

## Ripples from the Past

### Chapter 31 - Timelines

**“Angels and undead fighting together, now that will be something to see. I’m almost glad I came now.”**

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So many time lines to look back along, Nurigen had been busy. So many events that had just proven to be part of his legitimate work for Mendera. So many blind alleys that looked like he was deliberately trying to hide a tree in the forest. Eventually Chlo had tracked him though, on a time line that led to the deserted Terak base. They’d left in a hurry, expensive equipment left behind. There had been a few fires started in various places, but someone had turned off the life support system. Fire doesn’t last long with no oxygen. As covering your tracks went, it was an atrocious job, bordering on negligence. Jen contacted her before she’d even had a chance to give the planet an imperial Ident.

“You must be watching me Jen.”

“I knew you were close to finding their base. Do you need any of The Damned yet ?”

“Give me a while to look around.” Said Chlo. “I might just need a few tech clerics.”

There were tried and tested procedures for investigating abandoned enemy bases. The first and most important task was to make sure the base was deserted. It wasn’t unknown for small suicide squads to be left behind and traps were almost obligatory. Chlo used several imperial drones, letting them run a full scan and analysis of the base and the planet surface in a ten mile radius. Alyz next, obviously bored with simply wandering the multiverse with The Old One.

“Do you need a hand Chlo ?”

“There might be traps.”

“I’m pretty tough.”

“Fine.”

Chlo was actually glad of the company, as Alyz appeared next to her. The drones would take a while to finish their scans and Chlo had already decided to risk exploring the Terak base.

“They left in quite a rush Alyz.” She said. “Probably too quickly to leave anything nasty for us to trip over. I can’t be certain though, so keep your eyes open. I want a good look at their computer.”

Alyz followed her, as she walked along a corridor, towards a room the drones were telling her might contain the central computer. The remains of the computer of course, the task of destroying it would have been given to reliable people. One of her drones vanished, probably vaporised.

“There are traps Alyz, one of the drones found one.” She said. “There was a quiet hissing sound, before it ceased to be a drone.”

“If I hear hissing, I’ll move away..... Very quickly.”

It might have been a piece of ordnance of course, the drones had no instinct for self-survival and would prod and probe anything that looked out of place.

“When did the Terak leave here ?” Alyz asked her.

“Three days ago, easy to find on the timelines. A fleet of fairly elderly craft, but with enough firepower to do a lot of damage.”

“Where do you think they’re going ?”

“Ahh, that will take me a while to work out. The timelines follow individuals and there are over eighty thousand sentient being onboard their vessels. That ties the timelines in knots. Too much

interconnectivity..... I will find them, but it will take a while. Just hope none of them die while in flight, even if it's from a disease. That will cause far too much connectivity and disruption from far older powers. Even I might not be able to find them then."

"You mean the deities ? Surely the Terak left theirs behind, in the other multiverse." Said Alyz.

Poor Alyz, she was about to ruin her faith in an ordered and logical multiverse. No going back on what she'd said though, her old friend deserved the truth.

"It doesn't really work like that Alyz." She said. "Old gods, dead deities who've boiled away into the wastes of eternity, even deities we've never had contact with. Death involves them all, in a tangled web of knotted segments of time. How to best describe it ? Imagine you asked the clerics who keep the imperial archives, to inform you about every new book that mentions Ashunt blooms. They'd probably keep a list and carry on keeping that list, even if you died or simply vanished. In a way, that is how the multiverse handles the death of a sentient being."

"You make it sound as though the multiverse is run by half mad, bureaucratic clerics." Said Alyz.

"That is a fairly good description and sometimes it gets worse."

Chlo didn't slow down, as she pushed open the doors to the computer room. It looked like several crazy people had been let loose with sledge hammers.

"They did a good job of destroying their computer." Said Alyz.

"I thought they might and it's computers, at least six of them. All linked, all constantly copying each other, mirroring essential data. Half of the processing systems could fail and no one would even notice. I recognise the handiwork of Nurigen here, we might be in luck."

Terak technology was good, but Menderan tech was better. The small box Nurigen had placed below the computers had survived. Everything else had been reduced to tangled metal, but the bronze coloured box seemed to have escaped damage.

"Help me move the debris Alyz, I can't see it properly."

