

O Fortuna

Lower Heaven Episode Two

By Benjamin Loomis

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I

Vic gave his friend a moment.

“Wot mate, is dat supposed to be inspirin or someting?”

Felix fixed him with a look, eyes still blessed with apocalyptic surety. Burning limbs toppled from their branches in the blast clearing.

“Yer sayin yer all revved up for the downfall o’ society, all dat.”

Felix considered this. “Yes! Yes I am! We just got a glimpse of the inevitable! The logical conclusion of everything that’s wrong with our society! I’m excited because that means we’re not failures— of course we’re failing, the whole thing is failing! We’re not wrong to be behind in life, or suffering for it. And we’re not alone. It’s happening to all of us, and it’s happening soon, how could it not, with the state of everything?? Everyone who is fighting for the way things are to continue are the crazy ones, not the Stormtouched!”

“Slow it down bruv, lowah ye voice!”

Felix became aware he was shouting.

“I’m serious, man,” he said, coming down a level, “We have to figure out what we’re going to do about this.”

“Wot ‘we,’ bruv?” Vic stopped packing and panned to the other two. Regina was staring at the ground, pulling the hairs on one side of her head with both hands and conversing with herself, while Jimmy had dropped into a sprinter’s crouch with a serious look on his face.

“He look like he’s about ta take off into the trees, and she’s toast for sure.”

“Hey, don’t do that! They’re with us, at least until we get back. We all need to talk on the boat. Make a plan.”

“A *plan*? The plan is to act like it nevah happened bruv! Lookaddem— dese man’ll blab to the first mugs we see, git us fookin sent in for treatment.”

“No, look, they’re fine—”

“But we hardly know em, innit, cept she try an rob us.”

“The boatstop is just down the hill. We’re all going the same way!”

“Yeh, dat dont mean I hafta be nice.”

Felix let out a frustrated groan. “Vic, that doesn’t matter now, we have to parse what just happened! We’re not crazy! We need to talk about what it all means!”

Vic would have had a remark for that, but the air lit up with a sound, a sharp pitch, dominating everything, one keening burst of high-end noise that arrived out of nowhere.

Felix startled upward, and clapped his hands instinctively over his ear drums. The wail undulated into a trill, a singing broken with pegs of silence, creating a void that flapped in their ears like the air through the gap of an opening Aero door. Felix spun to see who was attacking them and in a few seconds his eyes landed on Jimmy, mouth wide open, still hunched in a meticulous crouch. The shrill noise shrank as he ran out of breath, and as he pause to redraw it, Felix was on him with his hands in his face, and Vic was double-time packing up his things and securing the corpse of the Stormtouched shovelbill for rapid departure.

“Jimmy! Stop! Now!” Felix said. The young barbarian fixed him solemnly with his big brown eyes, welling with tears.

“What are you doing? Be quiet!”

“Singeth I the ancient mourn song of White Crow tribe. One like me must now singeth.”

“*Okay*, but everyone in a kilometer just heard that, so we have to go, like, now—” the young warrior raised his hand to say something else.

“Jimmy, I swear, if you say you will fight them all—”

“No. But I must tell thou. *All* thou. A thing of import. Now.” He drew a serious breath, almost a sob.

“When Zuri first...”

“Can you *summarize*?” Felix said, searching the trees for lanterns. Jimmy looked at him hard.

“I canneth not.”

“Alright, then it’s really going to have to wait, Vic’s about to leave us here— get your things. Get Regina, follow us!”

Vic was out already, quick-stepping back the way they came. Felix zagged until he was tromping level with his short friend. The shovelbill had led them up a rocky crick they now scrambled back down, pushing through green and broken branches.

“Slow down, you’re not leaving us behind— they’re staying with us!” Felix said.

“Bruv, why? We ent need em, dey on dey own ting! Dey’ll get us nabbed, blow our cova, blabbin and yodelin on! We gotta save ourselves, get back to our ends, lay low.”

They found the main path, where many trails to far reaches all funneled the last few hundred yards to the boatstop. Vic kept striding with effort, Felix grabbed his shoulder to slow him down.

“But what happened to us happened to them! We all saw the same thing, and we haven’t talked about it! They’re the only other ones we can talk about this with!”

“*Oosh*, bruv, ye twisted! I ent doin a Storm ting for nuffin. Serious.” He wrenched his arm away from Felix and pushed forward to the path’s end.

