

Some say that there is a lot of meaning to people's names. I'm one of those that would agree and believe that I was named deliberately and cursed. My name is not anything remarkable like "Danger" or "Glory" or a name that means those things. My name instead is Bane. Look it up; it's a great name to give a child when there's no interest in keeping the child's welfare sane. I feel at times that my existence to my parents was precisely that, I was the bane of her existence.

At eighteen, I think I have to agree with my name and that I'm my own bane of existence. I'm barely six-foot, and my peers usually avoid me despite a full head of sandy brown hair, a scratchy beard scarcely two weeks old, and an athletic build. I'm single, living at home, which does sound like the goal of so many eighteen year old uninspired to accomplish anything in their lives. Humans on Earth would be preparing to learn their desired trade or further academic education.

Oh yeah, I should mention, I'm not on Earth. I wasn't even born on Earth. Some on Earth would think I'm not even human, though I am. The planet I'm from is Magis. It's a decent planet, and from what I have seen of Earth, it's very similar, climate-wise. Magis is a little larger and closer to the system's star, but I never paid close attention to the science classes taught here.

Regardless of where my planet and star system are, I figured I should clear things up. I realize that I painted a bleak picture of my home life, and it is not as bad as it sounds. My parents weren't bad; I had a roof over my head and a bedroom that was mine. But the family was large enough where the oldest took care of the youngest. I feel closer to my oldest sister Regeen than I ever did to my parents. Most of my family isn't in this, but I had to clarify before you all began to believe that I was abused.

Where am I going with this? You all need a little background. By the time I turned eighteen, I had broken ten bones, all different. The only reason my nose isn't crooked like a crone, hunched over, or walking with a limp is that I'm a mage. Though it's probably because internal healing is taught in our first years.

Magis, home of the mage and so original that I couldn't imagine what the founders thought when that name was picked. Of course, it is spelled close to our classification of humans. I'm confident that we're human; that's what I learned in biology. We're just genetically gifted with powers that some would deem, unnatural.

At the time this story started, I worked a simple job. It was a position within the Magis college. I sorted spell usage that covers the whole planet. There aren't many people here (not like Earth), but the government's method to ensure the safe practice of magic is to monitor the type and amount of magic used. That's my job. I'm on a task force that sorts through and visits households using questionable magic. That might sound exciting, but houses are registered for the type of magic users, and if there is a spike in magic that isn't natural to that house, we pay them a visit. It's pretty dull, not that I care about that. Unlike my other two siblings, I haven't had to go on a call yet. They work in enforcement, the closest thing we have to cops.

See, I'm not an energy mage like they are. My specific areas are conjuring, illusions and on top of that, I'm a wind elemental. Enforcement officers are usually energy mages. They're strong with fire and, well, lasers. That's the best way I can explain it. Being able to throw energy beams capable of going through almost anything is why they're considered for enforcement officers first. Fortunately, a conjurer can create something strong enough to block that stuff. I'll probably mention this more than once, but this is an excellent time to say I'm pretty strong. My conjuring is usually good enough to block anything my siblings have thrown at me.

I was actually at the top of my craft, skill, and power. My power will top out by the time I'm twenty-one, and at eighteen, I'm already more powerful than both my parents and my siblings. Still didn't matter when it came to others around me. Power might be attractive, but personally, I didn't care and preferred it that way. Eighteen, and if I made plans, I'd be preparing to become a hermit.

Sitting in my office half asleep, I get a call from my mother's office, a college Chair. I keep rambling about what's around me, and I have barely touched this story, so I'm not going to go too deep on my family's fame. We're part of the founding twenty, the twenty families that first left Earth. More followed, but the first twenty here established everything needed to sustain a large population on Magis for the last several hundred years.

I'm minding my own business, and my mother asked me to run delivery to another office a few buildings away, which did not really make sense because my mother is a teleport and could have quickly sent it that way instead of asking me, on my lunch.

