

2565 A.D.!

A TALE OF ADVENTURE IN THE SECOND DARK AGE OF MAN

By Jerome B. Bigge

Author's Note

I grew up on the Edgar Rice Burroughs books, having read and reread his entire "Mars" series from "A PRINCESS OF MARS" on forward. Later on I discovered John Norman's "GOR" series. "Gor" and "Barsoom" were utterly different kinds of worlds. Utterly different cultures. In both women usually played but minor roles. On "Barsoom" they waited to be "rescued" by their hero from "a fate worse than death", and on "Gor" they simply didn't get "rescued" at all! In both cases they were just there to be "done to" by someone and nothing more. Usually they were beautiful and pretty brainless. The usual types of "adventure fiction" female characters. Beautiful and dumb. Sometimes blonde. Always young and beautiful. And usually incompetent to do anything more than get into "trouble" and then look ever so beautiful for their handsome and muscular sword-swinging hero. The hero usually being of the sort who in real life would get run over the first time he tried to cross a busy street without his mother's help! His stupidity usually serving to insure that he goes from one fantastic and unbelievable adventure to the next while the reader silently groans at his lack of brains and his dedication to some briefly clad snooty and haughty "Princess"!

And with this in mind, I introduce you to Doctor Lorraine Marie Duval. Not a blonde. Not beautiful. Rather competent. The greatest swordswoman of the 26th Century or any time for that matter! The kind of a woman that will rescue you from boredom or from the TV for a couple days and make you think just a bit about just what a woman like her might just possibly be able to do!

Along with Lorraine I also introduce you to a delightful cast of characters, mostly all female, who will delight and amaze you in this tale of daring do. One of whom is not even human! Lorraine Duval's adventures taking place upon two worlds, the Earth of the 26th Century, and the PLANET MARS! (No, she doesn't meet up with "John Carter", at least not in this story!) I do promise you, however, that Lorraine does "grow" on you, and I think you will learn to love her just as I have over these pages.

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Book One

Chapter One

"Lorraine," my stepdaughter Sharon begged again there beside me, "I don't think you should be doing this. Not now!" Her beautiful soft azure eyes now filled with concern as they looked up into the icy cold angry darkness of mine. The blonde sixteen year old teenager hurrying to keep up beside me, my angry stride long and swift. My high heeled leather booted feet made little sound on the heavy thick carpet underfoot as I strode furiously down that dark hallway past the closed doors of the three vice-presidents of DUVAL COMPUTER INC. The soft rustle of my long black flowing silken dress seemingly loud in my ears as Sharon hurried to keep up at my side. My stylish broad brimmed black hat and net veil partially concealed the hot anger in my face. I am tall, 5'9", and strong as a whip. Far stronger than most women. A tall hard featured aristocratic French brunette that suspected the worst was now happening to her loveless and dying marriage! Why it concerned me so then is a question I can't answer!

Sharon was nicely dressed, better than most teenagers you see. I am a good mother. Perhaps a bit too "strict", but that is another issue you may consider for yourself as I have no wish to get into such things. For tonight she had worn a lovely pale blue silken blouse and a long flowing red and white checkerboard skirt, the color going well with her "peaches and cream" complexion, as did the hose and patent leather sandals she wore. Her hair a glorious golden mane that fell just below her shoulders. She was a beautiful girl in every way, perhaps a bit too "beautiful" for her own good, her sixteen year old body already showing the "promise" of a beautiful womanhood to come. I worried about her. About what would happen if she had to go through another divorce. As a practicing psychiatrist I knew what harm could be done to a young impressionable mind like hers should Sharon have to again suffer the agony of another bitter divorce!

"Please, Lorraine!" Sharon whispered as we halted before the door marked "PRESIDENT". "I don't want to lose you!" No doubt vivid in her mind was the thought she would never see me again if there was an end to the marriage between her father and me. Being only her stepmother, there was a good chance that Jack would be "awarded" Sharon. The thought making me hesitate for a moment. Sharon had become much more than just a stepdaughter to me. Much more. Yet it was still our tenth wedding anniversary. Jack had not come home from the office to help celebrate it with me. I thought that I knew the reason why too. That note from Janet Rogers had told me all that I needed to know about things!

Janet Rogers was a young University student working part-time at DCI on our "work-study" program. A very intelligent young woman who people often mistook for my own daughter, we were so much alike. In her I had found something of a "kindred spirit", someone who I could share my thoughts, my ideas with. I had no doubt that someday she would go far, as she was ambitious and bright, willing to work hard for a goal. It had been with tears in her eyes that she had shoved the note into my hand and then fled down the hallway, leaving me standing there, Sharon at my side. The note having read that Jack was "cheating" on me with Sandra Stephens, his personal secretary, a busty short skirted wide hipped bleached blonde with a big rear end who was the subject of a continuous number of quite "risque" jokes

here at DCI.

"What ever happens, you will be staying with me," I answered, clear in my own mind the thought that American civil law "ended" at the border and that my widowed sister in Baja would be quite glad to take care of Sharon for me should it become necessary to flee the country. Pushing the door open before me as I spoke, and expecting to see exactly what I saw there before me!

"OH SHIT!" I heard Jack gasp as he looked up, Sandra in his lap "naked" but for her bikinis, drinks there on the desk before them along with a white powder whose "identity" I had no doubt. Jack himself naked to the waist, the marks of her lipstick clearly visible there on his chest. I had suspected for some time that Jack might be "cheating" on me, but I thought he at least had better tastes than this cheap little office tart who flaunted her overripe slutty body in front of everyone! I still recalled the last time, when Jack had made a "pass" at Carol Simmons, the wife of a very good friend of mine, and the angry promise I had made him then to divorce him if I ever caught him doing anything like that again! Obviously he had not taken me too seriously!

"I thought you had better sense than this, Jack Duval!" I snapped, my dark eyes searing into his as we glared at each other from across the room. The rich furnishings of his office a silent backdrop to what passed between us now. Sharon at my side now clinging to me as if she feared losing me this very instant. Her young world suddenly turned horribly upside down. The bleached blonde hussy who had caused all this trouble clutching her red nylon dress to herself as she stood there in the corner, terror showing on her child-like features. I knew her kind all too well. Money "attracts" them like shit attracts flies! A bleached blonde slut who could type and take dictation, but otherwise little different than her sisters out selling their half-clad slutty bodies out there on the street corners of Los Angeles!

"She's at least a woman, which is more than I could ever say for you, Lorraine!" Jack snapped back in reply. His gray eyes cold as arctic ice as they burned into mine from across his desk. His hands balled into furious fists on its rich polished oak surface. Sharon there at my side clinging tightly to my arm. The beautiful teenage girl looking first at me and then at her still handsome blond haired father. The hurt now showing in her lovely eyes as she looked up at me. I hated myself for what I had done to her, but I felt it best that she know the "TRUTH" firsthand!

I felt "betrayed" that he would do such a thing to me. Especially with someone like that, Sandra being nothing more than a cheap "TART"! I had not been a "demanding" wife like so many I knew. I had never denied him my slim body whenever he wanted it. I had gone along with whatever he wanted me to "do" there in the bedroom, worn whatever costumes he wanted me to wear. I thought we had a good sexual relationship if nothing else. I certainly didn't deserve to be treated like this! I clung to Sharon like a drowning sailor lost in the middle of the ocean to a water-logged life-preserver. She was all I left now! My marriage was "dead" and nothing could ever bring it back to life now after seeing all this! I am not one who can "forgive and forget" such things!

"You know what this means, Jack," I answered, my voice cold as ice, its tone showing the hurt that I felt. I had warned him before of what would happen if I caught him with another woman after the "pass" he had made with Carol. That time I had "forgiven" him. This time I could not. Sharon standing silently at my side, her hand on my arm. She was all that I had left now of my dead marriage. I briefly clasped her arm, smiled, as if to tell her how much I appreciated her standing by me just then!

"Yes, I know what this means," Jack replied, sitting there behind his desk, naked to the waist, the marks of Sandra's lipstick smeared all over his chest. Reaching down, opening the drawer to his desk as I stood there. Then adding in icy tones, "I hope you do". The blued snub-nosed revolver suddenly in his hand making me start with surprise and stunned disbelief that he would actually be stupid enough to pull a gun

on me!Sharongasping with shock as she saw her own father pointing it at me! Her young eyes going wide with terror as she looked down its deadly waving black muzzle! WHAT WAS HE THINKING OF DOING NOW!?

"Jack! Don't Be A Fool! Put That Away!" I snapped, thinking ofSharonthere beside me, putting as much authority into my voice as I could. I felt her shivering with terror as she clung to me. A cold chill going down my spine as he silently cocked it in reply. The metallic click terrifying in its implications! Sandra stepping back a step, her back to the wall, fear showing in her soft brown eyes, her hand before her open red mouth, the red dress she held before herself almost forgotten in her terror.

"I can't afford another divorce," Jack answered in cold tones. His voice was flat and toneless, the Smith & Wesson's muzzle a terrifying sight. I did not think that he would be foolish enough to let me reach the Walther PPK .380 in my big leather purse slung over my left shoulder. Or the slim blade strapped to my left thigh beneath my long flowing skirt. I am not "like" other women. Jack knew that well after ten years of marriage to me. The jokes made at Duval Computer about my being "the toughest bitch in LA" had the ring of truth about them. I should have leftSharonout in the car, I thought to myself as I looked down that .38 bore, aware that Jack was out of his head from the cocaine he had been "sniffing" earlier. I wondered how much the alcohol had slowed his reaction times. What it would feel like when the bullet struck me and plowed through my heart.

"You can't afford three murders either, Jack," I answered in a cold level voice that betrayed little of my true emotions. Slipping my heavy purse down off my shoulder and nudgingSharonto one side with my elbow. My dark eyes hard and cold. My reaction times are extremely swift. The fencing masters back when I was on the French Olympic fencing team had said that they had never ever seen anyone as "fast" as me. I had over the years kept up my skills, more for the exercise than anything else, but it had kept me "supple" and swift on my feet even if Jack had laughed at being married to a wife who engaged in such an "unfeminine" sport! "The Queen of Swords" being one of my nicknames!

As terrified by my words as I thought she might be, Sandra moved towards her lover. Her movement diverting his attention only for that brief instant that I needed. LIKE A BLACK MISSILE MY PURSE FLEW TOWARDS HIM, THE BLAST OF THE .38 DEAFENING AS I LEAPED FORWARD! MY FINGERS LIKE STEEL AS I SEIZED HIS HOT GUN AND THRUST IT ASIDE! MY VICIOUS SWIFT FLATTENED PALM SMASHING HIS NOSE AGAINST HIS FACE, STUNNING HIM WITH THE AGONY OF THE BLOW! My thumb driving deep into a nerve making the smoking gun drop with a heavy thud to the desktop. A harsh shove forcing him back as a second later he looked down the still smoking muzzle of his own weapon! Blood running down his face as Jack whimpered like a little hurt child with the pain of his now smashed nose!

"I was only going to ask forSharonand enough money for her education," I said in a flat, toneless cold voice, "But now, Jack, it is going to be an entirely different story!" And with this I retrieved my purse, and slipped the gun inside with mine. Gathering my stunned stepdaughter, I snapped, "Enjoy your slut, Jack, if you still can!" With this I turned and strode from the room, takingSharonwith me, and slammed the door behind me as I left. Leaving Jack standing there with the blood running down his face, and his blonde hussy yet standing there at his side.

Chapter Two

"Lorraine!" Sharon pleaded again, seeing the lightning flash ominously ahead in the black sky over the harbor. "Please let's wait until morning before flying to your sister's!" The gusty humid wind rocking my slowly taxiing black Beechcraft Bonanza "BLACK LADY" there in the darkness, the brilliant mercury lights of the taxiway reflecting off the polished wings. The thought of flying up into such a storm, even with me at the controls, no doubt terrifying her. The storm was like nothing I had seen before, its very center according to the radar return unlike anything anyone had ever seen, I understood from what the control tower told me. The return being utterly different from normal!

"I'm not spending another night here in Los Angeles," I snapped back, "And that's final!" The cold icy anger showing in my voice as I waited for the clearance to take off, the dull reddish glow from the instruments in front of me no doubt making my face look even more harsh than ever. My mood so vile and bitter from the events earlier that evening that flying into a storm I normally would have avoided makes it quite possible that at the time I had a subconscious "death wish" and was really seeking our own deaths as a solution to my horrible emotional suffering.

I had spoken briefly to Janet Rogers on the telephone, telling her of what had happened, and thanking her for everything she had done for me. I would see to it when I reached La Paz that she would have sufficient funds to continue her education as far as she wished to go. I had a few weeks before changed my will, leaving all my wealth to Janet. Janet shared my own ideals, my own personal philosophy on life. Sharon had her own father's estate, but Janet had nothing, having been the illegitimate daughter of a teenage girl who had given her up for adoption at birth. She had been bounced from one foster home to another, and I suspected that I was about as near to a mother as she ever had!

"Couldn't we just drive somewhere and stay the night?" Sharon begged, making another futile attempt to talk me out of flying up into the storm ahead. The glow of the lightning flashing again in the clouds a warning of what laid in wait for us. The wind that now gusted through the open window there at my side moist and warm, smelling of the rain soon to fall. I had no wish to "intrude" now on anyone that I knew, and I didn't wish to just drive anywhere and stay in a motel until the weather cleared up!

"No!" I snapped, the rapidly whirling disk of the propeller flashing in the taxiway lights as I finally at last received clearance to take off. The controller in the tower warning me of the dangers that laid in the sky ahead for such a light craft as mine. My answer was a curt "thanks" as I hung up the mike and then pushed the throttle forward to begin the take-off run. The swift gusts rocking my V-tailed airplane as it rolled down the runway, the marker lights flashing by one after another on either side. Sharon reaching out to touch my arm, her soft eyes like those of a hurt doe in the red glow from the instruments. I felt ashamed at how I had treated her. How I had taken out my anger on her, my beloved beautiful teenage "golden girl".

"Don't worry, we'll be O.K.," I answered, giving Sharon a smile and reaching over to tousle her soft golden hair. Thinking that I'd make it all up to her later for how I had mistreated her. Then pushing the throttle all the way in, the roar of the big turbocharged engine at full power effectively preventing any reply she might have wished to make. The blonde teenager's imagination no doubt vividly picturing the terrors that might await us there in the sky ahead. The lightning like thunderbolts from the hands of an infuriated Zeus, the shearing gusts that could tear our wings off if I flew into the center of the storm, all the dangers that could be awaiting us there in the sky! The tower warning me once again to avoid the storm at all costs, its center on the radar like nothing anyone had ever seen before! A strange shifting "blob" that was almost like something alive! I wondered if there was a "UFO" up there! I could hear voices in the background asking if they should call out the Air Force to investigate the "return" now showing there on the radar screens.

The marker lights of the runway flashed by under the low wings as we raced down the long runway, our

plane heavy with gasoline, the engine roaring in our ears, my powerful fingers steel bands clamped around the wheel. Fighting to hold the plane on course as the wind gusts shook and rocked it. My stepdaughter's face showing the terror she felt there in the glow from the instruments as Black Lady leaped and jerked in the gusts, Sharon's hands now tightly clenched there between her knees as she stared straight ahead, watching the storm rapidly approaching us!

There was a sudden last gust that shook the craft, bouncing it hard against the concrete of the runway, Sharon softly gasping in terror. Then I drew the half wheel slowly back and lightning streaked clouds were all that could be seen as the ground fell away beneath. A sigh of relief going through me as I brought the wheels up, and then throttled back to cruising power a moment later. Turning and giving my Sharon an encouraging smile as her eyes met mine in the glow of the instruments. I reached out and touched her hand for a moment before a powerful gust of wind once again demanded my full attention at the controls. The control tower once again warning me to avoid the storm at all costs and to make my turn now away from it even although I didn't yet have hardly a thousand feet there beneath me! Warning me of the "unknown" there up in the clouds ahead! The man obviously was seeing something I wasn't! I could hear their conversation in the background, something again about calling the Air Force to investigate, the "return" now being half a mile across! I found their conversation utterly "fascinating" then!

"Scared?" I asked, giving her a smile. The thought of a "flying saucer" filling my thoughts. It is said that "curiosity killed the cat". It also gets people like me into "trouble". It certainly did in this case! Sharon and I were to share adventures that I believe no one of the 20th Century ever shared. On the other hand we have also found something that we would have never had back in our own time. Perhaps fate guided my hands on the plane's controls. What is, I think now, was "meant" to be.

"A bit," she admitted, giving me a brave smile, while keeping a firm hold on the seat as if she might go flying out of the airplane even with her seatbelt fastened tightly around herself. A flash of lightning there in the sky ahead briefly lighting up her features. For an instant I wondered why I was doing what I was. I heard the man in the control tower calling again, warning me to "TURN BACK THIS INSTANT"! I smiled to myself. I would do as I damn well pleased! If there was a "flying saucer" hiding there in the center of this storm, we would find it now!

"Get the parachutes from behind the seats," I ordered, Sharon giving me a "strange" look, but knowing better than to argue the matter with me. The lightning now flashing all around us as I pushed the throttle all the way back in, the roar of the engine almost overwhelmed by the crash of the constant thunder around us. The clouds like monsters in the sky as they seemed to leap and dance, lightning flickering in their depths, the wind gusts now so strong that it was impossible to hold the plane steady. We would find that "flying saucer", Sharon and I!

"I hope we won't -----!" Sharon breathed, her breath nearly taken away as the laboring airplane suddenly dropped a hundred feet in a powerful downdraft. There was danger that the wings might be torn off! The lightning jagged zigzag streaks in the dark clouds around us. My hands fighting the controls as the craft leaped beneath us like a living thing, not even the roar of the engine drowning out the heavy drum roll of the thunder. Fat oily raindrops beginning to splatter against the windshield like hailstones as I quickly slid the window shut, my mouth now set as I flew Black Lady further up into the storm!

"Tower to Beechcraft NC109677," the radio crackled, the static bad now. "YOU ARE TO TURN BACK IMMEDIATELY!" My reply was to snap it off, putting an end to the annoyance. We would see what laid ahead in this strange storm if it was the last thing I ever did! And it almost was too as you will see! When I think back on it, I wonder what drove me to do it, to take a risk like that, especially with Sharon's life too at stake. What has motivated me to do the things that I have done? To take the risks of combat, to put my own life at stake like I have done for one who would not even be born until six

centuries after my own birth! One tall and golden, the ruler of a mighty Empire, so incredibly beautiful it takes your very breath away even to look upon her as she sits on her golden throne. Darlanis, Empress of California!

"Maybe we'd better do as he says," Sharon ventured, the look on her face telling much of how she felt as she clutched the parachute to herself like a life preserver. I nodded, thinking of the dangers, the "risks" that we were now so foolishly taking.

"LORRAINE!" Sharon screamed, the sky ahead of us suddenly filled with a greenish flickering glowing "blob" of light like nothing I'd ever seen before! The blob seeming to almost reach out to engulf us like some strange alien living blob of unholy light! The controls strangely unresponsive as we seemed to be drawn in like a bit of food sucked in by an amoeba! The cold terror clutching at my heart like the fist of a strong man as I uselessly twisted the wheel as far as it would go! We were flying into this terrifying blob of unearthly living light, and there wasn't a single damn thing that I could do about it either! My last thoughts as the light closed around us and I felt an intense tingling electrical shock go through me were of Sharon and how recklessly foolish I had been to risk her life, her dear young precious life, for THIS!! And then I lost consciousness...

Chapter Three

I regained consciousness to the sound of my stepdaughter's terrified sobbing, the beautiful blonde teenager frantically twisting the ignition key and throwing the selector switch from one position to the other. The plane's electronic ignition system and its backup no doubt completely burned out from the effects of the electrical field through which we had just passed. The plane rocking in the gusty air as it glided down into the darkness. The rough storm-tossed sea dark and deadly there beneath us in the bright beams of the landing lights as I flicked them on and dazedly took control, aware that only mere seconds were left now before the crash into those leaping waters below!

"Hold on!" I breathed, drawing the wheel back, my feet steady on the rudder pedals. Stalling out my beloved Black Lady just over the leaping waves beneath us. A quick silent prayer to the God of my childhood going through my thoughts as we waited for the impact! Then with a terrible slam that sent our bodies straining against the black webbing of our seat belts, knocking the breath from our bodies, the airplane plowed into the leaping, rolling sea! The water in a solid mass spraying up over the dying metal bird! The seams in the aluminum fabric tearing open with the impact. The cold sea water spurting in from a dozen openings like some hungry monster now seeking our living flesh!

"Sharon!" I ordered, "Get the life preservers out from behind the seats!" The water now already lapping up over our ankles as we quickly unbuckled ourselves, the plane floating for the moment nose down due to the weight of the engine. The great waves banging it about and flinging us from one side to the other there inside the fuselage as we now fought to save our own lives!

"Lorraine, I'm Scared!" Sharon whimpered as I forced open a door. The cold seawater suddenly flooding in with a rush as the airplane swiftly now sank beneath us! The rapid inrush of water threatening to take us with it to the bottom of the ocean! The darkness surrounding us like some threatening monster held only momentarily at bay by the glow of our powerful landing lights!

"Come On!" I barked, reaching in and seizing the terrified girl by her silken blouse while I clung to the

doorframe of the sinking plane. The buttons popping as with a strength borne of desperation I dragged her out just in time. The airplane slowly rolling over on its side and with a surge of bubbles, sinking beneath the waves! An instant later it was gone, the glow of the landing lights soon fading away as it sank into the cold dark depths, leaving us in an almost impenetrable darkness. The odor of gasoline in our nostrils from the ruptured fuel tanks in the wings as I thought belatedly of the five thousand dollars cash in my purse now sinking to the bottom of the sea with the plane! All because I wanted to see a UFO! And look what had happened!

"Brr, It's Cold!" Sharon muttered as she clung to her life preserver, her face only a dim pale shadow there in the near utter darkness as we clung to each other, terrified of drifting apart into the unknown darkness around us. "What happened?" she asked me, a question for which I had no immediate answer just then. Still vivid in my memory the strange green flickering light and the awful searing agony that had accompanied it!

"Some strange electrical effect, I guess," I mused. Thankful at least that we were alive and together as I took her hand in mine. The thought of having to return home looking like a utter fool preying on my mind. Why had I insisted on flying off into a storm searching for the unknown? I have always prided myself as being a sensible sober and competent woman, one not given to wild flights of fancy like some dizzy silly teenager!

There seemed to be something puzzling as my eyes adjusted to the darkness around us. THERE WAS NOT A LIGHT TO BE SEEN ANYWHERE! I wondered just how far we were out to sea! I strained my eyes for the faintest gleam of light. The faintest glimmer of modern civilization. How far had we come out past Los Angeles?

"I wonder just where we are?" Sharon asked a moment later, echoing my own thoughts. The waves carrying us up and down, the salt stinging our eyes. The girl too having noted the lack of any lights. Her young voice showing the beginning terror she felt too at the lack of any visible indication that we were anywhere near land! Just how far out were we? The water was cold. * * There is a northwards set to the current here, and the lack of visibility prevented us from seeing Trella's lighthouse beacon. The actual crash site of my airplane was seven miles out to sea and almost due west of Trella according to the Lorr's records.

"We should be half a dozen miles outside the harbor, a bit to the south," I answered. "Somewhere around the Long Beach area, I think," I added, puzzled at the lack of any lights. Straining my eyes in the darkness as the waves carried us up and down, the occasional flashes of lightning in the clouds above doing little to help, only showing more heaving waves as far as the eye could see! I became aware too that it was now raining, that some of the water striking my face was fresh, not salt! "It's raining, Sharon," I said, "That's why we can't see any lights." Keeping out of my voice the terror I felt knowing that we were further out to sea than I had guessed, perhaps a dozen miles or more! Being borne by the current to who knows where! How long would it be before the cold water sapped our strength and we lost the strength and the will to cling to our life preservers. HOW LONG DID WE HAVE TO LIVE? That really scared me!!

"I'm scared, Lorraine," Sharon whimpered, clutching at my hand. "When will they come to save us?" Her girlish voice now showing the terror that she felt. WHERE WERE WE? WHERE HAD WE GONE DOWN? DID ANYONE EVEN KNOW THAT OUR PLANE HAD GONE DOWN???

A little while later, my watch having died, its electronics burned out, as we still puzzled over the mysterious lack of lights anywhere to be seen, suddenly Sharon gasped and clutched at my arm! Crying out "LORRAINE!" to get my attention! Then to my utter amazement I saw it too! A brilliant blue-white

light floating there in the sky! The sea brightly illuminated there beneath it. And above the light I could faintly see the glowing shape of a giant silvery saucer at least a hundred yards across outlined by a shimmering bluish glow that seemed to surround it! "It's A Flying Saucer!" she breathed, her teeth chattering a bit, her eyes wide there in the glow from the light, Sharon trembling with excitement that was mingled no doubt with a certain amount of fear of the terrifying unknown floating there nearly above us!

We watched a glowing beam of light from the craft dip into the sea and then to our amazement saw the dripping wreckage of my airplane being lifted from the sea! The battered craft held by that pale glowing beam of light that could only have been some sort of a "tractor beam" often written about by the authors of science fiction! My airplane lifted up into the sky and then drawn inside that great disc! The interior glowing with a reddish cast, tiny figures of something moving inside that looked suspiciously like ants! GIGANTIC BLACK ANTS! It was our first glimpse of the LORR! It would not be our last here in this strange new world into which we had just unknowingly flown! Had it been a clear night we might have also seen Deimos passing over like a rocky "potato" visually about a fourth of degree in size, or about a half the size of the full Moon as viewed from Earth.

"Did You See That, Lorraine?" Sharon breathed out, gasping as if she had been holding her breath, as well she might have, for what we had just seen raised questions for which I had no answers! I did not doubt that we had seen what we had, my thoughts chaotic and confused as I felt her hand clutching at mine. The silvery disc now closing up as it floated there nearly overhead, a strange tingling sensation going through me as if it used some sort of electrical process to stay up, and then suddenly it rose up into the cloudy sky with a soft hum of infinite power and was gone as quickly as it had first appeared! Leaving us to ponder what we had seen as we tossed helplessly there in the sea below!

Chapter Four

As time passed, we could faintly see low mountains in the distance to the east as the sky lightened. The low peaks darker masses against the glow of the purple sky. There was something very familiar about them, as if we had seen them before. But not a light or a ship was to be seen, not even a fishing boat. Nor an airplane buzzing along there in the sky above. The lack of these things something that puzzled us both as we clung to our life preservers, the memory of the giant silvery disc that had recovered my drowned airplane still very much in our thoughts. I had wondered if I had actually seen what I thought I had seen. Had not Sharon seen the same thing I would have suspected that I was losing my mind. That the shock of everything that I had been through in the last few hours had caused me to have hallucinations of things that I knew couldn't possibly exist! FLYING SAUCERS PILOTED BY GIGANTIC ANTS? OH COME NOW! It couldn't be!

"You know, Lorraine, those mountains look just like the ones behind Los Angeles, but where's the city or anything else for that matter!" The rising tone of Sharon's voice telling much of how she felt seeing nothing of what we should have been seeing! WHERE IN THE HELL WERE WE? There seemed to be something there in the distance, something like very old barely visible ruins, but it was hard to make out anything there in the dim light of the approaching dawn. Actually we were seeing the remains of LA some five centuries after its total destruction by anti-matter bombs!

"I just don't understand any of this either," I remarked, glancing about, slipping an arm around the cold shivering girl to comfort her, as puzzled as she was by the strangeness of it all! There being no reasonable explanation I could think of that would explain why there was no sign of the city or of Man for that

matter! Sharon like me was unable to get the memory of the giant flying saucer and its terrifying looking occupants out of her thoughts. HAD WE ACTUALLY SEEN WHAT WE THOUGHT WE HAD SEEN?

I had reviewed in my own thoughts again and again the mysterious "blob" of greenish flickering light and the terrible electric shock that had caused me to lose consciousness and burned out the ignition system of my plane. But even so, how could that have effected everything? Why I had passed out and not Sharon was a question for which I had no answer. I could only guess that our ages, Sharon being sixteen to my thirty nine, might have had something to do with it. It is as good an answer as any I can think of. Few of those who passed through such things ever lived to tell about it. We were, I understand now, very "lucky"!

Little by little it grew lighter as the waves carried us further in towards shore. The wind dying down to a fresh breeze as dawn broke, the mountains now towering up into the iron gray sky. Both of us were now feeling the effects of cold and exhaustion from what we had been forced to endure, it being more and more an effort to cling to our life preservers as we constantly shivered from the coldness of the water around us. Sharon holding up surprisingly well, better, I mused, than I was! There seeming to be a sense of "disorientation" that I noted with professional interest, being well aware of what it portended for the future should we be forced to remain in the water very much longer! I knew the symptoms of hypothermia, feared the outcome!

"There are ruins there," Sharon said to me, indicating the very faint straight lines of what once must have been streets. I had no answer for her. Nothing made any sense. Nothing at all!

"Illusions," I mumbled, clinging to the life preserver, my strength failing due to the chill of the water. Trying to remain "rational", not give in to my own fears. Sharon was obviously seeing what wasn't there. Most of the area was covered by woods. "Perhaps we're not where we think we are and you're seeing logging trails or something," I suggested, trying to think of something that made sense. "Maybe some old farm land grown over."

"Lorraine!" Sharon gasped, shaking me, "Look at that!" Pointing to a ship, a strange ship, a ship like something out of a history book from the time perhaps of the Greeks or Romans or more likely, I thought to myself, a craft built by some Hollywood movie studio from the very looks of it! The vessel at the moment paralleling the shoreline to our left. The design was Roman or Greek, the twin snub masts rigged with brightly striped lateen sails. The oar ports along each side making it an exotic sight. Its design told it to be a cargo vessel. One quite obviously built for a considerable speed by its swift lines. A vessel, I thought to myself, built to carry cargoes where speed was more important than gross tonnage. It was our first glimpse at an Imperial slaver. The first hint that we were no longer in the 20th Century! The flag flying from its sterncastle one that I had never seen before, a brilliant golden eagle-like bird on a sky blue field! The flag of the Empire of California, I was soon to learn! The bird the fearsome TARK, a gigantic monster capable of actually carrying a woman or lightweight man on its back! * * I was once informed by a very learned scientist back in the 20th Century that no bird could ever exist that could carry even a child aloft, that such was "scientifically impossible". Tarks can actually carry up to a hundred and thirty pounds or so, although they cannot "take off" with such a heavy weight and must launch themselves from an elevation. They do have a rather "odd" metabolic system, and they probably represent the extreme limits for a flying creature, but they do fly and I have seen the birds!

"Just Where In The Hell Are We Now?" Sharon spoke in a soft voice. It being quite obvious to the girl too that there was something seriously wrong! That this was not the same "world" we had left the night before. What was this place? First a flying saucer flown by what appeared to be gigantic ants and then this lateen rigged vessel from the third or fourth Century of the Classical Era? NOTHING MADE ANY

SENSE ANYMORE! Where were we?

"I don't think we're going to have to wait very long for an answer," I replied with a grim smile. Waving at the strange approaching vessel as I spoke. Keeping to myself for the moment the fantastic theory I had formed that might just possibly explain just how we had gotten to where we were! It now was my theory that we had passed through some sort of a "space-time" warp and had ended up in another parallel universe similar in some respects to ours, but different in other ways from our own. I could think of no other answer at the time to what had happened to us. I would have laughed at the thought of "time travel"!

On its deck we could now see men moving about. Men dressed in bright colorful garb that well matched the ship that they sailed. The sailors pulling at the yards while another stood in the "crow's nest" set on top of the main mast. Pointing out to us in the water, his long brass telescope gleaming there in his hand as he gave instructions to those below. The telescope proof that this was not a Roman or Greek ship, for no such a device had existed back then so far as I knew. His words coming over the water to us in a tongue that was like nothing I had heard before!

The sound of their voices reminded me somewhat of the Mexican fishermen I had seen many times when visiting my sister in La Paz. Since I am nearly as fluent in Spanish as in my own native French, it did not worry me too much that the men might not speak or understand good old American English. Yet, I felt a sense of foreboding as I looked at the vessel. A sense that we would not find "friends" there upon its decks, only enemies in this place.

"What kind of ship is it?" Sharon asked me, the tone of her young voice now showing the same concern that I felt. There being something about the ship that bothered her too. I suspected that we had traveled into another universe, one parallel to our own. That might explain much, I thought to myself. A different history, a different rate of technological development, I mused. That might also explain why there was no Los Angeles visible there on the horizon. Why men sailed on a ship like that! The "reality" however was even stranger than my own wild theories. I had no "answer" of course for the "flying saucer" we'd seen, or the obviously "alien" crew that had "manned" the flying saucer!

"I sure wish I knew, Sharon," I answered nervously, taking her hand in mine. The colorful red and white striped sails exotic to the eye. The flag flying from the sterncastle as I have mentioned a beautiful blue and gold banner that I had never seen before. The name "RONDA" painted in a strange script on the vessel's bow above the exotic painted eyes. The craft still yet reminding me very much of those built during the Classical Era.

With the long sloping yards braced tight around, the vessel headed straight for us, the dark eyes painted on either side of the bow seeming to look directly at us. The waves splashing up against the painted wooden hull, some spray flying over the bulwarks, the ship a blue green in color that closely matched the color of the waters on which it sailed. Had it furled its sails and taken down its masts, it would have been hard to see against the background of the sea and sky. Such is sometimes done by those who make their living by preying upon honest men! Pirates!

Slowing its approach as it drew near, the Ronda took a position upwind from us, the sails flapping in the breeze as it drifted down towards us slowly rolling from side to side in the heavy swells. One of the sailors then tossing us a life-ring with a line attached so that we might be drawn in. The man wearing a brightly colored bandanna around his head just like some pirate from the Eighteenth Century! I was soon to learn to my dismay that the Ronda was much like a "pirate" ship in many ways!

Seizing the ring, Sharon and I clung to it with all our ebbing strength as a burly bare chested sailor pulled

us in hand over hand. His brown leather kilt and accouterments reminded me of another era now history. The sword there at his hip left no doubt that men were what they seemed to be, and not some movie actors out sailing around in some movie "prop" out on a holiday!

As we were dragged alongside, the rail was lined with faces silhouetted up against the now cloud sprinkled morning sky. Brutal faces, some bearded. Among them was one that I took for being the captain of the ship. His attire was different and considerably richer than that of the others. But his face, I noted with a mental shudder, was just as cold and "cruel" as any of his men!

"Who are you?" the captain yelled down to us. His speech a mixture of Spanish and English that Jack would have called "wetback English", but with a clipped accent that made it almost another tongue. The men making low remarks to each other that I suspected were not very respectful of women! The term "prime collar meat" being one of them I did not understand just then as one of them pointed to Sharon beside me and "nudged" another!

I cautioned Sharon in a low voice not to reply to anything they said, knowing that any word we uttered would immediately brand us as aliens and strangers. I feared what their reaction might be to those not of their own kind. I suspected that we might be in even more danger aboard their ship than we had been floating helplessly in the ocean! I sensed their evil intentions towards us! That we might have jumped "from the frying pan into the fire" by coming aboard this ship! There was a smell too, one I found strangely "familiar", but for the moment could not place.

Strong arms dragged us up over the side of their ship. A number of comments being made in their strange tongue about Sharon's beauty and including another puzzling reference to "collar meat" that made me shudder at its implications! I recalled the writings of John Norman. This culture was an awful lot like his descriptions of "GOR", the supposed "counter-Earth" that circled the other side of the Sun. There they enslaved women not of their own countries. Did they do the same here too, I wondered?

With strong horny palms claspng our arms, a quick search having disarmed me of my dagger, which implied something I didn't like to think about, we were brought before the captain of the Ronda. His own clothing speaking of his high status as compared to the others surrounding us. The swarthy stocky man being attired in a fine maroon woolen tunic and a blue silken cloak, high laced sandals much like boots there on his feet. I thought him a hard man. One that would not know the meaning of mercy towards those less fortunate. The ornate slim blade there at his hip did little for my peace of mind. I very much doubted that these men could be considered "civilized" in any sense of the term. All were armed with an motley assortment of swords and daggers, making them look even more like a bunch of pirates, which I now rather suspected that they might very well be! * * Slavers are supposed observe certain "rules" about obtaining women, but these are often ignored, it not being unknown even now for a slaver to kidnap women in Trelandar and sell them in Sarn. In a society operating at a Twelfth Century level of technology it is all too "easy" for a beautiful woman to end up a slave! She may protest that she was wrongfully enslaved, but who will believe her? Especially if her master has "papers" claiming she of a nation outside of the Empire of California! It is probably for this reason that most women of the 26th Century do bear arms.

"You have names, wenches?" the captain snapped at us. Regarding Sharon in a way that I didn't like at all. His dark eyes roaming over her wet form like spiders, a leer going over his swarthy face as he studied the girlish curves thus revealed. The men gathered around whispering low comments to themselves. Comments, I gathered from what I could understand, that did not bode well for either of us! The chains I saw there on the deck spoke of things that I did not much like to think about. "I am Doctor Lorraine Marie Duval and this is my stepdaughter Sharon," I snapped in reply to the captain's rude question. Putting just as much power and authority into my voice as I could. There was no longer any doubt left in

my mind that we had somehow traveled into another "world" not our own. And no doubt at all that we were in serious trouble right now! We might end up being slaves!

"You're not of the Empire," the captain commented. It was a statement, not a question. He had made up his mind about something. It left very little doubt in my mind that not being of this "Empire" had left us both open to a fate neither of us would enjoy! And the chains there on deck left little doubt now as to the sort of ship that this was! A SLAVER! That was what the stink was that I smelled. The smell of SLAVES! Confined slaves!

The cruel leer in the captain's dark eyes as he looked again at Sharon made me shudder. I wished I had my .380 or Jack's .38. Both had gone down with my purse on the airplane. Either would have been a comfort to me just then. I had little doubt now what could happen to us both! The captain's next words only served to confirm my own worst fears of what our fate was to "be" here.

Stepping back a pace, regarding us both, the swarthy captain of the Ronda then said to me with a cold cruel smile, "I think I can get forty gold crowns for the two of you in Sarn. Thirty for your girl as a pleasure slave and ten for you as a fighting slut for the arena." My worst fears had just been confirmed as I realized just what he had just said. WE WERE TO BE SOLD AS SLAVES, SHARON AS A SEXUAL PLAYTHING, AND ME AS A GLADIATOR TO FIGHT IN THEIR ARENA FOR THE ENTERTAINMENT OF HIS PEOPLE!

Chapter Five

"I'll take the girl," the captain of the Ronda said to his crew, adding with a smile, "She's too young and 'tender' for the likes of you ruffians anyway". The captain then quickly added as his men frowned and growled among themselves at being "deprived" of Sharon, "You can take the older woman as she's not 'worth' too much of anything anyway". The words he had spoke horrifying me as their meaning became clear! Not only were we to be slaves, but my Sharon was to be raped and I was to be given to the brutal crew of the Ronda as a mere "plaything" of very little "value"!

Sharon slapped his face when the captain tried to touch her. My stepdaughter knowing enough Spanish to guess what the man planned now to do to her. The crew laughed uproariously at their master's "discomfort". The captain's face flushed with fury as he struck Sharon back, sending her stumbling stunned to the wooden deck there beside the man at the wheel. I felt a blood red rage go burning over me at the sight! The crew was paying me little attention. They didn't know the kind of a woman they now had in their midst. They would soon learn! There was no shortage of swords. I am not a beautiful woman. I don't have a "sexy" figure. I don't have the quick "repartee" of one like Janet Rogers, for example. But I do have one "quality" about myself that other women can only envy: When it comes to a fight, I am one of the meanest and toughest "bitches" that ever walked the face of the Earth! When other girls my age were playing with dolls, I was out playing with bows and arrows, a wooden sword thrust through my belt. My father used to say that I was the best "son" he ever had! I was weaned on Edgar Rice Burroughs' "MARS" books. When other girls studied dancing, I studied fencing. I did not consider the situation "hopeless" despite the odds against me. I would have taken the "gold" for France had I not gotten sick back then. When it comes to the use of the sword, I am without equal!

Laughing, the captain reached down to Sharon, my teenage blonde stepdaughter swiftly flipping him over herself with a judo throw. Her feet braced against his gut as I had showed her. His heavy painful

crash to the deck making the crew roar with laughter! Now it was time for me to take a hand in affairs! Spinning, I drove a knee into the groin of the man holding me, my slim 5'9" body possessing amazing strength from daily exercise. As he cried out in surprise, doubling over with the agony, I jerked the sword he carried from its scabbard there on his hip. The weapon having a basket hilt and a good two foot long blade. I thought it would "do" just fine for my immediate "needs" now!

With a swift thrust I killed the man before he could cry out a warning. The others so involved with their captain and his humiliating treatment at the capable hands of my Sharon that none saw what had happened! Now they would learn the fury of Lorraine Duval! NOW THEY WOULD PAY! Using the sword as it was might to be used, the weapon a cross between a cutlass and a short sword such as was used by the Romans, I leaped into their midst with a blood-curdling cry. The men now falling back in terror as they suddenly realized then that I was not what they had thought! * * The professional fighting man or woman of the 26th Century wore a small brand on the inside of their left wrist that identified them as being of that "caste". As Lorraine at this point did not have such a brand on her wrist, no one aboard the Ronda realized that she was capable of perhaps fighting back. However it is apparent from the story that the captain did consider her from her physical build as being quite suitable for being trained for arena combat as a female gladiatoral slave. (author)

The cold hatred made a haze before my eyes as I leaped among them, my stolen blade taking life before they could even defend themselves. Two died before they could draw their blades, so swift and vicious was my attack. They faced a black clad shedemon in human form, not a weak, helpless woman such as they had perhaps thought of me! With a curse on his lips, the captain drew his sword and attacked me. There was a swift second of dancing, ringing steel, and then I lopped off his head like a melon! The horrid thing dropping to the deck and rolling back and forth with the motion of the ship, the open mouth for a second horribly seeming to try to speak as his horrified eyes stared about for a few seconds before then finally glazing over in death! With a cold blaze of fury in my dark brown eyes I faced the remaining eight men. Standing there on the deck with the gray mountains of California in the background behind me. The ship rolling and rocking in the heavy swell. The motion doing little to settle my stomach. I wondered what to do next. The bloodstained cutlass heavy in my hand as the cutthroat crew regarded me. Looking much like a bunch of pirates out of some historical novel, their cutlasses and swords now in their hands. Sharon unnoticed behind them stealing a long slim dagger from a corpse. The polished blade gleaming in her hand as our eyes met for a brief second. I didn't consider the "odds" quite so bad now. I thought that this time I might "win my gold" after all. I lost the chance to fence in the Olympics due to the "flu" and never got the chance to prove to those watching just how "good" I actually was. My coach, however, said that he thought I would have won the "gold medal" had I had the chance to fence in competition as I had already bested most of the other young women before falling victim to a virus that ruined my hopes for a "gold"!

There seemed to be a sense of "unreality" about the entire affair. A sense that none of this was real, and that it was only a bad dream from which I would awake to tell Sharon about at breakfast before she went off to school. Then the sun broke through the clouds and shined down upon us, and I knew that this was "for real" after all. And that the four still forms lying there bloody on the wooden deck were dead men. Men that I, Lorraine Duval, had killed with the blade now in my hand. I took a better grip of my weapon and waited for the men facing me to decide what to do next. My awesome skill with a sword having for the moment at least, awed them into a paralyzing fear of me. I didn't think it would last once the first mate got his men under control. The ship had drifted noticeably closer to the rocky shoreline, the red and white striped sails flapping and shivering in the strong breeze. I had no doubt that soon now it would be necessary to set the vessel under proper sail before it drifted into the jagged rocks and was destroyed. I needed at least some of the crew to sail the Ronda. I knew next to nothing about the handling of a lateen rigged vessel like this. "KILL HER!" the first mate yelled as he led his unwilling seven men against me. Waving his sword over his head to urge them on. I thought him a brave man, if also a foolish one. I

suppose he believed that I would just stand there before them and take their charge, going down beneath their numbers. They didn't know me. You never accept a frontal assault if you have any choice in the matter. They didn't know that they were now facing Lorraine Duval, "the toughest bitch in LA" as they used to whisper behind my back there at Duval Computer Incorporated! And I probably "was" too!* * Shortly after I started my practice I was threatened by a drug addict with a knife demanding drugs. I seized his wrist, broke his arm across my knee, and turned him over to the police. A few months before Sharon and I flew through the "Gateway" into this era, I killed a drug pusher who was selling drugs to the children at the local high school to where she was going with an icepick.

I leaped to one side, my keen blade a deadly extension of my arm. Thrusting deep into a man's side before he was hardly aware that I was there. Taking his life as he measured his length on the deck. My wet black leather spike heeled boots slipping a bit in the blood already spilled from another's dead body. Sharon driving her long slim dagger to the hilt into another's back, reducing their numbers now to six. Leaping among them as they milled in confusion, my blade struck twice. Taking life once, the other man dropping his blade as my point slashed his arm to the bone. My slender swift form flashing among them as I fought like a black clad demon, the bloody deck slippery beneath me. Sharon striking again, driving her bloody dagger deep. Her eyes meeting mine for a brief second as we fought together for our freedom and honor. For the precious right to decide as free women who would be allowed to use our bodies!

Once again with a swift flash of steel I took another life. Paying dearly for it as I slipped on the now bloody deck and took a deep cut just below my heart, the blade horribly scraping against my ribs as his sword blade slid across my chest just below my breast, making the blood run red beneath my now ruined dress! The wound hurt, but I did not let it prey on my thoughts, accepting it as merely a consequence of battle. I think my old fencing master would have been proud of me that day, my blade darting and flashing in the sunlight, ringing out against those of my foes. He always said that I had been born in the wrong era and of the wrong sex. I think he was right on the first, but wrong on the second. I have never felt that I was born into the "wrong" sex even if I have suffered a certain amount of prejudice from unthinking men who thought that a woman should not "do" certain things just because she happened to be born a woman!

The surviving sailors in their leather kilts and vests were an exotic sight, their attire reminding me somewhat of Imperial Rome. Their weapons and mine also being somewhat similar to those used back then. Janet Rogers always used to say that technology determines everything we do or can do, but that is a subject I will leave to others more qualified than I to consider and comment on. It does, I suppose, decide certain "issues". One can only build railroads when you have the "technology" to do so.

Now only the first mate and two of his men were left. One of them was wounded, clutching a bloody arm. Fear showed in their dark eyes. I did not envy them. Sharon now stood at my side, the bloody dagger she had used so effectively there in her hand. She was no longer the girl she had once been. Much passed between us without a word being spoken. Stepping back and lowering my point, I said to the men, "I will spare your lives if you will submit to me and accept my command." My dark eyes burned into theirs. They dropped their weapons with a clatter to the bloody deck and then knelt. Beaten men kneeling before a woman who had beaten them. I found the sight satisfying to my feminine soul.

Chapter Six

I stood there on the swaying deck before the three kneeling men, one of them clutching a bloody and

bleeding arm from our fight. The cutlass-like sword in my hand heavy, the length of the blade now stained with blood. I could feel the blood running down my body beneath my dress, the slash having gone through both my dress and the chemise beneath I had worn. The wound starting to bother me now with a dull ache that turned to a sharp biting pain with every motion I made. Sharon there at my side, young, blonde, and beautiful, the long slim dagger she had just used so effectively bloodstained there in her hand. Her beautiful azure eyes as blue as the patches of sky above us now filled with concern as she saw the wet red blood staining my black silken dress below my bosom, the entire side of the dress now almost dripping with my life-blood as I bled from my wound!

Overhead three seagulls screamed around the mastheads, the brightly stripped red and white sails flapping noisily in the strong breeze that was driving us nearer and nearer to the black jagged rocks of the coast. I would have to get the ship under sail and soon or we would all be doomed, I thought to myself, regarding the three kneeling before us. Feeling a sense of helplessness because I would have to depend upon "enemies" to sail the Ronda, men who I would not be able to trust! Men who might just bide their time until I was forced to sleep, and then make their "move" against me. True, I might have Sharon take turns with me watching them, but I knew all too well that with a ship like this that there were things that they could do to it that neither she or I would know anything about until it was too late! I might be a true "master" of the sword, but sailing ships were something I knew rather little about, especially ones of a design like this. We were, as Janet used to say to me back in the 20th Century, "between a rock and a hard place" with very damn little that either one of us could do about it right then!

"We'll take care of it," I told Sharon, clasping her to me, gasping a bit with the pain of the movement, my right arm with its bloodstained sword around her slim girlish waist. Pleased and proud of what she had become, now truly "my daughter" instead of having been Marcia's, Jack's first wife. A now drunken shell of a once radiantly beautiful woman whom I had lately always hated to allow Sharon to even visit anymore for fear of what might happen when she drove after drinking heavily like she did! The two citations Marcia had gotten for drunk driving having had little effect upon her continuing drinking and driving! Jack's alimony payments had been heavy, Marcia's lawyer having been convincing to the trial judge that the divorce was all Jack's fault as well it could well have been judging from my own personal experiences with him as you have seen earlier here in my story.

I first met Jack Duval after his divorce from his first wife, the beautiful tall aristocratic blonde Marcia. The divorce having been a nasty affair that had driven him to seek my professional help with his "nervous problems". We had soon fallen in love, Jack being handsome and having a "style" about himself that I found quite attractive. He said that he loved me and found me attractive too. I said "yes" to his marriage proposal. I suppose he needed a "wife" for Sharon's sake here, and I was just stupid enough to jump at the chance, Jack being a far better "catch" I believed then than any man I had been able to attract on my own. It wasn't one of my "best" decisions, and ranks along with my attempt to fly through a violent thunderstorm to see a "flying saucer" for being really dumb and stupid acts on my part!

Our marriage was a stormy one almost from the start, Jack being a man with a "roving eye" for anything that was young and blonde, although his tastes were pretty catholic and I tried to ignore as best I could the way that he chased after women like a dog after bitches in heat. Marcia was also a mean and vicious bitch that missed no chance to exploit the situation and tried to make my life as miserable as she could by trying to turn Sharon against me. It would have made a wonderful soap opera or novel no doubt. Especially after Jack started making comparisons between me and his ex-wife, who was just slut enough to "bed" him one time after getting him drunk and then tell me all about it over the phone! Saying that I wasn't "woman" enough for a man like him or he wouldn't have "turned" to her for "something" that "he couldn't get back at home"! The implications being obvious!

Giving swift orders, I had the ship put under sail away from the black jagged rocks that had threatened

to destroy it. Another few minutes and it would have been a wreck upon them, so close had it been, the sound of the breakers echoing in my ears as we pulled away. Then as the sailors hastened to do my bidding, the wounded man taking the wheel, I wondered what to do next after ordering the bodies scattered about on the deck to be gathered up and placed out of the way for their later disposal. My question as to where we were and what year it was having made the first officer give me an odd strange look before answering that we were off the coast of "Trelandar" and that this was, as everyone knew, the year "518". Then adding to my immediate question, "After The War", his look leaving no doubt that he thought he was sailing beneath a mad woman who had undoubtedly lost all her "wits" and was now a well proven dangerously insane manic to boot!

"Somehow we must have traveled into the Earth's future," I told Sharon. I watched the first officer and other sailor resetting the sails. Sharon nodding while doing her best to stem the flow of blood from my wound with part of my skirt that she had cut from the hem of it to use as a bandage. My chemise was torn where the sword had cut it, but otherwise still usable as I was naked beneath it save for the pantyhose that I had worn. I had not worn a bra, as my breasts are too small to "need" one.

"If it is the case," I added, "Then we must accept the fact that we must have flown into some sort of warp in the space-time continuum that separates our time from this one". I was rather puzzled by the first mate's reference to a "War", since at the time we had flown through the time warp into this era, there had been a considerable improvement in relations between the USA and the USSR and no reason to believe that things weren't going to "continue" as they were. Obviously however, such a War had occurred, for otherwise how could one account for a ship like the Ronda, and men and a culture like this? A social order that seemed to have been taken right out of some adventure fantasy novel like John Norman's "GOR" series. Nothing made any sense. What was "Trelandar" and this "Empire" to which this ship belonged, if such was the case? There had been mention too of a woman called "Darlanis", who apparently was the "Empress" now! And references to an "Empire of California" which puzzled me too!

"Oh," Sharon answered, "disbelief" evident in her very look, no doubt not knowing what else to say just then. Still vivid in my memory the green flicking blob of light and the agony that had accompanied it. With another smile taking the silken compress from her hand and pressing it up tightly against my still bleeding slash across the ribs. Another three or four inches different and it would have gone right through my heart!

"Such a thing is in theory quite possible if enough energy could be released in one spot," I explained, adding, "And we see here aboard this vessel the evidence that Man committed the ultimate 'folly' after all." It being readily apparent to me that there had been after all the Third World War that doomsayers had predicted. The Ronda and her crew ample proof that nothing but the most barbaric civilization remained, and that similar to the Dark Ages after the fall of Rome! The only puzzlement that disc we had both seen, and the giant ant-like creatures that flew on it. I had no answers for that. COULD IT BE THAT MAN HAD FOUGHT WITH THEM? HAD THERE BEEN AN INTERPLANETARY OR INTERSTELLAR WAR?

"Yes, It All Fits Together Now!" I muttered to myself, suddenly everything being utterly clear to me. The disc, its recovery of my plane, the Ronda, the barbaric culture from which it came, everything suddenly fitted together like the pieces of some jigsaw puzzle! Sharon looking up at me, a puzzled expression on her face as she finished wrapping another strip cut from my dress around me to hold the packing in place against my cut flesh. The bleeding already now starting to stop as clotting took place.

