

ECHOES OF THE BREACH

FRACTURED FUTURES

A GLOBAL MALIFAUX CAMPAIGN

Couldn't go back north. Too many influential figures in those parts. Most were paying handsomely to have her head delivered to them on a platter, laws be damned.

Didn't know anybody in Appalachia. Could disappear for a while, but that would mean giving up everything they had against the organization. Marcy called it a "sunk cost"; they'd all been through too much to throw it away.

Past the great river, maybe... but without supplies or cash, she'd be signing her death warrant as an apprentice pioneer. Plains didn't mean anything to the creatures brought out to hunt her and hers down.

Overseas was out of the question. She didn't know anyone able to forge passports well enough that she could board a ship, much less risk weeks at sea where she might get recognized.

There was one other option, and Brendan had Guild contacts...

Malifaux it was.

Nia's hand slipped into her pocket for what felt like the hundredth time, pulling out a small sheaf of papers and flipping them open. Despite having been recently issued, folded lines marred the identification page's center. A plain picture. A few lines of text, a signature. Everything Nia was, represented on those few pages. Rather, it was everything she wasn't. The whole thing was a carefully constructed lie. Nia flipped the papers again, trying to master the art of transferring them to whoever asked without rousing suspicion. But there was such a thing as too much practice. Her fidgeting drew some neighboring eyes, and Nia felt a pit grow in her stomach. *Calm down! This is nothing. Just another day. Get yourself together.*

She stowed the papers and craned her neck to try and see the front of the line before wiping her forehead on her coat sleeve. The weather of Breachtown made the garment impractical, but space on the Iron Ram was limited. Anything you could wear or carry into Malifaux on your person, you did. At least, that's what the Guild employee had told her when she purchased her ticket. That was

long in the past now. That piece of advice still vied for space with countless other scattered thoughts in Nia's head.

The line moved up a few feet. Breachtown Station looked mirage-like in the heat. Building edges rippled, trying to figure out if they wanted to move a few inches to the left or right. The raised train platform looked out over the city, but there wasn't much else beyond Guild red and iron. Training grounds, warehouses, and militarized outposts created a barrier between city and encroaching desert. Patrols walked endlessly. Constructs clanked behind them or stood guard at checkpoints. The whole town knew it had a red glove around its throat. Its civilians made peace with that long ago.

Nia's eyes drifted to the hazy blue ring far down the track. The Great Breach. Earth's sole portal to Malifaux waiting for her to cross over and leave the past behind. Every passenger who cleared the Guild checkpoint closed a few more feet between Nia and the doorway to a new life. She took her identification papers out for what she hoped would be the last time. Three people left in front of her... two...

Almost there. One ride and it'll be a new life.

“Ma’am, we don’t have all day. Next!” The voice startled Nia from her thoughts. She fumbled her papers into the Guard’s hand, cursing herself for wasting all that time practicing. The Guild agent gave her a side glance, holding it before looking down at Nia’s life in her hands. Those gray eyes went side to side like a typewriter, moving to the next line after the previous one earned tepid approval. Nia wiped her forehead again, sweating the nerves of someone innocent, yet feeling guilty of everything.

The Guard held Nia’s gaze for what felt like forever until she snapped the passport shut and gave a curt nod. Nia returned the gesture, hefting her small bag and walking towards the Iron Ram’s carriages. Somehow, despite its official tone, the Guard’s sign felt reassuring. Nia couldn’t decide if that was a good thing or a bad one.



Nia worked her way through the train cars bit by bit. They smelled like oil and wood polish covering hints of sweat and desperation... something she contributed to, just one more soul leaving a tiny mark on the Iron Ram before being thrown into a strange world.

Suits and posh dresses made up less than a quarter of the passengers. Nia was part of the remainder. Those passengers only wore old clothes, an unsure future, or falsified papers. Nia had all three.

She made her way through the first passenger car and into the second, trying to find an empty seat without holding up the line of passengers. All Nia needed was someone raising a fuss about how she was moving too slowly. Rows of faces stared back. Anxiety rose in the woman’s gut.

Blend in. No point making a scene.

