Amazon's Chattel
(With Illustrations)

A tale of powerful femininity
…and tamed manhood

By
Willem Overmars

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One



Memories of her treatment of him in the recent past mitigated for him the lack of real compassion he felt for the dying woman beneath him.

Not to mention the ridges of the scar-tissue he could feel rubbing against his tunic.

The same scar tissue *she* and her whip had placed there during the early days of his…

Training.

Through all the long cold hours of the winter night she had neither moved nor spoken. Bryn Neville Daffyd had brought her into the shelter of the ruined tower and wrapped her in two tarpaulins upon the snow covered interior, using another to rig a flimsy shelter from the elements flaking in upon them as he huddled in his cloak at her side. He had built a fire of dead brush, and since then the two had waited, alone in the vast wasteland girdling the polar ice-cap of Penthesilea-3.

Hence his startlement, when her voice shattered the silence.

“Daffyd.”

“Yes?”

“I feel myself… *leaving*.”

He nodded, the lies of reassurance unnecessary.

“I will not reach Rhodius.”

Again, Daffyd nodded, neither pleased nor displeased by the certainty of his knowledge. If anything, surprised that her onrushing end did not fill him with more of a sense of… *triumph*. After all, and though he had been more than kind to her over these past hours, she had been, and still remained, his enemy.

As well as his *owner.*

A position she remained in now.

At least for as long as she continued to breathe, anyway.

He was not so naïve, though, as to believe she had placed herself in harm’s way instead of him after the attack upon them from a sense of altruism and repentance for her unfair treatment of him.

And, as he had been told by more than one female since his ship landed on this benighted world:

“You may well be a pitiful excuse for a man; but you will make a most valuable and docile slave.”

The colour, as it always did when he recalled the insulting – and totally inaccurate sentiment on his behalf, - rose to wind-bitten cheeks and made them warm against the chill blasting them.

At least temporarily.

The female Pentheselian, whose name was Myrina, fell silent once more as the wind continued to howl down from the northern plateaus and the broken walls of the tower groaned against it, in defiance of a superior and natural power that could only, eventually, be triumphant.

Their shelter barely a facsimile of better days.

Brooding and but a shadow of what must have been a splendiferous former glory, roofless now but so huge and sprawling its walls seemed more like cliffs of smooth Jet than the ruins they were.

Walls, Daffyd told himself, that gave the impression of containing still a taint of forgotten evil about them.

The Earthman glanced at Myrina, face non-committal.

“A man likes to die in his own place, and I have no doubt the same applies to a woman,” he said, unable to be too empathetic with her – considering he had already shown her more kindness than she deserved after having attempted to consign him in perpetuity to a fate that would have been purest anathema to his free-wheeling soul.

Was anathema to that soul.

He watched as she was shaken by an agony that was as much of the mind as it was of the body.

“The only thing that matters to me is that I shall not reach Rhodius,” she said again.

Nodding his understanding, not that he cared much one way or the other, Daffyd spoke quietly, the Universal-Translator embedded next to his brain-stem still functioning well enough for him to use the courtly and respectful High Pentheselian his sense of decency obliged him to use with the dying Myrina – though the almighty himself knew she did not deserve it after her treatment of him:

“If that is the only burden and regret you take from this life, Myrina Appollonia, then you are more fortunate than most.

He leaned over, placing one large hand on the Pentheselian's shoulder.

“You and your kind have used me and my fellows badly, he said. “But it cannot be denied that you have given your life for mine – even if your motivation was born of self-interest rather than any desire for my own well-being.”

Her eyes followed his and he could tell from them that the gesture his sense of honour was about to compel him to make would be beyond a mindset that had been taught to place itself before society, fellowship, and the finer feelings possessed of most homo-sapiens he had encountered on his explorations.

“For that reason,” he went on, “I will take your burden upon myself, if I can.”

Of course, he did not want Myrina Appollonia's burden and even as the words left his mouth he was cursing himself for his stubborn adherence to a code of honour the female warrior dying before him would *never* have applied to him.

But then, and whatever her motivation, the Pentheselian had fought for him when the superstitious women of the tribe through whose land they were passing saw him and his alien strangeness as an ideal sacrifice to appease yet another God to whom the people of this technically advanced and morally backward world prayed.

It had, in fact, been Myrina Appollonia who had taken the killing-star that had been propelled in his direction that her objections to having her property harmed might be rendered academic.

And that was why Daffyd had brought Myrina into the bleak north country with the intention of reaching the city of her birth before oblivion overtook her vision.

Something in the Penthesilean was driven by some secret demon and was afraid to die before she reached Rhodius.

A demon he sensed she was about to pass on to him.

If the sense of honour his mind was cursing allowed him to accept it, that is.

“I have sinned, Daffyd. I have stolen a holy thing. You're an outlander, you would not know of Harmonia Apollonia and the talisman that she left before being ferried beyond the northern extremes – and, no, she is not an ancestor and there are many of us who share her name.”

Myrina flung aside the tarpaulins serving as blankets and sat up suddenly, her voice gaining a kind of febrile strength in her anxiety.

“It was by means of its magic properties that we were transported here, when events back on the world we once called home were doing their best to ensure our race were either enslaved or made extinct.”

A tear of what he told himself was both remorse and regret trickled down a dirt-smudged cheek.

“I… I hardly need say that it is… *sacred*.”

She collapsed back onto the tarpaulins and, when she spoke next, the energy had left her voice – if not the fear and remorse.

“Before I became a noble, I was born and bred in the Thieves' Quarter under the Wall. I was proud of my skill. And later the talisman became a challenge. It was a treasured thing. So treasured that hardly a woman of Amazonia has touched it since the days of Harmonia Apollonia who made it.

“The talisman is known as the *Gates of Death’* and it is not just my city's talisman and protector but our whole world. It is said that one day we will need its strength. For who holds Rhodius and the pass to the northern extremes holds Penthesilea - and it is the talisman that will keep the city, and our world, safe.”

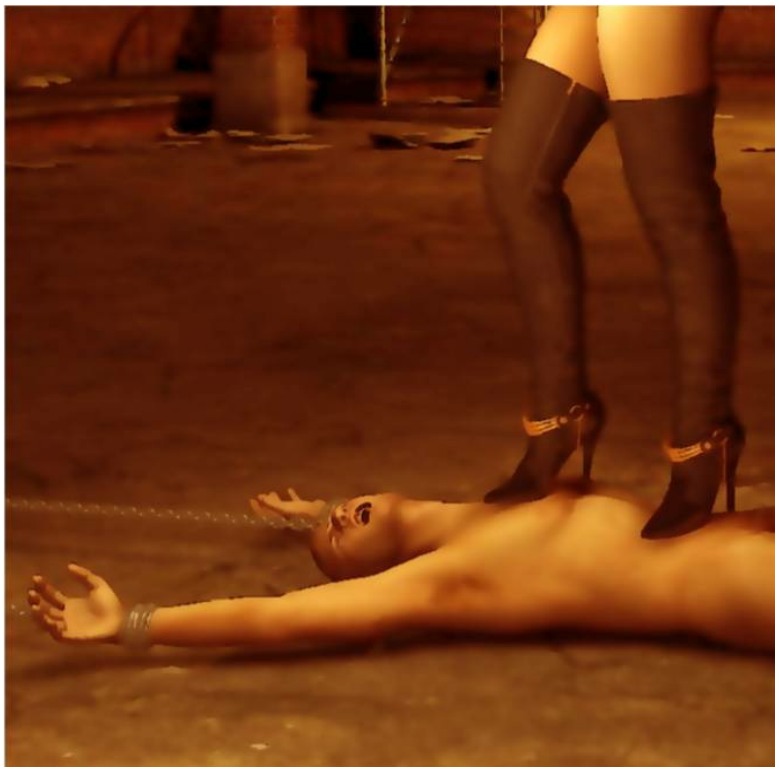
She coughed violently, her back arching, and blood trickled from her lips and down her chin. Even in extremis, she still struck Daffyd as imposing and highly sexual. A sexuality that had more than once enslaved him and whose powerful pull he could still feel.

“I was a thief once, and proud. And I stole the talisman,” she told him.

Her hands went to her girdle, a belt of worn leather with a boss of battered steel, but her fingers were already numb.

“Take it, Daffyd. Open the boss. There, on the side, where the beast's head is carved. Do not be fooled by its dimensions. It is tiny but unimaginably powerful in the hands of those who know how to evoke its power... You must be… must be…”

Two



His thoughts flickered back to how powerful and imperious she had seemed to him not so long ago; even if his thoughts had raged against describing her in such a way in the privacy of his own mind.

For some reason beyond him, he felt a twitch at his groin as an image of her standing above his naked and spread-eagled form as she stood upon his chest and allowed her cruel heels to keep him pinned.

A powerful and imperious woman who was no more and was about to lose what vestige of her womanhood was left to her.

Daffyd took the belt from the fast fading Myrina and found the hidden spring.

The rounded top of the boss came free.

Inside it was something wrapped in a scrap of silk.

Something hard and cylindrical.

“I had to leave Rhodius,” Myrina whispered. “I could never go back. What I did was madness. Hubris. The talisman was of no use to me whatsoever and I soon discovered the fact.”

She watched, shaken between awe and pride and remorse, as Daffyd unwrapped the talisman from the silk.

Daffyd had, being the logical and pragmatic man that he was, discounted most of Myrina's talk as superstition, but even so he had expected something more spectacular than the object he held in his palm.

It was a crystal lens, set in a plain but burnished metal casing some four inches across. Man – not robot – tooled and crafted with obvious expertise. But still, ancient craft and long-lost expertise or not, only another crystal artefact.

Turning it about, though, Daffyd was forced to correct himself as he realised that it was not *just* a simple lens.

Not on this or any other planet.

What he saw upon closer scrutiny was an intricate interlocking of many facets that, the longer one stared, became incredibly complex and hypnotic.

For what appeared to be one simple crystal lens was, in effect, a melding of similar but different crystals that became hypnotic if one looked at it for too long.

“What is its use?” he asked of Myrina, more to distract himself from the thrall into which he was falling than to learn its purpose – though he was interested in that too.

“We are as children before it,” she answered, voice fading. “We have forgotten its power, though not its purpose. But there is a legend, a belief - that Harmonia Apollonia herself made the talisman both to ferry us from a planet that no longer wanted us and as a sign that she would not forget us.”

She hesitated.

“It is also believed that there is a dark-side to its powers that would cause complete destruction should it be released into the wrong hands.”

She forced another breath into her lungs and continued, knowing her time was growing more finite and wishing to impart her knowledge of it to him and, if she could, extract a promise that she might pass in a modicum of peace.

“The belief is that Harmonia herself would come back when Rhodius is threatened. Back through the Gates of Death. To teach us again the power that was hers!”

“I do not understand,” said Daffyd. “What are the Gates of Death? For you surely do not mean the hereafter. From that place of which we all know there is to no return.”

The fading Myrina answered:

“It… It is a pass that opens into the black mountains beyond Rhodius. The city stands guard before it. None of my sisters remember why, except that it is a great trust bestowed upon our people and we *must* preserve it.”

His gaze feasted on the talisman.

“You would like me to go on into the Fastness? To take this to Rhodius?”

Myrina looked at Daffyd, eyes filling with emotion.

“I… I cannot ask that of you,” she said. “Not after the way I have… *used* … you.”

His eyes hardened at the reminder, though, and in truth, the memory of the many and various ways in which she had used her superior prowess and agility to render his own advantage in strength and ferocity subservient to her was never far from the surface.

And, more worryingly for a man so protective of his soul's self-worth, neither was the base excitement a part of him had taken from her sexual usage of him – even if the domestic aspects of his service to her produced no like response for him to disgust himself with.

"And besides," she went on, "the Fastness is not used to strangers," she went on. With me, you might have been safe. But alone...

"No, Daffyd. You have risked too much already. Go back, out of the Fastness, while the decision remains your own."

She slumped back on the blankets then, the simple effort of speaking too much for the amazing female superstructure that had kept him, Bryn Neville Daffyd, both in thrall and unwilling submission of a kind previously unimaginable to him.

His cheeks reddened as images of just what had constituted that… *submission* …flashed at the back of his eyes.

But then he saw a bluish pallor had come into the hollows of her cheeks as the blood-supply to her head grew ever more weak and sporadic.

"Myrina," he said, all the humiliations and slurs to his manhood placed upon him until now as nothing before her onrushing departure. She was, after all, and no more or less than he, a product of her own culture and the genetics that had given birth to it. The slavery she had inflicted upon him was no more than the norm on this female-dominated world to which her people had once been transported. Even if he found the belief that the crystal he now held was instrumental in transporting a whole people through space and time was, to say the least, credulous. And she had been, judging by the ownership into which his former crew-mates had succumbed – and his pride and sense of masculinity cringed as he applied the term to himself – a relatively kind… *master*.

Then again, as her eyes fluttered and closed, louder and more urgently:

"Myrina!"

"Yes?" he heard her gasp, barely audible now, eyes opening again with what looked a massive effort.

“Go in peace, Myrina. I will take the talisman to Rhodius.”

The Penthesilean sighed, and smiled, and Daffyd was glad that he had made the promise.

“The riders of the Apostátes hunt these gorges,” she warned him as her voice grew ever weaker.

“They and their kind are barbarians and you must look out for them. They know neither fear nor mercy and are beyond even the power of Rhodius. If you are taken by them it will likely be over for both you and… and my eternal soul.”

Daffyd's knowledge of the geography of this part of Penthesilea was vague indeed, but he knew that there were mountain valleys waiting ahead and to the north, between him and Rhodius.

Myrina had also told him more than once of these savage upland warriors who had placed themselves beyond the laws and society of their own kind.

To be taken by them would not be… *good*.

Again, his female… *master* …closed her eyes and Daffyd knew that he had not long to wait. The wind spoke with the voice of a great organ and the planets two moons had set to leave the landscape beyond the tower draped in darkness that was only relieved by the glimmering whiteness provided by a carpet of snow.

Daffyd looked up at the brooding walls and shivered.

The smell of death was already in the air.

Placing a kiss upon her pale and now lifeless forehead, before drawing up the tarpaulin to cover her in what was, at least, a shroud of sorts, and to keep him from questioning his commitment to her – and one that placed his own life in great danger - he bent closer to the small fire he hoped was concealed from outside eyes and studied the lens.

Under closer scrutiny, he saw there were scratches on the bezel, as though it had been held at some time in a clamp, or setting, like a jewel.

An ornament, probably, worn as a badge of rank.

A strange ornament for a female-warrior – even if she had been a former thief - such as Myrina, but one that spoke volumes on behalf of the cultural development of her people.

For, despite a certain low-grade technical expertise that did not come anywhere close to that of his own planet or that which he had seen on a host of others before landing here, the main thrust of Penthesilean society was religious and spiritual rather than scientific.

And an unbending and unforgiving religiosity, at that.

As the firelight made tiny dancing sparks in the sombre surroundings of the ruined tower, he suddenly had a curious feeling that the artefact of ritual and superstition he held in his hand was alive.

A pang of fear he knew was primitive and unreasoning, even as it unmanned his modernity, shot through him.

Berating himself for his weakness, he fought it down and felt a great tiredness take a grip of him as his vision began to blur.

Unable to resist, he shut his eyes.

And yet…

In the darkness that was only relieved by the carpet of snow, it seemed to him that he could both see and hear.

And not only those things in the near vicinity....

Three



He knew not how long he stayed that way but, suddenly, he started up, shaken now with an eerie terror that had nothing to do with the image of himself being ridden on all-fours with Myrina upon his back, dressed as if for an equestrian event back on his beloved earth and with the crop equally beloved of her ready to use upon his naked buttocks if did not respond well enough or speedily enough to her commands.

It was, so she had said, the most effective way of imprinting upon a slave's mind that he was his female master's property and existed only to please.

Immediately, shrugging the imagery aside, he rose to his feet and raised his hand as if to hurl the talisman away.

And could not bring himself to do it.

He sat down again and stared hard at the crystal.

Questioning it.

And, in the process, himself.

Many changes had been wrought in him since his ship had crash-landed on this strange and female-led world.

All of them unwilling.

