

## Mendera – Empire

### Chapter 13 – Juliette

**“You’re going to trap Estrin-Okanan, the most powerful of all the deities ? We’re fucked ! She hates you anyway.” – Nurigen**

A rare rain storm was sweeping over Mendera. Chlo washed the streets with an artificial shower several times a week, usually in the hour just before dawn. About three times a year though, sometimes four times in a good year, a natural rainstorm came down from the Nikar Mountains and lashed the city for several hours. Not that the residents minded the storm, it was considered lucky, the children came out of school to play in it and even the merchants in the market took time to thank their particular god or gods for the sign of good fortune. Rain in Mendera ! The word went out on the news channels throughout the Empire as a good omen. Of course the storm drains were agitated so that the whole city smelt bad for days, but even that couldn’t dampen the spirit of optimism.

“We have to keep it secret from her.” Said Sikush.

He was stood on his favourite veranda in the imperial palace and watching the rain beat down on the plants in the garden. Nurigen was with him and had just mentioned being surprised that Kittara didn’t know she was to give lodging to a deity. Chlo had shown Sikush the timelines, Kittara buying the house, getting a cat, Estrid moving in. Of course it was all probabilities normally, but on this occasion there were temporal way points locked into the multiverse. That was rare and the fact that one major way point was Kittara buying a cat was extremely strange.

“Surely she has to know,” said Nurigen, “otherwise she might reject the child.”

“No. She has a natural protective instinct for children, especially girl children. Something in her past and nothing to do with the soul she inherited.”

Chlo had shown him the time lines and the two sisters. Kittara had been the oldest of three children the year her mother had died. No militia raid or warriors seeking vengeance on the tribe, her mother had died from the sickness that had arrived with the wet spring.

“Real memories, or fake implants from Chlo ?” Asked Nurigen.

Sikush looked at his old friend. Had he ever given him reason to be so cynical ? Perhaps, but you can’t run an empire without manipulating people, not if you wanted the empire to survive.

“No. The memories are real, you can look at them if you want ? I’ll have Chlo give you access to the temporal probes.”

That was how it was done. No need to record anything, the past never changed, or very rarely changed. Just lock the probe onto the moment and it could go back there any time you wanted.

Sikush remembered seeing a young Kittara trying to keep her two young sisters alive and failing. The father ? Fathers didn’t play much of a role in their society, they just impregnated the female and moved on. He ignored the noise of Nurigen’s voice and used Chlo to look back at the death of the youngest sister.

‘But I want to wait with Aysha !’ Said Ishan the youngest.

Chlo now understood the language and Kittara had been her name, though Kattara was a more accurate translation. He watched Kittara persuade the youngest girl to wait in bushes under the tree on her own.

‘Wait here. Stay still and quiet.’ Said Kittara.

She had no option other than raiding the village on her own. They needed food more than money and there would be food in the village. Her mother had always left them in different hides, though usually at least two warriors had been left with the children. The raid on the village had gone well and Kittara had arrived back to find Aysha in good spirits and eager for the food she'd brought.

'Ishan will be pleased, you found some Oulan fruit.' Said Aysha.

The tree had thorns and Ishan had been well hidden, but as they approached the tree they saw blood on its lower branches. Perhaps it had been one of the many predators in the jungle, or perhaps a passing villager? Ishan had been killed by a single blow to the throat and her tiny body was limp and lifeless. They'd buried her in a shallow grave next to the tree and carried on heading towards the big city.

"Sorry?" Asked Sikush.

"I said!"

His old friend was getting a bit petulant and Sikush wondered if he had been right to let him carry on with his chronicles of the empire. He might give posterity a very cynical view of the Menderan Empire. Then again who was likely to ever read it?

"I said. Perhaps she can be more convincing to Estrid if she knows?"

