

Episode 2: The Motives of the Wolf

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From set *Innistrad: Midnight Hunt*

“These woods belong to us,” he told her. People said he didn’t talk much, but he talked to her. Maybe it was because this was her first hunt. She was a wild mess of a girl then—streaked with dirt and blood and earth. Distantly, she thought to herself that she should start braiding her hair if this was going to keep happening.

“But what about Kessigers?” She felt compelled to ask.

Tovolar grunted.

He stared straight back at her, and she straight back at him. It only made sense to ask. She hugged her legs closer to her chest. “It’s just—I think we can share.”



Tovolar, Dire Overlord | Art by: Chris Rahn

How strange she must have looked, covered in blood, looking out toward the village to which she was too afraid to return. The village she was now defending. Tovolar had stayed with her after she changed back. She was glad for the company—the thought of being alone right now was worse than the thought of facing her family. Somehow, as bad as this was, it was easier to deal with knowing that she wasn’t alone.

Tovolar was Kessig’s own personal bogeyman. She’d heard about him all through the last four or five years, heard what he did, and a lot of things he didn’t do. Whole herds of cattle slaughtered. Houses

broken into and torn asunder. They said he killed vampires; they said he dabbled in dark magic; they said he was all sorts of things.

But in the morning, when she woke as she did, he had gotten her a blanket and sat quietly at her side. The man sitting next to her was all muscle and tooth, yet he made himself smaller to keep from frightening her. In his own quiet way, he explained what had happened.

The first thing she asked was if she'd killed anyone. He said, "Not tonight." And so, their conversation, such as it was, began. This was the first moment of truly uncomfortable silence.

But then he stood. He did not need to ask her to follow.

She simply did.

She shifts before she knows what she's doing—dives into the woods near the witch and goes, her clothes dropped haphazardly along the way. The wolves don't wait for her. Streak's bounding in front of them all—but he chances to look back at her, and she nods to him.

The howl pierces the silence of the woods, the silence that is not silence, the silence that is the thousand teeming lives within. She knows it. She knows him.

And he, of course, knows that she's here.

She doesn't know why she expected any different.

She doesn't know what to expect when she catches up to him.

"Hunting is who we are," he told her.

She didn't like this. There was something wrong with it—some dark magic in the air. In the early hours of the morning, they might see anyone and anything; surely, there would be hunters in the forest? Surely, there would be people—people from the village, even, who might see her with him and know what had happened to her?

"But if it was just hunting, people wouldn't be afraid," she said to him. "We don't have to kill *people*."

She'd seen the good reason, like any other Kessiger. People pulled bodies out of the woods every morning. You had to, especially after full moons. Werewolves were enough to deal with—no one wanted to add geists to Kessig's compounding problems. Hunters often visited her father in the smithy to seek new weapons. Sometimes they even spoke about what they saw—about the beasts bigger than two men stacked together, who tore through flesh as easily as the elder Kord tore through paper. Their weapons adorned the house and so, too, did all the holy symbols that didn't sell.

Her father said they would protect her. So did everyone else.

But Arlinn never found much comfort in the dour outlook of the village. With them, it was always about what she couldn't do—she couldn't go into the woods; she couldn't play her flute too loudly; she couldn't greet strangers or make new friends when travelers came through. Caution and the angel kept them safe, that was the thought, but they also kept her world small and boring.

We don't trust you. Go away—that was what her village said to the world. Wasn't there room for more?

And when she heard the howl, she realized that there *was* something more. It sounded so happy, so soothing, so so like an old friend.

A life free of walls, free of holy symbols. A life free of fear and full of something *else*.

Under cover of night, she left.

Tovolar glanced back at her. "That what you think?"

"Yes," she answered, with all her heart.

He shook his head and kept walking. She followed.

