

# Nomad Void

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# Sawellwell

With Reignited Flames

# Copyright

SAVEHAVEN: WITH REIGNITED FLAMES  
NOMAD VOID

Cover art by Sasazuka Shinon

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## Understanding

*Did something happen between them?* Aeri frowned as this phrase rang in her head.

*Then how do you know she was the one who attacked first?* Her fists clenched.

*There could have been a misunderstanding.* She started gritting her teeth.

*...misunderstanding...* This word kept echoing in her head as her teeth felt more pressure and nails started sinking into the skin of her palms.

“Misunderstanding my ass!”

As she shouted, her fist slammed the desk she sat at, drawing the eyes of everyone in the room, which took her a few seconds to realise.

Before she could make an apology, a remark came her way.

“Aeri, ...”

A woman with a book in her hand stood by a chalkboard. Wearing a white-edged short black jacket and a skirt, her light-rose hair was a bright spot with a black chalkboard behind. She sighed before continuing.

“...we understand you are going through a difficult time. But, please, address your emotional problem. There are people you can talk to if you need help.”

“I’m sorry, teacher. You’re right...”

The teacher exhaled in a relief as she brought a hand with a book up and was about to resume the lesson when Aeri got up from her place and marched towards the classroom door.

“I *do* need to talk to someone to address this problem.”

“That’s not—”

Her words bounced off the door, reaching it the moment it shut.

“...I didn’t mean right now.”

She sighed yet again.

“What a troublesome girl.”

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Orena took a sip from a mildly warm cup of tea, sitting alone under a shaded bar desk. A bartender with long bowing moustache and a beard was carefully polishing a glass in his hands. He briefly looked at Orena, noticing a drop of sweat appear on her forehead.

“You’ve been coming here in hot weather ever since I opened the spot last year, young lady. I have always wondered why you favour tea over cold drinks, unlike most other people, even more so as a sorceress. If I may ask, of course.”

“Ah... yes. Naturally, as a sorceress, I can freely control the flow of air to cool myself. That is what my peers usually do. But they often catch cold because of that, so I deal with the heat the usual way. And I find herbal tea much more refreshing than any cool drink.”

“I see. You are very clever for your young age.”

He gave her a cheerful smile, which hit her unexpectedly along with the compliment, causing confusion as she thought how to respond.

“My apologies. I didn’t mean to embarrass you.”

“No, it’s fine.”

Though she said that, being engaged in a conversation all of a sudden left her in an awkward spot. She didn’t know whether to say something or to end it right there. The answer came from the academy’s tower bells, which signalled there was only ten minutes left of the afternoon break.

“I must excuse myself. Thank you, as always.”

A cup landed on a plate with a quiet ring as she stood up from a seat and gently bowed before taking a leave.

She waited for a tram to run down the street before crossing it. Just as she reached the other side, a feeling hit her as if somebody was watching her. She looked all around finding no eyes drawn to her and continued her way.

As Orena was about to enter an alley, the same feeling hit her again, but this time there was even no one around.

Through the alley she entered into a yard enclosed within two-storeyed houses. With every step she took down the stone-paved trail, she felt the uneasiness grow. As she neared an exit, the feeling climaxed. Orena instinctively turned around, extending her hand.

Her guts did not deceive her: on the other side of the trail, near the entrance, stood her unwanted acquaintance, Aeri. For a few seconds, she was silent and motionless, yet when she opened her mouth, her speech reached Orena as a distorted, indiscernible echo. Seeing no response from Orena, she became visibly angrier, saying something again, now in a scream.

Something was off about her. She looked hostile, but her stance didn't imply she intended to attack. Even her weapon freely hung from her shoulder behind her back.

Cautiously, Orena lowered her hand, observing how her opponent would react. With no action following, she finally spoke.

“What do you want?”

First came a little confusion, succeeded by an angry response.

“Are you mocking me? Was anything I have said not clear?”

