

# Episode 1: Class Is in Session

Adana Washington

From set *Strixhaven: School of Mages*

In the seemingly endless halls of the Biblioplex, where arcane knowledge from countless worlds lined shelves that had seen the rise and fall of empires, it seemed as though the only sound on the whole plane of Arcavios was the *click* of heel on stone. Professor Onyx, as she was known here, took a deep breath as she walked, inhaling the smell of old paper and the familiar ozone that always seemed to accompany magic. She needed a break from yet another insufferable meeting. For all the wisdom and learning in this place, it was populated with some remarkably thickheaded individuals.



Professor Onyx | Art by: Kieran Yanner

Case in point: despite her considerable renown throughout the Multiverse, the other professors of Strixhaven hadn't recognized Liliana Vess when she introduced herself by an entirely different name. That hadn't surprised her. The school had always been that way, even since she'd been a student so many years ago; always wrapped up in its own little problems.

There was something calming about the weight of all those books, tomes, and scrolls around her. They seemed to wrap the place in a kind of hush. When the students arrived, the campus wouldn't be nearly so quiet—but for the moment, she savored the sense of solitude as she wandered the stacks.

A rustling sounded from up ahead. With a twinge of annoyance, Liliana pictured that perpetually chattering Codex; it most likely would be coming around the corner any minute now. As she rounded the next bend, though, it wasn't the school's magically animated book she saw in the stacks.

"What are you doing?" she said.

The figure froze, their hand still reaching for another book to add to the pile at their feet.

Liliana stepped forward. "Students aren't to arrive for another—"

The words fell away as a streak of purplish light flew from the figure's hand. It grazed her arm, and the room suddenly seemed to buckle and sway as a sickening sensation spread throughout her body. With a gesture of will, she isolated the spell's effects, then quashed it. An amateur's work, yes—but none of the five colleges of Strixhaven taught magic of that nature.

"So," she said, a swirling current of deathly energy wreathing her hand as she called up her own magic, "you're not just here for summer sessions, I take it."

The figure was masked, she could see now—the space where the eyes should be were covered only with smooth, flat metal. She'd heard of the Oriq, of course. The school was full of concerned whispers about the secret society of mages, the ones obsessed with forbidden magics and power at any cost. She hadn't expected to see one so soon, though. "I know what you are," she said.

The intruder looked toward the hall, then back at Liliana. "Then you know that your days are numbered."

"Professor Onyx?" A vaguely familiar voice called from one of the nearby halls. Liliana spun in the direction of the sound, spell-charged hand raised. Dean Shaile Talonrook stood at the end of the hall, frowning. "Are you alright?"

When she turned back, the intruder was gone. Only the pile of books and scrolls on the floor showed that they had even been there.

Liliana collected herself, letting the magic dissipate. This was no time to draw more attention to herself. "Yes, I just—thought I saw something in the stacks. Have the faculty moved on to the next topic at hand?"

Dean Talonrook clicked her beak, her huge dark eyes filled with annoyance. "Dean Nassari is insisting on lengthening this year's season of Mage Tower."

Liliana frowned as she touched her arm where the spell had grazed her. Following Dean Talonrook back toward the Hall of Oracles, she glanced toward the books. "Surely we have bigger problems than Mage Tower."

"Quite right, quite right!" crooned Dean Talonrook. Liliana hardly heard anything else she said.

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In his chambers on Kylem, Will Kenrith stared helplessly at the towering stack of books on his bed. He'd been trying to choose which one to bring with him; at first, it seemed certain that the tome regarding the Molten Prophecy was the best bet, but then he had remembered his favorite historical text, the accounting of Thadus the Healer. It was now an hour later, and he was no closer to deciding. He ran a hand through his short blond hair and glanced around the room, his eye catching on the glowing owl-shaped card on the table before he shook his head. There was no way to know how long it would be before they returned to Kylem. If they ever did.

The front door banged open, making Will flinch, and Rowan Kenrith strutted inside.

Will's sister was just as tall as him, golden hair flowing down the red cape thrown over her shoulder. She frowned at Will, her gaze flicking to the books still spread out in front of him. "How are you still not ready?"

