

Chronicles of Mardoun

Chapter 14 - Show me yours

“You unleashed a lot of power here Kittara, it will have been felt in some very distant places. I don’t think we’ve seen the last of these ruins.” – Sikush

Princess and Albas were looking up at a large sign above the main building that said ‘Xeodz’ in bright red letters on a pale blue background.

“Should we have a sign on an underworld titty bar ?” Asked Albas.

“Hey,” said Princess hitting his arm, “my girls will be offering a lot more than just titty.”

Albas looked thoughtful.

“I wonder if they have a place called ‘Kittaraz’ on the 7th rift ?”

The building work was ahead of schedule and the roof of the level hundreds of feet above had been repaired and strengthened after the fire at the old Jinxies. The name had been obvious to Princess.

“Without Xeod I’d never have had the money, and it looks cool.” She had said.

The opening night had been fixed for eight days after the upcoming mission, and Albas was staying on Ixir to manage the final stages of the rebuild.

“Get them to make sure the stream is cleaned up.” Said Princess.

“Chlo has a team from Mendera installing a water cleaner.”

The twenty seven reliable fighters that Princess had provided had been taken aboard the Old One, and only Princess was left to go. They exchanged a long kiss and then just looked at each other, neither wanting to mention the love word.

“They can provide you with new armour.” Said Albas.

“No, I’ll use this, it feels lucky.”

As Alyz appeared Princess picked up the armour and put her Yakkie over her shoulder.

“I can give you guys more time ?” Said Alyz.

“No,” said Princess, “I’m ready to go.”

Alyz picked up the bag containing the few things Princess was taking with her and waited for them to say their goodbyes. Albas kissed Princess and took a good firm hold of her left buttock.

“Bring it back in one piece.”

“Don’t try out too many of the new girls.” She replied.

Then Alyz held her arm and moved both of them to the control room on the Old One.

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When Sikush had told her that it was her responsibility to teach Sventa, she was sure he didn’t have this in mind.

“That is just the right spot.”

Kittara had to admit there was something a bit special about sharing a bed with a girl with wings, and the things she could do with those sharp scratchy talons ! She took the angels head in her hands.

“No, that’s wonderful, but Estrid is here.”

As she gently pushed Sventa away she wondered why she found it so hard to keep her clothes on around her. It had been a few days since the dark angel had come to live with her, and she had her own room, a very nice room, the trick was getting her to sleep in it.

“Get dressed. I don’t have any duties today, so we can all go out somewhere.”

As she watched the angel put on her clothes, Kittara had to admit a few days of rest and plenty of food had worked wonders. Her body had filled out and her skin although still a bit leathery,

was much softer than it had been. The old Sveta seemed to look out of her eyes and there was really beauty there.

“Can I have real food today ?”

Sveta hadn't hurt anybody in Mendera yet and hopefully never would, but her moments of moral ambiguity could be a bit worrying. The worst was her diet.

“Not during the day Sveta, but tonight I'll take you hunting.”

By hunting Kittara meant hunting for raiders on outer world planets. On her first night in Mendera Sveta had openly requested live people as food, and she seemed surprised the Empire didn't have prisoners in dungeons for her to devour.

“If I don't eat, I'll die.” Had been her straight forward comment.

Luckily Chlo can duplicate just about anything and didn't take much persuading to provide the body of a dead raider.

“I think this should be our secret.”

Kittara had said as she watched the dark angel expertly butcher and consume vast chunks of bloody flesh. They had already been on one hunting trip and Sveta had ruthlessly stalked and killed two heavily armed raiders, before eating their body parts. The second area of dilemma was her sexual appetite mixed with a huge amount of curiosity. Kittara still didn't quite understand how Genova managed to mate, but it seemed to involve a lot of effort, for very little bodily contact and pleasure. Sveta was insatiable and seemed to exude an irresistible sensuality. The result was that most visitors to the house tended to end up naked and in bed with her quite quickly after arriving. Estrid seemed protected from her attentions not just because of her age, but also because Sveta sensed something within the girl that discomfited her.

“How do I look ?”

Kittara looked Sveta over and after a lot of experimenting with Chlo, her clothes were just right. There was no way of covering the wings, so Chlo had designed a long flowing robe that would hide her talons if required, but still showed her feminine curves.

