

The Ancient Ones

Chapter 9 – The Sagurians

“The Hive Mother had a name, a full name given to her by the deity who’d created her. Sevril-Narge, who some ignorant fools once called the bug goddess. She had created her and given her the name of Ginnda-Aanash. Sevril had died, her essence boiled away in the wastes of eternity. Ginnda-Aanash still lived; one of Sevril’s few surviving creations. Who had killed her creator and any thought of revenge, didn’t concern her. She’d been alive for a very long time and had seen many deaths. Including the end of a few deities. Nothing lasted forever it seemed, even the gods. Ginnda believed it wasn’t for her to exact revenge for anyone, even her creator.” – Last Emperor Chap 20



Muzzie didn’t take the Silver Lady with him, as he went through one of the rear entrances to his palace. The Lady and Ginnda-Aanash the Hive Mother, didn’t really get on. No warfare between them, or harassing of each other’s followers, but it always seemed like an uneasy truce. They both had a lot to gain by having their lairs beneath his palace, so Muzzie had quite a bit of leverage. Still, taking the Lady with him might have seemed deliberately provocative. Just him and Aeony, the emperor and his partner. That looked like a compliment, a statement that Ginnda was a trusted friend and ally.

“She has to be told.” Said Aeony. “I know her children are wandering a long way from home. I accept that communications can be difficult that far away, but the attack on Nara-Abash could cause the empire a few problems. Others have magic users who can see what happens right across the rifts.” The problem was that the Lady had asked Ginnda to send out her children, some very fast strong and ruthless children. He’d agreed to it as the best way to find and deal with the assassin sent after the two young Algarians. With hindsight, perhaps he shouldn’t have been so keen to let loose the Children of the Hive.

“I did agree to her sending her children to keep Seren’s expedition safe.” Said Muzzie. “There was no mention of open warfare against friendly towns and villages. Ginnda has already changed her instructions to her children. They will now be a lot less aggressive.”

“We’re just lucky that Nara-Abash wasn’t destroyed.” Said Aeony. “As it is, we’ll have to pay for a lot of the rebuilding work. A pretty coastal town that has been there for several thousand years, or so I’m told. Then the Children of the Hive turn up. It’s just the sort of excuse Tandalla will use to try and take over the empire.”

Muzzie could see her point, in terms of diplomacy the unprovoked attack on a quiet town in the middle of nowhere, was as bad as it gets. His main worry though; was how much gold would have to come out of the imperial purse to rebuilt parts of the town. Several of Ginnda’s children were beginning to fuss around them, like arachnid kittens. It was hard to imagine their older siblings wreaking havoc on the outer edges of the Sacred Sea.

“Ahhh, Muzzie and Aeony.....I see far too little of you.” Said Ginnda-Aanash.

They were expected, but the Hive Mother always talked as though visitors were a surprise. There was even a comfortable looking sofa with a table in front of it. As soon as they were settled on the

sofa, Ginnda would have arranged for refreshments to arrive. For a huge arachnid, Ginnda was very good at providing delicious drinks and nibbles.

"We came to say we really do appreciate your help, but your children need to be used with more care." Said Aeony.

"Yes, wonderful fighters, lucky to have them." Said Muzzie. "But we don't want them starting a war by accident."

The food arrived and for a while the serious side of their visit was pushed aside. Ginnda seemed to enjoy talking about nibbles she'd never be able to eat. Muzzie often wondered if that was the appeal; forbidden fruit. For a truly massive creature who looked like a spider, the Hive Mother had to be careful of what she ate. Baked pastry nibbles had been known to upset her digestion for days.

"Wonderful.....Always the best pastries." Said Aeony.

"My children know a bakery just south of Bredon's Edge." Said Ginnda. "A wonderful Moullay-Dredger hybrid with a touch of human. He seems to have been born to bake."