Delmus was lounging in a chair and pretending not to listen, but both he and Luri realised they were both at the centre of something pretty momentous, or apocalyptic if he got it wrong. Protocol demanded that he was accompanied by two guards all the time, so Luri and Delmus had been volunteered for the role almost continually. Luri yawned and winked at him, bless that girl.

"No. If Estrid picked up that it was a plot we'd all risk destruction. When Estrin-Okanan finally wakes and takes on full form she must be as protective of Kittara as Kittara was of her. Then she'll protect her on her trip beyond Gateway."

Sikush stopped the temporal probe from showing him the death of Aysha, once was enough. Kittara had come home to find her raped and dead on the dirty bed they shared in the big city. In reality the big city was a mining town of about twenty houses. Any of the miners could have killed Aysha, so Kittara had killed them all to be sure. Then she'd joined the raiding party, but that had been after she'd buried Aysha next to her youngest sister, beside the tree in the jungle.

"Are you listening to me?" Shouted Nurigen.

If Chelac had seen the tear on the cheek of Sikush he might not have snapped at him. Sikush merely looked at him.

"Have a care Nurigen. Choose your next words carefully."

He heard Nurigen muttering an apology behind him as he watched the raindrops hitting the lake. Mendera looked at its best after one of these storms and he would take a walk around the market place. As he turned he saw Nurigen on his knees a beseeching look on his face. Sikush knew the old man didn't fear death, but they both knew an eternal can inflict worse than death on those unwise enough to insult them. Luri and Delmus both had their hands on their swords, but he saw confusion in their eyes.

"Get up you old fool and let's go to the market and annoy the new owner of Hassan's Emporium."

He walked over and helped his old friend up, while Luri and Delmus looked relieved.

"So you're really sending her to Neosto?" Asked Nurigen.

"Yes. With an aspect of Estrin-Okanan as her protector."

The rain blew several large leaves from a fruit tree next to the lake as they quietly let Sikush ponder on the future. There were a great many ways it might go wrong, but how else was Kittara going to

get the powers she needed ? Yes he'd send her to learn everything Neosto could teach her. He turned to see Chelac quietly waiting for his attention.

"Can you still control her when she has that power ?" Asked Nurigen.

Ahh a question he could answer with 100% certainty. He put his hand on his old friends shoulder as he moved them to the market place.

"Yes." Was all he said.

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Abijah crouched behind the altar stone and gave a silent thank you to Sikush for sending Babak with her. She'd gone storming in, all caution forgotten and bore the scorch marks on her arms to prove it, while he'd behaved like a professional warrior. True she'd killed more of the creatures than him, but he was sat next to her completely unharmed and keen to get on with the fight, while she winced at every bruise and burn.

"Ready ?" He asked her.

She rubbed a nasty bruise on her arm and remembered the instructions Juliette had given them.

'Go to the ruined temple five miles south. It will be your home until you leave here. There are only two ways to leave my realm, you die or I send you back to Sikush, so you'll need a home.'

Of course there had to be a problem with obtaining that home, they were sent for training and knew nothing was going to be easy.

'There are creatures in the Temple. You must get them to leave.'

That had been four days ago and luckily no time limit had been set on the job of claiming their home.

How many of the creatures where there ? They'd killed dozens and yet the numbers coming from the lower levels didn't seem to decrease. Plus the ruined temple was immense. They'd cleared the first three floors and thought that was it, battle over. Then more creatures arrived and they discovered the stairs leading to the seemingly endless catacombs and basement areas.

"Do we really need a home this big ?" She asked him with a grin on her face.

"You mean settle for a little hut a bit nearer to work ?"

They both laughed and shook their heads as they rose up from behind the altar and fired a few dozen of the creatures with fireballs. Construct creatures or real ? Abijah had decided they must be constructs if this was a standard part of the training, but it made no difference to her. Fake or real, they needed killing.