“You look gorgeous.” Said Kittara, and she meant it.

As they went out into the garden Estrid was eating bright pink junk food and trying to feed some of it to an unamused Emperor Xeod.

“Don't cry to me if he bites you.” Said Kittara.

It was another hot sunny day in Mendera City, and as Estrid called up the news channel it said a bad sandstorm was approaching from the east.

“The force walls will hold it,” said Kittara, “so where shall we go today ?”

“Can we go anywhere ?” Asked Estrid.

“Yes, if you stop teasing my cat and give him proper food.”

Sveta vanished and reappeared further down the garden, where she snarled at the group of Genova until they went away. The dark angel although now fully corporeal had kept the ability to move through the grey between realities and as Sikush had guessed it made it impossible to keep her in the house.

“Sveta leave them alone.” Said Estrid.

The dark angel reappeared next to them and picked up a drink. Despite the talons, she was able to pick up most things and was getting more adept at using everyday objects.

“Why do you disturb the multiverse Kittara ?” Asked Sveta

Kittara sipped a fruit juice and thought why not tell them ? It had been so long since she'd talked about it to anyone other than Sikush.

“It seems there is a prophecy about me, or rather Mardoun that means one day I'll have a massive effect on the multiverse.”

Sventa stared at her for some time, and made a clucking sound.

"There is one large dominant soul within you. How did you find out who it belonged to?"

"Come on, I can show you where it happened and show you more of the City."

Kittara held onto Estrid and moved them to the contest ring next to the Western Sentinel. A few seconds later and Sventa appeared next to them. The dark angel had kept her power to unerringly find Kittara anywhere she went. Kittara walked towards a fifty foot high statue of a female warrior brandishing a sword that looked out over the contest ring.

"This is the oldest surviving statue in the multiverse and it's of Mardoun."

They all looked up at the colossus towering over them.

"The body is thicker," said Estrid, "but the eyes and the expression are yours."

"Yes, the face is very you." Agreed Sventa

There was no name plaque on the statue and the figure had a muscular frame that was a long way from Kittara, but the eyes and the expression were definitely hers.

"This is where Sikush holds the remembrance days, the six days or so at the end of summer when the tournaments finish."

"What happens then?" Asked Estrid.

There were several rows of seats behind the ring and Kittara took them over to them and sat down.

"It is the one time of the year when the Guard allow ourselves to grieve for fallen comrades. Even Sikush spends the whole six days in full mourning for the dead. Sikush will choose a few of the fallen and follow their souls to where they are now."

"And one year he followed the soul of Mardoun?" Asked Sventa

"There had been many requests over the years, but for some reason he always refused. Then he suddenly agreed and showed the fragments of her soul going to various beings in the Multiverse, but the majority of it went to me. That is quite rare, most of the time a soul is split into thousands of tiny parts."

"Do you remember much of her life?" Asked Estrid.

"Some and I have dreams of her battles in the early days of The Temple, but most of it comes to me in snatches when I least expect it. It's like seeing extra bits of my life out of the corner of my eye, but when I turn to look they're gone."

Estrid was smiling at her.

"Early days of The Temple indeed. We were told nursery rhymes about monsters kept locked away deep inside The Temple. Does anyone still believe those old stories?"

Kittara and Sventa exchanged a smile.

"No of course not, who would believe nonsense like that?" She said.

"How about you Sventa," asked Estrid, "do you remember everything from before your were changed?"

Sventa gave her wings a few flaps, which startled a few passing pilgrims.

"Yes everything."

"Are you happy now?" Asked Kittara.

"Oh yes, I can touch and eat, and fully enjoy all my senses. Thank you Kittara, I'm very pleased with how the ritual worked out."

Kittara realised that immortality and being one of a kind would be an issue for Sventa as time went on, but she wasn't going to mention that now. For some reason she put her hand on the back of Estrid's head and asked.

"Estrid, do you know how you see things others don't?"

The effect was sudden and stunning. The ring and the statue of Mardoun faded and Kittara was given the vision of a huge empty space, and at its centre was a tiny sparkling dot.

"Kittara are you ok?"

