

Chronicles of Mardoun

Chapter 13 - City of the Lost God

“The City of the Lost God has been deserted for millennia. No one goes there since the war, it’s considered a place of death and desolation.” – Cleric Ojetin

Kittara woke from a brief two hours of dreamless sleep and laid thinking about the day ahead. She had promised herself at least an hour sitting in front of The Flame and nothing was getting in the way of that. She had been with Sikush the night before and had enjoyed six unhurried hours of intimacy, but several weeks had passed since they returned from Ixir and she had a few projects to finish before the mission to NKG0056.

“You’re going rogue.” Chlo had said to her, often.

Sikush knew what she was going to attempt and where she was going, but all he had said so far was.

“It may not turn out as you hope.”

She had returned naked from his bed and as she pulled back the sheets a wonderful smell of sex drifted up from her lower body. It was strangely comforting and evocative, and if time had allowed she might have enjoyed some personal time. She gave Emperor Xeod a quick stroke, as he lay on the chair beside her bed and headed for the shower.

“Sorry Chlo, no playtime today.”

Not that her and Chlo were getting on too well anyway. Chlo still gave her full access to all the resources of the Empire, but made no secret of her disapproval of what Kittara intended to do.

“I’ll keep it secret,” Chlo had said, “but you can’t go there alone.”

As she showered Kittara made an observation to herself.

‘The problem is, as always, the clerics.’

She realised this was a drastic over generalisation, and she quite liked some of the clerics, and she had explored a huge number of strange places with Ojetin, but the present state of unease in Mendera was definitely the fault of the clerics.

“Oh, ok then, we should never fall out.”

Chlo had appeared naked in front of her as herself, which was quite rare. Kittara moved towards her and enjoyed a few minutes of unexpected oral sex.

“I kept your secret, but he knows, he always knows what you’re doing.”

“That’s ok Chlo, if he wanted to, he could stop me. Now I must get going.”

She slightly regretted sending Chlo away, but she needed her time at The Flame, she ached for it, almost like time with a lover. She dried herself and headed for her weapon store while still naked. In the early days of having Estrid with her she rarely walked around her home naked, but she now felt more relaxed about the girl’s presence.

“Ahhh I thought so.”

She picked up the eternal killer and there was no mistaking the extra throb of power it now had since killing the high level demon on Ixir. She had started to carry the weapon everywhere, which caused a few strange looks from the other members of the Guard. Yes, she had to admit that carrying a weapon capable of killing the Emperor, when you’re one of his guards might seem a bit strange.

“I gave it to you to use, so use it, wear it all the time if you want.” He had said when she asked him about it.

She threw the sword belt over her naked shoulder and carried on walking towards her small store of objects and artefacts. She picked up a small and expensive looking satchel, much like

the ones used by clerics to carry their books and papers around in. She returned to her room and threw both sword and satchel onto the bed. Yes, it was all the fault of the damned clerics, she thought while she shimmered into a clean uniform.

"Chlo, please wake Estrid."

Kittara strapped the sword tightly to her back and threw the satchel over her shoulder and descended the stairs to the main living area. In the garden Sventa was sat waiting for her.

"Good morning Kittara, Chlo has put out your usual breakfast."

As Kittara sat down she noticed more and more Genova seemed to be arriving all the time and many were now going through the force wall and onto the path behind her house. Even she could see the lines of disturbance in the multiverse that were attracting them. If the Sentinels weren't screaming, they must certainly be giving her house a doubtful look.

"Good morning Sventa, and before you ask, it will be tomorrow."

Kittara noticed it wasn't just the pilgrims who stopped to stare at the ever growing group of angels who drifted in and out of her garden, now several young clerics were standing and pointing.

"I'm sorry if I've caused you problems." Said Sventa.

"It's not you it's the fucking clerics ! All the things that happened on Ixir that are supposed to be impossible, like demons travelling to their own mini reality on Ixir, taking control of Kallin in some way, creating those watchdog creatures, and all the rest." Kittara realised she was ranting.

"Sorry Sventa, it really isn't your fault. The clerics have themselves and most of Mendera worked up to a near panic with stories of super demons who can work miracles."

