

## "IN HARM'S WAY"

### AN ADVENTURE IN THE SECOND DARK AGE OF MAN

By Robert J. Simmons

#### Forward

When I married Carol back in 1976, (AND THAT WAS A LONG TIME AGO!) I hoped that we'd settle down to a comfortable settled married life that would go on for year after year. For the first fifteen years until the year 1991 that was the way that it was. Then suddenly we were "plucked" out of our own time, our own era, and "dropped" into a strange hostile world over five centuries in our future. A world where Man had fought a great WAR with alien beings from another world and lost back in the 21st Century. Where the mysterious and almost "supernatural" Priestesses of Lys now "controlled" the entire solar system from behind the scenes. Here we quickly found adventure (a lot more than we wanted) and a "cause" for which we soon found ourselves fighting for there in the service of Maris, the Queen of Dularn against a great Empire.

The "world" of the 26th Century was a strange place, in many ways much like that of Rome at its glory. A social order where capital ships of the navies were still heavy triremes, where the most "advanced" missile weapons depended upon human muscle power. The sword was the preferred personal weapon of choice, and human slavery was commonplace everywhere. The common form of political organization was a constitutional monarchy with Queens now preferred due perhaps to half mythical legends of a "woman" who had once ruled the entire world way back in the Twenty First Century.

"In Harm's Way" is a term that was often used by sailors in the old "square rigger" navies before the development of steam. When you sailed up broadside to broadside with an enemy ship, you certainly were "in harm's way" for sure as you faced a row of black cannon muzzles and knew that death might be in the air now! On the other hand there are other ways of being "in harm's way" than in a ship to ship battle. Certainly facing a group of 26th Century "feminists" who hate everything "male" would "qualify"... Another is meeting up with the Lorr and the Women in an era when you least expected it. A time before the Priestesses of Lys were "founded" by Janet Rogers. A time when Man still felt himself to be the only form of intelligent life in the entire solar system. Before we learned the "TRUTH" there beneath the surface of Mars.

#### Chapter One

My unicorn was just a bit skitterish on the icy street as he followed the trotting mare of the Royal Warriress ahead through the blowing snow of this late winter blizzard. Few of the residents of Arsana we passed paying us any attention, their collars pulled up high, caps and hats snugged down tight on their heads as they scurried along the now slippery walks to their destinations, the store fronts and brick condominiums side by side like a wall fronting the street on either side all tightly shuttered for the night. Night had already fallen, and I thought regretfully again of that fine roast beef dinner with carrots and potatoes that Kathi had fixed for Carol and I. I had been looking forward to a quiet peaceful evening with my wife, nearly three months pregnant with our baby girl, Kathi attentive to our every need, but when the Queen of Dularn "beckons", one dares not say "no"... As the Admiral of Dularn I had my "duties" to the Queen.

It was the first of March, the year 2568 A.D. as I think of it. The people of this era saw it however as 521 A.W., marking time now from The War of 2047 between Earth and the planet Mars. In any case it was not a night for man or beast, I growled to myself, my greatcoat collar pulled up, my tricornered hat as Admiral of the Royal Navy pulled down tight against the wind that threatened to blow it from my head. My sword slapping against my thigh as my stallion trotted after the mare just ahead of him, a gust of wind blowing a handful of icy snowflakes up into my face. Arsana is built on the ruins of Victoria on the Island of Vancouver, although none but historians call the island that now. To everyone else now it is "Dularn", or "God's Land" as the early settlers called it after The War of 2047 when Mankind reverted to a barbaric and primitive style of life similar to that of Twelfth Century Europe during the Dark Ages after the "fall" of Rome. It is a lovely land, at least in warm weather, but the winters can be unpleasant, perhaps due to the long term climatic effects from the use of anti-matter bombs by the Lorr some five centuries ago. The sudden "Ice Age" of the second half of the 21st Century caused by the Lorr's bombing still not completely over even now.

So far as I knew our peace treaties with the Empire of California to the south still held, although Darlanis is yet still an "ambitious" Empress, and one who still dreams of being a "second Janet Rogers", the first having once been the ruler of the world. There was also Lorraine Richards, once of the 20th Century like Carol and I, who as a student of weaponry and war, had become the "Warlady of California" as well as the Queen of Free Trelandar, a land that once had been southern California in a time now "myth".

Arsana is a walled city of about thirty thousand, somewhat smaller than such great capitals as Sarn and Trella to the south, but yet an adequate sized city, especially in a technology where one either rides an animal or has said animal pull you in a buggy or carriage of some sort. In such a social order, life is much different from that of the 20th Century, and a trip of a hundred miles can take you days by land, instead of a couple hours behind the steering wheel of an automobile down a modern freeway. This is the sort of a thing that eventually makes you realize just how much the world has "changed", and that what you took for granted back in the 20th Century doesn't even exist now except as words in a history book. There are no telephones, no TV or radio. You either go read a book or attend a play or lecture as "entertainment" in this era. People work hard, harder than they ever did in our time, with a standard "workweek" of about sixty hours or so with yet little if any machinery to "ease" one's labors. On the other hand it is a social order that has a "vitality" about it that ours didn't. People in this society take politics seriously, and one can hear serious discussions often carried on in the workshops and places of business about the "merits" of various ideas, about how "good" a Queen Maris Marn "is" or isn't. I have no doubt that these people take their "politics" seriously.

Personal freedom is considerably greater than it was back in the 20th Century. The "right" to keep and

bear arms is taken for granted by all Dularnians. The idea that a "democratic" government could dare "disarm" you and that you would not rise up against that government is something few people here can "understand". The same is perhaps "true" in the field of drugs, in the issue of "prostitution", and a number of other things. A "line" has been "drawn", and both the Queen and the Senate know better than to "cross" it. Taxes are low, and "welfare" almost non-existent... This is an "Aryan-Nordic" culture, quite "different" from my era. The concept of "civil rights" being unknown here.

Hunched up on the back of my mount, I saw the gates of the palace opening before us, the Warrioress trotting on through just ahead of me and then dismounting to take my reins as I swung my leg up over the back of my unicorn stallion, my face already numb from the cold as the snowflakes came pouring down from the sky, the lamps on their posts only dim glows in this blowing blizzard. The palace there before us like a massive pile of cold wet stone.

"All I know, Admiral Simmons, is that her 'majesty' said it was 'important'," the woman repeated as I faced her, her walnut hair there beneath her helmet now crusted with snow much like her chain mail, her chattering teeth leaving no doubts now as to her own discomfort. No doubt she'd dash to the guardhouse for a warm drink of some sort while warming herself next to the pot bellied wood burning stove that was the usual source of heat here in this land. What would have been called a "Franklin Stove" back in colonial America, which Dularn muchly resembles in many ways...

"I'm sorry to call you out on a night like this," Maris Marn smiled to me, taking my hands in hers, the precious jewels in her tiara glittering in the lamplight while a slave girl looked on. The sweet curves of the Queen's body visible there beneath the wool of a long gray dress that set off her green eyes, her golden hair falling about her shoulders over her white furred cape. A very "attractive" woman, whom Carol once told me reminded her quite a bit of the 20th Century TV actress Katherine Kelly Lang. (Brooke Logan, of the soap opera, "THE BOLD AND THE BEAUTIFUL")\* \* It should be noted here that many Dularnian women do "bleach" their hair, much like the woman of the 20th Century did. On the other hand the number of "natural" blondes was higher than what would otherwise occur due to the activities of the Priestesses of Lys, who have the power to alter the genetic code to some degree. It is my theory that this "technology" was first invented in the 21st Century during the time of Janet Rogers, and has been carried down through the generations up to the Twenty Six Century.

"I assumed it was serious," I smiled back. The captain of the North Star, Sandra Steven, standing there to one side of the room, her first officer, young Shari Johnson, seventeen, at her side. The North Star was the "flagship" of Dularn, a hundred and twenty foot long raiding schooner mounting twenty four ballistae and some six catapults. Last year with the "assistance" of the late raider North Wind we'd taken her up against the Imperial's new "dreadnought", the "iron-clad" Athena under the command of Lorraine Richards herself. We'd "won", but it had been the sort of a "victory" that had left sixty dead, and almost that many wounded to one extent or another. I still had the scar in my leg from the ballistae bolt I'd gotten hit by, and Carol had almost gotten killed in that battle, while Maris' left leg still bothered her a bit, especially when the weather was damp like this...

"I have a 'mission' for the North Star," Maris said to me.

"Which you don't want anyone to know about," I smiled back.

"You will sail immediately," Maris replied, her eyes meeting mine. "And carry out my orders to the best of your abilities." The Queen then giving me my sealed orders and a quick brief kiss! The few words that she whispered into my ear left no doubts now!!

"Carol!" I breathed, my wife giving me a smile as she sat there beneath the stern windows of the North

Star, the lights of the city just visible across the harbor through the blowing snow. Her hazel eyes filled with "concern" as she rose, her greatcoat open, hinting at the still youthful curves of her body beneath. Her walnut hair wet with melted snow as I took her in my arms. I love my provocative brownette more than life itself, for without her life would not be worth living. She is five seven to my six one. In her now grew the little bit of flesh that would be our little girl in another six months. The Priestesses had "done" what would have been only a "dream" back home in our own century.

"A 'secret mission'?" she spoke, her red lips brushing mine. Her hand reaching up, brushing my dark hair as my deep brown eyes held hers. Her mouth that of an "houri", her curvy body an erotic promise of delight as my wife pressed herself up against me.

"'Sealed orders' I'm to open when I reach our destination," I answered. That was quite a ways to the north, along the southern coast of what had been the State of Alaska back in our own time. I wondered what Maris wanted with anything that far north! There among the icebergs and everything else in that icy sea...

"Kathi is putting a few things away for you," Carol said, a smile curving her soft moist lips as I still held her in my arms. "I told her to keep an eye on you and see that you take proper care of yourself," my wife continued, her eyes growing moist now. The memories flooding back of another time, another place, of my wife attired in a buckskin bikini peeling potatoes at the sink. Of "making love" in the clearing behind the house, Carol wet and sweaty beneath me, her hazel eyes filled with love meeting mine. Of playing all those little "games" that we used to do together.

"You are the Warlady of Dularn," I said. "Maris needs you." Carol was under our Constitution the head of the military, and took her orders directly from the Queen herself. The concept of a "civilian control" of the military is considered "foolish" now. The "national sport" of Dularnians is archery, followed closely by public contests of the sword. They are a martial people, well used to defending themselves from enemies, living in a hostile and dangerously savage world where such skills are often needed if one wishes to live in freedom. Slavery was "commonplace", especially that of women, who were often sought by slavers of other nations, the light haired women of Dularn often sought as slaves.

"The ice cap extends further down than it did in our time," Carol said, telling me what I already knew. No doubt she wished to make conversation, to have a last few words with me before she left the ship. She was pregnant, carrying our daughter to be. I kissed her again, holding her, the memories flooding back of other times, other places. Of a warm sunny forest in a time now myth. Perhaps it was just as well that Kathi interrupted things then. Neither Carol or I were truly of this era like another is. A woman who many say is the greatest swordswoman of all time. A tall slender black haired Queen, a true "Warlady" of the great Empire to the south of us. She who once had been Lorraine Duval.

"I have stowed away the things, mistress," Kathi spoke, her eyes having perhaps missed little of what had been going on then. Her long heavy woolen dress half concealing her sensual curves. Her blondish hair still wet with melted snow much like Carol's. The gleaming band of her slave collar was snug about her throat. It was of fourteen carat gold, marking her well as what she was. A sudden knock at the cabin door putting a quick halt to things.

"Enter," Carol spoke up, standing there beside me, her coat thrown back, her ornate weapons belt, the sword, clothing, leaving little doubt as to her status as Warlady, a rank that made her second only to the Queen of Dularn. A small brand on the interior of her right wrist marked her as being of the Caste of Warriresses. My wife's skill with a sword and bow was famous.

"We are ready to set sail, sir," captain Steven said, her hair white with snow where it wasn't covered by

her uniform hat. She was a good sized gal, the sort often considered "Dularnian".

"I will be leaving now," Carol spoke quietly then to us.

"You may get us underway, when convenient," I said to Sandra, the boat that had brought Carol now disappearing into the darkness towards the docks. Kathi below, taking care of things.

"Going to damn 'cold' there," Sandra smiled. I nodded back. Her eyes glittering in the light of the lamps there on the quarterdeck. She is a blonde, although the dark roots I've seen leave little doubt that her own natural hair color isn't "light".

"Johnson!" Sandra barked from the quarterdeck, "Get those men up on deck and hoist the jib and spanker!" Sharil looking up at her, almost as white as a snowman as she stood there below us! The captain then adding in a low voice, "There was a strongbox that came aboard just after your wife that took four men to carry it below, and there is only one thing that weighs that much!" I smiled, nodded again, cleared my throat. I knew "what" our mission was. Maris had whispered that in my ear before I'd left the palace. It was perhaps "best" right now that no one else "knew"! Three thousand gold crowns would buy half a dozen ships like the North Star, a hundred prime slave girls. Such a "treasure" carried aboard a ship can make any commanding officer "nervous", especially when it is so "easy" for a crew to take over a ship and turn pirate. Just then, however, my thought was not of the gold carried below in its strongbox, but of a young blue eyed teenaged Queen now held in helpless bondage there far to the north of us!

"I had it put in your cabin," she then added with a smile.

"That was doubtlessly wise," I smiled back at her then...

"I have detailed a guard," she added, seeing my nod...

## Chapter Two

I watched the last lights of Arsana fade out in the blowing snow, Sandra barking orders as the main sail was then hoisted up. It was a lousy night for sailors, I thought to myself just then. The ropes were stiff, icy, the deck and yards slippery with wet snow. It is easy to injure yourself under such conditions or perhaps even die in a fall from the yards to the deck. Unlike "life" on land, aboard a ship you are much more dependent upon your companions, upon your officers, upon everyone doing just what they "should"! This is perhaps why naval discipline must be as strict as it is. Why "slackness" cannot be tolerated at sea. The ocean does not give you a "second chance" to correct errors!

"This will probably last until morning," Sandra said to me. My teeth were chattering from the "chill" of this damp icy wind.

"Carry on, call me if needed," I answered, leaving her then. While I was her superior officer, she was responsible for the day to day operations of the ship as its captain. It was up to her to navigate the ship, to sail it to wherever we were to go now... My sealed orders from Maris had merely said to sail to a certain point far to the north of Dularn and then open the orders there. The Queen had however told me

that this was a "rescue mission". That the freedom, perhaps the life of Sharon Duval, the Queen of Orgon, now depended upon my being able to carry it out successfully. Maris had not told me "why" this had to be carried out in secrecy, but I assumed she had good reason for her actions here. As for "why" we were doing this instead of an Imperial squadron was something she'd not answered, although I suspected that Maris doubtlessly had good reason for acting as she had in this matter.

There are to the north of Dularn a number of small islands and coves along the coastline of north America, scattered groups of people living much as those of perhaps fifteen hundred years ago had lived. Their "culture", if you could call it that, was much like that of "Northmen" of the Twelfth Century. They made their living by fishing, farming during the summer months, and by carrying out raids from the sea on coastal villages to the south, both in Dularn and California, it not being unknown to find their small swift vessels as far south as Baja. These ships being usually what we'd call a "fourth rate", that is a two masted schooner about eighty feet in length at the largest, most of them ranging from about seventy to eighty feet and carrying sixty foot masts with main and top sails. While such craft cannot fight any warship, they can outsail most. On the other hand the crews of such ships are trained fighting men, with a tradition of close hand to hand combat much like the "Vikings" of old. They also use among their own islands oared vessels much like the old Nordic "serpent", even to the dragon heads, and packed with men half drunk and full of fight, eager for "battle"! Fortunately for the "civilized" nations to the south of them they tend to fight so much among themselves now that they have never become a "serious" threat, although they are a "terror" to those who live in coastal fishing and lumbering villages to the south, who have good reasons to fear the "Northmen", especially so for any young women!

"I have your dinner, master," Kathi smiled, the table set. I could smell the odor of the food, my stomach growling with hunger from having missed my supper. The roast beef, carrots and potatoes the sort of a dish any proper Dularnian might "enjoy"!!! None of this "rabbit food" that was popular in California either!

"You even managed to warm it," I smiled, well aware that no doubt "the admiral's slave girl" was able to do things that otherwise would have taken an "order" from the captain to have done.

"I have also washed and 'shaved' if master would like to enjoy me afterwards," Kathi smiled, her eyes glowing hot into mine! She was a good looking wench, a bit "ripe" bodied, with gun metal gray eyes. Shorter than Carol, but built on a scale of 38-26-38.

"I will take 'that' under consideration," I smiled at her. Aboard any wooden sailing ship there is no way of "heating" it as such, which means that in weather like this the interior is much like that of some barn in the winter, both in temperature and in the odors that soon gather below deck from unwashed human bodies. One is always "cold", with "warmth" just a memory of other times. If you try to wash your clothing, they will not "dry" due to the damp below decks, which merely makes the "problem" even "worse". The only "heat" aboard such a ship being the "cookstove", which is built in a small room below decks, all shielded with metal to prevent the spread of fire. Other than this, the interior of a sailing ship such as the North Star is miserable in the winter...

"I have taken the privilege of cutting master's food," Kathi said to me, taking the cover off the dish, the "steam" gently now floating up in the still musty air of the ship's stern cabin. I had no doubts either that the wench had hopes of sharing my meal. When alone Carol and I often let Kathi sit at the table with us, treating her more as a "servant" than as the slave girl she was. She was an extremely "female" gal, who knew just "what" she was.

"Help yourself," I said, sitting down, Kathi quick to join me, her body warm against mine through the wool of our clothing. Just having her around just then was a comfort considering what this "mission" of ours could lead up to. It being obvious to me that we were going to try to "ransom" Sharon Duval from

some den of pirates, and that Maris wanted to be the one to take the credit for doing so. The fact that none of us might come back from this "voyage" was something that I didn't think Maris had considered. Men such as these often are totally untrustworthy, and we could all end up no better off than the Queen of Orgon herself... Assuming that the pirates bothered keeping any of us alive here!

"I had something to eat before I came aboard," Kathi said, confirming my suspicions that Carol had quickly managed to put "2+2" together and come up with the proper answer. While she did not know "where" we were going, I supposed my wife was not fool enough to allow Queen Maris to keep such a "secret" to herself...

"You're a good girl, the 'best' any man could have," I said, giving her a "hug". I don't think Kathi really "understood" then why, and it wasn't my place to tell her. She had once been the "favorite" there on Lorraine's estate last year, and when Maris had "come" for us at the orders of First Priestess Tais, Carol had decided to take Kathi with us as our own personal slave girl.

"You should eat more," Kathi said, giving me a smile back.

"It's best not to make love on a full stomach," I told her.

"I'll let you come first in my mouth, then you can 'ride' me longer," Kathi smiled, the slave girl one who knew her "stuff"...

I listened to the slow creak and groan of the ship as it took the long Pacific rollers, the gentle glow through the stern windows speaking of the dawn to come. During the night we had cleared the strait, Sandra having put the wind to good use, even to hoisting the stay sails, although I pitied the men who had to climb up to the yards and set them here in this sort of weather. Kathi was warm and a bit "moist" beside me, her hair a pale shadow there on the pillow. She was naked, wearing only her collar beneath the blanket and comforter, her body warmth "comforting". I had "used" her well before retiring, her soft cries of pleasure as she climaxed leaving no doubts as to her strong sexual drives. Like Carol, she was a woman who "needed" a man's "touch" often. Back home she was a "tease", often doing little things to let me know just what sort of "thoughts" were going through her mind... Carol having threatened more than once to put her in a "chastity belt" just to be "sure" that she wasn't giving out her "favors"!!

Above me I could hear the footsteps of an officer, no doubt Shari, who as the "first" would be on deck when the captain wasn't. The "second" was an older man, who had reported aboard when I had. No doubt he'd been "selected" for his position here. I understood that he was "familiar" with the area we were going. I understood that he was married to a "brown" woman who had once been a Scribe in Trelendar before fleeing to Dularn years before. The term "brown" being used in this era to denote a person of Negro ancestry. Such persons are not "commonplace" in Dularn, but there is little "racial discrimination" as such, "caste discrimination" being far more commonplace here in the 26th Century now.

I thought of Carol, wondered how she would "make out" without me. We've been "together" for so long that neither of us was "comfortable" without the other. I suspected had she not been three months pregnant Carol would be sleeping alongside me right now instead of Kathi. She was now bothered slightly by "morning sickness", but I supposed that she could always get a woman to stay with her until I either returned or the baby came in September. The "implications" of the last was something I didn't like to think about, but I supposed had to be "faced" in this matter.

"This is the first time I've had breakfast with an admiral," Sandra smiled, Shari's surprisingly green eyes glowing into mine. Here eye color a "contrast" to the dark walnut color of her hair. The second officer, a

Carl Cabot, sitting there watching us all. His bright red hair and craggy features made me think of an old "Viking", which he did somewhat resemble. Kathi, like the well trained slave girl she was now seeing that our coffee cups remained filled and that we lacked for nothing in the way of food. The three midshipmen, a teenage girl of seventeen and two boys of sixteen sitting there nervously in fear of all the "rank" here... It is not unknown for parents to send a son or daughter to sea to put an "end" to an undesired teenage romance that is felt unwise. This is no doubt why so many girls end up as a naval midshipman. Considering the "risks" they take, I would think twice myself of sending a daughter of mine to sea, but I am after all not a true Dularnian and I suppose perhaps not one to judge these matters...

"We might as well enjoy our fresh food while it lasts," I answered, well aware that all three believed that I knew exactly "where" we were going and what our "mission" would be in those waters far up to the north of Dularn. Icy waters where icebergs might be a far worse threat to the ship than any "enemy action". Despite the watertight bulkheads, ice posed a considerable risk, drifting ice floes being easily able to crush the wooden hull between them if the ship was "caught" as others had been in years past. For this reason most polar expeditions used oared galleys.

"We've just completed a refit, so the ship should be in good condition," captain Steven said, glancing at her first officer, who nodded back in reply. The second officer sitting there studying me, while the three midshipmen sat stiffly at attention and tried to eat at the same time, no doubt very conscious now of their table manners. As "Admiral of the Navy" I ranked just below my wife, the Warlady of Dularn, and probably was considered as being something of a "god" by such lowly beings as the three.

"You will reinforce the rigging with all the spare cordage aboard the ship, have the sailmaker and all available hands sew reinforcing cords through the sails, and rebuild the top masts so that we can carry small top gallants if the wind permits," I said then. "I want this ship to be able to make thirteen and a half knots." This was a knot and a half beyond "rate" for the North Star, and would have made us one of the swiftest vessels afloat!! The "look" there on Sandra's face was something utterly "delightful" to see, not because she was "happy" about such orders, but because I think she utterly didn't know what to "say"! "Further, as we will be using nothing but flame weapons and darts, I want all the javelins and catapult shot now stored in the sand ballast over the keel. Then the crew of this ship will start training in the use of the sword, the bow, and the crossbow until every man, woman, boy, girl aboard this ship has been trained to the limits of their abilities. And when they are not practicing with weapons, we will carry out sail drill, weapons drill, until the ninety eight people aboard this ship, including our four slave girls, are prepared for what may occur when we reach our destination."

"It rather sounds like our destination is 'HELL'," the second smiled, sipping at his coffee. Sandra and Shariglancing at each other, while the three midshipmen just sat there "frozen"... The two boys with frozen "grins" on their faces, while the girl, a blonde like many Dularnians, looked much like a frozen statue. I had no doubts that she was well aware of what happened to girls her age if they got taken captive by such men as the "Northmen"!!

"I think it will be a bit 'colder' than that, but we may run into some people with 'horns'," I smiled, letting Kathi refill my coffee cup. "But 'hell' is a pretty good description of things." "And," I smiled, glancing at the women, "As my wife would say, for any woman who survives it could just be a 'fate worse than death' ahead if this ship is ever taken in battle by an 'enemy'."

"Sir?" Sandra said, standing there at the doorway, the others now gone to carry out their duties. "Just what is going on?"

"We are going to try to snatch a beautiful young woman from the hands of men who are frankly some of the 'worst' who ever lived," I answered. "And now you know as much as I do," I added.



"There was a `rumor' I heard just before we left Arsana that Sharon Duval, the Queen of Orgon, was captured by the `Northmen'," she answered, her eyes burning hot into mine. I nodded... "The Queen is a `crafty wench'," she smiled, leaving me then.

### Chapter Three

"At least there's plenty of `work' for `idle hands'," Sandra said to me as I walked the deck with her beside me, the sun now out, melting the snow yet hiding in shady corners of the ship as fleecy white clouds drifted across the azure vault of the sky. I nodded back, gave her a smile in reply. I'd warned her earlier to keep her knowledge of our mission to herself and to share it with no one until we reached the position where I was to open my sealed orders and proceed from there. There are a lot of Dularnians who bear Lorraine Richards considerable hatred, and to be ordered to risk their lives for her step daughter might not go down too well with everyone just now. There was a chilly brisk breeze from the westnorth west, enough to cause a good "chop" and send showers of icy spray over the forward parts of the main deck much to the "discomfort" of anyone underneath it. We were driving the ship hard, but I planned to drive it harder still! I had no doubts that we weren't the only ship sailing on this task! The Imperials would no doubt send a squadron as soon as they knew of the fate of their beloved Imperial Princess and teenage Queen.

"This isn't a `pleasure cruise' and the enemy we will face is much `different' from that we've faced before," I spoke, those sailors on deck within earshot listening carefully to my words. I saw men up in the rigging, others on the yards carrying out my orders. A number of women on deck sewing reinforcing cords into the sails. Even Kathi, the "pampered pet" she was, had her own "tasks" to do now. I saw the midshipmen, all three of them with the first officer, Shari motioning with her hands, the three now nodding as they listened to every word she had to say to them. I remembered that only the year before Shari had risen up from the rank of senior midshipman to that of lieutenant aboard this ship!

To starboard in the distance I could see the land, the trees coated with white. Dularn has a lot of pines, oaks, the sort of trees you see in lands that have "winters". I thought of Lorraine, that tall proud brunette Warlady of the Empire of California. It would have been a "comfort" to have her at my side now. Despite what everyone believed, we'd been extremely lucky that our first salvo had seriously wounded her in the battle last year between our respective ships. On land I thought Carol was a more "competent" Warlady, but at sea Lorraine had no equal in my eyes.

"Why just one ship?" Sandra asked, standing there, the wind blowing her bleached hair. She was a fine looking woman. I had no doubts that many men would pay a good price for her in a slave market. And if things didn't go well, she could well end up as a slave girl. Living out the rest of her life as just a plaything! And not as the "pampered pet" of some slave girl in Arsana, but as some barbarian's "slut", her back often welted from the whip, forced to do things that no self-respecting woman would wish to. I wondered if such thoughts had already passed through her mind?

"I'm assuming that Maris believes that one ship can "do" what a fleet could not," I answered, her gray eyes meeting mine as she nodded, her seagoing attire the common blue tunic and hose of both sexes. (I might note at this point that from the back it is sometimes hard to tell a man from a woman in this

society.) She was wearing a leather fur collared jacket, such necessary yet despite the warmth of the sun that shone down upon us from above.

"Those of your time had weapons that in this time could make a nation 'master' of the world," she answered, making me "smile". Such things are more "myth" than reality. It is no doubt "true" that one man with the military rifle of say 2045 could do a lot of "damage", but so could a couple of Marines with M16's from my time. The rifle of 2045 A.D. wouldn't have "won" the war in Vietnam, although I suppose we would have killed a lot more of the "enemy" with it. Maybe the "blaster rifle" of the Women of Mars would have been "decisive", but one even wonders about that too.

"This is a mission of 'rescue', not 'war'," I said to her.

Sandra and I circled, the tips of our blades touching. She was "good", but not in the same "class" as someone like Carol is. Actually I thought that Shari had a bit more potential here now. This was our second day at sea, the wind brisk, the sails drum tight as we smashed our way through the waves towards the north. I made a quick sudden thrust, Sandra parrying it, then making her own attack in turn that I parried, suddenly now going through her guard with a sudden unexpected thrust to just "touch" her breast!

"You're 'good'," she breathed, dancing back, her boots clattering on the quarterdeck planking. At least such "exercise" did "warm" one a bit, I mused then, the three midshipmen watching us. The sun dipping in and out from behind the clouds there overhead.

"Had quite a bit of 'practice' down there in Trelandar last year," I smiled back. Lady Tirana had used us as "gladiators" in the arena there in Trella. She had won a number of gold crowns in doing so, as well as "irritating" Darlanis for some unknown reason. Such "irritation" having almost cost Carol and me our lives. Only my wife's fantastic swordsmanship having saved us...

"Never thought of an 'admiral' as being a fighting man," the captain smiled back, driving in, making me pay attention to the task at hand just then. She was "good", and learning fast too!

"Never planned on being an 'admiral'," I now smiled back.

I watched the midshipmen at their work, the hands all keeping busy now carrying out my orders. From the rear rail over the stern to the start of the bowsprit was a hundred and twenty three feet. The "width" of the North Star is about twenty feet at the widest point, with the length of the ship at the water line just a hair over a hundred feet. The masts are eighty three feet to the tips of the top mast, although the actual yard on which the top gallant mounts is a foot or so below that. We had come very briefly close to shore yesterday, lowered a boat, and cut ourselves a new set of top masts, these being about seven feet longer than "standard". Later stopping at a fishing village, purchasing a few things that we'd need to complete our "refitting". I doubted that the "Northmen" would easily give up their captive. They would doubtlessly welcome the gold, but they might very well decide to keep both us and the North Star along in the bargain...

"Going to be the most 'fit' crew that ever sailed," Sandra smiled, seeing me nod. I was keeping everyone "busy" as I had promised. There had been little "griping" from the crew surprisingly. I suspected that most everyone knew that we were sailing into danger, into "harm's way" as seafaring men once put it back in another era when ships were square rigged and carried cannon. We were three days out from Arsana, and four hundred miles north.

"I'd think a woman as 'attractive' as you would be married," I said, Sandra being blonde, gray eyed,

and rather nicely figured by the standards of this era, which finds "muscle" on a woman to be much more attractive than it was back in my own era long ago. Husbands often "brag" about their wives' fighting skills, much as a man of my own era might "brag" about cooking and housekeeping. The Dularnian wife on the other hand, if she has "married well", will have a slave girl to do the cooking, housework, and also keep her husband "happy" if she doesn't happen to care for sex. This is probably a more "sensible" state of affairs than what was done back in our own time, the women of this time as a rule being a lot more "rational" about such things than were their counterparts of the 20th Century. The existence of legal prostitution no doubt helps keep things from getting out of hand, I might add.

"Was," Sandra answered back, the tone of her voice leaving no doubt that I had indeed touched "a tender spot" with my question. "Too many wenches in Arsana with 'morals' of an alley cat." I could fill the "rest" in for myself. It is doubtlessly "why" many Warrioreesses don't marry until rather "late" in life when they actually "retire" from active service as such. "Didn't figure she was 'worth' a duel," Sandra added, giving me a "smile" and letting me fill in the rest for myself. The Dularnian wife is often quite "possessive" to the point that she will "challenge" a woman who gets too overly "friendly". This can get "involved", especially if the "mistress" herself is married as is often the case. Dularnians are a "violent" people, much more so than were 20th Century Americans, and sword duels are quite commonplace, more surprisingly enough among women than among men! \* \* Women seem to be more "touchy" about their honor than men, I might note here. Men will "laugh off" things that women won't. This is true of Californian women to a lesser extent too. (R.S.)

"Sail Ho, Dead Ahead!" the lookout called down, putting a halt to this. "Looks like two ships, right close together too!"

"Shari," I said to the first officer, seeing her turn, "If you look up at the stars at night, are they tiny points of light without any 'blurring', and is the full Moon a clear sharp disk?"

"Yes, sir," the first officer said, a puzzled expression on her pretty face. I hope my daughter grows up to look like her...

"Then take our best telescope and go up there and tell us what you see," I said. "And 'see' what is there, not what you think 'should be' there," I added, well aware of such things from my own experience many years ago in another land, a war now myth.

"Two ships, both topsail schooners!" Sharicalled down to us. There are no topsail merchantmen I know of, only warships and pirates carrying topsails. "Looks like one of ours chasing a pirate!" she added with a yell that could left no "doubts" now!!!

"The Sea Star has doubtlessly found something," I smiled. The Swiftstar was in dry dock, and the other third rate was somewhere on patrol back in the straits between Dularn and the mainland. Dularn usually keeps a couple such ships on patrol for pirates, who are as I have mentioned quite a "nuisance" to those living in coastal villages along the western shore of the island. The new Northlight was being used as a "training ship" right now.

"There's a sail behind us!" Sharisuddenly yelled down. As we were faster than any merchantman, there shouldn't have been anyone capable of catching up with us now! Not at ten knots now!

"General Quarters!" Sandra snapped, not even hesitating now!

"What kind of sails, Shari?" I yelled up at her, seeing the men and women coming pouring out from below, some blinking a bit in the bright sunlight after the semi-darkness of the lower deck. The trill of the

bosuns' whistles something "familiar" to me now.

"Square sails, sir!" Shari answered, the tone of her voice now leaving no "doubts". There are only two ships that carry square sails. One is the Sarn to Trella clipper, and the other is the flagship of the Warlady of California, Lorraine Richards! The fact that the Athena was doing better than ten knots spoke much of its rig, the heavy dreadnought not being noted for speed. On the other hand Lorraine is a woman like none other I know of. There had been "rumors" of "steam engines", but Maris' spies in the Empire tended to pass on "tales" that were just "fantasies". Lorraine also had a "security system" that was hard to penetrate. I understood the ship had been completely rebuilt and refitted.

"We are 'not' at war with the Empire," I now said to Sandra.

"A good friend of mine last year lost her daughter to them," she snapped back. "Now she's just a slave girl kneeling before some damn Imperial!" Both sides in the war had employed a number of "privateers" that frankly were more used to flying the "Jolly Roger" than either the "maple leaf" or the "tarl" of the Empire. The new Dularnian flag just introduced this year was based upon one first used in the American Revolution of 1776. A rattlesnake, poised to strike, surrounded by a circular field of stars. There were those, however, who had pointed out to Maris that our flag looked something like that of the personal flag of Darlanis, whose own flag is a golden crown surrounded by a circle of stars. A number of senators having "proposed" that Dularn return to its own "maple leaf" flag that it had used for hundreds of years now.

"I would like to have the stay sails hoisted up," I said to Sandra. "And if you think it might be wise to go to battle stations as soon as the new sails are in position," I added then...

"Sea Star asks if we can render assistance," Shari called down, reading the signals. The sails of Lorraine's ship were now just a speck there on the horizon behind us. She was obviously pulling up, which amazed me as the North Star was doing close to twelve knots, although she had of course not reached her "limits" as yet due to my modifications of the rigging and equipment. I saw Sandra glance at me, then down at the deck where the crew now stood among the weapons, the ballistae and catapults now cocked. The men and women obviously uncomfortable due to the spray that leaped up over the bow with every wave that we smashed into now.

"They may have 'useful information'," I suggested to Sandra.

"Hoist battle flags!" she snapped, her hair golden in the sunlight. A bit of the icy spray flying the length of the ship to touch my cheek with a cold drop. In this wind a "fight" would be "hit and run", not the old broadside to broadside battle so beloved of certain sea officers that I knew. Even "outgunned" as the pirate was, I had no doubt that he'd put up a good fight!

"Remember our darts don't have the 'range' of javelins," I pointed out. On the other hand I considered them much more "effective" against another ship than the more usual javelins. I am of the opinion that victory at sea is best obtained by killing the enemy, not by trying to punch holes in his ship or rigging. While ballistae javelins will pierce a ship's hull, making holes a couple inches in diameter doesn't do that much "damage" either!

"A little gunnery practice won't hurt," she smiled back. I considered her a "competent" captain, although not "outstanding" when it came to battle. I'd seen her in action as a first lieutenant the year before there late last summer. She was a good sailor, but not really the "fighting officer" that Maris or Lorraine are. Whether I am their "equal" is a question I will leave up to the reader to decide. On land Carol is superb, perhaps even "better" than Lorraine, but I still give Lorraine the "edge" when it comes to fighting at sea.

That Imperial Warlady is good!

"I would like lieutenant Johnson on the jib," I said to her. "This is likely to be a battle where maneuver will be important."

## Chapter Four

"You wish to take command?" Sandra said to me a low voice as the pirate ship rapidly approached, the Sea Star a mile or so behind. That the pirate was "fast" was without doubt, since a Dularnian third rate of the "Star" class is now "rated" at thirteen knots. This is, of course, under ideal conditions and so forth.

"If I 'fell' in battle what would you do?" I challenged her. Just this had happened last year in a somewhat different context. Lorraine had "fell" in the first salvo from the North Star, leaving her husband Admiral Jon Richards and captain Janice Hill in command of the dreadnought. Jon Richards had been "unfamiliar" with the heavy armored battleship, and Janice, while a goodsailor, was not really a top notch fighting captain. Both of them had I think depended too much upon Lorraine to see them through. The fact they had also been depending upon Darlanis, who is something of a "loose cannon", probably didn't help matters any here.

"The 'best' I could," she smiled back, barking her orders. The North Star swinging up into the wind, close hauled, the sails pulled in fore and aft, drum tight as we smashed into the waves! The spray flying up over the bow in gloriously glittering sheets there in the sunlight, the chill breeze flapping the flags above! I thought all we needed was a brass band to strike up a tune now. One of those old marching tunes that they used to have long ago in an era that is now just myths and legends to most Dularnians!!

I watched the pirate closing the gap, the two masted schooner now swinging out a bit to seaward as I would have if I'd been facing such "odds" to hold the wind gage against us. He didn't stand a chance against the North Star, but I suppose he thought it was still possible he might be able to avoid a fight with either ship if he could still keep his lead ahead of us. Whether or not he was now "aware" of the Athena was another question. In any case the Athena was too heavy to be "effective" in a fight like this even if Lorraine had the "speed" to keep up with us...

"Let fly the jib, put the ship on the port tack!" Sandra yelled from beside me, her hands clenched on the quarterdeck rail as the sun briefly dashed behind another cloud, the difference in temperatures immediately apparent this early in the season now. The spray leaping over the bow adding to the "discomfort" of the crew there on deck, many of them now soaked to the skin by it.

"Which side are you planning to 'engage' with?" I asked.

"Starboard," she answered, her voice just a bit "curt" now. I couldn't too much blame her just then either. As admiral I'd have to write a report upon her actions afterwards, and a bad report from me could ruin her entire career in the Dularnian Navy! She was no "aristocrat", and was dependent upon her career for a living. If she handled the North Star badly in this "fight" she could end up "beached" for the rest of her life, such concerns no doubt preying now on her thoughts as she stood there beside me.

"If you're nervous having me here I can go below," I said. I was well aware that she could "blow" this "engagement" if she didn't position the ship just right. We didn't need a long chase after the pirate, especially as the North Star, even "refitted", was hardly likely to be much faster than the Sea Star right now.

"Correct me if I make a mistake, but otherwise....," she breathed, her eyes burning into mine. I understood. She had her "pride". The crew had to have "trust" in her ability to command.

"Carry on then," I said, resisting the "temptation" I had just then to pat her on the rear end for some unknown reason now! I have a hard time at times in taking women "seriously", perhaps due to feelings of "male chauvinism" that are inappropriate here. It is hard sometimes to think of women as being good "fighters". Of being able to "command" ships of war in battle, of leading a country's own armies into battle as my own wife might do someday.

I still remember the first time I killed a woman in battle, of seeing her body lying there in the dirt, her blonde hair pale against the ground beneath her helmet. Knowing that I had killed her. The golden neck chain about her throat had left no doubts either that I had taken from her children forever their own mother with my own lethal crossbow bolt. The fact that she had come charging down on me on her unicorn with set lance meant very little just then. It is hard to fight against a "foe" that is both blonde and beautiful. Who believes in the "justice" of her cause just as much as you do your own. She died that night, I lived...

I watched the pirate come racing down towards us, the North Star swinging about a bit, Sandra firing her starboard broadside! The ship still turning as our crew rewound our weapons, the women with packets of darts for the ballistae and catapults. The pirate now returning our fire, although his marksmanship left a lot to be desired, obviously from the number of casualties he'd took. A couple of ballistae javelins, low, striking our hull, while a catapult shot tore a hole in the main sail just above the yard.

"Hoist the top sails!" Sandra yelled, men scurrying up to the yards, while the pirate slowly drew ahead of us, the Sea Star also drawing up a bit, carrying all the sail she dared hoist now with the wind the way it was. The Athena now hull up on the horizon ahead of us, much like some frigate from a time long ago!

The pirate now fired again, a javelin thudding into the main mast, the others passing harmlessly through our sails. A catapult shot, short, splashing up spray just off the starboard quarter! I guessed that he only mounted about six ballistae a side. Most pirate vessels are not that heavily armed, I note, depending mostly upon speed to make their escape from a warship like ours.

"Starboard weapons, mind your elevations, fire at will!" Sandra barked. I'd been waiting to see if she would give that order. With a crew as well trained as ours it was more effective and efficient to let each weapons crew fire as soon as they were ready now without having to wait for a command from an officer. I glanced at the inclinometer there mounted on the quarter deck railing, smiled to myself. We were now several degrees beyond the point that is generally agreed to be the "limit" for a second rate like the North Star. Yet the ship seemed to be holding up well, our speed just matching that of the pirate, close to about thirteen knots I guessed, judging by the wind, the waves, the way that the bow wake moved away from the ship. Sea Star had now moved up slightly, running about a quarter mile astern of the pirate and a bit further out to sea. The Athena now moving to intercept, although I hoped that Lorraine would stay out of this!!!

"I wonder if we could carry a stun sail," Sandra asked. I shook my head in the negative. The rigging where I touched it was as rigid as a steel bar. Trying to get more speed out of the North Star right now

didn't make much sense to me. I saw no reason to risk the masts for the sake of sailing half a knot faster! A javelin whistled past our heads, falling into the ocean beyond. A pirate gunner on the other ship was doing some good shooting.

We were now engaged in a running battle with the pirate just out of bowshot, or perhaps two hundred and fifty yards considering the range of the Dularnian compound bow normally used now. I had seen one person hit, the man no doubt fatally wounded, while a woman had been hit in the leg by the missile after it passed through him. What "damage" we were doing to the pirate I didn't know, although I couldn't see too many men running about on his deck any more!! The number of bodies I saw there proof of our own marksmanship and the effectiveness of our patterns of darts as they fell like a constant deadly hail on his unprotected deck! I saw another man hit, a slave girl help him below to sickbay. I saw that Kathi was obeying my orders, doing what she'd been told.

"The pirate's turning away!" I heard Sandra yell, the North Star turning with him, our fire now continuous, his hardly anything to speak of in return. Sea Star now turning, firing, the pirate now suddenly swinging up into the wind, with no one at the helm! The Athena a mile or two off rapidly closing the distance!

"Check the hull," I said to the oldest midshipman, the girl, "We took at least several hits and on the other tack they are going to be well beneath the water line." Such had happened to us last year after Carol's attack on Lorraine's estate where the Warlady fired a ballistae bolt just at the waterline, the missile piercing the hull and causing us some "difficulty" later on then.

"Aye, aye sir," she said, her eyes still a bit "bright" from having seen her first battle at sea. I knew how she felt. During the fight there is a feeling of "numbness" as everything happens around you, and afterwards you feel "glad" to just be alive! The first sailor had died, while the woman and the second man would recover. Captain Sandra Steven now was climbing aboard the prize after a rather "hairy" trip over there in our longboat, while an officer from the Sea Star, now grappled on to the pirate, waited on deck to help her. The Athena backing a top sail as she came up, Lorraine now here judging from the flag flying!!!

"Sure got a 'big' cookstove aboard that, sir" Sharisa said to me, the funnel that ran up the length of the main mast puzzling, especially for the amount of smoke pouring forth now. A low deep thudding, just audible over the sound of the waves against the hull, now seeming to come from the Athena as she came closer yet!

"I would like a boat lowered," I replied, seeing Sharinod. I supposed that it was proper that I go pay Lorraine a visit now.

I leaped for the Athena's gangway, the boat falling away beneath me, then scrambling up as the big ship rolled in the swell. A tall slender brunette, clad in black, reaching down and helping me aboard. Once again I looked into the dark eyes of that Imperial Warlady, the greatest fighting woman of all time, some yet claimed... Not, I may note, ever in my wife's presence however.

"There may be survivors to be 'questioned'," she said to me. There was a "tension" in her body, a barely suppressed "fury" that seemed to radiate from her now like heat from a stove. I knew of her feelings towards Sharon. She would rescue Sharon or die in the attempt, I knew. No doubt she would welcome our help, but on the other hand I had no doubt that she would wish to be in command. I was thankful that Carol wasn't here right now. There is "bad blood" between the two Warladies. A deep burning hatred. Women can "hate" harder than any man can, I might "note" here...

"Return to the ship, tell the first officer to signal the captain that we wish to 'question' those who survived on the pirate ship." The midshipmen in the stern then carrying out my orders, staring in awe at the tall Queen standing there beside me!!

"You have a steam engine," I said to Lorraine, the sound now unmistakable as was the smoke pouring from her funnel, the very weapons here on the broad deck leaving no doubt that Lorraine was using steam catapults as the ship's new armament now! Weapons far superior to anything that we had aboard the North Star too! \* \* The Athena (the same is true of all the other Imperial steam frigates I know of), carries sixteen steam catapults a side along with six "quick firers", a weapon similar to a small ballistae, but recoiled automatically upon firing. Such weapons use a thirty round vertical magazine like a 20th Century BREN, and have a rate of fire of three rounds per second, firing a short steel javelin much like a crossbow bolt. The catapults can be fired five times in the space of a minute, I might note at this point.

"I had a long argument with Tais," the Warlady smiled back. Lorraine has an I.Q. well up in the genius class. She is the woman who laid the foundations for the World Federation of the 21st Century. Unfortunately Janet Rogers didn't follow it all...

"I doubt if she 'approved' of that," I smiled, seeing the weapon in its holster there at her hip. The grip leaving no doubt that it was a modern pistol of some sort or another. Not a weapon that she could have build herself, but one fabricated upon another world, one that is only a dot of light in our night sky. A world where horrid monsters live in caverns below the surface, "sharing" their desert world with beautiful golden haired women.

"Aurora and I are good friends," Lorraine smiled in reply.

"You are not making this voyage for your pleasure," I said.

"'Dularn' is not 'involved' in this," she snapped back, the flat level cold hostile tone of her voice now leaving no doubts however that she would not be "stopped" in her mission by anyone. "And we are a long ways now from Dularn," she pointed out, our position such that from the deck of the Athena one could see nothing but restlessly moving heavy swells coming at us one after another as the chilly breeze blew in from the west north west. The waves from peak to valley being about ten feet in height now.

"There is 'peace' between our countries and we face a common enemy," I answered, well aware of the tension she was under now.

"I could use a 'volunteer' from one of your ships who could guide me when we reach our destination," she answered in reply. "I will pay well for his services," the Queen of Trelandar added.

"You have come to rescue your daughter from the 'Northmen'," I smiled back. "The same mission Queen Maris has send us on." I saw no reason to lie to Lorraine about this. While I had not yet read the sealed orders, I had a pretty idea as to their content.

## Chapter Five



"You have heat!" I breathed to Lorraine as I stepped into the Athena's stern cabin, the gentle warmth just then to me like a loving caress from my beloved brownette back there in Arsana. The fittings, the furnishings all speaking of the famous Warlady. Unlike my wife, who is not really a "fighting woman" by nature, Lorraine is exactly what she "appears" to be without any doubts. The greatest fighting woman of all time perhaps, I feel here...

"When I have steam up," Lorraine answered. I wondered about her "fuel consumption". She burned wood, I could tell that both from the smoke and the "odor". Here in this time such "fuel" would be no doubt superior to anything else, and easy to obtain. "I can make three knots under steam, eleven under sail, and a bit over twelve with both," she added, her eyes glowing into mine...

"Your husband?" I asked, wondering just then about him.

"My orders as Queen of Trelandar," Lorraine answered.

"In case you don't come back," I filled in for her then.

"I have considered that 'possibility'," she said, walking to a wine closet, opening it, and removing a bottle, two glasses. I wondered about Yvette Senchal, who had been Lorraine's personal slave girl almost from the time she'd first come here from the 20th Century with Sharon. Flying through a "space-time" warp called a "GATEWAY" by those of this time. Such being caused by the use of anti-matter weapons by the Lorr in The War of 2047. I may note here however that the Priestesses of Lys appear to have a means of generating these on their own, using the power of a thunderstorm to open a "passage" between the centuries. Such was the means that Tais used in any case to transport Carol and me to this era, although I suspect that it took the "help" of many Priestesses to concentrate such "forces" to open up a "GATEWAY".

I suspect too that there may be a "GATEWAY" opening off and on over the Atlantic off the coastline of Bermuda. It is known that a Lorr battle disc with a load of anti-matter bombs exploded in this area back in 2047 A.D., the resulting blast causing great destructive tidal waves that washed far up over the coasts. This may be the source of the mysterious "Bermuda Triangle" of my era.

"How did it actually happen?" I asked her, thinking of Sharon, her stepdaughter. That had been puzzling me ever since Maris had told me what our mission here was. Sharon would have had guards, at least a full squad of Warriresses to protect her. It seemed odd that she could be "taken" by some pirate like a village girl just blossoming out into womanhood. The Imperial Princess was "smart", a very capable and competent person for nineteen. I'd seen her the year before, telling Darlanis what to do! The people of Orgon thought highly of their young Queen, I knew. She was generally thought to be more "competent" than Darlanis...

"A surprise attack on a village she was visiting in Orgon," Lorraine answered. "Her Warriresses gave their lives for her, but there were too many...", the Queen of Trelandar added, handing me my drink, and sipping thoughtfully at her own as she stood there before me, her dark brown eyes burning straight into mine.

"Queen Maris has learned of it somehow, and has sent me with three thousand gold crowns to try to ransom her back," I replied. How Maris "learned" of it was something I didn't know, but I felt it hardly mattered now. "Together our chances of success are a lot better than they would be separately," I smiled at Lorraine.

"Carol's abilities might be 'useful'," Lorraine smiled back.

"She's back in Arsana, three months pregnant," I said. A gentle tap at the cabin door now putting a sudden halt to our talk. A midshipman entering at the order of his royal mistress.

"Their 'admiral' is needed," the young midshipman said, his voice a bit squeaky just then, perhaps due to his age and the "frown" on Lorraine's stern face just then at being "disturbed".

"I'll go with you," Lorrainesaid, her sword swinging at her hip. I have seen her in "action", the greatest swordswoman of all time. Adding, "It's time I met with your people anyway now."

