

# 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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## Foreword

Inspired by Blue Archive.

This publication is written in an experimental style and format. Apart from the tense-form choice and visual-novel-like dialogue format, I aim to maintain specific rhythm and melody, although I do so with varying success, even after several iterations of changes, so this can very well be called “Style over Substance (Beta)”. Still, I hope you enjoy reading it.

The pronunciation of names follows Japanese phonetics: e.g. Hane is [hʌnɛ] with ‘ha’ as in ‘hunch’ and ‘ne’ as in ‘net’, Sumi is [sumi] with ‘su’ as in ‘super’ and ‘mi’ as in ‘me’, etc.

## Authority

With the sun slowly making its way closer to the horizon, notes of crimson are seeping into the orange, cloudless sky. Hit by the rays of the setting sun, the walls of what could have been a residential building cast creeping shadows onto the desolate land below. Although with both the walls and the ground charred and deformed, there is no telling if they used to harbour humans, serve as a warehouse, or even were a part of one structure. The labyrinth of directions this place used to be is now but a multitude of obstacle tracks barely separated one from another.

A winged creature encased in steel armour soars through the sky in the distance. It swings closer to the ground spewing thick clouds of fire, which erases what remains of human presence in this place as metal and even stone slowly melt away.

Somewhere farther, where a foot can still land without being set ablaze, a human clad in red armour from head to toe hides behind a corner in a maze of walls that one can call intact amidst a scenery of devastation. Holding a long rifle upright against his body, he breathes slowly inside the helmet, as if not to let the breath obstruct his auditory senses, waiting for the silence to be broken and let the weapon claim another life, like it has done already, as witnessed by a body to his right.

At last, a crack of rubble crushing to dust beneath another human's foot triggers a chain of predetermined motions: his head and body turn to the left in sequence with one knee going down, letting him aim behind the corner. Locked on a target, he makes a shot that leaves a blazing trail and a large hole in a plate of black armour, its wearer staggering and falling to the ground. The shooter then returns to his previous position, as if following inertial force of a recoil.

Assuming an upright stance, he then prepares to relocate until another foe can trace him through the gunshot sound, but that "until" comes earlier than expected with several rapid steps and a swing shortly after. From behind the corner appears an axe, outpacing its wielder's emergence, slicing the rifle and slamming the shooter into a wall with a blade that sinks into his chest.

The axe wielder's fate, alas, is the same: as he pulls the axe back, gushing blood filling the cavity left behind by it, a dozen projectiles find their way towards him. They aren't as strong to leave a hole in his body, but they hit hard, one after another, peeling off chunks of his armour, until a few of them meet the flesh through the openings. Withdrawing their rifles, three red figures on the other side of the corridor then promptly relocate elsewhere.

This blood-stained pattern repeats sporadically across the battlefield, in the end leaving only one black-sided troop. With the screeching sound of a blade rubbing against metal armour one of them pulls a sword from an enemy's body and follows three other members of his troop.

The troop takes a corridor that brings them into a semi-open space with only one wall running forward to their left. The right-most member notices another figure emerging in synchrony on the opposite side, and he is not from their ranks. His noticing the troop comes but a second later and one too late.

In one swift motion, he grabs and throws a small grenade strapped to his belt towards three troopers, but it explodes in front of him hit by a foe's shell. Two other men in black line up beside the shooter to ensure a kill, one other accelerating in a dash to close the distance with the rest.

Just as the two bring down their rifles, a bardiche tears through the smoke left after the explosion. It whistles through the air before it hits and nails one in the middle to a wall. Two bullets follow it just half a second later, hitting two troopers to the black shooter's left and right. There is no penetration: shells detonate on an impact. Not enough to inflict any damage, but they aren't meant to kill, rather to stagger.

Both regain balance when the red figure has already closed in on them. Smoke covers his shape in a black veil as it transitions into trails left in his path, accompanied by the sound of two side arms hitting the ground behind him. He reaches for the bardiche, yanking it from the wall and slashing both, drawing a blood-painted crescent moon connecting their necks.

As he releases grip on the weapon, his body spins a little further following the momentum. He stops facing the right where the fourth man has already shortened the distance, only a trooper spraying blood from a wound on his neck separating them. Both simultaneously take a side step: the one in black channelling force into the sword through a tight grip, sending it in horizontal strike aimed at the opponent's core; the one in red shielding behind blood-spraying trooper. Using the trooper's body as a cover, he grabs his two side arms and points them to the enemy's face, his arms supporting body of the shooter under the armpits. The striker lands a hit, the blade cutting both at their ribs, as two shells hit the striker in response: one breaking the helmet, letting the second through.

