

Planning-10

New ending to the chapter 9

The wall opened to the loot room and Don strode through, only to stop a few steps in.

Tibs followed.

The room was smaller and instead of the five pedestal, it contained only a chest.

“Check it for traps,” Don instructed.

“Don,” Jackal said, as Tibs headed for the chest, “Don’t start giving orders.”

“I’m,” the sorcerer said, turning to face them, then faltered. “We can’t trust that the chest’s safe.”

“We know our role,” Mez replied in a gentler tone than Tibs thought Don deserved.

“Yeah,” Jackal added. “In this team, we don’t have to order people about.”

“Unless it is to keep Jackal from doing something idiotic,” Khumdar said.

“There’s no need to order me even then.”

“No,” Mez said, “I remember us trying to just suggest you stop trying to get yourself killed, it only started working once Tibs threatened to kick you in the shin.”

“Higher,” Khumdar added.

“The only person who’s able to suggest you do something,” the archer continued, “and you actually listen, is Kroseph.”

“Whose suggestions come with far more weight than out orders,” the cleric added.

Tibs glanced over his shoulder and Don looked at them, baffled.

“Can we get on with this, instead of bashing the team leader?” Jackal asked in exasperation.

“I do not believe we have much else to do until Tibs has confirmed the chest is safe to open.”

Jackal looked at Don with his ‘can you believe I’m being treated this way’ expression only to close his mouth and scowl. “Fine. Anyone think it’s odd we’re back to having just a chest instead the choice of items?”

Tibs glanced at the ceiling before focusing on the chest.

“Oh, right,” Sto said, “you only had one run after you asked me to help arm the runners. The others were finding it strange how I let them have all five, instead of forcing them to pick one. Since you talked about how having the guild ask question about what was going on was a bad thing, I went with chests. And now I’m not sure it’s worth going back to the pedestal.”

“The chest’s safe,” Tibs said, once he was done looking it over. He opened it and stepped away.

Mez was to the side, by the entrance, talking with Don in a low voice. Tibs considered shaping the air to hear what was being said, but he didn’t care enough.

“Tibs?” Jackal called in a low voice as he took items out of the chest, then mouthed ‘enchanted?’

Tibs pushed the leather chest armor with a foot, then a knife and the amulet. Jackal glanced at the sorcerer and archer before slipping the knife in his pouch.

That would be why Mez was keeping Don away. Tibs helped put the leather armor in Khumdar’s pack, then they left.

“Just remember that you’re part of a team,” Mez told Don as they approached, then the Sorcerer stepped away and looked angry for a second, before the expression cracked with indecision.

Chapter 10

“I’m fine,” Done snapped under his breath as Tibs looked over the shallow cut along his arm. His dark robe only had the light armor enchantment Sto put on all the sorcerer’s robes, and it hadn’t proved effective against the golem person with void essence who had blinked from place to place, dodging Don’s attacks until it was close enough to cut him. It has then allowed the sorcerer to put a hand on her and push corruption essence in, melting it before it could blink away.

“It’s not like you can do anything about it, so stop trying to be a hero.”

“We look after each other on this team,” Tibs replied. “Even if the person hurt is an asshole.”

When Don didn’t snap a reply, Tibs looked up from the arm. The sorcerer was looking away, mumbling something angrily.

“We forgot bandages, didn’t we?” Mez asked. Then Khumdar offered a roll of linen.

“Traveling as I did, being prepared has always served me well, especially when I did not expect to need

it.”

Tibs took it and wrapped the cut, making a splint of his essence around it to speed up the healing.

“Are you really a cleric?” Don asked.

“I do not care what you believe,” Khumdar replied flatly then walked away.

“I wasn’t—” the sorcerer called, then closed his mouth. “Is he?” he asked Tibs.

“What do you care?”

“Don’t you care that someone on your team’s lying about what they are?”

“We’re all lying about something,” Tibs replied.

“I’m not.” The way the words lit up marked him as a liar, but Tibs didn’t call him out on it.

“The only thing I care about is that Khumdar has our back, and he does.” He secured the bandage and rerolled the rest of the linen.

“I—” Don closed his mouth. Tibs was mildly curious as to what he’d intended to say, because there had been no light.

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The last line of the boar’s crest slid into place, completing the design and the door raised up, revealing the uneven floor of the room. Don let out a whispered curse.

“You have this Tibs?” Jackal asked.

“Just wait here while I check the pattern is the same.”

“Pattern?” Don asked.

“There’s an order to what column on the floor causes the others to move,” Mez said in a reasonable tone, causing Jackal to close his mouth.

“I never noticed that,” Don replied, awed.

“Did you let your rogue try to work it out?” Jackal asked, rolling his eyes.

“Jackal,” Mez said. “That’s not helping.”

“He—” Jackal pointed at the sorcerer.

“I agree with Mez,” Khumdar cut him off, and earned himself a stunned stare from the fighter.

“Didn’t you walk away from him asking you a question?” Jackal demanded.

“Yes, so the situation would not become aggravated. We are a team. None of us will gain anything by fighting and arguing. We know this. I believe you have all seen the result of teams who could not work together during your early runs. That we agree with the decision or not, Don is part of our team. We must put our conflicts aside while inside the dungeon, or we will not survive the run.”

“I didn’t expect you just let him be intolerant of you,” Jackal said.

“I’m not—” Don started.

“I have lived with intolerance directed at me my entire life. It is a large part of the reason behind becoming who I am. I no longer care how people feel about what I am. I find it easier to ignore them, instead of engaging and wasting time explaining something they have no interest in understanding.”

