

## Planning-28

Quick Note: I made the decision that when Tibs returns from his audience with Metal, his would be assassin will still be there and Tibs will deal with him then and there.

Tibs slipped in through the broken window and sensed around him. The house was at the edge of Kragle Rock's Street and it too was neglected. Which made it for a good location to meet with one of the guards, or for a trap to be set.

He only sensed one person, two floors below, along with three dogs.

He relaxed slightly. Serba was someone he believed he could trust. But she was a Wells, and as Jackal had made a point to tell Harry, Wells either led or followed. He wasn't sure if being at the head of her pack of dogs made her a leader, or who she was following if it didn't.

He moved quietly; he knew enough about essence and the elements to know it wasn't only darkness that allowed someone to hide from detection. As far as he could tell, every element could do its version of what any other element did, if the user was powerful and knowledgeable enough.

The guild was both.

He made it to halfway down the last section of stairs before being detected. One of the dog growled. Next time, he'd wrap himself in darkness instead of trusting to his skills.

Serba stood when Tibs stepped into the lamp's light, sword in hand. It was a well-made sword. He could tell that by how the essence aligned. It didn't quite feel like the work of someone with the element, but it was closer than most of the metal weapons and tools Tibs sensed in the town.

"You just can't help sneaking around, can you?" she said, sheathing it.

"I can't be too careful when the guards' leader considers me a troublemaker."

"You saying you aren't?" She sat, and Tibs joined her at the table. As soon as he sat, Thump nuzzled his leg.

"I'm just doing what I have to keep the town safe." He dropped the pieces of jerky to the floor, and a second dog joined Thump. The third, Serba had a hand on the head of. "Why did you want to meet?"

"I thought you'd want to know where your stuff's being kept. The equipment that was confiscated in that raid a few weeks ago," she added at his frown.

Tibs nodded. Getting that back would be good. He'd be able to equip a few teams before the new stuff arrived.

"It's on the floor below the cells. It's where anything confiscated ends up. I can't tell you which of the rooms it's in, but that's where it will be."

Tibs frowned. "I didn't know there was a floor below the cells."

"I didn't either until I had to bring a bunch of illegal herbs there. The door to the stairwell's down the corridor on the left after you exit the stairs taking you to the cells."

Tibs shook his head. "There isn't a corridor on the left. It's on the right."

"No, it's on the left. There's two guards at the bottom of those stairs, a clerk with the key to take you in, and guards regularly patrol the floor. I don't know how you'll deal with them, but that's where your stuff is, if you want it back."

Tibs focused on her, sensed for anything out of the ordinary on her person, then extended it to the dogs.

Nothing.

"Did they give you something before you headed there?"

"No, why?"

"Have you noticed how the dimensions inside the guild building are always changing?"

She thought about it. "I thought there was something odd about it."

"Irdian mentioned it's part of the building's security. Now it sounds like some areas do more than change size. There was no corridor on the left when I was taken to the cells, but there was one for you."

"Can that be done?"

Tibs chuckled. "We can bypass entire floors in the dungeon by walking through a doorway. I don't worry about what can't be done anymore. Just how I'm going to figure out how it works."

"So you think that the adjutant who escorted me there had something on him that stopped the magic?"

“Who is he?” Tibs asked. That would be a way to ensure only authorized people reach sensitive areas.

“I don’t know. I’ve seen him around, but never interacted until then.”

“Can you get his name? If he has something that lets walk around unaffected, I’m going to need it to reach my stuff.”

“I can’t get you whatever it is.”

“I’ll handle that. I just need to know who he is.”

She stood. “I’ll get you that information.”

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Tibs sighed as he sensed the person attempting to sneak up on him. He was getting tired of these attempts. And with the amount of corruption tainted liquids on their person, there was little more than an assassin they could be.

Tibs turned into the alley to get away from the people in the street. When he sensed only his follower was around, he pulled Darkness from his bracer, wrapped himself in it, and waited.

The woman who walked by him was pretty, he supposed. Wearing a dress that hid knives and poisons and probably other things he couldn’t identify. One of his would be assassin had something Garran had identified as a garrote. Which was nothing more than a string with handles on each end.

He stepped behind her, considered how to proceed, then simply touched her and pulled his essence out of her body. She dropped, lifeless. He softened the ground until she sank into it, let her sink until he thought no one would accidentally dig her up, and reformed the ground as it had been before continuing on his way.

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Tibs pushed the wall until it revealed the corridor on the left, which opened to the room with the chest. He opened it and left the others to store whatever was in it. The exit was closed, just as the previous time. He found the next section of wall and paused before putting his weight on it. If he was wrong about the pattern being set, he might lock his friends in the other room.

He pushed it. He wasn’t wrong. He listened and didn’t hear the echo announcing another section of walls had moved.

