

# Firebrand

## Chapter 29: Tiny Trials

Tiny Trials

"Good work, boy." Master Alastair watched as Martel pulled water into the air, separated it in different drops, and made them float around separately.

"Thank you, master."

"I think it's time we move on to earth. Your skills in water will suffice for now."

"Already? I'm still not good enough to make it rain."

Master Alastair laughed. "That is among the hardest skills, pulling so much water from the sky. You probably won't master that until you are an acolyte, training under the Mistress of Water."

Unless Regnar could show him a trick or two unknown to the scholars of the Lyceum, Martel considered.

"Besides, earth is easier to learn than water for you. I expect you won't take as long."

"Very well, master."

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As the evening before, Martel arrived early to the play, although he had another reason for his excitement this time around. The players, preparing the stage, cast him a few looks as he approached.

"Someone's eager." The words were spoken between lips holding a pipe.

"Hey, Regnar," Martel greeted him. "Well, I had nothing else to do."

"Come along. I'll show you my little palace of tricks."

Following the hedge mage and his grin, Martel walked behind the stage and up a ladder. He and Regnar ended up on a small platform that oversaw the stage itself, hidden behind the canvas that covered all edges. A large tub of water stood up there along with a bellow, and Regnar sat down on a small stool next to the items.

Martel looked over the edge at the stage below where the players finished their preparations. "That's clever. So you do all the magic from here."

"Aye." Regnar's eyes glistened. "It's about to start in a moment. Make yourself comfortable, lad, and I'll show you."

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Martel spent the next half hour watching Regnar. As the play began, the hedge mage ignited his pipe, took a few puffs, and blew smoke down on the stage. He continued this while letting the smoke spread to give the appearance of fog, through which the villain entered.

In between swigs of his wineskin, Regnar used the bellow to create wind, further amplified by his magic. He tore a piece of parchment apart, strengthening the sound to cause thunder in the distance. When rain was needed, he raised water from the tub into the air and scattered it across the stage.

Martel watched it all with fascination. While not necessarily learning any new magic, he enjoyed watching how the hedge mage employed his powers to create all sorts of illusions for the audience.

"Time for a break," Regnar sat, returning to his stool. Below, Roland had begun a lengthy monologue. "Not much left. Bit of rain, and of course, making the dragon breathe fire."

"How do you do that?"

"Oh, the players inside the costume have a small lamp. When the time comes, they blow on it, making the flame grow, and I add a little extra power to the fire," Regnar explained. "Of course, half the time, they blow out the flame. On those days, the dragon has a cough instead of breathing fire," he laughed.

Martel looked over the edge of the platform as Roland approached the final trials.

Regnar shook his wineskin. "Hold the fort, will you? Just going to get this filled. There's a nice Sindhian seller just down the street."

"Oh, sure."

Wineskin in one hand, Regnar balanced precariously on the ladder until he made his descent and disappeared down an alleyway. Martel meanwhile turned his attention back to the play.

The minutes passed.

"Through dreadful storm, Roland strode ever valiant towards his goal," the storyteller spoke on the stage. Nothing happened, and he glanced up at the

platform towards Martel. "Through dreadful storm!" he reiterated. "Howling gales and terrible downpours! Rain, rain, and rain!"

Martel finally caught the cue. He looked back, but no sign of Regnar. Looking at the tub of water, he got to work. He raised the drops into the air and sent them flying down against the actor below. Grabbing the bellow, he tried to send a gust of wind the same way; it dissipated long before, as Martel lacked the magic to amplify it. Throwing the bellow aside, Martel focused on the water instead, drenching the beleaguered Roland.

The story continued, and the dragon appeared. "With fire from his jaws, the dreaded serpent came against brave Roland!" shouted the storyteller.

Martel looked down on the stage. The dragon costume was basically painted canvas that the actors held to the side, with no roof. He looked down to see the woman in front carrying the lamp, gently blowing on it to increase its flame.

Reaching out, feeling its heat, Martel poured his magic into it. Like lightning, a rod of flame shot out from the dragon's mouth, and Roland threw himself to the ground with singed hair.

"Sorry," Martel mumbled.

Soon after, the dragon was slain, and the actress inside disappeared backstage, only to appear as Roland's love. Martel breathed a sigh of relief that the play had concluded and his improvised role as stage wizard had come to an end.

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Climbing down from his platform, Martel stood around for a little while watching the players pack away their costumes and tools of the trade.

"You, kid, where's Regnar?" asked the storyteller, ostensibly the leader of the troupe.

"That's what I wanted to talk to you about. He left about halfway through," Martel said concerned.

"Drunken fool."

"Has that happened before? He said he'd be right back, but he never returned."

"Yeah, he's not the most reliable sort." The storyteller sighed. "Wait, if he left, how did the last effects take place?"

"That was me," Martel admitted. "I figured I should step in."

"That explains why the dragon had more bite than usual," grinned the actor who played Roland.

"Uh, sorry. But what about Regnar?"

"Don't worry about him. He's sleeping it off in some alley. Here." The storyteller counted out three silver coins. "Since you finished his job for him, you can have his coin. Mind you, that's apprentice pay. You'd have to travel with us for a while and learn the trade to get full pay."

"Oh, no thanks. I already have employment, so to say."

"Well, if you change your mind, we're here for the rest of the spring faire before we move west." The storyteller nodded at Martel and turned his attention on his troupe, cleaning up the stage.

"I'll keep that in mind," Martel remarked. He began his walk back to the Lyceum, silver coins in his pocket.