

"THE WARLADY OF DULARN"

2567 A.D.!

By Jerome Bigge

FORWARD

I should explain here that I have written a series of "adventure interplanetary war with alien beings living beneath the surface Old Stone Age (35,000 BC) and enslaved Neanderthals to serve them as slaves inside gigantic caverns they hollowed out beneath the surface of Mars. Over thousands of years, the Lorr genetically "altered" these slaves and produced the race of Cro-Magnons, from which we are descended. Upon discovery of the existence of the Lorr in the 21st Century, Mankind decided to destroy the aliens, both doubtlessly due to their enslavement of humans and due to their own appearance, which was similar to that of gigantic ants. This resulted in an interplanetary war which Mankind "lost", with the result that only the most barbaric civilization remained as a rule, although there was still some records left of the past. In my books there is a "history" dating from 1988 through the year 2047 where I chronicle the development of a "world civilization" under the rule of a benevolent woman dictator, Janet Rogers. Janet Rogers in turn owing her ideas to Doctor Lorraine Marie Duval, a Los Angeles "shrink" with a genius level I.Q. and a hearty dislike for everything for which "Western Civilization" stood. A woman who is perhaps the greatest swordswoman of all time, a sort of "female John Carter" for you Burroughs fans, who gets into all sorts of adventures in the 26th Century, and who unlike most such fictional characters is also a person of "feeling" and "emotion". There is also plenty of the sort of "philosophy" for which John Norman is so famous (I am a "fan" of his), although I do think my own stories are perhaps more "realistic" in treatment of women...

In this, the fifth book of this series I introduce two "new" characters that I think the reader will like. Also, we'll see our famous sword swinging "Queen Lorraine" from another viewpoint. There were those who had no "love" for her, and they were not all "Dularnians" by any means either! One suspects here that perhaps the Priestesses of Lys were engaging in a little "balance of power" here, giving the Dularnians someone from the 20th Century to balance off the "advantage" that Darlanis had in Queen Lorraine. And the question is raised here: "Did Lorraine fly up into that thunderstorm that sent her and Sharon into the 26th Century of her own free will?" In any case this is another lusty sword swinging tale that you will enjoy. Especially as "Carol" is just the sort of a wench that you'd love to meet, but would never want to "take home to greet your parents"! In any case, I now present the "Simmons", a loving couple who suddenly finds themselves "teleported" from the Twentieth Century up to the Twenty Sixth! Where Robert Simmons finds plenty of adventure with his lusty and sexy wife, Carol, who has been "introduced" before to my readers.

Jerome Bigge

"THE WARLADY OF DULARN"

2567 A.D.!

By Jerome Bigge

Chapter One

"It was a dark and stormy night". Well, it was! Not that I was paying it that much note just then as I watched my wife Carol finish up her strip dance there on the brightly lit stage. Carol now doing a series of "hip rolls" while supporting herself on her toes and fingertips in a way that left no doubt that for a woman in her late "thirties" she was still in fantastic physical condition. Her 5'7", 37-26-38 body was glistening a bit with sweat under the bright stage lights as my provocative brownette then spread her thighs wide and arched up her curvy behind. Thus giving every man sitting there around the shadowed tables an excellent "view" of that narrow strip of buckskin colored chamois that ran up between those lovely tapering muscular thighs of hers! A lovely pair of golden disks covered her pierced nipples. A quick toss of her head, a provocative glance behind her, and then my wife dashed off the stage, followed by the cheers of the men that practically now shook the building! Carol still being the best!

"She is an amazing woman," a feminine voice said from behind me, the azure eyes that met mine as I turned owned by a beautiful tall blonde haired woman, one who I suspected from her "accent" was not from any place around here! And the way that her clothes "fitted", the "style", all indicated that she was a "foreigner". And little did I realize just then how truly "foreign" she was! "One of many 'talents'," the woman continued, giving me a smile. "Few men, Mr. Simmons, could say the same about their own wives." I supposed it was true, although at the age of forty one after some fifteen years of marriage I loved my Carol as much as ever!!

"You are the same woman we met in the supermarket today," I said, remembering. There had been "something" about the woman. "Something" that Carol had said gave her the "creeps" about her! My wife had been unable to explain further, saying it was only a "gut feeling" that she had when they had met, the woman having merely said that she was pleased to meet us, and that she hoped we had enjoyed the books she had sent us. Her words for an instant having meant nothing to either of us just then until suddenly Carol had gasped with shock, remembering the strange books sent to me! Strange leather bound books supposedly written by a woman everyone believed dead! The fantastic Dr. Lorraine M. Duval herself! The greatest swordswoman of all time, it's been said! Another book by the incredibly beautiful Darlanis of California, the ruler of western North America in the 26th Century! And with the books there had been a strange golden coin, a large coin of over an ounce of pure gold, stamped with the likeness of a beautiful woman, the inscription on the coin in Latin reading "DARLANIS, REGINA

CALIFORNIA"! The other side showing a crown in front of a background circle of stars that had left little doubt too!!!

"I am First Priestess Tais, of whom Lorraine 'wrote'," she suddenly spoke to me, her eyes burning down into mine with azure flame. I knew there could be just one "Lorraine" of which she spoke. But everyone believed that she had died at sea in a plane crash years three years ago! Yet "Tais" had just spoken as if Lorraine yet lived! "And soon it will be 'time' now," she spoke in tones that made a chill go down my back at their very implication! Lorraine had written of Tais, the First Priestess! A woman who lived in the 26th Century, the head of the Priestesses of Lys, who also had appeared to be the world religion of that era! The Priestesses of Lys had also served the "GUARDIANS", beings so powerful that they controlled the destinies of intelligent races through the entire Universe! Serving too the wishes of "SHE", who is "Mistress of All", who Lorraine once "spoke with" on Mars. That "BEING" that mortal men have for centuries now called "GOD"!

My first impulse was to reach out and grab her. To shake the "truth", whatever it was, from her! I know now how "futile" that would have been. I think she could have stood up against the entire armed forces of the whole world had she so wished and crushed them, so great was the powers that she commanded! Powers that allowed her to travel through time, back to an era that even to her is I believe still partly "myth". "I will be waiting," she said, strolling off, and leaving me sitting there so stunned that I could only watch her walking through the crowd! A few of the "HUTCH's" male patrons, "drunker" than the others, now trying to "pick her up" without any success. I saw her roughly "shove" one back down into his seat, and thought that it was just as well that she was leaving, as she didn't appear to be the sort you'd want to get into any sort of a "fight" with! The band now starting up, introducing the next strip dancer, Chris, the last dancer of the night. It was Saturday night, the end of the week. And the "end" of far more than Carol and I ever realized then! The "end" of a peaceful life we'd lived for the last fifteen years. And the beginning of an incredible adventure in a future world!

"Strange bitch, that one," the waitress commented, stopping by my table there in the back, the blonde now gone from sight, but not from my thoughts. I ordered for Carol, knowing she'd be with me shortly as soon as she got dressed. We usually had a last drink together before leaving. Carol usually being the one to drive us home as after a night of watching her doing her strip dances I often wasn't really in a condition to drive home safely.

I watched Carol come through the crowd, moving around the closely set tables with that "confident" stride that she has, the provocative sensual curves of her firm muscular body so beautifully displayed there beneath the clinging soft oiled leather of her fitted jumpsuit. The "jut" of her still firm breasts denying the "fact" that she was now in her late thirties. An age when most women, but not yet my Carol, often started "showing their age". I was well "aware" too of the fact that she had nothing on underneath her outer clothing. Strapped around her hard muscular waist a broad leather belt that now supported a long slim dagger on the right hip and a short lightweight sword with a two foot blade on her left. Attire that made her look really "dom" as all get out! Attire that said, "LOOK, BUT DON'T YOU DARE TOUCH ME"! * * This was of course a "costume", not something that she wore on the "street" back in the 20th Century as she probably would have gotten arrested for "disturbing the peace" or something. Now, of course, things are a bit "different" and my beloved "Warlady" often does go so "attired" here on the streets of Arsana. (R.S.)

"You're still the 'best'," I said, taking her in my arms, Chris up there on the stage now strutting back and forth in time to the music. Carol's hazel eyes glowing into mine as she nodded back, her rich red mouth sweet and moist as she pressed it up to mine. The very "feel" of that provocative figure like a caress! Mrs. Robert J. Simmons being a woman like no other, I often feel !

"You love me too much, Bob," she laughed, seating herself in the chair I held for her, her walnut hair a lovely mane falling about her shoulders. She is to me at least a "beautiful" woman. More of a "woman" than any I've ever met in my entire life, and I include those both of the 20th Century and those of the 26th too!

"I'm a lucky man," I smiled, sipping at my drink, feeling its warmth as it trickled down my throat. Carol is the sort of a woman that novelists write about. The sort of a woman that makes getting up in the morning always worthwhile. Her three novels of a "futureAmerica" of the 22nd Century "erotic" delights to read! Books that in their way I now think have "shaped" a future world. Queen Maris thinks that they did, and perhaps she is right here. There is also "A KEY TO A WOMAN'S HEART" which my wife wrote just before all this happened. A book that in its own way has altered in many ways the sexual "relationships" between men and women. I should note here, however, that this book was published under the "pen name" of "CAROL" and thus was not identified as being my wife's until Carol herself publicly laid claim to its authorship!

"You're a handsome 'devil' who could 'charm' any woman," my wife smiled, her lips wet now from her drink as I smiled back. I suppose she is "right", although I've never thought about it that way. I am a bit over six, dark, and I suppose rather well built. Carol is the sort who gives you considerable "encouragement" to keep yourself so. A woman who has absolutely no "doubts" about herself as a sexy "desirable" woman. Like Princess Lara of Baja.

"That 'blonde' was here," I said, wanting Carol to "know". My wife "stiffened" a bit, a look of "concern" filling her face. "She claims to be 'Tais', the 'First Priestess'," I added, Carol nodding, the look in her hazel eyes now one of almost terror now! My wife of course had also read the strange books we'd been sent. The two written by Lorraine Richards, the other one by Darlanis. Books that told of a strange future civilization of the 26th Century. Of a world now so much like that of my wife's own novels!

"We're getting 'out of here', and 'NOW'!" Carol snapped, roughly shoving back her chair, her raised voice drawing the attention of a nearby couple over the "boom- ra-boom" of the band. I doubted that it would do any good. I didn't think one could "flee" from such infinite power. From those who were Mistresses of both time and space! I suspected we would soon be seeing her again! And she had said too that the time was drawing near now! I quickly flung a tip down on the table and followed my terrified wife out the door, knowing then as Carol did not that one could not "run" from that which was to be! We had been "sent for"! I did not think it would be long now before we both stood in the presence of a tall brunette Queen, the greatest swordswoman of all time! Mrs.LorraineRichards, the Queen of Trelandar! Warlady of the Empire ofCalifornia! I hoped Carol would like the 26th Century. I suspected that we would never see our era again!

"Can you drive O.K.?" I asked Carol as we ran out to our car in the parking lot, the rain pouring down upon us in buckets as I opened the Reliant's door for her, both of us getting well soaked by the downpour. The flashing lightning, the heavy drum roll of the thunder leaving no doubts that it was not a very nice night! A good night, I thought, for the sort of thing Tais wished to do!

"I'm all right now," Carol answered me, getting in, reaching over as she did to unlock my side. I climbed in, shut the door, and kissed her, feeling Carol for a moment "cling" to me before she got control of herself. I handed her the keys, let her start up our old trusty Reliant. I saw no sign of the mysterious Tais, if that indeed was her name. Had the books, the coin, just been a trick of some sort? That had been Carol's first belief when we had received the books and the coin together in a package through UPS. On the other hand I felt I had "known"Lorrainewell enough to know just about how she "thought", and the books were certainly written just the way thatLorraineherself would have written! My only regret now was that I had not given them to Janet Rogers. On the other hand had I done so, I doubtlessly would

have altered "history" in a way that no one could have predicted. Carol's own three novels, I should mention, have had their own "effects" as history has shown, especially in the field of "feminine attire"! And "A KEY TO A WOMAN'S HEART" is the most popular marriage manual of all time, as well as the book that mothers "give" to their sons when they see that their sons have seen there are two sexes!

"Carol," I said to her, touching her arm, her eyes gleaming in the light reflected off the windshield from the parking lot lights. "Whatever happens, you're the only one I've ever loved." I wanted her to know that, to understand what the situation had been between Lorraine and me. I didn't know then that she would allow to accompany me into the future or not. She was my wife. The only woman I've truly loved, the only one I've really loved! The very "odor" of her wet body in its leather comforting to me!

"I'm not the 'pushover' I was back then," Carol snapped, the "implications" of her words leaving no doubts as to her own feelings. I knew that Carol had even learned the sword (and very well too!), learned to be "violent", all because she had once believed I "loved" Lorraine because "she" was all these "things"!

"Tais will know where we live," I pointed out. She would no doubt be "waiting" for us there. If she was "what" she appeared to be, and I had no reason to believe otherwise just then, then I felt our best policy was to keep on the "move" until the time passed that Tais would be able to use the thunderstorm as a "power source" for opening a "GATEWAY" back into the 26th Century! It being my theory from what I had read of Lorraine's writings that such thunderstorms were a "power source" for the space-time warps that allowed one to travel from one era of time to another!

"I'm not 'running'," Carol suddenly spoke, her hands on the steering wheel like she was grasping some weapon. "I'm not going to give that damn bitch the 'satisfaction'!" she snapped in cold furious tones that left no doubts as to just "who" she referred to! "And 'GOD DAMN IT' as long as I'm your wife no damned time traveling bitch is going to snatch away my husband!" she snarled!

"Carol," I said, reaching out, touching, the thunder like a drum roll. I saw the look in her eyes, understood much that I had not perhaps "understood" before. I was "more" to her than just her husband. I feared then for what might occur when we met Lorraine. When Tais transported us through time to another era! I hoped Lorraine would "understand" how Carol felt about things!

"I wear your neck chain," she spoke in level tones, starting the car, yanking the shift lever into "drive". "'SHE' doesn't." * * It was always a bit of a puzzlement to me where the ideas came from for "clips" and "straps", for "neck chains" and so forth. I never was able to obtain a satisfactory answer to these questions from anyone until the time there on the North Star that Maris Marn showed me the tattered remains of one of Carol's own novels. Then I realized just "who" had actually invented these things. I regret to say however that Carol and I are bitter enemies, at least she still is towards me, although I bear her no dislike. I am of course a bit "uncomfortable" with her use of me as a character in her books, (I am nothing like her "Queen Lorraine"!) and I am at least thankful that she has not written any more! (L.R.)

"We've had a good fifteen years together," I said to Carol as the outskirts of Seaside fell behind us, the windshield wipers going "click-clack" as they swept aside the downpour that fell from the lightning streaked sky overhead. The lightning from time to time lighting up the trees that now grew on either side of the rural road. The forest moving to enclose us now on both sides as we now left the last traces of our civilization behind.

"And we're going to have a lot more," Carol promised me.

The headlights lit up the woman as she stood there alongside our hidden forest home, the home in which

Carol had lived with me for the last twelve years. That hidden "earth home" we had both loved so well. I hated the thought of "leaving it". Tais standing there before us, dry as a bone despite the rain pouring down only a further "proof" if any was needed of her awesome "powers"! The wet leaves in the trees dripping as the rain yet poured down.

"It is now `TIME'," Tais said to us as we stepped out of the car, her voice soft, but yet audible over the sound of the thunderstorm. Carol standing there with her hand on the hilt of her swordlike some "gunfighter" out of the Nineteenth Century going out to "fight"! "It would be best if you joined hands," she suggested then to us. The lightning seeming to grow worse now, a series of constant brilliant flashes and deafening bangs as Tais raised her arms, an awesome "glow" of some hellish blue-green light now surrounding her as she stood there! I felt an electrical "tingle" go through me, Carol's hair standing up around her head, the car starting to stutter and miss now due perhaps to some strange electrical effect as the glow that surrounded Tais now grew rapidly larger and larger! The car then sputtering out!

"Beam us up, Scotty!" Carol spoke softly, her eyes glowing up into mine as I clutched her to me, clinging to her "reality"! Holding her, clinging to her as everything suddenly went "blank"!

Chapter Two

"Whew!" Carol breathed, clinging to me, our bodies yet "tingling" from the passage through time.* Suddenly it was daylight! * Carol and I suffered much less "effect" from being sent through time than did Lorraine and her daughter Sharon. This may be due to the fact that the Priestesses of Lys "controlled" our "GATEWAY" whereas they did not "control" the one Lorraine used. (R.S.) The golden links of Carol's neck chain around her throat glittering there in the bright sunlight that peeked down through the leafy boughs above. Our house now only ruins there in the forest, the sun gleaming down upon us, the soft breeze gently rustling the leaves as it wafted on by! The entire area was far more "grown up" now than it had been back in our own time! The clearing behind the house where my wife used to "sun" herself wearing only her lovely golden nipple "clips" and a brief "strap" covering her shaved sex was now only another part of the forest. The fact that the house itself still "stood" in a way more a credit to its "construction" than anything else, my father having built it more on the design of a bomb shelter than anything else.

"The Twenty Sixth Century," I said, looking into her lovely hazel eyes. There was no doubt in my mind as to "where" we were, or "when" either. The very ruins of our home, so adequately described by Lorraine in her own books, leaving no doubts of this! I glanced down at my watch, saw that it had stopped running now. Doubtlessly the "side effect" of being transported through time. This is also why I think that our car stopped running back then. And why the attempt that will be made sometime in the future by Darlanis' "clone daughter" to alter the "past" will fail. One is forbidden by the nature of time travel to use electronic devices.

"If it is'," Carol answered, now drawing her sword from its sheath. The two foot long blade gleaming there in the sunlight. "If that damn Tais `knew' what she was doing," my wife muttered, the soft leather of her jumpsuit clinging to every lovely curve! I thought of a favorite video tape of mine, of a certain actress. Lana Clarkson and a certain Mrs. Robert Simmons are much alike.* * "THE BARBARIAN QUEEN" is perhaps her best work. (Jerome Bigge)

"I don't..," I muttered, looking about. There was no trace of our car or anything else. Or of anyone

"waiting" for us now! I recalled the forms of life Lorraine had described. The dinosaur like Garth, the saber tooth tiger called a Tigon, the dire wolves as big as ponies. The horrible mutants that often made life dangerous in the more deserted parts of this strange world! There were also, I recalled, "outlaws", dangerous men. Perhaps even possibly bands of runaway slave girls now living "by their wits". Much like Carol's own "libbies" did in her own books. I felt a sudden "terror" just then. This was a "dangerous world", not our own! A world where "help" was not a phone call away! * * Whether or not it is actually any more "dangerous" than what the 20th Century was is a good question. Here at least you are allowed to possess the means of "self-defense". A world where it is "understood" that those who commit criminal acts do not "have" the "protection" of the law as they did back in our own time. If I kill a criminal in this social order, I am "rewarded" for the deed, not put on trial. There is much to be said for this. (RS)

"I wouldn't `recommend' that we go inside," Carol suddenly spoke, her voice level, emotionless. The sword gleaming there in her hand. She was no longer of the 20th Century. No longer too the "wife" I had known. She seemed "competent", sure of herself! Her hazel eyes constantly moving as she searched for danger, the stance of her firm trim body that of the trained fighting woman! Suddenly I realized that Carol was the one making the decisions!

"No, it probably wouldn't be `wise'," I answered, standing there, looking at her. The sword there in her hand, the leather of her jumpsuit, the movements of her muscular body beneath it. I had not really "thought" about it before, but Carol was not now the "same" woman she'd been back when I'd been "seeing" Lorraine. In the last several years she had been "working out", building herself up, both by exercising and by her "dancing", practicing with the foil and the bow until she was awesomely proficient with them both! Especially with the bow, where Carol had become truly "legendary" in her skill. My wife being able to hit tossed paper plates that I flung up into the air with her compound almost every time! She had put on a bit of weight, all muscle too, Carol now going about 133 or so, although the weight hardly showed any. She didn't have big muscles like a man would, but she was damm strong, something I'd noticed now and then in the last year now! Her lovemaking less "gentle" and more "rough" than it used to be!

"I'll make you a spear," she answered, hacking at a sapling, her actions instantly reminding me of those of another! Suddenly her words came back to me that she had spoken earlier about her no longer being the "pushover" she had been "before". Words that now left no doubts in my mind about things that had "puzzled" me over Carol's behavior in the last several years. The changes in her personality. Her "interest" in all sorts of "martial arts", including those karate classes once a week there in Seaside. My wife was now a "black belt", as "deadly" with her hands and feet as if she was armed with a weapon. The last "drunk" she'd "decked" there at the "HUTCH" hardly even "knew what hit him"!!!

"You are `OF THE WARRIORESSES'," I said as my brownette busily hacked away at the sapling. Carol merely nodded, gave me a "smile" back. Cutting off the sapling, I watched her hack off a length about six or seven feet in length with her sword and then put a point on it with her dagger while I stood and watched her. Her calm, competent actions those I would have expected not of a woman like her, but of another, a tall, stern featured brunette!

"`One in a thousand'," Carol smiled, handing me my spear.

"More like `one in a million'!" I replied with a smile then.

"We'll take a look around, then figure out what we're going to do," my wife replied, her voice calm, competent, emotionless. It was the sort of a thing that a woman like Lorraine would say!

"We wouldn't stand much of a chance against `that'," I said, poking at the skull of the skeleton with the

tip of my crude spear. Carol nodding, walking about the remains of the Garth that Sa-she- rahad killed. Its "reality" now sobering us both!

"At least we made it into the right time," Carol replied, standing by a crude grave marker set up there in the clearing. I recalled Darlanis' book, remembered then "who" was buried here!

"Lorraine's estate should be that way," I said, pointing.

"Unless you want to try for Trella ," Carol laughed back.

"You're `taking' this better than I hoped," I said to her.

"Don't have too much `choice' now, do I?" Carol smiled back, giving the skull of the Garth a kick with a booted toe. I didn't think she'd enjoy the walk, especially not in those spike heels!

"Carol," I said, my wife's hazel eyes meeting mine. "I'm just glad that you're here." There had been a subtle change too in our relationship. Carol was no longer just a "playmate". No longer just the sexy wife that made my life an "Hefnerian dream"! Now she was far more! More than just a wife too! I felt for her a sensation of both "love" and "admiration". The feeling that my delightfully provocative brownette was far "more" than I had ever given her credit for being! The proof her very own actions now!

"You put `this' on me," Carol answered, touching the golden links that circled her throat. Her "neck chain" that marked her in a way that I found very beautiful on her. "And I am a woman who `protects' what is `hers'," she added, the "implications" of her words leaving no doubt in my mind as towards her own opinion of our "status" together as husband and wife. I was her "possession", and she fully intended to "fight" for me if so necessary! Her words reminding me much of those spoken by Lana Clarkson in her tape, "THE BARBARIAN QUEEN" which I'd seen a number of times.

"I have `loved' but one woman in my life, and that `one' has been you," I said to her, holding her then in my arms there in the forest, the ruins of our home only a small brush covered hill! And I "wanted" her like I've seldom ever "wanted" her before too! This would probably be the last time either of us would ever see the place, and I wanted to "have her" one last time right here!!!

"I'm going to be a bit `smelly' after everything," Carol warned, undoing her leather jumpsuit, slipping it off, the sunlight casting moving spots of light on her beautiful tanned body. Making her truly an erotic delight to the eye as she stretched out there on the coarse grass behind the ruins of our 20th Century home and looked up at me as I stripped. Her hot wet mouth welcoming mine as I joined her on the grass, kissing and licking at her, "touching" her, the half-stink of her body making her seem even more "erotic" than usual! That mixture of odors of her sweat, leather, perfume, and her own sexual musk as I kissed the interiors of her thighs making her seem so incredibly "female"! Tasting of the "sexuality" of her, licking in between her "lips"!

"Carol!" I breathed, my wife pushing me back, rolling me over so that she might straddle me, my cock slipping up into her heated wet warmth. Into the "softness" of her inner tissues. I welcomed her tongue, delighted in the nip of her strong teeth as she bit, her nails digging deep, scratching, marking me as hers!

Then I was on top of her, "drowning" in her, her strong legs locked about my hips, her body arching beneath mine, her tongue deep in my mouth, her nails scratching, clawing, drawing blood! She was a female animal in heat beneath me, possessive, hungry! The woman has yet to be born who can surpass Carol at lovemaking! Carol is truly I believe as much "THE QUEEN OF LOVE" as Lorraine is "THE QUEEN OF SWORDS" and Darlanis is "THE QUEEN OF BEAUTY"!

"Yes, Yes, take me, have your Carol!" she gasped softly, my cock buried deep in that hot drooling love sheath of hers. My wife being the sort of a woman who can make love like no other! It was at that moment that she suddenly cried out in terror just as a heavy object of some sort came smashing down, the blow stunning me as I saw dimly the figures of several men! A second blow knocking me senseless as Carol's angry curses were the last sound I heard! Then I knew only the "nothingness" of unconsciousness!

I became conscious of "pain", of a "headache" like nothing I'd ever experienced before. And of the "fact" that I was alive. The sunlight dazzled my eyes as I looked about, the dead body of a brutal looking man clad in a soiled leather kilt and vest lying there beside me face down. In his heart the stainless steel dagger that my wife had carried as a part of her costume! The blood like a reddish stain there in the grass beneath him as I rolled the body over, the teeth yet clenched in death as his eyes stared unseeingly up into my face. There was no sign of my wife, which "heartened" me considerably as my first fear had been that these men, "outlaws" by their attire, might have killed her! On the other hand what they might "do" to Carol now was something I didn't want to think about, especially as she had apparently killed one of their number before they had taken her captive! I could only pray that they might keep her, even at the cost of her rape, for I could not even think of living in a world where there was no longer a "Carol". So important is my beloved brownette to me!

I managed to dress, putting on the shirt and blue jeans I had worn there to the "HUTCH" to watch Carol "dance" so long ago now. I took the dead man's weapons, found Carol's sword and her own clothing, made a bundle of things that I could carry on my back. The "heft" of the man's sword was pleasing in my hand just then, I noted. The weapon had a polished steel blade about two feet in length, with the sword blade itself about three inches wide, the point and edges honed razor sharp. Such a weapon at "close quarters" is "deadlier" than a longer and heavier sword might be, I believe. The hilt was tightly wrapped with a roughened rawhide made to fit a man's grasp perfectly. I had no doubt that I could put the sword to a good "use" here in this era. We have lived for fifteen years in this very same forest. I did not think it would be that difficult either to track these men. To follow wherever they took my wife. I am good with a sword. Not as "good" as Carol perhaps, but I did not think that my "skills" would be found "wanting" when the time came either. I was no longer a "wimp" of the 20th Century. A man who paid "others" to do his "fighting" for him. My "caste" was now of the "Warriors".

Chapter Three

I found their trail at the edge of the semi-clearing beyond the skeleton of the Garth, its remains "hinting" at more than I wished to think about just then. The scuff marks in the coarse grass leaving no doubt that Carol was trying to leave a trail for me to follow. Such now "heartened" me considerably, I assure you, more perhaps than you can understand. I also found the hoof prints of what I believed were horses, although I knew that they more likely were the hoof prints of unicorns, a mutated form of the horse common in this era some five centuries after The War.* * Lorraine believes that unicorns are the result of genetic manipulation in the 21st Century before The War of 2047. I consider this likely considering the nature of the animal in question. Others may differ, but I do believe the Warlady on this. (R.S.)

Once, some twenty one years ago I served in the Marines, and such military training was now once again "useful" as I tracked those who had stolen my Carol. No longer was I a "civilized" man of the 20th Century who relied upon the police for "protection". A "wimp" who paid "others" to "protect" him and his

"loved ones". I think the "price" we paid for such things back then was perhaps too high. Others will disagree, but I much prefer life here in the 26th Century with its "dangers" to those of my own era. Here at least you can still yet legally carry the "means of defense". "Protect" what is "yours" without fear of a "lawsuit" afterwards. In the 20th Century it was a "crime" to kill a "criminal". Here of course you get a "reward" for doing so. Sometimes I think the Lorr did us a "favor" by destroying the civilization of the past. Lorraine once spoke to me of "over civilization", of a social order that forbade one to carry the "means of defense". She once said she would not "weep" if America was "cleansed" of its "liberalism" by thermonuclear fire. That it was "diseased", "sick". She is of course a "Warlady". Others may disagree as they will.

They had taken my Carol. I would get her back or die in the attempt now to regain her! The sword in my hand, a short, thick bladed weapon, much different in its design from the light thrusting weapon that my wife favored, recalled to me the memories of times far back in the past. Of Legions marching off to war under the Imperial Eagles of Rome. I looked forward to "meeting up" with those who had stolen my Carol. There was little left of the 20th Century now as I followed them. What followed them now was no longer of 1991, but a "MAN" of a sort that perhaps had not walked the Earth for a thousand years or more. A MAN who lived by a "LAW" not made by "governments", but by TRUTH! By the biological "realities" that Men once understood long ago! They had taken "my woman", my Carol. I fully intended to get her back or die in the attempt! They would pay with their lives for what they had doubtlessly by now done to my beloved brownette!!!

The trail followed a game trail among the trees, their great leafy limbs now far overhead making the forest cool and shady. I have lived in such an environment for some eighteen years. Hunted small game and a couple times even the deer, although Carol's own "reaction" to my killing a deer was perhaps understandable. My wife having almost made "pets" out of a number of them there out in the clearing behind our home. I am at "home" in such a forest. More so perhaps than even most fighting men of this era. I am, I believe, not quite as "civilized" as most men of the 20th Century were. I believed in things that most "liberals" considered to be "Neanderthal". I was a life member of the National Rifle Association. I owned guns. Hunted. I believed in a society where you had to EARN your place in it. In a "social order" where the "law" did not "protect" those who sought to take away the "freedoms" of others. I have knelt before a beautiful golden haired Queen. And pledged my sword to her service as I did so. Stood on the decks of a ship of war under fire. Led men and women in battle. I am no longer a man of the 20th Century. The "civilization" from which I came is now only a myth and legend. Perhaps it is just as well. It was "sick", a social order that did not deserve to survive. A society of "wimps", not free men!

I watched the movements of the birds, the behavior of the little scurrying animals. Such can tell one "wise" in the ways of the woods much. I used to practice tracking Carol through the forest back home in the Twentieth Century. She never managed to "hide" from me for long despite her best efforts to do so. Such skills are, I believe, something that it is wise for the Warrior to know. I am, by the command of a golden haired Queen, now of that honorable caste. The brand of the sword is burned into my wrist as it is burned into Carol's. Such is, I think, "fitting". It is said that the caste "selects" you, you do not "select" it.

Briefly, for a moment, I saw something moving between the trees, a creature that had once gone "extinct" at the end of the last Ice Age, but reborn once again. A great wolf the size of a pony. I found the hilt of the sword in my hand a "comfort" just then as I stood frozen, motionless. I had confidence in the blade. It was a good, serviceable weapon. Made to slash as well as thrust. The blade of polished steel, well honed on both edges to a razor's edge. Such a blade will take a man's head off with one swipe. Cut through an arm, slash off a hand. In the hands of one who knows its use, such a weapon is as "deadly" as any ever developed by a violent race of Men. Men who "understood", as those of the 20th Century did not, that one does not "appease" an "enemy" either foreign or domestic. One does not give up what is "yours". That, I think, we of the past never did understand! Such is, I think, the "fallacy" of believing that

all "issues" can be settled with the "ballot box". There are "those" which in my opinion can be "resolved" only on the field of battle! There are "times", even in a "democratic society", when one must take up "arms". Defend with "violence" if necessary what is "yours" even if the "vote" went against you. Those who do not do so can no longer call themselves truly "MEN". Such is now "understood" by men who carry swords there at their hips. By the women who stand at their sides, WOMEN not like those of the 20th Century, but the "warrior women" of this barbaric era. Women who are in their own way now more truly "equal" than were those of the past! That is, I think, why there are "Warladies". Why men will die in battle at their command. The Imperials have their "Lorraine", and we of Dularn now have our "Carol", my own beloved "Warlady"!

The forest was in itself a thing of beauty. The trees towered far up into the sky, while the gentle breezes softly rustled the restless leaves, the sunbeams like dancing spots of light there on the coarse grass that carpeted it. There is, so far as I can tell, little difference between the forests of my time and this. Nature heals "wounds" far better than "Man" has ever done.

I crossed the remains of a highway, a bit of rusted metal sticking out of a bit of broken concrete the last remains of another era. I thought of the centuries that had passed one by one in their slow passage year after year. The sun was getting lower in the sky now. It was, I thought, late in the afternoon. Perhaps close to fouram back in our own time, I suspected now, although I yet felt little fatigue after all that had happened.

The trail crossed a little stream, and here those I had been following had halted for a moment. The imprints of Carol's knees still in the soft mud of the bank where she had been allowed to drink. The lack of hand prints leaving no doubts in my mind that she had been bound, doubtlessly with her wrists behind herself. The mark of shod feet beside her knee prints told its own tale. Doubtlessly she had been held by the hair, that lovely soft walnut colored hair of hers, and held with her face to the water. I feared now that I might not be able to catch up with them before dark, and I suspected from what I had already seen that these forests might be indeed a dangerous place to be after night came!

Now quenching my own thirst, I proceeded on my way, fighting down the "thoughts" of what they might do to my Carol once they reached their eventual destination. I recalled from Lorraine's writings much of what she had herself written on such topics. If Carol did not "fight" too much she probably would not be "hurt". Her provocative sensual "femaleness" might hint at her "value" in the slave market. She was worth much "alive", and nothing dead. On the other hand "submission" was not a part of her "nature". I was at least "thankful" that they were not "civilized" men, for such men are often far more "cruel" than more simple barbarians.* * After considerable thought and a number of discussions with my wife and Queen Maris, I believe this was "due" to the great deep rooted "hatreds" that the "civilized man" of the 20th Century had towards the women of his era. There is much less hatred directed towards women now in this era than there was back in my own time. The reasons for this are, I believe, due to the "fact" that in a "democratic society", one cannot "protect" one's "rights" as well as they can in a society that is less "democratic" and certain items are never ever "subject" to a "vote". As Queen Maris said when I discussed this with her (She is not a "dumb blonde" by any means!), "The men of Dularn have `drawn a line' that `no woman', not even their Queen, may "cross" except at the price of her own life!" Such appears to be true on the issue of "slavery" at least. There is true "sexual equality" in Dularn, but it is not the "same" as the sort of a perverted "sexual equality" that the feminists of the 20th Century apparently wanted for women. I should also note here that there is no "alimony" as such. (R.S.)

The trail at points grew difficult to follow, but at each of these points there would be scuff marks to guide me, it being obvious to me that Carol still hoped that I lived, or otherwise she wouldn't have bothered trying to leave the "trail" that she was!

Something moved through the trees to my right, something tan and slinky, something big! I paused behind a tree, my sword at the "ready" although I knew how useless a weapon it would be against such as that. I recalled Lorraine's "adventures" with the "Tigon" as such were called. She had water at least to help her. I did have my crude spear, but I doubted its "value" here!

It was with a deep heartfelt sigh of relief that I saw the creature now slink off, the body striped like that of the tiger. Such creatures do not normally include "man" as their prey, but one can never be "sure" about such things either! In any case I was damn glad to see the last of it as I once again took the dim trail that I hoped would lead me to these outlaws' "encampment". To my stolen lost "love". To that provocative brownette of mine!

Carol is more to me than life itself. She is what makes my life worth living. It is more than just "love" as such. More than just the fact she is "good in bed". Carol is the sort of a woman who makes you delight in the fact that you were born a man! That we are members of a race that includes two sexes, not one...

The sun was close to the horizon when I faintly smelled the odor of wood smoke. The smell of a campfire. Had I found the camp of those who had stolen my beloved Carol? Was it here that I would find her again? They had my Carol! She was mine! About her lovely throat had been the golden chain that marked her mine! The golden chain I'd put about her lovely throat years ago as a "mark" of what she meant to me, my wonderful Carol Lynn Simmons!

Cautiously I crept closer, every sense alert now. I moved "only" when I had assured myself that no one had seen me. I was but one man against an unknown number of the "enemy". They might well have bows, perhaps crossbows. Such can be as deadly as the rifles of my own era. That as developed and perfected by the industrious caste of Builders of Dularn will hurl a sharp pointed steel shafted bolt a distance of three hundred and thirty yards. One who has fully "mastered" such a weapon may do so as often as four times in the space of a minute, I note here for the reader.

The outlaws' encampment was in a small clearing that to my surprise overlooked the ocean! The Pacific! I had for the moment forgotten the fact that the great earthquakes that followed The War of 2047 A.D. only added to the destruction caused by the Lorr's bombing of the Earth from their orbiting battle discs! At the moment, however, I fear my only thought was for Carol as I saw her lying there with her wrists tied to a tree at the edge of the clearing! And with her ankles tied to stakes driven into the ground so that she laid helpless before them, spread for her rape if such had not already been done to her as I feared it had been!

There were five men, rough looking brutes, some in vests and leather kilts like the dead man whose weapons I now carried, while others wore forest green tunics and hose, making me think of "Robin Hood and his Merrie Men" of legend. A half dozen horned unicorns were tied to a hitching rope strung there between two trees a short distance from my wife. I studied the terrain, searching for a way to reach my Carol that they would not see. I did not see any such a way just then. To face the five of them in a sword fight was out of the question. I know that the legendary Lorraine once fought a dozen men, or so it is said, but she also had an element of "surprise" that I wouldn't enjoy here! As well as the fact that she had "help" too that I didn't have...

Chapter Four

"Strange bitch, isn't she?" I heard one of the men say, his words strangely accented, almost as if he wasn't speaking in English. His speech, the best I can describe it, being a mixture of Spanish and English, what Lorraine once called "wetback English"!

"Some kind of a 'Dulie' spy from the looks of her," another said, standing there regarding Carol as she laid there helpless before them, "staked out" there on the ground for their pleasure! The very "way" that she laid, her head turned to one side, left no doubts in my mind that she had already been "sexually abused"! I could see a number of livid bruises on her body from having been beaten. Her face especially was quite badly bruised, I saw! Smeared with dried blood from a nosebleed she'd suffered earlier.

"Could be off that 'raider' that been around these parts," another added, chewing on a piece of dried smoked meat. "Giving the Warlady's people the 'fits'," he added with a low chuckle. I had no doubt either that they were referring to Lorraine herself!

"Think the slavers would buy her?" the fourth now ventured, a fifth now strolling off into the forest towards me, his intentions obviously being to find a spot to relieve himself. I felt it best then to follow the man, in the hopes that I might be able to "reduce" the odds against me at least by this much! If only I could free my Carol. Together we might "stand" against the four!

"Do good in the arena too with muscles like she's got," the first laughed, Carol helplessly fighting her bonds as the man approached her. I recalled that in this era women were often made to fight each other in the arena for the amusement of the "crowd". Much like the Roman "Games" twenty five centuries ago.

Such "contests" are often between slave girls using "blunted" swords or other weapons. They are usually briefly clad, such women often being a part of a "stable" of "fighting women" owned by some "promoter". Other "contests" are fought hand to hand, their bodies often "greased". One thinks of here of somewhat "similar" events in the 20th Century such as our boxing matches which can hardly be considered a "sport". Watching people fight one another is a "sport" I feel that probably dates back to the Stone Age. One "wonders" sometimes about just how "civilized" we are. The "culture" of 26th Century California and Dularn to a lesser extent is very "similar" to that of Rome at its height.

I watched the man pass me, it obviously being his intention to find a fallen tree on which to "sit", such being the best way to empty one's bowels in reasonable comfort. I moved away from the encampment, following the man. My sword gleaming in my hand. Fortunately the brush was fairly thick, allowing me to move away from the encampment with little danger of being spotted just now!

"You know 'how' to 'please' a man, Dularnian bitch?" the man said, standing there, looking down at Carol. My wife shuddered at the "thought", the terror of her "position" clutching at her feminine heart. At first she'd been proud of how she'd behaved, but now, the "reality" of the situation was overwhelming her, and she could only raise a tear stained face to his as she looked up.

"Just 'fuck me' if that's what you want," Carol whimpered in soft tones, trying to avoid looking into his eyes. The "talk" about selling her to "slavers" terrifying. Did Bob yet live? A forlorn hope was all that "survived" now. They would have killed him had they not been in a hurry to get out of the area, saying something about "forest girls" that had meant nothing to her! It being apparent from their conversation that there was a band of runaway slave girls living somewhere in the area, women who lived by their "wits" and what they could hunt and steal from peasants! Much like the "libbies" of our own Twentieth Century novels had!

"'Better' when a woman uses her mouth," the man growled, his eyes burning hotly into hers as he

reached down and yanked up her head, Carol mentally shuddering at the very thought of performing such a "deed" with a man like him! Of having to do such a thing!

I didn't give the man a chance to even cry out a warning! I took a two handed grip on my sword and swung it in a mighty cut that severed his head from his body as he sat there on the log! The body "toppling" off the log, the head lying there, the eyes wide with shocked horror as for a few seconds the mouth continued to move before actual unconsciousness and death now came to him! A stink rising up from the twitching body as his bowels emptied.

Suddenly I felt then a warm feminine hand go over my mouth, a keen edge pressing up against my throat! Felt the curves of a woman's body press against my back, and saw two other women, clad in poorly tanned animal skins, the remains of clothing, step out into the field of my vision! Each armed with a crude bow, with sharpened sticks thrust into their skin belts like crude daggers! I felt it "wise" then to now gently drop my sword to the ground.

"Why did you kill him?" one asked, auburn haired, the other one dark haired as is common among the women of Trelendar. The one behind me I thought was a "brunette", but I wasn't sure. Such women, I knew, would not hesitate to "kill" at the slightest "wrong move". Like most women of the 26th Century, they were not afraid of using "violence" against an enemy, or of "killing" him. This is not a "civilized" era by the standards of my own century. It is much like that of European society during the Middle Ages.

"They took my wife," I answered, motioning with my head, the girl behind me obviously competent enough to cut my throat should I make the slightest "wrong move". I recalled Carol's "libbies" in her stories. Remembered Lorraine mentioning something about Darlanis having led some sort of expedition against female outlaws. These were doubtlessly the same sort. Each wore about her throat a snug fitting steel collar. The mark of the slave girl! Such collars being impossible to remove without the use of tools.

"We will help you if you will help us get to Dularn," the leader spoke, her eyes, an iron gray, burning hot straight into mine. I felt it best just then not to tell her that I knew next to nothing about getting anyone to "Dularn", and I wasn't too sure that the Dularnians wouldn't just keep them as slave girls! The men of Dularn, like those of California, often viewing the women of other countries in terms of slave collars and the whip! While most men do not own slave girls, I do suspect that the free woman of both California and Dularn is "different" than she would be otherwise just because slave girls do exist and can be bought! Surprisingly enough there is little opposition by women to this! * * An "exception" of course being Queen Maris and my wife Carol.

"I will do for you what I can," I said, it being obvious that they thought me "Dularnian" due doubtlessly to my "accent". Lorraine remarked on the same thing in her first book, and I do find that unlike those of California, those of Dularn do speak in an accent that is much like that of Twentieth Century Americans!

"You keep the Caste Codes?" their leader asked. I nodded. Those of the Warriors lived by a strict Code of Honor. Their promise is their "bond". This is an era in which contracts are kept. There are few "lawyers", and no laws favoring them either! The legal profession being prohibited by law from holding public office, I might note here, which doubtlessly tells us much here!

"Your mate is of the Warriresses?" the leader asked as she laid beside me watching the outlaws before us. She could have used a bath. She was a good looking wench, but one I'd much prefer to stay "upwind" from too! Her attire was quite "brief", and concealed little of her figure, which was excellent, I had noted.

"Probably a 'match' for any two of those," I answered back. I wasn't too sure how these women would be in a fight, but I only needed enough of a distraction to free Carol, and I was pretty sure that the three of us could deal with the four remaining men! The auburn woman was from Dularn, and said that she knew how to fight. "If you can make some sort of a 'fuss'," I added, the woman nodding, her iron gray eyes glowing into mine there in the growing darkness. The sun now low on the horizon, a red ball the color of her hair now hovering just over the ocean. It would be night soon, and in a land where I had little idea of what sort of animal life might be about! Her name was Sandi Cahill, she said, telling me that she had been a shop keeper's daughter in Arsana.

I watched the man kneel over her, grasping Carol's hair, and force her mouth up against himself. I wanted to order the girls to use their bows, but I feared that their marksmanship might be such that Carol's life would be as much endangered as his might! The horrors of what Carol had been forced to endure made me furious at whoever was "responsible" for getting us into this "mess"!

"Make a 'fuss' over there," I said, pointing, hoping that the men would rush to that part of the woods. I did not think that the other two women would be any "match" for the outlaws in a fight. Especially not if it got to be hand to hand. I had armed Sandi with the dead man's weapons. She was Dularnian, and like all Dularnians, was trained in the use of such weapons. I decided to keep her with me. She could free Carol while I tried to hold off the other outlaws. I had told the other two former slave girls to fire their arrows at the men only when they were "sure" of their targets. I feared their skill might be lacking!

"Now!" I hissed, charging the camp, Miss Cahill at my side! I saw one of the outlaws clutch at an arrow, yank it out of himself. The arrows were but sharpened sticks. The bows were not of a sort that could drive an arrow either far or also very deep!

I charged the man closest to me, meeting his thrust with a quick parry, slashing upwards, cutting his throat, the blood dark as it spurted, the others yelling, running towards me! One yet clutching a bleeding thigh, where an arrow had driven into him! I saw the blurred streak of an arrow, the missile flying wide of its mark. Then suddenly Carol was at my side, her slim keen blade flashing in the dying rays of the setting sun, and Sandi Cahill now dashing about to stand there on the other side of me!

The odds were "three to three", but there never was any doubt of what the "outcome" would be. Carol's blade moved with a swiftness that dazzled the eye, the man staggering back almost as quickly as he had engaged her, the blood spurting as he dropped his sword to clutch at his pierced heart! My own stumbled back, the blood now spurting from his neck, while my new sword companion drove her keen point up through his throat up into his brain! The third man dropping his sword and collapsing to the ground! A few twitches marking the final dissolution as he went on to "faceLys" as they say here in this era to be judged for his "sins"...

"I 'knew' you would come," Carol said to me, suddenly then throwing herself into my arms, sobbing and weeping as she clung to me while the three runaway slave girls looked on at the scene! I could feel her tremble as I held her, stroking her dirty matted hair. She had been raped, beaten up, kicked a few times, but just then I think nothing really mattered to her but the fact we were still both alive. That we had both survived this adventure!

Chapter Five

"You are a Dularnian Warriorress," I whispered in Carol's ear, warning her about our three "allies". Carol nodded, her naked body yet trembling a bit against mine as I held her. I had brought her clothing with me. My own was now the worse for wear. I thought however perhaps one of the dead men might "donate" his.

"From the 'disputed territories'," my quick witted brownette whispered back, clinging to me, her nakedness like a warm caress. Sandi Cahill and her companions looking on. I wondered if there was a band of such now lurking somewhere out there in the woods. It was now getting dark, the sun a red glow there on the horizon. The moon now glowing there to the east just visible between the trees. I heard the cry of some sort of animal, a big animal! Thought how "helpless" we'd be against something like a Garth! * * Lorraine once told me that she thought the Garth was the result of the early experiments by the Women of Mars there in Leith to "recreate" the dinosaurs from fossilized DNA. It is as "good" an explanation as any. She also claims that the dire wolf and the saber tooth tiger were "recreations" produced by genetic manipulation back in the era of Janet Rogers' "WORLD FEDERATION". This is doubtlessly the "case" at least so far as the unicorn is concerned, so it is safe to assume the same of the "others". (R.S.)

"We're 'lucky', that's all I've got to say," I told Carol.

"When I get my hands on Lorraine...", my wife muttered!

Carol squatted by the fire, the leaping flames lighting up her face, the sensual curves of her body well displayed by the soft fitted leather of her 20th Century jumpsuit. We had told the three runaway slave girls that we were from the "disputed territories". They seemed "content" with that. I didn't want to let on that we knew next to nothing about Dularn, that we were in reality only "time travelers" from the Twentieth Century. Sandi and her two friends had been of considerable help, and I hated to disappoint them now with the "TRUTH". Perhaps Lorraine could be helpful to them. I thought she might if I "asked" her. The two dark haired girls had been whipped so badly that their backs were badly scarred, while Sandi had been "tortured" by some sadistic "pervert"! Such are "rare" now in this era, but they do "exist". "Slave abuse" is "illegal" here in Trelandar, but it does happen.

My wife had "washed" herself in the ocean, rinsing out her mouth, although the man had not come in it before he had suddenly found "other things" to draw his attention. The five men had all raped her, staking her out there on the ground and taking "turns" sexually abusing her. I had "suggested" baths for all of us. The three slave girls at least smelling a bit better afterwards! Carol feared that she might be "impregnated" by her rapists, such an additional horror she might have to soon face if it was true! Due to having myself "fixed" years ago, Carol had not been using contraceptives which "meant" of course that any sexual intercourse with a "fertile" man could result in her impregnation! Fortunately "nothing" ever came of it, and after our capture by Lady Tirana's forces, Carol was of course "implanted" with the usual contraceptive implants commonly used in this era. Easing her mind and also putting a halt to her monthly menstrual cycle.

"You two are 'spies', aren't you?" Sandi had said in tones that left no doubts as to what she thought was the "truth". The other two women being Tula and Susan "of" Trelandar. Both were "convict" slave girls, women convicted of crimes and enslaved as is the policy here in the 26th Century. Sandi had spent a dozen years as a slave here in Trelandar after being taken by pirates from a coastal vessel off Dularn. Her first master had died of a heart attack a few months before and she had been sold by his widow, ending up in the cruel hands of a "pervert" who tortured her with sadistic pleasure. One night she took a knife, drove it into his throat to the hilt, and ran for her life, well aware of the execution that now awaited her should she ever be captured!

"What makes you think that?" I asked, Carol there at my side as we sat around the fire, drawing "comfort" from it and each other. The sounds that came from the forest from time to time left no doubt of the sort of animal life that roamed it at night!

"You don't have caste marks, and your clothing is odd," she said, well aware perhaps of the "fact" that we were both "armed". "And there is no doubt that you are both of the `Warriors'," she added, regarding Carol as my wife nodded quietly back in reply. The "Warrioresses" being a "twin-caste" of the "Warriors". The other two runaway slave girls now nodded, glancing at each other. Both had been petty thieves, such being a more "serious" crime in this era than it was back in my own time when criminal acts were less "punished" than they are now. This is a "harsh era", but in its way a "fair" one. I consider it perhaps superior to our own. Here the "criminal" does not seem to have more "rights" than does the victim of his misdeeds. And if you kill a criminal, you are "rewarded" for your deed, not put on trial for it like back in my own era. One wonders sometimes if the "Western Civilization" that we bragged so much about was really even worth preserving! I once told Queen Maris I saw little "reason" to consider it so.

"We are here on a `mission'," I said, glancing at Carol. I knew my wife was "quick witted". That was one of the reasons I'd married her in the first place twelve years ago. Carol was the sort of a woman who could "think on her feet" without hesitation! Unlike that blonde I'd been going with who never "knew her mind"! One who could never "decide" what restaurant to goto, or what to "order" once she got there. A submissive woman, not like Carol.

"To `gather information'," my wife added with a "smile". I knew from bits and pieces of conversation I'd overheard that the Empire of California was once again at war with the Dularian Republic, that being its new "official name" apparently, I noticed! Queen Maris Marn of Dularn doubtlessly being well "aware" of the "political advantages" she might be able to gain here in this era by calling her own constitutional monarchy a "Republic". Maris is a good competent Queen, although she lacks the "pizzazz" that Darlanis is so well known for. The "elections" in the "disputed territories" were a lot "closer" than one would have "expected". I think Carol gave us the "edge" against Darlanis and Lorraine.

"For Queen Maris," Sandi smiled back, her eyes meeting mine as she stirred up the fire a bit. The sparks flying up into the sky like fireflies. The odor of the wood smoke was "comforting". Its flickering light highlighting the dark trees there around us. Carol yawned, her eyelids heavy, and leaned her head against my shoulder. I put my arm around, "comforted" by her very presence.

"For Dularn," Carol smiled, careful here as we had no way of knowing if Sandi was "suspicious" of us or not. I recalled that as far as I knew Maris was still Queen of Dularn, but one could never be sure about those things. I had not been able yet to determine just what "year" this way, although I suspected it was not too far in the future after Lorraine's last book in 2566 A.D.

"We're only a dozen miles from the Warlady's estates," Tula said, interrupting our conversation. That would have to be our own "destination". Why Lorraine hadn't been there to "greet us" was something I wanted an answer to. It was starting to appear that either Tais had made some sort of "error" in her teleporting us through time, or the Priestesses of Lys had their own "plans" for us that Lorraine herself had known nothing about! It is now my considered opinion that the second is probably more "correct"! One thinks here of "balances of power", of a cold ruthless "plan" that used us as "pawns" for some yet almost unfathomable purpose! It is now my belief that what "happened" was "planned" to happen!

"Our eventual `destination' if things go right," I said, seeing Carol nodding in agreement. There is not another to compare with her anywhere. Provocative, sensual, a fighting woman almost beyond compare! My own beloved "Warrior Wife". My Carol! A wife who is also now a "Princess of Swords". A Warriress who once crossed blades with the awesome "Lorraine" herself and survived to tell of the

"experience". When one is as much in "love" with a woman as I am with my Carol, she is much "more" than just a "wife" to you. Far, far more! She is truly my "one and only"!

"I am of the Merchants, not the Warriresses," Sandi said, "But I will fight at your side if you wish to attack Lorraine's estates." It being obvious that Sandi had little "love" for the famous Warlady of California, the new elected Queen of Trelandar.

"We don't intend to attack her estates," Carol quickly said. That would have gained us nothing but a swift death in any case!

"We are after `information'," I quickly interjected here.

"There is certain `information' we require," my wife added, yawning, her hazel eyes half concealed now by her drooping lids.

"It has been a `hard day'," I said, hugging Carol. I could see the "tiredness" in her, the way she fought to stay awake now. We had both been awake now for well over twenty hours. I guessed it was perhaps six or seven a.m. in the morning back in our time.

I snuggled up against Carol there beneath the blanket, her body warmth "comforting" just then. We had given up a "comfortable" peaceful life for "what"? A life of danger and adventure? Sandi still sitting there by the fire, looking down into it now. Her attire was brief, rather "provocative", I supposed. She wore her hair tied in a ponytail, such being an excellent choice given the sort of a life she led here hiding in these Trelandarian forests of the 26th Century. She had lived in Trella, the capital, which laid ninety miles or so to the south from where we were.

"Bob," Carol breathed, her sleepy eyes now meeting my own. She was naked beneath the blankets, her body "warmth" enjoyable. It is colder in the 26th Century than it was back in our own era. I suspected too that it was in the spring here, not the middle of the summer as it had been back in the Twentieth Century. There was sufficient "proof" of this when you looked closely at things.

"Yes?" I asked, holding her close, enjoying her "closeness". Just the simple fact that we were both "alive" in this new world!

"I'm glad we're together," she said, kissing me then gently.

"I wouldn't want to live without you," I told her. I think she knew that it was true. There is, I think, only one "Carol".

"Nor I without you, Robert John," my lovely brownette whispered softly, using the name she sometimes used to use long ago.

Chapter Six

I was suddenly jerked awake by my wife to the sound of a woman's angry cursing! Seeing to my horror a tall brunette woman, veiled, wearing a stylish hat, clad in a flowing black silk dress and leather trappings, standing there over us with a drawn sword! Her attire that of a high born Lady of Imperial

California, one of the caste of "Warrioresses". Her keen point warning us without any need for words not to make a "move"! A number of men, perhaps half a dozen or so, clad in the green of the Caste of Foresters, and guided by a man who appeared to be an American Indian, now surrounding our campsite there on the seaside cliffs! Not the most pleasant way I can assure you to "greet" a new day!

"Lorraine," Carol breathed softly. It was an easy mistake to make. This woman could have easily been her older sister! I sensed, however, that she was not. I knew Lorraine's features a bit better than did my wife, and even "veiled" as this woman was, I knew that she was not the famous Imperial Warlady of California even if she certainly did look an awful lot like her! It was our first meeting with Lady Tirana, who is the Warlady of Trelandar. And a very "competent" Warlady she is too, let me assure you too! (Lorraine Richards is of course Warlady of Imperial California!)

"Others have made that 'mistake'," the woman smiled back, her dark eyes burning into the hazel of my wife as she nodded. I saw Sandi, her hands already tied behind her, now being stripped! And there were Susan and Tula, both naked, bound, tied to a tree! Their eyes wet with tears over the gags that filled their mouths. They had been "taken" in their sleep, bound and gagged before either one of them could cry out or give a warning. Sandi had been on "guard". Obviously she had not been "alert" enough this time! I knew that she was part of a band of runaway slave girls, women who now lived as best they could out here in the forest, robbing the Peasants of food and supplies, and being a "general nuisance" that I had no doubt many people would be happy to be freed from!

"I'll hazard a guess at 'Lady Tirana'," I smiled up at her, remembering the description Lorraine had given of Tirana Greyson. The "veil" worn by high born Californian women is like a "net", and does not really conceal the features all that much. The compound bows of her men leaving little doubt too, such being a "development" of Lorraine, who I knew manufactured them in Trella. A similar weapon is manufactured in Arsana of the same design. Both are "eccentric pulley" recurved compounds like the "Dularnian" crossbow, but of fibreglassed wood, not steel like the crossbow. An "arrow shelf" is used, allowing the use of a shorter, lighter arrow than those generally used in the 20th Century. The pulleys are of machined steel, set on steel pins at the ends of the bow limbs. It is an expensive weapon to manufacture, and is a "military" weapon. Most people use the more common "longbow", which can be manufactured with simple tools most Peasants have.

"I see my 'reputation' has even reached Dularn," she smiled back, motioning with her point in a way that left no "doubts" as Carol reached for her clothing beside her. My wife shrugging, no doubt well aware that Lady Tirana now believed us both to be from Dularn. An easy mistake to make, considering our accents!

"We are Bob and Carol Simmons from the Twentieth Century," Carol said, being well aware too of just "who" Lady Tirana was.

"At least it's an 'original' alias for two Dularnian spies," Lady Tirana then laughed, "motioning" with the point of her long slim sword, the blade some thirty inches in length, the sort of a thrusting sword favored by many such professional fighting women. The Warrioress of the Twenty Sixth Century being a "professional" at her "trade" much like a Physician or a Builder is at theirs'. A woman like Lady Tirana being "unlike" anything we of the 20th Century knew. It is, I think, a "state of mind" more than just training in the use of weapons. A Warrioress looks upon "issues" "differently" than would someone not of the Caste, I might note. I do not think a "liberal" of my own era would have liked such. Those like Lady Tirana tend to be quite politically conservative. The "concept" of "civil rights" is virtually unknown in this era. In general the "government" plays little role in day to day life.

"We are not 'Dularnian spies' whatever you might think," my wife snapped back, getting to her feet, and

covering herself with a hand as Lady Tirana "appraised" her as to her "market value" by a long searching glance. My wife's automatic instinctive reaction one that left no doubts as to what she thought of all this!

"Your nipples are pierced, your pubes are shaved, and you have obviously 'sunned' yourself recently wearing no more than clips and strap," Tirana smiled back, her dark eyes gleaming with a certain degree of "pleasure" I suspected over her smiling lips. "You are also 'neck chained'," Lady Tirana Greyson then added. "And the women of the Twentieth Century did not 'do' any of these things," Lady Tirana laughed back, "My lovely Dularnian delight!" Then adding as she regarded Carol, "And it will be the collar for you, my 'lovely', and the 'pleasing' of men will be your duties!"

"I've always 'wanted' to be a 'slave girl'," Carol "said". The tone of her voice leaving few doubts how she felt about this!

I stepped aside as Tirana's unicorn relieved itself there on the trail just ahead of me, well aware of the rope around my neck and the occasional tugs on it caused by the four women behind me. We were gagged, our wrists bound securely behind us in shackles. I did not think very many slaves ever escaped from Lady Tirana! Tirana had also attempted to obtain from Sandi information as to where the other slave girls had been "hid". Sandi had refused to tell her, despite having her face severely "slapped" by Tirana! We had then watched with horror as Tirana had swiftly built up the fire while her men staked out the helpless woman, Tirana's intention being obviously to extract the "information" she wished from Sandi even if there would be little "left" of Sandi later!!!

Carol and I had both watched in shocked horror a few moments later as Tirana had then held a burning brand to Sandi's crotch, the former slave girl screaming in agony and then weepingly sobbing out the "information" that Tirana had wished to have. I recalled the "incident" Lorraine had related about the "crossbowman" and Lady Tirana. I understood then as I had not before certain "things" that Lorraine had only "hinted" at in her own writings! Lady Tirana, like many here in the 26th Century, being an "expert" at the "extraction" of "information" from prisoners. I should note here that she had "good reasons" for doing this, the runaway slave girls having had become a considerable "nuisance" to the local Peasants and often to those who entered the forests! Their "activities" much like those of Carol's "libbies" in her own stories, her "libbies" also being a considerable "nuisance" to those of "NEW CALIFORNIA". The "libbies" often serving the "role" in my wife's books of "popping up" when least so "wanted"!

Our only "hope" now was that Lorraine would return from her duties as the commanding admiral of an Imperial fleet now fighting against the Mexican Empire off the coasts of Baja. Otherwise I muchly feared that Carol and I could only look forward to a life as slaves, in a social order where a dog had as many "legal rights" as we did! I recalled the chapters in Lorraine's first book where she had taken on the role of "slave inspector". She had written much about slavery then, and I feared that we might be getting a first hand view of it if Lady Tirana didn't believe the "truth" that we were actually time travelers from 1991 A.D.!

Our biggest "problem" was that Carol had all the "marks" of a woman of the 26th Century except for the "caste mark" on the wrist. She had the pierced nipples, the shaved pubes that most women of this era had, and she also had the sort of "skills" that one might "expect" to find a woman of this era in possession of!

Tirana was quite "knowledgeable" about the Twentieth Century, no doubt due to her close relationship with Lorraine, now the Queen of Trelandar thanks to Sanda Talen's recent "REVOLUTION". She had pointed out that the women of the 20th Century did not pierce their nipples, or shave their pubic regions (this is of course "untrue" as many did), nor did they "know" the sword as did my wife. Also, Lady Tirana had pointed out that no woman of the 20th Century wore a "neck chain" as did the women of the 26th

Century. As Carol was obviously "not" what she claimed to be, thus it seemed logical to Tirana that I was also not what I claimed to be, as I was obviously Carol's husband without doubt!

The problem was that while I did appear to be a man of the 20th Century (except for my skill with a sword), Carol certainly didn't appear to be a woman of any era except this one! And her attire certainly didn't match any that Lady Tirana knew about as being the "attire" of a woman of the Twentieth Century! The use of leather attire being quite popular I learned among Dularnians! (It is also rather "popular" among the bird girls of Talon too!)

So thus I ended up leading a slave coffle with Carol following just behind me, Sandi next, with Tula and Susan behind her. Lady Tirana's half dozen armed men and her Nevada "guide" being quite enough to insure that we didn't escape our "proper fates"! We had been "spotted" from the air early the evening before by a bird girl of Talon riding on a Tarl. Lorraine having introduced this new form of warfare the year before in her attack on Dularn. The Priestesses having later suggested to the Queen of Talon that such "assistance" perhaps was not really all that "proper" now...

It was a delightful spring morning, much like the ones that Carol and I used to enjoy back in the 20th Century. My Carol being the sort of a woman that it is always a pleasure to be with. However I fear just then that I paid such things little notice, Tirana having told my wife that she'd bring forty gold crowns* in a "good market", which didn't "delight" Carol at all just then or me for that matter, especially as I feared I might not ever see my beloved wife ever again should Carol be sold as a slave girl! * This is a rather good price for a woman, especially one as Lady Tirana pointed out who was obviously "getting up in years", Carol appearing by the standards of the 26th Century considerably older than her actual age of thirty eight. Carol was also rather "put out" by the "fact" that she was appraised this low, feeling with some "justification" that she was "worth more" than some blonde Dularnian teenager just unloaded off an Imperial raider. (R.S)

I thought of the books that Carol had written back in the 20th Century. Novels that reminded me much of this strange era! Carol's "NEW CALIFORNIA" being a barbaric society much like this one was, being built upon the ruins of "Western Civilization" after the collision of the Earth with an asteroid in the Twenty First Century. The destruction caused by the asteroid's collision with the Earth much like the destruction done by the Lorr's bombardment from their orbiting battle discs in The War of 2047.

