**ACE 24**

Both girls stared at me.

“What,” Vi stated, nonplussed, unsure how to respond to my statement.

Powder, however, had gone stiff as a board, looking at me with an odd combination of fear and hope. *“Really?*” she whispered, and I nodded.

“Ninety-nine point ninety-nine percent sure,” I agreed, and the small girl ran at me, impacting my side and bursting into tears as she held onto me tightly. Patting her head, I continued, “As far as I’m aware it’s completely possible with the contacts I have, *eventually,* which is why I shifted around their ‘ages’, as Clagor and Mylo will be brought back as they were when they died, minus injuries of course, while you two will still be around and growing up in the intervening years. But that’ll take *time*. There’s a number of ways I could make it happen, different kinds of magic or favors I could, once I have enough pull, call upon, but unless Runeterra’s afterlife is a *lot* different than I think, and there’s no indication that it’s one of *those* placed, then it can be done.”

Violet was shaking herself out of her surprise, and took a threatening step forward, partially lit by the still-open git. “*How?”* she demanded angrily.

“Magic,” I shrugged.

Scowling she shook her head, “No, that’s not good enough.”

“I can tell you my *main* method, but let’s get something to drink first, since this is gonna take a bit,” I informed her, using my phone to close the portal as I started to turn towards the stairs, half-carrying the human limpet hanging from my side, the girl having stopped crying, at least.

“No, *now,*” the older sister ordered, taking another threatening step my way.

Lifting an eyebrow, staring at her, I had to ask, “Wait, are you threatening the person who said he can *resurrect your family* because he *isn’t telling you everything instantly?* Come now, you’re better than this.”

“*Vi! Stop!”* Powder ordered tearfully, still holding onto me as if I might vanish into thin air if she didn’t. *“Why are you like this!?”*

“He’s saying he can *bring them back from the dead,*” Violet argued, still glaring at me, and I took a second to wonder if I’d pegged some cultural taboo by accident. There were a lot of ‘came back wrong’ myths, especially as the Shadow Isles was a *thing* where that happened *all the time*, but I didn’t really understand the issue here. “Like he can just, I don’t know, wave his hands and make everything like it was? Like he can fix everything we *did?”*

Powder was now glaring *pretty* hatefully at her sister, more than I expected from the girl, and I tried to find a way to diffuse this landmine, having *thought* that I’d lanced this emotional boil back at the Last Drop, but apparently I’d left the core intact from Violet’s statement. And there was something *else* from Powder, which I hadn’t even realized, which. . . yeah, give me intrigue and word games over this emotional gordian knot, but I couldn’t cut it, nor would I walk away. Maybe if I-

“Vi, we live in a *magic house* in *another world!*”the small girl shouted, still holding onto me with one hand while waving around us with the other. “You can *drink* the *water!* And *Jayce* fought a *ghost!* And *got her* to give us *magic healing!* And *now* we’re gonna be *Pilties!*”

Even *I* knew that was the wrong thing to say, as the brawler, now glaring just as angrily back at her sister, slashed a negating hand, “I’m *no* Pilty! And neither are *you!* Jayce has got you all turned-”

“Am *now!*” Powder argued. “Got a thing that says so and *everything!* And *Jayce* did that! And I’m *perfectly fine!”* she shouted, which, well, kind of undercut her statement. “So, So if he says he can bring them back? He can!”

Trying to handle the sudden turn, I interceded, “I’m pretty sure getting you papers and raising the dead aren’t *really* comparable, and. . . you know what, you two go have a seat in the living room and I’ll put dinner in the oven, and make us some drinks. This is gonna take some explanation,” I sighed. “More than I thought.”

“I’m *no* Pilty, and neither is *Jayce!*” Vi snapped, then froze, clearly not having meant to say that, something her sister unfortunately *instantly* picked up on.

*Well that took. . . what, a week?* I wondered, making a mental note to train the brawler on OpSec, as Powder, perplexed, turned an inquisitive look my way, and asked, confused, “Jayce?”