"Here, you use some of this," the sailor at the wheel said to me, holding out a small bottle of some sort of clear liquid, his own wound amazingly now only a long slash across the skin that seemed to bother him very little. He was younger than the others, and seemed to bear me less resentment. The material, I

quickly discovered when Sharon then applied it to me, being both antiseptic and anesthetic, as well as possessing amazing healing qualities! The sailor telling me that the compound was a medicine provided by the "LORR" as part of their technology. "One of the few good things the damm `ANTS' have ever given us!" he had muttered, going back to his station there at the wheel under the watchful eye of the first mate, who I didn't trust out of my sight. His words only further confirmation of the fantastic theory I had developed as an explanation for everything we had experienced in this incredible and fantastic era. It being now perfectly clear who had won "THE WAR"! THE LORR!! THE "ANTS"!!!

"What kind of cargo does this ship carry?" I asked the first mate, having little doubt now from the chains on deck and the smells that left no doubts as to the cargo chained below. My face stern as his eyes met mine. The sword was heavy in my hand as I regarded him. I did not trust him, and I think he knew it. Sharon at my side, the dagger she had used so effectively at her hip thrust through her belt. My own dress was now nothing but torn rags that only half covered my bloody chemise beneath it.

"Slaves, Mistress," he answered. "Seventy three prime female slaves along with the Princess of Dularn now chained in the captain's cabin." His dark eyes glancing again to the sword there in my deadly hand, thinking what thoughts I knew not as I started a bit at his words. A PRINCESS! Obviously this ship carried "valuable" cargo indeed! She, I thought to myself, might very well have the answers to my questions! It was obvious too that she must be an "enemy" of this "Empire", which gave me hope that somehow, somewhere, Sharon and I might find safety with her.

"Bring the Princess to me, NOW!" I snapped, putting just as power and authority into my voice as I could. Telling the other sailor to bring the slaves up on deck, which he hesitated to do, apparently being somewhat afraid of them without having his fellow sailors as a "backup" should they rise up against him!

"I told you to GET THEM!", I snarled, half-lifting my sword, the man hurrying off to do my bidding, the shifty-eyed first mate quickly doing the same, Sharon following him at my order to see that he did what I sent him to do and absolutely NOTHING MORE! I didn't trust the man, and he was the only one who actually knew how to navigate the Ronda!

"She speaks English!" Sharon called delightedly out to me, walking beside a big beautiful blonde haired woman, as naked as the day she was born except for a strip of bluish cloth around her hips and lovely golden disks fitted over her nipples like the "pasties" once worn by 20th Century "strip-tease" dancers. The first mate now slinking away like a whipped cur, the woman having a sword belt strapped around her hips! Those iron-grey eyes of hers burning into mine as I stood there in the sunlight, my own bloodstained blade yet in my hand. This was obviously the "Princess of Dularn", wherever that was here in this fantastic world! She was tall, perhaps 5'8" or 5'9", and quite well muscled, a true fighting woman! The fact that she had already armed herself spoke much of her! Obviously in this strange era women "fought"!

"I am Janis Jord, Princess of Dularn," she smiled, drawing her blade and lifting it in salute. On the inside of her left wrist a small brand, a stylistic sword that reminded me somewhat of the Christian cross. A mark that I would later bear upon my own left wrist, the mark of a WARRIORESS! "I salute you as one Warriress to another". Her swift eyes having not missed the bodies now gathered there by starboard the rail for later burial at sea. I returned her smile and raised my own blade in reply, a feeling of relief going over me at the thought that we now had at least one "friend" in this strange new time!

Chapter Seven

The slaves were a sorry sight as they were brought up on deck, their nude bodies chained by their necks to each other with steel collars. The women dazzled by the sunlight reflecting off the sea after the stuffy darkness of the hold, many of them showing the effects of seasickness from the Ronda's heavy roll in the seas. I had considerable sympathy, my own stomach not as peaceful as I would have liked. The bodies there by the rail and the half dried bloodstains on the deck leaving no doubts as to what had transpired earlier. Janis standing at my side, the presence of the Princess of Dularn a comfort to me. Whatever was to happen to us in this strange era, we at least had one friend that we could rely upon. Somewhere where we might make a new home for ourselves. We were no longer two helpless strangers in a strange alien land. We now had Janis, and a "home" promised to us in her own country, although I wasn't sure yet as to "where" Dularn was.

"I wonder just how much they're worth?" Sharon mused half to herself as she stood there at my other side. The slave women being of all types, some blonde like Janis, most brunette like me, but all, I noted with a smile, were attractive young women. The kind that lusty men would find sexually desirable and worth the cost of their purchase. I thought once again of the "GOR" novels that I had once read before I grew too disgusted with the author's treatment of women to continue on with the series. This era was too much like his "GOR"! I recalled what the young seaman had said about the "LORR". Like "GOR", this world too had its "Priest-Kings" that controlled Man's activities and his technology. We were a conquered people, living on a conquered world no longer our own. Ruled by hideous monsters from another world.

"Most of them twenty to thirty gold crowns apiece," Janis Jord smiled from beside me, having overheard my stepdaughter's comment. She was, I thought to myself, our only hope of ever finding a safe haven for ourselves in this strange and so far hostile land. How many centuries had we come into the future, if this was indeed our own future? I recalled conversations that I had often had with Janet Rogers. Janet having the sort of a mind that could range over the entire spectrum of thought and make sense of it all. I wondered what had happened to her? I had left her over a hundred thousand dollars in my will. It would have been enough to allow her to complete her education and give her a good "nest-egg" towards establishing herself in whatever professional career that she decided upon. We had discussed the possible development of a computer controlled device that would induce a state of hypnosis, such a device having awesome medical uses, especially in my own professional field, where I had used hypnosis to help many of my own patients to deal with their seemingly otherwise overwhelming personal problems. I have no doubt now that Janet did actually construct such a device, as it is in use even now from what "evidence" I've seen of such things. The Lorr also possess the same device, theirs being more "advanced".

"Are any of them 'known' to you?" I asked the Princess. We could use anyone we could get "on our side". Janis had said that it was a long trip to Dularn from here, wherever "here" was to wherever "Dularn" was! The Ronda sailing well close-hauled in the breeze, the sails drawing well, spray from time to time leaping over the bow to soak the gathering slave women. Some of them looking hopefully now over at us. A couple of them at least seemed like the sort that we might be able to use to assist in the sailing of the ship on its long voyage up to Dularn. I was a bit reluctant to tell her that we were both from 1988 A.D.!

"No," Janis replied, "Although I think we can use them to pull on ropes and do what is necessary to get us back home." I had to smile a bit at that, Janis having naturally referred to her own land as "home" where we were strangers in a land so strange that there could never be a time, I thought to myself, that we might consider it a true "home". We would always be "strangers", something to be stared at by the curious, I mused!

Giving the first mate orders that the slaves were to be bathed, their unwashed odor one that made me want to stay upwind of them, Janis and I retreated to the late captain's cabin in the ornate high sterncastle. Leaving Sharon on guard to keep an eye on things and to see that my orders were carried out. Both of us very much aware that none of the three surviving crewmen, especially the shifty eyed first officer, could be trusted. I had told him to sail north, that being the direction in which Dularn laid, until further notice. "Sarn" also being in that direction, I recalled, remembering the captain's comment about selling Sharon and me there. Janis having told me that it was the capital of the "Empire" ruled by her younger sister, and that her own country was at war with it! She had also told me that I was now officially so far as the Empire was concerned a pirate and could be expected to be "hung" like any pirate if we were ever caught!

"We need to talk," I said to Janis, after she gave orders to the first officer that the women be freed of their shackles and allowed the run of the ship. This had lead to a considerable argument between Janis and the first officer, who feared what the women might do to the ship before he finally agreed to do as she ordered. Otherwise he seemed to obey her considerably more willingly than he had me. Of course she was the "Princess of Dularn" as well as also being its "Warlady", her mother being the "Queen of Dularn", and I suppose that might have had something to do with it too. In a way it irritated me, the way she "took over", but I supposed it was for the best as I really didn't know what to do about the slaves anyway. Janis nodding, leading the way to the late captain's cabin where she had been kept helplessly chained by the ankle to the deck as his "plaything".

"Tell me how it happened," Janis said, handing me the brass goblet, the wine dark and red swirling about with the roll of the ship. Her eyes were friendly, understanding. I knew I could trust her. Tell her everything. I told her the story as I have told it up to this point. Of how we had flow into some sort of a flickering greenish blob of light and had ended up here, wherever "here" was, in the year 518 after The War. I told her about the flying saucer, about the gigantic ants we had seen, how they had recovered my airplane, but paid us no concern. Our lives apparently having meant little to the alien monsters that operated the disc. Told her of how the Ronda had picked us up, of how I had victoriously fought the entire crew of the ship after I learned that we were to be sold as slaves in Sarn, Sharon as a "pleasure slave" and me as a "fighting slut" for the "arena". Janis smiling, listening, drawing the complete story out of me out with an surprisingly expert touch, nodding and smiling as she went, and doing so with a rather "professional skill" that surprised me.

"You were very fortunate," Janis smiled, the light from the open stern windows flickering across her beautiful face. "Others have not been so lucky". Telling me of a "great silver bird" that came flying out of the sky nearly a century before to crash in flames in the center of the city of Sarn. Sarn being built, as I later learned, on the ruins of San Francisco. The craft obviously some sort of commercial airliner that had no doubt flown through the same type of space-time warp that I had! Janis calling these "Gateways" which she said were caused by the use of "anti-matter" weapons during the War, which occurred in the year 2047 A.D. when Mankind fought the alien Lorr and lost the battle! The "Gateways" being an accidental by-product of the incredible release of energy produced when anti-matter weapons over a certain level are used. "Warp-holes in the space-time continuum"!

The Lorr first arrived in our solar system in two gigantic starships miles across, hollowed out asteroids to be exact, sometime during the next to last Ice Age. We of the 20th Century saw them as Phobos and Deimos, the moons of Mars. They had traveled across the trackless infinite wastes of interstellar space for a dozen centuries in what is called "Cold Sleep", some form of life-extending hibernation where their body temperatures were reduced to near freezing and their life-spans therefore greatly increased. As I am a doctor, I know of such things, and the technology, while advanced beyond anything known in the 20th Century, is not really all that impossible to understand. The Lorr are, of course, centuries ahead of us in technology, and what we might consider impossible to us would be only "difficult" to them. They

also possess another version, called the "Warm Sleep", which is used for the longer voyages in our solar system. This I have experienced without any harm. I believe from what I have able to determine that it is done with the use of a drug developed from their own venom, which is a paralytic somewhat similar to curare.

Their own home world was somewhat like the planet Mars, its gravity about half that of the Earth, which made our own world unsuitable for them. However, Mars was nearly perfect for their needs, and as the Lorr are a subterranean race like the ants they greatly resemble, they made themselves a home there inside the planet in great underground caverns dug out by the almost infinite power of anti-matter which they use as we once used atomic energy. The surface of the planet being of no interest to them, which is why they remained hidden so long from our telescopes and the early explorers who landed on Mars in the early part of the 21st Century and found the world nearly as lifeless as the Moon.* * The reader might consider the fact here that a race of beings as advanced as the Lorr could no doubt alter the signals we have received from our space probes so as to make it seem that Mars is without life. Before you dismiss the concept of creatures like the Lorr out of hand, consider that we have no answer for the problem of "flying saucers" or for the puzzling changes in the evolution of Man that occurred fifty thousand years ago. (author)

After their arrival in the solar system, they studied the primitive forms of Man that then existed, and found that by genetic modification of the Neanderthals, they could produce a superior form that could be used to serve them as we use animals such as dogs and horses to serve us. The male of the race they found too violent, too prone to "make trouble", but the female of the race was ideal, and large numbers of human women were bred through the use of asexual reproduction to serve the Lorr in their underground caverns beneath the surface of the planet Mars. These women were later released upon the Earth, where they interbred with the more primitive males to produce what we call the Cro-Magnon race, such being the immediate ancestors of "homo sapiens". It will be seen from this that modern Humanity owes its entire existence to the Lorr, who were responsible for producing a creature that later "turned" on them and nearly destroyed them in 2047 A.D.! One can hardly blame the Lorr for doing what they did to us after we tried to exterminate them all!

The Lorr are neither benevolent or malevolent. We are to them much as we view the higher forms of life on our own world. Their thought processes are quite alien in many ways, and while I count among my friends She who is First among the Lorr, I do not pretend to believe that "Raspa" lives by the same moral code or thinks anything like I do. The mind in that nightmarish body is utterly different from a human's! Yet she took great risks to save my life when she could have simply left me to die there on the surface of Mars, so who is to say whether or not Raspa or her kind don't possess some sort of moral code similar to ours. We are intelligent beings. The Lorr are intelligent beings. I think we share that in common if perhaps little if anything else.

I do feel that after what has occurred there on Mars there is something of a "bond" between Raspa and me. Perhaps there will be "trust" someday and Man will be allowed to again ride on wings of fire out into space. To travel perhaps someday to the stars as the Lorr have already done. I do not expect to see such things in my lifetime, nor that of any Man or Lorr now perhaps alive, but someday I think that it will happen. That Man and Lorr will cross the infinite trackless wastes of interstellar space together, side by side, to other worlds circling the stars!

It was not until the year 2043 A.D. that the Lorr decided to let themselves be known to the 21st Century World Federation that now controlled the entire Earth. Earlier societies they did not trust, but the World Federation, established in the year 2011 by Janet Rogers, the first woman President of the United States in 2008, (Yes, she did go far!) lead the Lorr to believe that perhaps Mankind could be trusted with the knowledge that their solar system was being shared with another intelligent race. It was the worst

"mistake" that they could have ever made. Especially when Janet Rogers suddenly died while in their care near Mars of a heart attack. It being commonly believed back on Earth that the Lorr had killed her! (She was naturally an "old" woman then and did have a faint heart murmur even when I knew her in 1988)

A gigantic comet was passing through the solar system at the time, a comet over fifty miles across that would come close to Mars after swinging around the Sun and racing back out to the Oort comet cloud from which it had come. In one of the most despicable acts ever committed by Mankind the comet was somehow diverted from its orbit so that it would strike Mars and destroy the Lorr! A number of World Federation spaceships loaded with H-bombs going with it to insure that there would be no survivors!

The response of the surviving Lorr was predictable. Earth was nearly defenseless against their superior technology. Anyone who builds starships isn't anyone you want to pick a fight with. We should have known better but didn't! The Lorr dropped enough anti-matter bombs to blast the Earth into another Ice Age, destroying every major city and settled area that they could find, and probably killed perhaps close to 95% of humanity in doing so!

Chapter Eight

"The Lorr imposed upon the survivors of The War what we call 'THE EDICT'," Princess Janis Jord of Dularn told me. Telling me that under "THE EDICT" that Mankind was limited to the technology of an era now over thirteen centuries in the past! "There are exceptions in the fields of medicine and such, but for the most part Men must now live as their forefathers once did in 'The Dark Ages' after the fall of Rome". Her voice bitter as she finished speaking and shifted to a more comfortable position there beside me on the leather covered sofa we were sitting on. The warm sea breeze now wafting through the open stern windows smelling of the sea. The heavy iron ring set into the wood and the chains there on the deck a ready reminder of Janis' earlier captivity before my skill with a sword had unknowingly freed her from being a nearly helpless "plaything" of the Ronda's cruel vicious captain.

I thought her a beautiful woman, her blonde hair, iron gray eyes, well shaped mouth and lips making her a delight to the eye. She also had very nice well shaped legs, which the briefness of her earlier attire had well displayed, Janis having worn when I first met her nothing but a strip of blue silk around her hips. Now she was wearing a brown leather kilt and a vest, both taken off the body of a dead man who had no further need for clothing. I had to admit that she certainly did look a lot better than I did, what with my torn and bloody dress that was really nothing more than a tattered rag that only half covered me! She had a beautiful figure, long lovely legs which I envied. I wear long flowing skirts for a good reason. I am not beautiful and I don't have a sexy figure. I do, however, have on quality that no other woman has, and that is my skill with a sword, which is something else entirely! Something that has made me a "living legend" now!

I had been rather amused by her choice of attire, Janis having made no attempt to cover her breasts from me when we first met, although she had stopped to select a sword belt to strap around herself to carry the sword she had selected to be hers from those here in the captain's quarters. On the other hand as I was to learn she would have been embarrassed to be seen without the beautiful golden nipple covering disks that she wore, such being part of the culture to which she belonged as a member of royalty. The disks being fitted to her pierced nipples in such a way that they were similar to earrings. Janis feeling that a woman who did not wear such "jewelry" was of a lower class and not really someone who she would be interested in "associating" with! This seems to be a characteristic of both Dularnian and

Californian civilizations and is I suppose just one of those things that are hard for one of the 20th Century to understand. On the other hand some 20th Century fashions such as "see-through" blouses are only thought suitable for public wear by "hip-swingers" (street-walkers) here in the 26th Century! The same would be true of mini-skirts on adult women, although with some exceptions, that being Darlanis Marden, the Empress of California, who often wears rather exotic brief golden attire that reminds me so much of some comic book heroine from our own time!

The fashion of wearing nipple coverings (clips) appears to date back to the 21st Century before The War as there are surviving photographs of women wearing such fashions back then. Apparently they were worn beneath sheer blouses and such, although it is hard to tell, as the only photographs that have survived are in such poor condition that it is very difficult to tell much. There are references to women wearing "clips" and "straps", the "strap" being a mini-thong that was usually worn on the beach like the 20th Century bikini, although once again the references to these items are not really all that clear as to just when and where these items were actually worn. Here in the 26th Century the "strap" is a common piece of attire, almost unisexual, as is the shaving of the female's pubic hair among the upper classes (castes) of the two civilizations. The slave girls here aboard the Ronda naturally were all "unshaved", as is common among slave girls everywhere as a mark of their own "animal" status!

"But The War took place over five hundred years ago!" I protested when Janis told me about THE EDICT, which one disobeys at the risk of your life. The Lorr constantly now patrol the Earth, both by spaceship and by telescopic observation from Deimos orbiting a thousand miles up in a polar orbit about the Earth and woe be to any who disobey, for "The Light That Burns" will seek them out and leave only ashes behind! It is somewhat like a laser, but also electrical in its effects, being a directed beam of almost pure energy that can destroy anything it touches. They also possess a weapon that fires projectiles that explode on impact with a force that nothing can withstand. I understand that the bullet or shell is composed of material that has been "altered" so that it becomes atomically unstable by alteration of the electron orbits around the nucleus. I have seen such a weapon in the form of a handgun firing a small caliber high velocity bullet that explodes on contact with the force of a 20mm shell! Their human servants are sometimes so armed, although they also possess other weapons such as a neuron whip that can be used to punish you as they wish for periods of time. The Lorr themselves also possess a paralyzing sting in their mandibles which can be quite lethal to humans if you receive too much of the venom into your bloodstream. I have been "stung" twice myself and can assure you that it is not a pleasant experience either!

"The Lorr have not forgot what we did to them," Janis answered with a grim smile. "They are not like us. They neither forgive or forget that we once killed them by the millions." Neither has Man ever forgotten that the Lorr killed his kind by the billions in return. There is much hatred burning between the two races, but perhaps someday, there will be understanding. I and Raspa have done our parts to bring that day a little bit closer. Twice now she has saved my life, both times at risk to her own. I owe her much, and love her as a friend despite her hideous appearance, Raspa, like all the Lorr, looking much like a common carpenter ant scaled up about a hundred and fifty times! They are not actually biologically insects, despite their appearance, but they certainly do look horrid enough, being like something out of a 20th Century drug-addict's worse nightmare!

"Lorraine!" Sharon cried, bursting in, and that is really the proper term here, for she very nearly knocked the door off its hinges in her haste to tell me what was happening outside! "There's a flying saucer following us, and it's so big it fills the whole sky!" The last was a bit of overstatement, but Raspa's flagship is pretty big, being about a thousand feet in diameter! "You've got'a come see it! Right Now!" Sharon cried, almost jumping up and down there in her excitement there before us!

"STRIP! BOTH OF YOU! EVERYTHING!" Janis barked instantly, "Those 'Things' could kill us all

like ants if they find what I think they are out here looking for!" The look in the Princess' iron gray eyes leaving no doubt in my mind that she meant exactly every word of what she said!

"Just try to behave like a couple of slave girls," Janis said, snapping a pair of empty collars around our necks so that we stood chained in among the other women, all of whom were completely naked and terrified of the great silvery disc that now floated nearly overhead. The craft being, I thought to myself, a full thousand feet across, if not more as it blotted out the Sun!

"And keep your yaps' shut!" she warned, strolling off, the long cloak she now wore along with the rest of her trappings making her look like the captain of a ship like this one. Janis having warned everyone that we would be all "fried" if the Lorr discovered who we were. Actually, as I later learned, the Lorr would have done nothing of the kind, but I suppose at the time it seemed a wise move on Janis' part to have us behave as slave girls. The Princess no doubt fearing that we might both be taken to Mars for questioning and then kept there as their own slaves. A fate that I muchly feared considering what she had told me too!

"You will heave to and prepare to be boarded for inspection," the metallic voice came from the great disc, the soft hum of its anti-gravity generators seeming to come from everywhere at the same time. Once again we felt that tingle I had felt before, the effects of its anti-gravity generators at close range. I thought of the hundreds of thousands of tons floating there above us in that gleaming featureless smooth surfaced disc and shuddered. Even the greatest battleship that ever sailed the oceans of Earth would have been as helpless as the Ronda beneath such Power, such awesome Alien Power as now floated there above us!

The first mate quickly barked the orders that brought the Ronda up with a flapping of the sails into the wind, Janis standing just behind him wrapped in the late captain's cloak. Her words to him, as I later learned, having been few, but in a tone that had doubtlessly left no doubts in his mind what so ever of her "intentions" if he even attempted to betray us to the Lorr!

"Lorraine, I'm scared!" Sharontrembled, clinging to me.

"You're not the only one," I assured her as the women on either side of us knelt. I did the same, dragging Sharon down with me. The silvery disc a thousand feet across floating over our heads leaving no doubt that we were in the power of creatures with a technology far beyond anything Man had ever produced. A technology that once carried them across the trackless infinite depths of interstellar space to our solar system some fifty thousand years ago. They had come in their silvery gleaming shining discs when Man had been but a shambling brute back in the Old Stone Age, stooped and hairy, peering out over his world from beneath the heavy brows of primitive and brutal Neanderthal Man.

"I know you're scared," I answered, giving her a smile and holding her close, fighting down in my own heart the terror that sought to overwhelm me at the very thought of meeting the Lorr face to face! Adding as a lovely pair of azure eyes met mine, "Just remember what Janis said and don't speak to them." Knowing well that our accents could very well betray us to the ant-like inhabitants of Mars as being from another time! The horrid alien monsters that now ruled the entire Earth ever since The War five hundred and eighteen years ago!

From the giant disc came two pale beams of light that made the Ronda shudder as it was seized and held, the craft sinking down a bit over us, hiding even more of the sky with its great bulk. The shadow, I noticed to myself, was over a thousand feet across! I thought of the technology, the awesome knowledge it took to build such a craft, and felt much like the first Neanderthals must have felt fifty thousand years ago when they first laid eyes upon the Lorr and their awesome craft!

From beneath the giant disc I saw great doors slide open, and then a smaller craft descended towards us, the smaller craft perhaps no more than thirty odd feet in diameter. The smaller disc quickly settling down alongside us, with its rim just touching the Ronda's rail, an exit ramp then being extended to touch the deck with a gentle bump. A doorway or portal then opening up, and before my eyes I watched three Lorr descend it to the deck. Their movements slow and measured in Earth's oppressive gravity. Their awful heads turning, watching, their bodies encased in some sort of a transparent armor, devices mounted on their backs, with some sort of weapons mounted between their antennae as they stood there on their six legs, black shining ALIEN HORRORS from another star system many light years away now!

The Lorr, unlike humans, are bred for specific tasks. They are all females, the males of the species being extinct for many thousands of years. They reproduce by means of asexual reproduction that is somewhat similar to cloning, but with the use of a system of genetic control that speaks of an awesome technology.

There are three general types of Lorr, the first being what we would call "The Princess", about ten feet long, which is the most intelligent and is usually in command of their activities. The second type is "The Warriress", about eleven feet in length which has been bred for fighting, their bodies being modified so that they are perfect fighting machines. They are not as intelligent as the "Princess", but are quite "fearless" and will fight on despite the odds against them. The third type is "The Worker", which is somewhat smaller, about nine feet, and performs all the tasks that would be required in their society. They also have their human servants, which outnumber them somewhat, these women being able to do tasks that the Lorr find difficult due to the structure of their forelimbs. The Lorr having only a claw at the end of their leg, not hands like we do. They once had a sort of humanoid servant back thousands of years ago, but these went extinct when the Lorr found that human women were better servants than the little ape-like creatures that they used before. The "Servitors" are well treated and usually think of Mars as being their "home" just as we consider Earth "home". They can withstand Earth's gravity to a degree, and do act, I believe, sometimes as "spies" to see that THE EDICT is lived up to, although the Lorr prefer to employ native Earth women for this task whenever so possible as more than one Servitor has returned to Mars impregnated, such women often being "easy marks" for Earthmen!

"Want do they want of us?" I heard one of the women mutter, the tone of her voice showing the terror she felt as another Lorr, this one escorted by a young woman, descended from the smaller disc floating alongside the Ronda. She was blonde, about 5'8", very beautiful. Attired in a dark blue form fitting jumpsuit, a wide black belt around her waist with a pistol of some sort there in a holster, and carrying some sort of weapon that looked somewhat like a flashlight there in her right hand. It was my first glimpse of a neuronc whip, one of the punishment devices often used by the Lorr to control and discipline humans.

Three of the terrifying Lorr Warriresses now stood upon the deck of the Ronda, two facing us, the third facing Janis and the crew. Their antennae waving slowly, such being a sense organ for their sixth sense, which is somewhat like a short range radar from what I have been able to determine, the Lorr having a "radio-radar" sense that is utterly unlike anything us human beings possess! Their bulging black compound eyes, now unshaded thanks to the protective shadow of the spacecraft overhead, were like multi-faceted black jewels that missed little. Their shiny black bodies, completely hairless, covered by a natural horny armor so thick that a sword could hardly cut into it, added to their terrifying appearance. The young woman and the giant ant-like horror pausing for a few seconds before then coming over towards us as we knelt among the naked slave girls, trying our best to look like only another pair of naked sluts that would be supposedly soon be sold in Sarn! I could feel Sharon shivering in terror as I held her close, feeling utterly helpless!

The pair then stopped before us, the blonde beauty an utter contrast to the horror that now regarded us from its multi-faceted eyes. The young woman quietly regarding me from lovely grayblue eyes while

holding her weapon, for such I suspected it to be, at the "ready". I noticed then that she wore some sort of what appeared to be a common "over-the-ear" type of hearing aid there beneath her golden hair as she brushed it back, which rather surprised me considering her youth. It was my first glimpse of the means by which the Lorr, being incapable of speech, use to communicate with other human beings through their human servants.

The Lorr's long antennae extended forward like a pair of slim black whips as we knelt there before it. The terrible mandibles opening wide as the nightmarish horror then extended a clawed forelimb towards us. Sharon trembling in terror there in my arms as I held her close, her head against my shoulder as we knelt naked and helpless among the slaves. Feeling utterly helpless to protect her from the horror now standing there on its six insect-like legs before us! Then the young woman suddenly said to me, nearly shocking me out of my skin! "Raspa, First Princess of the Lorr, extends you greetings, Doctor Lorraine Marie Duval."

Chapter Nine

"How?" I gasped, not believing my ears as the young woman beside that horrid ant-like monster that was First among the Lorr informed me that she knew "who" I was! Sharon wide-eyed as she knelt beside me, my arms yet around her trembling terrified body. The slaves around us keeping their eyes, heads docilely down as they knelt in terror before the horrid thing before us and its beautiful human servant. The young woman's weapon in her hand leaving no doubt that she would protect the horror there standing beside her. I recalled what Janis had told me of these women. That they knew no loyalty but to the creatures that they served.

"We recovered your aircraft and found aboard it the means to identify you, along with considerable information as to what era you came from." the young woman who spoke for Raspa answered with a smile as if to say "how stupid do you think we are not to know such things?" "Along with weapons 'forbidden' to Man under 'THE EDICT'". These obviously having been Jack's and my own handguns!

"You could have picked us up!" Sharon uttered, the anger showing foolishly in her voice. The Lorr had come, retrieved our plane, and left us to drown. I had no doubt that they could have found us had they wished. The saucer had no doubt possessed technology far beyond anything known in the 20th Century! To find two women floating in the sea would have been nothing for them if they could find an airplane sunk to the bottom of the sea hundreds of feet down! I wondered just what their answer would be to that! What justification they had for leaving us to drown!

"The one responsible has been disciplined," the answer came. I felt satisfied with that. Perhaps these creatures did have a spark of decency about themselves after all despite what Janis had said about them. They were intelligent beings with an advanced civilization. They would have a moral code of some sort. It might not apply to human beings, but they no doubt respected intelligent life for what it was. In that, I thought, they were well in advance of Mankind! They do consider themselves superior to us, and see Earthlings nothing more than "violent barbarians"!

"What are you going to 'do' to us?" I ventured, fearing only the worst from them. I knew of their power, of the fact that they might be of the opinion that Sharon and I possessed too much knowledge of 20th Century technology to be trusted among the men of the 26th. Although I was later to learn that a considerable amount of knowledge had been saved and there was more known about the past than I had

first thought upon encountering the Ronda and its piratical crew. Princess Janis had been evidence of that.

"As long as you obey 'THE EDICT', 'nothing' at this time," the reply came, the young woman speaking in a monotone as she repeated what the First Princess of the Lorr said to her in her radio speech. Just "how" such a thing was done puzzled me then, although I learned later that the Lorr actually communicate by means of short-range radio transmission at a wave-length of about two meters judging from the length of their antennae which are usually about a meter long. (half-wave antennae?)

"You are a very great swordswoman," the young woman said, although I had no idea if it was her speaking or the First Princess. "Only one such as you could have killed the men there at the rail and taken over this ship and freed the Princess of Dularn." Apparently they knew who Janis was too!

"You would make an excellent detective!" I smiled back, wondering if the observations had been made by the Lorr or by the young golden haired beauty there at her side that spoke for her. I should have had the bodies tossed overboard and the deck cleaned up, but had put it off, being more curious to learn about where and when we were than such morbid details as attending burials at sea here in the 26th Century. I hadn't planned on the First Princess of the Lorr coming to visit us for an inspection!

"My Warriresses have reported these things to me and the conclusion is rather obvious that you have killed these men and have taken over this ship. The recent injury to your body is only further proof of that fact. The normal crew for a ship this size is about a dozen men, and there are now only three crewmen aboard along with the Princess of Dularn, who I understand has been gone from her country for some time now," the answer came back from the young woman, although I had no doubt that she only was "repeating" what she had just been told by the alien horror there beside her. "You should realize that our intelligence is superior to yours and that I am in direct contact with my ship's central computer banks and its own sensory devices by antennae link." I had no doubt this time who was doing the "talking"! "Therefore it is obvious that I do know of what I speak," the First Princess concluded with a wave of her antennae almost as one would wave their hand or arm! I was very impressed by her!

"And we are free to go?" I ventured, regarding the horror on its six legs there before me, having no doubt that it had the power to order our instant death if I displeased it in the least! Studying it with a "Warriress' eye" for any point where it might be vulnerable to attack by an unarmed woman. Coming to the conclusion that unless I had a sword that I would be no match for it! (I fought one on Mars hand to claw and did lose the fight!)

"I may later wish to speak to you, but for now you may go," it replied, speaking through the voice of the young woman beside it. I wondered what it felt like to serve such monsters, to be at their beck and call. Perhaps with time one grew used to them, I thought to myself. I would have another opinion of Raspa later when I learned of the beauty of the mind and personality beneath that hideous exterior. They are, in their way, truly not what they first seem! I had much yet to learn here in the 26th Century. First impressions can sometimes be quite deceiving!

I held Sharon in my arms as the Lorr climbed back into their silvery disc, the great mass floating a hundred feet over our heads speaking of Power almost beyond our comprehension. The young woman for a moment turning to look at me before then stepping inside to join the others. The small disc then rising up to enter the giant above, which then swiftly disappeared into the sky with a soft hum of infinite power. I did not think we had seen the last of the Lorr. Especially not after what She who was First among the Lorr had said to me. There was much I had to think about. Many questions that I needed to have "answers" to.

Chapter Ten

"Things do seem to be kind'a 'looking up' now," Sharon said with a sleepy smile to me. Both of us now feeling the effects of what we had gone through, neither of us having had a chance to sleep for many hours. The teenage blonde slipping off her blouse and skirt as I nodded in agreement. The thought going through my mind that we would both have to obtain new clothing as soon as possible. Sharon's ripening figure well revealed by her skimpy bra and matching bikini panties. The knowledge that Princess Janis was in charge of things having taken a great burden off my mind. Our snack of wine and cheese and dried preserved meat having taken the edge off our hunger and served to help settle our jangled nerves after our experience with the horrid looking Lorr.

"I'll see about different sleeping arrangements later," I smiled as I slipped into the late captain's bed beside Sharon. The touch of my body against hers no doubt "comforting" to the lovely teenager after everything we had been through in the last twenty four hours. Sharon snuggling up to me like she used to when she was little and there was a thunderstorm to terrify her. I thought of the one we had flown through to get to this strange place. Of the horrid Lorr, of the battle I had fought against the brutes who had sailed this ship. I wondered if I would have nightmares from it all. I hoped not. I had been through enough!

It had been my decision that the slaves aboard the Ronda be freed and given their choice of going to Dularn with us or being put ashore somewhere, there to seek their own fates. The Princess agreeing with my decision on the matter, fortunately, for I would have hated to have started out our relationship on a "sour" note! Janis promising me that in Dularn the women would be all given the chance to make new lives for themselves as best they could. All had agreed to take the Princess up on her generous offer. Dularn, from what Janis had told me of it, being a society much like that of early colonial America, in many ways something like what America had been back in the Seventeenth Century. Unlike the "Empire of California", Dularn was a true democracy, with the monarch having only the power to repeal bad laws and a popular Assembly serving to pass them. Members of this being selected by a vote of the "taxpayers" to serve a term of office, thus insuring that the interests of the people were truly served. Janet Rogers had invented the concept of limiting "voting rights" to taxpayers back in the 21st Century, Janis had told me much to my surprise! She admired the woman muchly, saying that had she not died when she had there would have never been any War between Man and the Lorr. I think she was right. Janet was the one person who could have faced the Lorr, saw them truly for what they were, and accepted them as being our equals, not as the horrible alien monsters that they first appear to be to the human eye.

As Sharon snuggled up against me, her lips like a pink rosebud there in the near darkness of the cabin, I thought again of the warning that Janis had given me that under Imperial Law I was now a pirate and could be hung from a yardarm if ever captured! Words that had done nothing to settle my nerves at the time, Janis having informed me that only in her own distant Canadian country could I ever hope to find a safe home for Sharon and myself under the benevolent protection of her mother the Queen!

I thought I would keep the matter for the time being to myself, there being no reason to worry Sharon over the fact that her beloved stepmother was now legally a PIRATE! The thought making me smile as I cuddled the girl to myself, thinking of the romantic novels I had read as a young girl. The very idea of I, Lorraine Duval, being a pirate! With such thoughts going through my mind and Sharon warm at my side, sleep swiftly came on its silent silken wings to finally bring peace to my fevered thoughts.

In our conversation with the Princess shortly before we retired for the night, Sharon and I had been amazed at the changes that had taken place over the centuries. Even the names of cities and places

having changed, The War having left little untouched. Those who survived having been few and perhaps subconsciously trying to "bury" the past that had caused them so much pain and suffering as they destroyed and burned what little remained. Such not being that uncommon as I knew from my own professional experience. The "Priestesses of Lys" no doubt playing a part in things as Janis pointed out to me. Their teachings of the "evils" of the pre-War era doubtless having had their effect on such matters too. The truth was of course different, but the Priestesses were powerful and held the allegiance of most people. To go up against them was the act of a "fool", Janis had informed me. It being commonly believed that they had the "antennae" of the Lorr and served to keep Humanity properly "docile" under the domination of the ant-like aliens and their own spaceship now orbiting the Earth like a second Moon. Organized religion has often served such purposes in the past, and it was no surprise to me, a professed agnostic at the time, that this one did too! One could expect no less from the Lorr, who after all, knew as much about Man and his "weaknesses" as anyone did! The "Ants", as Janis called them, having been apparently watching over Man and all his social activities for some nearly fifty thousand years now!

Going on, Janis explained that the name "Trelandar", which sounds like a place nowhere on Earth, is actually merely the name for what was once known as southern California. The name having been started by the practice of referring to persons who came from that area as "Tree-landers" because of the great redwoods. Janis explaining that in her own country, the name "Dularn" was brought about from the combination of the French word for "God", "Du", with the English word for "land"; thus producing the word "Duland" or "Dularn" as it was now called by most people, few referring to it as the island of Vancouver which lies off the coast of Canada. It is a lovely country, and is a true "God's-land".

The cultural changes seem to be more the after effect of The War and the resulting barbaric social disorders that followed. There are examples in history of such, the "Dark Ages" after the fall of Rome being one. The well educated Princess of Dularn noting that it was also possible that the Lorr, knowing as "much" of human history as they did, had decided that encouraging such a social order would be in their own best long term interests!

Oddly enough, the Lorr had permitted some of the knowledge of the past to continue on, such as the anti-aging serums that I found so amazing when I first heard of them. As well as the equally necessary controls upon human reproduction that made me smile as I heard of thought of certain friends of mine would have had to "say" about that! This last being in the domain of the Priestesses of Lys, who apparently watched over Mankind like a benevolent mother. The Princess telling me that the Priestesses had now taken over the complete control of organized religion, "permitting" none other but their own. Christianity having been ruthlessly stamped out along with all other religions that had survived The War of 2047. They having done so by a means that Janis didn't completely understand, saying that they possessed strange alien powers that made them almost the equals of the Lorr! Telling me of Priestesses who could read minds, heal with their thoughts, move objects without touching them, and do other utterly amazing things that no one understood just how they did! The Priestesses claiming that they received their powers from "Lys", although no "educated" person really believed all that "nonsense"! I suspected, however, that there just might be a simpler answer now to how they managed to do the things they did!

I considered it quite possible that the Priestesses had perfected a certain device I had discussed with Janet Rogers before my flight through time, that being the concept of computer controlled electronic hypnosis, against which of course there would be no defense. Prolonged use of such a device could, I suspected, perhaps lead to the development of mental powers only hinted by my own earlier experiences with hypnosis. Janet Rogers having been one of my best subjects, possessing under hypnosis amazing powers that had lead me to later suggest that the subject might be very well be one well worth further investigation! Had such studies been carried out, it was quite possible I thought to myself that the "Priestesses of Lys" would be the ultimate result. Janet and I having discussed just how such a device of such awesome power could be kept from "falling into the 'wrong hands'", Janet laughing and saying what

we needed was a new type of "religious order" that could keep the device from being abused by ambitious politicians and other evil people out to rule Humanity!* * The next book of this series delves deeper into this topic.

I awoke to the heavy leaping and rolling of the ship as it surged and leaped in what I knew must be a heavy sea. A motion that did little for my beginning seasickness, the meal I had eaten earlier not one that had agreed that well with me. Forcing the sleep like misty fog from my mind, and clad only in my chemise, I slipped from the swaying bed. Sharon still sleeping soundly despite the motion, the bed on its chains swaying back and forth with the now increasing sway and the roll of the Ronda.

Pulling back the curtain and looking through the salt stained stern windows, I could see that it was now dark, the only light coming from a guttering candle set in its stand alongside the door. My watch having as I have mentioned expired during the passage through the time-warp, I had no idea of how long we had slept, except to note that it must have been at least half a day from the look of things. I thought fondly of a long soak in a hot tub as I stretched, my wound having healed amazingly swiftly from the application of the healing compound I had applied to it, as I felt surprisingly little discomfort considering how badly I had been cut only that morning! The thought going through my mind of my fine silken nighties back home in the 20th Century and how nice it would be to slip into one right now and go back to bed for some more well deserved sleep after all I'd been through.

I was about to rejoin Sharon in the swaying bed when there came a soft knock at the door. And as I padded over in my bare feet to answer it, it suddenly opened and admitted one of the ship's former slave girls. The wench holding a candle lantern and clad in only a bit of soaking wet reddish silk that did little more than accent the feminine curves there beneath. Sharon's eyes gleaming in the pale shadow of her face as she awoke from the disturbance to regard us both now standing there at the door.

The briefly clad brunette saying to me in an urgent voice, "Please come, Lady Lorraine, the Princess has been hurt and the crewmen are all gone!" Her soft skin beaded with droplets of water that left no doubt that there was now considerable spray flying up over the bulwarks as the Ronda pounded her way along through the growing seas! The ship's heavy pounding telling me that we were doubtlessly in for a storm with no one on left board capable of sailing her through it!

"I'll be all right," Janis groaned, holding her head. The Princess the now picture of misery, one of the former slave women having found the Princess lying unconscious below decks in the wardroom beneath the captain's cabin, the three surviving members of the Ronda's crew now gone! "I'm lucky they didn't stop to slit my throat for their trouble too," she groaned as I cradled the Princess of Dularn in my lap, seeing the blood now matted and clotted in her golden hair. Knowing she was lucky to be alive!

From her I swiftly learned that she had come upon the three preparing to escape from the ship. One of them striking her down with a wooden belaying pin before she could draw her sword or give an alarm. What concerned me more just then was the fact that without any of the crew to help sail the Ronda, we were in serious trouble! Especially with the weather getting up as it was! The ship's rolling and pitching and pounding getting worse and worse by the minute!

Chapter Eleven

The heavy rolling motion of the ship made it hard to retain our feet as I helped Janis Jord out onto the

deck, Sharon at her side doing what she could for the still stunned Princess of Dularn. The gusting wind whistling ominously through the rigging in the darkness. The salty cold spray drenching us to the skin as it flew up over the leaping bow in the darkness. The women now gathered on deck beginning to show their terror as the word passed among them of what had happened. The thought of being aboard a ship under such conditions being enough to terrify anyone! The crew having made off in a small boat kept beneath the stern castle and mounted over the rudder. We had another, somewhat larger, that was mounted upside down on deck between the masts, which would have carried perhaps a dozen men at the most. Sharon and I had slept through everything that had happened just below us. The noise of the ship working in the heavy sea and our own state of exhaustion, both nervous and physical, having been enough to keep us asleep despite the noises that they had made escaping. I wondered if they would reach the shore or drown!

I knew I would have to take command of the Ronda despite my lack of knowledge, Janis being too badly hurt to be of much use yet. Or face the horrors soon to come as terror ran rampant aboard the ill-fated vessel! I shuddered at the thought of what it would be like, a ship filled with terrified women. Janis muttering something about a "cape" that meant little to me at the time. Sharon helping the Princess below to do what she could for her while I remained up on deck. The eyes of the woman at the wheel shining in the light from the binnacle as she silently watching the goings on. The cracking of the striped sails barely visible overhead telling of the strain they were taking, the ship lying nearly as close to the wind as it could. A sudden flash in the overcast sky ahead telling of the storm soon to be upon us. The sound of the thunder hidden in the crash of the waves against the shuddering hull as the Ronda pounded through the growing sea.

Then just as I thought that there was no way that things could get any worse, a woman came running up to me, stumbling on the wet rolling deck. Crying out, "The Water Barrels Have Been Drained!" The young half clad blonde's eyes wide with the first signs of terror, the departing crew apparently having made sure that we wouldn't travel far before having to put in for fresh water. Her words spreading fear and terror among those within earshot of her. The women on deck gathering in terrified clumps, muttering among themselves, panic now taking its toll! I thought I could faintly hear the ominous crash of breakers ahead and to the right! Janis' muttered warning coming back to haunt me at the sound. The term "lee shore" going through my mind! We needed to turn through the wind and go about on the other tack, and damn soon! The only trouble was: I didn't know how to do it!

"Steer as close into the wind as you can!" I ordered the woman at the wheel. Knowing from what Janis had told me earlier that tacking a ship like the lateen rigged Ronda was a task that required an experienced crew, especially in weather like this! The woman nodded and turned the wheel a bit. The warning flapping of the sails telling that little was to be gained that way as she regarded me. Keeping her thoughts to herself. Waiting for further orders. Obviously considering it "my problem" too!

I knew that the problem was that in order to tack the Ronda, it would be necessary to first take in sail, then swing the ship over on the other tack. Letting the sails back out again after the yards had been swung across. The design of the short stubby masts and their rigging being such that the sails would not clear unless this was done. Our only other choice was to turn and attempt to sail back downwind; but due the design of the Ronda's lateen rigging, I suspected that this would most likely result in disaster in such a "wind". Unlike other sail designs, the lateen rig cannot be easily adjusted as such for wind conditions, but is usually replaced with different suits of sails as needed, although the positioning of the sails in respect to the wind can of course be adjusted to "take" more or less of the wind like any sailing vessel. In any case I knew the Ronda was already carrying far more sail than was proper for her under the conditions!

Looming ahead out of the darkness it seemed to me as if I could see the gleam of breakers as they

smashed against the jagged rocks of the shoreline. This part of Trelandar being mostly jagged and rocky with few areas where one could seek shelter, the woman at the wheel told me. Having been a fisherman's wife before being taken and then judicially enslaved as payment for a debt he had been unable to pay. Her name was Shirl, she told me.

"I'm making you second in command!" I cried over the whistle of the wind and the crash of the waves against the hull, hoping that Shirl was as competent as she appeared. The woman being a big brunette who looked competent and capable. The muscles beneath her now spray-soaked shift telling of a life of hard labor. "I'm open to suggestions!" I added, grabbing at the woman as a wave suddenly flew over the bow and drenched us both!

"We have to tack away from this shore!" Shirl cried in reply, the problem being of course how to do it! Both of us knowing that tacking such a vessel as the Ronda would be no easy task in such weather. The Ronda now working heavily in the rising sea, there being no doubt that we were in for a storm that under the conditions we would never survive! We would be smashed and drowned against the rocky cliffs now faintly visible ahead and to the right. The breakers smashing into foam at their jagged feet. Their crash like distant thunder over the whistle of the wind in the rigging and the flapping of the sails. The lightning flashing again to remind us of what was coming! Things did not look good just then. I was getting very "tired" of being in danger!

"If we can't sail this damm thing!" I snapped to Shirl, "We'll row it!" Thinking of the oar ports I had seen along its sides. Shirl regarding me as if I had taken leave of my senses, but wisely keeping her opinions to herself, perhaps feeling that any woman who could take on a dozen men and defeat them all was not someone who you wanted to get in an argument with just then!

Not that I had any delusions about being able to row the Ronda out of danger; but if the sweeps could even slow down our drift towards the looming cliffs and jagged rocks that now threatened us, it might just buy enough time to get the sails somehow reset on the other tack before the storm hit us with its full force. Resetting the sails was going to be an "experience"!

The sweeps were long heavy things, made to be used by men, not women, but their design was such, I noted with satisfaction, that the women would only have to deal with their work. The actual weight of the sweeps themselves being supported by the oarlock and balancing weights attached to the inner portion of the great levers. With the women gathered around, the spray drenching their half naked bodies, Shirl at my side, I explained swiftly to them what I wanted. Telling them in no uncertain terms the fate that awaited them all if we could not draw away from the towering cliffs now becoming visible in the flickering flashes of the lightning. The deep crash of the breakers now audible to all mingled with the rolling of the thunder from the storm ahead.

At her command the women slid out the dozen long heavy sweeps, five women to a sweep, Shirl barking out the commands like an oar master on a war galley as the terrified former slaves struggled with the great levers. Their bare feet slipping on the spray soaked deck as they tried to keep pace with her commands. The spray drenching us all as it leaped up over the bow, falling in drenching sheets over the deck. While the dull crash of the breakers ahead and to the right told of the fate that awaited us if we could not draw clear of the rocks that would destroy us!

Hoping that my selected dozen women and myself could get the sails down once the pressure of the wind was taken off them, I tried to steer the vessel into the wind as best I could. It being my intention to attempt to put the ship on the other tack before it was destroyed. The Ronda almost "dead in the water" despite the best efforts of the sixty women on the sweeps, the force of the wind and the waves against the ship being so strong!

It seemed to me almost as if the ship was fighting me the way that it refused to turn, the sails flapping terribly in the wind. The crash of the breakers in the background terrifying in their import. The lightning flashing overhead showing the fate that awaited us on the dark rocks now no more than a quarter mile away. A bright flash for an instant lighting everything as bright as day, seeming to freeze us all in place. The thunderous crash deafening as darkness once again covered the sight of what laid there in wait for us to starboard!

"Dammit! If I'm going to drown, at least let me die like a Warriress, not a Rat!" I heard a loud voice say from behind me as I fought to turn the Ronda into the wind. A voice that I welcomed like a savior! Then Janis was there at my side, Sharon supporting her. The Princess of Dularn giving me a grim smile as she pushed me aside and took the wheel, the wind blowing her golden hair out like a flag as she stood there at the wheel now.

Letting the ship fall off for a moment to gather speed, Janis then brought the Ronda into the wind, the wet sails flapping horribly, threatening to rip apart at any moment. The Princess barking orders like a drill sergeant, driving us all, forcing us to do what must be done to save the ship and ourselves. A Viking Goddess there at the wheel, her leather trappings dripping with water, a long slim sword in its sheath strapped around her hips. Sharon at her side, ready to rely her orders if needed. We needed no whips to drive the terrified women at the sweeps to their best efforts, although the Ronda was slowly losing ground in the wind! Drifting into the threatening rocks now so close by!

The foresail was a great flapping wet mass that seemed to almost have a life of its own as we somehow managed to drag it down on to the deck, Shirl at my side, her powerful muscles welcome as we fought the wet leaping canvas. The heavy crash of the breakers in the background terrifying as we struggled with the long heavy yard, the wet sail like a living thing fighting our every attempt to reset it. Then we finally got it reset on the other side of the mast, our hands cut and bleeding as we drove ourselves. Pulling on the ropes, ignoring the agony that burned our soft water-soaked palms, our torn fingernails, knowing the fate that awaited us all! The lightning flashing and thundering in the sky adding to the horrors. A heavy downpour suddenly drenching us as we managed to reset the sail. The wet tarred ropes were burning agony in our now raw palms. We were rapidly learning what the life of a 26th Century sailor could be like!

The towering cliffs were only a hundred yards away, the white foam of the breakers looming up in the darkness. Blind terror now whimpering in my mind as I thought of what our fate would be if we failed to claw free of the doom that awaited us! The jagged rocks that would smash our frail vessel to splinters; the horrible smashing breakers that would snuff the life from our soft bodies. Leaving us all only broken carcasses to feed the fish and the monsters of the deep. The best efforts of the women at the sweeps were not enough, I saw, seeing the rocks and cliffs slowly coming closer with every wave that smashed up against the Ronda's bow!

Then showing seamanship that would have been the envy of the greatest sailing captains of all time, the Princess swung the Ronda about on the other tack. Screaming commands to the women on both masts as she did so, sailing the Ronda on just the foresail, leaving the mainsail miss-set, and using it only to help guide the vessel. Setting it so that it spilled much of the wind, the Princess having known that we did not have time to properly set both sails!

I sobbed with relief as the threatening cliffs slowly faded away into the darkness. The lightning thundering overhead, knowing how close we had come to doom! Sharon moving to my side, her arm going around my slim muscular waist. Knowing that her brave stepmother had done her best to save us them all. The Princess giving me a smile there in the darkness that told much, saying, "Well Done,

Warrioress!" Giving me a swift salute that meant much as Sharon hugged me again, the rain pouring down upon us all.

Chapter Twelve

The former slaves seemed happy as they sunned themselves on the yet steaming deck. Others making clothing from the sail that the Princess believed we could sacrifice for the purpose. My nipples were still a bit tender from having them pierced this morning and then fitted with the little golden rivets like 20th Century earring posts that served to hold the clasps of the beautiful golden nipple "clips" that upper caste women of the 26th Century wore. A number of them being stocked in a chest aboard the Ronda. Janis had done the same to Sharon, who delighted in running around the ship wearing nothing but clips and a brief black silken "strap" that left no doubts as to her beauty, Janis having said that the late captain's opinion of my Sharon being worth "thirty gold crowns" was probably quite a bit too low for such a "delight" as her! Janis' own comment making me smile as I regarded Sharon in her to me now quite utterly shocking attire while at the same time I studied THE BOOK OF LYS, the "Bible" of this era for anything that might "answer" my own questions here!

Sharon was now on "watch" with our biggest telescope, a task she had pleaded and begged for until I relented and let her do it. My stepdaughter hidden up in the rocks above watching for Imperial Navy vessels that might be out searching for us. Janis having said that there would be no doubt of pursuit if the former members of the crew were able to reach shore and give the alarm. We had even taken the masts down to better conceal ourselves here in the little hidden cove. Anchoring the Ronda so that it was concealed as best we could against any possible discovery. The way the Princess did things leaving no doubts about her either...

The Ronda was now at anchor in a little cove that Shirl had told us about. One where we hoped we could refill our water barrels and make needed repairs before once again setting out towards distant Dularn. The capital city, from what I could determine from the Ronda's maps and what Janis had told me, being located on the southern tip of the lovely island of Vancouver near Puget Sound. The actual country is of course much more than this, Dularn having control over a portion of what was western Canada back in the 20th Century and the State of Washington. This territory is disputed both with the Empire of California to the south and what are called "Montanas" to the east, a tribal society of nomadic peoples who appear to somewhat related to the American Indians of the past. To the north there are various small groups that somewhat remind me of the Vikings of the Twelfth Century in their appearance and activities, the "Northmen" being in the eyes of the Dularnians a bunch of pirates and raiders who live off plundering other people. Their raiding craft being often found even as far south as Baja! Baja being a country ruled by a blood-thirsty Princess who was now Darlanis' own "Warlady", Janis told me. Further south was the Empire of Mexico, and to the east of Trelandar independent Talon, home of the great birds I have already mentioned. Then beyond the Sierras was the territory claimed by the Nevadas, another nomadic people racially intermixed like the Montanas with the Indians.

