

Planning-5

Tibs felt the weaves in the wall as he walked through the guildhall, but he could only sense a small part of them and he didn't have the knowledge to work out what even that might do, although he could guess at the basics.

The Earth throughout the building had to be about reinforcing the building. Water could be about helping deflect attacks, as well as air. Darkness could make it... what? More difficult to find? It was the largest structure in the town still.

He simply didn't know enough about anything.

But he was hoping to fix some of that now.

He entered the training room, and Alistair was waiting for him.

"I'm glad I didn't have to send a reminder this time," the man said.

"I don't have a lot keeping me busy, now that Sebastian's dead," Tibs replied flatly.

"Now that you killed him, you mean?" his teacher said in an accusatory tone.

"He killed Carina," Tibs replied hotly, the ice cracking. "And I didn't hide I'm the one who avenged her."

"Avenged?" the man said with a short snort. His expression softened. "I am sorry that she was killed, Tibs. I truly am. But what you did, it goes beyond avenging her. What you did means you lied to me."

Tibs watched his teacher, trying to work out what he might have discovered. Did Tibs leave something behind, showing he'd used more than one element? He had the excuse of having used an item, or maybe he could lay the blame on Sebastian. The man had so many enchanted items, anything could be blamed on him.

"You aren't simply at the edge of Lambda," Alistair said. "That's why you didn't want to be tested. Somehow you've advanced beyond what you should have and you want to keep that from the guild. Keep it from me. Why? I agreed to help you. To postpone your test so your team would remain intact. Why didn't you trust me with this, Tibs?" the man sounded hurt, but Tibs didn't believe him. Alistair was guild, and like all of them, the only thing he cared about was the guild.

"Where were you when Sebastian raided the town?"

"I was away," the man said, the words bright.

"If you'd been here, you would have disobeyed the guild? Come and help us?"

"I..." Alistair closed his mouth on the glowing words he'd be about to speak and sighed. "Tibs, it isn't as simple."

"No, of course it isn't. I'm sure the guild thought about for a long time before deciding to just guard the dungeon. To force us to protect the town, to take the noble's coins and protect them. To sacrifice the town so the Everburn didn't touch this precious building. Since you were away," he said mockingly, "you didn't have to see what your guild did to us. So don't ask to think nice about them. This is about training, so train me. Teach me about weaving essence."

"You aren't ready for that," Alistair said dismissively.

"How do you know? You have no idea what I can do."

"Not as much as you think you can." Alistair's smile was amused. "What you did to that man tells me you've grown in power, Tibs. But what we do is about more than power. It's about control. That, I don't think you've gained since our last training session."

Tibs snorted. "You're one to talk about control. You didn't even know amulets could be used as reserves."

"I never needed—"

"Exactly! You never needed anything while I've had to fight for everything!" Tibs stopped himself. Found the spreading cracks and iced them. "Having more essence means you don't need to have control."

"That's a fighter's way to think, Tibs," Alistair said in disappointment. "We're rogues. We have to be cleverer than them, because they'll always have more power than we do. You'll be hard pressed to find one fighter who does more with their essence than make themselves or their weapons harder and stronger. There's a reason they pick Earth and Metal. Even those who go with crystal barely do anything clever with it."

"Aren't there fighters for all the elements? Harry's light."

"I said you'd be hard pressed, Tibs. Not that you'll never find one. Tell me, how does the fighter on your team use his element?"

Wastefully, Tibs thought. "That doesn't change things. More power means I don't need as much

control.”

“What do you think weaving is, Tibs?” Alistair demanded. “You think it’s just about pouring more and more essence into something? It is called weaving after the weavers of fabric. Have you looked at clothing with designs on them? Are they simply more and more threads pushed together?”

“Teach me and I’ll make it happen,” Tibs demanded.

“No. I don’t care how much you’ve increased your reserves, how quickly you can pull essence in to them as you use it, or how many amulets you are secreting on your. Without control, we will be wasting our time.”

“I can have control,” Tibs snarled.

Alistair smiled. “Then show me. Land one strike against me.” He crossed his arms over his chest. “Do that, and I’ll teach you essence weaving.”

Tibs placed a hand on the pommel of his knife. “You want me to use an essence attack on you? Anyone will do?”

“That, or your sword, so something else. Even your fist will—”

Tibs flicked his knife and the jet of water flew at the other rogue, only to deflect to the side with only a raising of Alistair’s eyebrow.

“Really?” the man asked.

Tibs formed his sword, and the jagged blade formed to the cracking of water turning into ice. Alistair shook his head, the disappointment clear on his face. Tibs remembered his teacher’s talk of anger causing this sword to be like this. He smiled, shook it and with a cracking sound, the jagged pieces fell off, leaving a smooth and straight blade.

“I’m glad you have gained at least that much control, Tibs. But you haven’t landed a blow yet.”

Tibs ran at the man, swung, and was shoved aside, barely remaining on his feet. All he saw was the flash of a knife, but it hadn’t come close to him. There had been essence too, but too quick for him to get the detail. He rushed again, and this time Alistair simply stepped aside as causally as if Tibs was a passerby his teacher disliked.

With a snarl, Tibs sent a wave of essence, the water forming a wall that distorted his teacher. With a slice up of his knife, a few flourishes and essence trailing the point the entire time, Alistair parted the wall before it was close to him. Tibs sent another and another, and each time that slice up or down and the wall parted.