"But that isn't why you're so upset is it ?" Sventa asked.

"No, it's not, but I quite like moaning about clerics."

Kittara was very good at keeping things separate, in their own compartments in her head. It wasn't just a handy knack, when you dealt with so much death and destruction it was a necessity. So the clerics were in a flap ! When she asked Sikush he simply said that no mention had ever been made by him that these things were impossible. Kittara had asked Chlo to search all the official writings of The Chaln e going back to the start of the first age of the Temple, and there was no case of him ever claiming only the eternal or the Empire could do these things. The clerics had put it in their ridiculous books, so to them it must be true. Kittara was quite relaxed about it, and knew that once Sikush worked out who was behind these things, she would be sent to do what she was superb at... killing it.

"Do you want to tell me about it ?"

"Not yet, perhaps after tomorrow."

Sventa nodded and faded away, as Estrid came into the garden holding Emp.

"Oh, the Angel has gone, did I do that ?" She asked.

"No, she still finds it hard to cling to this reality for long."

As she watched Estrid eat the junk food which was by now her normal breakfast, Kittara pondered on the conversation with Sikush the previous night.

"The clerics are fools, but there is one thing we can't ignore." He said.

The empathy between them worked both ways and she knew what he meant.

"Estrid ?"

"Yes Estrid. They, whoever they are want her dead. Then she can see assassins in cloaked armour that even you can't see. Then there is the whole business of being able to turn off whatever was hiding the entrance to the demon lair on Ixir. There is more than a slight whiff of darkness about her."

"You could say that about me ?"

“Yes, but I encouraged your darkness and you’ve had countless millennia to learn to control it. Estrid may be something different. She may turn out to be far more dark and powerful than we think. If that is the case, we can’t just release her back into the Empire.”

Kittara could feel a tightening in her throat, but kept it under control.

“Are you saying we, no that I may need to kill her ?”

“I can see several alternatives to handling the situation, but one of them may be her destruction.”

Kittara was a battle hardened warrior and though it hurt, her next words were.

“If it has to be done, then I must be the one to do it.”

Sikush had agreed.

“Are you really going to get Emp a girl friend ?” Asked Estrid.

“Shush, you’ll get me in trouble.”

They both laughed and played with the cat until Kittara left to go to the Temple.

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Princess inspected the progress of the workmen and was very pleased. All the so called low life characters below level 15 had once had really jobs and real careers and they were now getting a chance to use those old talents.

“You’ll get Jinxies open again in no time.” Said Albas.

“Yes, but I can’t call it Jinxies, and I still haven’t come up with a name.”

The Chalne had realised that Princess was a fish out of water on Mendera, so he had invited her for a private meeting in his office in the barracks of the Guard.

“Bring Albas if you want, you have some big decision to make, and Chlo will need your real name and date of birth ?” Sikush had said.

Princess had been having a hard time with Albas since they had arrived on Mendera and he’d stopped projecting the image of a native of Ixir. Although she knew he was the same person, it felt like she was talking to a stranger, but she took him to the meeting.

“You’ll always be Princess to us, but to make you a citizen of Mendera Chlo needs your genuine name and details ?”

Princess was shocked and thrilled. A citizen ? That meant more money than she had ever had in her life and more importantly a home when she wanted it.

“It’s Juliet, Juliet Garin. I was born 27 Ixir years ago on level 18, below Norraine. Or at least that’s what I was told.”

Princess started to sob and Sikush held her hand.

“None of that matters now,” he said, “you have done the Empire a great service and Chlo will issue a new birth certificate stating that Juliet Garin, 27 years of age, of Ixir will from this day be a citizen of Mendera, with all the rights and privileges that entails.”

“You’re fixed up for life girl, cheer up.” Said Albas.

“More importantly,” continued Sikush, “you’ll now have the protection of the Empire when you go back to Ixir.”

Albas looked at him questioningly, but Princess just smiled.

“Yes you could build a castle on top of a mountain on Mendera and live a life of luxury, but I think we both know you’ll get bored in days. Chlo knows what your personal balance is today in Imperial credits, give Princess the balance Chlo ?”

“Two million, forty two thousand and twelve.”

Princess looked surprised.