“I couldn't hear you because of the barrier.”

“Why did you assault my friend?”

“What are you playing here? It was you who assaulted me.”

“I am not talking about us three. Harin. Short girl, orange hair, blue eyes, same uniform.”

It took her some time to piece the picture together. She could not recall anyone like that, but hearing Aeri saying ‘assault’ helped her mind in restoring the image. The events that had transpired that day had been a blur, but now it started coming back.

“Well?”

“The answer is the same: she attacked me.”

“Liar!”

Aeri saw this outburst causing Orena to tense. Despite the surge of emotions, she found it in her to overcome them. She had not come here to fight, but to have answers.

“Harin would never attack unprovoked. And there is no thing that can provoke her.”

“She might have been upset over me destroying her arcane contraption.”

“What? What nonsense are you spewing? She doesn’t wield anything besides Chimera. And how exactly would you destroy it?”

“Not her own contraption. Something that supposedly belonged to her family. It exploded when I attempted to dismantle it.”

“Her family? What are you even talking about? How would you even have it?”

“I found it.”

“Found it? You want me to believe you just found an arcane contraption lying around?”

Orena fell silent. What she was about to say might trigger Aeri, but she had already engaged in this conversation, so there was no turning back.

“I overheard a conversation between two students of your academy. They were discussing something about legacy works. They had... they didn’t know where it was exactly, only some pointers. But I recognized the place by description. So I followed and found a contraption there before they found the place.”

“Before they found the place? So you actually met them there?”

“Yes.”

“And they just let you go even though you supposedly had a piece of heritage work.”

“They did.”

Aeri’s eyes narrowed as her brows formed a crease, making her face render a high degree of a doubt.

“Suppose it is what you say. What does this story have to do with Harin?”

“She approached me a day after and asked me if I had found a contraption. She said that it belonged to her family. I told her that it was destroyed and that must have provoked her.”

“This is horseshite. She would never attack anyone over such a trivial thing. Not Harin. The dead will rise before she attacks anyone.”

A blurry image of the girl emerged in Orena’s mind. Whatever fragments of that encounter she could recall would produce an image of a harmless girl. But even with her memory being riddled with blanks of the events that would follow, there were a few clear picture, and one of them showed Harin attacking her.

“That was what I thought and let my guard down.”

“Well, maybe your memory isn’t that good.”

“Or maybe you don’t know your friend as well as you think.”

Aeri’s face became one expression of anger. Even more hateful than the day she had clashed with Orena. It felt as if she would explode any second.

Orena slowly raised her left arm, while her right hand reaching for the opposite wrist. It looked as if she was getting ready to engage, but instead she unbuttoned a sleeve and pulled it up, showing her bare arm to Aeri.

Aeri’s anger got displaced by confusion as she saw a red line cross Orena’s hand with a pink area surrounding it in stark contrast with her light skin. There could be no mistaking it: this was a mark left behind by Harin’s invocation.

“Do I need to show the rest?”

Her confusion would not last long. She frowned again, getting angrier with each second. Yet when it seemed as if she was near the boiling point, making Orena

assume a defensive stance, Aeri just turned around and hastily walked away, leaving confusion to her opponent.

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“She lied.”

In her usual manner, Aeri appeared before the Magister storming inside in a fury and slamming onto his desk.

“Uh? What? Who lied?”

“That Sorceress witch. She lied.”

It felt as if her uttering each word came with great effort, almost as if she was forcing herself to squeeze them through teeth.

“Lied about what?”

“She said that Harin attacked her.”

The Magister tried to piece together what little information he had received. His mind was pushing him towards the obvious conclusion that she had talked to Orena, but it was hard to accept given her earlier behaviour. Though something was different this time around: her anger looked like a mask, one meant to hide lack of confidence.

“Wait, you actually talked to her?”

“Yes. Isn’t it what you wanted me to do?”

“But of course! Glad you figured it out.”

