

## The Ancient Ones

### Chapter 2 – Bredon's Edge

**“Podd had been the bone collector for the City of the Lost God for an incredibly long time. No one knew his ancestry, including him; his mother had been rather vague about the identity of his father. It seemed he might easily live for another thousand years, but then he had the bad manners to drop dead on a cold winter's day. Bad manners to Ash, who was his apprentice and lived on the premises, the boneyard.”**



“You can't go with them, Galla.” Said Muzzie. “It's far too dangerous for someone so important to the City. I'd like to be with Dava and Jelran when they leave, but I have my responsibilities; as do you.”

Galla noticed that Aeony was nodding in agreement with Muzzie. No one wanted to make a huge thing about it, but the previous attempts to find Maya had failed; everyone in the expedition assumed to have died. Maybe some of them were still out there, lost and still trying to get home. The rifts were truly huge places. One thing was certain, none of them had returned to the City of the Lost God.

“Seren is going as leader of the team.” Said Aeony. “She's also taking Itzel as her second in command. They'll be fine; you've no need to go trudging across the rifts.”

“But you're sending Ash with them.” Said Galla. “Are you really that desperate for decent fighters? It looks as though you're sending the expendable.”

“Seren is not expendable.” Yelled Aeony.

Maybe not Seren, but the others? Galla was beginning to think her inkling of what was going on, just might be true. It wasn't as if anyone in the City would miss Dava or Jelran, they were both criminals; illegal weapon traders from Algaria.

“Can we calm down a little?” Asked Muzzie. “Podd was a good friend and since his death, Ash has been very unsettled. He'll enjoy a few years away, looking for Maya and the Ancient Ones. Give him a chance before writing him off.”

“So I am being allowed to go?” Asked Galla.

Galla had lived a very long life; she'd even been blessed, or cursed by being given the gift of a fresh start. Not returned to her youth, but to looking and feeling like herself as a thirty year old. All those centuries, all those very interested admirers, yet she'd never managed to have a child. Muzzie didn't need to hear it said; Maya was like the daughter she'd never had.

“I never said that.” Said Muzzie.

“It sounded as though you were saying that.” Said Galla. “Never forget that only I know how to activate many of the portals at the Ring of Volkin. If I don't get a place on the expedition, I may not be able to remember the ways to activate some of them. I am getting on a bit you know.”

Galla had a strange pet, a talking bird that usually had the run of her apothecary shop in the old part of the City. Called simply Bird, he'd grown over the years and could no longer be carried by putting him inside her robe. He knew where she was going though; he was far from being mindless. Bird came through an open window of Muzzie's study and landed on her shoulder.

“I go with Galla.” Said Bird. “I keep Galla safe.”

"Oh, that damned bird." Said Aeony.

"Be reasonable." Said Muzzie. "I could put you in the cells until you give us the activation details."

"You'd really dump one of your oldest friends in the dungeons?" Asked Galla.

"Don't tell them, Galla." Said Bird.

"One more word out of your pet and I'll be having him for my supper." Said Aeony.

Galla stroked Bird and dug out a jar from the pocket of her robes. In the jar were live Nesh bugs, her pet's favourite food and the only thing guaranteed to keep him quiet. She'd never intended to have a pet bird, but one of her many aunts had died; leaving her the noisy pest as part of an inheritance.

"Fine, I can't force you." Said Muzzie. "Go with the two Algarians and if possible....Bring them back alive."

"Let her get her own way now and she'll take advantage in the future." Said Aeony.

Which sounded to Galla, exactly what Aeony did to twist Muzzie around her little finger. Not that Muzzie seemed to mind, the dark angel was definitely good for him.

"I have given my decision." Said Muzzie. "Galla will go with the expedition to the oceans to the east. If Maya isn't found in say two years; no make that three years. Galla will use her powers to bring everyone back to the City."

"Thank you, Muzzie." Said Galla.

"Clever Muzzie." Said Bird.

