

GILDED LEGENDS (EPISODE 001)

Written by

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EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

Red torchlight casts dancing shadows across the trees. A group of a dozen hooded, faceless POACHERS picks its way through the woods, careful and intent.

They pause as a LANKY SCOUT at the front drops to one knee and touches an indent in the dirt. Three claw marks gouge the earth and leave a print three times as large as his hand.

He beckons the group forward as he stands and flits further ahead. He stops by a broken tree branch and runs his fingers along it. They catch on a long, brown feather.

LANKY SCOUT

We're getting close, Captain.

The CAPTAIN, 40s, gruff and battle-worn, goes to the front. He checks the branch and nods.

CAPTAIN

Douse the torches, then. Keep quiet.

One by one, torches snuff out. The group falls into darkness.

They press onwards, even slower and more cautious. The Captain taps the shoulder of the poacher next to him, and the group spreads out into a line.

Ahead of them, a large shape moves in the darkness. Half the group stills, while those on the edges creep closer to surround the creature in a semi-circle.

A twig snaps. Everyone freezes, and then the creature bolts. The Captain growls and breaks from his cover.

CAPTAIN (CONT'D)

Amateurs. After it!

A STOCKY MAGE inhales deeply and blows on his palm. Flames erupt from his hand and ignite the plants in front of the creature, blocking its path.

The firelight reveals it to be a GRIFFIN. It turns to face the poachers head-on and shrieks at them.

One poacher throws a rope at it, but the griffin catches it in its beak and spins. It yanks the poacher forward and sends them into the flames.

The griffin tries to fly, but the dense tree canopy stops it. It darts away from the fire, and the poachers follow suit.

They break into a clearing, where the griffin spreads its wings and crouches low, as if to jump.

A shock of purple light fills the clearing as the Mage shoots lightning at the griffin, barely missing. The bolt splinters a tree and leaves burning embers behind.

The griffin falters, and the poachers fan out to surround it.

The Captain storms to the Mage, cuffs the back of his head.

CAPTAIN (CONT'D)
You idiot! Don't damage it!
(to everyone)
It must be in pristine condition.
Every scratch you put on it is a
hundred gold pieces out of your
pockets, you hear me?

The griffin shrieks and leaps at one of the poachers. She scream as it digs its claws into her and throws her back into the woods.

It flies up, but a rope snags its leg before it can get above the tree line. The poacher responsible pulls hard on the rope, and the griffin crashes back to the ground.

It shakes itself off as it stumbles to its feet, but the poachers throw more ropes over it. The griffin's muscles bulge as it fights against the strained poachers.

A rope snaps. The griffin swipes at another, yanks the attached poacher forward, and prepares to strike.

The Mage draws a shape in the air. Pink smoke pours out and surrounds the griffin. As it breathes in the smoke, its movements grow sluggish, footing unstable. The poacher in front of it rolls out of the way of its next attack.

CAPTAIN (CONT'D)
Good, good. Keep at it.

The griffin's breathing quickens as it struggles to stay alert. Desperate, it digs its talons into the ground and emits a dull, golden light.

CAPTAIN (CONT'D)
Uh-uh. I'm afraid I can't allow
that.

The Captain pulls a plain, gold coin from his pocket and holds it up between his thumb and forefinger. As he shifts his focus from the coin back to the griffin, his eyes glow gold.

The griffin's light sputters beneath his glare, then--as if siphoned out of it--flows into the coin. The griffin pants and staggers beneath the weight of the ropes.

The Captain walks up to it. It swipes at him, but he avoids the slow attack and counters by pressing the coin against the griffin. The coin glows gold.

The griffin shrieks and convulses slightly. Then, the golden glow envelops it. Everyone else shields their eyes.

The glow fades; the griffin is gone. The Captain looks at the coin, grins at the fresh image of a griffin head on its face.

He flicks the coin up into the air and catches it as it falls. Then he tucks it back into his pocket and shakes his hand out like it'd been hot.

CAPTAIN (CONT'D)

Alright, then. Easy enough, eh? A griffin can't do much on its own.