He quickly wiped the puzzled expression, but his attempt to make it look like his plan was thwarted by Hane’s chuckle.

“You did not?”

“Well, it was inevitable to resolve the conflict, but I certainly did not expect it to happen so soon. Anyway, back to the topic. I assume you firmly believe Harin did not attack her.”

“No. I *know* that. She would not ever attack anyone.”



“Correct. I understand she is your friend. But let’s for a moment—”

“This has nothing to do with us being friends. Go out there and ask anyone about Harin. You know what they will say? ‘Oh, that weirdo.’ She is always out there offering help and giving advice to other students.”

The Magister fell silent for a second.

“You’ll have to forgive me, but I fail to understand what’s so weird about that.”

“Oh, you don’t know where you’ve ended up, do you? This is Vanguard Academy. Words like ‘friendship’, ‘help’, and ‘cooperation’ exist only within a kol.

“Assuming this to be true, let’s assume she, I mean Orena, did attack first. How do you imagine this could have unfolded?”

“You’ve seen it already. She must have used this eldritch invocation...”

Aeri looked away as her mind tried to imagine the scene.

“So... she must have initiated the invocation, but then Harin triggered an invocation in response... it wouldn’t have taken her much physical effort to pull the trigger, even exhausted. Yes, this is what must have happened.”

“So Harin did...”

Conscious of Aeri’s defensive position over Harin, the Magister would choose his next words with caution. At the moment, the relation between them was that of a fish and a fisher: a careless move might undo all the progress.

“...respond offensively.”

“As much as I hate to admit it, there is no other explanation for the scars on her body.”

“Right. Now let’s take a step back. What could have led to this?”

“She said Harin approached her because she had found a contraption that belonged to Harin’s family...”

Her hand on the chin, Aeri now started measuring the floor in front of the Magister's desk with her feet.

“She must have become aggressive and...”

In the process of imagining this scene, she revisited the memories of her clash with Orena and the most recent encounter. In both cases, she had instantly gone into defence and wouldn't have retaliated even after multiple attacks.

“No, the only possible scenario... she must have used a simpler non-lethal invocation, after which Harin triggered hers, and then...”

Even this scenario did not seem convincing. Harin would not have retaliated unless her life had been in danger, and Orena did not seem like the type to provoke someone, much less to attack.

Aeri frowned, as if admitting defeat.

“Fine! It doesn't make any sense. I cannot imagine any scenario in which either of them would start it. So what are you suggesting?”

“I am not suggesting anything. I cannot, unfortunately. Not with the information I have. At this point, all we can do is rule out certain possibilities.”

The Magister took his turn immersing into thoughts. A theory came up as his eyes fell onto Aeri's weapon hanging behind her back.

“What if... is it possible that Harin fired accidentally?”

“What? Na-uh. This is an impossible thing next to Harin assaulting anyone. Her machina is twice bigger than my contraption, and Harin, she is tiny. Well, except for one part.”

The last part she almost whispered, as if accidentally voicing her thoughts.

“What?”

“N-no, nothing. The point is: to compensate for it, she has to use super light alloys, due to which her machina requires regular maintenance. I don't clean my room as often as she performs maintenance.”

Aeri's fist landed onto her palm with a clap.

“Yes, that's it. That must be why her machina activated yesterday. It must have been damaged in the fight.”

“I am sorry. Machina?”

“Oh, arcane machina. Think of it as a more sophisticated arcane contraption.”

“Arcane contraption? Ah, you mean that weapon of yours.”

“Yes. Among the others, obviously.”

“Thank you for clarifying. I didn't know you use specific term for it. Right, so—”

“Wait, wait. Hold on a second. What do you mean you didn't know it? If you don't know even that, what *do* you know about the specifics of the Vanguard coven?”

“Unfortunately, I am not aware of coven specifics. I only possess common knowledge about witchcraft.”

“Common knowledge? Such as?”

