t met before, and a trailing tail of house-staff. I wasn’t sure if I would call him a ‘young man’ or ‘middle aged.’ Right on that border, absurdly handsome like a movie character stepped off the big screen. While he was made from ice, that didn’t make him see-through. His colors were off, and he gleamed, but he wasn’t monotoned. He had black hair, though it looked more like ink than human hair, and eyes the dark red of frozen wine. He had that ‘something Asian in the last couple generations’ look of Keanu Reeves, if Keanu Reeves was 6’10 and had biceps bigger than a woman’s waist. Like... he was shredded. *Absurdly* shredded. Grate cheese on his abs shredded. He wore a two-layer robe, but it wasn’t quite closed right, letting a bit of his chest show and leaving him looking disheveled. It was intentional—he *always* looked tousled.

“Slow morning? I’ll join you for breakfast today,” he stated casually as he walked to my small table. “It’s not good for us to be too present since it’s not our month. Don’t want to be too available.”

He casually gestured at the trailing servants to get me dressed as he started nosing his way through the gifts.

“Not a problem for you, really, since you just have the Carnival of Meetings, and that has a somewhat different balance to it.” He studied a velvet bag for a moment. It was sewn shut, but his eyes seemed to see through the cover, and after a moment he handed it to one of the attendants to put on the table, before going back to rooting through the piles.

“Anyways, this is Vevin, goddess of... you’re a lake goddess, right?” At the woman’s nod he continued, “She’s volunteered to teach you Old Realm Script, Geomancy, get you started on basic orphiology... we have you with her for about five hours a day for the next week. See if she’s worth using. Don’t be afraid to toss her if she’s useless. You’re doing her a favor, don’t hand those out if the petitioner isn’t worth your time.” He shrugged, before walking to the table with two more packages.

While this had been going on, the ever-efficient servants of the house had gotten me up out of bed, found several gifts that evidently were clothes (this had been how all of my wardrobe had thus far been procured), and not only had they finished dressing me, they were halfway through applying makeup and fixing my hair.

Makeup, it seemed, wasn't a gendered accessory in Creation. Thanks, Creation. I hate it.

As I was seated at the little table with Lird and the now named Vevin, I studied her while Lird opened the packages he had picked out— the velvet bag held some kind of tea-set complete with a selection of teas, while the other packages turned out to be a cured meat spread, and a kind of large thick cracker. Before he had finished unpacking them, the servants had found a hot-plate, dishes, and silverware from among my unopened gifts.

I couldn't be sure exactly since Creation didn't use American Customary, but I think my apotheosis had put about five inches on my height, boosting me from a sort of average 5'10 to about 6'3. Somewhere in there, at least. Vevin looked to be a bit taller than me, maybe an inch or two. While I hadn't seen her shoes, I had yet to see heels. She wore dark blue, and both her hair and eyes were a purple verging on black. Her dress seemed to swish as if alive as she moved, and for a moment it was like her skirt was a tail—an image that swiftly vanished when she sat, but stuck with me.

She gave me a small confident little smile, unconcerned with Lird's dismissive attitude, and a deferential little bow that somehow managed to be amused. Considering Lird's attitude towards her, there was something wrong here. Like always, I lacked context.

"Nice to meet you Vevin," I said, nodding in acknowledgement, and feeling awkward. I would normally shake hands, but I was told that while there was a similar custom in a few places in Creation, it wouldn't be appropriate. An important god could get away with sticking with their favored cultural norms, but even then, such a gesture was only appropriate towards peers. It left me feeling rude, and I didn't know what to do with my hands instead, so I just played with the silverware. "I just hope you don't find me a frustrating student. I don't know what orphiology is."

She lightly shook her head as I tried a bite of crackers with meat spread. Delicious

of course.

“I’m sure you’ll be a fine student. I’ve taught mortals, I’m sure a young god will prove a more able student.”

I wasn’t.

“Oh,” Lird interrupted, “do you need to top off?” For a moment, a blue-green glow snaked around his fingers like a cat’s cradle.

“Nope.” I lightly shook my head, and genuinely smiled. “I started respiring essence last night.”

“You did?” There was a flash of curiosity there. “It seems your apotheosis is fixing itself. Before long you’ll be a real god.”

Ah, yeah. I wonder why I didn’t want to start the day.

“You couldn’t naturally regain essence?” Vevin asked.

“Don’t ask questions outside your station.” Lird didn’t even look at her when he responded for me, an almost bored tone to his voice. “Anyways, if you don’t need a pick-me-up anymore, I’ll leave you to your day. Resplendent Water is going to be taking our leave of the Sanctum for the day. Only the Dreamer is going to be holding court. It’s really disgraceful the way the Cold Roars treat their court. It’s their month—they’re supposed to be the key figures here. See you tomorrow at the latest.”

He finished his last bite, nodded, and left trailed by servants. Two of them stayed—I guess my escort for the day.

“Before we get started, what should I call you? I only know you as the new Calibration god.”

“Ah. I’m Nathan,” I replied. The first part of my name was just my old name. But the Heavens had assigned me a new one too. Didn’t know how I felt about it.

“Nathan Nozi.”

Author’s Note

So something that I always forget until I go and look at the months...

In Exalted, air is associated with Cold, and the North. Yep, fine. We’re all on a page here. Water is associated with the West, and has lots of variations, but

thematically kind of defaults to a Mediterranean Sea for a Greek Mythology Style. Okay, we're still tracking.

However, the *season* of Air, the season when the elemental pole of Air is ascendent, is *autumn*. Winter is in the season of Water.

Why? Well, I'm guessing early on Water was going to be the 'cold' element, because ice=water, and so they arranged the seasons thus, and it never got changed even after they shifted cold to Air.

Well... this far north, Air is going to be pretty wintery, too. But I keep wanting to call winter 'air' and it's 'water.' Anyways, I thought I would share.

So there's **this old thing** about how spelling and names were done in the Old Realm. Not official, but I like it well enough. In this case, Nozi means Void-link-Lord. That said, this isn't a very expansive list of characters—I'm going with 'there are degrees', and the void in his name is similar but not the same as 'The Void.' In this case, it means hollow.

Basically Nozi means 'hollow lord' or 'lord of nothing.' Officially he has that because Calibration is the 'null' value in the calendar, the time that isn't, so he's the Calendar Lord for 'this time does not exist/the value is NULL.'