

Planning-6

Tibs stopped a step into the office. The summons to Harry's office—now he knew why the guard has simply said his commander—hadn't been a surprise. While Tibs didn't have many Runners to keep Merchant Row safe, he had them do their job, and when the guards tried to do it for them, it had led to altercations and a few of the Runners ending up in the cells. He hadn't done anything to get them released. There were no runs to be missed and their stay was only a few days. But he had expected Harry to summon him about this.

Only it wasn't Harry sitting behind the desk, hard metal gray eyes fixed on Tibs. He looked older. This black hair, tied in a tail, was streaked with gray, as was the short beard. His uniform was leather, with strips of metal attached to them in a way that left Tibs thinking they were more there as something he could use with his essence than to add protection.

The concentration of the gray essence made him weaker than Harry, but definitely in the Gamma range of Adventurers.

"Where's Harry?" Tibs asked. If not for the ice, he might have demanded or accused. He was annoyed the guard leader wasn't here to give his ultimatum. For all the problems they had, Tibs at least deserved to be yelled at by the leader of the guards and not a subordinate.

The silence stretched, the man unmoving. If he thought he could out wait Tibs, the man was in for a surprise.

"No here," the man finally said. "He left."

"Left for where?"

"I don't know, and it's not what you have to think about. I'm in charge and, unlike him, I'm not going to humor this little game you're playing at."

"I don't play games."

"You and your friends are playing at being guards. That ends now."

Tibs snorted. "I'm not letting you betray us the way Harry and the guild did. You can have what Harry protected. I'm keeping Merchant Row and the area around it. The guards can tell you what's mine if Harry didn't leave you the information."

"What's yours," the man said in a flat tone, "is that room you pay for. That table in the inn you've claimed, and the team you do your runs with. Tirania might indulge you because you're useful to her, but I don't. You will tell the Runner to stop interfering with my patrols, or I will take harsher actions than throwing them into cells for a day or two."

"Like what? Feeding us to the dungeon? Leaving us alone the next time someone tries to destroy the town?" Tibs smirked. "There's nothing you can do to scare us. We survived Sebastian."

"My job isn't to scare you. My job is to make sure order is maintained. You're interfering with that."

"I'm a rogue. Breaking rules is what I do."

"Breaking the rules comes with consequences."

Tibs shrugged. "Have fun trying to catch me doing it."

The man raised an eyebrow. "I've already 'caught you.'" The door opened. "Take him to the cell."

"Sir?" she asked. "They're kind of full after that bunch we arrested."

The guard leader's smile was cold. "Just put him in with them. It's my understanding he's who they are here for, anyway."

"Sir, Runners are supposed to—" she stopped at the cold glare.

"I'm not my predecessor," the man said. "He abandoned his post, left behind Runners who think they get to set the rules. They break it, and they're going to be treated like any other criminals. Throw him in a cell."

"Yes, sir." She placed a hand on Tibs's shoulder and guided him out of the office and through the building. "I'm sorry about that," she said. "After everything you did for us, he shouldn't be treating you like this. I'd let you go if it was up to me."

Tibs nodded, still thinking about what the man had said. Harry had abandoned his post. Not simply left, abandoned. What could push Harry to do that? The guild was everything to him.

The cacophony as they reached the bottom of the steps pulled Tibs out of his thoughts.

"The Hero's getting the tour?" one of the two guards by the barred door asked, amused.

His escort hesitated. "He's getting to share in the accommodation."

"What?" the other guard asked, as the other lost all humor. "Is this a joke?"

She shook her head.

"Doesn't the captain know what he did?" the other asked. "There wouldn't be a town here if not for Tibs and Don. I get throwing the occasional Runner in there when they get uppity, but him?"

"You're welcome to go tell him that," she said. "But until you get him to change his mind, Tibs is going in a cell."

"How the fuck are we going to clear one of them for him? They're already packed."

"He's going in with the rest of them," she said. "Captain's orders."

The two by the door looked at Tibs. "They're going to rip him around when we put him in there without his armor or weapons."

"The captain didn't say anything about removing his armor," she said.

"But it's..." the man smiled. "Right. The rules are we disarm anyone we put in a cell. The armor's always just been something we agreed to do, so none of the rougher ones would get an advantage. I'm going to have to take that knife."

Tibs handed it to him. He'd get out of his armor as they told him too. He wasn't worried about people. He had enough essence to make sure they left him alone.

"Don't bother trying to do the water thing you do," the guard said, securing the knife in a chest. The lock was simple enough. "They cells have all kind of enchanting on them to keep magic from being used in them."

"They can do that?" Tibs asked.

The guard shrugged. "It's magic. What can't it do?"

A lot, Tibs wanted to tell them.

The door was unbarred and opened. Voices became deafening, only to fall into silence as Tibs was escorted past the door. The silence was hungry. The men and women dressed in clothing going from Street to wealthy looked at him as if he was the answer to all their problems. No, as is his corpse was the answer.

Only a few looked away when they noticed Tibs looking at him hungrily. Townsfolk Tibs expected were here for causing problems after drinking too much.

As with everywhere within the guild, the weave of essence in the walls and the cells' bars was so tight Tibs had trouble teasing the strands he could sense apart, but whatever effect they had, didn't affect him.

"Make space," the guard told to the men and women in the cell they stopped before. It was the third out of four on this side, with four matching them on the other side. There were easily a dozen people in each, and if this one had fewer of them, it was only by one or two. "This is Tibs. He saved this town, so you're going to treat him with respect, or I'm going to come in there and teach to respect heroes. Is that clear?"

They stepped back, away from the door, but there was nothing in their expression that made Tibs think respect was what they were going to give him once the guard was back on the other side of that thick door.

