

Chapter 19: The First Disciple

Being a mercenary, Perfection had been knocked unconscious many times before. None of those experiences had ever been fun, and this one looked to be the least fun of them all. She slowly opened one of her eyes, mainly because the other seemed to be glued shut. Perfection knew that in all probability it was her own blood that was keeping her eye closed, and immediately tried to move her hand up to rub it clean.

Bad idea. The moment she moved her arm, pain blasted all through the limb. If she had been in any condition to scream, Perfection would have, but all she could manage right now was a hoarse rasp of her parched throat. Her arm was most likely broken, another experience she had more than enough of.

After the pain subsided to a small degree, Perfection became aware of the world around her. She could hear sounds of a battle somewhere nearby, which proved that this was really an attack and not just some sort of freak accident. She rolled over onto her right side and tried to think back on what actually had happened earlier. They were looking at a map of this world, and then someone mentioned two disciples of the Dark Lord. One was following their other two companions up north while the other was...

Perfection finally managed to sit up with minimal movements to her injured left arm. The entire auditorium room was in darkness. She could not tell if that meant that night had fallen while she was unconscious, or if there had been some previous light source that was now destroyed. The fighting was coming from outside the room, so she had some time to spare.

She turned back to glance around her general vicinity, to see if Lazarus or anyone else were nearby. Instead she saw a large empty space, where that strange rune-covered object once occupied. She had thought it blew up, but if it had done so there was no wreckage from the explosion. Could an explosion have vaporized the thing? If it had done so, Perfection knew she was lucky to be alive.

Slowly getting to her feet, Perfection cradled her injured arm with her right hand while treading around the area to find any other person she recognized. However, it became apparent that there was not a single soul in the area. Perhaps she had been the only one knocked out, which seemed just a little unfair to her.

Seeing how there was no one she could get any information from, Perfection set about finding material to make a sling for her arm. The near-absolute darkness did not make this task in

any way easier, and Perfection almost screamed as her arm brushed up against a wall hidden in the shadows.

After struggling around in the dark some more, Perfection soon realized it was hopeless. The only option she had was to get to a well lit area and find someone to mend her arm. She turned towards the dim light coming in from the back of the auditorium and slowly made her way towards that. She could still hear a battle raging outside, but did not see any choice except to go out there.

Concerned with her own troubles, It Perfection a few moments to realize that the light at the far end of the room was not light coming through an open doorway, but rather a dim glow that was approaching her. Immediately afterwards she saw that the dim glow was coming from the elf Dobby.

“Where the hell have you been, you little cretin?” she greeted Dobby once he had stopped in front of her. This close, Perfection saw that the glow was coming from one of his hands that was clenched into a tiny fist. The other hand held a bottle of alcohol.

“Nice to see you too, bitch.” He returned her welcome. “Unlike the rest of you guys, I got myself to safety the moment I knew something was wrong.” he finished this with a quick pull of the bottle, which looked to be almost empty.

“Wait. You were gone even before that thing blew up. You knew what would happen?” She asked a bit angrily, annoyed the little wretch didn’t warn the rest of them.

“I didn’t know *what* would happen.” he answered. “I only knew *something* would happen. I’m an elemental. I can tell when bad magick is in the area.”

“And so you ran away. Thanks a lot,” Perfection said, cutting off with a wince as she accidentally moved her left arm.

“Injured?” Dobby asked as he flung away the empty bottle. Perfection nodded. “Here. Let me heal you.”

He grabbed her broken arm before she could react, and Perfection let out a shriek as a searing cold passed through the limb. She dimly noticed that the light in Dobby’s palm passed from his hand into her arm, but was otherwise in too much shock to notice what was happening. It ended abruptly as Dobby pulled his little hands away. Perfection was about to slap the little bastard, but stopped when she realized her previously injured arm now felt fine.

“I didn’t know you could heal.” She commented, trying to find a way to say thanks without actually saying it.

“I can do a lot of things.” Dobby replied. “I don’t feel the need to tell random people every single thing I am capable of.”

“But then why didn’t you heal Brittany back at the safehold?” Perfection thought back, “She could have used it She was damn near in a coma for a couple weeks.”

