

Ruins *of* Change



J. R. Dwornik

Sample

Kina stared at the unhappy pit that had appeared beneath her feet with wide-eyed fear. She hadn't expected the floor to give out, and she only barely managed to grab a collapsed pillar to prevent falling in after the ancient stones. She could hear the blocks break and shatter against the hard earth far below.

She focused her determination on the fallen torch, which illuminated the floor only a few feet away. She had survived much to reach this far, she would live to defeat this trap as well. It was her own slim, but strong, arms that pulled her out of the hole and back onto solid floor once more. She breathed heavily from both fear and exertion, and numerous scrapes burned her shins and forearms, but Kina Ukiel still breathed freely.

This pitfall was easy compared to her escape from the farmlands of Faneria. She had been young and naïve then, and never thought just staying alive would be a struggle on the streets. She fled the kingdom and survived royal knights, bands of thieves and horrible creatures. A simple hole in the floor would not do her in.

With a heavy sigh, she again peered into the abyss. The urge to throw herself into the pit vaguely pulled at her soul, but Kina refused to let go until her life was stolen from her final grasp. Letting herself die would be to surrender, to admit that she was not strong enough. Disturbed, she pulled her eyes away from the pit.

Gathering up her torch once more, she began to survey the passage with a little more care. The layers of cobwebs, dust and debris concealed an ancient temple. The complex stones that formed the floor had been supported by arrays of wooden timbers and stone pillars, but time had taken the wood and the mortar had long since eroded away. The entire temple had collapsed perhaps as much as a lifetime before Kina breathed in the cool airs for the

first time.

Soon this place would be gone for all time. Roots from trees and other vegetation invaded the ceiling like long brown vines and slowly devoured the last passable tunnels. They would one day clog and collapse the temple completely, but that could be years in the future. There was plenty of time left for today.

Kina slipped her foot along the edge of the pit, seeking loose stones with her toes as she edged forward. Her goal was deeper inside and despite her solitude, she was not alone. Occasionally, she could hear the heavy feet of those who also hunted in the darkness. She could hear their curses and their screams. The life beneath the earth was not one that welcomed humans openly. The gods were claiming their sacrifices today.

Their voices grew soft as Kina continued forward. A few pebbles kicked free by her leather boots dropped within the hole only to hit the dark ground seconds later. The echoes traveled up to her ears as the only accompanying sound to her own breathing.

But this was her place, and despite her black mood, she enjoyed the challenges these ruins presented her. She enjoyed proving she could step above expectations and thrive where few dared venture. This was how she earned her living and she lived better now than she had as a child of Faneria. Windermere, a provincial town near Faneria's center, had been the home to her parents and theirs in turn. It was a place of gathering for people and surrounded by vast fields of fertile green lands. It was often visited by those of the royal house of Faneria, their standard flying high from atop the tallest point of the citadel. Though it was peaceful, Windermere had never been home to her.

Kina dressed well, her yellow shirt only slightly worn and more than a little dusty from her present excursion. Her pants were dyed brown, and coated again with a lighter layer of drying mud from her knees down. She had a vest to match, which sported only a few snags from her previous adventures. When her clothing was cleaned, she would not be mistaken for a villager. She would also not be mistaken for a noble lady for the choice of styles that could only be practical in Kina's world. A flimsy dress would be torn and ruined within minutes of entering such holes.

Drawing herself along the final distance around the hole at last, Kina scurried down the next corridor with short light steps on the uneven floor. She held the torch low so it would not blind her as she looked ahead for more signs of danger. Crumbling temples and unexpected roots were not the only dangers in such places. Sometimes traps lay in wait for the unwary. Worse still, there were creatures that claimed dark tunnels as home.

The tunnel she had chosen narrowed terribly ahead. The walls had collapsed in, leaving only a small hole large enough for a full-grown man to crawl. She moved carefully, keeping her right hand well in front to keep the burning torch clear of her face and hair. It did make it harder to see much

further ahead through the glare of the flame and she needed to travel slowly through the confined space with the smell of burning pitch in her face.

She had learned her lessons well in youth. She had been navigating inside ruins such as these for much of the past seven years of her life. At first she had been forced into passages too narrow for grown men to navigate. She had hated these dark places then.

Soon, however, Kina discovered the signs of people living in these places long ago. Understanding and curiosity replaced anger and helplessness. After years of exploring collapsed corridors such as this, she had become less disposable to the band who had taken her in off the unforgiving streets. Now they needed her. They protected her from the cruel world, and in return she led them to riches unseen in several lifetimes.