There are also new forms of life to be feared, both in the sea and on land, various mutated monsters caused by The War along with the gigantic mutated eagle called a Tarl which is capable of flying off with good sized children and animals up to seventy pounds or so. These creatures are greatly feared by the Peasants, who have a number of tales of children being carried off by the great birds to be consumed by their young, which are I suspect perhaps more based upon fact than myth. The birds can be domesticated and bred as they have been by the people of Talon for centuries, and while I am a bit

heavy for one, they are used to carry women trained in the use of the bow there upon their backs. Talon is an delightfully exotic place, lying between two mountain ranges, and I hope to someday visit the place, although whether or not I want to go take a ride on one of their Tarls is another matter! It is however the "land of the great birds".

The royal Princess of Dularn was now relaxing in a hammock at my side, her body like mine oiled against the sun's rays, a bit of silk for modesty over her shaved pubes, her nipples of course covered by the lovely golden disks that she wore both as jewelry and as a covering. I thought her to be one of the most beautiful women that I'd ever seen. The tall blonde Princess having fine regal features that left no doubt that she was of royal blood. Her even more beautiful younger sister Darlanis was the Empress of Imperial California. I thought of the secrets we had shared, Janis telling me much of herself, of how she deplored the seemingly senseless winless conflict between her country and Darlanis' Empire. A conflict, she had told me, that had been going on for years now with no indication of any end in sight! A war, Janis felt, that was as much her mother's "fault" as Darlanis'! A war that had now cost thousands of lives on both sides!

Around us towered the great frowning cliffs of the cove we had entered just before dawn. The sparkling waters a contrast to what we had endured out in the ocean. Shirl had gone ashore with three women she had picked to seek water, all three of the Peasant Caste and thus familiar with doing such tasks. Something we badly needed, having now only a few days supply left, and that only if very strictly rationed! Of wine and beer we had a plenty, but that does not really satisfy one's thirst and only leads to further "trouble" later on when drunkenness takes over.

The Ronda was a good ship, I thought to myself, having seen what she had endured, the mishandling she had tolerated. Despite whatever Janis had to say about the superiority of her own country's vessels, said craft being schooner rigged instead of being lateen rigged like most Californian craft are. The damage had been minor, and easily repairable with the materials we had at hand. It was pleasant to relax after what we had been through. To let the sun bake the ache from our strained muscles, to rub scented oils into our skins, and apply healing lotion to our rope-burned hands. The night before now only a memory none of us would soon forget. We all owed Janis our lives, for without her seamanship, we would have been dashed upon the rocks and destroyed. I knew that better than some of the others aboard as I studied the BOOK, searching it for anything that might be useful.

"I would think," I had said to Janis, "That your mother and your sister Darlanis would be able to establish peace between your countries." It having puzzled me why the two, mother and daughter, now separated by politics, both being of the Warriress Caste, were not able to somehow settle the differences between their countries without resort to the senseless bloodshed that had been carried on for years. Janis being the crown Princess of Dularn and next in line for the throne, which can only be held by a woman of the royal family line under Dularnian Law. Dularn is, like Talon, a "Queendom" where only a woman may be the ruler. I suppose there is something to be said for such a practice, although I suspect now that it is more an "illusion" of something else than anything based upon actual rational reasoning. Women rulers being often as "blood-thirsty" as their male counterparts.

"Neither Darlanis or my mother have been able to resolve the differences that divide us," Janis had answered. Explaining that at least in her country, and no doubt in California as well, there were those who profited from the war, and had little interest in seeing an end to it. Her own brother being one of those who supported the continuance of the war between Dularn and the Empire of California. In the case of the Empire, the problem was perhaps best described as being "Princess Tara of Baja", who was also head of the Californian Senate and additionally "Warlady" of the Empire, her own son having been the royal Imperial Prince and legal successor to Empress Darlanis Marden. Darlanis herself is overly ambitious, and while she may "protest" all she wants that she is a "good" Empress, which I don't deny,

she is still far too eager to spread her own dominion by any means she can wherever she can do so in the name of "advancing modern civilization"! * * She has "mellowed" a little since she "lost" Trelandar to me, but she still thinks of herself as a "reincarnation" of Janet Rogers in a way. As a woman who is "born to rule" other peoples!

Curious, I had attempted to learn how Janis had become a slave girl aboard the Ronda, but she merely told me that she had been captured by slavers while on a secret mission that only she could do herself. More than this, she refused to tell me, saying that her mission had been a military secret that must be kept secret for now at least. I didn't question her further, knowing that she would have told me more if she felt it wise to do so. I am now free to reveal that she was attempting to form some sort of an alliance with Talon, and to use Talon's "bird-girls" and their great birds against the Empire. She was however betrayed and ended up helplessly chained aboard the Ronda as a slave girl!

I was just about to doze off, THE BOOK OF LYS there on the deck beneath me when there came a bright flash of light into my eyes. The flash repeating itself again just as I opened them. It was Sharon signaling us from up in the rocks over to starboard! The Ronda being tied with its bow facing inwards, a plank leading across to land. My blonde teenage stepdaughter in her exotic "26th Century" sunbathing attire waving down at us. Calling out, "Lorraine! There's A Big Galley Coming This Way!"

With a bound I was on my feet, grabbing for my clothing, the clinging back silk blouse that I had made from the remains of my dress, the leather kilt that I now wore as a skirt. Janis throwing on her own leather, the sword and dagger swinging in their scabbards. Her face grim as she fastened her harness, both of us knowing what our fate would be if we were captured! The women on deck gathering together in terror, some running below to get a possession or two. All of them well aware that slavery once again awaited them if the galley captured us as well it might. There being no hope except to flee into the forest before the Imperials captured us. An act, I had been told, that would only prolong the end considering the deadly nature of some of the mutated forms of life prowling the forest here in the 26th Century!

Sharon was shaking with excitement as we reached her, Janis immediately taking the telescope and training it on the approaching vessel, a big Imperial galley. Its oars slowly dipping into the water as it headed towards us. Even at this distance I could see the painted eyes on its bow and the proud flags flying from its twin masts. The masts bare of sails, the wind being foul for it. I thought it a beautiful, proud vessel, the blue-green hull of the dreadnought blending with the gently rolling sea, a bit of foam showing white at its bow as the ram lifted and fell with the swells. It was almost a perfect duplicate of a Classical design!

Janis handed me the brass telescope, a big 16x50, saying in a strange voice, "Sarnian Lady, 54. Imperial Flagship. She's Carrying Darlanis." The term 54 referring to the number of oars, the vessel in question being a trireme with three men to an oar, the oars being fitted within a framework so that the rowers can most effectively exert their strength. It is a very interesting design, the rowers pulling straight back, the oars themselves pivoting back and forth where they fit into the framework. The top speed of such a vessel being about seven knots under oars alone.

The total fighting force of such a ship varies, but is usually in the neighborhood of about two hundred and twenty men. There is additionally a force of twenty Warriresses, Darlanis' own personal guard that travels with her wherever she goes. These women, Janis had assured me, were the best that the Empire possessed in their skill with sword and bow. Darlanis herself is generally believed to be one of finest swordswomen in the Empire. Having crossed foils with her a few times now, I can assure you that she can give me a better fight than anyone I've ever met! In any case, there could be no doubts of what would happen to us should one of Sarnian Lady's two lookouts happen to spot the Ronda now floating peacefully in the little hidden cove below us.

"What are we going to do?" Sharon asked, naked but for clips and strap, her young body oiled to protect it from the sun's rays. My stepdaughter staring at the approaching vessel, knowing from how Janis and I had reacted that we were once again in serious trouble. For an instant I felt like breaking down and crying. It seeming that ever since "THE GATEWAY" had sent us through time that it had been just one thing after another now!

"I don't know, Sharon, I don't know," I answered, holding her close. Staring first at Sarnian Lady and then at the forest near at hand. Thinking of what Janis had told me of the beasts that roamed its glades. Horrible mutations such as wolves almost the size of ponies! Janis staring again through the telescope at the galley, perhaps thinking of her sister so close, yet so far.

Closer and closer Sarnian Lady came, Janis pointing out her sister to me, handing me the telescope so I might see, the Empress of California standing there on the quarterdeck. Her blonde hair blowing slightly in the wind, the golden tiara leaving no doubt that this was indeed Darlanis Marden, the Empress of California as she calls herself. A long blue silken cape accented that incredibly beautiful 5'10" body, Darlanis wearing nothing more than a beautiful halter and miniskirt of a pure golden mesh, with a weapons harness so encrusted with precious jewels that it glittered blindingly there in the sunlight! Leather spike heeled boots, the color of gold, accented the perfection of her long tapering legs. She is said to be the most beautiful woman who has ever lived. I did not dispute it! I understood why the Warriors of California followed such a woman. Why men now spoke of her as men of the past might have spoken of a "goddess"! I understood now much that I had not believed before. What I saw there in the telescope was not a woman, or an "Empress", but some incredibly beautiful "golden goddess" out of an ancient mythology! A woman not truly of this Earth! (And I suspect THAT is the TRUTH now!)

"We'd better tell the women to flee," I said, lowering the telescope, the image of Darlanis still vivid in my mind, glancing down at the Ronda floating peacefully below. The vessel somewhat "mine" in a way and sorry to see the last of her. The thought of fleeing into the forest not really all that appealing. Sharon at my side, her beautiful azure eyes staring at the big galley now so close, the flags waving in the wind. The oars like the legs of some multi-legged insect as they drew it across the water towards us. Darlanis standing there on the quarterdeck looking out at the shore, perhaps thinking what thoughts I knew not. Had I possessed my 300 Weatherby with its 3x-9x telescopic sight, I would have killed her without a moment's hesitation, picking her off like one would a woodchuck at three hundred yards! I hated her without knowing anything about her. She was "THE ENEMY", nothing more! Such is the way we humans are, I suppose. It is perhaps why we are such a war-like race. Why we can kill one another so easily without feeling the least bit "immoral" about it. Why we are nothing but "barbarians" in the eyes of the Lorr.

"I suppose we'd better," Janis muttered, staring at her counterpart perhaps a quarter of a mile away now through the telescope, thinking what thoughts I know not. I wondered how long it had been since they had embraced, my thoughts for a moment despite my hatred going out to her there on the galley. Wondering if she ever thought of the older sister she had once loved long ago there in Dularn and who had loved her in return.

Then suddenly, just as Sarnian Lady was only a minute or so away from being able to see into the cove, I saw the galley turn. The sails swiftly rising to the masts and filling as she headed out to sea. The golden figure of Darlanis disappearing as she perhaps went below. Janis lowering the telescope, blinking a bit. Perhaps from the glare of the sun on the water, or perhaps from another reason. I didn't much care just then. I hugged Sharon until she was gasping for breath, knowing that once again we were safe! That Darlanis was searching elsewhere for us now!

Chapter Thirteen

Sharon and I waved down to the ship below, the bright sun shimmering off the peaceful rippling waters of the cove. My right arm just above the wrist still stinging a bit where Janis Jord, the Princess of Dularn, had burned into it the mark of the Warriress. Doctor Lorraine Marie Duval was now officially a Dularnian warrior woman serving her royal Princess. The day before, the day when we had watched Sarnian Lady sail so close by, nearly discovering us, Janis and I had spoken of much. The Princess confiding in me many things, private things that I will keep to myself, for they have no bearing on this story as such and were very personal parts of her life that I am sure neither she or her mother would care to have told even now after her tragic death, her mother following her in death some six months later...

Clad in the remains of my once beautiful clinging black silk dress and a brown leather kilt, wearing the late captain's ornate sword and a keen fighting dagger with a blade nearly a foot long, I looked much the part of a "Warriress". A bow and a quiver of arrows were slung over my shoulder should I come across "game", although I feared that my hunting skills with such weapons might leave a bit to be desired, considering that I had never actually hunted with such weapons back in the 20th Century, preferring a rifle which I felt made a more humane kill than what arrows did!

Sharon was wearing the mini-skirt and halter outfit that she had made from the remains of her own clothing. The skirt showed a bit more of her thighs than what I felt really proper, although no one else seemed to think there was anything else wrong with her attire. It being the current "style" for girls Sharon's age to wear their skirts quite short, much like the '60's of my own era. The thought going through my mind as I regarded her that she was no longer the demure little girl that she had once been before all this had happened to us. A long slim dagger at her hip spoke of things I preferred not to think about. This was not a "safe" age! On the other hand you weren't very likely to come up against some doped up creep ready to blow out your brains at the slightest chance. In many respects the 26th Century is "safer" for young girls than was the 20th even with the reinstitution of slavery. Usually at least here they don't rape and then kill!

Seeing an answering wave from the woman on watch below, we set out on our journey of exploration. A feeling of excitement going over me as my boots trod the rocky trail leading up from the little cove in which the Ronda was hidden. Then we emerged out onto the top of the rise, and before us I saw the woods. A faint trail running through it marking the remains of what once must have been a concrete highway, now almost completely overgrown. It was then I fully realized the centuries that had passed, the years one after another that had passed us by. There was little trace of what Man had once achieved. Sharon silent at my side, her hand on her dagger. Moving close to me as if to be protected from something unseen, unsensed that lurked in the dark woods before us. A forest so dense that the light from the sun hardly reached the ground, only dancing spots of light telling of the bright sun now overhead in the azure vault of the sky above!

"Lorraine, maybe we'd better go 'back' to the ship," Sharon said to me as we stood there looking into the forest. A sense of foreboding going through me as my eyes sought to penetrate its hidden mysteries. Then I recalled the Codes of my Caste, and with a mental effort, threw off the terrors that had preyed at me, my hand seeking the hilt of my sword. Its solid hardness a comfort just then as my vivid imagination populated the darkness of the forest with mutated horrors waiting to spring out at us...

"I'm sure there's nothing to be afraid of," I answered. Slipping my arm around her slender bare waist, her azure eyes meeting mine, thankful still for my weapons. Janis having told me much of what the animal

life was now like thanks to The War. The "Dire Wolf" being a good example, the animal almost as large as a small pony, and in packs, perhaps one of the most dangerous forms of life that ever lived! Capable of even pulling down the "Garth", a strange reptile like mutation that appeared to be somewhat like a not quite so miniature copy of the great meat-eating dinosaurs of millions of years ago! The thing standing a good ten feet tall! Then there was the "Tigon", a saber-tooth tiger like those that prowled the Earth thousands of years ago!

Taking Sharon's hand in mine, we entered the woods, my stepdaughter looking nervously about in the shadows as we passed into the shadowed glades. Perhaps thinking of all the tales that the Princess had told her about the strange beasts of this era and the even more frightening half-mythical humanoid mutants that were said to still prowl the deserted and abandoned parts of the world! Janis having spoken of that which was "hu" and that which was "mu", the second form of life being as "alien" as the Lorr!

We followed the remains of the highway, the tall trees towering up around us, the leaves rustling gently in the breeze. I thought it peaceful and quiet, there seeming something very familiar about the area, as if I had been here before! Centuries ago! I wondered if there would be anything still left of their home! Or was it now only inhabited by strange horrid monsters?

The day before, the day of "Sarnian Lady" and Empress Darlanis as I still thought of it, Janis and I had spoken much of my future in this, the 26th Century. Or the "Sixth Century After The War" as she thought of it. Time now being measured from The War of 2047. She had also discussed with me the requirements for becoming a member of the Warriress Caste, explaining to me the Caste Codes. The Codes remind me much of that by which I have always tried to live. "Standards" which have made me what I am. Standards by which I have attempted to raise Sharon, perhaps with some success. I am in any case very proud of the young woman she has become. She is no longer "mine", but yet in my heart there will never be another just like her even if someday I have children of my own as Jon and I hope once things get "settled" down and Darlanis stops dreaming of what "was" and never again can be.

Being a Warriress is not merely a matter of knowing weapons, for that is but a "muscle skill" that anyone, given good co-ordination and time, can develop, but more a matter of moral attitudes, viewpoints, and understandings that in most cases require years of study to develop and bring into use. Values that bring out the finest in a woman and make her more than just a female of the human race. I am proud to be of the Warriresses.

I am reminded here of a correspondence I once carried on with a famous 20th Century author of fantasy stories who steadfastly maintained that no woman, no matter how skillful, would be the match of a good swordsman in battle. It was his belief that superior strength would always win out in the end despite the woman's skill. I tried to explain to him without much success that swordsmanship is more a matter of agility than sheer muscle power. Granted, the Warriress who goes up against some fur-clad 6'3" "Northman" swinging a heavy longsword with a blade a yard long is going to have to be quick on her feet if she's going to survive, but I know a number who've done it and are still here to tell of it! Muscle isn't the determining factor when it comes to swordsmanship. Skill still plays a very large role in it. I know of what I speak, having been in such situations several times where I faced men stronger than me, but much less skillful.

We had walked perhaps half a mile through the woods when Sharon glanced back behind us, perhaps hearing or sensing something. Jumping nervously and jerking at my arm as she saw a shadowed something move into the brush a hundred feet behind us. "Lorraine!" she cried, clinging to me in terror. But by the time I looked, it was gone, Sharon telling me that it had looked like a gigantic wolf! I felt a cold chill go down my back as I recalled what Janis had said about the animal life here in the 26th Century, The War and its attendant strange radioactivity having mutated many forms of life into nightmarish

monsters never before seen by the eye of any modern man except in some fantasy films!

"I wish you had your rifle instead of that bow," Sharon said as I slipped the bow off my shoulder and notched an arrow on the string. My skill at archery being considerably inferior to my skill with a sword. I would have much preferred my 300 Weatherby Magnum, but I thought the bow would do if needed. It was a good weapon drawing about fifty five pounds. Made of yew and osage orange laminated on an ash stock, and perhaps about five and a half feet in length. I thought it at least equal to my .380 pistol so far as effectiveness was concerned. Most Warriresses could not have used such a bow with any degree of effectiveness, but I am not like most women. My physical strength, as I have mentioned, being quite unusual for a woman of any era. I can draw bows up to sixty five pounds, but my accuracy suffers badly at anything much over fifty five using the simple bows of this era. Darlanis' 75# compound, while difficult for me, is "usable".

"Perhaps we'd better go back to the ship," Sharon suggested, the concern showing in her voice. Her description matching that of a "dire wolf", a mutated wolf standing nearly four feet at the shoulder and weighing over four hundred pounds. I had no desire to face such a creature, but on the other hand, I had no wish to be chased back to the ship by something only glimpsed in the shadows by an overly imaginative teenage girl! Cowardice is not permitted a Warriress. It is in the "Codes" that she lives by.

"You need a more effective weapon than that dagger," I answered, regarding her with a smile that I admit now was a bit forced. Prepared myself to face whatever laid in wait for us. Knowing that she who wears the black of the Warriress may know fear, but must never allow herself to submit to it. Using my sword, I swiftly cut her a spear about five and a half feet long. Letting her sharpen it with her dagger. Forcing from my mind the vision of facing such a creature as Janis had described to me. Knowing in my heart that facing such a monster armed as we were would not be a simple matter, but yet Stone Age men with inferior weapons to ours had faced and overcome such monsters, or otherwise we would not have existed had Man not been victorious over such creatures and lived to transmit his genes down to us now!

Yet, I had little doubt that Sharon and I could deal with the "dire wolf" if such showed itself, having considerable confidence in my own fighting skills, confidence being a good part of being a successful fighter, for the coward is defeated before he even starts to fight. I knew that Sharon's courage would be adequate from our past battle there on the Ronda when we had fought for our lives and the right to live as free women, and her crude spear would be an effective weapon against such a beast. Especially when backed up by my sword and the skill of my hand. I had hunted "big game" before, but never with such primitive weapons as these. It would be an interesting challenge, I mused with a smile to myself, my heart now beating with a Warriress' excitement as I thought of what such a battle might be like!

Chapter Fourteen

It was cool and peaceful in the forest, Sharon seeming to enjoy it once she had gotten over her fears of our being attacked by a "dire wolf". Said creature no doubt, I thought to myself, only a figment of her overly "vivid" imagination. I thought I might have a few words with the Princess when we got back about filling my Sharon's head with her "tall tales" and terrifying her so! So far the only life we had seen had been rather ordinary birds and little animals that scurried away into the brush at our approach. Little feathered and furry creatures that were no different from what I could see of them than those of the 20th Century. Ordinary squirrels and common birds like those of our era.

We had not traveled far when we came upon something that made me pause, for there before us stood the familiar mound in the woods that marked the home of Bob and Carol Simmons back in the 20th Century! The reinforced concrete "Earth Home" having survived all these years! "Bob always said that it would survive an 'atomic war'," I breathed. Sharon at my side for the moment forgotten as the memories flooded back as if it had been but yesterday. The talks we had enjoyed together, the companionship that Jack had always been "too busy" to give me. Perhaps it was just as well that Jack made that "pass" that he did at Carol, or otherwise I fear now that the day would have come that I would have been guilty of sharing more than just "conversation" with Bob. Carol, more observant, more "knowing", had no doubts about what would have happened between us had our relationship gone on!

Now their home was nothing but a ruin fit for animals to live in, the trees having taken over everything over the years. I was a bit puzzled about the distance to the shoreline, the home in the 20th Century being considerably further away from the sea, but Janis says that the land settled somewhat from the effects of The War, and that nothing is the same as it was back in my time!

"Something wrong, Lorraine?" Sharon asked, seeing the moisture in my eyes as I looked upon the last remains of the past. A past that I would never be able to return to. Never be able to make Carol understand that the relationship between Bob and me was only friendship, and had nothing to do with sex. Not that I was ever foolish enough to think that he might leave a woman like her for someone like me. Carol being the sort of a woman of which it may be said that few like her have ever walked the face of the Earth. A provocative and sensual delight, beautifully figured, an houri of sexuality. The sort of a woman that one like me can never hope to ever compete with. Her bones no doubt molder somewhere in some forgotten grave now, hopefully alongside those of the husband she once loved seemingly more than life itself. She was a jealous woman, but perhaps with reason to be so.

"Nothing that you would understand, Sharon," I said to her. Crushing her to me, stroking her soft silky golden hair. Tears filling my eyes as I held her to me. "Someday when you are older and wiser, I will tell you about a part of my life that I have always kept from you because you would not have been able to understand," I told her, looking down into those lovely azure orbs.

"Let's see what we can find in these ruins," Sharon suggested, perhaps not understanding the emotional shock I had just undergone seeing the remains of Bob and Carol's beloved home. Bob having once told me that it was his intention along with Carol's to be buried out next to the little pond where he had first laid eyes upon his delightful and provocatively sexy curvy brownette. I did not wish to look for their tombstones, even if such had survived over the centuries, which I rather doubted considering the "condition" of everything else that I had seen so far here!

"Very well," I replied, hugging her once again to me, smiling into her eyes as they looked up into mine, knowing that she was as much "mine" as if I had given birth to her. Once again my lips brushed hers, then hand in hand, we walked towards the ruins so filled with memories of what had once been so long ago now.

"Well, we at least know now how far we've sailed," I said as we paused for a second to let our eyes adjust to the darkness before entering the interior. The glass patio doors now broken, half open, the framework now only rusty metal that fell apart at the touch. Explaining that we were now about eighty miles north of where Los Angeles had once stood before The War, our own home having been some twelve miles north of the city limits of LA.

There was little left in the house of interest, the ruins apparently having been stripped of everything valuable centuries before. But we did find a few items that had been overlooked, items that brought back memories of another life now six centuries in the past! Memories of dreams, of my own forbidden

fantasies that never could have been! Carol had understood too much of the dangers that I represented to their marriage. I recalled her words, the anger there on her lovely features. Our parting had been painful, especially for me. I wondered if Jack had suspected the truth. Understood my feelings. If he even cared...

With such thoughts going through my mind, I was aware of little until Sharon suddenly shook me into alertness there in the ruins, saying, "I Heard Hoof Beats!" I knew they would not be friends. Placing a finger to my lips, I drew Sharon back with me into the deepest darkest shadows I could find. Placing her behind me as I drew my sword, prepared to defend our lives and freedom against those who would be our enemies! I prayed that there would not be too many of them. I knew the fate of slaves in this era. What would be done to an innocent girl like Sharon!

Sharon and I could hear voices, the voices being, I noted, that of a woman and three men. The four apparently dismounting somewhere before us, discussing something about a dire wolf that they were hunting. I felt Sharon tremble against me as I pushed her deeper into the shadows, the rotten remains of a leather sofa at our backs. The crude spear clutched bravely in her hand. I debated whether my bow might be a better weapon than my sword, but decided otherwise, thinking that at close quarters, steel was superior to "wood"... I am in any case, more a "swordswoman"... * * I later learned the bow fairly well, but I prefer the sword...

Stepping through the broken ruins of the patio doors stepped a figure, the figure of a woman clad in a black tunic and hose, boots on her feet, a sword in its sheath at her hip. A bow half drawn in her hands. Then suddenly Sharon sneezed from the dust!

Seeing the movement in the shadows, and knowing that we were not "friends", the Californian woman raised her bow and launched the arrow there on the string towards me! My swift blade deflecting the missile to one side in a blurred slash that left few doubts as to the sort of skills with a blade that I possessed!

"Bors, Jon, Lars, To Me!" the attractive brunette cried. Whipping out her shining sword as she saw mine there in my hand, knowing that I was definitely not a "friend"! The three men dashing in, their swords in their hands. The three wearing leaf green tunics and hose, their caste being of the Foresters. Hers was of the Warriresses. She served California, I served Dularn. Her blade was pledged to Darlanis Marden, the Empress of Imperial California. Mine to Janis Jord, the lovely Princess of Dularn!

Perhaps I should mention here that it is customary here in the 26th Century that those of the fighting Castes pledge their swords not to the nation which they serve, but to their monarchs. The pledge is given while kneeling before the monarch, who as a rule touches the individual on both shoulders with her own sword. (I am referring here to those ceremonies that I have witnessed in person, both when I knelt before Janis on the Ronda and later on after Janis' death when I finally pledged my blade to Darlanis) For this reason the Warrior or Warriress does not think of "his" or "her" country in the same sense that a person of the 20th Century would. Californian Warriors and Warriresses speak of "dying for Darlanis" in the same way that a soldier of the 20th Century might refer to possibly dying for "America". One thus serves a person, not a "country". Additionally most people of the Empire do not think of being "Californians" as such, but refer to themselves usually as "Trelandarians", "Sarnians", "Orgonians". The Dularnians do have a sense of "nationhood", but not like what one of the 20th Century would expect, since their first loyalty is not to the "country" as a whole, but to their own village or town with the "country" as such coming in second. Whether or not this is good or bad is not for me to say, although I do think that it tends to prevent conflicts that might otherwise occur should one group happen to intrude upon the national territory of the other. The closest thing I can conceive as a unified nation is Talon, which is a very close-knit society, but also rather hostile towards anyone that lives outside its borders as others have

found, although perhaps with good reason here too...

"No!" I screamed as suddenly Sharon threw her crude spear directly at the woman. The woman throwing up her sword to deflect it away from herself, stumbling back as Sharon now dashed forward, her drawn dagger already now gleaming there in her hand!

As Sharon leaped upon the woman, the two fell into a shadowed pile of rubble with a loud clatter. My courageous stepdaughter and the brownette warriorress now involved in their own battle, I met the assault of the three men. My blade swift as it flashed through the dank air. One of the green clad men going down as I leaped to one side, my blade having slashed his throat and the side of his neck. Spinning on my heels as I faced the remaining two men there in the remains of the Simmons' home! * * As I am well aware, the home no doubt "belonged" to others after the death of Simmons, the couple actually living up into the third decade of the 21st Century according here to Janet Rogers!

As I feared, the warriorress soon got the better of Sharon, a sixteen year old girl no match for a trained fighting woman in such an uneven battle. Sharon's best not good enough as the woman stunned her with a blow and staggered to her feet. The black clad woman searching for the shining sword that she had dropped when Sharon's miscast spear had struck her. Her face bearing the marks of Sharon's nails as my brave girl laid stunned and moaning at her feet, knocked senseless by a blow that Warriorresses know.

I had just dropped the second man when she came at me. The warriorress' thrust at me fortunately missing its mark, her attack having been swift and deadly. I thought her to be a worthy opponent. She was somewhat shorter than me, but more feminine in her build, and reminded me a lot of Bob's wife Carol! She also was fast and deadly, with a skill that made me look to my own laurels. A true mistress of the blade! A Princess of the Sword!

Our blades rang together as they met in a clash of steel, her last companion standing back, letting her engage me while he sought to find an opening that he could exploit. There had yet been no words between us, none being necessary, our actions alone marking us as enemies. She was Californian, I was Dularnian. Nothing more was necessary. I respected her for what she was. I expect that she felt much the "same" about me. We lived by the same Codes. Her blade was pledged to Darlanis, mine to Janis, although I suppose technically it was also pledged to her mother Queen Tulis Jord, who was the actual true ruler of Dularn then.

"Now!" the black clad attractive brownette hissed, driving in at me, her blade ringing against mine. Attempting to hold me on the defensive just long enough for her green clad companion to kill me. Then suddenly Sharon raised up on one arm and flung an old pot at her, the missile striking the warriorress in the back and distracting her. Giving me the opening I sought to deal with her companion! Stepping quickly to one side there in the shadows, using him to block the attack of his black clad mistress, I slashed his throat in a swift cut. The blood spurting there in the semi-darkness as he fell to the filth of the once carpeted floor. Now she was all alone. Mine to kill if I so wished it!

Our blades rang out as they met in the swift deadly dance of clashing steel, dipping and darting, the Warriorress fighting for her life now as I drove her back. My skill with a blade terrifying her as it has others who have dared face me! My attack forcing the black clad beauty back, the woman swift in her movements as she leaped to one side, avoiding the trap that I had set for her. I met the woman's terrified return attack, a swift ringing of our blades there in the dim light of the Simmons' living room telling of our respective skills. She was an excellent swordswoman, better yet than any I had encountered here in this strange land. She was also almost a twin sister for another I had known!

Then I saw the horror in her soft hazel eyes as she slipped and fell in the filth. A quick motion of my

blade enough to take her life as she looked up at me, knowing her life was in my hands. I thought that there had been enough killing for one day. Her red lips, lips made for love and kisses, quivered as she waited for the swift thrust that would end her life. I was proud that she had not begged me for it. It spoke well of her spirit!

"I do not wish your life," I said to the woman, Sharon dazed behind her getting to her feet, her mouth bloodstained. The lovely brownette at my feet regarding me as she laid helpless before me, letting her sword drop to one side. She reminded me much of Bob's wife, Carol, both in looks and her own mannerisms.

"Lorraine," Sharon pleaded as she joined me, "Don't kill her!" My stepdaughter now standing at my side, her crude spear once again in her hands. Her azure eyes pleading into mine as she then added, "She didn't do anything more to me than just defend herself." Words that made my heart sing, for perhaps now I wouldn't have to take this brave lovely woman's life after all!

"What is your name?" I asked, letting her get up off the floor, telling her ours. The woman brushing herself off, the sensual curves of her figure little concealed by her clothing. I knew that such a woman would bring a high price on the slave market should I decide to sell her into slavery, such usually being the fate of attractive and desirable women taken captive both by the Empire and by Dularnians. The idea that you might be sold into slavery being less horrifying for most women of this era than the idea of being "raped" was back in the 20th Century for a woman of my own time. Not that most women enjoy being slave girls, although some apparently do, but female slavery is common enough and something that any woman, if she is attractive, knows could be her fate if she was to be captured by an enemy warrior.

"I am the Lady Lana Daris of Trelandar," she answered, standing there before us, her voice showing the strain she felt. Her voice, her face, her figure, all bringing back memories of Carol. The golden chain riveted securely around her throat marking her as a married woman of more than three years, and thus eligible to have children under the laws of The Priestesses of Lys.

"I think I can allow you to keep your clothing," I smiled in reply, it often being the practice to strip female prisoners, the supposed reason being that women often carry little knives and such on their persons and thus cannot be "trusted" with clothing. I suspect however, that the real reason is to break the woman's "spirit" by depriving her of clothing, even to the nipple clips and "strap" that are the common attire of 26th Century females.

Chapter Fifteen

A few minutes later we stepped out of the ruined "Earth Home" that had once belonged to Bob and Carol Simmons centuries ago, Lana in the lead. Sharon carrying her sword and other weapons as I did not trust the woman with arms even although she had given me her sacred word as a Warriress that she would abide by the terms of her surrender. Both Sharon and I starting for an instant at the sight of one of the mounts that the four had used. Sharon crying out, "It's A Unicorn!" Grabbing at my arm to get my attention as if such was really necessary! The white stallion and its ivory horn like something out of a "fairy tale"! Lana turning and looking at us both, a puzzled expression on her attractive feminine features. Perhaps wondering too just what sort of people that we were! Not knowing that to Sharon and I, such an animal as hers was found only in children's fantasy tales!

The mutated horse and its more ordinary companions muzzling at the grass growing at our feet. Raising their heads from time to time to survey their surroundings as such animals do. The unicorn's long ivory horn brushing the ground as it ate, its very appearance exciting and exotic. As if we were in some strange land found only in fairy tales. Sharon like a child wanting to dash up and see if it was real or not, something I felt might not be wise, that fearsome horn, I felt, being good for something more than just exotic looks! Unicorns, provoked, are dangerous!

"Sharon and I are time travelers from the 20th Century," I told Lady Lana. Said Lady regarding us both as if we had just escaped from the local version of "the funny farm", with understandable nervousness clearly showing on her attractive features.

"Oh!" she answered. Looking at me as if she had made her decision that we were both dangerously insane, and should be locked up somewhere for the good of society, the sooner the "better"! I could understand her feelings, given the situation too!

Speaking swiftly, I told her how we had come to this era, and our experiences so far. Telling her about the Ronda, and Princess Janis, to whom I had pledged my sword the day before as Sharon stood there at my side and stared at Lana's big unicorn.

"You are not Dularnians then," Lana said with a smile. Adding, "I wondered, because your accent isn't that of any land that I know of." Explaining to me how our accents marked us for being strangers. The lovely Trelandarian aristocrat no doubt nursing the hope that I was not an "enemy" after all. I wondered what I was going to do with her. Letting her go would not be wise, as she already "knew too much", but I thought she might be useful to us as a hostage, being a high born Imperial "Lady" and all that.

Janis had told us about unicorns, of course, as well as about all the other strange forms of life that now existed thanks to The War. There is, however, a considerable difference between hearing about such things and actually seeing them. I like unicorns, although there is no real difference between them and the more common horse, although the unicorn is, as a rule, a bit more spirited. And also a bit more dangerous! That horn being a deadly weapon! For reasons that are perhaps more a concern of the Caste of Physicians who deal with such things, those of the Warrior and Warriress Castes usually ride unicorns. The horse being considered a fit mount only for those of low caste and slave girls who are of course not included in the caste system.

"He's so pretty," Sharon breathed, caressing the unicorn as Lana stood at her side, my stepdaughter then turning to me and asking if she could ride him. The pleading look in her eyes like that of a little girl. Lana assuring me that her beautiful and exotic mount was quite safe with children. Which Sharon immediately assumed granted her my permission! My blonde stepdaughter vaulting upon the creature's back before I could open my mouth in reply! Settling herself in the saddle, grabbing for the reins!

"She'll be all right," Lana assured me with a smile as I tied her hands behind her back for the ride back to the Ronda with a strip of silk that I had cut from the hem of her tunic. I assured her in return that if anything happened to Sharon that her life would be forfeit on the spot! Lana shuddering a bit as she saw the look there in my dark eyes. With this I then boosted her up onto one of the horses and mounted another, letting the third one go. Taking the reins of Lana's and drawing its head up to the flanks of my own mount. Sharon already riding Lana's unicorn around in circles. Giggling with delight as the beast responded to her tugs on the reins. Annoyed at myself for having let Sharon do such a thing just because Lana said that it was safe! Turning in my saddle to regard Lana as she rode behind me, her expression rather wooden which I could understand given the circumstances in which she now found herself!

"When we get to Dularn I'll see that you get sent back home," I assured her. No doubt Janis could

"arrange" such things even if there was a war on between her country and Lana's. Lana giving me a smile and nodding, the jut of her breasts beneath her tunic and the flare of her hips and buttocks leaving no doubt in my mind that she would doubtlessly bring a high price in a slave market. No doubt Lana had been thinking about the same thing too! She had the sort of a body that brings high prices on the slave block. A pretty face, rich red lips, almost a dead ringer for Bob's provocative and sensuous wife back in the 20th Century!

"I wish my son could meet a nice girl like your daughter," Lana said to me as we rode along, explaining that she had a son Sharon's age and a daughter of five. Lana being the wife of Senator Jan Daris, a powerful political figure in Imperial political circles as well as being the overlord of the surrounding area. The anti-aging serums do sometimes confuse me a bit, since Lana appeared to be only in her twenties, not twice that age as she actually was. I suspected that she and her husband didn't get along that well either, since she seemed quite content to remain on their estate rather than enjoy the life at the capital with him. Senator Daris spending most of his time at Sarn, the capital. The city being built upon the remains of what once was San Francisco. Considering it her own personal business, I didn't question her further at the time, merely listening to what she had to say and drawing my own conclusions as to the "truth".

There is a saying in the Codes that reads: "Know not thy opponent if thou wishes to slay, for it is much harder to slay one you know than one thou does not." I was thankful that I hadn't killed Lana now that I knew what I did about her. Sometimes, as it says in the Codes, it is best not to know too much about your opponent. It is much easier to kill someone when they are a faceless, unknown nameless "enemy" than a fellow human being. I recall once meeting with some Russians who wished to purchase some items from Duval Computer, and being quite surprised to find that they didn't have horns or tails and looked just like we did!

It was pleasant to ride through the woods, the sunbeams peeking down through the leafy curtains over our heads. Sprinkling the ground around us with little moving patches of light, the dead leaves cracking underfoot. It was peaceful and quiet, only the sound of our voices disturbing the peace. The quiet rustle of the leaves overhead a pleasant sound to my ears. I felt a sense of peace and contentment that I had not felt in a long time. This new world suited me well. Here I could be what I wanted to be, not what others thought I should be because of my sex. I thought once again of Bob and Carol. This had once been their home. The woods through which they had walked together so long ago. He had loved her so much. So much that I'd known I'd never be anything to him but someone to talk to about things that his wife had no interest in, her intellectual abilities leaving a bit to be desired. Our topics of conversation being computers and the art of fencing, Bob being quite fascinated in both items.

We halted at the top of the rise overlooking the cove below, the Ronda lying there at anchor, the entire scene peaceful and quiet. A number of the former slave girls sunning themselves on its deck. Others chattering among themselves, gathering in groups, sewing shifts for themselves out of the sail Janis had said that we could spare. I would have preferred to let Lana go, knowing now what I did about her, but that was something that Janis would have to decide, the Princess being my superior officer. I knew this was not a time for words. She was a mother and a Warriress. I shared her feelings, the concern that she felt.

As I sat on the back of my horse, suddenly I remembered seeing a little china cat in the ruins of the Simmons' house that I wanted as "keepsake" of another time. I wanted that cat! Speaking swiftly to Sharon and handing the reins to Lana's horse to her, I wheeled my horse and sent him galloping back towards that ruined home that now meant so much to me because of its memories.

As I brought my galloping horse to a halt before the ruined home hidden there in the forest, my horse started to act up, to prance and pull away from the ruins. Snorting and blowing, the animal's actions

puzzling and baffling. Dismounting, I tied the horse to a convenient tree, and wondering why the beast had acted as it did, entered the ruins once again. Pausing to let my eyes adjust to the near darkness of the interior. IT WAS THEN I SAW THAT THE BODIES OF THE THREE MEN WERE NOW GONE! DRAGGED OFF!!!

For an instant my hand sought the hilt of my sword. A cold chill going down my spine, then I regained control of myself. Thinking that perhaps some animal had dragged them off into the woods. The thought going through my mind that anything capable of doing so would not be something I'd like to meet. Recalling what Janis had told me about the animal life of this era and remembering that Lana had been hunting a DIRE WOLF! Glancing about, I located the little white china cat. Slipping it into the leathern pouch attached to my sword belt on my right hip, when suddenly I heard a low snarling sound directly behind me!

Wheeling, I spun around, nearly screaming in terror as I saw what stood there, blood on its great jaws. The terrifying eyes looking into mine, seeming to glow red there in the dim light. The great powerful gray body like a nightmare, the dire wolf regarding me, waiting for me to make a move. A low snarl rumbling from its throat as I reached a cautious hand towards my sword. Carefully drawing it without a sound from the sheath. The two foot long polished steel blade seeming a puny weapon to pit against such a beast! Yet, I had confidence in the blade, knowing it to be an excellent weapon, the keen point and razor sharp edges making it more deadly than you might think. It felt comforting in my hand. I had no doubt that I could give a good account of myself if it came to that against even this dire wolf.

Voicing a low snarl, the dire wolf took a step towards me, its eyes slitted glowing coals. The great body moving with surprising grace for so large an animal. I stepped forward to meet it. The dire wolf stopped, regarding me, perhaps puzzled that I had moved towards it, its prey usually fleeing in terror from it. I knew it would be stronger than me by far, but I thought my sword was the equal of its fangs. I don't think it ever faced a Warriress before. It seemed puzzled by my actions. I did not show fear. I did not trigger off its genetically programed "attack instinct" that many animals have by trying to flee from it.

The dire wolf snarled viciously at me, baring its fangs, the teeth in its jaws terrible to look upon, but it made no move to attack me. Seeming fearful of my sword, perhaps being hurt at one time by such a weapon, and knowing what a sword could do to it. I had not uttered a word so far, merely holding myself still before it, my keen blade at the ready, waiting for the attack I felt sure was to come. Then to my surprise, it backed off, stepping back several steps. A low warning snarl coming from it as I edged my way around it towards the remains of the patio doors. My sword shining in my hand, the china cat in my pouch, the little bauble that I could have died for here in this strange land!

Feeling with my free hand, I found the edge of the door behind me, and keeping my attention on the dire wolf, stepped outside into the daylight. The wolf then disappearing back inside the house that once had belonged to Bob and Carol. Leaving me standing there on the outside looking in, my blouse plastered to my slender muscular body with my own sweat! Why the wolf didn't attack me I don't know, but perhaps it knew that it would die if it did, and wishing to live, it refrained from attack. I have no other answer that makes any sense even today as I write this.

A few minutes later as I showed Sharon the little china cat, Lana remarked to me, "You know, there is a dire wolf in these parts that's killed three cows now and could possibly kill someone if it isn't killed first." Adding after a second's pause, "I had hoped to hunt it down before it killed again." The lovely brownette's tone of voice implying that she wasn't likely to be doing any more hunting for anything for some time to come.

"Oh," I said, giving her a smile. I thought I'd tell her about my latest adventure later on when we were by

ourselves! We could both have a good laugh about it. Then it wouldn't be quite so frightening to think what could have happened to me!

Chapter Sixteen

Janis Jord and Lana Daris silently regarded each other there on the deck of the Ronda. One blonde, the other brownette. One a royal Princess of Dularn, the other a high born noblewoman of the Empire of California. I stood to one side with Sharon at my side, holding the little china cat that had almost cost me my life. The memory of the dire wolf still vivid in my memory. I had told no one of the wolf. I thought the tale would be too unbelievable. Behind us the former slave girls of the Ronda looked on, whispering quietly among themselves. The sun burning brightly down out of the clear blue azure sky. Its heat causing the pitch between the deck seams to stick to our feet. It was the middle of summer. The year was 2565 A.D, or 518 A.W. as it is more commonly known. I cared little for what had gone on there before me, the humiliation of the Lady Lana Daris disturbing me!

Lana was naked before the Princess, Janis having ordered her stripped and searched. The search had been thorough, even to the probing of her anus and vagina for secret weapons. Every piece of jewelry and ornamentation had been checked, even her lovely golden nipple clips having been removed. Her hair had been combed out for hidden pins that might be pressed into use as a weapon. I was learning much of what a Warriress must know, even if it was embarrassing to the lovely brownette to be so searched before everyone. Like the Princess, Lana was "shaved", such to be expected of a woman of high Caste. I had seen the tears fill her soft hazel eyes as she was forced to bend over and have Shirl check with a fingertip inside her vagina and anus. Every piece of Lana's clothing had been carefully gone over for secret pins or other devices that might be somehow used against us. During the search she had been forced to stand naked before everyone, an object of ridicule, as women of her class are hated by slave girls as a rule. The average slave girl much preferring to be owned by a man than by a woman as was to be expected. It being a common tactic of those men who owned slave girls to make the delights obey by threatening to sell them to women if they don't behave themselves! Few slave girls needed warning a second time!

"Let her dress herself and we can continue this somewhere else," I spoke up, my eyes holding the iron gray of the Princess. There was no need to have Lana stand naked before everyone here on deck. Especially not considering the nature of the "crew" we now had, most of the slave girls being low caste women who had nothing but envy and hatred for a woman of Lady Lana's breeding!

"I am not finished with my questioning," Janis snapped back. She was not in the best of moods and was not to be trifled with. On the other hand I saw no reason for her to take her feeling out on Lady Lana, who certainly now represented little danger to us!

"Dress yourself," I told Lana, her eyes wide with shock as she regarded this surprising interplay between the Princess of Dularn and me. Sharon moving close, her eyes filled with concern as Janis' hand went to the hilt of her sword. I had fenced with the Princess the day before as a demonstration of my skills. She was good, but no more match for me than Lana had been! As a matter of fact, I thought Lana was a bit better! The gathered women muttering among themselves as they waited to see what would happen. I prayed it would not come to a duel between Janis and me.

"Do as Lorraine says," Janis snapped at Lana, then turning and going below. I wondered if Sharon and I had a "home" anymore! Lana picked up her clothing and started putting it back on. Snapping the clips back over her pierced nipples and drawing the black silken "strap" up over her hips. Her constant staring at me getting on my nerves as I stood there. No doubt she was "grateful" for what I had done for her, but I had done it not for her as such, but because I saw no "reason" for any woman to be needlessly humiliated like that in front of others of her own sex. I had no doubt that Janis had humiliated Lana deliberately.

"Stay with her," I told Sharon, indicating Lana as she finished dressing herself, the assembled women now moving off, going about their own affairs. It was time that Janis and I had a discussion about just who was "in charge" here aboard the Ronda.

"I thought it would be you," Janis greeted me, taking a long drink from the polished brass goblet she had there in her hand, the glare off the water coming through the open windows behind her turning her blonde hair into a radiant glow, her features shadowed so that I could not clearly "read" her emotional state.

"There was no need to 'humiliate' her before the others," I answered in level tones, willing to face whatever was to come. I knew that if it came to it that the Princess would have the overwhelming support of those aboard the Ronda. "Not like you did."

"There was a 'need', and you reacted the way I hoped you would," Janis answered, filling a goblet and then handing it to me. "I needed to know just what sort of a woman that you were."

"You were 'testing me'?" I asked, my tone betraying my surprise as I took the goblet from her hand there in the late captain's cabin, the stern windows open to draw whatever fresh air was willing to waft inside. It was hot below decks, the sweat now starting to show there on the Princess' lovely features as she nodded in the affirmative to my question and seated herself.

"You have 'leadership qualities' that I wish I had," Janis smiled back. "My mother can use a woman like you when we get to Arsana." Arsana being the capital of Dularn located on its southern shore. "Someone who can take command and exercise leadership and settle this damn stupid war with my sister Darlanis." I wondered what Janis thought I could do. Granted, I probably knew items of military technology unknown in this era, but on the other hand I didn't think that the Lorr would tolerate my using my own knowledge of such things for the defense of Dularn. All firearms for example being strictly forbidden under "THE EDICT".

"I'm not a professional soldier, I'm just a woman who happens to be good with a sword." I pointed out futilely, I thought, to the golden haired Princess. I knew little about military tactics or the command of armed forces, although I had served a "hitch" in the United States Marines shortly after my graduation from medical school in France. That was the way I had gotten the money to start my own practice. I didn't see what good such knowledge would do Dularn, since I really didn't know that much about the command of armed galleys, mounted warrioresses, or the command of Legions of foot troops armed with edged and pointed weapons. While I had always had an "unfeminine" interest in such things, I didn't see what good it would do now, especially considering that Tulis must certainly have had people more competent than me to lead her armed forces in the fight against the Empire!

"You knew Janet Rogers, and judging from her writings, she thought quite highly of you," Janis answered me with a smile. I failed to see just what bearing that had to do with anything now!

Perhaps it is time that I step back here a bit and explain a few things to the reader. Give him or her

some understanding of the differences between the cultures of today and the cultures of my time. A means of comparing Dularnian culture to that of the Empire of California and both "cultures" in comparison to that of my own era which is now to most people only legend and myth. I believe this will also explain why the Empire will never be able to conquer Dularn despite Darlanis' best efforts to do so. I am myself doubtful that it could be done with anything less than the weaponry and technology of the Twentieth Century, and even then I am rather doubtful that it would be done except at the cost of a great loss of life as we saw in Vietnam. The Dularnian people have perhaps one of the most amazing social, economic, and political system ever developed by the mind of Man. It is based much upon the writings of Janet Rogers, who was one of the greatest political thinkers who ever lived. It is because of her sex that Dularnian Law provides that only a woman may sit on the throne of Dularn. That only a woman may wear the golden crown of the Queen of Dularn. The policy is perhaps wise, perhaps not. It is said that a man gave the orders that caused The War. Perhaps it is true, but I still doubt that women are "morally superior" to men.

Dularnian military strength is primarily "defensive". Both sexes are trained in the use of arms and those who fail to meet minimum standards are exiled from the country. Thus the ordinary Dularnian is quite capable of fighting as a guerrilla both by himself or herself or in groups. The countryside is heavily wooded, and the militia groups are trained to use the terrain to the best advantage against any invader. Dularn is thus much like the early American colonies before the American Revolution. If we think of Dularn in this light, and think of the Empire as playing the "role" of the "British", we will understand why even although the Empire is more militarily powerful, it cannot ever conquer Dularn as long as the Dularnian people don't want it! It should be mentioned here that the Dularnian Constitution provides for the armament of the people as part and parcel of its design.

Dularn's economic system is pure "Janet Rogers" capitalism. As a matter of fact, all her writings are required study in the public schools which all Dularnian children must attend. Thus the people are both well educated by 26th Century standards and also quite knowledgeable about political, economic, and social affairs. The military technology is superior to the Empire's, especially in small arms, the Dularnian compound crossbow being an example, the design being a duplicate of a 21st Century design used by sportsmen of that era for big game hunting after the outlawing of private firearms early in the century. Janet's mistaken action having been severely condemned by Dularnian writers for centuries from what I understand. (No, she too wasn't perfect!)

The political system is once again almost perfect "Janet Rogers", consisting of an Assembly based upon popular election of candidates by the "taxpayers", also the election and recall of Supreme Court judges. The role of the monarchy replacing that of the "President", whose role was to allow only those laws deemed proper and necessary, and the repeal of those found unneeded and unnecessary, this having been Janet's role back in the 21st Century as head of The World Federation which she led for a number of years prior to her death in 2045 near Mars. Despite what the Lorr say about her she was still a good person who meant harm to no one. Too much of an "idealist" perhaps, but Janet herself was not a woman who would have ever allowed The War to get started!

Dularnian society is based upon a social order that reminds me much of colonial America, with "town meetings" and such items. There are no large "Estates" as are found in the Empire, nor the almost "feudal" social order that seems to be common everywhere else where "civilization" exists. Dularn in this respect is "unique", and its equal is unknown anywhere else on Earth. (I do have data regarding Eurasia and South America). In many respects it is the sort of society that Janet Rogers wanted for Humanity, and its culture is well worth preserving despite whatever Darlanis or anyone else thinks about it! It certainly has a lot more to recommend it than the "Communism" of the Lorr, which suits only a race of totally "alien" creatures such as themselves!

Darlanis' Empire of California is considerably different from the political, social, and economic systems of Dularn as it is now somewhat based upon the political concepts of the Lady Sanda (Harles) Talen. There is perhaps more "color" in Imperial affairs than in the more drab Dularnian society, Darlanis being a strikingly beautiful woman who dresses in exotic attire making the most of her beauty. It is often said that the Legions of the Empire would follow Darlanis to "The Gates Of Hell" itself should she wish to take them there. It is perhaps Darlanis herself who makes the Empire what it is. She is a woman that no man could ever "resist", nor any woman feel anything but "envy" for. Tall, a stunningly beautiful blonde, a "Viking Goddess" of a woman, Darlanis does make an impressive appearance in her golden mesh. I was once told by a man that when he knelt before her that he could think of nothing else but what it would be like to kneel between her thighs and lick the silk that covered her crotch! I suspect that a number of others have felt the same as they knelt there before her. She is perhaps the most beautiful woman of all time! It is HER, her beauty, that makes the Empire what it is!

Darlanis herself hopes someday to form a Federation of Northwest America, using the modified Dularnian political and economic system ("THE NEW ORDER") she supports, while at the same time giving her society more internal unity than what is found there in Dularn. I wish her luck, but doubt that it will ever come to pass in either her lifetime or mine. Perhaps I am wrong, but such things have an "inertia" of their own, and as I write this there doesn't seem to be much hope of anything like this ever coming to pass. Janet Rogers was perhaps truly unique!

"I'll say one thing for you, Lorraine," Janis said with a smile as we shared a cheese that had been stored away perhaps just a bit too long, "And that is that you certainly do lead an adventuresome life." I smiled in agreement, thinking of all that had happened. Taking a sip of the wine, its coolness and tartness good after the heat of the day and the adventures I had had.