“Two things,” Dobby answered, walking away in the darkness and forcing Perfection to follow behind him. “First, I can heal *minor* injuries. Like your arm. Things that don’t require much energy to do. Second, I did heal her. Many times, at least twelve that I remember. I spent entire nights standing over her with my master trying to pull together and salvage the broken bits of her mind. The Dark Lord really messed with her head. If not for Lazarus, Troye, and myself all helping out, the odds are pretty damn good that she would still be in that coma.”

“Wow.” Perfection could only reply, not realizing just how much the little elf had done. “but anyway, what’s going on here? Who’s attacking us? You said something about bad magick.”

“That’s right.” Dobby said. “From what I can tell, it is probably some lackey of the Dark Lord trying to earn a promotion by killing all of us.”

“Is it that disciple they mentioned?” Perfection asked.

“I am assuming so.” Dobby said. “But the magick is weird. It seems like there are two or possibly even more sorcerers attacking.”

“Two or more?” Perfection spoke up. “Shit. I’ll bet one of them is one of these sorcerers at the portal. Infiltrated the place and whatnot. That would probably explain why these bastards got in here so quick. Where’s Lazarus?”

“In the hall outside in a desperate battle.” Dobby replied, pointing a small grubby finger towards the doors.

“Then why the hell aren’t you out there helping him, you little prick?” She did not wait for an answer from the elf. “Let’s go.”

Dobby halfheartedly followed after Perfection as she marched up towards the room’s exit and pulled open the doors. She was greeted by the sight of a lot of stuff blowing up, causing her to instinctively duck and lunge to some place with cover. This irrational move only landed her in the very middle of the magickal battle, where she was almost instantly hit from multiple sides by invisible blows, a few of which nearly blasted her to her knees.

Managing to pull herself out of the crossfire, Perfection finally got a glimpse of the area around her. The sorcerers had arranged themselves into two opposing teams, both of which were

crouched behind large chunks of debris on the far sides of the large hallway. Most of this wreckage looked as if it had fallen from the walls and ceiling, which Perfection knew did not bode well for the structural integrity of the building. She made a mental note to leave this area as soon as physically possible. From the fury of the battle, however, that did not look to be too soon. She saw a few bodies laying in the center of the makeshift battlefield, obviously casualties that occurred before the two sides could barricade themselves in. Many of these corpses wore dark clothing, giving Perfection a few moments of shock as she thought one of these might be Lazarus. However, she calmed herself a little later when she spotted their companion behind one of the debris walls, quite alive for the present.

Perfection retreated further until she found some cover by the door she just came through.

"We need to get out of here!" she yelled to Dobby. Even though he was only feet away, Perfection had to scream in order to be heard above the sounds of the magickal battle that threatened to drown out everything else. "Go get Lazarus! The place is about to collapse!" she gestured to the various debris littered around, noticing some cracks in the wall next to her as she did so.

"It's dangerous! You go get him!" Dobby shouted back.

"Little prick!" Perfection screamed, and seeing how Dobby was not about to move anywhere, prepared herself to run once more into the magickal onslaught. Before she had the chance to really think rationally about what she was doing, Perfection ran out towards the side Lazarus had positioned himself on. As she sprinted, she was only hit twice by invisible blows, and those were only ones which glanced by her, apparently intended for another target.

The run seemed like an eternity, but must have taken only seconds. Perfection leaped over some debris and found herself out of the battlefield, having landed behind Lazarus and his fellow sorcerers. Getting to her feet, she made her way over to where the sorcerer was crouched.

"I'm glad to see you're still alive," she heard Lazarus say as she crouched down next to him.

"Likewise." Perfection replied, "we need to get the hell out of here. From all this wreckage, I'd say the building is about to collapse!"

"You're wrong!" Another sorcerer next to them yelled out. Perfection turned and saw that it was the man who they talked with earlier. A second later she remembered his name was Townshend Rahl or something similar.

"Why am I wrong?" she screamed a reply, gesturing around wildly. "Look at this place!"

"You're wrong because the building collapsed fifteen minutes ago!" Rahl answered, proving that he knew more about buildings than she did. "A good amount of our spells are going towards the effort to keep the place from crushing all of us!"

As if on cue, another large chunk of ceiling fell down next to them, conveniently landing on a dead body with a sickening crunch.

"Alright, what do we do?" She yelled this question to everyone in the general vicinity. "How do we all get out of here?"

