

## *Coil of Destiny*

Excerpt from Book 2 of Coil Trilogy

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### Chapter One

LARA sent a hate-laden glare at the tall, blond man towering above where she lay sprawled on the training field. Unfortunately, the man wasn't the enemy, but her training partner. It was hardly fair since the Pyranni warrior staring down at her was well versed in weapons, fighting, and battle strategy. And then there was her, who was receiving a crash course. It had been a month since the trial in Malkese, the sovereign city of Kureto. She was homesick for Earth, where she didn't have to fight with weapons or learn how to fall to the ground without hurting herself. There, she was a college student. The heaviest item she carried was her backpack.

On this planet, danger was the norm, and the only way to learn to protect herself was to learn the various weapons and how to hold and use them. She wasn't certain how much more her body could handle. She had bruises upon bruises and aches where she knew it should be impossible. Her muscles were so sore Lara could hardly move to block anything during their training session.

She hissed at her sparring partner, showing her teeth to the devil incarnate, when he reached down to help her up. Skye Silverhand, once a Pyran warrior, was now receiving Tal'Ai training with her. She scoffed at the thought of him needing weapons training. What Lara had not known when she agreed to the Tal'Ai training was that gaining control of her magic was only one part of the training she'd receive. Three weeks ago, she'd become a student again. Since then, her longing for home had increased until it was the first and last thing she thought of each, long day.

Tired of sitting on the ground and feeling every one of her aches and pains, she rolled over and pushed herself up with a breathless grunt. She

straightened up only to realize her practice sword was still on the ground where she dropped it.

Lara gave a heartfelt groan. She limped over to the weapon and stared at it like the sword would attack her at any given second. She swore aloud as she dipped down and picked up the current bane of her existence. Why had she ever thought learning how to wield a sword would be neat? The pads of her hands and fingers were raw from the friction of the sword handle from blocking and feinting Skye's strikes and parries.

Consciously, Lara knew gaining knowledge of how to use weapons was important, necessary. Since being transported to this world, she'd been in enough battles and fights to understand she was lucky to still be breathing. Chion, a large, white Paka and her friend, had saved her in many of the battles, acting as her overly protective guardian. She knew she couldn't continue to expect Chion to save her, but this was ridiculous. She hurt. Everywhere.

Standing back up, she turned her head to look at Skye again. As if their sparring was nothing but a warm-up, Skye flowed through his forms. She secretly loved watching him as he moved from one stance to the next, his sword looking as if it was a natural extension of his arm. The man made wielding a sword look like child's play, entering into the realm of artistry.

A paka walked over to her. Though sentient, the Pakas reminded her of giant black panthers the size of tigers. He sat down and curled his tail around his body. *Lara, you cannot forget your footwork. That last block left you open. You didn't shift your left foot back, putting your right foot forward into an awkward stance.*

The paka's disapproving tone made her feel like a recalcitrant child. Lara was trying. But for some reason, she wasn't learning it as fast as the Tal' Ai pair wanted. The Tal' Ai pair trained all Tal' Ais when they became newly bonded. Her situation was unique. They never had to teach pupils older than nine or ten years of age. Both Skye and her, as well as their two bonded Pakas, had received the bond at a much later age.

The Tal'Ai trainers trained all new Tal'Ai pairs how to control their magic and protect themselves. Afterward, each pair was be called into the service of the Kurite kingdom. As they gained the necessary skills to survive, many Tal'Ais were then chosen to learn more advanced skills, like espionage and scouting. The difference between their training and the younger Tal'Ais' training was that Lara and Skye had a third component, history.

Every day involved waking up early for weapons training. After a quick bath and a light repast, they were inundated with learning their magical abilities. After a larger meal at dinnertime, a history lesson was given. The next day they were required to repeat what they learned the previous evening. Her days had never been so intensively focused. Lara had often complained about the study load she had for classes in college. Now, she'd gladly take that load in order to get a single day's reprieve.

"I know, Tryvor. I can't seem to figure it out. When he is coming at me, I can't remember everything you tell me. It gets jumbled in my head, and I panic."

She was losing patience with herself. Lara felt as if she was stumbling in the dark, trying to learn something that was beyond foreign. Next to Skye's fluid movements, Lara felt uncoordinated and ungainly. She was all elbows and feet. She refused to remember the pure torture of the first couple days. She'd been insanelly out of shape.

*It will come. You must give yourself time.* Tryvor sighed. *You must remember you only arrived here three weeks ago. During that time, you have come far since picking up a blade. You must not compare yourself to young Skye.*

She scowled, irritated at the paka's statement. Of course she compared herself to Skye. Who else could she use as a comparison? They were the only ones receiving training from the Tal'Ai teachers. In another three weeks, a new and much younger class of trainees would arrive following a bonding ceremony in Areth. She felt as if she was somehow lacking in this dangerous place, where enemies would kill you without a thought. She needed to learn how to wield a sword sooner rather than later.