

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.

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

The sun spilt fainting light as it moved towards the horizon, painting cloudless sky in hues of crimson and orange. What once might have been walls of a residential building were now only sporadic obstacles in the way of sunlight, casting thin shadows, which slowly crept outwards across the desolate ground filled with smaller remains of human civilization buried underneath it. A labyrinth of directions in the past, this place was brought down to an endlessly wide road, charred walls with blasted off chunks splitting it into adjacent tracks.

A winged creature encased in metal armour soared through the sky in the distance. Diving closer to the ground in a swinging motion, it spewed clouds of fire that engulfed everything in its way, erasing what little reminded of human presence in this place as metal and even stone slowly melted away.

Somewhere farther, where a foot could still land without being set ablaze, a human clad in a full set of red armour hid behind a corner within a maze of walls that one could call intact amidst the scenery of devastation. With a long rifle held upright against his body, he was breathing slowly inside the helmet, as if not to let the breath obstruct his auditory senses. The weapon had claimed one life already as witnessed by the body that lay beside him, and he was waiting for the silence to be broken to let it claim another.

At last, a crack of rubble crushing to dust beneath another human's foot triggered a chain of predetermined motions: his head and then his body turned to the left in an unbroken sequence bringing him into a kneeling position as he aimed from behind the corner. A pull of a trigger released a projectile, which left a blazing trail in its path and a gaping hole in black armour, its wearer staggering

and falling to the ground. Without a delay, the shooter returned to the previous position, as if given inertia by a recoil.

Assuming an upright stance, he got ready to make a break for the next spot until another foe could trace him through the gunshot sound, but “until” came earlier than expected with a series of rapid steps followed by a swing. A sharp edge appeared from behind the corner outpacing the emergence of its wielder, another man clad in black, slicing through the rifle and slamming the shooter into a wall with an axe blade sinking into his chest.

The axe wielder’s fate, however, is the same: as he pulled the axe back, gushing blood filling a wide cavity left behind, a dozen shells hit him in sequence. Not as strong as the one that killed his comrade, they still hit hard, one after another, peeling off chunks of armour, until a few of them met the flesh through the openings. Three red figures on the other side of the corridor then withdrew their rifles and promptly relocated elsewhere.

The blood-stained pattern repeated sporadically throughout the battlefield until but one troop from the black side remained standing. With the screeching sound of a blade rubbing against metal armour, one of them pulled his sword from a fallen enemy and followed three others.

The troop took a corridor transitioning into a semi-open space, one wall still running ahead of them to their left. The right-most member noted another figure synchronously emerging opposite to them, and he was not from their ranks. His noticing the troop came but a second later, a second too late.

His hand reached for a grenade on his waist and threw it towards the troop in one swift motion, but it exploded in front of him hit by a foe’s shell. Two other men beside the one who made the shot lined up next to him, one other accelerating in a dash to close the distance with the rest.

Ready to release a volley that would ensure a kill, they had their opportunity taken away as a bardiche tore through the smoke left behind by an explosion, whistling through the air on its way towards the shooter in the middle. He got hit and nailed to a wall with a loud thud. The next moment two shots followed the

bardiche, hitting the two men to the left and right of him. There was no penetration: shells detonated on an impact. Not enough to do any damage, but their purpose wasn't to kill but to stagger.

They regained their balance when the red figure had already shortened the distance, black veil partly enveloping his shape as it transitioned into trails stretching from the smoke cloud, as two side arms hit the ground behind him. His hand grabbed the bardiche, yanking it from the wall and fatally slashing two men in a single swing, drawing a blood-painted crescent moon.

As he released the grip on the weapon, his body continued the spin until he stopped facing the direction of the fourth foe, only a trooper spraying blood from his neck wound standing between them. Both simultaneously took a sidestep in opposite directions, one in front of his dying comrade, sending the sword in a horizontal strike aimed at the opponent's core, the other shielding behind the trooper's back. Using the trooper's body as a cover, he grabbed his two side arms, pointing them to the enemy's face from below the trooper's armpits. The blade hit both, the man in red and the trooper, at the ribs as two shells hit the striker in response: one breaking his helmet, the second delivering a killing blow.

The man in red let go of both the trooper and his guns, his arms dropping down, just like the bodies of the two enemies in front of him. With the sword stuck in its armour, the trooper's body fell, revealing a crack in the survivor's armour. The wound leaked blood that flown invisibly down the red lacquer, yet he remained standing, as if not even feeling the pain.

