

Planning-102

Tibs slipped by the stunned clerk and was out of the room, medallion in hand, and running for the exit. He had to make it before the alarm sounded. Clerks stared at him. One called after him. Even an adventurer watched him, looking more amused than anything else.

Good, he was outrunning the alarm.

“Stop him!” someone yelled as he turned a corner, using Earth to keep from sliding.

Okay, things were going to get interesting. An adventurer, with metal as her element, and an Earth instructor, turned and stepped into the center of the corridor. Metal essence shifted around the adventurer, an etching forming between them and Tibs that encompassed the corridor.

That he could deal with. Tibs just hoped they wouldn't notice his eyes.

He channeled Metal and ripped the etching apart. The adventurer had been too confident in his strength and wasn't 'holding on' to the essence. The net came undone as Tibs ran by them. He sensed the Earth essence amass over the instructor's arm, but could only ready himself for the impact by coating his back with ice. Adding Earth or Metal risk one of them noticing.

The fist connected, and the ice shattered, along with his shoulder blade. Tibs focused through the pain. First, his landing. Ice on the floor. His concentration broke as he landed badly, but he was sliding on the extremely slick surface. When he could think through the pain, he sufficed himself with Purity, then switch back to water. He got to his feet and realized he'd lost hold of the medallion.

He couldn't tell where the entrance to the building was, but he had been heading in its direction already, so forward was where he needed to go. At some point, he'd run outside of the enchantment that protected the back of the building.

He ran off the ice and shouldered the clerk with wood out of his way before they could make anything of the essence they were manipulating. They lost their concentration on hitting the wall.

More people ahead, since he was getting closer to the exit. And he knew where the exit was. Lots of Runners, a few guards, a handful of adventurers, and three instructors.

This was going to be—

Etching came undone as Runners ripped them apart.

—easier than Tibs expected.

A golden eyed adventurer appeared before Tibs, and he launched himself over her with an air disk. He sense essence accumulate before him, and sent himself to the side by jumping off another disk. Then the wall, rolling on the floor and back to his feet.

When this was over, he'd come up with a way to thank them for the help.

“Close the doors!”

Not if Tibs could help it. He threw water at the feet of the guards grabbing the handles and turned that to ice. As they fell, he threw water under the still moving door and iced that so it would climb up and thicken.

The weave protecting the entrance was already chewing through it, using corruption. He tried to undo that, but he wasn't strong enough to overcome that part of the weave. He settled for adding more and more ice to slow the process and ensure he'd make it.

The Water essence was ripped out of his control and the ice disappeared. He cursed and switched to Earth, filling the gap under the door again. He didn't have the training to turn that into anything like stone, and adding Arcanus was out of the question under these conditions, so he just through more and more essence and hoped no one would react fast enough to—

That was ripped out of his control.

Metal then! Spikes before the door biting into the wood, and only then being affected by the protective enchantment.

“Who's helping him!”

That essence was ripped away, but it has done its job. He would—

Ice formed in the gap. Shimmering and so clear, he mostly knew it was there because he sensed it. He didn't bother trying to take control of it. Someone able to do that with ice was far more powerful than he was, and they would expect him to try.

So he suffused himself with Corruption and threw that at the ice. It didn't get through everything, but enough that when Tibs jumped into it, the ice shattered, slicing into him. Purity took care of that as he landed, then was running again.

Yells to stop him continued, but the outside guards had been too surprised, and today, they didn't have elements.

Tibs turned into the closest alley to both make it harder on the guards running after him to keep up and to be out of sight to make their work even harder. An air disk launched him up above the roofs, and with only a little use of air essence, he landed on one and continued running.

He started for the Dungeon and immediately realize he was going to need help. Sto's call had stopped mid scream, as if someone had muffled him. That probably meant Sto wouldn't be able to keep the creatures on the fourth floor from trying to kill him.

He could do little against the guards patrolling the dungeon's streets other than avoid them, but the dogs, on the other hand.

He didn't bother trying to sense Serba. Her essence wasn't distinctive among the mass of townfolk. But while her dogs had no more essence than people, it didn't form the shape of a dog, not a person. He sensed the largest group of them and switched direction.

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He'd picked up an escort.

Three other rogues running the roofs in parallel to him. There had been five, but two had jumped down and led guards away. He motioned ahead to the left and down, and another rogue dropped from her roof.

He saw the end of the roofs as a plaza opened. The dogs were there, as were a lot of people, and too many wore metal. Okay, it made sense she'd be with other guards. There might be an event in the plaza. Unless merchants were involved, Tibs rarely found out about those ahead of time.

He dropped from the roof, assessing before landing. He didn't see her, but the mass of dogs with children told him where to head. Guards moved among the townsfolk, looking relaxed. The air was relaxed and from what he gathered as he ran through them, this had been impromptu, to celebrate the breaking of the sickness.

Everyone there wore Sto's ring.

The guards who yelled after him did so in good humor, telling him to slow down and enjoy the day.

He'd do that after he'd saved Sto and confirmed the guild was done for. The last thing he wanted was for some power hungry adventure to think the death of their leader meant it was time for them to take over. He couldn't afford to just hope the infighting for power would deal with all of them. He was going to have to ensure it continued until there was no one left.

Where was she? Not with the crowds; she didn't like people enough to celebrate with them. But her dogs were here, so she would be—in that alley.

“Serba! I need your help!”

She stared at him. “What do you need me for? Get Jackie.”