"You go first," Lorrainesmiled, looking down at the boat. The waves lifting and dropping it nearly a dozen feet at a time. I nodded, smiling to myself, venturing down the Athena's gangway. The boat coming up under me as I leaped, squatting as I hit, my hands grabbing for the edge of the hull as it fell again, a seaman holding it off from the Athena there beside us. The midshipman giving me a big smile, and grinning up at Lorraine standing above. She was wearing a soft leather skirt with hose. A heavy jacket, a hat with veil, high heeled boots as fitting an Imperial high born woman of her position. Not the best attire for jumping into a small boat held alongside a ship in a "sea" like this one! She also carried one of those long rapier like swords that some Warrioreses prefer, not a practical weapon either when you have to jump down into a boat filled with men as the scabbard was a good two and a half feet long, sticking down there beside her...

"O.K.!" I heard Lorrainesay, the Warlady leaping for us! I managed to grab her before she went over the side, her right arm going in up to the elbow in that icy cold water, her hat flying off, and then floating away now on its own voyage back to Dularn!

"It would have been 'easier' to take the Athena over there and grappled on," she growled, her arm dripping, her black midnight dark hair falling about her shoulders, the boat's crew with "wooden faces", fighting to keep from laughing at her discomfort!

"Trouble," Sandra said to me as I turned and helped Lorraine aboard, the Warlady's near "bath" in the ocean having been seen of course by everyone aboard the North Star. "That pirate made a good haul of women somewhere, and the captain of the Sea Star now feels that they are part of the "prize" that we've just taken..."

"The law reads, 'No citizen of Dularn may take a woman by force for the purposes of 'enslavement' from any nation," I said. I was sure that the captain of the Sea Star knew that as well as I did. Queen Maris would certainly remind him of it in no uncertain terms once he returned to Arsana with the prize, I knew too!

"He doubtlessly maintains that since the women were not taken by him, but by others that they are now a legitimate prize," I heard Lorrainesay from beside me, the Warlady's awesome intelligence well displayed by her delightful phrasing of the situation!

"How did you know!?" Sandra gasped, standing there amazed!

"It is 'logical', considering the 'nature' of your law," the Warlady smiled, her dark eyes burning into those of my captain... The Sea Star and the prize now drifting a bit down to leeward. They were already far enough away that it would be a hard pull for a boat's crew, especially in this sea. I wondered if he was thinking that if he got "far" enough away, that I'd just let him go. A lot of Dularnian seamen were strongly opposed to this law. There was considerable sexual "polarization" back in Arsana and elsewhere over it, with women for the law and the men against it. A number of high born Ladies opposing it, no

doubt fearing that they might someday have to do a bit of "housework" without having a slave girl to do such "demeaning labors" as dusting furniture. It being difficult to get any free woman to do such work as they considered such tasks to be the proper duty here of a slave girl.

"Signal Sea Star to bring that prize back," I snapped, Shari hastening to do my bidding. The ship would be a welcome addition to the Royal Dularnian Navy, and the women could be useful to us as some of them might come from areas near where we were going...

"I will buy that ship, everyone aboard her," Lorraine said, adding, "I will give you a draft for two thousand gold crowns for that vessel and whatever women are aboard it." Her eyes burning into mine in a way that left no doubts of her determination here!

I looked at the women there on the deck of the pirate ship, bloodstains here and there telling of what had happened earlier. They clutched to themselves what clothing they could find, shivering in the cold, their teeth chattering from the chilly breeze. The Warlady of the Empire of California standing there beside me, swaying with the motion of the ship. Around us the Athena, the North Star, and the Sea Star, ships of two different nations, of two different cultures. I wondered at the thoughts that must have passed through their minds as they stood there together in a tightly packed group, now clinging to each other in their terror.

"I am Lorraine, Queen of Trelandar, Warlady of the Empire of California," Lorraine spoke in a clear ringing voice, the sunlight striking bluish glints off that coal black midnight hair as it dipped in and out from behind the drifting cotton clouds there above. "I have purchased this ship, and everyone aboard it," the tall brunette spoke, her left hand on the hilt of her sword, her right on the butt of the Martian blaster pistol that she carried. The women muttering among themselves at this, not all that happy perhaps at the thought that they might now be her own "property"!

"I am giving you a 'choice'," the Warlady continued, saying, "You may serve aboard this vessel under my command, sharing the risks that I will be sharing, and afterwards reaping the rewards of faithful service to the Queen of Trelandar, or you may decide to accept the collars of slave girls, in which case I will sell the lot of you to the captain and crew of the warship Sea Star." There was of course only one "reply" the women could make to her!

"They're not fighting women," I said to the Warlady as we stood on the deck of the "Vengeance", this having been the "name" the Warlady had bestowed upon her new ship. Lorraine having said that she would take direct command of the former pirate schooner. Placing her first officer in command of her armored dreadnought.

"They will soon learn to be," Lorraine smiled, glancing at the seamen sent over from our ships and hers to man this new part of her "navy". The vessel would be rearmed, refitted, and in time I had no doubt would uphold the honor of this tall brunette!

"What in the 'Name of Lys' is she hoisting?" Sandra gasped, lifting the telescope to her eye just before sunset. I didn't need the telescope to know what it was now! Lorraine believed in "justice", and I suppose it didn't take her long to pass sentence on those pirates who had survived the earlier battle. Sandra lowered the telescope, her face showing the emotions that she doubtlessly felt. I supposed the sixty odd women aboard had made no objections to pulling on the ropes fixed to the yardarms. To putting a final "end" to those who had "abused" them so earlier!

"They generally hang pirates," I smiled in reply to her...

"A chance to stretch our legs," Sharisaid to me, her green eyes glowing with pleasure as we stepped from the boat a day later. Lorraine needed more firewood for the Athena's boiler. She burned it up almost by the ton too when she kept steam constantly up like this in readiness for battle. The ships floating out there a couple hundred yards out, their catapults and ballistae cocked and loaded, the Athena broadside to the shore, smoke pouring from her funnel, her awesome armament ready to fire at a second's notice. She fired sixteen steam catapults a side, all with a range of around five hundred yards, either with shot or darts. Her rate of fire was up to five broadsides a minute, I knew, now thinking of what it would be like to go up against such a ship...

"There are dangerous animals here," I reminded her, thankful for the crossbowmen we had with us. The ground still covered with snow despite the warmth of the sun there in the azure sky.

"There is a 'legend' of 'Amazons' who ride on great wolves," Sharis answered with a smile. I smiled, shaking my head in reply. Dire wolves are "big", but they aren't big enough to support the weight of a grown woman on their backs like a horse or unicorn.

"Sailors are great story tellers," I smiled back at her.

"As you 'say', sir," Sharis answered me back doubtfully.

## Chapter Six

"Cloud'n up," Lorrainesaid to me, watching another boat load of firewood being rowed out to the Athena two hundred yards out. It was getting later on in the day, the sky now gray, a few flakes of snow drifting down with the breeze. Up this far north winter often lasts until almost into May, I knew from what Sandra and others aboard the North Star had told me. Men from the ships standing guard, their crossbows cocked and ready. The design of the Dularnian crossbow allows it to be cocked for some time without damage, I may note, the design being different from that of the older and more "simple" types still in use in Californianow. The Dularnian design is "compound", has a "draw" of about two hundred to two fifty, and is cocked by a combination of belt hook and foot stirrup. It is a man's weapon, most women using bows. The "maximum range" (for volley fire) of these crossbows is three hundred to three hundred and twenty meters (330 to 360 yards). A "siege crossbow" is now built here in Dularn with a range of five hundred meters, but this weapon is cocked by a windlass and usually fired from a support of some sort. A number of these were carried aboard the North Star, designed to be fired from mounts set on the railings. The bolt is quite heavy, I will mention, and will often go completely through a man at almost any range. These weapons were a new design, and we didn't have them the year before when we'd faced the Imperial Warlady there in Trelandar... Carol and I having done our "best" to "match" Lorraine's weapons.

"Going to snow too," I smiled, the Warlady's dark eyes meeting mine as she nodded in reply. Kathi standing there looking at us, all huddled up in her coat, her head barely sticking out like a turtle's from its shell. It was most definitely colder now, the sun gone behind the clouds. I expected snow before sunset...

"That should be enough firewood," Lorrainesaid, seeing the last of the loads now being dragged from the forest, the pines in their greenery the only bit of green in the terrain I could see. She had a "reserve"

supply of lamp oil, which could be used to provide a hotter fire if needed. Coal is not found in Trelandar, although there are supplies of it elsewhere, I might mention now. It is sometimes used as a fuel in Dularn, although most people prefer to burn firewood, which is plentiful on our wooded island.

"Hard to believe anyone could live in these woods," I said. I yet tend to be a person of the Twentieth Century in some ways.

"I suppose it's what you get 'used' to," Lorraine answered, giving me a smile. I knew that people had once lived here long ago, some of our wood choppers having found some ancient ruins. Bit and pieces of "rubble" that spoke of another era now history.

"Too damn cold for me," I muttered, shivering a bit despite my greatcoat and well aware that it wouldn't be much "warmer" aboard the ship either. We were a long ways north of Dularn now, almost to the point where I would now open the "sealed orders" Maris had given me over a week before. One of the midshipmen now bringing the rear, glancing nervously behind himself at the dark forest, no doubt having listened to some of the sailors' tales...

"You're missing someone," Lorraine said, glancing about. I felt a sudden "chill" go through me at the thought of "who" it might be! I hadn't seen Shari Johnson for some time now either!!

"We can't remain anchored on a lee shore like this," Sandra said to me, pacing the quarterdeck beside me, the snow now blowing down on us like a white hail. Little hard pellets that stung one's face when they hit. I nodded, well aware of that "truth". If the wind got up any we could lose all three of our ships now.

"She's alone, doubtlessly lost, terrified, cold," I said.

"We can leave a cache of supplies for her," Sandra said.

"I will spend the night ashore," I said, seeing her nod.

"I'm surprised to see you here," I said, Lorraine arranging a windbreak out of a portion of an old sail she had brought with her. She already had a fire going, the smoke drifting off into the woods before us, the snow almost hiding the ships from us as they took the wind in their sails and headed back out to sea now. There was beside her a large bag filled with a number of items...

"I wish to make 'contact' with those living in this area," the Warlady answered, adding more fuel to her fire. "They may have information that we need if we are to recover my daughter." The Queen of Trelandar in her furs looking much like some Eskimo. I had dressed in my uniform, a sweater underneath, a stocking cap to cover my head, my greatcoat for warmth, heavy socks on my feet there inside my boots. And a couple blankets for sleeping. Like her I had also brought with me a portion of an old sail as well as enough supplies for a week or so if Shari didn't return. In such a case the supplies would be left for her if she made it to the site of our former camp. There was little more I could do...

"Perhaps they will have found my officer," I said to her, thinking of how "competent" she was in a situation like this one. That had always been something I'd admired about the woman even back in the 20th Century. There is only one "Lorraine". There probably will never be another. I am glad that I have known her. I am sorry in a way that we are divided as we are by "politics".

"Most likely they 'took' her," Lorraine answered, throwing some pine branches on the fire, making it blaze up even more now. "The 'idea' of 'Amazons' isn't that far fetched either, I feel." Adding that this

part of North America was mostly "unknown" now. I recalled too that Carl Cabot's wife, Tasha, of the Scribes, had done some "exploration" a ways to the south of here in what is called the "Northern Territories" by us of Dularn. There is much yet to be learned of life during the 21st Century before The War of 2047 put an "end" to everything. One question that has always puzzled those of the "LEARNED CASTE" as Scribes are often thought of is the "fact" that the black race in North America was nearly exterminated just after The War, only a few ever surviving, and those for the most part being women. On the other hand given the nature of Black culture as my wife and I knew it in the 20th Century, I suspect that the "answer" is really not that difficult... Blacks being the most "hated" minority in the history of Mankind. Their "extermination" once "law and order" broke down logical...

"Women living without men?" I ventured, helping her set up our camp now. I supposed it was possible. There are bands of runaway slave girls in the more southern parts of the Empire where it is possible to live mostly out of doors the year around. Such women often tend to be a serious "nuisance" to the Peasants.

"That band under San-shaw was a 'bother' for nearly a year," the Queen smiled, looking up at me, her dark eyes glowing into mine as I squatted down across the fire from her, the smoke of it stinging my eyes a bit. "And with 'leadership' I see no reason why women could not live by themselves for generations without men except for reproductive purposes," Lorraine Richards smiled.

"A 'leader' like you," I said, seeing Lorraine smiling back.

"We still have 'feelings' for each other, don't we?" she said. I nodded. I loved Carol, and I'm sure she loved Jon, but yet there is between Lorraine and me "something" completely different from what ordinarily passes between a man and a woman...

"It 'hurt' to have 'you' as an 'enemy'," I said to her.

"Let us never be 'enemies' again," she answered me.

"Do you ever wish you could go back?" Lorraine asked as we sat side by side before the fire, the sail spread between two trees behind us keeping off a good portion of the snow, the wind.

"Carol and I had a 'good life'," I said, thinking of all the good times we'd had. The "comforts", the lack of "worries" that had made our lives together an "perfect" marriage few might know. I had noted as had Carol that here we didn't make love as we had. That life was not the "same" as it had been for us back in 1991. I supposed our lives had more "meaning", but the "fun" was gone. I often looked upon our "old life" as a "dream" that was over... On the other hand there was a degree of "excitement", of "doing" things that we'd never dreamed of back in our own time. I think that Carol and I were like a pair of children living together as we did, living off my inheritance, playing all our little sexual "games" that we played together like a couple of teenagers who had just "discovered" the pleasures of sex. That there was something "missing" from our lives is obvious when you reconsider the last few years of our marriage, both our "reactions" to Lorraine. Mine in seeking a woman who was "more" than just a "playmate", and Carol's attempts to "remake" herself into another "Lorraine".

"I'm 'happy' here," Lorraine said to me. She'd been unhappy back in the 20th Century, married to that lecher of a husband of hers who chased after every woman he saw, including my own wife! "This is 'where' I belong, where my heart is despite everything."

"You never did belong in the Twentieth Century," I smiled.

"It was a dying society, and rotten at the core," she said.

"You changed history in a way no one ever has," I told her. Lorraine had been "responsible" for Janet Rogers, the most famous woman of all time. For a few brief decades it had been almost a "Golden Age" in a way before her death there in a Lorr spaceship. It was not a "perfect society" (Has there ever been one?), but it had "rectified" most of the "mistakes" that had been made in the 20th Century. One could not deny that even if Janet Rogers was not all that "popular" with those who wrote our Dularnian school books. Janet had been a "dictator", sometimes perhaps ruthless with her enemies, but in her own way she had given Man more true "freedom" than he'd ever known for centuries under any democracy. On the other hand Janet was strongly opposed by those who had for generations lived off the taxpayers as simple "economic drones". She having abolished "welfare", the "minimum wage", and such...

"I'm 'good' at a few things," the Imperial Warlady smiled. Carol had never "understood" the relationship between me and this woman. Lorraine was not like other women. There is nothing "female" about her. She is more of the "sort" like Queen Victoria.

"You 'understood' the 'mistake' of 'Civil Rights'," I said. We had often "discussed" such matters back in the 20th Century. Lorraine had been "opposed" to the concept of "Civil Rights". Saying that any society who "encouraged" such things was doomed!

"The 'ideology of slaves', not of 'free men'," she answered. "'Equality' is a 'myth' that can exist only in a true 'socialist' society." The Twentieth Century author, John Norman, had spoken of the same things. I think he would enjoy meeting this fantastic woman! Socialism had proved to be a historical failure, the World Federation of Janet Rogers having been quite different, its "makeup" in many aspects being more like that of "Fascism"...

"A social order where one 'earns' their place," I answered.

"Like 'here' in this time," the Queen of Trelandar smiled in reply, now bending forward, stirring up the fire there at our feet. "A culture that has much to recommend it in my opinion."

"You should put your ideas in writing," I suggested to her.

"I have," the famous Warlady smiled, the fire blazing up.

"We are not alone," Lorraine whispered, her keen eyes having missed little. It was night now, the snow still yet falling, although in large soft flakes that coated everything in "white". I saw the woman step out into the firelight, a great dire wolf at her side the size of a bear. I could see the saddle on its back!

"You will not reach for a weapon," she spoke, the words in a strangely accented English, the bow half drawn leaving no doubts! She was clad in furs, much like Lorraine's, although not as well made, her facial features, coloring indicating that she was of a mixed race, perhaps a part "native American" and part a "white".

"That doubtlessly would be wise," the Warlady answered as she got to her feet, raising her hands. I followed her example.

"We took the woman of your people," the woman volunteered. Several of her fur clad companions now stepping out into the firelight, their bows now held with arrows pointed at our hearts!

"You will follow me," the woman said, mounting her wolf. I didn't think we really had too much "choice"

in the matter either right now. She had tied our hands securely behind our backs, and looped rawhide ropes around our necks that left no "doubts" as to our probable "fate" should we attempt to resist her in any way... Her companions now mounted their own beasts, the animals appearing to be a "larger" version of the dire wolf known to the south. While not as "large" as horses or unicorns, they appeared well able to bear the weight of these women, who like the women of Talon (a nation that borders Trelandar), were rather small in size.

"The `stories' were right," Lorraine whispered with a smile.

"The ultimate `consequences' of `feminism'," I smiled back.

"We are not as `incompetent' as men often think," she said.

It seemed as we marched for hours through the snow covered forest there in the darkness, although Lorraine says now that it wasn't that long. No doubt being the Warriorress she is Lorraine was carefully "observing" such matters. The "attitude" of a true Warriorress of this era is something hard for one of the 20th Century like Carol or I to understand. Lorraine is such a woman...

I recalled the time last year when Carol and I had been captured by Lady Tirana (the Warlady of Trelandar) and with three other captives had been marched on a rope back to the royal estates of the Queen of Trelandar. This was much like that time, except that back then we'd been able to see where we were going! Now one could only see the dark boles of the trees against the paleness of the snow, the "stillness" as we moved almost awesome.

Unlike a horse or unicorn, the soft pads of the giant wolves made very little sound there in the snow, the women themselves in their furs apparently not being of a "talkative" type unlike most of their sex. Little was known of this land by those of the south, the world of the Twenty Sixth Century in many ways resembling that of the far distant past. That a social order of this nature could exist a thousand miles north of Dularn didn't surprise me that much as Dularnian political power does not extend more than a few hundred miles at the best north of the island. I wondered what sort of "culture" such a society like this might have. The woman of the 26th Century tends to be much more "able" and "self-sufficient" than her sister of my time, and a society of "Amazons" really didn't seem that far out of place right now! The fact that they had taken our supplies, Lorraine's "trade goods" had left no doubts that we might be in for a serious time!

## Chapter Seven

"You don't build something like this overnight," I whispered to Lorraine as we were led into what appeared to be a large fortified village that no doubt was "home" to a thousand people at least. Those who stepped out of the houses to watch us pass by were all women, young, old, all ages in between, it being obvious that the people of this area lacked the "anti-aging" serums of the southern civilizations. We had crossed over a small river, the water dark against the snow on either side of the bridge. I smelled the odor of wood smoke, the odors of a culture like this. Even Arsana with its sewer system "smells" a lot in hot weather due to the droppings of horses and unicorns as well as other animals. One soon gets "used" to such smells however, I might note. No doubt there is much less "air pollution" than there was in the



20th Century with automobile exhausts and factory smokestacks.

"Women are as capable as men of building civilization," the Warlady answered, now tossing back the hood to her coat, looking about as we were now led in on our tethers behind our captors. The torches here and there giving enough light to see clearly. I could tell that these women were a mixed ancestry, no doubt the result of interbreeding with the Eskimos and such who lived to the north. Their weapons, appearances however indicated that it was likely that they had trade relations of some sort with a more "advanced" people, a number of the women armed with light swords. Dularn has trade relations with nomadic barbaric peoples to the east, much like the Nevadas to the south. Their ruler is married to a Dularnian noblewoman as is mentioned in Darlanis' own book. Such people roamed over a good portion of south western Canada as well the north western portions of the United States. They call themselves "Wyomings", although such a name does not mean that they are from what was once that State back in the 21st Century.

"Not a man in sight," I mused, talking more to myself than to Lorraine just then, who was doubtlessly drawing her own conclusions here. I knew she still had her Martian blaster pistol hidden underneath her outer clothing, but that would hardly do us any good in this situation even if she had her hands free to use it. A number of the giant wolves wandering about much like dogs might in another place. I had no doubt that they would be fearsome foes in battle, especially due to their great size, the animals being the size of full grown ponies, say five hundred to six hundred pounds in weight. As such animals are omnivorous to a considerable degree, I supposed keeping them "fed" wasn't as "impossible" as it might first seem. The houses were log cabins, as one might expect given the nature of the area. They seemed well built, there being no evidence that these women were in any way more "primitive" than any other group living in this snowy land.

"Keep your mouth shut and your `opinions' to yourself," Lorraine answered in a harsh whisper, having overheard. I supposed that was "wise". "I'll do all the `talking' for us both," the Warlady then added, the tone of her voice leaving much "unsaid".

"Admiral Simmons!" Sharicried, dashing to my side. She didn't look "harmed" in any way, although no doubt she'd just had herself an "experience" that few teenage girls her age ever had!!

"I am Valeris, Queen of the Free Women," the woman said, her dark eyes burning into ours as she sat there on her skin covered throne. She was a brunette like Lorraine, but coppery skinned, her appearance reminding me somewhat of that of the late San-sha who had herself headed a band of ex-slave girls called the "Free Women". I guessed Queen Valeris to be actually about fifty years of age, although by the standards of the "south" she would be considered close to death due to her physical appearance. Her "palace" was just a large log structure that reminded me much of the "long houses" once built by the Vikings of northern Europe. A number of the women of this land now gathered about, whispering among themselves. The walls were decorated with hunting trophies of the sort that is rather commonplace in this era everywhere. On the other hand I saw no evidence of slaves, either male or female. Such was rather surprising, as slavery is now commonplace.

"You lack the anti-aging serums of our civilizations," the Warlady smiled back, "Along with many of the wonderful things I can give you," Lorraine added, no doubt having planned all this. "In return I ask only that you assist me as you can in the recover of my daughter from the evil men living to the north of you."

"It is far, many days ride from here," Queen Valeris said, obviously "impressed" by this "Warlady" from distant California. Unlike me, Lorraine had come obviously well prepared to "deal"...

"I will `pay' well for your help," Lorraine answered back. "I can extend the lives of everyone living here in

this village." A "buzz" among Valeris' women leaving no doubt that her words had been "overheard" as no doubt the Warlady had intended they would. Lorraine is a very skillful politician, a very "competent" Queen.

"I will give you my decision in the morning," Valeris said.

"Did they mistreat you, Shari?" I asked my first lieutenant.

"I think they took me so that you would come," she smiled. We were in a bedroom somewhere off the main throne room of the Queen's "palace", if you could call this place by that "title". The smoky fire in the fireplace took some of the chill off things now. Lorraine going to it, using the poker to rearrange things.

"I was hoping to find 'allies' here," Lorraine said to me.

"You are truly 'what' you are, aren't you?" Shari said then.

"I am a 'woman of peace', who has been 'forced' to be otherwise," Lorraine then smiled, sitting down on one of the two beds. "On the other hand one who wishes to live in peace must be always be prepared for war." I had to "smile" a bit at that, as it is very much like the philosophy behind the Dularnian militia idea.

"It is said by some that you are the greatest Warriress of all time," Shari answered, going to the small window, and looking out through the semi-transparent material that now covered it. I suspected that the material was from the afterbirth of some large animal, such being transparent enough to let it light through it.

"I am a woman 'good with a sword'," the Warlady smiled back.

"The greatest swordswoman of all time," I smiled at her now.

"They 'keep' men here," Shari suddenly blurted out, "Like we do dogs." Lorraine looking up, nodding to herself. "And the boy babies are usually killed and only the girls are kept!" she said! The tone of her voice leaving no doubts what she thought of it!!!

"That would be a sensible way of doing it," Lorraine spoke.

"And you want to make 'friends' with these women?" Shari retorted. Obviously she was rather "upset" by what she'd seen or been told, the latter more likely I felt than the former here...

"We keep slaves in our societies, and infanticide is legal," the Queen of Trelandar answered back. The Priestesses of Lys destroy deformed and defective children at birth. Such prevents the spread of undesirable mutations and relieves society of the "burden" of caring for those who can never be "self supporting". The concept of a "right to life" is unthinkable here in this era. Abortion on the other hand is very rare, and is usually only done if the child will be defective and would have to be destroyed in any case. Such "decisions" are rightly those of the Priestesses. Also "unwed motherhood" is virtually unknown, I might add here, all women being implanted with a contraceptive device at puberty. This is of course "true" only in the more civilized societies...

"You think this sort of a society is 'good'?" Shari challenged Lorraine like some "radical" from the 1960's. I wondered why she was so "upset" about it anyway here? She certainly hadn't impressed me before as being "political" to any degree here. On the other hand I really didn't "know" her that well, most of the conversations I'd had with her being about running the ship.

"These women do not make war on their neighbors, although I suspect that they have defended themselves in the past; they are not a 'threat' to anyone, and if this sort of a 'life' pleases them I see nothing wrong in letting them live as they see fit," I heard Lorraine reply, the Warlady's back turned to us as she now drew back the bedcovers, having removed only her heavy fur lined boots and her coat before slipping in beneath the roughly woven hair blankets. She had worn heavy wool hose, with a heavy sweater for warmth. Her pistol was "concealed" beneath her clothing.

"They kill 'innocent babies' just because they are boys!" Shariprotested. I advised her then that perhaps Lorraine had no wish to continue this conversation, which was leading us nowhere. My "advice" having come as "Admiral" of the Royal Dularnian Navy.

"Baby killers!" Shari snorted under her breath, sounding much like some Twentieth Century "RIGHT TO LIFER" from our time!\* \* I once discussed this matter with Queen Maris, who said that she didn't feel such matters were a proper concern of government. In any case the Priestesses of Lys do have the final say in this.

"There are two beds, and three of us," I said to Shari. I saw her nod, smile a bit in reply. I didn't think she wanted to sleep with Lorraine, especially after the "argument" she'd had with the Imperial Warlady over the sexual practices of Queen Valeris' women. I supposed that most of them were lesbians, much like the Women of Mars, such being quite commonplace in this era.

"I'm no match for your wife in a duel," Sharilaughed, her eyes as green as the sea glowing with affection into my own then. \*\*\*\*\*

"She's as 'strange' as they are!" Shari whispered to me in low tones as we followed Lorraine and Queen Valeris back to our encampment on the seashore the next morning. Shari having taken a strong dislike to both these women and the Queen of Trelandar.

"It would be 'wise' on your part to keep such 'opinions' to yourself until we are back on the ship," I pointed out to her. I personally didn't find these women all that "objectionable" myself. They certainly had the "right" to live their lives as they saw fit, and if they practiced 'infanticide' as Shariclaimed, it was their own concern, and none of ours. I also understood that they had little to do with the Priestesses of Lys, perhaps due to the fact that they practiced "witchcraft", which of course the Priestesses do not ever tolerate among their own followers. Such "witchcraft" was nothing more than hypnosis along with the use of certain herbs and plants, much like what was practiced by the American Indians of an era now mere myth and legend in this time.

"Aye, aye, sir," Sharimuttered, not delighted by my order.

"That ship isn't mine," Lorraine replied, lowering the telescope. It was square rigged, and appeared to be much like the Athena, even to the trail of smoke now escaping from its funnel. "Looks like Darlanis decided to put in an appearance," the Warlady explained, explaining that Darlanis had been building a steam frigate much like hers and must have completed the vessel now. I had no doubts too that the big blonde was concerned about Sharon, Darlanis looking upon Sharon much as any mother might about a daughter, especially as Sharon herself saw Darlanis in that way.

"Sarnian Queen," Sharisaid, lowering the telescope. Queen Valeris regarding the ship with a bit of awe, the vessel no doubt almost as strange to her as a Lorr saucer might be to any of us.

"The most beautiful woman of all time," I now teased Shari.

"If you 'like' that kind," Sharimuttered back in return.

"We are not at war with the Imperials," I pointed out then.

"You trust 'her' too much, sir," Sharianswered back. The "her" she referred to here I knew was not Darlanis, butLorraine. "She is the woman who was 'responsible' for Janet Rogers." It is true thatLorraine is generally considered in that light, but it is also quite likely that Janet Rogers did things mostly as she felt they should be done, and not whatLorrainewould have done.Lorraineherself is considered to be a very "competent" monarch. A certain amount of this may be due to Sanda Talen, a very capable woman who is the Prime Minister of Trelandar, butLorraineis thought of as being a "good" Queen, even by those opposed to her!

"Leave such matters to 'wiser heads'," I answered back, a bit annoyed now at her, taking the telescope from her and focusing it again on the Samian Queen. I saw the Empress, her golden hair and height unmistakable, and then another woman with her. A shorter, somewhat smaller woman, a beloved brownette who I'd left there in Arsana less than ten days ago! I held the telescope up to my eye, paying no note now toSharior anyone else just then as the emotions flooded through me at the sight of my own wife...

## Chapter Eight

"Carol!" I breathed, seeing that brownette in her furs, Carol's eyes missing little as I helped her from the boat, her arms going about my neck as she pressed those warm sweet lips to mine. A beautiful woman tall and golden haired next alighting from the boat, the Empress of California giving us both a big smile as we broke our embrace. "Like old 'home coming week'," I now smiled to her. It is hard to "dislike" Darlanis despite everything. There is something about the woman that is very hard to describe. A sort of innate "goodness" that has been noted by others too... I thought of the "stories" I'd heard, of her half secret daughter who might someday become the "last Leaderess" of the Earth. The woman those of the 21st Century would know as "Domino Tremaine". Once again the "thought" going through my mind that was it possible that this was the same "Domino Tremaine" we'd met inSpain?

"I thought that I might need a good 'Warlady'," Darlanis explained, her eyes like lovely azure jewels glowing into mine as she broke into my train of thought here. Carol's warm smile saying more than paragraphs could have just then as we embraced...

"Thought you might be able to use my 'help'," Carol smiled. Darlanis having strode off to greetLorraine and Queen Valeris. Carol explaining that Darlanis had specifically asked for her help. Apparently the big blonde beauty wasn't as "dumb" as I thought! Darlanis was no doubt well aware of my wife's "military" talents!

"You could be 'IN HARM'S WAY'," I then said to her in reply, thinking of "what" we might be facing when we reached our goal.

"I may be pregnant, but I'm not that far 'gone' yet!" Carol said to me, perhaps not that "delighted" at

seeing Lorraine here. On the other hand the idea of putting a pregnant woman "in harm's way" didn't much please me even if I was delighted to see Carol!

"Lorraine's made 'allies' out of these people," Shari said, going on before I could stop her to say that these "women" killed babies if they were of the "wrong" sex. She was obviously muchly "upset" by the idea, much like a "right to life" from our time!!

"She'd make a 'bargain' with the 'Devil' if she felt it'd do her any good!" Carol laughed, the laugh a bit "forced" I thought! While she was carrying a girl, not a boy, I suppose that any pregnant woman might be a bit "uncomfortable" with such thoughts!

"These women also practice the most vile of 'witchcraft' and even denounce the teachings of the Priestesses of Lys!" Shari added, carrying on about Lorraine and her "allies". Adding that in her opinion they no doubt secretly worshiped the "EVIL ONE" as part of their dark evil religious rites. Carol quietly listening to all this, her attractive face expressionless as she nodded...

"They practice hypnosis, which is not 'witchcraft' despite what the Priestesses have to say about it, and not all the teachings of the Priestesses of Lys have any justification," my wife then spoke in level tones. "Also, infanticide was quite 'commonplace' in societies living at this level of technology, although usually girls were the ones killed, not boys as these people do."

"Oh..." Shari breathed, standing there, looking the "fool".

"Lieutenant," Carol now said, "I must remind you that you are under military discipline, and if you in any way interfere in this mission I can assure you that I will order a court martial." I saw Shari nod, her surprisingly green eyes wide with surprise! The sun shining brightly down upon us, melting the newly fallen snow. It was, I mused then, turning out to be a rather nice day. On the other hand I suspected that Shari just then didn't agree!

"We have a problem as to 'who' will be in command," Darlanis said to us. I could understand the Empress' concern. While there was no doubt in my mind that Lorraine was the most "competent", Carol on the other hand had no love for the Imperial Warlady, such "dislikes" actually dating back to even before Lorraine and Sharon first flew through the GATEWAY into this time. The Empress in her heavy furs reminding me of Shannon Tweed, a movie and TV actress of the 20th Century, but more "muscular". I would also mention "Lana Clarkson", although Darlanis is somewhat better looking in the face and doesn't have quite as full a bust.

"Command at sea should be Lorraine's, command on land should be Carol's," I suggested, seeing the Empress nod in reply. I thought that was a wise decision. Lorraine is a great naval commander, but on land Carol had proved herself to be the "superior" last year. Carol is "crafty", something that Lorraine is not...

"Think you can 'work' with Lorraine?" I asked Carol as she settled herself there on the seat beneath the stern windows, the North Star now gathering the wind in her sails and leaving the land behind. Carol had much to my surprise placed Shari with Queen Valeris' forces, who would march north on their gigantic wolves to launch an attack upon the pirates who had taken Sharon. My wife had said that it would "teach" Shari a few things that she needed to learn. I supposed that it just might do just that. The other ships had come sailing up over the horizon shortly afterwards. I had put Carl Cabot in Shari's place, the oldest midshipman, a girl of sixteen, moving up to take his place in turn. Shari had risen to such a position from midshipman, I recalled...

"I admire the woman for her fighting skills, I just don't care for the fact that she still has 'feelings' for

you," my wife answered, her lovely hazel eyes looking up into mine as I handed her a glass of wine. One should not drink to excess when pregnant, but a small amount of alcohol is not harmful to the fetus.

"I've never considered her seriously as a sexual partner," I answered, sitting down beside her. Shari had not had any more to "say" after Carol had gotten done talking to her. I hoped that would be the "end" of it as I hated to see young Shari court martialled by my wife for her opinions, opinions that might be secretly shared by many aboard the ships of all three nations. I suspected too that my feelings towards Shari were based to a certain extent upon the fact that she reminded me of Carol in a way. Of the way Carol had been years ago when I first met her in 1976.

"Lorraine's not very good looking," Carol smiled back. She has a rather stern, angular face, one that could not be considered beautiful. She is hard, muscular, rather small breasted. I'd seen her in a bikini once years ago, and while "attractive" in her way, simply didn't compare to a woman like Carol in looks! Carol being the sort of a gal that could have graced centerfolds.

"While you are one extremely 'provocative' wench," I smiled. My wife is not a "beautiful" woman in the objective sense, but she is the sort that leaves no "doubts" either when you see her. I had "informed" Kathi that we would not need her "services" now.

"I was a 'disappointment' to a lot of men there on Lorraine's estate," Carol smiled, sipping at her wine. She had once been a slave girl there, and while perhaps the most "provocative" of the slave girls save perhaps for Kathi, had been a disappointment to those men who had been allowed the pleasure of "using" the brownette. Carol having simply "laid there" like a corpse!!

"But never to me," I answered, turning her face to me, kissing her then. Carol is a great "comfort" to have around, the sort of a woman who is always a "pleasure" to be with. Her red lips soft, warm against mine as she returned the kiss with her tongue, letting me know that she was still the "best" there is...

"Kathi is going to have to 'sleep' by herself," she laughed.

"There is still only one 'Carol'," I said to that brownette.

"It 'bothers' me being under the 'command' of that 'Imperial'," captain Sandra Steven said as we had dinner together. My wife nodding, smiling, Kathi quick to be of service to us. The slave girl well aware that while I might allow certain "liberties" to be taken, Carol wasn't very likely to permit such stuff! This is why slave girls fear "mistress" more than they do master. Slave girls like Kathi quickly learn how to "appease" a master...

"She is 'competent' at what she does," Carol smiled back. I supposed that was a pretty description of it. Lorraine was far more intelligent than Carol, having a far higher IQ than my wife. On the other hand Carol was "crafty" in a way Lorraine wasn't...

"That Darlanis is 'unpredictable'," the captain smiled. The old term "a loose cannon" was perhaps more "fitting" here regarding Darlanis. The Empress was incredibly courageous, but not a good military commander. On the other hand if there is ever an expedition to Hell, I suspect Darlanis would be the one to pick as its leader. She also seems to lead a charmed life, getting out of situations that make you wonder if God doesn't have plans for that big beautiful blonde. I admired Darlanis greatly, although she was certainly something of a "dumb blonde" in the full sense of the term and not really a competent military commander. On the other hand she gave a good account of herself against the North Wind last year, so one sometimes "wonders" about the woman.

"She is concerned about Sharon, as we all are," I answered.

"Wind's against us now," I said to Carol as she joined us on deck. We'd been forced to shorten sail considerably so that the Athena and Sarnian Queen could keep us with us. Even with their square rigs now furled and the fore and aft stay sails mounted, the two armor plated steam frigates were slow sailing up into a wind. Even using their steam engines to help matters out as they were both now doing required a high consumption of firewood which in turn meant more landings for fuel. Vengeance was far ahead, a dot there on the horizon ahead of us. The two steam frigates were miles behind us. You could see the smoke from their stacks.

"Maybe the old girl isn't as obsolete as Lorraine says," my wife laughed. The North Star was still sailing as good as ever. While we were no "match" now for a steam frigate with its catapults and armor plate, we could sail circles around both of them!

"You could be risking Sharon's life by an attack," Carol said as we sat together in the stern cabin of the Athena, Queen Valeris of the Free Women with us, smelling much like a wolf too. We were perhaps a hundred miles now from where the Imperial Princess was being held captive, assuming that those we thought to be her captors actually were. That no one really knew for sure now. It was snowing a bit outside, the snowflakes gently drifting down into the restless ocean. Lorraine had steam up, mostly for warmth aboard ship than for any real "need" for it right now. I wondered how long it would be before she needed to make another trip to shore for more firewood. We were supplying Valeris' women with weapons, such food as we could. They now carried short swords manufactured in Trelandar, and the Imperial compound bow as designed two years ago by Lorraine. The same weapon as is manufactured in Dularn now. While I had no doubts that these women could fight, they were unwilling to submit to discipline, and Carol didn't think that we could "rely" upon them too much...

"I will attempt to ransom her, and if that fails...", the Warlady answered in level tones, glancing at Carol. My wife nodding. Then it would be up to Carol to avenge the famous Warlady.

"I've never liked you, but...", Carol answered her softly.

"I have 'this'," Lorraine answered, drawing her pistol, laying it there on the table before us. "It may be 'adequate'..."

## Chapter Nine

"I will go in alone," I heard Lorraine say to Darlanis. We had brought the Athena and Sarnian Queen in under steam, the smoke from our funnels slowly drifting up into the iron gray sky overhead. A few flakes of snow now drifting down, a gentle but chilly breeze from the north leaving no doubt that we were now getting close to the great arctic ice cap of this era. The scattered ice floes that we'd now seen drifting out there in the ocean like ghostly white islands had left little "doubt" of this. The crews were at "general quarters", with weapons now issued...

Floating alongside the warship was a boat of fur clad men who looked much like the Vikings of old. If Queen Valeris was right, and I had no doubt that she was, this was the place where they held Sharon

captive. Lorraine would take with her five thousand golden crowns, an amount of "wealth" that in this time I had calculated would have built and "outfitted" a dozen ships, and also paid the wages of their crews for some time to come. She had placed me in command of the Athena, telling me what she wished me to do should she not return from this mission of hers.

I had sent Carol earlier to Queen Valeris, my wife's "cunning" something we might need if Lorraine failed to ransom her stepdaughter from these men as I suspected might well happen. A couple of swift schooners now in dry dock had left no doubt that we had indeed finally found the right place. The other ships, the North Star, the Vengeance were both further out to sea. We had almost stripped these ships of their crews to provide the Athena and the Sarnian Queen with the manpower necessary for the sort of a battle we might be forced to fight here. This would be a battle without "rules", the "code of honor" meaning nothing to such men as these now looking up at us as Lorraine carefully descended the icy gangway to step down into their boat. The heavy chest of gold then being swung out and lowered down beside her. Such an amount of gold weighed about three hundred thirty pounds.

"Got more 'guts' than I'd have," captain Janice Hill of the Athena said to me, her appearance and build making her look like a "daughter" of Lorraine. I suspected too that both Janice and Lorraine looked upon their "relationship" together in such terms. Janice was a competent sailor, but not really a fighting captain. Darlanis' captain was an old grizzled sailor. I assumed that he "knew" a few things. Darlanis was a completely different matter. Her courage I did not "doubt", but she was a "loose cannon" whose actions under fire were something none of us could predict now...

"Keep steam up," I answered, seeing her nod. Our steam engines and weapons were the only things that might save us now!! We were vastly outnumbered by these people, several of their long oared vessels lying there at the wharfs, while a couple others now kept a close watch from nearby. While such vessels were not "ramships" as such, they were filled with men, and like any oared vessel, would have the advantage in maneuverability over both our steam frigates. On the other hand the "firepower" of a steam frigate is awesome, perhaps three times that of the North Star...

Lorraine kept a careful eye on her surroundings as the Warlady of California was guided along the half frozen muddy paths that made up the "streets" of this ramshackle city the men with her called "home". Some slatternly women looking out at them, a few passersby moving out of their path. Despite the cold, the snow, the place had a "stink" like that of penned up slaves, the Queen of Trelandar noticed thoughtfully. Obviously "cleanliness" was not something considered very "important" here in this place. The visible signs of aging among the population leaving no doubts that they too knew little of the anti-aging serums of the south. Once long ago she had stood against a Legion, "bluffed" them all. A "living legend" some now claimed to be the greatest fighting woman of all time. Lorraine wondered if it was true... The gentle drifting snowflakes from the iron gray sky now coating the unpainted rough logs of the houses there upon both sides of them. A few from time to time kissing her chilled face beneath her parka. The rough hewn logs of the houses seemingly "fitting" here.

"You wouldn't bring 'much' in a slave market," the leader of the group had said to her when they'd landed, the "implications" of that something that left no doubts in Lorraine's mind as to what sort of men these were. "Not like your girl would," he added with a grin, Lorraine nodding, the "feel" of her Lorr force saber and blaster pistol beneath her outer clothing a comfort to her just then. If she was to die in this place, she would at least give an "account" of herself that would never be forgotten!

The Warlady had shuddered despite herself beneath her clothing in reply, not from the cold air, but from the thought of what perhaps had already "happened" to her lovely innocent Sharon at the hands of these sub-human beasts! The hatred burning in her heart washed over her like a flame as she marched in the midst of them almost like some captive through their dirty filthy village. Regardless of what happened



now, she pledged she would see this matter out to the final end, dying if necessary in defense of one who was slim and golden, one who perhaps now was the "hope" of a new civilization that someday might dawn on Earth after she and Darlanis were gone... A true "second Janet Rogers" .....

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"We wait for the signal," Carol spoke, looking up at Queen Valeris as the fur clad woman sat there astride her gigantic wolf, a long metal shod lance there in its socket at her stirrup. With the Warlady of Dularn was a force of Warriresses, fighting women of both Dularn and California. Women armed with swords and the deadly short compound bows that could hurl a dozen arrows a minute to a distance of two hundred and fifty yards. Lieutenant Shari Johnson of the North Star now nodding in reply, sitting there on her own wolf beside the Queen of the Free Women. Carol wondered if her own opinion of these women was still the same as it had been. She had spent days now living with them, sleeping in their own camps, sitting around their fires at night while the wolves howled at the Moon peeking from between the snow clouds.

"We have extra wolves," Valeris answered. The animals were superior to a unicorn over rough terrain, although little faster. Carol smiled in reply, made a polite comment that she preferred to "fight" on foot. Keeping to herself that she was terrified of the gigantic creatures, which she didn't trust all that much yet.

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The structure, Lorraine noticed with that professional interest of a well educated person, was much like that of the long houses of the Vikings. A open fire down the center being vented to some extent through the roof. The interior was smoky, smelly. A number of half naked women, dirty, clad in nothing more than bits of crudely treated animal skins, now were going about their duties as slaves. Their own eyes looking up into hers in a way that left no doubts in the Warlady's own mind that there was indeed "A FATE WORSE THAN DEATH" for a woman in this horrid place!

"You are from the Empire, `woman'?" the pirate king spoke, sitting there gross and swollen on the skin covered throne, Sharon there beside him, her azure eyes burning into those of her famous stepmother! The blonde haired girl completely naked but for a brief bit of fur that served more to "accent" her nakedness than to cover it, Lorraine saw. A blaze of hot fury going over the Warlady as she slipped back her coat. Her thin unrouged lips curving into a grim smile as she whipped out the blaster pistol!!

"I am," Lorraine snapped, leaping forward up on to the dais. The report of the pistol was loud, like the crack of a whip, the more sodden "THUD" of the explosive bullet hardly noticeable. Lorraine spinning about, turning, half throwing the force saber into Sharon's hands, the half dozen pirates now leaping forward all dying as swiftly as Lorraine's trigger finger could pull the four and a half pound pull semi-double action trigger six times!!

"Cut the other women free!" Lorraine snapped, the steel of her voice something that made Sharon feel very proud of the woman just then. Despite the admiration and love she felt for Darlanis it had been Lorraine who had come here, a woman who Sharon knew was the greatest fighting woman of all time, a tall rather stern featured brunette with whom she'd once flown from the Twentieth Century to this time. The same woman who had defeated the entire crew of a Bajan slaver with just a sword, the same woman who those in the Empire of California knew to be a true "Empress of Swords", a true "Warlady" in the full true meaning of the term!!!

The pistol held in both hands, concentrating on her sight picture, Lorraine opened fire upon the stunned surprised pirates gathered about there in the great hall. The pistol was a weapon completely unknown to these people, and as she had expected, they fled in terror, jamming the exits, making better "targets" of themselves. A few trying to escape by lying down behind things swiftly dying at the hands of the

infuriated women who only a minute before had been serving them as docile meek slave girls...

Sharon had waded into the "melee" swinging the force saber, a weapon against which there was no defense, the meter long "blade" of pure force passing through matter with no resistance! The young Queen of Orgon quickly organizing the former slaves into a fighting force as her step mother's pistol sent the last of the terrified pirates fleeing from the building into the cold!

"They will be back with reinforcements," Lorraine snapped to Sharon, exchanging her empty magazine for a full one of thirty. "And some of them will have crossbows," the Warlady pointed out.

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"Some sort of `fuss'!" Janice spoke, cocking her head. I had no doubt what "sort" of a "fuss" it was, and "who" was responsible for it! Lorraine had wisely left me in command, although I doubted that Darlanis would obey any order I gave her...

"Battle Stations! Light Your Firebombs! Destroy Those Ships!" I yelled to the crew as I stood at the quarter deck railing! "FULL STEAM!" I barked into the speaking tube that connected the quarterdeck with the boiler room amidships. "Hoist that anchor!" I ordered, the Athena already coming up on her anchor!!

I saw Sarnian Queen hoisting her battle flags, Darlanis firing a full broadside of fire bombs into the village, her quickfirers all in action, pouring a rain of missiles into those gathered on the docks. Her other broadside firing, two of the longships bursting into flames, the others now under oars moving in!

"Fire on those longships!" Janice Hill snapped from beside me. I saw men and women from the North Star, the Vengeance with their bows, crossbows now at the armored railings, firing, the black smoke pouring from our funnel as the lamp oil was pumped into the fire that fed our boiler! The heavy "thud-thud" of the engine beneath our feet a comforting sound as we swung slowly about, our massive armored bow pointed right at a pirate vessel!!

## Chapter Ten

An arrow zipped by Lorraine's shoulder, the Warlady's too quick "return" shot blasting the log apart right next to the man. "Easy!" Lorraine breathed, fighting to keep her nerves under control. She could see the smoke rising up into the sky, hear the alarm bells, the yells and cries of men, the screaming of women...

Most of the fleeing slave girls were barefoot in the snow and half frozen mud, their nearly naked bodies doubtlessly already numbed by the cold as they now fled towards the docks. Yet they all held weapons of one sort or another, and woe to the man whose "path" they crossed. The pirates had not yet made much attempt against them, doubtlessly due to the fire from the ships! Several of the nearby houses already ablaze from the fire bombs! The streets between the houses now filled with smoke like a fog.

"I knew you'd come," Sharon had said. Lorraine had nodded.

"Getting too 'old' for this sort of stuff," she'd laughed!

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"Attack!" Queen Valeris cried, waving her drawn sword, Carol and her women following, pausing only to fire upon the village ahead of them. The pirates had been careless, allowing only a hundred yards between their own village and the evergreen forest. The women on their racing wolves throwing the "fire bombs" over the village walls as they dashed up in the face of pirate crossbowmen and archers much like American Indians of another time...

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I saw the pirate try to turn away, but it was too late with both the captain and the helmsman dead from quickfirer missiles!! The heavy armored bow of the Athena striking amidships, the pirate longship smashed in, the men thrown into the icy water, their deaths no doubt swift in that numbing paralyzing liquid! I saw Sarnian Queen coming about, firing both broadsides, the black smoke pouring from her funnel, the heavy "thud-thud" of her steam engine audible over the still icy waters, the flames, the smoke rising up into that iron gray sky something I will never forget!! The falling snow, the low visibility like that of another time...

An arrow, fired at maximum range, thunked down on the deck next to me. We were firing our thumping quickfirers at anyone we saw on shore, the constant fusillade having quickly taught those on shore that opposing one of our steam frigates with bows and crossbows was a quick way to commit suicide! Most of the pirates having now either fled our fire or died in combat against us. I saw Sarnian Queen moving towards the dock, saw a group of half clad women come dashing out towards the ship, Lorraine's last pistol shots driving back the few pirates who still showed fight! Her highly explosive bullets no doubt terrifying them even more!

"Bring us in closer!" Janice snapped to the helmsman, the Athena turning, firing a full broadside at maximum range into the village, another sixteen fire bombs, this being followed up by darts, sixteen full packets of fifty each like a deadly rain to fall from the iron gray sky above! A last serpent now fleeing to the sea, the North Star and the Vengeancethen closing in on it. Ropes were being thrown from Sarnian Queen to those on the dock, a grouping of nearly naked women holding swords and a few bows. Their "leader" a lovely slim golden haired girl holding a "weapon" that brought back memories of a movie now only a "legend"... \*\*\*\*\*

"These men are 'mine'," Queen Valeris said, her dark eyes meeting ours. I saw Lorraine nod, smile back. I did not envy the handful who had survived, or the women who had surprisingly fought at their sides. Those would be taken south to California. At Lorraine's order Queen Valeris would be given everything left. We would take the gold back south with us, however. On the ships there was considerable "celebration" at this almost "bloodless" victory of ours, there having been no fatalities on either vessel! The last serpent had surrendered without a fight under the broadsides of the North Star and the Vengeance. The women of the Vengeance had decided to cast their lot with Queen Valeris. She would have the other two pirate schooners as her new "navy". I wondered what Queen Maris Marn of Dularn would think of all this?

While the "losses" had been almost totally on the side of the pirates, Queen Valeris had taken some losses among her own forces during the assault on the village from the back, and Shari Johnson, first Lieutenant of the North Star, had died with them!! Taking a crossbow bolt through her heart just before the last of the pirates surrendered to the infuriated fighting women from the south. Her body now laid wrapped in a hammock on the North Star.

"We won," Carol said to me, her eyes glowing up into mine. I supposed that we "had", although the

issue had never been in "doubt" what with the steam frigates and their awesome firepower.

