

## Mendera - Empire

### Chapter 7 – Prophecy Girl

**“She shuddered as she imagined the abominations that must be waiting in the other rooms for the multiverse to begin again.”**

Luri loved the market just south of the Grand Council building, it was vast and seemed to have a huge selection of the more esoteric ingredients for her spells. She looked at some dried mushrooms, which seemed a little expensive.

“Are they genuine Menura grown?”

The merchant looked hurt and turned his palms up to her as he tried to gain her trust. He was an Ushong and as far as Luri could remember they were still at war with Ushong, but no one cared as long as they behaved and had bargains to sell. Chlo will have checked his craft for ordnance and the blaster he carried wouldn't fire while he was on Mendera, but trade is trade.

“Would I lie to the Guard?”

Luri passed the trader a few Imperial credits and her purchases were carefully wrapped in paper and given to her. The Imperial traders a block away could be paid by transfer, but the out worlders always wanted cash.

“Does anyone in the market sell the figurines of the Guard?” She asked him.

The merchant chuckled, she knew he wouldn't have the highly expensive figures of the Guard, but she'd promised to buy one for a friend's child. Now she was getting embarrassed because Hasim would tease her for years.

“No. You want the esteemed Hasim, trader in all things precious. His emporium is to the north of the market.”

Yes she knew where Hasim sold his overpriced nonsense and she also knew the trader was mocking her. As she made a rude gesture at the Ushong trader Luri noticed another warrior in the crowd. Not that most people would have noticed the way he assessed the crowd, the way he was totally aware of his surroundings and carefully placed every footfall, but Luri noticed. She moved in exactly the same way.

“Did you get him Chlo?” She asked over the private channel.

Chlo recorded all visitors to Mendera scanned their DNA on arrival and she quickly identified Grai Harg of Ventella, who was on a pilgrimage to see the Temple of the Flame, or at least the outside of it, which was as far as any pilgrim got.

“Pilgrim my arse, Chlo.”

Chlo passed the Ventellan's details to the Mercs who looked after every day policing on Mendera and Luri asked to be informed when he was brought in for a beating. The Mercs didn't enjoy the lengthy procedures associated with petty crime, so if they didn't beat someone as they were arrested, they invariable got a beating for causing hours of process and procedure. Luri walked to the north of the market and found 'Hasim's Emporium'. Not that there was any gaudy sign, just a small and dignified metal plate on the door. It also said by appointment only, which Luri ignored as she walked straight in.

“Lurisiana. It's been months since you visited my humble establishment.”

The merchant from Ixir always insisted on using her full name and one day she hoped he'd break just on little law, so she could watch the Mercs give him hours of due process.

“Hasim, I've been saving up to afford your prices.”

Then there were the usual pleasantries to get through as Hasim called one of his assistants to see what refreshments Luri would like as she was taken to one of several private viewing rooms. No instant food and drink from Chlo here, the high prices also entitled you to some of the best food and drink on Mendera, all freshly prepared on the premises. Luri hadn't intended to ask for food, but then decided she might as well get her money's worth.

"Do you have silver fish from lake Misogon?"

They did and Luri was promised they had the best sauce in the multiverse to go with them. As she ate Hasim sat opposite her and joined her in having a drink.

"So, what are you looking for today?"

"I need one of the Guard figures, the one of me, it's for a little girl's birthday."

The figurines had been created in precious metals for the 3<sup>rd</sup> age of the temple, which had started only a few weeks before. The figures actually bore a close resemblance to the Guard and her one played a high quality 3d projection of one of her most famous battles, when a button on the side was pressed.

"Of course. They're very popular, but I know we have some in stock."

There was no barely hidden ridicule, no taunts, he simply muttered at an assistant who walked off to get the requested object.

"The last time I saw you, you were with Delmus. He rarely comes in here."

Luri was never sure of her relationship with Delmus. If no one else was in their lives they still fucked each other senseless, but she couldn't with any honesty say it was anything more than lust.

