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# Episode 5: First Over the Line

## K. Arsenault Rivera

From set *Aetherdrift*

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Somewhere on Avishkar, a team of racers is bursting through an Omenpath to raucous applause. The streets are lined with grateful spectators; there's as much confetti in the air as there is aether; the music started in the early morning and gives no indication of stopping. When these daring racers cross the border, they do so as storied heroes. In many years, the children watching will tell their children of the electric moment they realized that the race was, at last, drawing to a dramatic close.

No one will tell stories about *this* landing. At least, not glorious ones. In time, Pia Nalaar might be convinced to recount it as a joke. Daretti will log it as one of the great failures of his career, both the landing itself and the circumstances that brought him there. A few days from now, Chandra Nalaar will tell her girlfriend that she really, really had no idea it would go this way, and Nissa will narrow her eyes as if that cannot *possibly* be true.

For instead of charging through the Omenpath back to Avishkar, valiant and unbroken, the rocket car spirals into the air above an oasis on Amonkhet. Its riders hardly have any idea what's going on. Reality is lost in a jumble of momentum and torque; gravity itself is the only thing keeping them in their seats. Rolling this way and that like a firework in motion they soar, soar, soar ...

Then hang, impossibly, in the air.



Art by: Yeong-Hao Han

"She'll hold on a little longer!" shouts Daretti.

"I'm not too sure about that," says Pia. And, as it often happens, Pia Nalaar is exactly right. No sooner has she spoken than the tip of the ship turns down like the nose of a disappointed parent.

Pia throws herself toward the back end of the ship. Between her weight, momentum, and determination to slow this thing down no matter what, she manages to keep them from going fully vertical.

Daretti, lamenting the lack of material for proper stabilizers, searches through a cabin, finds a hunk of metal that looks something like a wing, and lashes it to the side of the rocket. Was it his best work? No. Not by a longshot. He would have loved to spend two days crafting the perfect work to seamlessly integrate a new system rather than cobbling one together from scrap, but he can't do that while plummeting through the air toward certain death.

Chandra Nalaar swears. Once that's out of her system, she blasts the ground ahead of them with a gout of fire. The pleasant waters of the oasis bubble and hiss into a boiling steam, and she thinks to herself, *Maybe that was a mistake.*

Loot, for his part, clings to Chandra's shoulders and wonders how exactly any of this came to happen. The precise engineering malfunctions that sent them into the air escape him. But the fear of crashing? Oh, he gets that.

"Coming in hot!" Chandra yells. "Brace for impact!"

"We don't have anything to brace with, or on!" Daretti answers.

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There isn't space for any further argument. An instant later, the ship hits the earth. A scorching streak of black and brown against the verdant green of the oasis will be their signature for the years to come. Not the proud mark of heroes, but the embarrassing signature of a celebrity who hadn't quite been paying attention to that autograph.

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A little while later, Chandra's the first one to wake beneath the warm sun of Amonkhet. Her pounding headache is bad enough to begin with, but then there's the trouble of figuring out what's happened to the others. Her eyes blur and water as she pulls herself back up to standing. What little she ate before comes up in insistent fashion as she pukes out the side of the car. Vaguely, she's aware of Loot clinging to the belt of her uniform. After she's cleaned herself up, she scoops him into her arms and calls out for her mother.

"R-report in. This is Chandra ... Nalaar to ..."

"Chandra, don't shout. Please don't shout," comes the aggrieved answer. Pia groans. "I'm going to be fine."

A weight rolls off Chandra's shoulders. She leans against the side of the half-wrecked car as the world spins around her. A deep breath to try and steady herself. Then, "Daretti? Are you okay, too?"

"For a given value of okay," he says. Surprisingly he sounds a little annoyed. "I'd advise you to take a few moments to collect yourselves. You might be lightly concussed. Or heavily. The spinning and the headache will continue for quite some time. Thankfully, I'll never again be caught unawares of such a situation. If you need medicine, I've plenty."

Chandra slumps down. So much spinning. The ground beneath her doesn't feel real. She finds herself holding Loot close because she so badly needs something to hold. The little creature holds her back, and she feels a faint sense of pride that everyone's made it out of this okay.

Mostly okay.

"Make sure Chandra gets her fill, first," Pia says. "This isn't the first time I've had to deal with this sort of thing. I'll be fine in a little while."

"Don't be so stubborn," Chandra mumbles.

"Oh? You're telling *me* not to be stubborn?"

Chandra groans. "Mom ..."