"I'll try to be a bit more careful in the future," I promised with a smile in reply, "I'm curious to see if the anti-aging serum you injected into my hip yesterday will actually work on me or not." Janis having injected me with the primary serum, saying that she could also use the secondary on me, but she didn't think it was necessary. After all, I was only thirty nine! Usually, the injections are given at about the age of twenty five, with booster injections necessary on a yearly basis later on. The effect being to completely halt the aging process until about the age of seventy, when there is a slow decline in vigor. Although generally usually not noticeable until after a century has passed. One "side effect" of the serum being that a woman neither menstruates or ovulates while receiving it, it being necessary to use a neutralizing drug so that she may become pregnant and have children. There is also a drug used on young women that provides about the same effects, and prevents them from becoming pregnant before they are old enough to take on the responsibilities of motherhood. I had seen to it that Sharongot a dose of that! I fear I pestered poor Janis nearly to death on what she knew about such things, Janis finally telling me that I'd have to talk to one of the Priestesses of Lys, who apparently got the stuff from the Lorr for all she knew! (The Lorr do "deny" this.)

"Shirl's done a good job of getting in the water and some fresh fruit for our trip to Dularn and I'm going to give her the Ronda as a prize when we get to Arsana," Janis said, changing the subject before I got into talking about things that she had a hard time explaining. Shirl had proved to be a good first officer and Janis thought the woman might even have a future in the Dularnian Navy if she was interested in such a career. Dularn, unlike the Empire, being a considerably more "open" society where a woman of low caste might rise high despite not having the "breeding" that was considered so important in the Empire itself.

"How long do you think the trip will take?" I asked in reply, sipping at my wine. Both of us were now a little "tipsy". I had little idea of how fast the Ronda actually went, although I was well aware that by 20th Century standards the ship was pretty slow, the highest speed ever recorded in the captain's log for the

ship being just over ten knots. He had been quite proud of that, so I suspected that the normal cruising speed would be considerably less as we could not rely upon the wind all the time.

"Two weeks, a little more, depending upon the wind," Janis smiled in reply. She did not need to add that we also might well be the subject of a considerable search effort by the Californians, the patrolling pattern of Sarnian Lady being proof that the escaping members of the crew had successfully reached land and spread the word that the Ronda was now in the hands of "pirates"!

Lana greeted me with a warm smile as I came up on deck, the lovely brownette chained by an ankle to the deck so that she would not require constant watching while the Ronda was at anchor here in the little hidden cove. It being a simple precaution as Lana could have escaped us in a minute had she leaped overboard and attempted to swim for freedom. Laying a hand on her sunwarmed shoulder, I said, "Janis will see that you are returned to your home as soon as possible." Knowing that the Princess was not one to neglect such things. I would be there in any case to remind her in case she did forget the promise she had made to me.

"I know, Lorraine," Lana replied. Pausing for a moment to look up into my eyes before then adding in a soft voice, "You are truly from another time, another place, another culture to take such concerns about me." Placing her hand on mine where it rested there on the sun baked rail, much being left unsaid just then. The touch of her hand against mine arousing thoughts, urges, that I have always fought against since early puberty. Urges that I knew would "horrify" Janis if she knew of them, lesbianism being something that few Dularnians tolerated, although it was common enough in the Empire between many women of high birth and their slave girls, with even Darlanis thinking little of such things!* * No, she doesn't "abuse" her slave girls that way, although I understand that it is a common practice among many mistresses.

As dusk fell, we slid out the sweeps, the former slave girls taking their places at the great levers, and slowly we rowed the Ronda out of the little cove that had been our home for those few simple days. The quiet creak of the great sweeps and the gentle whispering ripple against the bow the only sound. Then with a rustling noise, the sails were lifted up to the masts and set, drawn tight, Janis having ordered the blue green raiding sails set so that we might be better concealed from any prying eyes. The slavers using such when they wished to conceal themselves from any who might wish to steal from them their precious cargo.

As the sails took the wind, the Ronda heeled over, the water white under her bow. A soft shudder going over her as she took to the sea once again, her painted eyes looking north towards distant Dularn. Seemingly alive after having "slept" in the sun during the quiet days of the cove. I saw Lana at the rail, a length of chain securing her to a ring there in the deck, looking back at the dark shoreline drawing away, her lovely hazel eyes brimming with tears, knowing that she was being taken away from everything she held dear. With a word to Janis I went over to her, taking the black clad brownette in my arms, and gently pressed her face to my bosom while I stroked her soft brown hair. Feeling the sobs shaking her as she clung to me, a half moon shining down telling of the night to come. The stars already sprinkling the sky, Venus and Mars now shining down upon us all.

Chapter Seventeen

Janis lowered the telescope from her eye, her face having an expression I'd never seen before on it. One both of concern but yet joy. I wondered what she had seen. The Californian trireme was hardly

visible to the naked eye there in the distance, its low blue green hull and sails merging well with the sea. We were out of the sight of land, the Ronda laid well over on the port tack. The former slave girls having learned now how to take in sail and let it back out, at least well enough that we no longer needed to fear our fate if the wind changed direction or force. Shirl had been a good first officer. The Ronda no longer sailed where the wind happened to take her, but where we wished to go. We had all learned much in the week since we had left the little cove there in Trelandar that had given us shelter and a chance to make necessary repairs and take on water and what fresh food we had been able to find there in the twilight-like darkness of the forest. The memory of the dire wolf still vivid in my thoughts. I had also taken the time to do some "work" on my archery, such being "fitting" if I was to become a proper Dularnian Warioress.

The Princess handed the telescope to me, saying with a grim smile, "'Sarnian Lady'." Adding with another, "And my sister is still aboard if I read the flags right." It being the common practice to fly a special flag for royalty. The tall blonde looking out over the blue green waves to the distant speck almost invisible against the meeting of sky and water there on the horizon. I wondered what thoughts went through her mind. I wondered if Darlanis was looking at us, perhaps knowing that her own sister was only half a dozen miles away. I wished I could be the one to bring these two sisters back together and end this stupid warfare between a mother and daughter that neither wanted or really desired. (Ah, such beautiful ideals I had back then!)

We were flying the Californian flag, the "Imperial Tarl", although I think Janis would have preferred to fly her own country's flag, which is a beautiful green and gold banner. Lana moved to my side as I stood there with Sharon, perhaps understanding much without words, as had Janet Rogers six centuries ago. They were in a way alike, but in others utterly different.

From the distant vessel there came a series of bright flashes, Sarnian Lady asking our identification number, Janis told me. The Princess having a rueful expression on her face as she explained that it was doubtful that we could deceive Sarnian Lady into believing that we were another ship. Especially if any of the Ronda's original crew were aboard, sailors having an uncanny ability to "recognize" ships upon which they served. I suggested that she try it anyway, for otherwise we would have to outrun the big Imperial battleship all the way to Dularn, something that I wasn't sure that the Ronda could do, especially if Sarnian Lady could keep us from approaching Dularn once we went far enough north! Then she would only have to wait for the wind to drop and she'd have us helpless sitting right there before her mighty ram!

Janis quickly sent the number of another ship, a vessel similar to ours. The Princess looking again through the telescope at Sarnian Lady. The warship seeming to grow smaller for an instant as she swung her bow out towards us, heading out to investigate this mysterious vessel her lookout had spotted from his swaying masthead perch. I cursed Darlanis under my breath!

From Sarnian Lady quickly came a series of answering flashes. The Princess looking at them as she held the brass telescope to her eye. The wind blowing her hair and ruffling her blouse, the leather of her kilt little concealing the feminine curves beneath it. She was, I thought to myself, a beautiful woman. One that I had learned to respect, not just for her title and rank, but as a person in the conversations that we had had together. She was, I thought to myself, a good competent leader. I did not regret having pledged my sword to Janis Jord, Princess of Dularn.

For an instant she stood there swaying with the motion of the ship, then she lowered the telescope and looked at me. Her iron gray eyes soft and different from what I had seen before. "They want us to heave to for inspection," she said, regret showing in her voice. Adding, "We have no choice now but to try to outrun her." I wondered if "her" referred to the approaching trireme or She who it carried. I suspected "both" in this case!

"That damm Darlanis!" Sharon breathed as she stood at my side, the anger showing on her lovely young features. Muttering "If I had a gun I'd blow a hole through that god-damm bitch!" in tones that I am sure she didn't intend for me to hear! Obviously Sharon didn't think too highly of the beautiful Empress now perhaps walking the quarterdeck of her flagship half a dozen miles off. Perhaps I should have paid a little more attention to what my stepdaughter was thinking just then, but I had other concerns and really didn't give her words all that much thought just then!

"Shirl! Call all hands to quarters to make sail! And hoist our own flag!" Janis barked, women scurrying about the deck as we set a dangerously heavy set of sails on the Ronda, much more than any prudent captain would ever set in a wind like this! The ship heeling far over, the lee deck almost awash as the hull creaked with the strain. The spray flying over the bow in a white sheet as we smashed through the waves. Behind us Sarnian Lady doing the same, doubtlessly at Darlanis' orders, for no prudent captain of a trireme would ever attempt to fly so much canvas in a wind! The spray flying up over our bow in sheets to fall upon the deck!

I saw Lana standing there by the rail, looking out at the pursuing trireme. I wondered what thoughts went through her mind as she saw Sarnian Lady's mad pursuit after us. Galleys weren't built for such abuse, I knew from what Janis had told me. Under such conditions it was quite possible that the trireme could suffer considerable damage or even be destroyed. There was also a big Dularnian galley somewhere about, the "Janis", a 56, which I suspected would be a match or more for Darlanis' flagship in any sort of a fight! Then we could "turn the tables" on Darlanis!

"I have power in the Empire," Lana suddenly said to me as she touched my hand there on the rail, her lovely hazel eyes soft as they looked into mine. "Power enough that I can see to it that justice is served and you have a chance to speak for yourself before the Imperial Senate." I knew that Lana was the wife of one of the most powerful men in California, and I supposed it was possible that even Darlanis would have to allow me to speak. Whether or not it would really do me much good was another question. I was still "guilty" of the crime of piracy, since I had taken the Ronda by force, and there really wasn't any way of getting around that unpleasant fact no matter whatever anyone said! I was much in the same position as a political refugee who had hijacked an airliner to escape political oppression. Although my motives had been justified, the means I had used might be considered in a different light, especially by Darlanis and California!

"If worst comes to worst see that Sharon is taken care of," I answered, placing my other hand over hers, Sharon at the moment having gone below, allowing us to speak without her hearing us. "I can ask no more than that." Lana's eyes holding mine as she nodded. I knew I could trust her to take care of Sharon for me.

"If the wind holds," Janis said to me, touching my arm as I stood with Lana, the brunette stepping back, aware that Janis did not much care for her for reasons that I had not been able to determine, "We will sail 'Sarnian Lady' mastheads under in another couple hours." Then it would be an easy matter to change tack and head further out to sea, where we would no longer likely have to worry about any further pursuit from any Imperial warships. I nodded, aware of what would happen to us if the wind didn't hold. Or an overstrained sail or mast gave way. I heard Shirl call out to the Princess that we were doing a full eleven knots! The Ronda was doing her best and then some! Fleeing Sarnian Lady like a terrified doe fleeing a dire wolf! Perhaps we would finally see the last of Darlanis! She seemed like a "bad penny", I mused to myself, always showing up when we didn't really want her about!

We were not totally defenseless, of course. The Ronda mounted four powerful ballistae, a weapon similar to a big crossbow that could shoot yard long bolts over a quarter of a mile. We also had a number of bows and several of the Dularnian crossbows which I had been quite fascinated to see, since they

showed a quality of workmanship as good as anything the 20th Century could have produced. They were highly effective weapons, although the cocking of the bow took everything I had even using the belt hook, and only Janis, Shirl, and myself were strong enough to recock them after firing. Or so I thought, Sharon having to my surprise as you will found a means to cock one despite the fact that the two hundred plus pound pull should have been far beyond her ability to handle! I had also considered applying my knowledge of 20th Century weaponry to equip the Ronda with firebombs, since we had a couple small catapults capable of firing such things. Janis however had vetoed the idea, saying that she would not use fire at sea, such being against the "Codes".* *This did not prevent others from later using such weapons, with the eventual result that naval combat eventually required armored steamships completely covered with metal plating to protect them from such missiles and the flamethrowers that had been introduced in the year 2567 by Bob Simmons, an American ex-Marine transported into the 26th Century by the Priestesses of Lys. (author)

We had sailed Sarnian Lady nearly hull down on the horizon when suddenly the wind gusted and died, leaving us becalmed. Janis laid her hand gently on my shoulder as I held Sharon, saying in a soft voice, "I'm sorry it had to come to this, Lorraine. I think you would have enjoyed Dularn very much." Her iron gray eyes moist as we shared much left unspoken just then. The Princess then muttering to herself as she turned away, "Oh Lys, I ask only that you grant me the boon that I ask ----."

The rest of her words lost to me as Lana embraced us, saying softly, "Don't give up hope yet." Her hazel eyes like Janis' now moist as she understood what laid ahead. I wondered what Darlanis would be like. I suspected I would not have long to wait.

Chapter Eighteen

Sharon stood silently at my side as we watched Sarnian Lady closing the distance between us. The trireme now no more than a quarter of a mile from us as we laid helplessly becalmed before it. The black painted eyes on its bow glaring at us malevolently. Janis telling me that we were now coming into range of her ballistae and heavy crossbows, the ram having been readied along with the catapults. The figures of people now easily visible upon her forecastle as the long rows of oars brought her relentlessly towards us. The Ronda's great lateen sails now flapping uselessly in the calm that had suddenly struck us. Dooming us to our fates, whatever they might be. Janis had left the Dularnian flag flying. A helpless "mouse" giving this "cat" "the finger"!

As I have mentioned earlier, the design of 26th Century galleys is different from galley design during the time they were used before the development of cannon and square rigged warships finally made them obsolete. The triangular lateen sails are used mainly to sail the vessel from point to point. The oars being used when in engagement against other galleys. The low masts and flammable sails being taken down before the galley enters into battle, fire arrows sometimes being used in battle although the use of fire at sea is discouraged by the "Codes". Sarnian Lady had taken down her masts and sails, leaving only the low hull now rolling in the swell, her decks bristling with men and armament. She looked irresistible, unstoppable. The "Imperial Tarl" flying over her high ornate sterncastle, a smaller flag beneath it. Janis telling me that it was the personal flag of Darlanis herself. A field of stars circling a stylized golden crown on dark blue.

Sarnian Lady mounted eighteen ballistae to our four, the weapons also being heavier and more powerful than ours. She also carried half a dozen catapults, the weapons running the length of the ship on a spine

over and above the rowers, who sit below the main deck where they are protected from enemy missiles in battle. I could see men gathered at each weapon now, a group of women, Warriresses by their attire, gathered on the forecastle around a tall golden haired woman towering over all of them wearing golden mesh whom I immediately recognized once again as being none other than Empress Darlanis Marden herself! The glitter of her golden halter and brief miniskirt catching the sun's rays and reflecting them back into my eyes! The precious jewels encrusting her trappings giving her a barbaric look like something out of a novel!

"Sharon, I want you to stay with Lana regardless of what happens," I told her as she clung to me. Her lovely azure eyes wet with tears, knowing the fate that awaited me at the hands of the Californians. I knew that whatever happened to me she would be safe with Lady Lana. I was not that hopeful about my own future despite what Lana had said. I was in possession of the Ronda, guilty of slaying nine of its crew, (True, Sharon had killed two, but that was a secret I hoped to keep to myself!) including its captain, and seizing its valuable cargo for my own. They could, I supposed, also charge me with the deaths of Lana's three Foresters as well as holding the Lady Lana Daris herself by force if they wanted to get really "nasty" about it all as they might!

"Drop the sails and lower our flag before some 'triggerhappy idiot' over there takes a shot at us," Janis yelled to Shirl as Sarnian Lady swung broadside to us. Her eighteen ballistae and six catapults aimed squarely at us. I thought of what old-time sailors must have thought when they faced a row of grinning black muzzles back in the time of the old square-riggers. Sarnian Lady's armament looked just as deadly if more primitive.

"What will happen to them?" I asked Janis in low tones as the former slave girls gathered at the rail to stand and look at Sarnian Lady. The women silent as they regarded the end to their hopes of freedom now floating a hundred yards off. They too had lost much. Some wept bitterly as they stared at the blue-green battleship there broadside to them. Others shook their fists in futile hatred. "Freedom" had been so close for all of us! A boat being lowered, no doubt to send a "prize crew" to take command of the Ronda. The Imperials standing there waving at us!

"The 'collar', no doubt when we reach Sarn," Janis answered. Starting a bit as we both saw Darlanis climbing down carefully into the boat there beside Sarnian Lady. Leaping down into the arms of a young officer ready to catch her should she slip and fall. Janis clutching at my arm as if she could not believe her eyes. The two having been separated for six years by the warfare between their two countries. The bright sun glittering off her attire as Darlanis seated herself beside the young officer, the thought going through my mind that she had more courage than I would under similar circumstances! Darlanis being just too easy a target for any crossbowman willing to die for his or rather "her" freedom! And the Ronda was filled with desperate women!

"Where's Sharon?" I hissed as Lana joined Janis and I on the deck to greet the ruler of California. I had to admit that there was certainly nothing wrong with the Empress' courage considering the situation and the "risk" that she was taking that someone might just be willing to give their life if only they could take Darlanis' first! "The bitch has BALLS!" I muttered to myself, now utterly fascinated by Darlanis and her incredible courage to come like this to us when one shot from a crossbow could have put a swift end to her entire life and career as the Empress of California! This being my first "glimpse" of the "DARLANIS LEGEND"!

"I don't know," Lana answered in a low voice as the boat hooked on and I heard a woman's voice snap something in tones too low to be understood on deck over the creaking of the Ronda's hull in the swell. The voice doubtlessly that of Darlanis herself as she was the only woman there in the craft! The assembled feminine "crew" of the Ronda silent behind us as many now showed their displeasure at the

turn of events with teary eyes. Shirl had done her best to restore order. We would greet Darlanis as a free people, as proud freedom loving Dularnians greeting an enemy.

Then suddenly SHE was there before us! Stepping up onto our deck! Tall, standing well over six feet in her boots, her hair of the most lovely light gold, her eyes a beautiful azure skyblue that seemed to glow like precious jewels. A halter of pure gold mesh covered her high firm breasts, a matching short gold mesh mini glittering there in the sunlight around the flare of her hips. High golden leather boots on her feet. The precious jewels covering her trappings sparkled with hundreds of brilliant points of light. She seemed to tower over us all, almost like she was something "alien", not human. A "goddess" that could blast us all with a thunderbolt! So beautiful that she took your breath away, although by 20th Century standards she would have been too tall, a bit too muscular. The dagger, the long slim sword at her hip marked her as being of the Warriresses. I saw the muscles moving there beneath that flawless lightly tanned skin as she swayed with the roll of the ship, saw the flatness of that perfect belly, the strength of her thighs, the swell of the biceps in her arms and knew that she had physical strength even beyond my own. She was so incredibly beautiful that I felt that I was in the presence of something not completely totally human, not something truly ever born of Woman. It is, I believe, a major part of her power over the hearts and minds of others, although I should mention here that she is highly intelligent, very well educated by 26th Century terms, and on good relations with the Lorr, which is unusual given the usual sort of relations between Mankind and the ant-like inhabitants of Mars. There is of course a very good reason for all this as you will see later on.

I felt Janis tremble with emotion beside me as Darlanis lifted her arms, her eyes seeming to suddenly glow as she perhaps for the first time recognized her sister, the red lips moving, but only a soft whisper escaping as I saw how this beautiful goddess of a woman could feel human emotions. Lana suddenly trembling at my side, although whether from excitement or something else I didn't know as she jerked at me, her eyes wide with horror as I saw it too! A gasp going up from the assembled women as they too now saw what stood on the Ronda's quarterdeck, a cocked and loaded crossbow in her young trembling hands! SHARON!!!!!!!

"DARLANIS!" I heard Sharon sob, "I WON'T LET YOU HANG LORRAINE AS A PIRATE WHEN WE WERE ONLY DEFENDING OURSELVES!" I HAD NO DOUBT THAT SHARON FULLY INTENDED TO KILL DARLANIS RIGHT WHERE SHE STOOD! The crossbow one of the Dularnian types that would hurl an steel shafted bolt over three hundred yards. Darlanis had made a fatal miscalculation in coming aboard as she had. The power of her beauty, of her provocative attire which had served to almost "stupefy" the rest of us, had absolutely no effect on Sharon! I could hear the yells from Sarnian Lady, see men at the ballistae, turning, aiming them, all of Sarnian Lady's armament now aimed directly at Sharon. The Warriresses having fitted arrows to their bows, crossbowmen had taken their positions, but none of it would do the least good as no missile could strike Sharon before she pulled the trigger and fired a two ounce steel bolt RIGHT THROUGH DARLANIS' HEART! And Sharon was an excellent shot too with the weapon, I recalled, leaping forward to save Darlanis' life as the golden Empress stood there looking into the face of Death. Standing there calmly as if nothing had happened!

"SHARON! BY MY COMMAND! FREEZE!" I cried, throwing myself in front of Darlanis, praying that the post hypnotic suggestion I had placed in her mind so long ago still worked. Janet Rogers and I having been working in the field with a curious Sharon as our test subject months ago! Sharon wavering there before me, fighting the post hypnotic suggestion, unable to kill Darlanis without first killing me, the thought going through my mind that she might just kill us both with the same bolt should she happen to fire by accident. "LOWER THE CROSSBOW!" I snapped, aware of Darlanis' azure eyes, of her height, the glitter of her golden attire. Seeing Shirl sneaking up behind Sharon, suddenly grabbing her, the bolt shooting off harmlessly into the sky as Sharon then collapsed sobbing into the strong arms of Shirl. She

was a good first officer. I hoped that Darlanis understood that.

Chapter Nineteen

"Do you have any final comments or statements?" Darlanis asked, her lovely azure eyes holding mine as Sharon squirmed a bit at my side. The hard oak seat of the chair no doubt just a bit uncomfortable to her well spanked buttocks under her thin short skirt. The beautiful Empress of California having taken Sharon aside after we boarded Sarnian Lady and there in front of everyone impressed upon her bare rear end in a very effective way that one does not threaten the ruler of the Empire of California with a crossbow! I had to smile at the sight, Darlanis giving Sharon a good two dozen where they did the most good, there being considerable strength in that tall beautiful muscular regal body!

We were now seated on the quarterdeck of Sarnian Lady, the entire crew of the ship assembled to listen, to see justice done! Darlanis magnificent there in her golden attire, seated between the captain of the trireme and its young first officer, who was, I understood much to my surprise, Darlanis' own legal heir to the throne of California should anything happen to Darlanis herself! He had been the young officer in the boat that she had ordered to remain there while she went aboard the Ronda alone by herself. His name was Jers Bisan, and he was the son of the formidable Imperial Warlady, the Princess of Baja, a former Queen of Sarn, the Princess Tara Bisan of whom we will meet later on in this story. The woman herself being an evil sadistic "witch" who I think you will learn to "hate" just as I have now with very good reason! * * It was the "practice" in the 26th Century that when a woman was divorced that she took back the "name" she had borne before her marriage, Tara having been married earlier on and then widowed.

Overhead flew the colorful banner of Imperial California, below the smaller flag of Darlanis herself. The sun yet bright in the sky above, a breeze having come back up, unfortunately too late to do us any good now that we were the captives of Darlanis! Sarnian Lady was under sail back to Sarn, the Ronda following close behind, the former slaves now once again locked in chains. Darlanis having ordered such fearing that they might attempt to seize the ship from the half dozen sailors sent over from Sarnian Lady to sail the prize back to Sarn for its eventual disposition.

"I ask freedom for the woman Shirl," I answered, remembering how she had kept her wits about herself and had safely disarmed Sharon before my stepdaughter managed to kill Darlanis. Princess Janis sitting there at my side, keeping her thoughts to herself. She had been questioned, as had others, as to the truth of my statements about my taking the Ronda and why I had done so. Darlanis had done most of the talking, drawing me out, making me relive the horror, the terror of our passage through time to this era. Then our "rescue" by the Ronda, and my battle against its barbarian crew. Telling Darlanis of what the Ronda's captain had said about Sharon and what our fates were supposed to be once we reached Sarn. Darlanis nodding, hopefully understanding what the situation had been. She was a woman. I hoped she understood what any mother will do when her own children are in danger.

"Gladly granted," Darlanis answered with an understanding smile. "Let it be so noted." Turning to the Scribe who was now taking down the hearing for the official record. The two handsome officers on either side of the briefly clad Queen nodding in agreement. I mused to myself that Darlanis should perhaps wear a longer skirt if she was going to sit before men dressed like that in that gold mesh outfit, but wisely kept my opinions to myself, very well aware that they would probably not be appreciated! On the other hand I suspected that Darlanis wore what she did for a reason, since any man dealing with her would have a hard time keeping his mind from drifting into visions of what laid beneath!

To one side sat Lady Lana Daris, who was acting as my legal counsel. She had used as my defense the fact that I had only acted in self defense there aboard the Ronda and that at no time had I ever sought to harm anyone who did not first offer me harm! Whether or not this had any impression on Darlanis was another question, although I thought that no doubt Janis' opinions of the matter carried considerable weight, the woman being Darlanis' older sister and the Princess of Dularn. She now wore a long gray gown, one of Darlanis', which fitted her fairly well, although she was not as broad shouldered or widehipped or as tall as Darlanis. Darlanis being a full 5'10" in her bare feet, although she usually wears thick soled spike heeled boots to give her an additional four inches, making her stand an actual 6'2". I have seen her in nothing but clips and strap, and would guess that she weighs about a hundred and fifty pounds, twenty more than I do! She is one "BIG" blonde! A very "impressive" woman!

"If there are no more comments or statements, this hearing is hereby ended," Darlanis spoke. "The woman Lorraine Duval, who claims to be from another time along with her stepdaughter, Sharon, will be held until a decision can be rendered by this courts martial as to her guilt or innocence of the charges brought against her under the laws of the Empire of California." With this Darlanis rose, the two officers doing the same, and Lana took me by the hand, her face somber, to another part of the deck where we might speak in private. I did not understand why she was so depressed. I thought we had done quite well in impressing Darlanis as to just why I had done what I had. Certainly as a woman she would be able to understand why I had been forced to do what I had! Rape has never been "legal" in any civilized state!

"Why the long face?" I asked Lana, Sharon coming to stand beside me there at the rail. "I thought we did pretty good." I certainly had sensed that Darlanis understood why I had acted as I had. Why it had been a matter of "life or death" for Sharon and me! Everything I had learned from Janis had indicated that while the status of women was not as high here in the 26th Century for the most part as it had been back in the 20th Century, it was still permitted for a woman to defend herself against her rape. Still permitted for a mother to "defend" her daughter against any who sought to rape her! And the late captain of the Ronda had made it ever so clear that was exactly what he planned to "do" to Sharon as soon as he had the opportunity to do it too!

"On the matter of your being a 'pirate', yes," Lana smiled, then adding, "But don't forget that you are also legally an 'enemy' of the Empire and that might just have consequences we haven't thought of yet." I also was considering the fact that Janis had considered me "valuable" because of my 20th Century knowledge, and Darlanis might have exactly the same plans for me too!

"It's just not fair!" Sharon protested, surreptitiously rubbing her buttocks there beneath her skirt, Darlanis having given her a spanking that I was sure she would not forget for some time! Sharon had been "lucky" that Darlanis had a sense of humor or it could have been very unpleasant for all of us had Darlanis decided to say lop off Sharon's head or do something else to her!

"You're lucky that Darlanis is the sort of person that she is or you'd be feeding the fish right now," Lana answered Sharon in reply, telling her that there was a death penalty for what she had done as I had suspected that there would be. Darlanis had not known of the slim dagger I had worn beneath my skirt when I had asked her what she planned to do to Sharon there aboard the Ronda and Darlanis had laughed and said that she planned to give her a good spanking! Otherwise I had planned to take Darlanis hostage in the hope that Sarnian Lady wouldn't fire on the woman herself! Telling the Californians that they could have Darlanis back when we reached Dularn safely and not before! Darlanis had asked me exactly that question later on, and I had been honest with her there at the hearing, feeling that she should know just what sort of a person I was, although I don't think she had any doubts about that after hearing what I had done aboard the Ronda.

"All gather! A decision has been reached!" the scribe said in a loud voice, the crew gathering as Darlanis and the two officers came back up on the deck from below where they had been considering our fate. A number of Darlanis' Warriresses standing by, proud in their chain mail and helmets. The scribe obviously a slave girl judging by the collar locked around her neck, the thought going through my mind that I might end up the same way! Her brief gray clinging shift well revealing the provocativeness of her thighs, the sweet feminine curves of her body there beneath the clinging cotton. I recalled what I had been told by the slave girls aboard the Ronda of what it was like to be the slave of a woman like Darlanis and shuddered mentally to myself.

Once again we seated ourselves after Darlanis, it being the protocol that you stand until she sits, which reminds me of an old joke I'd better keep to myself about the royal posterior. I suppose Darlanis wouldn't mind, as she does have quite a sense of humor about such things, but she is a good friend of mine even if we don't agree on some things, and I don't want to embarrass her.

"It is the decision of this court by unanimous vote that the woman Lorraine Duval is innocent of all charges brought against her for the seizure of the vessel 'Ronda' upon the grounds that she was acting in self defense of herself and her stepdaughter," the young Prince intoned as Darlanis sat there smiling at me while he read from the script there before him. The smile there on Darlanis' lips making me wonder just what now was in store for me! That woman was as smart as she was beautiful, and I suspected that she was also ambitious enough to "use" me if she could!

"Oh Lorraine! You're Innocent!" Sharon cried, throwing her arms around me before everyone there, sobbing in relief now that she knew that we were "safe". Safety being a relative term here! Especially considering the way that Darlanis smiled at me as Lana took my hand in hers. Janis frowning to herself, looking out over the sea. I felt sorry for her. It might be a long time before she saw Dularn again. I wondered what "plans" Darlanis had for me. I suspected that this entire "hearing" had been cooked up by Darlanis to get me in the "proper frame of mind" for something she wanted from me. I knew her sort from the 20th Century. Some things never change despite the passage of time. Darlanis was a woman "driven" by ambition. She would stop at nothing to satisfy those ambitions. I wondered what her "offer" would be?

Chapter Twenty

I jumped as a soft hand gently touched my arm, having been lost in thought as I stared out over Sarnian Lady's foaming wake. Watching the Ronda following close behind, keeping station with us as ordered. Darlanis' sloe-eyed personal slave girl saying softly to me, "My mistress desires to speak with you." The wench was a delight in her clinging short red silken shift that drew the eye of more than one officer there on the trireme's quarterdeck. The golden collar locked about her neck left no doubts as to her status. I wondered briefly what her opinion was of Darlanis? Slave girls often know "more" about their mistresses than even their own husbands do. More than one high born Lady has ended up divorced thanks to the wagging tongue of her slave girl.

"Very well," I answered the delight, following her, aware of the sway of her hips beneath the shift. The slim brunette a feminine delight that any red-blooded man would have much appreciated. I fought down the thought of what such a wench might be trained to do, it being not uncommon here in the Empire for slave girls to be "pleasing" to both sexes! Part of the "sexual immorality" the Dularnians claimed was "part and parcel" of the Empire, which they denounced much like the Christian fundamentalists back in my own era. I thought briefly of Bob's wife Carol, who had once expressed her opinions of such things to me at

one time. Carol being of the opinion that what couples did together was of no one's concern but their own. An opinion that I already shared, having seen enough of such ideas to know what the consequences were in the long run. Janet Rogers hadn't believed in such "nonsense" either, but that was a part of her writings that the Dularnians didn't talk too much about from what I had learned in my conversations with the Dularnian Princess. The thought going through my mind as I followed the slave below that Darlanis was considerably different than what Janis had told me about her!

"Inform the guard, Lynn, that we are not to be disturbed, and then take your leave of us," Darlanis ordered as Lynn ushered me into her "Imperial Presence". The sloe-eyed wench nodding and closing the door behind herself as she went out. The tall regal golden Empress giving me a warm smile of greeting. I wondered if one bowed to such an august personage, or just shook her hand. I came to a quick decision and bowed, wondering why Darlanis had requested my presence. It was rather warm below decks, and I noticed a faint gleam there on Darlanis' forehead from the heat, the thought going through my mind that she sweated just like any one else! I wondered too how comfortable that gold mesh was she wore day in and day out. While it was lined with silk, still I suspected that she avoided sitting down on any hard surface while wearing it. In private she sits with the back of the skirt pulled up over her buttocks for comfort, but I suspect that she has often wished she had never started the style as gold is not the most comfortable thing in the world to wear day after day! * * She also wears a gold thread outfit which is more comfortable, although I do think as she does that the gold mesh is a bit more "impressive" on her. She is also an excellent public speaker as I suppose most of my readers know who have ever listened to her.

"There is a matter of some importance that I wish to have your opinion on," Darlanis smiled, seating herself on a comfortable sofa and then indicating that I was to sit beside her. The flowery scent of her perfume washing over me as I did what she wished. Being around Darlanis was somewhat nerve-racking since I didn't know what to say or do. Feeling like a school-girl instead of an adult woman of nearly forty who always considered herself the equal of anyone she met. Her awe-inspiring beauty making me feel "inadequate" as a woman sitting there beside her.

"As you wish, your majesty," I mumbled in reply, my palms sweaty as I held them down between my thighs and waited to hear what she had to say. Aware of her beauty, the scent of her perfumed body in the still warm air of her palatial cabin, the fine silks, the hangings speaking of the type of person that she was. Aware of her sexuality, the almost incredible "femaleness" of her that I had seen in only one other woman, Darlanis' attire concealing little of her magnificent figure. I thought of the mysterious beautiful young woman who had been the companion of Raspa, the First Princess of the Lorr. Darlanis could have been her mother had I not known better, they had looked so alike in a way.

"There is wine there on the table before us," Darlanis said to me with a friendly smile. "Would you care for some?" Those azure eyes glowing into mine as she spoke, her voice like a beautiful caress. I could understand why she had the power that she had. Men, any man, would be almost powerless against a "goddess of beauty" like this. No doubt that was a "facet" of her power.

I poured for us, handing her a goblet, taking the other, seating myself once again beside her. Aware of her eyes on me. The smile that curved those perfect lips, rich and red with lip gloss. "Let us drink to friendship and understanding," she said to me. I found that agreeable considering the circumstances in which I found myself. Aware of the rich furnishings, of the beautiful hangings, the lovely paintings, the rugs there concealing the planking beneath of the deck. Darlanis was obviously a woman who enjoyed comfort. Not the sort that I would have thought would be sailing around the ocean on a trireme like this.

Darlanis took a sip of her wine as she regarded me over the rim of the golden goblet with those beautiful azure eyes. I wondered what she thought of me. I wasn't really sure what I thought of her. Darlanis

wasn't what I had thought she would be like. She was warm, friendly, pleasant. The sort of a woman I thought that made friends easily. I found her quite intriguing.

"I need your advice on a matter that is of great concern to me," Darlanis spoke, lowering her goblet. I suspected that she was "testing" me, although with her there was no way of knowing.

"Shoot," I smiled, her eyes briefly glowing up into mine. There is a considerably change in the use of such idioms over the centuries, and the meaning of the word "shoot" was quite different here in the 26th Century than it had been back in the 20th.

"I'm really going to enjoy having you around!" she laughed, then suddenly stopping, her hand briefly reaching out to touch my arm as she said, "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to make fun of you." That last sentence an utter surprise to me as I always thought that a woman like her would never apologize for anything she did!

"I could say the same for you," I smiled, although I didn't know if that was really what I meant to say just then. Darlanis was obviously quite a lot different from what Janis had claimed!

"You are what I have always dreamed about all these years," she replied, her words making little sense to me at all! I didn't know then of course about Darlanis' life-long study of the past. That she was perhaps more knowledgeable about such things than anyone else alive here in this time! That she actually knew a considerable amount about me due to Janet Rogers' own writings. Janis having carefully kept such from me for what reasons I will never know. Perhaps fearing that I might learn the "truth" and see that not all "truth and justice" was on the Dularnians' side! That Dularn had once had its own "Empire" not that long ago too!!

"A woman from six centuries ago?" I ventured, now enjoying this verbal interplay with Darlanis. I was no longer afraid of her. I sensed her own vulnerabilities, her own weaknesses that she had fought all her life. It is, I suppose, one reason why I picked the profession that I did. Why I was so "good" at it too!

"Did you ever think of the questions you could answer for us? The questions we've never been able to answer? You were the woman that Janet Rogers worshiped, the woman to who she dedicated every book she wrote! YOU ARE THE 'LORRAINEDUVAL' OF LEGEND!!!" Darlanis breathed, suddenly so terribly "vulnerable" there before me. Now I understood why Janis had said I might "alter" history itself! Why I was the "second Janet Rogers" all Humanity wanted!

"Perhaps," I answered, taking a sip of my wine while I gathered my thoughts. Darlanis sitting there looking at me, those beautiful azure eyes pleading into mine. Now I suspected why she had come looking for me, why she had chased us halfway to Dularn.

"Lorraine, I can give you everything you could want. Money, estates, power, slaves, everything that the Empire has is yours." Darlanis was "begging" now. I hated to see her do it. Hated myself for letting her do it too. For leading her on like this! I could think of only one thing I wanted from her. It would be little to ask. She had the power to grant my wishes, I knew too.

"Let your sister return to Dularn. Free the slaves aboard the Ronda. Give the ship to Shirl as a command. She's earned it if anyone ever has," I answered. Still vivid in my mind how she had acted to save Darlanis' life there only a few hours before.

"And in return?" Darlanis asked, sitting there. Beautiful. Tall. Golden. The flowery scent of her perfume in my nostrils. A cool breath of air coming through the open stern windows to us.

"Whatever you ask," I answered, aware that I had just "sold" my soul to Darlanis for the freedom of those who had become my friends there in the last week or so. I wondered what "price" she would charge me for her "favours". I felt "dirty", "unclean".

"I ask only your friendship, nothing more," she answered. Suddenly I felt "clean" again, felt that suddenly a great burden had been lifted from my shoulders. Felt nothing but love for her, the thought going through my mind that I loved her like I had loved no other woman ever before! That here now was my home! Not with the Dularnians still living in a past now history, but in this young glorious civilization still struggling to be born. This time we would learn from the mistakes of the past. Make our peace with the Lorr. That was why I had been sent to this era!

Chapter Twenty One

"For centuries," Darlanis spoke to me in that lovely voice of hers, "Man dreamed of someday meeting intelligent beings from another world. Of meeting with another form of intelligence in peace and friendship. But Man saw only that the Lorr were not like himself, and thought only of death and destruction. Yet, with the aid of the Lorr, Man perhaps could rebuild the glorious civilization that He once lost!" I thought Queen Darlanis an excellent speaker. She had a "way" with words that I wished I had. We were sharing wine, our own thoughts, ideas, ideals as Sarnian Lady now sailed over a seemingly endless rolling blue green sea.

"Same problem that humanity always had with anything or anyone 'different'," I smiled. Racism wasn't too much of a problem any more due to "reasons" that I'll get into another time, but there was enough "caste prejudice" to suit any bigot! "Shoot first, ask questions later." I smiled. Darlanis nodding back. She had enough background in the idioms of the 20th Century that she could follow me fairly well as long as I didn't use "slang".

"Also similar to the problem we have with you making the Dularnians out as a bunch of pirates and them making you Imperials out as a bunch of slavers after their women," I added with a smile as Darlanis nodded. She had a first rate mind, better than her sister, who was intelligent, but not really a heavy thinker.

"Unfortunately there is some truth to those claims," the Empress admitted. Dularnian women were prized as slave girls. Dularnian men also thought much the same about Californian women in turn. One voyage and a hold full of captured women could make a man almost rich enough to retire! The Dularnians, having better ships than the Empire, using fore and aft rigged schooners, did do a brisk traffic in captured women, although they weren't all that careful or concerned just as to the nationality of the necks that got collared. It not being unknown that a raider would grab a blonde from some fishing village on the other side of the Dularnian island and sell her to some Imperial slaver in exchange for a pretty little brunette from Trelandar or Baja. Then there were the true pirates, who traded with both sides "undercover".

"You could always outlaw slavery except for convicts and such," I suggested with a smile, knowing Darlanis would never agree to that. In any case she didn't have the power to do it as such an action would have required a vote of the Imperial Senate. As about 95% of the Senate was composed of men who owned slave girls, they weren't very likely to vote against their own selves!

"We could always start a feminist 'revolution' and overthrow the government," Darlanis laughed, saying that she saw no other way that it could ever be done. As the men of the 26th Century were not the "pussies" of the 20th, any woman who tried to start any sort of "women's rights movement" either got killed or just simply "disappeared", perhaps to be found years later a collared slave girl in another country. Unfortunately the men of the 26th Century knew too much about the legends of the feminist movements of the 20th and 21st Centuries to allow anything like that again!

"I've got a hunch that your 'Priestesses of Lys' have some form of perfected 'electronic hypnosis' and access to advanced technology from what I've heard of them," I commented, changing the subject, curious to see what Darlanis knew about the subject!

"They have the means to control minds," Darlanis answered, although she admitted she didn't know just how they did it. As Janet Rogers had been interested in the topic and also had access to computer technology, I considered it likely that she probably had possessed such equipment during the time she ruled the Earth. That also explained the Priestesses of Lys as I recalled having told Janet Rogers one time that the most successful historical political organization I knew of was the Roman Catholic Church! I suspected that Janet had organized them before her death in 2045 A.D. The fact that the Priestesses of Lys took an active part in population control proved to me that they were aware of the need for such as Janet had not. The Priestesses of Lys providing the politically unchangeable "basic operating system" necessary for the continued success of any long lived civilization much like the Roman Catholic Church had done back in the Middle Ages. I had suggested the concept that any society must have certain basic "rules" that were not subject to political modification or alteration. A "basic operating system" that was intentionally made extremely difficult to modify. Such should be set up by those most competent. By those who could foresee the problems that might not even crop up for centuries to come. Population control one that Janet had ignored for the most part. She felt that if people had access to the proper information, and that there were no restrictions on contraception or abortion that the "population problem" would solve itself. I had been doubtful of that. Janet was too much of an "idealist", too little of a "realist" like myself. History shows that her World Federation was already falling apart due to population pressure before The War finally "solved" the problem for us! The Red Chinese had the answer back in the 20th Century, but Janet was strongly opposed to doing anything like that since it violated all those "libertarian" beliefs to which she held so dear back when I knew her.

As we spoke together, both of us now a little bit drunk, there came a soft knock on the panels of the door, which opened to Darlanis' order, Jers Bisan stepping in, saying, "We believe that we have sighted the Seahawk, your highness," his eyes for a moment meeting mine, studying me, seizing me up in a way that told much of the sort of a man that he was. Jers Bisan a young gentleman that any mother would have been delighted to have courting her daughter, the thought already having passed through my mind earlier that he really wasn't "that" old and that Sharon was "older" than her years after everything she had been through!

"Beat to quarters and make all possible speed under both sails and oars," Darlanis snapped back, standing up, adding, "And signal the Ronda to stick close to us if she can." I thought it best to take my leave of Darlanis then as I saw her slave girl slip into the cabin, the wench's dark eyes wide with excitement or fear for all I know as Darlanis took down a golden helmet and slipped it over that lovely head. A tunic of golden chain mail hanging there on a hook beside her along with her own weapons.

"What is it, Lorraine?" Sharon asked as she joined me there on the quarterdeck, Lana at her side. Janis standing there watching everything, a grim smile on her lips as the Californians dashed about making preparations for battle. Sarnian Lady now turning, a young midshipman signaling the Ronda as it turned to follow us. A new flag being raised, this one a blood red in color as it flew over Darlanis'. Sarnian Lady

had raised her battle flag. We were going to fight Seahawk, whatever "Seahawk" was!

"I think we are going into battle," I answered, a clatter drowning out my words as the oars were slid outboard, the oarsmen taking their places between decks, their horny palms doubtlessly now gripping the leather padded extensions of the rowing frame to which the oars were fastened. Then as the big trireme came about fifty four oars as one bit deep into the water, and with a surge that made us all sway on the deck, the Imperial warship leaped ahead, the ram splitting the waves before it. The blood-red battle flag snapping in the wind over our heads. It would be dark soon, I noticed, the sun low and red there in the west over the smoothly rolling ocean as we once again headed towards Dularn.

"I don't see anything!" Sharon protested, shading her eyes with her hand and looking out to sea over the bow of Sarnian Lady, the men at the ballistae and catapults greasing and testing their weapons. Others dashing here and there over the one hundred and ninety foot length of the great Imperial flagship.

"Here, try this," the young Prince said, handing Sharon a telescope. My stepdaughter giving him a sweet smile. Her azure eyes flirting with his as he said, "You probably won't see much, even the lookout can't see more than the tops of the masts." He would make her a good husband, I thought to myself. Girls as young as her were often married women here in this era, I knew.

As Sharon looked through the telescope Janis stepped up and explained that the "Seahawk" was a big three masted schooner stolen from the Dularnian Navy. Its present captain and crew a gang of blood-thirsty pirates that had plagued both the Empire and Dularn for several years now. Sharon's eyes growing wide at the tale, excited at the thought of seeing "real pirates" up close!

"Oh, there they are!" Sharon breathed, spotting the tips of the three masts just above the horizon. I did not think we had much chance of catching a ship like that if even the Ronda had been able to outsail Sarnian Lady. The powerful surge of the oars and the steady beat of the drummer telling that the speed we were now making was taking its toll of the men there at the oars!

Suddenly cheering broke out all over the ship as Darlanis stepped out on deck, glowing there in the dying sunlight almost like a Grecian goddess in her golden armor, a compound bow in her hand, a quiver of arrows slung over her back, her sword at her hip. Briefly standing there looking out over the bow before stepping below to where the rowers were giving their best. The oars suddenly dipping into the water with renewed force as She walked among the rowers, perhaps briefly touching them, encouraging them to greater efforts. The thought going through my mind that men would follow her anywhere! To the Gates of Hell itself!

"We could lose the Ronda if she falls too far behind and the pirates circle around," the young Prince commented to the captain as he nodded, glancing behind where the Ronda was now but a toy there on the waves nearly a mile behind us. I thought it was perhaps time that I spoke to Darlanis and "earned my keep" as her new advisor. I knew Sarnian Lady would never catch the pirate.

Chapter Twenty Two

"You shouldn't be here," I protested to Darlanis as she shifted her position on the uncomfortably hard seat of Sarnian Lady's launch beside me. "Your life is far too valuable to be risked like this," I explained as the burly oarsman ahead of me rowed with a tireless stroke, keeping his thoughts to himself. His eyes

shining in the darkness, the stars now bright overhead. I envied his muscles, the man no doubt strong enough that he could have put me under one arm and Darlanis under the other and carried us both off! It was a warm night in middle July, and the oarsmen were stripped to their kilts, their muscular masculine shadowy forms swaying back and forth with the motion of the oars.

"Are their lives less valuable than mine?" she challenged, indicating the oarsmen rowing us across a black ocean to the shadowed Ronda with a nod of her golden head. "Should they take the risks of dying in battle while I relax in safety aboard Sarnian Lady?" Darlanis challenged me. I had no answer. There was none that I could give. Now I understood why the Warriors and Warrioreses of California were so willing to die for their Empress. Why men almost fought to serve her, to even die for Her!

"Victory will be ours," she said, taking my hand in hers, the boat's motion on the open sea making my stomach queasy. The dot of light ahead the lantern hung in the Ronda's rigging for us. Mars like a bright orange star shining down upon us, Venus bright in the western sky hanging low above the faint glow of the sunset. I tried not to think of what laid ahead if my plan was successful and the pirates took our "bait". I wished again that I was brave and courageous like the regal woman beside me, Darlanis showing no signs of apprehension at the dangers she would soon face. I wondered how many battles she had seen, how many enemies had died at the point of her long slim blade? She was truly of the Warrioreses. Born into that martial Caste at birth much unlike me, a woman of another time who had suddenly found herself now in an alien world she did not yet fully understand!

Behind us came Sarnian Lady's two longboats, each loaded down with oarsmen and warrioreses. Our launch carrying another dozen. Our total force numbered sixty. There would be another half a dozen on the Ronda, sailors from Sarnian Lady, but yet it was still a small force to oppose perhaps a hundred men or more! I didn't like the idea of such odds, though Darlanis didn't seem to share my fears, saying that any one of her people was equal to any two of the enemy, which I rather doubted, but felt it wise not to disagree with her just then! Darlanis being a "Queen of Swords", Janis had told me in passing, whatever that all meant!

At least Sharon was safe aboard the trireme, I thought to myself. Janis had insisted upon coming along, as had Lady Lana. Even the young Prince was with us, although I had protested "putting all our eggs in one basket" like we had but to little avail.

The Ronda loomed up out of the darkness like a ghost ship, the sails hardly visible in the darkness, a faint glow in the east telling of the moonrise soon. Our timing had been perfect.

"Sharon!" I gasped as a pretty young blonde climbed over the side and stepped through the Ronda's sally port. My stepdaughter greeting me with a smile, burly Shirl at her side holding a boarding pike. The burly ex-fisherman's wife giving me a smile as others crowded by us to take their places on the Ronda's deck.

"You don't think I'd 'miss' this, do you?" Sharon replied, a slim bow and a quiver full of arrows slung across her back. I thought of the pleasures in spanking that curvy young rump, but suspected that it wouldn't do much good. Darlanis behind me whispered something to her older sister, something to the effect, "like mother, like daughter". The young Prince giving me a "don't blame me" smile as he stood behind Sharon. I wondered how much Shirl had to do with things too! And perhaps that smile now curving Lady Lana's lips betrayed certain knowledge kept secret from me! Obviously I had been "had" by all of them, and good!

"You're mad at me, aren't you?" Sharon said, standing before me, looking at my boots. Darlanis laughed softly behind me at some comment that Janis had made. Lady Lana smiled, a glow there in her hazel

eyes. A number of the oarsmen now standing about, poking each other in the ribs at the sight there before them. I wondered if they too might have been "in" on all this!

"Yes, I'm mad at you!" I laughed, sweeping her up into my arms and crushing her to me, her feet inches off the deck. Kissing her cheek before setting her down, knowing that she would soon bear the mark of the Warriress there on her own left wrist!

The Moon rose golden in the east, its rounded orb perhaps concealing secrets centuries old. I wondered about those who had lived there beneath its surface before The War and there were no more spaceships to bring supplies. They now perhaps served the Lorr like the others the "ants" used as human servants, thinking again of the one who had so much reminded me of Darlanis in a way. I thought of a woman with a dream, a tall regal Empress who sought to give Man back the civilization He had lost. One who could see beyond the apparent outward shape of others and honor what laid beneath despite appearances. Many would die tonight if my suggestion bore fruit and the "Seahawk" took the "bait" as I hoped it would. I still wondered if I had done the right thing.

"What are you thinking about?" Sharon asked me a few minutes later as we stood at the rail looking out at the Moon rising there in the east, a great swollen misshapen orb now lifting over the distant horizon. The reflection there in her lovely eyes. I had watched Deimos passing over earlier, racing across the sky, a reminder of the might of the Lorr and their domination of Earth.

"Of another's dreams," I answered. Telling her of Darlanis and what we had spoken of. I wondered if Darlanis had been right when she said that the Empire represented Man's last hope. A second "ROME", she had called it. I thought of how those aboard Sarnian Lady had fought to volunteer themselves to accompany Her. I hoped the Prince had chosen well. It would be a nasty fight.

"We have the "Seahawk" within sight, sir," the sailor said as he stood before the young Prince. Pointing astern as the Ronda sailed slowly towards Sarn a hundred miles distant. Darlanis smiling and giving me a hug at the words, acting more like a delighted child about to get a new toy than a Warriress going into battle! I couldn't see what everyone was so happy about. Despite whatever Darlanis' warrioresses could do with their bows, there would still be many aboard who would never see the sun rise in the morning. I forced the thought of my mind that I might be one of them. Tossed overside in the morning to feed the fishes.

"The Warriress may know fear as she faces battle, but conquers that fear as she conquers the enemy she faces." I found the thought comforting as we went about preparing ourselves for the battle, the pirate schooner now plainly visible from the Ronda's deck. I was thankful for an experienced commander like Darlanis. She would know what to do. I would only need to follow, put to "use" the amazing Dularnian compound bow she'd given me...

Somewhere to the west of us, her sails down, lookouts at her masts, her hull hidden by the curve of the Earth, was Sarnian Lady. I wondered what thoughts passed through captain Stone's mind as he waited for the outcome of our plan. I did not envy him, not with the life of his beloved ruler there "on the line"!

I had given Sharon our biggest telescope to look at the Moon and stars with, it being something to take her mind off what loomed in the distance behind us. Perhaps curious, she scanned the horizon, and to her credit, spotted the sail ahead, the sail of another galley. A galley of the same class as Sarnian Lady! And with three masts of various heights rigged with square sails!

"Well, what is it?" Darlanis asked as the Prince looked through the telescope, there being just a touch of rasp in her voice that told of hidden fears. No Californian ship being equipped with square sails, although

there were some "Northmen" ships so equipped, I recalled, from what Janis had told me once.

"A three master, no doubt about it," he answered, looking at Princess Janis, seeing her smile in reply and nod. Her flagship, the "Janis", a powerful galley of 56 oars, being so fitted out.

"Signal Sarnian Lady to close up," Darlanis snapped. Adding, "Send enemy vessel sighted." For an instant I saw a cold blaze in her eyes as she looked at her older sister, then it was gone and she was the same as ever. I saw Sharon with the signal lamp and the code book climb the rigging to the Ronda's crow's nest. My stepdaughter having learned much in the past ten days we had lived here in the 26th Century. She had been a good "Girl Scout" back in the 20th Century and knew Morse Code, the Imperial code used being much the same. We also had the Dularnian codes.