"He's been busy, you know, a big Empire to protect."

Just then Delmus flagged up an interest in her strange Ventellan she'd seen at the market and offered to help, as did Babak and Jen. To an outsider the informal watch and help system of the Guard would have seem chaotic, but it had worked well for countless billions of years. The assistant came into the room with a large box and started to unwrap the object inside from what seemed like yards of coloured paper. This was all part of the showmanship of the Emporium and Luri knew it had to be endured.

"Beautiful, a real masterpiece." Said Hasim.

A button was pressed and the table with the figure on it moved smoothly in front of her. It was perfect, like looking in a mirror and Luri almost bought another for herself.

"Guaranteed to last a lifetime." Said Hasim.

"How much is it?" She asked.

Hasim looked at her as though she'd insulted his mother and pulled another look of hurt onto his face. Then he named a price that would have fed most families of the Empire for several years.

"Will you gift wrap it and deliver it tomorrow?"

Luri reached for Chlo and had her transfer the truly obscene sum of money while she gave Hasim the name and address to deliver it to. As she left Hasim saw her to the door.

"It comes to us all you know."

She looked at him as the Ixir merchant started to close the door.

"We all get softer as we get older."

Then he closed the door and Luri hoped the guard would let her give him a few good hard kicks if he was ever brought into custody. She decided that a look at the wares of a certain Maran weapon smith might improve her mood.

"I'll take that frown away."

The girl was stood next to a stall selling animal feed and Luri remembered seeing her there before. Anything was permissible on Mendera, as long as no one got killed, well no one who mattered and the relevant taxes were paid.

The girl looked attractive and Luri might have been tempted, but she noticed the Ventellan pilgrim again and this time he was talking to a trader in electronics from Ixir. Luri put his position up on the common channel and was about to decline the girls offer, but there was a certain look about the girl. "Tonight. Come to my place."

Luri passed her hand over the small electronic device the girl carried and gave her clearance to take a shuttle to her home in the mountains. The girl nodded and kissed her cheek, and as Luri turned the pilgrim was walking away.

"Follow him Chlo." She said.

Chlo now had a benign probe locked onto the Ventellan, which he'd never lose and that at least ten of The Damned were now watching in case they were needed. Keeping a discreet distance in a busy market is difficult and this guy looked a pro. He noticed her being far too attentive and picked up his pace around the back of stall offering exotic pets for sale.

"He's gone down Luri, opened a grate to the storm drain." Chlo told her.

By the time she reached the grate Delmus was next to her. She pulled open the cover and the stench from below was overpowering. On the plans for Mendera there were no sewers, Thrax always said 'there are no sewers on Mendera', but Luri knew what she was smelling.

"Oh, why did he have to run for the damn sewers?"

Luri took a few steps down the access ladder and then jumped off and brought herself to a stop, hovering over the slow moving sludge just under her feet. Herusher used to say that cleaning the sewers for a thousand years was the ultimate punishment for a member of the Guard, who gave less than 100% at their training. Luri had to assume that no one had been punished in a very long time, the place was full of all sorts of rubbish and it stank. Delmus came down and hovered beside her.

"Chlo says he's making for junction 5," he said, "I'll wait there."

Luri nodded and she followed the deep foot prints the pilgrim had left in the hardened sludge on the narrow path along the sewer wall.

"Doesn't anyone ever clean down here?"

Luri came to a corner of the sewer and even hovering she had trouble squeezing past a mound of grease and rotting vegetation of some kind.

"It gets flushed out in the rainy season." Said Chlo.

"But we don't have a rainy....."

Yes, Luri got the joke and joined in the chuckle with Chlo. Then there were shots from a blaster and Luri could hear the familiar whine as it recharged, three quick shots and then a fourth, quite close.

Luri moved herself to the small paved area in the centre of junction 5 and found Delmus holding what was left of Grai Harg.