Aeri folded her arms, looking at him curiously with a hint of a doubt.

“There are five elements of nature used in witchcraft...”

The Magister made a pause seeing how Aeri raised a brow.

“And each coven can use only one of them and adjacent sub-elements...”

Her brow immediately went down as her eye started twitching, making the Magister hesitant to continue.

“And each element serves a specific purpose: defence, offense, healing, enhancement, and curses.”

Aeri's face gained an unstable symmetry as her other eye started twitching as well.

“And each element of nature counters the other, like lightning is strong against water and—”

“Stop it! I can’t take it anymore!”

Aeri covered her ears, vigorously shaking her head.

“Are you making this up?”

“Um, no. Is it that much wrong though?”

“Everything you said is wrong! How is that even supposed to work? Is one coven supposed to be completely defenceless against another with this ‘countering’? I feel awkward and embarrassed just hearing this. Just how are you a Magister? What do they teach you at the academy?”

“Subjects such as economy, negotiations, psychology, history, bureaucracy—”

“Fine, fine, I get it. A lot of stuff. But seriously, I thought they would at least educate you on basic concepts of witchcraft. I know the Oath is strict, but you run the academy after all.”

“Magisters don’t need to know concepts of witchcraft to perform their duties, as a rule. When we do, they can be explained to us on the ‘need to know’ basis.”

“I guess I can tell you something then, but there’s also...”

She turned to look at Hane, who was going through folders in a book case opposite her desk.

“Don’t mind me. I’m under the Oath.”

Though conscious of what was going on in the room, she remained focused on her object of search, replying without interrupting her motions.

“Oh. I didn’t know they require female workers to take the Oath.”

“They don’t as far as I know. Hane, you’re not a witch, are you?”

This subject peaked the Magister’s curiosity genuinely.

“I am not.”

“Which means...”

“That I am a drop-out.”

Looking at Aeri, the Magister didn't notice any distinguished reaction read on her face.

“You don't seem surprised.”

“Why should I be? You don't even imagine what it is like to study at Vanguard. No wonder she didn't make it. Our academy ranks first by the number of failed students.”

“I didn't fail. I quit.”

Though this response did not seem to be shocking, it did make Aeri a little surprised.

“What? Why?”

“Disappointment in the world of witchcraft.”

“Disappointment? Sorry, but I cannot imagine what kind of disappointment would lead someone to trade witchcraft for papers.”

“Papers, huh?”

Hane immediately stopped browsing through the contents of a folder in her hands. She closed it and turned her attention to Aeri with a look that sent chills down her spine.

“Of course. Because doing paperwork isn't as fun as wielding fire and lightning to cause destruction? Who would want that, right?”

Hane steadily approached Aeri. Even just one step away from her, she wouldn't stop, forcing Aeri to start walking backwards.

“Oh, and I can't even express how much value your tools of destruction bring to society compared to 'papers' that keep institutions like yours running.”

They eventually ended up with Hane almost pinning Aeri in a corner between another book case and a wall.

“I’m... I’m... sorry.”

For the first time the Magister witnessed the opposite spectrum of Aeri’s emotions: fear. It seemed as if Aeri would start crying if Hane pushed a little further. He was about to intervene and calm Hane down, but before that became a necessity, she just silently walked back to the book case.

Exhaling with a relief, Aeri returned to the Magister.

“Sheesh. That is one scary lady. Are you sure she is not a coven witch in disguise?”

Almost whispering, she cautiously looked in Hane’s direction, as if waiting to make another apology had she heard it.

“No. The coven witches are much scarier. Terrifying even.”

The Magister recalled his earlier encounter with the coven witch. Even though his determination had repelled any emotion of fear, he could clearly evaluate the threatening nature of her message.

“What? You’ve already met them?”

“Uh? Oh. No, it’s just what I’ve heard. Anyway, back to the topic. You were saying something about arcane...”

“Machina.”