"Just give me a minute," he said. The Molten Prophecy. Definitely the Molten Prophecy.

Rowan picked up the invitation from the table across the room. Golden sparks floated up from it, the owl-shaped card glowing slightly in her hand. "You've had two weeks, Will. We need to get going."

"The histories say Strixhaven has existed there for millennia. I'm sure it can wait a few more minutes for us." He glanced back at the stack. How could he make do without the accounting of Thadus? "Or, possibly hours."

Rowan groaned. "Kasmina is probably waiting on us right now."

Will sighed. Kasmina. The woman had told them plenty about all the things that Strixhaven had to offer. But her invitation had come out of nowhere, arriving only a few days after Garruk had been satisfied enough in their security to leave them on their own. They hadn't spent that much time with her on Kylem, yet now they were supposed to go to an entirely new world on her word alone? Will turned back to his books. "I'm sure she'll be fine."

"We are *leaving*."

"Yes, I know. Today, certainly. I just need to—"

"No, Will." Rowan crumpled the invitation in her hand. "Now."

Will started to speak, but light burst through the room, tendrils of shadows swirling through the air. He squinted against it as it spread out to surround his sister. Behind her, specks of a bright blue sky shone in a web of verdant green leaves.

Rowan grinned and waved as she stepped into the light and disappeared.

Will clenched his jaw, fighting the pull at his core. But his connection to his sister was too strong. Soon the same tendrils of light and shadow erupted around him, washing the bed in its ethereal glow. Desperately, he grabbed the *Memoirs of Thadus the Healer* before the light could pull him to a new plane. All around him, then, was light and color and sound unlike any in Kylem. He was hurtling through nothing, through everything.

The first thing Will heard, wherever Rowan had taken them, was a high-pitched screech. It was coming from a blur of feathers and talons—a blur that was headed right for him. Will yelped, raising the *Memoirs* as a shield. The bird cut up into the air just before impact, whirling in a wide arc overhead.

They were in a clearing, surrounded by dwarfish, gentle-looking trees. At the edge of it stood a familiar figure carrying a crooked staff. After a moment, the bird dropped out of the sky and landed on the woman's shoulder.

"Hello, Will. Rowan." A spear of sunlight shone over her, setting her red hair alight. Kasmina gave something of a small smile, nodding to him. "I see you've both made it. And just in time. Classes will be starting soon."

Will looked around. He couldn't see anything but wilderness. "So, um. The school's nearby, then?"

"That's right." Kasmina turned and stepped toward the edge of the clearing. "Just beyond the forest. We'll see the first torch soon."

*The first torch?* Will wondered what that could mean.

“So what’s this place like?” asked Rowan, breaking from Will’s side to follow her. “Are there others like us? People who can move between worlds?”

“It’s a very large campus,” Kasmina said. “I’m sure there are others from different planes. Are you coming, Will?”

Will clenched his jaw, then marched along behind them.

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There was, as Kasmina had said, a torch. What she hadn’t said was that it was *massive*—more like a tower, really. The silver column rose high above the trees, piercing the brilliant blue sky. Even from the ground, Will could see the dancing flame at the top of the structure, its light rivaling that of the two suns that shone above it. As they reached the base, Will brushed a hand against the smooth metal. “How do they keep this thing lit?”

“Like most things on Arcavios,” Kasmina said. “With magic.”

Will glanced at the woman, annoyed. “Is this your home world?”

“I have been with the university for a long time, but no.” Kasmina looked toward the horizon. “The next torch should be that way.”

Will looked in the same direction, but all he could see were the green fields stretching out before them, broken only by a foot-worn path.

“If there are more torches, you’ll have time to admire them later, Will. Come on,” said Rowan, running ahead.

“Rowan, slow down,” said Will. “We don’t know who or what could be out here.”

“Exactly!” she said, laughing.

They walked for a few miles before they reached the next torch. Will wondered how many of them there were across this plane—and what other, stranger lands they might tower over.

“The *Stormwright Texts* were a lot more thorough,” Kasmina said, idly.