She ignored Estrid and kept looking as the space grew and grew until she felt it must consume the entire Multiverse. The tiny dot of power grew too, until Kittara could just make out that it looked like a mini tornado of bright orange power.

"Kittara you're worrying us."

Kittara kept watching as the space expanded further. It didn't feel dark or light, just endless and capable of destroying everything. Then Kittara heard the Sentinel call twice. Not a full scream, but just a call for attention.

"Chinnura."

She heard the word in her head and realised Sikush had looked into her mind. As she came out of the vision she noticed Estrid and Sventa were both looking worried and several pilgrims were staring at the Sentinel Temple.

"You need to be honest with her." Said Sikush and then he was gone.

"What did you see?" Asked a very anxious looking Estrid.

A Chinnura thought Kittara, of course it made perfect sense, though it presented more problems than it answered. She gave them both a reassuring smile.

"Have you heard of Chinnura Estrid?"

Estrid shook her head, but Sventa started to look very thoughtful.

"The multiverse sometimes does strange things and even Sikush doesn't know why. Very rarely a soul is given the smallest trace of something immensely powerful."

"Is this another cleric's tall story?" Asked Estrid.

Kittara had to smile. Luri was herself a Chinnura and wouldn't appreciate being called a cleric's tall tale.

"No Estrid, this isn't one of those stories. There are dark fragments of souls and light, but unusually in you the particle is immensely powerful but completely neutral. That is probably why Xeod wanted you killed, you must have scared him."

"Do I scare you?" The girl asked.

Kittara took her hand.

"Perhaps a little, because you have immense power locked in you and no one knows what you might do with it."

Sventa had started to bob up and down on her wings, which usually meant she was getting bored.

"Ok," said Kittara, "lets go to the Council Club and get some really huge and unhealthy treats."

"Yay." Shouted Estrid.

As Kittara watched her dance about with Sventa she found it hard to believe that within her was a power that had caused the Sentinel to shudder.

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Luri looked at her old friend and really didn't want to drag him out of his comfortable home.

"Are you ready Ojetin? We should be going."

He was sat in his favourite chair and next to him was a large bag of last minute essentials. He'd already insisted on taking two huge trunks full of clothing which had been taken on board the Old One a few days earlier.

"I definitely have my own private quarters?"

"Yes, they're really nice. I finished off the rooms myself."

She'd known him long enough to know he wasn't being awkward, he was just telling them he had seen a few too many summers to go on this kind of mission.

"I let Chlo know what to do with my home and belongings if I don't come back. There are a few items for Kittara and Sikush, but most of it will be yours. Don't sell the house. Promise me you'll live here, even if it's only a few days a month?"

If there was some way to avoid taking him she would have, but they really did need him.

"Piaff stop it. You'll be home here in a few days and everything will carry on as it always does."

"Promise me, or you'll need the Guard to get me on board."

Luri pulled a chair next to him and sat down. His mood was beginning to affect her too, and she hoped his premonition of his own demise was wrong.

"If it's what you want, I promise that when I inherit this house that I'll live here all the time."

"Thank you. I seem to have forgotten my stick, it's over there."

As she went to get his stick she noticed him put an envelope on the side table, and after picking up his bag she noticed the envelope was addressed to her.

"Just in case." He said.

"Hold on to me."

Luri then transferred their reality to his quarters on the Old One.

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Alyz had been amazed at the change in Qunan Arje. Since his whole team had arrived on the Old One and Sikush had made a few visits, the rebel leader seemed to have found a hidden strength, or perhaps he now had a cause?

"No matter what Baby, you have to stay close to the Raptor. You're the only one with plenty of hours flying those kinds of craft."

Alyz was happy to stand and quietly listen as Qunan went through another training session with his team, after all it was his mission. Qunan had started calling the six foot six augmented female Baby many years ago and the name had stuck.

"I'll dig in and set my Yakkie on max." Said Baby.

No one would ever have called Baby pretty, but even Alyz would get a few bruises from her in a fight. There were four augmented warriors in the rebel force, and they formed the back bone of the attack. All of them were tall and muscular and skilled in just about all weapons and battle machinery.

"Hogni will lead the first group, who will enter the mine with me." Said Arje.