“How did I get a fortune like that, and more importantly, can I really spend it ?”

“Yes you can. As a citizen of Mendera you get a monthly allowance to cover the essentials. Once the allowance was quite modest, but the Empire has done quite well over the years and the

citizen's allowance is now enough so that you can live very well. The two million is as a thank you from the Empire, Me really to show appreciation for your help."

"And I really can spend it, on Ixir if I wanted?"

"Yes, you could go back to Ixir and live in the same neighbourhood as Carl Laudry and still be under the protection of the Empire. Ixir is a very different place with Maxl Leonide as president and the Guard can now operate openly."

"Then I want to go back home." Said Princess.

"To do what? Settle a few old scores, buy a few new trucks and start gun running again? As I said things are different. You could rebuild Jinxies and make it the best bar on Ixir. The Empire would put up the money and you'd provide local expertise and run the place. Are you interested?"

"Can you give me some time alone with Sikush?" Princess said to Albas.

"Ok, Chlo will know where I am when you've finished."

Once he'd gone Princess pulled her chair closer to Sikush.

"And what do you get out of this? Getting Jinxies rebuilt won't be cheap, and I don't see you really wanting to be in the escort business."

"The Empire can afford it. Everyone will know who put up the money, so you won't get hassled. What do I get? A local team who will owe the Empire a few small favours and your services on the upcoming mission."

Princess asked Chlo for a drink and settled back in her chair.

"I'd go on the mission for free, I've got quite attached to Kittara and Estrid. Rebuilding Jinxies will cost a good quarter of a million, but I want the place to be mine, ok?"

"Chlo estimated half a million for Jinxies if it's built well, and the Empire will throw in the best security system we can build. You can have 60/40 ownership in your favour."

Princess agreed and started to get up to leave.

"One other thing Princess, do you have any local fighters you could recommend, as a recovery team for the mission?"

"Hundreds, thousands if you need them, all first class fighters."

Sikush looked at her and held her gaze.

"How many of those would you tell the location of your money box?"

She held his gaze, but she turned pale.

"Twenty, perhaps twenty five."

"Good, have them ready, and try to keep in with the local police, they need to eat too."

That had all been some time ago and now the living accommodation of Jinxies was complete and most of the old girls had agreed to come back.

"No heavy stuff this time," Princess told them, "you only do what the punters want if you're comfortable doing it."

Princess didn't think Albas would stay with her long, his reputation and that of the other Guard didn't indicate they had a long future together, but as they went to examine how the new long bar was progressing she was happy. With the new Jinxies, she could see a future for herself on Ixir and if that went wrong? Well there was always that castle in the mountains of Mendera.

Kittara arrived in the Temple of the Flame and looked into the main temple area, and that was a mistake. She was seen by one of the younger clerics who ran off to get others. She calmed herself and headed down the corridor to where the true flame burned, and would burn for eternity.

"Would, er would you like us to leave?"

Two clerics were sat quietly reading as she entered the flame room.

“No.”

She sat herself down in her usual position, crossed legged in front of the flame. The sword she slid out of its scabbard and placed to her right, while the satchel she placed to her left. She felt at home and tried to regain her focus, but the muttering outside in the hall didn't help. A handful of young clerics entered the chamber and sat down, looking at her and muttering.

“You are welcome here, but please be silent.”

Why did they seek her out? Sikush said she was their spiritual security blanket and laughed about it. Kittara reached out for that dark inner place within her and started to float above the stone, while a grey mist drifted around her. She allowed herself an hour to just float in the world between dreams and reality, before settling herself back on the stone surface. When she looked up the room was full of concerned faces. There must have been over a hundred clerics crammed into every space they could get into, but none had dared come closer than a good six feet from her.

“How many of you have ever been in here before?” Kittara hadn't meant to preach at them, but once started her flow was hard to stop.

“This!” She said thumping the stone with her hand. “Is why we are here. It is the only thing that really matters. It is why you, and your families have been in this temple for so very, very long.”

She looked slowly around the face and of course knew them all, they were in a very real way her family. Sikush had said to her after the celebrations for her initiation were over.

“You're family now Kittara.”

Kittara smiled at the faces around her.