I was focused on getting this errand out of the way that I never noticed a dwarf following me through the college grounds. This should have been something that stuck out to me because dwarves live in another system by themselves and rarely move around off the planet. I placed the Thaumaturgic/Psionic suspect report into the in-box of the office clerk my mother asked me to and turned to realize that a dwarf was in my way.

"I'm looking for Ban-e?"

I guess this had to be the first time that he'd been on the planet, as they're more isolated than I would want to be. I'm anti-social and would love to be a hermit, but I also recognize that contact with others is a norm for humans and mages. He had a strange accent that was a cross between how I imagine oriental and a Scott trying to talk without knowing proper names. My point is, he brutalized my name, "I'm Bane."

"I need your help in conjuring something for me."

I closed my eyes as I tried to figure out his reason for seeking me out. "You know there are shops that sell their services, right? I only got my degree two months ago."

"Aye. Looked there, and none said to have the ability I'm asking for. The last mage gave me your name and pointed here for help."

"They said Bane Tamos specifically?"

The dwarf handed me a piece of paper, (yeah we still hadn't integrated digital notes), and my name and location were there. I closed my eyes again, thankful I had not developed a headache yet. It was bound to happen with a dwarf being directed to me, "Was that from Destiny Lous?"

"The lass never gave me her name, but the shop was Lous Conjure."

"What do you need to be conjured?" I figured I could get the dwarf whatever he needed, and I could get to lunch. "Most things that get conjured don't stay for more than a fortnight. And that's if the object is in the same area as the conjurer. Not sure how I could be of help with whatever you're needing."

"Yeah, that's the...issue." The dwarf glanced around before leading me out of the office with a beckoning wave.

I shouldn't have followed, but I was certainly curious about what precisely the dwarf needed. We paused outside the building, and he glanced around again (shifty little bugger). "I need something conjured off-world."

Muttering a curse a little too loud, he loosed a laugh at my colorful metaphor, "What exactly are we talking about?"

"A paid week's vacation. Handsomely assuming you can conjure up what is needed. Five hundred gold."

I sucked in my breath. Five hundred gold is what I would make in maybe two years at my desk job scanning for magic. To get that much in a week, I stopped myself there, "Illegal and dangerous, I assume?"

"There might be something like that involved. But you wouldn't have to leave the ship."

"What planet?"

"Planets. Earth and then we're headed to Laocadia."

Earth, such a bad idea. I wanted to walk away and decline the offer. Still, five hundred gold was not something that I could ignore, and woefully, I let greed decide my answer, "What's your name?"

"Fulman. Chester Fulman."

"I'm going to have to clock out and let my job know that I'm taking a few personal days."

"Of course." He handed me a datapad with a mess of information. "This has the landing pad and ship information. Once you're there, we'll be able to get out of here."

I took it and glanced at the information before stuffing the pad into my pocket. Chester left quickly, and I was surprised that he went in the correct direction. I looked around the courtyard. Classes were in session, so it was empty minus a few tardy students. With a sigh, I went to tell my boss the fantastic news.

As soon as I got on the ship, I was going to ask a bunch of questions because my mind was playing tricks on me. My boss did not really ask any questions, which at the time I didn't think was strange. I

certainly didn't think there would be a conspiracy against me, nobody I knew hated me, and my mom wouldn't set something up like this, I hope.

Another issue that I realized I'd forgotten was that I had not stopped at home and packed anything. All that I had on me was my clothes to work today. It wasn't much either. A pair of khaki slacks, a couple pockets on them, and then a dark purple shirt that was as plain as I am. The only other thing is an ankle-length black cloak, sleeveless with a hood.

There is a probability that I could just conjure something if I really get tired of the clothes I'm wearing. As I'm powerful, I wouldn't have to worry about the primary conjuring rule, 'never rely on a conjuration'. This was heavily emphasized with clothes too. Imagine wearing conjured clothing in front of an audience, and the conjuring expires. I don't need to detail that for everybody.