"Sarnian Lady is replying," Darlanis said as she observed the flashes through a telescope. Adding in the same tones, "If that is the 'Janis', then this is the night for it." Referring to the light breeze which would hinder neither vessel in battle. I felt the tension like an electric current as the two women regarded each other. Both were armed, both disliked the other for what she stood for. Both were Warriresses with a tradition of dueling. It would take little to cause a fight now here on the decks of the Ronda! Janis I knew was no match for me any more than Lana had been. Of Darlanis I knew little more but that she was said to be a "Queen of Swords" and one of the finest swordswomen in California. She might very well even be a match for me!

"Our enemy is out there behind us," I interjected, stepping between them. For an instant Darlanis' eyes seemed to blaze like white hot coals into mine, then she nodded, understanding. Janis stepping back, giving me a smile and a nod as I turned to her.

The pirate schooner was perhaps a couple miles behind us now, the Ronda doing well, despite the fact that she was carrying nearly twice her rated capacity, the slave girls having been told to stay below. Darlanis had promised them their freedom and had ordered their chains removed. Weapons had been given to those who wished to fight. I did not think they would be of much use.

The pirate seemed determined to capture us despite no doubt seeing the signals from Sarnian Lady and the sight of the Janis creeping towards us. I wondered about that! There were questions yet in my mind for which I could conceive only one answer!

As I stared at the approaching Dularnian galley, I saw a sudden flash of light from it, as if it was replying to a signal, but then I put it out of my mind as I knew none aboard the Ronda could have signaled the Janis. I knew Sharon had the signaling equipment up in the crow's nest that she now shared with Shirl.

Chapter Twenty Three

"Keep your head down, dammit!" I hissed to Darlanis as a pirate ballistae bolt thudded into the Ronda's stern. Pulling her back down beside me just as suddenly the stern window just to the left of us shattered. The yard long heavy iron bolt thudding into the rear of the cabin! The ten warriorresses with us cowering down on the deck behind us as the missile zipped over their helmeted heads. My hair was wet with sweat beneath my steel helmet, my body damp beneath the gleaming chain mail that Darlanis had insisted that I wear. I thought of Sharon with Shirl there in the Ronda's crow's nest. I prayed to my childhood God of six centuries past that my Sharon would be safe. I asked for no more than that. Again I wondered why I had

suggested this to Darlanis. Why I was putting my life at risk for her Imperial Glory!

I felt a nervous shudder go through Darlanis' body as her eyes sought mine, their azure beauty wide with nervous tension beneath her golden helmet with its Tarl's crest. "She's scared too!" the thought went through my mind. There being a certain "satisfaction" in not being the only one scared as another missile suddenly smashed through the windows. Showering us with jagged bits of broken glass as it thudded into the wall behind us. Bits of the glass cutting my neck as I felt Darlanis shudder against me, feeling her body shake as I held her. I suddenly wondered just how much actual combat Darlanis had actually seen!* * This was the first time for Darlanis to be "under fire". She had of course faced enough enemies in combat before, but this was the first time that she'd ever had to endure being fired upon!

The pirate vessel was now less than a hundred yards off, its sails looming up over us as I saw men now gathered at its rails, weapons waving in their hands as they cursed and yelled at us. Others busily working the powerful ballistae mounted on a spine between the three masts, the big three masted schooner apparently almost carrying as heavy an armament as Sarnian Lady! Our return fire of course ineffective against such odds. Several more bolts smashed into us, another whizzing through a smashed window to thud heavily into the wall behind us. Knocking down a lamp, fortunately not lit. I could smell the fear-sweat of the warrioresses around us mingled with the smell of the sea and Darlanis' own flowery floral scent. Her perfume was heavy and overpowering here in the still damp air of the Ronda's darkened cabin.

"They'll be grappling us any moment now," Darlanis breathed from beside me. The pirate now slipping alongside the Ronda, maintaining a constant rate of fire that told of excellent discipline. The heavy thud of the missiles halting as the pirate prepared to grapple the Ronda, the Prince having played the role of a fleeing merchantman to the very end. I wondered why they had not used fire arrows to fire our sails. It would have been an effective tactic for those who lived outside the "Codes". The bracer-like polished steel arm-shield heavy on my left arm as I got to my feet with the others, knowing the waiting was over!

Darlanis and I drew our swords, my blade a bit heavier and shorter than her own rapier, the weapon a Dularnian Warrioress' sword of the finest steel that the technology of the 26th Century could provide. I thought it an excellent weapon, well suited to my own fighting style, the blade being thirty inches long and honed to a razor sharpness. I slipped it back into the sheath at my left hip and picked up my bow, giving Darlanis an encouraging smile as we then dashed from the cabin just as the impact came! The warrioresses close behind, their bows in their hands, arrows already nocked on the strings. The impact nearly knocking us from our feet as the pirate grappled us, the Ronda's hull groaning with the strain as the two ships swung together like lovers!

The pirates were already swarming over the rails when we reached the main deck. A flurry of arrows from those under Lana's command forward making them reel back as our men, helmeted with swords and pikes in their hands, some with shields, came pouring up from below. The young Prince urging them on, his sword glistening in the moonlight as he led the attack. Lana urging on her own dozen or so women, former slave girls, their archery poor, but due to the shortness of the range, still yet effective against the massed pirates. Other former slave girls followed closely behind our own men, crude spears in their hands.

From another hatch aft came our third force of ten warrioresses under the command of Princess Janis and their own lieutenant, scattering at her command to more effectively use their bows. I heard swift barked orders behind me as ten bow strings were drawn back, the snap of the bowstrings almost as one as they fired their volley into that pirate horde, driving their shafts deep. The Janis' sails gleaming in the moonlight against the star sprinkled sky less than half a mile away. I saw Sarnian Lady perhaps a mile away under sail and oars, the bright moonlight now flashing off the splash of the great wooden levers.

I saw Sharon lean down out of the crow's nest, her bow at full draw, her hair silvery in the moonlight. The swift shaft driving deep into one of the yelling horde swarming over our deck. Shirl at her side, the pike in her capable hands. My stepdaughter waving down to me before fitting another arrow on her string. A true "War Maid" of the 26th Century! My Sharon!

Suddenly, I saw a string of heads along the enemy's rail as pirate crossbowmen replied to our fire, something going "zip" just past my ear as Darlanis cried out and slammed me down to the deck! Behind us a half dozen of our warrioresses struck down! "Attack!" I screamed, scrambling to my feet, Darlanis at my side, her rapier in her hand shining in the moonlight. Both of us knowing that the pirate crossbowmen were our greatest danger, and that we must strike before they could reset and reload their compound bowed weapons with their so deadly foot long lethal bolts!

There are three types of crossbows in general use, the best known and used being the "Dularnian", which is actually a copy of a hunting crossbow of the 21st Century. It is cocked by means of a foot stirrup and a belt hook. The maximum range of the most powerful ones (200+ lbs draw) is about three hundred yards, although the "effective" range is a third of that. A second type, more crude, lacking the involved and expensive to manufacture pulley system, has a shorter range of about an eighth of a mile. A third type, more powerful and heavier, is wound up by means of a small windlass, and will fire a heavy iron bolt about a quarter of a mile. All three types may be fired from a hidden position much as firearms of the past were, but the first two virtually require that you stand to reset the weapon. The third type is quite slow to reset, and is not generally used to any great extent anymore in anything but more settled siege type operations.

While it is true that a strong archer can equal the "cast" of the second type of crossbow, the weapon does have the major advantage of being usable under conditions where a bow would be next to useless. The more effective compound longbow of the 20th Century is virtually unknown here in the 26th Century, although I understand a few have been made in Dularn, which has a somewhat superior handicraft technology to that of the Empire of California in some things. The composite bows used by the various barbaric nomads to the east of the Empire have little or no advantage over the standard Imperial laminated bow except in length, being usually about two thirds the length of the laminated bow and thus better suited for use from the back of a horse or unicorn. The nomads being quite skillful in the use of such weapons from the backs of their mounts, which is why Darlanis has never been able to expand her domain to the east past the mountains.

I have no desire to get into the centuries old debate as to which is the superior weapon, except to say that it depends upon the tactical situation. In general, one can say that the bow is superior in close combat, while the crossbow is best used from a defensive position where its accuracy and range can be better utilized. To me the bow is similar tactically to the submachine gun of the 20th Century, while the crossbow is more similar to the rifle. Archery is "best" at "close quarters", while the crossbow is best when you are firing over a greater distance as between two ships at sea or something. As a hunting weapon, the crossbow is my own personal weapon of choice, as it is easier to hit with and more powerful and "sure" in its strike. For "war", however, I prefer the 60# draw compound bow that was once a gift from Darlanis, the same weapon that I first used on the Ronda...

Leaping to the top of our rail, with a mighty bound I leaped the gap to the enemy's rail. My sword flashing in my hand as I slashed and thrust at the enemy gathered there, my bow in my left hand. Darlanis following close behind, her rapier seemingly dealing instant death to any it touched. The terrified pirate crossbowmen dropping their weapons and going for their swords, a half dozen dead or dying before could defend themselves. I marveled at Darlanis' swordsmanship as she leaped in among them, as deadly as she was beautiful. Her rapier singing a song of death as I followed her, aware only of the enemy that

we now must kill!

Thrusting my sword point down into the pirate's deck where it would be ready in hand, I drove three swift shafts into the bunched up enemy at the other end of the ship. Darlanis standing at my side, her breast heaving with emotion like a Viking goddess. I saw one of the pirates, a big heavy man there in the moonlight, turn and order men to attack us. My fourth shaft dropping him as they charged us, a yelling, screaming horde of perhaps a dozen men. I got off another shaft, burying it deep into a man's belly, then they were upon us! A yelling horde!

I struck a man in the face with my bow as he swung down at me with a longsword, a heavy two handed weapon with a blade a yard long, taking the blunted blow upon my armored left arm. The impact denting in the steel through the leather of my long bracer-like arm shield with numbing force! Driving my sword deep into his gut as Darlanis thrust into another. The ruler of Californiaa beautiful deadly dancing golden demon of death as she fought! Her marvelous swordsmanship striking terror into the hearts of those whom she fought! "SHE'S DAMM GOOD!" I thought to myself, seeing her fight. Then the pirates swarmed around us, and I had other things to do than admire Darlanis' swordsmanship!

With my back to a mast, I fought like a demon, Darlanis a whirling dancing angel of death as she quickly fought her way to my side. The ragtag pirates falling back in terror as they saw something behind us! Then I saw a pirate clutch at the half buried fins of a crossbow bolt in his gut, eyes wide with horror. Another dropping his sword and falling to his knees before us, pleading for mercy! A third falling back, dying from my thrust!

"Darlanis!" I cried out as I turned and saw what it was! Shaking the Empress with my own emotion as I grabbed her arm, for there proud and majestic, less than a hundred yards away, was the mighty JANIS! Her sails seeming to fill the star sprinkled sky itself as she slowly came alongside, the pirates fleeing in terror as I saw the long row of eighteen ballistae along her spine suddenly spit metallic death! Darlanis dragging me behind the mast, the deck of the Seahawk suddenly covered with dying men!

"Darts!" Darlanis hissed, the Janis having used the much more effective steel darts rather than the heavy metal javelins. I noted that none had come our way, the few surviving pirates near us untouched. Every shot of that awesome broadside had been aimed only at the swarming pirates! Dozens having been killed!

With a terrible groaning of timbers the Janis grappled onto the pirate vessel. Faint screams coming from below that puzzled me, while pouring over the Dularnian's rail came a surge of tall warrioresses led by a blonde lieutenant a good six feet tall! The helmeted warrioresses under her command pouring a swift deadly volley of arrows into the surviving pirates as they turned to face this completely unexpected new threat from behind them!

Following the warrioresses came the men of the Janis, big burly men like the Vikings of old, swinging their great shining longswords. Leading them a tall officer proud in his fine uniform, rugged and handsome and totally masculine! "Their captain!" Darlanis breathed, the man a perfect specimen of everything a man should be! He was dark and totally masculine, several inches over six feet, with rugged manly features that stirred the red blood in my veins and made me wish with all my heart that Darlanis in all her golden beauty was somewhere else just then!

Before the crew of the Janis could even engage them, the pirates dropped their weapons and knelt, sullen beaten men awaiting our pleasure. Princess Janis leaping among them to greet her own people, WHEN SUDDENLY HORROR STRUCK AS A BLURRED STREAK IN THE AIR PASSED BEFORE MY VISION AND I SAW THE TALL PRINCESS STAGGER, HER EYES WILD,

CLUTCHING AT HERSELF! THEN TO MY HORROR, I SAW THE PIRATE CAPTAIN SLUMP BACK DOWN ON THE DECK, DROPPING THE CROSSBOW HE HAD JUST USED AS JANIS FELL INTO THE ARMS OF HER CAPTAIN, THE BLOOD RUNNING FROM HER MOUTH, DYING IN HIS ARMS AS HE HELD HER!

The end came swiftly for the pirates, perhaps in its way a more merciful end than that they would have received at the end of a noose. For a minute later there was not one live pirate left as I held a sobbing, weeping Darlanis in my arms, her salty hot wet tears wetting my chain mail as my own blurred the sight before me. The Dularnian captain himself weeping as he took the still form of his Princess and carried her back to the Janis. Sarnian Lady then throwing her grapples onto the Ronda, her men leaping aboard. The ill-fated pirate's deck running red with blood from her scuppers as the bodies of the pirates were thrown over the side to "feed the fishes". Our losses had been heavy. Heavier by far than just the loss of life, for with Janis dead the hope of peace between Dularn and Californiawas further away than ever! For only Janis could have healed the "rift" between mother and daughter that had been a cause of this stupid warfare!

Chapter Twenty Four

Grim faced Captain Stone of Sarnian Lady took Darlanis from me as I handed her over to him. Sharonat her side. The sobbing golden Empress clinging to Sharonlike some lost child as I then started to look for Lana among those wandering the bloody deck of the Ronda. I wondered about the puzzling truce between those of Sarnian Lady and the Janis, but just then the fate of a certain lovely hazel eyed brownette concerned me much more! Where was my friend Lana! I had seen the young Prince carried off, his bandages dark with blood. We had lost over half our own in the bloody fighting. I reflected upon the fact that death was still death, whether it came by a 20th Century bullet, a Lorr energy beam, or was delivered by an steel headed arrow or crossbow bolt.

It was then as I looked among the fallen warrioresses before the forecastle that I found her, the crossbow bolt buried in her heart. Her eyes glazed in death, the sword still in her hand! "Lana!" I sobbed, going to my knees, clutching her lifeless body to my bosom. Her cheek already cold in death as I held her, the salty tears scalding my cheeks as I tore off my helmet to hold her for the last time once again in my arms. First Janis, now her! Next to her the body of a woman I had known well aboard the Ronda. Our "losses" had indeed been heavy. I wondered if even Darlanis would consider it worth the "price" that we had "paid"!

I felt strong arms raise me, and sobbing, I buried my face against a strong masculine chest. Weeping out my sorrow and misery, strong arms holding me close, death all around us. "There, there, my brave little warrioress," his voice said, "cry and weep out your pain, let it flow and pour out." His hand stroking my damp hair as I clung to him, my salty tears of sorrow wetting the fine material of his uniform. He was the captain of the Janis. He too had lost much that horrible night when the dying pirate captain had slew his lovely tall golden haired Princess. More than just Janis herself, for without her, there was little hope of bringing the war between Dularn and Californiato a swift end. Especially now when there would be no one left to "advise" Tulis, to tell her that "peace" was a better "choice" than this war that had gone now for six years without any "end" yet coming in sight!

With a shuddering effort I forced myself back under control. Looking up into his dark eyes, my voice soft as I whispered, "We have all lost much this night." Thinking of his Princess dying there in his arms

and my dear friend Lana lying there at my feet. And I had been "responsible" for all of this with my "suggestion" to Darlanis in how to trick the pirate into attacking the Ronda!

"Yes," he answered, looking down into my eyes, his strong arms still holding me close. I didn't ever want him to let go! I had suffered too much this night. I wanted "out" of all this!

Suddenly there was the tall blonde warrioress lieutenant at his side, her voice urgent as I became suddenly aware that not all was well! The truce between the Dularnians and the Imperials was rapidly breaking down without Darlanis or Janis to control the situation! The crews of Sarnian Lady and the Janis had discovered the feminine cargo the Seahawk had carried below, and now both demanded that the women be turned over to them! The pirate having made a good haul of feminine lovelies somewhere recently!

The scene was "tense" as I dashed between the two crews, the naked women cowering in a shivering, terrified mass, men on both sides fingering the hilts of swords. The black clad warrioresses of the Janis fitting arrows to their strings. The few surviving warrioresses of Darlanis' personal guard doing the same thing on the other side. Crossbowmen from the Janis setting bolts on the tracks of their crossbows while their Imperial counterparts did the same. A word from their captains and both would be at each other's throats! The blood lust was high, their hatreds strong!

My sword shook in my hand as I faced both sides there in the moonlight, standing among the trembling terrified women. Knowing that neither captain Eric Stone of Sarnian Lady or captain Jon Richards of the Janis really wanted to see the outcome of such a battle between their own crews! One that could go on and on until there wasn't a man or woman left able to fight! I knew these people well enough now to know what they were like. Knew the hot blood-lusts that could drive them at each others' throats like maddened rabid animals. There would be few survivors, if any.

"STOP IT!" I screamed at the top of my lungs, waving the blade in my hand, prepared to kill whoever made the first move, my face, I am told, being such that few cared to look upon it! Crying, "SO HELP ME GOD, I'LL KILL THE FIRST ONE THAT MAKES A MOVE TOWARDS THESE WOMEN!" I am told that the tears were running down my cheeks at the time, but I don't really remember too much, only that everything was blurred before me and that I was very, very angry, a blood-red fury overwhelming me that could have driven me to kill anyone, even those I knew, should they have approached me just then! "BRAVE MEN AND WOMEN DIED HERE TONIGHT TO RID THE SEAS OF THIS GOD-DAMMED PIRATE, AND ALL THE LOT OF YOU GOD DAMM BASTARDS CAN THINK OF IS WHO IS GOING TO GET THESE POOR WOMEN AND MAKE SLAVES OF THEM!" I screamed, the fury coursing so hot through my shaking body that I was more like a maddened rabid animal, not a reasoning thinking human being just then!

Then turning to captain Richards of the Janis, I snapped, "If its women you want, I'm sure that Darlanis will give you all you want for coming to our assistance!" I am not a feminist, but just then I hated the entire male sex, including him too!

"We sought no prizes or rewards when we answered your request for aid," captain Richards answered, his voice level as he regarded me standing there. Adding, "We seek none now." With this he then turned and barked swift orders, his crew and his tall warrioresses now withdrawing back to their majestic ship, leaving us all standing there like a bunch of fools!

Suddenly I was running to him, the tall captain who had held me in his strong arms. Crying out his name, throwing myself into his arms as he turned towards me. Begging his forgiveness for my angry heated words only a minute there before!

"You are forgiven, my brave one," he smiled, holding me. Adding, "Your Empire is truly fortunate to have one as brave and courageous as you leading its forces." I thought I would wait a while before telling him the truth. I thought I knew who had requested his aid and established the truce. I would speak with her in the morning. We all owed very much to Sharon.

Chapter Twenty Five

The moonlight sent rippling silvery reflections through the multi-paned stern windows of the Janis, the warm glow of the oil lamps revealing the richness of the furnishings. "This would have been our Princess'," captain Jon Richards of the Janis said to me as he ushered me inside. The pain showing in his voice as he closed the door behind us. The warrioress on guard outside keeping her thoughts to herself. She was tall, dark haired. It should be mentioned here that most Dularnians are dark haired.

"She was my friend too," I answered, touching his arm. Remembering how she had died. The furnishings of the cabin more masculine than feminine. Much like the Princess herself, Janis being a woman who like me, paid little attention to the fact of her sex. I knew that I would miss her. That a part of my life was now gone. In a way I was responsible for her death. I had told Darlanis how she could capture the pirate schooner, thus putting into motion the chain of events that had led to Janis' death on its decks. Lana too had died, thanks to my suggestion!

"You are so much like her in many ways," he answered then. Holding me by the arms, looking down into my dark eyes, his touch making me very much aware of my own womanhood. It had been a long time since I had been with a man who wanted me for myself. I knew by some feminine instinct that before the night was over that I would give myself to him to "do" with as he saw fit.

"You have an interesting accent," captain Richards commented as he got out the glasses and a bottle of wine from a dark oaken cabinet, "One that I have never heard before." Then asking me with a smile, "Just where are you from anyway?" His dark eyes holding mine, seeming to see into the very depths of my soul.

Returning his smile with one of my own, I said, "Not that you're going to believe me, but I was born in France near the city of Lyons in the middle of the 20th Century, my father was an American businessman and my mother a lovely French countess." I ran a finger over a lovely inlaid handcarved pattern there on the surface of the wine cabinet and added, "My stepdaughter Sharon and I are time travelers from before The War." Telling him of how we had entered this era through one of the mysterious "GATEWAYS" caused by the use of anti-matter weapons that produced warps in time. There being other incidents over the centuries where helpless aircraft had been carried from their time to this, although usually without anyone surviving the passage! Only a small plane like mine, more manually controllable, could do it.

He suddenly reached out and cupped my face, holding me so that he could look directly straight into my eyes, and said in a level voice, "Count from one to ten in your own native tongue."

Smiling, I replied in French, "Un, deux, trois, quatre, cinq, six, sept, huit, neuf, dix." A smile now curving his lips.

"Very interesting," he answered, setting down the bottle of wine and the glasses and going to the door.

Giving orders to the warrioress on guard for "Yvette Senchal" to be brought to him. The name sending a thrill through me, for it was a name that only a French girl would have! Darlanis had told me that there was no other civilization left on the Earth besides that of the Empire! Of course her definition of "civilization" is similar to that of the Greeks of the Classical Era, who thought that everyone else were "barbarians" because they didn't happen to speak Greek!

Then turning to me, Jon said, "During a storm we were driven far to the south, near what is now the Straits of Panama. And there, on a deserted rock, we found a woman, a woman near death from thirst and exposure, who speaks a language now only legend, a language that none of us can understand well enough to make heads or tails of. A woman, I believe, who from the drawings she has made comes from the same country that you were once from." I wondered if she too might be a time traveler like Sharon and me!

"How?" I protested, knowing that the Lorr EDICT against transoceanic travel bound men to their own hemisphere, although the type of ships now in use were considered incapable of such voyages in any case. Jon merely shrugged in reply. Or was she a woman who like Sharon and me had been caught in a GATEWAY and sent into the 26th Century! I knew from what Darlanis had told me that there might very well be one in operation there in the infamous "Bermuda Triangle" from the crash of a Lorr battle-disc, its entire stock of anti-matter bombs having exploded in the crash, causing death and destruction over an area of many thousands of square miles! The tidal waves alone having caused death and destruction over the entire coastlines of the continents that faced out towards the Atlantic! The Earth itself having been shaken by the awesome blast of some three hundred kilomegatons!

"That is something I hope you can find out for me," he answered, giving me a smile as I stood there and regarded him. Jon then adding with another smile, "You French women do seem to have a certain aura about yourselves that I find of considerable interest." I wondered if we did. This "frenchwoman", in any case, found HIM to be of "considerable interest"! I thought it would not be difficult for me to kneel at his feet and beg his collar.

"Besides," he added with a smile, holding me once again in his strong arms, seeing my smile in reply, "You're just too pretty to be anything else but what you are." No man had called me "pretty" for a long time. I promised myself that I'd show him a night that he'd never forget! I may not be "beautiful", but I do know how to show a man what a woman can "do" with him in bed!

"Thank you," I whispered in reply, my eyes moist with emotion as I pressed myself up against him, my arms slipping around his neck as my lips sought his, my chain mail clad body crushed against his powerful form as his strong arms clasped me and his lips tasted the sweetness of my mouth, my booted feet barely touching the thickly carpeted planks of the deck beneath!

Darlanis, who is a bit of a philosopher among other things, claims that for every woman there is a man to whom she can only relate to as a total complete female. A man to which she will be unable to be anything but a woman. To be true to one's own biology and to belong to such a man is not to be, as the feminists of the pre-War era believed, an evil thing, but to be part of something greater than oneself. It is more than sex, it is more than being a companion, it is, I believe with all my heart, something that must be experienced to be understood. I have experienced it. I understand even if others will not what it means.

Jon Richards released me as the soft knock on the door was repeated, and barked, "Enter!" The warrioress there on guard then letting in a slim feminine figure that swiftly knelt before us, her head down, her knees widespread in the position of the slave girl before men. A gleaming collar locked around her slender neck telling of her status. Could this be "Yvette Senchal"?

"I felt it best to collar her as she is obviously a slave girl judging from the brand you can see there on her thigh," Jon answered as I glanced at him, the slave before us a feminine delight provocatively clad. On her left thigh just below the hip there was a mark, a brand, one I recognized as being the universal "Venus" symbol for a woman. Her attire consisting of a strip of green silk a foot wide and five feet long through which her head had been passed by means of a slit in the clinging material. The garment, if one could call it that, fastening at her waist by means of a matching silken cord looped around her slim form and tied in place. The silken strip barely covering, and in a way that very much revealed the slim feminine perfection beneath!

"Yvette!" he suddenly snapped, the wench raising her head, her hair a lovely dark mass falling to below her shoulder blades. Her eyes beautiful dark liquid pools, while her lips were full and red with rouge, just made for kisses and the pleasing of masters. With a motion of his hand she stood before us, her body totally female beneath its scanty covering. Yvette was a small girl, about 5'3", but flawless in her beauty. I agreed with the captain. Such as she belonged locked in a slave girl's collar!

Once again the slave girl knelt before us, her very motions as she resumed the position telling that somewhere someone had trained this curvy little delight thoroughly! "Yvette Senchal!" I whispered, seeing the girl's head come up and her eyes meet mine at the sound of her name, then saying in French to her, "Parlez-vous francais?" (Do you speak French?)

"Oui! Oui!" (Yes! Yes!) she sobbed, seizing my hand and covering it with wet kisses as she knelt before me, sobbing out her pleasure at finding someone who could speak her own language, her English being very poor and broken and almost useless for serious conversation, Jon had told me earlier. I let pass her neglect of using my proper title of "mistress", which is how a slave girl supposedly is to address all free women, although of course there usually is but one actual "mistress" before whom she kneels and serves as so desired.

"I can speak with her," I smiled at the surprised tall Dularnian captain beside me as Yvette Senchal clung sobbing to my hand, a swift order from me returning her to her former position.

"You can actually speak her jabber!" Jon breathed, looking first at me, and then at the slave girl kneeling before us. Yvette being, I suspected, one that Queen Darlanis herself would be very interested in questioning! I wondered how Yvette had gotten to where she had, and how she had escaped the Lorr's EDICT! It being now quite obvious to me that she was of this era and not someone from another time as I had first thought.

"French is a very beautiful language," I answered him, a bit annoyed that he had referred to it as "jabber", although I suppose it did sound like that to him. The memory once again going through my mind about the Classical Greeks having considered everyone else "simple barbarians" because they didn't speak Greek!

Keeping Yvette on her knees as was proper, I soon learned the story of how she had come to be where she was, and more importantly, where she came from! The wench having been the personal slave girl of the Prince of France who had set out against his mother's wishes to try to defy THE EDICT by secretly sailing far north and then crossing the ocean near Greenland. Yvette telling us of the great icebergs that had threatened their little ship, only swift work with the oars saving them from death. The ship having been much like the Ronda with both sails and oars, a bit of disappointment going through me as Yvette described the vessel as I had been hoping against hope for something more modern in design. ImperialFrance obviously no more advanced in its technology than was the Empire of California half the world away!

Finally after weeks at sea they had reached the coast of North America, their food and water nearly gone. The little band of courageous adventurers encountering skin-clad savages that had killed several of their number. The Prince then sailing south along the coast until disaster struck somewhere in the Florida Keys, where a hurricane drove their vessel on to a reef and left only a handful of survivors, the French Prince unfortunately not one of them, leaving poor little Yvette now masterless and alone.

Permitting the wench a sip of wine, we urged her to continue her story, Yvette telling us of how the survivors built a raft and set out to seek land. A tale of horror as thirst claimed lives under the burning sun. She told of how they had caught a seagull and drank its blood, of the horror as one of the surviving sailors drew his knife and sought to cut her throat to drink her life-blood. Of the fight over her that left two men dead. Her tale holding us spell-bound as she told of how the strange ship had come. The vessel filled with swarthy men who killed her companions and took her captive, raping her and forcing her to do the most degraded acts. Captain Richards telling me that she had no doubt been found by pirates on the east coast of Mexico. Such having been known to prey on even Californian vessels by traveling through the Straits of Panama and daring the rocks and reefs there. The current being such that only oared vessels could pass through the straits, and then only the most fool-hardy of captains ever dared the rock-filled passage between the two oceans!

Letting Yvette have another sip of wine as she knelt before us, I translated for her as she told us of how the pirate ship sank in a storm in the Straits of Panama. The wind and the current that flows from the Atlantic into the Pacific smashing it against the rocks, forcing them into the leaping waves, many drowning instantly while others struggled helplessly against their fate. Then clinging helplessly to a yardarm, she found herself swept through the Straits and out into the Pacific. There she found herself cast upon a waterless rock, where she was later found by the Janis. I might note here that the present Straits of Panama are the result of The War, being formed by the terrific blasts of several large anti-matter bombs during the Lorr's bombing of the Earth in 2047 A.D.

What was more interesting to me was the information that there was now another "Empire" nearly halfway around the world, the FRENCH EMPIRE! I wondered what Darlanis would have to say about that! As a Frenchwoman I found it quite satisfying to know that there was a French speaking Empress who ruled over even more of the world than Darlanis now did! A tall dark haired woman who muchly resembled me in some respects! The Empress Jacqueline!

Our conversation was interrupted at this point by the lovely blonde physician of the Janis. The woman having volunteered her services to assist her counterpart on Sarnian Lady with the wounded from the battle with the pirate. She informed me much to my pleasure and delight that the young Prince was now out of danger and that the woman Shirl was tending to him. I knew he would be in good hands then. She then took her leave of us.

Chapter Twenty Six

The moonlight sparkled on the sea as the Janis, its sails gleaming against the black star-sprinkled sky, held its position with the other three vessels. Its captain holding me close. We had spoken of much, of our hopes for the future, of the war that divided us. Of the puzzling fact that the pirate had not had any fear of the mighty Dularnian trireme. Jon wondered about that, saying that if his suspicions were true, then he feared much for his country. He would not explain further, except to say that he feared the worst now that Janis was dead and her brother Darl Jord, a worthless "playboy", was now Queen Tulis' only child

except for Darlanis, who had been "disowned" many years before! I knew of the Queen's action, although Janis had thought it a "mistake" on her mother's part, and had suspected that it might have had something to do with the war now between the two countries. Darlanis was a proud regal woman, and "touchy" about her "honor".

With us, a cloak thrown over her provocatively clad form, was his lovely slim provocative slave girl, Yvette Senchal, once the personal slave girl of the Prince of France. (Her name was actually "Yvette, the girl of Prince Senchal", but due to the confusion of language, she had somehow gotten the name "Yvette Senchal") I wondered what thoughts went through her mind as she looked out at the three other ships there in the moonlight, thousands of miles from her home, the vessels slowly rolling with the gentle swells of the restless sea there beneath the glowing Moon.

I watched a "ship's girl" in her short clinging shift pad across the deck and disappear down a hatchway. The Janis, like all warships, carrying a number of such wenches sentenced to service aboard a warship for their crimes. Unlike my era, there are no prisons as such anymore, criminals being sentenced to serve their countries by many such forms of servitude. The concept first being started back in the early 21st Century by my late friend Janet Rogers, who did so much to "civilize" Humanity.

The life of a "ship's girl" is not usually hard, although like any slave girl she must obey perfectly or face the consequences of her foolishness! In battle she is expected to nurse and tend the wounded, a duty she and her sisters in bondage perform under the watchful eye of the ship's physician. The Priestesses of Lys refusing to have anything to do with military matters. They have their reasons, which I will get into later on.

The Janis carried half a dozen such wenches, their very lives at the mercy of their captain who could execute any that did not obey orders, slaves being as rightless as animals under both Imperial and Dularnian Law. It is very rare however for a girl to suffer such a fate, for they know very well why they are where they are and what is expected of them! In general, those I have seen seem content with their fate, there being few women in the 26th Century who actually truly hate sex. Credit here going to the Priestesses of Lys, who establish the sexual morality of the 26th Century much like the religions of the past so did.

It had not come as that much of a surprise to me to learn that Francetoo had the famous Priestesses who form the world "established church" of this era. The Priestesses operating in much the same way as did the Roman Catholic Church during the Middle Ages in Europe. They are all powerful, and none dares to defy them for reasons that I will get into in another chapter. I will mention here that they were the invention of Janet Rogers in the 21st Century, and that I did play a minor part unknowingly in such matters. Having suggested to Janet that she study the role of the Catholic Church back in the Middle Ages as a "stabilizing force" holding society together. Their relationship with the Lorr is symbolic of the power that they possess, and will, I am sure, surprise as many of my readers as it first astounded me!

The Priestesses of Lys have as I mentioned earlier nearly eliminated all other religions, their intolerance in this field one of the few things that I have against them. My largest argument with them however is their hostility towards technology. * * There is a "reason" for this which will be in the next book. The War did not occur because Man learned how to travel through space to another world, but the uses to which he supposedly put his new knowledge to slay others of another race not his own.

Jon threw a cloak around me and drew me close, the mighty Janis barely rolling in the swell as we followed the other vessels now creeping towards Sarn. Sarnian Lady in the lead, her sails barely filling in the slight breeze. I wondered again what thoughts went through Yvette's mind as she stood silently at the rail. She fascinated me. I suspected she would do the same to Darlanis. Perhaps even deflate that golden

Empress' swollen ego just a bit too when she learned of the Empire of France! Of a tall dark haired Empress who many called the "second Napoleon". A monarch much like Darlanis who was now "conquering" all Europe!

"Shall we go below?" Jon asked, looking into my eyes, it being now long past midnight. I thought of what this day had held as I nodded. I had awakened that morning confident that we would soon be in Dularn with Janis. Then Sarnian Lady had showed up. We had fled, but to be captured later on when the wind died. I remembered my first glimpse of Darlanis, of Sharon's hatred for her that had almost cost the beautiful golden Empress her life. Of Sharon getting spanked there on Sarnian Lady by Darlanis. Of my "trial" if such it was for the charges of "piracy". Later conversations with Darlanis. The excitement of spotting the pirate. My suggestion to Darlanis that had resulted in our causing the pirate to attack the Ronda. The intervention of the Janis. The death of Janis Jord, the Princess of Dularn. The loss of my friend Lana. My meeting with Jon. Yvette Senchal. I thought of the drawings she had made as she padded quietly behind us. Scenes of another land unknown to those of western North America! Another civilization in the very land of my birth centuries ago!

Yvette's touch was gentle as she washed me and prepared me for love, smiling and touching me just enough to let me know that wenches like her weren't something you'd find in any slave market! I found her touch exciting and arousing, Yvette, like any highly trained slave girl, being quite capable of pleasing a woman as well as a man. I thought of Darlanis' Lynn. Yvette made her look like a Priestess in comparison! I was "buzzy" from the wine I had gulped down, and already well lubricated, "readied". Freshly shaved, Yvette smiling a bit about that as free women of her own land did not shave their pubic hair, but only trimmed it.

Yvette then slipped the black strip of silk over my head, drawing it down over my oiled and perfumed body, having inserted into me the scented vaginal suppository that is often used by slave girls, and tied it in place around my slim muscular waist. I wondered about the sparkle in those dark eyes as she then slipped a silken cord around my neck, looping it around my throat and then slipping the ends under my armpits. Swiftly tying my wrists to its ends. The bondage crossing my wrists behind my back and rendering me as helpless as any slave girl! There being sufficient strain on me from it to insure that I would be well aware of my helpless bondage! My body ready to serve a man's pleasure! I prayed that Jon would like what he saw brought before him! Yvette had done the best that she could for me.

Giving me a final intimate caress to insure that her efforts had not been in vain, Yvette then brought me forth from behind the screen to present me to her master. I felt giddy from the wine and the setting, the bondage and my scanty attire exciting me! I knew then why slave girls often love their masters. I knelt before him, my head down, in the position of the docile slave girl awaiting her master's pleasure. "My use is yours, master," I said, meaning every word that I uttered! * * Some of my readers may object here that a scene like this is completely out of order from the type of person that I appear to be in the rest of this story. However it should be remembered here that what I look like does not mean that I am the "sexual dominatrix" that Jack always made me out to be back in the 20th Century. While I do not object to playing out such "roles" on occasion, I prefer the "submissive role" in my own love-making.

At a motion of his hand I stood, turning before him at his command, my nipples swollen and hard beneath my golden clips and my vagina wet and ready for love. "You are a very attractive and desirable woman," he said, touching my face and looking into my eyes as I stood barefooted before him. I wondered what Jack would have thought if he could have seen me then. The black silk covered just enough to tease the eye. I do not have a very feminine figure, but somehow Yvette had worked wonders, for I could see in his eyes that he found me exciting and desirable. I moaned softly in my throat with desire as he took me in his strong arms, my body molding itself to his. This night I would be his, his to enjoy as he wished. I wanted it exactly that way.

"You are a rather surprising woman," captain Jon Richards of the Janis said, looking down into my dark eyes. My loins still all tingly from the powerful orgasm that had rippled through them. I had arched and moaned like an animal as he took me. Using me as a woman, as I had hoped he would. Our bodies damp beneath the covers from what we had done together. He had even removed my nipple clips so that he might kiss and suck my nipples.

"You could always sell Yvette and keep me," I teased. Kissing him, running my fingers over his back. I was glad he had untied my hands before taking me. It had taken all my self-control not to dig my nails into his back when I came. My legs drawn up and wrapped around his hips as I took everything he could give me! It had been a l-o-n-g time since I had been so well "had"!

"I will give it some thought in the morning," he answered, kissing me again, making me squirm as he reached down to touch me, the scent of the suppository mingled with my own scent and the odor of his come that now oozed from between my vaginal lips.

"I'm also good with a sword and bow," I pointed out, slipping a caressing hand down there to return his touch, my long tapering fingers talented and sensitive. Doubtlessly he had already noticed that when I stood beside Darlanis fighting the pirates. Such is considered an "asset" in any 26th Century wife.

"That's not generally required of a slave girl," he answered in reply. Kissing my naked nipples and gently biting them, something that encouraged me to slip under the covers and apply my warm wet lips and mouth where I thought he would enjoy it the most. I'm no "Lara Warsan" or "Yvette Senchal", but I'm no slouch "under the covers" either! I know how to please a man!

"You are making a very convincing case for keeping you," he admitted. Slipping several fingers into me and moving them delightfully, making me purr with the pleasure of his touch!

I made no reply, my mouth being filled at the time, his touch there between my thighs encouraging me to do my best. He then drew my hips to his face and tasted of me, delighting me to the core. I don't think even Yvette could have done any better than I did with Jon that wonderful glorious night!

Wrapped in blankets, we sat on the leather covered seat beneath the stern windows, the scent of the sea fresh in our nostrils. Watching the sky grow red in the east, telling of the sunrise soon to come. It would not be easy to say good bye. We kissed for the last time, knowing that once the sun rose we would once again be mortal enemies if I pledged myself to Darlanis as I now felt I should. She was now the only hope we had of eventually ending the warfare between our two countries. Peace seemed further away than ever now that Janis was dead and her worthless brother Darl now sat beside his mother on the throne of Dularn. Darlanis might yet add Dularn to her "Empire" given the present political situation there in Dularn, Jon had worried! No doubt her own mother had much the same fears as Dularn was losing the war to the Empire piece by piece. Queen Tulis lacked the personal "charisma" that Darlanis possessed. The ability to lead and inspire others. I remembered Darlanis there on Sarnian Lady. Men fighting among themselves for the "honor" to risk their lives for their golden Empress. Darlanis standing there before them. Tall, golden, like a "Viking Goddess" out of some old mythology! Now I understood why Janis had considered me the last hope of her people. I was the woman out of a time now legend. The "Lorraine Duval" written about by Janet Rogers. My decisions could influence the fate of nations, perhaps even that of a world to come!

Chapter Twenty Seven

"What are you doing here?" I gasped in surprise as Yvette Senchal carefully climbed down from the rolling Janis into the gig with me. Her attire much more modest than before, her few meager possessions and her fascinating drawings in a canvas bag at her side. Her collar was gone, her neck bare. Her cloak no doubt sparing the four oarsmen and their boyish young teenage midshipman the embarrassment of seeing "too much" of their captain's lovely and provocative delightfully "french" slave girl.

"Pardon?" Yvette answered, not understanding my words, her dark eyes searching mine. Her accent bringing back fond memories of long ago. I translated my question into French as the midshipman then barked an order in his squeaky high pitched voice and four oars as one bit deep into the rolling blue-green sea.

Yvette replied that she thought she was being given to me, although why she didn't know. Not all that delighted I suspected at the thought of being given to me despite the fact that I could speak French. She then handed me a letter that explained much as I read the few short paragraphs.

"MY DEAREST LORRAINE:

I AM GIVING YOU YVETTE TO KEEP FOR ME, KNOWING THAT YOU WILL TAKE CARE OF HER AND NOT ABUSE HER AS SOME MIGHT. SHE IS A GOOD GIRL, WELL TRAINED IN THE ARTS OF LOVE EVEN IF SHE CAN'T SPEAK OUR LANGUAGE VERY WELL YET. I HOPE YOU WILL VALUE HER AS I HAVE.

I VERY MUCH FEAR THAT WITH THE DEATH OF OUR BELOVED PRINCESS THAT HER MOTHER WILL NOW ATTEMPT TO USE THE WAR BETWEEN OUR COUNTRIES AS AN EXCUSE TO COMMIT DULARN TO A COURSE OF ACTION THAT WILL END IN DISASTER. I THINK I KNOW NOW WHY THE PIRATE TARKAS DID NOT FLEE WHEN HE SAW THE "JANIS". IF MY SUSPICIONS ARE TRUE, IT IS MY DUTY AS A WARRIOR TO DO THE ONLY HONORABLE THING I CAN.

I AM TRULY SORRY LORRAINE THAT WE ARE ENEMIES, FOR HAD MY PRINCESS LIVED, I BELIEVE THAT SHE AND DARLANIS MIGHT HAVE BEEN ABLE TO WORK OUT SOME SORT OF A PEACE BETWEEN OUR TWO COUNTRIES. I HOPE YOU WILL REMEMBER ME AND THE NIGHT WE SPENT TOGETHER. I KNOW THAT I WILL NEVER FORGET YOU AS LONG AS I LIVE.

LOVE,

CAPTAIN JON RICHARDS

THE RAMSHIP "JANIS"

My eyes were moist as I turned and waved at the tall figure there on the Janis' quarterdeck, cursing the cruel fate that would always keep us apart. I thought I would speak to Darlanis.

Sharon threw herself into my arms as soon as I came aboard Sarnian Lady, smiling and hugging me, her azure eyes a delight to see after all we had been through. Telling me that Darlanis wanted to see me just as soon as possible, there being something about Sharon's actions that told me that she knew more than what she was telling me! Sharon just "bubbling over" with her secret!

In a few words I told Sharon about Yvette Senchal, my stepdaughter's eyes growing wide as she looked at the slave girl. The wench slipping off her cloak, revealing herself clad in only the strip of green silk that I had seen her in before. The crew and officers of Sarnian Lady poking each other and whispering among themselves at the sight. Captain Stone stepping down to the deck and informing me to "Please Cloak That!" No doubt concerned about her effect upon the safe operation of his ship. I told Yvette to put her cloak back on and then asked Sharon to find something for her to wear that covered her more modestly. I then turned and waved to a figure there on the Janis' quarterdeck as the big Dularnian galley started turning away, a part of my heart going with its captain to whatever adventures laid ahead!

Darlanis was as beautiful as ever as Lynn ushered me in, the slave girl then taking her leave of us as I seated myself next to the bed. The Empress nibbling at her breakfast, greeting me with a warm smile. Up close I could see that her azure eyes were a bit puffy, but otherwise thanks to Lynn's attentions she was the picture of beauty like always. Darlanis being, as I think I have mentioned before, one of the most "beautiful" women of all time.

"Care for a bit of breakfast?" Darlanis asked, offering me some of hers. The Empress being in an excellent mood considering all that had happened only the night before, I thought to myself. I nodded in the negative and thanked her. I had eaten earlier.

Taking a swallow of her tea, Darlanis said, "I have a very serious matter to discuss with you, one that could effect the futures of both you and your stepdaughter." She patted the bed beside her, reaching out to me and taking my hand in hers as she then said, "I know that you are unfamiliar with our customs, but as you perhaps know, I am a widow and childless." Darlanis telling me of the tragic accident that had taken her daughter twelve years before. Telling of the storm and the shipwreck, of seeing her little eight year old Anna being swept away from her. The tears filling her eyes as she spoke, the memories no doubt still vivid even after all these years. I understood how she felt, the thought of losing Sharon having given me a few nightmares since we had been transmitted through time into this barbaric era.

"Among those of our caste it is frequently the custom that two women will privately adopt the other's children so that if one is killed, the other can become their mother," Darlanis said, wiping at her eyes as she regained control of herself. Telling me that it was a way so that a warrioress' children knew that they would always have someone to turn to. Someone to become their new mother. I had earlier made somewhat similar arrangements with Lana for Sharon before the battle with the pirate.

"Last night," Darlanis said, holding my eyes with her own, "Your stepdaughter saved my life." The Empress swiftly explaining that she had attempted to poison herself after brooding over her sister's tragic death and that Sharon had fought her with all her strength to keep her from doing so. Finally getting the poison away from her and throwing it out one of the stern windows. Sharon had then gotten Darlanis helplessly drunk and somehow managed to get her into bed. Slipping in beside her and holding her as the Empress sobbed and clung to her like a baby. Darlanis finally passing out from the amount of alcohol, Lynn being too terrified of her Imperial mistress in such a mood to be of any help!

"That is one reason why I want to adopt Sharon," Darlanis said, holding my hand, there being a pleading note in her beautiful voice that surprising me. Those beautiful eyes moist with emotion as they looked into mine. I knew I could never say no to such a request knowing that Darlanis could do for Sharon. Yet, I feared that Sharon might grow away from me with time, a fear that made me hesitate to say yes, for Sharon was all I had left now.* * My fears were quite justified here as you will see later on.

"I understand your fears," Darlanis said, looking up into my eyes. The Ronda and the Seahawk visible through the open stern windows following behind Sarnian Lady, little trace visible from here of what had

transpired less than twelve hours before. "She will always be `yours', but let her be `mine' too," the beautiful Empress asked. Her hand warm in mine as she awaited my answer.

"I would be happy to let you adopt Sharon," I "lied", having made my decision for her sake, my eyes moist with tears. Thinking of how Darlanis had fought at my side last night. I knew how Sharon worshiped the Empress, although after seeing Darlanis at her worst, she might have a more realistic view of the real woman behind the crown and the exotic clothes and all the pomp and ceremony. I had to think of Sharon's future, and Darlanis could offer her far more than I could. She deserved that, if nothing else. My decision "hurt", but it was the only one I could make.

"Thank you, Lorraine, thank you so very much for giving me such a gift of understanding," Darlanis said in reply, her voice soft and filled with deep emotion. I thought Sharon would make the Empire a good princess anyway. She was beautiful like a princess should be, and she did have a pretty good head on her shoulders even if she was still a bit impulsive at times yet!

"And did you know that it was Sharon who called the Janis to our aid and set up the truce agreement?" Darlanis laughed, explaining that Sharon had used the signal lamp and had given orders in the names of both the Princess and the Empress to the ships. As well as giving a good account of herself in the battle! "Now that's the kind of a daughter I want to have!" Darlanis added. Laughing with delight. A delight I shared with her, Darlanis being a person who now meant much to me too. We had stood together in battle as caste sisters. Sisters of the sword.

"What I haven't told Sharon yet is that she will be in reality a true Princess of the Empire," Darlanis said, "And if anything was to happen to me, the Empire would be hers." I sat there stunned as Darlanis explained that under Empire Law she was required to appoint a successor to herself to insure the continuation of the royal line. Prince Jers Bisan having been the legal heir previously, which made what she said rather puzzling to me.

"Our young Prince has resigned his title to the throne to marry the woman he loves," Darlanis explained, Jers being engaged to the most famous prostitute in the Empire, Lara Warsan! "I have kept it a secret until now, hoping he would change his mind, but since he plans to announce it as soon as we reach Sarn, it no longer matters," she added. Darlanis having taken Jers with her on this voyage for the sole purpose of trying to talk him out of marrying such a woman as Lara Warsan, the notorious "Queen of Prostitutes" as she is often called. Her efforts had been futile as the young Prince had officially the night before resigned his title and claim to the throne of the Empire to be free to marry his beloved Lara despite Darlanis' warnings of what might happen when his mother, the Princess of Baja, learned about the affair! The former Queen of Sarn being of course utterly against such a marriage between her son and the famous Trelandarian prostitute!

Chapter Twenty Eight

Nibbling a bit at Darlanis' breakfast, I ventured, "Considering all that has happened, perhaps it is time you considered getting some sort of a peace treaty signed between your mother and yourself." Darlanis immediately giving me a look that told me without asking that I had just said something SHE DIDN'T LIKE AT ALL! The HATE in those lovely azure eyes terrifying to see!

"My brother raped me when I was fifteen," she answered in icy cold level tones. "He took my

VIRGINITY from me!" The tone of her voice leaving no doubt in my mind the fury she still felt! "I was just an INNOCENT YOUNG GIRL! I didn't KNOW anything about such things!" she snapped angrily. "THEN MY OWN MOTHER TOLD ME THAT I WAS A 'LYING SLUT' FOR SAYING SUCH A THING ABOUT HER OWN SON!". I saw the tears in her eyes then as she wept, "MY OWN MOTHER STOOD THERE AND SLAPPED MY FACE, saying that it would have been better IF I HAD BEEN DROWNED AT BIRTH like an unwanted kitten or puppy!" Darlanis sobbed, her voice filled with burning hatred for something that had occurred years and years ago. "Only Janis ever believed me, saying that my brother was just the sort who might do something like THAT to me!" she sobbed, her voice filled with a burning hatred that I knew would live as long as he was alive! I did not dare venture to ask how Darlanis knew it was him, suspecting that I had already gone far enough if I valued keeping my head just then from the look there on her face! I recalled that Janis had once told me that their father had died in battle when Darlanis was just a little girl. Perhaps had he lived things would have been different than they were. One always "wonders" about such things. What "could" have been?

Knowing it was time to change the subject, I said to the beautiful golden haired Empress, "We sure walked into it last night, didn't we?" Giving her a smile of understanding, knowing that her courage and bravery had inspired us all. Then adding with an understanding smile, "I guess even an experienced Warriress like you can make mistakes at times." Thinking of the unexpected crossbowmen. It was then that I noticed that Darlanis was regarding me as if I was speaking in another language than hers!

"I don't quite understand what you mean," Darlanis answered in a puzzled voice, looking up at me, shifting her position beneath the bedclothes, the dark blue clinging silk of her nightshift going well with her coloring. The Empress having a beautiful skin and a lovely light golden tan that any woman would envy.

"Well," I answered, suddenly aware that Darlanis was eying me in a way that made me feel just a bit nervous again, "We didn't figure on those crossbowmen, but you handled things pretty good at that." Thinking of how she had fought. Remembering that deadly singing rapier of hers that even I wouldn't have cared to face! Then adding, "I was darn glad you were there at my side, because you knew what to do without thinking, and I was knew that we could depend upon a Warriress like you to see us through."

"Let me tell you a secret,Lorraine," Darlanis answered after a moment's silent pause that made the blood chill in my veins. Saying then, reaching out and clasping my hand in hers, "And that is until last night I've never been in actual combat."* * Darlanis has fought a number of sword duels in her life, but this was her first actual "combat experience" as such. Earlier she had merely sat on her unicorn and watched others "fight" for her in her various wars of conquest that she has waged for the past twenty years against one country or another. She is a woman "driven" by ambition, and although Sharon "worships" her, I do not view Darlanis in quite the "same light" as my stepdaughter! She can be a very "loving" woman, but also a very dangerous foe!

"What!" I breathed, unable to believe my ears, seeing her smile and nod in reply. It seemed so unbelievable considering her courage, her bravery. I thought of how she had climbed alone to the deck of the Ronda to face us all. Darlanis had "BALLS"! I suppose that really isn't the proper term, but it did fit her!

"Actually it was you that gave me the courage to face those crossbowmen," Darlanis answered. Her hand warm in mine and her beautiful azure eyes asking for my understanding and compassion.

"But I thought that you'd seen combat before," I replied. Thinking of how nervous and scared I had been and how comforting it had been to think that at least one of us knew what they were doing! Her courage and bravery had inspired us all, I knew too.

"No, Lorraine," Darlanis answered with a smile. "And all the time I was so scared and terrified that all I could think of was to stick with you because you looked like you knew what you were doing." Her words coming out in a rush as she clung to my hand. Her breakfast forgotten there before her on the tray. I had to smile at the thought. Neither of us had known the truth!

"Why did you go anyway?" I asked, having asked her that question before. Remembering her answer. I understood now what sort of a woman she was. Why I, like others, would follow her to the Gates of Hell themselves should she wish to lead us there! I knew now that my heart, my sword, were hers to command forever!* * It is perhaps Darlanis' own personality that makes her what she is. She is a very "likable" person, one you "admire" despite yourself. Even those who have hated her, like my friend Sanda, tell me that it is awful hard not to "like" Darlanis in person!

