

## City of the Lost God

### Part 29 – Apocalypse

**“The huge spell though, the wall of seemingly never ending fire. That had been something else; it seemed to almost caress the darkness in her soul.”**



Nethra woke from a bad dream and found herself bathed in sweat. She got out of bed and noticed Merrick waking and watching her.

“Are you alright, this is the third night in a row ?” He asked.

“We need to go back to the City.” She answered.

She opened the shutters and looked south, towards the City. Everyone knew something was happening there, something both terrible and epoch making. Each night her dreams had shown her fires everywhere, especially in old town. Part of the great library was collapsing, even the dark angels screamed in fear.

“But we’ve just got settled into our life here.” Said Merrick. “And don’t forget, Silsk will probably kill me on sight.”

Nethra stretched out her tail and wrapped it round herself, something she hadn’t done since being a child.

“Listen !” She said.

In the distance was a sound like thunder, but different, deeper and almost continuous. Like falling trees, or cracking rocks. The sound crept closer and closer.

“What is it ?” Asked Merrick.

“The dark thing begins to wake up.” Replied Nethra.

The ground began to shake and their home with it. They’d left the tavern and were now in a house right on the southern edge of Avald. It hadn’t been built to survive earthquakes, but the timbers flexed and cracked without collapsing. Merrick ran to her, still naked and half asleep. They clung to each other, while the world about them shook. Others didn’t seem to be as lucky as them; the sound of collapsing buildings filled the night and the screams of terrified townsfolk.

“We need to return Merrick, promise me ! Silsk will have other things to worry her and she might be dead by the time we arrive.”

“Dead. Are you sure ?”

“I’m not sure, my dreams show her falling from the towers and not rising again. We need to return and we can do it properly. No running away with a just a cart. We can hire some porters and buy new things, we have the money.”

Merrick was righting a wardrobe which had fallen over and finding clean clothes.

“Yes, fine Nethra, I’ll begin packing now, just let me get dressed.”

“No ! Now we have to help others. There are many people in Avald who need our aid. But we must pack up and leave before nightfall tomorrow.”

Merrick was sat on the bed, his trousers almost pulled up.

“Why ?” He asked.

“It’ll be safer out on the road tomorrow.” She answered. “The shaking of the ground will be far worse tomorrow night.”

It was her turn to pick up fallen objects and find her clothes in the mess the quake had created. Eventually they both descended the stairs, ignoring the mess in their own home and heading for the front door.

“Oh, and send a message to Waide.” Said Nethra. “She may wish to join us on our trip to the City.” The front door faced north and it opened to show them a city in ruins. Fires burned out of control in various parts of Avald and the worst damage seemed to be in the centre of town. They strode out of their home to see who needed their help.

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Babaef felt the tremors in the ground as he descended the stairs and into the crypt. The City was solid though, one of the great Gods had created it. Tomma-Goran was thought of as one of the greatest of the old Gods, his only sin was in helping the humans. He'd built the City on solid rock and laid a permanent enchantment over the fabric of his great City. The ground shook and objects fell over, but not a single stone of the ancient crypt even cracked.

“We need to expect more tremors,” said Babaef, “they'll become stronger as the moment gets closer.”

No one needed to ask what moment, they all knew that something sought to escape the catacombs, something that had been waiting for countless millennia. The dim yellow lamp light was hindered by the dust kicked up by the quake and they had to stand for a while, allowing it to settle.

Again Babaef led, taking them down another two flights of stairs and into tunnels that led off in at least ten different directions. The smell of old death and mould filled the place.

“This place will do as well as any.” Said Babaef.

A junction in the tunnels, not far from the stairs provided a clear area of floor, large enough for Babaef to draw a chalk circle on the ground and then get them all to sit round it.

“Do you need any of my spells ?” Asked Muzzie.

“No, we only seek those who join us willingly.” Replied Babaef.

Babaef could feel the souls around them, the souls the shrine owned, the souls it had claimed since the City had been young. He stood in the centre of the circle and spoke words known to all with power. As the air around them began to chill, Babaef targeted his words, drawing in those he hoped were the best warriors.

“Sensan do you hear me ?” He called. “Taken before your time, I offer you a chance for one last battle.”