"Lorraine`won'," I answered, feeling strangely depressed.

"You had `emotional feelings' towards Lieutenant Johnson, didn't you?" Carol replied, putting her hands on my shoulders as I stood there among the crowd of Imperials and Dularnians along with the fur clad and rather "smelly" Amazons of Queen Valeris.

"She was a good officer," I answered. "One I had high hopes for." I saw Carol nod. She is a "smart" woman, that brownette. One who knows that there are times not to ask further questions.

"Bring her up into the wind, captain Steven, and we'll perform our burial service here," I said, my wife standing there beside me. Such a "service" is always given by the highest ranking officer on board, in this case Carol as the Warlady of Dularn. I could see the land like a haze in the distance, the sails of the two steam frigates as they sailed back "home" to warmer climes...

"The old girl still has some `life' in her," my wife said to me as captain Steven informed me that we were making all of twelve knots. We had easily caught up with and passed the two steam frigates, neither of which was any "match" for us in speed.

"I hope Maris gives her a good retirement," I answered, well aware of how "obsolete" the North Star was now. Like an old war horse, it was now time to put her "out to pasture". There was a "need" for a swift passenger ship to carry people from one end of Dularn to the other. The North Star could well serve that need.

"And what are you going to tell Maris?" my wife asked me as I finished writing up my "report" of the "events" of this voyage.

"I think she'd better make the best `deal' with the Empire that she can," I answered back, looking out over the restless waves. Soon Imperial California would "rule the waves" as Great Britain had once done many centuries ago. A great fleet of Lorraine's steam frigates, almost invincible, the smoke rising from their funnels, would soon patrol the ocean from Baja to Dularn...

"You don't think we can't build ships like that...?" Carol challenged, standing there, the sun striking highlights in her hair. She was "different" now, more "mature", I supposed, what with the pregnancy and everything else that she'd been through. No longer the sexy "playmate" of memory, of an era now long gone.

"For every ship we build, the Imperials will build three," I answered. And how long would it take for Darlanis begin dreaming once again of an "empire" that stretched from Alaska to Baja...? Of course it wouldn't be "called" an "empire" anymore, but it would still be the same exact thing in "fact" if not in "name"...

"Dularn's defeated `HER' before," my wife pointed out to me.

"She has Lorraine now," I smiled, wondering how much difference it would make in such matters. Lorraine was the most competent military commander of this era at the more "conventional" types of warfare. Carol was better at "guerrilla warfare", but I was well aware of the fact that guerrillas have never "won" a war without "outside support" from someone else. On the other hand I was well aware that Queen Valeris might look with more "favor" upon Dularn than she would upon the Empire there to the south. I had no idea, however, of what the men of Dularn would think now. While Dularnians are more

"used" to the idea of "sexual equality" than would be Californians for example, still Queen Valeris' own practice of male infanticide wouldn't be "acceptable" to most men.

"And Maris has `us'," Carol answered back, putting her arms around me as we stood there swaying with the motion of the ship there on the quarterdeck. Her hazel eyes burning up into mine. I wondered if it really "mattered" anymore. If anything did now!

"There was a woman among those Lorraine took with her who I suspect was Japanese," I said to my wife, seeing her nod in turn. No doubt she had been a survivor off a ship from Japan that had followed the coastline to the north, eventually violating the old "EDICT" the Lorr used to maintain about intercontinental travel. If the Priestesses no longer kept that "rule" in effect, I mused to my wife then, would it be possible to reach Japan with the North Star? Open up trade relations before the Imperials did so? On the other hand Lorraine's steam frigates were probably better at transoceanic voyages than schooners like the North Star were.

(several days later)

"Bob!" Carol breathed out, her eyes wide as she suddenly sat up in bed beside me! The soft glow that filled the stern cabin of the North Star, a "glow" that came from the white gowned figure there before us leaving no doubts as just "who" she was now!!

"Tais!" I muttered, well aware of the Priestess' own powers!

"Like to take a little `trip' with me?" the Priestess asked.

"Where?" Carol challenged, well aware as I was that we were completely powerless up against one such as the First Priestess.

"Your home, the year 1991," Tais smiled back at us both. "There is a matter that you can assist me with back in your era." I wondered what we could "do" for someone as infinitely powerful as Tais, a woman who was "mistress" of both "time" and "space". Kathi sitting there in her cot, her eyes wide with amazement at the sight of the First Priestess, who was to her much like the Pope of the Catholic Church would have been to one of our time. \* \* The completely sincere faith that the people of this time have towards the Priestesses of Lys and their teachings yet amazes me. On the other hand there are those who do manage to "oppose" them, Queen Valeris and her Free Women being a good example of this...

"Whew! What a way to travel!" Carol breathed, my arms about her as we stood in front of the ruins that had once been our home centuries before. The bright flashes of the storm that had been summoned up by the combined powers of the Priestesses now lighting up the area, the trees towering up around us. The remains of our once beloved home only a weedy hump here in the Trelandarian forest that was part of the "property" of one "Queen Lorraine"...

"It does have its advantages," Tais smiled, standing there, "Although on the other hand it is not as `easy' as it appears..."

"A sufficiently `ADVANCED' technology will appear to be as `MAGIC'," I smiled, quoting an author I'd once read of long ago.

"There is a Garth," Carol spoke up in level tones, the next lightning flash revealing the great reptile to both Tais and me as it stepped out of the forest. There are no "known" weapons in this era that will stop one in its tracks. I think only one of the "big game" rifles of the 20th Century would do the job here. Both

the Priestesses and the Lorr of course possess "advanced" weapons, with the Priestesses perhaps the "more" advanced here.

"No problem," Tais smiled back, a sudden lightning bolt then blasting the ground in front fearsome reptile as it stood there now watching us! The horror then quickly departing the "scene".

"I see you could be rather 'persuasive'," I smiled at her, the thought going through my mind that there was a damm good reason why no one had ever tried to directly "oppose" these women!!!

"We are not allowed to take life save in self defense," Tais answered, the flashing of lightning now almost continuous, the crash of the thunder like continuous broadsides from battleships!

## Chapter Eleven

"Whew!" Carol breathed, the sun now peacefully shining upon us from between the leaves there in the trees, our house, car, everything just as we had left it. Tais giving me a smile, her eyes like beautiful azure jewels glowing into mine. The "tingle" from our passage through time now dying away as we stood there.

"We are about eight hours ahead of the time that I originally 'teleported' you into the future," Tais smiled back, her very attire leaving no doubts that she was in no way of our own time.

"We've got a 'problem'," I said, thinking. The house was locked up tight, and we didn't have any "house keys" either now, I explained, Tais giving me a "smile" as if to say not to worry!

"As I recall, I left the keys in the ignition," Carol said.

"I still don't see why you just can't go 'take' what you want," my wife said to Tais as we stepped into the house, everything just as we'd left it the evening before to drive into Seaside. For someone with Tais' "powers", it seemed hard to believe that she actually needed our "help" and "assistance" to obtain a few books from this era. Why couldn't she just "teleport" what she needed right back to 2568? I knew that Tais had been in this time before, and that she had been dressed much as a woman of the 20th Century, so why couldn't she just do the same thing again...

"We are no longer in our own time," Tais smiled back. "Here I have no more powers than one of you would have," she explained.

"I find 'that' rather hard to believe," my wife smiled back, sliding the glass patio door closed behind the three of us. I too found it hard to believe knowing what I did about this woman!

"The 'powers' that you think I possess are not mine, but the combined minds of many Priestesses," Tais answered with a smile, looking about the kitchen with the same sort of "fascination" I thought that an archaeologist might have viewing the interior of a Pharaoh's tomb. Her actions only a further "proof" of what she was trying to explain to us. "I do have certain 'abilities'," shesmiled, a water glass there on the sink suddenly floating up into the air, "But I'm afraid I'm not quite what you think I am."

"Just 'what' can you do?" Carol asked, catching the glass.

"I can 'sense' the thoughts of people, and I can 'do' little 'tricks' with the gravitational field like the one you saw," Tais answered, her attire as before reminding me of a Grecian Goddess.

"Can you sense the thoughts of animals?" I asked, curious.

"Yes," Tais answered me, now walking about the kitchen.

"How much do you know about this time?" my wife asked.

"Much 'less' than we'd like to know," Tais smiled back.

"We'll have to find you some clothes to wear," Carol said.

"Seems 'funny' driving a car again," Carol said to me an hour later, her attire like ours now that of the 20th Century. Fortunately for us she had left her purse in the car when Tais had first teleported us into the future, so she still had her driver's license and library card, the latter being necessary if Tais was to obtain the books that she wanted. I had explained to her that we could not simply drive to Los Angeles and obtain them as she had first believed, but would have to obtain them through the library there in Seaside. Tais in some of Carol's clothing looking little different than a woman of this time, the blouse and jeans she wore fitting her fairly well, although she is a taller woman than Carol, about five nine to my wife's five seven.

"How did you get around the first time you were here?" I asked, recalling how Tais had managed to be in both the Hutch and later on waiting beside our house when we'd later arrived home.

"I stood beside the road and hitched a ride into town," Tais answered, giving me a smile as she sat there in the back seat. I nodded, smiling to myself. No doubt a beautiful blonde like her hadn't waited very long either to get a ride. "Later I hired a taxi to take me back to your house," she continued, Carol nodding as she drove, her eyes half on Tais in the rearview mirror and on the road ahead. "I gave the taxi driver a diamond worth about two gold crowns," the First Priestess smiled, answering a "question" that had been puzzling me here ever since we'd arrived now.

"You don't have the 'ability' to duplicate our money?" I asked, turning in my seat. To people as technologically advanced as the Priestesses of Lys seemed such would have been easy to do!

"The 'samples' of your money that we have are too damaged to be useful," the First Priestess answered. I recalled that "cash" money as a "legal tender" had come to a halt in 2013 when Janet Rogers introduced her "cashless economy" based upon "credits". "Only the coins and such have survived, and it was felt that the use of a large number of these coins would not be 'wise' here."

"And handing out diamonds wouldn't 'be' either," Carol said, slowing for a truck ahead of us, traffic getting thicker now as we approached Seaside. Tais going on to say that the Priestesses could manufacture such diamonds easily from a nearby bed of coal.

"Interesting," Tais mused, looking about. I supposed to her Seaside was something much "different" than it was to us. Much like the sort of "reaction" that a person of our era might have if they were suddenly transported to one of the great capitals of the 26th Century. "A 'technologically advanced' social order, but with flaws that will eventually lead to its own destruction."

"That 'future' could be 'altered'," Carol now pointed out as we stopped for a traffic light. Seaside is a combination of seaside resort community and a rural farming community. I understand that it was destroyed in The War due to an earth quake and now lies some distance out to sea due to the changes in the land contours. On the map I have it would be to the north west of the "estate" of the Queen of Trelandar about three miles out to sea.

"The 'consequences' would not be what you expect," Tais answered. "Even if you could somehow 'prevent' The War from taking place in 2047, that would not thus prevent it from taking place later on." I suspected that she knew too of what she spoke here.

"Then the future is unpredictable?" I "ventured" to Tais. I had wondered about this, about what the limits of their knowledge were. I understood too that the Priestesses of Lys themselves were "allied" with similar "beings" elsewhere in the Universe.

"Time is 'like' a tree with many branches," Tais replied. "There are also other 'futures' open to Mankind that we cannot 'predict' with any degree of accuracy." I supposed she knew what she was talking about. I did later on "alter" the future myself, and much to my amazement the Priestesses were unable to "predict" this either with their own capabilities of time travel. Tais once explained to me in further detail the "nature" of time, but I fear it would be of little value to repeat these matters here. The idea of a "tree" with many "branches" as Tais said is perhaps the best "picture" that I can give of the true nature of "time".

"Any Scribe would sell his or her soul for this!" Tais spoke in awe as she walked through the public library. Her own words coming as a surprise to both of us as Tais was the representative of the true rulers of the whole solar system in the 26th Century!

"It's just a public library," Carol smiled, "And nothing like what you'd find in a big city," she added with a grin then. No doubt enjoying herself seeing Tais' amazement at all this now!

"There are thousands upon thousands of books here!" Tais breathed. "The knowledge of generations of men stored on paper! If only it was possible to teleport all this...", she whispered!! The look in her eyes one that I will never forget as long as I live! She was the ruler of the solar system in the 26th Century, a woman (I consider her "female") who could order Queens around!

"Don't you have a computer like Lorraine's?" I ventured, recalling what Keri Greyson had told me about such a "device". I knew too that surviving CD-ROM's had been found, such having allowed Keri to learn far more about the past than any other member of her caste. Keri of the Scribes now being the acknowledged "expert" on the 21st Century, her book having been published just recently both in the Empire and in Dularn. I had a copy too. If Lorraine had a computer, then I was sure the Priestesses would...

"Most such information as you see here was never stored in a form that survived the magnetic impulses caused by The War," Tais answered. "And books remained far more 'popular' than CD-ROMS." I watched Tais standing there, the "impression" I got from her just then that of a child suddenly introduced to a candy store...

"We'll have to wait for the other books," I said, Tais nodding, the librarian no doubt wondering "why" we had requested the books that we had. Tais' beauty having drawn some "note", the First Priestess being a tall aristocratic looking blonde, almost a "dead ringer" in a way for the actress Shannon Tweed, although Tais also reminded me in a way too of the Empress of California.



"I fear that young man `admirer' me would be quite disappointed were his `fantasies' to come true," Tais smiled as we left the library, the young man in question being something of a "nerd" using the slang of the Twentieth Century. What is called a "specs" in Dularn by those of other castes than the Scribes...

"At least you don't have the sexual `hangups' those of our religions had," Carol smiled, her "tummy" just showing a bit now. Fortunately she had once purchased a pair of slacks with an elastic waistband, which allowed a certain of "room" for "expansion".

"`Christianity' was not a `benefit' to your society," Tais smiled, her arms loaded down with half a dozen books. "Those who were its founders were `sick', unfit to tell others what to do." I supposed she was right, knowing what I knew about Christianity.

"Could you go back in time that far?" I asked, holding the door for Tais and my wife. I wondered what the TRUTH had been...

"The further back or forwards you go in time, the more power it takes to open a `GATEWAY' that far back," Tais explained then. "Past a thousand years in either direction the energy requirements exceed that of any natural source of power available now."

"Guess we'll never know then," Carol smiled, squinting a bit in the bright sunlight of this delightful summery day, it being about noon now here in the middle of summer. "Although it's too bad that there isn't a way of getting back that far in time now."

"There may be," Tais mused, standing there as I unlocked the white Reliant. "It may be possible to modify the devices invented by the Women to allow instantaneous travel through time as well as through space." I knew of such devices, Darlanis having mentioned them as had Lorraine. They worked by warping space itself, causing two points in space to be drawn to the same spot...

"What do you think?" Carol smiled, standing there beside Tais. I was suddenly very much "aware" that Tais was a beautiful and desirable "woman". At least she had the "body" of one here!!

"I fear what I `appear' is not what I `am'," Tais laughed.

"You do `fill' that bikini pretty nicely," I smiled back. It was not as "brief" as what Carol was wearing, but it showed Tais off pretty good. She certainly didn't look like a Priestess now!

"I do not understand the benefits of exposing one's body to the sun while wearing such attire," Tais said, her eyes holding mine. I knew she could sense my thoughts, almost "read" my mind.

"You are a very beautiful woman," I said. I could see that.

"I am `not' a woman in the sense you are thinking of," Tais answered. "Only in my exterior form am I what I appear to be..." Tais going on to explain that she was "neutered" much like a dog!

## Chapter Twelve

"Guess I never knew 'what' they were," Carol said to me, Tais having gone for a walk in the woods down to the little lake. I suppose to her this "land" of ours, this society was "legend". She was not of the Twentieth Century, or even really of "Earth".

"We 'neuter' dogs, so I suppose it makes 'sense' in a way," I answered, soaking up the welcome heat of the sun on the chaise lounge, Carol stretched out on the other one, doing the same now.

"But I saw her naked and she didn't look any 'different'," my wife protested. I supposed the operation didn't leave scars. The Priestesses had a "technology" far in advance of anything we knew, although the Physicians of the 26th Century could perform operations too without badly scarring a person's body. There was a "mark", but it wasn't anything like that left by surgery of our own time, the "glue" being used sealing flesh together far better than stitches ever could. Tais had the "body" of a woman, but in a way she was an "it", sexless, freed from sexual desires like a dog that has been operated on. I supposed such did have its "advantages" for an "organization" like the Priestesses of Lys were. There would be none of the "problems" that priests and nuns had.

"Makes a lot of 'sense' when you think about it," I smiled. I wondered why the Catholic Church hadn't done the same with their priests and nuns? On a woman the surgery is rather complex, but men have been castrated since before the time of Jesus.

"For 'something' like them," Carol retorted, her hazel eyes burning into mine beneath the dark glass she now wore against the brightness of the sun. We were on our patio behind the house, a "spot" that brought back fond memories of other times long past!

"I don't think she looks upon it that way," I pointed out.

"That also explains why they can 'kill' babies the way that they do," Carol answered, lying there, her own bikini concealing just "enough" to accent the sensual provocative "charms" of her. The Priestesses of Lys killing new borns that were "defective" in any way. A wise policy given the nature of genetic damage caused by the long term effects of The War of 2047. When one considers the "social costs" of supporting the "disabled" and the "defective", the policies of the Priestesses do make a lot of sense... The 26th Century also recognized a "right to suicide" and it was the general policy to "put to sleep" those people who in our own time would have filled nursing homes. The Priestesses themselves doing this there in their Temple that dot all our major cities.

"They're 'superior' in every way to Christianity," I said.

"If YOU say so," Carol answered curtly, then getting up, going into the house. I suspected that the "fact" of her own pregnancy no doubt had much to "do" with all this right now too...

"There has been 'conflict' between you and I am the 'cause' of it," Tais said when she returned from her walk in the forest. The black nylon of her bikini going well with her blonde hair...

"Bob brought up a certain 'topic' I'm 'uncomfortable' with," my wife answered back as we both sat there at the kitchen table.

"It would not be 'rational' to do other than what we do," Tais answered. "In the first century after The War the rate of mutation was far higher, and there was no other choice if the human race was to be saved from becoming a race of hideous monsters..."

"In this era we don't kill 'defective' people," Carol said.

"One of the 'cultural failures' of your society," Tais said, seating herself at the circular kitchen table there by the sliding glass patio doors. The "view" through the doors one of the things that I'd always "admired" about the house since my parents built it back in 1969. "A 'weakness', not a 'strength' as such."

"It wouldn't surprise me to learn that you were 'responsible' for Nazism either," Carol snapped back, hazel eyes blazing!

"The 'parallels' you see are only in your imagination," Tais answered. "In any case as Lorraine understood the human race is far from being capable of self government in the full sense of the term." I recalled the conversations Lorraine and I once had. Lorraine having maintained that what was "needed" now an "organization" standing outside of the political system that would control the "basic operating system" of society much like the Roman Catholic Church had back in the Middle Ages. The Priestesses of Lys are of course the consequences of her ideals expressed here.

"Let's go take a walk," I suggested to my wife. Carol's nod leaving no doubt that she was not going to "give in" to Tais now!

"How long is it going to take to get those books she wants?" Carol "snapped", tossing an acorn into the lake there before us. She was just "pregnant" enough now for it to "show", especially I thought when dressed in only so "little" as she was just now. I could "understand" her feelings, the "knowledge" that if the baby she now carried was not "perfect", it would be killed at birth and she would have absolutely nothing to "say" about it either...

"A week at the most, I guess," my arm around her nakedness.

"I don't want to go 'back'," Carol suddenly said, sitting there. "I want to stay here, 'live' our lives as we planned to."

"That 'choice' is not ours to make," I "pointed out" to her.

"We have 'tasted' of the 'Tree of Knowledge'," she replied.

"And have found the fruit 'bitter' in our mouths," I said.

\*\*\*\*\*

"Ohh!" Kathi breathed, sitting up, the covers falling away, the golden disks now covering her nipples visible in the glowing light. Through the stern windows of the North Star dawn was just breaking. The roll of the ship beneath our feet a familiar feeling... This was our "home", that other "home" now only a memory.

"Good bye," Tais smiled, suddenly now "disappearing" then.

"Back 'home'," Carol "lied", kissing me then before Kathi.

"Where the 'Warlady of Dularn' and her 'Admiral' belong," I said standing there holding her, looking at her in the dim light from the stern windows. Her uniform, mine, leaving no doubts as to "what" we both were. We were no longer just "playmates" as we once had been. Yet in a way like Carol I hadn't wished to return to this time. For a week Carol and I had once again been "home". Unlike Lorraine, neither of us really "belonged" in this "world".

"I worry about those steam frigates," captain Sandra Steven said to me as we shared our breakfast with her. Carol and I both were still a bit "out of sorts" from things. Kathi there to one side, eating her own breakfast. I wondered what she would have thought of the Twentieth Century had we been able to take her...

"A full ironclad probably would be the best answer," I smiled back, the low temperatures we'd experienced on this voyage having kept our food fresh. "Something built on the hull of a trireme, completely armored, and with a couple of steam engines for power." Such a vessel wouldn't be very fast, but it would be almost invincible by the standards of this era. "One would have both missile weapons and the capability of ramming if necessary."

"And you'd have to come to shore every few days for wood," Sandra smiled back, well aware of the "weakness" of steam ships.

"Such a vessel could burn coal, not wood," Carol explained.

"Wood is 'everywhere', but coal has to be mined," Sandra answered her. "You would need the capability of using both fuels." I suspected that Sandra Steven was by no means a "dumb blonde".

"Extra fuel could be carried on a sailing ship," I said.

"Arsana," Sandra said, lowering the telescope from her eye.

"Where our 'duties' lie," Carol said, standing beside me.

I took the hands of the golden haired Queen in mine as she stepped on to the deck, her long silken gown there beneath her furred cloak outlining the ripe curves of her body. Maris tends to be a bit on the "plump" side, a woman who is always "dieting" much like those of the era from which we came. Those lovely sea green eyes now gleaming with deep affection into mine. She is well worth the "risks" Carol and I have taken for her. The sort of a Queen who in any Dularnian's eyes is worth fighting for. We tended to be a patriotic people, more so I think than the Imperials, who perhaps "see" their society in a different light. On the other hand Trelandarians greatly respect their "Lorraine". And Darlanis is also highly thought of by most of her subjects.

"You recovered Sharon?" Maris said to me. I nodded back.

"She is safe with her stepmother," Carol explained to her.

"We have 'much' to speak of," the Queen of Dularn answered.

"I only wish I could have gone with you," Maris Marn said, a fireplace snapping and "crackling" there at the side of the room. It would be the first of April in another couple days, I knew. I felt at "home" here now, Carol at my side, a sword at my hip, the various trappings that go along with being the Admiral of Dularn. Carol and I having told her of our adventures with Tais in 1991.

"Do not confuse 'technology' with 'civilization'," I smiled, hearing a seagull's cry as it circled far above the battlements. They bear only a slight "relationship" to each other, I suspect. One can be "technologically advanced" without being "civilized". The week we'd spent with Tais had taught us both much of things.

"I have never been able to `understand' why the people of your time allowed their government to do the things it did," the Queen of Dularn answered. We had told her of our brief trip back through to time to our own era, of our own experiences together. We had however left out our own personal feelings at coming back.

"Perhaps because they didn't have anything to believe in or `stand up' for," my wife smiled, her eyes meeting those of Maris. I remembered seeing President George Bush there on the TV. Maris was a far more "impressive" leader, someone with far more "color" and "leadership" abilities even if she wasn't a true "blue blood" like Darlanis or Lorraine in her own way. The Queen of Trelandar having been the daughter of a French countess back in our time. I wondered why the American people had never elected a woman as President of the United States back before Janet Rogers in 2008. And she had been forced to use electronic hypnosis at that too...

"I also think they didn't have the `leadership' we have," I said, taking the Queen's hand in my own, and then kissing it. I "loved" this woman, not as a woman as such, but as our own Queen! Knowing people like Maris made it all "worthwhile", I felt then.

"Their social ideology was `flawed'," our Queen smiled back. As a point of interest here the historians mark the "BROWN VERSUS BOARD OF EDUCATION" decision by the U.S. Supreme Court as being the first step towards "disaster" for America, the later "civil rights acts" and "gun control laws" under President L.B. Johnson only serving to carry the nation further on towards "disaster". While "racism" as such is almost unknown in this era (there are very few Blacks, perhaps no more than one percent of the population in the Empire, and far less in Dularn), the idea of "discrimination" upon such a basis is almost "unknown" here in 2568. One is "aware" of the race of people, but only in the same sense that one might note hair color, eye color, and their own "caste". There is, I might mention, considerable racial intermixture among the Imperials, although such is much less known here in Dularn, most of Dularn's original inhabitants having come from Canada...

"There was a woman found with Sharon who we believe came from Japan," Carol spoke up, changing the "subject". The Queen nodding, Maris being well enough educated to know where Japan was and what its people would look like. With the ending of Lorr control of the Earth such voyages might become more commonplace.

"The North Star would be capable of such a voyage," Maris mused thoughtfully, "Although I'm not sure if the Priestesses would `bless' such a voyage at this time yet," Maris then smiled.

"And I think it is time that we discussed things with those of the caste of Builders," I smiled, recalling my conversation with captain Steven about the "ironclad". Such a vessel might be an excellent way of "impressing" a certain tall blonde with the idea that Dularn had every intention of remaining a free country! I had drawn up the plans for a "battleship" like nothing that had ever steamed across these seas before, a design so made that from a distance it would resemble some great sea monster of the deep!!

## Chapter Thirteen

"Back again," Carol said, held in my arms while Kathi looked on, perhaps a bit "puzzled" by my wife's

tone of voice... The rooms were cold, chilly, but the sun was streaming in through the shutters, the sound of children playing in the "enclosure" formed by the buildings faintly audible through the closed windows. Dularnian cities are laid out in square blocks, with the buildings all fronting the street like a solid wall while the interior of the "block" is left open for a playground and gardens. The idea of separate "yards" as such being almost completely "alien" to any one of this era as is the idea of "private property" in housing as we used to think of it in our own time. Our own quarters being rather similar in design to what would have been called a "town house" in the Twentieth Century. Such design does of course allow for a greater population density than what would be practical with a more "spread out" sort of housing, space being at somewhat of a premium in a walled city such as Arsana is. Such a design also has its advantages for military defense, as it would force any invader to pass through the streets while subject to fire from the roof tops on either side. I might also add that the "roof top patios" above most Dularnian homes are often used in warm weather for entertainment and some degree of privacy. I might also note here that I've never seen windows on any house on the first floor, which makes breaking into a house rather difficult without the use of something like a battering ram or the use of ladders. There is no such thing as "zoning" as such, although heavy manufacturing is not carried out in "residential" areas. On the other hand you do not need to go far to buy your daily "necessities", and most people do travel by foot throughout the city, often with their two wheeled little "carts" that you pull behind you, or have your slave girl "pull" for you if you are "wealthy" enough to have such a delightful wench to serve you so.

Arsana is the largest city in Dularn, and measures about two miles across. The largest city I know of is Sarn, the capital of California, which is built in the shape of a horseshoe and covers a considerably larger area due to the bay in the center of it. It is doubtful at our present level of technology that a city of larger size than this would be practical in a society where most people travel by foot to their destinations.\* Trella does have "public mass transit" in the form of horse drawn trolleys, an "invention" of Lorraine's that Maris is hoping to someday "copy", although there is considerable "opposition" from those now engaged here in the trade of transporting people for pay. Most people who live in the city do not own horses or unicorns, such animals being quite expensive to keep, both due to their feed and the "tax" that you must pay that is used to clean up the "messes" the animals make on the streets when they "relieve" themselves.\*\*\* The bicycle is just a "curiosity" since the streets are not "smooth" enough to make it practical nor is rubber available for the tires. "Experiments" with animal skins have proved useless. \*\* There are "public restrooms" for the people spaced every few blocks along the streets. These are quite "practical" in a society like ours with good social discipline. The sort of "vandalism" that I saw in the Twentieth Century doesn't exist in Dularn. Children in this society (the same is true in California) are expected to "mind their manners" or they get a good whipping until they do. The people of this era are strict with their children. The type of "teen age activities" known in our time would not be "tolerated" anywhere in this era by the people of any country. A son or daughter who cannot be "controlled" is turned over the "authorities" for "discipline". For girls this is often slavery. For men this means castration and lifelong work on a labor gang.

"Nice having a `wench' around though," Carol smiled, sitting there watching our slave girl. Kathi busy at work taking care of things, and seeing to our own comforts. Her present attire being such that one saw much of her legs, Kathi wearing only her leather halter and matching leather miniskirt. As our home from cellar to the roof top patio is five floors, she had ample opportunity for "exercise" in climbing all the stairways. It should be noted here that Kathi was also responsible for taking care of our animals, and seeing to all the household chores, all of which kept her busy most of the day. She was frequently given "time off", and we did give her an "allowance" to spend upon herself... The life of slave girls in a society like ours is not unpleasant. Most masters are well aware of the fact that a "happy" slave girl is more pleasant to have around than one who is always unhappy...

"Especially if her skirt is short and she's `built' like a brick palace," I smiled, seeing Kathi now look up at me and grin. I often "patted" the wench whenever my wife wasn't around to see. Kathi enjoying such

"teasing", as many slave girls do, I notice. Like Carol, Kathi has strong female drives, and no "doubts" about herself as a woman. She is better "built" than my wife, but not as "good" in bed despite the fact that she tries hard to be so...

"I think the 'term' referred to a different sort of 'structure'," Carol laughed, sipping at her wine as we ate our dinner there on the third floor now overlooking the "enclosure" outside. We rarely opened the windows on the "street" side any more as there was nothing to see but just the buildings on the other side of the street. Such also tended to keep out the street noises...

"In any case she is a 'pleasure to the eye'," I observed, Kathi at the moment bending over to feed the fireplace. The design of these fireplaces is such that they are quite "energy efficient" in that they also serve to heat water at the same time for the radiators that are commonplace in many Dularnian homes. One has the benefits of the open fire, and energy efficiency too. A grill work is built in the top of the fireplace through which the water is circulated. Usually only the upper floors are heated in the colder months of the year, I might also mention here. Most Dularnian construction tends to be quite thick walled, which also "helps", and one also "dresses" for the climate, of course.

"I trust you do not find me 'displeasing'," my wife teased.

"You do 'smell' a bit better," I answered, Kathi in need of a bath, I had noticed earlier whenever she stood too close to me.

"Steel or iron will rust when exposed to sea water," the man said, looking up at his beautiful Queen standing there. He was of the caste of Builders, which in turn covered the occupations of Engineering and Science, although the "latter" is also split among a number of other castes such as Physicians and Scribes. I was well aware of that fact, but didn't consider it "important".

"Paint will serve to protect it," Maris smiled back then.

"There is no provision for sails," the man protested then.

"It is powered by steam, not by the wind," Maris now smiled.

"It looks like something out of a sailor's nightmare," the man said. I tended to "agree" just a bit with him on that idea!

"I wonder if Lorraine has the same problems," Maris said to me as the man left with the drawings. The "fact" that Lorraine could build steam ships didn't mean that we could, I was aware...

"People raised in a 'Twelfth Century' technology will have a hard time dealing with that of the early Nineteenth," I answered.

"And what shall our 'dreadnought' be called?" Maris asked.

"That," I smiled, "I will leave up to the Queen of Dularn."

"Starting to 'show' a bit now," Maris smiled, Carol nodding. It was late spring, the great bulk of the "DIANA" there in the shipyard having drawn its share of the idly curious. The newspapers had dubbed it "Simmons' Folly", it being held that no ship without sails would be of any "practical value" for warfare despite the proven fact that Lorraine's steam frigates had "proved" themselves without doubt there on the southern coast of Alaska. The shape of the hull, like that of a fish, had aroused suspicions that perhaps

we of the 20th Century knew little of ships! In the water it would give the impression of a great sea monster! The "spines" that ran down the Diana's back were an added touch! The painted "eyes" and all the rest merely adding to the "look".

"Gives me a bit more of a 'stake' in things," Carol said.

"I think that is 'why' we have Queens," Maris smiled back.

"That Prince of the Wyomings seemed to like you a bit," my wife smiled. That was a bit of an "understatement", I thought... He'd been almost totally infatuated with Queen Maris, I'd noted. Such a marriage would have important political ramifications for Dularn, especially with Queen Valeris there to the north now. The "Queen of the North" having spread her ideology of "feminism" over a considerable area with the "help" of Imperial weaponry and "advisors". In this I suspected the hand of Lorraine, who was of course well aware of Twentieth Century history and such "things". Maris was supplying the Wyomings with our weapons, along with a number of "advisors" upon my suggestion, it being obvious to me that eventually some day Dularn and Queen Valeris were going to clash, especially as she worked her way further to the south now. In such a case it would be "wise" to have allies such as the Wyomings, whose cavalry might be more an "answer" to her wolves. I was also concerned about the Imperial "spy" we'd caught, no doubt an agent of either Darlanis or Lorraine, who it could be expected would view the construction of the Diana with some concern here.

"He did make me arch and moan like no man before," Maris answered in a quiet tone that she might not be overheard just then! I had suspected that she had "given" herself to him, which among the high born women of Dularn doesn't usually occur unless the woman is very sure of her own emotional feelings towards the man. The type of sexual promiscuity like in our era is almost unknown. On the other hand prostitution is "legal" and quite commonplace.

"He is a rather 'handsome' devil," Carol then smiled back.

"Who knows how to 'pleasure' a woman," Maris assured her.

"Would master come," Kathi interrupted, now kneeling there.

"This makes the design more complex," the chief engineer said to me, showing me the drawings that I had prepared for him.

"It also allows to run both engines off of either boiler," I now pointed out to him in reply, seeing him nod. While it made a "plumber's nightmare" out of things a bit, I felt it would also make the ship more "reliable" especially under combat situations. The Diana's top speed would be about seven knots. Quite inferior to that of even steam frigates under sail, but on the other hand we could make seven knots right into the teeth of the wind, which no sailing ship, not even the well designed North Star could do! \* \* The ship ended up with three engines and a top speed of about eleven knots, which while not a match for the "faster" sailing ships, did make the Diana much more "effective" as a ship of war. The "appearance" of the vessel also helped in terrifying enemies.

"Last Sunday the High Priestess gave a sermon there at the Temple about the need of living in 'peace' with one's neighbors," the man spoke, looking me straight in the eye. I was well aware that we were "pushing the law" quite a bit with the Diana and its new weaponry. "She said that in the 'time of myth' that men did nothing but build better ways of killing each other," he added. I had recently been running experiments with "carbide" cannons... I suspected that the Priestesses of Lys had their own spies too.



"She is right," I smiled, "But on the other hand if we allow the Imperials to build ships and weapons that we have no defense against, then will our children 'curse' our names as the flag of the Empire flies over Arsana?" I challenged him back. He knew of course that Carol was pregnant, that she was carrying our child. The "welfare" of one's children is taken seriously in this era.

"We'd all feel better if you talked to her," he answered.

Neither Carol or I had ever paid much "attention" surprising as it may seem to the Lys "religion" as such. While we were well aware that nearly everyone in this era followed their teachings, neither my wife or I have ever been "religious" people as such or did we ever "belong" to any church back in the Twentieth Century. Thus as we stepped down from the taxi carriage in front of the great temple that covers an entire city block here in Arsana, we felt a certain degree of "awe" mixed with some "unease" despite the fact that we both knew that what we were doing was "right" whatever the High Priestess of the city said about our actions...

"Impressive," Carol said, looking about. We had I supposed passed it at one time or another, but we hadn't paid it much note at the time. Surprising as it may seem to the reader, there were a lot of places in Arsana than we'd never seen despite the months that we'd lived here. This "temple" being the "mother temple" for the rest of the much smaller local temples here in Arsana. I might note here that "religion" is considered "important" in this era, and that I have never met an "atheist" even among those who you might think would be one. It is taken for "granted" that Lys exists, that she is "Prime Cause" of everything as the Priestesses say. The Priestesses themselves pointing to Lorraine's own documented experiences there on Mars when she supposedly met up with Lys, who the Imperial Warlady herself refers to as "SHE"...

## Chapter Fourteen

"Reminds me a little of cathedrals in Europe and temples in Greece," Carol whispered as we stepped inside the great Temple of Lys here in Arsana. The High Priestess of the Temple also being the High Priestess of Dularn, I might mention here at this point. The interior reminded me of a Catholic Church in a way except for the "differences" in the altar, as the Priestesses do not believe in "Jesus" or anything like that, Lys being always "portrayed" as a beautiful tall golden haired woman. Much like what Lorraine "saw" on Mars. One "wonders" about such things since "blonde" haired women have always been considered somehow "superior" to more common "types". The actual "symbol" of Lys is of course the ankh. I have often wondered just how "far" that Tais has gone back in time. Could she have visited Egypt in the time of the Pharaohs? Or could "SHE" herself have paid a "visit" back then?

"You've never been to either place," I pointed out to her. Carol and I had once been to Spain, but we didn't tour the place, having stayed for three weeks at a seashore castle back in 1990.

"I've seen 'pictures'," Carol now hissed back in low tones.

"Here comes a Priestess," I smiled, seeing her approach. There are a number of different "levels" of Priestesses, the most common being the silver ankh, with the gold ankh much more rare. There are also "student" Priestesses, I might mention in passing. The "religion" itself is the consequence of certain "ideas"

that Lorraine passed on to Janet Rogers in the Twentieth Century, it having been Lorraine's quite "justified" concern that "electronic hypnosis", for which she is somewhat "responsible" for, could be used as a means of "control" from which there would be no escape. On the other hand the Priestesses themselves are far "more" than what Lorraine ever thought they would be, and I feel that in a way they probably represent the "best" of the Warlady's ideals...Lorraine being one of whom it may be said that she "meant well".\* \* Sometimes my husband does not clearly "see" what he should. I do not view Lorraine Richards as anything but what she is. (C.S.)

"May I be of service to you?" the Priestess asked us both. She was dark haired, and obviously from her "coloring" not of Dularn, but from a land much further to the south of our island. I suspect that the Priestesses of Lys do possess most of the technology of the 21st Century, and perhaps even have "aircraft" of some sort, although this is nothing but "conjecture" on my part.

"I am Robert Simmons, and this is my wife Carol," I smiled.

"Your 'activities' are not 'unknown' to us," she announced.

"I hope not 'all' unfavorably," I smiled back at the woman.

"Lys 'understands' much of such things," she spoke softly.

"At least you're an 'improvement' over Christianity," Carol smiled back, the Priestess nodding, giving my wife a smile back. The Priestesses of Lys not being "anti-sex" like Christians were. On the other hand just mention the word "hypnosis" to a Priestess sometime and watch the "reaction" you get right back in reply!!!

"We follow the true teachings of Lys," she replied in turn. "And obey her commands to 'safeguard' Mankind from the Evil One." With this she turned away, beckoning us to follow her across the Temple to the other side, where she indicated a doorway, telling us to enter. Her dark eyes for a brief moment meeting my wife's.

"Tais!" I breathed, instantly recognizing the First Priestess standing there, the other Priestess beside her no doubt the High Priestess of Dularn herself, a woman by the name of Martis.\* \* Many Dularnian women have names that end in "is" for some reason I've never been able to determine. The practice being much more common among those of the upper classes than otherwise here.

"Been making things go 'boom', haven't you?" Tais smiled, the room lit by some sort of glowing panels in the ceiling. I'd once been told that the Priestesses "knew" the "secrets of the past" and could use them to do things that no one else could do! I supposed such "devices" served to "awe" the common people into believing that everything the Priestesses said was the TRUTH too. Many of the "tales" spoken about the Priestesses of Lys tend to make me believe now that at least some of their awesome "abilities" tends to be nothing more than scientific "trickery" of some sort. Much like that used by stage magicians back in my own era. Their ability to "kill" by merely pointing their hand is due to their "possession" of a device that sends electric current down a coherent beam of light. I once saw such a "weapon" in use too... It is "impressive" in use, but rather inaccurate, and really no "match" for a man with a crossbow if you keep your wits about you. The technology, while "impressive", is "understandable" to one from an era where such concepts were not that "far-fetched".

"I take it you don't 'approve'," I answered, well aware of the sort of "power" that Tais now possessed over all of Humanity. For all practical purposes she was the undisputed "ruler" of the entire solar system as such. The room much like an office, with chairs and a large oaken desk. Tais half sitting on the edge of

the desk, with the High Priestess sitting in a chair to one side. She was blonde like many Dularnians, her eye color a steel gray.

"Not any more than I did Lorraine's ideas to build a second 'Constitution'," the First Priestess smiled back, her eyes as "blue" as Darlanis' now glowing straight into mine. I have my suspicions here that the life span of Priestesses is considerably greater than that of ordinary human beings, but this is only a "conjecture" on my part with little to actually base anything on. On the other hand it is noteworthy that Darlanis' daughter, Domino Tremaine, who traveled from "somewhere" in the 26th Century back to the 20th Century and died in the year 2047 did not age as much as she should have done considering that great span of time! Carol and I having met the woman in 1990 when she appeared to be in her early thirties. Of course the anti-aging serums may be the "answer" here, especially if she took a supply of the drugs with her back into the past, which may "explain" things here now.

"I'd better stick with steam catapults then," I smiled back.

"That would be 'wise'," the High Priestess of Dularn spoke.

"I trust you found the books from our time 'useful'," Carol said. Tais having needed us to help her obtain certain books unknown in this time. I expected that the public library would never get them back now, although it was still possible of course to go back in time and return the books if Tais wished to do so.\* \* This was later done, I might note, Tais being thoughtful enough to do so knowing that otherwise Carol would be "liable" for them.

"A great deal of caution must be taken by anyone who travels back in time," High Priestess Martis added, glancing up at Tais.

"I am well aware of that 'fact'," Tais answered, the tone of her voice leaving no doubt that she and Martis differed on this. I knew from what Lorraine had told me that the "organization" as such was "controlled" by those who had reached the level of "High Priestess". Such in turn forming a "council" which then elected one of their number as the "First Priestess" to represent them...

"And this second journey back into time to satisfy your own curiosity about their culture was utterly without reason," Martis snapped in cold icy tones, both women now paying us little note. "Your bringing them here to this time was bad enough, and I still see no justification for they're being here just because you want to keep Darlanis from establishing an Empire of North America!"

"Fortunately the majority on the council disagree with you," Tais "retorted", her voice icy cold as her eyes burned into the other's. I recalled the sort of "powers" these women possessed, and shuddered at the thought of what they might do to each other!

"We are here, and we hold the welfare of Mankind in just as high a regard as you do," Carol suddenly interrupted them both!!!

"Don't build any weapon using explosives," Martis said, her eyes burning hot into mine as she then left the room, closing the door behind herself in a way that left no doubt as to her opinion of things here. Tais giving me a "wan" smile, spreading her hands in a way that made her seem very "human" just then to us...

"High intelligence does not always mean great wisdom," the First Priestess smiled. "There are those among us who do not understand that our role here on Earth is to 'guide', not 'rule'."

"Is she...?" Carol breathed, her hand on her sword hilt.

"She knows better than to oppose me directly," Tais said.

"But she could be 'dangerous' to you?" I asked Tais, seeing her nod in reply. I supposed Tais had pretty much the same sort of "problems" that any head of state would have had in our time. She wasn't an "absolute dictator" by any means, and it was just possible that she could be "replaced" with another if the Council of High Priestesses decided she was "unworthy" of her "position".

"We are in many ways little different than you humans," she smiled. The way she spoke just then leaving little doubt as to how she saw things. In "form" she was human, in reality perhaps something else. "Our 'position' here is to 'protect' Mankind from "those" who would wish you harm." That was the general view that the Priestesses of Lys held vs a vs the human race as such.

"You could put an 'end' to warfare, all 'evil things'," my wife retorted. I wondered if the Priestesses did have the power?

"In such a society life would hardly be worth living," Tais smiled. "Janet Rogers' World Federation was not a 'success' any more than the Soviet dictatorship that died out in your own era. Man does not 'need' another planetary dictatorship of that sort."

"Queen Valeris of the 'Free Women' doesn't think too much of your organization," I smiled, recalling what I'd been told then.

"The 'feeling' is rather 'mutual', I fear," Tais smiled. "They practice a sort of 'witchcraft' that in other eras has resulted in considerable harm, and I must tell you that there are 'ways' that one can bring evil spirits from the 'astral world'."

"I'm from the 20th Century, not the 12th," I smiled at her.

"Such things 'exist', and I am not lying about this either," Tais snapped back. "We have been forced already once to 'close' a sort of 'GATEWAY' that was established between this world and the 'astral world' that lies in another plane of existence." The tone of her voice leaving no doubt that she "believed" all this!!

"And hypnosis has something to 'do' with all this?" I asked, well aware that the Priestesses strongly opposed its "use" by any but themselves. I suspected too that I knew the reason why here.

"We possess the 'power' to open 'Gateways' both through time and into other planes of existence," Tais answered, "And we have learned at the cost of a number of lives to be a bit 'cautious'."

"'Parallel Universes'?" I asked her, recalling my reading, wondering what life might be "like" in such different "worlds"...

"There are 'planes of existence' where life has become extinct on the Earth, others where Man has remained only a barbaric savage living in caves, and others where he has conquered his own solar system and sought the stars," the First Priestess answered.

"What about 'what' you were talking about?" Carol now asked.

"There are 'non-material' planes of existence where exist beings of great power, beings who are more 'evil' than any man who ever lived on this Earth," she said, "And I might add, there is a 'HELL' where

lives the 'being' we call the 'EVIL ONE', the 'anti-Lys' who has since the beginning of time opposed LYS herself for the immortal souls of beings throughout the Universes."

"Lorraine was told 'something' of this," I said to my wife.

"The 'Battle Between Good And Evil' will take place eleven years from now in the southeast part of Trelandar," Tais replied. "There is a 'possibility' that it will be the end of life here on Earth if the 'EVIL ONE' wins against us," the Priestess answered.

## Chapter Fifteen

"You don't really 'believe' her, do you?" Carol said as we left the Temple, stepping back out into the bright sunlight of this late Mayday. The "unreality" of what Tais had "said" still echoing through my thoughts. There is in both the "BOOK OF LYS" and the "BIBLE" mention of a "final battle" between "good" and "evil", but Tais' claim that she knew when it was to happen, and where, did seem a bit "far fetched", even considering Tais' amazing "abilities" at traveling through time itself to other eras.

"Lorraine believes in it, but I think she got her wits a bit 'addled' there on Mars both due to Raspa's venom and from lack of oxygen," I "suggested" with a smile for my delightful brownette.

"Darlanis and Maris 'believe' in such things," she answered.

"They are both 'people' of this era, raised in this 'religion'," I pointed out. The Priestesses doubtlessly used hypnosis themselves to get people to believe. They did "run" things here pretty much. Their "control" wasn't infinite, but it was enough.

"And 'if' she is 'right'?" Carol "challenged" me in return.

"Then we're all in a lot of 'trouble'," I "grinned" back.

"It's not 'funny' Bob!" Carol suddenly snapped back at me.

"You're pregnant," I said to her. Pregnant women often got a bit "snappy" at times, the chief engineer had "confided" in me.

"And I don't want my little girl dying eleven years from now!" Carol "snapped" back, the fury in her voice surprising me!

"Let us hope then that 'good' wins over 'evil'," I replied, stepping down to the street and hailing a "taxi" to take us home.

"You don't usually see one of these this far north," Kathi said with a grin, pointing to the spider there in the cellar. My wife wasting no time in drawing her sword and putting an "end" to the creature. Such spiders being a foot across or more with a bloated hairy body the size of an orange. Carol carrying the thing on the tip of her sword outside and then tossing it off..

"Saw one of those things one time on Lorraine's estate," my wife said. "Gave me the bee jees then just like it did now." I couldn't much blame her, as some insects of this era are awesome. While such spiders are not that "dangerous", they do have a painful bite, and they can kill small animals, which are often their prey. The radiation from The War having caused many "mutations".

"If you find 'another', just kill it," I told Kathi then.

"Yes, master," Kathi answered, giving me a smile back.

"Never 'seen' a ship like that before," the chief engineer said to me as the Diana took on her final form there in the yard.

"I have," I smiled, thinking of submarines that I'd seen.

"Two inches of cast iron armor plate," the engineer said.

"And reinforced by four inches of solid oak," I added then.

"The guards caught another 'wench'," he smiled at me then.

"Darlanis and Lorraine must have an 'ample' supply," I said.

"They say those 'Imperial gals' really know how to 'please' a man," he smiled back, a big "grin" on his half-handsome face. He was a heavy set man, dark haired like me, his wife a tall and rather "waspy" looking blonde who doubtlessly was a bit "frigid". She was also the Mayor of Arsana, which didn't "help" any either as she was constantly on the "go" like a lot of "politicians". I understood that they didn't get along that well, although I had little doubt that they would stay together regardless of "that".

"You should buy her and find out," I suggested to him then.

"My wife could use always use a 'housemaid'," he observed. "Especially one that couldn't 'quit' without notice like the last one did," he added. Few upper class women will "do" housework. The aristocratic women of this era consider such "work" beneath them. They spend their time on more "worthwhile" pursuits which bring them out into the public eye. I'd met his wife once, Carol having said that she reminded her a great deal of Nancy Reagan...

"I'll talk to Maris about her, Jard, see what I can do," I smiled, Jard Sandar being a man who "appreciated" a fine wench. I didn't think the girl would be too badly "damaged" by her interrogation. There are "ways" of inflicting pain that don't mark the skin or damage the body for any future use. Queen Maris herself would doubtlessly be the one to ask the "questions", although Carol might take a hand in things. My lovely brownette being a woman who could be very "nasty" when she wanted to be...

"The Senate is getting a bit 'concerned' about the amount of money we're spending on the Diana," Maris said to me, looking out the window of her palace at the bay. I nodded, well aware that I was spending gold crowns like some Congressman from my own era...

"The 'best' always costs more," I smiled back at the Queen. The third engine and propellor had added a bit to the cost of it. It was not a matter of "ordering" ready made parts and putting something together with them. Most of the work had to be done from scratch. Making boilers that met "proof" was another worry. I wondered if Tais would let me make another trip back in time. I could use half a dozen books

on engineering and metallurgy now.

"We are not a 'rich people' like those of your time," she said. I'd already been "reminded" of that "fact" by the two daily newspapers, both of whom felt that "Simmons' Folly" was just a "waste" of the taxpayer's money that could be better spent elsewhere in building ships of "proven design" such as more "Norths". The "fact" that such ships as the North Star were now militarily obsolete hadn't apparently penetrated their minds quite as yet. We could copy the Imperial steam frigates, but I didn't see much "advantage" in doing so. The Empire had a lot more "resources" than Dularn did, and we'd never be able to "match" them at that. The Northlight was being "converted" to steam, although I didn't think it hardly worth the "bother" considering everything now...

"You can always 'cut a deal' with Darlanis," I told her.

"There is no need to be sarcastic," Maris snapped back.

I squatted down behind the "quickfirer", took aim, squeezed the trigger device. Half a dozen bolts spitting out then a jam!

"Bolts are shifting in the magazines," I said to Carol as she stood there watching, her pregnancy now rather "obvious"...