But his new willingness, to open himself up to possibilities in direct contradiction of every pragmatic and scientific belief that he held, was close to being the most… *surprising*.

For he was tempted now, fascinated, like a child that plays with fire, something primeval in his in his innermost soul wanting the spiritual and metaphysical to triumph over his native pragmatism and logic.

Suddenly, compelled by a desire that seemed to come from outside of himself, he touched the flat surface of the lens to his forehead.

Then…

He lay outside the tower, on his stomach, filled with an almost crippling fear and a sense of self-loathing of a power such as turns the bones to metaphorical jelly.

There was no snow.

There was ice everywhere, rising to half the tower's height, sheathing the ground.

Cold and clear and beautiful.

And deadly.

But of snow there was not a sign.

Rising, he found himself instantly on the move, gliding serpent-like and with infinite caution, over the smooth surface; even his movements seeming as if they were suddenly beyond his own volition.

Almost as if he had been… *pre-programmed*.

Which was not his only shock.

The tower had gone.

Vanished.

But there, far below him in the ever-decreasing distance and in a huge valley, was a city.

Even as his unwanted movement propelled him over the ice, he saw the distant shape of its temples and palaces; a glittering and beautiful city, blurred and fairylike and strange, as if it were a dream viewed through gossamer.

And yet, he had clarity.

He could see those who dwelt there, moving slowly through the pristine and beautifully cared for streets.

Women of status and… *power*.

And men who had neither.

His hatred flared, recalling his own indignities and, more so, those that had been inflicted upon his crew before he had been spirited away by the woman he had come to know as Myrina.

His… *owner*."

The same Myrina he had just left dead under a tarpaulin in a ruined tower not moments before he had somehow been transported across the Fastness to a point above Rhodius itself.

The woman who had wanted him for her own and did her best to break his spirit and his manhood.

And had almost succeeded so that, even now, he felt less than the man he had once known himself to be.

The same woman who had also wanted the artefact now transporting him.

Failing in both endeavours only at the last.

Even if she had left his manhood a sorry and almost unrecognisable entity from what it had been before she had taken him and had broken his spirit to her bidding so that he became her slave in mind and body – at least until her

wounds robbed her of the spirit to try and heal herself and maintain command of him at one and the same time.

And yet, had he not used his new freedom from the tyranny of her control of him to give her his word that he would return to its rightful place the so-called mystical artefact *she* had stolen?

But why?

She had used *and* abused him and, worse, had virtually destroyed the one thing he had always considered inviolate.

His sense of manhood and the self-esteem running hand-in-hand alongside it.

Though obviously not completely.

Why else would he have given her his solemn promise to give her immortal soul peace?

And especially as he had no belief such a thing was possible?

Suddenly, the tower and the city vanished, swept away as if a tide had passed across his vision.

Now, he found himself standing beneath two immense black cliffs, their sheer faces guarding a single pass forebodingly.

The cliffs hung over him, leaning out their vast bulk as though to crush him as the wind through the narrow mouth of the pass made the music of evil laughter to his keened ears.

Without being aware of having given them any such command, his legs took him forward, into the pass.

Quite alone.

Drifting veils of mist crept and clung between the ice and the rock, thickening and becoming more and more dense as his disobedient limbs progressed him further and further into the pass.

Soon it was almost impossible for him to see and fear grabbed at his vitals as the wind spoke to him in many tongues without offering a scintilla of comfort.

And then, suddenly, he was no longer alone.

A shadow rose in the mist before him.

A gigantic and amorphous grey shape that moved toward him, misty tendrils outstretched as if to devour him.

And, as he realised he was in the presence of death itself, he heard a fearful and bloodcurdling cry…

*****

…It was Daffyd who yelled in blind atavistic fear, and the echo of his own cry brought him up standing, shaking in every limb.

He had dropped the talisman.

It lay gleaming in the snow at his feet, and the alien memories were gone.

And Myrina was dead.

After a time he crouched down, breathing harshly. He did not want to touch the lens again. The part of him that had learned to fear strange gods and evil spirits with every step he took, the primitive aboriginal that lay so close under the surface of his mind, warned him to leave it, to run away, to desert this place of death and ruined stone.

For what it had shown him, the power that lay in wait to be used wrongly and the appalling images he had been shown of the evil possible if it were, made him wish to bury it thirty feet under and hope it was never seen again.

Yet he forced himself to take it up.

He did not look at it. He wrapped it in the scrap of silk and replaced it inside the iron boss before clasping the belt around his waist. Then he found the small flask that lay with his gear beside the fire, took a long pull, and tried to think rationally of the thing that had happened.

Memories.

Not his own, but the memories of Harmonia Apollonia, a million years ago in the morning of a world. Memories of hate, a secret war against unhuman

beings that dwelt in crystal cities cut in the living ice, and used these ruined towers for some dark purpose of their own.

Was that the meaning of the talisman, the power that lay within it? Had Harmonia Apollonia, by some elder and forgotten science, imprisoned the echoes of his own mind in the crystal?

Why?

Perhaps as a warning?

As a reminder of ageless, alien danger beyond the Gates of Death?

Suddenly one of the beasts tethered outside the ruined tower started up from its sleep with a hissing snarl.

Instantly Daffyd became motionless.

They came silently on their padded feet, the powerfully built mountain beasts, moving daintily despite their bulk through the sprawling ruin.

Their riders too were silent.

Tall and unnaturally muscular women with fierce eyes and russet hair sat astride them commandingly, wearing warm leather skins and each carrying a long spear.

There were a score of them around the tower in the windy gloom but Daffyd did not bother to draw the sword he had relieved from his dead owner.

He had learned very young the difference between courage and idiocy.

He walked out toward them, slowly lest one of them be startled into spearing him, yet not slowly enough to denote fear.

He held up his right hand and gave them greeting.

They did not answer him. They sat their restive mounts and stared at him, and Daffyd knew that Myrina had spoken the truth.

These were the riders of Bellohk, and they were both lesbians and predators.

Four



Daffyd waited, until they should tire of their own silence.

Finally one demanded, “Of what country are you?”

He answered part truthfully:

“I am called Daffyd, a man of earth without a tribe in your land.”

“A stranger,” said the woman with short cropped black hair who was obviously, he thought, their leader – or at least the leader of this particular raiding-party, if that os what it was.

He pointed at the dead Myrina and asked, “Did you slay her?”

“She was my friend,” lied Daffyd, “I was bringing her home to die.”

Two riders dismounted to inspect the body and, a hard-bitten woman of over six-feet, called up to the leader:

“She was from Rhodius, Sallinah. And she has not been robbed.”

It was a minor detail the woman had no trouble remedying for herself.

“A stranger,” repeated the leader, Sallinah. “Bound for Rhodius, with a man of Rhodius.”

Her eyes became even harder as greed and opportunism was added to the mix.

“I sense, girls, there is someone in Rhodius willing to pay good money for our boy here.”

Daffyd shrugged indifferently, though he bridled at being described as *“boy”* by this savage woman who had to be at least ten years his junior.

He gave no resistance when the tall Sallinah slid from her mount and relieved him of all he owned - except his clothes and Myrina's hide belt which was not considered worth the stealing.

Her hands as she set about robbing him were, strangely for a supposed lesbian, he thought, both intrusive *and* intimate.

One of the women brought Daffyd's own beast and that of Myrina's from where they were tethered, and he was told to mount - as usual, over the vocal if unintelligible protest of the creature, which seemed to like neither the look nor the smell of him.

They then moved out from under the shelter of the walls, into the full fury of the wind.

They were in the North country, Daffyd knew. Half a world away from the Penthesilea of spaceships and commerce and visitors from other planets. The future had never touched these wild mountains and barren plains and these women who lived only for the rituals of a past he knew nothing of, were the only law to be had here.

Sallinah did not tell Daffyd where they were taking him, and he did not ask.

It would have been an admission of fear.

And have made no difference to his eventual destination in their company anyway.

An eventual destination they reached the following afternoon and which proved to be a large but narrow valley.

Looking down as they approached, Daffyd saw that on the floor of the valley as far as he could see, were women and beasts and makeshift but secure shelters outside of which fires burned.

Hundreds, maybe thousands, of them.

The voices rising up on the thin air came as deep murmur he found, despite his warrior-soul being unwilling to initially admit it to himself… *terrifying*.

Though was curious to meet the female who led this… *tribe*.

They found their way single file down a winding and the wind gradually stopped buffeting them as they made their way through the camp and its shelters.

Upon first appraisal, Daffyd told himself there were no men in the camp.

Only women and children – and amongst those children, no boys.

It was telling. Explaining as it did that the raiding-parties were not simply intended to amass booty. After all, men were still necessary if the gene pool was to be continued in its somewhat singular and gender-biased way.

And what better way of finding a sperm-donor than by taking him as a slave

and then disposing of him or selling him on afterwards?

They came out of their holes in numbers to shout at Sallinah and her women, excited to see what new delights they had fetched back for their enjoyment.

Sallinah, herself, he could see as the women inspected him with interest, was flushed and jovial with an importance something told Daffyd would prove only temporary of duration when the novelty of her latest arrival became – as all novelties eventually became – old news.

Daffyd rode impassively, face stone-like as he stared straight ahead; affecting to look neither left nor right, or down or up as he avoided all eye-contact in the hope of avoiding *too* much unwanted attention.

They came at length to a shelter larger than the others, but built exactly the same and looking no more comfortable, let alone palatial.

It was obviously the home of their leader, but to his surprise there were no guards.

Sallinah dismounted and bade Daffyd do the same before hammering on her shield with the hilt of her sword:

“Douana Chryseis! It is Sallinah. With a gift.”

No sound came from the interior and Sallinah went on:

“A gift, my Douana, you are going to like a great deal.”

A few beats of silence passed, and Daffyd could sense his female captor was becoming edgy.

Then, from inside, in an a toneless voice which was nonetheless female and still managed to retain something of power and leadership in its timbre:

“Enter, Sallinah.”

Sallinah pushed aside the hide curtain and went in.

With Daffyd at her heels…

Five



When he came back from a rather vivid memory of being introduced to his new owner for the first time – this as he was forced naked to his knees to place unwilling lips upon the toe of her boot - the first thing Daffyd noticed was the smell of strong oil from a brazier in the corner. The floor of packed snow was carpeted at intervals with furs that were much used yet still managed to look inviting to him in his condition of weariness. Otherwise there was no adornment other than a chair and a table.

Behind the chair sat a woman.

A woman such as no other Daffyd had ever seen.

Even on this benighted and retrograde planet.

He could tell from what he could see of her seated body that she was tall.

Very tall.

In the shaking light thrown by the brazier, Daffyd saw she was covered from neck to impossible full breasts, down to her thighs themselves, and above a tunic of dyed leather, in tightly linked chain mail.

Black chain mail.

Though what significance this was supposed to hold he had no idea.

On the table before her, rested an axe, a fearsome looking thing made for the cleaving of skulls Daffyd knew without being told had seen *much* use.

Her head and face were covered by an ancient war-mask of the inland Queens of Penthesilea once pointed out to him in an old drawing by Myrina.

Fashioned from black polished steel, it presented an unworldly visage of slitted eyeholes and a barred slot for breathing as it made its way past the nape of the woman's powerful corded neck to rest between her, no doubt, equally impressive shoulder-blades.

The intense and expressionless scrutiny of that mask was bent, not upon Sallinah, but upon Bryn Neville Daffyd.

The voice from behind the mask spoke a second time:

"Well?"

"We found him in the gorges to the south," said Sallinah. "His owner had died and he was about to leave her."

She hesitated a little.

"And?" demanded the mask.

"His owner was… a woman of Rhodius… He… He was accompanying her

there."

"Rhodius?" queried Douana Chryseis softly, the war-mask nodding along with her as her attention again turned to Daffyd.

"And why, stranger, were you accompanying your owner to Rhodius?"

"My name is Daffyd. Bryn Neville Daffyd. I am from a planet called 'Earth'. That I am detained upon your planet is through no fault of my own."

"I ask again, Bryn Neville Daffyd, formerly of… *'E*arth*'*, why were you travelling to Rhodius in the company of your owner?"

Quite suddenly, Daffyd found himself tired of the whole business.

"Why should I not go, or be taken, to Rhodius? Is it against some law, of which I have yet to hear? And why would a woman of Bellohk make it her business?"

The head in the war-mask was motionless as he continued:

"It is well known that you and your people have no time for either the city or its inhabitants," he finished.

Next to him, he felt Sallinah tense, watching and waiting it seemed with delighted anticipation.

The long-fingers of the hands belonging to the woman in the armour caressed the axe.

Surprisingly slender hands, skin both smooth and sinewy.

Hands ill-equipped, it struck him, to wield such a weapon.

"What we choose to make our business is our business alone – and certainly not for the slave of a woman of Rhodius to question," she said, rather than cleave his skull in two.

Then, after pausing that he may understand her intent should he choose to defy her, fingers still caressing the axe as if it were a lover rather than an instrument of death:

"Now, I ask you, again: why were you and your owner going to Rhodius?"

“Because,” Daffyd sighed with equal restraint, careful to avoid describing Myrina in the way all knew she was to him, “the woman I was *helping* wanted to go home to die.”

“It seems a long, hard journey, just for dying.”

Douana Chryseis bent forward, in an attitude of deep thought.

“Only the condemned or Appollon-ished leave their cities, or their clans. Why did your owne… *friend* … flee Rhodius?”

A voice spoke suddenly from out of a heap of furs that lay on the pallet in the shadows of the corner, unseen by their covering.

A shriller voice, female again, with what Daffyd took as the tell-tale signs of either madness or deep cunning in it.

“Three women beside myself have fled Rhodius over the last few years. One sickened and died unlamented, alone in the Fastness. Another was tracked down and executed. But only one, other than me, lived.”

All eyes and ears were attuned to the voice emanating from the corner so mysteriously, at least for Daffyd.

“A thief named Myrina,” it concluded. “Who, in her stupidity and folly, stole a certain talisman.”

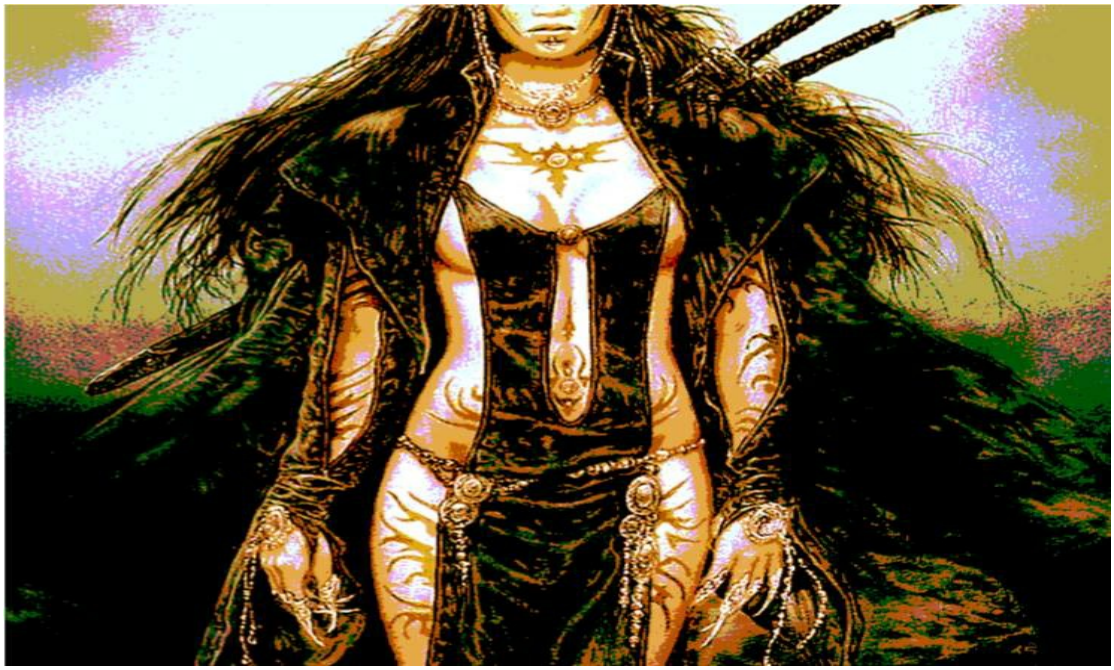
Now those same eyes and ears were focused upon Daffyd.