Aeri sighed, seeing this situation as if she had been a teacher about to explain the basics of math.

She lifted the belt from which her contraption hung, bringing the device closer to the Magister’s face.

“This is called an arcane contraption. It’s a highly sophisticated mechanism that we use to perform extraction invocations. It has its drawbacks compared to other types of invocations, among which is bigger size required for more complex invocations. I am a contraptionist: I rely on an array of arcane contraptions. Harin is the opposite. She is... well...”

“Just say how it is.”

“She bestowed the title of an omniscionist on herself. Though technically she is an arcenist. She focuses on developing invocations by transposing aspects of different elements. And she uses what is called an arcane machina. It is even more sophisticated and bigger and heavier than my Arc Emitter as a result. She wouldn't be able to lift it if it wasn't for special alloys. It isn't fragile, but still requires regular maintenance. So, no, an accidental invocation is out of the question.”

The Magister recalled Aeri's earlier words about any fellowship being limited to a kol, which brought up another theory.

“Could someone have damaged it?”

“Damaged it? You mean on purpose, like sabotaging? No. Firstly, a witch either carries her arcane contraption with her or leaves it behind so many locks and traps that it would be easier and safer to try and take it from her hands. Besides what's the point? An arcane contraption is a product of a witch's own skills and knowledge, so any damage can be repaired.”

The Magister tilted his head forward, rubbing his forehead. At this point, nothing he had tried to come up with had brought them closer to an answer.

“Let's start from the very beginning. Why did Harin approach her, again?”

“She said that she found an arcane contraption that belonged to Harin's family.”

“Arcane contraption that belonged to Harin's family? Like some kind of a relic?”

“I don't know. Harin comes from a family of inventors. Her mother is not a witch though, so she is not a hereditary witch, and she never mentioned anyone among her ancestors being a witch.”

“And how did she find it?”

“Well, not exactly found. Oh, right, I remember now. She told me that she had overheard two Vanguard students discussing heritage a work and she had known where it had been.”

Aeri noticed confused expression on the Magisters face.

“It’s a term we use to describe any work of witchcraft of the past. Before covens. The arcane contraption she ‘found’ appears to be one of those.”

“Is that common? I mean finding heritage works.”

“Ho, no! Do you think covens wouldn’t search every nook and cranny of the habitable land? Whatever was lying there has already been found. And whatever is still out there is nigh impossible to find.”

“But she didn’t find it. You said she overheard Vanguard students discussing it.”

“And I find it hard to swallow. To stumble upon a contraption, I could attribute it to luck. But to know where to search? No, she definitely lied. She must have wanted to avoid more trouble. And I fell for that.”

“Something doesn’t add up.”

“That is exactly what I was saying.”

“No. I mean, why craft such an elaborate lie? She could have just told you it was a lucky find, and it would be more convincing. And on top of it, she didn’t mention just any students, but students of your academy. If she wanted to hide something, that would be the worst option.”

“Haven’t I already mentioned how fellowship is not a thing here?”

“But does she know that? *I* didn’t know that.”

A corner of Aeri’s mouth showed a glimpse of her teeth, an indication of her reluctantly admitting his point.

“How did Harin find out Orena had the contraption?”

“I don’t know. I didn’t have a chance to ask: there was too much for me to process at the moment. But the fact that she did not tell me, Sumi, or Minali could only mean that it happened in our absence.”



The Magister took a moment following the chain of events from one end to the other, trying to add another link, but eventually ended up hanging on a loose end.

“It looks like we’ve hit a dead end.”

Aeri felt disappointed, but only shortly. Expecting the Magister to solve the puzzle with fragments of evidence that didn’t seem to make sense would be too much. And she understood it.

“Well, you’ve helped—”

“I am going to speak to Orena.”

“What?”

“There are just too many unknowns. Everything that you have described points to too many coincidences: her overhearing a conversation, the conversation being related to something incredibly rare, her knowing the location, Harin finding out about this, and... the only thing that falls out of the picture is their clash. We must be missing something.”

