



**The Warlord's
Comeuppance
Gail Koger**

Warning

This e-book contains sexually explicit scenes and adult language. This material is meant for mature audiences!

Gail Koger

**The Warlord's Comeuppance
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Prologue

Stealing from a warlord and giving him the one finger salute as I made my getaway was not the brightest thing I'd ever done. Okay, I'll admit it—it was an incredibly stupid stunt.

Did I mention that this particular Coletti warlord is the most feared in the entire galaxy? That Zarek's the ultimate predator and even the other warlords are scared spitless of him? That he never ever stops until he either captures or kills his prey?

Yeah, I have the big, bad warlord after me and all because of one little finger. Okay and a Ditrin crystal the size of my fist. Am I worried? Of course, only an idiot doesn't fear a very angry Coletti warlord. But, I am very good at what I do. Bad news is—so is Zarek.

My name is Detja. The Enforcers call me the Ghost. As a master thief, I must be a combination of magician and chameleon. The illusion of magic deflects attention away from the act and when things go to hell, like they sometimes do; the ability to blend into any situation or culture is a must.

My looks are my biggest illusion. I'm a Farin, one of the fragile flowers of the universe. No one in

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a million years would ever expect me to be an extraordinary thief or powerful psychic. Everyone takes one look at my delicate frame and exotic features and dismisses me as harmless. Really big mistake on their part. I'll admit that most Farin females are timid creatures, devoted to domestic duties and incapable of doing harm to anyone. Me? I'm an anomaly, a genetic throwback to a time long, long ago when Farin females were warriors.

Chapter One

The Sharqi Pleasure Palace is a male's wet dream. For me, it was an utter nightmare. Species from every corner of the galaxy swarmed the dimly lit, disgustingly gaudy interior. All with one thought on their feeble minds. Sex. Lots and lots of sex. Not a problem since the joint was full of willing, overly enhanced females and all of whom were available for a price.

For me, it was a really big problem. Trying to keep out of reach of the grabby paws, claws and slimy tentacles was annoying. As in 'pulling my laser pistol and shooting every one of them in the balls' annoying.

Only the memory of Thea's tear-streaked face kept me focused as I upped the potency of my psychic lure. My hips shimmied and shook as I gyrated around the tables in an erotic hypnotic frenzy trying to lure Dogon, one particularly vile male, closer and closer with the promise of utter sexual ecstasy. Unfortunately, all I seemed to be doing was attracting every other vile creep in this hellhole. Yuck, just kill me now. I winced as another adoring fan left another bruise on my ass.

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My long silver hair swirling around me, I snaked my arms high above my head and clicked the zills on my fingers to the beat of the drum. A Hoochee dancer's costume leaves very little to the imagination. A tiny metallic green bra with a beaded fringe that barely covered my nipples and a matching beaded skirt that twirled around my bare legs, bare butt and you get the picture.

A lecherous smirk on his face, Dogon finally gestured to me. Bless you, Goddess. I gave him a seductive smile and danced out of reach. My arms beckoned to him, enticing him with the promise of utter rapture. Eyes glazed with lust, he shot to his feet and followed blindly as I danced towards one of the private rooms. I'd soon be wiping that smirk off his face. One jab of my tranquillizer ring and I'd relieve the little creep of the Desh Raj medallion he'd stolen from Thea.

My psychic senses went into alert mode. Someone very powerful had just teleported in. My heart stuttered in shock as Zarek's predatory gaze locked on me. Balock's balls! Of all the pleasure palaces in the galaxy, he just had to walk into this one?

Something hot and primal moved in Zarek's amber eyes and I gulped in horror. Hells bells! He wanted me. Not in the torture and kill kinda way, but in the lick every inch of me kinda way. Maybe I had used a little too much sexual juice.

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Okay, way too much, because I suddenly craved his touch. This was bad on so many levels but how could any female not want to touch every delicious inch of him?

Zarek practically oozed sex appeal and he had the hard, muscular body and chiseled features of a vid star. His long ebony hair was done up in those sexy warrior's braids. Yummy!

Doing it with him would be mind-blowing and probably fatal. It wouldn't take him long to figure out that I was one who took the Ditrin crystal. But, Goddess, he was one magnificent male specimen.

Cold fear skittered down my spine. What was wrong with me? There was no way he could have marked me, was there? I eyed the tailored black uniform that emphasized his massive frame and literally burned with the need to touch all those luscious muscles. Oh, Goddess. I sucked in a panicked breath. I had to stop this. Big, bad. Big, bad. Big, bad, scary Warlord who wants me dead, dead, dead. And don't forget the rumors about the whole swapping out your DNA thing. A smart thief doesn't let her hormones control her. A smart thief cuts her losses and runs.

Dogon made a sudden lunge for me. I hooked a chair with my left foot and shoved it at him. He tripped over it and plowed face first into a table of

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exceedingly drunk Prithvi. Their antennas quivering madly, the multi-armed bugs reared up on their little stick legs and began whacking Dogon about the head and face.

I winced as ugly black blisters suddenly sprouted on Dogon's face. They were going to leave some really nasty scars.

Zarek's autocratic mental voice suddenly rang in my head. *Come to me, female.*

Sure, be right there. Not. I shimmied rapidly to the table of a drunken Askole warrior whose tentacles squirmed wildly around his snake-like features. His yellow-green eyes fastened on my breasts and he smiled, exposing really scary fangs.

I took another gulp of air and gave him an erotic psychic push. I didn't have a death wish nor was I suicidal. It was a move of sheer desperation. If Zarek wanted me, he was going to have to fight the Askole for me. Hopefully, during the ensuing carnage, I could escape.

Zarek upped the wattage of his command. *Come to me, now!*

My feet automatically started towards him. Balock's balls! I strengthened my mental shields and crawled onto the Askole's lap and reluctantly began licking his black armor-plated skin. Ewww.

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Gross. He tasted like dead things. Guess bathing wasn't high on his to do list. Ugh. I was never ever going to get the taste out of my mouth.

Out of the corner of my eye, I caught a brief glimpse of Zarek stalking towards us, fury evident on his face. Maybe this wasn't such a good idea after all. I squirmed as the Askole's tentacles slithered over my breasts and his fangs nipped at my neck. I knew I was in big trouble when one enormous clawed hand clamped around my waist while the other slid up my thigh to my bare mound. Eeek!

Zarek's psychic bellow exploded in my head. *The female is mine, warrior. Release her now.*

The Askole cackled madly. *Think you can take her from me?*

Yes. An instant later Zarek's massive fist slammed into the warrior's face.

The Askole's head snapped back and, with an enraged roar, he tossed me out of the way. I sailed across the room and smacked into a wall. Stars sparking across my vision, I crumpled to the sticky floor, fighting for breath, fighting to stay conscious.

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I dimly heard Zarek roar a frightening battle cry. The Askole answered with one of his own as I slid into the beckoning darkness.

Detja! Wake up. Now, a persistent voice demanded. Detja, open your eyes!

Ouch! What happened? What's all the yelling about? Horror flooded me, as I realized it was Adan, my surrogate father, mentor and boss all rolled into one scary package. *Father, I didn't expect you back so soon.*

So, it would seem. Adan's mental voice was full of menace. *Where are you?*

My eyes popped open and I stared in disbelief. It was pure pandemonium. Everyone ran screaming for the exits. Chairs, tables and bodies flew in every direction.

The Askole was moving so fast all I could see was a black blur as his terrifying claws and fangs flashed in a dizzying display of death. Those patrons that didn't move fast enough got pureed. Blood and bits of their innards splashed over the walls. Ewww!

In an almost choreographed dance, Zarek teleported in and out; avoiding his deadly claws and fangs and beating the snot out of the warrior. Not an easy task. Color me impressed.

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Detja!

I swallowed hard. *Ah, the Sharqi Pleasure Palace.*

Doing what?

Thea's medallion was stolen and I'm getting it back for her. No big.

No big? Isn't that Zarek?

Balock's balls. *Small galaxy, isn't it?* Dodging chairs, I crawled rapidly towards the door.

Do you have a death wish?

A huge furry hand clamped around my waist and the next thing I knew I was dangling over a shaggy shoulder. "Gotcha, my pretty." The Hus Ping, a five hundred pound hairy humanoid, barreled his way through the terror-stricken crowd, knocking people down right and left.

Zarek's voice was a harsh roar. "Put the female down, Hus Ping, or die."

Not the brightest bulb in the universe, the Hus Ping stopped and growled, "Get your own female."

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He stepped towards the door and whoosh, the Askole was suddenly in front of us. A second later Zarek popped in beside him. Both warriors bared their fangs in a menacing display.

His once spiffy uniform a shredded mess, Zarek asked calmly, "You think you can defeat both of us?"

The Hus Ping dropped me like a rock and ran.

Goddess, what a coward!

Zarek plucked me off the floor and sat me, not too gently, on a table. "Do not move."

Okay, time for my fragile flower routine. I pasted a suitably terrorized look on my face, let the tears flow and trembled violently. "Yes, my lord."

This one will be a handful, the Askole commented.

Of that, I have no doubt.

What? Now they're best buddies?

Giving me a deadly look, Zarek turned to the warrior. *Shall we continue?*

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The Askole gave a slight bow and the fight was on again.

Goddess, testosterone turned males into total idiots. I quickly recorded myself on an illusion disc.

The males seem to have an irrational need to possess you, Adan commented mildly. Why is that?

He just had to ask. *Ah, well, this is a pleasure palace and lust rules here. So, to bait my trap I drew on all that sexual energy just floating around and unfortunately, I used a tad bit too much psychic power and wham! I'm everyone's wet dream.*

Have you lost all reason?

It seemed like a good idea at the time.

Adan's mental voice was calm, almost contemplative. *As good as giving the Warlord a one finger salute?*

I flinched. When Adan used that calm, reasonable tone, I was in big trouble. With one quick look at the combatants, I triggered the illusion disc and slid off the table. My double kept on crying and trembling helplessly as I made a bee line for the door.

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I stepped out into the dimly lit alley and a horrified gasp escaped me. Dogon's once handsome face was now hideously deformed by the oozing black blisters. He grabbed a handful of my hair and dragged me over to an air bike. "Get on."

Since I needed to get as far away as possible from Zarek and my mark was so kindly providing transportation, I became the fragile flower once again and obediently climbed on.

His breath coming in labored gasps, Dogon crawled on behind me and started the engine. "You will pay for what you have done."

"Yes, my lord. I apologize humbly for your clumsiness, my lord." He smacked me upside the head and I sagged against him as the world spun dizzily for a moment.

That fool is going to die. Painfully, Adan swore.

More than likely, but not by your hand, okay? Remember, pretty boy's not so pretty anymore and with his ego that's just punishment. My skin crawled as something slimy dripped down my back. I glanced over my shoulder and shuddered. Oh, yuck, his face was melting off.

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Prithvi venom does tend to make a mess out of humanoids. There was a vicious satisfaction in Adan's tone.

Word to the wise—never, ever get Adan riled up. Any fool who manages to do that simply vanishes. Forever. Without a trace. A shudder shook me as those nightmarish images crawled out of the dark place I had shoved them. Ugh!

Dogon punched the air bike into high gear and off we zoomed, barely missing a wall. I clung desperately to his leg as the bike veered wildly; swerving from one side of the street to the other, forcing loudly cursing pedestrians to dive for cover. Dogon careened around a corner, shot the bike over a vendor's stand and just missed a tree.

Goddess, he was going to get us killed. I hit him with a hard psychic command. *Stop the bike.*

The bike skidded to an abrupt stop, hurling me face first into the control panel. Those pretty little sparkling lights danced merrily across my vision again and everything began to fade to black.

Fight it, Detja! You cannot allow the Warlord to take you.

Female! Zarek's furious bellow was like an electrical prod. I jerked upright with a startled

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gasp and shook my head to clear it. *The name is Detja, you idiot. Not female.*

There is nowhere you can run, that I can't find you, Detja.

Aggravating an angry Warlord is never a good move, Daughter.

Yeah, well, he's beginning to annoy me. A lot. Okay, I had a big mouth when my temper got the better of me. A cold chill slithered down my spine when I felt Zarek's powerful mind reach out, searching for me. Goddess, he might even be stronger than Adan and I had about a minute or so before things got really interesting. Swiping at the blood running down my face, I looked around for Dogon.

His face nearly gone, Dogon moaned pathetically on the sidewalk. Yeow! His gigolo days were definitely over. I staggered over to him and quickly searched him for the medallion. Balock's balls, it wasn't on him. I pulled a hotel pass key from his pocket. Hmmm. Wonder if he had it locked up?

The Warlord comes, Adan warned.

I quickly recorded my image on another illusion disc and pulled a handful of my special toys off my necklace and tossed them down. The Warlord was

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going to get a big bang out of this. Grinning like an idiot, I wobbled over to the bike, climbed on and punched it.

Now, Adan instructed.

I triggered the disc and set off the timers on my little toys. In the bike's vid screen I saw Zarek teleport in. My illusion gave him the one finger salute. A second later there was a bright flash of light followed by a thunderous cracking boom. The Warlord was blown across the street and smack into a wall. Ouch! That had to hurt.

His face a bloody mask, Zarek erupted to his feet and started laughing.

Okay, not quite the reaction I had expected. *You think something got rattled loose?* I asked father.

He does seem inordinately pleased by your actions, Adan answered a bit puzzled, too.

I am thoroughly going to enjoy taming you. To make you beg for my touch, Zarek threatened.

Outrage and fury had me hissing. *You are so going down.*

Is that a challenge, my little flower?

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Little flower? Oh, please. *You betcha.*

Detja, Adan snarled, *provoking the Warlord will only make him want you more.*

Okay, so it might be a tad more challenging dodging Zarek than the Enforcers. But, it wasn't anything I couldn't handle. My stomach knotted with growing unease. Right?

At last I have found a female worthy to be my mate, Zarek said with smug satisfaction.

I let out a squawk of disbelief. Mate?! No. No. No. No. Not happening.

I did warn you, Adan said, more than a little irritated.

Make no mistake, I will find you Detja or should I call you "The Ghost"?

I'm not that easy to catch. Just ask the Enforcers.

Shut up, Detja, Adan snapped. *Once he finds your mental pathways, he can track you anywhere.*

It's time for your first lesson in obedience and when I am done with you, you will be begging me for release.

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A startled gasp tore from my throat as a phantom mouth began to suckle my right breast. Holy Goddess! The bike swerved wildly when a second later a hot tongue laved my left nipple. I hauled off and gave him a vicious mental punch. *Don't touch me.*

The fiend actually laughed. *You're going to have to do better than that.*

Putting everything I had into it, I hit him again and again.

I do love a female with a little fight in her.

An invisible hand suddenly slid between my legs and began tormenting my little bud of flesh until I was writhing uncontrollably on the seat. Oh, Goddess! *Father! Please, make him stop!*

The sensations stopped abruptly. *I cannot block him for long. Get to your ship.*

The female is mine, Zarek growled.

Is she?

Know this old one, I will have her and there's nothing you can do to stop me.

Isn't there? The mental link was severed completely.

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My breath coming in shuddering gasps, I brought the careening air bike under control and headed for the spaceport. *How? How was he able to do that?*

Zarek's mental powers are most impressive. He will make a worthy opponent.

I rolled my eyes. Once again, testosterone ruled. *Can we focus here? Are you telling me he can psychically have sex with me any time and any place?*

Yes and every time he links with you, the bond between you grows stronger and stronger until he owns you, mind, body and soul.

What!? There has to be a way to stop him. I winced. That came out a bit shrill and whiny.

The only way to stop the Warlord is to kill him.

Hasn't about half the galaxy tried that?

Yes. Even the Alliance has sent their best hunters after him. None have ever survived.

Hells bells! You were able to block him. Show me—

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Adan's mind went on alert. *Captain Zan and his troops are in the area.*

I brought the bike to a stop and considered my options. Zarek wasn't far behind me and that sneaky bastard Zan was a little too good at his job. His focus on catching the Ghost made him one major pain-in-the butt. I did a quick scan of the area. Balock's balls. The Enforcers were everywhere and it looked like they had the spaceport locked down, too. *Nothing I can't handle, Father.*

Be careful, Zan is no fool. The Warlord is also aware of the Enforcers and I doubt he will attack until you are safe.

Oh goody!

A squad of red uniformed Enforcers trotted towards me with their laser rifles held ready.

Awww. How sweet. Zan had brought in his elite troops. Grinning, I gunned the bike and headed straight for them.

Zarek's growl rumbled in my head, *Are you mad?*

Watch and learn. I allowed the bike to swerve wildly as if I had trouble controlling it and then ran it into a tree. I crumpled to the ground making sure

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I was showing plenty of skin and cried pitifully, "Help me. Please, help me."

And Enforcers, being the dumb asses that they are, trotted right over. Shouldering their rifles they all crowded around me, gawking at my breasts that had spilled out of that itty-bitty nonsense of a bra. Sheesh! Show a little cleavage, okay a lot of cleavage, and males turned into brainless idiots. Not one of the morons had noticed my bloody face or asked if I was okay. Nope, their attention was firmly focused on my chest. Like I said, idiots.

I pointed a trembling hand towards the pleasure palace and sobbed, "An Askole is at the Sharqi. Oh Goddess, there's so much blood." I slumped to the ground and wept hysterically.

The Sergeant stiffened in alarm and shouted, "Katz stay with the female, the rest of you with me." And just like that they trotted off.

Really, it was almost too easy.

Quite the little actress, Zarek commented.

It's a talent, I replied modestly and jabbed my tranquillizer ring into Katz's neck. A second later he keeled over with a moan. I patted him. "Sweet dreams."

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I tucked my breasts back into the bra and gaped as a black blur streaked by. Hmmph, guess the Warlord hadn't killed him after all.

The black blur spun around and the next thing I knew my head was jammed in the smelly armpit of the Askole warrior. Eeep!

Zarek's furious roar reverberated around my skull. *Release her.*

Make me.

Oh for Goddess's sake. Are you trying to get us captured? I asked.

The Askole cackled. *I haven't had this much fun in ages.*

Lucky me. We whizzed through the city and any Enforcer stupid enough to get in his way was pureed. Ick! And I thought I was bloody before.

Where are you, Daughter?

Haven't a clue. Can't see much with my head stuck in his armpit.

The Askole stopped abruptly.

Please, I gasped, I can't breathe. The Askole dropped me face first into a muddy puddle. I

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crawled to my feet and wiped the muck off my face.

Keep him talking while I triangulate your position, Adan instructed on a private link.

I'll do my best.

The sun spilled over the jagged edge of a mountain revealing a forest of white, skeletal-like trees twisted into agonized shapes. A river of sluggish gray water oozed through a chaotic mass of tumbled stones.

You aren't seriously thinking of going in there, are you?

The Askole grinned, exposing his awesome fangs. *It would be a challenge.*

Ya think? Wasn't going toe to toe with the Warlord enough of a challenge?

He stared down at me for a long moment. *You would make a fitting mate.*

My blood turned to ice. *Wow, I... Ah... Really flattered but I'm kinda too small for you.*

Think only the Colettis can alter DNA?

Really? I backed away slowly. *Didn't know that.*

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A glittery blue light engulfed me and I gave the warrior a one fingered salute.

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Chapter Two

I transported into total darkness. *Father?*

Two burning yellow eyes appeared in the inky blackness and moved towards me. *Daughter.*

A cold thread of dread snaked up my spine and I stumbled backwards until I hit the wall. Adan was in his true form and that only happened when someone was about to die horribly. Way too many people had been dying like that lately. *What's going on? Has someone boarded the ship?*

No, we are alone. The lights snapped on revealing something found only in the most horrific nightmares. A Katanic shape shifter. Even the Askole and Coletti gave them a wide berth. The few unlucky enough to see a Katanic in their true form usually ended up as dinner. Those that survived the encounter were never quite the same again. Lucky me, I was one of the few, the proud, the... Uh, you get the picture.

The huge, heaving silky black mass with those truly scary long ropy tentacles, oozed slowly towards me. My hand clamped around my necklace and I fought down the urge to throw one of my deadly little toys at it. It's Father. He won't hurt

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me. He won't... A head suddenly bulged out from Adan's hide, its mouth frozen in an endless scream. I gasped. There were other body parts moving inside the thick mass. Oh Goddess, this was so not good. Father had been busy eating someone. *Did Zarek track me here?*

No.

Relief flooded me. Thank Goddess, he was okay. My relief suddenly turned to panic. Why was Zarek's safety so important to me? If that fiend had marked me, he was so dead.

My hunger grows too strong, my child. I can no longer control it. An enormous mouth edged with hundreds of serrated teeth appeared in the mass. A sticky black tongue shot out, smacking me in the chest and jerking me forward.

I swallowed my instinctive scream of terror and stared up at the creature looming over me. *You are not going to eat me, Father. So knock off the big, scary monster routine.* Goddess, that had come out way too squeaky. A tiny part of me was afraid he might want dessert.

Adan's harsh laughter sounded in my mind. *Even as a child you were so very defiant and so determined not to show fear. What I must do grieves me greatly.* Two tentacles abruptly shot out, one wrapped tightly around me, trapping my

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arms against my body. The other caressed my face gently.

Wait! Do? What's going on? I know you've been uh...eating people a lot lately, but they were all bad guys and no one's going to miss them. If you're that hungry, you could always eat Zarek.

Zarek would be an unpleasant mouthful to swallow and unfortunately, I was forced to enter into an agreement with him.

What!? What kind of agreement?

You will know soon enough.

But... His tentacles tightened and I could feel his mental anguish. That's when it hit me. There were way too many body parts roiling around inside Adan. Who? I moistened my suddenly dry mouth. Who did you eat?

Captain Zan's troops.

All of them!? Even Captain Zan?

The Captain escaped my trap.

I have to admit I was a bit disappointed that Zan had escaped. I knew the Captain and he would be utterly relentless until he found out what had

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happened to his men. *You said your hunger was out of control but... Wow! This is really bad.*

A tentacle petted my hair. *More than you can imagine. Every one thousand years I must return to my home world to regenerate. If I do not, I will become a killing machine unlike anything this galaxy has ever seen. You know what I am capable of. Not even an army of Warlords could stop me.*

I knew. Oh Goddess, I knew. Sick fear curled in my stomach as I suppressed those terrible images. *But you were banished. They'll kill you if you return.*

Another tentacle slithered across my cheek. *Even for my kind I am very powerful. I will not die, my child, but I must sever our link until my regeneration is complete. Your mind would not survive the process.*

You've been in my head since I was five years old. I can handle it. You'll need someone to watch your back.

Adan's voice was a furious hiss and his mind clamped painfully around mine. *You will obey me in this or I will take your memories of me. Do you understand?*

To have all those terrible images wiped from my mind forever was so very tempting, but to lose

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my memories of father filled me with a blind panic. *Please. Please don't do that. You're the only family I have left. I can't lose you, too. I'll do as you ask, okay?* The painful pressure stopped. I gave myself a mental head smack. Goddess, when had I become such a wimp?