~

~

Every civilised town or city needs a bone collector, someone who picks up and deals with the dead. They may have different names in different places, but their task was still the same; to stop the dead putrefying on the streets. Podd had been the bone collector for the City of the Lost God for an incredibly long time. No one knew his ancestry, including him; his mother had been rather vague about the identity of his father. It seemed he might easily live for another thousand years, but then he had the bad manners to drop dead on a cold winter's day. Bad manners to Ash, who was his apprentice and lived on the premises, the boneyard.

Podd had taken Ash in and given him a home, when no one else had wanted him. Ash was named after the colour of his skin and his eyes. He really did look as though he bathed in fresh soot every morning. Strong though, everyone agreed that Podd's apprentice was very strong. Ash had a small tail and tiny bumps on his back that had probably been wings in one of his ancestors. There was a lot of Dredger demon in him of course; almost everyone in the City had a lot of Dredger in them. He was an odd one though, there was no denying it; the apprentice didn't seem to age that much. Still, working in the boneyard was his life and he enjoyed it, until Podd had the bad manners to drop dead on a very cold winter's morning.

"I was hoping we'd get on." Said Pook. "Podd thought well of you, or so I'm told. Now I hear that you're planning to go on some kind of expedition for several years. I have to admit it; I feel you're letting me down. Don't expect a bed here when you get back."

Pook was a distant relative of Podd's; the name sort of gave it away. Podd had no children, no wife, and no surviving siblings, so deciding who inherited the boneyard hadn't been easy. It was a thriving business, mainly from boiling down bodies to produce fat for soaps. Bones were used in fertiliser, but the big money was in the fat, or so Podd had told him.

"Doesn't feel like home now Podd has gone." Said Ash.

"Podd had too many old ideas." Said Pook. "I intend to make quite a few changes, you'll see."

Ash had liked going out with Podd looking for the dead. Ash even liked pushing the heavy cart along the cobbled streets. The people who ran the City only paid them a few coppers for each body they

picked up, but there were sometimes a few gold pieces in a purse, or a dagger worth selling. They were never that rich, but they hadn't starved.

"I prefer to go east with Galla, I like Galla." Said Ash. "She saved my life once when something poisonous bit me."

"Galla is a good apothecary, but she won't be much use on an expedition." Said Pook. "I heard they'll be heading over the distant mountains to the islands beyond the Sacred Sea. Tough creatures are said to live there, nasty creatures. Best if you stay here with me; the cart won't push itself."

Ash had tried to get on with Pook, but he wasn't like Podd. There was just the two of them, but Pook never took his turn to load up the fat boiler. He acted as though that was beneath him. He was even talking about selling off the things Podd had found in the mud between the boneyard and the Great River. Some of the items were sacred. Pook was just a nobody who a cleric somewhere had decided was the closest thing Podd had to a living relative. Pook now legally owned the boneyard and Ash had grown to hate him.

"Not staying here." Said Ash. "I'll be leaving with Galla."

"Then you can sleep in the streets until you go." Said Pook. "I don't want you here.....Sleep out in the rain and see if you're made to be an adventurer."

Ash knew there was something inside him, a little darkness as Podd called it. He'd once seen off two members of the Assassins' Guild who'd been trying to cause trouble for Podd. Ash grabbed hold of Pook by the collar of his jacket and looked him straight in the eyes.

"I'll stay here until we leave.....Is that alright?" Asked Ash.

"Yes, of course.....I was only joking." Said Pook.

Ash had decided that any more jokes like that and the fool would go missing, his body going into the Great River. No one would miss him.

~ ~

Itzel was a dark angel, one of the first of the new born from before Aeony became their queen. Not that her birth had required a male of her kind and copulation, dark angels didn't breed that way. Her birth had taken place in the temple of the dark angels. It had required some powdered remains of past great dark angel fighters. A magic user spoke the words and Itzel was born, fully formed and with the race memory of her kind. Of course it wasn't quite that easy, these things never are. Her birth had occurred close to a millennia ago, so she felt no shame in forgetting some of the details. "I'm impressed Faal, Shelzak demons are tough." Said Itzel. "You definitely did a good job of sending this one to the underworld."