"The passage on the left." Said Babak

He was taking charge, leading her and she let him. All the time she'd been trying to become one of the elite he'd been learning, actually listening to Herusher. When they'd split up she'd become cornered and nearly incinerated herself using fireballs to escape. Now she was happy to follow and Babak was good at his job. He kept to the left, her on the right and together they moved along the passage destroying all the constructs. Down another set of stairs and into yet another level of the catacombs.

"They're even bigger !" She said.

A disruption spell dealt with a dozen or so, but they hid behind pillars and statues and they still had to face a small army of the creatures. How long since she'd slept ? Four days she thought, but it might be longer. No food, no water, yet she held her sword firm and punched it hard straight in the face of the nearest creature.

"Come on !," shouted Babak, "We sleep when they're all dead."

Round a pillar dripping with a viscous blue liquid and they could see the next set of stairs going down. Damn the creatures blocking the stairs were bigger and one fired a fireball at them. As he

blocked the spell and returned fire he started singing, an old song from his school days that Abijah recognised. Bless me in the darkness, yes that was the song. Its simple story of a hero vanquishing a mythical monster seemed to suit the occasion, so she joined in with the song.

“Disruption works well.” She shouted over the noise of battle.

Babak nodded and took the head off one of the bigger creatures. Big and savage looking they may have been, but the mechanical looking creatures still died when you cut their heads off. Down another set of wet steps, this time covered in green slime and another level appeared.

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Alyz had taken another contingent of twenty of the Guard to Annill.

“Sumahn mustn’t feel neglected.” Sikush had said.

She had listened to the deity asking her to go through the portal and find some way to end the siege.

“I can’t leave here until the city is safe,” He’d said, “and Sikush will need my help. You must find a way to block the portal.”

The deity no longer worried her, the semi adversarial attitude she now realised was part of the persona Sumahn adopted. So she’d agreed to go through the portal. After all it was why Sikush had sent her. Now she was watching the midday stream of Dracc pour through the opening.

“Like clockwork,” said Milligan, “but your people soon destroy them.”

Sure enough within a few minutes the Guard had reduced the mass of writhing creatures to a heap of corpses. She noticed that the Annill troops now cleared the dead, so the stench of death was much weaker in the cavern.

“When do they come again ?” Alyz asked.

“Just after dusk and just before dawn. They never miss and they always come in large numbers.”

So if Alyz was going the time was ideal. She had the rift manipulator in her back pack, a parting gift from Sikush.

“Just in case you can’t find a way back. Don’t lose it though, it’s needed for another task.” He’s said. Looking quite heavily laden and alone Alyz walked to the portal and after a last wave to Milligan she stepped through it and into the land of the Dracc.

“Chlo ? Chlo are you there ?”

It was just habit. Chlo hadn’t been with her in Annill, so she didn’t really expect a connection in this place, wherever ‘this place’ was ? It was hot, very hot and at first Alyz though she might be on the 7<sup>th</sup> rift, but there was no pulling at her reality, no pain. She walked across the hot dark red sand that seemed to go on for miles and saw a large group of Dracc massing for the next attack. They totally ignored her, even when she cut the head off one of their number. Alyz felt in her mind for a switch and at least half the creatures died in a fireball, burned to a dark red powder, but still the survivors ignored her, didn’t even seem to notice she was there.

‘Curious.’ She muttered to herself.

Without Chlo to give her a long range scan she had to improvise, so she launched herself straight up to a height of about a thousand feet to get a good look around. Nothing ! Red rocks, red sand, with just the occasional purple rock to break the monotony. Then she saw a red dot in the far distance. A light of some kind ? As she moved towards the light she wondered if it would lead to a mysterious cave, but it took her to a strong looking door in a long barrow. Alyz tried her knife on the metal of the door and couldn’t even scratch it, but she was the daughter of the greatest Weaponsmith the multiverse had ever seen, so she had a few tricks. People who build doors are rarely the same people who break through them and they tend to forget that any door is only as strong as the material the frame is fixed to. Alyz tried her knife on the mortar inside the edge of the frame and it

came away. Not a huge amount, no sudden disintegration, but she could cut it away given time, which she had plenty of.