She hears someone pouring something next to her. An herbal scent cuts across the smell of burning grease. A hand takes Chandra's. *Daretti?* He gives her a cup.

"The taste leaves a little something to be desired, but it'll settle your stomach and dull the pain for a while," he says.

Chandra is far, far too out of it to keep from blurting out her thought. "Is this what you feel like all the time?"

Daretti's laugh is a soft, pained one. "On the bad days," he says. His manipulator arm reaches out to Pia with a cup of tea. "Rest. I'll take a look at the engine and figure something out in the meanwhile. Just don't fall asleep."

"Rest without falling asleep?" says Pia. "You ask for such simple things."

"Believe me," Daretti says. "When it comes to this, I'm a bit of an expert."

Great medicine—the kind that's not just ludicrously expensive but rare—will make you forget you ever had a malady. It will erase all traces of sickness's hold on you and leave nary a mark upon the paper.

Most people do not get to have great medicine.

Good medicine will erase most of whatever's going on, but it'll leave traces. A ghost mark on the blueprint of your mind and body. In Chandra's case, it's a pulse at her temple, a certain dryness on her tongue, and the unshakable feeling that she's forgetting something. The pain's gone, for the most part, and to everyone's great joy, no one has puked in a couple hours. Rest without sleep has mostly consisted of sitting there with her eyes closed. Pia spent her time telling stories from her days as Renegade Prime again. Daretti listened without complaint, tinkering with the rocket car's engine here and there.



Art by: Chris Rallis

After what feels like three hours but is closer to one, the goblin makes his diagnosis.

"Nalaars Prime and Junior. Loot. I regret to inform you we've blown the engine."

"Junior?" says Chandra, blinking.

"Not surprising with how hard we pushed that thing. Is there enough scrap left around to patch it up enough for another ride?" Pia says. The old rebel pushes herself up to her feet.

"For most people? No. No, there would not be nearly enough scrap. The odds would be insurmountable," Daretti says. "But—"

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“We aren’t most people,” Pia answers. She nods. “Well, there’s nothing for it, then. We’ll just have to beat the odds again. Cobble together a working ship from ...”

Pia looks around at the oasis they’ve found themselves in. Truth be told, there are far worse places for them to have ended up. There’s water aplenty, despite Chandra’s best efforts to steam it; dates strewn across the ground for food; half-buried statues under distant sands for a bit of artificial beauty to complement the natural.

“Sandstone, palm trees, scrap, and determination. Easy.”

“What should I do?” Chandra asks. “If we’re going to try and get this thing going?”

Pia smiles. “You, Nalaar Junior—”

“I’m, like, fully grown. You can’t really call me Junior if I don’t have the exact same name anyway.”

Pia pokes Chandra’s forehead.

“—are going to be your dear sweet mother’s personal welding torch.”

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*Maybe—and this is just a thought—we shouldn’t be trying to weld stuff in the middle of a desert. Maybe.*

Chandra wipes her brow. Her motorcycle suit is half-undone, her sleeves hanging by her ankles. After hours of grueling work with the sun beating down on her shoulders, the engine is ... better? She’s not sure. She hopes so. The mechanics of this stuff aren’t exactly her strong suit. Kolodin’s the one who was into all the mechanical stuff. So long as the engine worked when she turned the key, that had always been more than enough for Chandra. The details get too scrambled in her head for her to make much use of them.

But Daretti’s pretty sure this is going to work. And Pia’s pretty sure that Daretti’s right. So, they’ve got to be onto something.

“I believe we’re developing an all-new type of engine here, purely out of desperation. Isn’t that something?” says Daretti. “Junior, will you smooth over this weld here?”

A line of fire along the seam Daretti points out. She’s done this four times, at least, but it’s fine.

If it gets them closer to getting out of here.

“You might be right about that. I never would have thought to integrate palm fibers that way. And the hippo bones were a real find. Who knew they were so supple?”

“Flexible and lightweight. It’s no aluminum, but it certainly has its uses,” Daretti says. But when he glances up at Pia and Chandra, there’s something different about him. An ... understanding? He sniffs. “But ... I think that’s most of the welding work done for the evening. With the dark coming, it might be best for the two of you to get some more rest. I can handle it from here.”

Pia tilts her head. “Are you sure? I’ve got a bit of fight left in me.”

“Yeah, and I don’t mind giving you some light if you need it,” says Chandra. “You already gave us that medicine earlier. Maybe you should be the one to get a little rest? We can take care of you this time.”

