

Chronicles of Mardoun

Chapter 8 - Grand Council

“Without the Imperial Bank there would be no trade as no planet in the Empire trusts another’s currency or banking system” – Alyz

There were two chambers to the Council building in Mendera City. The smaller council chamber for local matters and usually not requiring the attendance of The Chalne and the Grand Council where as many as a thousand councillors from the planets of the Empire came to make laws and settle differences. These meetings were held four times a year and Sikush was obliged to attend. “Not here yet ?”

As he arrived Sikush was told all the councillors were present apart from Councillor Adrill from Arcadia. They had moved reality to The Chalne’s small private dressing chamber behind his seat in the Grand Council. For a smallish room there were quite a few people in it and Kittara noticed Albas, Alyz and Hol, and then Luri appeared in another corner.

“What’s wrong ?” Whispered Estrid.

Kittara led her to a quieter part of the room and crouched beside her.

“It’s protocol. All the councillors need to be in the chamber before Sikush enters. The Arcadian party arrived in Mendera last night, so they should be here. If they’re not here then the Council can’t sit.”

Sikush shimmered into fresh clothing that resembled the uniform of the Guard. Chlo appeared and stood next to him as the time arrived for the meeting to begin.

“Hol, Jen, get out there and stand behind my chair so it looks like I’m on my way. Alyz take as many of the Guard as you need and find Councillor Adrill. This is Mendera City, we can’t lose a councillor and his entire retinue !”

Chlo looked deeply worried and on the common channel orders were going out to hundreds of the Guard.

“Can’t they have the meeting without him ?” Asked Estrid.

“Arcadia is one of the six founding members and their votes count far more than the outer worlds, and Arcadia always supports Sikush. This may be a plot against The Chalne.”

Chlo smiled and on the common channel she marked the location of a faint trace of Arcadian DNA her probes had located far to the north in the marshlands.

“Luri, lock us in,” said Sikush.

Luri walked out to The Chalne’s council seat and fifty or so of the Guard lined up across the two entrances to the Grand Council chamber. Luri stamped her foot on the floor for attention.

“Councillors, we believe there is a threat to your safety. This is being investigated by the Guard and the chamber is being sealed for your protection.”

Some of the councillors sat and looked about in disbelief while others started to shout wildly at Luri. Sikush walked over to Kittara and led her and Estrid to one of the windows that looked out from the dressing room into the chamber. The five councillors of the founding members of the Empire were sat quietly in their slightly raised section of the seating.

“You see those five people there ?” Sikush said to her pointing. “They’re all important figures where they come from, leaders of their people. I think one of them sent the raiders to New Algaria to kill you.” The three of them examined the councillors.

“Take her out there Kittara. In the confusion no one will notice. Walk her through the chamber and feel if anyone bites.”

Kittara took Estrid out into the chamber while Luri was trying to keep the councillors calm.

"I think we can ignore the lady in the first chair, that's councillor Mellora of Mendera and she's head cleric of the Western Sentinel. The big chap is Councillor Samara from the New Keo Group, a bit of a big mouth, but no killer. Walk slowly through the other three while I watch, and try to ignore anyone who talks to you."

The seats of the six were slightly raised and surrounded by a short railing with entrances at both ends and Estrid slowly walked through the entrance and smiled at the Menderan councillor as she passed. She may have only been 12, but dressed in the uniform of the Guard and with a dagger on her hip, she was accepted as belonging there. She walked past Councillor Samara and the empty chair for the Arcadian.

As she approached the remaining three one dropped some papers. Estrid move forward and picked them up and all three councillors looked straight at her. To her left was the short Councillor Pollyn from Ventella and Estrid noticed her skin glowed in a beautiful shade of green. In front of her was Councillor Leonide from Ixir a short swarthy man who seemed annoyed at her presence. Before he could speak she gave the papers back to the third, Councillor Neoz of the Maran Group and walked slowly back to Kittara. She noticed Kittara looked shocked and Sikush was stood close to her, while Kittara shook her head.

