

## Ripples from the Past

### Chapter 34 – An Eternity of Chaos

**“Albas had seen some strange sights since becoming one of The Damned, but seeing a wraith vaporised by a lightning bolt was one of the strangest. At first the wraith was expanded to three or four times its normal size, before exploding into a cloud of bright luminescence.”**

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Kittara sat alone, out among the crumbling battlements. She was spinning orbs of power, tapping conduits that led to the places of darkness. She pulled on sources of power which were willingly given and a few that weren't. Hopefully the warrior angels, the undead and the rift warriors would defeat the enemy, assisted by Minraver of course. Having an eternal definitely made it all more interesting. Could Minraver be defeated? Kittara wasn't sure, so she was testing links, feeling how much power she could call upon if needed. Allowing that much power to flow through her would mean her death of course, but she had died before. What was her life anyway, when put in the scales against an eternity of chaos.

“You may need some power from the darkness, but don't throw your life away. You're no longer cursed by prophecy. Enjoy the freedom you now have Kittara.”

Kittara sighed as she saw Qunan Arje walking towards her. As the famous rebel leader had died in the previous switch, it had to be the multiverse using him as a vessel. Not the worst choice the multiverse had made, Kittara had quite liked Qunan. Until he'd become insane and tried to kill Sventa of course.

“I tried to pick someone whose death you regretted.” Said Qunan.

“Ahh, learning from our emotions again. Tell me, do you even really exist without our emotions?”

“Probably not. Life exists so that we can see, hear and understand.....Ourselves, the multiverse.”

“Hmmm.”

Kittara carried on testing links to sources of dark energy. Despite all her talk about welcoming eternal chaos, the Lady of the Shrine wasn't stopping her from using the power of the shrine. Others too, who should have been enemies, seemed less than keen on him, the crawling chaos, being released again.

“Why are you here?” Asked Kittara. “If it's to tell me I might have to sacrifice myself again? I already knew that.”

“No, I wish your life to continue. Your thoughts are so clear, your memories so bright..... It would be sad if you had no new memories. Survive Kittara, we may have use for you one day.”

“When is the enemy arriving?”

“Now, I already see a dark spot in the sky. In a few moments your seer will feel it and call the alarm.”

“Next time, if there is a next time. Come as someone I might feel happy about seeing.”

The fake Qunan Arje was gone, just as Louelle began to shriek and sound the alarm. There was a dark spot in the sky, one that was rapidly growing. It seemed their enemy preferred to fight in total darkness. That didn't worry Kittara, she could kill just as well in the dark, as she could in the light. The darkness would also allow the creatures out of the basements and cellars, the shadows who had abjured the light a very long time ago.

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Seren watched the Terak warriors go through their morning routine. Just like the dark angels, there was a lot of washing activity by the edge of the great river, followed by the smells of breakfast being

cooked. A few Dredger demons had crossed the river and suffered a quick death. So far though, Aukar's army still seemed happy to pretend it was just another ordinary day on the rifts.

"They will come and talk to us eventually." Said Seren.

"How well do they speak the common tongue?" Asked Itzel.

"They speak an older version, but Chlo said we'll understand them."

The Terak were still legendary monsters to the dark angels, the villains in numerous nursery rhymes. Only now those legendary creatures were there, solid flesh and blood and eating breakfast. Seren found it quite disconcerting, but also exciting.

"Today we may well find out who is the better warrior, Dark Angel or Terak." Said Seren.

"Our people are eager to fight.... Will you make them the offer?"

"We agreed on that Itzel. It is important that we carry out the plan we agreed. I think it's what Sventa would have done, had she been here."

"It's just..... I heard that Terak meat is so delicious."

Sventa had left her in the position of commander of the forces of Erasmus Seven. Seren liked to bounce ideas off Itzel though and it had become almost a joint leadership. Not that Seren was under any illusion about where the blame would fall if it all went horribly wrong. Get too many of her warriors killed and Sventa would never forgive her. There was activity on the other side of the river, a few Terak beginning to cross at the shallows.

"They're walking rather than flying. Do you think that signifies anything?" Asked Itzel.