A mixed chorus of groans and half-hearted agreement answers him. The Captain turns and walks towards the woods, and the other poachers fall in behind.

LANKY SCOUT

Hold on, Cap'n. We've got some fledglings over here.

The Captain stops, looks back. The Scout waves him over from the other edge of the clearing, where the ground dips.

At the bottom of the hill crouch three shivering FLEDGLING GRIFFINS who stare up at the poachers with wide eyes.

The Captain claps the Scout on the shoulder and whistles for the others.

CAPTAIN

Lucky day, gents. Round 'em up.

As the poachers move in, one of the fledglings puffs itself up, lets out a cry, and lunges up the hill, talons out. A net falls over it, and it crashes to the dirt.

The Captain walks up and looks down his nose at it. He tuts.

CAPTAIN (CONT'D)

A valiant effort, my friend. Better luck next time.

The two remaining fledglings back away, but three other poachers already stand behind them, blocking the path.

The Mage walks up next to the Captain, reaches into his pocket, and pulls out another blank, gold coin.

INT. TAVERN - NIGHT

Warm light fills a crowded, boisterous tavern. Patrons sit at every table. Indistinct chatter and laughter bounce off the worn walls.

Coins pass between people everywhere:

A WOMAN at the bar slaps a few coins onto the counter. The BARKEEP sweeps them off to replace them with a full tankard.

In a shadowy corner, a MAN tests the sharpness of a small dagger with his thumb. He nods and pushes a stack of coins to a WOMAN across from him.

THREE MEN playing cards fan their hands out onto their table. One rolls his eyes and another groans as the third cheers and drags a pile of coins to his chest.

One of the coins drops onto the floor and rolls away from the table. It narrowly avoids a series of dirty boots and shuffling feet before it bumps into a clean, polished shoe, whose owner dips down to snatch it up without missing a beat.

AZRA, 23, charming and flashy, holding a lute, weaves through the crowd with practiced ease. He pockets the coin, brings his hand to his lute strings, and picks out a simple melody.

He hums along and slips around one patron with a graceful spin. It takes him right into a WAITRESS, who carries a round of drinks on a tray in one hand.

Azra barely manages to duck beneath it. He flashes her a smile and continues on his way.

He makes it to the bar and puts an empty cup on the counter, then pulls his stolen coin out of his pocket and drops it in.

Azra slides onto a barstool, and his idle strumming picks up in speed and complexity.

The conversations of nearby patrons falter as they turn to watch and listen. A few meander forward to drop coins in Azra's cup, and he rewards them with a grin and wink.

Before long, conversations resume. The occasional passerby still drops a coin in Azra's cup. His eyes fall shut, a lazy smile on his face as he loses himself in the tune.

STOCKY MAGE (O.S.)
Sure is pretty.

Azra's eyes open and he turns to smile at the Mage, who slides onto a barstool further down the bar. His face is flushed. A stain marks the front of his shirt. He hiccups.

AZRA
Thank you kindly.

Azra punctuates his words with an intricate series of notes.

A few of the other poachers walk past. One stumbles, and they laugh as another helps them back to their feet. The Scout brings up the rear and pauses by the Mage.

LANKY SCOUT
Haven't you had enough, mate? Best not stay out too late, or it'll be your head.

The Mage waves him off.

STOCKY MAGE
M'fine. Did you hear the music?
It's real nice.

LANKY SCOUT
I'm sure it is. Can you even see straight? He won't be happy if you get lost out here.

STOCKY MAGE
I'll be back when I've had my fill.

LANKY SCOUT
I think you've had that, don't you?

STOCKY MAGE
Of the music!

LANKY SCOUT
Ah. Yes. The music.

The Scout glances over his shoulder. Most of the poachers have made it out of the tavern. He sighs.

LANKY SCOUT (CONT'D)
As you were, then. Not my job to look after you.
(to Azra)
Loves a good drink, this one. Send him on his way soon, would you?

Azra flashes him a smile.

AZRA

'Fraid it's not my job to look
after him any more than it's yours.

LANKY SCOUT

Can't argue there.
(to Stocky Mage)
Leave soon, alright? Good work
today.

