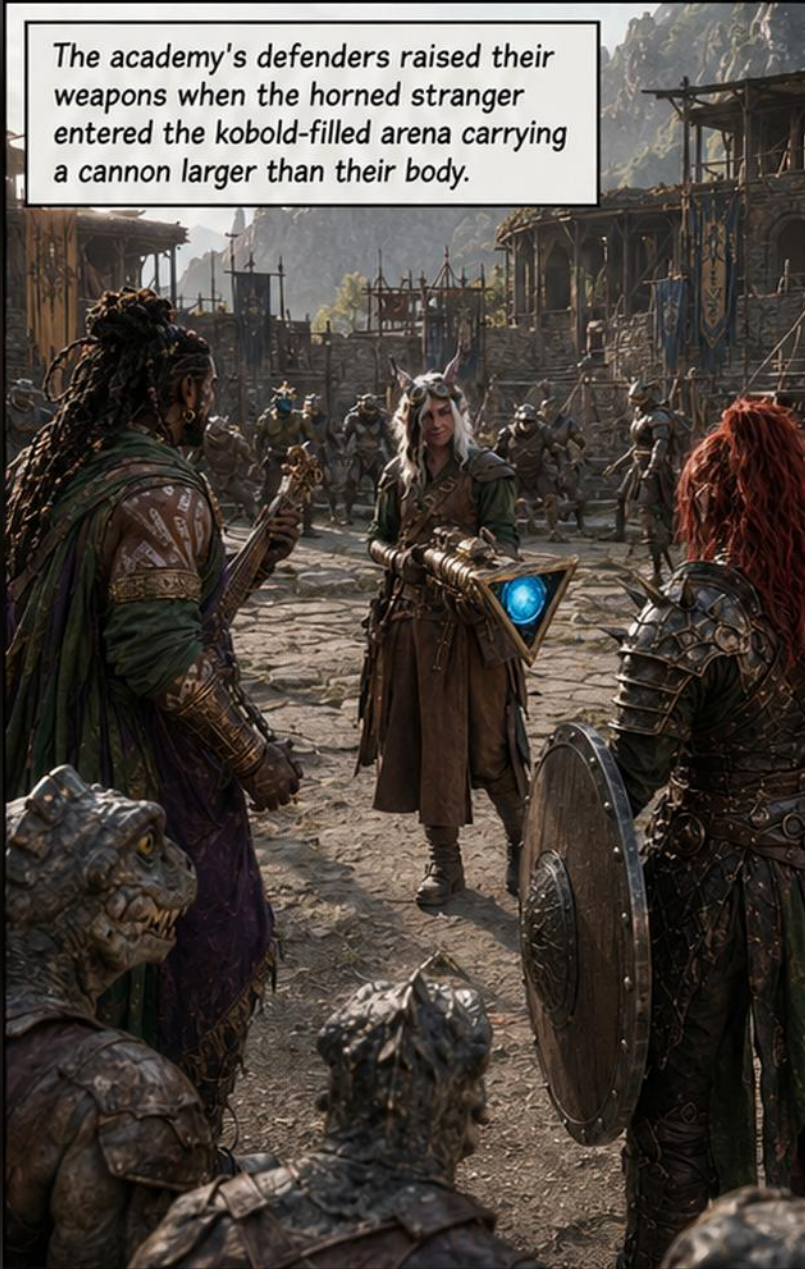


THE ARTIFICER'S WARNING



The academy's defenders raised their weapons when the horned stranger entered the kobold-filled arena carrying a cannon larger than their body.



Beside the tiefling floated a winged cauldron with a golden face and an intelligence of its own.



The stranger lowered the weapon and explained that the cauldron had shown them a future threatened by the Horde.



They had crossed the realm because the academy would need their help to survive what was coming.





Clifford asked whether one flying cauldron was the artificer's only robot companion.



The tiefling smiled, and machines emerged from wagons, packs, hidden compartments, and tiny portals.



Flying scouts, walking tools, wheeled defenders, and scuttling repair units poured into the arena as an enchanted army.

The clever kobolds recognized the machines as things that could be dismantled.



They grabbed hinges, gears, plates, and exposed joints from every possible angle.



Protective enchantments flashed before any robot could be harmed.