“My comrade was called Gileshi,” he lied, having already thought of a suitably plausible name for his outlaw owner.

At his midriff, the leather belt weighed heavy about him, and the iron boss contained within it seemed hot against his belly as he forced his eyes to remain staring straight ahead and not flicker to the talisman to which the voice from the corner alluded.

He was though, and as of now, beginning to feel the first pangs of fear…

Six



Up close, she was full-bodied and no less… *sensual* …for being so barbaric.

The Douana Chryseis had risen from her seat and shrugged off both the chain-mail and the leather tunic beneath it, standing before him now in garments that barely covered her magnificent body and were, he knew, chosen to both shock and infatuate those of his sex as well as those of her own.

Imperious and commanding, despite the humble setting, she planted her feet on the packed snow of the hut and fixed his eyes with her own.

Though her eyes were on him – and hungrily so, he thought – it was to the woman on the furs she spoke via the corner of her mouth;

“It was the sacred talisman of Rhodius. Without it, the city is like a woman

without a soul."

Tanit's artefact had a similar importance to ancient Carthage, Daffyd thought; always a student of his own world's history; mindful of that particular city's fate after it the relic said to be protecting it had been stolen.

"The nobles were afraid of their own people should it be discovered," spoke the woman in the corner. "They dared not tell them that it was gone… But *we* know."

"And," said Daffyd, "you will attack Rhodius before the thaw, when they least expect you."

"You have a sharp mind, stranger," said the woman he presumed was their queen as she regarded him haughtily – the licking of her lips as she took him in belying, he thought, the rumours that she and her women were lovers only of other women.

Save, of course, for those occasions of necessary procreation when only a man would do.

"Sharp enough to know that the great wall will be hard to carry, even with the talisman of Harmonia Apollonia...."

She did not finish but turned instead to Sallinah:

"When you plundered the dead woman's body, what did you find?"

"Nothing, Douana. A few coins, a knife, hardly worth the taking."

"And you, Bryn Neville Daffyd. What did you take from the body?"

"Nothing," he answered with perfect truth.

"Sallinah," said the Douana Chryseis, "search him."

Sallinah came smiling up to Daffyd and ripped his jacket open.

With uncanny swiftness, the Earthman moved. The edge of one broad hand took Sallinah under the ear, and before the woman's knees had time to sag Daffyd had caught her arm. He turned, crouching forward, and pitched Sallinah headlong through the door flap.

He straightened and turned again and now his eyes held a feral glint.

“That woman has robbed me once,” he said. “It is enough.”

He heard Sallinah's women coming. Three of them tried to jam through the entrance at once, and he sprang at them. He made no sound. His fists did the talking for him, and then his feet, as he kicked the stunned barbarians back upon their leader.

“Now,” he said to the Douana Chryseis, “will we talk as equals?”

The woman before him, who seemed to grow more desirable with every look he took of her, laughed with pure enjoyment and it seemed that the gaze behind the mask studied Daffyd's savagely handsome face and then lifted to greet the sullen Sallinah who came back into the shelter, her cheeks flushed crimson with rage and humiliation.

“Go,” said the Douana Chryseis. “The stranger from… *‘earth’* …and I will talk.”

“But Douana,” she protested, glaring at Daffyd, “it is not safe....”

“My dark mistress looks after my safety,” said Chryseis, stroking the axe she had strung across her back, stupendous breast heaving up and down and giving Daffyd a solid hint as to the excitement she was taking from the situation. “Go.”

Reluctantly, and with looks promising retribution on Daffyd, Sallinah marched from the tent and lowered the flap behind her.

The woman before him was silent then, the blind mask turned to Daffyd as he met that eyeless gaze and was silent also.

Which was when the bundle of furs in the shadowy recess straightened slowly and became a tall woman of indeterminate years with rusty hair and beard and a statuesque bearing.

She shuffled over and crouched at the feet of the Douana Chryseis submissively, watching the Earthman as she did so.

Her Douana leaned forward:

“I will tell you something, Bryn Neville Daffyd. I did not know either my mother or my sire – though his provenance is hardly important. But the blood of queens infuses my veins. My name and rank I have been forced to make with my own hands, but I tell you this…”

She took a small step towards him and, despite his fortitude and inability to confess his feelings – even to himself – he felt a nameless dread overtake him.

A dread almost powerful enough to make him forget the aching need he felt for this woman whose face he had yet to look upon.

“…before long they will stand as high as any and will ring loud and clear from the wilderness of the Fastness to the stronghold of Harmonia Appolonia itself.”

Her passion chimed with something deep in Daffyd and he felt a momentary compulsion to throw himself to her feet, clasp her shapely and powerful ankle in their boots and swear eternal allegiance to her in her quest.

“I will take Rhodius,” she swore, unaware – or perhaps all too aware – of his feelings. “For who holds Rhodius, holds Penthesilea and, with it, the power and the riches that lie beyond the Gates of Death!”

“I have seen them,” said the woman still upon her knees at the very feet Daffyd had himself just imagined being supplicatory before.

Her eyes blazed as she continued to stare up devotedly at her Douana:

“I have seen Harmonia Apollonia the mighty. I have seen the temples and the palaces glitter in the ice. I have seen *Them*, the shining ones. Oh, I have seen them, the beautiful, hideous, and all powerful ones!”

She glanced sidelong at Daffyd and there was something of infinite cunning in the shining blue pupils of her eyes,

“That is why Seetar is mad, stranger… *She has seen.*”

A chill swept Daffyd as he recalled his own experience with the medallion.

He too had seen.

Not with his own eyes, but with the mind and memories of Harmonia Apollonia.

Memories of a *million* years ago.

And now he knew it had been neither dream nor illusion - that fantastic, scarcely credible, vision opened to him by the talisman.

The same talisman now hidden in his belt!

If this shrill madwoman had seen what he had....?

What creatures reside beyond the Gates of Death I do not know," said Chryseis. "But my own dark mistress will test their strength and, once they have smell of riches in their nostrils, my crimson felines will hunt them down."

"The beautiful and cruel ones," whispered Seetar. "Such great temples, and palaces with great towers made from the whitest of stone!"

Her Douana patted her on the head indulgently, as if she were a domestic animal deserving of a treat.

Then her attention turn back to their… *guest*.

"Ride with me, Daffyd," said the Douana Chryseis abruptly. "Yield up the talisman wherever you have secreted it and be my shield."

Douana or not, she was as transparent as the water of a mountain pool and Daffyd warned himself – compelling erection or not – to be careful.

"Why do you choose me?" he asked, buying time until he knew how best to react.

"We are of one blood, Daffyd, though we be strangers and you a mere man while I am a superior woman. I sense it with as much conviction as I hold that you have access to the talisman of Harmonia Appolonia."

Her voice became suddenly low and sibilant.

Promising.

Persuasive.

Seductive.

“Would you not like to respect the body your eyes cannot stop drinking in with more intimacy and respect?”

He felt his cock lurch forward, as if it were intent upon negotiating for him.

Again she narrowed the gap between them, the warn breath that made its way past her mask entering his nostrils with a sweetness and promise his manhood had already submitted to.

Though his sense of rightness and moral rectitude had not – even if his voice was no more than a croak when he replied:

“And what would your… How did you describe them? …your crimson felines say to that?... To have their Douana join in union with a humble man? Even if that union is but temporary?”

He indicated the woman still abasing herself at her Douana’s feet – the same feet he had picture himself fawning before not moments ago.

A woman staring up at the object of her fealty and lust with unmistakeable recrimination.

“And what would Seetar say? Look at her, already catatonic with jealousy and fear lest I take you up on your proposal.”

“Seetar knows that the opinion of slaves is not a matter to which their owner attaches any great importance… Knowledge, I suspect, with which you are wholly familiar and have grown used to during your time in the service of your departed… *‘friend’*.”

“When one has no option but to bend and serve, or disobey and die or be tortured, such knowledge is hardly likely to be missed,” observed Daffyd. “However, my circumstances have changed and, with them, my options.”

He allowed the truth of his words and the weakness of her position if she wished for his help – grateful she could have no idea that the talisman she sought was currently residing in the buckle of a belt mere inches from her own flat stomach she was in the process of easing ever closer to his.

The same belt buckle not inches above the raging erection that seemed set to

burst from his trousers at any second.

“And besides,” he went on. “I will bargain with neither man nor woman until I have looked into their eyes. Take off your masks, Chryseis—and then… perhaps …we will talk”

Seetar's breath made a snakelike hissing between her surprisingly white and even teeth as she sensed what was about to happen.

“Are you sure you are ready for such a… sight?” asked the Douana.

He nodded.

“It is not negotiable if you wish for my assistance,” he assured her.

“It is not something I make a habit of,” she told him. “And with good reason.”

She indicated the fawning creature at her feet.

“Loyal Seetar here,” she went on, “can bear witness to the effect I can have on either man or woman if they look upon me… Are you willing to lose yourself in me as she has? Perhaps so badly that all you can think of is serving me and your knowledge of the talisman is placed beyond any chance of your recall?”

Seetar suddenly rose to her feet, and for the first time Daffyd realised that this had once been a sensuous and vibrant woman.

“Would you look upon the face of your own destruction?” she intoned. “You are but a worthless man, but I sense a certain pride in you. Are you really ready to lose what remains of your manhood under the heel of my wonderful Douana?”

“I will take my chances, Seetar,” he said lightly, as dismissive of such nonsense as ever – despite his own experience with the talisman.

“My Douana,” Seetar implored with a clarity Daffyd had thought beyond her. “By tomorrow the last of the tribes will be with us and we will need to march soon. After that, we must march. Give this lowly and unworthy man to Sallinah for the time that remains. There is much hate in her for him now and she will make sure you soon have the talisman.”

The mask was unmoving now, fixed upon Daffyd with no sign she had heard a single word of her slave's suggestion.

Until Daffyd heard what sounded remarkably like a sigh.

Then....

"Sallinah……!"

Seven



He was dreaming.

Dark dreams.

Recognising them for what they were made them no less disturbing.

No less… terrifying.

The woman coming ever closer to him through the clearing, carrying a knife in either hand he knew boded him no good, was the kind of woman he could have allowed to pleasure his rigid cock under other circumstances.

But that, he knew, was not to be.

Not here.

Not now.

Not on this planet.

Dream or not, he began to thrash around as his tormentor crept ever closer to his bound and naked form, eyes fixating on the object she was here to remove.

He gasped as he she dropped a knife to free up hand and take up his humiliatingly erect cock.

He sensed her eyes upon his and saw the sheer pleasure she took from the task entrusted her, then, pulling his erection as far from his body as she could take it, she raised the other knife and…

…The flames leaped high from the fire in the windless gorge as the women sat around it in a circle.

The savage riders of the mountain valleys of Bellohk rested with all the pent-up eagerness of predators who sensed a weakened prey would soon be within their reach.

Now and again their white teeth showed in a kind of rictus of unholy anticipation for what was too come.

“He is strong,” they whispered, almost admiringly, one to the other.

“He will live the night out. I would take wagers upon it.”

On an outcrop of rock watching with the rest of them, the Douana Chryseis, wrapped in black leather and cradling her ever-present axe in the crook of her arm, took note of the entertainment that, so far, had yet to yield the results she both needed and expected.

At her feet yet again, huddled in the snow, resided the slave who was as ever-present as her axe.

Seetar.

At the centre of the clearing, that the spectacle might be seen by all, long spears had been driven deep into the snowy earth and lashed together to make a frame.

Upon this frame was hung a man.

A big man, muscled and trim, his shoulders lashed to the shafts which, had they a voice, would have groaned under the pressure.

It was, of course, no other than Bryn Neville Daffyd. Former free man of Earth and recently released from his bondage to the thief and renegade Myrina. Now free again.

For his sins.

He had already been lashed without having asked for nor been given mercy. The suffering earthman knowing only too well such pleas would only have fed the sadism of the savage women tormenting him and driven them to an even greater desire to inflict pain upon him. Knowing also the delight the women of this benighted took from humiliating a male.

A knowledge which strengthened his resolve but made his agonies no easier to bear; though his determination not to allow a sense of his already diminished manhood to be taken further down the ladder to that complete and abject shame from which he knew he would not return, stiffened his weakening resolve somewhat.

As he sagged against the hide strapping keeping him in place between the spears, his breathing sounded harsh in his own ears and he knew the sobs he could also hear were his own.

The snow that had been trampled by the feet of his hungry tormentors was patterned red with blood.

His blood.

It was Sallinah, of course, who for the most part was wielding the whip flaying him; giving it up to another only when her favoured arm tired for the moment but retrieving it as soon as blood and feeling returned enough to continue punishing him.

Still smarting from his almost dismissive treatment of her before her Douana, he could tell that the question she asked at intervals was one she would far prefer he did not answer.

Yet.

The pleasure she took from marking his flesh and making him squeal as well as sob was too great for her to wish for a quick resolution.

“Where is the talisman?”

She had stripped to the waist for her work, despite the cold, and steam rose from her bare upper body as her perspiration met the air, breasts that were almost the equal of her Douana’s, nipples hardened and aroused, rising and falling to the rhythm of the lash as she flayed her with focus and precision – proud of her ability to make the whip sing to her tune and land wherever she directed.

Even in his agonies, it was obvious to Daffyd that this sick and twisted bitch was proud of her skill.

The knowledge only served to bolster his determination to die rather than feed the sadism that demanded his *total* breaking.

He may have squealed, he may have sobbed, but Bryn Neville Daffyd did not cry out.

And he certainly did not beg.

The bitch he knew as Sallinah stepped back and panted, and looked at the Douana Chryseis, frustrated at her unheard of lack of success when it came to breaking the resistance of a mere male.

She received a nod and dropped the whip to approach her victim and lift his head by the hair.

“Daffyd,” she said to no response.

Then, louder, directly into his ear:

“Stranger!”

Eyes opened and stared back at her and Sallinah could not repress a slight shiver.

It seemed to her that, far from breaking him, the pain and indignity had served only to bolster the wretch’s resistance.

A memory flashed into her mind and she recalled a similar response from a huge snow-cat that had wandered into one of their snares.

It took an effort of will for her to dismiss the idea that it was not a man she spoke to but a predatory beast.

A beast whose current captivity had best end in death if she did not wish to find herself on the end of *his* lash.

“Daffyd,” she said into his ear. “Where is the talisman of Harmonia Apollonia? Tell us and we can end your suffering.”

There was no answer.

Not wishing to lose any more face than she already had, Sallinah forced a laugh and glanced up at the darkened sky and the brightness of their planet’s twin moons as smoke from their fires drifted between them and her vision.

“The night is but half gone,” she told him. “Have you any real idea of what lies ahead of you before morning?”

The cruelly, patient eyes of her Douana – eyes growing more impatient with every moment of his resistance that passed – studied the man’s face intently.

And, through eyes both filmed and crusty, the man whose torment she had ordered noticed her inspection of him.

And stared back at her as defiantly as a man in his straitened circumstances could stare.

Something that both startled and angered the barbarian queen – unused as she was to such resistance and disrespect from either woman or man.

But it was Sallinah who voiced her Douana’s anger:

“You think I cannot make you talk?” she snarled into his ear. “Then you do not know me! I am SALLINAH!... Sallinah who can make even the insentient granite of the gorge in which you suffer speak if she has a mind to demand it!”

Taking a step back, she drew back an arm and swiftly returned it to strike her captive across his tear-stained and be-grimed face.

Only to receive a smile which infuriated her still more.

With a scream Sallinah took hold of Daffyd's hair with one hand and began beating him about the head with the clenched fist of the other, face white-hot with rage.

A beating that, while savage still, was nothing to the agonies she had already piled on the man.

A fact explaining the lack of a suitably abject and supplicatory response from him whose absence maddened her further.

Suddenly, beyond reason, Sallinah drew her knife and was about to end the existence of the male wretch taunting her.

Only to be stopped by possibly the only voice capable of penetrating the fog of temper prompting her every action.

“Wait, Sallinah!” cried the Douana Chryseis.