These thoughts escaped me as I approached the ship and saw the dwarf at the base of a ramp. It was an Ovlov class freighter. It is primarily round, a smooth, oval ship with its cockpit at the top of the craft. I could see the four landing gear surrounding the brownish-gray-colored ramp, a step above rust. But it was far from a rust bucket. This class isn't cheap. Even I know this fact with my desire to remain home and accomplish nothing. It could jump between systems within a short amount of time. We could make it to Earth in three days. A military frigate would take at least a week to make the same trip. At least that's how I understood it all.

As I approached the dwarf at the bottom of the saucer, he waved me over, "Nice of you ta make it. Forgettin' anything?"

"If you're referring to a focus, I don't need one," I answered. For centuries, there's been debate about using a focus within the magical community. Some prefer to use a wand or staff for their magic, and I have read about gems being used. The few times that I tried a wand, I felt limited. A staff can be volatile, and just because I read about gems doesn't mean I know anybody with that type of focus. There are instances it could be helpful though, a focus can bring control to some spells. Menial tasks, in my opinion, like a ball of light. Without a focus, you'd have that in your hand, but one allows the user to focus it in a specific direction, like a torch or flashlight. My powers usually don't need that as conjuring and illusions are brand spectrum magics. Most enforcement officers do carry a focus, but as I mentioned before, they are energy wielders. That extra control with fire magic helps, or so I've been told.

"Cap'n!" He shouted, and I winced.

Apparently, the captain he was calling for thought the same, and I heard a woman's voice answer in annoyance, "I'm right here, no need to shout."

"Aight. Here's that boyo we were told to find."

I frowned at that and was about to ask when the captain, I assume it was the captain, appeared at the top of the ramp. She was a she-elf. The tall, elvish female walked toward me. She was six inches taller than me, with a pistol on her right side, and I noticed a knife handle in her knee-high leather boots.

She rattled something off to the dwarf in another language, dwarfish, I guess, and Chester laughed. As she turned to face me again, I realized that I had missed a detail; she was missing an eye. I didn't actually find that out until later as the right side of her face was under a large bandage, and she could only see out of her left eye. The eye was brown and it sort of matched her white hair? Long, straight, white hair that was untouched by any accessory. Most of the observations were made later because I tried hard not to stare at her face. First impressions and all.

"Captain June. You're Bane?"

"Bane Tamos?"

"You don't really sound sure of yourself." She was smirking at me. I resisted the urge to roll my eyes, even females from other species I'm awkward.

"Bane Tamos, Mage."

"I hope so. Fulman insisted that we grab a mage for our mission, and you were recommended by most of the people in the market."

Mission? Why was I recommended? I wasn't really told anything except that I merely would have to conjure something for him. June turned, and the dwarf and I followed her onto the ship. The ramp began to close as I stepped in the circular belly hold of the ship. "What exactly am I going to be needed for?"

"You have your bags, right?" June asked, "Or did you shrink them and have them in a pocket?"

I know that I froze at her question, the hiss of the ramp behind me sealing my fate of not having luggage. This was the moment that I realized that my packing had been neglected. I know I stood there dumbly looking at her as my name joined fate in a foreshadow that I wouldn't realize until this whole affair was over.

There was nothing to do now except follow Captain June. She was disappearing out of the hold and up a stairwell on the far side of it all. There wasn't any cargo to get around, and I figured we would pick it up on Earth since that was our destination. It could be our destination. So far, I'm not really getting a coordinated vibe among this crew, and I've only met two out of...I have no idea, really. I should have asked a few more questions before agreeing to this.

The flooring was a metal mesh. Like walking on a window screen, except this was solid material. Some weird mineral found only on Laocadia, the elvish world. I realized that Chester disappeared in another direction, "So what exactly am I going to be needed for?"

June ignored my question, "So this is going to be your berth."