"She has a right to know Kittara."

Sikush turned towards Estrid and pointed.

"You see the short guy who tried to talk to you ? That is councillor Leonide of Ixir and Kittara is certain he paid a lot of money to have you killed." Estrid looked at Kittara.

Just then the common channel was full of reports on the Arcadian councillor being safe and found chained up inside a cave. Alyz was trying to get the councillor to come the chamber, but he wanted to return to return home. Kittara knelt in front of Estrid.

"No doubt about it. When he saw you it was like he'd seen a ghost. I can't look that deeply into a supposed friendly councillor but I know he's the one."

Alyz appeared and walked across to Sikush.

"He won't come, insists he wants to go straight home, and no way were he and his people chained up there by bandits."

Sikush asked for reports on the common channel and the general consensus was that for some reason councillor Adrill had faked his own abduction and put himself somewhere he thought he wouldn't be found until after the council sitting.

"Bring him here Alyz, and don't take no for an answer. I want him and all his people in this chamber in the next ten minutes."

Alyz vanished and Sikush turned once again to Kittara.

"I can't do anything about Leonide without more evidence. There's no time for much training, just show Estrid the basics and leave for Ixir tomorrow." Kittara nodded.

"And when you get back we'll go to Arcadia."

They could hear a commotion outside in the chamber and everyone went out to see the councillor being brought in by the Guard along with his staff. There was much cheering and back slapping as the story of the abduction by bandits was heard. Sikush walked slowly up to Adrill with a huge smile on his face and gave him a huge hug. As everyone in the room applauded he leant forward and quietly whispered.

"Pull a stunt like that again and I'll give you to Kittara as a toy."

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Arran and Imber Cole had been operating a high tech counter surveillance business on Ixir for the past five years and lately business had been good. The brothers had provided a no questions asked service for a few borderline criminal organisations and word had got around. They both had good homes in one of the better parts of Norraine, not the best part of town, but better

than most. Arran had a pretty wife and two children and Imber had a live in girl friend. The problem was success meant nights like tonight. They were walking along a rubbish strewn path in what was definitely not a good part of town.

"Arran are you sure this is right ? We've had some meetings in funny places, but an abandoned hospital in the lower 12th ?"

Arran gave his brother one of his long suffering looks, but he too had his doubts about leaving his personal transport two miles away and walking to this dump.

"Look the door is just over there. This enquiry came from a good source and I think it's for the Foundation again, and they pay very well,"

At the mention of lots of money Imber Cole cheered up and they pushed open the graffiti covered doors to the old hospital. They pulled small hand lights out of their pockets and turned them on.

"Oh hell, is that a Growler over there Arran ? It is, it's a damn Growler !"

Arran looked and a fairly large insect like creature with ten legs, pincers and an armoured surface scuttled off through a hole in the wall.

"Yes, and a big one, a good two feet long. Come on the instructions were to follow the yellow stickers with a smiley face and there's one on that door over there."

Imber felt under the back of his jacket and brought out a small energy weapon, the sort favoured by street gangs.

"Are you crazy ? If we're meeting a top guy his goons will shoot you as soon as they see that, put it away."

Imber put the gun away and they went through the door and down a long flight of stairs to an old ward. More Growlers moved in the shadows as they passed and they made an unsettling clicking growl of a sound.

"I heard they carry a disease that makes you impotent."

Arran now ignored him and led the way along the only corridor with a working light and he noticed a yellow note with a smiley face on it clinging to a door at the end of the corridor. As they went through the door they saw four men in what looked like a disused operating theatre and on the slightly buckled table was an open briefcase and a working desk lamp. Both brothers relaxed, this was what they were expecting to see. No kidnapers, no drug heads, just some crime barons wanting their phone conversations kept private.

"Stay there please."

One of the men looked better dressed than the others and kept well back while one of his minders came towards them.

"Your Bio Reg cards please."

