

## City of the Lost God

### Part 30 - Yam Kermul

**“When we get back, I’m going to force you to read the history of the Menderan first age. No ! Thrax was no giant. He was just an ordinary man with big ideas.”**



Adamaz stood alone on the side of the mountain. He’d sent all the other library staff inside The Dome, they’d be safe there. The Dome was the highest point in the City and had once been the home of Tomma-Goran, the deity who’d created the City. Logic and experience said that it had to be the most secure and solid place on the entire 1<sup>st</sup> rift. Caspian had been with him, until they’d both seen the sky fill with flame, near the shrine of the dark angel.

“Time for you to go inside Caspian.” He’d said.

“Come with me Adamaz, you might be hurt out here.”

People rarely used his name, he didn’t encourage it. Head Librarian, or just plain librarian suited him. It showed Caspian cared whether he lived or died though and that had pleased him.

“I’ve been dead for a very long time Caspian.” He’d answered. “Very little scares me. One thing that does scare me, is the death of the library. If it goes, the City will follow and that can’t happen. You are my successor boy, you must be in place of safety.”

“Very well Adamaz.”

He’d been on his own since then, watching the towers sway as each tremor shook the entire city. Adamaz was almost knocked off his feet; as yet again the entire mountain shook. The long and narrow bridge to the library shook, but it didn’t show any signs of breaking. Even the frail and delicately carved handrails, seemed impervious to the movements of the rift. When a God made a city it was built to last, except that there was something about the west wing of the library. A repair perhaps, or an alteration.

“What was it you old fool ?” He muttered at himself.

It had been during his days at the library, but he’d been there so long and his memory wasn’t what it was. In fact, if he was being honest, his memory hadn’t been able to hold half of the things that had happened in the countless millennia, he’d resided in the City. His mind was like a leaky and overflowing bucket and although he knew something significant had happened to the west wing, he just couldn’t recall the details.

He walked towards the bridge, the view of the City was better from there. A bad tremor began and Adamaz held onto the stone pillar at the end of the bridge. His mind might have seen better days, but his strength hadn’t left him. The head librarian held onto the pillar and survived the quake, without even losing his footing. There was no sign of any magical activity in the direction of the shrine, just the continuous glow of chaos energy.

“She’ll know for sure, younger mind.” He muttered.

Aeony was flying round the tower, climbing in a long spiral that would bring her up to The Dome. He lost her as she skirted the library and then he saw her again, heading straight for the bridge.

“Aeony ! Aeony !” He shouted.

He hated shouting. Children shouted and street louts, it was undignified behaviour for someone of his age. The dark angel must have heard him though, her course changed slightly and she dipped her flight, to land near him. Another quake shook the ground, but Aeony didn’t slow down. She landed perfectly on the shaking mountain, almost making it seem easy.

"You should be inside on a night like this old friend." She said.

"I can't see what's going on, from inside." He answered.

The dark angel gripped his robe firmly and then put her tail round the bridge pillar, effectively anchoring them both securely against the quakes. With anyone else, he'd have been slightly annoyed by her actions, but Aeony was allowed a degree of familiarity.

"Is it done?" He asked.

"Yes, Silsk is dead and placed in an urn, just like all her sisters before her."

"Good, good. Do your sisters know?"

"I placed a notice in the place of gathering. Word will spread, though I can't see there being any challenge to my leadership."

More tremors and still the library seemed to be strong enough to resist the shaking. Already there were two sections of the slums on fire, the orange flames illuminating the grubby streets.

"You must remember." He said. "The west wing. Was it altered or repaired? I remember something happening to it."

"It was altered Adamaz, always a dangerous thing. The added wing on the Sorcerer's guild building has collapsed, I flew over it on the way. Much of the rebuilding work of old town has been reduced to rubble and Jumban's store has been completely destroyed. It's almost as if the City is being returned to how it was, when Tomma-Goran first created it."

Adamaz was worried now. Losing the entire west wing, might render the library unusable.

"Is the entire west wing a latter addition?" He asked.

Aeony was actually laughing and it was a rare thing to hear a dark angel laugh.

"No, they just pulled out the large windows and built two turrets, the reading room turrets." She said.

"Oh, that's not too bad, even if they do fall away."

Aeony held him tighter, as the mountain shook and it seemed a miracle that any building in the City, was still standing.

"This is nothing, compared to the destruction if he breaks free." Said Adamaz.