"It came at me.....Luckily I had an enchanted blade on me." Said Faal.

"Muzzie has killed a few Shelzak in his time." Said Itzel. "He'd be impressed.....This is a really big Shelzak."

"Nasty brutish thing." Said Jenda.

Itzel nodded her head in agreement. Shelzak demons were big, muscular and very hard to kill. Just about all of them was armoured with bone plates under the skin, male's even had bone armour covering their penis. The one on the floor in the corridor just outside Faal's rooms in the palace; was a particular large male specimen. Not that bright, but if someone aimed a Shelzak at someone, their target usually died.

"It might have been heading for Dava and Jelran." Said Itzel. "Their rooms are just a little further along the corridor. You happened to run into them and.....One dead Shelzak."

"No, I'm pretty sure it had been sent to kill me." Said Faal.

He would be, it was a kind of ego thing with Faal. Jenda had probably killed the Shelzak, though that would never be mentioned. Itzel thought that if Faal wanted to hire an expensive guild trained assassin as his companion and apprentice, then that was up to him. Muzzie would have an idea about Jenda and be pleased that Faal was taking sensible safety precautions.

"I'd recommend that you move to another part of the palace." Said Itzel.

"No, I think we'll be fine here." Said Faal.

Itzel had seen it, the quick look at Jenda, who'd nodded at him.

"Yes, they're not likely to send another Shelzak." Added Jenda.

"You're probably right." Said Itzel.

It was true; whoever had sent the Shelzak was hardly likely to send another to suffer the same fate. Not that Itzel believed the brute had been sent to assassinate Faal. The more she thought about it, the more certain she was that the Shelzak had been sent to kill Dava and Jelran. The big questions were who had sent it and why? That was what she intended to tell Muzzie.

"It's Muzzie fault, at least in part." Said Faal. "He refuses to have enough guards in the palace; anyone could get in and wander about as they please. He says too many guards make it feel like a prison."

"He has a point, but it is nice to feel safe at nights." Said Jenda.

They came to collect the dead Shelzak, the Dredgers who dealt with such things. Dredgers are strong, yet it still took six of them to wrap the body and move it around. Very efficient, they cleaned every spot of blood from the floor. Itzel was expected to sign a form before the dead Shelzak was carried away. Sadly she knew the form well, she'd had to sign quite a few over the years.

"They're very efficient." Said Jenda.

"Yes.....They usually are." Said Itzel.

"How long until you leave to look for Maya?" Asked Faal.

"Three days from now." Said Itzel. "First we'll go to Bredon's Edge for the night. Then we'll go to the Ring of Volkin. Galla will work her magic there and activate a portal to take us a very long way from home."

"You must be nervous?" Asked Jenda.

"I'd be lying if I said no, but this won't be the first time I've travelled deep into the rifts." Said Itzel.

"I wish you a safe return." Said Faal.

~ ~

Lilleth was Muzzie's contact with the Holy City, Mendera City. There was officially no contact with the human Menderan Empire, so everything had to be done very carefully and kept very secret. With no extra arms, residual wings or red tinge to her skin; Lilleth easily passed for human in Mendera City. Muzzie had known Lilleth for more years than he'd like to mention and like him, she seemed to have an unnaturally extended lifespan. No one seemed to understand such things; there was no way of knowing if a hybrid was likely to live a couple of hundred years, or several thousand. Not that everyone thought of outliving their loved ones as a gift; to some it looked like a curse. Lilleth had been to far too many funerals and lost just about everyone she'd ever loved. Apart from Muzzie of course and she was quite fond of Galla. Louelle the seer with the body of a serpent, had cast several protection spells over Lilleth. Strong spells and some considered Louelle to be the last of the Serpent Deities. Had those spells granted Lilleth an extended lifespan? Lilleth thought they had, but there was no way to be certain. She was currently sat with Muzzie in his study, with the doors locked and not a guard in sight. She'd been to Mendera to find out gossip for Muzzie and no one else in the City of the Lost God could know that; not even Aeony.

