

The Ancient Ones

Chapter 4 – Guardian of the Way

“Good morning sister.” Muttered a passer-by.

“May chaos always pass you in the night.” Said Tejan.

She was wearing the robes of a cleric, one fairly high up in the temple. It gave her an excuse to have the hood pulled across her face on quite a warm morning. The robes also hid her sword and leather armour. No one would recognise her, not even her mother; if she’d still been alive.’



Three days and nights they’d been on the road, since being attacked by bandits. There had been the strange sound of flapping wings at night, as if some huge flying beast was in the air of the rift above them. Their days had been peaceful, but there had been cries in the night, to go with the sinister sound of huge wings flapping. So far no one had been attacked, but everyone seemed to think it was only a matter of time. It was the cries, the sound of something in agony.....

“I’m beginning to see why the map calls this the wetlands.” Said Lilleth.

Not that Lilleth was totally convinced that the map from the Great Library was that reliable, they rarely were. It had been drawn up during the reign of Xanash the 4th, which was a very long time ago. Such maps tended to be partly to show the way and partly as attractive works of art.

“If the map is accurate, we’ll soon come to a wide river.” Said Galla. “There is said to be only one bridge that crosses the river. In one of the notes it mentions a toll being demanded to cross the bridge.”

“They’ll not make a fortune from that.” Said Jelran. “We’ve yet to see anyone else on the road.”

“It’s a very old map.....Things change.” Said Lilleth.

The wetlands continued to earn their name. By the time they reached the wide stone bridge, it was difficult to see where the wet and sodden soil ended and the river began. The river was wide, the current moving quite fast. Definitely a river that required a bridge to cross it in safety.

“The bridge looks safe and solid, even if it has been here for a very long time.” Said Galla.

“More than could be said for the fort.” Said Lilleth.

Actually more of a castle than a fort, but it was marked as a fort on the map. The bridge looked solid and reliable, but the fort looked every one of the thousands upon thousands of years since someone had built it. The wetlands didn’t help, the stonework was covered in various types of algae and fungus; most of them doing their best to gradually destroy the walls. The double doors looked solid enough, though one was slightly open. No sign of any taker of tolls though, the damp and mouldy ruin looked deserted.

“No one has lived here for millennia.” Said Chenad Gurd, leader of the Dredger team. “We should cross the bridge and be on our way.”

Lilleth thought that was a bad idea, but it was Galla who spoke first.

“I sense old dark magic here.” Said Galla. “The door is open.....We should make every effort to pay the toll.”

“A waste of good money.” Said Ash.

“Maybe, but I agree with Galla.” Said Seren.

As Seren was the leader of their expedition, that ended any arguments about it. There was a notice on the doors of the fort, several lines of the old imperial language, etched into a metal sign. Lilleth rubbed her hand over the sign to make it readable. Galla read the notice in her wonderfully sonorous voice.

“N’Sim N’Har – Guardian of the Way.” Said Galla. “I’ve heard of him, a very powerful magic user who’s supposed to have been dead for many years.”

“A toll is required to cross my bridge. Failure to pay the toll will result in a curse upon all who cross and every member of their family.” Said Galla. “We should go inside and if we find no one alive.....We should leave a reasonable sum for their ghost.”

“What is a reasonable sum ?” Asked Itzel.

“One gold piece seems about right.” Said Seren. “One imperial gold piece of course, not the rubbish they produce in Tandalla.”

Once they were inside the fort, the entrance was dark. Lilleth produced a little magical light, as did Galla. They produced different types of light at different intensities. Both used their magic to send light globes up, to hang against the ceiling. The result was a warm light which lit up the fort better than any oil lamps could ever manage.

“It’s not that filthy inside.” Said Dava. “It might be quite comfortable once there was a fire lit in the fireplace.”

“It smells a little of mould, but it’s not that bad.” Said Ash.

“I can sense something, though it’s not exactly alive.” Said Lilleth.

“Do you think it’s dangerous ?” Asked Seren.

“I have no way of knowing.....It’s this way, down the hallway.” Said Lilleth.

The inside of N’Sim N’Har’s fort looked quite well preserved, though there was a sign of water running down the walls in a few places. It wasn’t the sort of place Lilleth would have chosen to live, but she had slept in worse. The feeling of something alive was growing all the time. Eventually Seren opened a door and they were in a room, which had once looked out over a garden. Now it looked out over a decaying mess of putrefying vegetation.