"He is already free." Said Aeony. "He just lacks a physical presence. Tarin will stop him though; he'll kill the Lord of Death. Or at least he'll kill the corporeal body and send his soul scurrying back to Leng."

"Don't tempt the fates Aeony. That place is never named and for a reason." Said Adamaz.

"Silsk would never name it either. Old wives tales and superstition, there are no listeners, waiting to punish those who talk of infamous Leng."

As if to punish her heresy, the tremors became stronger and the sound of cracking stone filled the night.

"See what you've done Aeony! One of the turrets is breaking away."

"Nonsense, no addition or alterations to the City, will survive the night, no matter what we talk about."

As they watched, one of the turrets broke loose and fell. A reading room, with space for two dozen scholars, the turret was huge and weighed hundreds of tons. It missed the lower tower and crashed into the street, shattering the cobbles. The noise of breaking stones, rose up to them joining the roar of the earthquake and making conversation impossible. Aeony merely pointed at the second turret. The second reading room was breaking away from the library. It had survived the earlier tremors, but had finally succumbed. It broke apart as it fell, most of it hitting the street and becoming another pile of debris, not far from the first turret.

“This isn’t good Adamaz, this isn’t good !” Shouted Aeony.

Three huge stone blocks had clung to the mortar, until they too had fallen. The blocks remained close to the wall, finally crashing through the roof of the lower tower. As if their job had been completed, the quakes ceased and they could walk onto the bridge to examine the tower.

“They may not be disturbed.” Said Adamaz.

That part of the tower was inhabited by strange creatures, best left in peace. Some had been there since the City had been built, perhaps even breeding there. No one could be certain. There were theories, that yet more of the abominations were trapped in the flooded cellars and a lucky few sometimes reached the surface. Again, no one could be certain, as no one ever dared to enter that part of the tower.

“Look !” She hissed at him.

The broken roof was a long way below them and they were both relying on the ultra-violet wash to see anything. Up from the roof came a few tentacles, glowing with a light blue phosphorescence. They gripped the edge of the broken tiles and pulled, larger tentacles appearing, to help pull something up.

“I hoped and prayed that they’d all died out.” Said Adamaz.

A glowing blue bulk appeared in the hole in the roof, pulled along by the tentacles. It remained still for a moment, but the broken roof couldn’t bear the weight and everything crashed back into the room below. The creature shrieked when it fell, at least Adamaz assumed it was the creature that shrieked. There were answering cries, lots of answering cries, from a great many creatures. They’d been disturbed and they obviously intended to investigate the disturbance and perhaps, punish whoever had caused it. Dozens of glowing tentacles reach up, grabbing the roof and the wall, tugging to get a good hold. There was almost fear in Aeony’s voice, as she spoke.

“We should get under cover.” She said. “Have you a spare bed for me, in The Dome ?”

“Yes of course. At least the ground tremors appear to be over.”

The quakes were over, but he still clung to the dark angel, as they tore their eyes away from the abominations on the roof below and walked towards The Dome.

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Merrick had the waggons tied down with ropes and pegs, once the quakes started. He was no expert on surviving such things, but he reasoned that it was much the same as anchoring a fishing boat in a storm. He’d kept them moving during the early tremors, hurrying them out of the wood. Falling trees seemed a ludicrous risk to take. By pure luck, if such a thing really exists, they’d found a small clearing and placed the waggons in a circle.

“Use the ropes and pegs we brought.” He’d told them. “Fasten the waggons to the ground.”

The ground was stony and it was dark, which made it more difficult. By the time the major quakes began, they had the waggons pegged into the ground and a camp site formed in the centre. Nethra had advised against a fire.

“Just in case the waggons shift about.” She’d told him.

Now they were all sat on blankets in the dark. Nethra, himself and the dozen or so assorted guards and porters they’d hired. Not Waide, she’d refused to sit and continually paced about, her short bow at the ready.

“I feel the need to be on the move too.” He told her. “Sit down Waide, or a big quake will throw you to the ground.”

“Leave me be !” She spat.

He felt it too, they all did. The urge to run, to get away from the ground moving under your feet. They'd had trouble getting the waggon handlers to remain seated. A few animals had run past them, all stampeding in the same direction. It puzzled Merrick that they all seemed to be heading one way, when the quakes seemed to cover the entire rift. He'd put the waggons in a circle to act as a barrier, hoping the larger creatures ran round their camp. So far it had worked, but a really large creature, might decide to simply stampede straight through.