Dim light glimmered ahead as the space expanded beyond the tiny cave she crawled through. Kina hastened to escape the enclosed space, anxious to stand once more. Scuffling forward, she exited and rose to her feet with a loud breath of relief.

That was followed by an even louder gasp; the treasure room indeed! When she had heard of this place she had dismissed the idea of a treasure room as a myth. The very thought of a place such as this being left untouched, with the population of Brighton so close, was mystifying. There were two small piles of golden coins and jewelry on an altar next to a stone pedestal and two tall, unlit candles. On the floor were numerous heavy chests, still sealed.

She didn't need any great intellect to decipher that this was an important place. These were offerings, gifts to whatever gods these beings had worshiped before they vanished. Large carved murals on the walls depicted a strange people in various acts of worship amidst the trees at the base of the temple. Often it seemed they cast great spells which summoned fascinating beings to do their bidding. Though they were foreign to her, they were oddly familiar at the same time. She had seen markings like these recently.

As Kina gazed at the ancient works on the wall, a flicker of light caught her eye and drew her attention to the back of the chamber. A deep rectangular box of stone sat alone in the darkness far away from the treasures that dominated the altar.

Tilting her head in curiosity, Kina approached slowly. There were no sources of light here outside her torch and the reflections off the polished gold surfaces. Without any treasures here, she wondered what had caused the reflection of light. More to the point, why was this part of the room neglected?

The unpolished surface of the stone looked oddly foreboding as she approached. It denied her the simple explanation that this place was a temple buried and forgotten. Such uncaring work flew in the face of the elegance of the rest of the chamber.

She leaned over the dark lip and illuminated the inside with her torch. A

shape of a man loomed out of the darkness, and Kina shrieked at the skeletal remains inside.

“Fine,” she declared to herself softly as she tried to calm her heart. She looked about the room and the murals and noted certain images no longer held any mystery. “Not a temple,” she concluded and swallowed deeply. “Burial chamber.” Judging from the images, a very important one too. The carvings showed dozens of people bowing to an object in a great ritual upon a massive temple, though she could now see that it was a casket.

Again she illuminated the skeleton, but this time she did so slowly so that she could study it. This was not the first body she had seen, and a skeleton was by far less gruesome than some bodies she had witnessed. In honesty, she found these far less torturous than the freshly deceased. It made them no less uncomfortable to see.

The body was covered by old material, long ago stolen of its original life much as the man who wore them. A dirty sword lay upon the chest with both thin, boney hands resting upon the hilt. A small, tarnished crown encircled the skull, resting unevenly around the head it no longer fit.

This place was indeed a burial chamber, and for somebody who once held great importance in this land. And much like the commoners of Windermere, he had died and was forgotten. The riches he had tried to take with him instead simply filled the forgotten room along with his fragile bones. All the power he once had was now meaningless as she, the lowest of all people, stood over his rotted corpse.

She whispered quiet prayers to Veran, the Goddess of Change. Though often maligned, Kina found it was always best to stay in Veran’s favor. Those in power feared change, and those in need wished for it nightly. Yet change took all forms and favored few.

A strange object caught Kina’s eye and she focused her attention on it in curiosity. The body had been buried wearing an odd amulet. It looked like it was made of glass, and was intricately carved with some strange writing, but it was no larger than the fingernail on her smallest finger. The way it reflected the firelight drew her eyes into it.

With her free hand, Kina reached in and delicately lifted it from the brittle bones. She avoided pulling, but the ancient leather necklace broke away despite her gentle touch. She hardly noticed.

“Okay, Your Highness,” she muttered as she turned the object over in her hands and studied the bizarre markings, “why be buried with this of all things?”

A deep grinding sound of rock on rock stole her moment of thought and drew her eyes upwards. A stone statue of a man in armor, three times her own height, shifted and was now on the verge of toppling. Even as Kina watched the statue pitched forward and began to plunge downward towards her. She blinked once, hesitating in horror, before tossing herself aside.

Kina hit the ground hard. The torch she had been holding skidded away

and went out amidst the suffocating dust. Coughing in the darkness, Kina lay still and waited for the rubble to settle. Cave-ins were part of the job, but she knew that was no natural event. She opened her eyes and could barely make out the crystal in front of her face. She choked down another cough and grabbed the amulet irritably. She would have to look at it later. She stuffed it into her belt pouch and clipped the leather bag closed.