She opened the door to the right in the hallway. Yeah, everything bent inward. Living in a world where everything was right angles and straight up, down, and across, coming on to a ship where everything was rounded and circular. I half expected to walk on the walls during the system transition.

"You ever been off-world?"

I shook my head after realizing she had asked the question, "Never been off the surface. Well, there were some flying lessons. Most of us...."

"Don't care. You're not going to be flying this ship. You're here because we were told to get you. Now, if you don't mind. Let's get to the common room. It's where all the meals and everything is done."

I tried to glance into my room as she turned on her heel and kept going at a fast pace. My quick glance into the spherical room showed me that I would be living in a goldfish bowl for the next week. I caught nothing else except it was open to space and crystal clear.

I chased after Captain June, "Excuse me, Captain?"

She continued to ignore me and pointed to a cabin to her right. "This is my spot. Don't worry about the transparent chambers; they're shaded from the outside so nobody can see in. Don't you dare try any of your mystical crap to try and break it. My quarters are shielded from that."

My mind was spinning already, and that was not from the freighter. However, I suspect that we were spinning into orbit and waiting in line to jump out of the system. "Can we slow down here? I have a thousand questions."

"I'm sure you do. Don't care. Just get to the common room and sit down while we get ready to just the system. I have to get to the bridge." Her answer didn't help, but I realized that was all that I would get right now. Maybe if there was another person in the common room, I could find something else out about what they were all planning to do and why the hell would they need a mage to conjure something for them.

We arrived in the main room. "Look, you don't have any extra clothes, right?"

"Right."

"What about credits?"

"I had ten gold in my pocket when we left."

"That might be enough to get something once we get to Earth. You'll probably need it."

"What? I thought that I wasn't getting off the ship?"

"Not sure yet. We might need you there. Depends on how strong your magic can hold and everything."

I closed my eyes in frustration; This deal was getting worse all the time. We entered the kitchen area from the central circular hallway. This room was on the left, toward the interior of the ship. Based on my calculations, it was stuck in the ship's center, above the cargo hold and two-thirds the size. Above would be the bridge, smaller by another third but just as crucial to the ship.

"Last I heard, gold is still of value there. Fifty credits to an ounce and a shirt is roughly two credits."

Her remark did not make me feel better. Each coin was about ten ounces of gold as Magis was exceptionally rich with the ore. It was still treated as a precious commodity due to its specialty in potion

brewing and other magics that I didn't study. Regardless, I would be sitting pretty good on Earth if I had to get off the ship and go into a market based on her valuations.

"Katie!" June shouted into the kitchen, and I heard a clamor of pans clattering against each other before a head popped out of the double doors, which I assumed led into the cooking area. It was off-center to the rest of the room, on the far side of where we entered. The walls blocking the kitchen from the rest of the area looked like the only thing straight on the ship, but the off-white spoke of fire damage. Not sure how it would have happened outside the kitchen, nor was I sure how safe eating in the dining area would be while the cook was cooking.

I assumed she was the cook, though I found myself staring once again as Katie came out of the kitchen. She was the most unusually dressed and overt person I can claim to the day of ever seeing. Katie looked like a tree; if that tree was made of steel bark and fiber optic cables. Her, it? The hair was curled and looked like a junk drawer of wires on top. Still, it became straight about midway toward the back of the head. It seemed to be alive like a technologically enhanced Medusa. The face was simple, glowing E's for the eyes. There was no humanoid-like nose and a mouth that looked like a permanent smile, like an aged cartoon depicting robots. Yeah, I've seen the Jetsons. It was a long afternoon in Earth's history class. The rest of her was like a digital wraith. No legs. And she was floating like a magnet with the same polar charge; I could literally see the magnetic energy between her and the deck. She had two arms entwined cables that appeared similar to the fiber optics to that of her hair.

This was a lot to take in with a glance, so it was when Captain June nudged me, well, she smacked me hard, that I realized I was staring, again. I coughed and looked at June before back at Katie, "What are you?"