I have let this go on far too long, but I cannot lose you, my child, to the hunger. Even now I crave a taste of you.

His tongue suddenly slimed my face and I gave him a hard mental slap. *Father! Stop it!* For thirty harrowing seconds his tentacle tightened until I could barely breathe. *Father, you are stronger than anyone I've ever known. You can control it.*

The tentacle loosened and his entire body trembled with need. *Your faith in me is unwise. I must leave. Now.*

No! There has to be another way.

I have no choice; if I stay millions will die. If for some reason I do not survive the rebirthing, I know you will be safe with the Warlord. He is quite satisfied with your bride price.

What!?

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Your mind may fracture when I sever our link and I will not allow you to be damaged. To prevent this I've strengthened Zarek's bond with you.

What!? But... You can't...

Father just ignored my stuttered protests and kept on talking. Zarek now has the ability to step in and seal any breaches in your mind until you are strong enough to cope. You will need his strength to survive what is to come.

I butted in desperately, Stop! I don't need... I gasped as a tentacle delivered a stinging slap to my face.

Enough! It is done. The Warlord can and will protect you from all harm. He is also strong enough to control that reckless streak of yours. The shielding at our villa on Mikolic will hide you from the Alliance detection devices until your mate can claim you.

No! There's no way you're just handing me over. I'm not a piece of property to be bought and sold. No one owns me. Not even you.

My brave, little warrior you have been mine since the moment I found you desperately trying to protect your dying parents.

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A sob broke from me as he allowed those awful memories to come flooding back. The Tai-Kok's brutal attack on our ship, the sirens wailing and the people's terrified faces appearing and disappearing in the billowing smoke. So much blood and I kept stumbling over the shredded bodies.

Then the monsters came for us and my father tried so very hard to protect my mom and me but there were too many of them. They tore him apart while my mother screamed uselessly.

A blind rage had swept through me and I grabbed my father's pistol and started firing. But all I managed to hit was the walls and the ceiling. The Tai-Kok's honking laughs stopped abruptly when Adan appeared in all his terrifying glory. I gave him a watery smile. *You ate them, everyone one of them; even though their metal teeth gave you a bad case of indigestion.*

Even then you were so fearless. You watched me eat over a dozen Tai-Koks and never flinched. When they were all dead, you grabbed one of my tentacles and said 'can I go home with you?' I will miss you, daughter.

His tentacles clamped around my head. A second later blinding agony ripped through my mind and I fell into oblivion.

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A harsh voice kept demanding, *Detja! Wake up. Detja!*

Cold. I was so very cold.

Detja!

I moaned as pain rocketed through my head.
Quit yelling. Goddess, you're worse than Father.

Open your eyes.

Go away. Tired. Wanna sleep.

Open your eyes now, the pitiless voice commanded.

Go away you bossy jerk!

Open your eyes and I'll leave.

Promise?

Open your eyes. Show me what you see.

I reluctantly obeyed and blinked in dismay. There was nothing but an endless black void that seemed to stretch to eternity. Oh Goddess, where was I? What happened? A shudder shook me as an aching cold void formed inside me. Empty, I was so very empty. I instinctively reached out searching

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for Adan's mind and found nothing. *Father? Where are you? I need you.*

Tears of anguished grief poured down my cheeks. He was gone! Oh Goddess, he was gone. The ache in my chest grew with each breath until the pain was excruciating. I thrashed around struggling to breathe, fighting to survive the utter loss of his touch. *Father*, I pleaded, *I can't do this*. A cold, unending silence was my only response. Tendrils of ice encompassed my body and I began to shiver uncontrollably. I was alone, so very alone.

A golden light blossomed in the void and a mesmerizing voice called to me. *You are not alone, Detja. I am here. You are mine and I will never allow anyone to harm you. I will never leave you. Come to me. Come.*

I moved eagerly towards the light and that beckoning warmth.

That's it my little flower, come to me.

Little flower?! Memory came rushing back and I let out a scream of pure rage. *May you burn in the tenth hell.*

That's my Detja, fight it.

I hissed. *I'm not yours nor will I ever be yours.*

The Warlord's Comeuppance

His amused laughter grated along my nerves.
You cannot escape your fate.

Never! I'll never surrender to you.

Phantom hands stroked my body gently. *Watch and see.*

I backed away as the light grew brighter and brighter. No. There had to be a way out. That black void pressed in on me, suffocating me, overwhelming me with its terrible emptiness. A shudder shook me as those icy tendrils grew stronger, sucking the life from me.

Those soothing hands tightened until their grip was painful. *Feel me. Feel my touch.* The hands roved over my body, possessing and branding every inch of me. *You are mine.*

“Nooooo!” I bolted upright and found myself on a massive bed in a room right out of male’s wet dream. Sex toys and silk everywhere. Father had redone my room! Blinking in disbelief, I looked around frantically for Adan. *Father*, I pleaded, *I can’t do this.* I rocked back and forth sobbing hysterically. *Please, father.*

“Enough, Detja,” Adan said coldly.

I scrambled from the disgusting bed and stared at the vid screen. Adan had once again assumed my

Gail Koger

dead father's form. His aristocratic features were tight with anger. "You are stronger than this."

"Empty," I wailed. "I'm so empty."

"The Warlord will gladly fill that emptiness, again and again, until there is no doubt in your mind that you belong to him."

Shocked rage flooded me and I gave him the one finger salute. "You bastard, you sold me out."

"I made sure you would survive."

"I will not submit to the Warlord."

Father gave me a mocking smile. "No one can escape their fate. Not even me. Be safe, daughter." The vid screen went black.

That terrible emptiness came flooding back and I fought back the tears. I wouldn't let them win. I couldn't. If Zarek took me, I'd be lost forever.

That's when I caught a glimpse of myself in the mirror. I turned and stared in utter horror. Oh Goddess! What had father done? My hair was artfully tousled, my lips rouged and my naked body was draped with jewelry meant to entice and lure a man into bed. A sob caught in my throat. How could he?

The Warlord's Comeuppance

I jumped as ghostly hands cupped my jeweled covered breasts and a thumb caressed my right nipple.

Very nice. I can't wait to bed you, my little flower.

Fury swept through me and I slapped at his hands. *Don't touch me!*

The Warlord chuckled. *You will crave my touch. Even beg for it.*

Maybe, when the ten hells freeze over.

He laughed and patted my bottom. *Adan said you were a virgin and I must admit I like the idea of being your first lover.*

Gag me. I was going to kill Adan slowly, painfully. I grabbed a robe off the bed and slid it on. *How about I just kill you instead, lover?* I sucked in a startled breath. Our bond was definitely growing. In my mind I could see Zarek putting his ship into orbit. Oh Goddess, I was out of time. I pulled a jumpsuit out of the closet and struggled to pull it over my jewel encrusted body.

You run from me and you will not like the consequences, Zarek promised darkly.

Gail Koger

You can't catch what you can't see. I rushed into my armory and started loading up with weapons and explosives.

I could feel his delighted satisfaction. *The Ghost does have a cloaking device.*

Balock's balls, I had such a big mouth. I clamped the cloaking belt around my waist and slid on my handy dandy wrist comp unit. *You'll never get your grimy paws on it or me.*

A spectral hand slid possessively down my back. *Won't I?*

I fled.

Chapter Three

In the dim, pewter light the shabby garishly lit businesses stood out brightly. Boisterous shouts, wailing rhythmic music and wild, unrestrained laughter spilled out into the street to combine with the rasping voices of the street vendors.

I hurried down the crowded street, dodging the persistent vendors and keeping a watchful eye on the alarming amount of Enforcers in the area. Were they tracking the Warlord, Adan the terrible, or the Ghost?

On a crumbling brick terrace, females dressed in colorfully embroidered caftans sat idly at the tables drinking tiny glasses of Quar and giving the passing males come hither looks. I glanced longingly at the Quar. Goddess, what I wouldn't give for a dozen or so glasses of the extremely sweet and oh so very intoxicating beverage. It would take the edge off my growing need for Zarek's touch.

My senses screamed a warning. I darted into a shadow and carefully scanned the area around me. The Warlord was close but where?

I told you it was futile to run.

Gail Koger

I gasped as Zarek moved out of a doorway a scant foot away, his amber eyes glittering with menace.

A girl's gotta do what a girl's gotta do. I hit the control on my cloaking belt and ducked under a peddler's table.

I have no time for your foolish game, he snarled, hurling the heavily loaded table across the courtyard.

Screams, shrieks and curses sounded as everyone ran for their lives. Couldn't really blame them, an enraged Warlord was a pretty scary sight. I wanted to run shrieking, too.

Whoa! I scrabbled backwards as Zarek's massive hand barely missed me and rolled under a vendor's cart. How in the ten hells was he finding me?

You cannot hide from me. The vendor's cart was abruptly heaved upwards and launched into a squad of Enforcers. Smack! Down they went with their arms and legs wriggling frantically under the heavy weight.

Goddess! I quickly crawled under another table, flinching as it also went flying to crash

The Warlord's Comeuppance

violently against the wall. *Are you nuts!? This place is crawling with Enforcers.*

Adan's appetite has drawn quite a bit of unwanted attention.

Then go!

Not without you, my little flower. He lunged and somehow managed to grab a handful of my jumpsuit.

I twisted and kicked him in the face. *I'm not your little flower.*

His massive frame suddenly smashed me against the cobblestone street and a second later a laser beam sizzled a scant inch over our heads.

I looked over Zarek's shoulder and grimaced. Captain Zan and what was left of his elite troops were fanning out around the courtyard. *Oh goody, Zan and his little friends wanna play.*

Does nothing frighten you?

After living with Adan for twenty years? Not much. A ribbon of dazzling red energy kissed the street next to my head. *Could you maybe, like, I don't know, teleport us out of here?*

Gail Koger

Energy barrier, Zarek growled, pulled his weapon and in an amazingly quick succession shot down a dozen Enforcers.

Color me impressed. I winced as Zarek abruptly dragged me along the jagged cobblestones. *Yeow! Easy. I'm delicate.* His snort of amusement did nothing to improve my temper.

The searing hiss of a laser flashed dangerously close to us. "Surrender or die," Zan shouted, his hard black eyes searching the now empty marketplace. Seems my cloaking belt was affecting Zarek, too, and the Captain was in a bit of a snit about his quarry simply vanishing.

I did a quick scan of the courtyard and threw a handful of my stun grenades around us. *Can you teleport us behind those carts over there?*

Yes. I could sense his pleasure at sticking it to Zan.

A fleeting second of utter blackness and poof we were there. I touched a button on my wrist comp unit and activated my energy shield. A scant twenty seconds later blinding flashes of light were followed by a series of thunderous cracking booms as the stun grenades blew one by one.

The Warlord's Comeuppance

Zarek's disembodied head surveyed the unconscious troops and then gave me a hard kiss. *You are a fitting mate.*

I touched my mouth in stunned disbelief. Goddess did he know how to kiss but I had to admit it was kinda weird being kissed by just a head. Weird and hot. Really, really hot. Zarek had great lips, warm, firm and... Great lips? Hot? Oh Goddess, I was in so much trouble. I disengaged my shield, quickly pulled off my heavy jeweled bracelet, touched the center stone and shoved it into the Warlord's hand. In perfect High Coletti I asked, "Think you can hit their energy barrier with that?"

He examined the now brightly glowing stone and cocked an arrogant brow at me. "You doubt me?"

I rolled my eyes in disgust. What an egotistical jerk. "Unless you want to be crispy fried, I suggest you throw it. Now!"

With a wolfish grin, he hurled it and I quickly engaged my energy shield again as for ten blinding seconds a sun-bright holocaust raged above us.

I shook my head to clear the ringing in my ears. "Whoa! Think I used a bit too much peist in that one."

Gail Koger

Zarek roared with laughter, hooked a powerful arm around me and teleported. There was a disorienting moment of inky blackness, quickly followed by a funny buzzing crackle and suddenly we falling out of the sky.

A shriek tore from my throat as we plummeted down.

Down.

Down.

Down.

I frantically wrapped my arms around Zarek's neck as his grip loosened and fell away. "What's wrong with you? Get us out of here," I shouted into his right ear.

We kept falling. One terrified glance at the rooftops rushing towards us and I instinctively linked with Zarek's mind. Holy Goddess! He was out cold. I gave him a hard mental smack. *Wake up! Wake up! Now! Do you want your fragile flower to be splattered all over the rooftops? Wake up!* I smacked him again.

With a snarl, his eyes popped open and his arms clamped around me. *You dare strike me, female?*

The Warlord's Comeuppance

I snarled right back. *You betcha and I'll do it again because we are about thirty seconds away from certain death, you moron!*

His fangs bared menacingly, he glanced down and poof! We were standing in a lush garden.

I sagged against him. "I never ever want to do that again."

"Zan's new scanner is quite effective," Zarek commented, his hand idly stroking my back.

"Ya think?"

A slight smile pulled at his mouth. "My fierce little warrior, you are worth every bit of your bride price."

"Really? How much did you give Adan for me?"

"One credit."

"What!? Are you joking? That can't be right!" It was downright insulting.

"The old one felt I was being penalized enough by taking on a bad tempered mate with homicidal tendencies."

"I'm not the one tearing around the galaxy killing people and taking things that don't belong

Gail Koger

to me,” I snapped as he abruptly dumped me on my feet.

The Warlord cocked a disbelieving eyebrow at me.

Head smack. I walked right into that one. “Okay, I’m a thief. I’ll admit I occasionally take things that don’t belong to me but homicidal, no way.”

“Lord Santo and Callahan might disagree with you.”

I glared up at him. “They were trying to kill me and a girl has the right to defend herself.”

“As do the Coletti.”

“Defend as in running amuck around the known universe, conquering planets and stealing females?”

“I do what is necessary to ensure the survival of my people.” Zarek’s hand closed around the controls to my cloaking belt. He deactivated it and, before I could stop him, slid it off my waist. “Hey, give that back.”

He simply held it out of reach and examined the belt carefully. A shadow of annoyance crossed

The Warlord's Comeuppance

his face as he fingered the crystal. "You broke up my Ditrin crystal?"

I shrugged. "Yeah, so?"

"Intact, the crystal was worth ten million credits."

"Still think my bride price was such a bargain?"

He let out a long sigh. "Taming you is not going to be easy."

"You have no idea."

Zarek abruptly shifted into combat mode. "Zan has found us."

"How?" I yelped as he shoved me to the ground. Ten seconds later a barrage of laser bolts seared the air above us. I caught a fleeting glance of an Enforcer hovercraft skimming daringly low above the rooftops, its gun turrets spitting lurid bursts of red before Zarek pushed my head down.

"The Captain is following the energy signal from the crystal."

Balock's balls. I pulled a couple of grenades out of my pockets and shoved them at the Warlord. "I'm getting really tired of being shot at and I think it's time we put a stop to it. Don't you agree?"

“Very much so.” With a deadly aim, Zarek hurled them at the hovercraft. The night sky suddenly lit up like a holiday display. Black smoke billowed from the hovercraft as it began spinning and twisting violently. A heartbeat later the ship exploded into a great ball of rippling flames.

I quickly engaged my shield again as pieces of burning, twisted metal rained down on the garden, setting the trees and bushes on fire.

My shield sparked ominously and flickered out. I stared in open-mouthed horror at the sudden inferno raging around us. Goddess, talk about bad timing. We’d be crispy fried before my shield’s power source could regenerate. “Think you can get us out of here, big guy?”

With an irritated growl, Zarek’s arm clamped around me and a fleeting second later we were inside a large warehouse.

I patted out the burning embers on my jumpsuit. “You know, you’re kinda handy to have around. Another ten seconds and we’d been a bit charred.”

The Warlord stared at me for a long moment as if I was some kind of interesting specimen he’d just discovered.

The Warlord's Comeuppance

I grinned at him. "Betcha you're rethinking the whole mate thing, huh?"

A diabolical smile spread across his hard mouth. "No, I was wondering how long it would take to make you scream."

Scream? I backed away from the predatory gleam in his amber gaze. "Easy big scary one, I'll steal you another crystal."

"Yes, you will."

An electric shock jolted me as ghostly fingers slid down my stomach and glided between my legs. A soft needy cry broke from me as they caressed my little nub, sending liquid fire racing through my body.

My knees threatened to buckle as the fingers abruptly penetrated me and began to thrust deep inside me. "Stop! You can't...Zan..." My inner muscles rippled and clenched around his fingers. Goddess, oh Goddess. I gritted my teeth and fought back the waves of ecstasy threatening to give the Warlord exactly what he wanted. Me. "What in the ten hells do you think you're doing?"

"Making you scream." His large hand clamped around my neck and his mouth descended on mine. His tongue invaded, tasted, possessed.

Gail Koger

A voracious sexual need exploded inside me. I needed to feel him inside me, to taste him, to know the shape and texture of his skin. I groaned as his tongue began to thrust inside my mouth, the rhythm matching the movement deep inside me. I whimpered as I rode a crest of pleasure so intense I thought I would die from it.

My wrist comp unit's warning chimes finally penetrated my sexual fog. Oh Goddess, what was I doing? If I didn't stop this now, the Warlord would own me mind body and soul. Thumbing my tranquillizer ring into place, I quickly jabbed it into the side of his neck.

Zarek reared back with a roar, his fangs extended and ready to strike. "What have you done?"

Cold fear skittered along my nerves as I struggled to break free of his fierce grip. I looked into the Warlord's cold, remorseless eyes and knew I was about ten seconds away from having my throat torn out. Mate or not. I babbled, "It's a sedative. Just a sedative. I don't understand, you should be unconscious by now."

"I am Coletti," he snarled, his scary index off the charts.

"Okay, okay, I'll admit it was a big mistake on my part, thinking I could take down a mighty

The Warlord's Comeuppance

Warlord. But in your warped and delusional mind, you think I should be thrilled and honored to be your mate and I'm not. Go find or steal someone else."

"You are my chosen and you will yield." Zarek's fangs suddenly sank painfully deep into my neck.

Testosterone was the bane of the universe. I punched him in the face. "What part of no don't you get, you thick headed moron?" I hit him again. "Let go of me. I'm not dinner." I swung at him again.

The Warlord caught my hand and twisted it behind my back. *Ah, but you are so very tasty and your sweet blood will cleanse the drug from my system.*

Not what I wanted to hear. My vision grayed as he continued to suck down great gulps of blood. Sheer blind panic bubbled up, clouding my better judgment and like a total idiot, I launched a mental attack on the Warlord.

A white hot pain ripped through my head as Zarek's mind easily blocked my attack and penetrated my defenses. *Yield.*

Gail Koger

From somewhere deep inside me came a desperate, angry strength and I fought his invasion. *No, I won't.*

You are mine and I will never let you go.

His ruthless mental assault grew stronger until one by one my shields fell. Pain vibrated through every cell of my body as I battled to keep my last shield from shattering. Oh Goddess, he was too strong. I couldn't...

A violent shudder suddenly shook the Warlord; he swayed and dropped to his knees.

About time that stupid drug worked. I kicked him out of my mind and struggled to break free of his grip.

You need me to survive.

No. I don't.

You're mind will shatter without my touch.

Not if I shut down my psychic abilities.

Stubborn female, from the first moment I saw you I knew you were destined to be my mate.

I think the drug is affecting your memory.

The Warlord's Comeuppance

You took my crystal and gave me that cocky one finger salute. That's when I knew you were the one I was searching for.

Get real. There's no way you knew I was female. Not in that Degan sailor getup.

I knew. With a groan, Zarek collapsed to the floor, his arms still wrapped tightly around me and squashing me under three hundred pounds of pure muscle. *I knew.*

My luck definitely sucked. Big time. I wiggled, squirmed and shoved in a frantic effort to get the mountain of yummy male off me. Yummy? I moaned. I was so screwed. Inch by torturous inch, I slowly shimmied free and scrabbled backwards away from the Warlord. I sagged against a shipping container and sucked in a deep, calming breath. That had been way too close.

A callused hand suddenly grabbed my ankle. *I will come for you.*

"Eeep!" I stared down into his drug clouded eyes and there wasn't a doubt in my mind that he would pursue me to very gates of hell. Coletti warlords were a relentless bunch who never stopped until their prey was either dead or captured. I reached into my pocket and pulled out a small but oh so deadly bomb. The only way out was to kill him. But could I?

Gail Koger

You cannot harm me.

He was right. Blast it. I couldn't. My desperate gaze settled on a dozen crates ready to be shipped to the Vesta penal colony. A feral smile pulled at my mouth. I couldn't kill him but I could send him where he belonged. I patted his shoulder. *I think you need a nice long vacation and I have the perfect place for you. How does a trip to the Alliance penal colony for big, bad Coletti warriors sound?*

A harsh laugh sounded in my mind. *You think like a Coletti.*

No reason to be insulting. I pried his fingers off one at a time. *Soon you're going to be so busy surviving hell you'll forget all about your little flower.*

His reply was a faint whisper. *Never.*

A wave of dizziness swept over me as I stood. My wrist comp unit chimed another warning. I glanced down at the screen. Big surprise, Zarek had taken too much blood. I tapped it and felt a tiny sting as the miniature pressure injector administered a blood booster. Now all I had to do was get the big scary guy off the floor and into a crate before he woke up. I scanned the warehouse and sighed. Yep, this was going to be so much fun.

The Warlord's Comeuppance

I wiped the sweat out of my eyes and heaved again. Goddess, trying to stuff six foot eight inches of solidly muscled Warlord into a shipping crate was hard work. If the dock workers hadn't left their anti-gravity sled behind, I'd never gotten him off the floor. With one final shove I managed to get all three hundred pounds of him inside the crate. I winced when his head bounced off the bottom. "Sorry."

A faint hiss sounded in my head. *You will be.*

Fear curled into me like a living thing and I stared down at him in utter disbelief. The drug should have knocked him out for a good twelve hours. He couldn't be waking up this quickly, it was impossible. I jumped about a foot when Zarek moaned and thrashed around. Oh Goddess, he was coming around. I slapped a breather on him and quickly sealed the crate.

I shrank back from the menace emanating from the crate. That was one incredibly angry Warlord and if he ever caught me, I would be one very dead thief. My hands were shaking so badly I could barely fasten on my cloaking belt. I looked around for his laser pistol and groaned. He still had it. A loud bang sounded from inside the crate. And he could keep it. No way was I opening that crate again. Nope, not happening and not my problem. Okay, it was going to be a major problem for the

Gail Koger

Alliance prison guards, but hey, that's why they got all that hazard pay, right?

I hurried over to the transporter control panel and sent Zarek to the cargo hold of the prison ship. I reset the controls, trying to ignore the growing ache in my chest. I didn't miss the big guy. Not a bit. I didn't need him. I didn't want him. All I had to do was transport to my ship and I was out of here. No bossy Warlord chasing me around, telling me what to do, touching me, kissing me. Balock's balls. I had to get him back. No! I fought down the urge to surrender to that voice whispering in my head. Sneaky, sneaky bastard! *Not working*, I snarled.