"Maybe the Imperials will sell us some weapons," she smiled back. I didn't "dignify" that sort of a "comment" with a reply. I do love my wife, but things were getting a bit out of hand now!

Maris Marn, the Queen of Dularn bent over the "quickfirer", letting off a burst, the bolts ripping into the target a hundred yards away. I mused to myself that she shouldn't have worn such a "tight" gown as the Queen was just a bit "broad" in the "beam"!

"Not bad," the chief engineer said, his slave girl at his side. She now served a master instead of her Imperial mistress. She had told the Queen of Dularn "little" that we didn't already know. Maris had not felt it "necessary" to "scar" her beauty...

"I think I've got the magazine problem licked," I answered.

"Wasn't thinking of that," Jard smiled, "patting" his slave.

"I don't understand what is wrong with these engines!" Jard Sandar complained, the sweat now rolling down his face as the hot early summer sun burned down upon us from a cloudless sky. I did, but I didn't want to "irritate" anyone any further. It was obvious that these people were totally "incompetent" at building any bit of technology more advanced in design than what we had. The Diana now drifting helplessly there in the middle of the bay, while those on shore hooted their delight at "Simmons' Folly"...

"Signal that galley to take us in tow," I said to the midshipman standing there. Obviously there was work yet to be done!

"You did your 'best', and everyone knows that," Carol said to me as I sat across the redwood picnic table from her. Kathi to one side, watching us both, well aware of the fact that "master" was not in the best of "moods" just then. The early evening sun shining down as we sat there on the roof top patio overlooking the city. A cool breeze off the strait comforting just then. The "failure" of the Diana's engines to work was infuriating now!

"I'm glad you think so," I "smiled" back. Even Maris was starting to "wonder" a bit now, while the newspapers were having a field day denouncing "Simmons' Folly" and its "waste" of money!

"I still have 'confidence' in you," my brownette smiled, her hazel eyes glowing into my own as she took my hands in hers then.

"We want to 'know', Admiral Simmons," the head of the Senate snapped, standing there before his companions, "When we will have a steamship and just how much 'more' is it going to cost the taxpayers?" I could understand their concern. We had already put nearly two thousand good gold crowns into the Diana, with nothing yet to show for it but a "useless" immovable armor plated hull. The modifications to the Northlight were going no better either. It was almost as if someone was sabotaging our every effort here!

"The castes of Builders and Scribes must work more closely together," I answered him with Maris standing there quietly at my side. Such had been a "problem" for some reason I couldn't figure out. "We do know that the Imperials can build such ships, and there is no reason I know of that we cannot do the same." I was "aware", as was Maris, that Lorraine was building such a vessel there in Trella, and hers was coming along better than ours!

It was hot inside the closed up Diana, the great bulk of the battleship like a beached whale as it laid there at the dock. I wondered "where" the watchman was that should have been aboard. The hatches were open to give a bit of air and light to the "gun deck", where the quickfirers and my steam catapults were mounted. The sound of a dropped tool below decks making me "start " then! I dashed down the hatchway, into the dim darkness of below decks! Then stumbling over the dead body of the watchman on the deck! I had no "doubts" then as to what was going on here as I crept towards the engine room, my every sense alert here in the darkness, my sword now gleaming in my right hand, twenty four inches of polished Dularian steel with an "edge" sharp enough to shave by.

"Traitor!" I snapped, kicking open the door, whipping up my sword, the chief engineer's assistant drawing his without a word. The tools, the half open transmission housing leaving no doubts! I had no doubts now why the Diana had never "worked" properly...

He came at me like a madman, the quick interplay of our weapons ringing in the engine room. This was a fight to the death, and both of us knew that. He was "good", but I was "better". I had no doubt that all our "troubles" had been due to his efforts! Who had paid him to do this to us? He was no Imperial !

"Who do you serve, Lorraine or Darlanis?" I snarled, fending away his blade. Or could it be another, one who none would suspect of such a thing? I recalled the High Priestess of Dularn...

"Go to Hell!" he snapped, charging in at me. I fainted, parried his thrust, and made my move. He staggered back, the blood spurting from his throat, and collapsed there on the deck! I didn't think now that I could have taken him alive in any case.

"The two 'women' we caught were undoubtedly Imperial spies, but neither Lorraine or Darlanis would stoop to something like this," I said to Maris, her eyes like azure jewels holding mine. Carol sitting there quietly watching, swollen now with child. I didn't like to think too much about the implications of all this.

"Who else?" the Queen of Dularn challenged. Queen Valeris of the Free Women wouldn't give a damn about the Diana and so far as we knew Princess Tara had gone into "retirement" after her escape last year from the Nevadas who had held her captive at Darlanis' request. There weren't any other "enemies", or were they?



"Who has been 'denouncing' the Diana since the start of its construction?" I challenged the Queen back. I saw Carol nodding.

"If you are accusing the High Priestess...!" Maris gasped.

"It is 'possible'," Carol suddenly spoke from beside her.

"Let me 'handle' this," Maris Marn said to us both then.

"Scary," Carol said as I helped her up into the carriage. She was over six months pregnant now, her belly well swollen up. A pair of passing children giving me a big "grin" as I "nodded". It was a lovely day, the sort of a day that anyone might enjoy...

"It answers a 'question' I've been wondering about ever since Tais told us that 'stuff' about the future," I said to her. I knew from what Lorraine had told me that Princess Tara would be "involved" in this "war" between "GOOD" and "EVIL", but what was the "role" of the Priestesses of Lys in this matter, and for that matter, their own "superiors", who controlled other worlds out there in the Universe? If the "EVIL ONE" was to come to Earth, then someone had to help him get here, and it certainly couldn't be Princess Tara, who didn't have the "technology" to do the job! That meant "allies", and there could be only one source for them!

## Chapter Sixteen

"You could be 'in harm's way'," I said to Carol, well aware that the High Priestess doubtlessly "knew" by now that I killed her agent when I found him sabotaging the Diana. If the Priestess decided to take "matters in hand" herself I didn't want to think of the sort of dangers that I might be exposing Carol to...

"I have no desire to be a 'widow' either," Carol answered, gently patting the great beast that Maris had given us for "protection". The gigantic dire wolf as big as a shetland pony sitting there, its head on a level with Carol's shoulders as she stood beside it. It had been a "gift" from Queen Valeris to the Queen of Dularn, who had quickly found that such an animal was not to be completely "trusted" on crowded teeming city streets. Kathi quietly regarding the crossbow that I had armed her with.

"These may give us an 'edge'," I said, checking the brace of flintlock pistols that we'd keep on the two bedstands. If Martis came after us herself, she was not likely to be following the "weapon laws". What "sort" of weapons the Priestesses of Lys had was something I didn't know, but I could assume that they would at least possess the most advanced weapons of the 21st Century!!!

The "attack snarl" of a mutated seven hundred pound Canadian dire wolf is something I hope to never hear again as I was suddenly woke from a fitful sleep by the great beast's sudden attack upon the white gowned figure now standing there in our bedroom!!!

There was a dazzling bright flash of a blue-white beam of light as the Priestess raised her right arm, the gigantic wolf for an instant seeming to "glow" as she jumped to one side of it!

"Die!" the High Priestess screamed, a beam of bright bluewhite light sizzling just over us to strike the wall, the flintlock pistol in Carol's hand deafening as she fired over my shoulder! A smell in the room like that of some great electric storm as High Priestess Martis fired an uncontrolled shot up into the ceiling over our heads! The "buck" of the pistol in my hand unnoticed as I fired, dropping her then and putting an end to this!

"Fire!" Kathi cried, the smoke and flames now visible from the effects of the Priestess' weapon, some sort of "laser" I suspected, although nothing like anything I'd ever seen before now!!

"Put it out!" Carol snapped, jumping from the bed, her sword in her hand, running to the still form of the Priestess while our slave girl and I bent our efforts at beating out the two fires...

"She's dead," I said, holding the lamp, Carol now squatting down, removing the silvery tube like device from Martis' hand. It was little larger than a "pocket flashlight" from our own era, although its "deadliness" was obvious from the still form of the wolf who had died attempting to protect us. The cause of death I quickly determined to be most likely electrocution, such weapons "killing" in much the same way as a lightning bolt does, I suspect. The "power supply" is quite "limited", and the weapon really is not as "effective" as say a Lorr blaster pistol might be. It is not very "accurate" as you have seen from this story both from its design and the lack of any sort of a "sighting system". On the other hand it certainly doesn't lack for "stopping power" as it "dropped" our Canadian mutated dire wolf instantly.

"You killed a 'Priestess'...", Kathi "muttered", looking on. There was blood on the white gown, and a hole in her forehead. Carol's shot had hit her in the chest, mine there in the head. The back of the head was a blasted bloody mass of bone and brain.

"An evil woman, who 'betrayed' her vows," Carol answered.

"Kathi, go to Queen Maris, bring her here," I ordered her. The slave girl nodding, shivering in terror as she scampered off.

"How did she get in?" Carol said to me, Kathi dashing down the stairs towards the street, almost as if driven by demons now! The front door had been locked, and there was no other way into our home, or was there now? I glanced "up", my wife now nodding!

"I've heard of 'these'," I said, looking at the "flyer", a device that muchly resembled a "wet bike" of the 20th Century in some ways. The question was how to get "rid" of the damm thing!!

"Bob! You Don't Know How!" Carol protested as I "straddled" it! It was a moonless night, the sky overcast. No doubt Martis had flown it over the city from the Templeto here, landing on our roof! That explained too how she'd managed to gain entrance!

"They're just women with an 'advanced technology'," I said, studying the flyer's controls there in the light of Carol's lamp.

"Ohh," Carol gasped, the flyer floating up a bit just then!

"Think I've got the 'hang' of it," I smiled, twisting the control, the rooftop dropping away there beneath me! I'm not too bothered by "heights", but this wasn't the most enjoyable "ride"! Arsana spreading out there beneath me as I rose up into the sky!!

It was a "hairy" thing to "ride", especially if you really didn't know what you were doing. The right twist grip acted as an "accelerator", the left controlled "up and down", while pushing the "handlebars" controlled direction. Just what the flyer's "range" was I didn't know, although I didn't think it was likely to be too far, the craft obviously controlling gravity some way!!

I swung it around towards the harbor, the lights of the city there below, well aware of the instant death that awaited me if I did the least thing wrong now! I needed to get "rid" of the flyer, but HOW? I could land outside the city, leave it, but I wanted to get rid of it in a way that couldn't be traced back...

"Wrap up the body in several blankets," the Queen ordered standing there in our bedroom, a hooded cloak thrown over herself. Carol did so without a word while Kathi whimpered to herself in terror at the very idea of what might happen to them all if the Priestesses of Lys found out that we had just killed one of their number. There is an automatic death penalty for killing a Priestess, although I didn't think that it would have been "enforced" in this case as the High Priestess of Dularn had obviously come to us with murder in her heart and our deaths in mind...!

"How are we going to dispose of it?" Carol asked Maris Marn.

"The Diana's boilers are large enough to hold a body," the Queen answered. "And a coal fire is hot enough to destroy it."

"You have a carriage?" Carol asked. Maris nodding, smiling. Her captain of guards, Tori Wells, she trusted to keep "secrets"!

"There are certain 'advantages' to being a 'Queen'," Maris said to me as I carried the blanket wrapped body aboard the ship. Maris' "authority" being such that no one asked her "questions". Captain Wells in her chain mail watching us all silently. I was dripping wet now from my swim back to the Diana after crashing the flyer into the water. Thankfully it had sunk as I had hoped! Due to the darkness of the night I doubted anyone saw anything...

"Hope someone doesn't wonder why we're getting up steam in the middle of the night," Carol said, closing the hatch behind us and dogging it shut. The interior of the Diana pitch dark but for the starlight streaming down through the overhead hatches. I was thankful for Maris' lamp, although I know the Diana by heart. Tori's eyes gleaming into mine for an instant as I glanced back. She was a sexy looking woman, almost another "Carol" in looks...

"I doubt that she told anyone what she was 'planning'," I answered. This had been no doubt a "solo operation" given the actual nature of what the High Priestess had attempted to "do"...

"Let us 'hope' so," the Queen of Dularn "smiled" in reply.

"Boiler room one," I said, Maris lifting up her lamp.

"That should be enough coal," I said, setting down the shovel. I lifted the blanket wrapped body, pushed it in through the door, laying it out on the coal, and then closed the door after tossing in a match to light the lamp oil soaked coal. A few more strokes of the pump sent enough lamp oil into the boiler to get a good fire going, Carol peeking in through the little port in the door to see how well the fire was burning up the Priestess' body.

"Be careful with that," Maris warned as I once again took out the Priestess' weapon she'd given me and studied it. I had already determined what was the "trigger" and what was the "safety" on it. I debated

whether to keep it or not. I had no idea of how to "recharge" it, and was doubtful that it could be done in any case... It really didn't seem too wise to keep it around.

"Throw it away, Bob, Get RidOf It!" Carol then warned me.

I walked down to the end of the dock alongside the Diana, the smoke pouring from the funnel tower at the stern, rising up into the star sprinkled sky above, the lights of the city reflected in the rippling waters of the bay, and flung the weapon as far out into the bay as I could. For a few seconds I thought that would be the "end" of it, then suddenly there was a "flash" in the water and a "whoom" as water flew up as from an explosion!

"Lousy engineering," I smiled to myself, seeing the water now settle back. "What you'd expect from some bunch of `women'!" It being rather "obvious" that the Priestesses weren't all that great as "engineers" despite their "technological advantages"... Fortunately the flyer had been somewhat better designed that way!

"The Priestesses of Lys have `reported' that their High Priestess is `missing' and they fear `foul play' has occurred," the Queen of Dularn said to me the next afternoon as Jard Sandar and I were going over the Diana inch by inch just to "check" what sort of sabotage had been done to the ship at Martis' orders. I had not told him, of course, that her ashes were now at the bottom of the bay after being "dumped" from boiler number one. I was well aware that a number of the Priestesses had "telepathic" powers to a certain extent, but as neither Carol or I were "temple goers" as such, I wasn't too worried about "that" right now. Maris wasn't either, although I wasn't too sure about Tori here. She was a married woman, her husband a Physician, with children. Maris said she was "trustworthy" even in a "matter" such as this!

"We used to have the same sort of `problems' in the Twentieth Century," I answered, giving the Queen a big "grin" and seeing her "nod" in reply. "They used to pass an additional `antigun law' after such `incidents' but I guess you can't do that as `guns' don't exist in this time." Jard looking at me curiously.

"A search will be made of the city, but I do not expect to `find' anything," Maris Marn smiled back, well aware that she was as "involved" in all this as we were. Kathi was utterly terrified of what could happen to us, but I wasn't too concerned now.

"There's someone coming up the steps!" Carol breathed as we ate dinner that evening there on the roof of our house, a golden head and azure eyes suddenly popping up as Tais climbed up to the roof, the breeze from the strait gently ruffling her hair a bit. The rays of the sun low in the west sending sparkling beams of light from her diamond encrusted ankh there between her breasts.

"You probably `know all'," I told the Priestess, aware that Tais had the power to read our thoughts. The First Priestess smiling back. I was well aware that the house had been locked from below, but I supposed that wouldn't have been a "problem" for Tais any more than it had been for Martis the night before! Kathi cringing down like a whipped cur, shaking with open terror! The slave girl suddenly then actually wetting the roof beneath her as she voided urine in her terror like I've seen animals do.

"You saved us the `trouble' of a trial and execution," Tais answered. "And perhaps a great deal more had it become `known' that one of us had `misused' her powers for the service of evil."

"Couldn't you `detect' such with your telepathic powers?" Carol asked, motioning for Kathi to set a place for Tais to sit. The First Priestess drawing up a chair, and then seating herself. Kathi then dashing off to wash herself and put on a clean strap.

"I did not believe that she would break her `programming'," Tais answered. "It hasn't ever `happened' before," she added. I had suspected "such" was the case, knowing what I did about them. I supposed it had come as a great "shock" to the Priestesses that one of their number could actually attempt to commit a "murder"!!

"Maybe I'm `trespassing' where I don't `belong', but have you ever considered the `fact' that this `war between good and evil' that you told us about could perhaps be `stopped' before it ever happens?" I challenged, Tais' azure eyes blazing into mine as she sat there with a piece of meat on her fork halfway to her mouth. "That perhaps a small force could be sent forward into time to put a `stop' to it before it ever happens?" I added then.

"It could be a `suicide mission'," Tais answered me softly.

"Are you familiar with the caste codes of the Warriors?" I asked the First Priestess. Such "things" are spoken of in them. I glanced at Carol, at her swollen belly, at the life within her. I thought of a certain "blonde" I knew, brave beyond all others, who might be just the "sword companion" for such an "adventure". I am a proficient rifleman, fairly "good" with a handgun too...

"Bob! You could get killed!" Carol protested then as I had suspected that she would. I had no doubts that was possible too!

"There are things worth dying for," I said, seeing her nod. "And I want my daughter to live in a world safe from danger..."

## Chapter Seventeen

"Impressive," I said, looking about at the "city" before me. The world headquarters of the Priestesses of Lys. Their "Rome". The "style" of the buildings reminded me much of that era too...

"We enjoy beautiful things," Tais answered with a smile.

"`Shalimar' is all of that," I answered, quite impressed.

"It is built completely of fine white marble," she said. I wondered how the Priestesses had transported such materials here? The quality of workmanship left nothing to be desired, I noticed. Perhaps the Lorr had been of "assistance" in the transportation of the building materials. On the other hand perhaps the Priestesses had done the task themselves. They had just teleported the two of us from my own roof top in Arsana to here in "no time". I wondered just how "powerful" the Priestesses of Lys really were? We had also traveled in time, as it had been sunset in Arsana and here it was apparently still daylight. Nor had there been any of the "fireworks" that Carol and I had experienced in time travel. Apparently short jumps in time like this didn't require a thunderstorm as a "power supply" to open up a "Gateway" in spacetime.

"Where are we?" I ventured, the sun shining down upon us. I had clasped hands with Tais and "zap", we were here in this spot! The small city spreading out before us, with mountains all around and a large lake

there in the distance gleaming in the sunlight.

"On the border between California and Nevada, a hundred miles from what was Leith, with Talon being over that way," Tais smiled, pointing. I wondered if the nomadic Nevada ever gave the Priestesses of Lys any "difficulty". I rather "doubted" it!

"You ever met a fellow by the name of Robert A. Heinlein?" I asked Tais as she showed me the suits of "powered armor" we would wear in this short journey through time to a point only eleven years in our future. The powered armor reminding me much of the similar devices that he'd used in his book, "STARSHIP TROOPERS".

"I don't believe so," Tais answered, not "understanding" me.

"These were in a 20th Century science fiction book," I explained. "Along with a 'social philosophy' that made a lot of sense," I added, recalling his idea of "earned citizenship" by means of "national service". The book had been "popular" among some of the Vietnam veterans that I'd known back then long ago.

"Heinlein, Robert A," Tais spoke, a "far away" look in her eyes. "Noted Twentieth Century author of science fiction novels, died in the year nineteen ninety one. The novel to which you referred relates the 'adventures' of a young man who learns the meaning of 'citizenship' in fighting in an interstellar war," she spoke in a flat toneless voice. "A somewhat similar social policy was carried out by Janet Rogers in the Twenty First Century." I suspected she was picking up the mental transmissions of another Priestess somewhere, one sitting before some sort of computer.

"What does this 'EVIL ONE' look like?" I asked, changing the subject. I knew the old Christian "Devil" had horns and a tail, walked around on "hooves", and was supposed to carry some sort of pitchfork in most of the "illustrations" I'd ever seen of him.

"Something like a gigantic spider," Tais answered back.

"Ugly bastard then," I smiled back at the Priestess.

I took aim with the rifle, squeezed the trigger, the sound of the muzzle blast almost nothing to the sound of the "blast" when the "bullet" hit its target and exploded with a force that nothing could have resisted. The dirt and rock was blasted right up into the air as if a heavy bomb had just been exploded there!

"The bullets have an explosive force equal to a ton of TNT," Tais smiled. "The rate of fire on full auto is thirty per second, the velocity is eleven hundred meters per second, and the magazine holds three hundred such rounds," the Priestess added...

"You could sink battleships with this!" I breathed in awe. The magazine was a long cylinder, mounted underneath the barrel. The weapon was a "bullpup", and just about as long as my sword. There were telescopic sights, although with such "ammunition" as this one hardly needed to do any more than just point the thing!

"I fear that the EVIL ONE is far more indestructible than that," Tais smiled back. "You are dealing with a 'creature' that cannot be destroyed by any means known in the physical universe."

"You said though that it was 'destroyed'," I protested, the rifle "heavy" there in my hands, "aware" now of something of the true "nature" of the sort of "thing" that we were going after...

"At the cost of hundreds of millions of lives and making the Earth itself 'uninhabitable' from the geological stresses and the radioactive fallout from the use of a three hundred and fifty thousand gigaton positron bomb," she answered me. "There was also the damage caused by the crash of Deimos as it was used as a 'distraction' while the Starfire itself made its approach carrying the bomb," Tais added, her eyes glowing straight into mine. No doubt it had been a "suicide mission" for the Starfire anyway. Such an explosion would leave a crater hundreds of miles across. I understood that the Earth itself was rendered almost lifeless.

"And you are looking for a way to alter this 'future'," I said, well aware of the terrible destruction that must have occurred. No doubt the Women and the Lorr had evacuated the survivors to Mars, leaving Earth a lifeless radioactive frozen ruin as thousands of volcanoes poured smoke and dust into the atmosphere.

"It is beautiful here," I said, trying not to think of what laid ahead in the future for us all. The Priestesses themselves were almost like children in some ways, I thought to myself then. Most had been "neutered" at puberty, and while they still had the "bodies" of adults, they did not have the "personalities" of women. Tais had said that the elimination of "sex" was an asset. I did not argue the point with her, feeling that perhaps she was "right" in a way, although such a life was certainly not for me. They use drugs so that the girl develops breasts, although these seem to be smaller in size as a rule than those of normal women.

"It will be destroyed by the EVIL ONE on June 14th, in the year 2579," Tais replied. "All you see will be totally vaporized when the bomb is exploded by the Starfire." I understood that the "crew" of the Starfire in this suicide mission consisted of Tais herself as well as Darlanis and her daughter An'na of Mars. Tais using her "powers" to "shield" the Starfire long enough so that it could come close enough to the EVIL ONE to destroy it.

"The 'Battle of Armageddon'," I answered, seeing her smile.

"The ultimate conflict between 'good' and 'evil'," she said.

"Maybe prayer would be more effective than weapons," I said.

"Lyswill not 'interfere' in this matter," Tais answered me.

"Doesn't give a 'damn' about us then," I snapped back then. I knew everyone "claimed" that God existed, that Lorraine even claimed to have spoken with a "being" she had called "SHE" there on Mars, who supposedly was "GOD", "LYS", or whatever ran things.

"I believe Lyscares, but cannot 'interfere' in this," Tais answered, the tone of her voice leaving no doubt that she had sensed my thoughts on this subject. "Perhaps there is something similar here like what existed between your United States of America and the 'Union of Soviet Social Republics' in your time."

"A 'limited war' like the 'one' in Vietnam?" I smiled back.

"Perhaps a 'test' of our determination to resist 'evil'," Tais said. I wondered about "that". Didn't make much sense...

"This is a recording made of our first 'confrontation' with the 'EVIL ONE'," Tais said to me, putting a disk that looked much like a little CD into a device somewhat like a VCR of my own era. A flat panel that covered the whole wall lighting up there before us. The sharpness and detail far superior to anything I'd seen!

"They are 'volunteers'," Tais said, the three young women in silvery jumpsuits each carrying some sort of short compact "gun". The "camera operator" obviously a fourth. They looked much like soldiers I'd seen long ago when it was time to strike out into the jungle on patrol, well aware of the fact that death awaited. The sky above them dark, lightning flickering now in the clouds. "This was our first attempt a number of years ago at this," Tais said, the tone of her voice leaving no doubt that she knew "what" was going to happen to these four young women when they went into the future to face the EVIL ONE. "We knew that 'something' had happened in our own future, but at the time we didn't know what."

"There's you," I said, seeing a bit "younger" Tais talking to the three women in the picture there before us. The hair, the ankh and everything else about her was quite unmistakable there.

"I knew all of these Priestesses personally," Tais said, a tear now glistening in her eyes as she sat there. "Their deaths were not something that should have ever 'happened' to anyone."

"Time jump is complete," Tais said, the three young women standing there looking about, the camerawoman panning the area, the scattered ruins that were left of Shalimar leaving no doubts! THEN SUDDENLY THE 'EVIL ONE' WAS THERE! A HORRID LOOKING THING LIKE A CROSS BETWEEN A CRAB AND A SPIDER, A HUNDRED FEET TALL, A GOOD FOOTBALL FIELD ACROSS! GREAT COMPOUND MULTIFACED EYES, A SET OF STINGS LIKE A SPIDER HAS, A DOZEN CLAWED AND MULTIJOINTED LEGS! Even in the picture I could feel the "evil" of the thing!!

"Our weapons were useless against it," Tais spoke in a flat toneless voice. I saw the Priestesses firing, saw the blue-white beams of energy strike the creature, having almost no effect on it but seemingly merely to "irritate" it a bit! I heard their voices as they begged to be "transported" back in time, saw the THING reach out with clawed forelimbs, seize these terrified women as they fled in terror, the view now "sideways" as the camerawoman dropped the recorder to flee. I saw a woman torn in half, her body there a few yards away from the still running recorder, I heard screams, sobbing, a woman crying "LYS! SAVE ME!" and then a scream as the THING lifted her a hundred feet in the air and to my horror dropped her right into that great fanged mouth it had!

"That's enough," Tais snapped, shutting off the viewscreen. "I recovered the video camera when it left and got back before it came for me," the First Priestess added, her eyes wet with tears.

"Were you aware of all this happening?" I asked. I saw Tais nod. The tears now rolling unnoticed down her cheeks as she looked at me. I knew then that she and the others had witnessed this entire scene from its beginnings to its awful conclusion...

"I gave the orders not to open the 'Gateway'," she said.

"You did the right thing," I answered, seeing her nod.

"I do not believe the blaster rifles will have any more effect upon it than did our energy beams," Tais said to me then. I could fill in the rest of her thoughts for myself. If we went up into the future, we both could suffer the same fate as the four Priestesses had. "And we dare not open a 'Gateway' if it is too close to us," she added, her glistening eyes burning into my own.

"Can it fly?" I asked, thinking of a helicopter or something of that type. Perhaps a Lorr saucer. They were "armed" and I suspected capable of traveling a lot faster than any airplane...



"It is capable of changing its form to something that can," Tais answered. "What you saw is not its true shape in any case. It is also capable of increasing its size to any that it wishes."

"Looked solid enough to me," I disagreed. Perhaps one needed to use "heavier" weapons. The most powerful fighting craft ever built so far as I knew was the Starfire, which mounted half a dozen heavy laser cannon and could fire anti-matter missiles. On the other hand Tais had already told me that such weapons were of no value against the thing. That it was "indestructible"...

"It is also capable of dematerializing itself when confronted with atomic weapons," Tais pointed out to me then. "It cannot be 'killed' in the sense that only a small 'part' of it is actually in our own plane of existence." Tais going on to explain that the EVIL ONE was actually a "supernatural being" similar in its own composition to that of LYS herself, which is the name now used for GOD. The question was here, how do you "kill" a "god"? The positron bomb had been powerful enough to force it back into its own plane of existence, but "that" wasn't an "answer" here...

"Maybe we could close up its 'Gateway'," I suggested to her. Cut off the "part" of it here in our own plane of existence from the rest of the THING. Once "that" was done it might be possible to get rid of what remained here in our own world. "We need something 'armored', capable of flight, of reaching space if necessary," I said to her. I saw Tais nod, give me a smile in turn.

"Perhaps we did need a 'Warrior'," the First Priestess said.

"There is a time to 'pray', and a time to 'fight'," I said.

"And may LYS have 'mercy' on our souls," she then smiled.

"And 'trust' in ourselves," I answered the Priestess.

## Chapter Eighteen

"There is another thing," I said to Tais, seeing her pause.

"And what is that?" the First Priestess asked me then.

"We also need a 'piece' of that thing to study," I said.

"That might be helpful," she said, wishing me a good night.

I ran through the deserted streets of a ruined city, not a city of the 26th Century, but one perhaps of the 20th. The husks of burned out cars in the streets, rubble everywhere, windowless buildings blackened by fire on either side. I was clad in the uniform of the United States Marines, an M-16 grasped in my hand, helmetless now, wet with sweat as I fled gasping down the street. The sky was gray, cloudy, featureless overhead, nothing living in sight. Not a bird, not an insect, not "anything" of normal life!

Behind me now came a "THING" a hundred feet tall, squeezing in between the buildings on its dozen

clawed legs, a great spider-crab like HORROR like nothing this world had ever seen before!

I fled down an alley, suddenly finding to my horror that it was a dead end! I spun about, seeing the EVIL ONE already there before me. I raised the M-16, fired a magazine full of thirtyright into that awful "face", the bullets bouncing off like BB's !

"Face cold steel!" I screamed, fixing my bayonet! I saw the great "head" of the HORROR come down, the two great stings closing... I thrust up with the bayonet, jamming the rifle into its horrid maw! A greenish fluid oozing out as it caught me now in a clawed forelimb, raising me up to face its horrid compound eyes!!

"Wake up! Wake up!" I heard a voice saying, my body shaken! I opened my eyes to look into the concerned eyes of a Priestess. Dawn was just breakingI noticed, seeing the glow in the east...

"God! What a nightmare!" I gasped, the Priestess giving me a "funny look" at my use of the word "God", which is almost unknown here in this era in the context in which I had used it now.

"A few minutes seekingLys' grace might relieve your soul," she replied. I wondered if she herself "believed" in such stuff. I supposed that she did. This entire religion had been designed byLorraineback in the 20th Century as a means to deal with the "problem" of "electronic hypnosis" whichLorrainehad done the primary "concepts" on before accidentally coming to this century. Whether or not there was a "Lys" didn't seem to matter right now. The "EVIL ONE" was real enough, and we had to deal with him now!

"We may all needHer mercy if things don't work out," I said, slipping out from beneath the now sweat soaked bed covers. I wondered for a second what she "thought" of seeing a nearly naked man,then concluded that she probably didn't care any anyway. She was dark haired, rather "pretty", a bit "flat chested" like a lot of Priestesses are due to having been desexed as a teenager. This was something that was not general public knowledge, I knew. On the other hand it made a lot of sense when you think about it. The Priestesses had no need for the capability of "reproduction". Free from "sexual urges", they might accomplish "more" than us. On the other hand they were "strange" in certain ways, I'd noted.

"You speak of the `EVIL ONE'," she answered, regarding me as I stepped into the "bathroom" and closed the door behind me then. While I knew she was not a "woman" in the actual sense of the term, I still felt embarrassed about performing certain "actions" in front of her. "We have prayed toLysto be delivered from him," she added through the closed door. I didn't think prayers would be of any "help" here. More "direct" and effective measures would have to be used. Just "what" they would be I didn't know just then. From what Tais had told this "THING" was just about indestructible and impervious to any weapon we might use...

"How much `data' do you have on this `THING'?" I asked the Priestess who had apparently been "assigned" to me while Tais was off somewhere "doing" whatever she had left to do. The breakfast was well prepared, and left little to be desired in any way here. During the night my clothing had been washed and even pressed. I wondered briefly if such a creature as the EVIL ONE was could be "communicated" with. Perhaps we could "reason" with the thing, although I doubted it judging from its vicious attack upon the Priestesses which was more like that of some "predatory beast"...

"It entered our plane of existence on June 14th of the year 2579 at about9:11 amin the morning and started to destroy everything in sight, killing anyone that it found," the Priestess answered. "We know that it regenerates itself as fast as it can be hurt by any weapon, and can dematerialize itself almost instantly when confronted by any really powerful weapon," she continued on.

"What is it made of, and has there ever been any attempt to communicate with the dammed thing?" I asked her then, slowly sipping at my orange juice. Apparently the Priestesses did not use either coffee or tea, nor alcoholic beverages of any sort either.

"It appears to be of `matter', but we feel that it is not `matter' as we know of it, and for all practical purposes its actions appear to be just those of an irrational beast much like any `predator'," she answered back, her eyes, a steel gray below long blonde hair, burning into mine. I recalled the video disc. On the disc the Priestesses had opened fire upon it when it had appeared, a not unreasonable action considering its own "looks"!!

"Some of you are `telepathic' to a certain degree," I said. "Have any of you ever been able to pick up `thoughts' from it?"

"It is just an irrational predatory `monster'," she snapped.

"And you're planning to blow up the world to get rid of it," I replied, well aware of "what" the Priestesses "planned" to do.

I watched the video disc several times, the entire thing. There was no doubt that the Priestesses had fired at it first. I supposed I couldn't really "blame" them considering the "looks" of the "thing". It certainly was an ugly enough monster to meet anyone's standards for a good nightmare after seeing the "thing". On the other hand was it REALLY just some dumb stupid "monster"? Or was it "INTELLIGENT" despite its horrid terrifying appearance? I saw no evidence that the Priestesses had tried "communication"!

"You should wait for Tais to return," the Priestess said.

"Can you send me into the future or can't you?" I asked.

"It would be unwise to go alone," she protested then.

"Just answer the question," I snapped, seeing her nod.

"We can send you to the time of the EVIL ONE," she said.

"One to beam up, Scotty!" I said as I stood there. In the powered armor I looked something like a deep sea diver, although due to the "feedback" system built into it I could have taken on a tyrannosaurus and given him a punch on the jaw that would have matched that of a pile driver! I could "lift" several tons, and even could fly for short distances with the jet pack on my back.

"I will `assume' that is a `joke' on your part," a feminine voice answered in my headphones as I stood there on the marble dais, now holding the blaster rifle in my arms at the "ready". I had noted before that these "women" didn't have much of a sense of humor. I wondered what it would be like to take on the EVIL ONE in "hand to hand" battle. Judging from what I'd seen of it, it wasn't too likely that I'd win such a "fight" against it now!

"Power field is building up, `Gateway' is starting to open," another voice spoke, a sort of "haze" in the air around me now.

"Don't forget I'd like to come `home' again," I answered.

The "scene" was much like I'd seen on the video disc. The ruins of Shalimar only scattered rubble like

that of parts of the "Classical World" left after the passage of two thousand years. I still had "communications" with the Priestesses back in 2568. The sound of the feminine voice in my headphones a comfort then. I had been warned that I had to be "clear" of it to be teleported back as there was the danger of bringing it "back" to our time.

"Ohh, Ohh," I spoke, seeing the EVIL ONE materialize before me. "Big fella , that's for sure," I said, now aiming my blaster. Even knowing what to "expect" didn't really help too much here!

"I AM ADMIRAL ROBERT SIMMONS OF THE DULARNIAN NAVY!" I said, my external speakers at full volume. The EVIL ONE now taking a step towards me. I put three quick shots into the ground just before it, the dirt flying up, the blasts spraying stones and stuff all around. I saw the EVIL ONE pause, hesitate just a bit. "I WISH TO TALK TO YOU, BUT I CAN HURT YOU IF YOU ATTACK ME!" I warned the HORROR standing there on its dozen clawed legs like a spider. I wondered what sort of a "world" had ever spawned that!

"YOU SPEAK FOR SHE WHO RULES?" the creature suddenly spoke! I later learned that it was speaking directly into my mind now!!!

"I AM ONE OF HER `SUBJECTS'," I answered the THING in reply.

"I AM BUT A `PART' OF MY MASTER WHO RULES HELL," it spoke.

"WE DO NOT WISH YOU IN THIS PLANE OF EXISTENCE," I said.

"THE `GATEWAY' BACK HOME IS CLOSED," I heard it "saying". That was a bit of "news" that really shook me right to my boots! I'd been thinking of suggesting to Tais that we try to devise a way of "closing" its Gateway, and now we needed to "open" one!!!

"IF SUCH A `GATEWAY' IS OPENED, WILL YOU LEAVE?" I asked, well aware that if it didn't agree to leave there wasn't much of any "option" left to us now but to almost destroy the Earth here!

"WHY DID YOU NOT ATTACK ME LIKE THE OTHERS?" it now asked.

"THEY DID NOT THINK YOU WERE INTELLIGENT," I informed it.

"I DID NOT THINK THEY WERE INTELLIGENT," it answered back.

"YOU COULD BE `RIGHT' IN YOUR ASSESSMENT," I said to "it".

"YOU ARE OF A `SUPERIOR RACE' TO THEIRS?" it now asked me.

"I AM A `MAN', THEY WERE `WOMEN'," I said, wondering if it "understood" such concepts. I wondered what had "happened" to Princess Tara or whoever now had originally opened the "Gateway" to bring it here. I wondered if they had even known "what" it was? I suspected Tara had been looking for "allies" here to help her win her hate filled "revenge" against Darlanis and Lorraine. I recalled in Lorraine's books that she claimed that Tara was "possessed" by an "evil demoness" of some sort, although I tend to take "some" of what Lorraine has written with a grain of salt.

"I AM A `MAN'," it said. I didn't dispute the issue either!

I watched the "Gateway" open, saw the "EVIL ONE" disappear into it, the "Gateway" now closing

behind it. It was all over...

"`Shoot first, ask questions later'," I said to Tais. I saw her nod. It had come as a terrific "jolt" to her to learn that I had just "prevented" the greatest disaster Man had ever known...

"But it was the `EVIL ONE!'" Tais hotly protested in return.

"Maybe just someone with a `bad reputation'," I smiled back. All the "thing" had really wanted was to "go back home" again...

"You have `altered' history," Tais breathed back. I nodded.

"Glad to have been of `help'," I smiled, thinking of Carol.

"Sometimes it takes a `good man'," the Priestess grinned...

"I'd like to see my wife," I told Tais, seeing her "smile".

## Chapter Nineteen

"That didn't take very long," Carol said to me, relaxing under the stars there on a lounge, the full Moon shining down upon her swollen pregnant body. Kathi giving me a smile, the blanket she'd used to cover herself against the chill slipping away to reveal that ripe provocative sexy body briefly clad in leather. To Carol and Kathi I had been "gone" only a couple hours at most.

"I `saved the world'," I smiled back at my beloved brownette. The EVIL ONE was now back in Hell where he belonged. If the Priestesses hadn't started shooting at him as soon as he had appeared there that morning, nothing would have ever happened, I explained to Carol and Kathi, telling them the entire story here.

"And Tara and her `friends' probably ran in terror when they saw what they'd gotten," Carol concluded. That was why the EVIL ONE'S "Gateway" had closed behind it, "trapping" it on the Earth.

"I think Mankind was being `tested'," I ventured. That would "explain" the nature of the "message" SHE had given to the Priestesses of Lys. It was obvious that they had failed it too! This was in my own opinion the "reasoning" behind The War between Earth and Mars in 2047. The appearance of the Lorr no doubt had a great deal to do with Mankind's "willingness" to fight The War. We are still a race that "takes up the gun" too readily at the least provocation. The Priestesses of Lys had done no "better".

"But it was called `the EVIL ONE!'" Kathi protested, forgetting for the moment that she was but only just a collared wench.

"She does have a point," Carol smiled there under the moonlight as I sat there beside her. I had met up with the "DEVIL".

"I think there are 'questions' that never will be answered," I smiled back. I recalled its words, "I AM BUT A PART OF MY MASTER WHO RULES HELL." I think the true "EVIL ONE" had merely "probed" this "Gateway" that had opened between our planes of existence, and sent only a small part of himself on through it. I suspected that we had all learned a "lesson" here, including the EVIL ONE. Maybe that had been God's intention here, I guessed. Perhaps God had wanted us to look upon the "face" of EVIL, see for ourselves just what sort of a creature it was. I suppose the Priestesses of Lys will eventually evolve their own "answers"...

It was a bright sunny day in early August. The Diana was now finally "ready" for sea, for its final check-out when it was announced that we were going to have a "visitor"! Lorraine Richards, the Queen of Trelandar, Warlady of the Empire of California, had decided to pay us a "friendly" visit. I suspected however as did Maris that she was more interested in the Diana than in us. Her own battleship, the "Invincible", was near complete. Her ship floating there in the harbor, a bit of smoke rising up.

"I know we're not at war, but I still don't like the woman," Carol said to me. There was a personal hatred between the two. My wife's swollen belly jutting out leaving no doubts as to the late stage of her pregnancy. Queen Maris stepping forward to greet her as the Warlady tall and slim stepped up on to the dock, her boat's crew smartly fitted out, I noticed in black shirts. The tall masts of her steam frigate, the Athena, towering up into the sky as it rested above its reflection there in the harbor. I knew that the Imperial shipyards were building more just as fast as they could, a half dozen of such vessels already now at sea...Lorraine no doubt having studied the Diana quite "carefully" too. Her own "counterpart" to the Diana was almost ready for the sea. So we had "heard" from Imperial sailors plied with strong wine while sexy short skirted members of the "Prostitute Guild" sat in their laps and encouraged them to tell everything that they knew.

"I trust you have a good doctor picked out for when the 'time' comes," Lorraine said as she exchanged greetings with us.

"We do," Carol answered, a bit "curtly" I thought to myself.

"And the Priestess in attendance," Lorraine added then. If the child was "defective" in any way it would be destroyed at birth. Such was the "law", a "law" that none dared "violate"...

"There will be nothing wrong with the child," I said to her.

"It is a wise law, if perhaps one possible only in a 'social order' like this," Lorraine smiled back, her words bringing back memories of similar discussions I'd had with her in our own era. Lorraine having held that the basic operating system that ran a society should not be subject to control by the political system. She had used as her "model" the Roman Catholic Church during the Middle Ages as an "example" of the sort of "operating system" she wanted to impose upon Mankind. The Priestesses are the "result".

"Are you thinking to become a mother?" I asked the Warlady.

"When I return to Trella Jon and I will..." she "smiled".

"Do you 'good'," Carol smiled, the true meaning of her words doubtlessly considerably "different" from what they appear here. Carol like any "mother to be" having considerable concern about such things. I saw Lorraine "nod", her dark eyes meet my wife's.

"So 'this' is the Diana," Lorraine smiled, standing there in the control cabin with us. Maris Marn giving me a big "grin". I had a little surprise in store for the awesome Imperial Warlady. We had steam up on all

three boilers, the black smoke from the coal fires rising up into the sky over the city. The Diana lying there at the dock like some great armored creature of the sea, a "design" that had not been "missed" by very many here in Arsana.

"Like to take a ride?" I smiled back at the Warlady, trying to keep a straight face. Maris openly giggling to herself then!

"I understand that some people have called this 'Simmon's Folly'," Lorrainesmiled back, her dark brown eyes holding mine. She was wearing a black silken blouse, deeply cut at the neck, a matching soft leather skirt and fine polished high heeled boots. Along with the sword and dagger worn by those of the Warriresses now supported by a beautiful weapons belt set with lovely jewels. Her golden tiara with its precious jewels marking her as a Queen. She is not a "beautiful" woman, but she is rather "attractive"...

"The chief engineer was delighted with that wench of yours," Carol smiled. I understood that she pleased him well as a slave girl should. She was also "pleasing" as a cook and housekeeper to the Mayor of Arsana, Jard's aristocratic looking blonde wife who some people here had nicknamed "The Queen of Arsana" for reasons that really have little to do with this story as such now...

"Darlanis', not mine," Lorrainesmiled back at my wife. "I use other 'methods' of obtaining 'information' than sending women to a country where they soon end up as slave girls." I suspected I knew what "sort" of methods the Imperial Warlady used too... I had no doubts that she had "purchased" considerable information in the same way that we had, using the exact same "methods" here.

"Lieutenant, rouse the crew," I said, seeing her nod. I saw her raise the hatch, scramble down the ladder. Here at dock the interior of the Diana was like an oven in this summer sun. I rather hoped that at sea things would be a bit more "pleasant". I glanced through the viewing slits, saw that the ventilation hatches were being swung shut across the Diana's armored back. The blue green painted hull now gleaming there in the bright sun as the Dianalaid at the dock like some great monster of the sea.

"There are duplicate controls on the deck below," I said, seeing Lorrainenod. "We are surrounded here by three inches of steel armorplate," I added. I suspected that the Diana would have been "proof" even against muzzle loading cannons. Against the weapons of this era it was totally and completely impervious.

"I was recently 'informed' by First Priestess Tais that you 'resolved' a 'problem' that had been 'concerning' her," Lorrainethen suddenly said. I wondered how much Tais had told her of it?

"Doesn't 'pay' to be 'trigger happy'," I smiled back at her.

"Perhaps a 'lesson' we all could 'learn'," Lorrainesmiled.

"Cast off fore and aft!" I heard the midshipmen yelling, the men at the dock freeing the Diana from its moorings, the ropes being quickly brought aboard and then stowed, the armored hatches now closing as the ship drifted very gently away from the dock.

"Engine number one slow astern," Sandra Steven spoke, her hand moving the "repeater" as she took the helm herself now. I had been impressed enough by her abilities at command to request her as "captain" of the Diana, an "honor" I wondered if she really "appreciated" all that much considering that the Diana did not "handle" like a sailing ship, being driven by its triple screws. I had carefully explained to her that number one and three could be used to maneuver the ship by running them either forwards or backwards, the Diana being able to turn about in her own length.

"I expect you prefer sails to this," Lorraine said to her.

"There are 'advantages' to 'steam'," Sandra answered back. The Diana now clear of the dock, backing slowly out into the harbor. The blonde now reaching forward, pushing engine number three "repeater" to slow ahead. The slow even "thud-thud" of the engines a comforting sound just then. Carol sitting there smiling at me, her forehead glistening a bit from the heat inside the Diana's control cabin due the hatches being all closed down now. I rather doubted that she was all that "comfortable" right now.

"We clear of the other ships?" Queen Maris asked, looking out of the slits at the harbor. Normally we would have had all the hatches raised, but this was a special occasion and the Diana was at full battle readiness, her weapons all "armed" and ready!!

"Yes," I said, blowing the steam whistle, smiling to myself!

"We're under fire!" Lorraine cried a few seconds later, the city opening up on us with everything they had, as did every ship in the harbor with the exception of course of Lorraine's Athena!! I saw flames through the viewing slits, a firebomb having made a direct hit on the Diana, catapult shot and quickfirer missiles a constant hail falling from the sky upon its great armored length!

"Scared?" Carol laughed, Lorraine shaking her head in the negative. It had been a good "trick", one that I didn't think the Warlady of California would forget for some time now as we "proved" to her that no weapon of the 26th Century was effective against the Diana! A bit of burning oil flickering in one of the viewing slits from a direct hit on the control cabin itself now! I blew the steam whistle again, the fusillade then stopping now.

"We could steam into Trella with this, sink and burn every ship in the harbor, hurl fire bombs a quarter mile inland, while you could do nothing but sit and watch," Carol said to Lorraine.

"My own battleship could do the same to you," the Warlady smiled back. "That is why we are 'wise' to remain at peace now." I rather thought Lorraine did have the "better" of the exchange!

## Chapter Twenty

"Close to a hundred yards," I said, Sandra herself still sitting at the Diana's controls. "Come to a dead stop." Sandra doing so, the crude "barge" there floating ahead of us as the Diana now drifted closer. "Flamethrowers open fire," I ordered...

A "blazing hell" spurted from the Diana's twin forward flame throwers, the blazing columns of fire like nothing I'd ever seen since leaving the Twentieth Century. In a few seconds the barge was a blazing ruin, the flamethrowers stopping fire at my order. The Diana then turning her armored bow towards the second barge. A nod from me and a sharp barked order from Sandra brought our four forward quickfirers into play, three missiles a second from each one, the upper turret above us then opening up in addition!!

"Impressive," Lorraine smiled, the Warlady's eyes meeting mine. I supposed her battleship would have



the same capabilities as mine. The only vulnerability the Diana had was being rammed. And with our watertight compartments the ship could probably survive such a "strike" without being put completely out of action!

"We carry twenty quickfirers a side, eight steam catapults, and three flame throwers, as well as two quickfirers and a catapult and flamethrower astern," Carol smiled, the Warlady silently nodding back. I do think she was rather impressed by the Diana.

"You forgot the rear turret quickfirer," I smiled then.

The "test" over, I gave the orders to open all the hatches, orders that were doubtlessly "welcomed" by the Diana's sweating men and women, especially those who served the boilers below the main deck. Someone having already posted a sign at the entrance to boiler room number two, "Lys, be merciful, I've already served my time in Hell!" Our earlier "tests" of the Diana at dock having quickly shown what it was like to shovel coal into boilers in the confined and poorly ventilated boiler rooms there below deck! Those who served the boilers usually stripping down to straps...

"You need to develop a better 'ventilation system'," the Warlady of California smiled, no doubt welcoming the cool air as it came through the open hatches. With the hatches all closed the Diana would be like an oven under a more southern summer sun!

"We could circulate sea water through radiators," Carol suggested, her hazel eyes glowing into mine. "And set up fans," she added, her own features "glowing" a bit as she sat watching us.

"Like to take control?" Sandra asked, giving me a smile.

"Crafty wench, aren't you?" I smiled, seeing her nod.

"I'll check on things," she replied, going below.

I swung the Diana around and put half power on all three engines, the "thud-thud" of the engines now speeding up as the Diana passed out between the breakwaters out into the strait now.

"Maybe seven knots," Maris smiled, looking outan hatch.

"Think the North Star could make seven in this wind?" I asked, the strait relatively calm, with only a light mild breeze. The Diana cutting nicely into the water, the nearly submerged ram hardly visible there at the bow. Lorraine at my side, watching.

"On the other hand the wind is 'free', and I don't 'smoke' everything up like this does," the Queen of Dularn smiled back. The smoke thrown off by the Diana would also be a "tell tale" to anyone aware of the "nature" of a steamship. On the other hand the Diana laid considerably "lower" in the water than a sailship. I thought what the Diana could have "done" the year before. We could have spread death and terror the length of the Empire, and forced Darlanis and Lorraine to agree to any "terms" we wished...

"How's it going?" Jard Sandar asked, sweaty and dirty with grime. Aboard the Diana there was no rigging to blacken with tar like aboard a sailing ship, but coal is dirty stuff to handle and there were always "places" where grease and oil were "necessary".

"We're doing a bit over seven knots," I smiled back, pleased as punch with the Diana. If half power gave seven and a half knots, then full power should give something well over ten, which was all I could

really ask for given the limitations of technology in this era. Raising boiler pressure much up over two hundred PSI was likely to blow the boilers and the Diana itself sky high!

"I'm keeping boiler pressure at two hundred," he answered. That was the standard "working pressure" of our three boilers. I supposed we could exceed that a bit, but there was no need to do so now, and the engines needed "breaking in" before being asked to deliver full power to the three great bronze screws that drove us through the waves. Captain Steven returning, saying that she had found nothing on her inspection tour that requiring returning to Arsana for repair. It having been my intention here to take the Diana to Sana, Maris' own home village, and stay the night.