Each attempt released a pulse of magical force until the frustrated kobolds fled into their underground tunnels.



Angora invited the artificer to teach the academy how weapons, magic, and machines could work together.



The inventor accepted because the greatest fighters from many lands had finally gathered in one school.



Clifford presented his living lute and confessed that he dreamed of creating an entire band of magical instrument companions.



The artificer began teaching him how melody could awaken a mind inside carefully joined wood and metal.



Angora asked whether the same knowledge could strengthen her violet psychic sword.



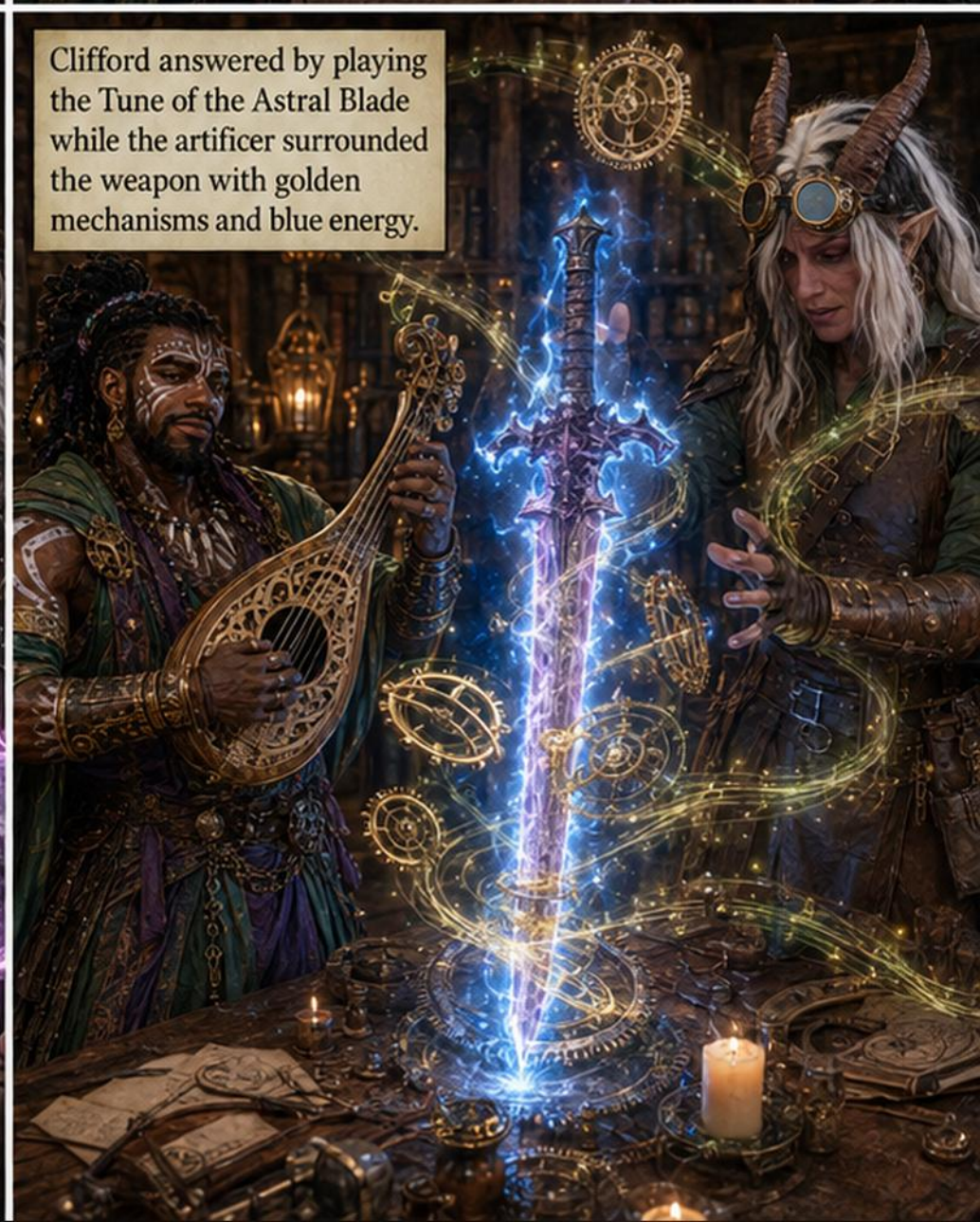
The artificer spoke to the living magic inside the blade, which rose weakly from Angora's hands and nearly fell.