“Welcome to my home.....I am N’Sim N’Har – Guardian of the Way.”

Lilleth could tell the guardian of the way was a ghost. It was a bit disappointing. In life he’d probably been a powerful demon hybrid of some kind. Now he was a ghost who’d probably never be able to curse anyone. Fairly nebulous, he hovered about behind a very solid looking wooden desk.

“Greetings N’Sim N’Har.” Said Seren. “We’re explorers from the City of the Lost God. How much is your toll to cross the river by the bridge ?”

“Fifteen imperial gold pieces.” Said the ghost. “None of those crap gold coins they make in Tandalla. They’re more lead and tin than gold.”

“Think again ghost.” Said Galla. “Fifteen is a ridiculous amount.”

“I don’t see how you could spend that much gold.” Added Itzel.

The ghost of the guardian of the way was becoming agitated. Lilleth thought he was probably worried that they might search the fort and steal the gold he’d acquired from gullible travellers. In truth, she was as curious as Itzel, about why a ghost needed gold coins.

“Have a care.....Refuse to pay and I’ll curse you and all your descendants.” Said N’Sim N’Har.

“Once you were probably mighty.” Said Galla. “Then travellers had to put up with being fleeced.

Now you’re a harmless wraith, living on your past reputation.”

“Five.....Pay me five gold and you can use my bridge.” Said the Ghost.

“One gold piece is all you’ll get from us.” Said Seren.

She dropped a nice shiny gold piece on the desk and the guardian of the way simply stared at it for a minute or two.

"You're not the first from the City of the Lost God to come this way." Said N'Sim N'Har. "Pay the five gold I ask and I'll tell you where they were headed."

"Who were they?" Asked Seren. "Give me a name or two, wraith?"

"Gold first.....Information second."

Seren had obviously decided the ghost was a waste of time. She began moving towards the hallway and the others started following her.

"Adamaz was leading them." Said the ghost. "Him as was once the head of the Great Library. Older than sin he must be now, but he still looked tough as nails. His hand magic made the air crackle when I asked them for fifteen gold."

The ghost chuckled from the memory and it definitely sounded like Adamaz had been there. Seren dropped another four gold pieces onto the desk and they all stopped heading for the door. Lilleth knew that Adamaz had been leader of the first expedition looking for Maya. After they hadn't returned, Muzzie had been less keen to send the great and powerful.

"Tell me what you heard?" Asked Seren. "And what you saw?"

"Olvir, son of Caspian had died on the way here." Said the ghost. "That had them rattled; what were they going to tell Muzzie, who hadn't been watching his back. The usual kind of thing when someone important is killed."

Olvir being dead was terrible news, everyone liked Olvir. When the time came for him to run the Great Library, everyone knew he'd make it a far more friendly and efficient place. He'd even promised to open up the forbidden sections to anyone who wished to read what was in them. For a fee of course, the library wasn't a charity.

"Olvir dead.....We should return and tell Muzzie." Said Ash.

"No, we continue with our expedition." Seren. "Anything else ghost? Some good news to soften the bad would be appreciated."

N'Sim N'Har was pawing at the gold coins with his ethereal right hand; and of course passing right through them. Lilleth wondered how he picked up the gold and hid it away somewhere safe. It looked as though the ghost was considering asking for more gold.

"They were original heading for the islands beyond the Sacred Sea." Said the ghost. "Something happened on the way here, they'd met someone they hadn't expected to meet. She'd told them to keep straight east and head into the caves below the mountains."

"Who did they meet? Did you hear her name?" Asked Seren.

"No, but they seemed in awe of her." Said the ghost.

"It may have been one of the female deities." Said Galla. "Estrin-Okanan could have appeared to them somewhere between here and the Ring of Volkin."

"Or our new friend might be lying to us." Said Jelran.

"I'm not lying.....That's what I heard them say." Said the ghost.

Lilleth doubted if she'd have threatened N'Sim N'Har with pain and suffering; there was no telling which demon deities might owe him protection from his enemies. Galla didn't seem worried though, as she gave the ghost one of her piercing stares.

"I can bring pain, even to the dead.....Terrible pain." Said Galla. "If you're lying I will come back here ghost of N'Sim N'Har. You will see that pain and misery don't end when you die."

"It's the truth; I have no reason to lie." Said the ghost.