Daretti shakes his head. He points to his eyes. “My visual capabilities far exceed yours, especially as day gives way to night. The sort of fine work that must be done to tune the engine from here would drive Nalaar Senior to frustrated tears, and Nalaar Junior would leave in all of ten minutes. So, you see, I’m the best suited for it.”

“Senior? Can’t we go back to Prim ...” Pia starts. She stops and glances at Chandra. Her daughter’s grin is a little too smug for her to finish the sentence.

“Fine. But not because I couldn’t do it. It takes more than you can imagine to drive me to tears these days, Daretti.”

Daretti chuckles as he turns his attention back to the ruined vehicle. Pia loops an arm through Chandra’s and pulls her away.

“Can you get a fire going?” Pia asks. “As beautiful as these sands may be, we’re still in a desert. The second the sun goes down, our bones are going to start chattering.”

The prospect of lighting a fire alleviates Chandra’s boredom. Daretti’s teasing blows away like ash in the wind. As she sets off to start collecting tinder—dried palm leaves, shavings from the trees, what grasses she thinks might help—Loot bounds up onto her shoulders, chirping enthusiastically. *You guys are good at fixing things.*

Chandra smirks. “My *mom* is really good at fixing things. I mostly melt them.”

Loot shakes his head. Chandra drops a bundle of dried palm fronds, and Loot bounds down to pick it back up. He lays it in place with a surprising amount of care for such a little guy. He holds them up to her and sniffs. *When you see things that are wrong, you fix them.*

“Well, yeah. Who wouldn’t?” Chandra says. Then her shoulders slump. “I guess a lot of people don’t, come to think of it. But that never really made sense to me. Change happens when someone tries to fix something. Not everyone can go all the way, but anyone can try. And more people should.”

“She gets that from me,” Pia calls out. “But plenty of other things she gets from her father. Like all that optimism.”

“You’ve spent so much time lighting things on fire, and it turns out you light yourself up a little, too,” Chandra says with a smile. Chandra dumps the gathered materials next to a resting Pia. She starts stacking the wood, filling the hollows with tinder. Loot is happy to scurry about and follow directions. A little of the shavings here, rocks around the edges, dig a little deeper.

Pia’s question—the one that has been brewing behind her eyes like strong tea—comes when Chandra ignites the fuel in a conflagration of joyous warmth.

“Chandra ... why didn’t you want to race with us?”

The warmth of the fire keeps Chandra from freezing up and relaxes the tension this might otherwise inspire. “I already told you, Mom. I wanted the best chance to win.”

Pia fixes her with a quizzical look. “But you know how long we spent working on that vehicle. I’m your mother. If you need help with you and your family, then you know I’d do anything I could to help you.”

Chandra’s cheeks go red. Nissa. *Family.* It isn’t wrong. After everything they’ve been through together, they could never be anything else to one another.

Nissa ... it’s hard to imagine a life without her.

“You’re right. We spent so many nights working on that thing, I can’t even count them now if I tried.” She sinks down onto the grass next to her mother. Overhead, the stars of a distant plane shift and sway in their own particular dances. One of her favorite things to do with Nissa is look up at the stars like this, trying to spot the commonalities among planes. Neither is very good at it. And now, with what’s happened, it’s gotten a lot harder to do.

But Chandra hopes they can keep it up.

“Do you think all of those stars have their own Planeswalkers?” she asks.

Pia hums. “They might. Or they might not. It’s hard to say without going there ourselves, isn’t it?”

“I bet we could if we tried.”

“It’d take a lot of trying,” says Pia. “And you’re not factoring in the travel time, either. You can sashay between the planes as you like, but planetary travel has got to be a different story. Saheeli used to theorize with me about it sometimes over chai.”

Silence fills the space between them. Chandra thinks of the things she wants to say, tries to fit the words together in her head, and realizes it’s no use. It’s better if she speaks her mind. She’ll feel her way toward the important parts, like she always does.

“If all of those other places have their own Planeswalkers, I’ve never seen them. I wonder what they’re like, wonder if the Phyrexians invaded them, too. How many times have they had to save their worlds, and does anyone even remember?”

Chandra laces her fingers behind her head. “I couldn’t risk messing it up. Nissa and I have already lost so much. We can’t lose her second chance at a spark, too. I’m worried. You should see her when she talks about Zendikar and the things she’s lost. I can hear it in her voice, and it’s like—it’s like whatever pain she’s feeling—I feel it, too. We deserve a happy ending, and she deserves it more than anyone.”