“Any news from Mendera City ?” Asked Muzzie.

“Well.....Brown is this year’s colour to wear.” Said Lilleth. “Their food still makes me puke.....Please Muzzie, I haven’t eaten a proper meal in days. Can I eat while we talk ?”

Muzzie laughed and Lilleth saw the old Muzzie, the one who’d been happy to run the best tavern in the City. He was ageing, but doing it very slowly. They’d been lovers for quite a while, so she noticed the grey hairs and the extra laughter lines. She still gave him another couple of thousand years. That was good; the rifts were more stable with Mussaneth Osranetherer as emperor.

“Sorry Lilleth, you should have said something.” Said Muzzie.

“I did.....Several times.”

Muzzie got up and went to the door. There was a quiet conversation with one of his guards, which she hoped meant breakfast would soon arrive. He came back and sat closer to her, so that they could both speak in little above a whisper.

“So, are Dava and Jelran what, or rather who they claim to be ?” Asked Muzzie.

“Hard to be certain.” Said Lilleth. “If someone is willing to spend enough to give them a believable cover story. Nearly all my contacts say they’re genuine, two rather silly young people who made a mistake trying to get some extra cash.”

There was a knock on the door and Muzzie came back with a fairly well loaded tray. It was obvious that he’d ordered breakfast for himself, as well as her. Lilleth dug into the food and after a few days eating human food, it was wonderful.

“Oh, this tastes wonderful.” Said Lilleth.

“Humans thrive on their food, but I agree.....It gives me bad guts.” Said Muzzie.

“As I was saying, it’s hard to be totally certain that Dava and Jelran are genuine.” Said Lilleth. “I’m almost certain they are, because everything checks out; and almost by chance I read a local militia bulletin in Mendera City. The two of them are wanted dead or alive. No desperation to get them into a trial, just shoot them and get paid a lot of money. That makes me certain that Dava and Jelran are genuine and really at risk.”

Muzzie pushed a scribbled description across the table at her; it looked like Aeony’s version of the common tongue. It was the description of a large and very dangerous Shelzak demon. A male and the description mentioned him being dead.

“Faal claims to have killed the Shelzak.” Said Muzzie.

“Yeah.....In his dreams.” Said Lilleth. “Jenda could do it.....She was a very good investment for Faal to add to his household; a well-trained member of the Guild of Assassins.”

Muzzie was eating and looking at her, as if to say ‘we know what happened,’ without actually saying it. Once he’d swallowed enough breakfast to talk, he gave her his idea about the dead Shelzak.

“Obviously the Shelzak was sent to kill the two young Algarians.” Said Muzzie.

“Agreed.” Said Lilleth.

“Which means someone is likely to try again.” Said Muzzie.

“Yes, but if Seren and Itzel are with them, the assassin would have to be very good.” Said Lilleth.

It was coming and Lilleth knew she’d walked right into it. She knew the gossip about at least two dozen skilled fighters wanting to go with the expedition to find Maya. Most of those had been given a polite no from Muzzie. Now Muzzie was going to ask her to go and being honest, she wasn’t keen on turning her life upside down for a few years.

“The Shelzak wouldn’t have been cheap.” Said Muzzie. “Whoever wants them dead seems to have deep pockets.”

"Yes, I can't disagree with that." Said Lilleth. "Please don't ask me to go with them; I'm so busy at the moment."

"You're the best old style ranger on the rifts." Said Muzzie. "I'll pay you well and the two Algarians will have a much better chance of survival with you as a member of the expedition."

Old style ranger indeed, but she knew Muzzie meant it as a compliment. The world had changed, the rifts had changed with it; but there was still a need for her skills.