The man in red drops his arms, guns falling to the ground, as do his last opponents. As the trooper falls, his comrade's sword stuck in his armour, a crack is seen in that of the survivor. A wound leaks blood that flows invisibly over red surface, yet it does not look like he feels any pain.

In this room with dead bodies, there is a presence drawing his attention. With his head raised, the man in red looks in the presence's direction. The presence looks at him and he stares back at it. Although his eyes are hidden, his glare burns through the helmet and absorbs the presence more and more. Surroundings fade, until...

THE MAGISTER

---

Ouch!

A pulsing pain in his forehead kicks the Magister from a dreamland into the real world after hitting his head against a wooden arm of a carriage seat.

WOMAN'S VOICE

---

Watch it, will you?

COACHMAN

---

My apologies, m'lady. The sun ahead makes it hard to see.

Instinctively rubbing the aching spot, the Magister slowly opens his eyes. He fell asleep with a book on his chest, which slides along his body as he gets up, pages fluttering as it falls and lands on the floor.

Squinted eyes gradually render an image: a blurry spot takes a shape a woman with long black hair in a beige shirt. Sitting on the opposite side of the carriage, she rests her hands on a brown brief bag and a black jacket of the same colour and texture as her full skirt.

THE MAGISTER

---

Hane?

HANE

---

You recognise me. That means you didn't hit your head too hard.

She reaches into her bag and holds out a flask, water splashing inside its metal case. Taking the flask, he lifts his hair, the colour of a storm cloud, and presses it against the swelling, letting the cool touch of metal douse the burning sensation.

HANE

---

You have quite an ability to sleep soundly in such a tight space. Not to mention the sound of hooves.

THE MAGISTER

---

My, yes! I had such a vivid dream. There were these metal beasts flying and burning everything. Everything was in ruins and then there were... knights?

But they were wielding rifles and pistols that were shooting fire and exploding. They were fighting in such intense—

Seeing Hane's brows come together and the lack of enthusiasm in the eyes below them, the Magister hesitates to continue.

HANE

You might be reading too many futuristic novels.

She picks up the book on the floor to inspect the title which reads "Crimson Days". Just on its own it wouldn't say much, unlike the subtitle that claims this book is based on a prophesy, that of the Vanguard witches on top, making one of her eyebrows rise as she goes over it.

THE MAGISTER

Actually, I don't read them much. I simply grabbed the first thing that caught my attention at a bookshop to read on the road. Somehow, they didn't have history books. Which reminds me, did you know that—

Hane lifts her eyes from the book, giving the Magister a cold look that tells him she's not in the mood for a lecture on history either.

THE MAGISTER

...anyway, how long till we arrive?

HANE

Half an hour, more or less. We could have been there already had we taken a railway.

THE MAGISTER

Yes... technically, we could've. But the railway is quite expensive, and being notified about an assignment two months into an academic year didn't give me an opportunity to purchase a ticket in advance, and they don't provide discounts for—

HANE

You do realise that the railway is cheaper than taking a carriage?

THE MAGISTER

---

Wait, really?

This could pass as a joke were they not riding in a carriage already.

HANE

---

Just for how long have you been living in a cellar?

THE MAGISTER

---

Well, living in my home—

Before he can finish, a sudden sound draws their attention, and they turn their heads to look outside. A thunderclap. At first, it appears to rampage somewhere far away, but then they catch a glimpse of an electric discharge a few dozen metres away, partly concealed by the trees.

HANE

---

Lightning? I don't see any thunderclouds.

THE MAGISTER

---

And I haven't seen one arching above the ground either.

HANE

---

Witches, most probably.

THE MAGISTER

---

You make it sound like that's something routine.

HANE

---

Not routine, but neither something to be surprised by. They wouldn't have a Disciplinary Committee at academies if it were not common.

THE MAGISTER

---

I see...

She turns her attention away from the window and focuses back on the Magister, who is now rubbing his chin instead of the forehead, looking in her direction, but not at Hane, rather through her.



HANE

---

Back to what we—

THE MAGISTER

---

Coach! Please stop the carriage!

Hane only lets out a sigh. Somehow, she had a gut feeling the Magister would exhibit an exemplary line of behaviour...