Seeing things never felt the same after her first hunt. She hadn't realized how limited her human eyes were until she saw with the wolf's; hadn't realized the visual is truly only a small part of the world. She cannot see the grubs wriggling through the underbrush with her human eyes; she cannot smell blood in the air from miles away with her human nose; she cannot taste the sharp tang of the night with her human tongue.

But as a wolf, she can do all those things. And she knows that he's just up ahead. She catches his scent long before she can see him. So, too, the scent of the others around him—some familiar, and some decidedly not.

What have you gotten yourself into? She wonders.

When at last the trees break enough for her to catch sight of him, she skids to a halt. He is there, his eyes piercing as ever in the night, surrounded by huge wolves. Arlinn is by no means the runt of the litter, but these newcomers have arms thick as the trees around her. One's wearing a ship's chain as a bandolier. Isn't it early in the night for them to have changed?

Tovolar, flanked by his packmates, looks about the size of a human man. But he isn't. That much is clear as Arlinn makes her way to him, as his gruff face tries to smile for her. "You came home."

"I came to investigate," Arlinn says. Looking the newcomers up and down, she suppresses an instinctual growl. "Who are these guys?"

Tovolar stops near Redtooth. Arlinn's hackles rise.

He meets her eyes, then walks away.

He does not need to say follow me.

Arlinn's stomach threatened to empty. A sweet, pungent miasma forced its way down Arlinn's throat. She knew precisely what lay ahead of them, and she wanted Tovolar to stop leading them. She wanted to stop following him.

But where would she go if she did? She was a wolf now, just like him. No matter what happened, there were good odds she'd end up rampaging if left to her own devices.

She couldn't just leave.

So, she followed, and when at last Tovolar pointed out the bodies to her, she did her best not to vomit. Her best wasn't very good. Three hunters torn apart like common animals, their ribs exposed to the brightening day, their faces locked in rictus terror. Crossbows and silver bolts scattered around them like pine needles. Blood-soaked symbols of Avacyn clutched in their hands. Everywhere she looked, there was something worse to see, and everywhere she looked, her stomach threatened to empty, until at last it did, and all the raw venison she'd enjoyed came up out of her.

Tovolar grunted. He set his hand on her shoulder then turned her to face the bodies again.

"Please," she stammered. "I don't want to look."

But he kept one hand on her shoulder. “You have to understand.”

She sucked in a breath. “But why? What is there to ?”

He let go of her then, long enough to stride over to the bodies. What might have taken her three steps took him only one. Kneeling next to the bodies, he looked up at her again. “Last night, how did it feel?”

She swallowed. “Like being free. But it isn’t worth—”

“Being free is worth whatever we pay for it,” he answered. Standing, he kicked one of the bodies with the tip of his boot. “I’m tired of hiding.”

And how strange it was that hiding was all Arlinn wanted to do.

She smells them before she sees them.

More wolves. Plenty of them. They wear human forms now but that does not change what they are, does not change the hunger they feel, does not change them in the eyes of the villagers. They are wolves—and she is, too.

She sees them comparing armor pilfered from cathars; she sees them painting patterns on skin that will show just as well on fur; she sees them fighting like newborn pups. There are so many new faces and new scents that they leave her dizzy, shifting back to her human form as the horror of it starts setting in.

Because her eyes, of course, aren’t telling her the whole story.

Those wolves don’t smell like Mondronen. They’re not part of Tovolar’s pack. So why are they here? And the others—those who, like Tovolar’s guards, stand head and shoulders above their rest, their faces seemingly caught mid-shift—who are they?

This is more than just a hunt.



Art by: Ryan Pancoast

The howls coming to her ears tell most of it. As a child, she'd plug her ears to try to keep the sound away, but there's no hope of doing that now. Dozens of wolves all calling to each other in the night, maybe even a hundred voices proclaiming to each other: *I'm with you, I will hunt.*

And that voice is lodged at the base of Arlinn's throat, too, as moonrise draws ever nearer. Already some of the more eager—like Tovolar's guards—have begun their transformations. The crack and pop of bone lend the distant howls asynchronous percussion.