There were two sides to Ginnda and Muzzie liked them both. She and her children were staggeringly good fighters. Ginnda had handed the demon city of Segin-Unadaris to Muzzie with few casualties on the empire's side. Another thing he liked was her genuine good nature and quick wits. He wasn't about to turn such an ally into an enemy, not over an obscure fishing town on the arse end of nowhere.

"Don't chastise my children for being given an impossible job." Said Ginnda. "They were only given a rough description of the assassin and had no idea that many would assume they were enemies. They had to defend themselves, Muzzie. Have you heard any more about Tandalla and their ambitions? My children and I could win Tandalla for you in two or three days; maybe less."

Aeony was giving him a look which said she agreed. It had been silly of the Lady to tell Ginnda to use her children to deal with a single assassin. They existed in their thousands for the big one, the fight to keep Muzzie as emperor. That day would come, Muzzie was now certain of it.

"There will be no chastising of the Children of the Hive." Said Muzzie. "As you said, they were given an impossible job."

"What are their current orders?" Asked Aeony.

"They know the enemy now, the one called Tejan." Said Ginnda. "She is their only target and she should be killed on sight. If they're attacked by the local population, their orders are to retreat as fast as they can."

"That sounds perfect." Said Muzzie

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At first Maya thought Uula had caught something and was playing with it, until eventually killing it or letting it go free. Uula Podda was a strange mix of predator and empath, which could sometimes lead to strange ways of dealing with other creatures. Add on the sheer size of the flying Ancient One and she definitely wasn't usually bothered by smaller predators.

"Uula seems to have found a new playmate." Said Tareq.

Her partner was right; the pretend fighting was all a game, two large creatures playing with one another. Uula had the most strength, but the other creature appeared to be quicker.

"At least they seem to be having fun." Said Maya. "There is something about her new friend. A memory is in my head from a long time ago. I just can't quite manage to get at it."

Uula was like a weird chimera, a mixture of many creatures. The creature who still sometimes called her mother was all legs and huge feet, with large wings thrown into the mix. Not pretty in a

conventional way, but Maya loved her like.....A sister really rather than a child. A kid sister who'd been her constant companion for over five hundred imperial years.

"Ahhh, Uula's friend has wings, she can fly." Said Tareq. "She flies well.....I hadn't expected that." There was something about the beat of the creature's wings and the friendly sound it was making. Maya knew that sound; she'd once spent quite a lot of time with the Hive Mother. That had been during the ongoing struggle to make Muzzie emperor.

"Oh, my poor memory after hundreds of years." Said Maya. "Uula's new friend is a nearly adult child of the Hive Mother, Ginnda-Aanash. No wonder she's treating Uula as a friend, we were good friends of Ginnda's."

The giant spider like creature had to be smart; all Ginnda's children were clever. It would know Old Imperial at least and some were fluent in other languages. Usefully, some of the adult Children of the Hive, could speak the language of the demon cities. After hearing Ginnda's name mentioned, the winged creature stopped playing and walked up to Maya.

"Careful, it seems very strong." Said Tareq.

"I'm sure I have nothing to fear from Ginnda's offspring." Said Maya.

The child of Ginnda looked like a dangerous flying bug in an armoured shell. It was weird and alien looking, yet Maya remembered they liked to be hugged. Not that her arms would go far around the creature.

"Does your friend have a name, Uula?" Asked Maya.

Of course it had a name; all sentient beings had a name. Maya could have phrased it better, but the creature itself replied to her in faultless Old Imperial.

"My hive name is Nim-Phraxis-Deh." Said Nim. "I'm known to my hive sisters and brothers as Nim; you too may call me Nim."

Maya hugged Nim as hard as she could, noting the rather sweet smell that came off him. Nim smelled like all things nice, the kind of treats eaten at the Feast of Nigon.

"You're welcome here, Nim. Think of us as your family." Said Maya. "I have to ask why you're here? If you came to protect me, I think Uula is quite capable of dealing with any enemies I might have."

