

### Planning-99

Don proved harder to find than Tibs expected.

It used to be all he had to do was sense for someone with corruption as their element, and it would be him. But with the corruption sorcerers working on building the over the pool, there were a lot of them in town, and they weren't all staying by the corruption pool. Tibs could dismiss many of them by how strong they were, but that left too many close enough to Don. Tibs had to run around Kragle Rock looking for his teammate.

And he so didn't have the time to waste.

He found Don at the Pool and Tibs cursed himself for not starting there. It didn't matter that with the concentration of people with that element there; it was impossible for him to tell anyone apart, or that he had no reason to think Don would be helping, or talking with them, or that they'd even acknowledge a Runner. He should have known to start there.

Now, most of the day was gone, and Tibs was hungry, and Don might not want to take time to help him and... Could he ask another Corruption sorcerer to help him? They wouldn't know enough to question why he wanted to focus on making a weapon. But would they question that he had Corruption as an element? How widespread was the knowledge that Don was the only Runner with corruption as his element?

"Tibs?" Don called, approaching. "What are you doing here?"

"Looking for you." He motioned for them to move away. It should be easier to convince Don, anyway. "You said you wanted to train me," he added once there was enough distance.

"And I figured you'd find more reasons to be too busy," the sorcerer replied casually.

"I never found reasons. I just was that busy."

"And you no longer are?" again far too casually.

"I'd like to not almost kill everyone the next time I have to use a lot of corruption."

Don nodded. "How about we eat? We can work on your control afterward."

Tibs bit back his reply. It was a sensible suggestion; how well would he focus while distracted by his hunger? It wasn't like he'd be able to suffuse himself with Purity the entire time.

"Alright," he replied, hoping he didn't sound as forlorn to Don as he did to himself.

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Quigly approached as Tibs finished his meal. It was only him and Don at their table.

Mez was with his girl, as was becoming the norm. Khumdar was off in the town somewhere, and Jackal was in bed getting over the corruption Tibs had infected him with. It was leaving his body quicker than the first time, but it would still be a day or two before the fighter could get out of bed.

“Tibs,” the warrior greeted them. “Don.” He looked around the inn. It was mostly Runners at the tables, with a few of the townsfolk. Guards were no longer welcome here. People also left as much of a space between Tibs’s table and the others as they could. He pulled a bag from a pouch that looked a lot like the one Jackal had, down to fitting items larger than it was. Tibs wanted to know how much they resembled each other, but he didn’t want to draw attention to Jackal’s. “It’s a good thing you told me about these. I don’t think we’d have bothered with them, considering how much there’s been in every chest.”

Tibs opened the bag filled with plain looking brass rings. He couldn’t tell if each had a weave, but he counted on Sto to continue until Tibs told him they no longer needed them.

“Should I ask how it is the dungeon knows we need these?” Quigly asked, eyes fixed on Tibs, who shrugged. It wasn’t like he could have an answer to that. He was just Runner, like the warrior.

“How did the dungeon know to start providing meats and other foods when we were having trouble getting it from outside?” Don asked. “Or weapons when we were getting ready for Sebastian’s attack? This is its town. It needs us to survive, so it must have ways to know our state and take actions. And if you think about it, it also serves as incentive to get Runners to go in, so it benefits too.”

“Yeah, that makes sense,” Quigly said, only glancing at the sorcerer before returning to Tibs.

He placed the bag on the floor and would store it before starting his training. In the morning, he’d distribute them. He couldn’t free his town only to have the people die from the sickness because he wasn’t prioritizing.

“Anyway,” the warrior finally said. “I’m glad me and my team could help. We kept a few to give to the people we care about.”

“Won’t Cross shove that down your throat when you try to give it to her?” Don asked, smiling over his tankard.

“She can do whatever the fuck she wants to me after she puts the thing on. There’s too much riding on it.”

“Hasn’t she made it clear she doesn’t care about your heart at all?”

Quigly leaned on the table. “How about you keep that corrupt nose of yours out of other people’s business? Or do like that cleric of yours; keep the fact you think you know things to yourself?”

“Noted,” Don replied, grinning. “I will no longer comment on your impressive attempts at getting that woman to kill you.”

The warrior left, grumbling unflattering things about the sorcerer.

“Don’t,” Tibs said as Don opened his mouth. “I don’t want to know about them. I don’t want to know about Mez and his girls, or anyone you know about that’s involved with someone else.”

“You really don’t like knowing about couples?” Don asked, wiping the sauce out of

his plate with the last of his bread.

“I can’t not know about Jackal and Kroseph,” Tibs replied darkly. “That’s more than I wanted to know about anyone, ever.”

“You only say that,” Kroseph said, taking his finished plate, “because you haven’t found that special someone for you.”

Tibs snorted.

“How about you, Don? Anyone you are chasing?”

“I’m not the chaser,” the sorcerer replied. “I’m one of the Heroes of Kragle Rock. I get chased. And there is this lady from a neighborhood not too far from here that has been dedicated in her attempts to get me to—”

“Can you just not.” Tibs glared at his teammates, who grinned. “Since you’re done, how about we get to training?”

“You are training?” Kroseph asked, surprised.