The Scout claps the Mage on the shoulder, nods to Azra, and
vanishes into the crowd.

Azra settles back into his seat and plucks at his lute
strings. He glances at the Mage.

AZRA

Have a good hunt today, then?

STOCKY MAGE

Now how did you know that?

Azra eyes the Mage's tattered hunting cloak.

AZRA

Lucky guess?

The Mage squints at Azra, and his mouth opens and shuts.

STOCKY MAGE

Well, I think you're right. I think
we are hunters.

Azra laughs. The melody he plays trills in unison.

AZRA

You think so?

STOCKY MAGE

Can never be too sure, can you?

AZRA

Right, yes, of course. I only think
I'm a bard, myself.

STOCKY MAGE

But you don't know, do you? You
could be anything. I could be
anything.

AZRA

I think what you are is drunk,
mate.

STOCKY MAGE

Ah, I think you might be onto
something there.

The two lapse into silence. Azra finishes his song, shakes out his hand, and starts a new one.

AZRA

Will your friends wait for you
long?

The Mage stares at him, then hiccups and almost knocks his barstool over in his sudden rush to get to his feet.

STOCKY MAGE

They won't! Oh, I bet they've left
me here already, the bastards.
Where are they?

Flustered, the Mage looks around. Azra laughs and jerks his head towards the tavern's entrance.

AZRA

Aye, bit late to find them here.
Try your camp, eh?

The Mage turns and takes a wobbly step forward, then stops himself with a smack to the forehead and turns back to Azra.

He reaches into his pocket, fishes around, can't find anything. He tries another pocket, pats himself down, and eventually pulls out a gold coin.

As he moves it towards Azra's cup, a griffin face on the coin glints in the light.

Nobody notices. The coin falls into the cup.

STOCKY MAGE

Thanks for the talk. And for the
tunes.

AZRA

Two of my top talents, if I do say
so myself.

He stops playing long enough to offer the Mage a cheeky salute as the latter hurries and stumbles into the crowd.

Azra sighs and melts against the bar, fingers plucking out a more relaxed melody.

The number of patrons dwindles as the night presses on, but Azra stays at the bar and plays until the candles dim.

INT. INN - BEDROOM - DAY

Morning light pours in through the window of a standard inn bedroom, furnished with a bed, nightstand, and dresser.

In the bed, Azra stirs and stretches his arms over his head with a yawn. He sits up, eyes heavy with sleep, and throws his legs over the bed's edge.

Azra snags a plain tunic from the floor and tugs it over his head as he stands. He turns to the nightstand, where his cup of tips from the night before sits.

He picks it up and dumps its contents onto the bed. He sorts them into three piles: bronze, silver, the rare gold.

A frown crosses his face when he comes to the griffin coin. Azra picks it up and scrutinizes it with a curious hum.

AZRA

Odd.

He runs his thumb across the coin's surface and turns it slowly. The griffin head glints in the light.

Azra shrugs and flips the coin into the air. He catches it on the way back down.

AZRA (CONT'D)

Well, coin's coin, I suppose.

A small, golden light burns from within his closed fist. Azra gasps and drops the coin on the bed. It glows brighter.

The light grows in intensity until Azra holds his hands up to shield his vision. After a moment, the light subsides, and Azra lowers his hands, blinking hard.

He keeps blinking. Rubs his eyes. His mouth falls open.

A fledgling griffin stands on his bed, dazed and disoriented.

AZRA (CONT'D)

Oh my gods.

The griffin flinches at his voice, and Azra slaps a hand over his mouth, eyes wide.

The two stare at each other. A soft knock at the door makes them both jump hard.

INNKEEPER (O.S.)

Azra? Are you awake in there yet?

Azra scrambles to throw a blanket over the griffin. It lets out an indignant squawk. He tries to shush it, but it only makes more noise.

It stumbles backwards, panicked under the blanket, and falls onto the floor with a thud. Azra winces.

INNKEEPER (CONT'D)

Oh dear. Do you need any help?

AZRA

No, no, one moment.

He stumbles to the door, cracks it open, and peers through.