They recklessly pushed the ruined computers to one side, ignoring the threat of traps. Chlo knew there were definitely traps, when a second drone found one. There was no time for caution though, she had to know if the box was what she hoped it was.

"That's enough, I can get to it." She said.

It was a Menderan box, there were even Menderan letters stamped into the metal. She ran her fingers over the surface, finding the tell-tale signs of an active device. It was connected to a thick cable, which limited how far she could move the box.

"Bless you Nurigen, even if you didn't install it for my use." She said. "A link box, a very smart one. Knowing how paranoid your father could be, he probably hid the backup computer. He liked cables, even if they are low tech. Most engineers would think the thick optical cable was a coolant intake. Run the cables through the pipe ducting and your backup computer can be just about anywhere."

"How do we find it ?" Asked Alyz. "Do we have to take the place apart ?"

"These will find it for us. Ironically Nurigen did a lot of the work to miniaturise their wings and power supply."

Chlo moved a cloud of the tiny drones from stasis in the imperial stores. Over a hundred tiny drones, little larger than gnats. They buzzed around just above her head waiting for orders. She sent them down into the pipe ducting to find where the cable ended.

"They will find his backup computer." She said. "He could hardly build a sealed room in the Terak base, but he might have cut into a hollow wall space."

"He might have taken it with him."

"Maybe, but my guess is that when he left here, he was running for his life. The Terak aren't famous for tolerating failure."

The tiny drones found where the cable went through a wall. There was sealant around the cable, but the drones were equipped with energy weapons, some even had jaws. Their power packs didn't last long and half of them would never return to Chlo.... They had penetrated the wall cavity though and found the backup computer.

"They found it." Said Chlo. "In a cavity wall behind the stores. Come on, it's not far."

Alyz following she took almost the same route Chelac Nurigen had walked on the way to the stores. He'd taken a diversion to pick up a bag from his room, but they took a much more direct route. Her drones reported while they were en-route. There were another twenty active traps in the base and three automatic turrets in what had been the Terak officer's living quarters. Chlo sent several heavy duty drones to take care of the problem and left a note to Jen, that it might take another hour to secure the base.

"They didn't even take their dead." Said Alyz.

Body containers, coffins, call them what you like. They all had a certain uniformity of look, no matter where you went in the multiverse. Four of them had been placed on a rack against the wall, sealed up airtight, the name of the deceased written on a simple paper label.

"That is rare." Said Chlo. "Probably done because of forgetfulness, rather than being deliberate."

Death did strange things to the timelines, hiding some while bringing others out, pushing them into the foreground. Chlo had often thought that ghosts were merely a result of sensitive people, seeing back through time. She saw Nurigen, waiting in the stores, before vanishing into a portal. She had him, but had her reasons for not telling Alyz.

"Are you alright Chlo?"

"Yes, just concentrating on the drones. This way, in the next room."

No tech clerics yet, the atmosphere in the base was still unbreathable. There would need to be quite a lot of equipment brought from Mendera before the clerics arrived. Imperial power blocks, life support systems, perhaps even a mobile lab. Until all that arrived everything had to be accomplished with drones. A heavy engineering drone had a laser aimed at a section of wall, waiting for orders to continue. Chlo set a few limits on heat and depth, before allowing the drone to get to work.

"They can be better at this than the clerics." She said. "You just need to keep an eye on them."

It was an outside wall, the inner skin made of a tough metal alloy. Once again Nurigen had shown his genius, picking a wall that no one was likely to drill into by accident. There was a slight hiss of escaping hot gasses, as the drone removed a two foot section of internal wall. The drone was sent away, so that the next part could be done by her own hands.

"Help me disconnect the cable Alyz."

The backup computer was Menderan of course, which drove her hatred of Nurigen in a little deeper. She was beginning to understand the depth of Chelac's insanity. He'd put in the secret backup system out of paranoia, rather than any wish to betray the Terak. He simply didn't trust anyone.

"Is it still working?" Asked Alyz.

"Yes, I can feel it....I'm going to put it all on the common channel, all their plots and schemes."

Perhaps a mistake to use Menderan tech, but Nurigen probably thought no one would look for yet another backup system. Everything was encrypted of course, but Chlo had never met any encryption she couldn't crack.

"They're heading towards Medrona." She said. "It might be too late, but take Nurigen's computer to the Old One Alyz. He'll be able to calculate the best speed and course to intercept Aukar."

