

## Mendera Temple

### Chapter 17 – Angels with savage weapons

**“Delmus pulled at the wires and about a foot of cable came out of the creature’s head, followed by a large lump of brain tissue and dark grey blood.”**

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Juliette had been standing between two of the largest portals for some time, watching the Dracc pour through. She’d seen their leaders with their armour and communications devices and had been tempted to kill them, but now wasn’t the time to show herself, or the power the angels could wield. When she’d last been on the walls of Annill, Luri was still killing Dracc in vast numbers, but time and mathematics weren’t on her side. If every defender of Annill were to kill a hundred Dracc, the city would still be overrun. Now the turrets outside of the city were silent and overrun. Some of the turrets on the walls still fired, but now it was the towers holding back the millions of Dracc. Once they fell silent, it was up to the Genova to save the city.

She’d known it would happen, so had Sikush, it was inevitable. Even if all of The Damned could have been spared for the battle, it was doubtful if they could have saved Annill. Only the Genova had sufficient numbers and the destructive power to do it. Juliette wondered how much of Annill would be left standing, but Sumahn-Nerish had to remain unmolested and safe in his Alcázar, it was essential for the survival of the multiverse. There were now no more Dracc coming through the portals, even they seemed to have a limit on their numbers. Juliette left it a few minutes, to be certain every last Dracc was on the rifts, before moving herself to the lifeless rock, where the vast army of the elder Genova were waiting.

Over a million of the young Genova had already been fighting in Annill. They were energetic, they were fast on their feet, but they had little raw power. In front of Juliette and brought to a frenzy by Estrid, were over six million elder Genova. Once, in a different switch and on a different world, their long dead ancestors had fought to contain the crawling chaos. They had won, but the cost had been the loss of their reality, a loss of any solid form or home. Estrid had temporarily given them substance and many had recovered their ancient weapons, the savage weapons the angels had all once carried. Juliette had no idea how many of the weapons would still work, but she was sure enough would. Enough to destroy the Dracc and teach the deities a lesson, teach them why the angels had once been the most feared army in the multiverse.

“Are you ready?” Shrieked Juliette.

They all had children, some grandchildren and a few had great grandchildren. None of them were worried if they didn’t survive the day, they were just there to gain a future for their future descendants. Their long hair flowed behind their beautiful white and gold robes, their savage weapons glinted in the morning light from the sun the dead planet orbited.

“We are !” They shouted.

Juliette was back between the portals and she began running. No weapons in her hands, just her natural Genova powers, but she was running after the Dracc horde as they advanced on Annill. Around her other angels began to appear, until she was accompanied by a vast army of running Genova. The Dracc didn’t react, or even seem aware that they were being followed, until the first fire cloud killed thousands of their number.

“None can survive, kill every single one !” Shouted Juliette.

Others took up her call, until the entire army knew that no mercy was to be shown. The Dracc were to be exterminated, their presence completely removed from the rifts. Flames everywhere around her and then to her right a green cloud from an angelic weapon and thousands of Dracc crumbled to dust. It was carnage, but the Genova weren't having it all their own way. Juliette saw many of her fellow angels pulled apart, caught by the Dracc before they could fight back. They were still over nine miles from Annill and it looked like they'd have a hard fight all the way. Juliette let loose a fresh wall of flame and then moved to Annill, to see how things fared with Luri, if she was still alive.

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"Damn !"

Delmus had wanted to take the creature alive, but he'd misjudged the blow, or the creature's skull was a lot more fragile than the other Dracc's. He'd caught up with the rather strange Dracc quite easily and taken care of his two bodyguards, but all he had to show for all the hard work was a dead Dracc. He sensed movement in the dark, but quickly realised it was another member of The Damned approaching.

"I thought you might need a hand." Said Juno.

He didn't need light to examine the body, but Delmus always felt more comfortable with a little light to see by. Lacking the skills of Luri, he couldn't create a pure white light, but he reached into his mind and the tunnel became lit with a dull yellow glow. Juno smiled at him and increased the clarity of the lighting.

"A good clean kill." She said.

"I wanted it alive."

"Oh."

Juno helped him turn the creature onto its back and straighten out its legs and arms. The comms box was attached by cables that went directly into the head.

"It must be one of their leaders." Said Juno.