The key was thick and loud as it turned in to lock. So this would need a knife to open. His picks weren't tough enough for the kind of strength it would need. It didn't matter. Tibs wasn't breaking out. He was going to see this through and show that man, as well as his people, that he would endure the same fates they did.

Tibs stepped through the door and had to fight to keep the ice from shattering as essence bombarded him. It was violent, but uncoordinated. A case of using quantity instead of precision. A case where Tibs applied Alistair's example, and limited its effectiveness by being precise in how he countered it, molding the essence within him with angles that caught the assault and deflected it.

When he opened his eyes, any essence he pushed past his skin was ripped to nothing, but he had control of the ice again. He counted the men and women looking at him hungrily, barely out of arm's reach as the thick wooden door slammed shut and the bar closed on the other side.

Thirteen of them. One of which Tibs thought was one of the townsfolk. No one was immune to greed. And if Tibs believed Jackal, Sebastian would have been all the coins he had to convince people to avenge him.

"I'm not Tibs the Hero," he told them flatly. "I'm Tibs the Dungeon Runner. I've been up against the dungeon and survived. If you think you're deadlier than him. Try me."

The first to come at him was a woman. Two steps were all it took for her to be able to swing at him. He blocked and hit her in the stomach, then groin, then the chest, and then the face. She fell back, groaning in pain. Tibs had tried to add Earth to the ice to increase his strength, but that was ripped away by the enchantments. He added working out how to move the essence from his bracer within him to the unending list of things he had to do.

He kicked the knee of the man who attacked next, breaking it. Then one of them had Tibs pushed against the bar, punching him in the face, and Tibs let the ice crack a little.

With an angry scream, he knelt the man in the balls, then smashed his elbow in the side of his head. As the man fell, Tibs kicked him in the face.

These people weren't responsible for Carina, for what had happened to his town, for the pain he felt. But he didn't care. He wanted to lash out at someone, and they seemed happy to volunteer.

Tibs was hit often and hard, but after so many runs, so many fights against Sebastian's thugs, pain was something that needed to be intense for it to bother him. His grunts were barely heard over the pained screams of the people he hit, and that was buried under the cacophony of conversations from the other cells.

* * * * *

"Please," the man pleaded, arms protecting his face, "I'm sorry."

Tibs had him against the back of the cell, the one part that was stone instead of metal bars. He was the last one left from the others in his cell, and Tibs realized, and he reforms the ice, that he hadn't attacked him. Tibs had been the one to grab him, intent on hurting him like the others. Even the few from the adjoining cell who'd thought to get in their shots when Tibs had found himself pressed against the bars separating them. Those weren't as injured as the ones in his cell, but Tibs had also made them regret trying.

Tibs recognized the man as one of the townsfolk, and let him go. The man scurried as far from him as he could.

Tibs looked at the unconscious and groaning people on the floor, on the bench and on top of one another, and smiled in satisfaction. Maybe Jackal had a point about the pit and how useful just hitting people was. He dropped onto the bench and leaned against the wall.

All the cells were quieter now. What conversation took place was worried. The door opened and the guard who'd led him to the cell stopped in front and looked at the damage Tibs had caused.

"I did tell them to treat you with respect. Do you need anything?"

"An ale would be good," Tibs said, then looked at his hands. "Something to clean off this blood. I'd use Water, but..." he motioned around him.

"I'll see what can do." He looked at the injured. "Did you hurt any of them badly?"

Tibs chuckled. "I don't know. I just used fists, feet and any part of my body that would connect, so they're all alive, but a cleric should look at them."

"I doubt any of them can afford to pay one. Don't worry about them claiming you started this. Everyone else here will say you just defended yourself." He raised his voice. "Isn't that right? Or should I move Tibs to your cell?"

Tibs chuckled at how loud the agreement was.

"I'll bring you a tankard and some old cloths," the guard said before stepping away.

* * * * *

Tibs opened his eyes to the sound of the bar being removed from the wooden door. Everyone in his cell was conscious again, and giving him as much space as they could. He still hurt. He'd considered letting go of Water just long enough to suffuse himself with Purity, but on top of not wanting to let his emotions go out of control, the guard has seen his cut face. Tibs had no way to explain that kind of healing.

Two sets of boots approached, and Tirania was the first to become visible as she passed the mass of people pressed against the bars. With her was the man responsible for Tibs being in the cell.

She looked at Tibs, the injured people in the cell, and pursed her lips. "Why is he in here?" She demanded.

"That's where criminal belong," the man replied. He looked no happier than she did, but he was glaring at Tibs.

She turned to face him. "He is not a criminal. He is the Savior of the Dungeon. The Hero of the Town. Do you have any idea what it would look like if he wasn't among those going into the dungeon tomorrow?"

"It'd look like if you break the rules, you get punished," the man replied flatly.

"Not everyone is—"

"I enforce the rules," the man cut her off, and Tibs stared. Even Harry had never done that to her. "Cutting them any kind of slack leads to what you've had to deal with ever since the runs in this dungeon started. So yes, everyone is subject to the rule. If you aren't happy about it, have me replaced."

While they glared at each other, Tibs tried to understand how it was the man was here if Tirania hadn't put him there. Wasn't she in charge of everything taking place within the guild?

"Tibs is getting out of that cell, now," she stated.

"Are you overriding my authority?" the man asked, his tone flat.

"In the one case, yes."

He nodded and motioned. A guard came and unlocked the cell. Tibs exited the cell and turned to follow Tirania, but the captain of the guard grabbed his arm.

“Don’t think her getting you out of here means you can do whatever you want. Stop playing your game, or I will throw you back in here again.”

Tibs locked eyes with him. “I never play games.” He wrenched his arm out of the man’s grip and caught up to Tirania, already making plans to ensure his people no longer ran into the guard’s patrols.