

RIPPLES IN TIME - EXCERPT

THE SEVEN PORTALS
BOOK 3

ANDRE JONES



After a sumptuous dinner, Leonie fell into a deep sleep. She woke early and refreshed. Wandering downstairs, she was then treated to breakfast of various breads and jams, eggs and fried strips of meat, with Arulan and Jesop telling her about the local produce.

Feeling bloated after all the fine dining, Leonie went for a stroll. They insisted on giving her a tour of the town, even a look at the exquisite jewellery made from the locally mined crystals. The jeweller's, like every other building in town, was all stone and iron.

"Wood is hard to source," Jesop explained. "With all the granite lying around, it makes sense to use it. We've artisans from all over Shak'aran to work the quarry and the mines."

"These fetch a huge price in Saa-Na," Jesop told her, proudly showing her a gem.

"Saa-Na?"

"Lyhosa's capital city," Arulan told her.

"I've not seen the like in Delta." Leonie's *thief* mind mentally assessed the jewel's value; it was impressive. *More than I've seen all my years in Delta in this one rock.* "It's truly wonderful," she admitted to them, handing it back with respect. Again, her mind absently took into account the thick bars on the windows and metal-clad doors.

There was a rumble of distant thunder. The weather was closing in and large dark clouds coming from the south-east. Large, flat raindrops blew in from the nearby storm.

As they moved on, any townspeople she passed either bowed or doffed their hats at the trio, and thanking her for yesterday. "Thanks, but there's no need, really." Feeling uncomfortable with all the gratitude and attention, she looked for a convenient avenue to get out of everyone's way.

She saw Rod on the ramparts just as it was starting to rain. "Ah, if I could have a word with Rod about some ideas I

have?" Nice as they were, she hoped Arulan and Jesop would decline going out in the rain. "It might prove very helpful in future attacks."

"By all means. We have a few things to do ourselves, if you'd be so kind to excuse us?"

"Not at all. You have a township to run. You are both too kind." Leonie happily walked out in the rain and made her way up the stairs to Rod. She nodded to a few of the men as they were busy oiling the ballistae.

"Morning. You slept well, I trust?"

"I slept well enough. I was exhausted." She watched as other men covered other ballistae with canvas. "How is it with the fortifications?"

"Just the one damaged ballista. I sent some men out this morning to retrieve what bolts they could find. Not a huge loss, but having more would ease my sleep."

"I can understand. About that ... Yesterday I had a chance to have a look at the underbelly of the l'ith. You no doubt know their joints are the weak spot?"

"I do, but no one wants to crawl under a drone."

"I also saw the difficulty in jabbing them from above with the spears."

"Not a perfect tactic, but the occasional thrust gets an eye and as you've seen already by the dead l'ith outside, we have our successes."

"I don't doubt you for a moment." Leonie looked over the battlements. "See where the downward spikes are located?" She pointed.

"Yes, to prevent them crawling over the wall."

"And the l'ith are there for quite a while."

"They are determined," Rod agreed. "Gives us ample time to jab them."

“These walls are very solid and well built. I assume you have some very fine stonemasons handy.”

“Of course, I’m sure you know we’re also a mining town and there is a quarry in those hills.”

She pointed down the wall. “I’m guessing just over a metre – about three or four feet – below the spikes, would be a good place to have holes so your men can stab the underside of the l’ith.”

“Of course, like arrow-slits. Good idea. I’m sure the stonemason can drill holes of sufficient size.”

“And then normal spears can be used. Save any more men being pulled off the wall. How is he, by the way?”

“A broken arm and leg, unfortunately, but alive, thanks to you.”

“Maybe the spearmen on the wall can have a restraint. Something easily clipped or unclipped as required.”

“You are a treasure trove of ideas.”

“Fresh eyes can see clearer. I’m just glad to help.” The rain started coming harder. “I reckon I might postpone my departure a bit longer, at least until this storm blows over.”

“If the manor house – or the company – gets a bit *stuffy*, there will always be an ale or two for you in the tavern,” Rod offered.

“Sounds great.” She smiled, purring. “I better see what Noldor is up to. Catch you later.”

“Catch me?”

“Sorry, a phrase meaning I’ll see you later, or we’ll meet again.”

“Looking forward to it. I also better attend to the walls before everything rusts.”

With a nod, Leonie leapt off and headed north. *Hey, Noldor. Where are you?*

I am about ten minutes north of you. There is an overhang to rest after yesterday's entertainment. What are your plans?

I was thinking to wait out this storm. She blinked hard as rain dripped into her eyes. She wished she remembered to don her goggles before the storm.

That is a sound plan, considering. I am in no rush, but I might cruise ahead and scout the terrain for tomorrow.

You think the storm will last the night?

It has the smell of it and slow moving. Yes.

Ok then. See you in the morning. Let me know if you find anything interesting. She turned around and raced back to a warm fire.

"I was hoping we'd get to see your wyvern up close," Jesop said. Standing beside his sister, along with Rod, they gathered on the wall to say their good-byes the following morning.

"I hope you can understand his reluctance," Leonie replied. "Any time he's encountered humans, it didn't go well, and you do have weapons that can do him serious harm. Better for all, this way. Even I can't persuade him to do something he doesn't want to do."

"Well," Jesop hid his disappointment. "Thank him for us anyway."

"And to you, for your hospitality." She shook their hands, then turned to the castellan. "I hope those wall improvements work out, Rod."

"I'm sure they will. I have the artisans working on it as we speak. Maybe the next time you pass this way, you can enjoy a few drinks like we did last night."

“I’d like that very much.” She nodded to him, then waved to everyone who had gathered to watch her leave. Leonie quickly put on her goggles, and with much fanfare, she left Arilaso.

“One last show,” she muttered. Even though they knew of some of her abilities, she raced off as fast as she could go. Once out of sight she slowed to conserve power.

Welcome back. I can feel something. She received Noldor’s message as she continued north.

Another wyvern? Where are you?

No, this feels nothing like another wyvern. I believe it is another portal. The energy is familiar. Keep heading north.

A portal here? Leonie questioned.

You did say you thought they all originated in the Vale.

True, according to the sages. I wasn’t expecting to find anything down there other than the ruins of buildings.

There are those too.

Flying at around a thousand metres, Leonie finally spied the wyvern circling ahead.

The ground below was denuded of vegetation like the Badlands on Earth, but without the rad. Many l’ith were out and about; some individuals, some in groups. Their paths seemed random.

“They’re just like ants,” she muttered to herself. She saw many toppled buildings and collapsed walls, roads covered in detritus, elaborately paved areas, gardens now long dead. *Where is it?* she thought to Noldor.

Down in there.

There was a long shadow below them. *In that crevice?* She estimated the uneven crack in the earth was about twenty metres long, but only five at its widest point.

I believe so. From the amount of activity, I also believe this is an entrance to one their hives? The sense is stronger the closer I

get. Strongest when directly over it. As if the crevice itself is somehow amplifying it.



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