"He has a point, he hasn't even asked for more gold." Said Dava.

“We’ll leave here and discuss what to do next on the road.” Said Seren.

“You could stay here tonight.” Said the ghost.

No one seemed keen and fairly soon they were crossing the stone bridge and heading east. Seren kept them to the road they’d been planning to use; right up to the point where it split. No road signs, just one road leading to the mountains and another that would take them to the only ocean on the rifts; the Sacred Sea. As for a name for the mountains ? Lilleth wasn’t aware of a proper name; they were just the mountains to the east.

“We’ll camp here for tonight.” Said Seren. “After a meal, with the camp fire keeping us warm.....We’ll decided whether we go the islands, or the caves into mountains. We’ll discuss the two choices, but the final decision will be mine.”

“We could vote on it.” Said Chenad Gurd.

“You and your Dredgers have thirty seven votes.” Said Seren. “No....I promise to listen to everyone, but Muzzie did put me in charge. The final decision has to be mine.”

Covers were put over waggons, tents were erected and a meal was cooked. It was the cosiest night Lilleth could remember since they’d left Bredon’s Edge. They’d even found a stream which Galla’s wonderful magical powders had indicated was pure, clean water. When they left the next morning, their water barrels would be full again.

“I almost felt sorry for the guardian of the way.” Said Dava.

“When he was alive he’d have happily killed you.” Said Lilleth.

“Then he’d have eaten you.....Raw.” Said Galla. “Save your sympathy for those who deserve it.”

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Tejan didn’t have a full name, not anymore. Born on Pesallia Two she’d been stripped of her old identity as part of the conversion process to become one of the elite Menderan Guard, The Damned as they were known throughout the Menderan Empire. Conversion had been hard, she still remembered the pain. After a huge amount of training, Tejan had become a virtually unstoppable killing machine. Tejan was a rarity, almost unique. After all that hard work and pain, she’d decided the life wasn’t for her.

The conversion wasn’t completely reversible, she’d been left with the speed, the strength and a body which healed itself incredibly quickly. What had been removed ? Tejan had lost the ability to move herself instantly to just about anywhere in the multiverse. Gone was her instant link to all the military intelligence networks of every planet in the Menderan Empire. Probably the worst thing, the loss that had hurt the most; her Nurigen blade had been taken away and her uniform of The Damned. She’d been returned to the planet of her birth as nothing, a nobody. Not that anyone with those fighting skills remains a nobody for long.

“You’ve worked for us before.” Had said Hvorchak. “We were very happy with the way you handled those jobs; apart from the price.”

They’d been wandering around the largest shopping centre in Tranquillity, the capital city of Algaria. Large public places were the best places to meet clients; none of the shoppers would remember the tall woman with dark hair, or the broad, muscular man she’d been talking to. All clients moaned about her prices, but they all paid up. No one was silly enough to have an ex-member of the damned chasing them for money.

“I charge a high price because I’m good at what I do.” Tejan had told him. “Half up front into the account number I gave you, the balance on completion. Do you want me to look after the problem with the two young Algarians ?”

Hvorchak worked for Tad Dunne, though why Tad wanted two young Algarians killed wasn't immediately obvious. Probably something to do with an arms deal gone bad. Not that Tejan cared; she was just in it for the money. Hvorchak had rubbed his neck, a sure sign he was getting agitated. "Is there a chance of a reduction in your fee?" He'd asked her. "We have paid you a lot of money for previous jobs. Think of it as a repeat customer discount."

"No."

"Maybe a small reduction as a sign of good faith?"

"No."

They'd ended up sat in a fast food place that was full of kids. Even that was good, there's no better cover for a meeting than a few dozen noisy kids.

"You have to decide." She'd said. "Do I have to start counting down from ten? I do have other clients."

"Very well.....Half the fee will be in your bank within the hour." He'd told her.

He'd looked sad; someone was probably going to yell at him for not getting a discount. It was likely to be Tad Dunne doing the yelling, she'd heard he was a famous bully. A file was passed to her, an old fashioned cardboard file. It would contain her instructions printed on paper, with where the Algarians were last seen. Pictures too, all printed on paper. A very old fashioned way to do business, but the rift destroyed just about any and all technology. No organisers, no data cubes.....Everything was on paper. Why the rifts had that effect on technology wasn't fully understood, even by the tech guys of the Menderan Empire. Tejan would go through the file later, in private. There was one important question she'd had to ask, as she'd sipped at her drink and chewed at a truly dreadful pastry.