The woman intent on taking Daffyd’s life hesitated.

But did not stop.

Her knife was at the point of Daffyd’s throat, when…

Eight



Later, when he was told of what happened, he would recall nothing of the incident other than seeing Sallinah's knife heading towards his throat and closing his eyes to meet death.

Though he did recall the last image to flicker up onto the screen at back of his eyelid as he breathed his last breath before his throat was severed and he lost consciousness.

Only to realise that it had not been Sallinah's knife responsible for his fall

into blessed oblivion but the fact he had simply passed out from the ours of torment and his loss of blood.

A last image of his former owner.

Myrina.

The woman to whom he had been sold and to whom – though he knew not how she achieved it: be her control of him hypnotic, chemical, or through a superior strength of will – he could do nothing else but obey.

This last image of his former owner as he knelt before her in the way she had taught him and slathered at the highly polished black leather of her boots.

Even in his fevered thoughts, unable to decide if he was more ashamed of allowing himself to be used in such a way, or…

…Or devastated by the fact a part of him was taking such obvious… pleasure …from the feelings of delicious submission he felt in the presence of the woman who now owned him…

…The Douana moved swiftly, her great axe spinning through the cold night air, steel illuminated by the fires still burning around the temporary camp.

Her aim was true and there could be no doubt of any mistake as the axe found its mark.

It caught Sallinah squarely where the cords of her neck ran into the shoulder.

And carried straight on through.

There was silence throughout the gorge as the Douana Chryseis walked slowly and unconcernedly across the trampled snow and took up her weapon of choice once more.

“I will be obeyed,” she said, glaring about her as if she expected someone to take issue with her treatment of a loyal sister for having allowed herself to be provoked into disobedience and take the life of a man she been expressly ordered *not* to take.

At least not until the talisman was safely in her Douana’s grasp.

She gestured toward the now comatose Daffyd:

“Cut him down and see that he does not die,” she ordered before walking to the outer edges of their temporary encampment, deep in thought that did *not* include the loss of the once loyal Sallinah.

From what appeared a vast distance, Daffyd heard the mutterings of the warriors who had witness his flaying.

Before his consciousness gave itself up in its entirety for the moment and his head fell forward against his chest and his body hung limp against the hide straps.

He might just as well have been dead at this point, as the only image he could recall seeing before he slipped into the merciful arms of Morpheus was that of Myrina.

And in all her haughty and despotic sexual glory as he groveled at the end of her leash and paid fealty to her feet.

And then no more.

Until…

*****

The face that she had not shown him before – for, as she had intimated, reasons of his own sanity and a desire not to cloud his knowledge of the talisman’s whereabouts – was revealed to him now.

And in a way almost as startling to him as the impact of that incredibly savage and sensuous face itself.

He had come awake fully once more, after days of fever and delirium following his vicious scourging at the hands of the now decapitated Sallinah, upon his back.

A back resting against a multitude of furs of such softness he felt as if he was once again floating unsupported in the absent gravity of deep space.

But it was not his relative comfort, nor the absence of agony from the back lacerated by the dead woman’s cruel leather whip, which startled him almost as much as the intense eyes in a breathtaking visage that gazed down intently into his own.

No.

That honour belonged to the fact those intense eyes were gazing into his as they rode a cock, so powerful and urgent, it took him some time to actually comprehend the organ in question was his own.

“You are with us again,” the commanding voice of Douana Chryseis filled his ears, with only the slightest of vibratos to betray the fact his cock was embedded in the velvet and vice-like pussy belonging to the queen.

“My clever Seetar was right. The cock of a man is the fastest way to gain command of his thoughts,” she observed with a smile beatific in its triumph and its pleasure – even if he could see disappointment in it too when she realised that gazing upon her face was *not* having the obsessional and devotional effect upon him she had assured him it would.

She was riding him slowly, her hour-glass body partly clothed above the waist in some scraps of brown leather that served only male her seem more naked. The utterly stupendous and conical breasts - breasts that put even those remarkable examples residing at the chest of the woman whose head she had recently cleaved from her shoulders - rising and falling as if he truly were some broken steed upon whom she rode. Nipples jutting out like arrowheads betrayed the level of her own arousal and, as they came into his focus, intensified his own.

Never had he felt such sensations as the gossamer yet unyielding walls of her womanhood slid the length of the spear it was in the process of taming and caused the sperm in his scrotum to heat and bubble as if his balls were a cauldron upon the point of boiling up and over its confines.

But not yet.

Though losing himself in the sensations of being ridden and used in such a way - as well as drinking in the face that had been kept from him, and which was of such a sensuous, quirky, and haughty beauty he had no doubt it was capable of all she claimed for it – Daffyd’s manhood kicked in and demanded he make both his own pleasure and hers last.

To give a good account of himself.

To show her it was not women alone who were capable of inspiring the joys

of sexual abandon.

To find a form of… *redemption* …for the manhood recently flayed from him at female hands.

And before that…?

Much worse.

“Do not hold back,” advised the vibrato voice from above, eyes piercing his own as if they would carry on through to his very enslave and place the shackles of her femininity about it and bind him to her spiritually as well as physically. “There can be no possibility of offspring.”

Her eyes raised themselves to the makeshift roof of their temporary shelter and a low, almost feral, grown could be heard deep in her throat as he thrust up to meet her on her pussy’s descent.

Then, again staring back down at him:

“I can thank the hardship of our land and the many battles in which I have fought for that.”

Fully awake now – as well he might have been under such circumstances, it struck him – he began to be more… *pro-active*.

Reaching around a hand, he slipped it under the crack of an arse that was easily the equal of the breasts swaying above him and found her engorged clitoris on its upward motion.

And, this time, it was not a low and feral growl which greeted his manipulation of her as she continued to ride him but a fully-fledged scream of utter delight.

A scream which went some way to restoring the manhood she and others had come near to destroying.

Again and again he diddled with her girl-cock as her body quivered above him and he himself began to lose the battle against his own outlandish hunger for the woman riding him.

“Yes…” she cried.

“Yes…” he paraphrased.

“Yes…” she cried again, this time with an almost painful urgency.

“Yes…” he paraphrased again, as the boiling sensation in his balls became so intense there could be only one out come.

“Yeeeeeeeeeeees!” they screamed together before the pent-up cream of his long-denied balls met the equally volcanic if less underused walls of her superior and queenly cunt.

Bryn Neville Daffyd was, once more, well and truly awake.

Nine



Four women came towards him.

Dressed in the decorative and symbolic warrior attire intended to allow them a respectable entry into the afterlife, should they fall in battle, Daffyd knew their arrival before him was not intended to be a social occasion.

They came to where he had been tied back upon the frame, naked from the waist up – for still they had not gotten the information they required from him; despite their leader's attempt to extract it the more traditional, and more… *seductive* … way - and he listened to them while squinting through slitted eyes as they decided next move.

They were hesitant but, as he did not move, they plucked up courage and came closer.

One, a svelte twenty-something who looked as if she had stepped from one of earth's catwalks, prodded him with the point of her sword.

"Make sure," said her sister-in-arms at her side, a sword of her own resting against a long brown cloak.

The point bit into his back again and blood welled up and out of the weals still crisscrossing his back.

Daffyd clamped down upon his own tongue and tried not to cry out against the pain.

The swordswoman responsible grunted.

“We will be having no trouble here.”

Daffyd felt a knife working at the leather straps restraining him and waited.

The rawhide sliced apart and he was free.

But did not fall.

Instead, gathering his legs under him, he sprang.

The woman with the knife who had released him was the first to suffer in his first mad rush and was flung head first into the fire.

Then, as her stunned comrades pondered whether to recue her from the flames or attack the man who had put her there, Daffyd began to run toward the scaly mounts where they had been tethered.

A woman loomed up in front of him and he swerved as he saw the shadow of her spear, catching its haft in his two hands and wrenching it free of his owner before fetching her a blow upon the temple with its butt-end.

Voices began shouting from behind him as he ran and, in the distance, he saw that the Douana Chryseis had turned and was coming back to where she had only recently left him to her women.

She was not running as that would have been too undignified – he was only a man, after all – but she was striding out.

Fast.

There were women before Daffyd now as more became alerted to the fact he somehow gotten free.

He gripped the long spear and realised he was in possession of a good weapon, crafted by an expert.

His body curved into a half crouch and let out a cry that was the warning of a predatory killer to those who would try to harm him.

Then he went in among the women and began the slaughter without giving a moment’s thought their gender..

Daffyd had sprung to life too quickly and they had not been expecting him.

He could smell the fear on them.

And the shock.

This was a man.

A berserk man.

Attacking *them*.

They simply fell away from him, these so-called wild riders of Bellohk, and he took the lives of any who came within reach of his killing rage and the spear helping him to assuage it with their blood. Sooner than he would have believed, he broke through their ranks and nothing between himself and escape but the two mounted women guarding the herd that served as transport.

Being mounted, they had more courage and came at him as he ran, the padded feet of their beasts making a muffled drumming in the snow.

Daffyd hurled his spear.

It drove through one woman's body and drove her from the saddle to fall between the legs of the mount belonging to the comrade behind.

The beast crashed to the ground atop its rider and, without a further look, Daffyd ran on.

Until he did look back.

Through the shouts of an animated crowd of women, he glimpsed a statuesque and familiar figure moving through them as cyclone passed through a cornfield.

Douana Chryseis was again in her favoured black chain-mail with her axe swinging at her side, poised to be thrown; her war-mask covering the features likely to prove disturbingly addictive, she claimed, for all those with less… *powerful* …personalities.

A description which did not include *him*, it seemed.

Daffyd realised the herd had caught his scent and were restless. For reasons unknown to him, the brutes disliked the smell of him and now, with the reek of fresh blood upon him - other's blood – they found his close proximity no less palatable. In fact, they were already beginning to snarl and hiss before he reached them, scuffing their padded hooves against the packed snow in anticipation of his arrival.

Singly a likely mount out, he rushed it before the beast decided to break, the head of speed he had worked up enough for Daffyd to catch it by a floppy ear and hold it still as he leapt upon its back.

Then, as his digging heels urged it to bolt, Daffyd allowed himself savage and animalistic cry of triumph as his mount took him from the scene of both his imprisonment and torture.

A scene also responsible for the most incredible sex he had experienced in his life.

Including the submissive and totally uncharacteristic kind he had known while in the service of deceased Myrina.

Clinging low to the scaly neck, he saw the women of Bellohk scattering before him as they attempted to avoid being trampled under pads of the onrushing beast as Daffyd's heels and screams of exhortation urged it to greater efforts.

They were followed in their flight by the herd that was, to Daffyd's pleasant surprise, stampeding after them through the encampment and decimating the makeshift shelters – and some women – as they passed.

He snatched a fur-cloak from the shoulders of a fleeing warrior as she passed too close to his escape and, twisting it by the ears, turned his mount in the direction that would lead them down the valley.

He caught one last glimpse of the Douana Chryseis, malevolent and strangely erotic as she fought to detain one of the stampeding beasts and fought back the memory of that body above him as he himself had been ridden with just as much fierce determination as he rode the beast below him.

Even then, in the midst of a flight upon which his life depended, weary to the bone and in agony from the wounds inflicted upon him, he felt a tell-tale stirring below the belt the buckle inside which resided what the Douana sought in her quest to gain ascendancy over the world and fellow woman who had made her an outlaw.

And then, knowing he would have to deal with the shame of his reaction to her at a later time, he was out of sight…

*****

The beast maintained its pace without any urging from Daffyd, almost as though it felt that by doing so it shed the alien clinging to its back.

Soon, the camp was a memory and a carpet of untrammeled snow lay before them upon the lower valley through which they fled as Daffy maintained his hold upon the beast's conveniently floppy ears with increasing difficulty.

The adrenalin of combat and flight had left him now and his bleeding body was one single mass of pain. Yet still he applied as much strength as he could muster. That the beast might not sense his weakness and turn upon him.

His determination bolstered by his desire to thwart the Douana Chryseis.

For whom - as much as he unwillingly relished the memories of the incredible body that had both ridden and ravished his own, he now held in his thoughts as a figure of evil and senseless dominion.

A driven and near demented woman, he considered, whose one-dimensional desire simply to rule *all* – and with no mitigating intent visible, or likely to be - made her a figure to be stopped at all costs.

Even if the benighted world and its ruling caste of women for whom she intended to become an avenging tyrant, had shown him and his crewmates nothing but contempt and human bondage since his craft had been forced to crash land upon it.

It was only when they reached open-land again and the beast began to slow and finally stop, that Daffyd dismounted and, using some vines that littered snowscape, tethered the near comatose animal to a nearby tree. Then,

scooping up snow to rub on his cuts and gashes, he realised he was close to passing out from a mixture of agony and fatigue himself. Fatigue he could not give way to as he knew that, the moment his pursuers managed to herd together the beasts who had stampeded they would be coming after him.

Wrapping the cloak around him, he struggled to remain awake until the beast – like his brothers, renowned for his recuperative abilities, recovered enough to continue.

This time, however, at a more sedate and energy conserving pace.

*****

He was three days on the open land.

Thankfully, without a sight of his pursuers who, no doubt, had been fooled by his decision to take the less exacting but far more obvious escape route of the plains to the more arduous but less conspicuous trails up into the mountains.

In his fatigue, Daffyd rode in a kind of semi-awareness that did not prevent him from becoming feverishly alert. Frequently he mistook the shapes of shadows, trees and rocks for riders and took what cover was available until he was sure he was mistaken. He was afraid to dismount lest he fell asleep, though the vines with which he had tethered the beast made a useful makeshift bridle and allowed him to handle and maneuver his mount with greater ease and less expense of energy.

For once, he was grateful for the powerful wind which blew fresh snow over his tracks to obliterate them the moment he passed; yet at least twice he did see riders in the distance and each time managed to cover both himself and his mount with camouflaging snow until the danger passed in a different direction.

And then he *did* rest.

Far in the distance towards the horizon, he could see the outline of the ruined towers that were now his former owners sepulcher and again, as had happened during his flight from the Douana, he felt himself hardening below the waist – almost as if he had been programmed to react in such a way to… *certain* …women.

He knew that he wasn't entirely sure where he was going but told himself this was probably a good thing.

After all, if he had no true idea of his location then how could his pursuers?

In the tortured badlands outside the Fastness, maligned by many a millennia of snow, ice, frost and flood, it was certainly easier – if not easy - to follow a man.

But to find a lone man, lost in that wilderness was another matter

The odds, he knew, were with him, and the knowledge brought more than one grim smile to Daffyd's determined face during his flight and mission to keep his word to Myrina and return the talisman to it its rightful place that her soul might know peace in eternity.

Though. For the life of him, he could not bring himself to fully understand why he would have not only given his word to one who had used him so shamefully but be prepared to accept such hardship in making good upon it.

And this while having no idea of the kind of reception he would receive from the hateful women of this planet should he reach there.

He would soon find out…

Ten



Many sunsets later an unbidden image of Myrina came to him, again as she gazed down upon with haughty pleasure as he slathered at her footwear while masked and collared, kept in place by the locked collar and attached leash she so enjoyed having wear.

And unmanly response his manhood supplied to the memory of his own disgrace that was almost as crushing to his sense of masculinity as the sense

of loss he took from the knowledge he would never find himself on the end of her leash again.

The image led him into others of even more degrading and painful memories of her treatment of him when he realised they were on a plain that sloped upward to a black and towering rock-face.

A rock-face into which was hewn a single pass.

Sensing to where it led he urged his mount forward with the vines consisting of its makeshift bridal and they moved forward until, some fifteen minutes later, they came to the mouth of the pass itself.

The pass as they approached its end was bathed in an eerie crimson light and, as he emerged further, Daffyd saw that the landscape was bathed blood-red by the receding sun.

A sight that was as strangely compelling as it was terrifying as he pondered just what awaited him when he returned the missing talisman.

Would it be a hero's welcome – as much as these women he considered Amazons after that race of mythical women from earth's history of which he had read so much?

Or would it be a return to the slavery of both a domestic and sexual kind he had known in the service of Myrina?

Slavery that had left no stone unturned in the attempted destruction of both his self-respect and his manhood itself.