"I did warn you." He said.

Waide had been thrown off her feet, landing with a thump on her rear. She scowled at him, but remained on the ground.

"It's clearing the old wood." Said Nethra. "The forest will survive."

She was right; he could hear the trees falling as the quakes intensified. Down would come the trees infected with fungus, then the huge old trees, who'd already seen the centuries roll by. It would clear gaps, allow new saplings to emerge. It might even cause more useful little clearings to form.

"Just so long as all the roads aren't blocked." He said. "Or it'll take us forever to get back to The City."

A powerful tremor caused one of the waggons to pull out two of its pegs. Another went up on just two wheels, but didn't tip over. There was spare space, he'd made sure of that. They could lose a waggon, maybe two and still get everything back home. Home!? It was something they still hadn't decided on. Back to the slums was the obvious place to go. They'd had a proper house in Avald though, even if not for very long. Nethra liked the slums, as did he, they knew everyone there. For some reason, the crashing of falling trees, made him decide on where he wanted to call home.

"I want a house," he said, "a proper house. Somewhere in The Lanes. We can stay at Muzzie's while we look around; he has plenty of space to store our things."

Nethra was looking at him, though he couldn't see her expression clearly with just the usual ultra-violet night wash.

"We'll be safer there too," he continued, "until we see how things are, with Silsk."

She was nodding at him. Not always a good sign, but he was hopeful.

"Not The Lanes," she said, "they're all snobs. I'd like a proper house though, maybe in Old Town. Maybe near Galla, there are some decent places close to her shop."

A shop, of course, he hadn't considered that. No better way of selling off contraband than a proper shop. He hugged her, as the ground shook and a strange glow filled the sky.

"Yes Nethra. If we survive, we'll get a place near Galla."

The glow carried on after the quakes stopped. Judging by the direction, the glow was right over the City. Everyone was mesmerised by it, though none had ever seen it before, apart from Waide.

"Chaos!" She said. "It's the glow of pure chaos. I pity anyone walking the streets of The City, this night."

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Lilleth had run out of arrows quite quickly, she was now using her sword against the things that slithered. Babaef hadn't expected them to be attacked, but it appeared that not all the forces of chaos, were on their side. They were on their own now, just her and Muzzie.

"Down Lilleth!" He shouted at her.

She ducked and a ball of fire went over her head, so hot that she could smell her hair singeing. They screamed now, the slithering things and they were completely corporeal. Muzzie's daylight spell hurt them, she could see their skin blistering, if the gelatinous ooze could be called skin. They burned and screeched, but they still attacked. Something it seemed, was ordering them into battle.

"I think I can hear Babaef using magic." Said Muzzie.

Lilleth skewered the thing, that was trying to bite her foot. She listened and heard something, but the quakes were making all sorts of strange noises, in the catacomb tunnels.

"Maybe." She said. "Though it might be just more cave-ins, from all the tremors."

"No, definitely heard a shout before the rumble."

They'd tried to stay together as a group. The slithering things obviously had different ideas, or the one controlling them had. A flood of snapping jaws at a junction in the tunnels and Babaef had been forced to withdraw. A few turns in the catacombs, while fighting for their lives and they'd found themselves alone. There was no sign of Sensan and his army. The grotesque army of ghosts that had seemed so numerous on the surface, had vanished into the miles of tunnels. Not they were lost, for some reason, they always knew the direction that would take them to him, the dark one, Yam Kermul.

"Gesse ! Gesse !" Shouted Muzzie.

"It's no good, he'll never hear you."

"He might, his hearing is better than ours."

There was a thumping sound that couldn't be mistaken for anything else, other than an answer.

Some parts of the tunnels were riddled with connecting passages and junction. The part they were in looked newer and the walls were solid, as far as they could see.

"He's in the next tunnel." Said Muzzie. "Stand back Lilleth, I'm going to break through."

She wanted to object, the catacombs looked ready to cave-in, without Muzzie adding to the damage. Before she could stop him, he'd aimed a spell at the wall and it melted away. No explosions, no wave of intense heat, the wall simply melted away, leaving a passage to the next tunnel.

"That's useful, how did you find that ?" She asked.

"I didn't, it just appeared in my mind. I think we're being helped."

"I think Babaef is right." She said. "We're just pieces in someone's bigger game. Come on, let's see if you've made a passage to Gesse."