“Don’t do that! Don’t shut down!” Felix said to his back. “You saw it, I saw you seeing it! And they did too! I’m not proposing anything out of the ordinary, I’m just saying we need to sit down, and talk it through make a simple plan about what we are going to do about this, please!”

Vic reached the tree lip and reached back, shushing him with a hand motion. Felix approached and saw they had come within earshot of the little adventurer’s rest at the riverfront.

Vic pointed at the silhouette of a man pissing into the river’s reflected moon, and the shards of lantern light through the sides of the structure now visible. Vic looked at him stern, the skin around his weak eye twisted and squinty.

“Im not talkin bout it. I dont wanna be a flya.” He whispered, before turning and stomping away towards the building.

Felix sighed, and waited a few seconds for the others to catch up.

II

The boatstop shack sat longways to the water, its hammered tin roof cocked back toward the jungle to offer sight of the river bend and sheet the elements off waiting heads. A signal fire jumped low out of a drum barrel lighting the boarding dock as the clouded sky turned twilight. Framed by four trunks still rooted in the riverbank, the ramshackle walls were timber slab on ship's planking, reclaimed to this place and smacked to hold with fat square nails. A ring of patchy axe hacks and scorch marks made a clear yard around the structure. The forest crowded in quickly—it was seen as a civic duty for all level of jungle trawlers to maintain the little clubhouse's perimeter while waiting. A good way to blow off steam, too.

The Aeromobiles worked like windup toys— and there was no place to land and recharge in the jungle. The standard adventurer MO was to parachute in and hitch a ride back from one of the many makeshift stations like this on a boat bound for Heaven. Wealthier adventurers splurged for flare packs that summoned on-demand cabskiffs and cut out the wait, but they were far from affordable. It was common for vessels from upriver to take citybound passengers and earn a few extra coins for their troubles on the water.

As they crossed the line carved out from the rainforest, Felix pantomimed sewing his lips shut to Regina and Jimmy before stepping into the makeshift room. There was a fungal must to the wooden shelter. Sweat and anaerobic mud smell wafted up through the squishy boards. On their right the structure opened like a diorama to the river leg, their view fuzzed by a large flynet of gauzy mesh to stay the midge clouds. Vic was out there, a silhouette pacing in front of the stoked drum fire. Inside, a small table set had been knocked together.

Two young men sat on stumps around it. The pairs' looks lifted as the three of them entered. The two gave an expression flat and dull as unscrubbed pans, eyes that had looked on too much today already. Both were blackened with dirt and singes, in matching beige vests cargoed with pockets. They were both missing big patches of hair, showing skin the florid mottled pink of flesh recently healed by health potion.

They nodded when they didn't feel threatened and turned back to their game of Iscosc, moving pebbles between triangular chalk marks sketched on the table. This game, and the matching vests, standard College issue, marked the two as Wizard students, either doing their Intern years or doing research in the jungle for a First Solvo.

Felix looked to Jimmy and Regina, fearing a questionable outburst from either or both. Instead they were looking around transfixed, blinking around the shanty, seeing the manmade angles through their new lenses, as if born in the jungle that day. He felt it too—the stillness, the usual mundane peace of this place didn't match the flaming urgency the Storm's rays had gifted him. Just being here, and thinking about his vision near other people put him on edge, out of place.

The two students were keeping an eye on them and the silence was becoming awkward when there was a stirring at the doorway.

"Felix? Say, it is you!" Behind him another had come in, wiping his hands on his vest.

He returned to his senses, then did a double take. The older man wore a set of chunky old-timey spectacles that he'd recognize anywhere. Wrinkles parenthesized his wide bright eyes like he was surprised to have reached middle age. He was of middling build and wore one of those Wizard pocket-vests too, but his was of heavier cloth and tailored to his figure. Atop his head sat the characteristic tricorner hat, his had three stripes running around the brim, two barred green and the top purple, the highest noticeably newer than the other two.

Felix affected a shocked smile, stepped back, and whispered through his teeth to Regina:

“Go to the porch, we’ll talk out there. Wait for me, don’t say anything to Vic, he’s pissed off.”

“Uh, why?” Regina said, tone challenging. “This is his fault.” At least the crazed look was receding.

“Not now—he’s para. Just don’t. Jimmy’s being weird too. Just, I’ll be out in a second, go—” he usher-shoved her away, and turned back to the unlikely and awkward reunion he was about to have.