"Perhaps Aukar is coming himself. We'll know when they're closer."

About a dozen Terak were wading through the shallows, a particularly large male in the lead. Seren didn't quite believe it was Aukar, until she could see the armour he wore and the royal plume on his helmet.

"It's him." Yelled Itzel. "Now that is bravery, to come himself."

"Get our warriors into the air." Said Seren. "I want him to see a wall of our dark angels, between him and the rift gate."

Seren walked towards the Terak walking out of the river. Aukar would have a few of his general with him, but she had no way of knowing who. She only recognised Aukar by his elaborate armour and royal plume in his helmet. Not that he was going to introduce himself. One of his generals did that for him.

"I am General Dhūlen and it my pleasure to introduce Aukar, ruler of the Terak."

Dhūlen's voice was a bit nasally, but she understood him well enough. He sounded like someone from an outlying planet, learning the common tongue as a second language. His diction was too good, no one on Mendera spoke that well. Aukar removed his fancy helmet and took a step towards her. Time to introduce herself.

"My name is Seren and I command the warriors of Erasmus Seven, the Dark Angels."

She knew there was a chance she'd die if the talks went badly. That was another advantage of bouncing all her ideas off Itzel. If today was to be her last, Itzel would kill every single Terak warrior.

"I didn't know the dark angels still served Mendera." Said Aukar.

"Our home planet is not part of the empire. The 1<sup>st</sup> rift was given to our emperor a long time ago though, as her hunting ground. You have entered our ancestral hunting grounds without permission."

She'd heard that the Terak found it impossible to smile, yet Aukar managed it. His question was obvious though and expected.

"May I have permission for my army to travel across the 1<sup>st</sup> rift?"

“No.”

Silence, while Aukar muttered quietly to his generals, especially Dhūlen. It was an odd place to hold talks, on the muddy bank of the great river. The fate of so many warriors on both sides, rested on the outcome of the meeting.

“My army needs to enter the rift gate.” Said Aukar. “I do not doubt the bravery of your warriors Seren, but many may die today. My people will also die, perhaps in great numbers. No one will gain anything from such a battle, apart from the Menderan Empire. Perhaps there is something you want ? Something I can give you as a token of respect ?”

Seren could almost taste Aukar’s flesh in her mouth. She wanted to fight him so badly, yet there was a constant nagging in her mind. Sventa would have wanted her to make the offer and make it in good faith. Not that anyone seemed to know where Sventa was at the moment.

“There is an offer, which can’t be negotiated.” She said. “You either agree or disagree and you must decide now. You can’t go home, so you can have the 1<sup>st</sup> rift as a new home. It is big, far larger than you might think. There is more space here than on a dozen planets. You brought few females with you, but there is room on the rift for a billion Terak to eventually call home. Would you be interested in that ? Shall I tell you the terms of the offer ?”

More muttering with his generals, but she could tell he was interested. Aukar was a brave leader, but the attack on Mendera City was a plan born out of desperation. Given a reasonable alternative, he’d probably agree to it. Seren hoped he’d agree fairly quickly, as her feet had already sunk about three inches into the muddy river bank.

“Tell me the terms of the full offer and I will consider it.” Said Aukar.

“We, the Dark Angels will give you our ancestral hunting grounds, the entire 1<sup>st</sup> rift. As far as possible you will live alongside those who already inhabit this place. You must give me your word that the Terak will never again make war against the empire. Personally I can see us being allies one day, but that isn’t something you need to agree to.”

“This rift will be ours, to do with as we please ?”

“Yes, just don’t wipe out the tribespeople.”

More muttering with the general called Dhūlen. Itzel was back, hand on her blade. So many of her dark angels would have loved to fight the Terak. Even a part of Seren hoped Aukar was about to say no.

“Can we discuss this and give you our answer later ?” Asked Dhūlen.

“No.”

Seren wasn’t being awkward, she had a quarter of a million warriors with little in the way of provisions. They were either going to fight there and then or go home. When Aukar gave her a slight bow, she knew they were going home.

