

You're right—my bad. Here's the full **Ace & Mai** Eldritch Fragment in English, like the others. No Warhammer, mythos-focus, complete story.

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Alala — The Dream-Shriek

The first sound wasn't the storm. It was the seam beneath it—an ache of air like a breath held too long by the sea. Mai caught it before Ace did, a ripple on the recorder's spectrum that crawled down instead of up, finding the soft places in the skull.

"Forty-two hertz and falling," Mai murmured, cupping one ear as the ferry shouldered through white water toward the island. "That's beneath the usual blowhole chorus. Not wind. Not engine."

Ace leaned on the rail, water speckling her lashes. The night was a deep green, and the northern sky wore small black scars where stars should be. "Feels like being stared at by an empty auditorium."

"That... is creepily specific," Mai said, smiling despite the cold.

"Been in a few," Ace said. She tapped the hilt of a green-lit katana with one nail, the Verdant Flame inside it quiet but awake. "You think it's our thing?"

"Local calls it the Howl Stone. Fishermen say it sings before something washes ashore that shouldn't." Mai squinted at the shore, where a pale tooth of rock leaned out of the pines. "And our tipster's field recordings? Same signature, but layered. Like a choir trying to be one throat."

Ace's smile thinned. "One throat trying to be a world."

They came in on a metal ramp that screamed when it met the dock. The island smelled of tar and resin and old salt threaded with peat smoke. A long, lean man in a wool coat waited with a lantern.

"Harbormaster Tarmo," he said. "And you must be the two who like trouble."

"We prefer to say trouble likes us," Mai said, shaking his hand. Ace nodded cheerfully.

He led them along a path where the pines leaned like conspirators. "Heard the stone tonight," he said. "Straight through the frame of the house. Wife woke with blood on the pillow. Nosebleed." He glanced back at Ace. "This part of work always sounds like a joke until it's not, doesn't it?"

Ace looked past him at the pale slab in the moonless dark. "The part where stones hum and people go missing? The joke's in the punchline."

They saw the Howl Stone first as shine: a polished oval rising from the bluff like a mirror a giant forgot to hang. Three rusted pins were sunk into its base; wooden cross-pieces made a mute instrument's ribs. The sea thundered below, but the noise felt... wrong. As if each wave were being sampled and replayed an inch out of phase.

Mai set the case down and unfolded the directional mics with quick, quiet hands. Ace crouched near the stone without touching it and listened with her bones. The seam under the storm breathed again. The pines hushed. The island held its own breath.

"Don't stand in front," Tarmo said. "When it starts, you'll want to lean in. That's how it gets you."

"Has it gotten anyone?" Ace asked.

"Three in all the years I've kept count," he said. "Or we say three. Sometimes we say they just left."

"Is there a difference?" Mai said softly.

"On paper. Not in dreams."

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They slept—if it counted as sleep—in a retired storehouse that knew every wind's grammar. At half-two, a single note threaded the walls like a nail pulled through old timber. Ace opened her eyes on the dark and let the Verdant Flame lift from her skin like a second pulse. Mai's hand found hers and squeezed, a wordless morning in the midnight.

"It's here," Mai breathed.

"Not all the way," Ace said. "It's trying the room."

They went out into salt and frost. The sky had the sickly clarity of a diver who's gone too deep. Several small black orbs rode the clouds—no moon, no stars, just absences. Down at the stone stood a woman with a scarf round her head, fingers pressed to the polished face. A sound poured from her that wasn't voice so much as pressure, sustained and slightly jagged, like a glass rim sung too hard.

Tarmo stood in the grass, hat in his hands. "Maret," he said. "It's too strong tonight."

"It wants the angle," the woman said hoarsely, not looking away. "You said to warn you. I'm warning you."

Mai recorded, angles shifting, lips pinched white. Ace felt the note climb her ribs like rungs and stop under her throat, knocking. She swallowed. It knocked again.

"What is she singing?" Mai asked, voice tight.

"Not words," Ace said. "The space between."

Maret stopped. The night seemed to sigh. The absences in the sky pulsed once, and Ace's left ear went hollow. Maret turned, her cheeks wet with sea brightness.