Perfection's question went unanswered, for at that exact moment a large explosion tore through the hallway, blasting aside pretty much everything and sending all the sorcerers flying. Perfection too was knocked backwards by the blast, and hit a wall with enough force that her eyesight dimmed for a second. Lying on the floor, she turned her head around enough to see a new sorcerer on the scene, garbed in all black robes with a number of jewels and various other adornments hanging from necklaces and chains. Perhaps it was because she was falling unconscious once more, but Perfection thought she could see the magick waves that spiraled around this dark sorcerer's white hands. Moments later she fell into oblivion once more.

It turned out there were some things worse than being knocked unconscious twice within the span of a few minutes. One of these was being roughly awakened from unconsciousness while in chains.

Perfection blearily glanced around, a task that was made much more difficult in that she had large chains attached to the manacles on her hands, feet, and neck. She was alive, however, and apparently free of the collapsing building. Looking around, Perfection saw that she was lying on a low hilltop perhaps less than a mile from the ruins of the portal complex. She was not alone. There were at least a hundred other prisoners on the hill, all clad in chains similar to the ones she wore.

"Awake, I see," a voice pulled Perfection out of her observation, and she looked to her left to see Lazarus chained next to her.

"Barely." she moaned a reply, her throat parched and raspy. "What the hell happened in there?"

"From what I can tell," Lazarus answered, "we lost the battle. The fight was interrupted

by a new sorcerer, who I can only assume is one of the disciples of the Dark Lord we discussed earlier before all of this commotion occurred."

"That guy all in black, right?" Perfection asked. "the one who burst in before I was knocked out?"

"Yes." he agreed, shifting around a little, although it did not do much good as he was chained down just like her. "Right before all of us were knocked out, actually. The disciple unleashed some spell I have never seen before that rendered all of us unconscious."

"Wonderful. How long have we been out?" she asked, looking around to get a glimpse of the sun in a vain attempt to estimate the time of day. This attempt largely failed; the sun was blocked behind a large barrier of trees, and the only information she could gain was that it was nearly nightfall.

"At least a full hour, from what I can tell." Lazarus answered. "I was taken completely unawares by that spell. I couldn't feel any waves at all. Must be some new type of concealment trick worked out by the Dark Lord..." This last part was spoken quietly, as if Lazarus was talking more to himself than to her.

"Okay." She spoke up, pulling Lazarus out of his introspection. "so we're captured. Where are they taking us and why?"

"I am assuming the dark sorcerers want us alive." he answered once more, turning his attention back to Perfection. "That is more than I can say for some of the others here. Townshend Rahl is dead, as is his assistant Lorna Grisholm. I have not seen any sign of Medraut, but I am thinking him to be dead as well, perhaps when the buildings collapsed."

"Okay." Perfection said, completely unfazed by the deaths of some random people she had just met and never really knew, "so why do these guys want us so bad?"

"I'm sure you know the answer to that," Lazarus retorted. "I think that they are planning to use us as captives in order to get Brittany and Mal'Zyn to follow us to the stronghold of the Dark Lord and surrender herself."

"They're idiots, then." Perfection commented to herself. "Brittany has no idea where we are and she won't hear anything about our capture for weeks or months, if she ever finds out about it."

"Oh, she will, believe me." Lazarus said. "Remember how we discovered one of the disciples were in the area we traced her to. That disciple will contact Brittany and inform her of this, I'm sure of it."

"And you mean to just let us be captured and dragged back to the Dark Lord's lair?"

Perfection demanded, not wanting to be used as a hostage.

"Certainly not. That is why I am talking to you about this," Lazarus answered, "I have a plan that will allow you to escape from all this and go search out our two companions."

"What about you?" Perfection questioned, a little surprised about her consideration for the sorcerer's welfare. "Are you just going to remain here in chains?"

"Yes, I will." Lazarus responded, "You are the mercenary, so you have the better chance of finding Brittany. They also might not search so hard for you when you escape, as you are not a sorcerer. I am, so I will be seen as a more valuable captive."

"Well, this is all good," Perfection interjected, "but it doesn't actually tell me *how* I am going to escape from here."

"Of course." Lazarus answered. "It is actually rather simple. The Dark sorcerers cast a spell that prevents any of us from using our magick. However, they forgot to cast this spell on my servant."

"Dobby," Perfection concluded. "I wondered where that little cretin went. So what does he do with his magick?"