"Uula is indeed, the only guard you will ever need." Said Nim. "Strong, powerful and fast.....I could learn so much from her. I am here to watch and pass on what I see to the Hive Mother. Muzzie will also see my memories, as will the Silver Lady. There have been errors in deciding who were enemies. By keeping in touch through my eyes, it is hoped to stop further errors."

Errors sounded such an innocuous word. Maya could imagine what the Children of the Hive could do to a town they considered to be enemies.

"Others are on their way to see you, including Galla the apothecary." Said Nim. "The information I send to Ginnda can help them find you. I know you were very fond of Galla."

"Galla.....I think the world of Galla." Said Maya. "She started my formal training as a healer. Who else is with her?"

"She travels with her Bird." Said Nim. "I don't know everything the Silver Lady might see, but Seren the dark angel is with her. They recently rescued Adamaz the librarian. Two young humans are with them, but I have no idea why. Anyway, they're all on their way to see you."

"Such a strange mixture of people." Said Tareq. "Do you know what it means?"

"I think it means our quiet life in the village, will soon be over." Said Maya.

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Rayan Morresa was a female Kveld, a creature who could run on two feet, or four. A poetic way of referring to those hybrids who had the ability to turn into four legged creatures. Dangerous

creatures with sharp teeth and claws, who had a thing for feeding on those they killed. Very tough and hard to kill, Rayan had once killed a room full of Quron warriors. That had been during the wars to make Muzzie emperor; she'd been wounded but had survived. Even on two legs she was a formidable fighter with a blade or bow. As the creature on four legs, she was just about unstoppable.

"Why didn't our informants warn us, Bodrin?" Rayan asked. "We pay them well and everyone likes imperial gold pieces. Did you pick up any rumours about this?"

Bodrin wasn't that bright, he was her muscle and part Shelzak. He wasn't a Kveld like her, but if anyone tried to harm her, he was capable of tearing them apart. Muzzie had teamed them up and despite her own concerns about working with a part Shelzak hybrid; they'd developed a good working relationship. They were spies for Muzzie's empire, sent to keep an eye on developments in Tandalla. They had well paid local informants, but no one had thought the Tandallan army would make an appearance that day.

"Our informants probably decided to take our gold and keep the temple happy." Said Bodrin. "I heard one rumour about the High Priest wanting to set himself up as a kind of emperor. Then that informant turned up in the dunes with his throat cut."

"Why didn't you tell me about that?" Asked Rayan. "I need to know everything you know."

"It was probably nothing." Said Bodrin. "Everyone knows the Imperial Army could wipe out Tandalla in a day; leaving just a pile of ashes and a hole in the ground."

The empire had done that to Quron, leaving the city as a smouldering ruin. Muzzie's fighters had even managed to bring down the legendary Quron Towers. The problem with such a devastating victory against a tough opponent, was people's expectations. Tandalla would never dare to attack the empire, would they?

"Look, Bodrin.....Fucking look." Said Rayan. "Do you call that nothing? The entire Tandallan army are marching out of the city; they're even banging their war drums."

She'd have yelled at Bodrin, he was a bit wary of her anyway. They were on a rooftop overlooking the army streaming out of the gates of Tandalla. Being heard might cause a bigger fight than the two of them could win. Wherever the army were heading would be a long journey. Annill was the furthest city, right at the far end of the third rift and a good three years to get to on foot. Annill had gold though, lots of gold; which had to be tempting to the High Priest of Tandalla. Aarabash was closer though still quite a trudge; every city on the rifts was well spaced out. Aarabash was a farming city, who provided much of the food consumed by the City of the Lost God. Taking over Aarabash would be a huge victory for the High Priest.

"Where do you think they're going?" Asked Bodrin.

There was even a chance that the entire army of Tandalla were starting on the long trip along the Pilgrim Trail, which would eventually take them to the City of the Lost God. Rayan doubted if the temple were ready to make such a bold move, not yet.