Soon.

Never.

My mental alarms suddenly screamed bloody murder. A second later the power to the console died abruptly. Not good! I quickly scanned the area. Zan and his buddies were right outside the warehouse! That pesky, pain-in-the-butt captain was a little too good at his job. I pulled off my cloaking belt, set it in the middle of the transporter pad along with all my weapons and put my deadly little bomb on top of the pile. The Captain was going to get a real bang out of this.

Run.

The Warlord's Comeuppance

I set the timer and ran.

I burst out of the doorway, doing my best impression of a hysterical Farin female. An instant later searing pain stabbed my chest and I collapsed in a boneless heap on the ground. Goddess, stun beams hurt.

A low growl sounded in my head. *Oh shut up.*

No one harms you.

Get real. Like you're not planning on ripping my throat out? What's the big deal anyway? They kill me. You kill me. Dead is dead.

Another growl rumbled in mind. *Your death would serve no purpose.*

Oh please! You can't let anyone know that an itty-bitty Farin female took down the scourge of the universe. You'd be laughed out of the big bad warrior society. I'm one dead female if you catch me. You know it. I know it. Hard hands scooped me up and threw me over a muscular shoulder.

Foolish little flower, I'll admit you are too headstrong and totally aggravating; but you have a warrior's heart and your delicate, perfect body was made for my touch. You are, and always will be, mine.

Gail Koger

You are so full of it. My heartbeat kicked up a notch when a loud buzz sounded in my right ear. Oh Goddess, I had twenty seconds before everything went kaboom and all I could do was bounce helplessly against the Enforcer's back.

A tremendous cracking boom sounded, the earth shook and the warehouse disintegrated in a nimbus of yellow flames. The blast slammed us into a wall and the last thing I remembered was the Warlord's furious growls.

Chapter Four

Zarek's insistent mental voice kept jabbing at me. *Wake up. Wake up, Detja. Zan has you in his medical bay which is equipped with very effective drugs and if he discovers who you are...*

Stop already. You're giving me a headache.

Once I am free of this crate, I'm going to do more than give you a headache.

Yeah, yeah, yeah, the big, bad, cranky Warlord is going to teach me a lesson. If you can escape the toughest prison in the galaxy, and that's never been done before, now has it?

You doubt me?

Pretty much. With a theatrical moan, I opened my eyes and met Captain Zan's deadly black gaze. Goddess, this was going to be fun. With an ear shattering shriek, I scrabbled backward on the examining table feigning absolute horror and let the tears to roll. "What happened? Who are you? Where am I?"

"Tell me where he is."

Gail Koger

Great tearing sobs shook my body as I stammered, “I...I don’t...understand. Who are you talking about?”

His intimidating face an inch from mine, Zan snarled, “Where is the Warlord?”

The last place you’d ever look for him. Drawing on all my acting skills I pasted a look of complete and utter terror on my face, screamed bloody murder, leapt off the examining table and made a desperate run for the door. “He can’t catch me. He can’t catch me.”

The Captain grabbed me and easily subdued my feeble struggles. I clutched his rather grubby, really stinky uniform shirt and tearfully wept, “Please! Please, don’t let him take me. Please.”

Zan stared deeply into my eyes and tried to work his psychic woo-woo on me. Like that was going to happen. My shields firmly intact, I fed him bit and pieces of what really happened. Me, in my itty-bitty outfit, gyrating around the tables at the pleasure palace and lo and behold in pops the most wanted man in galaxy. I quickly cut to the Warlord’s and the Askole’s furious battle, complete with the utter chaos as the patrons ran for their lives. And for the dramatic conclusion I showed him Zarek grabbing me off the floor and vowing to make me his. I sagged limply in his grip and allowed my eyes to roll back in my head.

The Warlord's Comeuppance

Clever, the Warlord commented.

Thank you.

With a sigh of utter disgust, Zan dumped me back on the table and triggered his com-link. “Any sign of the Warlord’s body?”

“Not yet, Captain.”

I opened my eyes a tiny slit and watched Zan drag an agitated hand through his short spiky hair. “Were you at least able to trace the last transporter coordinate?”

“No Captain, the power surge destroyed all the stored data.”

Gleeful satisfaction curled through me as Zan punched the wall in pure fury. Awww, the nasty captain was having a bad day and it was only going to get worse.

“I want every inch of the city searched and nothing leaves this planet until he is found. Dead or alive.”

“What about the Despair, Captain? It’s scheduled to leave for Vesta as soon as Sariel is taken onboard.”

Gail Koger

Sariel!? That drunken idiot was Sariel, the Askole's most deadly warrior?

A very effective disguise but who is he tracking?

I smothered a groan and gave myself a mental head smack. I think I know why he's here.

Zarek's growl echoed in my mind. Adan?

That'd be my guess. Father's always wanted to taste Askole and his last trip was in their quadrant of the galaxy.

The Warlord spat a vicious curse. One of their merchant ships was found drifting in space and the crew had mysteriously vanished.

Right down Adan's gullet.

Sariel won't stop hunting him, until one of them is dead.

A stinging slap rocked my head. "Wake up!"

He was so going to pay for that. I opened my eyes and let out a blood-chilling, ear-shattering, totally hysterical scream that went on and on and on.

The Captain smacked me again. "Shut up!"

The Warlord's Comeuppance

I curled into a little ball and shivered convulsively. "Don't let him take me. Don't let him take me. Don't let him take me."

Zan threw up his hands in absolute disgust and stomped out.

The second the door slid shut, I scrambled off the table with a grin. That was fun.

Fun? Are you insane? Zan is not a fool.

Really? The moron left me my wrist comp unit and jewelry. He's about to discover just how big of a mistake that was. Plugging my comp unit's sensor probe into the security panel, it took me all of ten seconds to disable their alarms, shields and weapons systems. I also downloaded a nice little virus that Adan had cooked up. Every computer on every ship they were linked with was going to shut down system by system until nothing but life support functioned. I shuddered. Adan did like his meals alive.

A very effective weapon to add to my arsenal, the Warlord commented with obvious relish, *but I will put it to better use than hunting food.*

I banged my head against the wall. Stupid. Stupid mistake. Goddess, how could I forget that the Despairs' computers were also linked with the

Gail Koger

Enforcer's? That low down, conniving fiend had been mucking about in my head, that's how.

I will not allow you to leave me.

Wanna bet? I quickly stopped the virus from spreading to the Despair. *You are so gone.*

The ship's light suddenly died and an instant later the emergency backup lights came on. Wow, the virus certainly worked fast. I pulled my sensor probe out and cocked my head. Oh goody, someone was coming to visit.

The sick bay doors were forced open and a young Enforcer stepped inside, a laser held ready. I collapsed in a huddle on the floor and let hysteria reign.

He grabbed my arm and jerked me upright. "Shut up."

Well, that was just rude. I jabbed him in the throat with my tranquillizer ring and he was out cold before he hit the floor.

I might allow you to keep that ring. It does have its uses.

Awww. That's so sweet. I'm all choked up. I yelped when a phantom hand smacked my bottom. Hard.

The Warlord's Comeuppance

My patience is at an end.

The hair on the back of my neck literally stood up at the menace in his tone. In my mind I could sense his power returning and the drug clearing his system. Balock's balls, he'd be able to teleport shortly. Not good at all. Snatching up the Enforcer's laser, I bolted down the corridor. A smart thief knows when to run like the demons of the tenth hell are after her.

I skidded to a stop and ducked into the shadows as a dozen heavily armed Enforcers escorted a mobile stasis chamber down the corridor. I caught a brief glimpse of a badly beaten Sariel trussed up inside like a holiday bird.

Hmmm. I needed a diversion and there was nothing quite like a rampaging Askole to draw everyone's attention. I pulled an earring off, pushed the timer and tossed it at the stasis chamber. Squeezing my eyes shut, I counted down, five, four, three, two, and one. A blinding white light was followed quickly by a loud cracking pop as the chambers power unit fried.

I flipped the laser pistol to stun mode and started firing. Blinded, the Enforcers were easy targets. An agonized cry broke from me as a dazzling red bolt seared across my left shoulder. My

Gail Koger

knees buckled from the intense pain and I collapsed to the cold metal floor. Oh Goddess, that hurt.

Zarek hissed, *Easy targets?*

Lucky shot? Another bolt crackled an inch over my head. Enough already. My hands shaking badly I blasted away at the last Enforcer standing and watched in horror as the bolts hit the walls and ceiling and missed him entirely.

Unbelievable!

His teeth bared in a feral snarl, the Enforcer returned the favor. I barely managed to get my shield up before dozens of energy bolts slammed into it. Dead-Eye was a little too good.

The Warlord's power surged wildly. A scant second later Dead-Eye grabbed his throat as if he was being strangled, made obscene gargling noises and did a face plant on the deck.

Whoa! *Ah, thanks, but I could have handled him.*

Tend to your wound, he snarled. *We will work on your combat skills later.*

No need to get all growly. I had it under control. Sorta. Tapping my wrist comp unit, I

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sighed in relief as the pressure injector administered a pain killer and healing agent.

A low ominous roar erupted from the stasis chamber and it rocked wildly. Sariel was awake and in a pretty foul mood. Couldn't really blame him. I struggled to my feet, staggered over to the chamber and disengaged the metal restraints.

With a loud snapping crack the glass shattered and Sariel burst out, fangs bared in a deadly snarl.

"Eeep!" I backed away slowly. *Easy. You're free.* I gestured down the corridor. *Go. Get out of here.*

His glowing yellow eyes surveyed the unconscious Enforcers and stopped for a moment on the dead one. Sariel gave me a truly scary smile. *The Warlord chose well.*

Color me happy. *You should leave now before Zan returns with reinforcements.*

And leave you wounded and alone?

That's the idea. My inner alarms went on red alert. Zan and about two dozen storm troopers were headed this way. *You need to go now!*

Gail Koger

Sariel let out a battle roar and was gone in a flash. A scant second later screams and sounds of a battle echoed around the corridor.

I rolled my eyes in disgust. Testosterone should be outlawed.

You have your diversion, Zarek replied a little too happily.

Yes, I do, and why does that make you so happy?

I also need a diversion.

Balock's balls! In my mind's eye I could see the dented metal and where the Warlord had been pounding on it with his bare fists. A bloody fist slammed into the lid and with a hissing pop the seal broke. If he kept this up, in another ten minutes or so and he'd be free of the crate. Not quite what I had planned and if I wanted to keep on breathing, it was time to leave.

I took a quick peek out the door and winced. Bloody bits and pieces of the storm troopers littered the ground. Guess they were right; Sariel was the Askole's deadliest warrior.

My senses screamed a warning as Captain Zan stepped out of a doorway, with a tube-shaped

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portable rocket launcher on his shoulder. He sighted in on the Askole and fired.

A dazzling green ball shot out, tracking Sariel as he zoomed around, slicing and dicing the troopers. With a loud boom, a stun net exploded from the ball, wrapped around the Askole and lit him up like a holiday display.

Sariel toppled to the ground and twitched spasmodically. A dozen prison guards in their fancy armored black jumpsuits and gleaming helmets trotted out, grabbed a handful of the now deactivated netting and hauled the still quivering warrior inside the Despair. Wow. Color me impressed. *Looks like Sariel will be your new roommate. Play nice.*

A useful ally, Zarek growled and with one mighty shove, sent the crumpled lid of the crate flying. *Engage your shield!*

A dazzling green ball streaked towards me. “Eeep!” I quickly obeyed. Two seconds later the net deployed and wrapped tightly around my shield. Hundreds of green and yellows sparks blew in every direction as my shield and the netting shorted out in an eye dazzling display. Holy Goddess!

Get to your ship. I will come for you.

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Yes, my Lord. Anything you say, my lord. I yelped as he smacked my bottom again.

Go! Now!

No need to get all cranky. I'm going. Just not very fast, not with all those blasted spots dancing across my vision. I blinked rapidly, trying to clear my sight. Sheesh, I wouldn't even see Zan if he jumped out in front of me.

A male voice shouted, "There she is."

I tripped over something and crashed to the ground. A dozen laser beams crackled overhead, missing me by inches. Goddess! Those morons were trying to kill little itty-bitty me. Now was that nice? I pulled off my last earring, set the timer, hurled it over my shoulder and squeezed my eyes shut.

A scant five seconds later my miniature stun grenade blew. A blinding flash of light was rapidly followed by a cracking boom. I jumped to my feet and took off. Bam! Right smack dab into a wall. I staggered back and rubbed my head. Ouch! That smarted.

Zan is right behind you, the Warlord snapped.

A quick glance over my shoulder and I groaned. He certainly was and I really didn't like that

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particularly nasty smile on his face. *Can't you do your woo-woo on him?*

Woo-woo?

Zan raised that blasted rocket launcher to his shoulder and fired.

"Eeep!" I cringed in horror as that glowing green ball streaked towards me. Goddess, this was going to hurt. My jaw dropped when at the very last moment; it swooped around me and headed right back at the nasty captain. Color me surprised.

Zan dropped the launcher and roared in fury, "Zarek, may you rot in the tenth hell!" With a boom, the netting deployed, wrapped around the Captain and lit him up. He crashed to the ground, jerking convulsively.

Nice.

Thank you. Now get your pretty little ass to your ship.

Pretty, huh?

Detja!

Okay. Okay. I'm going. Goddess, you're such a cranky butt. I tottered over to Zan and picked up the launcher. "Bet it hurt a lot, huh?"

Gail Koger

Zan, eyes full of impotent rage, lay there helplessly, unable to move or talk. I loved that in a male.

“You don’t mind if I take the launcher, do you? It’s not like you’re going to be using it for awhile.”

A growl rumbled through my head. *What are you doing?*

I’ve always wanted one of these.

I will buy you one.

Really? Gonna be kinda hard to do in prison, don’t ya think?

Get to your ship, the Warlord bellowed. That pain medication has taken what little sense you have left.

I frowned. He was right. The medication was making me a bit loopy. I clutched the launcher to my chest and smiled at the Captain. “Better luck next time.”

Better luck next time?

He is very persistent. I stopped abruptly and scanned the area ahead of me. Those pesky Enforcers had set a trap for me. Hmmm. I needed

The Warlord's Comeuppance

another diversion. I glanced down at the launcher and smiled. Not a problem. Quickly connecting my sensor probe to the launcher's control display, I tapped away on my comp unit.

Overloading the power unit will not create a sufficient diversion.

Sure it will. Once I put it by those Sexton gas tanks over there. It will rock their world.

Zarek planted a hard psychic kiss on my mouth.
You are truly the perfect mate.

Flattery will get you nowhere. I propped the launcher against the gas tank, set the timer and ran.

Three minutes later all hell broke loose. The ground shuddered and shook as with a thunderous cracking boom the gas tanks went up in a fiery pillar of churning debris. Blazing shrapnel boomeranged through the air in a deadly starburst, setting dozens of buildings on fire. Thick clouds of black smoke rose up and blotted out the sun.

Whoa!

Well done, Detja.

I ducked a flying door. *Think I took out the underground tanks as well.*

Gail Koger

Zarek's frustrated fury swirled across my mind as the Despair did an emergency launch.

Awww. The big bad Warlord can't teleport yet, can you?

Eeep! A phantom hand closed around my throat and I could almost feel his hot breath on my face.

I can reach out and touch you any time, any place. You would do well to remember that.

Okay, you've made your point, really well by the way. Can you let go now? Note to self, don't aggravate an already furious Warlord. I mentally pried at the fingers biting into my neck. *Kinda hard to breathe here.*

You belong to me. His fingers tightened. *Say it!*

A ripple of panic cramped my stomach as his savage rage rolled through my mind and I parroted obediently, *I belong to you.*

He gave me a hard shake. *Never forget it.*

Like I could forget a six foot eight Warlord bent on capturing me? *Please... Can't... Breathe.*

His grip went from killing to sensual. *Still you fight me.*

The Warlord's Comeuppance

The Ghost never surrenders.

You will and eagerly. Zarek's mouth crushed mine in a punishing kiss of utter possession. His large hands roved over me, setting my body on fire. Goddess, he was way too good at psychic sex.

Another explosion rocked the earth. I flinched as rocketing shards of flaming metal impaled the building next to me. Eeep! That was a little too close for comfort. A rippling fireball rose high into the smoke filled sky.

Get to your ship.

Yes, my lord. Acid smoke stung my eyes as I looked frantically for an avenue of escape. Burning debris littered the street and charred metal structures rose around me like freakish skeletons. Whoa! Sometimes I really out did myself.

I felt Zarek's feral smile in my mind. *You make an excellent Coletti and I will be the envy of every Warlord.*

Color me happy. Adan, the match maker, would be so proud. I scrambled over a collapsed wall and froze when the earth rumbled ominously. Oh Goddess, that didn't sound good.

Gail Koger

A heartbeat later the street shuddered and great gouts of cobblestone began to rise and crack. A fountain of fire erupted from the buckled ground. Where was the Warlord when you really needed him?

On the Despair, where you put me, Zarek snapped.

It was a rhetorical question, I snapped back, dodging a sudden geyser of flame.

The Warlord's battle cry echoed in my head and in my mind's eye I caught fleeting glimpse of him quickly breaking a guard's neck, releasing Sariel and the two of them rampaging through the ship, slaughtering the guards. Ick! They made an extremely lethal team.

A ball of fire fell out of the sky and slammed into the burning ground. A canon like blast ripped through the air as I instinctively dove behind a mound of rubble. Burning debris plunked down around me. Goddess, help me!

Get on your feet and run, Zarek snarled. *The Gods cannot help you.*

My breath coming in fast, panic-shallow gasps, I obeyed, giving the burning hover craft a wide berth. Around me writhing orange flames crawled over the buckled pavement as if seeking likely

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victims. They raced behind me hungry, roaring out their anger, burning everything they touched. The heat became unbearable, blood drummed in my ears, cutting off sound as I ran through a silent hell.

I stumbled into my ship, half-blind, coughing and covered with dozens of burns. I quickly shucked off my smoking jumpsuit and melted boots. Sagging against the wall, I shuddered with relief. Another minute in that burning nightmare and the Warlord would have been looking for a new mate.

The eerie silence in my head was suddenly shattered by Zarek's bellow, *Launch your ship.*

Bossy fiend. Hacking up a lung, I staggered obediently to the bridge, set the coordinates and launched. My stunned gaze locked on the view screens. Holy Goddess, the entire city was on fire. If the Enforcers caught me, I'd be locked up for the next ten thousand years.

Tend to your wounds. I will not have your body scarred, Zarek commanded.

Too exhausted to argue, I hobbled to sick bay, climbed into the regen tube and hit the start button. The last thing I remembered before everything faded to black was the Warlord's possessive kiss.

Gail Koger

Chapter Five

The ship's cheerful computerized warnings penetrated my sleep dazed mind. "Approaching Coletti warbird is within missile range. Shields and weapons systems are disabled. Warp drive engines are shut down. Approaching Coletti warbird is within missile range. Shields and weapons systems are disabled. Warp drive engines are shut down."

"What?!" I scrambled out of the now open regen tube and commanded, "Computer, bring warp drive engines and shields online."

"Acknowledged."

If that conniving fiend had been mucking around in my head again, I was going to geld him. I sprinted to the bridge, took one look at the computer readouts and let out a shriek of frustrated rage. Blast it! My ship was in Coletti space not orbiting Bella as I had intended and I was about five minutes away from being boarded. An evil smile curled my mouth. Or not. I dropped into the pilot's chair, bought up the weapons display and punched up a com-link with the warbird.

On my screen was a Coletti warrior who rivaled Zarek for sheer menace and size. A burn scar on

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the right side of his face twisted his mouth into a permanent sneer. His pale gold eyes narrowed slightly as he took in my black, soot covered face and singed hair. His gaze dropped to my bare breasts and popped back to my face. "Where are your clothes, female?"

Ooops. Knew I forgot something. The name Voss popped into my head. He was Zarek's second-in-command and a stone-cold killer. With a tap of my finger I downloaded Adan's virus and gave him a vacant smile. "They got burned."

"You will clothe yourself, now," Voss roared. "A Warlord's mate does not display herself in this manner."

This was going to be fun. I cupped my girls and examined them. "You don't like my breasts? The males at the pleasure palace found them most pleasing. I was very popular."

"Silence female," Voss bellowed his disgust obvious.

"I bet your yummy warriors would find them pleasing, too," I added, keeping an eye on my computer readouts. Sure enough their systems were failing one by one.

Voss glanced down at his screens and his deadly gaze fixed on me. "What have you done?"

Gail Koger

Three stars for the smart guy. I gave him a triumphant smile. "I defeated you without firing a shot. You were out-maneuvered and out-smarted by a female and a Farin at that. Pretty much sucks being you, doesn't it?"

Voss bared his fangs in a fierce grin. "You are truly the Warlord's mate."

Oh gag me. "Much as I'd like to stay and chat about the big guy, I have places to go, things to steal." I broke the link, typed in the coordinates to Bella and engaged the warp drive.

Our paths will cross again, small one, Voss rumbled in my head, and then you will know the taste of defeat.

Good luck with that. A little heads up, you should really work on getting your weapons systems back on line, there's an Alliance battle cruiser heading your way.

Voss spat something nasty at me in a Coletti dialect I wasn't familiar with and was gone. Talk about a poor loser.

I sniffed the air. Ugh! What was that awful stench? Another sniff and I realized it was coming from me. One glance at my soot covered body and I grimaced. No wonder Voss was so disgusted. I

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wasn't a pretty sight and stunk like something that had been left to rot for three days. My stomach rumbled loudly. Shower first, food second.

I stood under the pulsating sonic waves and sighed with pleasure as they massaged my tight muscles. It had been a really bad week. Adan goes on an eating binge to end all eating binges, and then sells me to the most wanted man in the galaxy for the unbelievable price of one credit. Now not only do I have to deal with Zarek the awful but Zane the nasty is hot on my trail and to top it all off I got to lick the foul hide of the Askole's deadliest warrior. Yuck!

Detja! The Warlord's roar reverberated around my skull.

My heart stuttered in alarm. *What?*

You attacked and disabled one of my warbirds!

Attacked? I never fired a shot and how was I supposed to know it was one of your ships? There are a lot of nasty warlords prowling around out here and don't forget the Tai-Kok. I looked like a tasty snack. No shields, my weapons systems disabled and no warp drive. Drifting in space, in a drug induced coma with a big bull's-eye painted on my ship! A phantom hand closed around my throat. Eeep!

Gail Koger

You will fix Voss's ship. His fingers tightened painfully. *Now!*

Yes, my lord. I scurried back to the bridge and quickly downloaded the virus killer. *His ship's system should be coming back online.* I looked at the tracking sensor readout. *If he plays dead, it'll draw the Alliance battle cruiser in for a closer look.*

Zarek's fingers stroked my neck. *Perhaps you should sit in on my war councils.*

Did he mean that in a good way? Or was he being a sarcastic ass? Taking a quick peek at his mind, I realized that he and Sariel had control of the Despair. Blast it. Another peek and, holy Goddess, they were heading for Vesta to free the prisoners. A smile curled my mouth. Really good news for me, because that meant he was going to be way too busy trying to take Vesta, the most fortified planet in the galaxy, to chase me down.