"I dreamt of the city under the waves," she said, gaze fixed not on them but on whatever stood a step behind them in the air. "And something cousin to a god turned its head and found me listening. There's a call written in the veining of this stone. I can keep it wrong. I've kept it wrong for years." She touched her throat. "But I'm getting old."

Ace held her eyes. "What happens if it's right?"

Maret didn't answer. But the black orbs in the sky seemed to tilt, like ears cocking.

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In the morning Mai crouched in a half-collapsed quarry where the island had once mined its own bones. A sheet of pooled rainwater lay black as a pupil. Old drill marks made dotted lines like staves. She laid the spectrograms over a notebook filled with her compact, pragmatic handwriting, then over the map Tarmo had sketched on a feed sack: fault lines, old chapel, drowning ground.

"See how the fundamental splits?" she said, pointing. "It's deliberately detuned. Maret's been shading

it flat at a constant ratio. Every time the wind is right, she cancels one of the partials. That's not folk luck. That's math."

"Who taught her?" Ace asked.

"Grandmother, she said," Tarmo replied. "Before that, a man who came with a crate of books and a broken jaw."

"Cultist?" Ace asked Mai.

"Or a survivor," Mai said. "Either way, we're looking at a gate made of resonance."

Ace touched the water. It trembled, repeating the night's tone like a memory tapped on a rib. "We're not stopping sound," she said. "We're stopping hunger using sound as teeth."

Mai looked up at her. "Alala?"

Ace didn't say the name aloud. Names are doors. But she nodded, and the quarry seemed smaller.

Tarmo shivered, though the sun had found them. "We don't say that word here."

"Then don't," Ace said kindly. "Let us say it for you."

*

Dusk leaned over the island early, heavy with weather. They borrowed the old chapel for a meeting. The pews held thin ghosts of centuries of knees. Maret came, and two fishermen with hands like driftwood, and a girl with tangled hair and a stubborn jaw who'd stopped her ears with sandpaper to sleep. They were not a cult. They were a neighborhood trying to keep a lid on a pot.

Mai put the spectrograms next to the altar's scorched edge. "We think the stone's been tuned to a set of starless positions," she said. "Those black... not-moons you've been seeing? They're absences resonating with the stone. If any one of them aligns perfectly with the fundamental, the rest will lock in. That's your door."

Maret's smile was tired and fierce. "And I've been keeping the hinge a little rusty."

Ace leaned on a pew, boot tapping. "There will come a night you can't sing it ugly enough, Maret. Voices fail. That's the human tragedy and the human beauty."

Maret met her gaze. "And when it does?"

Ace didn't look away. "Then you let us take it for a while."

The girl with the sandpaper plugs frowned. "You mean sing it?"

"I mean hold it," Ace said. "There's a piece of me that drinks sound. The more it drinks the quieter the world gets. Sometimes that's a blessing. Sometimes it's a bad idea." She felt Mai's glance and added, "We'll do it together."

Tarmo cleared his throat. "If you two have a plan, we're with you." The others nodded in that stoic island way that meant they would carry you out of the surf with your boots still on and say nothing about the weight.

Mai pulled the back off her disruptor and laid its heart on the altar like a silver organ. "I can retune the modulator to a counter-note. If I phase-lock it to the stone's core frequency and we anchor it in the rock, Ace can absorb what leaks. Think of it like... an anti-choir."

"And if it gets angry?" the fisherman asked.

"It will," Ace said. "Sing anyway."

Maret reached into her bag and set a small, glossy pebble on the wood. It had the same mirror finish as the Stone. "My grandmother called this an echo-seed. If the song gets away from you, break it. The last thing the stone sang will be the first thing it hears."

Ace turned the pebble with a fingertip. It almost hummed. "Old women who save the world," she said. "My favorite genre."

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The storm came in like a crowd. By midnight, the pines leaned horizontal under a wind that had forgotten its own alphabet. The sea below the bluff turned phosphorescent where it smashed itself to foam, leaving ghost light hanging in the air. The black ovals in the sky multiplied and drifted closer, not falling, just thinning the world where they passed.