"He fired at me three times and then blew his own head off."

The body was complete right up to the neck, then there was just a flap of loose skin and a bit of bone jutting out where the head had been. Chlo appeared next to them and crouched next to the body.

"I'm picking up something from the body, something odd." She said.

A knife appeared in Chlo's hand and she cut through the clothing of the dead pilgrim and then down into the flesh of his abdomen. As Luri watched Chlo cut deep into the body and pulled out a metallic sphere about an inch across, which she held tight in her hand. There was a dull thud as the sphere exploded and a bright flash between her fingers.

“Good job I found that,” she said, “or we’d all be covered in....”

There was a dull thud and a flash, followed by another and Luri saw her heels go over her head and she fell on her face in about two feet of sewage. The worse thing was that she was almost certain she’d swallowed some of it. As she stood up and shimmered into a clean uniform she noticed Delmus was spluttering and spitting something out of his mouth.

“Oh, I hate this place.” She said.

Two large parasitic worms had taken a hold on her, one on her left elbow and the other just below her left knee and she had to use her boot knife to dislodge them. She looked at Chlo to find her looking clean and serene, as though nothing had happened.

“I think you can guess what I was going to say. I’m guessing there were three devices on him.”

Luri normally liked Chlo in a mischievous mood, but today she wasn’t so sure. Chlo was prodding through the sewage for the larger lumps of the pilgrim’s body.

“I want a few bits to analyse,” she said, “the bacteria levels are so high, they’ll digest these pieces in no time.”

Delmus gave Luri a disgusted look as Chlo collected about five or six of the larger pieces of Grai Harg and put them in glass containers.

“I need a shower,” said Delmus, “I may need to shower for a week.”

He then offered to let Luri share his shower on their private channel, but Luri told him it would have to be another day. He vanished just as the Mercs finally arrived and started asking Chlo millions of questions, which she totally ignored. Chlo was never normally impolite and Luri stood next to her until she looked up.

“I think it’s synthetic,” said Chlo, “his DNA, it’s just not right.”

“Like a construct?”

“No, he’s a perfect Ventellan, but I’m certain he’s synthetic.”

Luri watched Chlo prod at bits of body in the sewage as she moved herself back to the market, she needed a few extra reagents and she might as well get them today. As she walked back to the stall of the Ushong she looked up Chlo’s notes on Grai Harg and added a personal note about helping with any legwork and asking to be kept informed, then she smiled as she noticed Delmus do the same. On a whim Luri walked past the Ushong merchant and headed for a trader who sold certain unguents that would liven up her night with the courtesan she’d booked.

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Sikush sat in his office in the barracks and listened to the whispers of the dozen or so Genova who drifted in and out of vision around him. They’d once had their own world, but it had gone in a switch a very long time ago and they’d managed to move through the grey between realities to survive. They weren’t immortals and had children, but from most accounts their sex life lasted just the briefest of moments and lacked any passion.

“Where?” Sikush asked.

Chlo was very good at tracking their seeded DNA to find new life in the multiverse, but she found it very hard to find new forms of life that evolved in the new multiverse. Not only did that mean potential trading partners and members of the Empire might be missed, but also new recruits to the Guard might be overlooked. The Genova were perfect finders of life forms as they were drawn to it like bugs to a flame.

“We can show you.”

Sikush put out his hand and waited for one of the Genova to hold it. He never forcibly pulled an angel into corporeal existence, but most of them seemed to enjoy the experience.

'Like a drowning man being pulled out of the water.' He often thought.

This time a young male held his hand while Sikush pulled him through and into the Menderan reality. "Now, take me there." Said Sikush.

Herusher would have gone crazy if he'd known Sikush was about to enter the grey alone, but Sikush often went on what he thought of as private trips. The male angel held tight to his arm and entered the grey. It was nothing like the instant transfer of reality and more like being pulled through all the walls in a house. Sikush saw bright lights, heard strange words on several different worlds as they passed very close and then he found himself alone at night on a mining planet in the middle of nowhere.