'Father would be proud.' She thought.

He had often told her she lacked the focus and discipline to be a master weapon maker, but there she was slowly picking the mortar out the wall that fixed the door frame in place. Four hours and she'd done the right hand side of the door. Another five hours and the weight of the door broke the few remaining pieces of mortar and it collapsed backwards into the entrance hall.

'Of course a good thief would fix it back after.' She could almost hear Nurigen saying.

"Fuck that !" She muttered as she stepped on the door and walked down the hallway.

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Sikush and Nurigen bought a few minor items in the market, but their real destination was Hassan's Emporium, which had recently changed ownership. Hassan had been a good trader, but once his name was associated with rumours of terrorist links ? Well it was only a matter of time before he sold up, or was found in the storm drains with half his face missing. Hassan had chosen to sell the emporium and move to planet in the Maran Group to retire on the proceeds. Of course he'd never done anything wrong, but the Maran viewed him as a kind of hero, so his destination was almost inevitable.

"Do you want him to have an accident ?" Kittara has asked.

Sikush had pondered for a while, but Hassan had done no real harm to anyone, so he'd allowed him to go to Maran Exo5 and had even wished him well before he went. As to the new owner ? Sikush had great hopes for a long and mutually beneficial relationship with him.

"The sign still says Hassan ?" Said Nurigen.

"Good for business," he replied, "and a low profile."

How many would realise the emporium wasn't run by a member of the Hassan family ? Old customers would still see the same staff, while the new owner could come and go as he pleased. They entered the door and received the usual welcoming offer of food and drink, while the manager fussed around with various catalogues. Sikush sat himself down and had to admit the service did mark the emporium out as being just that bit special.

"Was there anything in particular you were looking for ?" Asked the manager.

Anything in particular ? Sikush would have given whole systems for the location of the final two deities, but he enquired about gold daggers, with personal engraving. The manager smiled, he was on comfortable ground with expensive, if pointless personal adornments.

"Yes, yes of course. We can provide the finest Joran gold daggers engraved by the most able craftsmen. Perhaps his excellence would like to see a sample ?"

His excellence indeed ! Perhaps he should convert the manager and get at least one of The Damned who was polite ? He agreed to see a sample and rested back the chair while it was found.

"For Abijah and Babak," he explained to Nurigen, "as a reward on their return."

"Excellent, they will be pleased."

If they returned of course ? Juliette was a hard woman to please and her constructs were capable of killing the Guard.

"Of course we can fit precious gems into the handle."

The sample blade was perfect, the lustre of the gold just right. Of course they would be useless as weapons, but he knew that both Abijah and Babak would be immensely proud to own them.

"A star gem on each handle I think." He said.

The manager did a double take, star gems were staggeringly rare and expensive.

“Er we can obtain the star gems, but I will need to find a.....”

Sikush held up his hand to silence the confused manager. Pity really, he was so polite he liked to hear him speak, but they had other matters to deal with.

“Talk to Chlo about the price, but I definitely want a star gem on each.”

The manager bowed and went away with the sample, while Nurigen was still agreeing the price on a pair of impressive looking boots. Always the warrior thought Sikush, but he had to admit that the boots looked very well made. They had another drink and then the manager appeared to ask the inevitable question.

“Would you like to see something else ?”

“A word with the new owner please, if he’s in ?”

The manager departed to ascertain if the owner was on the premises. Of course he was, Chlo knew his exact position the second they’d come into the emporium and that he seemed pleased they were there. After less than a minute the manager returned.

“Mr Hassan will see you in his rooms.”

So he’d even carried on with the name, the fiction that another Hassan had carried on with the family business. A short corridor and they entered a sumptuous set of rooms. As the new owner came to greet them Sikush noticed he’d put on a little weight.