"Sail Ho!" the midshipman called down from the upper turret, her young feminine voice echoing off the metal plates of the control cabin below. With no masts the Diana had a limited range of visibility of about eight miles at the best, its highest point now being only about thirty feet above the surface of the ocean. That being the tops of the fore and aft quickfirer turrets. The Diana was flat bottomed and now drew about sixteen feet of water. The smoke from our coal fires was vented out through three stacks in the middle of the ship mounted over the "reptilian backbone".

"Probably just a merchantman," Maris smiled, standing there.

"What sort of ship?" I called, looking up the hatch, the girl apparently standing on top of the turret itself, the hatch being open so that she might stand up on the observation deck.

"Two masts, like a fourth rate," the girl called down.

"Have 'topsails'?" the Queen now yelled up to her.

"Yes, your majesty," the girl squeaked back at her.

"Could be a 'Northman' pirate," Maris answered back.

"I'm increasing speed," I said, going to three quarters.

"Sea's getting up a bit," Lorraine observed from beside me.

"Close lower forward hatches!" I ordered, seeing them swing shut. The Diana "split" a wave, some of it splashing over the low bow. The "thud-thud" of the triple engines now a heavy regular beat. I noticed the waves were growing larger, the wind up.

"Gaining on him, but not by much," Maris said, holding the telescope there in her hand as she descended the steel ladder to the control cabin. "No doubts about 'what' he is, however," she added, her eyes glowing into mine. The sails there on the horizon that divided sea from sky left little doubt as to things now.

"I'm going below," I said, stripping off my ornate coat as Admiral of the Dularnian Navy. The boiler rooms would be as hot as ovens despite our earlier primitive attempts at ventilation.

"Can we go to full power?" I asked, sweating in the heat from the boiler. Jard's own assistant, a woman, dark haired, now stripped down to strap and clips, her naked body glistening with a film of sweat in the light from the swinging overhead lamps. I wanted to catch that pirate, and I thought the Diana could do it!

"Those pirates 'come' for only two things, women and gold," she "answered" for him, her dark eyes

burning into mine as Jard nodded. "And we'll give you the steam you need," she added, now turning and snapping orders at the men gathered about waiting for orders. The entire crew of them looking like lost souls in hell!

I pushed the "repeaters" all the way to "full power", the Diana leaping forward as the thudding of the engines grew louder!

"We're gaining on them now," Sandra breathed, Maris nodding.

"There's a storm on the horizon," Lorraine pointed out then. The waves were growing larger, the Diana smashing through them. I saw the forward upper hatches swinging shut, it being obvious that the spray was now coming through. I felt a few droplets of moisture on my face, the armored bow of the Diana throwing water to either side as the ram smashed through. The pirate was no doubt well aware of the "nature" of what was now chasing behind!!

"About ten and a half knots," the first lieutenant spoke. I nodded, well aware that the Diana was doing as well as I hoped. Our best calculations had indicated a maximum speed of eleven...

"Waves about ten feet now, a few larger," Maris spoke.

"She'll take a lot larger than that," I smiled right back.

"If he can get the wind under his 'coat tails' he'll outrun this," Lorraine pointed out then. Right now the pirate was fleeing to the north with Dularn itself there to starboard, sailing as close to the wind as he could with his handy fore and aft rig.

"We'll try to prevent that," Maris Marn answered her back. The Diana smashing through a wave that sent spray into our faces! The shape of the hull such that water tended to flow around the ship rather than be violently thrown to one side or the other. I saw Sandra step about, close the forward hatches, smiling at me.

"Was getting pretty bor...", Carol spoke, suddenly gasping! I saw my wife clutch at herself, a look of "pain" going over her face. Lorraine studying her thoughtfully, no doubt well aware of what was "happening" here! My wife was going into labor here aboard the Diana! And we were several hours now from Arsana in pursuit of a pirate! Miles from land, even further from "help"!

"You have a Physician?" Lorraine said to me. I knew that she was "one" in the sense that she had once studied medicine before becoming a "shrink" back there in the Twentieth Century. I had a Physician, one of the best in Dularn. She was well paid for her services, the crew of the Diana being all "hand picked".

"The aft cabin would be best," I said, glancing at Carol.

"I'll take command," Maris Marn smiled, standing there.

## Chapter Twenty One

"I guess there could have been worse places," Carol forced a smile as I helped her along the length of the Diana to the stern cabin at the other end of the hundred and sixty five foot battleship. Lorraine giving me a smile, reassuring me that there was nothing to "worry" about. I wasn't that "sure" of that. Carol was not a "young" woman, nor had she ever had a baby before this! The men and women of the Diana's crew regarding us with curious stares there inside the semi-twilight of the armor plated hull.

"She'll be all right," Lorraine "reassured" me again then.

"You're not having the baby, she is," I snapped back, pushing open the door to the stern cabin, a smell of "smoke" in the cabin from the backdraft. That was something "more" that needed to be "fixed" before we put the Diana into actual "service" now. The white boiling water churned up by the triple propellers much different than the sort of a "wake" left behind a sailing ship. The cabin dim, "dark", the only light that which came through the seven portholes that ran across the width of the ship's stern. I would have liked to have had the sort of a "stern cabin" that a sailing ship had, but such would have made the Diana extremely "vulnerable" to enemy fire astern. Carol reaching up, touching my face, giving me a smile as I gently lowered her to the cot. The arrival of the Physician for a moment put a halt to things.

"I hope you've delivered a baby before, Saris," I said to her. She was an upper class Dularnian woman, divorced, one son in the Army. Her hair a sort of reddish brown, her eyes a vivid green that reminded muchly me of another's whose grave was now on the bottom of the sea some fifteen hundred miles to the north. I knew she was "competent", but this was not like treating battle injuries. Nor was Carol a woman of her own Twenty Sixth Century.

"I've brought a few into the world, although this is the first time I've ever done it without having a Priestess at hand," she answered. The Priestess' role in this being to put the woman in a deep state of hypnosis, and then later on to "verify" that the newborn is "fit" to live. We did have the means to relieve pain, but hypnosis is far superior as a pain control for childbirth. Carol was "hypnotizable", having gone to a local temple some months ago when it had been explained to us what childbirth was like in this era. "I cannot promise a pain free delivery," she added, looking down at Carol, who grimly nodded back in turn.

"I will need a candle, and your trust, Carol," Lorraine said to my wife. I saw my wife nod, well aware of "what" Lorraine was attempting to do here. Doctor Saris Sanson glancing over at me.

"What you `see' here you will `keep to yourself'," I spoke.

"I am an `educated woman', not a Peasant," she smiled back.

"The Priestesses have `reason' for their concern," Lorraine spoke, "But as I am their `founder' in a way, I think I am `qualified' to do this." Saris nodding, quietly regarding the Queen.

"Ship's going to `battle stations'," I breathed to Saris, hearing the bosun's whistles. Saris like me watching Lorraine attempting to hypnotize my sweating wife without much success so far from what I could see of things. It being obvious that the Priestess who had originally "mind programed" my wife back in Arsanahad also made sure that no one else could hypnotize her now.

"Won't be much of a `fight'," Saris smiled, no doubt thinking of the Diana's firepower as matched against that of a pirate! On the other hand those aboard the raider would be desperate men. Dularnian naval ships hang pirates without showing any mercy...

"If he can get the wind at his back...", I nodded back. To do so he would have to cross in front of the

Diana's bow, face the ship's forward quickfirers. Granted in these seas we would not be able to use anything but the upper turret quickfirer, but even so our missile fire would far exceed that of a fourth rate!

"Hey!" Saris gasped, the Diana coming around in a sharp turn, heeling so far over that we could hardly keep our own feet! Then suddenly I heard the engines going into full reverse just before a terrific sudden crash sent us all stumbling back a step!

"Her Majesty should have been a Farmer!" I gasped, there being no doubt that the Queen had just rammed the damn pirate ship!

"I'll be all right, Bob, see what happened," Carol hissed, another labor pain "tightening" her face as Lorraine uselessly still yet tried to hypnotize her. Saris stepping forward with a filled hypo, no doubt some of a pain relieving drug to ease my wife's labor pains. Carol grasping at the cot, her face wet with sweat, beads of it on her forehead, her swollen body twisting and squirming with the pains of childbirth. I wanted to be with her, but I also wanted to know what the damn Queen of Dularn had done!

"I'll be right back," I assured her, dashing out the door. Through the ship's open hatches on either side I could see the listing raider, sinking by the stern, people in the water, most of them women, now swimming as best they could towards the Diana! The Diana rolling helplessly in the waves as she waited for them!

"He turned right in front of us," Maris said, giving me a sheepish smile. While the Diana had not been harmed, I wondered how many innocent lives had been lost among those aboard the pirate ship. Not the pirates themselves, who would hang as soon as we got back to Arsana, but the innocent women they had stolen. I saw Sandra nod as she affirmed what had "happened" here only a moment ago. The only thing we could be thankful for was that the pirate had not kept the women helplessly chained below decks. At least someone had the human decency not to let them all drown...

"Launch a boat, send it over to that wreck," I snapped. The pirate ship probably had watertight compartments and would stay afloat despite the Diana having rammed it square in the stern. I was interested in saving life now, not in taking a "prize" here. The storm to the north now filled most of the sky in that direction. The Diana's roll indicating that the weather was getting up. The waves were huge monsters, even tossing the Diana about!

"Aye, aye sir," captain Sandra Steven answered, then going below to give the orders to the crew, leaving me with Maris Marn. She had been "holding" the Diana in place by using the engines. I didn't envy any boat's crew in waves like this either. They could easily end up swimmers in the water just like the women...

"He came around so fast there was nothing I could do," Maris said to me, her eyes pleading up into mine. I supposed that I wouldn't have done any better. The Diana was "handy" in her own way, but one had to understand the relationship between the force exerted by the propellers and the triple rudders mounted behind each of the three great bronze propellers. I nodded, smiled a bit. I supposed it didn't "matter" that much anyway as any running battle between us and the pirate could have taken even more women's lives had any of our own missiles ever pierced his hull.

"We'll find out who 'freed' those women, hang the rest," I smiled, Maris nodding, her golden hair matching her own tiara. I respected Maris for the Queen she was, and I supposed that I had expected an awful lot of her in placing her in charge of the ship as I had. And while Sandra was its captain, she really didn't understand that much about steam ships like the Diana either yet.

"I'll take care of things, get back with your wife," the Queen of Dularn answered, giving me a quick kiss then much to my own surprise. Her body for a brief second pressing against mine!

"How's it coming?" I asked, Saris sitting beside Carol, my wife naked to the waist, a blanket covering her from there down. Lorraine standing at the stern, looking out one of the portholes. Maris must have turned the Diana just a bit then, as suddenly a wave came washing up, splashing in, and spraying the Warlady!

"Better close those," I said, lighting another lamp.

"Weather's getting up," the Queen of Trelandar said.

"Wouldn't want to `do' this again," Carol said to me, clasping my hand in hers. I saw her face "tighten", felt her squeeze. The child was a month early, although this gave us little worry. Saris was a competent doctor, and we weren't that far from land. I could hear thumps and bangings, the muted sound of voices from beyond the closed cabin door, a midshipman on "guard" right now. The Diana was under way again, heading back towards Arsana now. I understood that the "prize" was still capable of being sailed. The storm had caught up with us, the sound of thunder audible.

"`Once' will be enough," I assured my beloved brownette.

"Never planned on having children," Carol smiled at me.

"Never planned on being `here' either," I smiled back.

"Remember the arena in Trella?" Carol "smiled" then.

"Two against an `Empire'," I said, wiping her brow.

"Back to back, side by side," Carol smiled up at me.

"You'll be a good mother," I said, holding her hand.

"We will live again through her," Carol said to me then.

"And the future is safe again," I said, recalling "another".

"Hurts....," Carol gasped, Lorraine reaching down, assisting. "Like `Passing A Watermelon!'" my pain racked brownette breathed, the sweat just rolling off her as she hissed with the pain of it!

"Just a little more, my Warlady," Saris said, her hands under the blanket, a pillow underneath Carol's rump to raise her, "And you'll have a fine daughter to follow in your footsteps."

"I'll be a lot happier when she is...!" Carol gasped.

"A fine girl, flawless in every detail," Saris said, Lorraine nodding. I hoped that they were "right". A newborn baby isn't the prettiest thing in the world, but Carol seemed content! My wife cradling the little squirming fussing crying infant to her breast, our daughter suddenly finding her mother's nipple...

"You have a `name' for her?" Lorraine asked. Carol smiled.

"Hope," my wife said, looking the Warlady in the eye then. Little Miss Hope Simmons now happily sucking out Carol's milk...

## Chapter Twenty Two

"Engines one and three stop, number two reverse, drop anchor," I snapped, the lightning flashing in the sky over Arsana. I saw the anchors drop, one from either side of the bow. In the morning we could push the Diana up to the dock with a galley. I wasn't in the "mood" just then to try to do it here in the dark. Sandra gave me a smile, getting up from her seat at the controls.

"Hope the 'prize' made it back O.K.," Maris said to me. We had left the damaged schooner behind once we'd gotten back into the strait. I didn't think they'd have too much trouble now. We had "collected" about a couple dozen women, all glad to soak up the "warmth" from the Diana's boilers below decks. Lorrainewas with Carol, keeping an eye on her while my wife now slept, the baby beside her. She had a "future" now, thanks to my efforts in the future in dealing with the "EVIL ONE". I hadn't seen Tais again since that time, perhaps with reason, it being reasonable to assume that the Priestesses of Lys were a bit embarrassed now.

"I'm not going to attend the hangings," I said to the Queen. Pirates who had survived to reach the Diana would with the exception of "one" who had unfortunately drowned would hang in Arsana. He had freed the women, doubtlessly saving many of their lives. On the other hand half a dozen of the captured women had drowned there in the ten foot waves before they could reach the Diana.

"You are Admiral of the Dularnian Navy," Maris said to me.

"And it is my 'duty' to see men 'hang'?" I said to her then.

"You don't 'believe' in a death penalty for piracy?" Maris challenged me, captain Steven perking up her ears at our words although she knew better than to enter into a "discussion" like this. Maris certainly had her "dander" up, that was for sure. I would have said "PMS", but that wasn't possible here in this century due to the fact that only "fertile" married women can menstruate. Otherwise the "contraceptive implants" prevented such.

"I didn't say 'that', I merely said that I didn't wish to attend the hangings," I repeated. Such "events" were popular in Arsana, and always brought out a big crowd to watch the hangings. Dularn hangs criminals, while the Empire beheads them. I do not consider one method of execution more "civilized" than the other. It is probably likely though that beheading is a "swifter" death.

"You consider us all 'barbarians', don't you?" Maris snapped back, the "tone" of her voice quite unpleasant. I saw lightning flashing up in the sky over the city. It was obvious that I had "touched" a sore spot with the Queen of Dularn here too now. No doubt Maris had also been "nursing" such ideas for some time. I could understand her "feelings", especially as she did have a certain degree of pride in her own abilities, in her competence. I suspected all that all "this" related back to her crashing the Diana into the pirate schooner and the comments I'd made to her.

"We weren't any more 'civilized' back in our time," I smiled, well aware of "where" Maris was coming from right now. "And there are features about Dularnian culture that we of the Twentieth Century never had," I added, giving Sandra a nod then.

"It would still be best that you attended the hangings," the Queen of Dularn repeated, her emerald green eyes burning straight into my own just then. "We all must often 'do' things that we'd rather not have to do," she added, having "given" her orders.

"I can walk," Carol said, two seamen with a stretcher ready.

"It would not be 'advisable'," Dr. Saris Sanson smiled back.

"I suppose so," Carol admitted, allowing us to lift her on to the stretcher, our little daughter snug there in Saris' arms. Queen Maris was there, along with Lorraine, the Imperial Warlady. I could hear the low rumble of thunder through the Diana's hull. It seemed "fitting" just then considering everything. For the first time in my life I'd seen a "side" to Maris I hadn't liked.

"It would be best perhaps if your wife stayed with me for a few days until she is recovered," Queen Maris said to me as she gave the orders now to have Carol taken to the Royal Palace instead of back to our own home there inside the city. "My Physician can take over now from yours too," the Queen said to me, her eyes holding mine as I nodded back in reply. The precious jewels of her tiara gleaming there in the light from the lamps held up. The rain, a heavy downpour now, wetting everything and everyone.

"That probably would be 'best'," I said, holding Carol's hand in mine, looking down at the now sleeping baby in her arms. I would send Kathi over to tend to my wife's own needs, Carol no doubt preferring to have Kathi than one of Maris' slave girls. I was aware of the subtle "tension" between Maris and me, of the fact that in the first time I'd known her the Queen of Dularn had "pulled rank" on me. I wondered if it had anything to do with my first reactions to her handling of the Diana against the pirate? I suspected that was the "reason", as Maris was a "proud" woman.

"I'm sorry I couldn't be of more help than I was," Lorraine said to Carol, who nodded, giving the Warlady a smile in return. Lorraine had tried to do what she could for Carol, but my wife's own "mind programming" had prevented her from being hypnotized.

"You did what you could, and that's what counts," Carol said as she was now lifted up into the carriage to take her to the Royal Palace, Queen Maris now climbing in after her. I took the hand of the Imperial Warlady, held it for a brief instant, then climbed up into the carriage where my wife and the Queen waited.

"How do you feel?" I asked, fussing over Carol a bit, my wife nursing our little baby daughter there at her breast, the thought going through my mind then that she was no longer the same woman that she'd been back there in the Twentieth Century. Queen Maris' sea green eyes glowing into mine as I stood up. A waiting slave girl, dark haired, collared, now giving me a smile. I saw the lightning flash through the palace window, heard the rumble of the thunder. It was August 6, the year 2568, or 521 as time is now measured. The world was at peace, the future safe...

"Like a mother," Carol smiled, her hazel eyes glowing warm.

"Life 'continues'," Maris said, giving me a smile. I think that motherhood is more highly regarded now than it was back in our own time, perhaps due to the effects of "population control". Here one must be married, have a "stable marriage" of more than three years, (this is the symbolism of the "gold chain" a



wife of more than three years wears) before you are "allowed" children...

"Kathi," I said to the wench, her halter and short skirt leaving no doubts that she was a very "desirable" collared wench, "Before you go to the palace I have a 'task' to ask of you." The girl nodding, her eyes, so much like Queen Maris', meeting mine.

"As Master wishes," Kathi answered, coming to me. I had her kneel, then undo me. She was "proficient" at such things, and it did not "delay" her more than ten minutes at the most either now. No doubt the fact that she was "blonde" had its advantages here. I then had her wash out her mouth before leaving for the palace.

"Last night would have been better," I smiled at Maris as I stood beside her, the pirates all standing there bound in a group now guarded by guardsmen with drawn swords. The crowd was large, the people pushing and shoving each other a bit for a better view. Vendors of foodstuffs, drinks, moving with difficulty in between the tightly packed people. "One should have an overcast sky, perhaps some lightning flashing, the drumroll of thunder." The scaffold had come as a surprise, as Dularn generally executed people by simply hanging them by the neck until they died of it! Lorraine standing there watching us, her dark eyes unreadable...

"Those who drowned were perhaps the 'lucky' ones," she said. I suspected that she had done some thinking, made a "decision". That explained the scaffold, the neck breaking "drop" that would be used to kill instead of just simple strangulation as before.

"In the Twentieth Century there were a number of 'debates' over whether or not a 'civilized nation' should execute criminals," I replied. "The 'question' was never 'answered'," I said.

"I think it has been," Maris answered, giving me a "smile". I recalled the words of First Priestess Tais, about what would have been done with High Priestess Martis had we not killed her.

"One should not confuse 'technology' and 'civilization'," I said to the Queen of Dularn as the first pirate was marched up on the scaffold. A hood placed over his head, the noose slipped about his neck. I saw the executioner glance up at his Queen, saw Maris nod, saw the hooded man drop through the trapdoor. The "death", I thought, had been "swift", "different" than before. I supposed the people were a bit "disappointed", as usually those hung kicked and jerked for perhaps a minute or more before losing consciousness from strangulation and lack of blood to the brain.

"I am not unfamiliar with such ideas," Maris smiled back.

"I will 'resume' my full duties as Warlady once our daughter is weaned," Carol smiled to me, her hazel eyes glowing into mine. Little Hope Simmons at the moment drinking her fill from my wife. I thought she would make a good mother, one who could be both a "loving" mother and one who would not make the "mistake" as was made in the Twentieth Century of not disciplining one's children. Carol now holding the baby to herself so that her breast was concealed, such being the way a woman "nursed" when in the presence of others, my wife having "adapted" well to Dularnian "culture".

"I'll complete the 'refit' on the Diana in another week," I said, Queen Maris having wished to use the Diana against the Northmen there in their own ports, while Queen Valeris attacked down from the north. I was a bit "worried" about this, as it was obvious that eventually there would be a "clash" between the Free Women and the Wyoming to the east, who were considerably "concerned" about Queen Valeris' "activities" here to the south now. There was also the "concern" now in certain quarters about "what" we would do if she decided to someday attack our "territories"...

"There is 'meaning' in my life now," Carol said to me, looking down at the little baby girl that she held there in her arms. There was no "need" just then of any further explanations. Carol was a mother, a Warlady of Dularn, no longer just my "playmate".

"And perhaps when she grows up there will be no more war," I said, wondering if someday it might come true, although I doubted it unless the Priestesses of Lys decided to take over completely!

## Chapter Twenty Three

"You sent for me?" I said, seeing Tais nod and smile in return. The "attire" of the First Priestess utterly different than usual! The sky was cloudy, the drum roll of the thunder audible. No doubt the good people of Arsana were cursing this change in the weather, although its "cause" was the woman there before me, a sort of strange looking device like a door frame behind her. I recalled the descriptions I'd read of the mysterious "Portal" used by the Women of Mars to travel between the Moon and their own world. I recalled what Lorraine had said of the device, what Aurora had hoped to be able to "do" with it before the Priestesses suddenly decided to take matters into their own hands back in 2566 A.D. Aurora having told Lorraine that there was another alien race in the solar system, beings who she had dubbed the "Others", these beings being the ones who had invented The Portal. I wondered if there was any "truth" to these claims. Tais didn't think so, saying that the Priestesses weren't "aware" of anyone.\* \* I believe from what has occurred that the Priestesses of Lys of a future era are themselves the "Others". I now believe that in a future era they will refine the "Gateways" to the point that they can travel back and forth in time to earlier eras with a "means" of traveling about, perhaps using much modified Lorr saucers. It is noteworthy that the Lorr themselves observed "flying saucers" from time to time that they couldn't "explain" either...Aurora's own "comments" to Darlanis do indicate something else! There are no doubt "paradoxes" in "time travel", I believe now...

"I have received permission to establish a permanent 'Gateway' in time between 'here' and your own era," Tais smiled back. That explained her clothing, the short leather skirt and attractive matching leather jacket. I suspected she was a decade "early" in her choice of styles, but it didn't matter all that much. "This will allow us to carry out certain 'studies' that would be otherwise impossible given the nature of time travel as it is..."

"I didn't think there could be such a thing as a 'permanent Gateway' in time," I said looking at the device, recalling what she'd told me earlier when we'd spent a week back in 1991 waiting for her books to come in at the public library there in Seaside.

"We have made a 'technological break-through'," she smiled. I supposed that was possible. The Priestesses are "scientific" in their thinking. They take very little on "faith" as such. I suppose too the fact that they knew not "love" had its effects...

"Isn't there a danger of 'effecting things'?" I asked Tais.

"A certain degree of 'caution' will be in order of course," Tais smiled back, the crash of the thunder audible now even here in the great Temple of Lys. "That is why I wish to use your home as our base in

your time," the First Priestess said to me then...

"Getting 'used' to this now," I said to Tais, the First Priestess giving me a smile as I slid open the glass patio door. There in the clearing behind us the pile of equipment that had been sent through time with us to be set up in our utility room. Part of the equipment was a transformer that Tais would hook up to the house's power supply, although the main source of "power" would be still six centuries in the future! The Priestess in her stylish leather attire looking little different than any woman of this era, Tais being a striking blonde any man would "notice"... She does remind me considerably of Shannon Tweed in her "looks".

"Shouldn't take more than a couple hours to hook things up," Tais smiled back. She had the "idioms" of the Twentieth Century down pretty good now, having spent a week with Carol and me here in this time the last time we'd been here. I considered her "competent" at what she did, although the Priestesses' "reaction" to the EVIL ONE hadn't indicated that they were "infallible"...

"Two hundred and forty volts is nothing to play with," I said, Tais nodding, giving me a smile as we walked towards the utility room there at the end of the mostly underground house. I supposed she knew what she was doing. Neither of us had given any thought to the "fact" that Man is not "alone" in the solar system. Tais had said that there was no way that anyone of this time could detect the operation of a "Portal", or of a "Gateway" for that matter. On the other hand neither of us had thought of the Lorr there on Mars, or of their lovely feminine Servitors. Or of the "fact" that we could be very "altering things" here...

"It will 'do'," Tais said, giving me a smile as she looked about. I nodded, hoping she "knew" what she was doing here now.

"Be careful," I said, holding the flashlight, Tais nodding. I was careful not to touch her, her own leather soled boots perhaps giving her some protection should she short out the circuit. It had been hard work setting up the Portal, and I was well aware of the "fact" that Tais didn't smell all that "holy" right now... She had wisely followed my "suggestion" to wear Carol's clothing. She didn't look bad either in a pair of cut offs and a pull over.

"I don't want to stand before Lysquite yet," she breathed.

"Do you actually believe in all that stuff?" I asked her.

"The 'reality of Lys' is without 'doubt'," Tais answered.

"Is that 'you' or a 'Priestess' talking," I challenged her.

"Me," she replied, twisting the "hot" wire around the screw.

"Probably be pretty 'hard' being the First Priestess if you didn't." Tais now tightening the connection down as I spoke. I wondered if the Pope believed in all the bullshit he talked here. Tais says that Christianity was "founded" by men with sexual hang ups. By men who "lacked" something "vital". I think it is true. On the other hand the Priestesses themselves shouldn't talk here!

"I would think after your 'experiences' that you'd believe," Tais smiled, closing the panel box. I knew that there was an "EVIL ONE", having met "Him" myself, but all the rest of the mumbo jumbo that the Priestesses "preached" there in their Temples??

"I believe in you," I said, taking her by the arms, looking into those beautiful azure eyes. "I trust what

you say is true."

"There's a certain amount of 'illusion' in what we 'do', but the major tenets of what we teach is the Truth," she answered me. "The very history of our organization is proof of 'what' we are."

"It works," Tais said, a shimmering glow forming between the frame. She stepped forward, poked a stick into the warp field, the stick itself suddenly "cut off" as part of it now appeared six centuries and fifteen hundred miles away from here! I wondered how much "power" the device was drawing to work. The light had "dimmed" noticeably when the Portal was turned on, I'd seen.

"You're pulling a lot of power," I pointed out to her then.

"About a hundred amps," the First Priestess smiled in reply.

"We're going to have to have the power company put in another line then," I said, well aware that Tais was drawing electric power to the point that we might soon be in trouble otherwise...

"We should be all right for the time being," she smiled.

"It wouldn't 'be' what you expect," Tais smiled, her azure eyes glowing into mine as she stood there dripping wet before me. The black string bikini didn't really "conceal" that much either. I had no doubts either that she had "read" my thoughts just then.

"You're still a beautiful woman even if you aren't," I said.

"There are certain 'advantages' in being as I am," she said, sitting down on the beach blanket beside me, the gentle breeze now rippling the still waters of the little lake there before us.

"I'm sure Carol would 'agree' with that," I laughed in turn.

"Tais," I said, looking over at her as she laid there beside me, her golden hair drying in the sunlight that peeked through the leaves overhead. Her beautiful azure eyes turning to me...

"Yes!" she said, her eyes suddenly glowing hot! I knew she had read the thoughts in my mind. Understood what I understood!! The "Others" had existed, and we both knew just "who" they were!!

"We have to turn the Portal off!" she cried, springing to her feet! I remembered what Lorraine had said to me. What Aurora had told her! That the "Others" had "left" a Portal on Earth! That over a period of centuries they had finally made it "work"!!

Tais was far ahead of me before we reached the house, the First Priestess moving in great bounds that carried her a dozen feet at a time. I knew that the Priestesses, at least some of them possessed superhuman physical powers, but this was the first time I'd seen such powers in operation! The silvery disc there in the clearing on its three landing struts left no doubts now!!!

"They are inside," Tais hissed as I came gasping up, Tais herself panting for breath from her own two hundred yard sprint.

"Can you 'locate' them?" I asked, well aware that Tais' did have the power to detect the thoughts of others, hopefully even those of the Lorr and their lovely feminine Servitors, who were the Women of Mars back in the 26th Century now. I was also aware of the "fact" that we dared not use lethal force for

fear of altering the future, although there was much less likelihood of any danger here due to the fact these people were not of the Earth...

"They are in the utility room," Tais answered me back.

"We need to take them by surprise," I said to her.

"That should not be too difficult," Tais smiled back.

"Just 'hold' it right there, 'ladies'," I said, holding my .30-30 at my hip. I didn't dare "use" it, but they wouldn't of course know that. Tais had my .38 Smith & Wesson on the Lorr, as "ugly" a thing as you'd ever want to look at. They do look like a carpenter ant "scaled" up about a hundred and fifty times. The three women in their silvery jumpsuits standing there, each glancing at each other. All three were light haired, white skinned. Their attire well displaying their figures beneath it. Tais says that they probably were from Leith, which lies hidden in the Sierras somewhere to the south of the "site" of Shalimar.

"Step to one side," Tais snapped, a firm tone of "authority" in her voice despite the fact that she was still nearly naked... "We wish you no harm, but we will kill if forced to do so," she added, edging around towards the still operating Portal, I following her, keeping the Winchester aimed towards the three women.

"You are 'not' of this world?" the Lorr asked, the speaker mounted between its antennae repeating its radio speech in words. Its compound eyes like multifaceted jewels in that awful head as it turned its head, the light bulb above it well illuminating it. It stood between our washer and driver, some ten feet in length, perhaps a third of that in height. I can understand why people "freaked out" when they encountered the Lorr. They are "ALIEN"!!

"We are 'visitors'," Tais answered, beckoning to me now. I thought of the "mysteries" of time travel, of the "fact" that the Women would eventually figure out how to "work" this "Portal" in centuries to come. I wondered if one of these women here was the distant ancestor of Aurora, who was the true mother of Darlanis!!

"The man is 'human', you are 'not'," the Lorr replied then. I recalled that these creatures had a "radar" sense along with the normal five senses that human beings had. I suspected that the Lorr had detected something about Tais that wasn't "human"...

"You go first, I'll follow," Tais ordered, standing there. I did as she ordered, the .30-30 still clutched in my hand, my only "attire" the swim briefs I'd worn here in the 20th Century.

## Chapter Twenty Four

"You do have your 'share' of 'adventures'," Carol said to me as the taxi carriage took us back to the palace where she was now staying with Queen Maris. Such made a lot of sense as Maris had a Physician in attendance and ample slave girls for every "need". Her full breasts in her nursing bra now pushing out her uniform.

"And my clothes are 'back' where I can never get them," I smiled, Carol having had to get me a complete outfit of clothing. I wondered what the Lorr and her three Servitors would make of my uniform and everything else. They would no doubt take the Portal apart and transport it back to Leithor even to Mars. Then centuries later in this time Aurora and her followers would figure out how to make it work as a means of travel between worlds, not realizing that it was also a "time machine" that could "link" two different eras centuries apart. Tais of course had known just "what" could be done with such devices, which is why she had put a "halt" to the work done by the Women there in Leith, Luna, and Mars when she had. Apparently the device was actually "invented" by the Priestesses of Lys sometime in our own future, although it is also possible that they themselves obtained it somewhere else.

"We can never go 'back' now," Carol said to me, looking out at the passing scenery as the taxi carriage took us back to the Royal Palace of Dularn. "Not with the Lorr waiting for us now."

"I didn't think you were ever thinking of 'that'," I said.

"It has passed my mind from time to time," Carol admitted.

"A 'return' to the 'good old days'?" I smiled back at her.

"I think we were 'happier' back then," my wife said to me.

"The 'fantasy' and the 'reality' are two different things, aren't they?" I said, taking her hands in mine, her hazel eyes meeting mine as she nodded back. This was not truly our "world". I recalled the conversation I'd once had with Lorraine there that night on the beach before Queen Valeris' Free Women came for us. Lorraine "belonged" in this era, in this time. She fitted here. Her social philosophy, her skills with weapons, all made her a true member of this "world". She had been in the Twentieth Century only a "misfit", a woman who never did "belong" in it. Here she was at home, a sword at her hip, and "adventure" awaiting ...

"At least we still have each other," Carol said to me, looking into my eyes. I still remembered her there standing in the hot sun baked sands of the Arena in Trella, a sword in her hand, naked but for a bit of leather concealing her sex. I had been very proud of her then. Of the Warrioress she had become, the wife she was to me. There is still only one "Carol", even now...

"We have stood together, side by side, back to back," I said to her. That was something no one could ever take away from us. I recalled Lorraine, how I had felt being "bossed around" by her. Carol never ever did that. She never made me feel "inadequate". This is not something in Lorraine's writings. I don't think she is aware of the fact that she is an extremely "dominant" woman...

"How did the Priestesses react seeing Tais in a bikini?" my wife asked, a hint of laughter in her voice. I remembered that, Tais jumping through the Portal in that black nylon string of my wife's, the Priestess at the control console staring in open awe.

"I don't think she'll live that down for a while," I smiled. Tais had quickly shut off the power, thus isolating the Portal in 1991 from the Portal here in 2568. I supposed that the Lorr and her three Servitors wouldn't take that long getting the Portal disconnected from power and out of the utility room so that they might take it where they could check it out more carefully then. They weren't likely to stick around where someone might see them.

"The first 'beautiful blonde' that I didn't have to 'worry' about," Carol smiled, her hazel eyes glowing warmly up into mine. The sun now sinking in the sky there towards the west, the day almost over. I

thought that I was getting my share of adventure!

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"We have a `visitor'," Jard Sandar said to me, poking his head down through the hatch into the semi darkness of the hold as the North Star now sat there in the dry dock being refitted. The sweating men with me looking up from their labors in installing the steam engine there aboard the ship, our new second "steam sailer ". While such a vessel was no "match" for a "battleship" such as the Diana, such steam frigates still have considerable "value" as military vessels as they had both sails and an engine. The Northlight, our "first", had been quite a "success". As I had ordered a "spare" engine and boiler set built, Maris had "suggested" that the North Star be the one to receive this engine and boiler set, thus giving Dularn its "second" steam frigate.\* \* These vessels were fore and aft rigged, not square rigged, but as they were both "steam sailers", they were considered frigates.

"Send them down," I replied, turning again to my work of supervising the work crew in getting the steam engine installed as Queen Maris wanted it, somewhat "annoyed" just then at being "bothered" by some idle "curious" of the sort I'd met before. Doubtlessly another Senator or other high Dularnian "official". Such people, especially the women, being a real "pain", especially as they didn't "understand" half of what they saw before them.

"I think you'd better come look for yourself," he answered. "Looks like Darlanis herself is paying us a visit this time..."

"Her Imperial Majesty, Darlanis Marden, Queen of Sarn, Empress of California!" the Royal Crier announced standing there. The big blonde in her golden mesh now striding into the throne room like she "owned" the place. There were people in Dularn who actually "favored" her over Maris, perhaps due to the fact that Darlanis is supposedly the "daughter" of Queen Tulis, who was the Queen of Dularn before Maris Marn. Darlanis also is somewhat more "impressive" than Maris, and "looks" the part of what one thinks an Empress should look like. A "Shannon Tweed" on "steroids" is a pretty damn good "description" of the Empress. I do "admire" the woman, although she isn't all that "bright" in some ways, Darlanis being something of a "dumb blonde" in some ways...

"Trouble in high heels," Carol whispered, giving me a smile. My wife in a long green gown, the first time that she'd worn such since giving birth to our baby daughter some ten days before now. Her hair was attractively done, with a number of small diamonds set in its darkness. Carol was wearing a nursing halter underneath the clinging silken gown, since otherwise her heavy milk filled breasts would have drooped somewhat unattractively just now. The Lords and Ladies of Dularn all gathered in their formal dress to "honor" the Empress of California. Darlanis nodding to them. In her spike heels she towered over every woman there too!

"Hugh Hefner would have loved her," I whispered back to her. Darlanis is one of the most beautiful women who has ever lived. She is "awesome", a big tall (5'10") rather "muscular" blonde. A "SHE-RA" of the 26th Century. Incredibly courageous, but not considered by most as being much of a military commander. On the other hand she had done rather well against the Alaskan pirates who had kidnaped Sharon some months before, so she was obviously more "competent" than most people gave her "credit" for being.

"She `wants' something from us," Maris said from beside me. Darlanis had brought three steam frigates with her, stating that she was going to be "pirate hunting" there to the north of Dularn. As most pirate vessels would easily outrun her steam frigates, I suspected that she had plans to wage a campaign of mass destruction against whatever coastal villages she could burn up!!

"Probably to 'stay out of her way'," my wife "suggested"...

"I understand you are now a father," Darlanis said to me as we danced. I'd always wondered what it would be "like" to dance with Darlanis. To hold that magnificent perfect body to yours. The "reality" turning out to be something of a "disappointment". Her husband was off fighting another war somewhere in the east. The Nevadas are a warlike people, always "fighting" somebody...

"You probably met up with Lorraine," I smiled back at her.

"I understand the Diana's maiden voyage was successful," the Empress said, her azure eyes burning into mine from inches away.

"I'm glad that you desire peaceful relations with us," I answered, seeing Darlanis "smile" in reply, there being no "answer" she could give to a comment like that except to "agree" with me.

"I have learned a bit of 'wisdom' over the years," Darlanis smiled. "And sometimes the sword is unsuited for certain tasks."

"You have a beautiful daughter," Darlanis said, looking down at Hope as she sucked away at her mother's breast, Carol holding a folded cloth over herself as nursing women now do in this era.

"Perhaps she can grow up without knowing war," Carol said.

"That is the wish of every mother," Darlanis smiled back.

"Man has never known 'peace' since The War," I pointed out.

"And before it Man lived under a 'political tyranny'," the Queen of Dularn observed, giving me a smile as I now nodded back. By Dularnian "standards" the World Federation "was", although by the "standards" of Twentieth Century America it probably wasn't. Janet did run things with a "tight rein", but on the other hand she was smart enough to know when to leave well enough alone too!

"Those who lived in the World Federation for the most part did not consider it so," Darlanis smiled back in honeyed tones... "Just as those who live under my rule do not see 'things' as you do." Those azure eyes blazing in open challenge as Maris nodded.

## Chapter Twenty Five

"We obviously do not share the same 'viewpoints' on things," Carol said, holding Hope to her breast beneath the cloth she had to conceal her bare breast with its bare nipple from our view. It is the "nipple" here that is considered "shameful" to display by the people of this time. The causes of these odd "cultural taboos" is now lost. My wife sitting there, her formal gown undone a bit so that she might nurse, such activities being "commonplace" in this society. A slave girl, one of Maris', standing close by to be of service. It is not that uncommon to see a woman nursing her baby, although she will be careful not to display her breast if in public here where others might see her nursing. The group of us now in an



antechamber off the throne room itself.

"If there had never been any `involvement' by Lorraine, would you still `feel' the same?" Darlanis suddenly challenged my wife. The Empress no doubt well aware of Carol's feelings here! Carol now switching the baby to the other breast, doing so with an "ease" that surprised me considering how short a period of time it had been since little Hope had been born. Hope was growing fast, having gained almost two pounds since her birth aboard the Diana. She was now the weight of a normal baby of fullterm, that is about seven pounds, instead of the five which she had weighed in at when Carol had delivered her a full month early...

"Do you think Lorraine would have done better than Janet?" Carol "smiled" up at the Empress, answering her question with another. Maris giving me a "grin", Carol obviously having the "better" of the Imperial Empress in this little "game of wits"...

"You did pretty good," I said, holding Carol in my arms as we danced in time with the music. Carol "fitting me" a lot better than Darlanis had, especially as Carol didn't try to "lead".

"Just as `good' as a woman of this time?" Carol smiled back, it being obvious that we weren't thinking of the same thing now! Nursing your baby while wearing a formal gown isn't the easiest thing in the world to do, but Carol had pulled it off with ease! She seemed to be a better mother too than I had expected of her.

"And you gave Darlanis something to `think' about too," I said, recalling Carol's retort to Darlanis' earlier "challenge" about whether or not she was prejudiced against Janet Rogers' World Federation because it had been designed by Lorraine Duval.

"Pretty `good' for an Alabama `farm girl'," Carol laughed.

"Nineteen fifty two was a `good year'," I smiled in reply.

"Kathi is going to `go without' tonight," Carol whispered.

"Probably still a bit `slack' down there yet," Carol said, her hazel eyes burning down into mine as she "rode" me. She was quite a bit "looser" than she had been before, but that was to be expected considering how little time had passed. Her breasts were "heavier" now even though she was "milked dry", and swung back and forth with the motions of her body, the darkness of her nipples against her skin bringing back memories of other times... For a woman who had given birth less than two weeks ago she didn't look bad at all, her stomach now almost as "flat" as before.

"Not much `worse' than Kathi," I smiled, the blonde slave girl lacking the performance that her "looks" seemed to promise. On the other hand my wife is to love making what Lorraine is to swordsmanship, and it's hardly fair to Kathi to compare her here. Perhaps Lara Warsan, the Princess of Baja would be a "match" for Carol. I've never met the Princess, but she is quite "famous"...

"We could probably `trade' Kathi for one of Maris' girls," Carol said, knowing fully well that we'd never do that to Kathi. The slow sensual rhythm of her hips reminding me of the times she used to "dance" there at the Hutch. Fortunately no one ever knew that Carol was a "dancer", or otherwise I'm sure Lady Tirana would have had her dancing before the men there on Lorraine's estate every night. Such "dancers" being considerably more "valuable" than an ordinary slave girl, I might note at this point...

"Kathi's doing pretty good in `slave school'," I said, the blonde having learned a number of "useful" and

"pleasing" skills.

"She'll never `match' me," Carol smiled, changing the "pace" of her movements. My wife reaching down, "caressing" herself. I thrust up into her, into the heated liquid "warmth" of her body.

"There's only `one Carol'," I said, my wife that "one" too.

"Just `remember' that when you're with Kathi," she laughed, "bouncing" up and down on me a bit, her hazel eyes burning down into my own as she rode me like some cowboy on a bucking bronco.

"That isn't `wise' letting those Imperials see everything," Jard Sandar growled to me as he stood beside me. I saw no harm in having Darlanis' own engineers off her frigates help in the final "conversion" of the North Star to "steam". Maris having "agreed" with Darlanis to render her "assistance" in the form of the Diana and our two new "steam sailers". As the "Northmen" were even more of a "menace" to Dularn than to the Empire due to the distances involved here, I thought it was a rather smart move on the part of Maris to offer our "help" to Darlanis. Of course the newspapers hadn't seen it that way, but that was to be expected considering how many yet hated the Empress of California.

"We're no longer at war with `her'," I answered him back.

"Don't take any `unnecessary' chances," Carol said to me, standing there on the dock next to the Diana, the gangplank behind me. "I'm too young to become a widow," she "smiled" then, holding little Hope in her arms, her hazel eyes holding my own.

"I'll be as `safe' aboard the Diana as you in the palace," I laughed, taking her in my arms, kissing her soft moist lips then. I knew of no weapon of this era that could harm the Diana, nor with a "force" the size of this one was there any "doubt" as to what the "outcome" would be. We would destroy everything we could, and perhaps force the Northmen to realize that their days of sailing to Dularn and points south for slave girls was over...

"I see you didn't have to `strip' this time," I said, the Diana's engineer giving me a smile in reply as she stood watching the men shovel more coal into boiler number three. On the other hand I noted too that she had adopted attire more "suitable" for a more "southernly" climate than that of Dularn, being attired more as a woman of Baja than as a Dularnian woman of high caste.

"The radiators and fans help," she smiled, her face glistening a bit from the heat off the boiler. We had all the hatches open, which also helped, although ventilation was still not as satisfactory as I would have wished. On the other hand the Imperial ships had the same problem I'd found in my tours of them...

"How we doing?" I asked, captain Sandra Steven standing there beside the helmsman, peering out through a forward hatch.

"The barometer is starting to fall a bit," she answered.

"I'll take a look topside," I smiled, climbing the ladder.

"Impressed?" I asked, the midshipman nodding, her eyes glowing with excitement. She was blonde, too "beautiful" for her own good. I suspected that was "why" she was aboard the Diana now... The sky was clear in all directions save for the northwest, where a dark line of clouds now hovered just over the distant horizon. Behind us was Sarnian Queen followed by the two other Imperial steam frigates, and then behind them came the Northlight and the North Star, their "handier" fore and aft rig already showing

its "advantage" as the square riggers were forced to set both their stay sails and run their steam engines to keep up with the Diana.

"Order lower hatches closed and secure all loose gear," I yelled down the hatch to Sandra below. I could tell from the way that the Diana was cutting into the swells that we were in for a good storm. The swell growing higher although also still smooth.

"What about the Imperials?" Sandra asked, looking up at me.

"They have look outs, I'm sure they know about the storm," I answered. The big steam frigates could take a heavy pounding, and I knew our own vessels were certainly "seaworthy" enough yet.

"Sea's getting up," Sandra said, the armored bow of the Diana smashing through the waves. We had been forced to close the upper hatches forward, the spray even flying up to the control cabin some twenty feet above the water. The steady "thud-thud" of the triple engines was a reassuring sound inside the Diana. I went around and started closing the forward hatches, the spray having several times sprayed right into the control cabin. We could always operate as before by looking through the viewing slits, although the interior of the cabin got a bit "stuffy"...

"Anything from `them'?" I asked the midshipman, the water spots on her uniform leaving little doubt that at times spray was now passing completely over the Diana as the ship smashed through the waves. I estimated their height at about fifteen feet now. The top of the forward quickfirer turret is thirty feet from the ship's waterline. The black smoke from our boilers drifting off in a dark cloud there towards the island of Dulam miles away...

"No, sir," she answered, standing there, clinging to the railing there on top of the forward quickfirer turret that is mounted on top of the control cabin. I could see the spray leap up over the bows of Sarnian Queen, although Darlanis was still keeping up with us, her other ships still holding their own station. The Northlight and the North Star having swung out a bit, both pounding heavily in this sea from the way they appeared now.

"Sandra," I yelled down through the hatch, seeing her look up at me. "Cut engine two off and maintain three and one as they are." That would slow the Diana and ease the strain on the other ships. It was obvious that the sailing ships could not take the sort of "sea" that the Diana with her superior design could take!

## Chapter Twenty Six

"Waves are now at least twenty feet," Sandra said to me, the Diana's bow often completely disappearing into the swells now. I nodded, well aware of the fact that although the Diana could withstand far greater waves bows on, turning the ship into the "trough" of the waves could spell disaster for us all if the ship was ever tilted more than forty five degrees from the horizontal. The "roll" of the ship due to taking the waves on her port quarter was something that worried me just a bit here. The "roll limit" for the Diana was no more than forty five degrees, and we were at times going almost thirty right now! Headed straight into the waves there was no problem, but we couldn't continue on the course we were

on now without risking a "roll over" if the sea got up much more than what it was! I'd ridden through one storm this size aboard the North Star with Queen Maris in command, and she'd been forced to drop sea anchors and ride it out!!

"Darlanis and the others have been forced to heave to," I answered, well aware of the latest report of the midshipman, although I still had the power yet to smash through these waves like a battering ram! The Diana could handle anything nature could throw at her! She was superior to any surface ship built!!

"They will drift to leewards faster than we will," she said. The storm filling the sky there ahead of us. I could see the flash of lightning, even heard the "rumble" now of the thunder...

"They know where we're heading," I answered, the view quite blurred there through the glass covered forward viewing slits. At times now the visibility was cut completely back to "zero"!

"We need to cut back on the engines," Sandra said to me. I could tell that she was "scared", perhaps more so as she didn't really "understand" the Diana that well. How "strong" it was...

"That's the last thing we want to do now," I answered, ordering the helmsman to steer directly into the storm so that we took the waves straight on. The Diana's motions now changing to just a simple up and down, the stress on the hull muchly reduced!

"Go below," I said, the girl nodding thankfully, the water running off her, her uniform as wet as if she'd been in swimming! When the Diana smashed through a wave now the spray came up over the entire forward part of the ship! Fortunately the water wasn't very cold this time of year, although the impact of the spray against our bodies was enough to fling us back against the railing as the entire forward part of the ship disappeared into a wave! I estimated wave height at nearly twenty five feet, higher than I'd ever seen before in all the times that I'd been at sea!! The crack of the thunder and the flash of the lightning reminding me of heavy gunfire back in another era now only myth and legend.

"Going to get worse before it gets better!" Sandra said to me in a half yell, the "slam" of the waves against the Diana's armored hull making the ship creak and groan. Given the nature of the battleship's construction, I wasn't concerned with damage as such, as the Diana could withstand any "sea" as long as she was headed into them. Trying to turn the ship however would be flirting with disaster, especially since the Diana's upper armor made her somewhat "top-heavy" as compared to any sailing ship...

"I'll check around," I said, leaving her standing there.

The interior of the Diana was like walking through a shower. The dripping water everywhere as seawater leaked around the upper hatches. While such water didn't "hurt" anything, the Diana's own pumps, driven by her triple steam boilers, being able to handle it, there would be "work" for the crew later in greasing down everything and seeing that rust didn't start eating away at us! The men and women of the crew in the semi-darkness of the interior like lost souls clinging to the interior of the ship, a few swinging lamps our only illumination here inside the battleship.

"How 'bad' is it?" the engineer asked, her eyes holding mine. She was a "competent" woman, her caste that of the Builders. She had been Jard Sandar's assistant ever since I had killed the first one for his "treason" against us. I thought rather highly of her, although it still seemed a bit strange to see a woman doing such things that one would expect a man to do. Daris Adara was married, a mother, a gold chain about her throat marking her as such. Her husband a Physician in Arsana, I understood. I supposed he liked the exotic sound of her name as much as I did. They had a slave girl, like most well to do couples...

"Not good," I answered in a low voice. "We've been forced to head directly into the storm to cut the roll down," I explained to Daris, seeing her nod. After the storm was over we'd have to head back towards land, our present course being towards Japan, although we lacked the "fuel range" to travel that far...

"We've already had a couple minor injuries from the roll," she answered, the halter she wore plastered to her breasts, her bare midriff and shorts more the attire of another sort of woman.

"I'll see what I can do," I replied, giving her a smile.

"Engine number two one half reverse," I said, Sandra nodding, pushing the repeater to one half back, although I was well aware she didn't understand the reasoning here. With one and three one half forward, number two half reverse, we would slow the Diana but still keep the ship pointed into the waves. The almost constant "crack" of the thunder echoing through the hull.

"Took the 'strain' off her," Sandra said a moment later, the ship now slowly moving into the waves, the pressure of wind and wave against the hull such that we were hardly moving forward...

"Let's just hope the other ships 'survived' this," I said.