I felt the Warlord's grin. *Always plotting, always scheming. You will turn your ship around and rendezvous with Voss at these coordinates, 25 mark 45 mark 5. I will not tolerate your disobedience any longer.* His tone was lethally matter-of-fact.

Fear ballooned through my mind and it took every shred of will power I had to contain it. I

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bolted for the sick bay, desperately trying to think of ways to stall him. *If I don't turn around, what happens? You kill me?*

No, I will make you scream.

*Scream as in...*I sucked in a startled breath as he licked his way down my belly and buried his head between my legs. Holy Goddess! *Oh, that kind of scream.* His tongue swirled around my little nub, deftly tormenting it, until he had me writhing and gasping, teetering on the edge. Then he stopped—cold.

I will torment you over and over again until you do exactly as I ask, when I ask. No questions. No arguments, just total obedience.

I picked up the pressure injector filled with Omni, put it against my neck and triggered it. *You lose. I won't live that way. I'd rather be dead.*

What have you done?!

The room spun dizzily around me, my knees buckled and I hit the cold metal floor.

Zarek's voice was a harsh whisper of sound. *What have you done?*

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Stopped...you... Pain exploded in my head and I curled into a tight little ball as Zarek vanished completely from my mind.

Tears leaked down my face as I fought the aching emptiness, the utter loss of his touch. The cold void in my chest grew until I wanted to scream from the sheer agony of it. Damn you to the lowest hell, Adan. You had no right. You had no right. I lay there sobbing in defeat. There would be no escape. No reprieve. I was trapped. Oh Goddess, I was even obeying his commands without thinking. The Warlord's hold on me was unbreakable and once the drug wore off I would be his forever.

Enough! Adan snapped in disgust. *Get up. Quit acting like a whiny child. Wallowing in morbid self-pity, wailing against fate, will accomplish nothing but your own defeat. I taught you better than that.*

Father? I shot upright in astonishment.

Get up. Fight for what you want.

Swaying drunkenly, I slowly struggled to my feet and sucked in a deep calming breath. Adan was right. I was turning into a weak, sniveling coward, who gave up at the first hint of trouble. A shudder shook me. The way a true Farin female would act. *My apologies father, it won't happen again.*

The Warlord's Comeuppance

His voice was a thread of sound. *Remember you are survivor, a warrior and they can never take that from you.*

I miss you, Father.

As I do you. Be strong my child. Adan pressed a comforting kiss on my forehead and was gone.

Once again I was alone. My psychic abilities gone, I had the weirdest sensation of being disconnected from the real world. It was as if I had been trapped in some kind of gigantic vacuum that threw my senses off kilter and left me utterly blind and unable to defend myself.

The ache in my chest wouldn't go away. I needed Zarek in my mind, to hear him, to touch him, to taste him. Goddess, I was so screwed. I needed a life mate who considered me a partner but all that sneaky, conniving Warlord wanted was a mindless puppet that did his bidding without question. Like that was going to happen.

My computer announced brightly, "The Warlord Zarek is hailing you."

What a surprise. My eagerness to hear his voice was truly horrifying. With a badly shaking hand, I touched the com-link on the wall next to me. "My

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lord, is there something else you need? Another pint of blood, perhaps?"

"Just you."

"We don't always get what we want, do we?" I sagged against the wall as his gravelly voice eased that cold void in my chest.

"Show yourself. Now!" His tone was urgent, commanding.

The clawing want in every cell of my body had me instantly obeying. A sudden chill of despair quivered through me. How sick was that? Taking my time, I pulled on a black jumpsuit filled with my little hidden treasures and stuffed my feet into the special boots Adan had made for me. I had a feeling I was going to need them.

"Show yourself." Zarek's tone was a tad too confident for my liking.

I walked over to the vid screen and tapped a button. The Warlord's harshly beautiful face filled the screen. I drank in every aspect of his hard, chiseled features.

Zarek's cold amber gaze inspected my face. "The Omni will not save you."

The Warlord's Comeuppance

“Perhaps not, but it will make it a tad harder for you to find me.”

The Warlord laughed. It was a masculine, mocking taunt. “You cannot survive without my touch.”

“I can try.”

“I will come for you.”

“I know, but since you’re out to conquer the known universe, it might take awhile.”

“The Alliance battle cruiser Endeavor is hailing you,” my computer chirped merrily. I was really starting to hate its unfailing good cheer.

Something dark and terrifying flickered in the Warlord’s eyes. “Download Adan’s virus into Endeavor’s computers.”

“And if I refuse?”

He bared his fangs in a menacing snarl. “You won’t like the consequences.”

“Have I ever?” A quick glance at the computer readouts and I knew with a chilling clarity that things were about to get really ugly. Voss’s warbird was rapidly overtaking my ship, the Endeavor had its weapons systems locked on me and to complete

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the picture, I had an extremely homicidal Warlord on my screen. Color me lucky.

“I won’t be responsible for the death of over two thousand crew members. I want your word that your warriors will not harm the crew. That they will be treated as honored war hostages.”

“You dare to make demands?”

Sariel’s cackle of glee sounded in the background.

Zarek spat something nasty in Askole.

Sariel growled menacingly in response.

I let out a loud whistle. “Can we focus here?”

The Warlord’s deadly gaze fixed on me. “Tread carefully, my little flower.”

Repressing the urge to give him a one figure salute, I gritted my teeth and continued, “As you know, the Alliance still holds over a thousand of your warriors on Petron. Once you have captured the Endeavor’s crew, you simply do a prisoner exchange. Then there’s the added bonus of Commodore Vala. Having him as your personal guest will certainly speed negotiations right along. It’s a win-win situation.”

The Warlord's Comeuppance

A particularly nasty smile curved Zarek's mouth. "An admirable plan but Commodore Vala will not allow his crew to quietly surrender."

"Once the Endeavor's shields are down, it won't really be a problem. I'll simply transport containers of Sark gas onto every deck and they will all be sleeping peacefully when your warriors board the ship."

"For a female, you have a truly devious mind."

"Thank you. Do we have a deal?"

"You have my word as Overlord of the Coletti clans."

Overlord? When had that happened?

My annoyingly cheerful computer announced, "Commodore Vala demands that you lower the shields and come to a complete stop or be fired upon."

Balock's balls! I bolted for the bridge, dropped into the pilot's chair and punched up the view screen. As soon as Commodore Vala's cadaverous yellow features filled the screen I let out a blood curdling shriek and cried, "Don't shoot. Don't shoot. Please. Don't shoot."

Gail Koger

His beady little eyes devoid of any spark of humanity, Vala replied in a high nasal voice, "Captain Zan warned us that your act was quite convincing and you are just as deadly as the Warlord. Lower your shields and come to a complete stop or I'll have my Cydon fighters destroy your ship."

The computer sounded way too happy when it proclaimed, "Warning! Warning! A squadron of Cydon fighters have just launched from the Endeavor."

Eeep! I quickly tapped a button on my console and downloaded the virus. "Wait! You're making a really big mistake."

The Commodore's skeletal face tightened with rage when he realized his systems were failing. "Destroy that ship!"

My tracking screen was suddenly full of blips. Voss had launched his Stealth fighters in response and I was dead center in the oncoming waves of ships. I hurriedly transported the gas canisters onboard the Endeavor and throttled the warp drive to full speed.

With the roar of a provoked predator, Zarek instructed, "Get out of the combat zone."

The Warlord's Comeuppance

“That is the plan.” Fastening my battle harness, I put the ship into a complicated zigzag maneuver as the Cydon fighters opened fire. Ribbons of dazzling energy flashed around me. Goddess, I should have painted a big bulls-eye on my ship.

“Hard to port,” Zarek snapped.

Senses electrified, adrenaline burning through my veins, I immediately wrenched the ship to port, flipped under a Cydon and fired. The gut-wrenching shockwave of a fighter exploding way too close made my ship pitch radically.

A dozen Stealth fighters whizzed by, lasers blazing and the blackness of space was abruptly filled with brilliant billows of orange and yellow flames of disintegrating spacecraft.

“Warning! Warning,” my computer chirped almost gleefully. “A Tik missile has locked on. Destruction imminent.”

“Holy Goddess!” My fingers danced across the fire controls and I unleashed every weapon I had. A scant instant later the missile vanished in a blinding white flash.

My ship shuddered violently as the energy flux disrupted my shields. Stressed metal shrieked and groaned; systems shorted and blew out, adding a

Gail Koger

pall of ozone tinged smoke. The control console was suddenly awash in warning lights.

“Systems failure,” the computer announced happily. “Structural integrity has been compromised; loss of life support is imminent. Please evacuate to the life pods.”

With every ounce of strength I possessed I willed away the panic. I calmly unbuckled my harness. The screens flickered to life and I caught a brief glimpse of the Warlord’s furious face.

“Get to your life pod, female!”

“What? No step-by-step instructions?”

The ship bucked wildly, throwing me to the deck. Zarek’s voice was lost in the rising hiss of random noise. “Voss... Provide... Cover.”

“Structural integrity will fail in sixty seconds,” the computer chirped. “Please evacuate to the life pods.”

“Blast it!” The howl of escaping air had me on my feet and running.

“Warning. Structural integrity will fail in thirty seconds.”

The Warlord's Comeuppance

I leapt into the pod, sealed the door and hit the eject button. With a thunderous roar the pod shot from my dying ship and threw me head first into the control console. For an instant my vision grayed.

"Please fasten your safety harness," the computer encouraged jovially.

"Shut up," I hissed.

"Complying."

Rubbing my aching head, I climbed into the pilot's chair and fastened my harness. A blinding flash lit my view screens. There went my ship and my only hope of outrunning Voss.

A red warning light began to blink frantically on my console. One look at the readouts had me groaning in dismay. My power relays were damaged. I had about twenty minutes before they stopped working all together. Then it would be a fast ride to eternity.

With a tap of my finger, I brought up the scanners. The only habitable planet in this solar system was Joroco, a barren desert wasteland occupied by a few hardy souls who mined Sipan. Blast it. Its one space port was located at Karoo and I was sure it would soon be swarming with Coletti warriors and Enforcers. Getting off planet

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without being captured was going to be quite a challenge.

My tracking screen was suddenly full of red blips. Okay, pretty blasted impossible. A formation of Stealth fighters had me surrounded.

Voss's grim face appeared on my screen. "My fighters will escort you to Karoo."

"I'm not hurt. Thanks for asking."

"The Warlord instructed me to tell you that any attempts to escape will be dealt with harshly."

"Awww. That's so sweet. Isn't love wonderful?"

A muscle started twitching in his cheek. "You will comply immediately with the Warlord's wishes."

"I'd love to, but there's one tiny little flaw in his plan."

"What is that?"

"My power relays are damaged and if I don't land quickly, the Warlord will be looking for a new mate."

Atmospheric turbulence buffeted my escape pod. The console came alive with trouble lights.

The Warlord's Comeuppance

Holy Goddess! My stabilizers were off line. My fingers flew over the controls. "Come on. Come on."

The pod plunged toward the planetary surface at terminal velocity. The shriek of overstressed metal became horrific. Acid smoke fumes filled the air, searing my eyes and lungs.

"Use your braking thrusters to slow your speed," Voss instructed.

I brought them online and the roar of the engines became deafening. G forces slammed me back against the seat. My teeth slammed together as the shaking grew worse.

The pods violent vertical descent slowed and began to level off. The stabilizers came on line and the crushing centrifugal force eased. Glittering pink sand rose up to greet me.

"Bring the nose up and it will increase your glide path," Voss directed.

Burning blue sparks spewed in every direction as systems blew. Something clawed at the bottom of the hull as I fought to keep the nose up. The pod bounced several time, skidded wildly across the sand and plowed to a sudden, stunning stop against blood red pillars of stones.

Gail Koger

Chapter Six

Smoke billowed from the console. The breath knocked out of me, I fought to stay conscious and fumbled with the harness release.

Hard hands pushed mine out of the way, unbuckled my harness and lifted me. A dizzying second of inky blackness and the blinding caress of the sun had me ducking my head against a massive chest. "Zarek?"

A loud cracking boom reverberated off the rocks, the sand shook violently and pieces of burning metal pelted the energy shield surrounding us.

"Great timing, sweetie."

"My name is Jaylan, not sweetie."

"Who?" I peered up at the shadowy face and wished the ringing in my ears would go away.

Jaylan laid me gently on the hot sand and ran a scanner over me. "Jaylan. I serve the Warlord. At his command I am to protect you until you can be reunited."

The Warlord's Comeuppance

The world spinning madly around me, I scrabbled backwards away from him and hissed, "Protect!? Reunite? You idiot, the only one I need protection from is the Warlord and you can forget the reuniting crap. Not happening. Not ever!"

Ignoring my outburst completely, Jaylan put a large hand on my shoulder and pushed me down. "I need to tend to your wounds, little one. The Warlord would be angry if I returned you damaged."

"Goddess forbid we anger the mighty Warlord." My stomach heaved. "I don't feel so good," I moaned and promptly threw up all over his boots.

Muttering something vile under his breath, Jaylan pressed an injector against my neck and triggered it.

The ringing in my ears vanished and the world stopped spinning. "Thanks. Sorry about your boots. Phew! You should go and clean that smelly mess off before the sun bakes it on."

Jaylan tilted my head and smeared something on my forehead. "I'm not a fool. Given the opportunity, you will run."

Color me lucky, Zarek had sent a smart guy. I really hated that in males. "Where would I go?" I gave him my best pitiful I wouldn't hurt a bug look

Gail Koger

and gestured at the coral pink sand sizzling under the unforgiving sun. "I wouldn't survive very long in that."

Jaylan laughed. "You are everything they said." He injected me again.

"What was that?"

"The antidote."

"The antidote for what?"

"For the Omni."

"What!?" My temper flared and I swung at him.

Jaylan caught my fist easily and pushed me back down. "Behave yourself or I will shackle you."

Shackle, huh? Hmmm. Not a bad idea. I repressed a smile. The muscle bound idiot would naturally assume I was totally helpless once he had me chained up and let his guard down. Mentally I rubbed my hands together in glee. Let the fun begin. I turned my head and bit his hand. Hard.

With aggravated growl, Jaylan planted his knee on my chest, pried my teeth off his hand and spat, "If you weren't the Warlord's mate, I would have you on your knees screaming for mercy."

The Warlord's Comeuppance

“What is it with you guys and screaming?”

He shook his head in disbelief. “Does nothing frighten you?”

“Not much,” I replied, snapping at his hand again.

Flipping me over, Jaylan twisted my arms behind my back and clamped the shackles on. “You try to bite me again and I will gag you.”

“And what would your precious Warlord say about that?”

“That it was necessary,” Zarek’s gravelly voice answered from the com-link on Jaylan’s belt. “If she continues to misbehave, sedate her.”

I levered myself upright and twisted around so I could see the Warlord’s face on the tiny monitor. “It’s a pretty sad day when the only way the Overlord of the Coletti clans can catch a female is by sedating her.”

His tone one of amusement, the Warlord asked, “How bad are her injuries?”

“A concussion and some cuts and bruises,” Jaylan responded, pulling out another pair of shackles he hurriedly fastened them around my ankles.

Gail Koger

“Is the area secure?”

“Yes, the only life signs are from a Sipan prospector two clicks from here.”

“Good. Voss now has command of the Endeavor.”

I tried to get a good look at Zarek’s face, which was pretty hard to do on the itty-bitty monitor. “The crew is unharmed?”

“They sleep peacefully in the cargo hold.”

I let out a relieved breath. He had kept his word.

Jaylan inquired eagerly, “How’s goes the battle to take Vesta?”

“Adan’s virus took their planetary defenses down in under a minute and once we freed the warriors, the battle was ours.”

Holy Goddess, there would be no stopping them now.

“How badly was your ship damaged?”

After a quick check of my shackles, Jaylan stood confidently and pointed his com-link at the

The Warlord's Comeuppance

smoldering piles of crumpled wreckage. "As you can see my lord, my fighter is a total loss."

"Can any of it be salvaged?"

Jaylan moved closer to the wreckage and scanned it.

I grinned. Worked like a charm every time. Thank the Goddess for dumb males. I retrieved my lock pick and thirty seconds later I was free. Adan had made sure I was the best escape artist in the galaxy. A particularly useful talent in my line of work and since numb nuts hadn't searched me he hadn't found any of my other little toys, either. Bet that was going to go over well with the Warlord. Pulling a small tube of lip color from my pocket, I touched a small button on the side and presto, instant stun baton.

"Some of the warp drive can be rebuilt, but the rest is beyond repair."

"Voss is sending a shuttle for you."

"Don't bother," I said.

As Jaylan spun around, I triggered the stun baton. A look of incredulous fury crossed his face an instant before the bright yellow energy beam zapped him in the chest. His limbs twitched

Gail Koger

violently and he toppled to the ground. Not as good as Zan's stun net but just as effective.

I leaned over Jaylan and took his laser pistol. "Never, ever, underestimate a female, sweetie," I patted his cheek. "Bye-bye."

"Detja! You will stop attacking my warriors."

I snagged the com-link off Jaylan's belt and hissed, "Quit sending them after me and it won't be a problem, now will it?"

"They are there to protect you."

"Protect me!? If you hadn't mucked around in my mind, I'd be safely on Bella now. Not caught in the middle of a stupid war, getting my ship shot down and crash landing on this goddess forsaken planet! And let's not forget that you're the moron who left me drifting in space without any shields or weapons systems. In an area where both you and I know the Tai-Kok are trolling for their next meal."

"Enough! No one challenges my decisions or talks to me in that tone. Not even Voss would dare."

"Ewww. The big, bad, scary Warlord has spoken. It's amazing your warriors follow you at all. You're a bone head, so locked in to the instant

The Warlord's Comeuppance

obedience thing that you wouldn't recognize a good idea if it came up and bit you on the butt. ”

“I will no longer tolerate your defiance and disobedience.”

“Then it sucks being you because I'm not a mindless puppet. I want a life partner who treats me with respect and values my talents. If you want instant obedience go find another Farin and leave me the hell alone.”

“Then it sucks being you,” he parroted back at me. “You are mine and there is nothing you can do to change that.”

The shrieking squeal of an overstressed engine caught my attention. Seems the crash had caught the prospector's attention and he was probably looking to do a little salvage work. “Gotta go, my ride is here.”

I tossed the com-link away, ignoring the Warlord's furious roar and stepped out of the rocks.

The battered, badly pitted transport came to a sudden halt in a billowing cloud of pink. The driver stared at me in astonishment and popped the cockpit canopy.

Gail Koger

I wrinkled my nose at the stench that rolled off of him in horrific waves. He looked like a Baykal but it was hard to tell with the layers of grime covering his hairy, bloated body. His long tangled mass of greasy gray hair had some kind of wildlife crawling in it. Lck!

With tears rolling down my cheeks, I hurried over to him and in Galactic basic I pleaded, "Please, can you help me? My ship crashed."

A calculating expression in his beady red eyes, he carefully looked me over. "Where are your males?"

"Dead," I sobbed. "All of them dead."

With a grunt, he climbed out and bared his rotted teeth at me in a gruesome smile. "My Gert took off awhile back and I need someone to cook and clean."

I gagged; his breath should be registered as a lethal weapon. His grimy paw reached for me and I lit him up with the stun baton. He flopped around on the ground and the wildlife swarmed off him in droves.

"Eeep!" The slimy white wormy things were headed straight for me. Shrieking like a demented banshee, I scrambled up on the transport and

The Warlord's Comeuppance

blasted away with my borrowed laser. "Get away from me! Get away from me!"

Detja!

"Get away from me. Get away from me."

Detja!

The ferocity of the Warlord's voice finally penetrated my panic fogged mind. *What?*

What is attacking you?

I sucked in a shuddering breath and looked around at the crispy fried critters littering the sands. *Ah... It's okay. They're dead now.*

What are they?

Icky wormy things.

Icky wormy things? The Warlord actually sounded like he was struggling not to laugh.

I don't like creepy crawlies, okay. No big. I fried their little asses.

I see.

Gail Koger

I took a quick peek inside the smelly transport and shuddered. Goddess, I hoped there weren't more in there.

Jaylan will be happy to check for you.

Shock roiled through me. Holy Goddess, not only was Zarek back in my mind but Jaylan was standing a few feet away, glaring at me. A stun grenade would take of that rather large problem.

Zarek's mind suddenly clamped around mine and he snapped, *You will not attack my warriors again! Do you understand?*

I winced. *Painfully clear.*

Jaylan stalked over to me and pried the laser pistol out of my hand. "Icky wormy things?"

"Funny guy, you've got some crawling on you, too."

He took one look at the dozen or so wormy critters slithering up his boots and broke into a funky shaking, stomping dance routine.

I had to admit it was pretty effective. Grinning, I slid into the cockpit, gunned it and left him dancing in the dust.

You are a menace.

The Warlord's Comeuppance

Flattery will get you nowhere.

Jaylan is my best tracker.

Goody for him.

There was a loud thump and the transport wobbled violently. I glanced over my shoulder and groaned. Seems I had picked up a hitchhiker.

Jaylan rapped on the canopy. *Stop.*

Hmmm. Wonder how fast this piece of junk could go?

Detja! Zarek's bellow sent shards of pain rocketing around my skull.

Okay. Okay. I slowed the transport to a crawl and popped the canopy.

Jaylan ripped me out of the pilot's seat and tossed me in the cargo area. "Enjoy the icky wormy things."

My hand clamped around a stun grenade.

The Warlord's hold on me tightened painfully. *You make any attempts to harm Jaylan or escape again and I will personally lock you in a room full*

Gail Koger

of icky wormy things over and over again until you have learned proper obedience.

The conniving fiend would, too. *You've made your point.*

Excellent. You will follow Jaylan's commands as if they were my own.

Since I had seldom followed Zarek's orders, it shouldn't present a problem. *As you wish, my lord.*

Disappoint me and you will regret it.

Blast it, I had handed him the perfect weapon and he wouldn't hesitate to use it. *Yes, my lord.*

A low hiss brought my head around. Two red eyes glowed in the blackness. Holy Goddess! I quickly tapped a button on my wrist comp unit and a small beam of light shot out, catching a coiled a sand snake. How lovely.

Keeping my movements slow, I eased over to the door, attached my sensor probe to the door pad and with one tap of my finger, opened it. I dove through the door, tossed the stun grenade at the snake and slid the door shut.

Bam! The transport rocked violently. Smoke and flames belched from the undercarriage and it ground to a sudden halt. Oops. Wrong grenade.

The Warlord's Comeuppance

The Warlord snarled, *Ooops?*

Jaylan grabbed the front of my jumpsuit with a growl. "What have you done?"