Among the pile of bodies, a presence attracted his attention. He turned his head towards the presence's direction. The presence looked at him and he stared back. His eyes could not be seen behind the helmet, but his glare burned through it. The longer he stared, the more his glare absorbed the presence. The surroundings faded, until...

“Ouch!”

The Magister woke up with a pulsing pain in his forehead, hitting his head against a wooden arm of a carriage seat.

“Watch it, will you?”

A woman’s voice rang sharp and loud as she shouted at a coachman, punching a vulnerable mind in the state of transition from the dreamland to the reality though sensitive eardrums.

“My apologies, m’lady. The sun ahead makes it hard to see.”

Instinctively rubbing his forehead, the Magister opened his eyes. He fell asleep with a book on his chest, which slid and fell to the floor as he lifted his body to assume a sitting position, but he didn’t bother picking it as the aching spot on his head bothered him much more.

Squinted eyes gradually rendered the image of a black-haired woman in a beige shirt sitting on the opposite side of the carriage. Her hands were resting on a brown brief bag and a black jacket, complimentary to her full skirt of the same colour and texture, in her lap.

“Hane?”

“You recognize me. That means you didn’t hit your head too hard.”

She reached into the bag and held out a metal flask, water audibly splashing inside. Taking the flask, he lifted the dark-grey hair hanging down his forehead and pressed it against the swelling, letting the cool touch of metal douse the burning sensation.

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

“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—”

Hane’s eyebrows slowly came together as he talked, discouraging the Magister from continuing.

“You might be reading too many futuristic novels.”

She picked up the book on the floor, inspecting the title that read “Crimson Days”. By itself, the title wouldn’t have said much, unlike the subtitle, “Based on prophecies of Vanguard witches”, which made one of Hane’s eyebrows rise higher with every word she read.

“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 lifted her eyes from the book. Her cold look suggested she was not interested in a lecture on history either.

“...anyway, how long till we arrive?”

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

“Yes... technically, we could’ve. But railroads are 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—”

“You do realize that the railway is cheaper than taking a carriage?”

“Wait, really?”

This could have passed as a joke had they not been riding in a carriage already.

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

“Well, living in my home—”

Before he could finish, both got distracted by a sudden sound and turned their heads to look outside. A thunderclap. At first, it appeared to them as though it had been rampaging somewhere in the distance, but then they caught a glimpse of an electric discharge not far away.

Hane’s eyes jumped around, trying to pinpoint the source.

“Lightning? I don’t see any thunderclouds.”

“And I haven’t seen one arching above the ground either.”

“Witches, most probably.”

“You make it sound like that’s something routine.”

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

“I see...”

Something was brewing within his mind as signified by him rubbing his chin and looking in Hane’s direction, but not at her, rather through her.

Hane turned her attention away from the window and focused back on the Magister.

“Back to what we—”

“Coach! Please stop the carriage!”

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

“You want to intervene, do you not?”

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

“They won’t listen to you.”

“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 worked by the book, like he did. Which also might have been the reason he used to pronounce the word “Magister” in a historically accurate way with “g” as in “garden”.

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

“They aren’t criminals.”

“No, before anything, they are children. And... a picture is worth a thousand words, so I won’t stop you.”

With the carriage coming to a full stop, the Magister opened the door to step outside, showing a confident smile.

“Let’s hope I have a way with children then.”

Electric discharges were bouncing confined within three long metal rods connected by small metal bridges in a triangular spiral formation, like a cage designed to contain a violent force of nature building inside. With a finger releasing a trigger, this energy lunged forward forming intertwined lightning arches.

As if hitting an invisible barrier, they then continued their way, bending around their target, a girl in an elegant blue dress with golden edging, its upper part following the lines of her gentle physique. Her grey hair, almost white at the roots and dull emerald at the tips, with three thin braids hanging along the left temple, seemed to be undisturbed by occasional blows of wind.

Here, in the middle of a pedestrian roadworks, where puddles carpeted the dismantled part after a recent rainfall, she stood extending her arm with an open palm facing her opponents: three girls several meters away from her.

All three wore light-blue uniforms with white edging, though each attire was slightly different. The one in the front had a long below-knee coat with open quarters revealing an above-knee plain skirt. The colour of the uniform was contrasted by her long carrot-orange hair done in a ponytail and dark-red eyes, both expressive of her emotional state. A rifle-like contraption in her hands still had residual energy sparking between the rods of a cage-like barrel after the last attack. A girl in the back to her left wore a similar uniform, but with trousers instead of a skirt, her dark-hair with marine lustre were flowing down her back all the way to the shoulder blades except for a single lock hanging between dull-green eyes. The third member with wavy bronze-brown hair slightly below her shoulders and deep black eyes looked the most distinguished due to unfastened hip-length coat revealing a black skin-tight undershirt.

