

Chronicles of Mardoun

Chapter 5 - Colonies & Allies

“Religions of faith & worship have always puzzled me. Surely a responsible deity would let you know they exist ?” – Elthriaxer

The three of them arrived on a balcony overlooking the grounds of the Imperial palace on Mendera. Obviously some unofficial rota was at work, as Alyz quietly left after giving him a quick kiss. None of them needed sleep, but they enjoyed sex and a couple of hours sleep after sex always felt wonderful.

“So you’re staying tonight ?” he asked Kittara.

For answer she got so close to him that she almost looked folded into him and gave him a long passionate kiss. Then she noticed on the common channel that his destination for the following morning was a dump of a colony called New Algaria.

Why did people always call their mud pool, disease ridden colonies after their home world ? It was New Dump, Spirit of Dump, Dump 2, even for one particular noxious mining colony, Dump Reborn.

The Empire has a complex structure with six of the original planets having a constant presence at the Grand Council on Mendera where Imperial directives are agreed and ratified by The Chalné. All the other nearly 4000 worlds have rotating councillors that may only get a seat in council once every 5 to 10 years. It’s a flawed and unfair system, but it’s worked well for billions of years and it’s unlikely to change.

Algaria is well outside the central sphere of influence and still has to obey the rules when it comes to colonising other worlds. The Empire will send the Guard to protect colonies from attack, and provide instantaneous travel for medical problems and other emergencies that could lead to serious loss of life. Apart from that the Empire has often said, or rather The Chalné has said his people are not a taxi service. If a planet hasn’t got the technology to land a viable colony on a new world then it shouldn’t expect the Empire to help it. Of course all the worlds had access to all the Imperial news channels and entertainment, so they saw all the colonies of other planets and all the wealth they gained from those colonies. Very few member planets of the Empire had democratic politics, but leaders and politicians who don’t look after the aspirations of their people don’t tend to last long. So everyone started to look for faster than light travel and the means to get a colony across several lights years of inter stellar space.

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Algaria never managed to develop fold space technology and only ever achieved about 70% of light speed, but they did develop a highly efficient system of cryostorage that in theory would preserve the life of a ship full of colonists indefinitely. So a little over 40 years ago the Algarian star ship had landed on New Algaria with a crew of 1,200 and 60,000 colonists in deep freeze. Much to the surprise of most of the Empire not only did 54,902 of the colonists survive coming out of cryostorage, but the colony thrived and prospered.

They had enough Menderan technology to link into Chlo and let their home world know they were safe, but the journey had taken over 400 years so they were now very much on their own. The Chalné had visited them a few years after they landed with a few luxuries and some Imperial power blocks so that they had a more reliable power supply, but like all colonies they had to sink or swim by their own endeavours.

Now Chlo had picked up a distress call that raiders of some kind had landed there. Of course Kittara didn’t have to go, there was no rota of who went where with Sikush, but she liked to be

with him as much as she could. He'd once tried to force Alyz and Kittara into having a life. He'd set limits to the hours they could travel with him and used Jen and Albas far more as his personal guard. Despite being done out of good intentions it went badly and he ended up with two top members of the Guard who were constantly moody and aggressive. So now he left them to decide who were to be his companions of the day. The result was that Kittara and Alyz were with him most days and he had to admit he enjoyed their company. A lot of training for The Damned is about trust and loyalty and after billions of years following him around they trusted and obeyed him usually without question.

She watched the Guard register their presence for the following day. Six were required for what was likely to be a live fire encounter with raiders, plus Chlo and at least a further 100 on constant watch. Jen would be there another Arcadian. The Arcadians had removed themselves from the day to day affairs of the Empire long ago and only allowed visitors to their planet by strict invitation and few were ever invited.

They were however one of the oldest peoples of the Empire and even without biological conversion lived to 5 or even 6 thousand Menderan years. Jen was a typical Arcadian with long limbs, a full figure and blue eyes. She too bore the mark of loyalty to The Chalne on her left hand and was one of the best fighters in the Guard. Then she wasn't at all surprised to see Albas come up. He was one of the few male members of the Guard to be accepted to the personal guard of Sikush. Now tall dark and well muscled he was always popular with the women of the Empire, no matter where he went and he was probably looking forward to the attention of a few grateful colonists' daughters. He has started his year long evaluation for the Guard as an ex member of the Ixir underworld on Mendera. He'd been to prison on a few occasions and wasn't well liked. This meant he'd had to try harder than most to be accepted and cope with his new look and biology after conversion.