“Yes, of course..... Action at last.”

She was alone and able to think for all of about two seconds, before Jen noticed the drones reporting that the base was secure. There was also quite a bit of excitement, when Aukar’s target was revealed on the common channel.

“He’s locked into the old ripples Jen..... We can give him a warm welcome when he arrives at the Well of Souls.”

The Damned began to arrive, with robot loaders carrying the heavy equipment. Chlo did her best to ignore it all, while finding the exact right spot in the caged off area of the stores. It was so easy to find where Nurigen had arrived on the rifts, his sanctuary on the 2<sup>nd</sup> rift. No question of telling Alyz of course, she’d have wanted to kill her father then and there, probably giving him a painful death. The multiverse had prophesied his death in the future though and such prophecies need to be respected. Not that Chlo could move straight to Chelac’s home on the rifts, but she knew of a way to get there.

“It’ll give him something to think about.” She muttered.

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Later they argued about who had sensed the coming attack first. Hol thought Minraver had begun to move towards the entrance gates first, though Louelle claimed to have felt a disturbance in reality several minutes before. They’d be ready this time though, there was no reason for anyone to die, apart from whoever or whatever was about to arrive uninvited.

“What was sent last time ?” Asked Gesse.

“A reptilian monster about twenty feet tall, all teeth and claws.” Said Hol. “We lost two of the tribal rift warriors that time.”

“It’s probably another test of our defences.” Said Minraver.

“Then they will find the undead here and learn to fear us.” Said Gesse. “Keep your people back Hol, the undead will deal with this.”

“I’ll take the children to a place of safety.” Said Minraver.

Poor Mix, he looked so disappointed. Even Seesha seemed disappointed about missing the fight between the undead and the monster.

“We were sent away last time.” She complained.

“Not fair.” Added Mix.

“Let them stay and watch.” Said Hol. “They need to know that monsters can be real, but they also need to know that monsters can be beaten.”

They didn’t need to have the ‘who is in charge’ conversation, Minraver merely nodded her agreement. The young Menderans were to stay, but behind a wall some distance from the gates.

“They probably sensed all the activity, when we rebuilt the guard towers.” Said Celli.

“Makes sense..... Are you sure you don’t need help Gesse ?” Asked Kittara.

“Just watch and enjoy Kittara of Mendera.” Said Gesse.

Only Louelle refused to move back, remaining at the top of a rebuilt guard tower, pointing at where the attacker was likely to arrive. Reluctantly, she had agreed to take no part in the coming battle. Everyone else who wasn’t one of the undead had moved well back, most finding a comfortable spot, from which to enjoy the spectacle. Hol had sat herself on the wall near Seesha. Albas was close to the children too, while Tejan and Juno were quite near to Rhian and Kerr. It made her quite proud that without a word being said, her people knew who needed a little extra protection.

“Of course, it might be something far more dangerous this time.” Said Minraver.

“Gessee has at least five hundred of the undead surrounding where Louelle is pointing. Nothing will get past them.” Said Hol.

She wound up three tears of The Damned though and hung them in front of her face, ready to use. Just in case of course..... It always made sense to be prepared.

“It’s another reptilian monster.” Shouted Celli. “I can almost taste it.”

It was so quiet that they heard a sound like a sudden gust of wind, as the portal opened. Another tall reptile creature arrived, again looking like a deliberate insult to the old gods. The mindless brute instantly stamped on one of the undead, but they don’t die easily. No amazement that its intended victim rose from the ground, it just turned and gripped a revenant in its jaws.

“That is a meal it won’t enjoy.” Said Mo.

Even several rows of long sharp teeth, couldn’t do much damage to a revenant. The monster found itself under attack, as the revenant ran its clawed hand down its neck. That seemed to be a signal, for the undead to move forward as one, hitting, kicking and biting the uninvited guest in their midst.

“It might not know fear, but it feels pain.” Said Seesha.

“I think it’s trying to get away.” Said Silky.

It was roaring as it tried to break free, but the undead were in no mood to show mercy. The creature shook its head, trying to throw the revenant from its jaws, the revenant who was causing it so much pain. It bled copiously, yellow blood with the occasional swirl of green.

“Don’t let it escape.” Shouted Gessee. “Surround it, bring it down.”