The cavern was lit again by the light of a torch. Then two. A third joined in as Kina lay in the wrecked burial chamber. She recognized the voices and the appearances of the men who entered now. These were Drago's men, a nasty bunch of sell-swords. Unfortunately, Drago Kramoris wasn't leading them; instead it was a rough and sweaty looking man by the name of Loor who was in charge. Shorter in both stature and temper, Loor was not an impressive man. Thinning, sweaty hair plastered to his head and he wore a scowl that seemed a permanent feature.

"Gold!"

Kina looked to the coffin and nearly sobbed. The stone box had been dealt a direct hit by the falling statue. It had been split and crushed by the massive monument, spreading royal remains amongst the debris. Change was cruel to those fallen from favor.

With a heavy sigh, Kina sat up and regarded the mercenaries coldly. "Have you no respect for the dead?" Her question drew a few looks, though none looked at all chastised by her accusation.

"Do ya hear them complaining?" Loor asked darkly as he gazed about the room at the different treasures. Loor drew his sword and pointed it towards her. "And what've ya been doing down here, missy?"

Kina refused to be ordered around by Drago's men, even if they were more than a little intimidating. She stood slowly, ignoring the question long enough to brush some of the dust from herself before meeting Loor in the eye. "I promised I would find this place for Drago, did I not?" She tried to make her words sound more refined and impressive sounding to further distance herself from the likes of Loor.

"And I promised I would cut ya good if ya followed us down here," an unimpressed Loor responded archly.

A defiant smirk spread across Kina's features. "If I had followed you, I would be still lost in the darkness."

"Mind your manners." Loor unexpectedly charged forward and pulled his sword back in preparation for a vicious blow. Kina stumbled backwards and fell in a heap upon a pile of debris. She saw the sword begin to swing downward and she shrieked in fright.

The blow never landed, however. Kina opened her eyes to see Loor paused, looking over his shoulder back to the passage they had entered through. The rest of the men had parted and allowed Drago to walk inside.

"You lay a finger on her, Loor, and I'll have your bones spread from here to the Seas of Tremaine."

Kina smiled at her protector as he stared down at Loor. Even without his armor she could see him as a leader. He stood tall and firm amidst his men. His brown hair was nicely managed and his skin was clean. Next to his men he could have been royalty.

“Your thieving wench was about to make off with the treasure,” Loor accused without backing down. Another scathing look with those piercing blue eyes and Loor did resheath his sword.

“I could not steal treasure like this even if I had intended to,” Kina snapped back. “Do you believe I could carry even a portion out of this crypt myself?”

Her remark went unanswered as all attention was instead upon an angered Drago. “You promised me you could do better, Loor. Yet she is here before you again. Why is it you give me these empty words?”

Loor dropped to one knee and bowed his head. “Forgive me,” he pleaded, hoping not to incur Drago’s infamous temper. The smile on Kina’s face grew slightly upon seeing the sell-sword fall into his proper place. Drago paid him little attention and instead approached where she lay in the dust. He alone loved her in this world. Not her parents who couldn’t feed her, not her former lord who made her toil in the fields, only Drago Kramoris. He had found her and freed her from a life of servitude in order to help his band reach ancient treasures.

Kina raised her hand with confidence, smiling at Drago in anticipation of his help in standing. Instead he smacked her hand hard enough that the pain burned fiercely in her fingers and tingled in her palm.

“You were told to stay at the inn. I’ll not have my men ignore my orders and I’ll certainly not have the likes of you ignore me.”

Kina blinked in shock, cupping her injured hand close to her chest. “I meant only to help you. I did not mean to displease you.”

Drago was angry with her, and simple apologies never appeased him. “Be silent!” Kina pinched her lips together tightly at Drago’s words. “I spared your life, wench, and that means your life belongs to me. Disobey me again and I swear it will be the last.”

Drago moved on, ignoring her and gold alike. Kina sniffled, but maintained her composure and silence. He could not kill her. She needed Drago and he needed her. His band had not been so successful before she had accepted her role, but she would not risk further angering him. She had witnessed the madness of his temper and she would not be the subject of that wrath.

Drago stepped on one of the bones scattered across the tomb and deliberately pulled the dust covered sword from the grip of the dead king’s ancient limb.

“This is why we’re here,” he proclaimed to his men, holding up the large thin-bladed weapon for all to see. Cheers rose with the men who celebrated their prize. Kina stayed silent as she was told but smiled defiantly. She had

discovered the entrance to the caves and pointed the way, and she too was enjoying the moment of victory, even if she had momentarily fallen from favor.