Will started at Kasmina’s nearness. He frowned, then followed her gaze to the book at his side. He slid his hand over it, the worn cover giving him a sense of security. “I haven’t heard of that one.”

“Well, you can always consult it at the Biblioplex, once we reach Strixhaven.”

“The what?” Rowan asked.

“The Biblioplex,” Kasmina replied. “Home to the most extensive collection of knowledge regarding magic on any plane, anywhere.”

“Oh,” Rowan said, not bothering to hide her disappointment. “More books. Who cares?”

“Are you *joking*?” exclaimed Will. “We could learn anything! Everything! We’ve got to pick up the pace!”

Rowan rolled her eyes. “Now who needs to slow down, hm? Didn’t you say there could be beasties out there?”

“My owl would alert me to any approaching danger,” said Kasmina. “Neither of you have anything to fear.”

Will glanced at the bird. It flexed its white wings as the light of the suns bounced off its round eyes. In a halting motion, it turned its head to look directly at him. Will frowned. “What’s wrong with it?”

Kasmina looked ahead. “Nothing at all. Although she is getting a bit long in the tooth.”

They walked the rest of the way in silence, with Will sneaking glances at the owl and her owner. But the bird always seemed to know when he was looking and stared right back until Will couldn’t keep himself from looking away. He noted the changing landscape as they moved, spotting a range of red-dish-gray mountains in the distance.

Finally, Kasmina broke the silence as they passed another torch. “Welcome to Strixhaven.”

As the trio crested the ridge, Will almost fell on his face at the sight before him. The campus stretched across the horizon, an intricate tangle of gleaming towers and flattened rooftops. A massive arch of jagged stones floated over what must have been the center of the institution, the ends of each stone pointing toward the ground smooth and flat, as if a giant blade had sheared away the bottoms.

Will stepped over to Rowan’s side. “This is “

“Bigger than our castle,” Rowan said, her voice low.

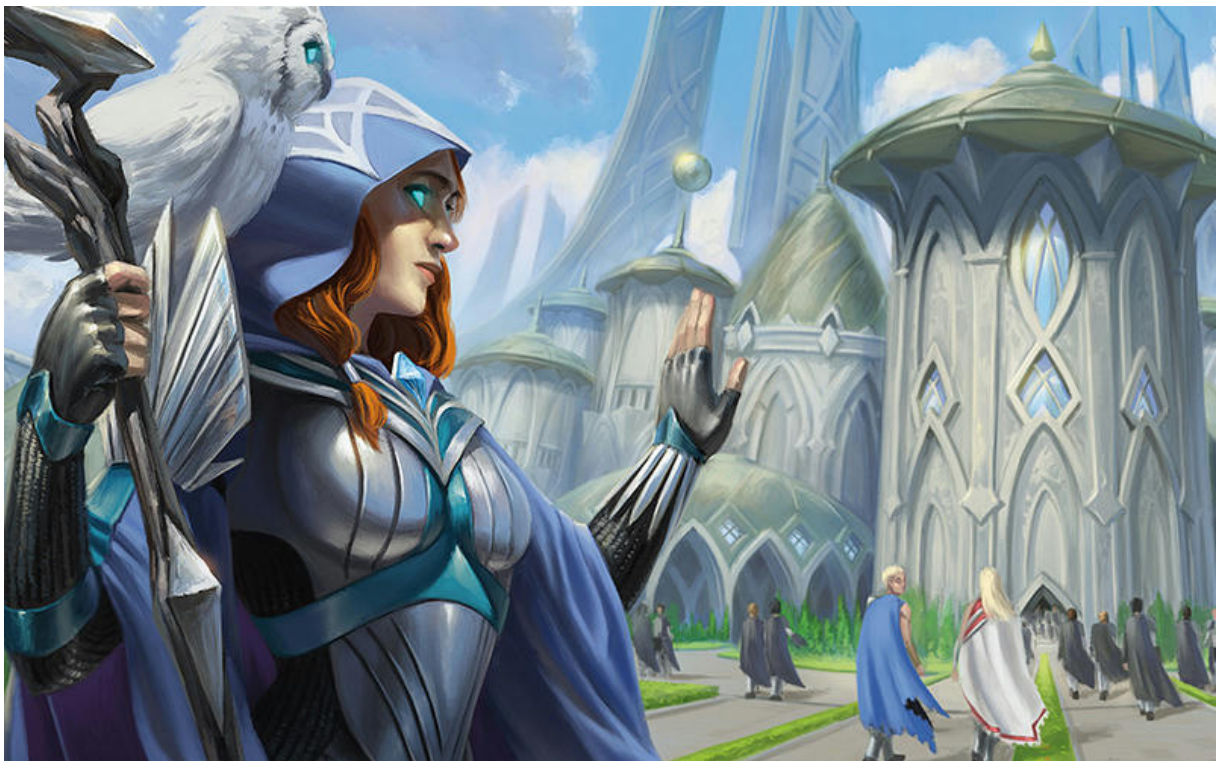
That was one way to put it. The expanse of Strixhaven was bigger than all five castles on Eldraine put together. At the center of it, an enormous building rose above the rest. Sunlight glinted on its pointed arches while large orbs floated over the shorter buildings.