"She is there." A young female angel pointed to a fire that was just a few embers.

They had tied her to a wooden post and burned her legs with red hot knives, then at some stage she'd had a long and thorough beating.

"Strong, still strong," said a Genova, "she will die, but not for a few hours yet."

He felt for Chlo and she was going crazy trying to correlate his position and get some of the Guard sent to him.

"We've never been to that system, we never seeded there." She told him.

Then the common channel started chattering in his head and Jen appeared silently about ten yards from him, quickly followed by Delmus. Sikush looked at the girl tied to the post and pulled her clothing aside. There didn't seem to be one bone left intact in her body, yet one of her eyes opened and looked at him.

"Wonderfully vicious this one," said an angel, "just what you wanted."

He could see the analysis going up on the common channel and apart from knowing she was beaten almost to death, Chlo had nothing on her. She had no DNA, bore no resemblance to the body structure of any life form they'd found and the worst bit was that Chlo couldn't heal her.

Sikush put out his hand and waited for a Genova to hold on, as soon as one did he pulled a female fully through into reality. She had long golden hair and seemed to almost glow with an inner light.

"Do what you can for her." Said Sikush.

There was the sound of shouting from the nearby mining community and Sikush noticed Delmus quickly went off to investigate. The angel ran her hand over the beaten creature and there was a definite sign on tissue knitting together, but the girl let out a loud and anguished cry.

"Not too much," he said to the Genova, "just enough so she'll survive the journey to Mendera."

There was the sound of fighting from the miners huts and on the common channel Sikush could see another two of the Guard were involved. The angel ran its hand over the face of the injured girl and once again there was the long drawn out cry of pain.

"There is much of the darkness in her," said the Genova, "but some of the light too."

As the locals were now obviously aware they were there, Sikush sent a light spell up above the girl to get a good look at her.

"She looks reptilian, but some of her organs are like nothing I've seen before." Said Chlo.

He pulled her clothes to one side and the creature was definitely female, had breasts and female genitals, but her skin was almost scaly and dark as night. He used a knife to cut the ropes that bound her to the post and held her in his arms. She seemed almost impossibly heavy for such a small creature.

"High density bone structure, again I've never seen this before." Said Chlo.

Delmus was reporting that the local mining community had been subdued with no loss of life on either side and he was asking for orders. Part of Sikush wanted to wipe them out for what they'd

done to her, but he told the Guard to withdraw as he moved his reality to the Imperial Palace on Mendera.

"It might be kinder to let her die." Said Chlo.

There was something about the ruined life form he'd just laid on the sofa that seemed special and the Genova seemed drawn to her too. Yes the creature did look very reptilian and any noises she'd so far made sounded like animal cries, but she'd wielded a sword, wore properly tailored clothes, she had to be an intelligent creature.

"Can you heal her?" He asked Chlo.

Chlo appeared next to him and expertly ran her hands over the broken body. At the same time there was a shimmer and the girl was dressed in a clean white gown.

"No," said Chlo, "I have no parameters to work to, no idea where to start. The Genova can perhaps give her strength while her bones heal, but they'll be crooked and the pain will be terrible."

Sikush paced the room, he'd never converted anyone without their consent, but if he didn't do something the girl would die and that worried him, far more than he could explain. He knelt next to the girl and looked deep into her and found a brutal warrior, but further down was something else, something that drew the angels to her.

"I'll take her to Qasit." He told Chlo.

As he picked her up the creature looked straight at him and seemed to say, "Kittara". Was it her name, or just another cry from pain? He felt for a doorway that only opened for him and moved himself to the cavern in Qasit. The cold stone table looked like it belonged in a mausoleum and he wasn't surprised that she tried to struggle as he removed her gown and lay her on it. He felt deep into her mind and tried to reassure her without language. He gave her the feeling of being helped, the feeling of being cared for and she relaxed. Then he gave her the need to be still, very still.