“Professor Zinvyk!” Felix blurted, cottoned for more to say.

“Yes! Long salutations! Good to see you, my boy! I can’t think of when last we crossed paths!”

“A year ago. Before I dropped out.” he said gracelessly.

“Oh...yes.” The professor’s eyes smushed together in a show of sympathy. “Dreadfulness. All understood though. These things happen to some. But do not think of it, we are not studying History, how does your present treat you? You’re in the jungle, have you made yourself a Ranger?”

“Not quite...my friend Vic has. I am voyaging with him on my weekend. I work at Pagerock, in the boot department. And I see you’ve achieved your Third Solvo... Plants? You switched concentrations?” Felix said, lifting his eye to the Professor’s hat, trying to redirect.

“Yes, and gratitude!” the older said cheerily, eyes pointing upwards as if he could see it. “More combined than switched, really. I found a lot of thaumatic fecundity in the lichen field—they’re not very showy beings, oft overlooked one would say. But if you find the time to be fascinated with something no one else has been, discovery can be ripe. It avails the symbiotic relationships between plant and fungal species are myriad, and produce variations in lichen, interactions going down to the mote and I theorize, to the submote level even.”

“Oh, with chartable applications?” Felix couldn’t help but asking.

“Of course my boy, of course.”

Those three hatbands marked Zinvyk’s progrees to the middle of the Wizard’s pyramidal hierarchy. Good-natured Zinvyk was an Academocracy man through and through, a Wizard’s Wizard, despite his adventurous streak. Felix stared at his former teacher with the same mix of wariness and disbelief he himself got whenever someone on Merit marked him as one of the city’s fortunate sons. Though he’d grown up surrounded by people who talked and thought like Zinvyk, he hadn’t been in conversation with a Wizard since his fateful departure. Twelve months living outside of the collegiate community working shet jobs to stay alive was enough to defamiliarize him, make weird the customs he was raised on, he realized as they were back in front of him.

Everybody knew the Academocracy was the legacy of the Founders, an unbroken connection back to the first meetings held in the Arks’ ruins, when the city of Heaven was but a dream. They had escaped the Old Continent and found a new one, and by an equal miracle the Articles they dreamt up to govern the city were still in place two hundred and forty-five years later. Thinking about this, being part of this project gave a lot of his peers’ strength, but Felix could never really feel it, only act it out in pantomime.

The whole idea as they all learned in History class was to form a more better government than what the Old Continent had—which from the little material that survived, seemed to have been nothing but a series of arbitrary legal prejudices, roles and privileges assigned according to weird things like level of skin pigmentation, or even what you thought happened when you died.

There was much debate about the Old Continent and what had happened there. No one since the first generation ever saw it, and only a few of them ever took time to record their remembrances, so troubled were the early years. Everything known about that other place was speculated from those few accounts and deduced from what they could learn about the desolate, infected ocean that stretched endlessly east.

All efforts to send explorers back across the water had been flummoxed by the deadly barren waters, which rapidly gnawed the hull of even the strongest metal ships, and destroyed the lungs of any who breathed it. There were no fish, nothing alive to reprovision a voyage, the most successful of which had found a few dead islands some kilometers off the coast, and claimed them as research stations for the Heavenly state. The conquerors who returned had lost all their teeth and hair by the time they made port, and died in quarantine days later. No future sea explorations were made. For the last hundred years, the Ocean Authority had limited itself to monitoring, and had never detected any change that made further tries hopeful.

The operating theory then, was that the Old Continent had somehow fundamentally changed how the oceans had worked, and thus, the entire planet they lived on. There were mixed accounts of when the seas had turned in the Founders' notes. They themselves only saw a small slice of whatever cataclysm had happened, and those who did write about it seem very keen to forget, pass on only what they felt necessary to their descendants. The government they laid out in the Articles was designed to reverse, to reject and prevent the excesses of their apocalyzed birthplace. Any study of the Old Continent was read through their lens, had to be interpreted as through a mirror. The distance between the Founders designs and the true picture of the Old Continent, and the further distance between the Founding and the WSWN, these gaps created many academic job postings to speculate on how the Founder's governing intentions should be applied.

