

Hour of Restoration

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From set *Aetherdrift*

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Art by: Julie Dillon

"You've brought me children." Mahitab eyed the children, who sat in a corner of the one-room shack Mahitab and Niharet called home. It was windowless and slightly damp, lit only by a single oil lamp. There was a small table for eating and a small tub for washing. It was all functional, but somewhat depressing. Mahitab and Niharet hated it, and their fervent desire to live elsewhere was what had driven Mahitab to take on this job.

At Mahitab's declaration, Basri Ket, her former crop-mate, sighed. The children—twins, Marunaten and Merinaten—glared at Mahitab with affront. "We're fifteen!" they said in unison, a shrill chorus that made Mahitab grimace.

"They're young, but skilled," Basri cut in. "I believe in them."

Mahitab raised an eyebrow, ignoring that last bit. "Thought only khena came in twins." The children looked ridiculously similar, both soft-boned and sepia-skinned, with fluffy dark curls.

The girl twin wrinkled her nose. “You’ve never seen human twins before?”

“They’re the best embalmers in Naktamun,” insisted Basri.

Mahitab pinched the bridge of her nose. “We don’t know what we’ll face out there, and you’ve brought me two children who aren’t even old enough to have gone through a single trial—”

“We were studying to be viziers of Hazoret!” argued the boy twin.

“Much more useful for your needs than anyone who’s passed a trial,” said the girl twin.

“And alive, too!” added the boy twin.

Basri took Mahitab’s elbow gently and pulled her away from the twins, toward the darker corner of the shack, where Niharet was bent over one of her books, reading by the light of a single candle. She looked up at their approach.

Basri said, “It’s not everyone who’s willing to make this trek, Mahitab. But they know Temmet was Oketra’s chosen. They know—”

“Yeah, yeah, you’ve given me the spiel before,” Mahitab interrupted. Basri was convinced Temmet would know how to bring Oketra back, convinced he had some kind of arcane knowledge that would heal Naktamun. “I don’t care whether or not they share your delusions. They’re going to get themselves killed. Niharet and I can manage on our own.”

Niharet nodded. “I’ve been reading up on restoration rituals. We don’t need them.”

Mahitab motioned toward Niharet and her book. “See?”

“First of all, I don’t have delusions,” insisted Basri. “Amonkhet needs a respected leader. Even if Temmet doesn’t hold the knowledge I believe he does, his presence alone would unify us. And as for your books, reading is not the same as *doing*. The twins are trained, and they wish to serve.”

“Fine.” Mahitab shrugged. “If they die, it’s on you.”

Basri shot her a startled look. “No one will die under my protection.”

Mahitab rolled her eyes. Basri had always been like this—hopelessly optimistic, eager to fight, confident in his ability to protect everyone, regardless of the situation—and he was so damn nice that it was difficult to tell him how idiotic he was being. The problem was that he *was* a hero—Mahitab knew firsthand. He’d saved their crop in the Trial of Solidary, saved Mahitab, saved Niharet. Then he’d vanished before anyone could thank him. He never *boasted* because Basri would do no such thing, but he had other ways of hinting at his prowess and position. Even if he was unaware that he was doing it.



Art by: Kai Carpenter

Mahitab poked his white-and-gold armored chest. “Like I said. *Your responsibility.*”

When Basri Ket had shown up on her doorstep a week ago, Mahitab had—naively—thought he was there to reunite with the two remaining members of his crop. But after they exchanged niceties, Basri got right down to business and presented her and Niharet with his well-crafted arguments about how Temmet was integral to Naktamun.

Mahitab and Niharet were the only remaining members of the crew that had entombed Temmet, the only ones who knew where he could be found. *That* was why Basri had come to see them, and he was willing to pay a steep price for that knowledge.

At first, Mahitab had refused, despite the money. She had no desire to trek back out into the Amonkheti wastes. But then Niharet had pulled her aside, looking wistful, and murmured, “Wouldn’t it be nice to have a home with windows?”

Niharet despised enclosed spaces, as would anyone who had been entombed, as she had. She had been different, before it happened. Opinionated, self-possessed, enamored with her own cleverness. But she’d spoken out of turn one too many times, spoken of gods that were meant to be forgotten. That was all it took to be branded a dissenter. The angels came for her, stole her away even as she screamed and clawed for help. They wrapped her up and locked her—alive—in that sarcophagus, and then paraded her through the streets.