There was a single available seat towards the center-rear. Nia made for it. An older woman wrapped in a deep purple shawl sat in the other spot. A shock of well-kept gray hair decorated her head, which felt familiar in some far corner of Nia’s mind. Suitcases rested beneath the seat and above it; their labels each referenced high-class fashion houses in Europe. A longer box sat open on the older woman’s lap; something metallic shone from inside. *Something valuable...*

“Is this seat taken?” Nia asked, well aware of the awkward and pointless nature of the question. Still, she’d asked it. A coy smile pulled the woman’s lip up in one corner.

“Depends on how lucky you are. Heads or tails?”

“Heads,” Nia replied immediately. The familiar rush of chance filled her brain and mixed with deprecating thoughts. *Don’t respond so fast, that looks weird!* “Er, yeah. Heads.”

A coin glinted in the palm of the other woman’s hand. Nia hadn’t seen her produce it, but that meant nothing to sharps and scammers. It rang clear and metallic on the flip. When the older woman removed her hand, a face stared back. With a little noise of surprise, she shifted the container on her lap to make a bit more room.

“Welcome aboard.”

Nia quickly slipped into the seat to avoid holding up the train any longer, already withering under the glares of passengers unlucky enough to avoid participating in a game of chance. She took a few seconds to adjust her bag. The older woman watched with interest. “First time?”

No, I’m meeting a friend. Taken this train a dozen times at least.

Nia felt her throat close around the lie she’d almost habitually slipped out. “Yes,” she admitted, painfully cognizant of her inexperience with travel on the Iron Ram. “How about you?” The older woman shook off the question with another laugh.

“No, no, I’ve been back and forth many times. But I’ll always remember the first. I looked exactly like you did, sweat and all. But I made it, just like you will.” Her rings glinting around arthritic knuckles. Light played off their surfaces and intermingled with the metal resting inside the plushly-lined box. It looked like a cuff of some kind. Beautifully worked, but carrying a long and heavy blade on its underside.

“I don’t remember seeing you in line. How’d you get that on board?” Nia asked almost jokingly. The Guild Guard weren’t always the most thorough, she’d heard, but they had an eye for the valuable and dangerous.

“My dear, I haven’t stood in a line for years. It’s not what you know, it’s who you know.” Nia’s fellow passenger gave a thin, almost proud smile and winked. “You could get an entire Peacekeeper in this carriage if you asked the right person to fill out the proper forms.”

“Good to know,” Nia nodded. She assumed a ‘Peacekeeper’ was something large, expensive, or unusual. Probably all three. The older woman closed the box and wrapped her shawl tighter, apparently satisfied with the cuff.

The pair sat in silence for a bit. Breachtown's hustle and bureaucratic bustle continued outside the Iron Ram's sealed windows. Nia watched more passengers file through on their way to the third carriage. She noted important details about each one: strong, easy target, hidden weapon. Old habits died hard.

"Are you in the mood for another game?" The question was accompanied by the prodding of a bony finger. Nia looked over to see the woman holding a deck of cards. "Should be a few minutes before we set off."

Nia looked at the deck's worn edges and faded black coloring. "I don't have much to wager," she said tentatively. The woman beside her tutted away the comment and cut the deck, shuffling the cards in rapid staccato atop the oiled box.

"That's quite all right. Lots of things are more valuable in Malifaux than scrip. Tell you what," she said, crooked fingers deftly handling the cards, "we'll play a simple game of War. You know it?" Nia nodded, and the woman continued: "Good. No bets, no wagers, this will just be for fun. Or actually, what about this? I give you a piece of advice every time you win, since this is your first time going to Malifaux? How's that sound?"

Nia looked at the proffered cards, then to the woman, and back again. *Even if she knows magic, it can't end worse than the last time.* "All right, deal." She slid the top card off the deck: a Ten of Tomes. The woman thumbed the second to reveal a Two of Rams. Nia hid it well, but felt her skin prickle with excitement over the win.

"Not off to a bad start," she said. The woman looked deeply at Nia. "The first thing I wish I'd learned when I was in your seat? Malifaux brings out things in people they never knew they had. Makes them nastier. Even the sweetest person can turn into a monster if she's not careful."

The day they were betrayed. Claimed he had no choice. His life for everyone else's, and the change they'd fought so hard for. A liar behind a smiling face.

The woman flipped her next card: a Six of Crows. Nia's expression soured when she pulled a Five. The next round returned to her favor: an Eleven of Masks to a Two of Masks.

"Masks, eh? Fitting, since Malifaux loves the indecisive. Pulls them apart and doesn't let go. Change too often and you'll find pieces of yourself in every corner with nothing to show for it. Find a path and stick to it."