The melted edges of the passage were completely cold, as if the stone and rocks had always been like that. A narrow squeeze and they were in a much wider tunnel. Lilleth examined the stones in the wall and saw the handiwork of a deity.

"This is an original part of the City." She said. "It should withstand any quake."

Not that there had been any fresh tremors for a while, it seemed that they had ended, or been ended by whoever had caused them. They found Gesse about forty yards down the tunnel, surrounded by dead enemies and about fifty of Sensan's army. He seemed happier since Ventus had gone from his shoulder.

"I'm so glad to see you both," he said, "these guys are good fighters, but they don't speak. Or at least, they don't speak to me."

Gesse was surrounded by the slithering things, all of them dead. He was busy using a sharpening stone on a well notched blade.

"You've been busy." Said Muzzie.

"Yes, with the help of Sensan's creatures." Said Gesse. "They can follow basic commands and in the absence of their real commander, they seem to accept me as the next best thing."

A few slithering creatures, foolishly approached them. A magic user, one of the human sorcerers, used a spell which turned them to nothing but ash. Lilleth had never seen a full blood human up close. There were rumours about Ousha, Silsk's servant, but they were just rumours.

"Really powerful if you give them orders." Said Gesse. "But....."

He was pointing his finger at the side of his head and twirling it about.

“Nothing in their heads.” He continued. “They’ll attack anything that comes close. Without orders though, they’ll just wander about aimlessly. I’m guessing that’s why we were all split up.”

“When did you last see Babaef ?” Lilleth asked.

Gesse had finished sharpening his blade and shouted a few words of instruction at the ghost warriors.

“I’ve told them to guard you both.” He said. “They seem to understand the common tongue, or at least some of them do. I was separated from Babaef not long after you’d both gone. Parts of the catacombs kept collapsing, we’d be attacked by the slithering things and then Babaef had gone.” He waved his hand towards the far end of the passage, in the direction of the pull they all felt.

“It’s there,” said Gesse, “so we may as well go to it. Unless you’ve a better idea ?”

Muzzie was shaking his head and they were both looking at her.

“It’s why we came.” She answered.

The ghost army were ruthlessly efficient at dealing with anything that threatened them. She only had to use her sword once, as they covered a good mile of the major passage. Every side tunnel, brought a fresh attack from the slithering creatures, but they didn’t survive long. Eventually they came to a solid wall, with tunnels leading off to the right and left. They all knew the way they wanted to go, the pull was straight ahead and slightly down.

“I’m fed up with this maze.” Said Muzzie. “Stand back.”

He used the same spell that had melted the previous wall and even the stone wall built by a deity couldn’t resist the ancient power. It melted, gradually and reluctantly, but it melted away. Muzzie kept using the power the Hand or Arcardis gave him, melting the wall and the floor, melting a passage in the direction they wished to travel.

“I just hope we don’t have to fight all of..... Those !” Said Gesse.

They were drawing back from Muzzie’s ball of daylight, cowering as best they could. Muzzie had melted his way into a large chamber and it was full of the undead, who inhabited the lower levels of the catacombs.

Chaos creatures appeared out of the darkness beyond Leng. Some said that they were created in the wastes of eternity. They roamed the rifts, corrupting any living thing they touched. As servants of chaos, they had immense power and there were those with the skill and courage to tap that power. First the sorcerers of Leng had converted the chaos creatures, turning them into some of the best invocers on the rifts. Adamaz was just such a convert and still had the dents in his skull, where the tentacles of unspeakable creatures had altered his mind.

Converted chaos creatures were sought after. There were rumours that the deities themselves, had been known to pluck invocers from the libraries of Leng. They died, yet death didn’t seem to touch them, that was their gift from whatever had created them. Some had the smell of corruption about them, but only after tens of thousands of years. Most lived happily alongside the living, holding positions of power and influence. Few realised that they fed by consuming the life force of the living, leaving nothing but a dry husk. Those that did realise, looked the other way, as long as the feeding was discrete and the victims were those that no one would miss.

But no matter how high a converted chaos creature rose, they all eventually suffered the same fate. There came a point in their lives when they felt the pull, often travelling vast distances, sometimes from other worlds. The catacombs pulled them and they were unable to resist. Once there, they inhabited the lowest levels, never to be seen again. No one, or at least very few people ever escaped from the catacombs. An ancient curse prevented anyone from leaving, unless they were aided by

chaos itself. There were rumours that millions of converted chaos creatures were gathered in the catacombs, waiting to fight in some great future war. No one knew the truth.