“The Duke will pay well for that trinket,” Loor cackled, looking to the men as though he had discovered it.

Drago grinned as much as his men as he cradled his treasure. “Gather up anything of value. I want this place stripped bare before nightfall.”

“With pleasure,” Loor answered. He leered at the treasures and Kina felt disgusted by the group of greedy men. Looting the tomb in such a manner felt as wrong as leaving the gold buried and forgotten. She knew the money would be spent on women and drink in various towns over the next few months. What remained would be spent on trivial items, which they would someday give away for favors in other towns. No joy would be spread to the people who served as slaves to their masters.

Drago noticed her. “Kina, you will return with me.” His displeasure with her remained in his voice, but she could see excitement in his eyes. Despite his temper, she was pleased that he had requested her company.

She followed him through the tunnel his men had traveled, giving no further thought to his anger. She knew she was lucky to have his protection in this cruel world. Instead she devoted her time to the casual study of the traps the men had found. One never knew when such traps could be encountered again.

The tunnel was wider and clear of much of the debris than the path she had found. As she expected, however, it had been more dangerous because of this. Two of the men, nameless to her, were left where they died when they triggered a hail of arrows. Their blood seeped into the earth between the stones. She forced her eyes away from their ashen faces. She tried, failingly, to banish the thoughts of when she too would fall from Veran’s favor.

Sunlight was a welcome change to the shadows and cobwebs. The vibrant colors of the surface world were filled with greens and blues. Within sight of the caverns was the great castle of Brighton. A small guard of horseback riders raced along one of the dusty roads bearing the colors of Edan’s southern-most province of Deverell. Farmers gave them little attention as they worked their fields in the hot sun. The temple was a mere mound of collapsed debris now and the entrance a forbidding looking hole in the ground amidst a small cluster of trees.

There were horses tied near, but Drago had not given her one to ride. Instead she walked alongside as he rode. Kina was long used to such treatment. Horses cost money and often there was little enough to go around after the initial celebrations. She didn’t mind as it gave her time to reflect upon her experiences once more.

How many centuries had passed since the forgotten king had died? What had this land looked like then? The fields of green farms dominated the landscape of the region. Trees were few and distant between, but she had

seen the roots within the temple. Once there were trees here and the land had been much different. She closed her eyes as she walked and imagined the forests that had once surrounded the temple and the town that had been here before.

As they approached the castle gates, Kina once more marveled at the stunning size of the city walls. The wall was built from massive stone blocks, carved and carried to this location. It had taken years to construct these walls, and Kina didn't doubt that many of the workers died so that a long dead king had one more fortification to his name.

And despite the walls, Brighton was typical of every city she had visited before. People crowded into the dirty streets and a certain stench hung off those that lived in them. Peddlers swindled their customers, and soldiers would shove the weak out of their path as they went along their way without purpose. The citizens of this 'fair land' would accept their feeble existence and pay the taxes that allowed their lord to feast in comfort.

Her simple life in Drago's little band of sell-swords may seem inhospitable to the people here, but she found their way of life just as alien. She looked down on those who stared at her whether they be peddlers or peasants. She wondered which oddity they found unusual about her. Was it her clothing, which was so unusual for a woman? Or perhaps her short ginger-colored hair, a rare color in this region, matched only by an unlady-like style? Was it the powerful company she had in Drago Kramoris that drew their looks? Or perhaps it was her freedom they found so compelling.

"Does Brighton make you uncomfortable?" Drago's question caught her by surprise. She peered up into his blue eyes and once more marveled at their depths. Uncertain of her words, she found herself only nodding silently.

He laughed in amusement. "Relax Kina," Drago told her. "We shall leave this place behind us soon." He swung his bag off his horse and Kina snatched it as it bounced into her chest. It felt heavy, and the shape of the object inside told her it was the sword he had claimed from the crypt.

"Take this up to the room with you and do not let it from your sight. Brighton is rife with thieves." Mirth slipped away and was replaced once more by the seriousness that suggested that she do so without argument. "And have the keeper prepare you a bath. We shall dine with nobility tonight."

Kina blinked in surprise as she clung to the bag as though her life depended on it. "As you wish," she responded mechanically. Drago's horse picked up the pace and Kina stopped and watched him go. His dark blue clothes stood out among the townsfolk nearly as much as her own, so she was able to watch him for quite some time before he disappeared amidst the crowd.