“I need you.” He stopped. “And I don't have time to argue. Someone's life is in danger.”

“Then get more of your—”

“You! You're the one I need. The others can't help with this.”

“And I can?” she scoffed.

“Please, Serba. One of my friend is going to die if you don't help.”

That sobered her. She let out a series of whistles, and the run ran after her and Tibs.

“Guards and adventurers are going to try to stop me,” he said.

“Why?”

“I pissed off the guild.” He figured keeping it simple was best. “Is it going to be a problem?”

She laughed. “Just tell me what to do. If Jackie can follow your lead, what else can I do?”

“He's the team leader.”

“Sure, keep telling yourself that.”

When guards stepped into their path, Serba let out another series of whistles and the dogs ran ahead of them, jumping on the surprised guards and bringing them down.

“Are they...” Tibs trailed off.

“They aren't trained to kill,” she replied, disappointed. “So they're going to be fine.”

The next person to try to stop them was an adventurer. Epsilon, since any lower and

he'd be a Runner, but only barely that. Don's essence felt almost as dense. Metal, like a lot of the adventurers who also acted as guards.

"I've got this one," Tibs said as the man moved his hands to his sides and thin blades formed. "Keep running down this street. I'll catch up."

And air disk had Tibs in the air, his ice shield and sword forming. The adventurer watched with none of the surprise Tibs's use of other elements had caused today. This one might not know who he was, or what he shouldn't be able to do.

The man moved quickly and smoothly, deflecting Tibs's descent so he'd crash to the ground instead of on him.

Tibs didn't crash. His feet touched the packed dirt and Earth stopped him, then he propelled himself at the man, who now reacted with surprise, but parried with essence assisted ease.

Tibs was used to that trick. Too much, according to Jackal and Mez, but winning was more important than doing it the 'right way.'

He ducked under a swing and nudged the man's essence as he moved to parry Tibs's attack and the sword was too far to stop him. Tibs's blunted sword edge hit the man in the face and he staggered.

"Not looking to kill you," Tibs said, as the man looked the blood on his hand from running it over his face. The blood was mainly from the broken nose. "Just walk away."

"I don't let murderers live."

Tibs smiled. The guild was done for at least.

The adventurer came at Tibs fast, doing something with his essence Tibs couldn't quite understand as he fought to keep the far too fast attacks from slicing him. The man's swords had an edge to would cut anything not reinforced with essence.

While Tibs didn't understand how metal could be used to make someone faster, the solution to that was simple enough. He disrupted the essence again, and the man stumbled. His skin turned metallic as Tibs's pummel approached, so he added Earth to the strength of the blow, and when the impact sounded, the man dropped and didn't get up.

He wasn't losing life essence, so Tibs took off to rejoin Serba, who'd made good distance during his fight.

"You're not just a runner, are you?" she said as he fell into step with her among her did.

"I am."

"Then where did the item you used to jump like that come from?"

"The dungeon."

"Tibs, the guild takes everything that comes out of there, someone is—"

"They only take what they know we find. We've become good at sneaking the stuff we want to keep out."

"Irdian is going to have a fit if he finds out."

"You going to tell him?"

"I don't work for him anymore."

Tibs stared at her, but was kept from asking when that had happened as the edge of the town came into view. If the guards knew he was heading for Sto, they would be—

They made it out of the town proper with no one in their way.

Why? They had to want him at all costs, so why weren't they covering the obvious ways out of the town?

"Tibs? Please tell me your friend just got into a fight among the stalls."

Because as far as the guild was concerned, the dungeon wasn't a way out. The guards would be at the Transportation platform and on the opposite side, guarding the road there.

"Inside," Tibs replied.

"I'm not a Runner," she replied.

"It's okay. This doesn't need a Runner."

"It's a Dungeon, Tibs. Runners are who go in them."

"No, anyone who goes in them is called a Runner. But this isn't a run, it's a rescue."

The guards who saw them only looked perplexed. One called after Serba, but she didn't respond.

"You can't go—"

One of the adventurer at the bottom of the steps started to say as Tibs and Serba ran past them, but only watched instead of trying to stop them. By the door, the two guards there watched, not overly interested, while the cleric stepped forward. They never let anyone pass until they'd assured themselves the Runners were in good condition, unless one of them had pissed them off. Tibs didn't recognize this one, but he was strong. Past Epsilon. Tibs had no idea what he was doing on healing duty, but he wasn't the first one strong enough to be in the field, the way the guild used to do things manning the door.

Tibs hoped this would work, because any slow down here might make the guards interested in stopping him too. He suffused himself with Purity and locked eyes with the cleric.

The man took a step back in surprise, then only stared in shock as Tibs and Serba ran by them and into the dungeon.

Tibs breathed easier when the guards didn't follow them inside. They were Epsilon, and Tibs had noted a preference for not going in from all the guards unless ordered to do so.

"How are you not out of breath?" Serba asked, panting, as he opened the doorway.

"Essence." He made a purity weave and applied it to her. She stared at him, at his eyes, as it spread and her breathing slowed back to normal. "I'll explain later. We have someone to save first." He motioned to the doorway showing the orange sky of a setting sun and the top of roofs if someone paid attention.

"Tibs, I know I said all you had to do was tell me what to do, but that's..." she looked scared.

"Serba. I can't save him without your help. Please help me save him."

"What is it," She grumbled under her breath, "about you that's making us do stupid stuff like this?" She stepped through the doorway.