Going from 5 feet tall and almost dwarf like appearance to a 6 foot 6 hunk may have it's advantages, but it takes a while to get used to. Kittara could identify with his need to work harder than most to be accepted. She was nearly killed quite early in her evaluation year as being too aggressive to control and too dangerous to release. Luckily Sikush had taken the time to train her and adjust her attitude. The Guard didn't work to a strict rota and the six needed for the New Algaria trip were put on Chlo's list on a first to ask basis. Again this sounds like an inefficient system, but it had worked well for a long time and he had never turned up anywhere without more than enough of the Guard around him. The next to check herself in was a surprise. Lurisiana was one of the oldest of the Guard and had joined in that period when records of who came from where were vague at best. She was one of the first ten to join and there were rumours about her being a convert from the enemy, whoever the enemy was then ? Chlo would never discuss the past history of any of the Guard and always replied with the annoying "That's their story".

Lurisiana, or Luri as most called her never volunteered for anything so he must have requested her presence which was interesting. She was their expert on old dead languages and an incredibly powerful magic user, who it was said had first used the tears of the Damned as weapons. Not literal tears of course, but power drawn from the fabric of the multiverse and wound tighter and tighter into a small spinner tear shape that glows green and yellow and can have the power to destroy worlds. She was one of the few of the Guard that made people feel uneasy in her presence. Her home was a large almost castle like structure she'd built high in the Nikar mountains in the great desert of Mendera and she was almost a recluse, living there most of the year unless Sikush needed her. Kittara was looking forward to seeing why he thought Luri as she called her was needed for a routine raider clear up mission ? The last name to finalise the party was Hol Azreemy, who wasn't a member of the Chalne's personal guard, but the latest

new member of the Guard. A rookie who had a mere 800 thousand years in the role. She was one of the few modern Menderan's who had been thought suitable for the Guard and everyone had high hopes for her. She was a bit star struck with Kittara and had copied her look right down to her hair cut. Kittara put on a show of being embarrassed by this, but in reality liked Hol a lot and was pleased to have her old Menderan style copied.

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"Quite a party for a small clean up?" She said to him as they showered together before bed. They could have used Chlo to get clean after the day. A small shimmer and they'd have been fresh and clean, but both of them liked the feel of a long hot shower at the end of the day. "Chlo seems to think the craft and number of crew doesn't indicate the usual type of raiding party."

As he spoke to her he gently dried her off with a large towel that had appeared in his hand. She enjoyed being pampered and stretched up her arms so he could dry every bit of her. She almost purred as he gently used the towel to dry the tidy dark bush between her legs and lingered over drying the area it covered. He didn't linger for too long as they both preferred the bed to the hard brick of the shower where their impatience had often led to hard thrusting sex against uncomfortable walls. He held her to him and then they were both naked on his bed in his personal sanctum in his palace on Mendera. There were no doors to this room, so the only way in was to be brought by him and he brought very few here.

She felt him reach for Chlo and tell her to lock them out of the common channel and they were alone. No one could contact them for the next six hours and the usual constant chatter in her head had stopped. She reached a hand for his now erect sex organ and holding firmly she worked her hand up and down, enough to get him rock hard but not enough to splash anything on the sheets, not yet.

She brought her mouth down over his now rock hard erection and began to slowly lick working her way down it licking and gently sucking. Then when she got to the bottom she came back up again quickly while holding it firmly between her lips. She looked up at him and saw him smiling back down at her. They had worked out a sexual repertoire they both enjoyed and looked forward too, but sometimes she still liked to surprise him. Not tonight though, tonight she felt he was in the mood for what they both knew and enjoyed. She once again began licking the tip to get it nice and wet and began another slow journey down his erection. She looked up and was pleased to see he was still watching her. Eventually she felt him tense and thrust deep into her mouth as his fluid spurted deep into her throat. She always swallowed, it seemed strangely impolite not to.

She licked around the top and then got the last drips as they appeared from his now relaxing penis. Then she lifted herself on to him and wriggled until her face was level with his. Her eyes were now very dark.

"So dark I could fall into them forever," he said and she squealed with delight as he flipped her over onto her back and started to carefully use his teeth and tongue on her nipples.

"Not fair, stop getting into my head", she said to him, though really she loved the way they became almost one person during sex. He unashamedly looked into her mind and her empathic link with him was so strong that she always knew how to drive him crazy. She reached for his hand and put it between her legs and started pushing his fingers against her now very moist cleft.