He'd expected an apparition perhaps, or a larger form of something like Ventus. Babaef hadn't expected a rotting corpse to limp out of the tunnels. Barely able to drag its sword along the ground, the thing of rotted tissue and bone, slowly edged towards Babaef.

“Bring your guild members with you Sensan.” Said Babaef. “All who fell in the shrine are welcome. Come join us here for a last chance at glory.”

More weapons screeched as shrivelled arms dragged them over the stone floor. At least a dozen warriors, maybe more. They'd all died in the shrine or its grounds and their souls had been claimed by chaos. Bodrin and Jhorn were likely to be there, but none were in a condition to be recognised.

“What use are these wretched things to us ?” Asked Chillan.

“Quiet !” Snapped Babaef. “It is extremely unwise to disrespect the gifts we're given. Wait Chillan and you will see.”

A dozen was just the start, Babaef needed an army, hundreds, perhaps thousands if he could pull them from the crypts.

"I call all who were warriors and died in this place." He said. "I offer you nothing but death, but it will be a clean death. Cleaner than waiting in this place for the world to end. Join me !"

The sound was deafening, as the dead rose, many human, some creatures the world had forgotten. Babaef didn't care who joined his army, as long as they could fight. He carried on calling, for the magic users and those who could call on the powers of the spirits. Dark or light, he didn't care, he wanted to bring them all back to life, for one final battle.

"Some are human." Whispered Lilleth.

"They can still fight." Said Gesse.

The army of bone and rotting tissue, crawled, crept and dragged itself towards Babaef. Sensan reached the edge of the circle and one of his skeletal feet touched the edge of the chalk circle.

"We have our army !" Shouted Babaef.

As Sensan touched the circle he transformed and so did all the others. None of their new army looked as they had in life, their skin was grey, their eyes lacked the vital shine of a living being. But they were solid, muscular and holding their weapons. Even their clothing looked renewed and ready for battle.

"Sensan, they are yours to command." Said Babaef.

Sensan started up the stairs, his army of the dead following him. Most of them were, or had been, hybrid warriors in life. Sensan and his men were in front, with at least a thousand hybrids following them. Towards the back were the human warriors from the days when they had ruled the City. Behind them walked the strange creatures with four arms, reptilian heads and muscular legs. Most of those appeared to be magic users and even Babaef had no real idea of who they were, or what powers they could wield.

"Can they be killed ?" Asked Lilleth.

"Yes, but they'll be tough to kill." Said Babaef. "They all know this is their final battle."

They followed the army of ghosts up the stairs into the room with the statue of a dark angel. There was no sign of the chaos creature, but the stairs closed once they'd all left the crypt. Sensan marched on, leading them deep into the shrine building to wait for the hour they were needed.

Babaef heard a quiet voice as he followed, as did they all;

"Fight well my children, fight well."

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"No ! You'll rip the pages carrying it like that." Shouted Adamaz.

He had everyone clearing up the books which had fallen off the shelves during the ground tremors. One whole section of ironwood shelving had fallen over and it had taken the concerted efforts of over fifty librarians to get it upright again. Adamaz was trying not to panic, but he knew that worse was yet to come and his precious books were so fragile. Even Vella had been drafted in to help move the most valuable tomes to the deeper vaults. She had a good steady hand and Adamaz now trusted her with the priceless books the spells were copied from.

"Thank you Vella, just move one Codex at a time and be careful." He told her.

Even the kitchen staff were moving books, but they were only allowed to move boxes, once the library staff had filled them with books. Adamaz remembered what few others did, the previous occasions when the ground had shaken and the library had lost books and the invaluable knowledge they contained. Caspian went past and Adamaz caught his eye.

"Is the western annex cleared Caspian ?"

"Everything worth saving, just a few modern works on thaumatology left on the shelves."

"Good, good. The annex shifted last night and I fear it may collapse."

Caspian was looking at him intently and not moving politely away, as he'd expected him to.

"Can the fabric of the City collapse?" Caspian Asked. "I thought that a God had built it."

"Have a care boy, talk about the great Tomma-Goran with respect. His City has lasted for countless millennia, so long that most have forgotten his name. But there are powers almost equal to his at work here and I fear that the library isn't safe from the quakes."

Adamaz touched him on the shoulder, Caspian had worked wonders in moving the most valuable of the archives.

"You've done well and so has Vella, thank you." Said Adamaz.