Pia is quiet but not inattentive. Her glance shifts from the stars overhead to her daughter. Quietly, she wraps an arm around Chandra’s shoulders. It’s comforting—but it isn’t quite enough to keep Chandra’s real feelings from spilling out.

“I know you’re doing your best, and I know it *sucks* that I left, but I just ... I couldn’t risk it. And now, we’re here on Amonkhet, way behind, and I know that we’re not going to win, and I’m going to have to go back there and tell her that I messed this up—”

“Shh, shh. She’ll understand, Chandra,” Pia says. She kisses Chandra’s hair. “You did the right thing. You know she wouldn’t have had it any other way.”

Chandra doesn’t sob. Sobbing would not be the heroic thing to do. But if someone were to listen closely, they might hear something that sounds an awful lot like a sob. “I know. I just. I wish I could stop her hurting. I wish I could do something, figure this out, put together some magic solution that fixes everything, and I can’t.”

“Life doesn’t always work out that way,” says Pia. “We try our best, and we do whatever we can to make the pieces fit together, solder things together, file them down, jury-rig them however we can. Sometimes it works, and you’re off to those planets up there. But sometimes, it doesn’t.”

Another shake of the shoulder, another thing that might, in another person’s eyes, be a sob.

“What do we do when it doesn’t?”

There’s a long pause between them, but also a warmth as palpable as the fire flickering before them. Pia Nalaar isn’t crying, either. No one would say as much. But if a single bead of salt water happened to be at her eye, well, that’s another story.

“The same thing I did when I thought I lost you and your father on the same day,” she says. “We ... improvise. We find other ways to be. Nothing we make is ever wasted; no move is ever in vain. All the years I spent struggling and raging against the Consulate trained me to help dismantle it—and to help me understand my long-suffering daughter, who doesn’t like to accept help, even when she needs it.”

As night falls upon the oasis, it can't be said whether either of them is crying. But ...  
It could be said they're bonding.

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It has been many months since Chandra Nalaar slept the whole night through. Nightmares keep finding her. Whether it's Nissa's face streaked with Phyrexian tears, Urabrask's dying screams, or the bodies of the Mirrans as they charged the Seedcore, there is always something to haunt her. Being with Nissa helps. When she wakes and sees her love next to her, she can assure herself that everything turned out all right, that everything was worth it in the end.

But here, on Amonkhet, she has no such comfort.

When she wakes this time, it is with the moon high in the sky, the sands painted silver, the oasis's surface like a great mirror in which she might recall all the things that have happened to her and might yet happen. Moths are drawn to flame, but the pyromancer is drawn in this moment to stillness and comfort.

She leaves camp and walks to the lip of the oasis. When she dips her feet in, she finds the water is cold, shockingly so, and her heart beats in double time as the rest of her adjusts.

Once more, she looks up at the sky.

So it is that she does not see the man before he speaks—for he manifests next to her in the quiet manner of moonlight upon skin.

**"Something troubles you,"** he speaks.

"Well, yeah, but that's nothing new," Chandra answers. Then the thought catches up to her that she *should* be alone, and she turns to see the speaker. A wave of calm washes over her at the sight. She knows that maybe she should be freaked out by him, but she isn't. And she knows what that means.

One of Amonkhet's gods.

Next to her, with his legs likewise in the oasis pond, is a very tall, powerfully built man with a lion's head. No, not quite. Where Ajani's is that of a living creature, this man's is a golden mask of surpassing quality, a fierce white light illuminating his eyes and maw. He is bare and barrel-chested, his brown skin glimmering with gold, even in the middle of the night. A golden bow is strapped to his back.



MAAZ ALI KHAN

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Art by: Maaz Ali Khan

**“It is new to me ,”** says the man. Something in his voice reminds Chandra of the markets of Ghirapur. He sounds *alive* .

“You’re a god,” Chandra blurts. “You’re a—I thought Nicol Bolas killed everyone but Hazoret? But you’re here.”

A soft laugh bubbles in the chest of the young warrior. **“You have an interesting way of speaking, Visitor ,”** he says. **“Indeed, I am. To kill a god is to kill the very spirit of a thing. Bolas thought he had strangled our spirit within his claws, but what do you see around you? ”**

Chandra looks around. Across from them, a pair of caracals have fallen asleep on the banks of the oasis. Fruit grows on the trees; fish swim in the water; lotus flowers bloom. It is green here, beautifully, bountifully green.