Not every one of the undead rose unscathed. Some appeared to have broken arms, which they kept held against their bodies, others crawled because their legs were broken. None looked to be dead though and they weren’t stopping their constant biting and kicking.

“It’s dying, finish it off.” Yelled Gessee.

One of the revenants managed to kick the creature at just the right spot on one of its four muscular back legs. It seemed to know it was finished, its roars became more plaintive as it toppled over. The undead covered it, almost devouring the once mighty beast.

“Wow.” Yelled Mix.

Soon the monster was little more than a mass of yellow flesh. Gessee ordered his people to step back, so that Louelle and Celli, could use dark magic to incinerate the remains. It was done, they’d easily survived the second test of their defences.

“Next time they’ll send something far worse.” Said Hol. “They’ll try to weaken us before even beginning the main assault. The undead are superb fighters, but I doubt if there are enough of them.”

“What are you saying Hol ? Are you suggesting we can’t win ?” Asked Tejan.

“We could dig his jail out of the ground and run with it.” Said Mo. “The undead are strong enough to drag it across the rifts.”

Hol knew the moment would come, a full on conflict with Minraver. She might be an eternal, but she was nothing like Sikush. Too timid when it was time to act, too worried about protocols, ifs, maybes and crippling anxieties.

“I’m not talking about running.” Said Hol. “We can win..... Minraver knows what we need, she has the answer to our problem, tens of thousands of them.”

Minraver looked genuinely confused, as though she really didn’t understand. Realisation arrived though, accompanied by irritation and anger.

“Are you talking about my warrior angels Hol, my Genova ?”

“Yes I am, what use are they or your fleet if all they do is orbit Mendera ?”

So much anger, even a little flame in Minraver's right palm. She was capable of incinerating anyone who annoyed her, before they'd had a chance to use a weapon. Did eternalists even feel regret about such things? Sikush seemed to feel regret sometimes, but Minraver was different, cold as ice.

"You forget who you're talking to Hol Azreemy. My warriors are the final line of defence, the reserves to be kept until last."

Hol was in no mood to back down. She'd realised Minraver didn't want the position of commander of the fortress, because it meant dealing with so many disputes, so much minutiae. Hol was also beginning to think she'd been chosen for the role, because Minraver believed her to be weak and easy to control. Her own anger was beginning to build.

"Reserves for when?" She asked. "If we lose the battle here, it's all over. It makes sense to use your warriors here, to fight the most important battle of all. As Sikush has often said, if Mendera City is destroyed, it can be rebuilt.....Any city can be rebuilt."

The flame in Minraver's palm grew a little. Hol began to wonder if her very long life was about to end, as a pile of dry ash on the rifts. Few of those around them seemed to understand how quickly her argument with Minraver had become much more serious than a mere disagreement. Celli was fondling the hilt of her blade though, while glaring at Minraver.

"Are your angels too high and mighty to fight with us, is that it?" Asked Celli

Hol breathed a sigh of relief when Kittara spoke, everyone respected Kittara.

"Hol speaks sense Minraver." Said Kittara. "The problem with moving the reserves back to Mendera was only temporary, they will be there by now. Your warriors are of more use here than anywhere else. Unless you have other reasons for not wanting them to fight with us?"

"So it's fine for us to fight and die here, but not your angels." Shouted Silky.

"No, that's not what I meant at all." Said Minraver.

Hol had to smile, as Minraver tried and failed, to get herself out a gradually deepening hole. Kittara had started it all of course, with just a tiny hint that Minraver might be keeping her angels away because of some kind of snobbery. Hol knew that the warrior angels would be arriving in the fortress, when Louelle tried to offer her support to Minraver.

"I don't blame you at all Minraver." She said. "Dreadful place full of awful people. I'd have left days ago if it weren't for my vow to certain deities."

"I never said anyone was awful!"

No good, Gesse was even threatening to move the undead out onto the rift and watch the coming battle from a safe distance. Minraver really had no option.

"Please listen to me!" Shouted Minraver. "There was no intended insult to anyone. I am grateful to you all for being here, very grateful. There are fifty thousand of my Genova in orbit around Mendera. I will leave ten thousand of them there, out of respect for The Chaln . They will be his personal guard, in case the enemy attack the holy city."

That comment caused a lot of nodding heads. It often surprised her that many people who might not be that keen on the empire, still held the emperor in high regard.