And, should the latter prove the case, and he was returned to bondage at the feet of a woman likely to prove an even harsher owner than Myrina, why had he even made the promise to the dying woman – let alone feel compelled to make good upon his word?

Had Myrina, even with her last breath, somehow used the power she possessed to command him to ensure he gave his unbreakable word to do as her fearful soul needed?

It was a conundrum he was still pondering when he emerged fully from the pass and the whole panorama unfolded before him.

So red was the sky and the landscape below it, Daffyd could almost believe the world had self-mutilated.

To the earthman's mind, it seemed as if he was upon the threshold of the inferno itself, and recalling his own experiences in the metropolis sprawling before him – and the even more shameful and degrading treatment handed out to the other men, if not the women, who made up his fellow crew-mates – he could hardly be blamed for thinking he had stumbled upon the summer residence of a world consisting of female Lucifer's.

A dark and recent memory crept to the forefront of his mind and he recalled the frightful hallucination the talisman had inspired when last he imagined stepping through this ill-favoured pass.

He forced remembrance of that vision from his mind, by a great effort.

Turning back in his condition was not an option and he knew that death and torture surely lay behind as well as ahead of him.

Possibly.

The talisman he carried would prove the key.

The beast who now seemed as weary as its rider plodded on and Daffyd saw a great walled city to which the pass had brought him

A city, only having left the palatial quarters and gardens of his former owner the once, he did not recognise.

Then, with the talisman of Harmonia Apollonia strapped secure and unseen in the buckle of the blood-stained belt around his waist given him by his former owner for the saviour of her soul, he knew more than a little hesitancy.

Double-checking to see it was still where he had last left it, Daffyd took the talisman of Harmonia Appollonia from its buckle and stared at it.

Which was about the exact moment he lost consciousness…

*****

He was stood in a large square, lined about with trader's stalls and the booths

of wine-sellers as they closed up at the end of the day.

Beyond were the buildings and streets.

A city.

Lurking grandiosely against the background of brooding mountains which hemmed it in and, no doubt, provided a natural defence against invaders likely to attempt and unlikely assault via the single-pass through which he had made his entrance.

The traders were eyeing him curiously as they were supervised by their female masters and suddenly he heard the tramp of military feet in the distance.

Sure enough, not a minute later, a small detachment in light armor made their way into the square and pushed their way through to him as he regained presence of mind, at least, to return the talisman to its buckle without being observed..

A very young officer with a dazzling demanded to be told at once who he was and why he was in their city.

“No one crosses the wilderness in snow,” she said, eyeing him balefully as a soldier to her size who towered at least five inches above Daffyd himself and looked as if she were twice as muscular stepped in front of their uninvited guest.

“And least of all a man,” she sneered into Daffyd’s tired, unshaven, and unwashed face; almost as if inviting him to take exception to her demeaning of his gender.

“The clans of Bellohk have joined to form an army under the Douana Chryseis and are close behind me,” Daffyd said, ignoring the huge woman and speaking to the woman in charge. “If this is Rhodius, they intend to take it.”

The crowd picked that up and, along with the soldiers, burst into laughter.

“I will see your superior, and at once,” he demanded.

There was laughter at his presumption.

“You'll see exactly what we wish you to see!” snapped the young woman, a comely and fresh faced example of the world’s womanhood despite the contradiction of her armour and her severe tone. “What's this nonsense about the clans of Bellohk making peace with each other to form an army?”

Daffyd regarded her in a way she could not mistake to be anything other than disapproval.

Then, when her serious but pretty cheeks had flushed red under his gaze:

“I have fought in many battles,” he told her. “And *never* have I or my comrades in arms refused to listen, when we received a warning of imminent attack.”

She was not moved and Daffyd breathed an exasperated sigh.

“The talisman of Harmonia Apollonia that provides the city of Rhodius – if this be that city – has been missing for some time – and the Douana Chryseis knows this,” he told her. “Fortunately for Rhodius, she neither has it in her possession nor knows where to acquire it.”

He paused, then:

“But I do.”

The females in the crowd, who obviously had no idea the talisman was missing, so well had their rulers hidden its loss, began to shout. The women were not of high-rank but they were adequately clothed – which was more than could be said for the men they owned. Men who looked cold, miserable and beaten, and did not look at all troubled by the possible loss of the talisman for whom the winter had been long, arduous, and was not finished quite yet – though their summers would be improved by warmth and nothing little else.

Eleven



He was now certain he was in Rhodius.

He may not have seen enough of the city whilst inside Myrina's home and on their flight from the city with the talisman to recognise it, but he did recognise the imposing woman who had presided over the slave auction at which he and his male colleagues had been sold.

And this as each of the female members of that same crew who had survived their forced landing looked on and seemed strangely… *animated* …by the spectacle of their crew-mates being sold into the service of an alien female.

It was one of those former crew-mates who stood at the imposing woman's side now and gazed at him with what he could only describe as insolence towards her former captain.

Ensign Nadia Kopecki.

One of the younger females aboard their ill-fated ship and one of the more attractive and more… *erotic* …examples he had visualized many times in his sleep.

Dressed now from head-to-foot in gleaming leather with a strange green sheen which did nothing to diminish his former and unsated lust for her.

He saw also what looked to be a knife strapped about her thigh.

A former lust-object who, the body language between her and the imposing woman seated on an ornate high-backed chair told him, had found a lust-object of her own.

A former comrade whose demeanour expressed nothing but confidence, despite the fact he was only yards from her.

Confidence inspired, no doubt, by the presence in the chamber, and just out of earshot, of five fearsome and powerful looking female soldiers tasked with the duty of protecting her and, more importantly, their Douana.

Feigning indifference to the insolence of power he saw in his former Ensign's eyes, Daffyd turned his attention to the woman into whose presence he had eventually been led. Another savage beauty with flaming red hair above a body built for sex – and not solely for members of her own gender – who was at least the equal of the Douana Chryseis and her superior in height and muscularity.

“My people tell me you have some outrageous fiction concerning the talisman of Harmonia Appollonia,” she began in a voice utterly devoid of warmth; though Daffyd did not miss the way her eyes drank him in.

“The Douana Chryseis,” said Daffyd, grimly controlling his anger, “will be battering at your gates within two days,” he told her, ignoring her question for now.

“She has battered before without the slightest joy,” came his answer. “Why should this be of any concern to me or my people?”

“Perhaps,” he began, “because you had the talisman in your possession at the time. Without it, things are a little different, wouldn’t you say – even if you have not seen fit to trouble your subjects with its loss?”

She did not answer immediately and, instead, crinkled her eyes thoughtfully after Nadia Kopecki took advantage of the silence to whisper in her ear.

The head facing him, savage yet somehow aristocratic features shrouded in a halo of fierce red-hair, nodded with understanding.

“I knew you were familiar to me,” she said, almost as if to herself. “And my loyal Nadia has just informed me that you were bought as the chattel of the accursed Myrina.”

It was not a question and Daffyd saw no reason to supply an answer, but turned instead a baleful and accusatory look upon the turncoat who had turned upon her former comrades – or at least the males amongst them – though he did utter a one word response by way of a question of his own:

“Loyal?”

The former Ensign’s cheeks reddened under his disgusted scrutiny, but her eyes remained on his – albeit with difficulty.

“There is no honour in remaining loyal to that or those who possess none themselves,” the woman whose name he recalled as Arfemia – *Douana* Arfemia – assured him loftily. “You are a man. What would you know of such an elevated condition?”

His was ready with his answer:

“Enough to ensure that when my word is given it is acted upon and seen through until my own honour is satisfied,” he told her, eyes not leaving the treacherous former Ensign for whom all trace of his equally former lust had vanished.

This time, she did avert her eyes from his own as he continued:

“And enough not to betray those former colleagues and shipmates – even if they are men – who had shown me nothing but care and protection during our travels together.”

The Douana Arfemia was unfazed and Daffyd got the impression she was intrigued by him.

And *not* just intellectually.

“I assume from the fact you are here alone and feel secure enough to speak your mind without fear of retribution,” she began, “that your former owner no longer exerts the control an owner should exert over her chattel.”

Turning his gaze from Nadia Kopecki, he regarded his interrogator, remaining silent under the somewhat slitted and cruel observation of her dazzling and purple eyes as she continued:

“Which tells me in turn that the accursed traitor Myrina is no longer of this world.”

He nodded.

“So tell me what is to stop me from simply allocating you to another owner who will be given full control over you and make you think twice about speaking to a superior in such a way again?”

Daffyd recalled the words Myrina had whispered into hi ear before she passed and smiled.

“Really? You smile? Knowing that I could soon have what skin that remains to you flayed from your worthless hide and even have your manhood of which you seem so proud removed from your keeping by either the use of a metal cage specifically designed for the purpose or, if you displease me too much, recommend to your new owner that you be emasculated completely?”

“If it pleases,” interjected the treacherous former Ensign as Daffyd made to reply, “it would be my honour to have ownership of him transferred to me.”

The warm brown eyes that were now as glacial as the landscape Daffyd had only recently traversed, suddenly found the resolve to stare into his as she added:

“I promise that the dog will never show such disrespect in your presence or that of another woman again.”

The listening Daffyd could only shake his head and allow his thoughts to question how he could ever have mistaken the sadistic and faithless young bitch before him as a desirable and compassionate woman worthy of a man’s time and affection.

“I will take it under consideration, Nadia,” said the Douana, the eyes regarding the man before her seeming to indicate she had plans of her own for him.

“Then you yourself might wish to consider the late Myrina’s final words… The words she whispered to me after I had promised to return the talisman to Rhodius in order to salvage her soul and protect your city and your lives.”

He was still smiling, knowing it would irritate her.

And absolutely infuriate the young bitch at her side who had just offered her services as his new owner.

Irritated or not, though, the Douana was unable to prevent herself from giving a start at his declaration of returning the talisman.

Her own words, when they came, were uttered more with hope than assurance.

“And what exactly did the traitor have to… *whisper* …to you?”

Daffyd made her wait, smile still in place.

Then, finally:

“What she whispered to me,” he began, “was her very last order to me as my… *owner*. Made while she breathed long enough to deliver it and bind me

to her wishes.”

The Douana’s eyes asked what that order might be, though Daffyd sensed she already knew what he was about to say…

Twelve



There had slept upon a bed of skins and woven cloths and his freshly bathed and tended body had luxuriated upon it, refreshed after a sleep of indeterminate duration.

Until the guards from the chamber had arrived and, wearing fresh clothing, he had been escorted to another comfortable, if less spacious and ornate, than the one he had visited last.

This time there was no sign of either the Douana or his fellow earth-woman he took to be her lover; it was simply him and yet another woman.

A woman, insultingly to his intelligence, dressed in a way likely to prove appealing to a man of earth.

Or *any* man, come to that.

Though he still suspected the hand of Nadia Kopecki in the seductive dress of the black haired woman in boots and what passed for stockings on this matriarchal world.

To his surprise, the guards withdrew and he was left with the woman who – again insulting his intelligence – bore a strong resemblance to his former and deceased owner.

Much good their puerile attempt at subterfuge would serve them.

"What?

"Did they really think he was pining for his late and formerly sadistic female owner so much he would simply spill his guts when placed in a room with someone who resembled her?

The woman chosen to fill the role, though, was rather fine.

This he admitted to himself as his recently acquired pants filled involuntarily.

She wore leather boots with red-hoops and dark hose contrasted sexily with the milky white skin of her thighs and had a fine, haughty but approachable, demise about her. The leather tunic above showed off her breasts to impressive effect and left her shoulders bare as her raven black and untied hair cascaded over them. Her eyes were brightly cynical but not mocking.

On first appearance, Daffyd, despite the insult to his perceived intelligence, both liked and desired her.

A reaction that had him biting his lip as he recalled how beguiling such first impressions could be.

And *especially* in regard of women.

No matter which planet they begat from.

Ensign Nadia Kopecki being but the latest example the admittedly biased Daffyd considered a truism.

She appeared a civilized woman, he told himself. But then, so did they all. At least when dealing with other women. So civilized, in fact, he knew from

their own history when compared to that of his own world that the origins of their culture were many millennia advanced before the first clay brick was put to use in Babylon. Even if they were technical children when compared to the advances his own people had made.

The above, Myrina had informed him, a proscription of the Harmonia Appollonia herself that technology should be used to enhance the lives of the planet's women rather than be set to the development of new weapons that would not only kill them with more efficiency but would mean eternal competition to see who could devise the most potent killing machine.

It was the reason the weapons on his downed craft would not function and the reason he was where he was now.

Had it not been for this… *supernatural* …proscription of the talisman concealed at his waist, he and his crew-mates would not only be free but, should they have wished, be the rulers of their new world.

He wondered if she and the other women of the kingdom were *too* civilized. His thoughts harking back. Had peace and unchallenged supremacy drawn and cut their claws so fully they would be no match for the wild clanswomen coming fast across the snow towards them? Despite all the savage talk that had been aimed his way.

Talk was cheap, he told himself, and the women headed towards Rhodius with but one thought in mind were not of a mind to parley.

"It is a strange tale you bring, Bryn Neville Daffyd of earth," observed the woman when he had seated himself in the chair arranged opposite her – no doubt that he could drink in her sensuality with an unrestricted licence likely to increase her appeal to him.

A ploy that was – and to his immense disappointment with himself – having some success with him.

Daffyd told his story just the same – or at least as much as he felt it circumspect to divulge at this point. it.

He spoke slowly, watching the impact of every word upon her, grateful for the rest that had returned his senses to their full sharpness.

“You do realise that, though Myrina gave you an explicit order to obey no women but her and that, as your owner at the time of her death, you were – are – compelled to obey her still, there are other ways available to make you… *malleable?*”

He had seen for himself some of these ways practised upon other men – and in Myrina’s own household – but, after his experience in the women’s camp being all but flayed alive, he was reasonably confident he possessed the fortitude to withstand whatever was thrown at him without becoming the mindless serf it was suggested he might become.

It also occurred to him to question why Myrina had not simply ordered him to return the talisman rather than simply accept his word he would do so.

Could it have been that the owner who had actually saved his life did so from more than a sense of protecting her property?

That she did so because she had… *feelings* for him also?

The woman, whose name she told him when asked was “Odreesa”, asked him many questions regarding the Douana Chryseis and these he considered it safe to answer.

“Where was the camp?...

“How many women?...

“What exactly, did the Douana Chryseis say and want from you?”

Daffyd had answered, with meticulous care as Odreesa sat in a curious pose of one who is listening intently but is, yet, lost in thought.

The fingers playing nervously about the hilt of a short sword resting at her side, he noticed, belonged to a hand that was not that of a warrior but belonged to a scholar or a lady-of-leisure – perhaps both.

Whatever, but it was certainly not the hand of a woman who had known combat.

There was not a callous or blemish upon its smooth and well-tended surface.

She changed the subject suddenly:

“Douana Arfemia informed me you told her that the, so-called, *‘Douana Chryseis’*, ordered you scourged. Why was this?”

“I put one of her chieftains in her place,” he answered without preamble, not entirely truthfully but enjoying the look of discomfort upon her sensuous face as a man told her he had taken a woman to task.

When he had gone on to tell her as much of his story as he was willing to tell, Odreesa sighed and rose, regarding Daffyd from under hooded eyes:

“It is a tall tale, but… I can believe it.”

She closed the distance between them as he sat in his chair still and as his eyes confronted her taut midriff and wandered down to those milky-white thighs where they met the darker material of her hose, he felt the pull of her sexuality.

And fought it until his irritation at being so patronised – or *“matronised”*, as his thoughts had it – ensured he could no longer help himself:

“Tell *me* now, Odreesa,” he began, raising his eyes past her magnificent leather-clad breasts as his thoughts raced…

“Why do all the women here seem to have such stupendous bodies?”

“…Do you place such little value on the intelligence of a man that you would insult him by being so obvious in your form of dress?”

To his great pleasure, her face hardened with annoyance and she averted those hooded and sensual eyes he was beginning to find so fascinating.

Her embarrassment did not last long, however:

“Given the quality of the men I have come across,” she told him, a slight colouring at her cheeks telling him she was attempting to sound more confident and self-assured than she felt, “my answer would have to be a most resounding yes.”