"Why did you go?" she asked me back with a smile. I had gone because she had gone. I told her that. It seemed to please her. I knew she liked me. I knew I loved her. I worshiped her!

"I still can't get out of my mind the thought of you standing there on the deck of the Ronda," I said to her as she nibbled at a bit of her now cold breakfast. She had been DARLANIS, THE EMPRESS OF IMPERIAL CALIFORNIA! Like something out of some fantasy. Not a real woman, but something like "She-Ra" there on TV. That cartoon character that Sharon had loved so much back "home". And Darlanis did look a lot like "She-Ra" in a way, I thought...

"I knew that Janis wouldn't let me come to any harm," she smiled. She hadn't planned on Sharon, of course. I wondered how she knew that Janis had been aboard the Ronda. Darlanis merely smiled when I asked her and said that she had her "own sources of information". Saying that she had planned to intercept the Ronda and rescue her sister before I did the job for her! That explained much that I had been puzzled about since I first saw her.

What is the meaning of courage? What do we mean when we say that a certain person, perhaps a Warriress friend, has "courage"? Courage is defined by the Caste Codes as "The willingness to engage the enemy in close combat despite whatever fears you may have for your own personal safety." I guess that is just about as good a definition of courage as I can think of. I have written this short chapter so that you might understand better what I and my caste sisters are like. And perhaps to explain something that even Janis had not ever mentioned to me! I understand now the hatred that burns in Darlanis. And why she was so willing to carry on with a war against Dularn that she could never win! Why there is so much "hatred" burning in her own heart!

Chapter Twenty Nine

Sarnian Lady rolled sickeningly in the heavy swells like a drunken sailor weaving his way out of some waterfront dive. Her colorful lateen sails flapping and shuddering as the big trireme barely made headway over the heavily rolling blue green sea. The motion making my stomach heave once again and reminding me that I would never make a good sailor. Darlanis walking up to the rail alongside me on the tall quarterdeck, her azure eyes a pair of lovely gems smiling into mine as she slipped her arm about me. I had already "fed the fishes", and my poor heaving stomach seemed to have the idea that they were still out there looking for more!

We were, Captain Eric Stone informed me, skirting the edge of a storm perhaps a hundred miles away.

The oppressive heat and the heavy swells, plus Sarnian Lady's shallow draft, the galley being flat bottomed like a canoe with a big centerboard that could be raised or lowered as desired, made me wish that ships like this had never been invented! Especially when one could see the example of the Ronda and the Seahawk, both of which, in my own considered opinion at least, were more seaworthy vessels than this damm galley of Darlanis! The big trireme having the unfortunate tendency to roll itself from side to side as the heavy swells crossed its path, the vessel reeling as I have said like a drunken sailor staggering bleary eyed from some seaport tavern.

Clearly visible to port was land, wonderful solid land with trees and green growing things. Where the wind gently rustled the leaves in the trees and the sunbeams danced through the towering trees to the ground below. Then my stomach heaved and once again I vomited sour bile over the rail. Darlanis holding me, stroking my hair as I cursed ships and the seas on which they sailed. In my thoughts cursing Her too just because she didn't suffer from seasickness! Because she couldn't know how I felt!

"We should reach Sarn tonight," Darlanis told me. No one hoping more than me that she was right. Not after having to endure Sarnian Lady's motions in this heavy rolling sea. The officers on the quarterdeck seeming to smile to themselves as the legendary Lorraine Duval showed that she too had her weaknesses. I hoped they enjoyed the sight as they stood there swaying easily with the ship's motion. I thought of wiping the smiles off their faces with the point of my sword, such was my "suffering" then.

Darlanis' new Imperial Princess then weaved across the deck trailed by Yvette Senchal to take me from Darlanis as I raised my pale sweaty face from the heaving sea. Sharon holding me, stroking my hair and suggesting that perhaps it would be better if we went below. Darlanis telling me that she had some brandy that might help relieve my suffering and that she would ask Tala Sen, the ship's physician, if she had anything for my seasickness.

Tala Sen's dark slanted eyes and yellow tinted skin hinted of lands now legend as she gave me a bitter potion. Telling me that it would help relieve my discomfort and nausea. The woman physician telling me of the young Prince's recovery from his wound suffered during the battle with the pirate. It had cost us twenty eight lives to put an end to his infamous career, including the lives of two dear to me. I wondered if it had been worth it. The women we had rescued doubtlessly would have thought so.

The brandy Darlanis gave me did definitely help, along with her suggestion that I slip off my clothing and get into her bed, the Empress giving me a big tumbler of her brandy that warmed my stomach and made the blood sing in my veins. "Now isn't that better?" she said, kissing me, her lips warm and sweet against my cheek. I thought how beautiful she was, although by 20th Century standards she was too tall and muscular to be considered as such.

Darlanis refilled my tumbler and filled one for herself, sipping the brandy as she sat on the edge of the bed and made small talk with me. Her eyes lovely azure gems, the gold mesh of her attire exotic and beautiful. I remembered that this same woman had once been raped by her own brother. I wondered what her sexual life was like. If she even had one anymore. I knew there were no lovers, no one to whom she could turn. No man to take her in his arms and hold her close. No one who loved her for the woman she was. Tender, vulnerable, loving. Her marriage had been loveless, the King of Sarn having been more interested in his own slave girls than in her. She had been but a beautiful figure on a golden throne to him. A sort of "trophy", nothing more. I felt sorry for her. The only man she had ever loved was a barbarian enemy Prince living beyond the mountains that divided her Empire from his lands. She had once spoken of him, but only briefly as if the memories were still yet too painful for her to bear. He had been the only one who had seen her as a woman, not as the imperious tall golden haired ruler of Imperial California.

"Lys! Is it hot!" Darlanis breathed, the sweat glistening there on her forehead. I suspected the brandy,

not the heat, but refrained from informing her of that fact. "'Mind' if I strip?" she asked, standing up, undoing her golden mesh halter, the skirt quickly following as did her boots. Leaving her in nothing but golden nipple clips and a brief blue triangle of silk that did little to conceal the perfection of her body. She doubtlessly would have made an excellent "centerfold", although she lacked the big full breasts of a Playboy Playmate, Darlanis being broad shouldered and wide hipped, a tad heavy in the buttocks. She is magnificent in a long silken evening gown, especially one fitted to her so that the perfection of her figure is clearly revealed.

Darlanis went to the door and slipped the lock home, giving me a smile that promised much. Although just what I didn't know or care just then, reaching for the brandy bottle and emptying the rest of it into my glass. "This is a good cure for seasickness," I told her with a smile, holding up the glass. I noted that Sarnian Lady was rolling even more than ever, but it didn't seem to bother me anymore thanks to Darlanis' wonderful brandy!

"If you were a man and you could have me any way that you wanted, how would you have me?" Darlanis suddenly asked as she stood before me, her words coming as a complete surprise to me!

"On your back, your wrists and ankles tied to the bedposts, after you'd been teased and played with for at least an hour," I told her, thinking of Jon and what we had done together. It was a heck of lot better than the way Jack had always wanted it with me. Dressing me up in tight leather corsets and all that stuff so that I looked the part of his own perverted sexual fantasies.

"I wish you were a man," Darlanis answered, standing there, looking down at me. I am somewhat "bi", but Darlanis didn't arouse any sexual feelings in me. I didn't know about her and I dreaded what might happen if she did happen to have such feelings towards me! Unlike the Dularnians, who are a somewhat "straitlaced" puritanical people by 26th Century standards, the Empire did not look upon such things as being anything too much out of the ordinary! "I want what I can never have," she breathed, her words almost a sob. "Never will I be allowed to be a woman!" I reached out my arms to her and suddenly she was sobbing bitterly against my shoulder, her magnificent body pressed against my own!

"It can't be all that bad," I spoke softly, stroking her hair, feeling the wetness of her tears. She was drunk, the brandy having no doubt released all the inhibitions, all the secrets she had been holding back all the years now finally coming out!

"I want him!" she moaned. "I want him to have me, to have me on my knees before him, my hands bound behind me so that I am helplessly his when he tears off my last bit of clothing and I am naked before him, his to enjoy, to use as he sees fit!" I had to smile a bit to myself, Darlanis having a rather vivid way of expressing things that were just a bit "pornographic" by 20th Century standards. "I want to be bound before him, helpless, his to enjoy, to use!" she added, obviously a woman who enjoyed total submission to a man despite her appearance which might lead one to think otherwise of her! "I want to bear his children!" she added, weeping on my shoulder as I held her, letting her talk herself out. This last of course is no longer ever possible for her after the injuries she suffered as a captive of the pirates.* * It was necessary for me to surgically remove her uterus to save her life due to infection caused by the abuse that she suffered.

"You can have what ever you want as long as you are willing to take the full consequences of your actions," I told her, gently stroking that rich golden hair, smelling the perfume of her body as I held her to me. I was glad that the door was locked. I wouldn't have wanted Sharonsay for example to come barging in just then and see Darlanis lying there in my arms wearing no more than a 20th Century "strip-tease" artist! "Let your heart guide you, let your emotions flow, let yourself become the woman that you are capable of being," I said to this lovely golden Empress.

"But I would have to give up `everything!'" she wept in reply. "I would have to wear beads and a buckskin loincloth in his tepee! Become his squaw!" To a "civilized woman" like Darlanis this was no doubt a horrible fate. She had no doubt been sexually excited by his "masculinity", by his exotic qualities, but on the other hand she had been very much aware of what such a love might "cost" her. Darlanis was a politically ambitious woman. The ruler of an "empire" that covered a good portion of what had once been California, Oregon, and Washington back in my own era.

"If you had truly loved him, such things would have meant nothing to you," I told her. "Nothing at all." I brushed back her golden hair, wiped at her eyes, her eye makeup having "run" a bit. Darlanis' awesome beauty is of course partly due to the skillful use of cosmetics. She does have the face, the bone structure, the figure, but there are "enhancements" she uses too. The skillful use of tiny brushes, various pigments, all do count.

"But I thought I did!" Darlanis protested, getting up, wiping at her eyes, finding a cloth, and completing the task. I was drunk. There was no doubt about that now. She was too, I felt!

"You confused your own sexual excitement for love," I smiled back. "You confused the involuntary responses of your body for something that was not `real'." That she had felt such things made her more "human" in my eyes, and less of a "golden goddess".

"A woman of Dularn is not supposed to feel such things," she said to me. I recalled what Janis had said about such matters.

"Women have had such `feelings' for a million years," I pointed out. "Your political beliefs have little to do with it."

"Have you ever had such feelings?" Darlanis asked, her eyes glowing down into mine as she stood there swaying with the roll of the ship. She didn't seem overly "steady" on her feet either.

"Yes," I answered. "Had it not been for Sharon I think I would have sailed back on the Janis to Dularn with Jon Richards."

"He was married before," Darlanis smiled. Apparently she knew something of him. "His wife was killed by Imperial troops."

"In a war that you were responsible for," I answered without thinking. The brandy was obviously effecting me too or I would have never said something like that to her. Darlanis nodding in reply, staring over my head out through the stern windows of Sarnian Lady at perhaps something that only she could have seen.

"That Queen Tulis caused," Darlanis answered in reply.

"If you could take her life, would you?" I asked.

"You speak like a Priestess," Darlanis answered back.

"I am responsible in a way for them," I informed her.

"I would not wish her death," Darlanis then now admitted.

"Your brother's?" I ventured, using my professional skills.

"I would not weep at his funeral," Darlanis answered back.

"If you had a sword in your hand and he stood before you, would you kill him?" I asked, driving deep for the "truth" here. Had Darlanis not been as drunk as she was I would have never been able to do this, but the brandy had relaxed her normal "reserve" and made it possible to plumb the depths of her own feelings towards her family there in Dularn. The same royal family that she now fought a long and bloody war with. A war that had taken the lives of thousands on both sides over the long years it had been fought. I recalled that she had lost her father when she was but a little girl. No doubt that had also had its influence on her.

"I think castration would be a more 'fitting' punishment." Darlanis answered. "He took that which is most precious." I had to smile a bit to myself at that, although I knew that Dularnian high caste girls did value their virginity highly, and usually only finally surrendered it there upon their own marital beds.* * This is what Janis once told me. It is only partially true.

"And if you someday set your standards over Dularn, what then?" I challenged her. "What will you do then?" Darlanis did not answer me, but merely went to the sofa beneath the stern windows where she sobbed softly to herself, perhaps seeing for the first time truths that I believe she had never before faced!

Chapter Thirty

"Sarn," the Empress of California said to me as I stood at her side, our relationship having undergone a subtle change since the events earlier that day. The lights of the great capital city visible before us as Sarnian Lady slowly approached in the faint breeze. I thought it a lovely city. One that perhaps symbolized much, its appearance there in the distance reminding me of ancient Rome or Athens as they had once perhaps stood in their glory thousands of years ago. Standing on the ruins of what once had been San Francisco before The War. The thought of the mythical phoenix going through my mind as I thought of the stellar fires that had consumed the original city. The War of 2047 had left little. I wondered what new adventures waited here for Sharon and me. Mars high in the sky overhead symbolic of the power of the ant-like beings now the masters of Man. Once again I wondered if Man would ever once again rule his world, or would He be for the rest of time remain the servant of alien masters?

Taking in the great blue green triangular lateen sails, the low curses of the sailors audible to my ears as they struggled with the rebellious canvas there in the darkness, Sarnian Lady proceeded into the harbor under the power of her oars, the beat slow as we exchanged salutes with the forts at the entrance to the harbor and the warships at anchor inside. The Ronda and the Seahawk being towed in behind small galleys, such being used to tow ships in the bay if they do not have the ability to move themselves except by sail, the prize crews being too small to row the vessels themselves. These galleys, incidentally, are rowed by convicts, castrated men, former criminals and outlaws. There are no prisons as existed back in the 20th Century, such having been replaced with the enslavement of criminals early in the 21st Century, a policy that has been carried on through the centuries to the present era. The Empire either fines or enslaves those who turn to a life of crime, a policy that is far wiser than those of the 20th Century who let dangerous criminals back out on the "streets" without any thought as to what they might do next! Here in the 26th Century you are considered responsible for your actions, regardless of your social or economic status or what your "childhood" was like. Poverty is not considered an "excuse" for crime like it seemed

to be back in my own era. You are not given a "second chance". I find this social order to my liking. We have finally learned a few things over the centuries at least!

As Sarnian Lady moved slowly through the bay, Darlanis regal in her finest, her golden mesh reflecting the torches set there on the rails of the galley, suddenly there came a yell of warning from the look-out in the bow as a small sailboat came out from between two anchored galleys on a collision course with us!

"OARS REVERSE!" captain Stone barked, the great levers digging deep into the water as the oarsmen threw their entire weight upon the grips of the rowing frame. Sarnian Lady shuddering as she slowed just in time! The tiny vessel nearly struck by our ram! Our captain muttering under his breath words that I'm sure would have been much more audible had not his Empress and her new teenage Princess been standing right there on the quarterdeck.

"What the !!" captain Stone muttered as the little vessel, not content with nearly being rammed by us, swung around and tried to grapple us. The grapple sailing high and nearly striking Darlanis in the face! Sharon grabbing it and nearly being yanked overboard as the slack in the rope was taken up by Sarnian Lady's slowing forward movement. A heavy galley, even with its oarsmen doing their best, still not being able to halt instantly!

Leaping forward, I jammed the three pronged grapple into the rail before it pulled Sharon over the side. Muttering a furious curse as I did so that made Sharon say, "Oh, Lorraine!" in soft tones. I guess she missed the comment that Darlanis made under her breath! Sarnian Lady now slowing to a halt as the straining oarsmen dragged their blades in the still waters, the Ronda and the Seahawk swinging wide behind their towing galleys as they too slowed to a halt there behind us here in the sudden confusion!

Then our sailors had hold of the rope and swiftly the little vessel was dragged alongside as Sarnian Lady idled in the water. The Ronda and the Seahawk drifting at the end of their tow-lines. Around us I could see people on ships pointing telescopes at us in the light of lanterns and torches. While in the distance I could see the welcoming VIP's of the Empire waiting at the Imperial Palace dock for their ruler, the area brightly lit by torches, the smoke drifting up into the dark star-sprinkled sky above. There is very little "light pollution" in this era, and the night skies are very beautiful, utterly "unlike" those of my own era...

"What In The Name Of Lys!" Darlanis breathed as suddenly the rope was cut and the little vessel swung free of us in the darkness. Taunting feminine teenage laughter coming from it as it filled its sail and proceeded across the bay! It had been nothing but a teenage prank by a bunch of mischievous teenage brats!

"Captain Stone!" Darlanis snapped, "Sound battle horns and give pursuit!" her regal body rigid with fury! "Those brats are going to be taught a lesson they'll never forget!" Her captain barking swift orders as Sarnian Lady became alive under us!

"Port oars forward! Starboard oars reverse!" captain Eric Stone barked, Sarnian Lady swinging around, the heavy "thud thud" beat of her timing drum audible across the water, the loud blasts of her battle horns warning all to steer away from the ramship!

"Maximum beat!" Darlanis ordered, the great oars digging deep into the still waters of Sarnian Bay as the great warship came about, our bodies swaying with the surge of the oars. Even undermanned as we were, the trireme seemed to leap forward with every stroke, the little vessel ahead of us drawing closer with every second that passed. The tone of her voice made me shudder!

I saw the little craft swing around an anchored merchantman, and I thrilled as captain Stone brought

Sarnian Lady around after it. Swinging the big 54 like a rowboat around the anchored vessel! Then came another turn as Sarnian Lady seemed to heel around almost in her own length as we wheeled around an anchored 48. A smaller sister to Sarnian Lady, but not as ornate. And then there just ahead of us was the little sailboat that had given us so much trouble! Pursued by the Empire's biggest trireme!

Bearing down on the vessel at a good seven knots if not more, Sarnian Lady must have been a terrifying sight as I saw the five teenage girls there in the darkness suddenly tack off to starboard. Their little vessel was suddenly dismantled and capsized as the starboard oars passed over it, so close had we come!

"Bring them aboard!" Darlanis snapped, the launch already slipping down its ropes into the water. Six burly oarsmen quickly taking their places at the oars as captain Stone sent the second officer in command to help fish the girls out of the bay!

It was five very wet and terrified teenage girls that clung to each other as they knelt dripping before their infuriated Empress. Sobbing in terror as none dared face those blazing azure eyes that burned down upon them. They spoke of how on a dare they had planned to "taunt" the galley, innocently claiming that none of them had known that it was Darlanis'. A claim that none of us believed, knowing far better! Everyone knows Sarnian Lady!

"Spoiled brats!" Darlanis hissed to me as I stood at her side. Sharon looking first at the girls kneeling there on the deck and then at Darlanis, who did not appear just then to be in a merciful mood! I thought of what she might do, and shuddered!

"Darlanis," Sharon pleaded, "You aren't going to have them beheaded or something, are you?" Someone apparently having told my stepdaughter something of the power of the Empress of California. Darlanis smiled and shook her head in the negative, affectionately tousling Sharon's hair with a diamond be-ringed hand.

Then glaring down at the terrified dripping kneeling girls, Darlanis said in a stern level voice, "As the Empress of California, I hereby sentence the five of you to one year of servitude as slave girls aboard the very next warship to be commissioned."

"My father will hear of this!" one of them protested much to my surprise, braver than the others. All five of them being short skirted delights that any oarsman or sailor would enjoy using. The one speaking a ripe bodied blonde whose short wet silken dress revealed much of the feminine delights there beneath it.

"Yes, I plan to speak to him, Shari," Darlanis snapped, obviously knowing the girl's name much to my surprise. Darlanis then ordering the five to strip off everything and assume the position of the female slave as they quickly did, five naked girls now shivering there bare nipples before their Imperial Empress!

Minutes later five new slave girls knelt nude and in collars on Sarnian Lady's quarterdeck, their tears coursing down their cheeks as each was chained to an iron ring set there in the deck. Each had her wrists shackled behind her, her ankles crossed so that she could not rise to her feet. A burly seaman with a whip insuring that none broke her position or spoke. Five pampered aristocratic brats who would learn much in the next year, Darlanis told me with a smile that spoke much left unsaid just then!

"Oars Inboard!" captain Eric Stone barked, the polished brass speaking trumpet in his hand. Sarnian Lady slowly creeping towards the Imperial Palace dock, men standing there ready to receive our lines. Others ready on the dock with poles to help assist as the big trireme approached. The quiet dark water trickling and rippling around the ram. A burly sailor at the bow flinging a rope to those on the dock. Another at the stern doing the same, eager hands seizing them. The many oil torches smoky as the flames flickered and leaped in the soft warm breeze. The high and mighty of the Empire gathered in their finest to greet us. I wondered how many knew of what had existed here on this island before The War. The lights of the city flickering in the distance like twinkling stars. I thought of another city, another era now but mostly legend. Of another who would have loved to have seen all this, one with whom I had "shared" much over few years we had known each other. One who like Darlanis, studied history. She had died aboard a spaceship a hundred million miles from Earth. In the company of horrid alien monsters like giant ants. I thought of the Lorr and the young woman who so much resembled this golden Empress now standing so regal there on the quarterdeck beside me. I wondered if there might not be another Imperial Princess. One that was yet of Darlanis' own bloodline!

Such were my first impressions as Sarnian Lady docked. The leather and rope fend-off's groaning with the strain as with a gentle shudder we came to a halt. The long voyage was now over. The ropes drawn up taut around the bollards, a carpeted gangplank swiftly placed in position. Steel clad warriors, The Imperial Guards, taking their places. Swords at their hips, long pikes in their hands, the torchlight reflecting off their polished helmets and tunics of gleaming chain mail. The proud Imperial Tarl was painted on their round shields. I thought them doubtlessly quite effective protectors of their beloved and honored Imperial ruler. She was very beautiful now there at the rail looking out over the city she ruled. I knew now why it was an honor to kneel at her feet. My heart and the sword at my hip were hers now to command. Among my "things" was the Dularnian compound bow she'd given me.

In front of us gleaming pale in the reflected torchlight rose the great marble Imperial Palace. The massive pile with its walls now lit by torches, its towers rising up into the starsprinkled sky like something out of a storybook. Here, I knew, Darlanis now lived and ruled this mighty Empire in The Second Dark Age of Man. An era much like the first except for the Lorr. Sharon moved close, my arm slipping around her slim waist as we looked out upon the sight of Imperial Sarn there in the starlight. I thought of Rome at her glory. I wondered what new adventures awaited us. Mars like a baleful eye glowing down on us. Deimos had passed overhead just before sunset. A second "moon".

Darlanis stood for a moment overlooking the city, the bay, perhaps thinking thoughts only a ruler would think. Her hair a golden glory there in the torchlight, the light sparkling off her golden tiara, off the diamonds and other precious jewels that encrusted it. She was veiled now, the veil accenting the lines of her beautiful face, giving her an exotic appearance that I found very attractive on her. Her eyes sparkling as she turned briefly for a moment to glance at me, as if she might share this with me. The long blue silken cloak she wore now tossed back to reveal her golden mesh attire. She was magnificent, a Goddess of Beauty!

It is the custom in the Empire for the women of the aristocracy to veil themselves when out in public view. A custom that I enjoy since it softens the hard lines of my face and makes me more attractive and feminine in appearance. I also often wear a large wide brimmed hat for the same reason, and long flowing dresses which do much to conceal the flaws of my "boyish" figure.

Turning to me again, the Empire's veiled Empress said in a voice that hinted of steel, "I wish Sharon to be at my side as I walk down the gangplank." I nodded, understanding, knowing why, but still uncomfortable in my heart with the idea. She had the Empire, I had only my Sharon. It had not been easy for me to accept at first. My love, my respect for Darlanis was the only thing that made it possible. I had

stood at her side in battle upon an enemy deck. She was now my Empress. I had laid my sword at her feet and pledged my life and my honor to Darlanis Marden, the Empress of California. Janis was dead, only a "memory" now.

"My daughter! Is she safe?" a richly dressed aristocratic man cried. Dashing up to Darlanis as she and Sharon stepped off the carpeted gangplank. A couple of guardsmen with their pikes holding the man back. A busty and wide hipped blonde in her finery, veiled, there at his side clutching at his arm. I thought of the wench called Sharinow only a slave aboard Sarnian Lady. Kneeling nude with her companions there upon the quarterdeck.

"Yes," Darlanis said in a level voice. "Your darling Shariis quite safe aboard the ship." A smile curving her lips beneath her veil as she then added, "You can go see her if you wish. I'm sure she'll explain everything to you." I wondered what her father would have to say when he learned of the punishment meted out. The daughter obviously a genetic clone of the mother. The Lorr have permitted certain fields of scientific research to continue. I thought of another, one who had cost me my own marriage now so long ago. The woman meeting my hot gaze with a puzzled expression beneath her translucent veil as she brushed on by me.

"Where's My Son! Damm You, Darlanis, Where's My 'SON!'" a beautiful black haired veiled woman snapped, wearing the black of the Warriress Caste, her voice arrogant, but filled with concern. She would have been a dead ringer for Bianca Jagger, I mused to myself. Deep dark eyes above the net veil flashing into mine as I regarded her from just behind Darlanis, who was not at all pleased to be addressed so, even by someone like this woman!

"If you have gotten HIM killed on your Lys-dammed ship, so help me Lys! I'll gut you for the 'slut' of a whore you are!" I heard her scream, GRABBING DARLANIS AND SHAKING HER SO HARD THAT I FEARED HER CROWN WOULD COME FLYING OFF! Darlanis suddenly breaking free of the woman and giving her a shove that sent her stumbling back a dozen feet, the repressed fury so hot in that tall golden body that I could almost feel it radiating from her!

"He was hurt in the battle with the pirate Tarkas, Tara," I heard Darlanis snap, the anger at being so handled showing in her voice as the two regarded each other. Darlanis had spoken much to me of Princess Tara Bisan of Baja, the former Queen of Sarn. Warlady of the Empire and head of the Imperial Senate, which made her effectively the "Prime Minister" of the Empire. She was not a woman to be "crossed" by anyone, not even Darlanis! I was surprised that they had not "crossed swords" at one time or another. I thought I knew the reason "why". Tara's skill with a sword was said to be legendary. She was slim, medium tall, and looked much like the sort of a woman who would be "good" with a sword. The way she had recovered from Darlanis' shove was proof that she was quick on her feet. Swordsmanship is a matter of skill, not sheer muscle power. While Darlanis would be far stronger than Tara, I suspected that Tara's quickness would match Darlanis' strength!

"And just who's this blonde 'brat' at your side?" the Bajan Princess snapped, "Some little plaything of yours?" Looking at Sharon like some slave girl in a collar. I didn't like the tone of her voice, or what she had implied. I decided I didn't like Princess Tara very much. Darlanis reached out and stopped me before I could express my opinions with the point of my sword. Her eyes for a brief moment holding mine as she shook her head. She no doubt feared that Tara would kill me. She didn't know the perfection of my own skills, which are just a bit superior to her own! She is the only woman I have ever met who can give me a really "good" match, although even her skills don't "match" mine!

"And where did you get HER from?" Tara challenged, regarding me. The tone she used with the word "her" implying that I was something that had crawled out from beneath a rock. "She's as ugly as some

Lorr!" I am not a beautiful woman, but I do have my pride and I just about had "enough" of Tarad despite her awesome reputation. I thought lovingly of pounding the Bajan's face into the flagstones that made up the surface of the dock. Killing her with my bare hands seemed the proper way to go with "slime" like her! Then I suddenly felt strong masculine arms seize me as Darlanis motioned to two of her guardsmen, the Empress being well aware of the thoughts that had been going through my mind just then! The guardsmen, unlike the sailors aboard the Ronda, being well aware of the sort of woman they held and kept enough tension on me that there was little hope of my now interfering in things!

"Lorraine Duval is from the 20th Century, as is her stepdaughter Sharon, who has consented to become my adopted daughter after your son decided that he did not wish to be my successor," Darlanis answered, her voice icy cold. The people watching us suddenly muttering among themselves at this item of information, both due to the fact that Sharon and I were from a time now almost legend in this era, and also because Crown Prince Jers Bisan had incredibly given up his claim to the throne of California! I saw another woman, wearing the black of the Warriress, this one a stunningly beautiful brunette, attempting to calm the Princess.

"WHY YOU DAMM BITCH!" Tarascreamed, whipping out her sword. "I'll carve your !@#\$\$%^&*() heart for that!" Tara using words that I didn't understand, but yet had little doubt as to their meaning. Darlanis drawing her own, the blade shining there in the flickering light of the torches. I wished I could have taken her place, not because I thought that my own skill was really all that much better than hers, BUT BECAUSE I WANTED TO KILL THAT DAMM BAJAN BITCH LIKE I'VE NEVER WANTED TO KILL ANYONE BEFORE!!!

I watched Darlanis toss aside her cloak, veil and hand her golden tiara to Sharon. If she died Sharon would be Empress of California, although there would be "legalities" that might tie things up for years, I knew. In any case Tarawouldn't be around to enjoy it since I had every intention of seeing that Bajan D.O.B. (daughter of a female dog) dying at the point of my sword!

Looking up, I saw the young Prince now clinging to Tala Sen. The look in his face one that I will carry for the rest of my days. Doubtlessly Tarawas a black hearted bitch that deserved to get what was coming to her, but she was still yet his MOTHER!

"You have been a good friend," Darlanis said to me, standing there, her sword in her hand. Tarahad the assistance of her lovely companion, a beautifully featured exquisite creature that could have been a "Miss California" if they'd ever held a beauty contest! She was no more than 5'3", and utterly perfect in every way. Darlanis had told me about her. This was the Princess Sela, the younger daughter of Dala Dai, the Queen of Talon. Talon being allied with Baja and thus also allied with the Empire of Mexico. I thought of the great birds. Sela had no doubt ridden upon them. Felt the beat of their great wings as they bore her aloft. She had lived the dream of flight as only birds fly..

"Be careful with those high heels of yours," I warned, recalling how my own had nearly been the death of me aboard the Ronda when I had slipped on the bloody deck and nearly got myself run through for my pains! Darlanis nodding, giving me a smile. There was only the sound of the wind and the soft ripple of the quiet water against Sarnian Lady's massive hull now.....

The attack of the Princess was swift, Tara's slim rapier flashing in the torchlight as her blade met that of Darlanis. The swift dip and dart of the blades so swift that the eye could hardly follow, the steel ringing together. The two women so perfectly matched that I knew that it could only end in the death of one of one or the other. I feared for Darlanis. She could not match Tara's swiftness or speed, the Princess' fighting style so much like mine that it was almost like she had been my pupil! I feared that Darlanis would die there before my eyes! She should have let me take on Tara! Not that I was really that much "better", I

could see, knowing my own limits, but at least Darlanis would have lived, and it was important to this era that she did!

"Lorraine!" Sharon cried as Tara drew blood, the Princess leaping back as Darlanis' red blood stained her skin below her left breast. I saw the Empress shake herself and then return to the attack, stalking the Princess like a beast of prey stalking its victim. I thought of what Darlanis had told me there on Sarnian Lady. I thought I knew now why she had challenged Tara!

"Darlanis!" I cried, "We stood together on the Seahawk!" I saw her eyes for an instant meet mine, a grim smile curving her beautiful lips. I knew she understood. She did not fight alone!

Once again Tara leaped to the attack, Darlanis meeting it with all her skill, the slim blades ringing and dancing their deadly beautiful dance, the polished steel shining in the flickering light of the torches surrounding us. I saw Darlanis drive the Princess back, her blade beating down against that of Tara's, using her greater reach, her greater strength to wear down and eventually defeat the now sweating Princess! In the crowd I saw the beautiful features of the woman who had come with Tara, her attire leaving little doubt that she was of the Warriresses. I recalled Darlanis having mentioned the Princess, whom she felt was a more fitting companion for the young Prince than Lara Warsan. If this was Sela Dai, then I wondered what Lara was like!

Tala Sen fought to hold the young Prince as he saw his mother fall back before the Empress' attack, the handsome boyish Prince suddenly grabbing her sword and jerking free of her! "Lorraine!" Tala Sen screamed as I leaped forward, the guardsmen having let go in the confusion, but another was suddenly there before me! A tall full busted sensual delight in a short red leather skirt and a green silken halter. Her hair reddish brown in the torchlight as the young Prince fell into her arms, the sword dropping from his hand to the dock as she held him to herself, cupping his face to her loving bosom. It was Lara Warsan!

The beautiful reddish brownette holding him close, speaking in low tones, her blue-gray eyes taking in the scene before her. Darlanis had spoken much of Lara Warsan, whom Sharon says looks like the 20th Century television actress Catherine Bach. I recalled what Darlanis had said of her, that she was "The Queen of Prostitutes", and as I looked into her eyes, I pitied her for what I knew was coming if Tara lived. On the ring finger of her left hand a slim golden ring symbolized his commitment to her, a commitment that even Darlanis had not been able to break despite her offers of all the resources of the Empire would he only give up his beloved Lara for Sela Dai, whom he had formerly loved and who everyone had thought he would eventually end up marrying! I suspected that Lara was lucky that Darlanis was the sort of a monarch that she is, since another would have just arranged to have her throat slit and her body left in a dark alley somewhere!

Across from the two fighting women I saw the beautiful woman who had been with Tara frown and then dash around the fighters, and I suspected then that Tara too had hoped this woman would be the one to win her son's heart away from the lovely "Queen of Prostitutes"! While she was objectively considerably more beautiful than Lara, I suspected that Lara had "something" that even she didn't have! I caught her arm as she stepped towards Jers and Lara, and shook my head in the negative. Her beautiful face looking up into mine from behind her veil, her beauty such that even Darlanis would have had to look to her laurels with a woman like this around! "He loves you no more," I said, suspecting the truth. Darlanis had spoken of her, of the Princess Sela of Talon, whom she considered a more fitting companion for the Prince. I could understand why just from looking at her! She so beautiful it took your breath away! A perfect face, a perfect body!

It was now becoming obvious as the duel dragged on that Tara was losing as Darlanis drove her back, forcing the Bajan Princess to expend her strength, while Darlanis' was obviously superior! Darlanis, while

bleeding and glistening with sweat in the torchlight, was still in fairly good condition while Tara was showing every sign of physical exhaustion! Their blades ringing and clashing together, the polished steel flashing in the torchlight. They had fought now for several minutes. I did not think that Tara had much left. She did not respond as swiftly now to Darlanis' attacks. I thought I saw terror now in those dark eyes as she fell back before Darlanis' latest assault. Sela Dai at my side muttering to herself, perhaps praying to Lysto spare Tara's worthless life. I wondered if Darlanis would kill her knowing the effect that it would have on Jers, who might very well become her most bitter and deadly enemy. He was young, popular among the oarsmen and sailors that manned Sarnian Lady. Darlanis might make herself an enemy that would destroy her if she killed Tara!

Darlanis, bloodstained, cut through Tara's tired defense and slashed the Princess across the face, cutting her cheek to the bone, the cut running from just below her right ear to her lips! I saw the red blood run down her beautiful face and heard the young Prince cry out as if Darlanis' blade had cut him instead of his mother! I saw the tears in Lara's eyes as she held him, holding his face to her bosom as he sobbed out his misery, his hot tears wetting the thin silk that barely covered her breasts. I saw the reflective glitter of tears in Sela's eyes there over her veil, although whether or not she was concerned for Tara's fate or Jers' was something I did not know or dare ask just then.

Around us stood the gathered nobility of the Empire, the men and women who ruled this post-War society, whispering and gasping among themselves as they watched the duel that none had ever thought they would see. The light from the myriad torches flickering off their features. I wondered how many prayed for Darlanis and how many prayed for Tara. I watched Lara holding Jers.

I saw the swift blades ring together in the deadly dance of steel. The boyish Prince sobbing out his misery on Lara's soft bosom. Sela Dai miserable there at my side, tears running down her cheeks beneath her veil. The torchlight shining on Darlanis' sweaty glistening bloody body as she fought. Tara's black silk dress now plastered to her with her own sweat and blood. She was now losing this duel. I could tell. Darlanis would win, but at a price I shuddered to think about for what it would do to Jers. I saw Darlanis' blade flash out, hear Tara cry out, stagger back!

"I do not wish to kill," I heard Darlanis say to Tara, stepping back, but wisely keeping her point raised. My eyes holding the Empress' as they met for an instant. Tara hissed something beneath her breath I suspected was obscene in reply. Their blades met once again there in the torchlight, casting swift moving shadows there on the flagstones of the dock. Then Darlanis found the opening in Tara's rapidly weakening defense that she sought. Her blade was swift. Tara screamed with the pain as Darlanis slashed her wrist to the bone with her point, cutting the tendons and crippling her. Tara's dark eyes blazing with hot hatred as they looked into her ruler's, Tala Sen running forward to treat her, Sela Dai dashing to her side to comfort her. Tara's blood dark on the stones as it oozed from between her fingers. Darlanis lowered her blade. Tara's laid on the bloody stones there at her feet. It would be months before she would be able to hold a sword in that hand again, I knew, and the slash there on her cheek would leave a scar for the rest of her life.

"Nothing has really been 'settled' by this," Darlanis said to me, the fatigue showing in her voice as I pressed a bandage up against her bleeding ribs. The gathered nobility of the Empire muttering among themselves at the outcome of this famous duel! I nodded, smiling as she then added, "I would be pleased to have your arm as we walk to the palace as it has been a rather tiring day." Then with Sharon taking her other arm we did just that!

Chapter Thirty Two

When I was a little girl, my sister Marie and I used to play with ants. Our favorites were the big black ones that lived in a dead tree near our home, their nest deep far inside the wood. Little did I know then that I would someday meet with alien beings much like the ants we played with so innocently back then as children do. My childish cruelty to them causing me considerable discomfort six centuries when my most secret memories of such events were revealed to the ant-like Lorr by their mind-scanner.

The Lorr are not really "ants" in the sense that we think of them, the aliens from another star system now nearly a hundred light years away having originally come from a planet rather like Mars, I understand from what I have been told. They are however, quite completely "alien" in the full sense of the word, their mental and physical characteristics alien to anything we of Earth are familiar with. They are in a way perhaps a more successful life-form than Man, but this is a matter open to debate. The thought processes of the Lorr are not like those of Men. We share little with them. They are perhaps a better and nobler race than Man. Our evolutionary paths have been completely different. We are an aggressive species. They are not. Had their sun not started to turn into a red giant over fifty thousand years ago, it is doubtful that they would have ever developed the capability to travel between the stars. Man on the other hand would have probably done so in another century or so had The War not put a sudden complete halt to his technological development.

The great Lorr battle-disc came a day after Sharon and I arrived in Sam. The silvery terrifying craft floating with its soft hum of almost infinite power over the Imperial Palace, its shadow bigger than that of a football field. We obeyed its orders. You do not argue with something like that. The Lorr commander had her orders directly from the antennae of She who is First among the Lorr. I was to be taken to Mars for interrogation by Raspa herself! I kissed Darlanis and Sharon good bye. I did not know if I would ever see either one of them again. The black horror now standing there on its six legs at my side was like something out of a nightmare. It was impatient, seemingly annoyed with me for delaying it when it had been ordered by Raspa herself to bring me to her. The great horrible mandibles angrily opening and closing as it waited there in the Imperial Palace for me, those who served their ruler shrinking away in terror at the sight of it. I felt it best then not to annoy it any further by delay. I saw the moisture in Darlanis' eyes. Would I ever see her or Sharon again? Those who the Lorr took sometimes never came back. I feared that such a fate awaited me there on Mars!

The First Princess inclined her antennae towards me as I sat there helplessly strapped in the "interrogation chair", her great black compound eyes like multi-faceted jewels in the dimly lit cavern a mile beneath the surface of Mars as the two others of her kind on either side of her silently regarded me. I knew she did not see as I did. The Lorr evolved under a different type of sun than did Man. Their visual sense is nothing like that of humans. The Lorr see far into the infrared. They speak by means of radio waves instead of sound, and use radar to find their way in the darkness of their caverns. Their lungs are adapted to an atmospheric pressure of one tenth that of the Earth. They can breathe the thin surface atmosphere of 26th Century Mars and live and thrive upon its surface where all humans require oxygen masks, even their "Servitors", who are adapted to a pure oxygen atmosphere at a pressure of one tenth Earth normal. Such an atmosphere being maintained inside the Lorr caverns for their human "Servitors", all female, men being considered too violent and untrustworthy. The Lorr using their same cloning techniques on their human servants as they use upon themselves, the males of their race having been extinct for nearly fifty thousand years! I feared what these creatures might "do" to me if they thought I might perhaps be a "danger" to them because of my own knowledge, a fear that I felt "justified" knowing what I did about them now! And the "visions" that they drew from my mind were certainly no help as everyone "saw" just what "sort" of a creature that I was!

After a flight of about a week we had landed inside Mars, a bit of disappointment here as I thought the Lorr could do better, although the best spaceships Earth ever built would have taken over a month and exhausted all their reaction mass for their impulse fusion drives in making the trip. During the trip I had been kept in a state of suspended animation, my every memory recorded by means of their "mind-scanner" and then transmitted ahead of the battle-disc by a coherent radio beam to the TRIAD, the Lorr ruling council of three Princesses of which Raspa is the head, holding the position of the First Princess among the Lorr.

This was now my third day on Mars, the first two having been nothing but biological tests and then an interesting type of "brain-washing" where they showed me their own history and then my own race's history in comparison. Needless to say the Lorr were depicted as being noble, wonderful brave intelligent beings whereas human beings were shown as being warlike, aggressive, and unable to accept life in a universe where they had to share their solar system with another race. When you got done seeing all this you felt like something that had crawled out from underneath some flat rock that very richly now deserved being "stepped on"!

What was far worst was the way their mind-scanner revealed my own memories, especially the time when I had as a child used a magnifying glass to concentrate the burning rays of the sun upon helpless black ants, horribly burning several of them to death, my memories of this event being displayed on holographic displays all over the planet so that everyone could see just what sort of a despicable creature that I truly was! This having a profound effect upon the Lorr, who are in appearance almost identical to the ants I had so horribly burned to death as a child! Especially since to the Lorr this brought back their own racial histories of how millions of their own kind died a similar fate when their own sun swelled up into a red giant and burned them all to death! Only a few million of the billion inhabitants of their world being able to flee aboard the three starships they had managed to construct before the terrible heat put an end to everything!* * It is of course interesting to "ponder" what happened to the third Lorr starship which was sent towards another G-type star.

They had of course shown me their "Exodus", which is to them almost a sacred event in their history, and I realized then for the first time that they were not really that unlike us humans! I saw their bravery, their courage as they fought against time to construct a means where a small portion of their race might live! Hollowing out small asteroids and installing inside them a form of anti-gravity space drive far in advance of anything Man ever built. One such starship now circling the Earth, the other having been destroyed in a futile attempt to stop the gigantic comet that nearly destroyed them in 2047. The Lorr showing me the half a dozen Earth spaceships that had accompanied it there on their computer generated display, the ships all loaded with H-bombs to finish off any surviving Lorr after the giant comet hit Mars!

"You are a true example of your race, Lorraine," Raspa said to me, her radio voice coming to me by means of the hearing aid type device that is used to convert Lorr radio speech into sound. The Lorr gathered there in the great cavern by the thousands like black frozen rocks standing on their stick-like legs. The utter silence of the numbers uncanny. There were among them a number of women, clad in the various colored jumpsuits which seem to be the uniform of those who serve the Lorr. Among them the one called "An'na", whom I suspected to be the daughter of Darlanis!

"What I did I did as a child, without knowing the evil of my deeds," I answered. Who thinks of the pain an insect might suffer? I remembered once spraying a number of ants with RAID back a few years ago when they had infested our patio. I had watched them die, squirming and twisting in agony. The Lorr had watched "that" part of my memories too. Displayed there before them on a great glowing screen in full color, as my own eyes had seen it!

"You are a barbarian, of a race of barbarians," Raspa said. "There is little that can be said in favor of

your kind." I supposed that it was true. "Your people without provocation once attempted to exterminate our entire race," she added, those awful eyes seeming to glow directly into mine. "Were we not a civilized people we would have long ago turned your world into a radioactive cinder as lifeless as your Moon." I had little doubt that they had the capability to do it whenever they wished too!

"We are in a way your children. You created us," I pointed out. The Lorr were responsible for Man's rise to civilization, to his leaving the caves and building cities. To the lifting of his eyes from the dirt beneath his feet to the stars above him. In a way the Lorr were "God". They were our "Creator". They had "made" us what we were. Over the centuries they had attempted to guide us, using their technology to "civilize" us. They are perhaps even responsible for some of the religions that Men once believed, although Raspa assures me that Christianity isn't theirs.

"We could have given you much," Raspa said, "But your people could only see what they wished to see, and they looked upon us as 'INSECTS' to be exterminated, nothing else." I suspected from what Darlanis had told me that there was also another reason why the World Federation of 2046 had decided to exterminate the Lorr. It having become known on the Earth that the Lorr used human women as servants to perform the tasks their claws could not easily do. While the women who serve the Lorr are not mistreated, there is an issue of "slavery" here that has not ever been addressed.* * Most "Servitors" are content with their lives, but some do feel the lack of "freedom" that we of Earth often take for "granted". Mars also reminds me in some aspects of a gigantic "nunnery". I also have my "suspicions" about Aurora, who once admitted to me that she was once the "mistress" of Darlanis' own father in 2521. This plus certain other "evidence" I have makes me suspect that it is "possible" that Aurorais actually Darlanis' own mother...

"But Mankind saw you as a species that enslaves other intelligent species, and thus felt it proper to destroy you before you perhaps took over the Earth too and used its people for your own selfish purposes," I answered her back, recalling what Darlanis had told me from her own studies of what had been written just before the Lorr bombing from space put an end to everything.....

"You practice slavery on your own world," Raspa answered. "We do not abuse our 'Servitors' as you abuse your slave girls." Trying to argue with Raspa was like arguing with an ultra-powerful computer. The Lorr having the capability in their caverns of tapping into their own central data banks for anything they require by just sending out a signal from their antennae to a nearby receiver. The Lorr Princesses on either side of her regarding me with that motionless stare that only the Lorr possess, those great compound eyes seeming to burn into my consciousness. The slight movement of their long whip-like antennae the only evidence I could see that they were even alive there beside Raspa!

"Have those who serve you ever been given the 'choice' of where they would like to live?" I challenged her back, well aware that I was far out of my "intellectual depth" in arguing with a creature whose I.Q. was approximately "300" in human terms! Even Janet Rogers, who was the smartest person I've ever met, only was about 190 or so. The Lorr of course, by their control of genetics, are able to do things far beyond our own capabilities. They are, I should mention here, quite superior to us in intelligence.

"Few of them wish to live in a social order as crude and barbaric as your own," Raspa answered. I knew that there were small communities on the surface of Mars, a number of the "Servitors" having opted to live there on the surface despite the discomforts and dangers of living on a world where one had to always concern themselves with whether or not there was oxygen to breathe. While the surface pressure is only a little less than that of the caverns, the oxygen content of the atmosphere is only a portion of that inside the caverns, which requires the use of an oxygen mask for any human venturing on the surface. The Lorr, with their compound lungs, are able to function on the surface of Mars, although they find the oxygen content of the present atmosphere even a bit too low for their liking and often carry oxygen with

them when they move about on the surface. There is some water on the surface, not much, but some, most of it coming from the shattered comet that crashed into Mars in the middle of the 21st Century. Enough water anyway that the Lorr are now "terraforming" Mars and colonizing it with "Servitors" who reproduce by means of cloning techniques far beyond anything known to 21st Century Man. These are the lovely "Martians", and someday Mars will be a new world where Woman and Lorr will live together not as master and servant, but perhaps as "equals" beneath the skies.

"Are you aware that your An'na may be Queen Darlanis' daughter?" I suddenly challenged Raspa, curious to see what her reply would be. An'na standing there close to another Servitor, an older woman, blonde haired, little different than a woman of Earth. Many such women of Mars being "blonde", the Lorr preferring such.

"That is known to me, but it is An'na's decision whether or not she wishes to stay with us or be returned to that barbarian," Raspa answered. The young woman under discussion now putting her arms about the older woman, whose name I understood was Aurora. An'na's eyes so much just like Darlanis' now "burning" into mine. "Here she can live as a civilized creature, not some sword-swinging barbarian as her own mother has now become there on Earth." Then after perhaps a long "minute" of soundless discussion among the three horrors before me Raspa announced that it was the decision of the TRIAD that while I needed "watching", I was not at this time at least a "danger" to their "domination" of the Earth. I breathed a sigh of relief then, as I had feared that they would just "reprogram" my mind and make me into another "Servitor"...

Chapter Thirty Three

"I didn't think you'd want to associate with a 'uncivilized barbarian' like me," I commented to Raspa as she told me to follow her aboard the small disc shaped spaceship the next morning. Such ships being used for travel over the surface of Mars and short hops out into space. They are powered by small bits of anti-matter about the size of a large pea held inside a special magnetic containment field. Should the anti-matter come in contact with normal matter, then of course there is a great release of energy, even a pea-sized bit of anti-matter containing a dozen kilotons of explosive power. Normally, of course, the anti-matter is safely controlled and there is little danger from the use of such material. On the other hand flying around in something that could just go "BOOM" at any moment does bother your nerves just a bit! Especially mine after what happened with our disc.

"You can't help being 'what' you are," Raspa answered, settling herself on the couch there before the controls and clipping the ship's computer feeds to her antennae. The oxygen cylinder there at my hip and my breathing bag and mask a necessary part of my attire were I to step out onto the surface of Mars with its .5 PSI oxygen pressure, that of the Earth being about six times as great! I had to admit even to myself that I was starting to get used to the sight of the Lorr, Raspa being no longer the nightmarish creature that she had first appeared to me. Why she took this interest in me was something I didn't know or dare ask, although I was happy that she did, since otherwise I would have learned little about this very alien civilization on a world that I'd visited before only in the far reaches of my own imagination!

"I'll try to do better in the future," I told her, settling myself as best I could beside her on the other couch, the close confines of the ship and the thought of what laid behind that deck beneath me making me just a bit nervous. The bigger ships are powered usually by fusion reactors, and thus are "safer" in my opinion, although the Lorr don't feel their smaller craft are in any way dangerous, Raspa having pointed

out to me that she knew of only two failures of the magnetic containment fields in the entire fifty thousand year span that they had been using anti-matter as the power supply for spaceships of this design! I of course mention this only because of what happened to our ship!

"One should always seek to improve one's self, for that way lies true civilization," Raspa answered me with a gentle wave of her antennae. The movement of the antennae in conversation being somewhat similar to our movement of our hands and arms when we talk. The saucer at the moment gently rising up a long shaft to the surface of Mars, the only sensation being that faint "tingly" feel that seems to be a side effect of the Lorr's anti-gravity drive. Raspa once explained how the system works, but I didn't really know any more after she got done than I did before I asked her! I am well educated by 20th Century standards, but the Lorr use technologies that Man hasn't hardly even dreamed about using!

"I'm rather surprised that you'd want to be alone with me, considering how 'violent' I am," I answered, remembering how that had been brought out the day before. Not that Raspa had anything to fear from me, since obviously I was totally dependent for life itself here on Mars upon the continuing "good will" of the Lorr!

"You are an intelligent being," Raspa answered, the saucer now rising just over the rim of the shaft and then moving across the surface of Mars, much to my pleasure and delight. My earlier arrival on this planet having been while in a state of unconsciousness where I had awoke on a bed with a young woman watching over me, the lighter gravity and the thinness of the air leaving no doubts that I was indeed now on or rather "inside" Mars!

"And attacking you would be a stupid act, wouldn't it?" I smiled back, enjoying this conversation considerably more than the one I had the day before with this very same creature.

"I am capable of 'defending' myself if attacked," Raspa assured me with a wave of her antennae. Below us the viewscreen showed rolling plains covered with low broad leaved green plants called "Life Plants" due to the oxygen they released into the atmosphere. The leaves are edible, being similar to that of a cabbage and also hold considerable water, which they extract both from the soil and from the thin atmosphere of the planet itself, making the plant both food and drink. They are a genetic construction of the Lorr designed for the purpose of "terraforming".

"You rather 'look' like you would be," I observed with a smile. Raspa had both her mandibles and the stings at the tips which released a paralyzing poison into the bloodstream of the one stung. I suspect that the Lorr long ago in their evolution were hunting meat-eating creatures not unlike Man, and they stung their prey and then dragged it back to their underground nests for later consumption. Due to the nature of their venom, one can be stung and remain conscious but helpless, and totally paralyzed. I once had a nightmare while on Mars about being stung and then dragged off into a dark cavern where I was then actually eaten by a number of Lorr. The nightmare such that I could "see" their mandibles tearing me apart, ripping me open, my flesh being then torn from my body until I could see my own bloody skeleton!

"Where did the comet strike?" I ventured, not knowing what Raspa's response to that would be. She was the one responsible for the "terraforming" of the surface of the planet, the Lorr due to their subterranean natures having little interest in the surface of a world. In my opinion the Lorr should have let themselves be known to Humanity back in the 19th Century when there would have been nothing that Mankind could have done to threaten them. Perhaps starting their terraforming operations about the time of the American Revolution, so that they might be able to present to Man a new clean world that might be shared. While the existence of the Lorr would have been a big jolt to Man's opinion of himself, especially to religious fundamentalists, I do believe that the Lorr made a very serious mistake in waiting until after Man first developed the capability of interplanetary spaceflight!

"The impacts covered one entire hemisphere," Raspa answered in what seemed level tones, although it was hard to tell given the means of communication that we used. The Lorr had sacrificed their larger starship, the one we once called Phobos, in a futile attempt to destroy the comet. The impact did shatter the comet, but the hundreds of fragments still struck the planet and did a great deal of damage, even with what defensive preparations the Lorr could make. What puzzled me, however, was why the Lorr had permitted the comet to come so close before making any attempt to destroy it, since the orbital change was made on its "in-swing" before it arced around the Sun and came back out aimed at Mars.* * A very small change in orbit was all that had been necessary to redirect the comet. NASA used somewhat the same means to send its own unmanned spacecraft out into the solar system. I understand how such things can be done, but they are difficult to explain without the understanding of space flight the Lorr possess.