Sighing, I pinched the bridge of my nose. “Technically, Violet, *you’re not wrong,*” I stated, sorting through approaches until I found one that seemed like it’d work. “You two will *always* be seen as foreigners from Freljord instead of natural born Piltoverians, and, with how. . . *elevated* my position is, along with my nonstandard perspective, classifying me as a ‘Pilty’ would not work at all,” I stated. “But, then again, treating you as a. . . what’s a slur Piltoverians use for Zaunites?” I questioned.

Rallying with impressive speed, Violet offered, at least realizing she’d fucked up, “Sump Rat.”

Nodding to her in thanks, I continued, “It would be like treating Vander, or you two, like a common ‘Sump Rat’, when your childhood, while a little rough up until a few weeks ago, was not *impoverished* by any stretch of the imagination. Just as I won’t look down on you for coming from the Lanes like most ‘Pilties’ would, I also don’t have to worry about you running off with whatever you can carry when my back is turned like Piltoverians do with ‘Sump Rats’.”

I paused, then amended my statement, “Well, I don’t have to worry about that *again,* given how we met.”

That got a wince from both girls, the tiny tinker looking pained as she started to say, “Jayce, I’m so sorr-” but was cut off as I patted the top of her head.

“I know, Powder, just know that, while ‘Pilties’ have problems, most aren’t better or worse than your average person from Zaun, just *different* in how they’re jerks*,”* I told her, glad that the momentum of the previous subject had been *thoroughly* diverted, though it’d need to get addressed before it came up again at an inopportune moment. “So, *dinner.*”

Getting it started, Powder insisted she help while Violet just sipped the drink I’d made her. The older girl opened her mouth to say something when I finished cleaning up, but I nodded towards the sitting room, and she shut it, nodding back, clearly *not* having forgotten about the promised topic of discussion, but at least willing to let me take the lead as I did what I said I was going to.

Well, *mostly,* the brawler claiming what was normally *my* chair, almost aggressively draping herself across it. Shrugging, I sat on the two person ‘love-seat’ that she normally used, Powder happily plopping herself right next to me, the slip of a girl leaning slightly against me. The older sister didn’t look happy, but my replying glance hopefully conveyed my thought of, ‘If you didn’t want that to happen, you *shouldn’t’ve taken my seat*’.

“Let’s talk magic, and why this entire thing’s gonna take a bit,” I warned them, Vi staring at me intently, while Powder was confused, before sitting up straight with a quiet, “Oh,”, her attention drawn in like I was a magnet.

“Magic is, at its core, *energy*, but not all magic is *just* energy. As far as I can *tell*, the magic on Runeterra is. . . *potent,* but thankfully unaligned, which makes it relatively safe. It’s not a manifestation of the will of the planet, it’s not flavored by passing through gods or beings of power, it’s not solidified belief nor is it emotionally aligned, and while it’s responsive it isn’t *overly* so, nor does it have any kind of real ‘tide’.” Which was good, because, while with my **Defenses,** *I’d* be fine, Warhammer 40k style Psykers were a whole mess of ‘hell-to-the-no’, and others wouldn’t understand that I *wasn’t* a ticking time bomb once I’d learned to tap into it.

“The type of magic the Banshee used, the one in the potions that healed you, and the one I’m going to see if I can try and get some *more* of to bring your brothers and father back? It comes from a *very* specific type of magic called The Weave, and it’s. . . first of all, you’re *fine,*” I insisted, which caused Violet to tense, but that was better than her misunderstanding my next statement. “It’s *infectious*, but on a metaphysical level, and, with enough, on a *global* level.”

Which itself explained *part* of why the help had been so freaking *expensive*, as there *were* dangers to using the Weave in unaligned areas, but **DEATH** could’ve just sent a Water-bender or something and I would’ve been *fine*. Which, thinking about it, might have been part of **DEATH**’s test for me, and one that I only now realized that I had *not* passed. For places with a hostile magical system, like Westeros or Randland, forcibly realigning it into something like the Weave was a *good* thing, if not a *cheap* thing, but for someplace like this?

I honestly wasn’t sure if Hextech would still *function*, or if those mana-packed crystals would be reduced down to a generic ‘magic item ingredient’, for artificers to cobble together to make a cloak of protection plus four.