Despite the three girls obviously being on the same side, only the one in the front appeared aggressive. Still, the grey-haired girl could not hide some nervousness.

“How long do you think you can stay defensive?”

The fiery-haired girl’s voice expressed irritation by her opponent’s behaviour.

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

Her chain of thought was interrupted by the girl to her left.

“Aeri, calm down!”

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

Whilst the two girls were arguing, the third one stood with her arms folded above two metal-encased tubes forming a cross over her abdomen as they connected from a waist-bag on her back to a sword-like and a shield-like contraptions on the belt holding her trousers. Despite her body language making her seem relaxed, her eyes cautiously observed both her fellow witches and their opponent.

The grey-haired girl hesitantly made a few steps back, which was immediately noticed by the hot-blooded witch.

“I’m not done with you!”

She pointed the weapon at the girl again and pressed down on the trigger, building up another charge. Seeing how her direct attacks had no effect, she scanned over her, looking for anything that could expose the opponent’s weakness. Her eyes eventually stopped at the girl’s feet, one of which was soaking in a puddle.

If I can’t hit her directly...

With a slight incline, she pointed her weapon at the ground where the puddle stretched outside the supposedly shielded area around her opponent and released the trigger. A discharge hit the water and found its way to the target.

The girl's body convulsed momentarily with a following fall to her knees. She started breathing heavily bowing to the ground, but just for a few seconds. As she raised the head, her facial expression morphed from composed to uncontained anger as her green-tinted grey irises dimmed to blackness, revealing glowing patterns: one in the form of an octagon with enigmatic symbols on the inside and the other being an octagram with similar symbols between the points.

The black-eyed girl tensed momentarily, her hands instinctively reaching the opposite sides of her waist to grab the weapons.

“Finally taking it seriously, huh?”

From the hot-headed girl's bag emerged a strange contraption: two long metal pieces held together by an invisible force detached as electric discharges started dancing back and forth between them, forming distinct patterns that looked like some kind of symbols. A feeling of fatigue washing over her with increasing intensity, forcing her to kneel and hyperventilate.

Her friend on the right was experiencing similar sensation, having a half-visible spherical object surrounded by an iridescent mist appear floating beside her. It then expanded into two hemispheres revealing a telescopic tube connecting them as a thin sheet of ice formed beneath it. Same with the dark-haired girl, who had a large glass plate with glowing writings within appear in a similar manner.

The girl in the dress rose, extending her hand towards the group again. Faint trails of light started stretching from the objects beside the assailants in an uneven path towards the girl's open palm where they converged, forming a rapidly growing ball of violent energy. It was swirling like an iridescent cloud of fire accompanied by lightning discharges within.

“Is this... what you did to...”

The girl in the front had a hard time speaking with her heavy breath getting in the way. She tried to process what was happening and how to fight it, but any chain of thought she tried to build would fall apart under the pressure of building

fatigue. Fortunately, she didn't have to come up with anything due to an unexpected intervention.

“What is going on here?!”

The Magister's voice rang loud and clear, and the question was meant not to be answered but to announce his presence and attract attention before someone could get badly hurt. Unfortunately, it was his getting the attention that would cause the events to go awry.

As the grey-haired girl got distracted, her eyes losing the glow and returning to normal, she lost the control over the accumulated energy. The blazing ball thrust towards the group, but the orange-haired girl's focus was shifted away for her to see the imminent threat. Her peripheral sight was hit by the incoming light to warn her of the danger when it was already too late.

“Aeri! Look out!”

The dark-haired girl forcefully pushed her friend away from the path of the energy ball, but in doing so she placed herself in her stead. The other girl jumped in front of her, bringing the hand with a shield-like contraption up. As if following the motion, a wall of spiky ice appeared in front of her but to no avail: just as the bright light pierced through the crystalline matter, the swirling ball melted through the wall as if it hadn't been there. It then passed both girls, engulfing them in agonizing flames, as it continued its way before disappearing in a burst a dozen meters away.

“Sumi! Minali!”

Both the surviving girl and the Magister rushed to the victims. The Magister lifted one of them from the ground, holding the badly burnt body of the dark-haired girl who was struggling to breathe in pain.

This sight left Hane paralyzed with shock. Not only her. The culprit, the one responsible for inflicting these injuries, seemed to be in even more shocked state, staring blankly at the site of the incident.