HANE

---

You want to intervene, do you not?

THE MAGISTER

---

But of course! What reason could there be not to?

HANE

---

They won't listen to you.

THE MAGISTER

---

Of course they will. I'm a Magister, after all, and they are academy students. I might've not taken office yet, but factually I *am* one.

...but not to an extent where he would believe the world works by the book, like he does. Which also might be the reason behind his habit to pronounce the word "Magister" in a historically accurate way with "g" as in "garden".

HANE

---

Have you ever seen a criminal stop on a demand of a policeman?

THE MAGISTER

---

They aren't criminals.

HANE

---

No, before anything, they are children. And...

She catches herself at a thought that she is trying to discourage a man from doing something he has already firmly set his mind on, letting out another sigh instead of continuing the initial thought.

## HANE

A picture is worth a thousand words, so I won't stop you.

As the carriage comes to a full stop, the Magister opens a door to step outside, showing a confident smile.

## THE MAGISTER

Let's hope I have a way with children then.

\*\*\*\*

Electric discharges are bouncing confined within three metal rods connected by small metal bridges in a spiral formation. Like a cage designed to contain wild beasts, it restrains a violent force building inside. As a finger releases a trigger, this energy takes the shape of intertwined lightning arches lunging forward with a thunderous roar. As if hitting an invisible barrier, they then continue their way, bending around their target.

A girl wearing a simple and elegant blue dress with golden edging is standing where the strike was meant to hit. Wind gently blows in her direction, but her grey hair, almost white at the roots and dull-emerald at the tips with three thin braids hanging down her left temple, seem to be unaffected by it.

Here, in the middle of a pedestrian roadworks, where puddles carpeted the dismantled part after a recent rainfall, she stands with one hand extended forward, palm facing her opponents: three girls wearing strict light-blue uniforms with white edging. Outnumbered, she holds her composure, although her face can't hide some nervousness.

## HOT-HEADED GIRL

How long do you think you can stay defensive?

Anger and irritation overcome a girl in the front, wearing a long coat and skirt. Her carrot-orange hair done in a ponytail and dark-red eyes perfectly match her emotional state. A rifle-like contraption in her hands still has residual sparks within its cage-like barrel after the last attack.

#### HOT-HEADED GIRL

“How does she deflect my invocations so easily? No, she’s not deflecting them. It’s like they—”

Her chain of thought is interrupted by a girl to her left, whose dark hair with marine lustre flows down her back reaching the shoulder blades with just a single lock hanging between dull-green eyes.

#### DARK-HAIRED GIRL

Aeri, calm down!

Despite being on the same side, the two do not seem to have an agreement on how the events are unfolding. It is obvious even to the opponent, though she keeps her guard up.

To their right, meanwhile, a girl with wavy bronze-brown hair slightly below her shoulders seems more like a bystander. Unlike the other two girls, her coat is cut at hip length, but it makes her stand out in a peculiar way, being completely unfastened, revealing a black undershirt. The coat partly covers two strange contraptions, one shaped like a sword and the other like a small shield, strapped to the belt of her trousers, the same as the dark-haired girl’s. She seems uninvolved as conveyed by her pose: at ease, hands folded above two springy tubes forming a cross as they connect to the contraptions from behind her back. Yet her black eyes cautiously observe both her friends and the grey-haired girl.

#### AERI

I told you already, don’t try to stop me!

As she snaps at her comrade, the grey-haired girl cautiously backs away a few steps, which catches attention of the hot-blooded witch.

#### AERI

I’m not done with you!

She points her weapon at the opponent again and holds down the trigger, building up charge for another attack. Seeing how earlier attacks did not have

effect, she scans over her from head to toe in search of weak spots. Her eyes stop at the adversary's feet, one of which is touching a puddle.

AERI

“If I can't hit her directly...”

She gives the weapon a little incline, aiming it at the ground where the puddle stretches outside the area which is supposedly shielded, and releases the trigger. A discharge hits the water and jumps to the girl, making her body convulse and fall to the knees.

She bows to the ground and her breath becomes heavy, but for a mere few seconds. As she raises her head, her composure is gone, and there is now only anger. Her greenish-grey irises dim to plain black, revealing two glowing patterns: one is an octagon with strange symbols inside, the other's an octagram with similar symbols between its points.

The black-eyed girl tenses, instincts commanding her hands to take out the weapons strapped to her waist, one arm over the other as they reach for the opposite sides.