So too shrouded was the Old Continent's technology. The Founders had written down as many of the universal laws their advanced society used to function as they could remember, but they knew far more would be lost than they could alone set down. So much of what they as individuals knew was more rarified knowledge, how to move information and people around. Either that, or skills built upon numerous industrial subprocesses to bring materials together they had been able to take for granted in their lives, none of which existed anymore. On this barren rocky eye of this vast green land, everything would have to be relearned and rebuilt.

It was the Founders greatest fear that their newborn city would become host to the same power games they had escaped, through which the crudest rise; their project falling prey to the same mental viruses their ancestors had never overcome. It was out of this anxiety they made their most innovative decisions for the island.

The Academocracy made government a direct extension of the education system. Scholars and sensible people, not warlords or charlatans, would be the leaders of Heaven. By providing free education to every child on the island, they reasoned, the best and brightest of their descendants would matriculate into positions of authority, based on logic, individual merit, and the freedom of choice.

They also took steps to erase the foibles of ego, legacy, and corruption in the most important seats of power. The height of decision-making power lay in the Edifice, built into the ridgeline bestriding the island, a crystalline speartip piercing out of the peak. Twenty-seven served at any given time. Appointments to the Edifice Council were for life, drawing from the most-accomplished Wizards from the ranks of the departments that oversaw various aspects of the city.

Ascending to the Edifice was Heaven's highest honor and the greatest sacrifice. In Chapter 7 of the Articles, the Founders laid out the process of Sublimation, making the cost explicitly clear. One couldn't simply walk into the Edifice— to Sublimate meant to give up everything: one's name, one's family connection and wealth, one's entire prior life. The individual's identity henceforth synonymous with Heaven itself, and into the mountain spire they disappeared, speaking only again in mandates borne down in response to appellates from the city's agencies and departments. The Edifice made law with one faceless voice, the voice of Heaven itself, an unchanging presence speaking down from the mountain through each generation. This was the most sacrosanct part of the Articles, encircled densely with warnings against future revisionism to this part especially.

Between that Edifice and the youngest school student learning their Social Identification Number on their first day of school, the city was run by a labyrinthine org chart of academicians-bureaucrats. Housed in the thirteen sky-scraping colleges, they simultaneously conducted research and playing functionary roles in the many Agencies, Departments, Authorities, Jurisdictions, etc. that made up the Academocracy's body.

This massive hierarchy created an equal opportunity sorting mechanism to bring new generations of talent in line with the latest scientific advances, and credit to the Founders, the system had proceeded over a meteoric technological regime over the last two and a half centuries. The supreme specter of the Old Continent and its vast capabilities had left them with more challenges than useful information.

But despite having to rediscover many of the world's physical laws from scratch, and lacking many of the minerals and much of the stability their ancestors had had, Heaven had prospered. It was theorized, in some ways they had even surpassed the hypothetical capabilities of the Old Continent, like in batteries and solar and wind tech. Much was still not understood, and challenges there still were, but the system had surmounted every threat to it so far and was still standing.

Felix met Zinvyk just as he was reaching up, beginning to climb the real pyramid that started after your free first twelve years of public school. Back then the professor only had two stripes on his hat and Felix was still part of the Community, how the Wizards referred to themselves. Zinvyk's Basic Fungus Concepts was one of his prerequisites. The spry teacher's facility with spores and molds made him a department standard, as was the unflappable scruffiness and barely restrained obsession for street music. He took to it downright anthropologically, annotating the vulgar patois lyrics of lower Heaven musicians in pulpy hobby journals that certain subcultures of Wizards subscribed to with guilty pleasure.

He became Felix's favorite teacher when they ran into each other at a grime rap battle in a club on Savion Street. It was one of Felix's many sneakouts from the skydorm his dad was letting him stay in during his Civil Service years. He had nervously dressed in plain black to avoid suspicion, but there was Zinvyk, looking obliviously comfortable, wearing a checkered suit and his tricorner, clutching a lager and bumping elbows with all the local rap affiliates. They both avowed to tell no one, and gleefully watched Stackt PaPa absolutely bodybag Viciouz Zkinz.

That made him feel comfortable with this teacher, because a professor who snuck out to rap battles obviously didn't care about impressing anyone. This was the type of Wizard Felix was angling to be. It had been a cinch since birth that his older sister Kalix was the intellectual heir to their father's ambitions, possibly even a potential for the Edifice. Felix's role was to find a respectable lower rung of the Academocracy to occupy.