Delmus pulled at the wires and about a foot of cable came out of the creature's head, followed by a large lump of brain tissue and dark grey blood. Delmus picked up the box and the controls were unmarked, the device was a complete mystery.

"At times like this," he said, "I really miss the link to Chlo."

"Its hands are almost human." Said Juno.

Delmus examined the hands, looked at the creature's eyes, even noticed that the head was larger than other Dracc. It was interesting, but it told him nothing useful in defeating them.

"If it had been alive," he said, "it might have been useful, but dead it's useless. I'm going to carry on down the tunnel and see where they came from. Are you coming ?"

"The city needs us Delmus."

"It's your choice."

Juno nodded at him and followed as he broke into a sprint, heading along the Dracc tunnel as it descended steeply into the ground.

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The main gates still seemed to be a target for the Dracc, though Luri couldn't understand why. They could use each other's bodies as ladders to scale the walls, so why spend so much time battering against the strongest part of the defences ? Luri put it down to insect stupidity, once given a goal, they obviously carried on trying to achieve it, even if it made no sense at all. Luckily the battlements were narrow, so Luri could keep the Dracc back with her Nurigen and the odd fireball, but she could see the city was being overrun. Behind her the tower was still firing, the clatter of the devices almost

deafening. Few of the wall turrets were still in action, but the towers were higher, the walls smoother. With luck some of the towers might survive the attack of the Dracc.

"You should leave the wall, I can take you."

It appeared as though a cloud of fire was thrown at the Dracc and when it had cleared, Juliette was stood next to her on the battlements.

"I saw the sky in the distance turn to flame," said Luri, "I take it that was the Genova attacking?"

Juliette held her arm out stretched, her palm hanging over the front of the main gate. A green mist fell from her fingers and Luri could hear the Dracc screaming. Looking over the wall she could see them actually running away. There was something they feared! Everywhere the green mist touched the Dracc died and from the look of their distorted bodies they died in agony.

"The main army is still nine miles away from the city," said Juliette, "there can be no survivors, no pockets of Dracc attacking rift settlements for millennia. The undead were never properly destroyed and even now they can appear from nowhere and attack the farms around Quron."

Above them the tower fell silent as the green mist killed every Dracc for quite some distance. Luri had her first chance to look carefully at the city and every street seemed full of Dracc, every house seemed to have been broken in and raided.

"We need to move to the hill of the Alcázar," said Luri, "to keep them from attacking the deity."

"I promised Sikush I'd keep Nurigen safe," said Juliette, "I'll take you to the Alcázar and then look for him."

There was an explosion and a house in the best part of town burst into flames. It might have been an exploding turret or an accident. But it highlighted the plight of the city.

"Nurigen had a dozen angels with him," said Luri, "I picked them myself and a squad of the Guard, he'll be fine. Come with me and protect Sumahn-Nerish."

Juliette agreed and pulled Luri through the grey, bringing them out high on the Alcázar hill. All was quiet and it could have been any other night in Annill, if it wasn't for the burning buildings and the constant chatter of fire from the defence towers.

"We must beat the Dracc here," said Luri, "can you cover the hill in your mist?"

"The mist kills all, friend or foe. I think the main army can spare a few elder angels."

Juliette put her head back and appeared to howl into the night, but her cry was pleasing to the ear and reminded Luri of pleasant times in her life. The howl rose until it was beyond the range of normal ears, yet Luri still felt strangely comforted by it. As Juliette finished the hill began to be covered in Genova. Not the angels Luri was used to, these all looked to be of immense age, they exuded an air of dignity and power. Most had pure white hair and they carried huge and delicate looking weapons.

"None can pass us," called Juliette, "not a single one."

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Nurigen came to in a large cavern and he had no idea how he'd arrived there. He could remember Smilenta pulling him through the grey and then he'd woken up lying on the damp floor, with a very sore head. Everything ached as he sat up and he felt the wound on his head, wincing from the pain. He looked at his hand and was slightly alarmed by the wet blood he'd found. In front of him and lit by the flickering flames of a fire was a Dracc.

"Can you understand me?"

This Dracc was different, it had hands and it was carrying a device of some kind. It hobbled towards him and didn't look well, puss was coming from where cables from the device went into its head.

Nurigen tried to stand, but cried out as he put weight on his legs. He didn't think anything was broken, but his left knee was badly swollen.