I saw Lady Tirana turn in her saddle, glance back at us. I was struck again by her amazing resemblance to Lorraine Richards. While this is not mentioned in Lorraine's own books, they do look quite a bit alike, and even share the same "mannerisms" to some degree. Tirana is also an excellent swordswoman, I might note in passing, although she does not have the awesome "reputation" that Lorraine herself has. Both women are tall and slim, brunette. I would say that Tirana has a slightly more attractive face, but that is a "matter of taste", as I find Carol very "attractive" whereas another, more "objective" in this issue, might point out that there are a lot of women who are better looking than Carol. On the other hand, Carol in a long green fitted silken gown is a woman who can "turn heads" when she walks into a room there on my arm. And she does have the "figure" to wear such clothing too!!!

Carol, who has been "helping" me write this tale, comments here that I am a quite "handsome" man, and in my uniform as a Dularnian naval captain do make an "appearance" that she muchly "enjoys". I suspect here however that Carol would like it somewhat better if Queen Maris was not the beautiful blonde that she is. Maris being a lusty young woman whose "company" there on the North Star I much enjoyed, much to my wife's considerable "annoyance" too! And perhaps with some degree of "justification" too considering that Maris once "offered" herself to me when we were both captives of the Warlady of California. I turned her down, because I loved Carol too much to "cheat" on her, but fortunately Maris "understood" and never held it against me. Saying that she hoped her own husband would be as "faithful"

to her when she remarried. Carol has been trying to "fix her up", but so far without any success. (My wife comments that Maris "needs" a husband.)

I have noted over the years that I am "attractive" to a number of women, Lorraine being "one", even though she "denies" it now. I do recall, however, the times that she seemed quite "interested" in me, or why else should she have worn such "brief" a bikini as she had back there that summer the Duvals were staying at the little lake down the road from us? One that was fully as "daring" as any that my own wife ever dared to wear in public? This is of course not a part of her "books", but I do think that the reader should be "aware" here that Lorraine is not exactly the same sort of a person that she "appears" in her own novels.* * In Lorraine's two books, she appears to believe that her relationship with my husband was merely a matter of "friendship". I should note here that she became far too "friendly" with my husband for my own liking! That bikini Bob mentions was "imported" from France, and was "skimpier" too than anything you'd see on a public beach back in my own time. I also suspect that Jack Duval "felt" that since his wife was after my husband, that I might be "fair game" in return. Lorraine and I are not "friends", and never have been almost from the start when she started getting "friendly" with my husband, her "violent talk" at first scaring me until I realized that she was doing it mostly for Bob. (Carol)

Chapter Seven

The bottoms of my feet were "raw" and bruised when we reached the cleared area that composes a part of Lorraine's vast estates. We had, of course, been forced to march barefooted. I wondered how Carol was "doing" there behind me, and how long it would be before Sandi healed from the burn Tirana had given her. The fact that Tirana "treated" the burn surprised me, although I understand now that she was merely "doing" as she saw necessary. Extracting "information" from prisoners is sometimes a part of a Warrior's duties, and Lady Tirana had viewed her acts as that. I once watched Queen Maris extract "information" from a captured merchant captain, and I had to admit that it wasn't something I'd want to see again. The American Indians (and their counterparts of this era) usually had their women do the "torturing". I have my "suspicions" why this is so, but they have little bearing on this tale as such and I will leave such matters for another time.

The estate reminded me much of movies I have seen of plantations in the deep South before the Civil War with the "exception" of course that one did not see numbers of "black" slaves. The black race as a matter of fact being even less numerous now than are the American Indians, perhaps due to the fact that most blacks died in the Lorr's bombardment of Earth's cities in 2047. Those who survived this then were further killed off in a "race war" that came afterwards, due perhaps to reasons too complex to get into here. There was a large tree shaded manor, and a number of smaller outbuildings of the sort that one might now expect in such a place scattered about. Fields stretched out beyond, with the forests there in the distance. And there before the manor I saw something that left no "doubts" as to just "where" we were! A black "V-tailed" Beechcraft Bonanza, Lorraine's famous "Black Lady", the double barred "Cross of Lorraine" painted there on the fuselage tied down there before the manor. And beside it was a young woman, small, clad in leather, feeding a gigantic bird! A Talon of Talon, perhaps the biggest raptor of all time, I believe! Its wingspan at least thirty five feet if not more. A bird that in its appearance reminded me considerably of eagles and hawks! On a flagpole too there was a flag, the famous Cross of Lorraine, leaving no doubts in my mind that we had reached "her" estates!* * It should be mentioned here that Lorraine actually "owns" an area measured in hundreds of square miles. I realize that to my Dularnian "readers" such would be almost "unthinkable", but it is the way that the Imperials do still "order" their society. Imperial California is actually a "feudalistic" society much like that of Europe during the Middle

Ages. It is "democratic", but in a way that reminds me much of my own era where the "people" really did not have often that much of a "say" in things. (R.S.)

"You were no doubt sent here to 'spy' upon us," Lady Tirana said, addressing us as we stood there exhausted behind her from the nearly twelve mile march. I am in good condition, as was my wife, but such a "forced march" had taken its toll on both of us! In any case, being gagged, there was no reply that we might make. "And I have no doubts either as to just 'who' sent you here," she said, her dark eyes burning hotly into mine now through her veil. No doubt "crediting" Queen Maris of Dularn with sending us here! "I've had reports of the North Star being spotted in this area, and I have no doubts that Maris would just love to make trouble!" Her words suddenly now bringing back to me then the "comment" that one of the outlaws had made while discussing what to "do" about Carol about there being a "Dularnian raider" in the area!

"I think, however," Tirana smiled, "That you will find that we have better 'use' for the two of you than that Lys-damned bitch of yours had!" The very implications of her words leaving no doubts! The thought passing through my mind then that Maris herself had once been a slave on these very estates only a few years ago! I recalled too how she had escaped from Lorraine, the thought going through my mind that perhaps she had "reasons" to fear Lorraine. Or more likely, I think now, Lady Sanda Talen! * * Maris was the "slave girl mistress" of her late husband. Maris of course had little "choice" in the matter (I "suspect" however that she "enjoyed" the relationship while it lasted), but Sanda saw the "opportunity" when Lorraine took over the estates to make life as miserable as possible for the beautiful Dularnian. (R.S.) Tirana then giving a series of orders to those men who came riding up, orders that quickly put into motion an expedition to hunt down the remaining runaway slave girls out there in the forest! Telling the helplessly gagged Sandi that she would soon be back with her "friends", but that all of them this time would soon be enjoying the "pleasures" of "male companionship"! Sandi merely nodding, bowing her head like a properly docile slave girl does! The auburn wench secretly smiling to herself, well aware that she had "tricked" Tirana into a "wild goose chase", Sandi and those of her band having made up carefully thought out "stories" to tell should they ever be "captured" by the likes of Lady Tirana! The courage and bravery of these desperate women speaks of qualities that we of the 20th Century only believed men might possess! They were also "intelligent" enough to hide their main camp from the air, knowing of Lady Tirana's bird girl from Talon and her awesome winged mount. Lorraine had earlier attempted to capture these very same women by using Black Lady, but the sound of the airplane's engine gave them enough warning to hide themselves before she flew over. These women under their "Leaderess" later on "served" both Queen Maris and later Carol. They also served with "distinction" there on the North Star when we fought the "Athena" under the command of Lorraine herself almost in sight of Arsana! That "epic battle" that has now become the "stuff" of "legends". A "battle" that was fought between two Warladies burning with hatred for one another. Lorraine of California, Carol of Dularn! * * Lorraine claims not to "hate" Carol, although one wonders. (RS)

"You are a man that any woman might find 'attractive'," Lady Tirana said to me, her dark eyes burning straight into mine as she reached out and gently touched me with her whip while we stood helplessly before her a short time later. Carol "frowning" a bit at her words as she stood there a few feet away. My wife and I shackled by our wrists to rings fixed in the cross beams over our heads, while our ankles were shackled to other rings set in the floor holding us both helplessly spread eagled before her. Tirana herself was now unveiled, a long slim whip a yard long in her hand. I recalled what she had "done" to Sandi and felt considerable terror then as we stood there naked before her facing each other! I had no doubt that she desired "information", and I shuddered at the "thought" of how she might now attempt to obtain it from us! We were now in one of the estate's brightly painted wooden outbuildings, one used to house slaves such as ourselves. We were alone with her, although there were men at arms outside should Lady Tirana require any "assistance" in "dealing" with the two of us. Men who might bring instruments of torture if needed!

"I'm sure that Carol does," I answered, keeping my voice level despite the terrors that I felt being in Tirana's "power". I recalled what Lorraine had written about the "crossbowman". I knew this was the same woman who had "done" those horrible deeds! My brownette nodding a bit, while wisely keeping her mouth shut. Carol bearing up surprisingly well considering all that had happened to her since we'd both been "teleported" into this century! Her battered face and bruised body was proof of what she endured! A lot of women would have come "unglued" by now from everything she'd been forced to endure, but not Carol! I was proud of her!

"Your wife is a very sensual woman, especially for a Dularnian," Lady Tirana smiled at me, the sun having warmed the building to a point that made it feel like "summer" inside. The women of Dularn having a reputation for being "frigid" due to their different sexual "morality" than those of California. Also perhaps due to the fact that the woman of Dularn usually wears tunic and hose instead of a dress like her Californian sister. I could smell her perfume and hear the soft rustle of her silken dress as she moved about Carol, gently touching her with the whip. Tirana is a tall woman, perhaps five eight or five nine, slim, and I think rather muscular. She looks the part of the Warriress she is. Like Lorraine, there is no mistaking her for anything else!

"Despite what you think, Carol and I are from the Twentieth Century, and not from Dularn, although we have been 'transported' here to this era apparently at Lorraine's own request by First Priestess Tais," I said, having already told Tirana this before! The building we were in had a "stink" caused by confined people. It is the "policy" on Lorraine's estates to "chain" all slaves at night. Even those slave girls picked by the men to "pleasure them" must be "chained" after a certain hour, with only the major domo holding the key to their chains. A "policy" that Lorraine herself started after Maris' own escape in 2565 from the estates.

"The slave girls we captured with you all claimed that you told them that you were both Dularnians," Tirana now smiled back. She was a highly intelligent woman, almost a match for Lorraine. Not the sort of a woman that it would be "easy" to fool, I knew.

"They wanted our assistance in getting them to Dularn," I answered, "And at the time it seemed the 'best' thing to do." I saw Carol nod in agreement, my wife's quick wits useful just now!

"Your wife is obviously a woman of this era," Tirana pointed out, brushing the tip of her whip up against my chin. "And I am not 'interested' in playing these little 'games' any more now." There was in the tone of her voice an awesome terrifying warning!

"What will be done to us if you find that we are 'spies'?" Carol suddenly asked Lady Tirana as my wife stood there helplessly half a dozen feet away from me. The feminine "perfection" of her 5'7" body and 37-26-38 figure one that almost any woman might envy. I knew what Tirana had once "done" to a man at Lorraine's behest, and shuddered at the very thought of what she might "do" to us in trying to obtain "information" that we did not possess!

"We are a 'civilized people' here in Trelandar," Lady Tirana smiled back. "You will be kept as slaves." I had no doubt that the free men here on the estate would greatly enjoy having a "slave girl" like Carol around! I'd seen only one woman so far, Tirana's own slave girl, a delightful ripe bodied blondish wench, who could surpass my delightfully "provocative" brownette, and I suspected that Kathi might not hold her position as "sex princess" among the slave girls here very long if my wife didn't wish her to do so! Nor would she who was now "first girl" keep hers.

I might note here that it is customary when one has a number of slaves to appoint one as "first" to act as

"head nigger" over the others. The fact that the term "head nigger" has survived since the Nineteenth Century is only further proof that slave owners have always used such means to better control their slaves. Usually the "first girl" is the most "favored" of slave girls, although she can also be the best "fighter", as was the case with Carol when she held the position. If men decide "who" will be "first girl", it is usually the best looking wench among the slave girls, while if the slave girls themselves are allowed to "settle" the issue, she will be the best "fighter" among the group. This was the case here. In the case of men other considerations such as "fairness" determine just "who" is to become the "head nigger" over them. Sometimes however such decisions are "made" the same way that women make them, although not "often". Men tend to "co-operate" better together than women do, it seems. The "reasons" for this are well beyond the "scope" of this book.

"We are off the raider `North Star'," Carol said quickly, giving me a quick wink that I hoped Lady Tirana had "missed" just then. "And our mission here is exactly what you suspect it is." As I think I once said, Carol is a rather "crafty" gal at times!

"I think you might have `fooled' Lorraine," Tirana smiled. "That Queen of yours is a `crafty bitch' that is always a `jump' ahead of us," Tirana smiled, regarding Carol as she stood there. I wondered if it was "wise" to try to "deceive" Tirana this way, but I supposed there really wasn't any other "decision" that we could make! Especially as Tirana was obviously willing to use torture to find out what she would have considered "THE TRUTH"!!!

"You are of the `Warrioresses'?" Tirana smiled. I don't think she had any "doubts" about Carol, my wife's muscular build from her dancing and exercise obviously that of a fighting woman!

"The Caste marks were removed by a member of the Physicians," I quickly answered, Carol nodding in agreement. If Tirana was to believe that we were indeed "spies" from the North Star, then we would have to make her believe we were just that!

"We do not `abuse' slaves here, but they are kept under strict discipline," Tirana "warned", calling for the men outside.

Chapter Eight

"I am `curious'," Lady Tirana said, a number of the guardsmen now gathered around as we stood in the yard before the manor, a cool breeze off the ocean working against the heat of the sun. A couple of slave girls in brief shifts, standing about watching. The female slave is not generally "overworked" as a rule, I note. With them were a couple of hard looking women dressed in leather, swords there at their hips, slave whips coiled at their belts. Women hired as "overseers" here on the estate. The major domo, a woman by the name of "Keri", clad in a blouse and leather skirt, a sword at her hip, now joining us. She was tall, quite slender, dark haired, and very "attractive", I noted to myself just then, wondering why such a woman was not "neck chained". Tirana tossing Carola fencing foil, taking the other for herself. My wife naked but for a strip of cloth about her hips, her "provocativeness" well displayed. Carol is the sort of a woman that to "see" is to "want". I knelt naked, a nearly "valueless" male slave, beside the provocative Kathi, a blondish wench somewhat shorter than my wife, but with a figure that probably went something like 38-25-38, her jutting breasts and ripe curvy rear end making her the "sex princess" among slave girls here on the estate. Kathi's own attire a brief leather halter and a short leather skirt. She was barefooted like most slave girls, her feet a bit dirty. I felt the warmth of the noon-day sun on my shoulders, a "sun" no

different than the one that I had known back in my own era some six centuries ago. Birds sang sweetly in the trees, an occasional buzzing fly no different than those I'd known before. There are, however, insects that are utterly different from any I've ever seen in my own time. Spiders bigger than a man's hand, ants some half a foot long "reminding" one of the Lorr, who once ruled Mankind before the Priestesses of Lys the year before took power! It was early May in the year 2567 A.D., or 520 A.W. as time is now measured, the old standard for measuring time now of interest only to those of the caste of Scribes, which includes historians.

"And if I `win'?" Carol smiled, standing there. I knew of her skills. I knew next to nothing of Tirana's except as to what Lorraine had written of the woman. I knew she had once been the "Warlady of Sarn" a long time ago. Lorraine had appointed her Warlady of Trelandar to watch over "things" while she was gone. Apparently "Keri" was the "replacement" for Sanda Talen, now the Prime Minister of Trelandar, and Lorraine's former major domo. I later learned that Keri was Lady Tirana's own granddaughter. The anti-aging serums of this era do tend to "confuse" one at times!

"You won't," Tirana smiled back, taking the "guard" position as Carol nodded in reply, taking a better grip of her own weapon. Lady Tirana's intention being to "show off" a bit with us, I supposed. She is an excellent swordswoman, and takes pride in her skill. Kathi whispering to me some "comment" about how "good" her mistress was and how "easy" she'd "beat" my wife. I made no comment back, feeling it "wise" under the circumstances to keep my mouth shut. Kathi being a "snitch" and "tattle-tale" I soon learned, who none of the other slaves here "trusted" or "liked". Kathi greatly loved "getting something on you" and then blackmailing you into "pleasuring" her there behind the slave shed. I might mention too that she wasn't too careful about her hygiene, apparently feeling that douching once a day was often enough even if she had sexual intercourse several times as she usually did. She didn't sleep of course with the other slave girls or I'm sure that the other girls would have taught her "better manners" fast! She probably wouldn't have looked so "attractive" too afterwards!

Tirana's attack was swift, her foil almost a blur. Carol "meeting it" skillfully, my brownette instantly returning the attack, her own skill with the foil amazing even me! As Carol's attack continued, Tirana giving "way" before it, I could hear the amazed muttering and comments among those watching! One of the men at arms beside me now muttering to another that he hadn't seen a woman "fight" like that since "'The Warlady' went south"! The reference being obviously to Queen Lorraine, the "Warlady"!!!

"'Good', Dularnian slut!" Tirana laughed, Carol once again driving in on the "attack", forcing Lady Tirana back! The clash of weapons bringing even more of the curious, among them several more slave girls, most of them in short brief clinging dresses. The female slave is not generally kept bare breasted except when men so wish it, especially not when their nakedness might be "offensive" to a high born noble free woman such as Lady Tirana. I should also note here that as a rule slave girls are forbidden to "shave" or wear "clips", this being "reserved" for "free women". It is however noteworthy that in my wife's own novels they did. Carol in the last year or so of our marriage sometimes "dressing" so around the house just to "tease" me a bit with her sexuality! My wife being well "aware" that a naked woman is less "sexy" than a woman with just a "little bit" of something concealing her sex.

"And if I win?" Carol once again repeated, standing there.

"We will `discuss' that if you do," Tirana challenged back, suddenly driving in at Carol, my wife for a second "yielding" before the "Warlady" of Trelandar. Carol then meeting her, holding her much to everyone's amazement, including my own, I must admit! I watched a swift interplay that the eye could hardly "follow", then much to my amazement, and perhaps Tirana's, Carol "touched"!

"You are truly `of the Warriresses'," Tirana smiled, giving my wife a bow, Carol nodding, perhaps not

knowing what to do now! I saw fleecy white clouds drifting against the azure of the sky, listened to the chirp of birds in the nearby trees, and saw a beloved brunnette now standing there naked but for a strip of cloth about her hips, a fencing foil held there in her hand. I knew then I had indeed "found" what I had once "sought" in "another"!

"Yes, I am `of the Warriresses'," Carol spoke, looking at me as I now knelt there beside Lady Tirana's personal slave girl. She seemed "different" than before. More like "another" I had once known. One whom I had once almost "worshiped" years ago. "And I would be `first girl'," Carol then said, regarding Tirana. A big burly looking brunnette now looking at Tirana, nodding "no"!

"The slave girls pick their own `first girl'," Tirana said.

"She is `first girl'?" Carol said, regarding the brunnette.

"She is," Tirana answered, giving my wife a "smile" then.

"Looks as strong as an ox," Carol smiled back at Tirana.

"Weapons are not allowed," Tirana commented then to Carol.

"You won't be so `pretty' when I'm done with you!" the brunnette growled like some animal, stripping off her dress at Keri's barked order. Carol stripping off the strip of cloth that had girded her own hips. My wife was both strong and "supple". I did not think it would be much of a "match". Carol struck hard, twice, using her karate skills and it was all "over" almost before anyone could realize what had happened! The woman lying there in the dirt, well stunned from Carol's sudden karate blows!

"Your Queen picked well," Lady Tirana smiled, Carol picking up the strip of cloth she had worn, fastening it again about herself there at the left hip. Such is done so that it may be easily removed by a man facing the woman. Several of the guardsmen leering at Carol, then looking at Lady Tirana. I could tell that they were sexually "excited" by Carol! That they wanted her "hot and sweaty" moaning there beneath them! I saw a trace of terror in Carol's eyes as she understood their muttered comments... I don't think she had understood just how "attractive" she was now!

"She will be allowed to `choose' who she `pleasures'," Lady Tirana spoke, the men muttering among themselves at this "news"! Explaining that Carol would "pick" one man a day to "pleasure" and that Carol would be the "one" to make the "decision". "However," Tirana added, "She will `sleep' with the slave girls." "And," Tirana smiled at Keri, "She will be `securely chained'." * * Carol quickly got the "reputation" of being "poor in bed"! As my wife explained to me later on, she had no wish to become "another" like Kathi, feeling that one "Kathi" was enough! (R.S.)

I chopped at a clump of weeds, ripping them out of the dirt, the sun hot on my back, the sweat of my labors wet on my brow. I was now a slave, a nearly "worthless male slave" laboring on the estate of Queen Lorraine of Trelandar. I wondered what Carol was doing? An ant scurried across the ground at my feet to meet the deadly downswing of my hoe. The insect, some half a foot in length, being cut in half by the tool. I thought again of Carol. Felt "resentment" that she was not out here in the fields working under a hot sun weeding between the corn stalks sprouting up now. I was naked but for a bit of cloth tied about me with some cord. Just enough to avoid offending some free woman should she see me. More just a crude "jockstrap" than anything else I can think of. I was careful to move about, thus keeping from getting a sunburn, Keri having warned me about such a bit earlier there in the day.

"Work, slaves!" the overseer snapped, snapping her whip as she rode by on her unicorn. I felt it sting

my back, the woman's dark eyes for an instant burning hot into mine as she reined in her prancing unicorn. She was a "lez", I had heard from one of the others. The sort of a "bitch" that is often used to oversee male slaves. I thought fondly of how it would feel to have my hands around her throat, to watch her die. I thought about what one man could "do" in this era with a modern rifle. She wheeled her unicorn and galloped off, not knowing the "thoughts" I entertained in my mind. A sword in its sheath at her hip. A dagger on the other. Her black hair was cut short like many fighting women wear it. Her name was "Cassie". I had no idea of what her last name was. She wore a sort of halter and shorts of a soft tanned leather. I suspected from the darkness of her skin that she was of "mixed race". Lars Debolt, once a Dularnian raider's bosun, had "said" that she sometimes made men "pleasure" her with their mouths as she stood before them. It sounded like the sort of a "thing" a woman like her might "do". I recalled a feminist I'd once met back in the Twentieth Century. Like most of her "ilk", she was a "lez". She had made a number of rather "nasty" comments to my wife about her novels. Carol's "switchblade", suddenly pressed against her throat, had made her "think twice"!

I wiped the sweat from my brow and bent again to my labors. I thought of Lorraine. She was a "bitch". Just another "exploiter" like all the rest of the "Lords" and "Ladies" of Imperial California. In my heart I pledged my sword to Queen Maris. I was no longer a man of the Twentieth Century. My "country" laid to the north, the island men once had called "Vancouver", but now called "Dularn". "God's Land" as the first settlers had named it. The Queen of Dularn had "friends" she knew nothing about, I thought. I recalled what Lorraine had written. Maris Marn was her name. She was blonde, beautiful. Well worth "fighting" for.

"I am a Dularnian," I said to the slave next to me. He nodded, shrugged, bent to his labors. Lorraine Richards, Queen of Trelandar, Warlady of California, had just gained herself two new deadly enemies. I wondered where the North Star was right now?

"Work!" the overseer snapped, riding up to me. Raising her whip. I regarded her as she sat there on her unicorn. Judged the "time" it would take to kill her. To take her mount. I thought back to my basic training as a Marine. Recalled my D.I. I decided this was not the "time" to act. I smiled up at her.

"I am a Dularnian Warrior," I said to her. She nodded.

"You are a `MAN'," she answered, riding off then.

"I am `with you'," my companion spoke softly.

"Freedom is far away," I smiled back.

"It is `close'," he answered in reply.

"I do not understand," I said, puzzled now.

"There are `men', and there are `slaves'," he said.

"You speak `truths' seldom `understood'," I said to him. Knowing of "what" he spoke. "Truths" that had once been "denied" by those of the past. I recalled the novels of John Norman. Of "others" who had spoken out against the "concept" of "political correctness". The men of the 20th Century had permitted their "manhood" to be taken away from them. Those of the 26th had not.

Chapter Nine

"The 'quality' of the 'sluts' has improved around here!" my friend Lars now smiled as we were served our dinner in the slave shed. Our treatment was not much different than that of any farm animal, except that we were kept chained up while they were not. I had been informed by the other slaves that slaves were better "treated" here on the Queen's estates than elsewhere in Trelandar. And that Trelandar had "laws" that other countries didn't! We were worked hard, but we were not "abused". Keri saw to that. She was of the Scribes, not of the Warriresses as I had thought. We all thought highly of Keri Colter as unlike all the rest, she treated us like human beings, not as slaves are usually "treated" in this era. I think we "worked harder" for Keri than for Cassie or anyone else. And unlike the others, she wasn't fearful of us. Keri often moving among us without concern as to what we might be able to do to her, something that the other overseers never did.

"Carol!" I breathed, softly, reaching out to her. Her hazel eyes now filled with tears as she clung to me. I flinched as she touched the whip marks where the overseer had struck me earlier. I recalled what Cassie had said about a slave girl sometimes being "given" to us for the night if we "did good work". I hoped it would not be my Carol. I don't think I could have "stood" it.

"You've been whipped!" Carol sobbed, clinging to me, naked but for that strip of cloth about her hips that concealed little! Slaves are sometimes kept naked except when free women are about. It is done more to break your spirit than anything else, I think. A kind of "sexual harassment" that the girl can do nothing about! Carol told me that it "bothered" her even though she was now used to be "looked at" by men while doing her "dancing" at the HUTCH.

"Cassie swings a 'mean whip'," I smiled back at my brownette delight. The lash marks would heal. Carol nodded, pressed her warm sweet lips to mine. To hold Carol in your arms is to "want" her. That is the "sort" of a woman she is. Another slave girl, whom I recognized as Sandi, now serving dinner to the other men. Apparently Lady Tirana had decided to "keep" her here despite the "price" on her head for having killed her master there in Trella. Sandi had told Keri the "tale", what had been "done" to her then. There are ways of causing a woman much pain without marking her.

"I fear what they might 'do' to you," Carol said softly.

"How are you being treated?" I asked, concerned for her.

"Like a woman who men find 'attractive'," Carol smiled, leaving the "rest of it" left "unsaid" just then. I had little "doubts" however that she had been "touched" and "teased" a lot.

"You don't have any contraceptive protection," I told her.

"I've been 'implanted'," Carol now then smiled back at me.

"It is time to leave, mistress," Sandi said to my wife. Slave girls call their "first girl" by that "title". Carol kissed me again, briefly for a second "hugging me" before getting to her feet. I looked upon her beauty and felt "desire" for her.

"Fine looking woman," Lars Debolt smiled as Carol and Sandi left. Female slaves are often quite closely supervised. I nodded, ashamed of myself now for the thoughts I had entertained about my wife. "I understand she beat Tirana in a 'match' too." I nodded, gave him a smile, started spooning my oatmeal

into my mouth with my fingers. Felt the tug of my collar as the chain drew tight. I did not think slaves ever now escaped Lady Tirana. On the other hand I did not think escape was all that impossible. With "leadership", stolen weapons, "much" might be done, I mused. A ship of some sort would be "necessary". Some one to sail her. I glanced at Lars, and recalled that he had once been a "bosun".

"That new auburn," he smiled. "She's a true `delight'." I had to stop and "think" for a second before I realized he was talking about Sandi. I supposed that she was. She wasn't in my opinion the "woman" that Carol was, but she was "attractive" in her own right, and doubtlessly she could "pleasure" a man plenty! Both had been of course "collared sluts", women who now were nothing but "vessels of pleasure" as one of the guards had said.

"Their collars are lighter than ours," I smiled, easing mine. It was a length of strap iron, hammered about my neck with a ring for the chain. Simple but crude. Doubtlessly effective.

"They are women," he smiled. "They have `value', we don't." He was a handsome man, dark blond hair, sort of a "Viking" type. His own birthplace was one of the islands to the north of Dularn.

"M.P.S." I smiled back, remember a book I had once read.

"What was that?" he asked, seeing me smile in return.

"Members of the Privileged Sex," I explained to him.

"I do not `envy' women," Lars smiled, regarding me.

"There was a time when they had it `better'," I said.

"We know `little' of that era but legend," he smiled back.

"There is `Lorraine'," I pointed out, curious to see what he thought of the famous Warlady of California. Most of the slaves here seemed to think rather "highly" of her, which surprised me.

"A very `intelligent' woman, `good' with a sword too," Lars smiled. "Probably even better than your wife," he laughed a bit. "Looks a lot like Lady Tirana, although Tirana's better looking."

"You are `of the Warriors'," Lady Tirana said to me as I stood there before her with the others. Her eyes glittering into mine through the netting of her veil, her features shaded from the sun by a broad brimmed hat. The high born noble "Ladies" of Californiada not consider being "suntanned" as "proper" for one of their ilk. One speaks of their "fair white skins"; of a lovely "pale" Lady. It was a pleasant morning, the sun warm, the birds singing away. I was "of the Warriors". Lars had said so. The fact that I lacked the "caste mark" meant nothing. Keri, the major domo was standing there just to one side of Tirana. She also wore a broad brimmed hat to protect her eyes from the sun, a green silken open "V" necked blouse, a leather skirt to the knee. The sort of attire worn by the Californian woman of "quality", if not of the "nobility" as was her grandmother, Lady Tirana Greyson. I saw Cassie standing there, tanned as any slave girl in her halter and shorts, her hand resting on the hilt of her sword. A guardswoman some yards away leaning back against a shady tree. Such women are not "Warrioresses" as such, but are much like one. She had a compound bow, one of Lorraine's newdesign, beside her. Such a weapon can shoot an arrow completely right through a man.

"I am," I said to her, Carol standing there silently behind her. Her shift well betrayed the "delights" of her sexy figure. The provocative and sensual Kathi standing next to her, the pair making me glad that I was a

man so I might enjoy "seeing" such. We male slaves used to talk a lot about Kathi. What we'd like to "do" to her. It was perhaps just as well that she was never given to us. She was a "tease", a true "slut" in every sense of the word. Only the fact that she was Lady Tirana's allowed her to get "away" with some of the stuff that she "pulled" with people!

"Are you `good' with a sword?" Lady Tirana then asked me.

"My wife is `better'," I answered her back in level tones.

"She is no longer `your wife'," Tirana then reminded me. Enslavement "legally dissolved" our marital relationship, I knew.

"That is your `opinion'," I replied to the black clad Lady. I believed in "death do we part", and I knew that Carol did too! I didn't give a "damn" about what the laws of this era "claimed"!

"She has not been `faithful' to you," Lady Tirana teased me.

"What she `did' was not of her own `free will'," I answered.

"I think you are `of the Warriors'," Tirana now smiled back. Keri's eyes were like dark coals as they looked into mine then. She was a "classy" woman who some said looked like Janet Rogers. I believe Janet was a bit shorter however, although I'm not sure.

"I am `of the Warriors'," I answered, my right hand suddenly holding the front of her dress, her own dagger in my left pressed up against the vulnerable softness of her throat. She had been "careless". I recalled my D.I. He would have been proud of me then.

"Bob!" Carol breathed softly, her hazel eyes wide with fear. And I think "something else" too. I have never struck Carol, or ever done anything to her that might even "imply" that I might. I think that in a way women "respond" to "men of violence" in a way that they do not "respond" to men who they do not think "violent". It is, I think, why all women find "Warriors" attractive. Lorraine believes it also explains why so many wives will "stay" with a husband who beats them. I suspect that she may be right. There is in most women an "instinct" to submit to a strong male.

"I trust I did not `winkle' your dress," I said to Tirana, slipping her dagger back into the sheath at her hip, releasing her. Tirana stepping back, her dark eyes glowing hot into mine!

"Shall I kill him?" Cassie asked, her sword gleaming in the sunlight. Tirana shook her head in the negative, waved her back. I noticed that Keri had not drawn hers to "protect" Lady Tirana. I suspected she had "understood" that I meant no harm to Tirana!

"Release him from the chain," Tirana ordered. I saw Cassie "hesitate". She was "afraid of me" now. Tirana took the keys from her, and squatted herself before me, unlocking my shackle!

"Give him your sword," Tirana said to Cassie, drawing hers. Stripping off her veil, her dark eyes burning hotly into my own.

"No, Lady Tirana!" Carol begged, going to her knees, clutching at Tirana's long flowing dress. She wore spike heeled boots, the open leather vest that reminds me so much of one I once knew. Of a woman Carol and I had once known there in Spain a year ago. Lady Tirana and the Countess Miranda de Sanchez del Cortez were much alike despite the fact they lived six hundred years apart!

"I was a 'Lady of Swords' many years ago," Tirana said. I nodded, took the sword that Cassie gave me. Keri had drawn Carol back from her grandmother. I wondered if Tirana wished me dead. Keri gave me a smile, standing there, her dark eyes glowing hot!

"I fear I can lay claim to no such 'titles'," I smiled back, taking a better grip on the weapon there in my hand. Cassie's sword being a shorter, somewhat "heavier" weapon than Tirana's. A number of men and women now running up, some with drawn swords! All the women on the estate, I might note here, did carry swords. Most Trelandarian women do, there being "incentives" to do so as the "militia law" applies to both sexes, I might note in this ms.

"It is a contest of skill," Lady Tirana said to them in level tones. I thought then of Lorraine. They were, I felt, much alike in many ways. I wouldn't have stood a "chance" against the famous Warlady of California however. But against Lady Tirana???

I felt the sun warm on my shoulders as I faced Lady Tirana. I wanted to keep her facing the sun. Such is a common practice of Warriors. I think Tirana had no "doubts" about my membership in the caste. I was no longer a man of the 20th Century. No longer the "civilized" man that had walked the streets of Seaside so long ago now. The ruins of that city are now far beneath the blue green sea, I understand from one who has knowledge of such.

"It would be wise not to kill me," Lady Tirana informed me.

"I am but a 'valueless male slave'," I pointed out to her.

"Your Queen 'picked well'," Lady Tirana smiled back at me.

"You doubtlessly 'knew' her once," I smiled back, on guard.

"She is a beautiful woman," Tirana said, suddenly attacking. I parried the thrust, which would have driven deep into my shoulder. Tirana was "good". Perhaps not quite the equal of my wife, but she was most definitely better than any other woman I've met! On the other hand I've had a lot of practice fencing with Carol. She usually "beat" me, but on occasion I did manage to beat her!

"You are 'skillful'," Tirana said, trying to circle about. I did not permit her to do so. The sun can be your friend or your enemy. I watched her, sensing her movements, her "stance".

"You are a 'Warrioress' Trelandar can be proud of," I said. Meeting her "sudden attack", returning it this time, making her jump back. She was lethal, deadly, a "worthy" opponent, I mused! I could hear the men at arms and their feminine counterparts now talking in low tones, saw Carol and Keri standing there to one side. Tirana had not been a "match" for Carol. Was she for me? Keri watching me closely, and speaking now in low tones to Carol.

Lorraine has written that swordsmanship is more a matter of "skill" than strength. I believe it is true, but not completely. There is also the "issue" of "physical fitness" that comes into play here. One needs a certain degree of "quickness". I was barefooted. Lady Tirana wore high heeled boots as "Ladies" do. I could hear birds singing in the trees. I thought of Lorraine. Of what "she" might "do" in a situation such as this. I did not wish to allow this "match" to "continue". Tirana was "too good"!

I "allowed" Lady Tirana to attack me once again. I parried aside her long slim rapier-like blade, and driving forward before she could jump back placed my point right at her throat! A shudder going through

the brunette as I smiled and lowered my sword.

"He is `of the Warriors'," Lady Tirana spoke. "Chain his woman beside him for the next hour." I gave my sword to Cassie. Took a lovely provocative brownette in my arms and kissed her.

Chapter Ten

"You are `different' now than you were before," Carol said to me as welaid together. Our first "joining" had been swift, a mere "release" of sexual tension. She had bit, scratched, her thighs clamped tight around my hips as I took her, "had her" as "mine"! She had cried out softly, sobbing out her own "release"! She had "come" swiftly, surprisingly so considering "everything". On the other hand she had been "wet", "ready" for me even before I had first "touched" her. I thought I knew the reason why too. It is, I think, "something" that goes back to theold Stone Age. Back to a time when there was no such a thing as "marriage" yet.* * Lorraine believes from the archaeological discoveries made before she and Sharon flew through the "GATEWAY" that early Man did not form monogamous relationships, but that each "mother" had her own "needs" for "protection" met by the "tribe" itself. Such is, I may note here, also done by the higher apes, it seems. (R.S.)

"I have `discovered' something," I said to Carol, holding her close. She was smelly, sweaty, freshly "fucked". We were both well chained by the neck. Cassie had "seen" to that too! Carol's pubes were "bristly". I was unshaven, just a male slave. Back home in the Twentieth Century we both would have been more "touchy" about such things. Here, it hardly seemed to "matter"! The social order that we had once known was now only a "memory". Like a "dream" from which we'd awakened to find ourselves "here"!

"The `meaning of manhood'?" Carol breathed, now kissing me.

"There is `something' to be said for it," I informed her. The men of my time had "forgotten" what it meant to be a "man". There is something to be "said" for a barbaric society where men understand the true meaning of "manhood". Where swords are worn. A social order where men now refuse to let women "dominate" them. A "line" has been "drawn". Women know "better" than to cross it. That is, I think, why it is "possible" to haveQueens, Warladies in command. Why men will take "orders" from a lovely brownette in the heat of battle under the fire from an Imperial first rate. It is "something" the women of the past never did "understand". "Equality" is something that you "earn", not something of "laws". Perhaps that is "why" our own society "died" as it did back then. Why it was "replaced" with that of Janet Rogers, who understood!

"You are more like the men in my books now," Carol replied. They had been true "barbarians", muscular "he-men". "Men" I had considered as nothing more than my wife's own erotic "fantasies"! Men to whom women were only "playthings", slaves to be "enjoyed".

"As I recall you used to get pretty `wet' at times when you wrote them," I smiled, kissing my beloved brownette once again. I reached down, "felt" of her, noticed that she was "wet" again.

"Have me again," Carol breathed, clinging to me. I did.

The ship was three masted, big. A heavy Imperial first rate some hundred and thirty five feet in length. It laid at anchor a furlong from shore. What had once been "long bow shot" many centuries ago. I recalled that Lorraine had written of such things.

"Corsica," Lady Tirana smiled down at me, Carol at my side. Half a dozen burly rough sailors from the ship now at the oars. The ship's big longboat rising and falling in the heavy swells.

"I have 'heard' of it," I answered, giving her a smile back. We were slaves, chained together by the neck, Carol and I. We now knelt in the bottom of the boat, facing our black clad mistress. I noted too that it was still commanded by Valerie Dunn.

"It is said that the North Star has been 'seen' in these waters," the tall redheaded woman captain of Corsica commented to Lady Tirana as they sat side by side at the stern. I smiled to myself. I thought of a lovely golden haired Queen who had stood upon its decks. Of another I had once known back in another era. I had never "met" Maris Marn, but yet she was my own "Queen" now! Carol and I were Dularnians, even if we'd never seen our country!

"I am sure you would be delighted to 'take' it," Lady Tirana smiled back. There was a considerable bounty on both the ship and its beautiful captain. I admired Maris' courage to take command and sail these seas now claimed by the Empire of California!

"It would be the 'end' to a 'legend'," Valerie smiled back. Maris being thought of by many as being a sort of "Robin Hood"...

"Trella," Lady Tirana said to us as we were brought up on deck. Carol and I had spent the trip shackled together in the ship's lower hold there below the waterline. I had muchly "enjoyed" myself. I have no doubts that Carol had also "enjoyed" such "attentions"! She had been "affectionate", "loving", but yet "different" than before. We were being transported to Trella to fight in the arena for the "amusement" of the people of that great capital city. I thought of the Roman Games. Wondered if we would ever "see" each other again after this. One never ever knows about such things. Trella was "impressive" in a way, reminding me somewhat of Rome in its glory. Of Athens perhaps in the time of Pericles. Of other "classical" cities of legend. Just to the north of it lie the crumbling ruins of what once was Los Angeles centuries ago, a place where "strange things" are seen and even the "bravest" of Warriors refuse to enter at night.

"Kneel! Bow your heads!" Lady Tirana snapped. We quickly did so. She was tall, golden, almost like a goddess of old myths and legends. It is said that she is the most beautiful woman of all time. I recalled the likeness there on the coin that had been sent to me with the three books. It did her but little justice, I thought! The beautiful golden mesh she wore concealed little of her magnificent figure. DARLANIS, EMPRESS OF IMPERIAL CALIFORNIA now stood there before us as we knelt before her! She was, I thought, perhaps a woman of whom "legends" might be made. A "Shannon Tweed on 'steroids'" as Carol later on described her. The woman who would be the mother of one not yet born, but yet one that Carol and I had met back last year in the 20th Century! The mysterious beautiful woman we had known as "Domino Tremaine"! A woman who would live on without aging until the year 2047 A.D.!

"Kiss her feet, you 'worthless slaves!'" Tirana snapped. I did so, pressing my lips against a big toe, the nail well painted as she stood before me, tall, golden, truly the Empress she is! Carol doing the same as she knelt beside me to the other toe. SHE wore high heeled sandals, the straps crisscrossing up her legs. Keri standing at my side bowing low to her golden haired Empress. The sun hot on my body as it came out from behind a fleecy cloud. A trio of well armed helmeted women clad in chain mail standing a bit back from us. My first glimpse of Imperial Warriresses. I supposed that they were a part of Darlanis' own personal guards. Such women are said to be the finest in all of California itself!

"Stand, remove your dress," Darlanis ordered Carol. My wife did so, silently "submitting" to the "inspection" of the Imperial monarch of California. I watched out of the corner of my eye. I had to admit that Lorraine had not "lied" in describing Darlanis. On a scale of one to ten, Darlanis rated at least a good eleven!

"She is not 'beautiful', but she does have an excellent figure," Darlanis said. That was an honest "assessment" of my wife. Perhaps not as "flattering" as she would have liked, but honest. Carol is not objectively a "beautiful" woman. She is, I feel, a woman who "grows" on you. A woman who becomes beautiful to you. The sort of a woman you feel "comfortable" with. Want to marry!

"She is a Dularnian spy, perhaps off the North Star," Tirana then spoke. "Her husband is the man now kneeling at your feet." Darlanis had powerful muscular legs. By the standards of the 20th Century she was, I thought to myself, probably more the sort who would have made another "Lana Clarkson" than anything else!

"She is not of Dularn," the Empress spoke in level tones!

"What do you mean?" Lady Tirana gasped in shocked surprise. I wondered just what Darlanis "knew" that no one else had seen?

"She is too 'tanned' to be off a raider," Darlanis spoke. "And it is too early in the year yet for a woman of Dularn to be sunning herself," the Empress added, obviously no "dumb blonde"! Carol did have a beautiful tan, with only her pubes yet "white". No free woman would ever "sun" herself aboard a Dularnian warship anyway, since such would be doubtlessly "bad for discipline", although slave girls are sometimes allowed to do so when there is little risk of battle in the near future. The "status" of the slave girl being utterly "different" than that of the free woman. A slave being "legally" an "animal" under the laws of California.

I should mention here that photography does exist in this era, although nothing like what was known in the 20th Century, as cameras now are big and bulky things like those of the Nineteenth Century. There is also a certain amount of "pornography", although the photographs are naturally all of slave girls, as no free woman would ever "allow" herself to be so "photographed" if she had anything to say about it. I am speaking here of Dularnian women, as I don't know about those of California, who are supposedly less "up tight" about such things. Queen Maris says that no woman of "breeding" would ever allow herself to be so photographed, although on the other hand she does not seem to be greatly upset if I happen to see her in nothing but "clips" and a strap. The "modesty taboos" of this era being quite different from our own. The "display" of a woman's nipples beneath her own clothing for example is considered extremely "daring", and something that no true woman of "breeding" ever does, as Queen Maris "informed" my wife there at Arsana when we had that great "ball"!

"I don't understand," Lady Tirana breathed, captain Valerie Dunn now at her side. Darlanis now being joined by another woman, a dark haired woman, much like my wife in some ways, her own attire such that it was obvious she was a person of "importance"! Her broad brimmed hat and veil proof of her own social standing. She wore the silken blouse and leather skirt common in this era. High heeled leather boots, a sword at her hip as is common now due to Lorraine's "militia law" and its universal military training provisions. She was followed by a collared slave girl carrying a baby there on her back, much like an Indian squaw might do. The slave girl on a chain leash much like one might leash a dog! The collar on a slave girl usually being fitted loose enough on her to allow this without any discomfort for the girl so leashed. A trio of Warriors following her, standing there and "watching". They wore helmets and had shields as well as wearing chain mail. Their arms were short spears along with short swords and daggers.

Their overall appearance reminding me much of that of "Rome"...

"A 'slut' you are considering buying?" the newcomer asked. The tone of her voice much as if she had asked if Darlanis was considering buying some domestic animal Tirana now had for sale!

"This woman is supposed to be 'Dularnian', but as you will note, Sanda, she is rather darkly tanned for this time of year." Darlanis going on to say that it was "too cold" in Dularn before late spring for a woman to lie out in the sun and get a suntan.

"I am not from Dularn," Carol said softly, raising her head. "My husband and I are Bob and Carol Simmons from the year 1991."

"They first claimed to be from a time before The War," Lady Tirana spoke up, "Although you can see for yourself that she was shaved and has her nipples pierced like any woman of our time."

"She does have an 'odd accent'," the other now "observed". "Not a true Dularnian 'accent' either from the sound of it," Sanda said, moving a bit closer to Carol to "study" her. I suspected she was Lady Sanda Talen, now the Prime Minister of Trelandar.

Tirana replied, "But they are both highly skilled with the sword and she was also wearing the golden neck chain of a wife."

"Nipple piercing was 'unknown' before the time of Janet Rogers," Darlanis spoke, "Although we do have records of women who did shave before she became President of the United States in the year 2008 of their time," the Empress answered like some teacher.

Sanda adding, "I would also dispute the fact that they come from an era before the 21st Century as the people of that era had no skills with swords with few exceptions such as our own Lorraine. Also, neck chaining was also unknown until that time." * * These practices were all written up in my wife's books. While her novels did not sell that well in our own time, I suspect now that they did so later on in the 21st Century when there was a renewed "interest" in such things. This is, I believe, and Lorraine herself agrees with me on this, the "cause" of such practices as nipple piercing and neck chaining and so forth. (R.S.)

"Maris Marn would be familiar with the writings of Lorraine. She also had a good opportunity to learn from her a number of details about the Twentieth Century that she might be able to 'use' in attempting to 'fool' us with spies pretending to be from that era," the woman Darlanis had called "Sanda" answered. "There is also 'reference' in Lorraine's books to a 'Bob and Carol Simmons' and Lorraine herself told me quite a bit about this couple, neither of whom would naturally have any "skills" with our weapons."

"Is Sharon Duval here?" Carol asked, glancing about. Her nudity had drawn some attention, although Darlanis drew lots more of course, a number of armed men holding back the crowd that had gathered about to see with their own eyes the Empress in person!

"I think we've 'wasted enough time'," Darlanis spoke, taking Sanda Talen by the arm, the two women walking off, Lady Tirana's dark eyes hot with fury as she regarded a quickly kneeling Carol!

"I'm just lucky Tirana didn't do anything more than slap my face," Carol said to me as the cell door slammed shut behind us. We were both naked, imprisoned in a small cell yards beneath the surface of the earth, the only light that which came from a oil lamp down the passageway. I felt straw under my feet, guided my wife down beside me. Tirana had slapped her hard several times, giving my wife a nosebleed from being so "struck". Slapping a slave girl's face is a common way free women use to "discipline". Male slaves are generally whipped, although some women do "slap".

"Darlanis at least knew that you didn't come from Dularn," I pointed out. Our trouble was obviously Lorraine's own novels! I supposed it seemed "logical" to everyone but us that Queen Maris might try to pull such a "trick" as this, using people who "met" the description Lorraine had given of us as far as possible. It should also be "noted" here that Lorraine's description of Carol is quite accurate, although she does not describe me at all here.

"Didn't do us any good, did it?" Carol answered, the tone of her voice showing the "hopelessness" that she felt now. Sharon or Lorraine was our own only hope, I thought, and Sharon herself might not "recognize" us, as she had only seen me a couple times and Carol once. And that was some three years ago, I recalled!

We were somewhere beneath the great city arena of Trella. I thought of the works of Edgar Rice Burroughs, of his "Mars" series that has, I suspect, been the "source" of many later works. Ones as John Norman's own "GOR" series and my wife's "NEW CALIFORNIA" novels, which I suspect had a great influence on life in the 21st Century even if they never "sold" that well in our time! Carol's non-fiction work, "A KEY TO A WOMAN'S HEART" is "famous". It is the sort of a book mothers here "give" to their children. A book that every married couple also gets as a "wedding gift". I have even overheard women saying, "Well, 'Carol' says.....!"

"Why 'were' we transported here?" my wife spoke softly there in the darkness, her face against my shoulder as we sat together there in the darkness far beneath the ground. I felt "wetness", realized that she was weeping to herself. "Why did Tais DO this to us?" That had been a question for which I had yet no answer. I know "why" Tais did it, but the "price" we paid is something I hope Tais never makes anyone else "pay" for her cold-blooded act in establishing a "balance of power" between Dularn and Imperial California. Sometimes I wonder if the Priestesses are "human"? * * They are in a strict "biological sense", but otherwise? I should mention here that they are biologically "neutered", incapable of reproduction or perhaps even understanding such! (R.S.)

"Perhaps there was a 'mistake'," I said, kissing her, tasting the salt of her tears on my lips. I held her, "stroked" her there in the stuffy darkness of our cell far beneath the earth. We were two poor lost souls, six centuries from our own "home"!

"We are at least still together," Carol said to me then. Perhaps it was to be our last night together I thought as I then pressed her down on the straw, her arms going about me as our lips pressed together in a long deep kiss. Her nakedness as always "exciting", "provocative" despite her unwashed, smelly body.

"No regrets?" I said to her. It had been her decision to come with me. She assured me that she wished to be nowhere else!

"I haven't been completely 'faithful' to you," Carol spoke softly there in the darkness. Her words for a moment "puzzling" as I did not consider her "use" by the men on the estate as anything but "rape". The fact that she was forced to "choose" every day a man to "have" her no doubt only added to her misery there! "There were a couple who were 'too good' as 'lovers' for me to be able to 'hold back'," she

spoke softly, gently caressing me. I could tell by the tone of her voice that she was quite ashamed of herself for having had sexual "release" under such circumstances!

"Keri gave us Sandi one night," I said, holding my wife there in my arms. In the darkness Sandi had looked a lot like my wife. Especially when I held her head in my lap and had her "do" me with her mouth. She was "good", but not in the same "class" as Carol, who is a fantastic fellatrix with a style all her own.

"She does look a 'little' like me," Carol observed in reply.

"Much more so in the dark," I assured my brownette delight.

"It seems all I 'do' now is think of S-E-X," Carol laughed, explaining that guardsmen were always "touching", "teasing" her.

"Just like I used to do at home," I said to her in return.

"Except I don't 'tease' back," Carol laughed, kissing me.

"To see you is to want you" I told my sexy brownette.

"Apparently 'seeing' is not 'necessary'," Carol spoke.

"I think I have 'discovered my lost youth'," I told her.

"That's a new way of calling it," my collared wife laughed.

"You will 'draw blood', not kill," Lady Tirana said to us. The point of the sword was blunted, the edges sharp. One might "cut" with such a weapon, but killing would be a bit more "difficult" than with a properly "pointed" weapon. I was naked but for a brief bit of leather. I could hear the roar of the crowd. I thought of the movies I'd seen of "Roman Games". I never thought I'd ever get to "act" in any of them. I considered telling Lady Tirana that, but suspected it would only make "trouble" if I did! After the "episode" with Darlanis yesterday Tirana was in no mood to be "fooled with" by anyone. I "liked" Tirana, and I knew how she must have "felt", especially with someone like Darlanis being told by Carol that she was actually a time traveler from 1991 AD!

Carol stood by my side, naked but for the brief bit of soft leather that just barely covered her sex. We would fight side by side. Such "fights" are determined upon a basis of "points", upon the degree of "injury" one inflicts upon one's opponent. We would fight against another "couple", a male and female slave pair. One was not supposed to "kill", although it did "happen". I felt Keri's eyes on me, the look in her eyes leaving no doubt. Women do have "sexual feelings" when they look at a man so clad. Male slaves are sometimes bound and placed in a half hood so that they cannot see, but yet have their mouths exposed. Free women will then "avail" themselves of the "opportunity". I had once been so "treated". I yet recalled the taste, the "smell" of her. The soft muffled cries she had made as I had knelt before her. I suspected who she was, but knew better than to speak of it now...

Due to the conflict between the Empire and Dularn, there were now a large number of Dularnian slave girls in the Empire, a ready source of women who "knew" the sword to at least some degree. There were also increasing numbers of Californian women who had learned the sword due to Queen Lorraine's "encouragement" of such things as means of increasing the equality of the sexes. This had made it possible to stage a number of "combats" between women and between women and men. The latter being less "popular" due to the fact that the men usually "won" unless the woman was really "good" due to the

considerable differences in strength. A woman, even of this era, being a "match" only for a teenage boy!*

*The "average woman" of the 20th Century is about as strong as a healthy thirteen year old boy. Those of the 26th Century, more used to physical work, were stronger, but not by that much. (JB)

However, the latest "popular" form of the "sport" right now was the matching of "couples", paired slaves facing other slaves. I understood that there were men who actually had "stables" of such slaves, and who spent considerable time pairing them off to get a "pair" that might fight well together in the arena. Lady Tirana's thought here was that Carol and I might make a "winning combination" as we were married to each other, and she had spent a good deal of time in training us to fight side by side against other pairs. Tirana using "volunteers" from the men and women at arms who guarded Queen Lorraine's estate. Carol and I having now easily "bested" all of them much to Lady Tirana's own pleasure!

I won't go into Lady Tirana's "motivations" for all this, although I suppose she took a bit of pride in having "fighters" like us, much like someone might take pride in having a fast unicorn or a swift ship. The fact that Carol and I might get killed probably didn't "bother" her that much, as we were but "slaves"! * * One thinks here of the attitude that people of our own time had towards "those" of other races, of other nations. Towards those less fortunate than ourselves. I do not think the civilizations of the 26th Century are really any more "cruel" than ours was. I will admit, however, that every once in a while Carol or I will be a bit "shocked" by something no one else thinks "anything" of. Dularn is probably more "civilized" than the Empire, but on the other hand it also has "games" much like those Carol and I fought in there in Trella. Carol is "uncomfortable" about human slavery, but on the other hand it is probably more "sensible" than what we did back in our own time with putting people in prisons for years at a time at considerable cost to the taxpayers. And there is always something to be "said" for having a pretty little collared wench kneeling there at your feet, although my wife does see that Kathi "minds her manners" and behaves as a "proper girl" should! She is probably also the only slave girl with panties! My wife having "insisted" on such as Kathi is a bit "careless" like many slave girls about "showing too much" of herself! (R.S.)

"We who are about to die, salute you!", Carol answered the old Warlady, Tirana being actually well up in her eighties, something that had surprised both of us, although Lorraine does mention it in her books. The anti-aging serums preventing physical aging until one reaches about a hundred or so where there is a slow gradual decline until death takes you at about a hundred and thirty. Tirana giving her a "puzzled look", then shrugging, her dark eyes regarding us both as we stood there before her. I put an arm around Carol, hugged her. I had "confidence" in her. In her skills, abilities, and more importantly, I could "trust" her! There are perhaps better fighters but when the time comes to walk that "shadowed valley", I want my brownette there at my side too! We have stood together with death all around us, faced the "fire" of an Imperial first rate, one commanded by Lorraine herself, and I pray that when the "time comes" we will die together as "one"!

"Whatever," Tirana muttered, seemingly "preoccupied" then. Keri giving her grandmother a "hug", her dark eyes meeting mine. I had little doubts Keri was the "one" that I had "knelt" before.

I looked up into the stands, saw the standards of the Empress of California, saw the glitter of gold there in the sun. I thought of one tall, golden, who had "suspected" the "truth" in a way, although she too had refused to believe that we might be in truth "time travelers" from the Twentieth Century. I could hear the roar of the crowd, felt the sun hot on my naked body. Carol standing there beside me, bare breasted, naked but for the bit of leather now covering her sex. She threw her head back, breathed deeply, the muscles moving beneath her tanned skin. I thought of others, realized Carol was as much a "Warrioress" as any who bore the caste mark on their wrist. I thought her "beautiful" despite what Darlanis had said of her. I took her in my arms, kissed her before the thousands there in the stands. I think they understood that we were not just a pair of slaves paired up together!

"I'm glad I married you," I said to her, looking into her eyes. Holding her, feeling the "warmth" of her nakedness against mine. She was strong, supple, more of this era than of our own! I knew I had found my "Warlady". Lorraine was but a memory now.

"I am too," Carol laughed, her eyes sparkling into my own!

"Even if we did end up on 'GOR' and in 'NEW CALIFORNIA?'" I laughed, referring to the writings of John Norman and one Carol Simmons. The author of the last giving me a sword salute back!!!

"We have 'work' to do," I said, seeing our "opponents" now.

The male slave staggered back, dropping his sword, his feminine companion, a slim blondish wench, clutching a bleeding thigh as she stood there, Carol giving me a smile as she stepped to my side. The cheers of the crowd like a roaring there in our ears!

"Lars and Sandi gave us a 'better fight' than any of these," Carol said in a voice that would not be overheard. I nodded. I had little doubt that Lady Tirana had wagered heavily on us. She doubtlessly stood to make a considerable amount of money. A pile of golden crowns. I also suspected that no one would believe now that we came from the 20th Century. I no longer really "cared"!

"We are upholding the 'honor' of Dularn," I smiled back.

"The 'honor' of two none will believe," my wife smiled.

"Like that 'bitch' up there," I pointed with my sword.

Chapter Twelve

"When it is nightfall, we will close the shore and send a boat to that little cove we've used before," Queen Maris Marn of Dularn spoke, her first officer nodding, glancing out at the sea. With the black painted hull, the black dyed sails, the North Star was now for all practical purposes "invisible" at night. "There you will land me, my personal Warriresses and extra weapons and supplies," she added. The first officer wheeling about, shocked at her utterly unexpected words! The "dangers" that she would face! There was a "bounty" of a thousand golden crowns on her beautiful golden head. A "bounty" that the Empress of California herself had placed there! There were "outlaws", men who would be "delighted" to turn in the Queen of Dularn to Imperial troops!

"You could be....," he breathed, well aware of the dangers!

"I am giving you my direct orders," the Queen answered back, her eyes like beautiful green gems burning straight into his own. She kept to herself the "strange dream" she'd had just the night before. The tall golden haired woman who had told her what she must now do. The instructions had been given in a way that Maris herself could not "disobey", although she did not understand why! Only one, a tall, stern featured brunette who "commanded" an awesome fleet south of Baja, could have explained to her the lasting effects of post hypnotic suggestion of the sort commonly used by the Priestesses of Lys upon small children. Maris' own mind having been "programmed" to the point that she could be turned into a nearly mindless robot by any Priestess using a certain "command word". Such a "word" had been given the night

before when Tais had "teleported" herself to the stern cabin of the North Star some thirty miles from shore. The "balance of power" would be re-established between California and Dularn once again. Darlanis would have the amazing Lorraine, and Maris would have that couple from the 20th Century as a "counterpart" to the Imperial Warlady!

I brought my sword under the man's guard, slashed his chest. I could hear the clash of steel behind me, knew that Carol was holding her own against the other two men. They had sent five men out against us this time. I suspected that the orders had been given by a tall golden haired Empress. The cheers of the crowd were deafening as I spun about and met the blade of another, Carol swiftly slashing, the "fury" blazing in her eyes, the blood running from his body as he staggered back, badly wounded!

"GOD DAMN THAT BITCH!!!" Carol snarled viciously, the anger showing now in her ordinarily lovely voice. Neither of us had any doubts now as to why we were being pitted against these odds!

"They are 'Californians'," I pointed out, searching the crowd with my eyes. I suspected that Darlanis shouldn't have given the orders that she had. The people of Trella had not much liked seeing what they had just seen. Only Carol's fantastic skill with a sword had saved us this time! Only the fact she was able to keep several of our opponents "busy" at the same time had allowed us this victory. Now I could tell she was nearly exhausted, the sweat glistening upon her naked body under the sun!

"Damn Imperials!" Carol snarled, using the common Dularnian term for those of the Empire of California! "Face Me, Darlanis!" my wife suddenly cried, although I don't think she was heard above the roars of the crowd! It was, I thought, just as well. I doubt very much that Carol would have been able to "match" the awesome Empress of California. I once saw her take on Lorraine. It was a "lesson" I think my wife has never forgotten either yet!

"Six of them this time," I said, seeing the men being driven out to meet us. There was no hope now. Even back to back we could not hope to stand against such numbers! Then suddenly there was another at our side, a tall brunette, her long slim blade gleaming there in her hand! Lady Tirana! Her dark eyes glittering there beneath her stylish broad brimmed black hat as she gave us a smile of assurance! The roars of the crowd were deafening, like the sounds of a subway train there in New York! And Keri, her granddaughter, her dark eyes glowing hot into mine as she too now joined us, her own blade gleaming in the sunlight!

"Never did like the 'bitch!'" Lady Tirana said. "Too damn beautiful for her own good." I suspected there was a long story behind this, but just then we didn't have "time" for it either! * * Lady Tirana was once the Warlady of Sarn when Darlanis first became its Queen by means perhaps not that "honorable". Darlanis accused Tirana of "incompetency" in the death of King Thar Marden a few months later, and removed her from her position as Warlady. Lorraine mentions this in her first book, but doesn't go into any "detail", perhaps because her friendship with Darlanis. Darlanis as a young woman was a cold, ruthless, "calculating" person who "used" her beauty, her body, to "get" what she "wanted". (R.S.)

I watched guardsmen dash out, guide the armed slaves back. I suspected that Darlanis had given the orders, or perhaps Sanda Talen, who is a good friend of Lady Tirana's. Lady Tirana commenting that she would have liked to have seen how the four of us could have fought together. I think we would have done well. I might note here that Keri's skill with a sword is second only to her grandmother's. I often "think" of her, hope she found a man who could "love" her in the way that she wanted to be so "loved".

"Your wife is an attractive woman," Lady Sanda Talen said, Carol having been allowed to use makeup, a bit of perfume. Her slave shift was new, freshly pressed. It fitted well as did my own attire, a white

cotton tunic of the sort often worn by male slaves. With us was Lady Tirana, and a number of others. There had been a "heated discussion" between Darlanis and Lady Sanda! At the moment Sanda was now nursing her baby son, her blouse undone, although she did so in such a way that she did not show her breast. Women who nurse wear a sort of "nursing bra", I might note here. They also do not wear "clips", or the "nipple posts" that pierce the nipple for the clip "pins". Lady Sanda would remain "clipless" until her baby was weaned, at which time she would have her nipples pierced once again and the "posts" fitted. She might also consider a "lift" too if she felt she was starting to "sag", the woman of the 26th Century usually going "braless". Big breasts are not considered "attractive" on a woman in this era, it being common to "moo" a woman with an oversized bustline. On the other hand a woman with a "full" rear end is much admired!

"I never should have allowed Darlanis to give the orders she did," Lorraine's former "major domo" said. We were in the royal palace of Trella, in the same palace that had once felt the tread of one I had always "admired" before I realized my Carol was truly "more". Now Lorraine was another "memory", nothing "more".

"She is fighting a war she cannot 'win'," Tirana said. I recalled that in Lorraine's last book she had attempted to convince Darlanis to negotiate a peace treaty with Maris, but that Darlanis had refused to "give" at all on the issue of the "disputed territories" there north of Orgon. (Oregon in my own time)

"She has Lorraine," Lady Sanda smiled, "But even SHE cannot win what cannot be won," the Prime Minister of Trelandar replied. The attractive brunette then suddenly turning to Carol and asking, her dark eyes burning straight into Carol's as my wife stood there beside me, "Are you both truly of the Twentieth Century?" Keri regarding Carol, almost as if she was "studying" my wife. I should perhaps note again that Keri is a Scribe, not a Warriorress despite the fact she is skillful with a sword and bow. Her own field of "study" (she is a Teacher) is 21st Century history. She once told me that she would have "believed" us if we'd claimed to have been from that time, which did have "neck chains", "clips". Keri informing me that men and women did wear swords in that era! There are a large number of "book-disks" from that era, all now "unreadable" except on Lorraine's computer which Keri has used to write her own "thesis" on the "way of life" in the 21st Century. * * She was nice enough to send me a copy, in which she claims that Janet Rogers introduced such things as a part of her "NEW ORDER" which was supposed to be an entirely "new answer" to Mankind's seemingly "unsolvable" problems. There are still surviving photographs of that era, of women in costumes that leave no doubt that "feminine provocativeness" reached its peak then too! (R.S.)