"If I was planning strategy for the Tandallan army there is only one place." Said Rayan. "The temple complex at Nara-Unadaris. The portals there can take an army almost anywhere, instantly. Muzzie has it well guarded and the dunes have the famous Quella Traps to claim the unwary. I would still bet a year's pay on the High Priest sending his army to take over Nara-Unadaris."

"Should I go and use the crystal?" Asked Bodrin.

"Yes, I want to watch here for a while." Said Rayan. "Go.....Go and tell Faal that I believe the Tandallans are about to attack the temple complex at Nara-Unadaris. If Faal isn't there, his assistant Jenda should be listening."

Tandalla to Nara-Unadaris was a year and a half's march for a fit army, but it was an incredible prize. Once taken over the army of the High Priest could be back in Tandalla as quickly as they could walk into the portal. If Muzzie asked what was going on before the plan fully hatched, Tandalla could claim their entire army were just out on manoeuvres. As plans went, it was a piece of genius.

"I should have seen this coming much, much earlier." She muttered.

Faal would be listening to the crystal; he probably slept with the thing. It was a question of getting the right reaction to what Bodrin was saying to them. If Muzzie moved more of the army to Nara-Unadaris; the coup would be effectively over. Rayan was looking for clues in the way the army were dressed and equipped, signals that she'd been right. She wrote notes on paper with a pencil, about as much technology as could be relied on to work on the rifts. Her eyesight was better than that of most hybrids, due to the whole Kveld business.

"Hmmmmmm.....Rangers with lots of shovels." She muttered.

Nara-Unadaris was surrounded by sand dunes and many had become predator traps over the course of time. The Quella Traps they were known as, deep pits in the ground full of tar and the rotting remains of creatures who'd chosen the wrong path through the traps. Remains had been pulled from the traps of creatures so old; that none of them still walked the rifts.

"That's it.....The Elite Troopers are carrying sand mats." She mumbled.

She was looking for things to back up her idea, she knew that. Lots of shovels though, strapped to the backs of Rangers who rarely used them. Now Elite Troopers equipped with sand mats, on a rift with few areas of loose sand. They had to be heading for Nara-Unadaris and the Quella Traps.

"I need to get on the crystal." She muttered. "I dread to think what Bodrin may be saying to Faal."

Bodrin was her muscle, good in a fight, but not exactly the sharpest knife in the drawer. Rayan went over the roofs, crouching most of the way. Down quite a long set of steps to use in case of fire.

Followed by an open door on the lodging house they were using. It had all taken her a while, probably too long. Bodrin might have told Faal there was no cause to panic, but there was; there was a lot of cause to panic. The door to her room was still closed, but Bodrin's door was open. She began talking as she entered the room.

"Bodrin, they've got shovels and....."

Bodrin was on the floor, his face and neck covered in blood. Two agents of the temple were stood over him, Rayan recognised their robes. Temple agents were tough for clerics; they'd already had a few fights with them. Both of the agents held bloody knives, assumed to be Bodrin's blood.

"Rayan Morresa, you are ordered to come with us." Said one of the agents.

"By order of the High Priest of the temple." Added the other.

"Bastards." Said Rayan.

No turning into the Kveld, the predator on four legs. Once she'd eaten in that form, it took a few hours for her to be back on two legs and; she always ate at least some of what she killed. Her hands looked normal, yet those normal looking fingernail on normal looking hands; quite easily ripped out the throat of one of the agents of the temple. The second agent started yelling, which couldn't be allowed. Rayan held one hand over his mouth, while she opened up his abdomen with a blade. So much blood, so many wonderful bloody entrails. It seemed a waste to leave it all lying on the floor, but she had a lot to do. Bodrin wasn't quite dead; she cradled his head in her arms.

"Do you have the crystal?" She asked.

"The agents broke it, shattered it into many pieces." Said Bodrin.