“I will show you something.”

She reached for the satchel and removed two pieces of what looked like silver metal, but to Chlo they didn't even exist. Some artefacts from the forbidden time Chlo could see, but not analyse. These were different, they came from beyond the 7th rift and although Kittara could pick them up and show them to the room, Chlo saw nothing.

“These two tablets were given to me by a high level demon called Neosto, during the celebrations for my initiation into the Guard. That was so long ago that whole star systems have come and gone since then.”

She had them now, the anxious faces were looking at her in wonder. The immortal warrior who barely said two words to them was telling them stories from times so far back, that to them they were a time of legends.

“Three sides of these plates detail dark rituals, and I have performed most of them, but the first page isn't like that.”

Kittara remembered how long it had taken her to even gain enough knowledge of the dead demon tongue, so that she could even read the tiny etchings on the tablets.

“I spent almost an entire age of the temple trying to learn the language these etchings are written in. Luri knew some of it, but I had to travel to the 4th rift and spend years with the creatures there. Creatures that are neither dark nor light, and spend there whole lives dwelling in the rifts between realities. In the end I became one of the few people in the multiverse who really understands what is written here.”

Once again she held up the metal tablets and showed them to the room.

“I don't know who wrote these, but he was a very powerful dark magician, and he knew a switch was about to wipe his world out of existence. Did he rant and rave at fate? No he didn't. The entire first page of this tablet is a love letter. Not to woman, but to his world. This powerful dark creature put a huge amount of his power and resources into casting these tablets into the grey between worlds, not to boasts of his conquests, but to tell how much he loved the beauty of his world. The language is strange to us, but I'll read you the final lines as best I can.”

Kittara was suddenly aware that Chlo was putting her out to the news feed, but it was too late to turn back now.

"I apologise for using a quarter of this script to tell you of my world, but without its wonders and beauty I would not be who I am and would not care if the knowledge recorded here was passed on. If this slight memory of my times lives on, then we live on."

Kittara put the tablets down and carried on.

"Our world isn't threatened, we have no enemy at the door, no apocalypse about to destroy our world. We need to show a small amount of the strength shown by one we would call our enemy. We, You need to be strong and calm."

By now the room was packed and they all gave her thunderous applause and showed no signs of leaving.

"Now, I have things to do."

Kittara looked at the last page of the tablet and the last ritual, which she had studied hundreds of times, but had never needed to use. She felt for her private link with Sikush and sent him an image of the ritual and simply asked.

"Will it work?"

Then he was there, sitting on the opposite side of the flame from her and looking around at the crowd.

"I didn't know you had such a fan club?"

"It's been one those days."

All the clerics saw was the two of them sat smiling at each other, as all the conversation was on their private channel. News of The Chalné and Kittara being in the flame room was spreading and even more clerics tried to cram into the room.

"Can I see the tablets?"

Kittara handed them to him.

"I recognise the style and his rituals always work. That is a miracle really when you consider they were written for a reality that was over five hundred switched ago."

"So it will work?"

Sikush settled back crossed legs and looked into the flame.

"Yes, it will work, but like the dark mist that surrounds you, there will be effects you don't expect."

Kittara took back the tablets and put them in the satchel.

"I'll take Sventa to the City of the Lost God tomorrow."

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Luri hated the lands beyond the 4th rift, it was all dusty scrub and creatures that didn't fit in anywhere else. Like the Dredger Demon she was looking for now. Kittara had given her a rough location, but Farhj was a nomad and could have set up camp anywhere in a five hundred square mile area.

"I have a lock on his DNA, about a mile away." Said Chlo

Chlo had called her a rogue a few times, but was still helping. Luri wasn't too happy about where she was going, but Kittara was a friend, she was family. If she said this was essential, then Luri would go through with the mission.

"Just below you."

Luri had been criss-crossing the wastes at a height of about three hundred feet, and now brought herself down at the entrance to a large and well camouflaged tent.

"Farhj is doing well for himself Chlo."

"He peddles poisons, has quite a clientele."

Luri entered the tent and found a low level demon browsing the stock on display. There was a general truce on the 4th rift, but the eight legged creature gave Luri a wide berth and left the tent.