“That’s the Biblioplex,” Kasmina said, coming to stand next to them. Will nodded absently, still speechless as he gazed out over the campus.

Rowan let out a short laugh, jolting him from his reverie. “This is going to be good.”

Will smiled as he followed his sister toward the looming gates. They were massive enough to seem close, even though it would probably take them another hour of walking to arrive.

He’d only taken a few steps when he abruptly realized Kasmina wasn’t following them. He and Rowan turned and looked back, curious. “Aren’t you coming?”



Art by: Brian Valeza

“Oh, no,” Kasmina said, shaking her head. She looked to her owl, and the bird took off, flying toward the Biblioplex. “I have other matters to attend to. Look for an owlin called Mavinda Sharpbeak. She will help you get settled in.”

“Oh.” Rowan cleared her throat. “Well, uh, thanks, then.”

Will bowed. “What my sister said. Thank you for bringing us here.”

“No need for such formality,” Kasmina said, smiling. “But you are most welcome.”

Will straightened and glanced at the woman once more before going to join his sister. “Rowan,” he whispered. “What do you think an ‘owlin’ is?”

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On the other side of the gates, the campus bustled with activity as people hurried along the wide stone paths of Strixhaven. Some of the younger students wore identical uniforms, their gray cloaks fluttering behind them as they hurried along. The older ones were each garbed in unique outfits and moved in groups, like colors staying together.

Red and blue ruffles and frills stood in stark contrast with the angles and swirls of the black and white coats and spats. Green and black overcoats and heavy boots seemed the complete opposite of the elegant, narrow red and white waistcoats and high collars. Will turned on his heels, taking in the kaleidoscope of moving colors and shapes.

“She’s strange, isn’t she?” said Rowan, absently. She didn’t seem nearly as bowled over by the spectacle all around them—if anything, she seemed lost in thought.

“Who?”

“Kasmina. Her and that owl.” She shrugged. “I guess it doesn’t matter anymore. She got us here, right?”

Before Will could form a response, shouts rang out from farther inside the campus. In an instant, Rowan was off, running toward the voices.

“Hey!” called Will, starting after her. “Wait up!”





Art by: Manuel Castañón

They raced around a corner only to skid to a stop at the entrance to a smaller courtyard. Inside, a crowd watched as two groups of students flung spells across a grassy field, the bolts of light and color zipping and spiraling through the air as they narrowly missed their targets. One spell impacted a girl in red and blue and she started to float, kicking her legs helplessly and waving her arms. Laughter and applause rose up from the crowd.

Will stared in horror. “I thought this was supposed to be a *school*. This is—”

“Brilliant!” Rowan finished, grinning. She tugged on the sleeve of a nearby student, a young dryad in black and green. “Who’s winning?”

“So far, Prismari seems to have the advantage,” said the student. “But I wouldn’t get too comfortable if I were them. Those Silverquills can be a vicious lot.”

“Bloodthirsty battling, in the middle of the campus?” sputtered Will.

The dryad frowned. “This is just a duel. No one’s actually going to get hurt. Not too badly, anyway.”