"Only right, the emperor must be protected." Someone shouted.

"No one wants the emperor to be left unprotected." Said Gesse.

Hol felt like mentioning the eighty thousand reserves and probably half a million affiliated troops belonging to empire worlds, but she didn't. She'd won and there was no benefit in antagonising Minraver any further.

"The bulk of my warrior angels will be here by morning, you have my word on that. A little over forty thousand Genova, fully armed veterans of a great many wars."

Everyone began to cheer and as often happens, the crowd changed its mood completely. The undead were cheering Mendera and the emperor, some even cheering Minraver.

“Angels and undead fighting together, now that will be something to see. I’m almost glad I came now.” Said Mo.

Poor Mo, he was to receive the tongue lashing that Minraver had probably been saving for her.

“Oh yes Mo, you’ll see it all and see my fleet fall from the sky.” Spat Minraver. “My fleet, that can travel anywhere and destroy anything our enemy might throw at us. It will arrive here and suffer the way all technology suffers on the rifts. A few hours and you’ll see my fleet crash to the ground, to become nothing but useless scrap metal. Oh yes, you will see all that Mo.... And I hope you enjoy it.” Minraver then muttered at her then, without making eye contact.

“You got your own way Hol. I’ll be back with my fleet before morning.”

Minraver, sister of The Chalné and one of the most powerful beings in the entire multiverse, now hated her. Kittara approached her with a huge smile on her face.

“To be honest Hol, I never thought you had it in you. I’m glad you did though. We just might stand a chance of defending this place now.”

“Minraver thought I was weak.... Which is why I couldn’t be... If that makes sense ?”

“Oh yes, it does.” Said Kittara. “She’ll never forgive you though.”

“I know.”

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Chlo had limitations, which few Menderan citizens would have believed. She was the AI organic hybrid who ran everything, even making sure Mendera City had the occasional rainy day. It all required technology though and the rifts were destroyers of all technology. She was as helpless as any others who wanted to trudge across the hostile rifts.

“Alyz will have it in her room.” She muttered.

Moving her reality from the Terak base to Mendera city was easy, everyday use of the powers and technology at her disposal. Normally she’d have respected Alyz’s privacy, but it wasn’t a normal day. Many of the elite members of The Damned had hung onto their rooms in the vast barracks, probably out of nostalgia. There were quite a few items of dirty laundry in Alyz’s room and the bed looked to have been slept in quite recently.

“A place to escape to..... From all the suspicion and accusing looks. I understand Alyz.”

The rift manipulator was priceless, yet Alyz had used it as an ornament on her dressing table. It did look attractive, purest gold etched with characters from the old dark alphabet of ancient Leng. Chlo picked it up, wiping off the dust with her fingers. She’d return it of course, once she’d accomplished what needed to be done.

“The dunes next I think.” She mumbled.

Demon tech had once destroyed a suburb of Norraine, the capital city of the original planet of Ixir.

The disaster had killed tens of thousands and left part of the city uninhabitable for decades.

Something that huge is never forgotten and The Damned always went out onto the dunes to the east of Mendera city, to activate demon tech. Chlo expertly ran her fingers over the device and there was no explosion, no crater formed in the dunes.

Not that Chlo was going straight to where she’d seen Nurigen, that was far too dangerous. Others were still looking for Chelac Nurigen and more would begin looking for him, if Mendera won the war.

Chlo used the device to move herself to the ruined village on the 1<sup>st</sup> rift. She stepped out of a portal quite close to the rift gate.

“Alyz is the real problem.” She muttered. “Far too clever for her own good.”

There was a good chance that Alyz might suspect something. Add on her current state of boredom and a little paranoia..... No, there could be no chance of her being followed to where Nurigen was hiding. Chlo stepped into the slight shimmer, which was the only physical sign of the rift gate. She appeared on the well cut grass which surrounded the Well of Souls.

“Tie yourself up in knots Chlo; make yourself dizzy, so no one can follow.” She mumbled.

She moved her reality to the thousands of square miles of beige desert sand on Menura Oasis and walked in a straight line until she was bored with it. Next the wet lands of Algaria, before moving her reality to Phlot. Always in the uninhabited areas, where there was no chance of being seen. A few more places, until Chlo knew her movements through the timelines were as good as untraceable. Finally she moved herself back to The Well of Souls in Mendera city. She’d travelled unimaginable distances through several different universes, to end up standing beside the well in the middle of the night. The final step in her long circuitous journey had the potential to be dangerous, even for her. “Catch me if you can.” She muttered.