Caspian nodded and was gone, shouting instruction to the team about to wrap and box the books on Esoteric Doctrine.

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One of the cooks had sprained an ankle, but otherwise, Bailig's mansion had come through the quake without too much damage. The staff weren't happy, but none had run off. The quakes seemed to cover the whole 1<sup>st</sup> rift, travellers talked of the entire pilgrim's road shaking. The staff muttered, but he paid them well and there didn't seem to be anywhere that was actually safer.

"You must try 'Death's Regret.'" Said Bailig.

She took the sword from him and swung it around easily. They were in his private armoury, surrounded by some of the best weapons ever made on the rifts. After a few swings, Maya stabbed the sword into one of the wooden targets and it easily penetrated over a foot of hardwood. She noticed a slight fog that coated the edge of the blade, which grew in density as she used it.

"Do they all have names?" She asked.

"Most of them."

"Besides being very sharp, what does 'Death's Regret,' actually do?"

"The black mist poisons those it cuts and stops the wound from healing." Replied Bailig.

"Is that all?!"

Bailing laughed as he took the priceless blade from her.

"A demon general sacrificed twelve of his staff to enchant this sword. But if you want something a bit more dramatic, try this."

He carefully handed her a single edged battle axe, with a long metal handle.

"You now hold 'Angel's Tears.' Be very careful with it. Like most of my weapons, it will hurt friend as well as foe."

The axe didn't look much. No mist, no fiery edge, no ancient warning etched into the blade. Maya had a wall of super weapons in front of her and the axe looked the least impressive.

"Try it." Said Bailig.

The weapon was heavy, but easily wielded by a Kveld. She swung it a few times to judge the weight and then hit a wooden practise dummy. One moment the dummy was several solid pieces of wood, joined by thick ropes and the next it was a pile of ash. The incineration had taken place in the blink of an eye.

"That is more like it." Said Maya. "Don't tell me. A hundred Genova had to be trapped in the axe head, to obtain the effect."

He was watching her swing the axe, a serious look on his face.

"Make that two hundred Genova and you're pretty close to how it was made. It'll kill just about anything, including us, so keep well away from me once we're in the catacombs."

"You're giving this to me?" She asked. "It must have cost a small fortune."

"It wasn't for sale. I had to kill five men for that axe, one who called himself the best swordsman on the rifts."

Bailing paused and smiled at her.

"I proved to him that he wasn't."

Maya still couldn't believe that he was giving her such a weapon.

"Don't you want to use it?" She asked.

"No, I have another weapon in mind."

She watched as Bailing reached for a blade among the weapons that killed Kveld. He picked up a long sword, commonly known as "The Kveld Drinker." Maya almost changed into the beast, only long hours gaining discipline over her powers stopped her. She drew her gums back and growled at the weapon.

"You can't use that thing, it drinks the souls of our kind." She said. "I know for a fact that it has killed four of my ancestors."

Bailing ran the blade gently over his hand, teasing it with his Kveld soul.

"Not only Kveld Maya, it drinks anything of the darkness and adds their strength to its own. If I can feed it enough of the things that slither, it just might kill the dark one himself."

"Yam Kermul is his name." Said Maya.

"You remembered?"

"No, it just came into my head. I'm guessing he no longer feels the need to hide his presence."

Bailing carried on swinging the blade around, which both annoyed and excited Maya.

"Be careful with that thing." She said.

"I intend to be. Right up to the moment went I ram it into the heart of Yam Kermul."

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Tarin's house had been built well and it shuddered a little during the quake, but it didn't collapse. The makeshift shelter over his outside forge fell in, but he easily fixed it back in place. The quakes didn't worry him. His metal working tools were virtually indestructible and he could work almost anywhere. If his house collapsed, he'd find another and build a new forge.

"I'll make my move tonight, when the quakes begin again." Said Aeony.

"Are you sure you can beat her in a fight?" He asked.

He was fascinated by her skin, now that they'd been lovers. The urge to run his hand over her breast was almost irresistible, but he knew the timing was inappropriate.

"I could beat her." Said the dark angel. "But a face to face fight would mean our factions joining the battle. Losing Silsk will weaken us, we can't lose even more sisters."

"How will you do it?"

