

# Episode 1: Penmanship Practice

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Friends,

I can't wait for all of you to discover how witty I can be when I don't have to rely on an interpreter. You thought my poetry was good before? You just wait.

If you all set up your scribing boards properly, you should be seeing these words as I write them. They're coming through to you in my very own handwriting. Field study may be separating us for now—but how could it hope to rend apart the bonds of friendship we have woven together in Lorwyn? Just as the strands of fate now bind us together—



KIROL HERE. This is pretty cool. I think I saw some of my seniors using these things? Hey, if I draw something, can you see it on your end? Like ... tell me if you see ...



Abigale here again. Yes, I do see the drawing. You are lifting an entire building overhead. I had no idea you nearly went for Prismari instead of Lorehold. With that being said, it'll be easier for everyone to follow if we keep things to whole, complete letters.

As I was saying—though distance is keeping us apart, our experiences will weave us back together again.

That's part of the lesson I'm learning at the Forum of Amity. Diplomats here come from all sorts of places—yet the divisions aren't so clear as they are between the colleges of Strixhaven. Within these halls, colors don't signify *color* so much as personal taste. I've always heard Prismari talk about the beauty of fashions and the stories contained therein, but until now I never really thought about it. Local fibers and dyes are used in the construction of an ambassador's garments. Before any of the diplomats speak, you can often deduce their home if you learned enough about textiles.

Of course, the rhetoric is no less interesting—when I can make any sense of it at least. With so many people talking at once, my hearing aid is having difficulty keeping up. And it isn't as if being deaf is something people can tell from looking at you, either. I've lost track of the number of times I've had to flag someone down to make them repeat themselves.

It's ... lonely.

But that's why I have all of you! With our scribing to focus on, no matter how hard it is to communicate with people here, I'll always have you all waiting for me.

So, tell me everything! What are your field studies like? Have you met any interesting people? Is it exciting where you are? It can't possibly be as exciting as our recent journey, but that's likely for the better. Righting the balance of night and day should only happen once in anyone's lifetime.

Please let me know! And make sure to follow the rules! Start every letter off with an address and close it with your name.

All my love,

Abigale



Art by: Olivier Bernard



Comrades, compatriots, cohorts,

I suggest that we as a group visit the Forum of Amity and lobby for Arcavian diplomats to be instructed on the use of sign language. Honestly, it's a travesty that no one has been. All those who concur with my sterling reasoning—let's meet up after this field trip period is done. Shouldn't be too long. Especially in comparison to *last time*. Making short work of this means we can put our attention elsewhere.

However ... I am curious about the fashions you mentioned, Abigale. Can you draw sketches of them for us? I'm looking to update my wardrobe for the coming season. It's been two whole months since I bought anything new, and people are going to think I'm losing my touch. I've always wanted to look ambassadorial!

However thrilling the Forum of Amity might be, it can't possibly match up to Spectacle Summit. All you need to know is right there in the name.

Mornings begin with an incredible, unbeatable view ...

(Twenty-six pages of extremely technical but nonetheless stirring description follow. Sanar visibly changes ink no less than five times.)



At this rate, they're going to have to name a hall after some of the things I've gotten up to! But ... Hmm ... Looking at this stack of paper, I may have ... lost track of time, a bit.

Hopefully that makes for fun reading?

Abigale, does this thing generate new pages for every one of them I write? I can't even begin to think of the applications if it does. With the right setup, this could be an all-new form of performance. Imagine if we could project this! Whole groups of people seated in amphitheaters watching someone compose in real time!

It reminds me of—



Art by: Justin Gerard



Hi, Sanar. It's Tam.

Sorry for the interruption, but I have to offer two counterpoints. First of all, what you're describing has already been attempted. We have records of it both here on Arcavios

and in New Capenna. Turns out most people don't like to be watched as they compose. Instead, what seems to work better is a collaborative process not unlike what the Capennans *later* developed: spontaneous improvisation. In fact, I hear improvisation is so popular there that sticking to the written melody can sometimes be seen as insulting the audience.

But the second point is more important: Can we please keep letters to a page or two? Waking up to thirty pages feels more like homework than fun.