Tovolar turns toward her. There is a smile on that face, there is pride in his eyes as he gestures widely to the wolves around them. As they walk farther in, he is greeted by howls so high Arlinn feels them on her skin—and by what used to be the Mondronen Howlpack's salute.

"Who are all of these people?" she asks him.

"Family," he answers. "Our new pack."

Arlinn frowns. "Not much of a family reunion to me. Looks more like you're getting ready for something."

His shoulders rise in a laugh he can't quite voice. The sound echoes. She knows that look. She knows she won't like the answer.

But she stays for it anyway.

"Getting ready to take what's ours," he says. Behind him two of the new wolves, already changed, tear down trees to serve as clubs. "Used to be just the woods. Now the nights are, too."

Streak nuzzles against him. Stopping their trip, Tovolar kneels to pet him. Boulder thwaps his head against Arlinn's shoulder, as if asking permission to join him. Arlinn swallows.

"Tovolar," she says, her voice dropping low, "just what are you hunting?"

Trees coming down. Wolves howling. A man with an obelisk slung over his shoulder. The air thick with the scent of hunger. Blood, too—someone's already killed. She can hear jaws tearing flesh asunder. It isn't far.

The moon's climbing higher and higher.

Tovolar touches the tip of Streak's nose, runs his hands over his ears. Streak never sits this well for her. He isn't moving at all, not even swishing his tail. Tovolar touches his forehead to Streak's, then points—and away the wolf goes, hungry as the night.

Arlinn's stomach sinks. It's only hunger. He'll be back. But she doesn't want to waste any more time. He stands again, towering over her, as always, looking about the gathering before looking back down at her.

"Whatever we want. Bloodsuckers, when we can find them. The Dires have a lot of fun making them beg."

"Dires?" She stares, but she already knows who he means—the wolves at his sides, the behemoths. "Hunting vampires is one thing, but you can't—"

A sharp grunt stops her, or perhaps the old reflexes attached to it. His brows narrow, his lips pull back from his teeth, and as the light falls on his face, his teeth grow longer.

"We can do whatever we want," he says. "I tried to teach you that."

More howls, closer now. Arlinn's heart hammers in her chest. She wants to hunt. She wants to run.

She plants her heels. “No, you can’t. People have been living in these woods for generations; they’ve carved out lives for themselves. All they want is a life without fear, the same as us.”

He draws up to her, eyes burning. “Too much church in you,” he growls. “Too little wolf.”

When he looks down on her, she is again standing in the wood with him, again staring at the bodies of the cathars, again afraid.

When she returned that morning, her mother waited in the drawing room. The years wore heavy on her—but this night was heavier than most. The woman’s shoulders slumped; great bags formed beneath her eyes. When she threw her arms around Arlinn’s embrace they were small and weak.

“Where *were* you?” she creaked. “Arlinn, they found four of our boys down in the woods, torn right apart just like “

And she could have told her then. She could have been honest.

But her eyes fell on one of the angel’s symbols, shaped by her father’s own hands, and she knew that she couldn’t tell the truth.

Arlinn isn’t some young pup anymore. She isn’t afraid anymore.

Moonlight makes it easier to shift. Her bones crack and rearrange, forge themselves into something at once new and old. Tovolar falls into relief before her.

He’s smiling.

She hates that he’s smiling.

On the first hunt, she ran with Tovolar. On the second, Tovolar and three others. On the third, she ran with the pack.

Tearing through the forest, lost in the thrill of the hunt, all she wanted to do was sink her teeth into the sumptuous flesh of a deer. And she thought, foolishly, that she might even keep her mind long enough to drag it back to the village—to her father’s smithy, maybe, where she could say that maybe one of the boys up the road had left it for them.

When your barn is full of mice, you get yourself a cat. When your woods are full of werewolves, you send out your best hunters. It’s only natural.