"Are you in charge?"

Nurigen took his first good look around the cavern and it looked to be a rest area for the Dracc, perhaps even a kind of healing place for their injured. Some of the Dracc seemed well, but others had injuries, bad burns, missing legs, some were covered in corrosive green slime. The light was coming from two enormous fires and in the distance some injured Dracc were feeding on something. Nurigen had always supposed they must eat, if only to repair their bodies and stay fit for battle. The Dracc in front of him was making a kind of chirruping noise. Then Nurigen realised what the Dracc were eating. One took a human foot from a huge mound of body parts and began to chew on it. Nurigen blinked his brain refusing to believe what he was seeing, but there was no mistaking the legs, arms and even heads on the mound.

"You bastards!"

He still had his dagger, for some reason they'd taken his sword, but left the dagger on his belt. Swollen knee forgotten Nurigen was up on his feet and limping towards the Dracc with the device, dagger at the ready. Instantly a great number of the Dracc seemed to take an interest in him and begin to move towards him, their huge jaws swinging towards him in a menacing manner. The sickly looking Dracc leader turned towards them and began using his device and chattering at the approaching Dracc. At first they seemed to ignore whatever the leader was doing, but then one of them gave an answering chirrup and stopped, the others quickly doing the same. Nurigen didn't know why, but it was obvious that he was being kept alive for some reason, probably for an unpleasant and painful interrogation.

"What are you planning?"

It seemed his fate was linked to the creature in front of him, so Nurigen slowly moved closer and examined the infected area of its head. Sevril had hurried the construction and the head had been enlarged before cables of some kind had been inserted into the brain. The extra section of skull was weeping grey fluid and a massive fungal infection was seeping out of the cable hole. The creature was obviously dying, it was just a question of how long it took to die.

Nurigen was tired, his leg was painful and he'd had enough of walking on it. He spotted a rock ledge and sat down. Only then did he see the other mounds of body parts, some human, some Genova, some parts of hybrids from Annill. The human parts were bad enough, but the angel's arms looked so childlike. His sword hadn't been taken, it had simply ended up about eight feet away and he saw it among a pile of clothing. Certain death it was almost certain to be, but Nurigen picked up his blade and faced the sickly Dracc.

"You'll do to start with."

Hell fell as he struck, his weight adding to the force of the blow. The blade broke the creature's skull, brain tissue and thick grey blood fell to the floor, the dead creature toppling over on its side. Nurigen was now on his knees and waiting for the other Dracc to attack, but the attack never came. He was momentarily blinded by a bright white light and when he could see again the Dracc in front of him had been burned to ash. Other Dracc were screaming and running towards the far end of the cavern. Leaning on his sword, Nurigen looked in the direction the Dracc were running, just in time to be blinded by another cone of pure white light. Someone was attacking the Dracc and doing a good job of it. As he limped towards that part of the cavern, he could have sworn he heard Delmus in the distance, shouting abuse at the top of his voice.

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There had been no other Dracc in quite a long tunnel and Delmus was wondering if they were wasting their time, after all, Annill did need every warrior in the front line. Delmus had used pure instinct to decide on the direction to go at four junctions and eventually they'd arrived at a ramp leading down into a large cavern.

"I'm sorry it's my fault."

An angel had appeared through the wall and was having trouble remaining corporeal. Delmus didn't know Smilenta, but he knew how to anchor a nervous Genova. He held her hand and gave her time, waited for her to speak when she was ready. Juno simply sat on the dusty floor and watched them both.

"It's this place, this cavern," said Smilenta, "it has something that attracts us, something very old. I came here thinking it was safe and they attacked me."

The miserable and dejected creature in front of him didn't look like the cloud of eager Genova who had entered the city. He instinctively treated her like a human child and began to wipe the dust and soot from her face.

"I'm sure you did your best." He said.

"You don't understand, I dropped him. I was scared and there was so much fire..... I dropped him."

There was no consoling the young angel, who was starting to fade out of view. Delmus held her arm tightly and pulled her back into reality.

"Who did you drop?"

Smilenta looked surprised and began to cry, Delmus hadn't realised angels could cry.

"I was told to protect him with my life, Nurigen, I dropped Nurigen."

She now had their attention and Juno moved much closer.

