

Stepping up-82

Sebastian didn't let the destruction of the catapult stop him, as Tibs had hoped. Even before the elation over the victory passed, Sebastian had his people running into the town from all directions in what had felt at the time as a desperate last play to Tibs.

Now, as he chased another group of Sebastian's people, and watched more burning buildings, he understood. They carried pouches filled with everburn that they flung at buildings. The thing leather burst on impact and all it to was for another to throw a torch at it and it was yet one more building removed from his town. One less home for his people to return to when they won.

According to Kroseph's father, the people in the dungeon had enough food for two more days, which Quigly felt was enough. Without the catapult, Sebastian only had his army, with only a few items, like the shields, that could block essence.

Tibs tackled the slowest of the people in green and black and the others kept running. He ran his sword through her back, then was up and ready to pick up the chase when he saw the fire spread from the black patch of everburn.

He looked around to confirm he was alone. So many of Sebastian's people were in the town that the teams had had to break up to deal with them all. The woman at his feet was dead.

He switched to fire and approached the flames. This was his first time alone with everburn. He wanted a way to end the fire. And that meant sacrificing the chase.

There was essence in the everburn, but only in the way there was essence in everything; Water, earth, air, fire, darkness, and even corruption, along with more he couldn't identify. He couldn't explain where the fire essence it emitted came from, because that was where it differed from other burning things, like a log or a torch. Where they kept the flames alive by consuming what was burning, and the fire essence was a consequence of the flame, the everburn generated the essence without being consumed and that fed the flame, making it nearly impossible to extinguish, as well as burning far hotter.

He took control of the essence and it fought him; the pressure mounting against his will as more and more accumulated. While he did that, the flames on the everburn died, but the wood of the wall kept burning. Any attempt to reach for its essence to snuff it out was enough for some of that from the everburn to escape his control and reignite the fire.

Then, even controlling that was too much, and it shattered, causing him to stagger back as the fire roared back to life, the burst of concentrated essence causing the wall to burn entirely in seconds.

Hands on knees, he looked at the damage. Not doing this correctly would cause the house to burn down faster, not that they'd kept that from happening. Any building with everburn on it was destroyed. All they were able to do was keep the destruction to that building. Which now, with all these people running around and flinging everburn, would be difficult.

If they needed to save a building, Tibs decided, it would take multiple Runners with fired as their essence working together. With the strongest containing the everburn. The way

this was going, Sebastian might destroy the town even if Tibs stopped every one of his people.

He took up the chase. There was nothing he could do for this building. His best hope was to prevent more everburn from being spread.

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The scream came as Tibs dispatched another one of Sebastian's people. He'd been running all morning and early afternoon. He'd lost track of how many people he'd killed, but there always seemed to be more. The only part of the town free of damage or fighting was the nobles' neighborhood. Every road and alley leading there seemed to have an adventurer keeping anyone out.

The scream came again, and now he heard the mocking laughter too, multiple people laughing.

He went up the closest building and made the rest of the way from there. He peeked over the peak of the roof and into the square. Three archers in green and black were in sight, casually loosing arrows at the screaming man who Tibs couldn't see from this vantage. Each of the two ways out in his sight had a fighter standing in it, enjoying the entertainment. He could hear others also out of sight. There were two more, so they would also be guarded.

The out-of-sight man screamed again in pain. Tibs couldn't wait. He went over and slid down the roof. It was low, only three stories. He wouldn't even need air for his landing.

He suffused his body with earth and rolled with the impact, letting go and switching back to water. He had a wall of ice up before the archers and one fighter. Then he has his ice sword and shield ready.

He saw who the man the archers had been shooting was and sighed inwardly. Don was going to hate that Tibs was the one saving him. He noted the four dead Runners, then had to focus on the two approaching fighters and keep in mind there were at least two more.

He had one down quickly, then was parrying the other. An archer made it around the wall and Tibs shoulder the fighter aside long enough to make an 'x' attack and the archer didn't get up.

The fighter got in close and tried to bash Tibs with the pommel of his sword, but Tibs had a knife in his shield hand and that in the man's stomach, ripping it out viciously before sending it back into his magical hiding place. A side effect Sto had forgotten to mention was how only the knife went there, none of the blood using it cause. With his sword and shield being ice, the only thing he needed to clean after a battle was his armor and himself.

A third fighter was around the wall with the other two archers.

"Don, can you do something about those archers?"