He allowed himself a small laugh at this and she continued, as if it were important to her that he understand her contempt for his gender:

“Those of your sex make the most useful and obedient of servants, but for all

matters requiring strength of character and intelligence they are to women as children are to loving but strict mothers."

"Loving but strict mothers with strength of character and superior intelligence such as Douana Chryseis and her followers, you mean?" he asked, the question deepening the flush spreading itself more widely across her cheeks.

"The same women with such strength of character they are set on obliterating your city and your very lives?"

"We have only your word for that," she responded, averting her eyes from his as she did.

"The word of a man you said you believed not moments before," he reminded her.

Daffyd yawned suddenly weary of the whole thing and wondering not only why he had given Myrina his word in the first place but why he was so determined to follow through on it and save her soul and the lives of the women she had once considered friends.

"Believe me or not believe me," he told her. "What I tell you will be easily proved."

Her gaze returned to him as he finished:

"Simply wait a day or two."

A silence stretched out between them and it was obvious she was giving great thought to his assertion and the danger of ignoring it.

It also occurred to him as equally obvious that the Douana Arfemia placed great trust in this woman's judgment and would act upon her recommendation.

"I will advise the Douana to arm the city," she said at last. "I dare not do otherwise. But I will tell you this..."

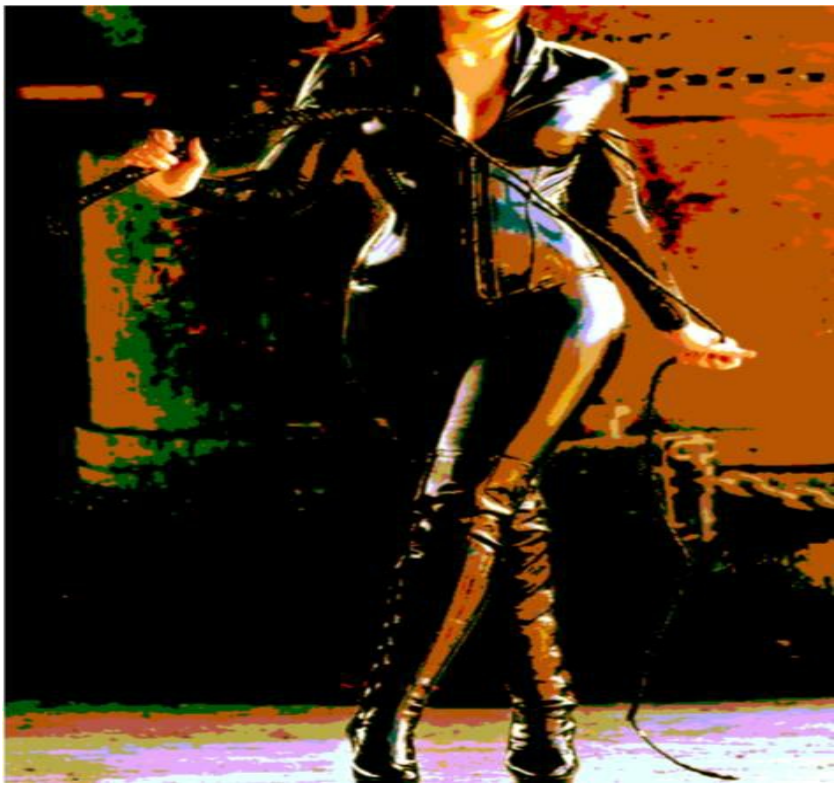
A look of fiery intent which belied the profession of scholar – if indeed that was what she was – transferred itself from her eyes to his. "If the attack does not come and you have set a whole city upon a war-footing for nothing there will be no ending to the torment you will suffer and I, for one, will gladly

assist my Douana in inflicting them upon you.”

The lips he found so sensuous became a sneer as she finished:

“And for as long as you remain alive to… *appreciate* …them.”

Thirteen



It was former Ensign Nadia Kopecki who came to wake him the following morning, with two guards stationed beyond the open entry to his temporary but comfortable quarters.

A former treacherous and hateful Ensign for whom he could not prevent his loins desiring – as much as need disgusted him.

His desire for her all the more surprising as she had decided to present herself upon this morning dressed in skin-tight leather and knee-length boots with wicked heels that, back on earth would have seen her earn a good living as a retro dominatrix.

A look which, before his landing and subsequent slavery to Myrina, would

have made no appeal to him whatsoever.

She even held a long thing whip between her fingers.

“Our warriors are already complaining about a false alarm,” she told him. “Rhodius has not fought a war for centuries and they find it hard to believe they will find themselves having to fight one now. No army, after all, has breached the walls surrounding Rhodius nor made it through the single-file passes leading to the wilderness in centuries of our earth years .”

He gave her a look of utter disgust.

“Your warriors, you say,” he almost hissed, the very sight of her making him wish to throttle the life from her svelte neck.

Even if his cock did have another view on the subject.

“Were you always so deceitful and treacherous you could jettison your own comrades simply to make your own life more comfortable?”

Having had time to accustom herself to the venom she inspired in a man she had once desired so strongly, she was not so fazed by his contempt upon this occasion.

“You labour under the illusion I am the only woman amongst those who survived our landing to have resigned herself to life here, my *former* captain,” she said, growing in confidence each time she asserted herself towards him, the fifteen year gap in years and shipboard seniority as nothing to her now.

“You lie,” he snapped, thinking of those other estimable women who had survived. “There is no way upon this or any other planet that the women I knew would take so craven a route.”

Nadia Kopecki laughed.

“You must remind me of that again when you see your first-mate and second-in-command, Eklund, being walked upon a lead by your so favoured blonde communications officer.”

The inference hit him with all the power of spear to the gut.

“Not Eklund!”

“Not Amanda!”

“Please tell me you jest, Nadia,” he asked in a softer voice, using her first-name in the hope it might reach something of the young woman he had once thought her to be. An image of the masculine Eklund being paraded around in leash and collar by a woman of this lopsided and foul world was bad enough. But to be led as if he were nothing more than a tame and domesticate pet, and by a woman some five years his junior who had been under his command also, was something Daffyd knew his friend and shipmate would *never* recover from.

And led by the same forever cheery and shapely blonde he himself had made love to on many – badly kept secret – occasions.

She was already nodding her head, eyeing him carefully in case he decided to spring and she needed to call upon the guards outside before he throttled her upon her next words:

“It is true, Daffyd,” she confirmed, returning the compliment with a different reason in mind. “It was Amanda who divulged both yours and Eklund’s whereabouts when you both went into hiding after the crash and we had been welcomed with open arms.”

Daffyd felt sickened.

“It was she who asked for Eklund and was given him as her slave after they performed some kind of secret ritual upon him… The same ritual they performed upon you for your own Lady Myrina.”

Her expression soured a little.

“I was not so fortunate when I asked for you, as that bitch Myrina had already earmarked you with the Douana.”

“You were more fortunate than you believe,” he told her truthfully, eyeing her slender neck in the hungry way of an assassin rather than a lover or servitor.

He saw the involuntary shudder traverse her body in the leather catsuit and

went on with an intensity likely to turn those shudders to outright trembling.

“Should by some abomination or perverse miracle I were to ever end up in your service it would be a *very* short period of servitude.”

He stared deep into her eyes and allowed all the hate he now felt for her to flow freely.

“A short period you would find *intensely* painful.”

For a second he thought she was about to call the waiting guards from outside, so on edge was she from his venom, but she controlled herself with an effort and seemed about to speak when he allowed his own voice to roll over her:

“You may also tell the faithless bitch, who is no doubt your closest ally in this benighted place, that should she ever find herself in my presence alone I will snuff out her worthless existence with no more thought than I would end the life of a rabid dog.”

He paused to let her see the depth of his sincerity and asked himself how he could feel such anger and revulsion and yet, in spite of the sincerity of his disgust, want to throw the cat-suited bitch to the floor and ravage her until she howled.

“That is my promise to both of you,” he said, mastering his own traitorous lust with no small effort of will. “Be sure to pass this message on to your sister in malevolence and tell her I will be doing all I can to return my friend Eklund’s manhood to him.”

She scoffed, regaining something of her composure now that she felt safe he would not attack her – at least for now.

“Good luck with that, you pompous and sanctimonious windbag,” she told him, though he noticed with a curl of the lip that she edged closer to the open door as she delivered her insult. “You live in a woman’s world now and your threats count for noting. I have but to whisper to the Douana Arfemia and you would find yourself once again lashed and scourged. Far from making threats upon my person you should look to your own safety.”

He laughed.

“Your insistence that you hold the talisman of Harmonia Apollonia will soon be seen as the pitiful little bargaining chip that it is. And when that happens they will hear your own screams from here back to the miserable Earth you love so much.”

Allowing himself a derisory little smile he knew would infuriate her, he moved to the window.

Looking southward, to where the plain ran down from the mountains and spread away below Rhodius, he could see nothing moving out there.

The frozen landscape was notable only for its emptiness and the absence of anything denoting life – even the wildlife seemed to be in a condition of forced and fearful hibernation.

Nothing marred the empty whiteness.

“You do know they will attack with the dawn.”

Again she scoffed.

“They would not be so stupid – not while knowing the power of the talisman protects the city and all women who dwell within it.”

“I agree” he said, surprising her. “It would, as history has told them, be to commit suicide.”

She looked pleased with herself.

For a while, anyway.

“But for a reason I fail to understand,” he told her, “you refuse to acknowledge that the talisman is no longer held here. A salient fact the barbarians at your gates are only too willing to embrace.”

Her confidence was evaporating before her eyes.

“But…”

“You, like your Douana,” he interjected, believe that because I say I have knowledge of the talisman’s whereabouts that I must have it hidden somewhere within the city walls.”

He saw the prospect of his having hidden Myrina’s spiritual salvation and his

bargaining chip somewhere beyond the city where it could be of know use to their well-being sink in to her selfish little mind and was happy to prolong the lie; knowing all the time that the item in question resided in the buckle of the belt holding up his newly acquired trousers.

“You…” she began. “You wouldn’t dare. It would be your life as well as ours should they attack without the protection of the talisman in place. You’re bluffing. Myrina commanded you to fetch it her and you are still compelled to obey her, be she dead or alive.”

He shrugged.

“But she didn’t command me,” he told her, loving the puzzlement creasing elfin features he had once found pleasant to look upon and wanted now only to throttle or fuck.

“She…?”

“I offered,” he said.

“You…?”

“That’s right. She was as puzzled as you.”

“But… why?”

“Because, for all the ill-treatment I received in her service, I sensed something… *noble* …in her. A fact confirmed for me when she risked her life to save me from the mountain women intent upon taking me from her and slew them.”

Nadia Kopecki was watching him now as if he were a plague sent from above, the seed he had planted in her mind that the talisman might not be in the city as she and the Douana believed taking route and leading her to peruse more… *unpleasant* …alternatives.

“An act of sacrifice which ultimately cost Myrina her own life and one a self-entitled piece of filth like you would not understand,” he finished.

The insult slid effortlessly from her shoulders.

She had far more important things to worry about now, after all.

At the top of them being the prospect her former captain was telling the truth and, soon, the unused to action troops for whom the talisman had made such

engagement unnecessary, would be all that stood between the city and all who lived in it and annihilation.

Turning sharply on her heel, she sped from the room and made her way to the quarters of the Douana…

Fourteen



They waited upon the ramparts, looking down upon the frozen waste of the plain that was, as yet, devoid of life.

The Douana with Daffyd at her side and Nadia Kopecki a few steps back.

Soldiers lined the walls at regular intervals, huddled in their cloaks against the biting wind that came out of the dark, whistling across and down from the plain stretching before them, as in the streets below and inside the gates the watchfires shuddered and flared as they waited for dawn.

They waited.

And they waited.

And still there was nothing.

“How can you know they're coming?”

Daffyd shivered and declined to answer.

They would acknowledge him right soon enough.

“If,” the Douana told him, beyond the hearing of the soldiers who, though cold, remained confident they were protected by the talisman, “you spoke truly to Nadia and the talisman whose whereabouts we knew we could not

torture from you is not within the city, your death will be no less gruesome and painful as ours."

Daffyd shrugged, "Then you will have your answer at least."

The Douana nodded her savage and sensual head and something stirred in him.

And no, it was not the usual libidinous reaction the women of this world inspired in him – even if it was not entirely absent.

That reaction, if he was truthful, ever-present whenever he was in her vicinity

His thoughts, he realised to his surprise, were expressing admiration for her – or at least certain elements of her.

No.

This was not *just* sexual.

It was the fact that, unlike the soldiers, confident in their ignorance, and the terrified looking and not at all ignorant earth-woman at her back, Douana Arfemia's expression was one of determination and resolution.

Perhaps, even, resignation.

In the face of an oncoming disaster for both her and her people, if his lie to Nadia Kopecki concerning the talisman's whereabouts she believed true came to pass, she remained steadfast and unyielding. *"Queenly"*, in fact.

"She is a woman it would be an honour to serve," sprang the thought into his mind he hurriedly attempted to snatch back at the very moment it was thought.

And yet he knew and could not deny the effect this woman was having upon him – an effect he had heard described from the lips of the Douana Chryseis in regard of the impact a sight of her enthralling and beguiling features would have upon him should she choose to reveal herself.

An impact not delivered when she had done just that and rode his supine yet responsive body to one of the most explosive orgasms of his life.

Without the subsequent enthrallment and bondage on his part.

But with this woman – a woman who had seen no reason not to let him gaze upon her unmasked face – he could feel these responses growing towards her on his part and had even caught himself imagining what it would be like to find himself wearing her collar as he knelt on all-fours at the end of her leash.

He felt a white-heat of self-recrimination sear the back of his eyes as he cursed himself for visualizing in a positive form what his goof-friend Eklund was no doubt experiencing at the feet of the traitorous Amanda.

Thoughts of the deceased Myrina and her treatment of him stoked the fire of his self-disgust:

"What is happening to me?... Have I been under a woman's heel for so long that I begin to crave it?"

Next to him, he saw those sensuous features with their scimitar nose and full lips regarding him curiously with the smallest of smiles, almost as if she had divined his thoughts and found them… *appealing*.

He coughed and used words to cover his embarrassment, half of a mind to inform her that the talisman resided in his belt-buckle and that – if it truly did provide protection – she and her people had nothing to be concerned about.:

"They will wait for darkness. They will have an hour or so, between moonset and dawn."

The Douana nodded, half-smile still in place as if to let him know she had seen through his new… *appreciation* …of her.

Kicking himself but grateful the Kopecki bitch seemed not to have witnessed their exchange, Daffyd turned his head towards the cliffs above Rhodius as they soared upward. Blotting out half the sky as they rose. Close in to the walls, they seemed to tower outward in a curving mass, like the last wave of eternity rolling down, crested white with the ash of cremated dynasties.

A shudder ran through him and he recognised it as fear.

Something he was unused to feeling when warfare was spontaneous and visceral.

But waiting?

Waiting for hostilities to begin?

Be it with swords and spears or the sophisticated weaponry of his own that would no longer work upon this one?

That always took its toll upon his nerves.

Daffyd knew that the Douana had ordered the narrow passes into the city to be filled with explosives and caved and knew that the attack, when it came, would not come from any of those directions.

Yet still a nagging worry ate at him.

He had come painfully to this place after Myrina's passing and some strange magic had let him see forbidden things, had linked his mind in an unholy bond with the long-dead mind of one who had been half a goddess – though he be a dread man.

Were his efforts on his former owner's behalf to prove futile he knew he would not be allowed to go unscathed and, more likely have nothing but a long and protracted death to look forward to.

As would the Douana herself.

He drew himself up sharply then, and silently swore at himself for such craven thoughts.

If the, in many ways, admirable woman alongside him could meet her fate with such magnanimity and bearing, then so could he, Bryn Neville Daffyd, formerly of Earth and, moreover, a man.

The sun touched the horizon then with a last gleam of reddish that tinged the snow and seemed to him a harbinger of that which must surely follow.

Nadia Kopecki, growing more and more fearful and trying to camouflage it with bluster, spoke then:

"I do not believe in your barbarians, Daffyd. You are simply buying time for reasons of your own and I will no longer play your game."