"He was protected by The Damned, where are they?" Asked Juno.

"There were so many Dracc, they ran away, they had to."

Delmus wasn't surprised, being torn apart by the Dracc wasn't a pleasant way to die. With no Chlo to contact on the rift, there was no common channel. They'd all just assumed Nurigen was safe.

"Where did you drop him?" Asked Delmus.

The angel pointed into the far distance and they could just see the light of a fire at the other end of the vast cavern.

"There," said Smilenta, "near the fires. He is guarded by a lot of Dracc and one of their controllers."

Delmus pulled the RM9 off his shoulder and pressed the recharge switch, while Juno began to check her own weapons.

"Can you bring other Genova," Delmus asked, "to pull us out once we have Nurigen?"

"Not there, it will take our minds, we have no will of our own when we are near it."

Delmus almost wished there was time to investigate the mysterious artefact that was robbing the angels of their senses, but he needed to concentrate on rescuing Nurigen.

"Here then," he said, "can you bring more angels here?"

Smilenta gave him a huge smile and Delmus kissed her on the forehead.

"Oh yes, I will bring you many angels."

She'd gone, no sliding into the grey, just vanished.

"I hope nothing distracts her." Said Juno.

Delmus led the way, down the ramp and across the rough rock floor of the cavern. Almost immediately they saw Dracc, battered and injured Dracc, some missing limbs. None of them seemed eager for a fight, or even really aware of them. One briefly snapped its claws at them, but then collapsed in a heap on the floor.

"They all look injured." Said Juno.

There were thousands of injured Dracc, leaning up against the walls, lying in dry gullies, some moving around and making a plaintiff chirruping sound.

"Perhaps they've come here to die." Said Delmus.

The second half of the cavern was lower, they'd need to go down a steep area of rock and sand to get to it. Delmus was observing the fires below them when he saw Nurigen. He pointed and Juno smiled at him when she too had seen the master weapon maker.

"He's still armed." She said.

As they watched Nurigen lifted his long sword and almost cut the controller Dracc in two with it. Delmus watched Nurigen fall to the floor and every able bodied Dracc in the cavern turn to look at him.

"Fuck !" Shouted Delmus.

Switching the RM9 to a little under full power, Delmus quickly aimed and fired into the mass of Dracc warriors. The entire cavern was lit up like day by the energy released by the weapon and the air quickly filled with the aroma of burning insect.

"He's covering his eyes." Said Juno.

"Typical !"

Nurigen was on his feet and using his sword as a crutch. Delmus fired again and turned most of the Dracc guard to ash. Nurigen was now limping towards them, but very slowly.

"We're coming for you old man," shouted Delmus, "second time I've had to get you out of trouble."

They began to descend the slope, slipping on the smooth rocks. Some Dracc warriors attacked them, but they were both now using swords and they easily cut the insects to pieces. As they walked around a huge boulder they almost bumped into Nurigen.

"I knew it was you," said Nurigen, "loudest mouth in The Damned."

Juno was far better at healing, so Delmus stood guard while she examined Nurigen's knee and applied a few healing ointments.

"That feels as good as new." Said Nurigen.

"I've used our healing salves," said Juno, "you'll be able to run on it now, but tomorrow you'll be in agony. You'll need to see a proper healer very soon."

The Dracc weren't beaten. As they set off jogging towards where Delmus hoped the angels were waiting, they could hear the sound of Dracc running after them, a great many Dracc.

"Can you run ?" Asked Delmus.

"I think so." Answered Nurigen.

"Then run !"

They ran, but the Dracc were faster and the ground was very rough. Even fit, Nurigen would have found the ground difficult to run on and he was slowing down.

"Not far," said Delmus, "I can see the ramp, not far, run."

The Dracc were so close that Delmus could hear their jaws snapping together and then a voice was in his head.

"Down. On the floor and stay down."

He grabbed Nurigen and pulled him down, using his own body to cushion the fall for his old friend. He saw Juno flatten against the ground just as a cloud of flame went over the top of them. Delmus looked towards the ramp and he saw Smilenta, but she wasn't alone. Delmus had grown up in a tough family, his mother had three other children to control and she used threats to keep them well behaved. One of those threats had been to set the angels on them and behind Smilenta were several

angels who matched his mother's description. Despite the billions of years since his childhood and his training in The Damned, Delmus actually felt a little scared.