“Yes... everything seems either oddly convenient.”

Aeri followed the chain of events the Magister had recited, up to the conflict between Orena and Harin. She still failed to imagine Harin attacking her, but it triggered a recall of the recent accident that had occurred at the dorm.

“And now that I think about it... how could Harin’s machina release an invocation even if it was damaged. It doesn’t incorporate infused cores. A mere touch would not trigger an invocation without an infusion. It’s almost as if someone—”

A bright flash filled Aeri’s vision.

With her eyes starting to recognize colours and shapes, she saw a familiar face in a place she had recently been to.

Orena was walking down a lively street. Her mind seemed preoccupied as could be judged by her eyes fixed in their sockets rather than focusing on anything around her.

As she approached her destination, she was taken out of her thoughts by the voices of two girls sitting by an outdoor bar. There were three more seats vacant, but she hesitated to take one of them as those students were from the Vanguard Academy.

With both girls wearing black-edged grey uniforms and facing the bartender, they could be distinguished only by hair, the girl on the right in particular. Being poorly cut, locks of her wavy shoulder-length hair were sticking out like spikes here and there. And if it wasn't enough, they were carelessly dyed brown, resulting in a shiny bronze colour. A few locks she had missed and the roots revealed her natural golden colour. The other girl, on the opposite, had her green-tinted light-grey hair neatly done in a long braid.

Just as Orena was about to walk away, a word dropped by the girl on the left caught her attention.

“Heritage work? Leads? Somebody must have played a joke on you.”

“Aye, aye. I just wanted to run it by you. Just in case, you know.”

“It might have been worth a shot, but a mansion in the Heruson forest? Not only is it located on the outskirts of Inakray, you know the size of it? Definitely somebody wanted you to spend a few days there wandering around.”

As if illuminated by something they had mentioned, Orena changed in face, which vanished in another flash, which took Aeri to a clearing in a thick forest.

Orena was making her way to a façade of an old mansion, walking between two overgrown rectangular indentations in the ground. Supposed to be filled with water from three square columns down the middle of each, they would now only accumulate rain water in large shallow puddles.

The right side of the mansion front doors was slightly open, just enough for Orena to squeeze through. The wooden fibres of the floor cracked under her foot as she stepped in, screaming of years, if not decades, of decay.

The clouds in the sky gave way to the sun, its rays illuminating the interior through the holes in the roof and collapsed window frames while barely piercing layers of dirt accumulated on the glass of a few surviving windows. As the light hit the floor, it revealed two sets of footprints. Somebody had been here, and not too long ago.

Orena followed the footprints around the site eventually returning to the point of entry. As could be judged by the density, the visitors had been thorough enough, and anything of value must have been found.

One more lap through each hallway and inside every room yielded no discoveries: all doors were open, every composite object dismantled, and any fragile thing shattered to pieces.

She looked disappointed, though just a little: she must have not had expected to make any findings, just like the two girls she had overheard.

Already at the entrance, wood cracked again—but this time, not under her feet. It came somewhere from the passage on the second floor to which a stairway from the lobby led.

She ascended, looking all around her. Given the state of the building, anything could have made this sound.

As her glance dropped from the ceiling to the floor, she noticed something strange about a baluster in the railings. From a crack in it a shining emanated, as if reflecting the light. A closer look revealed something metallic inside.

Orena grabbed the baluster at the top, giving it a slight push. Feeling how it easily moved, she grabbed it with the other hand at the bottom and pulled it. The baluster came off, leaving behind torn holes in rotten-through wood.

She noticed that moss on the surface formed a straight line, splitting it into two vertical parts held together by two metal rings at the top and the bottom. Despite

the rust and the swollen fibres of the wood, the rings came off without much resistance. The two parts of the baluster came apart just as easily as she pushed them in opposite directions. The inside was hallowed out to fit a long cylindrical object, which had two pincer-like elements placed in a cross on one side and a smaller cylinder protruding on the other.