"Killed a sand snake," I growled back. "It was dark in there. So I grabbed the wrong grenade. Big deal. Next time you might want to check for poisonous wildlife before you decide to toss me in head first." Smoke rapidly filled the canopy and I tried to hack up a lung. "I think it's going to blow."

His voice full of repressed rage, Jaylan snapped, "You think?" His big arms clamped me to his chest, squashing the air of my poor abused lungs. There was a disorienting moment of blackness and we were standing a short distance away from the burning transport.

A sea of crescent shaped sand dunes glowed a brilliant pink in the setting sun. The hot arid wind moaned, sending swirling vortexes of dust dancing over the dunes.

"Got any water on you?"

Jaylan sucked air through tightly gritted teeth and emitted a ragged hiss. "No."

Gail Koger

Fighting back a grin, I fanned myself and watched the boiling black cloud of smoke rise high into the air. “Too bad, it’s kinda hot out here.”

He stuck out his soot blackened hand. “Give them to me. Now!”

I raised an inquiring eyebrow. “Give you what exactly?”

“I will strip search you if I have to.”

“Bet the Warlord would like that.”

Zarek’s warning snarl sounded in my mind.
Detja.

With a sigh, I dug out a handful of stun grenades and placed them carefully on his hand. “Happy?”

“And the stun baton.”

I pulled my tube of lip color out and handed it to him.

“Lip color?”

“Push the button on the side.”

He triggered it and the baton sprung out. “Clever.”

The Warlord's Comeuppance

“Thank you.”

“Is that all of them?”

“Yes.”

Jaylan grabbed the front of my jumpsuit and lifted me to eye level. “Is. That. All. Of. Them.”

I looked him right in the eye and lied my ass off. “Yes. It. Is.”

“Why don’t I believe you?”

“Don’t know. You Coletti are a suspicious bunch.”

“With good reason.” He tightened his grip on me and teleported again.

A fleeting second of blackness and we were standing on a hill overlooking a haphazard collection of metal and plastoid structures. That had to be Beelzebub, the only water source for thousands of miles.

“Think they have any Datol?”

“We shall soon find out.” Jaylan teleported again and poof we stood under a battered metal

Gail Koger

awning that provided some relief from the unforgiving sun.

I gagged at the putrid odors drifting out of the dilapidated buildings. “Doesn’t anyone bathe here?”

“Water is a precious commodity and not to be wasted on bathing.”

“Wonderful. That smell is enough to stop to a charging Gourman.”

Jaylan sat me on my feet and leaned over me menacingly. “You will behave yourself.”

I pasted a suitably chastised expression on my face. “I promise to be a good little female.”

His fists clenched as if he was resisting the urge to strangle me. “I thank the Goddess above that I will soon be rid of you.”

“Awww. The big, nasty warrior having a bad day?”

A muscle twitched in his jaw and Jaylan reached for me.

Eeep! The demented, ‘I am so going to enjoy killing you’, look on his face had me backing away from him.

The Warlord's Comeuppance

Detja! Quit provoking him, Zarek snapped and then added to Jaylan, As much as you'd like to choke the life from her, and believe me I know the feeling, she is my mate and you will protect her with your life. Do you understand me?

Jaylan let out a shuddering breath. That she has survived this long without being murdered is truly amazing.

Hey! I was doing fine until the Warlord came along.

His muscles corded with restraint, Jaylan leveled a killing gaze on me. "We need to disguise you. I have no desire to fight the miners for you."

"Wouldn't want to get your pretty uniform all mussed, now would we?"

He bared his fangs at me and growled.

I quickly pulled out an illusion disc and triggered it. The air shimmered slightly and in my place stood the dirty, hairy Baykal prospector. "I'm starving, hope they take credit cards."

He stared at me for a long moment. "Good disguise."

"A Girl Scout is always prepared."

Gail Koger

“Girl Scout?”

“It’s an Earth thing.”

“Never heard of this Earth.”

“It’s in a galaxy far, far away. Father went to sample a creature called the blue whale and ended up bringing back Jake, Earth’s most successful thief. I learned a lot from him.”

“I’m surprised Adan didn’t eat him.”

“Me, too.” My stomach rumbled loudly. “Let’s eat.”

The interior of the drab, rundown bar was dimly lit and the wheezing air-conditioning unit pushed warm stagnant air around the battered tables and chairs.

The jabber of a dozen languages stopped abruptly as Jaylan stepped through the door. The motley group of miners stared at him for a moment and then began stuffing food down their gullets at an alarming rate.

The bartender, a Hus Ping with badly molting fur, hurried over to us and bowed slightly. “My lord, how may I serve you?”

The Warlord's Comeuppance

“Your best table and some Datol to start,” Jaylan replied scanning the occupants carefully.

Best table? You’re joking, right?

Quiet! Jaylan snapped, following the bartender to table at the rear of the bar.

As you command, big cranky one. The sensory assault of dozens of incredibly smelly miners combined with the aroma of cooking oil and stale Datol made me want to puke. I gawked at the “best” table. Its grimy black surface was partially covered by a badly stained table cloth. The eating utensils had bits of dried food caked on them. My appetite died a sudden death.

Jaylan jerked out a chair. “Sit.”

What? He thought I was some kind of trained animal? The image of hundreds of icky wormy things crawling on me sudden popped into my head. *Very funny*, I hissed at Zarek and sat.

“Our special today is Tocat stew,” the bartender said, twitching nervously.

I bet it’s special alright.

A scowl on his handsome face, Jaylan snarled, “Two bowls.”

Gail Koger

The bartender gave another bow and took off like demons from the tenth hell were chasing him.

There is no way I'm touching vermin stew.

Then you'll go hungry.

Better than puking for the next week.

A female Hus Ping scurried over, set two bottles of Datol and basket of what looked like sticks on the table.

She suddenly thrust her huge breasts into Jaylan's face, "Does the mighty Coletti warrior need me to service him?"

The look on Jaylan's face as he stared at her semen covered fur and swollen red nipples was priceless. I choked back a laugh. Poor guy was having a really bad day and it was only going to get worse. *Awww. She's sweet on you.*

"Be gone, female."

"As you command, my lord," she huffed and flounced off.

You know, you should take her up on her offer. With the Alliance on your ass, it might be awhile before you get laid again.

The Warlord's Comeuppance

Eyes glittering with repressed rage, Jaylan grabbed his Datol and drained it. *You should be beaten regularly.*

Any male stupid enough to try that will be picking pieces of himself out of the walls. I took a long swallow of my Datol and savored it. It was truly the nectar of the Goddess.

He placed one of my stun grenades on the table. *Where did you get these?*

I made them. Why?

You made these?

His incredulous tone made me want to whack him upside the head with my bottle. *Believe it or not, some females have abilities other than making babies.*

A muscle in his jaw twitched. *Then you won't have any problems describing how they are assembled, will you?*

My temper flared and I projected the process into his mind. *Happy now?*

Very, the Warlord answered.

Gail Koger

I gave myself a mental head smack. Goddess, I had walked right into the conniving fiend's sneaky little trap.

A ghostly hand stroked my cheek. *Soon all your secrets will be mine.*

Don't count on it.

Zarek's laugh echoed in my head. *Once our bond is complete your knowledge will become mine.*

And yours, mine. Think on that for awhile, my lord. I felt his sudden unease and grinned. That had shut him up.

Jaylan leapt to his feet and in one smooth movement drew his laser pistol.

That can't be good. *What's wrong?*

Don't move. Don't speak.

But...

Do as he commands, Detja, the Warlord said, his voice low, threatening.

The sensation of danger skittered across my nerves and a second later six heavily armed Coletti

The Warlord's Comeuppance

warriors stood in front of our table. Each one was powerfully built and radiated sheer menace.

Jaylan bared his fangs in wolfish grin. "It has been a long time, Cantor. Come to try and kill me again?"

Cantor touched the ugly scar dissecting his once handsome face. "Give me the female and I will let you live, brother."

Brother? Whoa, some bad blood here.

With a shrug, Jaylan gestured at the female Hus Ping cowering at the bar. "Not your usual type but you are welcome to her."

Cantor inclined his head in a mocking little salute and drew his rather large sword. "I want the Farin."

Me? Why would he want me?

"Do you see a Farin here?"

His eyes burning with a murderous rage, Cantor shoved the tip of his sword against Jaylan's neck and plucked the pistol out of his hand. "I will take from the Warlord what he took from me."

"Tia was never yours."

Gail Koger

“Wasn’t she?” He drew his sword slowly across Jaylan’s neck and watched as the blood poured from the cut. “You will tell me where she is or you will die slowly, painfully.”

Okay, enough of this brotherly love stuff. Triggering my voice distorter, I belched loudly and in a perfect imitation of the prospector’s voice said, “For three hundred credits, I’ll tell you where she is.”

Cantor’s malevolent gaze fixed on me. “Where?”

“Her ship crashed near my dig.”

“Shut up or I will kill you,” Jaylan snarled.

“That’s my line,” Cantor spat and dropped him with a vicious blow to the face. “Chain him up.”

His warriors obediently slapped shackles onto his wrists and ankles.

He pointed his bloody sword at me. “Where is she?”

I quickly adjust my illusion to one of fearful groveling. “Gert has her, my lord. He stole the female from me and took her to his camp in the Desolation.” My illusion licked his lips greedily.

The Warlord's Comeuppance

“Sweet little female with breasts just begging a male to suckle them.”

Death glittered in his golden eyes. “Did you touch her?”

“No! No, my lord, I didn’t the chance. Gert... Gert will ride her hard before he sells her to the slavers. You’d best hurry.”

Very well played, Detja, but tread gently with this one, Zarek advised.

Ya think?

Cantor’s right eye began to twitch. “What are the coordinates to his camp?”

“Don’t I get a reward for telling you?”

“You get to live.”

Coordinates popped into my head and I repeated them. “Latitude 33.9 and longitude 20.”

“If you have lied to me, I will hunt you down and feed your entrails to the Sobot worms.”

“No need for that, my lord. I wouldn’t lie to a mighty Coletti warlord,” I whined fearfully as my hand closed around a stun grenade. Cantor’s fierce hatred bordered on insanity and if this didn’t work,

Gail Koger

taking him and his warriors out wasn't going to be easy.

Cantor stared down at his brother for a long moment; his hand trembled slightly as he ran the tip of his sword down Jaylan's cheek. "I should kill you now for your betrayal but I won't."

Awww. I'm so touched. Such brotherly love made me want to puke.

"I want you to watch the mighty Zarek die at my hands and all that was his will be mine. I want you groveling at my feet and begging me to end your suffering."

Yeah, like that was going to happen.

Grabbing a handful of Jaylan's uniform, Cantor dragged him over to a support beam and chained him to it. His fierce gaze swept over the bar. "Anyone foolish enough to free him dies."

The terror stricken bartender stuttered, "No-no one w-will touch him, my lord."

Satisfied that he had everyone properly intimidated, Cantor and his warriors popped out.

I exhaled a long breath. *What a nut job!*

That he is.

The Warlord's Comeuppance

The miners let out a collective breath of relief and immediately stampeded for the door, almost trampling the bartender in their haste to get as far away as possible before the Coletti warriors returned. The Hus Ping growled something at the female and they quickly followed the miners.

Outside, shouted curses and the roar of dozens of engines filled the night air. I winced at the repeated crunch of metal on metal. It sounded like one of those Earth's demolition derby as the fear crazed idiots made their getaway.

I started towards the door. A smart thief never outstayed her welcome.

A picture of a bloody, mangled body popped into my head. *That is what Cantor does to his enemies. You cannot allow Jaylan to be taken by him.*

When did he become my responsibility?

When he rescued you from your burning life pod. You owe him your life.

Just color me grateful. I stomped over to Jaylan and started picking the locks. *Who's Tia?*

My first mate. She was killed in the Great War.

Gail Koger

I caught the fleeting images of two strikingly beautiful females and laughing children. I flinched as those loving memories were abruptly replaced by the gruesome images of their shattered bodies. His agony became mine and I shuddered in horror. Those awful memories would be forever burned into my mind. *Who killed them?*

It does not concern you.

Sure it does. If I have a big bulls-eye painted on my chest, I need to know why and who.

I have many enemies.

That's stating the obvious. How did your second mate die?

An Alliance hunter killed her in an effort to weaken me.

That did explain his hatred of the Alliance. The only thing the idiot hunter had accomplished before his rather bloody demise was turning the Warlord into a merciless predator. *What about your children?*

Two survived.

And you didn't think it was necessary to tell me any of this?

The Warlord's Comeuppance

It changes nothing.

It most certainly does.

We will discuss this at another time.

But—

Tend to Jaylan. Voss will come for you.

Wait a minute! You've got some explaining to do.

An icy silence was my only answer. Blast it, there was nothing quite like a Warlord in a snit.

Gail Koger

Chapter Seven

Jaylan moaned and twitched. Bet he was going to be in a snit when he woke up, too. I quickly relieved him of all my little toys and scanned the area. No life forms other than the local wildlife. Eeep! A bunch of those nasty, slimy, wormy things were clustered around the settlement. Thousands and thousands of them with one thought on their tiny little minds. Get Detja! I could already feel them crawling on me! Ick! Ick! Ick!

Focus, Detja.

There are thousands and thousands of those icky, creepy, crawly, wormy things out there.

I felt him mucking around in my head and the crawly sensation faded away. *They will not harm you. Now concentrate on your defenses.*

Yes, my lord. To my utter amazement I was no longer freaked out by the slimy wormy things. Nice. Bet the Warlord would regret that little decision down the road.

Ready to talk about—

The Warlord's Comeuppance

No! His frustrated bellow rocketed around my skull.

I rubbed my aching head. *Okay, no need to yell. When you're ready to talk—*

Concentrate on the task at hand.

I was just going to tell you about—

Not! Now.

Okay. Okay. Goddess, what a cranky butt. I tapped my wrist comp unit and brought up the scanner. Blast it, everything that could move had been taken in the mad exodus. That meant we were trapped here and I got to plan a little welcome home party for Cantor the terrible. A happy smile curved my mouth, nothing quite like blowing up stuff to make my day. Another tap and I brought up the map of the settlement. Hmm. I could put some stun grenades here, here and here. Then plant some of my special stuff there.

You will also need to plant some along the southwest perimeter wall, Zarek added, all calm like.

Surprise, surprise, his crankiness was talking to me. I studied the southwest perimeter wall on my map. Hmmph, how'd I miss that one? Three gold

Gail Koger

stars for the Warlord and his strategic planning.
You ready to answer some questions about—

No!

A battle roar reverberated off the walls.
“Cantor!?”

Great, just what I needed another cranky butt. One look at Jaylan’s bared fangs and the raw fury burning in his eyes and I quickly said, “I sent him on a wild goose chase.”

“Wild what chase?”

“It’s an old Earth saying. He’s out looking for me in the Desolation but the only thing he’s gonna find is a whole bunch of hungry sand sharks.”

“He will die by my hand. No other.”

“That might be a little hard to do with no weapons and being outnumbered six to one. But hey, if it makes you feel better, go for it.”

“Do not mock me, female. I am a warrior and I have killed many in battle,” he snarled and promptly did a face plant on the floor.

Ouch! That had to hurt. Testosterone should be outlawed.

The Warlord's Comeuppance

Jaylan erupted to his feet and looked around wildly. "Who hit me?"

"No one, you big idiot." I shoved a chair out with my foot. "Now sit down, before you hurt yourself."

"A female cannot command a warrior."

The Warlord snapped, *Sit! In this situation, you will follow Detja's commands.*

He sat, looking a bit dazed. *My lord?*

She has a plan.

A plan?

I gave Jaylan an evil smile. *We're going to even the odds a bit and my favorite part, turn Cantor into a bloody mess.*

I like that plan.

I thought you would. I slid the heel of my boot open and carefully plucked the explosives out. *Now this is the good stuff.*

How good?

The Warlord immediately riffled through my mind and I felt his feral smile. *Very good indeed.*

Gail Koger

I took a pinch of the blue substance, rolled it into a ball and stuck a timing device on it. *This is going to rock Cantor's world.*

Jaylan plucked it from my hand. "I'm starting to like you."

Color me happy.

I planted the last of my little toys on the south perimeter wall when alarm prickled along my nerves. I glanced up and gaped in amazement.

The most pathetic excuse for a Coletti warrior was standing on the wall staring down at me. His scrawny frame was covered by a stained jumpsuit that was so ragged it barely covered his scarred flesh. The laser rifle he had pointed at me was a relic and I seriously doubted it would actually fire. I raised my gaze and blinked in disbelief. Except for two scraggly warrior's braids, he was completely bald. He snarled at me and I fought back a giggle. Not so scary guy had only one pitiful fang. This was going to way too easy.

Pasting a terrified look on my face, I backed away from him and triggered my stun baton.

Pitiful jumped down and stalked towards me. His expression one of delighted greed, he cupped himself and rocked his hips. "Pretty."

The Warlord's Comeuppance

He had to be kidding. I gave a panicked little shriek and fled.

A big grimy hand grabbed my arm. Gotcha dumb ass! I twisted, used his forward momentum against him and tossed him over my shoulder. Smack! He smashed head first into the wall.

With a roar, Pitiful jumped to his feet and I lit him up with the stun baton. He flopped around and more of those disgusting wormy things swarmed off.

Ick! Ick! Ick! Those nasty things were so not getting on me. I danced madly on their little asses, smiling at the satisfying squishing noises they made under my boots. "Die. Die. Die!"

Detja! Have you lost all sense?

What?

With a touch of sarcasm in his voice, Zarek asked, *Why are you killing those disgusting, wormy Scorm, when there are twenty scavengers searching for you?*

Pitiful moaned and I lit him up again. *Nineteen not twenty.* I stomped on some more Scorm. *And besides, I really enjoy killing these slimy critters.*

Gail Koger

As will the scavengers enjoy raping and killing you.

Good point. I picked up Pitiful's laser rifle and checked it over. Blast it. Not only was it poorly maintained, there was only half a charge left.

Jaylan popped in, snagged the rifle from my hand and shot Pitiful in the chest.

What that really necessary?

Yes, both warriors said in unison.

A bellow of unmitigated rage shattered the night air. "Jaylan, you miserable coward, did you think I could not defeat a few sand sharks? I don't die that easily."

Okay, so the easy way was a bust.

Jaylan bared his fangs and growled like a rabid beast.

Balock's balls. I quickly grabbed his arm before he could teleport. "Wait! You face him now and he will kill you. We need to stick to the plan."

Sporting a slitty-eyed predator glare, Jaylan snapped, "He will be the only one dying today."

The Warlord's Comeuppance

Goddess, here was a prime example of testosterone poisoning at its finest. “I have an idea on how to pit Cantor and his crew against the scavengers.”

Listen to her, the Warlord commanded.

He peeled my fingers off his arm, “What is your plan?”

I sucked in a lungful of air and screamed. A blood curdling, ear shattering, totally hysterical scream guaranteed to bring them all running.

Jaylan rubbed at his ear. “You are a truly devious female.”

“Thank you.” The sound of dozens of booted feet running toward us, had me adding, “Now would be a good time for us to leave.”

“As you command, my lady.” He wrapped a hard arm around me and teleported.

We popped onto the roof of the bar which gave us a perfect view of the night's entertainment. I plopped down on a chair that I had a loudly grumbling Jaylan bring up earlier, along with the appropriate snacks. Hey, what was game night without beer and chips? Okay, all we had were those sticks things that the Hus Ping female had left us but hey it was better than nothing. Right? I

Gail Koger

grabbed a bottle of Datol from a bucket and settled back to watch the fun.

Like a swarm of hungry Scorm, all nineteen of the scavengers surged down the street and ran smack dab into Cantor and his rather chewed up warriors. For a scant second they stared at each other in stunned amazement and then all hell broke loose. Furious bursts of laser bolts flew wildly as they all sprinted insanely for cover.

“How come they aren’t teleporting?”

“Teleporting to the Desolation and back drained their energy. They need to conserve their power for battle.”

I rubbed my hands together in glee. “How about we make them expend a bit more energy?”

Jaylan bared his fangs in a feral grin. “You think like a warrior.”

“Awww, you’re too kind.” Tapping my wrist comp unit, I set off a stun grenade. A bright flash of light was followed rapidly by a loud cracking boom. The stunning blast blew three scavengers through a flimsy plastoid wall. Ouch! That was going to leave some nasty bruises.

Another tap and kaboom! One of Cantor’s warriors was catapulted head first into the roof.

The Warlord's Comeuppance

The building creaked and groaned ominously. The warrior slid slowly down the badly tilting roof before his boot caught on a piece of bulging metal. He hung precariously off the edge; blood dripped from his fingers, staining the ground beneath him.

“Well done, my lady.”

“Four down, twenty-two to go.”

Jaylan grabbed a hold of my arm. “Hey!”

“You don’t get to have all the fun.” He examined my screens and tapped the detonator key.

A thunderous explosion rent the night air. Rocketing shards of metal and a rippling fireball rose high into the night sky. The orange flames revealed the scavengers running madly in every direction.

A loud metallic screech sounded. Cantor and his warriors burst from the burning building seconds before it rather spectacularly collapsed in on itself. As they sprinted down the street, I set off more of my stun grenades and rocked their world.

I just love it when a plan comes together. I held up my hand. “High five.”

Gail Koger

Jaylan looked at me like I was nuts. “High five?”

“It’s an Earth tradition. You know, when we win and the bad guys take it in the shorts?”

He smacked my hand. Ouch! “Not so hard.”

Bolts of dazzling energy suddenly lit up the darkness. Two of Cantor’s warriors toppled to the ground. Guess some of the scavengers had stayed to fight.

Cantor and his crew returned fire. A vicious crossfire erupted, punching holes in the surrounding buildings.

Whoa! Even though they were outnumbered three to one, Cantor and his bunch were quickly whittling down the scavengers. Color me impressed.

There was a flurry of evasive maneuvering as the scavengers retreated.

“Okay, time to bait the trap.” I touched the comp screen and smiled as my terrified, blood curdling scream sounded from the south perimeter wall.

“Your scream is enough to raise the dead,” Jaylan said, taking a long swallow of Datol.

The Warlord's Comeuppance

“And it works like a charm every time.” I picked up one of the sticks, bit into it and promptly spit it back out. Yuck. It tasted worse than Sariel’s filthy hide. Grabbing another bottle of Datol, I drained it in an effort to kill the taste.

A flurry of movement at the south wall caught my attention. Cantor and his warriors had walked right into our trap. I tapped my wrist comp unit and a cannon-like blast ripped the night air. The building shuddered violently beneath us and flames like gigantic fireflies flew from the south wall. Blast it! I used too much peist again.

Bleeding from a dozen wounds, Cantor staggered out of the smoke. Whoa! Was this guy lucky or what?

“Some believe my brother has been granted nine lives.”

“Nine, huh?” I downed another Datol and stared at my screen. “Hmmm, let’s see what we can do about that.” I poked the screen with my thumb and my panic stricken shriek filled the night air.

Cantor spun around, took one look at Pitiful chasing me, and teleported.

“Sucker.”