“Life,” she says.

**“Just so ,”** answers the god. He rests his hands on his well-muscled thighs. **“Where there is breath, where there is water, where there are people who wake every morning and face the dawn—so shall there be gods of Amonkhet. ”**

Quiet comes over them, then, but it is not really quiet. Life rarely is. Daretti’s snoring, the wind, the gentle purring of the caracals. All of these things are there, if she only slows down to hear them. And, somehow, she thinks she can. Just for a little while.

**“Life is speaking to you ,”** the god says.

“Yeah, I think it is,” Chandra answers. And it doesn’t matter to her that she’s not sure what it’s saying.

**“Good. It gladdens my heart to have helped you ,” says the god.**

Chandra studies him. She might not deal with gods as much as some of the other Planeswalkers do, but there's a question at the back of her head she can't quite shake. “Is there anything I can give you in return? I mean, of all the places you could be, you're here. I'm sure there are more important things you could be doing.”

**“Wherever a god chooses to be is the most important place to that god ,” he answers. “It would delight me if you told me of the other worlds, about how they live and in what they believe. If you told me of dawns, of glory, and of the common life there—yes, that would delight me .”**

Chandra tilts her head. “That's all?” she says.

**“Mortals are not the only souls to see the opportunities of other worlds. The dream of our champions is my dream, too. ”**

Hm. That wasn't something Chandra had ever considered. She thinks for a moment. Then she looks up at the stars again.

“Well ... my girlfriend's favorite place in the Multiverse is called Zendikar.”



Art by: Josiah “Jo” Cameron

In twenty years, Spitfire will tell people about this moment.

Everything is lining up perfectly. As her ride howls through the Omenpath, there is nothing to hamper her. No distractions. She can't even see the other teams in the rearview as she shoots through the

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streets of Ghirapur anew. The happy faces and colorful signs lining the track are to her what is right and due to her. Each Avishkari child looking on, each woman in a racing jersey, each man waving a flag is a reason to win.

And she's going to win. She's certain of it.

Only Winter, captain of the Speed Demons, stands in her way. And even then, not by much. Whatever trick it is that they're using to get ahead isn't helping them anymore. The strange glitching of their car is worse than it's ever been, the silhouette constantly blurring at the edges against the reality around it. As Spitfire shifts into high gear, she's more certain than she's ever been.

The others don't have the horsepower to win this.

All the hours she and Pia spent working on this car have come to fruition around her. Four turns, left, right, left, right, through the streets. Up ahead is the statue of Kari Zev: the last marker before the straight into the finish line. The track moves at a gentle curve around the flower-festooned statue. When Spitfire and the Speed Demons pass it, the flowerpots fall over.

She's going to overtake them on the straight. She knows it. The Speed Demon's engine has no hope of competing with hers, especially not when they're so close together to start with. They've been relying on tricks this whole time.

But she's trained for this. She's put in the work. Every flip and every switch in this car is one she's learned like her own heartbeat.

Faster.

The Aether Ranger's front bumper scrapes against the Speed Demon's driver-side door.

Faster.

Chassis to chassis, eye to eye. Spitfire doesn't spare Winter so much as a glance. A cheater like him would never deserve it. Not even as he explodes into flame next to her with a billowing, sinister laugh.

*Faster!*

Winter shoots a gout of blue flame at her. Spitfire accelerates through the heat, her already burned hands screaming anew in pain. The finish line is the only thing that matters. Winning is the only thing that—

*Where did that wall come from?*

It all happens so fast. In twenty years, she's still going to be putting together the pieces of what happened.

Shooting up in the middle of the track is an intricate wall of golden filigree; a fence neither of them had accounted for when they accelerated. *How did it get there?* She didn't have time to figure it out, couldn't have possibly realized how the track's own safety precautions had been deployed against its racers.

All she has time to do is throw up her arms and brace for impact.

Stars explode across the back of her eyes; her head knocks between the walls of the roll cage; the steering wheel thrusting into her gut knocks the breath right out of her. In the aftermath of the crash —when she's trembling in the seat, when adrenaline is aether in her blood, when the world is a distant dream—confusion is all she knows. Everything is a blur of color and pain and frustration. All she can do is try to sit up, but even that is an impossible task right now. Trying turns her stomach upside down.

Hands on her shoulders. *The marshals?*

“No … I c-can still …”

The words come out slurred and clumsy, but she means them with every fiber of her being. Temporarily blinded by the impact, she tries to bat away the person who’s come for her.