Katie's hair and optic cables flared a million colors, light passing through a billion prisms. Even I understood that she was annoyed, "I am Cyad, the sentience of Whiskey."

"Whiskey?"

I felt the glare of June before her smack to the back of my head, "That's the ship you're on. The Whiskey."

"Nobody ever told me that," I complained, but neither cared.

Both were glaring at me still, and I felt claustrophobic between them, "You were needed on the bridge, Captain?"

June's glare softened slightly, but the annoyance remained. Katie was still projecting her annoyance, and I realized that I would need to tap a few detection spells on my food to ensure I wasn't poisoned. Crap, she's a cybernetic individual and our cook? How was that going to work? "You're the cook?"

"I am. Best one in the quadrant."

June scoffed, "That's not saying much. There aren't too many cooks that try human, elf, and dwarf food that move around these parts."

I watched June head to the bridge and felt Katie's stare, "You going up?"

June was climbing the stairs at the end of the room, though it was circular, so was it really the end of the room? I knew I should take something for the coming headache; it was going to be brutal. Her question did not really leave room for an answer that was to keep me from going with June. I didn't really think she would want me on the bridge, but it was either stay with Katie the "cyad" or go with June and face her annoyance.

Hurrying after June, I trekked up the stairs and entered the cockpit. It was a dome that matched the rest of the ship, and it was to be expected. Everything was dark, except for the panels. In the middle of the cockpit was a single chair with the pilot. He was lounging in the chair as it was leaning back with his feet up. I knew he was not relaxed because it was how the ship was designed. The pilot could control the whole ship from the chair, and the rest of the panels around the bridge were redundant in case the pilot's chair was damaged.

"Oh, you decided to come up?" I was not sure how I was to take that greeting, but she pointed to the chair in the middle of the bridge, "That's Jack. He's our pilot. Doesn't really go anywhere except where this ship takes him."

Jack was another elf with reddish hair braided over his shoulder. I couldn't imagine that it would be comfortable to have it behind his back while piloting in the hair, but it was a decent length as I guess most elves were like that. He wore a plain jacket of red with a white undershirt, pants were the same type as June's plenty of pockets, but his holster was empty. I saw the weapon not even an arm's distance away on the floor.

"So you're the mage we were sent to get?" His voice cut through the low hum that accompanied the electronics on the bridge.

"I guess. Not really sure I'm the one you all want."

"Your last name Tamos?" Jack asked.

"Yeah."

"Then, from what I hear, you're the one that we need."

"Stow it, Jack. Need to know, remember?"

I could see Jack rolling his eyes before he turned his concentration back to the digital display flashing around his chair. I wanted to ask more questions, but it looked like I was just a third wheel, so I went back to the dining area.

Stepping off the last stair, I could feel the Cyad staring at me. I was in her domain, after all. Her colors looked like they had cooled, a bunch of blues and purples lazily coloring the white floors as she turned to face me, "Do you need something?"

Her technical tone did not filter out sarcasm or forced politeness. Still, I was no longer fearing for my life, "I would like to apologize for my previous behavior."

"You don't sound sure with that apology. When you're sure you want to apologize, I'll be here."

I muttered a curse and ran a hand through my hair, "I'm not used to this, alright? Cut me a bit of slack. I've been practically abducted on a mission that--"

"Were you forced here against your will?"

"What? No."

"Were you offered payment for future services to be rendered?"

"Yeah?"

"Then there was no abduction. You are here of your own free will, and we are grateful we did not have to resort to those underhanded tactics to get you to join us."

"You'd have all done that to get me on this mission?"

There was a pause as Katie processed that question, "There is a probability that it would have happened had you refused to join us. However, that statistical probability is rendered moot as you have come on board with your own fruition. Please adjust to your current surroundings. Your mood is disrupting my processing patterns."

I could do little to refute her logic as it was not wrong. I sighed again, "You know where Fulman went?"