“I do train,” Tibs replied.

“When your teacher is here,” the server replied, “or when something happened that you hold yourself responsible for.”

Tibs pointed up and leveled his gaze on Kroseph.

The server rolled his eyes. “He’s not that badly off and you know it. He’s just using this as an excuse to have me tend to him.”

“Like you need an excuse to ‘tend to him’,” Don said, grinning.

“I’m a caring guy,” the server replied as Tibs put his head in hands and groaned. “I will tend to whatever my man needs.”

“Kro!” his father called. “If you’re going to spend so much time talking with them, how about you sign up to become a Runner?”

“Work calls.” The server left.

“Don’t even start on the everyone needs a special someone stuff,” Tibs said in his hands. “I don’t want to hear it.”

“It doesn’t have to be a special someone,” the sorcerer said, grinning when Tibs glared at him.

“Are we going to train or not?” Tibs saw the mirth in Don’s eyes and he raised a finger in warning.

With a chuckle, the sorcerer stood. “Come on. We’re going to need somewhere without people around for this.”

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“Are you going to get in trouble for this?” Tibs asked as they entered the incomplete building over the corruption pool.

“Not so long as you don’t destroy this. While it won’t be official until I’ve reached Epsilon, I am a member of the Academy.”

“You’re pretty close already,” Tibs said, looking around the large space. “I have a hard time sensing the difference between you and some of the sorcerers working on this.”

The building was as deep as six of the shops and three of them wide. It went beyond the pool in each direction and their place was to encase it, therefore keeping the smell from spreading and making this part of Merchant Row usable again. How those working in this

building were going to stand the stench, Tibs wasn't sure. No one was as immune to the smell as he was.

Don smiled. "Good to know, but until I've pass the examinations, I'm still just Lambda. My instructor is only now explaining what the one to reach Zeta consists of." He reached the center and faced Tibs. "Alright. I think we're going to start by figuring out how much essence you can keep under control."

"I'd rather find out how to make a weapon out of corruption."

Don watched him. "What you made was a weapon, a massive one, which is what turned out to be the problem."

"Which is why I want to learn to make something smaller instead. Something more concentrated, like sword."

Don's eyes narrowed. "You already know how to make swords."

"Out of ice and metal, but those elements want to be solid. All I have to do is shape them and I barely have to think about them after that." He pulled corruption essence to his hand and formed a knife out of it. It was more the impression of a knife, with the blade drooping down ever more. "This is what I get if I think about it as much as I need to for my ice sword." He added metal, and the edge gained the gleam of sharpness, but it continued to droop. "Unlike with my ice sword, metals not doing much to make it a better weapon."

"That would be because their natures are at different ends."

"I figured that was something like that. And I need to use letters to make them work together, but everything Alistair taught me is in relation to water. Those that work with that element don't do the same thing with corruption."

"It's going to be because while they both seem to be the same to you, as being fluid, they aren't actually fluid in the same way. Corruption imparts a—" he sighed. "Tibs, I don't think this is the time to indulge your curiosity. You have a habit of throwing everything you have at a problem, and that's when you lose control. The best thing for now is to work on that. Find your limits and figure out how you can safely push beyond them."

"I think..." he hoped this worked. "That the reason I go for throwing everything is that I don't have another way to use that element. Something safer. I haven't thrown so much fire I lost control of it since I work out the fire whip."

"You drained yourself at the permit office, burning that boss down."

Right. "I panicked. But I've been working with the whip since, so I won't have to do that."

"Which reinforces my point that you need to learn to control the use of large amount of essence before focusing on the precision."

"But with something to use I can practice with without needing this—" he motioned around them "—I'll be able to be more confident in what I can do."

Don paced, and Tibs worked on more arguments. As tempting as it was to fill the guild building with corruption, too many others would be hurt. There had to be one and only one dead from this. He might have to hurt others when he ran afterward, but he'd be able to manage it without killing anyone.

"You're reasoning doesn't make sense, Tibs," Don stated. "Over and over, you've demonstrated that you're at your most dangerous when you are forced to use more essence

than you can handle, and the dungeon knows that. It's going to keep finding ways to push you, and you know that." He looked at Tibs. "This has nothing to do with the dungeon, does it?"

"Of course, I'm trying to keep the team—"

"I'm not Jackal. And I don't think even he'd believe that one."

"I'm just—"

Don raised an eyebrow.

Tibs sighed.

"I'm going to make you a deal," the sorcerer said, and Tibs readied himself to explain what he was planning. "I'm going to help with this today. I'm going to explain which if the Arcanus you need, where in the etching and how to maintain something like what you want."

Tibs stared, waiting for the conditions.

"But this is the only time. When we meet again for training, and trust me, I will drag you to more of these because whatever this is about? I want to make sure you don't end up hurting one of us again. When I train you again, it's going to be about your control and you are not going to try to change things. Is that clear? This is your only chance to have me help with that corruption blade idea. You are on your own with that afterward."

Tibs nodded, happy Don had talked him into eating first, because he had the feeling the sorcerer wouldn't care if he'd been distracted or not. Tibs was about to experience Don in implacable instructor mode, and it was going to be up to him to keep up.