AERI

Finally taking it seriously, huh?

From her bag a contraption appears. Two long metal pieces held together detach as electric discharges start jumping between them, forming symbols and patters that appear in flashes. She feels fatigue wash over her with increasing intensity, weighing down her body and putting stress on her lungs.

Her friend to the right is in a similar state, having a translucent sphere coated in iridescent mist appear beside her. Suspended in air, the sphere then expands into two equal parts with a tube between them and a thin sheet of ice crystallizing beneath it. The same with the dark-haired girl, but a large plate of glass with glowing writings within appears instead.

The grey-haired girl gets to her feet, extending her hand. Faint trails of light start stretching in an uneven path from three contraptions towards the girl's open palm. There they converge, forming a ball of violent energy that rapidly grows.

Iridescent and bright, it swirls like a cloud of fire with lightning discharges raging within.

#### AERI

Is this... what you did to...

Her heavy breath gets in the way of her speech and messes up thoughts. She tries to process what is going on and how she can fight it, but any chain of thought she attempts to construct falls apart under the weight of fatigue. Fortunately, she does not have to come up with anything due to an abrupt intervention.

#### THE MAGISTER

What is going on here?!

His voice rings loud and clear, and the question is meant not to be answered but to announce his presence and attract the attention until someone gets too badly hurt. To his misfortune, it is the effect he desired that causes events to go wrong.

As the grey-haired girl gets distracted, her eyes returning to normal, the blazing ball gets out of control, thrusting towards the three girls.

Having her focus shifted away, the hot-blooded girl does not see the threat. When the approaching light hits her peripheral vision to warn of an incoming danger, it is already too late.

#### DARK-HAIRED GIRL

Aeri! Look out!

The girl to her left forcefully pushes her to the side, away from the path of the energy ball, but this action places herself in her stead. The girl to the right jumps in front of the dark-haired girl and brings up the hand with a shield-like contraption. With this motion, spikes of ice form a wall before her, but to no avail, alas: just as the bright light pierces through crystalline matter, the swirling ball melts through the wall, as if it was not even there. It then passes both girls, flames swallowing them, and continues its way before vanishing in a burst a dozen metres away.

## AERI

---

Sumi! Minali!

Both the surviving girl and the Magister rush to the victims. The Magister lifts one of them from the ground, holding the badly burnt body of a suffering girl, who struggles to breathe.

This sight leaves Hane numb, but not only her: the culprit seems to be even more shocked, staring blankly at the horrific site.

## THE MAGISTER

---

Hane! Flares!

Hane snaps out and rushes back to the carriage. After a minute, a clap shakes the air followed by a red-coloured flare soaring up with a whistle, leaving trailing red smoke in its path, and one second later, a blue flare follows.

It doesn't take long for help to arrive, but by that time, both girls have already drawn their last breaths.

\*\*\*\*

It is noon with the sun high at zenith, pouring down light onto the outside world. The blinding brightness radiates from every object, seeping into enclosed spaces even through the smallest gaps.

In this room, where the windows connect the floor and the ceiling, it is as bright on the inside as it is outside. Light reflects off a white marble desk next to the windows whilst its black veins are hot to the touch, except where three shadows stretch across it.

The grey-haired girl turns her head to the right, looking at the vacant seats by the desk next to her.

## GREY-HAIRED GIRL

---

“My Magister did not even show up. That means it's decided then. They are going to seal it. No, given who I am, they will most probably burn it.”

She then turns to look directly ahead where Aeri, the sole survivor of the incident, sits in the opposite side of the room, her gaze glued to her opponent, eyes burning with hatred. Their eyes meet just for a second, which makes her feel uneasy and forces her to look away.

#### GREY-HAIRED GIRL

“It is probably for the best. It is the third time this has happened.”

Knowing what awaits her, she tries to justify it, but even her inner voice does not sound convincing. Her fists clench down by the dress as she tries to contain her anger.

#### GREY-HAIRED GIRL

“No. Even if I hurt them, it was not my fault. Why can they—”

Her thoughts are interrupted by the squeaking sound of a door opening. Catching his breath, the Magister almost falls over. Before he can excuse himself, a fair-haired man makes a remark.

#### DISGRUNTLED MAN

You sure took your time, Magister.