On the other side stands the concerned INNKEEPER, 60s, grandmotherly.

AZRA (CONT'D)

Sorry, hello. Good morning.

INNKEEPER

Morning, love. Everything alright?

AZRA

Ah, yes.

He fakes a cough into the crook of his elbow.

AZRA (CONT'D)

Bit of a sore throat. Did a little too much last night, I suppose.

INNKEEPER

I never saw you for supper.
Breakfast is ready downstairs. You need to eat after a big evening, you know.

Azra steals a glance at the wiggling lump under the blanket.

AZRA

Thank you. I'll be down shortly.

The Innkeeper smiles and nods at him, then walks towards the next door. Azra leans against his as he shuts it, bumping his forehead against the wood.

After a moment, Azra turns around--and freezes. The lump beneath the blanket is gone.

He drops to his knees and checks under the bed. Nothing. He looks out the window next. Still nothing. Azra whips around, eyes wide, then stops, shoulders slumping with relief.

The griffin hides in a shadowy corner of the room next to the dresser, its breathing quick and shallow. As Azra makes eye contact with it, it lets out a hiss.

He crouches in front of it and reaches out, but withdraws his hand when the griffin panics and pushes itself further into the corner. It gives another high-pitched cry.

Azra winces and shushes it, hands up as he backs away with slow movements.

AZRA (CONT'D)
Alright, easy. You want the whole town to hear you? They'll have my head if they find you here.

When the griffin calms down, Azra stops and runs a hand through his hair. He stares at the griffin for a moment longer before he exhales sharply and shakes his head.

AZRA (CONT'D)
Gods. You can't be here. How did you get here?

The griffin stares at him, unblinking. Azra sighs.

AZRA (CONT'D)
Okay. Okay. Stay put. I'm going to get some food. I'll share, alright?

The griffin watches him as he backs away until he bumps into the door.

Azra turns and wraps his hand around the door knob but doesn't open it. He lingers for a moment longer to take a deep breath, then steels himself and slips out of the room.

INT. INN - MAIN HALL - DAY

A COUPLE sits next to a fireplace built into the wall and converses over hot drinks.

Across the room, a few other PATRONS sit at long wooden tables and enjoy plates of steaming food.

Azra trots down the stairs and swings towards the tables. Beyond them, through a doorway to a kitchen, the Innkeeper prepares another plate.

She looks up at his arrival and smiles, coming out to meet him and offer him the plate.

AZRA

Thanks. Mind if I take it back upstairs?

INNKEEPER

No songs for us morning folk, then?

AZRA

It's rather quiet. Wouldn't want to disturb the peace.

Doors swing open behind him. The Innkeeper looks past Azra and frowns.

INNKEEPER

Looks like someone else may be taking care of that for you. Wonder what they want so early?

Azra turns and watches as THREE KNIGHTS walk into the inn.

KNIGHT #1

Attention!

The quiet conversation lulls only slightly. A courtesy at best--even Azra pays them little mind as he crosses the room to return to the stairs.

A fourth KNIGHT enters the inn. A flash of color glints on his chestplate--the insignia of the ROYAL GUARD.

ROYAL GUARD KNIGHT

We have reason to believe arcane beast traders are operating in or near this town.

Remaining conversation dies. The room stills. Azra freezes.

ROYAL GUARD KNIGHT (CONT'D)

I'm sure you're all well-aware that it is prohibited to interfere with arcane beasts, much less steal them from their homes. Anyone suspected of doing so will face swift and severe retribution.

Murmurs sweep through the patrons. The Royal Guard Knight waits for them to quiet again before continuing.

ROYAL GUARD KNIGHT (CONT'D)
A documented family of griffins has
vanished. Signs of struggle are
present. If you have any
information...

Azra blanches and rushes up the stairs.

INT. INN - BEDROOM - DAY

The griffin trembles in the corner of the room as Azra paces in front of it. His plate of food sits forgotten on the bed as he fidgets with mounting intensity.