“Hane! Flares!”

Hane snapped out hearing the Magister's call and rushed back to the carriage. About a minute later, a clap shook the air followed by a bright red flare soaring upwards with a whistle leaving a red trail of smoke in its path, and a second later, a blue flare followed.

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

The outside was blindingly bright, illuminated by the sun high at zenith. This brightness radiated from every object the sunlight touched, bouncing even into enclosed spaces through the smallest gaps.

Here, in this room, where tall windows went all the way from the floor to the ceiling, it was as bright on the inside as it was outside. A marble desk next to the windows was hard to look at where it was white and hot to the touch where black veins run, except the spots where three shadows stretched across it.

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

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 turned to look across the room where Aeri, the sole survivor of the incident, sat, her gaze glued to her opponent with burning hatred. Their eyes met for a second making it uncomfortable for her and forcing to look away.

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

She tried to justify the impending verdict, but even her inner voice did not sound convincing enough. Her fists clenched down by her dress as she tried to contain her anger.

No. Even if I hurt them, it wasn't my fault. Why can they—

Her thoughts got interrupted by a squeaking sound of the room doors opening. Catching his breath, the Magister almost fell over the doorstep.

“You sure took your time, Magister.”

A disgruntled fair-haired man in his thirties with a short haircut and noticeable stubble covering a good portion of his face all the way to the temples was the first to break the verbal silence. The expression on his face and his pose, with the head leaning on the closed palm of his hand, conveyed a mood between boredom and irritation. Of the three desks arranged in a rectangular formation, he sat by the central one beside three other people.

A younger man with long black hair to his right looked apathetic: there were no signs that would convey his displeasure of being in this room, rather simple lack of emotional engagement. Same as his neighbour he was clad in a strict suit with a white shirt under a grey turncoat.

To the left of the fair-haired man was another one. He looked a bit younger due to shoulder-length, wavy, marigold hair and his face being smooth free of growth except for a triangular soul patch under his lips. He stood out from the rest with his preference in clothing, wearing a green silk jacket over a light-blue shirt. The upcoming hearing seemed to be of little interest to him as well, but unlike the disgruntled man, he preferred to fill his waiting time with use by reading a book, not tearing his eyes away from it even when the Magister appeared.

To the left of him sat a short-haired blonde woman in glasses and black cardigan over a white dress, who only let out a sigh seeing her neighbour's lack of involvement.

Even without introductions, which seemed to be of little relevance to them, their postures and behaviour were indicative of their roles: the two in the middle being Magistern from other academies, and two others serving as their aides.

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

“Not acquainted with the layout?”

As the disgruntled man expressed his confusion, a white-haired man, sitting one seat away from Aeri, stepped in to clarify as he rose from his place.

“My apologies, 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 took his place next to the hot-tempered witch he had been tasked to represent, he greeted Eraban with a handshake.

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

The fair-haired man straightened as he was about to begin the procedure when the Magister got ahead of him.

“That I am not sure about.”

“Not sure about what exactly?”

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

“Please elaborate.”

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

“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.”

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

He felt a bit of relief dismissing the Magister’s concern, though one concern got just replaced by another. The fact that one party was defined as accused, not even referred to as a defendant, instantly raised a flag. Yet the Magister chose to ignore this, listening to his inner voice that was telling him there had to be a misunderstanding.

“Disregarding this...”

Unintentionally, he commented on his own thoughts.

“I understand how the...”

He briefly flipped a few pages in a stack of papers before him, looking for something.

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

Orena snapped out of her self-absorbed state, focusing her attention on the Magister, unable to comprehend his agenda. Meanwhile, too focused on her adversary, the Magister’s remark did not reach the ears of Aeri, until she noticed something catching Orena’s attention and followed her gaze to the Magister, wondering what she had missed.

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

The Magister’s state of alert continued to rise, but he complied with the request, wanting to familiarize himself with the content of the Case as much as the fair-haired man, as he had not been given time to do it. He took a sheet of paper from the stack and began to read it.

“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 rose as he finished reading the word, followed by a brief pause, which his mind needed to process the contradiction between the words on the paper and his telling of the events that had occurred.

“...three aspiring witches, the members of the Kol of Omniscience of the Academy of the Vanguard Coven, inflicting fatal injuries on 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 continued reading, his tone changed from conveying scepticism to unconcealed disbelief.

“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.”

The Magister then skimmed through the document once more, even flipping it over to inspect the empty other side.