"We are," I said, wondering if this time they might believe!

"Which hand did you burn when Jack Duval put his hand under your skirt?" Sanda Talen suddenly asked my wife, while holding her baby son up to her breast there beneath her blouse. I knew "that item" had never been a part of Lorraine's books, and it was not likely to be something that Lorraine would have told Maris!!!

"My right," Carol answered, putting her arm around me as I stood beside her. "And he did more than just put his hand under my skirt," Carol then added, Jack having actually inserted a couple fingers right up into my wife's vagina after pushing the crotch of her bikini aside with a quick brush of his own hand! My wife at the time bending over the oven, removing a roast she had just cooked. Her unthinking "reaction" had caused her to burn the back of her right hand against the top of the oven then. Carol had wheeled about with a curse, grabbed a meat fork and put it up to Jack Duval's throat, telling him in no uncertain "terms" what she would "do" if he ever "touched" her again like that! Lorraine had been standing there, and watching the entire scene. I have often wondered if she considered Carol as being the "sort" of a woman that men might so "play with" if it so "pleased" them.

"It is just 'possible' they are telling the 'truth'," Lady Sanda said to Lady Tirana, who nodded in the negative. Tirana pointing out that Carol's nipples were pierced, something that was not done in the 20th Century, nor did women of that time wear "straps", Lady Tirana being obviously well versed on our own era!

"I tend to believe it," Keri interjected, giving me a smile.

"She was also 'neck chained' when we found them," Tirana added, "And their skill with a sword indicates they cannot be from that era unless whatLorrainehas told us both is utterly false."

"I am ordering you asLorraine's representative to keep them both until she returns from theGulfofCortez," Lady Sanda said. "She will know, I am sure, if they are what they 'claim' to be."

"You are risking your life for nothing!" the first officer protested, well aware of the dangers of closing the shore this close to Trella. Trelandar having a patrolling first rate, the awesomeCorsica, kept constantly on patrol for Dularnian raiders! A few stars visible from time to time between the moving clouds. They had "felt" their way in, the land only darkness before them.

"It is my life to risk," Queen Maris Marn of Dularn replied. She wore the black of the Warriress, as did her three women. A slim dark haired wench, coppery skinned, standing at her side. La- rathe slave girl already smelling the forest ahead of them!

"There are dangerous animals, other 'things'," he pleaded.

"I am 'of the Warriresses'," Queen Maris answered back.

The distant howl of some great predatory beast greeted the Queen's ears as she climbed up the rocks, a muttered curse behind her making her smile to herself as one of her Warriresses slipped on the stone. La- ralikea dark shadow ahead, climbing the cliff like some monkey. TheNevadawench pausing, reaching down with a hand to her beloved mistress. Maris' beautiful golden hair now covered by a dark cloth so that none might see. The long rope that joined them would later serve to drag up the other weapons and supplies that they had brought with them. The new compound bows she had just introduced there in Dularn as an "answer" to the Imperial weapon recently designed by QueenLorraine.

"Not enough 'exercise'," Maris grunted, sweating now as she climbed. Life aboard a ship gave one little chance for exercise. Especially if you were the Queen of your nation and you couldn't go scrambling about the ship without losing your "royal dignity"!

"Mistress getting too fat too," the slave girl laughed back. The "width" of the "royal behind" was something the men aboard now often whispered about, Maris having put on a bit of "weight" over the last few months. The constant strain on her nerves having driven her to constantly "nibble" when she shouldn't have.

"This should take it off," Maris smiled up at the girl.

"We'll stay here for the night," Maris spoke, seeing the remains of what had once been a campsite for others on the cliffs. She was sweating despite the coolness of the night time forest. She thought of the forms of life that might inhabit its darkness. Shuddered to herself, the sword at her hip as "useless" as a stick against some of the creatures that roamed its dark glades! Creatures that would have delighted a big

game hunter of the 20th Century, but Maris had no .375 Magnum either to deal with them!!!

"They are off that raider," the woman whispered there in the darkness to her companions. Their bodies stained with berries so that they blended in with the terrain around them. The Leaderess of their united bands a woman who had once been of the Nevadas.

"Sandi said they would be `friends'," the other spoke.

"We can kill them, take their weapons," another said.

"We will take them alive, question them," San-sha spoke, a motion of her arm sending out the other women under her command. She herself would "take" the blonde haired woman sleeping next to the tree. The woman who obviously was in "command" of the force.

Chapter Thirteen

"Be still!" the shadowed figure hissed, Maris' terrified eyes looking up into hers as she pressed the sharpened stick down against the feminine softness of the Dularnian Queen's throat! San-sha smiling to herself as she saw the woman's obvious terror! Her last mistress had been "blonde" much like this "Dulie" bitch!

"We have them all, San-sha," another spoke. The Dularnian Warriresses had been "easy pickings", San-sha mused to herself! The former slave girl smiling to herself as she regarded the now terrified "white woman" she had taken captive. To her kind there was but little "difference" between an Imperial and a Dularnian! The woman's slave girl a woman of her own race, San-sha noticed! San-sha thought to herself that it might be nice to make a slave out of this golden haired bitch, make her see what it was "like"! Put a few welts on that lovely back just to teach her a "lesson"!

"I am San-sha, Leaderess of the `Free Women'," she spoke to Maris, the Queen nodding, her voice only a weak terrified croak! It was pitch dark too, Maris' face only a pale shadow before her, the Dularnians having "known better" than to build a fire "here"! San-sha having united a number of the bands of runaway slave girls under her own command, the remains of Sandi's now the last.

"Maris of Dularn," the Queen answered, regaining her voice.

"The Imperials would pay `highly' for you," San-sha smiled.

"Do so if it pleases you to see me a slave," Maris retorted.

"We share a `common enemy'," San-sha smiled back. "We are thus `friends' by the `codes' of my people," the Nevada explained to the Queen, withdrawing her sharpened stick from Maris' throat.

"Bring her up into the wind, come about!" I heard Valerie Dunn snap, still staring through her telescope at something on shore. Carol and I having been allowed the "freedom" of the deck instead of being chained as slaves usually are in the hold below. We were, I thought, perhaps a quarter mile or so off the cove. I could see the cliffs, almost the little campsite there above it. The tall trees of the forest that

overlooked the sea there below. The sea was "choppy", the wind a bit "brisk" from the north too. We had been forced to "tack" back and forth, slowing our travels.

"Bring those two!" she snapped, pointing at Carol and me! "Have the longboat swung out, ready the ballistae and catapults!"

"We're going to land?" Lady Tirana ventured, perhaps a bit nervously, the longboat leaping wildly in the swells, the Corsica perhaps a furlong from shore, as close in now as Valerie dared to take her in. The ship anchored fore and aft, the catapults wound up, the ballistae readied, Corsica's awesome armament aimed directly over our heads at the top of the cliffs towering up there before us! I thought of "Captain Hornblower". Of other stories I had read of naval adventures in the 18th Century. If there was anyone at the top of those cliffs, we'd be "easy pickings" too!!! Keri had stayed aboard the ship, not wishing to come with us now.

"Signal them to fire," Valerie snapped, ignoring Tirana's question for the moment, the young girl now acting as signals midshipman giving the signal. I heard the heavy thumps as the ship's catapults fired, the hundreds of darts from the ballistae like dark arrows overhead against the azure blue of the sky. I understood what Valerie was doing, and smiled at the very thought of what perhaps "others" in another century would have thought!!!

"Covering fire," I whispered to Carol, who nodded, not perhaps "understanding" such things. I saw smoke rise up above the trees, a thick dark oily smoke from the jugs of lamp oil that the ship had fired. Gallons of such flammable liquid having been fired! The "firepower" of these "primitive" weapons impressive!

"My 'greetings' to your Dularnian friends," Valerie suddenly spoke to us, her eyes burning into ours. I understood much then!

"Remove your dress," Valerie said to Carol as she stood before her there on the quarterdeck of the Corsica, the smoke still rising from the burning trees there at the top of the cliff. My wife did so, standing there naked before the Corsica's captain as Lady Tirana looked on, a puzzled expression there on her face!

"You will note the tan marks, the fact that her nipples are pierced, recall that she did once wear the neck chain of a wife," Valerie said, Tirana nodding as my wife stood there, the sun bright in the sky overhead. The ship rolling in the swell. "I do believe now that she is from the time she says she is, but how long were they 'living' in our time before they were captured?" Tirana nodded doubtfully, a puzzled expression now on her face.

Pacing the quarterdeck, Valerie continued, "Darlanis was wise enough to 'see' these things, but even she did not 'realize' they could have been living for months aboard the North Star as 'guests' of Queen Maris before she landed them up there on those cliffs in an attempt to deceive us," Valerie Dunn continued. Her eyes burning into mine as I shook my head in the negative, although I knew that it would do little good against her "logic"!!!

"You mean they actually are from the 'past'!" Tirana spoke, the very tone of her voice revealing the emotions that she felt! Keri smiling to herself, perhaps delighted at Valerie's findings! She was an "educated woman", one of the Caste of Scribes, a "Teacher" actually before her grandmother had asked her to become the major domo there on Lorraine's own vast spreading estates.

"Lorraine flew through a 'Gateway', and I think it possible that they perhaps did the same, and were

picked up by the North Star," Valerie continued. "And knowing what we do about Maris, I think it likely she convinced them that Dularn was 'America' and that we were now but the 'enemies' of everything they held dear!" Valerie continuing on to say that it was a known fact that others beside Lorraine had passed through these "Gateways", and that it was the most likely explanation for our presence here in 2567 AD! *****

"Forest too 'green' to burn for long," San-sha breathed, her own emotional state speaking much of how she felt. Had it not been for Maris' telescope, for the Queen's quick wit, they would have been caught in the Corsica's first broadside. Maris having had a pretty good idea of what was in store for them when she saw the ship now being readied for firing broadsides into the forest!

"If they send a landing party we will be able to pick them off with our bows," Maris smiled, her own weapon ready at hand. There among the thick trees, in the smoke, the "advantages" would all be with the "defenders", the well trained Warrior Queen knew!

"You smart for 'white woman'," San-sha smiled back in turn!

"Darlanis is your 'enemy', not me," the Dularnian replied.

"My Prince 'weak' like all men around a beautiful woman," San-sha laughed, "Especially one with yellow hair like yours is. Maybe 'better' if women 'runned things' like they did long ago."

"It does seem pretty 'logical' when you think about it," I said to Carol there in the darkness of the lower hold where Carol and I now laid chained. Valerie had ruined our "chances" of ever convincing anyone of this era that we were not on the side of the Dularnian Republic. That we did not "serve" the Queen of Dularn.

"This era reminds of me of 'GOR'," Carol laughed back at me. My wife's amazing ability to "rebound" from everything amazed me. She was my "strength", and far more now to me than just a "wife".

"What do you 'mean' by that?" I asked. She was but a paler shadow there in the darkness beside me. I could still smell the perfume she had been allowed to "use" earlier at Sanda's request. Fortunately no one knew that she was an exotic dancer, or I suppose Carol would have been forced to "dance" before men at night. Such "slave dances" (no free woman will do one) are commonplace. The wench is usually "auctioned off" afterwards to some warrior. "Trained" slaves like Kathi, Lorraine's Yvette, and others can do a number of these dances, although Carol is "better" than Kathi!

"All 'strangers' are 'enemies'," she laughed back, her hands "touching" me. Carol can be extremely "provocative" when she wishes to be. This was one of those times. I reached out, took her in my arms. Welcomed her darting raspy tongue in my mouth!

"I see you spent your time 'pleasurably'," Lady Tirana said, her dark eyes burning into ours. I suppose it was "obvious" we had. There are certain "tell-tale" signs of such things, especially if you are nude and your wife has just bitten your lip! Keri regarding Carol, my wife smiling back at the major domo. I suspected that she had "noticed" how Keri sometimes "looked" at me. I had no doubts now that Keri had become infatuated with me.

"This is a 'fast' ship," I noted, giving Valerie Dunn a smile. The Corsica was that. All of Lorraine's big ones were.

"I hope to see the day soon when your Queen kneels naked before me," captain Valerie Dunn said, her eyes burning into ours.

"We do not have the 'numbers' to do as you suggest," San-sha said, sitting there before the fire. The flames lighting up her coppery colored face. She was an attractive woman, although a bit on the "muscular" side, the sort of a "woman" Maris then thought to herself who perhaps sometimes wished she was "other" than what she was. Such was not "uncommon" among certain women. The brand new Dularnian dagger in its sheath at her hip and the bow of the same manufacture near by would doubtlessly be well put to "use" by a woman such as her, Queen Maris thought to herself. She had at one time or another learned the "three finger" draw as used by Californians instead of the "pinch" draw of the Nevadas.

"A surprise attack, at night," Maris spoke in reply. The guards would be few. Fire arrows could do a great deal of damage and spread terror among those who lived on the nearby estate. The same estate Maris mused, that she had once been a slave on! Then she could reach the slave shed, free those she had come for!

"Such would bring a Legion," San-sha answered. "The Warlady is not one to provoke." She spoke not of the Warlady of Trelandar, but "another". One that Maris herself had once "faced". A shudder going through the young Queen at the thought. Even with the odds in her favor, Maris had "lost" to that awesome Warlady! Her own beloved North Star "beaten" by an Imperial third rate!

"I will go then with my own women," Maris spoke, knowing as she spoke of the futility of such an action. Yet, she could not turn back now. She could not "disobey" the "orders" given her!

"You are brave, but a fool like many before you," San-sha said, her dark Indian eyes now meeting the green of the blonde's.

What "woke" Maris she knew not, the fire low, the woman on guard nowhere to be seen, a shimmering figure, a woman in white, blonde, standing over San-sha, touching her, a sort of pale light seeming to surround the woman. A woman, Maris knew with an icy cold hand of terror clutching at her heart, who was the same one who had come to her in her dreams! The one who had given her "orders" she could not disobey now even if they were to lead to her own death! Then suddenly the woman was just "gone" as if she had never been! "Has it all been a dream?" Maris "mused" softly!

"There is a ship to be loaded, and every slave here will be required to 'work'!" Cassie snapped, standing there, her whip in her hand. The slave girls beyond the line of us male slaves now glancing at each other, no doubt well aware that they too would be required this time to work up a good sweat at their labors! I saw Carol, naked but for a strip of cloth, now among them. Lady Tirana stood there behind Cassie, her features "veiled", a broad brimmed hat protecting her from the rays of the morning sun. Keri there beside her wearing a broad brimmed hat, blouse and her usual leather skirt, a long slim sword at her hip. I saw men, women, on guard, recalled the "rumors" I had heard of the North Star being once again in this area. The Corsica would return tomorrow to escort the ship to Sarn. I thought of Valerie Dunn. I hoped for Maris' sake that she did not cross paths with Valerie!

Chapter Fourteen

"WORK! You damn worthless 'Dulie' slut!" Cassie snapped at Carol, snapping her whip. She seemed in a "vile" mood, even for her. I saw her whip "strike" Carol this time, saw the livid welt there on her naked back. My wife gasping, stiffening for an instant, then turn to regard Cassie for a second, the "look" in her hazel eyes something that left no "doubts" in anyone's mind of her own thoughts! Carol then quietly picking up the burden she had been assigned to carry, flinging it up on her back with a grunt from the strain, and carrying it to the ship. Lady Tirana had saddled up a unicorn this morning, and rode off. She had, I knew, her own "estate" to check upon occasionally. She was a competent woman, capable, honest, and one that I "admired" muchly despite the fact that she now "believed" the "worst" of us both.

"Mean bitch, isn't she?" the guard said, giving me a smile, leering at Kathi as she walked by, her body an "erotic promise". The ship was tied to the end of the dock, a small lateen rigged vessel, designed for the transportation of cargo along the coast. It was a pleasant day, a few clouds in the sky, the rain of the early dawn hours having left the air fresh, "clean" in a way I'd never known back in my own time with its air pollution "from" LA. Now Los Angeles was but ruins, inhabited I'd been told by strange mutated creatures of a sort that had made it a "forbidden zone".

"We all have our 'days'," I answered, slinging the hundred pound sack of corn over my shoulder and walking off with it. In the past at one time I would have found such "difficult", but in the last few years I had frequently "worked out" with weights. I suppose because I had considerable "incentive" considering the "sort" of men that Carol seemed to admire in those books of hers! Strong, muscular "he-men" of a sort one found only in fantasies! * * It should be noted here that women do have "wet dreams". (R.S.)

"If you strike her again, I'll whip you!" I heard Keri snap at the luckless Cassie, Carol having been assigned burdens heavier than those given the other slave girls. Carol and Cassie having "gotten into it" a bit earlier, Cassie in a true "vile" mood! Cassie seemed to have it "in" for Carol in any case, why I didn't know, although Carol says that women like Cassie hate women like her. And if you can tell me "why" here, I'd like to know too!

"What's this now?" I heard Cassie yell, turning about, yanking out her sword, with Keri now doing the same, their blades gleaming there in the sunlight. The other guards running up just as a beautiful blonde haired woman stepped out of the forest, a bow there in her hands! And with her were a dozen other women, a cry of delight from Sandi leaving no doubt as to just "who" they were despite their obvious "lack" of proper attire! One, a tall coppery skinned woman, obviously their leader or "leaderess" as one might wish! I saw that three of the others wore tunics, hose, the common attire of the Warriress as did the blonde who was their officer. Such being a common practice with Maris, who maintains that it prevents the enemy from knowing "who" is who!

"I will trouble you to lay down those weapons," the "blonde" spoke, her accent almost the same as Carol's and mine! She was a Dularnian! "I am Queen Maris of Dularn," she added, leaving no doubts now as to her "identity" as her green eyes roamed over us! The people guarding us setting down their weapons, well aware of the dozen so arrows now aimed in their direction ready to fire! The bows in the hands of the women "brand new" Dularnian weapons!

"I think we should say 'hello' to our Queen," I said, taking Carol by the arm as she stood among the slave girls. If we were going to ever find a "friend" here in this strange era, it would have to be with this woman! And at least she believed in pretty much the same things that we did! Dularn being a "republic" and all instead a sort of benevolent dictatorship like California is!

"You are Carol and Bob Simmons?" Maris said to us, her green eyes strangely "glassy" as if she was

not in "control" of herself just then. I thought of Tais, of the "powers" of the Priestesses of Lys. I recalled the "writings" of Lorraine, what she had told me back in the 20th Century before she'd flown through the time warp into this era. I thought too of Janet Rogers, of an age of science unknown in this era. Of FIVE CENTURIES of experiments!!!

"Mind programmed," I whispered to Carol, Maris standing there like some lovely "robot". Her companions staring at her, a look of "concern" on their faces. I knew then what I had only "suspected" in a way before. Of the "plans" that had been made!

"We are," I said, Maris seeming to "shudder" for a second.

"I have been 'sent' for you," she spoke, her voice "odd".

"By one tall, golden haired," I smiled, recalling Tais.

"Yes," Maris answered back, her voice more "human" now.

"No!" I heard a voice cry! "I'm not going!" I saw Kathi, Lady Tirana's slave girl, break away from the others, flee back towards the manor perhaps a quarter of a mile or so away from us! Kathi doubtlessly aware of "what" would happen to her if the rest of the slaves, both male and female, ever got their hands on her!

"Kill her!" I heard a woman bark, the woman being I thought the coppery skinned woman who was in charge of the outlaw women! Kathi would bring other guardsmen, guardswomen with their bows!

"NO!" Carol screamed, dashing after the fleeing "delight"! Maris shaking her head, trying to "clear it" of her programming! I suspected she did not "understand" what had been done to her or "how". I recalled too the "hostility" that the Priestesses had towards the practice of hypnosis. I understood "why". Lorraine had "suspected" I think the "truth". I wondered if they had once "decided" that it would be "better" if she died. I recalled the "crossbowman". Lorraine had thought Princess Tara had sent him. * * See "2565 A.D.!" for further details of this "incident". (JB) I put my hands on the Queen's arms, "steadied" her for a moment. I saw that Carol had caught up with Kathi. Saw her tackle Kathi. Roll her over, slap her face hard twice, taking the "fight" out of her. I smelled the sweet odor of Maris' perfume, suddenly became "aware" of a beautiful pair of green eyes looking into mine! Of a soft red mouth, the lips parted, open, sensed the "hunger" in that beautiful body. Fought down the "thoughts" she aroused!

"Your wife is a 'lucky woman'," Maris Marn of Dularn said, a "look" in her eyes that left no doubt as to what she was thinking just then. I suspected it had been a long time since any man had held her in his arms. She was young, "vital" much like Carol is! Keri sitting there with the other guards, "frowning" to herself, former slave girls on either side of them with bows held "ready".

"Carol is a 'jealous' woman," I warned the Queen of Dularn. "And she can be 'vicious' if 'provoked' far enough too," I added. Maris nodding, understanding the "meaning" behind my warning too as Carol came strolling back, and dragging Kathi along with her.

"I am 'keeping' this 'one'," Carol snapped, holding Kathi by the hair, the ripe bodied blondish slut now sobbing, "begging" to be allowed to remain on the estate instead of going with Carol! I had no doubts that she was terrified of Carol with good reason!

"As you wish," Maris said, quite "agreeable" with all this.

"Tais planned all of this?" Carol whispered as she stood at my side an hour or so later. Maris was a competent sailor even although the lateen rigged cargo vessel was doubtlessly unfamiliar to her. She had gotten us safely out of the little harbor, barking her orders in a ringing voice that left no doubts she knew what she was up to! Maris had ordered Keri to "free" us of our collars, although this same "privilege" was not afforded to Kathi, who would remain a collared slave as we agreed was proper! Kathi being the sort of a wench that "belonged" in a slave girl's collar too if any woman "did". All the other slaves had gladly taken the opportunity to be free. Those who had followed San-sha however had not wished to "leave". I recalled Carol's novels. Those famous "libbies" of hers. Dularn would now have "allies" living almost within "stone's throw" of the Warlady's estates. I wondered what Lorraine would "think" of that tidbit! Carol had found a deerskin among the ship's cargo. With a dagger and some bootlaces she had made herself a crude halter, and a brief skirt. There were weapons strapped about her hips. She was no longer a 20th Century "housewife", although I think she's never been that. She had also found a "neck chain" to "grace" that lovely throat. Selected one of the Dularnian compound bows, a quiver of arrows. The sea was calm, the breeze mild, an "ideal day" for "sailing".

"We are to 'her' what Lorraine is to Darlanis," I answered.

"We don't have Lorraine's military abilities," Carol said.

"Lorraine is more 'legend' than 'reality'," I smiled back.

"And now she has 'us'," Carol answered, looking at Maris.

"And Tais saw to it that we would hate California," I said.

"Lady Tirana, the outlaws, Darlanis, everyone?" Carol asked. I nodded. Given "infinite power", "anything" becomes "possible"!

"I have a theory the Priestesses can control anyone of this time by a 'code word' of some sort implanted into their minds by an advanced form of electronic hypnosis," I said, Carol nodding.

"And they also possess time travel," Carol noted in reply.

"The Lorr never stood a 'chance' against them," I noted.

"Hold me," Carol breathed, moving into my arms then.

"They are to us as 'gods'," I said, stroking her hair.

"I fear what they may do," Carol said, clinging to me.

"She 'needs' us now," I said, indicating Queen Maris.

"Not good!" Maris spoke, staring through the telescope. I saw nothing but a tiny spot of color there in the distance like a speck of something against the horizon that divided the sea from the sky. We were well out, with land only a "haze" to starboard. The wind was not very strong, the sun hot, the sky a clear blue.

"How long until the North Star meets us?" Lars Debolt asked, his arm possessively around Sandi's slim waist. A number of the other slaves now also staring astern at the spot of color there. The wind now barely "filling" our sails as we crept slowly along, the little vessel not being designed for speed, but for

"cargo".

"They could not `save' us from `that'," the Queen replied.

"I would like a look," I ventured, wondering if she would allow me the use of the little telescope. Without a word Maris handed it to me. It took a moment to locate what she had seen.

"Big galley," I said, lowering the telescope, letting Maris take it again from my hand. "That same one we saw back there in Trella that Lady Tirana said was `Sarnian Lady'," I told Carol.

"If Darlanis learns.....," my wife breathed softly back.

"They will signal her from shore," Maris spoke swiftly.

"We have the guards' weapons, the bows," Sandi spoke.

"Like .22's against a battleship," I smiled back.

"We can beach, hope for the best," Maris spoke.

"We can destroy Sarnian Lady," Carol answered her.

"That's an Imperial first rate!" Lars breathed, awed.

"It's made of wood, and wood burns," my wife answered.

"And we are carrying ten casks of lamp oil," Sandi added.

"And a fire pump to carry it from us to them," I added too.

"No," Maris spoke softly, shaking her head. I saw her eyes.

"We don't exactly have a choice in the matter!" Carol said!

"The Caste Codes?" I snapped, taking Maris by the arms then.

"Yes," she answered softly, her eyes pleading up into mine.

"There was just a `mutiny' on this ship and you are no longer `in command'," I said, Maris making no attempt to pull away or do anything but just stand there looking up into my face. Those beautiful green eyes like precious jewels glowing right into mine as I held her, that red mouth, the lips moist, parted, begged for a kiss I dared not give them! I sensed once again that "hunger"!

"You'd better take these," Maris said, reaching down, half drawing her sword and dagger. Handing them to me, then turning, her eyes for a brief moment once again meeting mine before she disappeared with her three warrioresses down the hatchway. I saw Carol's eyes, saw too that she had "seen". I feared then for the Queen of Dularn. My brownette is a "jealous" woman. Good with a sword too. I suspected that she might even be better than Maris!

"I'll see that they are `secure'," Carol said, going below. Such might someday be "important" if we reached Dularn. Neither Carol or I were legally bound by the Caste Codes, but Maris was. Should it be

determined that she had allowed a violation of the Caste Codes to take place without doing anything about it Maris might be in very serious trouble. Thus it would be necessary to be "sure" that Maris and her companions were in the "legal sense" at least unable to prevent our "violation" of the Caste Codes. I did not however realize that Carol had other intentions in mind!

"What is the `penalty' for killing the Queen of Dularn?" Carol asked, tying Maris' hands behind her back with a length of rawhide boot lace. The Queen for a second giving her a puzzled look as one might expect given the nature of the situation here! It was stuffy, rather "smelly" in the cabin, the ship old, dirty. It had not taken Carol long to tie the other three women secure.

"We usually hang assassins, but I suppose that would be up to the Senate," Maris replied, suddenly then horribly "aware" of the very nature of the "question" that Carol had just asked her!

"Got any laws against adultery?" my wife smiled back then.

"A public whipping, but it's rarely done," Maris said.

"You do have `dueling' don't you?" Carol asked then.

"What are you getting at?" Maris asked, suspecting!

"Come with me," Carol spoke, drawing the Queen with her.

Chapter Fifteen

"We will have to conceal our `intentions' until the last minute," I explained to Lars Debolt. He was presently in "command" of the ship as I had little idea of how to sail her as yet. We were sailing directly towards the shore now in the distance. I had no wish to cause more loss of life among those who "served" Darlanis than necessary when I set fire to Sarnian Lady! As for Darlanis herself I would have gladly "wrung" that beautiful neck and felt the "better" for having done so after what she had done! Earlier my wife had told Kathi that her "use" would be hers now to decide, the wench now being our "property" as it was. Carol had also made Kathi to perform the "gesture of submission" before her in front of everyone, thus confirming her own status. Kathi being forced to strip, to kneel before Carol in the nude, her knees wide apart, her head down, her arms extended before her with her wrists crossed. Carol had then bound her wrists with a length of rawhide, thereby "accepting" Kathi's own "submission".

"Or we will be lucky to `hang' as pirates," he smiled back. I wondered what Darlanis would "do" if we hoisted a "Jolly Roger" flag up over the stub main mast. I felt it "proper" considering what we "planned" to do. I wondered for a moment what Carol was doing, and why she had not yet come back up on deck to joinus? The other slaves looking nervously at the approaching trireme. I would cover the fire pump with an old sail. Those aboard Sarnian Lady would have of course no ideas as to what our cargo had been!

"At least I will die in the company of a beautiful woman," Lars laughed, kissing Sandi, stroking her naked breasts, her nipples I noted, being erect, her very "stance" leaving no "doubts"! She was nicely "assed", her breasts high, firm, quite "nice" too.

"Take her below, `use' her," I said, taking "command" of the old cargo ship. The name "Cleolantis"

painted in flaking paint on its bow above the painted eyes many ships have in this era. I watched Lars dash with Sandi down the hatch to the deck below. I supposed it would not "take long". She was already well aroused! I thought of Carol, wondered what she was doing just then. For an instant then I saw "another" now standing before me, one tall, slim and lovely, Keri Colter, Lady Tirana's own granddaughter!

"This will do," Carol said, pushing the Queen of Dularn in among the sacks of grain. Maris nodding in reply, well aware of the fact that she was helplessly bound, and that Carol was armed. The brownette's attire giving her a "savage look" Maris felt was fitting considering what she had suggested doing to Sarnian Lady. Carol's innate "dominance", the very "look" of her reminding the Queen of Dularn of "another". Of a tall, stern featured Warlady!

"It's been a long time for you since you've had a man, isn't it?" Carol spoke in level tones. Maris blushed, nodding back. A pair of soft "understanding" hazel eyes meeting her own emerald. Carol had been glad to see the "last" of Keri, and here was this damn blonde "making eyes" in a way that left no "doubts" either!

"I've never 'felt' this way before," Maris breathed softly. It was the "truth", she felt, recalling the emotions she'd felt!

"And my husband is both 'handsome' and 'manly'," Carol said. Maris thought that the brownette's words were an understatement. Had there not been a "wife" like Carol, Maris knew she would already have taken his sperm in her vagina as they laid together. The Queen puzzled that she felt the way that she did towards me!* * It is my belief now that Maris was mind-programmed by Tais. I suspect that I was tested here to prove if I loved Carol. (R.S.)

"He is much like 'another' I once knew," Maris said softly. Yet it had been "different" back then. Not even Carl Talen had aroused such feelings in her. Carol's husband was a "MAN" in the full sense of the term. A man to which she could only submit to! Just as this wife of his was one that a hunk like him might love! Maris having no doubts that a man would have to be very "sure" of his own "manhood" to be married to a "woman" like this brownette! Much like Jon Richards, who had married the fantastic "Lorraine"! They had "gone together" for some time, but she had "wanted more" out of life than he could give her, Maris being well aware of the sort of a woman she was, the term "gold digger" being "fitting"! She had "lied" to Lorraine, even to herself, but Maris was well aware of the truth that she was herself nothing but a true slut!

"And when Bob 'touched' you, you felt 'warm and wet', didn't you?" The Queen nodding, and blushing hotly at Carol's words! She would not have "used" such terms, but she understood their meaning, the "implications". She had been sexually aroused then.

"There is a 'difference' between 'feeling' and 'doing'," my wife said. Maris nodded, unable to meet those burning hazel eyes with her own beautiful green. "But just remember I am his wife." The words "I am his wife" seeming to almost now ring in her ears.

"I don't want us to be 'enemies'," Maris answered softly. She admired the woman, the way that she was willing to deal with this "matter" where another might have let it "fester" until the time came that it would have been "decided" with a dagger or poison. Maris being well aware of the "history" of Dularn's past. Many Dularnian Queens had died violent deaths, some by assassins. She recalled the "rumors" there had been about Queen Tulis back when she had been a teenage girl. About the wife of a "Senator" who had been found lying dead in her bed, a dagger in her heart! Tulis had been the sort of a Queen who "took" what she "wanted". Much like her famous 'daughter', the present Californian Empress! There had been a

"rumor" too about Prince Paul, about a mistress! There had even been a "claim" that his mistress had been of Mars!

"You are a very beautiful woman, and 'blonde'," Carol said. Maris had been compared by a few with Darlanis, the acknowledged "Queen of Beauty" of the 26th Century, although she did not have the "height", or the "amazonic" build of the Empire's own ruler.

"Many in my country are light haired," the Queen replied. Not all Dularnians were light haired, but a large number were.* * It should be noted here that it is possible to make a "blonde" out of a dark haired person by the alteration of one gene in the set of 48 chromosomes that make up a human being. It is my belief that the Priestesses of Lys possess such powers as the technology was developed by the World Federation of the 21st Century before The War of 2047 destroyed that civilization. Many children are born "light haired", but become dark haired later on. I have spoken with a number of Physicians here in Arsana and elsewhere who note that the number of "light haired" children born to dark haired parents seems to be greater than what ordinary current genetic theory would indicate. The Priestesses appear to be the ones "responsible" as all pregnant women usually see a Priestess some time before giving birth. Their "role" here in life in the 26th Century reminds me much of that of the "Catholic Church" in the Middle Ages, although their power, I might note, is greater. All in all, I do think they are a "benefit" to humanity much as Lorraine planned them to be when she gave the concept of them to Janet Rogers. As a "means" of installing a "safeguard" against the misuse of electronic hypnosis by a world political state. Perhaps Tais now is "the second Janet Rogers"! She is for all practical purposes the "ruler" of the world in a way, although she rarely "interferes" in domestic politics. I also note here that Aurora's "conversations" with Darlanis in her own book indicate that Aurora herself has somewhat similar "powers" to a much lesser degree, "proving" Lorraine's theories. (RS)

"My husband has a 'weakness' for 'women' like you," Carol mused, regarding the Queen of Dularn, "And I also suspect too you may be being 'tested' yourself for some reason here." Given the sort of power that the Priestesses of Lys possessed, such was, my wife felt, quite "possible" considering their other capabilities!

"Perhaps 'you' are also so being 'tested'," Maris ventured.

"Perhaps Tais has a 'sense of humor'," Carol "smiled" back.

"You are not a 'beautiful woman', but there is a 'quality' about you that I have 'seen' in few others," Maris then answered.

"I am a 'woman' who has no 'doubts' about herself," Carol smiled back, leaning back against one of the sacks of corn there in the ship's hold. Keeping her voice down as she suspected they were not the only ones here in the hold from the soft sounds she had heard only a moment ago. The sort of sounds that men and women make when they are making "love" in conditions like this! Many "believing" that they would die beneath Sarnian Lady's ram.

"You are also much like 'another' in some ways," Maris said, remembering a tall, stern featured brunette who had demonstrated to those of Dularn the awesome power of the great Tarls of Talon!

"Lorraine?" Carol asked, well aware that she had been told the "same" by some of the other slave girls there on the estate. A nod by the Dularnian Queen leaving no doubts in my wife's mind. Carol recalling then what I had told her about being "selected". Of what Tais had once said to me about my wife back in our time.

"One I much fear," Maris answered. It was not just a "fear" of the famous Warlady's military capabilities, but something else that Maris feared. The woman's "dominance", her appearance, all instilling in Maris strange "feelings", "urges" that she feared! * * A part of Maris' "hostility" to me may be due to this. (L.R.)

"I think I know 'why'," Carol spoke, suddenly seizing the beautiful Queen of Dularn in her arms, and pressing her lips down upon the lovely soft mouth of the blonde's! Maris for an instant "fighting", then Carol felt her "yield", felt the lips "open" beneath hers, felt the warm body of the Queen press up against her own half naked form. Her actions leaving no "doubts" now in my wife's mind as to just "why" Maris Marn so feared the "Warlady"!!

"Carol!" Maris breathed, still held in my wife's arms, her beautiful azure eyes seeking the lovely hazel of the brownette's. Carol herself now feeling strange "urges", "feelings" she'd never felt before too as she held the blonde Dularnian in her arms! A feeling of "terror" clutching her heart as she realized just what these feelings meant! Was she another like the Imperial Warlady?

"I think I 'understand' now what I did not before," Carol said, looking into the lovely eyes of the Dularnian. She recalled the "hostility" another "blonde" had once felt towards her long ago. That woman had been, Bob said, quite "submissive". I suspect here too that a great deal of Carol's "attractiveness" to me is the "fact" that she is a rather "dominant" woman in a way! On the other hand we get along as well as we do because we are a "team", not just a husband and wife. I can "rely" on Carol, and she on me. The two of us "together" is greater than the "two of us" apart. Carol is "Warlady of Dularn", which I feel is proper. I still recall that arena in Trella. Carol "there" at my side.

"I fear I am not much of a 'Queen'." Maris spoke softly, her eyes glowing into the hazel of Carol's. Others had noted too that she was not the "Queen" for example that the late Tulis had been. That had been part of the reason she had taken command of the North Star. "Running away" from her own "responsibilities". Carol's own body warmth, her "closeness" now a strange "comfort".

"A 'Queen' must have both 'courage' and 'compassion'," my wife now answered back, looking into those beautiful green eyes. "And the world does not 'need' right now either a woman playing 'She-Ra' or another who thinks she's 'the second Janet Rogers'."

"I think I do need a 'Warlady'," Maris answered softly.

"And a 'Warrior' to stand at her side," Carol smiled.

Chapter Sixteen

"Everything O.K. below?" I asked, Carol climbing up on to the deck beside me, her hazel eyes glowing into mine. I wondered if she had "spoken" to Maris about "matters". I hoped she had not "queered" things with the Queen of Dularn with her jealousy. I suspected now that Maris' reactions might be a simple "side effect" of her earlier "mind programming" by First Priestess Tais. "Programming" sexual feelings towards me in Maris might be a good way of making sure that Maris carried out the task "set" for her.

"The Queen is a very 'interesting' woman," Carol said to me. The tone of her voice leaving no doubt they had shared "secrets". "And I am now the 'Warlady of Dularn'," Carol spoke with a smile, her hazel eyes glowing up into mine with a "delight" that left no "doubt" that Tais had been right all along about my

amazing wife! I suspected however that Maris had been "mind programmed" so that she would select Carol. I felt however that it was an excellent idea! Carol was a "natural leader" as she had proved there on the estate, and she was "vicious" enough when "provoked" too to be just what Dularn now "needed" to "win" this war against the Empire of California. Dularn now had its own "Lorraine", I felt.

"A woman of many talents," I smiled, remembering then what Tais had "said" there standing before my table at the "HUTCH". Carol was a woman who had led a "hard life" before she met me. She was in her way like "another" I had once known, "admired". I was at a loss for words, although I knew such had been "decided". Carol had been "picked" for her position as Lorraine apparently had been "picked" for hers. I wondered if the Priestesses of Lys really knew what they were "doing" here. "Snatching" people from one era and transporting them into another like pawns in some odd chess game. Like some "gods" of some strange "alien" mythology. I wondered if they had some means of "watching" us in "action"?

"I was 'worth marrying', wasn't I?" my wife teased me back, leaning against the railing. Her hazel eyes smoldered into mine. I was very "proud" of her, although I've always felt so about my wife, Carol being the sort of a woman any man might envy you for! I wanted to grab her, dance about the deck with her, but I knew this was neither the "time" or the "place" for such "antics" now!

"Although I'm going to 'miss' my sexy slave girl," I teased her, noting how that cut up deer hide "accented" that provocative body. Carol is not "beautiful" in the face, but she is the sort of a woman that even more "beautiful" women might well envy too! Her "skirt" was quite short, and the halter didn't "cover" much. I remembered standing there in the arena at Trella, a sword in my hand, Carol at my side, and "knowing" I had "found" my "Warlady"! That there was no other woman in the world I would have wanted to be married to just then. That Carol was truly the woman for me! I think, however, that I've always known that even at the start! Ever since that morning I looked at Carol lying there sunning herself and realized that she was truly the "right" woman for me!

"You could keep me as a 'slave girl'," my wife smiled back. "Although we'd have to 'keep up appearances' I suppose," she teased. Sarnian Lady was rapidly closing the distance between us with every stroke of her oars. I think both of us wanted to "ignore" that "fact" as long as we could just then. Neither of us looked forward to what would happen even if we were "successful" in setting the trireme afire with lamp oil! The fire pump was now set up on deck, and covered by an old sail. I thought of Darlanis, of her "pride". Of what she had said there in Trella to Sanda Talen for "interfering" as she had in "certain matters"! My wife had suggested that she kill Darlanis to add to the confusion when we "fired" the trireme. I had refused to hear of it! Carol's archery is such that she can hit human sized targets on a regular basis at a distance of a hundred and thirty yards. At a distance of a hundred yards she can kill a dozen men in a minute! She can hit just as small a target with her bow as I could with my .357 Magnum revolver back in the Twentieth Century. She isn't as skillful a swordswoman as some, but I haven't seen very many who can equal her with the bow. She came in second in the Games here in Dularn for her skill at archery, and it was a close call!

"There is also something to be 'said' for the free woman," I smiled back, Carol standing there leaning up against the railing. She also looked a lot like the cover photo on one of her own novels. She had "posed" for that picture while wearing almost the same sort of a "costume" that she wore now, I remembered. I had taken that picture myself, one of some twenty four on the roll. Carol had worn a sword, a dagger, held a bow "ready" in her hand. Nother own "compound" of course, but just one we'd made for it.

"Or in having both a 'wife' and a 'slave girl'," Carol said, her eyes glowing into mine. She had often played such "roles" in the past. Many of her chapters in her books are based upon such. The books are now again "available" thanks to the assistance of Queen Maris, Empress Darlanis, and Queen Lorraine of Trelandar! I know how "silly" they must seem now to everyone, but on the other hand, they sometimes

seem pretty "real", especially to Carol and I, considering some of our own "experiences" in this era!

"I suppose Kathi will be 'useful' to do 'housework'," I said then, changing the "subject" just a bit. The "topic" of our conversation now standing by the rail on the other side of the ship. She didn't look too "delighted" at the way that things had gone!

"I'm tired of kitchen work and dusting," Carol smiled back. Those had been some of her tasks on the estate among many others. "Housework" was not one of her favorite "chores" in the 20th Century, and I had no doubt that she hadn't enjoyed it here either! Especially since the "house" belonged to a woman whom she hated!

"I wish we had a Priestess aboard," Lars Debolt said to me as he now joined us there on deck, his hand clasping that of the lovely Sandi, her "disheveled" appearance and the "look" of her now bruised and swollen mouth leaving no doubts she had been just very well used! His words for a moment I fear puzzling me until I realized that in this era the Priestesses of Lys married people! Sandi turning, biting the side of his neck with her teeth. Many women of this era "mark" a man when they make love, often in such a way that it is somewhat difficult to conceal the mark later on. Leaving of course no doubt that you have just made love.

"Maybe Queen Maris can 'say a few words'," Carol suggested.

"It is what we 'feel' here that counts," Sandi said, pressing her free hand to her left breast, which I saw had been bit!

"It is time to get ready," I said, regarding Sarnian Lady.

"A lovely day," I said as Carol stood beside me, the weapons strapped about her provocative half naked body seemingly fitting! I recalled the arena in Trella, the clash of steel, the memory of a fighting woman almost beyond compare. Of the roar of the crowd as she raised her sword high, "naked" but for the bit of leather. Carol is in her way I think now as much a "legend" as any other.

"We are 'together'," Carol answered, her eyes holding mine. The sun was high in the sky, hot on my bare shoulders as I stood by the fire pump, screwing the hose into the fitting, four of the strongest men aboard ready to pump the handles at my command now. The other end of the hose shoved down into a fifty gallon barrel of the lamp oil, a smoking torch there in my wife's hand "ready". The old cargo ship gently rolling in the swell, the sails hardly drawing now. Sarnian Lady, proud in her gilt and paint, like some great insect now crawling across the blue green waters towards us. The banners flying proudly as the trireme rapidly approached. I wondered what Darlanis thought, knowing who she was now pursuing. I supposed she was delighted by the way things had apparently "turned out". She would be "freed" of Maris for good!

"Got the Princess with her too," Lars spoke, looking through Maris' telescope at the rapidly approaching trireme. A cold chill of horror now going through me as I realized just "who" the Princess was! Sharon Duval, Lorraine's own beloved stepdaughter! And Lorraine had always been "touchy" about Sharon even back in the 20th Century, I recalled, remembering certain "incidents"!!!

"Remember Lorraine's first book?" Carol said to me, her hazel eyes burning hot into mine. I nodded, knowing that whatever we "did" to Darlanis, Sharon must not be harmed or Lorraine would spend the rest of her life "hunting us down" wherever we went! I felt suddenly "sick" at the thought, remembering Sharon from years ago, a lovely young girl, so utterly "different" from both her "lecher" of a father and her "dominatrix" of a step mother!

"Nothing must happen to her," I said. Carol nodded.

A catapult shot dropped into the sea almost "alongside" us, throwing up a burst of spray that splattered down over our decks. Darlanis had some good marksmen aboard that battleship of hers, I "mused" to myself! I did not think the Empress had bothered much to bring her own vessel to "battle readiness". We were but a ship stolen by some runaway slaves and that notorious Maris Marn of Dularn! We didn't even mount one catapult or ballistae! No doubt Darlanis wished to make this "conquest" of hers as "bloodless" as possible. "Taking" an old cargo ship "stolen" by some slaves with Maris Marn's "help" wouldn't be something the oarsmen aboard Sarnian Lady would "brag about" in the taverns of Trella!

"The next one will hit," Lars Debolt warned, the first shot having been a "warning" to "heave to". Carol nodding, ordering the man at the wheel to start swinging us about up into the wind` the sails flapping uselessly overhead as Sarnian Lady approached. The fire pump had a maximum range of less than a hundred feet. We had to get close to Sarnian Lady. Awful close! Close enough to almost "see the `blue'" of Darlanis' eyes, I had warned those aboard. Carol had told everyone to strip off their weapons. She wanted Darlanis to be "careless". To think we were "terrified" of her. I recalled whatLorrainehad written of her. I thought her a "proud woman"! Not the sort likeLorrainewho would keep her "distance" until she was "sure" of our actual intentions! Darlanis is brave, and quite "courageous" under fire. She is "smart", but a "dumb blonde" in some ways. Not really a "competent" commander I feel. Not a "Carol" or a "Lorraine", although I think she is perhaps "braver" in some ways than either of them!

"I love you, Bob," Carol suddenly turned and said to me as Sarnian Lady closed the distance between us. I thought of all the other women I'd ever known, including those of this era too! None could ever compare to my brownette, I realized, not even the "Queens of Beauty" such as Darlanis and Maris now tied up below!

"`One in a million'," I said, reaching out, kissing her. I saw men watching us from Sarnian Lady, Darlanis with a telescope to her eye, a young blonde haired woman standing there beside her that I knew must be Sharon Duval, now the "'Queen of Orgon'" and "Princess of the Empire of California", Darlanis' "successor" if anything ever was to happen to that magnificent "Amazon" of hers!

"The `best'," Carol answered, suddenly turning in my arms, thrusting her rump right against my groin. "Just remember that." The hazel of my Dularnian Warlady's eyes burning hot into mine!

Chapter Seventeen

"We're within bowshot now," Carol said standing there at the rail, her words "reminding" me of another's. I wondered if Carol would have been the "way" she was now if we'd never metLorraine? The sort of "questions" that I've often asked myself now of late. I would have never given up Carol for Lorraineregardless of whatLorrainemight have "thought" back then. I "admired"Lorraine, but I did not love her. She "fascinated" me, but that was "all".

Sarnian Lady was "big", far larger even thanCorsicahad been. Almost two hundred feet in length, three times the length of our stolen cargo ship. An Imperial "dreadnought", now somewhat "obsolete" perhaps in this new era of fore and aft rigged schooners such as the North Star. I don't think Darlanis really "understood" the "threat" she faced. She is brave, but in some ways rather "dumb".Lorrainewould have

been more "cautious". I suppose it is just as well that she is "Warlady". Darlanis is not I feel a good military commander. On the other hand her own courage and bravery is something that might "inspire" any. I admire her a great deal even if Maris finds her a constant headache to deal with. Our "peace" with the Empire is precarious. There is still much "hatred" on both sides. And there is, "Lorraine". A woman, I think, still yet driven by a "dream" of what once was. I once tried to explain to Lorraine that her "dream" had indeed come "true", but in a much "different" form than what she wished. There is no glorious world civilization, or great "starships" to carry one to other worlds. There is, however, a "new world" to explore. A social order that offers "more" than the "old" did. "Adventure" for those who seek it. I have Carol. My "Warlady". That "playful" wench of mine who still delights in "teasing", in doing those things that leave no doubts that she is truly one in a million. I serve a beautiful Queen, and see her every day, but at night I snuggle up next to a sexy provocative "delight" who in her way has proven to me and others that there is but one CAROL!

"I have given Sandi her 'instructions'," Carol said to me. We were perhaps a mile from shore. A long ways to swim, I mused. Sandi would cut Maris and the others free if we failed to "fool" Darlanis. I didn't know if Darlanis would pick up "survivors" or not. I didn't know what we would "do" if Darlanis couldn't control the fire on her own ship and was then forced to abandon it! There were only a dozen men aboard the Cleolantis, and half a dozen slave girls. Maris and her own three Warriresses. Sarnian Lady carried a crew of a couple hundred plus Darlanis' own personal Warriresses numbering a dozen or so. Slaves too, who might die just because of what we did! And we couldn't just shoot some burning oil out into the water to scare off Darlanis! She'd just pull back far enough to get safely out of range, and then pour a deadly stream of catapult shot and ballistae bolts into us until the Cleolantis eventually sank under us! She also had the same deadly "fire weapons" too that I'd seen used so effectively by the Corsica! And under oars she was far more "maneuverable" than any sailing ship! That was why galleys were still in military service even in this era of fore and aft rigged schooners! "We are 'doing' what we must 'do'," Carol said then, putting her hand on my arm. She was my "Warlady" now, no longer my "wife" in the same sense she'd been "before". I felt as if a great "burden" had been taken from my shoulders. I felt "love". More than just "love" as you think of it. Carol and I are "one". I am very proud of what Carol has become. I am glad I am "hers".

"I'm glad I married you," I said to Carol, my wife nodding, the torch burning well there as she held it low so it would not be "spotted" by those aboard Sarnian Lady. I saw the "beauty" of the ship, recalled what Darlanis had written in her own book. I did "like" her in a way. She was brave, courageous, and I hated to "do" to her what I was going to do. As Lorraine once noted, it is "easier" when the "enemy" is but a "faceless foe". I think it is "why" the warfare of the 20th Century was as it was. There is something to be said for a social order where weapons are limited to those "edged" and "pointed". Where you must "see" the "face" of your "enemy". Where they are not just a speck in rifle sights. Or a "nameless enemy" you "kill" with the "push" of a "button". That is, I think, why The War happened as it did then.

Carol, smiling, raised a hand, gave Darlanis the "one finger salute". I wondered if the Empress understood the meaning of it? I flung the sail off the fire pump, the four selected men leaping to the handles as I picked up the brass nozzle. My wife holding her flaming torch there just in front of it! I saw Sharon point, grab at Darlanis! She was of an era where flamethrowers had once existed! She understood what Darlanis and the others did not! "Aim for the deck!" Carol snapped, the oar ports a poor "target"!

"NOW!" I snapped, the oil gushing forth, instantly ignited by Carol's torch. It was much like the demonstration I had once seen in the Marines of a flame thrower in action. Worse I think due to the greater quality of flammable liquid spurting forth! I recalled those who had dropped the first atomic bomb. It was, I thought, much the "same". We had unleashed a "HORROR" like none any had ever seen before! The flames gushing out, falling on the decks of the doomed trireme as its terrified officers tried to turn it away! I saw Darlanis, tall, golden, a sword in her hand, trying futilely to maintain order. A hopeless

task as men fled, some burning, to seek the sea! The oil spurting out suddenly stopping as the fifty gallon barrel of it ran dry! Carol standing there, the torch yet in her hand, her eyes filled with horror as she saw what we had done! I watched terrified oarsmen seeking the "safety" of the sea, a few, more "in control", throwing something overboard that might float them. Darlanis leaping among the flames, "magnificent" as she fought to save the lives of her own people! I saw everything blur before me, realized then that I was crying, knowing what we had "done" to these people, many of whom I had "known" by Darlanis' and Lorraine's very own writings!

"Throw everything overboard that will float them!" Carol snapped in loud tones in as we stood there "stunned" by what we'd done to Sarnian Lady! "Sandi! Free Maris and the others!" The former slave girl dashing to obey as Carol buckled on her weapons, warning us to "disarm" anyone who managed to reach us now! My wife's awesome "competency", something I've "taken for granted" for years now, once again coming to the fore as we hurried to put her orders into action! Seeing the futile efforts of those aboard the doomed trireme, the flames now shooting up into the sky, to launch what few boats yet remained as others now dove into the water to escape the flames! The sheer bravery and courage of Darlanis awing everyone now aboard the Cleolantis as we watched the Imperial Empress, now "burned" herself, fighting to save the lives of her own people even at the risk of her own! And there was Sharon at her side, taking the same "risks" that she was! A true Princess of the Imperials! A true "daughter" of their own "Warlady"! Carol dashing about to see that her orders were being carried out, while the smoke from the burning Imperial trireme rose up like a funeral pyre into the sky like some cloud of doom! I reached down, grabbed her hand, drew the terrified dripping Imperial warriorress up over the side, yanked her dagger out its sheath and tossed it over the side as she scrambled to join the others now being dragged over the side! Reached down for the oarsman behind her like some fisherman now drawing a net full of fish from the sea! And there were "more" behind him too!

"Oh, Lys!" I heard Maris breathe, her eyes filled with horror at the sight there before her. I thought of the pictures I'd seen of Hiroshima. The books I'd read about that "event". Knew Carol and I been the one "responsible" for the deaths, these horrible burns as we dragged men sobbing in agony over the side, some now drowning right before our eyes as they gave up the "struggle"! I grabbed a burned slave girl, her shift horribly burned right into her own flesh, her only sound a horrible "Ah-ah-ah" of agony! I saw Sandi vomiting over the side, felt the "gorge" rise in my own throat as I saw below me the "horrors" of what we had done to these people! What Carol and I had ordered us to "do"! The wind blowing the smoke from the blazing trireme over us, the odor horrible as screaming trapped men and women died in agony on that floating funeral pyre that had only minutes before been a proud Imperial flagship! I saw Sharon clinging to Darlanis, the Empress' eyes filled with horror as she saw the horror all about! Her proud flagship only a great blazing mass of flames as it now started to "settle" in the water. Her own people, terrified, out of "control", reaching out, clinging to the sides of her badly overloaded small boat. I saw a burned warriorress, in agony, now reach out to a half naked slave girl there on our now overcrowded deck, one of the six who had come with us from Lorraine's estate. The warriorress begging in a pitiful sobbing voice to be put out of her suffering, her burns I knew too great for any "hope" of her ever surviving them! I saw the Queen of Dularn draw her sword, saw the woman guide the razor sharp point to a place there on her throat, and watched the swift thrust that put a quick "end" to her suffering! The tears rolling down Maris' own reddened cheeks as she looked up at me then!

I saw Darlanis, the side of her face burned, her beautiful golden hair now half burned away, allow Sharon to help her up on to our deck, the Empress' skin reddened, dirty, even bleeding in spots. Her eyes were like blue pools of horror as they met mine for a brief instant although I don't think she recognized me now. Maris going to her, speaking to her, her words inaudible over the sounds of the moaning and whimpering burned now already on our deck! Sharon clinging to her Empress, as if Darlanis was the only thing "left" in a "world" that had suddenly become something of horror! A world where once again there existed weapons of mass destruction! A world where the flagship of a mighty Empire might be reduced

to a blazing wreck by the command of one person! Sarnian Lady now only a sinking mass of flames as the smoke like a great black column rose up into the sky to mark her passing. I thought of the mushroom clouds of atomic warfare, and knew that Carol was the "Warlady" who had killed as many as fifty or sixty people if not more, including innocent harmless slave girls who had not survived to make it to our deck. I prayed that they had not been chained aboard Sarnian Lady, that I had not been the one to condemn them to a horrible agonizing death aboard the now sinking trireme! I saw the fin of a shark in the water, as the creatures of the deep came in now to "finish" what fire had not!

Suddenly to my horror I felt a greasy oily liquid spray over me like some heavy rain, and I saw Carol standing there at the fire pump, spraying the deadly flammable oil over everyone aboard the Cleolantis! A blazing torch held ready in Sandi's hand now! I saw the fins of more sharks gathering around the blazing embers of Sarnian Lady, and realized that Carol only needed to toss that torch down among us there before her to condemn us all to death!

Chapter Eighteen

"If Darlanis.....," Carol said to me with a nod of her head as I dashed up to her to demand an "explanation" of why she had just sprayed everyone aboard the Cleolantis with the same flammable oil we had just used to destroy Sarnian Lady. My wife having kept her "wits" about her while the rest of us, so "awed" by the destruction of Sarnian Lady, had not "considered" what Darlanis might "do" to us in her fury. Even "bare handed", the survivors from the trireme, now only a mass of burning embers, could have easily overcome everyone aboard, as we were outnumbered by almost eight to one by those from the Imperial battleship! At the moment however, Darlanis was doing nothing more than going about the deck, trying to "help" her people as she could, and giving "grace" to those who were far too badly burned to survive! I saw Maris Marn there at her side, both for the time only being concerned with the horrible suffering lying there before them! I watched the sharks moving among the burning embers that were the last remains of Sarnian Lady, watched them take bodies, the water swirling, bloody as they feasted. The "horror" of the scenelike something out a "nightmare". A "nightmare" my own wife had made!

"Darlanis wouldn't have hurt you!" Sharon sobbed, the tears rolling down her burned cheeks as she stumbled among through the "survivors" from Sarnian Lady now packed together on the vastly overburdened Cleolantis' deck to stand before us. "I told her you, you.....," the rest only meaninglessly sobbing as the Princess broke completely down then. Darlanis then at her side, taking her in her arms, her own beautiful azure eyes now filled now with pure hatred as they met our own! I was thankful that her burns were not serious, although I had no doubt that they were painful. Darlanis' attire such that it had offered her little "protection" from the flames. Carol stood at my side, the blazing torch ready in her hand, a sword at her hip. A cocked crossbow at her feet. I would have "hesitated" to kill a woman like Darlanis. Carol wouldn't. That is, I think, "why" she is the "Warlady" she is.* * It is also "why" I think women have not ever been "used" in warfare to any great degree until in the 21st Century where they took their place alongside men. Janet Rogers was, I understand, not a woman you wanted to "cross paths with". Women, unlike men as a rule, do not subscribe to the same "rules of fair play" that men do. I speak here of women who are not `of the Warrioresse's'. Carol's later "comment" to Maris on this topic reveals much. One may draw what "conclusions" that they wish from all this. (R.S.)

Sharon was no longer the "budding" teenage "delight" she'd been when we'd seen her last "shocking" her step mother with the "briefness" of her bikinis. Lorraine being a bit "strait laced" when it came to such! She is in that respect somewhat "Dularnian" in her own "traits". One might note here that Dularnians also

"believe" that one should be "emotionally ready" for sex before first experiencing it. It is perhaps a more "intelligent" view than that the people of our time had towards such "matters". It is not unknown here in Dularn for young women to be placed in a sort of "chastity belt" when they go out on a date with a young man. The design of these such that it prevents intercourse, but does not otherwise prevent the girl from "playing around" a bit! I am told that these came into use in the 21st Century, but there is a lot of "myth" and "legend" here that makes it impossible to ever determine the truth, although Lorraine claims that she has read novels written in that era that do mention such "devices"!!!

"When Lorraine returns...", Darlanis muttered threateningly, her voice "tight" with pain. Her burns were no doubt quite painful. We had "little" in the line of medical supplies. Sarnian Lady was now only a mass of burning embers on the bosom of the sea. A few blacked, burned bodies floating among them. I estimated that the Imperials had "lost" a fourth of their numbers. I supposed terror and panic had "accounted" for many of these. Some of course had drowned. I also knew too that there would have been a lot more yet but for Darlanis' "courage", her abilities to "command" under "fire". I wondered too as Maris stood at her side if she would have done as "well" had the positions been reversed? I still greatly "admire" Darlanis even if she is still nothing but "trouble" for us Dularnians, although I suspect now that Princess Tara has a "hand" in things once again after she "escaped" from the Nevadas and fled to a safe "asylum" in Mexico.

"She will find that Dularn has a 'Warlady'," Carol answered. "You will also find that your coastline is more 'vulnerable' than ours," my wife added, standing there before the Imperial monarch. "And we also have 'allies' where you least expect to find them." Carol is also a good public speaker, being quite "quick-witted". More so I think than is the Queen of Dularn, our own Maris Marn.

"Are you 'what' Sharon says you 'are'?" Darlanis asked then.

"'Welcome to the Twentieth Century'." Carol spoke, indicating with a nod of her head the smoldering remains now drifting on the waves. "A century where 'war' was truly 'war'," Carol added. The "implications" of her words not being "lost" upon Darlanis, who nodded in reply. Her eyes, a beautiful azure, burning "hot"!

"I am not unfamiliar with the traditions of your era," Darlanis answered in cold level tones. I don't think she quite understood just what my wife "implied" here, but it didn't matter.

"We 'were' from the Twentieth Century," I informed Darlanis.

"I have Lorraine, Maris has what she now has," she replied. I think Darlanis would call Carol a "name", but thought better of it just then. Carol is not a "Princess Tara" by any means although the Imperials did one time rather hint that she was such.

"You are truly 'She-Ra'," I then said to Darlanis as she stood there holding Sharon in her arms. "I am sorry that we must be enemies." Darlanis' eyes blazed into mine. I don't think she "understood" just then what I was trying to say to her now. In a way I think she is one that I shall always "admire" regardless of the fact she can also be a royal "pain in the neck" at times too!

The North Star came sailing up over the horizon shortly afterwards, perhaps "drawn" by the black smoke that had risen up into the azure blue vault of the sky. Maris had ordered medical supplies sent over as soon as it was possible to lower a boat. I understood "how" she felt about all this. How Darlanis felt too! They were much like the Japanese after the atomic bombs had been dropped. Suddenly their own "world" was not longer the "same"! They had been like children "playing" their "games", and suddenly now they had seen the "True Face of War", and neither liked it!!!

"It will be necessary to destroy Lorraine's airplane, kill the birds before they can be used against us," I "informed" Queen Maris as the Queen of Dularn silently regarded my wife from those beautiful emerald eyes of hers. She had a more "feminine" face than did Darlanis, I noticed. Carol says Maris reminds her somewhat of Katherine Kelly Lang, (Brooke Logan, BOLD AND BEAUTIFUL) a soap opera actress of the 20th Century. Darlanis had been allowed to go "free" with her people, perhaps because none of us wanted to add to their "suffering" any further just then. I suppose it was a "mistake" we all paid for later on, but at the time I think Maris would have refused to entertain any other "idea". Carol had put on a little "archery demonstration" before we left the Cleolantis for the North Star. I had watched her put a half dozen arrows into a target the span of a man's hand the length of the Cleolantis in the space of half a minute. I don't think anyone on the ships had ever seen that "done" before. I think Darlanis "understood" then how easily she could have been killed. Carol being to archery almost what Lorraine is to swordsmanship. She came in "second" at the "GAMES", but it was a close "call". She told me later that she had a "bad release" on a couple when the arrow "went" before she had it "aimed" where she wanted it. I suspect a case of "nerves" as there were thousands watching.

"That will require a direct attack on her estate," Maris replied, glancing at her first officer, who nodded. "She will not `forgive' you for that either." our Queen pointed out in reply. The sun was now low on the horizon there in the west. The glowing orange orb visible through the salt stained half opened stern windows. The cabin, I noted, was austere for a woman. Not what one might expect for a Queen's to be either. La- raknelt to one side, waiting to be of "service". The North Star was rolling gently on the swell as we laid hove to. We had already made a deadly enemy out of Darlanis, and now we would do the "same" with Lorraine. I wondered if Maris would agree it was "necessary" to "deprive" Lorraine of her airplane before she used it against us. True, she had been "warned" by the Priestesses of Lys not to do so, but how would she "react" when she saw Darlanis and Sharon? I hated to see Black Lady destroyed, but I saw no other "choice"!

"The airplane is a serious `threat' to you," I pointed out. I had no doubts now that Lorraine would be furious at us for what we'd done to Darlanis, especially as Sharon herself had been "involved". I recalled what Lorraine's "reaction" had been before. Carol sat silently at my side, keeping her "opinions" to herself for the moment. I knew "word" of what we had done had spread throughout the ship. "Even if she does not use it to `bomb' you, she can still use it to guide her own ships into a position to capture you," I said. We had no defenses against aerial attack.