"Be patient." He said to her and moved his hand to her inner thigh and began to fondle it as his tongue moved from her left breast and down over her perfectly smooth tummy. By the time he reached that wonderful bundle of nerves just below her now ringing wet bush she felt she was

going to explode. He flicked at it with the tip of his tongue and then licked the area around. She arched her back, closed her eyes and completely surrendered to the moment.

Now he was delving deeply into her with his tongue and stretched his arms up under her thighs so that he could fondle her breasts at the same time. Kittara felt waves of pleasure start between her legs and work their way right up to her neck. Then he lifted her legs and moved up onto her. Deep and hard he plunged into her. Neither of them wanting there to be anything gentle about this. She moved her legs right up around his back while he used all his weight to pound down hard into her. She clutched at his back digging her nails into him while the waves of pleasure continued to grow until she felt she was on fire. He showed no signs of easing up and she felt almost as though she must be split in two. She put her teeth around a large bit of his chest muscle and bit him, hard. He seemed to push into her even deeper and then came the spasm as his fluids pumped into her. They lay in each others arms in the tangled mess of sheets and she looked into his eyes.

“Are you mine ?” He asked. “Always,” she replied and when he looked as though he was about to go to sleep.

“Did you fake the death of Qunan Arje ?”

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They were on New Algaria. Alyz had met them where Kittara and Sikush were hovering over the rear gates of the Temple of The Flame and he'd shifted all three of them to a small hill about half a mile from the raider's craft. The others appeared near to them then nodded and vanished to carry out tasks allotted by Chlo. Kittara looked in the direction of the raiders craft and saw it had been carefully landed against the side of rocky outcrop, so it was almost invisible from above, About 200 yards long and cigar shaped it looked and felt far too slick for the raiders they usually met.

“Crew of 80 with evidence of decent weaponry and some fairly sophisticated surveillance devices”, said Chlo who was now standing next to her.

“There is a small patrol of three men who spotted us arrive and will be here in a few minutes, and they have Yakkies”.

Kittara looked at the terrain map Chlo had put in the common channel and noticed the three dots approaching from their left. The YK2 assault weapon, also known affectionately as Yakkie was the standard weapon for all troops of the Empire and had never been seen before in the hands of raiders. It was a signature weapon and could only be fired by the person it had been allotted to. It was supposed to be theft proof !

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Most people would have found a girl hovering two feet in the air while apparently asleep a bit surprising. The raider patrol approached with no sign of caution or in fact recognition of the two women and man in front of them. All three were carrying the YK2 with its familiar shape. Two flattened circles joined by a 3 inch wide body and the whole thing about a yard long. In the front end of it are 3 holes, this is the business end.

“Can we help you,” Sikush said to the lead raider as he approached to about 15 feet of them.

The raiders looked casual about them, like they were out on an afternoon stroll. Their clothing was new and tidy, they had good strong new looking combat boots. Everything about them screamed wrong and still they walked closer. Kittara still looked asleep and seemed to be taking no interest in them, while Alyz looked towards the raiders craft apparently unconcerned with the three men in their midst.

“I wouldn't do that”, was all Sikush managed to say as the lead raider raised his weapon in his direction. Kittara moved in a blur of speed and the demon blade now in her hand hit the raider on the left side of his neck and cut through his flesh, bone and clothing all with equal ease to

finally exit halfway down his right torso. The quarter of his body holding the weapon with his head on top fell to the ground with his eyes still aware and briefly blinking in disbelief. Kittara was already in front of the next raider, as was Alyz. They both punched their blades into his chest and ripped them out of the side, then the next raider, punch then rip. The whole encounter was over in less than four seconds and three very dead raiders lay on the ground. "We do need at least one alive", Sikush said.

Kittara could see the buzz of traffic starting about the dead raiders. Chlo already had their DNA and pictures and was working through every database in the Empire and a few outside it to get a definite ID.

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"We need the leader and two others alive, extract them now", she picked up being sent to Jen and Albas via the common channel. As they looked down at the enemy craft they could hear the high energy fire of a Yakkie and then the whine as it recharged. Even at half a mile distance they still heard the shouts and screams coming from the raiders and then it quickly stopped.

"Prisoners now on Mendera", came across the common channel.

All three of them moved to right in front of the raiders craft and Jen, Albas & Hol arrived next to them. Lurisian was already informing the colonists that a raider craft full of high technology and other loot would soon be theirs to strip of anything useful.