I watched the moonlight on the waves as the Diana cut through the water, the sea still high, but nothing like it had been earlier. Except for some minor burns caused by stumbling against the hot boilers and steam pipes, we'd come through fine. The Diana having "proved" herself in a way no one could doubt. I was now again running at one half ahead on all three engines, our speed about seven knots or so against these heavy swells we were now smashing our way through. There had been no sign of the other ships, Sandra having said that it was likely that they'd been blown back into the strait and would have to work their way back.

"Call me if needed," I said to Sandra, "And get some 'rest' yourself," I added, seeing her nod. She was a good captain. Not I thought one like Maris or perhaps myself, but she was "capable", and that was all that really counted here right now...

"I expect you were thinking how 'nice' it was there on Lorraine's estate, weren't you?" I teased Kathi as the slave nodded.

"I fear I am not a 'sailor'," Kathi smiled, her eyes warm.

"But you know how to 'pleasure' one," I smiled, undoing her halter, dropping it to the table, cupping her full firm breasts.

"One and three full stop, two slow ahead," I ordered, the Diana slowly creeping into the bay. Ahead of us a boat, men at the oars, a man tossing the lead. The chart showed ample water, but such charts often are not that "accurate" either, I'll note. The hot late summer sun shining down upon the armored battleship. A few clouds like puffs of cotton slowly drifting towards the east. We'd seen nothing yet of the other ships, but I was fairly sure that they probably had survived the storm considering the way the wind had been blowing and where the strait was that separated Dularn from the mainland. There would be ample "work" for everyone, both chopping wood for the boilers to conserve our coal, and repainting the upper hull where the paint had been washed off by the force of the waves we'd endured two days ago. "Drop both forward anchors!" I snapped a moment later, the anchors slipping into the still waters of the bay with a splash. "Have a boat take an anchor out astern," I added, Sandra nodding.

"Like some great sea monster," Kathi said to me, shading her eyes as we stood there on shore looking out at the Diana resting quietly above her reflection. Men and women scrambling over the hull, tied by ropes to the "backbone" that ran the length of the ship. As I've mentioned before, the Diana is designed to look something like a "sea monster", a bit of "psychology" I'd stolen from Lorraine's earlier painting of her Squala as a great shark. Some fishermen from a local village having arrived shortly after we'd anchored with a number of items they wished to sell to us. A couple of wenches with them who saw some "silver" to be made. In a society where "sex" and "reproduction" are now two totally and entirely "different" things people now look upon such matters much differently than one of the 20th Century might do so here.

"I'm going to check the underside of the hull," I told her. That would also give me the "chance" to try out our new underwater breathing equipment that I'd perfected a short time before.

"I'll take a dive with you," Kathi smiled, her eyes glowing. The blonde being a strong swimmer, with excellent lungs, I knew.

A few fish scurried out of the way as I swam beneath the anchored Diana, the great hull like the shadow of a sea monster over me. The breathingmask allowing me to both see and breathe. Kathi beside me, completely naked but for her strap and clips, the golden collar about her throat, the bubbles rising up like silvery bells from her own breathing mask. Our crude swim fins sending us beneath the battleship. The leather hoses that supplied us with air curving back behind to the surface of the bay.

I worked my way back towards the stern, Kathi beside me, her bleached hair floating about her head, the planking of the hull up overhead making me much aware that the Diana was "vulnerable" from underneath, although since the hull was made of oak planks six inches thick it'd take some drilling to make a hole in it... The three great bronze screws motionless in the water just ahead of us, gleaming in the filtered rays of the sun almost like gold.

## Chapter Twenty Seven

Suddenly I felt a "touch" between my thighs, the caress of a woman's fingers, Kathi giving me a big grin through her breathing mask, letting in a bit of water, which she then had to blow out!

"You've been learning from Carol!" I thought to myself, the blonde hovering there just out of reach now. I saw that the propellers were in excellent shape, and still free from any nicks.

"We could spend the night ashore," Kathi suggested, her gray eyes glowing into mine. Daris Adara giving me a big "smile" just then, while several of the crew turned their faces to hide their own grins at the "comment" that the admiral's slave girl had made to her master. As everyone who could was doing so, I saw no harm in it, the interior of the Diana not being all that comfortable due to the dampness we'd hadn't been able to get out of the ship.

"It is pleasant to watch a wench at work," I said, watching Kathi cooking our dinner over the open fire there some yards from the beach, the Diana visible between the trees. Her own attire left little "doubt" that she was well worth the gold collar that she had locked about her throat. In a good market she'd

probably bring something like fifty gold crowns, both due to her own sexuality and that fantastically delightful full busty wide hipped figure of hers! Kathi being around 5'6" and 38-26-38 or so...

"I think master enjoys looking at his wench," Kathi smiled.

"That is why your skirt is so short and your halter is made the way that it is," I said, Kathi's attire leaving little to the imagination. She was at times even "mistaken" for a prostitute.

"I am a woman 'born' to the collar," Kathi said to me.

"The 'same' was once said of my wife," I smiled back.

"She is a Warriress, I am but a slave," Kathi said.

"There is something to be said for both," I smiled.

"I believe the meat is ready," Kathi informed me.

"'Sit' before me, keep your legs open," I told Kathi. The light from the fire lighting the side of her face, her sexy body. Such of course allowed me an excellent "view" of her, which the slave girl was well "aware" of. Kathi had no "doubts" about herself as a woman. She knew she was attractive, quite desirable.

"I expect my strap does not cover 'much'," Kathi smiled.

"I trust you have not neglected to 'shave'," I replied.

"I am a girl kept under strict discipline," she said.

"At least spanked when you misbehave," I noted then.

"I think you 'enjoy' spanking me," Kathi "retorted".

"You do have the 'bottom' for it," I observed in turn.

"I notice that you enjoy looking at it," she answered me.

"You object to your master looking at you?" I challenged.

"It gives me 'pleasure' that my master finds me beautiful," Kathi answered, running her fingers through her golden blonde mane. She was freshly bleached, and looked more a true blonde.

"It is better than using my hand," I smiled back at her.

"A girl would rather hope so," Kathi laughed in reply.

"The ships are coming, sir," the Diana's first lieutenant said, her dark eyes meeting mine as Kathi slept beside me there beneath the blanket, the fire that had lit up our night now only ashes at our feet. She was brunette, a silver neck chained wife, her husband a Warrior back in Arsana. I remembered another such officer, a bit younger, who we'd buried at sea far to the north. I prayed that Carol was right, that Hope would grow up in a world that had renounced war as a means of settling national disputes.\* \* I am aware

here that Shari Johnson died in a "rescue" mission, not in a "war", but I've seen enough others die in battle that it doesn't really matter any more to me if it is a "war" or not now.

"I wasn't sure that you had survived," Darlanis said to me, Kathi careful to be of service as one would expect. Darlanis no doubt had high standards about such things, and I didn't want the Empress of California to think that Kathi was just a "sex slut".

"I had the same concerns about you," I smiled back, the Diana's stern cabin hot here in the morning sun even with all the hatches open to draw in some fresh air. The sailing ships as I had suspected had been driven back to the strait where they had taken shelter until the storm blew over. It was obvious that the Empress was "impressed" with the Diana, and its "capabilities"...

"The Empire is fighting a great war against Mexico, one that is straining our 'resources' to the limit, and if Dularn was to render us 'assistance', I for one would be extremely grateful," the Empress now spoke, her azure eye burning hotly into my own. I knew that her husband, Prince Serak of the Nevadas was leading the land forces, while Lorraine Richards, the Warlady of California, was in command of the naval forces, using her force of steam frigates against the Mexicans. The "assistance" of the Diana would be no doubt "decisive" as Mexico had no defense against us! Lorraine's own battleship having sunk on its maiden voyage under conditions that were still under investigation from what Darlanis had said there earlier, leaving only the Diana yet in operation.

"I'd think you'd be off the coast of Mexico with Lorraine, not here two thousand miles or more to the north," I smiled back. I suspected that Darlanis hoped that I'd put in a "good word" for her with Maris, who probably would be willing to render such "assistance" in return for certain "concessions" from the Imperials.

"Like to come over to Sarnian Queen with me?" Darlanis asked then, her eyes like two precious azure jewels burning into mine. "There's something that I'd like to show you there," she smiled.

"You might be 'interested' in this," Darlanis said, setting a package there on the table before me. The fittings and furnishing of her cabin leaving no doubts that she liked her luxury. A cool breeze off the sea blowing into the cabin through the open stern windows, one of Darlanis' own slave girls waiting to be of service to us. A trim figured brunette wearing a red silk shift.

"Looks like the papers off a ship," I said in passing, pausing then as I saw that they were papers off a DULARNIAN VESSEL!!!

"One of my ships 'took' this vessel while 'engaged' in the stealing of women from a coastal village in Sarn," Darlanis said, her eyes burning down into mine with azure fire. "And these papers say that the ship is Dularnian..." she added then, her eyes holding mine as I nodded in reply, the papers obviously as they seemed to be! Even to the "seals" and everything else necessary!

"Someone turned 'pirate'," I mused. I knew it had happened before. There were those greedy enough for gold to turn nations against each other just for the profits that could be made then!! "We captured an 'Imperial' only a few days ago doing the same thing," I added, looking up at her. "Maris is 'sitting on it' to keep the 'hot heads' in the Senate from raising a big 'fuss'." I saw her nod, her mind obviously hard at work digesting all this.

"Maybe someone wants to start a war between us," she said.

"And both of us know just 'who' that might be," I "smiled".



"She no doubt sees this as an `opportunity'," Darlanis said. If there was trouble to be made, Princess Tara would be the one!! She'd nearly caused the destruction of the whole world in 2579...

"Why are you bringing this to me instead of Maris?" I asked.

"I am to you `more' than just an `enemy ruler'," she smiled.

"And just `what' are you planning to `do' now?" I asked her.

"We need more `information', and I believe the place to obtain it will be among those to the `north'," the Empress smiled.

"How much do you know of these areas?" I asked, Carl Cabot and his brown skinned wife both studying the map there before us. Darlanis looking on, her azure eyes missing little of things now. Maris had made him captain of the North Star, a wise move I felt.

"It is an area with many `relics' from before The War," she spoke, her midnight dark eyes meeting mine. Tasha was an attractive woman, intelligent, a surviving member of a race that was almost extinct here in North America. Luckily for us Carl had brought her with him on this voyage, perhaps feeling that her intimate knowledge of the area we were going to might be of help in our perhaps hopeless attempt to wipe out the pirates that infested these islands and coves hundreds of miles north of Dularn. I supposed too that there were the usual reasons for having one's wife aboard. Many naval captains of this era do such things now if there are no children involved that require a parent's care... Tasha was Carl's second wife, the first having died in the bitter warfare there between California and Dularn back in 2565. There had been a son, now old enough to take care of himself. I didn't think he cared too much for Darlanis, or "what" she represented.

"We're `interested' in the people, not your ruins," Darlanis snapped. Tasha looking up at her, her thoughts in her dark eyes. Tasha Cabot was of the Scribes, while Darlanis was a Warriress. I had no doubt that Tasha considered herself "civilized", while there might be some "doubt" in the case of Darlanis herself here!

"Too bad Queen Tulis didn't raise you better," Carl snapped.

"Easy!" I hissed, well aware of what "this" could lead to!

"Perhaps I spoke out of turn," Darlanis now smiled in reply.

"I have a question for you, Admiral," Tasha said to me, Darlanis having just left for the Sarnian Queen, the African woman's eyes dark pools that glowed up into mine. She was quite "different" from the Blacks of the 20th Century, although I suppose that was a matter of "culture", not "race" as such. In any case she considered herself a "Dularnian" as much as I did. Her birthplace had been in Trelandar, she had been a friend of Sanda Talen, and after Trelandar had been conquered by Darlanis Tasha had found it "wise" to leave the country, having ended up in Dularn.

"She's a `barbarian'," I smiled back at the "black" woman.

"I wasn't `referring' to Darlanis," Tasha said to me then.

"O.K., what is it then?" I smiled, watching Darlanis' boat.

"Why were my people nearly exterminated by yours?" she asked. "We know that just after The War of 2047 that nearly all males of my race were killed like wild beasts, and only the women allowed to live." Such is a matter of "history", I might note.

"You know of the 'BROWN VERUS THE BOARD OF EDUCATION' decision of the United States Supreme Court in 1954?" I asked Tasha.

"Yes," she answered, no doubt well "read" on such things.

"One can 'earn' their place in society or one can 'manipulate' the political system in an attempt to win a place in society that you can't otherwise qualify for," I replied, seeing her nod. "Blacks were the most 'hated' group in America in the 20th Century, and I suspect that they weren't any better in the 21st."

"Then when all 'social controls' broke down..." Tasha said. This was a bit of history that most people didn't know about now. As a matter of fact in Lorraine's first novel she states that the few "Blacks" she saw was due to the effects of the Lorr bombings. This was no doubt "true" to some extent, although it is more the "truth" here to say that few Blacks survived the aftermath of The War when the surviving rural population took matters in their own hands. In any case it appears now that Black women were the first "slave girls", with white women soon afterwards in turn suffering the exact same fate in the almost constant struggle for survival that was "life" on an radioactive and freezing planet.

"What is 'past' is 'history'," I said, seeing Tasha nod.

## Chapter Twenty Eight

"North Star reports 'enemy in sight', sir," the first lieutenant of the Diana said to me, Kathi busy cleaning up the cabin, the steady "beat" of the battleship's triple engines reassuring. It is pleasant to watch such a wench at work, her skirt "short" enough that the masculine eye is drawn to what lies "underneath".

"I'll come," I answered, setting down the history book Tasha had given me. One that she had written there in Arsana only a few months ago, drawing upon the work of many other Scribes. She was "smart", a woman who had a better mind than most people of this era. I understood much now that I hadn't before of our history before The War of 2047 changed everything. I think Tasha too had realized that "racism" is a two edged sword that cuts both ways. Her "history" wasn't perfectly "accurate", but she had done a good job of digging up the "truth", the book covering the time period from the American Civil War to the year 2050 A.D.

There is a somewhat "similar" book written by Keri Greyson of the same caste as Tasha Cabot, which covers the same era, but from a somewhat different view. Both are well worth reading too. Unfortunately the Lorr as I've noted here put a halt to the hopes of the Priestesses to do their own "exploratory research" in the last decade of the 20th Century and the first decade of the 21st.

"What do we have?" I asked, climbing up the metal ladder, captain Sandra Steven now peering through a telescope at the distant mast heads of the North Star there on the horizon. The midshipman beside her,

the smoke rising up from our triple stacks amidships, the other ships following in a line there behind us. The North Star was acting as a scout, being quite a bit "faster" than the square rigged Imperial steam frigates in sailing to windward. A cool sea breeze blowing off the Pacific as I stood there with them now on the top of the forward quickfirer turret.

"Topsail schooner," Sandra answered, reading the flashes.

"We're out of Dularnian territorial waters now," I said.

"I'd like to go to three quarters," she said to me then.

"You won't catch one of those with this," I smiled back.

"North Star is still in pursuit," the midshipman spoke.

"Signal the other ships," I said to the midshipman. I suspected that Darlanis could read our signals, the mast heads of her ship being high enough to see the tops of the North Star's. "You may go to three quarters if you wish," I "added" for Sandra.

"North Star's still pulling away from us," Sandra said. I nodded. I was well aware that the North Star was faster than the Diana, especially when under a "combination" of sail and steam...

"Stay at three quarters," I answered, climbing the ladder.

"Signals from the Imperials?" I asked the midshipman, a young man that I had some "hopes" might turn into a sea officer. The Imperial ships had broken formation, and were now almost up to us, their yards bulging with sails as they now took the wind. I supposed they were trying to get steam up, but that takes time.

"None, sir," he answered, his eyes bright with excitement.

"It will be the North Star's prize," I pointed out to him.

"I don't 'envy' those 'she' gets her hands on," he replied.

I could see the two ships as the Diana came chugging up, the three Imperial steam frigates now holding their position close by, while the Northlight kept its station on us astern. I did not "envy" the captain or crew of the captured raiding vessel, especially as Darlanis is not too "patient" a woman and I expected that she wouldn't be too "gentle" with her captive either now.

"The captain 'admitted' that they have had 'communications' with Princess Tara," Darlanis said to me there in her ornate stern cabin, the sun now settling there in the west over the sea.

"Under torture he would tell you 'anything' he thought you wanted to hear," I pointed out, the Empress now nodding in reply. I didn't "ask" what sort of "methods" that she'd used, being well aware that aboard a steam ship like this there were lots of hot pipes and such as well as a boiler to heat up various "devices".

"If we destroy these pirate bases and their ships, then I think your Queen will grant me the 'assistance' I desire," Darlanis answered, her azure eyes holding mine. I thought of the innocents that would be killed, the women and children as our ships fired broadsides of javelins and fire bombs into defenseless villages.

I remembered another war, another time now mostly "myth". Burning villages, innocent women and children like burned husks.

"In another year new ships will be built, and there will be the same 'raids' as before," I answered. These people were poor. All they had was the sea, the lumber to build ships to raid upon Dularn, steal the things that they could not make or afford to buy. I wondered if there was another "solution" to this problem? "We need to find a better solution to these problems than killing people with 'bigger and better' weapons before we end up dropping atomic bombs in another century or so," I said, standing there...

"You 'talk' like a Priestess," Darlanis snapped back at me. Such is considered something of an "insult" in this era, I note. It being held that the Priestesses of Lys are always willing to "see the other side", and that they "abhor" war in all its forms. For this reason they will never serve on a ship of war, nor will they "bless" such vessels or anything else having to do with war. They do believe in "self defense", but that is the limit they go.

"I think we could 'hire' these people to fight for 'us'," I said, keeping my voice level, ignoring the Empress' own "insult" which really didn't mean all that "much" to me, not as it might to someone actually "from" this time, who would see it different. And Dularn could use "allies" here, especially as Queen Valeris was starting to "worry" us now with her own "activities", there having been a minor clash between her forces and the Wyomings. I was well aware of the "dangers" of "feminism", especially the "sort" that Queen Valeris represented, in an "era" like this one. An "alliance" between Dularn and the "Northmen" might be useful. The one between Dularn and the Wyomings certainly had been such.

"I rather doubt that they will attack the Diana," I said, Sandra nodding as I stepped down into the boat, the village there on shore much like that the Vikings had built sixteen centuries before. With me was the lieutenant from the raider, the vessel having escorted us into this little snug bay. While the Diana was in no danger due to its construction, any wooden ship would have been in a lot of trouble, judging from the catapults set up.

"You could end up being held for ransom," Darlanis observed.

"I don't think these people are that 'stupid'," I replied.

"What sort of vessel is that you came in?" she said to me. She was "blonde", tall, the same size physically as Darlanis, but not as good looking. I considered her a doubtlessly "competent" woman, one who no doubt held the loyalty of those men about her. This big building of rough hewn logs now serving as her "palace". She was the "Queen" of these people, her husband having been killed in a battle shortly before against Queen Valeris' forces. Valeris pushing her way "south", armed now with Imperial weapons and "advised" by Imperial military advisors of the Warriresses. I suspected too that Darlanis was not all that "friendly" towards Dularn as she had seemed. That she still lusted after the "empire" of her dreams, a "secondRome" here on the western coast of North America stretching from Baja to Alaska. A social order of semi-independent nations all ruled by that tall Imperial Empress.

"It is a steam powered battleship, proof against all, your majesty," I answered, seeing her nod. Her name was Freydis, a fitting name I felt for such a woman. With Dularnian weapons and our own "advisors" she might be able to hold Valeris at bay now. She was clad in leather, a long bladed sword there at her hip. I thought of Lana Clarkson, of the movie "BARBARIAN QUEEN" I'd seen back in the Twentieth Century. Queen Freydis was much like that.

"Do you speak for the Queen of Dularn?" Queen Freydis asked, a young woman, blonde like her mother sitting there at her side.

"The Queen of Dularn listens to my words, often follows my suggestions," I answered, seeing the Princess nodding in reply... Queen Freydis' son had died with his father in the battle against the "Free Women", their deaths no doubt thanks to Darlanis' own activities here. With better weapons and perhaps assistance from the Wyomings and Dularn we could put a "halt" to Valeris' "march to the south". Otherwise we'd end up some day fighting her ourselves in the forests of Dularn, and no one wanted to see "that"!

"The 'Queen of the North' has offered us much," she replied. "Things that we've never had before, including the drugs that extend life and medicines to cure diseases we now often die from." Such "medicines" Valeris herself had obtained from California. I recalled the savagery of Valeris' women, their own "cruelty" towards men. Such was common knowledge now in Dularn among many.

"And 'what' has she 'asked' in return?" I "challenged" her.

"That women 'rule'," Queen Freydis answered in level tones.

"And that you eventually 'become' as them," I added for her.

"She has not asked that of us," Freydis answered in reply.

"Not yet..." I smiled, standing there before her throne.

## Chapter Twenty Nine

"No man has ever beaten me in swordplay," Queen Freydis suddenly said, stepping down from her throne. She was six feet in her boots, a big burly Amazon of a woman, a true "Viking Queen". I suspected that she wanted to "prove" something here with me. I saw some of the men standing there watching grin at each other. If anyone was to ever make a movie about Vikings, they would have made great "extras", especially with their own swords and attire.

"You wish to cross blades with me?" I smiled back, undoing my ornate uniform coat, handing it to the awed midshipman standing behind me. A lot of the women of this time have inflated opinions of their own abilities. There are, so far as I know, only three that are better than me, and I'm married to one of them. One of the other two was aboard the Diana waiting for us.

"You have implied that I am 'incompetent'," she answered. I supposed that you could have taken my earlier words that way.

"That can happen to the 'best' of us at times," I said.

"I will not hurt you very much," she smiled back at me.

"I am pleased by that information," I smiled in reply.

"You may draw," she said then, drawing her own blade.

"As you wish," I said, smiling at her daughter then.

"I am ready," she said, standing there before me.

"Ladies first," I smiled, holding my blade ready.

"Defend yourself," she laughed, swinging up her sword.

"I have," I said, my point at the side of her neck. It had been a simple move, although one seldom used or understood here. I had once done the same to Lady Tirana, the Warlady of Trelandar just last year. It is a simple enough "trick" if you have skill. I had merely stepped inside her guard, and caught her forearm on my own. Apparently few people of this time understand it either. It is similar in a way to knife fighting techniques as taught by my old D.I. when I was a new recruit in the U.S. Marines back in the 20th Century. The long heavy sword as used by those to the north of Dularn is not really as "effective" a weapon as thought. It is actually too "long" and "heavy" for really close in combat.

"You may have me if you wish," Queen Freydis said then, her gray eyes wide with surprise and something else that made me glad that Carol wasn't around to see, my wife being extremely jealous.

"I fear my wife would not approve and her skill with a sword exceeds mine," I smiled, sheathing my own weapon as she nodded...

"You are a mighty Warrior," she spoke, sheathing her blade.

"I am Darlanis Marden, Empress of California," Darlanis said to Queen Freydis, the two a "study" in "contrasts". The Empress in her golden mesh, Freydis in her short leather skirt and leggings that are often worn by the "Northman" woman in this land. I might note here that Darlanis still used the last name of "Marden" even though she was married to Prince Serak of the Nevadas. She once told me that she did so for "political" reasons, which I suggest the reader accept, as she didn't go any further into it.

"Queen Freydis Thorson," Freydis answered, stepping up on to the metal surfaced inside deck of the Diana, regarding Darlanis with that "look" that one warrior woman gives another if she's not at all sure that she's too "friendly". Freydis was also of course well aware that Darlanis was the "source" of her problems. That without the "support" of the Empire Queen Valeris would not be the "threat" that she was to everyone here in western Canada.\* \* I had "discussed" this matter with Queen Maris shortly before I sailed on the Diana. Maris being of the "opinion" (true as it turned out) that Darlanis was trying to "isolate" Dularn by surrounding it with hostile nations, thus leaving us "ripe" for the "pucking" when the Imperials no longer had Mexico to worry about. Darlanis does have a good head on her shoulders, even if she is not really that great as a military commander. Her "tactics" may be lacking at times, but she takes a "long range" view of things.

"You have steam up, captain?" I asked, Freydis looking about in awe. I wouldn't have wanted to take her on in a hand to hand. She had shoulders on her like a man, and muscles to match too along with an "odor" that spoke of too infrequent baths, I noted.

"As you ordered, sir," Sandra smiled, grinning at Freydis.

"She is captain of this vessel of yours?" Freydis asked.

"I am, your majesty," Sandra "smiled", and nodding to me.

"Your Queen isn't like Valeris, is she?" Freydis asked me.

"We believe in 'equality', of 'earning' one's way," I said.

"Equality of the sexes is something assured under our laws," Darlanis spoke, standing there watching, smiling to herself now. She had promised Freydis that she would "call off" Valeris in return for Freydis' "support" in the Empire's war against Mexico. I had no doubts that Freydis understood the "implications" here. On the other hand the "fact" that the Diana was "Dularnian" also counted for something here, Freydis being well aware that our new "battleship" was superior to anything that the Empire had at sea!

"She fights a very 'fluid' sort of warfare," Freydis said to me, taking a goblet of wine from Kathi, who had a hard time keeping from staring openly at this golden haired "barbarian queen". "Her forces will never stand and fight, but merely 'flow' around any fixed defense, which they then attack from the rear or engage in a sort of constant 'skirmish' against which there is yet no effective defense." She may have been a "barbarian", unable to read or write, but Freydis was a quite capable competent monarch! The steady "thud-thud" of the triple engines at three quarters a sound that was hardly "noticeable" any more after all this time as we came back out to sea to meet up with the rest of the ships.

"Looks like old Hara knows what she's doing," I smiled back. Hara Eslund had been the head of the Warriress Academy there in Trelandar before their "revolution". She was a good friend of Lorraine, and well acquainted no doubt with Lady Tirana Greyson. The military "tactics" on the other hand reminded me of Carol's!

"Valeris is a smart woman, a 'warriress'," Darlanis smiled, her azure eyes glowing into the steel gray of Queen Freydis'... "One who has learned the advantages of 'association' with the one civilization that still believes in the ideals of Janet Rogers." \* \* Last year Darlanis had spoken much the same way in her campaign to convince the people of Dularn's "southern territories" that they would be better off under the rule of Queen Sharon of Orgon. Darlanis is a very "popular" monarch, even although "life" under her rule is not as "free" as one might wish it to be, mainly due to the fact that Darlanis herself has a hard time "understanding" these sort of things. A problem "compounded" by the fact that Queen Sharon herself is a "liberal" in the late 20th Century way. Lorraine is more a "conservative" by the same standard, although she herself has little actual "effect" upon Darlanis' "politics". The "revolution" mentioned in Lorraine's first book was more to "reestablish" Darlanis' rule over Californiathan anything else. It has been noted by some however that there is more "freedom" in Trelandar than in the rest of the Empire in the sense of there being less "restriction" of business and so forth. Sarn and Talon (Queen Dai is quite "liberal") are thus in a way quite like the United States of the last decade of the Twentieth Century. I suspect too that Darlanis' own political viewpoint is colored by the fact that she considers herself to be following in the "footsteps" of Janet Rogers, who is of course now almost "worshiped" by many people still despite the fact that she was more a benevolent dictator than any actual "champion of freedom" as such...

"She is a vicious bitch 'driven' by hatred of men," Freydis answered. "One who 'you' have exploited for your own purposes." Freydis obviously being the sort who spoke what was in her heart. I had to cover my face to hide from Darlanis the "smile" that her words brought forth, even Kathi turning away, giggling a bit now!

"My intention was to rid the area of the pirates who have infested it for centuries," Darlanis replied in cold level tones.

"While at the same time seeking whatever political advantage you could obtain from your relationship

with her," I pointed out. I was strongly tempted just then to point out that the only "difference" between her and Princess Tara was the fact that she was "blonde" and Tara "brunette". Darlanis is an extremely "ambitious" woman, one who believes she was destined to rule "all". She is a very "nice" person (the same was true of Janet Rogers), but one who believes that everything she does is "RIGHT". In this respect she reminds me of "TRUE BELIEVERS" and "BORN AGAINISTS" of my own era, who held that they were "right" and everyone else was wrong. Such "issues", of course, can be "decided" only on the battlefield. "And just how far 'south' did you plan to allow Queen Valeris to 'ride'?" I then challenged the golden Empress...

"You are a 'Dularnian'," Darlanis answered, not pleasantly.

"We hold to the ideals of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Tom Paine, those who founded the United States of America. People who believed in 'freedom', and who were willing to fight and if necessary die for it. Those who believed in their hearts that 'government' should be the 'servant' of Man, not its 'master' like the 'woman' whose 'ideals' you apparently believe in."

"I have 'heard' of such things," Queen Freydis breathed, her eyes holding the now blazing hot azure of Darlanis'. I was well aware of the fact that I was not a match for Darlanis in a duel, and the Empress was just about "mad" enough to go "challenge" me!

"You have a 'choice'," Darlanis snapped to Freydis, standing up, the rapid rise and fall of her breast leaving no doubts as to the emotions she felt burning through her body. "You can either decide to support me or watch your country be destroyed, turned into a lifeless wasteland as a memorial to your own stupidity."

"There is only one 'decision' for a woman of honor to make," Freydis snapped back, standing up, facing the Empress of California. I told Kathi then to have signals made to Sarnian Queen, that the Empress was leaving us for her own ship. Once again I feared that there might be warfare between Dularn and the Empire.

## Chapter Thirty

"You sent the other ships away," Queen Freydis said to me, her steel gray eyes burning into mine as we sat there at the long oak table, a number of rough looking men sitting there with us, such being Freydis' own advisors and military commanders. A number of slave girls, some of who I suspected were "Dularnian", being of "service" to us. The smoke from the cooking fires and the very "attire" of these people reminding me again of the Vikings of perhaps the Tenth or Eleventh Century. Their "culture" being quite similar except that they built a better grade of raiding ship, their fore and aft rigged schooners the equal of anything that had ever come out of a shipyard back home there in Arsana.

"They will be of 'better use' now somewhere else," I smiled. Neither the North Star or the Northlight were a match for Darlanis' steam frigates, and the Diana could easily "handle" anything that the Imperials possessed. I had a great deal of "confidence" in my "invincible battleship", which no weapon of this era could even "dent", the Diana being for all practical purposes invulnerable to all known weapons with the possible exception of cannons.



"Will Dularn send us better weapons, `military advisors'?" the "Viking" across the table from me asked. I had stripped the ships of all their small arms, both the compound bows and the crossbows, which might "help" just a bit against Queen Valeris...

"I can give you all the `military advice' you need," I smiled back. "You can't fight Queen Valeris `face to face', but you can use her own `tactics' against her just as she has used them against you. Strike at her rear, pick off small units of her forces, but always avoid a direct `confrontation' with her. You have ships, the ability to land forces from them, and I will see to it that the Imperials will not be able to hinder you now."

"In the past we have had much reason to fear Dularn," another spoke, sitting there, a great mug of beer there before him.

"As Dularn has `feared' you in return," I pointed out.

"Will your people go along with what I suggest?" I said to Queen Freydis as boatload after boatload of firewood was taken out to the Diana. I would stuff the ship full, stack it everywhere I could. I needed the "range" to be able to fight effectively against roving Imperial ships that I'd find to the north.

"My sex will," Freydis smiled. I knew that Dularnian slavers used to pick off "Northmen girls" whenever they could get the chance to do so. Such women were considered to be ideal servants back in Dularn, although the Imperial female slave is considered "better" at pleasing a master. "It is wrong to enslave us because of our sex," she added, reminding me muchly of Maris Marn.

"You might have to get a bit `bitchy'," I smiled back.

"`Enemy in sight'," the midshipman called down, the scouting fourth rate turning away, fleeing back to our protection. I had little doubt that Darlanis would fight. She had three steam frigates, three first rate triremes, all "54's", an equal number of lesser smaller biremes, perhaps a couple "third rates" (two masted fore and aft schooners), along with armed transports and everything else. The "fact" that the Imperials were "willing" to divide their forces such spoke much of what Darlanis' ultimate intentions here were. With "hostile" power to the north, to the south, Darlanis had no doubt hoped to "persuade" Queen Maris that the best "option" she had here was to "submit" to Imperial rule. No doubt Dularn would have been allowed to keep its own culture, much of its own laws, but we'd be only a "part" of the Empire, a nation whose Queen would have to take her orders from Darlanis...

"Signal my ships to carry out their instructions," Queen Freydis spoke from beside me, her steel gray eyes meeting mine. It would be up to me now, up to the Diana, the last "hope" Dularn had now to remain a free country. If Darlanis and her "puppet" managed to seize control of everything to the north of Dularn, then we'd eventually be forced into a battle we could never win!!

"General Quarters, Battle Stations, Rig for Ramming," I spoke, seeing the first lieutenant nod and then dash below to carry out my orders. I had given Daris Adara her orders earlier. "Maintain speed at three quarters," I said, seeing Sandra nod. I could see the Diana's ram, half in and half out of the water as she cut through the waves, a great metallic "sea monster" that I hoped would terrify the Imperials enough to give them pause now!

"Darlanis is now letting her triremes take the lead," Sandra said to me, peering through the still open hatches as the Diana approached the enemy fleet at three quarters speed. I thought of Darlanis, tall and golden. I respected the woman, admired her even if she was an enemy of the ideals for which Dularn

stood. I had to admit that Darlanis was meeting me as best she could, her triremes being the only vessels with any hope of matching the Diana in battle. Their iron shod rams the only weapon that could possibly now pierce the battleship's armored hull, two inches of steel behind six inches of oak there below the water line.

"Close all hatches, watertight doors, go to full power," I replied, Sandra pushing the "repeaters" to full ahead now, Queen Freydis standing there at my side, while a midshipman made herself "useful" by closing the control cabin's heavy steel hatches.

"Those galleys will be slower than us, but handier," Sandra commented, obviously thinking out herself what "attacks" that we might make here. They were coming for us under oars only, like a trio of great centipedes creeping across the calm ocean towards us. The sun bright in the sky overhead, a few clouds breaking the monotony of the azure blue. The Diana leaping forward with every "thud" of her engines, like a charger heading for battle...

"We will keep the caste codes," I said, seeing her nod. I would not use the flamethrowers unless Darlanis used them first. While such weapons were useless against the armored Diana, I knew well how "effective" such weapons were now against wooden ships. I had in any case no desire to kill any of Darlanis' own people.

"We will have to 'flank' them," I said, well aware that Darlanis was fully prepared to "sacrifice" her entire naval force if only she could destroy the Diana. The Empress well aware that as long as the Diana sailed the seas that her ambitions could never be. Lorraine's own battleship having struck an "uncharted" rock and sunk on its own maiden voyage only a short time before. While the Empire could eventually build another, for the time being the Diana was the "decisive" weapon here on the western coast of North America. The last "hope" Dularn had against Darlanis...

"Her steam frigates carry rams," Sandra reminded me then.

"Not much wind," I smiled, the sea almost as calm as glass.

"I think it is time that you took control," Sandra smiled.

I felt in "control", the spokes of the Diana's wheel in my hands, the three "repeaters" locked at full ahead at my side now. This would be a battle that would decide the destiny of a world. A "weapon" built by a man of the Twentieth Century against those of a more "primitive" era. Far behind us now the three ships of Queen Freydis were swinging out, moving to circle in, to strike at Darlanis' relatively "unprotected" rear. I thought of Maris Marn, of Carol, of a Queen standing there beside me, her trust in this strange "machine" she hardly understood. I felt Freydis place her hand on my shoulder. Her steel gray eyes meeting mine. She reminded me much of Lana Clarkson, who played just such a "role" in "BARBARIAN QUEEN" back in the 20th Century. If we won this battle, then Queen Valeris would be deprived of her Imperial support, and it was possible that here, in this time, Darlanis' hopes of an "Empire" that stretched from Alaskato Baja would be crushed. The Empire would still exist whatever happened here, but it would no longer be the danger to free men that it was now.

"Half a mile," Sandra spoke, her voice level, calm, much like my wife's had been when we'd sailed the North Star into combat. I could feel the sweat beneath my armpits, the interior of the control cabin sealed up like this growing warmer by the minute. The Diana was closing at a rate of twelve miles per hour, a bit over 11 knots, the best Daris Adara could give me...

"Turning now!" I breathed, spinning the Diana's wheel, the Diana coming around, the "thudding" of the

triple engines hardly noticed. The Diana now racing towards the west, the three galleys turning in pursuit, too slow by far to match our superior speed as I circled them. I now spun the wheel in the other direction, the Diana coming about again, the galleys trying to follow us about, their own missiles harmlessly striking against the Diana's armored hull, although the catapult shots were "noisy"...

"Looks like they fouled one another," Sandra said to me, the ram of the Diana parting the waves as we raced towards their vulnerable sterns. They had fired upon us, but such fire had been hardly noticed, the ballistae bolts and catapult shots harmless! It appearing that one Imperial galley had crashed into another...

"OhLys!" I heard Sandra breath, the Diana's armored ram smashing into the stern of one of the galleys, tearing, ripping into the vessel, the speed and weight of our battleship such that we tore right through the back of the vessel like a great shell!!

"Lots more of them yet," I answered, spinning the wheel, the Diana coming about again, a catapult shot thudding against the control cabin, fired from the leading steam frigate before us now as the Diana came charging in like Moby Dick at his tormentors...

"Nice day for it, Darlanis," I laughed, the Diana smashing into the stern of her flagship, smashing the propeller, the rudder, her steam catapults and quickfirers totally ineffective against the heavily armored Diana. I recalled how "proud" Darlanis had been of these "steam frigates" of hers, but the Dianawas truly a "battleship" in the full sense of the word. Perhaps not a vessel of the Twentieth Century as such, but the late Nineteenth perhaps I mused just then! I wanted to cripple Darlanis' navy, bring that haughty Imperial Empress to her "knees" before me. I had no desire to take life, as they were almost totally defenseless against the Diana. Freydis standing there, the very look on her face leaving no doubts as to her own feelings here!

"With this you could be master of the world," she spoke.

## Chapter Thirty One

"An `obsolete technology'," I said, the Diana facing off against one of the remaining galleys, the other apparently being too badly damaged from its collision to continue on fighting right now. A more "competent" commander than Darlanis might have used better tactics, butLorrainewas thousands of miles to the south, fighting a "holding action" against the Mexican Empire...

"You're going to hit ram to ram!" Freydis gasped, the Diana charging in at full power, the heavy "thud" of her engines speaking of a technology centuries ahead of what faced her now. At the last moment I turned the Diana slightly, letting the armored hull sheer off the galley's oars, thus crippling him and leaving him dead in the water. I then came back around and gently rammed both vessels, just enough so that they would need considerable repair before being usable again. Darlanis' other two steam frigates having gathered around the listing Sarnian Queen, the Empress no doubt now well aware that she had "lost" this battle!!

"I'm glad you weren't harmed," I said to Darlanis, the Empress nodding silently as she stepped aboard

the Diana. I think she had never realized what the Diana could "do" to other ships. How "helpless" any "normal" surface ship was against the Diana.

"I will order Queen Valeris to halt her advance," Darlanis replied in icy tones, her azure eyes burning straight into mine. Dularn had "won" this little "war" against the Imperial Empress without any loss of life on either side. I was proud of that...

"Dularn still wishes to live in peace with its neighbors," I said. "All of them, including Queen Valeris and her Free Women."

"I will inform Queen Valeris of `that'," Darlanis answered.

"Mankind, and now `Womankind' too," I said, looking at the three women there gathered around the table, the stern cabin's open hatches bringing in what breeze there was here in the bay, "Has yet to learn that there are better ways of resolving `disputes' than recourse to the sword. And that building better and better weapons such as this ship in the long run gains nothing."

"Seems it `settled' things pretty good in my eyes," Queen Valeris said, her attire even more "barbaric" than Queen Freydis', while Darlanis in her golden mesh added her own glittering beauty to the setting. "And unless this can sail across the land as well as it can on water I don't think you could stop me from freeing women from `masculine oppression' wherever I wish to go."

"Most women do not wish to be `free' from `masculine oppression'," Queen Freydis retorted, "And I don't think even Darlanis would tolerate your `activities' if you went that far `south'."

"Dularn believes in trade, not war," I said, "But we will fight to defend ourselves from anyone seeking us harm," I added. Valeris' dark eyes burning into mine as she nodded back in reply.

"Darlanis," I said, the Empress turning as the other two Queens now left, "I have a few words I'd like to say to you now."

"I think I have a few I'd like to say to you," she "smiled".

"I had a `dream' one time long ago, of a `united world', of a `world' without war, without slavery, without all the `evils' we have now," the Empress said, standing there, looking out one of the hatches at the still calm waters of the bay. "The `world' that Janet Rogers gave to Mankind for a brief few decades before the Lorr destroyed everything." I knew Darlanis "worshiped" Janet Rogers, having once even seen Lorraineas something of a "second Janet Rogers", the term so "common" in this time that it is often used in referring to any who seek high political office.

"I think that could be accomplished, although not by the `methods' you've used so far," I answered, looking up at her there, the simple "magnificence" of that tall golden perfection. She is sometimes thought to be the most beautiful woman who has ever lived. I consider it possible, although not too likely...

"Both Talon and Trelandar are `part' of the Empire, but yet they are free independent nations," Darlanis pointed out to me.

"Maris does not `trust' you," I said to the Empress in turn.

"She fears with good reason that I might `take' her crown," Darlanis smiled. "I am still considered by most the daughter of Tulis (the Queen of Dularn before Maris), and although I am as you know the

daughter of Aurora and Prince Paul, I still look upon myself as being 'Dularnian', as being a 'woman of Dularn'."

"You consider Dularn 'yours'?" I asked, seeing her nod.

"I was a Princess of Dularn," Darlanis said to me then.

"There are people in Dularn who consider you so," I said.

"I am not a 'competent' military leader," Darlanis smiled.

"Your use of the triremes against the Diana was as good as I could have done had our positions been reversed," I said to her. I didn't add that I wouldn't have "positioned" them so close together, which had been a serious mistake on her part, although I don't know if she was responsible for that "decision" or not now.

"You are 'in love' with me," Darlanis suddenly said to me.

"I admire you, but I fear Carol would not," I smiled now.

"Your wife is actually quite beautiful," Darlanis said.

"I am quite 'content' with her," I smiled back at her.

"In another year I will have a squadron of these, and I can build battleships far faster than you can," Darlanis said to me as she stood there looking out over the bay. In the long run, she explained, Dularn would "lose" to California, assuming that the taxpayers of California were willing to pay the heavy taxes needed for a force of battleships like the Diana. The Diana having "cost" the taxpayers of Dularn three thousand gold crowns. \* \* About \$1,000,000 dollars as close as I can determine here. I should note however that due to the differences in the standards of living and such one should multiply this figure by a factor of two to three to get some idea of the true cost of the battleship. I might note here that the average working man in Arsana is paid about one gold crown a month, which indicates a "value" for the gold crown of about eight to nine hundred dollars in 1991 money.

"I am 'aware' of that fact," I answered. At the present time it was possible in theory at least that I could wipe out the Imperial Navy, although just what "good" that would do Dularn was another question. My position, or rather Dularn's here was much the "same" as the United States faced just after World War Two, the Diana being the "atomic bomb" of this era in a certain sense.

"In the long run I win, you lose," Darlanis "smiled" at me.

"I don't think you are a 'dumb blonde'," I smiled in reply.

"You have won a 'battle', but I will win the 'war'," the Empress smiled, leaning against the armored back of the battleship.

"Is 'that' how you want to go down in history?" I asked her. "Just 'another' like Alexander, Julius Caesar, all the 'rest'?"

"Perhaps I have 'underestimated' you," she smiled back.

"Do we have enough fuel to reach Dularn?" I asked Daris that evening, such concerns always on my mind, given the way that the Diana burned fuel in her boilers. Darlanis would follow us to Dularn, and hopefully she and Maris could work something out now.

"At half speed there should be no problem," she smiled back.

"Inform the crew we will sail at dawn," I said, Sandra nodding. Some of Queen Valeris' women hadn't been so "hostile" towards men after all, our men had found. And there were also a fair number of Imperial Warrioreses who weren't all that "unfriendly" after having a "tour" of the Diana. We had, of course wisely kept the engine and boiler rooms guarded just to be safe.

"I think maybe I'll get married again," Sandra said to me, the sea breeze coming through the open control room hatches bringing with it the familiar smell of the sea. There was a bit of "weather", not enough to really "bother" things, but the Diana was throwing up a bit of spray, enough from time to time to get a few droplets in through the forward hatches. Behind us came one of Darlanis' steam frigates, the rest of her fleet to follow later as soon as repairs were made to those ships that had been damaged by the Diana's ram. There had been a couple of our own men burned on hot pipes when they stumbled against them during my first hard turn, but such burns had been quickly "forgotten" now that we were returning home, victorious from our first real battle! So everyone believed, although I knew better, being well aware that in perhaps only a year there would be a force of battleships sailing these very seas, and flying the Imperial flag from their flagstaffs. As Darlanis had said, we had "won" a battle, but she would "win" the war in the long run due to the simple economic facts of life. Dularn just didn't have the resources to ever compete in a naval "race" with the Empire of California. And the technology of Freydis' people was too primitive to be of much help here even if she was willing to "help".

"Life will go on," I said, standing there beside her.

"We did `win'," she said, looking at me curiously.

"Sitting Bull beat General Custer too," I smiled.

"I don't understand," Sandra said to me then.

"Perhaps it doesn't matter any more," I mused.

"You are a man who thinks deep thoughts," she smiled.

"I am a man who sometimes worries about things," I said.

"One must have `faith' inLys," Sandra said to me in turn.

"And in the Priestesses who `serve'Her ," I smiled back.

## Chapter Thirty Two

"You won a great victory," Carol said, held now in my arms. The great bulk of the Diana there floating over its reflection in the harbor. We had repainted the hull where the Imperial missiles had knocked the paint off. Other than that, there was no visible evidence that the Diana had ever been in battle. I looked down into my brownette's hazel eyes, felt the sweet curves of her body against mine through the uniforms we both wore now.

"You have given us `allies', `friends' halfway to Alaska," Queen Maris "smiled", standing there beside us, her eyes bright. I could hear the cheering of the people, the clang of the gongs. To everyone in Arsana this was the greatest victory they knew... To the people of Dularn I had actually "beat" Darlanis in battle!

"The `end' of an era," I "answered", holding my wife close. In a few more years Dularn would be another "ruled" by Darlanis.

"But we `WON'!" Queen Maris exclaimed, sensing my thoughts.

"So did Sitting Bull," I answered, seeing Carol nod in turn.

"The Empire can build battleships faster than we can," Carol explained. We had a "temporary" advantage over them now, but we both knew that would not last long. I recalled Darlanis' words. We had "won" a battle, but she would in time "win" the war here.

"You were `in harm's way', weren't you?" Carol said to me as I looked down at little Hope Simmons there in her crib, the baby happily cooing and making all those "noises" that a baby makes...

"I felt pretty `safe' in the Diana," I smiled back at her.

"I fear for what the future holds now," Carol replied to me.

"Darlanis wants to have me take the Diana down `south' to Mexico," I answered, looking down at Hope thoughtfully. "'Sink' the `Mexican Navy' for her so that she can make the Gulf of California into an `Imperial lake' for her steam frigates." I saw Carol nod, her hazel eyes burning into mine. The Empress' "ambitions" knew no bounds. She saw herself as a second Janet Rogers. I knew Darlanis even made the claim (which no one supported) that she was the "representative" of the old United States of America.

"She believes sincerely that all of Mankind would be better off under her rule," my wife now said, standing there at my side. Darlanis saw herself as "SHE-RA", as representative of the GOOD. Lorraine had once referred to her as "THE QUEEN OF LIGHT". Even in her description of God as she had seen Her there on Mars Lorraine had made the comparison of God as "looking like" Darlanis!

"Judging from what we know, Janet Rogers was the same way," I answered, recalling what I'd read of her. Unlike the dictators of the 20th Century, Janet had been a warm, loving and benevolent ruler of Mankind. A "Big Sister" who watched out for everyone...

"Maybe we'd all be `better off' under Darlanis," Carol replied thoughtfully. "At least there wouldn't be any more wars."

"I failed you," I said to Tais as she stood there at my side, the lovely white marble city of Shalimar spreading out before us. "Darlanis will eventually end up as Empress over all of western North America despite anything Carol and I can do now."

"She is not an evil woman," the First Priestess replied.

"But you didn't want her to be able to do this," I said.

"We are not `infallible'," Tais smiled back at me then.

"She is truly a `Queen of Light'," I spoke thoughtfully.

"She does live up to her moral standards," Tais observed.

"And she keeps the caste codes," I added with a smile then.

"Lys asks little of us but that we keep her teachings," the Priestess smiled. I was familiar with "THE BOOK OF LYS", with its contents. Unlike the "BIBLE" of Christians, Lysis is a merciful loving God who asks little of us but that we respect others. \* \* Apparently "Lys" does not "tolerate" other religions very much, or is it the Priestesses of Lys who are "intolerant"? I suspect that the "latter" is more likely the "truth" in this matter here.

"A copper for your thoughts," a woman's voice said to me as I sat there at the end of the dock, doing a little fishing alongside the Diana, a pair of beautiful azure eyes meeting mine as I looked up. The Empress of California now giving me a warm smile.

"`A penny for your thoughts' back in my time," I smiled back at her, the perfection of her well displayed by her golden mesh.

"I am not unfamiliar with the phrase," Darlanis smiled, sitting down beside me, slipping off her boots so that she might like me soak her feet in the water, and adjusting her skirt so that she didn't have to sit on the golden links that made it up. Like Carol and Californian women in general, she didn't have the "modesty taboos" that are more commonplace among Dularnian women.

"Gold doesn't make that comfortable a dress, does it?" I smiled in reply at her, the fish having so far ignored my worms.

"It does rather `pucker' the skin on my rear end," she laughed back, the silver links about her throat reminding me that she was a married woman. I have a "weakness" for blondes, and Darlanis was certainly the "queen of blondes" in every sense too.

"I hated having you as an `enemy'," I said to her then.

"I have suspected that for some time," she smiled back.

"It is just as well that we are both married," I said.

"I was thinking the exact same thoughts," she admitted.

"It must be `hard' for you," I said to her, seeing her nod.

"He has `Pussycat' (a slave girl), while I have only my `hand'," she answered, staring out over the still water towards the strait beyond. I recalled hearing other women make much the same comment. While most women do not have strong sexual drives, those who do suffer badly from the "double standard" that allowed married men to seek "relief" with prostitutes and slave girls while denying their wives the same in return. On the other hand sex for a woman is more an "emotional" experience than it is to a man. Carol



says that "male prostitutes" wouldn't be "practical". On the other hand does her "viewpoint" reflect that of all women?

"Found yourself some `company'?" I heard Carol's voice say, the clump of her boots there on the dock much like that of any other woman's. Women in this era having a "clip-clop" walk just like they did back in the Twentieth Century, doubtless due to the fact that high heels are still just as popular now as back then. Kathi following close behind, a "Hefnerian" dream in her leather.

"`Checking up' on your husband?" Darlanis smiled, getting up, standing there barefooted before my wife. The two women just above the "same" in height right now with Carol in her 3" heels.

"I don't have any `cause' for concern, do I?" Carol smiled.