“**The Weave** works on archetypes,” I explained, pausing as I realized neither girl knew what that *was*. “It works on. . . stereotypes, themes, things like that. You have **Barbarians, Rogues, Wizards, Clerics, Druids**, and the like, but what they are is *very* specific and the way they gain power, while fairly fast, is both very *set* **and** capped. Anything new is a *massive* pain in the ass to create, as you have to impress its shape unto *the entirety of your planet’s magical fabric,* and while it serves as a rope-ladder, letting you ascend quickly, at the top it turns into a straitjacket, keeping you from going any higher, because every *single* step further requires you to rework the entire system, and that’s functionally impossible, especially for standard Weaves, which is what we’ll have access to.”

I’d heard stories from some of the recruits who came from R&D, and they all agreed that ‘Mythic’ Weave-worlds were simultaneously *terrifying* and *complete bullshit.*

Looking the brawler in the eye, I informed her, “Here on Runeterra, Violet, **if you pushed yourself hard enough, if you had the proper support, and if you survived *long* enough, you could potentially punch a *god* in the face, and come out of the confrontation the victor**. Powder, you could to,” I added with a smile.

“I’d rather blow ‘em up,” she shrugged, smirking, “Or shoot ‘em.” Thinking about it she glanced at my hands, “Or stab ‘em. Or all three.”

“You said *we* could,” Violet pointed out, giving me a searching, skeptical look.

“I could too,” I added, if that’s what she was asking, or maybe. . . “But Weave-empowered heroes. . . *can’t*. Some special few can break through that barrier, but they’re *extreme* exceptions to the rule. Without a *lot* of extra help, or some serious out of context bullshit, Weave-users are stuck at that level of capability, *forever*. In some cases, if the world is less dangerous, that’s enough, but as the Weave spreads, it starts to change the world itself, at first in subtle ways, and in time will eventually ‘rebalance’ things to a degree that ensures conflict will continue, as the struggle of heroes, villains, and monsters all vying for supremacy is part of its very fabric. And in the chaos of that rebalancing happening, when even minor magical entities can find themselves *gods*, well, shaking things up can make things *worse* instead of better if you aren’t careful.”

Because for every group of adventurers that kicked Loki’s shit in, there were several hundred *thousand* who died miserable deaths trying to punch above their level. For every shining city on a hill, a thousand villages were wiped out by bandits, cults, monsters, and the like. Resurrection was cheap on Weave-worlds for a *reason,* and it often *wasn’t enough.*

“How is magic ‘infectious’?” the girl beside me questioned, breaking me from my thoughts.

“It’s, okay, it’s *actually* a *literal* weave, like fabric, but a metaphysical one,” I explained, tapping the material of the couch we were sitting on, but short of cutting off a piece I couldn’t demonstrate this easily. “Actually, gimme a sec,” I told them, jogging up to my workshop and grabbing a few rough-spun samples from my idle attempts to create Runeterran-kevlar, and *failing*. Bringing them back, I held up the smallest sample, made of bright green strands. “If there’s just a few scraps of Weave, like we got drinking the potions, or from being around the items I got off the Banshee, it’s fine,” I explained, easily pulling apart the tiny swatch into its component threads. “Use more, and it takes longer to dissipate,” I stated, doing so to the next size up. “The problem happens when you use a *lot*,” I finished, holding up the largest, pulling on it, but it remained intact. “Because it’s *not* static, but will attract more free-floating magic to itself, getting larger and larger. And once it becomes self-sustaining, it’ll seek to spread more and more if there’s nothing to push back on it. And, like I said, there’s nothing pushing anyone *through* the medium of magic on Runeterra. Or if there is I haven’t noticed.”

Powder frowned, “And bringing them back is using a *lot*?”