She made her way inside the inn and did as she was told. In the privacy of

her room, Kina allowed herself to relax. Her traveling bags lay next to the bed where she had left them and showed no signs of being disturbed. Content that everything was as she had left it, she began to unload her tools on the foot of the bed. Her dagger, while not fanciful, was a gift from Drago and served her well. She lay it next to Drago's bag. Her pouches contained the few coins that represented her own personal wealth. She frowned as she rediscovered the crystal in another of her pouches.

She looked at the odd inscriptions and found them unlike anything she had seen within the caves. If it was writing, it predated the burial chamber, much like the writing in the chamber predated the writing of today. While she could read none of it, she did have the stylized lettering well memorized.

The door opened with a creak and Kina instinctively let her right hand fall to the dagger on the bed. A small, raven-haired girl entered with a bucket filled with steaming water. "I'm sorry if I am intruding," she said nervously as she tried not to look at Kina. "I'm here to prepare your bath."

Kina smiled gently and brought her hand away from the dagger, knowing that the weapon was concealed from the door. "Thank you," she responded and not knowing what more to say, she returned to studying the crystal. Light refracted within, creating colors and flashes that drew her eyes within its structure. If a dead king had chosen this of all things to wear around his neck when he was to be buried, then it would hold great importance to him. Alas, without being able to read the inscriptions, she doubted that she could decipher what purpose it had held.

"Excuse me, your bath is ready," the serving girl interrupted again.

Kina turned and faced the raven-haired girl and gave her full attention for the first time. How long had she been studying that crystal? The tub was now full and gentle trails of steam rose from its waters. She noticed the girl was pale and appeared frightened, much as she herself had been at that age. She had not been much older when Drago rescued her from her dreary life in Faneria.

"I was once a serving girl like yourself. You have nothing to fear of me," Kina told her, though the girl did not seem at all relieved to hear the words.

"If you say so, miss. Would you like for me to wash your clothes while you bathe?"

Kina considered it only briefly. She was unused to being served, but at the same time she knew time would be short. If she were indeed meeting with nobility this night, then it would be best if she spent the extra coin to wear something unmuddied. She dropped the crystal back into her pouch and left it on the bed near her dagger and sought more usable currency from her change purse.

"I would very much like that. And if you could," Kina said uncertainly, "could you find me a leather boot lace I can use for a necklace?"

"As you wish," the girl answered. "Do you wish for me to come back for your laundry?"

Kina shook her head. “No, it’s okay. I’ll bathe now. How much does all this cost?”

“Not much for someone like yourself, I assure you,” the girl answered quickly. “Only two Gulls.”

Kina paused unbuckling her belt and looked over her shoulder at the serving girl. Two of the silver coins called Gulls this kingdom minted wasn’t much, if she was a lord or favored knight. Still, tonight Kina would have a lot of money. She removed two of the silver coins from her small purse and looked at the crude likeness to the late King of Edan. It had been eight years since the passing of the king, and with no strong heirs to the throne Edan had fallen into chaos. Many of the nobility had become warlords in their attempts to claim the crown. She gathered up a copper coin as well before sealing the small pouch and letting it drop to the floor. Kina winced as she noted it didn’t sound much like metal on metal as it hit. She hoped Loor wouldn’t cut into her share of the treasure again.

Handing over the coins and her roughly folded vest, the serving girl seemed more interested by the mud that flaked off her shirt and dropped to the floor than the added tip to the fee. “What do you do, if you don’t mind me asking?” There was a bit of a tremor in her voice as if she had ventured too far with her curiosity.

Kina tried to relax her with a friendly smile. She removed her shirt and handed it to the girl as she walked past to the waiting water. “I find treasures.”

“Treasures? Where?” The girl seemed awed by the quick answer and her eyes lit up with excitement. Rather pleased the girl showed interest, Kina tried to open up a bit more of a conversation.

“Here and there. Even here in Brighton. Civilizations long gone once lived in these very lands. Their riches are often left forgotten.” Kina folded her pants over her arms and thought about the race that had built the temple before those of Edan expanded to the region. “When a people move on, they can’t take everything with them. So people like me travel great distances to find what was left behind.”

“It sounds terribly frightening.”

Kina’s eyes snapped fully open. “Frightening?”

“Being outside the safety of the town walls makes me very afraid. The Darkwood forests are not more than a day’s walk. There are creatures there that venture out and steal away the unwary.”