Another of the minders walked between them and the door as they withdrew their ID cards from their pockets. The Bio Reg system on Ixir was full proof and so far no one had found a way to crack it. They gave their cards to the goon in front of them and he read the tamper proof details of their DNA and then he aimed the scanner at their now open mouths. Imber always felt awkward about this part as the scanner examined the saliva from eight points in the mouth to ensure it matched the card. The machine beeped and a reassuring green light came on.

"They're who they say they are boss, Imber and Arran Cole."

The man nearest the door had in his hand a very high tech device for Ixir. About a foot long it had a screen on it and several switches. It worked in the same way as a Yakkie. At the business end were three holes. From the centre hole came a ranging and information probe ray and from the other two came energy beams, which were harmless on their own. They passed invisibly through air and harmlessly through most objects including human tissue, but when the beams met they created an intense point of energy, that in turn created an explosion. This device was

very clever and had already ignored the friendly targets in the room and had calculated the precise points inside Arran and Imber to do the optimal damage. As the boss nodded at him the man simply pressed a small green button.

“uhhh.”

Was the only sound Arran made as the two beams met in his heart and it was vaporised. Imber made no sound at all as he slumped to the floor. The men left the room but before they went the man in charge stopped to look down at the dead men. He had no idea who wanted them dead or why, he was just a middle man. Job done and tomorrow he'd be a bit wealthier than when he woke up today. He stepped over Arran's body and headed for the stairs.

“A good meal for the growlers for a month or so.” He said as left.

~ ~

Kittara had taken Estrid to a part of the Menderan forests that people rarely came to. Not that any part of Mendera was exactly over crowded once you got away from the migrant areas. The people of Mendera like most of the Empire had small families and the total population of Menderan citizens was only around 20 million who spread themselves over the planet. The various immigrant areas from the Empire were another matter.

Each of the other five founding members of the Empire has been given about 6 square miles each in areas far enough from Mendera city to not pose a nuisance, but close enough to use the stores and markets. Some of the outer worlds had small areas too and they were allowed to run these areas under their own laws and rules. Not that anyone born there was considered Menderan. One of the first Imperial edicts was to the effect that only the descendants of the original settlers would be Menderan citizens.

Everyone else, even if they were the 10,000th generation born on Mendera would still be an immigrant with no rights of citizenship. Strangely enough this never caused and real upsets among the migrants. It was how it had always been, it was the law. All of the various peoples of the migrant areas had kept their population in check except Ixir. After cramming nearly 15 billion into their home world they now had 12 million jammed into their 6 square miles and were constantly trying to enlarge the area. After Sikush had the mercs remove their buildings from illegally settled areas and forcibly repatriated a couple of hundred thousand back to Ixir they stopped trying to illegally grab more land. As it was both Ixir and its Menderan enclave were dependent on cheap food from Mendera for their survival.

“Where are we ? It's beautiful,” asked Estrid.

“We're right round the other side of the planet from Mendera City and not far from Lake Misogon. I'll take you to meet the people of the fishing village there one day.”

Kittara looked around the clearing in the forest and decided it would do perfectly and there were some boulders on a nearby hillside for ranged shots. She called for Chlo and together they examined the weapon Sikush had given Estrid. They put it around the girl's neck and adjusted the sling so that it was at a comfortable height and position to use.

“Put your hand flat on the rear panel.” Said Chlo

Estrid noticed two blue lines appear in her eyes and a red dot. Chlo showed her how to move her hand to set the power of the weapon and switch it to long distance mode.

“Show her how to set friends on it.” Said Kittara.

The Imperial Yakkies won't fire on the Guard, but this was a far different type of weapon and Chlo showed Estrid how to point it at a friend and use the controls to flag up a friend.

“No need to worry about proximity or hitting yourself with this weapon either.” Said Chlo. “It won't fire at you or a friend and will limit its power if proximity is a problem. Set it to level 2 and fire between your feet.”

Estrid was now getting used to the controls and moved her hand to select level 2 on the bottom green bar and then she moved the weapon so the red dot was directly between her feet. Then she gently pushed on the area Chlo had shown her and....nothing happened !