"There are angels on the ramp." He said.

"Is it Smilenta?" Asked Nurigen.

The weapon smith looked at the ramp and then he too went silent. The Genova behind Smilenta looked ancient and their robes were so white that they seemed to glow. They looked solid, which Delmus realised made them so different to Smilenta. There was no hint of dissolving into the grey, no fidgeting, they stood there, solid and resolute. In their hands they held strange looking weapons, like intricate sculptures made of silver metal tubing. But these weapons belched red and yellow fire that scorched and melted the rocks of the cavern and turned the Dracc to ash. One angel had a particularly intricate weapon of gold coloured tubing that threw out a lightning bolt, a black and brown lightning bolt. The crack of the lightning filled the cavern and they could hear Dracc screaming in the distance. In his head Delmus heard a reassuring voice.

"They are gone now, you can rise."

The cavern was quiet now and Delmus helped Nurigen to his feet. Juno brushed herself down and pushed her sword into the webbing on her back. Like many of the Guard, Juno had copied the webbing idea from Kittara, it left the hands free and felt more comfortable than a sword on the hip.

"Smilenta, you're alive." Said Nurigen.

Delmus left the two of them to get reunited while he approached the angels who'd cleared the cavern of Dracc in a matter of seconds.

"Thank you," he said, "how is the fight for the city going?"

The angel who answered him was male and looked almost impossibly old, his skin was just a patchwork of wrinkles, but his eyes still sparkled.

"Not well, no matter how many we kill, there are more to take their place. Even if we win, the city of Annill may well be uninhabitable. We must return to the battle now."

"Can you take us to the surface?" Asked Juno.

"Where do you wish to go?"

Delmus looked at Juno and then Nurigen, but they just shrugged at him.

"The Alcázar," said Smilenta, "go to the Alcázar, our orders were to take Nurigen there if the city was overrun."

"Luri and Juliette are there," said the elder angel, "we can take you to them if you wish?"

As no one seemed against the idea, Delmus agreed and the angels went into the grey, pulling the Menderans with them.

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Kittara paced over the tiled floor like a caged animal, she wanted to be in Annill, not Mendera. Several badly wounded angels had been seen in the city, they seemed to seek out the holy places to rest. One had died right in the centre of the pilgrim's path and the entire city was in uproar. Sikush hadn't been indifferent, he'd personally healed several badly disfigured Genova and was talking to one of their elders, Giron, who was one of the few living angels to have been trained by Juliette. "Another thousand of The Damned," said Sikush, "another twenty thousand, what could they achieve that the angels can't? Little can be done against the huge numbers of the Dracc without destroying the city, so it's down to hand to hand fighting and the use of old powers."

"We don't want twenty thousand, we just want one."

Giron looked straight at Kittara and she agreed with him, but wouldn't say anything out of loyalty to the empire.

"Kittara has battles to come and it's vital that she survives to fight them." Said Sikush

There was whispering, which infuriated Kittara, with Giron pointing at her and she heard him talk of darkness. She felt Sikush in her mind as he invited her to come closer.

"I won't order you," he said, "but would you be willing to go to Annill?"

"Can I take Sventa?"

"No, I need her here."

Kittara was getting what she wanted, they both knew that.

"Yes of course I'll go, I can leave now."

"Do you need to collect any equipment?" Asked Giron.

"No, I have everything I need."

She briefly touched hands with Sikush and Giron was pulling her into the grey. They arrived just behind the Genova front line, which was still four miles outside of Annill. The ground around them was covered in insect parts, with the occasional dead Genova. Giron saw her looking at the body of a young angel.

"We'll collect the bodies after the Dracc are destroyed." He said.

It was what she would have done and she was pleased. Kittara knew the angels had power, but she thought the savagery of Sventa was a one off, she was pleased that it wasn't. Other angels were now examining her, she knew she was far too dark for their liking, but she wasn't here for them, she'd come for him, he wanted the Dracc destroyed.

"I'll find one of our battle commanders," said Giron, "to give you an overview of the battle and your orders."

"No orders," she said, "you heard him, no orders. I fight alone."

Kittara lifted herself into the air and rushed forwards, the lines of Dracc beneath snapping their claws at her, but unable to reach her. The powers she intended to use would destroy friend and foe, so she hovered over the Dracc about a mile away from the angels.