Then came the Hour of Devastation, when everything was lost, and everything was regained. Mahitab found Niharet and freed her, but the girl Mahitab had grown up with, the girl she’d loved, was never the same again.

Mahitab thought of all the times Niharet woke up screaming in their windowless shack, desperate for fresh air. On those nights, Mahitab would step outside with her in the cold and instruct her to take deep breaths. Once the nightmare had passed, they would drag their cots closer and lie face to face. Mahitab wouldn't hold her, because Niharet couldn't fall asleep wrapped in another body. Instead, she'd twine one of Niharet's long curls along her finger like a tree vine and tug, and Niharet would close her eyes, knowing she was safe.

Windows. A tiny feature Mahitab had never before paid attention to. But windows meant sunlight and fresh air. Windows meant Niharet could see an escape route and be at ease.

Of course, Mahitab had accepted Basri's offer.

"We're not just a pair of useless *children* ." The girl twin had snuck up on them, and she spoke the epithet with the sort of disdain usually reserved for insects. "Hazoret will protect her servants. And we're not that young. By Amonkheti standards, we're practically middle-aged."

Mahitab scoffed. "Spoken like a child. Those are the old ways."

"Amonkheti ways!" protested Merinaten.

"No ."

They all startled and turned to look at Niharet, who had gotten to her feet with a scowl.

"They're not Amonkheti ways," she said slowly. "They are the ways of the Great Trespasser, who decimated us in his thrall. He had no regard for the lives of children, but we do. If we're to survive, to thrive, we need to protect our children." Niharet's eyes were wide. She seemed to tremble from within. Mahitab hurried to her side and put a steady arm on her stiff shoulder.

To Mahitab's surprise, Basri swept his heavy white cape aside and knelt at their feet.

"They will be protected, Niharet, I promise you that," he said solemnly, looking up at her like a penitent. "You have my word. My life for theirs, if that's what it takes."

Pretty words , thought Mahitab. But ultimately meaningless .

The five of them set out at dusk. Mahitab had learned long ago that to survive the desert, you traveled at night when it was cool and rested by day, when the suns were so hot they scorched your skin.

Mahitab left Naktamun behind reluctantly. Over the past few years, the city had begun to heal, to become a place worth living in, and it was a paradise compared to the Broken Lands. With the Ghirapur Grand Prix coming up, the city was even more lively, the preparations sending everyone into an excitable frenzy. Mahitab wasn't sure what to expect from the race, but it would be something different from what any of them had ever seen, and that was enough for her to look forward to it.

The cramped mud and limestone structures of Naktamun gave way to open space and shifting sand. The horizon ahead of them was endless and dark, like a gateway to another world. Mahitab's gait slowed as her feet dug into the dunes. The twins had been chattering to one another, but they quieted once the march began in earnest. There was no breath for empty talk when you needed to focus all your energy on putting one foot in front of the other. Sweat beaded on Mahitab's back, then turned clammy as the temperature steadily dropped. The heavy breeze was laden with grains of sand that scraped roughly against any exposed bit of skin.



Art by: Ron Spencer

As they marched, the sky darkened, the lights of Naktamun minuscule pinpricks in the distance. A trail of milk-white stars looked down upon them, and the plump round moon shone ivory-gold. The milky constellations painted along the blue-black sky were what Mahitab used to find her way. In the vastness of the desert, they were her only anchor.

To their credit, the twins marched without complaint, though Mahitab could hear them struggling to catch their breath. She allowed them a brief pause to take sips of water, but did not allow anyone to linger.

Hours later, when Mahitab spied the violet-pink skeins of morning creeping along the horizon, she stopped.

“We’ll set up camp here,” she told the others.

No one had the energy to speak. They set up a single large tent—far easier and safer to share one shelter than worrying about several—and crawled into it. They ate a shoddy dinner of jerky, dried apricots, and walnuts.

“That wasn’t so scary,” said Merinaten. “I told you Hazoret would protect us. She guides our way.”

“We got lucky,” said Mahitab flatly. “And we’re not even there yet.”

Basri’s jaw hardened. “You could do to speak of our gods with a little more respect.”

Mahitab smirked. “You switching allegiances so easily? I thought you were Oketra’s man?”

Niharet leaned forward. “Perhaps we’re protected by other gods.” Her voice was quiet, but it rang with a conviction Mahitab remembered well.

“Surely you can’t mean the insect gods?” Basri demanded. “The scorpion murdered Oketra.”