"Probably to his room. He doesn't socialize, so I do not care."

"Where exactly is his room?"

"I'm obligated to help based on my nature's programming, and you are a passenger on my ship."

"Isn't that contradictory? How can you be naturally programmed?"

"For a contradiction yourself, why should it matter?"

"How am I a contradiction?"

"You are human, yet you are a mage. How can you be both? Humans are biologically known to be without power, yet you, a human, have power. You are still human, but your planet has decided, without scientific evidence on the 'why'. That is a contradiction."

"No, we did that because we wanted to be distinguished from the rest of humanity."

"But you cannot as you are still 'just human'."

"Do you have something for a headache?"

"No."

"I thought you were naturally programmed to help me."

"When it comes to things with my ship, yes. You requested directions to a berth on my ship. I am programmed to help you."

"Which you still haven't pointed out."

"You continue to interrupt."

"You continue to not be helpful." I was beginning to get annoyed with her and figured I could just wander through the ship knocking on the crew doors until I found his.

There was an overhead chime, and Katie slowly moved a single finger to her mouth and shushed me. I frowned at the gesture, but as the chime over the ship speakers sounded again, I figured she knew that something important was coming.

"This is your captain, mid-day announcement." Captain June's voice floated through the intercom system. I noticed a speaker screen around the entire room of the cafeteria, but the voice was not unpleasantly loud, thankfully. Just for a brief description of this ship, its overall cleanliness was terrific. There was one hell of a cleaning droid or something that took care of this ship. Crap, I missed the start of the announcement.

"...new crew member, a mage from Magis." I rolled my eyes at her mispronunciation of my planet's name as she continued, "Please make him feel welcome as he will be here for at least a week. Our current destination is Earth. There we will be conducting our business before departing at our leisure. Unless, of course, there's a catastrophic event, and we shall flee ahead of the mass exodus of the planet. They've been predicting that it is going to happen for the last thousand years, so maybe they'll be correct this time."

I looked over at Katie and saw her listening intently to everything the captain said. Maybe there was a doctor on board that had something for my headache. With my luck, she was the doctor too.

Barely out of the common room, I saw the dwarf coming out of his room. He turned and saw me, eyes widening in surprise, "What are you doing here?"

"What?" This did not make sense; would anything on this ship ever make sense?

"How did you get onto this ship?"

"You brought me, Fulman."

Fulman paused and thought for a moment before shrugging, "Maybe I did. I have a few issues with my memory. Did I perchance write you a note? Give you a datapad or something?"

"Yeah." I reached into my cloak and pulled out the datapad he had given to me at the college.

He took it and scrolled through the information, "Ah, see, I wrote ye a note. Did you bother to read this?"

"I haven't had the chance." I took the pad back to him and scrolled my eyes to the bottom of the page where he was pointing. Aloud I read, "I have issues with my memory, if I forget who you are, please pass me this datapad. Thank you."

Fulman was walking away from me already, "Hey!"

"Aye?"

"So, do you remember anything else that is going on with this mission?"

"Only what Captain June shares with me."

"So not much?" I asked, realizing that sharing anything with this dwarf would get tiring if he kept forgetting details.

He shrugged, "Was there anything that I promised you?"

I shook my head, "I guess the details aren't important? I could tell you anything I wanted right now, and you wouldn't know the difference."

"Yeah, ye could."

"Anybody else on this ship?" I might have only been a teenager, and I was on the mission right now because of, well, greed. But I have something of a moral compass, and I'm not somebody to take advantage of a handicap. Memory loss is a big handicap, especially when trying hard to be a functioning member of whatever society I find myself in now.

"You meet Katie and Jack?"

"Yeah."

"Good people them. Then there's our strange mechanic. She's around here somewhere. I have a hard enough time remembering her, but she's around. Keeps this ship afloat."

"Right. I guess I'll just head back to my bunk then. Get ready for whatever this mission is."

"Aye. See ya 'round."