This had never been a problem, a total relief actually. He loved both of his family members dearly, and did not envy them for mentally superceding him, it felt natural and right and was comfortable. At that point, Felix still hoarded a childhood notion of designing Malgas for the Malliseum Arena, another oft-pursued hobby that he saw becoming a fitting Wizard career someday. So he did his intern years in the Biology department, trying to make good, slowly working toward the Prima Solvo he'd never end up getting.

The Bio department, where Zinvyk and his father both did policy research back then, regulated all flora and fauna entering the City at the higher levels, designing vaccines, engineering new food crops, heavy work. At lower levels (Felix's) Bio controlled the stray street animal population. He interned as a research veterinarian's assistant. He had hated the job and the stipend would have starved him if he had had to pay rent, but anything that wasn't a lateral move required at least one Solvo out there, defended and recorded in the Ultima Vitae, the final record of all discovery in Heaven back to the earliest days. He was supposed to be spending his off-time in the labs working towards his solvo, and he did on some nights. More often though, he found a reason to walk out of the College grounds to carouse on the island at quitting time, vicariously living a dark life, developing useless interests and habits.

It didn't feel right, he thought. Even before everything happened. Even before this. I just didn't have the words to know what it was yet.

That had been his life before: amputating dog nuts, labs and classes, then hookah bars, Pit fight team drafts, salvias in the taprooms, food cart pods, a regular schedule of trivia nights at assorted taverns, smoky billiard rookeries, sense cinemas, gaming lounges, a gorge of the whole wheeling complex of inner Heaven's lust to be entertained. But as a Wizard, he could never do more than visit, scratch the surface. Wizard. The word was whispered and flung at him every time he tried to make a friend who wasn't still in the school system. No one knew exactly when the term 'Wizard' became affixed to the Academocracy (and Wizards themselves considered it a slur) but once the popular imagination had coughed it out it had stuck. Felix had a theory now:

It was when the city stopped seeing us as their own best and brightest, he thought, still unable to really group himself with Heaven's downtrodden in his head. It was when they started seeing us as a different group of people altogether.

But on he went. Hungover work shifts interspersed with weekly family dinners, til the one week it didn't happen. Those nights he had used to listen about his sister and father's progress towards three and six Solvi respectively, upward through the Academocracy, this system to which there was no alternative, which had perpetuated itself on its own merits for 245 years, inventing every paradigm-shifting technology their world had along the way, from the Cuum-can, to the health potion, to the Skyzymyk Solution, to the Aeromobile, with the vast promise of more to come.

"How amazing," Felix said.

"Indeed!" Zinvyk said, pleased to be asked about his studies. "I never thought I'd get my Tertio Solvo honestly, and much less in something besides fungal reproduction media design. The jump to a higher department level has left me with little time to stay abreast of happenings in the rap game though, I say with sadness. I suppose we must all grow up eventually." He took on a startled look, like maybe he just offended Felix and was about to qualify his remarks.

Felix kept going, spreading his hands a little. "Well, at least you still have time to get out of the lab, into the jungle, not all at your rank can say that."

"Ha! My wife wishes I couldn't. She'd prefer I leave danger to larger men. I have been attempting for her sake to do more indoor, submote research work. But when your new sub-

director digs up your Prima Solvo on the applications of mucilaginous plant germ matter as a spore reproduction substrate and gives you more funding to update your studies, well, I could hardly say no.”

“Of course not.” Felix said.

“Yes. He wants to review the results of my studies with adrenopomes as the substrate, to propagate some extremely rare spores. I needed to source the samples myself to ensure quality. It’s all very exciting, hush hush, Solvi in the making.” Zinvyk said, lowering his voice and wiggling his eyebrows.

A little flag went up in Felix’s brain.

“Adrenopomes? Like the fruit? In the Punika clade? We ran into some Rangers on the Aeromobile going for them this morning, has a new application been discovered by someone?” Adrenopomes were a red round fruit, a delicacy you saw in Zuri markets and the higher end groceries in the center island. They had a tangy juice, but a rough skin and enough seeds to make eating them a chore. They were common enough, but Felix had never heard them mentioned with interest twice in one day before.

“Oh? No, are you sure? A Ranger you say? No.” A concerned look clouded the professor’s face. “This is all brand-new, this study is top-secret, no other department should be working on it, outside of Bio. It is...” he slowed down, began tiptoeing. “a study within our protected domain. It has...”