The undead they were called, the vast army in waiting. Muzzie looked into the chamber and it was crammed with them. So many were crushed in, that they found it hard to avoid his ball of daylight and some were moaning piteously.

“There are thousands of them.” Said Lilleth.

“And this is just one chamber.” Said Muzzie.

Gesse led them down into the chamber, the undead moving aside and allowing them through. At the far end of the chamber was a set of stairs, wide enough for an army to walk down. They all felt the pull growing stronger.

“Not far now.” Said Gesse.

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Tarin walked alone, he hadn't even drawn his sword. Those who could read the old language of the rifts and there were few of those left, would have known his armour carried the runes of chaos.

There was no larger game when it came to Tarin, he was one of them, a sworn servant of chaos and all that it stood for. The writing on his shield was in praise of Yam Kermul and indicated that Tarin was a commander of his armies. The slithering things clung to the walls as he passed, none dared to even impede his progress.

He felt the glow of chaos around him and it felt like coming home. There were so many collapsed tunnels, that he couldn't run, but he wasn't in a hurry. Tarin clambered over obstacles when he could and found other routes when he couldn't. Finding the hundred ghost warriors in one tunnel confused him for a while, until he remembered Sensan's resurrected creatures.

“To me !” He commanded.

They may have followed Sensan, but they readily obeyed Tarin. They'd been found by a commander worthy of the name and those with vocal chords, actually gave him a subdued cheer. His new found comrades formed up in lines behind him and followed him, as he clambered over yet more rubble. Passage after passage, he found yet more of Sensan's warrior, aimlessly wandering and eager to join him.

“To me ! To me !” Tarin yelled.

He didn't feel as if he was being led, but it did cross his mind, that Yam Kermul was deliberately using cave-ins to bring him to the next group of ghost warriors.

“To me ! To me !”

By the time Tarin came to the way down to the lower catacombs, he had nearly six hundred behind him, all eager to follow him. Not a set of steps for him, or a melted hole in Tomma-Goran's enchanted walls. Tarin found a slippery path that took him down into a chamber, filled with thousands of the undead.

They were scared of him, he could feel it. The undead didn't just fall back, the ones in the front actually knelt before him. He was tempted to try and add them to his ranks, but knew they wouldn't follow him. Their war was still a long time in the future, perhaps even after the current world had died and been replaced. Chamber after chamber, Tarin led his army through, never meeting the slightest resistance. Until he too, found a wide set of steps and knew that Yam Kermul was close.

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Chillan had been crushed under a falling passage and it had been no accident. He hadn't died, but one of his new legs was broken in several places.

“Stay still while I try to heal you.” Said Babaef.

“Something is controlling the cave-ins, picking us off and splitting us up.” Said Sensan.

Babaef was now better at understanding the odd diction with which Sensan now spoke. He was right of course, the quakes weren't random and something was doing its best to keep them from being a cohesive force. They had less than a hundred of the ghost warriors with them and many of them had been injured. Losing an arm in a cave-in, didn't seem to bother them, but it did make them poorer fighters.

“Stop struggling Chillan, I'm trying to help.” Said Babaef.

“It hurts, please, it hurts !”

Ideally he'd have put Chillan to sleep, a simple spell would have done the job. They needed to be on the move though, before the next wave of slithering things attacked. Babaef ignored the screams and stretched out the broken leg, hearing the bones scratch against each other. It was bad, too many breaks to be healed too quickly.

“Hold him down will you Sensan ?” He asked.

Sensan took the task seriously and put a knee on the sorcerers chest, while Babaef straightened his leg as best he could. He thought Chillan might pass out, it might have been a mercy if he had. He screamed at every movement to his shattered leg. Babaef quickly used a healing spell, watching the green healing mist, as it spread over the ruined limb.

“Not long now Chillan, calm yourself.”

He moved his fingers over the breaks, spreading the spell, concentrating it where it was needed. Babaef was working a near miracle, but he knew the leg would be rigid and misshapen. Chillan was looking far more comfortable and the screaming had ceased.

“One more minute.” Said Babaef.

He put his hand round the knee joint and used all his skills to heal it, but it was locked. Perhaps it might be improved, once they were on the surface, if they survived the day. He was giving Chillan a rigid leg to move around on, but he would be able to walk.