Maret stood at the Stone with a blanket around her shoulders. She sang wrong on purpose, a warrior's sabotage, breath whetting the edge of a flawed note. Mai's disruptor sat open-gutted on a tripod, cable like a vein running from its frame into a corner drilled at the Stone's base. Ace stood barefoot on sea-cold granite, katanas sheathed for now, palms open to the rain.

"It's almost funny," Mai shouted over the wind, cheeks riddled with salt. "All the things we've fought with and we're doing this with a rock and a song."

"Don't blame me," Ace yelled back, grinning like a dare. "You're the one who brought science to a knife fight."

The Stone answered them. No hand touched it, but its mirror face flexed as if something inside the rock took a breath. The note came up through Ace's feet like the island clearing its throat. Mai's modulator woke with a thin, pure counter-tone, a thread of wire against a saw blade. The night added harmonics of its own: guttering chapel bell, rigging on a mast, rain's countless fingers.

The black ovals stopped. Every emptiness in the sky turned toward the island.

Ace felt the shriek pushing into the spaces between cells, searching for joints, for any hinge that would take a pivot. She let the Verdant Flame unfurl through her throat and ribs, a green hush, not absence but the promise of it, the way a forest eats a footstep. Her breath flowed, and the knocking at her throat found no door.

Mai's fingers were a blur on the disruptor's controls, watching the spectrum like a weatherwoman trying to steer a tornado. "It's not a single voice," she said through her teeth. "It's a bundle trying to be one. I need your silence narrower, Ace. Like the sharp edge of a wedge, not a blanket."

Ace closed her eyes. She imagined the world as lines, each singing itself as it went about the business of existing. She chose one and un-sang it, turning her silence into a blade, a surgical nothing that cut along a specific frequency. The pressure in her ears equalized. The breath in her chest turned into a well whose sides were words she could not read.

The Stone's surface convulsed. It no longer reflected the storm but something beneath it: a city's shadow dragged across the seafloor, fluted towers and vaults like rib cages. In the middle of the not-image turned a head too big for its neck, a loathsome crown of cartilage and lamprey teeth whispering in and out of its gums. It angled toward the island with the weary inevitability of tides.

Maret's voice broke. The flawed note faltered, righted, faltered again. Blood ran from her nostril. The girl with the sandpaper plugs—plugs gone now, hair whipped horizontal by the gale—ran forward and took Maret's arm, lending a human chord to a human voice.

The disruptor screamed as Mai forced its power feed into a place it was never meant to live. The tripod shook. The anti-note hit the Stone's face and slid off, then caught, then bored a hole. Steam burst from the drill channel and smelled like old kelp and forgotten altars.

"Now," Mai shouted. "Ace!"

Ace drew the katanas. The Verdant Flame ran down their spines like rain on glass and turned into shapes—letters from a language used by wind between pillars. She cut the air, not at the Stone, but at the lines whose intersection made the Stone a door. The blades found tensile points and parted them, green hush parting pressure like skin. Sound buckled. The island staggered.

The thing below the sea reared in the mirror and opened everything that could be mouth. The scream that came through was older than instruments and younger than grief. It tore the tops off seven waves at once and held them there, white crowns trembling in the air like a shivered audience refusing to fall. The black ovals dropped several feet without moving.

Ace took the scream into her, all of it, a pianist who had become a closed lid. It hurt. Silence always does if it's big enough. She held the hurt and did not pass it on. The Verdant Flame found the seams and sealed them, a green lacquer burned into invisible joints.

Mai drove the modulator's spike deep into the Stone's base. The counter-note inverted, the waveform folding on itself. For a heartbeat the sound was nothing and the nothing was sound, a neat Mobius of un-noise.

"Break it!" Mai gasped, hand fumbling for the echo-seed.

"Wait," Maret hissed, hoarse and sudden. Her eyes were wide and full of a terrible knowledge. "If you break it now, it keeps the last right note it heard. We need to make sure the last thing is wrong."

Ace met Mai's eyes. A flash of shared thought moved between them the way lightning passes through a tree and leaves it standing, surprised to be alive. Ace nodded once. Mai's mouth crooked, the smile she wore when solving a math proof in a burning building.

"Sing wrong with me," Mai told Maret.

Maret laughed—astonished, delighted, mad—and sang. Mai joined, her voice low and sure and just a hair off, engineering imperfection like a watchmaker building grit into an escapement. Ace held the door of herself against the gale that wanted to live inside her lungs.