"Timescale old friend.....Is there a date to work to?"

"They mustn't live long enough to be interrogated by the Algarian police force."

The meeting had been over; it was all up to her now, and her contacts. She'd waved the file at Hvorchak as she'd left.

"Always a pleasure." She'd told him.

Tejan was currently walking past the gates of the Temple of the Flame, in Mendera City, the Holy City on the planet Mendera. It could truly be said to be the centre of the greatest empire in the multiverse. For some reason, Tejan still thought of it as home. After all she had walked away from them, not the other way round.

"Good morning sister." Muttered a passer-by.

"May chaos always pass you in the night." Said Tejan.

She was wearing the robes of a cleric, one fairly high up in the temple. It gave her an excuse to have the hood pulled across her face on quite a warm morning. The robes also hid her sword and leather armour. No one would recognise her, not even her mother; if she'd still been alive.

Past the Temple of the Flame and despite looking as if she was simply wandering around; Tejan knew where she was going. It was a long walk through the temple district that took her past every one of the sentinel temples. The trudge out to The Well was even further. It was a nice day, she passed many people out with their loved ones, or maybe someone else's loved ones. After protecting the great and the good for a while; Tejan was a bit cynical about who was great, or even good. She saw the elderly woman heading for her, but avoiding her might get noticed. High level clerics didn't avoid the faithful.

"My youngest is still missing." Said the woman. "Went to a frontier world a year ago and hasn't been seen since. Can you see her on the other side, sister?"

"It's forbidden to look into the world beyond." Said Tejan. "Tell me your name and I'll say a special prayer for you tonight."

The woman gave her name and they parted, with Tejan giving her a fairly generic blessing. Not that Tejan intended to break her word about the prayer. Contacts were what her life was all about now; a good contact was worth their weight in imperial gold pieces. The contact she was meeting at The Well really was a high priest of the Sentinel Temples. She'd pass on the woman's name to him. There he was, standing just inside the building which housed The Well. He looked awkward, which was fine. People expected their clerics to look awkward, as if their minds were permanently on higher things.

"Wēland.....Have I kept you waiting long?" Asked Tejan.

Wēland was a high priest, but there was no rule on celibacy to go with the rank. She kissed her old friend long and hard, definitely the kind of kiss reserved for ex-lovers. He'd given her the robes she wore and with luck, he'd be able to help her out with other things she needed. Just being in his company at The Well, would mean being left alone by the city militia.

"Been a while.....Forgotten how much I enjoyed us kissing." Said Wēland.

"Are you calling me forgettable?" She asked, while laughing.

They kissed again, until a family walked into the building. The Well was a public place, a gateway to hundreds of places on other worlds; and the rifts. Get the activation right and you could instantly be a very long way from Mendera. Few of the general population knew how to activate The Well, but Tejan did.

"Are you still avoiding the City of the Lost God?" Asked Wēland.

"Yes, too many there will recognise me as an old enemy." Said Tejan. "I'm going to the Ring of Volkin and from there.....Forgive me for not saying where; it might put you at risk."

"I'd never tell anyone where you're going." Said Wēland.

"I know.....I just think that knowing might cause you problems." Said Tejan.

She was being sincere, but he looked hurt. She knew what he was like. Wēland would rather die than tell anyone her destination from the Ring of Volkin; and that information might get him killed.

"This bag is for you.....I obtained everything on your list." Said Wēland. "It really is an adventurer's bag of essential supplies. I also included three really nice blades."

It was a huge bag, but she still had the strength of one of The Damned. Wēland knew the bulk of her work was as an assassin, or course he did. He either chose to ignore that, or genuinely didn't care. Both options seemed a little strange for a high priest of the Sentinel Temples.

"I promised a prayer for a woman who may have lost a child in a frontier world." Said Tejan.

"Those worlds are brutal and harsh, but there's money to be made." Said Wēland. "Give me her name and I'll pray for her tonight."

"Did you find the grey powder?" Asked Tejan.

"Yes, in the Sentinel Temple of the East, right where you said it would be." Said Wēland.

"No huge expertise needed, just two lines of Old Imperial." Said Tejan. "I'll then be taken from wherever I am and placed in the closest Sentinel Temple. Might not be a convenient way of running away.....But that depends on who might be chasing me."