"I'm not proud of what I have to do." She snapped. "Silsk will go up to the roof of the towers, she always does when anything strange happens in the City. I have a weapon that can hurt her. She won't expect me to ram it into her back and then the fall from the roof will finish her off."

Tarin fetched two glasses and a bottle of the strongest hard liquor he owned. He passed a glass to Aeony and waited for her to take a sip.

"You'll need to be careful." He said. "If your sisters see you do it, they'll rip you to pieces."

"I know, but I have to take the risk. The City needs a strong ruler, but Silsk is now more of a danger than a protector. She's completely insane!"

"Have you told anyone else?"

"Only Adamaz. I'm hoping the tower can have a better relationship with the library once she's gone, perhaps even with the Sorcerers Guild. We weren't always the enemies of those institutions."

Tarin had to chuckle, though Aeony was giving him a nasty look.

“Don’t get me wrong Aeony, I applaud your sentiments. But the City is owned by chaos, every stone of every building is impregnated with it ! Every child is taught the nursery rhymes that praise chaos, almost everyone prays to chaos. Even if Yam Kermul dies tomorrow, the City will always be a place of intrigue and subversion.”

“But killing Silsk will help.” She said.

Tarin couldn’t resist kissing her on the cheek and to his amazement, she folded her body towards him.

“Yes Aeony, killing her will definitely help.”

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Muzzie left the halls of the shrine temple and made his way past the lines of newly resurrected warriors. They looked worse now that his daylight spell was illuminating them properly. Their skin looked unnatural, even on the humans it hung in grey folds. He had no idea what some of the creatures had been in life, but he was sure they hadn’t had grey skin and dead looking eyes. But they held their weapons steadily and looked ready for battle.

“They scare me a little.” Said Lilleth.

“Just think what they’ll do to the enemy then.” Said Muzzie.

“Sensan is the only one to talk and he only speaks to Babaef.”

Babaef and the others were waiting in the shrine grounds, waiting for full darkness and the tremors to start up again. None of them knew whether the chaos creatures at the entrance to the catacombs would attack them.

“Surely chaos is on our side now ?” Gesse had asked.

Babaef had given a cynical chuckle before answering.

“Chaos is chaos my friend.” He’d said. “We must assume nothing.”

It took a while for every creature to leave the shrine and get into formation.

“I make it thirteen hundred at a quick count.” Said Chillan.

Muzzie spent the time looking through the spells available to him. He liked the immolation spell, it had worked well against the creatures on the rifts, but they had been living animals, even if their bodies had been altered and corrupted. He was nervous about using spells specifically against darkness and chaos, as they might affect their own army.

“Use a massive firewall spell.” Said Lilleth. “You can’t go wrong with fire and incineration.”

“Good idea.”

He found a spell that indicated what looked like a whole town engulfed in fire and decided it looked exactly what he was looking for. He started the spell as Babaef gave the order to advance, giving the spell time to grow.

“Advance !” Shouted Babaef.

Sensan repeated the order to his army, but they all noticed that the voice sounded completely alien. Whatever had happened to Sensan, his experiences in the crypt had changed him. Across the shrine grounds they marched, Muzzie keeping well in front, so that he could use his fire spells. Babaef was building a spell too, as was Chillan. Vast balls of energy grew above the army as the powerful magic users, prepared their mystic weapons.

“Now we’ll know.” Said Lilleth.

Very few had seen the entrance to the catacombs, even in the full light of day. Muzzie had once taken a look, while in the company of Podd. A large open space had a ruined temple of some kind in the middle. Who had destroyed the temple, or why it had been shattered into fragments, no one

knew. There were rumours about titanic battles between servants of the gods, but no one really knew. In the centre of the ruined temple was a hole in the ground. Once there had been an elaborate gate over the entrance, or so the legend said. No one living had ever seen the gate; it had been a ragged hole in the ground for as long as anyone could remember. There were no other entrances to the catacombs, or at least none that an army could use.

“Your light hurts them.” Said Babaef. “Good !”

Muzzie understood the idea of daylight, he’d just never actually seen it. He’d read enough to know about worlds with a proper day and he’d talked to the rare visitor who claimed to have seen such places. The bright white light of his spell was hurting the chaos creatures, he could see them trying to hide from it, smell their flesh burning as it touched them.

“They’re bigger than I’d hoped they’d be.” Said Lilleth.