“I Aukar, leader of the Terak agree to your terms. There will be fights and squabbles of course, but we will not seek to destroy the current inhabitants of the rift. I will create a sacred duty, passed down through the generations, to remain at peace with the Menderan Empire. There will be peace and we will have a new home.”

Seren bowed politely to Aukar, it seemed appropriate.

“I will give you a last piece of advice, Aukar monarch of the Terak.” She said. “Leave your camp here and travel many miles before building a permanent town. The abandoned city here is a bad place, best avoided.”

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Celli heard the alarm and saw the darkness spreading across the sky. She'd become an expert on the layout of the fortress, after organising so much rebuilding work. She'd become so close to the tribespeople, that they'd given her a small personal guard. For some reason one of the huge revenants had also attached himself to her.

"He's probably just glad of the company, after spending years in the catacombs."

Silky had told her. For whatever reason Celli found herself with a loyal entourage, all armed to the teeth and ready to fight. The first urgent matter was light and luckily Hol had foreseen an attack at night.

"Light the fires, get all the fires and braziers burning." She yelled.

It wasn't just her shouting, the order to light the fires was being repeated right across the fortress. The light was never going to be bright, but slowly everywhere was being lit by the orange light of wood fires. Some of the fence posts Kittara had found were used in the outer defences, but most had gone to serve as firewood. Celli was a Shelzak demon and besides being hard to kill, she'd also been born with a natural gift for magic. As she passed an unlit fire pit, she spoke a few words and held her hand in a certain way. In a split second the pit was ablaze.

"No dawdling, no areas of darkness, everywhere must have enough light to fight by." She shouted. Celli ignored the things keeping to the areas of darkness, the shadows, wraiths and creatures never named. They were for Silky to control, if she was able. Celli ran like the wind, her self-appointed guards running behind her. Once she was happy that the fortress was awake and as well-lit as it was ever likely to be, she headed towards the front gates.

"Portals are opening, many portals." Louelle called from the watchtower.

Some parts of the outer wall had been repaired better than others. The stairs Celli chose to get to the top were narrow, with several loose stones. Shelzak demons aren't light, weighing as much as three or four of the tribespeople. She ran up the steps though, jumping when one of the steps moved beneath her foot. By some miracle she reached the top of wall unharmed, her guards with her. Shelzak are tough, as long as their heart still beats, they can recover from just about any injury. Celli felt fear though, as she saw the portals opening near the base of the mountain.

"Twenty gateways to who knows where, maybe hell itself." She said. "More still opening. It would seem our enemy is sending all their forces against us. Who here can see the portals opening in the darkness?"

The tribespeople could see in the background ultraviolet wash, but none of them seemed to see what she was seeing. The twenty or more enormous doorways, opening to allow a massive army to enter the rifts. Celli could even see creatures appearing from those portals, huge unnatural creatures.

"I see them, as clearly as I see you." Said the revenant.

"Find Hol then and tell her what you've seen." Said Celli. "Tell her it doesn't look like the enemy will attack in waves. They appear to be massing to overwhelm us with in one massive attack."

It was a pity to send her best fighter as a messenger, but the information was important. Celli sat on the edge of the wall and watched, as their enemy arrived. Not thousands, or even tens of thousands. It looked as though their enemy had called upon every type of vile creature in that other multiverse. Celli wouldn't have been surprised if the creatures walking towards the fortress numbered in the millions.

"Does anyone know a daylight spell?" She asked.

Blank faces and it was something she wasn't that good at. Celli concentrated, building an orb of light over her head, which wasn't as bright as she'd hoped. Still, it would have to do. She sent it high and

far, watching it drop about halfway to the open portals. As it burst it showed enough to make even her undead gasp.

“What are those things ?” Someone asked.

“I don’t know, but we’ll fight them until none of us are left to fight.”

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Kittara stood and watched the fortress come alive, as everyone prepared for battle. She’d done what she could, building up pathways to enough dark energy to destroy any attacker. In doing so she’d destroy the fortress though and every living soul in it, and the undead. She was still considering the option of sacrificing her own life if need be, by taking his prison into the wastes of eternity. That option would only be used if they looked likely to be overrun by the approaching creatures.