"I had once hoped for `peace'," Maris said, her eyes holding mine. We were going to make this war a lot more "nastier" now! I already knew that there were a lot of people on both sides who wanted to see an "end" to this conflict just as soon as possible! I suspected this might be the best way to see an "end" to it now! We had to force Darlanis to negotiate, to see that she could not continue to hold on to a part of Dularn and claim it as "hers"! All we "wanted" from Darlanis was free elections in the "disputed territories". An end to this constant "raiding" back and forth.

"We should have kept Darlanis and Sharon," Carol spoke then.

"I think you are a true... `Warlady'," Maris said to my wife. The tone of the Queen's voice was not too "complimentary" either. Maris was "angry". I think "scared" a bit of Carol too now. I could understand her feelings. My wife was no longer the "same" as she had been back in the 20th Century. She was "hard" now, almost like "another" I had once known. I did not find these new qualities quite as "desirable" as I once "believed" that I would. I saw the two officers of the North Star "glance" at each other. I recalled that they had perhaps once seen Lorraine herself here.

"I believe in winning wars, settling the issue," Carol said. The tone of her voice left no doubt what she

thought of all this. 'War' is not a 'sport' with 'rules', a 'referee'," Carol snapped. "And you'd better decide right now if you want to 'win' or not!" Earlier Maris had mentioned something to her of the Caste Codes. Carol had retorted that "War is not a 'game' that children play"!

"Carol has been 'abused', 'mistreated', almost killed by the people of this time, and neither of us asked to be here," I said. We were but "pawns" in a great chess game played out by "others". I wondered if even Tais really "knew" what was going on here. In Darlanis' book there is the "notation" by Aurorathat the Priestesses themselves were but a part of a greater organization. Did some hideous alien being, even more "alien" than a Lorr, make the "decisions" in matters like this? I thought of the "flying saucers" men had once seen back in our own era. Were they all Lorr?

"Lady Tirana and Keri are to come to no harm," Carol then interjected. The golden links of her neck chain glistening about her throat. Carol had "spoken" as a Warriress so "speaks", despite Maris' own royal rank. I suspected that those aboard the North Star understood "who" was truly in command now. Maris was still its "captain", but the "use" to which the ship would be "put" was now a "decision" that Carol and I would make, and only "we" would make. I suspected that Maris now "preferred" it that way too. She is a very "nice" woman in a way. Not really in my opinion a "fighter". Not a "Lorraine", or a "Darlanis", or even a "Carol"! On the other hand she is pretty "competent" at times!

"A life of 'adventure'," I smiled at Carol as I reached up to her, helping her down into the longboat beside me, taking the Dularnian compound bow from her, setting it down there beside us as she took her place with me. My wife's face as "black" as that of any Negro. Maris there in the stern of the other boat, the "whaleboat", was giving orders to those left aboard. The black painted North Star only a darker shadow there in the darkness as we now scraped and bumped up against the hull of the three masted schooner. There were but few stars, no moon. My wife now was wearing the tunic and hose of the Warriress, attire I thought "fitting" considering what she had now "become" here in this new land we'd been teleported to by the mysterious Tais. I had selected one of the Dularnian crossbows for myself. I am a "riflesman", not an "archer" like my wife. The crossbow was more like the rifles of my era. I considered it "adequate" for the task.

"I always needed a 'Warlady'," Maris spoke there in the darkness, settling down beside us, taking her boat's tiller. Her hair at Carol's order had been dyed black. We were all attired in black, our faces now blackened at my wife's order. I thought again of "another". Dularn now had its own "Lorraine Richards"!

"You have 'one' now," I said, putting my arm around Carol. I had great deal of confidence in my "Warlady" sitting beside me. My wife reaching out there in the darkness, "caressing me", although half an hour of "69" with Carol had left me pretty well "drained" and "limp". I had "clung" to her, "licking her dry", "needing her" then as I've seldom ever "needed" her in the past. The North Star taking up the "slack", giving us a "jerk" as the ship started pulling the boats there through the black water. I had made the suggestion that this might be a better method than a long row in from out atsea, while at the same time the ship could thus offer its own "covering fire" for the landing party.

"I don't know what I would 'do' without you," Carol spoke softly, in a low whisper that "others" might not "overhear". It is not something that you wish to "think" about. I knew earlier Carol had said that "if she 'fell'", I should "consider" Maris. I didn't like to think about what life would be without Carol. I will admit that Queen Maris is a beautiful woman, and that I do "admire" her considerably, but she is not "Carol". Not my Carol. I can't conceive of Maris doing all those "little things" that Carol does. Those little "teases" and "tricks" that my wife does that makes life with her the erotic delight that it is. There is, I think, only one "Lorraine". Only one "Darlanis". And there is, I am "sure" now, only one "Carol". Sorry about that, Maris, but you are just not Carol and you never will be. On the other hand I think someday you will find a man who will love you just as I love my Carol. Who you will delight as Carol does me! And I think

you too, Keri, will also someday find your "Warrior"!

Chapter Nineteen

The North Star carried a total of three boats, two large craft thirty feet in length usually carried in between the masts, and a small boat slung over the stern. Depending upon the weather, how bad the "seas" are and such, you can carry about fifty to sixty people in the two larger boats, and perhaps a dozen more in the smaller craft. In "landing operations" carried out before my wife and I took charge of things it was usually the practice to have the landing parties row in from a distance out to sea. Such almost "insuring" that they would arrive after a long row somewhat "exhausted" from their labors. I on the other hand had the ship tow them in on the end of a long rope, the ship then firing its own armaments as a form of "covering fire" while they made a landing. This quickly became a rather "standard" practice, and was even used by the Imperials themselves under Lorraine before the end of the warfare between the Dularnian Republic and the Empire of California in the fall of 2567 with the Treaty of Arsana. The "tactics" were of course based upon the landings made upon the Pacific islands held by the Japanese in the Second World War. The ships off shore firing their heavy guns at the enemy while the landings took place. I am a "Marine". We understand "such". And Carol in her novels developed some "interesting ideas" too! Perhaps Tais "understood" more than I've given her credit for!

"We have `our duties to do'," Carol said to me in low tones as the North Star dragged us through the water at a "speed" we'd never have been able to obtain under oar power. The dimly seen, more "sensed" shoreline there to starboard now close by as the second officer took the ship as close in as he dared, relying on the "soundings" made by the men with the leads there in the bow. This was "dangerous" work due to the rocks, many uncharted, but also allowed us a certain degree of "surprise" that we probably wouldn't have had coming in directly straight in from the sea. I had to "smile" a bit at her words there in the darkness, as my wife does not like to be compared to the Imperial Warlady at all! And her "comment" was the sort I'd half expect to hear from her!

"I'm glad you're here," I told my Warlady, aware of the warmth of her body, the odor of her perfume as she sat there beside me, our weapons at our feet. Carol and I have lived together for fifteen years as man and wife. I have always felt "complete" when I had Carol with me. Jon Richards once related to me that he felt much the same about Lorraine. I suspect he loves her as I love my Carol. They are, I think, much "alike" in some ways. More so now than they were in the past. Carol is "hard" in a way. Not like most women. I think that is why I always "liked" her so much right from the beginning. Lila was too "soft", too "submissive". Not the sort of a woman that I "wanted" as a wife. I didn't know of course about the "interplay" between Carol and Maris there in the hold of the Cleolantis. My wife's establishment of a degree of "sexual dominance" over the Queen of Dularn. The same sort of a "sexual dominance" that Lorraine might have "had" in the same situation. Maris being the sort of a woman who is capable of being "dominated" by almost any "strong" woman. I note here too that Darlanis (another "dominant" woman) was able to somewhat "bluff" Maris during the public debates there in the "disputed territories" much the same way until Carol then stepped into the scene to "back up" Maris a bit.

"I expect `she' is," Carol answered, indicating the other boat now being dragged alongside our own. I knew that those on the North Star practically "worshipped" Maris, although I also heard that she was not considered a competent military leader. A number of people having said that "old Queen Tulis" would have done a "lot better" against the "Empire" than had Maris so far! It should also be noted here that Darl Jord, Queen Tulis' son, did not desire a wife who had much of a "will" of her own. Maris was probably

his "choice" for a wife for reasons that are more "political" in nature than anything else. He practically "ran" Dularn before his death, using Maris as more of a "figurehead" than anything else. She is a "good" Queen, but not a "fighter". The sort of a "Queen" who needs a "CAROL" around to help "defend" her from both the "Darlanis" and the "Lorraine's" of this world. I recalled a brief conversation I had held with Maris earlier in the evening. "I'm not a 'Darlanis'," Maris had said, the "implications" of "that" being something that made me pause for thought just then! "I'm just a 'gold digger' who let her 'greed' run away with her. Just some jumped up 'Vanna White' who 'sold' herself to the Prince of Dularn like any slave girl," she had said.* * As I know a fair amount about Vanna White (she did live in our time), I am always "curious" as to where this "term" came from. It appears that any woman who made a lot of money without really "earning" it was later on often called a "Vanna White". Oddly enough this is a Dularnian term and is unknown elsewhere. (R.S.)

"Darlanis made it back," Carol breathed beside me, the North Star turning now, setting us free as she fired her broadside at point blank range, the old Cleolantis bursting into flame as the Dularnian raider turned out to sea to come back around to provide us "covering fire" for our landing. The whaleboat under Maris' command already getting its oars into the water for the short row to shore. The thought now occurring to me as it no doubt did to Carol as I gave the orders to do the same that we might be facing a far larger "force" than we had first "expected" to find here! At least it would be easy to tell "friend" from foe, as any "whitey" would be an enemy. Such is always a "problem" at night. It is not uncommon in the heat of battle to mistake friend for foe!

"Be like a hornet's nest," I heard one of the sailors growl, there being no doubt now that we would be facing the survivors off Sarnian Lady, and they would certainly be ready to fight too! I wondered if Maris would signal the North Star to pick us up? I waited to see the "signal" for that, but the whaleboat was still yet rowing towards shore, the blazing Cleolantis lighting everything up as the flames roared up into the cloudy star-less sky! I saw a couple figures "high tailing it" back towards the manor! One male, the other a half naked collared wench! A slave girl! I supposed there had been some sort of a "deck watch" put aboard.

"I'm going to tell Maris to 'withdraw'," I said to Carol, the whaleboat now pulling up on shore ahead of us, the North Star firing a full broadside over our heads, the bursts of flame ahead of us reminding me much of my old basic training in the Marines! I could see moving spots of light ahead, realized that Darlanis was doubtlessly now fully "aware" of what was happening now too! I suspected I could hear the ring of an alarm bell, giving alarm! The ship was firing alternate fire bombs and patterns of darts, which resemble crossbow bolts. It is an extremely effective weapon against ground forces, but of little use at sea as no catapult is really that accurate and the rolling and movement of the ship reduces the "accuracy" even further. On the other hand as a weapon to be used against ground troops, it is perhaps the best thing available given the current limitations upon technology imposed upon us by the Priestesses of Lys. While such fire from the ship was not as effective as even a couple 20th Century mortars would have been, on the other hand it sure did the job! I should also mention here that it is possible to fire small clusters of darts from a ballistae. This is the weapon mentioned by Lorraine there in her first book as being used by the Janis to fire "darts" against the pirates in possession of the Seahawk. It is also possible to use these for close range "covering fire".

I saw Maris raise her sword, directing the forces under her command, thought of "what" we faced here, and shuddered at the very thought of facing these doubtlessly infuriated Imperials!!! Carol called out to her, but Maris was already dashing ahead of her own forces, her sword glistening there in the light from the burning brush. The first officer leading off his own force. The North Star coming about, and anchoring now at my order, firing a third load of deadly missiles, the ballistae bolts and catapult darts falling far ahead of us! I was aware as perhaps the others were not here that this sort of "fire" was not really all that "effective", but on the other hand it did certainly tend to "deter" the Imperials considerably as Darlanis

told me later on when Lorraine captured us! The North Star's catapult shot, fired at their maximum range, reaching halfway to the manor house itself a quarter of a mile from the ocean! The ship's own twenty four new "compound ballistae", twelve to a side, each with a range of 550 yards, actually reaching closer to the manor house itself, this being a "new weapon" that so far at least the Imperials had not managed to find out about yet! While these missile weapons were not that "effective" fired as they were, their effect upon the "morale" of Darlanis' people was something else, as they could of course do nothing about it! These new ballistae were "transportable", I might mention, and could be carried with an invading force to fire over their heads at the enemy. While not all that "effective" used like this, the Imperials did tend to view such "activities" with considerable "concern", as one could not usually see the flying two foot long steel bolts before they struck. Due to the lack of "depth", the North Star had to stay out a furlong or so from shore to be sure of not "grounding" itself here!

"At least there's nothing wrong with Maris' courage," Carol spoke as we leaped from our boat on to the shore, the blazing Cleolantis lighting things up almost as bright as daylight! And also additionally making excellent "targets" out of us for any enemy archers or crossbowmen! The ship firing another broadside over our heads. Such fire being "directed" by signal lights so that it could be directed on the enemy by forward spotters! Much as what was done by similar people back in the Twentieth Century. These tactics were completely "unknown" when we first applied them in this era, and served to greatly demoralize the Imperials who instead of being able to close with our usually militarily inferior forces on a hand to hand basis, first had to endure the firepower of a Dularnian warship's major armament! Also, Carol's practice of staging only night attacks, of face blackening, of hair dying, of using black clothing, also served to hinder the military effectiveness of the enemy in any direct battle with us. I will admit however, that Lorraine got "wise" pretty fast, and at the end of the war was using our own tactics back against us!

"Scatter, take cover!" I snapped, motioning with my free hand, my compound crossbow in the other, a couple of riders now galloping towards us. Women with long lances! Our men and women now scattering, seeking the darkness. I heard the "twang" of Carol's compound, saw a saddle "empty", took aim with my Dularnian crossbow, put a bolt through the neck of the unicorn and its lovely feminine rider, dropping both only a dozen feet before me!

"She's dead, Bob!" Carol snapped, pulling me away from the body of the woman I'd killed. I felt "sick", knowing I'd killed her. I remembered hauling her over the side of the Cleolantis. She had been one of Darlanis' warrioresses. An Imperial woman. Glistening about her throat was the gold of a neck chain. I wondered if she was a mother. Had children whom she had held in her arms. Had once nursed at her bosom. I didn't "feel" quite so "warlike" then. War is much "better" when the enemy is just figures in uniforms that you shoot at from hundreds of yards away! Not quite so nice when the "enemy" is both blonde and beautiful. I muttered something to Carol, followed her, paused for a second to recock my crossbow with the belt hook, put another bolt on the magnetic track. I felt like a "murderer", not a "Warrior" then.

"War is truly hell!" I growled, then following my wife.

"My `sentiments' exactly," Carol answered in reply!

Chapter Twenty

"Someone's taken `command'," Lars breathed, crouching by my side, his lovely wife Sandi just behind, an arrow nocked on her bowstring. Her silver neck chain covered by a dark strip of cloth. She didn't have Carol's abilities, but most of our "work" was at a close enough range that it hardly mattered now. The Imperials were now once again an effective disciplined force, not just a "rabble" as they first had been when we had attacked. There had been some "swordplay", but most of it had been archery. The Imperials being handicapped by their "lack" of such weapons. The airplane and the Tarl had both been "hidden", leaving no doubts that someone had "thought" of what we might "do". I have no doubt that it was Sharon, who is much like Lorraine that way! The forces around the manor house and outbuildings had been too strong for us, now that someone competent was finally in command.

"Lady Tirana," I guessed, recalling what I knew of Darlanis. Darlanis herself was "returning fire", her big seventy five pound draw compound having a range that equaled that of our own crossbows! She and Carol were making a "personal duel" out of it at about a hundred and thirty yards, although the range was too far for my wife's "lighter" sixty pound draw bow to be much effective even with my wife's awesome skills at archery. Carol's forces under her command then launching a barrage of arrows and crossbow bolts at Darlanis which didn't seem to "bother" the Empress in the least! Darlanis being of the sort who takes little consideration for her own personal safety. I believe that she thinks she is "unkillable". It may be true, as she does seem to be "lucky" in a way that you wouldn't believe. In her book of course she claims that her "daughter" (Domino Tremaine) wrote in the 21st Century that she "recalled" her mother as a young girl. I might mention here that Carol and I once "met" Domino Tremaine, or at least a woman of the same name there in Spain when we spent an "exotic" three weeks with the Countess. I realize that this has no "bearing" on this story as such, but it does indicate that Darlanis' own book may be more "accurate" than some people have thought. Just "how" she did it is another question of course...

"`Competent bitch'," Sandi muttered from behind me, taking a shot at a running Imperial oarsman, missing. Their "losses" had been far greater than ours had been, although not all the deaths had been on one side, of course. I saw a man run across in front of me, took aim, saw him drop, roll, twist and kick, much like a deer does when you shoot it. Moved back behind a tree to recock. A crossbow, unlike a bow, requiring that you stand to recock one. The "draw" of the weapon I was using went 220 pounds, and I used a belt hook to draw it, with my right foot in a stirrup. It is not really "difficult" once you get the "hang" of doing it. On the other hand it is not something that women as a rule can "do". There are of course "exceptions". Carol can manage to "do" it. * * There is one excellent book on crossbows. "THE CROSSBOW" by Sir Ralph Payne-Gallwey. It is now out of print, but may yet be available in a large public library. We could build the Dularnian crossbows today of course. They would doubtless make an excellent weapon for deer hunting and such, although there is considerable "prejudice" against the crossbow for some reason. (JB)

"Find Carol," I told Sandi and Lars. "Tell her to pull back." Lady Tirana was now getting Darlanis' people "organized". I "respected" the old Warlady. She was using fire arrows now to help "light things up" a bit. The North Star had ceased firing several minutes ago. I supposed that Maris had given the order. She seemed "competent", a capable commander. More so than Darlanis, I now mused to myself. Darlanis was brave, but incompetent. She had a lot of "balls", but she wasn't a good military leader.

"The Queen?" Sandi asked, her eyes glistening in the light from the numerous small fires. She looked a lot "different" with her face blackened. So had Carol's, I recalled, remembering. I nodded, made a "dash" for it, heard something go "zip" past me. Thought of my basic training so long ago now, it seems. Realized that I could get "killed" just as easy by an arrow or crossbow bolt as with a bullet. Ducked behind some brush, found that it was already "occupied", the surprised woman going for her dagger! I hit her in the face, hard, my right fist slamming into her jaw!

"You wouldn't look bad in a slave's collar," I said to her, holding her own dagger to her throat as she

regained her "wits". I could see the terror in Keri's eyes as she looked up into mine. She had worn only a brief robe, nothing else, and that had come "undone" during our struggle. She was "slave naked" as they say!

"As long as it's yours," she spoke, looking up into my eyes. There was no mistaking the "implication" behind that she'd said! I suspected that she was becoming sexually aroused despite all! A common female sexual fantasy of this era is to be so "captured" by some handsome barbarian warrior who will keep you as a slave.

"I doubt if my wife would allow me to keep you," I smiled.

"Your wife `of the Warriresses'?" she asked me in reply.

"I think you could say so," I answered, thinking of Carol.

"Too damn many Warriresses, not enough `men'," she smiled.

"We had the same problem during the Twentieth Century", I said, Keri gasping softly as she realized just "who" I was now! I reached between her thighs as she struggled with embarrassment, "touched" her, and sniffed of my fingers. There were no doubts!

"Yes, I was the `free woman' you `pleasured'," Keri spoke as I rolled her over, tying her hands behind her. She had a nice body, although considerably "slimmer" than that of my own wife's.

I left Keri bound there in the brush. She had offered me no resistance, and I doubted if anyone else would find her. I had also then very briefly tasted of her lips before leaving her. A strong master would have much enjoyed her. She was "ready" too!

I worked my way towards the manor house, going from tree to tree. Watching for any of the "enemy", the only ones I saw being a couple burly "oarsmen" types on "guard" there by the door. Then as I dashed up to the side of the house, I heard the sound of swordplay inside, that "clash of steel" beloved by novelists! The sound now coming from an open window there just to my left!

I spun about at the "sound" of racing footsteps, put a bolt through the chest of the man dashing towards me with a spear. I saw him drop, kick and thrash a bit much like the other I'd shot! Took a look through the open window, saw Maris and Sharon at it!

Sharon is Lorraine's step daughter, the adopted daughter of Darlanis. She is in her thinking a lot like Lorraine. She does not however share the fighting skills of that famous "Warlady". I could tell from the way that Maris fought that she had no desire to harm her. Sharon, however, had "other opinions" about the matter and was doing her "best" to kill the Queen of Dularn!

"Sharon!" I cried, the lovely blonde Princess turning, Maris reaching out, grabbing her wrist, disarming her, Sharon driving her knee up into Maris' crotch, while going for Maris' face with her nails. I reached through the window, grabbed Sharon, Maris stepping back, her face bleeding, and then giving Sharon a punch in the jaw that old Mike Tyson himself would have been proud of!

"Vicious bitch!" I heard Queen Maris snap, then suddenly I heard footsteps there behind me! I wheeled, going for my sword, knowing as I did that it was too late! The oarsman swinging his club down at me as I tried to duck down under it, Maris screaming "something" I couldn't make out then. Then there came a terrific blow to my head and the utter "nothingness" of unconsciousness!!!

"Pull back!" Carol screamed, nocking, drawing, firing, a constant stream of deadly arrows that disheartened the Imperials despite their own Empress' orders to attack! Darlanis springing to the saddle of a unicorn to charge them, the animal dropping beneath her as a lovely brownette's deadly skill shot the beast from beneath her! "Back to the ship!" Carol ordered, a half dozen picked archers with her keeping up a constant rate of fire against the Imperials facing them. My wife ignoring the arrows and crossbow bolts that zipped by, fighting down the terror in her own heart as she now saw no sign of me or Queen Maris either! One of her arrows much to her satisfaction causing that damm big blonde she so hated to "fall", the Empress clutching at her leg!

"Your husband went for the Queen!" Lars cried, seeing the "madness" in those hazel eyes as Carol's blackened face turned to look into his. Carol nodding, screaming orders, withdrawing the force back to the ship. The ship once again now firing, a series of flaming bursts of fire falling between them and the Imperials! A man, splashed by the flaming liquid, running about, screaming! A "pattern" of darts, eighty in the packet, now falling, hitting! Lady Tirana ordering her forces back, while keeping up a steady stream of fire with the few crossbows that she had available now! The archers under her command firing high into the sky to drop their arrows among the fleeing Dularnians two hundred yards off!

"Back to the boats," my wife cried, grabbing men, women, her eyes wild, her bow now useless there in her hand for lack of arrows to shoot, her full two dozen having been fired. Carol drawing upon resources she never knew she possessed to bring order out of chaos. A crossbow bolt, better aimed than the rest, slapped the side of her head, stinging like a bee in its passing! She reached up, felt of the wetness, and shuddered to herself!!!

"Get to the boats!" Carol cried, grabbing men, women, pushing them on past her. More arrows falling, a few crossbow bolts. A man falling, clutching at his back, then collapsing, dying! The North Star firing another broadside, forcing the Imperials back. Carol saw two men hit, one behind the other, the second, pinned like a fly on the ballistae bolt. Such missiles, two feet long, several pounds in weight, capable of killing several men! The North Star's crew switching to darts, the missiles just passing over her head as she dashed for the boats waiting there now in the water, the oars out, ready to be put to use. She now splashed through water to her waist, strong hands seizing her, dragging her up over the side, like men dragging in a big fish! The oars digging deep into the water as the boats headed out towards the anchored North Star, arrows falling all around them!!!

"Bob! Where are you?" she cried, her eyes in her blackened face wild as she hear no reply but the curses of the Imperials there on shore as they dodged the arrows and crossbow bolts now directed at them from the boats and from the ship anchored off shore, its batteries once again firing, the entire shore erupting in flame, forcing the Imperials back. A tall golden Empress, now clutching her leg, her teeth gritted with pain, adding her own hot curses to those launched towards the North Star's people!!!

Chapter Twenty One

I was "aware" of pain, of a pair of demons pounding on an anvil there in my head. Of the odor of a woman's perfume, of her sweaty body, of her "softness" as I laid with my head cradled in her lap there in the darkness, her blackened features looking down into mine. I felt the caress of her hand, wondered how Carol had found me. Why she bore the marks of nails on her cheek? Just then such "questions" meant far less than that she was here. That my beloved brownette had rescued me despite everything

here.

Around us I could just faintly see the boles of trees, the thought suddenly coming to me that it was now near dawn! The ship certainly wouldn't have stayed at anchor that long! True, there wasn't anything "effective" that Darlanis or Tirana would have against a Dularnian second rate, but I knew it was gone now. Leaving Carol and I somewhere in the woods just off Lorraine's estate! And why did Carol's "love coo" have the "accent" it did?

"Carol?" I whimpered, my voice weak, my head sheer agony! I could hear the chirp of early rising birds now greeting the dawn. There was a very faint "glow" in the sky there to the east now.

"You were too heavy for me to carry," she whispered, the marks on her cheek leaving no doubts now as the memories came flooding back to me. Sharon clawing at Maris, and drawing blood! "The ship is doubtlessly gone by now, I fear," Queen Maris spoke. "Your wife would see to its safety, I am sure," the Queen added.

"Where?" I asked, seeing nothing but forest now around us, and wondering why Maris had "stayed with me" instead of fleeing? I supposed perhaps the "caste codes" that my wife had made "fun" of, not understanding their own true meanings to any "Warrior". As a Marine I quite understood such things even if Carol didn't. One does not abandon one's own "wounded" to the enemy. Such is a part of the "caste codes" that I understood as a former "Marine".

"A few hundred yards into the forest to the north of the manor house," Maris answered, gently stroking my forehead, her very action leaving no doubt that it had been more than just the Caste Codes that had led her to "save me" at the cost of being left behind herself! I had no doubts she would have stood over my body and given her life against impossible odds had it become necessary for her to do so. Women are like that when they love.

"We need to find those 'libbies' of yours," I said to her.

"'Libbies'?" Maris asked, puzzled by the use of the term.

"San-sha, her band," I explained to the puzzled Queen.

"Later," Maris answered softly, gently stroking my face.

"We have to get out of here," I said, wondering if we could.

"The Nevada with them is dead," Maris spoke then in reply.

"Lady Tirana may order a search for wounded," I told her.

"She was the 'competent' one," Queen Maris said to me.

"You should not be doing this now," Maris said to me. It took all her strength just to support me, the woods, everything now spinning about as I tried to stand. It was pretty obvious I was in no condition to make an attempt to cross the cleared area that leads from the manor house down to the ocean a quarter of a mile away. Maris might make it across if we didn't delay too long, but there was no hope that I could with my head as it was!

"Leave me, find the band," I said to her, seeing her nod in the negative. I hadn't thought that she would.

Carol wouldn't have done so in similar circumstances, and Maris wouldn't either! Yet there was no way that I could see that we could make it to the other side of the cleared area the way that I was. Maris was a woman, not a man, and she couldn't carry someone weighing forty pounds more than she did across a hundred yard clearing on her back without now taking the considerable risk of being "spotted"!

"I am `of the Warriresses'," Maris said to me. There was in the tone of her voice a "determination" of the sort I'd heard in Carol's when she said that she was going into the future with me regardless of the dangers we might face there. Maris goes have "guts" when push comes to shove, let me tell you right here! She is not a "Darlanis", but she is a good competent fighter too.

"To the sea," I breathed, thinking it might be possible for me to float on my back and let her swim towing me. It wasn't too likely that we'd be "spotted" if we found a log to help float us. There wouldn't likely be sharks close in to shore to worry about.

"My thoughts," Maris spoke, half carrying me as we started towards the ocean a quarter of a mile away. The Queen grunting as she took my weight, and clutching me to herself like a child. My feet seemingly almost "useless" as I clung to Maris as best I could, well aware of the "nature" of the situation and what could happen to both of us if we were now discovered by the Imperials!

"If they capture us, use your dagger on me," I said to her, fighting to stay conscious as she "dragged" me alongside herself.

"I am the Queen of Dularn," Maris grunted back, staggering under the load of almost carrying me. She was "out of condition" from life on shipboard, and finding it "hard going" helping me. About ten pounds overweight, most of it on her hips and thighs.

"Better than what Darlanis will do to me," I answered her.

I was quite "confused" at this time, and was I believe now, perhaps confusing Darlanis with Carol. Darlanis was "angry" at me for what we did to her ship, but she wouldn't have killed me for it. Carol on the other hand has a vicious, vindictive "fury" in her that can be "triggered" if you "push her" too far. Carol is a woman, I fear, who is truly a "WARLADY" in the true sense of the term. "Provoked", she is perhaps more "dangerous" than anyone, including the infamous Princess Tara! Her very actions later on were adequate proof of that. Lars later on told me that it was "terrifying" to be sailing under Carol's "command", that she was like a "demon" in human form there on the ship's quarterdeck!

"Rest," Maris whispered, letting me slump down to the coarse grass underfoot, the dark boles of the trees now visible against the faintly glowing sky. It would be dawn in another hour, I knew. The Queen's breathing rapid, the "wetness" of her body now telling its own tale. We had come perhaps three hundred yards. The pain in my head was a bit less now, although I was just as "weak" as ever, unable to even stand without Maris' arm about me.

"I underestimated you," I said to the emerald eyed Queen. With her face blackened, her hair dyed she really didn't look that much "different" from Carol, I thought to myself just then.

"Others have," Maris spoke, keeping her thoughts to herself.

"It will float us," Maris said, regarding the canoe. The sun had not yet risen in the east, but it was now quite light. A blacked hulk half sunk at the dock the last remains of the Cleolantis. Part of the dock itself had been burned by the fires.

"We can't get by them," I pointed out, a number of men and women gathered there on the beach looking at the damage. I saw among them a couple prisoners that they had taken. Both female. They had been stripped, their faces washed clean of the lampblack we had used to blacken our faces. They knelt nude beside Darlanis. I did not envy them. Darlanis' losses had been "heavy". I saw the bandage, bloody, wrapped around the Empress' left thigh. She had the "look" of a woman who has "seen too much" of death.

"I am a `crafty wench'," Maris assured me with a smile.

"You are a good looking wench," I observed, Maris' lack of attire something that left no "doubts" about that. I held a pole out as if I was "fishing", Maris with another, while she took a "sunbath" as Imperial women do wearing nothing but clips and a brief strap. She was trifle "plump", but pleasingly so, I noted as she paddled us along with a slow regular stroke. We had used sand to get off the lampblack, our clothing and weapons there in the bottom of the twelve foot canoe. Fortunately there had been a paddle. Ilaid reclining in the bow, while Maris paddled us on past the royal estates of the Queen of Trelandar. On past half a dozen Imperials, Maris even "waving" to a few as we passed on by!

"I believe you are feeling `desire' for me," Maris observed.

"We will have to `control' ourselves," I said to the Queen.

"It is a beautiful day," Maris smiled, the sun rising there in the east over the forest. We were almost clear of the estate now. She was a woman that any red blooded man might have wanted.

"And we are a couple `lovers' out for a ride," I said back.

"I hope you love your wife very much," Maris said to me.

"I do," I said to the Queen of Dularn, enjoying the "view".

"Carol may not have survived the battle," Maris spoke then.

"We discussed it last night," I said to the Queen of Dularn. It was "hard" not to stare at that brief bit of silk that covered "just enough" of her, while leaving no doubts as to whatlaid beneath it. She was a rather "ripe" bodied woman, a bit like Lila Jordan, who I'd been going with before I met my delightful Carol.

"You are a very handsome man," Maris said to me, her eyes like beautiful green gems gleaming in the reflection off the sea. "If your wife did not `survive', my throat is yours to `chain'." An "offer of marriage" that left no doubts as to her feelings!

"Carol," Lars said, touching her arm, seeing those hazel eyes look up, the hellish "fury" that burned in their depths like nothing he'd ever seen in anyone's, male or female, ever before! She was now in total command of the ship, and men whispered in awed terror when they saw her stride the quarterdeck, knowing the hate that burned like searing flame in her heart towards anything "Californian". Men whispered that Dularn now had a "WARLADY"!!!

"He was your friend," Carol answered, her voice "soft" then. The North Star's second officer had been a fool to try to "face" her when the "fury" was on her like it was now. Carol had wasted little time in fancy swordplay. It had been like seeing some vicious alien creature that not even the fabulous "Warlady" of Californiacould have faced! Carol had killed him with a single vicious slash, and then kicked his body right over the railing! The first officer had died from an arrow loosed by some Imperial. The North Star

now had a new "captain", one driven by PURE HATE!!

"I just want you to know that it will be a pleasure to stand at your side when we face those Imperials again," he said to her. A smile lighting up her face. She was too "hard" a woman for his liking, although on the other she was also damm "competent" too! The sort of a woman much like the Imperial's Warlady, who he understood came from the same legendary era as did Carol and Bob!

"I appreciate that," Carol said softly, then kissing him.

Chapter Twenty Two

I regarded Maris Marn, Queen of Dularn as she sat there in the stern of the canoe, the regular strokes of her paddle taking us further and further to the south, the estates of the Warlady of California only a "notch" there in the forest now behind us. The gold of her nipple clips, the rich blue of her silken strap that concealed her sex making her look like some "centerfold"...

"I would be better looking if my hair wasn't dyed," Maris smiled, perhaps sensing my thoughts. She knew she was desirable. That she was the sort of a woman who would bring fifty to sixty golden crowns in any Imperial slave market just for her beauty! Many men in this era like a woman with a "bit of meat" on her. I am told that such women are "softer", and nicer to make love to.

"You don't look 'bad' as a brunette," I smiled back at her.

"I'll have to put my clothes back on when the sun gets up higher," Maris smiled. She would burn easily, a blonde like her. We were quite close in to shore, no more than a couple hundred feet out. The shoreline at this point rises up in cliffs that towered up about sixty or seventy feet, the coast curving out just a bit now as Maris paddled us around the end of the point. A tree leaned out from the top of the cliff, peering out to sea.

"Yii!" I heard her gasp, the terror showing in her eyes! A heavy Imperial trireme coming right at us under oars less than a furlong away! The beat of its drum having been muffled by the sound of the breakers against the cliffs there to port! And there was another Imperial first rate, a schooner, just to seaward of the trireme! Both ships flying the Cross of Lorraine!!!

"Keep calm!" I hissed, Maris sitting there shivering in terror! The trireme would miss us, although not by a whole lot. I wondered why it was so close in to shore, the men in the bow casting the leads leaving no doubt that its captain was cautious. The schooner, further out, flashing signals now to the trireme, the name "JANIS" painted there on its bow. The other, the three masted schooner, had the features of a gigantic shark, the Squala, painted there on its bow. These were Lorraine's own ships!

"Look!" Maris gasped, pointing astern. I saw it then, a buzzing black object in the sky racing towards us. BLACK LADY!!! The plane's landing lights flashing on and off towards the ships!

"'Enemy in canoe'," Maris breathed out, reading the flashing lights. I saw men dashing to the trireme's armaments! The airplane now coming down in a screaming dive towards us both! And Lorraine had once made nitroglycerine too! Did Darlanis have it?

"Think you can find your way through these woods at night?" Carol asked, indicating the map in front of her to Sandi Debolt. Sandi as a "libbie" knowing more about the forest than anyone else aboard the ship. La- rabeside her nodding, "wondering" if her mistress yet lived. This strange warriorress from the "time of legends" was "loco", La- rathought to herself, although she had to admit to herself that it was just the sort of a "trick" that the Imperials wouldn't ever consider likely! Something that only a Nevadamight think of doing, and most of them wouldn't have tried it! Marching through the forest at night to then launch a dawn attack upon the royal estates of the Queen of Trelandar. The Warlady of the Empire of California. The "Lorraine" of legend. The woman some said was the greatest fighting woman of all time. La- raprivately wondered to herself if it was true. This "Carol" was certainly "vicious" enough to satisfy anyone...

"There are `things'," Sandi breathed. She'd seen some of them. Never "up close", but she didn't want to either. Carol giving her a "look", smiling a bit to herself. She had heard of the legends. Recalled what Lorraine had written. Sixty men and women, armed with compound bows, compound crossbows, good steel weapons, had little to fear from such "creatures". She also had plans to dismount one of the ship's new compound ballistae and take it with her. The ability to launch missiles to a distance of five hundred meters might just come in "useful" against Darlanis! The Imperial wench one of the men had "taken" had told them much!

"I've never caught any `fish' like this before!" the sailor on the Janis laughed as he dragged Maris up the side and over the railing. Her lack of "dress" leaving no doubts as to her beauty. Maris, wiser in the ways of warfare at sea than me, had capsized the canoe, depriving the Imperials of a target for their weapons! The Janis, under Lorraine's order, had then swiftly lowered a boat when it was seen that I could not swim and would have drowned had it not been for my lovely feminine companion then. I might also note that being "dunked" didn't do much for my headache either, but I was getting pretty used to that by now too!

"Nor I," the Imperial Warriorress, one of Lorraine's, said as she hauled me aboard with a surprising strength. She was dark haired, about Carol's height, built much the same. Her dark eyes going over me in a way that left no doubts either! As I was naked but for my "strap", she no doubt was enjoying it! Many women of this era, especially those of California, make no "bones" about such "matters", I might note here for the curious. There are special "clubs" in major Californian cities where only women go. Where they are "served" by male slaves, and where they can also "enjoy" themselves in whatever ways they happen to wish. There is also one such "club" here in Arsana, which my brownette has "visited" a few times, usually to come home with the odor of strong drink on her breath and a look in her eyes that leaves no doubt that she has been "enjoying" herself a bit "too much". It is the "sort of a place" that a less "tolerant" society than ours would never permit, although I note that Queen Maris has been "seen" coming out it a few times, so I assume that it does enjoy the "protection" of the "crown" and a certain "warlady" I know!

"Bob Simmons!" I heard a voice cry, Lorraine herself pushing through the curious to face me. She was much the "same" as I had recalled her, although I think she was "different" than she had been back when I had known her. With her was a tall dark haired man, who I recalled was her husband, Jon Richards, once the captain of the Janis. Maris moving to my side, shivering a bit although it was not cold. The muttered comments being made leaving no doubt that the crew of the Janis found the Queen "attractive"! Her scanty attire of course leaving no doubts as to her "beauty".

"Tais sent us here to this time," I said to her, Black Lady coming in for a landing, the sea being calm enough to permit this. I had no doubt it was flown by either Darlanis or Sharon, neither of whom I had any real desire to meet again just then!

"That's not Carol," Lorraine spoke, regarding Maris.

"I'm Maris Marn of Dularn," my Queen then spoke in reply.

"Out working on your tan?" Lorraine smiled back at Maris. Maris being quite naked but her golden nipple clips and strap. I saw Maris blush, place a hand over her pubes, which puzzled me a bit just then as most women of the 26th Century do not have the same "modesty taboos" as did the women of the Twentieth Century.

"Our clothing went overboard with the canoe," I told her.

"We are going to have `visitors'," Lorraine smiled back.

"Sharon!" Lorraine breathed, the "lump" on the Princess' jaw something that left little doubt as to how she had received it! Darlanis there beside her like a tigress about to "pounce" on me!

"That man is a `WAR CRIMINAL' and the woman beside him struck Sharon!" Darlanis snapped, most unpleasantly too, I felt! No doubt the arrow that Carol had put through her thigh hadn't made her disposition any better. We'd "wupped" her twice now, making her look like a "fool" in front of everyone, and I didn't think that the Empress of Imperial California had muchly enjoyed it either! She is actually a highly intelligent woman, but a total "loss" so far as a military commander goes, I regret to say!

"Your daughter is alive because I did not wish to kill her," Maris spoke, her voice level. Sharon is legally Darlanis' "daughter" in that she will inherit the throne from the Empress. "And this man has my protection as the Queen of Dularn," Maris snapped, suddenly "brave" as she stood naked but for attire that would have almost caused a Twentieth Century "stripper" to blush.

"He burned Sarnian Lady out from under me!" Darlanis "protested" to Lorraine. It was true. I had set fire to the ship. Darlanis was "burned" pretty bad, her burns doubtlessly painful. She had been thrown from a galloping unicorn, had an arrow shot through her thigh, and had been made to look like a "fool" twice in a twenty four hour period. All in front of her own people!!!

"Any idiot that put you in command of anything bigger than a row boat should be court martialed," Lorraine laughed in reply, a laugh that was repeated by a number of those aboard the Janis! I did not think the Empress was all that popular with some people! I didn't think Lorraine was in a "good mood" either just then. I suspected that Darlanis should have kept her mouth shut instead of saying what she did. Lorraine's words were of course quite humiliating to Darlanis, who looks upon Lorraine as a "mother" in a way. As someone she can "turn to" when things get "bad". Read Lorraine's first book, the latter parts, and see what you think!

"She may be a `dumb blonde'," I said to the Imperial Warlady, Maris half supporting me as I stood there, "But Darlanis is the bravest and most courageous woman I've ever seen. And if we ever have an expedition to hell I'd like Darlanis to lead it because she's got more `balls' than anyone I've ever known!" I could hear the waves lapping against the hull, the cry of the seagulls as they circled there overhead looking for anything to eat. The birds being well aware that ships like these often tossed items overboard that could be eaten by such as they were.

"I guess I `deserved' that," Lorraine grinned sheepishly.

"Perhaps I spoke in `haste'," Darlanis smiled at me.

"I sprayed lamp oil on her ship and set fire to it," I said as Lorraine nodded. "Queen Maris objected to it and we took command of the ship away from her and confined her and her warrioresses below," I told her. I knew of the Caste Codes, what Maris had "said" about them then. Maris nodding, confirming my

"tale".

"A little 'Twentieth Century warfare'," Lorraine smiled, her dark eyes glowing into mine, a cloak covering my nakedness as I sat there on the sofa, the trireme once again under way towards "home" less than a mile away now. Sharon had taken off in Black Lady back to Lorraine's estate. Darlanis sat beside me, her eyes glowing into mine. She is incredibly beautiful, the sort of a woman who as my wife once said, makes you want to keep a "firm grip" on your husband. Maris, cloaked, there at my other side. I was happy to hear from Darlanis that Carol's body had not been found among those who had "fallen" there on Lorraine's estates.

"And you should see the bitch he's got with him!" Darlanis smiled at Lorraine, "A woman who looks like Lara and fights like you!" "Lara" of course being the famous "Princess of Baja", one once better known as "Lara of Trelandar", the Xaviera Hollander of the 26th Century. That is a pretty good description of Carol!

"Carol?" Lorraine asked, a bit "puzzled" I think here, perhaps with reason as Carol had been utterly "different" back when Lorraine had known her. That "Carol" had been "submissive", a "feminine" Carol. Not the hard bitten fighting woman I knew now!

"Dularn has a 'Warlady' now," Queen Maris smiled in reply.

"The North Star will launch an attack at two am upon the Warlady's estates, and another attack at four am," Carol said, her hazel eyes burning into the gray of Lars as he nodded back there in the stern cabin of the North Star. "And if I don't come back from this, take the ship to Dularn and tell them what happened to their Queen," my wife then added, her eyes meeting his.

"I will carry out your orders," Lars said, wondering if he would ever see his beloved Sandi again when she went with Carol. Carol had spent the last hour with him explaining things. He understood why it had to be so. How she wanted everything so done. The sails that would be spread over the deck suspended by ropes between the masts. The men on the pumps who would spray water on the ship when they came in to attack. Suspended from a swaying mast head, the North Star carrying blue green sails that blended with the sky, the sea, Carol had seen the two ships in the Celestron 90 that had once belonged to the Queen of Dularn. Now that Lorraine was on the "scene", it was time to take "precautions"!!!

Chapter Twenty Three

"I never was a 'threat' to your marriage," Lorraine said to me as we stepped down on to the dock, Maris at my side, men busy at work repairing the damage done the night before by the North Star's fire weapons. Darlanis greeting Sharon, who had flown ahead back to the estates. I wondered what Carol was doing now? Lady Tirana standing there regarding us, not overly "delighted"! And here was Keri, giving me a big smile as she greeted Lorraine. I felt Maris' arm tighten about me as she held me "close" to her.

"I don't think Carol saw it in that light," I told her, Keri looking at me curiously while Maris now helped me along. I saw boats being lowered now from the Squala to take off its crew for shore leave. I suspected there would be a "shortage" of slave girls considering that Lorraine had now "lost" all of hers. Lady Tirana of course had slave girls of her own, and I supposed that they might be used now in

"pleasing" the men from the ships along with the slave girls that were carried aboard the two warships.

"Perhaps you should also consider the 'possibility' that Tais could be responsible for your wife being as she is, and the way that you yourself have become," Lorraine answered, that awesome mind I had once so "admired" once again now hard at work. I supposed I had never "considered" that. There had been a severe thunderstorm shortly after Lorraine had disappeared through the "GATEWAY" into the 26th Century, and it was only after that storm that my wife started to become the way that she is now. Did Tais go back into the past? Find Carol alone in the house, use her awesome mental powers to "reprogram" my wife's mind? Making her into another like Lorraine? And Carol would remember nothing about it, considering the nature of hypnosis as practiced by the Priestesses of Lys. While it is Lorraine's belief that they do rely upon electronic equipment to induce a state of hypnosis, it is my belief that some of the Priestesses are capable of hypnotizing anyone that they wish with the sheer power of their minds. On the other hand Tais once said to me that Carol was a woman of "many amazing talents", and Carol could have been what she is now for years before such "traits" actually showed up in her actions. Carol's own "toughness" being one of the reasons I married her!

"And what is going to happen to Maris?" I asked, glad to have her "support", stumbling a bit before Keri reached around me and added her welcome strength to that of the Queen of Dularn. I liked this golden haired Queen, who represented an "alternative" to the sort of society that Lorraine and Darlanis represented...

"She can 'nurse' you back to health while I see if I can locate the North Star," Lorraine answered. She had said that I had a bad concussion, perhaps even a cracked skull, and that I needed to have someone watching over me on a constant basis for several days. As Lorraine is a "Physician" as well as a "Warrioress", I had no doubts that she knew about what she was talking about here. Keri immediately "volunteering" her services for the task!

"How is my 'patient' doing?" Lorraine asked, quickly checking me over with a skill that left little doubt of her abilities. Darlanis giving me a smile, while Maris frowned a bit to herself, perhaps a bit "jealous" of Darlanis for all I know. Maris having gotten the dye mostly out of her hair, so she was once again the "blonde" she had been before. She wore a long gown, a bit "snug" I thought, as it definitely left no doubts as to the "delights" there beneath. Especially as she was being kept "nude" beneath it, much to her own embarrassment, which I found puzzling as Carol has always gone "nude" beneath all her own evening gowns ever since we were first married some twelve years ago! Maris however like most women of the Twenty Sixth Century has a "nipple taboo" that seems to have no rational basis for its being. The exposure of the nipple beneath one's clothing being considered very "risque" and something that no woman of "breeding" ever does! My wife once attended a royal ball "barenipped" beneath her gown, and while she got a lot of "attention", she also got a lot of frowns from the other women present. Maris later on taking her aside and giving her a set of "clips" to properly cover herself!

"My 'nurses' are beautiful, my doctor is 'attractive', and I seem to find myself constantly 'visited' by beautiful women," I told Lorraine. My last "visitor" having been Princess Sela Dai, a little brunette "spitfire" who Maris certainly had no love for! And the Queen of Dularn wasn't too "delighted" about Keri either! There was a "tension" now between the two women that you could have cut with a sword. Like two cats "spitting" at each other! I think Keri thought that she'd soon be "free" of Maris, and that Lorraine would solve the "wife" problem by killing her in battle!

"There is also a 'shortage' of slave girls," Lorraine smiled back, glancing at Maris. Six of them had fled with us to the North Star. I knew of at least one who had died here on these same estates only last night, taking a crossbow bolt through her heart. I had watched her die. I was "tired" of war, of "death". I saw Maris blush, "cower" just a bit, a hand over her breasts. I had no doubt that Lorraine "knew" what she

was doing here too! She wanted to "break" Maris' "spirit", and such was a good way of doing it too, as Maris found it embarrassing to be bare nipples. Maris actually seeming to "react" the same as say my wife would if she was forced to go bare breasted in public before everyone!

"I assume when your ship returns from Dularn the problem will be 'rectified'," Maris now answered Lorraine in level tones. The Empire having a big three masted schooner lurking off the Dularnian coast. It had attacked several villages, taking women and gold. Even a woman of ordinary appearance is worth crowns in a slave market, and a ready market always exists for a nice girl!

"Human slavery and legalized prostitution help keep us 'free women' from getting too 'uppity'," Lorraine smiled back in reply. I recalled the book "M.P.S." that I had once read. The author had stated almost the same conclusions about legalized prostitution, although he had not advocated the enslavement of women! On the other hand I am glad that I live in a society where there are slave girls. Where one may "admire" a saucy little collared wench strolling down the street, her skirt as short as the law will allow. It being "necessary" of course to "protect children" from seeing too much of such creatures, and "learning things" that they should not "know" until they are "older" and "wiser".* *We had these types in the 20th Century, I might add too. (R.S.)

"Would you want to be a slave girl?" Maris challenged back. Darlanis giving me a big smile, almost a "grin" as she sat there taking this all in. The gold mesh she wore didn't really "conceal" that much. She is "sexy", but not in the way that Carol is, for example. She reminds me of Lana Clarkson, although her face is more like that of Nina Arvesen, a soap opera actress of the 20th Century. She is tall, 5'10", and quite "muscular", a true "big blonde" in the full sense of the word I can assure you! Her daughter, "Domino Tremaine", was an almost perfect "clone". I had told Darlanis about "Domino", although I had held much back as I had no way of knowing of Darlanis' reaction to such "news". Domino having been a woman who had led a rather "exotic" life. I assume too that she possessed the anti-aging serums of the 26th Century, as at the time of her death she really didn't look all that much "older" than when Carol and I met her there in Spain!

"I doubt if I would be 'worth much'," Lorraine smiled back. Keri giving me a smile as she sat there beside the bedroom window, the soft breeze off the sea now gently blowing the curtains. I recalled what she had said to me there last night in the brush. I wondered what sort of sexual fantasies that she masturbated to. Some of the "scenes" in my wife's books were quite "revealing" of Carol's own sexual fantasies. Women tend to have sexual fantasies that are quite "romantic" and "involved" whereas those of men are more just "sexual" in the ordinary meaning of the term. This is, as my wife once said, because women are interested in the "game", where men are usually only interested in the "goal".

"I spent three years as a slave girl," Maris smiled in turn.

"You'd be a 'fifty gold piece' girl in Trella," Lorraine smiled in reply, "Although I'd sweat a bit of that 'lard' off you before I put you up for sale," the tall slender Warlady added. I tend to like a bit of "meat" on a woman, and I found Maris quite nice the way that she was, although she was bit full in the rump!

"I think I can find a better 'use' for the Queen of Dularn," Darlanis then smiled, her eyes glowing into those of Maris Marn. Maris shuddered, and averted her eyes, leaving no "doubts" in my mind as to the fate that Darlanis had in mind for the Dularnian.

"I hope Lorraine wasn't too 'hard' on you," I said to Lady Tirana when she came to visit. I suspected she'd had a good "roasting" from Lorraine for doing the things to us that she did!

"You are 'important' to her in a way I don't understand," the old Warlady smiled, "Although I think that

wife of yours had better `watch out'," Lorraine not being that "delighted" when she saw the damage that had been done to her estate, her property! I saw Maris nod, her eyes for a brief moment then meeting Tirana's. Keri giving me another "smile", her blouse undone almost to the waist so that I could see the sides of her lovely firm breasts. It was a rather "warm" day, and Keri had commented on the "heat". I had not mentioned to anyone what had passed between Keri and me the night before. Such might be quite "embarrassing" to Tirana's granddaughter should it become known she had "offered" herself!

"I'm taking Sandi with me," Carol said, Lars nodding. Every married man on the ship had said "good bye" to his wife, seeing that she carried his sperm in her vagina when she went with this strange new "Warlady" of theirs. Few ever expected to see their wives again, every woman on the ship with the exception of their Physician and Kathi having been ordered to see to her weapons, see that she had sharp arrows, two quivers full each. That she had left her "will" there on the ship in case that she never returned to it. That had been "something" Carol had thought to do.

"Anis should do a good job," he smiled, regarding the woman standing there next to Carol. She had been a "ship's girl", a slave slut kept aboard for the pleasure of the single men. A big "hard looking" woman, who Queen Maris had saved from the hanging she faced for slitting her husband's throat because she had found him with another woman. Putting her sword through the other woman's heart in a short, but brief sword duel in Arsana. More importantly the woman having been a "Princess of the Arrow" at one time, Carol knew, the best archer on the ship besides herself. A woman who could draw a compound almost as "stiff" as any man's!

"Just carry out my orders, that's all I ask," Carol said, dismissing the former bosun then, fighting against the exhaustion that now wanted to overwhelm her. She had gotten a few hours of restless half sleep, just enough to make her more tired even yet!

"You `Dulies' are strange ducks," Lorraine smiled as we sat there at dinner, Maris raising her head, regarding her. I suspected that the term "strange ducks" wasn't one used in this era. Keri there on the other side of me, regal in a fine fitted gown.

"I suppose it gives you pleasure to `insult' me," Maris said in reply, chewing, her jaws yet working on the bit of tough beef. Lorraine had ordered an old bull slaughtered for the meat. I had no doubts that he'd been around for a long time too, judging from the toughness of his meat. I had eaten the vegetables, the soft foods. My head still ached, and I didn't really feel too great. Maris' breasts were outlined underneath that dark blue silk, her nipples being quite clearly displayed much to her embarrassment. I thought of what it might be like to have to live with a woman like that day after day, both of us "wanting" each other, and how long would it be before we both gave in to our own sexual lusts? And Keri was making a number of little "hints" I couldn't ignore! Running her left hand over my thigh under the table in a way that left no doubts as to the thoughts that now went through her mind! I wondered what Lady Tirana "thought" of all this sitting there across the table from us seated on Lorraine's left. Darlanis and Sharon sitting together, and looking much like they belonged so.

"I think Lorraine means that you have a different `culture' than ours," Sharon translated, Darlanis giving her a smile as she nodded. Made up, fixed up as she was, the burns didn't show so bad, although I could tell that she was still "tender" from the way that she "favored" certain parts of her body. Also, she had a "bad" leg from having an arrow shot through her left thigh. I myself had been "dressed" for dinner, Maris doing the work, fussing over me just like Carol used to do back home, getting everything just "right". She and Keri had gotten into quite a "spat"!

"Ours is superior to yours," Maris answered back. "In our land women are the equal of men, and we only enslave criminals." * * This was a part of Maris' own political propaganda that she used against the

Empire of California. It was "true" in the "legal sense", so far as the government of Dularn was concerned. It was not actually "true" otherwise, as most Dularnian raiders were quite willing to take women and gold wherever they could find it. Maris also considers women such as La-raas being "not of Dularn" in the same way that Auroramight for example view us of Earth as not being "civilized". Darlanis also engaged in a bit of propaganda of her own, painting a "picture" of the Empire that is for most purposes quite unlike the "reality" of her society. (R.S.)

"A third of the crew of that raider of yours are women," the Warlady pointed out in reply. It was true. Queen Maris had done so for some very good reasons in my opinion. Life aboard a raider is not for the faint of heart, and sometimes a ship never returns. Dularnian culture is different than that of California, and is in my opinion "superior" in that a wife is "expected" to be more than just a household drudge and mother. Most Dularnian women tend to be well educated, intelligent women. They may have their sexual "hang-ups" like any, but on the other hand they tend to form the very same sorts of marriages that last and last. And a Dularnian wife expects to be at your side when "battle" comes. It is a social order that has a lot of wives like my own beloved.

"I find married couples superior to single men," Maris said. "I don't have the 'discipline' problems you have on your ships." Lorraine nodding, perhaps well aware of the "truth" of her words.

"You might be interested in this," Lorraine smiled back, ringing a small bell she kept near at hand. A burly man now carrying in what I recognized as the "bow" section of one of the new compound ballistae, and setting one end down there on the floor. They are five feet in length, and weigh about a hundred pounds.

"I see your spies are 'competent'," Maris smiled in reply.

"There is a new warship now being commissioned at Trella," Lorraine smiled. "It will carry sixteen of these per side," she added. "I plan to 'take' that damn North Star of yours." I saw the look in her eyes. I feared much then for my beloved Carol!

Chapter Twenty Four

Lars Debolt watched the sun set there in the west, the glowing ball disappearing beneath the waves. Sandi at his side, her silver neck chain glistening against the tanned skin of her lovely neck. He found her beautiful, a "wife" beyond compare. The sort of a wife that a man might cherish for the rest of his life. His arm now drew possessively tight around her body, holding her close, Sandi in turn then gently caressing him as women do when there is no "need" for words. When the thought of death is near. Queen Maris had "married" them, although they would see the Priestesses when they reached Dularn, and pledge their love again before Lys. She Who Was The Mistress Of All, Life Everlasting.

"One last battle and then 'home'," Sandi spoke softly, her eyes glowing up into his. She did not think the Queen yet lived. Or that man from the "time of legends" as some called it. Carol would doubtlessly die "the death of the Warriress", finally putting to rest the "demon" that now drove her like some madwoman! Perhaps she and the Imperial Warlady would die together, their swords buried to the hilt in each other's hearts. That, Sandi thought, would be a fitting "end" for a woman like Carol Simmons.

"They were a 'warlike people'," he said, his thoughts much different than hers just then. He was Dularnian, and Sandi was of his country, a woman who "understood" as no Californian would. "A people

who fought war after war from what the history books tell us," he mused, looking out over the gleaming restless sea.

"Even their children," Sandi breathed, thinking of Sharon. The Imperial Princess. A beauty almost like Darlanis, but like their Warlady too. A woman who might someday rule their Empire.

"When there is gold about your throat...", he said, looking down into her eyes, holding her in his arms. Sandi nodded. She would be a good mother. Teach her sons to respect women, teach her daughters the sword, the bow, so that they might stand beside their men when the enemy came once again seeking women and gold.

"Can you `undo' me?" Maris asked, turning her back to me as we both prepared for bed early that evening. The sensual curves of her rear end reminded me much of Carol's. We had been given a bedroom there in Lorraine's manor. There were, I knew, guardsmen about. Those of Sarnian Lady too and the other two ships. I wondered if Carol would try an "attack". I hoped "wiser heads" might prevail. Taking on Darlanis and "taking on" Lorraine were two utterly different matters. Lorraine deserved the title of "Warlady of the Empire of California". She was truly a "Warlady". A "professional fighting woman", a member of the Caste of Warrioreses. The greatest swordswoman of all time, some had said. I considered it quite likely, knowing Lorraine!

I felt the brush of Maris' rump against my groin, the sensual warmth of her body, felt "desire" for her. She was beautiful, a "blonde", her hair long, golden, her eyes a rich emerald color. The dark blue silk of her long evening gown concealed "little". She turned about, her lips moist, open, breasts, nipples outlined beneath her gown. I knew she was completely nude beneath it. As "naked" as any of the collared sluts now "pleasing" strong men. Lady Tirana had taken Keri aside, spoken in low heated words to her. I suspected that she had pointed out the situation to Keri! That both Maris and I were now legally "prisoners of war" and that as long as Carol lived, I would continue to be her husband. I suspected Keri now hoped that Lorraine might make me a widower.

"It is `hard' for me too," Maris breathed, looking up into my eyes. I smelled the odor of her perfume, and another "odor" too. It was "different" than Carol's, but yet "recognizable" as being but only one thing. The "scent" of a now sexually aroused woman! Such "odors" are unmistakable to one familiar with women.

"You are the Queen of Dularn," I said, looking into her eyes as she stood there, the "fire" burning in their depths leaving no doubts as to the thoughts that went through her mind just then.

"I am also a `woman'," Maris breathed, her voice "husky".

"It is time," Carol said, La-ranodding. Carol had removed her collar, given her weapons, the clothing of a free woman. There were no longer any slave girls on the North Star. "And may God have mercy on our souls," the brownette smiled at the Nevada. La-ranodding, and mentally then "correcting" her name for Lys.

"Maris," I breathed, holding her, the "taste" of her mouth yet on my lips. I felt the warmth, the feminine softness of her. The sensual curves of her body pressed up against mine. I knew she was sexually aroused, warm and wet, "ready" for me right now!

"There is...", Maris spoke softly, "A way...", Her eyes burned up into mine. I felt the sweet curves of her belly, the feminine warmth of her body. I wondered if Lorraine had planned it to "happen" this way. I suspected that it was quite possible! She would have a degree of "control" over us both that she would not have had otherwise. A woman "in love" doesn't think clearly!

"I 'love Carol'," I said, forcing Maris from me, holding her at arms length. I knew the pangs, the cravings of the "addict"! She was a beautiful woman, blonde, ripe bodied. And "desirable"! I thought of Carol. Of the taste of her mouth. Of her own odor. The way that she "clung" when we made love. Of the arena when I had stood beside Carol, knowing that I had found my own Warlady!

"I used to be a pretty good 'milkmaid' when I was a girl," Maris said to me, her eyes like green fire burning hot up into my own. I knew that she was not using the term "milkmaid" as I or anyone of the 20th Century might so use it, but in "another" way! My memories of my teenage years flooded back. I had no "doubts" what she meant by the term "milkmaid". Little ever "changes"!!!

"'Milkmaid'?" I breathed, wanting to throw her from me, anything to end this maddening desire I had for the Queen of Dularn! I wanted to strike her down, to bring blood to those soft lips!

"I've 'milked' a few 'bulls' in my time," Maris said to me. The smile on her lips left no doubt of what she was speaking of. It is called "milking the bull" by the Dularnian teenage girl too young yet to engage in ordinary sexual intercourse or the even greater intimacy of oral sex as practiced by people of this era.

"There's still enough 'glow' on the horizon to spot us," Lars said to Carol as she gave the orders. The brownette nodding, a "Valkyrie" standing there on the quarterdeck. He wondered if he would ever see her again. Or his beloved Sandi for that matter. He wondered what it would be like to be the husband of a woman like this one. She was "dominant", totally so, much like the legendary Lorraine. Yet, he suspected, she was also a woman who could love like no other, who could "please" a man like no other could. Bob, at least, had thought so much of his wife. He had once told him that there was no other woman in the entire world who could "match" his fantastic Carol. Lars believed it!!!

"When I was a girl in Sana, still a virgin, we would be 'intimate' without having sexual intercourse," Maris said to me now. Young Dularnian girls as a rule prize their virginity highly. I know Lorraine once made "fun" of all this, but in some ways I do think the Dularnians "know a little something about things" here! Promiscuity is frowned upon for either sex, and a girl who comes home with "blood on her strap" from losing her virginity had better have a ring there on her finger signifying her engagement! * * One might note Darlanis' reaction when she caught Lorraine's foster daughter Gayle and the Prince of Talon "together". (J.B.)

"We used to call that 'necking and petting' in our time," I said to the Queen of Dularn as she stood there before me, the silk of her gown concealing very little of her "feminine charms". I thought of Carol, wondered what she was thinking right now. I recalled seeing her dance, the sensual beauty of that fantastic body, Carol being the sort of a woman who could grace centerfolds although she didn't have a beautiful face to go with her figure! I thought of Keri, tall, slim, in a way like Lorraine or her own grandmother, but in other ways utterly different. She was actually a more "regal" woman I thought than the Queen of Dularn was! I thought of Lorraine, whose mother had "been" a French Countess.

"If Carol 'attacks', there will 'nothing left'," Maris said. I knew the "truth" of that. Lorraine was not Darlanis. She was even "better" than Lady Tirana. And she had the crews off both her own ships, a total of about three hundred men and women plus those from Sarnian Lady! The North Star had a crew of ninety. I knew of seven deaths from what Darlanis had told me, (two more died aboard the ship later on) and adding in the two who were captured, Carol now had only about eighty left to fight four hundred or more! And all under the "command" of Lorraine Richards herself, the greatest fighting woman of all time, I'd been told!

"She will 'attack'," I said, knowing my beloved brownette.

"And she will 'die'," Maris said to me. I nodded back. I knew my brownette. The "odds" would mean "nothing" to her "now". Lorraine's "hostility" towards Carol also puzzled me. She was "friendly" towards me, so far as things went, but whenever I said anything about Carol the Warlady would "stiffen up" as if she had some deep seated hatred of my lovely brownette that I couldn't explain. And so far as I knew, Carol had never done anything to Lorraine back in our own era, although they were not "friends". In her first book she wrote that she felt she had "wronged" Carol, but she never went into further detail and to this day I have no idea of what she was thinking about at the time she wrote all this. Yet, Lorraine did not kill Carol when she had the chance! On the other hand she did "mark" Carol's face in a way so that we would know that my wife now lived only because she so wished it!!

