

Agrigore and Jinora

Several dozen people gathered at the corner of Hopkins and Feltner Alley to watch Tantra Coffeehouse burn to the ground. It was still very early in the morning – many of them hadn't changed into their work clothes yet. They only knew to come out of their homes from the fire alarm that sounded at the school just up the street.

Only then did the neighborhood come alive with parents rushing to collect their children from frazzled teachers in the schoolyard. Then they stood across the street, hugging one another and assuring the smaller children that things would be soon under control.

The coffeehouse had been closed for remodeling for about a month now, and the regulars who had been holding out – who had been waiting for the beloved establishment to reopen – were finally faced with the reality that it wasn't coming back. Some wondered how they might find the owner's home address, to send a condolence – perhaps a basket of muffins or a fruit and cheese platter. A blustery wind whipped flames across the back end of the building, causing an uproar of groans and cries from the crowd.

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Of course, they weren't allowing this to go on for their own dark pleasures. Several of the onlookers had already alerted a scout. Others recorded footage with their trade interfaces, sending it to the news station and fire department. But no emergency personnel arrived.

After a time, when the fire died down and the school had sent the alert that classes would resume, people started checking their watches and mumbling about being late to work. The crowd dwindled, just as the fire had, and the last couple of people agreed to look up the owner and pay him a nice visit. And the building was nothing more than bits of charred wood and warped metal surrounded by the rocks in the yard that kept its secret.

Of course nobody ever bothered sending their condolences. Which was perfectly fine, because Adam wasn't at his home anyway. Somebody else was, though. Three miles down the road, on the first floor of a cinder block apartment building, visitors were approaching. "Welcome," said a scout as he answered the door to Adam's apartment.

The Ancient Ones said nothing as they stooped to enter. Instead, they looked around expectantly. One of them, the younger one, jerked its neck restlessly as it examined the living area.

"Has he returned yet?" asked the older one, even though the answer had been quite obvious.

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“Not yet,” said the scout. “I believe the suspect has been informed of our intentions.”

With a rattling breath, the Ancient One grabbed the scout’s arm and pulled up its sleeve. It typed into a small console just above his trade interface, pulling up a holographic map of the city. But after a few unsuccessful minutes of searching for the coffeehouse owner, the Ancient One dropped the scout’s arm. “We shall conduct our search, Jinora,” the Ancient One said to its younger counterpart.

“Of course.”

The scout stood in the living room, awaiting orders, as the Ancient ones moved about the apartment, turning over couch cushions and tearing through books on shelves.

“Agrigore, I think I’ve found something,” said Jinora in a whispery voice.

Agrigore found Jinora in the bedroom. It consisted of a full sized bed – sharply made – and a nightstand with a lamp, a glass for water and a large notepad on top. Jinora had pulled all the clothing from its drawers and was now holding a small day planner. Agrigore took it and ruffled clumsily through a few pages.

It contained ordinary reminders – work meetings, delivery dates and payout schedules.

“Does it contain any names?” Jinora asked. “Meeting places? References to technology?”

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Agrigore flipped through the pages of the book, taking care not to skip any. “None.”

Jinora continued scanning the apartment, moving toward the spare room. This one had no bed. Instead it contained a workout bench and an assortment of dumbbells and other equipment. The Ancient One hoisted each piece, rubbing a clawed hand across the smooth surfaces, or sometimes shaking them.

After a while, when nothing fruitful came from the spare rooms walls or floors or from within the workbench itself, Jinora joined Agrigore in the kitchen.

Agrigore had already begun emptying the drawers, letting silverware fall indiscriminately across the floor. Jinora watched, hoping to spot a stray piece of ill-hidden equipment. When nothing was found the Ancient Ones moved to analyzing the notes on the refrigerator. There were more date reminders and a very aged thank you note from a customer. Then Agrigore went for a folded piece of paper that was taped toward the top. It had come from the same notepad that was in the man’s bedroom. He gently peeled the tape off and unfolded it. In very plain letters, it read:

To Whom It May Concern,
Go back to hell.
Sincerely,
Adam

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There was a low, guttural grumble as the creature reread the note. Then, with a piercing screech, it swiped the remaining papers from the refrigerator. Agrigore ripped appliances from the countertops, leaving deep peeling gashes in the drywall, and smashed them onto the floor.

After several minutes of this, when the neighbors had heard enough to call a scout to investigate, they slinked out of the building with nothing to show for their careful inspection.

Adam, of course, was unaware that any of this was happening, and he would probably never find out. He was on a mission, from which he wouldn't be returning.

Somewhere below the Capital City, deep beneath its surface, he was digging at the base of a large, crystalline pyramid.

"Why do you bother charging them if we're just gonna cover them up again?" asked his accomplice.

"Extra precaution," Adam grunted as he heaved a large chunk of earth over a shoulder. Then he planted a small, rock-like box in the hole he just dug and flipped a small switch on it.

"So nobody knows it's here?"

"Not exactly, Mot."

Adam stood back, dusting the dirt from his pants, and admired his work. Four devices now surrounded the base of the structure. "So nobody knows it's here until it's too late."

Then he placed a rather large box inside of the grid and pulled Motley backward, away from the pyramid. An electrical

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current whipped out of the box, like lightening, and struck the pyramid. Then several more reached out, licking the tower from top to bottom and making their hairs stand on end. “The Ancient Ones won’t detect it if they come digging around,” Adam explained as the eerie current bathed them in a purplish glow. “Until they strike the field. The energetic output will destroy them before they can move to a safe distance.”

Then, when the lightening flickered and stopped, Adam pulled a handful of explosives from his backpack. Motley took several, and they trotted toward the farthest end of the room. Then they worked their way up, each on either side of the tunnel entrance, attaching the small bombs to the soil.

After they had carefully placed their final bombs near the pyramid, they stood in the doorway that led to the City of Fire. Then Adam gave the final nod, and Motley demolished the Deprogramming Station.

With a massive hiss the ceiling caved in, sending sand into every crevice of the place.

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