“I’m not intolerant,” Don whispered in the silence.

Tibs was on his seventh column by then, and the behavior of the others matched his memory. “I’m ready to guide everyone through,” he called. “Don, how are you at jumping?”

“Don’t worry,” the sorcerer replied. “I’m going to be fine.”

Jackal snorted.

“He needs to know so he can point you to columns you can reach,” Mez said.

“I misjudged my capabilities our first time in this room,” Khumdar said. “And did not complete a leap properly. Recovering from that proved difficult.”

Don looked at the cleric suspiciously.

“I’m not... great at jumping,” Don finally admitted.

Jackal closed his mouth at the glare Mez gave him.

Tibs gave the assignments, making sure Don had the easiest ones to reach.

“How did your team get through this room?” Jackal asked, when there were roughly halfway to the partially closed path right before the end of the room and Tibs was testing a set of columns.

“Setareh rushed it,” the sorcerer finally said. “She ran through, jumping from one column to the other before the center path closed.”

“Setareh did have a love for jumping and running,” Khumdar said.

“You knew her?” Don asked, surprised.

“She and I shared interests.”

“I had to melt a column that rose in her path the first time.”

“You melted a column?” Tibs asked, losing track of the movement his jump caused. “With corruption?” He glanced up.

“Don is powerful,” Sto said.

“It only worked that time. The next one, I though I’d melt a path, through, but the dungeon made them resistant somehow.”

“I learn fast,” Sto said proudly.

Tibs studied Don’s essence. It was dense, it matched Jackal that way, but that couldn’t be all there was to it. He’d used up a lot of his fire reserve before he’d damaged the Ratling’s camp walls, and Sto hadn’t woven protection into them against fire like he had corruption. Skill had to come into it. Alistair had shown him that skill could defeat brute force, and it had to have been what Don had done. A weave or an etch that make his essence more effective. They weren’t supposed to learn about weaves until after Lambda, but sorcerers read a lot of books, so Tibs wouldn’t be surprised Don knew methods the teachers didn’t want him to know. He’d have to find a way to get the sorcerer to talk about them so he could figure out how to apply them to his essence.

He had to back track to get the sequence again, but then it was simply a matter of moving the others appropriately from column to column until they were all on the other side. The lever opened the door and lowered the floor.

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Tibs looked at the shield at the top of the intersection. Reaching the dragon crest had taken longer than they’d planned. Since he couldn’t ask, he didn’t know if the information that had been written down had been wrong, or Ganny had changed the triggers in this section of the floor, but following the papers had gotten them lost, and required restarting from the boar’s crest.

“How long do we have left?” Jackal asked.

Tibs shrugged. Not a lot of time, but beyond that?

“A candle’s worth at the most,” Don said, studying the shield also.

“Are you sure?”

“Yes.” The sorcerer rolled his eyes. “Didn’t you bring one to work out how much time the line represent?”

“We figured out it was when the next team enters,” Jackal replied. “But unlike you, candles aren’t something we waste coins on.”

Don was the one who rolled his eyes. “Being able to know how long you have isn’t a waste.” He motioned to the jumbled crest. “Is one candle enough time to solve that lock?”

Jackal narrowed his eyes at the tone, and Don looked away. “Tibs?” the fighter asked.

“I don’t know.” He hadn’t studied the puzzle yet. He could tell the idea was to reform the dragon too, but it wouldn’t be like the other two. And he didn’t know how long a candle took to burn. He knew they took the same amount of time, and that they were used to count time, but Tibs had never had much use for knowing time like that. Looking up at the sun or moons had always been enough.

He stepped to the crest and immediately, he knew sliding the tiles wouldn’t be how this was one solved. Each tile was connected to a dot in the corners that allowed four of them to spin around each of those dots. There was resistance, and when they were realigned a subtle click felt through his fingers. There was essence throughout the crest, but Tibs figure it was to allow the square to turn around the center point and their edges pass through the other squares at the edges, instead of being what he had to overcome.

By the time he had the bottom row lined up, half of the line in the shield was gone. “I’m not going to have the time,” he admitted. “I don’t know how I’m going to get the last pieces to line up.”

“Then next run we come here first,” Don said.

“No,” Jackal replied and glared at the sorcerer. “We do the other two room first, then we come to this one.”

“Jackal,” Mez said. “I think Don’s right. Loot’s not that important—”

“It’s not about the loot.” Jackal sighed. “It’s not just about the loot, but yes, it’s in part that. And no, it’s not me being stupid. One of the reason for the runs is to get the loot. The coins from the fights in the halls and the few caches there isn’t as much as what we get from the rooms now that we aren’t limited to one item. With this guard leader not liking Tibs, there’s no telling if the merchants will be allowed to continue paying him, and Tibs is going to insist on helping the Omegas when they arrive and that’s going to take coins. Unless someone knows something I don’t. We aren’t in a hurry to clear the floor, so it’ll take however long it needs to

take to work out this door after we clear the previous two. Now, lets head back. If we're lucky, the dungeon will through some golem people or Gnolls in our way, I still want to hit stuff."

"I can make that happen," Sto said.

"Does anyone else find it odd that Jackal had stated he is not in a hurry to reach the boss room?" Khumdar asked.

"I think Kroseph replaced out leader with a more sensible one," Mez replied.

"No," Tibs said, walking by them, as he followed the fighter. "He just threatened to withhold *them* time if one of us told him Jackal's been stupid. Not you Don. He's not interested in what you think."