

“We sell it *back* to them,” Narco said.

“But then what are you gonna put on your bolts?”

“Need I remind you, before your mind of chemicals and formulae overheats from its own cleverness,” Aurex the tiefling killer and dropout from the Assassin’s College said, “It took our people *three weeks* to steal those vials of *dreamtime* **and** they managed to get in, get it, and get out without anyone noticing. Those resources could have been put to better use if that drug doesn’t end up on a bolt in Castagan.”

Loroyan Thel, the dark elf brains of the Operation peered at Narcotics. “We can handle the paladin with or without the *dreamtime*,” he said almost under his breath.

“*And* get him to talk? Under *dreamtime* he’ll talk while he sleeps and we’ll know it’s the truth.”

Thel sighed. “I’m aware of that.”

“But then you got no sleep juice on your bolts!” Zarek, not unusually, felt two steps behind the conversation.

“Forget the bolts, Zarek. I want to hear what our alchemist director of Narcotics has in mind.”

Narco turned to the Tiefling. “Aurex, don’t you see?” he smiled riotously, tossed the small vial into the air and snatched it back out again. “It’s *exactly* as you said, our agents got in, got the drug and got out and no alarms. No searching, no deaths, no guards alerted. No trace.”

No one spoke.

“No trace...of *us*. So we take this *back* to the Lens, we tell them we lifted off someone who tried to sell it to **us**.”

“Ooooh,” Zarek said.

“No good,” Thel said, shaking his head. “They’ll rumble that immediately. Wizards are reliably clueless but they’re not stupid.”

“So we kill someone!” Zarek said.

Everyone frowned at him, as this was his solution to everything and would be on his family crest if fate ever conspired to make a noble of him.

But the orc had a point. “Yeah see if it’s just *us* right? Well, sure they’ll rumble that like Thel says. But if we give ‘em a *body*, right? And we say yeah this piece of piss tried to sell us this juice, right? But we didn’t even know what it was! We asked him where he got it, he got defensive. Says he stole it from you *wizard* lot, right? And we said ‘oh you trying to offload your scrab on *us* so you can go back to the Lens and frame us? Pull the other one.’ And he got pissy and tried something and we sorta had to kill him, you know?”

Everyone looked at Zarek.

“Right? So they see this body, they start wondering...who’s this, right? And if they’re wondering *that*, they’re *not* wondering...about *us*.”

Thel slowly smiled and looked at Narco who smiled back and waggled his eyebrows.

Then they turned to look at Aurex whose visage was inscrutable. Slowly, she said...

“It might work.”

“Good enough for me,” Thel said. “Let’s give it a shot. Well done, Zarek.”

“Oh thanks, boss,” the orc enforcer said, beaming with pride.

“You people done scheming?” a small, piping, snarling voice said as their chief negotiator and resident goblin officer said, hopping up onto a chair.

Thel explained their plan.

The goblin was impressed. “Hey, you came up with that all on your own?” he asked Narco.

“Well, I...,”

“Not bad for a drug addict.”

“Garrote,” Thel warned. Vennal, their director of narcotics looked hurt. He wasn’t like the rest of the officers of the Operation, he wasn’t a killer by trade.

The goblin looked around the table. “That it?” he said. “That all you got?”

Aurex took out her *sinmetal* blade and began polishing it again, meaningfully looking at the goblin.

“Oh yes, you’re all very clever,” Garrote said. “But unless you’ve forgotten we still got *this shit*” he stabbed a dagger into the map of the temple they intended to infiltrate, there to confront and combat the Order of Paladins who were, of late, bent on the destruction of the Operation. “To deal with.”

“With all the intel Aurex ferreted out,” Thel said. “Their wizard’s true name? The guards you blackmailed?”

“Thel they have AN ARMY. They know we’re coming for them, they’re gonna surround this place so tight a *mouse* couldn’t get in and *don’t*,” he pointed to Narco, “get any ideas I’m not gonna be a mouse again, put those filthy potions away.”

“Yeah that *is* a pissar,” Zarek said. “We gonna fight our way in boss?”

“Well, it’s been a month, I was hoping a solution to that would have presented itself.” Thel admitted, frowning. “It’s not too late to call up the Crew.”

“Don’t you get it?” the goblin smiled. “Heh. Hehehe. Narco here got halfway there, but it’s up to the charming goblin to *seal* the *deal*.”

“Get it over with,” Aurex said, and held out her blade to see the light in the tavern glint off the shining grey metal before being absorbed.

Garrote’s face fell. Aurex and her blade. “Yeah. Anyway. We take the *dreamtime* **back** to the Lens, we give ‘em some corpse they can pin all their suspicion on just like Narco and Zarek say. *Then* we say ‘Goodness would you like this back? Seems expensive.’ But we say, we don’t want paying. Maybe Aurex’s people dig up some dirt on the Lens? Should they even have this stuff? It’s illegal as shit. So, you know, we embarrass them, lie to them, give ‘em someone else to be suspicious of, a little blackmail thrown in for good measure and we just offer to give it back to ‘em. Free.”

“To *what end* Garrote?”

The goblin grinned. “So they take care of our little military problem for us.”

No one spoke. The officers of the Operation were stunned. Thel looked at Aurex and Narco. “They could do,” he said.

Narco nodded. “Lend us a unit of elementals, show how grateful they are.”

Aurex frowned, hating to admit the goblin was right. “You got it in you to brace a *quaesitor* of the Lens?”

Garrote made a “psh” noise. “Wizards are easy, you just gotta *flatter* them before you threaten them.” He smiled. “By the time I’m done with them, they’ll think it was *their* idea.”

“I can try and dig up something on their *quaesitor*,” Aurex said. “Give Garrote some ammo.”

Thel put his hands flat on the table. “Intel says we got a week before the Order of the Black Pegasus comes after us, and I intend to go after them first. So...work your magics, and let’s see if we can’t convince the Lens they owe us a favor.”

“Blackmail, Intel, drugs,” Garrote nodded at the three vials of *dreamtime*. “Just a day’s work for us boss.”

Zarek finally caught up. “Heheh. Oh ho ho ho. This is good, you guys. Oh yeah, this is gonna be fun.

“This is real thieves’ guild shit.”