"That's it Luri, lose me what little business I have."

The creature talking was the colour of wet mud, and his skin looked like it needed a good iron. He had the usual four arms and two legs of a higher level demon, but his face was less feline and more like that of an insect. Standing about eight feet tall, and with a long barbed tail, he didn't look like a creature to pick a fight with.

"I'm here to buy Farhj, mind if I look around."

"No, not all, always pleased to receive Imperial credits."

Luri went walked among the various tables covered in strange jars and bowls, most of which were very familiar to her. She remembered the list Kittara had given her, and the instruction that the final item had to be fresh, as fresh as possible.

"Ahh Janga weed, is it local ?" Asked Luri with a frown.

"Would I try to pass off local crap to a warrior like you ? It's from Govia."

Luri picked up the jar of Janga weed, and carried on collecting the items on Kittara's list. Then she placed them in front of the Dredger Demon to get a price.

"Some good items here for a dark ritual." Noted the demon.

"Hmm let me see, shall we say seventy credits ?"

Farhj started putting the items in a sack, and was prepared for the ritual haggle, with him finally agreeing to accept fifty credits.

"There is one more item, but I believe it to be quite rare."

To Farhj rare meant expensive and expensive was his favourite price and his tail started to wag gently.

"You name it, Farhj can obtain it, at a price of course."

"I need the heart of a higher level type demon, very fresh, a Dredger heart would do."

The demon rattled his tail and made the sucking sound all traders seem to make when they can see a very good deal coming their way.

"Very rare Luri, but I'm sure I can find what you need. The price would be high, perhaps a thousand credits. I can obtain one for you in about nine days."

Luri removed the stasis box that was on a strap over her shoulder and took the lid off and placed it on the table.

"I'm sorry Farhj, but I need the heart today."

The demon suddenly understood her meaning and spat a cloud of poisonous phlegm at her. Luri hated Dredger demons, but gave him credit for not just running away.

"Sorry old friend, but this has to be fresh."

Luri grabbed the demon and spun him around, while ignoring the constant lashing of his tail. She grabbed him around the neck and plunged her short sword into the flesh of his chest and cut around the area where his heart should be.

"Keep still, I need this in one piece."

Farhj didn't seem to appreciate her need and still struggled and screamed as she removed a large chunk of his chest and reached in for his heart. She pushed the writhing creature to the ground and expertly cut the blood vessels to his heart and removed her still beating prize from his chest.

"Well Chlo, she said fresh, and this is fresh."

Luri trimmed the bits of flesh hanging from the heart and then put it inside the stasis box and turned it on. The body of Farhj was still twitching as she put seventy Imperial credits on the table and left.

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Sikush had left the Temple of the Flame and come straight to the empty building on level 40 of Ixir. With Maxl as president the Guard could move about freely and he wanted to see the building for himself.

“Any signs of the creatures Jen ?”

“No. There are still huge reality disturbances here, but the creatures, the demon lair, they’ve all gone.”

There were six very anxious members of the guard with him as he looked over the empty building and when he went down the stairs to the eighth floor down the number grew to ten.

“No residual trace of a link to the 7th rift Chlo ?”

Chlo appeared next to him as they walked down the stairs into what was now an empty storage area.

“Where Kittara said the demon lair was is now this empty store. I can’t use temporal probes because of the reality distortion, but there are no signs of a link to the 7th rift.”

Sikush motioned to Jen to give him a sack she was carrying, which was the same one Kittara had found in the demon lair. Sikush removed a small gold device from it and ran it over the wall, while muttering.

“Very strange, they seem to be learning, yes very strange.”

He turned to Jen.

“Use a disruption device to bring the whole building down, make sure it can never be used again.”

Sikush handed the sack back to Jen and then he and his guard moved their reality back to Mendera.

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Hol wasn’t happy with what she had to do, but Kittara had told her it was important. She had been complaining for a long time about being given squeaky clean newbie missions. Well there was nothing squeaky clean about hiding out in a graveyard for the past fourteen hours.

“Still no sign of what we need Chlo ?”

Chlo had called all of them rogues a few times, but she was still giving all the conspirators full cooperation.