Chlo emptied her mind of all images and any thoughts of where she wanted to go. There was a slight chance that she might end up on the surface of a sun, or on the rim of a singularity. Unlikely, but people had jumped into the well and vanished forever. It was a relief to find herself standing on stony ground in the middle of a heavy rainstorm. She took in her surroundings and had a fair idea where the well had left her.

“High ultra violet light, thorn scrub and plenty of rain.” She muttered. “Add on the stony soil and I’m probably on the 5<sup>th</sup> rift, not far from Tandalla.”

Tandalla had been renamed Dix Tandal after flooding had caused the city to be rebuilt, about five miles further upstream on the Tandal river. Chlo used the demon device to confirm her location and her suspicions had been right. She was on the 5<sup>th</sup> rift, about seven days hard walking from Dix Tandal.

“Perfect.”

She’d never visited Nurigen’s house on the 2<sup>nd</sup> rift, his sanctuary away from the troubles of the empire. The timelines had shown it to her though and the image was locked into her memory. No closing her eyes as Nurigen had done, she concentrated on the image and gently stroked the right areas on the demon device. It looked as though where she standing was disintegrating away to nothing, as a portal transported her to within a few yards of the house. It was raining there too, though not with the same intensity. No shimmering into fresh dry clothes, she’d have to face him while dripping water over his floors.

“Bastard.” She muttered.

Her true organic form was small and light, based on a young Hol Azreemy, the first human she’d had contact with. She opened the side door to the house, finding it to be unlocked. Chelac was either feeling very secure in his hideaway, or he didn’t care who found him. She crept along the hallways without making a sound. He was at the front of the house, staring through the windows at the rain. Had he heard her, as she’d opened door after door ? It didn’t seem likely, as he jumped back when she spoke to him.

“Hello Chelac.” She said. “We need to talk.”

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“You’d think they’d have left at least a few skeleton crews behind.” Said the Old One.

“They did, the two needle craft are powering up their shields.” Said Alyz.



They'd arrived at Medrona and the Old One had uncloaked his small fleet of lethal space craft. It was an easy way to see if any of the Terak fleet were still manned. It seemed that Aukar had left at least a few of his warriors to guard the fleet.

"Do we need any live prisoners?"

"No, we have everything in their computer, all their plans." She replied.

One of the needle craft accelerated towards them, firing its Ion weapons as it came. The Old One's craft had that perfect mix of Menderan shielding and infamous Aumashy weapons. Alyz almost felt sorry for the Terak warriors manning the needle craft. The Old One fired their weapons, he seemed to really enjoy the excitement after weeks of boredom.

"They recognise the green hue." She said.

"Everyone recognises the weapons of the Aumashy Alyz."

The first needle craft was enveloped in green flames and began to disintegrate. No quick death in the centre of an explosion for the crew. The corrosive effect would soon break their craft apart, exposing them to the vacuum of space. A nasty death to inflict on an enemy, but effective.

"Are you letting the second one escape?" She asked.

"No."

Needle craft were known for their fast acceleration and the Terak crew were putting survival before valour. They were on the far edge of the short range scanners, before Alyz noticed an uncloaking imperial raptor on the scanners, one of theirs.

"I sent it out there.... Just in case." Said the Old One.

The raptor ripped the needle craft apart, giving the Terak no time to respond. The rest of the Terak fleet continued to orbit Medrona, with no signs of any other craft being manned. It seemed a pity to destroy the fleet, the craft would have been prized on many unaligned worlds. There were no crews spare to take them to an empire world though and Aukar couldn't be allowed to use them again.

"Destroy them all." Said Alyz. "Leave nothing but orbiting debris."

Orbiting debris was the curse of many worlds, everything from the remnants of huge battles, to old tech satellites. Medrona was a dead world with a bad reputation though. Despite the recent arrival of the Terak fleet, it might be another thousand years before anyone else visited the planet. The Old One used his entire fleet, to turn the Terak vessels into tiny pieces of scrap.

