



THE BOOK OF ARROWS

The Nexus Season One: Unseen World

Episode Six

SAMPLE

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Sara Blake

Author



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PREVIEW

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DSPNS1E6 Preview

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ABOUT THIS SERIES

Welcome to Arcanum!

The Nexus is a series of print (or digital, for you folks in e-book land) fiction, structured in the format of a television series. The individual books, called *episodes*, are novella-length, ranging from 10,000 to 40,000 words.

Each episode has a self-contained plot of its own, but also builds toward a season arc.

Season One consists of nine episodes. There will be a Season Two, but Season One is a complete series in and of itself.

Also, for those readers following my Barrow City fiction, I should note that The Nexus is set in a completely separate world. There is no overlap between my Barrow City and Arcanum fictional worlds.



Four Months Ago

Aurora Arcanum - Citizens Report Northern Lights in Sky Over Arcanum 6/2/23

Several citizens reported seeing pink and purple lights in the sky over Arcanum yesterday evening during a power outage. Witnesses likened the phenomenon to the aurora borealis, but my research suggests otherwise.

The aurora borealis, also known as the Northern Lights, is a natural light display that occurs in the high-latitude regions of the Northern Hemisphere. Usually only visible in far-northern regions, such as Canada and Scandinavia, sightings have been reported as far south as Cuba and Texas.

These rare, southern sightings, however, are linked to periods of high solar activity, when charged solar particles hitting the Earth's magnetic field are greatly increased. According to SpaceWeatherLive, no such increased solar activity would have explained a sighting of the Northern Lights in Arcanum yesterday.

Further, the light display happened during one of the increasingly frequent power outages we've been experiencing in Arcanum, prompting speculation as to a connection.

I witnessed these lights myself yesterday evening, near Sylvan Park. I spoke with others, and one in particular reported having seen

a similar display in the sky during the previous blackout as well, further suggesting the two phenomena are related.

This is a developing story; we clearly have no solid answers as of yet. Citizens of Arcanum, what have you seen, and when and where did you see it? It's time to engage the power of public discourse and get to the bottom of this mystery once and for all. I'll be updating the story here as developments happen, but join me in the comments, where the real work of solving Arcanum City Secrets can begin!

Victor Thorne tapped his finger on the desk as he read over the web page a second time. It was just a blog, a silly website some local amateur had put together to spread conspiracy theories, but people were doing exactly what this anonymous pot-stirrer suggested: sharing their experiences in a public forum. They were putting together a pattern, a bigger picture. It wasn't good.

When the inspector from the electric company had come around, questioning excessive power usage at a disused banquet facility Victor owned on Barrett Road, Victor had been able to handle him with a simple memory spell. After that, he'd placed one of his people inside the power company to make adjustments to his account, so that the electricity remained on, but was no longer metered, and no longer associated with Victor. The power outages and occasional corona effects would continue to vex and perplex citizens, but the general population would blame those on the electric company, who would no longer be able to trace them back to Victor's lab.

This blog, though, had Victor concerned. People were providing dates, times, and, more importantly, locations of the things they'd seen. If this blogger were to plot out all the corona discharge sightings on a map, they would draw a rough circle, right around Victor's project. That would not do.

Victor was confident he could find out who was running the website. Even if the person were using the most secure setup possible, bouncing his information around the globe through an assortment of anonymous IPs and high-end encryption, there were people who could trace it. Those people were expensive, but Victor could afford both their expertise and their discretion.

Not that he imagined this person was running such a sophisticated system as all that; this was almost certainly some random conspiracy nut sitting in a coffee shop with a laptop. If the situation escalated and merited intervention, Victor would act. For now, he'd wait... and watch.



Boxes

Weather Summoning

Ella chewed her lip, considering. Spells? Rituals? Natural phenomena? It was no good; she was going to have to dig into the book to figure it out.

This had been Ella McIntyre's life for almost two weeks now. She'd been warned Marcus' library was boxed up, and that her first project would be to organize it and get it back onto shelves, but nobody had been able to prepare her for the sheer scope of the project. The basement room full of books was larger than her whole apartment. Larger than many whole houses. The number of boxes, let alone the number books, was overwhelming.

Ella was in heaven.

She'd decided the best approach was to first sort the books into general categories. This would give her an idea of how the actual library, once it was ready to be reassembled, should be laid out. The problem was this was all new information to her. She had no idea what the categories should even be without going through the books themselves. And she often had to read large portions of a book to gain even the smallest clue what it was about.

Marcus, to her relief, encouraged this. She was going to be the curator of this collection for the foreseeable future, so he wanted her to understand the subject matter. He'd told her he understood it would make the initial organization project take exponentially longer, but he urged her to take all the time she wanted

actually reading the books and learning. She'd taken much advantage of that permission.