Hogni was one of the augmented males, and he nodded at Arje. Alyz had never heard Hogni say much, but knew he'd once killed an entire squad of mercs single handed. Salomé had told Alyz that the five soldiers who had said they wanted to carry on with Arje after the mission were the four augmented warriors and her. Alyz wasn't surprised the augments wanted to carry on with a war somewhere, it was all they were really suited for. Huge, aggressive and with a life span often shortened by the augmentation process, they rarely fitted into civilian life.

"Oddr will lead the second team, who will take control of the small settlement of miners. I think they call the place Boomers."

Oddr the second male nodded at Arje. Boomers! thought Alyz. Every group of miners, mercs, or engineers always called any settlement they started Boom Town, which eventually became just plain Boomers. It could be one shack made from packing cases, with a hole outside as a latrine, but it was always Boomers.

"Then we may have a change of plan. Nauma was going to be on the 3rd team with Salomé, but she may now be needed to strengthen the recovery team?"

Nauma was 2nd female augment and it was known she didn't relish being what she called a nursemaid to the group brought on board by Princess.

"We'll be ok," said Princess, "Nauma can stay with Salomé."

Qunan had a brief quiet word with Princess before carrying on.

"So team 3 will be the rapid reaction force with Salomé and Nauma as planned. Any problems during the mission report to Salomé who will be giving all orders once the mission commences." Alyz knew that Princess had not wanted Arje ordering her people to their deaths, as his reputation was well known. Giving Salomé command once the mission started had improved morale not just for the team from Ixir, but for the whole group.

"Now I think Alyz has a few words?"

Alyz walked from where she was to the front of the group and noticed the devotion on their faces as they looked at Qunan. Whatever the leader had, it was potent and reputation for bungled missions or not they needed his charm and charisma.

"You all know the plan." Began Alyz. "You could probably all recite it in your sleep. The important thing is to take control of the ruins deep in the mine and hold them. Once our cleric has been to look at them, everyone returns to the Old One and we leave."

She looked around and was pleased that no one asked her what was so important down there, or what their chances were or any of the other questions weekend warriors always asked.

"You need to really make sure the settlement is under your control. The last thing you need is an angry gang of miners armed with blasting lasers coming up behind you."

"Is there a chance they might call the Guard for help?" Asked Salomé.

Alyz looked over the room and decided they could take a little honesty.

"That would be the ideal outcome. We could block comms from the planet, restrict access and go through the ruins at our leisure. The problem is New Keo are very unlikely to risk the loss of face they'd suffer. If you took out one their Enforcer Class craft they might, just might call for help."

Qunan walked back to the front of the room.

"Thank you Alyz. Now there will be more training with your teams in the main lock."

As the soldiers wandered off in groups, Alyz headed for the corridor that led to the control room and Salomé walked with her.

"There are rumours about who is going to be with the recovery team. Nauma says she heard you're sending a demon with the cleric."

Alyz liked Salomé, but knew that deep down she was just a girl from the colonies. Tell her a dark angel and a Chinnura were coming aboard and even at this late stage she might run.

"There will be various experts helping the cleric, but they're all loyal to the Empire and no threat to your team."

They came to where Salomé needed to turn off to get to the main bay.

"I'll be in charge on the ground. Be honest with me, what is the worst scenario?"

"It all depends on where New Keo have their fleet when they get the alarm. According to Chlo the worst scenario is two Enforcer class craft arriving fairly quickly. If that happens you could lose a lot of people."

"How many?"

"Chlo estimated 70% of your forces."

Salomé turned and walked towards the main bay, while Alyz entered the control room.

"So Alyz, how are they hanging?" Said the Old One.

"Not too badly. I see Chlo has been enhancing your vocabulary?"

"Yes, she hooked me up to Ixir Channel 77."

Alyz noticed Ojetin was sitting at the back of the room and looking at a probe of NKG0056. She wasn't that keen on him, but realised he had his uses.

"All quiet down there?" She asked him.

"It would seem so. No sudden arrival of troops, no defences being constructed. It looks like we still have the element of surprise."

Alyz asked Chlo to appear as the next few moments were crucial to the mission.