“The Great Trespasser brought ruin to all things.” Niharet did not look at Basri, but at her own fidgeting fingers. “But the Chitin Court is blameless for his crimes. Is Hazoret to blame for all those who died in the trials?”

“Hazoret has made amends,” interrupted Basri. “After what was done to you, Niharet, I’d thought you—”

“That’s enough,” Mahitab cut in sharply.

The twins looked on with interest, eyes wide and mouths slightly open, ready for a fight, but Basri only shook his head and settled down on his side, readying himself for sleep. Niharet pulled her knees to her chest and looked away.

“We’ll take guard duty in shifts,” Mahitab announced. She turned to the twins. “You two will start. I’m trusting you to keep each other awake, and to wake me up for next shift.”

They nodded eagerly, pleased to be assigned a responsibility, and lifted the tent flap to settle just outside of it. Under the light of the rising suns, their shadows were outlined against the fabric of the tent. Mahitab let the trill of their whispers lull her into an uneasy sleep.

Their morning passed without incident. Once the first sun had sunk past the horizon, they packed up and began again. Mahitab pushed them hard. They could make it to the tomb by next sunrise if they didn’t stop. Mahitab’s bones ached with the effort of trudging through the dense sand dunes, her feet deep sinking with every step, but at least that was the only thing she had to worry about.

But the quiet in itself was worrying. The Broken Lands may not have carried much life, but they ought not to be *this* silent. Mahitab walked with her shoulders high and tense, her neck constantly swinging back and forth, on high alert. She swore she kept seeing things out of the corner of her eye, but the desert had a way of making you lose yourself to the vagaries of hallucinations.

Niharet sidled up to her and tugged on her sleeve. “Are you all right?”

Mahitab shrugged. “We’re nearly there.”

“Are we really?” Marunaten jogged up to them. “That’s good, because Meri’s getting tired.”

“I’m fine!” came Merinaten’s exasperated response, her voice distant. Mahitab stopped walking and looked back. Basri walked only a few paces ahead of Merinaten, but that child should not be at the rear of their group.

“Merinaten!” Mahitab called. “Come closer.”

Merinaten glanced up at her, the bags under her eyes evidence of the exhaustion she so desperately wished to deny. Basri glanced back at her and paused, waiting until she caught up.

There was a stillness to the air that made the hair on the back of Mahitab’s neck rise. The desert sands seemed to shift beneath their feet like a mirage.

When the sandworm erupted from beneath the sands and swallowed Merinaten, none of them could have done a thing about it.



Art by: Brent Hollowell

Basri moved first, before the massive worm, squealing and thrashing, sprayed sand everywhere. The creature's screeches mingled with Marunaten's screams for his sister.

Mahitab pulled out her khopesh without waiting for her vision to clear. When she could see again, she looked first for Niharet and found her crouched close by, one hand covering her eyes, the other on her khopesh. Safe, for now.

Basri swung his spear in a wide arc, and a wave of sand rose. It hit the worm at its base, sending it careening off balance. Basri cut his spear through the air, this time sending a rope of sand onto the creature's head, knocking it down to the ground. Its jaws sagged open, revealing a struggling Merinaten, impaled on its many teeth.

The girl was *alive*.

Mahitab ran as fast as she could and leapt on the worm's head. She tried not to shudder at the feel of the worm's slick, undulating skin beneath her as she raised up her blade and sank it to the hilt in the creature's head. Hot blood bubbled from the wound, stinking of rotting meat and metal. The worm shuddered, then lay still.

Marunaten hadn't stopped screaming his sister's name. He climbed inside the worm's mouth before Mahitab had had a chance to get down. Basri caught up to him, and Niharet lingered behind them all, her back to them, her eyes carefully keeping watch for any other creatures.

"Patience, Marunaten." Basri laid a hand on the boy's arm. "We have to extract her carefully." Basri's voice was calm, and his hands steady, but his brown skin was blanched with fear.

Mahitab slid down, landing in an unsteady crouch. The blood on her hands was already coagulating, like curdled milk, and she fought the bile that rose up in her throat. She pushed her way through everyone to Merinaten, whose arm and leg had both been impaled.

“Niharet, with me!” barked Mahitab. “Basri, get her legs. Marunaten, stay *back*.” The boy’s face had turned a sickly shade of green, and he was much too anxious to be of any real use.