The man in his thirties with a short haircut and face covered in stubble, from his chin to the temples, looks displeased just to be here. His head leans on his fist and his face tells he feels both irritated and bored. Of the three desks arranged in a rectangular formation, he sits by the central one beside three other people. A younger man with long black hair to his right looks apathetic: there are no signs of displeasure of him being in this room, rather plain absence of emotional engagement. Both are clad in strict suits: white shirts, grey turncoats.

Yet a person most detached from the current proceedings finds himself to the left of the fair-haired man. He looks somewhat younger due to his shoulder-length, wavy, marigold hair and smooth face, free of growth, except for a soul patch under his lips. Wearing a green, silky jacket over a light-blue shirt, he appears quite a landmark for browsing eyes. The hearing seems to be of as little interest to him as it is to his neighbour, but unlike the fair-haired man, he seems

to have come prepared for a case just like this as can be judged by him having a read, not tearing his eyes away from a book even when the silence was broken.

Next to him sits a blonde woman, short-haired, in glasses, clad in a black cardigan over white dress, who lets out a sigh seeing her neighbour's lack of involvement.

Even with no introductions, which do not seem to be of importance to them, their poses and behaviour speak for themselves: the two in the middle being Magistern dispatched from other academies, and two others being their aides.

#### THE MAGISTER

I'm terribly sorry. I am not acquainted with the layout of the academy just yet, so I've got lost searching for the Hearings Room.

#### DISGRUNTLED MAN

Not acquainted with the layout?

As he expresses his confusion, a white-haired man, sitting one seat away from Aeri, rises from his seat to provide explanation.

#### WHITE-HAIRED MAN

Sorry, I should have mentioned it. This is Magister Rensin. He has just taken his assignment yesterday. And since both Magister Manshik and his aide fell ill today, Magister Rensin has been tasked to take his place in this hearing with me landing assistance to him. I am Administrator Chusuran's aide, Eraban, by the way.

As the Magister takes his place between the hot-tempered witch he represents and the aide, the men greet each other with a handshake.

#### DISGRUNTLED MAN

Doesn't matter. It won't take long anyway since there is not much to discuss.

He straightens, ready to begin the procedure, when the Magister gets ahead of his speech.

#### THE MAGISTER

That I am not sure about.



**DISGRUNTLED MAN**

---

Not sure about what exactly?

**THE MAGISTER**

---

How fast we will be able to carry out the hearing.

**DISGRUNTLED MAN**

---

Please elaborate.

He now attentively stares at the Magister with a new emotion read on his face: concern.

**THE MAGISTER**

---

Well, you see, I am not sure if it was lost as the documents were handed to me or my colleague had symptoms that prevented him from completing it, but the Statement of Innocence appears to be missing. So I'll have to conduct an interview session with my ward to prepare one now, though I'm not sure if it'll suffice, unless you agree to reschedule the hearing, of course.

**DISGRUNTLED MAN**

---

The Statement of Innocence is not missing. Your ward is not the accused, the aspiring witch from the Sorceress Academy is.

Now the Magister becomes concerned as well. The fact of there being a party defined as accused, not even referred to as a defendant, instantly raises a flag. Yet, the Magister chooses to ignore this fact, listening to his inner voice that tries to convince him that this is a misunderstanding.

**THE MAGISTER**

---

Disregarding this...

Unintentionally, a comment on his own thoughts slips off his lips.

**THE MAGISTER**

---

I understand how the...

He briefly flips a few pages in a stack of papers before him, looking for something to continue his thought.

#### THE MAGISTER

---

...how Orena is seen as an offender, but her actions were clearly an act of self-defence.

Orena snaps out of her self-absorbed state, focusing her attention on the man whose agenda seems to be unclear to her. Meanwhile, with Aeri too focused on her nemesis, the Magister's remark goes unnoticed by her, until she sees Orena's attention get drawn to something and follows her gaze. Now looking at the Magister, she wonders what she might have missed.

#### DISGRUNTLED MAN

---

Magister, let us follow the formal procedure. Could you, *please*, read the Case of Accusation?

The Magister's state of alert continues to rise, but he doesn't object, wanting to know the Case's content as much as the fair-haired man, as he did not have time to do it before. Taking a sheet from the stack, he begins to recite it.

#### THE MAGISTER

---

On behalf of the aspiring witch Aeri Uilounyuk, the Magistertum of the Academy of the Vanguard Coven hereby presents an accusation against the aspiring witch of the Academy of the Sorceress League, Orena Eltonska.