The monsters weren’t the corrupted abominations of rift creatures, or the almost transparent chaos creatures who habitually lurked in places of darkness. In front of them were monsters of chaos several times their size, one brute had to be at least twenty feet tall. Some on four legs, some on two, they all had arms and hands to carry vicious looking weapons.

“Let them come to us.” Said Babaef. “Let the spells do their work before charging.”

Gesse hadn’t spoken for a while and Muzzie could see his brother examining the army of huge monsters in front of them. Out of all of them, Muzzie thought that Gesse was the only one who didn’t have to worry about being the one destined to die. Sensan halted his army a mere twenty yards from the entrance and still the creatures guarding the catacombs didn’t attack. Muzzie pushed his ball of daylight towards them, causing most of the creatures to hide behind the temple ruins.

“A predicament.” Said Babaef. “If possible, it would be nice to avoid a battle with these.....beings. I just have a feeling that we aren’t going to get into the catacombs without a fight. The shrine did say we’d have to fight our way in.”

“Move slowly forward.” Said Gesse. “They’ll attack, I can feel it.”

“Very well. We’ll advance at a slow walk.” Said Babaef.

Gesse was right, they’d only moved forward a few feet, when the monsters charged at them. They ignored the pain of Muzzie’s daylight spell and ran at them. Some swinging huge clubs, others armed with swords and shields. Babaef released a fireball, which incinerated one huge brute, so Muzzie unleashed his fire spell. A wide wall of flame began just in front of him and quickly engulfed the advancing army of chaos creatures. Some disintegrated instantly, but others hung on for a while, resisting the inevitable. They didn’t survive long, the heat was simply too intense. Muzzie had to retreat back from it and he could hear the stones in the ruins, cracking in the extreme heat. Sensan ordered his ghost army to move back, as the heat scorched the ground and turned their enemy’s weapons into molten metal. When it seemed that Muzzie had set the entire world on fire, the spell ended and they were looking at stones that glowed with the heat.

“That..... was effective.” Said Babaef. “Have another one ready, Muzzie.”

He never had a chance to start the spell building up. They had barely begun to move forward, when a fresh wave of colossal creatures appeared, climbing out of the entrance to the catacombs. If anything the new wave of monstrous creatures were larger and more ferocious than the last. They ignored the heat of the stones and ran across them to attack Sensan’s army.

“Now it’s going to be sword against sword.” Said Muzzie.

There was no time for anything else, he held his sword ready and walked towards the approaching enemy. Babaef was on his right and Muzzie saw that he too had pulled a long blade from under his robes.

“Kill them all !” Shouted Sensan.

Everyone was running and Lilleth was readying her bow on the run. A monster with four arms and a sword in each was in front of Muzzie and he was busy deciding which arm to strike first. Chillan he could see, firing off a mild fire spell and then reaching for a sword. Gesse was right behind Babaef, Ventus on his shoulder, shouting abuse at the enemy. Closer the enemy came and Babaef used a fireball spell on a particularly large two legged creature. It's abdomen burned away, leaving the rest of it to crash to the ground, it's heavy club crashing into Sensan's army. Muzzie ignored it all and swung his sword at the monster's arm, the closest and the only one he could reach anyway.

“What the.....” He shouted.

They'd gone, vanished. Muzzie had expected his sword to connect with the muscular arm of a twelve foot tall creature and it had vanished. He overbalanced and tumbled across the ground. Muzzie jumped up and spun around, finding no enemy to fight.

“They just disappeared.” Said Lilleth. “One second they were there and then..... gone.”

Something was going on near Babaef, it appeared that some of Sensan's army had been knocked down and were unlikely to rise again.

“It was the club Muzzie, a chance in a million. Crazy !” Said Chillan.

Sensan was saying some words over two of his people who'd been crushed by the falling monster. Nearby Gesse was being looked at by Babaef, who was applying a healing spell to nasty looking gash on his shoulder.

“I think this should work Gesse, but revenants are a bit out of my area of expertise.” Said Babaef.

So, the one destined to die was Ventus, the one of them who seemed least likely to fall in battle. His small vaporous body wasn't any more solid in death, but he was clearly finished. His head was broken in two and as Muzzie watched; his body became a fine mist that sank into the ground.

“Who thought he'd be the one.” Said Chillan. “I felt sure I'd be the one to satisfy the prophecy.”