“Okay, enough of this,” said Will, trying to sound forceful. “Rowan, come on. We need to speak to—well, some kind of administrator. A schoolmaster, perhaps. There are classes to join, and surely books we need to acquire, and—”

Rowan stepped forward, ignoring him completely. Out on the field, a student had fixed his eyes on one of the Prismari in red and blue. His hands were raised, and his lips moved as he spoke in a low, focused tone. Between his fingers, curls of black ink began to form.

“Watch out!” shouted Rowan. She sent a jolt of electricity at the one preparing the ink spell. He yelped as it zapped him, causing the black ink he was conjuring to splash all over his uniform. More laughter and applause from the crowd. The Prismari student turned and looked to Rowan, surprised. “Thanks!”

Rowan grinned and started to respond; before Will could warn her, a coil of living ink swept her feet out from under her. She landed on her back, coughing as the air rushed out of her chest for a moment,

and peered up to see who had hit her—a student in black and white robes, same as the one she'd shocked. "Stay out of this, first-year," hissed the student.

The air around Rowan snapped and crackled with electricity as she called up another charge. "Want to try that again?"

Back on the sidelines, the dryad leaned over to Will. "So, that's your sister?"

"I'm afraid so," he said, grimacing. He had been hoping for quiet, for learning—so far, this was just as bad as Kylem.

"Looks like she's chosen her house."

It was true—Rowan was standing on the side of the Prismari students now, hurling sparks across at the others. Reluctantly, Will stepped onto the field, picking his way through the battle, dodging goutts of flame and arrows of light as they flew back and forth. When he finally managed to reach her, he grabbed her arm. "Rowan, this isn't our fight. Let's go."

She just laughed. "Will, you'd have some fun if you actually tried it!"

"We're not here to have *fun*, Rowan! We're here to become better mages!"

"Stand aside, first-year!" came a shout from behind him. He turned just in time to catch an orb of ink in the chest, which exploded and sent him crashing into Rowan. Together, they picked themselves off the ground, coughing, and Will looked down in horror: the copy of *Memoirs of Thadus* that he'd had in his traveler's pack had fallen out and was dripping with black ink. He knew at once that it was ruined. "Okay," Will growled, clenching his jaw. "Maybe it is our fight."

Rowan tugged him to his feet. "Remember the match against Vitrus and Gorm?"

Will nodded, calling up the energy to cast magic. Instantly the air around him dropped several degrees; he let out a breath, which fogged in the air. "Let's do it."

Rowan turned and lifted her hand, calling forth a sphere of lightning that popped and sizzled as it stretched and snaked into the air.

Will counted as he sent a wave of cold wind and ice to swirl around Rowan's lightning. "One two THREE!"

Will and Rowan moved as one, their magic combining as it arced toward the other students. They didn't seem to be grinning too smugly anymore—but just before it hit the Silverquills, Rowan's lightning flared and snapped, cutting through the ribbons of Will's ice magic. Will frowned, but it was too late to adjust. Rowan's attack was strong, at least; it pierced the shield of light the older Silverquill student had conjured, sending her stumbling backward.

Rowan whooped next to him, but the celebration was short-lived as she spun and used a lash of lightning to knock away another mage's barbs.

Will stared at the spot where their combined magic—the interweaving of spells they had always been able to do—had failed. Something wasn't right.

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Liliana stood outside the Biblioplex, watching the bright parade of students as they passed. She could almost feel the weight of her old Witherbloom uniform and pulled absently at the collar of her professor's coat.

Across the way, Dean Nassari strutted through the Biblioplex doors, with Dean Lisette next to them. Liliana fell into step alongside the deans.



“Professor Onyx.” Dean Lisette nodded in greeting. “How are you settling in with your classes?”

“Just fine,” Liliana said. “Though I’ve been hearing some disturbing rumors from the students.”

Dean Nassari laughed. It was an odd sound, from an efreet, like water streaming over crystals. “Well, young minds are wont to create elaborate tales. I think it’s a good sign. Active imaginations, and all that.”

Liliana forced a smile, trying to keep her tone light. “Unless they’re also playing dress-up and skulking through the halls, I would say this is a little more than innocent play.”