“So, Slow Mo,” he said, “how are you enjoying life as an emporium owner ?”

“Well, it beats crossing roofs in the rain.” Mo replied with a grin.

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They’d cleared out all the levels of the abandoned temple, then the last few constructs had appeared from sewers just as they thought the job was done.

“Is there no end to these things ?” She asked Babak.

He seemed happy, just smiled at her and carried on breaking their metal limbs before cutting off their heads. It hadn’t been so much killing as disassembling, but the creatures did leave a nasty blood like substance once they were cut open. After more days than they cared to think about they finally found a clean corner of a grubby room to sleep in.

“Here ? With no bedding ?” Babak had asked her.

The look in her eyes had answered him and the sex had been hard and prolonged. Almost like reaffirming life after so much destruction. They woke sore and dirty from the fight and promised each other.

‘The next time we fuck it’ll be in a clean home’.

They had no idea if the creatures would start to decompose, they did seem most mechanical, but they decided to clear all the bodies out of their home.

“There is a door at the back that overlooks a ravine.” Said Babak.

There was and in front on the drop was a small veranda where they could stack the bodies. As they stood there the view of the sky caught Abijah’s eye.

“This could be a beautiful world.” She said.

The twin suns were about to set and they illuminated the ravine with a soft golden light. Small insect like creatures were flying in and out of the plants below.

“Pity we’re going to drop several tons on scrap construct on them.” Said Babak.

The work was hard and took longer than the killing. Five days after they started they found a tower room that neither of them remembered seeing before, with clean bedding and beautiful wall hangings.

“A present from Juliette ?” Asked Abijah

Of course it had to be, the creatures were hardly likely to reward them for wiping them out. After several more days every part of every dead creature had been sent to the bottom of the ravine and most of the yellow blood had been wiped away. The sex that night was the best either of them could remember. Abijah mounted him and felt exultant as his rock hard dick sunk deep into her. The following day they would report to Juliette for their next assignment, but now they had a home for the next few thousand years.

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The first corridor had been safe, but as Alyz entered an oval chamber at the rear of the barrow the Dracc appeared and by the way they threw themselves at her, they were aware of her presence. "Bastard !"

One got past her swirling Nurigen blade and bit her calf. Not since training with her father as a teenager had anything managed to hurt her, yet her leg felt like it was on fire. These were obviously tougher creatures than those attacking Annill, but she still managed to clear to room in a few minutes.

"You should leave !" The voice said.

Alyz spun on her wounded leg and winced. Behind her was a blue spinning portal, an obvious invitation to leave the world she was in. Alyz ignored the portal and sat herself on the floor to examine her leg. A quick healing spell and most of the bruising was gone, but she knew she'd have to move slower and treat the creatures with more respect in future.

"I said !! You should leave !"

There was anger in the voice, but also perhaps a small amount of fear ?

"Sorry I can't do that." Replied Alyz.

Was the voice Sevril-Narge the great bug deity ? Alyz couldn't imagine her sounding so pleading. Surely a deity could have simply reduced her to a pile of dust ?

There were two doors leading from the oval chamber and Alyz decided to keep taking the left path for as long as she could. If that didn't take her where she needed to be, then she'd come back and try the right door. Needed to be ? Alyz hoped she wasn't in a useless mouse trap created by Sevril. Through the left door and into another long corridor, this one with pulsating red walls.

"Go further and you'll die."

The voice sounded desperate, so Alyz ignored it and ran along the corridor to the first door on the left. Locked ! The door is the same metal as the outside door and the red pulsating wall is immune to her knife. Brute force seemed the only solution.

'Where is Delmus with his RM9 when you need him ?' She thought.

Lifting her skirt she reached for the belts of devices Chlo had given her. The first belt held thermal devices which weren't what she needed, but the second belt held seven disruption grenades. Small, but incredibly powerful, one would have been overkill for the door, but Alyz wedged four into the edges of the frame. For some reason since the voice started she felt that the clock was ticking and she simply had to get through the door. Safe proximity for the grenades was outside the barrow, but she ran back to the oval chamber and rolled herself into a ball.