Gail Koger

The second he popped back in, I hit him with a stun grenade. Bam! Cantor somersaulted through the air and landed face first in a pile of rotting garbage.

A slimy mass of Tocat stew oozing slowly down his neck, Cantor climbed to his feet, took one look at the hundreds of Scorm crawling over his jumpsuit and broke into a crazed, itchy, stomping dance routine.

Jaylan and I exchanged a high-five.

“Prepare to die,” a cold voice announced behind us.

I glanced over my shoulder at Cantor’s beat-all-to-hell warrior and tapped my wrist comp unit.

Sariel and Zarek suddenly stood there. Both warriors bared their fangs in a menacing display.

A startled battle cry broke from the warrior as he made a rather spectacular leap backwards, teetered wildly on the edge of the roof, pitched forward in a desperate attempt to regain his footing, stumbled backwards and tumbled over the side. Color me surprised.

Putting down our Datol, we ambled over and peered down. The warrior had crashed landed right

The Warlord's Comeuppance

on top of two scrawny scavengers. I winced at their bizarrely twisted arms and legs. "That's gotta hurt."

Jaylan belched loudly, reached over and jabbed repeatedly at the screen. "What else you got?"

Zarek and Sariel vanished and the street below us was suddenly populated by a hodgepodge of illusions. Me, in my dancing girl outfit sobbing hysterically on the table.

Adan in his true form, his ropy tentacles full of screaming Alliance soldiers, charged madly down the street.

"Surrender or die," Captain Zan shouted, his hard black gaze searching the blazing street.

Zarek, his eyes glittering with rage, tossed a heavily loaded table of fruit across the street.

Sariel cackled madly, "Think you can take her from me?"

Black smoke billowed from a hover craft as it spun and twisted violently before exploding in a rippling fireball.

Gail Koger

Dozens of ugly black blisters sprouting across Dogon's handsome face, he promised darkly, "You will pay for what you have done."

The Askole moving so fast all you can see is a black blur as his terrifying claws and fangs flashed in a dizzying display of death.

Fountains of fire erupted from the ground

Out of the flames came a dozen prison guards in their fancy armored black jumpsuits and gleaming helmets.

His bellow of fury echoing off the buildings, Cantor fired wildly at the illusions and managed to score a direct hit on the disc.

The illusions vanished and an eerie silence fell, broken only by the crackle of the burning buildings.

"Well, that sucks."

"Totally," Jaylan agreed.

A stun beam slammed into Cantor's chest, knocking him to the ground.

A fleeting second later the street was full of big, mean looking Coletti warriors.

"Whose side are they on?"

The Warlord's Comeuppance

Jaylan peered at them for a moment and grinned. "Ours."

"Oh. More Datol?" I turned around and ran into a brick wall. I squinted up at the wall. Holy Goddess, it was Voss.

He bared his fangs in a totally evil smile that said gotcha my pretty.

"Betcha practice your scary face in the mirror every morning, huh?"

"You're drunk," Voss accused, obviously disappointed that I hadn't screamed or fainted.

I hiccupped. "Just a bit."

Jaylan snapped to attention. "Battle commander."

Voss's cold gaze swept over him. "You allowed her to drink?"

"She's easier to handle that way, commander."

"Wise decision."

A titanic explosion erupted, sending shards of metal whooshing over our heads.

Gail Koger

His gaze fixed on the boiling column of black smoke rapidly filling the night sky, Voss asked, “How can one small female be so very destructive?”

“It’s a gift. Whoa!” I tottered unsteadily on the edge of the roof.

Voss snagged my jumpsuit and jerked me back. His big hands suddenly turned me upside down as he patted my legs for hidden weapons. “Hey! Cut it out!”

He spun me upright, ran his hands along my rib cage, plucked whatever toy he found and handed it to Jaylan. “Stop it! That tickles.”

Voss went for my wrist comp unit and I bit him. Hard.

“She’s got a bite like a sand shark,” Jaylan commented, prying my teeth off of Voss’s wrist.

Voss’s fingers dug into my arm as he took my comp unit. “Tell Kasum to bring me a sedative.”

My head spun madly as he tossed me over his shoulder and teleported. A fleeting second later we stood on the street. My stomach heaved in protest. “I don’t feel so good.”

The Warlord's Comeuppance

Alarm filled Jaylan's eyes. "You might want to put her down, commander."

"She wouldn't dare."

Everything in my stomach came spewing out. All over Voss's back. I watched the mess drip down his once immaculate battle uniform. "Sorry."

"Sorry?" With a growl of barely contained rage, Voss threw me at Jaylan and stomped off. "Kasum! Where is that sedative?"

Laser bolts suddenly peppered the area. Jaylan tossed me inside the bar and returned fire. I slid across the grimy floor and smashed head first into the bar. Ouch!

A sizzling red beam streaked by my head. I scurried behind the bar and mentally scanned the area. Huh, scavengers, go figure. What a suicidal bunch of idiots.

One of the suicidal idiots popped in, grabbed me and teleported out.

Gail Koger

Chapter Eight

A nauseating moment of blackness and we appeared next to the burning south wall. What in the universe made all these males think I was some kind of prize to be won? Like I could be owned?

I stiffened with rage as he slid his hand between my legs. The idiot had picked the wrong female to mess with. I jabbed him in the neck with my tranquillizer ring. With a pathetic whine, he crumpled to the ground. A Warlord he wasn't. I grabbed his laser rifle and checked it over.

Jaylan's worried shout reverberated around my aching skull. *Detja!*

Stop shouting, I've got a headache.

Where are you?

Why should I tell you, huh? You lost me. Now you get to find me.

The Warlord's tone was one of extreme exasperation. *Detja, we do not have time for your foolish games. The Alliance Armada is two parsecs away.*

The Warlord's Comeuppance

Holy Goddess! They sent the entire Armanda?

Yes.

Guess they're a bit peeved that you took down Vesta's planetary defenses so easily.

Something big moved in the shadows. I whipped up the laser rifle and shot it. Imagine my surprise when Voss tumbled out into the light. *Ooops.*

Ooops? Zarek's voice was a low growl.

It was an accident. Really.

What did you do?

She shot Voss, Jaylan answered from behind me.

There was a moment of stunned silence and then Zarek bellowed, *Voss is dead?!*

It was just a stun beam, I inserted quickly.

Do you have a death wish?

Hey, it's dark. I'm kinda drunk and this place is crawling with scavengers. He should have said something.

Jaylan snorted. *You still would have shot him.*

Gail Koger

Who me?

Voss twitched and his large hand reached for my ankle.

Eeep! I jumped back.

Get her out of there. Now!

Jaylan grabbed me and teleported. We popped in next to a heavily armored shuttle.

Voss's battle roar echoed off the buildings.

"Wow! He sounds kinda mad, huh?"

"Kinda?" Jaylan shifted nervously. "When he gives that particular battle cry, it means his prey is about to die very messily."

"A bit harsh, isn't it? I only stunned him and it wasn't even a full charge." I palmed the illusion disc I took off of Jaylan.

Most warriors find being defeated by a tiny female upsetting, Zarek stated a little too calmly.

Then most warriors should leave me alone or suffer the consequences.

The Warlord's Comeuppance

Jaylan hurriedly added, *I will do my best to defend her, my lord.*

Awww, you're so sweet but it's not really necessary.

Jaylan gaped at me. *You think you can defeat the battle commander?*

Nope. I'm going to do the next best thing.

Jaylan shoved me behind him. *And that is?*

Hide in plain sight. I triggered the disc a second before Voss popped in.

His fangs extended and ready to strike, Voss bellowed, "Where is that little she demon?"

Jaylan turned, his eyes widened slightly at the big muscular warrior standing quietly behind him, and shrugged. "Hiding?"

Voss stared at my illusion and smiled. A terrifying, 'I'm so going to enjoy killing you' kinda of smile.

Hiding in plain sight was definitely a bust.

His voice a purr of menace, Zarek uttered one word. *Voss.*

Gail Koger

The deadly rage burning in Voss's eyes was instantly suppressed. *My lord, I will guard the she demon with my life.*

Awww. How sweet.

Detja! Stop provoking my warriors and give Jaylan that disc.

I disengaged the disc. *He started it.*

Voss roared, "Kasum! The tranquillizer now!

Goddess, Coletti warriors were such cranky butts.

Lurid bursts of red zinged by my head. Was there a bull's-eye painted on my chest?

Three hundred pounds of angry Coletti warrior abruptly smashed me to the ground. "When someone is shooting at you, it is customary to duck," Voss snarled, firing back at the very persistent scavengers.

"I know that," I gasped, wiggling around as I managed to pull my last defensive weapon.

"Yet you stood there, like a dazed petka waiting to get shot."

The Warlord's Comeuppance

“No need to be insulting.” I winced as another laser bolt came uncomfortably close. “Will someone please kill those stupid scavengers?”

As you command, my lady, Jaylan responded and teleported.

An agonizing scream was followed quickly by another, then another. The barrage of laser fire stopped. Color me impressed.

Voss jerked me to my feet and snarled, “You do anything to harm the Warlord and I will snap your neck like a twig.”

I reached up and tapped his gleaming white fangs with my index finger. “Do you get those professionally whitened?”

He stared at me in absolute disbelief.

I fought back a grin. Goddess, I loved messing with males. It was so much fun.

Jaylan reappeared, loaded down with high-tech weaponry. “They weren’t scavengers, they were bounty hunters. The Alliance just plastered your face all over the media and offered a three million credit bounty to whoever brings in the Ghost. Dead or alive.”

Gail Koger

“What a bunch of cheapskates. The Ghost is worth at least five million.”

The Warlord inquired a little too pleasantly,
How much Datol did you consume?

Ten bottles, Jaylan answered.

Ten!

I was thirsty, okay? I gave them my best pathetic look. And starving. It has been three days since I've had anything to eat.

Voss slanted a black look at Jaylan. “You allowed her to drink ten bottles of Datol on an empty stomach?”

“She refused to eat the bowl of Tocat stew I bought her.”

“Would you eat wormy vermin stew?”

A rather scrawny warrior with a medical insignia on his black battle uniform teleported in and held out a pressure injector. “I have the tranquillizer, Commander.”

“Don’t just stand there. Inject her, Kasum,” Voss commanded, more than a little irritated.

The Warlord's Comeuppance

Sucking in a deep breath, I hurled a small glass sphere against the shuttle. It shattered and a bright green cloud of gas spewed out.

The Warlord roared in fury, *Detja!*

Voss's hands locked painfully around my neck. "You little she—" With a choking gasp, he crumpled to the ground.

Jaylan's reproachful gaze fixed on me as he too succumbed to the billowing green cloud of knock-out gas.

Rubbing my abused neck, I fought back my growing need for air and carefully surveyed the area. Kasum and the other warriors were sprawled limply on the sand. Thank the Goddess, the gas actually worked on Colettis.

My wrist comp unit chimed and I greedily sucked in a lungful of air. Good thing the fast acting gas dissipated so quickly or I'd be sprawled on the ground with the rest of them.

With two fingers, I cautiously pulled my wrist comp unit from Voss's pocket. The sheer menace radiating from him had me nervously backing away. And I thought he was angry before. I tapped my scanner and sighed with relief. The bounty hunters' shuttle was close by. I would be long gone before—

Gail Koger

My psychic senses screamed a sudden warning and dread skittered up my spine. Someone very powerful had just teleported in. Someone really familiar, but that was impossible. There was no way—

“Going somewhere my little flower?”

The cold fist of reality socked me in the stomach. It was him. Oh Goddess, it was him. For a long nerve twisting moment I stood frozen in utter horror. I knew this moment would come but...

His mocking laugh shattered the silence. “Frightened?”

Drawing on every ounce of courage I had, I forced myself to turn around.

Zarek was standing directly behind me. His black battle suit fitted him like a glove, emphasizing every luscious muscle. Two ornate daggers protruded from his knee-high armored boots and on each arm he wore large gold warrior’s bracelets with elaborate designs. An etched gold headband denoted his rank of Overlord. I flinched at the stark possessiveness in his amber eyes. His gaze was one of a hungry predator eyeing his prey.

“How? I thought—

“I was still on Vesta?”

The Warlord's Comeuppance

I backed away as he stalked towards me, all fluid grace and rippling power. “Ah, silly me, I thought conquering the known universe would take a bit longer.”

“The only one I’m interested in conquering is you.”

A surge of uncontrollable panic overrode my common sense and I bolted. I knew it was a stupid move and that there was little chance of outrunning the Warlord, but I had to try.

The Warlord appeared in front of me. I spun and ran the other way.

Once again the Warlord appeared in front of me. His smile was pure predator. As if the beast that lurked below the surface had been unleashed.

Trembling with frustration and fear, I skidded to a stop. The conniving fiend was playing with me. “I won’t let you turn me into a brainless puppet.”

He cocked his head; his merciless eyes tracked my every movement. “I don’t want or need a puppet. I want you. The scheming little thief. The explosives expert. The excellent statistician. The always plotting female that fears little and who will fight at my side without flinching.”

Gail Koger

“But...” Zarek’s voice was soft with menace as he gestured to his men sprawled across the sand. “...I demand unquestioning loyalty to me and my warriors.”

I swallowed hard. “I didn’t hurt them. I just put them to sleep for a little while.”

“Yet you would leave them defenseless and unprotected?”

Blast it, he had me there. I edged towards a laser pistol. “They should be coming around any time now. No harm. No foul.”

“Do not.”

I literally froze as his mind clamped painfully around mine.

I’m in your mind, my little flower. I know your every thought, your every scheme.

That sucks. The Warlord grabbed me with a stunning quickness, a ferocity that terrified me.

It ends now. No more running. No more scheming.

I struggled against his brutal grip. “I won’t submit.”

The Warlord's Comeuppance

“Oh, but you will. Eagerly. Again and again and again.”

Voss's voice was a harsh croak, “My lord, did that little she demon escape?”

“No. I have her.”

“Good. She needs to be beaten regularly.”

I glanced over Zarek's shoulder as Voss climbed unsteadily to his feet and gave him the one finger salute.

Voss gave a low growl of aggression and staggered towards us.

Detja! Quit provoking my battle commander.

I winced as the pressure on my mind increased painfully. *Yes, my lord. I'm still drunk, my lord.*

I am well aware of that fact. The Warlord turned to Voss. “Get your warriors back to your ship. I will follow shortly.”

The battle commander clamped a hand to his chest. “Yes, my lord.” He paused and bared his fangs at me, “That she demon needs to be ridden hard and often.”

Gail Koger

My mouth dropped open in outrage. “How’d you like to lose an arm or a leg?”

The Warlord tightened his grip and teleported. A fleeting second later we were in the cockpit of an X-class fighter.

To my stunned horror, Zarek quickly bit into his wrist and, with a proprietary hand, tilted my chin up. “Drink.”

My gaze flew to the blood dripping from his wrist. “Ewww! No way.”

I felt him mucking around in my head and to my utter horror I latched onto his wrist and sucked his blood like it was candy. *Why?*

I want you stone cold sober for our bonding.

Eeep! Not what I wanted to hear. I bucked against his hold. *You’re making a really huge mistake. I’m not mate material. I don’t play well with others. I take things that don’t belong to me and I really enjoy blowing stuff up.*

You are the perfect mate.

Color me happy.

The Warlord's Comeuppance

Zarek pulled his wrist from my mouth and with sensual strokes of his tongue, closed his wound and began licking the blood off my lips.

My body immediately vibrated with pure, undiluted need. The clawing want grew with every stroke. Dear Goddess, I couldn't control it, couldn't stop it. *Wait! Did you forget about the Alliance Armada?*

The Warlord gave me an unholy smile. "There is no reprieve. No escape." He held me against the wall and with one quick yank he ripped my jumpsuit open, another yank and it was down around my ankles.

"No! Wait!

"You cannot stop what was meant to be." His hot mouth closed around my right nipple, sucking it to a stiff aching point.

My body arched and I moaned at the raw hunger he ignited in me. He was a fever in my blood. I burned for him. He was everywhere, touching my mind my body. His mouth fastened on mine, branding me, claiming me.

That's it, let go.

Gail Koger

My senses reeled as he slid his fingers into me, stroking until the pressure inside me built and built. “No. Not right. Can’t.”

Zarek’s mind pushed hard into mine, sweeping away all my barriers, until we were as one. What he wanted, I wanted. What he needed, I needed. His body moved against mine, hot, aggressive, and perfect. I met him kiss for kiss, touch for touch.

I writhed as a firestorm of sheer ecstasy swept through me. He thrust into me, harder, deeper, stretching me until we were a single entity. I felt the mating bond snap in as a brain-jelling climax hit. Spasm after spasm shook me as I fought to get my breath back and my swirling senses under control. In that moment I knew I was irrevocably bound to him. A part of me reveled in the bond, another part wailed in anguish.

A cold metal band was abruptly clamped around my neck. I touched the etched surface and hissed with fury. It was an ownership band. “Take it off!”

Zarek’s voice was calm, amused. “No. There will be many males who will want to claim you. Now they know that you belong to me and only me.”

A blind fury exploded inside me and I erupted into a fighting, struggling wild thing. I bit, kicked

The Warlord's Comeuppance

and clawed the Warlord. "No one owns me. No one!"

He simply wrapped his arms around me and clamped me against his massive chest. "You are mine. Forever and always, mine."

His mouth caught my scream of denial and his wickedly agile tongue swept into my mouth, consuming, dominating me. His hips bucked relentlessly as he thrust deep inside me. His marauding fingers were without pity, imprinting on my soul, branding me forever. He drove into me, harder and harder. "You belong to me. Say it."

My body was on fire. I couldn't think. I couldn't breathe. Zarek caressed my breasts, thighs and the white hot heat danced, consumed, until I writhed and begged for completion.

"Say it." His teeth scrapped and nipped my breasts.

"I belong to you," I screamed as he slammed into me again and the world exploded.

Limp, boneless and sated, I sat quietly on the Warlord's lap as he piloted the fighter into the landing bay of the Despair. The fact that I was buck naked didn't bother me. Much. I was too focused on the fingers stroking my stomach. On the rather terrifying fact that Zarek's body had become a

Gail Koger

source of comfort and stability. I hadn't felt this safe or protected in a very long time.

The bad new was, I was chained to him forever and these feelings were probably nothing more than psychic woo-woo.

Zarek let out a long sigh and his arms clamped around me. "It seems you need more convincing."

"Not really necessary," I squeaked as his hand slid between my legs and a jolt of electricity sizzled through me.

"Very necessary," he replied and teleported.

There was the familiar flash of inky blackness and then I was falling. I hit a black silk covered bed and before I could move I was pinned under the Warlord heavy frame.

His hands stroked and caressed until I was frantic with need.

"Who do you belong to?"

With one brutal thrust he was inside me, setting off explosions of pleasure so intense I could only whimper. He was without mercy as he drove me over the edge, again and again and again. My inner muscles rippled and clenched around him as

The Warlord's Comeuppance

multiple orgasms tore through me. “You,” I screamed. “I belong to you.”

Gail Koger

Chapter Nine

I stood in the sonic shower, hoping desperately that the pulsing waves would wash the Warlord's touch off my skin. It wasn't working. He was embedded in my mind. I ached for his touch. Needed it to survive. How could I have let this happen? I should have been stronger. I should have fought harder. Shame burned my cheeks at the memory of how I had begged for Zarek's touch like some common whore. Writhed like a wanton as he pounded into me, made me his.

There had to be some way to break his hold, but how?

Zarek's growl reverberated around my skull. *You are an aggravating, troublesome mate who refuses to accept what is. You cannot wash away my touch. You are not, nor have you ever been, a whore. Your feelings are as they should be. We have bonded. Most females would be honored to be chosen as my mate.*

My temper flared to life. *Honored! I was sold to you for a credit and I will find a way to undo this stupid mate bond.*

The Warlord's Comeuppance

His rage roiled through me mind. *Stupid? It seems you need yet another lesson.*

Balock's balls! I dashed into the bedroom and looked around frantically for any kind of weapon. My eyes fastened on a huge, blood stained sword hanging on the wall. Perfect! I reached for it and every nerve in my body went on red alert as the Warlord teleported into the room. I threw a nervous glance over my shoulder and realized the conniving fiend was staring at my bare butt. "Quit staring at my ass."

Zarek smiled, revealing his sharp predator teeth, and pointed to the sword. "You think you can defeat me with that?"

I looked back up at the sword. It had to be at least four feet long and probably outweighed me, too. "Not a chance."

The menace in his gravelly voice sent shivers down my back. "Yet you still fight me?"

"I will never surrender." I hurled a chair at him.

He batted it away. "The battle is over and I have won you."

Grabbing a lamp, I threw it at him. "Like hell you have."

Gail Koger

He caught it and placed it on a table. “Enough of this foolishness.” He vanished. A scant second later he popped in behind me, lunged forward and grabbed my arm.

“Cheater!” I twisted, used his forward momentum against him, and hurled him over my shoulder.

He hit the wall with a satisfying smack. Knocked from it braces, the razor sharp sword dropped like a guillotine. Zarek rolled out of the way a scant second before he would have been decapitated.

“Oops.”

His voice was low and dangerous as he got to his feet. “Oops?”

I almost laughed at the look of pure astonishment on his face as I back somersaulted out of his reach. I still had a few tricks up my sleeve.

The Warlord’s eyes narrowed in speculation. “It seems you have been holding out on me, my little flower.

“Just a bit.”

He pounced.

The Warlord's Comeuppance

I dropped to the floor, brought up my knees and feet with a hard thrust and sent Zarek flying over my head. He hit the bed, bounced hard and was on his feet in an instant.

Color me impressed.

“A unique fighting style, but it won’t save you.” Baring his teeth in a fierce grin, he crossed his arms and stared at me.

I hissed as mental fingers slid down my stomach and glided between my legs. An electric shock jerked my body as the fingers penetrated me. “Stop it.”

“I haven’t even started yet.”

I moaned as the fingers moved deeper inside me and my body began to vibrate with need. Oh Goddess. Oh Goddess. He was relentless, stroking me deeper and deeper until my pleasure reached a critical mass and a scream exploded from me. My knees buckled and I sank to the floor, quivering from the after shocks.

“The battle is over and you are mine,” Zarek stated again. A smug smile on his handsome face, he started undressing.

Gail Koger

What that conniving fiend needed was a taste of his own medicine. Acting on pure instinct I slid into his mind and mentally licked and sucked on his penis.

Zarek's massive body jerked violently and his eyes widened in shock.

Smiling, I stroked his penis with my tongue until he vibrated with pure undiluted hunger. Pay backs were a bitch.

With a roar, the Warlord scooped me up and threw me on the bed. Before I could take a breath, he had buried himself deep inside me and we were locked together, one mind, one need. He stroked me with long, hard thrusts until our world exploded into pure bliss.

Spasm after spasm shook me as I lay sprawled across his chest. He was going to kill me with pleasure, but Goddess what a way to go.

Zarek nuzzled me gently. "You, my little flower, are full of surprises."