The sword could sense the Horde approaching, and fear was draining its strength.



Clifford answered by playing the Tune of the Astral Blade while the artificer surrounded the weapon with golden mechanisms and blue energy.



The restored sword became a streak of violet light, climbed above the academy, and struck the earth with renewed power.



Beside the blade appeared a strange glowing stone that the artificer warned Angora to guard until it was needed.



The inventor also knew why the ancient text had vanished from the magical library.



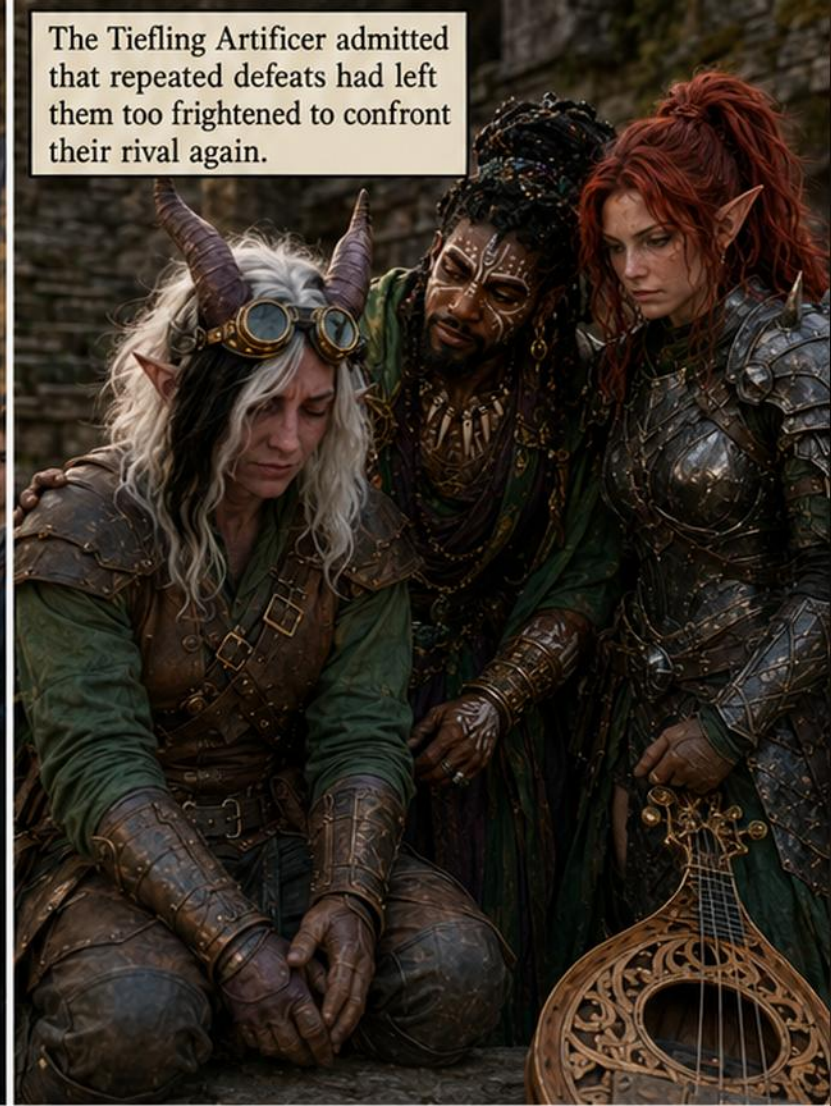
Their own rival had stolen it and carried it to a distant castle protected by robot soldiers.



The Rival Headmaster promised to remain at the academy, defend the students, and continue their united training.



The Tiefling Artificer admitted that repeated defeats had left them too frightened to confront their rival again.



Their Winged Cauldron Companion volunteered to guide Clifford and Angora in the inventor's place.



With a stronger sword, a mysterious stone, and a new mechanical ally, the heroes began their journey east to recover the knowledge that could save the world.