“Strange indeed.” Said Muzzie. “I think we all assumed he was involved with this thing we're seeking, in some way.”

“Chaos is a player of games.” Said Babaef. “I'm beginning to wonder if we're just pieces in a far bigger game.”

There was no body to bury and Sensan seemed ready to carry on. The bodies of his people had gone, but Muzzie had no idea what had been done with them, perhaps it was better not to know what became of such creatures.

“We should keep moving and enter the catacombs.” Said Babaef.

Muzzie actually felt more hopeful now that Ventus was gone. For a start, the awful prophecy of death had been lifted from them all, at least for now. They all clambered over the stones of the ruined temple and stood by the ragged hole in the ground.

“The stairs have long gone.” Said Babaef, “But I think we can easily climb down.”

It wasn't a dignified way to enter the catacombs, scrambling over loose stones and piles of broken masonry, but everyone made it safely down to the first tunnel.

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Aeony clung to a small chimney on the roof of The Dome and watched the spells being used near the entrance to the catacombs. Most of the power being used was quite ordinary, she could almost see the signature of Babaef in some of it. The huge spell though, the wall of seemingly never ending fire. That had been something else; it seemed to almost caress the darkness in her soul. Someone had real power, a power unseen in the City for a very long time. Aeony had a hope, but whoever wielded



the power had to survive the trip into the catacombs and manage to escape afterwards. But it was a hope, maybe they wielded enough power to.....

"She comes to me and her end." She muttered.

She was brought out of her musings by seeing Silsk come out of her window and drop. The dark angel unfurled her huge wings and used the speed of her drop to gain lift. Over the roofs of the City she soared, shrieking, showing all that she ruled the City of the Lost God. Silsk turned slowly, but didn't approach the shrine or the catacombs.

"Something there might defy your shrieking eh?"

Crawling over the roof of The Dome, using her wings to steady herself, Aeony watched Silsk fly to the very top of the towers. Aeony beat her wings and flew, but kept close to the Dome and then the great library, using the ancient walls to hide her progress. Silsk would soon know she was there, but she didn't want any of her sisters to know she was with Silsk. The dark angels were already so few in number, Aeony dare not risk a war between factions. Close to the library she flew, popping up over the roof and climbing still higher, right to the top of the tower.

"You saw it too?" Asked Silsk.

Aeony walked towards Silsk, there was just about enough room for both of them, on the highest place on the towers.

"Two separate forces, both under the protection of chaos." Said Aeony. "It should be interesting."

Silsk no longer made any pretence at understanding the battle being fought in the City, her City.

"Who are they?" She asked. "Surely not that fool Nigon."

"No, Nigon is already dead, or soon will be. The real power in the catacombs is Yam Kermul."

Silsk actually looked scared.

"Him, I thought he'd fled the rifts and gone beyond gateway, even beyond....."

"Leng! I think we can say it now," said Aeony, "now that it's main general is in the City. He went beyond Leng and into the darkness. We can only wonder at what he found there."

"How do you know all this?" Asked Silsk.

Silsk was intent on watching the area of the City near the catacombs. Aeony brought a small blade out her pocket. Quite small, but very old and very precious. Podd had given it to her, though he too knew it was priceless. Podd was always digging in the mud by the river, finding bones and weapons from wars of the past. He'd given her one of his finds, a Nurigen blade, made when humans had ruled the entire 1<sup>st</sup> rift. The blade was small, but Aeony held it in her hand, knowing it would do the job.

"I have my sources Silsk." Said Aeony. "Tarin once served Yam Kermul, he knows his ways."

"Who stands against the famed and self-proclaimed Lord of Death?"

Aeony moved closer, not quickly enough to alert Silsk, but gradually she edged ever closer.

"Our very own Babaef, but he is aided by some fairly impressive people."

"Babaef!" Exclaimed Silsk. "who would ever have believed that could happen?"

Aeony struck and then struck again and again. Six times she plunged the Nurigen blade into Silsk's back, feeling the full length of the blade penetrate on each thrust.

"Aeony! Why!"

"Because you're insane!"

Silsk turned, but Aeony could already see death in the dark angel's movements. She was slow in turning, very slow and went down on one knee.

"But you can't..... the City..... it's mine."

"No longer."