“Skulking?” Dean Lisette arched a brow. “And you’ve seen one of these people?”

She paused. How to answer this? “I saw a stranger in a mask on campus. Whether this was one of these Oriq, however “

“That word again. It always sounds so serious. We really don’t know if these rumors are more than a harmless prank,” said Dean Lisette.

That magic the masked stranger had slung at her was far from a harmless prank. “We shouldn’t underestimate them, in any case. The other deans and professors should be warned. Surely the school has some line of defense that we can employ.”

“You mean, other than Alibou?” Dean Nassari huffed. “I’m sure he would love to actually have something to do for a change. Maybe then he’ll let go of his grudge against me.”

“I was thinking something more than a single golem.”

“Even if these whatever-you-call-them do present some risk—our students are hardly helpless lambs,” said Lisette. “They can defend themselves.”

“But who’s going to protect them from each other?” said Nassari, gesturing at a nearby courtyard. Liliana could see errant spells sailing into the sky as cheering and shouting filled the air; another duel. Lisette sighed while Nassari laughed. “See? With such talent, I don’t think they have anything to fear from the Oriq.”

“Dean Nassari,” started Liliana. “We should really—”

“Fine, fine.”

Together, they moved to break up the battle. Nassari sent a wide swath of water through the crowd, corralling Prismari students. Vines and roots shot forth from the ground under Dean Lisette’s command, pulling children away from each other and binding their hands before they could send any more magic flying.

A young boy grumbled as he followed a blond girl off the field. “This isn’t Kylem, Rowan.”

Liliana frowned, her gaze sweeping over their clothes. They were out of uniform, and swords hung from their belts. His short hair was just as bright as hers, their eyes and noses mirrors of each other.

Kylem, he’d said. She knew of a place called Kylem—but it wasn’t located on Arcavios.

The girl frowned. “I know that, Will. But this isn’t Eldraine, either. And you can’t tell me what to do.”

“Can we please just go? Before we get into trouble.”

Liliana watched as the twins passed her, briefly meeting the boy’s gaze. He shot her a nervous smile, then hurried past, pulling his sister along with him.

They probably weren’t Oriq agents. But if they were planeswalkers, then maybe they could be useful if—*when*, she corrected herself—trouble arrived at Strixhaven.

Will marveled at the walls inside of the student dormitories. Intricate lines raced along the stone, glowing with a soft light. He reached out and traced one of them, the magic tingling against his fingertip.

"This is it," Rowan said from down the hall. She waved Will over before pushing in the door.

Going in after her, Will took in the sturdy walls and the glass window. Sunlight streamed in, filling the space with a warm glow. Two beds stood on either side of the room, each neatly made with gray blankets covered in intersecting golden lines. On the wall behind the door, two uniforms hung on racks, matching shoes sitting on the floor beneath them.

Rowan dropped onto the bed closest to the door. "This is nice. Much better than those rocks they called beds on Kylem."

Will chuckled as he set his books down on the other bed. He sat down, sinking into the plush mattress, and ran his hands along the gleaming stitches. The same glowing lines flowed across the stone walls. Carved symbols nestled in at the corners, stone flames and trees and stars marching along the ceiling. His attention snagged on the flames, reminding him of the fierce duel outside. He looked down at his hands. "Did that spell we cast together seem off to you?"

Rowan looked over from the other bed. "What do you mean?"

"I don't know. It just wasn't the same as on Kylem."

"Well, we're not on Kylem, remember?" Rowan shrugged and planted her feet on the blanket. "Besides, it worked, didn't it? What's the big deal?"

Will shook his head. "Yes, it worked, but it should have been smoother. More cohesive. We've done spells together dozens of times, but this time, it was as if our magic wasn't cooperating. I wonder if the Biblioplex will have some answers."

"Well, you have fun with all that reading," Rowan said. She pulled herself up and headed toward the door.

"This isn't just my problem, Rowan," protested Will. "What if being on this world is doing something to affect our magic?"

"My magic was just fine."

"No, it wasn't." Will stepped toward his sister. "But here, we can figure out why. You heard Kasmina—this is the most extensive collection of magical knowledge in the Multiverse! We didn't come here to get in some stupid school feud."