"I just hope you enjoy being one of The Damned." He said to her, despite knowing she didn't understand.

She screamed as he converted her body to Arcadian DNA, as he then changed her to an immortal being, but she never once tried to struggle or move from the table. When he started to give her the pleasure of the healing spell he let it linger longer than usual, the poor creature deserved that.

"Sit up."

As if bemused by her new pain free body the girl brought her legs up one by one and stared at them. She looked straight at him and made a strange gurgling sound. As no time passed on Qasit he decided to start with the basics. He pointed at her and said.

"Kittara."

He had no idea whether it was her name in her old language, but it was going to be her name now. She looked back at him, smiled and made a noise like a startled cat. He could see it was going to take a while, but after several hours he pointed at her and she said.

"Kittara." In a soft feminine voice.

He pointed at himself.

"Sikush."

Now there was just the rest of the language and full training for The Damned, oh how he knew Herusher would hate him for bringing him this recruit. For some reason he kissed her to thank her for her efforts and she responded, a hand going around his neck as she pulled him to her. He let the kiss run its course, then he dressed her in the gown and picked her up.

"Let's go home." He said.

"Home." She repeated perfectly.

He moved his reality to one of the many unused wings of the Imperial palace and called for Chlo.

"It worked !" Said Chlo.

Kittara looked at Chlo and gently touched her face.

"Chlo." Said Sikush.

Kittara repeated the word perfectly and pointed straight at Chlo.

"Don't be too impressed," he said, "getting that far took about six hours. Can you load language directly into her mind now she's one of The Damned ?"

He knew language needed common parameters to hold onto. There's no point in teaching someone the word 'cup', unless they can relate that word to the thing you drink out of.

"I know a few linguistic short cuts," said Chlo, "give me a few days."

Kittara had now taken off the gown and was inspecting her new parts and examining the tuft of fur between her legs.

"Until she has language and basic social skills Chlo, keep her hidden in this wing. No one in or out except us."

Chlo nodded at him and hoped the girl would at least be toilet trained.

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Luri stepped out of the shower and picked up a short blue dress from the bed. She could shimmer out of her clothes at just the right moment tonight, but there was something really nice about undoing a catch and stepping out of a dress. As to underwear ? No, not tonight, the less clothing to come off the better. She picked up the expensive jar of Unguent she'd bought earlier and rubbed a small amount on her thigh. She knew from experience that in about an hour her libido would be almost limitless.

"Shuttle five minutes away." Chlo told her.

She put on a pair of red high heels and started the descent down the stairs as the shuttle landed and part of the outside wall of the house wrapped itself around it, effectively bring the whole shuttle into Luri's entrance hall. The courtesan from the market place stepped out of the shuttle wearing a long fur coat.

"I thought it might be cold, being in the mountains." She said.

She undid the coat and let it drop to the ground, to reveal the tiniest pink mini dress that barely hid the fact she wasn't wearing any panties. Luri gave her a long intimate kiss and brought her into the lounge where food and drink was waiting.

"So what do I call you ?" Asked Luri.

"Tanil." The girl said.

Luri looked at her and could see a bit of Ixir there, but something else to give the long legs and a bit of bone structure. Maybe a bit on Maran blood there ? Luri didn't care, she just wanted a night of uncomplicated sex and sex with Delmus was beginning to mean something.

"I've seen you in the market before." Said Luri as she offered Tanil a drink.

"You'd be amazed at the amount business I get from clerics."

Luri was warming to her new friend and she understood the benefits of sex within the city walls of Mendera. Sex with no consequences, no disease, no pregnancy and Chlo would even prevent those under the influence of drink and drugs from copulating with a life form they might damage or even kill. Death from chronic sexual incompatibility was sadly all too common in parts of the Empire.

"Beautiful house." Said Tanil, looking around.

"Some of it was built by Thrax."