Aeony kicked Silsk with all her might, it had to look like part of the conflict going on near the shrine. Strange powers were at work in the City and the other dark angels were keeping to their rooms. Flying around and through such forces was highly dangerous and Silsk had just been unlucky. The first kick had Silsk right on the edge of the roof.

“For fuck sake die !” Shouted Aeony.

The second kick sent Silsk a good six feet away from the roof and she fell. The sickening sound of broken bones as she hit the west wing of the library, rose up to Aeony. Another few seconds and Silsk hit the cobbled streets not that far from Muzzie’s. Aeony had to see the body, had to be certain that Silsk hadn’t, by some dark miracle, managed to survive. She fell from the roof and gently glided down towards the bundle of bones, flesh and broken wings.

“At last. I will rule now.”

No one was around to see Aeony examine the Silsk’s dead body. Everyone was keeping to their homes, hiding from the conflict they all knew was coming. The first tremor hit the City, as Aeony picked up Silsk’s remains. There were rituals to be performed and Silsk had to be laid to rest in a certain secret place. If anyone had been about, they’d have seen the rare sight of a dark angel crying, as Aeony carried away the dead body of Silsk, the onetime ruler of the City.

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Maya saw the sky fill with flashes of fire and decided to take cover in one of the many abandoned buildings near the shrine grounds. By pure chance, she’d chosen the same building that Sensan had once chosen as his temporary headquarters. A group of bandits had taken over the building; they’d even found or stolen some furniture for their lair. There were nine of them, all hungry and hiding from the turmoil in the City. Needless to say, they didn’t view Maya and Bailig entering their lair as a friendly thing to do.

“Kill them !” Shouted one.

Maya didn’t need her new battle axe, she used her short blade to cut the throat of the one who’d spoken. The next she killed by breaking her neck and a third by ramming his head into the wall.

When there were no more live bandits in front of her, she turned to help Bailig.

“No !” She said. “If we feed, we’ll be stuck in the form of the beast for hours.”

Bailig had cut the throat of a bandit and had the body in his arms, looking at the man’s bloody throat and starting to change. He lost the yellow tinge in his eyes and nodded at Maya, as he dropped the lifeless body.

“Sorry.” He said. “Fresh blood seems to take away my control.”

“I know, there is something I brought that will help, but it’s for later.”

Maya took them upstairs, the view would be better from there and Bailig would be away from the temptation. The next floor had a few bedrolls laid out, but no more bandits. Sensan had carried out a few repairs and it looked like the patches to the roof were still solid. The room looked dry and there was still a new looking set of wooden steps, leading up to the roof. Maya silently climbed the steps, Bailig following close behind. They’d put a few chairs on the roof and a table, almost a home from home for them to sit on warm nights. Just one bandit was sat at the table and he looked to be fast asleep.

“Sloppy, very sloppy.” Said Bailig.

The guard woke as Bailig lifted him off the chair and snapped his neck, before throwing his lifeless body into the street below. They sat at the table and helped themselves to the beer and bread that was there. Babaef had just used a fire spell against the twenty foot high chaos creature and they watched it collapse to the ground.

“We’ll let them clear the way for us.” Said Maya.

She watched as the army near the catacombs halted and appeared to be dealing with their dead.

“We’re not the only ones waiting.” Said Bailig.

He pointed towards another roof and a figure in full battle armour. Tarin, though neither of them could see him well enough to recognise the master weapon smith.

“There will be others, already here, or on their way.” Replied Maya.

It took a while for the entire army below them, to enter the catacombs and vanish from sight. Maya had a flask in an inside pocket of her coat, containing a liquid made by a shaman in her home town. She took off the top of the flask and used it as a cup, which she filled and offered to Bailig.

“A few drops of this will stop me changing for days.” She said.

He seemed hesitant to take the cup from her.

“How long will a cup full stop me from changing ?” He asked.

“I don’t know, weeks, maybe months. We have to drink it Bailig ! If we change we are his creatures and we’ll do his bidding whether we want to or not.”

Bailig drank the liquid and passed the cup back to her. She refilled it and as she drank, she noticed the warrior in full armour again. He was running the last few yards and vanishing into the catacombs. Maya put the top back on her flask and buttoned it carefully into her inside pocket.

“Come.” She said. “It’s about time we went in search of Yam Kermul.”

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Part 30 will be posted at the end of March.