So ... one page? Please?

Best,

Tam



Art by: Jodie Muir



Tam,

Isn't that boring?

Sanar



Heyyy, everybody!

It's your favorite Mage Tower ace, KIROL, here. Why keep things to one page? I mean, come on! You can hardly fit anything onto a single page.

And speaking of reading ... my professors say there's not going to be any of that involved where we're going! All the better for me. Keeps me nice and trim. They did say to bring "as much note-taking equipment as you can possibly manage," though. Isn't that weird? No time to read but plenty of time to write, I guess.

We're off to the Fields of Strife. Best name of the whole bunch by far, even better than Sanar's, and I'll fight him on that. (He'll lose.) You would not believe the safety lectures they're giving us. We've got to attend no less than *five* before they'll let us on the trip at all.

See, time and magic don't work the way they should over there. The place is haunted by all kinds of old warriors who are stuck re-enacting old wars—but the wars aren't contemporaneous. It's *centuries* of war. Why shed so much blood over this place? That's what we're trying to find out!

I tell you, there's nothing like being surrounded by history. Lectures are one thing; books teach you a bunch, sure. But watching *real* warriors *really* duking it out all around you? I can't wait.

But man, these lectures. Check out this bit of my notes:

"When you're on-site, be sure to keep something boring and mundane with you at all times. Something that you know well. There will be times when you are so beguiled by the very flow of the mana around you that you will lose yourself to it. Pulled forth along the unseen currents, you will wander off into the crevices of these old ruins and we will never see you again. The best method for averting such tragedies is to bring along a memento—preferably a small, tactile item easily stored in a pocket. Students are required to reorient by practicing mindfulness with their memento every hour and ensure that their partners do the same."

Spooky, right?

Well, it doesn't bother me. My family would never let me live it down if I wandered off and got myself absorbed into an eternal war between nearly forgotten ancient empires. Who knows where or when I'd end up? I just ... won't get caught!

And I'll be honest with you. *I've already seen a spirit.*

Now, you've got to forgive me if I get some of the details wrong here. I'm writing about what happened a couple hours after the fact. It's all pretty fresh, but what can I say? My memory's a bit weird, so maybe some things are a little wrong. I might take some

creative liberties. But the *spirit* of what's said is correct. Ha! See, Abigale? I can write good too.

We're set up at Camp Herrian right now. It's the usual base camp for expeditions out into the fields, just on the outskirts of things. In the mornings it's hard to tell whether you're seeing crimson flowers bobbing across distant meadows or two formations about to clash. Sometimes, it's both. But the key part is that it's all at a distance. They keep you here while you get all the safety lectures.

It was my fifth day here, and I was getting used to finding random seeds in my shoes. My supervising professor needed some help hauling a half-degraded caryatid from Pranticle Peak down into the camp for further study. Of course I volunteered for it. Miles of hills and rocks and meadows are nothing compared to my gains.

The thing is, it took a long while to travel all that distance. So there I was with a couple hundred pounds of rock on my shoulders and the sky starting to go violet around us and a chill beginning to set in. My fellow lifters—mostly owlin, but not all—were starting to flag. Probably because *they* had bad shoes.

“Come on, we've all got one more hill in us!” I said.

And just as I pointed ahead to the camp, I heard one of my friends shout. Two seconds later, the weight all shifted onto me, directly, as they dropped the caryatid. Frantic footsteps and yelps followed.

I slung the caryatid across my shoulders and turned. Sure enough, there it was: a withered-looking figure in battle-scarred armor with burning eyes and two spears jutting from their chest.

“Whoa,” I said. “How'd you get hurt like that?”

They didn't answer me, which I thought was pretty boring. But they *did* rear back their sword arm for a swing. I shifted the statue so that I could take the brunt of the hit instead. I locked eyes with the ancient warrior and let out my best war cry.

I guess it was pretty good—they dissolved back into the currents.

I grinned. If I could have slapped my chest, I would have. Who knew it was so easy? Our professors say you absolutely shouldn't engage with a spirit on your own, but I managed it without any trouble at all. Turns out getting lost and nearly murdered by elves (no offense, Lluwen) on a distant plane changes your perspective! How's that for field experience?