I caressed his hard ridges of muscles. "Sometimes I even surprise myself." With a sudden startling clarity I knew Zarek was mine and I would never give him up. I kissed his chin. "You wanted me. Now you have me. Are you up to the challenge?"

The Warlord's Comeuppance

A laugh rumbled deep in his chest. "With you at my side there is nothing I cannot accomplish. Together we will rebuild the Coletti Empire."

Relief, pleasure and joy swept through me as he opened his mind to me. He wanted a partner not a puppet. And he was right. Together we would be unstoppable.

My lord?

What is it Jaylan?

Commodore Chi of the Tong battle group is demanding that we surrender or be destroyed.

Did you download the virus?

No, they have blocked all communication from us.

How long before they overtake us?

Ten minutes.

In a blink of an eye my gentle lover was gone and in his place was an extremely lethal warrior, ruthlessly honed by battle. *Go to battle stations.*

Yes, my lord.

Gail Koger

“There is a way to back door the virus.”

Something dark and terrifying flickered in his eyes. “How?”

“I need my wrist comp unit and access to your communications console.”

The Warlord planted a hard kiss on my mouth and climbed out of bed. “Get dressed.”

“In what? You destroyed my jumpsuit.”

His amber eyes heated and a smile touched his hard mouth. “So I did.”

“I don’t think anything of yours is going to fit.”

He grabbed a large black duffel bag off the floor and tossed it on the bed. “Adan gave me some of your things.”

“What a thoughtful bastard.” I opened the bag and smiled in delight. Not only were there a surprising amount of clothing, but he had included several of my special jumpsuits, boots included, a tool kit and enough jewelry to blow up a battle cruiser.

“Everything you need?”

I smiled at Zarek. “Oh yes.”

Chapter Ten

We popped onto the bridge and only Zarek's quick reflexes saved us from being mowed down by Sariel who was whizzing dizzily around the command consoles, snarling orders at the crew.

Sariel came to an abrupt stop and bellowed, *Why is that female on my bridge?*

The Warlord growled back, *Your bridge? This female is my mate and she is going to save your foul hide by disabling every ship in the battle group.*

Awww. How sweet.

Sariel hawked up a wad and spat it on the desk. *Are your battle skills so poor that you rely on a tiny female to defend you?*

And once again testosterone reared its ugly head.

The Warlord snarled something nasty in Askole.

Baring his terrifying fangs, Sariel barked out a particularly nasty curse. Even with my limited

Gail Koger

knowledge of the Askole language I knew it insulted Zarek's heritage, manhood and prowess as a lover.

I quickly jumped between the two deadliest warriors in the galaxy. I know, pretty stupid move. *Stop it!* I shoved futilely at Sariel's gore covered chest and quickly flicked bits and pieces of people off my hand. Ewww! Gross.

Zarek's growl of warning echoed in my head. *Get out of the way, Detja.*

For Goddess sake, give it a rest. That battle group is about two minutes away from turning us into space debris. So, can we focus here?

Sariel stared down at me in disbelief. *Utterly fearless and totally correct.*

Zarek gave me a regal bow. *As my lady commands.*

The entire crew let out a relieved breath.

Who has my wrist comp unit?

Jaylan hurried over, handed it to me and gestured to a console. *My lady.*

Sorry about the knock-out gas.

Consider it forgotten, my lady.

The Warlord's Comeuppance

Hmmph. Being the Warlord's mate did have its perks.

I slid into the chair and desperately tried to ignore the fact that I had less than two minutes to disable the battle group. I connected my wrist comp unit's sensor to the communications console and tapped the screen. The display showed the Tong battle group closing rapidly on our three ships. Goddess, were we out gunned! I bet they were all giddy with joy at the thought of killing not only the Warlord, but Sariel as well.

Studying the screen, I found my target, a medical support ship. I brought its schematics up and smiled. Sure enough, the captain was a bit lax about security protocols, secure in the knowledge that not even the scourge of the universe would attack a medical ship. Morons like that made my job so much easier. With one tap of my finger, I downloaded Adan's virus to their subroutines and watched as it spread rapidly through the ship.

The idiot captain then made the fatal mistake of opening a com-link directly to Commodore Chi on the battle cruiser Singh. To my delighted surprise his terminally stupid command staff contacted every ship in the battle group and even sent a message to Admiral Devraj, the commander of the Alliance Armada.

Gail Koger

My gaze locked on the scanners, I watched with growing dread as the battle group grew closer and closer. Their deadly array of weaponry locked on our ships, ready to blow us into itty-bitty pieces. "C'mon. C'mon."

Five hundred meters short of total annihilation the Tong battle group came to a sudden, complete stop. I blew out a relieved breath. Whoa! That was cutting it a little too close.

Zarek kissed me. *Well done, my little flower.*

I grinned up at him. *I wouldn't want to be in Commodore Chi's boots when he tries to explain to the High Command how his entire battle group was defeated without us firing a shot.*

Jaylan swung his chair around and gave me a high-five. *Half of the Armada has been infected, too.*

Sariel snatched me up and planted a wet one on my mouth. *If you ever tire of the Warlord, you will be welcome in my harem.*

Ewww! Blood and gore now covered my jumpsuit. *Do you ever bathe?*

With a snarl, the Warlord pried me out his arms. *Do not touch my mate again.*

The Warlord's Comeuppance

Crap! Testosterone was the bane of the universe. *You have any Sark gas?*

Yes, both warriors growled.

Great! How about we go help ourselves to some of that lovely weaponry?

Sariel cackled madly.

The Warlord smiled. A smile that took deadly to a whole new level. *A worthy idea.*

I shivered. The predator had been unleashed and there would be no mercy to anyone who got in his way. *Why don't we trade the hostages for some of the Tongs' solar technology? Their solar generators are the best in the galaxy.*

Zarek gently caressed my cheek. *You would protect our enemies?*

With the solar generators, our people would no longer live in the dark.

Jaylan hurriedly added, *The battle cruiser Singh has over a hundred Zie missiles, my lord.*

Amusement flashed in the Warlord's eyes and he whispered into my ear, "You, my little flower, are corrupting my warriors."

Gail Koger

“It’s called being practical, my lord.”

The Warlord straightened. “Indeed.” He looked at Jaylan. “Deploy the gas.”

“Yes, my lord.”

Sariel spat another slimy wad on the deck. *Never thought I’d see the mighty Warlord brought to his knees by a tiny female.*

I rolled my eyes in disgust. Males. *The Tong’s technology also includes the best mapping equipment in the galaxy with which you could locate new water sources and end your five hundred year drought. Who knows, you might even find enough water that you could bathe regularly.*

Detja!

He smells like he’s been dead for a year.

Displaying his wicked fangs, Sariel leaned down until we were nose to nose. *All the better to disorient our enemies, my pretty.*

Fighting the urge to puke, I took a hasty step back. *Great battle tactic.*

Exactly.

The Warlord's Comeuppance

That smell is also a sign of his prowess as a warrior, Zarek added.

If I could replicate that stench in my lab, it would make a great stink bomb. Lob it into a building and while everyone is running for their lives, we simply walk in and clean out the place.

The Sark gas has been deployed, Jaylan stated.

Zarek handed me a breather. "Ready to do a little looting and sabotage?"

"I'm always ready."

The battle for the Singh was a very short one. The few crewmen that managed to get to a breather before they succumbed to the gas were no match for the Coletti warriors. The few they didn't get, Sarel sliced and diced. I thought he was a bloody, stinky mess before but now? He made the miners on Joroco look good. At least he didn't have any wildlife crawling on him. Or did he? Ewww.

Commodore Chi pulled the incredibly stupid stunt of making a run for it in an escape pod. An escape pod? I mean, c'mon and they made this guy a commodore? Needless to say, he didn't get very far and the Warlord was happily interrogating him. If you could call it that. Basically, he was shifting through Chi's memories not caring about the pain he caused or the damage he did. My sweetie has a

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one track mind and can be a bit brutal at time. His title of the most feared male in the galaxy was well earned and I hoped I would be able to stop some of his more homicidal tendencies. Yeah, I know. Who was I kidding?

Poor Jaylan had once again been gifted with the duty of protecting me from all harm. A job he wasn't very happy about. Couldn't really blame him but telling the Warlord to buzz off was never a good idea. He carefully wrapped his arms around me and teleported us to the bridge of the Singh. "Do not wander off. Do not talk to any warriors. Do not blow up anything, stun or gas any warriors."

"Not even the Tong?"

"No! If we happen upon any Tongs, I will deal with them. Not you."

I gave him an evil smile. "Anything you say, boss."

"My lady, please. He will kill me."

"Okay, I'll be a good little female."

"You've never been good in your entire life."

"True." I patted his arm. "Relax, I won't let him hurt you."

The Warlord's Comeuppance

He just snorted in disbelief.

I took one look at technological marvel of the command consoles and instantly fell in love. “Whoa! Take a look at this weapons display.”

Jaylan dropped into the command chair and began running a diagnostic on the systems. “Unbelievable.”

“Hey, only the biggest and the best are acceptable for the Tongs.”

“Totally,” he said, running possessive fingers over the console. “The High Command will be enraged when they learn the Warlord now possesses it.”

“Yeah, wish I could see their faces when they discover the entire battle group has been turned into scrap metal. Hey, get a look at that subroutine.”

Detja! You can play with our new toy later. Get to work.

Yes, my lord. Goddess, what a spoil sport.

I heard that.

I'm surprised you've finished your interrogation so soon.

Gail Koger

Chi's shields were easily overcome. His knowledge is now mine.

Before you turned the Commodore's brain to mush, did you learn anything interesting?

Very, Zarek said smugly. We will discuss my findings later. He pressed a hard psychic kiss to my mouth. Now do what you do best.

Rain havoc on the known universe?

Exactly.

My pleasure. And it was. I quickly plugged my sensor into their communications console and downloaded the Tong's codes and battle plans. Smiling with glee, I emptied out the personal bank accounts of the morons who made up the High Command and sent some particularly nasty viruses to their command and control computers. As an added touch, I also sent each and every one of them the one finger salute. I thought it added a nice personal touch.

I frowned as images of naked females suddenly flashed across my mind. What in the ten hells was going on? Linking with Zarek, I gasped in horror as I saw him strolling around several dozen unconscious females and checking them against the Tong's personnel list.

The Warlord's Comeuppance

Don't even think about it, I hissed.

Jealous, my little flower?

*Not even a little bit but that's not the point.
You are not stealing those females.*

His voice full of deadly resolve, Zarek stated,
Oh, I think I can.

What if they're married? Have children?

Then I will send them back.

*You're stealing their lives, their hopes, their
dreams. It's not right.*

A killing rage simmering just below the surface,
the Warlord snapped, *And genocide is?*

Genocide!? What are you talking about?

*For the last one hundred years, the Alliance
High Command has put all their resources into
exterminating our entire race.*

What!? How? Nightmarish images suddenly
cascaded into my mind. The blinding flashes of
incandescent light as hundreds of slender black
missiles slammed into the cities on the Colettis'

Gail Koger

home world. The massive roiling shock waves that incinerated everything they touched.

Zarek's scream of defiance as burning Coletti warbirds tumbled from the sky and crashed into the charred buildings.

In my mind's eye I could see the skeletal remains of long dead cities scattered across a seemingly endless ocean of burnt orange sand. Gaunt, wind-tortured peaks of black stone surrounded the emerald seas. No animals. No birds. Not a single tree or bush or even a weed dared to sprout in that utter desolation. All that remained were the bones of the slaughtered. Millions and millions of bones, unburied, crying out for vengeance.

I shuddered in horror. Tanith was now a ghastly testament to the destructive power of the Alliance's deadly Dar missiles.

Only three million Colettis made it to underground shelters. We soon discovered that a gas released by the missiles had created a genetic anomaly and only one female baby is born for every one thousand males. I will do what I must to ensure the survival of our people.

Tears leaked down my face. *Holy Goddess, I didn't know. I am so sorry.*

The Warlord's Comeuppance

I don't need, nor want, your pity. I expect your help. His voice was filled with implacable resolve as he continued, *I will rebuild the Coletti Empire and I will take as many females as necessary to accomplish that. Those who oppose me will die.*

I get it. I really do but I don't like it. I have a few demands of my own and they are not negotiable either.

His mind tightened around mine. *You dare defy me?*

We're partners, remember?

Zarek muttered an obscene epithet.

Is this a deal breaker? Cause if it is, I'm outta here.

My reply seemed to vex him a wee bit. *What are your demands?*

The females will be treated with respect.

That is acceptable.

Give them back their clothes. No female wants to wake up buck naked and find a bunch of fierce Coletti warriors ogling her like she's dinner.

Gail Koger

My warriors find the sight of Alliance uniforms offensive.

Okay, find them something else to wear.

Acceptable.

They will need time to adjust to their capture and their new lives.

I will allow them a month. Agreeable?

Agreeable.

Now, my little flower, you will listen to my terms.

Blast it; I should have known that was way too easy. Terms?

You will be responsible for all the newly acquired females.

Me?!

Yes, you will instruct them on what to expect and how to act. You can make their adjustment to our ways easier or you can watch as they are forced to my will.

Bit harsh don't you think?

The Warlord's Comeuppance

These females now belong to me and there is nothing you or they can do to change that fact. One way or another they will accept the destiny the Goddess has given them.

I gritted my teeth in annoyance. The Goddess has nothing to do with this.

Perhaps not but they will do as they are told or suffer the consequences.

What kind of consequences?

I will wipe their minds. They will have no past, no memories, no hopes, no dreams or free will. They will simply obey any command given to them.

A cold chill skittered down my back. He meant it. You'd really turn them into vacant-eyed breeders?

If I must.

The negotiations were definitely at an end. The conniving fiend knew I'd never let that happen. You drive a hard bargain, my lord.

I am the Overlord. I do what I must to—

I cut him off. Ensure the survival of your people. I get it, okay?

Gail Koger

Our people, the Warlord corrected.

Our people, I parroted obediently.

I cannot do this alone, the Warlord admitted, allowing me to see the depth of his need for me, his loneliness, and his fear of dying before his people were safe. I was his heart, his anchor. Without me he would give in to the blood lust that drove him and millions more would die needlessly.

The dead will be avenged and together we will stop the Alliance. Never doubt that, my lord.

Phantom arms wrapped tightly around me.
Together.

Chapter Eleven

I walked into the holding area and groaned. Thirty-one frightened, angry and very naked females were crammed into the small cell. I blinked in disbelief. Each one of them had the Goddess tattooed on their butts. Go figure.

Jaylan and Kasum stationed themselves by the doors and grinned at all that lovely flesh on display.

The bolder females immediately started shouting curses and threats.

That conniving fiend was evil, truly evil. I glared at my escorts. "Where are their clothes?"

Jaylan shrugged. "Don't know."

"Well, go find out. Now!"

His gaze fixed on the rather large breasts of a Tong female, Jaylan answered, "I cannot leave you unguarded, my lady."

Grinding my teeth in frustration, I linked with Zarek. *Did you or did you not promise to get the newly acquired females clothing?*

Gail Koger

I did.

They're still bare-ass naked and this is not the way to win their confidence.

I said I would provide them with new clothing, just not when and I care nothing about winning their confidence; all I want, or expect, is their obedience.

My temper flared to life. You arrogant, lying bastard! You made promises you never meant to keep. You said together we would rebuild the Coletti Empire. Is that a lie, too?

A ghostly hand wrapped around my throat. Tread carefully, my little flower.

Or what? You'll turn me into a vacant-eyed breeder?

No. I will make you scream. His hands were suddenly everywhere, stroking and caressing my body, igniting a raw hunger that only he could fulfill.

Liquid heat pooled between my legs and a shudder shook me. The fiend was turning me into a raging nymphomaniac. A moan broke from me as his thumb rubbed my little nub. *Stop it! I can't... Not here.*

The Warlord's Comeuppance

Oh, I think you can.

My knees buckled and I collapsed to the floor with a hiss. *I will not...be controlled like this. Am I your whore or am I your partner?*

The Warlord reined in his anger and placed a gentle kiss on my mouth. *I will have the clothing delivered within an hour. Acceptable?*

If that was an apology, it sucks.

A growl rumbled in my head. *Warlords do not apologize. Ever.*

The Warlord might not, but Zarek better.

An amused laugh broke from him. *So very defiant.*

I mean it, Zarek.

Stubborn, too.

I growled.

Any future negotiations will be spelled out and I will not embarrass you in this manner again. Acceptable?

Gail Koger

It stilled sucked as an apology but what could I expect from the scourge of the universe. *Acceptable.*

I think our little demonstration has been most effective. You now have the female's full attention.

What?! I looked around and groaned. I most certainly did. The females' expressions ranged from puzzled to worried to anxious to furious.

One look at Jaylan's and Kasum's smirks and I pulled my stun baton. "You think it's funny?"

Jaylan snapped to attention. "No, my lady."

Kasum edged away. "No, my lady."

"Get out. Now!"

Do as she commands, Zarek said.

Both warriors fled.

I turned my attention to my reluctant guests. "My name is Detja and unfortunately, I'm the Warlord's mate."

A low growl sounded in my head. *Unfortunately?*

The Warlord's Comeuppance

Butt out.

The Tong female with the humongous breasts stepped forward and spit in my face. "Traitor."

My already frayed temper blew and I slammed my fist into her nose.

Her head snapped back and she swiped at the blood gushing from her nose. "You traitorous whore, how many credits did it take to let that slimy snake crawl between your legs?"

I hit her again.

An unusual negotiating technique, Zarek commented in amusement.

Screw diplomacy.

I gave the bitch a nasty smile. "Silly me, I thought I could help you adjust to your new lives but I can see that's not gonna happen now. Fact; you now belong to the Warlord who is a real pain-in-the-ass about obedience and ladies you do not want to make him angry. Fact; willing or not, you will soon be mated to a Coletti warrior. Fact; you will soon be begging for your mate's touch, craving it, needing it to survive. Fact; no amount of running, fighting or wailing will change that."

"Never," the bitch shrieked and charged me.

Gail Koger

I stepped to the side, rammed my fist into her stomach, hooked my right foot behind her heel and in a fast sweep, knocked her flat. Before she could get up, I stunned her.

Another female came at me. I ducked under her swinging fists and kicked her off her feet. She smashed face first into the deck. As she struggled to rise, I pressed the baton against her back and lit her up. "Anyone else think they can take me?"

Did I ever mention that I have a big mouth? So it wasn't a total surprise when someone immediately jumped on my back. I flipped them off and blocked another blow. One second I was holding my own and the next second I was on the floor being punched and kicked. *I could use a little help here!*

The Warlord's terrifying battle cry echoed around the room and shrieking females went flying, crashing into the ceiling and walls and tumbling to the floor, out cold.

I scrambled to my feet and wiped at the blood running into my eyes. Someone had some wicked nasty toenails. Ducking a flying fist, I bellowed a battle cry of my own and unleashed a series of snap-kicks into a stocky female's stomach.

The Warlord's Comeuppance

Jaylan popped in, grabbed two squirming, kicking females and grinned in delight. "Your plan to gain their confidence seems to be working quite well."

"Oh shut up." The room swirling dizzily around me, I grabbed my stun baton off the floor and backed into a corner, fighting to stay upright.

The Warlord's psychic power flared and the room suddenly went quiet.

I glanced around. The females still standing were now vacant-eyed.

Holy Goddess! "Please tell me you didn't mind wipe them?"

"I've merely taken control of their minds."

The females whimpered.

"Please," I wrapped my fingers around his hand, "Stop. They only did what any good warrior would do. Fight their enemy."

Not an ounce of mercy in his gaze, he snapped, "They harmed you."

I rubbed my aching jaw. "I did throw the first punch."

Gail Koger

“True.” Zarek tightened his mental grip and warned the helplessly females, “Injure my mate again and I will turn you into empty-minded breeders. Do you understand me?”

In unison, they wailed, “Yes, my lord.”

The Warlord grunted in satisfaction and released his hold.

The cringing females scurried to the far wall and huddled together, giving us a terrific view of their tattooed butts. “What’s with the tattoos?”

Jaylan volunteered, “They signify their breeding status.”

I frowned. “Which is?”

“They are genetically sound and fertile,” Kasum added from the door.

“Silly me, I should have known the Warlord would only take the best.”

“I picked you, my exquisite flower, as my mate and you are everything I could wish for.”

“Good answer.”

Zarek tilted my head up and began licking the blood off my bruised face. “Did you really think you could defeat thirty-one females single-handedly?”

The Warlord's Comeuppance

The sensual stroke of his tongue had my body vibrating with need. I gasped, "Thought I would give it a try. Pretty stupid, huh?"

"You think like a Warlord," Zarek said.

Blast it. I was thinking more and more like him and every time he touched me I got twisted up with lust. "Bedroom now," I croaked.

"Kasum needs to check you over first."

"It can wait. Need you. Now."

"I will not have your body scarred."

Raining kisses along his jaw, I murmured, "What's a few scars?"

"Kasum?"

"Here my lord."

"Tend to my mate."

"It would be an honor, my lord." He stepped over to me and held out his arms. "My lady?"

I let out an aggravated growl. "Bossy fiend."

Gail Koger

The Warlord's cruel gaze locked on the females cowering in the corner.

“Eeep! I didn't like that look at all. “Promise me you won't hurt them.”

Zarek let out a long sigh. “They will not be harmed.”

“And you'll get them some clothes and something to eat.”

The Warlord gave a slight bow. “As you command, my lady.”

“And could you do something about their toenails? They're lethal weapons.”

My mate stared at me in disbelief. “Toenails are lethal weapons?”

“You betcha. Thanks sweetie.” I stepped into Kasum's arms. “What are you waiting for? Let's go. I need some quality time with my mate.”

We popped into sick bay and a crawly sensation swept over my body. I frowned and looked around. “Do you feel that?”

“Feel what, my lady?”

The Warlord's Comeuppance

"It's like I have a hundred Scorm crawling on me."

Kasum stared at me in alarm. "Someone is scanning you."

"That can't be good." Rubbing my twitchy skin, I linked with Zarek. *Kasum thinks someone is scanning me. Got any ideas who it is?*

No. The tracking scanners are clear.

My heart slammed in sudden alarm. *Holy Goddess, it couldn't be them.*

Them?

Katanic hunters have cloaking devices for their ships.

Go to battle stations, the Warlord roared.

A scant second later a glittery blue light engulfed me. *Zarek!*

"My lady," Kasum cried and lunged for me.

I caught a fleeting glimpse of Zarek teleporting in before the transporter beam whisked me away and I found myself face-to-face with a Katanic shape shifter in its true form. The huge, silky black

Gail Koger

mass suddenly loomed over me and a sticky tongue slimed my face. Eeep! I was on the dinner menu.

I felt Zarek slide into my mind. *You will not die.*

That is the plan. My hand closed around a grenade filled with the good stuff and I smacked at its probing tongue with my baton. *Get that nasty thing off me.*

I've never eaten a Farin before, a masculine voice announced.