“That was dangerous,” Don said, as he and the others stepped out of the other corridor.

“No, I knew nothing would happen.” He went to the end of the corridor and pushed the on the right wall, instead of taking the left turn. It didn’t move.

The last time, pushing it in four steps, then the right wall two had revealed a switch with the dragon crest over it. Pulling it had open the exit. The only difference was that the wall he’d pushed wasn’t at the end of its motion.

“Pushed the wall until it stops,” he called.

He heard it ground, and twice, there was an echo. He did his best to locate it, but there was no direction to the sound.

“It’s not moving anymore,” Jackal said. “You want me to push the one on the left like last time?”

“That’s where the attack is triggered,” Mez pointed out as Tibs was about to say yes.

“Let me get in place.”

Tibs stepped close to that opening. There had been two moves before the attack. He nodded to the fighter at the end of the corridor, and Jackal pushed, disappearing on the left with the wall moving. There was a pause.

“Again,” Tibs said and concentrated on sensing. He had an idea what to expect, but he wanted to feel the doorway form this time so—there. He looked up and saw the shimmering on the ceiling. “Incoming,” he called, and the golem people dropped through it, immediately turning in his direction.

With a curse, He backed away from the approaching fighter and rogue. Both had Earth as their element, just like the last time. Tibs threw himself to the left as the rogue flung a knife, rolled and cursed again halfway through coating a knife in Corruption to deal with the extra protection the two golems had. Don would sense it, and almost certainly be able to tell it wasn’t some poison.

Tibs absorbed the essence and send the knife back to its hiding place. He formed a sword and shield out of ice and readied himself. The Sorcerer golem flew out of the corridor and crashed into the wall, Jackal trailing behind him and the archer golem fell out, fire covering its back.

Tibs clocked the fighter’s sword and slashed the rogue. He jumped back, and then to the side, avoiding Khumdar’s staff. Tibs saw the lighting jump from the sorcerer’s hand to Jackal, then had to focus on the fighter before him. Taking hit after hit on his shield, waiting for an opening.

When it came, Tibs stabbed, lengthening the sword until it pierced its stomach. Unlike with a real

person, all this caused was for it to lose some of the life essence that powered it.

"Tibs," Don called. "Out of the way."

Tibs threw himself at the rogue, distracted by the cleric's attacks, and left the fighter for Don. Together, they tore the rogue apart quickly. The fighter was melting under the corruption. Jackal broke the sorcerer in two, his armor scorched and smoking from the lightning hits. The archer and other fighter were already dissolved back into the dungeon.

"Lightning," Don said, indicating the melting sorcerer, "Earth, Earth, Wood," he pointed to the floor where Tibs expected the fighter had been, "And Metal." Where the archer had been. "Same as the last time. Is it a coincidence?"

Tibs shook his head. "Only the loot and hallways are random in the dungeon." He stepped to the right wall at the end of the corridor and pushed. It went it. "When the dungeon changes something in a room, it's in reaction to us getting too good for how it's set up. We aren't there yet." He pushed it again and once more. Then the left wall, twice, and the switch was revealed. "It's all about the patterns on this floor." He pulled the switch and heard a wall move.

"The exit's opened," Mez said.

"I know." Tibs tested every wall section. None of them moved. He turned to the others. "Opening the exits prevents us from continuing with the room."

"That makes sense," Don said. "The dungeon will want to limit our options."

"So we have to pick between leaving now, or continuing?" Jackal asked.

"I doubt it," the sorcerer said. "I suspect that we will get other opportunities to unlock the exit, but each time, it'll be at the expense of stopping our forward motion."

"There may also be situations where levers will become hidden again," Khumdar said. "And it is possible we will not be able to unhide them."

"We'll only be able to find out as we progress and test the situations as they arise," Don said.

Tibs nodded.

"And since you pulled the switch," Jackal said. "That means we're done. At least you waited until we got the loot from the chest and that fight."

"I couldn't open it until then."

"So they only become accessible in stages," Don said. "That's good to know. We'll want to start building a map of our progress."

"You're in charge of that," Jackal said, heading for the exit. "Good job dealing with that fighter."

"Thank you," the sorcerer replied, taken aback. "It was simpler, since its attention was focused on Tibs."

"Maybe we should do that all the time from now on," Mez said, "have Tibs get their attention and us attack from the rear. I did enjoy it too."

"That only works when I know there's going to be an attack," Tibs said, following Jackal out. "And if I tell you it's coming."

"If you keep the information to yourself," Don said, "that's an easy way to end up dealing with them on your own."

"Nah," Mez said, "Jackal's always going to be there to come to his rescue."

"I thought it was Tibs who was always rescuing him," Don said.

"We give and take," Tibs replied.

"It is how healthy relationships are made," Khumdar said.

"I already have a man!" Jackal called, "so stop trying to set me up with my brother."