"My scanners are showing a lot of crashed shuttles on the surface." Said the Old One. "I don't think Aukar had an easy landing on Medrona."

"No one ever does." Said Alyz. "Take us lower, just inside the atmosphere. We need to get a look at what happened."

The craft was designed to land in active war zones. The choppy but thin atmosphere of Medrona didn't trouble them at all. Very few of the Terak landing shuttles looked to have escaped without some damage. The evil reputation of Medrona was well deserved, few warriors left the surface without gaining some extra scars. Alyz left a report on the common channel.

"Terak landing shuttles appear to have been attacked by whatever calls Medrona home. It seems fairly certain Aukar lost a large part of his force. There is no sign of his army on the surface, so we must assume he used the portal in the stone circle and is on his way across the rifts."

They almost missed Mo's vessel still standing on the only safe landing place on the planet. Aukar had landed in one of the worst places to land, to the north of the stone circle. The Terak fleet had either not seen the Revenge, or had decided a bulk freight carrier wasn't worth destroying. Alyz should have reported the vessel to Mendera, but they might order her to destroy it.

"Mo would never forgive me." She muttered.

“Do we destroy it, or mark it as an imperial vessel ?” Asked the Old One.

“Mark it as imperial and add a leave alone.” She said. “Mo might well be relying on it as his way to get home.”

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Nurigen didn't attack her as she walked towards him, he knew how strong she was. He was looking past her though, watching the door she'd opened.

“Looking for your daughter ?” She asked. “Alyz has taken an oath to kill you, but that can't be allowed to happen today.”

He'd been a great man once, but now she suspected he was a little crazy. His clothes looked grubby and he hadn't shaved the stubble from his chin.

“Chlo, you have to let me explain..... I never intended...”

“Shut up ! No excuses, it's far too late for that. You'll just lie anyway, to save your life. You talk about wanting to die, but if I were to say you were going to die right now.... You'd beg me not to. We both know it.”

“I don't know what I want Chlo. You said Alyz has vowed to take my life ?”

“Yes, by pushing a blade into your throat. Quite a vivid image, something to look forward to.”

He sat in a chair which sent up a cloud of dust, as he collapsed into it. Chlo remained standing, waiting for a chance to torture him. Not physically of course, but mental torture which would last for thousands of years.

“Are you going to arrest me or something ?” He asked. “Am I being taken back to Mendera ?”

“No, no one knows I'm here and they will never know. I'm here to tell you about a prophecy Chelac, though you probably won't like it.”

She waited, looking into the eyes of a man she'd once been proud to call a friend. She knew the war would require her to become her dark self again, do some questionable things. Torturing an old friend though....He was a traitor and deserved it. He had to ask her of course, if she remained silent for long enough.

“Tell me about this prophecy Chlo ?”

“Alyz is destined to kill you, there can be no doubt about that. I've seen it on the time lines, your daughter kneeling on your chest, ramming a demon blade into your throat. It is a prophecy from the multiverse and cannot be broken without severe and unexpected consequences.”

For a man who craved death, he looked very scared.

“When will this happen ?”

“It could be next year Chelac, a hundred years from now, or after the passing of several millennia. I'm not going to tell you when. I want you to be constantly wondering if every day of your life, might be that day.... The day you die by the hand of your daughter.”

“But you can't leave it like that, it's not.....”

“Not what ? Not human, not right, not appropriate ?”

“I'm not human Chelac, but I think your punishment is right and appropriate.”

She thought of the old abandoned village on the 1<sup>st</sup> rift and ran her fingers over the demon device. As she vanished, Nurigen was still shouting at her.

“No Chlo, you must tell.....”

Once the abandoned village had been a dangerous place, even a dark angel had been seen there.

That had been a long time ago though, before the balance of the multiverse had moved, just a little.

There were no demons in the ruined village, or anyone else for that matter. Chlo sat on a wall and allowed herself to cry.

“Not for you Chelac Nurigen.” She yelled. “I hope every remaining day of your life is pure hell.”  
No, her tears weren’t shed for him. Chlo cried for the Chelac Nurigen who had been her friend for a very long time. Nurigen the archivist, who’d plotted with Mo to keep the records of Kittara safe from destruction. Nurigen who’d loved to visit the school for the children of clerics and tell them stories about the old days of Mendera, the golden days.  
“That is the Nurigen I’m crying for.”

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