Princess Sela Dai, small, brunette, a beauty of Talon, the silver links of a neck chain gleaming about her throat, stood on the end of the dock and stared out at the last remains of the sunset. Somewhere out there was a ship, commanded by a woman who by now might have either died in a sword duel or now was in total command of that ship. A woman to whom the Caste Codes meant nothing. A woman who was in her thinking as "alien" as a Lorr!!!

"I fear the night, what it will bring," Sela spoke, moving into the arms of her captain, her Prince, Mark Berson of the Squala. She had kept her last name, as was done in Talon, the "Dai" clan having ruled that country for centuries, Queen after Queen. Her mother, Dala, now its present ruler. Talon, like Dularn, was a "Queendom", a land where only a woman could rule. A land where women still spoke of the time when one woman had ruled the world. A woman who had for a brief few decades, ushered in a "Golden Age" for all of Mankind that had never been seen before or after! The fantastic Janet Rogers, who yet "lived" in legend. *****

"Ohh!" Maris gasped there on the bed, her naked body only a paler shadow against the darkness of the bedspread. I felt the contractions of her vagina around my fingers as she climaxed, the liquid "softness" of her inner tissues different in its way than those of Carol's. She laid face down, her thighs open, while I sat on the bed next to her. I had not wished to allow her to "milk" me. Even if by the standards of Dularn it was not considered "sexual intercourse", I did not think Carol would have ever looked upon it in that light. And I could not conceive of my brownette not returning for me. Despite whatever Lorraine did, or didn't do, Carol would come back for me. I knew that, just as I knew the sun would rise in the morning. And I did not think that it would be the sort of an "attack" that Lorraine now half expected it to be! Carol was a "crafty wench", and no "fool"!!!

"Don't drop that ballistae!" Carol snapped as the boats were unloaded. The North Star only a greater darkness out there now. The ballistae, while not all that "heavy", was a bit "awkward" to handle, especially in the darkness when you couldn't see what you were doing. The weapon itself weighed about two hundred pounds. The bipod was twenty or so. The bolts were three pounds apiece. She had sent La-raup ahead, the wench dragging up a long rope. Such would be of assistance in getting the weapons, people up the sides of these cliffs in the darkness. Maris had climbed them once, La-rahad told her, but Carol wanted to make sure that everyone made it safely to the top, so thus the hundred foot rope. "And you can call me a 'bitch' later!" my wife snapped, her hand there on the rope as she started climbing the cliff up into the darkness of the forest above, a few trees peeking down, a grim smile now curving her lips at the low curses of those below her!

Chapter Twenty Five

"What!" Carol gasped, whipping out her sword as she saw the "movement" there in the darkness of the forest before her! Her keen shining two foot long slim thrusting blade now held at the ready as she instinctively took the position of the swordswoman!

"A 'friend', mistress," La- raanswered, forgetting for the moment that she was now a "free" woman under Carol's own command. "This is San-sha, Leaderess of the Free Women." Carol nodding, sheathing her sword, smiling to herself there in the darkness. She sensed the movement of others there in the darkness, recalled what Maris had said about these women. They could be "useful"!

"And you?" San-sha asked, standing there in the darkness.

"Carol Simmons, Warlady of Dularn," my brownette answered.

"You are a 'Warlady', Carol Simmons," San-sha smiled back.

"I 'do' what I have to," Carol answered, extending her hand.

"We outnumber her by five to one," Darlanis pointed out to the tall stern featured brunette now giving her orders for the night. Lorraine nodding, speaking in low tones to an officer. Men were posted, armed with crossbows, backed by female archers.

"Maris has a 'Warlady'," Lorraine answered Darlanis back.

"You act like you were facing yourself," Darlanis said.

"Perhaps I am," Lorraine said, not explaining further.

"You don't 'need' to do 'that'!" Maris said to me there in the darkness of the bedroom as she laid beside me on the bed. I supposed she could tell by the "shaking" what I was "doing". I hadn't "jacked off" now for over a dozen years. I visualized Carol dancing before me, undressing herself, reaching out to me! The orgasm was sudden, the "release" like the breaking of a taut cord. I didn't care much then what Maris thought of such things! I could "face" Carol when she came for me knowing that I had been indeed "faithful" to her. That I had not "succumbed" to Maris! Or to Keri, who had been pretty "obvious" about "it" too, I knew!

"Lorraine will never forgive you," Carol warned, well aware of what could happen to San-sha's band of "Free Women" if the Warlady decided to rid herself of such an "annoyance" regardless of the "cost". The "power" of the Imperial Legions was something no group of runaway slave girls ever wished to face, especially not with the Warlady of California in "command" of such a Legion.

"In Dularn a woman is not just 'pussy'," San-sha answered.

"You will be 'welcome' on the North Star," Carol replied.

"Earth," Aurora spoke, her hand on the shoulder of her beloved granddaughter, the Moon now a glowing crescent to one side. She wondered if she should have "asked permission" to make a landing on the planet, although it always "annoyed" Aurora considerably that suddenly the Priestesses of Lys controlled it all!

"It'll be good to see Darlanis again," An'na spoke, her hand touching certain controls, changing their settings slightly as the Starfire passed the orbit of the Moon, thus entering Earth's space. Where it now passed under the control of the Priestesses of Lys according to the "agreement" made between those of Mars and the true rulers of the lovely green and blue world there before them. "Stand on the surface of a world where you can breathe the air without having to wear an oxygen mask like Mars." The gravitational field generators now acting against the Earth ahead of them, slowing them down from their initial seventy mile per second speed to a much slower speed suitable for a landing. The new computer controls requiring only a pilot to fly the ship, although for cautions sake one stayed at the controls while the other slept. Monitoring the radar, watching for meteor swarms. The Earth was an "exciting world", unlike Mars with its arid cold deserts, a world where life was hard and sometimes dangerous too. Aurora's own mother having died there on the surface when Aurorawas only a child from lack of oxygen when her "rover" had suffered a mechanical failure and her calls for help had not been received. Now there were radio satellites in orbit around the planet to prevent just such "accidents", but back then the Lorr had paid little heed to such. Feeling that the life of a Woman, who they considered as slaves, was not really worth such trouble! The Lorr viewing human beings much as humans might dogs and cats! "Useful" creatures to keep around, but not really truly "Lorr"!!!

"A violent cruel world, where human life is nearly valueless," Auroraanswered her in level tones. She was Leaderess of the Women, sharing power with Raspa , First Princess of the Lorr. "A world where people go armed all the time, where swords are often red with blood. Where war is still a common part of life." Auroramentally adding to herself that she was glad that the Women had now left the Earth for good. Leith was now abandoned after being inhabited for tens of thousands of years as a "base of operation" there on the Earth. A second city, its exotic name now forgotten by everyone, had gone down with theislandof Atlantissome twelve thousand years ago. Tais had "hinted" to the jade eyedAurorathat the Women were not all that "welcome" now. Only their base on the far side of the Moon was still inhabited. And no "weapon" or device of "destruction" was now allowed there.

"And a world with `MEN' on it," An'na answered. She wondered what it would be like to "make love" as Earthlings did. A question she had asked Aurora many times, although Aurora had not viewed such "activities" as being anything but "degrading" for a woman. Saying that it was both "painful" and "unpleasant" to have one's body so "invaded" by the fertilization organ of a man!

"The `fact' that your mother `enjoys' such things does not mean that they are either `enjoyable' or `proper'," Aurorasaid. "A woman's `touch' is far more `gentle' than a man's, and unlike men, we Women can live in peace with ourselves, which they cannot do as history has proved in the past thirty five thousand years."

"You allowed a man to `touch' you once," An'na retorted then. He had done more than just "touch" her, of course, but in An'na's mind sexual intercourse was something mysterious, exotic!

"I was `young', foolish, and what did it `gain' me"?Aurorapointed out in reply, looking down into the lovely eyes of the only true daughter of Darlanis. The Leaderess gasping with shock as suddenly a shimmering figure seemed to materialize before the ship, the figure of a blonde haired woman dressed in a white gown of a style that might have reminded another ofGreeceandRome!!!

"What we're `seeing' isn't `there'," An'na spoke softly, adding, "And we've just come to a dead stop too," the "implications" of that something that left no doubts as to the true nature of what stood there in airless space just ahead of the ship!

"Impossible!"Aurorabreathed, well aware of what would have happened to them had the ship been

suddenly stopped from a speed of seventy miles per second! And she had felt nothing at all!!!

"Why do you 'doubt' us so, Aurora?" First Priestess Tais asked, suddenly now standing there beside the Martian Leaderess! Gently placing her hand on the shoulder of the attractive blonde! Aurora, like many of the Women of Mars, being "blonde" thanks to the genetic work of the Lorr many centuries before in modifying the Neanderthals into a more "modern" and "useful" form of life! "And the hostility you give off towards me concerns me too," Tais said, her eyes, an azure blue, now meeting the jade of Aurora's. "You have your world, the rest of the solar system to 'exploit'."

"Why not?" Aurorasnapped back. "You took away my dreams!" "Dreams" of a world where one might live without oxygen tanks, the many precautions that one had to take on the surface of Mars. She understood now why those of the Earth had done what they did. Why The War of 2047 A.D. had "happened" back then just as it had.

"We acted only to protect other forms of intelligent life in the Universe according to the Teachings of Lys," Tais answered. The Lorr and the Women had been warned not to trespass beyond the confines of the solar system, the Oort comet cloud the limit beyond which they were not now allowed to go with their spaceships. There had been considerable anger among the Women at such orders! Talk even then of some sort of "action" against the Priestesses! Aurora, "wiser" than many, had known the "folly" of such an idea!

"We're not 'barbarian savages' like those down there!" Aurorasnapped back, indicating the Earth there ahead. An'na sitting there at the controls, content for the moment to take this all in, while keeping her own "opinions" to herself. An'na too had been "disappointed" that the starship Valkyrie had been taken from them by the Priestesses, but on the other hand she had no doubt that the Priestesses of Lys had done the "right thing" regardless of how her grandmother looked at the issue! An'na recalled the "plans" that had been made to colonize another world! The comments that had been made by members of the Women when the possibility of intelligent life upon the planet had been discussed. Aurora's comment that such "savages" could be "civilized" if necessary with "blaster rifles" had summed it all up!

"There is no 'difference' between Lorrainedreaming of fifty four gun frigates to conquer Dularn and yours of taking over the worlds circling another star with a fleet of starships," Tais answered in level tones. "Nor would I consider you any more 'civilized' than those now inhabiting the Earth there before us." There suddenly came then an instant of "blurring", as if they had stepped through one of the "Portals" used to travel between Mars and Luna to their scientific base there on the "farside" of Luna.

"Hey!" An'na gasped, Mars now floating there in space before them! A hundred million miles of space having been crossed in no time at all! The ship having been "teleported" right back home!

"I think it best that the two of you stay on Mars right now," Tais smiled, now suddenly disappearing as swiftly as she had come. "Teleporting" herself in an instant back to the Earth!

"We have prevented what could have been a disaster from taking place," Tais spoke with the power of her mind to those now seated around the semi-circular table before her. "Had the Starfire landed on Earth it might have been 'used' in ways forbidden to those of this world," Tais spoke into the minds of those who sat there nodding in agreement. It was possible to "look" into the future, although one could not be "sure" whether or not the "future" you saw was actually the "future" that was to be. Even for the Priestesses "time" was still a mysterious thing, something that was barely understood. Time travel itself dangerous. Not so much for the time traveler herself, but for what she might do without knowledge of the consequences centuries in the future! The fact that Carol would never bear children had been the major reason she had been "selected" to become Dularn's new "Warlady". Tais' subtle "adjustments" of Carol's

mind there in 1988 had done the rest. Carol herself of course had no knowledge of this.

"It is now time to give Carol her `test'," Tais then spoke to those seated about the semi-circular table. The Priestesses now joining hands, closing their eyes as they concentrated their awesome mental powers, a horrible "monster" now suddenly being teleported by the power of their minds over seven hundred miles! "The tyrannosaurus has now been positioned," Tais spoke, raising her head. The rest would be up to Carol now. Would her courage and abilities to "command" be sufficient against such a monster?

Chapter Twenty Six

"Forest `strange' at night," San-sha said as she walked at Carol's side. "Things come out that do not like light of day." The 20th Century brownette smiling to herself in the darkness. The Indian woman's own superstitious nature was matched by many from the ship, the force of men and women, over half of them women, now huddled as close together as they could get, their hands nervously fingering their weapons as the sounds of the night came whispering in their ears! The few carbide lamps they carried did little to help too. Their imaginations now easily did the rest! Carol also suspecting that Maris should have seen to the better "exercise" of her crew, judging from their lack of "conditioning" for such tasks as this. Those living aboard a ship having little opportunity to get in much exercise as a general rule, she noted!

"Afraid of the dark?" Carol smiled back, her voice not quite as calm as she would have liked. She recalled what those aboard the North Star had claimed lived in these forests. Myths and legends that Carol had no doubt were more in the nature of "ghost stories" than anything else. There was the Garth, but against their crossbows even that dinosaur like reptile would be easy to kill. Nothing could withstand the impact of dozens of arrows and crossbow bolts at the same time, and if necessary they had the ballistae off the ship, and Carol had no doubt "that" could even drop a charging elephant right in his tracks if it came to that!

"You `white woman', not of the `People'," San-sha retorted! She knew of the "legends" of her people, of the "HiddenValley".

"Sorry, I didn't mean to offend," Carol quickly spoke, her hand touching the Indian woman's arm as they walked side by side. La- raup ahead, scouting the way, a light bow her only weapon besides the long slim fighting dagger she now carried at her hip.

"My people have legend of things like Garth, but bigger," theNevadaspoke, her voice low. The few lamps they had were of little help, and only served to guide the column now marching down the game trail towardsLorraine's estate ten miles away. A group of men carrying the ballistae off the ship slung on poles.

"Dinosaurs?" Carol asked, recalling Darlanis' book.Leithwas a long ways from here, and she doubted that any dinosaur could have gotten this far without getting killed in the process!

"That which walks on two legs, its head in the sky," San-sha replied. "That which men once called `Try-rano-saurus'." Carol smiled to herself, thankful for the darkness that concealed her face from San-sha. The thought that the same forests she had lived in for fifteen years now harbored dinosaurs was laughable! Then suddenly La- rawas running down the trail back towards them!

"What is it, La- ra?" Carol asked, halting the column, the Indian woman breathing hard, muttering to herself in a language that Carol could make neither heads or tails of. San-sha speaking to her in the same language, the tone showing her "concern"!

"There clearing ahead, big 'thing' in it, like Garth, but not Garth," San-sha spoke, her voice strange, echoing in Carol's ears. "We scout it out, and you have big 'crossbow' made ready!"

"Sandi, I want that ballistae wound up, a bolt placed on the track. Set it up on the bipod and we'll use it like a crossbow if we need to," Carol spoke, Sandi nodding, her eyes gleaming in the darkness. Carol wondered just then how much she had heard! The muttering among those behind her leaving little doubt that at least some of San-sha's words had been overheard by those behind!

"Wind blow from it to us," La- rawhispered, Carol straining her eyes to make out any detail at all in the darkness. She could see something out there, something as big as an elephant, but she couldn't make any details. There was, however, an odor! The sound of great jaws crunching bone, the sound of "breathing"!

"We can work around it," San-sha whispered softly, the sound coming from the creature ahead that of something eating. And its sheer size indicated that it could have tackled anything that it found! "Bows no good against that, bows on 'sticks' no better." Carol smiled at that, the Dularnian crossbow having the ability to drive a bolt right through a deer from one end to the other! The missiles usually went right through a man like a bullet except at very long range when the bolt was somewhat less "lethal"!

"And if it gets our scent, follows us?" Carol challenged. That was all she needed! A tyrannosaurus attacking the column! The brunette fighting down the terror she felt at facing such a creature armed with the weapons of this era. She had little confidence in even the ballistae off the North Star against "such"!

"No way kill 'thing' like that," La- ra agreed with San-sha.

"Darlanis did," Carol answered her, remembering her book. "And what Darlanis did, I can do too," Carol muttered to herself!

"We will need the firebottles, every bow, crossbow we have," Carol spoke in a whisper, her orders being passed back down the column. She doubted that many actually believed in the "reality" of the mysterious creature ahead of them. To them it might be some sort of a "forest devil", something no weapon would kill! Against a human foe they would stand and fight, but against this? Carol prayed they would not break and run in terror at the sight of whatever it was there in the forest glade a furlong ahead now! *****

"What was Carol like?" Jon Richards asked, holding his wife Lorraine in his arms, kissing the side of her neck as she gently caressed him in return. Wondering a bit now whether own "relationship" had been with this man from the past. With the "woman" who Lady Tirana said had been almost "another" like Lorraine herself, but yet so utterly "different". This famous Carol Simmons. The woman who almost six centuries before had written "A KEY TO A WOMAN'S HEART". He stroked her hard muscular body, a body not like most women's. Yet his Lorraine was a woman like no other. A woman who was "easy" to live with, a woman with "brains", who a man could "talk to", "relate to" in ways you couldn't with most!

"Remember Lara?" Lorraine spoke, caressing him as she laid beside him there in the bed, their only light a dim glowing lamp. The windows open to admit a little fresh air. Carol had been a "sensual delight" much like the present Princess of Baja, but she had also been so "different" in her own way too. "She was not a 'beautiful' woman, but she was 'provocative' like Lara is," Lorraine explained, thankful Jon had "understood" about Bob Simmons. About the "emotional bond" that was still there after all this time. The

Warlady had worried much about that. She knew how a man might feel meeting his wife's "former lover", although Lorraine had not ever considered me in quite those terms, I believe.

"Better with a sword, though," Jon smiled, having heard of Carol's skills. Of what those from Sarnian Lady had said of her.

"And we do have your former 'girlfriend'," Lorraine teased. There was a sense of "unease" in knowing he had once "known" the woman who was now the Queen of Dularn. Especially as Lorraine had little doubt that Maris was of a "sort" who might just try to exploit such "memories" for her own benefit if she could "do" so!

"She never was any 'match' for you," Jon laughed, kissing her, reaching beneath the bed covers, caressing her nakedness. A pair of strong muscular arms drawing him to her. The Warlady's own surprising love making skills being such that even the most highly trained of slave girls could hardly "match" her at "such".

"Carol will return for us," I said to Maris. I "knew" as I knew that the sun would come up in the east there in the morning! Despite Lorraine's own "preparations", I had no doubt that Carol would "return". "She will come through the forest at night, and take Lorraine's forces by surprise from the rear," I told Maris. The Queen's golden hair a pale shadow there against the pillows.

"Just remember: You can't outrun it, so shoot like you've never shot before," Carol spoke in low tones, dimly seen faces of terrified men and women now meeting her eyes. She wondered if she was doing the right thing. Perhaps it would be better to try to get around the creature, but if it "scented" them? At least like this they had a good chance of now killing it, assuming that her own marksmanship with the ballistae was adequate to the task!

"It senses us," La- rabreathed, the terror filling her heart as she laid next to the new Warlady of Dularn. She had "faith" in Carol as a fighting woman, as a Warriress, but against THIS? Carol taking her position behind the ballistae, aiming it like a crossbow as best she could, the weight of the weapon almost more than she could "handle" even mounted on the bipod as it now was! Burly Anis at her side, an arrow knocked on her bowstring. Carol hoped the woman was still the "archer" that others had said she was. The woman drew a bow as heavy as any man might draw, a good eighty pounds. She was a dark haired woman, near six feet tall.

"THROW THOSE FIREBOMBS!" Carol yelled, hearing something like a great "snarl" from the dimly seen great object before her!

"OHLYS!" Carol heard Sandi mutter, the great scaly body now clearly revealed! The great jaws, the teeth like daggers, the small ridiculous looking forelimbs, all leaving no doubts now! A TYRANNOSAURUS! She saw the great head come around, and without a second's thought she fired by instinct, the ballistae thumping as a three pound sharp pointed steel bolt, two feet long, at a velocity of 375 feet per second slammed into the dinosaur's skull!

"SHOOT! DAMMIT! SHOOT!" Carol screamed, the horrible roar of the mortally wounded dinosaur like nothing she'd ever heard!!!

Darlanis suddenly sat up in bed, her eyes wild, the sound that had come to her ears bringing back memories of another time! Men everywhere on the estates stared at the forest, reaching for weapons. None had ever heard a sound like that before! None wished to hear it again either! The roar of an

infuriated tyrannosaurus is something you never ever forget. And one just shot in the head with a ballistae bolt is a very infuriated dinosaur!

Chapter Twenty Seven

Carol grabbed for her bow, nocked an arrow, drew, released. Reached for another arrow, did the same. She might have well been shooting straws for all the "effect" her arrows had on the tyrannosaurus. The great carnivore twisting about, looking for the "source" of its "hurt"! Carol saw it charge a terrified man, saw the great jaws suddenly come down, lift its screaming victim up, the screaming suddenly stopping as the jaws now "closed". The teeth like daggers smashing bones, everything as the great reptile looked about for another victim there in the flickering glow of the burning fires, the man's blood streaming from its mouth! Its scaly hide now bristling with arrows, most driven about half way in, perhaps a foot at the most Carol later on determined. The crossbow bolts doing somewhat better due to their greater weight and higher "impact" velocity. "We need lances, arrows no good against that Lys Dammed Thing!" Anis screamed now!

The brownette aimed for an eye, seeing to her satisfaction the arrow drive deep into that organ, half blinding the creature! "AIM FOR THE EYES!" she cried, the horrible thing coming at her! "What an end!" Carol thought, thinking of what would "happen" if the damm thing even stepped on her! Carol dodging around behind a thick tree, the dinosaur, half blinded, smashing into it, the ballistae bolt still sticking out half sunk into its thick skull!

San-sha aimed carefully in the dim light from the fires, shot, the dinosaur rearing up with a terrible roar, now totally blind, Carol and the Nevadawoman fleeing for their lives as the creature stumbled and then suddenly fell with a great thud into the brush, the ballistae bolt piercing its skull finally now taking effect on it! "Too stupid to know when it's dead," San-sha said, smiling to herself at the sight of the white woman's "shakes", her own bravery having awed everyone in her "command"!

"I guess I've got a lot to learn," Carol answered, her voice not now as "calm" as she would have liked it to be just then! On the other hand she didn't think anyone would ever doubt her own abilities to "command under fire" after this "affair" either now! The forest was once again still as her people now gathered about.

"The nearest dinosaurs are in that valley next to Leith some seven hundred miles from here," Lorraine smiled as Darlanis told her what she had heard. On the other hand the Warlady had no idea just "what" had made that terrible "roar", and she certainly wasn't going to try to lead any exploratory force into the forest at night to find out! Not that she thought she'd get anyone to go with her, knowing the "superstitious" natures of her people!!!

"That was the sound of a tyrannosaurus," Darlanis insisted! Sharon clinging to her beloved Empress, giving Lorraine a smile! She personally suspected Darlanis was having another "nightmare"! Darlanis did have "them" at times, even to waking up screaming!

"I'll have a couple of ballistae taken off the Janis," the Warlady smiled, giving her husband a nod. Jon smiling at the big blonde, who he thought was just having another of her nightmares. Darlanis had never been quite the "same" after what Princess Tara had "done" to her that time there in 2565. The Empress nodding.

"I see it, but I still don't believe it," Carol said, looking down at the body of the dinosaur, the lamps doing little to dispel the darkness. The body bristling with arrows, the ends of a few crossbow bolts visible here and there in the great carcass! Anis prodding it with the point of her sword, the hide, Carol now thought to herself almost like some sort of leather "armorplate".

"Sometimes we of the People know more than you 'whites' do," San-sha smiled, putting her arm affectionately about the other. And "believing" now herself in "legends" she had thought only "superstition" before! The "proof" lying right there before her! She had been earlier merely trying to "scare" the Dularnian Warlady a bit, San-sha often doing so with "white women" who thought they "knew it all" like this one did. Now she "wondered" if it would be safe to even live in these woods any longer with things like this horrible monster roaming about. Perhaps life would be "better" in Dularn, San-sha mused to herself with a grim smile!

The lookouts on the Squala considered keeping a watch as being only a waste of time. One could see nothing at night, and in any case, they were safely at anchor only a couple hundred yards from shore. Lorraine's orders to anchor the ship fore and aft had been carried out, and the weapons had been made ready just in case someone did see something. There was a fog, a mist off the sea, and "visibility" wasn't all that good. Thus, when the North Star suddenly came looming out of the darkness and the fog like a terrifying ghost, men at first couldn't "believe" what they saw!

"May Lysbe with us," Lars breathed to himself, testing the new flamethrower that Carol had "designed". Mounting the end of the hose out on a spar that could be held away from the ship so that there was no danger of the fire spreading back to the ship! The North Star now bearing down upon the anchored Squala, a few arrows and crossbow bolts so far being the only "response" that the Imperials had made to their sudden "arrival" on the "scene"!

"They're the ones who are going to need her 'help'," a man laughed, the Imperial warships now opening up with their ballistae, the badly aimed missiles then zipping harmlessly between the masts as the North Star opened up with its catapults against the Janis! Two big gouts of flame leaving no doubts as to some good "hits"! The Janis being too close to shore for the flamethrower.

"As is Carol," Lars muttered, bringing down his arm, the men on the fire pump playing to with a "will". The blazing oil spurting forth in a blazing stream for nearly a hundred feet, splashing against the Squala, screams of terror coming from the doomed Imperial schooner! Men jumping into the water to escape the fire as the North Star wrote "finis" to Lorraine's very own flagship!

"Making a big 'fuss' about something," Maris said to me. I grumbled something back in reply, wishing the blonde would leave me alone just then. She had claimed to have heard some loud roar from the forest, although I couldn't imagine what would make such a sound. I was tired, exhausted, still recovering from getting hit on the head, and I suspected that perhaps Carol had fired a broadside from long range at the two anchored ships in the cove! Maris now getting out of bed, going to the window, naked as the "jaybird". Women have no "modesty" once they get to "know" you. This is I believe, something that dates back even before our era. Sort of a "you've seen me nude, so what does it matter now for?"

"Told you that Carol would come back," I said, tempted to "add" a bit more, but thinking the "better" of it considering that Maris was the Queen of Dularn. Keri and Lady Tirana at that moment bursting in, telling us to get dressed as Lorraine wanted to see us and right away too! A glance through the window

leaving no doubt that my wife had put some of the North Star's own fire bombs to good use, judging from the flames I could see now!!

"Your wife `paid us a visit tonight'," Lorraine said to me, in "tones" that most definitely were not "friendly" by any means! Darlanis grinning to herself, covering her face with a hand at the famous Warlady's own "discomfort". I recalled the "comment" that Lorraine had made about Darlanis' own "competency". It was now pretty obvious that Carol had made a "fool" of Lorraine too!

"I think the term `sitting ducks' might apply here," I said, Carol's military tactics being much like those of the Viet Cong, the memories flooding back of what I'd seen there in Vietnam...

"I do not like being made a `FOOL' of by `ANYONE'," Lorraine snapped back in the most unpleasant tones just then. It being quite obvious now to me that the Warlady of California could be a most unpleasant person too if she wanted to! Lorraine is a very "proud" woman, and Carol had made her look just as "incompetent" as Darlanis had "been" earlier, with the added insult here that at least Darlanis had been "taken by surprise", which Lorraine could not of course claim here, much to her own "embarrassment"!

"You never did think much of Carol," I retorted back at her. I remembered some of the "snide remarks" she had once made about my wife. About Carol's lack of an education, about the sort of a woman that she was. Lorraine considering herself "high class" and Carol just a cheap "slut", my wife having been a former prostitute and model for "skin magazines" before I had first met her. It is a long, "involved" story, and has little bearing here now.

"Don't `provoke her'," Maris warned, shaking my arm a bit!

"Carol will `pay' for what she's done," Lorraine snapped.

"Your military tactics could be `improved'," I answered.

"Lorraine is `Warlady' of the Empire!" Keri gasped at me.

"She is just a woman `good with a sword'," I smiled back.

"Explain yourself!" Darlanis now suddenly snapped at me.

"I have formal military training, she doesn't," I said.

"This is not the Twentieth Century," Lorraine snapped.

"Your `position' here is not `good'," I smiled back.

"What do you `mean' by that?" Darlanis challenged.

"You are all `sitting ducks'," I smiled back at them.

"You speak in `riddles'," Lady Tirana now snapped at me.

"Carol is using Twentieth Century military tactics," I smiled. "She now has the `advantage' in that you are operating from a `defensive' posture where you can only `react' to attack. The exact same situation as what applied there in South Vietnam." I saw Lorraine nod. She was, I thought, well aware of this now.

Carol had the "advantage" of the darkness of night, of being "mobile" while Lorraine had to "sit and wait" for my wife's attack!

"You are, as now I recall, a 'Marine'," Lorraine said to me.

"And Carol is not as 'dumb' as you think," I "smiled" back.

"She has won a battle, not a war," Lorraine then answered. The tone of her voice left no doubts now as to her own feelings. I feared much then for what the future might hold for my Carol.

"I think," Carol said, "That we have learned much tonight." Those gathered around her nodding, glancing at each other, and at their Warlady. A "Warlady" who, they suspected, might be even a "better" Warlady than the one that the Empire of California had! Carol keeping to herself the thought that the dinosaur might have been "placed" just where it had been just to "test" her courage! The thought making her "shudder" to herself as she "knew" without further "thought" the sort of "beings" who possessed such powers! *****

"She is more 'intelligent' than we thought," Tais said, "breaking" the "mind-link" that she had been maintaining with my wife. Completely of course without my Carol being "aware" of it.

"The 'power' of her mind is not equal to that of Lorraine's, but she is extremely 'flexible' in her thinking," another spoke.

"A worthy 'adversary' for the 'Warlady'," a third added.

Chapter Twenty Eight

"I am afraid," Keri said to me as she guided us back to our room. "I have never 'seen' Lorraine like this ever before," she explained, her dark eyes meeting ours as I nodded back in reply. Lorraine's anger had been something I'd never seen before either. I suspected that having Darlanis there hadn't helped anything... Lorraine had her "pride", and Carol was making her look like a fool by these attacks out of the darkness no one could stop now! The Imperial Warlady in much the same position as those of America had been in South Vietnam against the more "mobile" Vietcong. I wondered how long it would take before Lorraine figured it out?

"I believe I have a 'Warlady'," Maris smiled then in return.

"I think either you or Jon will soon be a 'widower'," Keri spoke, her eyes glowing up into mine in a way Maris didn't like!

"She is 'wet' for you," Maris said to me, the 26th Century "slang" so utterly "descriptive" that I had to laugh at it a bit! The Queen of Dularn a woman who missed "little" of what went on!!

"How good are you with a sword?" I asked, changing the topic of our conversation. If Maris and I could "escape", we might be able to gain the "safety" of the forest and find San-sha's band. I wondered what sort of animal had made the "roars" that everyone had been talking about. I knew of the dinosaurs that lived in that hidden secret valley alongside hidden Leith, but that was a good seven hundred miles

from here, and I was quite doubtful that one would have ever made it this far without first being spotted! On the other hand the forest had other creatures almost as dangerous. Creatures that were almost invulnerable to our weapons. There is the saber tooth tiger, the cave bear like a gigantic grizzly, although these are rare this far "south", and are found more to the north and east where the climate is somewhat cooler.

"Your wife is probably 'better' than me," Maris smiled back.

"And I took Keri as a 'hostage'?" I suggested to the Queen.

"It's almost two hundred yards to the forests," Maris said, "And there are the crossbowmen who would obey Lorraine's orders. Lorraine would have probably "won" the war in Vietnam. Of course there probably wouldn't have been too much "left" after she got done with it, but she is the sort who believes in "winning" wars. The Queen quickly explaining that Lorraine would doubtlessly be willing to "risk" Keri's life to prevent our escape from here!

"And to the north?" I smiled. That was a hundred feet!

"Lorraine's people are all over," Maris pointed out.

"There is always Lorraine's airplane," I smiled back.

"I wish you weren't married," Maris suddenly said to me.

"We'd better get some rest," I said to the Queen of Dularn. I could see the "look" in her eyes. The "need" in their depths.

"I wish it wasn't going to be this 'way'," Keri said to her grandmother as the two sat there on the manor's porch overlooking the dark mysterious and now somewhat terrifying forest some two hundred yards in the distance. "There will always be 'memories', a 'ghost' sharing our bed when we make love," Keri spoke softly.

"Don't 'rush' it, but 'be there' when he 'needs' you," Lady Tirana replied, reaching over in the darkness, touching her hand. "He will hate Lorraine for doing what she must do," Tirana said. It was best, she felt, to warn Keri of the "realities" of this!

"And Maris?" Keri asked, well aware of the Queen's beauty.

"Darlanis will 'deal' with her," Lady Tirana assured her.

"A life of slavery at Darlanis' beck and call," Keri said.

"You do not 'approve'?" Lady Tirana asked, "puzzled" a bit.

"I find myself with 'questions' that lack answers," Keri replied, looking out into the pitch darkness of the nearby forest. "Why my sex is considered by men as something to be enslaved...?"

Captain Valerie Dunn smiled grimly to herself as she saw the smoldering remains of the Janis yet smoking there at the dock. Of the Squala there was nothing left but drifting charred planks. The tall black

clad brunette Queen who rode to meet her was not "like" she'd ever known her before. She could feel the Warlady's "hate" like the heat of a fire as she was swiftly given her "orders" in a cold harsh voice to find the North Star and destroy it even at the cost of her own beloved Corsica! "You will tow your boats behind the ship," Lorraine had advised her. Valerie nodding, well aware of what it would be "like" to conduct a night battle at sea using flame weapons! There would be few surviving.

"And those of the North Star?" Valerie asked, well aware of what it would be like, the horrors of such a battle filling her own mind with vivid scenes she much preferred not to think about!

"There will not be 'room' in your boats for them," Lorraine answered. Valerie shook her head in the negative, horrified at the thought! "Do 'this', and I will 'see' that you never have to ever 'worry' again about anything," the Queen of Trelandar added! Her dark eyes in the light of the torches now burning into hers! Lorraine at first giving the glowing light there in the darkness little note just then. Perhaps she thought it just a small boat.

"Lorraine!" Lady Tirana screamed, a great dark shadow there in the mists now approaching a couple hundred yards out! A gout of flame shooting out in front of it like some "dragon" out of a long forgotten mythology! Valerie grabbing the Warlady's arm, a look of horror in her eyes as she knew what it must be! The North Star had returned! And this was their new "flamethrower"!

"Tirana! The ballistae! Everyone take cover, use your bows!" Lorraine snapped, her awesome abilities to command under "fire" once again displayed. "Fire at the bow of the ship!" It was of course completely unnecessary to tell anyone which "one"!

"Another Imperial," Lars smiled, watching the scene unfold, the new Imperial first rate just sitting there helplessly before them! Running figures there on the beach doubtlessly more Imperials. Men at the ballistae, catapults already ready to fire!

"They're shooting at us!" Lars heard someone cry, a heavy ballistae bolt slamming into the foremast just over his head! A few arrows, almost "spent" at this distance, falling on the ship!

"Helm to port, fire the broadside!" Lars snapped. Twelve ballistae and three catapults hurling their deadly missiles into the darkness, although these Imperials on the beach seemed to be "wise" to a ship's broadside and had already now taken "cover"!

"Down, Keri!" Lady Tirana snapped, yanking her granddaughter down just in time as the North Star's missiles slapped into the sand all about them! Several "thuds" into the ballistae's mount leaving no doubt that the Dularnians had some "gunners" aboard!!!

"It's going to attack the Corsica!" Keri cried, seeing the North Star swinging about, a number of yells from those on the Imperial first rate accompanying Corsica's own broadside into the North Star. A gout of flame amidships on the North Star indicated that Valerie's officers had kept their heads under "stress"!!!

"Got the Lys-dammed fucking licking bastards!" Lady Tirana growled most "unladylike" just then, the flames from Corsica's one lucky shot hopefully enough to put "paid" to the North Star!

"Oh Lys!" Keri whimpered, clinging now to her grandmother. The young woman seeing the flamethrower in action as the burning North Star now sprayed a stream of blazing oil on the doomed Corsica in return, the Dularnian obviously determined to destroy the Imperial regardless of its own fate!

The flames instantly leaping up into the sky as those aboard the Corsica leaped overboard to flee the horrible burning oil that the North Star now sprayed!

"Throw that sail over the side!" Lars growled, jerking the spent arrow out of his thigh that some Imperial had shot there! It being obvious that the Warlady herself was now in "command"!!!

"Damm good thing we've got Carol!" another "commented" then. The shielding sail, soaking wet with seawater, had "contained" most of the burning oil from the Corsica's fire bomb. The soaking wet decks, sails, all had made the North Star hard to burn.

"They're controlling the fire," Lorraine spoke, the Corsica now a blazing pyre, the flames shooting high into the sky, a red glow like that of the setting sun lighting up the entire shore!!!

"Lorraine," Valerie Dunn spoke, weeping brokenly as she laid beside the Warlady behind a log on the beach. The Warlady's own unicorn behind them now dead, along with the body of a woman who had not been able to reach "cover" in time to save herself from the North Star's broadside. Lorraine's keen eyes searching for others, a grim smile curving her thin lips as she saw that Lady Tirana and Keri were safe. It had been "Carol's turn" this time. The next time, however, Lorraine vowed then, it would be "hers".

"Vengeance will be `mine'," Lorraine said to Valerie Dunn.

"I require `information'," Lorraine said, grabbing Maris by her lovely golden hair, the fury in the Warlady's face leaving no doubts that she would "obtain" what she wanted even if there was nothing left of the Queen of Dularn afterwards! The point of Valerie Dunn's sword, placed against my throat, left no "doubts"!

"My ship, my Corsica, was just destroyed by your wife," the captain of the late Imperial said to me in tones that left no doubts she would doubtlessly be delighted to kill me on the spot!

Chapter Twenty Nine

"There is a glow in the sky," La- rasped softly to Carol as she came back from scouting out the terrain ahead with San-sha. Their clash with the tyrannosaurus had left everyone nervous and jumpy. Carol however suspected that the reptile had been somehow "teleported" from that hidden valley right into their forest in front of them. "Why" however was a question she couldn't answer! The only "answer" she could think of now didn't make any "sense"!

"The North Star must have `found' something," Carol smiled, thinking of what Lorraine's reaction would be to such an attack. Carol recalling as if it was only yesterday how Lorraine had stood there watching while her husband put his hand under her skirt. Making her burn the back of her right hand on the oven! "Remembering" the "smirk" there on Lorraine's face when she put a meat fork to Jack Duval's throat warning him never to "touch" her again! The reoccurring thought that Bob was dead something she tried not to think about. She needed all her wits now, and later she could give way to her tears, assuming she survived all this! The brownette well aware too of her own "responsibilities" both to Dularn and to those

of the North Star to see this all to the end!

"We are not far from the Warlady's estates now," San-sha said as she walked beside the brownette. Carol nodding, hoping that they would reach the estates just as dawn started to break. Carol's "plan" here being that by having the North Star attack at two am and four am she might keep the Warlady and her entire force awake all night without a chance for rest. This might slow their own reactions down enough to make her own attack effective!

"We will be badly outnumbered by the Imperials," Anis said, voicing the same "thoughts" that had been on everyone's mind now.

"Gives you a chance to 'practice' your archery then," Carol smiled, then putting her arm about the former slave girl's waist. If there was an "afterlife" as everyone in this era so believed, Carol expected that a lot of them would be seeing it today too. She had left instructions for Lars if she didn't "return" to take the ship back to Dularn. Telling them what had "happened" here.

"Just what instructions did your wife have?" Lorraine asked me, Valerie's sword point now placed right up against my throat leaving no doubts! Queen Maris sitting there, the "fear" in her lovely teary blue eyes noticeable as Lady Tirana stood there with her hand on the Dularnian Queen's shoulder! Maris was utterly "terrified" too now of Lorraine, and I thought I knew "why" too! Lorraine is a totally "dominant" woman in every sense of the term, the very sort of a woman that a woman like Maris "fears". We were sitting in a small room just off the manor's living room. I could hear the sounds of the night insects, the sounds of men talking in low tones. Lorraine had everyone "alert", "armed". I reflected upon the fact that she truly was a "Warlady" in every sense of the term. The title "fitted" Lorraine like no other!!!

"I suspect she is following her own plans now," I answered. I could see the sweat on Lorraine's brow. She didn't "smell" all that great either now. Lady Tirana was there, standing by Maris. Lorraine had already "spoken" to Maris. A couple "slaps" across the face and Maris had "broken" like slave girl before a master! Unfortunately, Maris had not been able to tell Lorraine anything. I was a bit disappointed in Maris, thinking that she was made of "sterner stuff" than this, but I supposed it hardly mattered now. The sudden SLAP of Lorraine's hand came almost as a shock to me! The blow making everything spin about before me for a second now! I could feel the sting in my cheek, the FURY in Lorraine's eyes!

"Carol is just a dumb cunt with hardly enough brains to come in out of the rain!" Lorraine snapped, her dark eyes blazing into mine in a way that recalled to me the "crossbowman" she had once had Lady Tirana torture, even although it "accomplished" nothing! Lorraine's husband, Jon was outside inspecting their defenses. I had no doubts that Lorraine was a competent military commander...

"In the past three years she has gotten her G.E.D., wrote a series of three novels, and that marriage manual you all use here in this time," I then answered the Warlady in cold level tones, my cheek still "burning" from the blow of that bony hand. "She has also 'learned' the sword and the bow, the latter perhaps better I think than you are, and the sword almost to your level." I forgot to mention that Carol was also a "black belt", but I suppose Lorraine wouldn't have been "impressed" by that anyway now.

"That is utterly impossible!" Lorraine snapped back at me.

"No more 'impossible' than our being here," I said to her.

"The Priestesses of Lys with 'time travel'?" she snapped!

"The process is I believe similar to the means that one might use to travel between worlds using the

`GATEWAYS'," I said. "From what I've seen, I think they rely upon thunderstorms as a `power source' and I also suspect now that my wife's mind was `altered' somehow to make her into what she is now," I explained.

"It would be much more `logical' for Tais just to `tell' me that she didn't want Californiato control the `disputed territories' north of Orgon,"Lorraineinstantly came back with. She has a truly first ratemind, the "best" I think I've ever seen in a woman. That was one of the reasons I'd "admired" her so much!

"The `long term' political consequences for Dularn might be something that Tais `considered' and you haven't," I answered in reply. "This way everyone will believe that Dularn `won' instead of seeing that the Priestesses of Lys really control this world."

"This is `nonsense!'" Valerie Dunn growled, glancing at her Warlady. I supposed to her it would have been. I think Maris however "understood". Tais had "programmed" her mind there on the North Star. I think she had enough "brains" to understand!

"I suspect it is the `truth',"Lorrainesnapped back at her!

"But we can't.....," Valerie breathed, "awed" a bit now!

"We are being `tested',"Lorraineanswered in level tones.

"What do you mean, `tested'," Lady Tirana then spoke up.

"Californiahas us, and Dularn has `them',"Lorrainesaid.

"And we have him now," Lady Tirana interjected here now.

"And I think we will soon have Carol,"Lorrainespoke.

"You haven't got her `yet'," Maris suddenly spoke up.

"I have all my `best people' with me,"Lorrainesaid.

"The `battle of Armageddon'," I smiled at the Warlady.

"The `destiny of a world' will be decided beforenoon," the tall black clad brunette spoke. I thought that was "stretching" things just a bit, but perhapsLorrainespoke in "other terms".Lorrainewas in the eyes of the Imperials "unbeatable". A woman who none could "stand" against. I suspected from what Maris had told me earlier that Darlanis might have been a bit more "reasonable" hadLorrainenot been "available" to do her "fighting" now!

"You're disabling the airplane!"Sharonbreathed softly, holding the lamp up high at Darlanis' orders there in the barn. The Empress reaching into the engine compartment, popping off the twin distributor caps, and then removing both ignition rotors. A half muttered reply the only answer thatSharongot back in turn!

"Carol has not `violated' the `Edict', and I plan to see thatLorrainedoesn't either regardless of what happens now," the tall golden haired Empress answered in level tones, closing the cowling on both sides of the engine compartment. "And these will remain right here in my pouch until I am sure I can `trust' your step mother." Darlanis "patting" her harness pouch as emphasis.

"But she.....," Sharon breathed, seeing Darlanis' eyes.

"She is an amazing woman," Tais, the others nodding. To "touch" Darlanis' mind was know the "meaning" of true "goodness". Darlanis was truly "THE QUEEN OF LIGHT" who would destroy "THE QUEEN OF DARKNESS" spoken of in the last pages of the BOOK OF LYS, the "revealed word" of She Who Was MistressOf The Universe!

"She was always so `nice' to me," Sharonspoke softly, her arm about the powerful muscular body of a woman who she loved now more than any. The beautiful azure eyes of Darlanis looking down into hers as the Empress nodded, well "aware" just then of "who" Sharonspoke. Of a lovely Twentieth Century brownette who would soon die there at the hands of the Imperial Warlady of California ifLorraineherself had anything to say about it! "I could talk to Carol in a way that I've never been able to talk toLorraine."

"Lorraineis rather `Dularnian' in a way," Darlanis smiled, sipping at the wine as they sat there on the veranda looking out into the darkness. A faint glow there on the horizon to the east now speaking of the day to come. The Empress herself wondered what to do. Not about the Simmons, but about the Queen of Dularn thatLorraineheld captive. Maris would have to be enslaved, but the Queen was not an "evil" woman, and she "deserved better" than to spend the rest of her life as a simple "collared" slave slut.

"`Strait-laced'," Sharonsmiled.Lorrainewas still that in a way even now. Especially where she was concerned. And the way she had gotten upset when Gayle and Carl Dai got married only a further "proof" thatLorrainewasn't really all that "modern" in her own thinking despite what she "claimed" to the contrary now!

"There is something to be said for `waiting'," Darlanis smiled, huggingSharonto herself. The night was chill now, making her long heavy cloak a "comfort" there over her golden mesh.

"Be like kicking over a bee hive," Sandi whispered to Carol.

"No doubt it will be a fight that legends will be made of," the brownette smiled back. "Like the Spartans there inGreece." The black clad Dularnian Warlady smiling toherself at the idea.

"Whatever," Sandireplied, having little idea of what Carol was talking about. San-sha and La- ra muttering to themselves in their own tongue, perhaps praying Sandi thought to their "gods". Anis was standing there watching them all, an arrow nocked on her bowstring. She was a "hard" woman, almost another like Carol, Sandi thought to herself. A former Warrioreess, perhaps to die as Warrioreesses so wished it. In battle, with weapons in her hand!

"Time to `wake them up'," Carol spoke, the ballistae now set up and waiting there on its bipod like some gigantic crossbow. A supply of bolts and a couple strong sailors to wind it back up! Her "eye" for such things even better than the ship's "gunner"!

The ballistae bolt smashed into the side of the manor no more than a yard from where Sharon was sitting, Darlanis instantly grabbing her shocked terrified Princess and forcing her down, saying, "There could be another!" The missile having driven right through the outside wall of the manor house into the living room inside where it had stuck into one of the interior walls!!!

"What the hell!" Lorraine growled, hearing the noise, and dashing out of the room. I prayed that Maris was "competent" in a fight. Valerie Dunn was "careless". I swept up her sword blade with my forearm, and leaping up, delivered a punch to her jaw that would have put Mike Tyson himself "down for the count"! I think my boxing instructor in the Marines would have proud of me just then. It's "hard to keep a good Marine down", he used to say. I don't think that Valerie really realized that I possessed actual fighting skills even superior to that of most Warriors! I think I should also mention here and now that a woman, even those of the Warriresses, is not really any "stronger" than a teen age boy is! Women such as Carol and Lorraine are about equal to a very athletic sixteen yearold, and even Darlanis herself is only like some "junior" on a high school football team! In a test of sheer strength I can easily "best" any woman I've ever met. It is true that there are a number who can "best" me with a sword, but in a hand to hand fight I can "deck" any of them with one good blow. And that includes two certain "Warladies" I know too!

I grabbed the sword from the unconscious Imperial captain, turned, saw that Maris had "dealt" with Lady Tirana almost at the same instant I had with Valerie Dunn in very much the same way. The Queen of Dularn is an excellent "boxer" I might mention here. It is another thing she can "do" rather well beside sail a ship and sit on a throne and look "beautiful"! She can "lick" Carol. Carol says it was just a "lucky punch". Maybe. Maris is "good"!

"We'll bind and gag these," I said, Maris nodding. I had no hatred for either Valerie Dunn or Lady Tirana, and I did rather like the old Warlady, who had been quite "nice" to Carol and me.

"If Lorraine returns," Maris whispered in level terms then.

"The two of us should be a 'match' for her," I answered. Maris at the moment slipping a gag between Lady Tirana's teeth. Valerie was still unconscious, although Tirana was coming around.

"I think we would do well together," Maris said to me then.

"I think the Queen of Dularn needs more clothes," I spoke.

"Perhaps they will confuse me for a slave girl," she smiled. She was, as they say, "slave naked", her robe having fallen open.

Val...! Lorraine gasped in surprise, stepping into the room, a bit "distracted" just then. I put the point of Valerie's sword to her throat, warned her not to try "anything". Lorraine was only "doing" as she saw right. I had no wish to kill her. She was, after all, a woman I had once thought "very highly of".

"I hope Sandi has enough 'smarts' to follow my orders," Carol whispered as San-sha laid there beside her, the Indian woman a bit "smelly" now from their swift dash across the corn fields and everything else. A nod from La- rather in the darkness adding her opinion to this. Anis kneeling now behind a bush, watching. There was a "glow" there in the east now, although it was still dark, the forests still yet only a darker shadow against the sky. Carol guessing it was now somewhere about 5:15 in the morning. The four of them dashing then to behind a small outbuilding some fifty yards from the manor house proper. A number of men on guard leaving no doubt in Carol's mind that Lorraine was "alert"!

"Too bad you white, make good Nevada," La-rawhispered then. The two Indian women having that awesome skill at archery that my wife notes seems to be almost a "racial characteristic" of them. As Darlanis notes in her own book that the Nevadas started little children using bows, and that their women were expected to be able to fight effectively in the defense of their encampment, it is perhaps not all that surprising here as to their own skills. I am "doubtful" in any case that it has to do with their "race". Archery is "important" to the Nevadas. It is the means by which they have preserved their own freedom from Imperial California.

"Let's reduce the 'odds' a bit," Anis suggested, getting up on one knee behind the outbuilding, and taking aim. The luckless guardsman then gasping and falling, the arrow buried in his body! A woman, a Warriress, yelling briefly before two more arrows put an halt to her career permanently, San-sha and La-rahaving skill almost as good as that of Carol herself. They were, Carol knew, actually a bit "better" at quick shots, although they did not have the accuracy at a long range that she did, she had noticed.

"Them 'blondes' make good targets," La-ra "laughed" as she followed the other three women to another place of "concealment"! The Indian woman thinking to herself that if her people back long ago in "the time of legends" had possessed a "leader" like Carol the "white eyes" might not have ever taken their lands from them!

"We'll try for the manor house, see if we can get a hostage," Carol said, thinking of Sharon or perhaps another then. Someone she could "use" to hold off Lorraine or Darlanis until the North Star could return at their signal to now pick them up. Despite whatever her feelings were now, she was "responsible" for these people. For seeing that as many as possible got back safe!

"Where's Lorraine?" Jon Richards asked, Darlanis now in command of things from what it appeared. Sharon and Keri assisting her along with Captain Berson of the late Squala and Princess Sela Dai of Talon. The ballistae bolts were not really that much of a "threat" as such in the military sense, but they were quite "terrifying" as there was no way of telling from where they came! And they were being followed now by a number of crossbow bolts! The missiles came out of the darkness seemingly from everywhere!

"Take some men, get down to the cove, see that the North Star gets a proper 'welcome' if it comes back as I am sure it will!" Darlanis snapped, her sword gleaming there in her hand! An arrow, spent, almost falling at her feet now as the Empress of California gave her orders, seeing that the estate was defended!

"Make those things 'count'!" Sandi hissed, the North Star's "gunner" carefully aiming the ballistae there from between the trees. It was "necessary" to move after every shot so that the Imperials could not "guess" where the missiles were coming from!

"I'll try for those 'officers'," he growled, squeezing off a shot. The bolt going a bit high, just over Darlanis' golden head as the Empress "ducked"! Sharon then urging her to "keep moving" so that she made less of a "target" for the Dularnians. Darlanis herself "smiling" a bit at the words that Sharon had "used" then! "Words" that would have made even the most hard bitten of Warriresses to blush, especially when heard coming from the lips of a beautiful and innocent looking young Princess like Sharon Duval!

Four bows "twanged" almost as one, those on guard in front of the manor collapsing as the deadly missiles did their work. An oarsman, grabbing up a crossbow, put a bolt far over Carol's head as my beloved brownette then sent a swift shaft back in reply! A terrified slave girl, not thinking, now dashing across the field! A ghostly pale "shadow", her naked body highlighted.

"I get her, we learn much!" San-sha hissed, dashing forward!

"Cover her!" Carol snapped, firing at the two guardsmen who had followed the slave girl. One falling, the other turning, and fleeing, now taking Anis' arrow right in between his shoulders! The shaft from her awesome bow driving right through his body!

"One less to `worry about'," she smiled to her Warlady!

"I underestimated you," Lorraine said to me as Maris secured her wrists behind her. "You and that wife of yours both," the Warlady spoke, tossing her head, her hair like a heavy dark mane. The living room wall having a new "ornament", a ballistae bolt!

"And her too," I answered, indicating Maris with a motion of my head. The Queen of Dularn had come through when I needed her.

"You are a man that many women could love," Lorraine said to me. Her words then made no "sense" to me. I think they do now.

"The guards in front of the manor!" Maris breathed, the fall of their bodies leaving no doubts that "someone" had come for us.

"Tell!" San-sha hissed, holding her dagger to the luckless slave's throat, the woman sobbing helplessly in her terror. She had, Carol noted then, also "wet" herself judging from the odor. They were now crouched behind the outbuilding used to house pigs! The odor unmistakable, and bringing back some very old memories!

"They hold Queen of Dularn, and man who was a slave here!" the slave girl sobbed, her hair a darker shadow against the paleness of her face. Carol noted that the two Indian women, with their darker features, didn't show up quite so much in the light!

"His name!" Carol hissed, seizing the wench by the throat!

"Now!" I snapped, shoving Lorraine ahead of me, my hand on her arm. I thought of carrying her over my shoulder, but felt it was better to send her on ahead of me. The Imperials would certainly know their own Warlady! And Dularnians would know that we had taken her captive! I had judged where our "friends" were by the direction from which the arrows had come. The distance I had determined rather easily knowing the range of our compound bows. The trees that shaded the manor house during the day gave us some "cover", although Maris' golden hair stood out in the dim light!

"Three now come this way!" San-sha spoke, raising her bow, an arrow nocked on the string as she readied herself to shoot. Carol could see the three among the trees, two clad in what appeared to be robes, carrying swords, and pushing with them a black clad woman, who now appeared to an Imperial of high rank.

"That mistress!" La-rab breathed in awe. "The Queen!"

"Well, what do you think of that!" Anis now smiled!

"Hold!" the black clad dark haired woman snapped, suddenly rising up there before us from the brush, a bow in her hands, an arrow nocked on the string. She was obviously a "Dulie"! Then suddenly I

realized just "WHO" she was! MY OWN BELOVED CAROL!!!

Chapter Thirty One

"Carol!" I breathed, holding her, kissing her, stroking her hair. My wife sobbing with emotion in my arms as I held her now. Lorraine, Maris, the Indian women, the Imperials, all forgotten as I once again held my wonderful brownette in my arms. My Carol had come back for me! I tasted the salt of her tears as she clung to me, her mouth soft, moist against mine as she sobbed with deep emotion. How thankful I was that I had remained "true" to her! That I had not succumbed to the "charms" of Maris Marn.

"You actually 'planned' all this?" Lorraine asked, standing there, tall, proud, truly the Warlady that she is. I don't think she had believed me when I told her how Carol had "changed". I think she expected Carol would still be the "same" as she had been back when the Duvals had taken that little cottage for the summer a quarter mile down the road from us. When a bikini clad Sharon had come "strolling" around. When Jack Duval had leered at my wife taking a sunbath there behind the house. I think that Lorraine still thought of my wife as being a "sexual plaything".

"I am the Warlady of Dularn," Carol spoke in level tones.

"Imperials have spotted us!" San-sha then interjected.

"I think a 'cease-fire' might be in order," Lorraine said.

"There is something to be said for 'discipline'," Lorraine said, her eyes cold as they looked into the hazel of my wife. I could feel the "tension" there in the living room. The burning hatreds that only hard military discipline on both sides held in check. Only Maris' own authority as Queen of Dularn and Carol's as Warlady held our own people in control, while that of Lorraine and Darlanis did the same for the Imperials. An "uneasy" truce had been declared. I could feel the "tension" in my wife's body!

Carol was dirty, sweaty, smelly, and utterly exhausted from everything she had been through. Yet there was still "fire" in her eyes, an "alertness" that left no doubts she was running on "nerves" now. Lorraine after the events of the night was in little better condition. She was a "legend" in the Empire, and now Dularn had a "legend" all of its own, a true fighting woman, one who might well be able now to even change the course of history! Carol had "proved" herself in a way that left no "doubts" as to her own right to be truly the Warlady of the Dularnian Republic!

"My wife is a woman of 'many talents'," I said to Lorraine. Queen Maris sat on the other side of me, more now properly attired as the Queen of Dularn than as some "Playboy Centerfold"!

"Archery being obviously one of them," the Warlady smiled.

"It is hard to believe that there was a tyrannosaurus living only a few miles from here," Sharon spoke from beside Darlanis. What the Empress had "heard" there while asleep had been "real".

"The North Star," Queen Maris said, the ship creeping in towards us through the drifting mists like some "Flying Dutchman". I held Carol to me, felt the "tension" burning in her body as we faced Lorraine, Darlanis, Lady Tirana, Valerie Dunn, and others. It was now dawn, the sun a glowing ball there now on

the horizon. It had been a long night for all of us, especially us of Dularn.

"You have `won' this time, but the next time you will not," Lorraine suddenly spoke to Carol, the very tones of her voice a terrifying threat now as we stood there! "I am not going to allow some dumb `cunt' like you to....!" Carol's furious slap as she "leaped" at the Imperial Warlady almost knocking her to the ground! I knew to my horror why Lorraine had spoken as she had!

"Draw, you God-damned bitch!" Carol screamed, whipping out her sword, the cold smile on Lorraine's stern features leaving no doubt to my horror that she had wanted Carol to "do" as she had!

"She's no match for you!" Darlanis cried, trying to stop her Warlady. I felt Maris cling to me with both arms, Anis helping! Carol and Lorraine now "circling" like a pair of vicious dogs, a sharp clash of steel ringing out in the stillness of the morning as their swords met for the first time in deadly combat. Carol against Lorraine! My own beloved brownette against the greatest swordswoman of all time! Carol's swift blade meeting Lorraine's, although just "barely" this time, Lorraine "feeling out" Carol! Then Lorraine started "driving in" at my Carol, forcing her back!

I could feel the coldness of the morning mists, hear the sounds of the ocean there in the early morning, the noises made aboard the North Star some two hundred yards away. Men yelling, the duel between Carol and Lorraine one perhaps many had hoped to see some day. I knew, however, what the "outcome" would be of this! Carol, despite her own wonderful skills, had no chance in this! The woman has yet to be born who can face Lorraine and ever survive! She is truly the greatest swordswoman of all time!

"Maris!" I begged, "Stop Them!" My Queen shook her head in the negative. It was, I knew, "an affair of honor". I saw Sharon tugging at Darlanis, the Empress shaking her head in the negative. I knew Lorraine would kill Carol. This was the woman who had faced an entire Legion once. To the Imperials she was almost a "goddess", a woman who had become a "living legend" in three short years. A woman who had rose from a homeless refugee to the position of Queen of Trelandar, Warlady of the Empire of California! The woman who was to the Imperials spoken of with "awe"!!!

I saw Lorraine's long slim blade flash, heard my wife cry out, reach up, touch her face, the blood dark against her skin!!!

"No! I won't let you kill her!" Sharon cried, running forward, throwing her arms around Lorraine, dragging her away from my wife. Carol merely standing there, her left hand pressed up against her face, well aware I think now that regardless of how "good" she had become with a sword, she had faced one far greater than her! That no woman, from any era, could ever face Lorraine!

"There won't be a `Sharon' next time," Lorraine spoke then.

"I should have `known' better," Carol said, taking the cloth from Maris, pressing it to her bleeding cheek. There would be a scar. Not one that might disfigure her, but she would be marked.

"You faced her, knowing her `reputation'," Maris said then.

"I always wondered if she was as `good' as they said," Carol smiled, allowing me to help her then into the North Star's boat. I saw Keri standing there alongside Lady Tirana. I kissed the palm of my hand, blew the kiss towards her. I don't think Carol understood just then, but I suppose it was just as well then too. My wife is a "jealous" woman, perhaps I think now with "reason".

"I need 'transportation' to Trella," Lorraine said, her eyes burning into the azure of Darlanis' as she nodded. The sun now a glowing hot ball there on the eastern horizon as they walked back to the manor house a quarter of a mile away. The "events" of the night something none of them would ever forget, especially the Warlady of California! The sails of the North Star blazing red there in the glow of the rising sun, the Warlady noted just then. "I still have my 'duties' to attend to as Warlady of California." The mists clearing from the ocean as the sun rose up higher now.

"Your new ship, the Athena, is commissioning there," the Empress noted. Lorraine nodded. She planned to "settle" things once and for all. At sea where her experience and skill might be applied more "effectively" than this damn "jungle warfare" that Carol Simmons and her husband had dreamed up for the Dularnians!

"Lady Tirana can take care of things here," Lorraine said. There was damage to be repaired, the dead to be buried properly.

"And I am going with you!" Jon Richards spoke, grabbing his wife by the arms, pulling her around to face him. Lorraine nodded, her dark eyes meeting his. She would wish for no other now.

"It is not a 'victory' I will 'rejoice' in," Lorraine said. There would probably be few "survivors" when they met this time! *****

"Carol," I breathed, holding her in my arms, content just then to hold her, to feel the warmth of her body against my own. To know that she lived. That we were once again "together" now. She was naked against me, warm, soft, utterly and totally Carol!

"I had a 'dream' once," Carol answered softly, touching her cheek where the Physician had glued back together the sword cut. While "deep", it would not leave a bad scar when it healed up. I "understood" without any further "explanation" what Carol meant.

"You faced her," I replied, holding her close. I could feel the North Star's movement as the ship sailed through the waves. Hear the creak of the rigging, the swish of the water against the hull. Our cabin was tiny, only large enough for a double pair of bunks, a chest for storage built underneath the lower one. Room aboard a raider is precious. Such a ship is "cramped" for space.

"She 'beat' me," Carol said in a soft whisper. "And before 'everyone'," she added. "And I gave it everything I 'had' too!"

"You 'beat' her where it 'counted'," I pointed out to her.

"It isn't 'over' yet," Carol answered, regarding me then.

"You should get some rest," Darlanis said, meeting the darkness of Lorraine's eyes as the Warlady taxied Black Lady around into the wind for a takeoff. Jon Richards in the back seat keeping his thoughts to himself, well aware of his wife's "temper". The blast from the propeller and the noise from the engine making conversation difficult just then. Lorraine nodding, pushing the throttle all the way forward for takeoff. The airplane bumping over the rough ground, the Queen of Trelandar keeping her thoughts to herself just then as she watched the instruments before her. The Empress well aware that had it not been for Sharon, it was quite possible that Lorraine would have killed Carol!

"I will when I get to Trella," Lorraine answered as the airplane lifted up into the air, the tall black clad brunette reaching down, moving a lever, well "aware" of Darlanis' eyes on her.

"I want to see an `end' to this war," Darlanis now ventured.

"So do I," Lorraine answered, a cold chill going through the Empress as she saw the "look" there in the Warlady's dark eyes. "And the quicker I can catch up with the North Star the better."

"I don't want it to `end' this way," Darlanis spoke softly, reaching out, touching the hard muscular hand of the Warlady's. Far too vivid in Darlanis' mind were the last moments of Sarnian Lady. She was of the Caste of Warriories, but this was a new form of "warfare" that she wished to have no further part of now.