“Now aim at the other side of the clearing.”

Estrid moved the weapon until it was aimed at a small rock about 30 yards away and once again gently pushed and, there was a loud crack and the stone disappeared in a searing white flash. She grinned from ear to ear and it was obvious she was now enjoying herself.

“Now set for 3 on the power, then long distance and try one of the rocks on the hillside, over there.” Said Kittara pointing to rocks about 200 yards away.

Estrid raised the weapon and when she selected distance her vision changed in the top half of her eye and it was as though she was standing next to the rock. She selected power 3 and pushed the switch. There was a loud bang and the rock fell in two. Estrid tried to control herself, but couldn't resist a quick jump in the air and a whooping sound. They spent another hour with Chlo or Kittara setting her ever more difficult targets until Chlo said.

“Time for the real selling point of all YK weapons, the constant fire or repeat function. You'll need to move your hand back until you see a flashing purple dot, got it ? Ok now press and you're in repeat mode. Choose a target about 30 yards away and run the weapon over it while holding the fire button down.”

Estrid had never seen a Yakkie fired in continuous, so she had no idea what to expect, but she imagined it was going to be spectacular. She wasn't disappointed ! The other side of the clearing erupted in a wall of flame and destruction until she released the fire button.

“Wow.” Was all she could think of to say.

Just then two huge bear like creature appeared through the trees and started to snort and dig up the ground.

“Jangar.” Said Kittara. “In the woods near Mendera City they're cute harmless little creature, but up here they've evolved into savage brutes.”

Estrid looked nervous and started moving closer to Kittara.

“They're plant eaters, but they'll attack anything that moves. I'm putting out a low level thought that we're not worth bothering with. But I'll give you a count of five to get your weapon ready before letting them loose.”

Estrid reached for the controls. What level, distance or close ? Then she instinctively did what warriors have been doing with the Yakkie for billions of years. She left it on continuous, set the level to 7 and had faith in the proximity protection stopping her blowing herself to bits. She placed the red dot on the Jangar beast closest to her and as it roared and ran at her she pressed and held the fire button. There was flame in front of her, but she kept her fingers pressed on the switch and swung the weapon in an arc. She felt bits of Jangar beast hitting her face and soil coming down on her head as she released the switch.

“Well done.” She looked and Kittara and Chlo were applauding her and bowing in her direction, with no indication of mockery.

The scene in front of her was shocking. Bits of the animals were everywhere and where the weapons field of fire had gone past the beasts it had carved holes through the forest, leaving burning stumps of trees almost half a mile away.

“I did that ?” Said Estrid looking at the destruction.

Then the remains of the Jangar vanished and all that remained was the burnt and blasted landscape. Estrid looked enquiringly at Chlo.

“All constructs. Kittara and I decided to give you a proper test, but you were never in danger. Besides Sikush gets very angry if anyone kills the Jangar, who incidentally live far to the west of here.”

Estrid looked shocked, then angry and then she started laughing. Kittara's right hand shimmered and she was holding a grey bag.

"Sikush gave you a few other treats and surprises, now," she said rummaging in the bag, "where do we begin?"

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Alyz was beginning to enjoy working with the Old One. As they added new systems to the ancient craft he seemed to regain his humour and he claimed to be looking forward to trying his newly upgraded weapons.

"Cluster bombs," he seemed to chortle. "Yes, I'll be careful not to hit the ruins with them."

He hadn't even complained when a small Imperial shuttle was brought through his airlock and fixed to his infrastructure. Qunan and his team had needed living accommodation and the elderly craft didn't even have a wash room. Then there had been strengthening for a craft that really didn't seem that well designed for landing on a planet. Alyz often wondered how he was supposed to deliver his precious race bank to a new planet, as there didn't seem to be any shuttle craft on board.

"No I don't mind. I understand that my crew must be comfortable and delivered safely."