“That is the best I can do in these tunnels. On your feet and let's have a look at you.”

Chillan was wary of putting weight on the limb, so Sensan dragged him to his feet. He walked about on the stiff leg and seemed pleased.

“Thank you master. The pain has gone and I can walk tolerably well.”

“Good.” Said Babaef. “We need to keep moving. The quakes seemed to have stopped and we've still a long way to go.”

Sensan shouted a few commands and the ghost warriors formed a loose circle around them.

“I'm drained from the healing spell and Chillan will need protecting.” Said Babaef. “We're going to have to rely on your people Sensan.”

“We'll fight to the last man.” Replied Sensan.

Still the odd accent, whatever Sensan was, it was no man. He seemed loyal though and Babaef needed him and his men. They moved towards where they all felt the dark one to be. The attacks were less ferocious, but every side tunnel invariably meant fighting off dozens of the slithering monsters.

“It doesn't make sense.” Said Chillan. “You're here to release the dark one. Surely they should be letting us through ?”

“The armies of chaos don't all follow the same leaders or doctrines.” Said Babaef. “Leng have their own way of worshipping chaos and the Shrine here was built by those that followed a different path. They see each other as heretics Chillan.”



It took them over an hour to cover about a mile and a half, constantly being attacked by the creatures that slithered. Eventually Babaef stood in front of two huge doors, slightly ajar. He knew them of course, they were marked on the plans of the catacombs. Few had ever seen the plans, but he had, the sorcerers guild actually owned an ancient copy. The doors even had a name;

“Welcome to the doors of Elthriaxer.” Said Babaef.

“Who ?” Asked Chillan.

Babaef had to laugh, how could anyone in the City, not know of the architect who had designed it.

“You probably just know him as Thrax, from your reading of the history of the City.”

“Oh, him.”

“Yes him Chillan ! Elthriaxer went on to design and build the great holy city of Mendera. Before that though he worked for the demons and before that, he designed this City for Tomma-Goran.

Everything past these doors is the domain of the elder undead and very few ever return.”

The doors were over two hundred feet tall and even the slight gap in them was wide enough for Babaef to walk through, side by side with Chillan.

“Was this Thrax a giant of some kind ?” Asked Chillan.

Again Babaef chuckled.

“When we get back, I’m going to force you to read the history of the Menderan first age. No ! Thrax was no giant. He was just an ordinary man with big ideas.”

Babaef led, the others following. Through the doors he went and down a set of wide steps, wide enough for their entire party to walk side by side.

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In The Dome, strange things had been happening. Walls that had been thought of as solid, were cracking and crumbling. In at least six places, the very fabric of the building was falling apart. Caspian knew what was happening, even as he received the summons, to inspect the refectory.

“Look Caspian !” Said Adamaz. “Look ! There’s another kitchen through there.”

Adamaz was rarely excited and Caspian had never known him to be so animated.

“You know what this means Caspian ?”

Caspian knew only too well, but he was going to feign ignorance.

“Someone must have bricked up part of our kitchen.” He said.

“Don’t be a fool ! This is a way into the upper Dome. At last, we have access to the rooms and apartments of the ancient humans. Who knows, maybe the rooms Tomma-Goran once used.”

Adamaz was like an excited child and the worst thing was, that he was right. Caspian had been there, though he’d never had the opportunity to explore properly. It was the beginning of a new age for the library, a time of real power for Adamaz and himself. Nothing was ever going to be quite the same again.

“Come boy.” Said Adamaz. “The quakes seemed to have stopped. We must at least have a quick look around.”

“Yes, yes of course.”

Vella was in the kitchen, come with the others to gawp at the collapsed wall and the kitchen beyond. She’d been there, she’d know the potential problem. Caspian leant close to her ear;

“Run Vella, run.” He said. “Make sure that no way has opened from our hidden library to the Upper Dome.”

He saw from her eyes that she understood the threat to their hidden loot and the statues of the ancient human dwellers in The Dome.

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Vella ran like the wind, as if Chaos Lord Valsec the Usurper himself was chasing her. Their home had always seemed quite close to the refectory, but now it seemed an awfully long distance. She was breathing hard by the time she reached their private section of The Dome.

"The key." She muttered to herself.