"Darlanis and I were discussing the `double standard'," I said, giving my wife a smile as I sat there "fishing", the early autumn day pleasant and delightful. The Diana would be "ready" for sea in another couple days, ready to take its long voyage to the south, where in the Gulf of California we would prove to the Imperial Mexican Navy the "destructiveness" of a "battleship"...

"Which only proves that men still `rule' women," Carol said.

"Seems hard to `believe' when every country from Alaska to Baja is `ruled' by a woman," I smiled back at my brownette wife. \* \* Queen Valeris just south of Alaska, Queen Freydis further south, our own Queen Maris of Dularn, Queen Sharon of Orgon, Darlanis as Queen of Sarn and Empress of California, Queen Lorraine of Trelandar, Queen Dala Dai of Talon. Baja is ruled by Tara's son, Prince Jers, but his wife Lara has much to "say" about it. The Nevadas and Wyomings are "ruled" by men, but they are also "barbarians" and not considered "civilized" by any one now living in the societies that make up the western coast of North America.

"Only in Valeris' lands do women actually `rule'," Darlanis said. I supposed it was true as far as it went. I recalled that men of this time had "drawn a line" that no woman dared "cross". Everyone in Dularn still recalled the name of "mad" Queen Kathis, who was dragged from her palace by an enraged mob and hung in the public square! Her successor had been Tulis, who most believed to be the mother of Darlanis. No Queen since had dared go as far in the "cause" of women. Maris' outlawing of slave raids against other countries really had been "accepted" as a means of keeping peace with the Empire than anything else. It had not had much effect upon the supply of slave girls flowing into Dularn either!

"And she is a `dead end'," Carol commented, slipping off her own boots, her obvious intention being to join me there fishing. I recalled what Tais had "said". It was just as well that Queen Valeris had "obeyed" Darlanis' orders. Otherwise she would have "faced" a great gleaming cylinder floating in the sky, its laser turrets dealing death and destruction like the "wrath" of a god!

"Some things `change', some things remain the `same'," the Empress of California smiled, her wet feet leaving marks there on the dock. Carol giving me a kiss and a smile as she plopped herself down beside me, pulling her pants up as high as she could so that she might wet her own feet in the cool waters of the harbor. Darlanis whispering something to Kathi, who then followed her...

I might mention at this point, having "neglected" to do so before for some reason that my wife has had considerable "influence" on clothing styles here in Arsana since our arrival here in 2567. Her "fashion business" is extremely "profitable", (she does do the "designs") enough so that one of the Senators in the Senate recently questioned the fact whether my wife was actually paying enough "attention" to her duties as the Warlady of Dularn! As I mentioned in my previous book Carol did have a "fashion business" in the

20th Century, and while it was not something that made us "rich", Carol did make a decent profit from it. On the other hand the one she has "here" in Arsana has given us such an income that it now equals the pay we receive from the government. (This is why you now see teen age Dularnian girls in miniskirts.)

"I think you could 'fall' for 'that'," Carol said to me.

"She is a very beautiful woman," I admitted to my wife.

"And she uses that 'beauty' to her advantage," she said.

"Maybe there is a 'second Janet Rogers'," I said to Carol.

"I'm going with you on the Diana," my wife said to me then.

"Perhaps to 'keep an eye' on your 'property'?" I teased her.

"Especially when there is a 'blonde' like her around," Carol answered, giving me a smile, a delightful twinkle in her eyes...

### Chapter Thirty Three

"I just hope I'm still Queen of Dularn when you return," Maris said as we made our good byes there at the dock, the great bulk of the Diana there behind us like some strange sea monster. The Senate had not thought much of Maris' agreement to assist the Empire in its war against Mexico. I suspected that most of them did not understand the "realities of power" that existed now. I supposed I couldn't really "blame" them too much either. For the time being we possessed the one "ultimate weapon" against which there was no practical defense in the Diana. It was true that we would not possess this "advantage" over the Empire for long, as I knew there was already a second Imperial battleship under construction there in Trella to replace the one Tara's agent sank. I had watched Darlanis board the Arsana to Trella clipper that now ran between our two countries, a bit of "hope" for peace now.

"We're doing the 'right' thing," I said, Carol nodding.

"It shouldn't take us that long," my wife added then.

"I'll keep things 'safe' for you," Maris promised.

There was no cheering this time when we left Dularn.

"I'm glad you're here," I said to Carol, Sandra standing by the helmsman, the steady regular "thud-thud" of the Diana's three engines such a "familiar" sound that I hardly noticed it anymore.

"Hope should be all right with Kathi and that 'wet nurse' that Maris found for her," my brownette answered, my arm about her firm feminine body as she stood at my side, her ornate uniform as Warlady of Dularn seeming "fitting" now after everything. I knew if neither of us came back that Maris would act

as Hope's mother until she became of age, such being in the "will" that we had signed. Such is commonplace in this era, as has been noted. I was somewhat surprised that Carol would leave Hope right now, but my wife is not a woman who is extremely "maternal" anyway... \* \* Perhaps "that" is "why" we left Hope with Maris when we decided to return to our own time as I've written at the end of this...

"We'll be back before the first snow," I smiled, seeing my wife's hazel eyes meet mine. Ahead of us laid a voyage far longer than any the Diana had ever undertaken before, a distance of two thousand miles down the coastline of North America to the Gulf of California. Ten days sailing at seven and a half knots, although the Diana did not have the "range" to steam that far without "refueling", our maximum range at best being about fifteen hundred miles. We would refuel in Sarn, again in Trella, and then hopefully once again in La Paz. I wished to keep our coal supplies in "reserve" as much as I could, such "fuel" being more "efficient" than ordinary firewood. Lamp oil was even "hotter" burning than coal, but its cost made it rather impractical.

"Going to seem 'funny' fighting on the side of the Empire," Sandra "commented", voicing an opinion "shared" by many aboard. "Especially against a foe that's never 'bothered' us," she added.

"'Ours' is not to 'ask why'," Carol smiled, "But to 'do'..."

"Bother you, being away from Hope like this?" I asked Carol. My wife standing there looking out through the open stern hatches at the boiling wake, a "hint" of wood smoke there in the cabin.

"I am both a 'mother' and a 'wife'," Carol answered back. "And I have been neglecting the latter 'more' than I should do."

"It's a 'comfort' to have you here," I said to my love then.

"Darlanis was right about the 'double standard'," Carol smiled. "And there's no real reason for it any more either now."

"I don't think you'd get too many husbands to 'agree' with you," I smiled back, looking over the charts. We would stay well out, just within sight of land. Given the speed at which we were able to travel, it wasn't too likely that any spy could transfer information swiftly enough to the Mexicans that our arrival off their shores wouldn't come as a complete "surprise" to them now!

"I gave you Kathi to 'use', and all I had was my 'hand'," Carol answered, turning about, facing me, her features in shadow against the glare of the sea. I suspected that this had been "bugging" Carol for some time, or she wouldn't have spoken so. I suspected that this might have something to do with her coming along on this voyage and leaving our little girl back home now...

"A man can 'use' a woman without feeling an emotional commitment to her, but few women can enjoy sex without it," I said. There have been "kept" men, but no actual "male prostitutes" as such. Such "men" in the 20th and 21st Century being homosexuals. I have no doubt that such practices still exist in this time, but they do not seem to be "common", perhaps due to the fact that in this era heterosexual sex is more "available" than it was in the 20th Century due to the existence of legalized prostitution in all countries of which I have knowledge, including those ruled by the nomadic Nevadas and Wyomings. It is noteworthy here to note that legalized prostitution existed in the early 20th Century before women obtained the vote. Women of course being no fools did all they could to "outlaw" it for very much the same reasons that any union member of the same era always opposed "scab" workers. This is clearly "understood" in this era, especially in Dularn, where as I have mentioned earlier, men even executed one of their own Queens for "trespassing" where she should not have done. It is noteworthy here too that "feminism" in the sense it

was known in the 20th and 21st Centuries is not "tolerated" to any degree. Lorraine herself notes this in her first book, as does Darlanis in hers. The "hostility" towards Queen Valeris in Dularn was in part caused by the "fact" that she was an "extreme" feminist who believed that the world would be better off without men in it. Much like the Women of Mars, who hold to much the same beliefs...

"I could take a `lover'," Carol smiled, the tone of her voice leaving little doubt that she was "teasing" me a bit here. Carol is the sort of a woman who requires an emotional commitment to be able to actually "enjoy" sex with a man. It was this very "commitment" to her that was the reason that she became my wife.

"Probably `raise' a few eyebrows in Arsana," I smiled back.

"I am not considered `unattractive'," my brownette said.

"Your figure still is pretty good," I observed in return.

"I fear I would not be as `good' in a bikini," she said.

"That is a matter of `opinion'," I smiled back at my wife.

"I have `stretch marks' and my breasts sag a bit now," Carol smiled. That was true, although I suspected that after Hope was weaned that Carol's breasts would doubtless return to "normal"... I had noticed that my wife seemed a bit "insecure" about herself.

"I wouldn't say that you're `over the hill' quite yet," I answered, Carol stepping forward, undoing her uniform coat, the "jut" of her breasts beneath the thin silk blouse she wore leaving little doubt that she was still a very "attractive" wench...

"My nipples are still too `tender' for clips," she smiled. I knew she was wearing a bra since otherwise she "drooped" now.

"You could probably stand to be `milked'," I answered her.

"They do feel rather `full'," my wife admitted to me then. It was necessary to keep Carol "milked" so that her milk wouldn't "dry" up before we returned to Arsana. A breast pump being used for this purpose, some women "milking" themselves so that they can "bottle feed" when necessary, although "nursing" is much more common and no doubt is "better" for the baby, it is believed now.

"That one's `dry'," Carol breathed, sitting in my lap, naked to the waist. I took the glass breast pump from her left breast, emptied out the milk it contained and placed it over her right. The milk then spurting in a dribble from her nipple as I drew the plunger back to create a vacuum. A woman's milk is far "richer" than cow's milk, and has a high "fat" content. This is why it is perhaps "better" for a baby than anything else as it also contains certain "trace elements" vital for the baby's own health.

"If we had coffee we could use it for `cream'," I smiled.

"I bought some in Arsana before we left," she announced.

"Just like being at home," I spoke, Carol nodding back.

"The one thing we can never have," my wife spoke softly.

"Thanks to my allowing Tais to use that 'Portal'," I said.

"It wasn't your fault and I doubt that the Priestesses would ever 'trust' us to the point that they would allow us to return back to our own time," Carol answered, kissing me gently then... \* \*They "did", and we've never been "troubled" by the Martians. I have written this book in the knowledge that you will not believe the "truth", that you will think of it as only "science fiction". It is perhaps just as well that you don't "believe" what I write. That is one of the reasons we left Hope for Queen Maris to raise.

"You're still the 'best' wife any man could have," I said to Carol, holding her in my arms, the steady beat of the Diana's engines only a "background noise" that one hardly even noticed now.

"I may not have 'youth' any more, but I do have 'experience'," Carol smiled back, gently touching the swollen spot on my lip that she'd bitten as she'd arched and scratched beneath me.

"You're still 'better' than Kathi is," I told her in turn. It had been much like "old times" back in the Twentieth Century.

"Kathi 'promises' more than she can 'deliver'," Carol said. "What makes a woman really 'good in bed' isn't having big breasts or a big behind, or even blonde hair, but the willingness to 'let go' and 'give' of herself to her lover." I knew she was right...

"Weather's getting up a bit," Sandra said to me, indicating the barometer, which had dropped considerably since earlier this afternoon. We were a day out from Arsana, a couple hundred miles south now. To the east would be Orgon, the northernmost part of the Empire. The wave "pattern" now indicated a storm to the west, which would be a bit of trouble given our present course as the waves would strike the Diana from the side, which was the worse place to hit given the battleship's own "top heaviness". I was well aware that if the Diana was ever rolled more than forty five degrees from the horizontal that she'd probably go "over"...

"We'll make for the bay right here," I replied, pointing it out on the chart, telling Sandra to go to three quarters, which would increase our speed from seven and a half knots to about nine. I would ride out the storm safely at anchor in this Imperial controlled bay, and then proceed onwards after it was over.

## Chapter Thirty Four

"Going to get 'nasty'," Sandra said as the Diana passed between the fingers of land into the bay beyond. To the "north" was Dulam, to the "south" was Orgon, a part of the Empire. It is called "Salmon Bay" in this era, but was known as Gray's Harbor back in the 20th Century. What was once the little city of Aberdeen now is only ruins caused by the aftermath of The War of 2047. There are several fishing villages and a lumbermill, but nothing of a major size. There was once a large Imperial encampment here, but that was abandoned after the Treaty of Arsana...

"Ships at anchor to the south," the midshipman on duty called down through the open hatch that lead to the forward quickfirer turret. "Looks like an Imperial fleet of some sort!"

"Same bunch we met up there to the north when Darlanis got a bit `sticky' about things," Sandra announced, using a telescope. Obviously they had made repairs and had come this far south before coming earlier to this bay to "hide" from the storm outside.

"I suggest that we make sure we stay on the `Dularnian' side of the bay," Carol spoke, her tone that of the Warlady of Dularn.

"Imperial ships are signaling one another, the galleys are taking down their masts!" the midshipman yelled down at us then!!

"BattleStations!" I snapped, pulling the lever that sent the warning signal through the ship. The hatches being closed down the Diana's flanks, Sandra going to the control room hatches and closing them, the Diana now coming to full battle readiness!!

"How deep is the water here?" Carol asked, interrupting my train of thought. That could be a "problem" right here too now!!

"There's plenty of water, no problems there," Sandra answered, the Diana now swinging around to face her possible enemy.

"We're not at war with the Empire," Carol said to me then.

"Someone forgot to tell them that, your `ladyship'," Sandra replied back, her blonde hair like a halo around her head in the half light of the interior of the control cabin. It was growing dark outside, the lightning flashing in the sky to the west now.

"As long as they stay where they are, we will do the same," Carol answered, her voice level, that of the Warlady of Dularn.

"We will however keep steam up on all three boilers," I added, seeing my wife nod. We could hold our position with the engines. While the interior of the Diana might get a bit "uncomfortable" all "buttoned up" as we were, I saw no other alternative right now until we found out what the Imperials were up to.

"I will require a boat, half a dozen men to row it," Carol said then, the tone of her voice leaving no doubts that she was planning to be rowed over to the Imperial fleet gathered there...

"Not `good' being out in a storm like this, your ladyship," one of the oarsmen said to my wife as they rowed her over towards the waiting Imperial fleet, her ornate uniform now covered against the coming rain by a raincoat. The lightning flashing in the sky overhead, the droplets of rain driven by the growing wind all spoke of danger. Carol was well aware that an open boat like this was not the safest place to be in a thunderstorm, but it was a "risk" she was willing to take if she could prevent a conflict.

"I suggest you save your breath and put your backs into it," Carol "smiled" back, the boat already rolling there in the waves. The slap of the waves now throwing a bit of spray into the boat.

"Aye, aye, my lady," the sailor muttered, doing so then.

Carol leaped up from the gunwale of the Diana's boat, dashing up the slippery rain wetted gangway, aware of the faces of the men staring down at her. The crack of the lightning and the rumble of the thunder like great guns adding a bit of "background" to the scene that she would have happily done

without...

"I am Carol Simmons, Warlady of Dularn," Carol spoke as she stepped aboard Sarnian Queen, the preparations for battle aboard the big steam frigate leaving no doubts now as to the Imperial's plans. The Imperial admiral nodding, standing there in the rain, the water now dripping from his hat, his raincoat. He was an older man, no doubt one well experienced in the "ways" of the sea. She was very much "aware" of the fact that she was but one woman among hostile men. Men who often viewed women in terms of chains and slave collars. Only the "caste codes" and the system of "honor" of this era protected her now, not the blade at her hip!

"'Heard' of you," the Imperial admiral answered in reply.

"We are here at the request of your Empress," Carol spoke, reaching under her raincoat for the orders from Darlanis herself.

"Come below," he answered, the rain pouring down upon them.

"Seems 'odd' that you'd help us now," the admiral said, giving the documents back to my brownette as she sipped at her wine. A slave girl, clad in the common short brief shift of the Empire now quietly watching, a gleaming collar of metal about her neck.

"Most people in Dularn think the 'same'," Carol smiled back.

"Wouldn't have stood much of a chance against 'that'," he smiled, my brownette nodding, her hazel eyes meeting his in turn. With her raincoat off the Warlady was impressive in her uniform.

"Dularn has never sought war with the Empire," Carol spoke.

"Darlanis has 'dreams' of being the 'second Janet Rogers'," he admitted, seeing my wife nod in reply as she sipped at her wine. Her hazel eyes over the rim of the goblet meeting his own.

"Had a 'bad childhood' that she's still trying to make up for," Carol smiled in reply. "Tulis should have never 'disowned' her like she did though." The thought going through Carol's mind just then that as Tulis had "known" that Darlanis was not really her own daughter, perhaps the Queen had not looked upon her quite the same as she would have had Darlanis been of her own "blood"!!

"There was a 'rumor' I heard once that Darlanis wasn't actually Tulis' daughter anyway, but some 'bastard' that...," the admiral answered, the rest of his words forgotten as a midshipman knocked and entered the cabin in reply to his command to "enter".

"The Diana is 'signaling' us and has come about facing us," the midshipman spoke, eying Carol as if she was some "alien"...

"Send 'thirty' in standard code, nothing else," Carol spoke.

"Stand down from battle stations, and drop both forward anchors," I ordered, seeing the signals now from Sarnian Queen. I saw Sandra nod, an expression of relief going over her features. "Keep steam up on number two boiler, and warmth on the others," I added, the "boom" of the thunder like distant guns in the cabin.

"Looks like our boat is putting off from Sarnian Queen," I heard Sandra say, the captain suddenly

jerking back as a thunderous "BANG" seemed to hit the Diana, a strange eerie flickering bright light for just an instant seeming to illuminate every thing while I felt my hair stand on end and an electrical shock course through me! It was obvious that the Diana had been struck by lightning! Then I thought of the midshipman standing on the top of the quickfirer turret! Had she been struck by the bolt?

"Signal Carol to return to Samian Queen," I said to Sandra, climbing the ladder to the quickfirer turret. "She can stay on aboard until the storm is over," Sandra doing so with the carbide lamp commonly used for such purposes. As it was now quite dark, I had no doubts that my wife would see the message I sent to her.

I felt for a pulse in her throat as I pressed my lips down upon the girl's, her wide open blue eyes staring sightlessly up into the rain, and feeling none, I tore open her clothing and pushed hard down on her naked chest with the heel of my hand as I started artificial respiration. I felt "responsible" for her, as I should have "withdrawn" her from her station when the lightning started to get bad, the rain pouring down upon me unnoticed just then in my attempt to save her... WHY GOD HAD I FORGOTTEN HER???

"Get the Physician!" I cried to Sandra as her head appeared in the hatchway. Turning back then to the luckless girl whose life I had been so thoughtless to risk for no good reason at all!

"LYS, OR WHO EVER YOU ARE, SPARE HER LIFE FOR ME!" I begged in my thoughts, breathing for the girl, forcing her heart to beat with the heel of my hand against her bare chest just under her young still girlish bare left breast, the golden clip that covered her nipple pressing up against the palm of my hand. I was aware that another lightning bolt could strike the Diana at any time, that we were the "highest point" on the ship in a sense...

"Here," the Physician said, shoving a hypo into her breast, her eyes meeting mine. As long as we could force her heart to beat, her lungs to provide oxygen to her blood, she would live...

"I've 'wasted' her life," I said, weeping now, the tears unnoticed, the girl's blonde hair dark in the rain. I had "closed" her eyes, aware that it was my own "fault" that she was dead now!

"I'm getting a pulse," the Physician answered, soaking wet like me now in the rain. "Weak, but its there," she said to me.

"Admiral," the girl breathed, her eyes looking up into mine. I took her hand, held it. Just then naval discipline meant nothing to me. Susanna Anders giving me a smile, telling me that she needed her rest. "There was this great big flash of light, and I saw myself lying there on the deck, the entire Diana below me. Then you came and 'worked' on me, and I saw this very beautiful woman come and say to me that I had to go 'back', that I couldn't 'stay' with her even though I so wanted to, she was so beautiful, so nice that I didn't want to ever go back to 'here' again..." I nodded, well aware of the description, of its "meanings" here...

"I asked Lys for your life, and She gave it to me," I said.

## Chapter Thirty Five



"Any `excitement' while I was gone?" Carol asked the next morning as she came aboard after spending the night aboard Sarnian Lady thanks to the storm that had nearly taken a young girl's life. The Imperial ships now leaving to sail back south, to return to their home port in Sarn. The Diana had steam up now on all three boilers, the anchors drawn up short as we prepared to follow. The doctor had said that the midshipman would recover.

"Midshipman Anders got struck by lightning," I said to her.

"I see," Carol replied, the look on her face telling much.

"She's alive, and the doc says she'll be able to resume her duties in another day or so," I smiled back. I didn't believe my wife would "understand" what Anders had told me. I had no doubts now that God, Lys, She, or whoever is the Supreme Being does exist. The "description" was similar to that which Lorraine gave.

"She was `lucky'," Carol smiled, giving me a quick kiss.

"Sarn," Sandra said, giving me a smile. We had caught up with and passed the Imperials heading back down south. The superiority of a steam ship over sailing vessels was without doubt...

"We'll dock at the Imperial palace dock," I smiled to her.

"Hope those Imperials know `why' we are here," Sandra said.

"If we'd had `this' last year..." Carol mused thoughtfully.

"And what would we have done after we destroyed their navy?" I challenged her. Dularn could never have defeated the Empire. Nor did Dularn have the "resources" to match the Empire battleship to battleship. "Darlanis would have `won' the war anyway."

I could hear the bollards creak as the ropes took up the strain, the Diana coming to rest alongside the dock that had once been "home" to another ship, one now only a memory. A ship that I had destroyed over a year before with my Twentieth Century knowledge of weapons. Sarnian Lady had been the pride of the Imperial Navy, the flagship of its beautiful golden Empress. I had taken a fire pump, sprayed crudely refined oil on it, and set the ship afire. I recalled the "look" in Darlanis' eyes as she had climbed aboard the stolen cargo vessel of Lorraine's. Like those of Hiroshima she had "seen" the "future". She'd been like tentative Americans who had suddenly faced Gatling guns. For the time being the Diana was the "ATOMIC BOMB" of this era, a weapon against which there was no defense. No nation anywhere in the world had a ship like the Diana. Less than a month before I had taught the Imperials the consequences of "facing" a "battleship". Of pitting their own Twelfth Century technology against that of the late Nineteenth. Had the Priestesses allowed it, the Diana would have mounted breech loading cannon firing explosive shells. Even the frigates and such of the Eighteenth Century would have been "helpless" against the Diana, whose armor would have turned cast iron shot, and whose ram would have pierced their hulls. I am reminded of Jules Verne's "20,000 LEAGUES UNDER THE SEA". The "design" of the Diana is much like that famous "submarine" in that it looks much like some strange "monster" from the "deep"...

"There's Darlanis," Carol said, that big blonde coming now.

"No doubt we'll have to get all dressed up," I smiled back. Darlanis would doubtlessly hold some sort

of a "ball" for us now. The mere fact that Dularn's battleship was fighting on her "side" no doubt meant a lot to that tall beautiful regal Empress right now. Such a "victory" meant a great deal now to her politically.

I could feel the "warmth" of Darlanis' body against mine through her thin silken gown as we danced, the big blonde as before taking the "lead", her azure eyes glowing right into mine. Such gowns tend to be quite "revealing", and as Imperial women do not ever wear anything underneath them but just clips and a strap, one is also quite able to "see" quite a bit of the woman. This is probably why most Dularnians consider the Californian woman as being more "sexual" than the women of their own country.

"I think my husband finds your wife quite fascinating," the Empress said to me. She'd flown Lorraine's airplane, Black Lady, all the way to the battlegrounds, stopping in Talon for fuel, and had returned shortly with her husband before the Diana arrived...

"Carol is a woman of whom it may be said that she has no 'doubts' about herself as a 'woman'," I smiled back at Darlanis.

"I am surprised that she was willing to leave your daughter in Dularn this early," Darlanis answered, pulling me around with her. I supposed she was a good dancer, but I'm not used to dancing with a woman who "leads", and I did have a bit of trouble.

"Carol is 'more' than just a 'mother'," I pointed out.

"I think Serak is 'aware' of that fact," Darlanis smiled.

"Aurora has a beautiful 'daughter'," I said to her. \*Her reaction much as if I had suddenly slapped her right in the face! \* This is not public knowledge, I should note at this point. The novel of Darlanis' "adventures" that I read in the 20th Century was never published in the 26th, a more "abridged" version being known here where Auroras just considered a good "friend" of the Empress. However, there are "rumors" that have existed for years that Darlanis was "not" actually Tulis' daughter, but the child of a mistress of Prince Paul, who is of course Darlanis' father.

"I will deny it if you speak it," Darlanis warned me then.

"Pay more 'attention' to your husband then," I "suggested".

"I am 'enjoying' myself more than I thought," Carol said. There was a "brightness", a "sparkle" to her eyes that I hadn't ever seen before. She was wearing a gown in the Imperial style, and the sensual curves of her body were well displayed by it too! The dark green silk clinging to every curve like a second skin...

"You might consider 'behaving' yourself before you get all of us into trouble," I pointed out. Few women of this era will "tolerate" the sort of things that were so "commonplace" back in the late 20th and the 21st Centuries before The War of 2047 A.D. The women of this era tend to view their husbands as "property".

"Are you 'jealous'?" Carol giggled softly, obviously having had "more" to drink than she should have done under the circumstances. She was wearing a new "style" of clips, shaped somewhat differently than those commonly worn, and a "strap" of silk. The "effect" was that of being completely "nude" underneath her gown.

"Darlanis could get pretty `nasty' if you go too far," I warned. Many wives will "challenge" a mistress here in this era. And although Carol is a fantastic swordswoman, she is not really a "match" for Darlanis, who is almost on a "par" with Lorraine...

"I suppose she `could', couldn't she," Carol answered a bit more soberly this time. I don't think my wife had intended to do anything "more" than just "tease" Darlanis a bit, but Darlanis is not the sort of a woman that you ever want to "tease". Neither is Lorraine for that matter, I might "note" here at this point.

"I think I will keep you `company' for the rest of the night," I said, seeing Carol nod. She would doubtlessly be quite a "delight" in bed, especially after everything she'd done here.

\*\*\*\*\*

"Trella," I said, seeing Sandra and Carol nod. At a steady two hundred miles a day the Diana did cover a lot of "ground". I supposed we weren't as "fast" as a sailing ship in one sense, but on the other hand the strength or direction the wind blew made little difference to the Diana. It was noticeably warmer now, a "hint" of what it would be like when we reached the Gulf of California. As long as we could keep the hatches open it didn't make that much "difference", but "closed up" was something else yet...

"A little `different' than last time," Sanda Talen smiled, her dark eyes having missed little about the Diana there at dock. The Prime Minister of Trelandar being Lorraine's "right hand" in more ways than one. She is a very "competent" woman, one who I have no doubt is fully competent to "rule" Trelandar if anything ever happens to Lorraine Richards, now the Queen of Trelandar and Warlady of the Empire of California. So far the Diana had been doing well, Daris Adara having told me that there were no problems with the engines or anything else. We did keep a good guard while in port, being well aware from what Darlanis "believed" now that an agent of Princess Tara had been "responsible" for the sinking of the Imperial battleship on its maiden voyage. The Princess of course being well aware of what battleships could do. She was now "Warlady" of Mexico I'd heard, the Emperor of Mexico having wisely decided that his armed forces needed "leadership". The woman is extremely "competent", and quite "dangerous" too.

"Sandra, see that everyone understands that `no one', and I repeat, `no one' is allowed aboard without my written orders," I said to the captain. Sandra nodding, well aware of my "orders".

"Military secrets?" Sanda said, her dark eyes meeting mine.

"Tara's agents," I smiled, seeing her nod in reply back.

"We are barely `holding' our own," Sanda said as we ate dinner. Unlike Darlanis Sanda had not made a big "fuss" about us...

"I would think with Talon's help that you'd be able to at least `win' the war on the ground," my wife "ventured" in reply. Talon being the "home" of the great Tarls, a gigantic bird that is capable of carrying a small woman on its back into battle. In 2566 Lorraine "used" such birds against Dularn, and demonstrated the power of "air superiority" in a way that no one ever forgot too! Later on Queen Dala Dai of Talon had "second thoughts" about using her "air force" in such a way, but it was "proof" what the Warlady of the Empire was capable of. This "demonstration" of her "air power" later led to her shooting by Prince Darl Jord, who we now know was a close "associate" of Princess Tara...

"The birds are only `effective' against massed infantry," the Prime Minister of Trelandar answered. Queen Dala had used the birds up against Darlanis a number of years ago, putting a "halt" to the Empress' attempts to take over other countries by the use of her military power. Due to the marriage of

Lorraine's foster daughter Gayle to the Prince of Talon, Queen Dala decided to throw in with the Empire, probably feeling that such a "move" would be to Talon's ultimate advantage later on as it has been.

"Another war that got started over 'female slavery'," Carol suddenly now snapped! Both the Imperials and the Mexicans having "raided" each other for women for years. Eventually things had reached a "boiling point" and war had broken out between the two countries. Much as it had between Dularn and Californiabefore.

"Over men wanting to 'own' women," Lady Sanda smiled back.

"Queen Maris of Dularn has taken the first step against it," my wife replied. "Now if Darlanis and you could do the same..." I knew that Freydis had decided to "follow" in Maris' footsteps. Whether or not those who ruled the Empire of California could do the same was another "question". I recalled the "fate" of Queen Kathis, who had been "executed" by an enraged mob for her own actions in behalf of women. The men of this time tend not to be the sort of "wimps" as was known in the 20th Century. AsLorraine herself once pointed out, here men "have drawn a line", and no woman who values her life dares cross it, not evenQueens...

"Not evenLorrainedares....," Sanda answered her softly.

"If women will stand together....," Carol snapped hotly.

## Chapter Thirty Six

"It isn't 'funny' Bob!" Carol snapped at me rather unpleasantly I thought. No doubt I had been "smiling" just a bit here as I sat and watched while sipping at my Trelandarian wine. The wines of Trelandar being considered to be the "best" you can get. Most of these wines are not very "strong", although you can obtain those that are "fortified" and are more like a "brandy"...

"This isn't the Twentieth Century and you aren't dealing with the sort of 'wimps' who lived back then," I answered. "The men of this era would be just as 'willing' to 'stretch' your neck as they did poor Queen Kathis' back there in Arsana sixty years ago." There had been "talk" of a force of "volunteers" to go fight against Queen Valeris and her Free Women. Maris had stopped it, but it had taken everything she had to stop it then. The Queen having used the "excuse" that it would provoke a war with the Empire of California, which I suppose was "possible"...

"Not if enough women were to stand together against them!" Carol snapped, the "fire" showing now in those lovely hazel eyes. I supposed Carol was thinking of the sorts of things that women did back in the 20th Century. Such "worked" against the "liberals" of that era, but would be completely ineffective in this era where men were men and women had to realize that fact as "TRUTH"! This is an era where people are willing to overthrow governments! And in this era the "armed civilian" can be almost as "effective" as regular military troops in battle. The Dularnian longbow (now obsolete) has kept Dularnian Queens from getting certain "ideas". This is perhaps "why" Dularn has the "culture" that it does now. The "concept" of "anti-weapons laws" is almost unknown here too. Even when Darlanis conquered Trelandar the people had their own weapons. The Empress having concerned herself only with those who might revolt against

her as eventually did Sanda's people...

"We would see a final 'world war', this time between men and women, and in the long run women would lose," I said to her. "As you recall Queen Valeris lost in her clash against the Wyomings." This had been the first time that Valeris had come up against someone with "modern" military weapons and military "advisors". Despite her "help" from the Imperials she had lost that battle to the Wyomings, who unfortunately did not pursue their victory. "I 'suspect' that such a 'war' took place as part of the 'aftermath' of The War of 2047, which is why female slavery exists today."

"He is 'right', despite whatever you wish to think," Sanda smiled. "As a Scribe I can assure you that the men of this time are not anything like the 'men' of the time from which you came. They are willing to destroy their own civilizations rather than let them fall into the hands of those whom they do not 'trust'."

"The 'wimp' is 'extinct'," I now smiled up at my brownette.

"And 'sexism' reigns supreme," my wife snapped right back.

"The societies of your time were 'overcivilized'," Sanda commented. "They were 'weak', unable to 'resist' anyone who was willing to make 'demands'." The "same" was not true today as my wife knew quite well. Carol had already fought one sword duel in Dularn over an "issue" much like this. While she had "won", I had warned her never to get herself in such a situation again...

"Lady Sanda was 'right', regardless of what you think," I said, watching Carol get undressed for bed. "You know what happened in Dularn when Queen Maris tried to go too far." I saw my wife nod. Maris had escaped with her life, but only by fleeing to the sea, taking command of the North Star. "Feminists" don't live long in this society unless they are Queens or like Lorraine, such swordswomen that no one is "willing" to take them on. And even then there are "limits" that no woman ever dares cross. Those who "do" will find a crossbowman on some rooftop waiting...

"No 'civil rights', no 'human rights', and everything is 'settled with the sword'," Carol answered, removing her clothing. The clips and strap a woman wears here in this era make her in my eyes more "sexy" and "provocative" than if she was totally nude. Carol is "responsible" for such things, a "fact" few know about.

"A society where you 'earn' your place," I answered back. A woman can rise high in Dularnian or Imperial society, but she has to "earn" her position, it is not given to her as a "right" here.

"A social order with no 'laws' but what men decide to have," Carol said, standing there at the window, looking out over the city below there in the moonlight. "Where the concept of 'civilization' as we once knew it is merely words in a history book. Where in the final run 'brute force' now decides everything..." I admired the sensual jut of her ass, the way that the moonlight outlined her. Carol is still a provocative and sensual delight.

"As it has now for four hundred years," I pointed out then sitting on the edge of the bed, waiting for Carol to come to bed. Wondering what she would be "like" when she did after all this.

"Maris did manage to 'outlaw' slave raids," my wife spoke.

"No doubt that is 'something'," I said. Maris had of course done so for reasons that had nothing to do with slavery as such. Darlanis had a similar law, and for the same political reasons. Slavery itself is most likely "untouchable" by any monarch now.

"Why do men enslave women?" Carol suddenly asked, turning. "Take us by force like animals and sell us like one would dogs?"

"Deep in every man's heart he wants to `own' his woman," I said. "'Own' her completely in the sense she is totally `his'." There were men in the 20th Century who looked upon their wives in just that light. Even to the point that after a divorce they still felt as if they "owned" the woman, that she was "property". This accounted for the incidents one read about in the newspaper.

"We are human beings, not `animals' to be bought or sold," Carol said, standing there in the moonlight streaming in through the window. She was a woman that any man would fight to possess.

"You have a point," I smiled, not wishing to argue with her.

"Would you like to `own' me?" Carol teased, standing there.

"You are a `wench' worth many gold crowns," I said to her.

"But you didn't have to `pay' for me," Carol pointed out.

"One `buys' a woman with other things than gold," I said.

"Tie my hands before you have me tonight," she answered.

"How do you feel?" I asked, midshipman Anders smiling back.

"I don't think I want to be on top of the Diana in another thunderstorm," she smiled. She had come close to dying up there. Only my knowledge of life saving techniques had saved her life.

"You came very close to having me read the last rites for you," Carol said, standing there at my side in the control cabin. The steady beat of the Diana's triple engines hardly noticed now.

"Never seen a ship like that before," midshipman Anders said to me, lowering the telescope and handing it to me. We were off the coast of Baja, a long ways south of Trella now. The vessel in question was not an Imperial, nor anything else but "Mexican"! The sea was calm, the breeze warm and weak. The vessel ahead of us oddly rigged, a combination of square and fore and aft sails.

"Must have gotten around the Imperial blockade," I said.

"Put a shot across his bows," I said, the Diana now at "Battle Stations". There had been no reason to increase speed yet. In order to fire our catapults we had to keep our hatches open. I heard the "thump" of the port forward steamcatapult, saw the splash there in the water ahead. The ship swinging about, now coming broadside to us a quarter of a mile away. The sudden broadside taking us by surprise. The catapult missiles all firebombs! Two striking the Diana, one forward, the other aft of the control cabin. The "hit" forward striking right into the hatch!

"Fire!" I heard the yells, the smoke rising from the hatch!

"Turn us away!" I snapped, following Carol to the main deck!

"Came right through the hatch!" the lieutenant cried, her eyes a bit "wild" just then as she directed the fire

control party to do what they could. The flames fortunately containable although we'd lost the use of the port forward catapult, the quickfirer and flamethrower on that side and more importantly the life of one of the crew who hadn't survived the blazing oil that had splashed about! I saw a woman, her hair almost burned away, her eyes filled with agony as she was half carried towards the stern, her burned clothing sticking to her seared flesh. I saw a man shake his head. Even the Physician would be able to do little...

"Get that fire totally out!" I ordered, the choking smoke now slowly being cleared away by the ventilation fans. I supposed it had been a "lucky" shot, but it had damaged the ship! We had lost one man to the fire, and had three badly burned too! I recalled the woman, the gun team leader. The look in her eyes.

"Now it's 'pay-back' time!" I snarled, thrusting the three "repeaters" to full ahead, the Diana leaping forward like an enraged beast after the ship. The Mexican was making a "run" for it, but it would do him little good now! He fired another barrage of fire bombs as we closed with him, our remaining forward quickfirers firing back. The flames once again coating the Diana, although they did no harm, as with the hatches all closed, we were proof against such weapons. I drove the Diana's ram squarely into his hull near the stern, and then backed out, the starboard flame thrower now spraying burning oil over everything! Sandra standing there watching, her eyes filled with horror at the sight although she didn't say anything about it to me then.

"She didn't make it," Carol said to me. We now had two dead. I recalled her eyes, the agony in them. The Physician had done what she could, but her burns had been too intensive. The other man had been just a burned husk when we finally got the fire out. There had been some minor internal hull damage, but nothing serious due to the quick actions of our fire control. I had gotten my "vengeance", but it didn't bring back the lives of those who had died. There had also been a certain psychological effect upon the crew. The Diana was no longer so "invincible".

"We will have last rites tonight at sunset," I said to her.

"All stop," I said, the Diana coming up into the wind, the hatches open to catch the breeze, remove the "smell" from the fire. Carol read from the Book of Lys, the "BIBLE" of this era. We consigned the two bodies to the deeps, their souls to Lys...

## Chapter Thirty Seven

"'Bothers' you, doesn't it?" Carol said to me as she laid there beside me. It was not the "deaths" as such, as aboard any ship of war one must expect such things. It was I think the sense of "invulnerability" that one had aboard the Diana. The sense that nothing could ever harm you beneath its armored hull.

"A 'lucky shot', I suppose," I answered her, lying there.

"Can we make repairs?" my wife asked then, holding me.

"Perhaps in La Paz," I answered, kissing her lips.

"Princess Lara Bisan ," she spoke, standing there. I had no doubts that she was the sort of a woman any man might lust after. She was fuller busted than my wife, a bit heavier in the legs. A sort of "cross" between Kathi and Carol. Her hair a reddish brown shade that went with her gray blue eyes. She had a striking resemblance to a TV and movie actress of the 20th Century, one Catherine Bach. (Daisy Duke, THE DUKES OF HAZARD). She wore the halter and short leather skirt commonly worn by Bajan women. She was sensual and provocative, a woman without any "doubts"... "The Prostitute Princess" many called her, Lara having at one time been the head of the Prostitute Guild, which is almost like a "caste" with its own "laws" each member is supposed to meet.

"Admiral Robert Simmons, my wife Carol, Warlady of Dularn," I answered, standing there, "awed" a bit despite myself at Lara. I recalled the books by Lorraine and Darlanis, the role this woman had played in them. It had been Jers' love for her that had triggered off the duel between Darlanis and Tara, started this "conflict" between the two women that had almost killed Darlanis.

"I am honored," Lara answered, Carol nodding, smiling back. The sun burning down upon us, "hotter" than the summer sun of Dularn. The Princess of Baja was darkly tanned, almost as dark as the people around us. The men in their open vests and leather kilts, the women in their matching halters and short skirts. All carried swords, Baja being a country that was not a part of either the Empire of California or of Mexico and had no wish to be. It is "friendly" towards the Empire, but is not really a "part" of it as such, being much like Talon is in that regard, I find. Perhaps like Dularn will be in the future in another year or so.\* \*The earlier relationship between Lara and Darlanis is quite interesting as it shows just what sort of a woman Darlanis actually is. The Empress is not a "dumb blonde" by any means, and she is quite willing to take a "long view" of things if necessary. The Prostitute Guild itself is a "child" of Darlanis', and was "used" for her own benefit in earlier years until the "revolution" in Trelandar in 2565, when Lara decided that she was "Trelandarian".

"We will need to make repairs," I said, Lara nodding, her eyes having missed little. I suspected that a lot of people had underestimated her, dismissing her as just another "hip swinger". Considerably older than her boyish husband, I suspected that Lara really was the one who "ran" things here in Baja, her earlier questions about the Diana having left little "doubt" of that now.

"We have skilled workers in wood and metal," she smiled back, "And the damage to the wood here is not serious," she added, referring to the inner side of the protective superstructure just behind her. "This will be a 'decisive' weapon only until others like it are constructed," Lara added, giving me a smile...

"A 'beautiful' woman, and smart too," I whispered to Carol, who nodded thoughtfully back. I think Carol was aware that there was another woman who was just as "sensual" and "provocative" as her! The Princess of Baja carefully studying the Diana, captain Steven at her side, explaining how everything worked on the ship.

"And who 'runs things' around here," Carol smiled back then, seeing me nod. There was no "doubt" that Lara did rule Baja now. Her husband Prince Jers was in another part of the country just now, the arrival of the Diana having been somewhat "unexpected".

"Baja was 'friendly' towards Dularn in our last war," I said. Not too "openly" of course, but Maris had said that Dularnian raiders could put in for refits and supplies in the smaller ports without trouble, the official Bajan position here being "neutral", much to Darlanis' own annoyance, I suspect here now. Our later "agreement" with Trelandar was merely the final blow that eventually forced Darlanis to agree to the "terms" there in the Treaty of Arsana that returned to Dularn what was "Dularn's".

"You are welcome to stay with me at the palace, while I will find quarters for your men and officers,"



the Princess said then. "I fear that this would be rather 'uncomfortable' here now in the sun." That was something of an "understatement", as the Diana was not the most "comfortable" ship when in port under a hot sun.

"That will be just fine," Carol answered, nodding to Lara.

"There will be good food, and dancing," the Princess smiled.

"I 'fascinate' you," Lara said to me as we danced. She was a "better" dancer than Darlanis in that she didn't "lead", the rich sensual curves of her body now an erotic delight pressed up against mine. While not extremely "beautiful" as such, Lara is the sort of a woman that no man will ever forget if he meets her. The formal attire of a Bajan woman can be quite provocative. The Princess' was, Lara being a woman who leaves no "doubts" either!!

"You are one of the few women I've ever met that I would seriously consider being unfaithful to my wife for," I smiled back.

"I suspect that Carol and I share the same 'background'," Lara said. "There is in your wife a 'quality' I have seen in few others. She is not a woman like most." I knew "that" was true.

"Carol was a 'prostitute' before I met her," I said to Lara.

"This was Tara's before it became 'mine'," Lara said to me, changing the subject, her eyes glowing warmly straight into mine.

"It dates back even before my time," I said, aware that Triskelion itself dated back to the time of the Spanish Conquest.

"The Priestesses came and removed everything left over from the "time of legend"," Lara said, using the term often used for the era before The War of 2047 altered all of Mankind's history. I supposed that had been a "wise" move on Tais' part considering what sort of "equipment" had been left behind by Domino Tremaine, the last "Leaderess" of the World Federation, whose dried remains were found beneath Triskelion by Princess Tara some years before.

"'Enjoying yourself'?" Carol asked, her smile a bit drunken.

"A very 'interesting' woman," I said, the "topic" of our "conversation" now talking to some of her nobility and military.

"A woman like that is more dangerous than any blonde," Carol said. The implications of her words not missed. Lara was that.

"Another 'legend' like Darlanis," I smiled back at my wife.

"What I would have been had I been born here," Carol smiled.

"Prince Jers Bisan," he spoke, a young handsome boyish man, his wife standing there possessively at his side. It was quite "obvious" too who "wore the pants" around here. I suppose it was natural enough considering "who" his mother had been. The embittered, "vicious" Princess Tara who was now the Warlady of Mexico.

"Carol Simmons, Warlady of Dularn, my husband Robert, Admiral of the Royal Navy," my wife answered, giving Jers a "smile".

"You are the couple from the past, from before The War," he said, Lara at his side, her arm possessively around him. About her throat was the golden neck chain of a wife of more than three years. Such "chains" are felt by some to "symbolize" the submission of the wife to her husband. I did not think this was "true" in this case at least. Lara was "more" than just a wife to Jers. Once she had been a prostitute, he a prince who his mother had wished to see married to Sela Dai, the Princess of Talon. That had been before he'd met Lara, who had supplied more than "sex". Lara was now both "mother" and "wife", and Jers was hers totally.

"The Athena," Prince Jers said to me, standing on the top of the Diana's forward quickfirer turret, lowering the telescope he had used to identify the approaching Imperial steam frigate. "A woman that lives up to her title of 'Warlady'," Jers then smiled.

"The Imperials seem to be holding their own," I said, seeing him nod. The Empire of California was well aware that Mexico, with its interior lines of communication, would eventually "win" a war of this nature if it dragged on for year after year. Only the fact that the Empire had been forced to hold Mexico at "bay" had saved Dularn from having to face alone the Imperial might...

"Lorraine is 'competent' at what she does," he smiled back.

"We 'meet' again," Lorraine smiled, standing there, the sun beating down upon us, striking highlights in that coal black hair of hers. "And this 'time' against a common foe," she added then. The Athena now floating above its reflection there in the harbor. The Diana there at the dock, like some sleeping deep sea monster. Jon Richards, her husband, standing at the side of his "Warlady".

"Let us pray for the day when there is no 'need' for 'Warladies'," Carol "spoke" from beside me. I didn't think we'd ever live to see that. Mankind is extremely "warlike" by his nature. Peace has only existed when enforced by the sword of conquerors and men have become "less" than men as happened back in the past.

"No doubt the people of that time will 'read' of us and envy the fact that we lived in a time of 'adventure'," Lorraine smiled back, her black silk and leather trappings seeming "fitting" on her like nothing else would be. She is truly what she appears... A living legend that men will speak of for thousands of years. "On the other hand I grow weary of fighting 'winless wars' like this one," the Queen of Trelandar said, her eyes holding Carol's. "And what Maris has done in Dularn must be done here," she added. "We must eventually put a halt to feminine slavery as 'normal'."

## Chapter Thirty Eight

"I didn't think you were 'opposed' to such things," Carol said. I don't think she ever read Lorraine's books very well. I was well aware of the "fact" that Lorraine had once sought to end the sort of slavery that existed now, but had quickly found it to be impossible. There is also the possibility here that the "attempt" on her life made back in 2565 was related to this issue... Jon Richards standing there taking this

all in, smiling to himself. I supposed that he was "content" with Lorraine, who is not a hard woman to live with as long as you let her have her "way". He was once "involved" with Maris Marn, although I think he did find the "right" wife in Lorraine, who is quite unlike the Queen of Dularn. Lorraine being a woman who "thinks like a man" in a number of ways, as is noticeable if you read her books carefully.

"The 'enslavement' of women for reasons other than crime is wrong," the Queen of Trelandar smiled back. "Unfortunately I do not have the 'power' to put an 'end' to such things," she added.

"Women could stand together, and 'demand' it," Carol said.

"This is not the Twentieth Century," Lorraine smiled back. "The men of this time are not the 'castrated wimps' of your era."

"There are issues that can be 'settled' only on the battlefield," I said, interrupting this delightful interplay of theirs. The men of this time had drawn a "line" that no woman, not even Queens dared cross. I knew of "mad" Queen Kathis, of her death.

"Most men don't own slave girls," Lara then commented here.

"But many dream of doing so," her husband interjected then.

"I suspected that you weren't totally 'invulnerable'," Lorraine said to me, the heat inside the Diana like that of an oven. Most of the repairs had been made, but the burned wood of the superstructure still remained as a "memory" of what had happened...

"The Mexican didn't hesitate to use fire," I said to her.

"The 'nature' of the Diana is known to them," she said.

"What is so 'attractive' about a slave girl?" Carol said to me as she laid there beside me in bed, her eyes glowing into mine as we talked. I knew she'd been talking to Lara, even Lorraine. Jon Richards and her had been engaged in a long talk earlier now. I supposed that he found Carol's "feminism" delightfully radical. Carol was the sort of "feminist" that you "listened" to, I knew. A cool breeze off the gulf driving away the heat of the day now.

"She is 'yours'," I answered her, "Totally and completely 'yours' in a way that no wife or mistress ever can, I suppose..."

"Most slave girls are not 'beautiful'," Carol said then.

"Their masters find them 'attractive'," I smiled in reply.

"There could be an 'alternative'," Carol suggested then.

"It would be 'hard' to find one," I said, "puzzled" now.

"Prostitution is legal everywhere," Carol explained then.

"There is a 'difference'," I explained, fingering a nipple.

"What is it about slave girls that makes them 'different' from a woman that might be hired to perform the

same 'services'?" Carol asked. This is not as "outlandish" as it may sound, especially not here in an era where prostitution was looked upon in a different light than it had been back in our own time. Here the prostitute had a "Guild", an "organization" behind her, protecting her from anyone who wished her harm. The Prostitute Guild is politically powerful throughout all of western North America now. One can "hire" women for such purposes. It is often done among certain circles where one might "need" a woman as a "companion". It is quite commonplace in large Imperial cities such as Sam and Trella as a part of "business practices" among the Merchants, the Prostitute Guild even having a "hand" in such stuff in "training" women to perform in such "roles". The Guild itself is the "invention" of Lara, although with considerable "aid" from Darlanis, dating back to 2555 or so from what I understand, Lara having at that time been falsely accused of fomenting revolt in Trelandar against the Empire. (I believe she might have been "guilty" to a certain degree judging from what Sanda Talen told me recently) I suspect that Darlanis, who is "smarter" than she looks, decided that Lara might be "useful" to her and so decided to spare her on the basis that perhaps such a woman as Lara could be "used". We should remember here that Darlanis has always portrayed herself as being a "merciful ruler", (This is the basis of the "SHE-RA" myth about the Empress invented by Sharon Duval) and no doubt she felt with good reason that a "grateful" Lara could be "used" for the purposes of the Empire if Darlanis herself was willing to give Lara certain things in return that the prostitute wanted...

"You didn't answer my question," Carol said to me, caressing me. For a "feminist" her love making was flawless, I mused then.

"If you give Kathi an order she has to obey," I said to her.

"Considering what we 'pay' Kathi I don't think she'd be very likely to make 'trouble' anyway," Carol pointed out to me in return. Kathi's own "income" was that of most laborers in Arsana! She "earned" more than did most women who did such work for pay!!