Chlo had looked at Alyz every time he said 'my crew'. There was a huge unspoken dilemma and everyone knew it had to be discussed prior to the mission. Alyz felt for her private link with Sikush, but he was going to be busy with the Grand Council for days.

"You can do it," He told her. "Be honest with him, he likes you."

Alyz called Chlo and together they both walked towards the control room. If only he had a face or something to relate to, but when he went silent she had no idea if he was pleased or angry.

"It must have occurred to him millennia ago Alyz," said Cho, "but he's never suggested it to Sikush or myself."

They entered the control room and Alyz noticed there were yet more blinking lights and relays.

"All completely unnecessary," Chlo had told her, "but he loves it all and the more sub systems I install the better his humour and the more his old self seems to awaken."

Chlo created chairs and Alyz prompted her for drinks, strong drinks.

"Old one," Alyz began, "there is something important that we need to discuss before the mission and now seems as good a time as any."

She took a long sip of her drink and allowed the alcohol to do its work.

"Ahh you mean supposing this old craft decided to go rogue with your shiny new weapons and tried to take over the universe?"

Alyz laughed and wished it was as easy as that. Sikush trusted the Old One, but even so he could be reduced to vaporised metal in seconds if he showed rogue tendencies.

"No Old One. Sikush feels he may not have given you all the options open to you. He feels you must have realised your reality could be transferred next to a suitable planet for your people at any time. Now in fact. Even though we need you Sikush has told me to make you the offer of moving you now to a suitable planet."

There was silence and Alyz was worried. Sikush had told her to make the offer, but not what to do if the ancient craft accepted.

"How long will it take me to reach the place I was programmed to arrive at?"

Chlo seemed to think for a long time before answering.

"The Great Void has created a strange state of equilibrium in this bubble of the multiverse and it may never close up. The time it will take you to cross the void is so immense as to be meaningless, but I will transfer the number to your databanks."

Again there was silence until the Old One almost sighed.

"That is a very long time."

The pause went on so long that even Chlo reached out to see if Sikush might come and have a word, but he pushed her away.

“Will there be a suitable planet there when I arrive ?”

Chlo like Alyz had been told to be completely honest with the Old One.

“I have no way of knowing, the time lines are just too long. As you know Sikush has given his word to find you a suitable world if there isn’t one where you’re going.”

This time there was no doubt about it, Alyz heard several long sighs before he replied.

“All I have is a destination and it’s not just my only order from a long dead people, but perhaps also my destiny. My people have slept a long time, and they will be safe where they are for a long time yet.”

There was another pause and more sighing, but Alyz was pleased things seemed to heading the right way.

“You are my people now, Qunan and his fighters are my people and I will take my people on this mission and bring them home again.”

Alyz smiled and finished the rest of her drink.

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Kittara held on tight and wrapped her legs around Sikush and tried to pull him even deeper into her. They had been having deep hard sex for hours and her passion showed no sign of abating and nor did his. She often pondered on why what was such a repetitive pastime never got the least bit boring. Two thrusts a second for at least two hours, regularly, over billions of years.

“Ahhhhhhhhhh.”

She screamed with pleasure, not caring how much noise she made as no one was likely to hear.

All that passion over all those years, yet it still seemed to get better, the passion more intense.

He paused and wiped the sweat from her brow, his sweat that was still dripping into her eyes.

“Ok ?”

For answer she nodded and bit hard on the muscle at the top of his arm. He pulled himself higher on to her and began driving into her, harder and harder. Her breasts were getting hotter the skin tighter, she hoped he wouldn’t forget them. On cue he roughly grabbed her left breast and squeezed it while rubbing his thumb nail over her nipple.

“Yes !! Ohhhhhhh.”

She was thankful for the way he got into her head at these times and started using her legs to aid the rhythmic thrusting, until the spasm came as his salty fluid jetted into her. Could she feel it, or was it just her imagination ? Chlo had once told her it was impossible to fell cum against her insides, but she could swear she felt the hot fluid. He moved off her slightly, but as she tried to move from under him he held her pinned and kept a good hold on her breast. She smiled knowing that he was still hungry and there was still unfinished business once his dick hardened again.