Rowan rolled her eyes. "Oh, really? And what did we come here for?"

"To learn. To get stronger. To take advantage of the knowledge and wisdom that Strixhaven has to offer." Will dropped his hands to his side. "We could take all of that back to Eldraine and help our own people."

Rowan only shook her head. "That's what you came here for, Will. But I'm not you. We may be twins, but I'm allowed to live my own life."

"Of course you are." Will sighed. "That's not what I meant."

After a moment, Rowan turned and left. Will grabbed his books and hurried after her. But as Rowan moved farther down the hall, Will's steps slowed. Maybe he would have to find answers on his own.

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Art by: Piotr Dura

On a bench along a scenic campus courtyard, Kasmina watched her owl returning from the dormitories. She could still see the twins in her mind, their images a bit warped from the shape of those avian eyes. Strixhaven would offer many possibilities for them both. She just needed to see which ones they would take.

Something pulled at her attention, and Kasmina closed her eyes. But instead of darkness, her mind filled with red.

Another of her owls flew through the air, soaring over a rocky desert. Movement below snagged her gaze.

A man climbed the rocks, the reds and browns of his clothes helping him blend into the landscape. Beside him, a foxlike creature leapt nimbly up the side of the formation, only to suddenly stop and drop into a defensive stance.

There was a rush of air as several figures seemed to slide from the shadows, stepping out of the surrounding mesas at impossible angles. They were dressed in dark clothes, metal masks hovering where their faces should be. A sickly purple light coalesced in each of their raised hands—all of which were pointed at the man with the fox-thing. Slowly, he raised his hands in surrender.

Kasmina sent a mental command, and her owl followed high overhead as the mages bound the man's arms and dragged him toward a yawning cave mouth waiting ahead.

Lukka grunted as the mages shoved him into the cave. Mila prowled at his side, her teeth bared and hackles raised. Silently, he reached out through their link to soothe her. If she attacked, the mages would think he was an enemy. And while he was sure he'd win the fight, that wasn't what he had come here for. Mila looked up at him, then slowly settled back into wariness. She kept in step with Lukka, stepping over aged, moldering books that spilled over from the bare stacks along the wall.

The mages brought him into a larger chamber. Stalagmites and stalactites cut through the space like jagged teeth, the ceiling bathed in shadows. Lukka stumbled on a loose stone, sending a small shower of pebbles skittering down the slope behind him.

“Quiet,” one of the masked mages hissed at him. He shoved at Lukka’s shoulder. “Keep moving.”

Lukka took a breath, trying to smother his own annoyance. Then one of the stalagmites moved.

At first, he thought he was imagining things, the darkness playing tricks with his mind. Then Lukka extended his senses and froze—the pebbly, ridged texture wasn’t stone, but some kind of shell. Slowly, whatever it was seemed to unfold, stretching long and spindly legs into the darkness. Behind him, another stalactite shifted in place, making a low chittering sound as it did. They were surrounded.

“Keep. Moving,” said the masked mage.

They picked their way through the space, every skittering stone sending their gazes up to the ceiling. Lukka tried to envision what the creatures looked like when they were active. The thought of facing one of them in the flesh brought back memories of the many crawling nightmares that lurked in the cave systems under Ikorla. Accompanying the horror, though, was an odd familiarity—he couldn’t help but feel as though he had encountered their kind before.

The mages yanked Lukka to a stop, forcing him to his knees. Mila turned toward the far side of the cavern, dropping low with a snarl. Lukka glanced down at her. “Hey. Quiet.”

The crunching of bones punched through the silence. Footsteps approached, and out of the shadows came a tall thin figure. Swirling around the long, almost bird-like mask hiding his face were currents of dark, coruscating energy.

Lukka tried to keep his own expression neutral as the man approached one of the creatures hanging from the ceiling, pausing to caress its shell. “Welcome to Arcavios, Lukka of Ikorla.”

“You know me?”

“I know many things. Things that I could teach you.” The masked man stepped away from the strange creature, toward Lukka. “And in exchange, I believe there are things *you* could do for me.”