"You should have thought of that last year when we had the chance to negotiate a `settlement' with Queen Maris," Lorraine snapped back. Darlanis nodding, her azure eyes moist with tears. She suspected strongly that she would never "see" Lorraine again. That both she and this Carol Simmons would die for their causes! That both ships would "burn" there at sea just because of her own stubbornness the year before in refusing to negotiate with Maris!

"Then I'll do it now!" Darlanis wept, a tear rolling down a burned cheek, "And you will carry my offer of peace under a flag of truce to Queen Maris!" Lorraine shaking her head in the negative! The Warlady's eyes like icy coals burning right into hers!

"Combat fatigue," Lorraine then answered with a grim smile. "It happens to the best of us," the Warlady smiled at Darlanis. "A nice quiet rest in Trella should do you a world of good now."

Chapter Thirty Two

"Hey, slut!" the sailor yelled at Kathi, the naked blondish slave girl turning, wondering if she was going to be "had" again! The single men aboard the ship having taken their "pleasure" of her one after another ever since they had left Lorraine's estate! The lower deck of the North Star crowded, with worn out sails now being used to divide it up into compartments so that the single women and married couples might have a little bit of "privacy". Fortunately for Kathi's sake most of the women from San-sha's band of runaway slave girls and those from the estate had already found male companionship. She was paying dearly now for having been the "snitch" and the "tattle-tale" she had once been before! Her "reputation" having soon been spread all over the North Star.

"Yes, `master'?" Kathi replied, going to her knees. She was more terrified however of the free women than of the single men. Only those who had once worn the collar of the slave girl could understand what it was like to be some "rightless female animal".

"I want you to go down into the hold and bring up some of that cheese and smoked sausage we have stored away," he ordered, the odor of rum on his breath, the woman beside him one of the former members of San-sha's band, a tall slim brunette who some had said reminded them a bit of the famous Warlady of California!

"Please no, kind master," Kathi begged on her knees, fearful of the rats she knew lived down there among the boxes and crates.

"Someone fetch a whip!" the woman called out, giving Kathi a "smile" that made Carol's ripe bodied slave girl shake in terror!

"She is not yours to whip," a voice suddenly spoke from behind Kathi, the sailors and their women nodding, and moving back!

"It is sometimes 'hard' to be a slave girl," Queen Maris said smilingly as she gently tousled Kathi's hair with her hand. Kathi taking the Queen's hand in her own and gently kissing it. Looking up into the green eyes of the Queen with teary gratitude.

"Come with me," Maris then said, "And I'll show you where the food they want is kept," Kathi getting to her feet, following the Queen of Dularn, her bare feet padding on the deck planking.

"And just what do you mean by that!" Darlanis snapped, fearing the "worst" now of Lorraine. The ocean a thousand feet below the airplane looking much like a pond with little ripples on it.

"You had Sarnian Lady burned out from under you, you were attacked there on my estate only hours later, and then last night you had to face hostile fire again, and I have a hunch that you haven't slept more than a few hours with those burns the way that they are on you," the Warlady of Imperial California "explained".

"I'm still your commander in chief!" Darlanis snapped back.

"Under the laws of Trelandar Maris is now legally a 'pirate' for attacking my estate and I am thus within my legal rights under our Constitution to pursue pirates," the Warlady smiled back. "Also, there has never been a formal declaration of 'war' between the Empire of California and Dularn, which also makes Maris' own activities those of a 'pirate'," the Queen of Trelandar added. A nod from the Warlady leaving no doubts in Darlanis' mind that she was actually legally entitled to do what she wished with Maris! * * The reader will recall here in that in the previous book of this series Darlanis did obtain a "declaration of defense" from the Imperial Senate, but she did not ask for or receive a declaration of war as such. Also, Sanda Talen had pointed out to Darlanis the year before that under Trelandar's "Constitution" they were entitled to act in their own self-defense against "pirates". I also suspect that Darlanis at this point was getting pretty "tired" of the entire affair and just wanted to get "out". (J.B.)

"That damm Sanda Talen!" Darlanis muttered more to herself than to those with her in the airplane. The Scribe having once been a well known lawyer there in Trelandar before Darlanis' own military invasion had forced her to flee for her life for the "crime" of attempting to organize a "popular resistance movement" against Darlanis' rule. The beautiful blonde Empress being well aware that in any contest of "wits" against Lady Sanda Talen she stood no more chance than she did facing Lorraine with a sword!

"A quite 'intelligent' woman," Lorraine agreed, smiling.

"But against their fire weapons?" Darlanis now protested.

"Maris keeps the caste codes," Lorraine then smiled back in reply to the golden Empress. "Fire will not be used this time."

"She was 'brave', that 'Carol', to face you," Darlanis said.

"Down here," Maris said, reaching down, lifting the hatch.

"Is there supposed to be `water' down there?" Kathi asked.

"OH LYS!!!" the Queen of Dularn gasped, looking down! The water swirling, dark, a cold chill then going through Maris Marn! The North Star's hull had been obviously punctured by something!

"Are we sinking?" Kathi whimpered, the terror showing now!

"No, but this is `SERIOUS'!" Maris snapped in reply. The Queen taking the lantern from the slave girl, and climbing down the ladder to the hold into the dark water below, the cold seawater swirling about her waist as she looked about, a number of items floating about, gently drifting with the current as the ship rolled in the gentle swell! While the North Star was built with four watertight compartments below the waterline, the piercing of any of them would cause the ship to ride lower in the water, slowing it! Making it more "vulnerable" to the enemy too!

"Kathi, get Lars, have him put men on pump three," Maris ordered, the slave girl nodding, then dashing off. The golden haired Queen of Dularn raising the lantern high, frowning at the sight of what she saw before her. It being obvious that their entire supply of fresh and preserved food had been destroyed by the water with the exception of that hung from the crossbeams above! And it was a good two weeks sail at least back to Dularn! The Dularnian Queen having little doubt too as to the "cause"!!!

"The North Star took `fire' from the Imperials last night, didn't it?" Maris spoke in level tones as she stood there in the swirling dark water of hold three. Lars nodding, not meeting her emerald eyes. He recalled hearing the bolts hit, although he had felt that they had done the ship little "harm". The marksmanship of the Imperials hadn't been that good there in darkness anyway.

"We were hit at least once at the waterline with the ship heeled over on the port tack from the land breeze last night," Maris spoke, her own "experience" being such that she knew quite well from what she'd been told earlier how everything had "happened". The thought going through her mind that it was quite possible that the bolt that had done the "damage" had been the very same one that Lorraine had "said" she'd shot off! "And now we are heeled over on the starboard tack with that hole at least six feet underwater," the blonde Queen of Dularn said. While the pump could deal with such a "leak", still it would be necessary to make "repairs", and the only way such "repairs" could be made now would be to put the ship on the opposite tack! And that would mean sailing back south, and away from Dularn and safety!!! *****

"I want to go with you," Darlanis said, touching Lorraine's arm as the Warlady silently regarded the heavy three masted schooner now at floating there at anchor in Trella's harbor. The Athena would be "captained" by Janice Hill, who the Warlady knew she could trust to follow her orders to the letter! Janice Hill herself, so much like a "daughter" of Lorraine in her own appearance, now standing there quietly to one side with her husband and son watching the two royal women and those with them. Lorraine's earlier words to her having left no doubt in the young captain's mind that this was now perhaps a voyage from which she would never return! Lorraine's terse orders having left no doubt that she might never see her husband or her own little boy ever again! A fine pair of dark eyes now looking up right into Janice's as she glanced down at her little boy, wondering if she would ever see him ever now again once the Athena set sail to seek out the North Star. Lady Sanda Talen, Prime Minister of Trelandar, her baby son in her arms, quietly standing there watching them. A number of people, the curious, now were held back by the city guardsmen.

"If I `fall', make Lady Tirana your Warlady," Lorraine said.

"Lorraine," Darlanis said softly, "I wish that.....," The Warlady nodding, briefly kissing her then before stepping down into the boat that would take her out to the now waiting Athena. Jon Richards briefly glancing at Lady Sanda, and then following his wife down into the boat. Janice kissing her husband, hugging her son, while watching the midshipman get their boat under way. Once loading was completed, she would be rowed out to the ship. There to sail under the direct command of Lorraine Richards, the Queen of Trelandar, and the Warlady of the Empire of California!

I awoke to the sounds of "activity", of men carrying things, of "thumps" on the deck overhead, the sound of voices, Carol now sleeping quietly there beside me, her lips like a lovely rosebud. Slipping out of the bunk, I quickly dressed, pulling on my stuff. My clothing still damp from Kathi's having washed it all earlier.

"Bob?" Carol breathed, her eyes half open, the exhaustion from everything she'd been through still showing on her features. She had done the "impossible", actually "defeating" Lorraine! I knew, as the others did not, that Carol had really "won" in that her military tactics had actually been "superior" to Lorraine's!

"Just `checking' things out," I said, giving her a smile.

"Something's `wrong'," Carol spoke, raising her head, throwing back the blanket, her beautiful body a pale shadow in the dim light coming through the curtained port hole there in the hull.

"I'll check it out," I answered, giving her a kiss then.

"I'll be right behind you," my wife answered in reply.

"Trouble?" I asked, seeing Maris supervising the opening of crates, of boxes, it being "obvious" that everything had been wetted. A stream of water spurting over the side further proof! The sun bright in the sky there just to the west, the few clouds like lovely cotton puffs floating there in the azure blue vault. The blue green "day" sails taking the light breezes gracefully with nothing but a rolling ocean now to be seen in any direction.

"We've been `holed'," Maris answered, looking "tired" now. "One of those Imperial ballistae bolts fired at us last night hit below the waterline and went right through the side of the ship."

"I guess your weapons aren't as `primitive' as I thought," I smiled back, Maris giving me a bit of a frown just then in reply! I suppose I shouldn't have said that just then, but as I've never really considered the weapons of this era as being really all that "effective", I suppose it was an "easy mistake" on my part!

"I know you `mean well' and all that, but I'm just not in the `mood' right now," Maris forced a smile, turning back then to seeing what could be "salvaged" from the water damaged "stores".

Chapter Thirty Three

"Situation under control?" Carol asked, walking up behind me. Maris nodding, the nervous exhaustion

from everything she'd been through showing as she supervised the crew in opening boxes. It being rather obvious that most of the ship's food supplies had been seriously damaged by being wetted there in the flooded hold.

"I think we took a hit below the waterline last night," the Queen of Dularn answered, my wife nodding back, glancing at me. I noticed that Carol had neglected to wear "clips" underneath her tunic, the outline of her nipples being clearly visible beneath. While such would have caused no comment back in the 20th Century, I knew that in this era such was considered rather "provocative" and not something that a woman of "breeding" ever did in public. On the other hand Carol is a woman who is naturally provocative.

"Lorraine said she took a shot at the North Star," I said.

"Must be 'hard' on a woman like that," Jon Richards spoke as Lorraine stood there on the Athena's quarterdeck, the bright sunlight gleaming off her golden tiara as the Queen of Trelandar. He had noticed the exhaustion showing there in her face, in the "shortness" of her hot temper should anyone dare "cross" her now. The "strain" was "telling" on her now. And something else too! The crew of the ship dashing about, getting things ready for sea.

"I didn't 'catch' that," Lorraine "snapped", turning about.

"That young captain of ours," Jon answered, recalling her.

"She's sailed under my command before," the Warlady said.

"I mean having to leave her husband, her son like this," Jon spoke, wondering if anyone here would ever see their homes again.

"You didn't have to come with me," Lorraine answered back.

"Janice," her husband spoke, holding her close, looking down into the darkness of her eyes. She was an attractive woman, not a "beautiful" woman as such. Tall, slender, almost a "clone" of the Warlady in some respects. The golden links of her neck chain glistening around her throat. His son's hand there now in his. Their child, formed from the loving union of their bodies. And now she might never return from this voyage. Her body wrapped in a hammock with a catapult shot at her feet tossed over the side or more likely burned to a crisp as two ships now died in flames.

"I have 'trust' in 'Her'," Janice spoke softly. She had been in command of the "outclassed" Huntress when Lorraine had taken it up against the more powerful North Star. And beaten the Queen of Dularn in a ship to ship battle! Janice had no doubts that Lorraine, given the firepower of the Athena, would be able to put "paid" to the North Star regardless of whatever these people from the 20th Century could dream up for the Queen of Dularn!

"She is fighting one of her own kind from the 'time of legends'," he answered, thinking of the ruins there north of Trella. Ruins of a great city so large that Trella itself would have been only a small part of what once had been the city of Los Angeles.

"She is our Queen, our Warlady," Janice answered, kissing him, and then giving her beloved son a last long loving hug. Her vision blurring a bit then as she moved away, the tears now filling her eyes. She had kept to herself what Lorraine had said about the "dangers" of this voyage. It would be a "battle" like that of

the old legends. There would probably be few survivors even if the Athena did have the steel plates that could be raised like shields to protect the crew from enemy ballistae bolts. She had no doubt that Maris Marn would fight like a cornered wildcat! She wasn't so "sure" either that Maris might not use "fire" when she knew she was going to lose this battle. Or if she died in the conflict, which was quite likely, would Carol then use fire?

I watched Maris give the orders, the North Star coming about on its new course almost due south. Back towards Trella, and the tall black clad Warlady who I had once known in a time now myth.

"Now to find that damm hole!" Maris Marn growled, tying the rope about herself and lowering herself over the side, the memory of sharks filling my mind as I stood beside Carol and watched the Queen of Dularn working her way along the side of the ship, the waves often splashing up, wetting her as she carefully checked the hull for the hole in it we now knew much be somewhere about.

"A rather `competent' woman," Carol smiled in a soft voice.

"Probably would have made me a good wife," I smiled back.

"Was she `good in bed'?" Carol suddenly asked me then.

"Never `tried' her," I answered, giving her a smile.

"You were hit pretty hard," my wife smiled back then.

"I think she's found the puncture hole," I answered her.

"The last supplies are coming aboard now, your majesty," Janice Hill said, bowing to the Queen of Trelandar as the Warlady nodded back. She looked "haggard", "worn out", but yet her eyes were "bright", "eager" as if she could not wait to set sail now! The small boats clustered around the Athena almost so thick that one could have easily jumped from the deck down on to any one of them. The awesome power of Trelandar's ruler was well displayed!

"The lamp oil, the fire pumps?" Lorrainesmiled, her face in shadow against the bright glow coming through the stern windows of the cabin. The Prince-Consort of Trelandar there beside her. The Athena was being "stuffed" with food, weapons, and supplies. The heavy steel bolts for its thirty two ballistae, the eight heavy catapults that the ship carried as an Imperial first rate. The first "iron clad" of the 26th Century, the inch thick steel plates inside the hull rendering the ship impervious to missiles.

"And those `odd' looking little ballistae of yours," Janice added. The design of the weapons like nothing she'd ever seen! The weapons built like big compound crossbows, but fitted with big crank wheels and a sort of "hopper" that fed bolts one after another every time the bow string was drawn back to full cock by means of the crank wheels! Weapons that would fire a dozen bolts or more in as many seconds! Six such weapons now being set up on the deck on their swivel mounts where they might be put to use!

"A little `invention' of my wife's," Jon Richards smiled.

"That's done!" Maris spoke, giving me a smile while Carol stood there beside me. The water dripped off her soaked body. I think Maris had "done" what she had just because Carol was "there". I suspected

too that Maris had wished to "prove" to my wife that she was not just another "dumb" blonde like Darlanis. I wondered too why Maris was so "terrified" of Lorraine. Not so much of the Warlady's own military capabilities, but of the woman in person. I had watched Lorraine's "interrogation" of her. I had been surprised by how "weak" Maris had seemed. Almost as if she was a slave girl and Lorraine her mistress. Yet otherwise I had seen no reason to doubt Maris' courage and bravery under fire or her competency to command a ship of war. As long as she didn't have to face Lorraine herself Maris seemed quite "capable". I had also noticed how Maris "deferred" to Carol, who was also a "dominant" woman, although in a different way than was Lorraine.

"An Imperial ballistae bolt," Maris said, lying it there on the desk before her, Lars nodding there at my side. Carol smiling a bit to herself. I think she too now realized how "effective" the weapons of this era might be. She had told me about the dinosaur, about that "strange" feeling she had about it now. I wondered how much of a "thumb" the Priestesses of Lys did have in this "pie". They were, I sensed, almost infinitely powerful. And, I now suspected to myself, almost as "alien" as any Lorr!!!

"Lorraine said she took a shot at the North Star," I said. The shimmering light from the stern windows behind Maris now highlighting her hair almost like a golden halo around her head.

"It went right through the side of the ship, and was found sticking into the hull on the other side there in the bilge," the Queen of Dularn added. Such a missile weighs about four pounds, and has a velocity of nearly a hundred yards a second with a "range" of a quarter mile if fired at a forty five degree angle. Such a missile fired at close range will pass completely through a unicorn lengthwise and pierce a man standing behind the animal.

"How thick is the hull of the ship?" my wife asked then. Maris explaining that the North Star was built of layers of one inch thick planks laminated together with a layer of pitch between them. Such makes for a very "watertight" vessel, and also one that will take a considerable "sea" without any damage due to its "flexibility". The ship is actually built with a "skeleton" that forms the basic framework on which the hull is then laminated with three layers of one inch planks, each separated by a layer of pitch between them. Imperial ships are heavier hulled, and while "stronger", also weigh more and thus are a hair "slower" for the same amount of sail to hull ratio. Such things are, of course, a matter of "compromise" between a number of "factors".

"What you need to do is build a `ironclad'," Carol smiled.

"The Imperials, or rather Lorraine, has," Maris answered. "The Athena now about ready for sea carries steel shields for the crew," the Queen of Dularn smiled. Obviously she had her spies. "The hull itself is reinforced by inch thick armor plate inside."

"Why don't you do the same thing?" Carol challenged her.

"Such armor is heavy, and `slows' the ship," Maris replied.

"But such would save lives," my wife persisted then in turn.

"And make this ship less `effective' in battle," Maris said. "Lorraine can afford to sacrifice a bit of speed, we cannot now." *****

"I wish to get out of the harbor by nightfall," Lorraine said. Janice nodding, well aware of the nature of the order and what it would entail for those aboard. "You will put the slaves to work that I have ordered sent out to `assist' the crew." Captain Hill nodded, bowed to her Queen, and then left the cabin. A hundred

half naked slaves adding their own muscle to the labors. The entire resources of Trella now at work "readying" the Athena.

"This isn't going to be as 'fast' a ship as others of this 'class'," Jon noted as Lorraine busied herself with preparations. The steel plates there on deck that would be raised as shields in battle would slow the ship as would the steel armor inside the hull. He doubted that it was even anywhere as swift as the North Star might be with its own recent modifications. On the other hand it was now nearly "invincible". Only fire weapons could be effective against it, and Lorraine's new rapid fire ballistae along with Athena's other heavy weapons would make closing the ship almost suicide for the crew of any ship that attempted it...

"It will 'serve'," Lorraine answered, her eyes burning hot!

The merchant captain had failed to take wait for escort. The North Star had come dashing over the horizon, her blue green sails making her almost invisible against the meeting of sea and sky. A quick shot across his bow with a catapult had been enough to make him heave to. He had not been "cooperative" with Maris. A bad mistake on his part. Carol had "assisted" in the "matter". An iron had been heated in a brazier. Maris had then asked her questions again. He had proved stubborn for a short time until a red hot iron had been pressed against his flesh. Then he decided to be a bit more "cooperative" with us. We learned much then...

"What sort of 'defenses' does a city like Trella have?" my wife then asked, regarding the Queen of Dularn there before her. We had stripped the merchant of what we "wanted", and let him go.

"Carol, you can't be 'serious'," I breathed, turning a bit.

"We wouldn't stand a chance," Maris answered in awed tones.

"If there was a fog?" Carol challenged. Often there was.

"You're going after the Athena?" Lars now ventured in turn.

"We either 'lick' Lorraine now or later on," Carol said. Maris giving my wife a "look" that left no doubt that Carol's use of the term "lick" meant something quite "different" in this era. "And I think it is time that we let the people of Trelandar know that 'there is a war on'," my wife added, giving Maris a "smile".

"You are 'truly' a 'WARLADY'," Maris answered my wife back.

"Maybe I just 'understand' a few things you don't," Carol came back in a level voice, Maris' "sarcasm" not being "missed".

"Yours was an era of war like never before or after," Maris said. I recalled that she had told me that only the day before.

"Better than these 'chess games' of yours," Carol snapped.

"May Lys `bless' us on this voyage, and protect us with her power," Lorraine spoke, wondering why she was speaking thus to the crew of the ship when she knew the true "reality" of "things" like none other who now walked the face of the Earth. SHE did not intervene in such affairs, and it would be up to them to deal with the North Star as best they could. The faces of the men and the women looking up at her in the ruddy glow of the sunset nodded in "reply" to her words. To them she was "Lorraine", a "living legend" as she stood there before them, a glowing shaft of force a meter long in her upraised hand that left no doubts as to "what" she was! The same weapon she had once used as a "bluff" against an Imperial Legion under the command of Princess Tara.

"Captain Hill, set your course for Dularn," Lorraine then said, snapping off the force saber, and clipping it to her weapons belt. A "Warlady" had spoken. Janice nodded, gave orders.

"If we destroy the Athena before Lorraine can use it against us, we destroy her own capabilities to wage war against us," Carol spoke in level tones, regarding the Queen of Dularn. I understood the logic of her thinking, although I was also well aware of the price we might pay for the destruction of the ship. Sailing in would be one thing, but sailing out would be another! While we might be able to sail into Trella's harbor at night past the fortresses on either point of the harbor, sailing back out after the Imperials knew what we were up to was something else!!!

"The steam catapults Lorraine has now at Trella fire thirty pound shot to a distance of five hundred yards and their ballistae fire javelins a yard long and some eight pounds in weight," Maris answered. The North Star could be easily destroyed by such weapons if something happened. Such missiles would smash through our decks, pierce our hull like paper. There was no way that we could now avoid such fire should we succeed in our task either! The harbor at Trella so designed that one must pass within range of the fortresses placed on either side of the harbor's mouth.

"You are said to be Dularn's finest captain," Carol smiled.

"I would like to live long enough to see Dularn again," the Queen smiled back. The "implications" of that no one missed now!

"We either "deal" with the Athena now or later," Carol answered, her eyes holding the lovely green of the Queen of Dularn.

"At least we should be able to `sleep' tonight," Darlanis said, giving Sharon a hug as they shared dinner together there on Lorraine's estate with Lady Tirana and Keri Greyson. One of the slave girls from Sarnian Lady had died from her burns earlier. Sharon had seen the tears in the Empress' eyes as she held her hand. Few "understood" how "good" a person Darlanis really was. She was, as Lorraine had said, truly "THE QUEEN OF LIGHT" sent by SHE to save humanity and all intelligent life from the EVIL ONE!

"You have the `power' to put a `halt' to all this," Sharon said, looking up into the beautiful azure blue of Darlanis' eyes. Valerie Dunn, Sela Dai, Mark Berson wisely keeping silent then.

"I am fighting to `preserve civilization'," Darlanis spoke.

"`Defined' as the Empire of California," Keri suddenly said.

"Keri!" Lady Tirana gasped, horrified by such a "outburst"!

"You are a 'Scribe', not a 'Warrioress'," Darlanis replied.

"What the world doesn't 'need' is another 'Janet Rogers'," Keri answered in level tones, "And the American Civil War has no 'bearing' upon your right to retain the 'disputed territories' you claim as part of your Empire." Sharon nodding in agreement. She had once tried to point this out to Darlanis without success.

"Lorraine once said the same thing to me," Darlanis mused.

"Going to be a bit 'foggy' tonight," captain Janice Hill of the Athena noted to Jon Richards, Sealord of Trelandar, Prince Consort to the Queen of Trelandar, Warlady of the Empire of California. The now "legendary" Lorraine Duval, the woman who had in her own way, been responsible for much of Man's own past history. The Queen now asleep in her bunk there in the cabin below them. A few stars now already shining in the east as the lights of Trella fell behind them. A glow in the west the last of the sun.

"The North Star's no doubt sailing towards Dularn as fast as she can go," the handsome former Dularnian naval captain smiled. Fighting to keep out of his thoughts that lovely face framed by golden hair that he had once loved so much. That elder daughter of the mayor of Sanawho he had once knelt before and begged her hand in marriage, her neck to grace his silver. She had, however spurned him like the "gold-digger" she was. What those of Dularn called a "M.P.S." after a famous book about women written nearly six centuries ago by a "Jerome Bigge". Yet, he had seen her only the day before, a bit "heavier" now, but yet still the same. Maris had been the first woman he had really "loved", although he had never had reason to be discontented with Lorraine, who had a pleasing personality, an "even" temper. And was the sort of a wife that a man might live out the rest of his life with and never feel that another would have been a better "choice" for him!

"She's not a beautiful woman, but I do love her," he spoke, unaware of speaking out loud, Janice giving him a "strange" look.

"Lorraine?" she asked, the puzzlement showing in her voice.

"Just thinking out loud," he laughed, looking up at the sails. The Athena carried an impressive sail plan, but its own weight handicapped it, forcing the hull down deeper into the sea. The fact that Lorraine had insisted upon carrying supplies for a period of three months didn't really help matters any either now!

"I've never sailed a ship this 'heavy' before," she said.

"You got it out of Trella O.K.," Jon smiled right back.

"I had a chance to observe your wife," Janice smiled.

"One of her many 'talents'," Jon observed in reply.

"Scared?" I asked, Maris standing there, swaying gently with the roll of the ship. There was a heavy swell, but little wind. A faint glow in the west the only remains of the earlier sunset. She was but a dark shadow standing there, her hair a pale glow.

"I'm not a 'Carol' or a 'Lorraine'," Maris answered me back.

"I thought all you people believed in an afterlife," I said.

"That doesn't mean I want to 'experience' it," Maris spoke.

"Why are you here?" I asked. Once I knew she had taken command of the North Star to escape an unhappy marriage. Such was not the case now. On the other hand perhaps she was still "running" away from something. I suspected from what I'd seen of her what it might be. She was not a "strong" woman like Lorraine or my Carol might be. I suspected she was still "running" yet now. Maris was in some ways a woman of mystery, hard to "understand".

"I am Dularn's best captain," Maris said to me. I knew it.

"There are certainly 'others'," I pointed out to the Queen.

"I am not a Darlanis or a Lorraine," Maris answered back.

"I'm 'fascinated' by the 'role' of women here," I said.

"I don't think I understand," the Queen answered back.

"It's quite different than my own time," I said to her.

"Women have 'earned' their positions here," Maris answered.

"Men will follow you into battle, but yet I've heard them also talking about you in ways that would make a whore blush," I told her. I suspected that men spoke about Carol much the same.

"I take pride in being a woman," Maris answered. "Those of your era did not." I suspected that what she said was true too! I recalled Carol's own comments on this topic, so much like what Maris had just said. I suspected that I had just heard a "truth" that those of the Twentieth Century wouldn't have cared to hear! "I would certainly rather be whistled at than be 'ignored'," she added. I recalled what Lorraine had once written of this topic. I wondered too if what Lorraine "was" now was actually due to her life as a teenage girl when she had been "teased" about her lack of sexual attractiveness. Was that why she had become a warlady?

"Back in our era there was a lot of 'talk' about 'sexual harassment' and such things," I said then to the Queen of Dularn. I wondered if such "issues" still yet existed in this future era.

"'Sexual harassment'?" Maris asked, the term "puzzling" her.

"Unwanted sexual advances made by a boss or co-worker," I answered, recalling the commonly used definition of such things. It was so "sudden" I had no time to react. Maris' left hand had a firm grip on my tunic while I felt the sharp point of something pressed up against my throat. I recalled what I had done to Lady Tirana there on the estate one morning. Maris had been "quick"!

"Would you care to 'sexually harass' me?" Maris teased back.

"I don't think it would be 'wise'," I smiled, feeling her let go. Obviously the women of this era didn't have a "problem"!

"If a woman isn't `interested', she tells a man so," Maris said. "And if he `persists'," she sometimes does as I just did." I recalled that I'd never seen a free woman in this era without some sort of a weapon, if only a slim dagger there at her hip. I suspected that the 20th Century "sexual harassment" problem was something only Scribes knew from their study of our own history.

"What if he is her boss and fires her for doing `that'?" I asked, curious now about the laws of this era about such things.

"If he has a wife, she goes to her, if not she lets it be `known' what he `did'," Maris spoke there in the darkness. Women of this era are not the "pushovers" that they were in my own era. While there are no "labor laws" as such in this era, either in Dularn or in the Empire of California, there is a form of "social pressure" that can be applied that does seem to keep employers from exploiting their employees to an excessive degree. There are "guilds", which resemble somewhat the unions and professional organizations of the 20th Century. Also there are "caste codes". "Honor" is considered important, something not to be "violated". In many ways this era reminds me of another only "history" in my own time. Of a time when people thought such things "important"!

There is very little "spouse abuse" as such. Perhaps because women are "armed" and because for the first three years of your marriage you are forbidden to have children. Thus the woman is not as "trapped" in a marriage as what existed in our own era. She also tends to be more "violent" a person than the woman of the 20th Century, and one much less likely to be "pushed around". I once asked Maris about "child abuse", and she had a hard time understanding this, as "disciplining" of children is commonplace. "Sexual abuse" is "illegal" as such, although most mothers would never "tolerate" it in the first place, the mother of the 26th Century being quite "protective" of her children, more so in my own belief than was the mother of the 20th Century in many cases.

Jon Richards removed his clothing and slipped into the bunk beside his sleeping wife, feeling her arm go about him as she snuggled in close. He suspected that the "hatred" he had sensed between Carol and Lorraine might have its origins far in the past. And despite what his wife had told him, he suspected that Carol might have had good reason to "hate" Lorraine for what she had once "done" back there in a time now only myth and legends.

Chapter Thirty Five

"I'm scared," Kathi said, kneeling before her new mistress. How "safe" life had been there on the estate compared to this!!!

"We are all `scared', Kathi," Carol Simmons smiled back, reaching out, and affectionately tousling the slave girl's hair. Kathi was basically a good girl, just one who needed "discipline" of the sort that only a mistress might give to a girl like her. She had restored the girl's clothing, such as what it was here. Given orders to the crew that the girl might not be "used" without her permission. Kathi had been extremely grateful for that! She had also been given a "strap" to wear, much to her surprise! One made of soft oiled leather that matched her halter and skirt.

"You are a great Warriress, like their `Warlady'," Kathi said, Carol giving her a "smile" in return. Kathi

was not the only one who now compared her to Lorraine Richards, the Warlady. Yet Carol hadn't seen that she'd really "done" all that much! It had been obvious that one had to do what she had done, and there wasn't really anything too unusual in using the tactics she had! On the other hand, Carol mused to herself, perhaps they were now!

"I `wish' I was back home in our own time getting fucked," Carol smiled, sharing more with the slave girl than she had first "thought" that she might. "I'm getting pretty sick and tired of all this fighting," she said, the slave's eyes glowing into hers.

"I wish I hadn't been so `nasty' towards you," Kathi said.

"Never thought I'd be your mistress, did you?" Carol said.

"You're a more `attractive' woman than me," Kathi admitted.

"Beware of the lying tongues of slave girls!" Carol teased.

"Men on the estate thought so," Kathi smiled back at Carol.

"I suppose I am rather `provocative'," Carol admitted then. "A true `M.P.S' like that `Mr. Bigge' claimed," my wife smiled at Kathi. The provocative slave girl now giving her a puzzled look.

"`Member of the Privileged Sex'," Carol smiled, the slave girl nodding, obviously not "understanding" such a concept when expressed in such terms. Kathi certainly didn't consider herself "privileged" by any means, especially not now as Carol's slave!!!

"Like `free women'?" Kathi ventured. She had been a slave since her late teenage years, when she'd been caught shoplifting jewelry with another girl in Trella and sentenced to slavery for her "crime". The other girl's parents had been rich, and they had been able to "buy" their daughter's freedom easily. Kathi had not been so lucky. She had ended up a slave of Lady Tirana. One of half a dozen there on her estate next to Lorraine's. She had been "taken" with her mistress by Dularnians, who had quickly in turn "lost" all to the Seahawk and Lorraine's own "trickery"! Later Kathi had become Lady Tirana's own "first girl" after the old Warlady had sold her first girl to Lorraine some time before.

"I would `assume' so," Carol smiled, hugging the slave girl.

"Sail Ho!" the lookout called down as Maris stood beside me. Against the darkness one could see little but a spot of paleness. The night was cloudy, no Moon. Deimos had passed over earlier, a moving spot of light one hardly noticed unless you looked for it. It is sixteen seconds of arc, more a "speck" unless you use a good telescope like Maris', then you can see the shape of the old Lorr starship circling the Earth in a polar orbit as it has done ever since The War. It's abandoned now, just a lifeless rock...

"Another merchantman making a `run' for it," Maris guessed. Our own black sails of course making us nearly "invisible" now. "Be `easy pickings' if we didn't have `bigger fish to fry' now."

"Quiet," the first officer of the Athena said, his captain nodding as she stood there on the quarterdeck looking out to sea. Lorraine "hoped" to hold the North Star off with the Athena's own firepower long enough to win a victory against the Dularnian. On the other hand if the North Star could "close", then both ships would be doomed to a fiery death there at sea. She thought longingly of a time when there had been no strange warrior women from the 20th Century to introduce new methods of combat. New

means of killing one another. There was no doubt in her mind that the 20th Century had been far more "violent" than her own, such proof being obvious when you looked at women like Carol and Lorraine!

"You left a will with your wife?" Janice asked, well aware that if he had not it was "too late" now to do so. Lorraine had given such instructions to the crew, to the officers of the ship. Perhaps the Dularnian practice now used on their own naval ships of using married couples had something to "say" for it. On the other hand one's children then suffered from losing both parents.

"I just hope she keeps her legs together," he answered back. That was a problem often when men were gone for a long time from home. In an era where women were implanted with a contraceptive device that was a hundred percent proof against pregnancy sexual faithfulness was something one could not take just for "granted". Janice herself knew that her husband would visit the brothels, perhaps pay for the "attentions" of a "hip-swinger" from time to time. That was "accepted". Something no wife worried about. On the other hand Janice wondered why women were not "granted" the same "privileges". A woman's only sexual outlet if she wasn't to be "unfaithful" to her husband was masturbation, and that did not always "satisfy". Especially not the need at times to be "held"!

"These forts are about half a mile apart, aren't they?" I said as Maris made Carol and me a rough sketch of Trella. It did not appear that there would be much "fog" tonight. And I wasn't too sure that in a fog we might not end up sailing up on to some rock and tearing the bottom out of the ship in trying to do this!

"Yes," Maris answered, her lovely eyes glowing up into mine. We had the stern windows covered so that there would be no glow. Such can be seen for miles at night at sea, as Lorraine relates.

"And the Imperials do have ships of this class?" I asked. Darlanis had two from what I had heard. Neither had been "used" to any effective degree against Dularn, but they were "there", and Dularn itself had to take a certain degree of "caution" now. Darlanis' agents are "competent", whatever you think of Darlanis herself. I don't think that big blonde is that "quick witted", but she is quite "competent" if you give her a chance to be so! It was our plan to hoist an Imperial flag, pose as one of these ships coming down from Sarn, and "hope for the best" in getting out after we now set fire to the Athena there in Trella's harbor!

"Almost perfect copies, although the sail plan is slightly 'different' from what I've heard," the Queen of Dularn answered.

"What's the minimum crew you need to work the ship?" Carol asked, bending over the map, her body heavily perfumed, I noted. I had to "smile" to myself, as the perfume was one often used by slave girls. Carol on the other hand is a totally female woman. The sort of a woman who has no "doubts" about herself as a woman.

"A dozen, I'd suppose," Maris answered, a puzzled note in her voice. Carol glanced up at me, "nodded" in reply to my own.

"We land a force here, behind the northern fort," I said, pointing to the sketch. "A force of about sixty should do it." The Imperials would number about a hundred. With the element of surprise on our side I thought it would be "sufficient" for the task. The Imperial forces, from what Maris had told me, would be easy to "surprise" as no one would ever believe that a single enemy ship would ever try to enter into a harbor like Trella's.

"There is a problem," Maris said, looking down at the map.

"What's that?" my wife asked as she stood beside me.

"I worry about the wind," Maris then answered softly.

"It seems strong enough," I said, feeling the ship roll.

"Coming `out' of Trella I have to sail right straight into it," the Queen explained, "And you're leaving me with less than a quarter of mile of `room' to exit without coming under fire from that other fort." I glanced at Carol, saw her nod back in reply. Maris would have to tack the North Star back and forth, and in such a confined area that she would have no room for any error!

"How big a crew would we need to sail the Athena out?" I asked her then. There would probably be only an "anchor watch" aboard the Imperial first rate, and a couple dozen men could handle a ship like the Athena without trouble even in Trella's bay! A sudden knock on the cabin door putting a halt to everything!!! *****

"We're quite a ways `out' from Trella, your ladyship," the captain's voice came out of the darkness as Lady Sanda Talen nodded back. Her own personal yacht, a lithe vessel some forty feet in length, taking the long rolling swells with a competent ease.

"You're as `safe' here as in bed with your slut," Lady Sanda laughed back, the captain's slave girl a provocative sensual gal. One could see the flashing light of Trella's lighthouse there on the horizon, the cloudy sky now giving a "hint" of rain to come. She had been a bit "nervous" about things ever after Lorraine had told her what she had, and Sanda had thought that a short sail to relax her might be just the ticket before retiring for the night. Ease the "tensions" she'd been under over everything lately here.

"Something small, moving fast," Maris spoke, lowering the night glass. I could see nothing but a pair of ship's running lights of the sort that small vessels lit when sailing at night.

"We could use `information'," Carol spoke in level tones.

"General quarters, wind up the ballistae," Maris spoke.

"Against `that'?" Carol now laughed there in the darkness.

"It may be necessary to `convince' them to heave to," Maris answered, her hair a "paleness" there in the darkness beside me.

"Something out there," Lady Sanda's captain spoke, straining his eyes into the night. The Prime Minister standing beside him. Suddenly she didn't feel so "safe" anymore. She recalled seeing slave girls sold. Thought of what it would be like to stand naked on the "block" in some Dularnian slave market and be "sold"!

"Take us back to Trella," Sanda snapped, "nervous" now! The man at the helm spinning the wheel as something "big" came racing out of the darkness towards them. There was a ripping noise as something shot through the mainsail! The other ship a black terrible monster there in the darkness compared to her own !

"A Lys Dammed Fucking Dulie!" the captain muttered in fear!

"Ahoy There!" Sanda heard the Dularnian hail! "Heave To!"

"Run for it!" Lady Sanda snapped, drawing her sword. The captain shrinking back, the two sailors cowering down on deck! A flurry of missiles slammed into the hull of her yacht with thuds!

"I'm not dying for any woman!" the captain yelled, grabbing the wheel, crying out in agony as Sanda's sword drove deep into his body! The Prime Minister of Trelandar taking the wheel herself, turning, and keeping the Dularnian enemy straight astern!

Chapter Thirty Six

"Making a run for it," Maris spoke. We had all witnessed the scene there on the little yacht's deck. There was something strangely "familiar" about the woman now fleeing us, although in the darkness it was impossible to tell just who she actually was. That she was an Imperial "Lady" was obvious from her fine attire visible there in the little yacht's own helm and running lights.

"Got `guts'," Carol spoke, the North Star's forward ballistae firing with a thud, putting another bolt into the now doubtlessly sinking yacht! "And a `head' on her shoulders too," my wife added, more I now think to herself than to Maris or me then. The woman doing the best she could to prolong the final outcome. Men setting the topsails up there in the darkness, working by feel, the North Star heeling a bit, smashing through the waves!

"Catapults!" Maris snapped, the North Star's catapults firing this time, the little yacht's foresail now flapping uselessly as one of the shot hit a "vulnerable" spot. Even although it had "slowed" the little yacht, the woman was still yet fleeing us!!! The little vessel was "fast", its main mast tall, the hull slim, well designed for speed. The woman herself obviously competent!!

We were chasing the yacht around in a circle, the North Star to the port of the other vessel, the yacht being "handier" than even the North Star in such a "contest" as this. We were faster, of course, but so far Maris had not given orders to fire at anything but the hull of the other vessel, or the woman who now so courageously fled us would have been a riddled corpse by now!

It was like some "nightmare" from which she could not awake. Sanda could see the big Dularnian there just to port a bit astern as it continued to fire upon her. The fact that the bolts were aimed low left no doubts in her mind that they "wanted" her! And as a slave girl too, no doubt, Lady Sanda Talen knew fully well! And the way that her yacht now sailed left no doubt that it was sinking underneath her from the enemy ship's broadside! A dozen ballistae bolts having pierced her hull, driving right on through her vessel to protrude into the sea on the other side! The dead captain at her feet a grinning corpse she paid hardly any notice! The two sailors of her crew cowering there at the foot of the mast, both useless cowards who refused to even assist their Lady! The damaged foresail making the yacht pull to windward, hard to handle. The big Dularnian threemaster behind her well handled!

"Prepare to grapple!" Maris snapped, the North Star coming about, a dozen men there at the rail ready to throw the grappling hooks that would mean the end of this brave Imperial woman's hopeless attempt to outsail the North Star in a private yacht! I felt Carol's hand grasp my arm, saw the woman there on the

other vessel slash her yard rope with her sword and stand there facing us, her long slim blade gleaming there in the light of the lamps! One woman standing against the entire crew of a second rate ship! One against some ninety! I thought then of Lorraine, of Darlanis. I understood then the true meaning of "courage" as never before. She did not wear the black of the Warriress, but none of that caste could have been braver than this Imperial Lady!!!!

The impact was sudden, jarring, almost throwing Sanda from her feet. She had seen the name of the other ship, painted there on its bow. The terror clutching at her heart as she knew who would be in command! The one woman who had every reason in the world to hate her for what she had once done there years ago now! The North Star's grapples holding her sinking yacht helpless as a beautiful blonde haired woman, one she knew well from the past, now jumped down on to her deck, her own sword yet in her sheath! Maris Marn, the Queen of Dularn, who she had once "wronged" long ago when Maris had been but a slave girl and she the major domo!

"Wonder where the North Star is now?" one of the officers on the quarterdeck ventured to another as Janice Hill stared out to sea. Into the darkness, keeping her own thoughts to herself now.

"If I was them, I wouldn't even want to be on that ship when the Warlady catches up with them," the other officer now laughed. Janice smiling to herself at the words. At least she didn't have to worry about "morale". Apparently everyone thought that as long as they had Lorraine herself aboard "victory" was assured!!! *****

"Draw," Sanda wept, knowing the fate that Maris no doubt had in mind for her. Whether or not she would be a "match" for the Queen of Dularn mattered little here as death would be preferred to the sort of a fate that no doubt Maris would have in mind now!

"Perhaps 'another time', Mrs. Talen," Maris Marn spoke then. "But for now I only ask that you come aboard as my honored guest." Sanda sheathed her sword, wondering what Maris "wanted"!

"I believe you have met Bob and Carol Simmons," Maris spoke, "introducing" us again to the famous Prime Minister of Trelandar.

"I see that a Scribe can be as brave as a Warriress," my wife smiled, Lady Sanda nodding, her "nervousness" now obvious. We had taken aboard the two sailors, cast off from the sinking yacht, the North Star only half a dozen miles from Trella now as Carol and I followed Maris and Sanda down to her own stern cabin.

"I don't think I've ever been so 'scared'," Sanda admitted.

"I wouldn't mind having you on 'our side'," Maris added as La- rapoured wine and made herself otherwise "useful" to us now.

"I thought you'd be long gone from here now that Lorraine.....," Sanda answered, perhaps not "thinking" right here.

"And what has Lorraine done?" Maris asked as we sat there in the captain's cabin of the North Star. Her eyes burning hot into the darkness of Sanda's. I saw Sanda swallow nervously in turn!

"I suppose you'll learn eventually," Sanda spoke softly, looking down at her hands, at the drink she held there in them.

"Lorraine's already set sail in the Athena," I ventured.

"I will `do' for you what I can if you will surrender now," Sanda spoke, looking up. "Lorraine will `listen' to me, I know. There are many here in Trelandar who consider your cause `just'." I was well aware that many in Trelandar had no love for Darlanis and that Sanda was one of them. No doubt with good cause here...

"You once `abused' a slave girl placed in your power," Maris spoke in level tones. "You terrified her, made her think that.."Sanda nodding, holding Maris' eyes with her own. I recalled what Lorraine had written. Sanda had been "jealous" of Maris. It had, I supposed, been the sort of a thing meant more to "scare" than anything else. A kind of "practical joke" in a way, I feel.

"Lorraine did look like `one'," Sanda spoke softly in reply.

"You knew how I felt about such things," Maris snapped back. Carol sitting there beside me looked baffled. She had not read the books as carefully as I had. It had been a "nasty" trick. I supposed on the other hand there were a lot of women who would have done the same thing given the same circumstances. Sanda had been the major domo on the estate. Maris had been a slave girl. Sanda is a good looking woman, but not a "beautiful" one like Maris. I don't think Sanda ever realized what Maris might do then.

"You were `blonde', `beautiful'," Sanda spoke softly back.

"It is something that any woman might do," I said then, putting my arm around Carol. I knew of what Carol had said to Maris in the hold of the Cleolantis. The Queen had told me the whole tale there when we had been captives on Lorraine's estate. I did not think Sanda was really "guilty" of all that much. It had been, I supposed, a "nasty trick" to pull on a helpless slave girl, but one I also felt that I could "understand" such a woman doing too!

"She is a brave woman," Carol said to the Queen of Dularn. There was that in my wife's voice that left no "doubts" either!!!

"I will put you ashore in the morning under a flag of truce," the golden haired Queen of Dularn then told Lady Sanda. "I don't think a slave girl's collar would be `fitting' for one so brave and courageous as you," Maris added, giving Sanda a warm smile. I suspected that a certain old "hatred" had been buried.

"Lorraine has a new sort of crossbow or ballista that fires very rapidly," Lady Sanda said. "There is also some sort of `shielding' for the crew," she added, "That can be raised up as needed to protect those on deck from the missiles of an `enemy'".

"Machine guns and armor plate," I smiled, glancing at Sanda. She was of the Scribes, an educated woman who would know of such.

"Such a ship would be quite `heavy'," Maris now smiled back.

"It would be `best' if a `ransom' was paid for me," Sanda said. "Otherwise people might `wonder' a bit about things here."

The morning sun was just rising there over Trella when the North Star swung up into the wind just out of ballistae shot, the small galley with the truce flag there waiting for us. I watched Maris give Sanda an

affectionate hug before the Prime Minister of Trelandar then climbed down into the waiting boat. It took little time to transfer the supplies we had requested as Sanda's "ransom". Enough fresh and preserved food to see us safely home even if we took a month or so to get there. Such being necessary to avoid crossing paths with Lorraine out there hunting for us!!!

"There is something to be said for Scribes," Maris smiled as the North Star now filled its sails and headed back out to sea. I suspected that Lady Sanda might be a "friend" useful to us now. Maris had signed an "agreement" with Sanda which would no doubt "infuriate" both Lorraine and Darlanis had they known of it now! Dularn would no longer make war upon Trelandarian shipping. In return Trelandar would provide "safe harbor" for Dularnian ships. Lorraine could of course "override" such an "agreement", but it would be "embarrassing" for her to do so as Maris had assured Sanda that no Dularnian ship would now attack Trelandarian ships!

"We're going to have to hunt down our own ships now and tell them that Trelandarian ships are no longer 'fair game'," Carol noted, the sailing plans of such vessels being kept secret in a way that even Maris herself didn't really know where they were!

"The only other ship in this area is the North Wind, and I think Miles (captain Miles Larson from Tvois) knows my 'hand'," I heard Maris smile back. Copies of the agreement would be carried on all Trelandarian ships to be presented to any raider captain.

While this "agreement" did help considerably, it also presented the "problem" that there were a number of "pirates" operating in these waters who would fly the flag of either side as they saw fit. These of course didn't care "who" they "attacked"! These pirates appear to be under the control of Princess Tara, of whom it may be said that she is truly "THE PRINCESS OF DARKNESS"!

While in Lorraine's book (and Darlanis' too) it is claimed that Maris had a number of "privateers" in operation, the truth here is that Maris only had two in operation, these being the "ANISE", which was taken by an Imperial second rate off Sarn, and the "POLARIS", which discontinued operations shortly after learning of the agreement between Maris and Lady Sanda of Trelandar. The other ships attributed to Dularn by Imperial writers were all pirate vessels flying the flag of Dularn or that of the Empire as they saw fit. It should also be noted here that the Empire also had a number of "privateers" of their own, many of who were little more than "pirates", there being evidence now that many of Princess Tara's organization actually "hired out" to the Empire of California as "privateers" so that they might be "legal". It should be noted here that the Empire suffers from being a feudalistic society with a weak central government, many of the Lords and Ladies of the Empire being almost little "kings" and "queens" in their own right. I refer the reader here to Lorraine's first book where she notes this in passing, although she does not go into detail here. You might note however, her own activities did indicate that as a "Lady" she had considerable "power" over the people who lived in the hundreds of square miles she then ruled! The fact that she also maintained a warship of her own (the Squala) indicates that a High Lady like Lorraine actually did have the power to engage in some military operations all upon her own!

Chapter Thirty Six

"Making a run for it," Maris spoke. We had all witnessed the scene there on the little yacht's deck. There was something strangely "familiar" about the woman now fleeing us, although in the darkness it was impossible to tell just who she actually was. That she was an Imperial "Lady" was obvious from her fine

attire visible there in the little yacht's own helm and running lights.

"Got `guts'," Carol spoke, the North Star's forward ballistae firing with a thud, putting another bolt into the now doubtlessly sinking yacht! "And a `head' on her shoulders too," my wife added, more I now think to herself than to Maris or me then. The woman doing the best she could to prolong the final outcome. Men setting the topsails up there in the darkness, working by feel, the North Star heeling a bit, smashing through the waves!

"Catapults!" Maris snapped, the North Star's catapults firing this time, the little yacht's foresail now flapping uselessly as one of the shot hit a "vulnerable" spot. Even although it had "slowed" the little yacht, the woman was still yet fleeing us!!! The little vessel was "fast", its main mast tall, the hull slim, well designed for speed. The woman herself obviously competent!!

We were chasing the yacht around in a circle, the North Star to the port of the other vessel, the yacht being "handier" than even the North Star in such a "contest" as this. We were faster, of course, but so far Maris had not given orders to fire at anything but the hull of the other vessel, or the woman who now so courageously fled us would have been a riddled corpse by now!

It was like some "nightmare" from which she could not awake. Sanda could see the big Dularnian there just to port a bit astern as it continued to fire upon her. The fact that the bolts were aimed low left no doubts in her mind that they "wanted" her! And as a slave girl too, no doubt, Lady Sanda Talen knew fully well! And the way that her yacht now sailed left no doubt that it was sinking underneath her from the enemy ship's broadside! A dozen ballistae bolts having pierced her hull, driving right on through her vessel to protrude into the sea on the other side! The dead captain at her feet a grinning corpse she paid hardly any notice! The two sailors of her crew cowering there at the foot of the mast, both useless cowards who refused to even assist their Lady! The damaged foresail making the yacht pull to windward, hard to handle. The big Dularnian threemaster behind her well handled!

"Prepare to grapple!" Maris snapped, the North Star coming about, a dozen men there at the rail ready to throw the grappling hooks that would mean the end of this brave Imperial woman's hopeless attempt to outsail the North Star in a private yacht! I felt Carol's hand grasp my arm, saw the woman there on the other vessel slash her yard rope with her sword and stand there facing us, her long slim blade gleaming there in the light of the lamps! One woman standing against the entire crew of a second rate ship! One against some ninety! I thought then of Lorraine, of Darlanis. I understood then the true meaning of "courage" as never before. She did not wear the black of the Warriress, but none of that caste could have been braver than this Imperial Lady!!!!

The impact was sudden, jarring, almost throwing Sanda from her feet. She had seen the name of the other ship, painted there on its bow. The terror clutching at her heart as she knew who would be in command! The one woman who had every reason in the world to hate her for what she had once done there years ago now! The North Star's grapples holding her sinking yacht helpless as a beautiful blonde haired woman, one she knew well from the past, now jumped down on to her deck, her own sword yet in her sheath! Maris Marn, the Queen of Dularn, who she had once "wronged" long ago when Maris had been but a slave girl and she the major domo!

"Wonder where the North Star is now?" one of the officers on the quarterdeck ventured to another as Janice Hill stared out to sea. Into the darkness, keeping her own thoughts to herself now.

"If I was them, I wouldn't even want to be on that ship when the Warlady catches up with them," the other officer now laughed. Janice smiling to herself at the words. At least she didn't have to worry about

"morale". Apparently everyone thought that as long as they had Lorraine herself aboard "victory" was assured!!! *****

"Draw," Sanda wept, knowing the fate that Maris no doubt had in mind for her. Whether or not she would be a "match" for the Queen of Dularn mattered little here as death would be preferred to the sort of a fate that no doubt Maris would have in mind now!

"Perhaps 'another time', Mrs. Talen," Maris Marn spoke then. "But for now I only ask that you come aboard as my honored guest." Sanda sheathed her sword, wondering what Maris "wanted"!

"I believe you have met Bob and Carol Simmons," Maris spoke, "introducing" us again to the famous Prime Minister of Trelandar.

"I see that a Scribe can be as brave as a Warriress," my wife smiled, Lady Sanda nodding, her "nervousness" now obvious. We had taken aboard the two sailors, cast off from the sinking yacht, the North Star only half a dozen miles from Trella now as Carol and I followed Maris and Sanda down to her own stern cabin.

"I don't think I've ever been so 'scared'," Sanda admitted.

"I wouldn't mind having you on 'our side'," Maris added as La- rapoured wine and made herself otherwise "useful" to us now.

"I thought you'd be long gone from here now that Lorraine.....," Sanda answered, perhaps not "thinking" right here.

"And what has Lorraine done?" Maris asked as we sat there in the captain's cabin of the North Star. Her eyes burning hot into the darkness of Sanda's. I saw Sanda swallow nervously in turn!

"I suppose you'll learn eventually," Sanda spoke softly, looking down at her hands, at the drink she held there in them.

"Lorraine's already set sail in the Athena," I ventured.

"I will 'do' for you what I can if you will surrender now," Sanda spoke, looking up. "Lorraine will 'listen' to me, I know. There are many here in Trelandar who consider your cause 'just'." I was well aware that many in Trelandar had no love for Darlanis and that Sanda was one of them. No doubt with good cause here...

"You once 'abused' a slave girl placed in your power," Maris spoke in level tones. "You terrified her, made her think that.." Sanda nodding, holding Maris' eyes with her own. I recalled what Lorraine had written. Sanda had been "jealous" of Maris. It had, I supposed, been the sort of a thing meant more to "scare" than anything else. A kind of "practical joke" in a way, I feel.

"Lorraine did look like 'one'," Sanda spoke softly in reply.

"You knew how I felt about such things," Maris snapped back. Carol sitting there beside me looked baffled. She had not read the books as carefully as I had. It had been a "nasty" trick. I supposed on the other hand there were a lot of women who would have done the same thing given the same circumstances. Sanda had been the major domo on the estate. Maris had been a slave girl. Sanda is a good looking woman, but not a "beautiful" one like Maris. I don't think Sanda ever realized what Maris

might do then.

"You were 'blonde', 'beautiful'," Sanda spoke softly back.

"It is something that any woman might do," I said then, putting my arm around Carol. I knew of what Carol had said to Maris in the hold of the Cleolantis. The Queen had told me the whole tale there when we had been captives on Lorraine's estate. I did not think Sanda was really "guilty" of all that much. It had been, I supposed, a "nasty trick" to pull on a helpless slave girl, but one I also felt that I could "understand" such a woman doing too!

"She is a brave woman," Carol said to the Queen of Dularn. There was that in my wife's voice that left no "doubts" either!!!

"I will put you ashore in the morning under a flag of truce," the golden haired Queen of Dularn then told Lady Sanda. "I don't think a slave girl's collar would be 'fitting' for one so brave and courageous as you," Maris added, giving Sanda a warm smile. I suspected that a certain old "hatred" had been buried.

"Lorraine has a new sort of crossbow or ballista that fires very rapidly," Lady Sanda said. "There is also some sort of 'shielding' for the crew," she added, "That can be raised up as needed to protect those on deck from the missiles of an 'enemy'".

"Machine guns and armor plate," I smiled, glancing at Sanda. She was of the Scribes, an educated woman who would know of such.

"Such a ship would be quite 'heavy'," Maris now smiled back.

"It would be 'best' if a 'ransom' was paid for me," Sanda said. "Otherwise people might 'wonder' a bit about things here."

The morning sun was just rising there over Trella when the North Star swung up into the wind just out of ballistae shot, the small galley with the truce flag there waiting for us. I watched Maris give Sanda an affectionate hug before the Prime Minister of Trelandar then climbed down into the waiting boat. It took little time to transfer the supplies we had requested as Sanda's "ransom". Enough fresh and preserved food to see us safely home even if we took a month or so to get there. Such being necessary to avoid crossing paths with Lorraine out there hunting for us!!!

"There is something to be said for Scribes," Maris smiled as the North Star now filled its sails and headed back out to sea. I suspected that Lady Sanda might be a "friend" useful to us now. Maris had signed an "agreement" with Sanda which would no doubt "infuriate" both Lorraine and Darlanis had they known of it now! Dularn would no longer make war upon Trelandarian shipping. In return Trelandar would provide "safe harbor" for Dularnian ships. Lorraine could of course "override" such an "agreement", but it would be "embarrassing" for her to do so as Maris had assured Sanda that no Dularnian ship would now attack Trelandarian ships!

"We're going to have to hunt down our own ships now and tell them that Trelandarian ships are no longer 'fair game'," Carol noted, the sailing plans of such vessels being kept secret in a way that even Maris herself didn't really know where they were!

"The only other ship in this area is the North Wind, and I think Miles (captain Miles Larson from Tvois) knows my 'hand'," I heard Maris smile back. Copies of the agreement would be carried on all Trelandarian ships to be presented to any raider captain.

While this "agreement" did help considerably, it also presented the "problem" that there were a number of "pirates" operating in these waters who would fly the flag of either side as they saw fit. These of course didn't care "who" they "attacked"! These pirates appear to be under the control of Princess Tara, of whom it may be said that she is truly "THE PRINCESS OF DARKNESS"!

While in Lorraine's book (and Darlanis' too) it is claimed that Maris had a number of "privateers" in operation, the truth here is that Maris only had two in operation, these being the "ANISE", which was taken by an Imperial second rate off Sarn, and the "POLARIS", which discontinued operations shortly after learning of the agreement between Maris and Lady Sanda of Trelandar. The other ships attributed to Dularn by Imperial writers were all pirate vessels flying the flag of Dularn or that of the Empire as they saw fit. It should also be noted here that the Empire also had a number of "privateers" of their own, many of who were little more than "pirates", there being evidence now that many of Princess Tara's organization actually "hired out" to the Empire of California as "privateers" so that they might be "legal". It should be noted here that the Empire suffers from being a feudalistic society with a weak central government, many of the Lords and Ladies of the Empire being almost little "kings" and "queens" in their own right. I refer the reader here to Lorraine's first book where she notes this in passing, although she does not go into detail here. You might note however, her own activities did indicate that as a "Lady" she had considerable "power" over the people who lived in the hundreds of square miles she then ruled! The fact that she also maintained a warship of her own (the Squala) indicates that a High Lady like Lorraine actually did have the power to engage in some military operations all upon her own!

Chapter Thirty Eight

"Back home, I always used to 'dream' about leading a life of 'adventure'," I said to Carol as we lent a hand in tautening the rigging. The North Star smashing through the waves with everyone looking nervously at Maris standing there at the wheel. She was driving the ship "hard". Putting far more "strain" on it than any reasonable captain would do save in the most dire emergency. The Swiftstar had once been Maris' own flagship before pirates working for Princess Tara took it with the help of the late Darl Jord. It was "fast", "handy", perhaps even "superior" to ours although we would "outgun" it some due to our superior armaments! It also had under the command of Princess Tara managed to keep ahead of the Corsica under the command of Lorraine herself for a period of about three and half days, finally eluding the Warlady in a great storm that resulted in the loss of Corsica's main mast due to Lorraine's eagerness to "close" with her own arch-enemy...

"And?" Carol asked, twisting the belaying pin, her foot braced against the railing. A bit of spray shooting up to wet us both. I wondered if the North Star was the "match" of Swiftstar? The Swiftstar was the fastest, "handiest" ship that Dularn could build. Smaller than the North Star, it might still be the faster even with the changes that Maris had made in her own ship's rig.

"I'd love to be sitting at the kitchen table drinking coffee and watching you peeling vegetables in one of those buckskin bikinis of yours," I smiled back. Carol usually wearing very little around the house, more to "tease" than anything else, I might note here. The sort of a woman who never left one any "doubts". I was getting "tired" of war, of fighting for a cause that seemed "hopeless"! Of fighting against a woman I had once much admired! That was before I had learned just what my wife was really like!!

"I wonder if Tais could send us back home after all this is over," Carol answered softly, glancing at

Maris standing there as I secured things. The taut rigging singing in the breeze now as the North Star smashed through the waves towards the Swiftstar.

"She'd have to erase our memories," I pointed out to Carol.

"I wouldn't `want' that," my wife answered. I "understood". Carol was no longer the "playmate" she'd been back in our time. We had once stood together back to back in the arena at Trella. I could still hear the "roar" of the crowd, feel the heat of the hot summer sun on my naked shoulders, the sand beneath my feet...

"You've `proved' yourself in a way no woman `could' back in our own time," I said, seeing Carol nod back in the affirmative. That, I think, had been a "flaw" in our "Western Civilization".

"I'm `more' than just a `housewife' here," she replied.

"And `more' than just a `playmate'," I smiled back.

"What sort of `armament' does that clipper carry?" I asked, joining the Queen of Dularn there on the quarterdeck, Carol at my side. Closer to it now one could see how "big" the ship was. I guessed it at around a hundred and fifty feet in length, the masts perhaps a hundred feet or more. It carried top-gallants, sails no schooner carried, and the way that it tore through the water left no doubts that it probably could outrun us with ease!

"A dozen small ballistae a side," Maris smiled back at me. While it was not a "match" for the handier North Star in a fight, it could defend itself against most pirate vessels if it had to.

"Why do you build schooners when you could have something like that?" Carol asked. My wife is not "nautical" as such. She is a good Warlady. An excellent fighting woman. But no sailor!

"The North Star could sail circles around it in a fight," I pointed out to my wife. The Queen of Dularn nodding to affirm.

"They used square riggers back in the past," Carol replied.

"The cannon of that era considerably `outranged' the weapons of today," I pointed out. "Such battles were fought broadside to broadside as their ships had but limited abilities to maneuver." * * One reads here of ship to ship battles fought at distances so close you could almost reach out and touch the other ship. While the maximum range of the largest cannon of that era was about three miles in theory, the "effective range" was probably little more than half a mile due to the inaccuracy of the weapon. (J.B.)

"Now `seamanship' counts for more," Maris smiled at my wife, the two ships only a couple miles off now. I wondered what the captain of the clipper thought of all this. The "identity" of the North Star was not hard to determine due to its rig. He could run, but only if forced would he fight. Even the Swiftstar probably outgunned him, and there could no doubts about the bigger North Star doing so! I should perhaps mention here that both the Swiftstar and the North Star (the same is true of the North Wind and also of the late North Land destroyed in 2566) are of a "design" that Maris herself worked on. She is "blonde", "beautiful", but she also has a "head" on her shoulders, I should note.

"Signal from the clipper, your majesty," captain Valerie Dunn spoke, the azure eyes of her Imperial Highness meeting hers. Darlanis had "baited a trap". Now they had to find the "mouse"! Two days before

the Swiftstar had been "trapped" in a small cove south of Sarn by an Imperial galley and had surrendered without a fight, the crew fleeing into the forest to escape the noose! With Valerie Dunn at her side and Sharon as co-pilot to fly the plane back, the Empress had taken command of the captured pirate, it being her intention to capture the North Star herself and thus avenge the blow to her injured pride by the loss of Sarnian Lady! Lorraine's new system of "telegraph" stations along the coast now allowing such messages to travel the length of the Empire in less than a day. It was, Darlanis mused, at least something that the "enemy" didn't know about, or if they did, could do much about! A bit of "technology" the Priestesses of Lys had not objected to.

"It is the North Star?" Darlanis asked, now standing up, the golden mesh of her attire giving her a "look" like none other as the light from the stern windows outlined her against its glare. The tall Empress a woman that anyone might admire, Valerie knew.