"Be patient." She called to the Dracc below.

She imagined herself sat in front of the flame, felt the peace and contentment. Quite quickly the usual dark aura surrounded her, but now she let it grow, let it build in intensity. There had always been the suspicion in her mind that the dark aura was less a gift from beyond gateway and more of curse, but today she was going to use it to the full. At first the Dracc seemed to like the darkness as it spread out from her and touched them, but they drew back as the cloud began to crackle with power.

"Not long now."

Her sword remained tied to her back, it wouldn't be needed today. Kittara dropped into the ranks of the Dracc and let the darkness in her loose. Those touched by the dark cloud became dust and those it missed began to scream. Up the cloud rose and it spread over the millions of Dracc before descending and turning millions of them to a dry dust that was caught up in the darkness. Soon nothing could be seen of Kittara, but the Genova saw the crackle of power and they heard the Dracc scream.

"Sre amnit donara senela onamba."

Kittara was gone, the creature she'd become was using the ancient tongue, the language of Leng itself. The cloud reached up hundreds of feet now and it spread right up to the walls of Annill. No friend was alive under the cloud, not that the creature would have cared. Orange and yellow lightning began in the cloud as it descended and where it touched nothing lived. Some part of Kittara still held control and stopped the cloud from rolling over the city, but it took all of her willpower. The



deaths fed her, each adding to her power. The human souls in the city were so tempting, so sweet, but she kept control and began to spread the cloud further across the plain, covering the Dracc as they ran.

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“I’m just amazed and pleased.” Said Nurigen.

He thought all the budgers had died and the mobile towers destroyed, but the team he’d sent back for ammo had brought the four surviving towers right across the city to the Alcázar. A few other survivors had turned up with an ammo waggon and there were now four fully operational towers on the hill. True, the million or so Genova defending the Alcázar were doing a very good job of keeping the Dracc back, but his devices were sending incendiaries deep into the insect ranks.

“Something has them agitated.” Said Luri

The creatures seemed driven to a new frenzy, climbing over each other and rushing headlong into the fire storm being fired at them by the elder Genova. Beyond the city walls a dark cloud was blotting out the glow from the portals, a cloud with orange lightning.

“What new evil is this ?” Asked Juliette.

Nurigen noticed that even Delmus seemed to lose his natural optimism at the implication of events outside the walls.

“Surely she’d never dare.” He said.

They were all thinking the same thing, Sevril-Narge had come to Annill and was pushing her Dracc forward. Such audacity would mean a direct battle with Sumahn-Nerish and that might mean the end of the multiverse.

“Drive them back !” Shouted Juliette.

The Genova used their ancient weapons and the hillside filled with the smoke and stench of burning Dracc, but still the creature advanced towards them. Nurigen saw a Dracc controller approaching and informed the budgers. A few seconds later the creature was destroyed by a well-placed metal bolt. They were getting very good at killing the Dracc leaders and that was the first Nurigen had seen in some time.

“The cloud advances to the city walls.”

One of the elder Genova had spoken, they were all worried about the darkness approaching and what it might signify. Giron appeared on the hill and quickly whispered to Juliette, whatever he said seemed to please her. Juliette summoned several of her commanders and then she approached the Menderans.

“It is an ally who frightens the Dracc,” she said, “I’m bringing more Genova from outside the city walls, we are going to advance and retake the city.”

“What is it that frightens them ?” Asked Nurigen.

“A darkness that frightens them more than a million Genova, Kittara has joined the battle.”

More angels appeared on the hillside, Delmus and Luri eager to join them for the advance. Nurigen stayed with the budgers and his towers and Juno remained with him. Smilenta was bruised but still by his side and together they watched two million angels advance on the remnants of the Dracc.

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Kittara stood on the battlements above the main gates of the city. Something of her still remained and it stopped the cloud from entering the city. The angels weren’t far behind her, but they were keeping well clear of her, which was sensible. She pulled in the dark cloud, absorbing it, using the darkness to recharge the thing inside herself.

“Humans still live.” She muttered.