"You must leav....."

The voice stopped as the grenades went off. The chamber was filled with an acrid red fog, so Alyz simply stopped breathing. The portal had gone and the entire barrow was in darkness. Treading carefully over the debris Alyz made her way back to the door.

"Bitch !" The creature said.

The red pulsating walls near the door had become lumps of what looked like dead flesh on the floor and the acrid fog was everywhere. The room past the door looked completely destroyed and part of the roof was blown away to reveal a view of the brown sky outside. The real point of interest in the room was the dying creature lying in a pool of white ichor in its centre.

“What the fuck are you ?” Asked Alyz.

A ray of some kind just touched her left arm and she couldn't move it any more. Alyz ran at the creature with the Nurigen held high, but then realised it was dead. A small weapon fell out of one of its eight small hands and an awful stench rose from the body. Her arm was still dead, the flesh grey and lifeless. Alyz tried a few spells and creams, but nothing worked. She'd been lucky, a direct hit from the weapon would have killed her.

“What the fuck is this thing ?” She muttered.

The creature looked like a lower level demon, but with white skin and eight hands that could obviously work tools and weapons. She had a recording device in her pack, so she spent several minutes recording the creature and everything else in the room. As to the weapon ? That would go back with her, so she pushed it into her pack. Then she saw the counter !

“Stupid girl !” She shouted at herself.

It looked like a picture on the wall, but it was moving. A pendulum shape on the picture was moving back and forth and beneath it a set of characters was changing. Alyz had no idea what the characters were, but it didn't take a genius to realise that it was counting down. Alyz grabbed her pack in her good hand and hurtled through the hole in the ceiling. Shouting curses at every one of the great demon gods she dropped to the hot sand and reached in her pack for the rift manipulator.

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She'd found a pool to bathe in. It had been brackish when they arrived, but now seemed fresh and clear as crystal. Or was it ? Perhaps it was still dark and brackish and she just saw it as clean ? She decided to accept everything at face value and enjoyed the novelty of dressing herself.

Abijah felt proud of their home as they left that morning. There had been a discussion about removing the stairs to their tower room so that only they could easily get to it.

“We have to live here without fear.” She'd said.

“Then don't put us in a prison !” He'd replied.

Now she could see his point, removing the stairs was an admission that they were the outsiders, weren't in control. Babak was now the undisputed leader and her respect for him seemed to grow every hour. The walk to see Juliette had been wonderful, they really were in a beautiful world, unless that too was a construct ? As they reached Juliette's rather grand house they noticed that it too was beautiful and covered in flowering plants, yet it had seemed so dark and foreboding when they first arrived.

“So ! You're back for your next quest ?” Said Juliette.

Abijah had hoped that Juliette would be more corporeal than the other Genova, but she had the same annoying habit of disappearing in the middle of conversations. She also had the habit of instantly moving to about a foot from where she was. Add that to her feet not quite touching the floor and Juliette was an uncomfortable person to talk to.

“Yes,” said Babak, “the creatures are all dead and we have our new home.”

Juliette vanished and appeared quite close to Abijah, her long white robes whipped up by a wind neither of them could feel.

“Kill them did you ? Well that was one way.”

Abijah felt uneasy, but didn't know why. What other way ?

“How else could we have cleared the temple out ?” She asked.

Juliette prodded Babak’s arm with a long finger nail.

“Your bruises heal, wounds close, you’re getting stronger.”

Then Juliette smiled at them and it wasn’t an unkind smile.

“The first creature you met just inside the temple. Remember him ?” She asked.

They both remembered the creature who’d been armed to the teeth and had been their first kill.

They nodded at the angel.

“If you’d asked him, just asked, he would have left and taken all of the other creatures with him.”