So, anyway, I'm not worried about it. I'm gonna do great, never mind what my folks say about how useful a degree in archaeology is.

I hope you're all having as much fun as I am!

Your favorite,

Kirol



Art by: Bryan Sola



Hi, everyone.

Lluwen here. No offense taken. I'm glad you're having so much fun, Kirol.

I'm not doing my best!

Things are ... different. I knew that they would be. I had it in my head when I left that I'd have to get used to a whole new culture. New values, new social norms, all of that stuff. I thought there was no way that the people of Arcavios could be anywhere near as bad as the ones back home. Obsessing over perfection and what they considered to be beauty standards, tearing each other apart whenever there was something even slightly off about a person ... I really thought it couldn't be any worse than that.

And I guess it isn't. My advisors told me it was a good idea to introduce myself to the other elves. "Strong communal bonds," they said. To be honest, I was kind of scared to. I mean, you saw where I came from, what those bonds were like. What if these guys were the same?

They aren't. Lots of reasons why. Even outside of the so-called preservationists that want me to go home, they keep calling me a satyr because of my horns. Some of them are three times as old as I'll ever be. Every time I try to tell them something new, they just look down their noses and tell me they learned that years ago. Even their ears are different from mine—they can hear things I can't. When they speak to me, sometimes

their voices go up into this high register. I end up losing words. They stare back at me when I can't always answer their questions or ask them to repeat things for me. Sure, they do it, but there's that moment of hesitation, and ...

I'm sorry, I know I shouldn't be talking about this.

There's a Witherbloom trip to Titan's Grave in the works right now. I'm going to sign up. Things will get better.

Your friend,

Lluwen



Art by: Alix Branwyn



Lluwen, my friend, if I could make a suggestion? The man in charge of the expedition to Titan's Grave is Professor Fel. Now, I heard it from a friend who heard it from his brother's girlfriend who heard from her doctoral advisor that he's the surliest guy in Strixhaven. And that's saying something with Dean Embrose around. Maybe ... reconsider? Also—I can't help but notice that *Kirol* got more than one page and no one said anything about that. Curious.



Sanar, please sign your letters.

This is Abigale again. Sanar has a point. Two, really. Kirol's letter was *two* pages, which is unfair to Sanar. One page, everyone! Poetry is about describing a single flower petal that calls to mind an entire garden for the reader. Letter writing is more casual, of course, but still. Consider the words you want to use for the greatest effect.

The other point, though—I can confirm that Professor Fel is dark-tempered. Unlike Kirol, I can promise that *my* recollections are completely accurate except for an adjustment or two made for the sake of good prose. Last semester I took a course on poisonous flora so that I better understood which flowers to reference when. I've rarely seen a professor look so bothered to stand at the lectern. It was as if we were pelting him with stones and not questions.

"Each of you has two sample dishes of petals before you. One contains baby's breath. The other is hemlock. Make yourself a cup of tea and add the correct petals. When you are done, come to the front of the class and drink it."

I raked my claws against my upper arm, puffed my feathers, and went a little limp. *Professor Fel, what if we drink the wrong one?*

"Then I'll administer an antidote, and you'll never make the same mistake again. You'll find there's no more efficient method for learning which is which." He signed back as he spoke, too.

To his credit, he was right. Who could lose focus when the stakes were life or death? All of us were glued to our desks trying to figure out which was which. One of the Witherbloom hopefuls had to help me figure it out—baby's breath petals are the size of rice grains.

While we spent all that time on our assignment, Fel paced the room and tended to a concoction of his own.

The first student came up to drink his tea. A brave grin, countered by the shrinking of his pupils, was on his face as he tipped the cup.

It wasn't until *he* let out a breath that *we* all did. The classroom broke out in cheers.

Fel silenced us by shattering a vial of the antidote. There was no anger—only cool annoyance. "It's good to see that one of you isn't here to waste time. The rest of you need to take heed of his example. The borders between life and death are as thin as the petals upon the water. Thinner, in places."

I dropped out of the class that day.

If you have a high tolerance for such behavior, then perhaps he'll be worth your time—but I'd caution you to be ready for his methods if you're going to study with him.