Whatever it was, a smile that appeared on Orena's face meant that she found something of interest.

Upon exiting the premises, she encountered two faces, the faces she had not had an opportunity to look at before: the girls in grey uniforms.

Orena and the girls froze in their places. The gaze of the girl with the weird hair style fell onto the artefact in Orena's hands. She then exchanged glances with her friend. Just as the other girl opened her mouth, an exclamation came out of it when she received a whack on her head.

“Here's your 'joke'. Told you we should have come here right away. Hurry, there still might be something we can find.”

She then hastened to enter the premise passing Orena by, as if ignoring her presence.

Once inside, they waited for Orena to leave.

“Doesn't look like she's noticed.”

The short-haired girl was cautiously peeking through a gap in the doors, while her friend leaned against a closed partition, her arms folded.

“We've taken too many precautions. She needs to be a genius or a detective to spot something. I was more concerned that she wouldn't notice the baluster.”

A flash hit Aeri again, taking her to the walls of the Vanguard Academy.

Her friend, Harin, was walking there when a shout from behind made her look back while not slowing her pace. She stopped only when she felt her arcane machina hit something.

“Ouch!”

A girl sat on the ground in front of Harin, rubbing her forehead. The same girl with a braid that had appeared before at the mansion.

“Aaaah! Sorry, sorry, sorry, I wasn’t looking ahead. I’m so sorry!”

Harin pressed a button on the handle of her machina, forcing the belt to detach at the back and pull inside the handle. She placed it on the ground beside her and got down to the injured girl, rummaging in her handbag.

“I’m sorry, sorry, sorry. There must be something cold.”

A purple-eyed girl in the same grey uniform with a long coat and trousers approached Harin from behind. Her long white hair hung a few centimetres from the ground as she knelt. While Harin was distracted, the girl’s hands made a few subtle touches applying small pieces of paper to the machina. Upon contact they instantly burnt away leaving behind patterned marks: two smaller ones on the button of the handle and the trigger on the grip and one larger one on the side of the main body. The marks were distinct yet unnoticeable unless looked at closely.

“Sorry, sorry, sorry. I can’t find anything. Ah! Here, use this.”

Harin lifted her machina from the ground just as the girl pulled her hands away, and stretched the device towards the girl before her.

“You are overreacting.”

The purple-eyed girl’s voice was even and calm, almost blending with the environment.

“It is nothing serious. Right, Eunah?”

“Yes, I’m fine. Don’t worry.”

“You are quite strong for someone your size.”

Harin looked at her with a puzzled expression. She then redirected her gaze to her machina.

“Ah, no, no. It’s actually not that heavy. I used super light alloys for the most part. I would have also used wood, but my machina combines the effects of

combustion and electric discharges. Also, the catalytic cores are stored inside without rigid containers—”

“Are you sure you want to tell all these details to rival witches?”

“Rival? We are students of the same academy, are we not?”

“We are, but—”

“Aye, aye, I know. Aeri always nags at me for doing this, but it’s not like I’m showing you the schematics. Besides, even if you were to replicate my machina, what of it? It’ll just motivate me to whip something else. It’s not a problem for an omniscionist like me. So I see no problem giving ideas to my fellow aspiring witches.”

The brows above the purple eyes came together. Not that much to show strong emotions but enough to indicate that something about that response displeased her.

“Hm? Did I say something wrong?”

“No, it’s just that—”

“Say, is this your kol’s emblem?”

The girl on the ground pointed at an engraving on the grip of Harin’s machina, which depicted a gear inside a drop with two wrenches in a cross formation on the background.

“Oh, this? It’s my family emblem.”

“Are you... a hereditary?”

“Ah, no, no. We are inventors. There were no witches in my family. Not that we know of.”