The day she'd lost him. Begged him to make a choice, for her, for both of them... and he couldn't. All she could do was

run from his screams as those things the organization sent after them took his life.

Nia furrowed her brow when the woman dealt a Twelve of Masks. She breathed in, fingers hovering over the deck for three seconds before drawing a Thirteen of Tomes. The woman raised an eyebrow, folding her mouth down in what some might call an impressed expression, while Nia let out the breath she'd been holding.

"Might be hope for you yet," she said, sitting up. "What else should you know? Ah, I know! Don't make bad deals. Too many people let themselves be manipulated. One of the worst ways is debt." She palmed the coin flipped earlier, making it glint in the train car's dim light. "Doesn't have to be money. Could be favors, deals, obligations, anything like that. If you can't pay it, don't agree to it."

The day she'd paid her final dues. Talked with Brendan and got her false papers. Threw him money and everything the group found out about the organization. She indebted Brendan to everyone they'd failed. But what other choice did she have?

Nia wasn't sure, but she detected a tiny sliver of pride in the old woman's voice. She started to ask a question when the Iron Ram let out a roaring whistle and lurched forward. Nia almost slid off her seat. The older woman kept her feet planted, barely moving an inch. She still held out the deck of cards as the Iron Ram gained speed. "We've got time for one more before we go through. What do you say?"

Before Nia could answer, the older woman slid a One of Rams from the deck, and Nia felt a giddy surge of happiness. The stakes weren't that high, but even winning this was a welcome change of pace. Nia casually flipped her card, and felt her heart freeze.

The Black Joker stared back up at her.

Nia felt old memories creep up. Tightening her jaw. Turning her knuckles white. Closing up her throat. They faded quickly, but were unwelcome. She'd truly lost that day.

What did they even look like? I didn't even see them before...

"Good game, dear," the older woman said. If she noticed anything about Nia's shift in demeanor, she said nothing. "But I do have one last thing to tell you, and remember this if you forget everything else: in Malifaux, bad things happen." The woman started to pack the cards away, but stopped. She let out a little noise of surprise. "Well, would you look at that." She peeled off a card stuck beneath the Black Joker: its Red counterpart. Nia perked up.

“That means I win,” she said, letting a bit of satisfaction run into her words. The other woman flourished a hand in humble agreement.

“That it does. I guess that’s as good a lesson as any. Even the very bad can end up very good, especially in Malifaux.” The moment the old woman finished speaking, the entire train plunged into darkness. Nia felt the Breach’s energy wash over her. It wasn’t unpleasant. Felt almost dreamlike. Sort of a tingle floating across Nia’s body that reminded her of the first time she’d touched an electric light.

Just as quickly as it came, the sensation stopped. The Iron Ram shook, and Nia instinctively grabbed onto the old woman’s hand. She patted it. “We’ll be in Malifaux in a few seconds. Nothing to worry about.”

Nia started to breathe out. Then the Iron Ram violently shuddered. Bags and boxes tumbled down on their owners below. Nia felt the old woman’s hand leave her own. Several screams and cries of alarm rang through the second carriage; people were being thrown from their seats in the gloomy space between worlds. Nia tried to stand. She grabbed the armrests and pulled, steadying herself in the aisle. Just then, the emptiness outside the train started to glow.

Light in the windows grew, flooding the whole carriage with blue-orange energy. It blocked everything else out. Nia looked around in panic. Everything blended together until it became nothing. She called out for the older woman, for some tiny piece of familiarity, feeling tears run down her face. The forceful light grew. A single piece, a pinpoint of reality in the midst of breaking chaos, cut through the Iron Ram’s metal walls and buried itself deep inside Nia’s body.

Fire. It burned out her nerves and muscles. Nia’s bones shattered, reformed, and broke again. Blood boiled and evaporated, only to be replaced by the tangled essences of lives Nia had never lived. These too were burned away until none remained, and the force began consuming Nia’s entire being. Glowing impossibly bright with the fire of maddened creation itself, she had time to turn her head once. The old woman’s face contorted, skin boiling and bubbling, the box on her lap reduced to cinders. Tears ran down Nia’s face. They evaporated before everything went white.