Your friend,

Abigale

PS: I'm sorry the other elves are so disrespectful. I know just how disheartening that moment of hesitation can feel. If you ever want to talk about it, I'm here.



Lulu, my pal,

Fel is weird. No getting around it. My parents know him, and generally speaking that's a bad sign for most people.

Except you guys! Meeting my parents wouldn't change anything for you all. You're already great!

I can try to write to them to see what they think, though? If you have the time to wait for a letter, it might be nice to have a second opinion.

Also, the other students *totally* ratted on us having seen a spirit, so now I have to find an "academic advisor" for this trip or else I'll lose my seat.

Do you guys, uh ... know anybody? Because I can't have my folks following me out here. They're better where they are.

The best,

Kirol



Everyone,

I wish you all the best in your adventures finding an advisor who can keep up with you, Kirol. Whether that's doable has yet to be seen. Easier to solve a system of eighth-order differential equations by hand than try, for most people. But, anyway, we have a lot to check in about.

Lluwen—although there are elves on many planes, they aren't all the same. Lumping you in with them meant making some assumptions about you that I'm sure you didn't want. I'm sorry your advisors did that to you. I can't tell you how isolating it was for

me coming over from Shandalar. Culture is a mutable thing. No two places will develop exactly the same way. When you try to do what you've been taught and it doesn't land right, it's like you've been given a random series of numbers and rules that work for calculating the next one in a series, but the rules only work half the time.

It's isolating.

Now, Professor Fel isn't the sort of teacher who appeals to everyone. I've heard my own share of rumors. Some of my classmates think he used to work for the Oriq on the side. Others that he was involved with coordinating the Phyrexian Invasion. His habits of slinking through the halls at night with no explanation have done him no favors.

But I bumped into him one of those nights near the memorial to the fallen. He clutched a scroll beneath one arm and a jar of glowing samples in his other hand. This is what happened, more or less.

He stared down at me and tilted his head. "Gorgon. That's uncommon."

"There aren't many others at Strixhaven, Professor. Can I help you with anything?"

He hummed. "Do you have the ability to petrify? Is it strictly physical? What happens to those who are trapped within the stone? Is it possible to recover them?" He wasted no time. I answered his questions, and then he said, "That's no use to me. Good night."

No thrown items, no tantrums. Only brusque curiosity.

I think it's worth working with him.

Lluwen, if it would help you to have company, I don't mind coming along at all. Honestly, I'd rather be there than at the Paradox Gardens with the others. I'd like my education to be a little bit more ... multifaceted. Fel doesn't intimidate me, and I heard Oracle Jadzi is going to be there. I have a few questions I'd like to ask her.

Best,

Tam



Tam,

I would like that. A lot. And thank you all for telling me about Fel. When I submitted my application to Witherbloom, he was ... hard to read.

"You're the Lorwyn applicant," he said. "I've heard rumors about you."

"What sort of rumors?" I asked. There were thorns in my throat.

"That you keep to yourself. That your classmates have no idea of your intentions. That you are aloof and intimidating."

Every word felt like it was tearing off a little skin, though I don't think he meant to. Like you said, he wasn't angry. It was like he was listing off the qualities of plants. I told him I would put it differently.

"I'm certain that you would," he said.

But he stamped my form anyway. When I carried it out of his office, I realized that everyone waiting in line to speak with him was staring at me. One of them—an elf—opened her mouth. Making one of those sounds I can't hear, probably.

I kept walking. No matter what she said, I had my admission, and that's kind of all that matters.

Even better that I'll be going with a friend now. Thank you.

Your friend,

Lluwen



KIROL HERE.

Great news, everybody! Ajani's stepping in as my advisor! Showed up yesterday in the middle of camp and gave me a pat on the back. "Have you been getting into trouble?"

"Maybe a little," I said. "But with you around there's no reason to worry! Those ghosts don't stand a chance."

He tilted his big fluffy head at me. "What makes you think we're going to fight any of them?"

All around us the others were getting ready for their trips. We were one of the last crews headed for Pranticle Peak. There wasn't much good gear left; the climbing harnesses I tucked into my bag were so worn down you couldn't even tell they were leather. Not great. But, you know, I've never backed down from a challenge.