"I can see how that might be useful." Said Wēland.

They kissed again and when his hand reached out and touched her breast, she didn't resist. She missed Wēland and their long walks across the Menderan dunes. He hadn't been a very adventurous lover, but for a while, she had genuinely loved him. Part of her still did, but not with the intensity there had once been between them.

“Oh, stop that.....Or I won’t want to leave.” Said Tejan. “I need to be going and The Well is always a bumpy ride.”

“May the Old Gods protect you.” Said Wēland.

She waited until Wēland was a long way back along the road to the Sentinel Temples. Not a dot in the distance, but far enough in case her using The Well should stir up the local population. There was a woman with a child, which caused more of a delay, as they said a prayer and threw a few copper coins into The Well. Where did the coins end up ? Tejan had no idea, but doubted if they ended up as an offering at the feet of a deity. More likely there was a huge pile of coins somewhere at the arse end of the seventh rift.

“Here we go.” She muttered.

Tejan was an old hand at using The Well; she knew all the quick ways, if a quick way existed. The Ring of Volkin could be her destination after the full four lines in Old Imperial, or just one word in the common tongue of the rifts. Actually two words, but they were spoken as one.

“Farhj- nevesh.” She yelled.

There was a risk using the quick activation. Get the pronunciation wrong and she might end up anywhere, perhaps even flung into the void. Tejan never did get it wrong. She ended up stood about twenty yards away from the stone circles of the Ring of Volkin. It was raining and it was dark, the same as it had been the last three times she’d been there.

“Why is it always the night when I come here ? And it’s always raining.” She muttered.

It was the farmlands, it had to rain quite a lot, or there’d be no crops. Still, she was beginning to take the bad weather and the darkness personally. Tejan had never used any portals to beyond the mountains. A friend at the Magicians Guild in the City of the Lost God had given her the instructions, written on a piece of parchment. Ink and parchment aren’t a good thing to get wet in the rain. She used a fairly basic light spell and shielded the parchment with her robes. She still had a few basic spells from her days in the damned, but sadly none of the massive battle spells.

“Two rows back, fifth stone from the left.” She muttered.

She was in front of the stone, when her light had obviously attracted a couple of undesirables. There were a lot of portals in the Ring, which meant an opportunity for bandits to rob those using them.

“Oh, so what do we have here ?” Asked a female voice.

Once Tejan would have known the two of them were there, but her senses weren’t what they had been. Two bandits, one male and one female. Both were holding short swords and looking at her. Tejan let her robes drop to the ground, showing the good quality armour she was wearing beneath them. She put down the heavy bag of essential supplies Wēland had given her. She held up her own sword, which was of far better quality than theirs.

“Not what you think.” Said Tejan. “Let me be on my way.....Or this will end badly for you.”

“The cleric seems to have a shiny sword.” Said the male bandit.

“Nice looking bag.....Bound to be full of nice things.” Said the female.

They both needed a bath, yet her nose hadn’t even detected they were near her. There were times when Tejan was tempted to beg for the return of a few more abilities of the damned.

“Leave here.....Or you will both die.” Said Tejan.

Was there a slight hesitation ? It was so hard to tell in the dark and the rain. The female came straight at her, while the male tried to get behind her. It was all very basic stuff, fighting with swords for beginners. Tejan stepped in to meet the female, which is always unexpected. A swing of her sword and the female bandit was left screaming and looking at her own entrails. Tejan turned and used her sword to turn aside the blade meant to cut into her back.

"I did warn you both." Said Tejan.

She dug her blade deep into the chest of the male and he was probably dead before his body hit the ground. Finishing off the female was a mercy and required just one sword slash across her throat.

Tejan surveyed the scene of blood, mayhem and death.

"Still got it." She told herself.

Still raining too, as she put on her fairly sodden cloak and picked up her bag. Dark too, as she counted the stones again, knowing that getting it wrong could be fatal.

"Two rows back, fifth stone from the left." She muttered.

Tejan placed her right hand on the stone and spoke the words her friend in the Guild had written out phonetically in the common language of the rifts. She had no idea what she was saying, but she was confident she'd said it right. There was a buzzing sound and a lilac swirling portal appeared in front of the stone.

"I most definitely earn my fees." She mumbled.

Tejan stepped into the portal and for about three or four seconds, her world went dark, totally dark, darker than the rifts ever were with the permanent ultraviolet background wash. When the light was there again she was on a hillside, looking out over a well-lit and green valley. She'd seen sunlight on planets and considered it to be overrated.