Merinaten breathed rapidly, eyes scrunched shut in pain. Mahitab crouched behind her and placed her arms beneath her shoulders.

“We’re going to lift you out, Merinaten,” Mahitab said firmly. “It’s going to hurt, but you’ll be all right. Everyone grab a limb, and on my count—one, two, lift!”

Merinaten screamed, and she was free. Basri lifted her into his arms and carried her out of the sandwurm’s mouth, then set her very gently onto the sand. He removed his white cape, folded it up, and placed it beneath her head.

Mahitab jerked her chin at Niharet, who had already opened her bag. She took out gauze, honey, and adhesive. She settled quietly beside Merinaten and began to work on the leg, which was bleeding far more rapidly than the arm. Marunaten knelt beside his sister and clutched her free hand in both of his own, his tears like rivers on his dusty skin.

They worked fast, because that was all they knew how to do, and by the end all Mahitab could say was that Merinaten was still alive.

Mahitab cursed. This could have happened to any one of them, but the fact it was the child hurt more.

“We have to go back!” said Marunaten.

“I’m *fine*, Meru,” said Merinaten, her voice hoarse from screaming.

“We’re only about an hour away,” said Mahitab. She drummed her fingers on her knee impatiently. She didn’t want to be the one to force Merinaten to continue, but they were *so* close, and she was loath to start this trek all over again, even if Basri was willing.

She glanced at him, and she saw it all in the stricken look on his face: he couldn’t afford to pay her again. This was his only chance to find Temmet.

He swallowed, then placed a solid hand on Marunaten’s shoulder. “It’s all right, lad. I’ll carry Meri.”

Mahitab pursed her lips, torn between annoyance and ugly satisfaction. So, the pragmatist in Basri had won, after all. So much for his pretty words.

Basri lifted Merinaten onto his back. She bled all over his white cape and armor, her head lolling on his shoulder, and they began their march once more. Mahitab led the way, and Niharet was forced to cover the rear. Mahitab kept glancing back at her, watching Niharet look over her shoulder every other minute.

And then, Mahitab saw it in the distance, the weak light of dawn reflecting off its limestone facade: a pyramid, half-buried in the sand, but still the height of five people stacked atop one another.



MAXIME MINARD

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Art by: Maxime Minard

"You're certain?" said Basri quietly. "Temmet is here?"

Mahitab pointed at the steadily lightening sky, where the stars still lingered as dawn approached. "I know my constellations."

"It's just so ... unadorned," said Basri.

"We were going for safe, not adorned," said Mahitab, wryly. She hesitated. "The honored dead had been used for long enough. They needed a place of true rest. We didn't want them to be found." Her words hung heavily, accusatorily, but Basri said nothing.

Mahitab led them to the back of the pyramid until she found what she was looking for. She'd marked this stone herself when they'd left, just in case, and it marked the entrance, even if that entrance was currently buried under a pile of sand. But that's what Basri was for.

"Here," said Mahitab, pointing at the stone.

Basri set Merinaten down gently into her brother's arms. He raised his spear and very slowly the sand began to rise. It looked like sugar, glittering in the dawn. Mahitab had never thought sand could be beautiful. Slowly, the entrance began to emerge, though it was recognizable only to Mahitab: a slightly discolored series of limestones that had a hollow backing and could be kicked in with just the right amount of pressure.

"May I?" She reached for Basri's spear. After a moment of hesitation, he handed it over, and Mahitab slammed its base against the stones. One of them shifted back very minimally.

"Here, let me," said Basri. He took back his spear and began to push at the stones. He worked until a sheen of sweat had built up on his skin, and the entrance was about the size of a large window, just wide enough to wriggle through.

Mahitab entered first, crawling on her hands and knees. The tomb enveloped her like a cloak, the complete darkness nothing like the star-speckled night of the desert. The stale air, thick with dust, made her cough. Mahitab shook her head to steady herself. She worked quickly to light her torch. Firelight washed over the plain corridor, with its low ceiling and dirt floor. She called for the others to come inside.

Niharet came first, her breath hitching, becoming shallower. Her hands were clenched into tight fists.

Mahitab cupped her cheeks. "It's all right. We're not trapped." She took a deep breath and nodded at Niharet to do the same. Niharet closed her eyes, her hands finding Mahitab's wrists and squeezing hard until her breathing slowed.