"We're here to research these ancient wars, aren't we? I think if we shake things up and try for a couple fights, we'll uncover something new," I said. "Observing can only get you so far. Warriors understand the language of combat better than anything."

He let out a grumble. One of my classmates, an owlin named Breeze, looked over his shoulder as he was packing. Probably trying to figure out whether to interrupt. I signaled that it was all right. From the look on Ajani's face, interrupting wasn't going to get us anywhere. He was having himself a big think.

As I started to wonder what, exactly, was making him look into the middle distance like that, he spoke again. He laid a great big hand on top of my head.

“When I was your age ...”

Oh, I was really in for it.

“... I thought similarly. It will be an honor to show you otherwise.”

“Think you’ve got it in you, big guy?” I said. In the spirit of horsing around, I tossed an elbow at him. “I’ve got a pretty hard head, they say.”

“Mine was harder,” he said. He smiled. “I’ll look forward to the challenge, so long as you look forward to listening.”

“Got your arguments sorted out? They need to stand up to peer review.”

He picked up a whole trunk’s worth of supplies and set them on the caravan’s cart. A guy like that, you’d think he’d have no trouble with it—but I heard him huff and saw a little twitch in the small of his back.

“To be honest,” he said, stretching, “I’m not sure. I thought I’d found the answers, once. But ...”

I jogged over to help him. “Did something happen?”

“A lot of things,” he said. “Most too gruesome to share on a nice day like this.”

“You could try me,” I said. “In Lorwyn we saw some pretty rough stuff. Things I never imagined. And that was from the very start.”

As I hefted the last of the trunks onto the cart, he caught my eye again. “Lorwyn was only the beginning. Do you know how Planeswalkers activate their abilities?”

I leaned back against the cart. “Come to think of it, I don’t. Professor Vess was pretty tight-lipped about it, I don’t talk to Professor Fel much, and besides Oko, you’re the only other one I’ve met.”

He pulled himself up to sit on the edge of the cart. With a pat, he invited me to sit next to him, so I did. “Trauma.”

“What do you mean?”

“Trauma is what awakens a spark. There are nights I lie up staring at the sky, wondering how many of us will never know what we are. The luckiest of all of us,” he said. “I wish them well, when I think of them. I wish them more years of ignorance.”

I didn’t know what to say. What *could* I say? Though there were plenty of people around, it was just me and him talking. I looked down at my feet and the ground underneath, and I wondered what had happened to the Planeswalkers I knew.

He must have known what I was thinking. “I lost my brother, Jazal. The only member of our pride who cared about me. He died simply because he was *my* brother.”

There was a silence, broken by the brays of the animals and the creak of wood.

“That must have been awful.”

“It was,” he said. “And in its wake, I thought, much like you, that fighting was the only language a warrior could speak.”

I got the feeling that he was about to start on a story—he had that look to him—but that was when one of our field leaders showed up. It was time to get going.

Before we left, before I ran off to get my stuff, I asked him, “Will you tell me more about your brother?”

He said he would.

Your friend,

Kirol



Hey, everybody! It’s Lluwen.

Tam and I got to Titan’s Grave the other day. I thought the trip was going to be awful, but it flew by. I guess that’s what happens when you have good company. The days back at school feel like a total crawl sometimes—but when we’re passing the hours talking about fractals in nature, there’s never enough time.

And here’s the weirdest thing: When I’m talking with Tam, other people don’t mind talking to me. I can’t tell you how many times someone came up to me on the way.

“That Quandrix student ... You two are friends?”

“Yeah,” I’d say. “Pretty good friends. Why? I know it’s unusual for one of them to be with us, but she wanted to keep me company, and she had some questions for Oracle Jadzi.”

“Keep *you* company? Why?” they’d say, or something like that. I don’t know how accurate you guys expect me to be about this sort of thing.

I know it’s not the best solution. You don’t have to tell me how conditional people’s attention can be. But right now? It feels good. And it was enough of a first step that I felt comfortable taking a couple more.