She saw the impressed look and knew that a private dwelling built by Thrax was now worth a small fortune on the local market. Tanil didn't seem in a hurry, which was nice, so many of the working girls Luri had known seemed to want to get the job done and move onto the next client.

"Have you anything particular you'd like to do tonight?" Asked Tanil.

Luri thought long and hard before answering.

"How are you with pain?"

Tanil seemed unfazed by the question, but Luri had really hurt Alyz during one of their hotter sessions and Alyz was one of The Damned. She was sure Sikush would take a dim view of her causing too much damage to a citizen.

"I can handle most things, I'll tell you if it hurts too much."

They finished their drinks and then came the obligatory tour of the castle Luri called home, with appropriate appreciative noises from Tanil at the various turrets and night time views. All Luri really wanted to do was get her new friend out of her pink mini dress and bent naked over her bed.

Eventually Luri led her up the stairs and into her bedroom.

"Now. Take that dress off!" Said Luri.

Tanil undid the dress and let it slip to the floor, then she stepped out of it and looked steadily at Luri.

"I thought you'd never ask."

Luri spun her around and pushed her face down over the edge of her bed and while holding her down with her left hand she started to spank the girl. There was nothing playful or half-hearted about it, this was a serious spanking from a strong warrior.

"Bitch!" Shouted Tanil.

Luri spanked harder, but there was no plea for mercy from Tanil, just a defiant glare as the blows landed.

"Now the other side." Said Luri.

The girl squirmed as Luri swapped hands and pushed her right hand hard between her shoulder blades. Luri then used her left hand to spank the other buttock, the occasional blow being delivered to Tanil's thigh. Eventually Luri lifted her up like a doll and threw Tanil on her back in the centre of her bed.

"Let's see how wet you are." Said Luri.

She pushed the girl's knees apart and pressed her mouth into the very wet bush in front of her. A definite tang of Ixir thought Luri, but tempered by decent living on Mendera and regular meals. Tanil moaned as Luri worked her tongue back and forth, lingering wherever gained the best response. Luri felt for a breast and was pleased to find it was very firm and the nipple was erect as she rubbed her thumb around it.

"My turn now." Said Luri.

She was quite rough with the girl as she swapped positions and pressed Tanil's face between her legs. Tanil needed no persuasion though and expertly started using her tongue on the right spots.

"Move up a bit."

Luri pulled her legs back and pulled Tanil with her, so that she could get both her hands comfortable around the girl's head. Luri knew using her hands to press the girl further in wouldn't give her greater pleasure, but she couldn't help herself. She moved one hand to Tanil's throat and rhythmically moved her face up and down as Tanil kept her tongue deep inside.

"That is perfect." Said Luri.

As the waves of pleasure built Luri tightened her grip on Tanil's throat until she sensed the girl's consciousness drifting off, then she allowed the blood to flow again. For nearly half an hour Luri

kept Tanil barely conscious as the pleasure became almost too much to take. Eventually Luri let go of her new friend and lay back on the bed with a huge sigh. She lay there in the afterglow for some time and when she did look up Tanil was crouched on the end of the bed grinning at her.

"I thought you'd be hiding in a corner." Said Luri.

Luri really had expected to find a terrified Tanil hiding in a corner of the room with her dress clutched to her breast and she was pleased that the girl seemed quite calm.

"You're the first woman to do that," said Tanil, "but a few men have done similar things."

Luri looked at Tanil and as the passion faded, at least for a while, she looked the girl over for any damage.

"Are you alright ? Would you like a drink ?"

Tanil laughed.

"I have no problem with what you did. I could probably teach you a few things."

Luri was suddenly very interested and sat on the edge of the bed while she had Chlo produce fresh drinks.

"Really," she said, "I'm listening, tell me a few of your ideas ?"

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Kittara woke covered in sweat and threw the sheet off the bed as she gasped for breath, her heart pounding in her chest. The words she used for things were going from her mind, she no longer knew who she really was, or where she was. She held up her claw and it wasn't hers, a strange fleshy hand with five fingers was at the end of her arm.

