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# The Obsidian Gateway

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## Introduction

In the quiet corners of Arkelis, a city renowned for its countless libraries and labyrinthine archives, lived a young scholar named Liora. Her life, until now, had been shaped by the pursuit of knowledge: by the musty scent of ancient tomes, the hush of candlelit scriptoriums, and the enduring mystery found within the darkest, rarely traveled halls of the university. For Liora, the boundaries of the world were always much closer than they seemed; she had grown up on stories of hidden realms whispered about in myth, but tempered them with the logic and skepticism expected of an academic.

Everything changed the evening she stumbled upon the Obsidian Gateway.

The gateway was not a door in the usual sense. Rather, it was a strange, ancient relic—pitch-black, cool to the touch, etched with runes that seemed to flicker like embers under her fingers. It had been lost for generations, dismissed as legend by most, until Liora's curiosity led her deep into the forgotten vaults beneath the city. There, surrounded by dust and silence, she brushed aside a threadbare tapestry and found her fate bound to a relic whose true purpose no one had understood for centuries.

Unbeknownst to her, the mere act of discovery sent ripples through the fabric of existence. The Gateway, dormant for untold years, stirred at her presence. When Liora performed her first experimental unlocking—a cautious, scholarly probe—it flared to life. She glimpsed impossible landscapes, heard voices from worlds not her own, and, in that instant, realized the world was far larger and more perilous than Arkelis' old walls had ever allowed her to dream.

But Liora's awakening touched more than just her own destiny. With each use, the Obsidian Gateway sent out a call that was answered—by beings both benevolent and malevolent, drawn from realms where shadow walked freely and ambition knew no bounds. Alone, she would have been lost or consumed. However, fate began to draw others to her side: a rogue mage whose past was as turbulent as the storm-wracked worlds he'd glimpsed, a warrior with an unbreakable will and haunted eyes, and a thief whose nimble hands were matched only by her quick wit and hidden heart.

Thus began the journey that would lead Liora and her companions through worlds unknown: floating cities above raging storms, forests where the trees shared secrets, territories at once breathtaking and treacherous. They would be tested not only by the strange wonders and dangers of these realms but also by truths long buried—about themselves, about the Obsidian Gateway, and about the fate that tied their lives

together with so many others.

Before it is over, Liora must decide what she is truly willing to risk for knowledge, for friendship, and for the fragile hope that even the darkest gateways can lead, someday, to a dawn.

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## CHAPTER ONE: Shadows in the Stacks

The hour was late, even for the notoriously nocturnal scholars of Arkelis University. A thin, pale moonlight struggled through the arched windows of the Grand Archive, casting long, distorted shadows that danced like forgotten spirits across towering shelves of books. Liora, perched precariously on a rickety wooden ladder, didn't notice the eerie ballet of light and dark. Her focus was entirely consumed by a brittle, leather-bound volume wedged in a dusty corner, labelled with an archaic script that few living scholars could decipher.

It was a text on comparative mythologies of the pre-Sundering era, a period often dismissed as pure fabrication. But Liora found the recurring motifs, the strange shared symbols across disparate cultures, too compelling to ignore. Her fingers, stained with ink and perpetually smudged with charcoal from her endless note-taking, carefully pulled the book free. A puff of ancient dust exploded, tickling her nose and sending her into a quiet, almost inaudible sneeze.

The silence that followed was profound, broken only by the rustle of pages as she opened the book. The university's head librarian, Master Elara, often chided Liora for her "unhealthy obsession with the obscure and unsubstantiated," but Liora believed the most profound truths were often hidden where no one else bothered to look. Tonight, her instinct hummed with an almost electric certainty. There was something more here.

Her research had been leading her down increasingly unorthodox paths for months. It started innocently enough, cross-referencing astronomical charts from the Age of Iron with the architectural blueprints of forgotten temples. Then came the linguistic anomalies - certain phrases, repeated in utterly unrelated texts, always linked to concepts of "passage," "threshold," and "the place between."

Tonight's book, *The Whispers of Aethel*, spoke of a "Gateway" not as a metaphor for enlightenment, but as a tangible object. It described a "void-stone of unimaginable age, black as the heart of a dead star," capable of "bridging the impossible chasm between realms." Most scholars considered it flowery, fanciful language, a poetic rendering of spiritual transcendence. Liora, however, saw something far more literal.