"Keep the craft intact", said Sikush before moving himself to the interior of the vessel. The others followed him and the raiders were about to learn why no one messes with The Damned. It was a slaughter. The raiders had already seen their leader and two others vanish after being grabbed by people who just appeared from nowhere and now more warriors in the same uniform were hacking them to pieces. All discipline failed and they tried to flee in panic. Sadly for them none of their attackers were going to give them any mercy at all and the slaughter didn't stop until they were nearly all dead and the inside of the craft was a bloody mess. Chlo immediately started her analysis and reports on the crew and the craft.

"Lots of money on all the crew, all newly printed and genuine Imperial currency. Yakkies appear new and in good condition, but there is no record of them in my systems, Cloth.....".

"Give a trace of the crew and who hired them a priority and if needed use probes", The Chaln  said interrupting her.

Kittara was in the crew's quarters and had one of them spread over a bunk in front of her with a razor sharp short sword pushed into his side. Her uniform was tattered and bloody, but she was happy. Sikush had left her to play with this one while he and Chlo sorted out the details she hated doing anyway. When they found out who had sent the raiders she knew who he'd send to teach them the error of their ways. She twisted the knife and the man moaned and lay still. Now all the crew were dead she shimmered and put on a new uniform and followed the others to the colonist's town.

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Talking to anyone in the Empire and beyond was never a problem for the Guard as Chlo entered the local language and any essential vocabulary into the common channel and from there the Guard pulled it into the language centre of their brain. It sounds complex but The Damned do it all the time automatically and take it for granted. So when Kittara appeared just inside the walls of "Tranquillity", the main town on New Algaria she knew not only the language in the correct local dialect, but also that the head man was called Hvorchak and that his daughter had been killed by raiders less than a year before.

Her arrival caused the usual interest, especially among the children who all of course wanted to be members of the Guard one day. One young girl of about 6 or 7 walked towards her holding out a Kittara doll. Not the expensive platinum kind the rich buy as ornaments to impress their

friends. This was a simple stuffed toy barely recognisable as her, but with her name embroidered across the front. Kittara bent down on her haunches to take the doll off the child and look at it approvingly. The girl looked delighted. She was plump and radiated health and to anyone else this would have been taken as a sign that all was well with the colony and the children could look forward to a happy future. She however had seen many such colonies and knew the likely outcome for New Algaria. The gravity here was about 15% higher than their home world and a politician somewhere had decided this was within acceptable limits. Within a few generations the people here would start to look heavier and more muscled than the people of their home planet. At first a few jokes would be made about this, but a few new colonists might still slip on board the Empire shuttles sent a few times a year to pick up mined minerals and produce. Then the people here would start to look so different that no one wanted to come here and no one wanted them to come home. Even the constant chatter over the Empire's network would reduce. Of course the shuttles would continue to take away good and bring whatever had been bought by the colonists, but no one would want to be seen dead on New Algaria.

Not that all the blame could be put on politicians. Everyone wanted to expand and gain wealth and planets exactly matching the conditions of their home world were rare. One group of returning colonists had actually been attacked and killed by a mob on one planet for being too alien, too divergent from the norm. Other aliens in the Empire was one thing, but having your own kind adapt into something different really seemed to freak people out.

Kittara looked around and then her left hand shimmered and held a huge candy bar of the best known brand on Algaria. She doubted the child had ever seen one, but they had entertainment channels with adverts, so you had no doubt the purpose of the gift would be understood. The child leant towards her and kissed her on the cheek. The last raiders here had captured and raped a few women and some children had been killed in the process. Deep down inside some part of Kittara was very happy no one was going to be killed by the raiders they had just dealt with. She stood and in her hand was a basket of candy and she began giving out bars to the growing crowd of children around her. Nearby was a glow almost imperceptible against the daylight as the Genova watched her.

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"Do with them as you please", Sikush was saying to Hvorchak as Kittara approached his compound. Hol had brought the two raiders back from Mendera, but obviously their leader was still being held for interrogation.

"I'll let the women deal with them," Hvorchak replied and everyone knew the fate of the raiders was going to be very unpleasant. The raiders who has previously attacked them were long dead, killed by Imperial Mercs. But these were raiders and any raiders would do to punish for the rapes. Kittara would have quite enjoyed watching the women of Tranquillity deal with them, but knew they'd be somewhere else that night.