On 04.06.157 U.C., Orena Eltonska *assaulted*—

His tone rises as he finishes reading the word, followed by a brief pause needed by his mind to process the contradiction between the words on the paper and his telling of the events he's observed.

#### THE MAGISTER

---

...three aspiring witches, the members of the Kol of Omniscience, inflicting fatal injuries on the two of them, namely Minali Angohanyuk and Sumi Senko. Witnesses claim Orena used a kind of powerful invocation that was clearly meant to kill her opponents.

As the Magister continues to read, the scepticism in his voice transitions to unconcealed disbelief.

#### THE MAGISTER

---

If it wasn't for the actions of Aeri's kol-mate Minali, who pushed her out of the way, Aeri would have suffered the same fate.

Based on this, the Magistertum of the Academy of the Vanguard Coven formally accuses Orena Eltonska of the first degree assault on aspiring witches of the Academy of the Vanguard Coven.

Although the lines that don't even fill half of the page clearly indicate this to be the entire content, the Magister skims through the document from top to bottom once more before flipping it over only to find the blank other side.

#### THE MAGISTER

---

That is it?

#### DISGRUNTLED MAN

---

Obviously, there is nothing more to it. With this, I will pass the verdict to the covens to decide upon a sentence.

Hearing the words "verdict" and "sentence" instantly send Orena spiralling into despair. She was ready to accept it the moment she stepped into the room, but hearing the Magister mention self-defence gave her hope, false hope, which softened her mental defences, making the blow all the more painful.

As everyone is about to rise from their seats, a sudden question interrupts their motions.

#### THE MAGISTER

---

*What verdict?*

#### DISGRUNTLED MAN

---

The 'guilty' verdict, obviously. Orena is guilty of the first degree assault on aspiring witches of the Vanguard Academy, just as stated in the Case. Or do you want to hear the announcement of the verdict with all the formalities?

#### THE MAGISTER

---

What about the Statement of Innocence?

#### DISGRUNTLED MAN

Have we not clarified this already? Your ward does not require one.

#### THE MAGISTER

I'm not talking about Aeri. I am talking about Orena. We haven't heard her Statement of Innocence.

As the Magister looks at the grey-haired girl, he just now realises there isn't even anyone at her side.

#### THE MAGISTER

And whilst we're at it, where is a Magister from the Sorceress Academy who is supposed to represent her?

Now Aeri also fixates on the Magister, confused by his attempt at defending Orena. Meanwhile, Eraban gives the Magister a subtle tug at his hand, drawing his attention and whispering silently.

#### AIDE ERABAN

Magister, your ward is right there beside you.

#### THE MAGISTER

I'm aware of that.

After giving the aide a reply, he turns back, awaiting a response from his opponent.

#### DISGRUNTLED MAN

Obviously, none is needed. And since there is no Statement of Innocence, it effectively means that the accused is guilty.

He then attempts to stand up yet again, as if ignoring the Magister's concern.

#### THE MAGISTER

No. What that means is that there is a violation of the Chapter II, Section 1, Article 2, Clause 1 of the Magistern Code of Conduct, which ties with it the invocation of the Chapter IV, Article 1.

Tension slowly builds up in the room. Even the man in a shiny green jacket whose eyes were jumping between the lines of the book a moment ago has now them glued to the Magister, even if sceptically, not expecting him to go far.

The fair-haired man meanwhile struggles to hide irritation.

DISGRUNTLED MAN

Please remind me.

THE MAGISTER

Chapter II, Section 1, Article 2 states: ‘A Magister is responsible for representing an aspiring witch from an academy of his assignment in case of her being accused of having an involvement in an inter-academy conflict of any scale.’

Clause 1 of the article states that regardless of the circumstances, a Magister must prepare a Statement of Innocence on behalf of an aspiring witch he represents.

And if you are referring to the Article 1 of Chapter IV, it empowers me to file a complaint against another Magister in case of misconduct.

Hearing this makes the fair-haired man raise a brow. He then turns his head to his aide to the right. Without a word spoken, the aide pulls up a bag and takes out a book. After flipping through some pages, he lays the book on the desk and pushes it towards his superior, who goes over the lines at which his aide is pointing.

DISGRUNTLED MAN

That is not what is says.

THE MAGISTER

What?

The Magister quickly reaches into the bag that sits on the floor near his chair. The book he pulls out is much slimmer compared to the counterpart, so it takes him less time to find the lines. But before the Magister can say anything, the fair-haired man takes a note of how much the book differs.