She spoke to the back of the Douana's head:

“I'm returning to my quarters to bathe and get warm.”

Then, receiving no acknowledgement from the woman Daffyd suspected was her lover, her foots were heard echoing from the stone steps as she disappeared out of sight.

The plain was now in utter darkness and the only light came from the faint, far Northern stars.

“Is she right, Daffyd?” asked the Douana, using his name for the first time with what he actually took to resemble something akin to regard. “Is that all you are doing? Simply buying time that you might free your colleagues and somehow escape us?”

He smiled and returned the compliment in regard of her own name – minus the honorific.

“To where, Arfemia?”

He noted her start and realised it was probably rare for her to be addressed so familiarly – even by her lovers.

And yet…

He sensed also that there was something in his familiarity she found… *pleasing*.

“Where could we possibly be safe on this planet except here – even if your idea of hospitality to strangers – at least the males amongst them - leaves so much to be desired?”

Daffyd settled himself against the parapet and scanned the snowscape below thoughtfully.

“I came here simply to honour one of your sisters who – despite having been a sadistic bitch to me – had saved my life at a time when I was unable to save it for myself. I came only that her eternal soul might know peace upon the return of the talisman she, and for reasons beyond me. Had so ill-advisedly stolen?”

They turned towards each other at the same time and their eyes locked.

“I had given my word, Arfemia, and, to me, my word once given is not to be withdrawn.”

To his surprise, not having witnessed anything much resembling honour from a woman during his stay here – at least not towards a man - she gave him a nod of understanding.

Before quickly asking the question uppermost in her mind:

“And the talisman, Daffyd? Can you at least assure me it is safe within the walls of Rhodius?”

He was about to answer, truthfully, when his senses suddenly tingled and he became alert, squinting his eyes and looking out into the distance at what appeared to be nothing.

“They come,” he told her.

She keened her own ears then turned back to him.

“I hear nothing.”

His hearing and sense of smell, far keener than the Douana’s, had picked up the scent of the beast’s transporting them and the stealthy but unmistakable sounds, of a vast army on the move in the darkness.

“Concentrate” he urged her.

“I still hear nothing,” she told him. “You are wrong. There is nothing on the plain.”

Daffyd said, “Wait…”

Fifteen



The Penthesilea dawn came with a rush and a leap, flooding the world with harsh light. The cruel and cold brilliance of its winter light glinted from sword-blades, from spearheads, from helmets and burnished mail. It dazzled the defenders as it was reflected from the war-harness of beasts and bounced

from helmets, head-bands and breastplates of the bare-armed female foot-soldiers as they arrayed themselves in motionless silence on the plain across from the city walls.

Despite their numbers, the women of the various clans of Bellohk made barely a sound above a whisper to be heard.

Until a hunting horn sent out one deep and sonorous cry into the crisp morning air and, on cue, the ranks of female warriors began to move.

And move in a way that seemed thoroughly orderly for a coalition of fiercely independent warriors of the wasteland who had not known the discipline of military life.

As if they had been drilled.

As if the whole attack had been many months in the planning.

Slowly at first, they came closer towards the walls, then more swiftly as discipline broke and the the barbarians swept toward the city with blood-curdling cries intended to fright the defenders as well as keep their own barbarian intent at white-heat.

On they came, a tide of imminent death, mayhem, and destruction towards the walls and its gates; tall women running like deer, leaping, shouting and swinging their great swords. Riders, spurring their mounts forward, the beasts snorting and frothing beneath them. Spears, axes, and sword-blades held high.

A fear-inducing sight of warrior-women and their beasts, shaking the ground with the thunder of their advance.

And there, Daffyd noticed, ahead of them all and in her black mail and bearing a sable axe, the Douana Chryseis herself.

Rhodius came to life then. There came the expected cries from below the ramparts and soldiers began to pour up onto the Wall.

Daffyd was not impressed by the quality of what he saw.

Not when he compared it to hordes brushing the gates as they made ready to make the city and its people theirs.

Mobs of citizens choked the alleys, he saw, and every rooftop was full. A troop of nobles went by, brave in their bright mail, to take up their post in the square by the great gate. A sight which reassured him not even a little.

The Douana Arfemia said nothing and Daffyd did not disturb her thoughts.

From the look upon the face that affected him more and more, they were dark indeed.

Suddenly, they were joined by Nadia Kopecki, her former contempt for Daffyd's assertion a memory and trying to bolster herself with bravado he could see was plainly forced.

"Let them attack!" she said. "Let them break their spears against the Wall. They will crawl away again."

Daffyd began to grow restless as barbarian archers let fly and the muted song of the bows became a wailing hum.

Women fell, and were kicked off the ledges by their fellows, their descent serving only to increase the blood-howl of the clans below as Daffyd heard the rap of scaling ladders against stone and a thudding from below.

"What is that?" queried a pale-of-face Nadia.

"Rams," he answered. "They are battering the gate."

She listened again, and Daffyd saw in her face the beginning of true fear as she realised not even her lover the Douana might be able to save her from the savage women below intent on owning the city and *everything* inside it.

The gates were holding though and, so long as they did, the inhabitants of Rhodius were safe.

For so long as they did hold.

It was a long fight and Daffyd watched it from the ramparts as it progressed. To his surprise, the soldiers of Rhodius fought bravely and well – no doubt bolstered by the belief that the talisman would come to their aid if things became critical. Should the walls be breached, however, he knew they would be as foundlings warding off hyenas against the superior battle-skills and

savagery of the women from the wasteland.

But the clans below were suffering also and their dead now lay so thickly at the base of the walls and beneath the wheels of the battering-ram they were finding it difficult to find forward momentum enough to even reach the gates – let alone batter it into submission.

But Daffyd knew enough of these barbarians to be sure there was no possibility of them simply giving up. They had sat restless and chafing in the valley for many days, anticipation high at the prospect of sating their desire for conquest and riches. Now the battle-madness was on them they would not be stopped by loss of some of their number.

Wave after wave of them rolled up, and were cast back.

Only to return even more relentlessly.

The intermittent thunder of the ram against the gates was even more spaced out now as the heavily-armored beasts themselves who had been trained to nudge it forward from behind found it becoming more difficult to gain leverage over the bodies of the clans-women beneath the ram's wheels.

And still, riding the lines and seemingly uncaring of her own safety as she was cheered by her women, could be seen the Douana Chryseis – waving her axe frenziedly as she urged them to even greater efforts.

"It is the end of Rhodius," said Nadia Kopecki as a ladder thumped against the ramparts not a few feet away from where she stood clinging to her lover for protection; watching wide-eyed and terrified as fierce women swarmed up the rungs, savage-eyed clanswomen with laughter in their mouths and death in their hearts.

Daffyd was there ahead of any defender with a spear he had taken from one of the fallen Rhodians.

He spitted two women through with it before the weapon was lost to him and a third came leaping over the parapet intent on decapitating him.

Daffyd simply received her into his arms, dragged her forward so she was off balance, then used momentum of his own to rush her back to the ladder and over the ramparts to sweep her comrades in savagery off the rungs and

crashing to the unyielding and ice hard earth below.

Catching up a dead man's blade, Daffyd set about the invaders with the Douana Arfemia at his side with his former Ensign nowhere to be seen – the only man in a sea of raging and warring women.

Within minutes his arm was as red as that of a veterinarian delivering a calf. But the joy of birth was a long way from his mind. And even as he killed and maimed, he managed to keep a vigilant eye on the bitch in the black-mail as she went back and forth tirelessly in attempts to keep her troops to a white-heat.

For all his efforts though, by mid-afternoon the barbarians had gained the Wall in three places. And had spread inward along the ledges of the ramparts, pouring up in a resistless tide as the defenders broke.

The ensuing rout became a panic.

“The talisman is not in the city and, thanks to the accursed Myrina, Rhodius must fall to the forces of savagery and night,” said the Douana Arfemia during a brief lull in the mayhem.

Daffyd looked at her, covered in blood but otherwise unmarked, standing tall and defiant, despite what she knew must face her in the hands of the conquerors, and almost felt an urge to genuflect before her which stunned him with its power.

More so by the desire he felt to… *serve* …this woman of another world whose people had enslaved his male crew-mates as well as himself and shown them only humiliation of both a social and sexual kind.

He let fall his sword and saw her eyes narrow to his side as she took the gesture for capitulation.

From below, the iron-sheathed timbers finally gave up resistance and one last hammer-stroke of the rams saw the gates breached.

Which as when the female nobles of Rhodius – to Daffyd’s admiration - made their first and final charge.

As soldiers they went up against the riders of Bellohk, and as soldiers they

held them until they died.

Those that were left were borne back into the square, caught as in the crest of an avalanche. And first through the gates came the winged battle-mask of the Douana Chryseis, and the sable axe which drank lives whenever it was swung.

His intention of handing the Douana Arfemia the talisman, in the hope there was something to its vaunted powers and might be of help to her in saving the day, forgotten, Daffyd leapt from the ramparts onto a rider-less beast and landed upon the saddle pad.

The Douana Chryseis, swinging her axe with abandon as she sensed her quest was about to prove successful, was directly ahead of him.

Daffyd's eyes shone with a strange, cold light upon sight of her and he struck his heels hard into the scaly flanks.

The beast plunged forward and Daffyd cut a path through the combatants until he was within hailing distance:

“Ho, there! *Chryseis!* He bellowed”

The black mask turned toward him, and the remembered voice spoke from behind the barred slot, joyously.

“The gods are with me. You are here! Come and feel the embrace of my axe, Earth-man. I have much to do so I promise I will make your end a speedy one.”

Daffyd could see his laugh above the tumult surrounding them infuriated her – just as it had been intended to do.

He urged his mount forward at the exact time she did the same.

Their two mounts clashed together and her axe came down in a whistling curve as his sword flashed to meet it.

And was shattered, leaving only the hilt clutched in Daffyd’s momentarily numbed hand.

So powerful had been the contact, however, that the axe of Chryseis, though

still intact, fell to the ground alongside the snapped sword-blade.

Daffyd pressed in.

Chryseis reached for her sword, but her fingers were also numbed by the force of the blow and she was a split second slow.

The hilt of Daffyd's weapon fetched her a stunning blow on the helmet protecting her skull and the dull thud of the contact numbed his hand still further as she reeled back in her saddle.

It was but for a moment, but that moment was enough for Daffyd to rip off the war-mask with his free hand that *all* might see her much vaunted face as his hands went about around the naked throat.

A gasp went up as the barbarian warriors paused in their carnage to take in those features that had been seen to this point by only a few – Daffyd amongst their number as she had ridden his treacherously hard cock – and stare.

He did not break that neck, as he had planned. And the Clansmen who had started in to save their leader stopped and did not move.

Daffyd knew now why the Douana Chryseis had never shown her face, and realised he had suspected it all along.

The rumour of that face and its ability to obsess and enslave was just that. A rumour. A myth perpetuated over time by Chryseis and chosen intimates - Seetar amongst them – that her rule over the barbarians should not be challenged if her rightly vaunted reputation in combat not be enough in itself to deter opposition.

The throat he held was the same, white and strong, throat he had seen above him as she rode his only recently awakened body to a volcanic eruption of pent-up seed. As was the mane of rust-red hair that now fell down to her shoulders over the shirt of mail. So too the passionate and kissable red mouth, tight now with fury beneath fierce eyes of the palest green that were as untamed as those belonging to the wildest of beasts.

The memories of that face, *that*, body, riding him as she sat impaled upon his cock and flexed her vaginal walls to supply him the most intense sexual

pleasure he had known to that point led him to a fateful hesitation.

A hesitation she was swift to take advantage of.

Her fists came up together between his outstretched arms and caught him under the jaw with a force that nearly snapped his neck.

Stunned but still conscious, he was taken clean out of the saddle to lay sprawled upon the bloodstained cobbles, all wind taken from his lungs.

Bending low, Chryseis wheeled her mount and snatched up the axe from where it had fallen before turning to face her warriors; the myth of her face blown and attempting to spin it in a way that might that might yet avoid disaster as she reached down to snatch-up her war-mask that she might once more conceal her features..

“So now you know,” she addressed them as Daffyd lay beneath her and attempted to regain his senses. “The face you have heard so much talk of is not arbitrary in its effect and only those I choose to feel its full force will succumb to its power.”

“And what of the Earth-man?” rang out a voice from the back, the rumour of her having taken him to her bed and revealed herself obviously having spread wide.

“It is true,” she answered, noting that the what remained of the forces protecting Rhodius had edged away from the fray and were arraying themselves beneath the ramparts in a more orderly fighting formation that, she knew, would serve them no purpose now their walls were breached. “The man I have just vanquished proved resistant to me. But do not suppose to yourselves that, because his provenance on another world provides him with immunity, that anyone else on our planet will prove equally resistant.”

Chryseis could hear mumbling coming from the ranked barbarians before her and took heart that she had said enough to allay any doubts they might have.

For now, anyway.

“I have led you well,” she said. “I have taken Rhodius.”

She gazed about her in challenge, hands fondling the sharp end of her axe

with a preoccupied affection.

Then:

“Will any woman here dispute me?”

Her face might still only be known to them from a fleeting glimpse before her war-mask had been replaced, but they did know the axe.

And, more importantly, what she could do with it.

The bloodied and savage female warriors looked from side to side uneasily, completely at a loss, and Daffyd, coming to his senses upon the ground, told himself he had only once seen another woman as proud, beautiful, defiant before.

And set him to wondering and, to his surprise, worrying as to the fate of the Douana Arfemia.

He also realised that the nobles of Rhodius were preparing to take advantage of the lull brought about by the unmasking of the barbarian Douana; believing, no doubt, that either the gods or the talisman had wrought a miracle to help them.

It lent them hope where they had lost all else but courage.

Led on by a large woman he did not recognise, they tore into the barbarians.

The woman who for the moment was the Douana Chryseis still, drove her spurs in deep and the beast beneath her leapt forward with an enraged howl into the ranks of the Rhodian nobles.

Again and again the great axe rose and fell… and then rose again.

And not once did she look back to see if those she had ruled followed.

Which was when her clanswomen found their tongues.

“*Chryseis! Chryseis!*” they cried, any doubts concerning the mythology of the face beneath the mask forgotten as their leader’s fearlessness detonated once more the blood-lust of only minutes before.

Battle resumed as they made to follow the example of their fearless Douana.

Daffyd, scrambling for his life underfoot, could not forbear smiling. Their childlike minds could see only two alternatives. To slay her out of hand for the *part* myth she had perpetrated upon them; or to not just follow as before, but worship her.

They had chosen to worship.

Somehow, amidst the carnage, he managed to take cover behind a wrecked market-booth, and then make his way from the square.

In the general blood-lust – and he being but a man - they had forgotten him.

Something, for the moment, he did not wish them to remember.

Finding a temporary concealment, he touched the bruise under his jaw where she had struck him, and thought of the lithe and swift strength of her. The way she had ridden alone into battle and then defied her own soldiers when her mythical face had been revealed and she needed to lie quickly to prevent losing her control. He also remembered the death of Sallinah, and how she had kept her bloodthirsty female-warriors tamed.

As he had been with Arfemia, he was filled with wonder and a deep, deep, excitement.

He remembered what Chryseis had said to him after their union:

"If you do not willingly give me the talisman, and there is anything left of you after we have tortured its whereabouts from your broken and bleeding lips, you will make me the most estimable and obedient of slaves."

He allowed himself a rueful laugh as he realized the memory had once again brought him to full tumescence, his eyes bright with an unnatural and uncharacteristic need to again know such subjection in the service of a woman.

So radically had this world altered him.

The tide of war had rolled on and he could tell there was fighting all over the city as the main struggle swept shrieking through the streets.

The short northern day was almost gone and was about to take the millennium old freedom of Rhodius with it..

Finding another bolt-hole that offered a more reasonable safety, he settled himself to wait…

Sixteen



Despite the cold and cries of bloodshed that continued throughout the night, Daffyd slid at one point into a fitful and confused sleep ravaged by fantastic and terrifying dreams - though when he came awake the only image from those dreams was of a composite woman.

A composite woman compose of both the Douana's.

Arfemia *and* Chryseis.