Feeling that Raspa was in a "good mood", although it is hard to tell such things with creatures that have no facial expressions, the Lorr "face" being identical whether the creature is happy or furious at you, I ventured, "Raspa, why didn't the Lorr of the 21st Century stop that comet before it hit when you've must have seen how its orbit had changed?" The sudden agitation of her long whip-like antennae and the movement of her mandibles telling me that I had indeed struck a "SORE SPOT" with her now!

"We are not like you humans," Raspa answered in tones that even with the limitations of the communication devices spoke much of her emotional state, "We did not observe the comet because it was of little interest to us. It was only because of the Earth's own amateur astronomers that we learned that the orbit had been changed." Apparently the government of the World Federation hadn't been able to "muzzle" all the amateurs despite its best efforts, a few of which apparently "leaked out" the news to others less well equipped, and thus let the Lorr know what had happened!

"You humans have a 'curiosity' about things that is almost incomprehensible to the members of our own race, and it was this failing of ours which allowed your race to very nearly destroy us." Raspa then added after a second's pause for further thought.

"But you built STARSHIPS!" I answered her, confused by all this. "Your technology is thousands of years ahead of our own!"

"We did what we had to do," Raspa answered. "Watching your own sun turn into a red giant does encourage one to considerable effort," she added, turning her head slightly so that she might look at me. The viewscreen showing the planet dropping away beneath us as the soft hum of our anti-gravity drive increased, the awesome power of anti-matter lifting us high above Mars' surface.

"But your work in genetics? The 'terraforming' of Mars?" I protested, "That mind-scanning device of yours?" Obviously the Lorr had sometime back in their history done some pretty serious scientific research to develop all those things! I could see the curve of the planet now, the many indicators before Raspa telling me little of what was going on, as they were in an alien language that meant next to nothing to me. The Lorr use a base twelve mathematics which is difficult for us ten based humans to comprehend. Only our concept of time is similar as we both use a base twelve system, although the Lorr divide their "day" into twelve parts which can get a little confusing until you get used to it.

"Our 'Servitors' now do much of the scientific research," Raspa answered. "They possess much the same 'curiosity' that does your race on Earth. They are now our scientists, our research workers." I suddenly understood now that the relationship between the Lorr and the women that served them was one of mutual dependency with each performing those tasks for which evolution had best fitted them for! The woman of Mars being quite different in her outlook on life than her earthly counterpart. Viewing the woman of modern-day 26th Century Earth as little more than a savage and barbarian fit for only breeding

more of her own kind! They do consider themselves to be a different species than human, having much the same outlook towards those of Earth as the Lorr!* * This is not always the case, of course, especially with a few such as An'na and Aurora, who is sort of An'na's "foster" mother.

"This is one of the craters caused by the comet," Raspa said to me, indicating with her antennae a crater several miles across in the surface of Mars there below us, the disc swiftly descending from its near orbital flight around a quarter of the hemisphere of the planet. Once there had been water there at the bottom now carpeted over by the water-seeking "Life Plants", but liquid water does not remain long on Mars, since the atmospheric pressure is too low to allow water to remain a liquid for long. Most of the water from the comet is either locked up in the ice caps at the poles or remains buried deep in the crust of the planet. There are heavy frosts at night, when the temperature drops below freezing even in the summer months even at the equator itself. Mars is a cold, hostile world, not "friendly" like Earth.

"It was believed in my time that the extinction of many life forms on the Earth far in our past was caused by the crashing of asteroids or comets into the Earth," I commented, seeing the damage that had been done by Janet Roger's World Federation shortly after her death. In a way I felt responsible, for I had been the means by which Janet Rogers had made her start in life, and had it not been for me, there would have never been a World Federation capable of doing all the horrible things that it did here!

"The damage would have been considerably worse on your world due to your much thicker atmosphere and oceans," Raspa agreed. The fact that the Lorr lived far underground no doubt had helped too, although those living beneath the point of impact did not survive despite having a mile or more of planet over their heads! The disc now coming in for a landing near the edge of the crater.

"Must have been a big thing!" I commented, clasping my oxygen mask back over my face after speaking, puffing away at my oxygen there in the thin and almost worthless Martian atmosphere. The crater spreading over several miles, and going down nearly a thousand feet into the crust of the planet itself. A large crack nearby in the surface telling of the forces that had been involved. Raspa standing there regarding me, her antennae gently moving back and forth with an almost hypnotic motion. The sky overhead so incredibly deep blue that one could actually see the brighter stars and planets! I thought of Edgar Rice Burroughs' "Mars" books. Of John Carter, Dejah Thoris and all the rest. Of the reality of the Lorr, who were the true inhabitants of Mars!

Suddenly Raspa leaped towards me, my little speaker in my ear hearing her scream, "CONTAINMENT FAILURE!" The First Princess' great mandibles seizing me as she leaped with me over the edge of the crack behind me, crying, "COVER YOUR EYES!" The pair of us falling towards the sands far below as suddenly EVERYTHING TURNED BRILLIANTLY INCREDIBLY BLINDINGLY WHITE AS IF THE ENTIRE WORLD HAD SUDDENLY EXPLODED IN A THERMONUCLEAR BLAST!!! A SEARING HOT BURNING SENSATION GOING OVER ME AS IT FELT AS IF THE SURFACE OF THE SUN WAS JUST OVERHEAD! THE ANTI-MATTER PELLET THAT HAD PROVIDED OUR DISC WITH ITS POWER HAD COME IN CONTACT WITH "NORMAL" MATTER AND HAD JUST EXPLODED WITH AN INCREDIBLE FORCE!

Chapter Thirty Four

I felt myself "CRASH" into the bottom of the crack after a tumbling fall of perhaps a hundred feet down

the very side of the crack in the surface of Mars, only the "lighter" gravity of Mars saving my life! My right ankle snapping at the impact, my body flung so hard against the rocks at the bottom that several of my ribs were cracked, the horrible sensation of feeling my own bones snapping something that will remain with me the rest of my life! The first thought going through my confused mind was "I'm ALIVE!" The second being "I'm BLIND!" as I could see nothing but the after-effects of the terrible blast that had destroyed our disc and left us marooned here on the hostile surface of Mars! A fine dust settling down like mist around me as I whimpered with the pain of my injuries, my every gasp sending a sharp pain through my chest. Thankful as vision slowly returned to my dazzled eyes.

"Raspa!" I whimpered, calling out into the blinding dust! My oxygen mask having been torn from my face by the fall. I did not for a moment realize that the air of Mars was unbreathable, that I would in a matter of only a few minutes be rendered unconscious by its lack of oxygen. I was only aware of gasping, of the fact that no matter how hard I breathed there didn't seem to be any air coming into my panting lungs! Then I remembered the oxygen mask and clasping it again to my face, breathed in the blessed richness of the pure oxygen drawn from the cylinder at my hip. The life-giving oxygen being stored as a liquid inside much like coffee is kept hot there inside a thermos bottle. The contents of the cylinder good for no more than twelve hours, the thought went through my mind just then, recalling what I had been told by the woman who had filled the tank for me this morning! I required about two cubic feet of oxygen an hour, and the tank held just a hair over twenty five when it was completely filled!

The system was a "re-breather" type where the carbon dioxide of my breath was removed and replaced by fresh oxygen. Similar devices have been used on Earth in the past by divers and by the astronauts of the 20th Century. That used by humans on Mars is similar in design, although perhaps more perfected in operation.

The current atmosphere of Mars is 35% oxygen, 62% carbon dioxide, with the rest inert gases. It is not breathable by human beings, but can be breathed by the Lorr and by various slow moving Earth reptiles who require less oxygen than warm blooded forms of life. The pressure at the surface is approximately 1.45 PSI. Your own blood will boil if exposed to the atmosphere, but otherwise surprisingly enough human beings can survive on the surface of Mars as long as they can breathe pure oxygen. I do not say that you will be "comfortable" doing it, for I never was, the slightest movement leaving me gasping for breath, but those who were born on the planet seem to be able to function fairly well under such conditions, the woman of Mars having different lungs and blood than a woman of Earth, her figure also being somewhat different, the chest being slightly larger while the legs and buttocks are slimmer due to the differences in gravity.

My only concern at the moment, however, was finding Raspa there in the dust as it slowly settled around me, the thought going through my mind that if the explosion had released any radioactivity I was a dead woman for sure! I understand that the explosion released a force of about three and a half kilotons, or about one sixth of the energy released by the first atomic bombs! Fortunately most of the "energy release" went straight up into Mars' atmosphere, or neither Raspa or I would have survived it!

"Raspa!" I gasped, seeing the giant ant-like alien shaking the dust from herself, her left forelimb obviously broken from the way she held it, standing there on five legs before me. She at least was still able to get about, which was more than I could say for myself, there being little doubt in my mind that my own right ankle was broken or badly sprained from the agony that shot up my leg if I even attempted to put the slightest weight on it. The pain in my chest with every breath I took telling of cracked or broken ribs! Only the lighter gravity of Mars permitting me to stand up at all as I hopped over to her on one foot as best I could! The motion of her antennae and the movement of her mandibles telling of her agitation as she reached up with her good forelimb to tap at the side of her head, her motions for a moment puzzling me before I understood what she wanted! My little radio receiver having fallen off there in the fall! While

she could still of course understand my speech, there was no way I could receive her radio speech without the little device now hopelessly buried in the dust! HOW COULD I COMMUNICATE WITH RASPA NOW???

I shivered with terror despite the fact that I was sweating beneath the close-fitting jumpsuit worn by the women of Mars, the material from which it was made adjusting for the outside temperature, the fibers swelling and contracting as needed. There were of course limits to what it could do, but that was the least of our problems just then, as my oxygen would run out in less than a dozen hours and we were, so far as I knew, without any means of obtaining help unless the explosion of our disc had been noted!

Suddenly Raspa pushed me back against the rocks, covering me with her own dust-covered form as I faintly heard the soft hum of a Lorr saucer! The movement of Raspa's whip-like antennae and the motions of her great mandibles indicating that she sensed that something was seriously wrong! The thought going through my mind just then that our own craft must have been somehow sabotaged on purpose! Someone had wanted us both DEAD! Only Raspa's strange ESP sense having saved us from death as I later learned!

Then I saw the craft as it flew overhead, fortunately far enough above us that we were concealed from its detection devices there among the rocks, the slowly settling dust no doubt effecting its sensory scanning devices and saving us both from instant death! The thought going unbidden through my mind of what it must have been like for those ants I had burned to death with a magnifying glass as a child, the same horrible fate now awaiting both of us if the silvery craft floating far over our heads happened to spot us down here in the crack with its radar or infrared scanner! The bulk of Raspa's body no doubt looking much like a rock from the height that the saucer was flying, my own figure being concealed by Raspa's. Her form also serving to conceal my own infrared "signature", the Lorr unlike Men being well insulated by their exoskeletons, their biological cooling systems being based upon their own respiration instead of sweating as we do.

"Raspa!" I breathed, clinging to her, then suddenly OUR MINDS WERE ONE! MERGED!!! I felt her fear, the pain of her broken forelimb, the emotions going through her! No longer did I see from my own eyes, but from Raspa's! The world around us utterly different as seen in Raspa's vision, which ranges down into the infrared where humans cannot see! The sky above almost black, the terrain different shades of brightness according to its own temperatures, the "coloring" different from what my own eyes saw. And The Lorr Radio-Radar Sense! How can I describe that! Awareness of one's surroundings in a way almost like ESP! Then her own amazing ESP sense that had saved our lives! The hatred burning there inside the disc now floating over the great crater as Raspa reached out to touch the mind of the other! The feeling of "satisfaction" that we had both been instantly killed!

I understood too how "unique" Raspa was even among her own kind, that she had kept these powers her own personal secret for fear that others would not understand. That she had an almost "human" curiosity about things that was quite unlike most of her race. Her inherent "goodness" washing over me, calming my fears. Yet only half concealed in the background of her mind the awareness that there was no possibility that I would be able to travel with her to the nearest human inhabitation, which was over a hundred miles away before my oxygen ran out and I helplessly suffocated in the unbreathable thin and almost worthless atmosphere of Mars! I saw her mind at work, that awesome mind far more powerful than my own. Saw her considering and rejecting concepts, ideas, until there was but one hope left for me! And that she wasn't all that sure about either! SHE WOULD HAVE TO STING ME!

The Lorr possess, as I have mentioned, the ability to inject a paralyzing venom into their victims, such venom having served perhaps at one time to preserve their victims in a state of near suspended animation until they could be consumed. Raspa was well aware of my emotional responses as our minds together

shared the thought. Of the visions that were generated in my own mind of helpless yet still living conscious victims being consumed alive by swarming Lorr! Visions so strong that I sensed Raspa's own shame that her race had once done such things thousands and thousands of years ago when they were but primitive hunting creatures that swarmed out from their underground nests in search of prey!

Yet I understood that only by her putting me into a state of near suspended animation could I survive long enough for her to go get help. For her to return with help for me. It would take her perhaps sixteen to twenty hours to reach the nearest human settlement, the nearest cavern of the Lorr being much further away yet, several hundred miles. Imposed in her thoughts a map of this portion of Mars, of lines, spots, circles, our own location clearly marked, with the nearest human settlement marked with a seemingly glowing spot. I would have to put my trust in her. I knew that it would not be an easy trip for her. That the atmosphere of Mars was barely breathable even for her compound lungs, and to travel that far across the surface of Mars, especially with a broken forelimb, would take a terrible toll on her!

It took me some time to dig the hole in the sand where I would be "stored" while Raspa went for help. Raspa helping me as she could, although her digging abilities were considerably impaired by her broken left forelimb, the Lorr using their forelimbs as we use our arms, the middle and hind legs being used for transportation and were rather useless as digging tools. Raspa had told me that such efforts were necessary for me to survive the night time cold, the temperature at night, even here on the equator of Mars, falling to well below freezing, equaling temperatures found on Earth in the more frigid portions of the planet! Due to the thinness of the Martian atmosphere you do not lose heat as swiftly, but the long term effects are the same, and it would be necessary to bury me in the sand for my survival. Otherwise it was quite possible that during the night time hours that I would suffer such a loss of body temperature that I would actually freeze to death over night despite the best efforts of the temperature adjusting attire that I wore!

"I hope I'm not digging my own grave," I said to Raspa as she stood there watching, it having taken a great of effort on her part to maintain a link with my own mind, such communications being quite mentally exhausting for her, although having once shared her thoughts, I no longer "saw" her as the horrid monster I had first thought her to be. The task took some time, since I became exhausted quite rapidly due to the lack of "oxygen pressure" caused by the extreme thinness of the Martian atmosphere, which exhausted me as much as if I had been working on Earth at a height of 20,000 feet without oxygen! While those born and raised on Mars can for example breathe fairly well even on the top of Mount Everest without oxygen, such abilities weren't mine!

Raspa shook her head in the negative and waved her antennae at me, then moving forward to gently brush my face with the tips of her antennae, which is a sign of extreme affection among the Lorr. Once again for a moment she mind-linked with me, letting me know that she would come back for me. For me to "trust" her.

Finally the "grave" was finished and I laid down in it, pulling the sand back over myself, Raspa kicking it back in as best she could until I was completely covered with only my head and neck now sticking out of the sand. Briefly Raspa brushed my face once again with the tips of her antennae, and then extending her mandibles, I saw the stings suddenly extending at their tips!

It was quick when it came, a sudden burning piercing pain on both sides of my neck, then a cold numbness that seemed to flow through my body as the Lorr venom entered into my bloodstream! I once again briefly shared my thoughts with Raspa, who was carefully monitoring the amount of venom she was releasing, as too much would have been fatal to me, and too little would wear off before she could return for me! Then she withdrew from me, stepping back a pace, and briefly regarding me for a moment, Raspa then set off on her long hundred plus mile trek to obtain help! Leaving me lying there paralyzed

buried to my neck in the ground!

Chapter Thirty Five

I hesitate to write much of this chapter for I know that the reader will never believe me. That he or she will say with good justification that what I experienced that night on Mars was only a very vivid hallucination caused by the side-effects of Lorr venom upon my mind and the lack of oxygen. That would be my own answer had someone told me the tale I am about to relate to you! I have never believed in the Christian Bible as anything more than a collection of Jewish folklore, and while I suspected that there was "more" to the Priestesses of Lys than what first appeared when Janis told me about them, I never even suspected the TRUTH! I often wonder if such TRUTHS are not meant to be understood by the finite minds of mortals, be they human or alien like those of the Lorr. I am myself still a bit confused over what I experienced that night on Mars, although Tais, who is First among the Priestesses of Lys says that what I experienced has been experienced by others. In this case at least there was no Lorr "trickery" involved to make primitive humans "behave themselves". What I saw, what I experienced for myself that night will always remain burned into my memories as doubtlessly they also remained burned into Raspa's! Who like me finds it hard yet to believe!!! THAT "GOD", "LYS", "SHE-IT-ALL", ACTUALLY CAME AND TALKED TO US!!

I had never felt so "ALONE" in my entire life as I watched Raspa disappear from my field of vision, the venom she had injected into me putting me into a near state of suspended animation where I could not move a muscle or do more than just slowly breathe, my respiratory rate having been "slowed" to perhaps a third of its original rate. There was no pain, no discomfort, nor for that matter any feeling of sensation at all! A synthetic version of Lorr venom is now used on Earth as a general anesthetic, I might mention here. It is quite superior to what was used back in my own era, and leaves less side effects after its use, although it is like the actual venom itself quite dangerous and in large enough doses, quite fatal to anyone injected with it!

There were scattered here and there a few of the "Life Plants" that grow everywhere on Mars except at the poles. Living on the water and carbon dioxide that they draw from the atmosphere, using the weak rays of the Sun for energy. Mars does have somewhat of an atmosphere similar to that of the Earth in that it will burn up small meteors and stop the more dangerous rays of the Sun from reaching the surface, although you can get very badly sunburned on Mars without realizing it, the ionosphere being considerably thinner than that of the Earth due to the lack of oxygen. It is because of the plants that Earth has an atmosphere that supports life as we know it. In perhaps another thirty to fifty years Mars will be suitable for life once again as it once was long ago in its history before its lighter gravity allowed too much of its original atmosphere to leak away into space. Already its surface gives life to numerous Earth plants, both natural and those modified by the Lorr to be more suitable for the severe conditions found there on the surface of Mars. The thinness of the atmosphere, the bitter cold at night, the heat of the day, all make it hard for life to survive upon the hostile surface of Mars. Mars having temperatures that range from about 80F during the summer time at the equator down to temperatures that get so bitterly cold at the polar caps that carbon dioxide sometimes actually freezes out of the air into solid dry ice! It is an excellent world for those with a "pioneering spirit", but at the same time it is not a world for the careless, for death comes quickly to those who foolishly fail to take the proper precautions with their life-support equipment! That is why no one ever goes strolling off by herself without a companion, the "buddy" system being the only way that you can survive for long on Mars!

I am told that if you find a deep enough crater carpeted with Life Plants that given "Mars Lungs" that you can survive until help arrives. Only the Lorr and certain Earth reptiles are able to walk the surface of Mars without having to carry oxygen. The Lorr because of their unique "compound lungs" like natural air compressors, and the reptiles because of their lower oxygen requirements as compared to warm blooded forms of life. The tortoises that you see on Mars burrow beneath the surface of the planet at night to survive, coming out only during the daylight hours when they nibble at the Life Plants for food and water as do the smaller little scaly creatures that you see from time to time leaping from one place to another in Mars' lighter gravity.

There was little that I could do but lie there buried in the sand and think. Think about what had happened. Worry about if Raspa would make it back in time. Wonder about if I would ever see Sharon again. I missed Darlanis. I had few friends here. I once again thought of how much "An'na" resembled Darlanis. About the woman Aurora, one of Raspa's own "Servitors" who seemed to have considerable "authority" here on Mars. What about the Priestesses of Lys? What "role" did they actually serve in this?

It grew dark, the sun sinking down in that incredibly deep blue Martian sky until it dipped beneath the edge of the crack. I hated to see darkness come, although Mars has no dangerous life forms and the only danger was of freezing to death in the night. I saw Jupiter in the sky, brighter than what you see it from the Earth, and in the west a large bright object like Venus seen from the Earth with another dimmer object just by it. Earth and the Moon! I felt homesick for my world, dangerous as it might be with its hostile people, its dangerous animal life, its barbaric civilizations almost constantly at war with each other. We were, as Raspa had once said, a bunch of barbarians, uncultured savages who delighted in mortal battle. Creatures incapable of selfgovernment. Yet we possessed a "curiosity" about our surroundings that the Lorr did not possess. They were a "stagnant" race content to live on as their ancestors did thousands of years ago.

It was dark now, night, the rocks around me only dim shadows in the darkness. Mars has no big Moon to light the night, only the various planets and stars with Earth the most beautiful. The stars however are a glorious sight unknown to those of Earth! The thinness of the atmosphere making them incredibly brilliant points of light that stare untwinkingly down at you from that utterly black vault of a sky. I thought I could almost see Jupiter's four major moons, but my vision wasn't quite that good! I saw the Earth-Moon double star set below my horizon, Venus now long gone, with Saturn now also glowing down upon me from above. Uranus is a "naked eye" planet from Mars, although you have to know where to look. Binoculars help a lot too, especially those big 10x60's that are commonly used on Mars by its lovely women.

As time passed I could see the beginning of frost on the rocks around me, the Lorr venom in my blood preventing me from feeling the cold or anything else. Raspa had warned me that I might suffer from hallucinations. That the venom would effect my mind to a certain extent. That was why when I first saw HER standing there before me that I thought it was only a figment of my imagination! Something caused by the Lorr venom in my blood!

SHE was tall, golden, incredibly beautiful, so BEAUTIFUL that even Darlanis would have looked "plain" beside HER. A long white Grecian type gown hung beautifully from HER body. I knew I was seeing but an hallucination as no human woman could walk the freezing night time surface of Mars so clad! And without a oxygen mask no human could live more than minutes upon its surface! As SHE had neither, I knew SHE was but a figment of my imagination caused by the effects of the venom that Raspa had injected into my neck. I did not believe what I saw standing before me.

"You do not believe what you see?" SHE said to me, giving me a warm friendly smile. As I could not speak or even nod, I merely regarded HER, puzzled by how clearly I could see HER considering how

dark it was. Obviously one went on a real "trip" with a dose of Lorr venom in your bloodstream! A great hallucinogen!

Giving me a smile, SHE extended a hand to me, and suddenly I was standing there beside HER, with my body still buried up to my neck there in the ground before me! Wow! Was I ever hallucinating now as I looked at myself! My own attire some sort of shimmering material totally unsuitable for bitter chill of the night! Yet, I could breathe perfectly well despite the lack of an oxygen mask! The thought going through my mind that in Edgar Rice Burroughs' "A PRINCESS OF MARS" the hero, John Carter, was separated from his body much like I had just been just before being transmitted to the planet Mars where all his adventures took place. The reality of course being that he would have died in a few minutes here on Mars gasping for breath, the atmosphere at the time Mr. Burroughs' wrote his book having been even thinner than it is now before the Lorr started "terraforming" their planet!

"You don't believe, do you?" SHE said to me. I told HER I didn't, quite surprised to find that I could talk now! Obviously this was all some "dream" that I was having thanks to the venom!

Turning to me, SHE extended HER hands to me, and as I clasped them in mine, SUDDENLY WE WERE MIND-LINKED! HER POWER SO GREAT THAT RASPA'S OWN MIND WAS NOTHING MORE THAN A LITTLE TINY CANDLE COMPARED TO AN ENTIRE UNIVERSE OF BLAZING SUPER-NOVAS!!!

"I didn't know," I whimpered, going to my knees before HER. I had never really believed SHE existed! I had always thought SHE was just something people had "invented" so that they could live off of other people! I KNELT IN THE AUGUST PRESENCE OF SHE WHO WAS QUEEN OF EVERYTHING! SHE WHO HAD LIVED BEFORE TIME, WHO WAS ETERNAL, EVERLASTING! SHE WHO WAS EVERYWHERE, EVERYPLACE!

"You're GOD!" I gasped, seeing HER smile. I had always thought of GOD as being an old man, but that is just Jewish folklore. SHE is without form or shape. We make HER in our own image and likeness. Raspa saw HER as a Lorr. I saw HER as a very beautiful woman. Others have seen HER differently. SHE is a sixth dimensional Being, to whom Time and Space mean nothing. SHE can cross the billions of light years of the Universe in less time than light itself would cross the diameter of the smallest of atomic particles. Her intelligence is that of all the intelligent races of the Universe combined. She is LYS, GOD, JEHOVAH, ALLAH, MAZDA, MITHRA, ZEUS, SHE-IT-ALL. Her names are beyond numbering. SHE is LIFE, INTELLIGENCE, TRUTH, GOOD, the INFINITE.

"I have been called that among other things," SHE admitted with a smile. "Currently I am generally referred to as 'LYS' by the people of your world thanks to the Priestesses who follow my teachings as best they can." I wondered if SHE even had a Name?

"Have you ever appeared to others?" I breathed, thinking, remembering the teachings of my childhood. SHE nodded, smiling. Once SHE had mind-linked with the son of a Jewish carpenter. He had tried to tell everyone what he had learned from HER, but they crucified him, not understanding such truths. Another time SHE had spoken to a man in Asia, but he had not understood HER. What SHE wished him to do. The son of the Jewish carpenter had done the best job so far of any SHE had spoken to directly, although SHE was more delighted with the efforts of the Priestesses of Lys and what they had done for the human race. Saying that they did not exploit the people like others had done in HER name for their own gain. Or tell lies about HER as others had done in the past! I understood now why the Priestesses of Lys were the only legal religion left on Earth. Why Christianity had been "stamped out"! SHE told me without words why in HER eyes it had finally become only an instrument of THE EVIL ONE who delighted in doing things against HER teachings, who fought HER for every SOUL that yearned towards

UNITY with HER! I felt that same yearning, the urge to be Held in HER arms, to "lose" my own Self in HER utter Goodness!

"Raspa is dying," SHE suddenly said to me, there being an instant of "blurring" and then SHE and I stood there on the sands of Mars looking down at the giant ant lying there on its side, Raspa feebly extending her antennae towards SHE. I saw SHE touch the tips of Raspa's long whip-like antennae, and then I was MIND-LINKED with Raspa! I sensed Raspa's thoughts, saw SHE as Raspa saw her, as a Lorr, but different in shape from that of a Lorr Princess, the abdomen being larger, different, that of a Lorr whose life is dedicated to reproducing more of her own kind!

Then there was a soft warm glow that seemed to surround Raspa, and I saw Raspa get to her feet, her broken forelimb instantly healed, her damaged ruined dying heart repaired, for Raspa had overstrained her heart in the thin atmosphere of Mars by running too fast, too long for even her lungs to supply her body with enough oxygen! I shared with Raspa that feeling of yearning, of love for SHE-IT-ALL as the Lorr refer to HER as. SHE standing there, watching us both, glowing in the darkness, the chill sands of Mars untouched by HER feet. To me SHE appeared as an incredibly beautiful woman, but to Raspa SHE was a beautiful Lorr Queen.

"It is best," SHE said to us, "That you continue on as you have." I understood the questions that would be asked were SHE to teleport us both to safety so easily. I understood why SHE did not interfere in the affairs of Men even when THE EVIL ONE did so. I understood why SHE, with her awesome powers, permitted THE EVIL ONE to exist when she could have with a mere thought snuffed THE EVIL ONE out of existence for good! That we, humans, Lorr, all forms of intelligent life everywhere in the Universe, had to seek for ourselves the TRUTH. That only after reincarnation after reincarnation would we develop the PURITY of soul necessary to merge and become part of HER. To lose our "SELF's" in HER and become part of what SHE is. PURE INFINITE PERFECT GOOD!! With this suddenly there was a "blurring" and once again I found myself there buried in the sand, with only my fevered thoughts for a companion! I knew too that when I returned to Earth there was a woman, a tall golden haired woman, with whom I would have to speak. With whom I would MIND-LINK so that she too would see, understand. Tais, First Priestess among the Priestesses of Lys, would be waiting for me when I was returned to the Earth. SHE had promised me that much. As SHE knew neither time or space, I had no doubt that what she had told me would soon come to pass!

Now you are probably thinking at this point, assuming that you haven't merely thrown my story down in disgust, that if I had indeed spoken with LYS, GOD, SHE-IT-ALL, that I should have some stunningly important information for the human race. That Raspa should have the same for her own kind. That we both should be sitting down writing out "Bibles" for our respective races to follow! Telling everyone how they should live so that they won't have to go through so many incarnations to "purify" themselves before they can "merge" their souls with HER! Sorry, the information I received wasn't of that nature at all, but instead was partly in the nature of a "warning" that I was to give to First Priestess Tais. The warning, "BEWARE 'THE QUEEN OF DARKNESS'" meant little to me then, although I "suspect" what it meant now!

On the other hand Raspa believes that our mutual experiences were merely the result of a lack of oxygen, stress, the effects upon me of her own venom, etc! I do know, however, that Raspa suffered a broken left forelimb in the fall, and later on she had six perfect limbs when she reached the little farming community the next afternoon! I had cracked ribs, a broken or badly sprained ankle, but yet when Raspa and the others came for me, I was perfectly sound, without any sign of injury at all. Not a single bruise anywhere on me! HOW DO YOU EXPLAIN THOSE "FACTS"?

And what great "Universe-shaking" information did SHE give ME? No secrets of how to build space

ships that could travel faster than the velocity of light. No great scientific secrets. Nothing but the words as once spoken by another 2500 years ago. "DO ONTO OTHERS AS YOU WOULD WISH OTHERS TO DO ONTO YOU." That was the great "secret" that SHE gave me. That I now give to you.

Chapter Thirty Six

I awoke with the rising of the Sun there in the east, the bright glow there on the horizon behind me reflecting off the rocks and sand there in front of me. The events of the night now only like a dream. I had no doubt that it had all been but just an hallucination, for the sand before me was completely unmarked. Doubtlessly Raspa had been right when she had told me that her paralyzing venom might cause such things. It would be something to share with her when she came back for me as I was sure that she would. I trusted her even if we were of a different species.

Yet even so my memories were so vivid, so vivid that I almost believed that they could have been real! That I could have walked, spoke with SHE who I had once worshiped as a child before the harsh realities of 20th Century Science taught me that such ideas were nothing but superstition and ignorance designed by dishonest men to deceive the gullible and separate them from their hard earned money. That such ideas were not for an intelligent person like me to believe in. Yet, I had put people under deep hypnosis and had them tell me things that seemed hard to believe unless there was "life beyond the grave". Others who had been "brought back from the dead" who recounted their experiences of seeing brilliant light, of actually seeing their "Savior". As a medical student, I had encountered such things, but had put them off as being nothing more than the hallucinations of overstressed minds. Now I wondered at what they had seen? SHE had told me that SHE appeared as what we wished HER to appear. Raspa had seen HER as a Lorr Queen. I had seen HER as a beautiful blonde haired woman, one so beautiful that it took my breath away to look upon HER. Others would no doubt see HER as "Jesus" according to their own beliefs. SHE is neither male or female, but as SHE is a protector of life, I consider HER as being "female". The Priestesses of Lys, who have studied this subject closely for centuries, possessing Janet Rogers' awesome secret of electronic hypnosis, consider HER to be "feminine". That is good enough for me. Especially since I saw HER as a woman, and Raspa saw her as a Lorr Queen, both of us seeing HER as the "feminine principle".

I watched the frost melt slowly off the rocks, the thought going through my mind that given enough water, Mars could be made into a lovely fresh clean world for a "new" species of "Man", one that would no longer know what "war" meant, for the women of Mars have no interest in "conflict" as we of Earth yet know it. Yet I find them in a way almost like children, displaying affection towards one another in hugs and kisses that to a woman yet of Earth sometimes seem "disturbing". There are of course no men, reproduction being done by a technology somewhat similar to "cloning", but allowing for the correction of any genetic faults. The Lorr having used the same system on themselves now for tens of thousands of years, the males of the species being totally extinct.

I doubt that the Lorr will ever allow men on Mars, for they feel that the male of the human species is too violent to be trusted. Perhaps they are right, as men tend to be more "aggressive" as a rule than women, who tend more to only fight in selfdefense against an attacker. There are exceptions, of course, my own Caste being one, but as a rule women are less "aggressive" than men. That is why all the human inhabitants of Mars are women. Their numbers being now about thirteen million, as compared to the eight million of the Lorr that live out their lives for the most part beneath the surface of the planet. The light of

the Sun, even at the distance Mars is from it, yet bothers them to a certain degree. They are creatures of darkness, and prefer their own dimly lit caverns much like the ants that they resemble so much both in their appearance and in their own mannerisms.

I watched the light from the Sun come creeping down the side of the crack in the surface of Mars that I laid within, wondering to myself how much oxygen remained in the cylinder there at my hip buried beneath the sand. True, my respiratory rate was far slower than normal, but even so the supply would be exhausted by the time the Sun once again set, only the slowing of my metabolic rate by Raspa's venom having allowed me to live even this long! I also worried how long the internal cylinder in the breathing bag there on my chest would continue to remove the carbon dioxide from my breath, the design also now being used with a small air compressor to draw the Martian atmosphere into the breathing bag where it was purified of its carbon dioxide so that the wearer of the device breathed pure oxygen despite the fact that the atmosphere of Mars is almost two thirds carbon dioxide. The present plans being to eventually raise the atmospheric pressure to about two PSI with an oxygen content of about 90%, making it thus suitable for human life upon the surface without the need for carrying about oxygen cylinders or wearing a compressor device filtering out the CO₂. Thus equaling the atmosphere already found in the Lorr caverns a mile or so beneath the surface of the planet.

There will eventually be Earth mammals on Mars, although no birds or flying insects, as the atmosphere will always be far too thin for any winged form of life. I am told however, that reptiles are more efficient as they consume less food for their body weight than mammals, and thus most Martian life will be reptilian. The ecology of Mars having been carefully studied as to what will be most satisfactory in the long run. The Lorr and their lovely human companions are in no hurry to "get things done" and I suspect that there will never be the "pollution" or other ecological disasters that overtook Man on his own world. I should also mention here that neither the Lorr or the women of Mars have any interest in overpopulating the planet they share, which is why their own numbers by Earthly standards are so low!

It is interesting in this context to note that one of the things SHE does object to is thoughtless, careless irresponsible reproduction. As many of the religions of my own era were opposed to the use of contraception or abortion, it is perhaps interesting to note here that what they taught was actually against HER own teachings! It is interesting to note, of course, that the Priestesses of Lys do the exact opposite of the "Christian" religions of the past, which is further indication of the fact that the Priestesses of Lys may very well know something of the TRUTH! That they might very well actually speak for SHE! It is also interesting to note here that the religious beliefs of the Lorr so far as I can determine indicate a viewpoint much like that of the Priestesses of Lys. Had the Lorr taken more of an "interest" in Mankind it is quite likely that The War never would have taken place as with their guidance we never would have done all the stupid things that we did. On the other hand we would have always remained "children" watched over and guided by the Lorr, and who knows what we would have turned out like? Would we have developed civilization, technology, or would we have remained simple peasants living out our lives in superstition and ignorance? And worshiping the Lorr as our "gods". One wonders?

Now the Sun shone down directly upon me, its heat just barely sensible to me, which indicated that Raspa's venom was starting to wear off just a bit, which also worried me considerably! Had she erred on the side of too little? Perhaps my own metabolic rate was different than that of a Martian? I was a woman of Earth, not Mars. My own biological processes might be different!

It was then that the saucer came, silent but for that faint hum of its anti-gravity drive, the disc stopping and then landing on the edge of the crack, a woman descending on a rope towards me while I saw a Lorr standing above watching, its great compound eyes seeming to glow into mine. Raspa had come back for me!

Chapter Thirty Seven

"Well, you don't seem any worse for wear, although I'd like to keep you overnight just to make sure," the doctor told me, her smile assuring me that there was nothing seriously wrong with me. Raspa nodding, An'na there at her side with Aurora. The First Princess of the Lorr was now a friend, not the horrid monster she had first appeared to me. I wondered if all I had passed through had been merely an illusion or reality? I had no broken bones, nor for that matter even any bruises, which had puzzled the doctor quite a bit considering the distance that we had fallen! Raspa too was in perfect health, which was surprising considering how far she had come across the surface of Mars so swiftly, the doctor having told me that I was lucky as few Lorr could have traveled so far so fast without dying in the attempt! Raspa having actually covered a distance of a hundred and seventeen miles from the site of our saucer's destruction to where she had found a small human settlement where she might obtain assistance in a period of little over eighteen hours! True, the lighter gravity of Mars had helped, but I suspected that the real TRUTH was not something that the doctor would have believed!

"Raspa," I said, reaching out to her a few minutes later, the others having left. Taking her antennae in my hands, such being a sign of trust among the Lorr. "Did we see last night what we thought?" I had asked her that when I had been brought aboard the saucer to be brought back to this underground Lorr "city". At the time she had been rather non-believing about the matter, merely saying that Lorr venom does strange things to people as does lack of oxygen to a Lorr's brain, the atmosphere of Mars being uncomfortably low in oxygen even to the Lorr. I felt her antennae gently caress my face, then suddenly we were once again MIND-LINKED! Once again I saw through her eyes, saw myself as I appeared to her, the colors all different and strange, saw how she saw, heard what she heard, sensed the small room we were in not with vision, but now by her own fantastic radar-sense!

Once again I saw what she had seen, the figure of myself and next to me the form of a Lorr Queen, and she saw what I saw, the form of a woman so beautiful it took your breath away! I sensed her thoughts, and she mine. We were now one! Two individuals, alien to each other, but yet one! I sensed also her concern that others of her race might consider her unfit to continue as their First Princess, that her own sanity might be considered doubtful!

"I suggest," Raspa said to me, breaking the mind-link, "That we each have 'much' to think about." And with this she left me, then going out the door which closed with a soft hum behind her.

I awoke from sleep to the sound of the door humming closed behind someone, and saw there in the dim light a Lorr, a strange Lorr! Saw its antennae suddenly lay back, such being a sign of anger and hatred among the Lorr, THE CREATURE THEN LEAPING UPON ME!!! "DIE!" I heard in my little earphone, its great mandibles now seeking the softness, the vulnerability of my tender throat!

"HELP!" I screamed, fighting to keep those terrible mandibles from my throat there in the darkness, the weight of the six legged giant ant holding me down as I struggled futilely against this nightmarish horror. A Lorr is stronger than any man, being able to lift somewhat over a quarter of a ton for a short period. They can drag off things weighing half a ton or more. Their muscle structure is different than ours. They have strange abilities, physical capabilities that us mere humans do not possess.

I rolled out of the bed, caught in the sheets, the blankets, its forelimbs tearing, ripping at my flesh, my blood running from my wounds, my only thought in my agony to keep those terrible mandibles from my throat, the awful stings already visibly extended! This must be, I knew, the one who had sought our deaths! The one who had sabotaged our disc and caused the containment failure that resulted in the explosion of our craft from its anti-matter fuel. Now she had returned, determined to slay! To kill! To inject into me a lethal dose of her venom! Venom enough to paralyze and kill me in only a few minutes! The fight a nightmare that will remain burned in my memory for all time!

Agony coursed through my naked body as her hind and middle legs tore at me, the claws ripping through the bed covers half covering me. I felt the flesh rip there in my thigh as I drew up my knees and tried to throw the giant ant off me. My body arching up beneath it as I tried a judo toss to no avail, the Lorr clinging to me with its six legs in an unbreakable hold. I am of the Warrioreses, but this was no human foe, but an alien monster whose ancestors had been bred beneath a different sun than ours. Bred by evolution to hunt and kill creatures like me. It was only later on in their evolution that they began using the humanoid creatures of their world to serve their needs instead of merely hunting them for food. The Lorr, like Man, is a predatory creature with a bloody past. It was bred to hunt, and to fight. Like Man it became ruler of its own world, master of the beasts.

Then suddenly my hand slipped and I felt its sting enter my neck, felt the poison of its venom flow into my bloodstream as its venom glands emptied themselves, the venom from the other sting spraying harmlessly against my face and neck as I held it clear! A few droplets of it stinging my eye as it sprayed out!

"HEY! WHAT ARE YOU DOING!" I heard the nurse on duty scream, the Lorr suddenly leaping free of me, and with one motion, its mandibles spreading wide, seizing her! Her scream cut short as it ripped out her throat with a clawed forelimb, the blood spurting out over its great black head as it killed her! I watched it then turn, look back at me for a moment in seeming triumph as it stood over the body of the innocent woman it had just killed, and then it was gone! The venom coursing through my body as I fought against the poison now running cold in my veins! The paralysis from the venom already starting as I crawled towards the door, leaving a trail of blood behind me from my torn flesh, everything seeming to swim before me as I started to lose consciousness. The sound of yells, of tossing bodies there outside in the hallway. Confused sounds like that of a fight! Then something like a shot registering in my consciousness just before I passed out there a foot or so away from the bloody torn dead body of the nurse who had been unlucky enough to be in the wrong place at the wrong time! Her lovely blue eyes now glazing in death still wide in horror from the sudden attack by the Lorr as her golden hair laid matted and bloody in the pool of blood that still oozed slowly from her torn throat and stained her lovely form fitting white uniform! I was unconscious by the time that Raspa and An'na found me lying there in a puddle of blood beside the nurse. The puncture wound on my neck proof of what had happened to me, as was the Lorr venom still wet there on the side of my neck where it had been sprayed harmlessly by her other sting!

"You were lucky, very lucky," An'na said to me, sitting at my bedside, Raspa standing at her side, her antennae gently swaying back and forth, one now splinted from having been broken in the fight with my attacker. I recalled the nurse, how swiftly she had been killed and shuddered at the thought. I now understood why it was said that no man could ever stand against a Lorr. Against a creature that is as strong as a lion or tiger of Earth. While they do not have the "endurance" of such creatures, the Lorr do possess amazing strength, being able to draw upon powers that can be developed in humans only under very unusual circumstances. On Earth they move slowly, our gravity uncomfortable to them, but don't deceive yourself that they can't move quickly if they really want to, even under our gravity! True, their endurance is short, but they can kill you in a few seconds, and that's all the time it took Sisa, the insane Lorr who attacked me, to kill the night duty nurse right there before me!

"I 'sensed' danger," Raspa said, speaking with her antennae close to me so that others would not overhear. I remembered how her ESP powers had saved our lives before. An'na had shot the insane Sisa with a blaster pistol, a Lorr weapon that fires explosive bullets when the creature had attacked Raspa, its bloody head and behavior leaving no doubts as to what it had just done!

"She was the one who Raspa disciplined for leaving you and your daughter to drown," An'na explained. Sisa had been the Lorr Princess in command of the battle-disc that had recovered my airplane. Her fury at being disciplined had led to the events that I have narrated here in this story. She had sought my death, and that of Raspa's. She came close to success too, only immediate medical attention having saved my life from the dose of venom she had injected into my neck. And that only because she had been able to only inject from one of her stings, not both. Raspa telling me that had she stung me with both her stings that I would have died in only a minute or so from so much of the venom!

"I think we should allow our patient to rest," the doctor interrupted, stepping into the room, glancing nervously at Raspa, who as First Princess of the Lorr, possessed almost infinite power over both the humans and the Lorr here on Mars. The armed guard, a Lorr Warriress with her laser armament outside the door backed up by a Mars woman armed with a automatic blaster rifle speaking of the recent events that had made news all over Mars!

"That is my own 'professional opinion' too," I agreed. Fortunately they had gotten to me in time, neutralizing the venom, although I had been warned that it would be some time before my injuries were fully healed, Sisa having almost torn me apart in the fight. The terrible ripping claws of that insane Lorr Princess having proved more injurious than any of the blades of those I had fought back on Earth! I would be glad to go "back home". To a world where I only had to face edged and pointed weapons!

"Aurora!" I smiled, giving her a grim smile, thankful to be alive after everything that had happened to me here on Mars. The attractively figured blonde giving me a warm smile in return as she sat on the edge of my bed, her green eyes glowing down into mine. She was, I thought to myself, a woman "burdened" by guilt. She is a very attractively featured woman, quite beautiful. More so in my own "opinion" than was Queen Tulis, although that is of course just my own view of the matter. She reminds me much of Darlanis, although her eye color and facial features are different. It is my "belief" now that she is actually Darlanis' own mother, although just "how" this all occurred I do not yet know. This last in any case explaining why Tulis acted the way she did!

"You are a close 'friend' of Darlanis, aren't you?" Aurorasaid to me, giving me a smile as I then nodded and smiled back. Her lovely eyes now looked down into mine. I knew she was an important person here on Mars, being Raspa's own "favorite" human. She is also a very famous "singer" here, her songs of "love" being extremely popular among the women of Mars, who admired her. I have listened to her sing, and wept as she did so. She is the finest singer I have ever heard either on Earth or Mars, I know!

"And you want me to keep from her that her daughter lives here on Mars," I smiled, suspecting that was the reason for this conversation we were now having. I supposed Darlanis might appeal to Raspa for the return of her daughter, although An'na was now "old" enough to make such "decisions" for herself, I thought.

"I loved her father," Auroraspoke softly, her words almost like a sudden blow to me as she sat there on the edge of the bed! "He was kind, gentle, and I 'gave' myself to him without reservation." She had been the Lorr's "ambassador" to Dularn, if such a term really applies here, the Earth being a "conquered" planet.* * The Lorr maintain "embassies" in the major capitols much like the nations of the Earth once did back in the Twentieth Century.

"And An'na is her daughter," I ventured, wondering if it was true. Aurora nodded, confirming my suspicions. Aurora going on to say that she considered Darlanis an "unfit" mother, Darlanis at the time An'na was eight years old being completely involved in building up the Empire of California and having "little time" for An'na, or "Anna" as Darlanis and Thar Marden had named her. An'na having been found by a patrolling Lorr disc floating in the ocean clinging to a life ring from "Samian Queen", Darlanis' own flagship which sank on some uncharted rocks off Trelandar during a storm. Darlanis having told me of the horror she felt seeing her daughter being carried off by the waves, never to be found!

"Darlanis is just a 'barbarian'," Aurora said to me.

"That is 'your' opinion, not mine," I answered.

"But I love An'na!" Aurora protested in reply.

"And so 'did' Darlanis," I answered her back.

"I was 'wrong' to keep her?" Aurora said.

"You know the 'answer' to that," I said.

"I fear that I 'do'," Aurora answered.

Chapter Thirty Eight

I watched the uncountable myriad stars on the Starfire's viewscreen, the brilliant reds and yellows and blues like intense points of light, and thought much of what had happened to me in the past few days. Of the scars that I would bear on my body for the rest of my life from the battle with the insane Lorr that had sought my life. The same creature that had sought to kill Raspa. I recalled how Raspa had once bragged about how superior her race was to mine. I had decided not to remind her of such statements. She was a friend. One does not do such things to one's friends. I thought too of the things Aurora had "hinted" at, but would not now speak "further" of. Darlanis and Janis had not been truly of the same "flesh" after all, and perhaps Tulis' "rejection" of the teenaged Darlanis made sense if you considered everything here...

During the days I had spent flat on my back recovering from injuries that probably would have left me almost crippled in the 20th Century, I was given the privilege of tapping into the Lorr's central computer system. Into their awesome data banks. Of learning from myself the truths, the realities of their history and our own for the last fifty thousand years. I wondered what certain groups in the 20th Century would have thought of what I had learned. Of the fact that the Lorr had used the black race of Mankind as a "control group" while they practiced their intelligence boosting genetic manipulations upon the white and yellow races. Only the women from these races having been used on Mars to serve. One supposes that they looked upon us much as scientists of the 20th and 21st Centuries would have looked upon experimental laboratory animals. We were the "test animals" they used for their own purposes. Our civilizations are of their doing. Otherwise we would still be living in grass huts and dancing around blazing fires at night chanting prayers to our pagan gods. The blacks of Africa "proof" of what we would have become. I wonder too about the cultural bias towards "blondes" we have? Many Lorr Servitors are "blonde". Have they too played their "role" in our history? One wonders a bit about such things...

I had been quite surprised at An'na's reaction to my suggestion that she travel to Earth with me and meet her true mother, Darlanis Marden, Queen of Sarn and Empress of Imperial California. An'na saying to me that she had no interest in being an Imperial Princess when she could live with Aurora on Mars and see sights that no person on Earth would ever see. An'na having told me of her ideas to rejuvenate the old Lorr starship that now orbited the Earth and use it to capture comets which could be dropped on the polar ice caps to increase the amount of water in Mars' atmosphere! I smiled to myself as An'na told me how nervous such ideas made the Lorr, and what "old ants" they were for not going ahead with such a great idea! Ah youth! Raspa having admitted to me that she thought it was a rather good idea, but too dangerous to try until it was proven that the comet could be guided accurately to a safe point of impact on Mars without endangering the lives of either Mars' own human inhabitants living on the surface or the Lorr who had enough bad experiences with a "directed" comet to last them for the lifespan of their own race!

The ship we were traveling in was of a different design, using both anti-gravity and perfected plasma rocket engines. Anti-matter mixed with water on a variable weight basis provided the rocket thrust. A flame far hotter than the surface of the sun, perhaps rivaling its own core! Its design being based upon that of an older ship that had once been stolen by a Mars woman who had attempted to flee to Earth with her small child, the ship exploding over Siberia in 1908 due to failure of its anti-matter power core. It is noteworthy here that some Russian scientists of the 20th Century did actually manage to determine from the remains of the vaporized space ship that it was an alien spaceship, and not a gigantic meteor or mini-comet as had once been thought! The Lorr themselves had used such engines in a somewhat similar design as the main propulsion system of their starships in their flight from their burning dying world to their eventual destination in our solar system. Reaching a speed of 12,000 miles per second, or slightly less than one sixteenth the velocity of light! The Starfire could do far better than that! I could understand why An'na had no desire to return to Darlanis if she could travel about the solar system in something like this! Especially since the Lorr had never really bothered exploring the solar system despite the fact they had lived in it for fifty thousand years! It being a racial trait of the Lorr that they have little interest in anything that is of no "practical value" to them. They lack the "curiosity" that will drive Mankind to the stars or destroy him. Doubtlessly the Lorr would have never developed space travel in the first place if their sun hadn't started to grow into a red giant and forced them to do the necessary research to save at least a small portion of their race!

"We could reach your world in a couple days if only Raspa would allow me the anti-matter to do it," An'na complained as we stood side by side watching the stars. I smiled again to myself. Anti-matter was expensive stuff, difficult to make, dangerous to store, and burning up large quantities of it just to "go a bit faster" didn't make any sense to the First Princess of the Lorr.* * The Lorr have naturally longer life spans than humans, some living as long as three hundred years where humans seldom live past a hundred and fifty at the very best. (Lorraine)

"I'm content with our speed," I assured her, happy to travel in a state where I might enjoy seeing the stars and exploring the ship, the Lorr having originally brought me to Mars in a state of near suspended animation, which is the way they use to travel between the worlds. Relying on their computers for the safe operation of their ships while traversing the void between the worlds.

"Why did Humanity hate us so?" An'na asked. I had read the histories of the events that led up to The War. Millions of the lovely women of Mars had died along with the Lorr when Earth redirected that gigantic comet so that it would strike Mars. Janet Rogers had given Men the "unity" necessary to meet the Lorr on an even footing, but Mankind saw only the "monster", not the intelligence, and could think of nothing but destruction. Even now it is commonly accepted as truth that the world government of that time did the right thing, their only failure having been that the comet didn't destroy all the Lorr as was

hoped! Not that educated people like Darlanis actually believed such, but I do suspect that the majority of the people living under her rule would feel that killing off all the Lorr would be a very excellent idea yet!

"Man has a history going back into the Old Stone Age of hating anything that is 'different'," I answered, slipping my arm around her, my body still a bit sore in places from what Sisa had done to me with her clawed limbs. With a good sword in my hand I would not be afraid to face a Lorr, but in a hand to claw fight, no human ever would stand a chance. It would be like fighting a dire wolf or some other wild animal that now roams the Earth.

"But we are just as 'human' as you are!" An'na protested, turning, looking me directly in the eye, "And your world killed 'us' just as they killed the Lorr!" I did not really have an answer for her. I still don't. I suppose the best answer would be the one they used during the Vietnam War when it was necessary to destroy villages in order to "save" them from the enemy. Raspa blames Janet Rogers for designing such a "dangerous" civilization as she did, although I don't think it was her fault that certain people within her government took it upon themselves to rid the solar system of the Lorr. One thinks of "wheels within wheels". Of similar incidents in the 20th Century where one part of the government acted against the wishes of another branch of the same government. The actual command of the expedition to the comet having been under the control of the World Defense Council, who no doubt was responsible for what happened. Janet Rogers tended to be a bit too trusting at times, and doubtlessly she was here.* * Just exactly "who" was responsible has never been determined, although it is commonly thought now to have been the "fault" of Domino Tremaine, who was Janet Rogers' "successor" at the time.

"This is 2565, not 2047," I answered. "It is up to us now to bury the past and see that it stays properly buried." That was the best answer that I could give her. I think that perhaps someday Man and the Lorr will seek the stars together. The Starfire was proof of that. Its drive and rocket power spoke of Lorr technology, but its crew and builders the lovely women of Mars. I did however wonder why it was so heavily armed, the Starfire also being the greatest engine of destruction that the Lorr had ever built! An'na having smiled and said to me that it was best to "be prepared". But for what? A couple dozen Mars women armed with blaster rifles could have routed one of Darlanis' Legions. And the Tarls of Talon and their lovely riders certainly didn't justify such an awesome engine of destruction like this? Were there other forms of alien "life" out there threatening us? Some "threat from the stars" that the Lorr now defended Earth from? I wondered if all the "flying saucers" that men had seen were Lorr?