#### DISGRUNTLED MAN

Obviously, you have been provided with an outdated copy of the Code.

He then gives his aide a signal, tossing his head towards the Magister. The black-haired man walks up to the Magister and hands him the book.

After inspecting the paragraph in question and seeing how the covered topic differs, the Magister starts looking through the other pages of the Code. To his surprise, the wording, structure, and content, all make it look like a different book entirely. Something feels off. His search then shifts towards the first page of the book and then the last. Observing this, the fair-haired man grows impatient, demonstratively tapping his fingers on the table.

#### DISGRUNTLED MAN

Can we help you find what you are looking for?

#### THE MAGISTER

Yes... if you could, please, point me to the page where I can find the seals of the covens, that would be much appreciated.

#### DISGRUNTLED MAN

There are none.

The reply's casual manner makes it apparent the man does not believe the seals to be of importance.

#### THE MAGISTER

Then it has no binding power upon any party. Not the Magistertum, nor the covens. In essence, it is worthless.

As if subconsciously matching the tone of his counterpart, the Magister's reply comes just as dry.

#### DISGRUNTLED MAN

Watch your tongue, Magister. By saying the document which defines the essence of the Magistertum is worthless you are insulting the Magistertum itself.

THE MAGISTER

I'm merely appealing to facts. The use of euphemisms won't change the fact that without seals this book's value is equal to a set of recommendations.

DISGRUNTLED MAN

This is ridiculous. I won't sit here, listening to a newcomer trample on the very foundation of the Magistertum. You presented your case, your role here is done. I am passing the decision to the covens.

The other Magister next to him and three aides seem to understand what the two are discussing. The same cannot be said for the young, who are watching two adults pass a ball to each other, each throw becoming more forceful, their eyes glued to the next player holding the ball.

THE MAGISTER

Do this, and it'll be two complaints leaving my office. We will see if my copy of the Code is outdated!

DISGRUNTLED MAN

The accusation is presented! The defence is absent! The verdict is made!

THE MAGISTER

Then I overrule your 'verdict'! Chapter IV, Article 2! I am taking Orena's case into my personal care!

By this point, neither is holding back any longer: they just scream at each other.

DISGRUNTLED MAN

You can't do any of that and you would not dare!

With his hands slamming the table, he shoots upwards, tumbling over the chair, his face showing not only bright emotion but colour as well.

THE MAGISTER

Try me!

The Magister stands up in a similar manner. Both are frowning with an intimidating look, their eyes interlocked. The others are speechless, except for

the third Magister, whose face speaks for himself, shining bright red as he is doing his best not to laugh. As for the girls, there is no better evidence of their astonishment than widened eyes. Even Aeri has forgotten about her animosity towards Orena.

AIDE ERABAN

Everybody, please, calm down.

With his best attempt at putting on a smile and stirring the air with his hands, Eraban gets up as well trying to get attention and calm both of them.

AIDE ERABAN

There seems to be a terrible misunderstanding. I suggest we reschedule the hearing.

The fair-haired man responds silently, giving Eraban a look suggesting he should talk to the Magister, with a nod given to him in response.

After everyone but the two men from the Vanguard Academy leaves, the Magister drops, falling back into a chair, his arms hanging down. Despite the confidence he demonstrated, that did put him through quite a stress. With his head thrown back, he lets out an exhausted breath.

AIDE ERABAN

You definitely know how to make an unforgettable first impression, Magister.

THE MAGISTER

You think?

As Eraban gets up and walks to the doors, he turns his head back for a second.

AIDE ERABAN

I must say, that was quite a display of professional diligence. I can only recall one other Magister who was just as diligent. From the Sorceress Academy, ironically. Too bad he is no longer...

He makes a pause that is obviously deliberate.



AIDE ERABAN

---

...there.

THE MAGISTER

---

Yeah, it's a shame.

Still in the process of mental recuperation, the Magister responds reflexively, with the message Eraban was trying to convey going over his head.

It takes several minutes after Eraban's leave for the Magister to finally come to his senses. After getting up and exiting the room, he encounters Orena standing in a corridor, looking down, as if she is avoiding her eyes meet the Magister's. Finally overcoming a feeling of embarrassment, she says just one short phrase.

ORENA

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Thank you.

Not waiting for him to reply, she turns away again and passes him by.

It takes him a few seconds to contemplate this moment. Then comes a response, when she can hear him no longer.

THE MAGISTER

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You're... welcome.