Was she laughing at them ? Abijah felt her face going red.

“So we did it wrong, spent all that time killing them for nothing ?”

Juliette prodded an old wound on her arm making her wince.

“If you’d asked him to leave you wouldn’t now be as strong as you are, my world wouldn’t look as fair to you.”

“So we did the right thing ?” Asked Babak.

Juliette vanished for a few seconds and reappeared only a few inches from Abijah.

“No wonder Sikush sends you to me,” she said, “all those powers, all those billions of years, yet you still can’t grasp that sometimes there is no right answer.”

The angel gently brushed Abijah’s hair with her fingers.

“Would you both like to do me a favour ?”

Of course they both said yes, it was why they’d come. Juliette handed them a single sheet of paper with writing that neither of them could read on it.

“These are details the favour I require. There is a man on this world who can translate the writing for you.”

Juliette turned to go, but Abijah called out.

“Where is this man ?”

As Juliette vanished they heard her voice.

“No wonder Sikush sends them to me !”

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“There good as new.” Said Sumahn-Nerish.

Alyz looked at her arm and to her surprise it looked perfect. She’d stepped out of the portal created by the rift manipulator right next to where the Dracc portal had been. Now the portal was gone and jubilant warriors were already celebrating.

“You did it !” Said Milligan.

His face dropped as he looked at her arm, the flesh looking as though it was rotting on the bone.

“Go quickly to Sumahn.” Said Milligan

She doubted he could save the arm, but perhaps the deities really could do anything.

“May I see the weapon that did this ?” Sumahn asked.

Alyz reluctantly took the weapon from her pack and handed it over to the deity. She watched him move around the small white tube in his huge hands and press the button on it. Nothing. Perhaps it was a one-time only device ?

“Hmm, not of demon manufacture, or the work of Sevril. Here give it to Chlo to examine.”

She was amazed to get the weapon back and put it inside her uniform top. She noticed the old god seemed troubled and kept pacing about the huge hall they were in.

“You have done me great service daughter of Nurigen. Take your garrison back to Mendera and tell Sikush I will be there when he needs me.”

Alyz started to walk away, but heard Sumahn say quietly.

“And mention to your father that he’s a mean old fucker.”

She couldn’t quite believe her ears, but as she spun around the deity was gone, leaving just a long drawn out chuckle behind him.

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He liked her skin. Black skin, shiny black warm skin was rare on Mendera. As Kittara lay there on her tummy he ran his finger the length of her spine and then leant forward and gently bit her left buttock.

“Ow.” She said with a chuckle in her voice.

“Herusher has been moaning about your lack of focus again.” He said.

Kittara just lay there, enjoying the way he was fondling her back and shoulders. They’d had so much sex that they both just wanted to enjoy each other’s closeness.

“So what are you going to do with me ?” She asked.

He spun her over and held her left breast, perhaps there was a little of his libido that wasn’t quite sated after all.

“Would you mind a few thousand years in the Temple ?”

“Can I sleep by the flame ?”

It was a curious request, but he was beginning to realise that Kittara was a very curious girl.

“If you wish, but try not to excite the clerics too much.”

“How many thousands of years ?” She asked.

“Ten thousand.”

Kittara moved her hand to his balls and began to fondle them like a much loved toy, which in many ways they were.

“Mo will be dead before I return.”

He leant over her and licked the small puddle of salty sweat from between her breasts.

“You can offer him stasis if he wishes to follow you, but he must make the decision freely.”

“And then ?” She asked.

“There is no promise. Offer him stasis and we’ll take it from there.”

Yes he was giving in to her, but she wasn’t getting everything she wanted. He gently pushed her leg to one side with his knee and nestled himself comfortably between her silky thighs.

“Can we have sex by the flame ?”

He entered her and felt her body tense as he gave the first thrust.

“I think I should bring you here for sex.” He whispered in her ear.