"Muzzie.....I have so many loose ends." Said Lilleth. "Lots of people expecting so much from me.....None of them will pay me if I don't deliver."

"I'll compensate you." Said Muzzie. "Give me a price, an amount in gold to get you on the road with them; when the expedition leaves for Bredon's Edge?"

Lilleth thought of the royal couple in Kahan. The current King of that tiny nation had offered her a lot to break up the betrothal of his daughter. A King who was unlikely to pay unless Lilleth turned up in person to collect her fee. A plantation in Tandalla who wanted to see how much their main rivals were charging for Ashunt Oil. Her mental list went on and on. Could she expect Muzzie to pay all of those fees? He had asked.

"I can give you a price, but you won't like it." Said Lilleth.

"Try me.....Give me a number, Lilleth?" Asked Muzzie.

"Seventy five thousand in Imperial gold pieces." Said Lilleth.

Muzzie had been chewing and she thought he might choke on his food. He looked at her, his expression changing from a smile to a very serious stare. He then looked up at the ceiling above, with its plaster demons and dragons along the edges. Lilleth was now hoping Muzzie said yes. There were always clients who argued about the fee once the job was done. One or two might well try to avoid paying her at all. To have the whole sum sat in her vault, waiting for her return began to feel like a very good thing. Muzzie looked at her again and offered her his hand.

"Agreed.....I'll have the gold delivered to you tomorrow morning." Said Muzzie.

Shaking hands was rare, something done in places like Tandalla. Lilleth was now quite excited about going to the islands beyond the Sacred Sea. She just hoped to survive and return to her home in the City.

~

~

Some of the dark angels had second names, but most didn't; Seren was known to everyone simply as Seren. Aeony's right hand person, one of the oldest and strongest of the dark angels; she'd once fought alongside the famous Silsk. That had been in the old days, when there were only a few of her kind, trying to protect the City. Now they had the ability to create more dark angels and when they flew around the towers on an important feast day, they could fill the sky.

"So, everything is prepared.....You leave for Bredon's Edge in the morning." Said Aeony.

"They don't like us in Bredon's Edge." Said Seren.

"You won't be there for long." Said Aeony.

They were standing on the roof of the highest tower; the roof of the Great Library. You needed wings to get there and few in the City had wings. Whatever they talked about was private from the hybrids walking the streets below them. Just her and Aeony stood looking out across the City of the Lost God.

"Any new specific orders for me?" Asked Seren.

"Not really, just keep everyone safe." Said Aeony. "However this turns out, your expedition to look for Maya and Uula Podda, the Ancient One; will be the last. Too many have never returned, it's become a source of gossip in the taverns."

Seren understood, it all began to chip away at Muzzie's reputation as the emperor who never made a mistake, who always won every battle. Personally Seren would have written off Maya a long time ago, but it wasn't her choice to make.

"If we find Maya, do I bring her back here?" Asked Seren.

"Only if she wishes to come." Said Aeony. "If she lives, Maya will probably be under the protection of the Ancient Ones. You won't be able to force her to return to the City. Get her to write a note to Muzzie about where she is and what she hopes to achieve. With luck, that will be an end to this nonsense."

"And the two Algarians.....Do I bring them back?" Asked Seren.

They both knew what she meant and it seemed an appropriate question.

"Yes, keep them alive.....Muzzie seems to think well of them." Said Aeony.

Several flying bug like creatures flew past them; children of Ginnda-Aanash the Hive Mother. They only had wings for the first fifty years or so of their lives. After that Ginnda's children resembled their mother and looked like huge spiders. Ginnda was a powerful ally and her children were harmless to the population of the City; yet they just reminded Seren of how many changes there'd been in the City.

"Don't forget to give Dava and Jelran decent blades." Said Aeony. "Their own weapons will quickly fall apart on the rifts, if they haven't already."