“We’ll frighten the angels.” She said smiling up at him.

They were in his palace on Arcadia and it was the largest of his palaces, spreading over many square miles of parkland. The Arcadians had largely given up on technology and had allowed the forests to reclaim their planet, but here they had created a city sized palace for him and surrounded it with well cared for lawns and trees. Outside the grounds of the palace Arcadia was a dangerous wilderness full of ravenous predators and impenetrable rain forest, with the Arcadian people living an almost aboriginal existence in clearings. Around the perimeter of the palace grounds a force wall kept the animals at bay, but the Genova had entered and bobbed about in small groups a respectful distance from them. Kittara knew the Arcadian though, they made up the bulk of the Guard and despite the fresh faced looks were savage warriors. She

wasn't fooled by their back to being hunter gatherers phase and knew eventually they'd return to being a power in the Empire again.

"Will you talk to the leaders while we're here?" She asked him.

"No, that can wait. There is no way Arcadia is behind this, and Adrill was probably paid well to sabotage the council meeting. He's being watched now and will be brought into council in chains if necessary."

Kittara pulled her hair back and looked up at Sikush and wondered whether this was all just a game to him. He smiled at her and kissed the end of her nose.

"I love you Kittara, and I'm sad you won't be around while I'm in council meetings for days, but Ixir is behind this, so tomorrow you'll off to Ixir."

"Estrid is so young," she began, but he held his finger to her lips.

"I'm sorry but she has knowledge you will need. You can take who you need, but not a huge force and Ixir have good tracking and will spot Guard appearing from nowhere, so I'm afraid its local transport or on foot most of the time. Oh and most importantly, don't kill Laudry I need him alive and running the Foundation."

Kittara put her hand between his legs and very gently ran down the length of his now hard dick and fondled his balls.

"So as long as Laudry is alive, I can do what needs to be done?"

Her hand moved back to his dick and started moving up and down.

"Yes." He said to her.

He pushed her legs apart and plunged into her and the hard rhythmic thrusting began again. If Sikush had seen the smile his reply had brought to her face he might have worried, but now he had other things in his mind. One of the Genova, a female was watching the disturbances in the multiverse as they passed through the one with the soul of Mardoun. She moved closer until she was inside the palace walls and quietly watching the lovers. Gradually she became more corporeal and took the shape of a beautiful woman with flowing red hair and shining blue eyes which showed fascination with the highly energetic copulation she was watching. Her wings fluttered and she moved behind a pillar to avoid being seen.

The angels made love, but not like this, the energy, the aggression, both scared and held her. In that instant the young Genova called Sventa made a decision that would have serious consequences for the whole multiverse and she noticed the multiverse started a few thin lines around her. She lifted her robe and her fingers probed between her legs until she found that pleasant cool area beneath her hair and began rubbing her fingers against it. She knew what she wanted and she was going to follow Kittara until she got it.

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Marra the wife of Arran Cole was concerned. He'd never gone this long without telling her where he was and the children were asking where Daddy was. She realised he worked for some clients who expected a high level of service, he told her they were all celebrities and huge corporations, but she did wonder sometimes. The money seemed to arrive in their lives very suddenly and he stopped keeping notes about meetings, and now he and his brother had vanished.

"They're probably both drunk in a brothel." Imber's girl friend had joked, but she'd never known him go on a bender with his pals without telling her. Should she inform the local police? They were useless, but if his personal transport turned up somewhere it would be a start to finding out where he was. She went into his study and turned on the combined information and communications device. When it beeped that it was ready she told it to open an important message to the police and mark it for immediate action. They did now live in a good area and their bank account was healthy.

“Give them the usual address and contact info and tell them Arran has been missing a day and a half and give them details of his personal transport.”

She remembered a few comments Arran had told her about how the police on Ixir worked after he’d had a few too many drinks.

“Add a reward of 500 Imperial credits to the officer who finds his personal transport, and mention more if he comes home alive.”

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