“The specification is quite strict, and the freshness requirement doesn’t help.”

Hol held onto the side of a mausoleum as another after shock shook the area. Chlo had taken her to a remote world where the people suited the required physiognomy, and had religious practises that matched the requirements.

“No embalming, burial on the same day, virginity valued.” Chlo had told her.

The recent massive earthquake and after shocks was helping too, as there seemed to be quite a lot of young bodies being buried. The problem was that Kittara didn’t just want a virgin.

“Not a virgin because they’re too young to be tempted. We’re talking fully sexually mature, but still completely virginal. In short I need extremely fuckable, but very good at keeping her legs together.” Kittara had told her.

This planet had never even heard of alien worlds and here was Hol waiting to violate one of their dead, it didn’t feel right to her. But Kittara had said it was important and she was family.

“Our poor Irena, killed just two days before her wedding.”

Hol had been keeping to the shadows, putting out a high level ‘ignore me’ thought control and no one had noticed her as she moved around the busy cemetery. She followed the family further in the hopes of hearing more about Irena.

“If she hadn’t set her sights on the Dukes son, she’d have been married long ago.”

This sounded promising and Hol back tracked to where the grieving family had come from. It was a mausoleum, which was ideal. The local tradition was for burial of the body straight into the ground, with only a cloth over the face. Hol had not been looking forward to digging one up, but a mausoleum was different. Hol moved herself through the wall of the building and looked at all the doors leading off the central corridor.

"This one," said Chlo, "fresh plaster around the door."

Hol shifted her reality to inside the small room and sent a light up to the quite low ceiling. On the stone table in front of her lay the body of a girl dressed in a shroud with buttons up the front.

"I can see why they buried her quickly Chlo."

Half the girl's head was missing, probably crushed in the earthquake, but enough was left to show she had once been very beautiful. Hol took the stasis box off her shoulder and placed it on the floor.

"Sorry Irena." She said.

Hol unbuttoned the shroud and pulled it back to reveal a very well developed and beautiful body.

"She certainly meets the fuckable requirement, is she a virgin Chlo ?"

"Yes, apparent age 18 or 19, still an intact virgin, and a very fresh corpse."

Hol took the lid off the stasis box and removed a surgical device from her belt. She put the device against the girl's naked chest.

"You could go in under the ribs." Suggested Chlo.

"I don't want to pull her body about."

Hol cut the skin away in a square over the girl's heart and folded back the skin. Another after shock rocked the mausoleum sending a cloud of dust from the ceiling. Hol set the device for bone and cut a section out the girl's ribs, which she removed and placed to one side.

"I am so sorry Irena."

Hol cut the blood vessels from her heart and then carefully cut away all the nerves and ligaments still connecting it to the body. Some blood still flowed out of the heart onto her hands, it was congealing, but the flow of blood meant the heart was fresh. After putting the heart in the box, Chlo closed up the wound in Irena's chest and buttoned up the shroud.

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Estrid was sat eating her bright pink packet of junk food while Kittara checked the items on the table.

"What is in the boxes ? Hol looked upset." She asked.

"Go to school as usual and Chlo will look after you when you get home."

Kittara put everything into a shoulder bag and hoped the ingredients would work. The ritual was for people in a different multiverse and she'd had to improvise. Were the ingredients even needed ? Hol had been trembling, yet often the words and the power of the speaker was all that was needed.

"Thank you." Said Sventa, who was sat opposite her.

"Thank me when it's over and I haven't failed."

She picked up Emperor Xeod and gave him a kiss, then she hugged Estrid and picked up the bag with all the ingredients in. Kittara held onto Sventa's arm and when she thought the angel was as solid as she was likely to get she transferred them both to just beyond the 1st rift.

"Is it always this dark ?" Asked the angel.

Kittara looked at the crumbling, long deserted village and almost expected to see soldiers with bows.

"This is mid morning, at night there are no lights, not even a star in the sky."

They walked along the path through the ruined village, with Kittara keeping a tight hold on Sventa's arm.

"Does anyone still live here?"

"No, there were too many battles, I was in some of them, maybe all of them. In the end we won and the front line was pushed back to the 7th rift, but nothing wants to live here now."