"This is important.....Did you get through to Faal before it was destroyed?" She asked.

"No, I never got a chance.....They were....."

Bodrin was dead with her arms around him. He wasn't her ideal partner as a spy, but they had become friends. One day, when she was alone; Rayan would cry for him.

"May the Gods not judge your sins too harshly." Said Rayan.

With luck, when her moment of dying arrived; there'd be someone there to make a similar plea on her behalf. Bodrin hadn't been mistaken, or lying. As she carefully let his body lie on the floor, it disturbed the crystal. Their way of communicating with the City of the Lost God, was broken into at least six pieces.

"Fuck !" She said.

A rare use of bad language, but the day seemed to call for it. There were other ways of getting in touch with the City of the Lost God. One was a crystal in the Library of Tandalla and there was a strange speaking tube gadget in a back room of the main temple. Not conjecture, someone previously doing her job had seen them and actually used the speaking tube. There were other rumoured ways of calling home in the City, but Rayan believed in searching for what she knew existed.

"First.....Let's have a look in the library." She muttered.

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Some of the crew had survived the sinking of the Angel's Gaze. It seemed obvious to Tejan that some of the Sagurians would survive the sinking of their vessel. All the survivors crawled or walked up the beach of Muddy's island, much in the way she had. There would be no working as a team to survive, chaos cults didn't work like that. Once a battle started, they tended to fight to the finish. Luckily, Tejan's headache was much improved by the time both sides were going at with any weapons they could lay hands on.

"Damn this will mean more delays in dealing with the damn Algarians." Said Tejan.

"Just survive.....I may be able to get us off Muddy's." Said Sökkelf.

Tejan had her blade tucked down here belt and Sökkelf was waving his blade in the general direction of a group of Sagurian survivors. Most from the Angel's Gaze were less fortunate, especially those travelling as a family group. Some men and women were holding any heavy object they could find, hoping to protect their kids. Chair legs and pieces of timber against cult members with swords. It wasn't going to end well for most of them.

"How can you get us off Muddy's ?" Asked Tejan.

No use, he'd hurtled towards the Sagurians and was either ignoring her, or wanted a little payback against the chaos cult.

"Well.....Looks like time for me to get bloody." Tejan muttered.

Sökkelf looked to be doing well against the group of cultists he'd chosen to attack. If they both survived, she was determined to find out where he'd learned to use a blade so well. Tejan found another group of cultists, who seemed to be threatening some passengers from the Angel's Gaze. They appeared to be doing it for the sake of it. Tejan wanted to say something witty before attacking them, but it had been a long day and her headache seemed to be back.

"Hey, arseholes !" Yelled Tejan.

If she'd just left one alive, the cultist could have spoken about her fighting skills for the rest of their life. Tejan wasn't in the mood to be merciful; she should have been enjoying a meal on the Angel's Gaze. Some of The Damned had believed in a kind of fighter's code, but Tejan had always thought the only rule was to survive. Besides, a living member of the Sagurians was just someone else to feed. Tejan went from one of them to the next, as they became a dead corpse on the ground. It was her speed and probably the best warrior training there had ever been. She'd been trained by

Nurigen himself. Tejan didn't count numbers until there wasn't a living cult member in front of her. Five, she'd swatted five of them out of existence as though they were merely an annoyance. The passengers of the Angel's Gaze liked what she was doing, they began to cheer her.

"If you want to help, drag their bodies into the sea." Said Tejan. "Take them well out so their bodies don't stink up the area around the beach."

"You should bury them.....Even devils like these deserve a proper burial." Said an elderly woman.

"Do as she says.....Drag the bodies into the sea." Said a member of the ship's crew. "All the bodies, those of our dead as well as theirs."

"I won't do it." Someone yelled.

"Then you won't eat or drink." Said Tejan. "I will remember your face."