"A 'North' class, anyway," Valerie smiled back. She "wanted" the North Star as bad as Darlanis did, but for other reasons!

"Going to be a 'nasty fight' too if it is," Darlanis smiled.

"I won't 'fail' you," Valerie promised. She had shared much with the tall golden haired Empress since they'd left the estate. For a moment she thought of that little baby girl in Sarn. The one that the Nevada slave girl Pussycat had borne for this woman! A girl who someday Darlanis believed would be "Domino Tremaine", the last ruler of Earth before The War Between Earth and Mars.

"Maris Marn is 'tricky', and that 'Carol' is vicious," the Empress answered. "But we have a better ship, and a good crew."

"And you to 'inspire' us all," Valerie spoke, drawing her sword, handing it hilt first to the Empress. Darlanis kissed it, and handed it back. Such is "meaningful" among the Warriresses.

"Something 'funny' about that," Carol said, looking at the clipper and the Swiftstar apparently chasing it a mile or so back from the big square rigger. "That's just too heavily armed for a pirate to want to tackle." I glanced at Maris, saw her nod back!

"BattleStations!" Maris snapped. "Wind up and load darts!"

"Look!" Carol breathed, the Swiftstar suddenly now turning!

"I will trouble you, Valerie, to run up a proper flag," Darlanis said with a smile, lowering the telescope. "And it would be wise to ask Lys for her 'blessing' as we are going to be in 'harms way' very shortly now," the Empress added with a smile as Valerie stood beside her there on the glistening quarterdeck. A young midshipman there on the quarterdeck with them staring in awe at Darlanis until an order from his captain snapped him back out of his fantasy of what Darlanis might look like sans clothes!

"That's not an Imperial flag!" I breathed, seeing it hoisted there, the Swiftstar now racing towards us, raising her battle flags. The memories flooding back, as suddenly I now remembered! The flag was the same one that had once flown over Sarnian Lady!

"Darlanis!" Maris spoke, almost in awe! Sharon's "She-Ra!"

"Like a bad penny!" Carol muttered in a low growl beside me.

"She's not likely to be in 'command' this time," Maris said. We would be facing one of Lorraine's best captains. Perhaps Mark Berson of the Squala, or Valerie Dunn of the Corsica. I suspected that it would be Valerie Dunn. Darlanis was from Dularn, as was Valerie in a way. The fighting women of this era tend to be a "clannish" bunch. Valerie had done well under Lorraine. How well she would do without Lorraine's guidance however was another question. From what we had learned earlier from Sanda Talen, Jon Richards had gone with Lorraine aboard the Athena. Maris had said that his skills at "command" were a "match" for hers. Maris had also told me once that she felt that Lorraine was more than a "match" for her, although I suspected myself that it was more Maris' own lack of self confidence here at play than anything else.

"They are 'handier'," Maris said to me. I nodded to Carol.

"You are Dularn's 'best'," Carol spoke to her Queen then.

"I do have a 'reputation' to live up to," Maris smiled.

"It will be a battle of 'wits', not 'firepower'," Valerie Dunn said, standing beside the magnificent tall golden Darlanis. The Empress' long dark blue silken cape blowing in the breeze. The polished gold of her tiara glistening there in the sunlight.

"I have 'trust' in you," Darlanis answered, touching her.

"Reef up those topsails!" Valerie yelled up at the men.

"It is a lovely day," Darlanis observed with a smile.

"If you say so, your majesty," Valerie answered back.

"'Steel is a Warriress' best friend'," Darlanis said.

"'And the death-cry of a foeman is music in her ears'," Valerie smiled back, recalling the many codes of her martial Caste. *****

"You will stand at my side," Maris said to me. Carol would be in command of the ship's weaponry with Anis and Sandi helping her. Lars would command the bow and that very important jib that I had used earlier. I thought it a wise choice for battle. I had learned much from Maris of the command of a ship. The balance of the wind up against the sails, the pressure of the waves. The "vector of forces" of which Lorraine has written elsewhere. A sailing ship is "alive" in a way no "powered" vessel ever is...

"The Swiftstar is taking in sail," I observed. That was part of my duties as first officer to keep Maris informed of such matters. To add my eyes to hers. To follow her orders, to take "command" if she fell in battle. I felt "confident" now of the ship, of what it could do. Of those who sailed her into battle.

Chapter Thirty Nine

"They aren't 'shortening sail'," Darlanis spoke to Valerie Dunn, lowering her telescope. For an instant Valerie's face appeared horribly to be that of a grinning skull as the captain looked at her, then it was "normal" once again. The Empress shuddering to herself, well aware of what such "visions" might imply. She was not a "civilized" woman like we of the 20th Century are. Not a woman who "had an 'answer' for everything". To her there were things that "couldn't be explained", but yet could be "understood". She "knew" then that Valerie Dunn was to die!!!

"Maris has always been 'reckless'," Valerie answered back. "A woman 'driven' by her own 'demons'," the red head smiled then. She was well aware of the "rumors" that were spoken about Maris.

"Or by that 'bitch' from Lorraine's time," Darlanis said... That damm "Carol Simmons" who had made so much "trouble" for everyone. "Lorraine should have killed her, saved us all trouble!"

"A cautious woman, that one," Maris said to me as I stood there beside her. I had "confidence" in Maris. On land she hadn't seemed all that "impressive", but here at sea she had proved to us all her own fighting abilities, and abilities to command!

"'Know' much about her?" I asked. The Celestron had left no doubt that Darlanis had Valerie Dunn in command of the Swiftstar. That fiery red hair had been a dead giveaway! Valerie had impressed me as being a competent and capable commander. Perhaps a bit more "conservative" than someone like Maris or Lorraine, but yet a capable, "competent" woman who would be a worthy opponent! She had a "reputation", although nothing like that of Maris Marn.

"I'm 'better'," Maris answered, giving me a smile. I saw Carol there by the mainmast, giving orders to Anis and Sandi. I had no "worries" on that score. In a fight there is but one woman who could possibly match Carol, and she was hopefully far away right now. I did not think Darlanis should have "tried this". I did not think she had made a "wise choice" here. Not against the North Star under the command of Maris Marn, the Queen of Dularn! Not against the finest sailor that has ever sailed under the maple leaf flag of Dularn! I once told Maris what that "flag" actually had stood for back in the 20th Century. Dularn does make "claims" of its own here in northern North America. Such are, of course, no more "valid" than those of California to the south. There is no longer a "Canada" or a "United States of America". I suppose, of course, that there are "memories" yet of such things. Dularn, unlike the Empire, looks to a "time" before Janet Rogers.

"Anis," Carol said, looking into the woman's dark eyes. A nod, a smile, much then left "unspoken". She would carry out the orders given her. She would live up to the confidence that Carol had placed in her. "My trust is in you," the Warlady now smiled.

"'Freedom' is worth fighting for," Sandi spoke then in turn. The brownette nodded. There was no doubt of what their fate would be should they fall into the hands of California's Empress. There were no "Geneva Conventions" here now in the 26th Century.

"What is your own plan of attack?" Darlanis asked Valerie, standing there, the bright rays of the sun glistening off her golden attire. Off the precious jewels of her tiara that marked her as the Empress of California. A few clouds like puffs of cotton slowly drifting to the east there in the azure blue above. A fresh cooling breeze from the west brought the odor of the sea.

"We have superior speed, perhaps an advantage in maneuver, while she has the heavier firepower if we close with her," Valerie answered, lowering the telescope she'd been using just then. Swiftstar mounted the older style ballistae, weapons that shot a heavier bolt, but not as far as the newer Dularnian weapons did. In combat they would be outranged by about a hundred yards now.

"It would be wise then," Darlanis smiled, "Not to 'close' until we are ready to fire our broadside." Valerie nodding back.

"The wind is in her favor," Valerie pointed out then to her.

"I assume that there are certain actions that can be taken," the Empress answered, secretly wishing now that she had Lorraine standing there on the quarterdeck with her than this woman. The Warlady was "crafty", a real "bitch" when it came to fighting. Valerie was "competent", but not in the same class as Lorraine...

"Our ballistae are inferior in range to their's," Valerie spoke, well aware that she was not Lorraine despite her own experience. The Warlady would have doubtless had some "trick" up her sleeve. At the time Lorraine had fought Maris the "edge" in weaponry had been on Lorraine's side although the North Star had enjoyed a total greater firepower due to its more numerous weapons. Now they were both outgunned and out ranged by the Dularnian raider. "We are, however, both a bit 'faster' and 'handier'."

"Their crew will be 'larger'," Darlanis pointed out then. A thought going through her mind of the weapon she had used there in Deimos when the Women had won their freedom from the Lorr. A weapon much like the military rifles of the 21st Century, but firing highly explosive bullets at the rate of some ten a second! That was before the Priestesses of Lys had showed their own awesome power and ordered both the Women and the Lorr off the Earth.

"There may be a lack of 'discipline'," Valerie ventured. It was a known fact that a part of the North Star's crew consisted of former slave girls. Women unused to the rigors of "combat"...

"Their 'Warlady' would have seen to that," Darlanis said. She had been an "eye witness" to Carol's abilities at "command".

"A very capable woman, if 'inexperienced'," Valerie smiled. Carol was "crafty", but not truly experienced in the ways of war.

"Who does not 'belong' in this time," Darlanis answered her. She was well aware of the capabilities of the Priestesses of Lys. Of the fact that they were the "masters" of both time and space. Obviously Carol had been brought here to this time to be a counterpart to Lorraine. The Priestesses had selected well, Darlanis thought to herself. On the other hand, if she could "take" the North Star, such a "victory" could alter history in this era now! And with the "rumors" she'd heard about Maris, it was possible...

"A woman with the body of an 'hour', but with the fighting skills of Lorraine herself," Valerie Dunn answered, looking again at the approaching North Star through her telescope, and thus missing the swift frown that passed over her Empress' features...

"We have the better Warlady," Darlanis suddenly now snapped. Valerie intelligent enough not to argue the point with Darlanis!

"What are their 'options'," I asked, seeing Maris' eyes meet mine. In a way she reminded one of

Darlanis, although when I'd seen the two standing side by side there had been much less of a resemblance between the two. Maris was "plump", a "softer" woman than Darlanis. Not "fat" as such, but she didn't have the hard firm taut figure like Carol or the Empress of the Californians. She was also a more "submissive" woman, not as "assertive" as one like Carol. She reminded me a bit of one I'd once known, back in our own time, a woman who I'd once thought highly of before I met my delightful and provocative brunette who meant so much to me!

"Lorraine would swing broadside to us at about three hundred yards and fire a full broadside, then she would continue sailing in a circle until she had made a full 'three sixty'," Maris said.

"We carry a heavier broadside than they do," I pointed out. Our ballistae were also of the new compound type, firing a lighter bolt to a greater distance. Lorraine I knew had such weapons.

"It will be 'easier' for them to turn than it will for us," Maris answered. "They can use the wind more effectively right now to maneuver than we can with it now blowing nearly astern."

"If you change course to north then they will have to come to a parallel course with us," I replied, visualizing the situation and what could be done giving the wind, the distances now... We could let Darlanis do the "work", make her chase us instead!

"Yes, it could be done...," Maris breathed, looking at me.

"Then I suggest we do it," I smiled back at the blonde.

"What in the name of Lysare they doing?" Darlanis muttered, seeing the North Star now changing course, turning towards the north. Valerie already giving orders, the Swiftstar following. Far in the distance now the clipper was coming about, following. The Empress had given her "orders". They would be "followed"...

"Lorraine probably 'educated' Maris last year," she said, well aware that Maris Marn was considered to be Dularn's "best"!! "Maris is now 'forcing' us to fight broadside to broadside if we press the engagement," the red headed captain added for Darlanis. There was no need to mention that they would be "outgunned" too!

"Or perhaps another," Darlanis breathed softly to herself, thinking. Carol probably knew very "little" about sailing ships.

"The man from the past was a 'Warrior' of that era," Valerie said. "I understand he served in his country's military forces. What was called in his era the 'Marines', I believe," she added.

"They were 'selected' for their 'mission' here," Darlanis spoke in reply, more to herself than to Valerie Dunn just then. The Swiftstar was "faster" than the North Star, but not by much. "If we decide to 'engage' it will be broadside to broadside..."

"If this was a 'Squala' class," Valerie muttered softly.

"We will have to 'make do' with what we have," Darlanis smiled back. She was of the Warriresses. If she could gain the deck of the North Star, cold steel might be the deciding factor!

"The Swiftstar is closing up with us," Maris said to me. I was well aware of that "fact". On the other hand we carried a heavier broadside than did the Swiftstar. At distances of less than two hundred and fifty yards our compound bows would be effective. Due to our larger crew we could maintain a heavier rate of fire than could the Swiftstar now, it also appearing as if Darlanis had not "manned" the Swiftstar quite as heavily as she could have done considering the fact that she sailed in "friendly waters" for her with "friendly" ports almost everywhere for supplies. On the other hand many of our "crew" consisted of women, mostly former slave girls who in any hand to hand fight would be no "match" of course for those now aboard the Imperial warship.

"A 'moment' with my wife," I said to the Queen of Dularn.

"It is wise to make one's peace with Lys," Maris smiled.

"How are you doing?" I asked, well aware that Carol had never seen "combat" of this sort. As an ex-Marine I was well aware of what could go through a person's mind at these times. Carol's eyes glowing up into mine as she smiled back, her arms going about me, her lips for a too short brief moment brushing mine...

"I think I also understand the meaning of the words, 'these are times that try men's souls'," she now smiled back at me then. The Swiftstar was only about a mile or so now behind us, I knew.

"You're always more 'scared' before the 'fighting' starts than during it," I answered, recalling my experiences in Vietnam. On the other hand this was not the 20th Century, but the 26th... Carol's beautiful hazel eyes looking up into mine as she nodded.

"It will be a contest of 'seamanship'," she answered back.

"Of 'woman' against 'woman'," I "corrected" with a smile.

"There is only one 'woman' I fear," Carol answered softly.

"Don't underestimate Darlanis," I warned my brownette then.

"I have 'confidence' in Maris," Carol said, "And in you..."

"Hoist more sail, close the 'gap' between us," Darlanis snapped. This was not a sort of "warfare" that she much "liked". Valerie regarded her, well aware that such an action would not be "wise". On the other hand Darlanis was not one that you dared to disobey. Valerie snapped out the orders in a loud voice, watching the men scurrying about the lithe two masted schooner's deck. With so much sail hoisted the Swiftstar would lose some of its maneuverability. And it was such maneuverability that would be the deciding factor in this battle, the red headed captain knew!!

"I think Darlanis has 'taken command'," Maris said to me. The Swiftstar was pulling up fast on us now, the spray from time to time spraying high over her bow. The ship was being driven hard. I wondered then how well the pirates had "maintained" her?

"Consider the possibility of damage to sails and masts," I said to Maris as she stood there swaying with the roll of the ship. I saw her nod, her eyes like azure gems glowing into mine.

"It is doubtful that Darlanis had time for a `refit'," she said thoughtfully. Whatever Darlanis was as a ruler, she was not a competent captain in my opinion, or much of a commanding officer either. She was incredibly brave, almost fearless, but something of a "dumb blonde" in a way when it came to actual battle.

"Perhaps....," Maris mused for a second, then suddenly snapping orders that sent men and women dashing over our decks to hoist up more sail. I knew the "condition" of the North Star. I did not think that the Swiftstar could be driven as hard anymore!

Chapter Forty

"Hoist more sail!" Darlanis snapped, Valerie shaking her head in the negative. She was well aware of the condition of the standing and running rigging, of the FACT that the pirates had not kept the ship up. More strain could damage the ship, leave them almost helpless before the North Star. The three masted raider was obviously even faster than what she believed it was, a match she suspected now even for an Imperial first rate in speed.

"That is an order!" Darlanis snarled, her eyes icy blue with fury! Valerie shuddered as she turned away, gave the orders now. The first officer shaking his head, looking at Darlanis, then he carried out the orders, the men dashing up the rigging to set more sail. The Warriors on the deck watching, tending to their weapons. Some looked up at their beloved Empress standing there. Even they understood that the ship could not stand more sail now.

"Swiftstar is hoisting more sail," Maris said to me in level tones. We were driving the North Star hard, the ship pounding in the seas. The spray was leaping up over the bow with every wave we smashed into. I reached out, clasping some of the rigging. The cordage was taut, hard, almost like a steel bar with strain!

Behind us the Swiftstar was smashing into the waves, her masts almost invisible for the sails she had now just hoisted. I saw Carol standing there on deck, talking to Anis. Men, women at the weapons, standing there, swaying with the motion of the ship. The wind had gotten up a bit too, the waves now slowly growing. Far in the distance, following, came the Sarn to Trella clipper.

"Darlanis is not a sailor," I said to Maris, seeing her nod.

"I would not however care to face her blade to blade," Maris smiled back. Darlanis was said to be "second" only to Lorraine, who many now claimed was the greatest swordswoman of all time. I had seen how Lorraine had dealt with Carol despite my wife's own skill. And Carol was "good", at least a "Princess of Swords"!!!

"Let us hope it doesn't come to that," I nodded in reply. Hopefully Darlanis would damage the Swiftstar enough to end this pursuit and we'd be "rid" of that damn big blonde for good now...

"I don't think that's a choice left open to us," she said. "I have no wish to have Darlanis as an enemy behind me with Lorraine somewhere ahead of us sitting there waiting for us to come to her," Maris answered. I could see her reasoning. We could be "trapped" between those two, without any hope of

fighting clear.

"Darlanis will fight, even if she can't win," I pointed out.

"She is of the Warriresses, as I am," Maris Marn answered.

"And she holds to the 'Caste Codes'," I added for her then.

"They are what 'separates' us from the 'barbarians'," Maris answered. She considered herself "civilized", although by 20th Century standards she herself would have been thought to be something of a "barbarian". One often "wonders" about such things... The history books of this era consider the people of the second half of the 20th Century, at least those of North America and Western Europe, as having been a bunch of "wimps" and "crybabies" who were totally and completely "unfit" to be considered as anything more than "slaves" just waiting for a master to come along! It being maintained by the philosophers of this era that Janet Rogers was a "result" of this "breakdown" in cultural standards. That a "dictatorship" of the sort she operated was perhaps the only "practical" form of government suitable for Mankind at that time. Perhaps there is something to this. Most Americans of the last half of the 20th Century did seem to lacking in the sort of qualities that their forefathers had possessed. They were in a lot of ways much like "slaves". Running crying to the "government" for everything instead of resolving matters themselves. I recall here the "civil rights" and such of my era, none of which exists now even though there is far more "racial equality" here in the 26th Century than there ever was back in my own time. One "wonders" about such things. About a culture where it was unsafe to walk the streets at night for fear of criminal predators. Due to "universal armament" now of course such things are merely only passages in the history books. Neither Dularn or the Empire has a "police" force as such, as such duties are considered "fitting" work for the Warriors and Warriresses of the military forces. Also no criminal escapes "justice" for "technical reasons" now. Violent criminals are castrated as a matter of course, and sent as slaves to the mines and the galleys to repay society for their misdeeds. This is a harsh, hard world, but one we much enjoy...

"You are the Queen of Dularn," I pointed out to her then.

"A successor will be picked if I fall," she answered me.

"As you said, you are of the Warriresses," I smiled back.

"As you are of the Warriors despite yourself," she "smiled".

"A rogue gust of wind, anything could destroy all!" Valerie protested, well aware of the Swiftstar's poor condition for this!

"Is it the ship's condition you fear, or her before us?" the Empress snapped back, the second part of her sentence clearly implying something that under other conditions Darlanis would have never given voice to. For an instant Valerie's eyes burned hotly into hers. Given Darlanis' rank there was nothing she could say or do even although she knew the "insult" there in those words...

"When it comes to battle you will not find me wanting," Valerie snapped back, her voice hard. Darlanis was a woman "driven" by hatred, a woman who could take them all to their deaths here!

"I judge that the North Star is now no more than half a mile ahead of us," Darlanis spoke in level tones. She was ashamed of herself for how she'd spoken to the woman, but as a monarch she knew that she

could never speak the words she so wished to say... An "Empress" such as her could never "apologize" to anyone.

"She's held together so far," I said to Maris, the Swiftstar now only half a mile behind us. Twice the range of our best weapons. Maris nodding, her eyes thoughtful as they met mine. I glanced at Carol, at the ship, the sails hard, full bellied, the sea ahead. Maris had been a good teacher. I had the "feel" of the North Star now. I could "sense" the play of wind, wave, the "grip" of the keels beneath us. A sailing ship is like a living thing. Much different in fact from a mechanically powered ship.

"Yes...", Maris breathed, the North Star suddenly heeling a bit more than before, a groan going through the ship as the overstressed rigging and masts took the strain. The Dularnian flag, the battle flags on each of the three masts snapping in the wind! I thought gladly of the close inspection we'd given the ship...

I turned, Maris' hand suddenly on my arm, seeing the Swiftstar's foremast suddenly snap off just above the deck, the ship suddenly swinging up into the wind, now helpless in the waves!!!

"Let fly the spanker, hard to starboard!" Maris screamed at the top of her lungs. The North Star turning now, Carol running across the deck, slapping backs, men and women dashing to weapons as the crew prepared themselves for battle! The ship coming more around now, the wind astern, the spanker being pulled back in, the jib freed for a moment to spin us the rest of the way about! Men up there, fifty feet from the deck, taking in the top sails!

"Not a chance now!" Valerie muttered to herself, her sword in her hand. The Swiftstar rolling heavily in the sea, a half dismasted wreck, all DUE to that Lysdammed Darlanis and her insane hatred that had doomed them all to a fiery death at sea!!!

"Open fire as soon as they come within range!" Darlanis snapped, her heavy compound bow now in her hand. Her golden attire glistening in the sunlight like that of a Viking Goddess...

"Get that cut away !" Valerie snapped at the first officer, "Put those Warriors of Darlanis' to work!" she added, well aware that they were useless for anything else right now until some sort of a fore sail could be rigged to act as a jib for the ship! The first officer staring at the approaching North Star with visible terror. Right now due to the pressure of the wind on the main mast they were lying bows on to the wind, with the North Star approaching from the north west, no more than a quarter of a mile away now. Valerie was well aware of Maris' "options" here. Her most "intelligent" move would be to fire a broadside from close range as she passed across their bow. While the Swiftstar might fire back with some of her armament, the Dularnian would be able to fire far more missiles per exchange now than they could!!

"We'll have to rig some sort of jib!" Darlanis snapped, the big blonde obviously a bit "smarter" than Valerie had "thought". Men already hard at work cutting away the rigging the held the broken mast alongside the ship as they drifted back towards land.

"We'll do what we can," Valerie answered, well aware of the fact that nothing they could do would be of any real value now...

"She doesn't stand a chance!" Carol protested, suddenly standing there at my side, her hazel eyes burning hotly into mine as I nodded back. To fight or not was rightly Maris' decision.

"Darlanis will not surrender to us," Maris answered back.

"Better get back to your post," I told Carol softly then.

"They're `sitting ducks'!" Carol retorted, standing there.

"She would not hesitate to destroy us," Maris answered her.

"Darlanis can't hurt us now!" Carol protested hotly in turn!

"She has her own navy, and ships the match of this," Maris answered in level tones. "And I have no wish to meet up with her again, especially not with Lorrainesomewhere still ahead of us!" I could see the clipper in the distance, several miles behind us. I had no doubts that its captain would "protect" his Empress if he could. The clipper had poor maneuverability, but its firepower was almost equal to the Swiftstar and not greatly inferior to ours. In any case it would soon be arriving to "save" Darlanis.

"Go back to your post," I said, taking Carol by the arm. I was well aware of my wife's feelings, and also well aware if Carol was not that military discipline allowed no other action now! Every Sunday Maris read to us the "laws" under which we sailed. I was well aware too that violation of Maris' orders was mutiny! That the penalty for that was hanging from the main mast yardarm! This was a Dularnian warship, and Maris maintained discipline!!

"They're so helpless against us!" Carol whispered hoarsely.

"I think Maris is well `aware' of that fact," I said softly. "But you are going to have to obey her orders or face court martial for insubordination under combat conditions," I warned her!

"The North Star is offering us `terms of surrender'," Valerie Dunn spoke, standing there, watching the men at work. The ship was less than a quarter of a mile away now, obviously working itself into a position where it might fire a full broadside down the length of the helpless Swiftstar. Darlanis nodding, her eyes unreadable just then. Valerie did not "envy" the Empress...

"I will not use fire," Darlanis muttered, mostly to herself. She had such weapons, and the clipper was coming up to "rescue". She could destroy the NorthStar, put an "end" to Maris' career. On the other hand she "admired" Maris, the woman's own "bravery".

"Perhaps `they' will `avenge' us," Valerie said, looking at the rapidly approaching clipper, well aware too that the clipper was no match for the North Star in a fight, although it could of course outrun the Dularnian raider without too much difficulty...

Chapter Forty One

"Go to Hell!" was the "answer" we got from the crippled Swiftstar. Obviously Darlanis had given the order to send "that" instead of a more "proper" reply giving the circumstances. Maris lowered the telescope, her eyes for a brief second meeting mine. The Swiftstar laid helpless in the water, almost defenseless against us with her foremast gone. A more "able" crew might have done something to regain control, I suspected thoughtfully, but Darlanis' own people were doubtlessly unfamiliar with fore and aft rigged ships save for Valerie Dunn herself. On the other hand the damage was such that perhaps there was little to be done now. Although I suspect that Maris in Darlanis' place would have done "something". I know Maris. There is no greater sailor anywhere.

"When we cross their bow, fire the port broadside," she said. "And tell the crew to `AIM'," she added in level tones. I wondered if they would. I suspected many thought like Carol did. They would be "sitting ducks", almost unable to defend themselves. "Dead in the water", a floating wreck half dismasted...

"We could fire their sails, force them to abandon ship," I said. We could put everyone "ashore" but for Darlanis then too. "She" we could keep as a "hostage" until we got safely to Dularn. "That" would deal with the problem of "Lorraine" out there too... The clipper could be "dealt" with if necessary by fire missiles.

"I will not use fire at sea," Maris answered in icy tones.

"I'm sorry, Valerie, for being such a `bitch'," Darlanis said, touching the woman's arm. "You were right after all too." It had been her orders that had gotten them all into this "mess"!

"We'll take some of them with us to greet Lys," Valerie Dunn answered the Empress, her sword glistening there in her hand. The North Star now closing the range, its "intentions" obvious...

"Man those forward ballistae, open fire on them!" Darlanis snapped then. "Get those other ballistae swung around!" There was no hope of victory now, only an honorable death in battle. She wondered what her "fate" would be. Obviously she had survived long enough to give birth to her daughter, although Domino had not mentioned anything more about her on the strange 21st Century computer card that had been found with her remains except to say that she remembered her mother as being "tall and golden". She had often discussed the writings with Lorraine, although the Warlady hadn't been able to help her much with them. On the other hand was she actually the mother of Domino Tremaine? Or had SHARON perhaps been her true mother, and Domino merely recalled her own name as words she'd once heard her own real mother say...

I saw a woman hit, pinned like a fly against the main mast! Other such missiles striking the hull, a couple ripping through the sails. A catapult shot ripping a hold in the main sail! I saw Carol lift her sword, then swing it down. The ship shuddering as the broadside was now fired. The range was just within bowshot. About a furlong, two hundred and twenty yards, the distance the English longbow could usually be relied upon to shoot. I watched our volley of arrows disappear up into the azure blue. I wondered how many "hits" they'd make now aboard the Swiftstar?

"Hard to port, let fly the jib!" Maris suddenly snapped, standing there. "Starboard battery, fire when your weapons bear!" I saw Carol glance up at me as the ship swung around only a hundred yards or so now from the Swiftstar. I think she understood the true meaning of "war" now in a way she'd never known it before. Swiftstar was still lying helpless in the waves, only a partial broadside having come our way. Some of their "fire" had been crossbow bolts and arrows. Their main armament difficult to use as long as they lacked the ability to maneuver. I glanced at Maris, our eyes meeting... I didn't want to fire another volley!

"I am not proud of what I am doing, but `A Warriress does not leave a living enemy behind her'," the Queen of Dularn spoke. Such is one of the "sayings" that are part of the "caste codes".

"Like Vietnam where we killed women and children," I said.

"That war is written up in our history books," she replied. "You were a cruel and `violent' people, more `warlike' than we," she added. I supposed that it might be "possible" in a way too.

"The North Star is coming about now," Valerie spoke, standing there beside the Empress of California. She watched Darlanis draw her awesome bow, the arrow disappear into the sky towards the enemy. She wanted to tell the Empress to seek what "safety" she could, but as a Warriress she knew better than to speak so.

"We will not be 'alone' when we stand beforeLys," Darlanis answered, fitting another arrow to her string. The bodies scattered here and there on the deck speaking now of the enemy ship's weaponry and missiles. The North Star was just within bowshot...

"Your courage inspires...", Valerie started to say, the arrow from the North Star piercing her heart just at that moment!!! *****

"Missed the bitch!" Carol snarled to herself, fitting another arrow on her string. She'd been shooting at Darlanis, but without any success, although she'd apparently hit Valerie Dunn! Darlanis now couching over the woman, her golden body visible to the brunette's hazel eyes. She wondered if the myths about the Empress of California were true. Was Darlanis the mother of the woman who Bob and she had met there inSpainonly a year ago...?

"Someone got their captain," Maris said, lowering the telescope. The crew of the Swiftstar was still shooting at us, however. I suspected that as long as Darlanis lived they would continue to fight regardless of the odds against them. A crossbow bolt thunking into the binnacle beside us ample "proof" of that!!

"Clipper's getting close now," I said, reminding Maris of that "threat" to us. True, the clipper was no true "match" for us, but it did carry a dozen ballistae a side, and doubtlessly I knew there would be those aboard who knew how to use a bow or a crossbow. Such weapons being carried as policy against pirates. It also had a heavy steel ram, and the weight to smash our ship!

"Set all sail, course due north!" Maris snapped, having made her "decision" regardless of what others might say later of this! We could have perhaps fired another volley into the Swiftstar before leaving, but I think Maris too had little wish to do so now!

"They're leaving!" the first officer cried, the delight now showing in his voice as Darlanis looked up at him, the lifeless body of Valerie Dunn in her arms. The Empress having had no doubts that Maris Marn would have continued her attacks until there was no longer any "resistance" from the Swiftstar had the clipper not come for them despite its own "vulnerability" to the raider. She wondered too how badly damaged the ship was from the hits by the ballistae bolts, which did have the capability she knew to pierce the hulls of most ships. The sails of the clipper lovely against the azure blue of the sky, the green of the sea.

"Her blood is on my hands," Darlanis said, kneeling there beside the body. She was "responsible" for the deaths, the injured now below. A blurring of her vision making her wipe at her eyes as she stood. The sails of the North Star to the north. Now it would be up toLorraine. The Warlady of ImperialCalifornia. "THE GREATEST FIGHTING WOMAN OF ALL TIME!" Darlanis mused to herself, turning away from the others so that they might not see the tears in her eyes.Lorrainewould destroy the North Star, and that would be the "end" to all this. To Maris Marn and those two from the 20th Century. Perhaps it was just as well that their "blood" would be onLorraine's hands instead of hers.

"We 'beat' Darlanis," Carol said, standing there beside Maris, looking astern at the two ships now side

by side. I didn't think it was all that much of a "victory". We had "tricked" Darlanis into wrecking her ship in her pursuit of us. No doubt had the clipper not intervened we would have been able to either capture or kill the Empress, although I didn't think that the latter was "possible". Darlanis would live to give birth, to raise a little girl who in 2047, five hundred and twenty years before, would write as a dying woman her last memories of her beloved mother there far underneath the great stone castle of Triskelion.

"I feel 'sorry' for her," Maris then said, turning away now.

"What do you mean...?" Carol snapped, my wife looking up at me as I took her arm, guided her away from the Queen of Dularn. I understood if Carol had not how "unequal" this fight had been.

"Darlanis is a proud woman," I said to Carol. "She has lost much this day." My brownette nodding, her hazel eyes meeting the darkness of my own. I think Carol "understood". She too takes considerable pride in her own fighting abilities, her leadership.

"Is there anything I can do for you?" the captain of the clipper said, well "aware" of his Empress' own "discomfort" now. With the help of his men it had been possible to effect some degree of repairs to the Swiftstar. Enough in any case that the ship could be sailed to a coastal seaport for additional repairs.

"There are the dead to be buried at sea," she answered. He nodded, well aware of what would be "said" when the ship reached port. He'd already heard the stories of Darlanis' "incompetency" at command. Of the fact that she had given orders that had resulted in the partial dismasting of the Swiftstar while in pursuit of the North Star. There would be those in the Empire who would call into question now the golden Empress' own ability to rule her people. Those who would say that the Queen of Trelandar, the incomparable Lorraine, was a more "fit" Imperial ruler!

Chapter Forty Two

Jon Richards silently watched his wife pacing the deck of the Athena, the crew, wise in her ways, giving her a wide berth. She was not a beautiful woman, but Jon loved her like no other. There was "something" about Lorraine he could never describe to any one else. A feeling that with her at your side nothing was impossible. She was "different" from his first wife, a Physician of Dularn, who had died at the hands of Imperial warriors under the command of that infamous Princess Tara of Baja. Lorraine was in a way a "Physician" too, although she considered herself more a "Warrioress", and wore the caste mark there on her left wrist. She was also a "Priestess" in a way, and knew much of things now forbidden to ordinary mortals. He believed she had been "touched" by LYSherself there on Mars, that what she had seen, experienced there on that arid almost airless world was "real"...

He glanced up at the quarterdeck, at captain Janice Hill standing there talking to her first officer. Janice was a "competent" captain, although in battle he knew Lorraine would be in "command" totally, with Janice only serving to relay her orders. Lorraine was awesomely "competent", the greatest fighting woman of all time, many said. Jon tended to believe it, having seen his wife in "action". If it could be done, Lorraine could do it.

The Athena was slow, almost like some bloated merchantman. Her heavy armor plate that rendered her almost invulnerable to conventional weapons also made her considerably "heavier" than a ship of the

"Squala class", which she otherwise muchly resembled. Jon wondered again to himself if Lorraine really understood what it would be "like" to fight a ship like the North Star to a finish under such conditions. The North Star would be "faster", and far more "handy" in battle than this "ironclad" of Lorraine's. There was a "blind spot" in Lorraine's thinking. A sort of intellectual arrogance that she knew "more" than anyone else alive. That was, he thought, perhaps the worst "flaw" in her character. He knew too that she considered herself "superior" to anyone of the 26th Century with the possible exception of the Priestesses.

He watched Yvette Senchal now saunter across the deck, speak to Lorraine. The French slave girl's slim body briefly clad. The wench, despite her "abilities", had been something of a disappointment to him in bed after he'd "tasted" of Lorraine. For a woman who looked like she did, her "intimate performance" was something almost unbelievable. That was a "secret" he shared with no one, being well aware of what Lorraine would think of it!

"We should be up to Sarn in another day," Lorraine smiled, walking up to him now. "Perhaps they will have news of the North Star," she added, giving him a smile. Her new "telegraph" allowed "news" to flow the length of the Empire in a single day...

"I plan to strike here," Maris Marn spoke, indicating a dot on the map there before her, glancing up at Sandi standing there. The location I understood was that of the largest slaver in Sarn. "There will be perhaps a hundred women if not more held slave".

"My archers will provide a diversion while the ship attacks," Carol spoke. The tactics were the same as she had used against Lorraine's estates. I failed to see why we were risking our lives for slave girls although both Carol and Maris seemed to "understand" the reason why as did Sandi. I recalled what Carol had told me about Maris and the threat that had been made on her life for her stand against the wide spread enslavements of women. I wondered if we hadn't signed on a "Flying Dutchman" that could never go "home". I considered the possibility of Maris "losing" this conflict to Darlanis just over the issue of female slavery!!

"Biggest problem is that we don't really know the lay out of the estate," I pointed out. Randomly firing broadsides into the darkness could endanger everyone's lives without "fire control" from the shore. Then there was always the danger of running the ship aground on some sand bar if one got in too close to land...

"A small fire control party could be landed," Carol spoke, her hazel eyes glowing into mine. One would need a lantern with a shutter, such being commonly used for signaling in the dark. "Say you with Sandi, Anis, La- raand a couple men to row you in."

"This is 'important' to you, isn't it?" I said to my wife after the discussion was over and we'd left the stern cabin. I saw Carol nod, her hazel eyes holding mine. She had not been that badly "abused" there on Lorraine's estates, but she had well learned what it is like to be a slave girl here in this barbaric era. She had well paid the "price" for her sensual beauty too. For a woman of thirty eight Carol certainly didn't look her age!!

"As it is to every woman on this ship who has ever felt the whip slash the tender skin of her back," Carol retorted in reply. "And Maris is the 'one' woman of this era who 'understands' too!" The "heat" of my brownette's words leaving no doubt as to her own "feelings" on this matter. I wondered what her reaction would be when we reached Dularn. Female slavery was commonplace in every country that I knew of. Only Maris of Dularn had ever dared to oppose it, and she had been almost driven from her

own country!!!

"A hundred more mouths to feed will stretch our food supplies to their limit," I pointed out. "Water could also be a problem," I added. Space below decks was another problem for us. The North Star was designed to carry a maximum of about ninety. Adding a hundred women, unused to the sea, to ships, would merely compound our problems. The area below decks already had that characteristic "odor" of confined womanhood. There had also been some "fights" between some of the men's wives and former slaves.

"We'll be 'home' in Dularn in a couple weeks," Carol spoke. The tone of her voice such that I knew I had indeed "touched" a sore spot with her. With this she strode off, leaving me standing there, well aware of the fact that we'd just had a "spat"...

Darlanis regarded the Swiftstar lying there at the dock being repaired, refitted, its ballistae and catapults now replaced. It was hot, the sun burning down from a pale blue sky overhead. She could feel the heat of it on her body, burning through the golden mesh lined with silk. She had heard the "whispers" spoken by those in the taverns, the smelly dives of this small seaport city in southern Sarn. She thought of Valerie Dunn, how she had died there right beside her on the forecastle of the Swiftstar...

"There is 'tension' between you and your wife," Maris said to me as the last boat returned back to the ship. I nodded, not wishing to discuss such matters with Maris just then. I knew of Carol's beliefs, of the fact that she looked upon freeing slave girls as the sacred duty of one who had once felt the slave whip. It was a lovely night, the air soft, mild, a few stars peeking out from between the clouds. The Moon had gone down an hour ago. I'd watched Deimos pass over, the blot of light "slower" than the old satellites of my time, but somewhat brighter due to its size.

"We have our 'disagreements' like any married couple," I lied to the Queen of Dularn, her face and hair only pale shadows in the darkness. We showed no regular light, the gentle creak of the rigging, the roll of the ship beneath my feet familiar now...

"I think it is more than that," Maris persisted, prodding at me in a way that I didn't much like just then. With anyone else I'd just told her to leave me alone, but I couldn't do that with the Queen of Dularn. "Your wife has impressed me as being a woman who is extremely level headed, a woman who knows the 'meaning of life'," the golden haired Queen of Dularn now "continued" on.

"This is not a 'military objective'," I answered her back. "Liberating slave girls isn't going to win your war any quicker!" Maris' activities were more of an "annoyance" than anything else. She was a "likely" in my opinion to start a bigger war than to convince Darlanis to allow free elections in the disputed lands. Only the fact that the Empire was fighting a drawn out war with Mexico allowed Maris to do what she did without any retaliation.

"I fight for 'freedom', not military objectives," Maris answered. "I know what it is like to feel the whip, wear the collar of a slave girl," Maris Marn continued, sounding like Carol!

"And if my Carol dies out there for your 'ideals'?" I said.

"There are causes worth fighting, dying for," she answered. "I believe 'such' was 'understood' even in your time," she said, walking off then, leaving me standing there with my thoughts...

"You should take more than just a knife," I told La- ra, theNevadawench almost invisible in her face paint and black attire. We could see the light of the lantern, the guardsman standing on duty at the shoreline just ahead to the north. Our boat gently rocking on the waves as the woman slipped over the side into the water. We were about fifty feet out, the depth about three feet.

"Bow too clumsy, and sword too heavy," she smiled back, then quietly moving off into the darkness of the night towards shore. I could smell Sandi beside me, the former slave girl sweating a bit now. Anis only a darker shadow as she settled herself on a thwart, her bow in her hand, an arrow nocked on the bowstring. Somewhere out there in the darkness was the North Star, waiting.

"I wish Bob and I hadn't had that `spat' over this," Carol whispered softly to San-sha there in the darkness as they crept carefully through the woods, working their way around the estate.

"Men often not `understand' women," theNevadawoman smiled. "Why we feel the way that we do about things," she added. Carol nodded in the darkness, well aware of "why" she felt the way that she did. She had not objectively been badly "abused" there onLorraine's estates, but she had suffered repeated "rapes" or so she considered them, since she had certainly not "consented" to be "used" as she had. Forced to have sex when she didn't wish...

"I wonder how slavery got started anyway," Carol mused to herself. She supposed that after the social breakdown caused by The War the stronger had simply "enslaved" the weaker much as had been done in eras far in the past. In a primitive social order without firearms, women had little means of "defense" against men who wished to enslave them. Men who cared little for the traditions of the past. Men who cared only for conquest, domination! Even in the 20th Century "civilization" had been just a "veneer".

"Those who do not `know' weapons end up the slaves of those who do," the Indian woman replied, having overheard Carol talking to herself. "Weapons and `freedom' are two sides of same coin."

"You sound like the Dularnians," Carol smiled back in the darkness, hearing the muffled footfalls of the women following. The Dularnian Constitution put into "law" the idea of "universal armament" as both the "duty" and the "right" of all free people!!

"They `right', know the `truth'," San-sha pointed out, now raising her hand, saying that she would go forward to explore...

"A well regulated militia being necessary for the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed'," Carol whispered to herself, recalling the words of the Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. In somewhat similar words was the "Prime Right" of Dularn, which totally forbade the government from ever "disarming" the people. A smile going over her attractive black painted face as she recalled having heard that in Dularn you could get into "trouble" if you didn't keep and bear arms! All able bodied citizens being members of the Dularnian militia from the age of eighteen on up!!

Chapter Forty Three

I watched the guardsman there on duty relieve himself in the ocean when suddenly a shadowy figure now reared up behind him and dragged him with a soft muffled sound down on to the sand. La- rahad

accomplished her task, and without anyone being the wiser. I had seen that she had put her knife to good use. There had been no sound, only a sort of muffled gurgle as she cut his throat. I considered what a "thousand" like her could have done in Vietnam. I understood now too why the Empire of California had never been able to defeat the Nevadas in battle. Why as long as the Priestesses of Lys maintained their "control" over technology, that no one would ever be able to conquer or control a people like hers. Like those of Dularn, the Nevadas practiced "universal armament".

"Take us in," I hissed to the two men at the oars, the boat moving in the darkness towards the shadowy figure standing there. Sandi suddenly vomited over the side, perhaps not feeling well. In the cramped confines of the ship such can often happen. It seemed more "likely", however, that there was another "reason". One should not "dwell" excessively upon such things in "combat". You lose your "edge", the ability to fight effectively at times.

"If we had a few dozen of 'those'," Anis whispered to me. Like most Dularnians she was "racist" in a way, believing that no Nevada could be really considered "civilized" or really an equal. The same was "true" of Californians, I knew, from what I'd been told by San-sha. Such things are I think "innate" in Mankind... An "us" and "them" attitude that is older than the caves, I feel. An idea that your "culture", your "race", your "ethos", is best.

"O.K., Sandi?" I asked, the odor of her vomit in the breeze. If she was sick it would be best that she went back to the ship.

"I'll make it," she answered, looking up at me, her face as "black" as mine. I knew Lars thought highly of her, a silver chain about her throat marking her now as "his" in a way that left no "doubts". Maris had performed the marriage as "captain". When they reached Dularn they planned to get properly married...

"Found a sentry," San-sha whispered. "Slit his throat," she added, her eyes in the darkness meeting Carol's. The brunette nodding, already "hardened" to warfare to the point such things no longer "bothered" her any more. Things had become now "us" and "them". She didn't even think of the "enemy" as being human. She had now truly become a Warriress, a true fighting woman of the 26th Century. Her life back in the 20th now only a "memory".

"There should be a manor house," Carol answered. "We need to take that, get the keys to their shackles," the Warlady said. Such an "action" perhaps had no "military value" as such, as I had pointed out, but Carol felt that freeing a hundred women from slavery was well worth the risks, the deaths that it might cause. As she said later on to me, "Freedom is worth fighting for..." Perhaps she is more a "true American" than I used to think. More faithful to the traditions of earlier America and that of Dularn. In the Janet Rogers' era they had "mind your own business laws". Janet used such "laws" to destroy many "activist organizations" through the use of civil lawsuits that quickly bankrupted them. Such still exist in the Empire, but not here in Dularn, I note...

I aimed the shuttered lantern out to sea, sent the signal. I hoped Maris had a good sense of "distance". Otherwise none of us was likely to "enjoy" what would fall as the North Star fired! I saw the answering signal from the darkness, a dark shadow against the sea the only thing I could see of the North Star even with my eyes as completely adapted as they were now to the darkness. I saw the red glows as the fire bombs were lit, saw them arch through the sky over us like meteors, and then flare up in flame as they fell perhaps a hundred yards further inland now. A sound of surprised yelling greeting them as people suddenly realized now that they were indeed under "attack" by the North Star!!

I ordered the North Star to fire another trio of fire bombs, and to then follow this up with a full broadside of darts aimed for a full area coverage using all twelve of our ballistae. Half a dozen of their

guardsmen were foolish enough to be "caught" in our broadside half a minute later, falling like wooden soldiers before the deadly barrage! A series of three flashes in the distance behind the buildings now visible beyond the flames left no doubts that Carol's forces had reached their objectives! I gave the North Star the order to "cease fire", and grabbing my crossbow, followed the three women towards the fighting now ahead...

"Follow me!" Carol cried, half a dozen women following her as she dashed for the manor house. Something went "zip" past her ear in the darkness, no doubt an arrow or crossbow bolt, she assumed, well aware of the fact that the weapons of this era could "kill" just as swiftly as could the bullets of the 20th Century!!

A man reared up out of the darkness behind a bush, swinging his sword in a deadly arc. She parried the slash with her bow, kicking him hard in reply, and followed that up with a swift thrust of her own blade, leaving the body sprawled there in the grass as the other women now dashed on by her, yelling like a swarm of feminine demons as mad as wet hornets! Pausing then, an arrow nocked on the string, her sword thrust into the ground before her, Carol searched for a "target", anyone not in "black face" being an enemy in her eyes! A terrified feminine pale figure running by in the night, naked, no doubt just a slave girl! One of those that she and the others had come for now. Her bow suddenly then snapping in two when she put some tension on it!

I fired my crossbow from the hip, dropping the man a dozen feet from me, his sword gleaming in the darkness. Anis giving him "grace" with a swift thrust of her blade as she dashed on by! La-rawas somewhere up ahead, almost invisible in the darkness. I could see shadowy figures in the dying flames of the fire bombs, but whether they were "friend" or "foe" I couldn't tell. The yelling and screaming, the curses, all bringing back memories of another time, another land. Only the lack of rifle shots made this "time" different from those times before. But yet men and women, both "ours" and "theirs", were dying here this night, just as they had died in that land almost half way around the world...

"The keys!" Carol snapped, her blade at the man's throat. A woman bleeding from her shoulder standing to one side, a baby in her arms, a little boy at her side clinging to her silken robe. "I want the keys to their chains!" she snapped, prodding him with her point. The man shuddering, nodding, saying that they were kept in the slave shed. San-sha toying with a dagger, eying the woman standing there, muttering something about "white-eye hair"! The woman's hair a lovely shade of reddish gold, her height and coloring leaving little doubt of her own Dulamian ancestry now.

"Guard them!" Carol snapped, grabbing the man, her point at his neck, a half full quiver of arrows still hanging down her back. The provocative perfection of her figure well displayed by her tight fitting attire. Her blackened features however left no doubts that she was a fighting woman. One now used to "warfare".

"Victory is ours!" Carol called to me as I came running up. I wondered what our "losses" had been. These had not been true "fighters" like those on Lorraine's estates. I did not think we had taken much in the way of losses. Surprise had counted for much here, I thought. The man she "held" trembling with terror. We had struck a blow for "freedom" in a way none could doubt now.

"You were right," I said to Carol as we walked back to the North Star. The former slaves were huddled together, almost as terrified of "us" now as they were of their own former masters. We had suffered three wounded, one death in our raid here. Much of the "credit" I thought belonged to the woman there at my side!

"Freedom is 'important'," Carol answered. "Everyone's!" I thought perhaps she was "right". Perhaps she

had seen what I had not. What we were fighting for was "freedom", not an "Empire"!!!

"This is the raider North Star and you will be taken to Dularn as free women to make your lives there as my free citizens," Maris said standing there on the quarterdeck, illuminated by several lanterns, torches being too "dangerous" to be used aboard a ship. I put my arm around Carol, proud for what sort of a woman she was. Lorraine had once said that Carol was only a "housewife", but I think she knew better now. My provocative brownette from Alabama had indeed "proved" herself in a way that left no "doubts" now of her worthiness to be the true Warlady of Dularn.

Lorraine smiled as she read the telegraph. While it did not give the position of the North Star, she could calculate that... The "raid" upon the slaver left no doubts in her mind as to "who" was responsible for that. And the ship would be heavily loaded. Slowed now by the very mass of humanity that it carried towards Dularn. And the Athena would be "waiting", Lorraine vowed then!!

"A bachelor's `dream'," I said to Carol, the former slave girls packed in aboard the North Star like sardines. There was already an "odor" of unwashed femininity despite the fact that we had sprayed the girls down with our deck pumps to get some of the "dirt" and the "stink" off them before then taking them below...

"Two women for every man," Carol smiled. Clothing was a "problem" until the former slave girls could sew themselves something to wear. The hundred some women having been kept nude in the slave sheds as is the common practice with slaves. We had also collected half a dozen male slaves, and taken them along with us. There were now well over two hundred people stuffed inside a ship designed for ninety. Maris thought we might have food enough. Water we'd have to stop for somewhere and fill our barrels. I didn't want to think about what it would be "like" if we met the Athena! We were as crowded now as any "slaver" ship!!

"Hoist the anchor, set course for Dularn!" Darlanis snapped. Her officer nodded, gave the orders to take the Swiftstar to sea. She had ninety Warriors with her, enough men to sail the ship. The Empress had made her plans. Close and board the North Star. "Settle" the issue with cold steel, cross her blade with that of Carol Simmons, take Maris Marn captive, and put an end to this...

"I was a lucky man back there in '76," I said to Carol as she washed off the last of the grease paint she'd used to blacken her face. She was naked in our little cabin, her body gleaming in the light from the lantern. We had the porthole open to get what fresh air we could. The odor of the sea much more pleasing than the odor here below decks from the crowd of women packed in.

"Worth keeping around?" Carol smiled, washing herself now.

"Good in a fight too," I smiled. Carol was all of that.

"That is a desirable quality in this era," she smiled.

"I don't think I'd want to go `home' now," I said to her.

"Me neither anymore," she answered, drying herself. "I think here I have discovered that I am more than just a wife..."

"You were always 'more' than that to me," I answered her.

"It is good to be 'loved'," Carol smiled, kissing me then. Her naked body invited my caresses, her rich mouth more kissing.

Chapter Forty Four

"We will have to find water in few days now," Maris said, Carol nodding in reply. With over two hundred people aboard the water consumption was well over twice the usual rate. The sixty men of the original crew now were sharing quarters with some hundred and thirty women. There had been three knife fights already between their Dularnian wives and some of the former slave girls. One such had been "fatal", the former slave girl buried at sea. Discipline aboard the ship was difficult to maintain, especially as many of the women didn't wear anything more than just a strip of cloth around their hips and clips on their nipples. This last I note is "cultural" in this era, and no free woman ever allows herself to be seen by those of the opposite sex except for a lover unless her nipples are first properly "covered" by her clips.

"We need to train the women in the use of arms," Carol said.

"You are thinking of Lorraine and the Athena," I spoke up.

"She will doubtlessly position her ship so that in order to reach Arsana we must pass her," Maris replied, walking to the stern windows, looking out at the wake there behind the schooner.

"We could make a great circle, sail around the island and come to Arsana from the north," I pointed out to the Queen then.

"We are now too low on supplies to make such a voyage," she answered. I also suspected that she didn't really want to avoid Lorraine. Maris had her "pride". She was Dularn's best captain.

"I will see that the women are trained," Carol smiled then.

"Need assistance?" I asked. Many of them were beautiful.

"Just remember I wear your neck chain," Carol smiled back.

"And I your wedding band," I smiled, lifting my hand to her. Here in the 26th Century you neck chain your wife, and she puts a "ring" on you in return. Carol's neck chain was of almost pure gold, I might mention, and was quite attractive against her tan. I recalled what Maris had told about the Priestesses of Lys and their abilities to "clone" a woman. I was sterile, but Carol had ovaries and a uterus. I thought she might make a good mother...

"Mark four!" the man in the boat just ahead called out. We had the North Star under sweeps, the sails furled on the yards in the darkness. We were "feeling" our way into a little cove that Maris knew about. Coming in at low tide, the Queen herself at the helm. I hoped she knew what she was doing as I stood beside her. Carol straddling the bowsprit, now watching the boat ahead.

"Mark three!" the man yelled back. Three fathoms, eighteen feet! Maris barked an order, the anchors dropping with a splash!

"Awfully shallow," I said, well aware of "what" we drew now. The center keel no doubt actually "touching" bottom beneath us...

"The tide will raise us," Maris answered. We could also "lighten" the ship if need be. Off load everyone by boat, the tide doubtlessly in that case being enough to float the ship off.

"Going to be a nasty job getting the top masts down in the dark," I said to her. I did not envy the men doing the work now!

"I'd pull the main masts but I'd need a sheer hulk to do it," she answered. A "sheer hulk" being a special sort of barge with a derrick on it to install main masts on ships the size of the North Star. The main masts being almost a yard in diameter with a weight that is measured in tons. The top masts were a lot lighter in weight, and could be handled with equipment aboard...

"I wonder what it is going to be like in Dularn," Carol said to me as we sat together there beneath cool shade of an oak tree. Below us in the cove laid the North Star, a sound of hammering audible at times as repairs were now being made. The ship even heeled over a bit, so that part of the hull might be scraped off. Maris had gone with the "water party", leaving me in "charge" of the ship and its lovely hundred odd "passengers" who now wandered about the shore below us, idling away the time, thinking thoughts perhaps of what their lives would be like once they finally reached a safe haven in Dularn. We were a bit short on food, but Maris said that we'd reach Dularn in another week, and I supposed we could all tighten our belts a bit until then. Maris could stand to lose another five pounds, I thought to myself just then.

"Winters are going to be a bit colder than we're used to," I pointed out to her. Dularn had a "winter" with snow and everything. There had been climatic changes caused by The War of 2047 that made the northern parts of North America colder than before.

"According to what Maris has told me, it's going to be something like colonial America," my wife answered, obviously thinking of something else than the weather. I was wondering just then what sort of a reception we might receive in Dularn. Maris was a "radical Queen" in the eyes of many of her people, and she was not all that "popular" with certain groups of powerful men... There had been "rumors" that she might not be "welcome" back now!

"There's a ship out there," I said then, looking out to sea.

"Some sort of big two masted schooner," Carol replied back.

"Let's see what this shows," I said, rising the telescope to my eye. The sail plan, the lines, left no doubt even if one did not see the flags. Like a "bad penny" Darlanis had come back!!!

"An 'old friend' of ours," I said, handing Carol the scope.

"If she 'spots' the North Star...", Carol breathed, holding the telescope to her eye. I did not consider it likely. The ship was well hidden, and I did not think Darlanis' lookouts would be searching the shoreline several miles off for a ship...

"That big blonde sure doesn't 'give up'," I smiled back.

"Any excitement while I was gone?" Maris asked me, the sweat on her forehead, the darkness under her armpits telling of their long march through the forest to find water. Life aboard a ship does not give one much opportunity for exercise, especially if you are the Queen of Dularn and must keep up a regal front at all time. A number of the crew (male & female) now bringing up the water barrels which had been dragged on crude sleds through the forest. They were gasping, exhausted from their labors, I saw.

"A 'problem' has returned," Carol said, telling of Darlanis.

"She sure must have it 'in' for one of you," she smiled now.

"If she can find Lorraine...", I said, seeing Maris nodding.

"A problem we will 'face' when we get to it," she answered.

"How big a crew does one of those Imperial first rates carry?" Carol asked as we watched the Queen supervising the loading of the ship. Such must be done with some thought to keep the ship properly balanced. One wishes the ship to be a bit "light" towards the bow, but not excessively so. Such things are a matter of "experience", experience gained by years at sea. Maris was so "experienced", I knew, and it "showed" at times like this!

"A little over a hundred usually," I answered, wondering why she wanted to know and what real "difference" it made right now. According to Sanda Talen Lorraine had not taken on quite as many men as she could have, no doubt due to the fact that she didn't know how long she would have to remain at sea "waiting" for us...

"We have over two hundred," Carol pointed out to me, a smile curving her rich lips. "Two to one odds in our favor," she said.

"A battle at sea isn't the same as a fight on land," I told her. True, the North Star would be far "handier" than Lorraine's armor plated dreadnought, but on the other hand we didn't really have anything "effective" against the Athena except fire bombs!!!

"Lorraine expects a 'ship to ship' fight, doesn't she?" my wife challenged. I was forced to agree that she probably did. I had considerable "confidence" in Maris, although against Lorraine I suspected that Maris would have little advantage over the famous Imperial Warlady, whose awesome intelligence was something I was well aware of. Unlike Darlanis, Lorraine didn't make the sort of "mistakes" that one might expect from the Imperial ruler!

"You are 'thinking' of something, aren't you?" I smiled.

"I am a 'crafty wench'," Carol answered, strolling off.

"Be dawn soon," Maris said, standing there, the dew wet on deck. The breeze had died shortly after we'd left the cove. We were I supposed several miles from land, although it was hard to tell here in the darkness. The sails hung uselessly from the yards, the ship gently rolling in the restless swell. A sickle of a Moon in the east lit things up just enough to see the sea. I recalled the fact that Imperial triremes often patrolled here.

"And perhaps there will be some wind now," I said in reply.

"It would take us some time to row to Dularn," she smiled.

"Getting lighter," I said to Maris, wondering why I had spoken. I was sure she could see that for herself. There was dew in her hair, her clothing damp on her body. She was a different sort of a woman from Carol. More "feminine" in a way, less "assertive" than my beloved brownette. More "intelligent" too, I suspected from the talks I'd had with her. I looked out over the sea, faint wisps of fog visible drifting like ghosts over the water. There was a noticable "glow" in the east over the land, the Moon now becoming more "pale" as the Sun below the horizon lit up the sky. We had the "night sails" still hoisted, not the blue green "day" sails that we used to avoid being spotted by others.

"Sail Ho!" the lookout called down. "To the southwest!"

"I'm going up," Maris snapped, striding to the rigging.

"I'll call general quarters," I answered, Maris nodding.

"What is it?" Carol asked, tugging at her clothing. She was "sans" clips, but I felt it wasn't time to "mention" that fact...

"Ship is three masted schooner, same 'class' as us," Maris called down. She had a "head" for heights, something I didn't... "Looks like it could be the North Wind, under captain Miles!" I could see her looking through the telescope. Another Dularnian!

"One of 'US'!" Carol cried, throwing her arms around me. I felt it wise then to whisper in her ear that she was bare nipped underneath her blouse and that it "showed" if you looked "right"!

Captain Miles of the North Wind was an older man, his reddish hair showing just a trace of "gray". He had smiled at all the women on deck there to greet him, many of them rather briefly clad, I might note, making us look like some Imperial slaver on its way to market. He was said to be a "cautious" man, not one to take "risks" unless there was a considerable gain to be made.

"There's 'trouble' in Dularn for you," he said to Maris, looking straight into the azure of her eyes. "Real bad trouble, my Queen. Maybe even your death if you return to Arsana now."

Chapter Forty Five

"If what you say is true...", Lorraine spoke, pacing the carpeted deck of Athena's stern cabin, her dark eyes burning into those of the Dularnian Senator and his companions, "Then this puts an entirely different 'light' on the issue now." Jon sitting there quietly, keeping his thoughts to himself. That the Senate of Dularn was seriously considering deposing Maris Marn in favor of Darlanis as their new "Queen" was an utter shock to everyone!!! Arsana visible there through the ship's stern windows.

"We'd be better off with Darlanis than a 'radical' like Maris," the Senator replied. "She's a Lysdamned 'FEMINIST' who will be the ruin of this country if she isn't stopped right now!" They had come out to the Athena in a small vessel flying a flag of truce as the Imperial dreadnought had patrolled the strait.

"You must value your slave girls highly," Lorraine thought to herself, regarding the men. That was really

the "issue" here, she knew. Maris had attempted to make a "stand" for women, as she had once dreamed of doing before learning its "consequences". Sanda Talen had wisely prevented her from doing so back in '65... The midshipman who burst in just then putting a halt to things!!!

"The EMPRESS is coming!" the girl squeaked, her eyes big!

"Darlanis may be interested in what you have to say," the Warlady spoke, "uncomfortable" with the idea of seeing Maris Marn deposed because of her beliefs regarding the "rights of women"!!!

"If we could reach Arsana...", Carol breathed, staring at Maris. The Queen of Dularn badly "shaken" by the news Miles had just now given her there in the stern cabin of the North Star!

"Many of those in the disputed territories will support me," Maris breathed. "It is likely however that the Empire will `exploit' this situation for their own ends," she added then for us.

"There are the lands to the north of Dularn," Miles suggested. "Ships like ours would be valuable..." I saw Maris nodding.

"You really don't have any `balls', do you Maris?" Carol suddenly snapped back. "Maybe that's `WHY' you've been `running' all this time instead of making a `stand' for what's `RIGHT'!!!"

"You don't understand...", Maris answered, her eyes "moist".

"Do you WANT the Imperials to WIN!?" Carol snapped back! "Are you just a whipped cur to go running off with your tail between your legs or are you a Queen who will fight for something!"

"There is Lorraine...", Maris breathed, not meeting the hot hazel fury of Carol's eyes. "And you are talking `REVOLUTION'!" I recalled reading in Lorraine's book that she had considered doing something about slavery, but had decided not to after threats had been made against her. Darlanis mentions somewhat the same thing in her writings. The men of this era are not the "wimps" of the 20th Century. They have "drawn a line" none dares cross.

"We won't fight Lorraine `single handed', will we?" Carol snapped, turning to Miles, who then nodded slowly in reply back.

"Always liked Maris, guess one last battle won't hurt," he answered. "Then I'll retire from this and let a younger man have the North Wind," he smiled, grinning up at Maris standing there.

"I haven't seen anything of the North Star, have you?" Darlanis spoke as she came aboard the Athena, Lorraine smiling to herself as the Empress' azure eyes did not "miss" their "guests"!

"Maybe it doesn't matter any more," the Warlady smiled back! Breaking this bit of "news" to Darlanis with pain in her heart...

"I think there is a good reason you are `here'," I heard Maris say to Carol as captain Miles of the North Wind climbed down the side of the ship to the boat that had brought him over to us.

"I will be at your side until the `end'," Carol answered...

"I wish to address those aboard," Maris said to me then. I nodded to Lars, who gave the orders to those gathered below the quarterdeck. Maris then stepping up to the railing, speaking to them in ringing tones. I thought she was well worth dying for...

"I see," Darlanis spoke, the golden mesh concealing little. Her azure eyes meeting the darkness of the brunette Lorraine's. She felt as if she was betraying her own sex doing this to Maris. The enslavement of women by both sides had been one of the causes of this conflict between Dularn and the Empire, and now she was going to be fighting on the side of the slave owners against the rightful Queen of Dularn who sought only to put an end to this...

"You are at least of royal birth, which is more than Maris can claim," the Senator continued, feasting his eyes on Darlanis.

"You are 'aware' of my true parentage?" Darlanis challenged.

"So what! Your mother is the 'Queen' of Mars," he laughed.

"You have 'reservations' about all this, don't you?" Carol said to me later on. We had listened to Maris' speech to the "crew" of the North Star. There was no doubt that they were all prepared to give their lives for Maris. For the former slave girls there was of course nowhere "else" to go. If Maris "won", there would be a major historical change like nothing since The War of 2047. Dularn would be the first country where no woman would be a slave unless condemned to slavery for her own crimes!!

"Either we're going to make 'history' or we'll all end up dead," I answered, taking my brownette in my arms, kissing her. I remembered those Japanese pilots at the end of World War Two...