A small sound of mirth escaped Kina’s lips as she thought of the safety provided by such walls. She had seen those walls close up and knew that they were little protection against a resolute force. She nearly said as much when she recalled her walk along the wall. She had seen unusual writing scribed onto the stone blocks. Kina pictured a corner of the wall in her mind and realized that they shared many of the same stylings of that in the cave.

Suddenly, Kina didn’t feel much like bathing. “On second thought,” she

said distantly, “just knock the mud from those and return as soon as you can. I won’t be long.”

The serving girl looked disappointed, but knew when she had been dismissed. She fled with the clothing as Kina lowered herself into the tub impatiently. Ironically, this bath was one of the few times Drago permitted such extravagance and Kina found herself wanting to be done with it. She settled herself by trying to focus her memories upon the cave and the strange markings within. She had heard of a people with long ears in tales told around mugs of ale. Stories of a race of magicians and secrets that vanished long ago. Just enough adventurers spoke of sightings to keep the old stories alive. Kina herself had listened to a scarred old man tell of seeing one as a child.

She doused her hair with water and ran her fingers through to prevent tangles. Drago sought power through riches, and Kina was determined to help him, but like today, she couldn’t help but feel a strange compulsion to explore the ruins. When she was alone, walking where few had ventured in a lifetime, she felt powerful. An illusion of course, she reasoned. There were so many dangers that she couldn’t let herself believe for a moment that she was strong enough without Drago.

By the time the serving girl returned with the dusty but no longer mud-caked clothing, Kina was nearly dry and pulling her gear together. There was no conversation this time as Kina accepted her clothing. She had her shirt on before she realized the girl was holding out a length of leather string. Kina offered her thanks and immediately measured it by eye quickly. It was a bit longer than she had hoped, but a quick cut with her dagger and it was well enough. The crystal weighed against her chest in a cool and oddly reassuring manner. She tucked it inside her shirt to hide it from view.

She slipped Drago’s prized sword deep within her travel sack, though the wrapped hilt poked free of her bag by several hand spans. So anxious to leave, she nearly forgot her dagger where it lay on the bed. Though Kina had few real belongings, she felt great desire to keep close the little she did hold claim to. With the dagger slipped safely away on her belt, Kina left the room and the inn for the last time.

The streets of the old city were well worn and populated with many peddlers and townsfolk. Many more were soldiers of the Duke of Deverell. The people still looked to her with discomfiting intensity. The soldiers leered at her and made comments toward her attire, the peddlers attempted to woo her with jewels and flowers. The worst were the scowls by the common folk who merely looked on as she passed. Their fear and dislike of her made her uncomfortable. Every town was the same. The common folk looked at her like a criminal, never hesitating to step aside but ever watchful of her.

Kina was quick to slip away from the main streets and into the shadows of

the city wall. She recalled that she had first sought the shadows to escape for awhile and that she had come across the strange markings by accident. At the time she had found the peculiar writing interesting, but she hadn't recognized that it was another language entirely. If her memory was correct, and she had little reason to doubt it, then these symbols and writings were the same as those found inside the ruin.

Now Kina wondered if she had not found some connection to the ruins here in the city. She looked at the great block of gray stone and marveled at its size. It must have taken many strong backs to lift such a block for any length of time. The city was encircled by thousands of such blocks, but she reasoned few would be marked as such. This stone, however, had the round-shaped letters, and they were the same as those in the burial chamber, though worn by ages. She had no idea as to what it may read, and she doubted that she could find somebody who could read the strange letters, even if she searched the city for weeks. The letters became less distinct around the edges of the block and were not continued on the next stone, but she could see other blocks with similar markings placed randomly within the wall.

For a short time Kina wondered if the wall had stood in the time that the temple towered over the land. It was quite the image she portrayed in her mind, but her imagined city never existed as such. A more probable solution instead replayed as it had in other cities she had visited with Drago. As one city was destroyed, another would be built in its place. No materials would be wasted and much was reused. The temple was likely pulled down stone by stone to build the great wall lifetimes ago.

The temple then would be very old, predating the settlement of this region of Edan. Kina felt the deeply scored letters with her fingers and imagined what the land could have looked like then. These stones would have been squared and the letters finely chiseled. Now they lay open to the elements, slowly decaying over generations. Yet generations had come and gone and even the people who lived in this land had changed, but the ancient temple stones remained as a silent monument. In stories told, the Goddess Veran treasured nature and Kina could not help but agree with the old tales. These stones had held their secrets for generations. Even long after the letters finally faded, the stones would remain.

© 2011 J. R. Dwornik
Purchase the book from
<http://www.brain-lag.com/>