"I've watched them train with short swords." Said Seren. "They're both good, but Jelran has the real ability."

"Good.....Then they might survive to return." Said Aeony. "That will please Muzzie."

Seren had been briefed two days before, the unofficial briefing from Muzzie and Aeony. Galla thought of Maya as the daughter she'd never had. If it hadn't been for Galla's constant pestering, Muzzie might have forgotten Maya a long time ago. Actually pestering was a bit extreme, Galla just cared for the Dredger healer and it showed. The good news was that while she'd been in the company of Uula, the young Ancient One; she'd never appeared to age. If they could find her, she might well still look like a young Dredger. There were a lot of ifs and maybes, too many for a warrior like Seren. She preferred a straightforward mission and an enemy to fight. As a side issue which made the expedition even more complicated; Muzzie hoped to make the Ancient Ones his allies. Seren remembered an old saying about making rock hopper stew.....First catch your rock hopper. In other words, first find your Ancient One. Adult Ancient ones hadn't been seen on the first rift in countless millennia.

"Galla can get you all back from almost anywhere." Said Aeony. "Trust her intuition and if Galla wants to bring you all back to the Ring of Volkin, accept her advice."

"Oh, I intend to." Said Seren.

~

~

Galla Sinsa-Ennari possessed many skills, including being a superb empath. If anyone near her apothecary shop wanted her dead, she'd have felt their intent. It was a typical day, with the main attitude of those passing by; being general indifference. She nodded back at a few who nodded at her, as she locked her shop's front door and quietly spoke the words of a spell to seal the door until she returned. Bird was with her, inside the cage he rarely used. No cover over the cage, he could get quite agitated if he couldn't see where they were going.

"He's not here, Galla." Said Bird. "We can forget Maya and stay home."

"Quiet.....He'll be here soon, I can sense his thoughts." Said Galla.

She'd hired Garus and his lads, who'd transport just about anything on their cart. There were once quite a few carts and carriages pulled by animals, until the population had eaten them during the bad times. Unfortunately there had been a lot of bad times in the City. Only the wealthy could now afford beasts to pull their carriages and waggons. Garus hired eager young Dredgers to pull his cart and gossip had it that he paid them pennies. Galla had paid him a few coppers to get her and her belongings to where the expedition would set off. And of course, Bird was going with her.

"Did you remember your bag of magical powders?" Asked Bird.

"Of course I did.....Quiet, or I'll cover your cage." Said Galla.

That usually worked to keep her pet quiet for a while. Galla had also remembered his food, mainly a lot of Nesh bugs that were alive enough to wriggle about in the container she had them in. She took pity on him; her pet was getting a bit old for long trips across the rifts. Come to think of it, so was she.

"Yes, before you ask.....I did remember your food." Said Galla.

"Bird is very happy." Said Bird.

"Galla.....I can get you a nicer looking bird." Said Garus. "That one looks scruffy and is always being rude to your customers."

"Ahhh, but I've had him a long time." Said Galla.

It was always a joke, but her bird always went quiet when replacing him was mentioned. To Galla her pet was more than just part of the family, he was her entire family. Though if she told him that, he'd become insufferable.

"Come on lads, the lady has somewhere to go." Said Garus. "Get the cart loaded."

The lads were quick, though Garus was quicker to be paid his fee. Galla had been told there was plenty of space on the waggons they were taking to the Ring of Volkin and then further east. Each waggon was going to be pulled by a dozen Dredgers, who guaranteed they could get them over any and all terrains. There were huge ancient tomes in the library, which mentioned road and tracks going all the way to the Sacred Lakes. After that the information was less clear.

"Packing for a long trip by the look of it, Galla." Said Garus.

There was being sociable and providing information to would-be burglars. Not that she expected Garus to rob her, but he was likely to talk to the worst of the worst in Muzzie's bar.

"I'm not sure yet.....We'll see how things go." Said Galla.

It was almost a relief when Itzel turned up. Unexpected, but Galla had felt her mind as she'd walked through her part of Old Town.

