Episode 11: Portents and Omens

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Proft's footsteps echoed as he walked into the chamber currently occupied by Niv-Mizzet, the Firemind and Living Guildpact. Etrata's did not. She moved beside the detective as quietly as a ghost and looked amused when he shot her an irritated glance.

Niv-Mizzet turned away from the massive platinum tome he had been studying, fixing the two smaller creatures with a look. "Ah, my guests," he said.

"Getting an appointment was no easy feat," said Proft.

"It isn't meant to be."

"Considering you were the one who indicated a desire to speak with me, I would have expected at least a few shortcuts in the process."

Niv-Mizzet made a motion with his neck, which might have been interpreted as a shrug coming from a smaller creature.

Proft frowned. "I would have thought your former guild would be thrilled to know I unveiled a murderer and saved their current leader before she could have *him* assassinated as well."

Niv-Mizzet waved a claw. "Some, yes. Some, no. Chamberlain Maree might have been delighted by Zarek's death, given what it would mean for her position. She did tell me how clever you were. I was quite impressed, really."

"To impress the Firemind is no small feat. Does it earn me the answer to a question?"

"Perhaps. Ask, and I may answer."

"How could you not know?"

An infinitesimal change seemed to pass over the dragon's face.

Proft went on. "Trostani was using the substance of Ravnica itself to kill people she deemed enemies of the city. You are the protector of all Ravnica. How could you not know? You must have seen her machinations. She isn't cleverer than you."

"I was otherwise occupied," said Niv-Mizzet, somewhat stiffly. "Her little game was disinteresting, and so I focused on what mattered."

"Ah. The project Kylox was working on for you."

"What do you know about Kylox?"

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Etrata pulled on Proft's sleeve. "Remember how I'm supposed to keep you from dying? That includes stopping you from antagonizing the most powerful beings in Ravnica."

Proft didn't move. "Not much, in the beginning. He was an ally. A friend, of sorts. Ours was a relationship built on favors and obligations, but I was fond of him all the same. And then he agreed to help you, didn't he? And he died for it. What project could possibly be worth his life? He was a careful man. He wouldn't take that sort of risk if he didn't feel it necessary."

Niv-Mizzet said nothing.

Proft took this as his cue to continue: "But he was working for you, and he died, and you don't like it when people break your things. Yet you didn't intercede after his death. That confused me, at first. Here you are, responsible for all of Ravnica, ignoring us in our hour of need—ignoring us when personal insult had been given to you. But as I considered it, I realized that the only reason you would stand back was because you were working on something bigger. Something you saw as a much larger and more existential threat than a few little murders. You've died and come back. You know death is an inconvenience more than an ending. I started making inquiries."

Niz-Mizzet still said nothing.

"Kylox wasn't the only one working for you. You have agents across all the guilds, hard at work on different aspects of the same project. You're not letting them communicate—why, if not because you fear someone figuring out how to exploit what you're still trying to understand?"

"Proft," said Etrata with more urgency. "Maybe now is not the time to show off how clever you are to the *Firemind* and is, instead, the time to tell him what you're hinting at before he eats us both."

"Of course." Proft cleared his throat, focusing on Niv-Mizzet once more. "I recovered Kylox's cryptex from his lab when he was taken. I've had time to decode it, and I know what you're up to.

"I know about the Omenpath Project."

Niv-Mizzet blinked, slowly and deliberately. Etrata had never seen a blink look like a threat before.

"What do you think you know?" he asked, his words like the creak and slam of a crypt door, heavy and immutable.

"I know that following the invasion, rifts began to open in the fabric of the plane. All the planes, from what I've been able to gather. Your agents call them Omenpaths. A curious name. May I ask—?"

"A phenomenon natural to the plane of Kaldheim. I've known many travelers from there. Now, please." There was a dangerous note in Niv-Mizzet's voice. "Do continue."

"These Omenpaths have been opening all over the city. A lesser mind might take them as random, but you—you saw the pattern, and you set your agents to mapping them. Studying them. Understanding them. You want to control the Omenpaths."

"They represent a way both off and onto our plane," said Niv-Mizzet. "As Living Guildpact, they're my responsibility. They could be used to exploit gaps in our security, stir up discontent, or smuggle in off-plane goods, undercutting Ravnican merchants."

"And I'm sure your reasons are all that noble," said Proft.

Niv-Mizzet narrowed his eyes. "Are you accusing me of something, Detective?"

"Let's not antagonize the nice dragon," said Etrata.

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"You plan to map, monitor, and control every Omenpath in Ravnica," said Proft, unbothered by their interjections. "More than that—you plan to make Ravnica the center of this new, freshly connected Multiverse. The glorious hub of it all. Isn't that right?

"Yes," said Niv-Mizzet simply.

"Well, as you're most certainly making a mess of the process, I would like to offer our services," said Proft.

For the first time, Niv-Mizzet looked genuinely surprised.

Etrata put a hand over her face.

"Your deductive skills would not be unwelcome," admitted the dragon, slowly.

"Excellent. Now, there is the small matter of our fee—operating costs, you understand, inescapable with the economy in its current turmoil ..."

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