“No, it’s a medium amount. It’s a lot for a single *person*,” I specified, at Vi’s incredulous look. “Which *can* cause problems if they try and spread it, like a disease, though one that gives you power. But, on a world scale? *No*. Even two or three *dozen* rezzes wouldn’t do it, as long as they were spread out, but sustained use of Weave magic on top of them *might.”*

Shrugging, I admitted, “I don’t know the limits of Runeterra’s magisphere, how it’d interact, this sort of thing’s *way* above my head, at least for now. *Industrial* use of the Weave, though, *will* start that chain reaction. It isn’t a guaranteed full shift, and equilibriums, er, *balances* can be achieved depending on the pre-existing systems, but that’s. . .” I blew out a long stream of air, “*So* past me right now it isn’t even funny.”

“But, we didn’t use that *there*, we used it *here*,” the tiny tinker countered, and it took me a moment to realize what she meant.

“Yes, you’re right about that. Good catch,” I told her, the girl preening a little. “The magic *here* is. . . hardened, but it wasn’t all *used up* here,” I told her, which caused her self-satisfied smile to drop a little. “The three of us will probably *still* be carrying a few threads of Weave magic inside us for the next few weeks, at least, though it’s probably eighty percent gone by now. Drinking enough potions is actually a *recommended* way of introducing larger Weave-patterns into more. . . *hostile* places, places that aren’t as nice as Runeterra. That’s why something as simple as requisitioning those potions, which we’d need dozens upon *dozens* of to start building a persistent bit of Weave in ourselves, means I’m going to be spending half my afternoons doing paperwork for the next few months.”

I paused, trying to figure out how to explain it. “The Weave is static, predictable, *boring,* and a trade off of immediate power for problems down the road.” Like Aura, as extending your soul out to cover your weapons and armor was a way for a *lot* of soul-based bullshit that normally needed skin-contact to yeet you right out of your body by parrying your blade. Which, yes, was why I’d bought **Soul Defense,** but sharing to people I didn’t ‘own’ would just be asking for trouble. “My boss *really* doesn’t want me to do what’s predictable, and is, in all likelihood, actively punishing me for using it in the first place.”

Violet grimaced, and, struggling with the words, still started to say, “Jayce, I’m sorr-”

I cut her off with a raised hand. “Don’t worry. It sucks, but my Boss *also* used this to sneak me some help through it for you two that he *probably* couldn’t otherwise, the fact that I’m paying through the nose for it stopping anyone from looking deeper into it, so it’s *worth it*. Just know that was a one-time thing. And what I’m going to try and bargain for in the future, and trust me this is the *easiest* way of bring ing them back, well it’s going to cost. . . twenty times as much? At least if he prices it linearly, based on what it’d cost on a Weave-world, but that means it’ll probably be *even more.* And *that* means I can’t pay him with paperwork if I want it in less than a century, I’ll have to pay him with what he *really* wants.”

“What does a skeleton want? Milk?” Powder questioned, brow scrunching up adorably. “Vander said it helps with strong bones,” she informed me seriously at my confused look.

Laughing, I patted her head, “No, and. . . please *don’t* call a primordial incarnation of Death a ‘skeleton’. *He* won’t mind, probably, but it’s a bad habit. No, I’ll need to invent something *new*, something that, at least in the places my employers have access to, they *haven’t* seen before, which is. . . harder than you think. But **DEATH** is older than *Runeterra*, as are his coworkers, and they get very, *very* bored. That means something new? That’s worth a *lot.*”

“Then we’ll help!” the tiny tinker declared, jumping to her feet, glancing toward her sister, who, after a moment, slowly nodded.

“You-” I started to argue, wanting to tell her ‘She doesn’t owe me for this’, but that might be taken the wrong way. “I’m going to do this no matter what,” I informed her instead. “You don-”

“They’re *our* family,” Violet stated, rising as well, interrupting me. “Even if you say we don’t *have* to, we’re *going* to help.”

While overly aggressive, I could see where she was coming from, and Powder nodded, expression serious. “Okay,” I agreed. “For now, we’re still settling in, but if I see an opportunity for you to assist, either of you, I’ll bring it up.” Thinking about it, I glanced at them both. “For now, though, if you’re going to help me in the future, you two *definitely* need some schooling, which means hitting the books. And I don’t mean *punching* them, Vi.”

“*Okay!*” the younger sister chirped, excited, while the older one frowned.