She remembered seeing the deer. It looked up at her while lapping at a river, pelt white as the moon, eyes red as blood. She remembered jumping for it. She remembered the pain that followed, sudden and sharp, the breath knocked out of her, the crack of her back on the rough ground. She remembered looking down and seeing the bolt buried in her chest. She did not remember very much else except that in the morning, she awoke surrounded by the grisly remains of the kids who used to steal pies from her mother’s window. Hunters, now—their crossbows just within reach.

Her mouth was slick with their blood.

She screamed, then. That was that.

This is the only time she’ll ever tower over him—when she’s transformed and he hasn’t. Now she’s the one who snarls at him. The others gather around in a circle, some shifting from the excitement,

some simply hungry for the taste of blood. Weapons and paws and feet beat against the earth: *thump, thump, thump*.

She rounds on him, but he does not move.

“You want to hunt,” he says.

And it’s true that she does. To be among those like you is a dizzying feeling. These wolves know her, though she does not know them; they know the struggle of existing in a Plane like this. Innistrad wants them dead. Isn’t it right to live despite that? Isn’t it right to take their lives back, by force if they must?

It isn’t. No matter how appealing it may seem, it isn’t.

She has to stop him. If she strikes him down now, the struggle for who controls the hunt might delay things enough to get some kind of help.

Down comes the claw.

But before it can make contact, Boulder’s in motion, jumping in front of him. Arlinn pulls back at the very last moment, her heart sinking into her stomach.

It only takes a moment of thought to figure out what’s going on, only takes studying Boulder’s friendly face turned at once hopeful and hungry.

Streak joins him. So does Redtooth. Only Patience remains at Arlinn’s side—but even she’s looking up at her expectantly.

They want to hunt.

Tovolar smirks. “Your pack understands.”

One by one the wolves around them change. How many are there, already changed? How many stand on their haunches waiting for her to draw blood?

Patience waited for her every day, once. Now Arlinn is the one who lingers.



Art by: Sam Rowan

There were symbols everywhere inside the church. In the mornings, when dawn's light first pierced the stained-glass windows, there were no shadows save those in holy shape. Arlinn treasured the dawn above all else. Each sunrise was a new victory against the beast within herself; each clean-handed morning a promise to her future self. The beast was gone.

Services began the moment the sun crested the Kessig hills. At first, she had not been permitted to hold them herself, but she attended every day with a feverish need for safety, as if the sight of the illuminated angel alone could bring her salvation.

Perhaps it could.

Or perhaps it was the people.

The same people at every service. The same people huddled around sacred texts. Barnaby always teasing her about being the first one into the cathedral—but becoming the second person soon after. Trusting herself enough to spend a night baking with Luciana, who swore she had better recipes but should have known better than to wager against a baker's daughter. Father Zakarias, always gently asking if there was anything else she'd like to confess and reassuring her when she lied to his face.

Safety and warmth. Good people. The morning light promised all of this and more, and for years it was enough. In time, she stopped worrying about what drove her here.

Until he showed up to morning services.

He didn't say anything. He didn't have to. The look of him was enough. The wild in him called to the wild in her: the scuffs of dirt on his borrowed armor, the smears of rusted red against the white and burnt yellow, the scents of fire and blood and pine. All he did was sit next to her. Didn't say a word.

But she knew with a dull, sinking horror what would come next.

Afterward, he left, and all her new friends asked what was wrong, and she told them that she didn't want to talk. She wanted to leave. Needed some time to herself. She'd be all right.

Arlinn locked herself in her room that night—pulled the curtains over the windows, wrapped her vestments tight, laid holy symbols wherever her eyes could find them.

But it was hard to see them in the dark.

Maybe that was why it happened.

Maybe that was why it wasn't enough.

But she'll never really know, not now, why it happened the way it did, or what unfathomable kindness drove Luciana to check on her.

She remembered the blood. She remembered the hunt. She remembered wanting to be anywhere but there.

And then, suddenly, she was.

To relive history is to tear open a wound and hope it will heal differently.