"Would I be in this situation if I could?" the man snarled back. "You're so bloody abyss good, just deal with them."

Tibs did an 'x', but the archers threw themselves aside. That was the problem with having to move his sword for the attack. Anyone with an inkling of sense knew to get out of the way.

He blocked and used his shield to bash the fighter away, leaving her bloody. He'd stopped trying to make his shield smooth after he realized how effective the jagged edges

on the front at hurting people, settling on making the edges more difficult to notice.

She was more careful when she attacked again, darting in and out. He nicked her when he elongated his blade, but trying to keep her between him and the archer caused him to forget about the fourth one until a sword pierced his side. The fact he wasn't standing still probably had saved his life, since he obviously couldn't count on Don to warn him.

He had his essence wrapped around the injury as the sword left it, and had them both in his sight, parrying and blocking. Don was slumped, three arrows in him. The fact he hadn't melted them away kept Tibs from thinking he was playacting. Then he focused on his opponents.

They didn't work well together. Tibs knew enough about team fighting now to tell that. One would attack, leaving the other open; and neither tried to give the archers an opening. The two of them had to make them for themselves and one of the fighters had an arrow in his back because of that. Not that it seemed to slow him.

Tibs blocked with his shield, then stabbed, and the man grunted, stepping back, but he couldn't tell if he'd pierced flesh. He pressed the woman, keeping to jerky movement to keep her on the defensive, and the archers from hitting him.

A patch of ice had her on her back. Then he had his sword in her chest, and air knife in hand and throw at an archer, using the reserve in his bracer to control it and ensure it hit. Then the other fighter was on him again, screaming as brought his sword down over and over, hard enough each blow Tibs blocked chipped some of his shield away.

The man finally slowed and Tibs ran him through with his sword and got an arrow in the back for his work. He ground his teeth as he turned to face the archer, who paused in notching another arrow, his eyes growing wide as Tibs walked in his direction.

If not for Don and the possibility he was conscious, Tibs would burn the man to ashes. Instead, he blocked the next arrow, not slowing. The archer fired another, which Tibs also blocked, then turned and ran. Tibs sent an 'x' blast at him, then headed for Don.

The sorcerer was still slumped but breathing. Tibs could pull the arrows out. Probably should; that would serve Don. Knowing him, he'd probably hidden behind the Runners. He deserved the pain of having them pulled.

Don groaned, opened an eye, and cursed. "I hoped I'd been delusional."

"I'd hoped you would have been smarter than to take on seven of them and gotten people killed."

"There were ten of them," Don snapped, then stifled a groan.

"Then you're even more stupid." Tibs kept the rest to himself. It was too late for the dead, and there could be more of Sebastian's people showing up at any moment. "Can you deal with the arrows? If you can't, I'll be happy to pull them out."

"I can bet you would." With a hand on a shaft, Don caused it to rot away to the usual dark purple goo Corruption always caused. When they were gone, the sorcerer didn't bleed. "It's something I can do," he said.

Tibs rolled his eyes as he pulled the man to his feet and carried most of his weight. He could sense the essence left in the injury, keeping the blood from leaking.

"You have an arrow in your back."

“I’m not trusting you to take it out. Someone at the inn can deal with it.”

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The cleric took one look at the arrow protruding out of Tibs’s back and had someone take Don so she could deal with it. The sorcerer protested he was the one in a worse state, and while Tibs agreed with him, a little suffering would do the man good. Once the arrow was out and she healed him enough to stop the bleeding, she moved on to Don.

“You saved him?” Kroseph asked, bringing him a bowl of stew. So many Runners had died that the worry they’d run out of food had proved mistaken.

“We need everyone we have, and he’s good with organizing things. We just have to keep him from going out and getting more Runners killed. Or make sure he’s with Runners who can stand up to him.”

“That means you need to go with him.”

“Jackal could too.”

Kroseph smirked. “My man would just kill him.”

“It’s tempting. Have you seen the rest of the team?”

“Mez came by after you stopped this morning’s attack, then he off hunting. Carina was out with a team dealing with the fires. Jackal is having too much fun beating up his father’s people to bother with eating. Khumdar…” the server shrugged. “He’s enjoying his cloak of shadows too much.”

Tibs grinned. The cleric hated not using it, even when there was a risk he’d be reported to the guild.

“Eat Tibs. Rest while you can. From what Jackal told me of his father, it’s when it looked like he’s about to lose that he becomes the most dangerous.”