"So Old One, everyone is on board apart from Kittara and her party and they will arrive tomorrow. Are you happy to continue?" Asked Alyz.

There was a brief pause.

"Yes, I am disconnecting the Needle ships from the defence grid."

Chlo sat at the control desk and Alyz watched as she aided the Old One in the series of operations that would send him towards the mining planet.

"Needle ships at safe distance." Said Chlo

On the main screen Chlo overlaid the trajectory around the local sun to NKG0056, and there was a gentle hum as the Old One turned on his cloaking fields.

"In 5." Said Chlo

The craft began to vibrate as the inertial dampers went offline.

"4."

"All those without a ticket please disembark." Said the Old One.

"3."

There was a sharp whine as the reality shift kicked in.

"2."

"1."

The billions of tons of the Old One instantly shifted to the correct trajectory to bring it to the mining colony in just over a day. The inertial dampers came back online and the craft invisible behind its cloaking device, headed towards NKG0056.

"Easy." Said the Old One.

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There were no assassins in the Guard and The Chaln  never ordered any assassinations. As Hol picked up her pace a bit she recalled Sikush inviting her to volunteer for the assignment, and her acceptance.

"Yes, I'll be more than happy to." She'd said.

She once again looked like a resident of Norraine on Ixir and this time she was a typical office worker on her way home, complete with business suit and high heels. It was the heels that were causing her to fall behind schedule.

"How does anyone walk in these things?" She had asked Chlo.

The backs of her legs ached and every set of stairs was an assault course.

"A bit quicker, his lift is on the way down." Said Chlo.

Hol quickened her pace and hoped she didn't fall flat on her face. She looked around and there were dozens of people in similar office uniforms heading home at the end of the day. She turned a corner and saw the executive transport standing about twenty feet from the door he would come out of.

"Two guards, both good and a driver, all armed." Chlo had told her.

No one had made an attempt on his life in years and the guards had lost their edge. They had the doors of the transport open and one was watching the door, but neither of them was stood outside the vehicle.

"He's just opening the door." Said Chlo

As Hol got a few feet from the door it burst opened and Carl Laundry walked through, almost bumping into her. She looked startled and he gave her his most charming smile. Hol walked straight at him and head butted him, while grabbing him around the waist with her left hand. As he started to topple she brought out a blaster from under her jacket and jammed it hard under his ribs.

"It has to look like a local hit by another crime family, so make it bloody." Sikush had told her.
"Make it huge." With the change in leadership on Ixir, Carl Laundry had gone from being an asset to the Empire, to being a liability.

"For the Cole family." Whispered Hol in Carl's ear.

The blaster was at so close a range that the plasma turned his heart and much of his lungs into a mush that then took out a section of his spine before exiting out of his back as a cloud of red vapour. She went down with his body and spun round on her knees to face the transport. One guard was still reaching into his jacket for his blaster, but the other was starting to aim at her.
"Make it bloody." Sikush had said.

The head of the guard aiming at her turned into a cloud of blood and bone as she fired her blaster. Then as the second guard stood to face her she vaporised his chest. Hol stood and walked towards the driver who was getting out of the vehicle with his hand raised.

"Sorry." Hol said.

She had nothing against him, but a local assassin would never leave any of them alive. The driver spun around and fell to the floor as the left side of his head vanished in a cloud of super heated plasma.

"Twenty yards to the stairs, no calls to the police yet." Chlo told her.

Hol turned back the way she originally heading and put the blaster back in its holster. She started putting out her usual 'I'm nothing to worry about' thought control and after a few paces she was once again just another office worker heading for home. When she reached the top of the under pass steps Chlo was just picking up the first police alert.

"No hurry, they won't get here for another eight minutes."

Hol went down the first set of steps and a couple were kissing passionately. She clattered as much as she could on her heels until they disentangled and walked off. The next set of steps were empty, so she shimmered and was wearing just a very skimpy bikini.

"So good to get out of those fucking shoes." She told Chlo.

She then moved her reality to a pool side party at the Council Club and was offered a drink by a passing waiter. She saw Sikush talking to Jen and looking her way.

"Thank you." He said on their private channel.

Hol took a mouthful of her drink and went to look for the Merc officer who had been quite attentive at the last Council club night.