Oracle Jadzi was the one who greeted all of us when we arrived at Jawdocks Landing. Smiling bright as could be, I thought she was one of the most charming people I’d ever seen. I kept thinking how every single wrinkle she had amounted to hundreds, maybe thousands, of smiles and laughs. What my people thought horrifying was beautiful when it came to her—as inviting as an unexpected path in the woods.

“Welcome to Jawdocks!” she said. “Now, I know you’re all eager to get knee-deep in the dirt as Witherbloom students, but please make sure you’re good and rested first. Pick up your gifts from the shops *before* you start your travels, and you’ll have less to worry about on the way back. Trust me.”

Fel was next to her, book in hand. He didn’t bother to look up from it. “Sign your name to the attendance roll before you dash off, or I will dock fifty points from your grade.”

“There’ll be plenty of time to dock points later. Let them breathe first, Dellian,” said Jadzi.

“Not if they’re here for a purpose. All of this ... chintz,” he waved his hand toward the rows and rows of shops, “is simply a distraction meant to part coin from their wallets and knowledge from their minds.”

The others were lining up already. Tam was ahead of me. The line moved quickly, but I kept catching people looking back toward Jadzi. Whispering.

“I didn’t know they knew each other,” I said to Tam.

She shrugged. “I’m not surprised. Professor Fel is inquisitive.”

“Is that why you think he’s not so bad?” I asked her. “Because the two of you are so much alike?”

She didn’t answer me, but she did give me a look—you know the one. I bet she’s making it right now as she reads this.



(I would like to say, for the record, that I *respect* Professor Fel.)



After checking in, our classmates scattered like dandelion seeds on the wind. Jadzi had been right. There were shops for just about everything you could want there. Miniatures of the titan, of course, along with “artisanal seed blends” that cost five times their value. But there were other things, too. Chocolates in the shape of various fungi, stuff like that. Tam and I only checked out a couple of the shops. Something about them felt ...

Titan’s Grave is so beautiful, you know? A perfect unification of death and life. Verdant greens springing up to reclaim something none of us remembers. Grubs and insects feeding on the mulch of a dead giant, birds eating the grubs.

Seeing all that replicated in cheap stone and rubber was wrong.

We went back to our camp and found it as empty as could be. Except for Oracle Jadzi, that is. We spotted her meditating at the outskirts, on a hill overlooking Ribtruss Town.

“Didn’t you have some questions for her?” I whispered to Tam. “There’s no one else here now. You’ve got your chance!”

“She’s busy,” Tam said. “I couldn’t possibly interrupt. Who knows what would happen to the flow of mana around her if I did.”

“You know, I think she cares more about the flow of *knowledge*,” I said. Just as I was about to give Tam a friendly shove forward, I heard Oracle Jadzi laugh.

“He’s right,” she said. “And I take it the two of you care more about this place than you do about gift shops?”

“Honestly, I don’t even know why they have gift shops here. Flowers make excellent gifts, and they’re free,” I said.

“A good head on your shoulders and a solid hold on your coin purse. That’s a good lad,” she said. She turned to face us, then, hovering in midair. “What can I help you with?”

We spent a few hours talking, just the three of us, before Fel showed up and chided us for wasting the oracle’s time.

“It’s never a waste to spend time with students,” said Oracle Jadzi.

Fel scoffed. But it seemed to placate him, at least for the moment, and he let us go without too much fuss.

I think ... I think this might actually go well.



Lluwen again.

Spoke too soon.

Yesterday we finally visited Toadstool Copse. Unlike the rest of Titan’s Grave, there aren’t too many of the locals around the area. It’s a delicate ecosystem working in complete cohesion, and you need clearance if you want to go poking around at it. Plenty of ruins about, too. Professor Fel provided clearance for us on the condition that we not “squander it.”

I wasn’t looking to upset him. In fact, I wanted to impress him. *No one* impresses Professor Fel. I got it in my head that if I pulled that off, no one would have any reason to question why I was here, or why Tam liked talking with me, or why Oracle Jadzi had bothered having a one-on-two conversation with me.

Yeah. There’s been a lot of talk.

Fel instructed us to try and find something no one else has ever seen before—something that represented a “step forward.” My classmates focused on insects and flora. A fine bet, sure. But I needed something better.