“I *know* things,” the older sister argued, a little petulantly.

Standing, I informed her, “And after this, you’ll know *more!”*

<ACE>

After the girls had gone to bed, I sighed, putting away the books they’d been using. As I’d suspected, Powder was a *natural* when it came to science, absorbing it like blue-haired sponge, but a quick check at the end of tutoring session showed her retention was. . . *spotty,* to say the least*.*

She instinctively knew what was right, and what wasn’t, based on what little she’d already learned, but getting her to explain *why* was where I ran into trouble. The young girl *obviously* found parts of my instruction boring, as did her sister, but Powder was willing to put in the effort to firm up her understanding. In turn, when she made seemingly *random* connections based on what I was teaching that didn’t *quite* make sense, and she, again, *couldn’t explain,* I did my best to take her questions, conclusions, and theories seriously and either confirm or deny them if I knew the answer, along with *why,* or I’d write them down to follow up with her on them later.

Unfortunately, her mathematical skills followed the same pattern, but *worse,* the girl quickly learning how to guesstimate answers, like how 8^3 was ‘a little over five-hundred’. That was perfectly fine for calculating values on the fly and stopping one from accidentally blowing oneself up when trying something new, however that level of vagueness *didn’t cut it* for precision work, or for iterating designs past a certain number of layers of complexity, which was *crucial* for anything that required accuracy or to hold up to stressors over time.

In short, she was ***Jinx.***

But Powder ***was*** learning.

Violet, on the other hand, had had a *much* harder time of it, but was willing to work as long as her sister was. The brawler *was* silently thankful, giving me an unsure half-smile and nod, when, as Powder was sucking in knowledge like a vacuum cleaner while her sister was stumbling along, I shut down the younger girl’s arrogant comments after the third iteration of ‘it’s so simple, Vi!’.

“But, I’m finally better at her than something!” Powder had whined, making no bones about what she was *really* doing.

“You both have different strengths. That’s *common.* But think about it, when Violet was better at something than you, did she shove it in *your* face? Or did she encourage you?” I’d countered levelly.

We’d stared at each other, and I *hadn’t* backed down until, shoulders dropping, the blue-haired girl had offered a half-hearted, “Sorry, Vi. I’m sure you’ll get it. *Eventually.*”

And the brawler had the maturity to *not* take it *personally*, having obviously been getting frustrated with *herself* over her difficulties with the material instead of being annoyed at her sister for her sniping remarks. The now white-haired girl *had* perked up a little when I’d both handed them a copy of *The Hobbit* and asked them to read the first chapter. Powder had been unsure, until I’d told them it was an account of an adventure from another world, with different magic, different races, but they were still all *people.*

After all, if I was going to be responsible for these girls’ education, some *Humanity* would be required.

In time, I *might* be able to get them into the Academy, but before I’d taken that Fae bitch’s deal, I’d finished getting my bachelor’s in Education, along with a now-useless teacher’s certification, and the Academy was. . . *lacking,* by modern standards. It was the premier scientific institution on the *planet*, don’t get me wrong, but it was clearly a *research* school first and foremost, the one person who’s talent lay in *actual* Pedagogy, while acknowledged by Heimerdinger, was forgotten by staff and student alike, the majority of instructors very much following the ‘take notes while I talk at you’ school of education, with a lesser amount employing the ‘screw around with things while I make sure none of you kill yourselves’ model.

And any idea of things like multiple learning styles, let alone multiple *intelligences?* The ‘Scientific’ Yordle *himself* poo poohed any such thing, declaring it all ‘Science’, and the staff followed suit.

Mind you, I was *pretty* sure that such metacognitive styles and skills could be *learned*, with time, effort, and a willingness to rework one’s understanding of things, but that wasn’t just putting the cart before the horse, it was not even bothering to acquire any equines before you began your journey.

Regardless, while I wouldn’t have time to teach both girls to the same *volume* of classes attending the Academy would entail, it was far less of a difference than it would be if they could go to high-school back home, actual classes only taking up, on average, four hours a day for Academy students. I couldn’t clear *that* much time in my schedule, but considering I was giving them personalized instruction, I could probably match their theoretical Academy gains in half the time, minus the minor networking that could occur, though that was balanced out by access to my own connections, and that was if I *couldn’t* find a way to motivate them.