She carefully descended the ladder, the ancient wood groaning under her slight weight. Setting the book down on a massive, oak reading table, she lit a fresh candle, its small flame pushing back the encroaching shadows. The Grand Archive was an intimidating place, its shelves stretching upwards into the gloom, a veritable forest of knowledge. But for Liora, it was home.

She traced a finger over a particularly intricate diagram in *The Whispers of Aethel*. It depicted a series of concentric circles, interwoven with lines that pulsed with a faint, almost imperceptible glow on the page. In the center, a symbol resembling an eye, but also a swirling vortex, seemed to stare back at her. The accompanying text, translated with Liora's painstaking effort over weeks, spoke of "keys of resonance" and "the song of passage."

"Utter nonsense," she murmured to herself, yet a thrill of excitement, cold and sharp, snaked through her. She had always found beauty in logic, in deciphering patterns and connecting disparate pieces of information. This was a puzzle of the highest order, an enigma that had eluded centuries of scholarship.

Her gaze fell upon another text, one she had discovered only last week - a cryptic journal from a forgotten alchemist, one Master Thelonius. His later entries, often dismissed as the ramblings of a madman, spoke of "the true nature of separation" and "the thinning veil." He mentioned a specific location within Arkelis, a "vault beneath the roots of the world-tree," a place thought to be purely mythical.

Liora had always been practical, grounded in observation and verifiable fact. Yet, the confluence of these texts, the chilling precision of their descriptions, was beginning to chip away at her scholarly skepticism. What if Master Elara was wrong? What if the obscure and unsubstantiated held more truth than the accepted dogma?

She spent the next few hours poring over the two books, cross-referencing phrases, sketching the recurring symbols side-by-side. The more she delved, the more a distinct, almost tangible sense of connection emerged. The 'void-stone' of *The Whispers of Aethel* and Thelonius's 'thinning veil' began to coalesce into a single, terrifyingly real concept.

The moon had shifted, now casting a silver square on the floor near her. Liora shivered, not from cold, but from a sudden, profound realization. The "vault beneath the roots of the world-tree" wasn't a metaphor. It was a literal place, deep beneath the university, a place that had been sealed off for centuries, deemed structurally unsound and historically insignificant.

She remembered hushed conversations between older scholars, snippets about forbidden passages and forgotten chambers. There were rumors of a great catastrophe, long ago, that had prompted the sealing of the lower levels. But Liora had always dismissed them as mere ghost stories for the younger apprentices.

Now, a new theory began to form, stark and unsettling. What if the catastrophe wasn't a natural one? What if it was connected to this "Gateway," to the very object described in these ancient texts? Her heart hammered against her ribs, a frantic drumbeat

against the stillness of the archive.

With renewed purpose, Liora consulted the university's original architectural plans, stored in a rarely accessed section of the cartography department. These were massive, hand-drawn parchments, detailing every stone and beam laid during Arkelis's founding. After an hour of meticulous searching, her finger landed on a small, unlabeled section beneath the oldest wing of the university—a section that abruptly ended with a thick, red line and the notation: "Access Sealed. Do Not Disturb. Per Order of the Founding Council."

It was a vault, exactly as Thelonius had described. And it wasn't just sealed; it was *forbidden*. A cold dread mingled with a thrilling surge of adrenaline. Liora knew, with a certainty that bypassed all logic, that the object of her obsession, the legendary void-stone, lay hidden within.

She extinguished her candle, plunging her corner of the archive into near-darkness. The moon had set, and the first faint hints of dawn were beginning to streak the eastern sky. The thought of venturing into the forbidden vaults was daunting, perhaps even reckless. But the knowledge, the sheer, intoxicating possibility of discovery, pulsed within her. She had to know. She had to see.

Liora gathered her notes, the two books tucked carefully under her arm. As she made her way silently through the labyrinthine corridors, the shadows seemed to thicken around her, no longer dancing idly but clinging to the corners, whispering of secrets and dangers. She felt a profound shift in her world, as if the very air had grown heavy with anticipation. The boundaries, which she had always treated as theoretical constructs, were beginning to feel terrifyingly real, and far, far too thin. What lay beneath Arkelis, in that forgotten vault, was more than just an artifact. It was a doorway, and she had just found the key.

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