Everyone uninjured began dragging the dead out into the Sacred Sea, leaving them well beyond where a low tide might bring them back. Even children were clearing the area of the dead. As for the injured and dying ? Tejan would leave that problem to the passengers to sort out. With limited food and water on a small island, there was only one answer to the problem.

"I could do with some help over here." Shouted Sockkelf.

Further along the beach, the man she was sleeping with was fighting well. Tejan was proud of him, the way some women are proud of having a boyfriend on the school sports team. Sockkelf was in front of several armed members of the Angel Gaze's crew and they were doing well. Not everything had gone their way; a few of the bodies on the ground were dressed in clothes the paying passengers tended to wear. Tejan began her routine of hacking and slashing until there wasn't a single living Sagurian on Muddy's island. Unless one or two had run off into the interior, but they wouldn't last long on their own.

"Gone, dead.....Every last one of them." Said Sockkelf, as he wiped blood from his blade.

By the time darkness was falling over Muddy's Island, all the bodies had been given to the sea, including those who'd been kin of the passengers. Tejan had left her mark on the memories of those who'd seen her fight, with some calling her a hero sent by the Gods to save them. First night on a strange island, everyone was simply glad to be alive. The reality of getting enough food and water would soon become a huge issue. Tejan had taken Sockkelf to a quiet spot close to the trees, where they'd built a fire and eaten whatever they could find. A battered barrel of fruit had saved them from a hungry night.

"We need a moment of honesty between us." Said Tejan. "You know Muddy's from your childhood; is there enough food growing here to feed all of those left alive ?"

"You mean fruit, roots and the occasional cooked bulb ?" Asked Sockkelf.

"Exactly.....Can we live off the land ?" Asked Tejan.

"Yes.....It'll be a boring diet, but it will keep us alive."

"And water.....Is there a spring of fresh water ?" Asked Tejan.

"Muddy survived here for years, but he was alone." Said Sockkelf. "There is a spring, more brackish than fresh, but it won't kill us. As to the amount of water coming out of the ground ? With the number of people we now have; we'd need to ration water."

"I had an awful feeling you'd say that." Said Tejan.

They'd saved many of the passengers from the cultists, only to force them to give the remains of their loved ones to the sea. Would they still be thinking of her as a gift from the Gods, when she began to make them go thirsty ? She looked up at the dark sky for a while, wondering not for the first time; why her life seemed full of obstacles and unpleasant choices. Soon life on Muddy's would be hell, unless there was a way of getting away from the damned place. She sort of wrapped herself

around the man she was genuinely beginning to love; enjoying the slightly salty smell of sweat coming off him. Mind you, she probably had the same smell.

"You mentioned a way we might get away from Muddy's island?" She asked.

"The flying creatures know us, those who were born on the islands." Said Sockelf. "I know it sounds crazy, but I used to call them down out of the sky when I was a kid. They speak a version of the common tongue, though not very well. If fishing was keeping me away from home, I'd send a flying creature to tell someone about it. Not a perfect system, but to a kid.....It was pure magic."

Sockelf was right, it sounded crazy, but not as crazy as many of the things Tejan had witnessed on the rifts with her own eyes. If you ignored the pain and suffering, the rifts were genuinely magical.

"So, you could send one of these things for help?" Asked Tejan.

"As long as they still know me and will come to me." Said Sockelf. "Then the message can't be too complicated, or it will get garbled. My home island is quite a journey, there and back. Assuming they get the message, my people won't be here for a few days. Even then, they're unlikely to arrive in a boat large enough to take everyone."

"Oh wonderful, I just know I'll get the job of deciding who stays on Muddy's." Said Tejan.

"Once I'm home.....I can get them to send another boat." Said Sockelf.

It didn't sound ideal and Tejan knew she might be a little paranoid. But, there'd be trouble when a boat far too small to take them all arrived, she knew it. As plans went though, it beat staying on Muddy's and fighting over who got enough brackish water to drink.