"Dobby will first use his spells to break your chains," Lazarus continued. "Those waves from his spell will alert the dark sorcerers, so he will then use more of his magick in order to create a rather large distraction, giving you enough time to escape and start heading North."

It took Perfection a moment to register what she had been told.

"That has to be the absolute stupidest plan of escape I have ever heard!" she exclaimed to him. "Create a distraction? What is this, a children's game? It is obvious these dark sorcerers have a lot of guards with them, and it is obvious that I will be caught the moment I try to run away! Do you think that everyone will ignore me, perhaps think I am some random innocent tourist off on some jaunt through the countryside?"

"You won't be caught by the guards, because I will be caught by the guards," Lazarus loudly interrupted Perfection's diatribe. His words completely stopped her short, and for a second she only stared at him wide-eyed.

"What are you talking about?" she demanded, "You haven't told me the entire plan."

"No, I haven't," the sorcerer admitted, "I am afraid you interrupted me before I was able to continue. Dobby's distraction will not be in the form of a giant fire or massive property damage, but rather in the form of breaking *my* chains along with yours. True, he will make a fake

distraction by blowing some stuff up, but that is only to get the guards out of the way. I know that the dark sorcerers, and especially the dark disciple, will know what is going on, and will feel the waves of the spell to break our chains. They, therefore, will realize someone is escaping, and I intend to let them discover that it is me, while you get away."

Now this plan was far more clever than the previous one outlined, and Perfection had to admit that it stood a reasonable chance of actually succeeding. However, a few details bothered her, almost as much as the realization that she was rapidly growing something that could be called a conscience.

"You are just going to let them capture you?" she questioned. "they'll probably kill you."

"I said this before," Lazarus responded, "of us, you stand the better chance of getting away. Without my spells I am useless in any sort of battle. Besides, I do not believe I am a captive that the Dark Lord will let die, as long as Brittany is somewhere else. Also, the Dark Lord's stronghold in the sunken Isles will almost certainly be our place of destination, and I will use the opportunity to do some creative spying."

"Alright." Perfection let Lazarus get his way, "What about your elf? Not that I care if Dobby gets crushed by a rock or eaten by a pack of rabid dogs, but..."

"Dobby can take care of himself far better than anyone of us will be able to." Lazarus smoothly interjected into Perfection's mildly embarrassing query. "He will stay near me as possible during my captivity, but he has ways of concealing himself from the prying eyes of the sorcerers."

"Okay, okay, fine," Perfection at last relented. "So when are we going to do this?"

"In about thirty seconds." Lazarus replied.

"Thirty seconds!" Perfection yelled, for a moment forgetting to keep her voice down. Glancing around, it seemed as if none of the other prisoners or guards heard, or if they did, obviously they did not care enough to investigate this outburst further. Quieting her voice back to a whisper, she turned once more to Lazarus.

"Thirty seconds!" she hissed, "That's too fast. I don't even know where to go yet."

"We know that Brittany and Mal'Zyn are North," the sorcerer calmly replied. "North is that way." he pointed as best as possible towards the trees behind them on the hill, a task made more difficult by the chains around his wrists. Perfection automatically turned her head to follow his finger to that direction.

And in doing so missed the first spectacular explosion that tore through the already ruined

portal complex, damaging and scorching the rubble even further in an intense fireball. For a moment the growing darkness was banished and the immediate area lit up exactly like daylight, and then it was gone, along with Dobby's Fireball.

But not for long. The world plunged back into darkness once the fireball disappeared, leaving Perfection a bit dazed with the afterimage of the brightness in her eyes. And she hadn't even seen the actual fireball, just the glow. As she heard the sound of running feet, apparently sorcerers or guards rushing over to find the source of the magick, another glowing ball of flame tore into the sky.

At that moment, the locks on Perfection's chains opened up with a resounding click, freeing her limbs. A glance over showed Lazarus had been similarly freed as well. Crouching down, he came a little closer to where she sat.

"Remember, try and find them to the North." he said, as if that wasn't already obvious. "We don't have much time here. I'll try to contact you if I discover anything important. Now go!"

With that, he was off, running down the hill towards the south, looking entirely like a prisoner trying to escape. Perfection stared after him for only a second, and then she too was on her feet, moving much more cautiously into the trees. To the north, to find their two lost companions.