She was walking through desolation towards him, savage and predatory in her armour and weaponry, and there was something possessive about this woman who at one time was he ruler of the Rhodians and at another the axe-wielding Douana of the barbarians.

And he knew that whoever reached him first would be the one to chain his mortal soul and the obedience that went it to her forever.

The hand that finally reached for him belonged to…

He awoke with a start and gave a sigh that was part relief for still being a free-man – for as long as that and his life lasted – and disappointment that one or other of the two women had not… *claimed* …him as her own.

He was – again – erect.

After a few minutes during which he collected his wits and berated himself for his weakness, a shivering Daffyd placed himself back in the bitter wind and, furtively and forever vigilant, followed the bulk of the massive Rhodian walls until he found a postern door that had been conveniently left open, no doubt by some male kitchen-help in his haste to save his own skin.

Moving like a shadow despite his bulk, Daffyd ventured inside.

The passageway he found before him was empty, dimly lit by a single torch.

A stairway branched off from it, and he climbed it, with no idea of his direction and trusting to fate to see him right.

He emerged into a narrow hall, obviously for the use of servants. A tapestry closed the end and rippled from the chill draught that blew along the floor. He peered around it, and saw a massive, vaulted corridor, the stone walls panelled in wood upon which were carvings of beasts and women.

And, below even the beasts, men.

Men in various modes of service to their female-masters.

Many of the modes depicted being sexual and female dominated.

From the corridor a single doorway opened and…

He caught his breath at the sight.

Upon a pallet before it slept Seetar,, curled-up upon it like the faithful dog to her Douana she was.

Giving thanks to his luck, Daffyd went back down the narrow hall; certain there must be a back entrance to the Douana's chambers – even if that Douana was no longer named Arfemia.

Eventually, he found the narrow entrance he sought and stepped past it into the interior.

It was in darkness.

He felt his way, stepping with infinite caution as his eyes attempted to accustom themselves to the utter absence of light, and presently there was a faint gleam of brightness filtering around the edges of another heavy tapestry.

He crept toward it, and heard a woman's slow breathing on the other side.

He drew the curtain back, a careful inch.

The woman serving as an interior sentry was sprawled on a bench crossways by the door, upon the other side of which lay her faithful Seetar.

Still in her mail, she was asleep. Sword in hand. And sleeping deeply. A door set in the wall opposite was closed, Daffyd noticed as he tiptoed to the sleeping Douana.

He hit her with a blow to the back of her sleeping head and made sure to catch the sword before it fell as she grunted once and became utterly relaxed.

Listening for the watchdog on the other side of the door and hearing nothing, Daffyd bound the sentry with her own harness and shoved a gag in her mouth.

Satisfied, he went on and through the door in the opposite wall.

The room beyond was large and high and full of shadows. A fire burned low

on the hearth, and the uncertain light showed dimly the hangings and the rich tapestries laid at intervals upon the stone floor between the dark, sparse shapes of solid and plain furniture.

Daffyd made out the lattice-work of a covered bed, let into the wall after the northern fashion.

She was there.

Sleeping.

Her rust-red hair the colour of the flames as she lay at her ease, sleeping the sound sleep of the untroubled and conscience free, it appeared.

He stood a moment, watching her, and then, as though she sensed his presence, she stirred and opened her eyes.

She did not cry out. He had known that she would not. There was no fear in her.

She said, with a kind of wry humor, “I will have a word with my guards about this.”

Seventeen



She flung aside the covering and rose - almost as tall as he even in her bare-feet, white-skinned and very straight and wearing only the latticed leather bustier she had worn beneath the mail in which she had dressed to go into battle.

He could not prevent himself from noting the long thighs, narrow loins and magnificent shoulders, together with her small but pert and self-supporting breasts.

She moved as a man moved, confidence having long ago replaced coquetry – assuming it had ever lay claim to a place in her make-up – as she placed herself before him, body language revealing no hint of fear or distress..

“Well, Bryn Neville Daffyd of Earth?”

He swallowed back the urge to ravish her - or, if he was as truthful as he was ashamed, to fall to his knees and place his lips upon her succulent and

delightfully shaped toes as an act of homage.

“I have come to either warn or kill you,” he said with an effort. “Perhaps both.”

Her laugh only made her seem more desirable in his eyes.

“I could have slain you in the square,” she said with her sensually avian and predatory look. “But now I think you did me a service. The truth would have come out sometime. At least during the heat of battle they had no time to think about it with any great prescience of thought.”

She snorted derisively.

“Were any of them to be found in possession of such.”

Daffyd said slowly, “It is unworthy for a ruler to confess such contempt for those who serve her so faithfully.

Shrugging indifferently, she moved to one of the tall windows and looked out at the cliffs and the high notch of the pass and its covering of fresh snow that hid the blood of those same followers she had just derided.

“Harmonia Apollonia was a great Douana,” she said, suddenly reflective. “She came out of nowhere to rule with a rod of iron and women still speak of her as if she were half a goddess. Where did she get her power, if not from the far and uninhabited north to which Rhodius is the only gateway?”

Daffyd stayed silent.

“Why did she go back there alone at the end of her days, if not to hide away her secret? Why did she build Rhodius to guard the pass forever, if not to hoard that power out of reach of all the other nations of Penthesilea prevented access to the north by Rhodius and the uncrossable mountain range which makes it impossible to reach even by sea?”

“And this is what you mean to discover? The source of Harmonia Appollonia’s power?”

“You say it as if it were a bad thing,” her voice lashed at him. “Is not ultimate

power best served in the keeping of the one most worthy too exercise it?"

"And you have proved yourself this superior entity how?" he asked. "By torture? By execution? By decimating a stronghold that has kept peace for a millennia?"

"The stronghold in which you were deemed fit to be no more than the Lady Myrina's sexual bondsman and human dog, you mean"

His face flushed.

"Or is it that your defence of Rhodius is made because you found a taste for slavery to a woman here and wish to experience it again? Is that why your handsome brute cheeks colour as if you were a virgin Page, called upon to bathe his female-owner for the very first time?"

He ignored the discomfort her words caused both his conscience and cock coming erect beneath them.

"You are not Harmonia Apollonia. And nor will you ever be," he told her.

He took her by the shoulders.

"Listen to me, Chryseis. You're already Douana of Rhodius. Your legend is assured. Make it even more enduring by becoming a wise and merciful ruler. Go this route and you will eventually be considered half-a-goddess yourself."

"Content!"

Her face was close to his, and he saw the blaze of it, the white intensity of ambition and an iron pride.

"Are you content?" she asked him. "Have you ever been content?"

"For all your qualities. you're a fool, Chryseis. Would you be as Seetar, mad with desire for an obsession you can never possess."

"Do you forget the happiness she takes from simply being allowed to serve and be in my presence?"

"Seetar is a mad-woman… Is that how you truly see yourself? Forced to live in the shadow a reputation you can never hope to match? Hated instead of beloved in the way of Harmonia? Is that your grand design?"

“You have the talisman,” she said suddenly. “That I am sure of. And if need be, I will flay you alive to get it”

She turned from the window and faced him across the room, anger giving way to an emotion he could not quite place.

“She wanted you too, you know”

Daffyd was at a loss.

“The Douana Arfemia.” She told him. “Like me, she saw in you the slave and body-servant she wished at her side until death.”

“How flattering,” he jeered, his inner reaction nowhere near as collected and untroubled as the one he presented to Chryseis as he visualized himself in service to her fellow Douana. “And you know this how?”

“Arfemia told me,” came the instant answer. “Not moments before my axe gave her the merciful end her bravery in combat deserved.”

“She…? She is…?” Daffyd began, the news hitting him harder than he knew it should.

“Dead,” she finished for him. “Your dreams of feeling her collar about your throat and the leash connecting to it in her hand are no more than that any longer. Douana Arfemia is gone and, in respect of her, all you have left are dreams.”

For some reason he felt suddenly bereft of energy and motivation.

What was he doing here?

What was he trying to achieve?

Why should he care if the woman in front of him ruled with all the cruelty of a more debauched and sadistic Russian Tsar from the medieval period upon his own planet?

He would never see his own land again and he cared not a jot for the people of this.

Except…

“She sensed it in you,” the newly minted Douana of Rhodius told him. “Told me that if it was not be her then it would be me to whom it would fall to ensure you found your true destiny.”

Deflecting her from the subject she was on, Daffyd found enough motivation to attempt to reason with her once again.

“Chryseis,” he said in a voice shot through with sincerity. Like you, I am convinced there is power to be found in the north lands. But I promise you it is a power that leads only to madness and, horror, and an evil that is beyond our understanding.”

“Really?... Then it is I who ask you: *you know this how?* ”’

“I… I have experienced it,” he responded instantly, once again experiencing the fear and wonder he felt when first he touched the talisman.

“Think about it, Chryseis,” he urged her. “Why do you think the talisman failed to protect Rhodius when it was in Rhodius itself? Even if it was hidden.”

“You…? You have actually held the surface of the talisman of Harmonia Appollonia?” she asked, ignoring his question.

He persisted:

“Could it be, you think, that the talisman saw in you a ruler who would prove worthy of the honour? A Douana it saw no reason to thwart and instead allowed events to unfold as they may?”

She was at least giving his words thought now and he allowed her thoughts time to draw their own conclusion.

Then, finally:

“It… It is possible… And you say you have actually held the talisman of Harmonia?”

He nodded, “And would not go into the north lands to experience what it showed me for all the power in the known universe.”

His eyes were suddenly faraway and without being aware he was about to do

so, everything he had experienced with the talisman to hand came pouring from him…

When he had finished it was harder to tell whose complexion of the two of them was the palest.

The full force of that dark vision inspired by the talisman swept over her as it did him and he came closer to her, driven by the need to make her understand.

“Yes, I have the talisman! And I have had a taste of its purpose. I think Harmonia Apollonia left it as a warning, so that none would follow her. For what can protect can just as easily destroy – empires as easily as people. I have seen the temples and the palaces glitter in the ice and I have seen the destruction of *all* things.

He took her by elbows and pulled her to him that he might stare his message into her soul.

“And not only with my own eyes… But with his.”

He felt this woman who appeared to be without fear flinch

“That is right, Chryseis. I have seen all I describe with the eyes and the memories of Harmonia Apollonia herself.”

“You… You are a man. Such a thing is… is… impossible.”

“Then you must see for yourself - the dreadful things that walk those buried streets, the shapes that rise from nowhere in the mists of the pass.”

He unclasped the buckle of his belt and removed the talisman, careful to keep his fingers upon the cloth covering it.

Her anger overcame her fear and curiosity for a few moments.

“You…? It was in your belt buckle the whole time?”

He could not help a smile.

“On my planet,” he told her, “we call it *‘hiding in plain sight’*.”

After a few moments, she held out a hand towards the burnished surface of

the artefact.

“I must know it for myself.”

Not a second later the talisman was in her hand and…

Epilogue



Bryn Neville Daffyd often asked himself if his intervention into the affairs of Penthesilea-3 had left it better or worse off.

On the whole, he concluded it had.

For the majority of its women, that is.

For its men, including him, nothing much had changed.

As he felt the moist fabric of Nadia Kopecki's gusset glisten his bareback as she rode upon him and his cock attempt to harden – the same cock she had sheathed in a metal prison that had become all the rage with the sisters of the new Rhodius since she and Amanda had introduced the idea of male chastity – it struck him that perhaps the women here were right.

Why else would he allow himself to be treated in such a way by a younger

woman he had once commanded and, into the bargain, hated with a passion?

It was a subject both he and Eklund had been too embarrassed to discuss with each other after Douana Chryseis had allowed him out on loan to Nadia Kopecki, but one he sensed they both had similar ideas upon.

Why else indeed would he consent to be ridden by the bitch as if he were no more then the beast-of-burden her ceaseless insults proclaimed him to be?

He was beginning to believe there was a strange… *rightness* …to his status upon Penthesilea and, strangely, it made his ability to accept it all the more ready.

That and the near constant condition of sexual readiness in which he was kept by the desirability of its women and the restriction of the cage surrounding his cock and his balls.

“The Douana gave me the key to your cage, you know?” said the voice of the woman astride him – the same woman who had managed to leap from the bed of Douana Arfemia to that of her replacement not days after Chryseis had taken control of the city and the talisman; the same talisman that had horrified any thoughts Chryseis might have had of visiting the forbidden north lands after it had, as he had warned her, shown her exactly what could be unleashed if the power found there were to be unleashed.

Not that she had become the benign tyrant he had hoped for after the experience – quite the opposite if her branding and collaring of him as her slave and personal property spoke truly; not to mention the floggings for minor infractions she seemed so delighted to mete upon his once-proud body.

When his tongue was not bathing her magnificent physique and all its orifices with his trained and servile tongue.

In short, Daffyd was lost in a world of submission to his female masters and knew it.

Had even come to relish it.

“She said that if I was pleased with my former captains service while she was away in the Fastness, then I could give his poor imprisoned penis a treat.”

Hating her as he did, Daffyd could not fight against the wave of almost painful sensuality racing through his subjugated soul with all the power of a tsunami as she underlined the fact his own pleasure was no longer his to control.

“Would my lovely and obedient former captain like his superior former ensign to allow his little cockle out so that he can rub it against the underside of her shapely little foot until it spurts all its useless cream?”

“Y-Yes, Lady Nad…”

The impact of her crop against his bare legs cut his croaked complicity before its abject acceptance could add yet more fire to his emasculation – if such were possible.

“Bad dog!” she chided him from above, the delight she took in being able to humble and older man in such a way – and a man who had once been her direct superior – simply dripping from a voice rich with self-satisfaction. “You know when you’re in doggy mode you’re not use grown-up language.”

His self-disgust again went off the chart as he realised her demeaning words were – far from killing his desire for her – urging his cock to even greater efforts to free itself from its cage.

“Let us try again,” she said in the manner of a patient and tolerant teacher educating a slow but promising pupil. “Then, if you please your lovely Lady Nadia, she will let you out of your cage and you can hump yourself against the creamy sole of her foot…. Would Lady Nadia’s little doggy like that?”

His reply was out before he thought about it, for to do so was only to invite still more of the mental pain the young bitch so enjoyed inflicting upon him.

“Woof!”

A hand reached out to stroke the smooth leather surface of the mask covering his scalp.

“Good boy!” he heard and again felt shame as a part of him thrilled to her demeaning praise.

“And will you show your lovely Lady Nadia how much you appreciate her

kindness by using your little doggy tongue to soothe her pretty arse as she takes her afternoon nap.

“Woof!” came the instant response as his temporary owner smiled above him, his cock, already lacerated by the bars defining his cage, thrusting with still more urgency against its confinement.

“Yes, of course you will,” he heard her coo. “That’s because you want to be the best boy you can be for your lovely Lady Nadia.”

The man once known as Bryn Neville Daffyd wondered just how much it would take before someone who resembled the proud captain and warrior he had once been said *“enough is enough”* and either killed or was killed.

He was about to find out.

“Then, once doggy’s Lady Nadia is all relaxed and her arse all shiny and pristine, she is going to take her doggy for a nice walk to see her good friend Amanda and her ever so obedient pet, Eklund.”

His spirits – such as they were - sank even lower, for no matter how many times his friend witnessed his submission to a woman he could not find a way to make his pain lessen.

Pain that was about to come worse.

“You see, Pet-Eklund has been a good boy for his owner too and has been promised a treat of his choosing.”

She paused and he felt her sodden gusset press against his back as her own desire reached a fever pitch.

“And guess what your good friend chose?”

Her laughter was near maniacal in his ears as she leaned her body into him and took him by the throat.

“You men were predictable on earth and aboard ship and nothing has changed.

Her voice became a seductive whisper:

“What he really wanted, he told Amanda was to feel a wet and warm mouth

around his hard cock when it was released from its cage."

Daffyd's own desire went almost beyond the restrictive scales upon hearing a fond desire of his own voiced.

"Amanda, being the kind owner she is, agreed to this. But…"

He waited as her hand stoked his scalp through the leather in an attempt to be soothing while at the same time humiliating him.

"But she has decided the wet and warm mouth Eklund puts his cock into doesn't necessarily have to belong to a woman…

THE END