AZRA
Okay, well, this isn't the best
news I've gotten. Do I tell them
the truth? Would they even believe
me? I wouldn't believe me. Or maybe
I would? I've got a nice face. Why
would I lie? This face can't lie.
Except it can, and I do.
Frequently. But I probably
shouldn't tell them that. I should
just tell them I would certainly
never kidnap a tiny, baby arcane
beast--

Finally, he cuts himself off, noticing the griffin's increasing distress. He pauses, collects himself.

AZRA (CONT'D)
Ah, sorry, little fellow. I suppose
my panicking won't do either of us
much good. I promised you food,
didn't I?

Azra retrieves the plate and surveys its contents.

AZRA (CONT'D)
Let's see. Meat? You eat meat?

He picks up a strip of bacon and holds it up, then towards the griffin. It doesn't move. Azra tosses the bacon to the floor in front of it.

The griffin gives it a tentative sniff, then snaps it down in only a few bites. Azra blinks.

AZRA (CONT'D)
A resounding yes, it seems. Here,
have some more, then. Not big on it
myself.

He slides the remaining bacon to the griffin and bites into a bread roll as it scarfs down the rest of the meat.

Azra sits on the bed and rubs his free hand over his face.

AZRA (CONT'D)
Gods, what to do now?

He remains motionless for a few moments until the griffin dashes towards him and snatches the remainder of the bread out of his hand.

Azra jolts as the griffin retreats to its corner and devours the bread.

AZRA (CONT'D)
You know, when I said I would
share, I was hoping you'd leave
some for me.

The griffin swallows the last of the roll and looks up at him. Azra sighs.

He puts the plate on the floor and watches as the griffin darts forward to claim every last scrap.

AZRA (CONT'D)
Wishful thinking, I suppose.

He eyes his traveling bag near the door and glances from it to the griffin. They're about the same size.

Azra walks over to the bag and picks it up. He looks back at the griffin, which watches him with wide eyes.

AZRA (CONT'D)
Would you be willing to hop inside
for a bit? Just long enough to get
out of town. I'll take you back to
the woods.

The griffin continues to stare, uncomprehending.

Azra holds the open bag out towards it, as if it would be as simple as getting it to crawl in.

The griffin doesn't move.

AZRA (CONT'D)
Come on, work with me here. We
can't let anyone see you.

He lowers his hands after a moment, ready to give up, but then the griffin sniffs the air and wanders up to the bag. It dips its head inside, and Azra stares, shocked.

Then he realizes it's found some of his travel rations.

AZRA (CONT'D)
Hey!

He pulls the bag away, and the griffin gives an annoyed screech. Instantly, Azra yields, shushing it and all but throwing the bag over it.

It stays silent, all too happy to steal his food, and Azra scoops the bag up with the griffin inside.

Not the most inconspicuous, but it would have to do.

INT. INN - MAIN HALL - DAY

Azra picks his way down the stairs with a bulging, occasionally wiggling backpack.

INNKEEPER (O.S.)
Everything still alright up there?
Sounded like somebody had quite the
fright.

Azra glances over to the Innkeeper, who wipes down the front counter with a dark rag.

AZRA
I think so. Must've been a
different room.

He makes his way towards the door with brisk, stiff movements.

INNKEEPER
Well, alright then. Will you be
back again this evening?

AZRA
Ah, not sure. Hold my room again
just in case?

INNKEEPER
Just for you, dear.

Azra smiles his thanks and continues forward. He almost makes it to the door when his backpack lurches hard to one side.

The griffin inside lets out a screech.

The room goes silent. Everyone looks at Azra.

One of the knights, still present, puts a hand on the hilt of her sword.

KNIGHT #2

What have you got there?

AZRA

Nothing. Stomach's just a bit upset.

The griffin's head pops out of his backpack.

Gasps run through the other patrons--the knight unsheathes her sword.

AZRA (CONT'D)

Sore throat? Little cough?

He takes a step back.

The griffin sniffs the air intensely, drawn to the remaining plates of food across the room.

Azra lets the backpack fall to the ground.

AZRA (CONT'D)

Here, uh, found this. Why don't you deal with it, eh, Knight?

Havoc breaks out. Azra takes off, and Knight #2 pursues.