"Please. Please make it stop !" She screamed.

Even the voice wasn't hers, but then she remembered where she was and relaxed. The new words Chlo was putting in her head replaced her old language and she now knew the name for the armoire that stood against her bedroom wall. Some words were out of context, what was a long sword ? Why was Chlo pushing it into her key vocabulary ? She calmed down and walked naked to the window, enjoying the cool breeze on her skin.

"No. Not again."

She held tight onto the window frame as she remembered what had woken her. A dream ? Other words were being pushed into her head, old words, words she understood, but had no translation into Menderan. As each word hit her mind she felt stronger, but for some reason she also felt angry. Kittara walked out of her bedroom and turned right and she was once again startled by the opulence of the royal palace. The corridor was lined by priceless works of art and her feet left marks in the soft carpet. Down the corridor and she was onto the marble floor of the veranda and then down the curving stairs and she was through the invisible force wall and into the cool air of the Menderan night. Kittara saw the fountain she could see from her bedroom window and walked towards it, just as another ancient word was forced into her head. As she fell to her knees it seemed like a switch had been put in her head, a switch that burned. She felt for the switch. No too vague, unfocused. She stared at the fountain and felt for the switch.

"No !!" She shouted.

A fireball seemed to emerge from her and dig a foot deep trench in the grass before it destroyed the fountain, then ran on and blast chunks out of the palace wall. Chlo appeared next to her and reached down to her.

"Sorry," said Kittara, "there are so many voices, things trying to get into my head. Sometimes there doesn't seem room for me in there."

As Kittara passed out she felt Chlo touching her arm, the next thing she knew was being on a long bench in the garden with a very worried looking Chlo, sat cross legged on the grass and looking up at her. Kittara noticed she was now dressed in a light robe of some kind. She looked towards the fountain and there it was, working perfectly, no damage, no blast marks.

“Did I ?” Asked Kittara. “It seemed so real.”

“It was real, Chlo cleaned up after you.” Said Sikush.

Kittara looked to her right and Sikush was just appearing and walking towards her.

“She needs a friend,” said Chlo, “someone who’s been through this.”

Sikush sat next to her and turned towards Chlo.

“Yes, I know. I’ll get Alyz to work with her, Alyz had a difficult time after conversion.”

Kittara looked at the fountain and then Chlo and all of it felt completely unreal. All she could think of saying was.

“What is a Long Sword ?”

The Chalné moved his right hand in a slight twist and he was holding a long golden sword that seemed to glow in the dark, though Kittara knew it was magical power she was sensing.

“This,” said Sikush, “is a long sword. Do you want to hold it ?”

As Kittara took hold of the weapon she firstly felt stronger, then she had the sensation of being angry, or rather as though the warrior in her was being prodded and she was certain she could see clearer.

“Good isn’t it ?” Asked Sikush.

Oh yes, it was good and Kittara looked at the etched words along the blade of the Nurigen sword and realised she understood the writing.

“It means.....” Sikush started to say.

“I know what it means. It means what it is and also what I am. Beyond technology, the ultimate weapon.”

The blade was giving her the confidence to say what she’d never have said without it.

“Is that what you’ve turned me into ? One of your ultimate weapons.”

He took the weapon back off her and nodded at her. He could have told her about doing it to save her life, but he knew why he wanted her and yes she was right.

“Yes.” He said.

Kittara slapped him hard across the face as she stood up.

“You should have fucking asked me first !”

“Yes you’re right I should have, but what would have been your answer if I had asked ?”

Kittara was still under the influence of the Nurigen as she felt for the switch in her mind. This was no unfocused blast, the fountain was destroyed completely, but nothing else around it. Her spell had been precise, focused and deadly. She turned towards him as he applauded her.

“Yes ! Of course I’d have said yes.”