The only sound was their own feet on the cobbles and eventually they stood in front of the aged city gates.

"Welcome to the City of the Lost God." Said Kittara.

Kittara pushed the gates and one swung wide open, while the other massive door came out of its hinges and crashed to the ground. Kittara took hold of Sventa's hand and led her into the ancient city.

"This," said Kittara, "was a city of demons and people. Both sides ruled it in their turn and billions died in brutal wars to hold onto it."

"How large is it?" Asked Sventa.

"About the same size as Mendera, but it's not far to where we're going."

Chlo had no record of a Shrine of the Dark Angel, but Kittara knew where it was, she'd been there before and knew its location. As Kittara pushed another gate open, an adjoining building crumbled and fell into the street. Kittara held Sventa to her to shield her from debris.

"Is there anything here except death?" Asked the angel.

"Trust me, I can feel where there is still power."

Out of the corner of her eye, Kittara was sure she saw, but no he'd never come here.

"Are you ok?"

"Sorry Sventa, this place plays tricks with your senses."

They carried on walking through the ruins in the strange grey light of the 1st rift. Every footstep seemed to bring fresh rumblings from the cracked and ruined buildings.

"When were the wars you fought in? This place looks so old."

"It's a strange left over part of the multiverse. Many switches seemed to ignore it, and now no one knows how old the place is. It's far older than me and I've been around so long that my age no longer has any real meaning."

One large structure seemed to have lasted better than the others, and Kittara led her towards it.

"The shrine of the Dark Angel, though all mention of that name crumbled away long ago."

Kittara led them up several sets of steps and around a cloistered square that looked in fairly good condition. Once again Kittara thought she saw someone moving in front of them.

"There is real power here Sventa, stay wary."

Eventually they came to another square with several circles of crumbled statues on plinths and a circular depression in the centre. In her mind Kittara saw the statues as hole once again, the outer ones being dark angels in all their awful winged glory.

"What was this place Kittara?"

"The holy of holies for the dark residents of this city, the place where even their servants feared to come."

Kittara could see Sventa was really scared.

"Trust me Sventa!"

Then on one of the inner plinths Kittara could have sworn she saw Sikush, but no, it was just an old crumbled carving of him. But why here?

"Are you ok Kittara?"

"Yes, I'm fine, it's just this place."

Kittara led the angel to the centre of the square and stood her in the depression.

"I feel, I feel rooted here."

"Don't try and move, this may take a while."

Kittara stepped back and put the bag on the floor. Would this work, was she just kidding herself? She pulled out the Jangar root and sprinkled it around the depression Sventa was stood in. Kittara didn't need to read the ritual tablet, she knew it by heart.

"Sident, Sident, movrae argental." She shouted.

Was it her imagination, or had the crumbled statues of dark angels become much more clear? Certainly the statue of Sikush seemed to look her way. Looking at the Genova she noticed Sventa had knelt on the ground and lowered her head. Kittara took the next two ingredients out of the bag and threw them at the angel's feet.

"Sident, Sident, amorentil, nevesh." She screamed.

The ground shook and Kittara noticed a blue mist now enveloped the form of Sventa. There was no mistaking it now, the statues of the dark angels were moving, coming to life. There were two more ingredients before the hearts, both of them powerful dark magic icons. Kittara placed them both on Sventa's feet.

"Sident, Sident, leminah, augmeni."

There was a definite cackling from the dark angels, who were now jumping up and down on their pedestals and the statue of Sikush seemed to be smiling at her. Was this real, or another illusion brought about by this place? Sventa hadn't moved in some time now. Kittara removed the hearts from their stasis boxes and was pleased that both bled a little. The demon heart she bit into and then places in front of Sventa.

"Sident."

Then she moved behind Sventa, bit into the virgin's heart and placed it behind the angel.

"Sident."

Now there was just the final evocation, but Kittara needed the power to make it work. She started to weave a small ball of dark power in front of her, like a tear of the Damned, but this was dark purple and seemed to crackle with energy.

"Damn this city, let it die."