The griffin flinches at the sudden commotion. Overwhelmed, it forgets the food and chases Azra, its one thread of familiarity, as he breaks out onto the--

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

Azra stumbles out of the inn, picks a direction, and runs. The griffin bounds after him, desperate and confused.

Knight #2 brings up the rear. She shouts for reinforcements:

KNIGHT #2

Need some backup over here! He's got a griffin!

Azra glances down at said griffin as it pursues him.

AZRA
Can't you stay with them? They'll
help you!

The griffin doesn't listen.

Azra groans and weaves through a few PASSERSBY, all of whom are caught too off-guard to even try to stop him.

Gasps and shouts follow as the griffin makes itself known, running with renewed vigor and terror at the sight of so many people.

Azra's run slows long enough to look at the griffin again.

AZRA (CONT'D)
All I did was feed you! That's the
only reason you chose me. Which is
not a very good reason, mind you.

He looks back and sees more knights in the distance.

AZRA (CONT'D)
Gods, okay, well, we're in it now.

Azra takes a few more fast steps, then an arm shoots out and snags the front of his shirt, yanking him into an--

EXT. ALLEY - CONTINUOUS

Azra wheezes as he's shoved against the alley wall, hands instinctively trying to pry the one on his chest away.

Metal slides on metal, and the hand vanishes just long enough to be replaced by the tip of a sword leveled at Azra's chest.

It's wielded by DAIN, 22, androgynous and well-kept. A royal guard badge gleams on their chestplate.

DAIN
Surely you knew running was
pointless.

Azra eyes the sword and tries to lift his hands, placating.

AZRA
Now, let's all just relax for a
moment, shall we? No swords?

Dain pokes the sword that much closer. Azra flattens himself against the wall.

AZRA (CONT'D)
Okay, point taken. Quite literally,
I'm afraid, if you don't watch
those last few inches.

DAIN
You're under arrest for
participating in the trade of
arcane beasts.

AZRA
Can I not explain myself?

DAIN
What's there to explain? You've got
a griffin and you ran from both
local and royal guards.

At the mention of it, Azra peers around in search of the
griffin. It pokes around some trash deeper within the alley
and finds something else to munch on.

AZRA
I just wanted to release it.

DAIN
You just wanted to sell it, more
likely.

AZRA
If I'd ever hurt it, do you think
it would have followed me out here?
Wouldn't it have run away?

DAIN
You just said it liked you because
you fed it.

Azra winces.

AZRA
Ah, so you heard that bit, did you?

DAIN
Be honest. You only gave it food to
keep it calm and under control.
Easier to manage, no fuss--no
problem for you, right?

AZRA
No--

DAIN

Didn't work out so well for you,
though, did it? You've got yourself
a problem anyway.

AZRA

Not intentionally.

DAIN

Of course not. An arcane beast
hunter would never intentionally
make problems for himself.

Azra pauses, frowning. Then recognition lights up his face.

AZRA

Wait--hunter. Hunters! Of course!

DAIN

So you admit--

AZRA

No, no, I met some hunters last
night. I don't know where they are
now, but I know what one looks
like. He could be your man.

Dain falters, brow creasing. Their sword lowers a fraction.
Azra rewards them with an encouraging, earnest nod.

AZRA (CONT'D)

Listen to me. I can help you. I'm
not one of them.

DAIN

Then why did you run?

Azra only has time to make an unconvincing, defensive sound
before FOUR KNIGHTS crash into the alley.

Two of the knights lunge at Azra, each grabbing one of his
arms.

The other advance on the griffin, which presses itself
against a crate, hissing and shrieking.

AZRA

Hey, hey, come on! Can't you see
it's terrified? Give it some space,
at least.

His protests are ignored. The knights tug him towards the
street. Azra's eyes go back to Dain.

AZRA (CONT'D)
I haven't lied to you. Tell them I
can help.

Dain stares at him. Hesitates too long.

Azra gets pulled farther away.

AZRA (CONT'D)
Tell them I can help!

Dain stays silent, conflicted and unsure.

The knights vanish around the corner with Azra in tow.