“That is it?”

“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 sent Orena spiralling into despair. She had been ready to accept it the moment she had stepped into the room, but hearing the Magister mention self-defence had given her hope, false hope, which had softened her mental defences before the blow, making it all the more painful.

As everyone was about to rise from their seats, the Magister interrupted their motions with a question.

“*What* verdict?”

“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?”

“What about the Statement of Innocence?”

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

“I am not talking about Aeri. I am talking about Orena. We haven’t heard her Statement of Innocence.”

As the Magister looked at the girl, he just now realized that there was even no one at her side.

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

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

“Magister, your ward is right there beside you.”

“I’m aware of that.”

After giving Eraban a short reply, he looked back at the fair-haired man in the anticipation of his response.

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

The man then attempted to stand up again, as if ignoring the Magister’s concerns.

“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 continued building up in the room. Even the man in the shiny jacket whose eyes had been jumping between the lines of the book a moment ago now had them glued to the Magister, even if sceptically, not expecting him to go out of line. The fair-haired man, meanwhile, struggled to hide his irritation.

“Please remind me.”

“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.”

Heaving heard this, the man only raised a brow. He then turned his head to his aide to the right.

Without a word spoken, the aide pulled up a bag and took out a thick book. After flipping over some pages, he gave the open book on the desk a push towards the disgruntled man, who had a quick look at a paragraph where the aide’s finger pointed.

“That is not what is says.”

“What?”

The Magister quickly reached into the bag on the floor beside him to pull out his Code. It was much slimmer than the counterpart, and respectively, it took him less time to find the lines in question.

Seeing the stark difference between the Magister’s reference material and his own prompted a comment from the fair-haired man.

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

Having been given a signal from his superior, who tossed his head towards the Magister, the black-haired man walked up to him and handed the open book.

After examining the respective text, which covered a completely different topic, the Magister started meticulously looking through the other pages. To his surprise, the wording, the structure, and the content made it look like a completely different book. Something felt off. His search then shifted towards the first page of the book and then the last.

As his opponent observed the Magister, impatience found more cracks to seep through as indicated by his fingers tapping on the desk, each tap louder than the last, until he could take it no longer.

“Can we help you find what you are looking for?”

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

“There are none.”

His reply came in a very matter-of-factly manner, as if it was something insignificant.

“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 came just as dry.

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

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

“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 in the room could definitely understand what the two were on about. The same couldn’t be said for the girls, who were watching two adults pass a ball to each other, each throw becoming more forceful than the last, their eyes glued to the next player holding the ball.

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

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

“Then I overrule your ‘verdict’. Chapter IV, Article 2! I am taking Orena’s case into my personal care!”

By this point, neither was holding back any longer: they were just screaming at each other.

“You can’t do any of that and you would not dare!”

The fair-haired man slammed his hands on the desk as he shot upwards, tumbling over his chair, his face showing not only bright emotion but colour as well.

“Try me!”

The Magister rose from his chair in a similar manner. Both were frowning with intimidating look, their eyes interlocked. Everyone was speechless, except for the third Magister whose face was speaking for himself, shining bright red as he tried to contain the laughter. As for the girls, their widened eyes served as the best evidence of their astonishment. Even Aeri forgot about her animosity towards Orena for the time being.

“Everybody, please, calm down.”

Eraban stood up as well, trying to get attention, smiling as best as he could in such circumstances and stirring the air with his hands.

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

The fair-haired man responded non-verbally, giving Eraban a frowned look as his eyes jumped to the Magister and back, with a nod given to him in response.

After everyone but the Magister and Eraban left, the Magister dropped, falling back into his chair, his arms hanging down to the sides. Despite the confidence he had demonstrated, that did put him through quite a stress. With his head thrown back, he let out a long exhausted breath.

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

“You think?”

As Eraban got up and walked to the door, he stopped and turned his head back for a second.

“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... there.”

“Yeah, it’s a shame.”

Still recuperating mentally, the Magister responded reflexively, with the message Eraban was trying to convey going over his head.

It took several minutes after Eraban had left until the Magister finally came to his senses. As he got up and walked out of the room, an unexpected encounter occurred. Orena was standing there in a corridor, looking down, as if she was avoiding her eyes meet the Magister’s. She finally managed to overcome a feeling of embarrassment, just enough to look at him for a second and say one phrase.

“Thank you.”

Without waiting for a reply, she turned her eyes away from the Magister and passes him by.

After several seconds of contemplation, his reply came when she could no longer hear it.

“You’re... welcome.”