Hvorchak beckoned them inside his house while several of his men led off the prisoners. The house was a sprawling single storey building with most of the luxuries of any Empire City, combined heating & air con, Links to the Imperial Network, enough electrical power to run anything they wanted. Yet it had a colonial feel to it, too few ornaments, too much fuss over gadgets taken for granted on their home planet, furnishings a bit too sturdy. They entered the main lounge and sat themselves on large comfortable couches while the head mans wife brought them drinks and plates of assorted delicacies.

"My people are already on their way to the raider's ship, useful, as we could do with a few more power packs. Can you set up the Yakkies for us", asked the head man. No preamble, straight to the business of making the most of an unforeseen windfall.

"Yes, Chlo can hook up an activation terminal to you comms unit before we go. Would you like some heavier weaponry for the town walls?"

"No, raiders will just think we've something worth taking." The Chaln  nodded seeing the sense of it.

"Any idea why such a large and well armed group decided to come here?" Asked Kittara and she could see Hovorach was concerned about something.

"We have a girl", he said, "She sees too much, more than it's good to see if you get my meaning. She said men would be coming for her. We've treated her kindly up till now, but after this, well if you could take her with you ... ? I'll get her brought here."

One of the head mans daughters went off to fetch the girl and they settled back to enjoy the food that had been given to them. After a few minutes a girl of about 11 or 12 came into the room and looked directly at The Chaln .

"The Angels said you'd come for me." She looked confident and poised and far more mature than any 12 year old girl he'd ever met before. Sikush gently looked into her mind and found her looking back. It was rare for anything to astonish him, but this girl astonished him.

"Estrid has never given us any trouble, but I think for her own safety it would be a good idea if you took her with you today", said Hovorach, "We're a long way from home and old superstitions can take hold, even in good people".

"I talk to the Angels, it makes people nervous", Estrid said.

"They follow me everywhere, come and stay at my house," Kittara said much to everyone's surprise, perhaps even her own.

"Take her to get her things Kittara and do her goodbyes, then get her settled in at your place," Sikush said and on their private channel he told her to bring her to dinner at the Palace that evening.

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As Kittara took Estrid by the hand and walked her to her home Chlo was reporting in on tracing who had given the raiders money and weapons. Surprisingly there was no record of the Yakkies they'd taken from the men, which was impossible. Imperial signature weapons could only be activated by Chlo, no ifs, no buts, yet she had no record of these.

The next step was to use benign temporal probes. Chlo could look back along the time line of the leader of the raiders to see who he met and where he was given his orders. It sounded simple, but even for Chlo it was a difficult task. Often the time threads became crossed and went off down blind alleys, or disappeared entirely into the Grey which is the area between time and reality. Then Chlo would have to restart looking at the last locked point she had. The technique was always a success and Chlo would get the answers, but it was slow and could take many days.

"This is where I live," and they walked into a clean looking single storey building of similar style to the Headman's, but far less grand and with far less furnishing. They walked into one of the bedrooms and Estrid started packing her few belongings into a bag.

"Is your mother, your family around ? Do you want to say goodbye to them ?"

"I think I scare them, perhaps best if we just go."

Kittara sat on the bed and the sad looking girl sat beside her. After a brief private argument with Chlo her hand shimmered and in it was a copy of the Kittara soft toy the other child was carrying, but this one was clean and new. It even had a passing resemblance to Kittara. She handed the toy to Estrid.

"I hope you're not too old for this ?"

"No, it's beautiful"

Kittara picked her small bag of belonging up from the floor and put her arm around Estrid and then both vanished from New Algaria.

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In detention bay 4 deep underground beneath the Guard barracks on Mendera Lurisiana looked deep into the mind of the leader of the raiders and found nothing in his memory between 15 days ago and 45 days ago. She knew of no one capable of that kind of mental engineering and she was impressed.

He knew nothing about who hired him, where the weapons came from or why his mission was so important. All he had was a desire to capture the girl Estrid and then destroy the town of Tranquillity. His DNA identified him as a modified inhabitant of Ixir, but as records on Ixir were far from complete she wasn't surprised that Chlo could find no trace of him.

"We could easily convert him to a useful Merc?" She said to Sikush who had just arrived.

"No, there's a chance he'd be triggered and go rogue on us, dispose of him."

Lurisiana raised her arm and made a few gestures and a green swirling mist enveloped the raider. When it cleared all that was left was a brown stain on the floor.