“Don’t be alarmed, this is the safest and best defended part of the fortress.” Said Mingal.

“But..... I want to see the battle.” Said Seesha.

“Me too.” Added Mix.

“Let them watch from the stairs.” Said Kittara.

There was a set of stone stairs leading nowhere, but they were still strong and safe. From them the young clerics could watch the battle, the darkness hiding unpleasant details. Mingal was giving one of his disapproving looks, but they’d both seen inside the jail. They knew one of the truly great secrets and would soon know others, if they survived of course. Mingal came and stood beside her, watching huge shapes moving up the mountain pathways.

“What will you do with them, the children ?” He asked. “If defeat looks certain.”

“I can put them into a deep sleep, wrap them up in an impenetrable ball of darkness and send them to..... But where to send them in a multiverse being returned to a state of chaos ?”

“It might be kinder to let them die here, if it comes to that.”

“Hmmm, maybe. Luri’s realm might survive. I may well send them into the darkness beyond gateway.”

The enemy seemed to like using electricity as a weapon. The first act of aggression from the silent creatures approaching the walls. A lance of bright blue, as artificial lightning shattered a building where the warrior angels were billeted. It had begun, the battle to decide the fate of several different multiverses.

“Go and protect the children Mingal, I have a message to send and you might not like my messenger.”

Kittara sat on the dusty floor and built a grey mist around herself, or allowed it to form. Even she wasn’t sure if the mist was something she unconsciously created, or whether it was sentient in some way, waiting to appear. Who to use as her messenger though ? She could think of several who’d get the job done, all unpleasant. Kittara looked past the portals still pouring enemy creatures out onto the mountainside. She felt the fertile area of the rift by the great river and found a Crauch demon. Large and tough, though not blessed with too much intelligence. Crauch were unpleasant demons, shunned by most living things. They ate the long dead, the more corrupt the body the better. It broke an old taboo which meant Celli was likely to kill the demon on sight. Not that Kittara intended that anyone would see her strange messenger.

“I see you creature of filth and corruption. Come to me.”

She put her words into its head, but the demon was far away and able to resist her call. Kittara felt for its life essence, attempting to cover it in her grey mist. Damn, it was still resisting. There might be other potential messengers closer to her, but the Crauch was perfect. Tough, likely to survive being pushed into an alternative multiverse and best of all, expendable.

“Living or dead will do just as well.” She told it. “I can kill you and your wraith will gladly answer my call.”

A wraith was useless for delivering messages, but the demon didn't know that. It ceased resisting her, allowing her grey mist to cover it completely. A few seconds later the eater of the dead was there, standing in front of her. She touched one of its four arms, forcing her will into its feeble mind. “You are mine now demon. I have a message to be delivered to a deity, though she's called Luri by those that know her well. I will put an image of her into your mind. Do you see it ? Will you recognise her ?”

“Yes.”

Crauch weren't clever, but they weren't stupid either. Any messenger might not find Luri, or die in the attempt. It was a very difficult thing to be flung into a long dead multiverse. The demon in front of her was the best out of a long list of bad choices and would have to do.

“I will send you close to where she should be. Find her and give her this message. Tell her Kittara says the enemy are too strong, the fortress will be overrun within three hours, four at the most. Tell her she must act before then, or it will be too late.”

She made the demon repeat the message back twice, before using prodigious amounts of power to send it hurtling through the grey between worlds. If it found Luri, she was confident it would give her the correct message. Kittara climbed past the children, to balance right at the top of the stairs no longer connected to any building. The mountainside was in darkness, yet she saw something which looked like the ripples moving across an ocean. It was the steady movement of the huge number of enemy creatures, as they approached the fortress walls.

“Can we come up there ?” Asked Seesha.

“No, I will fight them from here.”

There were a few fires in the fortress now, started by the enemy's lightning bolts. Kittara built a tear of the damned in front of her face and sent it into the darkness beyond the walls, allowing it to find a target at random. The noise of the explosion filled her ears, as the light showed her a huge reptile creature being ripped apart. Some of the creatures approaching the wall reminded her of the mollusc type monsters of the 7<sup>th</sup> rift, while others defied description. She'd killed one of the monsters though, a large one.