INT. JAIL - DAY

Sunlight peeks in through the lone, barred window of a small room, only large enough for a single cell.

The knights shove Azra in and slam the door shut behind him, locking it.

AZRA
Don't suppose I'll be getting a
chance to explain myself to any of
you, either, then?

His words are, again, ignored, and the knights leave.

Azra leans against the back wall and crosses his arms.

AZRA (CONT'D)
Right. 'Course not.

INT. JAIL - NIGHT

Navy hues of night cast the room in a dim blue light.

Azra now lies on the floor of his cell, half dozing off, hands clasped beneath his head.

DAIN (O.S.)
So, uh. Hey.

He stirs and looks through the cell bars. Dain stands at the room's entrance, having traded their armor for a dark cloak. They won't quite look at Azra.

AZRA
Have you brought food? Been in here
all day, you know.

Dain pats their pockets.

DAIN
Oh, uh. No. Didn't think about
that. Sorry.

Azra sighs and closes his eyes.

AZRA
Pity.

Dain shifts, awkward in the subsequent lull of silence.

DAIN
I'm Dain. By the way.

Azra makes a face. Resists. Then, finally:

AZRA
Azra, at your service. Or I
would've been, anyway, if you'd
just given me the chance.

Silence reigns.

AZRA (CONT'D)
Alright, you're clearly here for a
reason, so you might as well get on
with it.

DAIN
I want to believe you told me the
truth earlier.

Azra's eyes open. Curious, but he plays it cool.

AZRA
Try leading with that bit next
time, eh? Have you mentioned it to
the rest of the guard yet?

DAIN
Well, about that--

AZRA
Oh? Do they believe me?

DAIN
Not exactly. You're supposed to be
transported to the capital so the
head of the royal guard can
question you.

Azra winces.

AZRA
That is, in fact, the opposite of
what I was hoping you'd say.
(beat)
But?

Dain stares at him, hesitating.

AZRA (CONT'D)
Come on, I'm really hoping there's
a "but." Why else would you be here
at this hour?

DAIN
I shouldn't be. At any hour,
really.

Azra peers out at them. Opens his mouth--

DAIN (CONT'D)
Don't say "but" again. Have a
little patience.
(beat)
But if I just let them cart you off
to the capital, the smugglers that
are here will be long gone by the
time we make it back.

Azra sits up again.

AZRA
Is no one else going after them?

DAIN
The guard assumes you're in on it.
Thinks you can give us information
so we can cut down the whole
operation at its head without
tipping them off too early.

AZRA
You disagree?

DAIN
I'm not sure.

Dain steps closer to the bars, searching Azra's face.

DAIN (CONT'D)
You told me you could help. Now I'm
asking if you will.

AZRA

And what inspired the sudden change
of heart?

Dain pulls a metal keyring from their pocket. The cell lock
clicks, and the door swings open.

DAIN

Does it matter? Your alternative is
to face the royal guard.

Azra doesn't move.

AZRA

You are the royal guard.

DAIN

Barely. My captain doesn't seem to
think so. Changing her mind? It
would take, I don't know--

They shoot Azra a very pointed look.

DAIN (CONT'D)

Capturing a few arcane beast
smugglers, or something equally as
unlikely?

Understanding dawns on Azra's face.

DAIN (CONT'D)

But if I accuse an innocent,
genuine hunting party, I'll have
wasted my time and lost my chance.

(beat)

You said you knew what one of the
poachers looked like.

AZRA

It's not a certainty. Just a hunch.

DAIN

A hunch is more than I have to go
on alone.

Dain holds a hand out to Azra, who considers it.

AZRA

And you don't suppose freeing me
will wound your chances of
impressing this captain of yours?

DAIN

Not if we aren't caught.

AZRA
The likelihood of which is...?

DAIN
Rapidly decreasing with each second
we waste standing around here.

AZRA
A fair point.

Azra takes their hand.

AZRA (CONT'D)
Best get on with it, then, eh?

Dain pulls him to his feet and out of the cell--shaky
alliance formed.

They both step away, into the darkness.

The barred door shuts on a now empty cell.

END OF EPISODE