"This is a nice part of the City." Said Itzel.

"Until there's a flood.....We always get the worst of it." Said Galla. "Am I late? Were you sent to hurry me up?"

"No, I thought you might need a hand." Said Itzel.

Having a visible dark angel friend was useful, Garus was sure to mention that to his cronies after a few beers. Not that Galla had the kind of expensive talismans she once had, there just wasn't the market for them.

"How are Dava and Jelran doing?" Asked Galla. "Their first expedition across the rifts, they must be nervous."

"I did warn them, but they wouldn't listen." Said Itzel. "Dava picked up her gun this morning and it fell into about six pieces. You can't stop rift rot from decaying technology, just about all technology. Aeony has given them both a decent blade, so they should be alright."

"Oh, I'd have loved to have seen that gun fall apart." Said Galla.

To the locals it must have looked like a procession of some kind, or Galla being run out of town. Galla was at the front leading the way, with Itzel striding along beside her. Behind her came Garus and his lads, pushing the cart which contained everything Galla considered essential for an expedition lasting two or three years. On the top of the largest box in the cart was Bird in his cage.

“Stupid Dredger lads.....Touch my cage and I’ll bite you.” Said Bird.

~ ~

They’d left by the large opening in the city walls, where the southern gates of the City had once stood. Seren was occasionally pointing out landmarks, like the Winshin’s Building; general purveyor of food and supplies. Last store before the long road south.

“No one called Winshin has run the place for over a thousand years.” Said Seren.

Jelran had been told by Faal, but felt asking Seren would show an appropriate amount of interest.

“How far is it to Bredon’s Edge ?” Asked Jelran.

“Most will tell you that depends on how good a journey we have.” Said Seren. “We tend to measure distance in the time taken to get somewhere. Bredon’s Edge can be anywhere from a journey of a day and a half, to two days. Then it’s about the same from there to the Ring of Volkin.”

“Are the Dredgers going to stay with us for the entire expedition ?” Asked Dava.

“Yes, but don’t worry about them eating all our provisions.” Said Seren. “Dredgers are good hunters and tend to live off the land. Good cooks too, you’ll be tempted to eat what they catch.”

Jelran was tempted to ask why they were called Dredgers, but he’d been told by at least four people and the answer was even in a few Algarian history books. When the God Tomma-Goran had built what was now called the City of the Lost God, he’d needed creatures to do the digging and delving into the ground. He’d created the Dredgers and they were still mainly making a living by digging, building and having strong backs. Of course being a civilised human from Algaria, Jelran didn’t believe in Tomma-Goran, or any other of the Gods still worshiped by the hybrids.

“Look, we’ve walked so far.....So quickly.” Said Dava.

Jelran looked back, just as the road turned a little to his left. The towers of the City were gone, leaving just the forest to be seen. A huge forest Galla had told them, with the farmlands beginning at Bredon’s Edge.

“What is Bredon’s Edge like ?” Dava asked.

“You’ll like the Tavern, the Maiden’s Kiss.” Said Seren. “Clean beds and decent food. The locals don’t like us that much, people from the City. There’s been trouble in the past, a lot of trouble. They like our gold though. The Dredgers will sleep in their tents, but for one gold piece we’ll all get a bed for the night and some good food.”

Jelran liked the clothing he and Dava had been given. Leather armour made from the skin of a strange rift beast he’d never heard of. Trousers woven from the fibre of something that grew in the farmland and boots made of a softer leather than the armour. All new, Jelran thought they looked pretty good. The short swords they’d been given by Aeony, finished off the look. At first sight they’d look like hybrids from the City, who the farmers of Bredon’s Edge didn’t like. Jelran just hoped that didn’t cause them problems.

~ ~

© Ed Cowling ~ April 2026

~

‘Unless otherwise indicated, all the names, characters, businesses, places, events and incidents in this book are either the product of the author’s imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.’