“Now, if I could just repeat that a million times.” She muttered.

Kittara began to create more tears, hanging them in front of her face, before sending them at the monsters beginning to clamber over the fortress walls.

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Hol had moved her battle headquarters to the roof of the building she'd used before. There were runners there now to carry her orders to every commander in the fortress. Juno was with her, as was Albas. Far too many heavy hitters in one place, even if it was to protect her.

“Damn them, they're sending every monster they can find to attack us.” She said.

“I went to the wall, their numbers are so huge.... They fill the entire side of the mountain.” Said Juno Mo was there too, though Silky was still commanding her army of wraiths and shadows.

“It's those silver creatures Kittara mentioned.” He said. “They must have been planning this for millennia, gaining control of these monsters. The future Terak I think she called them.”

“There are so many.... All we can do is slow them down.” Said Albas.

Hol wanted to get angry and give them a speech about negative thinking. She could see the creatures though, about to pour over the outer walls. If she'd had half a million of The Damned, she

could have cut her way through the creatures, but she just had Albas, Juno and Tejan. Poor Tejan, who been brought to the fortress almost by accident.

"I agree, we can only hope to slow them down." Said Hol. "Juno and Albas, pick a secure place in the fortress and use spells until the enemy is too close and then use your swords. We must slow them down."

They left, leaving Mo and Tejan waiting expectantly for their orders. Tempting to give Mo the task that might save his life. She liked Mo, they'd fought together many times before. She doubted if he'd agree to abandon Silky though. Tejan though....Kittara seemed to think her life was worth saving.

"Mo can stay with me for now, I appreciate your honest opinions....Most of the time."

Hol shifted her gaze to Tejan, still wondering if she's made the right choice.

"Tejan, you can go to Mendera to tell them what's happening here. It's important that they know about this attack."

Hol leant in close to Tejan, whispering in her ear.

"We may be able to keep control of the fortress until tonight, but no longer than that."

Poor Tejan, such a task to give her, informing Mendera that the fortress would be where they were all likely to die.

"How can I get to Mendera?"

"Ask Kittara to send you, she'll realise it's important. She may well have her own message to give you. If she can't send you to Mendera City, I'm sure she can get you to a rift gate. From there you can make it to The Well of Souls."

Tejan was crying as she left, the girl was so very young for one of The Damned. There were still others with her of course, runners and two revenants to guard her until the end. It was time to organise her forces.

"Go to Minraver." She told a runner. "Tell her I expect to see her Genova fight the enemy and driving them back. Tell her I expect to see that happen in the next few minutes."

Minraver was too timid, but at least Mo wasn't saying he'd told her so. Like her, Mo was watching the enemy come over the outer walls. There was sounds now, the screams of those dying on both sides. The gates had been put together quickly, out of wood found in nearby valleys. The reptile monsters knocked them flat and began pouring into the fortress.

"Celli was there, right there guarding the gates." Said Mo. "I'd like to go and help her."

"No, stay here. Send a runner to see if she's still fighting."

She meant to see if Celli was dead of course, but didn't want to say the words. The sky to her left was lit up by the spells of hundreds of Genova as they fought against the never ending tide of monsters.

"They burn these strange creatures, they burn and die." Said Mo.

The enemy seemed to have limitless numbers, but Minraver's warrior angels were driving them back from a section of the wall. Creatures were dying from fire spells, huge reptilian creatures. It was almost as if the good news was destined to arrive when she was feeling at her lowest.

"Silky is leading the shadows and wraiths out to battle." Yelled Mo. "Now you'll see the enemy turn and run."

Run was a little optimistic, though the creatures did seem to be avoiding the creatures of darkness. Kittara said some of them were so old that they had no name, or at least none that a human could pronounce. They might be abominations, destined to never see daylight again, but Silky knew how to lead them. Two wraiths touched a monster large enough to see over the walls, instantly turning it to dust.

“Did you see that ?” Asked Mo.