Which had brought her, currently, to an old, heavy tome titled, simply, *Weather Summoning*. Did it contain spells to change the weather? A magickal system that used weather patterns as an energy source? Was it guide for planning out your rituals based on weather cycles? She had no way of knowing without opening the book and reading.

She added the book to a growing pile of three others, stacked up on a folding table. She'd spend the day working through the current box, then would show Marcus her *to be read* pile. He'd make the call as to which books she could take home with her and which he felt were safest remaining in the house. She'd take the ones she could home and peruse them that evening. The next morning, she'd do the same with any she'd had to leave behind, get them all added to categories, then start on the next box. Ella loved this job so, so much.

She reached back into her box and pulled out the next book. The cover was red leather, a gilt arrow stamped onto the front in lieu of a title. She turned it over, but the back was blank, as was the spine. Curious. She hooked a thumb under the front cover and pulled, but it didn't move. The back cover was the same, as were all the inner pages. The book would not open.

Ella set the book down and stepped away. She'd read enough novels and seen enough movies to know to be careful with a book in a magickal library that refused to open. She'd ask Marcus about that one later. She went back to the box, but her eyes kept returning to the closed, red book.



"I can't believe you're giving up your apartment," Mari said.

Kaden shrugged. "It makes sense. I spend most of my time at the theatre anyway, and it's easier when an emergency comes up for me to already be there."

"You don't want your own space?"

"I'll have my own room," he said. "And a living room that's the world's greatest home theatre. It'll be fun."

"But no kitchen."

"Yeah, there's that. But I don't exactly cook anyway. Plus, Liam's been talking about that. He *does* cook. I think he's wanting to remodel the storage room under the concession stand into an actual kitchen."

"And me?"

“What about you?”

“I mean... I’m not one of you guys. How okay are they gonna be about someone who isn’t on the team hanging around their secret headquarters? Am I going to be allowed to sleep over?”

“Nobody has a problem with Sini, and she isn’t even Arjun’s actual girlfriend. You know about the supernatural, that’s enough.”

Mari snorted. “Nobody has a problem with Sini?”

Kaden smiled. “Okay, that was probably overstating things a bit. But nobody’s problem with Sini has to do with her hanging out at the theatre and not being a member of the team. And they like *you*.”

“If you say so,” she said.

They continued packing and talking until they had enough boxes to fill Kaden’s car. As they loaded them into the vehicle, Kaden thought about what Mari had said. In general, nobody minded Mari spending time at the theatre, including spending the night. She wasn’t a Nexus Guardian, but she’d been helpful on more than one case. He thought of her as a sort of consultant. She wasn’t a member of their team, but she was a part of their world.

She did not, however, know about the Nexus. She knew they were a team, but didn’t even know they were called the Nexus Guardians. She knew about the theatre, and spent plenty of time there, but she had no idea there was a chamber, deep under the auditorium, that housed a giant ball of magickal energy. The Nexus gave magick performed in Arcanum a boost, so that it worked better in their city than in most other places. It also attracted magickal creatures to the city. Kaden’s team had a dual purpose: to protect Arcanum from the harmful magick and dangerous creatures the Nexus facilitated, as well as to protect the Nexus itself from those who would abuse its power. It was the main reason behind everything they did, and Mari knew nothing about it.

She also didn’t know that Liam, trapped in his wolf form and out of his mind during a rogue shift, was the werewolf who’d killed her uncle a few months previous.

Great, Kaden thought. He’d talked himself into being nervous about the move. He was still convinced it was the right thing to do, but Mari was right—her presence could become a problem.

Well, he thought, slotting the final box into the Tetris game that was his hatchback, *we’ll just have to deal with the issues when they arise*. “Let’s grab lunch on the way to the theatre. I need food before I lift all these boxes again.”

“Deal,” Mari said. She kissed him, and he remembered why all the risks were worth it.



Sini's bedroom could have been marketed by Mattel as Barbie's Dream Sex Dungeon. There was so much hot pink it hurt Arjun's eyes, and the decor consisted of a bizarre mix of fashion dolls and sex toys. And fashion dolls with *their own* sex toys. Arjun wondered where one could even buy hot pink leather chaps for a Ken doll. He got up from the bed, to use the bathroom.

"Hey, where ya goin'?" Sini asked, half asleep.

Arjun rolled his eyes and didn't answer. Now that he was up and moving, he thought it best he stay that way. Sini's house on Damiana Drive in Swansea was a bit far from the theatre for his comfort. He never felt right spending the night elsewhere and had not intended to sleep until mid-morning.

When he returned to the bedroom, Sini was sitting up in bed, naked. He looked at her round breasts, the stark contrast between pale skin and dark nipples making him want to climb back in between the pink, satin sheets.