Then you don't know how awful we taste. There's a bunch of Alliance ships heading this way and I'm sure you could find someone really tasty to munch on.

A generous offer but I'm afraid the only one I need to munch on is you.

Go figure. *Okay, but I should warn you that I'm gonna give you a really bad case of indigestion.* Cause the only thing he was getting to eat was one of my special toys and boom. His innards would be splattered all over the walls. Eeep! I was turning into the Warlord.

They said Adan's daughter was fearless.

The Warlord's Comeuppance

That's when I noticed the small cage sitting next to the transporter controls. Locked inside was a baby shape shifter. The little guy let out a mental wail, *Hungry*.

Oh holy Goddess. It couldn't be. *Adan?*

Momma?

What did you do to him?

Nothing. He merely survived his rebirthing.

But he's a baby!

The shape-shifter gave a mental snort. *I was told you were highly intelligent.*

I gave him the one finger salute.

Do not provoke him, Zarek hissed on our private link.

Don't provoke him?! The big creep plans on eating me.

I will never allow that to happen.

And how do you plan on stopping it?

I am tracking you. As soon as we are close enough, I will—

Gail Koger

The shape shifter interrupted, *Your mate cannot save you.*

It's a private conversation, so butt out.

My ship generates an energy barrier that prevents any Coletti from teleporting onboard.

A cold fear prickled along my nerves. *Thanks for sharing.*

The Warlord growled, *I will kill you.*

You can try.

I rolled my eyes in disbelief. Testosterone was the bane of the galaxy. The only one killing the slimy bastard would be me, not the Lord of the Universe.

When I am finished eating your mate, I will come for you. My race considers Coletti flesh a delicacy.

Picking a fight with the Warlord is a really bad idea. Why don't you just let me and the little guy go? It's a win-win situation. You get to live.

An executioner is forbidden from making deals with his prey. He looped a tentacle around the

The Warlord's Comeuppance

cage and dragged it closer to me. *Adan is a traitor and the punishment is death.*

Adan's little tentacles reached for me. *Momma Detja!*

I crouched down and stroked his silky hide through the bars. *It's okay, Adan. I won't let the big bad monster hurt you.*

The big bad monster laughed. It was a truly horrifying sound. *Our laws prohibit a child from being harmed.*

Good. I'll take him with me. Problem solved.

Not quite. The law has been broken and a death is required. Yours.

Why am I not surprised? *I'm being punished because?*

You are an adult and therefore responsible for Adan's acts.

His so called betrayal happened a thousand years before I was even born. How am I responsible?

With Adan's rebirth, you became the head of his Clan.

Gail Koger

I did?

The Elders decided your death would be an appropriate punishment for Adan's treasonous acts.

How kind of them but Adan severed his mental bond with me. My death will accomplish nothing.

A ropy tentacle wrapped around my waist and tugged me closer to his gaping maw. When a Katanic is reborn they must eat. The hunger is a living thing that rules their every thought. A primal, overwhelming need to feed that drives them to do the unthinkable. Even kill those they love.

My stomach clenched in horror. Adan won't eat me.

His sticky tongue slid across my neck. When I rip your bowels out, the smell of your blood will drive him into a feeding frenzy.

Rip my bowels out? You are so dead. I jammed my stun baton against his tentacle and lit it up.

An ear shattering shriek sounded and he flung me against the wall. Those pretty little sparkling lights made a return visit and the room spun crazily around me.

The Warlord's Comeuppance

Momma Detja!

The Warlord roared, *Throw the grenade!*

One look at those terrifying teeth coming at me and I hurled my grenade down his gullet and threw myself over the cage.

There was a loud cracking bang and gooey pieces of shape shifter rained down on me. I brushed frantically at the gory bits decorating my hair and jumpsuit. Ewww. Not one of my better plans.

Out, Momma Detja.

I quickly picked the lock and to my stunned amazement Adan happily scampered around me sucking down the icky bits and pieces of my executioner. My baby was a cannibal?!

Zarek's frantic touch roamed over my body. *Are you injured?*

No, I wailed as green slime dripped from my hair and ran down my nose. *Just covered with icky slimy innards.*

Ghostly arms closed around me in a bone crushing hug and Zarek's laugh sounded in my mind. *You can go toe-to-toe with my battle*

Gail Koger

commander without flinching but icky slimy things send you into a panic.

It's a female thing?

Perhaps. Now get your slimy ass up and transport me onboard.

Goddess, you're a bossy fiend.

Are you prepared to fight and defeat any other shape shifters that might be onboard?

Eeep! No way. I'm not that crazy. My boots slipping and sliding in the goop, I struggled to my feet and slid over to the transporter controls.

Put in these coordinates, 521.1 mark 628.3

I typed the coordinates into the control panel and tapped the transmit button.

Nothing happened.

I tried again and again. Blast it. I think that monster locked the controls.

The Warlord's frustrated rage swirled through me. The energy field is stopping us from getting a fix on you.

I'll go to the bridge and see if I can disable it.

The Warlord's Comeuppance

Be careful, my little flower.

Aren't I always?

You come back damaged and I will not be pleased.

My nipples sprang to attention. What kind of punishment did you have in mind? Something that involves a lot of screaming? Please say yes.

No. I will put you in with our charming guests.

Now that's just mean.

Tentacles wrapped around my left leg. Momma Detja?

I glanced down at Adan and did a double take. He had tripled in size. What is it, sweetie?

They know.

They who?

The Elders. They felt Kie die.

My luck had definitely taken a wrong turn. Did you hear that Zarek?

Yes. Get to the bridge.

Gail Koger

Yes, my lord.

Adan scurried up my body and wrapped a tentacle around my neck. *Me protect Momma Detja. Kill those that come.*

How about we let the Warlord kill them?

His little tongue lapped up the slime running down my face. *He not here.*

Good point. My stun baton held ready, I crept down the hallway and scanned the area. *I can't sense any other Katanics.*

They come, Adan said busily plucking pieces of Kie out of my hair and gobbling them down.

How close are they?

Popping an eyeball into his mouth, Adan reached out mentally. *Ship comes soon.*

Color me happy. I was still on the dinner menu. Throwing caution to the wind, I ran onto the bridge and quickly connected my wrist comp unit's sensor to the command console. I watched the scanner as the information slowly decoded. "C'mon. C'mon."

A sticky tentacle tapped several command keys. *Know code.*

The Warlord's Comeuppance

I stroked his soft hide. *You're such a smart baby.*

Me smart. Take knowledge from Kie.

My skin twitched as the crawly sensation returned. "Oh Goddess, not again!"

Elder mad.

As the glittering blue light engulfed us once again, Zarek popped onto the bridge. His bellow of fury echoed in my ears as we were whisked away.

Gail Koger

Chapter Twelve

The transporter beam faded and there stood an evil crone straight out of my favorite Earth fairy tale. You know the one with the seven dwarfs? The crone was bent with age and her wrinkled green skin hung from a skull like face. To complete the picture a long black robe engulfed her tiny form and a pointy hat perched precariously on her snarled white hair.

Adan clung tightly to my neck and shivered as her terrible orange eyes fixed on him.

There you are, my pretty and your little Farin, too.

I stared at her in utter disbelief. Was she for real? Because she definitely had her fairy tales mixed up. *Trick or treat?*

The evil crone smiled, revealing sharp pointy teeth. *Treat.*

Sorry, I'm fresh out of poisoned apples.

A tentacle slid from under the robe, wrapped around my waist and pulled me closer. *That you*

The Warlord's Comeuppance

were able to kill my executioner was quite unexpected.

I'm full of surprises. I palmed a special toy, hit the timer and let it drop to the floor.

Another tentacle plucked a piece of Kie from my hair. All that is left of my favorite executioner is pieces. Very small pieces. He can never be reborn again.

Like that's a bad thing? He was going to eat me. I have a right to defend myself.

I cannot allow you to go unpunished.

Let me guess. You're going to eat me?

A hideous cackling laugh sounded from her. No. I'm going to see just how good your survival skills are.

What?

She placed me back on the transporter pads. If you survive, the death decree will be lifted.

A sparkling blue light wrapped around us.

Zarek's agitated demand suddenly reverberated around my skull, Detja! Where are you?

Gail Koger

The light dissipated and to my stunned surprise we were standing on the bridge of an Alliance destroyer.

The bridge crew seemed equally surprised by our appearance. Not one of them made a move for their weapons. Mouths agape, they stared at me as if I were some kind of apparition. Did I look that bad?

Detja!

Eeep! We're on an Alliance destroyer. I looked around. The Challenger, I believe.

How in the ten hells did you end up on an Alliance destroyer?

The wicked witch sent me here to see how good my survival skills are.

Wicked witch?

Long story but I will need a bucket of water.

What are you babbling about?

The alarms abruptly began to wail and a calm female voice announced, "Intruder alert. Intruder alert. All hands to battle stations."

The Warlord's Comeuppance

That snapped the command crew out of their stupor. In unison, they jumped to their feet and drew their weapons.

I gulped as a dozen red dots appeared on my chest.

Me hide. Adan transformed into a flying insect and buzzed crazily around the bridge.

Wishing I could pull a disappearing act too, I drew on my considerable acting talent and became a scared, bewildered and not too bright Farin female. I allowed the tears to roll and cried, "Please don't shoot me. I'm unarmed."

A crewman jabbed me in the ribs with his pistol. "Get your hands up."

With a whimper of fear, I threw them up, making sure I flung gooey innards all over the idiot. I suppressed a satisfied smile as he wiped the disgusting stuff off his face and glared at me.

The alarms kept on wailing and that stupid voice kept chanting, "Intruder alert. Intruder alert. All hands to battle stations."

My head began to pound and a trickle of goo ran down my cheek. How was I supposed to run a con with all that noise? I glanced over my shoulder at the idiot who still had his pistol pressed against

Gail Koger

my back and asked, "Could you get someone turn that off? I'm alone and unarmed."

The Warlord snorted. *You have enough explosives on you to blow up ten destroyers.*

Let's hope they don't figure that out.

The Challenger's captain finally had enough too, and he slapped a button on his console and the alarms stopped. He tapped his com-link and snapped, "Zan, you're needed on the bridge."

Zan! That evil bitch had known he was here! Well the joke was on her. In another five minutes I was gonna rock her world.

A phantom hand stroked my cheek. *Try not to provoke them.*

Who me? Ugh! What was that awful smell? I looked down at the rapidly blackening flesh clinging to me and my stomach heaved. Ewww. Great clots of yellow pus stuff dipped from the gangrenous mess.

Bad man here, Adan announced an instant before the bridge doors swished open and Zan stepped out. His eyes widened in shock and a second later his laser pistol was pointed at me. "Where's the Warlord?"

The Warlord's Comeuppance

I sobbed loudly, "Dead. He's dead!"

Zan eyed my slime covered form. "How?"

"A Katanic shape shifter attacked us and there was this awful explosion and then I was here," I wailed.

A crewman ran a scanner over me. "That's definitely Katanic remains."

The Challenger's captain stormed over and bellowed, "Get her and that slimy mess off my bridge."

"Please, we have to leave this sector now, before it's too late. The others are coming. I don't want to die."

"Our scanners show nothing in the immediate area," the captain snapped.

"You idiot, Katanic ships are cloaked. They're coming." I shrieked hysterically. "They're coming to eat us all!" I grabbed a hold of the captain's arm, making sure I got plenty of goop on his immaculate uniform. "Please, don't let them eat me. Please."

A disgusted look on his face, Zan pried my hands off the captain and shoved me back. "Cut the act."

Gail Koger

Staggering, I deliberately tripped on a long strand of entrails and collapsed rather dramatically on the lap of the communications officer. His horrified gaze met mine and it was all I could do to keep from laughing. This was way too much fun.

Tread carefully, my little flower. Zan is no fool.

Really? I just planted a jamming device on their communications console. I threw my arms around the officer's neck and wiggled on his lap, spreading even more guts and pus over his pretty red uniform. "Please. You have to believe me."

The officer jumped up, rudely dumping me on the floor and puked his lunch all over the gleaming deck.

Ewww. I couldn't really blame the poor guy, I out-stunk Sariel.

"Get her off my bridge," the captain roared.

I scooted over to him, wrapped my arms around his legs and pleaded frantically, "Please, we have to leave now. If they get onboard, we're doomed. Doomed!"

The Warlord's Comeuppance

To my utter surprise, the captain's face turned a strange pasty white and an instant later he hurled all over Zan's shiny boots.

And just like that the entire crew was puking their guts out. Color me surprised.

The Warlord's laughter sounded in my mind. *Your method of disabling the bridge crew is quite unique.*

Gotta work with what you have.

Zan's furious gaze settled on me. "You bitch! You did this deliberately."

I gave him my best harmless look and fluttered my eyelashes provocatively. "Who me?"

A pair of shackles dangling from one hand, Zan started for me. "You are far more dangerous than the Warlord."

Awww. How sweet. He could turn a female's head with flattery like that.

My wrist comp unit chimed and the deck shook violently, knocking everyone on their asses.

A laugh escaped me when I noticed Zan had landed face first on the puke-covered deck.

Gail Koger

Slipping and sliding, he struggled to his feet, took a step and fell again. By the time he managed to stand, he was covered head-to-toe in stinky vomit.

Another explosion rocked the Challenger and down he went again.

Whoa! Too much peist again?

Or not enough, the Warlord added.

I shrugged. As long as that murderous old crone is dead, dead, dead, it's not really a problem, is it?

Katanics are extremely difficult to kill.

One look at the view screen and my stomach sank. The Elder's ship wasn't space debris. Oh no, I couldn't be that lucky. My little toy had blasted a rather large hole in the hull and had done enough internal damage that it was now clearly visible.

She mad, Adan cried as he buzzed crazily around my head.

I just bet she is. Sucking in a deep breath, I let out an ear-shattering scream and pointed at the screen. "Now do you believe me?"

The Warlord's Comeuppance

The blasted alert started up again and this time the female voice sounded a bit rattled. "All hands to battle stations."

The captain slanted me a black look and scrambled to his command chair. "Helm, come about to Mark 652.2."

Get Momma Detja to safety, Zarek commanded.

Two Warlords suddenly appeared on the bridge. My eyes widened in horror and I pointed to the one standing next to Zan. "Shoot her!"

Surprisingly, Zan obeyed.

With an ear shattering shriek, the Elder transformed into her true form and smacked Zan across the room.

A tentacle reached for me. *You dared to attack me!*

I slid out of reach. *I can't tell you how disappointed I am that you're still breathing.*

Adan! Get her out of there.

Adan grabbed me and teleported. An instant later we appeared in the engine room. Eeep! Right

Gail Koger

into the waiting arms of a shoot now and ask questions later security detail.

How I managed to engage my shields before a dozen laser bolts slammed into it, I'll never know. Great instincts?

The Warlord snorted. *Your wrist comp unit is connected to mine.*

You have a wrist comp unit?

I do now. Zarek projected a picture of Sariel into Adan's mind. *Protect Momma Detja.*

The air around Adan shimmered and he became Sariel. My shields dropped and roaring a pretty scary battle cry, my Askole attacked.

Thirty seconds later bits and pieces of the security detail decorated the walls, ceiling, floor and me. Ewww.

Adan picked up a handful of bloody flesh and stuffed it in his mouth.

Bad baby! You can't eat people.

He quickly stuffed another handful in his mouth and chewed greedily. *Not people now.*

The Warlord's Comeuppance

But they were. Eating people is bad. Really bad.

Me hungry, Adan responded grabbing another handful.

Zarek do something.

Kie did say he would have a primal, overwhelming need to feed.

And it's okay with you if he takes out a few Alliance soldiers in the process?

Yes.

What happens when he's older and wants to munch on an Askole or a Coletti?

The Warlord's irritated sigh rolled through my mind. I give you my solemn promise that once you are safely back on my ship, I will supervise his eating habits. But now I need you to disable this ship's engines.

Yes, my lord. Hurrying over to the control console, I connected my sensor to the panel and brought the engines to a dead stop. What now?

Zarek dropped a hard, psychic kiss on my mouth. Stay out of trouble.

Gail Koger

Stay out of trouble? Was he serious? *The Elder and the entire crew are out to get me. What's the plan?*

You hide.

That's it! For how long?

As long as it takes.

As long as it takes? What kind of answer was that? Did I have to run for my life for a minute or an hour?

Your illusions should keep her occupied and if they fail, your flash bangs are quite effective.

Or we pick my favorite solution. I blow her to itty-bitty bits.

I will deal with the Elder not you.

I can handle her.

No, you will not. You will run and hide.

But—

You will obey me in this.

I flinched as his rage and fear hit my mind. Fear? *You're afraid for me?*

The Warlord's Comeuppance

A harsh laugh sounded in my head. *How could I not be? Your utter fearlessness. The risks you continually take, no matter what the odds. Not to mention the games you love to play. All of that can, and will, get you killed. I cannot, will not, lose you, too.*

I stroked his face, trying to soothe away his fear. *I'm pretty tough to kill, sweetie. Even you have to admit I'm not a bit like your other mates. Now am I?*

He pressed a gentle kiss to my mouth. *You are truly unique, my little flower.*

Awww. How sweet. I kissed him back and drove my point home. *Has a female ever killed a Katanic before?*

No.

Has any male in the last five hundred years killed a Katanic?

You know they have not.

Whether you want to admit it or not, I'm a warrior. Just like you, only sneakier.

Much sneakier. His mouth devoured mine and his hands caressed my body.

Gail Koger

His touch sent liquid heat streaking through my body. Oh Goddess, I needed him.

Momma Detja! She comes. Adan tugged on my hair and bounced up and down on my shoulder. *Momma Detja?!*

Sheesh. Major buzz kill but he was right. This wasn't the time or place. I patted Adan's silky hide. *Thanks for the warning, sweetie.*

Me protect Momma Detja.

I know you will. I quickly tossed several illusion discs around the room and put everything I had into strengthening my shields. If she sensed us, we would be joining the mess on the floor.

She hurt.

Ducking behind a console, I smiled grimly. *Good. I plan on hurting her some more.*

Zarek let out a warning growl. *Detja.*

I know. Run and hide.

Exactly. She's far more dangerous now.

The Warlord's Comeuppance

The doors to the engine room disintegrated and the Elder charged in, her tentacles waving madly. *You can't hide from me.*

I triggered an illusion.

My gore covered image appeared by the engineering console. "I'm alone and unarmed."

The Elder spun around and fired a laser pistol at the illusion. The console exploded in flames.

Wow. My little toy must have done some major damage if she was using weapons. I tapped my wrist comp unit and the image of Kie being blown to itty-bitty bits filled the room.

Shrieking with incoherent rage, she fired wildly.

I hit the deck. Keep her occupied he says. Not a problem. Of course living to see tomorrow might be a bit difficult.

Billowing smoke filled the room and I struggled to breathe.

You think the Warlord can save you? No one can save you.

To my horrified amazement she transformed into a Kal demon. A blood red creature whose

Gail Koger

forked tongue flickered in and out of a massive jaw lined with needle sharp teeth. Its heavily armored, snake-like body was equipped with dozens of claw-tipped feet and the really wonderful ability to breathe hellfire. Even a little wheeze could turn me into a crispy critter. Did I mention that with one sniff a Kal demon could track her prey to the ends of the universe? Yeah, lucky me and since I stunk like a dead Katanic, my odds of getting off the ship in one piece pretty much sucked.

I scrambled to my feet and bolted out the doors.

The click of claws on metal sounded right behind me.

The Warlord bellowed, *Drop!*

I hit the deck and a hissing stream of noxious flames shot over my head. Eeep!

The Challenger's fire suppression system kicked in and quickly doused the flames.

The instant the chemicals hit the Elder's armored hide, she shrieked in agony and began to melt. Literally. Color me surprised.

With a yelp of pain, Adan morphed into tiny worm and quickly crawled under my jumpsuit. *Burns.*

The Warlord's Comeuppance

Hide in my pocket, sweetie. I felt him burrow in.

I'm melting. I'm melting, the Elder screamed in my mind.

You sure are, you evil bitch. I scrabbled backward away from the smoking ooze.

The air shimmered around her as she tried to transform back to her true form, but instead she phased rapidly from the Kal demon, to the Warlord, to the evil crone and back again.

Off with her head. Off with her head, Adan cried.

Where was a sword when you really needed one?

Here, the Warlord said and poof, there he stood with his humongous sword.

Running and hiding isn't working so good.

Your ability to drive a variety of species to a murderous rage is quite remarkable. With one mighty swing, he chopped the Elder's head off.

Gail Koger

It rolled to a stop at my feet. The blackened flesh shriveled away and soon there was nothing left of her but a puddle of chunky black ooze.

Ding dong, the wicked witch is dead.

Zarek's amused gaze surveyed me and he plucked entrails off my shoulder. "I think I want to read these Earth fairy tales."

"Some of them are really romantic. Some not so much."

He cocked a disbelieving eyebrow at me. "Romantic?"

"Yeah, the knight in tarnished armor rescues the fair damsel."

Adan wiggled in my pocket. *We go now? Bad man comes.*

Without hesitation my sweetie wrapped his arms around me and teleported. In that moment I knew, no matter how awful I looked or smelled, he would always be there for me. No matter how dangerous it was, he would always come for me. I would never be alone again.

We appeared on the bridge of Kie's ship. Zarek tapped a button on the command console. On the view screen a beam of incandescent red shot out

The Warlord's Comeuppance

and the Elder's ship disintegrated into a cloud of vaporized metal.

"That's not going to make Zan very happy."

Zarek grinned, punched another button and the ship went into hyper-drive.

I smiled up at him. "You know, with a fleet of cloaked ships, we could kick the Alliance's butts."

"And build an empire." His hot mouth closed over mine and my body caught fire.

Adan wiggled out of my pocket, morphed back to his true form and scampered off.

I reluctantly broke the kiss. *Where are you going, sweetie?*

Hungry. Go eat Kie bits.

I looked down at the bits of Kie still decorating me and asked, "Please tell me there's a shower on this ship?"

Zarek tightened his grip and poof. We were standing in the shower.

"You, my love, are a handy guy to have around."

Gail Koger

“I have many talents.” A burning hunger lit his eyes as his clever hands quickly stripped off my jumpsuit and boots.

His mouth gently brushed my lips, once, twice.
You are my heart.

All my lingering doubts and fears vanished. I had found my soul mate. *And you are mine.*

The Warlord's Comeuppance

About the Author

I was a 9-1-1 dispatcher for thirty-one years and to keep insanity at bay, I took up writing. Not to worry. The insanity isn't catching - much. Other than the addiction to chocolate and the twitch in my left eye, I'm good. I've had my weird but true stories published in newspapers and magazines. My first book was *The Ghost Wore Polyester*, a murder mystery/comedy set in Sedona, Arizona. *Just My Luck*, a science fiction romance, was reviewed by Chris at Night Owl Romance and received four out of five hearts. Lisa at Joyfully Reviewed called it an incredibly fun read. *The Warlord's Comeuppance* is the prequel to *Just My Luck*.

Gail Koger

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