There had been nothing in the Lorr's own data banks to indicate anything such, but I knew that such data might not be accessible to just anyone, and it would have been easy enough to conceal such information from me. Why did the Lorr maintain such a military presence around the Earth? Why did they respond so swiftly whenever a "Gateway" opened up? Why wouldn't An'na answer my questions? Why did she just smile and change the subject? What were the Lorr afraid of? What threat did they face?

Earth grew larger ahead of us, the Moon a gleaming crescent moving away to the right, my own world a great blue-green ball clouded ball much like the photographs I have seen back in the 20th Century before Sharon and I were transported into this, the 26th Century. It gave me a strange feeling, as if it had been just all a dream. A dream from which I would soon wake to see Jack there at the breakfast table opposite me, his nose stuck in the morning paper. There had been little left of our marriage at the end. I understand that he died in a car crash that night, his blood alcohol far over the legal limit, never knowing that both Sharon and I had disappeared into time never to return. Perhaps it was for the best for all of us that things ended as they did. Janet Rogers wrote much of me. Too much in a way, I suppose. Perhaps it would have been far better for two worlds if she had never followed up on some of my wilder ideas as she did.

I suppose that by the standards of the 20th Century my life really wasn't that bad, but in comparison to that which I live now here in the 26th Century, it was indeed stale and dull. Here there is a sense of adventure, of "newness" here in the post-War world that one of the 20th Century would have a hard time understanding, a sense that the world is what you want to make of it. True, there is danger and risk, but on the other hand you are the master of your fate in a way that those of 20th Century America would not understand. I am not sorry that I flew through the "GATEWAY". Here I am in a world where my heart is and shall forever be. Where my sword is pledged to the beautiful Empress of California. Where I can look up into the sky and remember the adventures I had there upon another planet. Recall the features of one who shall forever be my friend. Remember the night when I spoke for a few brief precious moments with SHE, whose memory I will never forget regardless of how many incarnations I must yet perhaps pass through before I can finally be united with HER.

I saw the wooded mountains of coastal California race by beneath the silvery three hundred foot cylinder that was the Starfire as An'na took the controls of her beloved ship then for our landing. Our speed slowing down to subsonic levels, and there ahead of us was the lovely city of Sarngleaming brightly in the noon-day sun! I could see on the viewscreen the city unfold before us, the ship slowing as An'na brought it down lower, flying only a few hundred feet above the harbor as before us rose the lovely Imperial Palace. In my mind's eye I could see a lovely tall golden Empress now being told of the approaching craft, her azure eyes perhaps glowing with anticipation as beside her stood a lovely young Princess who had once been mine. My eyes studying the viewscreen for every detail as An'na brought the Starfire to a halt there before the Palace, letting it hover for a moment on its anti-gravity drive before letting it ease down on the walkway before the great marble monument to human vanity there before us!

"This is your chance, An'na." I said to her, knowing that it would be the first meeting between her and her own true mother since she had drifted away helplessly clinging to a life ring from her some twelve years before when Sarnian Queen went down. I saw the tears glisten in An'na's eyes as there on the viewscreen we saw Darlanis walking towards us, Sharon at her side. I knew that it would have to be a decision she would have to make.

"We both live in different worlds, Lorraine," An'na sobbed, one of the women now touching the button that opened the ship's inner door to the ship's airlock for my recompression to Earth's heavier atmosphere. "It would never work out." I thought I understood, although Darlanis certainly wouldn't! An'na had made her decision as painful as it might be. Perhaps, I thought to myself, it was for the best. On Earth An'na would be almost like an alien, taken away from her own world she had now grown to love. Taken away from everything that now held meaning to her!

"It is good to have you back," Darlanis said to me. It felt good to be back despite my headache from my recompression to an atmosphere ten times thicker than the one I had grown used to on Mars. To again be able to breathe without an oxygen mask. I felt the heat of the sun on my body, my eyes dazzled by its rays. I took her hands in mine, looked into her azure eyes. Thought of another I probably would never see again. I was no longer the woman I had been before. I hoped that Darlanis could understand. Behind me the Starfire lifted into the sky with a soft hum of almost infinite power. At its controls a young woman, tears in her eyes as she watched the Earth fall away beneath her awesome ship.

"Something is bothering you, Lorraine," Darlanis said quietly as she watched sensuous dark haired slave Yvette Senchal complete the finishing touches of turning a "sow's ear" into a "silk purse". Sharon and Lara Warsan sitting beside her on the sofa. I had been thinking of An'na, of the beautiful "singer", Aurora. I am not a beautiful woman, but with Yvette's help, I did at least look the part of being one as befitted the stepmother of the new Imperial Princess to be. Fortunately the long gown covered the hideous scars that covered my body and upper thighs where I had been horribly clawed by the insane Lorr Sisa! Even Darlanis, insured as she was to such things, had gasped in horror when she saw me nude, saw what had happened to me there on Mars!

"I'm still not completely recovered from the change in atmosphere," I lied, it having been only hours ago that the Starfire had lifted from the island upon which the Imperial Palace stood. Yvette dabbing a bit of perfume behind my ears and on my neck. I had seen her eyes as she saw the horrible wounds on my body. Saw how I had been marked as if I had been clawed by some insane beast, which was exactly what had happened to me on Mars!

The gown fitted me quite well considering how little time there had been to obtain it. Darlanis had done well. Fortunately it would cover me well enough that none would see what I had gone through on Mars. It came up high and covered everything, while at the same time fitting me so that my boyish figure did look at least a bit feminine. The black silk clung well, I observed with a smile. Displaying the firmness of my breasts, the flare of my hips, the swell of my buttocks. I thought at least for once I might be able to stand alongside Darlanis, the Queen of Beauty, and not be ashamed of myself. Yvette and Lynn had done well, although Lynn had feared to touch me for my wounds so recently healed. I wondered how bad the scars would finally be. If any man would ever find me attractive so scarred, only my face having been spared the tearing claws of the insane Lorr Princess!

Perhaps you think that I make too much of such matters, but I have all my life been passed over or snubbed by those who only saw that which lies upon the surface. I suppose it is quite possible that I had been born a true beauty like Darlanis that my life might have been different from what it has been. Unlike a man, a woman is usually judged solely on her appearance. There are those, of course, who can see beneath outward appearances. I am, I suppose, the sort of a woman that "grows" on you, or so Jon tells me. That he loves me despite the still visible scars on my body speaks much of the sort of a man that he is, the woman I am.

I am told by others close to me that I have qualities that make up for anything I may lack in the "looks" department. Yet, still, when I look at a beautiful woman such as Darlanis, I do feel a sense of being "inferior". You may make of this as you will, I merely report what I feel. Sometimes I wonder why we are such good friends. Perhaps it is because she understands me better than I understand myself. She is very dear to me now. We have both suffered much at the hands of others. At the "hands" of one I now believed is "possessed" by "that" I was warned of...

"Perhaps you haven't recovered yet from what was done to you," Lara Warsan commented as she sat beside the Queen of California. The green of her long gown went well with the reddish tint of her hair. I liked her a lot already in just the little short period of time I had gotten to know her. She had an innate "goodness" about her that made me understand why Jers had made the decision that he had. She did truly "have a heart of gold". He would "neck-chain" her tonight there before Tais, the First Priestess. Before Darlanis, before everyone. The wedding doubtlessly would go down in history. She was a prostitute. He was a Prince! I hoped that his mother would accept that he loved her.

"That's possible," I smiled. I couldn't speak the reality. Tell of the pain in my heart. Tonight Jers would give up his claim to the throne of California to marry the woman he loved. I would lose my Sharon as she officially became the Imperial Princess in his place. She would be Darlanis', not mine any more! I

wondered briefly if I should have stayed on Mars with An'na and helped her to explore our solar system in the Starfire. I was no longer of value to anyone here on Earth. I had no wish to be exploited by Darlanis for her own purposes. I was tired of being a thing looked at, poked at, commented about. Something to "use"! * * I am mentioned in all the Janet Rogers' books as the woman who was "responsible" for her "NEW ORDER". Janet tended I think to "shade" the truth a little when it suited her own purposes. As I have noted elsewhere, another also attempted the same thing too!

For a moment I thought of telling Darlanis about An'na. I could ruin her joy, destroy her happiness by telling her how her own daughter, her own flesh and blood, had rejected her! Cause this tall proud golden ruler of Californiapain, hurt, suffering! I could bring tears to those beautiful azure eyes, make her weep and sob. Let her know that her own daughter yet lived on another world only a orange blob of light in a telescope! Then she would understand what she was doing to me! Know the pain, the hurt that I felt at seeing Sharon become her "daughter", her Princess!

"Sharon means more to me than you will ever know, Lorraine," Darlanis said to me, gently stroking her hair. They belonged together, I thought to myself. Sharon had the light golden hair like Darlanis had. She even shared Darlanis' facial features to a certain extent. I knew that Sharon loved her too, although she was fortunate that Darlanis had a sense of humor, especially after being compared to "SHE-RA", a 20th Century cartoon character! On the other hand Darlanis did remind me a lot of "SHE-RA" too! Of course she didn't have a "magic sword" or a "winged unicorn" to ride, but Darlanis did dress something like a "cartoon character" in her styles. And she was starting to go around "righting wrongs" whenever she could, which was making her now surprisingly popular with the people she ruled as the Empress of California!

"Well, Well, What do we have here?" Princess Tara said as she stepped up me, her own black gown nearly a duplicate of my own. Sela Dai of Talon at her side, beautiful in a silver lame that set off the whiteness of her skin, the coal black of her hair. She is a very beautiful Princess, very striking. Jers had once loved her before he met the provocative and sensual "Lara of Trelandar" as Lara Warsan is often called among other things.

"I'm `surprised' that you'd come to this," I answered, my voice not pleasant. I didn't like the Bajan. It showed too. Her right wrist was encased in a metal brace to protect the stitched together tendons there beneath it. She is a beautiful woman, but EVIL to the core, something I'd suspected from what Jon had told me about Tara's earlier activities as the "Warlady" of the Empire. There was something "unclean" about the woman, I sensed too. Tara having made Darlanis more "enemies" than she did "friends", and causing even those who might have looked upon Darlanis with favor to fear what Imperial conquest might bring...

"I wouldn't miss it for the world," Tara smiled, her smile making a chill go down my back. The Princess then turning away to speak to someone else in the great brightly lit throneroom. The beautiful silk of the women's fine ball gowns, the finery, the fancy attire of the noblemen making it a scene that will forever stick in my memory. There is a barbaric splendor here in the 26th Century that I always missed back in the 20th Century. Perhaps we of the 20th made things too drab in our futile attempts at "equality". At our own attempts to "level" everyone.

"There is a `DARKNESS' to her soul that makes me fear for what she may become the instrument of if she does not reject the `EVIL' that now controls her very being," I heard a woman's voice speak from behind me in level tones. Turning, I looked into the azure eyes of a tall lovely white robed woman dressed in a style of three thousand years ago. The woman was blonde, of an indeterminate age. For a moment I felt as if I once again was in the presence of SHE, in the very presence of GOD herself! Tais! The First Priestess of the Priestesses of Lys! The gold ankh studded with diamonds hanging there on its

golden chain between her breasts leaving no doubt of WHO she was, Darlanis having pointed out Tais to me a few minutes ago as being the "First Priestess".

"There is much I need to speak to you about," I said, touching her hand, feeling as if an electric shock had passed between us. Tais nodding back, her eyes glowing into mine. I sensed the forces, the "powers" that were hers to command. Sharon standing there beside me, a puzzled look on her beautiful features. I had felt it best that certain of the events that had happened on Mars remained my secret. I did not wish her to believe that her beloved Lorraine had taken leave of her senses. That she had once briefly spoken with SHE who is the true Mistress of the Universe.

"You carry for us a message of importance," Tais answered. Darlanis had spoken of the ESP powers of the Priestesses. That they possessed powers no one understood. Tais no doubt possessed such powers herself. I wondered what it would be like to MINDLINK with her. To merge my mind with hers, to see as she saw!

"You know what it is?" I asked, having no doubt that she could actually read my thoughts, or at least sense them in some way. The Priestesses of Lys have been developing such abilities for centuries now. They are far beyond what one of the 20th Century would understand, comprehend. I had once suggested to Janet Rogers that perhaps the secrets, the powers of electronic hypnosis, if such a thing was possible, be entrusted to such an organization for safe-keeping. I am glad that she did do just that.

"It is in the nature of a 'warning'," Tais answered. I knew from reading in THE BOOK OF LYS that "The Queen of Darkness" was said to be the "consort" of the EVIL ONE, the "DEVIL" of this era... The actual "warning" from SHE had been "BEWARE THE QUEEN OF DARKNESS", which hopefully meant "more" to Tais than it "did" to me!

I was now Lady Lorraine, my title and estates having been given to me by Queen Darlanis during the time I had been on Mars. Perhaps Darlanis had understood more than I had thought when I had told her about Lady Lana Daris and how much she meant to me.

When I had captured Lady Lana, her teenage son Brian had mistakenly believed that his mother had been killed by the dire wolf she had been hunting. Refusing to wait until the beast could be hunted down, Brian set out to destroy it on his own, dying beneath its fangs in the ruined house that once had long ago belonged to Bob and Carol. The body of the beast found no more than a dozen feet away, his arrow having done its deadly work if a bit too late. At the tragic news of the death of his only son and his lovely wife, Senator Jan Daris had committed suicide, leaving poor little five year old Mara a sudden lonely orphan.

Thus after the crowning of Sharon as Imperial Princess and the marriage of Jers and Lara, I planned to travel to Trelandar and take up there my position as Lady of the area, and raise Mara as my own daughter. I thought I owed Lana that much if not more. I felt Sharon was no longer mine in any case, with Darlanis as Empress of California being able to do for her what I could not. I no longer wished to be involved in Imperial affairs, or draw my blade in the service of the Empire's golden ruler. I had learned much on Mars. Too much to ever be the same that I had once been.

I watched Lara Warsan walk down that long aisle between the gathered nobles towards us, her features veiled as proper for a bride to be. The sensual movements of her body beneath the gown leaving no doubts that she was totally "female" in a way that few women are. Jers had, I thought to myself, made a good choice. Even the more beautiful and striking Sela Dai was no "match" for this woman! I thought of another I had once known. She too had been much like Lara. Sharon at my side now wore the tiara of an Imperial Princess. Darlanis had a "contented" look on her beautiful face. I could hardly blame her.

Everything now seemed to be "going her way". Queen Tulis was unpopular in Dularn, leaving Darlanis the opportunity to perhaps convince the people of that conflict weary country that "union" with the Empire might be in their best interests after all. Darlanis having carefully pointed out that she was, after-all, of Dularnian parentage herself! And with Tara stripped of her powers as "Warlady", it might be just possible Darlanis might finally "succeed" in her objective!

I saw Jers step down from the dais on which we stood, the throne just behind us, the Imperial Tarl of California looking down upon us all from its ruby eyes. Reaching with his hand for the lovely bride that awaited him. I saw the eyes of the people upon him, saw the shuffling and movement there on the balcony that circled the throne room as the "lesser folk" pushed and shoved for a better view of the proceedings below. Saw Tara in the forefront briefly glance back up towards the balcony, a sudden cold hand grasping at my heart as I knew what was going to happen! Recalled her words, "I wouldn't miss it for the world!"

"ASSASSIN!" I heard someone scream, saw a woman in the chain mail of Darlanis' personal guard draw a bow to full draw there on the balcony, her shaft aimed at us! Saw the arrow like a blurred streak whiz through the air over our heads as the assassin herself clutched at a crossbow bolt buried in her heart! Darlanis giving me a grim smile, the bright glitter in her azure eyes telling much left unspoken just then! A handsome warrior standing behind the throne unseen by anyone holding a Dularnian crossbow in his hands. Apparently Darlanis had taken "precautions"!

"I expected 'something' like this," Darlanis smiled as the uproar finally started to settle down, Tara having made a quick exit, although there was no way of "proving" she was to "blame"! I saw Tais standing there watching us, the glow of the many lamps making the diamonds set in her golden ankh glisten and sparkle. The flight of the arrow "puzzled" me, as it had seemed to curve in its flight away from Lara, as if it had been "pushed away" by some strange force. By the "powers" of one knowledgeable in ways no ordinary human would be. I had no doubts either now that Tais had used her own mysterious "powers" to save Lara Warsan's life!!

Chapter Forty

Sarn is a beautiful city of white stone that I find reminds me much of Rome at its glory. I suppose it isn't nice to say it, but The War did do one excellent job of "urban renewal"! Perhaps this time we will do things better than before. I wonder sometimes. We do seem doomed to repeat the "mistakes" of the past.

Clad in the black silk of the Warriress and veiled as a high noblewoman, I strolled the streets of the Imperial capital city, taking in the sights, a broad brimmed hat shading my eyes from the glare of the sun as Yvette now walked just behind me on her leash. One soon gets used to the numerous persistent organic smells which are perhaps in a way an "improvement" over the automobile exhausts of my own era. There is a certain vital essence to Sarn and other large cities I have been in that one did not find in my own era. A feeling that the world is new again and ready for any adventure. I no longer felt like a woman of forty, my birthday having occurred while I had been on Mars. Beneath my thin veil my red lips curved in a smile as I took in the myriad sights of the Imperial capitol. The slim keen blades at my hips yet a comfort in this barbaric and often quite lawless era.* * I am reminded here of the fact that you are at least permitted to carry the means of defense, which was not generally true in the 20th Century unless

you had considerable "influence" with the "right people" as I had thanks to my position. One may draw what conclusions one wishes. I have. "Freedom" does not necessarily require "democracy". Other forms of government may be better. Perhaps Darlanis is a better "leader" than was even Janet Rogers.

One can buy almost anything in Sarn, including naked slaves sold from its blocks. I stood and watched several women sold, my heart going out to the poor wenches as they stood terrified and trembling upon the sawdust beneath their bare feet. Yet, as I write this, I own a number of slaves, and generally think little of it. Perhaps I am not quite as "liberal" as I like to believe, although I am well known as one who will not "tolerate" the abuse of slaves in any form, as you will see in further chapters here.

There is not as much open prostitution as one might think, perhaps due to the institution of female slavery, but more likely due to the efforts of Jers' new wife, Lara, now a Princess of Baja who never dares set foot in her new homeland for fear of the death that awaits her from Princess Tara. Lara having earlier in her life organized the prostitutes of Californiain into a guild of their own, which has done much to raise the status of the women.

Another reason may be due to the social effects of strict population control, which tends to make sex more now a matter of "pleasure" than "reproduction" as such. Thus making the women of the 26th Century as a rule more likely to be "willing" than otherwise would be the case if they had to concern themselves with the ultimate results of their actions. Control of reproduction, as I have mentioned earlier, resting not with the Caste of Physicians, as you might first think, but with the Priestesses of Lys.

The Priestesses of Lys also bear the responsibility for seeing to it that those born are without "flaw", for all "flawed" children are destroyed at birth despite the wishes of the parents in the matter. The usual method is to drown the infant like an unwanted puppy, thus sending its soul back to the astral world to await another chance at life here in the physical universe. I am told that even now women sometimes give birth to that which is "mu", and not "hu", all that which is "mu" being thus destroyed.* * This policy started shortly after The War, when a large number of "mutated" children were born to mothers exposed to radiation. Most of these were destroyed, but some did survive to become the "mutants" that are said to inhabit some of the ruins near Trella.

I had during my stroll made a number of small purchases, a few of which were perhaps more in the nature of "impulse" than rational thought. Needing to concern myself little with the actual costs of things, I spent my silver and gold freely, thinking only of what I could do for those who had been generous with me. Putting Yvette to work carrying my things as I strolled along... The leash locked to her collar insuring that she stayed with me, the theft of slave girls being often commonplace in large cities.

I passed by the white marble temple of Lys, my eyes admiring its construction. The design itself reminding me much of temples I had once seen in Greece long ago back in what now seemed another lifetime ago. Back when I still believed that Jack loved me.

Acting on impulse, I climbed the marble steps and opened the door, stepping into the dimly lit coolness of the interior, Yvette squeezing in behind me, her arms well burdened with all the packages she'd been carrying. The marble pillars and wooden pews of the interior reminding me much of the great cathedrals of Europe that I had visited on vacation as a young woman back in the 20th Century. The altar holding a beautiful golden candle lit ankh shimmering with the flickering reflections of the myriad tiny flames before which I saw several women now praying there on their knees. There was a sense of peace and contentment that I found satisfying to my yearning soul. Here they knew the TRUTH about SHE. Here they understood the realities of existence as no religion ever had back in my own time. I felt at home here like I never had when my mother had tried to raise me as a Catholic. I recalled what SHE had said. About the lies spoken in HER name. About the perverted distortions of the simple TRUTHS that SHE

had once given to the son of a Jewish carpenter there over 2500 years ago. Perhaps I had unknowingly done "more" here than I thought!

A lovely white robed Priestess stepped to my side as I stood there with Yvette, the slave girl dropping to her knees and putting her head down as she knelt there beside me. "May I be of assistance?" the Priestess asked, regarding the two of us there. I wondered if she could sense my thoughts. Read my mind. Darlanis had told me much about the Priestesses of Lys, although I suspected she really knew little of "what" they really "were"....

"I am Lorraine Duval," I answered, meeting her eyes with mine as I lifted my veil. A smile curving her lips as she nodded in understanding. She was a warm, feminine woman, her hair as dark as a raven's wing, her eyes as blue as those of Darlanis. Eyes, I thought to myself, that could see inside my soul. The silver ankh hanging by its matching chain over her bosom a lovely ornament against the pure snowy white of her Grecian styled gown.

"Tais has been waiting here for you," she answered me, her voice warm and friendly, her azure eyes glowing into mine. "You have been 'touched' by LYS and will never now be at peace until you finally submit yourself completely to HER and obey HER teachings," the Priestess "added" with a smile, taking Yvette's leash.

"It is a pleasure to meet you again," The First Priestess said with a warm smile she greeted me there at the door, taking my hands in hers. The events of the previous night still vivid in my memories. While there had been no doubt in my mind that Princess Tara had been responsible for the assassin, there was no way of proving it and not even Darlanis dared go any further than to warn Tara that any further episodes would result in her death!

"Tara isn't 'The Queen of Darkness', is she?" I asked Tais. I had sensed something "unclean" about the evil Bajan Princess, but I suspected now that it was only my own feelings towards her.

"'The Queen of Darkness' is an 'evil spirit' from that plane of existence we call 'Hell'," Tais smiled back at me, her eyes, a lovely azure shade like those of Darlanis glowing into mine then. THE BOOK OF LYS I owned had a drawing of this "Queen", a hideous looking creature that could have easily graced any "nightmare"... The "EVIL ONE" himself looking somewhat like a giant "spider" with claws at the ends of his many legs according to the drawing. These drawings having left few doubts in my mind that both these "creatures" were merely a part of someone's "vivid" imagination! I also was starting to "doubt" whether or not my experiences on Mars were "real", or actually just caused by Raspa's own venom... Certainly someone as GOOD as SHE wouldn't allow "creatures" like these to threaten Humanity without doing something about it here! This last having made me "doubt" everything I'd experienced now.

"Every religion has its 'devils'," I smiled back at Tais.

"Ours, I fear, are 'real'," the First Priestess answered.

"You altered the 'flight' of that arrow," I smiled back.

"I do have certain 'powers'," Tais grinned in reply.

"I am not 'unfamiliar' with such things," I answered her.

"A little 'wisdom' is sometimes a dangerous thing," Tais answered back, her eyes glowing straight into mine. "And do not doubt what you experienced there on Mars," the white gowned First Priestess added,

looking at a painting someone had made of "LYS". The painting amazingly like the "vision" of SHE that I'd seen...! "And," Tais then added in warning, "'Beware' of Princess Tara and the 'evil' that now fills her soul like 'corruption' in a grave."

"I have the 'means' to 'deal' with her," I smiled, touching the hilt of my sword as Tais nodded, shaking her head in reply.

"You would not succeed in 'doing' what you are thinking," Tais warned. "We cannot alter THAT which is to be." I supposed she might be right, although I still felt that killing Tara would solve a lot of problems. A duel would be easy to arrange. I had no doubt that my skill with a sword would exceed hers. I thought dark murderous thoughts and saw Tais frowning as she regarded me.

"It is not wise for one to harbor such thoughts, Lorraine," Tais warned me. One cannot lie to a telepath. I nodded, understanding. Remembering what SHE had once told me. How THE EVIL ONE came to those who welcomed Evil into their hearts. The sword is not always the best way to deal with an enemy. I understood that. Still yet I didn't like having someone like Tara "around". She had attempted to kill Lara. Would my Sharon be "next" now? The woman was like a rabid dog, a threat to everyone around her!!

"How did you ever gain such powers?" I asked, changing the subject now to a "different" topic. Tais understood that I was not referring to her, but to those who had lived perhaps hundreds of years before. I knew that such ESP powers tended to be enhanced by hypnosis, although Janet and I had never followed through on everything that we and a number of others had found.

"That is perhaps best kept a secret," she smiled back.

Chapter Forty One

"You've proven to be a true friend," provocatively featured Lara Warsan said to me in a low voice as we stood on the quarterdeck of the three masted former pirate schooner, her sensual eyes holding mine, the Sun hot overhead in the nearly cloudless sky striking red glints in her hair. Her green silken halter and short clinging red skirt leaving little doubt that she was one of the most desirable and provocative women who had ever lived. Sharon called her "Daisy" after another who had lived six centuries ago, although I thought she reminded me more of Carol, Bob's lovely wife, who had been much like Lara in many respects. Carol had been the sort of a woman many men dream about having. And like Carol, Lara was dominant without being obvious about it.

"You mean because I 'suggested' to Darlanis that Jers be appointed to commander of this ship?" I replied, matching her smile with my own as we stood and watched the preparations for the voyage to come. I had understood why the young Prince no longer wished to serve on Sarnian Lady as its first officer. His mother had lost most of the use of her right hand thanks to Darlanis' fantastic swordsmanship in the duel that had occurred only a few weeks before. I had also suggested to Lara that it might be best if she too sailed with the man she loved. There had been a number of threats made against Lara's life, both by others, and some no doubt by Tara herself. Many people having been highly offended to learn that "Lara of Trelendar" had indeed married Jers Bisan, the son of a former King of Sarn. The survival of An'na or "Anna", the daughter of the last King now being known only to me.

"You are different than Darlanis," Lara said to me in a low voice as we watched the hustle and bustle of

getting ready for sea. "You accept me as an equal, not as a --," Lara added, pausing as she thought of the term to use. I took her hand in mine as those sensuous features looked up into my own. Words were not necessary for understanding just then. We both understood. Lara was the sort of a woman who had made her "living" as best she was able to, doing the only thing that she really knew "how" to do...

Assisting as they could were the Seahawk's five new "ship's girls", their gleaming collars telling of their status. One, a ripe bodied blonde, reminded me of another, their short and rather revealing shifts well displaying their feminine bodies for all to see. Lara was their overseer. Little missed those gray-blue eyes. She was strict with them, but also fair and understanding.

Sharon, blonde and regal as the Imperial Princess, was in a deep conversation with a young midshipman by the foremast, the young man obviously in awe of having such an "august" person aboard. Sharon was no longer the girl she had been even a month before. In a way I felt a sense of loss. A loss of something precious that I had once enjoyed for too brief a period of time!

I waved to Darlanis as the two warships and the five merchantmen we were escorting got under way, the two galleys under oar power, and the fat merchantmen under tow. Jers showing his seamanship by tacking the Seahawk out of the harbor, the schooner being far more "handy" than any lateen rigged vessel. Lara now standing there at his side, the look on her lovely face one that told much of the love she felt for him. The five slave girls at the rail, two of them sobbing openly at the thought of those they left behind. An Imperial golden haired Princess going to them and in low tones, consoling them in their misfortune. The sight filling my heart with joy that only a mother can understand. I was very proud of Sharon just then. She was truly a "Princess"!

I stood and looked out over the foaming wake of the Seahawk as Jers took his position ahead of the others, the swift former Dularnian raiding schooner well suited to the task of look-out. The other ships falling behind as we took our position to windward. The naval tactics reminding me much of those of the 18th Century when ships such as this often were used for such tasks. All we needed was a row of six pounders along each rail and any captain of that era would have felt right at home aboard the Seahawk! There was a newer ship, the Squala, somewhere about too! A bigger, heavier ship, a hundred and thirty feet long, ten more than the Seahawk. The new "pride" of the Dularnian Navy, I knew! A much "effective" vessel than the slow and heavy trireme Janis.

"Lorraine," Sharon said in a soft voice as she touched my hand where it rested on the rail. Her azure eyes so much like those of Darlanis looking into mine as she said, "What is it between us now?" Her surprising words puzzling me greatly, for I hadn't the faintest idea of what she was talking about just then!

"What do you mean?" I asked, puzzled by her words, concerned as only one who "loves" could be. Sharon meaning more to me than life itself. She was even more 'precious' to me now than before.

"You've been 'different' ever since you went to that temple of Lys and talked to the First Priestess," Sharon answered, her eyes looking up into mine. "You don't act 'right' any more." I had been spending considerable time reading "THE BOOK OF LYS". I wondered if she was referring to that as I was not a "religious" person in the ordinary sense of the word. I wished I could tell her about what had happened on Mars, but I feared to tell her of the "warning" I had been given by no other than SHE Herself!

"I've had a lot on my mind," I answered, recalling what Tais had warned me about, forcing a smile to my lips. My arms then slipping around her to hold her close as I kissed her forehead. I wondered if we really had "free will" or were the slaves of what was to be. Could I, by my own actions, alter the future? I feared for what the future might hold, recalling SHE's "warning"!

"We've always `shared' before,Lorraine,"Sharonspoke, stepping back. Her little chin high, her bearing regal as befitted the Crown Princess of the Empire of California. I thought her truly a Princess. A fit "daughter" for one such as Darlanis.

"This is to be kept between us, and not for Darlanis' ears," I said, making my decision. Telling her everything. I thought it right that she know. I didn't feel that she would believe it.

"It's like something out of the Bible,"Sharonbreathed. I knew she had at one time read the entire Bible as well as the Koran and the Jewish Sacred Books. I had thought that she should know such things. See what others had believed, still believed.

"There is a `life beyond death'," I answered. "You remember what I told you happened when I hypnotized Janet Rogers?"Sharonnodding, the story having been like something out of "THE SEARCH FOR BRIDEY MURPHY", which I am now convinced was the truth, despite claims to the contrary by those who did not "understand".

"And there is a GOD?"Sharonventured. I nodded, remembering SHE. That had been one of HER names. Raspa had called HER "SHE-IT-ALL", which I think is closer to the Reality of SHE than anything else I can think of. "And the Priestesses of Lys?" my lovely daughter added, looking into my eyes. I thought of Tais.

"Have their own role to play as do we perhaps," I answered.

"We could killTarabefore she becomes the `Antichrist',"Sharonventured, having shared the same thoughts that I had with Tais. Knowing the future, could we prevent it from happening? Tais had not said thatTarawas "involved", but I suspected such! In any caseTarawas certainly as "EVIL" a person as could exist!

"I suspect that something would stop us if we tried," I answered her. Wondering again if we truly had "free will" or not. I think in a way that we do, but that is something I will leave for the reader to decide for himself or herself. I remember once asking a priest a long time ago if "GOD" made souls just to be dammed as the Catholic Church said. If "GOD" knew everything as I had been told, then it was logical that "GOD" also knew whether or not such souls were made just to be dammed. However, according to what SHE told me, there is no actual permanent damnation! Evil persons just have to go through more incarnations until they finally reach through their own efforts that final stage of moral perfection where they can "merge" with SHE and become "one" with HER. Apparently the young Asian SHE spoke to one time understood that much at least of what SHE was trying to tell him for us all!

"I do like Queen Darlanis more than anyone else here in the 26th Century, but you are still the mother who held me when I was little and soothed away my fears,"Sharonsaid to me, her eyes glowing up into mine. I felt my heart sing with joy at her words as her hands clasped mine and much was then shared without words.

Chapter Forty Two

"I sometimes wonder what is going to come of all this in the years to come," provocative featured Lara Warsan mused, the links of the silver neck-chain that marked her as a newly married woman gleaming

around her throat as she looked out over the gleaming rolling ocean, the sunlight reflecting off the waves. The smell of salt in the air as Seahawk's forefoot cut through the water beneath us. The wind in the rigging a familiar sound as we stood at the bowsprit and spoke of what laid in our hearts. Two women sharing much. She was provocative, sensual, a woman who any man might desire. A woman who had given her heart to a young boyish Prince whose love might very well cost her life if one of Tara's agents managed to ever get her into the sights of their crossbows. Only out here at sea was she safe from danger, I thought!

"I'm sure that things will turn out O.K. for you in the end," I answered. "Jers' love for you is like something I've never seen before." He almost worshiped Lara. She was more than a "wife" to him. It was almost as if he feared his marriage to her would soon end in her death as I knew was quite possible, especially after the poisoned food we had found aboard the ship among the supplies. Fortunately Lara had not eaten any of it. I had done what I could to investigate, but to little avail. Even out here, miles at sea, Tara's evil still hung over us like a cloud. Her hatred of the lovely brownette still in our thoughts.

"Perhaps, but still I wish Darlanis had killed her when she had the chance," Lara replied, staring out to sea. I knew that there was already a "strain" in their marriage from his mother's burning hatred of Lara. Jers being torn between Tara and Lara. Between his love for his provocative and sensual new wife and his own mother, who yet still claimed to love him despite everything!

"SAIL-HO!" the look-out called down from his dizzy perch some eighty feet overhead. The Seahawk's towering high masts gave us somewhat of an advantage over the more common lateen rigged vessels common to this era in that our look-outs could spot other ships before they could spot us. Our blue green sails of course were a big help too, as we were nearly invisible at a distance unless you knew exactly where to look for the tall ship!

"What do you make of it?" I heard the handsome young boyish captain of the Seahawk call through his speaking trumpet to the man now swaying in his dizzy perch a good eighty feet overhead.

"Another schooner like this one, sir!" he called down, his words causing a stir to go through the crew. California had but one such craft, and we were aboard it! "Three masts!" the lookout added, leaving no doubt that the vessel ahead was indeed the "Squala", a fearsome terrifying Dularnian raider that had been prowling the coasts of southern California for the past month!

"Lorraine," Lara breathed, her eyes holding mine, her lips parting as if to speak more. Then closing in a grim line as my eyes met hers. I put my hand on her shoulder and gave her a warm smile of understanding. Her place would be beside her husband as his wife. Advising, helping, just "being there" when so needed.

Commander Jers Bisan was speaking to his first officer when we stepped onto the quarterdeck. His eyes briefly flicking over us before he turned again to the man, speaking in low and urgent tones, Lara at my side, her hand clutching mine. Her palm damp. She was, I knew, said to be "good" with a sword, although not in the same class as true mistresses of the sword as Darlanis or myself. Or Princess Tara for that matter. Tara having once tried to rid California of the lovely Trelandarian by trying to challenge her to a sword duel which would have had but one outcome!

I wondered what thoughts went through her mind at the thought of combat. I knew she was no coward from what Darlanis had told me of her, but I also suspected that she might not view things as I would, for example, or a Warriress such as Darlanis.

"We have sighted the enemy," he spoke, regarding us both in a way that spoke much. "It would be best,

Lara, if you stayed below with the other women where you will be safe." I didn't think that was the sort of a statement that Lara wished to hear just then. She was a woman of the 26th Century, not the 20th! I don't think Jers had thought before he spoke such words to Lara!

"My place is at your side, my sword in my hand," Lara answered in level tones. "I am not of the Warriresses like Lorraine, but I have fought before and I am not unskilled with a blade." I saw the look in those gray-blue eyes. Jers nodded, no doubt knowing better than to argue with her just then. I knew he looked upon her differently than most husbands look upon a wife. I think that is why he married her instead of Princess Sela Dai. Lara is the sort of a woman that is more than just a wife to you.

"I suggest then that you prepare yourselves, for we are going to be 'in harm's way' very soon now," giving me a smile that left much unsaid. I suppose he was glad to have me, as my skill with weapons was already "legendary" here in California after our battle against the pirate Tarkas when we first took the Seahawk.

"Do you think there's going to be a fight?" Sharon asked me as I buckled my harness around my slim waist, my chain mail gleaming in the flickering light from the porthole. It was hot below decks. The roll of the Seahawk was unpleasant in the heat.

"Yes," I answered, wanting to tell Sharon this time to stay out of harm's way. Knowing as I slipped the steel helmet over my head that it would be a waste of breath. The helmet and the armor were the best the Imperial armorer could supply. Thoughts of another battle went through my mind as I slipped the arm-shield on. I thought fondly of a Lorr blaster with its deadly explosive bullets. With such a weapon in my hand, there would be a good chance to avoid hand-to-hand combat. I had much to live for, I suddenly realized. I didn't want to have to fight again. To once again risk my life for the political ambitions of another.

"Be careful and don't risk yourself," I told her, kissing her before going up on deck, a Warriress clad for battle. I thought of another's lips on mine and how his hands had touched me. How we had made love, my body arching beneath his. If we met again it would be as deadly enemies. I prayed we would not meet. That this ship would not be "his" now for some reason.

"There's no doubt about it," Jers said as he turned to his first officer, the other ship a schooner much like the Seahawk. We would be evenly matched. I remembered the men of the Janis and how they had looked. I suddenly felt very small and female.

"Do you think that we can deceive them into thinking this is still a pirate ship?" Lara asked as she stood at his side. The slim short sword and the dagger now swinging from their sheaths. I did not doubt that she could give a good account of herself if it became necessary. I saw her briefly caress him. Not as a wife, but as a mother would. He was in his middle twenties, but noticeably less "mature" than An'na, who was several years younger yet. I had ordered Sharon to stick with Lara when the fight came. Lara was level headed and capable. I considered that it was now quite possible that the Dularnians were now allied with the pirates from what recent evidence we had been able to obtain. I had turned Jon's letter over to Darlanis. Her agents had confirmed his suspicions. I did not envy him. He was of the Warriors. It is part of the Caste Codes that one does not betray one's honor. One does not ally oneself with outlaws, pirates, those who live outside the Caste Codes here in the 26th Century.

"If Lorraine and our other warriresses will please hide themselves until I give the word, I think it is possible," he answered, leaving off my title as his eyes burned into mine. Lara once again touching, stroking, her gray-blue eyes meeting mine as I nodded. I understood much about their relationship. Why Sela Dai despite her beauty never had a "chance" against Lara Warsan.

"Of course," I smiled back, meeting Lara's eyes. Nodding to the squad of warrioresses who stood there waiting for my orders. Their armor gleaming in the brightness of the sun. I thought they might even the odds just a bit. They were all picked women. Volunteers from Darlanis' own personal forces. The best that the Empire had. Their archery might make a considerable difference.

It was hot and smelly in the cramped cabin where we were gathered, the smell of sweaty women awaiting battle an odor I can never forget. It is different than the smell of men. I thought of another time, another ship, another who had been with me then. The smell of her perfume mingled with her own "fear-sweat". She had been, I thought to myself, braver than I had known or suspected. Now, like Jers on the quarterdeck above, we would both be "tested" in battle. There would be no Darlanis this time to follow. No "Janis" to rescue us if things went against us. By the time Sarnian Lady reached us it would be all over one way or the other. Jers had been seriously wounded the time before. No doubt he had "doubts" about his ability to command. That was why Lara kept touching, stroking. She understood him as no one else!

"Oh, Lys, take me in your arms if I fall," one of my warrioresses prayed to herself. Her soft words seemingly loud to my ears although they were, I knew, spoken in a whisper. I added a silent prayer of my own to SHE, whom I knew watched over me. I was glad that Sharon was with Lara. I thought of Lana, of Janis. With a low growl escaping my lips I shook my head to clear it of such thoughts before they sapped my own will to fight! To win!

Unnoticed, my warrioresses drew back, muttering softly among themselves, their eyes upon me. To them I was already a legend. The woman from the legendary past who could match swords with the greatest among them. The tall slim brunette from the legendary past who their ruler called "friend". The woman who had traveled to another world, and come back with her body scarred from battle with an alien monster. The woman who had trained them in new ways of battle, ways that they didn't understand, but yet obeyed!

Warrioresses aboard ships are usually used in ranks, an officer directing their fire as you saw earlier in my story. I believed that such tactics tended to be wasteful of their lives. Thus I had trained my women to fight as individuals, to work their way around to the enemy's flank and then fire their arrows. Granted the individual warrioress was thus deprived of the help of her sisters if things went against her, but on the other hand I felt that she was more likely to survive than standing in a big group where she made an easy target for other archers or crossbowmen, the crossbow being quite popular in the Dularnian military forces, although their warrioresses generally use bows much like ours. Dularnian military tactics being quite similar to our own no doubt due to the excellent reason that technology determines one's tactics to a considerable degree in such "matters".

Then came the call from above, "ATTACK!", and from our cramped smelly quarters we charged up onto the deck, the heavy thuds of our ballistae and catapults shaking the ship as our missiles tore through the enemy's surprised crew! Our plot to pose as a pirate ship had been successful! Apparently word had not yet reached the Squala that the Seahawk was now part of the naval forces of the Empire of California! There on the horizon behind us came Sarnian Lady and the slightly smaller 48 that had been escorting the five big fat slow merchantmen from Sarn to Trella!

"SPREAD OUT! USE YOUR BOWS! STRIKE THEIR FLANKS!" I cried, my sword in my hand. Arrows and crossbow bolts whizzing past almost unnoticed, my blade gleaming in my hand. My women turning to shoot their swift arrows into the foe as they spread out as I had trained them. Our men leaping across the railings to the deck of the enemy ship. The clash of steel filling my ears as blade met blade across the rails, the Dularnian captain directing his men, his warrioresses gathered together, their arrows

whistling around our ears! Mine returning their fire, more effective by far as they poured their arrows as fast as they could nock them into the still confused and gathered bunched up enemy!

My blade rang against that of our foes as we fought our way across the enemy's deck. The blonde haired warrioress facing me screaming with agony as my blade bit deep, another taking her place as she fell back, the blood spurting from her wound. Ringing swords at my side telling that my sword-companions still stood as we fought like demons from the "other side"! The tall Dularnians were worthy foes, well trained in close deadly combat.

My blade ringing against those of my foes, I fought my way across the bloody deck, quarter neither being asked or given. An arrow zipping past me to bury itself in a foeman's breast. I prayed that Sharon would stay at Lara's side. My blade bit deep into an opening, my burly foe dropping before me, the blood spurting in a red gush from his mortal wound there in his throat.

I parried a down-slash from a longsword that would have almost split me in two, letting it slide harmlessly to one side, my keen point driving up through his throat to the brain before then slipping free. Death stood at my side, his cold breath chilling. A blade cut my hip through my chain mail. I saw the blood run as my slash whistled across her throat. She was the last of the enemy's warrioresses. The others only still forms on the deck.

I stood on the bloody deck as the few enemy survivors knelt before us in surrender, the breath rasping in my lungs, the blood of my wound running down my thigh, staining my black hose. I saw Sharon and Lara leap over the rail and come towards me, bows in their hands. Seven of my warrioresses had survived, although two had wounds that would require immediate medical attention. I was sick of fighting, of killing others for Darlanis' own ambitions!

Chapter Forty Three

"You did well, Lorraine," Darlanis smiled, raising her golden goblet in salute to me as we sat there in the beautifully furnished stern cabin of the Imperial flagship. I nodded in reply. Three of my women, women who I had known, who had names, identities, lives, who had loved, been loved, had died so that this Empress could sit here and salute me on another "victory" for her Empire! Another two nursed painful wounds there in Seahawk's sickbay with the couple dozen or so members of the crew who had been wounded in the battle with the Squala. We had put forty six bodies over the side of the Seahawk. The enemy had lost nearly twice that number. I hoped it satisfied her lust for "blood". Her love for this seemingly senseless war that had dragged on and on for years now! I was getting tired awfully fast of fighting her battles! Of shedding my own blood for her momentary glory!

"The credit should go to our young captain," Sharon answered for me, smiling at the young Bajan Prince across the table. Lara silent at his side, her gray-blue eyes in the lamplight unreadable. I recalled her actions before the battle, the way that she had touched him. She was a "mother" as well as a wife to him. I had very few doubts now that was why he had married her instead of Sela Dai or another of her type as no doubt both Darlanis and Tara had hoped: Lara being of low caste, and a "hip-swinger" to boot as prostitutes are commonly called here in the 26th Century.

"And to Lorraine for her as usual insight in suggesting our young Prince as captain of the Seahawk," Darlanis said, giving me another salute and a smile. Her use of the word "captain" also indicating Jers was

to be promoted from the rank of "commander" to "captain" for the successful capture of the big Dularnian raider which had been before far too swift for any of California's galleys to capture! There had been over a hundred women held captive below decks. I had no doubt that many were thanking LYS for their freedom now! They would be put ashore when we reached our destination to make their ways as best they could back home to their husbands and children. I would help them as I could. The cost meant little to me. I was now rich, titled, a "Lady" of Trelandar with estates, servants, slaves to command.

"He has proven that I was not mistaken in my suggestion," I answered in a level voice, my dark eyes burning into the azure of Darlanis' at the other end of the table. "His success in taking an enemy fully equal to his own command proves that," I added, knowing that the crew of the Squala had been Dularn's finest fighting men and women. We had done well, although my warrioresses deserved some of the credit for that. I hoped Darlanis understood the cost in human life that we "paid" for the Squala! My hip was still sore from where the sword blade had slashed me.

"You are 'right', of course," Darlanis answered, sipping at her wine, giving the couple a smile, Lara's eyes holding hers for a moment. I knew Lara had given a good account of herself with a bow, as had Sharon. There was no doubt now about Jers' bravery. About his ability to command men under battle in a ship to ship action. He well deserved his rank even if Tarawas his mother. I saw Jers reaching under the table, no doubt to caress Lara. She was far more to him than just a wife. I understood that even if Darlanis didn't. I saw Lara kiss his cheek, whisper in his ear. Her eyes for a brief moment seemed to glow right into mine. I had little doubt what she had said to him. I knew the "type" of woman that Lara was. The sort of "skills" that she possessed!

"A word, if you please," Darlanis said to me as we rose from the table to return to the Seahawk. Her eyes were unreadable. I nodded for Sharon to go with the others. Watched them file out. A chill going over me despite the warmth of the cabin as the regal Empress silently regarded me from beneath long golden lashes.

"There is something between us that wasn't there before," I listened to Darlanis say as Lynns silently filled our goblets again, those azure eyes burning into mine. The luxury of the cabin speaking of the woman who ruled this great 26th Century Empire so many had died for. The golden mesh of her exotic attire glittering in the light from the lamps. Men followed her, worshiped her almost like she was a goddess. For the sake of her royal touch men would gladly march into the jaws of death itself singing the brave war-songs of her Empire to die for their ruler.

"You think thoughts, Lorraine, that others before you have thought of me," Darlanis said, lifting her goblet to me. "That I 'use' people for my own benefit. That this senseless war between Dularn and California is merely an act of personal revenge on my own part because my brother raped me when I was fifteen. That did I not sit on the throne of California as its ruler that there might be lasting peace between our countries. That I am nothing but an overly ambitious and beautiful immoral 'whore' who has used her beauty, her body, to gain whatever she wants." I wouldn't have gone quite all that far, but Darlanis did cover the field pretty well! "You think that those who died in the battle today gave their lives in vain, that someday if you continue to follow me I will be the one to stand over your body and speak the last words before you are given to the sea. That I am no different from the monarchs of the past six thousand years who carved out empires that died with them. That I have delusions of being another 'Janet Rogers' and someday ruling the Earth as she did."

"I think more highly of you than that," I told her, sipping at the wine. I knew her. Knew her too well to believe that of her. There is an innate "goodness" to Darlanis that is hard to describe, to put into words. She is "ambitious", but it is an "ambition" like Janet had, an "ambition" to make things "better", not "worse" for Mankind. She isn't "perfect", but she was better than anything else we had even if she did use

her sex for her own personal gain like many beautiful women have done in the past. I recalled her past conversations with me. She was at least honest enough to admit that she too had done things in her life that she wasn't very proud of having done. Of having given her body to men in return for their support of things she believed in doing.

"You have seen too much of death, too much of battle," she smiled. "You have seen friends die, held dying companions in your arms, seen their eyes glaze over in death." Darlanis was, I knew, one heck of a public speaker. People swarmed to hear her. She had a "way" with words that I wished I had. Janet had been like that too, I thought. They were much alike in a certain way.

"Perhaps," I answered, knowing the truth there in her words.

"It is perhaps 'best' then," Darlanis said to me, "That you take the time to consider what you want to do with your life." I nodded back. I had no wish to follow the "way of the sword" anymore. To risk my life further for Darlanis' political ambitions!

"Any problems?" Sharon asked me as I joined them at the rail. My "word" with Darlanis had taken but a few minutes. The Seahawk floating about its reflection a hundred yards off there in the darkness of the night as the Moon glowed down upon us all. Squala there behind Seahawk, the prize crew busy making repairs.

"Darlanis gave me Squala," I answered, still not believing. Jers and the crew of the Seahawk would still get the "prize money", but the ship itself would be mine to do with as I saw fit.

"Oh, Wow!" Sharon breathed, giving me a hug while Jers looked on, his arm around Lara's waist. His thoughts unreadable.

I wore the black of the Warriress and the veil of the Lady. A sword there at my left hip, a long fighting dagger at my right, my hand on its hilt. Before me on the moonlit main deck between the masts stood the hundred or so women who had been captives aboard the Squala. They clutched whatever they could find to themselves as they regarded me standing there on the quarterdeck before them. I had a dozen seamen drawn from Sarnian Lady. Just enough to sail the Squala, nothing more. The sailors grinning to themselves at the delights before them, many of who had little to conceal their nakedness as they stood there on the deck below me.

"I am Lorraine, Lady Lorraine of Trelandar," I told them. "You will be under my protection until we reach my estates where I will help you as I can in making a safe return to your homes." My words being received with almost disbelief as I had suspected. A number of the women had been slave girls before being captured by the Dularnians, which meant that under Californian Law I was obligated to notify their masters and mistresses that I was in possession of them. The law is not often obeyed, of course, the female slave being an item of "property" that few men with any drop of red blood in their veins ever wish to give up! However, the Dularnians had removed the collars from these, and there was no way that I could determine their own true status as being "free" or "slave". Also, it was possible given the nature of things that some of the women might not even be "Californians" as the Squala had no doubt carried a number of "ship's girls" before her capture by the Seahawk! Thus there was little doubt at least five or six girls among the women who were actually Dularnians!

Another would have probably collared and chained the lot and sold them all to slavers in Sarn or Trella. Such has happened before. Given an average wholesale value of say 20 gold crowns per woman, which is realistic given the market conditions as they prevailed, I could have made say 2000 gold crowns on the entire lot. The gold crown of California is slightly over an ounce of pure gold having a value, I believe, of

about \$300 in 1988 dollars. The current value of my estates and holdings is about twenty thousand gold crowns. The Squala itself, which Darlanis gave me as a gift, has a value of about five hundred gold crowns.

"I wish the women who are of high caste to step over here," I said to them, pointing with my hand. High caste women are often marked with a small brand indicating their caste. The three high castes are: Warriresses, Physicians, and "Builders", which covers what one might consider the "scientific and engineering" arts. The Priestesses of Lys stand above the caste system. Merchants and Scribes and other "clerk-types" requiring a middle level of education are considered "medium" caste, it being believed that anyone who applies themselves can do such things. Lawyers are not often highly thought of as a rule, there being considerable prejudice against the profession that I understand dates back to before The War when they opposed Janet Rogers and greatly suffered for their hopelessly futile actions against her.

The low castes are split among various sorts of workers and the Peasants, who form a series of castes of their own. Prostitutes may be of any caste, although they do have a "guild" to which they belong, which offers them some degree of "protection".

I watched ten women separate themselves from the rest and go stand where I indicated, well aware that my activities were being watched from the other ships, the Seahawk being only a few hundred yards off. I then separated out the prostitutes, of which I had seven, such being considered desirable slave girls as they had already been "trained" by their occupation to "please men"!

"This ship carried 'ship's girls' and others who were slaves before they came aboard," I said, regarding the women standing before me. Telling them to stand where I pointed. A brief disturbance there among the women resulted in the ejection of a couple dozen women, who clutched what scanty attire they could to themselves as they stood there looking at me and the others. As they were already slaves, they would continue to remain slaves.

"Each of you will be responsible for the women who lived in your area," I said to the ten who stood clutching bits and pieces of attire to themselves before me there in the late captain's cabin. The chains and ankle shackle there on the floor leaving no doubt that he had kept at least one beauty to himself during the voyage. I thought briefly of Janis, what had been "done" to her.

"They are 'nothing' but low-caste sluts!" I heard one mutter to herself, regarding me. The woman of high caste often considers her lower caste sisters to be good for little more than the slave collar. There is little racial prejudice as such, but there is enough "caste prejudice" to keep any "bigot" delighted!

"They will be your responsibility," I snapped back, putting an "edge" to my voice. "Or I will collar you and sell you as a slave girl!" She knew I had the "authority" to do just that too! I was for all practical purposes an absolute dictator in my own lands, having much the same authority as some feudal Lord of old.

"We need more like you," a tall Warriress smiled as the others then filed out, muttering in low tones among themselves about me. I smiled, nodded. "I'm glad that we're going to be neighbors," she added with a friendly smile. The attractive older brunette explaining that she owned the estate next to mine to the north of me towards Sarn. "I'm the Lady Tirana Greyson."