They always kept their old bedroom locked and the key was hidden in where they now slept. She ran to their bedroom and picked up the shell on the windowsill. The shell was pretty, Caspian had bought it for her at the market. It was the shell of a creature that lived at the bottom of the ocean, or at least that was what the person selling it had said. She rattled the shell and a key fell out. Run, run to their old bedroom and she unlocked the door, entered and locked the door behind her. Now she finally relaxed a little. The tapestry over the hole in the wall was still there, everything looked the same.

Vella pulled the tapestry aside and entered the place they thought of as their secret library. The lighting globe was permanently on, set to its lowest level. In reality, the room had been LLud Narren's prison for countless years, though they had no idea why he'd been chained to the wall. He was dead now, so she accepted that they would probably never know the rest of his story.

"It's fine, everything is fine." She muttered.

Their precious things covered all the shelves and the old desk. The heavier items of gold, were still in an untidy heap on the floor. Everything was priceless and made them probably the richest people in The City. No new doors in the walls, no collapsed stonework, it was all fine.

Along the corridor and everything seemed in order. Vella turned on a lighting globe, just enough to be able to climb the spiral stairs. The room with the statues was fine, no new holes in the wall and the petrified form of Inanna, was where they'd left her. Vella had to stroke the face of the angel as she passed, just for luck. Up the stairs again and Vella finally sat on the floor and sobbed with relief. The wall was still there, the passage to the Upper Dome hadn't reopened, their secret rooms were still safe and their secret.

Something was trying to get into her mind, something important. Their fight with LLud Narren came into her mind and other memories of the few days they had spent, trapped in the Upper Dome. No food, nowhere to sleep properly, it had been a terrible time. Suddenly Vella was up on her feet and running again, she had to get there before Adamaz.

"Fuck ! Our clothes !" She shrieked.

Vella remembered that they'd left a few things behind in the Upper Dome, including clothing, which many people would recognise as theirs. The clothes were a known threat. What had Vella running so hard was something else, the unknown threat. She really couldn't remember what else they might have left there, or how incriminating it might be.

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Babaef reached the centre of the lower catacombs and they were all there. No undead of course, they still patiently waited for their apocalypse. Muzzie was there, with Lilleth and Gesse of course. They were at the edge of a fissure in the ground that looked relatively new.

"We've all been waiting for you." Shouted Muzzie.

Tarin was there, at the head of a sizeable army of the ghost warriors. Babaef should have felt aggrieved about having his warriors poached, but the time for such feelings was long past. Tarin was on the very edge of the fissure, looking down.

"There seems to be no way down." He said.

"None of us need to go any further." Said Babaef. "The ritual of release will be performed here."

"You still intend to release the dark one ?" Asked Gesse.

“Of course, it’s why I came, though I’m sure we all know it isn’t Nigon at the bottom of this fissure. Yam Kermul wishes existence in our world once again and I intend to give him that existence.”

“If we let you !” Said Lilleth.

From a passage in the rocks, walked Maya and Bailig, though it took Babaef a moment to recognise them. Their clothing was reduced to rags and both carried weapons that reeked of chaotic powers. Maya seemed to be the one leading and she stood beside Tarin, briefly acknowledging his presence.

“Let the ritual be performed.” She said. “Whoever any of us really serve, we all need the Lord of Death brought into existence. Serve him or hate him, we all need him here !”

Only Lilleth still looked unhappy, everyone else simply nodded their agreement. Babaef stepped back slightly, putting himself about ten feet from the fissure.

“I’d advise moving back a little.” He called.

Tarin moved his ghost army back and Babaef noticed that Maya joined him, Bailig silently following. Alliances were forming, though he had no idea if they were for him, or against him. Muzzie and Gesse found a rubble free area to sit on and everyone was ready for the ritual to begin.

“You should move back too.” He said to Sensan and Chillan.

Once they’d gone he was alone, just as he knew it would be. The final seal was the hardest to release and he always had needed to do it alone. He was about to try the unthinkable, to defeat the most dangerous entity that had ever walked the rifts. He was either going to die, or gain enough power, to rule not just The City of the Lost God, but also the entire 1<sup>st</sup> rift.

“So, Babaef you old fool.” He muttered to himself. “Let’s see if you’ve learned anything.”

Babaef raised his arms and mentally rehearsed the dozen or more lines of the first invocation. First he had to open the catacombs to the darkest of all powers. In many ways it was not only the first part of the ritual, but also the most dangerous.

“Sre amnit donara senela onamba !” He screamed.

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Part 31 will be posted at the end of April.