“Consul! Consul, you’re going to want to see this!”

*What …? Consul …?*

Her eyes focus. A high-pitched scream batters at her ears. Horror’s hands close around her throat.

For there in her lap is half of Spitfire’s mask.

They know. Oh, gods. They *know*.

“Wait. Wait, you can’t—”

But what can she do? Dazed and damaged as she is, she is helpless when the goons haul her from the wreck, when they drag her before the man she least wanted to see.

The anticipation of what he’s going to say is worse than the crash. In that moment, she wants nothing more than to melt into nothingness. When he speaks, she almost does.

“Sita! Are you all right? What is the meaning of this? You could have been *killed* out there!”

Pain and humiliation stop her throat. She can’t bring herself to say anything in response, much less to sort out what’s going on.

*Was it always going to end this way?*

“Take her to the doctor. Now. Spare no expense,” says Mohar. “I will not lose my daughter to degeneracy.”

As they carry her away, Sita hears her father’s next order to his men: “Tell *no one* of this.”

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A wave of the hand is enough to dismiss the guards. They might owe their allegiance to Mohar on paper, but a mind is an easy thing to change. It’s as simple for him to dismiss them as it is for him to breathe. Maybe simpler, these days.

The Speed Demons’ vehicle is little more than a warped mass of metal, but he knows without needing to be told where to find its only inhabitant. Vraska tears Winter from the wreckage.

“Where is Loot?” she asks.

Winter tries to kick away. With another wave of his hand, Jace compels him to go limp. A moment later, he is searching Winter’s mind for the answer.

“Do you *have* to do it that way?” Vraska asks him.

Jace nods. “A survivor like him would never willingly surrender a bargaining chip.”

“Loot is more than a bargaining chip,” Vraska says. “We promised to keep him safe.”

“We did,” says Jace. “But to Winter, that’s all he is. All he can be.”

There’s an uncomfortable silence between them. She knows him too well. There’s a sigh. “As long as you remember why we’re really here.”

He smiles at her. “We’re going to take care of everything. I promise. Now, let me take a look at this guy.”

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Jace turns his attention to Winter. The memories come to him: the fireball, the raiders. Somewhere along the line, the cage snapped off the vehicle.

Jace hums. This is ... less than ideal. "I think we need to take him prisoner."

"Why?" asks Vraska. "If he doesn't know, then what use is he to us? We could just let him go."

"He's a loose end," Jace says. "If things are going to get better for everyone, we can't afford any loose ends. Not anymore."

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In the morning, Daretti slaps the hood of the rocket car with glee. He rubs his hands together and beholds the majestic, awful creation they've cobbled together.

"Nothing like it in all the Multiverse," he says.

Pia grins. "The palm fronds add a bit of style, don't they?"

Chandra's already swinging into the driver's seat. Loot scampers behind her, settling across her shoulders as she searches for the ignition. *Wasn't there a key for this?*

"You have to start it the old-fashioned way," Pia says. She takes shotgun, leaving Daretti with the most room in the back seat. "I thought it'd be nostalgic. Your father and I used to start cars that way all the time."

Chandra blinks at her mother for a minute. "The old-fashioned way?"

"Move over."

A second later, Pia's rubbing two wires together beneath the steering wheel. Chandra's about to ask what that's meant to do when the engine roars to life. Pia leans back.

"The old-fashioned way," she says.

The engine's off to a good start—it feels alive if not strong. But they don't need strength. They just need to be able to finish the race and get back home.

"So ... we've got to find our way back to the track, and then to the Omenpath. Ketramose said if we head this way for an hour or two, we should see it—"

"Ketramose?" says Pia.

"The lion god. He gave me directions."

Loot chirps. *There's a closer one.*

Silence in the cabin of the car. Chandra's the one to break it. "An Omenpath? Have you been here before or something?"

*No. I just know where they are*, Loot answers in that strange way of his. He wiggles his tail to the east.

Something falls into place behind Chandra's eyes. "Wait a second. That's how the Speed Demons have been getting ahead, isn't it? Winter used shortcuts. He made you show him where the other Omenpaths are, the ones nobody else knows about."

Loot only nods.

Chandra can't keep from smiling. "Hey, maybe we can still win this after all," she jokes. But then she pats Loot's head and scratches him between the ears. "Probably not. But with your help, we're going to make a hell of an entrance."

In less than fifteen minutes, she'll come to regret those words.



Art by: Ernanda Souza