"I feel 'sorry' for Maris," Darlanis spoke to Lorraine as they stood there on the quarterdeck of the Athena, the sails of the little Dularnian vessel carrying it back now towards Arsana. "She tried to 'do' what millions of women have dreamed of doing." A nod from the black clad Warlady was "answer" enough just then.

"Sanda Talen stopped me from 'trying' it," Lorraine said.

"I didn't want it to 'end' this way!" Darlanis answered.

"You've 'won', and Maris has 'lost'," Lorraine replied.

"I'm going to offer her 'terms'," Darlanis answered back.

"Better dry your eyes," Lorraine said, offering her a cloth.

"Two ships, both 'Dulie' rigged'," Jon spoke to his wife, her dark eyes lifting, burning into his as she sat there in the stern cabin beneath the stern windows. It was nearly dark, the sun a hot glowing red ball on the horizon that divided sea from sky...

"Signal Darlanis," the Warlady answered him, the tone of her voice as if she was going to her own execution. He understood her "feelings". The fact they would have to kill a brave Queen who had tried to

stand up for the "rights" of her own sex against men who only saw a woman in terms of whips and a slave collar... She knew that Maris would never agree to "terms", to "surrender".

"Be nasty if she fights," Jon said to the Queen before him.

"I would," Lorraine answered, her eyes glistening with tears as they met his. "At least she had the `guts' to stand up for something!" Lorraine snapped, standing up, her hand on her sword!

"Swiftstar," I said, although Maris already knew that, I supposed. The lines of the ship approaching us unmistakable now.

"Two against two," Maris spoke, her voice hard, steely. So much like Carol's might have been under similar circumstances... To starboard the forest, ahead the masts, sails of the Athena on the horizon. Beyond her like a dim haze now was Dularn itself.

"Swiftstar's signaling," the signals midshipman spoke then.

"`Typical' of Darlanis," Maris snapped, reading the "words"!

The last rays of the setting sun highlighted Darlanis' hair as she stepped aboard the North Star, her golden mesh concealing little of that magnificent body. She is a very "impressive" gal!

"I have been in `contact' with Dularn," Darlanis said to us. "They have decided that your return would not be `welcome' now." I had no doubts that she spoke the truth. Darlanis was that sort of a woman. A true "sword sister" to Maris. They shared caste. The same "Code of Honor" that only those like ourselves honored.

"I have already been informed of that," Maris answered her. "The people of Dularn will be the ones to make that decision..."

"I think you will find my terms `generous'," Darlanis said.

"You've never been a slave girl, have you?" Maris retorted.

"I was the captive of Tara for a while," Darlanis answered.

"Not the same thing," Maris snapped, "Now leave this ship."

"I'm so `proud' of you," Carol said, putting her arm around Maris Marn, the Queen of Dularn. Darlanis now was being rowed back to her ship as fast as her oarsmen could pull on their oars. I wondered how many of us would survive, and if we did, then what? We were being given the choice of "deaths", either at sea or at the hands of the Dularnians if any of us made it to Arsana!

"I'm sorry it had to `end' like this," Maris said to her. I saw Carol's eyes meet mine. I thought our deaths would have "meaning". One of our ships might make it past the enemy to Arsana. Even if we all died here in battle, there would be those in Dularn who would "understand" what their Queen had fought for!

"John Brown, Harper's Ferry, 1857," I said to Maris then. I saw Carol nod. She did remember some of her "American history". We'd "lose", but our deaths would inspire others to "carry on"...

"Run up our battle flags, and hoist that new flag of ours!" Maris snapped to Lars, who nodded, giving me a big "grin" then!!

"That's not a flag I've ever seen!" the first officer of the Swiftstar gasped, glancing at his Empress, who smiled in reply.

"It was called the 'Stars and Stripes'," she smiled. "It was the flag of a nation that once believed in freedom for all." She felt it "proper" that Maris Marn was the one to fly it now. It was not the flag of 20th Century America, but an earlier one. An America who had stood against another "Empire", defeated it!!!

Chapter Forty Six

"Signal the North Wind to keep Darlanis at bay," Maris snapped, the Athena now coming about, hoisting her battle flags. The North Wind already falling back, her own battle flags flying. I glanced up, saw that old familiar flag flying there over us. I suppose the early United States had a lot of "flaws", but at least they had believed in a sort of freedom unknown in this era! In a sort of "freedom" that some called "unrealistic" in my era!! The right to keep and bear arms, to live as you wished free of a government that sought only to oppress much like the Soviets had! At least the Lorr had put an "end" to that sort of "government"!!

"Some of us still believe in the ideals of Washington, Jefferson, and the others," the Queen of Dularn said to me smiling. That was probably why she had picked the one that she had now...

"Might have a little psychological effect on Lorraine too," I smiled. Like us, she was from the 20th Century. I recalled the conversations I'd had with her back then. She had said that America had "drifted" far from the ideals of its founders. Now she would be forced to fight against someone who held those same ideals. I wondered if it would have any "effect" upon her now...

"You might want a few words with your wife," Maris smiled, her eyes meeting mine. I wondered if there was a "LYS" or not? I supposed so. Everyone including Lorraine believed in her now. "And tell the bosuns I want the most experienced men in the rigging ready to make sail at my order," the Queen of Dularn added!! *****

"Beat to quarters, rig for battle, raise the shields!" the Warlady snapped, captain Janice Hill relaying her orders to the crew. The massive heavy inch thick shields being lifted up into position on either side of the ship. "We may end up fighting both of them, but let's hope Darlanis can hold that second one!"

"Hardly seems 'fair'," Janice "muttered", standing there.

"Another 'dumb blonde' like Darlanis," Lorraine snapped.

"Maybe she's got 'something' to fight for," Janice replied, the Imperial Warlady's eyes for a brief instant like those of a great predatory animal as Janice shuddered at the "look" in them!

"Just 'do' your 'duty'!" the Queen of Trelandar now snapped!

"Any ideas?" I asked Carol, holding her in my arms. We had armed everyone we could, stripping the North Wind of all its extra small arms. Our only hope was to close with the Athena, and fight it out hand to hand. We couldn't lick the dreadnought in a ship to ship action, certainly not against Lorraine's own armor!!

"I'm still a `crafty wench'," Carol smiled, kissing me then. "And we have `more' to fight for than `they' do," my wife added. I hoped so, the Athena being a "thirty two" to our "twenty four". The ship being a hundred and forty feet long, twenty more than the North Star. Broader beamed too, and considerably "heavier". The design reminding me much of an Eighteenth Century "frigate"!!

"Bow to bow," Maris muttered from beside me, her eyes on the approaching dreadnought less than a mile or so away. The Athena was heavy, slow in the water. The sun gone below the horizon. The sunset was beautiful. Perhaps the last one I'd ever see, I knew. The old "Stars and Stripes" flew up there over our heads. A bit of "history" from an era to most now only myth and legend.

"Think what she can do, and do what she can't," I said then.

"Bob!" Carol suddenly cried, "What if we fire over her bow!"

"Load darts instead of javelins or shot!" Maris cried out! Such missiles could be fired so that they would come falling down on the Athena in such a way that her shields would be worthless!!

"Put your best gunners on the broadside you're going to use," I said to my brownette, her eyes gleaming with excitement! She is truly a "Warlady" in more than just her title, I know now!

"The port broadside would be best," Maris "suggested" then. We would fire, and then spin the ship around as quickly as we could before Lorraine could turn hers and then fire back at us. The wind was not very strong. The Athena would be "sluggish" to respond to wind and helm. I wondered if Lorraine knew that now? *****

"What would you `do' in her place?" Jon asked his wife as she stood there on the Athena's quarterdeck looking at the approaching North Star through a telescope. The Athena did not handle well, Janice had told him, her ability to maneuver faulty. While Lorraine seemed to be able to handle her fairly well, he was well aware that it took all of Lorraine's talents to do so...

"Our positions are similar to those when I took the Huntress up against the North Star last year," the Warlady "smiled" in reply, looking over to where Janice Hill now restlessly paced the deck. She did not add that Maris now held the same position she had back then. The North Star could easily sail circles around the slow massive Athena. On the other hand the Athena's superior firepower and her armor plate made her truly a dreadnought now...

"And Maris is a lot more `experienced' now," Jon pointed out to his black clad wife. She also had the pair from the 20th Century, although Lorraine had said they would be of little value to Maris in a battle like this, as such warfare was "alien" to them.

"The `odds' are in our favor," the Warlady smiled back then. She hoped that Jon had not noticed that she had lied to him then. If the North Wind could come to the North Star's assistance, then they would be attacked from both sides at once, and the Athena did not have the crew to fight both sides of the ship at once... *****

"When I give the word, everyone must fire at once," Maris said. Carol nodding, her sword gleaming

there in the twilight. We had, I thought perhaps less than an hour of light to fight by. The Athena now less than half a mile ahead of us. Lorraine had hoisted only her main set of sails for better maneuverability, I had noticed there in the telescope. Maris had done the same. Two "legends" were going to sail to battle this day. Lorraine was the Empire's "best" by far, and Maris hopefully was Dularn's.

"Swiftstar has broken free from Miles," I pointed out. We would soon have Darlanis to contend with again. She seemed to be in "command" of her own ship, which surprised me a bit. The big blonde had never impressed me too much with her intelligence, although I knew she wasn't really all that "stupid", just reckless! The North Wind was coming in pursuit, but Darlanis was pulling up on us, her battle flags flying bravely from both her mast heads! One thing Darlanis didn't lack, and that was "guts", I thought!!!

"We will 'deal' with that problem when the time comes," Maris answered back, her voice a bit "short" just then, I noticed! The Queen turning to me and saying, "Remember we will be turning to starboard, and the spanker is the sail we will be using here."

"My 'trust' is in you," I said to the Queen, kissing her! I saw Carol's eyes, saw her smile. I was glad she "understood" it! Maris was regal in her full dress uniform, the tiara in her hair. We were Dularnians, all of us, and she was our own beloved Queen!

"The North Star is starting to turn!" Janice Hill cried out. Lorraine wondered for a second what Maris Marn was "up" to, then she "understood", an icy hand of terror clutching at her heart!!!

"Hard to port, let fly the spanker!" Lorraine snapped, her awesome mind hard at work! "Starboard battery, prepare to fire!" The Athena slowly turning, even the forces of wind and helm not enough to match the swiftness of the North Star's rapid turning!!

"Fire!" Maris cried, Carol's sword swinging down as she repeated the order. Our firing discipline was good, our weapons firing as almost one! Twelve sheaves of darts from our ballistae, and three full "patterns" of them from our three catapults!! I watched the Athena swinging slowly to present her own broadside to us, thought of those sixteen ballistae and four catapults that made up her broadside! The North Star still turning, coming around, almost stern on to the Athena now as I saw Lorraine fire!

"Take her below!" Jon cried, holding Lorraine in his arms, the dart from the North Star there in her left shoulder! He wanted to pull it out, the blood already staining her blouse, but knew better. The Warlady's eyes burning up into his as she shook her head in the negative, her teeth gritted against the pain of the wound! "Janice, take command!" he snapped, the young woman captain of the Athena nodding, the terror showing in her eyes... Suddenly she was being placed in command in the midst of battle!!

"Aiii!" Maris screamed, the ballistae bolt driven into her thigh pinning her to the quarterdeck railing. I could see the blood, a great red stain against the blue silk of her hose, already running down her leg! "Pull it out!" she screamed in pain! I grabbed her leg, yanked with all my strength, the bolt slipping free, Maris collapsing to the deck, the blood spurting from her torn thigh! Kathi standing there, her eyes livid pools of horror as she saw what had happened! The midshipman staring at me from sightless eyes, the bolt pinning him against the aft mast like a fly, the blood still pooling there at his feet. To my horror I saw Carol down, Anis bending over her, several others lying on the deck tended by some of the crew, the Athena's awesome broadside having raked down the length of the North Star from stern to bowsprit! The ship's Physician would have her hands full now!!!

"Anis!" I cried as I wrapped a cord around Maris' leg to slow the bleeding, twisting it tight with a belaying pin! "Take Carol's position!" I saw her nod, now doing so. I saw two women now gather up the limp form of my wife, and carry her below. The North Star now sailing south, the Athena in pursuit, the North Wind sailing to meet us, now chasing after the rapidly closing Swiftstar! Anis now dashing about the deck, getting the starboard broadside ready to fire again, this time at the Swiftstar!

"Try to remember what I told you," Maris breathed, looking up into my eyes. She had lost a lot of blood, a great puddle of it there on the deck. More oozing from her torn thigh with every beat of her heart! "Don't let them have an 'easy victory' now!"

"Anis!" I cried, lifting my head. "Ready the port battery!" I didn't think Darlanis was experienced enough to react quickly! "Take her below," I said, the women now coming for their Queen.

"Lars!" I cried, standing there, my bloody hands on the quarterdeck railing, the puddle of blood from Maris, dark in the twilight, at my feet. "Get ready to let fly the jib!" I would fire a full broadside of darts right down the length of Darlanis' deck! If I could knock her out of the fight, then perhaps the North Wind and the North Star might be able to deal with Athena!! I saw Sandi at his side, her neck chain gleaming against the tan of her throat. Anis standing there on the main deck, her black hair and build reminding me then of Lorraine! Swiftstar coming up fast, Darlanis charging into battle like some angry pit bull!! *****

"I have to get back up on deck, Janice will need me now," Jon said, holding Lorraine's hand in his. The Warlady's voice a soft whisper as she nodded, saying that she understood he was needed. The Physician and her slave girl helpers as bloody as butchers, he noticed. The Athena's sickbay filled with wounded!! The North Star's "trick" had been extremely effective, he knew... The swinging lamps, the moans and sobs of the wounded like a glimpse into hell, he thought to himself, then leaving his Queen.

"Let fly the jib, helm hard to port!" I snapped, the North Star coming about like the sweet lady she is, the Swiftstar now a quarter of a mile away, closing rapidly, Darlanis doubtlessly now well "aware" of what I was trying to do, I suspected, seeing men dashing over her deck, her own jib suddenly flying free as Swiftstar started too late to turn away. "Fire!" I cried, Anis good as Carol had been, I saw, several hundred darts tearing through the air towards the Swiftstar now some three hundred yards away!!

"Let fly the spanker, swing her around to port!" I cried. I saw Anis grabbing men, women, sending them over to the other side of the ship. We did have a "big enough" crew to man both sides!! The North Star now turning back, Swiftstar turning away, presenting her stern as the starboard battery now fired its own broadside down the length of Darlanis' ship! The North Wind coming up, now broadside to broadside with Swiftstar, and firing another full broadside into Darlanis' ship as it passed on by her then...

Chapter Forty Seven

"Let fly the spanker, helm hard to port!" I snapped, using the speaking trumpet. "And to rephrase the immortal words of John Paul Jones, 'We are now going to start fighting!'" I added with a smile, seeing the North Star's motley crew looking up at me. "So as soon as any of your weapons bear, or can be made to bear, start firing on the Athena!" I doubted that we could do it much harm, but on the other hand we

might get "lucky" and hit something important with one of our sheaves of darts or patterns now from the catapults. In any case such fire would tend to impair the accuracy of their fire, which is perhaps why most shots were fired in combat, I understand from what I've been told by others. "And whatever fate holds for us now, we shall die as a free people!" The fact that Carol was perhaps dead making little impression. Such is the "nature" of combat, at least in my own experience. It is afterwards that you break down, weep for those who died. At the time I felt totally "drained", emotionless...

The range was about five hundred yards now, Lars trying for the Athena with our most forward ballistae. A splash off our bow an indication of the power of the Imperial's catapults... Sandi now at my side, acting as signals officer, taking the signals from the North Wind and relaying them to me. With the loss of Maris it would be me now up against Lorraine. I thought of Carol, my vision blurring a bit before I wiped my eyes. I saw Kathi down on deck, a bow in her hands, a quiver of arrows on her back. The North Wind pulling up a bit on us, Swiftstar still drifting.

"Inform Miles we will close the Athena and board," I said.

"They informed me that captain Miles is dead," she spoke.

"Going to be a big butcher's bill," I said to her then.

"Is there anything we can do?" Janice Hill asked, seeing the two ships approaching, the interchange of missiles now continuous between the three vessels. It was apparent that Swiftstar had suffered too many losses to be of any help now, Jon noted then... Athena was too slow to "run", and too ponderous now for battle. Her awesome firepower, heavier than that of any other first rate, seemed to be of little value against the approaching Dularnians.

"Lorraine would say that there are always 'options'," he smiled, trying to keep up her spirits. That the Dularnian ships were willing to run the gauntlet of Athena's weapons was proof of their "intentions". Despite the losses they might inflict on the two ships, there was no doubt that eventually they would work their way alongside, and then "settle the issue" with cold steel!

"That was close," Sandi breathed, the ballistae javelin having passed right between the two of us to thump into the stern railing. I had ordered the helmsman to steer something of a zigzag course in the hope that it might "hinder" the Imperial's aim. The Athena now turning, presenting her broadside as I feared she might. I swiftly barked the orders, everyone falling to the deck as a deadly hail of missiles suddenly flew towards us! Most of them going a little high, fortunately, although a few found their targets in human flesh due to the extreme crowding of our deck!!!

"She's swinging around," Sandi breathed, up on her hands and knees, the Athena now presenting her stern to us as she completed her turn. I could see her sails filling, more now being hoisted!

"Going to make it a running fight," I said, standing up now. It was getting darker by the minute, the sun long gone below the horizon. To the east I could already see a bright planet in the sky, probably Jupiter, I mused, trying to remember my astronomy.

"Hoist more sail!" I yelled down at the main deck, men and women climbing the rigging to set the stay sails. The North Wind had already done so, running parallel with us a hundred yards to port and pulling up a bit ahead of the North Star. We were still firing our forward ballistae at the Athena, as was the North Wind, while the Athena was firing her stern chasers. The distance between the ships closing, now

only perhaps a little over two hundred and fifty yards. Our crossbows now adding their own missiles to the fire we were now directing on the enemy warship!!

"She's swinging back around!" Sandi cried, and grabbing me!

"Going to be `nasty'," I breathed, the North Star's bow now aimed directly at the middle of the Athena as she turned around!!

"Fire!" Jon snapped, the heavy thuds of the Athena's broadside echoing in his ears. Janice Hill standing there, watching.

"I suggest we ram," she spoke. "Our weight is far greater than theirs, and we can at least cripple one of their ships..."

"Itsas good an idea as I can think of," he smiled back.

"Athena's turning a bit," Sandi said to me. She was a good officer. I saw San-sha lying there on deck with La- rasquatting over her. Bodies being carried below. The ballistae javelin from the Athena had cut my left leg just a bit after hitting the quarterdeck railing, the blood staining my hose as I stood there. Lars at the bow was directing the fire of the forward ballistaes. I saw the North Wind start to turn to avoid the onrushing Athena, a cold chill going through me as I thought of the difference in weights! We were all exchanging fire, ballistae javelins and catapult shot flying back and forth, the sails filled with holes, although there was little actual damage as yet to the rigging, I noticed, except for the main top mast. We had exhausted our own supply of the "anti-personnel" darts, and were firing heavier missiles now. Athena firing a pattern of darts that went just over us, ripping and tearing at the sails!!! Their "gunnery" wasn't up to Imperial standards, I noticed then. The death of Lorraine's first officer I suspect now was the reason here...

"Helm hard to port," I snapped, "Prepare to board!" The North Wind, fifty yards ahead of us, a hundred to port, now rammed by the Athena! The sound of the crash of the two ships a great "CRUNCH" as they came together, the North Wind losing its main and fore masts in the collision while the Athena seemed unharmed, no doubt due to its much heavier construction, I suppose!

"Need any help?" I heard a voice say, Carol suddenly climbing up from a hatch, her head wrapped in a bandage, a sword there in her hand! As I learned later, she had been merely knocked senseless by the ballistae bolt that bounced off the main mast!!!

"We're about to board the Athena!" Sandi cried with delight!

"Lorraine's got a lot to answer for now," my wife "smiled", the enemy ship seeming to tower up into the sky now before us!!!

"Repel boarders!" captain Janice Hill screamed, leaping down to the main deck, her sword gleaming in her hand as the survivors from the North Wind now came climbing up over the side of the Athena. Her keen blade biting deep, a man screaming in agony as she fought alongside her crew. The dismasted wreck of the North Wind now held by a dozen grapples alongside the bigger Athena...

"A bit too fast," Carol breathed, the North Star hitting hard in a great groan of complaining wood. Women now leaping from the rigging across the deadly gap that separated the two ships, swords and boarding pikes in their hands, and some with nothing but daggers! Carol dashing for the railing, my hands clasp her ankles, and boosting her up over the side of the Athena. I could hear the sound of swordplay on the other side as I now sought to follow her up on to the Imperial dreadnought. Handicapped a bit by my wounded leg as I saw Sandi join Lars. I could hear the curses and screams of hand to hand fighting, along with "For Maris Marn and Dularn!" yelled in ringing voices now!

Jon Richards met the attack of the brownnettofficer, her bandaged head making her look like some feminine pirate, although her swordsmanship quickly made him think then of his own beloved! In the darkness he did not recognize that he faced Carol Simmons!

Down on deckcaptain Janice Hill fought like a demon, her long slim blade now wet with blood, the battle she knew hopeless as more and more foes came climbing over the sides of the Athena! Most of them not men, but women, wild eyed women, unskilled with weapons, but driven by an anger that made them fight like furies!

"NORTH STARS!" I barked, "CEASE FIGHTING!" The battle now coming to an end as a couple hundred faces looked up at me then!!

"You're good, whoever you are," Carol spoke to her opponent.

"Lorraine's husband, I believe," I said, seeing Jon nodding.

"I would like to attend to her," he said, nodding to Carol.

"I'd like to see how Maris is doing," I said to Carol then.

"Your leg is bleeding," Carol answered, giving me a smile.

"We won," I said to Maris, although I think she knew that.

"You beatLorraine?" Maris breathed, pale, so very weak. Her golden hair outlining the "whiteness" of her face, her eyes,those lovely gem like eyes, now "glowing" straight into mine... The sickbay like a scene out of some demented hell. The Physician and her slave girls haggard, exhausted, bloody as butchers! The "sounds", the "smell", like something out of Dante's INFERNO.

"You `beat' her," I answered. It had been Maris' own teaching that had won the battle for us. That and the North Star herself, I thought. A ship that Maris had designed. Swift, handy, designed to fight anything afloat. Maris Marn had won this one!

"A bad design,"Lorrainesaid in a weak voice, lying there. "One you can rest assured I will not repeat again," she added, her dark eyes burning into the hazel of Carol's as she watched... My wife nodding, well aware that nothing had been "gained" here.

She was tall, golden there in the light of the lamps, her ribs bandaged from where a dart or bolt had cut her flesh. But yet she was still awesome in her majesty, truly the ruler of ImperialCaliforniain every detail. I think too that we looked upon her much differently than we had before. She had fought well against us. Showing surprising skill for one such asshe ...

"You have `won' this time," she said, her azure eyes ice. I knew she could have sailed off, left us, but she had not done so. She and Lorraine once stood side by side against a common foe...

"I am not interested in taking prisoners," Maris answered. She was very weak, the loss of blood having exhausted our Queen as she laid there on a cot in the stern cabin of the North Star.

"I will give you the Swiftstar, take the Athena back," Darlanis replied. "Perhaps Lorraine will listen to me this time."

"Nothing has `changed'," Maris spoke, Darlanis nodding.

"Perhaps more than you realize," Darlanis smiled then.

"What do you mean by that?" Maris answered, puzzled.

"There is a `Queen' in Dularn now," Darlanis then said.

"There has always been a Queen of Dularn," Maris answered.

"It takes more than a crown to make a Queen," Darlanis said.

"You wish to speak to me in private?" Maris asked her then.

"They may stay," Darlanis said, looking up at us both. "It is their lives as much as yours that are at stake here now." The tone of her voice, the look in her eyes leaving no doubts either!

Chapter Forty Eight

"Scared?" I asked Carol, now putting my arm around her as the North Star entered the greater harbor of Dularn's capital the next morning. The ruined North Wind on its tow there listing behind us, only vigorous work at the pumps having kept her afloat this long. Maris had said that the ship would probably never sail again, the vessel doubtlessly to be broken up for her materials. Swiftstar already gliding to anchor just ahead of us, Lars there on the quarterdeck with his lovely Sandi at his side. We had won a great victory, but the price had also been "great". Anis and San-sha were dead, along with about sixty others, both men and women who had given their lives for the cause of freedom. Maris there on her cot beside me, weak, pale from loss of blood. Thousands of people gathered there on shore, in small boats, all cheering us at the top of their lungs. It was a good homecoming!

"Not any more," Carol smiled back, briefly kissing me then. She was no longer the same woman I had known back in our own era.

"Nice looking place," I said, studying the city from what I could see of it from the quarter deck. It was smaller than Trella, Maris having told me that the population was about thirty thousand or so. A "comfortable" sized city, I thought to myself. It was walled, the walls on three sides about fifty feet high. The "style" is somewhat similar to that of a Medieval metropolis, the highest buildings about four stories high. Construction is mostly stone and brick, I might mention here, arranged in hundred yard square

"blocks" with interior garden areas. There is running water, sewers, although "waste" is often kept for gardens...

"Drop the anchor now," Maris said, interrupting my thoughts. I barked the necessary orders, the North Star now finally back home as the sails slid down the masts and the anchor splashed into the rippling waters of the harbor. We had finally arrived.

"Off load the wounded first," Maris ordered, her voice level as men now came aboard from the lighters. She was truly a Queen, I thought to myself just then, even if a good number of the Dularnian Senate apparently wanted another now in her place. "I will remain here until everyone else has left the ship," Maris said, "OLD GLORY" still yet flying over her head. I wondered how many here in this land, in this city, understood the "meaning" of that flag. I knew she had been "betrayed" decades before Janet Rogers replaced her with the "Phoenix" of the World Federation.

"There will be some who will object to that," I said, motioning with my thumb. Dularn's own flag is the "maple leaf" of Canada. I thought the old "Stars and Stripes" was more "fitting" in a way as Canada had not ever been the "free" nation Washington and Jefferson had sought for their country, only to have it later "betrayed" by those who sought only their own gain and advantage. America's "downfall" is considered by historians of this era to have begun with the "BROWN VERSUS BOARD OF EDUCATION" decision by the United States Supreme Court in 1954. It being held by most Dularnian historians that such a decision "weakened" the white race which was responsible for the maintenance of modern advanced society. The "problem" is more likely due to "multiculturalism", not "race" as such. There is very little actual racial prejudice as such in most 26th Century societies, but caste prejudice is quite common, and results in somewhat the same social effect I might note. Apparently every society must have its "niggers"...* * I should mention here that Keri Colter of Trelandar has done considerable research in collecting what literature is available from the era 2047 A.D. to 2100 A.D. What written material exists indicates that there were more black survivors of The War than are generally assumed by most historians; but that most of the men and the less attractive women were killed off by the rural survivors of that time, leaving the present racial status of the human race we see today both in California and in Dularn. (R.S.)

"I would have been a Scribe if my father hadn't wanted his oldest daughter to be a Warriress," Maris now smiled back at me. The Caste of Scribes includes historians, teachers, and lawyers. Maris was a well read woman, quite intelligent, I'd found too... She had a "step-mother", but I'd learned "little" about her yet.

"You understand our own history then," I said to Maris Marn.

"As well as that of our own era," the Queen of Dularn spoke.

"You once said that you understood why female slavery exists," Carol interjected then. "That the causes went far back."

"Women got 'greedy' back in your era," Maris Marn smiled. "Your society became 'weak', and didn't 'require' as ours does that you 'prove' yourself before you are accepted as an 'equal'." I recalled our history. We had extended citizenship, the right to vote, eventually to almost everyone living in the country despite the fact that the founders of our country had understood that rightly only "tax-payers" should ever be allowed to "vote".

"And in an era where 'muscle' was important, women soon became the slaves of strong men," I added for Maris, seeing Carol nod. There were of course those women who never were enslaved, but the tradition must have gotten started sometime in that era.

"Which is 'why' the free woman of today wears a sword," my wife smiled, standing there on the quarterdeck of the North Star.

"'Weapons and freedom are two sides of the same coin'," Maris answered. Such is a "saying" often voiced by the Warriress. A truth that has been "understood" for a thousand years, I feel. The "gun control" laws of the 20th and 21st Centuries were only a way that the politicians of those eras tried to establish their rule. Free men and women bear arms, slaves do not. This is understood by anyone of the 26th Century almost anywhere now. Had it been understood back in the 20th Century, would our own history have been the same as it was? One wonders about such things.

(Maris Marn's Speech to the Senate)

"There are those," Maris said, seated there before the Senate, her crutches propped beside her, "Who believe that I am 'unfit' to be the Queen of Dularn. That any Queen who evertakes a 'stand' in behalf of her own sex is unfit to rule our fair land." I stood to one side with Carol, well aware that there were those among the Senators who wished to depose Maris, "replace" her not with another Dularnian, but with Darlanis of California herself!! "In the recent battle between our ships and those of the Imperials many brave women gave their lives for the cause of freedom. Yet there are men in this very room who wish to make even more of my sex into mere 'playthings' with no more rights than the dogs in our streets, the unicorns that we ride. And solely because we are thought 'sexually desirable' and our culture allows for the enslavement of women from other nations. The very 'war' that we now fight with the Empire of California is caused in part because some men, both Dularnian and Californian, see women only in terms of whips and slave collars. Not as 'equals', not as intelligent beings with thoughts, feelings and emotions of our own, but as mere 'playthings' to 'decorate' their houses, warm their beds at night, and serve them their meals as collared rightless wenches who may be bought and sold as men so wish it." Maris now pausing for breath, the rapid rise and fall of her bosom telling of the strong emotions she felt. She was beautiful in her silken gown, the crown of the Queen of Dularn there in her soft golden hair... "I do not say," Maris continued, "That those women who commit a crime should not be 'enslaved' for their misdeeds, but I do say that to enslave a woman, any woman, just because she is a 'woman' is wrong. To carry out raids against another country for the sake of capturing young women to enslave is wrong. What is done by the Imperials is their concern, but this Queen of Dularn will not allow those of her country to continue on making these raids. If it is your desire to give this country to Darlanis as some of you now wish to do, do so, but first kill me so that I do not see what you have done to my fair land in the name of your 'greed'!"

"Made a bit of a 'fuss' there, didn't I?" Maris smiled later as we helped her up into the carriage. The "uproar" had been almost unbelievable. I had almost thought to expect to see sword duels to the death. The Senate had been completely sexually "polarized", the women Senators furious that any "man" might ever consider turning their country over to Darlanis because their beloved Queen wished to put a halt to the enslavement of "alien" women. Maris had "packed" the assembly in such a way that every married Senator there had his wife listening in the gallery. She is, as someone once has noted, a rather "crafty" wench at times.

"You've changed history," Carol said. I thought so too as we climbed into the carriage with her. She had been magnificent.

"Never underestimate the 'power' of a woman," Maris smiled.

I watched Kathi walking through the home that would be ours. She would be of course responsible for keeping it clean, for all the "housewifery" services that a slave girl is expected to do. The sensual exciting

curves of her body concealed but little by the brief leather of her clothing. Legally she was still a slave girl, but neither Carol or I thought of her that way anymore now.

"It will take a while before it is `our home'," Carol said to me. We would no longer enjoy the "privacy" we had enjoyed back in the 20th Century. While Carol could still "sun" herself on the roof top patio, it would not be the "same" as it once had been. On the other hand we had neighbors now, married couples of our same social status, the aristocrats of this society to meet. I could see children playing in the great open area in the center of the block, such being a common design of Dularnian urban life.

"No TV, no soap operas," I smiled, looking about. None of the technology that we'd gotten used to back in the 20th Century. Kathi now leaning on the window sill, looking out at the city. I took Carol in my arms, held her to me. Felt the wetness of her tears against my shoulder as I gently stroked her walnut hair...

(A week later)

"I know you've both earned a good rest after everything," Maris said, her emerald eyes glowing into ours as she sat there on her throne, "But this war must be settled before it drags on and on and Lorraine dreams up new `tricks' to pull on us next year." A good deal of Darlanis' "stubbornness" was due to Lorraine, Maris suspected, Lorraine being Darlanis' "pit bull" to "sic" on us. I was now a naval captain in the Dularnian navy, and Carol was officially the "Warlady" of Dularn, having been "confirmed" by the Senate the day before. A number of Senators having "resigned" their positions and sought political refuge in the Empire. I felt we were far better off without "traitors" in our midst. Without the sort who had wished to betray us to Darlanis. On the other hand there had been those who pointed out that the former slave girls we had brought here to Dularn had been mostly criminals "sentenced" to slavery for their crimes in California. Such women had no means of "support" in our society except either by prostitution (this "disturbed" the Prostitute Guild) or by finding some sort of employment, which might be difficult for many of them due to the differences in culture, language, education and so forth. Maris' "solution" to this was ingenious. Each woman was required to find a "sponsor", someone who would assume "responsibility" for her until the time she became a self supporting citizeness of Dularn. Most of these "sponsors" turned out to be single men as you might expect! In any case the "problem" was now solved to everyone's satisfaction!

"You're leading up to something," Carol said, standing there beside me. Her full dress uniform as "Warlady" was impressive. I knew the North Star and the Swiftstar had been refitted, and were now being stocked with food, water, supplies of all sorts. Volunteers being mustered in from the men and women of the city. I understood that Maris planned to send the ships out to fight...

"The Empire will believe that we are no longer a `problem' now that most of our ships have been either taken or destroyed," the Queen answered, the jewels in her crown glittering in the light of the lamps. The rich sensual curves of her body well displayed by the clinging blue silk of her carefully fitted gown.

"Doesn't look like you're going to get your house furnished for a while yet," I smiled, seeing Carol nod. The implications of Maris' words leaving no doubt as to "what" she wanted from us!

"At least we'll have a bit more `space' this time," Carol smiled. Without Maris the stern cabin would be "ours" this time!

Chapter Forty Nine

"Goodbye, and good luck!" Maris Marn, the Queen of Dularn spoke as we held her hands in ours. It was a lovely late summer day. A day to laze on the beach, soak up some sun, work on a tan. Not a day to be sailing a warship out into a hostile ocean!

"Just make sure that we have a 'home' to come back to," my wife smiled, taking the Queen of Dularn in her arms, kissing her. Maris nodded, well aware of how "close" she'd come to losing all.

I looked up at the flapping flag, the circle of white stars in the blue field, the thirteen red and white alternate stripes. The Senate had not raised that much "objection" to this new flag of ours. I wondered what the Imperial reaction to it would be? Darlanis maintained that she "represented" the old United States.

"Swiftstar's got her anchor hove up short," Carol spoke, bringing me back to the reality of the present. Lars was a good competent captain despite his lack of experience at "command"...

"Jib and spanker," I spoke, the first officer nodding. She was blonde haired, green eyed, and "capable" from what I knew of her. Sandra was her name, her last name "Steven". She was from the "disputed territories" as they are called, the northern part of the State of Washington back in the 20th Century. We also had Kathi aboard as our personal slave girl, I might note in passing.

"Aye, Aye, Sir," Sandra answered, relaying my orders to the bosuns. The sails rapidly ascending the masts. The North Star now being drawn up to her anchor by a dozen men on the capstan. I hoped Maris would be happy with my seamanship. There were at least three or four thousand people watching. It would not "do" at all to allow the North Star to crash into another ship or be taken "all aback" right here in the harbor with a good part of Arsana watching! There was a big difference in sailing the ship with Maris there to correct my "mistakes" and sailing her with no one to turn to as its captain! True, I had my officers to rely upon, and I supposed Carol could "help", but it was my responsibility, and I wanted to be sure that I did it right this time...

I saw the Swiftstar take the wind in her sails, her anchor suddenly coming out of the water, muddy and dripping, and I knew I could delay no longer now! I barked the order to hoist the anchor, and suddenly the North Star was moving, the wind in her sails! Drifting backwards for a few seconds until I let her fall off a bit, then with her jib and spanker close hauled she became a living thing beneath my feet, and we were off to sea again now!

"A good design," I said to Carol, who smiled back, standing there beside me. The crew at my order now hoisting the main sail as we followed the wake of the Swiftstar out of Arsana's harbor, its blue green hull and sails now the mark of a Dularnian raider.

"You're a good first officer," I said to Sandra, my careful inspection of the ship having found little to complain about now. We were well out, perhaps thirty miles or more at sea. The sails of the Swiftstar visible there a few miles ahead. Carol standing there on the quarterdeck, watching, her eyes now missing little. We had left Arsana the day before, and I had left orders that the ship was to be brought up to fighting readiness immediately now.

"I hope someday to have a command of my own," she smiled. She had been the only surviving officer from the North Wind, although her "command" was now only a wreck there in Arsana waiting to be dismantled for parts. I considered her highly competent...

"We seem to have a lot of young girls on this ship," Carol said to me as we ate dinner in the stern cabin, Kathi serving us. All three of our midshipmen were young girls in their mid teens. I suspected that "politics" was involved here too to some degree.

"Maris must have 'owed' some 'political debts'," I smiled. We really didn't have that many girls actually, but I did feel a bit "uncomfortable" with the thought of exposing sixteen year old girls to combat. We had no way of knowing if Darlanis wouldn't put one of her own second rates out on patrol, or even perhaps bring up one of the surviving first rates she had as a patrol. On the other hand all those belonged to Lorraine, who might have a different "view" of matters here due to our treaty with Sanda.

"We need to 'work' on our tactics," Carol said, changing the subject. She was most definitely starting to think like a "Warlady", I thought to myself. Another of the same cut as Lorraine! "There's no telling what we'll run into when we get further down the coast line." Maris' plan had been for us to "harass" the Imperials as much as we could, while taking as little a "risk" as possible in the hope that this might force Darlanis to seriously reconsider her policies. So far as we knew, the "agreement" between Dularn and Trelandar still held, although Lorraine could of course void it if she so wished. On the other hand it would not be to her "advantage" to do so, something I hoped to point out to her when we reached Trella, our current eventual destination now. In my view the key to peace laid with Lorraine, who had little to gain from continued warfare with Dularn. Much unlike Darlanis...

"And we need to have training sessions," I pointed out in turn. Both Carol and I might get killed, or wounded, and someone would have to sail the ship then, perhaps handle her in battle...

I watched the Swiftstar come up into the wind, now taken all aback. I suspected some poor midshipman was wishing right now that he or she hadn't ever been born! The one now standing there on my quarter deck nervously shifting from one foot to the other!

"Remember Shari that you steer with the sails as well as the rudder," I told her, the girl's green eyes wide with terror now!! We had tied the wheel, forcing the girls to steer with the sails.

"Aye, aye sir," she gasped, the wind blowing her dark hair. I considered her the best of the three, the other two daughters of aristocrats, both blondes, and while able to carry out orders, not of the "quality" I thought I'd want in command of the ship...

"Jib and spanker," Carol added, giving Shari a smile then.

"If we ever sail again, I'm picking the officers," Carol said to me that evening at supper, Kathi to one side eating hers. Shari was the only "competent" midshipman we had, with Sandra the only competent officer. I wondered how Lars was doing with his? The second officer was another "political appointee", I noticed. She was tall, blondish, and no more a "sailor" than some farmer! The elder daughter of a powerful Senator, unmarried at thirty. I noticed that she seemed to go about as if in deep thought most of the time, her mind in any case far from her "duties" on the ship!

"Maris 'owed' too many people," I replied, well aware of the issue here. Hopefully it would not impair our fighting ability.

"Maybe we can make something of 'what' we have," Carol suggested with a smile. I suspected those two midshipmen would be wishing they were back home with their mothers before long now...

"Now, Denise, the enemy is approaching us bows on," Carol said, standing there, the bright sunlight

striking highlights off her walnut hair, off the hilts of her sword and dagger, the gold trim of her uniform as the Warlady of Dularn. Denise, sixteen, blonde and beautiful looking at her with consider concern right now after having seen what had "happened" to her friend Monica. Carol having told that "unfortunate" that if she didn't 'improve' and "soon" she was going to be "kissing the gunner's daughter"! * * It is a common practice to "discipline" midshipmen of both sexes by bending them over the frame of an uncocked ballistae and then vigorously applying a good supple switch to their rear ends! A similar practice was carried out in the old sailing navies of the past with midshipmen (all male back then) I may note. (R.S.)

"Lady Carol!" Shari interrupted, "Swiftstar is signaling!"

"Signal `A'," I spoke to Carol. That was "Enemy in sight!" I could see the flashes of the light myself. The blue green sails of the ship blending in with the sea, the sky, the hull almost invisible against the ocean. At night we could cover the hulls with canvas. I had made the "suggestion" to paint the two ships thus shortly after we first reached Dularn. "I'd like to call up the crew, go to battle stations," I told my Warlady then. Although I was married to Carol, she was my superior officer now and I tried to maintain "protocol" for the sake of "discipline".

"That would doubtlessly be wise," Carol smiled back at me.

"Imperial second rate," Carol said, lowering the telescope. That had been my first impression too, but why was he now turning away? Any Imperial would have hoisted battle flags at the sight of a Dularnian, especially as it was unlikely that he knew of the North Star as yet, the Swiftstar being considerably ahead of us.

"I would like to investigate," I smiled, seeing her nod.

"At least the crew is `competent'," Carol observed. They seemed to at least know the difference between a stay sail and a stun sail, which was more than I could say for Denise and Monica. The North Star now smashing through the waves, every sail set. I could see the enemy ship, fleeing towards the south, Swiftstar in hot pursuit. Why should an Imperial warship run from Lars' ship?

"That's not an Imperial warship," I said to Carol then, her hazel eyes for an instant showing disbelief before she nodded in understanding. There was only one sort of a "merchant" who would be sailing these seas in that sort of a vessel. One built for speed, not carrying capacity. And there is only one "cargo" that is valuable enough to justify the expense of buying such a ship!!

"We could use a ship like that," Carol said to me then. I nodded. We were Dularn's last second rate now with the North Wind gone and the Northland destroyed the year before by fire. I knew that the Senate felt that commissioning privateers made more sense in this sort of a war. Dularn had a number of third rates, ships more suitable for patrol against pirates and that sort now. Most of these were two masted schooners much like the Swiftstar.

"The `cargo' is doubtlessly quite `lovely'," I smiled back.

"Doesn't smell that `pretty'," Carol smiled at me, the captured slaver now hove to, Swiftstar's shot across her bow sufficient for the slaver captain to be "reasonable" about matters. The slave girls would be of course chained below decks, no doubt on straw, which isn't changed very often on any slaver's ship...

Chapter Fifty

"Climb up out of there," the captain of the slavery yelled, the hatch now open above their cell. Women are usually kept in cells aboard a slaver, a dozen women or so to a cell in a space about ten feet square. The ladder now dropped down into the cell would allow them to climb out one at a time. Security aboard a slaver is much like that of a prison hulk, although of course the "conditions" are somewhat different in that dealing with women is usually easier than it is dealing with the same number of men...

"We spray them down about once every three days," the captain said to me, giving me a gap toothed smile. Apparently he didn't own the ship and thus really didn't care that much if his cargo now ended up going on to Dularn instead of going to Porlan. This last having been his destination with this cargo of slaves.

"How often is their bedding changed?" Carol snapped as the first of the girls now climbed out to stand on the deck before us. The girls usually try to reserve one part of their cell for their wastes, leaving the rest of it for themselves to lie upon. The stink that arose from the hatches like that of an outhouse...

"The ship was 'clean' when they were loaded aboard," he said. The vessel itself was of Sarnian registry, I might note. He had been picking up women all along the coast, with their eventual destination being Porlan, which the northernmost Imperial city just south of the "disputed territories". The fact that he would lose both ship and cargo to us didn't seem to bother him. He would still get paid for his services anyway, I suppose.

The first dozen girls had now climbed out on deck, blinking and squinting in the sunlight. They were all chained by the neck, I noticed, such being an additional precaution on a vessel where the slave girls outnumbered the crew by some dozen times.

"A sailor's dream, ain't they?" the captain smiled at me. "I understand they're headed for the brothels being built there." Darlanis was building up her military forces in Porlan, her "intentions" here being rather "obvious" from what I'd heard lately.

"You have keys for their chains?" Carol suddenly snapped.

"Want to talk about it?" I asked Carol as we laid together that night, the gentle roll of the North Star and the creak of the hull now familiar, comforting sounds. My wife had been quiet, hardly interested in conversation ever since we'd left the slaver ship. We'd put the second officer in charge of the "prize", and elevated Sharito to the position of acting second officer. She was at least "competent", if inexperienced, which was more than I or Carol could say for the other two, both daughters of aristocrats. I had told Sandra that I "needed" her, and couldn't afford to let her go, not with as "inexperienced" a crew as we had aboard now! Now if I could only get "rid" of Monica...

"I know most slave girls don't have it that 'bad'," my wife said. Those who ended up with single men as their masters often lived lives that most wives might envy I knew. Such girls were always "envied" by their less "lucky" sisters in bondage. On the other hand to be a slave girl in a military brothel was to live a life of constant sexual abuse, mauled and knocked around by half drunken men at arms. Carol didn't need to add the rest of it...

"You're thinking that had things been 'different' you could have ended up that way," I said, holding her close, kissing her.

"I think there are `fates worse than death'," she said.

"Put a shot across his bow!" I ordered, Carol standing at my side. The vessel was lateen rigged, slow, a bloated merchantman! We were just north of Sam, the "hunting" having been good now. Something went flashing just between us then, a seaman there on the deck grabbing at his chest, the blood suddenly welling forth!

"Helm to starboard, port battery fire when you bear!" I snapped, the North Star turning, bringing her broadside to bear!!

"Idiot!" Carol snapped, looking at the body there on the merchantman's quarterdeck. One of the seamen had told us that he was both the master and the owner. I supposed his life savings were tied up in this ship. That's the only reason I can think of why he would return fire with crossbows against the North Star!!!

"You will take the prize back to Dularn," I said to Monica, the golden haired beauty standing there terrified. She was totally incompetent, even after "kissing the gunner's daughter" for not paying proper attention to her studies. I considered her "hopeless". She didn't belong at sea, at least not on this ship!

"Please sir, send another," the teenage girl begged, no doubt thinking of what it would be like to be in command of our new prize. I would send over a couple seamen for "security" with her, but getting back to Dularn would be her "problem", she knew!

"It's considered quite an `honor' to sail a prize home," I said to her. "Your parents will doubtlessly be proud of you." I understood that they were a quite wealthy family there in Arsana.

"Take your books on seamanship with you, study," Carol said. I supposed if Monica could manage to get in sight of Dularn someone could always come out and tow the prize safely into port...

"I hate to say it, but she's good for nothing but pleasing a man!" Carol said to me. That was a pretty assessment of Monica! She could carry out orders, but she couldn't "think on her feet" when it was "necessary" for her to do so. The crew made little "jokes" about her, which was bad for discipline. She got waylaid before she went a hundred miles by some Imperial third rate on patrol, whose captain then kept the wench despite the fact that her parents offered a ransom far more than her "value"! As Carol just said, she did turn out to be "good for something" after all!

"Port battery, fire!" I snapped, listening to the man in the bow beside me tossing the lead. I heard the "thud" of the broadside behind me as our weapons fired their broadside into the darkness lit only by the fires caused by the Swiftstar's broadside fired just a minute before. Our hull as black as night due to the black canvas now spread over the side of the ship. Swiftstar invisible in the darkness just ahead of us had already released her boats, I knew. Sandra Steven, the first officer, now ordering ours released now at my order. I felt uncomfortable knowing Carol was leading the landing party with Sharif for signals officer. On the other hand she was more "experienced" at this than I was. The Swiftstar signaling its turn as we now made a great circle in the darkness, coming back around to fire a second broadside from our starboard batteries over the heads of the landing party. Such fire was not really all that "effective" as such, but it certainly did help "impress" the Imperials a bit! I hoped such "hit and run" raids would be as "effective" as Maris thought. We needed some way of getting Darlanis to "negotiate"!

"Imperials never knew what hit them!" Carol laughed, Sharif standing there watching the flames shoot up from the buildings. My wife had taken her with her, saying that she could use the "experience". I think

Carol felt a bit "motherly" towards Shari, who in a way did look like what Carol might have as a teenager... My wife's blackened face bringing back memories of another time. The boats now being hoisted back on board as we filled our sails.

"We need," I said to Lars Debolt of the Swiftstar, his wife Sandi at his side, the silver of her neck chain glistening in the lamplight, "To do something about the telegraph system the Imperials have." This was a series of towers about five miles apart running along the coast that served to relay messages from one end of the Empire to the other. The system was a development of Lorraine's, and unlike some of her other ideas, seemed to work effectively, at least when the weather was clear, I understood. There was nothing "modern" about the "technology", since a system very much like it had been in use in France in the 18th Century.

"Otherwise Darlanis is going to be able to figure out pretty soon about 'where' our ships are," Carol added, glancing at Sandi sitting there next to her husband. The Queen could send out a couple of second rates, and several third rates, enough ships to put a quick halt to our activities if they ever found us at sea!!

"Shouldn't be too hard to destroy one of those towers," Lars said, his arm around his wife. "Only trouble is that the Imperials are certainly going to know what we're up to when we do it!"

"Maybe there's a way of doing it so they won't know," Sandi suggested then, her eyes meeting those of my wife as she nodded. She was first officer on the Swiftstar, a position she deserved!!

"'Spooky' out here at night," Shari Johnson whispered, well aware of how useless her sword or bow would be up against some of the life in this era. Her black clad Warlady and the first officer of the Swiftstar smiling to themselves at her choice of words just then! The group of archers and crossbowmen following close.

"There's the tower," Carol whispered, the thing towering up into the star sprinkled sky. A small hut at its base no doubt housing the operator and his family. A little jetty jutting out into the bay had a small sailboat tied up to it, she noticed now.

"Hold your force here," Sandi ordered Shari, the archers and crossbowmen from the ships squatting down in the sand. Shari watching the two black faced women carefully creeping ahead, the lovely midshipman wondering to herself if she would ever be able to do things like this? To lead a force down a beach to assault an enemy outpost. To bring the force of Dularnian naval power to bear in a place like this? The sixteen year old girl well aware of the "fate" that would await her should the Imperials capture them. The "war" was "undeclared", and so far as the Empire was concerned, she might very well be considered as "collar meat". And the poor family she came from certainly would never be able to ransom her if the Imperials ever decided to make her a slave!!

"No guards, no nothing," Sandi breathed into Carol's ear, the Warlady nodding in reply. There was a small village down the coast a mile or so away. This part of southern Sarn was not heavily populated. "We could 'take' this ourselves," she smiled!

"Let's do it then!" Carol answered with a soft laugh, creeping forward, Sandi at her side. The brownette crawling up to the side of the hut, there beneath an open window, the gentle sound of snoring coming to her ears as she listened carefully now. A nod to Sandi and both women lit the fire bottles they'd brought, tossing them in through the open window and then dashing around to the front of the hut, their drawn swords now in their hands!!!

Chapter Fifty One

"Trella," I said to Carol, lowering the telescope, the city just visible there in the distance against the distant bluish haze. The ship gently rolling there beneath us as we stood in the main mast crows nest. "I'll use that little sailboat we've got," I said. The one we'd "stolen" from the telegraph operator.

"Take someone with you," Carol said, her eyes holding mine.

"I'd like Shari," I said, my wife nodding, smiling a bit. It was a nice day, a mild warm breeze just right for a "cruise".

"Scared?" I asked Shari as we sailed into the great harbor. She was an attractive girl, one who impressed me with her maturity, her "competence" at everything that she did. I had no doubt she'd make Dularn an excellent captain some day. She was eager to learn, to absorb information on everything. She was the daughter of a ordinary working family in Arsana, metal workers, I knew. A girl who had sought ships, the sea as her goal in life.

"You should have taken Denise, she's of the aristocracy," Shari smiled. "My father just pounds on metal and makes things."

"A 'metal worker' is 'useful', the aristocrats aren't," I smiled back. That was the "trouble" with our societies, I said. On the other hand those of the 20th Century had been no better...

"That must be the Athena," she answered, turning on the seat to look ahead. I noticed Lorraine had taken the masts down, the great hull showing no sign of the battle the ship had been in.

"There's an Imperial second rate," I said, seeing the ship floating there at anchor. Its flags indicated that it was one of Darlanis'. The design of these ships is a perfect copy of the North Star, I might note. Such speaks well of my beloved Queen.

"If Queen Lorraine has revoked the 'agreement'...", Shari breathed, her eyes meeting mine. She has hair slightly darker than Carol's, although her eye color is that of a blonde woman's.

"Such matters involve 'honor' and 'caste codes'," I smiled. In dealing with Lorraine I tend to see her as I saw her back in the 20th Century. On the other hand rationally I was well aware she was no longer the same person that she had been back then...

"That 'command' is pretty small, 'cap'n'," the prostitute said, leaning there against a post that helped support the dock. Her short leather skirt and halter reminded me of Kathi's attire. She carried the common fighting sword and dagger, a narrow band about her throat marking her as being a "caste sister", a member of the Prostitute Guild controlled by the new Princess of Baja, the yet famous "Lara Warsan", who is married to Tara's son Jers .

"I do have a regular ship," I answered, wondering "why" I had said it just as soon as I spoke. She was brunette, her skin color leaving no doubts as to her "mixed blood" heritage that is so common here in what was once southern California. I knew too that women such as her often acted as the eyes and ears of rulers such as Darlanis and Lorraine. Darlanis for example owes a part of her "success" to the support

given to her by Lara's "women"...

"You once had a midshipman called Monica Freeman?" the woman smiled, leaning there against the post. A few of the city's men at arms were watching us from a shady spot. I had expected more of a "reception" than this, but on the other hand I didn't know if the prostitute was actually "what" she appeared to be either.

"Blonde, about sixteen," I answered, a cold feeling going through me. It was obvious that Monica hadn't made it to Dularn! I was thankful she didn't know that much about our plans, as no doubt she had told all she knew of things. Such is why Carol and I never told any of those under us our full long range plans now.

"She pleases her master well," the prostitute smiled back.

"I am here to speak to your Queen," I said to the woman.

"We expected that you were," she smiled back at me now.

"In here," the man said, the "prostitute" smiling at Shari. Lorrainedoes have a sense of humor, and sending one of her own Warriresses attired as a prostitute was I supposed her version of a joke. On the other hand Lorrainedoes keep pretty close tabs on things. Very little happens that she doesn't know about!

"Expected you'd show up eventually," Lorrainesmiled, her dark eyes glowing into mine, the azure of Darlanis' a hot blaze!! "Especially after putting my telegraph out of operation like you did there five days ago," the Warlady of California smiled at me. The two sitting there on a sofa, both a "contrast" to the other.

"Your majesties," Sharibreathed, doing a little curtsy.

"You are an `annoyance'," Darlanis said to me. I supposed that was an honest description of matters. Two ships couldn't do that much "damage" to things, but we certainly could stir up a lot of "trouble" now for Darlanis up and down her long coastline.

"Who thought up the idea of painting your ships blue green?" Lorraineasked, her dark burning into mine. She was dressed in a black silk and leather outfit that went well I felt with her now.

"We use black canvas for night operations," I smiled back.

"You were in command during the assault on the Athena," Darlanis said to me, Sharisitting there beside me staring at her. The slave girl Yvette Senchal quick to keep our wine cups filled.

"Maris should make you Sealord of Dularn," Lorrainesmiled.

"The only thing Maris wants is free election in the disputed territories (these had once belonged to Dularn anyway) and an end to this constant fighting between our countries," I said to Darlanis over dinner that night. The Queen of Trelandar having laid a table that kept Sharivery busy "sampling" everything there...

"Are you aware that Dularn has a new flag?" Darlanis smiled.

"We are the rightful heirs of the ideals of America," I smiled back at her. I don't think Darlanis liked that

very much.

"Which were abandoned shortly after the middle of the era from which you came," Darlanis smiled, her eyes glowing into mine. "The ideals which I represent are those of Janet Rogers."

"I'd rather stay with my captain," Sharisaid to the slave girl who had been sent to show us to our rooms for the night. I could understand her "terrors". She was a girl of sixteen, and I suppose she was very much aware of the fact that in these affairs of state her status was such that none back home in Dularn would raise a finger if anything was to happen to her here in Trella...

"That's fine with me," I said, the slave girl giving me a big smile, her eyes going over Shari in a way that left no doubt! Shari was slim, quite attractive, her body now budding out nicely in a way that left no doubts as to the woman she would be later. She stood about five six, perhaps a hundred and twenty pounds. I understood from what Carol had told me that she was a virgin. Such is not uncommon with Dularnian girls, who value such much higher than does their counterparts to the south in California. This doesn't mean that the Dularnian girl doesn't "flirt" and do everything else that teenage girls do, but most girls are well aware of the fact that in their culture, virginity is still felt to be of importance, and few are willing to give it up without the assurance that the man will be soon chaining their throats.

"Is it warm here all year around?" Shari asked, going to a window, looking out at the moonlit harbor. I thought of Carol, of the North Star out there somewhere a dozen miles out to sea. Shari had nice legs, I noted to myself. She scrambled up and down the rigging a dozen times a day, taking her duties seriously as acting second officer of the North Star. I planned to see that when we returned to Dularn that the position would be hers.

"The winters are cool enough to require a jacket," I said.

"These ruins must extend for miles!" Shari breathed, standing there on a mound that overlooked the ruins of Los Angeles. I smiled to myself, enjoying the girl's reaction to such things. I felt towards her much as a father would feel towards a daughter. We were escorted by a squad of Lorraine's personal guard. Sometimes outlaws hide in these ruins, although they are for the most part "avoided" by Californians, who have a superstitious dread of such places. It is said that they are the habitat of "creatures never made by Lys", the sort of things that inhabit nightmares...

"This was a city of millions of people back in the time before 'The War'," Darlanis spoke, looking up at her, the bright sun striking highlights off the Empress' tiara, her golden mesh.

"What was life like back then?" Shari asked as she climbed down to rejoin us. I knew that most people looked upon this era as myth and legend, such "settings" being a favorite of writers.

"There was less freedom than what you enjoy today," Lorraine spoke, "A social order that had forgotten the ideals of its ancestors." I supposed that was a pretty good way of putting it.

"You cannot hold the people of the 'disputed territories' against their will forever," I pointed out to Darlanis that evening at the dinner table. Lorraine nodding, glancing at her golden haired friend. Carol had discussed with me the introduction of "guerrilla warfare" against the Empire. Of "hit and run" raids against Imperial installations. The "tactics" she had now perfected of night attacks, of the use of long ranged ballistae, all reminded me much of what the Viet Cong had done in Vietnam. And I suspected that eventually Darlanis would have to withdraw her troops just as the United States had done back in the early 1970's. The Empress had her "pride", her "dreams", but I did not consider them "realistic". On the other hand she was in her own way "popular" with many Dularnians, who admired her despite what she had

done, perhaps because it is hard to hate a woman as beautiful and as "honorable" as Darlanis is. Another would have exploited the "opportunity" she had been given there. Darlanis had not. As she once said, "There must be 'honor' among us Queens."

"You are a woman that many of us admire," Sharis spoke then. "What you cannot 'win' with the sword may be won another way..."

"Such as you 'won' here in Trelandar," Lorraine smiled.

Chapter Fifty Two

"She's 'good'," Queen Maris said, Darlanis there speaking to the people of this little city less than a day's sail south of Dularn. I had to agree that Darlanis was "impressive". Even Maris, who is a beautiful woman, looked "plain" up beside Darlanis. The beautiful golden haired Empress was doing her best to convince the people that she, not Maris, could "do" more for them...

"What the people want to hear is the 'truth'," Carol spoke. During the time Carol and I had made our voyage to the south the Empress had carried "war" north to Dularn itself, using much the same tactics that Carol had developed for Maris. Such had put a considerable amount of political pressure on Maris to "settle"... There had been only three ships, two third rates and one second rate, but against an unprepared people they had spread terror along the entire western coast of Dularn in only a few weeks. I suspected that while the ships had been Darlanis', the "tactics" had been those of Lorraine, who like Carol and I, understood the effective application of terrorism against a civilian population.

"Does pretty good once she gets going," I said to Carol, who nodded in reply. Darlanis was more "popular" than we'd expected. Sharon had been a big "asset" to her, one we hadn't planned on!!! Maris was speaking of a time long ago, when men founded a new country on ideals they had been willing to put their lives on the "line" for. When they had fought another "empire" now only a few lines in the history books. Against a "superior" military power. I listened to her speak of John Paul Jones, of an epic battle at sea in another era now half myth. Her words bringing back memories of when I had stood on the quarterdeck of the North Star, the sails of the Athena towering up into the dark sky before me. Maris spoke of a flag, one of thirteen stars, thirteen stripes. Of a country where it was understood that weapons and freedom went hand in hand, something that another later on "forgot", the name of Janet Rogers not being all that "honored" here in Dularn!

The "elections" were "closer" than we had expected, although I suppose there was no doubt that we'd "win" against the Empire. Darlanis took her "loss" with the regal poise that marks a true Empress, although we did "sweeten" the loss a bit by agreeing to certain "terms" that would be of benefit to everyone concerned...

(December 23, 2567)

"There's something 'wrong', isn't there," I said to Carol as she sat there looking out the window at the falling snow, the streets of Arsana slippery and half filled with slush. I was a "admiral" now, with the North Star and the new Northlight (the former slaver) now a part of the squadron that I commanded. We were having our "problems" with pirates from the north, who descended upon Dularnian coastal villages like the Vikings of old. I had told Maris only this morning that a "defensive" policy of the sort she was now

using was useless, that we needed to send enough ships and men to clean out these "nests" of trouble makers for good! If necessary perhaps seek the assistance of Lorraine!!

"I miss what we used to have," Carol said softly. "I miss the 'love', the little 'games' that we used to 'play' together." I knew what she meant. No longer could Carol run around in her provocatively daring buckskin bikinis, no longer could she "do" all the things that we'd done in the first fifteen years of our marriage. Now we had "responsibilities", a "position" to uphold. It was true that Carol no longer had to concern herself with "housework" or anything else like that, Kathi being our "housekeeper and cook" along with everything else, but yet I knew and understood just what my wife was driving at here. For fifteen years we had lived a life of "freedom", and now we were "tied down" with the burdens of our respective positions, with serving a Queen who in her way could be extremely demanding of our time!!

"Is that 'what' you now truly wish, Carol Simmons?" a well modulated woman's voice suddenly spoke, a shimmering figure of a blonde haired woman in a long white gown materializing before us! "Do you wish to again 'lead' the life that you led once before?"

"Tais!" I breathed, well aware of "who" this "visitor" was!! The First Priestess standing there, her blue eyes glowing softly. The golden ankh on her bosom was set with precious jewels, I saw. She was, I knew, the true ruler of the solar system. She had the power to cross both time and space, to travel anywhere, any time!

"You are thinking, Bob Simmons, that I could go back in time and warn Janet Rogers of what would happen, or perhaps even further back in time to other eras, put a stop to the evil, to the mistakes that the human race has made since the dawn of history." Tais' eyes holding mine, her awesome power to read minds only one of the powers that she possessed from what I'd been told earlier!

"I assume you have good reason for what you do," I answered.

"We are not 'infallible', but we do try to do our 'best'," she smiled back. "And 'history' is not as 'easy' to alter as you may think." I supposed it was true. Such things have their own inertia. The War of 2047 was not caused by Janet Rogers, but by others who sought to rid the solar system of the Lorr. What Carol and I had done in this time probably hadn't altered that much!

"I do miss my life that I had back home," Carol said then.

"But here you are important to others," Tais pointed out.

"I think you also know something you aren't telling us," I said. I suspected that she had the power to see into the future!

"In your time Carol would have never been able to have children," Tais answered. This was not true of course in this era! And with this she was suddenly "gone", just a brief flicker of light that made you wonder if she'd ever truly been here with us!

"I think our questions have been answered," Carol said then. She would make a good mother, I thought to myself, kissing her. We would speak to the Priestesses here in Arsana, have it done...

We had dinner with the Queen of Dularn for Christmas. While "Christianity" is virtually extinct, the old holiday is still celebrated on December 25th as it was long ago. Even the Priestesses of Lys don't seem to "object" to this holiday although they claim that Jesus was just another "forerunner" of the "truths" that were "revealed" to the first of the Priestesses of Lys. Perhaps they are right. I know that Lorraine once

said to me that she believed in them, even if she didn't "agree" with everything they taught. In any case Carol and I did have a good Christmas, while gently outside the snow flakes drifted down to now coat the city of Arsanawith a concealing blanket of white...

The End