"Give me a bright day on the rifts.....Any day." She muttered.

To her right the mountain rose that legend said touched the roof of the rifts. Larger than Mount Erran on the Pilgrim Trail, yet she couldn't remember seeing a name for it in any ancient books. To her left were miles and miles of trees and undulating ground. There was a road right in front of her, which would take her to where she believed the two young Algarians would be.

"The Sacred Sea.....I've always dreamed of seeing it." Tejan muttered.

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Galla wasn't sure of the decision taken the night before. Seren had asked everyone their opinion, even the thirty odd Dredgers who shoved and pulled their waggons. Just from her quick count of everyone's opinions, Seren had decided the way the majority wanted to go.

"You can't keep fussing about, Galla." Said Lilleth. "Seren is in charge and if she says were heading for the caves under the mountains; we're going through the caves beneath the mountains."

"We're not really kitted out for weeks, maybe months underground." Said Galla.

"We'll survive.....We're both capable of providing light without lamps." Said Lilleth.

"It's not just light." Said Galla.

"Seren has made her decision." Said Lilleth. "Like it or not, we're going into and hopefully through the caves."

"Name one dangerous predator in the caves?" Asked Galla.

"There's no reasoning with you when you get like this." Said Lilleth.

Lilleth walked away, which was far more annoying than arguing with her. The annoying thing was that she was right. They would survive the caves; Seren wouldn't be leading them in that direction otherwise."

"Looking forward to the caves, Galla?" Asked Dava. "They're rumoured to be beautiful."

Rumoured to be was such an annoying phrase, but Galla had decided to be cheerful, or no one would want to talk to her.

"Oh yes, wouldn't miss seeing them for all the world." Said Galla.

"I quite like caves." Said Ash.

Bird hated the cold and loathed the rain, but the morning was warm and sunny. He didn't need chivvying to come and sit on her shoulder, even after he'd been given three live Nesh bugs.

"I don't like caves." Said Bird. "Not easy to fly in dark caves."

Galla gave her pet another Nesh bug, to reward his good sense when it came to exploring holes in the ground. Of course the Dredgers wanted to go into the caves, most of their lives tended to be involved in digging and delving below ground. It was why they were called Dredgers.

"Fly ahead for a while, Bird." Said Galla. "I have a bad feeling about the road ahead."

"I feel that too." Said Bird.

Her pet sort of jumped into the air and began beating his wings furiously. Within a few moments he was well down the road that would take them to the caves. So, her pet had the bad feeling too. That was interesting and despite having to respect Seren's orders about the caves, she could still keep both eyes open for trouble.

"I like Bird, how long have you had him?" Asked Jelran.

"Sometimes it feels as though I've had him forever." Said Galla.

Being the slowest, the waggons were in front. Galla had begun a conversation with Jelran about Algaria, which was interesting. It wasn't every day that a creature from a spherical world arrived on the rifts. They dropped back and dropped back, until the waggons were quite some way ahead.

"They seem to have found something." Said Jelran.

By the time they'd caught up with the waggons, Bird was there too.

"Dead they are.....All three of them." Said Bird.

"I hope they weren't more from the City of the Lost God, sent to find Maya?" Asked Galla.

Three sets of remains had been dragged out of the bushes by the side of the road. They looked to be the usual Dredger hybrids who made up most of the population of the first rift. It was Itzel who found a cloak buckle, which solved the problem of their origin.

"Tandalla.....Clerics from the temple." Said Itzel.

She threw the buckle to Galla and there it was in silver inlaid in gold; the insignia of the city of Tandalla. All three of them had small items of gold recognisable as coming from Tandalla, which created another problem.

"I've never heard of anyone from Tandalla, heading east past the great mountain." Said Itzel.

"Neither have I." Said Seren.

"You won't have.....They consider this part of the rifts to be cursed." Said Lilleth.

"We're cursed.....Cursed." Squawked Bird, as he flew up the road.

"Keep an eye out for more dead clerics.....Stupid Bird." Galla shouted after him.

They buried what was left of the clerics, which was just a few pieces of bone and gristle. They looked to have been dead a while and the night scavengers had been busy. Dead Tandallan clerics where no Tandallan ever went. It was going to be a puzzle to keep Galla awake for quite a few nights.

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