Kittara began to pull all of the dark energy of the city towards her and wind it up into the spinning ball of power. First of all the older buildings crumbled and fell, and then the newer ones. Whole streets fell and crashed to the ground and still Kittara kept pulling in more power. The sky started to become streaked by lightning, but the dark angels seemed to be enjoying the show and shrieked in delight. Was the statue of Sikush glowing? Kittara ignored everything and kept winding in the power. Vast areas of the city started to crack and collapse into the underground crypts and catacombs and still she kept pulling in more and more power. Eventually only the square she was in remained and Kittara halted with the purple ball of dark energy spinning in front of her.

"It may not work as you expect."

Kittara heard the words in her head as she screamed the final words of the ritual.

"Sident, Sident, margano, humenda, svegah."

Then she threw the entire sphere of power into the centre of the square and fell to her knees. There was a huge explosion and a cloud of hot air hit her, so Kittara clung to the ground and closed her eyes. After a few minutes she looked up.

"What have I done?"

As she looked up the first thing she noticed was that the sky was now a dark purple and probably always would be. She doubted that the ruins of the city would ever see daylight again. The city itself had vanished and had either become just rubble, or had collapsed into the catacombs below. As she stood up she noticed the statues of the dark angels had become just featureless lumps of rock again and the statue of Sikush had vanished completely.

“ohhh.”

Kittara looked at the depression in the centre of the square and all she could see was a heap of what looked like sticks and bones. She ran to it and knelt in front of it.

“Oh Sventa, you wanted a proper solid body and I’ve destroyed you.”

Kittara threw herself onto the heap of bones as if to cover her shame and started to weep. Then she felt the hand on her shoulder.

“Get up Kittara, she needs your help.”

She got to her feet and Sikush was stood in front of her.

“I knew it was you.” She looked around. “Are you alone ?”

“Yes. I too can sometimes go on secret missions.”

Kittara held his hand and looked long and hard at the ruined landscape.

“All she wanted was a solid body, to feel the touch of another, to love. She’d helped me so many times, was it wrong to try ? Now I’ve killed her.”

“Kittara you’ve not killed her, you just didn’t get what you expected. Come on we must help her.”

As Sikush walked past her she looked again at the bundle of what looked like bones held together with leather straps and it seemed to move.

“Come on Sventa, the pain is over, let’s get you on your feet.” Said Sikush

Kittara went to help and between them they helped her to her feet.

“A dark angel !?” Said Kittara.

“Hardly surprising in this place, and you did change the last evocation.”

Sikush rubbed the dark angel’s legs and Kittara was certain that where he touched the muscle started to look stronger.

“Her wings Kittara, help me get them spread, so the blood gets to them.”

Sikush held one wing and Kittara the other as they gently spread them out to their full twelve foot span.

“Roarkkkk.”

“Her voice ! Is that how she’ll always sound ?”

“Kittara you’re beginning to sound like a cleric. She’ll speak well enough when she’s learned how to use this body. She’s now immortal, so there’s plenty of time for her to learn.”

Kittara looked around wondering if the place was still distorting her senses.

“She is immortal ?”

“Yes, you supplied so much energy and that last line. You changed a request for help into a demand to be obeyed. A bit risky, but it works and you now have your very own immortal dark angel.”

“I didn’t, couldn’t change the words. I wouldn’t know how.”

Sventa was giving her new leathery wings a few practise beats and already looked far stronger than the heap of bones she had looked earlier.

“You may not have known Kittara, but Mardoun did.”

The dark angel walked towards Kittara and grabbed her arm in very sharp talons.

“Kittara.”

The voice wasn’t unpleasant, but the claws would have seriously injured many people.

“You’ll have to teach her Kittara, she’s your responsibility now. You could try keeping her behind the force walls in your house, but I sense this lady will be hard to keep in or out of anywhere.

Come on we should start walking to the rift entrance.”

Kittara started to pick Sventa up.

“No, let her walk, she needs to get her muscles working.”

One either side of Sventa they picked their way through the debris of the city and out onto the cobbled path through the ruined village.

“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.”

Kittara looked at the grey leathery skin covering the skull of the dark angel and remembered the beauty of Sventa.

“Do you think she’ll ever forgive me ?”

“You made her an immortal with who knows what powers, she’ll forgive you.”

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