On the next one, he threw a knife and smiled as Alistair reflexively moved his arm to block it. His teacher had said any contact counted, and this would—

The air crystallized in front of the arm, the clear ice as intricate as gems nobles wore. It intercepted the knife, shattering from the impact, but sending the blade careening to the side. Tibs stared for a second, then attacked again. Waves of water, shards of ice. He even tried to encase his teacher in it, and the man simply stepped aside, or undid it with quick motions of his knife and trailing essence.

Tibs gritted his teeth but in annoyance and at the strain of keeping the ice filling him from breaking.

Etching, his teacher was stopping his strongest attacks with just etching. Other than the flick and ‘x,’ it hadn’t come up again, but from speaking with Carina, he’d gotten the sense etching was weak, something Runners did as a transition to weaving, not something they learned to depend on.

Tibs ran after the wave, sword high. When Alistair parted it, he brought the blade down hard. His teacher smiled as he moved only slightly and the blade slide away just before making contact. Tibs reversed the attack, but Alistair was already out of reach.

Tibs added water to the floor with the jet of water he sent, flicking water around to give the man more to focus on. He iced the floor as he ran, but Alistair kept his footing. Tibs dropped to his knees and slid under the water attack he sent, sword extended, ready to cut his teacher leg as he slid—

The abrupt stop sent him face first on the stone floor and the pain was followed by water falling over him. He groaned and pushed himself up, only to fall back. He hadn’t realized how exhausted this had made him. He still had ample essence, but all he could do at the moment was keep hold of the ice.

He’d catch his breath, channel Purity long enough to get his stamina back and—

“This is what control can let you do, Tibs.”

Tibs looked at his teacher, who stood well out of reach.

“Wielding all that power comes at the cost of exhaustion. Control lets you find ways around that.”

“You used etching,” Tibs said, panting accusingly.

Alistair smiled. “I used all the tools I needed to teach you this lesson. It doesn’t matter how powerful

you are, Tibs. How vast an adventurer's reserve is. Control and cleverness can always come up with a way to get the upper hand."

"I want," Tibs said, panting angrily. He didn't even have the strength to fill the cracks in the ice. "To learn etching."

"Yes," his teacher said. "I think you've reached the point where I can teach that to you. But, there will be rules Tibs. No more lying to me about what you can do. I know you don't like the guild and I understand why, but I am your ally in this."

Alistair's words were dark, but that didn't mean Tibs had to believe him. "Fine. I'll tell you everything I've figured out how to do," Tibs lied.

* * * * *

Tibs frowned as he watched the tents being put up behind where the buildings were being built.

"Tibs?" Sto asked. "What's going on?"

Tibs wasn't sure. They reminded him of when he'd arrived and the town was nothing more than a collection of tents, but they were larger.

"I think," he whispered after making sure no one was close, "the new runners are going to arrive soon."

"Yes! I hope that means you're all going to be doing runs again."

"Getting hungry?" Tibs asked, smiling.

"What? No, of course now, that isn't how—oh, right, because you all refer to me absorbing those who fail the tests as eating them. No, that's still fine, so long as I don't do too much work. I'm just bored. Ganny says that by this point, most dungeons have so many runners, there's always people in them."

"You mean they don't all close their doors at night?"

"Ganny?" Sto called after a few seconds of silence. "Do I have to close my door like I've been doing?"

"Don't you want some time to rest?" she answered, her voice gaining strength. "Hi Tibs."

"Don't you think I've gotten enough rest at this point?" Sto replied.

"So you're done making adjustments to the floors?"

Sto snorted.

"There you go. You can't do that when people are inside."

"I can, all I have to do is block off the parts where... Okay, I see how having time without anyone here will make that a lot simpler. Still, I could leave it open when I don't have anything to do."

"People like things to be regular," Ganny said. "If they can't tell when the door will be open or not, they're going to get irritable."

Tibs didn't think the Runners would care, but he could see how it would disrupt the schedule.

"So that's why you insisted I did it for the same length of time."

"That and to try to get you to understand how time works. I can't believe anyone else is having this hard of a time getting their dungeon to understand such a simple concept."

"Do you understand time, Tibs?" Sto asked.

"I know how to count it," he said. "Well, how to tell it by where the sun is, as well as Claria and Torus at night. I think it's got something to do with void essence."

"Really?" Sto asked. "And the sun isn't something in my area of sense, Ganny, neither is Claria and Torus, so don't even bring them up. What's that about time being part of void? I have plenty of that, and it never did anything with time."

"Like you'd know if it did," Ganny mumbled.

"I'm not sure. Something Carina said, how adventurers with void as their elements sometime end up being aware of time in different order."

"I wonder how that happens?" Sto mused.

"And I'm going to say we wait until you have a better handle on that essence before trying anything."

"Why are you making such a big deal of me losing a room?" Sto asked.

"I'm not making a big deal of you losing the room. I'm making a big deal of you losing the entire section of the cavern it was in."

"How do you lose a room?" Tibs asked.

"Go on," Ganny said, "tell him."

Sto sighed. "I don't know. I was experimenting with the doorways we've made to reach the lower floors. I thought that I could make a puzzle out of those the way Ganny's made puzzles on the third floor, and... well, I don't know. When I activated the weave, the room just went away." Ganny signed exasperatedly. "Fine, more than the room. There's this entire section on the fourth floor that's just not there."

“How can part of something inside a mountain, inside you, just not be there?” Tibs asked.
“Yeah,” Ganny said. “That’s why I think we need to not experiment with void anymore.”