

## Planning-30

“That’s him,” Serba said, indicating the man looking over fabric at the merchant’s booth. Tibs had trouble making out details about him through the busy crowd. The first day of the bazaar was always the busiest one. “His name is Brogan Roche. He’s third under the boss guard, so he’s careful with his stuff. I tried to figure out what the thing was, but I couldn’t.”

Tibs nodded. The man wore pants and shirts out of a rough gray-green fabric with lighter trim.

“I don’t know where he lives and don’t ask me to find out.”

He nodded again and made his way closer.

“This is good fabric for work clothes,” the merchant said as she places a bolt of gray fabric on the table.

Tibs sensed what the man on him, but he had nothing with essence. Tibs would have to find him when he was on duty. But now that he knew who his target was, he was off to find a candy merchant to spend the coppers he’d accumulated since walking into Market Place.

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Tibs detours on his way to the training room as he saw the guard lieutenant. He sensed, trying to make out how the item worked. But like anything containing elements he couldn’t identify, it didn’t help. It told him it was small enough to hold in the palm of a hand, and from Serba’s description, it didn’t need to be used with anything else. It might need to be activated, but once that was done, it would cancel the magic that made it difficult to work out the size of the guild building.

The outside was always the same, as was the entrance and hallway leading to the training room. Beyond that, Tibs never got the same distances to get to the same places, and if he focused too much on counting his steps, he ended up in the wrong place entirely. He was never sure exactly how he made it to Tirania’s office. He knew where it was, based on his first visit, and it felt to him like he always took the same route there, but if he paid too much attention to the way, he ended up lost.

He retraced his way to the entrance once Brogan stepped into the stairwell leading down, counting his steps. He avoided getting lost, but as with the previous times, the distances were different.

“I was beginning to wonder if you’d forgotten,” Alistair said as Tibs stepped into the training room.

“I got lost trying to figure out the size of the building,” he replied. At his teacher’s raised eyebrow, he continued. “I noticed some time back how the distance between places is never the same. So I’ve been trying to figure out how it’s happening.”

“How do you think it’s being done?”

“Magic.”

Alistair chuckled. “But what kind?”

“I can think of mind or void as what might do it. The dungeon makes doorways that lets us cross to different floors, so it might be able to change the length of the corridors.

Mind can change how I'd think about counting my steps. I figure other elements have their own ways of doing it."

"And remember that enchantments combine elements, which increase what's possible." Alistair crossed his legs as he sat on the floor. "How about you show me what you can do with Ank and Kha? Keep it small."

Tibs made a dagger out of ice, something simple without ornaments, and etched a quick line of water essence, adding more Ank than Kha. Once he was done, the result was a water that fell to the floor between them, then slowly oozes flat.

"What use can you think of for this?" Alistair asked.

Tibs looked at the unmoving puddle. He willed it together, feeling the resistance. It wasn't that it didn't want to obey him, just the thickness the combination of letters caused. He touched it, pushed his finger through the surface, then pulled it out, the water clinging to it.

"I could use this to slow someone."

"Good. How about another thing?"

Tibs willed it into his hand, moved it, turned his hand upside down and watched it stretched until it was a bulk connected to his hand by a thin strand. "Without doing more to it, I can't think of it."

Thick water splashed Tibs's chest, clinging to his torso and one arm. As he tried to pull his arm away, the water resisted, trapping it in place.

"It's good for subduing someone."

"Isn't this just slowing them down?"

Alistair chuckled. "I suppose it is."

"And in a dungeon, that isn't really useful. Making something hard and spiky ends fights faster."

"That's limited thinking, Tibs, and you can't limit what you do to the dungeon. You will be acting in the world soon enough." The water holding Tibs vanished. "Catch."

Tibs caught the ball of water. Unlike what had held him, it didn't shift. Other than it not being cold, it could be a ball of ice. He sensed the essence; the etching wasn't as tight as he'd expected, and he recognized Fey between the essences.

"Isn't it easier to just make it ice?"

"If the purpose is just to have a ball to throw, yes. But this is about practicing adding the letters to the essence so that you'll be able to, eventually combining them so they will interact and create a wide array of results."

"Like that mist which kept people from listening to us."

"Yes."

Tibs turned the ball in his hand. "Didn't you say Fey was the letter representing darkness? How does Darkness make this harder?"

"The fact one represents the other isn't an indication of what it can do. After all, you're not manipulating darkness when you make the letter. It's still water essence."

"Then why say it represents it? Why not just call it Fey and say it makes something hard?"

“I don’t know why it’s linked, and to say it makes something hard is limiting what it can do. Even on its own, the arrangement of Fey will alter the result. It’s one of the few letters that has an effect on its own.”

“More of it makes it harder?”

“It’s not quite as simple.”

“It never is,” Tibs said, and Alistair chuckled before launching into an explanation.