He wants to hunt. Her wolves want to hunt. The pack wants to hunt.

She doesn't. And she must keep them safe as best she can.

Arlinn kneels. She strokes Patience's head, scratching that spot between her ears, and gives her a final embrace.

“Keep everyone safe,” she says. Her muzzle’s awkward in this form, the words don’t make sense, but she hopes Patience knows what she means. A pat on the haunch serves as final permission. Arlinn stands, and Patience walks to him.

The gathered wolves holler and howl, each sound a dagger in Arlinn’s heart.

Tovolar nods. “When you’re ready for the new world, come find us.”

He starts to shift. She doesn’t stay to watch.

She finds her way back to the witch. It isn’t hard—she’s got the scent now—but it does take some time, since she stops whenever she hears one of her wolves among the howlpack.

There are no pleasantries. She doesn’t have time or energy for them.

“I’ll get your key,” she says.

If Katilda notices the wolves are gone, she says nothing about it—instead, she invites Arlinn into the warm light of the fire.

There are no wolves here.

But there are people, and there is something close to holy light, and for tonight, it will have to do.



Dawnhart Wardens | Art by: Joshua Raphael

Morning light brings new friends.

For an ancient witch, Katilda is a popular one. At first light, she and her witches gather in the center of the camp. Magic pours from them in streams, scattering out into the air. Katilda tells her it’s a calling, something to let the coven’s chosen champions know it’s time to gather.

Arlinn has a calling of her own, but it’s not one the coven can see. While they’re conducting theirs, she sneaks off to Ravnica. Nothing’s ever simple there. To even get access to Jace’s house, she needs to

fill out three forms and swear two oaths—and in the end, he isn't even there. But that's fine enough—there's still friends to be had, and a legend as well.

Arlinn's heard of Teferi in passing—mostly of a plan he was cooking up with the others—but she wasn't expecting him to be so approachable. Disarmingly so, even. He's the first one to greet her as she comes through the door. The easy smile counts for a lot—but so, too, does dealing with someone close to her own age.

Not that he's her age. He's much older. Almost unfathomably old. As he pours her a cup of tea she tries not to dwell on the implications.

"Take it you didn't just come here to keep me company, Arlinn," he says. "You look like you haven't slept."

"That obvious, huh?" she answers. The tea is good—smooth and full bodied, surprisingly so given how short the steeping time was. All the same, her mother's is better. She misses it.

"If you're going to ask if I can stretch out the night so you can rest up, the answer's no," he says. It's said with warmth, but Arlinn can't hide the flinch. Teferi leans forward. "Sorry, that seems like it hit close to home."

Arlinn doesn't bother beating around the bush. "The nights on Innistrad *are* getting longer, but that means no one's getting any rest. It's why I came. Something's coming—the wolves are "

She can't bring herself to finish, doesn't even know where to start—but she doesn't have to. At least not for another few minutes. Someone emerges, stretching like a cat atop the stairs, someone who hops with excitement when she realizes there's a visitor. Chandra jumps the banister (and the stairs) just to get to them quicker.

"Arlinn!" she calls, plopping herself down at one of the tables next to them. "Hey, did you bring that recipe for—"

Maybe Arlinn *does* look as dour as she feels—Chandra stops mid-sentence. Arlinn sighs. "I'm afraid it'll have to wait," she says. "As I was telling Teferi—"

But the door opens again, and another new face is staring back at her. A raised brow soon follows. "So, you're the one who used pencil on the ink-only forms?"

It's all so ridiculous, but it's ridiculous in the way that she needed.

It feels a bit like mornings with Barnaby and Luciana.

Arlinn allows herself to laugh, just this once, just to remember what it is she's fighting for.

Humans run in packs, too.

They listen. She's grateful. The stranger's name is Kaya, and the idea of day and night falling out of balance upsets her in that quiet way that leads to a decisive change. They'll come. They'll help. But first, they need to meet Katilda's people.