"Little sausage," Sini said, breaking his concentration.

Arjun's eyes shot downward briefly, without conscious direction. "Pardon?"

"What do you think about little sausages? For my grand opening?"

"I— Your—"

"Your team all liked the cake samples I had them try yesterday, but I was thinking I should have a savory snack too, not just the little cakes. What do you think?"

Oh, her shop. He remembered now. "I suppose little sausages would be fine," he said, still a bit thrown.

"I wonder if they make vegetarian ones," she pondered aloud, oblivious to his confusion. "Maybe little meatballs would work better. I know I can do those vegetarian."

"That could work," he said, already dreading the moment she asked him to sample a vegetarian meatball.

She seemed to notice he hadn't gotten back into bed. "You gotta run off back to the theatre?"

"Actually, I need to go to the mansion," he said. "Marcus and I have been doing some research with the Tempus Mora, plus I should check on Zephyr, see how he's settling in."

"Who?"

"Zephyr. The one who climbs on everything?"

"Oh, yeah," she said, leering. "He's pretty."

"Yes, he is. But he's out of your reach, for a number of reasons."

Sini pouted. "He's moving into Marcus' house?"

"Not permanently," Arjun said. He started looking around the floor for his discarded clothes. "He's been ill. He was released from hospital, but he'll be staying at Marcus' house, under the care of a private nurse, while he recovers."

"Everybody going to the mansion?"

Arjun shrugged, stepping into his rumpled pants. "I don't think so. Kaden is moving to the theatre soon, so I think he'll be packing most of the day. I'm not sure what Gina's got on her agenda. Liam will be at the mansion with Zeph."

"Who's Liam?"

"One of the numerous reasons you can keep your distance from Zephyr."

It was Sini's turn to roll her eyes. "Fine," she said. "I guess I'll just languish here, all alone." She flopped back onto the bed, arm across her forehead in a fake swoon.

Arjun allowed himself five seconds to appreciate the sight before looking away to find his shirt. "You do that," he said. He finished dressing and left to the sound of Sini's light snores.



"I don't need this stupid chair," Zeph said.

"Yes," Liam said. "You do. They wouldn't have even discharged you, had Marcus not promised around-the-clock private nurses. You are not walking all the way into the house and upstairs."

"You're planning to haul me up the stairs in a wheelchair?" Zeph asked.

"There's an elevator," Marcus said.

"Meaning I don't need the chair."

"Yes," Liam said. "You do." He knew he was repeating himself; hopefully it would sink in at some point. Not that he was holding his breath.

"They said there isn't even anything wrong with me," Zeph said, followed by a coughing fit so intense it caused his glasses to fall off his face.

"Yeah." Liam pushed the wheelchair up a ramp off to the side of the mansion's porch. "You sound great. They didn't say there's nothing wrong with you, they said they couldn't figure out what it was. That is not the same thing... at all."

"They said I probably had a virus that's out of my system now, and this is just the after-effects. I'm fine now." He shoved the glasses back onto his face.

Liam followed Marcus through the main sitting room and into the hallway

between the kitchen and the small dining room. At the end of the hall, Marcus slid back a wooden pocket door to reveal shiny, modern elevator doors. He pressed the button.

“No,” Liam said. “They said you probably had a virus that’s out of your system now, but that you’re still showing a lot of symptoms and that it doesn’t make sense. Are you always this bad a patient?”

“I’m not a bad patient.”

Liam looked Zeph in the eye and raised one eyebrow so high it was uncomfortable.

Zephyr frowned. “Whatever. Just because you’re a magickal werewolf and don’t get sick. You’d be worse than me if you did, I’ll bet.”

“You’ll never know,” Liam said, as the doors closed.

The elevator opened onto a hallway so long and full of doors it looked like a hotel, if much better decorated. Marcus led them to the end of the hall and opened one of the doors to reveal a beautifully appointed bedroom with an ensuite bath. A small seating area included a loveseat and armchair, both facing out toward a balcony with a view of the small waterfall for which the neighborhood of Falls Creek was named, as well as the Riverfront skyline in the distance. “I assume you’re sharing,” Marcus said. “But I did have the staff make up the room next door as well, in case I’m wrong.”

“No, you’re right,” Liam said, still taken by the room. “We don’t technically live together, but we don’t spend many nights apart. Besides, no way would I trust this one alone. He’d be over that balcony railing and trying to scale the building within ten minutes.”

“I would not,” Zeph said.

Liam gave him another eyebrow.

“I wouldn’t go over the railing,” Zeph said. “I’d go up, not down.”

Liam sighed heavily. “Let’s get you into bed. Do you have to pee first?”