She had, though they’d have needed far more such wraiths to turn the battle in their favour. Hol knew they were probably all going to die, the friends she’d brought all the way from Mendera. It pleased her though, to know they’d take a lot of the enemy with them.

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Rhian stroked Pug a few times before opening his pen and allowing him to follow her past the well. It was still quiet in the central area of the fortress, though she could hear the battle moving closer.

“He won’t go.” Said Kerr. “He’ll just follow you about.”

“There’s nowhere for him to go anyway. It just seems kinder to set him free, before.... You know.”

He’d know what she meant of course, the monstrous creatures were relentlessly moving closer, destroying everything as they went. They were too numerous to sneak past, so she and Kerr were waiting for the inevitable.

“I hope Kittara has sent the kids somewhere.” She said.

“I’m sure she has.”

There was a rumbling sound not that far away, followed by the ground vibrating slightly. Another building had been knocked over, though it was too dark to see where. One of the tentacle creatures lit itself up with blue lightning. They did that just before using lightning bolts as weapons. Rhian had a bow, given to her by the tribespeople. She fired two arrows at the creature before it became just another huge shadow in the dark again.

“You’re getting good with that thing.” Said Kerr.

“It probably never felt a thing, something that size. I feel better though.”

Rhian had never thought that much about her own death, people rarely do. Her grandmother had insisted on being brought home to die. Rhian could understand why and the fortress now felt like home. She stroked Pug again and realised if she could have chosen where to spend her final few minutes, it would have been right there, with Kerr and Pug in the ruined fortress. She sat on the wall surrounding the well, pushing a dozen arrows into the ground beside her.

“Why do you think anyone would want to let chaos loose ?” Asked Kerr.

“To destroy out multiverse so that theirs won’t end. At least I think that’s why, no one has given a proper answer.”

“What do you think chaos is like ?”

“I don’t know Kerr, I fly container ships for a living. Lots of swirling hot gas for eternity I guess, with no planets or life, or anything else.”

“Why would anyone help to make that happen ? It’s crazy, stupid....It’s not logical.”

“Louelle would say you’re making the mistake of trying to explain everything with human logic.”

“She says that kind of thing quite a lot.” Muttered Kerr.

Louelle had been in the gatehouse tower when the attack came and unlikely to retreat from it. Rhian knew there was a good chance that Louelle was dead. As she was the last of the Kiyoh, her entire race was probably now extinct. Pondering on the nature of chaos helped push any further dark thoughts from her mind.

“Louelle would say that although we recoil at the thought of eternal chaos, it’s paradise to something..... Out there.”

“How about all the mortal creatures helping to bring it about ?” Asked Kerr. “It will mean the end for all of them.”

“Fanatics, happy that their God will be set free. Even if they never live to see it.”

“That sort of makes sense.”



“As much sense as anything has recently.” She sighed.

Pug disturbed their talk, bellowing and running towards an approaching shape in the dark.

“They’re here.” Said Kerr, picking up a large wood axe.

The creature walked past a fire pit, enabling her to see it was one of the four legged reptiles. It had to be twenty feet tall and its head appeared to be mostly made up of jaws with rows of sharp teeth.

Pug was bellowing as he ran straight at the brute.

“Go get it Pug !” She yelled.

Rhian strung an arrow and aimed at the creature’s right eye, before pulling the string as far back as she was able. She silently prayed for luck to no one in particular, as she released the arrow.

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Albas had followed Silky, as she’d taken her wraiths and shadows on a rampage through the enemy ranks. There were other creatures among the shadows, horrors from a far older world. At first the reptilian monsters had shown no fear of Silky and her small army, but that had quickly changed. As little as a glancing touch from one of her wraiths was enough to turn the largest monster to dust. Their enemy weren’t purely mindless monsters, they’d quickly learned to avoid Silky and her minions who’d long ago abjured the light.

“Sadly they learned that shadows and wraiths can be destroyed by lightning.” He muttered.