“Pinyon potential.” Felix finished for him, lowering his voice instinctually. Zinvyk cringed and nodded, quickly switching his eyes to his assistants and back, saying without saying that they didn’t know.

Celio Pinyon, a prime descendant of the Founders, had been the first Wizard to make serious inquiry into the nature of the Storms, nearly 170 years ago when the first Stormtouched became visible on the streets of Heaven. His research group had created a hospital where the effects of the Storms were first documented on humans. At some point Pinyon himself had become exposed to the Storms, and the scandalous revelation of his mature works after his sudden disappearance (suicide, assassination, or Sublimation, body never found) had nearly caused an uprising. To put it lightly, the research team had scoured every inch of the living human form for a discernible imprint left by the Storm, grayly documenting every scalpel mark, finding nothing with chartable application. The name became a euphemism and crystallized the Storm’s danger posed into a demonic example. Storm research was tightly locked down, and the city was swept with a panic that defined the separation of Stormtouched people from the rest of the populace until now, created the first regulated treatment programs, a power reserved to the Bio Department and its ethical standards for perpetuity.

And the worst parts of Pinyon still haven’t been made public, Felix thought ambiently.

“But this is all under the purview of the sub-department directly, all above board, err, rather, *under* board review. This new sub-director, they come and go, Fewgaw, he is around your age actually, quite the rising star. I’m not sure if you knew him?”

“I don’t think so.”

“No, ah, well, its his project and he is.. he has... favor, as it were, with the, um, with the department director.” He finished, looking down, then at Felix.

“So this is all well-sanctioned and still behind the wall, that is to say. I’m sure it was just a coincidence, those Rangers you met.” he finished.

“Right. Or maybe someone told someone they shouldn’t have.” Felix said, and nothing else. Zinvyk paused too, biting his lips with his teeth, thinking of what to say next.

After a long silence, the words crept out.

“Felix, say, your father, he, have you two—”

“No.” Felix wanted to change the subject, and at the same time became aware the other two men had stopped their game and were listening to this young outsider receiving attention from their superior.

“So.” He said, returning the conversation to its rails, “You three were able to retrieve some specimens...”

“Yes, myself, Professor Patro, and his two assistants here. We got an excellent gathering of adrenopomes and a beautiful ringtailed wyvern. Unfortunately the head was damaged during capture, it would have been good to stuff and mount— almost perfectly preserved, and most undoubtedly Pinyoned itself.”

Felix looked around the room again. “And so... where is Professor Patro then, Professor?” he asked, and he didn’t even know why he was asking, just couldn’t help it. He understood the haunted look on the silent assistants’ faces now.

“Ah.” Zinvyk face darkened momentarily. “In the Cuum-canister, with the wyvern. What’s left. The Professor was... caught unawares, in his eagerness.”

“But,” he rejoined, after a second, “The pursuit of Logic will carry on, the wyvern and several bushels of ‘pomes we garnered, from several trees, all catalogued now— what Patro gave us is a terrific contribution.” He landed it with a flat, nodding smile.

And that was the trick to being a Wizard that Felix had never mastered, that detachment, the ability to see things removed from one another, the focus on parts in the abstract while ignoring the whole that allowed such thoughts to be had. He tried not to show his revulsion. And Zinvyk now seemed to be thinking of a way to ask about his companions, so Felix tried to detach himself before it got worse.

“Well, I don’t want to hold up your game any longer,” Felix said. “I should talk with my cohort. It was good to see you again professor, I hope your studies progress well.”

“Oh? Yes, you must, but before... I see you’re traveling with a very...colorful party. Tell me, how has your Zuri been acting?”

“He’s not *ours*, we only hired him for the day. And fine. Normal. Why do you ask?”

“Oh, quite, pay no mind. It’s nothing. Just that there are whispers... rumors, in certain College circles that something is building. On the South Bank.”

“Another protest in the Zuri Quarter you mean? A riot?”

“Bigger. Something else. Something planned. Has he said anything strange? Seemed on edge? Combative?”

“I haven’t heard anything like that, Professor, and I live right near there. Tell everyone there is nothing to worry about. Now—” Felix said, hoping he sounded sure of himself, trying to lead out of the conversation.

“Oh, right, yes, urm, well, good to see you my boy, til we— or rather, do be careful...” Zinvyk said, lowering his eye, sensing departure and sidling out of their dialogue with trailing abruptness, giving him a true Wizard’s goodbye.