The Dracc had broken into some homes, killing the occupants, feeding on their bodies, but they had missed most in their hurry to get to the hill of the Alcázar. Kittara soared over the city, keeping ahead of the angels and looking down at the houses. Her sight was different now, she saw through roofs, stones, walls, even right down into the basements. There were souls there, living souls, millions of them, some so pure that it hurt her to look at them. Knowing that she'd gone insane didn't stop the hunger, she wanted those souls, wanted to devour them entirely.

"No Kittara, just the Dracc."

He was in her head, he always seemed to be in her head. Kittara was still not in control, it was, the dark thing inside her, but she managed to limit its appetite to the Dracc. Angels were pouring down the hill, more were now inside the city walls. Soon all the Dracc would be gone, no more life force for the thing to feed on.

"No, they're mine!" She screamed.

She pushed a cloud of darkness in front of her, turning street after street full of Dracc to dust. It was a constant fight to stop the cloud from entering houses, but the remnant of Kittara kept the feeding frenzy away from humans. Some streets she ran along, others she flew over, trying to keep ahead of the angels, keep all the deaths for herself. Soon all the Dracc would be gone and part of her knew that was good, but the thing knew that would weaken it. One more street, the angels were only just a few hundred yards away. She pushed the cloud between two narrow rows of houses and felt the comfort of eating the life force of many more Dracc. She had to have more, there must be more.

Then it was there, another creature, non-human. She used the cloud to engulf it, caress it, devour it.

"No!"

Kittara was back and she was looking at Juliette. The Genova Juliette was leading were nowhere to be seen, she must have rushed ahead of them. Kittara pulled in the rest of the darkness and ran towards Juliette.

"I'm so sorry."

Returning sanity wasn't a blessing, it gave her the ability to see her old friend disintegrate. First the flesh went grey and lifeless, the eyes going opaque. Then the crumbling started, until nothing was left of Juliette but a pile of dust. A finger looked intact and Kittara had to touch it, but it turned to dust as she did. Kittara fell forward onto the street and wept for the angel and she also wept for herself. In her misery she missed the balance moving slightly.

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"No!"

Chlo felt the multiverse change, the almost audible thud as the balance moved against Mendera. It was only a slight movement and very few would even be aware of it, but these things had a cumulative effect. The desert around Mendera might claim a few more acres of fertile land, the weather of some planets might be more extreme. All that was minor though, it was the way the change affected intelligent beings that was the real problem. A family under stress might tear itself apart, people might start listening a little more to crazy extremists, cruelty might be easier to excuse, greed more extreme. It was subtle, it was small, but the change would be profound.

"I did warn you." Said Sikush.

Chlo calmed herself and thought of her and Sikush alone, pulling the prison of the one held captive over the wastes of eternity. At times like this the vision helped her focus, it had become her safe place. She hadn't been invited to join Sikush, but she carried on walking towards him. He was on his favourite veranda, Sventa was sat looking at him and his two guards were keeping their distance.

"I know," said Giron, "but there was no alternative. The Dracc had to be destroyed."

“Nonsense, it would just have taken longer to defeat them and now we’ve lost Juliette.”

Sventa was on a chair some distance away, her eyes taking everything in, but giving nothing back.

“What would you have me do Chalné ?” Asked Giron.

“I’m going to punish you in the most fitting way I know. You Giron are going to take over as leader of the Genova forces.”

“But Chalné I’m not Juliette, I don’t have the experience.”

“Then you’ll have to learn. Give me your report on Annill, is the city habitable ?”

In her head Chlo had hundreds of concerned people asking about all the injured angels turning up in the city, thousands of empire data feeds asking the same question. Chlo ignored it all and sat next to Sikush, holding his hand in hers.

“Yes Sikush,” said Giron, “the Dracc did a lot of damage and the army was destroyed, but millions of people survived and most of the buildings still stand. There is a lot to be rebuilt, but yes, the city is habitable.”

“Go, help Luri rebuild, remove all trace of the Dracc from the rifts, every speck of dust.”

Giron gave a slight bow.

“Yes Chalné. There is Kittara, she vanished, but no one knows where to.”

“I know where she is, now leave me.”

Giron was gone and still Sventa just watched, looking sad.

“It will have to be Luri now,” said Sikush, “she must be the one.”

“But what of the chaos inside her ?” Asked Chlo.

“The chaos makes her perfect.”

Sventa dissolved into the grey, no doubt gone to look after Kittara and offer her comfort.

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