The Stone shuddered. Its mirror skin crazed into a spiderweb of hairlines. The city below the sea wavered and yawed and finally misaligned: towers slipping out of key, streets tilting into a different rhyme. The great crowned head turned as if seeking the note it had lost and found only its absence. The black ovals thinned to black threads and then to nothing at all.

“Now,” Mai said, and Maret smashed the echo-seed against the Stone.

The pop was inaudible and absolute, the erased chalk line of the world. When sound came back, it came back an inch to the left, like a picture rehung. The storm was only weather again. The waves fell out of the air. The Stone’s mirrored face sloughed off in damp sheets and slid to the grass, where it lay like the skin of a lie.

Ace swayed. Mai was there, quick as a fact, catching her by the wrist, heat to heat. For a moment the two of them stood with foreheads touching, breath tangled, the island turning slowly under their feet.

“You’re an absurdly attractive noise-cancelling device,” Mai murmured.

“Buy me dinner before you talk that dirty,” Ace whispered back, voice raw as rope.

Maret sank down, laughing and crying at once. Tarmo took off his hat as if in church. The fisherman crossed himself and then pretended he hadn’t.

“What did we just keep out?” the girl asked, not letting go of Maret’s arm.

“A name that should not be comfortable in a mouth,” Ace said, recovering, sheathing one blade and then the other. “A cousin of the most famous sleeper, but not his servant. The Dream-Shriek. It doesn’t wake things up. It wakes waking itself.”

Mai crouched to examine the Stone’s base. The drilled corner still smoked faintly. “We cracked the horn,” she said. “But the song exists. It always will.”

Maret wiped her mouth, leaving a red smear like war paint. “I can keep singing it wrong awhile yet. And when I can’t, maybe the girl can. And when she can’t, maybe the wind will remember how we taught it.”

Ace picked up a thin sheet of fallen mirror and held it skyward. It reflected nothing but the green of the Verdant Flame, and then even that slid off. “Or we’ll come back,” she said.

“Bring dinner then,” Mai said. “You did promise.”

Ace snorted. “You’re impossible.”

“Correct,” Mai said, and kissed the side of her head where rain had threaded her hair into dark ropes.

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They left the island under a morning of gulls and trawler diesel, the water stupidly ordinary. Tarmo pressed a wrapped package into Ace’s hands before they boarded the ferry.

“What’s this?” Ace asked.

“Pebble from the quarry,” he said. “Not polished. Not anything. Just rock. In case you need a reminder that stones can just be stones.”

Ace tucked it into her coat with a small, private nod. “Sometimes we do.”

Mai stood at the rail and watched the island sink into distance. “I kept a copy of the wrong note,” she said. “Put it in a box with the bad matches and the too-bright prayers.”

“We should label that box ‘Ace’s best ideas,’” Ace said.

“You are my favorite wrong note,” Mai replied.

Ace smiled into the wind. “And you are the reason the song doesn’t end the world.”

Above them, the sky was unscarred. No absences. No ears. But deep in the ferry’s steel bones, a ghost of a ghost of a frequency thrummed—the memory of a door deciding to stay a wall. Mai felt it against her palm and, after a second, felt something else: a distant reply, faint as starlight on a wet road.

“Did you hear that?” she asked.

Ace tilted her head. The Verdant Flame blinked once along her pulse. “I heard it not happen,” she said. “Which is my favorite sound.”

They rode on. Far out beyond the shipping lanes, on the fringe of the continental shelf, a cable snapped a blip of static that made a technician in a coastal station look up and frown and then forget why she’d frowned. And still farther out, over a city that was not a city that turned in a sea that was not any sea we admit to, an old crowned head turned once, as if only now realizing the auditorium was empty.

The island sang wrong all afternoon, because that’s how people live. And in the evening, when the wind fell, the gulls came to sleep on the broken mirror and were not harmed by anything but their own foolishness, which is the smallest mercy and the greatest.

Ace and Mai went to dinner in a harbor town that didn’t know their names, and when the restaurant’s door chimed with a note almost, almost too pure, they both laughed and let it pass. —

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