Next came Marunaten, and then Basri with Merinaten held awkwardly in his arms. He handed her over to the three of them, and they struggled to bring her in gently. The girl was brave; she had clearly bitten her lip through the immense pain, and her face was pale, but she didn't make a sound. Finally, Basri joined them.

They walked the length of the narrow corridor, the ceiling slowly rising with every step. Finally, they arrived at an archway, and when they stepped through it, the ceiling rose so high that even Basri could reach up his hands and not touch it. They were in a large, square room, completely empty except for a single sarcophagus in the center.

In a low whisper, Basri asked, "That's him?"

Mahitab nodded, staring at the simple sarcophagus. "That's Temmet."

Niharet was the first to approach the sarcophagus. She laid her hand against it, eyes clouded, likely thinking of her own entombment.

Basri approached carefully, almost reverently, and began to push open the top of the sarcophagus.

Mahitab only caught a glimpse of Temmet, charred lazotep covered in wrappings, when a raspy, ragged voice from somewhere behind them said, "That's quite enough."

Mahitab whirled, her khopesh already held aloft at her side. Before her stood a group of seven people, and all but one of them undead. The one who stood at the center of the group was tall, and might have once been a man, but was now just a skeletal face wrapped in armor and draped in tatters. His eyes glowed from two holes in his skull, and in his grasp was a spear topped with a sharpened half-sun.



Art by: Piotr Dura

“What’s going on?” asked Merinaten, her voice high.

“Temmet’s body belongs to us.” The creature punctuated the declaration by pounding his spear once into the ground.

Though Mahitab’s heart pounded at the sight of the undead, she managed to hold her voice and weapon steady. “And just who might you be?”

The creature inclined its head. “Who are we? We are the loyal followers of the Chitin Court. We serve the return of the old ways.”

Mahitab cursed. *What were monarchs doing out here?*

Basri moved to stand beside Mahitab. “What would you want with Temmet’s body?” he demanded.

“The Scarab calls his wayward son home.” The monarch inclined its head. “We are prepared to fight you for the body.” Behind him, the other undead seemed to stand straighter, stiller, poised to attack.

“As are we—” But then Basri’s voice cut off with a sharp intake of breath, and Mahitab turned to look.

Niharet was at Basri’s back, her khopesh held at his neck. She smiled sadly at Mahitab, her eyes glossy but determined.

“Listen to them, Mahi,” Niharet whispered.

“Niharet.” Mahitab blinked at her, unsure what she was seeing. “What are you doing? Let him go.”

“No,” said Niharet simply.

Mahitab tried to think, but she felt like she'd been hit over the head. "I don't understand."

"Don't you?" Niharet smiled sadly. "I want to bring back the Chitin Court. Our true gods."

"Those gods have been twisted by the Great Trespasser—" Basri began, but Niharet pressed her khopesh against his throat to quiet him.

"And they defended us against the Phyrexians," said Niharet calmly. "The Chitin Court saved me from an ignoble death in Hazoret's arena. Amonkhet's oldest and truest divinities, despite everything. Only with their return can our corruption be unwound. Hazoret's way is failure and death." Her serene, assured tone sent shivers down Mahitab's spine. "Please put down your khopesh, Mahi. Make this easy."

Surely this was a dream, a mistake, because otherwise—how many times had Niharet lied to her? How much of herself had she hidden away? Had Mahitab ever truly known her at all? Mahitab lowered her khopesh, ignoring the looks of disbelief from Basri and the twins. She wasn't going to fight Niharet. She couldn't.

"Go on, Munhatep," said Niharet to the monarch. "Take the body."

Munhatep handed his spear over to one of his companions and marched forward. Marunaten scrambled back, dragging his sister with him. Munhatep moved far too swiftly for a dead man. It seemed his strength was magnified as well, for he lifted Temmet as though he weighed nothing more than a grain of sand.

"They're going to leave now," said Niharet. "And you're going to let them." "Mahitab," said Basri, his teeth grit. "You cannot let this happen. They'll desecrate Temmet's body, ruin him beyond repair and prevent Oketra's return—" Basri cut himself off with a sharp intake of breath, then shut his eyes with a euphoric smile.

When his lips started moving, Mahitab demanded, "What are you doing?"

Basri opened his eyes, and his expression was reverent. "Praying."

The ground beneath them shook with the force of a distant roar.

Then the top of the pyramid tore right off.