When they reappear in the woods together, Arlinn knows immediately which way to go. She'll take the towering Kessig oaks over the cramped buildings of Ravnica any day—she never feels like she can breathe there.

Beneath the trees and the arcs of the Celestus, they walk back to the coven. Chandra looks up at the old artifact with pure wonder and curiosity. Arlinn envies it a little—but truth be told, she feels some of that wonder herself to this day.

By the time they arrive, there are a couple dozen new faces there, too. So many in one day—it's going to be hard to keep them all straight. But she'll learn. And she wants to. Because the three at her back know what she is, and not even one looks at her in fear.

Perhaps it will be the same for the gathered cathars and mages up ahead. No one Arlinn knows personally, but she knows all cathars and priests after a fashion—you wear someone's clothes long enough, you get an idea of their character. They stand in a throng centered on the witch: six or so cathars, a couple of priests, and the rest hardy Kessigers of no particular stripe. Standing the proudest among them is a dark-skinned woman in white armor, a light dust of snow on her shoulders. If you asked a child to describe the bravest cathar they knew, you'd get someone like her: the well-polished armor, the noble features, broad shoulders, and gentle eyes. She's listening as Katilda explains something—but both turn toward the approaching newcomers.



Adeline, Resplendent Cathar | Art by: Bryan Sola

"Arlinn Kord, I take it?" calls the cathar. Her voice is rich and resonant—clearly, she's learned to project.

"The same," Arlinn answers. "These are my friends—Kaya, Teferi, and—"

"Chandra Nalaar," the pyromancer cuts in. "My name's Chandra. What's *your* name?"

The cathar smirks and chuckles. "Adeline's fine. It's nice to meet you, Arlinn, Kaya, Teferi, and Chandra Nalaar. Katilda says you're here to help with Harvesttide?"

Arlinn has the feeling Chandra would help with whatever it was Adeline asked of her, but they can't let their eyes stray too far from their goal here. "We're here to help find the key," Arlinn answers. "Festivals aren't much my thing, I'm afraid."

Kaya clears her throat behind her. "You didn't mention anything about a festival."

"Katilda thinks it's necessary," Arlinn answers.

"It is," says Katilda. Her voice somehow carries despite the small distance between them, and as the heroes rejoin the larger group, her eyes stay fixed to Arlinn's. "The ritual is a precise thing with little room for error. You cannot skip steps in ancient magic."

"It's a temperamental thing," echoes Teferi. "The older magic gets, the more set it is in its ways."

"He understands," says Katilda.

Arlinn doesn't have the energy to fight it when Teferi's already stepping up. "So, what do you need from us exactly? Arlinn told us about the ritual." He gestures to the Celestus pieces above them with his staff. "When we find the Moonsilver key, what's to be done with it?"

"You bring it to the center of the Celestus. Arlinn knows the way," she answers. "I will await you there with the coven. There, we join it with the Sungold lock and complete the ritual."

"And do you have any idea where we could find the key?" Kaya asks. "Any leads, any last known whereabouts?"

Katilda sighs. "No. It was taken from the Dawnheart Coven centuries ago."

"Right," says Kaya. "Then I guess we'd better start looking. Arlinn, do you have any ideas?"

She's never heard anything about a Moonsilver key before last night, and all she knows of the Celestus are old legends, but she is sure of one thing. "There's got to be something in Thraben. Might have been the church that took the key."

"And if that's the case, I'm sure it's safely hidden away," says Adeline. She nods. "To Thraben, then."

"Uh are you sure Thraben's all that safe?" says Chandra. "Are you *sure* we have to go there again? Because last time didn't go so great, and it wasn't very safe at all." Adeline casts her a sidelong look, and Chandra quickly adds: "Not that I'm afraid."

Arlinn sighs. "I know what you mean—but the vaults should still be all right."

It's been some time since Arlinn last visited the cathedral.

She hopes it'll go better than it did then.