Marcus chuckled at them. “I’ll leave you two alone. Liam, there’s a sticky note on the dresser, with the number to call or text to reach someone on staff if you need anything at all. The first nurse should be showing up for his shift this afternoon. I’m heading out for the rest of the day; I have an appointment on the other side of town. But if you do need me for anything, you have my cell number.”

Liam confirmed everything, thanked Marcus for his hospitality, then ran after Zephyr, who’d gotten up from the wheelchair and was walking into the bathroom on his own.



Marcus was gone when Arjun reached the Mansion. Hannah let him in and confirmed Zephyr and Liam had arrived about an hour earlier. He decided not to bother the two of them, and instead headed to the basement, curious how much progress Ella had made on the boxed-up library.

“Good morning,” he said, as he entered the cavernous room.

“Hey, Arjun,” Ella said. She held a book in each hand, seemed to be comparing the two.

“What are those?” he asked, happy in the knowledge that she would not respond with a cheeky, “books,” the way most of the people with whom he’d somehow managed to fill his life would have.

“I’m not sure,” she said. “They’re either duplicate copies of the same book, different editions of the same book, or volume one and two of a set.”

“May I see?”

“Sure.” She handed over the pair of old tomes. “Ah, I know these,” he said.

“So, which is it? Duplicates, editions, or volumes?”

“None of the above. This one,” he indicated the book in his left hand. “Is the table of contents for this one,” he said, indicating the book on the right.

“How?” Ella asked. “They’re the same length. Even the most extensive T-O-C wouldn’t be as long as—”

“Watch,” Arjun said, smiling. He handed her the book, keeping the table of contents for himself. “Keep yours closed for the moment.” He opened his book and flipped through. He stopped at a pair of pages listing various topics under the general banner of magickal creatures. He showed her the two pages, then said, “Now, open your book.”

“To what page?” she asked.

“It doesn’t matter. Start at the beginning.”

She did as he said, opening the book’s front cover. She paged forward, reaching the second chapter heading, looked at Arjun’s open pages, then back at the book in her own hands. She then resumed flipping through her book, jumping to the middle, then the end, each time comparing her book with Arjun’s. He knew what she was seeing; the book in her hands covered all—and only—the chapters listed on Arjun’s two-page spread.

“Close it again,” Arjun said.

She did.

He flipped through his volume once more, this time stopping on a two-page spread listing chapters about fire magick. “Open yours again.”

She did so, to discover an entire book on fire magick. She looked up, her eyes wide. “So, this is less a single book, and more an entire library *hidden inside* a

single book.”

Arjun smiled. “That it is.”

“How many...” she trailed off, looking over the expanse of boxes and piles of books.

“This sort of thing is rare,” Arjun said. “It’s why I recognized the books right off.”

“Is it something a mage could do, group several books into one volume like this, or does it have to be done when the books are first printed?”

“How do you mean?”

“Like, could you obtain a blank book and link it to several other books, so that a whole shelf full could be accessed through that single volume? Could you create a set of, say, ten books, on a shelf in a convenient location that actually accessed five hundred housed further away?”

“I can certainly see the benefit of something like that, but I’ve never heard of such a spell. Where did you get the idea?”

Ella shrugged. “Something I saw on a TV show.”

“It’s an intriguing thought. I’ll consider it.”

“Oh,” she said. “While you’re here, I have another book for you to look at.” She set the twin volumes down on a table and picked up a book with a red leather cover. She handed it to Arjun. “Any idea what that is?”

He took the book and looked at it, turning it over in his hands. There was no title or author, just an arrow embossed in gold, with some additional gold embellishments around the edges. He pulled on the front cover, but nothing happened. He tried again, discovering the whole book was sealed shut.

“Is it a fake?” Ella asked. “Like one of those false books that’s hollow inside, to hide valuables in?”

“It’s possible,” Arjun said. “I can feel a magickal signature on it, and it does feel like a protection spell of some sort. But perhaps...” He made a gesture over the book’s cover, attempting to break through the magickal lock. It took a few tries with slight variations, but the cover released, and the book popped open.

Arjun had seconds to see the book was not hollow before a wave of magickal energy shot out. He dropped the book, startled, as Ella shrieked. As they watched, the energy from the book coalesced into the shape of a young man wearing soft leather pants and no shirt, the strap of a quiver crossing his otherwise bare chest. With a smooth, practiced motion, and a speed that seemed out of line with an entity that had been trapped in a book for untold years, the archer pulled an arrow from the quiver, its tip bright gold, nocked it, and let it fly, directly at Ella. Before Arjun could take more than one step in the archer’s direction, before he could even think of a spell that might possibly stop—or at least slow—this creature, the second arrow flew, right into Arjun’s chest.

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