Debris and loose sand rained into the tomb. Mahitab dropped her torch, but it didn't matter; the dark chamber was now completely exposed to the scorching suns. Basri took the chance to throw off Niharet, who stumbled back, startled. The twins were wrapped up against each other, shielding themselves as best as they could from the rubble.

Mahitab stared up, eyes narrowed, at the massive creature that stared down at them.

A god. It had to be. Its giant golden face was lion-like, with a metallic gilded mane. There was no mistaking its divinity; Mahitab felt it in her veins, in her muscles, in the tension of the air around them, like the world was holding its breath. That bow he held: that was Oketra's bow.

"A false god," said Munhatep, sneering. He still held Temmet's body aloft. "Aim for its eyes!"

Two of his followers pulled out bows the length of their entire bodies and aimed at the god. But it was a comical sight: the arrows simply bounced off its golden skin. The god looked at them contemptuously, until they ran out of arrows.

"Back through the tunnel!" shouted Munhatep.

Quicker than the blink of an eye, the god crouched and extended its fingers into the tomb, and grabbed Temmet and Munhatep who held him. He tossed Munhatep aside; Mahitab winced at the crunching sound his body made when it struck the floor.

The god stood to its full height, towering over them all and blocking out the suns. “**Followers of corruption! Your gods abandon you!**” it said, the voice deep and rough and male, like a lion made human. It held out its hand, Temmet’s body filling its palm.

Mahitab felt the air compress, and there was a moment of heavy silence, like their entire plane had been frozen in time. Then there came a blinding light; Mahitab squeezed her eyes shut, and when she could open them again, Temmet’s body was free of corruption. He stood on his own two feet, in the palm of the god’s hand. From what Mahitab could see of the young man, he seemed dazed, but unafraid when he looked at the lion god, almost like he’d expected this.

“Who are you?” Basri shouted, on his knees. “That is Oketra’s bow you wield.”

The god slowly turned his head, and it was like a statue shifting over the decades. “**I am Ketramose. Your faith in my mother, Oketra, led me here, to her most loyal servants.**” The god turned back to Temmet. “**Your work is unfinished, Temmet. As you served my mother, you will now serve me. Together you and I will herald a new dawn.**”

Ketramose turned his back and began to march toward Naktamun. With each massive stride, he faded into the desert, and from their sight.

Mahitab sank to her knees. The rest of the monarchs fled, though the single mortal with them lingered, looking at Niharet, who was still staring after Ketramose. Then her eyes narrowed, her face hardened into something Mahitab no longer recognized.

“What just happened?” asked Marunaten, dazed. “What was that?”

“A new god,” said Basri. Something in his voice—like he might be saved or shattered at the very next breath. Finally, he looked up, and he smiled like he was seeing the sun for the first time in a very long while. “Even in death, Oketra guides me.”

Niharet walked toward the mortal, but Mahitab snatched her wrist and wrenched her back. “Where do you think you’re going? How long have you been lying to me?”

“I never lied,” said Niharet, infuriatingly calm. “I would have shared my beliefs with you, but I knew you wouldn’t understand. You don’t have faith, Mahi. You never did. You only do what’s expected of you.”

Mahitab blanched, stung by her bluntness. “I came out here for you! So that we could have a decent home, a life together—”

“I know,” said Niharet sadly. “I wish I could live in that home with you. But there are more important things.”

Words left Mahitab. This was not Niharet, her best friend, the woman she loved, the girl she’d grown up with. But she refused to give up on her. “Well then, come back with me, and tell me all about your faith.”

Tears glimmered in Niharet’s eyes. “I’m not going back, Mahi. I’m going with the monarchs.”

“In the Wastes? You’ll die!”

Niharet shook her head. “The followers of the Chitin Court have made the Broken Lands their home. They’ve welcomed me.” Gently, she tucked a stray curl behind Mahitab’s ear. “You could come with me. We could bring the Chitin Court back together.”



Art by: Wayne Wu

Mahitab took a step back, and Niharet nodded knowingly, unsurprised.

“No,” said Niharet softly. “I thought not. Goodbye, Mahi. I hope we see each other again one day.”

Mahitab watched her and the unknown mortal disappear into the tunnel. She would have kept staring after them, dazed, but Basri placed a hand on her shoulder. “I’m sorry,” he said.

Mahitab shook her head furiously, her eyes burning. She shrugged off Basri’s hand, ignoring the hurt look on his face.

With all the venom she could muster, Mahitab said, “Let’s go, Basri. Your new god awaits.”