"Fine, call down one of these flying creatures." Said Tejan.

"When there's light." Said Sockelf. "They won't come to me in the dark."

Which became a good excuse to cuddle up and have a good night's sleep. There could have been sex of course, but they were both too tired.

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Lilleth saw a lot of the old Pinthrad beneath the surface and was sure he'd heal. The Morning Tide had left the island a little later than Enster Tilly would have liked, but she seemed in awe of Ezzel Pinthrad.

"All that time on his own would affect anyone." Said Enster. "Give him time and I'm sure he'll be fine."

Nonsense of course, several hits on the head had turned Pinthrad from a great mind, to as he was now. Healers could do wonders though and Galla was one of the best. Every time the apothecary uttered a few words over Ezzel, he seemed to recover a little. He seemed obsessed with one thing, heading a different way to the intended destination of the boat. Pinthrad wanted to avoid Windhome Harbour and head for somewhere much further along the far off western coast of the Sacred Sea.

"No, not Windhome.....We need to go to Gezenter-Aparen." He'd been saying to anyone daft enough to come close enough for him to talk to.

Lilleth had never heard of Gezenter-Aparen, but the words sounded like the language of the Genova, the angels. Galla had never heard of it either, but if in doubt; ask a librarian who used to run the Great Library in the City of the Lost God. Adamaz had heard of it and was pretty sure it wasn't a myth. A Genova city on the edge of the rift where the Ancient Ones had once walked and still might walk.

"Pinthrad was never a fool and I don't believe he's a fool now." Said Adamaz.

Adamaz had borrowed navigation tools from Enster and scribble lots of notes on several pages of parchment. The more he scribbled the more serious he looked, until everyone on the Morning Tide

was taking a huge interest in what conclusion Adamaz might come to. Lost Genova cities were a thing of myth and legend, or just maybe they weren't. After the scribbling and a lot of looking at the sky, Adamaz spent a while whispering to Ezzel. When Adamaz finally spoke, everyone made sure they were close enough to hear.

"My old friend Pinthrad is right." Said Adamaz. "We are heading for the wrong place."

"Windhome is where we always go on that side of the Sacred Sea." Said Enster.

"I didn't say wrong for you, it's wrong for us." Said Adamaz. "We need to go to Gezenter-Aparen, an old city of the Genova. The name literally means gateway to somewhere magical. If I've got it right and I think I have, we need to head that way."

Adamaz pointed to the right of where the boat was heading, one of the few directions that didn't seem full of small islands with lush vegetation.

"We go that way until we reach the shore." Said Adamaz.

"Then you'll be swimming, the Morning Tide won't be going there." Said Enster. "There is nothing that way for a very long way. Some say there is nothing at all in that direction. I'm not taking my people that far from home and maybe even to their death."

"Yes, that way, that way.....The Genova will be there." Said Pinthrad.

"He's had a blow on the head, but I still trust him." Said Lilleth. "We need to go where Ezzel wants us to go."

"No.....Let that be an end to this nonsense." Said Enster. "I'm not sailing where many believe the sea is endless."

Lilleth knew Seren was worldly wise, but her next comment surprised even her. Then again, she'd seen so many seemingly insoluble problems solved by money, imperial gold pieces.

"We have imperial gold pieces." Said Seren. "Name your price for going in the direction Pinthrad wants to go."

Enster looked set to refuse any amount, but some of her crew surrounded her and began muttering at her. It seemed Enster had come through the last winter better than most. There were a lot of poor people in Hunthreads with no quick way to earn more gold. It was a far more humble Enster who finally answered Seren. She mentioned a price that was high, but not ludicrous.

"Agreed, paid in full when we reach Gezenter-Aparen." Said Seren. "Or I agree we will never reach that place and we head back to Hunthreads."

"I never realised there'd be so much adventure." Said Dava.

"Just pray you live to tell of it." Said Lilleth.

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