Bosco took a drag from his cigarette, tapping his heel rhythmically against Malifaux Station’s platform. It was his week to do Witchling duty, which meant barely enough

free time between trains to think up new ways to win Eliza over on the Temperance Club’s dance floor. He breathed out smoke and put the cigarette out with his shoe. “Atticus, come here!” he said, trying to get the attention of his wayward Witchling snuffling at the ground. A moment before the Station’s whistle started, Atticus’ head bolted upright.

The Iron Ram emerged through the Breach, thick black smoke roiling off its carriages. Bosco watched in horror while the train approached before drawing his sword and running to the edge of the platform. Dozens of other red-coated Guild employees did the same, and Malifaux Station’s elegant platform was soon a writhing mess of panicked bodies. Bosco elbowed his way to join the other Handlers, following behind Atticus as best he could.

The Iron Ram slowly rolled into the station. It stopped, letting off a hiss of steam. Bosco covered his face with an arm; the smoke pouring from the carriage was lessening, but it smelled terrible. He looked around. Guild Guard were positioned on the platform, but the Witch Hunters were the first line of defense in cases of anomalies. Every Witchling strained against their handlers, almost leaping onto the tracks in their efforts to reach whatever magic burned inside the train.

“Do we have backup?” Bosco coughed, keeping a hand on Atticus. His Captain, Calterman, nodded back through watering eyes.

“We gotta deal with this now or its all our asses,” he replied. “Looks like somebody in there sparked and the whole train got cooked. Smells like it too,” he choked, tentatively stepping towards the Iron Ram. Multiple Handlers converged around the smoking train car. They unsheathed their swords and brought out revolvers with practiced ease. Bosco adjusted his grip, words of a counter-spell on his lips.

Two groups of Witch Hunters converged at either end of the train car. Bosco followed Atticus up the back steps, hushing the Witchling as it scabbled at the melted door. On Calterman’s signal, the hunters simultaneously slammed the doors open with one brutal motion and waded into the smoke.



Burnt flesh. You think about the smell once, then twice, then countless times more.

Everything seared to a crisp. You see charred bodies fused to the seats, the walls, and the roof, melting into a slurry

of meat and fabric. Others look down at the floor, see it is carbonized. Patterned like you've been at the center of an explosion.

Seven, eight, nine hands moved one after the other. Afterimages of orange magic, like mirages you've heard about from friends while fighting back on Earth. It was your hand, your arm, your chest, legs... but it looks wrong. Ripples in reality leave behind afterimages. Ethereal torsos, legs, and heads shift with you, just out of synch. An unusual thing rests on one of the sets of arms: a cuff of some kind.

A voice speaks. How many ears hear it? Under arrest, illegal use... murder of innocents. No. No. You came to Malifaux to escape... to save everyone... No, to settle a debt. To seek glory? No, escape...

Your head tilts. Rather, several heads tilt. Some don't move. One starts crying, bringing a pair of arms up to your face. It all happens quickly, and slowly, and almost not at all. One version of you surges forward. She roars and knocks the Witch Hunters back. Then she runs through the black smoke and slams a Witchling into the carriage door. Some of the women watch her follow herself off the train. The same scene plays out on the opposite end: the woman catching her accusers off guard. Some share movements almost down to the footstep. One or two act differently. Aggressive, frightened, hurt, real, false: every part played by one actress on a burning stage.

The Guild does what it can. Guardsmen pepper some of Nia, of you, with shot. Witch Hunters engulf others in roiling flame or slip cuffs on those of you who didn't resist. Survivors flee in every direction. Saturated almost, your hair brilliant white and coat deep gray-blue, with a band of silver around one arm. Then that body fades into orange, blue, and another copy becomes real. Almost like something is trying to choose which path it will take.



Nia runs. Some of her stumbles. Others fight with a weapon taken from a kind, dead stranger. None of them know where to go. Visions shift through Nia's heads, colliding with each other as she repeats the last lessons she learned.

A dusty expanse littered with spent shotgun shells...

A narrow alleyway drawing her in on a trail of fresh blood...

Malifaux brings out things in people they never knew they had.

A hand covered with black veins linking to thousands of eyes...

A frozen mountain guarded by those who foresaw her arrival...

Find a path and stick to it.

A coffin of ghostly fire slung across her back...

A hidden school whose teacher nurtured magic...

Don't make bad deals.

A dimly lit lounge filled with sparkling clouds...

A marshy swamp filled with sour notes and celebration...

Bad things happen... but the very bad can end up very good, especially in Malifaux.



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