Whenever I found something unusual and asked one of the TAs about it, I found it was already in the records. Night was starting to fall, and if I didn't find anything in time ... I didn't want to know what the punishment for "squandering" this opportunity would be.

My shoulders slumped, and covered in dirt, I let out a sigh.

That's when I saw it.

A little creature. Some kind of ... plant-animal. They were about the size of my palm, with two arms and legs and leafy striations all across their shape. I spotted them against the grass, thanks to a soft glow coming from their eyes. They held in their little outstretched hands a bit of bark, tilting their head this way and that. If I didn't know any better, I'd say they were studying a map.

They stood beneath a mushroom—one that kept them from spotting me. I realized this was it. This was what I had been waiting for. There was plenty of information on lumarets in our guides, but nothing about this. What was this little person up to?

Growing up on Lorwyn has its benefits. When it comes to forests, no one can move through them more quietly than I can. I crept behind the little creature as it scuttled from mushroom to mushroom. Each time, it would look down at the piece of bark before picking a new direction to go.

Eight toadstools in, I finally saw the reason for all this: The creature had friends. Huddled around the base of a particularly stout oak, beneath a shelf of lion's mane, were a good two dozen more lumarets. When they spotted this one, all of them jumped up and waved their hands in the air.



Bogwater Lumaret | Art by: Lie Setiawan



Imagine that. Hold it in your head for a second. Whoever heard of something so cute? And it spoke to a society, too. They had mapmaking, communications, maybe even ... I couldn't help but think of tour groups.

I turned and ran as quick as I could for Professor Fel.

He greeted me with a raised brow and stern face, as always. "Lluwen. Have you found something for me yet?"

I told him about what I had seen, about the lumarets, about the way they were clearly communicating.

"They have no magic," he said. He snapped his book shut.

"How can you know that? They aren't in any of the records," I said. My face and ears were getting hot.

"They aren't in any of the records because they aren't worth studying," Fel answered. "Either keep surveying and return with something useful, or report for community service at the Clever Cricket. I imagine the children who visit for our daily magical demonstrations will be fascinated with your tales."

It ... It was like ...

I can hardly write about it.

It just hurts. How could he say something like that? I spent all day looking, and ...



Hey, Lulu.

I don't think anyone else is up right now. It's just us two.

You aren't alone. I'm so sorry he said that to you. Will you tell me all about the little guys? They sound cool, and I can't believe anyone would dismiss a sentient species like that. They probably have their own history and stuff, you know? Their own families to write home to, their own education, their own everything. All of that's worth studying. Maybe one day we can even have them at Strixhaven.

To be honest ... today wasn't great for me, either.

Our first expedition was ... well ...

I saw that spirit again. The same one from before. I know it was him because he called out to us when we saw him. “Defiler!” he shouted. “What right have you to intrude on my mission?”

He hurled a spectral spear at me. As it sailed through the air in my direction, I want to tell you I broke it or threw it back at him or something like that. But since it’s just us two, I’ll tell you the truth: I was afraid.

See, he looked like someone in my family. A cousin or something. I hadn’t realized the first time I saw him, but there was this cut to his jaw and this shape to his brow that my cousins have.

I was stuck in place when the realization struck me. What was I supposed to do? Fight back? Try to reason with him? Ajani was saying maybe warriors spoke other languages, but what about this one? Could I really talk when there was a nine-foot-long spear of ghost energy flying in my direction?

Before I could figure out what to do—Ajani did.

He slashed the spear in two, and in the same motion brought the flat of his axe down on the spirit’s head. Suddenly, the spirit was just ... gone. Energy all dissipated, I guess. I didn’t know if he would ever reform.



Art by: April Prime



It all happened so fast. One second he was standing at my side talking with me about leonin cultures, and the next ...

He looked at me when it was done. I could see the shame in his eye—but there was something else there, too. A darkness.

He rolled his shoulders. “Be more careful,” he said.

I was too shocked to say anything to him about it.

But I’m telling you, and you’re telling me, and we’re both hurt, but ...

At least we have each other, right?

At least ... we have each other.