“I swear I saw it on another contraption... Oh, right, it was that Sorceress student.”

“Sorceress student?”

“Yes. We encountered her the other day when we were going to search for a heritage work in an abandoned mansion, but she beat us to it. Though it looked more like a big cataclytic core than a contraption. It definitely had the same engraving on it.”

This information caused a surge of agitation in Harin. She immediately grabbed the girl by the shoulders, forgetting she had injured her just a moment ago.

“Who was it?! Where?! I must have a look at it!”

“Sorry, I have no idea.”

“What did she look like?!”

“Like any other Sorceress student. Sorry, I only remember her being around my height and having short grey-greenish hair with braids and green-tinted grey eyes.”

Harin jumped up, picking up her machina and pulling the belt over her shoulder as she ran into the distance.

“Thank you very muuuuuch!”

As another flash happened, Aeri saw Harin again, in a hurry barely catching her breath. Running along a pathway in a park, she was trying to catch to Orena.

“Miss Sorceress, Miss Sorceress!”

Seeing as there was no one else around, Orena brought her measured stroll to a halt and turned to face Harin, who stopped a few meters away, bending over and taking deep breaths.

“Are you talking to me?”

“Yes. Sorry, I know that sounds... I was told... Did you happen to stumble upon an arcane contraption recently, by any chance?”

“Arcane contraption?”

“A device like this one.”

Harin tapped her fingers on the metal case of her machina.

“Well, maybe not like this one. But something similar. Maybe not that much.”

“Why do you ask?”

“Um, if what I was told is true, it might have been created by someone from my family. I know this... if I could just take a look at it, if you don't mind?”

“Sorry, but it was destroyed when I attempted to dismantle it.”

This response makes Harin upset, making her look like a child with big watery eyes who is about to cry, which apparently makes Orena feel guilty as could be judged by her saddened expression.

“Ueheeeee. This must be fate's cruel joke. Oh! By any chance—”

It looked as if something was physically disturbing Harin as she squinted one eye while rubbing her shoulder under the machina's belt. She then pushed the button to detach the belt and started moving the machina down when the coils around the rods in the front started spinning.

“What in the—”

Before she could think, not to mention react, the machina fired, creating a yellow lightning that pierced Orena's arm. An explosion that followed sent her flying to the side, shredding a part of her dress.

As Harin was about to run to her, Orena miraculously stood up, angry, her eyes showing glowing patterns. Harin immediately dropped the machina, showing her hands.

“I'm sorry! I don't know how that happened!”

Orena stretched her hand, forcing a strange object to appear beside Harin: two cylinders, one inside the other, rotating in opposite directions. A bright orange light shone within through a grid of slits of different shapes.

The next moment Harin was already down on one knee, breathing heavily.

“I'm... really sorry... I honestly don't know... how this happened...”



As the energy ball was forming next to her palm, Orena's eyes started flickering and her face was showing signs of struggle as if she was trying to get a hold of herself. But just as her eyes turned normal, an electric discharge, emitted from somewhere behind the trees, hit her in the hand, making it drop numb and release the energy ball from under control.

The last thing Aeri saw was Harin's frightened expression as the ball approached her, shining blinding light onto her as another flash took Aeri back to reality.

“Aeri! Aeri!”

The Magister was standing before her, holding her by the shoulders.

“Hm?”

“You spaced out for several seconds. What happened?”

“Datastratum.”

“What?”

“My Brand.”

Her reflexes were answering for her while her mind was processing the events she had witnessed.

“I don't understand.”

“I'm sorry, Magister. Some urgent matters have just come up that I need to take care of...”

As she fully came to her senses, her brows came together and creases formed all around her eyes, which the Magister could swear flashed for a moment.

“...very urgently!”

While only her lips moved to render the words, her teeth produced a short screech as they clenched.

Her anger could be felt with each step she took marching towards the doors before exiting and leaving the Magister wonder what could have upset her this much all of a sudden.