Violet I was still trying to figure out, as there *was* more to the girl than ‘Angry McPunchalot’, but she was not exactly. . . *forthcoming.*

Powder’s handle, meanwhile was *ludicrously* easy to identify.

*Hextech.*

Well, Hextech *and* Chemtech, but with *that* glowing blue carrot, any sort of stick wasn’t required in the slightest.

Shelving the last of the books, and thinking about what I’d be working on with Viktor tomorrow, I ambled through the shelves of my Sweet Home’s library, countless leather-bound tomes lining the walls, mass-produced by the Company, color-coded by section and with metallic lettering to create a sort of ‘private study’ aesthetic.

*Hmm, we’re working on pinning down how the Proto-Matrix works tomorrow, but we’ve got time for other things,* I considered, looking up the scientific reference section’s location on my phone and making my way there. Turning the corner, I smiled, only for the expression to freeze, as the shelves were *completely bare.*

No, there was a *single* piece of paper, folded over and propped up, with the word JAYCIFER written on it. Approaching it, I picked up the note, and read it, unsurprised by its contents, but annoyed by them all the same.

**NO SHORTCUTS**

“Is it really shortcuts if it’s *pure tech?* I mean, I *know* how to make a lot of things that don’t exist here! Heck, I can *make a nuke!* It’s *not that hard!*”I yelled, frustrated, but there was no response, nor, checking the paper, were there any new words written on it.

There was, however, a *second* paper, under the first, bearing a single word.

**EXACTLY?**

“. . . I know *enough,*” I replied defensively, but, checking, there was no third note.

And, honestly, there didn’t *need* to be one.

I could practically feel **DEATH**’s flat stare on me, which needed no words.

“Yeah, yeah, I get it, that’s the *point*,” I grumbled, turning around, but nothing had appeared behind me. Walking down the hall, the next seventeen sets of shelves were empty as well, but at the back there *were* a smattering of books.

Grabbing one, and flipping through it, they were all things that were pretty much common knowledge, the kinds of books I might find in the *Academy’s* reference library, which I had access to, but nothing on, say, atomic theory, or how to make an offset litho printing press, instead of the kind that required each sheet to be pressed *individually*. I knew the assembly had to something to do with rollers, but, like, a *ton* of them because. . . ink drying rates?

“Not even a copy of ‘The Way Things Work’?” I grumbled, having loved that book as a kid, mammoths and all, but not able to recall the *specifics* that I needed to plagiarize the wheel, as it were.

But, like I told the girls, I was here to *invent*, not uplift this society directly, and that meant that if I remembered a thing *could* be done, but not *how*, exactly, I was just as likely to come up with something that did the same job, but with underlying different *mechanics*. Like somehow figuring out how to use targeted burns via Hextech discharges to *scorch* writing on pages en masse instead of soaking a long stream of paper with patterns of ink. If I cracked that odd application, I’d *still* be able to make a newspaper, but in a way that was *completely* novel from how they were made pretty much *everywhere* else.

Because when you have a hammer made of magic, why not use it to nail *everything.*

Okay, the phrasing needed some work, and while I *could* probably point people in enough directions to have them figure out the *normal* way of doing things, even if I *tried* to recreate what I remembered exactly, there was a not-insignificant chance that they, or I, would zig down the technological path where every *other* reality in the Company zagged, and doing that to base technologies, that then had *other* tech built up after them, would *still* result in something unique after a few layers of invention.

Unless, of course, I had *exacting* instructions to follow.

“Fine, we’ll do it this way,” I groaned, pausing, but. . . no, nothing changed. Which meant that this wasn’t a monitored, active conversation, but likely something **DEATH** had set up in advance. “Am I *really* that predictable?”

Still no answer, and, walking back out, I half expected to see a note that said ‘YES’, only visible as I left this section, but, for better or worse, *that* was the extent of my supervisor’s communications.

Sighing, I just shook my head. “Challenge accepted.”