Albas had seen some strange sights since becoming one of The Damned, but seeing a wraith vaporised by a lightning bolt was one of the strangest. At first the wraith was expanded to three or four times its normal size, before exploding into a cloud of bright luminescence. Albas had followed Silky all the way to the destroyed front gates, before she and her surviving shadows had fled into the relative safety of the dark places, the cellars and basements below ground.

“Remain here and I may be killed by friend as easily as foe.” He grumbled.

He was behind the enemy lines, watching the spells from Minraver’s Genova fly over his head. There were explosion ahead of him and a building collapsing not far to his left. Minraver seemed to be his biggest immediate danger, or more accurately the spells cast by her warrior angels. Flames passed above his head, huge walls of fire. So close that he had to crouch under a fallen stone column to escape the searing heat. Once the heat subsided he ran, finding his path blocked by a truly terrible sight.

“Oh, I always thought you’d be the one to get home in one piece.” He muttered.

There had been an event of legendary proportions, but no one appeared to have lived to tell the tale. There were the dismembered body parts of at least three huge reptiles and some from creatures he couldn’t even guess at. Huge pieces of blue flesh had been cut or blasted from something. A circle of the undead had tried to protect her, but they had been crushed in some way, though some bore signs of being electrocuted. The tribespeople had fought there too, though all of them had died, at least a dozen warriors. At the centre of all that death was the body of Celli. He had to push a dead revenant off her face, before he believed it was her.

“We didn’t know each other well, but I will miss you.”

Shelzak demons were tough, but there were limits to how much damage they could survive. Celli had been crush, stabbed, slashed and hit by several lightning bolts. Her skin was still smouldering in places. Albas still found himself touching her face, waiting for her eyes to move and a sarcastic comment to come out of her mouth. He closed her eyes, finally accepting that Celli was dead.

“I will avenge you and if I survive this day, I will tell all of Mendera about your heroic death.”

The battle was still going on around him, creatures dying on both sides. Albas would have liked a few quiet moments to at least cover Celli’s body, but fate had other ideas. They came out of the

darkness, the strange blue molluscs. They looked like huge shells, moving slowly towards him on a single undulating foot. They'd have looked harmless, maybe even comical, if it hadn't been for the hundreds of long tendrils spreading out from a hole in their shells.

"What new hell is this?"

Everywhere the tendrils touched, they left blue spark, sometimes even flames. Between the creatures, herding them along, were the small silver creatures. In the dark the silver colour was less clear and they really did look like small Terak. Albas did what any other member of The Damned would have done. His mind was too fatigued to cast spells, so he raised his sword and ran at the enemy.

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First a green swirl of mist appeared in the centre of the old abandoned village. The mist became more solid, spinning slower and slower, until it cleared to reveal Tejan. The rift gate was close, barely twenty yards away from her. Sending her directly to Mendera City would have taken ten times the amount of power and Kittara had needed every scrap of power for the battle.

"Picture The Well of Souls in your mind as you step into the gate." Kittara had told her.

It sounded so simple, but Tejan was doing it on her own. She wasn't as used to travelling the rifts as Kittara. Tejan felt far more at home on proper planets than the strange rifts with no horizons and a constant wash of infrared light.

"Someone has been here."

There were old camp fires near the great river, one still smouldering. There was also a scent in the air, the unmistakable perfume of dark angels. Their pheromones were famous, their aroma unique. Sventa's warriors had been camped there recently and in large numbers.

It was a mystery, but not one which could be allowed to delay her arrival in Mendera City. Tejan walked right up to the shimmer at the end of the road, the only sign of the rift gate. Once there had been a small temple with a shrine, but that had been destroyed during the second or third Great War. There had been many wars in the constant struggle between humans and demons.

"Take me home, please take me home."

She had The Well of Souls in her mind as she stepped forward. There was a dreadful feeling of falling, which seemed to go on forever.....

"Mummy, look someone came through the well."

"Shush dear, it's just one of the guards."

She was stood on the well-tended grass by the well, on a pleasant sunny afternoon. Families were there, enjoying a picnic. It seemed strange, wrong. Didn't they realise what was there, just a step away, on the rifts? Of course they didn't no one did, who hadn't stepped into the well and gone there.

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