"Most 'housemaids' won't provide sex," I answered my wife.

"'Depends' upon the woman," Carol said. Dularnian women had rather different opinions on it than did the women of California. I suspect that Carol was "willing" quite some time before our own "first time". Those bikinis she'd worn back then were "daring"!!

"The 'Guild' gets 'sticky' about 'non-members'," I said. I was well aware of "that", as the Prostitute Guild like any "union" is strongly opposed to "scabs". And they are quite likely to express their own "displeasure" at the point of a sword to any woman who decides to "make a little something there on the side". They are also politically powerful, enough now that no one wants to try to take them "on" without very good reason for doing so... This is also "why" you can't buy a slave girl and put her "out" on the "streets" to make money for you by "selling" her "services" as a prostitute. Lara with Darlanis' "support" stopped this a number of years ago, a "success" that would not have been "possible" I suspect without Darlanis' backing and Warriresses!!

"Slavery is not in the 'interest' of the Guild, is it?" Carol suddenly said, the "delight" showing in her voice at the idea!

"I wouldn't think so," I said, stroking her naked body beneath the bedcovers. She wasn't "aroused", but on the other hand Carol is the sort of a woman that doesn't take long to "get so".

"Let's make love then now," Carol said to me, doing so now. She was "good", better than she usually is, and Carol is "good"! I sensed her "delight", the pleasure she felt at having found a "solution" to the problem of feminine slavery. Whether or not it would "work" was another question, but at least Carol did

have a bit of hope now that her "dream" might come true in her lifetime!

"You do seem rather 'happy' this morning," Lorraine said to Carol as we ate breakfast together. Neither woman really "liked" the other, but both were well aware that they had to work together. Carol was probably the more "hostile" of the two, but even my wife had gotten over most of her earlier "hatred" of Lorraine.

"I found the 'answer' to our 'problem'," Carol smiled back, going into an explanation of what could be done using the support of prostitutes. Of "expanding" the role of the Prostitute Guild. Lara listening quietly, nodding her head in agreement with Carol.

"At the present time it is 'illegal' to seize women of other countries as slave girls in both Dularn and the Empire," Lorraine said. "I think we might be able to 'extend' this eventually to the point that the only 'source' of slave girls will be those who commit crimes serious enough to 'merit' enslavement," she added.

"We could 'suggest' this as a 'road to peace' between nations," her husband volunteered thoughtfully, glancing at Carol. I expected that he had enjoyed talking to Carol the night before.

"Just as Queen Maris did in Dularn!" Carol exclaimed back.

"It won't be 'easy', and it will take years to do," Lorraine spoke in level tones, her dark eyes meeting my wife's in reply, "But I think it can be done as long as we don't fool with things as they are like Queen Kathis once tried that time in Dularn."

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"Number three slow astern, number one slow ahead one additional notch," I said, the slow "thud-thud" of the Diana's three engines once again echoing through the armored hull of the battleship. No doubt a number of the crew had muchly "enjoyed" themselves in La Paz, which like all seaports is filled with the sort of "dives" and brothels that you'd expect to find here now. The Diana slowing moving out into the harbor, the smoke rising up from its triple stacks astern as we followed the Athena out now. "Number three now slow ahead one notch more," I said, seeing the Diana swing free of the dock. I was getting the "hang" of "maneuvering" the armored battleship by the use of its triple screws to the point now that it was no longer necessary to rely on tugs. The Diana now slowly passing through the harbor, all her hatches open against the broiling sun that burned down upon her armored bulk. "Number two one notch ahead of slow," I ordered, the third engine coming on, our speed picking up just a bit now as we followed Lorraine's steam frigate out into the Gulf of California.

"Feels good to be at sea again," Sandra said with a smile.

## Chapter Thirty Nine

"Lorraine's hoisting more sail," Sandra said, the Athena's crew busy at work setting the top sails and the top gallants now. She also had steam up, and was making all the speed that she was able to make. I didn't know what she was trying to "prove", but I had a suspicion as to what it might be. I pushed all

three of the "repeaters" to half speed ahead, the engines quickly speeding up to our "normal cruising speed" of seven and a half knots. If Lorraine wanted to make a "race" out of it, I could go to three quarters, which gave nine knots, the highest I usually push it...

"Looks like she's setting stuns and staysails," Carol observed, lowering the telescope she had been holding to her eye.

"Go to three quarters," I smiled, Sandra pushing the repeaters to three quarters, the beat of the engines growing stronger.

"We might ask her if she needs a tow," Carol smiled then.

"Slow to between three quarters and one half," I said a few minutes later, the ram of the Diana only a hundred yards now behind the Athena. In a good wind Lorraine would have been able to outrun the Diana, but not in a mild warm westerly like this one.

"She gets pretty good speed out of that," Sandra observed.

"She's probably the best sailor on this ocean," I smiled.

"You think pretty highly of her, don't you?" Sandra said.

"She's extremely 'competent' at what she does," I replied.

"'Hard' looking woman, though," Sandra mused to herself now.

"They call her 'old steel and iron' in Trelandar," Carol smiled. I supposed that was a pretty good "term" for Lorraine... \*\*\*\*\*

"Weather's getting up," I said, Sandra nodding. There was a heavy swell from the west, the coastline of Mexico there just ahead of us. The barometer had fallen quite low, a line of dark clouds behind on the western horizon. The Athena a quarter mile off us now hoisting up more sail, obviously running for "shelter".

"Chart shows some bays and coves ahead," Sandra said to me.

"Assuming you know exactly 'where' we are now," I smiled.

"And that there is enough 'water' for us," Carol now added.

"I guess we'd better stick it out with Lorraine," Sandra answered. I thought that was perhaps the best decision right now. "And hope that she knows this area better than we do," she added.

"Sometimes seems 'strange' that women can 'do' so much in this era when they couldn't back in ours," Carol said to me then.

"Our 'culture' is far different than yours," Sandra smiled. "Women have far more 'opportunities' here than they did before."

"If you don't end up with a slave collar locked around your neck," Carol answered back, Sandra nodding, giving her a smile...

"Most slave girls don't have it that bad," Sandra replied. "It is common knowledge that the slave girl is better treated as a rule than the wife." I'd heard "that" several times in Arsana.

"I didn't `enjoy' my experiences as one," Carol "retorted".

"You weren't `owned' by any one man," Sandra pointed out.

"That makes a `difference'?" Carol "challenged" in reply.

"It `would' for me, and most any other woman," Sandra said.

"I suppose that it might," my wife "admitted" then to her.

"Stay on her," I said, hopeful that any rock would be struck by the Athena first than by us. We were only a hundred yards behind the steam frigate, the lightning now flashing in the sky behind us. I had withdrawn the lookout for fear of being "struck". The Diana rolling heavily in the swell as we followed the Athena into this little rock bound cove on the western coast of Mexico.

"Coming about, dropping anchor," Sandra answered, the Athena doing so as soon as she got behind the point of jagged rock that extended half way out into the bay. Sandra pulling the repeaters to "slow astern" as the Diana now approached the steam frigate. She was getting the "feel" of the ship now, and "needed" me less.

"We'll do the same," Carol spoke, her eyes meeting my own.

"This should blow over by morning," Lorraine said, handing a goblet of wine to Carol and another to me. The sharp "crack" of the lightning making me "start" just a bit as a bolt hit nearby. The furnishings and fitting of the stern cabin reflecting the Warlady's own personality, the cabin a bit "austere" like Maris' had been aboard the North Star. I could hear the wind howling, the rain striking the deck over our heads like a fine hail now.

"Wouldn't want to be ship wrecked here," my wife smiled. Jon Richards was sitting there silently looking up at my wife. I sensed the "thoughts" there in his mind. Carol is "provocative" in a way that a "plainer" woman like Lorraine never ever can be.

"You'd probably bring a good price," Lorraine laughed. I saw Jon nod, smile at me. Carol probably would be "expensive"... Carol wasn't a "beautiful" woman, but she did have a nice figure.

"The `idea' of slavery was `reintroduced' by Janet Rogers," Carol answered, meeting the darkness of Lorraine's eyes. Janet of course had been the "protege" of the Warlady back in the 20th Century. Many of the "ideals" Janet put into practice were hers.

"It was the only answer to the `criminal problem'," Lorraine smiled. "As you will recall the `cost' of housing and guarding prisoners reached unaffordable heights back in your own time..." Violent criminals were castrated as a part of their sentence. It turned out to be an excellent "deterrent" to crime, especially with the Black ghetto males, who looked upon their "manhood" in a way that reminds one of primitive barbarians, not "civilized" men as such. Many fearing castration more than enslavement itself, hard as it may be to understand it by those of the 26th Century.

"And how `many' of those were `criminals' by our standards?" Carol challenged. About half were

"political criminals", people guilty of nothing more than violating some law that was a "crime" only because the "powers that be" of that time had "decided" to make such "activities" a crime. Merely carrying a "concealed weapon" could send you to prison, "unbelievable" as it may seem today for any of my 26th Century readers. The United States of America in the last decade of the 20th Century (the 21st was an "improvement" in some respects and "sexual freedom" was considerably better) was not "the land of the free and the home of the brave". It was in fact a "democratic `dictatorship'" that almost makes the worst of Darlanis' own activities seem "benevolent" in comparison. We hardly realize today how "bad" it was back then so far as personal freedom was concerned. This was a society where by 1995 under President Clinton employers were actually being told by the government "who" they could hire, a society where workers almost "owned" their jobs. A "socialist state" in "reality", if not in "name" almost like that of the U.S.S.R. Janet Rogers herself reintroduced much of the old "economic freedoms" that those earlier had taken away through government action. On the other hand her "cashless economy" gave her a degree of "economic control" that seems unbelievable by present day standards.

"We have made some `advances'," Lorraine smiled in reply. "I consider our present social order far superior to yours," she added. "We know the `meaning' of freedom here, `yours' did not." Jon giving me a smile, while he looked up at Lorraine standing there. The black silk and leather of her attire quite "fitting". Carol dressed in the silken blouse and slacks that were a part of the new styles that she had introduced there in Dularn last year. Her uniform coat tossed over a chair, still wet from the rain.

"You were `responsible' for Janet Rogers," Carol replied.

"I am not all that `disappointed' in her," Lorraine said.

"You agree that what she did was right?" Carol challenged.

"Overall it was a successful civilization," Lorraine smiled back. "Especially if compared to that of the Twentieth Century."

"She outlawed the private possession of firearms," Carol retorted. Janet had allowed people to carry swords, even encouraging such. There is something "good" to be said about such a "social policy". Janet did recognize a need for "personal defense". One where skill and self discipline counted for more than it did with firearms, where the "level of violence" was "controllable". Janet offered considerable "bounties" for information leading to the arrest and conviction of those in possession of firearms. It appears to have been quite successful judging from what we know of that era, although complete "disarmament" proved impossible.

"So `do' the Priestesses of Lys in our own time here," the Warlady smiled back at me. "I personally much prefer to live in a social order like ours where the sword is the personal weapon of self defense. Where skill with weapons is still `meaningful', not just the ability to `pull a trigger' like back in our time."

"A woman who is very `deep'," Carol said as we prepared for bed, the rain still beating down upon the Diana's armored hull.

"One who thinks deeply," I answered, seeing my wife nod.

"I think her husband is `interested' in me," Carol smiled.

"It would be `wise' that you don't `encourage' anything," I said to her. Lorraine was not the type to forgive such actions. "Don't forget that she is not truly a woman of the 20th Century." Back then she had been a "misfit", a woman who never did belong. Here on the other Lorraine "belonged" as if she was born



here...

"It is nice to know that I am still 'attractive'," Carol teased me, undoing her blouse, her bared nipples "erotic" in this culture where a woman never revealed her nipples except to her husband and Physician. The "origins" of this "taboo" are lost in time now. "That I am still a 'woman' that other men can desire."

"You could stand to be 'milked'," I smiled back, her breasts swollen and heavy. Carol enjoyed having me "milk" her, the "act" itself tending to be sexually arousing to her, my wife being the sort of a woman who enjoys a great of "intimacy" in marriage.

"I'm glad I came instead of staying in Dularn," she smiled.

"So am I," I told my delightful brownette in reply then.

## Chapter Forty

"Enemy in sight!" the signal came from the Athena just ahead, the flashes of light from the flagship's stern leaving no doubt of what laid ahead! "Five ships!" the flashing light said!

"Battlestations, all ahead three quarters," I snapped then. The alarm whistle sounding through the length of the armored Diana as we pulled up on the steam frigate ahead and started to move around. I saw the forward hatches being closed, the Diana being "buttoned up" for battle. There was little doubt that the enemy would use fire, although it was not "effective" against us. Lorraine said that she guessed that Princess Tara had given the orders, the Mexican Warlady no doubt now claiming that the use of an invulnerable "ironclad" like the Diana was in violation of the "codes" that govern all naval warfare here in this barbaric era.\* \* This actually became an "issue" during the construction of the Diana in Arsana. A number of the military castes claiming that the construction of a "battleship" was against the caste codes in that such a "vessel" was "invulnerable" against "ordinary arms".

"Three of their first rates, two second rates," Carol said, lowering the telescope. The first rates were square rigged steam frigates, much like the Imperials, but not as well "designed" as Lorraine's ships were in that they still lacked the top gallants. The second rates were simple "sailers", carrying that odd combination of a square and fore and aft rig that the Mexicans seem to like. We were now up alongside the Athena, the crew of the Imperial flagship waving and cheering us on. I "assumed" that they were cheering us, judging from their activities, although given the constant heavy "thud-thud" noise of the triple engines and everything else the interior of the Diana when "buttoned up" as we were now is not a quiet place by any means, I can assure you.

"Princess Tara has a better 'spy network' than even the Imperials," Sandra commented, it being obvious that the Mexicans had started on building steam frigates almost as soon as Lorraine's ship had steamed out of Trella's harbor late last winter.

"A woman with a well 'deserved' reputation," I smiled back, the Princess being quite "familiar" with such designs, no doubt.

"Lorraine says that they are building one of these," Carol answered, holding the telescope to her eye, peering through one of the small glass covered slits. I doubted that she saw much...

"Man is a 'weapon making animal'," I smiled, quoting some now forgotten Twentieth Century author I'd once read so long ago.

"If it wasn't for the Priestesses we'd be using cannon now," my wife answered, lowering the telescope. I nodded, smiled back. The basic technology of this era had been severely "strained" by the construction of the Diana. On the other hand muzzle loading cannon wouldn't be that "hard" to make if Tais ever allowed it. And the design of the Diana was "ideal" for such weapons, I felt, visions of "battle" between steam powered "ironclads" in my mind, the famous battle there in the American Civil War coming to mind.

"We have never learned to live in peace with ourselves," I heard Sandra suddenly mutter, I think more to herself than to us. I thought it was true. Even after the "experiences" of the past we still fought each other like predatory animals. Perhaps it is the fate of Man to always fight, always to "know" war. We have lived at peace only when under the "heel" of a greater conquering power. One thinks of Rome at its glory, of Janet Rogers' World Federation of the 21st Century. There was no "war" then, although Janet certainly had enough "terrorists" to deal with according to the history books. The "name" changes, but the reality still remains the "same". There are always those who seek to take away the freedoms, the "rights" of others. No doubt they existed when Homo Erectus roamed the Earth half a million years ago. We speak of "great conquerors", of Alexander, Julius Caesar, of Napoleon, of Hitler and Stalin, Chairman Mao. Of Janet Rogers, who "conquered" the entire world and made it "her own". Then here in this time we have Darlanis, a woman with "dreams", who perhaps sees herself as being the "second Janet Rogers" now.

"On the other hand," Carol replied then, "We 'live' in a way that 'those' who know not war will never know." I thought then that she spoke the truth. I recalled the words that Lorraine had written about the Lorr, about the Women. Two totally "stagnant" races, one "alien", one "human", sharing a dying desert world. Of the two only the Women had any interest in exploration, in being anything more than just a life form much like the ants unnoticed there beneath our feet. Perhaps "war" is the price we pay for being an aggressive, assertive life form that perhaps someday will seek the stars if the Priestesses of Lys ever do allow it...

"All ahead full," I spoke, breaking into this conversation. "Forward flamethrowers and quickfirers ready," I barked, my orders being swiftly relied by midshipman Anders to those forward. The helmsman then surrendering the wheel and controls to me now. Sandra went below to the main deck to check our battleworthiness.

"Once again we stand together," Carol said, her hand on my shoulder, her hazel eyes meeting mine. I thought of the Arena at Trella, of the sands, the sun burning down. Of a brownette naked but for a bit of leather, a sword glistening there in her hand. The five enemy ships were about a couple miles away now, closing the distance between us even though they stood no chance against the Diana. We were "vulnerable" to nothing short of "ramming"...

"As it should be," I said, touching her hand with mine now.

"I am 'part' of you, and you are 'part' of me," Carol said.

"Lorraine is not the only one who thinks 'deep thoughts'," I smiled back at my brownette. I saw Carol nod, a smile curve her lovely lips. We "belonged" together, Carol and I, like few "do".

"The `destiny' of a world is in our hands," she said to me.

"I'm glad you didn't stay in Arsana," I said to my beloved.

"What we `have' is `important' to me," Carol spoke softly.

"We don't `belong' in this world," I said to my brownette.

"We're just `hired guns' carrying out the wishes of others," my wife answered, staring at the rapidly approaching five ships.

"The `cause' for which we fight is `just'," I answered her.

"That doesn't alter the `reality' of what we are," she said.

"I am going to engage the enemy from seawards," I answered.

"That seems wise," the Warlady of Dularn answered me back.

The Mexican turned, firing everything he had, trying to ram. I saw the bow of the Diana blazing with burning oil, heard the sound of the forward quickfirers, all four forward and the turret above our heads. Fifteen missiles a second falling like a deadly hail on his decks. The ram hit just astern, the flamethrower now spraying its deadly stream of fire. He was done for even before the Diana broke free to seek her second victim. The second had come about to try to face us, the third following at his heels...

"Ram to ram," Carol breathed, the Mexican coming down on us. I reversed the engines, hit him with both flamethrowers, the Diana backing away at full power. Daris Adara was good down in the engine room throwing those levers over in that steamy oven below decks. She and her sweating crew now quick to follow my orders.

"Third one now," I said, Carol at my side, watching, the Diana now again racing forward to meet her "enemy" like a charging iron clad monster. It was hard to see through the flames that burned before the control room slits, the odor of burning lamp oil heavy in the air. Curses from above left no doubts either that some of it had come in through the firing slit over our heads. Midshipman Anders having a rather "surprising" vocabulary for one so "young" and pretty, I laughed to my wife just then.

The Diana and the enemy hit almost side to side, the frigate taking the full spray of our flamethrowers as we churned on past. The two second rates running for safety, the Athena charging on down at them. Behind us now three blazing ships, terrified men leaping into the sea to escape the leaping flames as the Diana came about to view the horrors that our flamethrowers had caused. Sandra scrambling up the ladder to stand at my wife's side, the look on the blonde's face leaving no doubts as to her thoughts...

"An `impressive' victory," Lorrainesaid, standing there on the deck of her flagship. Behind us burned the last of the two second rates, the crews having been put ashore and the ships both set ablaze by the Athena's own flamethrowers. The Diana lying alongside like a great monster of the deep, the painted hull now burned in places from the blazing oil that had fallen upon her.

"I suppose one could call it that," I answered her back.

"No injuries worth noting," Sandra said to me when I stepped back aboard the Diana, the open hatches now clearing the interior of the odor of burning lamp oil. Carol giving me a smile as she stood there

beside the captain. The crew of the Diana standing there watching, their own "silence" a tribute to the dead we'd left behind there floating among the drifting embers of the three steam frigates. I recalled the "end" of Sarnian Lady the year before from the use of a flamethrower. The "reactions" of Darlanisto the "use" of such a weapon. The Mexicans had been much the same. I thought of another era, the "use" of another weapon. The effects of "modern" warfare with the Diana and its weapons were much like that of Hiroshima. As Carol had said, we were but "hired guns". Not really people of this era despite everything. Torn from our home by the awesome power of the Priestesses of Lys to fight in wars six centuries in our future. Unlike the Warlady of the Imperials, we really never had "belonged" in this "world".

## Chapter Forty One

"Not even the Diana could make it," I said to Lorraine, lowering the telescope. Lermat is the major Mexican seaport on the Pacific. The design of the fortifications left no doubts that even a battleship like the Diana would never survive an attempted entry. The great chain linked through logs across the mouth of the harbor might not "hold" against the Diana's engines, although I suspected that it probably would unless the Diana rammed it at full speed ahead. And if it didn't break then it could cause the Diana to ride up over the chain, suspending herself helplessly to be pounded to pieces by the steam catapults of the great fort to the south of the entrance. Lorraine having told me that its catapults fired three hundred pound stone shot a quarter mile!!!

"The 'key' to 'victory'," the Warlady answered me back then. The rest of the Mexican navy here in the Pacific was bottled up inside, the five steam frigates of Lorraine's forces just behind. We "controlled" the sea for the time being, but the internal lines of communication that the Mexicans had "neutralized" us...

"Three hundred pound shot will smash the Diana's superstructure like an egg," my wife pointed out, echoing my own thoughts. "It will be 'necessary' to 'take' that fort first," Carol added. A sudden great splash a hundred yards off our bow left no doubts!

"I'm sure that their general is 'aware' of that," Lorraine answered, the tone of her voice just a bit "unpleasant" then too. He would doubtless be "ready" for an assault by a landing party. I suspected that she was at a "loss" for ideas of what to do now. The "embarrassment" of this before Carol explained her "comment".

"We need a 'ruse' of some sort," I said, smiling at my wife, Sandra wisely ordered the ship to back off another hundred yards.

"Be 'dangerous'," Lorraine said. I supposed it would be to take a captured Mexican merchantman into their harbor. I could think of nothing else that would get us "inside" the chain. Allow us to take the fort by surprise with a force large enough to defeat its own defenders before assistance could be sent from the town inside the harbor. If the chain could be "opened", then the Diana could enter, and cause enough destruction against an unprepared foe to jolt the Mexican Emperor into signing a peace treaty with Darlanis. So far the Imperial land forces with the Nevadashad not been able to win any substantial victories against Mexico. Even the tarls of Talon had been of little "effect" here. I supposed they were an "annoyance", but so far the Imperials had not found them really "effective" in the military sense against the superior numbers that the Mexican Empire could field in turn. The Mexicans under Tarahaving enough

sense to scatter a bit now, thus making the great flying birds and their riders ineffective.

"I'm going with you," Carol suddenly said to Lorraine then.

"As I recall you are rather 'good' with a bow," the Imperial Warlady smiled back, giving my wife a hug that surprised us both.

"We need something to make the Mexicans 'careless'," Carol said. "Something that will allow us to make a surprise attack."

"I think I know what might be 'effective'," I smiled back.

"If they 'suspect' what we are doing...", midshipman Anders breathed, the tone of her voice just too "steady" now to be true. The merchantman "fleeing" us with every sail set just ahead now.

"I will be a widower and 'you' my young lady will be captain of the Diana," I replied, well aware that just this could happen! Sandra and the two ship's lieutenants having gone with my wife along with virtually everyone else in Lorraine's fleet. I remembered the time that Carol and I had once "discussed" just this should she ever die in battle. She had "suggested" that perhaps Maris Marn might make me a suitable mate. I supposed that it was "possible", but there would never be "another" like my Carol...

"Ohh," the young teenage blonde answered, awed a bit now.

"If this doesn't work...", Lorraine mused, standing there.

"The water isn't that 'cold'," my wife pointed out then.

"They do have quickfirers like us," the Warlady pointed out, a pale sickle of a moon there in the sky to the east breaking the gloom of the night. The Diana a half mile back like some great monster of the deep. The merchantman's sails gleaming in the dim light left no doubt as to the "nationality" of the stolen vessel.

"Bob always did like those 'Hornblower' stories," Carol said, aware as she spoke that the Mexicans might not be "fooled". The actual "trick" is from Alexander Kent's "FORM LINE OF BATTLE" I might note, although the book is six centuries "out of print".

"I'm glad we got the chance to fight on the same side," the Imperial Warlady smiled there in the darkness, placing her hand on Carol's arm. "Jack Duval was a bastard and I was a 'bitch' for doing what I did back then," the Queen of Trelandar admitted.

"I wouldn't 'be' what I am today if you hadn't," Carol said.

"If the Mexicans have any real 'idea' of the Diana's performance...", Sandra spoke softly from beside, a thought that had passed through both Warladies' minds. Then they would know that no sailing vessel could outrun the Diana in a wind like this now!

"Going to be 'close'," the Warlady of California smiled, a "shot" from the Diana arching up in the air and falling almost alongside them. A gallon glass sphere filled with lamp oil, the burning wick easily visible she hoped to those there on shore ...

"It 'has' to be," my wife answered there in the darkness. If the Mexicans were to suspect the "truth" it would be all over for everyone. Those who survived to reach the shore would soon be captured, the

women doubtlessly sold into a life long slavery.

"Fire another?" midshipman Anders asked, looking up at me as I guided the Diana, my hands on the spokes of the great wheel, the triple repeaters only at half ahead on all three engines now.

"No," I answered. Too many "wild" shots and the Mexicans might get "suspicious" of the "truth". I didn't want to follow the ship too closely, as a lucky shot from the fort could badly damage the Diana despite its armorplate. Two inches of iron plate backed by four of oak wouldn't stop a three hundred pound shot, and a "lucky hit" could put the Diana right out of action!!

"I guess the distance at about half a mile," she said then. She was young, in her late teens, her eyes better than mine were. Her first name was "Susanna", a name that I felt fitted her well if not the sort of a name one might expect of a Dularnian girl...

"I'm going to turn away at a third," I answered, seeing her nod. I would go to full power on all, the helm hard to port as the ship turned away. I suspected that the maximum range of the steam catapults might be as much as five hundred yards if not a bit more. Those aboard the Athena were good for five fifty now.

"She's cutting it close," Sandra breathed from beside Carol, the Dularnian Warlady nodding in reply. Lorraine was completely in command, the tall slender waspish brunette standing there next to the helmsman. The captured merchantman racing towards doom if they didn't turn away from the chained logs just ahead of them!!!

"Ohh!" one of the Diana's officers breathed from beside them, a series of great splashes astern as the Diana turned away leaving no doubt as to the "power" of the fort's steam catapults!

"One of those would go right through this," Lorraine spoke, the words of the Imperial Warlady leaving no doubt in anyone's mind just then what could happen if this "ruse" didn't work now!! "Now back that main sail before we run up on to that log chain!" the Queen of Trelandar suddenly "snapped" then, jolting everyone out of their own musings! "And if you don't speak Spanish, keep your damm yaps shut or I'll dammed know the reason 'why' later!"

""Quien es barque?" Carol heard a voice call out from shore. Lorraine answering in rapid fire Spanish like a machine gun, the captain of the Diana beside her grinning to herself at the words!

"'Cusses' like a drill sergeant!" Sandra whispered to Carol, it being rather obvious to the brunette that Lorraine had decided that THE BEST DEFENSE HERE WAS A STRONG OFFENSE! The Warlady no doubt well aware that should those ashore have time to think things over that it might become obvious what the truth was here! The ship drifting with the wind towards the half floating logs.

"Got 'guts' too, the bitch!" Carol laughed then in reply.

"Going to be a 'nasty' fight too," the blonde answered back.

The men on shore were yelling something back in reply, the ship now drifting closer. In another few seconds it would be drifting up against the barrier, the brunette knew as she nocked an arrow on her bowstring. A drifting cloud now hiding the Moon. She thought of the child she might never see again, of a life now six centuries in the past. "Why am I here risking my life?" Carol mused to herself. Fighting in behalf of a "cause" that meant next to nothing to those of Dularn. "Just a God damm mercenary!"

"Now!" Lorraine cried, the ship striking against the logs! The Imperial Warlady leaping over the side on

to the logs, her sword gleaming in her hand, a yelling screaming horde behind her!

Racing to the bow, Carol drew back, released, the man falling to the sand of the shore, another swiftly following him to the judgment of Lys. Nearly a hundred arrows in the space of a few seconds released by the deadly bowstrings of two dozen fighting women left only dead there on the beach to oppose them now!

"Follow the Warlady!" Carol cried now, no one there in any "doubt" as to "who" this certain "Warlady" was! There was, Carol thought to herself then, only one "true" Warlady. Only one who truly deserved the "title" of "WARLADY"! Queen Lorraine herself!

It was sword to sword now, the incredible sword skill of the Queen of Trelandar striking terror into those who faced her now!! The Mexicans falling back, while quickfirers from the fort above uselessly peppered the deck of the ship and the dark waters! It being obvious now that the Mexican weapons could not be depressed far enough to fire directly upon a force below the fort itself.

Carol felt something go "zip" on past her, it being obvious that the fort's crossbowmen were firing at them, several cries of pain leaving no doubts that some of the missiles had struck their human targets! In the darkness it was hard to tell "friend" from "foe", although as the Mexicans did not use women in their own armed forces one at least knew the "side" any woman was from now!

The memories came flooding back in Carol's mind of other times, other places, of another "foe" she'd fought back then. Of a stern featured tall brunette who had once "marked" her face. Now she and that same woman were fighting on the same side, against the same foe. The thought made her "smile" to herself...

"Don't let them close that gate!" she heard Lorraine cry, a flurry of arrows and crossbow bolts dropping the Mexicans like toy soldiers there above them. She was aware of that "numbness" she'd felt before in combat as she scrambled up the rocks, the same sensation that this was really all nothing but a "dream" from which she'd soon awaken to find herself safely back at home. A battle raging at the gate, "close quarters" combat where one's skill with a sword might be the deciding factor if you lived or died. The Imperial Warlady herself leading them, striking terror into the hearts of their foes as her men swarmed forward now to take the fort from the Mexicans. A number now fleeing out the other gate towards town, terrified of that tall brunette whose skill with a sword was legend even here in Mexico over a thousand miles from Trelandar. The woman who it was still was the greatest swordswoman of all time, the incredible "Lorraine" herself!!!

## Chapter Forty Two

Carol drew back the arrow, released, felt the "jar" of the compound bow in her hand, saw the man she'd shot fall in the darkness there beside the gate. A missile of some sort shot from the fort's battlements zipping on by her to strike an Imperial crossbowman. She heard his "cry" as she nocked another arrow on her bowstring, returning the Mexicans' fire. Lorraine and a few of her own people now were fighting with swords there at the gate against a superior foe. Only the Warlady's awesome skill winning the "match" for them as the Mexicans fell back before this tall black clad "demon" in human form

that no swordsman could match...

"Dianas! To Me!" Carol cried, leading their assault, now meeting the Mexicans herself blade to blade, driving them back, while others on the battlements poured a steady stream of missiles at any they could tell were "foe", not "friend". The melee was such that in the darkness that it was difficult to tell friend from foe, although as the Mexicans were darker skinned for the most part you could usually tell one from the other without too much trouble in the light of the torches. On the other hand some of the Imperials were as "dark" as any Mexican, and no doubt more than one died from "friendly fire" there in the darkness inside the fort. Carol drawing on all her skills as she led the assault, the men and women around her both Imperial and Dularnian, former "enemies" now just all "friends" facing a common foe. The women archers pouring a deadly stream of arrows into their enemies there on the battlements, while the crossbowmen returned their fire with their deadly bolts that seldom missed in reply...

"Time for `this'!" Lorrainesnapped, drawing the weapon from beneath her clothing where she had concealed it. The sharp report of the blaster pistol and its explosive bullets driving the Mexicans back, the half dozen rounds left in the magazine just enough to demoralize the Mexicans, and allow them a victory now!!

"They've taken the fort!" midshipman Anders said to me, the tone of her girlish voice leaving no doubts as to her emotions. Her skin, hair reddish in the glow of the control room's lamps.

"The `butcher's bill' doubtlessly will be `high'," I said.

"`Butcher's bill'?" sheasked, a puzzled note in her voice.

"Slang from a time only `myth and legend' now," I smiled at the beautiful teenage Dularnian maiden. Thinking to myself that such a girl should be thinking of "love", not of killing people!

"Let us hope thatLyshas spared your wife," she answered in sober tones. Like all of this time she had "faith" in the teachings of the Priestesses of Lys that what they taught was "true".

"Yes," I answered, wondering what I would do without Carol. I liked Maris Marn, and no doubt she liked me, but she wasn't any thing like Carol, and I couldn't really see being married to the Queen of Dularn even if Maris was willing to marry me, which she might not be from all I knew. The "conditioning" of the Priestesses having worn off long ago, leaving Maris much as she was... It was true that I did have Kathi, but she wasn't "wife material" in any sense of the word. I recalled Keri Greyson of Trelandar. She was intelligent, beautiful, and doubtlessly "female" enough. A woman who in her way reminded me both of Carol andLorraine...

"You've `lost' your captain," Lorrainesaid, her eyes meeting Carol's there in the darkness, the few torches doing little to dispel the darkness. The bodies scattered here and there were both Mexican and their own, mostly the former, she saw. Carol nodding, "drained" now from everything she'd just been through. The memory of Sandra Steven just another to be "remembered" now. She recalled all the others who had died for one cause or another. For Dularn, for the Empress of California, for "freedom"...

"Another who has died for a `cause' few of us `understand'," the brownette answered bitterly. "In the `service' of one who was just last year our feared enemy," the Warlady of Dularn then added, the tone of her voice doubtlessly leaving no doubts in Lorraine's mind as to her true feelings about this entire affair.

"Darlanis did not `provoke' this war," Lorraineanswered, holding a cloth against her side where a swordblade had cut her. The bloodstain dark in the light of the few torches yet burning.



"So you doubtlessly 'believe'," Carol "answered" her back.

"What do you mean by that?" the Imperial Warlady challenged.

"You look upon Darlanis as 'SHE-RA', as a woman incapable of doing evil, as 'the Queen of Light'," my wife answered in reply. "As a sort of 'second Janet Rogers', one who will reunite Mankind under a single flag, under a single government as once before..."

"I know Darlanis, as only one Warriress can know another," the Imperial Warlady answered. "She did not 'cause' this war."

"As you wish," Carol answered, tired of this "argument".

"If they don't hold...", Susanna said to me, looking up at the fort as the Diana "eased" her way around the opened barrier.

"'They' will hold it," I answered. I knew our Warladies.

"The Diana is through," Lorrainesaid to my wife, who nodded in reply. She was tired of fighting, of war, of being a Warlady.

"Your majesty!" a man cried, dashing up. "There is a long column of men approaching us from the town!" No doubt reinforcements, my wife mused to herself, seeing the Imperial Warlady nod.

"Signal the Diana, inform them of the enemy marching on us," Carol spoke, her voice level, almost toneless. In the east there was just now the faintest of glows that spoke of the day to come.

"Message from the fort, sir!" midshipman Anders said to me. "They request that we engage a relief column marching to attack the fort from the town!" I nodded, well aware of the Diana's capabilities. What the three catapults and twenty quickfirers a side could "do" to men exposed out in the open. I didn't think the Mexicans knew much of the Diana's capabilities and firepower. Otherwise they would have taken more reasonable precautions...

"Open starboard hatches, ready broadside, fire at my command," I barked into the speaking tube that connected me to the "gun deck" as I turned the Diana in towards the rocky shore. I could see a few torches, the glint of weapons just ahead of us!

"Select your targets, fire catapults!" I snapped, the three catapults hurling their gallon glass jugs of lamp oil towards the shore. The flames would light things up for us! "Quickfirers! Fire upon anything that moves!" I now barked, my words echoed by the familiar "thumping" of the quickfirers as they opened fire!

"I expect 'that' taught them a little 'respect'," Lorrainesaid, lowering the 8x50 night glass. She had seen enough to guess at the rest hidden there in the darkness. No doubt some had survived the six hundred deadly missiles fired from the Diana in a space of ten seconds, but not enough to be a "threat" now to those holding the fort. The fort's own weapons would be adequate to "repel" any relatively small attacking force if well served.

"I think understand now 'why' you are a 'Warlady'," Carol replied. "Why you truly 'belong' in this era in a way I do not."

"I have at times pondered much the same thoughts," Lorraine answered. "Why I risk my life in causes like this," she spoke...

"That `did' for them, sir!" Anders said to me. I nodded. I supposed that it had. It was a lot like machine gunning down a marching column of men. The Mexicans had been taken by surprise. I suspected that some of them had survived, but not enough to be a real danger to the landing party now holding the fort there at the entrance to the harbor. Now we would deal with the ships ahead floating at anchor. And strike a "blow" they'd not forget!

"I sometimes wonder, Carol, just `who' we `serve'," the tall brunette said there in the darkness, staring out over the harbor. "Why our monarchs `do' the things that they do, especially mine."

"You mean like `supporting' Queen Valeris against Dularn?" my wife smiled, seeing the Imperial Warlady nod and smile back. Had it not been for the Diana and Queen Freydis, no doubt Darlanis' plans would have been successful in "isolating" Dularn from the lands about it. Carol still "wondered" about that. Lorraine was a far "smarter" woman than Darlanis. Far more "dangerous"...

"Darlanis is a woman who `dreams' of a world social order," Lorraine answered. "Of being the `second Janet Rogers' who will reunite Mankind under one flag, under one government, one ruler."

"You once had `dreams' of that `sort'," Carol pointed out.

"I `meant well', I suppose," Lorraine laughed dryly back.

"We could do `better' with the catapults, sir...", Susanna said to me, her eyes looking questioningly into mine as the Diana approached her next "target", the last one now a flaming pyre that lit up the harbor like a great bonfire. I was using the flamethrowers, not the catapults, being well aware of the fact that one lucky "hit" through a hatch could be our destruction...

"Yes...", I answered, the flames that suddenly washed over the Diana proof that some Mexican had gotten the distance right. Midshipman Anders nodding, now understanding why I did as I had! "Go below and tell the quickfirer crews to fire upon anything that shoots back at us," I added, seeing her nod and then follow my orders. She was a competent wench, and beautiful to boot too!

"Their battleship, sir," Susanna said to me, seeing me nod.

"Too `complete' to be burned," I answered, seeing her nod. The design was much like that of the Diana from what I could see. A great armored bulk in the dim light like some deep sea monster.

"I will lead a boarding party, `take' it for you, sir," she said. I wished she hadn't volunteered. There would doubtlessly be crossbowmen. I remembered Shari Johnson, recalled seeing her body wrapped up in a hammock to be tipped over the side of the North Star with a shot at her feet to speed her on her way to her final resting place at the bottom of the sea. I recalled the words of the "last rites" as Carol had spoken them that day now so long ago. She too had been young and beautiful like this one.

"Midshipman Anders," I said, seeing her stop and turn to look at me. Her hair the color of gold, her eyes a lovely blue.

"Yes, sir?" she asked, standing there looking at me.

"Just come back," I said to her, seeing her nod.

### Chapter Forty Three

"The hatches are dogged, ma'am!" the sailor cried to midshipman Anders, tugging futilely at the Mexican battleship's hatch while the Diana maintained a protective fire against those on shore. A few arrows and crossbow bolts now starting to fall among them leaving no doubt in the young blonde midshipman's mind that at least some of the Mexicans were willing to risk the Diana's fire in return for keeping the landing party from having a free hand with their own battleship! The inexperienced teenage Dularnian maiden now having little idea of "what" to do next too! It being obvious that those aboard the Mexican ship had closed the hatches, thus locking out the boarding party from the Diana.

"I'll signal the Diana!" the blonde haired girl answered, hoping that I might have some idea of what to "do" about things. "Perhaps the ship can ram this one," she suggested brightly then, an arrow dropping at her feet, while other missiles started falling among the boarding party like a deadly hail from the sky...

"Maybe we can cut the ropes and the Diana can tow it out to sea," one of the bosuns ventured, a grizzled old sailorman nearly old enough to be Susanna's own great grandfather. Anders nodding as they stood there, well aware of the "targets" that they made!!

"Do so," she answered, signaling the Diana as it came in closer, the black smoke of its coal fires rising up into the star sprinkled sky while the Moon, only a few days from "new" now gleamed down upon them in the eastern sky. A sky now growing just a bit "pale" there on the distant horizon as the rays of the sun started peeking just a bit over the curve of the Earth. The young midshipman watching the men leaping on to the curved hull of the battleship, others on the bow of the Diana waiting to take hold of the ropes to tow the enemy battleship away from its dock.

"Should'a sent one of the 'boys' instead of a pretty girl like you," a sailor smiled as a spent arrow thunked at his feet. The Diana's continuous fire had discouraged most of those firing at them, but some, hidden behind shelter where the Diana's missiles could not reach, were arching arrows and crossbow bolts at the landing party, such missiles, while not actually "aimed" as such, were still able of inflicting serious wounds if they struck you! The puffs of steam from the Diana proof of her own fire!

"Think of your work, not me!" Susanna Anders snapped back. A man clutching at an arrow in his shoulder falling from the deck of the enemy battleship into the waters alongside the vessel. A woman leaping into the water, keeping him afloat while others now lifted him back on to the ship. Puffs of steam from the forward turret telling of the Diana's return fire as the battleship now started to back away, taking up on the tow rope that joined it to the enemy battleship. The teenage blonde crouching down to make less of a target for herself as she clung to a hatch handle, the dock falling back as the Diana now dragged the other ship away...

"Landing Party, Get Aboard The Enemy Ship!" I snapped, carefully taking up the strain as the Diana started towing the other! Anders' blonde hair a pale glow in the moonlight as she scrambled aboard after her men, and then suddenly clutching at her leg! I saw a burly sailor grab her, keeping her from falling overboard!!

"I think Tarais going to be `pissed'," Lorraine said to my wife as the two Warladies now watched the goings on in the harbor. It being quite obvious that the Diana was towing the other battleship out from its dock, while at the same time maintaining a steady stream of fire upon those who now sought to prevent it!

"Maybe it'll shorten the war," my wife smiled in reply.

"I'm two weeks `past due'," Lorraine answered back.

"`Motherhood' will do you `good'," Carol laughed in reply.

"Make my husband more aware of his `responsibilities'," Lorraine answered with a smile in return, regarding the still lovely Dularnian Warlady in the now growing light as the first rays of the sun lit up the eastern sky, the stars mostly dim and pale with Venus bright in the east. "`Both' to me and the child I bear." The Imperial Warlady well aware of the other woman's own feminine attractiveness, of her provocative features that left no doubts in anyone's mind that she was fully and truly "female"...

"You talk as if there could be `another woman'," Carol said, wondering what woman would "dare" such a thing knowing "who" he was married to. It not being that uncommon in this era for a wife to "defend" her marriage with cold steel if it came to that! And Lorraine was commonly believed to be the greatest swordswoman of all time! A woman that no other woman at least could match!!!

"I am glad that we are not `enemies' any more," Lorraine smiled in reply, now laying her hand on the brownette's shoulder. "I am glad that I've gotten to know you as I have," she added...

"Bob and I don't really `belong' here in this time," Carol said, looking out over the harbor. She watched Lorraine nod in reply, the Imperial Warlady's dark brown eyes meeting her hazel.

"You have `done' what you were sent here to do," Lorraine answered. "And perhaps `reminded' me of a few things too," the Imperial Warlady added, putting her arm around Carol's shoulders. "Darlanis is not a `second Janet Rogers', and perhaps the `first' wasn't all that she was cracked up to be either," Lorraine said.

"If you could go back in time....," Carol breathed softly.

"It would make little difference," Lorraine smiled back.

"The Mexicans are trying to get steam up," the midshipman announced to me in a squeaky voice, staring past me at Anders there in sick bay getting her injured leg treated by the ship's Physician. The Diana had been towing the enemy battleship most of the way down the harbor towards the entrance. There had been little "interference" by the enemy. I supposed that we'd taught them a degree of caution with our quickfirers and flame throwers!

"Props and rudders are too deep for the ram," I answered, the Diana being a bit "difficult" to sail backwards like we were. It would be "easy" to sink the enemy ship, but such a vessel could be "valuable" if we could take it as a prize instead of just sinking it here in the harbor. I wasn't too sure as to the depth of water here, and it was possible that the Mexicans might be able to "raise" the ship later and make the necessary repairs.

"`That' could be quite a prize," Lorraine said, holding the telescope to her eye, the sky now quite light

there in the east.

"Looks like they're trying to get steam up," Carol noted, the wood smoke rising from the Mexican battleship's twin funnels.

"The Diana's backing off!" Lorraine spoke, viewing the scene through her telescope. "And she's ramming the other ship now!!!"

"That should 'hold' them," I spoke, seeing the midshipman nod. I had rammed the other ship just about where her boilers would be, I guessed. I suspected that "this" might be "enough" to encourage the Mexicans aboard to abandon their ship to us...

"There's a hatch opening!" the boy spoke in awe. I saw the men scrambling out over the armored hull like a bunch of ants when their nest is disturbed to leap into the still waters below!

"Send a boarding party over, take command of it," I replied.

"Aye, aye sir!" the boy cried, dashing below then to do so!

"We 'paid' a high price for 'victory'," I said, seeing my wife nod as the bodies were brought aboard for burial at sea. Among them the body of Captain Sandra Steven of the Diana, along with one of our two lieutenants. Both dead of crossbow bolts. I saw Carol's eyes meet mine, her hazel eyes filling with understanding. We had "survived", while they had died, and for what?

"Lorraine feels that it was worth it," Carol said to me.

"No doubt 'she' would," I answered, holding my wife.

"What are your 'intentions' towards the prize?" Lorraine said to me as I stood there on the main deck of the Diana, the dead bodies stacked almost like cordwood awaiting burial at sea.

"It was 'taken' by the Diana, and it will remain ours," I said. I saw the Warlady nod, her dark brown eyes holding my own. The ship was "repairable", and was even able of getting up steam on one of its twin engines. The design of the engines spoke well of the Mexicans, although I suspect some of its design was "due" to Princess Tara's "knowledge" of the past, the infamous Princess being as "knowledgeable" about such things as any of the Scribes!

"Oh Lys, we ask your mercy upon the souls of these who have died, in the hope that you will look upon them with mercy and gather them to your loving bosom as the 'mother' of all living things." I heard Carol say as she spoke the "last rites" over our own dead. We had purchased our "victory" at a high price, I thought then... "We ask too, oh dear loving Lys, that you grant us who live the wisdom to know good from evil, that we may keep your commandments, that we may live our lives in the hope that we will be gathered to your bosom after death to be forever united with you for all time." I recalled what Lorraine had written. I wondered if she had perhaps seen "God" there on the arid surface of Mars. I knew the Warlady was no longer the "agnostic" she'd been back in the Twentieth Century when I'd often spoken to her.

Stepping up beside Carol, I then said, "We mourn those who have fallen, but we must also remember the 'good' they did in their lives, the memories we hold of them, and remember that they did not die in vain, that the 'cause' for which they fought was 'just' regardless of what the Scribes someday write of our acts." With this I nodded my head and the first of the bodies wrapped up in hammocks and weighted

with shot was quietly tipped over the side of the Diana into the restless green waters of the Pacific.

## Chapter Forty Four

"We should be in sight of Dularn by tomorrow," Carol said to me, leaning back against the observation deck railing on top of the forward quickfirer turret. The captured Mexican battleship following close behind. The air was "chill", the leaves all now "turned" on the trees there to starboard, the sun bright in the cloud sprinkled November sky. It had taken us some time to return, what with the temporary repairs we'd had to make to the prize and the fact that it could only run on its portside engine. We'd made several stops for fuel, cutting our own in the forests. I had been working on the book I'd wrote here of our adventures, having "dedicated" it to our beloved Queen, Maris Marn of Dularn. The trip back home having been "slow", due to the other ship... I had also had ample time to think, to ponder over a few things.

"Our 'home' away from home," I smiled back at my brownette. We were not "truly" of this time, despite everything we had done! I missed those afternoons in the kitchen, sipping coffee, admiring Carol in one of her buckskin bikinis as she prepared dinner.

"If only we 'could'," Carol breathed, her eyes glowing hot!

"It is not likely that the Lorr will ever return," I said, having thought this over now for some time. The Lorr and their own servants, the lovely Women of Mars had gotten the "PORTAL" device from which centuries later they would develop into a means of eventually crossing space without the need to use space ships.

"We have carried out our 'mission' here," Carol said to me.

"There is Hope to consider here," I pointed out to my wife.

"I do not wish to take her back with us," Carol said to me!

"'Knowing' what the 'future' holds?" I asked my wife then.

"I think she would be better off 'here'," Carol answered.

"Queen Maris adores her," I smiled, seeing Carol nod back.

"I think we have made a 'decision'," I said to my brownette.

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"I wondered 'where' you'd gone," Ted's wife, Lila Jordan said, sitting across the circular kitchen table from my wife as Carol set the cup of coffee down before her. We had so far as the 20th Century been concerned, away from our home for about a week! We had told our friends that we had gone on a "vacation". We were both well aware of what could happen if any "believed"...

"I don't recall seeing that `scar' on your face before," Ted said, regarding Carol, who he'd seen a month before without any. Behind him the sliding glass patio doors that led one out to the redwood deck, the clearing behind the house and the woods beyond. Lila giving me a smile, her blue eyes and blonde hair reminding me just a bit of another that I'd once known in another "world". Once long ago I had thought that I had loved Lila, but then Carol had come into my life, and I'd realized just what my true feelings were. My brownette was far more "woman" than Lila ever was.

"I had a little `accident'," my wife answered, diverting the heavy set blond haired dentist's question. I recalled how Carol had gotten that scar in her duel with the Imperial Warlady. For a year and a half Carol and I had lived in another "time", in another "world" far different from this one. A world where guns were almost unknown, where men and women carried swords. Where "government" played only a very "minor" role in people's lives. I thought briefly of Maris Marn, of the awesome Imperial Warlady. She had "belonged" in the Twenty Sixth Century. We had not...

"Are you going to continue to `dance' at the Hutch?" Lila asked. I considered to myself what she would bring in a slave market. No doubt diet and exercise would "improve" her "value".

"I know it seems impossible, but you both look `different' than before," Lila muttered, sitting there across from my wife. I supposed that was possible considering the "time" we'd spent in the 26th Century. We were no longer the "innocents" we'd been...

"And how would that be?" my wife challenged her right back!

"You do look `different'," Ted admitted, giving me a smile.

"We have been `traveling'," I smiled, nodding at my wife.

"Still `fits' although I'm a bit `big' in the breasts now," Carol said, fastening the top to her delightful buckskin bikini. I admired her firm taut figure, much unlike that of most women.

"Probably raise a few eyebrows back in Arsana," I smiled.

"I wonder `why' Tais said `good bye' to us like she did," Carol mused, standing there looking at herself in the mirror now. "It was almost as if she never expected to see us again," my wife added, turning about, the swell of her firm buttocks provocative.

"Who knows?" I laughed, sitting there on the kingsize bed, glad to be back "home" with my delightful provocative brownette, while well aware of that "time travel" had its own "dangers" too.

And so with this I come to the end of this story. I will print it out and place it in the hollow tree as Tais asked me to. It is perhaps best now that those of this era do not believe what lies in the future. Not that it is likely that they would believe me, but I have no desire to risk the safety of those living six centuries from now. We know that Carol's three novels did survive, that she was responsible in her own way for many of the things we found there in the future, just as Lorraine was "responsible" for Janet Rogers, who will be ruler of the world...

The End

